

**Norman B. Keevil. *Never Rest on Your Ores: Building a Mining Company, One Stone at a Time*. Xviii + 459 pp, plus fig., ill., bibl., index. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017. \$35.95 (hardcover) ISBN 9780773551558**

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*Never Rest on Your Ores*—cleverly titled after a popular expression ‘never rest on your oars,’ which seems apt for a story of a natural resources company—was published as part of the Footprints series edited by Jan Errington. The series introduces the reader to personal stories of extraordinary Canadians, who in one way or another influenced this country and often the world. Norman B. Keevil Jr. is certainly one such individual. Born in 1938, Keevil Jr., a geologist, an explorer, and an entrepreneur, has been one of the central figures of Canadian mining since he joined the Board of Directors of Teck Resources Limited in 1963. The company was founded by his father Norman B. Keevil Senior—a legend of Canadian mining—who grew it from a small consulting firm, created like so many similar businesses after the end of Second World War, to a global mining giant. Keevil Jr. witnessed that growth, led, and managed some of the key undertakings in the history of Teck, such as the acquisition of Cominco, the company's involvements with Hemlo gold mine, and with Voisey's Bay, among many others. Any historian of technology, and especially a historian of mining will find Keevil's recollections fascinating.

Keevil is an excellent storyteller. He invites the reader into his family's life, recalling anecdotes from his father's early days as a researcher at Harvard

University. A historian of mining may be surprised to learn that a Nobel Prize winner, Dr. Harold Urey, head of Substitute Alloy Materials Laboratories at Columbia University, invited Keevil Sr. to join the Manhattan Project. Had it not been for the fact that FBI did not process his security clearance on time, Keevil Senior's career may have gone in a very different direction. The book also gives us a glimpse into Keevil's relationship with other mining personalities—President of Inco Mike Sopko, entrepreneur Robert Friedland, President of Bre-X David Walsh—all listed at the beginning of the volume like dramatis personæ in a play on Canadian mining. Yet even with its 459 pages, the recollections leave us wanting more. Joan Keevil, the author's wife, comes across as a fascinating yet somewhat enigmatic personality we would want to know better. What was the role of his mother, a chemist Verna Bond, only occasionally mentioned in the book, in the family's businesses? Were there any other exceptional women scientists and entrepreneurs that shaped Teck Resources? (Well-respected in the mining community Patricia Dillon is one name that a mining historian would want to find in this book.)

Although written in a very personal, often humorous style, *Never Rest on Your Ores* is in essence business history. It takes the reader through ore discoveries, establishments of mines, and mergers and acquisitions, as well as failures that made Teck Resources into one of the most diversified and largest mining companies in the world. Although Keevil talks about

miners vs prospectors hockey games (24); hints at fishing competitions (242); or recalls a cartoon that he commissioned, with Mike Sopko's head on a lion's body to depict Inco's position during difficult negotiations over Voisey's Bay (355), Keevil does not delve much into social history around his company. He also does not go into details on technological processes, or many innovations that came out of research conducted at Teck. His is also not a workers' history. For example, when he talks about Teck's acquisition of a bankrupt Westar Balmer mine, which went under in 1991, and was reopened by Teck as Elkview mine, he summarizes difficult union-management relationship in one short paragraph: "Teck soon reopened Balmer (...). All prior employees had to reapply, and were carefully selected for their ability and dedication to working. The Mine Worker's Union was shut out. The mine reopened as non-union, but we encouraged the Steelworkers' Union to come in, and that was approved by a free vote of the workforce." (330)

Where Keevil exceeds as an author and a writer, is when he takes the reader through complicated, highly political, and tricky business deals and schemes. He brings to life personalities and events; business negotiations behind the closed door and over a

cigarette; and dealings with domestic and global politics, which are all parts of building a company and keeping the company in business. Although, he is often careful in the narration that he creates for Teck Resources, omitting for example references to a failed attempt to take over Inco, which Teck Cominco launched at a value over \$17 billion in 2006 and ultimately lost to a Brazilian mining company Vale, Keevil does include some controversial events in his book. He carefully, so not to tarnish Teck's reputation, recalls the Bre-X fiasco, taking personal responsibility. "[W]hen the chase begins, it's human nature not to want to be left behind" (369), he admits of the reasons for pursuing Bre-X despite all the warning signs.

Although not technological history, *Never Rest on Your Ores* is nevertheless a fascinating read for a historian of mining. It offers a glimpse into the thoughts of one of the drivers of this industry. It shows us what is and what is not on the mind of this fascinating individual, as he looks back at almost eight decades of his life. It leads us through an entrepreneur's view of mining with all its insights and all its omissions.

*Anna Adamek, Ingenium: Canada's Museums of Science and Innovation.*