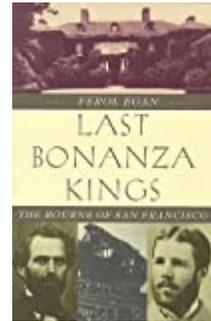




**Ferol Egan.** *Last Bonanza Kings: The Bourns of San Francisco.* Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1998. 289 pp. \$37.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87417-319-2.



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## Last Bonanza Kings

Ferol Egan chronicles the lives of William Bourn and his son and business successor, William Bourn II, in this study of two of California's mid-level businessmen. A New York merchant, the senior Bourn moved to San Francisco as a young man to take advantage of the California gold rush. Before his death in 1874, he invested in gold and silver mines in Nevada and California. Bourn II assumed leadership of the family businesses and successfully expanded them in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the main source of his income lay in the Empire Mine in California's Grass Valley, Bourne II became increasingly involved in San Francisco businesses, especially the Spring Valley Water Company. Along the way, he acquired real estate holdings in San Francisco, down the peninsula from the City, and the Napa Valley. Egan's account ends with Bourn II's death, after years of illness, in 1936.

Scholars will learn little new from this study. Egan had full access to the Bourn family records, but they apparently do not reveal much beyond what is already well-known about California and the West. Egan might have used his work to give readers insights into such topics as

western entrepreneurship, the growth of western cities, the evolving technology of hard-rock mining, or labor-management relations in the West. Unfortunately, he does not, for the most part, take up such matters. Moreover, Egan seems innocent of the works of such historians as Mark Foster, Gerald Nash, Gunther Barth, Roger Lotchin, William Issel, Robert Cherny, Richard Peterson, and Otis Young, Jr., and fails to connect his slender findings to larger pictures of western development. Too often, Egan slides over important issues in favor of lengthy descriptions of the social activities of the Bourn family. This book becomes in places a celebratory account told in purple prose. Thus, in describing the transition in leadership between the two Bourns, Egan observes that "for William Bourn II, the future promise of his greatness was simply passed on to him from his father as a relay runner might have handed a baton to the next sprinter or long-distance runner on the team. Young Willie was the runner for the completion of the race and the receiver of the final gold medal once he crossed the finish line" (p. 75).

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