

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT ASHEVILLE

FEUDAL STATE IN THE 20TH CENTURY: LIFE, UNIONIZATION, AND ARMED
REVOLT IN THE STRIKE ON PAINT AND CABIN CREEK, WEST VIRGINIA,
1912-1913

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BY
AMOS SHUMAN

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“Coal has been one of the prime factors in the evolution of our civilization. This carboniferous solid is the greatest source of heat and power in the world.”¹ The late 19th century saw the rapid rise of industry in the Northeastern United States; with an increasing demand for coal to feed the furnaces of industrial plants, mines began to open throughout Appalachia. In contrast to later mining techniques, such as strip mining and machine mining, all original Appalachian mining was done underground. Booming technology helped to advance the field, the Bessemer Process created new demands for steel, and in turn, a huge demand for coal. By the beginning of the 20th century, mining machines were being used to cut into new headings, and coal cars drawn by mules were being used to transport coal from mines. Yet, despite the availability of machine-powered technology, W.P. Eams states, “At the turn of the century, the average coal mine in Southern West Virginia used no machinery inside the mine.”²

Coal mines were spread throughout West Virginia, but were mainly concentrated into the southwestern corner of the state. The rugged landscape of West Virginia allowed for easy access to the coal. It was possible to go straight into the side of the mountain, and access huge headings.³ The ease of access encouraged the opening of new mines. As historian Ronald Eller asserted, “Many companies were organized with no more than \$20,000 to \$30,000 subscribed by a few men, with money borrowed from banks or wealthy friends. The ease with which a mine could be opened led to the establishment of hundreds of small mines throughout the region.”⁴ With the increase in the number of mines, “By 1900, coal production in the region had tripled, and in the next three decades

¹Phil Conley, History of the West Virginia Coal Industry (Charleston WV, Education Foundation, 1960), 1.

² W.P. Eams Jr., The Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia (Morgantown, WVU Library, 1968), 36.

³ Eams, 15.

it multiplied again more than fivefold, coming to an account for almost 80 percent of national production.”⁵ Mine owners rapidly increased their wealth, but seemingly little trickled down to the miners themselves.

The exploitation of miners was a common theme in the coalfields of West Virginia. The profound effect the coal boom of the early twentieth century had on the state of West Virginia cannot be underestimated. In contrast to many other coal mining areas, the rural atmosphere of West Virginia isolated mines and miners from contact with both civilization and media. West Virginia is an area of rugged terrain and even to this day little urban development; access to many areas was extremely difficult, even with the incoming railroad. As a direct result of isolation, coal companies were able to create a type of feudal state in the coalfields, whereby they controlled not only the means of production but also the miners’ entire way of life, primarily through their ownership of the housing and stores in company towns. Unquestionable control by coal companies and mine operators became the norm, leaving miners with no option other than unionization or armed revolt if they desired change. The attitude of discontent was especially personified in the Kanawha Coal Field, particularly the Paint and Cabin Creek Districts in 1912-1913.

Many books and articles discuss the West Virginia Mine Wars as a whole. There is some discussion in these books of the events on Paint and Cabin Creek, but they concentrate primarily on later, better known conflicts, such as the Matewan massacre and Battle for Blair Mountain. The majority of texts concentrate on Paint and Cabin Creek Strike as the groundwork for what became the largest labor dispute the United States has

⁴ Ronald D. Eller, Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 130.

ever seen. However, very few texts go into detail as to the precise nature of town life, store exploitation, unionization, and armed revolt in the Paint and Cabin Creek Districts. In David Corbin's *Life Work and Rebellion in the Coal Fields*, he discusses the walkout and violent actions carried out by guards during the Paint and Cabin Creek strike, but never discusses the extent of miner retaliation, and tends to focus on the socialism in the movement and the miners' reaction following the settlement of the strike. Corbin also neglects to describe precise details of any specific individual physical act during the strike. In *History of the West Virginia Coal Industry*, Phil Conley belittles the strike, referring to it as a, "labor trouble of 1912, where Mother Jones, that colorful agitator, was a leading figure."⁶ Even Charles Crawford's Masters Thesis, "The Mine War on Paint and Cabin Creek, West Virginia In 1912-1913", has no focus on exploitation of miners and only minor detail of shootings and armed assaults. In *Coal Towns*, Crandall Shifflett details immigration and the development of the coal town. He also discusses the operators' desires to keep the union out of West Virginia. The aim of this paper is to explore certain aspects of the Paint and Cabin Creek Strike of 1912 and 1913. Specifically, it will investigate the acts of physical violence carried out by mine guards and miners alike. Through the examination of transcripts of hearings, local newspapers, and speeches, the paper will detail how immigration, company control over miners' living conditions, the companies' refusal to recognize the union, and martial law functioned to instigate and perpetuate violence.

