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local and embodied knowledge of the effects of pesticides on workers’ health. It is in this context that Nash positions Rachel Carson’s powerful challenge to the modern conception of the body as isolated from its environment. Carson’s exposé instead presented human beings as porous and thus articulated the ecological body. Thanks to Nash’s history, we can now see to just what an extent this was a rearticulation, a return of the repressed understanding of the intimate relationship among health, the body, and landscape prevalent in the nineteenth century.

Still, readers may be confused by Nash’s argument that pesticide-induced illness “pointed to the environment’s active role in shaping health” (p. 129). Nash is here indicating how some observers were led to change their minds about the role of the environment in human health, but the statement also seems to reflect one of Nash’s larger positions: that nature should be seen as an actor shaping human beings and, by extension, history. In this context, it seems less the case that the environment was the actor than that human agents—that is, growers and chemical companies—shaped the environment in ways that then shaped the life and health of other people. To transpose a famous dictum of C. S. Lewis, one could say that what we call nature’s power over the human body turns out to be a power exercised by some bodies over other bodies with a nature they have transformed serving as its instrument. The book’s final chapter clearly covers the struggle to restore health to the California landscape that some people had turned into a hazardous place; in the process, it sheds light on the relationship among place, race, and environmental justice.

*Inescapable Ecologies* should itself become inescapable reading for historians of California, the West, agriculture, science, medicine, and the environment. It should also be read by physicians, public health officials, and anyone interested in health, disease, and the body, for it is a scholarly contribution of the most vital kind.

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DOUGLAS CAZAUX SACKMAN


This engaging account of Nome makes a powerful case for a de-romanticized history of Alaskan towns. Moving beyond the mining adventure that drove works like Terrence Cole’s *Nome: City of*
the Golden Beaches, Preston Jones, a historian at John Brown University, focuses on the years between the subsidence of the local gold rush and a conflagration that burned much of the city, in a style he admits is “more descriptive than analytical” (p. 2). Generously illustrated and filled with intriguing information, Jones’s work connects the history of Nome to questions of American empire, federal decision making, and the fate of small American towns on the Pacific Rim and throughout the fading American frontiers of the early twentieth century.

Each of the six brief chapters provides a thematic excursion into the Nome community. Jones’s argument emphasizes how residents sought “Americaness” in their unique environment, using U.S. imperial designs as an opportunity to promote growth, whether their competitors were conquered Filipinos or merely other settlements on the Seward Peninsula. Empire’s Edge provides a tour of Nome’s social institutions and includes an important reconstruction of Nome’s trade with Siberia before and after the Russian Revolution. The book is framed by “paradoxes that make up the story of Nome” (p. 19), including how Social Darwinist ideas were challenged by the day-to-day use of Native words and goods, such as parkas. Jones highlights the presence of women and the role of government action in planning the community, further breaking down preconceptions about mining towns. In considering the aftermath of the 1934 fire, Jones suggests how the era would echo in the region’s history, for “as always, Nome the symbol vied for attention with Nome the real American settlement” (p. 113).

Empire’s Edge is extremely accessible, enlivened by details—oranges for sale, high school Latin, a craze for bicycles—made incongruous by Nome’s location. It will prove a valuable addition to any undergraduate reading list on American frontier cities, as well as a key reference for anyone interested in the history of Nome or the Seward Peninsula. Jones’s examples, drawn from newspapers, family papers, and photographic collections, are gems of archival research, but scholars will often wish for greater depth; topics come and go quickly. The book does not consider the gold rush directly and notes only briefly the 1925 dogsled relay of diptheria antitoxin. Jones depicts the experience of white Americans in Nome as unified, claiming “there was little social conflict of any kind in Nome up to 1934” (p. 4), yet in other places he relates labor strife and debates over development. Empire’s Edge is a valuable contribution to the refocusing of Alaska history toward questions of American empire in the Pacific, but Jones does a disservice by not adequately addressing parallels to Yukon mining towns or
comparisons with more southerly Alaskan cities. Despite these caveats, Empire’s Edge is an extremely valuable portrait of an Alaskan community, seemingly on the edge of the world but dreaming of itself as an ordinary American town.

Yale University

ADAM ARENSON

Riding to the Rescue: The Transformation of the RCMP in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1914–1939. By Steve Hewitt. (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2006. xiv + 205 pp. $29.95 paper)

The author of this history of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) performs the useful service of covering an aspect of the history of Canada’s iconic national police within a defined period of Canadian history in two western provinces. Steve Hewitt examines the growth of the role of the RCMP in investigating radical labor groups and seditious movements including the Communist Party of Canada. Taking advantage of recent, more liberal applications of Access to Information regulations, Hewitt thoroughly researched documents not previously in the public domain.

His thesis is that the “Mounties” were the agents of the Anglo Canadian ruling class in reacting to left-wing movements often led by foreigners that threatened the status quo in society. He documents in considerable detail the activities of RCMP undercover operatives and secret agents infiltrating targeted groups, ferreting out intelligence, and often putting wrongheaded constructions on the meaning of it all. He quite rightly concludes that the role of the Mounties in national security was not so much to bring criminal charges against individuals but to undermine these “conspiracies” and prevent them from damaging social values and institutions.

This book is a very short summation (141 pages of text) of the author’s doctoral thesis and displays some of the more familiar traits of this type of work. For instance, there is a very defined historical point to be made and defended: RCMP members were unsophisticated and reactionary agents who performed the will of the ruling class to thwart changes proffered by those who sought a more egalitarian society. Hewitt provides many instances of such behavior but does little to examine whether the social movements under investigation were salutary or destructive in their aims and activities.

Also characteristic of a dissertation, Hewitt focuses his examination on one narrow aspect of a federal police force in a particular area of the country, even though the RCMP from 1920 on served