

JOHN BODNER

Review of

Frank, David and Nicole Lang. 2010. *Labour Landmarks in New Brunswick/Lieux Historiques Ouvriers au Nouveau-Brunswick*. Edmonton: Canadian Committee on Labour History and Athabasca University Press.

Pp. 111, illustrations, maps, ISBN 978-1-894000-09-3, \$10.00.

I began writing this review in a small village in British Columbia that has been the site of many a mine disaster, a goodly number of vicious strikes, as well as the murder of the labour organizer Albert “Ginger” Goodwin (1887-1918). There are a fair few memorials. I have also been fortunate to have worked for many years in the woods and seen makeshift memorials to broken or killed workers in locations so far away from anywhere most people would call a place that one wonders: why do it at all? Frank and Lang’s study of labour landmarks in New Brunswick provides many significant clues to unravelling the affective, challenging and contentious presence of these landmarks. The fact that I find in it clues to understanding my own relationship with memorials suggests that the work will be useful to researchers outside the authors’ province of New Brunswick. Moreover, its execution and design are of such quality that they could form a model for other researchers to follow.

To begin, the work is a modest 111-page, side-by-side bilingual study of fifty landmarks. The text is organized thematically: each chapter deals with a major historic occupations of the province. Fifty-two photographs illustrate the text and are unremarkable (whether through execution or indifferent printing specifications I cannot say), serving to merely document the main features of the landmark or event surrounding it. An extensive endnotes section is followed by a very good map, which is especially helpful to a reader unfamiliar with the province.

Those with more knowledge of the labour landmark catalogue of New Brunswick may be able to comment on whether or not the list is representative; however, this concern may miss the point. The study is not meant to be exhaus-

sive; instead, it uses specific examples to illustrate several overarching themes and perspectives. If the work has a central thesis, it is that memorials “point to a kind of unofficial public culture that owes its existence to local initiatives and support” (90). This perspective opens up the field of inquiry to include not only the specific event and narratives that the marker materializes, but also the larger socio-political context. This ambitious perspective allows the authors to balance the personal with the political in a productive manner. For example, we can counterpoint the opening chapter’s focus on the role of specific “memory keepers” in producing, preserving and creating memorials with the observation in the conclusion that labour memorials are partially a contest—material and public—with neoliberal discourses that would silence the past as part of its larger anti-union project. Within this larger framework, the authors do not forget the materiality of their subject and take time to document particular artists and their techniques in constructing some of the monuments.

Frank and Lang are able to accomplish much in a short space thanks to the quality of the writing. The work is a testament to the economical style championed by E. B. White and William Strunk in their classic *Elements of Style*. There is hardly a wasted word; the arguments are clear and well grounded in specific examples and the text moves, as I have noted, very well between biography, narratives and macro socio-economic history. The accessibility of the language makes the work appropriate for advanced high school students, as well as university undergraduates, while the topic and quality of the scholarship will be useful to a broad range of researchers in local history, labourlore and memorialization.