



Coal Dust on Your Feet: The Rise, Decline, and Restoration of an Anthracite Mining Town (Stories of the Susquehanna Valley)

Janet MacGaffey

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Coal Dust on Your Feet is a historical ethnography of Shamokin, Pennsylvania and its surrounding borough of Coal Township. This anthracite coal fueled the industrial revolution and its miners generated the rise of organized labor, both of which make the region of northeast Pennsylvania one of great economic and historic importance. The ethnographic field site of the study spans a century and a half as it looks at the history and ties to the home countries of the immigrants who established and worked the coal mines. Details of individual lives and family histories enliven accounts of industry and the struggles of the unions, means of livelihood, ethnicity, associational life and ceremonial occasions. It will be of interest to anthropologists, sociologists, scholars of urban studies and labor historians, and contributes to the canon of literature on community and sense of place.

The study focuses on the rise and decline of the mining industry, on the ethnic groups that formed the town's neighborhoods, and on the changes that have taken place in ethnicity, religion, class and community. It covers the period of prosperity when the factories of the New York garment industry moved into town for the middle years of the twentieth century and made Shamokin a shopping mecca. Today, the town is decimated by economic decline and population loss, but ethnicity remains an identity option and still has economic content. The strong sense of place of the people of the town rooted in their cultural and militant heritage, has given rise to a wider community of former residents who return to visit, participate in events and buy ethnic foods and cultural items. This wider community of belonging and identity helps to boost morale, sense of community and economy, in what is now primarily a retirement town with commuters traveling to work in nearby cities.

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