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“Mixed Up in the Coal Camp”: Interethnic, Family, and Community Exchanges in Matewan During the West Virginia Mine Wars, 1900-1922

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**“MIXED UP IN THE COAL CAMP”:
INTERETHNIC, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY EXCHANGES IN MATEWAN
DURING THE WEST VIRGINIA MINE WARS, 1900-1922**

by

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ABSTRACT

“MIXED UP IN THE COAL CAMP”: INTERETHNIC, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY EXCHANGES IN MATEWAN DURING THE WEST VIRGINIA MINE WARS, 1900-1922

Lela Dawn Gourley
Old Dominion University, 2019
Director: Dr. Elizabeth Zaroni

The West Virginia Mine Wars are etched in the popular memory of West Virginians, who view these events as an important part of their identity as Mountaineers; yet, there is still much historians do not know about the Mine Wars, especially when concentrating on the perspectives and experiences of the working-class miners. These everyday miners and their families are the topic of this thesis. Using oral histories from the Matewan Development Center Records housed in the W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, this thesis argues that community-building across ethnic and racial lines within Matewan’s coal camps was not only possible, but occurred at a degree unmatched by other West Virginia industrial communities. In these camps, miners lived less segregated lives than their counterparts, presenting a fairly mixed community in which inter-ethnic exchanges laid an early foundation for cross-ethnic organization and resistance against the coal operators. As miners in southern West Virginia struggled to unionize against pro-coal forces and their attempts to divide miners and the larger community along racial and ethnic lines, miners turned to their foundation of community in the coal camp to withstand strike tactics, including their almost two year banishment to tent colonies. Tent colonies presented opportunities for informal exchanges between miners – exchanges that were just as valuable as formal exchanges in their day to day lives. By examining both formal and informal exchanges between Matewan’s mining population,

this thesis argues that the “mixed up” quality of Stone Mountain Coal Corporation’s coal camps stimulated a shared working-class identity that was then mobilized by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) on a scale previously not achieved in West Virginia’s southern coalfields.

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Lewis and Cindy Reedy, for always placing education at the forefront of our lives; to my husband, Joseph, for constant support – and proofreading! – while pursuing my M.A.; and to my son, Sullivan, for being my driving force while completing the thesis writing process.

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Without the tireless work of the Old Dominion University Perry Library Interlibrary Loan staff – from finding obscure 1920s publications to elusive microfilm copies of newspapers – this project would not be what it is today without their keen efforts.

The staffs of the West Virginia State Archives at the West Virginia Division of Culture and History, the Eastern Regional Coal Archives at the Craft Memorial Library, and the W.L. Eury Special Collections at Appalachian State University offered valuable aid as I scrounged through archival records, oral history interviews, and file cabinet after file cabinet of microfilm rolls.

On a more personal note, to my husband, Joseph, thank you for pushing me when I was ready to quit a hundred times over. Thank you for using vacation time to travel to archives with me. And thank you for sharing the responsibility of our new son this last year; without your help, this project would not have reached completion. To my cousins, Stephen Reedy and Brenna Craig, thank you for loaning books from your collections to kickstart the research process and never complaining about the length of time in which they have remained in my possession. My closest and oldest friends, Breanne Meadows and Miranda Smalley, thank you for being my shoulder on which to cry in tough times, the ears on which fell my complaints, and for taking the time to put fresh eyes on this paper in the final hours.

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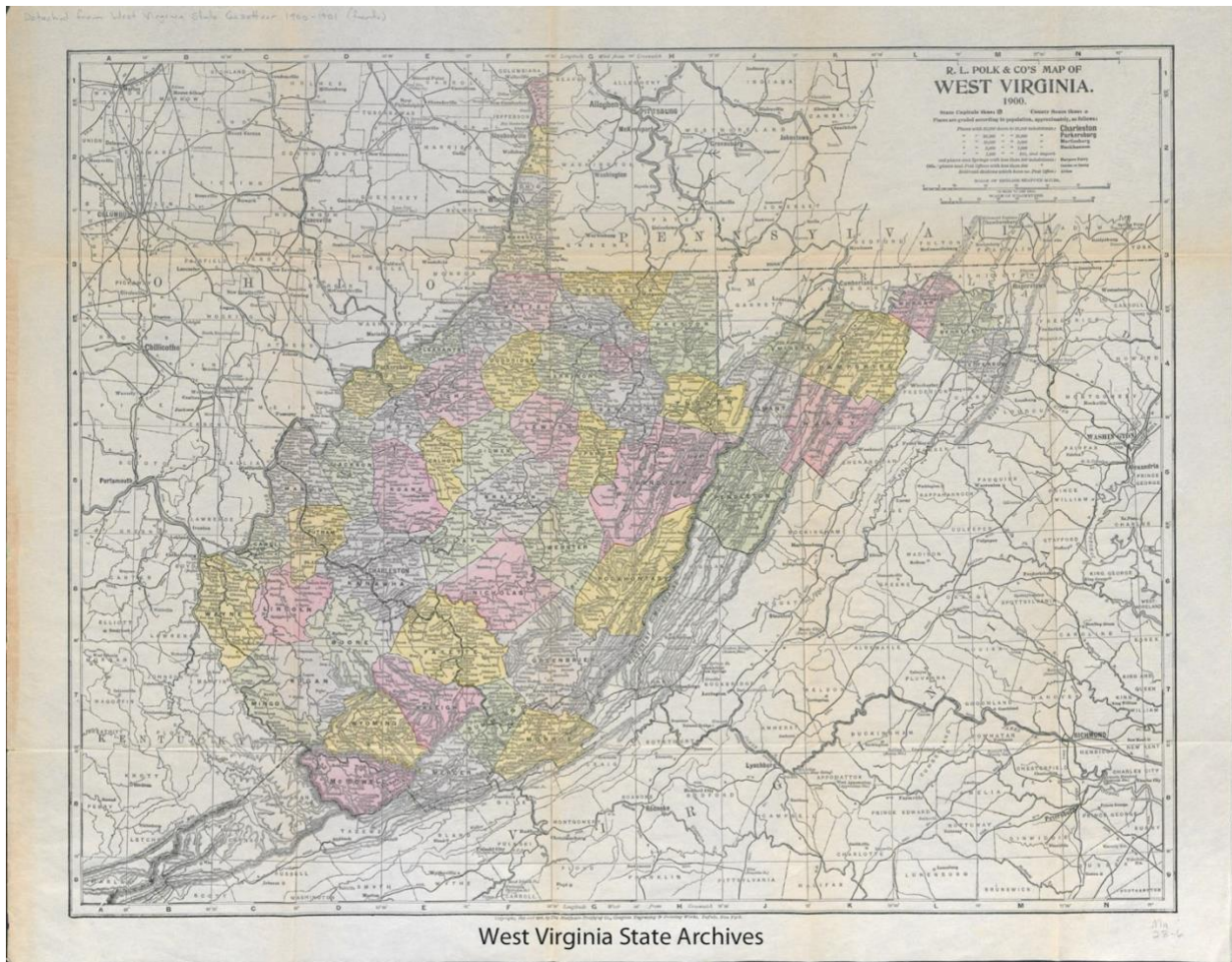


Figure 1. "R. L. Polk and Company's map of West Virginia 1900."
 R. L. Polk and Company
 Published by: Buffalo, NY, Matthews-Northrup Co., 1900; Removed from *West Virginia Gazetteer*, 1900-1901. Reprinted from West Virginia State Archives, West Virginia Division of Culture and History, Charleston, WV. <https://westvirginiaarchiveshistory.zenfolio.com/>.

CHAPTER I
PERPETUATING A FALSE NARRATIVE:
MATEWAN’S PLACE IN THE OVERSIMPLIFICATION
OF WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY

Introduction

On May 19, 1920, Albert C. Felts of the Baldwin-Felts Detectives Incorporated, along with twelve of the company’s private detectives, arrived in the town of Matewan in Mingo County, West Virginia, to evict the families of striking miners from Stone Mountain Coal Corporation housing.¹ That evening the attempted arrest of Matewan Chief of Police Sid Hatfield led to a shootout resulting in the death of seven Baldwin-Felts detectives – including Albert and Lee Felts – as well as Matewan Mayor Cabell Testerman and three striking miners. The ill-named “Matewan Massacre” sparked further unrest in the West Virginia coalfields, leading to the Battle of Blair Mountain, one of the greatest, yet under-studied, armed struggles in U.S. labor history.

The evictions at Stone Mountain Coal Corporation were not the first of their kind in the West Virginia coalfields. Miners had long endured the brutish nature of the mine-guard system and the coal companies’ use of Baldwin-Felts Detectives Agency. The term “West Virginia Mine Wars” describes a period from about 1900 to 1933 in which West Virginia experienced four

¹ Stone Mountain Coal Company was the actual company operating in Matewan, and Red Jacket was one of the company’s camps. Interviewees almost exclusively use the terms “Red Jacket Coal Company,” “Red Jacket,” and “Red Jacket Junior,” when referring to the events surrounding coal mining in Matewan around 1912-1922. There are also interviews in which the interviewee uses “Stony Mountain Coal Company.”

large labor strikes.² Of this era, Historian David Alan Corbin wrote, “These events resulted in an untold number of deaths, indictments of over 550 coal miners for insurrection and treason, and four declarations of martial law. They shook the foundations of the largest trade union in the United States and rocked the nation’s sense of honor and decency.”³ The strikes in Mingo County and the events surrounding the miners’ march and the Battle of Blair Mountain mark the bloodiest labor struggle of the Mine War era.⁴

The West Virginia Mine Wars, including the culminating Battle of Blair Mountain, are etched in the popular memory of West Virginians, who view these events as an important part of their identity as Mountaineers, an identity that connects them to a larger history of coal mining, community formation, and labor relations in Appalachia. However, there is still much historians do not know about the Mine Wars, especially about the perspectives and experiences of the miners. These miners and their families are the topic of this thesis. Using oral histories from the Matewan Development Center Records housed in the W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, this thesis argues that community-building across ethnic and racial lines within Matewan’s coal camps was not only possible, but occurred at a degree unmatched by other West Virginia industrial communities. The oral histories reveal miners and their families in Matewan as a community of peers who lived, as the

² Howard B. Lee, *Bloodletting In Appalachia: The Story of West Virginia's Four Major Mine Wars and Other Thrilling Incidents of Its Coal Fields* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library, 1969); Fred Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields: The Autobiography of Fred Mooney*, ed. J. W. Hess (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library, 1967); Lon Savage, *Thunder in the Mountains: The West Virginia Mine War, 1920-21* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990); David Alan Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981).

³ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, xiii.

⁴ Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*; Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields*; Savage, *Thunder in the Mountains*; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*.

daughter of an African American miner recounted, “mixed up in the coal camps.”⁵ In these camps, miners lived less segregated lives than their counterparts, presenting a mixed community in which inter-ethnic exchanges – in the workplace, at home, and during leisure time – laid an early foundation for cross-ethnic organization and resistance against the coal operators. As miners in southern West Virginia struggled to unionize against pro-coal forces and their attempts to divide miners and the larger community along racial and ethnic lines, miners turned to their foundation of community in the coal camp to withstand brutal strike tactics, including their almost two year banishment to tent colonies. These tent colonies further contributed to the creation of community within Matewan’s varied mining population, as harsh conditions forced families to depend on one another for survival. Tent colonies presented opportunities for informal exchanges between miners – exchanges that were just as valuable as formal exchanges in their day to day lives. By examining both formal and informal exchanges between Matewan’s mining population, this thesis argues that the “mixed up” quality of Stone Mountain Coal Corporation’s coal camps stimulated a shared working-class identity that was then mobilized by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) on a scale previously not achieved in West Virginia’s southern coalfields.

The overarching objective of this thesis is to address the oversimplification of understandings and depictions of interethnic and larger community encounters in Matewan during the time before and during the strikes of 1920 to 1922. West Virginia’s coal towns have been portrayed largely in a one-dimensional way, that is, as rigidly segregated by race and ethnicity. The total population of Mingo County in 1910 was 85.6% American-born white, which

⁵ Louise Darwin, Box 4, Folder 4, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA, 3.

contributes to this outlook.⁶ However, by 1921, the mining population in the county was 17.6% African American, 24% foreign-born white, and 58.4% American-born white.⁷ The Matewan Development Center oral history interviews show industrial agency – a story that involved much interethnic and community solidarity as well as real tension and prejudice – among miners as they attempted to unionize and create a common working-class culture before the 1920 strike.

Historical Context

Although the main focus of this thesis is the community-building that occurred surrounding the events in Matewan in 1920, an understanding of West Virginia coal mining before the unionization of Mingo County reveals underlying issues of community and solidarity that aided the UMWA in joining miners of varying ethnic backgrounds together. The events of the 1920-1922 strike cannot be fully examined without first describing the 1912-1913 strike in Paint Creek and Cabin Creek, Kanawha County, West Virginia, and the history of unionization efforts in the region. Paint Creek and Cabin Creek provided both the UMWA and coal operators with examples, tactics, and experiences to use during the strike period after the Matewan Massacre. West Virginia's nonunionized bituminous coal industry posed the largest threat to the UMWA's organized fields in Pennsylvania and Ohio. By 1912, only a small, weak cluster of unionism existed in that state's southern fields. The UMWA blamed miners' indifference toward unionization for lackluster numbers in West Virginia, and in 1910, UMWA Vice President Frank Haynes wrote, "West Virginia separated from Virginia during the Civil War period on account of the slavery question. If the miners of West Virginia *were awake* to their interests, both

⁶ "Annual Report of the Department of Mines." West Virginia Department of Mines, Charleston, WV, 1910.

⁷ Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color*, 70.

economically and politically there would be another historic separation in the state, and that would be the [miners'] separation ... from the hands of the coal barons and other organized forces of greed.”⁸ On April 8, 1912, a strike began in the Kanawha district of West Virginia’s coal fields. By May, the UMWA secured contracts for all fields in the district except Paint Creek, where operators refused the union pay scale and working conditions and brought in a private security force, the Baldwin-Felts Agency.

The Kanawha County Coal Operators Association resisted negotiating with the striking miners, claiming that the UMWA was a tool of their competitors in the Midwest. A previous UMWA strike comprised of miners in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Western Pennsylvania, called the Central Competitive Field, in 1897, brought public attention to conflicts between operators and miners for the first time. West Virginia miners as a whole did not participate, and so the terms of settlement – an eight-hour workday, uniform wage scales for day men, and tonnage rates set at a basing points price system, a system of pricing used by coal operators to charge a fee for the product and delivery fee based on location – did not apply to coal fields of West Virginia.⁹ Therefore miners in West Virginia did not gain those protections, worked longer hours, and were not paid a living wage, thus making the West Virginia coal fields more

⁸ Frank Haynes, Letter to the Editor, *UMWJ*, September 2, 1910, 2; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 25-26.

⁹ Mary Pandora Mourat, “A History of Coal Mining in West Virginia to 1933” (Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1947), 43; Ronald Garay, *U.S. Steel and Gary, West Virginia: Corporate Paternalism in Appalachia* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2011): 53-54. For more on the 1897 strike see: J.E. George, "The Coal Miners' Strike of 1897," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 12, no. 2 (1898): 186-208; For more on basing points price systems see: R. S. Khemani and D. M. Shapiro, commissioned by the Directorate for Financial, Fiscal and Enterprise Affairs, “Glossary of Industrial Organisation Economics and Competition Law” last modified March 27, 2013, <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=3150>.

profitable for the coal operators.¹⁰ The West Virginia operators understood if their fields organized, the Central Competitive Field and the UMWA could dictate “interstate wage agreements,” stabilizing the market of the bituminous industry. UMWA’s attempt to organize the state coupled with the operators’ staunch resistance resulted in the Mingo strikes of 1920-1922, “which embittered labor-management relations for decades.”¹¹

As Paint-Cabin Creek miners moved into tent colonies, the Kanawha County Coal Operators Association authorized the construction of emplacements for machine guns by mine guards, while the company imported a non-unionized workforce.¹² The strike became increasingly violent, and, as historian John Alexander Williams wrote, “by midsummer, the surrounding hills routinely echoed with the crack of gunfire and even the rattle of machine guns, which the guards posted in ironclad forts,” built near the company towns.¹³ Striking miners headed into the woods for cover as they lay in wait to fire at the mine guards, into the town, and at trains that carried strikebreakers. West Virginia Governor Glasscock sent 1,200 members of the state militia, into the strike zone on September 2, 1912; Paint and Cabin Creeks were under martial law.¹⁴ Glasscock finally withdrew the troops in October 1912 as the election for governor approached, but when violence flared again a month later, Governor Glasscock’s Second

¹⁰ Mourat, “A History of Coal Mining,” 45, 48; On the “Pennsylvania Conspiracy,” see: Jerry Bruce Thomas, “Coal Country: *The Rise of the Southern Smokeless Coal Industry and Its Effect on Area Development, 1872-1910*” (Ph.D. thesis, University of North Carolina: Chapel Hill, 1971), 252-255; Garay, *U.S. Steel and Gary, West Virginia*, 54-55.

¹¹ Thomas, “Coal Country,” 232-270; Garay, *U.S. Steel and Gary, West Virginia*, 54.

¹² West Virginia State Archives, “West Virginia’s Mine Wars”; Barkey, “Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike”; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 88; Mourat, “A History of Coal Mining,” 48; Bailey, *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 126.

¹³ John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 266.

¹⁴ Otis K. Rice and Stephen W. Brown, *West Virginia: A History* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 225.

Proclamation of Martial Law on November 15, 1912, stated, "...in order to execute the laws, and to protect the public peace, lives and property of quiet and ordinary citizens ... [I] do hereby declare and proclaim a state of war to exist in the District of Cabin Creek, in the County of Kanawha, and State of West Virginia ... And I do hereby further declare and proclaim that said territory is and shall remain under martial law until the necessity therefor ceases to exist."¹⁵ The state militia stayed in the Kanawha district until January 10, 1913.¹⁶

By April 1913, the UMWA wished to end the strike. UMWA President John White and the newly elected governor of West Virginia, Henry D. Hatfield, approached the coal operators with a settlement compromise. Instead of submitting Governor Hatfield's proposed compromise for referendum, the district union officials sent a group of selected miners' delegates to Charleston to agree to the compromise. Petitions by miners against what became known as the Hatfield Settlement rushed into the UMWA national office. To regain order in the Kanawha County fields after almost a year of striking, Governor Hatfield issued an ultimatum to the striking miners: accept such terms by April 25, 1913 or be deported from the state.¹⁷

Simultaneously, in March 1913, Senator John Kern of Indiana called for a congressional investigation of the strike and a senatorial investigation of the acts of the West Virginia state government.¹⁸ The U.S. Senate conducted hearings and published a report that denounced the governor, military authorities, and coal operators, citing numerous violations of the U.S.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Cometti and Festus P. Summers, *The Thirty-Fifth State: A Documentary History of West Virginia* (Parsons, WV: McClain Printing Company, 1975), 522; Williams, *Appalachia*, 266; William E. Glasscock, "Second Proclamation of Martial Law, November 15, 1912," in Cometti and Summers, *The Thirty-Fifth State*, 524.

¹⁶ Rice and Brown, *West Virginia*, 225.

¹⁷ West Virginia State Archives, "West Virginia's Mine Wars"; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 96-101.

¹⁸ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 98.

Constitution, West Virginia law, and human decency. As the Senate committee investigated the use of martial law, the miners rejected the UMWA contract and prepared to renew the strike. In the wake of the revelations of the investigation, the coal operators could not depend on the use of martial law in this phase of the strike, and they quickly granted all of the miners' original demands. The strike was settled at the end of July.¹⁹

Although the strike in Kanawha County was considered a victory for the UMWA and miners at the time, little changed until after the end of World War I. During WWI, the demand for bituminous coal for steam-powered vessels had helped the coal industry in West Virginia flourish, and UMWA membership grew as wages increased. After the war, miners still felt their wages were out of alignment with the economy and were determined to maintain their wartime wages. Many factors – including deregulation of the industry by the government, increased cost of living, failed strikes, and the resurgence of company efforts to resist unionization – led to a sharp decline in UMWA membership. The union responded by launching union drives in Mingo and Logan counties, two anti-union strongholds.²⁰ Coal operators then turned to political connections in the capitol and county sheriffs' offices to combat organization efforts on the part of the UMWA. The UMWA retaliated with a September 1919 march – composed of two- to five-thousand miners – on Logan County to remove Sheriff Don Chafin from his post. The miners, met by the overwhelming numbers of the combined federal and state forces, ended the march.²¹

¹⁹ West Virginia State Archives, "West Virginia's Mine Wars"; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 96-101.

²⁰ Clayton D. Laurie, "The United States Army and the Return to Normalcy in Labor Dispute Interventions: The Case of the West Virginia Coal Mine Wars, 1920–1921," *West Virginia History* 50 (1991): 2, accessed March 1, 2019.

http://www.wvculture.org/history/journal_wvh/wvh50-1.html.

²¹ Laurie, "The United States Army and the Return to Normalcy," 2.

In January 1920, the UMWA shifted the unionization campaign to Logan and Mingo counties. During a 1919 nationwide mining walkout non-union mines in southern West Virginia continued producing coal and undermined the strike effort. In an attempt to prevent the recurrence of this problem, UMWA President John L. Lewis and West Virginia union leaders rallied their efforts in Mingo County with speeches from labor leaders like Mother Jones. The coal operators answered this call to unionization by firing and evicting known union men from Stone Mountain Coal Corporation's towns.²² Journalist Winthrop D. Lane reported that seven union-affiliated families were removed from their lodgings at Stone Mountain Coal Corporation as the townspeople watched.²³ Chief of Police Sid Hatfield protested these actions by attempting to arrest the Baldwin-Felts Detectives Agents for illegally evicting the miners and carrying firearms in his jurisdiction.²⁴ Removing unionized men from company towns at Red Jacket camp, like in Paint Creek, led to the establishment of tent colonies outside of the Stone Mountain mines.

The Matewan Massacre was the bloody consequence of expelling union miners and their families from their company-owned homes and is viewed by historians as the climatic event of the Mine War years. The Massacre resulted in the deaths of almost a dozen men between and the arrests of Chief of Police Sid Hatfield and his deputy Ed Chambers. Both men were later summoned to the McDowell County Courthouse on charges of firing shots on coal company property. Asked to leave their firearms at home, policemen Hatfield and Chambers were gunned

²² Laurie, "The United States Army and the Return to Normalcy," 3; Stone Mountain Coal Corporation is also referred to as "Red Jacket Coal Camp," "Red Jacket Consolidated Coal and Coke Company," "Red Jacket," "Red Jacket Junior," and "Stony Mountain Coal Company," in the oral history interviews.

²³ Winthrop D. Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia: A Story of the Industrial Conflict in the Coal Mines* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1921), 48.

²⁴ Laurie, "The United States Army and the Return to Normalcy," 3.

down on the courthouse steps, allegedly by Baldwin-Felts agents. The murders of Chief of Police Hatfield and Deputy Chambers sparked the miners' march that led to the Battle of Blair Mountain between August 25 and September 3, 1921.²⁵ In response to the murders, UMWA District 17 President Frank Keeney organized a miners' rally in Charleston, and on August 7, 1921, one-thousand miners presented Governor Ephraim F. Morgan with a resolution to call an end to martial law in Mingo County. When Morgan refused the miners' request, Keeney called an assembly at Marmet – just south of Charleston – from which he hoped miners would march sixty-five miles to Logan County then to Mingo County. Keeney told the miners, “You have no recourse except to fight. The only way you can get your rights is with a high-powered rifle, and the man who does not have this equipment is not a good union man.”²⁶ On August 20, 1921, the miners assembled in Marmet, as Keeney had requested. Bill Blizzard, a UMWA leader in District 17, formed the men into columns and the march began.²⁷ Estimates of the armed coal miner group range from 7,000 to 20,000 men.²⁸ The original miner army that gathered at Lens Creek, about ten miles south of Charleston, was about 4,000 miners strong, but as the group marched, miners from surrounding counties joined.²⁹ The march approached an opposition force in Logan County of around 3,000 men with Sheriff Don Chafin in command. Governor Hatfield, fearing the way ahead after two years of labor insurrection, appealed to President Warren

²⁵ James P. Johnson, *The Politics of Soft Coal: The Bituminous Industry from World War I Through the New Deal* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 110; Laurie, “The United States Army and the Return to Normalcy,” 1-12.

²⁶ Quoted in Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 217; John Newsinger, “Matewan: Film and Working Class Struggle,” *International Socialism Journal* no. 66 (Spring 1995), accessed on November 6, 2017, <http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj66/newsinger.htm>.

²⁷ Laurie, “The United States Army and the Return to Normalcy,” 5.

²⁸ Discrepancies credited to the time each count was made.

²⁹ Mooney, 90; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 218-224.

Harding for federal assistance in the form of 1,000 troops and military aircraft.³⁰ Harding denied Morgan's request, citing "slow and halting steps to organize the National Guard."³¹ After continued requests for aid, on August 26, 1921, Harding dispatched Army Brigadier General Henry H. Bandholtz to investigate the situation in West Virginia. Bandholtz wasted little time meeting with Governor Morgan, Major Charles F. Thompson, Keeney, and Fred Mooney. While negotiations were underway, preparations for federal interventions proceeded. Brigadier General William "Billy" Mitchell arrived with three De Havilland Bombers (DH-4B) later that day. Mitchell told the press that the Army Air Service could end the disturbance by using tear gas and ground forces if necessary.³²

On September 3, 1921, union leaders sent out a memo that no shots were to be fired on federal troops. Bandholtz declared an immediate cease fire and ordered his troops to surround both armies – Blizzard's and Chafin's. By the afternoon of September 4, it was clear the war was over as miners and their families strolled through their communities. About 1,000 formal surrenders occurred on the part of the miners. Miners turned some 400 guns over to federal troops.³³ Legally, the miner army appeared to come out of the struggle on top as they were not arrested for their militancy, but the economic and political consequences revealed defeat. The federal government considered action against the union, as miners were guilty of insurrection for disobeying a presidential proclamation, but President Warren Harding opposed prosecution.

³⁰ Johnson, *The Politics of Soft Coal*, 111; Laurie, "The United States Army and the Return to Normalcy," 6.

³¹ Laurie, "The United States Army and the Return to Normalcy," 6.

³² Mauer Mauer and Calvin F. Seening, "Billy Mitchell, the Air Service, and the Mingo War," *The Air Power Historian* 12, no. 2 (April 1965): 37-43; Laurie, "The United States Army and the Return to Normalcy in Labor Dispute Interventions," 6.

³³ Robert Shogan, *The Battle of Blair Mountain: The Story of America's Largest Labor Uprising* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004), 202-228.

Robert Shogan wrote, “it was evident to one and all that any Federal investigation into the miners’ uprising would inevitably focus public attention on the close ties between the coal operators and the state and local governments, and this was a can of worms that no one in Warren Harding’s government wanted to open.”³⁴ Despite the federal government’s leniency, between 1921 and 1924, UMWA membership dropped by half as the state government focused on the dangers of communist influence and immigrant influences in the labor struggle.³⁵ For now, the southern West Virginia coal establishment and the mine-guard system were safe.

Matewan in Popular History

The 1987 release of John Sayles’s *Matewan* presented audiences across the nation with a powerful and moving story about the West Virginia Mine Wars, the Matewan Massacre, and the Battle of Blair Mountain. While the film’s release led to a reawakening of interest in the mining history of southern West Virginia, this piece of popular history sits at the center of a collective, false understanding of unionization in the West Virginia coalfields, particularly as they relate to interethnic relations.³⁶ Scholars such as Ronald L. Lewis, a prominent West Virginia labor historian, and historian Philip S. Foner commended the film for its contributions to the “little known but important event” in West Virginia and U.S. labor history.³⁷ Lewis applauded the film for drawing the audience “into the emotional lives of the strikers,” allowing viewers to

³⁴ Shogan, *The Battle of Blair Mountain*, 213.

³⁵ Shogan, *The Battle of Blair Mountain*, 202-228.

³⁶ The film and Sayles’s book about the process of making the film – *Thinking in Pictures: The Making of the Movie Matewan* – were released in 1987 and prompted a resurgent interest in the story of Matewan and Mingo County during the Mine Wars. The funding for the Matewan Oral History Project and the Matewan Development Center are a result of such revival.

³⁷ Philip S. Foner, “Matewan: The Story Behind the Movie,” *Political Affairs* 67 (January 1988): 35.