The end of the nineteenth century saw the United States faced with two major strikes, which brought the labor movement and class struggle into public light. The

⁵ Eller, 128.

⁶ Conley, 147

Haymarket and Pullman Strikes were the first strikes that the media took major notice of, and the resulting coverage raised awareness of unionization and the potential for future disputes. Both strikes also began the trend of utilizing the Army to bring strikes to an end.⁷

The labor movement was slow to come to the coalfields of West Virginia. The formation of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in 1890 was a huge step towards helping exploited miners across the nation.⁸ The UMWA helped to penetrate West Virginia, but the remoteness of many mines, accompanied by mine operators' resistance and the blacklisting of union organizers deterred miners from attempting unionization.⁹ There were attempts and even a successful installation of the union in certain fields. In 1904 the Union was driven out of Cabin Creek and a guard system was installed in its place. The guard system was a system of protecting company owned property from the threat of violence. Guards were usually armed and eventually took charge of the eviction of miners and their families from company housing throughout the West Virginia coal boom era.¹⁰

The sheer number of mines also created a difficulty for both unionization and outside media penetration. In the Paint and Cabin Creek Districts alone there were more than twenty-eight mines in operation. Cabin Creek Consolidation Coal Company owned twenty-two mines, and Paint Creek Collieries Company operated six mines.¹¹ The number of mines also presented a problem for mine operators in their need for labor. The

⁷ Pullman Strike, <<http://1912.history.ohio-state.edu/pullman.htm>> (28, September, 2003)

Haymarket Strike, <<http://www.chicagohs.org/dramas/>> (28, September, 2003)

⁸ History of the United Mine Workers of America, <<http://www.umwa.org>>(23,September, 2003).

⁹ Charles Crawford, *The Mine War on Cabin and Paint Creek, West Virginia In 1912-191*. University of Kentucky Press, 1939. (Conclusion,2)

¹⁰ Ken Sullivan, *Goldenseal Book of the West Virginia Mine Wars*, Pictorial Histories Publishing, Charleston, WV, 6.

native population of West Virginia was not adequate for the huge number of people required to work all the mines the state had in operation. Because of the small population mine owners went to large cities on the East Coast to recruit miners. By 1900 most miners were recent immigrants to West Virginia; large numbers of people from Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois, and Pennsylvania came to the state to mine. Some migrant workers were new to the United States; a particularly large number of Italians and a smaller number of Eastern Europeans came to the mines of West Virginia.¹²

The sudden need for a labor force, from 1900 to 1920, was accompanied by “problems in mountain agriculture, population growth, and mounting poverty.”¹³ These circumstances aided the mine owners in their ploy to recruit workers. As a result of miner recruitment, the state population increased greatly. Many Southern West Virginia counties averaged a fourfold increase with some counties expanding to more than nine times their former population.¹⁴ The population of Kanawha County, where Paint and Cabin Creek exist, increased approximately 400% during the first twenty years of the twentieth century.¹⁵ Census data for the county indicates a population increase from approximately 54,000 to 82,000 from 1900 to 1910. An even larger increase occurred from 1910 to 1920 with the population soaring from 82,000 to 220,000.¹⁶

After being recruited to the remote locations where mines often existed, miners were forced, by circumstance, to live in coal camps and towns. As John A. Williams has observed, “The remote and thinly populated character of the Appalachian coalfields

¹¹ Conley, 147.

¹² David Corbin. *Life Work and Rebellion in the Coal Field*. (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1981).

¹³ Crandall A. Shifflet, *Coal Towns* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990), 67.

¹⁴ Eller, 134.

¹⁵ *West Virginia Population, Maps of Interest 1900-2000*, <<http://www.rri.wvu.edu/wvmaps.htm>>, (28, September, 2003).

virtually dictated the building of company towns to house the workforce, while the marginal position of many operators increased their temptation to lower overhead costs at the mines by exploiting these captive communities.”¹⁷

Coal companies set up towns near the mines for their workers to live in. Because of many mines’ remote locations, lodging for the miners was a necessity.¹⁸ The only person with the capital to build the lodging was the mine owner. With the Coal town came a need for a store, also typically owned by the mine owner. Company owned housing and stores quickly came to the forefront of the conflict between owners and workers. The mistreatment of miners through overpriced goods at the company store was compounded by underpaying them through a process known as cribbing, where a company employed worker would dock poundage of mined coal based on estimated impurities in the mined coal. These practices, along with the use of the guard system to enforce them, led to a desire for unionization and change throughout the coal mines of West Virginia.¹⁹

Many of the mineworkers were new, not just to West Virginia, but to the United States. The immigrants were seemingly easier to exploit and were therefore the targets of recruitment by mine operators. Crandall Shifflett stated, “Between 1907 and 1911, West Virginia briefly had a foreign-born plurality in its mining population, which rose to 46 percent of the labor force during these years.”²⁰ We learn from the testimony of Jenina Sevilla, who had to have a translator in order to testify, of her and her husband’s recent

¹⁶ US Bureau of Census, Population for Kanawha County, West Virginia Collection , WVU, Morgantown West Virginia.

