



Oysters, Macaroni, and Beer: Thurber, Texas, and the Company Store (Plains Histories)

Gene Rhea Tucker

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From 1894 to 1934, a span of forty years that saw its parent company go from coal mining to oil drilling, the Texas Pacific Mercantile and Manufacturing Company operated and managed the various commercial and service enterprises essential to the life and history of Thurber, Texas. Thurber was a company town, wholly owned by the Texas and Pacific Coal Company, and the inhabitants viewed the “company store” with suspicion before and after unionization in 1903, believing it monopolistic and exploitative. But to call the mercantile a monopoly, or a mere contrivance to exploit laborers, paints an incomplete portrait of the company store as it existed in Thurber and elsewhere. With a keen eye for spotting telling detail, Gene Rhea Tucker examines a wealth of company ledgers, interviews, and newspaper accounts, presenting a case study not only of the microcosm of Thurber and TPM&M but of relations between labor and management in industrializing Texas, and a larger story of the complex role of the company store and company town in America.

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