“experience the fear and powerlessness engendered by the miners’ isolation and their vulnerability to exploitation.”³⁸ However, both historians overlook filmmaker Sayles’s historical shortcomings.³⁹ In *Thinking in Pictures: The Making of the Movie Matewan*, Sayles wrote about his decision to make the film:

In the late sixties I hitchhiked through the area several times and most of the people who gave me rides were coal miners or people with mining in their families. They spoke with a mixture of pride and resignation about the mining – resignation about how dark and dirty and cold and wet and dangerous it was and pride that they were the people to do it, to do it well. The United Mine Workers were going through heavy times then. Their president, Tony Boyle, was accused of having his election opponent, Jock Yablonski, murdered. The coal companies and most of the political machinery that fed on them and even the UMW hierarchy denied even the existence of black lung and refused any compensation for it. All this was added to the usual mine accidents and disasters and wild fluctuations in coal prices. But every miner I talked to would shake his head and say, “Buddy, this ain’t nothin’ compared to what used to go on. I could tell you some stories.” The stories would be about their grandfathers and uncles and fathers and mothers, and the older men would tell their own stories from when they were young... The people I read about in the history books and the people I met in the hills of Kentucky and West Virginia had important stories to tell and I wanted to pass them on.⁴⁰

While the movie does indeed provide insight “into the emotional lives of the strikers,” as Lewis notes, at the same time, Sayles does this history a disservice by perpetuating a false narrative about community and interethnic relations in Matewan in Mingo County, West Virginia. Sayles claims he too based the film on “stories” passed on to him by coal miners, but he used the tools of melodrama and historical fiction to develop a screenplay based on Appalachian life. While the film contributed to the collective memory and popular history of the Mine Wars, this thesis instead utilizes oral histories, that is, the actual stories that miners and their families told themselves and their interviewer about their pasts and their community’s past.

³⁸ Ronald L. Lewis, “Review of *Matewan*, Produced by Peggy Rajski,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 3 (December 1988): 1048.

³⁹ Foner, “Matewan,” 35.

⁴⁰ John Sayles, *Thinking in Pictures: The Making of the Movie Matewan* (Boston: De Capo Press, 2003), 9-11.

Oral histories from the Matewan Oral History Project, housed at the W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection at Appalachian State University, demonstrates that the simplistic depiction of West Virginia coal history, including its culture, significance, and worker/employer relations, are more nuanced than perpetuated in popular cultural productions like *Matewan*. Sayles presents a painless and almost immediate transition from a divided community – a community in which white, African American, and immigrant miners were bitter enemies – to a unified community of people joining together by campfire to enjoy music and dissimilar food and to rise up against coal operators. While this may make sense for a Hollywood production, it obscures a longer, more complex history of interethnic interactions that laid the foundation for a working-class consciousness, that found some success bridging racial and ethnic divides to create an interethnic culture in Matewan. Furthermore, the way in which immigrant and African American miners and family members talk about their time and acceptance in Matewan differs greatly from the way major West Virginia newspapers labeled these groups and their place in the coalfields. The oral histories offer testimony to a more complex and accurate depiction of the community of mine workers and their families. The term “braided identity” works well when describing the culture forged in Matewan’s coal camps and tent colonies.⁴¹ Heritages became intertwined as immigrants, African American migrants, and native-born white West Virginians mingled, picking and choosing which aspects of their own and different cultures to lay to the side or adopt in the households. Historical accounts of the voices of well-known labor leaders, coal barons and company officials, and prominent newspaper editors tend to privilege West Virginia labor histories. Use of the oral testimonies brings to the fore the under-utilized voices of the

⁴¹ Stephen J. Whitfield, “The Braided Identity of Southern Jewry,” *American Jewish History* 77, no. 3 (March 1988): 363-387.

everyday miners and their family members in one of the largest armed labor struggles in U.S. history. Everyday interactions among miners and their families – often families from different ethnic backgrounds – were instrumental to unionization efforts by the UMWA during the West Virginia Mine Wars, especially in the events surrounding the Battle of Blair Mountain from 1920-1922.

Literature Review and Historical Contribution

This thesis contributes to and is in conversation with the literature written on the history of West Virginia mining culture and society. Many historians have overlooked the community bonds created during the West Virginia Mine Wars. Early histories recounted the facts and figures of the coal companies, and more recent works have focused on political and economic factors of industrialization and unionization in the region. Through the voices, experiences, and perspectives of Matewan’s working class miners in their own words – native-born white, African American, and immigrant – the thesis contributes to and converses with other labor-centric social historians.

Reflecting social history’s concern with writing grassroots, worker-centric narratives, in 1981 David Alan Corbin published the most influential monograph for this thesis, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922*. As background on the topic, Corbin argues Wisconsin institutional labor historians depended heavily on the writings and statements of “liberal, muckraking journalists and trade union leaders,” who depicted strikes as nothing more than violent attempts to organize in an area referred to as “the last remains of industrial autocracy in America,” when writing their historical

interpretations of the events in West Virginia.⁴² In response, Corbin argues the unionization of southern West Virginia miners were, “collective and militant acts of aggression, interconnected and conditioned by decades . . . of social change, economic exploitation and oppression, political corruption, and tyranny.”⁴³ Corbin challenges the previously ingrained images of a traditional Mountaineer – the “gun-toting,” “moonshinin’,” feuding,” people of West Virginia.⁴⁴ As his study encompasses all of southern West Virginia for a period of forty years, Corbin’s book strives to account for as many examples of class consciousness as possible. This thesis’ focused study of Matewan differs from Corbin’s more expansive focus. Also, while Corbin’s work takes measures to remove the pejorative, oversimplified explanation of the causes and effects of the events leading up to the Matewan Massacre and the strike of 1920, this thesis focuses on the specific interethnic and community interactions of Matewan’s miners in various spaces – the town and in the tent colonies – that contributed to the successful unionization and call to strike of miners in southern West Virginia.

Historians persist in moving toward more inclusive ground-up, labor-centric interpretations, in part by describing mining communities as ethnically and racially diverse rather than homogenous. In *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932*, Joe William Trotter, Jr., argues that, while they were active in groups like the Knights of Labor and the United Mine Workers of America, “southern blacks” were making difficult transitions from rural to industrial life. His study aimed to insert African Americans into a literature that had largely overlooked them; his research traced the proletarianization of the African American working class, while demonstrating African Americans’ active involvement in the construction

⁴² Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, xiii.

⁴³ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, xviii.

⁴⁴ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, xiv.

of race, class, and culture in West Virginia mining communities.⁴⁵ In a similar vein, a collection of works edited by Ken Fones-Wolf and Ronald L. Lewis provides important context on the state of interethnic communities in industrial West Virginia before and during the Mine War era. In *Transnational West Virginia: Ethnic Communities and Economic Change, 1840-1940*, historians examine various communities, immigrants, and workplaces, analyzing how ethnic communities throughout the state of West Virginia mingled and adapted with native populations. In locales ranging from the northern and eastern panhandles, to the southern counties, the collection offers chapters explaining different examples of daily life in West Virginia's communities.⁴⁶ Both studies contribute to the larger understanding of the construction of interethnic mining community culture that is examined in this thesis.

On the broader topic of labor and mining history and disputes, a few studies show a pattern matching that of the events in Matewan in the early 1900s. Herbert G. Gutman's work on the changing values, morality, expectations, sense of time, and working habits in the industrial era apply relate to the budding awareness of West Virginia miners at the time of the Paint Creek and Cabin Creek strikes.⁴⁷ Building on Gutman's work, David Montgomery analyzes the second and third generation of industrial workers.⁴⁸ Montgomery argues the workers' control of production was a "struggle, a chronic battle in industrial life," in a variety of forms which he treats as "successive stages in a pattern of historical evolution."⁴⁹ The stages often overlap, but

⁴⁵ Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 1.

⁴⁶ Ken Fones-Wolf and Ronald L. Lewis, eds. *Transnational West Virginia: Ethnic Communities and Economic Change, 1840-1940* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Herbert Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrial America, 1815-1919," *American Historical Review* 78 (June 1973): 531-588.

⁴⁸ David Montgomery, "Workers' Control of Machine Production in the 19th Century," *Labor History* 17, no. 4 (1976): 485-509.

⁴⁹ Montgomery, "Workers' Control of Machine Production," 486-487.

Montgomery outlines three specific levels of development: functional autonomy of the workers, union work rule, and the mutual support in rule enforcement and sympathetic strikes across diverse trades.⁵⁰ Between 1900 and 1922, the workforce in Matewan begin evolving through Montgomery's levels of development.

Thomas G. Andrews's study *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* analyzes the causes and consequences of the militancy in miners' strikes in Colorado's southern coalfields. There are many similarities – the use of a private security force and tent colonies to name just a few – between the events surrounding the Ludlow Massacre and the Matewan Massacre.⁵¹ Similarly, the book *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coalfields, 1908-1921* by Brian Kelly explores class solidarity between black and white miners in 1908 and 1920 strikes.⁵² As in Matewan, pro-coal forces in the Jim Crow South sought to agitate racial divisions to split the workforce and prevent unionization.⁵³ Studies like Andrew's and Kelly's cover similar situations, although in different locations, during the same timeframe as the West Virginia Mine Wars, placing Matewan in a larger national pattern of labor violence at the turn of the 20th Century.

Historian James P. Johnson's 1979 publication *The Politics of Soft Coal: The Bituminous Industry from World War I Through the New Deal* offers little analysis of workingmen's interactions or day-to-day life in the coal towns, it does provide helpful background on political interactions and behind-the-scenes compromises between government entities and UMWA

⁵⁰ Montgomery, "Workers' Control of Machine Production," 487.

⁵¹ Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁵² Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coalfields, 1908-1921* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

⁵³ Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power*, 10-15.

leadership.⁵⁴ Mingo County is the topic of a few short paragraphs, but Johnson’s work inspired and contributed to the work of future scholars like historian Rebecca J. Bailey, an interviewer from the Matewan Oral History Project, who published *Matewan Before the Massacre: Politics, Coal, and the Roots of Conflict in a West Virginia Mining Community*. Bailey offers a bottom-up examination of the causes of the Matewan Massacre by analyzing the previously unavailable “documentary record” left behind by the people of Matewan, including partial records of the Baldwin-Felts Detectives Agency, partial transcripts of the trials surrounding the Massacre, and the oral history interviews conducted for the Matewan Development Center.⁵⁵ This project builds on Bailey’s work and utilizes the oral history interviews from the Matewan Oral History Project. Bailey also features the unique makeup of Matewan and Mingo County’s history as the “Achilles’ heel of the corporate Leviathan that was alleged to have held absolute power over politics, power, and economy of southern West Virginia.”⁵⁶ By addressing this issue, Bailey opens the door on the conversation of Matewan’s unique political structure and exceptional ability to be the UMWA foothold in southern West Virginia.

Labor leaders, journalists, and other prominent people who lived through the West Virginia Mine Wars provided the first histories of mine wars. While useful sources for reconstructing events and corroborating processes and experiences described in miners’ interviews, these primary sources—like all primary sources—reflect the biases, perspectives, and goals of the authors. Sociologist and progressive journalist Winthrop D. Lane published one of the first books published on labor relations in Matewan. His *Civil War in West Virginia: A Story of the Industrial Conflict in the Coal Mines*, written in 1921 directly following the Matewan

⁵⁴ Johnson, *The Politics of Soft Coal*.

⁵⁵ Bailey, *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 10-11.

⁵⁶ Bailey, *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 11.

strikes, was originally a series of news articles published between February 7 and March 3, 1921 by the *New York Evening Post*. Lane spent weeks in West Virginia collecting the stories of striking miners and ultimately provided a critical perspective on the mine wars. He argued that newspapers of the day spent too much time waiting for a huge event, providing national readers little context needed to understand the larger situation of the labor struggle. He wrote of the papers, “They do not supply the perspective necessary for a real understanding of what is going on. Being interested only in what is happening to-day, they do not often enough try to make that intelligible in the only way that it can be made intelligible, namely, by telling what happened yesterday.”⁵⁷ Lane also focused on the Appalachian society at the center of the mine conflict, a society which he called “semi-feudal,” and “paternalistic” due to the way in which coal companies, with the support of state officials and entities, controlled society to the detriment of miners.⁵⁸ Lane penned another article in 1921 on the conflict in Matewan titled, “The Labor Spy in West Virginia,” which recounted a Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency spy, C.E. Livey’s testimony, given to the members of the Committee on Education and Labor of the United States in July 1920. A personal interview between Lane and Thomas L. Felts, co-founder of the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency, is also included in the article. Lane’s work in the coal fields during the strike offers an outsider’s perspective on and critique of the paternalistic society in Matewan, unionization efforts, and the way labor struggles in one West Virginia county could affect industrial unrest throughout the nation in the 1920s.⁵⁹ In addition to Lane’s work, the autobiographical work of labor leader Mary Harris “Mother” Jones offered a first-hand look into

⁵⁷ Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia*, 12.

⁵⁸ Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia*, 12.

⁵⁹ Winthrop Lane, “Labor Spy in West Virginia,” *The Survey* 47 (October 22, 1921): 110-112.

the Mine Wars before the topic attracted scholars' attention.⁶⁰ While labor struggles in West Virginia comprise only a small portion of her larger autobiography, her experiences provide valuable perspectives on the struggles miners and their families endured during the Matewan strike period and support the oral histories.

Before the works of Corbin, Trotter, and Bailey, industrial and political actors like coal operator William Purviance (W. P.) Tams and Howard B. Lee published labor histories. Tams wrote *The Smokeless Coalfields of West Virginia: A Brief History*, offering another behind-closed-doors glimpse into the industry, but his perspective focused on the business – including the financial details and issues of maintaining a contented workforce – and the daily life of coal mining. His work describes daily life for the working miner, yet his perspective as a company man limits the value of the book for this study.⁶¹ Lee, West Virginia's Attorney General from 1925-1933, wrote *Bloodletting in Appalachia: The Story of West Virginia's Four Major Mine Wars and Other Thrilling Incidents of Its Coal Fields*, and like many authors, Lee's book recounts the events and history of the Mine Wars without significant examination or argument and with ardent bias. For example, on the first page of Lee's chapter on Mingo County, he wrote, "From earliest times, the inbred contempt of many Mingo Mountaineers for the law and their disregard of human life earned for the county the unenviable sobriquet of 'Bloody Mingo.'"⁶² The work, based on newspapers and investigative committee decrees, aids in the understanding of the timeline of labor struggles between 1912 and 1921. While the book is a useful primary

⁶⁰ Jones, *Autobiography*.

⁶¹ W. P. Tams, Jr., *The Smokeless Coalfields of West Virginia: A Brief History* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1963).

⁶² Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 51.

source, the bias against the miners and their implied “lawlessness” during the Mine War years must be acknowledged.

In another autobiography, the Secretary-Treasurer of District 17 of the UMWA from 1917 to 1924, Fred Mooney, published *Struggles in the Coal Fields: The Autobiography of Fred Mooney* in 1967. Where Attorney General Lee’s publication revealed biases against the miner, Mooney’s autobiography is biased against the coal operator; however, unlike Lee, Mooney does not claim impartiality in his work.⁶³ Although Mooney’s autobiography acts as evidence to the events of the Mine Wars in Mingo County, unlike Mother Jones, Mooney places more focus on himself and his role as an official in the UMWA for District 17. Mother Jones retells the events or stories as they were portrayed to her by the miner or miner’s family member, while Mooney narrates the story as seen through his own eyes.

The earliest historical analysis of the Mine Wars is Mary Pandora Mourat’s “A History of Coal Mining,” written in 1947. It focuses on the actions of Baldwin-Felts detectives and offers a synopsis of the early, albeit largely unsuccessful, unionization efforts of the UMWA from the time of its creation in 1890. Although the thesis is largely descriptive, rather than analytical, chronicling of the history of coal mining in general, Mourat provides significant coverage of UMWA strikes prior to those in Paint-Cabin Creek and Matewan.⁶⁴ Mourat underlined UMWA success outside of West Virginia which provides an example of the similar and dissimilar structures in Matewan comparatively. These structures led to a sustained UMWA strike while other West Virginia miners, like those in Paint Creek and Cabin Creek, could not preserve an active union. Jerry Bruce Thomas’s “Coal Country: The Rise of the Southern Smokeless Coal

⁶³ J.W. Hess, introduction to *Struggles in the Coal Fields: The Autobiography of Fred Mooney* ed. J.W. Hess (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library, 1967), x.

⁶⁴Mourat, “A History of Coal Mining”; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 25-60.

Industry and Its Effect on Area Development, 1872-1910,” concludes in 1910 before the Paint and Cabin Creek Strikes, but offers insight into the growth of the entire Appalachian region around the coal industry and provides an example for the fast expansion of mining communities and the outcomes of such rapid growth, which was an aspect of Matewan’s community-building uniqueness.⁶⁵ Mourat and Thomas together illustrate the UMWA’s success in regions outside of West Virginia, and in turn, demonstrates how those successes threatened coal operators in the southern coalfields.⁶⁶

Like Mourat, Richard M. Hadsell and William E. Coffey discussed the development of the Baldwin-Felts Agency as well as its services to operators and role in the mine wars. Yet their study heavily relies on a private interview with W.P. Tams, coal operator, to argue the necessity of the agents as deputies in the fields.⁶⁷ Hadsell and Coffey also primarily portray the agency in its own words by focusing on the correspondence from William G. Baldwin and Thomas L. Felts to coal operators and government entities. Hadsell and Coffey’s use of sources from the top of the labor chain of command continues the top-down approach taken by early labor historians, but it provide details about the actions of the organization, and inclusion of the founder’s words are useful to exploring the nature and need for a mine guard system.

In *Coal Men and Coal Towns: Development of the Smokeless Coalfields of Southern West Virginia, 1873-1923*, Charles Kenneth Sullivan studies forty-five of the “most important

⁶⁵ Thomas, “Coal Country,” 271-310.

⁶⁶ Thomas, “Coal Country,” 252-255.

⁶⁷ Richard M. Hadsell and William E. Coffey, “From Law and Order to Class Warfare: Baldwin-Felts Detectives in the Southern West Virginia Coal Field,” *West Virginia History* 40 No. 3 (1979): 268-286.

operators.”⁶⁸ His focus on coal towns built by “coal men,” as he calls them, providing insight on how coal operators used forms of corporate paternalism to try to dominate miners and subdue unrest. He argues the symbiotic relationship between coal men and their towns resulted in a co-dependence; in his analysis of the relationship between coal operatives and their “captive workforce,” the operator depended on the income from the “non-productive source” of the town – things like company store and recreational halls – and the town depended on the operator for support and assistance – or corporate paternalism.⁶⁹ The paternalism described by Sullivan is evidenced in the Red Jacket Consolidated Coal and Coke Company’s town – in the company store, dance halls, and baseball teams, to name a few. Yet, on the early development of coal camps in southern West Virginia during the late nineteenth century, Sullivan writes that segregation was, “the rule in all towns,” and was, “reinforced...particularly in the distribution of jobs,” which is not evidenced in the Matewan Oral History Project interviews.⁷⁰

On the topic of coal camp structure and planning, Geographer Mack H. Gillenwater focused on characterizing the layout of a typical West Virginia mining town in “Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements in the Pocahontas Coal Field.” Gillenwater argued that housing in mining settlements varied depending on social standing, with non-white workers pushed to the edge of the community in less desirable geographies – like on hillsides or at the

⁶⁸ Charles Kenneth Sullivan, *Coal Men and Coal Towns: Development of the Smokeless Coalfields of Southern West Virginia, 1873-1923* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989), 3-4.

⁶⁹ Sullivan, *Coal Men and Coal Towns*, 4-5.

⁷⁰ Sullivan, *Coal Men and Coal Towns*, 187. While rapid population growth in Matewan may prevented segregation in the camp, division within Mingo County’s Republican Party and differences between Mingo Republicans and the State Party leaders also prevented Jim Crow laws from garnering support in the West Virginia Legislature. See: Rebecca J. Bailey, “Matewan Before the Massacre: Politics, Coal, and the Roots of Conflict in Mingo County, 1793-1920” (Ph.D. diss. West Virginia University, 2001), 102-110.

entrance of the coalfield. His findings regarding ethnic segregation in the Pocahontas coal fields, the subject of his study, differ from the stories about housing and community found in the Matewan Oral History Project interviews.⁷¹ Gillenwater's exploration of mining communities in Pocahontas County, northwest of Mingo, offers a comparison to housing planning in Matewan. A chapter in Ronald D. Eller's *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930*, also provides a glance into the company town. Eller shows how southern West Virginia rapidly industrialized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and how that fast industrialization made coal towns like Matewan distinct from the surrounding areas, which modernized at a slower pace. Arguing that, "The coal miner in West Virginia experienced the impact of modernization in a manner quite different from the hillside farmer in North Carolina," Eller makes the case for the uniqueness of Matewan's population; yet, Eller argues that the structure of the company town, unlike the majority of American industrial communities, created a "system of closed, artificial communities that restricted rather than induced economic growth," and "blocked the growth of local retail enterprises and diversified or supporting industries," that might have accompanied the coal industry in West Virginia.⁷² The evidence in oral histories challenges Eller's argument, as the interviewees acknowledge a bustling business community in Matewan.

Oftentimes, historians default to the clichés of coal history in West Virginia: miners owed their souls to the company store; races were separated in company housing; strikebreakers were immigrants and migrant African Americans. Only within the last two decades have historians

⁷¹ Mack H. Gillenwater, "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements in the Pocahontas Coal Field" (Ph.D. diss. University of Tennessee, 1972).

⁷² Ronald D. Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), xxv, 197-198.

started to analyze life in coal communities for specific groups of people. The Matewan Development Center oral histories further expose the voices of working-class Americans from all backgrounds. The perpetuation of a simplistic depiction of these relationships in popular culture mediums such as the film *Matewan* has flattened the voices of the working class even further, quieting the importance of West Virginia coal country's culture, significance, and worker/employer relations.

Methodology

In addition to relying on the aforementioned scholarship for historical and historiographical context, this thesis employs as its main primary source material oral testimonies, autobiographies, and local newspapers from and relating to the West Virginia Mine Wars in the early twentieth century. While academics have previously relied on the testimony of coal operators and detective agency employees, new analyses may put oral histories like the Matewan interviews front and center to arrive at a different perspective. The interviews, recorded in the summers of 1989 and 1990 – more than sixty years after the events – by two West Virginia University history students, John C. Hennen, Jr. and Rebecca J. Bailey, for the project director, Paul McAllister, Jr., a history professor at West Virginia University (WVU).⁷³ In *Matewan Before the Massacre: Politics, Coal, and the Roots of Conflict in a West Virginia Mining*

⁷³ Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA. The Matewan Development Center Records are a collection of records related to the history of Matewan, West Virginia, housed in the W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. The Matewan Development Center in Matewan, West Virginia sponsored the project, and it was funded by the West Virginia Humanities Council, but no record of such a center opening could be found. At the time of my research, the interviews were only available for academic use at Appalachian State University (ASU).

Community, Rebecca J. Bailey surmised that the release of John Sayles's film *Matewan*, because it renewed both popular and scholarly interest in the Matewan Massacre, yielded funding for the Matewan Oral History Project.⁷⁴

Scholars who work with oral histories or testimonies do not treat oral histories as unmitigated fact or truth. Rather, they recognize that the texts represent the interviewee's "truth." As they recall events of the past, interviewees actively construct their own histories or stories, often to justify their lives and actions in ways that can include exaggerations or downplaying of certain events and emphases or silences on topics. Oral history accounts are remembered in selective, sanitized, and complex ways – often constructed to legitimize actions to the interviewee and the audience. Interview transcripts from the Matewan Oral History Project reveal silences in particular, as community members who told interviewees aspects of the story off-tape, but were reluctant to repeat parts on tape when the interviewer revisited the topic. Residents could not be convinced, even after more than sixty years, to break their silence. Secrecy surrounded the Matewan Massacre.⁷⁵

The nature of oral history interviews can make it difficult to use them in print. The typed transcriptions at ASU, taken after the tape recordings, do not reveal who transcribed the interviews, the timeframe for transcription after each interview, or if there was editing or artistic license taken while transcribing the tapes. Some of the transcripts had extreme dialectical and phonetical text. The transcriptions do not reveal whether dialects and colloquialisms have been interpreted, or if the transcriber purposefully typed the text this way, unknowingly eternalizing

⁷⁴ Bailey, *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 240.

⁷⁵ On selective retelling, see: Daniel James, "Tales Told Out on the Borderlands: Doña Maria's Story, Oral History and Issues of Gender," in *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Workers: From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box*, ed. John D. French and Daniel James (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 31-52.

his or her perception of the people of Matewan, West Virginia. In *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History*, Alessandro Portelli had the benefit of conducting the interviews with Appalachian coal miners that he then analyzed. While his methodology differed from my own for this very reason, Portelli's work offered much insight into the oral history methods and the people behind the words. Portelli acknowledges that spoken forms of language can be redundant, causing a substantial amount of editing and often sacrificing content to retain conciseness in a book or paper.⁷⁶ Portelli states, "*Oral History* means the telling of historical narratives in oral form. Yet the scholarly practice of oral history consists of transferring this spoken performance to a written text."⁷⁷

One of the challenges of including oral history arose from the desire to give the miners and their families their own voices in the narrative. It was therefore important to retain colloquialism and Appalachian slang to capture the essence of the interview. Yet, as Portelli acknowledges, "a neutral transcript," does not exist.⁷⁸ Each mark of punctuation, every contraction, and every misspelling is the interpretation of the transcriber, and introduces the interpretation of the transcriber. In his study, Portelli chose to avoid reproducing, "orthographically the sound of Appalachian speech," something he views as, "marred by negative connotations and excessive 'othering.'"⁷⁹ However, these distinct orthographic conventions – like Portelli's choice to keep the final 'g' on words instead of using an apostrophe – give the storytellers charm and define their true character.⁸⁰ I opt to keep the choices in

⁷⁶ Alessandro Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 9.

⁷⁷ Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County*, 10.

⁷⁸ Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County*, 10.

⁷⁹ Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County*, 10.

⁸⁰ Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County*, 10.

vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of the transcriber and interviewee intact. For particularly challenging syntax, the denotation “[sic]” is used to remove doubt of typos. Instances did exist in which racial terminology was removed or replaced for academic and worldly correctness.

Changes and insertions for clarity are in brackets.⁸¹

Using the transcriptions of the interviews, presents a research limitation, but it also offers the possibility of greater historical objectivity, as such scholars as Ronald Grele have argued. *The Handbook of Oral History* edited by Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless addresses the foundations, methodology, theories, and applications of oral history important to oral practitioners. In the collection, cultural historian Ronald Grele addressed some ways to discuss the “context of evidence” produced in oral history interviews.⁸² Grele identifies an important distinction between scholars who use oral histories but who have no connection to the creation of those oral history archives and scholars who create oral history archives and then use them as sources in their own work. This distinction of origin also has an impact on the way in which interviews have been utilized in historical work. Grele states:

Archival projects separated the creation of the interview from the end use, while social historians argued that those who did the interviews should also be responsible for their use and interpretation, thereby introducing one of the most crucial distinctions between oral history and other forms of historical research: the fact that in this case historians themselves were creating the very documents that they were called upon to interpret.⁸³

⁸¹ On the WVU collection: For the purpose of transparency and verification, the audio recordings of the interviews are housed at the West Virginia and Regional History Center at the West Virginia University (WVU) Libraries in Morgantown, West Virginia. When I began the research process, I contacted WVU while visiting the ASU archives. In 2015, I was told the collection was available to the public for research, but not for publication purposes. I was also told the collection was outlined on the University’s List of Collections for Oral History. As of January 30, 2019, the collection is not listed on the website. The transcripts are still available at Appalachian State University in Boone, NC.

⁸² Ronald J. Grele, “Oral History as Evidence,” in *Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006), 43-101.

⁸³ Grele, “Oral History,” 49.

Philip C. Brooks of the Truman Library argued there was a “fundamental, unresolved theoretical and methodological issue” in the practice of historians collecting oral testimonies, possibly bending the conversation in favor of their topics of study.⁸⁴ Although Grele acknowledges that these controversies have faded, they still define differences in “approach, use, and audience.”⁸⁵ The Matewan Oral History Project interviews were done with the express purpose of retelling the events of the Matewan Massacre and West Virginia Mine Wars for the Matewan Development Center in Matewan, West Virginia. This purpose shaped the interview process, and transcripts reveal that the interviewers drove the conversation in certain directions. Rebecca Bailey’s personal connection to the creation of the Oral History Project and to the community she interviewed affected her approach.⁸⁶ Bailey’s “insider” status mirrors Grele’s argument that oral history is evidence of communal and cultural connections when the interviewer is part of the community.⁸⁷

Other issues to consider in using these oral histories are the timing of the interviews and the age of the interviewees. First, most of the interviews conducted took place during the 1989 Pittston Coal Strikes in West Virginia, Virginia, and Kentucky. These strikes occurred when the Pittston Coal Company in Pennsylvania withdrew from the Bituminous Coal Operators Association and implemented workplace changes after the expiration of their last union-negotiated contract. In response, 500 miners from West Virginia joined 1,200 union members from southwest Virginia and Kentucky to protest the elimination of benefits for union members

⁸⁴ Grele, “Oral History,” 49.

⁸⁵ Grele, “Oral History,” 50.

⁸⁶ Bailey, *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 260-261.

⁸⁷ Grele, “Oral History,” 52; Unlike Bailey, I have no known connections to West Virginia coal mining from 1900 to 1930 or beyond, and this distance from the people’s stories has allowed my analysis to remain removed from larger emotional connections Bailey may have had at the time.

after unsuccessful negotiations between Pittston Coal and the United Mine Workers of America.⁸⁸ In the oral histories many of the interviewees drew parallels between the strikes of the 1920s – including the miners’ march and the tent colonies – and the Pittston Coal Strikes, which the community was immersed in at the time. The Pittston Coal Strikes may have distorted interviewees’ memories of early labor struggles; that is, their description and memory of early-twentieth-century mining work and struggles might have been different if those oral histories had been taken when relations between labor and the coal company had been more sanguine. In addition, many of the interviewees were 80 or older when the oral testimonies were recorded. Alice M. Hoffman and Howard S. Hoffman grapple with the problems of age and memory. They cite a psychological study in which investigator Marigold Linton determined an event is likely to endure in memory if: (1) it is perceived as highly emotional at the time; (2) subsequent events makes it appear to have been a turning point; and (3) it remains relatively unique.⁸⁹ Linton’s model helps to validate the Matewan interviews, as the event matches all three of these criteria.