¹⁷ John Alexander Williams. *Appalachia, A History*. (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2002), 259.

¹⁸ Eams, 52.

¹⁹ Howard B. Lee, Bloodletting in Appalachia: The Story of West Virginia’s Four Major Mine Wars, and other thrilling incidents of its coalfields (Morgantown, WVU Press, 1969), 4-13.

²⁰ Shifflett, 68.

immigration to the United States. “As soon as my husband came to this country about eleven years ago, he worked on the track at Banner Hollow.”²¹ This is one of many examples where an immigrant was immediately put into mine labor as soon as he entered the country. In many cases immigrants were recruited as they landed on American soil and advanced the cost of transportation to the mines, where they would work and have transportation costs deducted from their paychecks.²²

The testimony of Mrs. Waters describes Mr. Russee as, “an Italian,” who “had worked about four years,” at Paint Creek, and could hardly speak English.²³ Other examples of immigrant labor in the mines come from witness lists from trials during and immediately following the strike, where names such as Steve Yager and Joe Prince appear. These transcripts are often accompanied by notes such as “not citizen of U.S.”²⁴ Eventually, because of economic hardships throughout Appalachia, long-term residents of the state, as well as residents of neighboring states, migrated to the Mountain state, and began working in the mines to attempt to make ends meet. Whether citizens or not, mine operators alienated immigrant and domestic labor throughout Paint and Cabin Creek districts.

A miner with an inability to speak English was put at an immediate disadvantage, but the rural nature of the state allowed for an even easier exploitation of the mining labor force. Mines were set off of the beaten path and as a result companies built towns for their labor force. When miners resided in company housing the rent for the house was automatically deducted from their pay. Company housing was usually

²¹ Jenina Sevilla, Testimony to West Virginia Mining Investigation Committee (WVMIC, A&M #2036), 1912-1913. West Virginia Collection, Box 1, Volume 2, page 2 of her testimony.

²² Shifflett, 69.

²³ Mrs. Maggie Waters, WVMIC Box 1, Volume 1, pg. 2.

constructed by the cheapest means necessary. It normally contained little insulation, which resulted in brutally cold winters for the miners living in the company provided housing. In the testimony of Mrs. Riggs, who ran a boarding house for miners on Paint Creek, when asked whether the house was comfortable during the winter months stated, “No, sir; you could sit at the fire and burn your face, and freeze your back...there were little wood blocks put under it,” for foundation, and it was not plastered, “it was ceiled...Board was \$20.00 a month including room. Some months the men did not make enough to pay it.”²⁵

The testimony of W.H. Patrick, a miner, stated that his house’s foundation consisted of “a piece of timber under each corner.” “There were four rooms; what is known as the Jenny Lind; boarded up and down and battened... ceiled on the inside.” The back two rooms were built onto the main building as a lean-to, which included the kitchen, rooms averaged “about 12’x 14’, and the kitchen and dining room part was the same in length but about ten feet in width. They were small.”²⁶ The description of houses is consistent throughout testimonies. No running water, no insulation, and minimal weatherproofing were the norm throughout the field. Although rent varied depending on whether you were boarding in a large house or had a family house of your own, the cost was exorbitant for the accommodations provided, often taking as much as half of monthly wages.²⁷

Another result of remote mining towns was the need for a store. In the case of Paint and Cabin Creeks, company stores were set up in the middle of the towns. The

²⁴ Witness list from WVMIC, Box 1, volume 1, pg. 4.

²⁵ Mrs. Riggs, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg. 6.

²⁶ W.H. Patrick, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg. 2.

²⁷ W.H. Patrick, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg 3.

closest independent store was said to be “Not closer than Holly Grove, about four miles below there.”²⁸ By having their own stores, mine owners could raise prices and keep business. Maggie Waters stated,

If they did not deal at the company store they were kept out of work. They would say to the mine boss “that man does not deal with us, do not give him any work.” I do not know whether that means to force them or not. I know when men went to board with me, they would say, “please draw my board in the store, or I will not get work.”²⁹

So, although an independent store was present in the vicinity, it was not an option for miners to use. Additionally, company stores would issue credit and deduct money directly from miner’s wages, this practice is similar to issuing scrip, but was not illegal. It did however, force miners to use the company store.

