

Blair Mountain • Frank Keeney • Mother Jones • Battlo • Giardina • Mine Wars Museum

Goldenseal

West Virginia Traditional Life

Summer 2021

\$5.95

The West Virginia Mine Wars



U.S. Army troops arrive in Logan in 1921, ending the Battle of Blair Mountain. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Don Cheek Collection.





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On the cover: Weapons confiscated from miners during the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike are displayed on the state capitol grounds, 1912-13. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Daniel E. Hall Collection.

Published by the
STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA



Jim Justice
Governor

Randall Reid-Smith
Curator
Department of Arts,
Culture and History

Stan Bumgardner
Editor

Joseph Aluise
Assistant Editor

Jacob Hall
Publication Design

GOLDENSEAL (ISSN 0099-0159, USPS 013336) is published four times a year, in the spring, summer, fall, and winter. The magazine is distributed for \$20 yearly. GOLDENSEAL welcomes the submissions of manuscripts, photographs, and letters. Please see Contributor Guidelines at www.wvculture.org/goldenseal.

Correspondence to:
The Editor
GOLDENSEAL
The Culture Center
1900 Kanawha Blvd. East
Charleston, WV 25305-0300

Phone 304-558-0220
e-mail chgoldenseal@wv.gov
www.wvculture.org/goldenseal

Periodical postage paid at Charleston,
West Virginia.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
GOLDENSEAL, The Culture Center, 1900
Kanawha Blvd. East, Charleston, WV
25305-0300.

The Department of Arts, Culture and
History is an Equal Opportunity/
Affirmative Action Employer.

Printed by Morgantown Printing & Binding

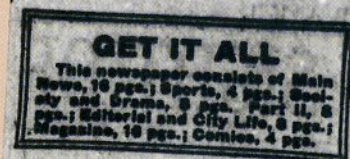
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From the Editor

Regrettably, West Virginia rarely enters into the national conversation about U.S. history. The Battle of Point Pleasant used to be part of it. While we still recognize its importance here, the 1774 battle between Virginia militia and Shawnee has more or less faded from national histories. Daniel Boone is obviously well known, but his brief time here is usually overlooked. These days, our state's most nationally covered topics seem to be John Brown's Raid (before we became a state), our statehood during the Civil War, the Hatfield-McCoy Feud, and, more recently, the 1960s War on Poverty. Our tragedies—Monongah, Hawks Nest, Farmington, Buffalo Creek, sadly too many to name—occasionally get a passing reference. Studies of the 1877 national railroad strike have become more popular; although, many skim over the role of its starting place: Martinsburg. Much more of our history should be recognized, but the national eye has long ignored, misunderstood, or misconstrued Appalachia.

The West Virginia Mine Wars, the subject of this magazine issue, has probably received the most recent attention. Interestingly, it's still largely an unknown quantity in West Virginia because the participants kept their roles secret and, as Sam Heywood's article [see p. 58] points out, our state tried to sanitize it away.

The Battle of Blair Mountain was likely the largest—exact numbers will never be known—armed uprising in the United States since the Civil War. To understand how it happened, we have to look back at the time period. After the Civil War, our nation's Industrial Revolution was in full swing. As with most revolutions, it was turbulent. This instance pitted businessmen's desire to maximize profits vs. the rights workers wanted to bargain collectively so they could earn a living wage (among other issues). Both sides dug in their heels, and violence periodically erupted nationally. Things turned very deadly during the 1877 railroad strike, the 1886 Haymarket Riot in Chicago, the 1892 Homestead strike near Pittsburgh, and coalfield strikes in Pennsylvania,



NUMBER 11,997.

MINERS

The Washington Times
THE NATIONAL DAILY
WASHINGTON, SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 4, 1921. DAY'S EDITION CALL THE TIMES **WEATHER** Sunday Cloudy; Probably Local Thunderstorm. **PRICE TEN CENTS**

POUR FIRE INTO WILLIAMSON

Colorado, and West Virginia, among other episodes.

Violence in labor disputes continued in various forms for decades, but where unions were firmly established, the conflicts generally became nonviolent (with notable exceptions). Emily Hilliard's article on food-services organizer Sterling Ball [see p. 5] shows how unions and businesses can still have contentious negotiations without devolving into armed conflict. Even as labor gains momentum again—locally with the 2018 teachers' strike and nationally in various ranks, including coal miners—workers and companies negotiate peacefully these days.

The Mine Wars also occurred in a time of social revolution. The 1910s saw radical reforms, notably in worker safety, health care, the prohibition of alcohol, civil

rights, and women suffrage. These changes opened people's eyes to what could be. Laborers began imagining a world where they could be paid a better wage and work in safer conditions. As workers got more say, national leaders saw it as a greater threat to our entire way of being.

In 1917, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia set off a global panic. The First Great Red Scare—a fear that Communism would overtake the world—alarmed local and national governments into taking unconstitutional actions, such as shutting down newspapers that supported workers' rights. Political leaders, most prominently President Woodrow Wilson's attorney general, A. Mitchell Palmer, combed for any potential evidence of labor uprisings while simultaneously stoking fears that workers were about to overthrow the government.

And, to be sure, many unionists would have relished that opportunity. The bigger question, however, was there really much of a chance of it happening in the United States?

Then, deadly violence broke out in southern West Virginia. As former *GOLDENSEAL* editor Ken Sullivan notes, "Everything else aside, the West Virginia Mine Wars galvanized the nation's attention in part because the Mine Wars occurred in a heated era of international revolution. The overthrow of the czar's government in Russia was exactly contemporaneous, workers' parties were active throughout Europe, and now came a massive uprising of radicalized coal miners in the hills of Appalachia. For a while, it really did seem like it could happen here."

The Mine Wars were the largest of many sparks that our 1921 world saw as the beginning of an American Bolshevik Revolution.

Why was this unknown to so many of us for so long? As Sam Heywood's article shows, one theory was to keep contentious subjects out of schools in the name of patriotism; however, in West Virginia schools of the 1970s, I learned about Indians and slaves—never told, albeit, from the standpoint of those who suffered from our nation's cruelest practices and policies. And if the intent was to avoid bad impressions of our state, why did we learn so much about the Hatfield-McCoy Feud—which tended to re-enforce our negative stereotypes—but not about the Mine Wars?

None of this is to blame my teachers, who inspired me to learn more about everything. They lacked curricular resources about the Mine Wars and hadn't learned about the subject themselves. Now, fortunately, some great books on the topic are out there, plus John Sayles' classic film *Matewan*

(1987) brought one of the seminal Mine Wars events to the big screen. In 2016, *American Experience's* "The Mine Wars" on PBS introduced a national viewing audience to the topic. There's now even a West Virginia Mine Wars Museum in Matewan and a classroom curriculum [see p. 83].

Anyone interested in the topic should look into these resources. This issue, marking the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Blair Mountain, isn't a comprehensive look at the Mine Wars or its climactic event. Others have done that quite well. Nor have we tried to repeat much from previous issues or from *The GOLDENSEAL Book of the Mine Wars* (edited by Ken Sullivan, 1991); instead, we've focused on specific subjects and events within the larger theme. For those unfamiliar with the story, my article on p. 8 offers a cursory overview of key causes and events. I admittedly gloss over many details.

While much of the magazine focuses on the union side—the underdog in this saga—it isn't pro-union (some reflects very poorly on the UMWA and its officials). It also isn't a case of liberal vs. conservative (union ranks are filled with folks of all political persuasions) or poor vs. rich (nearly everyone on both sides was poor). This edition, as much as anything, demonstrates that the Mine Wars are an essential part of the American story, one marked by periodic but rapid economic transformations that often benefit some people at the expense of others. The Mine Wars chapter shows how thousands of West Virginians reacted when they felt overwhelmed by these transformations and how industry and government leaders reacted to them.

When history moves swiftly, chaos ensues, or as songwriter Guy Clark once sang, "Survival's never graceful when the changes come that fast." —Stan Bumgardner

Ode to the Union

Former UFCW Local 347 President Sterling Ball

By Emily Hilliard

When Sterling Ball got back to his hometown of Parkersburg after being discharged from the U.S. Army in 1971, his plan was to buy a motorcycle, grow his hair long, move to California, and become a hippie. He got to step one, but because he had purchased his bike through a loan from the credit union of his employer, Kroger, he needed to keep his job to make his payments. So instead of becoming a hippie, Sterling became a union organizer.

"While working at Kroger, I quickly became what the company referred to as a rabble-rouser," he says. "I didn't like how some management was treating the workers, and started to complain. I knew we had a contract, but in that day, no one had a copy, and no one knew how to get a copy, so I wrote to the international union [Food Store Employees Union, now United Food and Commercial Workers] and they sent me a copy."

Sterling memorized the contract and began studying the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) and the Bureau of National Affairs reports on collective bargaining, organizing, and grievance handling. Soon, he was filing grievances on his own of what he thought to be violations of the NLRA. Seeing that Sterling knew his stuff, and to make his grievances legal, the president of Local 347 made Sterling a shop steward.

As he learned more about labor laws, Sterling started organizing other businesses outside of Kroger, helping workers win union contracts at Dils Ford (which he believes was the first auto dealership in the United States organized by a non-auto union), a Foodland, and a Food

Warehouse. He became a delegate to the Parkersburg Area Labor Council and held meetings at its facility. "Jack Brooks, then president of the local, decided—rather than Kroger firing me [resulting in] me saying something to a company person, let alone getting physical (which I probably would have in that day)—to hire me as a union organizer."

In his more than 30-year career as an organizer with Local 347, Sterling organized thousands of workers at drugstores, grocery stores, furniture stores, and nursing homes across West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio. He's a compendium of stories from the bargaining table, strike negotiations, and picket lines. Some are brutal, some are funny, and some he will tell only as alleged truths. Most campaigns started legitimately, with the union trying to organize an employer that was competitive with one of its union locations. Others, Sterling organized as a sort of moral payback.

"This restaurant—I was in there eating and this [manager] come over and was giving this waitress down the river in front of us—it was embarrassing. And I stood up and dressed him down. He told me I needed to shut up and if I didn't like what was going on here, I could leave. 'I don't want you causing me, quote, any trouble!' he said. We got out to the car, and I told the other organizer and staff rep, 'That's exactly what we're gonna do. We're gonna come back, and we're gonna cause him some trouble.' So I started a campaign. Next thing I know, I had 95% of the people signed on cards, and we won the election, tried to get a contract, didn't work, we ended up on strike. When we got to the election part of it, [the manager]



Former United Food and Commercial Workers Local 347 President Sterling Ball addresses the West Virginia Labor Federation. Courtesy of Sterling Ball.

said, 'Don't I know you from somewhere?' I said, 'Yeah, about probably two months ago, I was eating in your restaurant and you told me if I didn't like things, to quit causing you trouble, to leave. Well, that's why I'm here, friend.'"

In 1996, Sterling was elected Local 347 president, also serving as president of the Parkersburg Area Labor Council and as a member of the West Virginia University Labor Association Executive Board. He's written numerous labor poems and songs; some were sung on the picket line during UFCW strikes and the Ravenswood Lockout. Despite all of this, when asked about his proudest accomplishments (and he's reluctant to even call it "pride") are those he shared with his union brothers and sisters. "It's things that we did together. First by our membership supporting us, and secondly by the staff that I had being as dedicated

as I am to serving members and doing what they needed to do."

For him, this was exemplified in the changes that he and his staff brought to the local to make it more member oriented. In particular, he updated the Local 347 newsletter to include member profiles and recognition of shop stewards and the executive board. As a result of that shift, attendance at regular meetings picked up. He's also proud of the union picnic he organized at Camden Park in West Huntington in 1997, which he made free for all 347 members, costing the union about \$40,000.

"I kind of got in trouble with the regional director and some other local union presidents [about that]," Sterling chuckles. "To this day, I don't regret that at all. I think that keeping members strong, protecting them, doing something nice for the membership—that's important." While

Local 347 has since merged with Local 400, Sterling is committed to preserving the history of 347 by personally archiving its newsletters, photos, stories, and related materials.

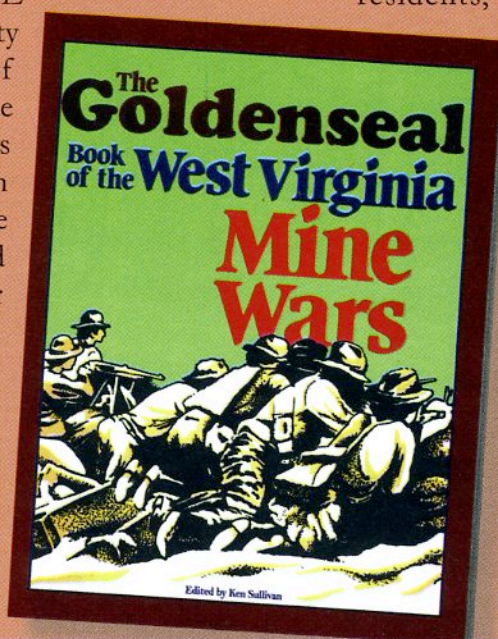
Though he retired in 2002, Sterling still considers himself that radical rabble-rouser he was back in 1971. At Sterling's last union board meeting, the new UFCW president remarked, "I know one thing, he's too ornery and he's too radical to go away. He'll always be there, and so he's probably always gonna be a spur in some company's butt!"

Through the course of his career, Sterling always looked to heroes of past labor struggles. "As far as inspiration to organize and unite our members together, I think the Mine Wars were one of the best examples that the labor movement ever had in terms of solidarity." He also cites John L. Lewis and Eugene V. Debs as important role models.

On the future of the labor movement, Sterling shares this wisdom, "If we don't change from the top down, I hate to think that Eugene V. Debs is not gonna be right. First off, we need to change the image to the worker. The other thing I really strongly believe in is that the labor movement isn't organizing like they should. You've got to go out and reach out to those that are non-union. They need our help. We've GOT to quit turning our back on these non-union workers. And the leadership has to recognize that the membership is the only reason that we have a union to begin with. The old cliché 'the members are the union' is just as true today as it ever, ever, ever was." *

EMILY HILLIARD is West Virginia's first official state folklorist with the West Virginia Folklife Program at the West Virginia Humanities Council. She writes a regular column for GOLDENSEAL. Learn more about the West Virginia Folklife Program at wvfolklife.org.

In 1991, GOLDENSEAL editor Ken Sullivan compiled a series of articles from the magazine into *The GOLDENSEAL Book of the Mine Wars*. Thirty years later, it remains one of the essential works on the topic. Much of the book is based on interviews with folks who experienced the Mine Wars firsthand and knew people like Mother Jones personally. The articles were written by some of West Virginia's finest historians, including some such as Lois McLean and Lon Savage who have since passed on.



The 109-page paperbound book sells for \$12.95, plus \$2 per copy shipping. West Virginia residents, please add 7% state sales tax: a total of \$15.86 per book.

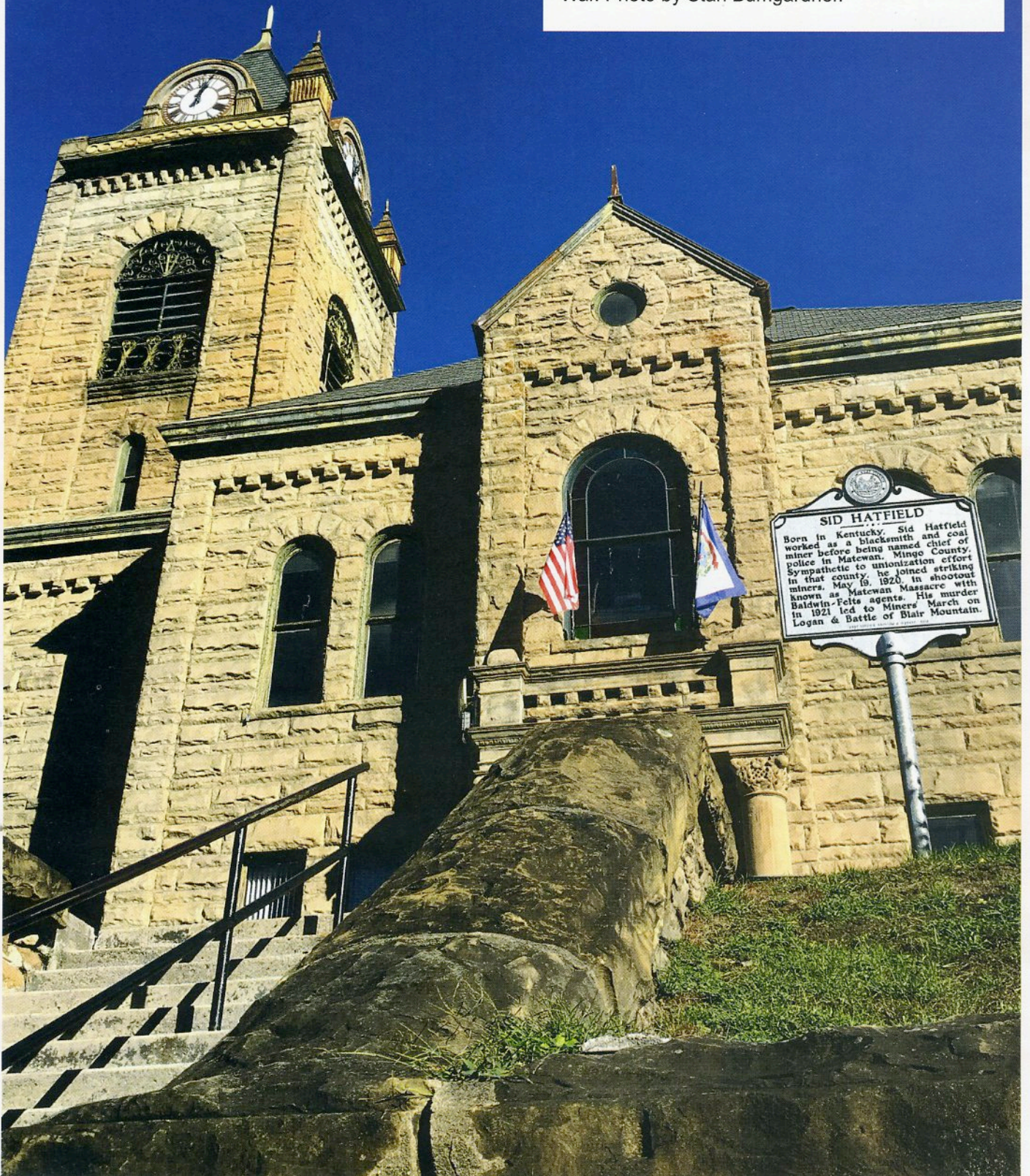
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In 1921, Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers were murdered here in front of the McDowell County Courthouse in Welch sparking the largest armed insurrection in the United States since the Civil War. Photo by Stan Bumgardner.



The West Virginia Mine Wars

A Brief History

By Stan Bumgardner

On August 1, 1921, Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers were gunned down in broad daylight as they walked up the steps of the McDowell County Courthouse in Welch. The assassins worked for the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency, which worked for local coal companies. It was an act of revenge for a May 1920 shootout at Matewan (Mingo County), where 10 men, including 7 Baldwin-Felts detectives, had been killed [see our Spring 2020 issue].

The murders set off an unparalleled five-week chain of events that culminated in the Battle of Blair Mountain in Logan County—the largest armed insurrection in the United States since the Civil War. The combatants were a rag-tag army of coal miners versus a posse-like army of law enforcement.

The battle itself lasted only a few days, but it'd been nearly 50 years in the making. The backstory begins January 27, 1873, when a ceremonial spike was driven at Hawks Nest (Fayette County), completing the Chesapeake & Ohio (C&O) Railway and connecting the Ohio River with the Atlantic Ocean. The C&O, soon to be joined by the Norfolk & Western (N&W) and Virginian railways, opened up southern West Virginia's vast fortune in natural resources to the world.

A virtual wilderness at the time, the region quickly sprouted little coal towns. Men who already lived in the area—mostly from old Scots-Irish or German stock—left their farms to work in the mines. Immigrants to our country and Blacks from the South, often the sons or

grandsons of former slaves, poured into the region by the tens of thousands. For most, it was a chance to make real money for the first time. Before industry arrived, people lived off the land and made most of what they needed to survive. Sometimes, they bartered what they had for what they needed. But times were changing. Now you needed cold hard cash to buy many things.

Life changed forever when the railroads and coal towns arrived. In southern West Virginia, the culture developed differently from other industrial parts of our state because it was so geographically isolated. The coal towns were built by companies, whose officials typically lived and worked out of state. Coal operators generated income from most facets of this economic experiment: rent on houses, the coal itself, even work tools, which miners had to buy from the company store. Particularly in the early days, coal operators could charge just about any price they wanted at the company store. There was no competition. It was about as close to a monopoly as you could get. They also adopted a form of credit, sometimes used in lieu of pay: *scrip*. Many miners fell deeply into debt before ever digging their first chunk of coal.

The companies were well connected politically, too, and owned or greatly influenced much of the press. Basic worker and human rights we take for granted today—such as reasonably safe working conditions, a chance to earn a living wage, and child-labor restrictions—



Rothwell Coal Company houses and stables in Dubree (Fayette County), Sept. 23, 1896. Photo by Thomas O. "Tuck" Taylor, courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives (WVSA).

were ignored by our state and local governments. Even when West Virginia and the nation finally passed mining laws, few were enforced. And there was nothing anybody could do to change it.

In 1880, a small group of miners mounted a brief show of solidarity by striking at Hawks Nest, near where the golden spike had been driven on the C&O seven years earlier. Governor Henry Mathews sent in the state militia, which ended it.

A slow turning point came in 1890, when the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA, throughout this issue) was formed in Columbus, Ohio. It believed that a large group of workers in the same basic occupation could negotiate with companies collectively to leverage more

bargaining power. So, if work stoppages were well-organized and if everyone belonged to a union, companies couldn't ignore individual workers' complaints as easily. To most coal operators, the UMWA was Public Enemy No. 1. They knew that unionism would cut into their bottom dollar and potentially disrupt steady production, which a growing nation was demanding. Companies used various tactics to keep the UMWA out of their mines. They employed mine guards, ostensibly as security forces, which sometimes resorted to violence against miners. They contributed handsomely to politicians who opposed labor. They spread information about the anti-American aims of unions and hired spies to infiltrate and dig up dirt on them. No



Coal company stores (this one unidentified) carried a little bit of everything, usually at inflated prices, proving at times both a blessing and a curse to mining families. Courtesy of the WWSA, Quin Morton Collection.

matter what they tried, more and more miners wanted to join a union.

Some companies required miners to sign contracts promising not to join one. From the companies' standpoint, other able-bodied men were always ready to grab a pick and shovel if union miners wouldn't. These *scabs*, as the unions referred to them, were often attacked verbally and physically by pro-union forces. A repeating pattern in the labor movement is how frequently workers turned on one another.

Miners began fighting back with more aggressive methods. While better pay and working conditions were near the top of their list, first and foremost, miners just wanted the right to *join* the UMWA. Individually, they didn't stand a chance, but collectively, they could be, and would eventually become, a force to be reckoned with. Coal companies—especially in our state, where shipping costs were greater—clearly recognized the downside. They would spare no expense in keeping the UMWA out.

The Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike

As both sides dug in, the conflicts became increasingly violent. Early strikes were generally in reaction to wage reductions, which followed price dips in the extremely volatile coal market. On April 18, 1912, union miners along Paint Creek in Kanawha County walked off the job, demanding better pay. Non-union miners (who earned less than UMWA miners) along Cabin Creek joined in, demanding to be paid in U.S. money instead of scrip, opportunities to shop outside the company store, and the right to hire their own check weighman, who determined how much coal each miner had loaded (dictating their pay).

The strike rapidly escalated in scope and violence. Companies evicted striking miners (no longer considered employees) from their company-owned homes, relegating them to live in tent colonies; brought in replacement workers; and hired a private army of mine guards led by the



Tents pitched along Paint Creek during the deadly 1912-13 strike. Courtesy of the WVSA, Coal Life Project Collection.

Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency. During the strike, both sides employed hit-and-run tactics, and pitched skirmishes occurred at Dry Branch and Eskdale in Kanawha County.

The most notorious episode happened on February 7, 1913. An armored train, nicknamed the *Bull Moose Special*, led by coal operator Quin Morton—with Kanawha County Sheriff Bonner Hill aboard—roared through a miners' tent colony at Holly Grove on Paint Creek. Mine guards fired machine guns from the train into the pitch-dark tent colony, where miners were living with their families. Fortunately, most sailed high, but one bullet struck and killed Cesco Estep, one of the first Mine Wars martyrs. After the shooting, Morton supposedly wanted to "go back and give them another round" but was talked out of it. Miners retaliated by attacking an encampment of mine guards at nearby Mucklow (present Gallagher), where 16 people died in an hours-long shootout [see *The GOLDENSEAL Book of the Mine Wars*].

On three occasions, Governor William Glasscock declared martial law and dispatched state militia to the strike area in what historian Fred Barkey called an "unprecedented exercise of military rule during peace time" (*West Virginia Encyclopedia*). The militia arrested more than 200 miners and union organizers, many under questionable circumstances. One of those was Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, a champion for the rights of workers and children. Even in her 80s and 90s, she was a fiery and often profane speaker who got under the skin of company and government officials, more so than any of her male counterparts. Vastly quotable, she opined about "Medieval West Virginia" and that "there is no peace in West Virginia because there is no justice in West Virginia." Perhaps more than any one individual, she garnered miners' trust during the 1912-13 strike and riled them up to fight. Some government and company officials naively believed she was so singly important that if she went



Armed miners at Eskdale (Kanawha County), 1913: (left-right) George Cole, Oliver Sloan, _____ Thompson, _____ Lunsford, two unidentified men, Homer Sloan, and Sam Holt. Courtesy of the WVSA, Dale Payne Collection.

away, the miners would just give up. Not for the last time, they'd drastically underestimated the determination of West Virginia coal miners.

Although everything was peaceful in Charleston 20 miles away, the prisoners were court-martialed (military court), an apparent violation of an 1866 federal law that prohibited martial law while civil courts are still operating. Glasscock was succeeded in 1913 by Henry Hatfield, who released most of those who'd been court-martialed but still kept many under military detention without charges. A licensed medical doctor, Hatfield visited Jones under house arrest in Pratt and refused to pardon her despite her advanced age and a severe respiratory illness, likely pneumonia.

The governor virtually dictated an end to the strike. It appeared to be

a compromise, allowing both sides to claim a certain amount of victory. In reality, coal companies got most of what they wanted—and more or less ignored their concessions—leading to a follow-up strike by rank-and-file miners to obtain additional demands not included in the Hatfield Agreement. The strike's violence, though, attracted the attention of Congress, which openly investigated the actions of a state government for the first time. Testimony from miners, their families, and coal officials were reported in newspapers nationally and published in the *Congressional Record*, flashing a negative spotlight on the West Virginia coalfields.