Just as age and timing play an inevitable role in shaping oral histories, so too can media and popular culture. Although the majority of the interviews contain the same or very similar accounts of the events – a concept Hoffman and Hoffman refer to as “validity.”⁹⁰ The authors of *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*, also address the issue of

⁸⁸ Richard A. Brisbin, *A Strike Like No Other Strike: Law and Resistance during the Pittston Coal Strike of 1989-1990* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Jim Sessions, “Singing across Dark Spaces: The Union/Community Takeover of Pittston’s Moss 3 Plant,” in *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change*, ed. Stephen L. Fisher (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

⁸⁹ Hoffman and Hoffman, “Memory Theory,” 277-278; See: Ulric Neisser, *Memory Observed: Remembering in Natural Concepts* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1982); For an opposing, yet interesting view on memory or remembrance, see, Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

⁹⁰ Hoffman and Hoffman, “Memory Theory,” 280.

authenticity of memory, but argue, “We knew that memory does not provide a direct window on the past, but we had learned from experience to trust the interpretive authority of ordinary people.”⁹¹ According to the authors, the interviewees in *Like a Family*, lacked access to power and “means of influencing historical debate,” which led to the assumption of morality in their testimonies.⁹² When asked about *Matewan*, most of the interviewees denounced the film’s portrayal of unionization, striking miners, tent colonies, scabs, and the broader topic of non-white workers. Despite such negative reactions, the film did serve as a stimulus to the memories of Matewan’s people. As it stands, the transcripts of the oral histories in the archive shows a collective memory that differs from the story espoused by historical and popular works, but matches the historical narrative left in local newspapers, government documents, and personal accounts from journalists and labor leaders published at the time of the events.⁹³ While interviewees’ memories did not match depictions in the film *Matewan*, and we cannot be certain the film caused more accurate memories for the residents of Matewan, we can compare oral

⁹¹ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, James Leloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones, and Christopher B. Daly, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), xiv.

⁹² Hall et al., *Like a Family*, xiv.

⁹³ In 1990, Hoffman and Hoffman conducted a study in which Howard Hoffman recalled all of his memories from service during World War II – from enlistment to discharge. He recalled the events three times: the first two times were of the “free call variety,” in which Howard Hoffman was to retell everything he could remember; the last time, Howard Hoffman was provided documents gathered from the National Archives Federal Records Center that included daily combat reports from Howard Hoffman’s fighting unit. The goal of the memory sequences was to, “determine the degree to which the presentation of various recognition cues might enhance memory claims.” Hoffman and Hoffman discovered, with a few exceptions: “[W]hen the events described in the recall documents coincided with those described in the historical material, the match was very close. Moreover, when the exceptions occurred it was unclear whether it was the recall document or the historical document that was the more accurate.” Hoffman and Hoffman, “Memory Theory,” 280-281; The authors of *Like A Family* also relied on “balancing memory against immediacy, recollections against observations made at the time”: Hall et al., *Like a Family*, xiv-xv.

history testimonies to other primary sources from the time period to understand the accuracy of the interviews as a whole.

In their exploration of oral history as evidence, Hoffman and Hoffman argue that memory is long-term, readily recalled, and changes little – if at all – over the passage of time. While we have no way of knowing how the interviewees would have recounted the events in their youth, the Matewan Oral History Project interviews do meet Hoffman and Hoffman’s last criterion of archival, evidential oral testimony: “These are memories of which we say, ‘I will never forget, so long as I live.’”⁹⁴ Considering the findings of Linton and Hoffman and Hoffman, it seems unlikely Matewan’s residents would easily forget the particular details surrounding the Mine Wars, no matter their age.

Autobiographies of labor leaders, government hearings from the events, and local newspapers supplement the oral testimonies and help to validate the narratives of the oral interviews. As the history of the Matewan Massacre and the strike of 1920 have previously been dominated by top-down approaches, the interviews are invaluable to the story remaining to be told. For too long the history of West Virginia’s Mine Wars has been oversimplified. Scholars have overlooked everyday exchanges as they relate to culture and community, especially interethnic relations, and how these exchanges influenced the success of unionization by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in West Virginia’s most southern coalfields in the 1920s. The utilization of the Matewan Oral History Project interviews in this thesis helps to produce a more sophisticated narrative relating to the community of miners and their families.

⁹⁴ Hoffman and Hoffman, “Memory Theory,” 281.

CHAPTER II

“JUST MIXED UP IN THE COAL CAMP”:⁹⁵

INTERETHNIC INTERACTIONS IN THE MATEWAN COAL FIELDS

“I would have to say that probably . . . as a general rule there was not that much discrimination. The people accepted people for what they were, or in other words what you were... The people in Red Jacket were very fine people... When you go to thinking about it, that’s all we all are; we’re not really natives of the country, so that’s the reason, I think, the people in Red Jacket was so good. I believe they were just plain people, you know? Working people, and they figure, ‘Well, we came earlier, we came later.’ I believe that’s about the only way to look at it.”

-Manuel Barrios, July 27, 1989⁹⁶

Histories of West Virginia coalfields tend to highlight white native-born miners’ disdain and prejudice toward outsiders, be they immigrant or African American migrant. For example, in his work on immigrants in West Virginia coalfields in the early twentieth century, Kenneth R. Bailey argues that at the end of the Civil War, an “almost exclusively white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant” population created and harbored conflicting sentiments about the need for workers and social mistrust of the outsider.⁹⁷ By the turn of the century, Bailey infers, “the power structure, public and private, reflected general negative attitudes toward immigrants, especially those from [S]outhern and [E]astern Europe,” as reflected in newspaper articles, official documents, and actions by government officials, as well as private companies.⁹⁸ He focuses on operators and government officials’ “religious and ethnic prejudices,” which “color[ed] their

⁹⁵ Louise Darwin, Matewan Development Center Records, 3.

⁹⁶ Manuel Barrios, Matewan Development Center Records, 27-28.

⁹⁷ Kenneth R. Bailey, “Strange Tongues: West Virginia and Immigration to 1920,” in *Transnational West Virginia: Ethnic Communities and Economic Change, 1840-1940*, ed. Ken Fones-Wolf and Ronald L. Lewis (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002), 244.

⁹⁸ Bailey, “Strange Tongues,” 244. As an example of government actions, see Rebecca J. Bailey’s description of Henry D. Hatfield’s campaign promises to miners while running from governor during the 1912-1913 strikes: Bailey, “The Progressive Era?,” in *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 88-123.

attitudes toward these immigrants and, consequently, [affected] how they treated them on and off the job.”⁹⁹

However, while newspapers and governmental officials in the state capital snubbed strange newcomers, in some West Virginia coalfields such as Matewan, interethnic relationships between these newcomers and those with longer histories in the region blossomed in the dark depths of the earth as fellow miners united around a common experience: mistreatment of the working man. Other historians, including Charles K. Sullivan, have also written about how prejudice and discrimination against immigrant and African-American miners became codified in towns and communities built by coal companies. In the early development of coal camps in southern West Virginia during the late nineteenth century, Sullivan writes, segregation was, “the rule in all towns,” and was, “reinforced...particularly in the distribution of jobs.”¹⁰⁰ And yet, coal towns in Mingo County offer a very different picture.¹⁰¹ Residents of Red Jacket Coal Camp near Matewan, West Virginia, lived in a community of peers weaving in and out of divided and ethnically open spaces including the workplace, home front, and leisure life of the mining town. As Manuel Barrios, the son of a Spanish mine worker, remembered about his life in Red Jacket, “The people accepted people for what they were...they were just plain people, you know? Working people.”¹⁰² Oral histories like Barrios’s suggest that workers at the Red Jacket Consolidated Coal & Coke Company did not always live segregated by race. This chapter shows that the Red Jacket Consolidated Coal & Coke Company’s fairly mixed communities instead

⁹⁹ Bailey, “Strange Tongues,” 256.

¹⁰⁰ Sullivan, *Coal Men and Coal Towns*, 187.

¹⁰¹ Sullivan, *Coal Men and Coal Towns*, 187.

¹⁰² Manuel Barrios, Matewan Development Center Records, 27-28.

produced opportunities for inter-ethnic exchange among miners from different backgrounds, laying an early foundation for cross-ethnic organizing in their fight against the mine company.

Acting as the catalyst to the Mine Wars, the Matewan Massacre drew attention to Matewan's mining districts in a larger labor history of the push for social, economic, and industrial reform. Documented first by contemporary journalists and early twentieth century social scientists, this history carried on through the work of labor historians and New Left historians. Self-representation was at the foundation of the miners' reform. Ownership of West Virginia has never belonged to the populace of that state; instead, corporate interests have and continue to dictate the lives of the Mountain State's residents. Outside political and economic ventures have plagued West Virginia since it gained statehood in 1861. With the railroads in the 1880s came the coal industry and the industry's presence solidified the state as a resource ground meant to line the pockets of out of state groups. As such, working communities within the state held a unique position in the laborer-company relationship, relying only on rebellion to break the exploitative cycle and with the UMWA as their principal ally in the fight.

Historian Rebecca Bailey questions this narrative and instead calls Matewan and all of Mingo County "the Achilles' heel of the corporate Leviathan that was alleged to have held absolute sway over the politics, power, and economy of southern West Virginia."¹⁰³ Challenging historians' interpretation, Bailey attempts to restore agency to the people of Matewan, who lived as an independent community with a miner elected as mayor and a pro-union sheriff. Bailey argues, "Mingo was a place where traditional clientelism, modern welfare capitalism, and old

¹⁰³ A.F Hinrich, *The United Mine Workers of American and the Non-Union Coal Fields* (New York: n.p., 1923); Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*; Bailey, *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 7-11.

and new social beliefs and behaviors still grappled for the upper hand.”¹⁰⁴ This thesis builds on Bailey’s observations to demonstrate that shared experiences as ill-treated workers and the unique position of the community as coal machine outlier – at least in Mingo County – served as a unifying factor over color of skin or origin of tongue. This allowed miners in Matewan to create a united front against exploitation in mines while also creating a community culture that allowed for regular inter-ethnic exchanges.

Historian Mary Pandora Mourat outlined the ways in which coal companies became the ruling body for communities in West Virginia mines. Because coal miners and communities were often located in remote areas, the people depended on the company for laws and justice. Mourat claimed the company controlled a miner’s life, “from the day he was born to the day he died.”¹⁰⁵ She explains, “He was baptized in a company owned church by a company hired minister. He went to school in a company-controlled schoolroom. His food had to be bought in company owned stores, and finally, he was treated by company paid doctors, and buried on company owned land.”¹⁰⁶ Bailey argues the company in Matewan had less control over its workers, but the oral histories declare while many aspects of life were managed by the coal company, the townspeople found ways to create their own blended culture that allowed for regular inter-ethnic exchanges culturally, commercially, and as coworkers in a dangerous and restricted work environment. These interethnic exchanges produced a common identity among miners in Matewan that would eventually lead to united labor activism and radicalism. Historians such as Sullivan admit that the jumbling of different social backgrounds created “prime union material,” but suggest that it took at least a generation for the diverse population to organize

¹⁰⁴ Bailey, *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 12-13.

¹⁰⁵ Mourat, “A History of Coal Mining in West Virginia to 1933,” 61.

¹⁰⁶ Mourat, “A History of Coal Mining,” 61.

successfully.¹⁰⁷ As early as 1911, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) found success in uniting miners from different ethnic backgrounds in the Red Jacket Coal Camp, an organizing success that would culminate in the climactic events at Blair Mountain on August 25 through September 2, 1921.¹⁰⁸

Living Arrangements within the Coal Camp

As early as 1880, industrial development transformed settlement in West Virginia. As railroad lines peppered the mountainous landscape, mining companies moved into the state bringing functional working communities with them. Typical company towns consisted of the mine, the coal tipple, a company store, homes, a church, and a school. Housing often varied in lavishness based on social standing and ethnicity.¹⁰⁹ This is where the story of Red Jacket housing in Matewan deviates from the typical company hierarchy in southern West Virginia. Geographer Mack H. Gillenwater categorizes housing in the typical West Virginia coal town along racial lines to reveal a hierarchical planning layout. While all workers' dwellings were low-quality, Gillenwater found the homes of whites located along the edge of the community and African American or immigrant housing further away from the camp center in less desirable

¹⁰⁷ Sullivan, *Coal Men*, 20.

¹⁰⁸ Sullivan, *Coal Men*, 20.

¹⁰⁹ For more on the development of company towns see: Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*; Gillenwater, "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements," Sullivan, *Coal Men and Coal Towns*; Tams, *The Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia*; Mourat, "A History of Coal Mining," 65; George G. Korson, *Coal Dust on the Fiddle* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1943); The St. Louis 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition included a photographic exhibition of American company towns in their idyllic form as prepared by the U.S. Labor Bureau: Morrell Heald, *The Social Responsibilities of Business: Company and Community, 1900-1960* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970), 3-5; Mack H. Gillenwater, "Company Towns," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia, June 18, 2012, accessed: August 19, 2018, [https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/1491](https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/1491;);

areas, often closer to the mine entrance or on hillsides.¹¹⁰ Gillenwater claims that the standard segregated camp structure pushed non-whites away from the center - the hustle and bustle - of the community and that white miners had better lodging because of the locale. However, the Matewan Developmental Center oral histories instead suggest that mixed lodgings throughout Red Jacket camp were common, and whites and immigrants alike suffered from incredibly poor living conditions in company towns. In a special report for the *Socialist and Labor Star*, American Socialist journalist J.L. Engdahl reported a mixture of ethnicities living side by side in the southern coalfields: "The situation is often found where three miners' cabins adjacent to each other successively house the family of a native white miner, a colored miner, and a foreign white miner. If race prejudice is to be beaten down in the economic and political struggle of the working class for its own emancipation, West Virginia is the place to make the first big beginning."¹¹¹ As an example of the poor living conditions, Richard Brainbridge of Montgomery, West Virginia, for example, recounted the experiences of his mother, Helen Rosella Martin Bainbridge, who was born in 1914. Although her experience was not in Mingo County, she battled against the poor quality of life in part of Gallagher on Paint Creek during the early twentieth century:

The miners worked under terrible conditions, not only at work but also at home: no job guarantees, they lived in company houses...Most company houses had no electric[sic] or inside water, and the only source of heat were the fireplaces. Mom said she learned very young to prepare for simple things like getting coal for the fire or a bucket of water. She would say, "Get those ready the night before, especially during cold weather. If it snowed overnight then you had to dig the coal out of the snow and sometimes the well would freeze. To bring a little warmth to those bedrooms that had no fireplace, we would take

¹¹⁰ Gillenwater, "Company Towns."

¹¹¹ J.L. Engdahl, "What Victory in W.Va. Would Mean," *Socialist and Labor Star* (Huntington, WV), Jun. 13, 1913.

hot coals from the fireplace and put them in small metal boxes and then place these boxes close to our beds. It didn't provide much heat, but it made you feel warmer."¹¹²

It was not only native-born white families like the Bainbridge family that suffered from harsh living conditions in West Virginia coal fields. Between 1900 and 1907, a considerable number of immigrants entered the coalfields of West Virginia, Alabama, and Virginia. These groups were previously unrepresented in the working populations of these states. In 1911, an investigation sponsored by the U.S. Congress reported that three-tenths of the labor force in these Appalachian states were foreign-born with the largest group comprising Southern Italians at a rate of thirty percent of all foreign-born workers and eight percent of overall employees.¹¹³ Historians have described the treatment of immigrant workers in the coalfields of Southern Appalachia in different, and often contradictory, ways. In her study of Italians at the Stonega Company in Wise County, Virginia, historian Margaret Ripley Wolfe asserts that immigrant workers at Stonega "experienced exceptional treatment" from their employers "compared to foreign laborers employed by some companies in the Southern Appalachians," and examples of continual maintenance and improvement of dwellings as well as concern for health and safety of their Italian workers – including the creation of a mine-safety program – suggest that Stonega used corporate paternalism to retain workers.¹¹⁴ The experience in Matewan coal camps, however, was vastly different as a diverse group of workers used a revolving door of

¹¹² "Chapter Four: Metro Valley," in *Mountain State Stories of the People: Celebrating West Virginia*, ed. Amy A. Stevenson and Rae Jean V. Sielen (Morgantown: Populore Publishing Company, 1997), 33-34.

¹¹³ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, S. Doc. 633, 61st Congress, 2nd session, 1909-1910, *Immigrants in Industry: The Bituminous Coal Mining Industry in the South*, V, 136-140.

¹¹⁴ Margaret Ripley Wolfe, "Aliens in Southern Appalachia, 1900-1920: The Italian Experience in Wise County, Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 87, no. 4 (October 1979): 456.

employment as a form of laborer agency, a tactic historian Price V. Fishback calls “use of exit and voice.”¹¹⁵ In southern West Virginia’s coal fields where Matewan was located, as opposed to northern fields, men left one mine when a labor or payment grievance surfaced, often moving to different companies multiple times during their working years. The initial need for workers caused companies to search for and hire immigrants, but once established in West Virginia, the workforce remained fluid and available for hire between mines. The U.S. Immigration Commission called the southern West Virginia mining force a “floating population,” and investigators of the Children’s Bureau reported that more than a third of miners moved every two years.¹¹⁶ Corbin argues that worker mobility in the southern fields produced a “strong, collective mentality” among miners from different backgrounds, one extensive community that connected the five coal fields in West Virginia. This helped provide the miners in southern West Virginia with influence over their destiny and a vast network between the mines as the events of the Mine Wars unfolded.¹¹⁷ This web of labor connections between miners and coal fields contributed to the unique role of Matewan and the Massacre in southern mine unionization.

Although the web of likeminded miners was vast and contributed to the eventual unionization of the southern fields, ethnic and racial tensions simmered below the surface.

¹¹⁵ Price V. Fishback, “The Miner’s Work Environment: Safety and Company Towns in the Early 1900s,” in *The United Mine Workers of America: A Model of Industrial Solidarity?*, ed. John H. M. Laslett (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 210-212.

¹¹⁶ Mourat, “A History of Coal Mining in West Virginia to 1933,” 207-208; U.S. Department of Labor, Children’s Bureau, *Welfare of Children in the Bituminous Coal Communities in West Virginia*, by Nettie McGill (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1923); 117; U.S. Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1911): 2 vols.; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 40-41; see also, Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 158-189.

¹¹⁷ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 42-43.

However, unlike in other camps, Red Jacket was not rigidly segregated, allowing miners more interethnic exchanges and eventually, a more unified front against coal interests. Most of the interviewees remember Red Jacket as a racially blended camp where, as Manuel Barrios recalled, there was “not that much discrimination.” The experiences of immigrants clearly varied, showing a nuanced dynamic between immigrants and native-born workers, one that could include discrimination, racism, or anti-Semitism, but did not at other times. The interviews include some evidence of segregation and discrimination among the workforce at Matewan; however, compared to other companies and counties in West Virginia, evidence of discrimination is less prevalent.

Oral history interviews of miners, their spouses, and children in West Virginia working for varying Matewan coal companies indicate poor behavior by the company and exclusion of immigrants by the community. Mattie Ruth McCoy Allara, the wife of Frank Allara – a movie theater owner and son of an Italian immigrant – told Rebecca Bailey of the Matewan Development Center, “Well back in those days...to be a Hungarian or Italian was worse than being ... colored.”¹¹⁸ McCoy Allara’s father-in-law, an Italian immigrant, was the head stone mason, a more lucrative position for the company, and those holding lower manual labor positions may have experienced feelings of jealousy and anger. When asked if her in-laws celebrated their Italian heritage through traditional cooking, Allara noted her mother-in-law would not allow Italian cooking due to the ethnic tensions in the camp community. She feared that displaying the family’s Italian heritage presented native-born miners with the opportunity to further alienate them.¹¹⁹ Frank Allara’s sister, Josephine Allara Hope said her mother was “very

¹¹⁸ Mattie Ruth McCoy Allara, Matewan Development Center Records, 9.

¹¹⁹ Mattie Ruth McCoy Allara, Matewan Development Center Records, 9-10.

particular” and, “wouldn’t let [father] talk[sic] Italian to us, which we all wished he had. We probably could’ve learned a little bit.”¹²⁰ While Allara Hope’s interview does not provide much insight about growing up as an Italian American in Matewan or being raised in a household with a white mother from Kentucky and an Italian father, her parents’ mixed marriage itself might suggest that racial divides were somewhat permeable. Second-generation immigrant Venchie Morrell, brother of Mack Morrell, had similar experiences to Allara Hope regarding languages. When asked if Italian was spoken in the home, Morrell said, “No. That’s the funny thing. See, they wouldn’t speak it to us ... My dad knew it, but they never spoke, and we grew up listenin’ to [English]. That’s all.”¹²¹ While the Allaras and Morrells generally felt accepted by the community, both pairs of parents hesitated to pass on their heritage in the form of language to their children.

In contrast to Mattie Ruth McCoy Allara’s memory of negative attitudes toward immigrants, Manuel Barrios instead remembered that neither the coal company nor its residents forced Spanish immigrants in Matewan to live a segregated life. Rather they sometimes self-segregated to create and maintain a united cultural and linguistic community. Barrios moved to West Virginia in 1929, around the age of ten, after his father spent eight years moving between the U.S. and Spain. His father was a bricklayer, but an economic downturn in Spain led his father to seek work elsewhere. When asked about the Spanish community and the living arrangements in Red Jacket, Barrios explained they were a group of twelve families; while they were not forced to live near each other he said:

...when you think about it, you don’t get along too good with the language, what are you going to do? You going to stay together? Or you can talk to each other and pass the time, do the things basically that everyone likes to do. You see what I’m saying? ... There was

¹²⁰ Josephine Allara Hope, Matewan Development Center Records, 2.

¹²¹ Venchie Morrel, Matewan Development Center Records, 2.

pretty much of a close tie, because you sort of begin, you begin a new life in a new country, and you learn [to] lean on each other...¹²²

Barrios spoke to how immigrants in Red Jacket “lean[ed] on each other,” that is, they cultivated a sense of community to sustain cultural traditions, language, and to help each other deal with the inevitable hardships embedded in the process of migration and settlement. The group of twelve Spanish families of Red Jacket also celebrated traditional holidays with one another.

Specifically, Barrios summarized the different musical traditions of native-born whites and immigrants during holidays noting, “[Families from different ethnic groups] might even get together and sing those songs. Like for instance, a hillbilly sings their hillbilly songs, and probably as even as much of some of them would like to dance.”¹²³

An anecdote shared by Barrios about learning to speak English as a child further disclosed community tolerance and even support for non-English immigrant workers and their families. As a young boy, Barrios had a limited vocabulary and comprehension of English, yet he was still able to attend the company school. Often he would go to the company store for his mother and, “the manager knowed[sic] that I didn’t speak English, so he would tell me, and I learned a whole lot of it that way – by picking up an object, whatever it might have been...”¹²⁴ The kindness and patience displayed by the manager helped Barrios learn enough English to “get along,” in four or five months.¹²⁵

Interactions between the children of the Matewan community provide the best examples of interethnic relationships. Of his classmates, Barrios mentioned, “They were all curious, you

¹²² Manuel Barrios, Matewan Development Center Records, 27-28.

¹²³ Manuel Barrios, Matewan Development Center Records, 27-28.

¹²⁴ Manuel Barrios, Matewan Development Center Records, 17.

¹²⁵ Manuel Barrios, Matewan Development Center Records, 17.

know? ‘Hey! Who is this fellow,’ you know? ‘Where did he come from?’ and all that.”¹²⁶ James Curry, an African American, had an experience similar to Barrios’s growing up in Matewan. Curry attended school with children from all backgrounds. He said while the school was not formally integrated, it was also not formally segregated, and he was “raised up with the white kids.”¹²⁷ He said, “I didn’t know nothing about no[sic] racial bribes or nothing like that. I just knew them, and they knew [me]. We played together and so forth.”¹²⁸ Mack Morrel, the son of immigrant parents, had a similar experience growing up in Matewan. To him, childhood innocence provided the stepping stone toward a more cohesive community: “Us kids, playin’ together. [African American], and white...every other kind. We learned to live with each other.”¹²⁹ His brother agreed with the sentiment, saying, “Kids, we didn’t make a difference with our colors, cause we...to us, there was[sic] no colored people ... We didn’t know what ‘colored people’ was[sic] other than they was just a different color than we were.”¹³⁰

Barrios’s depiction of a relatively open, amiable environment between Spanish and English speakers differs from the more common depictions of animosity and prejudice in historical accounts. Indeed, Barrios does not remember cases of ill-treatment from native-born whites of any age in the camp.¹³¹ During his interview, Barrios testified to the sense of community among workers from different ethnic backgrounds. When asked if the community members treated Italian and Spanish families as whites or blacks during the 1920s and 1930s, he responded:

We were Caucasians just like you, so we were treated just like the whites, and actually,

¹²⁶ Manuel Barrios, Matewan Development Center Records, 18.

¹²⁷ James Curry, Matewan Development Center Records, 2.

¹²⁸ James Curry, Matewan Development Center Records, 3.

¹²⁹ Mark Morrel, Matewan Development Center Records, 21.

¹³⁰ Venchie Morrel, Matewan Development Center Records, 44.

¹³¹ Manuel Barrios, Matewan Development Center Records, 18.

around our neighborhood...there was never that difference like they do in the extreme South. I think that goes probably to the south mostly, where blacks were not allowed to do this, and around here we mix with each other, play together, and rode the same buses together. We never had that kind of a problem. We were just people...They[sic] was not that way around this part of the country.¹³²

Immigration historians have argued that in the United States' evolving racial hierarchy, Southern and Eastern European immigrants held an ambiguous racial position of "inbetweenness." While immigrant were often compared to African Americans, they also learned the importance of not being black.¹³³ Charles Kenneth Sullivan argues that immigrants, particularly Italians and other Southern and Eastern Europeans, stood "between the native white and black groups," in coal towns, but in the realms of housing and jobs fared only slightly better than African Americans.¹³⁴ Sullivan's study of the Pocahontas coal fields of Virginia provides evidence of more interaction between African Americans and immigrants than either group had with natives.¹³⁵ In her study of Jewish immigrants in West Virginia, Historian Deborah R. Weiner argues that the "timing, the opportunities offered by the American economy, and premigration skills," among other factors influenced the economic well-being of Eastern European Jews in the coalfields. Thomas Kessner, studying Italian and Jewish immigrants in New York City, concludes the combination of premigration skills and permanent orientation – the idea of greater motivation to try to improve their circumstances as permanent immigrants versus those who might return to their home country – allowed Jews to "land higher on the status ladder than Italians," and to achieve a greater economic mobility.¹³⁶ However, Barrios's interview does not suggest that immigrant

¹³² Manuel Barrios, Matewan Development Center Records, 39.

¹³³ James R. Barrett and David Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality, and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, 3 (Spring 1997): 3-44.

¹³⁴ Sullivan, *Coal Men and Coal Towns*, 188-189.

¹³⁵ Sullivan, *Coal Men and Coal Towns*, 189.

¹³⁶ Deborah R. Weiner, "From Shtetl to Coalfield: The Migration of East European Jews," in *Transnational West Virginia: Ethnic Communities and Economic Change, 1840-1940*, ed. Ken

families like his own in Matewan wholeheartedly embraced ‘whiteness’ through the discrimination of African Americans. Barrios’s statement acknowledges an existence of “inbetweenness,” but also seems to suggest that discrimination was not common in the Matewan community.

Sullivan argued that only in the coal town, but not in company housing or the workplace, did “race and nationalities....mix more freely, and on more equal terms.”¹³⁷ Yet, like Barrios, Charlie Elliott, a native-born white worker who labored alongside many Italian immigrants during 1910s and 1920s in the Red Jacket Coal Company, could not recall instances of unwavering discrimination in the larger coal town community or on the job. He commented on the lack of native-born white workers, which resulted in the influx of foreign-born workers. He remembered Italian immigrants arriving in town:

I remember seeing them get off of [train] 16 there. Little ‘tallies, buddy. A whole rows[sic] of them. They took them up Red Jacket with little packs on their backs. And they wore[sic] little, short coats, you know? And learn them to load coal.¹³⁸

Elliott referred to his Italian immigrant coworkers as smart, good people, and did not recall the famous ‘lawlessness’ attributed to immigrants in Matewan.

Harry Berman agreed with Barrios about growing up as part of Matewan’s non-native population. As a Jewish boy with a Russian father, Berman remembered peaceful cohabitation among Matewan’s residents including his family and the one other Jewish family, the Schaeffers. He said:

I didn’t [experience hostility toward my religion]. They seemed to be okay [with it]. We seemed to get along all right ... Never had any problem[sic] with them, but in some

Fones-Wolf and Ronald L. Lewis (Morgantown: West Virginia University, 2002), 88-89; Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Mobility in New York City, 1880-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 8-10.

¹³⁷ Sullivan, *Coal Men and Coal Towns*, 190.