The miners’ second major complaint was that overcharging at the company store and high rent often cost more than they could make working in the mines. When asked whether it was possible for the average miner to save money, Mrs. Waters stated “No sir, not if he deals at the store. It is impossible for him to save anything.”³⁰ The exploitation at the store was one that could not be avoided. S.O. Johnson, a miner and store clerk, gave a comparison from company store to independent store in the Coal River region adjacent to Cabin Creek, stating “The 18 cent bacon was sold by the cash stores at 13 cents...The company store charged \$7.50 for Monitor Flour,” while a nearby independent store charged “\$6.50.”³¹ Although 5 cents per pound may seem minimal, when making an average wage of \$45-\$50 a month it can make quite the difference. W.H. Patrick

²⁸W.H. Patrick, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg. 4.

²⁹Mrs. Maggie Waters, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg. 8.

³⁰ Maggie Waters, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg 7.

³¹ S.O. Johnson, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg 3-5.

stated his average grocery bill was “\$20 to \$25 every two weeks,” that plus a minimum of \$20 a month rent comes to an average greater than that of the typical miner’s wage.³²

Maggie Waters also testified on the extortion that was carried out in the company store.

When I could buy meat for 13 cents a pound, I paid 25 cents at Wacomah. Breakfast bacon was 13 cents and 25-26 cents at Wacomah; granulated sugar was 10 cents a pound, when I could get it anywhere for 6 ½ cents. Flour I paid as much as \$8.00 a barrel for and could buy it for \$5.25 outside. We were not allowed to buy it off the wagon and deal outside. The company claimed the county road as their own.³³

It was not for lack of effort to purchase goods from an outside source that miners continued to be exploited; rather it was from fear of blacklisting or an inability to have access to the goods that miners remained customers of the company stores.

The third major complaint of the miners was a procedure known as docking. Miners, who were paid by the ton, were docked a certain amount of poundage based on projected impurities in the coal, such as slate. It was the job of the check-weighman, initially employed by the company to dock carts of coal. By organizing it was the aim of the union to have the check-weighman employed by the miners instead of the company. In union mines this was already the case, as we learn from B.A. Scott who was employed as a miner paid check-weighman at a union mine at the base of Paint Creek.³⁴

With the threat of “union agitators” and strikes, companies tried to maintain absolute authority through a system of guards. The majority of guards were hired through the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency. As guard W.H. Phaupp, manager of the guards on Paint Creek stated he was there for “handling the strike there and protecting the

³² W.H. Patrick WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg 5.

³³ Maggie Waters, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg. 5-6 (174-175?).

³⁴ B.A. Scott, WVMIC, Box 3, Volume 8, pg 825

companies property and employees.”³⁵ Although Paint Creek was unionized, the operators did not acknowledge it, and in turn instated a guard system for the protection of the mines. The constant presence of guards on Cabin Creek incited tension before any strike broke out. It was the guard’s job to make sure all actions in the given mines were in concordance with procedure, and report any Union activity. As S.C. Goff stated “About two months before the strike on Cabin Creek, I have seen as high as 18 to 20 right there at Ronda...and they were always armed when I saw them.”³⁶ B.A. Scott testified he was on strike for “better conditions for the working class, better wages, the recognition of the union and where there is recognition of the union there is no Guard system.”³⁷ Guards essentially became the operators’ private army to further the profit of the feudal state.

Unacceptable pay, working, and living conditions accompanied by the constant presence and threat of armed guards triggered a desire for unionization on Cabin Creek and greater union recognition on Paint creek. The UMWA, specifically including Mother Mary Jones, came to the Cabin and Paint Creek districts in an attempt to organize the miners. Union organizers throughout the districts made speeches. As Harold West, a reporter from the Baltimore area said, “I went to West Virginia absolutely unprejudiced, with the idea of telling the truth about the situation. I found conditions I did not believe could exist in America.”³⁸

The Kanawha River Coalfield had been unionized for several years by 1912, with the exception of Cabin Creek. In spite of being unionized, Paint Creek miners were

³⁵ W.W. Phaupp, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 4, pg. 1.

³⁶ S.C. Goff, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg. 18.

³⁷ B.A. Scott, WVMIC, Box 3, Volume 8, pg 825 (3 of testimony)

being paid an average of “two and one half cents less per ton,” than that of nearby unionized mines. When the Paint Creek miners found out about their mistreatment, they went on strike. Nearby Cabin Creek heard of the strike, and as a result requested changes in their own working conditions. Their requests were denied, and they joined their neighbors from Paint Creek by striking.³⁹ The demands of strikers were simple, a minimal pay increase, approximately 3 and ½ cents per ton, as well as the ability to speak freely and employ their own check-weighman, to prevent cribbing.⁴⁰

It is evident that change was desired as interest in the union spread rapidly and mass meetings were held, as flyers declaring, “A Monster Mass Meeting of all Miners will be held at Eskdale,” within the Cabin Creek district, concerning, “matters of grave importance.”⁴¹ Miners’ complaints included an inability to make social advances. Miners complained that no matter how hard they worked they were not promoted and could not afford to purchase their own land. Another flyer stated

“Brother Workers...Our fellow miners and workers on Paint Creek are fighting for living conditions and against the Guard System maintained by the Coal Operators. The workers on Cabin Creek have suffered from these conditions for years...Organize yourselves for mutual protection and to protect you wives and babies.”⁴²

The organization of Paint Creek and Cabin Creek was a drawn out process, starting as early as 1902, and did not necessarily entail strike, but the refusal to allow union organization to take place angered miners, and did evolve into the strike.⁴³

³⁸ Harold, West. “The Mine Guards,” *Baltimore Times*, 1912. David Corbin’s, *WV Mine Wars an Anthology*. Appalachian Editions, Charleston WV, 19.

