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Portrait of a Prospector: Edward Schieffelin's Own Story ed.

by R. Bruce Craig (review)

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Journal of Arizona History, Volume 59, Number 2, Summer 2018, pp. 148-149
(Review)

Published by Arizona Historical Society



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I need to stress that this book is not just a history of the pioneer days of recording. Amundson also presents an interesting, comprehensive history of the West and how it affected the American psyche during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Anyone interested in the early days of the recording industry, and the stories behind the songs, will find this a musicologist's dream.

Included is a chronological catalogue of western recordings from 1902 to 1918, with the stories and lyrics. One that stands out is the Edgar Davenport's 1905 poem, "Lasca." It is the tragic love story of a beautiful Mexican girl who gives her life to save her cowboy sweetheart. One can still hear this recitation at cowboy poet gatherings today.

Music of the American West has played a very important role in this reviewer's life, and I can attest that the author's flowing narrative will especially be a joy to any like-minded soul. Michael Amundson's *Talking Machine West* belongs on every library shelf, with the other classics of the genre: Jim Bob Tinsley's *He Was Singin' This Song* and *For a Cowboy Has To Sing*, and John I. White's *Git Along Little Dogie*.

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Portrait of a Prospector: Edward Schieffelin's Own Story. Edited by R. Bruce Craig. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017. Pp. 136. \$19.95 paper)

Indian fighting, secret treasure, lonely prospectors: the life of Edward Schieffelin included nearly every stereotype of life in the Old West. Schieffelin, the man who discovered the Tombstone silver mines, prospected extensively across the western United States in the late 1800s and left journal entries and memoirs that outline his adventures from his teenage years until shortly before his death in 1897 at the age of forty-nine. These scattered writings have been compiled by R. Bruce Craig in *Portrait of a Prospector: Edward Schieffelin's Own Story*. In this compilation, Craig weaves a series of vignettes into a chronological account of Schieffelin's prospecting adventures and thereby brings to life this "once famous, full-bearded pioneer" (p. 4). To aid in this task, Craig uses the transcripts of an interview Schieffelin gave describing his discovery of silver near Tombstone.

The stories include interesting tales of mistrusting prospectors, generous strangers, and Native Americans. Although his discovery of silver deposits near Tombstone, Arizona, made him famous and very wealthy, the most interesting part of Schieffelin's memoirs is his unsus-

cessful expedition to Alaska in 1882. Using his significant fortune accumulated in Arizona, Schieffelin outfitted an experienced crew to prospect in Alaska with everything that could be desired including a small steamship to navigate the rivers of the Yukon Territory. While prospecting in Alaska, Schieffelin commented on sled dogs, mixed-race Russians, the work of Louis Pasteur, and Native American traditional life. Unfortunately, Schieffelin's writings end rather abruptly after his Alaska expedition as Schieffelin died suddenly in 1897 after claiming to have discovered a rich mine near Canyon City, Oregon. In his attempt to turn Schieffelin's writings into a coherent story, Craig faces several challenges. While Schieffelin's writing style is charming and deeply human, it lacks clarity in places, which makes following his descriptions difficult. Moreover, there are enormous gaps in Schieffelin's writings that leave out some of the most interesting portions of his life, including any significant mention of his marriage to a woman whom he left in California for most of their married life while he prospected.

This is perhaps the most tantalizing but disappointing element of this work. While Craig seeks to provide a story that "helps to explain what America was," actual interpretative work is almost entirely absent (p. 2). The personal, psychological, and cultural factors that would drive a wealthy man to wander the West in search of another mining strike are not really explored by the editor. Schieffelin's life probably does help to explain "what America was," but how it explains America is not clearly demonstrated. For example, Schieffelin records interactions with Mexicans migrating to Arizona, Russians, British immigrants, and Native American tribes. The staggering diversity of life in the American West passes without comment and hence, an opportunity for Schieffelin's story to illuminate American life is missed.

Portrait of a Prospector is designed as an edited compilation of Schieffelin's writings but is too scattered to be a memoir yet is not interpreted enough to be a scholarly history. Thus, the work dwells in a kind of no-man's land. While Craig's editing notes, timeline, and maps are helpful, *Portrait of a Prospector* suffers from some disjointedness. What is described as both an autobiography and "Edward Schieffelin's Own Story" is not really either. Instead, it is a halting series of stories that casts light on an interesting figure. Despite this shortcoming, Craig's work in compiling, editing, and explaining these stories will be useful to future researchers and history buffs who wish to gain a more complete grasp on Schieffelin's life.

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