
The story of Baby Doe Tabor has been the gist of many western tales. A beautiful divorcee mesmerized a wealthy, married mining magnate, who in turn divorced his wife to marry the beauty. As the second wife of silver king H. A.W. Tabor, Elizabeth McCourt “Baby Doe” Tabor was shunned by society, but extremely happy and in love with her husband and their two daughters. The couple’s wealth and extravagance, and eventual fall into poverty after the silver crash of 1893, has become legendary. Tabor died penniless.

Baby Doe sought solitude in Leadville at the Matchless Mine, where Tabor earned much of his wealth. Her bazar behavior and actions garnered her the nickname “madwoman in the cabin.” After Baby Doe’s death in 1935, her papers and journals were locked away in the archives of the Colorado Historical Society, resulting in even more speculation about the Tabors’ lives and their legend. Countless authors and researchers attempted to gain access to the locked records through various channels, but they were not released until 1967. What Lizzie Tabor’s papers reveal is extraordinary.

Author Judy Nolte Temple, professor of Women’s Studies and English at the University of Arizona, and a team of researchers, spent countless hours reading and analyzing Lizzie’s small collection of journals and mass of disjointed rantings written on slips of paper and kept in no particular order. The mass of papers, filed in a folder titled “Dreams and Visions,” reveal a heart-wrenching account of a lonely and, yes, perhaps madwoman’s life.

Temple weaves together Lizzie McCourt Tabor’s life through archival records, Lizzie’s writings, and the author’s theoretical analysis. The academic scholarship behind this work is impressive, yet, at times, burdensome to the reader. This is a scholarly work, not another romantic legendary tale of Baby Doe and H. A.W. Tabor. However, if your interests lie in biographical accounts of the Tabors or in women’s history, do not be daunted. It is a fascinating analysis of a multi-faceted woman, Elizabeth “Baby Doe” McCourt Tabor.

Dawn Bunyak
Bunyak Research Associates
Littleton, Colorado


The journal received several books for review this year that do not pertain directly to mining, but include it as an essential element of their stories. Drifting West follows the lives and activities of four frontier drifters, two of whom surfaced
employed provisions of other national and state environmental legislation—such as the Clean Air and Clean Water acts, the Endangered Species Act, and the Wilderness Act—either to prevent mining outright, or to make it so onerous as to be impractical. The Wilderness Act of 1964, for example, permitted mining in wilderness areas, but not motorized vehicles.

Environmentalists have not succeeded in reforming the Mining Law of 1872 or completely prohibiting mining on federal lands. However, they have succeeded in shifting land-use standards from the multiple-use ethic of the early twentieth century to one that emphasizes environmental preservation as its dominate value, resulting in significant curtailment of mining and other resource extraction in the American West.

This is a good, dispassionate summary of the struggle of the past fifty years over mining, environmentalism, and land use in the West. It leaves the impression, however, that environmentalists, the public, and perhaps the authors, regard mining as an optional behavior pursued largely for profit, rather than as the essential human activity that it is.

_The Opium Debate_ traces the history of opium importation into the West, and hence the United States, in the nineteenth century. Diana Ahmad argues that opium’s deleterious effects and its association primarily with Chinese immigrants led to its prohibition being used as one of the arguments for excluding Chinese immigrants generally.

Although the West’s mining towns are not the focus of her study, Ahmad drew sources and observations from a number of them, including Boise, Idaho; Butte, Helena, and Deer Lodge, Montana; Pioche and Virginia City, Nevada; and Park City and Silver Reef, Utah. The prominent western mining states included in the study are California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, and Utah, along with mentions of Missouri, Oregon, Texas, and Washington.

This ninety-page treatise deals with the arrival of Chinese immigrants and smoking opium into the U.S. with the California gold rush, and the resistance that soon developed, especially in the West, to Chinese immigration. This resistance centered on cultural differences, economic competition, and opium use, and led to calls for Chinese exclusion. The book provides useful background on the introduction of the narcotic into China by the British and American involvement in the opium trade that developed, then deals with the introduction of smoking opium into the United States and the practices of its use.

There follows a discussion of the American medical community’s reaction to the drug’s adoption by some whites in communities where Chinese immigrants resided, including an number of western mining towns. The prevailing medical opinion was that the drug was addictive physically and degenerative morally, leading medical and civic leaders to demand the exclusion of the drug, and of the Chinese immigrants deemed responsible for it.

Ahmad discusses the culmination of the exclusion movement in 1882 with Congress’ passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which remained in force until World War Two. She concludes by noting that neither the Chinese nor smoking opium disappeared from the United States after 1882, the importation and use of the latter not being federally outlawed until 1909.

The author concedes in several places that the social-cultural opium argument was not as frequently or persuasively evoked as the economic argument for Chinese exclusion, but makes the case that it should be remembered as an important component of the exclusion debate; a reasonable, if unstartling, thesis.

Eric Clements
Southeast Missouri State University