Bloody Mingo

World War I brought a temporary peace, for the most part, as coal prices soared and wages kept pace. The federal



After rising to the leadership of UMWA District 17 in a 1916 election of rank-and-file miners, Fred Mooney (left) and Frank Keeney (right) guided the union in a more radical direction and were ousted after Blair Mountain. Courtesy of the WVSA, Frank Keeney Family Collection.

government brokered a deal between the UMWA and coal operators. Miners agreed not to strike in exchange for a wage increase. When prices fell after the war, companies cut wages and upped their pressure on unions. Word spread of labor organizers being harassed in southern West Virginia. A new, more radical leadership had emerged through the ranks in the UMWA's District 17. The two most prominent were Frank Keeney and Fred Mooney, who'd led the rank-and-file strike against the Hatfield Agreement in 1913. They focused their attention on Logan and Mingo counties,

the largest non-unionized bituminous coal region in the eastern United States.

In September 1919, thousands of armed miners gathered in Marmet, 10 miles east of Charleston, to march south and bring the UMWA to Logan and Mingo counties by force if necessary. Keeney convinced most to abandon the idea; although, a good number went about halfway—to Danville (Boone County)—before returning home. In return for Keeney's help, Governor John Cornwell promised to study their grievances; unsurprisingly, his commission determined that miners really didn't have much to complain about.

Months later, wages were lowered again in southern West Virginia at the same time when union miners were getting raises nationally. In spring 1920, miners in Mingo County walked off their jobs, and the focal point of the dispute became Matewan, which had a labor-friendly police chief, Sid Hatfield. On May 19, Hatfield tried to block Baldwin-Felts agents from evicting striking miners from company houses. A gunfight broke out, leaving 10 dead [see our Spring 2020 issue].

By July, Mingo County had become a war zone. Guerrilla-like tactics were the strategy of choice. Non-union mines were bombed, replacement workers were assaulted, and union miners were arrested or attacked. Union miners sometimes shot sniper style into coal towns where non-union miners worked and lived with their families. On at least one occasion, in May 1921, non-union miners fired back in force; at least 27 (and likely many more) were killed in what's come to be known as the Three Days' Battle of the Tug.

Tensions continued to escalate as martial law was declared yet again, and pro-union miners were arrested in increasingly larger numbers. The situation further deteriorated after a State Police raid on a strikers' tent colony along Lick Creek in Mingo County—after which, the UMWA's food shipments to the colony were cut off.

After more violence at a coal camp at Mohawk in McDowell County, just over the Mingo border, Hatfield and Chambers were brought up on what most consider trumped-up charges. When they were gunned down in Welch, all hell broke loose. Hatfield had been one of the few lawmen to stand up for the miners. He became the most prominent martyr of the Mine Wars, and his murder was a call to arms. In the miners' eyes, local governments in southern West Virginia had lost their legitimacy, and Hatfield's

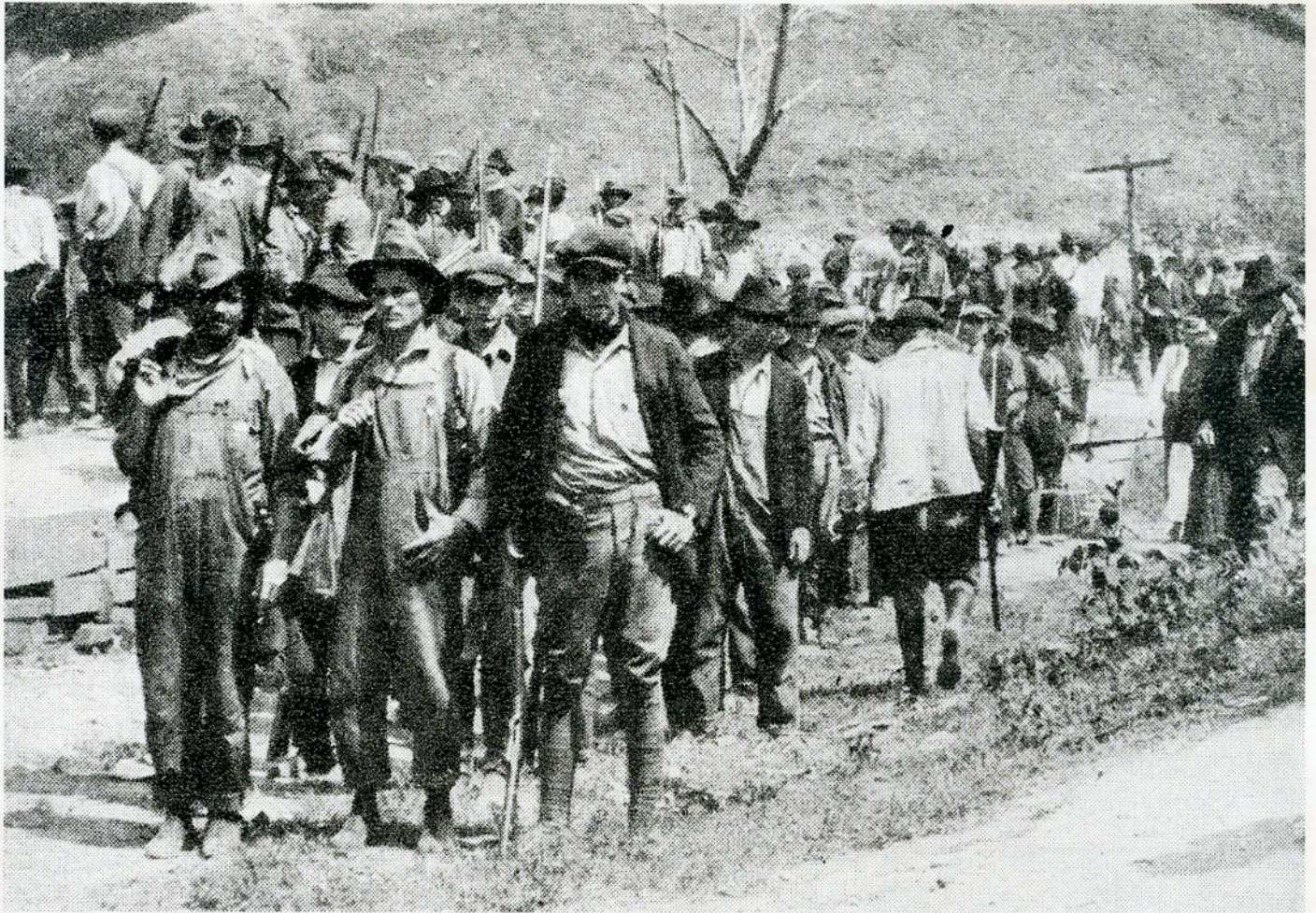
killing was a very brash signal they were in the coal companies' pockets and didn't care who knew it. As Gordon Simmons observes later in this issue, "By this stage, miners saw armed confrontation as their only recourse to shift the lopsided balance of power in which the coal industry continued to rely on mine guards—with the full support of the state government and local law enforcement in southern West Virginia—to prevent union organizing."

Blair Mountain

On August 7, six days after the murders, a large crowd gathered at the site of the recently burned state capitol in Charleston [see our Winter 2020 issue]. Already-angry miners were further rallied by fiery speeches from union leaders Frank Keeney, Mother Jones, and Bill Blizzard, a young protégé of Keeney's who'd soon become the "miners' general." This time, the UMWA threw its full, if not open, support behind an Armed March. Lawyer Harold Houston, who represented the union, told the national UMWA that "the boys need guns" and asked for money from the union's "burial fund."

Armed miners began assembling at Marmet, where the abandoned march had begun two years earlier. Many had served in World War I and knew the basics of military maneuvers. They collected medical supplies, organized supply lines, and listened to battle cries from union leaders—with one exception. Mother Jones suddenly had a pacifistic change of heart and, counter to her fighting words of a couple weeks earlier, urged the miners not to march; this remains one of the more debated episodes of the Mine Wars [see p. 38].

Ignoring her, thousands of miners started up Lens Creek Mountain on August 24 toward their ultimate destination,



Miners on the march from Marmet to Blair Mountain, 1921. From *The Outlook*, Sept. 14, 1921.

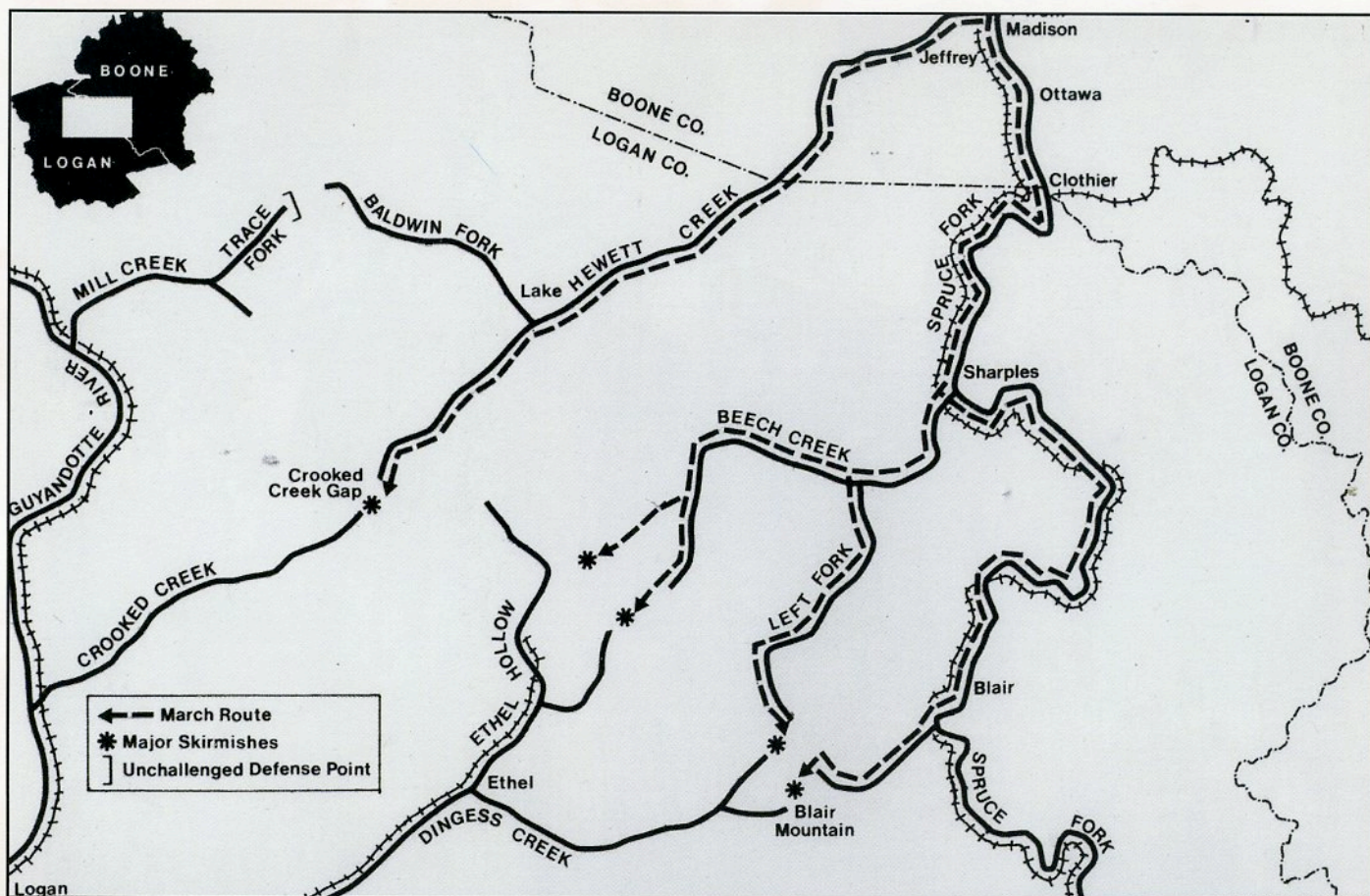
Williamson (Mingo County), where many union activists had been imprisoned. During the march, their numbers kept swelling as other miners and non-miners joined in. To help identify themselves, they wore red bandanas, earning the title "Red Neck Army" in the press.

Governor Ephraim Morgan alerted President Warren Harding to intervene. Both had been in office less than six months. National UMWA President John L. Lewis asked Harding to pull together union activists and coal operators to settle things peacefully. In his typical hands-off style, though, Harding declined to mediate and instead dispatched Gen. Henry Bandholtz to further assess the situation, which was already on the verge of civil war. Morgan warned Keeney and Mooney that the Army was on its way and that

the marchers and their leaders could be tried for treason.

On August 26, Keeney spoke to a large group of marchers at a baseball field in Madison (Boone County), about halfway to Logan. Publicly, Keeney instructed them to turn back for their own sake, meaning not only their physical but legal safety. This, too, is one of the more debated episodes of the Mine Wars. Although some miners ended their march at the ballfield, most continued on. Most historians think that despite Keeney's public pronouncements, he was privately urging the marchers on [see p. 22].

For any miners still wavering, events the next day reignited their rage. Word arrived that state troopers had killed two miners and wounded three others at Sharples, just over the Logan County



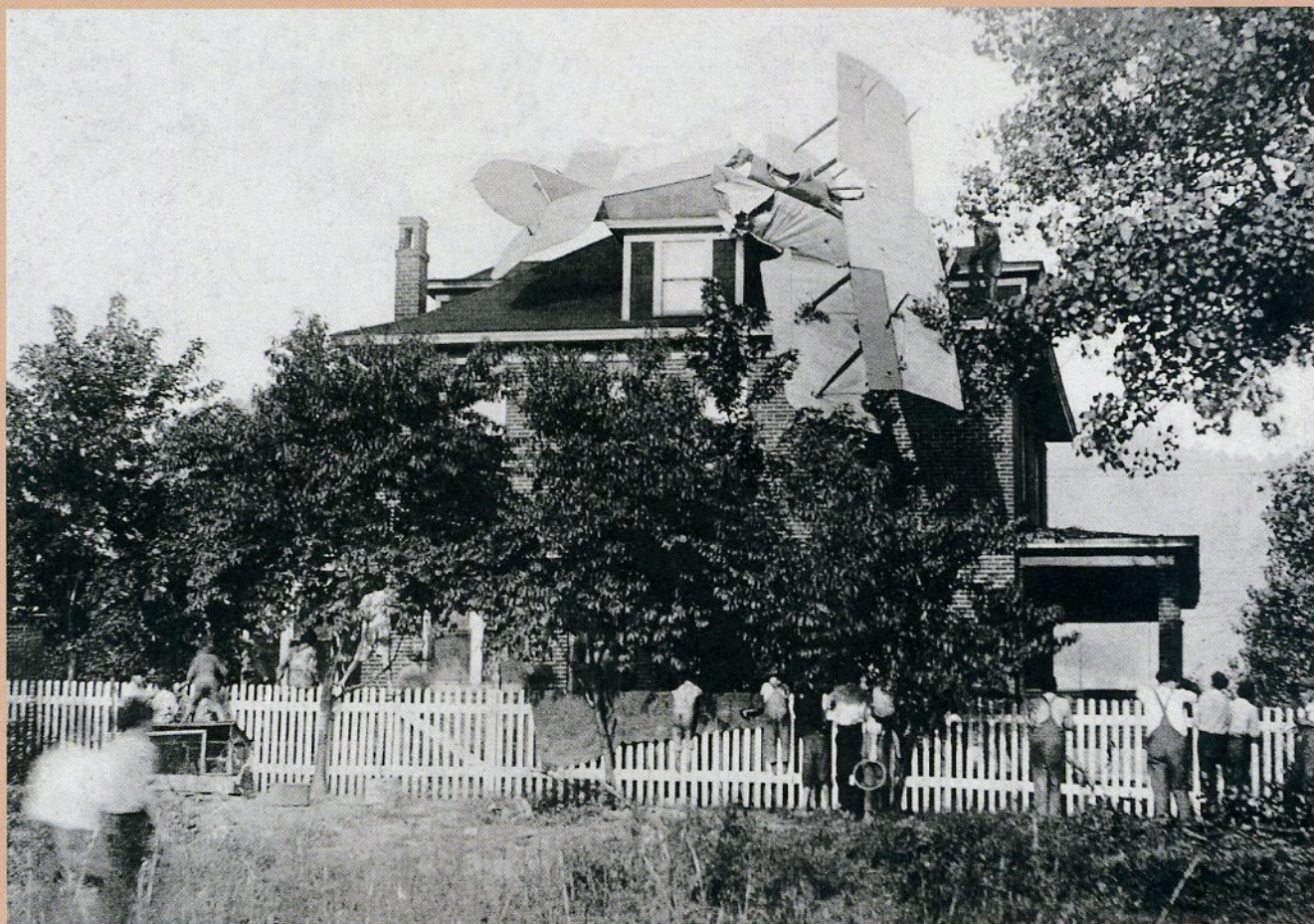
Movement of troops descending on Blair Mountain, 1921. From *The GOLDENSEAL Book of the Mine Wars*.

line [see p. 44]. The "Sharples Massacre," as the miners dubbed it, strengthened their resolve, and they marched on with growing fervor.

Twenty miles from Madison and six miles from Sharples stands Blair Mountain, a 2,000-foot citadel guarding the city of Logan. More pertinent to this story, it was a natural barrier between the miners and the heart of Logan and Mingo counties. Don Chafin, the Logan County sheriff, was as anti-union as it gets. Coal operators reportedly paid him kickbacks on every ton of coal mined in Logan County as long as he kept the UMW out. As the miners marched his way, he assembled an army of his own deputies (largely bankrolled by coal companies) and newly deputized citizens on the ridgelines of Blair Mountain. He also hired pilots to drop improvised gas and explosive bombs on the miners, but none hit their targets.

Chafin's forces were joined on Blair Mountain by more than 100 state troopers, who took up military positions at the crests of the mountain gaps. For days, the miners and Chafin's army fought to control these gaps. The miners divided into two columns at Jeffrey, just north of Sharples. One column headed up Hewett Creek and fought fiercely at Crooked Creek Gap. The second one split once again at Sharples and spearheaded three attacks. At one point, full-on battles were occurring in five locations along Blair Mountain as the miners tried to outflank Chafin's men.

On August 28, the miners captured their first prisoners: four Logan County deputies and the son of another. Three days later, local Baptist minister John E. Wilburn led a small platoon he'd recruited into a small skirmish, killing three of Chafin's men, including deputy John Gore,



Logan County Sheriff Don Chafin hired pilots to drop bombs on the miners. None hit their targets, and one of his biplanes crashed into the house of Logan resident K. F. Deskin. Courtesy of the WVSA, Don Cheek Collection.

Airplanes at Blair Mountain

One common misnomer about the Armed March is that the U.S. military dropped bombs on its own citizens—the marching miners. While Logan County Sheriff Don Chafin attempted this (unsuccessfully), there’s no evidence of bombs actually being used by U.S. armed forces. Brig. Gen. William “Billy” Mitchell wanted to show off the Army’s nascent air corps and potentially bomb the miners to demonstrate the military value of airpower. While Mitchell was a visionary in the future role of aircraft in war, his superiors resented his over-the-top posturing attempts such as this.

As leader of the U.S. Army’s First Provisional Air Brigade, Mitchell established a base of operations in what is now the Kanawha City section of Charleston. He recommended

dropping mustard gas, a lethal agent used in World War I. In the end, 21 Army biplanes (Martin MB-1 bombers) and tear-gas bombs were sent to Kanawha City. Mitchell, viewed internally as a self-glorifying loose cannon, was ordered to stay out of any maneuvers and to use the planes primarily for reconnaissance. His pilots got lost in the unfamiliar air space of West Virginia and played little role in the march other than dropping leaflets informing miners of the Army’s intervention.

So, the U.S. military did not bomb its own citizens, although it was prepared to do so. Only Logan County Sheriff Don Chafin had the temerity to attempt this reckless escapade, and, fortunately, his ineptitude saved countless lives.



Bill Blizzard and his wife, Lava Rae, outside the Jefferson County Courthouse in Charles Town during his treason trial, 1922. Courtesy of the WVSA, Blizzard Family Collection. For more about Blizzard, see our Summer 2006 issue.

the father of one of the deputies captured on the 28th. In turn, Eli Kemp, one of Wilburn's men, was killed by Chafin's deputies.

On September 1, President Harding, having avoided the fray as long as possible, finally deployed U.S. Infantry troops to the battlefield. They began arriving in Logan on the 3rd, and by the next day, almost all the marchers had laid down their guns rather than fight the U.S. Army,

which many had served in only three years earlier. Some marchers simply returned home with the rifles they'd brought. Most of those who surrendered were sent home on trains, but the government decided to make an example of the perceived leaders. Special grand juries handed down 1,217 indictments, including 325 for murder and 24 for treason against West Virginia. The total number of dead and wounded will never be known.

The most prominent treason trial was that of Bill Blizzard, who'd allegedly served as the de facto field general of the miners' army. Since it was impossible to field an objective jury in southern West Virginia, Blizzard's trial was moved to the Jefferson County Courthouse in Charles Town—about as far away as you can get from Blair Mountain and still be in West Virginia. Coincidentally, it was held in the same building where John Brown had been found guilty of treason against Virginia in 1859. Unlike Brown, Blizzard was not convicted. In fact, the only person convicted of treason in connection with Blair Mountain was Walter Allen, who skipped bail and was never recaptured. Among the few ever convicted of anything was the coal-mining Baptist preacher John Wilburn. He and his son were sentenced to 11 years in the state penitentiary for murder; they were pardoned by Governor Howard Gore, Morgan's successor, after serving three years.

Fearing the government would still come after them years later, most participants never talked about Blair Mountain again. In southern West Virginia, the Mine Wars

weren't discussed publicly much at all. As Matewan resident Margaret Hatfield once commented about Clare Overstreet, a key player in the 1920 Matewan shootout, "How do you explain to a child that the nice old man who runs the post office was once indicted for murder?" The Mine Wars became an unspeakable topic, a key reason why so many questions still remain.

Blair Mountain itself was a clear loss for the UMWA. John L. Lewis used the opportunity to expel more radical union leaders, such as Frank Keeney and Fred Mooney, who'd go on to work for rival unions but never again for the UMWA. Mooney later wrote that Lewis took the union "into the gutter." Mooney committed suicide in 1952 after a failed murder attempt on his wife. Blizzard stayed in the UMWA but with his wings initially clipped. He eventually rose to become president of District 17 and relived his early career on a smaller scale with a strike that turned violent at Widen (Clay County) in 1952-53. A few years later, near the end of his life, Blizzard resigned as District 17 president after punching Lewis' incompetent brother in the nose.



Miners at Cannelton Coal No. 2 (Fayette County) in the early 1900s. Photo by Red Ribble, courtesy of the WVSA, Burgess Collection.

The UMWA struggled in the years after Blair Mountain due largely to a drop in coal-mining jobs. Those who suffered the most were miners and their families. As coal production declined through the 1920s, many already impoverished West Virginians found themselves out of work, ushering in a Great Depression in West Virginia several years before it slammed the nation. President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal gave new life to unionism, and the UMWA finally organized southern West Virginia in a matter of days in 1933.

In the end, the U.S. Army seemed to point the main finger of blame at Don Chafin. Bandholtz said he believed that Keeney and Mooney had done what they could to stop the march and placed the fault primarily on Chafin for instigating the "ill-advised and ill-timed" shooting at Sharples. Chafin went to prison in 1924 for Prohibition violations—turned in by his cousin, future sheriff, and bootlegging partner-in-crime Tennis Chafin, a son of the famed feud leader Devil Anse. Chafin became a coal operator and retired in Huntington, where he died in 1954 as a millionaire.

While the Mine Wars are often portrayed as a tale of industry vs. labor, this is only one piece of a much bigger puzzle that emerged during the Industrial Revolution. Starting in the late 19th century, disposable income became more readily available. Our desire to have more things at the lowest possible cost kept growing steadier. Americans soon had cars, radios, appliances, and other comforts of modern living. Dr. Rebecca Bailey describes this attitude better in her superb dissertation on the Matewan shootout and the causes of the Mine Wars: "The average American was more interested in the maintenance of a steady supply of coal than in the individual human rights of West Virginia's miners."

Perhaps that's the hidden lesson of the Mine Wars. Still today, we all want to pay as little as possible, but what about the unintended consequences—from pay and work conditions to human and environmental costs? What's the real cost of the world we live in? Regardless of our individual politics or viewpoints, the answer might make us all a bit uncomfortable. ♣

STAN BUMGARDNER is the editor of GOLDENSEAL.



From Organizer to Outcast

The Rise and Fall of Frank Keeney

By Aaron Parsons

From the day he was born, Frank Keeney was destined to be a union man. During the span of the Mine Wars, many even came to view him as more than this; in their eyes, he *was* the union. In their time of need during the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike (1912-13), it was Frank Keeney, not national UMWA leaders, who was there for the miners. For this, Keeney quickly climbed the local union ranks to be elected president of UMWA's District 17 and became one of the most prominent voices for West Virginia mine workers. When Mother Jones tried to persuade the miners not to march to Blair Mountain, they chose to follow Keeney's word and proceed rather than heed the advice of the "miners' angel" [see p. 38]. Keeney had the miners' respect and loyalty, and many were willing to follow him, no matter the cause or cost. So why is it that a man who commanded such respect among the miners, who played such a vital role in the Mine Wars and the West Virginia labor movement, has been practically forgotten?

Keeney's own great-grandson, Dr. Charles B. "Chuck" Keeney, hadn't even heard his great-grandfather's name until around age eight. Learning about his great-grandfather's story piqued Chuck's interest, and he found one thing particularly peculiar.

"All I knew was this vague understanding that there was some kind of a war that was fought here," Chuck recalled. "And there were no monuments to this war. It wasn't in books, and my teachers didn't know anything about it, and yet, somehow, my family, or an ancestor of mine, played a central role in it."



Former UMWA District 17 President Frank Keeney, about 1962. All photos courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Charles Belmont Keeney III Collection, unless noted otherwise.

It was much deeper, though, than an absence of monuments. When Chuck tried to gather more information from his family, most were reluctant to tell him much of anything—other than an occasional story about Frank Keeney being smuggled into Logan County by Devil Anse Hatfield's family to organize the

miners there or memories from Frank's children about having to step carefully over miners sleeping on the floor as they left for school during a strike.

"Frank Keeney was a controversial figure," Chuck observes. "Frank Keeney was, for a big portion of his life, a very public socialist. . . . You also have the fact that he was responsible for killing people. He wasn't revered as a hero in the mainstream or within the UMWA because he had tried to form his own union. So, he was kind of ostracized on both ends of the spectrum."

It's understandable why Keeney's family would feel this way. He was, in fact, controversial; however, the same could be said about practically any other leaders who supported radical changes to "the way things are." For instance, some radicals, including other labor leaders such as Mother Jones, are often revered as heroes these days. Meanwhile, Frank Keeney and the miners who fought and died during the Mine Wars largely have been forgotten.

