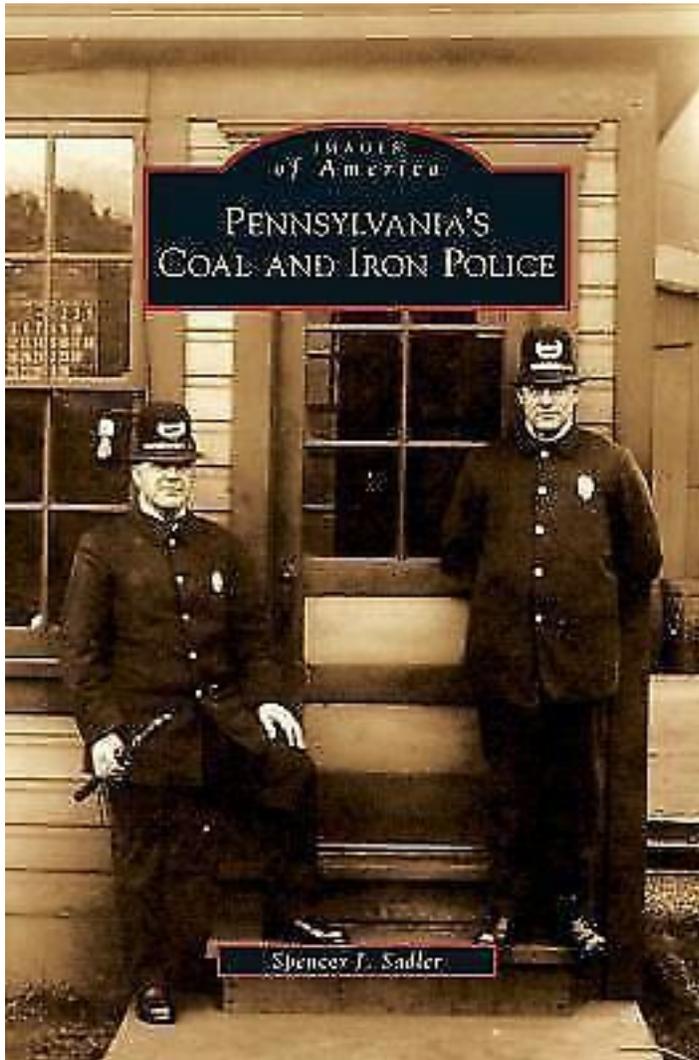


Pennsylvania's Coal and Iron Police by Spencer Sadler ; published by Arcadia Publishing (2009), 127 pages, paperback.



This book is intriguing as there aren't many books on this private police force; even though they played such a key role in Pennsylvania history. There are lots of pictures with the book seemingly written around them. This is a nice approach, as it is highly readable and a very short read: it can be devoured in 2 or 3 hours. .

Beginning with a historical account of coal mining, economic development and immigration; the author moves in gradually toward the Coal and Iron Police (C & I). Accounts are given of strikes and disturbances. Some of these such as the Homestead Strike of 1892 are widely known. Most are not. Small scale disturbances in small, often isolated places paint a telling portrait of why a private police force with government authority was necessary. More importantly, it illustrates where it went wrong.

The C & I were used to maintain order on the vast "mass private properties" that the coal and steel firms owned. Aside from security and law enforcement, the C & I engaged in completely monitoring workers

private lives. Their comings and goings and associations were noted and reported. Most of all, their union activity was recorded.

Workers' entire lives were controlled by the bosses. If they did not show up for work, the C & I would go to their company owned homes. If they misbehaved at work they would be evicted from their homes. If they went on strike, mine water would be put into their water supply. Their personal belongings would also be sold at auction.

Company towns exerted complete control over workers. Not only were workers paid in company script and living in company owned houses; they also faced the stark reality of company influence over local judges and politicians. The C & I Police were arguably the visible means of control, but only one of many.

The C & I Police had to pay \$1.00 for their commissions. This gave them police authority throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. There were no training requirements, no selection process save being hired by the company. There was no accountability except to the company. They were "company cops".

Therein lay the problem. From 1865 until 1931 the C & I quelled civil disturbances in the coal fields. A significant number of them were killed in doing so. In what may be the natural order of things, they became intimately involved in union suppression. "Officers" were recruited from the streets of Philadelphia. These street toughs bullied, beat, raped and shot workers and their family members. Again, a natural, predictable progression of events.

Violence in the Pennsylvania coal fields and steel mills driven by labor disputes was rampant. While there seems to be agreement between historians that murders of mine bosses decreased after the late 1870's hanging of 20 Molly Maguires; the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 resulted in the burning of 104 locomotives and 1,245 freight and passenger cars. Scores of strikers were killed and the Strike led to the creation of the PA National Guard.

Other lesser-known riots occurred frequently and in 1892 the nationally known Homestead Strike occurred. The Homestead Strike began as a lockout. Sheriffs' deputies and C & I Police were run out of town. A force of 300 Pinkertons came down the Monongahela River on barges and were fired upon by strikers who had in their possession a cannon. An 11 hour battle ensued with the Pinkerton men being forced to surrender. 8,000 PA National Guardsmen were deployed to restore order. Homestead drew national attention to both labor issues and the Pinkerton Agency.

The 1897 Lattimer Massacre where 19 miners were killed and 38 severely wounded and the 1902 Great Anthracite Strike called public attention to labor issues and the C & I Police. The Great Anthracite Strike lasted 163 days. Pennsylvania had to utilize the National Guard at great expense. This led Governor Pennypacker to create the first modern state police in America in 1905. What became the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) was initially not much better than the C & I Police. Referred to as "Cossacks" by its detractors; it has often been said that the PSP replaced the C & I and there is an element of truth to this.

In 1910 the Westmoreland Strike broke out. It lasted 16 months involving of 22,000 workers in 65 mines. 16 strikers and their wives were killed in the strike by the PSP and C & I Police. Some were shot to death in the tents they had to live in after being evicted. Strikebreakers , 'scabs' were living in their homes. Westmoreland gave birth to governmental inquiry; it was even suggested that the PSP be dissolved.

The end was coming as Governor Pinchot ordered the State Police to review C & I commissions. 4,000 were revoked. In the wake of serious public outcry, 87 companies eliminated their police forces. In 1929 legislation limited the C & I jurisdiction to company property. On February 10, 1929 John Bereski (Burkowski) was beaten until he was unrecognizable by 3 C & I officers. Widely publicized by Michael Musmanno, the brutality became national news. In April, 1929 Governor Fisher required the C & I to wear uniforms, to not use undue violence in making arrests, use weapons unnecessarily or use profanity. On February 9, 1931 Governor Gifford Pinchot announced that the 1,100 C & I commissions set to expire on June 30th would not be renewed.

The Coal and Iron Police died. The lessons did not. Accountability is critical for any and all protection forces. The executive order mandating uniforms is certainly relevant to contemporary state and provincial security industry regulations. A plan to have the state select, train and direct the officers who would be contracted out to companies in times of disturbance is intriguing.

Pennsylvania's Coal and Iron Police is strongly recommended for historians, students, faculty and anyone with a role in Homeland Security.

Chris Hertig, CPP,CPOI has had a lifetime interest in American History and has started a Security History Group on Facebook. A charter member and former President of the Pennsylvania Association of Criminal Justice Educators; he is also a member of the ASIS International Professional Development Council and the International Foundation for Protection Officers (IFPO) board of directors.