

the intricate details which provide the names, working and sometimes family backgrounds of union branch executives, lead to pages of listed information. However, in general, the book is easily accessed. It is especially interesting to see mining communities forming in a traditional mining community lifestyle, which were usually seen during the Depression. The people described by Thomas in the 1960s and 1970s were often living in conditions found during the Depression era.

The book, while being an enjoyable narrative and uplifting for any member of the working class, is limited in its use as an historical text. There is no critical analysis of the actions of the union during this period. Written on behalf of the CFMEU, the foreword states that the Pete Thomas essays recorded the 'struggles and victories' of the mining unions in Central Queensland during this period. This is very true. Every dispute, both at local, regional and state level is presented as a resounding victory, although in most cases the disputes led to compromises by the unions and often the adjournment of issues till a later date (as in the case of the housing tax and the Harrow Creek stay-down, just two of the numerous industrial disputes covered in the book). The long term future of the unions and the towns in the Central Queensland mining field were in fact compromised with every dispute. Yet the book also provides a perspective that helps historians outside the union understand union interpretation of disputes and political events. The extensive and thorough detail given throughout the text is breath taking and possibly not information that would ever be accessible to the general community without the passionate interest shown to the miners of Central Queensland by Pete Thomas.

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**Ronald L. Lewis, *Welsh Americans: A History of Assimilation in the Coalfields*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2008. pp. x + 395. \$49.95 cloth.**

Mention of nineteenth century migration to America, or elsewhere in the New World, typically produces images of hardship, discrimination and exploitation. Ronald L. Lewis' account of *Welsh Americans* reminds us that, for many migrants, the American dream of self-improvement, economic success and increasing prosperity was achievable. Unlike other ethnic groups, the Welsh were fluent in English and highly skilled. Moreover, their non-conformist brand of Protestantism – with its emphasis on sobriety, hard work, and respectability – fitted in with the dominant ethos of American society. Economic success meant that there was little need for Welsh workers and their families to group together. Instead, Lewis observes, 'they simply and quickly became Americans' (p. 307).

At 375 pages, Lewis' account of Welsh migration to the United States might appear an intimidating read. Instead, it proves a highly readable account of the experiences of Welsh miners in both their homeland and, subsequent to their migration, in the northern coalfields of the United States (principally Pennsylvania and Ohio). Lewis argues that to understand how the Welsh fitted into America we first need to understand the values, skills and experiences that they brought with them. Most Welsh migrated to the United States between the 1840s and 1900, at a time when the expansion of the South Wales' coal industry was transforming their

native society. By 1900 more than half of the workforce in South Wales was engaged in coal mining, with the industry shipping more than a third of the world's coal exports. Contrary to popular perceptions, however, Lewis contends that nineteenth century Welsh miners were not 'ideological radicals' (p. 28). Unionism was slow to gain a hold in the Welsh valleys, and it was not until 1898 that a permanent union presence was established across the whole South Wales field. By this date, migration to the United States had largely ceased. For most Welsh miners, the non-conformist minister, not the local union official, was regarded as the leader of local society. Self-improvement, respectability and abstinence from alcohol were the predominant values emphasised in the church chapel, rather than concepts associated with class division and conflict (pp. 29-31).

In settling in America, the Welsh were guided by work opportunities. Lewis demonstrates that Welsh migration to the United States was 'chronologically, geographically and occupationally concentrated' (p. 6). The bulk of Welsh emigrants arrived in America between 1840 and 1890. Most settled and found work in the anthracite coalfields of northern Pennsylvania and the bituminous fields of the Midwest. By 1900, there were 267,000 Welsh immigrants and their children in the United States. Of these, 100,143 resided in Pennsylvania. Another 35,971 were in Ohio (pp. 7-8). On arrival in America, virtually all worked in the coal industry. Unlike other ethnic groups, the Welsh were not subject to discrimination. Instead, they were rapidly assimilated into American society. Lewis notes that the Welsh prided themselves on, and were respected for, their 'religiosity, honesty, sobriety, hard work, and self-improvement'. All of these attributes were 'closely associated', Lewis notes, with the Protestant ethic and the American 'cult of success' (p. 92). Throughout the American coalfields, Lewis observes, the Welsh enjoyed 'a near monopoly' of managerial positions. Their upward mobility, in part, reflected a process of 'ethnic nepotism', in which Welsh managers promoted other Welsh workers whilst discriminating against other ethnic groups, most notably the Irish (p. 197).