Most who are aware of Keeney know of his role in the aftermath of the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike and the Battle of Blair Mountain. Very few know much about his early years or life after the Mine Wars. Born on March 15, 1882, in Coalburg (Kanawha County) to Charles Franklin Keeney, Sr., and Elizabeth Knight Keeney, he came of age during West Virginia's swift transition from rural- to industrial-dominated economy. He saw coal and lumber companies move in and take the land his family had once owned. His father died when he was a baby. He had two older sisters; an older brother died when he was an infant. To help support the family, he had to work as a trapper—a dangerous job of opening and shutting doors underground to allow mine cars to rush through—before he was even a teenager. He grew accustomed to

hardship at a young age and defiantly overcame it. A prime example comes from an episode at the mine where Keeney worked as a boy. Chuck laughingly recalls it as one of his favorite stories about his great-grandfather because it defines the kind of man he was.

"He was nearly killed by a mule. There was a partial collapse of one of the shafts where he was working, and the mule kind of panicked and began pushing him up against the wall, and it was crushing him. So, in order to get the mule off him, he bit off part of the mule's ear and was able to get the mule off of him so he could crawl to safety. I've been told that was the perfect synopsis of his character. He was more stubborn than a mule." It's likely the mule would agree.

Despite his mother's disapproval, Frank married a young Bessie Meadows, a coal miner's daughter from Boone County, in 1904. As Chuck pointed out in his master's thesis, "A Union Man: The Life of Frank Keeney," this incident reveals much about his great-grandfather's character: "Keeney's mother Elizabeth, who supported the family by knitting, strongly disapproved of Bessie and forbade her son from marrying her. Frank Keeney, however, told his mother that if she rejected Bessie as her daughter then she must reject him as her son. . . . Another theme of Keeney's character is revealed from this incident. Simply stated, Frank Keeney believed that his views were always correct. More importantly, however, he felt that if individuals were properly exposed to his point of view, they would inevitably be converted. In the conflict with his mother, Keeney believed that his mother should have loved his fiancée simply because he did. When his mother did not comply, he immediately shifted to a dramatic stance and threatened to cut himself off from his family."



Frank and Elizabeth "Bessie" Meadows Keeney in Eskdale on their wedding day, about 1904.

Seeing his mother give in to his wishes when he threatened drastic measures, Keeney continued this approach as a labor leader. His actions, however, would place a great strain on relationships inside the family, ultimately leading many to sever ties with him.

Keeney quickly rose to power within the UMWA after the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike and was elected president of District 17 in 1916. In addition to his keen intellect and sharp wit, he increasingly began developing more hubris, which boosted his popularity with the miners and antagonized elected officials. In July 1921, only a month before Blair Mountain, Keeney testified before Congress about the labor unrest brewing in Mingo County since before the shootout at Matewan the previous year. When asked why mine guards had suffered more casualties than the miners in this War on the Tug, as it was being called in some circles, Keeney replied, "When a real mountaineer of Mingo County shoots twice and don't hit a man, you know he is not shooting at you. And the men [the coal operators]

imported in there to do the shooting could not equal them; that is all."

In terms of the press, Keeney was a gold mine of quotable material. In one of his most memorable lines, he said, "I am a native West Virginian, and there are others like me in the mines here. We don't propose to get out of the way when a lot of capitalists from New York and London come down and tell us to get off the earth. They played that game on the American Indian. They gave him the end of a log to sit on and then pushed him off that. We don't propose to be pushed off."

Inspired by fiery quotes like that, many miners trusted him implicitly and felt he had their best interests in mind. In September 1919, they listened to him when he helped organize the first armed march on southern West Virginia and listened again when he and Mooney called for them to abandon it. Then, in August 1921, he stood in front of the state capitol and told them, "The only way you can get your rights is with a high-powered rifle!" After hearing these



UMWA District 17 leaders Fred Mooney (left) and Frank Keeney (right) about the time of Blair Mountain. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

words, thousands of miners took up their weapons and marched toward Logan County, culminating in the Battle of Blair Mountain.

During the march, the miners stopped off at Madison, the Boone County seat. Under pressure from Governor Ephraim Morgan and the federal government, Keeney told the marchers to turn back. Some did, but many didn't. Like much associated with the Mine Wars, Keeney's speech at that baseball field in Madison is a topic of speculation, given Keeney's powerful sway over the miners at that point. Why didn't his words stop the march? While we'll never know for sure, many historians believe that while Keeney was publicly telling them to turn back,

he was secretly spreading the word to march forward.

Though the miners' march was halted at Blair Mountain, that's not where Keeney's story ends. An important, and often overlooked, chapter of his life occurred after the shooting stopped in Logan County.

In the aftermath of the march and battle, more than 500 other participants were charged with various crimes, including murder. Some were held in the Logan County Jail for several months. Sheriff Don Chafin was said to have charged locals a quarter to come in and harass the prisoners, and, according to Bill Blizzard, who'd led the miners on the front lines at Blair Mountain, Chafin even shot a teenage boy in front of the

miners, warning that he'd do the same to them if they didn't cooperate.

Keeney, Mooney, Blizzard, and other leaders were charged with murder and with treason against the state of West Virginia. Fearing immediately for their safety, they avoided surrendering to authorities in southern West Virginia and turned themselves in directly to Governor Morgan.

It was impossible to find an impartial jury in Logan or Mingo counties, so change-of-venue trials became the norm. Blizzard's trial, moved to Charles Town (Jefferson County), was the highest-profile. Ironically, the proceedings were held in the same courthouse where John Brown had been tried for treason and sentenced to death in 1859. However, the results were different this time around. Blizzard was found not guilty.

Keeney's trial began in Charles Town but was moved to Berkeley Springs (Morgan County), where he was found not guilty of treason. In February 1924, he was put on trial in Fayetteville (Fayette County) as an accessory to the murder of John Gore, a Logan County deputy killed during the battle. In June, Circuit Judge J. W. Eary dismissed those charges because Keeney and Mooney didn't participate in the actual fighting.

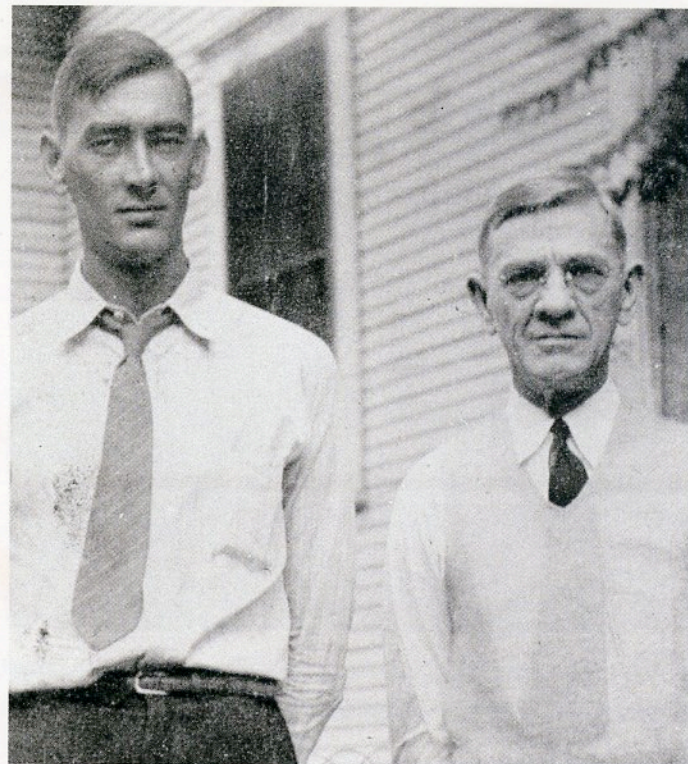
Though the trials failed in convicting most of the miners, they did succeed in one thing: draining UMWA funds. The legal costs practically bankrupted the UMWA in West Virginia, putting Keeney and the others on thin ice with John L. Lewis, the union's national president. Publicly, Lewis had defended Keeney and the others during the trials, but in private, he was outraged and blamed them for what he considered a political and public-relations disaster at Blair Mountain. A month after Judge Eary dropped the accessory to murder charges against Keeney, Lewis forced both Keeney and Mooney out of the union. Keeney also

resigned as president of the West Virginia Federation of Labor, a position he'd first been elected to in 1920; he was the first member of the UMWA to hold the office.

Keeney soon went from being president of UMWA's District 17—and one of the most prominent labor leaders in the nation—to operating an orange-drink stand in Charleston. He quickly abandoned this endeavor and purchased a Charleston grocery store; it didn't bring in much revenue, and he soon gave up this business venture, as well. Shortly after, Keeney tried to get into the oil business with his old friend and UMWA legal counsel Harold Houston. However, they made little profit, and Keeney soon added this to his growing list of failed business attempts. However, an opportunity soon allowed Keeney to regain favor among miners, and he was quick to act.

The Great Depression hit coal country well before it did the rest of the country. Overproduction in the years after World War I had led to an oversupply of coal and the subsequent closing of mines. As a result, UMWA membership dropped drastically: from almost 385,000 in 1924 to 98,000 in 1930. On top of this, there was growing disdain for Lewis among union leaders. The Save the Union Committee, formed in Illinois, quickly reached out to Keeney for help. During the late 1920s, Keeney worked with this reform group and the Reorganized United Mine Workers of America in Illinois to take back power from Lewis, but to no avail. Lewis had too much control over the UMWA; he'd even changed the union's rules so district leaders had to be appointed by him rather than elected by miners. Keeney realized there was only one solution: start a new union.

With help from Houston, Keeney formed the West Virginia Mine Workers (WVMW) union and the West Virginia Labor Party in 1931. The WVMW obtained funding



Frank Keeney with his daughter Syble Ruth about 1920 and with his son C. B. about 1944.

from Christian groups and organizations such as The Conference for Progressive Labor Action, Brookwood Labor College, and the League for Industrial Democracy. The young union, though, came about at a time when it was practically doomed from the start.

Chuck explains, "When he starts his union, he has to go up against the UMWA, the National Miners Union, the coal operators, the state political system, and the Great Depression. And it's just a little too much to be a successful union."

But the WVMW experienced enough initial success to put a scare into Lewis. Within a month of its founding, some 23,000 miners had joined Keeney's new union, quickly exceeding the UMWA's membership in West Virginia. In July 1931, Keeney launched a major strike, but coal operators refused to acknowledge the WVMW. As conditions grew worse for miners and their families, Keeney led hunger marches in Charleston, seeking money from the state government. No relief was given. The cost of the strike

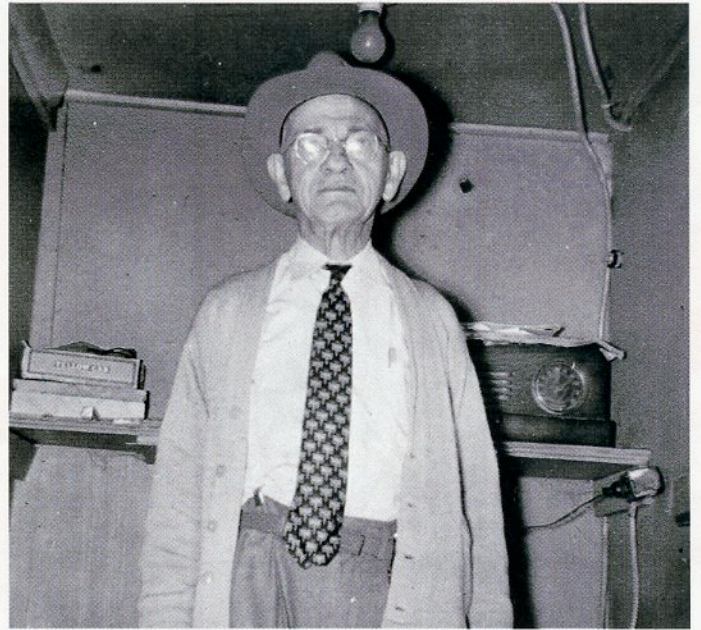
was too much, and Keeney ultimately mortgaged his home just to feed his miners. The WVMW was strained and holding on for dear life.

In 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt signed into law the National Industrial Recovery Act, which made unions legal across the United States. As a result, the UMWA was finally able to organize West Virginia's southern coalfields—one of the last union holdouts in the nation. This was the final nail in the coffin for the WVMW, which Keeney soon disbanded and encouraged his miners to rejoin the UMWA. Keeney had tried to take back control of West Virginia's union miners, but it seemed that fate—and Lewis' money and power—was against him. For a brief time, he continued his labor fight, aligning himself with the national Progressive Mine Workers of America, but this organization eventually collapsed, too. Keeney decided to leave the labor movement for good.

For the rest of his life, Keeney bounced from job to job. For a while, he owned



Once among the most influential labor leaders in the country, by 1960, Frank Keeney was working as a parking lot attendant in downtown Charleston.



a nightclub in Charleston. Late in life, he worked as a parking-lot attendant—where Charleston's Haddad Riverfront Park is today. His wife, Bessie, left him after the Mine Wars, and four of his six children wanted nothing to do with him. According to his great-grandson, "For many years, restaurants refused to serve Frank Keeney, but in the working-class pubs, he never had to buy a drink." Keeney gave his life to the union cause, and it took almost everything from him. He lost his influence, two unions, and his family.

There was never any doubt that Frank Keeney was a dedicated union man. His mother always knew, his wife knew, and his children knew. When his mother fell ill, Bessie cared for her while Frank continued his labor work. Bessie practically raised their children alone; they often went days at a time without seeing him. When the miners went on strike in 1931 and the WVMW ran out of money, Keeney mortgaged his family's house to feed them. His wife and kids could see that when given a choice between them and the miners, he'd choose the miners every time.

As if this didn't put enough strain on the family, it didn't help that Keeney had placed a target on his back, and in turn on theirs. Chuck notes, "Whenever he would go into Mingo, McDowell, and Logan counties on organizing drives, there were guards placed around the family home—you know, armed miners. And his children that were alive, and that I've interviewed, could remember looking out their windows to see a man with a gun patrolling back and forth in the yard so they wouldn't be killed. Their mother . . . slept with a revolver under her pillow. So, on one hand, the choices that he was making weren't just putting himself at risk, but his family at risk." Ultimately, Keeney's wife and many of his children felt betrayed and cut him out of their lives.

Frank Keeney died on May 22, 1970, at age 88. During the funeral service, most of his family stayed in an adjacent room, not wanting to be associated with the controversial man in the casket as the miners, who still revered him, paid their respects. Keeney went to his grave believing the story of the Mine Wars had been forgotten. However, that

didn't keep him from carrying a pistol everywhere just in case his old enemies remembered. "He never stopped believing that somebody might try to kill him," Chuck explains.

Frank Keeney was right about being forgotten—until the years that followed his death. Thanks to the work of recent historians, including his great-grandson Chuck, and organizations such as the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum and Friends of Blair Mountain, this has begun to change. "There has been an extremely big shift in the last decade. . . . The work of the Mine Wars Museum has helped with that. Our school curriculum has helped. There have also been books and films," Chuck says of the change. "I get contacted regularly now by strangers who want to know something about Blair Mountain. People all over the country and even internationally." When asked what he thinks his great-grandfather might have to say about this shift, Chuck says, "I think he would be pleased to know that people are remembering Blair Mountain now."

According to Chuck, remembering the life of his great-grandfather is more important now than ever. "I think that understanding a number of those issues puts today's issues in a lot more perspective. . . . Whenever workers are denied the right to bargain collectively, and whenever they are denied upward mobility in America, you have people turning to more radical ideologies, and sometimes even violence. We, right now in America, have the biggest wealth gap since the time of Blair Mountain. . . . If you want to avoid another Blair Mountain, then we have to look at the causes of what happened there, and we have to make sure that workers and people don't have to go through those kinds of things again."

When asked to describe his great-grandfather in just one word, Chuck immediately gives a perfect response:

"Resilient." Frank Keeney was strong. Frank Keeney was determined. Frank Keeney was a fighter. He met adversity with rigid determination. He dedicated his existence to improving the quality of life for miners and their families. He had his flaws but did what he felt in his heart was right, and he changed the lives of many West Virginians, including that of his great-grandson.

"For a long time in my early professional career," Chuck says, "I tried to avoid the Mine Wars . . . but every time I would go into a history professor's office, they would always say, 'You're Frank Keeney's great-grandson. You've got to write something about it. You've got to write about the Mine Wars.' . . . It's been kind of a weight that you have all this history, and because I know about it and most people don't, I felt this kind of obligation to do something both to protect it and to see it more broadly told. But had it not been for that family connection, no, I would probably be unearthing a sarcophagus somewhere west of Cairo right now."

Frank Keeney died believing the world had forgotten him. Today, let's remember him for both his successes and his failures, his virtues and his flaws, and for the impact he had on our state's and nation's history. It was once said that Keeney was "the embodiment of the union's spirit and purpose in West Virginia." With those words in mind, we should remember that Keeney was always a union man. But to many West Virginians, he was and will forever remain much more. To many miners who felt like the ultimate underdogs, Frank Keeney *was* the union. ✱

AARON PARSONS is the photo archivist at West Virginia Archives & History. A native of Logan County, he graduated from Man High School in 2010 and earned a B.A. in history and psychology at Marshall University and an M.A. in public history at WVU. This is his fifth contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

C. E. Lively

The Man Who Started a War

By R. G. Yoho

It's been said that Gavrilo Princip singlehandedly started World War I by assassinating Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in 1914. It can also be stated that John Wilkes Booth failed in his ultimate desire to restart the Civil War by assassinating President Abraham Lincoln in 1865.

It's certainly a rare thing when one man can be directly credited with starting a war—or attempting to. It's not an exaggeration, however, to claim that one mysterious figure in West Virginia history also started a war with the assassination of another prominent, albeit controversial, figure from the Mountain State in August 1921.

There was nothing particularly special about the birth of Charles E. Lively in Spring Hill, now part of South Charleston (Kanawha County), on March 6, 1887. One of 11 children, he was merely another child thrust into the harsh economic conditions of the southern West Virginia coalfields. Although Lively was a childhood friend of Fred Mooney, future UMWA District 17 secretary-treasurer and Mine Wars leader, nobody could have accurately predicted the divergent paths their two lives would take, eventually converging in strikingly similar and bloody ends.

According to Lively, he started working in the mines when he was nearly 13 years old. He received his first union card from the UMWA in Black Band (located in today's Kanawha State Forest) in 1902. It's believed that Lively joined the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency around 1912. Some evidence suggests, however,

that his association with the agency may have begun as early as 1910, when he first went to work in Colorado.

Working for the Baldwin-Felts, taking orders from Albert Felts, and operating primarily in the western states as Everett Lively, he quickly established his reputation as a trusted spy. Lively often referred to his undercover work as "secret service," not to be confused with the U.S. Secret Service, which began in 1865. The term *secret service* obviously appealed to Lively much more than did the harsh realities of calling himself a *labor spy*.

But spy he did.

Lively infiltrated the UMWA local at La Veta, Colorado, winning enough confidence from his fellow miners to be elected vice president. Once in that position, he acquired intel that led to a murder conviction of John Flockheart, the secretary of that same local. Lively could be counted upon to get the job done, even if it required him to bloody his hands in the process.

With strikes and labor hostilities growing rapidly in the Spanish Peaks region of Colorado in 1914, Lively's work called for him to be incarcerated in Huerfano County, run by perhaps the most corrupt sheriff in state history: Jeff Farr. To accomplish his goal, it's probable that Lively staged an altercation with a striking Swedish miner, Swan Oleen, at Pete Lage's Saloon on April 11, 1914. At the height of the dispute, Lively, a man skilled in deception, shot Oleen in a way that made the victim appear to be the aggressor—at least in the eyes of several onlookers. The wounded miner lingered



C. E. Lively (left) poses with an unidentified man, possibly a member of the Felts family. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives (WVSA), Paul J. Lively Collection.

throughout the weekend and died on Monday morning at Minnequa Hospital.

For the next 16 months, Lively remained in jail without a trial, collected intel from jailed miners, and passed it along to Sheriff Farr, who took it directly to his wealthy benefactors, Colorado Fuel and Iron, owned by John D. Rockefeller, Sr., and operated by Rockefeller's son. After finally pleading guilty to involuntary manslaughter, Lively was sentenced to 10 days (time already served) and ordered to leave Colorado. The details of his crime, published in small newspapers throughout the state, made Lively a marked man in the Colorado coalfields. He was no longer safely ensconced inside the stone walls of the Huerfano County Jail under the protective auspices of Sheriff Farr (and at least 300 deputies). So, the revelations of his undercover work necessitated his quick departure from the state. For the next several years, he also conducted undercover operations in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Illinois—assignments that may forever remain a great mystery due to the destruction of agency records by the Baldwin-Felts' chief clerk, Estil L.

The Ludlow Massacre

It's likely some of C. E. Lively's intel played a part in the brutal and bloody events leading up to the horrific 1914 Ludlow (Colorado) Massacre, in which 21 people—striking miners and their wives and children—were killed. The attack occurred a little more than a week after Lively had killed Swan Oleen. The record further indicates that some of the same machine guns used against striking miners during the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike in 1912-13 had been imported to Colorado by Baldwin-Felts and used on the strikers at Ludlow.

Meadows, at Thomas Felts' behest, in the mid- to late-1930s.

Upon getting off the train back in West Virginia around 1920, Lively quickly resumed his work for the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency. He soon generated good will and trust with union officials and fellow members by organizing locals at War Eagle and Glen Alum in Mingo County and at Mohawk in McDowell County. At the time, Lively was a member of the Stone Mountain UMWA local while earning \$225 and expenses per month as a Baldwin-Felts agent.

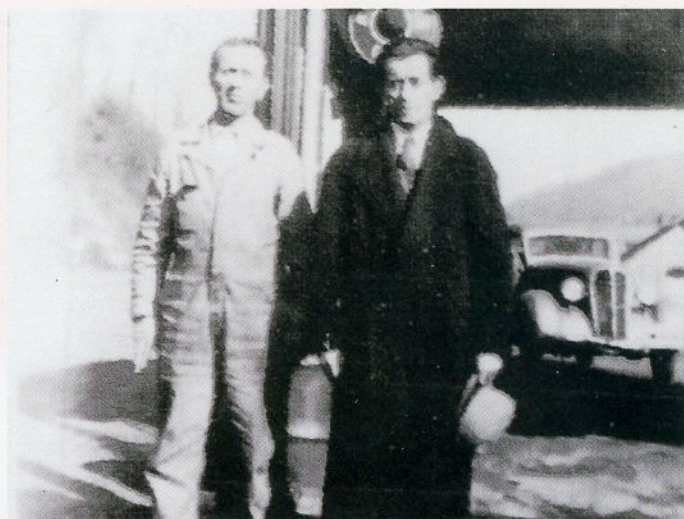
Not long after becoming a trusted union organizer, Lively opened a diner in Matewan, just downstairs in the same building from the UMWA offices. Despite Lively's sworn testimony that he didn't acquire the restaurant until sometime later,

UMWA leaders Fred Mooney and Bill Blizzard met with him in the restaurant on May 6, 1920, following a union rally during a huge rainstorm. Lively unsuccessfully tried to persuade Mooney to spend the night at his home, no doubt hoping to gain more intelligence on union organizing efforts in the region.

Lively was at UMWA headquarters in Charleston 13 days later, on May 19, 1920, when he learned that Albert and Lee Felts, five other Baldwin-Felts agents, and three townspeople had been shot and killed in Matewan. When Thomas Felts heard about the deaths of his brothers and other detectives, he wanted Matewan Police Chief Sid Hatfield and the other shooters to hang. He instructed Lively, one of his most trusted operatives, to acquire information that would lead to Sid's eventual conviction and execution.

While running his restaurant, Lively spent the next few months winning the trust and friendship of Hatfield and many others who'd been indicted for the murder of the Baldwin-Felts agents. Lively not only became their friend and participated in planning sessions for assaults on non-union workers, he also prepared meals for the attackers and even supplied them with cayenne pepper to foul the noses of the mine guards' dogs so they couldn't be tracked.

After many months of working both sides, risking being discovered, acquiring intel, and sending his secret handwritten missives to the agency, Lively remained loyal to the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency, alone. Fearing that he might be caught, he signed his communications as "Agent #9" and sent mail to fake business addresses and to the phony names of various women, as if to imply his clandestine activities were related to marital infidelities. Then, Lively waited for the trial of the Matewan defendants, which started in Williamson in January



The night before the shootout at Matewan, C. E. Lively (right) stayed at the home of his brother Arthur (left).
Courtesy of Larry Lively.

1921. He was certain that Sid Hatfield would be convicted for killing his friend and mentor, Albert Felts, who was Lively's boss and often his only friend in his time out West.

Realizing they were losing the murder trial, Tom Felts made a crucial decision to reveal the identity of his most secretive and loyal agent. Lively stunned the entire courtroom and the region's miners when he was introduced as a surprise witness for the prosecution. Yet, even revealing Lively's identity and undercover intel wasn't enough to convict the men who'd killed the Baldwin-Felts detectives.

Still, Tom Felts wasn't deterred in his efforts to gain retribution for the murder of his two brothers. A little over a year after the killings in Matewan, Felts was able to trump up some specious charges against Hatfield, forcing him to attend court in McDowell County, a place much more favorable to mine owners. Later, Lively would assert that even the assigned judge in the Mohawk case was a part owner of the mine [see Doug Estep's article in our Spring 2020 issue].

After being falsely assured of their protection in McDowell County, Sid Hatfield and his friend and deputy Ed Chambers, accompanied by their wives,



This is the only known interior photo of Sid Hatfield's trial in Williamson for the Matewan shootout. C. E. Lively was the surprise prosecution witness. Photo by Robert Ripley Keller, courtesy of the WVSA, with special thanks to Steve Trail.

boarded a Norfolk & Western train. Their destination was the county courthouse in Welch, where Hatfield's lawyer, C. J. Van Fleet, was trying to engineer a change of venue. Boarding their train in Iaeger—about 25 miles away—was Charles E. Lively, who even smiled at and briefly spoke to the Hatfield party before taking a seat.

After following the group around town for much of the morning, Lively waited atop the steep courthouse steps for their arrival. With him were several tough, heavily-armed Baldwin-Felts agents: Buster Pence, Bill Salter, and Hughey Lucas. They were surrounded by other law-enforcement officers, who were obviously complicit in the crime about to go down. At the sound of the 10:30 train whistle, Hatfield and the others walked peacefully to the courthouse, unaware of the danger they soon faced.

Upon reaching the first landing of the steps, Hatfield smiled and spoke to the crowd. At that moment, the killers rushed forward, and Hatfield and Chambers were promptly gunned down by Lively and the others in cold blood on the courthouse lawn. Lively repeatedly shot

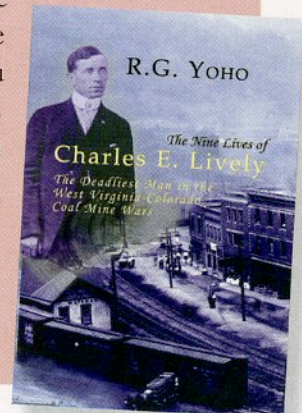
and administered the final killing volley on Chambers, possibly because Tom Felts thought Chambers' father, Reece, had been the real ringleader at Matewan.

