

accounts about an “Old South” which remain veiled in a literary context. Consequently, Fite’s study has the power to become a classic.

— Charles C. Irby
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David M. Gradwohl and Nancy M. Osborn. *Exploring Buried Buxton*. (Ames: Iowa State University Press) xvi, 207 pp., \$19.95.

Readers of *Explorations In Sights and Sounds* are in for a welcome surprise, especially if they have an occasion to wade through a professional monograph outside their own area of interest or expertise. *Exploring Buried Buxton* is a rigorous, specialized archaeological monograph that should be read by all who wish to learn of ethnic relations in the United States. It is also readable, comprehensive, interesting, and important. Moreover, *Exploring Buried Buxton* is significant as the record of a model academic process. As a result of the activities centering on Buxton, Iowa, over the past few years, professors have published, students have learned, the non-academic community has been involved in its past, grant monies have been well spent, and the nation has gained precious insight into a forgotten chapter of its multi-ethnic past. All of this is done in an understated style, in a very well-organized format, and, yes, even with humor.

Buxton may be buried now, but for twenty-five years it was a vigorous planned community established for mining Iowa coal. Buxton is remarkable mainly for its deserved reputation as a place where people of many ethnic backgrounds lived in relative peace and harmony during a time when racism was particularly virulent. Buxton faded away when the economics of the coal industry changed. Farming activities have obliterated most casually visible traces of the townsite that was home to nearly six thousand people at its peak.

When archaeologists were introduced to Buxton in 1980 by a lay historian whose mother had been born and reared there, cattle, pastures, cultivated fields, and scattered farmsteads greeted them. That summer an interdisciplinary team of archaeologists, sociologists, and historians from Iowa State University began work. They used oral histories of former Buxton residents and their descendents, archival materials from many sources, and archaeological techniques to piece together the story of Buxton. They came to reconstruct its history, to give its descendents an opportunity to learn about their cultural heritage, and

to bring Buxton recognition and protection.

Throughout the book assumptions are identified, inferences cautiously stated, and conclusions drawn carefully from multiple sources of evidence. An illustration of the thoroughness of the authors' work is revealed in the presentation of their finding about just one of many structures, the YMCA building. Ten pages are devoted to the building. Included are four full-page sectional diagrams and two other drawings, five contemporary and archival photographs, eleven archival newspaper accounts, references to a 1915 source book and a manuscript, information from six interviews, and descriptions of some of the hundreds of artifacts uncovered. Later, in a summary chapter, a page and a half is given to the significance of the YMCA building in the recreational and relaxation life of Buxton. Unfortunately, they were unable to learn the name of the basketball team's mascot dog, a feat they accomplished in another instance.

Evidence that the actual excavation remained a labor of precise professional expertise is shown by the 4,866 portable artifacts dug from the soil, sifted through mesh, cleaned, sorted, identified, labeled, catalogued to international standards, and stored for further study and dispersal to interested parties. That the team's efforts remained a labor of love is shown in the authors' commentary concerning nearby Feature 1—a 3.1 foot-deep pit excavated to reveal its contents: "Yes, Feature 1 ultimately was inferred to be an outhouse, or cesspit, and the highly organic matrix was taken to be 'night soil.' This onetime privy was subsequently filled with trash at the time it—and perhaps the whole town of Buxton—was abandoned."

Such is the human record of occupation, no matter the place or time. The methods used to learn the story of everyday life of its people and their relationship to the rest of their civilization in Buxton were much the same as were used to learn about the societies of Mexico and Peru, including the use of oral histories.

Readers of *Exploring Buried Buxton* can decide if it was a black utopian community, as some of its former residents claimed. I am pleased to note that Buxton's national significance was recognized in 1983 when it was included on the National Register of Historic Places.

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