

## *Come Hell or High Water: Songs of the Buchans Miners*

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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tories available — Sidney Mintz and Oscar Lewis — also compiled astute and detailed formal histories and socioeconomic studies of the communities from which those individual accounts sprang.

*The Great War and Canadian Society* is an important reminder of both past and continuing facets of Canadian society. The accounts do ring true and are valuable for what they represent. I trust that the compilers have edited them so as to retain the literal and thematic veracity of the originals. However, in my experience, many Canadians of 60 years ago were less gullible and docile, and had traditions which were more cosmopolitan and forward-looking than the general picture which emerges from *Great War and Canadian Society*.

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*Come Hell or High Water: Songs of the Buchans Miners* (Breakwater Recording 1001, Breakwater Books, St. John's Newfoundland).

In 1973 the miners of Buchans, Newfoundland fought a successful five and a half month strike against the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO). One prominent feature of the strike was a daily mass picket line, in which 200-300 people, including strikers, wives, children and supporters, marched to the company gate every morning and noon singing their own locally composed songs. Following the strike, Local 5457 of the United Steel Workers produced a booklet of the strike songs. With the cooperation of the Memorial University Folklore Department, Breakwater Books has now released a recorded collection of these contemporary industrial folk songs.

Many of the strike songs were written by Angus Lane, "a unionist and well known local poet." Lane was already famous in Buchans as the writer of a satirical verse, "Christmas of '49," also

included on the album, which told the story of the miners' attempts to travel home for Christmas in the days when ASARCO controlled the only transportation route out of the town. As the strike balladeer in 1973, Angus Lane supplied appropriate songs at each stage of the strike. In his first song, "All Because of ASARCO," he effectively set forth the origins of the strike:

The company makes millions on concentrate  
tons

While miners end up with lead on their lungs  
Mining makes old men out of our young sons  
Producing ore for ASARCO.

Chorus: Our plea, our plea, is for you and me  
To demand what we want from this  
company  
No one here will go down on their  
knees  
To beg or plead from ASARCO.

And in time for the victory banquet at the end of the strike Lane composed a rousing review of the main events of the strike, set to the tune of "Kelligrew's Soiree."

Another fine contribution to the album is a song originally written in 1971, during an earlier and less successful strike. "The Buchans Strike" was written by two daughters of a union member, Hazel and Fronie Flight, and is a reminder that the industrial conflict was also a struggle for the survival of the community. The song lamented the departure of men from the town in 1971 — "And some have left to settle down, But quite against their will!" — and described the community's determination to survive — "Our town won't become a ghost town, But will still remain alive."

The album was recorded in Buchans in 1975 and 1976 by Peter Narvaez of Memorial University, who has included a useful set of liner notes and copies of the original songbook. Most of the songs are performed by Sandy Ivany, recording secretary of Local 5457, and by local musicians on accordion, guitars and mandolin. When accordionist Don Bursey contributes a lively "Cock of the North," or Harold Skanes, "the musical impresario of

Buchans for the last 30 years," leads a rendition of "Solidarity Forever," one gets a sense that music has long enjoyed a central place in the social life of the community. Not surprisingly, these self-made industrial folk songs are made from the raw materials closest to the musical tastes of the people of Buchans, and as a result the album features a lively blend of traditional Newfoundland melodies and contemporary country and western music.

*The Songs of the Buchans Miners* adds to our understanding of Canadian workers in several ways. The case of Buchans seems to contradict the sociological image of the contemporary single-industry town as a place where unions are "seldom militant" and rarely "community-oriented," and where citizens experience "an overriding ambivalence and resignation." At least in the case of the early 1970s in Buchans, this generalization seems questionable.<sup>1</sup> The album also gives us some insight into the way in which original workers' folk songs continue to be produced. When the need arose in Buchans, talented local musicians came forward to give expression to the shared ideas and experiences of the working class community. Despite the powerful centralizing forces of commercial radio and recorded music, the people of Buchans have reminded us that "unofficial" or "popular" local cultural traditions are still very much alive. Breakwater Books are to be thanked for preserving and publishing this contribution to the tradition of industrial folk song in Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> Rex Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown: Life in Canadian Communities of Single Industry* (Toronto 1971), 96, 140. It would be interesting to know whether Buchans was among the anonymous communities surveyed in this study. Readers may also be interested to know that in addition to the present album, a colourful portrait of the people and history of Buchans is available in the form of a slide-tape show prepared by Oxfam Newfoundland in 1975, *Buchans — Company Town* (Development Education Centre Films, Toronto).

Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Worker City, Company Town: Iron and Cotton-Worker Protest in Troy and Cohoes, New York, 1855-1884* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1978).

#### "An Epitaph for William Hutcheson"

ON 11 JUNE 1883 William Hutcheson was fatally shot in Troy, New York:

Rattle his bones,  
Over the stones,  
He's only a molder,  
Nobody owns.

Hutcheson was a 28 year old unionist, born and raised in Brockville, Ontario, and like many other late nineteenth-century "saw artists" he had tramped a good deal in his time. After learning his trade in Brockville, he spent part of his life in Troy, where he was respected and liked by other moulders. Prior to his killing, however, he had worked in Oshawa, and he had only been in Troy three short weeks, working at the Cooperative Stove Foundry. But Hutcheson had arrived at an inauspicious moment. For months a strike had raged at the Troy Malleable Iron Company. Part-owner and manager of the concern, William Sleicher, Jr., hired and armed non-union men, and confrontations were common. Hutcheson's death was merely the most tragic and dramatic of many such clashes. Two young non-union workers were out walking just a few blocks from the Malleable foundry when one of them was struck with a stone. They quickly turned and exchanged angry words with two unionists, one of whom was Hutcheson. As the verbal battle escalated, the "scabs" drew revolvers and began shooting. Hutcheson fell to the ground, a 32-calibre bullet puncturing both of his lungs and ripping apart large arteries upon impact. He lived for a brief six minutes, and died with his head in the lap of an unknown woman who had rushed to his side after the shooting. We will never know what William Hutcheson's last thoughts were, but it is possible that he cursed those men who had brought him to his sad end. If