



Virginia City: Secrets of a Western Past (Historical Archaeology of the American West)

Ronald M. James

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Spent cartridges. The pieces of an original Tabasco Pepper Sauce bottle. Shards of a ceramic pot, stained red. For archaeologists each of the thousands of artifacts uncovered at a site tells a story. For noted Comstock authority Ronald M. James, it is a story resulting from decades of research and excavation at one of the largest National Historic Landmarks in America, the Nevada town that, with the discovery of the Comstock Lode, became a boomtown microcosm of the American West.

Drawing on the work of hundreds of volunteers, students, and professional archaeologists, *Virginia City: Secrets of a Western Past* shows how every detail—from unearthed artifacts to reports of local saloons to plans for the cemetery to surviving nineteenth-century buildings—adds to our view of Virginia City when it was one of the richest places on earth. James recreates this unlikely epitome of frontier industry and cosmopolitan living, the thriving hub of corporate executives, middle-class families, miners, prostitutes, and barkeepers—and more foreign-born residents per capita than anywhere else in the country—in a spot that had begun its life a few years earlier as the mining camp of several lucky guys. An excavation of the history of Virginia City, a window on the heyday of the American frontier, James's book is also an enlightening look at how archaeology brings the story of the past to life.

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