This assassination indeed started a war: the Armed March and the Battle of Blair Mountain. Although the brazen murder of the miners' folk hero, Sid Hatfield, was more than enough to outrage the miners and cause them to take up arms, it was the identity of the assassin, the duplicity of Lively's character, and the proud and audacious manner in which he was promptly released on bail that riled up even more people in southern West Virginia.

It's a rare and difficult thing for one man to start a war, but history often reveals to us that it is indeed possible. Nobody ever claimed that Sid Hatfield was an archduke, but the death of this one man at the hands of Charles E. Lively was clearly the catalyst to the Battle of Blair Mountain, the nation's largest armed insurrection since the Civil War. 🌿

R. G. YOHO is a West Virginia native and former president of West Virginia Writers Inc. He also is a member of the Western Writers of America and has published eight Western novels. His travels out West allow him to see the country the way it should be seen: between the ears of a horse. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

R. G. Yoho's *The Nine Lives of Charles E. Lively* (2020) is the first book-length (181 pages) biography of this pivotal figure in the Mine Wars. It's available from online booksellers. You also can follow our author's blog at rgyoho.com, where you can acquire his other books, including a novel about the Mine Wars and a biography of former WVU quarterback Major Harris.



A Relentless Dissident A. D. Lavinder

By Ginny Savage Ayers

Alfred Dillard Lavinder turned 41 in February 1921. By then, he'd had decades of experience in coal mining, as well as unionizing, organizing, and generally disrupting the comfortable life of those he deemed a little too comfortable. Lavinder, along with his brother George, didn't seek notoriety, accolades, or high office, nor did they set out to cause trouble for trouble's sake. They were quietly motivated to act, and to lead, guided by a profound sense of fairness. And what they and their fellow workers observed in the coal mines, under the repressive control of mine owners and operators, was anything but fair.

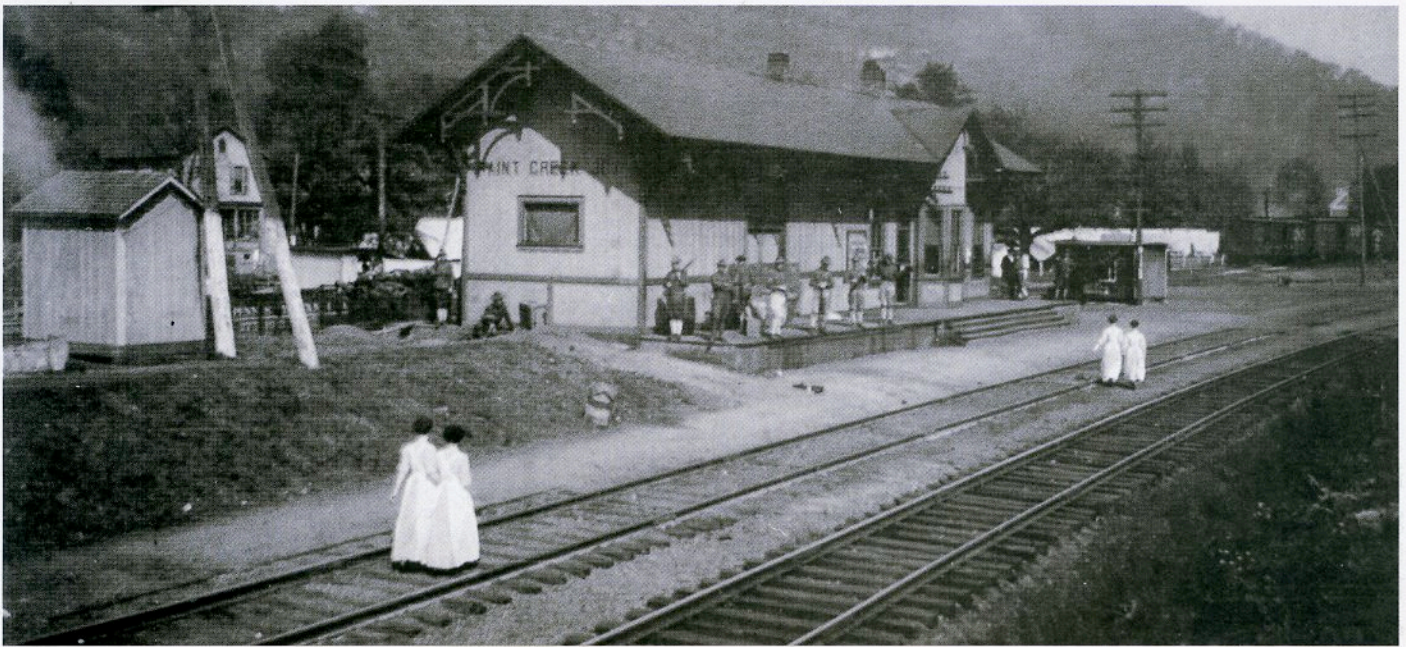
A. D. Lavinder and his nine brothers and sisters grew up on a farm in southwest Virginia. At age 15, he started working in a mine, where he joined the Knights of Labor and learned about socialism. By 1900, he had married, started raising a family (one of his sons was named Eugene Victor Debs Lavinder), and found himself in West Virginia's New River coalfields, where he joined with others to form a union. Prior to this, he'd worked in the coalfields of southern Illinois, where unions were much more prevalent and accepted; he spoke from experience to his fellow miners about the differences in livelihoods and working conditions between the two states.

The miners' strike of 1902 in the New River and Kanawha fields exposed him to evictions and other unjust treatment that came with working in a monopolistic coal industry. It also revealed to him the muscle of worker solidarity, when fueled by enough ire and flexed in sufficient

mass to rattle the traditional seats of power. And the control exerted by those in power was becoming intolerable: families forced to trade at the company store and live in company-owned houses, rent and mandatory medical fees deducted from paychecks, the overbearing presence of Baldwin-Felts guards. These factors and more represented all that was hated about working in the non-union coal mines.

Mother Jones, a fierce advocate for laborers, had worked in years past to organize the union in West Virginia. She returned during this time to amplify the miners' voices and assure them that they deserved to be heard. She and Al Lavinder found themselves dodging bullets flying overhead at one of her speaking events, and the two formed a bond when Lavinder helped her escape by carrying her piggy-back across a creek.

With the failure of unionization locally, Lavinder moved to Crown Hill near the mouth of Paint Creek on the Kanawha River—where several mine operators had signed contracts with the UMWA's District 17. As Lavinder developed friendships with other like-minded miners, they grew to see the inherent potential of a socialist system that would allow workers to enjoy the fruits of their own labor rather than watching the bosses reap the rewards at the expense of workers. Convincing others of the benefits of socialism and unions became easier following the economic downturn in 1908. Lavinder told others that capitalism "was trying to hang on by charity and soup houses . . . but that wouldn't work. The only way a man could protect himself was to keep the union strong."



West Virginia militia guard a depot along Paint Creek (Kanawha County), 1912. A. D. Lavinder was a key UMWA organizer during the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike and later played a role at Blair Mountain. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Pam Blevins Collection.

But resistance to the spread of unions was intense, contracts were broken by mine owners, and discontent continued to grow amongst the miners even as the economy regained steam. Lavinder, his brother, and several of their fellow coal miners were not just drawn into the fight for worker and unionization rights during the 1912-13 conflict along Paint and Cabin creeks; they became leaders of it. When violence escalated, even after Governor William Glasscock's declaration of martial law, dozens of striking miners, including the Lavinder brothers, were imprisoned for months. Mother Jones, herself imprisoned along with "her boys" during this time, liked to compare jail conditions to "Russianized America." Violations of their constitutional rights ranged from guards denying them access to their mail—while flagrantly opening and reading their letters—to being imprisoned without the benefit of knowing the charges against them.

During this period of imprisonment in 1913, when Lavinder and several others were being housed on the top floor of

a two-story house—part of what was known as the Paint Creek *bullpen*—we get a glimpse of his personality. Guards had gathered on the floor below, relaxing and chatting, when one of their rifles discharged accidentally during a cleaning. The bullet went through the ceiling into the room upstairs, where it tore through the finger of one prisoner. The finger had to be amputated, and the story that was passed down orally says that Lavinder saved it as a memento for years. Who knows why he kept it or what became of it—I like to think perhaps he was contemplating to whom he might give "the finger."

The Paint Creek-Cabin Creek conflict was resolved in 1913 but only to the degree that the temperature was lowered for a few years. Unionization efforts continued unabated; Lavinder stayed in the fight, as did his younger brother George Washington Lavinder. They worked on contract negotiations, were involved in state-level political campaigns, and ran for union positions; George served as secretary-treasurer of UMWA

District 17 for a couple of years before Fred Mooney moved into that position. But further unrest and strikes were inevitable, particularly following the destabilizing effects seen by post-World War I industries.

The sustained grievances of disgruntled southern West Virginia coal miners culminated in the 1920-21 violence. Not surprisingly, Al Lavinder found himself in the midst of this conflict, as well. Mid-May 1921 saw the Three Days' Battle of the Tug, when striking miners took out their fury against strike-breaking scabs. Governor Ephraim Morgan followed this up by declaring martial law, which was unevenly enforced on the rebellious strikers. Lavinder, while sitting in a Williamson (Mingo County) ice cream parlor one day, was approached by officers with a message from the state's adjutant general, Maj. Tom Davis, who wished to speak with him at his military headquarters. Lavinder replied by suggesting Davis come see him at the union office. That response, plus the fact that Lavinder was carrying a pistol (for which he had a permit), was all the officers needed to haul him off to jail, roughing him up along the way. He was released a few weeks later when a legal challenge to the martial-law proclamation was decided in the miners' favor.

Mooney, in his autobiography *Struggle in the Coalfields*, described Lavinder as "one of the best friends I've ever had," and the two men certainly shared in some memorable life experiences. They both were living in the Holly Grove tent colony at the time of the 1913 Bull Moose shooting, when a trainload of operators and militia crept up the creek in the dark of night and unleashed a barrage of gunfire, killing one striking miner. Years later, the two men, along with Frank Keeney and others, shared a cell in the Mingo County jail following the Battle

In 2018, our author finished a manuscript her late father, Mine Wars historian Lon Savage, had started about the 1912-13 Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike. *Never Justice, Never Peace: Mother Jones and the Miner Rebellion at Paint and Cabin Creeks* recounts the events of that violent strike and examines the fascinating inner workings of the UMWA as it transitioned from a nascent organization into a national labor and political force. This 360-page book is available from WVU Press and other online sellers.

NEVER JUSTICE, NEVER PEACE

MOTHER JONES AND THE MINER REBELLION AT PAINT AND CABIN CREEKS

LON KELLY SAVAGE AND GINNY SAVAGE AYERS



of Blair Mountain. The prisoners had declined to be released on bail for reasons of their own safety. They were aware of a warrant for their arrest in Logan County and wanted to avoid the much more perilous predicament of being imprisoned in that jail. In his book, Mooney told of a visit at the jail from reviled Logan County Sheriff Don Chafin, who was extending saccharin greetings to the prisoners and shaking hands. Chafin wanted to meet Lavinder and called out his name but didn't get the answer he might have wanted; Lavinder simply responded back casually to the sheriff, not moving from his bed in the rear of the cell. By that point, Lavinder had been pushed too far; the only message he wished to convey was that he would be pushed no farther.

The story of A. D. Lavinder's life is not well documented; I have yet to find a photo of him. It's a safe bet that if he'd been told his name would be featured in a magazine article 100 years later, he wouldn't have believed it for an instant, much less that he would be remembered as an important historical figure in our nation's labor movement. Yet, his impact on people and events of the day can be deduced from the efforts of high-powered figures, such as Chafin, who tried to suppress or intimidate him. Prior to the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek unrest, Lavinder



Mine guards stand lookout at the entrance to the *Bullpen*, where UMWA activists such as Lavinder and Mother Jones were detained during the 1912-13 strike. From the *International Socialist Review*, June 1913.

was the subject of a brutal beating by two sons of Devil Anse employed as Baldwin-Felts guards. And in June 1913, following his release from prison, a desperate attempt to silence him and others was made leading up to the congressional investigation that was set to begin. A federal indictment originating in Charleston charged 19 men with violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, alleging that in their capacities as UMWA officials, they had conspired with out-of-state operators to inhibit trade in West Virginia. The indictment was on a precarious footing from the start, and charges were soon dropped.

The conditions that Lavinder had observed and experienced were not new; they have been witnessed by working people throughout the ages, and still are. Like oppressed groups throughout history whose peaceful demands have been ignored, the miners turned to tactics of

violence and destruction because morality is not measured on a two-dimensional yardstick. As John Sayles wrote in his foreword to *Thunder in the Mountains*, "When a colonized people learn they can fight back together, life can never again be so comfortable for their exploiters. And if peoples' deeds last beyond their lives, it is partly through the stories we tell about them." Some of those stories are of the Lavinders of the world; thankfully, those people continue to arise, and their stories must continue to be told. 🌿

As a teen, GINNY SAVAGE AYERS heard much about the West Virginia Mine Wars as her father, the late Lon Savage, was working on his book *Thunder in the Mountains: The West Virginia Mine War 1920-21*. Following a career in microbiology research and teaching as a college adjunct, she started working to complete the manuscript begun by her father on the Paint Creek and Cabin Creek Strike. She currently lives in Maryville, Tenn. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, one of the most consequential labor leaders in American history. Courtesy of the West Virginia & Regional History Center (WVRHC), Bittner Collection.

Fallen Angel

Mother Jones and the Harding Telegram

By Gordon Simmons

Few people could even begin to match the long history of Mary "Mother" Jones as a labor supporter and agitator. From the Knights of Labor to the Industrial Workers of the World, Mother Jones rallied to the cause of working people for the better part of a half century. Her efforts were often on behalf of coal miners as an organizer and activist for the UMWA—so much so that she became widely known as "the miners' angel." As such, she played a prominent role in West Virginia as an organizer employed by the national office of the UMWA. She first made a name for herself in the Mountain State during a 1902 strike, when she

was imprisoned by a former leader of our statehood movement, Judge John Jay Jackson Jr., for giving a speech in violation of a court injunction. She was again imprisoned during the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike in Kanawha County in 1913 for supposedly inciting the miners to riot, recently detailed in *Never Justice, Never Peace* by Lon Kelly Savage and Ginny Savage Ayers.

If the spark that ignited the 1912-13 strike was coal companies' reliance on the brutal mine-guard system, the lessons drawn from the strike by the miners themselves proved to be a prelude to subsequent events. David Alan Corbin grew up in Dunbar and became a leading historian of the coal miners' struggles. As he revealed in *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields*—one of the first full-length studies on the topic—it was the experience of living and working under the domination of company control that led to the 1912-13 strike in which Jones was centrally involved.

Corbin showed that when the erstwhile allies of the strikers—the UMWA national office and the Socialist Party—sought to contain and channel the struggle into a compromise settlement that fell short of the strikers' demands, the miners returned to striking, even in the face of Governor Henry Hatfield's imposition of martial law and the private wishes of the UMWA. "The rank-and-file miners were outraged with the actions of the district union officials and with the compromise settlement," Corbin notes. Many miners refused to ratify the agreement negotiated by union and Socialist officials or to accept the imposition of martial law by the state. As a result, the period following the official conclusion of the 1912-13 strike was punctuated by a series of wildcat strikes unauthorized by the UMWA.

Out of this continuing insurgency, a number of local leaders emerged,

notably Frank Keeney and Fred Mooney—ordinary miners who'd participated in the struggles and experiences of their fellow workers. These rank-and-file activists were part of a grassroots movement that eventually supplanted, in a 1916 election, the entrenched officials governing UMWA District 17. According to Corbin, the West Virginians had developed an attitude of profound distrust of out-of-state labor officials. Rank-and-file miners seemed to reject these national dictates as part of their larger effort of shucking off coal companies' authoritarian rule, as well as the mine-guard system and the coercive state laws that backed it.

In the escalating aftermath of the gun battle at Matewan on May 19, 1920, and the subsequent assassinations of Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers on the steps of the McDowell County Courthouse on August 1, 1921, Mother Jones, then entering her 90s, returned to the West Virginia coalfields. By this stage, miners saw armed confrontation as their only recourse to shift the lopsided balance of power in which the coal industry continued to rely on mine guards—with the full support of the state government and local law enforcement in southern West Virginia—to prevent union organizing. Arming and mobilizing themselves to forcibly free southern West Virginia from company control seemed the only option available.

The prospect of an impending armed insurrection seems to have caught leading state authorities off-guard. The prevailing legal apparatus had relegated unions to the near status of a criminal conspiracy. Governor Ephraim Morgan had been unwilling to regard miners' grievances as worthy of consideration, so the political and economic elite of the day were, to a great extent, caught napping and panicked when miners began to amass in force.

As more and more workers gathered at Marmet, east of Charleston, for a



Mother Jones stands out front and center as the only woman in this group of UMWA leaders in Williamson (Mingo County). Her hand rests on Frank Keeney's shoulder. Near her are other noted UMWA leaders such as Charles Kiser (to her right) and Bill Blizzard (to her left, with his hands on his hips). Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Marcelene Jude MacClellan Collection.

prospective march on company strongholds to the south, Morgan attempted to enlist local union officials to dissuade the miners. Keeney and Mooney proved to be little help in discouraging their fellow workers from taking up arms and congregating.

Desperate to defuse the situation, Morgan made overtures directly to Jones herself, doubtlessly counting on the high regard she'd earned among West Virginia workers for her tireless support and her courageous and defiant participation in

past strikes. Given her history, Jones had a well-deserved reputation as a hell raiser with no special love for wealthy coal barons. Her impassioned, rousing—and often profane—invective was particularly unleashed whenever she'd speak of company mine guards. She held them more directly responsible for the coalfield violence than any other group. In one instance, Jones waved a bullet-ridden and blood-soaked mine guard's shirt during a speech on the state capitol steps and said it was the

first one she'd seen that was properly decorated.

Some historians have speculated that Morgan was politically canny enough to treat Jones with a measure of polite deference, apparent sympathy, and even flattery, leaving her with an impression of his basic decency and good will. Suffice to say that she still had kind words for Morgan in her 1925 autobiography.

Whatever his means, Morgan apparently managed to enlist her assistance in August 1921. Jones reportedly suggested the ploy of promising the miners that President Warren G. Harding would offer them relief. Jones had previously met with Harding. The encounter had been cordial enough for her to propose to Morgan that she could elicit an assurance from Harding that would deter the miners from marching on southern West Virginia.

But, as William C. Blizzard, son of rank-and-file leader Bill Blizzard, later recorded in *When Miners March*, the "young leadership of District 17 did not at all agree with this estimate of Governor Morgan."

Sometime after her meeting with the governor, Jones told Keeney and Mooney that she intended to address the miners gathered at the mouth of Lens Creek in Marmet. According to James Green, author of *The Devil is Here in These Hills*, "On the afternoon of August 24 (1921), Keeney and Mooney motored out to the Lens Creek encampment to see what the old lady had to say."

Mooney's autobiography, *Struggle in the Coal Fields*, and court testimony provide some evidence about what transpired, and several historians have offered variant, but essentially, similar accounts. Jones told the assembled miners that she had a telegram from President Harding and then read from a piece of paper she was holding. The gist of her purported message from the president was that the miners should

abandon the march and return to their homes. In return, the president promised to do all in his power to dismantle the mine-guard system once and for all.

The supposed telegram was greeted suspiciously by the audience of miners, especially after Jones brusquely refused to show her copy to Keeney, Mooney or, for that matter, anyone else. The gathered miners dispatched Keeney and Mooney to Charleston to contact the White House to verify the telegram's authenticity. The reply from Washington was that the president was away and had sent no message to Jones.

Quite a few historians have puzzled over Jones' curious and, in hindsight, rather clumsy attempt to deceive the miners into abandoning their march. Dale Fetherling grew up in Wheeling and, like his brother George, pursued a literary career. In addition to work as a journalist, Fetherling wrote a book-length study of Mother Jones, published in 1974. In *Mother Jones: The Miners' Angel*, he drew on an interview conducted by fellow historian Fred Barkey with one march participant, Charles Holstein [see our Spring 2016 issue]. Holstein's recollection, in Fetherling's retelling, was "that Mother Jones, in reading the 'signature,' absentmindedly said 'Warren A. Harding,' thus alerting the more sophisticated of her audience that the message was spurious."

While this account doesn't absolve Jones of telling an outright lie, it does give some evidence of a willingness, by at least one miner, to accord her a charitable measure of the benefit of the doubt as far as her intentions.

Another historian, Richard Lunt, author of *Law and Order vs. the Miners*, emphasized the actual effect of Jones' quickly detected deception. "Betrayed and angered," Lunt noted, "the miners did not return to their homes; they continued up



In addition to her union activism, Mother Jones was also one of the nation's most vocal opponents of child labor. Here, she leads a parade in West Virginia (exact place unknown) with children wearing miners' helmets and carrying picks. Courtesy of the WVRHC.

Lens Creek, over to Danville, and on to Blair."

Author Robert Shogan, who described the march on Blair Mountain as American labor's "largest uprising," attributed the miners' suspicion to another factor, which was also noted at the time. Why would the president of the United States choose

to communicate to West Virginia miners exclusively through Mother Jones rather than through their local leaders, Keeney and Mooney?

In *The Battle of Blair Mountain*, Shogan observed that the miners' doubts were reinforced when they requested to see the telegram, and Jones responded that it

was nobody else's business—since it was clearly their business more than anyone's. Shogan noted that, in hindsight, "Mother Jones's position was not unreasonable." After all, the eventual intervention of federal armed forces would doom the miners' advance on Blair Mountain. He wrote that "she might well have argued to the miners in a straightforward fashion. But her deceit smacked of arrogance and betrayal. The miners were furious with Jones and spoke of her as a 'sellout' and 'traitor,' and her ill advised gambit would mark her last involvement with the [union's] case in West Virginia. More important for the present, the net result of the fake telegram was to make the miners even more determined to go on with the march."

Lon Savage, who grew up in Charleston, published one of the first historically definitive accounts of the miners' march on Blair Mountain in his 1984 book *Thunder in the Mountains*. In recounting Jones' attempt to trick the miners from marching, he observed that she "indeed, had lied—for reasons she alone could explain, and she never did. With the discovery of her lie, her argument collapsed, and the march went on."

As Savage sagely observed, she never explained her actions, and there's no basis to believe she had any actual foreknowledge of federal intervention.

Regardless of the unresolved question of Jones' underlying intentions, the real lesson of the incident may not lie in speculating about her motives and purpose. Corbin, for one, believed that historians placed too much emphasis on the mysterious episode of the fake telegram and that the miners were, from the outset, disinclined to go along with Jones' suggestion to turn back.

"As in 1916," Corbin wrote, "given a choice between following a national labor leader and their own, locally elected one,

miners chose the latter." In this scenario, the miners would have been unlikely to heed her advice regardless of the telegram's authenticity.

Interestingly, in the closing passages of her 1925 autobiography, Jones had a few choice words for the opportunism of union officials and their betrayal of the rank and file. Despite her scathing observations, she had arguably aided the accumulation of autocratic authority by John L. Lewis during the contentious proceedings of the 1922 UMWA convention, a year after the telegram incident and the march. Lewis' authoritarian control would soon lead to the purging of local leaders like Keeney and Mooney from the UMWA and the eventual expulsion of radical opponents from his Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). In the long run—and, ultimately tragically—Lewis' iron-fisted control over the UMWA paved the way in the 1960s for the murderous Tony Boyle to lead the union. In short, the UMWA would become many of the same things the miners had been fighting against during the Mine Wars—not to be challenged successfully until Cabin Creek native Arnold Miller's election as UMWA president in 1972 [see our Fall 2018 issue].

Jones concluded in her autobiography that "despite false leaders," the workers' cause continues and will someday prevail. This may be the closest thing to an explanation—and perhaps even an apology—that anyone could expect for her botched attempt to dissuade the coal miners of West Virginia from undertaking their fateful march to Blair Mountain.*

GORDON SIMMONS, a former editorial assistant at GOLDENSEAL, is president of the West Virginia Labor History Association and an investigator for Public Defender Services. He has also worked as a philosophy instructor, bookseller, and union organizer. This is his sixth contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



State troopers take up positions on Blair Mountain to help stop the Armed March, 1921. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Police (WVSP).

“State Police Hold the Logan County Line”

By Merle T. Cole

This article’s title was taken from a headline in Beckley’s *Raleigh Register*, November 11, 1921—two months after the Battle of Blair Mountain ended. It both highlights and exaggerates the contribution of the West Virginia State Police (WVSP) in blocking what authorities termed the “Armed March.”

The police force dispatched to confront the marchers was in the midst of expanding from two companies (created in 1919) to an additional two authorized by the legislature in April 1921. The expansion law became effective on July 24. Police recruiters were busy screening hundreds of applicants and forming provisional units. Recruiters took

the job seriously, considering that the most frequent reason given for dismissing early members was "unsuitable for police work."

In summer 1921, the bulk of the WVSP's manpower was concentrated in Mingo County, as it had been on several prior occasions because of recurring violence related to unionizing activities: the Matewan Massacre, the Three Days' Battle of the Tug, and—less dramatic but equally deadly and more frequent—sniping and ambushing. Governor Ephraim Morgan reacted to renewed tensions in 1921 by proclaiming martial law in the county on May 19 (the one-year anniversary of the shootout at Matewan) and dispatched Maj. Thomas B. Davis, acting adjutant general, to administer the proclamation. For muscle, Davis initially relied on Company B, commanded by Capt. James R. Brockus; at this point, about 90% of the entire WVSP force was on duty in Mingo County. But the state supreme court invalidated Morgan's proclamation. The justices pointed out that *martial* law requires *soldiers* and that the WVSP didn't qualify. In fact, Davis was the only soldier in the state at the time. Morgan issued a second proclamation on June 27, creating two *enrolled militia* companies in Mingo County. This proclamation wouldn't be lifted until September 1922, after the UMWA had canceled its strike.

The Mingo County sheriff transferred law-enforcement responsibilities to Capt. Brockus. The captain was a tough, no-nonsense retired Army officer, destined to become the most respected, and feared, of early WVSP leaders. Believing he didn't have enough manpower to forestall anticipated outbreaks, Brockus authorized recruitment of several hundred "volunteer state policemen" to rally on-call. This group was also known locally as *vigilantes*, in tribute to the famous San Francisco citizens' public safety committee.

The WVSP were the only organized state forces present in Logan County. No National Guard *units* participated, although a handful of appointed guardsmen may have been sprinkled among the defenders on Blair Mountain. Paralleling the WVSP expansion, the state National Guard—depleted of guardsmen after being called up during World War I—had also been authorized in April 1921 but had not really started to reorganize before the Armed March. This was a problem nationwide; lack of National Guard units meant that federal troops had to be deployed to quell 20 major disorders nationally between July 1918 and September 1920.

