

Bob McCORMICK

Ashland, PA

Artsit second book reflects on life, childhood, and local coal experiences

Artist Bob McCormick continues to express memories of growing up in a coal region family surrounded by the anthracite landscapes of northeastern Pennsylvania. Stories McCormick heard as a child, members of the family, near and distant, and a few thoughts from life, further down the road, as he learned new information while doing his own genealogy research.

All these life elements shine vividly in his second hardbound book titled, RECLAMATION: From Coal Dust to Hope.

“As the government has been striving for decades to return our coal lands back to a healthier state, “Reclamation: From Coal Dust to Hope” tells some of the personal stories recalled by one grandson of the immigrants that traveled to America in search of a better life. Throughout his lifetime, I’ve been witness to such efforts to restore these hills and mountains.” McCormick explains.

In this coffee-table book, each image of the seventy paintings is accompanied by a one-to-two-page explanation that enriches the reader’s understanding of what life was like during the final years of the Anthracite boom. In addition to tales of the McCormick / Kelly clan’s earlier ventures upon these hills, approximately thirty pieces are derived from the author / artist’s memories of growing up in Schuylkill County during the 1950’s and 1960’s.

On the cover of the 130 page book; a coal field scene common to most of us. A piece of tired iron, a dragline shovel, works the active mining area, in the background quiet baron reclaimed stripes of previous coal fields. A string of heaping mine cars click, clack by a run-down, but still operating, coal breaker eeking on with it’s discolored rusty roof and shot out windows. A tall straggly white birch tree, in the foreground, signals the end of the fall season with its five or six bright yellow leaves, for some reason, still hanging on. A depressing scene to most. Unless you grew up there. Unless your grandfather was a ‘undeground farmer’. Unless you played baseball in the yard next door. Then you know. You can feel the sun making those oranges and yellows happen. The sound of that shovel working day and night. Your childhood home, now razed so they could get to the coal underneath. It was right there.



McCormick, has a studio in his home, where he created the original paintings for the book. Some created this year, with others going back to 2007. Most are created on watercolor paper. Others on found coal region objects. Corrugated rusty metal roofing included. A few pieces are of a collage nature with bits of coal and other helpful story telling pieces.



A while ago McCormick explained the back story of one of his paintings, How Harry’s Homer Hit Chicago (2023) McCormick was a kid, walking around the coal fields in Butler township, near the railroad tracks. Here and there they would stop to hit baseballs. His friend Harry was up to bat and slugged the ball so far it landed in a hopper full of coal of a passing coal train. The train kept on going, with the ball in it. Off to Chicago.

McCormick, who started painting almost 20 years ago, acknowledges his creative view, to painting what he loves most. Evident in local scenes of childhood like so many of us grew up in. One way or another.

RECLAMATION: “From Coal Dust to Hope” is a limited edition, hardcover book available for \$60 per copy. McCormick will be conducting book readings throughout the fall, or can be reached at robertmccormick385@gmail.com

by Johnathan B. Paroby