When, in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, coal owners turned to lower-paid Slav workers from Eastern Europe, most Welsh left the industry rather than compete with lower-paid (and Catholic) co-workers. Those that remained, however, occupied positions of power, either with the coal companies or the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). In occupying leadership positions within the UMWA, Lewis argues, the Welsh were largely driven by an eye to 'career' opportunities, rather than ideology (p. 268). Thomas L. Lewis, the National President of the UMWA from 1909 to 1912, used his union job as a 'stepping stone' to an executive career in the coal companies. The most famous UMWA leader of all, John L. Lewis (no relation to Thomas) – who held the presidency of the union from 1920 to 1960 – differed from his predecessor in that he 'embraced the union itself as a career', becoming 'the prototype career labor leader' (p. 276).

In labour history, it is tempting to highlight oppression, discrimination and the experiences of groups who are left behind by capitalism's economic advance. Lewis' book emphasises the need for balance in assessing the experience of workers and their families. For most Welsh migrants, the trip to America did provide them with opportunities for economic and social advancement that they probably would not have enjoyed at home.

Before finalising this review, it is perhaps fitting to reflect on the Welsh experience in Australia. Approximately 20 kilometres from where this review has been written

is the hamlet of Blackstone, once the hub for the Ipswich coalfield in Queensland. As in America, the Welsh dominated the early history of the industry. To this day the principal place of worship in Blackstone is the Welsh United Church, where hymns are still sung in archaic Welsh. Next door is the Blackstone United Welsh Soccer Club. Like their American compatriots, the Welsh in Blackstone were slow to embrace unionism. A permanent union was not established in the district until 1906. Even after they embraced union representation, the district remained socially conservative in outlook. As in America, the Welsh were rapidly assimilated into the wider society. Only the preservation of their language among a small minority of their descendants today distinguishes those of Welsh extraction from their neighbours.

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**Eric Richards, *Destination Australia: Migration to Australia since 1901*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2008. pp. xiii + 448. \$39.95 paper.**

So great is Australia's need for population that it cannot afford to be too exclusive as to categories to be regarded as eligible for admission (p. 161).

This cane cuttin', oh, it's something incredible ... The cane, it cuts you, cuts your skin like a razor ... the first week you feel all broken (pp. 86-87).

There were many familiar voices in Eric Richards' history of immigration to Australia. The opening quote of this review – taken from an immigration report circulated in 1944 – illustrates this familiar rhetoric. It is a bureaucratic voice patiently setting out the economic basis for pursuing immigration, framed here, as it so commonly was, in terms of ethnicity, point of origin, hierarchies of desirability and fears about the reception awaiting new arrivals. Any history of Australian migration necessarily includes these voices – known in short hand as the white Australia policy. Richards' history also includes many new or unfamiliar voices – those of the migrants who came to Australia. Sam Contarino – a Sicilian man arriving in Australia in 1922 to work in the cane fields of Mourilyan – evokes for the reader a sense of what it meant to be a sugar worker at this time: 'You had to cut it, load it, move the rail ... Oh we worked' (p. 87).

*Destination Australia* traces the history of immigration through the entwining of the governmental story of arrivals and the individual stories of migrants. The approach of governments changed over time – for example in the 1920s the idea of attracting rural migrants to populate the parts of Australia unoccupied by non-Indigenous peoples dominated – and accompanying these different discourses are different policies but also different imaginings of the ideal migrant. Richards patiently sets out 'new policy' after 'new policy' as they emerged across the decades, tracing for the reader both significant shifts but also constancies. One thread in policy that is carefully followed is the place of Britain as a source of migrants, a bellwether on policy, a source of irritation and an idealised template for a nation. Another thread is the United States. As the pre-eminent destination for so many migrants, but also as another settler colonial nation, the fortunes and approaches of this state are often