The first National Guard unit formed in our state under the new legislation was Company I at Williamson, authorized on August 26, 1921—two days after the march to Blair Mountain had commenced from Marmet. It was actually an amalgamation of the enrolled militia companies. It stayed in Mingo County under Maj. Davis' command, enforcing martial law and guarding against incursions from Kentucky; it did not deploy to Logan County.

Ironically, since the National Guard was still virtually nonexistent, the senior state representative on the spot was newly commissioned Guard Col. William E. Eubank of Welch. On August 30, the governor ordered him "to proceed to Logan . . . and assume command of the military operations in that district." As nominal commander, Eubank was the man the U.S. Army dealt with, or at least *tried* to, during the federal intervention at Blair Mountain. An Army liaison officer reported that when he arrived at Eubank's headquarters in Logan on September 3 to arrange the deployment of incoming federal troops, he found the colonel "and members of his staff to be so unmistakably under the influence of liquor as to render them unfit in our opinion

for an orderly transaction of business.” Note this was in the midst of national Prohibition!

The actual commander of the Logan defense force was infamous county Sheriff Don Chafin. In addition to his formidable corps of appointed deputies, Chafin called upon company mine guards and numerous civilian volunteers. In the prevailing chaos, these men were grouped into hastily formed companies, armed from stocks in Logan, and dispatched to the fighting front. Most were World War I veterans from our state’s southern counties. Many perceived in unionist rhetoric and actions the specter of Bolshevism, the Red Terror, and other horrific aspects of the 1917 Russian Revolution—which had announced its goal of worldwide exportation of Communism via the Comintern. Such fears were widespread throughout Europe and North America. A week after the battle, Governor Morgan would issue an official statement thanking “the volunteer citizens of Mercer, McDowell, Mingo, Cabell and Kanawha counties who made personal sacrifices to assist the authorities of Logan County in preserving that county from attack by armed insurrectionists.”

On August 27, the governor ordered Davis to dispatch Capt. Brockus to reinforce Chafin with all the troopers he could spare. Brockus’ Company B, including a number of “volunteer state policemen,” would actually play two important roles in the Battle of Blair Mountain—in precipitating it and in providing the strongest WVSP presence.

Lead elements of the Armed March had reached Madison (Boone County) when UMWA District 17 leaders—namely district President Frank Keeney—relayed an explicit warning from Brig. Gen. Harry Bandholtz, senior U.S. Army officer in the state, that federal troops would intervene if the marchers did not immediately

Please see Merle’s other articles about the early days of the West Virginia State Police (WVSP) in our Summer 2016, Winter 2017, and Summer 2019 issues.

disperse. A good many of the miners didn’t want to fight the Army and reluctantly began reversing course.

At this crucial moment, Sheriff Chafin inexplicably and provocatively decided the time was right to execute arrest warrants against 40 miners for stealing the horses of four state troopers near Sharples. Brockus personally led a mixed patrol of troopers, deputies, and mine guards to make the arrests on the evening of August 30. The force encountered and detained a few miners guarding the roads, got involved in a firefight near Sharples, and then withdrew, leaving two dead and three wounded. The miners labeled this attack the “Sharples Massacre,” which became a rallying cry for continuing the march.

Chafin’s force on the summit of Blair Mountain included some 120 to 140 state troopers from Company B and the newly organized Company D under Lt. Harvey N. Rexroad, another widely admired WVSP leader. In addition, WVSP Supt. Jackson Arnold personally brought a complement of 42 mostly new recruits from Charleston.

The adjutant general’s official biennial report summarized events succinctly without much detail: “6-8,000 miners . . . assembled near Marmet and marched overland to Blair and attacked the Sheriff of Logan County and the volunteer forces gathered by him. The marchers were stopped and held at Blair and at the head of Crooked Creek until Federal troops arrived and replaced the volunteer defenders.” After three days of desultory combat, the confrontation had ended by September 4.



State troopers ascend a ridgeline at Blair Mountain, 1921. Courtesy of the WVSP.

The Mysterious Death of Private Duling

By Merle T. Cole

Twenty-four-year-old Pvt. George A. Duling had enlisted in the state police on May 9, 1921, and had just under four months in service when he died on August 28. His death certificate states the cause of death as “gunshot wound of head—accidental.” The September 1921 Muster and Pay Roll for State Police Company B specifies the time of death as 7:15 a.m. but provides no other particulars.

State Police 1st Sgt. Jay C. Powers has a copy of a September 16, 1921, memo to Supt. Arnold from Capt. Brockus. The memo reports that Brockus had obtained an indictment in Logan County against John L. Rice for murdering Duling. This begins a trail of contradictions.

The agency’s biennial reports offer changing explanations, ranging from “accidentally shot” (3rd report), to “killed in action” (7th report), to “killed in line of duty” (8th report). In *Thunder in the Mountains*, historian Lon Savage attributes Duling’s death to “a laborer accidentally discharg[ing] a rifle” and cites “Capt. Brockus’ report, Aug. 28, 1921,” in the National Archives and Record Administration (NARA). But in response to a later inquiry, the NARA has said it cannot locate

the report cited by Savage.

Clyde H. East, a political writer for the *Charleston Gazette*, offered the ultimate obfuscation of the incident in the Spring 1927 edition of *State Police Magazine*. Reiterating an otherwise accurate chronology of early line-of-duty deaths, he wrote, “George A. Dunlap

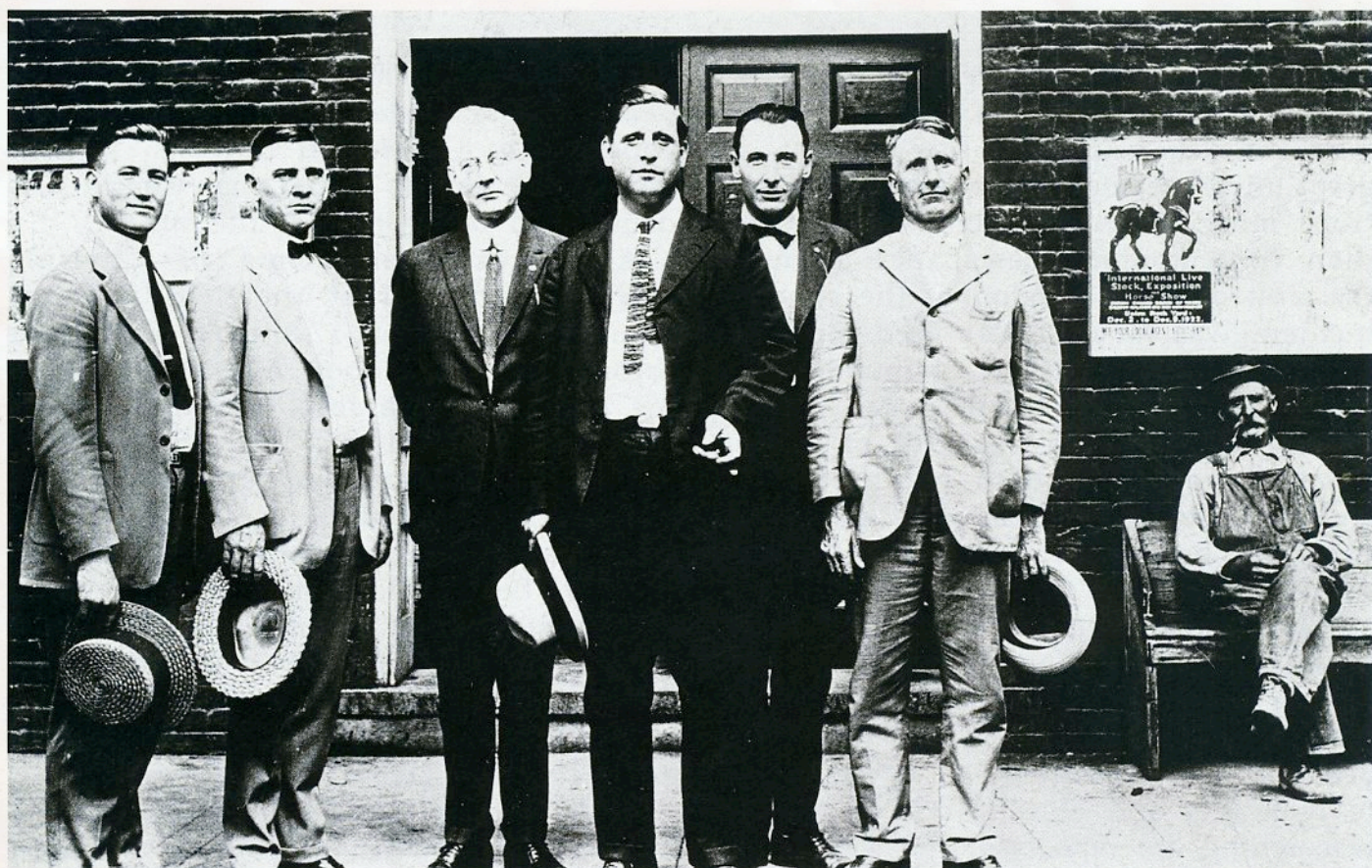
[sic], born in Charleston, W.Va., but reared at Gilboa in Nicholas County, was accidentally killed on August 8 [sic], 1921, at Matewan [sic] Mingo County, as the result of a rifle in the hands of a deputy sheriff.” East’s report at least has the virtue of 100% consistent inaccuracy—wrong name, wrong date, wrong place!



Private George Duling was the only state trooper killed in close proximity to the Battle of Blair Mountain. Courtesy of the WVSP.

The WVSP suffered only one man killed during this campaign—before combat began and apparently by accident. The trooper force was quartered in a temporary barracks in the town of Ethel (on the defense side of Blair Mountain), where Pvt. George A. Duling suffered a mortal gunshot wound under mysterious circumstances on the morning of August 28. Duling was the last of four state troopers killed during the Mine Wars. The others—Privates Ernest L. Ripley (November 18, 1920), Charles M. Kackley (May 25, 1921), and William L. McMillion (June 28, 1921)—all lost their lives in Mingo County. ❁

MERLE T. COLE was born and reared in Raleigh County, graduated from Marshall University, and worked for various federal agencies before retiring to his native county. His most notable service was as director of the USDA Agricultural Research Service Research Position Evaluation Staff and as a commissioned officer in the Maryland National State Guard. Merle is widely recognized for preserving the history of West Virginia law enforcement and military organizations, resulting in his selection as a Fellow of the Company of Military Historians and recipient of the distinguished National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Historic Preservation Medal. He’s made numerous contributions to GOLDEN-SEAL, most recently in our Winter 2020 issue.



Bill Petry (4th from left) was vice-president of UMWA District 17 during Blair Mountain. He's been largely forgotten except for one notable incident. Also pictured are (left-right) Bill Blizzard, Frank Keeney, attorney Harold Houston, Fred Mooney, and Andy Porter. The man on the bench is unidentified. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Blizzard Family Collection.

I Shot the Sheriff Bill Petry and Don Chafin

By Wes Holden

On the evening of September 19, 1919, my great-uncle William "Big Bill" Petry—vice-president of UMWA District 17—shot Don Chafin at the UMWA district headquarters on Summers Street in Charleston. Chafin was the former (and future) sheriff of Logan County and, at this time, served as the Logan County clerk. Regardless of his

employment status, few people disputed that Chafin was still the "King of Logan County," paid by coal companies to keep the union out of southern West Virginia. After his shooting in Charleston, he was re-elected Logan County sheriff and led the stand against the marching miners in what has come to be known as the Battle of Blair Mountain.

Amazingly, the shooting has received only a footnote in the history of the Mine Wars. In fact, aside from this incident, my great-uncle seems to be nearly missing from most Mine Wars chronicles. Other than contemporary newspaper accounts, the first detailed version of the shooting incident was labor leader Fred Mooney's autobiography, published posthumously in 1967. According to family lore, Mooney, the former secretary-treasurer of District 17, was jealous of both my great-uncle and Bill Blizzard and, as such, diminished the roles both men played in the labor uprising.

When subsequent authors wrote their versions of the Mine Wars, they relied heavily on Mooney's autobiography. While Mooney offers a fascinating first-hand account, it's questionable with regards to factuality and objectivity. Similarly, in researching the reports of the shooting in the *Charleston Gazette*, *Charleston Daily Mail*, and *Logan Banner*, I found somewhat different versions, depending on who they saw as the hero and the bad guy.

Given this situation, I feel compelled to relate my family's version of the shooting incident. On that September evening, Chafin, a staunch opponent of the UMWA, walked into the second-floor office of District 17 under the pretext of spotting a Logan County fugitive (a pro-union Black man) who he claimed was hiding out in Charleston. This intrusion occurred only weeks after armed miners had abandoned their first planned march on Logan County, so emotions were running high. Chafin was well out of his jurisdiction—both in the location of the attempted arrest and in the fact that he was no longer a sheriff. He claimed justification for being there because he was the surety for the fugitive, who allegedly had jumped bail. Regardless, this in no way provided him a legal basis for warrant-less bounty hunting. It also

didn't explain why he went to UMWA headquarters instead of addressing his concerns to Charleston officials. Several newspaper reports stated that Chafin was drunk and belligerent at the time.

About the same time of Chafin's intrusion, my great-uncle Billy Petry entered the District 17 office's first floor through the back door. After hanging up his coat, someone told him that Chafin was in the building. Upon finding the ex-sheriff, an argument ensued. Chafin warned Petry what he would do if the union sent more organizers to Logan County. Petry told him to leave. When Chafin started to draw his pistol, Petry pulled out his .22-caliber handgun and shot him in the shoulder just above the heart. The wound was not life-threatening, and Chafin survived to fight another day.

Based on my family's version, I think the Charleston newspapers reported it more or less correctly. After the shooting, a local deputy who'd unofficially accompanied Chafin placed Petry under arrest and took him to a justice of the peace. Petry was charged with attempted murder and, after posting a bond of \$10,000, left the courthouse. He went into hiding for about a week, even spending a night at my great-grandfather's house in Boomer (Fayette County). One month later, a Kanawha County grand jury indicted him on a felony count. He was granted bail after paying a security bond of \$2,500.

Former state Attorney General Howard B. Lee's account of the shooting in *Bloodletting in Appalachia* (1969) led to one of the most colorful quotes of the entire Mine Wars. When told by reporters that Chafin had survived the shooting, Petry allegedly replied, "That's what happens when a man carries a toy pistol. That [profanity deleted] is liable to get well. I should have had my old forty-four."

Coal operators sent a special train to Charleston to pick up their wounded



Don Chafin (1887 – 1954) was first elected Logan County assessor at age 21 and sheriff at 25. With financial assistance from coal companies, Sheriff Chafin's primary goal was to keep the UMWA out of Logan County. He also cracked down on moonshiners while overseeing his own illegal bootlegging business. He reportedly could be quite charming when he wanted to be. A friend of Jack Dempsey's, he sat ringside at some of the heavyweight boxing champ's prize fights. Courtesy of the West Virginia & Regional History Center, Fred Mooney Collection. For more about Chafin, please see Russell Fogelsong's article in *The GOLDENSEAL Book of the Mine Wars*.

hero, while miners along Cabin Creek and Paint Creek lauded Petry as a modern-day Robin Hood who'd avenged many wrongs they'd endured. Chafin, more than any one person, had come to symbolize the repression they'd been fighting against.

A year later, Chafin was re-elected sheriff of Logan County by a wide margin. He subsequently returned to Charleston with two deputies in tow and arrested Petry and several others for some alleged infraction that had occurred during

the first (abandoned) march in 1919. Since no direct trains ran from Charleston to Logan, there was a layover in Huntington. For some reason, Chafin felt obliged to take Petry to lunch. While they were eating, Petry told Chafin he was lucky to be alive after their encounter the previous year. When Chafin asked why, Petry said, "If I would have found you with my coat on, you would be a dead man today." Presumably, his .44 was in his coat pocket. Petry was able to post

In 1919, Bill Petry shot Don Chafin at the UMWA District 17 headquarters then located at 122½ Summers Street in Charleston's Kanawha Hotel. From *Illustrated Charleston*, 1911.



bail for a later hearing and returned to Charleston. Eventually, all charges were dropped by Logan County officials.

In preparation for the Armed March in 1921, recently elected President Warren Harding placed the strike zone under martial law and sent Brig. Gen. Henry Bandholtz to Charleston to evaluate the situation. Bandholtz met with Governor Ephraim Morgan, presenting official papers signed by Secretary of War John Weeks. The only union official Bandholtz could find left in Charleston was Petry, who remained under indictment for the Chafin shooting. Although my great-uncle is omitted from many accounts of this federal intervention, family tradition says that he accompanied Bandholtz's chief of staff Col. Stanley Ford and intelligence chief Maj. Charles Thompson on a special train to Blair Mountain in hopes of stopping the march. At Sharples, they located Phillip Murray, international vice-president of the UMWA, who'd been dispatched by John L. Lewis to persuade the miners to end their march. When the miners refused to listen to Murray, the three men returned to Charleston.

Upon hearing of the impasse, Bandholtz directed the Army to intervene. With the arrival of Army troops, District 17 leaders again urged the miners—this time, successfully—to lay down their weapons and return home. Petry issued a formal statement affirming that the miners had agreed to surrender, "submit[ting] without objection to rules and regulations that might be laid down by Federal authorities."

After the confrontation, and with other union leaders such as Frank Keeney, Bill Blizzard, and Fred Mooney in hiding or in jail, Petry was considered "acting president" of District 17. Weeks afterward, he appeared before a congressional

subcommittee, and, with guidance from counsel Harold Houston, released a statement demanding both a public accounting of the circumstances that precipitated the march and a working agreement to be signed by union, coal, and government leaders. Neither demand was met. In fact, the congressional subcommittee didn't even provide an official report of its findings; instead, politicians issued their own partisan statements, taking sides and angering everyone involved.

On October 19, 1922—more than three years after Chafin's shooting and a year after the Battle of Blair Mountain—the Kanawha County prosecuting attorney dropped all charges against Petry for Chafin's shooting. He found that the evidence strongly supported my great-uncle's claim of self-defense and noted that Chafin had fully recovered from his injury.

While relatively little has been written about any of the Mine Wars leaders, Bill Petry may be the most overlooked. Other than a few family tales and the shooting of Chafin, very little is known about my great-uncle's role in the union or his life in general. All I can fill in from family tradition is that after the Mine Wars and the subsequent trials, Bill Petry was forced out of UMWA leadership. He was later found guilty of a crime not related to the labor uprising and sentenced to the federal penitentiary in Atlanta, where he died during the mid-1940s. Ironically, this is the same penitentiary where Don Chafin served time on Prohibition charges in the mid-1920s. ✱

WES HOLDEN is a 10th-generation West Virginian. Now retired, he formerly worked for the U.S. Senate and served in the U.S. Army. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Huey Hager

Capturing Don Chafin's Brother

By Julian Martin

In 1921, Huey Elwood Hager, my grandfather-in-law, shuttled marching union miners from Jeffrey (Boone County) up Hewitt Creek to the Battle of Blair Mountain. I, my wife, and Huey's granddaughter, Linda Martin, interviewed Huey many years later about the battle.

He told us about capturing John Chafin, brother of notorious Logan County Sheriff Don Chafin. With a pistol held under his bib overalls, Huey went into a house—on the marching miners' side of Blair Mountain—where John Chafin and two county deputies were eating. He gave Chafin's group the choice of surrendering or facing 300 miners outside. They surrendered, gave Huey their guns, and followed him outside, where, to their surprise, only three armed miners were waiting.

Later, during the battle, one of the Logan mine guards Don Chafin had deputized for the occasion started firing a Browning automatic rifle at the miners. Huey and others climbed the mountain and then ambushed and killed the mine guard.

After the battle, a Logan County grand jury indicted Huey for robbery and murder. To escape indictments, many of the marchers, including Huey, moved away and assumed new identities. Huey fled "far away," in his words, to Monongalia County. He got a job in a non-union mine near Morgantown and started going by his middle name of Elwood. Within a year, he'd unionized the mine. Huey and the others pieced together, from memory, the oath required to induct new UMWA members.



Amanda and Huey Hager, a UMWA leader who captured Don Chafin's brother without firing a shot. Courtesy of Linda Martin.

You can read more of Julian's stories about Huey Hager and the old Osborne's Store in Griffithsville (Lincoln County) in our upcoming Fall 2021 issue.

Two African-American miners showed up one day at the mine. "They knowed me," Huey said. "I said, 'I never saw you fellers before.' They told me I had drove them up Hewitt Creek from Jeffrey to Blair Mountain when they was down here for the fight against the scabs. Those fellers came all the way down from Pennsylvania to help us out."

Julian Martin

In 2019, the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum honored Julian Martin with its Hell Raiser Award. The award's name was inspired by Mother Jones' quote, "I'm not a humanitarian, I'm a Hell raiser."

For years, Julian taught science and chemistry at Duval High School (Lincoln County). Charles B. Keeney III, great-grandson of Mine Wars leader Frank Keeney, was a student of Julian's. He remembers, at age 15, hearing Julian tell the class about building sidewinder missiles during the Cold War: "One day, I just stopped and realized that if they ever use what I'm building, people are going to die." So, Julian quit making missiles and became West Virginia's first volunteer in the Peace Corps, serving as a teacher in Nigeria.

Julian then returned to West Virginia to teach high school chemistry and physics and to volunteer for various groups. He's served on the boards of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, West

Virginia Environmental Education Association, and West Virginia Labor History Association. The son and grandson of West Virginia miners, he also was an early and vocal opponent of mountaintop removal mining.

In presenting him with the Hell Raiser Award, the museum noted that Julian had inspired high school students to stand up for their beliefs, ask questions that would make their parents uncomfortable, and expand their visions of the world.

You can read about Julian's adventures growing up in Boone County in his article "Truman and Me" in our Spring 2019 issue. —ed.

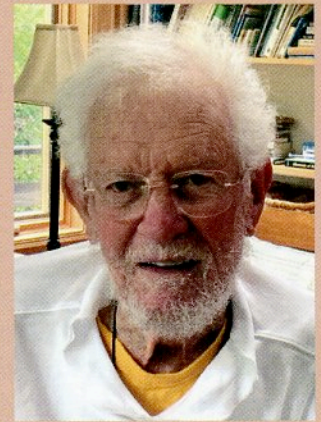


Photo by Stan Bumgardner.

My grandfather Charlie Barker and his brother Kin were also in the Battle of Blair Mountain. Many years after the march, Grandpa Barker began telling me about the march with, "When they killed Sid Hatfield, that was the last straw." That name, Sid Hatfield, stuck in my mind. Years after that, I read all I could get my hands on about Hatfield, the shootout at Matewan, and the Battle of Blair Mountain.

Grandma said that a woman they called "Mother" came to talk to the miners—she was obviously speaking of Mother Jones. I asked Grandma where "Mother" had come from. She thought she was from Charleston, not knowing about Jones' extensive national leadership role in union organizing and child-labor causes.

Grandma also remembered that leading up to the march on Blair Mountain, there was a train going up Coal River, heading for a rally at Peytona (Boone County). She couldn't see the actual train because

it was covered with so many miners lying on the top and hanging off the sides.

For most of my life, these word-of-mouth stories were all I knew about the Mine Wars. Sid Hatfield, Bill Blizzard, Frank Keeney, Fred Mooney, Cesco Estep, Mother Jones, and the Battle of Blair Mountain were never mentioned in my 12 years (1942 – 1954) of West Virginia public school education. I first learned about the largest civilian insurrection since the Civil War across the dinner table from Grandpa Charlie Barker and later from grandpa-in-law Huey Elwood Hager. ✱

JULIAN MARTIN is the 8th generation of his family to be born on Big Coal River in Boone County. They first settled there when Thomas Jefferson was president. His grandfather fought at the Battle of Blair Mountain for the UMWA. Julian has a chemical engineering degree from WVU and, in the 1960s, became West Virginia's first Peace Corps volunteer, detailed in his book *Imaggonna: Peace Corps Memories*. This is his second contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Proud to Be a Redneck

By Kenzie New Walker

The Battle of Blair Mountain is a watershed moment in West Virginia history and American labor history, but it's also one of the most obscure. This history holds an incredible power to bring people from different races, religions, and regions together, to instill pride of place and people in our youth, and to plan for a better future. Why do few West Virginians and even fewer Americans know about it?

It was no happenstance that this working-class history was written out of our state's history books and left out of school curricula for over a half century [see Sam Heywood's article on p. 58]. The stories of Blair Mountain and labor organizing were omitted in the official narratives, and many participants were uneasy about sharing their own stories due to potential legal retribution. Miners were also sworn to secrecy. Moreover, when families moved away after the mines started becoming highly mechanized in the 1950s—putting tens of thousands of miners out of work—many of these stories were lost for good.

I am of and from a family of *Rednecks*, and in recent years, I've clung to these stories of my great-grandfathers surviving in the melting-pot coal camps and working in West Virginia's underground coal mines. Three of my great-grandfathers proudly carried UMWA membership cards and likely dug hundreds of tons of coal during their lifetimes with nothing but a pick, a shovel, and a strong back. (My Papaw Ralph tells me he used to have a strong back and a weak mind; now, he has a strong mind and a weak back; 30-plus years underground can do that to a person.)

However, like most who heard about this history outside the traditional classroom,

I grew up learning through an oral tradition of storytelling, carefully listening to stories about the past. I'm one of the lucky ones—to still have my Papaw Ralph around to tell me tales at a point in my life where I dearly appreciate it. I remember when I first learned what a *scab* was from my grandparents. Mamaw and Papaw had moved from Mingo County to Summers County so my Mamaw could work. The nurses at Appalachian Regional Healthcare (ARH) in Hinton went on strike in the middle of winter, and I'd sit up with Mamaw during one her "shifts" at the bottom of the hill of Summers County ARH. I held protest signs while my Papaw helped brew coffee under the tent. At the time, I didn't realize how I was connecting with my ancestors.

Earlier this year, I pulled two old dusty Tide powder boxes from Mom's attic and began to unpack one of my great-grandfather's items: *UMWA Journals* from the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s; correspondence with former UMWA President Arnold Miller; and a handbook from a union local. I'm happy to have these belongings to remember him and his kind by.

Today, we're conditioned to hear or use *Redneck* as the butt of a joke or as a punch line. And more often than not, Redneck is used to ridicule someone. But here in West Virginia, and for those of us who celebrate and actively reclaim this history, it means something much more. It's a term of endearment and a sense of pride, and I do my best to inform people who use it in any other way.

The 1921 Red Neck Army was an interracial integrated band of Black, immigrant, and native white Appalachians who stood together proudly wearing red

Charles Holstein, who led a battalion of miners from East Bank (Kanawha County), wore this bandana during the Battle of Blair Mountain. It's one of the only known remaining bandanas from the march. Historian Fred Barkey wrote about Holstein, his father-in-law, in our Spring 2016 issue. The bandana is now on display in the West Virginia State Museum. Photo by Steve Brightwell.