³⁹ David Corbin, *West Virginia Mine Wars: An Anthology* (Charleston, Appalachian Editors, 1990), 15.

⁴⁰ Eller, 219.

⁴¹ Hadsell, “Union Flyer,” Microfilm, West Virginia Collection, A&M 2122.

⁴² Hadsell, “Committee of Cabin Creek Miners,” Microfilm A&M 2122.

⁴³ Crawford, 18.

Because mine operators resented the union in their districts, miners who helped to organize the mines were fired from work. Clauses were put into contracts stating that the company would not keep any person in their employment if they were associated with the union, also known as a yellow-dog contract.⁴⁴ As a result of the mine operators' unwillingness to recognize and negotiate with the union, a strike was declared April 20, 1912.

With striking or joining the union came immediate firing and notice of eviction. Patrick stated, "They served a five days notice on me, but it went on a considerable time, possibly three weeks, and one morning I was down at the front of the company store, when they sent a Baldwin man out there, and told me it was moving day."⁴⁵ Generally ten days notice were served when workers were either fired or went on strike, however as nearly all miners lived in company housing and possessed no private property, they had nowhere to go. Howard Lee stated, they removed all furniture and belongings in the house and put it onto a railroad car where it was then taken and dumped off of company property. "They herded men, women, and children into groups and forced them off of company property."⁴⁶

Furthermore, guards made the process of eviction even less friendly through both harassment and physical attacks. In recalling his family's eviction W.H. Patrick stated,

They waited until I got a box or two packed and piled them in the wagon and hauled them off. He came to me again and asked me if I had any place to put my things. I told him I had not, unless they could take them up to Holly Grove. They hauled them off, I found they had placed them in a car that had ice in it, and I did not see them anymore until Monday. There were 28 of the guards with guns and teams to move me.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Shifflett, 128.

⁴⁵ W.H. Patrick, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg 8. (128?)

⁴⁶ Lee, 20-23.

⁴⁷ W.H. Patrick, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg 9-10

Many instances were even more brutal, and guards made no accommodations as to where the belongings of the evictee would be placed.

In many cases the furniture and belongings were taken to the edge of company property and thrown on the ground. In the case of Mollie Fish, husband of miner Charley Fish, the family was given notice but had nowhere to go. The General Manager at Mucklow, Mr. Greene, stated, "If you do not have work in five days let me know and I won't throw you out." However, "on the following Friday they threw our things out."⁴⁸

All leniencies ended on June 20, 1912 when notice was given to go to work or move out, and on June 25 evictions began.⁴⁹ Consequently, when evicted, miners found the closest private property and sent up camp. Tent colonies sprang up wherever private land was secured by miners or the union. "The coal company owned and controlled all the land along both sides of the creek for a distance of fifteen miles, except the privately owned property at Holly Grove near the mouth of Paint Creek...they set up tents, and used this as the base for their operations." Tents as well as some food were provided by the UMWA to striking miners.⁵⁰

On June 26th, five men, representing the strikers, went to Charleston to petition for the restriction of the coal companies' use of mine guards to evict miners from their homes. "These men charged in their petition to the court... that the guards carried guns, intimidated, terrorized, menaced, pursued and obstructed the miners and their families in the free use of the public highways, and generally pursued a reign of terror."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Mollie Fish, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg 3.

⁴⁹ *Charleston Daily Mail*, Charleston West Virginia, June 25, 1912.

⁵⁰ Crawford, 35-36

⁵¹ *Charleston Gazette*, Charleston West Virginia, June 26, 1912.

Conditions were bleak and preparing to worsen, when the mine operators prepared to reopen the mines with non-union men. Violence, which since the strike began had played a role in the everyday lives of miner and mine guard alike, spread rapidly throughout the district. Union organizers and strikers professed their absolute dedication to the cause and attempted to inspire others. A speech from an unknown miner proclaimed, “So, let us stand steadfast until the coal owners pay us a wage that will be commensurate with the danger incidental to our occupation. We can slave all our lives until the end is reached.”⁵²

Mother Mary Jones, the infamous union organizer, came back to the district for the first time since helping to organize the Creeks, to incite miners to fight. She made speeches around the district, one in particular stated,

Let me say to you, my friends. Let me say to the governor, let me say to the sheriffs and judges in the state of West Virginia, this fight will not stop until the last damned guard is disarmed... If the governor proclaims martial law, bury your guns.”⁵³

Suddenly, the miners’ cause became directly associated with violence.