¹³⁸ Charlie Elliott, Matewan Development Center Records.

places...people didn't like Jews, but we always seemed to get along all right.¹³⁹ Berman's interviewer then interjected, "That's one thing I've heard, most people seem to remember that the different religious and ethnic groups got along pretty well down in Matewan."¹⁴⁰ This did not mean that Jewish families did not experience bigotry. In Mingo County's neighboring McDowell County, Maurice Herzbrun, the son of Hungarian immigrants living in Welch during the development of the coal industry in West Virginia, remembers discrimination. Herzbrun was born in Welch, McDowell County in 1905 and said his parents arrived in Welch sometime before he was born. His father was a merchant, and Herzbrun explained his was the second Jewish family to move to McDowell County, which abuts Mingo County.¹⁴¹ He remembered being called "Christ killer" by other children, but overall, Herzbrun remembered, "less discrimination in McDowell County than almost any place you'd come onto[sic]."¹⁴²

While the interviews as a whole point to interethnic integration in the coal community, including in living arrangements, boarding houses provide an instance of ethnic separation. Herzbrun called his father a merchant, but his interview indicates that his father also tailored items, as he custom made suits for residents of McDowell County.¹⁴³ His father visited "club

¹³⁹ Harry Berman, Matewan Development Center Records, 60-61.

¹⁴⁰ Harry Berman, Matewan Development Center Records, 61.

¹⁴¹ Maurice Herzbrun, Matewan Development Center Records, 1, 3-5.

¹⁴² Maurice Herzbrun, Matewan Development Center Records, 4-5.

¹⁴³ In isolated coal towns in the West Virginia hills, residents relied on the company store. Pack peddlers began to visit these towns to sell their goods. Eventually some of these peddlers settled into shopkeepers in the areas surrounding the coal camp. See: Stuart McGhee, "The Pack Peddlers," *Coal People* 16, no. 4 (August 1991): 9-12; Deborah R. Weiner, "Middlemen of the Coalfields: The Role of Jews in the Economy of Southern West Virginia Coal Towns, 1890-1950," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 29-56; Hasia R. Diner, *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Deborah R. Weiner, *Coalfield Jews: An Appalachian History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

houses” within the coal camp to sell suits. These so-called club houses were actually boarding houses, usually owned and operated by a married couple. The boarding houses serviced by Herzbrun’s father in McDowell’s coalfields typically housed fifteen to twenty unmarried miners from the same ethnic group.¹⁴⁴ These miners were typically placed in boarding houses with the help of a contractor or leader appointed by the company to assist immigrants. In one interview, William Aliff spoke about his father, a mine foreman or superintendent in McDowell County with many professional connections to immigrant laborers who often lived in houses like the ones Herzbrun serviced. Aliff said his father, a native-born, white man:

usually got ‘em [the immigrant workers] kind of...a leader and they would put ‘em in a boardin’ house or something where these fellows could stay and they would pay ‘em board and he [the contractor] would furnish ‘em their drinks and so on and they would load coal and uh...so consequently this contractor got commission off of this coal you see he was paid a contractor’s fee...[Anyhow], you would have this boardin’ house and a whole bunch of ‘em you know and get that he would get paid by the car whatever was paid you know and uh...those people they were good people uh... and they like to have parties and dances and they usually had a recreational hall in these mining camps.¹⁴⁵

Although Aliff’s interview only vaguely addresses his father’s foreman relationship with the Hungarian and Italian immigrants of McDowell county, the “leader” or contractor resembles the padrone in the American West as described in Gunther Peck’s *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930*.¹⁴⁶ Typically, immigrant groups worked for a contractor of the same ethnicity, who was often hired by companies to recruit and manage workers.¹⁴⁷ Aliff claimed companies owned the boarding

¹⁴⁴ Maurice Herzbrun, Matewan Development Center Records, 26.

¹⁴⁵ William Aliff, Matewan Development Center Records, 2-3.

¹⁴⁶ Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*, 18; On West Virginia’s peonage history, see also, Kenneth R. Bailey, “A Temptation to Lawlessness: Peonage in West Virginia, 1903-1908,” *West Virginia History* 50 (1991): 25-45.

¹⁴⁷ William Aliff, Matewan Development Center Records, 7.

houses in McDowell County and placed labor contractors in those homes for the interest of business. Aliff said of the contractors:

They catered to the company, because the company paid ‘em a contract price on that coal and see so consequently they spoke Hungarian or Italian or Spanish, and they took these men in the mines and they loaded coal by hand...the company paid ‘em that contract and well I think the company even handled their employee’s money and paid them so much for the car, but they had these guys in these boardin’ houses.¹⁴⁸

According to Aliff’s recollection, mining towns typically had three boarding houses, “one would be more or less for English speakin’ people, one for Italians, one for Hungarians, and some cases Spanish too...[yeah,] there was always a Spanish boardin’ house.”¹⁴⁹ In contrast to other venues in the camps – such as family houses, school, and the mines themselves – these company-owned boarding houses often separated Matewan’s miners along lines of ethnicity.

Scholars disagree about degree of segregation in coal camps. Joe Trotter argues “social boundaries between black and whites in southern West Virginia were hostile and rigid,” although not impermeable.¹⁵⁰ Trotter argues proletarianization of the African American community influenced existing patterns of racism and, over time, led to improved social and physical welfare.¹⁵¹ Matewan’s Red Jacket coal camp is substantially different regarding segregation. While the Red Jacket coal camp had an “Italy Camp,” oral histories show that Italians, African Americans, and native-born white miners lived in that camp. Louise Darwin, the daughter of an African American miner originally from West Virginia, denied that racial segregation existed within the Matewan camps in the 1920s:

We had some white people live in the same camp at that time...We had some family they was uh... ‘Tally [Italian] people, I think they called them, but they stayed in the same

¹⁴⁸ William Aliff, Matewan Development Center Records, 7.

¹⁴⁹ William Aliff, Matewan Development Center Records, 6.

¹⁵⁰ Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color*, 1-2.

¹⁵¹ Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color*, 1-3.

camp...we was mixed in that camp. This coal field, see that was Red Jacket Coal Company, so you just mixed up in the coal camp, but it was.¹⁵²

According to Darwin, the “mixed up” quality of the company camp paralleled the “mixed up” quality of the mines, where African American, white, and immigrant workers labored together and received similar treatment. When interviewer Rebecca Bailey referred to books claiming that African American miners were not treated as well in the mines as white workers, Darwin responded, “Up here [in Matewan], they all work together. Now, whether they be[sic] treated good or not, they all worked in the same mines.”¹⁵³ While her parents might have shielded her from racial discrimination as a child, they wanted Darwin to hold onto one piece of information: all miners worked together, in one place, at Matewan. The experience of Archie Bland, the son of African American migrants living in Williamson, Mingo County, West Virginia, during the striking years in Matewan, echoes Darwin’s recollections. Bland was fourteen years old in 1920. His mother was from Kentucky, and his father was from Sacramento, California.¹⁵⁴ When asked about racial segregation in Williamson, Bland remembered, “It was segregated to a certain extent during that time, but, not bad, nothing like it is now, naturally. I didn’t really see any difference, not too much different as far as treatment was concern[ed]. I got along with everybody myself.”¹⁵⁵ Oral histories from Matewan suggest mixed lodgings throughout the coal town were commonplace. Miners and their families from all backgrounds experienced poor living conditions in company dwellings. While there is evidence of some racism and discrimination in Matewan in the years leading up to the Matewan Massacre, interviewees indicate there was far less segregation and discrimination in Matewan than other West Virginia companies and towns

¹⁵² Louise Darwin, Matewan Development Center Records, 3.

¹⁵³ Louise Darwin, Matewan Development Center Records, 5.

¹⁵⁴ Archie Bland, Matewan Development Center Records, 1, 5-6.

¹⁵⁵ Archie Bland, Matewan Development Center Records, 5-6.

and other parts of the American South. Free from physical segregation, Matewan's Red Jacket coal miners supported the intermingling of cultures and differing peoples. Before independent businesses popped up in the outskirts of the coal camp, the company store acted as a social headquarters which fused Matewan's multi-cultural identity.

The Company Store and Social Activities within the Camp

The song lyric, "I owe my soul to the company store," written by the country singer Merle Travis in the 1940s, has cemented itself into popular culture for the way it depicts the economic entrapment of miners in company towns.¹⁵⁶ The company store often sums up the soul-crushing quality of life for miners and their families in coal camps, camps depicted as not just exploitative, but completely devoid of culture. Miners, for example, constantly denounced and fought against the company's use of scrip – a token redeemable for merchandise at the company store only – as payment instead of actual money. In 1928, a Senate Committee on the conditions in West Virginia coal fields found that scrip had depreciated five to twenty-five cents on the dollar when exchanged for U.S. currency.¹⁵⁷ The goods available at the store also had a reputation of being poor quality.

However, the Matewan Development Center oral histories offer a somewhat different – more neighborly – image of the company store, as well as other places of business in Matewan. Oral histories reveal that many business, leisure, and cultural institutions in town helped miners and their families actively create a sense of community, opening up opportunities for interethnic

¹⁵⁶ Merle Travis, *Sixteen Tons* (Hollywood: Radio Recorders Studio B, 1946).

¹⁵⁷ Mourat, "A History of Coal Mining," 64; U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Interstate Commerce, "Conditions in the Coal Fields of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio," Hearings (70th Congress, 1st Session), Vol. I and II (Washington, D.C., 1928), 1428.

exchanges as meeting places and venues for socialization outside of the camp. Recollections of Matewan's company store are inconsistent; some interviewees present at the time of the Mine Wars remember collecting and using scrip while others claim scrip was never given as payment in Red Jacket. The majority of interviewees that mention goods from the company store claim they were of good quality.¹⁵⁸ Around 1923, Vicie Blackburn worked as a cashier at the Red Jacket Junior Camp; she asserted that neither she nor the miners were ever paid in scrip. She suggested scrip was only provided to miners as a source of credit, or advance payment, on their next check.¹⁵⁹ Blackburn had a significant amount to say about the quality of goods at the stores during her time there:

I think they had the best merchandise, and I think they did the very best they could by their men that were workin' for them. I think that, I think Red Jacket was especially good to all their miners. Now, some people might have thought they were over-priced. I didn't think so. They may have had to pay higher prices...but they did have good merchandise. Very good. They carried name brands, and they had all the dry goods. Everything. Furniture and everything that these miners needed, they could get it from the store, and they would get what's called a lease. They would pay so much down, and they'd pay so much a month.¹⁶⁰

While in some areas, the company store could indeed take financial advantage of workers, the company store could also serve as an important community resource and social center. This was especially the case before residents had recreation buildings, since the store acted as one of the

¹⁵⁸ It is important to remind the reader that most of the interviewees were children or young adults in the early 20th century. Their memories about the company store may be simplified or romanticized as things like prices and scrip typically lack importance to children; see the methodology section of introduction to this paper.

¹⁵⁹ Vicie Blackburn, Matewan Development Center Records, 12; see also, Price V. Fishback, "Did Coal Miners 'Owe Their Souls to the Company Store'? Theory and Evidence from the Early 1900," *The Journal of Economic History* 46, no. 4 (December 1986): 1011-1029.

¹⁶⁰ Vicie Blackburn, Matewan Development Center Records, 11-12.

few general meeting places. When formal social and recreational buildings were added to the camp structure, they typically clustered around the company store.¹⁶¹

Historians often describe mining communities as dingy, dirty, and poor without any glimmer of culture. Furthermore, these camps are rarely seen as places of socialization and intermingling of differing people. While some interviews point to the shared poor quality living conditions faced by native born and immigrants alike, oral histories of Matewan coal miners and their families in Red Jacket and in the surrounding Matewan community show that miners worked hard to create a sense of community through their leisure activities and cultural traditions. In one of the interviews, William Aliff suggested mining towns bustled with cultural expression, stating, “And minin’ towns, they would have their dances and things there and a lot of ‘em played some music, they had their own music and so on, and they really had a good livin’ in the minin’ towns.”¹⁶² Mattie Ruth McCoy Allara remembered these dances and parties as well. She said the coal company held frequent parties hosted by the bosses of the camp in their homes.¹⁶³ Most of the coal towns had recreational halls, and Red Jacket’s hall included places to play pool, drink, and dance.¹⁶⁴

Like Manuel Barrios in his recollection of Spanish religious holiday celebrations in Matewan, Aliff noted that some of the cultural activities in the camp were separated by ethnicity. For example, he remembered different groups having their own bands for scheduled dance hours at the company recreational hall. However, these ethnic-specific cultural expressions did not necessarily produce segregation and intolerance. Rather, they fostered cultural exchange and

¹⁶¹ Sullivan, *Coal Men and Coal Towns*, 191-193.

¹⁶² William Aliff, Matewan Development Center Records, 3.

¹⁶³ Mattie Ruth McCoy Allara, Matewan Development Center Records, 20.

¹⁶⁴ William Aliff, Matewan Development Center Records, 32.

understanding in these isolated mining community. Aliff mentions, “People would have their own bands and they played ... good music, too, especially...some of the Hungarians and so on. They brought their music here with them, you know ... They’d be from different localities, you know, but they’d come in and play there, dance all night, man. Had a good time.”¹⁶⁵ Such cultural exchanges helped mining families foster inter-ethnic relationships, setting diverse mining communities on the path to overcoming differences and fighting together against workplace economic injustice. Coal companies were particularly consumed with keeping miners occupied during off hours, so that there would be less time for discontent, upheaval, and discussion of unionization. Social gathering places, like dance halls, provided such a distraction.¹⁶⁶

The drug store in Matewan also acted as a social gathering place according to McCoy Allara. Residents would meet in the store and “talk and see everybody, and they had little parties.”¹⁶⁷ Specifically, McCoy Allara attended card game parties hosted by her bridge club.¹⁶⁸ Edith Boothe’s brother-in-law, George Leckie, owned Leckie’s Drug Store. Boothe agreed that the drug store was a cornerstone of the community saying, “That was a meeting place for everybody in Matewan. They would go there for sandwiches and drinks and ... just...to meet people, the social part of the town.”¹⁶⁹ Many of the interviewees also mentioned a two-story building owned by an older African American woman known as “Aunt Carrie.” About half of the residents remembered Aunt Carrie’s as a house of ill-repute; a place known for getting anyone

¹⁶⁵ William Aliff, Matewan Development Center Records.

¹⁶⁶ On corporate paternalism see: Ronald Garay, *U.S. Steel and Gary*.

¹⁶⁷ Mattie Ruth McCoy Allara, Matewan Development Center Records, 20.

¹⁶⁸ Mattie Ruth McCoy Allara, Matewan Development Center Records, 9-10.

¹⁶⁹ Edith Boothe, Matewan Development Center Records.

whatever they desired whether it was illegal liquor, gambling, or evening company.¹⁷⁰ Jennie Grimmett mentioned that Aunt Carrie would keep quiet about the goings-on in her place of business, saying, “She was the little miss kingpin of them all. I mean anybody could go there regardless of who they was[sic], and you’d never know that she knowed[sic].”¹⁷¹ Even local politicians and policemen were among the customers, which probably explains why no one bothered Aunt Carrie’s business, explained African American Johnny Fullen.¹⁷² Fullen explicitly said Aunt Carrie kept a lot of secrets. “I mean, and everybody went there,” Fullen remembered, “and you talk about mixin’ and mingling and interracial junk goin’ on ... It went on and nobody touched it. Nobody.”¹⁷³ Fullen’s comment suggests that there was at least some tolerance for interracial intercourse – and perhaps interracial relationships, based on his grandfather’s parentage – in Matewan. This does not undermine the historical significance of interracial sex, violence, and rape as a means to reinforce white supremacy in segregated societies; however, Matewan – and the state of West Virginia – did not have Jim Crow Era laws and Matewan was not a segregated society.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Charlie Elliott, Matewan Development Center Records; Johnny Fullen, Matewan Development Center Records, 30-31; Jennie Grimmett, Matewan Development Center Records; “Carrie” is inconsistent in spellings throughout the interviews. I have chosen the spelling “Carrie,” as it appeared most often.

¹⁷¹ Jennie Grimmett, Matewan Development Center Records, 65-66.

¹⁷² Jennie Grimmett, Matewan Development Center Records, 66.

¹⁷³ Johnny Fullen, Matewan Development Center Records, 30.

¹⁷⁴ On Jim Crow laws in West Virginia, see: Bailey, “Matewan Before the Massacre”; On the disenfranchisement of African America men in the Jim Crow Era, see: Estelle B. Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); On interracial sex in segregated societies, see: Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance- a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011); Danielle L. McGuire, “‘It Was Like All of Us Had Been Raped’: Sexual Violence, Community Mobilization, and the African American Freedom Struggle,” *Journal of American History* 91, Issue 3 (December 2004): 906–931.

Another club, The Dew Drop Inn, was owned by mixed-race John Brown. According to his grandson, Johnny Fullen, Brown owned the club and a dry-cleaning store in Matewan. Fullen told the interviewer that his grandfather attended school at Meharry Medical College, which he described as a preparatory school at the time his grandfather attended school. Brown moved to Matewan around 1897 or 1898, opened Matewan Dry Cleaners in 1911, and opened the Dew Drop Inn Restaurant in 1916.¹⁷⁵ Fullen remembered the Matewan community as being largely racially integrated. Brown was an educated and established member of the Matewan community and was respected by its citizens. Of Matewan's unique racial climate, where people of different races "mixed and mingled together," Fullen said:

[T]he racial relationship around here was ... a little different ... I happened to always [say] that the reason for that was ... ninety percent of the people worked in the coal mines, and they worked inside that mountain and they were paid the same wages. They didn't write these contracts where blacks got less than whites ... You had a lot of foreign people come here, and they mixed and mingled together. I can't really pinpoint ... why the relationships around here ... were never really that bad. I can remember my grandmother and them telling me that ... [A]s far as back then, I'd say there was racial prejudice, but for some reason this area, this town, it's always been a little better or different.¹⁷⁶

Comparatively, Fullen spoke about Williamson in Mingo's neighboring McDowell County as having a very segregated community. Clubs, homes, and everything else were segregated. He said African Americans just could not go to certain areas of the town.¹⁷⁷ Fullen's grandfather held a very interesting position in the community. When asked if his grandfather moved back and forth between white and black communities, Fullen opened up about his grandfather's inbetween status as a middle-class black man:

¹⁷⁵ Johnny Fullen, Matewan Development Center Records, 3; The term "club" here refers more to the popular supper clubs of the 1920s and 30s that featured entertainment and a meal for an evening out on the town as opposed to the more recent concept of nightclubs.

¹⁷⁶ Johnny Fullen, Matewan Development Center Records, 6-7.

¹⁷⁷ Johnny Fullen, Matewan Development Center Records, 8.

[One of the older people], Miss Reams ... said when she first saw him, she was a little girl, and she didn't know what [ethnicity] he was, you know, said he had straight, black hair, and he wore it long... had it in a ponytail. He used to joke and say, "Well, I'll be black today," and stuff like that. He went to places where other blacks couldn't go, but because he was here so early, and he had a business, I guess people had a respect for him. It's hard to explain really.¹⁷⁸

Fullen's oral history indicates that his grandfather's prominent role in the community as a business owner offered him access to spaces to which poorer African American were denied.

Another notable minority businessman in Matewan was Harry Berman, the son of a Jewish Russian immigrant and a native New Yorker. Berman's father, who immigrated to the United States around the age of thirteen, began his peddling career in Maryland, but saved money to open a small clothing store in Keystone, McDowell County, West Virginia. The family moved from Keystone to Matewan when Berman was around the age of seven or eight in 1909 or 1910. The Berman store carried clothing for the entire family, and Berman remembered his father always keeping a full stock and having good business in Matewan.¹⁷⁹ Later, when the men from Red Jacket were on strike in 1920 and living in tents, Berman's father "carried [the miners] on the books ... [T]hey just didn't have the money at the time, so he would carry them a few from month to month that a way."¹⁸⁰ Just as the mining community accepted the Berman family despite their 'otherness,' Berman's father supported the community in their time of need, evidencing the inclusive culture of Matewan compared to other mining communities.

Charles Kenneth Sullivan argued, "Developing no real popular institutions inside or outside these towns, the population remained largely rootless in the region. For the most part alien, it lacked local resources of a cultural nature to fall back upon, even the resource base of the

¹⁷⁸ Johnny Fullen, Matewan Development Center Records, 8-9.

¹⁷⁹ Harry Berman, Matewan Development Center Records, 4-7.

¹⁸⁰ Harry Berman, Matewan Development Center Records, 7.

true natives was gradually eroded with the coal's ascendancy in the Smokeless counties."¹⁸¹ However, oral histories suggest that Matewan was an exception to this rule. In addition to the company store, miners and their families had a few clothing and grocery stores, a drug store, dance halls, saloons, a theater, and spaces for leisurely activities in Matewan.¹⁸² The businesses, leisure opportunities, and cultural exchanges remembered by residents depict Matewan as a bustling cultural and commercial community. This was a community where workers themselves, rather than the coal companies, created culture and community and they did so in ways that oftentimes fostered interethnic interactions and relationships.

Conclusion

Perhaps historian David Alan Corbin best articulates the everlasting effect of the bond of strangers on southern West Virginia:

None of them was aware of the culture that their arrival in southern West Virginia would help destroy, or of the new one that the capitalists who had enticed them were to provide, or of the one that they themselves were slowly to create from their old traditions and the new realities they would face...[The growth of the coal industry] broke down the traditional mountain culture, introduced new values, and brought in tens of thousands of southern black and Europeans to mix with the native population in the confines of the company town.¹⁸³

Analysis of the interviews of Jim Backus and Manuel Barrios reveals the fast rate of growth and community expansion at Red Jacket. Backus, who was eighty-seven at the time of his interview, remembered when fewer than twelve families lived in the area between Red Jacket and Mate Creek at the turn of the twentieth century, before the coal company built up the area between

¹⁸¹ Sullivan, *Coal Men and Coal Towns*, 207-208.

¹⁸² Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

¹⁸³ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 1.

1916 and 1918.¹⁸⁴ By the time Manuel Barrios's family joined his father in Red Jacket in 1929, there were twelve Spanish families in the camp alone.¹⁸⁵ In less than a decade, the coal camp transformed the population of southern West Virginia, increasing its size and also altering its composition. Fast growth in Red Jacket was also a factor in forcing intermixing. Limited housing and sectioning on the basis of ethnicity impractical.

Over time, the integrated living experience at Red Jacket allowed miners from different backgrounds to collectively agitate against workplace injustices, eventually giving way to one of the largest armed labor strikes in United States history. Jennie Grimmett best explained the interethnic web at Matewan that produced miner unity stating, "When you're in that sort of condition, everybody helps...everybody helps look out for the other's children or families. You depend, you *have* to depend. And if there's any fear, everyone is together as a whole. Watching...if it is something, that they all can try to protect each other."¹⁸⁶ The "mixed up" quality of Red Jacket, distinct among West Virginia coal fields, assisted in cultivating a shared working-class identity, an identity that the United Mine Workers of America would mobilize on a large scale. Overcoming their differences in backgrounds, the men of Red Jacket could focus on common abuses and lack of social standing to change the course of mining and labor practices in the United States, but the fight to reshape the coal industry was not easily won.

¹⁸⁴ Jim Backus, Matewan Development Center Records, 9.

¹⁸⁵ Manuel Barrios, Matewan Development Center Records, 27-28.

¹⁸⁶ Jennie Grimmett, Matewan Development Center Records, 33.

CHAPTER III

THE STRUGGLE TO FORM THE UNION:

COAL COMPANIES' SUPPRESSION OF UNIONIZATION, 1912-1920

"I said this younger generation don't know what a struggle the old miners had forming the union and getting the union, you know."

-Mattie Ruth McCoy Allara, July 14, 1989¹⁸⁷

In the late 1980s, when West Virginia University students were conducting oral history interviews for the Matewan Development Center, West Virginia was experiencing the largest mining strike since 1920.¹⁸⁸ In 1987, the Pittston Coal Company in Pennsylvania withdrew from the Bituminous Coal Operators Association and implemented workplace changes after the expiration of their last union-negotiated contract. In response, on June 5, 1989, after unsuccessful negotiations between Pittston Coal and the United Mine Workers of America, five hundred miners from West Virginia joined 1,200 union members from southwest Virginia and Kentucky to protest the elimination of benefits for union members.¹⁸⁹ Miners rallied in Charleston, West Virginia, to hear speeches organized by the UMWA urging cooperation between business and labor.¹⁹⁰ The UMWA set up "Camp Solidarity," in Logan County, West Virginia, to house members and labor activists. The 1989 rally in Charleston welcomed thousands as miners, their families, and supporters listened to UMWA President – and West Virginia native – Richard

¹⁸⁷ Ruby Mounts Aliff, Matewan Development Center Records, 6.

¹⁸⁸ For explanation of the effect of these strikes on the memories of the interviewees, see the "Methodology," section of the introduction of this thesis; Alice M. Hoffman and Howard S. Hoffman, "Memory Theory: Personal and Social," in *Handbook of Oral History: 277*; Neisser, *Memory Observed*.

¹⁸⁹ Brisbin, *A Strike Like No Other Strike*; Sessions, "Singing across Dark Spaces."

¹⁹⁰ Ruby Mounts Aliff, Matewan Development Center Records, 6.

Trumka, activist Jesse Jackson, and the governor of West Virginia, Gaston Caperton.¹⁹¹ On June 6, 1989, approximately sixty miners strategically retraced the path taken by miners marching on Logan County in 1921 purposefully to draw connections between West Virginia's striking past and the present. Reflecting on the Pittston Strikes in 2018, Rick Wilson, director of the American Friends Service Committee's West Virginia Economic Justice Project, wrote:

When I look back on it, I think of friends and loved ones, picket lines, burning houses, evictions, crashing coal trucks, singing, banter, jokes, stress, learning to play guitar, anger, sadness, Christmas, courage, goon guards, provocations, State Police, constant motion, solidarity, mercy, direct action, mischief, learning, absorbing history, brave women holding the line, landscapes and places, and the threat of violence, all to a Bob Dylan soundtrack.

At times, the atmosphere on the picket lines reminded me of the movie "Matewan" just before it all went down. One striking union miner was shot in the arm while picketing at the Slab Fork Mine, in Logan County. Another union miner was shot and killed in McDowell County around the same time. Two other men were wounded.¹⁹²

Wilson went on to describe the West Virginia Teachers Strike of 2018, and he again referenced the events of 1920 to 1922. Clearly, the Massacre had a lasting influence on West Virginia's working class, from miners to public employees.¹⁹³ The Pittston Strike and events that purposefully mimicked actions taken by miners in 1920-1922 easily could have influenced the

¹⁹¹ Associated Press, "Thousands Walk Off Mining Jobs and Threaten a Wider Coal Strike," *New York Times*, June 13, 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/13/us/thousands-walk-off-mining-jobs-and-threaten-a-wider-coal-strike.html>.

¹⁹² Rick Wilson, "Working-class Solidarity Urgently Needed as Ever in WV," *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, April 12, 2018, https://www.wvgazette.com/opinion/gazette_opinion/columnists/rick-wilson-working-class-solidarity-urgently-needed-as-ever-in/article_7c4b3f39-adab-5987-b7bb-c45a6b73c8d2.html.

¹⁹³ On the 2018 Teachers Strike see: Ryan Quinn, "A Look Back at the 2018 WV Public School Employees Strike," *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, March 24, 2018, https://www.wvgazette.com/2018_wv_teachers_strike/a-look-back-at-the-wv-public-school-employees-strike/article_c0dcd2db-4017-5bcd-b433-6b3afb6c3d57.html; Dave Jamieson, "The West Virginia Teacher Strike Was Rare, Militant and Victorious," *Huffington Post*, March 7, 2018, Politics, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/what-makes-the-west-virginia-teacher-strike-so-powerful_us_5a9db476e4b0a0ba4ad6f723.

way memories were shaped and retold in the Matewan Development Center interviews. One of those interviewees was Ruby Mounts Aliff, who expressed frustration with the miners of the 1980s. In her interview, which took place before the strike peaked in September 1989, she compared miners of yesteryear to those of today – “this younger generation” – who did not understand or appreciate the struggle to unionize the state in the 1920s and 1930s. Mounts Aliff pointed to differences between the 1989 strike and the strike of her youth. Wilson, instead, drew similarities between the 1989 strike and that of striking miners of 1920. In addition to the Pittston strike, the release of the film *Matewan* also undeniably sparked reflection on the part of the interviewees. Most of the interviews included questions about the film’s portrayal of the events in Matewan, and the majority of the interviewees had strong opinions about the poor representation of their community’s identity. The film and the Pittston Strike reminded Matewan’s people of the struggle they faced in the 1920s.