Blair Mountain bandana
Charles Holstein
East Bank
Kanawha Co., 1921

bandanas—working-class people fighting for a better future. While the term *Redneck* dates back much farther, the Red Neck Army made the term a powerful symbol for workers everywhere. Miners may have lost their fight on that famous mountain, but their sacrifices helped lay a foundation that their descendants built upon, eventually achieving better pay and improved working and living conditions. All of us benefit from their fight, even if we haven't done much fighting ourselves.

Today, red bandanas are as much of a rallying cry as they were in 1921, when miners tied them around their necks as unique battlefield identifiers; however, they're also symbols of working-class solidarity. A century later, organizations and labor groups—from history-focused

organizations like the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum and Friends of Blair Mountain, to labor organizations like the West Virginia Teachers Caucus and UMWA, to social change-driven organizations like WV Can't Wait and Southern Crossroads—are reclaiming and resurrecting what this symbol means and what history can teach us. All of these organizations make me proud to be a Redneck. ✱

KENZIE NEW WALKER serves as executive director of the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum and project coordinator for the 2021 Battle of Blair Mountain Centennial [see p. 87]. Kenzie grew up in the southern coalfields of West Virginia as the daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter of union coal miners. She spends a lot of time with her cat, Ralphy Dale. This is her second contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

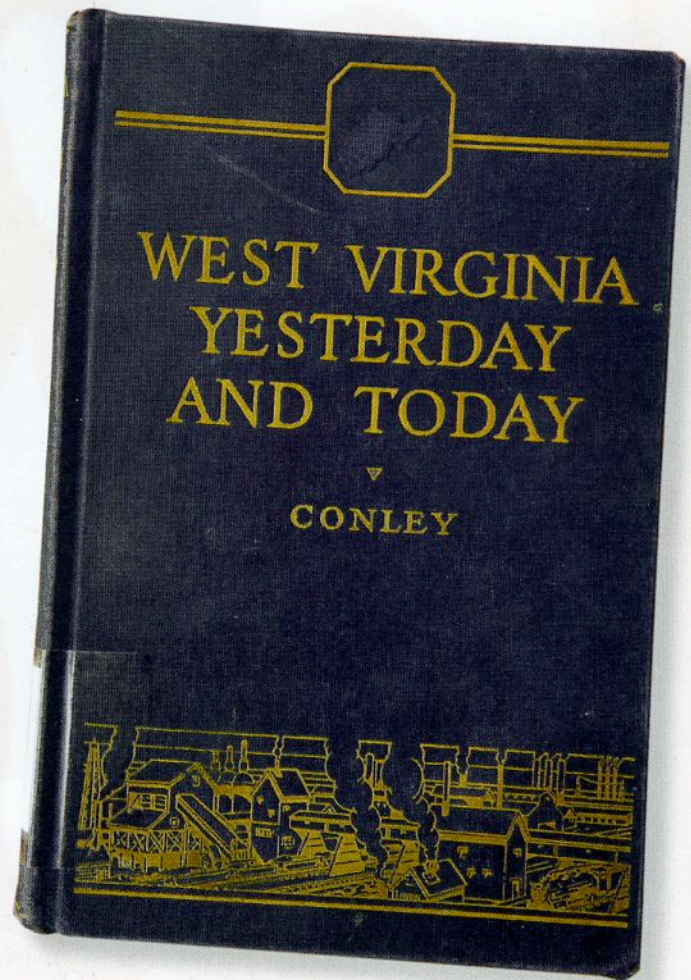
What Happened to the Mine Wars? Erasing West Virginia History

By Sam Heywood

Until recently, I looked back on the day I won the Golden Horseshoe with immense pride. It was, after all, a celebration of hard work and diligent study throughout an entire year of middle school. I remember beaming in front of the glistening capitol while posing for pictures and, later, humbly kneeling in front of the state school superintendent to be officially knighted. I was happy to be a West Virginian that day, and I truly still am; although, winning the Golden Horseshoe has taken on a different meaning as of late.

While researching another project for my undergrad studies, I stumbled across my first account of the Mine Wars. Mild curiosity soon turned to disbelief as I realized the scale of these historic events. These weren't the typical small tidbits of information that had faded from my memory since eighth grade. I couldn't have possibly forgotten about an army of thousands of miners marching on Logan, or the murders at Matewan, or an armored train outfitted with a Gatling gun unloading on a miners' tent colony along Paint Creek. So what happened? Why did a course titled "West Virginia Studies" completely omit an extremely important chapter in our history? Why have thousands of West Virginians to this day never heard of Mother Jones, the Battle of Blair Mountain, or Sid Hatfield? I was determined to find out why the Mine Wars have been clouded in obscurity.

I investigated an often-overlooked period: the years during and immediately after the Mine Wars. Due to the chaos from the union uprisings, 150 businessmen—many coal operators—met



West Virginia's standard history textbook for decades (written by Phil Conley in 1931 and later coauthored with Boyd Stutler) omitted many controversial topics such as the Mine Wars.

in Charleston on March 4, 1920, to discuss, in essence, what they perceived as a Mine Wars PR problem. Historian John C. Hennen writes in his book *The Americanization of West Virginia* about how these leaders conspired to prevent future unrest. Business interests controlled most of our state's press, but these 150 men worried that newspaper

propaganda alone wasn't enough to ensure an obedient workforce in the future; they needed to influence the workers of tomorrow: students. With Governor John Cornwell's full support, the group formed the American Constitutional Association (ACA). While this wasn't a state agency, it enjoyed quasi-official status in the school system, controlling the selection of textbooks and what was taught about our state's history.

The organization's purpose was clear: to spread the ideal of "Americanism" in West Virginia schools. Cornwell defined Americanism as a "respect for the constituted authorities, obedience to the law and the preservation of order." Under that definition, he qualified who could teach in the state: "I want to go on record as being unalterably opposed to the employment of any teacher or instructor, male or female, in any of the educational institutions of this state who is not one hundred percent American."

Following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the First Red Scare was in full swing in the United States. Cornwell and his associates feared any Communist influence on their future workers. The ACA and the state government effectively redbaited labor activity in West Virginia by frequently connecting the dots—regardless of whether they existed—between union supporters and Communism. Government and business leaders wanted a docile workforce that accepted their terms; any variance from that concept would not be tolerated in schools.

In 1931, the legislature helped codify this idea by prohibiting the "study of social problems, economics, foreign affairs, world government, socialism or communism until basic courses in American state and local geography and history are completed." Since teachers didn't have enough time to teach West Virginia Studies as it was, this

effectively meant they shouldn't deviate from the standard state history. Although the Mine Wars weren't explicitly named here, lawmakers clearly wanted to keep what they considered radical ideologies, like unionism, out of schools.

An educator named Phil Conley was chosen as the ACA's first managing director and tasked with filling the schools with pro-business literature. Conley had graduated from West Virginia University in 1914 and spent four years as school superintendent of a small district in the northern part of our state. He was a World War I veteran and a staunch believer in government order and the power of education.

In 1923, Conley first published—through the ACA—a pamphlet in response to the negative reputation coal companies had earned. *Life in a West Virginia Coal Field* is 73 pages of propaganda reminiscent of that in newspapers owned or controlled by coal interests. Governor Ephraim Morgan endorsed Conley's "unbiased study" in the preface of the pamphlet and urged West Virginians everywhere to believe its findings. Conley not only discounted the "dark foreboding, drab picture" of company towns given by "welfare workers, reformers and agitators from other states" but went as far as to claim that mining towns were far better in almost every way to other small communities. Schools, churches, houses—all provided by the coal companies—were said to be of the highest quality. He even insisted, quite tellingly, that the company stores "do not make unfair charges for merchandise." There was no mention of the miners' dissatisfaction with the towns, working conditions, or the private detectives hired to enforce order. It boasted that in West Virginia, "our section of the coal field was a different, and a happier place in which to live." Conley ignored a key point. Regardless of



Phil Conley is shown here at a picnic (the women are unidentified). In addition to his role in shaping our state's textbooks, Conley created the Golden Horseshoe contest and edited *West Virginia Review*, a history and tourism magazine published from 1924 to 1947. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives (WVSA), Phil Conley Collection.

which side you were on, *everyone* clearly wasn't happy with the status quo in coal towns or there wouldn't have been violent uprisings demanding better pay and conditions.

Conley went to work quickly, distributing the pamphlet to every school in the state. He was the only employee on the ACA's payroll, making \$6,000 a year just from his position as managing director—almost double what any coal miner or teacher made at the time.

Even though Conley had no formal history training, he was encouraged by state officials and business supporters to write a new West Virginia Studies book for schools. To streamline the process and reduce critical scrutiny, he used his own West Virginia Publishing Company to release his book. *West Virginia: Yesterday and Today* was first published in 1931 and immediately instituted as the new state history textbook. In the preface, Conley's commitment to the ACA's goal is evident:

"To be a patriotic citizen of the United States, a man must know our country, its past and present. To fulfill his duties and responsibilities to his state and to achieve the fullest pleasure and pride in it, the West Virginian must know West Virginia—its history, its government, its industries, its people."

Despite emphasizing the necessity of knowing the past and present, Conley made no mention whatsoever of the recent Mine Wars—and frankly just repeated most of what our first official state historian, Virgil Lewis, had already written decades before. Conley's book would be reprinted and updated 11 times, all the while remaining our state's primary textbook for 41 years. Later updates included sections on "Our Place in the Space Age" and "Our Future in Manufacturing," but still, the Mine Wars were completely omitted.

In the chapters "The Early Twentieth Century" and "Changes after World War I," Conley said only the following about labor:

"Labor Changes. Women began to find jobs other than housework and teaching school. They obtained work in factories and offices. Workers from foreign countries came to West Virginia to take jobs in the mines and other industries." The rest of the 20th-century chapter focused on the "progress" of West Virginians. He described the expansion of businesses, the influence of the automobile and radio, and the impact of urbanization and electricity, but he was silent on the massive labor movement that had made national headlines. In short, West Virginia history would focus entirely on the positives and ignore any blemishes.

In Conley's newer editions, he included this promise: "The amount of material requiring students to think, to form opinions, to express original conclusions is increased." Ironically, from his book—even in later editions—it was impossible for students to form any opinion at all about the Mine Wars. Conley provided them only with propaganda that idealized West Virginia and companies interested in our natural resources. Parts of Conley's book read more like an advertisement to visit our state than a history textbook for eighth graders growing up here: "People travel long distances to visit West Virginia, for here they find interesting natural features and many places of unusual beauty. There is no more magnificent scenery east of the Mississippi River than can be found in our state. Our mountains and hills and valleys present views which equal any in the world."

In Conley's chapter on World War I, he wrote, "West Virginia's natural wealth was a powerful help in the winning of the war. Hundreds of thousands of tons of coal were needed. Our miners worked overtime to produce it." Of course, there was no mention of UMWA leaders telling miners to halt strikes and endure unsafe conditions to support the war effort. Conley wanted to portray West Virginia as

a united patriotic force working overtime to save the country.

Conley always depicted industry in an entirely favorable light, including sections that singled out DuPont Chemical, Union Carbide, and the International Nickel Company for essential economic growth in West Virginia. But nothing commanded Conley's respect more than the resource that has defined our state: "Coal has been the principal factor in the advancement of the human race. In the past two hundred years inventions depending upon the use of coal have changed the course of human history." Conley spent the rest of the chapter cementing West Virginia's place as the nation's power plant: "If quality and quantity are considered, the Appalachian coal area is the greatest coal field in all the world. . . . West Virginia is said to have more coal than all of Great Britain. . . . Since 1931 West Virginia has led the United States in producing bituminous coal. . . . People who use coal have learned that the purest coal in the world comes from West Virginia. . . . Coal is used as a fuel to heat our homes and run our factories. It is used to produce electricity to perform countless services for man. Industry, science, and our homes depend upon coal as a most important source of chemicals."

While describing coal's many benefits, he devoted no space to the miners who extract it. Certainly, the Mine Wars didn't fit into Conley's desired narrative, so he omitted them entirely. Interestingly, he did include an entire chapter on our state's different grasses and seemed to value trivial facts about dates and famous people (some of whom spent only a few months or years here) over stories of West Virginians who sacrificed their blood to fight inequalities.

Non-education-related efforts to inform the public of the Mine Wars



Governor Homer Holt (1937 – 41), supported by the pro-business wing of the Democratic Party, blocked publication of the *WPA Guide* due to its depiction of the Mine Wars and the Hawks Nest Tunnel Disaster. Courtesy of the WVSA, Julia Holt Coyle Collection.



Holt's successor, Matthew Neely (1941 – 45), who had the ardent support of the Democrats' labor wing, green-lighted the *WPA Guide's* release after becoming governor in 1941. He's shown here (right) with national UMWA President John L. Lewis. Courtesy of the WVSA.

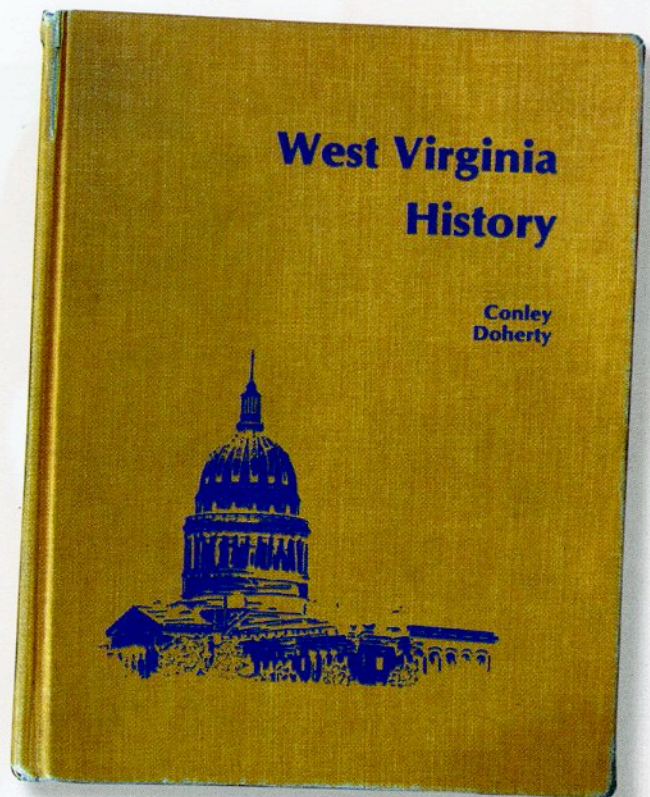
were thwarted as well. As part of a New Deal program, the Writers' Project of the WPA produced guides to each of the 50 states. When *West Virginia: A Guide to the Mountain State* (known more popularly as the "WPA Guide") was being prepared for publication in 1939, some politicians and the press pushed to stop its publication because it briefly discussed the Mine Wars and the recent Hawks Nest Tunnel Disaster, where hundreds had died from silicosis. The chapter on labor covered only 9 of the book's 559 pages. The rest painted positive portraits

of industry and served mostly as a tourism travelogue of West Virginia sites and scenery. Still, Governor Homer Holt called it "propaganda from start to finish" and claimed it didn't portray the state fairly. He successfully stalled the book's publication, but his successor, Matthew Neely—a strong labor supporter—allowed it to be printed intact in 1941. This was the first time the Mine Wars would ever be mentioned, even briefly, in a statewide publication. The book was never used formally in classrooms, just distributed to school libraries.

By the mid-1970s, pressure from some scholars began to mount for a more accurate and representative state history. Dr. William T. Doherty, a labor historian from Missouri who joined WVU's faculty in the 1960s, was appalled by the Mine Wars' absence in textbooks. The state Department of Education allowed him to coauthor a book with Conley, simply titled *West Virginia History*, in 1974. The book still contained familiar topics of Conley's previous works but, for the first time in a state textbook, included a few pages on the Mine Wars. It wasn't until after Conley's death in 1979 that Doherty was able to publish his own textbook with an entire chapter dedicated to the Mine Wars, including depictions of Mother Jones, the Matewan shootout, and the Battle of Blair Mountain. However, counties could choose their own textbooks, and most opted to use a book by well-respected historian Otis Rice, *West Virginia: The State and its People*, which contained only two pages on the Mine Wars and was kinder to the coal industry than Doherty's book.

Author Topper Sherwood, a West Virginia native, has reflected on how the inclusion of controversial historical topics in textbooks began shifting in the late 20th century: "Few credible historians want their writing to be superficial, to serve some 'official story' that only included 'good things' about the state. Since the 1970s, at least, the goal is to give students a richer and more substantive understanding of their past."

However, even with more historians writing about the Mine Wars and other controversies, our state still ultimately controls what books are taught in schools. Sherwood recounted his frustrations over trying to promote a new state history book by noted Appalachian historian John Alexander Williams, which was beaten out by a 20-year-old "more traditional" textbook in the selection process. Even as recently as 10 years ago, a bill brought



In 1974, William T. Doherty—the chair of WVU's history department—helped update the state history textbook Phil Conley had been re-issuing for more than 40 years (some with coauthor Boyd Stutler). This new version placed more emphasis on topics underrepresented in previous textbooks, including prehistoric cultures, the Industrial Revolution, the labor movement, conservation of natural resources, and traditional arts and crafts.

before the state legislature sought to "reinstate" the 1931 law, which made it illegal to teach "social problems" before essential American and state history. Ultimately, the bill wasn't passed because the 1931 law is still on the books. So, technically, it's illegal for teachers to talk about the Mine Wars before students learn *essential* history, whatever that might be.

During my research for this article, I reached out to many current West Virginia Studies teachers across our state. A great many said they emphasize the importance of the Mine Wars in our history, while many others don't due primarily to lack of instructional time. As specified by state curriculum standards, teachers must pack almost all of West Virginia geography, civics, economy, and history

into just a few instructional hours a week—mostly in eighth grade, with a few subjects sprinkled across the elementary years. Sadly, the Mine Wars typically gets glossed over as teachers struggle to cover hundreds of years of history and a wide array of topics in a relatively brief time. Contributing to the problem, many West Virginia Studies teachers never learned about the Mine Wars when they were in school, so their knowledge of the topic has been limited.

The Department of Education states that the primary goal of West Virginia Studies is to “promote pride in our state, develop intellectual and participatory skills as well as foster attitudes that are necessary for students to participate as effective, involved, and responsible citizens,” language that has hardly changed since Phil Conley’s first book in 1931. Conley himself instituted the award that remains incredibly influential in middle schools today: the Golden Horseshoe. Some teachers focus so intently on preparing students for this in-depth trivia test and satisfying the curriculum standards that the significance of the Mine Wars and other historical events is lost. It’s time for a shift in priorities in West Virginia Studies.

Renowned Mine Wars historian David A. Corbin commented on his own experience in the West Virginia education system: “During a dozen years of public schooling in West Virginia, I never heard about the great West Virginia Mine Wars. . . . Instead I was taught happy and pleasant things about our state. This included such bits of information like the location of the world’s largest clothespin factory or the world’s biggest ash tray. . . . When we were told of the importance West Virginia held in relation to the rest of the nation, we were not informed of the fact that our coal heated its homes, fueled its industries, and powered its battleships for decades.

Nor were we told about the thousands of West Virginians who died getting that coal out of the ground. We were not told of the struggle these people underwent for safer working conditions and a better standard of living; that is, the struggle for their union. No, nothing about that.”

Corbin quotes *Charleston Gazette-Mail* columnist Rick Wilson: “The typical mountaineer’s historical education has been a process of trivial pursuit. While we were busy memorizing the counties in alphabetical order, we were certainly not taught about how our ancestors were swindled out of their mineral rights and land by outside coal interests or any unpleasant consequences thereof.”

Perhaps the biggest lesson I learned from this was the need to re-evaluate our state’s relationship with Big Coal. As a kid, I felt a connection to the coal industry because coal “keeps the lights on,” sponsors football games, and, without question, is an essential part of our historical legacy. If we’re to honor this legacy straightforwardly, shouldn’t the Mine Wars and the hard work of miners be an essential part of it, too?

Remembering the lessons of the Mine Wars is more important now than ever. In 1921, miners stood up against corporate greed and organized to protect one another—a quality that comes more naturally to West Virginians than to the residents of any other state I know of. Miners even showed up in 2018 to support striking teachers when they were protesting for better pay and benefits. The least we can do is to honor what miners have contributed to our legacy, beginning by properly remembering and teaching the Mine Wars. ✱

SAM HEYWOOD is currently pursuing a graduate degree in history and Latin American studies at the University of Arizona, focusing on how history and memory interact. He may be far from the Mountain State, but he never forgets the people and places that have made this his home. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



Jean Battlo, photo by Michael Abraham.



Denise Giardina, photo by Steve Brightwell.

West Virginia Mine Wars in Historical Fiction Writers Jean Battlo and Denise Giardina

By Eric Douglas

Two of the best works ever written about the West Virginia Mine Wars are in the form of historical fiction. The two authors share surprisingly similar backgrounds: both are children of Italian immigrants who made their way to the Mountain State to work in McDowell County's coal mines.

Jean Battlo and Denise Giardina have spent much of their writing careers delving into the history and politics of southern West Virginia. Both, however, have done substantial work on other topics, and neither considers herself a West Virginia historian, even though Jean has authored several history books about her home county.

Jean's father came to West Virginia in the late 1910s, at 17 years old, from Italy. His name at birth was Fortunato Battaglia, but he was rechristened with the Americanized name Tom Battlo. He came looking for work and opportunity. Staying at a boarding house in Kimball (McDowell County), he saw a photo of the owner's niece and was immediately taken with her. She was still in Italy, so he wrote to her.

Eventually, Tom made the young woman an offer. He said he'd pay for her passage to America. If they didn't hit it off, he'd pay for her to go back home if she wanted to. Fortunately for West Virginia, the two got married. Jean was raised

the (self-admittedly spoiled) last of nine children. After her uncle died in a mining accident, her father eventually gave up coal mining.

"When he retired, he had hurt his back very badly, but he was 100% a miner on so many levels. The macho attitude was totally there and the camaraderie," she says.

Jean describes herself as a liberal and a borderline socialist. "During my childhood, my parents hadn't learned to restrict any of my reading, which was certainly good for me as a writer," she says. "But in terms of that, I ended up with some real serious problems because I read everything I saw."

That reading included a story in *Look* magazine about a Jewish woman being killed by a Nazi soldier. Learning about such atrocities initially made her feel ashamed to be a human being but ultimately inspired her to tell the story of courageous Holocaust victims and survivors. That article became the foundation of one of her early plays, "#8," about the Holocaust and the Jewish experience. The play had a run at the renowned Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre (SART) in Mars Hill, N.C., where a group of Holocaust survivors attended the final performance. Afterward, one of them told Jean that her play had captured what she'd gone through in the concentration camps as well as anything she'd ever seen or heard. Jean feels that to this day, "that is the highest compliment I ever got."

In school, Jean says, "I was actually writing plays before I learned to write." Her grades were poor until she got to high school and experienced Shakespeare for the first time.

"All my friends were struggling with it, and I'm reading it like a comic book," she says.

Despite a high school counselor discouraging her from pursuing higher education, she attended Marshall College

in the late 1950s and became a teacher. She's half-cropped out of the popular photo of students holding a copy of the school paper, *The Parthenon*, announcing Marshall's university status. Her actual writing career didn't start until later in life, but she doesn't remember a time when she wasn't writing.

Her first published works, oddly enough, were two books of Japanese haiku poems: *Bonsai* and *Modern Haiku*. Along with "#8," she also wrote a play about the Lizzie Borden murders and a musical about Pocahontas County native Pearl Buck's life, among other topics.

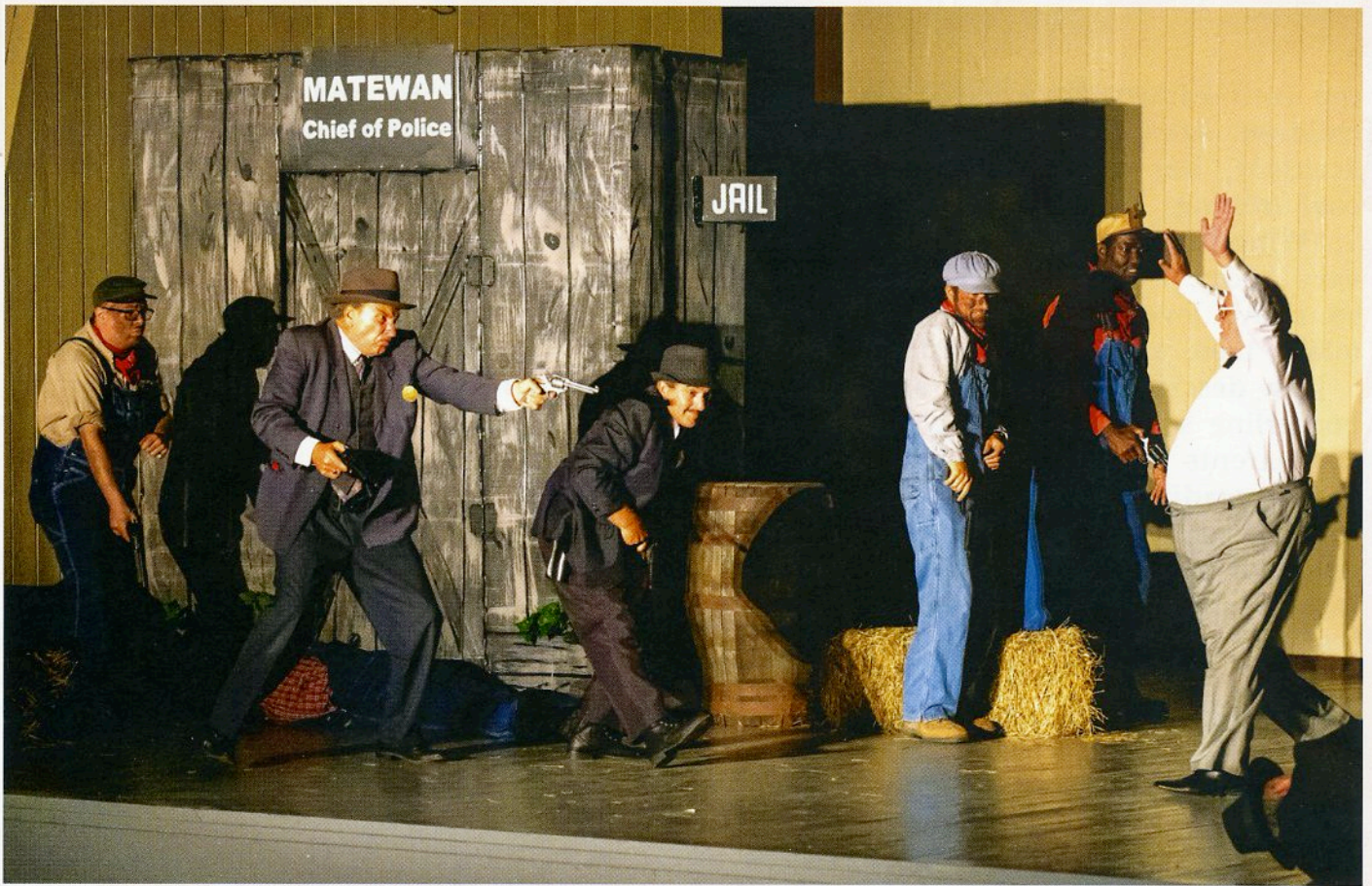
And then former Welch Mayor Martha Morris approached Jean to write about the Mine Wars and the story of Sid Hatfield. Jean remembers the mayor saying, "I can't believe you have written all this stuff and you've not touched the Sid Hatfield story."