In the midst of the strike mine operators feared they would lose profits as well as property. In response, many more mine guards were brought in to try to maintain order and protect the miners at work. W.W. Phaupp testified that at the time immediately following the declaration of strike he personally had thirty-seven men of the Baldwin-Felts Detectives under his authority on Paint Creek.⁵⁴ Charles Crawford, a miner,

⁵²Fred Mooney, Unknown speaker, “Speech by a miner who was a minister” West Virginia Collection, Microfilm, A&M 1428.

⁵³ Mother Jones, “Speeches,” Box 2 Folder 8, West Virginia Collection, A&M 960.

⁵⁴ W.W. Phaupp, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 4, pg 2.

recalled a large number of mine guards being ordered in on Cabin Creek, all the while building concrete fortifications and mounting machine guns.⁵⁵

Baldwin-Felts detectives made brutal attacks on miners and their families. The testimony of Riley Fish, a miner on Paint Creek, described a particular instance of violence carried out by the guards on him, stating, “They said damn the women and children and started to fire. They shot at me and I got behind the building, and they shot through the building.”⁵⁶ Riley Fish also recalled another occasion where guards abused miners and their families, when his sister and a friend were forced by guards to wade the creek. He recalled, “I seen both of the girls a short while after they set them to wade the creek, and they were wet up around their waists. They said the guards forced them to do it.”⁵⁷

Violence and threats befell the Creeks following the declaration of strike and guards appeared to show no concern whether their victims were male or female. Jenina Sevilla testified that guards had beaten her up and caused a miscarriage. She said, “The guards came to the house and broke in the house and they punched me in the face...I went to take the baby,” from the bed, “and they kicked me in the stomach. They called me bad names and profane languages.”⁵⁸

Another account of threatening behavior by the guards came in the testimony of S.C. Goff. He testified, “I got off the train at Ronda and the Guard Hines walked up to me and put me under arrest as quick as I got off the train...He said also that Mr. Burns

⁵⁵ Crawford, 39.

⁵⁶ Riley Fish, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg 1.

⁵⁷ Riley Fish, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg 3-4.

⁵⁸ Jenina Sevilla, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 2, pg3 (390?).

gave him orders to beat me to death. He informed me then that he would not harm me if I would get off the Creek.”⁵⁹

Nearly as soon as the strike was declared, a constant state of attack and retaliation between miners and guards erupted. Physical and armed attacks on men, women, and the miner tent colonies put the Paint and Cabin Creek districts into a state of war. The miners’ animosity towards guards and scabs was the driving force behind the nearly daily armed assaults on guards and company property. In retaliation, guards fired into tent colonies and at groups of miners from hilltops on a daily basis. The following months saw three declarations of martial law.⁶⁰

Approximately one and a half months after the strike began (April 20), the first casualty took place on the side of the miners. On the morning of June 4, 1912 a group of 10 guards followed a group of miners to a hilltop near the guards’ headquarters at Mucklow. On the hilltop shots were exchanged. The news later came that, “an Italian is dead at Wacomah, on Paint Creek, this county, a colored man named Ray Moss is seriously wounded.”⁶¹ Guards claimed that they fought in retaliation as the miners were planning to massacre them in the clubhouse.⁶² As a result of the death and first truly violent outbreak, resulting in one wounded miner, seven miner arrests, and a death, a raid was carried out on the morning of June 6. The *Wheeling Intelligencer* reported that thirteen Springfield Rifles and many sticks of dynamite were confiscated from miners’ housing.⁶³

⁵⁹ S.C. Goff, WVMIC, Box 1, Volume 1, pg 4-5.

⁶⁰ Sullivan, 19.

⁶¹ *Charleston Gazette*, Charleston West Virginia, June 6, 1912.

⁶² *ibid*

⁶³ *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Wheeling West Virginia, June 7, 1912

The next major outbreak of violence was August 31, 1912, where a battle was fought at Dry Branch on Cabin Creek. This was the first recorded fighting on Cabin Creek. Charles Crawford reported that tensions had been high for several days prior to the fight. On the afternoon of August 31, miners and guards engaged in a shooting match near the store at Dry Branch. In the battle, T.J. Hines, a deputy sheriff, was killed and miner Russell Hodges was wounded. "Many others were reported wounded, but their names could not be ascertained." The following day Crawford was mistaken for a guard and was nearly shot while investigating the scene of the battle.⁶⁴ Two days later, on September 2, 1912, Governor Glasscock made a declaration of martial law, and sent in 1,200 members of the state militia. According to the *Charleston Daily Mail*, "That Martial Law was necessary to restore order in the disturbed valleys of Paint and Cabin Creek, was the opinion of state officials, coal operators, labor leaders and the general public."⁶⁵