This chapter explores the struggles miners faced in their attempts to unionize in the early twentieth century as pro-coal forces sought to suppress these efforts. Overcoming the coal company’s attempts to divide miners and rifts in the larger community along ethnic and racial lines in which they were immersed served as one of the miners’ biggest challenges. Indeed, pro-coal forces, including the coal company, their private security forces, local government officials, and the *Logan Banner* newspaper tried to take advantage of miners along these lines through the use of migrant strikebreakers, called scabs, and racially charged public opinion and rhetoric. However, these attempts were met with union retaliation as organizers sought out multilingual men to bridge the gap between Matewan’s working population and strikebreaking workers. Matewan’s tent colony furnished an environment in which to build these multiethnic connections. After the Matewan Massacre, the UMWA temporarily won its thirty-year battle to

unionize the southern West Virginia coalfield, but the unions would not hold a secure position in West Virginia's mines until the 1930s. While the 1920s triumph of unionization was short lived, the UMWA's success depended on relationships built across ethnic and racial divides – a factor that UMWA leaders overlooked in earlier strikes in places like Paint Creek and Cabin Creek. Focusing on miners' economic similarities and injustices rather than their skin color, place of origin, or religion allowed a united front to face the coal company, its operators, and its private security force. Oral histories suggest that the UMWA succeeded in these efforts, because they fostered what David Alan Corbin called "Americanism" among miners, one that emphasized "liberty, equality and dignity to all," regardless of background.¹⁹⁴

Two bloody coal mining strikes shaped West Virginia's early twentieth century labor history: the Paint Creek and Cabin Creek strikes of 1912 to 1913 and the Matewan strike of 1920 to 1922. Historians call this period of history West Virginia's "Mine Wars" due to the nature and scale of violence on the sides of both laborers and company officials. The events of these two strikes paralleled each other, and the results of the latter cannot be discussed without mentioning the events of the first. While the 1912 strikes at Paint Creek and Cabin Creek in Kanawha County – northwest of Mingo County where Matewan is located – were unsuccessful, the miners laid the groundwork for greater success by the UMWA and Mingo County miners in 1920 to 1922. In 1912, the UMWA unionized all of the Kanawha field except Cabin Creek.¹⁹⁵ In Mingo County, miners in 1920 looked to young, rank-and-file labor leaders – like Frank Keeney and Fred Mooney – and militant ideology emerging from the earlier Paint-Cabin Creek strike for inspiration as they attempted to organize. In 1920 they again looked to the UMWA as their main

¹⁹⁴ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 241.

¹⁹⁵ Wheeler, "Mountaineer Mine Wars," 69.

source of support. However, pro-coal interests also looked back to the Paint and Creek Cabin Strikes during the spring of 1920 and, when miners in Mingo County walked off the job, Mingo County operators looked to Kanawha County operators and coal companies to learn and borrow anti-strike and anti-union tactics, including the use of Baldwin-Felts Detective agents and scabs in order to suppress and end strikes.

The Baldwin-Felts Detectives Agency and the Paint Creek and Cabin Creek Strikes of 1912

The UMWA had been fighting to unionize the coalfields of West Virginia since its creation in 1890, although its attempts before 1900 largely failed.¹⁹⁶ The UMWA was finally recognized and established among miners in the Kanawha-New River Coalfield consisting of Fayette, Raleigh, Kanawha, Wyoming, Boone, Logan and Lincoln counties, West Virginia, in 1902, but coal operators retaliated in 1903, founding the Kanawha County Coal Operators Association.¹⁹⁷ Operators' associations like the Kanawha County Coal Operators Associations became commonplace throughout the state as companies joined together to create production sub-regions based on market factors like type of coal produced, transportation connections, and markets where products were shipped.¹⁹⁸ The organization was the first of its kind in the state and utilized detectives from the Baldwin-Felts Detectives Agency as mine guards. As members of the mine guard system, detectives' job description included spying on union miners and

¹⁹⁶ On the history of miners' unions starting in 1860, see Mourat, "A History of Coal Mining"; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 25-60; Garay, *U.S. Steel and Gary, West Virginia*, 53-56; Failed attempts to unionize occurred in 1892, 1894, 1895, and 1897. West Virginia State Archives, "West Virginia's Mine Wars."

¹⁹⁷ For more on coal operators see: Kazuko Uchimura, "Coal Operators and Market Competition: The Case of West Virginia's Smokeless Coalfields and the Fairmont Field, 1853-1933," *West Virginia History* 4 No. 2 (Fall 2010): 59-86.

¹⁹⁸ Uchimura, "Coal Operators," 60.

harassing and intimidating UMWA organizers. Despite UMWA success in 1902, added threats from the agents discouraged union organizers from continuing their work and successfully organizing miners in southern West Virginia until 1912 and the strike at Paint Creek, Kanawha County.¹⁹⁹

William G. Baldwin and Thomas L. Felts established the Baldwin-Felts Detectives Agency in the early 1890s with the first office located in Roanoke, Virginia. Felts opened a second location in Bluefield, West Virginia, a few years later. Baldwin and Felts first contracted their services to railroad companies to keep order on the trains and to prevent theft. As railroads headed West and coal mines popped up along the West Virginia hills, the need for law enforcement presented itself. The agency had field offices located in Thurmond, West Virginia; Richmond, Virginia; and Denver, Colorado. Many small coal communities were not easily accessible and county sheriffs would not respond to issues in the camps. Companies posted deputies in the communities but due to cost, this solution was not ideal or long lasting.²⁰⁰ Consequently, local governments allowed companies to hire private guards that were deputized and recognized as “public law enforcement” by the residents of the camps.²⁰¹

In 1979, Robert M. Hadsell and William E. Coffey outlined the growth of the agency in research that relied heavily on the perspectives of Baldwin and Felts and the coal companies: an interview with W.P. Tams, a coal operator; correspondences from William G. Baldwin and Thomas L. Felts to coal operators and government entities; and local and national legislative acts and labor studies. Based on these sources, Hadsell and Coffey argued that the Baldwin-Felts

¹⁹⁹ West Virginia State Archives, “West Virginia’s Mine War.”

²⁰⁰ Hadsell and Coffey, “From Law and Order,” 268-270.

²⁰¹ Hadsell and Coffey, “From Law and Order,” 270.

Detectives Agency was “both constructive and malevolent.”²⁰² They claim the Agency, “functioned as a civilizing or at least stabilizing force in the absence of adequate public law enforcement,” but also, “carried out policies of brutal repression,” provoking two of the nation’s most violent labor strikes.²⁰³

And yet, the actions taken in 1920 by the agents of Baldwin-Felts in Logan and Mingo counties contradict the idea of lawfulness Hadsell and Coffey outline in their article. The authors call the social grouping in the coal camps “potentially explosive” as “several hundred people of diverse backgrounds were forced into a neighborly relationship under difficult circumstances.”²⁰⁴ Hadsell and Coffey suggest that ethnic diversity mixed with labor shortages and hazardous work conditions led to a population that was “often disorderly and sometimes violent.”²⁰⁵ The oral history contradicts that evidence, suggesting that overall, interethnic interactions in mining camps like those in Mingo County were generally positive, rather than “potentially explosive.” They instead show that ethnic diversity did not lead to lawlessness; instead interethnic exchanges between “forced” neighbors, especially in the tent colonies, produced a greater open-mindedness among native miners and the culturally diverse working population in Matewan.

Other historians paint the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency in a less favorable light than did Hadsell and Coffey. Baldwin-Felts hired agents to collect rent, stand guard over the payroll, and prevent undesirables – such as union sympathizers – from entering the coal camps. The guards were deputized by the county sheriffs. As a faction of local government, sheriffs supported coal operators, providing political and enforcement power – allowing them to exercise

²⁰² Hadsell and Coffey, “From Law and Order,” 268.

²⁰³ Hadsell and Coffey, “From Law and Order,” 268.

²⁰⁴ Hadsell and Coffey, “From Law and Order,” 269-270.

²⁰⁵ These descriptions are from the interview with W.P. Tams, Jr. See: Hadsell and Coffey, “From Law and Order,” 270.

“near total control over their employees’ productivity” and in their coal camps.²⁰⁶ Former West Virginia Attorney General Howard B. Lee wrote that the sole reason for the coal companies’ employment of Baldwin-Felts agents was “to suppress union activities,” and “to keep the miners intimidated.”²⁰⁷ Guards reserved the right to search all company-owned properties including miner homes without notice.²⁰⁸ Historian David Alan Corbin argues that Baldwin-Felts agents’ brutality “stimulated class hostility among the coal diggers and convinced them of the need for collective security and collection action.”²⁰⁹ Similarly, Mary Mourat, known for her critique of the industry in West Virginia, called agents “nothing more than ‘bums’ with psychopathic personalities,” who were “delighted in appearing big and important by beating miners unmercifully or killing them in cold blood at the slightest excuse.”²¹⁰ Mourat argued that the detectives’ “presence was the cause of many violent outbreaks,” and they were the “object upon which the miners blamed all their grievances.”²¹¹ Labor leaders and coal operators who participated in and observed the West Virginia mine wars, and Felts himself, also contradict images of the detective agency as lawful and “civilizing.” Even some coal operators, who greatly benefited from the detectives’ suppression of workers, characterized the agency as too brutal. In the aftermath of the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek strikes, T. L. Lewis of the New River Coal Operators’ Association believed that union violence was a justified and calculated response to some agents’ eager application of force.²¹² Coal operator W. P. Tams described the agents as

²⁰⁶ Garay, *U.S. Steel and Gary, West Virginia*, 54-56.

²⁰⁷ Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 10-11.

²⁰⁸ Hadsell and Coffey, “From Law and Order,” 271.

²⁰⁹ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 52.

²¹⁰ Mourat, “A History of Coal Mining,” 48.

²¹¹ Mourat, “A History of Coal Mining,” 48.

²¹² Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia*, 103.

“rough and often colorful individuals.”²¹³ Labor leader Mary Harris “Mother” Jones claimed in her autobiography that during the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek home evictions in 1912 an agent allegedly kicked an expectant mother in the stomach, resulting in the death of the fetus.²¹⁴ Labor leader Fred Mooney stated that “it became a pastime” for Baldwin-Felts gunmen to ambush miner tent encampments outside of coal company property.²¹⁵ In his autobiography, Mooney mentioned large-scale violence stating, “Every day or two [mine guards/Baldwin-Felts agents] would sneak into the hills and sprinkle the canvass cities with showers of leaden pellets, caring not if their bullets hit men, women, or children.”²¹⁶ History does not lack evidence against the agents’ abhorrent behavior during the Mine Wars.

Agents famously participated in the February 7, 1913, attack on a tent camp at Holly Grove, Kanawha County, in which they opened fire from a moving, armored train called the “Bull Moose Special” – named so for the Progressive Republican supporters of Theodore Roosevelt who financed the train.²¹⁷ The train was transporting non-union miners into the strike zone. Earlier in the day, striking miners shot at a company ambulance at Holly Grove and attacked a nearby company store in Mucklow triggering retaliation on the part of the Kanawha County Sheriff Bonner Hill, Paint Creek coal operator Quinn Morton, a number of deputies, mine guards, and C&O Railway police.²¹⁸ The 1913 Swanson Investigating Committee of the U.S. Senate, convened to investigate conditions in the Kanawha County mines after the Cabin

²¹³ Tams, *The Smokeless Coalfields of West Virginia*, 57-59.

²¹⁴ Jones, *Autobiography*, 151.

²¹⁵ Jones, *Autobiography*, 148-152; Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields*, 16.

²¹⁶ Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields*, 16; See also, Jones, *Autobiography*, 149.

²¹⁷ Hadsell and Coffey, “From Law and Order,” 280; West Virginia State Archives, “West Virginia’s Mine Wars”; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 88.

²¹⁸ Fred A. Barkey, “The Bull Moose Special,” e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia, January 11, 2011, accessed January 2, 2019, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/707>.

Creek strike, placed Thomas L. Felts on the stand to testify. Felts said of his employees, “In making our selections we tried to find men of strong moral courage.”²¹⁹ When asked if he preferred an employee who possessed moral courage or physical courage, Felts defaulted to the term “trustworthy,” to describe the men of Baldwin-Felts.²²⁰ Felts was then asked to choose between an employee who could “shoot well or pray well,” Felts said, “I would rather have the shooter for our kind of work.”²²¹ These descriptions of aggressiveness and violence match the accounts from the Matewan interviews.²²²

Yet Baldwin-Felts agents were not always recognizable as company cronies. In addition to posted guards, the agents, at the request of companies, infiltrated pro-union circles in the camps by posing as miners. Agents then spied on their “co-workers,” learning public opinion and monitoring the intentions of the workers for the company. They ratted out suspected union men who the company then fired and placed on a blacklist that circulated among coal operators.²²³ In 1921, a representative of the coal operators in the southern coalfields spoke frankly on the use of agents against the UMWA: “We claim that we have the right to employ secret service men; or detectives, to protect our interests. We want to know what our men are doing; what they are talking about. We want to know whether the union is being agitated.”²²⁴ One of the Agency’s most notorious spies was C.E. Lively, who gained the trust of miners in Matewan, climbed the

²¹⁹ “Preferred Men Who Shoot Well,” *Logan Banner and the Logan Republican* (Logan, WV), June 20, 1913.

²²⁰ “Preferred Men Who Shoot Well,” *Logan Banner and the Logan Republican* (Logan, WV).

²²¹ “Preferred Men Who Shoot Well,” *Logan Banner and the Logan Republican* (Logan, WV).

²²² Examples of violence can also be found in: Corbin, “Solidarity Forever,” in *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 87-105; Ralph Chaplin, “Violence in West Virginia,” *International Socialist Review* 13 (April 1913): 731-732; and U.S. Senate, Committee on Education and Labor, *Conditions in the Paint Creek District, West Virginia* (63rd Congress, 1st session, 3 volumes, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913).

²²³ Hadsell and Coffey, “From Law and Order,” 272.

²²⁴ Lane, “Labor Spy in West Virginia,” 110-112.

UMWA ranks, and is mentioned in multiple Matewan Development Center oral history interviews as one of the miners' greatest enemies at Stone Mountain Coal Company. In addition to submitting regular reports on union chit chat, Lively attended a district meeting in Charleston and claimed responsibility for organizing several locals in Mingo County.²²⁵ Hoyt N. Wheeler argues that Baldwin-Felts men, including Lively, acted as "agents provocateurs," occasionally encouraging violence in order to entangle miners in violent outbursts with mine guards.²²⁶ Until the volatile events in Matewan on May 19, 1920, coal operators' use of Baldwin-Felts detectives thwarted UMWA activity in the southern coalfields. Their actions certainly played a large role in ending the 1912 Paint Creek and Cabin Creek strikes. On April 25, 1908, coal operator Justus Collins, a coal operator, told F.M. Jackson, President of the Birmingham Commercial Club, that the agents were completely responsible for removing the UMWA from the Smokeless Coal Field, further reinforcing and justifying the need of private security agents for anti-union companies.²²⁷ Just as the Baldwin-Felts Agency hindered unionization within the camps, the *Logan Banner* attempted to influence public opinion on the coal companies, unionized miners, and foreign workers in the southern coal fields.

²²⁵ Lane, "Labor Spy," 111; Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields*, 72; Hoyt N. Wheeler, "Mountaineer Mine Wars," 81.

²²⁶ Wheeler, "Mountaineer Mine Wars," 81; U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Education and Labor, 15-16, 113, 115-123.

²²⁷ Justus Collins was an Alabama-born entrepreneur and coal operator. His first coal mine was in the Pocahontas-Flat Top coal fields of Southern West Virginia. This operation was followed by mines in the New River, Tug Valley, and Winding Gulf coal fields. Collins's business interests included coal, timber, rubber, cement, oil, and gas. He played a key role in organizing the Tug River Coal Operators Association, the Winding Gulf Operators' Association, and the Smokeless Coal Operators Association of West Virginia; Justus Collins, letter to F.M. Jackson, August 25, 1908, A&M 1824, Justus Collins (1857-1934) Papers, West Virginia and Regional History Center, West Virginia University Libraries, Morgantown, West Virginia; On the Birmingham Commercial Club see: Carl V. Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977).

The Logan Banner: Corporate Paternalism and the Infiltration of Popular Opinion

Pro-coal newspapers in West Virginia counties continued to portray miners poorly after their violent actions during the Paint Creek and Cabin Creek strikes, writing anti-union articles between 1912 and 1915.²²⁸ Articles that characterized coal companies as solicitous and charitable downplayed poor living and working conditions in the mining communities and damaged the image of the UMWA and their goals in the eyes of the papers' readership. The *Logan Banner* offers examples of such articles.²²⁹ The *Logan Banner* spilt considerable ink covering the Mine Wars, making it an invaluable resource for historians interested in the topic. The paper's coverage also confirms that coal companies essentially "owned" local political and legal systems. The *Logan Banner*, acting unofficially as the Democratic Party's newspaper in Logan County, had only praise for coal companies.²³⁰ Instead of attempting to "use historical data from Logan or McDowell counties to explain the unfolding events," in Mingo County, which Bailey argues cannot be done, this analysis of the *Logan Banner* attempts to demonstrate the influence the paper held over public opinion in the southern coal fields.²³¹

Despite heavy union activity in both of its neighboring counties, union organization failed in the Logan coalfields possibly due to papers like the *Logan Banner*, which worked diligently to turn public opinion against the strikers throughout West Virginia during the early

²²⁸ The *Logan Banner* was founded in 1888 by Confederate Army veteran, Henry Clay Ragland, originally of Goochland County, Virginia. Ragland made his newspaper the voice of the county, as well as the Democratic Party. It was a weekly paper until 1935: "About Us," The *Logan Banner*, Accessed March 13, 2019, https://www.loganbanner.com/site/about_us.html; Robert Y. Spence, "Henry Clay Ragland," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia, December 8, 2015, Accessed January 20, 2019, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/1961>.

²²⁹ Logan County sits between Kanawha County, the place of the 1912-1913 strike, and Mingo County, the setting of the 1920-1922 strike.

²³⁰ Bailey, *Before the Massacre*, 10-11.

²³¹ Bailey, *Before the Massacre*, 11.

1910s. Bailey described Mingo County as the UMWA's opportunity to "establish a beachhead from which to organize their true targets of Logan and McDowell counties," as southern West Virginia's "Achilles heel of [the] corporate Leviathan."²³² Logan County's location meant union organizing activities in Kanawha County were heavily covered, and articles in the *Logan Banner* could have easily made their way into the hands of the mining and non-mining population of Mingo County during the 1912 to 1913 strike. The *Logan Banner* reveals the type of anti-union sentiment that miners in southern West Virginia were up against during the Paint and Cabin Creek strikes and later during the 1920 strike.

The *Logan Banner* preyed upon fears of unemployment to try turning miners against the idea of unionizing throughout the late 1910s. Eighteen days after West Virginia Governor William E. Glasscock (March 4, 1909-March 14, 1913) called for martial law in Paint Creek and Cabin Creek, Kanawha County, the paper's front page called out to miners: "Logan Miners: If You Want a Job This Winter, Let the Union Alone"; "Your Condition Can Be Worse Than Now. Mines MAY Close Without Notice"; "Unionizing West Virginia Mines Will Kill Coal Industry of the State"; "Guyan Valley Will Be Deserted in Not 90 Days if Mines are Organized"; "Logan Coal Can Not Compete with Northern Product if Mine Cost Increases"; and "Foreign Miners' Strike Agitators in League with Competitive Producers."²³³ These inflammatory statements were meant to evoke fear of mining unions. On April 4, 1913, less than a month after Henry D. Hatfield entered the governorship, the *Logan Banner* published a series of articles, "written from information gathered from state investigations, reports, and daily newspaper editorials," titled,

²³² Bailey, *Before the Massacre*, 10-11.

²³³ *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), September 20, 1912.

“Why Operators of West Virginia Mines Oppose Unionism.”²³⁴ The first article in the series reported:

The operators, in their letter to Governor Hatfield, replying to the proposal of President White of the United Mine Workers of America, deny White’s statements of alleged grievances. The operators refuse to deal with him in any manner, claiming that White is endeavoring to have the union “recognized” so that the coal business of West Virginia may be controlled by persons outside of the state. Shall the Operators of Ohio, Penn.[sic], Indiana and Illinois be allowed to dictate, control and finally put W.Va.’s coal mines out of business?²³⁵

As reported in the *Logan Banner*, Kanawha County Operators asserted that their competitors in the Midwest were behind unionization drives in West Virginia. By portraying the union as a tool wielded by competing, out-of-state coal companies to take over West Virginia coalfields, the paper disregarded mine workers’ real grievances.

The *Logan Banner* also published articles that portrayed coal companies as benevolent benefactors who provided families with entertainment, places to gather, and distractions to fill their off-duty time. The *Logan Banner* essentially argued that coal towns did not need the UMWA, since the coal companies themselves took care of their workers. In an attempt to remove idleness from the workingman’s off-duty hours, companies introduced community centers, baseball teams, and community gardens and other activities. By occupying all hours in a miner’s day, the company believed they effectively filled unused time that miners might have otherwise used to think about one’s social station in life. As historians have acknowledged, many corporations, starting in the late 19th century, began offering benefits and services – in part in

²³⁴ “Why Operators of West Virginia Oppose Unionism,” *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), April 4, 1913.

²³⁵ “Why Operators of West Virginia Oppose Unionism.” Note: Governor Hatfield was sworn into office on March 4, 1913.

response to the lack of state and government support for workers – but also as a way to prevent worker agitation and unionization efforts.²³⁶

Contemporary journalists and historians criticized corporate welfare or paternalism for aiding in the control coal companies exerted over miners, describing the relationship between coal companies and miners as feudalistic.²³⁷ Journalist Winthrop D. Lane wrote, “The essential characteristic of a coal-mining civilization, in West Virginia as well as in some other parts of the country, is the extent to which the employer, the company, controls things. It is paternalistic, in some ways a feudal, civilization.”²³⁸ Lane criticized the paternalism in coal towns, writing, “[The miner] cannot escape from the dependent position in which it places him. The coal company touches his life at every point ... If the prices charged him for food at the company store are reasonable, it is because the coal company decrees it. If the physical aspects of this life, on the whole, are tolerable, it is because he is fortunate enough to have a beneficent employer.”²³⁹ Another journalist Matthew Josephson referred to entrepreneurs of the coal industry as “robber barons,” and argued, “in the hiring and firing of their workers the barons exercised their sacred rights over colossal properties in a manner which closely paralleled the ‘Divine Right’ of feudal princes.”²⁴⁰ Scholars, too, often refer to West Virginia’s coal towns as feudal. Business historian Hoyt N. Wheeler, for example, called Logan County a “feudal

²³⁶ Wheeler, “Mountaineer Mine Wars,” 83-89; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 117-136.

²³⁷ Wheeler, “Mountaineer Mine Wars,” 83.

²³⁸ Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia*, 22.

²³⁹ Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia*, 30.

²⁴⁰ Josephson, *The Robber Barons*, 49.

barony,” defended by “soldiers of fortune in the pay of mine owners,” referring to the county’s police force.²⁴¹

An example of such company paternalism producing positive images of coal operators in Logan County is a two-week series in the *Logan Banner* on a community garden in Weyanoke Coal & Coke Company in Weyanoke, Mercer County, West Virginia.²⁴² The title and subheading of the article read, “Garden Proves a Panacea for all the Labor Troubles: One Employer Solves This Problem of Long Standing. Plenty of Garden and Satisfaction at Wyanoke Mines.”²⁴³ Weyanoke Company’s Vice President and General Manager R. D. Patterson encouraged his mine employees to raise gardens for several years, “with the most gratifying results.”²⁴⁴ The *Logan Banner* explains Patterson’s reason for implementing gardens at Weyanoke:

It seems that coal miners, in common with the rest of mankind, are of a restless disposition. As soon as they’ve accumulated money enough to pay railroad fare they are likely to move on to the better job, which, like the good fishing, is always “over in the next county.

Furthermore, as miners work short hours and rarely put in a full month, they have a great deal of spare time, and you know what Satan is said to find for idle hands to do. Besides this, the cost of living is understood to be rather high these day[sic]. Being surrounded by vacant land you might suppose the coal miner would raise vegetables as a matter of economy, if not for his stomach’s sake. Left to themselves, though, the great majority will do nothing of the kind.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Wheeler, “Mountaineer Mine Wars,” 79; Garay, *U.S. Steel and Gary, West Virginia*; Matthew Josephson, *The Robber Barons: The Great American Capitalists, 1861-1901* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1934).

²⁴² “Gardens Prove a Panacea for all the Labor Troubles,” *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), August 22, 1913; “Gardens Prove a Panacea for all the Labor Troubles,” *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), August 29, 1913.

²⁴³ “Gardens Prove a Panacea for all the Labor Troubles,” August 22, 1913; “Gardens Prove a Panacea for all the Labor Troubles,” August 29, 1913.

²⁴⁴ “Gardens Prove a Panacea for all the Labor Troubles,” August 22, 1913.

²⁴⁵ “Gardens Prove a Panacea for all the Labor Troubles,” August 22, 1913.

In articles such as this the *Logan Banner* depicted miners as inherently lazy and disloyal, with “idle hands” requiring constant supervision and distraction by a paternalistic company.

Furthermore, by likening labor troubles to Satan’s workshop, the paper portrayed attempts at unionization in a negative light. The *Logan Banner* and Patterson suggested that, in order to snuff out union annoyance, the company’s men needed distractions such as the gardens. A

United States Coal and Coke Company (USCC) official was quoted saying, “When employees of a company are made to take a great interest in their homes and to have pride in the appearance of them, there is but one result – they become happy and contented, and are not so susceptible to ‘hard times’ and anarchistic propaganda.”²⁴⁶ Patterson noted success in convincing miners to farm by offering cash prizes for the best vegetable garden and other prizes for the most attractive flower garden.²⁴⁷ In the second installment of the series, the *Logan Banner* outlines the benefits of gardening for the coal company. The *Logan Banner* found five rewards for the company: gardening guaranteed a steady and reliable workforce; an orderly camp; a contented community; the most aesthetically-pleasing and healthiest camp; and fewer miners requiring assistance from the company store during the summer months due to the use of vegetables grown by the miners themselves.²⁴⁸ With miners settling in one place and hobby gardens removing them from unsavory locales throughout the town – gambling parlors and bars – the company not only sought to set the community at ease and better miners’ home lives, but it attempted to distract the miners away from union or radical influences.

Coal operators used a series of events and hobbies to occupy the downtime of miners and their families. Distractions came in many forms, including charitable work by the coal operators’

²⁴⁶ As quoted in Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color*, 131.

²⁴⁷ “Gardens Prove a Panacea for all the Labor Troubles,” August 29, 1913.

²⁴⁸ “Gardens Prove a Panacea for all the Labor Troubles,” August 29, 1913.

associations. As reported in the paper, in January 1914, the coal operators of West Virginia decided to finance a “campaign for education and social advancement of the miners and miner laborers.”²⁴⁹ John Laing, Chief of the State Department of Mines, is quoted in the article saying:

“Wherever there are Y.M.C.A. Buildings, and all of them have been erected at the expense of the company, they are community centers. All of them have swimming pools and baths, free reading rooms, gymnasias, pool and billiard tables and bowling alleys ... So pleased are the operators, who have helped organize these Y.M.C.A.’s, at the good accomplished, that they lost no opportunity to show other operators what can be done along this line.”²⁵⁰

Laing also mentions hospitals being built throughout the state by operators in order to care for miners and their families.²⁵¹ He believed these actions showed that, “West Virginia [was] leading all coal mining states in an effort to make employees as comfortable as possible.”²⁵² Providing miners with facilities such as these secured needed services and protections for workers while at the same time helped shield companies from unpopular public opinion. If the company provided all the basic needs of the miners and also provided entertainment and healthcare, the concerns of union miners appeared less valid. Historian Ronald Eller argued that while “moral considerations” were irrefutably a part of the improvement of social conditions, the business reasons – attracting new workers, resisting unionization, and to curb other “radical” movements – could not be overlooked.²⁵³

In addition to characterizing miners as idle, the *Logan Banner* also suggested that these men needed guidance from coal companies because they lacked money management skills. On September 5, 1913, and September 12, 1913, about two months after the conclusion of the Cabin

²⁴⁹ “Uplifting Campaign in West Va. Mines,” *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), January 9, 1914.

²⁵⁰ “Uplifting Campaign in West Va. Mines.”

²⁵¹ “Uplifting Campaign in West Va. Mines.”

²⁵² “Uplifting Campaign in West Va. Mines.”

²⁵³ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 220-221.

Creek Strike, the *Logan Banner* published a series titled, “Coal Operators Readily Respond to the ‘Touch’ by Miners Wanting Ready Cash,” which implied miners – especially African Americans – were irresponsible with their wages, unable to balance their accounts each month.²⁵⁴ The language used in this series of articles painted the company in a positive light.

The first week’s article in the series announced:

In numberless cases the pay day [of the worker] begins before the work does. It is a common practice for the coal companies to advance \$50 to \$100 worth of provisions, household goods and tools to new arrivals in camp who lack these necessities. Very often the companies go even further than this -- advancing cash to enable applicants for work to reach the camp.²⁵⁵

While showcasing the coal company as a charitable entity, providing money and necessities to miners even before work begins, the article failed to note that most miners were actually unaware of their debt upon arriving for work. The article harshly criticized African American miners in particular for their lack of planning when spending money during travel to the mines to begin work. The article read, “Colored miners are much given to travel when in funds. They never think of returning to work until the last nickel is spent. The[n] they write to the company for money to return on, and they get it.”²⁵⁶ Although the article does admit miners were “punctilious in repaying their debts,” it chastises miners for freely asking for and borrowing money from the company.²⁵⁷ The article closes with the statement, “[E]very day continues to be pay-day for the

²⁵⁴ “Coal Operators Readily Respond to the ‘Touch’ by Miners Wanting Ready Cash,” *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), September 5, 1913; “Coal Operators Readily Respond to the ‘Touch’ by Miners Wanting Ready Cash,” *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), September 12, 1913.

