



The Infamous King Of The Comstock: William Sharon And The Gilded Age In The West (Shepperson Series in Nevada History)

Michael J. Makley

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William Sharon was surely one of the most colorful scoundrels of the nineteenth-century mining West. He epitomized the robber barons of the nation's Gilded Age and the moral decay and corruption for which that period remains infamous, yet he was also a visionary capitalist who controlled more than a dozen of the greatest mines on Nevada's mighty Comstock Lode, built the Virginia & Truckee Railroad, manipulated speculation and prices on the San Francisco Stock Exchange, and revived the collapsed Bank of California. Sharon's archenemy Adolph Sutro called him "a thoroughly bad man - a man entirely void of principle," while a Comstock neighbor called him "one of the best men that ever lived in Virginia City." Both descriptions were reasonably accurate. In this first-ever biography of one of Nevada's most reviled historical figures, author Michael Makley examines Sharon's complex nature and the turbulent times in which he flourished. Arriving in San Francisco shortly after the Gold Rush began, Sharon saw his fortunes grow with those of the city. He was involved in real estate, politics, banking, and the San Francisco Stock Exchange, and was a party in several of the era's most shocking business and sexual scandals. When he moved to Virginia City, Nevada's mushrooming silver boomtown, his business dealings there soon made him known as the "King of the Comstock." Makley's engaging and meticulously researched account not only lays bare the life of the notorious and enigmatic Sharon but also examines the broader historical context of his career - the complex business relationships between San Francisco and the booming gold and silver mining camps of the Far West, the machinations of rampant Gilded Age capitalism, and the sophisticated financial and technological infrastructure supporting Virginia City's boomtown economy. "The Infamous King of the Comstock" offers a highly readable, fresh perspective on Nevada and the mining West during one of the country's most decadent and corrupt eras.

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