

soon as possible. Thus, the Welsh language, one of the oldest surviving native tongues of Europe, did not fare well in the mining villages of America. This was true even with the poetic and musical fêtes, the *eisteddfod*, that were promoted so vigorously from the 1870s to the early decades of the twentieth century.

Just as the early Welsh coal diggers represented the working class, their heroes of song and story came out of that class. John L. Lewis (1880–1969), the complex and sometimes heroic leader of the United Mine Workers of America, was lionized by most of his men (and often reviled by others). Yet the author's most fascinating story of a Welsh working-class hero is that of Mary Williams Thomas. Born in one of the many mining villages of the south Wales valleys in 1887, she married at age 16 and had two children by her husband, Thomas, before he deserted her and went to work in the coal mines in the western United States. When she went in search of him, she found herself stepping into one of the most vicious class wars in American history — the coal strike in Ludlow, Colorado, in 1913. Of the 2,000 miners and their families who joined the strike, most were immigrants like Mary. The owners of the mines threw the miners out of their rented homes and attempted to starve them back to work. Moreover, they brought in hundreds of “gun thugs” and state militia to terrorize the miners. Lewis chronicles Thomas's strength and heroism with dispassionate detail. At the end of the story (and the book) is the image of a dauntless person who lived up to the highest ideal of Welsh identity and womanhood of her time and place. Incidentally — and against all odds — she lived a long and happy life.

Mary Thomas's story is one of the many reasons one should read and reread Ronald Lewis's epic *Welsh Americans*. It is one of the rare books in ethnic history that deserves the appellation *classic*.

Forgotten Firebrand: James Redpath and the Making of Nineteenth-Century America, by John R. McKivigan. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008. xvii, 291 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$45.00 cloth.

Reviewer Mark Wahlgren Summers is professor of history at the University of Kentucky. His latest book is *A Dangerous Stir: Fear, Paranoia, and the Making of Reconstruction* (2009).

James Redpath was a little-known nineteenth-century reformer with a great deal to be little known about. Antislavery, the single tax, equal rights, Irish independence: for 40 years, there were few good causes to which Redpath did not devote his pen. Only now has a historian returned the favor. John McKivigan's *Forgotten Firebrand* gives an un-

adorned and sympathetic portrait of one of the more familiar activists of the Civil War era.

Redpath did a little of everything. Beginning as a reporter on the *New York Tribune*, the most reform-minded of all the dailies, he glorified the free staters' war on the Kansas Border Ruffians and issued some of the first biographies (rather more hagiographies) of John Brown. When Haiti needed a spokesman and administrator to build a colonization movement among blacks on the mainland, Redpath acted with energy, zeal — and deplorable results. His newspaper correspondence during the war lauded the freedmen's capacity, and after the war he became an ardent voice for the most radical Reconstruction possible and for impeaching Andrew Johnson. Ever the promoter, he founded a publishing concern to provide cheap (and radical) literature to Union soldiers. Later, the lyceum bureau he set up carried education and entertainment into the hinterlands for a half-century. Embracing Henry George's radicalism, he ended his career as managing editor for the *North American Review* and ghostwriter for Jefferson Davis. It was an astonishing record, and through it ran two consistent threads: a commitment to advance the cause of equal rights and a drive to make himself a business success.

So why has it take so long to produce a modern life of Redpath? For one thing, his papers are so widely scattered that any would-be biographer might feel daunted. For another, Redpath said too much in too many places, and, frustratingly, many of his contributions came without bylines or under pseudonyms. But perhaps the biggest reason is that the easily discouraged researcher might have wondered whether Redpath mattered enough to merit the extra effort. For all of McKivigan's fair-mindedness and clarity, the world will little note nor long remember Redpath's mark on his society, because on his own Redpath left a pretty faint mark. That may not have been his fault. So many mid-century agitators left rich collections of papers and speeches and legacies of remarkable accomplishment that it would take fabulous gifts to outshine them. Redpath lacked the eloquence of Wendell Phillips, the trenchant editorial style of William Lloyd Garrison, the physical courage of Lucretia Mott or John Brown, the colorfulness of George Train, or the influence of Charles Sumner or the Tappan brothers. No law, no deed, no great accomplishment beyond the creation of a lyceum bureau stands solely to his credit. His surviving letters are rather run of the mill. Others may have left an impression; Redpath barely seems to have left an indentation.

Perhaps at heart Redpath was more content with words than deeds, and with promotion, particularly self-promotion, than self-examination.

Others acted; Redpath wrote. Others dared their lives; he decried and deplored. Others uttered bugle blasts of eloquence; Redpath added notes to the chorus. Some readers may think that reason enough for honoring him. Others may note the ruined lives of southern African Americans who heeded Redpath and settled in Haiti. They may also draw a comparison between his career and that of the freedom fighter whose boldness he did so much to publicize. Like John Brown, Redpath came to hate slavery — so much so that he was prepared to fight it to the very last drop of the slaves' blood, and that of their masters, if he could only induce them to take up arms. Had he had his way, there would have been a thousand John Browns and four million Nat Turners. But Redpath would not have been among them. He was content to man the cheering section.

Cheerleaders, exhorters, hucksters — all deserve biographers; they should be so lucky as to find a McKivigan to do the job. But for many a reader closing this book, the question may be: Was this trip really necessary?

Westhope: Life as a Former Farm Boy, by Dean Hulse. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. xiv, 147 pp. \$19.95 cloth.

Reviewer Zachary Michael Jack calls home an Iowa farm and teaches writing, rural and urban history, and place studies at North Central College in Naperville, Illinois. He has edited many collections, including *Black Earth and Ivory Tower: New American Essays from Farm and Classroom* (2005); *Uncle Henry Wallace: Letters to Farm Families* (2008); and *Iowa — The Definitive Collection* (2009).

Memoirist Dean Hulse, the “farm boy” of the book’s subtitle who grew up on a North Dakota farm in the 1960s and 1970s, is someone midwestern readers will want to meet. He’s a straight shooter, careful to call out the fallibility of memory, and especially farm nostalgia, without condescension. More impressive still, this accessible, warm-hearted yet sober collection of essays can actually be read and enjoyed by the very ennobled small-town and rural folks who serve as its fodder and inspiration, unlike the many arch farm memoirs penned by literary types long since fled for the coasts.

Westhope — the title comes from the name of Hulse’s hometown, Westhope, North Dakota — is accessible, but it’s a double-edged sword, as the book suffers from a mile-wide, inch-deep syndrome that finds the author — a perceptive, laconic soul — leaving a subject before he has fully plumbed it. While this light touch facilitates an easy read, it robs the book of emotive power and depth, when, for example, Hulse tries to describe and concretize his own two-year stint as a young