²⁵⁵ “Coal Operators Readily Respond to the ‘Touch’ by Miners Wanting Ready Cash,” September 5, 1913.

²⁵⁶ “Coal Operators Readily Respond to the ‘Touch’ by Miners Wanting Ready Cash,” September 5, 1913.

²⁵⁷ “Coal Operators Readily Respond to the ‘Touch’ by Miners Wanting Ready Cash,” September 5, 1913

lucky employee at the average mine.”²⁵⁸ Contrary to the first week in the series, later articles point some blame at the company for allowing the practice to continue. While African American miners were singled out as particularly poor financial planners, the paper somewhat paradoxically lauded Ike Mitchell, an African American miner from South Carolina, as an example for others to follow. In an article titled “How a Coal Miner Can Save,” the paper showed that hard work and proper savings elevated the downtrodden miner in the eyes of the company and newspaper. Previously Mitchell had worked in cotton fields, and upon his entrance into the New River coalfields, coal managers noticed his home and surroundings, “had a clean and healthy appearance, and that his wife and children were well clothed, and that his family lived well, as judged by his purchases at the company store.”²⁵⁹ Mitchell then asked a manager to hold savings from his earnings, and the manager was surprised that Mitchell handed him three-hundred dollars.²⁶⁰ After two years, Mitchell had saved \$2,000, using it to return to South Carolina with his family and purchase land on which to grow cotton.²⁶¹ The *Banner* closed the story with this sentiment:

Ike Mitchell might have picked cotton in his native state for a life time[sic] before his savings would have amounted to as much as they did in West Virginia mine in two years, and there is a similar opportunity here for the laborer who wants to work hard and save his surplus earnings.²⁶²

While most *Logan Banner* articles criticized the financial decision of miners--specifically of immigrant and African American miners--Mitchell’s story was an opportunity for the newspaper

²⁵⁸ “Coal Operators Readily Respond to the ‘Touch’ by Miners Wanting Ready Cash,” September 5, 1913.

²⁵⁹ “How a Coal Miner Can Save,” *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), February 19, 1915.

²⁶⁰ “How a Coal Miner Can Save.”

²⁶¹ “How a Coal Miner Can Save.”

²⁶² “How a Coal Miner Can Save.”

to show that workers did not need the UMWA's negotiated wages to prosper; instead, they needed to make smart and responsible financial decisions.

The *Logan Banner's* overarching tone revolves around a condemnation of the miners and the UMWA. In 1913, the newspaper continually berated the unionization of coal fields. An article in October of 1913 attempted to pit miners against miners stating:

[A] lot of honest, toiling, contented men, who receive full pay for every hour's work, undisturbed by agitators and trouble makers -- and so long as an organization proves a menace and a curse to those it already embraces, it will certainly be left alone by those who think and see and read and know.²⁶³

By distinguishing between "honest, toiling, contented men" and "agitators and trouble makers" among the miners, the newspaper supported the company's endeavors to create separation among the workforce. There are miners who "know," according to the *Logan Banner*, that their situation could be much worse, and they dare not challenge the system that seemingly provides a decent lifestyle for their families. Then there are those questioning or rebelling against the system and livelihood the company system currently provided. The article continued to praise the coal industry for providing miners an all-around "fair deal" while insisting that compliant, non-unionized workers "are contented, live well, work hard and receive good pay":

The operators here pay their men better wages than any other class of workers receive, as an average. They house the men well. Men are encouraged to raise gardens and reduce the cost of living. Take the U.S. Coal & Coke Co. for example: Employees are contented, live well, work hard and receive good pay; this company, perhaps by reason of its vast backing and newer workings, has a vast host of satisfied, contented workers. They earn what they get and get what they earn ... Other companies are in like condition; operators and men seem to understand each other and the men receive a fair deal. Anyone can come here and see for one's self.²⁶⁴

²⁶³ "Miners Earn What They Get and Get What They Earn," *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), October 3, 1913.

²⁶⁴ "Miners Earn What They Get and Get What They Earn."

Another article from October 1913, asserted that coal output in the Pocahontas County coalfields steadily increased throughout August 1912, because of its non-unionized workforce. Norfolk & Western Railway increased its output because in Pocahontas County, “men [were] not hampered by union restrictions, but are free to work as hard as they like.”²⁶⁵ This article undermined the work of the UMWA in Kanawha County by suggesting that unionization impinged on workers’ freedoms and rights to “work as hard as they like,” invented conflicts between workers and coal companies that did not exist, and prevented coal companies’ ability to grow and profit.²⁶⁶

In the *Logan Banner*’s portrayals of miners as lazy, the newspaper took specific aim at immigrant miners. Their condemnation of immigrant miners who took too many holidays off when they should have been working reveal the paper’s and coal operators’ lack of respect for differing cultural and religious holidays. The paper also illustrates the importance of alcohol consumption, a common pastime in the coal communities of southern West Virginia. Considered a preindustrial carry-over in industrial working environments, the making and drinking of alcohol transcended cultural barriers. Miners drank to celebrate births, christenings, marriages, holidays, and these celebrations carried over into the workweek. In addition to these joyous events, miners often drank to celebrate payday as well.²⁶⁷ On superintendent declared, “Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday after paydays are the drunks’ holidays,” and another reported most of their workforce did not show up for work on pay Mondays.²⁶⁸ The *Banner*, upon discussion of incorporating bi-monthly paydays after the Paint-Cabin Creek Strikes, said, “[I]t is hard [to] get

²⁶⁵ “Miners Earn What They Get and Get What They Earn.”

²⁶⁶ “West Virginia Coal Output Increases Steadily,” *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), October 10, 1913.

²⁶⁷ Gutman, “Work, Culture, and Society,” 558-560; Korson, *Coal Dust*, 60; Corbin, *Life, Work, Rebellion*, 35-38; Montgomery, “Workers’ Control of Machine Production,” 485-509.

²⁶⁸ Jarius Collins, letter to Justus Collins, February 28, Justus Collins Papers; Mine Superintendent to Justus Collins, March 27, 1911, Justus Collins Papers.

the men into the mines on pay-day. Two official pay-days a month come pretty near adding two weeks' time to a list of holidays already too long."²⁶⁹ The paper's claim originated from the well-known and acknowledged practice of heavy drinking following payment for work.

Another article outlined the trouble with "the celebration of dozens of different holidays by foreign workers," which the *Logan Banner* described as "one of the queerest" problems faced by coal companies because such it "draws away enough workers to hamper seriously the operation of the mines." The article continued:

Each nationality, or religious sect, has its "holy days" and other occasions for celebration. A colony of Hungarians, for example, cannot understand why just because they happen to be in America, they should forsake the practices of their native land.

The worst part of it is that, in many cases, they do not notify the foreman in advance; they seem to take it for granted that ever[y]body knows they are not going to work on certain days. A mine boss would have to be a sort of human almanac to keep all the foreign holidays in his head.

It has been found impossible to bring about any uniformity in the observance of these holidays.²⁷⁰

The newspaper describes religious and ethnic diversity as a potential liability for the coal companies. It also lays the full blame not on the coal companies' insensitivity or ignorance, but on immigrants themselves, who failed to communicate with their operators about days they would not work due to holiday celebrations.

Generally, the *Logan Banner's* tone toward immigrant miners was unwelcoming and harsh. Between May 1912 and June 1914, the paper followed a story about an Italian miner, Vincenzo "Jim" Monderosa, who allegedly caused an explosion at the residence of his in-laws

²⁶⁹ "Coal Operators Readily Respond to the 'Touch' by Miners Wanting Ready Cash," *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), September 12, 1913.

²⁷⁰ "West Virginia Miners Have Many Holidays," *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), December 5, 1913.

while his wife, Theresa de Francisco, was staying with them after having left Monderosa.²⁷¹

Immediately, the *Logan Banner* framed Monderosa negatively, drawing on stereotypes of Southern Italians as innately hot-headed, violent, and “passionate,” noting:

The frenzied foreigner, in confessing to officers of a posse which had hunted him down after the terrible crime, said that his only regret was that the explosion, which jarred the town of Ethel, had not slain his wife. It was the climax to a hot, passionate Italian revenge, transported seemingly from sunny Italy to the mountains of West Virginia.²⁷²

Monderosa admitted his guilt for the crime, but the newspaper’s overall tone was anti-immigrant.

Oftentimes *Logan Banner* articles spread conjecture and hearsay feeding the community gossip circle. The paper obtained and published Monderosa’s marriage certificate and discussed Monderosa’s illegal marriage to de Francisco in the May 24 and July 7, 1912 editions. The newspaper alleged that in 1906 Monderosa had married a woman in Italy before immigrating to Logan County and was still married to that woman at the time of his marriage to de Francisco in 1911 – the reason de Francisco refused to stay with Monderosa.²⁷³ According to the *Logan Banner*, not only was Monderosa a criminal and murderer, but he was also a bigamist and an adulterer, suggesting his moral character was far from that of a desired employee in the West Virginia coal industry.²⁷⁴ The *Logan Banner* described Monderosa’s “type” of immigrant after his sentencing:

Judge Wilkinson passed sentence on him. 99 years in the penitentiary, a penalty more severe than hanging. It is hoped that no pardon will ever be given to him. Had his wife been a servant in a residence or hotel in Logan, Jim’s angry and murderous temper might have caused the death of a dozen or more persons, for he sought revenge regardless of

²⁷¹ “Quick Capture of Desperate Italian Powder Fiend,” *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), May 24, 1912.

²⁷² “Quick Capture of Desperate Italian Powder Fiend.”

²⁷³ “Quick Capture of Desperate Italian Powder Fiend.”; “Jim Monderosa,” *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), July 7, 1912; “Death on the Scaffold Instead of Life Imprisonment for Sicilian Murderer and Powder-Fiend,” *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), July 26, 1912.

²⁷⁴ “Death on the Scaffold Instead of Life Imprisonment for Sicilian Murderer and Powder-Fiend.”

consequences. This type of foreign emigration lands in America by thousands every year, and Logan gets some of it.²⁷⁵

By grouping all immigrants with Monderosa as “angry and murderous,” the newspaper promoted negative public opinion of immigrant workers in Logan County.

In addition to the commentary on the Monderosa case, the *Logan Banner* peppered articles with cutting remarks about the lifestyles of immigrant miners in southern West Virginia.

An article about lowered prices in a company store reads:

Only the best quality of groceries is kept, for the fastidious employees will not take second class goods. Prices on many standard package good run a shade lower in price that [sic] in first class stores in New York City for the same brands. Meats are very much cheaper than in the metropolis... At these prices the Austrians and Slavs in camp, who insist upon half a pound of meat apiece, at each meal, do not find the cost of living burdensome.²⁷⁶

This article contradicts most of the oral histories, which describe largely unnutritious, monotonous meals made mostly simple carbs and animal fats. The children of the mining population of the 1920 strike discuss these simple meals in the interviews explored in the next chapter. Survival modes and skills, while imperative to surviving two years in tents, were necessary for perseverance even when miners were not tied up in union activity. While pan gravy and biscuits seem to have made up a large part of the miner diet, the article insinuated that workers ate well. It also seemed to suggest that immigrants were excessively demanding and picky in their foodways.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ “Death on the Scaffold Instead of Life Imprisonment for Sicilian Murderer and Powder-Fiend.” In 1914, Monderosa appealed the court for a pardon of the charges, but the appeal was not settled in my reading of the *Logan Banner* through 1915.

²⁷⁶ “Company Store Limits Its Profits to Keep Down the Prices,” *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), November 14, 1913.

²⁷⁷ Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA; On immigrant foodways see, Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

Similarly, after the 1914 implementation of the Yost Prohibition Law, the *Banner* targeted immigrants' drinking habits. The Yost Prohibition Law of 1913, proposed by Delegate Ellis Yost of Monongalia County, created West Virginia's Department of Prohibition which enforced prohibition policy. The law banned the manufacture, sale, and keeping of spirits, but did not outlaw importation or consumption of spirits.²⁷⁸ In 1915, eight Hungarian miners were arrested after having been caught with ten gallons of liquor, which the men claimed was, "intended for celebration purposes on account of a Hungarian wedding which occurred in [Logan]."²⁷⁹ The men were released with their alcohol, but articles like this associated alcohol and crime with the foreign born.²⁸⁰ There were two additional articles on the front page from May 27, 1915, about illegal alcohol, but nationality is only mentioned in one other article, naming the offender as Italian. It reads, "Special Prohibition Officer A. H. Curry destroyed 300 gallons of fine Italian wine at Longacre. An old Italian got down on his hands and knees and washed his face and hands in the liquor as it was running in a rivulet on the street foot and a half deep."²⁸¹ Such treatment was not limited to immigrants. African American miners breaking

²⁷⁸ Cometti and Summers, *The Thirty-Fifth State*, 518-521; Merle T. Cole, "The Revenooers: Enforcing Prohibition in West Virginia," last modified 2018, <http://www.wvculture.org/goldenseal/winter17/Prohibition.html>; Jane Metters LaBarbara, "New Research on Prohibition in West Virginia," last modified September 9, 2013, <https://news.lib.wvu.edu/2013/09/09/new-research-on-prohibition-in-west-virginia/>; On the Yost Law and immigrants in Northern West Virginia see, Ronald L. Lewis, "Americanizing Immigrant Coal Miners in Northern West Virginia," in *Transnational West Virginia*, 261-296; Mary Merolle, "Prohibition," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia, December 5 2018, accessed January 13, 2019, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/1931>.

²⁷⁹ "Booze Arrest," *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), May 27, 1915.

²⁸⁰ "Booze Arrest.," Joe William Trotter also argues prohibition arrests and convictions were efforts to "discipline and exploit the black labor force" in Southern West Virginia counties; Joe William Trotter, Jr., "Black Migration to Southern West Virginia," in *Transnational West Virginia*, 136-159.

²⁸¹ "Washed in Liquor," *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), May 27, 1915; Trotter, "Black Migration," 136-159.

prohibition laws were also plainly characterized. When a “liquor path to the mines” was discovered in the Guyan Valley coalfields, the paper reported, “Gus Williams, 28 years old, a negro, was arrested by Captain C.C. Clingenpeel, charged with violation of the Yost prohibition law. Two other negroes are said to be sought in connection with the same affair. A considerable quantity of liquor improperly labeled, was taken, according to the authorities. Some of it was labeled in Italian.”²⁸² Mentioning race and nationality in these articles emphasized immigrant and African American community members as unlawful and also raised questions about their moral constitution while leaving white offenders out of the discussion.

Pro-coal newspapers like the *Logan Banner* used biased language and ethnic stereotyping to alienate the migrant and immigrant workforce in southern West Virginia. By fortifying the sometimes discriminatory and racist opinions of non-mining natives, media like the *Logan Banner* hindered the UMWA’s attempts to organize while trying to create fissures based on nationality and race within the mining community. The perceived lawlessness of African Americans and immigrants in the mines helped the *Logan Banner* mold the political and social opinion of its readers. Despite these attempts by the newspaper and by the coal company to create differences between white, native-born miners and their immigrant and African American counterparts, unionization in the coalfields bridged racial and ethnic barriers, encouraging collaboration among workers.

The Paint Creek and Cabin Creek Strikes: Labor Lessons Learned

The strikes in Paint and Cabin Creeks in 1912 to 1913, heavily influenced the actions taken by companies and unionized men alike during the 1920 to 1922 strikes in Mingo County.

²⁸² “Liquor Path to the Mines,” *Logan Banner* (Logan, WV), June 11, 1915.

Participants in the events – events that included nonviolent and thuggish actions – surrounding the 1920 strike used the earlier strike in Kanawha County as a jumping off point and a way forward for labor relations in southern West Virginia. In addition to hiring detectives to suppress union activity, another method used by the coal companies to prevent unionization was the hiring of strikebreakers, or scabs. Companies hoped that this would cause a rift among the workforce.

The 1987 film *Matewan* depicts African Americans and Italian immigrants arriving in Mingo County as strikebreakers in ways that suggest African Americans and Italians were not already working in the mines.²⁸³ However, historian Jerry Bruce Thomas argues that the “extensive use of black labor became a distinguishing characteristic of the southern smokeless coal fields,” and there was a larger concentration of African American miners in southern West Virginia than anywhere else in the United States.²⁸⁴ Johnny Fullen, the grandson of multiracial business owners in Matewan, remembered his grandparents talking about the employment of black miners before the strike. Fullen suggests strikebreakers were depicted incorrectly in the film *Matewan*:

I don't agree with [the film]. In fact, when I first saw that, I told [my wife], that one scene where they jumped on them blacks[sic]...I never heard my grandmother say that. Not as far as Matewan goes. Now, it could have been outside of Matewan at some other place, but back at that time, blacks and everybody else was welcome 'cause they was openin' up all them mines[sic].²⁸⁵

Coal operators did attempt to turn miners against each other through the use of scabs, but the suggestion that these laborers were primarily Italian or African American incorrectly characterizes the face of strikebreakers in this labor struggle.

²⁸³ *Matewan*, directed by John Sayles (1987; Cinecom Entertainment Group and Film Gallery/Seville Pictures, 2002), DVD.

²⁸⁴ Thomas, “Coal Country,” 178.

²⁸⁵ Johnny Fullen, *Matewan Development Center Records*, 32.

Despite this inaccuracy, companies employed scabs to disrupt picket lines and keep their mines producing during the strike. Leftist labor papers, like the *Socialist and Labor Star* and the *Labor Argus*, reveal that the UMWA and unionized miners responded to strikebreakers by engaging these men in union discussions, striving to convert scabs to union men. In 1913, the *Socialist and Labor Star* reported on union converts among strikebreakers, called “transportation men,” at Paint and Cabin Creeks.²⁸⁶ The coal operator’s efforts were in vain “as the union men have been busily organizing the transportation men during the lull, while Governor Hatfield’s ‘settlement plan’ was being tried, and as a result they, too, will walk out.”²⁸⁷ In an attempt to swiftly end the state of martial law left in Kanawha County by Governor William E. Glasscock, the newly elected Governor Henry D. Hatfield and UMWA President John White approached the coal operators in April 1913 with a settlement plan asking operators to: grant a nine-hour work day; allow miners the right to select a checkweighman; provide semi-monthly pay; and to end discrimination against union miners. The compromise ignored rank-and-file union members’ demands for complete union recognition and the end of the mine-guard system. Operators and union officials quickly agreed to these terms, but rank-and-file union miners remained outraged and attempted to unionize scabs during the period of negotiations.²⁸⁸ George F. Parsons of the Socialist Party of West Virginia acted as witness to these reports. He reported three hundred, “transportation men” were brought to Paint Creek to scab, but joined the union instead.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ “New River Strike Called for July 1; May Yet Be Averted – Strike on Paint and Cabin Creek Gaining Proportions,” *Socialist and Labor Star* (Huntington, WV), June 27, 1913.

²⁸⁷ “New River Strike Called for July 1.”

²⁸⁸ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 96-98; David A. Corbin, “Betrayal in the West Virginia Coal Fields: Eugene V. Debs and the Socialist Party of America, 1912–1914,” *Journal of American History* 64, Issue 4 (March 1, 1978): 987–1009.

²⁸⁹ “Parsons Busy,” *Socialist and Labor Star* (Huntington, WV), June 27, 1913.

One prominent example of a scab who quickly sided with the union, notwithstanding threats from company officials is J.M. Bailey, who unknowingly became a scab in Paint Creek after answering an advertisement that read, “Men wanted to do all kinds of work.”²⁹⁰ He contacted a labor agent who told him a plant was being built, and “all classes of workmen were wanted from pick and shovel [men] to engineers.”²⁹¹ Bailey and twenty-five other men boarded a train and upon arriving in Charleston were transferred to “some other men who locked the doors of the coaches and closed the windows and would not allow us to go out or raise the windows and ordered us not to talk to any one coming about the train.”²⁹² Suspecting something about their employment was not quite right, Bailey said the men like himself “got our eyes open and began to look for the real object.”²⁹³ The train arrived in Pratt, West Virginia, and the men were instructed to change trains – boarding a car headed to Paint Creek. Again, sensing something was off Bailey wrote:

Here we saw some tents, and thinking that something was wrong, I asked a man what it all meant; and another man dressed in uniform told me to not ask any questions but to get on the train and go on up the creek. I did not feel at ease after I had got[sic] on the train and I asked a man on there what was wrong and he told me ‘to keep my damned mouth shut or I would get it mashed,’ that he had ‘heard enough out of me already,’ and made a display of two large guns by shoving his coat back on either side. It was then I wanted to be at home with my wife and babies. I began to look about me and found that there were twelve or fifteen of those gun men on the train and they were cursing everything and everybody that came in contact with them and taking their guns out of their holsters – made all kinds of displays all the way up on the train.²⁹⁴

Upon arriving in Paint Creek at nightfall, the men were unloaded from the train and sent to a boardinghouse. Guards told the men that any attempt to leave would result in being shot. The

²⁹⁰ J.M. Bailey, “A Strike Breakers Statement,” *Labor Argus* (Charleston, WV), Jan. 2, 1913.

²⁹¹ Bailey, “A Strike Breakers Statement.”

²⁹² Bailey, “A Strike Breakers Statement.”

²⁹³ Bailey, “A Strike Breakers Statement.”

²⁹⁴ Bailey, “A Strike Breakers Statement.”

next morning, they were escorted to the office of the manager where they were told a “few union men” were on strike, because the management would not “let them run his business and that it was just a few men that would not work and did not want any one[sic] else to work.”²⁹⁵ They were told the guards were deputy sheriffs, kept to protect the men at work from striking miners who, they were told, would kill them if they left the mines. The men on strike did not know Bailey and the workers brought into the camp with him were unknowingly recruited to break the strike. At this point Bailey and his fellow workers realized they had been deceived. Deciding to leave, Bailey discovered the miners at the small town of Hansford and was “welcomed and received good treatment from them.”²⁹⁶ Bailey concluded his tale stating, “Those sheriffs are nothing but brutes in human form. Hoping that this will be some benefit to the strikers and that they will win the strike. I am on my way home.”²⁹⁷ Testimonies such as Bailey’s in 1913 meant that by 1920, the community was better informed and prepared in regard to coal companies’ use of strikebreakers. Furthermore in 1920, the well-known and published Massacre prevented coal operators from garnering unsuspecting men as strikebreakers as they had with Bailey in 1912. In 1912 to 1913, striking miners were converting and enlisting scabs, and sometimes these men were ignorant of the company’s methods. However, in 1920, the UMWA and striking miners were able to stay ahead of the coal operators. The miners at Matewan were not the only miners in Mingo County – or even in the tri-county area – seeking union recognition, and that had a direct impact on the differing climax and outcome of the 1912 and 1920 strikes.

Historian David Alan Corbin wrote that the most important outcome of the Paint-Cabin Creek Strikes was the southern West Virginia miners’ discovery of “unionism and the power of

²⁹⁵ Bailey, “A Strike Breakers Statement.”

²⁹⁶ Bailey, “A Strike Breakers Statement.”

²⁹⁷ Bailey, “A Strike Breakers Statement.”

collective action.”²⁹⁸ During the Paint and Cabin Creek strikes, the UMWA sprung at the chance to unionize the second most productive coal state – following Pennsylvania – by sending its top officials and providing ideological and financial support. However, the coal operators forcefully responded by withdrawing union recognition, importing strikebreakers, and hiring additional Baldwin-Felts detectives.²⁹⁹ Corbin wrote of the coal companies during the 1912 strikes, “[T]hey were determined not only to defeat the strike but to annihilate the union’s foothold on Paint Creek,” which they eventually did as the “power and brutality of the coal establishment” revealed itself and “the magnitude and expense” of the strike financially burdened the UMWA national office.³⁰⁰ By the spring of 1913, the UMWA – threatened with bankruptcy from feeding, clothing, and housing miners and families -- bent to the coal companies through settlement terms in conjunction with West Virginia Governor Hatfield.³⁰¹ Corbin argues that union officials were “intimidated by the brutality of the coal companies and bound by traditional union procedures,” and were “unable to provide the necessary leadership in what was fast becoming an extraordinary labor-management conflict.”³⁰² The leaders of the 1912 to 1913 strike failed in organizing the miners in Kanawha County, but young, rank-and-file members stepped forward and took the reins eight years later in Mingo County.

Even as the Paint-Cabin Creek strike was just beginning, these young miners were taking charge, garnering support from the Socialist Party where the UMWA faltered.³⁰³ Frank Keeney,

²⁹⁸ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 87.

²⁹⁹ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 87.

³⁰⁰ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 87-89.

³⁰¹ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 89.

³⁰² Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 89.

³⁰³ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 89; Frederick A. Barkey, *Working Class Radicals: The Socialist Party in West Virginia, 1898-1920* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2012), 78-123.

a twenty-four-year-old miner at Cabin Creek emerged from the strikers, journeying to the UMWA District 17 headquarters to ask for aid in arranging mass meetings and speakers in the strike zone to help raise moral and financial support. Upon their refusal, Keeney unofficially commandeered leadership of the strike and turned to the Socialist Party for support.³⁰⁴ Corbin draws attention to Socialist support during the strike and the resulting growth and popularity of the party in West Virginia.³⁰⁵ In addition to publicizing coal companies' transgressions against the miners, especially in *Socialist and Labor Star* based in Huntington, West Virginia, the Socialist party used the concept of direct action to validate fighting and violence.³⁰⁶ The Paint-Cabin Creek strike entered the "dimensions of a life-or-death struggle," and miners were ready for and did engage in the fight.³⁰⁷ Corbin states, "The operators had encouraged violence for years; the situation became more deadly when the miners made it a sword that cut both ways."³⁰⁸ The strike did end – after many deaths, multiple arrests, and an extension of the strike on the part of the Cabin Creek miners – in the form of a resolution between the miners and coal operators, but the terms of settlement in Kanawha County did not apply to the neighboring coal fields in Mingo and Logan counties. Another mine war would be fought, and the next time miners and operators alike would have more experience with radical, militant violence.

³⁰⁴ Corbin, *Life, Work, and the Rebellion*, 89; Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields*, 16.

³⁰⁵ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 90-95; Barkey, *Working Class Radicals*, 78-123.

³⁰⁶ Corbin, *Life, Work, and the Rebellion*, 90; Examples of violence can be found in Barkey, *Working Class Radicals*, 82-85.

³⁰⁷ Chaplin, "Violence," 731-732.

³⁰⁸ Corbin, *Life, Work, and the Rebellion*, 91.

Conclusion

The resolution of the strikes and the United States' entrance into World War I in 1917 kept the mining population relatively content and subdued as higher demand for smokeless coal caused wages to rise.³⁰⁹ The Paint and Cabin Creek strikes parallel and foreshadowed the strike at Matewan in many ways, but a 1912 letter by Socialist reporter Sigurd Russell published in the *Socialist and Labor Star* best anticipated the struggle to come. Although he did not know such a fight would arrive in 1920, Russell wrote:

“We will have to fight her all over again,” is what the Paint Cabin Creek boys are saying today. But they[sic] next time they are going to win. And to win they are willing to starve, to freeze and fight again. They well know that if they had held out a few more days, that they would have bettered their conditions ... And even the militia cannot keep them from winning their next strike.³¹⁰

Mother Jones held a similar opinion. She visited Matewan prior to the strike, attempting to prepare the men to respond to the company's actions.³¹¹ Because the miners at Paint and Cabin Creeks were largely unsuccessful in their demands to end the mine-guard system, the use of Baldwin-Felts agents was repeated in Mingo County. Furthermore, the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek strike introduced new labor leaders who would become prominent figures and significantly affect the outcome of the 1920 strike. In November 1916, UMWA organizer Frank Keeney, who had, during the 1912 strikes, turned to the Socialist Party for help, was elected president of UMWA District 17 and Fred Mooney was elected secretary-treasurer.³¹² The end of World War I led to a collapse in the coal market, and campaigns to unionize Logan and Mingo counties in 1919 and

³⁰⁹ Corbin, *Life, Work, and the Rebellion*, 100; West Virginia State Archives, “West Virginia’s Mine Wars”; Mourat, “A History of Coal Mining,” 45.

³¹⁰ “‘Fight ‘Er Over Again’ Say Paint Creek Miners,” *Socialist and Labor Star* (Huntington, WV), May 30, 1912.

³¹¹ “Smokey” Mose Adkins, Matewan Development Center Records, 13.

³¹² West Virginia State Archives, “West Virginia’s Mine Wars”; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 100.

1920 brought an end to the short-lived peace in the coalfields. In the fall of 1919, coal companies lowered miners' wages in southern West Virginia just as the U.S. Coal Commission granted a wage increase for union miners. Non-union miners in Mingo County responded by going on strike in the spring of 1920.³¹³ On May 6, 1920, Mooney and labor leader Bill Blizzard spoke to around 3,000 miners at Matewan, and over the next two weeks, around 1,500 miners joined more than twenty UMWA locals in the area.³¹⁴ Subsequently, miners in southern West Virginia once again experienced evictions from company property and the return of brutality from the Baldwin-Felts guards. In a maneuver to maintain power over striking employees by preventing unionization, coal operators in Matewan's coalfield hurled themselves into one of the largest armed labor struggles of the twentieth century.