Miners, operators and guards alike were somewhat satisfied with the initial conditions of martial law. The first day of martial law saw fifteen thousand rounds of ammunition and two machine guns confiscated from the guards. In the following week 1,900 rifles, several hundred revolvers, six machine guns, and two hundred and twenty five thousand rounds of ammunition were surrendered to or were seized by the militia.⁶⁶ The presence of the militia seemed to settle things down on the Creeks. By October 15, the governor lifted his declaration of martial law and sent the militia home. However, in the meantime, the governor allowed the coal companies to employ members of the militia to be their new guards and to protect miners they were bringing in to work. All was well

⁶⁴ Crawford, 38-41.

⁶⁵ *Charleston Daily Mail*, Charleston West Virginia, Septmeber2, 1912.

until mines began bringing in non-union workers (“scabs”) and violence returned to the creek.⁶⁷

November saw the striking miners, who had listened to Mother Jones, and buried their weapons, bringing them out to attempt to keep the mines closed. Newspapers were littered with reports of skirmishes nearly everyday. On November 14, striking miners fired at a C&O passenger train full of scabs heading to the mines on Cabin Creek.

Guards on the train returned fire into the hills near Dry Branch.⁶⁸ The following day approximately two hundred fifty armed strikers detached two passenger cars of scabs at Cabin Creek Junction and refused to allow them to travel farther up the creek to the mines. The train cars were then taken to Charleston where the militia guarded them.⁶⁹

The following morning Governor Glasscock issued a second declaration of martial law.

In his proclamation he stated,

Whereas, great public danger to life and property has for some time past and now exists, and numerous homicides have been committed, and unlawful assemblages of armed persons have congregated and resist the enforcement of the law...on the 14th of November, 1912, a large body of armed men, whose names are unknown, fired hundreds of shots at and into a passenger train...on what is commonly known as the Cabin Creek Branch.⁷⁰

The second declaration of martial law saw the convening of a military court at Pratt,

where law-breakers were rounded up, tried and sent to prison in a matter of days.⁷¹

While strikers concerned themselves with the trials at Pratt, military escorts allowed for

⁶⁶ *Kanawha Citizen*, Charleston West Virginia, September 12, 1912.

⁶⁷ Crawford, 45.

⁶⁸ *Charleston Gazette*, Charleston West Virginia November 15, 1912.

⁶⁹ *Charleston Gazette*, Charleston West Virginia, September 17, 1912.

⁷⁰ Glasscock, William E. West Virginia Collection, WVU, Microfilm, A&M # 1447.

⁷¹ *Charleston Gazette*, Charleston West Virginia November 21, 1912.

the mines on both Paint and Cabin Creek to be filled with non-union men. The court kept things quiet, and on December 13 martial law was lifted.⁷²

Things were seemingly quiet from December through February 3, 1913. The mines had been running with scab labor at nearly full capacity for over a month. Then, Mother Jones reappeared making another speech inspiring the striking miners to dig up their guns and drive the scabs and guards out of the valley.⁷³ At approximately 6:30 a.m., February 3, strikers fired more than 500 shots into the small town of Acme on Cabin Creek.⁷⁴ Four days later, on February 7, 1913, another shooting occurred at Mucklow. Mine superintendent James Pierce described the attack, stating, “About ten in the morning a body of men came out on the point above Mucklow store and began shooting into the store and at the men working the tipple. Our men fired back and the shooting only lasted a few minutes.”⁷⁵

As a result of the skirmish at Mucklow, the most notoriously violent action of the strike was carried out. Sheriff Bonner Hill, accompanied by guards and deputies, boarded an armored train known as the “Bull Moose Special,” and headed for Paint Creek under the cover of darkness. When approaching the tent colony at Holly Grove, the sheriff and deputized guards fired into the camp with rifles and a machine gun. Miners returned fire and struck the engineer in the hand. Unfortunately, miner Francis Estep was struck by the onslaught of bullets and fell dead at the feet of his wife.⁷⁶ Word spread quickly and by the following afternoon miners from around the Kanawha region were traveling to take up the cause of the Paint and Cabin Creek miners, specifically to

⁷² *Charleston Daily Mail*, Charleston West Virginia, December 13, 1912.

⁷³ Mother Jones, “Speeches,” Box 2 Folder 8, West Virginia Collection, A&M 960.

⁷⁴ *Charleston Daily Mail*, Charleston West Virginia, February 5, 1913.