A West Virginia Humanities Council grant gave her the backing to jump into the research, which eventually became the play "Terror of the Tug." She began her research after John Sayles' film *Matewan* debuted in 1987. Her story picks up right after the Matewan shootout in 1920 and ends with Hatfield being shot to death on the steps of the McDowell County Courthouse on August 1, 1921. Actually, she begins with his assassination, and the rest of the play is told in a flashback.

She explains "Terror of the Tug" along the lines of a Greek tragedy, inspired by her love of the classics. In her play, Sid Hatfield is a tragic hero doomed to failure because of circumstances he couldn't control.

"We know that he is a hero. But he's also manipulated," she says. [To read more about "Terror of the Tug," see our Spring 2020 issue.]

Unfortunately for West Virginia and the world, Jean says she's stopped writing these days, but a conversation with her



The Matewan shootout is depicted in this 2019 performance of Jean Battlo's "Terror of the Tug" at Pipestem State Park. Photo by Roger Shrewsbury. The play will be performed again at the McArts Amphitheater in Welch on Sept. 4, at 8 p.m.

leaves you with the understanding that she still plans to produce the plays she's written and see them on stage again. In fact, "Terror of the Tug" is scheduled to be performed at the McArts Amphitheater (founded by Jean) in Welch on September 4 at 8 p.m. as part of the Blair Mountain Centennial [see p. 87].

Jean, now 82, sees every second as a blessing from above and lives each day to its fullest. Eventually, she wants her epitaph to read, "She was delighted to be here!"



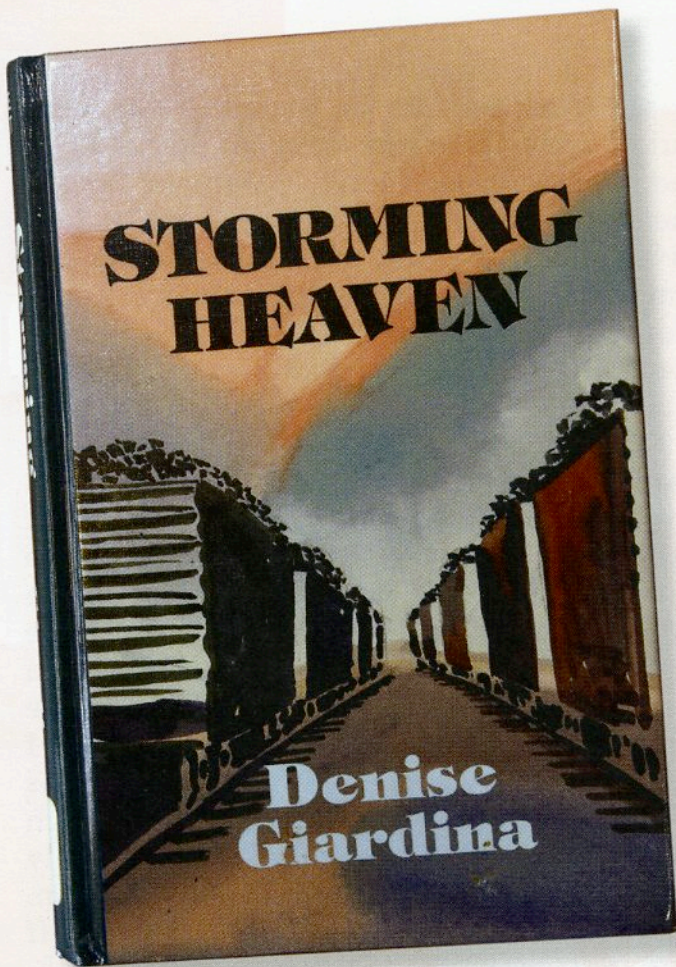
Denise Giardina also grew up in McDowell County, although she was born in Bluefield (Mercer County). She later moved to Kanawha County, where she graduated from high school and

attended West Virginia State College (now University).

Denise pronounces the county where she was raised "MAC Dowell," like many natives of the Free State[®] of McDowell do. As a side note, Jean Battlo—who very much still has her home county's distinct accent—says she eventually trained herself away from that pronunciation.

"I knew a little about [the Mine Wars] as a kid, although I didn't really understand the context of it," Denise says. "But my Italian grandfather was a miner during the time of the march on Blair Mountain. I think McDowell County was really in the hands of the coal companies, maybe more so than Logan County."

While Denise's grandfather worked in the mines in 1921, he wasn't personally involved in the march. Her father's claustrophobia kept him out of the



Denise Giardina's Mine Wars novel *Storming Heaven*. See Colleen Anderson's reviews of it and Denise's *The Unquiet Earth* in *The GOLDENSEAL Book of the Mine Wars*.

mines; although, in a county where about everything was economically tied to coal in one way or another, he became a coal company accountant.

In an interesting twist on the usual West Virginia immigration story, Denise's father was born in the United States, but soon after, her grandfather took the family back to Sicily for another 10 years. And then they returned once again to West Virginia. Her father was 10 years old before he spoke English.

Even though one of Denise's best-known works revolves around the Armed March and the Battle of Blair Mountain, she knew little to nothing about it from a historical perspective while growing up. She actually missed taking West

Virginia Studies in junior high because of an ill-timed move from McDowell County. At the time, McDowell County taught the subject in the eighth grade while Kanawha County taught it in the seventh. Likely, she still wouldn't have learned much about the topic since the Mine Wars weren't commonly discussed at that point. Even a later college class she took avoided the subject altogether.

Her first introduction to the Mine Wars came in the form of a book she stumbled upon. "I was browsing a bookstore on Hale Street [in Charleston] in the mid-1970s, and I found this book called *Bloodletting in Appalachia* by Howard Lee," she says. Lee was the West Virginia attorney general from 1925 to 1933 and, in the late 1960s, wrote one of the first published accounts of the topic.

Opening the book, she was startled by images of tent colonies, the Bull Moose Special armored train, Matewan after the shootout, and Blair Mountain. "I bought it immediately and took it home to start reading. I was like, 'I can't believe I've lived in this state for 20-plus years, and I've never heard this.' It was never talked about in school," Denise says.

She decided at that point that the Mine Wars would be the focus of her first book. It ended up being her second. Denise's first book was a historical novel called *Good King Harry* about King Henry V, set in England.

"I decided I wanted to write something not about West Virginia at first because I thought I'd make mistakes with it. So, I'd get those mistakes out of the way with the first book that I didn't care about as much," she laughs.

She continued researching the Mine Wars while working on *Good King Harry* and finally started writing the historical novel *Storming Heaven* in 1984. It was released in 1987. She admits that she typically takes a long time to write her

books. That one took three years, but she says she'd been researching it from the mid-1970s on. The book was recognized almost instantly as a classic in the field of historical fiction and one of the finest works of that genre ever to focus on West Virginia.

One striking difference about *Storming Heaven*, as compared to other Mine Wars books, is that one of the leading protagonists is a woman, Carrie Bishop. "I really wanted the character to be a woman because I'm a woman. And so I was most interested in her, not just in terms of Blair Mountain, but the whole Appalachian experience," Denise says. "Carrie Bishop's from Kentucky, and she grows up on a farm like my mom did. So, she's really based partly on my mom's family and the women in my mom's family."

Denise knew that she was going to end the book at Blair Mountain, so she had to make a conscious decision early on about how to get a woman there. In those days, she notes, there were typically only two professions available to women: teacher and nurse. While researching the story at the State Archives, she saw a photo of nurses on their way to Blair Mountain, and she made her decision.

"The UMWA had organized medical people to follow along behind the miners to set up medical camps so that when people got shot, they could bring them to the medical places," she says. "That's how [Carrie] gets to Blair Mountain. That was a decision I made pretty early on."

Writing the book (*spoiler alerts* ahead for those who haven't read *Storming Heaven*), she wasn't sure what would actually happen at Blair Mountain until she got there in her writing.

"I didn't know about the ending in terms of Rondal, who's the main character who gets shot at Blair Mountain," Denise recalls. "I didn't know if he was going

to get shot and die or not until the very end. Carrie is in the back of her wagon and trying to get him to safety in Logan. She keeps stopping to look and see if he's alive, and I was not sure myself. She got him all the way back to Kentucky, and I thought, 'Well, okay, maybe he's gonna live,' but then he died anyway. It's kind of weird."

The decision to focus the book on Carrie, instead of one of the men in the story, came from who Denise is and how she was raised. "I grew up with a woman who would not have called herself a feminist because the term wasn't used then, but she was a feminist," Denise says. "And then the feminist movement came along, and I was certainly interested in that. It was clear to me as I was doing my research that women were vitally involved, mainly because it was so dangerous for the man. They could get away with a lot of stuff that the men couldn't get away with. They were very active. And I wanted to capture that."

Denise has now published six novels, but only two of them are set in West Virginia and have to do with the coalfields: *Storming Heaven* and *The Unquiet Earth*. Growing up in West Virginia in the 1950s and 1960s influenced the way she wrote those stories.

"All you ever saw were stereotypes. Even during the [1960s] War on Poverty, there was a lot of focus on Appalachia when I was a kid, and when I was a teenager," she says. "I was glad to see that our problems were being addressed, but I hated the way we were all blamed for our problems. I really wanted to address that and make sure to add the fact that we rebelled, that we actually stood up for ourselves."

Nearly 35 years after *Storming Heaven* was published, it's still getting attention. A production company is even looking



This newspaper clipping of volunteer nurses on the Armed March (Clarksburg *Exponent*, Sept. 2, 1921) inspired the protagonist Carrie Bishop in Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven*. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives.

into the possibility of making a limited TV series based on the book. In 2019, the book was turned into a musical, produced by West Virginia Public Theatre in Morgantown. The pandemic put things on hold, but the show's producers are looking for additional places to stage it as theaters begin opening again.

Denise was skeptical at first about turning her story into a musical, picturing something like a show in Branson, Missouri. But when she met with the

producers, they told her they wanted it to be more like "Les Misérables."

"It ends just like *Storming Heaven* ends, but the audience is clapping and cheering because the music is so stirring," she says. ♣

ERIC DOUGLAS is a Charleston-area author. He grew up in West Virginia, and even though he left for a while, he never got the mountains out of his blood. He has a series of adventure novels and has recorded more than 150 oral histories. He is also the Assistant News Director for West Virginia Public Broadcasting. This is his third contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Songs of Labor

By Paul Gartner

The human cost of industrialization is a price that's been paid many times over in West Virginia.

In protest or sorrow, people sing about labor. Take the ballad "John Henry." In the oft-told tale, John Henry died in a race with a steam drill while building the Great Bend Tunnel on the C&O Railway at Talcott (Summers County) in the early 1870s. One of the great songs of working people, generations of students grew up singing about the man "who died with a hammer in his hand." John Henry embodies the spirit of all hard-working people, and we proudly claim him as one of our own [see our Summer 1996 issue].

Arguably, our state's second-most famous folk song is about similarly named John Hardy, a railroad worker who killed a man in a card game at the Shawnee coal camp (McDowell County). He was found guilty and hanged on January 19, 1894 [see our Spring 1992 issue]. The fact that songs about workers often end in death speaks to the sometimes-violent and rough-living conditions in labor camps, not to mention the dangers of industrial work. And the fact that people still sing such songs ensures that the dead are not forgotten and that their stories transcend a specific time and place.

Unfortunately, it's difficult to tie specific labor songs to our state's most significant series of labor events: the Mine Wars. The 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain occurred just before commercial recordings became commonplace. While early songs were likely written about and adapted for the Armed March, we may never know about them unless a record collector comes across some dusty 78s in someone's basement or a flea market.

After commercial recordings became more popular in the mid-1920s, many of

the first and most lasting work songs emerged from West Virginia, even if their origins are rather obscure. This is the case with the popular "Wreck on the C&O" about the 1890 death of railroad engineer George Alley in Summers County. Writing in the *West Virginia Encyclopedia*, music historian H. G. Young III attributes the original song to "an unnamed African-American engine wiper who worked in the Hinton roundhouse."

Railroad songs—often ending in disaster—were among the first recorded West Virginia songs about workers. One of the best songwriters of this genre was Monroe County native Roy Harvey, who lost his job as an engineer on the Virginian Railway after striking with other workers in 1923. He soon became the guitarist for Charlie Poole and His North Carolina Ramblers, a great early string band of the recording era. Harvey documented his labor experiences in songs like "The Virginia Strike of '23" and "Railroad Blues" [see our Winter 2007 issue].

In 1926, Texas native Vernon Dalhart recorded "Billy Richardson's Last Ride," inspired by the engineer's tragic death at Scary Creek (Putnam County) on December 14, 1910. While leaning out the window of the locomotive on a C&O train, Richardson was clobbered by a mailbag hook. One critic called Dalhart "the official mourner for the nation." He recorded many sides for different labels in the 78 era.

In 1930, fiddler Bernice Coleman from Princeton (Mercer County) recorded "The Wreck of the C&O Sportsman" (not to be confused with "Wreck on the C&O") about a disaster "just west of the station called Hawk's Nest," as the song says.



The UMWA Local 1643 band from Monongah (Marion County). Courtesy of the West Virginia & Regional History Center, Bittner Collection. For more on the band, see our Fall 1990 issue.

In terms of documenting early coal-mining songs, folklorist Archie Green authored the classic study *Only a Miner*. As with railroad ballads, many coal-mining songs convey the inherent hazards of the work.

One of the first major coal-mining ballads was recorded by singer-songwriter and fiddler Blind Alfred Reed (1880 – 1956) for Victor Records on December 19, 1927. “Explosion in the Fairmount Mines” retells the Monongah Mine Disaster—which occurred 20 years earlier, nearly to the day, on December 6, 1907—in Marion County. While the disaster, still our nation’s deadliest coal-mining tragedy, occurred 12 miles from Fairmont (spelled

differently in the title), it did take place in the Fairmont Coal Company mines. The blast claimed the lives of at least 361 men and boys (likely a much higher number), mostly Polish and Italian immigrants.

Reed, a Methodist minister—who also played banjo, mandolin, and guitar—was born in Floyd, Virginia, but lived much of his life in Mercer County. For his significant contributions to music in our state and nationally, Reed was inducted into the first class of the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame in 2007 [see our Winter 2008 issue].

Also in 1927, Henry Whitter recorded “The Explosion at Eccles, West Virginia.” On April 28, 1914, at least 180 men and

boys were killed in a blast in Raleigh County, our state's second-deadliest mining disaster. With G. B. Grayson, Whitter went on to record some classic songs, such as "Train 45."

On February 21, 1931, then-unknown cowboy singer Gene Autry recorded "The Death Of Mother Jones" for the American Record Corporation less than three months after the labor leader's passing. Though the song contains no specific references to West Virginia, it mentions how "grief and sorrow hover around the miners' homes." A bit ironically in light of Gordon Simmons' article on p. 38, the lyrics note,

*Mother Jones was ready to help them
She never let them down
In front with the striking miners
She always could be found*

The record didn't see wide release during the Great Depression. According to Green, it was heard by Tom Tippet, a labor organizer who'd known Jones. Tippet was very active in West Virginia in 1931 and taught the song to Walter Seacrist of Holly Grove—the site of the notorious Bull Moose incident in February 1913. Seacrist recorded it in a private pressing in 1932. It went on to have wide circulation in labor circles.

Green comments that the 1930s labor version of the old American gospel song "We Shall Not Be Moved" (30 years later, it became a civil rights anthem) originally included a reference to Frank Keeney and the Charleston hunger strike he led with the dissident West Virginia Mine Workers union in 1931 [see p. 22]. All roads lead back to West Virginia.

In 1943, George Korson recorded some musicians in West Virginia mining communities using a 78-rpm aluminum disc-cutting machine. Korson was a Pennsylvania folklorist who'd done extensive research



Barbara Koppel's Oscar-winning *Harlan County USA* documentary (1977) generated one of the finest film soundtracks ever. It features various artists, including David Morris and the chilling voice of Hazel Dickens, who details mine tragedies, the hard lives of miners, and the brutal murder of UMWA reformer Jock Yablonski.

in mining songs there. Sponsored by the UMWA, he began work in the bituminous coal regions, including in Monongah, where he recorded miner James Farrance singing "The Death Of Mother Jones." Korson wasn't aware of the Autry recording. Green later found out from Farrance that the miner had learned it from Autry's record. It could be argued the song had entered the oral tradition by this point.

And speaking of this, a collection from West Virginia University, *Coal Digging Blues*, includes "The Brave and Trembling Motorman" by Jerrel Stanley. Korson reports it was written by labor songwriter Orville Jenks of Welch (though the WVU liner notes differ on this) and entered tradition almost immediately

after it was composed in 1915. Jenks [see *The GOLDENSEAL Book of the Mine Wars*] wrote the ballad as a tribute to a coworker killed in a McDowell County mine. It was recorded by Jess Johnson in 1930 as "The Dying Brakeman" and by the Carter Family in 1938 as "The Reckless Motorman." These recordings give listeners a sense of how strong union support was at the time. Orville Jenks and his music were central to many union meetings. His "How Beautiful the Union Must Be" merges a free workplace with the great beyond:

*When you hear of a thing called union
You know they're happy and free
For Christ has a union in heaven
How beautiful the union must be*

The CD, available from WVU, includes more of Korson's 1940 field recordings, including three Black gospel groups: The United Four, The Evening Breezes Sextet, and The Rising Star Quartet. In a powerful performance of early 20th-century gospel, The United Four's "I Don't Want to Go Down Yonder" likens a mine to hell. The Evening Breezes sing about the Bartley Mine Disaster, which had happened only a couple months earlier, on January 10, 1940, killing 91 miners in McDowell County. Other songs on the compilation are poignant, like "Drill Man Blues," in which George "Curly" Sizemore of Lochgelly (Fayette County)—who had black lung—sings about miners and silicosis:

*I used to be a drillman
Down at old Parley
Drilling through slate and sandrock
And it got the death of me*

The late great Hazel Dickens was raised in a Mercer County coal community and wrote many songs about it: "They'll

Never Keep Us Down," "Mannington Mine Disaster" (about the 1968 Farmington Mine Disaster), "It's Only a Coal Miner's Grave," and "Fire in the Hole," to name just a few [see our Summer 2004 issue]. Boone County native Billy Edd Wheeler wrote and recorded the classic "Coal Tattoo" about the permanent scars, physical and otherwise, of mining. Many of his songs, including "High Flyin' Bird," emerged from his experiences growing up in the town of High Coal [see our Summer 2016 issue].

In the late 1960s, Clay County's David and John Morris risked their lives campaigning with UMWA reformer Jock Yablonski, who was challenging Tony Boyle for leadership of the union.

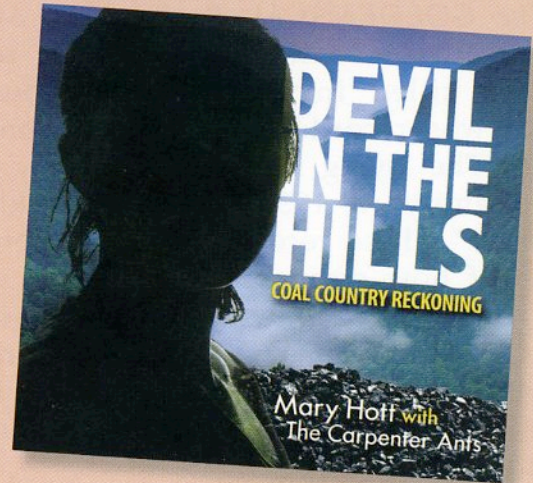
In 1976, longtime Elkins resident Michael Kline and fiddler Rich Kirby released *They Can't Put it Back*, an anthology of 11 coal-mining songs, for June Appal Records at Appalshop, which calls it "a musical chronicle of the struggles of American mines and mountain people with songs on deep and strip mining, black lung, union organizing, and topical ballads." In addition to the title track, the recording includes the duo's versions of "Mannington Mine" and "Coal Tattoo," plus "Black Lung Blues," "Coal Truck Breakdown," and "Coal Train Song." Kline and his wife, Carrie, continue to perform, do documentary work, and collect spoken histories from marginalized communities.

In the late 1980s, Elaine Purkey walked the picket line with her husband, Bethel, a UMWA miner who was helping the union local during the bitter strike against Pittston Coal. She composed and sang "One Day More," with the inspirational line, "If the company holds out 20 years, we'll hold out one day more." In the years after, Purkey walked picket lines with the steelworkers' union during the Ravenswood Aluminum Lockout, worked with West Virginians who'd lost water wells to mine

Mary Hott of Berkeley Springs (Morgan County) has a new CD for the 100th anniversary of Blair Mountain. A native of Paw Paw, she grew up singing in the local Methodist church, where her 88-year-old mother still plays piano and organ for services.

Mary taps into the emotions of West Virginia miners in the early 1900s. Morgan County is far from the southern coalfields, but she feels a connection with the working people there. “I don’t come from a coal family,” says Mary. “Paw Paw is an old canal and railroad town. But similar to the coalfields, we have our own unmarked graves and stories of the slave-like working conditions of the immigrants who dug the canal, built the tunnels, laid the track, all in pre-mining days. The working class everywhere has similar shared experiences, over multiple generations.”

On this CD, she’s joined by Charleston’s The Carpenter Ants, featuring Michael Lipton, Charlie Tee, Ted Harrison, and Jupie Little, with some help from musicians like Ahmed Solomon and Julie Adams from the Mountain Stage band. It’s produced by indie-rock legend Don Dixon, who coproduced REM’s albums *Murmur* and *Reckoning*.



Most of the songs were cowritten by Hott and Lipton and range from softer folk rock to R&B and blues. Many are based on oral histories collected by Joy Lynn, former owner of the Whipple Company Store in Fayette County. Mary closes with a gospel-inspired rendition of “Take Me Home, Country Roads,” backed by the incomparable Randy Gilkey on piano—playing in a way that must bring a smile to Mary’s mother.

Devil in the Hills is available from maryhottmusic.com and other online sellers. —ed.

damage, helped rewrite water regulations, assisted miners in obtaining black-lung benefits, and showed rural communities how to get their roads out of creek beds. “One Day More” was included on the 2006 Smithsonian Folkways CD *Classic Labor Songs*. The Ranger (Lincoln County) resident died September 2, 2020, of COVID-19 [see our Summer 2006 and Winter 2020 issues].

Of recent, the Mine Wars have become more popular in music, including songs by Vince Herman (a founder of Leftover Salmon) with his band Great American Taxi, Jess Klein, Louise Mosrie, David Rovics, Rob McHale, John Dominy, Dan Stevens, Pops Walker, Josh Hamblin, Bill Talbot, Alan “Cathead” Johnston of McDowell County, East Run Band of

Doddridge County, and the Colorado-based band Wandering Natives, to name just some. While most fall within the general categories of folk, old-time, or bluegrass, there’s even a punk-rock song about Blair by the Portland-based My Life in Black and White and a heavy-metal one, “Red Neck War,” by the Charleston band Byzantine.

In the words of Orville Jenks: “Don’t forget me little darling when they lay me down to rest.” 🌿

PAUL GARTNER moved to West Virginia from Ohio in 1977 and lives in Lincoln County. The multi-instrumentalist won the senior old-time banjo competition at the 2019 Vandalia Gathering. He performs with his band Born Old and is a copy editor for the *Charleston Gazette-Mail*. He’s contributed numerous articles to *GOLDENSEAL*, including his most recent in our Winter 2019 issue.

Blair Mountain

West Virginia's Sacred Landscape

By Charles B. Keeney III

"Every society needs sacred places. A society that cannot remember its past, and honor it, is in peril of losing its soul." –Vine Deloria, Jr., Lakota scholar

My first trips over Blair Mountain were on a school bus. Duval High, the school I attended in Lincoln County, often played basketball and football games against schools in Mingo and Logan counties. Before the state completed Corridor G from Danville to Williamson, you had to take Route 17 south from Madison, following the exact path of the 1921 Armed March, to reach most of those schools. As a teenager, I was just becoming familiar with the history so closely connected to my family [see p. 22] and home and had yet to grasp the full significance of the place. Staring out the window as the bus wound around the sharp curves of the southern crest of Blair Mountain, the ridgelines and slopes didn't look extraordinary at all. Blair Mountain appeared indistinguishable from all the other mountains in the coalfields. I recall seeing the trees flashing across the school bus windows. Who died trying to navigate those trees under gunfire? Who bled there? At the time, no one really seemed to know or care. To everyone else on the bus, it was just another mountain to cross on the way to the next ballgame.

The Blair Mountain Battlefield is one of America's great sacred landscapes. Intuitively, I may have known this as a teenager riding the bus to a ballgame, but I didn't tangibly comprehend the sacredness of Blair Mountain until I first walked its slopes in December 2010. On

that day, I accompanied Kenny King and two reporters from CNN, Rob Howell and Dave Tmko. The month before, I'd met Kenny and several other activists at Jimmy Weekley's home in Blair, and together, we agreed to organize a protest march to protect the battlefield from mountaintop removal mining. CNN had caught wind of our intentions and wanted to film our efforts for a documentary. Rob and Dave asked if they could go up on Blair Mountain and film a short interview with Kenny and me. So, on a snowy morning in early December, Kenny led us up to some defensive entrenchments he'd found years earlier near the southern crest.

We trudged up the mountain with fresh snow crunching beneath our shoes. On the way up, we came upon a buck and a doe. Both of them stared at us for a moment before darting off down the slope. They galloped in the direction from where the miners had attacked. The incline was steep and rugged. From our vantage point on the ridge, I could easily understand how a well-entrenched force could fight off a much larger number of attackers. Indeed, as I peered down, I realized that a direct assault would have been suicidal. What would motivate men to grab their guns and attempt to scale these slopes with machine guns bearing down on them? For the first time, I pondered how angry or desperate I would have to be to have done the same.



Clear-cutting on the Camp Branch Hollow section of the Blair Mountain Battlefield destroyed some of Don Chafin's defensive entrenchments. Photo by Kenny King, 2014.

Kenny led us on up to the entrenchments. Dave turned on his camera, and Rob interviewed Kenny as I stood behind the entrenchment and soaked everything in. The woods can be eerily quiet when it snows, and I knelt on one knee from the same spot as someone in Don Chafin's army would have done 90 years before and wondered who that someone shot at, whether he killed anyone, or if he was killed himself. Anyone who grew up in West Virginia is quite familiar with the crack of a rifle shot in the woods, and I could almost hear the shots of 1921 echo on the hillside and feel the bullets whiz by. Dave and Rob eventually turned their attention to me, but I was so caught up in the moment, being there for the first time,

I have no recollection of what I said, only what I felt.

