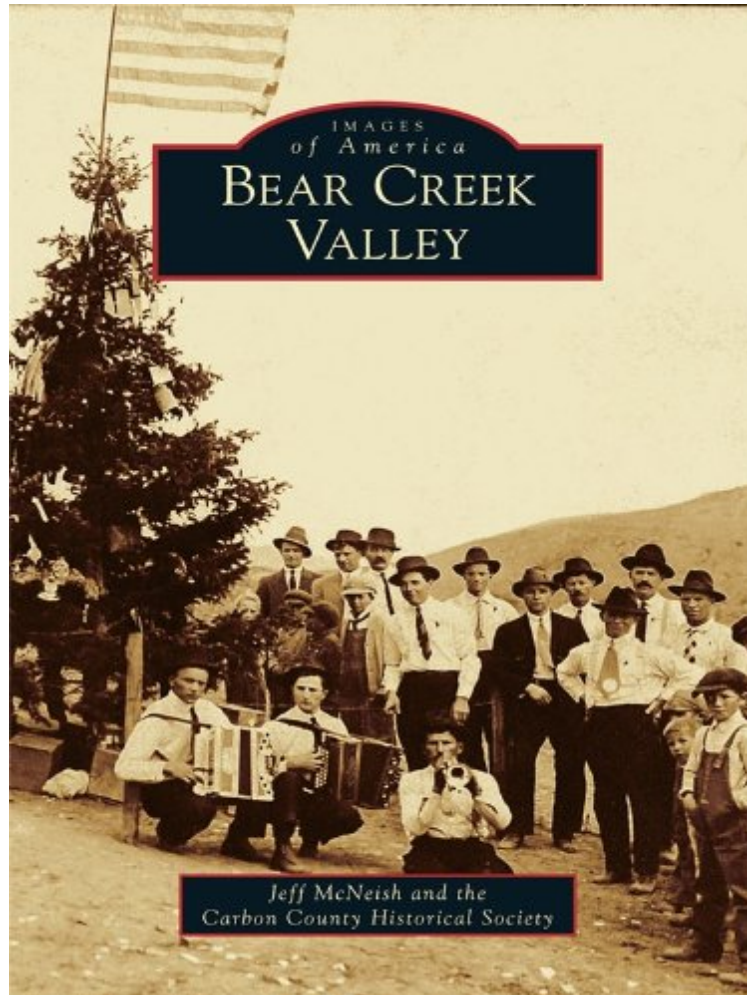


Bear Creek Valley (Images of America)

Jeff McNeish

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Jeff McNeish : Bear Creek Valley (Images of America) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bear Creek Valley (Images of America):

Memories of Montana's Bear Creek Valley flicker briefly to life each February on the anniversary of its darkest day. It is remembered as the site of Montana's worst coal mining accident, which claimed the lives of 75 miners, but the valley was so much more. For decades it was Montana's "coal basket," housing two towns, dozens of coal mines, and a population equaling that of neighboring Red Lodge. Businesses included a movie theater, dry goods store, grocery stores, hotels, hospitals, butchers, banks, bars, and union halls, all serving residents with pan-European origins. Its schools produced championship sports teams and community leaders. Gone, but not forgotten, Bear Creek Valley lives on in this book.

Title: New book on Bearcreek released Publisher: The Carbon County News Date: 12/7/09 Local historian Jeff McNeish is releasing a pictorial book on Bear Creek called Bear Creek Valley. This volume is the latest in the Images of America series. Bear Creek is remembered mainly for the site of Montana's worst coal mining accident which claimed the lives of 75 miners. However, as the book shows, there was so much more to this valley. For decades it had a population equaling that of neighboring Red Lodge with a movie theater, dry goods store, grocery store, hotels, hospitals, butchers, banks, bars and union halls and schools. McNeish hopes to accomplish two goals with this book. "The first is that it will bring to life the history of Bear Creek Valley for those who did not experience it during its hey-day and secondly it brings back fond memories for those who grew up in the valley and called it home," he said. Come and meet McNeish who will be signing copies of his book Dec. 5 from 5 p.m. - 8 p.m. at the Carbon County Historical Society's Christmas Stroll; Dec. 10 at 6:30 p.m. at the Carbon County Historical Society; Dec. 12 from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. at the Carbon County Historical Society. McNeish has also penned the three-volume The Smith Mine Disaster Chronicles. The News held an interview with McNeish earlier this week. What made you decide to do such a book? The project really fell into my lap when Arcadia Publishing contacted Donna Madson at the Museum about doing such a book. She suggested me for an author and the rest is "history" (pun intended). I was very glad the project did come my way. It gave me a chance to recreate the valley in its hey-day and tell its whole story, not just the saddest day. Can it be considered a companion piece to your books on the mine? No, I don't think so. This book encompasses roughly 70 years of history and focuses on the whole valley from Washoe to east of Bearcreek; while The Smith Mine Disaster Chronicles are narrowly focused on one location and six months of history. How important is such a book? I'm biased, but I think it's very important. So much of the history of this important piece of Montana is fading as we lose the remaining folks who were born and raised during its hey-day. Additionally, reclamation work and time have removed most signs of the large industrial complex that the valley once was. Beyond short articles, no comprehensive history of the valley has been done, that I know of. Hopefully this book will fill that void by at least gathering and documenting photographs from the valley. For me, this book also illustrated just how important the people and expatriates of Carbon County feel about their history. Not only was the museum a great resource for this book, but many of the other photos came from private individuals who've kept this history alive all these years by preserving photographs and documents themselves. Getting to know these folks and experiencing their generosity was the most rewarding thing that came out of this project for me. Where do you go next with your writings on Bear Creek? Oh boy, good question. I've got a couple of ideas kicking around in my head. One is a book on the tall-tales of the valley (humorous stories I've heard through my youth and research, but can't necessarily "prove" to be history). What do you hope to achieve with this book? I really wanted to capture and preserve what is rapidly fading away in order to tell its whole history, rather than just work on its saddest day (the Smith Mine Disaster). I felt it was important to communicate this history. I also hope that this book will bring back good memories for the folks who remember the valley the way it was. As ever, it is finely laid out and informative. Quality and care are certainly a hallmark of your work. Thanks! I had a lot of help! About the Author Local historian Jeff McNeish, lecturer and author of the three-volume The Smith Mine Disaster Chronicles, preserves the stories of this region in an ongoing labor of love stemming from over a century of family history in the area. The extraordinary vintage images in this book tell of an amazing place and time in Montana's history and are presented thanks to the efforts of the Carbon County Historical Society and like-minded individuals who refuse to let the memory of this remarkable place fade.