

John Sandlos

In the Shadow of the Gold Mines: Arsenic and Native Communities in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

My primary research project at the Carson Center will be to write a book with Arn Keeling titled *In the Shadow of the Gold Mines: Arsenic and Native Communities in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories*. The book will trace the impact of gold mining on Yellowknives Dene communities in the Yellowknife Bay area. In particular, the book will focus on three decades of controversy surrounding Giant Mine, which opened in 1948. Because ore from this mine was contained in arsenopyrite rock formations, the roasting of ore caused an acute arsenic air pollution problem as the roaster stack began to pump 7500 kg of untreated arsenic trioxide per day into the local air, beginning in 1949 (with no pollution control equipment in place until 1951). For the nearby Yellowknives Dene First Nation communities, later known as Dettah and Ndilo, the impact of such toxic loading was immediate and severe. Skin diseases and hair loss associated with arsenic poisoning were common among the Yellowknives during this period, and at least one fatality occurred. Using archival and oral history evidence, the book will argue that the production of a toxic landscape and the poisoning of a marginalized Native community near Giant Mine resonates with stories of environmental injustice in the United States. The resulting appropriation of local land and resources, whether through direct development or degradation associated with toxic loading, was also part of a broader colonial process that dispossessed Native people from their local environment.

I will also be editing (with Arn Keeling) a book collection, *Mining and Communities in Northern Canada: History, Politics, and Memory*, to be submitted to the University of Calgary Press's Canadian History and the Environment series. The sixteen chapters in this book will examine historical and contemporary social, economic, and environmental impacts of mining on Aboriginal communities in northern Canada. Although some of the case study communities include a substantial non-Native population (and one non-Native case study has been included to address the theme of gender) our primary goal is to contextualize the environmental history of mining in northern Canada in terms of broader histories of colonialism and Aboriginal political resistance in the region. The book is largely composed of research conducted for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded project "Abandoned Mines in Northern Canada: Historical Consequences and Mitigation of Current Impacts" (Principal Investigator, John Sandlos), and the ArcticNet funded project, "Adaptation, Industrial Development and Arctic Communities: Experiences of Environmental and Social Change" (Principal Investigator, Arn Keeling). Most of the proposed chapters have been authored by the principal investigators, co-investigators, graduate students and/or residents of case study communities. As a result, the proposed book is expansive in geographical scope, including pan-northern synthesis chapters as well as case studies from the High Arctic to the provincial norths and from the Yukon to Labrador.