Although miners in Mingo County were already striking, the evictions of union families from company towns in Matewan initiated fervent class warfare in southern West Virginia. In his Matewan Development Center interview, miner "Smokey" Mose Adkins described some of the events prior to the Matewan Massacre:

[Mother Jones] was an old lady. She just didn't ... give a damn for nothin' and she'd come to see us. And ... she told us exactly what they'd do to us. Well, we already knew that ... She went back and now, made one or two trips to come back. And then, why, they had struck up at Stone Mountain. That was a little mine right behind ... Matewan. [The miners of Stone Mountain] come[sic] out on the strike, so they'd fired all their men and notice [they] had a camp just outside of Matewan town... Lived right along by the side of the road. We'd go up there, you know, and play cards and things like that, and then [the company] decided they[sic] was gonna get rid of them too. Get them out of [there], so they sent for the Baldwin-Felts men to come put them out of the houses.³¹⁵

³¹³ West Virginia State Archives, "West Virginia's Mine Wars"; Mourat, "A History of Coal Mining," 43; For information of the political atmosphere of Matewan in 1920, Bailey, "The Progressive Era?," in *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 88-123.

³¹⁴ West Virginia State Archives, "West Virginia's Mine Wars"; Hadsell and Coffey, "From Law and Order," 282-283.

³¹⁵ "Smokey" Mose Adkins, Matewan Development Center Records, 13; Examples of leases for company housing can be found in: U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Interstate Commerce, *Conditions in the Coal Fields of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio*, Hearings (70th

Contrary to Hadsell and Coffey's portrayal of Baldwin-Felts guards as simple company law enforcement, Adkins foreshadowed unsavory actions taken toward unionized miners. The Baldwin-Felts detectives' reputation for lawlessness and violence – earned during the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek strikes almost a decade earlier – remained unchanged in Matewan. White, native-born union miner Jim Backus was unsure the miners knew the severe violence they were about to face in the months to come. He said in his interview, “[The company] was having them fellows all throwed[sic] out of their buildings and that’s where ...all about where it all started[sic]... and from [the shootings] on everybody – ‘course they was[sic] all expecting it anyhow – all the miners expecting[sic] trouble anyway, but they didn’t know it was going to come like that.”³¹⁶ Evicting miners from their homes was the first physical action taken against unionization by the Stone Mountain Coal Corporation in 1920 – an action that led to forced community building between people of differing ethnicities in the Lick Creek Tent Colony.

Congress, 1st Session) Vol. I & II (Washington, 1928), 1249; Sullivan, *Coal Men and Coal Towns*, 180-182.

³¹⁶ Jim Backus, Matewan Development Center Records, 16-17.

CHAPTER IV

“TO MAKE THE COMPANY COME TO THEIR MILK”:

MAKING COMMUNITY IN TENT COLONIES DURING THE 1920 STRIKE

“There are about 300 of us here in Lick Creek, living in tents. I have been living in a tent ever since June 1, and if it takes that to make the company come to their milk, I am willing to stay there five years, and the men all feel the same way ... we will never go to work for them until they do sign up.”

- Martin Justice, letter to the Editor, November 1, 1920³¹⁷

In an attempt to ostracize union miners from the security and creature comforts of the company town, and ultimately break their will to strike, Stone Mountain Coal Company evicted known union men and their families from company-owned properties in Matewan and into tent colonies.³¹⁸ After the United Mine Workers of America’s major campaign to unionize the southern West Virginia coalfields in January of 1920, about 3,000 miners along the West Virginia-Kentucky line in the Tug River Valley joined the union resulting in their immediate termination per company policy. Baldwin-Felts detectives forcibly removed those who refused to leave houses in the camp.

By banishing mining families into tent colonies, the coal company actually contributed to the union movement and strike. In these tent colonies, miners’ and their families’ forced reliance on one another for survival and companionship presented opportunities for informal everyday exchanges that encouraged miner and union solidarity against coal interests. These exchanges

³¹⁷ Martin Justice, letter to the editor, *United Mine Workers Journal (UMWJ)*, November 1, 1920, 17.

³¹⁸ While Stone Mountain Coal Company was the actual company operating in Matewan and Red Jacket was one of the company’s camps, interviewees almost exclusively use the terms “Red Jacket Coal Company,” “Red Jacket,” and “Red Jacket Junior,” when referring to the events surrounding coal mining in Matewan around 1912-1922. There are also interviews in which the interviewee uses “Stony Mountain Coal Company.”

were just as important to a growing community unity as were more formal exchanges among working male miners. The oral histories provide evidence of comradery and unity within the tent colony, as previously porous borders that segregated miners within the community shifted to allow cooperation and collaboration among Matewan's mining population. Miners from the Stone Mountain Coal Company wrote to the *United Mine Workers Journal* about their unity and determination to outlast the company's blacklist. One miner insisted that the "members of our local ... are standing firm. They are standing like a stonewall[sic]. If it takes ten years to win this strike, we will be right here."³¹⁹ Class out-weighed other factors in the fight against a nonunion mining company; the workingmen desired fair working conditions and decent pay through union recognition and negotiation, no matter the time it took to achieve those goals.

In tent cities set up by striking and unionized miners, mining families depended on shared resources and skills, as well as donations from the UMWA and non-mining citizens of Matewan. Although the miners and their families had little, they shared and maintained their stance against the coal company for almost two and a half years. As Martin Justice, who had been living in a hastily built tent city in Lick Creek with 300 others for six months, remembered: "If it takes that [living in tent cities] to make the company come to their milk, I am willing to stay there five years and the men all feel the same way."³²⁰ That Justice would refer to the miners as the company's "milk" suggests his belief that the company's dependence on them for their existence would ultimately force the company to allow unionization.

³¹⁹ T.H. Johnson, letter to the editor, *UMWJ*, August 1, 1921.

³²⁰ Martin Justice, letter to the editor, *UMWJ*, November 1, 1920, 17.

Thirteen detectives arrived by train on May 19, 1920, including the brothers, Albert and Lee Felts, of Thomas L. Felts, co-founder of the Baldwin-Felts Detectives.³²¹ As rain drizzled down on the Red Jacket camp, the Detectives removed families from company homes at gunpoint, their belongings dumped into the streets. Matewan Chief of Police Sid Hatfield, supporter of the union and the strike, sought to stop the evictions, claiming such an action was unauthorized under the law. As the detectives prepared to leave on the 4 o'clock train that same evening, Chief of Police Hatfield and Mayor Cable C. Testerman accompanied by a host of begrudged miners confronted Albert Felts seeking his arrest. Felts in turn tried to arrest Chief of Police Hatfield, resulting in a shootout that left ten dead. Seven Baldwin-Felts detectives, including the Felts brothers, two miners, and Mayor Testerman lie dead in the street. Coined "The Matewan Massacre," the events in Matewan on May 19, 1920, launched miners, coal companies, the state government, and eventually the United States Government, into one of the largest armed conflicts in America's history.

Chief of Police Hatfield and seventeen miners were tried and acquitted for murder in early 1921. He became a hero to the striking miners. On August 1, 1921, Chief of Police Hatfield and his friend and deputy Ed Chambers were gunned down – allegedly by Baldwin-Felts Detectives – on the McDowell County Courthouse steps.³²² Chief of Police Hatfield and

³²¹ For background on the creation and main purpose of the Baldwin-Felts Detectives, see Hadsell and Coffey, "From Law and Order," 268-286.

³²² No one knows exactly who murdered the men: Mary Mourat claimed labor spy and Baldwin-Felts agent C.E. Lively committed the murder. Most sources claim the gunmen were Baldwin-Felts agents seeking revenge. Mourat, "A History of Coal Mining, 49; Former Attorney General of West Virginia Howard B. Lee wrote, "Instantly, the trio of guards began firing, while the notorious mine guard, Hughley Lucas, turned and fired a number of shots against the stone wall[sic] of the courthouse to make it appear Chief of Police Hatfield and Chambers were armed and had fired first at the mine guards, but missed. About a year later Lucas told me that he emptied his pistol against the courthouse wall," Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 68.

Chambers were in McDowell County on charges of shooting at a coal facility. Both men came to the courthouse without their guns, unprepared for the ambush on their lives. The murders of Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers acted as the catalyst for the Miners' March on West Virginia's capital, Charleston, to overthrow the mine guard system. Miners attempted to gather in Kanawha County, marching fifty miles, but Logan County Sheriff Don Chafin sided with the coal barons claiming, "No armed mob will cross Logan County."³²³ He assembled a group of deputies, mine guards, and local volunteers at Blair Mountain along the Logan-Kanawha county line. Tensions festered until August 29, 1920, when the skirmishes escalated to a battle, the Battle of Blair Mountain. During this time miners were gassed and "crudely made explosion bombs" were dropped from planes hired by the Logan County Coal Operators' Association until federal troops arrived over a week after the battle began to suppress the uprising.³²⁴ Federal air power accompanied the troops that arrived to disarm the rebellion, and Brigadier General William Mitchell of the United States Air Service told labor leaders that he would end the march by dropping gas bombs and would not hold fire if the miners did not disperse.³²⁵ The West Virginia Mine Wars Museum exhibit on the conflict notes that while the air power was never used, it is the only time in U.S. history that the U.S. Government planned to bomb its own citizens.³²⁶ Between 10,000 and 20,000 miners are estimated to have been present at the Battle of Blair Mountain. They became known as the "Redneck Army," for the red bandanas they wore in solidarity. On the route to the capital, miners – and sometimes their families – lived in tents;

³²³ Molly Moore, "Stepping into the Mine Wars," *The Appalachian Voice* 3 (June/July 2016): 9, accessed September 2, 2018, <http://appvoices.org/thevoice/2016-issue-3-junejuly/>.

³²⁴ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 223.

³²⁵ Mourat, "A History of Coal Mining," 50; Laurie, "The United States Army and the Return to Normalcy in Labor Dispute Interventions," 1-24.

³²⁶ Moore, "Stepping into the Mine Wars," 9.

however, these tent colonies were originally established when miners were removed from their company homes in January of 1920.³²⁷

Oral histories show families were forcibly removed from houses in the company town, as the accommodations were no longer the responsibility of the company.³²⁸ Of the merciless evictions and creation of the ramshackle tent colonies, journalist and social activist McAllister Coleman wrote:

I once drove up on a union truck loaded with tents and food to the outskirts of a town where an hour before sunup[sic] six families had been set out. Through slashing rains, our truck sloshed along a valley trail to the coal camp where we found the women in drenched house dresses trying to calm their frightened children. They had taken refuge under the shed back of a small church. The men were standing ankle-deep in the creek water that had overflowed its banks and was swirling past the doorsills of the company houses. In the sulphur-yellow water there was a confusion of broken bedsteads, cribs, chairs, tables, toys.³²⁹

Miners from Red Jacket were situated in open fields in North Matewan near Cheap John's, a store where townspeople and miners went to trade.³³⁰ This area is sometimes referred to as "Blackberry City" in the interviews. Harsh living conditions in the tent colony at Lick Creek and

³²⁷ Lon Savage, "Matewan Massacre," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia, last modified 13 September 2013, accessed 29 August 2018. <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/1576>; *This Week in West Virginia History*, "Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers Shot in Welch: August 1, 1921," produced by Don Powell, aired August 1, 2018, on WV Public Broadcasting, <http://www.wvpublic.org/post/sid-hatfield-and-ed-chambers-shot-welch-august-1-1921#stream/0>; Moore, "Stepping into the Mine Wars," *The Appalachian Voice* 3 (2016): 8-9; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields*, 200-224.

³²⁸ Descriptions and examples of housing leases and, "yellow dog contracts," can be found in: Crandall A. Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991): 127-131; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 9-10, 67, 118; Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 78-83; Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia*, 47-57; and *West Virginia: Documents in the History of a Rural-Industrial State*, ed. Ronald L. Lewis and John C. Hennen, Jr. (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1991): 181-187.

³²⁹ McAllister Coleman, *Men and Coal* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1943), 101-102.

³³⁰ Mose "Smokey" Adkins, Matewan Development Center Records, 11; Vicie Blackburn, Matewan Development Center Records, 6-8.

Blackberry City forced Matewan mining families to rely on each other for survival and companionship. Families were able to survive the grim, comfortless conditions in the tents through the practice of skills like canning, hunting, folk medicine, husbandry, and gardening – skill sets miners brought to the mines from their lives before coal. These survival modes helped create community bonds – inter-family, inter-ethnic, and inter-racial bonds – that ultimately helped miners to join together to move toward community solidarity and unionization.

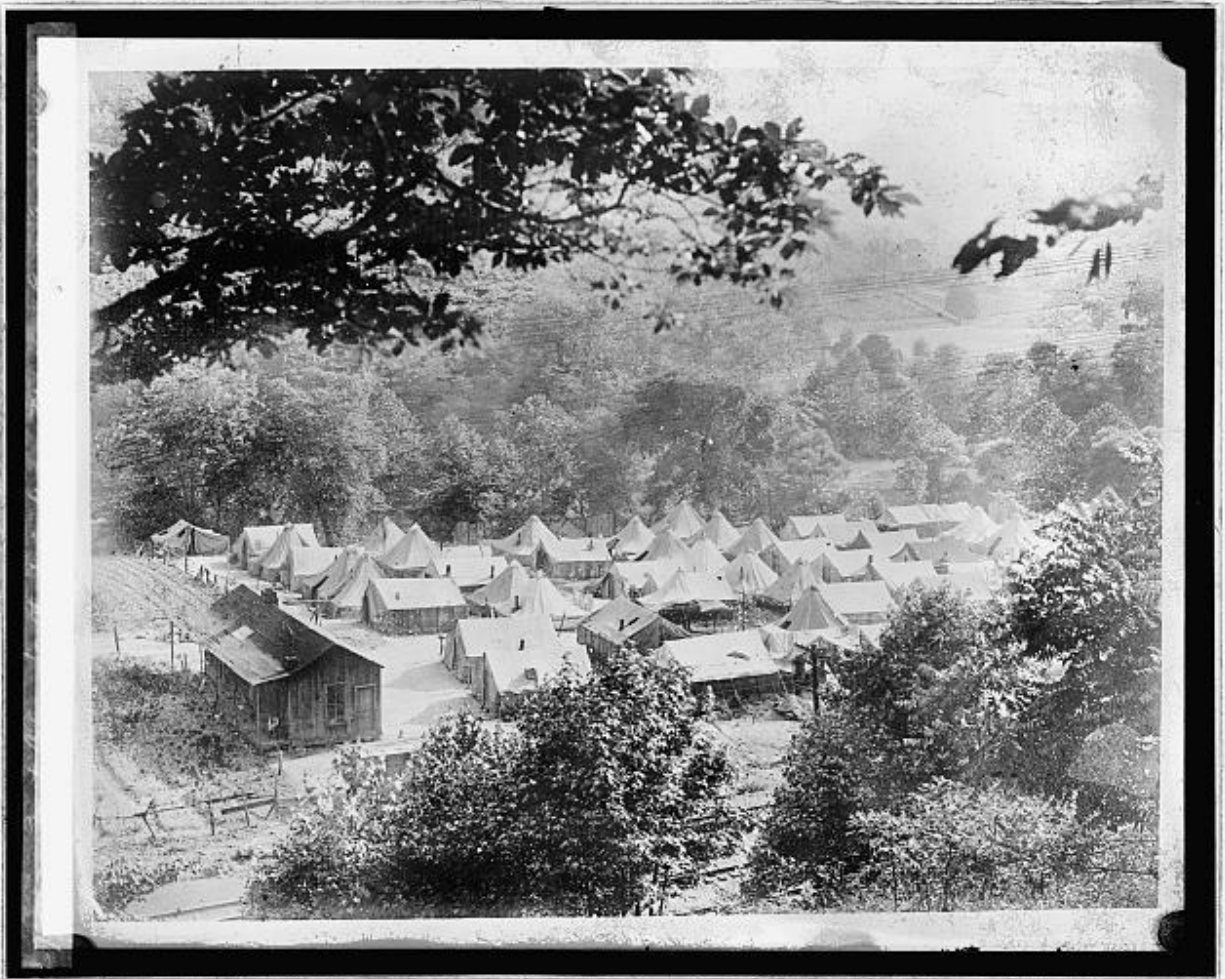


Figure 4. “Tent Colony of Striking Union Miners, Lick Creek, WV, April 12, 1922.” Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Washington, D.C.



Figure 5. "Tents, Lick Creek, WV, April 12, 1922." Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Washington, D.C.



Figure 6. A tent of the Lick Creek, WV, tent colony, April 12, 1922. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Washington, D.C.



Group of striking Union Miners
in the Lick Creek District of West
Virginia. #737v 4/12/22

Figure 7. "Group of Striking Union Miners in the Lick Creek District of West Virginia, April 12, 1922." Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Washington, D.C.

Survival Modes Under Harsh Strike Conditions

Families living in the tent colony had to be resourceful. It is important to remember that many families in West Virginia's coal mines were living in poverty even before the strikes. Historian Ronald L. Lewis equated coal camps to ethnic ghettos that served as transnational communities for immigrants in industrial cities. While there were great racial and cultural differences among the miners in the southern coalfields of Mingo County, there was one

common characteristic – most had experience in farming, a skill that would prove invaluable during the strike years in Matewan.³³¹ The hardships presented by life in the tents required methods of survival that many miners possessed from pre-industrial, subsistence living. The majority of these skills revolved around gardening, animal husbandry, and the preservation of food to make it through harsh winters. Skills, shared between families, were a substantial factor of community building in the tents.

An anecdote from Richard Brewer illuminated family hardships. He was asked about attending school in the mines and mentions packed lunches. His memory of schoolyard lunches reveals the economic standing of people in his community:

What we'd eat, we'd pack. And about all we had, you see -- and we didn't even have light bread, they'd bake biscuits -- and we'd pack our lunch in a little brown bag or a little, what we call[sic], four pound yard bucket. And ... my mom would fry what you call 'bean cakes.' She'd cook beans, and then she'd take the beans after we'd eat from them, and she'd mash them up. Make bean cakes out of them. Our potatoes the same way. We had our own cattle, so we had milk and butter. We'd take us a little jar of milk and butter and sandwich, or maybe peanut butter and jelly and maybe them bean cakes and things. That's what we had for lunch. We didn't have no[sic] lunch [provided by the school] at all 'til the last year that I went to school, the eighth grade.³³²

Clearly, even before the strikes, miners and their families struggled to keep themselves fed and nourished on such low pay. These poor conditions were only amplified in tent colonies.

Surviving photographs provide powerful pictorial evidence of the tent colonies as cramped, dilapidated spaces. Figures 4 through 6 (above), depicting the Lick Creek tent colony in 1922, demonstrate the tent colony's sprawling size, the ramshackle construction, and crowded living conditions. In Figure 5, for example, about a dozen people—mainly women and children—lived in one, fairly small tent. These residents are poking their heads out of holes in the tent,

³³¹ Ronald L. Lewis, "Appalachian Restructuring in Historical Perspective: Coal, Culture, and Social Change in West Virginia," *Urban Studies* 30, no. 2 (1993): 301-302

³³² Richard Brewer, Matewan Development Center Records, 7.

suggesting that the tent did not protect its inhabitants from the elements. Figure 6—shows jagged pieces of lumber, soiled textiles, and spartan furnishings—also suggesting that miners in the tent colony lived in hastily built, poorly constructed, unclean quarters. As miners lost their jobs and income, dependence on the community outside of the mining camp as well as one's neighbors and their skills became crucial for survival. Without allegiance to each other, miners and their families would have been worse off in the tent colony, and it is unlikely the strike could have been sustained for twenty-eight bloody, violent months.

Jennie Grimmett, the daughter of a native-born white miner, offered a gloomy story about living in the tents that illustrates the poor quality of life in the colony. Born in 1917, Grimmett was only around three years old when her father joined the union, and her family was removed from their home. She remembered life in the tents as depressing and spartan:

[It was a] little on the devastating side, after living in a house and having large rooms and a yard to play in, and then be confined with two tents; one for your beds – we all had to sleep in the same room – and then one for your kitchen. And the furniture that we had, we couldn't bring it all out of the house, we just brought what we could use in the tents. Beds and a chest to put our clothes in, and table, stove, and a cabinet ... [The rest of the furniture] was left in the house. By the grace of God, they didn't bother it. So when they did let us go back, it was there.³³³

Grimmett estimated her family spent two years in the tent colony at Matewan, being supported by the UMWA strike relief fund for the majority of that time. She specifically remembered the union providing rice, beans, flour, milk, and occasionally eggs, “which we's[sic] very happy when we had the eggs.”³³⁴ One time, Grimmett's aunt had prepared cornbread as dinner for the evening, but the tent ended up catching on fire. She said, “Oh, I was ever so hungry, and [the tent] burned down on top of that table of food. To make ends meet, we couldn't destroy it, we

³³³ Jennie Grimmett, Matewan Development Center Records, 3-4.

³³⁴ Jennie Grimmett, Matewan Development Center Records, 5-6.

just had to brush the tent where it had burned, the ashes...blow it off, brush it off, and eat it.”³³⁵

Grimmett’s recollection of eating burnt, ash-coated cornbread speaks to the desperation in which miners and their families lived.

Grimmett’s father worked odd jobs for people with no connection to the mine while on strike in order to bring money home to supplement their union relief check. This money was mainly used to buy lamp oil to keep lights on in the tent. The family also scavenged stray coal that washed down the creek in order to keep their stove fire lit. Some of the men, including Grimmett’s father, hunted to provide their families with meat. Grimmett cherished a memory of her father catching a rabbit, stating the family had “the best meal that evening.”³³⁶

Families’ survival depended on teamwork as well as charity from their fellow Mingo County residents. Grimmett explained the dire need for resourcefulness in the tent years:

[A]ll the miners at that time... People survived by getting things out of the mountain, you know, food. And some of the people that wasn’t connected with the mines, was real good...supportive. They let the men work for ‘em, you know. They’d give ‘em extra food, or give them extra money to help them survive, but it was rough.³³⁷

Farming and food preservation skills also helped the families survive during their arduous years in the tents. William Aliff mentioned his parents’ time on a farm in Virginia before moving to Mingo County in the early 1900s. People often continued growing their own foodstuffs after moving to mining communities. Historian David Alan Corbin calls gardening a “continuation of skills and habits that miners had acquired before they entered the coal fields.”³³⁸ Before entering the mines, many of the white natives practiced subsistence farming and hunting. Almost half of the Southern African American migrants to southern West Virginia had previously been share

³³⁵ Jennie Grimmett, Matewan Development Center Records, 15.

³³⁶ Jennie Grimmett, Matewan Development Center Records, 6.

³³⁷ Jennie Grimmett, Matewan Development Center Records, 6.

³³⁸ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 33.

croppers, and many European immigrants came from largely rural economies, suggesting they probably had some sort of agrarian experience as well.³³⁹ Aliff said, “We always had a garden and raised food . . . We never had a shortage of food, because there’s plenty of land around through here, you know, and you didn’t have to pay anything on it if you wanted a garden.”³⁴⁰ As Aliff states, sustainable food practices kept miners from spending funds on foodstuffs in the company store. Every bit of savings helped in an industry with poor wages and irregular employment.

Jim Backus, 87 years old at the time of his interview, also remembered his father keeping animals to provide for the family. They kept hogs and cows, including a milk cow.³⁴¹ However, heavy reliance on the land proved difficult for the families in the winter months. Grimmett said her family spent the majority of their time in the kitchen tent until bedtime during the colder months. With limited resources, Grimmett recalled that families depended on the union to provide, which they did.³⁴² Many of their neighbors benefitted from these practices, as food sources in the camp were often shared in friendship over the years. Residents taught those in tent colonies skills such as food preservation, butchering, tanning, and gardening.

Oftentimes the responsibility to maintain gardens and creating a subsistence lifestyle fell to the wife and younger children of a miner’s family. Ruby Mounts Aliff does not mention time in the tent colony, but her description of her mother’s homemaking skills exhibits abilities that were commonly held among the wives of miners. Her mother quilted, canned fruits and vegetables, pickled vegetables and pork parts, and smoked meats. The family also butchered

³³⁹ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 33-34.

³⁴⁰ William Aliff, Matewan Development Center Records, 35-36.

³⁴¹ Jim Backus, Matewan Development Center Records, 5-7.

³⁴² Jennie Grimmett, Matewan Development Center Records, 16.

their own animals.³⁴³ She mentioned the busy days of the summer as the family put up food for the winter:

My mother, she'd[sic] big barrels of pickled beans and pickled corn, you know, and they had their hog they'd pickled pigs' feet and ears. And they smoked their hams and fixed them ... They had two beef[sic] to butcher ... And Mom canning that meat and cooking it on an old cook stove. And a tub outside on a fireplace with the jars sitting down in it, you know, and papers keeping them from touching.³⁴⁴

With these skill sets, West Virginians were capable of providing for themselves in the cold, dead days of winter. These same skills--a tradition of foraging, gardening, pickling, and canning--proved integral to sustaining miners in tent colonies during the strike.

Although miners had allies in the city of Matewan, medical care was difficult to find. Multiple interviews mention company doctors as good, reasonable men, but they were not permitted to treat blackballed miners or their families during the strike. Because the only source of medical care came from the company, tent dwellers were once again left to fend for themselves. Jennie Grimmett discussed the ways in which the community relied on "home grown" medicine practiced by older women:

You learned to survive. Back in those days, there was so many things that elderly woman[sic] knew what to do to make...roots, herbs. You'd be surprised the things that grows[sic] in these mountains and these fields, that you can use for medicine. And these old women knew how to make it ... We learned to survive using herbs, weeds, whatever people calls[sic] [it] today. You'd be surprised that[sic] medication is out there.³⁴⁵

Another interviewee, T.R. Ball, mentioned the use of folk medicine as a way of life for native-born miners at the time of the strike:

Every fall ... we'd gather [herbs] and tie them up for the winter to make medicine out of them. We'd get every kind of [herb] grand-daddy and them knew about, and we'd tie them up and hang them up and let them dry out. Any of us get[sic] sick, why they'd knowed[sic] what to do. They take them[sic] [herbs], boil them, put a little whiskey in

³⁴³ Mattie Ruby Mounts Aliff, Matewan Development Center Records, 32.

³⁴⁴ Mattie Ruby Mounts Aliff, Matewan Development Center Records, 32.

³⁴⁵ Jennie Grimmett, Matewan Development Center Records, 7.

them, and fix it. Give it to us. That's all we had to doctor with. [Maybe one] doctor around here.³⁴⁶

This folk medicine, often practiced by women, proved instrumental to striking families in often unsanitary tent colonies with few other resources at their disposal. Without this knowledge, striking families would have endured greater suffering at the hands of the company's blacklist.

Unmistakably, survival was the primary goal while living in tents for almost twenty-four months. The feat of living through the extreme varying West Virginia seasons, lacking professional medical care, and depending on charity and homegrown food sources could have been even more challenging had Matewan's mining population not lived with a 'make due' attitude. The persistence of all miners' agricultural customs helped keep the community stable, paving the way for inter-family, inter-ethnic, and inter-racial interactions and the creation of a community culture.

Creating Community Bonds in a Time of Struggle

While many oral histories do not specifically mention how the tent colony brought together families from different backgrounds, they provide examples of growing community unity – a mixed community of native-born whites, immigrants, and African Americans. In 1910, Mingo County's mining population was approximately 6.4% African American, 6.1% foreign-born white, 1.9% American-born white with foreign or mixed parentage, and 85.6% American-born white with American-born parentage; however, oral histories like the interviews of Barrios, Backus, and Fullen denote the rapid growth, especially among African Americans and

³⁴⁶ T.R. Ball, Matewan Development Center Records.

immigrants, between 1916 and 1918.³⁴⁷ Records of the ethnic composition of the tent colony at Lick Creek could not be found, but the West Virginia Department of Mines Annual Report of 1920 provides information about the nationalities of employees in Mingo County in the fiscal year ending June 30, 1920. The official record reported the employment of 513 African Americans; 33 Poles; 1 Romanian; 18 Russians; 6 Slavs; and 29 Spaniards in the county's mines, while the oral histories provide evidence of the employment of Italian immigrants – at least in Matewan.³⁴⁸ Joe Trotter, Jr., for his work on class and race in the southern West Virginia coalfield, compiled West Virginia Bureau of Mines reports from 1915-1929. In 1921, the Mingo County mining population consisted of 518 African Americans, 704 foreign-born whites, and 1,716 American-born whites.³⁴⁹ Notwithstanding holes in documentary evidence, extant photos again offer additional signs of interethnic and interracial exchanges that occurred on a daily level. Figure 7 presents a diverse group of striking union miners and their families in the Lick Creek tent colony. About half of those in the photograph are African American and the other half are white; they are an integrated crowd, with black and white miners standing and sitting side-by-side. While there is much we cannot know about the relationships between the people in this photo, it suggests some level of interethnic exchange and community formation in the Lick Creek tent colony, exchanges and relationships that few historians have acknowledged or analyzed in their work on the topic. This diversity was not new – miners and their families had lived in fairly mixed communities in company housing since the early twentieth century – and those diverse communities provided some opportunity for building positive alliances across

³⁴⁷ “Annual Report of the Department of Mines.” West Virginia Department of Mines, Charleston, WV, 1910.