Since I'd learned that the battlefield had been removed from the National Register of Historic Places in 2009 and that coal companies intended to destroy it with mountaintop removal, I felt the need to make a stand. But until that December morning, I didn't fully grasp that I stood on sacred ground. Books and films can tell the story of the Mine Wars, but one must experience the places—feel the bullet holes in the buildings in Matewan, walk the path of the train tracks by the site of the Holly Grove tent colony, ascend Blair Mountain—to really get it. I knew then that protecting the landscape where this war had reached its climax was imperative to keeping the history alive. Losing was not an option.

Over the course of the next eight years, Friends of Blair Mountain (FOBM), the nonprofit preservation group composed of Kenny, myself, and others, would fight to protect the Blair Mountain Battlefield from mountaintop removal and get it relisted in the National Register of Historic Places. We formed coalitions. We went to court. We became citizen regulators, conducting site inspections, monitoring activity on the battle sites. We sought to reclaim our true historic identity and change the public narrative. While it's impossible to chronicle all of our fight to save the battlefield in an article, one vital aspect of our crusade was to prove the value of the place itself by demanding a full archaeological survey of the entire site.

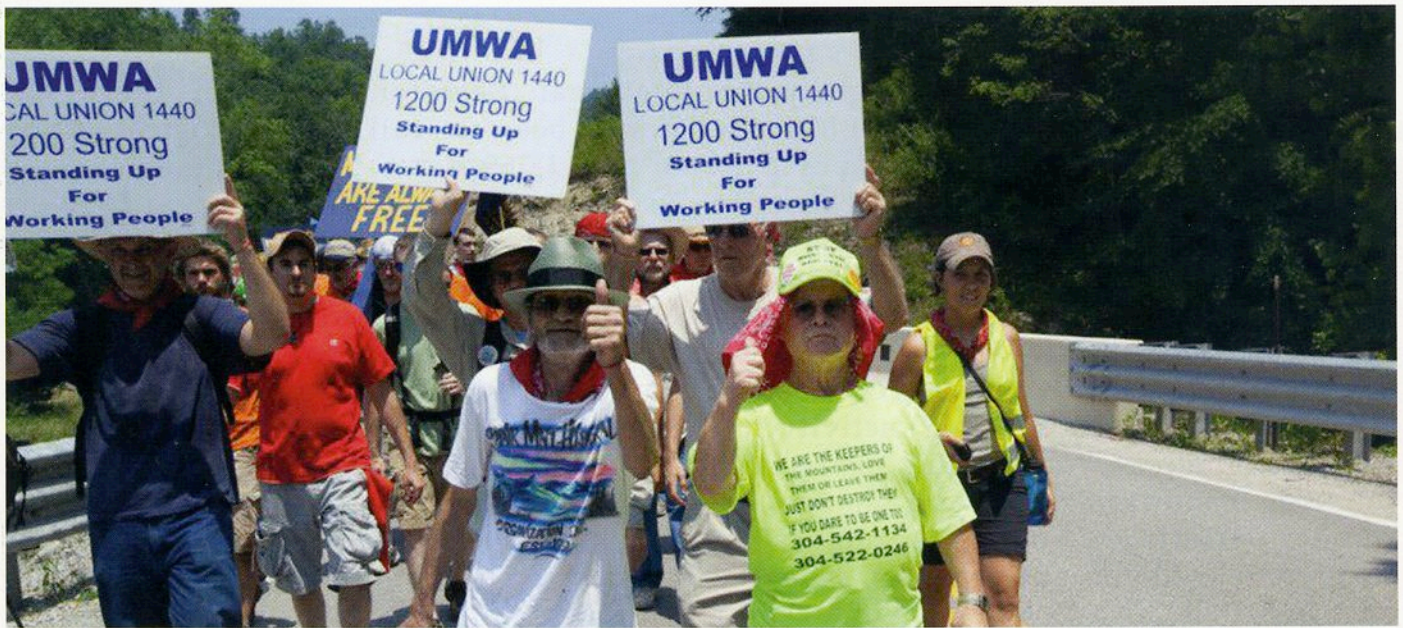
Preserving the battlefield was necessary because the landscape itself is indispensable as a source of archaeological discovery and education. As I stated during my testimony before the West Virginia Surface Mine Board on December 9, 2013: "If you're studying, say, the Battle of Gettysburg, you can look at generals' letters, diaries, letters home from troops—all these kinds of things in order to reconstruct the battle. You don't have that at Blair Mountain because the miners kept to a code of silence. What they were doing was illegal. They were in an uprising, so they didn't talk about what was going on. They didn't leave a paper trail. . . . Because there's no written evidence of the actual fighting, the archaeological evidence becomes paramount to understanding what happened. You have to know where people were shooting, where forces were moving, all that sort of thing."

For these reasons, we wanted to require a thorough archaeological survey of the battlefield before any surface disturbances could occur—an added layer of protection not afforded us due to the battlefield's delisting from the

National Register. To date, there has never been a full archaeological study of the 1,269 acres listed in the National Register. Archaeologist Harvard Ayers conducted a groundbreaking study in 2006 that proved essential to the battlefield's National Register nomination, but his work covered less than 10% of the whole site. Archaeologist Brandon Nida also conducted valuable work in later years, but again, his study covered only a fraction of the entire acreage. The coal industry, meanwhile, worked diligently to sidestep any responsibility for locating potential historic sites and artifacts. Holding the industry accountable became paramount to our success.

Between 2012 and 2014, FOBM met numerous times with coal executives and state leaders in an attempt to reach a compromise settlement on Blair Mountain. Eventually, the industry agreed to abide by the Section 106 review process established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. A Section 106 review requires regulatory agencies to consider the cultural and historical impacts of any development projects, such as mining, on properties eligible for listing in the National Register. In this role, the State Historic Preservation Office works with companies, other regulatory agencies, and groups with a vested interest in the property to assess any adverse impacts a project may have and work to mitigate damages. At times, this mitigation takes the form of a programmatic agreement, where companies agree to meet certain terms before the project begins.

In July 2014, the coal companies produced a programmatic agreement and sent it to FOBM and other groups for comment. Kenny King immediately referred to the document as the "problematic agreement," and he wasn't wrong. Aside from the fact that the



Jimmy Weekley (left) and Larry Gibson (right) lead a 2011 march—following the same path the miners did in 1921—to help preserve Blair Mountain. Our author is in red to the left. Photo by Paul Corbit Brown. See our Winter 2011 issue for more about the late Larry Gibson.

companies agreed to preserve only 8½ acres on Blair Mountain after mountaintop removal mining, they also claimed that they'd hired a private company to conduct cultural resource surveys on the battlefield and that no sites of historic significance had been found. The companies argued that these surveys were a sufficient means of studying the battlefield and that no actual archaeological studies needed to be conducted. The programmatic agreement also stipulated that once all the regulatory agencies had signed off, the coal companies waived all rights to any further regulation or inspection of the properties.

We obviously balked at this agreement. The document became even more unsettling when a sympathetic individual at the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) slipped me a copy of the cultural resource survey, which stretched to 102 pages. As I read through it, several glaring problems appeared. According to the report, the study's objective was to present "the results of an architectural survey,"

including "the systematic mapping of all buildings, structures, and objects 50 years of age and over." The study went on to state that criteria "typically used to assess archaeological sites was not applied to this project." In short, the companies hired a private research firm to examine and provide a historical overview of a rural mountainous battlefield and claimed that the report was an adequate substitute for an archaeological survey.

Obviously, one doesn't go looking for architectural sites on a forested battlefield. One looks for signs of troop movements, buried weapons, shell casings, entrenchments, foxholes, buried objects, and potential human remains. We needed to demonstrate that the programmatic agreement and cultural resource surveys, as submitted by the coal companies, were insufficient as a means of mitigation. We took our cause to the West Virginia Surface Mine Board (SMB) on September 9, 2014.

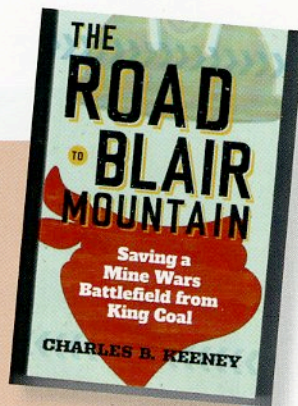
Within the DEP, a state-government agency, the SMB hears legal appeals regarding mining permits and regulatory infractions. The board, composed of seven

members appointed by the governor, has the authority to revoke or deny permits and to cite companies for violating regulations. Because FOBM had no money, we couldn't afford an attorney, but we found Brad Stephens, a lawyer in Morgantown, who sympathized with our cause and represented us pro bono. Brad didn't have any experience with coal or preservation law, but he and several FOBM board members met at my Charleston apartment the day before the hearing to hammer out a strategy.

In March 2014, FOBM had conducted a citizen's site inspection of the Camp Branch Permit, one of three surface mines overlapping onto the battlefield. During that inspection, we discovered four sites where the surface area had been disturbed by clear-cutting or with excavators or bulldozers. Because the battle occurred only a century ago, shell casings, firearms, and other artifacts could be found just a few inches below the surface; any type of timbering, digging, or drilling could demolish them. Kenny asserted that one of these specific disturbances had already destroyed some of Don Chafin's defensive entrenchments, which he'd documented in 2009. According to the permit, the coal companies were required to survey the area for archaeological sites and preserve areas of historical significance. If workers came upon any battlefield evidence, companies were to halt operations until a professional could view the site. The cultural resource survey used by the company, of course, didn't identify any sites, so the company proceeded accordingly with destroying this section of the battlefield.

Kenny and I testified before the SMB that the cultural resource surveys were inadequate, that Kenny had personally documented areas of archaeological significance, and that the companies had already destroyed some of these

Our author's new book portrays the unwavering determination of volunteers to help preserve Blair Mountain and get it relisted in the National Register of Historic Places. Keeney, the great-grandson of labor leader Frank Keeney, blends in family stories about the Mine Wars and a good dose of his own humor to make this a remarkably readable book about historic preservation. It's available from online sellers. —ed.



areas. Joe Stanley, a former coal miner, further testified that heavy equipment operators and workers clear-cutting the forest would, in no way, be able to identify entrenchments and other areas of importance due to the size of their machines. Clearly, the companies didn't make an honest effort to find archaeological sites, and, as a result, some areas of historical significance were destroyed when they clear-cut sections of the Camp Branch Permit.

Ultimately, the SMB didn't punish the companies for destroying the sections we'd documented; however, it did rule that if the companies planned further operations on the battlefield, "additional archaeological surveys would be appropriate" before any mining could commence. This ruling added another layer of protection for the battlefield and nullified the terms of the programmatic agreement. This would make it costlier and more time consuming for the coal companies to mine the battlefield and enabled us to stall their progress while awaiting a federal court ruling on Blair Mountain's delisting from the National Register.

Small victories such as this made all the difference in our crusade to save Blair Mountain. As Muhammad Ali once said, "It isn't the mountain to climb that wears you down, it's the pebble in your



A pistol and shells discovered on the Blair Mountain Battlefield. Photo by Kenny King.

shoe." We endeavored to be the pebble in King Coal's shoe, and, in doing so, we delayed mining on the battlefield until we won the federal lawsuit in 2016 and Blair Mountain was officially relisted in the National Register in 2018. Because the West Virginia State Code forbids surface mining on properties listed in the National Register, the battlefield is now safe from mountaintop removal.

But it shouldn't have been this difficult. Our efforts to save Blair Mountain not only exposed an effort to destroy our state's heritage and culture but also how federal and state preservation laws do not adequately protect our nation's battlefields. And many battlefields—from Wounded Knee to Gettysburg—are threatened by mining, construction, real-estate development, pipelines, timbering, drilling, vandalism, and other forms of destruction. The fight to save Blair Mountain exemplifies the need for more efficient protection of our nation's sacred landscapes.

Battlefields are sacred ground for many reasons. They are sites of conflict, sacrifice, heroism, tragedy, and bloodshed. They tell stories of clashing ideals, class divisions, racial hierarchies, nationalism, conquest, and resistance to conquest. To stand on a battlefield is to be haunted by all these ghosts at once. One is forced to try to make sense of them. As places of war, battlefields bring the conflicts of the past to life—from the glorious to the shameful and everything in between. On these landscapes, people fought, killed, and died for reasons both just and unjust. We cannot know who we are as a society unless we hold on to these places and seek out the harsh lessons of the bloodied soils of North America. Nowhere are these truths more self-evident than on the hallowed slopes of Blair Mountain. ✱

CHARLES B. KEENEY III is an associate professor of history at Southern West Virginia Community College, a founding member of the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum, and vice-president of Friends of Blair Mountain. This is his second contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



Photo by Kenzie New Walker.

The West Virginia Mine Wars Museum

By Stan Bumgardner

Some 30 years ago, the story of the Mine Wars was as absent from our museums as it was from our textbooks. Fortunately, we now have an entire museum dedicated to it. The West Virginia Mine Wars Museum (WVMWM) opened in 2015 in the old Chambers Hardware store, where the 1920 shootout started in Matewan (Mingo County). The founders, who originally coalesced while fighting to save Blair Mountain, recognized the need to tell the Mine Wars story in a museum setting.

After they announced plans for the WVMWM, Mine Wars relics began flowing in and haven't stopped. Much of the early material came from Kenny King [see p. 77], who's been studying and trying to preserve Blair Mountain for decades. Kenzie New

Walker, the museum's director, says "the museum literally would not exist without Kenny's work and dedication."

The museum recently moved into new digs in the UMW Local 1440 building in Matewan; the local has been another key supporter. New professionally designed and fabricated exhibits—an impressive team effort led by creative director Shaun Slifer—really engage the visitor. Some of the more intriguing items are the remains of a Model 1873 Winchester carbine rifle found on Blair Mountain (with unspent rounds still in it), a billy club owned by Army General Henry Bandholtz, a poetry book Frank Keeney read while living in a tent colony (with his handwritten notes in the margins), a "Don Chafin for Sheriff"

campaign button, and an entire prison cell from the old Jefferson County Jail in Charles Town that held miners accused of treason after Blair Mountain.

For Kenzie—the daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter of southern West Virginia union miners [see p. 56]—her work as museum director comes from a deeply held passion and commitment. Like most of us, she didn't learn about the Mine Wars in school and was bowled over when she finally heard that something like this had occurred in her own backyard while remaining a virtual secret.

One exhibit, in particular, speaks to Kenzie personally: a wall of 361 mine checks. Miners were issued metal tags (called checks) with their unique numbers on them. They'd place the tags on coal cars to get credit for the coal they'd loaded. More somberly, they'd also hang them on hooks when entering the mine; in case of an explosion or roof collapse, companies would look at the check board to determine who'd made it out alive and who might still be trapped inside. The 361 checks symbolize the minimum number of miners known to have been killed in our nation's deadliest mine disaster, the 1907 Monongah explosion in Marion County. One visitor gazed at the wall in disbelief and asked Kenzie if it represented all the miners killed in all our mine disasters, and she answered, "No, this was just one disaster." That wall speaks volumes without saying a word.

While artifacts are always a draw, the real heart of an interesting museum lies in the stories it tells. The WVMWM relates different sides of the story—the roles of union leaders, law enforcement, and the Army—but continually comes back to miners, their families, and why the right to unionize meant so much to them. One exhibit, for instance, relates how women, barred from working in mines at the time due to superstition, took part in union activities by chasing off replacement workers

Welch, West Virginia

Anyone interested in the Mine Wars should also visit the city of Welch (McDowell County), about 60 miles southeast of Matewan. The county courthouse, where Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers were assassinated, appears virtually as it did in 1921; a reenactment of the shooting will take place at noon on September 4.

Just down the street is a relatively new facility: the Jack Caffrey Arts & Cultural Center at 143 Wyoming Street. This 7,500-square-foot space features coal-mining artifacts; art displays; and a performance / meeting area. For folks interested in historic preservation, it's a great example of adaptive reuse; in its past lives, the building served as the city's post office and as an automobile dealership.

"We are moving from a coal economy to a tourism economy," says Welch Mayor Harold McBride, Sr. "When people come to our city, they want to hear about the coal, about the people, about Sid Hatfield and the 'Terror of the Tug.' They want to hold a piece of coal in their hands." He adds that the Caffrey Center "is important for our people. We need the art, the plays, and the museum to draw people in and for our people to use."

Please call to inquire about the center's operating hours (304-436-5392) or check out its Facebook page. —ed.

(*scabs*, in labor jargon) and blocking railroad tracks to prevent non-union-mined coal from being delivered to market.

Museum cofounder and board member Wilma Steele is another proud daughter of the southern coalfields. She sees her role as getting folks "to tell stories that connect people with this history . . . so the stories aren't lost."

The museum's audio clips are a really compelling part of the experience. They're from oral histories that Drs. Rebecca Bailey and John Hennen conducted in the 1980s with people who lived through and participated in the Mine Wars. While transcripts have been available online through the West Virginia State Archives for



The West Virginia Mine Wars Museum, at 401 Mate Street in Matewan, is open on Fridays and Saturdays, April through October. It's available for school and other tours by appointment. Visit the museum's website (wvminewars.org) or call 304-691-0014. You also can follow the museum on social media and become a supporting member.

West Virginia Mine Wars Museum Director Kenzie New Walker. Photo by the WV Hub. Kenzie's article in our Spring 2020 issue details many more exciting things happening in Matewan these days.

years, this is the first time people can listen to the people's actual words in a public setting. Kenzie refers to the "tragedy" in their voices. For instance, one woman describes being evicted from her company house. Kenzie notes, "Her stove was placed on the railroad tracks with the kettle of beans that were still cooking."

Since the museum staff didn't learn about the Mine Wars in public school, they've made the exhibits particularly appealing to young people and developed a curriculum and lesson plans for teachers. School groups comprise a significant number of the overall visitors, and Kenzie hopes the museum will make her generation of West Virginians the last to grow up without knowing about this part of our history. She also encourages tourists interested in our mining heritage to visit other fine museums in southern

West Virginia, including the Coal Heritage Museum in Madison (Boone County), the Exhibition Coal Mine in Beckley (Raleigh County), the Bramwell Depot (Mercer County), and the reconstructed depot right here in Matewan, among others.

While the WVMWM is a must for all West Virginia history buffs, the museum's appeal reaches well beyond our borders. As word spreads, visitors are arriving from across the country. The museum tells a universal story of underdogs fighting against what they saw as an unjust system. In Kenzie's words, "A lot of people can relate to the idea of fighting for justice."

Wilma says the "civil rights issues" in the museum mean the most to her. She underscores the importance of the Mine Wars in our own history: "I think to myself, 'If anyone else had this history, it'd be everywhere.' And that's why I'm here."



The remains of this model 1873 Winchester carbine discovered on the Blair Mountain Battlefield are on display in the museum. Photo by Kenny Kemp.

The museum has professionally cataloged its artifacts and set up an archival room for researchers. In the future, the staff and volunteers plan to record more oral histories from the descendants of Mine Wars participants, develop a driving tour of key sites, and preserve more manuscripts.

In a time when museums, small and large, are struggling to survive, the WVMWM is an inspiration to any community that wants to preserve its history, heritage, and culture. Board member Lou Martin urges others just to start with what you have, beginning with the kinds of people who get things done: "Build the team. Not every museum

is going to get made, but if the history or art collection—or whatever it is—is significant and people respond to it, you can start small, plant seeds, and then bring people to the project as you go."

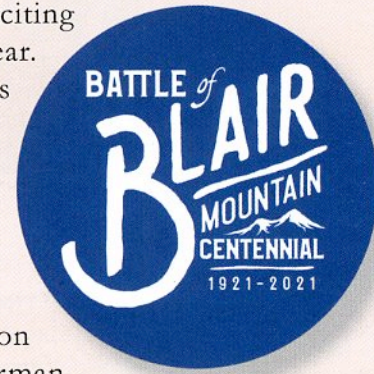
Wilma adds one more piece of advice, "Don't give up!"

Let's hope West Virginia communities can build, grow, and support more museums like this great effort in Matewan. All it takes is some artifacts, compelling stories, and hard work (at little or no pay, of course). 🍁

Very special thanks for our author Carl E. Feather's contributions to this article.

Schedule of Blair Mountain Centennial Events

The West Virginia Mine Wars Museum (WVMWM) and its partners have an exciting lineup of activities planned for the Battle of Blair Mountain Centennial this year. Some times and places had not been set by publication time. Please follow updates and newly listed events at www.blair100.com.



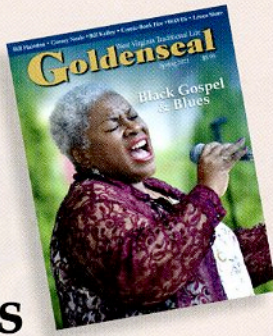
Special Events

- Aug. 19, 7:30 p.m., virtual: *The Battle of Blair Mountain: One-Hundred Years Later—Significance for Working People*, hosted by the Battle of Homestead Foundation
- Aug. 27 – Sept. 10: *Blair Footsteps Interpretive Signage*, hosted by the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia, Kyle Warmack, Patrick Corcoran, and Gibbs Kinderman
- Aug. 30, 12 p.m., Chief Logan Conference Center, Logan: *The Faces of Blair Mountain*, hosted by the National Coal Heritage Area Authority
- Sept. 2, 6 p.m., Joan C. Edwards Performing Arts Center, Huntington: *Labor Film Festival*, hosted by the Marshall University School of Journalism & Mass Communications
- Sept. 3, Marmet to Blair: *Retracing the 50 Mile Miners March to Blair Mountain*, organized by the UMWA
- Sept. 3, 4 p.m., Charleston: *Battle of Blair Mountain Centennial Kick-Off*
- Sept. 3 – 6, Morgantown: *Mountaintop: Coal Mine Wars in West Virginia*, special events hosted by WVU Libraries
- Sept. 4, 9 a.m., Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Charleston: *Museums, Labor, and Social Activism*, a symposium by the West Virginia Association of Museums
- Sept. 4, 10 a.m., Wheeling: *5th Annual Reuther-Pollack Labor History Symposium*, at the First State Capitol
- Sept. 4, 12 p.m., McDowell County Courthouse, Welch: *Reenactment: Murders of Sid Hatfield & Ed Chambers*, hosted by McArts
- Sept. 4, 2 p.m., McDowell Cinemas, Welch: Screenings of the film *Matewan*, hosted by the City of Welch
- Sept. 4, 2 p.m., Taylor Books, Charleston: *New Books about the Mine Wars: A Reading and Discussion with Authors*
- Sept. 4, 7 p.m., Charleston: *The Legacy of the Red Bandana*, hosted by Southern Crossroads, WV Can't Wait, WV United Caucus, Steel City John Brown Club, and the WVMWM
- Sept. 4, 8 p.m., McArts Amphitheater, Welch: *"Terror of the Tug" play*, written by Jean Battlo
- Sept. 5, 12 p.m., Big Laurel Learning Center, Kermit: *Solidarity Supper, Storytelling, and Songs*
- Sept. 5, 4:45 p.m., Matewan: *Guided Walking Tour of Historic Matewan*, hosted by the WVMWM
- Sept. 5, 6:30 p.m., WVMWM, Matewan: *"I Come Creeping": New Paintings by Chris DeMaria*
- Sept. 6, 11 a.m., Coalfield Jamboree Theater, Welch: *The People's Church: A Dissident Coalfield Worship Experience*, by the Rev. Brad Davis
- Sept. 6, 1 p.m., Racine: *Blair Centennial Finale*, at the UMWA Annual Labor Day Rally
- Sept. 8 – Nov. 17, Cantrell Hall, Wise, Va.: *Blair Mountain Lecture Series*, hosted by UVA-Wise College's Center for Appalachian Studies
- Sept. 9 – 12, Welch: *Coalfields Heritage Festival*, hosted by the City of Welch
- Sept. 10, 1 p.m., Logan: *Tours of Don Chafin's House*, hosted by the Logan County Women's Club
- Sept. 10 – 11, Downtown Logan and Chief Logan Conference Center: *Appalachian Heritage Days*, hosted by the National Coal Heritage Area Authority

Other Special Commemorations

- Republication of the 1973 *On Dark and Bloody Ground: An Oral History of the West Virginia Mine Wars* by Anne Lawrence, with a foreword by Catherine Moore and an afterword by Cecil E. Roberts (WVU Press)
- *Labor Cartoons in the Mine Wars Era: Symbols, Messages, and Meanings*, hosted by the Watts Museum at WVU

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The Legacy of the Mine Wars

By Stan Bumgardner

The summer after my father graduated from Charleston High School in 1946, he got a job digging footers for an apartment building along MacCorkle Avenue in the Kanawha City section of town. He and his buddies had to break up asphalt from the airfield Billy Mitchell once used as a staging area during the Armed March. Someone said it was the old airstrip, and that's all he knew about it. They didn't have jackhammers, just pickaxes, sledgehammers, and sweat.

When he was a kid, he used to play sandlot baseball a couple of blocks from there. The local ground rules were that any ball hit onto the 15-foot-high Adena burial mound was a homerun. The mound was demolished a couple decades later when Kroger built a supermarket at 38th Street and MacCorkle—now home to a Walgreens. In the late 1800s, more than 100 prehistoric burial mounds and other earthworks existed in the Kanawha Valley—among our few clues as to how people lived here 2,000 years ago. Today, only three mounds remain in the valley, the others bulldozed by the march of time.

My father often talked about long-vanished places and the life lessons he'd learned from them. We can't save all the past, nor should we, but maybe we need to preserve a bit more of it? One thing I've learned from this issue of the magazine is that, collectively, we've done a really poor job of preserving and communicating history.

In this case, it's the West Virginia Mine Wars. In only a few decades, though, historians have recorded countless interviews with those who were there; dug up long-lost documents and other objects; written books, plays, and songs; made films; developed a museum and a school curriculum; and started preserving and interpreting key sites.

These stories are important because coal miners—the hard-working backbone of our state and nation—demanded their right to fair wages and less-dangerous working conditions. In the end, the concepts of both capitalism and workers' rights survived in different ways, and a struggle between the two will always exist. This tug-of-war played out violently in places here at home: Holly Grove, Mucklow, Matewan, Blair Mountain.

The crucial question to me is why did a dispute between workers and business owners descend into a civil war? And why did others continually look away as miners aired their grievances? And more broadly, how do we address suffering and anger before things escalate into deadly violence?

The Mine Wars, like the Civil War, are a lasting reminder never to allow something like this to happen again. Problems are problems because they are difficult, and kicking the can down the road just builds up tension. Perhaps knowing more about the Mine Wars will motivate us to tamp down hatred, solve problems, and calm frustrations respectfully rather than instantly choosing sides. Here in West Virginia, especially, we can't afford to turn on one another. While we may not agree on everything, remember that West Virginians stick up for one another, particularly when others are trying to divide us. ✿

Underground miners, Logan County, 1905.
Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives,
Bob Spence Collection.





Photo by Stan Bumgardner.