³⁴⁸ “Annual Report of the Department of Mines.” West Virginia Department of Mines, Charleston, WV, 1920.

³⁴⁹ Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color*, 70.

racial lines, alliances that would aid them in uniting against the coal company during the 1920-1922 strike.

Ronald Garay focuses on UMWA supported coal strikes in West Virginia during the 1970s, his analysis of the lasting impact of community ties in West Virginia's mining towns illustrates the way in which miners came together to fight for their larger goals. He wrote, "[M]ost of the adult male population of a coal mining town is engaged in the singular occupation of coal mining. And when something like a strike threatens that livelihood, there is a unity of purpose and determination – a closing of the ranks, as it were – that draws the folks together. 'Strength in numbers' is not a cliché to coal miners and their families; it is a way of life."³⁵⁰ Dependence on each other within the colony – for home grown food and medicine, for example – strengthened the community bonds among union men, but the sheer number of striking miners, including the assistance they received from people in the larger community, also keep them afloat in tent colonies. Matewan's businessmen and their families, usually men with 'inbetween' status, offered support throughout the strike. Without this "strength in numbers," the two-year survival of miners in the tents would have been unlikely.

Evictions at Red Jacket Junior Coal Company once again displayed the brutality and viciousness of the Baldwin-Felts agents employed by the company – discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. Mose "Smokey" Adkins relived the experience of Baldwin-Felts Detectives hired as mine guards entering residences without permission. He began working at Red Jacket Junior Coal Company in 1913. Originally his job was greasing the cars on tracks coming in and out of the mine, as he was only 12 or 13 when he started working. After that Adkins moved to the braking line for the cars and held that position until 1918 when he began working at the

³⁵⁰ Garay, *U.S. Steel and Gary, West Virginia*, 129-130.

company's power-producing location, which he called "Sprigg." Around 1919, he started a position on the brake line at New Howard/Gates Coal Company in Matewan.³⁵¹ Adkins told the interviewer he did not live in company housing, instead living with his parents at Pigeon Creek.³⁵² During his two or three years at New Howard, Adkins crossed paths with union organizers attempting to enter the company housing area of New Howard/Gates Coal Company camp. He remembered:

They come some[sic] organizers in [there]. Union organizers and they wouldn't let them come in the camp, so they had a meeting down below the camp between...what they call Gates and New Howard at that time ... We all went down [there] and on Saturday and joined the union [sic].³⁵³

Adkins and his parents moved into housing at the New Howard coal mine around the same time that mine guards arrived at the Red Jacket camp in Matewan to prevent unionization. Adkins could remember mine guards shooting into the river with high-powered rifles and creating "the awfulest[sic] noise you've ever heard!"³⁵⁴ Adkins's mother had an unfortunate encounter with a mine guard:

[The mine guard] went to our house at the camp now, and went in... Just come and walked right in, and my daddy, he was gone too. [He] just begin[sic] takin' down things and when he'd find something he wanted, he'd just take it out and put it on the porch. I had a...little shotgun. A twenty gauge...one of them heavy bridge kind. It was a "Nitro Hunter," was the name of them, and I'd had it, bored it out for a sixteen gauge. He like[sic] that, and he took it out and put it on the porch... My mother told him, says, "That's my son's gun. Don't take it out." He said, "I'll take what I want." And he

³⁵¹ As previously explained with Stone Mountain/Red Jacket Coal Company, Mose Adkins refers to New Howard Coal Company as "Gates Coal Company," and "New Howard Coal Company." New Howard Coal Company was the operating business, and Gates was a mine/camp owned by the company.

³⁵² Mose "Smokey" Adkins's interview does not give any inclination about his ethnicity. Typically if the interviewee is African American, an immigrant, or the descendent of an immigrant the interviewers ask questions that highlight that experience. This interview does not provide that type of information.

³⁵³ Mose "Smokey" Adkins, Matewan Development Center Records, 6-8.

³⁵⁴ Mose "Smokey" Adkins, Matewan Development Center Records, 10.

threatened her. He told her he'd kick her down if she went out to get it. So she let him go and when I come home, why, I knew he was around [there] somewhere.³⁵⁵

After this experience, Adkins convinced his parents to move back into their home at Pigeon Creek, hoping to escape further intimidation by the mine guards. He went to his sister's home in Matewan, discovering there was a tent colony organized for miners in that area of the county. Instead of staying with his sister, Adkins moved into the tent colony at Rutherford Branch for two years, living there through two winters. He was supported by an UMWA relief fund, receiving five dollars a week while on strike. Adkins estimated the colony size around one hundred occupants, made up of miners and their families.³⁵⁶

Maggie Collins, born in Wyoming County, West Virginia, in 1894, lived in the tent colony at Blackberry City with her husband, Steve Collins, and their children in 1921. The daughter, Violet Collins, was only five months old when the Collins family moved to Matewan from McDowell County, West Virginia. The interviewer asked Maggie Collins about the living quarters within the tents:

I cooked on an old...coal stove. Yeah...we had a living room...living house...part living and a kitchen tent for the kitchen. And that's...we just lived the best we could[sic]... [There was] a separate tent for the kitchen ... For us there was a kitchen, and the rest of [the families] had to cook, sleep, and eat in the same place. They talked about it.³⁵⁷

Collins gave the impression that life in the tents was not that difficult due to their comparatively spacious lodgings as a large family; however, the Collins family only lived in Matewan for a short period of time. They moved in August because Steve Collins found work in Kentucky. While they were in Blackberry City, the union gave the family of six about fifteen dollars,

³⁵⁵ Mose "Smokey" Adkins, Matewan Development Center Records, 10.

³⁵⁶ Mose "Smokey" Adkins, Matewan Development Center Records, 10-11.

³⁵⁷ Maggie Collins, Matewan Development Center Records, 4-7.

compared to Adkins's five dollars, for a week for supplies.³⁵⁸ The most likely discrepancy in this amount of union relief is the size of the Collins family in contrast to Adkins as a single man.

The tent colony Adkins lived in was separate from the tent colony of miners from Red Jacket camp. At the time of the interviews, native-born white miner Jim Backus lived in the area of Matewan – Blackberry City – that was once covered with tents. The interviewer asked Backus about the “tent encampments.”³⁵⁹ The interviewer's choice of the word “encampment,” a word associated with war and military camps, suggests that residents lived against the backdrop of almost constant threats of violence from coal company cronies. Backus estimated that the community at Blackberry City was comprised of thirty to forty miners and their families. His brother-in-law lived in the tents, but Backus did not discuss anything besides the size.³⁶⁰ Backus also mentioned the community was placed on privately-owned land of pro-union families.³⁶¹

The Matewan Massacre created a schism in the town into pro-union and non-union factions.³⁶² Miners and their allies viewed the Massacre as, “a glorious instance of retributive justice,” while other residents saw the events as a “source of outrage and shame,” as the shootout did not reflect their “identity as a town.”³⁶³ Local and state chapters of philanthropic organizations like the Red Cross and the YMCA refused to offer aid to the inhabitants of the tent colonies. Historian Rebecca J. Bailey argues, “social affiliations directly influenced and were in

³⁵⁸ Maggie Collins, Matewan Development Center Records, 15.

³⁵⁹ After the association of miners with “radicals” and Socialists during the Paint and Cabin Creek strikes, strike violence increased to a level previously unseen. Through the use of guerilla warfare, miners, “aggressively, at times ruthlessly, attacked anything or anyone standing between them and their union. A man distributing anti-union material was castrated and left bleeding to death on railroad tracks.” Corbin, *Life, Work, and the Rebellion*, 89-92, 203; Barkey, *Working Class Radicals*; Jones, *Autobiography*, 148-168.

³⁶⁰ Jim Backus, Matewan Development Center Records, 22-23.

³⁶¹ Jim Backus, Matewan Development Center Records, 22-23.

³⁶² Bailey, *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 224.

³⁶³ Bailey, *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 224.

turn affected by the Massacre and the strike.”³⁶⁴ Bailey calls the divide in Matewan a “social-religious cleavage,” as Protestants in the town renounced the miners from the pulpit and helped organize the Mingo Militia to fight the striking men.³⁶⁵ Miners in the colony turned to evangelical Christian beliefs, singing hymns in the tents and using, “religious imagery to express their commitment to the struggle,” in letters to the *United Mine Workers Journal*.³⁶⁶ As public associations changed, miners depended on each other to create new social bonds, ultimately giving way to community solidarity in the face of significant opposition.

Like Adkins’s strike relief check from the UMWA, Hawthorne Burgraff, son of one of the native-born white organizers at Stone Mountain Coal Company, suggested most of the striking miners in the tents survived on foodstuffs and clothing from the union. But Burgraff also mentioned private donors.³⁶⁷ The amount of private help miners received demonstrates that the larger Matewan and Mingo County community supported the strikers. One example of community support came from Harry Berman’s father, a Russian Jewish immigrant who owned a clothing store. Harry Berman’s father not only supported the striking miners and their families by providing clothing; he also extended miners a helping hand by lending money and carrying the debt on his company books during the strike.³⁶⁸ Without private lands on which to pitch tents, help from union and private donations, and physical support from people like Chief of Police Sid Hatfield, outlasting the company would have proven difficult for the striking miners of Mingo County.

³⁶⁴ Bailey, *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 225.

³⁶⁵ Bailey, *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 225.

³⁶⁶ Bailey, *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 225.

³⁶⁷ Hawthorne Burgraff, Matewan Development Center Records, 6-8.

³⁶⁸ Harry Berman, Matewan Development Center Records, 7.

Bertha Collins Damron, the daughter of native-born white miner John Collins, was only two when her family moved into the tent colony in 1920. She recounted stories her father shared with her as a child and was the first interviewee to mention solidarity among the struggling striking families during their time in the tents:

[T]hey were all close, because they were all fighting for the same thing ... They shared. I've heard, you know, they'd get so many laughs through the years, 'cause a lot of the people still lived[sic]. And yes...they share, and...I guess especially the woman[sic] enjoyed their, you know, sharing maybe meals or what one didn't have the other helped... It was a tough life...Naturally [there were] hardships ... It was rough, but they survived. And never heard no complaints, you know? It didn't...people, I guess, didn't complain that much back then like they do now.³⁶⁹

Collins Damron's recollections of the meals and supplies shared by miner families in order to endure "a tough life" in the tents calls attention to a largely ignored element in labor histories of West Virginia. Few historians have examined the everyday relationships formed in the cramped tent conditions that forged class cohesion at Matewan. David Alan Corbin argued that miners developed a class consciousness through interracial cooperation that allowed miners to unite against the oppressive coal companies in West Virginia starting with the Paint-Cabin Creek Strikes in 1912. However, he keeps his focus on miners' more formal union activity, without acknowledging underlying social aspects of the mining population in the area.³⁷⁰ Oral histories suggest that these everyday exchanges in tent cities, the shared "tough life" described by Bertha Collins Damron, united families from different ethnic and racial backgrounds in ways that helped create community bonds.

³⁶⁹ Bertha Collins Damron, Matewan Development Center Records, 8.

³⁷⁰ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 52.

Conclusion

All communities had a part to play in surviving, and skills were likely shared across ethnic lines. Because most miners—both native- and foreign-born – arrived to the camp from largely rural economies based on some level of subsistence living – the quality of life in the tent colony was survivable if not slightly elevated beyond the rations the UMWA could provide per family. According to Venchie Morrell, “We made it, but it wasn’t the best in the world. But, anyway, it wasn’t the worst either.”³⁷¹ They relied on themselves and each other for food and health care, and that, along with support from the UMWA and the non-mining community, allowed striking miners to stand their ground against the company for over two years, notwithstanding the less than ideal end to the strike. After federal intervention at the Battle of Blair Mountain, miners returned to work. The UMWA lost almost half of its membership between 1921 and 1924. West Virginia would not see fully-recognized union mines until the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration.

³⁷¹ Venchie Morrell, Matewan Development Center Records, 6.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In 2015, I began research in the West Virginia Division of Culture and History Archives in Charleston, West Virginia, and I stumbled upon a few interviews from the Matewan Oral History Project. This led me to the large collection of the interviews and other Matewan Development Center documents at Appalachia State University (ASU) in Boone, North Carolina. I scheduled a trip to ASU and spent three days reading, photographing, and taking notes on the people of Matewan; these documents would become the basis of this study. It was not until I watched John Sayles's *Matewan* in September of 2017 that this project came to fruition. Watching Sayles retell the story of Matewan, I realized that West Virginians, and Americans more generally, have a simplified understanding of the Mine Wars, one that has been perpetuated in popular culture and in West Virginia's public schools. Conjecture perforates this understanding; public opinion and historical fact become one. The perception about the history of West Virginia coal culture, including the interethnic and community-level exchanges that helped define that culture, skews the truth.

Ronald L. Lewis and Philip S. Foner's praise of the film for its contributions to West Virginia and U.S. labor history overlook the historical and educational shortcomings of Sayles's film.³⁷² Both historians note that their colleagues harshly judge Sayles's depiction of the Matewan Massacre as an isolated event, his lackluster attempt to depict unionization, and his confusing portrayal of black and foreign workers as strikebreakers, or scabs, and white natives primarily as the unionized, striking workforce. Historians like Melvyn Dubofsky, John

³⁷² Ronald L. Lewis, "Review of *Matewan*, Produced by Peggy Rajski," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 3 (December 1988): 1047-1048; Foner, "Matewan," 35-39.

Newsinger, and Stephen Brier save their most trenchant critique for Sayles's portrayal of an ethnocentrically divided workforce in early-twentieth-century Mingo County.³⁷³ The analysis in this thesis agrees with the critiques of Dubofsky, Newsinger, and Brier. Sayles's film characterizes black miners as "replacement workers," more commonly referred to as "scabs," as early as the third scene. The fight scene between black and white miners along the rail line outside of Matewan is atypical and hyperbolized as compared to testimony in oral history interviews conducted between 1989 and 1990.³⁷⁴ Lewis claims historians will struggle with the film because it portrays black and foreign workers almost exclusively as strikebreakers, "although from the very beginning union militancy and leadership among miners in southern West Virginia stemmed from blacks, native whites, and foreigners."³⁷⁵ Sayles's *Matewan* undermines the importance of the African American migrant miners and foreign-born miners in unionization drives during the West Virginia Mine Wars starting already in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Perhaps the loudest and most influential at the time, the voices of minority miners remain unheard in the popular and scholarly histories nearly a century after the Massacre and thirty years after the release of the film.

Matewan remains a cornerstone in the historical memory of the Matewan Massacre and the Mine Wars. For many years after the events in Matewan and the murders of Chief of Police Hatfield and his deputy, citizens of the community would not discuss the tensions in place. Whether it was fear of private or legal retaliation, people felt it was too dangerous to discuss.

³⁷³ Melvyn Dubofsky, "Review of *Matewan*, Directed and written by John Sayles," *Labor History* 31, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 488-490; Newsinger, "Matewan: Film and Working Class Struggle"; Stephen Brier, "A History Film Without Much History," *Radical History Review* 41 (1988): 120-128.

³⁷⁴ *Matewan*, directed by John Sayles.

³⁷⁵ Lewis, "Review of *Matewan*," 1048.

Conversation about the lawless times of “Bloody Mingo” only seemed to contribute to the negative regional stereotype of a “dumb hillbilly” population. Preparing for the opening of the Matewan Development Center in 1992 Matewan resident LeeEllen Friedland wrote:

By all accounts, feelings of shame are being replaced by a realization that these events are imbedded in a larger social and economic context that encompassed far more than Matewan ... There is a nascent awareness among local residents that these events in Matewan’s history may be important beyond the boundaries of the community.³⁷⁶

The oral histories indeed illustrate that the significance of the West Virginia Mine Wars transcended Appalachia – they are evidence of a larger regional and even national history of industrialization and labor radicalism in the United States. They also provide a corrective to popular culture representations such as *Matewan*, which failed to accurately represent interethnic interactions and solidarity on an everyday level in mining communities. Unfortunately, audiences tended to largely accept the film’s version. On this topic, Historian Rebecca J. Bailey wrote, “[R]arely has a community been so enslaved to an externally imposed version of its past as the town of Matewan.”³⁷⁷ Common understandings of Mingo County’s history are limited to the much-studied and mythologized Hatfield-McCoy Feud and the Matewan Massacre and this taints the way younger generations perceive their present and future as West Virginians. Shaking off the “Matewan myth,” was Bailey’s goal. She wrote:

[T]he oral histories of Matewan could reveal hundreds of stories which would resonate with Americans from all regions and walks of life ... The youth of Matewan need to hear them, not just the stories of the Feud and the Massacre. They need to hear them because, like the forebearers[sic], they also are caught up in the ongoing struggle over West Virginia’s economic future, and they too will be judged for the decisions ... [M]ust the youth of Matewan and Appalachia sacrifice their history to myth and stereotype to earn their bread? If there is any hope that the political, economic, and cultural cycles that have kept their communities divided and impoverished can be broken, a reconceptualized and

³⁷⁶ Matewan Interpretive Plan Appendix II: “Matewan Folklife Survey. A Preliminary View” Box 1, Folder 10, AC.393: Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachia State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

³⁷⁷ Bailey, *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 260.

demythologized history must be written.³⁷⁸

Like Bailey, I hope that challenges to the myth and oversimplification from West Virginia's historical narrative can change the way outsiders view the Mountain State. It is for these reasons I chose to examine and privilege the voices of the working-class members of Matewan's society and labor struggles. The plethora of voices in the Matewan Oral History Project, I argue, provided a medium for exploring how miners' shared experiences as ill-treated workers oftentimes triumphed over the differences of ethnicity, allowing miners to create a community culture based in regular and mainly positive interethnic exchanges, a culture that the UMWA could draw on as a resource during their unionization campaigns in 1920 and that miners themselves could draw on as they struggled to survive in tent colonies. The miners' shared economic status and the common enemy they had in the coal company further diminished ethnic and racial barriers throughout the events of the Matewan Massacre, the strike, and time spent in tent colonies. The dissolution of porous borders between Matewan's native, immigrant, and African American populations examined in this study – often done in the informal realm of home and community, rather than formal realms of the workplace, emphasizes the unique cultural community in Matewan, West Virginia, during the 1920s.

³⁷⁸ Bailey, *Matewan Before the Massacre*, 260-261.

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APPENDIX I

INTERVIEWEE PROFILES

This section provides a short summary of the background and experiences of the Matewan Oral History Project's oral interviewees. Although I introduce the historical actors throughout the text, this information is useful to put upfront, should the reader wish to refer back to it.

"Smokey" Mose Adkins was born in Williamson, West Virginia, on November 19, 1900. The interview gives no indication of his race or ethnicity. His father was a bricklayer who helped make the brick used to pave Williamson around 1900. Adkins was a pack peddler at one point, but he went on to work at Gates Coal Company in 1918. He lived in a tent colony during the 1920 strike. Adkins met Mother Jones during the 1920 strike.³⁷⁹

Mattie Ruth McCoy Allara was born in 1904. She was a native-born, white member of the community, and her parents were from Logan County, West Virginia. Her father was a bartender and owned real estate, including bars, in Blackberry City.³⁸⁰ Her husband Frank Allara owned a theater in Matewan. Her sister-in-law was Josephine Allara Hope.³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ "Smokey" Mose Adkins, Box 3, Folder 2, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

³⁸⁰ Blackberry City is an unincorporated community in Mingo County located less than a mile south of downtown Matewan. It is situated on the Tug Fork, a tributary of the Big Sandy River, that creates a natural barrier between West Virginia and Kentucky.

³⁸¹ Mattie Ruth McCoy Allara, Box 3, Folder 3, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

Ruby Mounts Aliff was born in Blackberry City, West Virginia, in 1921. Mounts Aliff was a native-born white member of the community, and her father was a miner and a good friend of Chief of Police Sid Hatfield and Sheriff Ed Chambers. Her grandmother, Laurie Bandy, an English immigrant, owned a boarding house. Mounts Aliff's mother and uncles helped Bandy operate the boarding house.³⁸²

William Aliff was born in Sharondale, Kentucky, in 1918. He was a native-born, white member of the community. His father, Jake Hansfield, was a mine foreman who managed immigrant workers in the mines of McDowell County, West Virginia.³⁸³

Jim Backus was born in Meador, West Virginia, on January 20, 1902, and was 87 years old at the time of the interview. He was a native-born, white member of the community. He remembered a time before the mining communities started to grow in Matewan. Backus began working in the mines at the age of thirteen as a trapper and coal loader in 1915.³⁸⁴ For three or four years, Backus attended school and worked part time the majority of the year, but worked full time in the mines during the winter months.³⁸⁵

³⁸² Ruby Mounts Aliff, Box 3, Folder 4, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

³⁸³ William Aliff, Box 3, Folder 5, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

³⁸⁴ Trapper boys opened the trap doors through which mining cars passed when exiting the mines. The operation of these doors was a fast-paced job due to ventilation and air supply in the mine. It was also a dangerous job, as mine cars moved quickly, and trapper boys could be run over or mangled by the cars or doors if they were too slow; *Child Labor in West Virginia*, Pamphlet No. 86, ed. E. N. Clooper, Secretary for Ohio Valley States, National Child Labor Committee (New York, 1908).

³⁸⁵ Jim Backus, Box 3, Folder 6, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

Elder Ted R. Ball was born at Pinson Fork, Kentucky, and lived there until he was five years old. His birth year is not mentioned. He was a native-born, white member of the community. Ball worked on his grandfather's farm. A homesteader, he offers insight on the home remedies and herbal medicines of Appalachia's population before industrialization and the creation of mining communities.³⁸⁶

Manuel Barrios was born in Cordova, Spain, on July 8, 1919. His father, Estebon Barrios, immigrated to West Virginia around 1920 to find work as a bricklayer. He spent ten years traveling between Spain and the United States before bringing his family to live with him at Matewan around 1929. Barrios offers insight into the life of an immigrant child.³⁸⁷

Harry Berman was born in Keystone, West Virginia, on June 26, 1902. Berman's father, Max Jacob Berman, was born in Kiva, Russia, and immigrated to the United States at the age of thirteen. Max Jacob Berman began pack peddling in Maryland and eventually opened a store in Keystone, West Virginia. Around 1909, the Berman family moved to Matewan, opening a new store. The Berman Family was one of two Jewish families operating businesses in Matewan during the Mine Wars.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ Elder Ted R. Ball, Box 3, Folder 7, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

³⁸⁷ Manuel Barrios, Box 3, Folder 8, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

³⁸⁸ Harry Berman, Box 3, Folder 9, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

Vicie Blackburn was born on June 21, 1910. She was a native-born, white member of the community. Her short interview discusses the constant threat of company forces to miners in the tent colony and the structure of the company store and scrip.³⁸⁹

Archie Bland was born in Louisville, Kentucky, on August 12, 1906. He was an African American member of the community whose family moved to Williamson, West Virginia, sometime in his childhood. His interview focuses on segregation in southern West Virginia, coal company baseball leagues, and African American business owners.³⁹⁰

Edith Boothe was born in Matewan, West Virginia, on January 31, 1905. Her father was from Pennsylvania, and her mother was from Virginia. Boothe was a native-born white. Her paternal grandparents were English immigrants who moved to Matewan in approximately 1895 and started Marvin Coal and Coke Company. After eight to ten years, the mine closed, and Boothe's grandparents opened a grocery store in Matewan. Boothe's sister, Hazel, married George Leckie. Leckie owned Leckie's Drug Store, a social hotspot in the community.³⁹¹

Richard Brewer was born in 1918 in Spice Branch Hollow – a small community east of Red Jacket in Mingo County, West Virginia. He was a native-born, white member of the community.

³⁸⁹ Vicie Blackburn, Box 3, Folder 10, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

³⁹⁰ Archie Bland, Box 3, Folder 11, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

³⁹¹ Edith Boothe, Box 3, Folder 12, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

Brewer recollected information about foodways and food culture, the company store, and union organizers in his interview.³⁹²

Hawthorne Burgraff was born on March 5, 1911, in Williamson, West Virginia. He was a native-born, white member of the community. Both of Burgraff's parents were originally from Kentucky, but moved to Matewan when Hawthorne was about six months old. His father was a deputy sheriff under Chief of Police Sid Hatfield and helped organized the union. Burgraff discussed the massacre, Baldwin-Felts detectives, the tent colony, and the miners' march. He also spoke about social interactions in the community, including at the Urias Hotel and Aunt Carrie's place.³⁹³

Tom Chafin was born in Meador, Mingo County, West Virginia, in 1911. He was a native-born, white member of the community. He discussed the coal company baseball leagues and the Matewan Massacre.³⁹⁴

Maggie Collins was born in Wyoming County, West Virginia, on January 17, 1894. She was a native-born, white member of the community. She was 95 at the time of the interview. The Collins Family moved into the tent colony almost immediately after arriving to Matewan.³⁹⁵

³⁹² Richard Brewer, Box 3, Folder 14, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

³⁹³ Hawthorne Burgraff, Box 3, Folder 15, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

³⁹⁴ Tom Chafin, Box 3, Folder 17, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

³⁹⁵ Maggie Collins, Box 3, Folder 18, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

James Curry was born in Madison, Boone County, West Virginia, sometime after 1917. His parents came to the state from North Carolina in 1917. Curry was an African American and talks about being raised with white children in a mixed community, especially at an unsegregated school.³⁹⁶

Bertha Collins Damron was born on October 30, 1918, in Mohawk (an unincorporated community in McDowell County), West Virginia. She was a native-born, white member of the community. Collins Damron's father, a man later convicted for murdering Berman Hatfield, "never fooled with houses nor company doctors." Collins Damron's interview provides insight into life in the tent colony, secret societies like the Redmen, the fight to unionize, and battling with strike-breaking workers.³⁹⁷

Louise Darwin was born in 1923 in Red Jacket, Mingo County, West Virginia. She was an African American and the daughter of a miner. Darwin lived in the "Taly Camp," at Matewan and discusses mixed living arrangements within the camp.³⁹⁸

Charlie Elliot was born on September 22, 1897. He was a native-born, white man aged 92 at the time of this interview. The Elliot family was from Floyd County, Kentucky. Elliot worked in the

³⁹⁶ James Curry, Box 4, Folder 2, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

³⁹⁷ Bertha Collins Damron, Box 4, Folder 3, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

³⁹⁸ Louise Darwin, Box 4, Folder 4, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

mines at Red Jacket. While he was not a union man, Elliot discusses the attempts to unionize Mingo County during the Mine Wars. His interview also includes comments about the different nationalities and ethnicities mixing in the coal camps and aspects of social life in the community.³⁹⁹

Johnny Fullen was the grandson of John Brown, a prominent business owner in Matewan. His interview focuses on Brown's ability to climb socially and economically as an African American in southern West Virginia as well as moving between the white and African American communities. Fullen's interview refers to the size of Matewan's African American community, scabs, and higher income/class African Americans in the coal fields.⁴⁰⁰

Jennie Grimmett was born on January 22, 1917 in Chattaroy, West Virginia. She was a native-born, white member of the community. Grimmett's interview highlights the harsh conditions of the tent colony and the ways in which striking miners depended on one another for support and survival – including information on homeopathy – during the two years in the colony.⁴⁰¹

Maurice Herzbrun was born on January 28, 1905, in Welch, West Virginia. He was the son of Hungarian immigrants and said his family was the second Jewish family to move to McDowell County. His father was a merchant. The family attended an Orthodox temple in Welch, and

³⁹⁹ Charlie Elliott, Box 4, Folder 9, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

⁴⁰⁰ Johnny Fullen, Box 4, Folder 12, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

⁴⁰¹ Jennie Grimmett, Box 4, Folder 14, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

Herzbrun remembers his family fitting into the community quite well. Herzbrun's father supported the miners and offered credit to them during the strike period.⁴⁰²

Josephine Allara Hope was born on October 11, 1908, in Fort Gay, West Virginia. Allara Hope's father was an Italian immigrant, and her mother was from Kentucky. Josephine and Frank Allara are siblings, and Mattie Ruth McCoy Allara was her sister-in-law. Allara Hope's interview provides insight into the social life of Matewan.⁴⁰³

Mack Morrell was born in Matewan, West Virginia, on September, 22, 1919. His mother was Austrian, and his father was Sicilian. His brother was Venchie Morrell. Their father was a plumber and worked for the company until the Matewan Massacre. Morrell's interview discusses interethnic exchanges in the community/camp.⁴⁰⁴

Venchie Morrell was born in Red Jacket, West Virginia, on September 12, 1912. His mother was Austrian, and his father was Sicilian. Mack and Venchie Morrell were brothers. Their father was a plumber and worked for the company until the Matewan Massacre. Venchie focuses on immigrant laborers, unionization, and the strike in addition to social aspects of the community.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰² Maurice Herzbrun, Box 5, Folder 6, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

⁴⁰³ Josephine Allara Hope, Box 5, Folder 8, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

⁴⁰⁴ Mack Morrel, Box 5, Folder 18, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

⁴⁰⁵ Venchie Morrel, Box 6, Folders 1&2, Matewan Development Center Records, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., USA.

APPENDIX II

PERMISSION FOR REPRODUCTIONS OF MAPS

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APPENDIX III

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE ORAL HISTORY TESTIMONY

Lela,

Please feel free to use these oral histories in your thesis--that is why we have them. We do, however, want a hard copy of your thesis.

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Fred J. Hay, Ph.D.

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