⁷⁵ James H. Pierce, *Coal Strikes* (West Virginia Collection, A&M #1383), Box 1, Book 1, pg 80-83.

avenge the death of martyr Francis Estep. When Governor Glasscock heard the news he readied the militia and prepared to send them to the scene.⁷⁷

The militia, however, was not deployed in time. The morning of February 10th saw miners from around the Kanawha districts arriving at Paint and Cabin Creeks. Around noon the striking miners and their allies had organized and began to march along the ridge between the two creeks in search of a rumored machine gun. Charley Wright testified, “They said the news come that there was a gatling gun on the hill, in the woods, some where, and they decided to go up there and get this gatling gun.”⁷⁸ Once the group decided to head up to the ridge, they armed and began to march. When they got on top of the ridge above Wacomah, they met a group of mine guards and the most intense battling of the strike took place. Mine Guard C.B. Campbell stated there were “Between 18 and 22 guards on the hill,” as well as other mine employed men. Campbell declared, “There was five of us on top of the hill, and there were several fired shots before we got to the top.”⁷⁹

As fire was exchanged between strikers and guards, many miners were said to have run. Charles Gillespie testified, “I never seen a shot fired at all. I heard an awful lot of shooting is all I know about it. I broke and run.”⁸⁰ Charley Wright’s testimony was similar to that of Gillespie’s, however it was not the case for all strikers, as some stayed and fought. Thousands of rounds were exchanged and many were wounded. One report estimated more than 100,000 shots were fired during the battle.⁸¹ The exact number of

⁷⁶ *Charleston Daily Mail*, Charleston West Virginia, February 8, 1913.

⁷⁷ *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Wheeling West Virginia, February 10, 1913.

⁷⁸ Charley Wright, Coal Strikes (West Virginia Collection, A&M #1383), Box 1 Book 1, pg 45.

⁷⁹ C.B. Campbell, Coal Strikes (West Virginia Collection, A&M #1383), Box 1 Book 1, pg 71-72.

⁸⁰ Charles Gillespie, Coal Strikes (West Virginia Collection, A&M #1383), Box 1 Book 1, pg. 64

⁸¹ *Kanawha Citizen*, Charleston West Virginia, February 14, 1913.

miner casualties is unknown, but the *Wheeling Intelligencer* reported fourteen deaths, 10 miners and four guards, the morning of the 11th.⁸² The number of wounded could not be ascertained, but several hats and guns with blood on them were found near the scene of the battle.⁸³

The following morning Governor Glasscock made his third declaration of martial law, but this time it could not quell the anger of the striking miners. As the train brought in the militia, more than 70 pounds of dynamite were discovered lacing the railroad tracks heading into Cabin Creek Junction.⁸⁴ This was the final serious attempt at a violent act during the strike.

Approximately one month later, March 4, 1913, after countless arrests and trials, Dr. Henry Hatfield was inaugurated governor of West Virginia. Two weeks later Hatfield visited the strike zone and proclaimed a pardon to all that had taken part in the strike to that point.⁸⁵ With his option for pardon issued, an agreement between operators and the UMWA was able to be reached on April 29, 1913.

There is no denying that the strike and violence that took place on Paint and Cabin Creek during the strike of 1912 and 1913 set precedents for future strikes in West Virginia. However, the strike was more than a foreshadowing of future events; it was the first time national attention was focused on the exploitation of miners in the coal fields. The strike played a significant role in the development of class-consciousness in West Virginia, as well as the entire United States. As David Corbin stated,

It was their intention to Americanize the Southern West Virginia coal fields. Americanism meant the abolition of company stores, company

⁸² *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Wheeling West Virginia, February 11, 1913.

⁸³ *Charleston Daily Mail*, Charleston West Virginia, February 11, 1913.

⁸⁴ *Charleston Daily Mail*, Charleston West Virginia, February 13, 1913

⁸⁵ *Charleston Daily Mail*, Charleston West Virginia, March 18, 1913.

churches and company ministers, company schools and company teachers, company houses and evictions, yellow-dog contracts, blacklists, scrip, and mine guards... The miners' resistance stemmed not from the brutalities and discipline demanded by industrialization, but from the exploitation and oppression of the class system that developed in the coal fields.⁸⁶

It is hard to estimate the exact number of people who suffered from violence and harsh conditions during the strike on Paint and Cabin Creek. Without a doubt, the strike came near to achieving many of the goals that were at the root of protest and violence, but it also fell short in eliminating the need for future disputes of similar nature. The results of the strike helped to bring about the end to unjust cribbing, as laws came to pass so that the mine could not employ the check-weighman. Furthermore, the strike did not end the guard system, but it did help to expose many of the brutalities involved in it, and assisted in the limiting of companies' use of guards. With the end of the strike mines remained physically isolated from large metropolitan areas, but the violence brought the watchful eye of the media to the scene. The media attention furthered the impact of the strike well beyond that of a 3 and ½ cent per ton increase in striking miners' pay. Although it took time, the Paint and Cabin Creek strike promoted and inspired the end of the feudal state and unquestionable company control, that existed throughout West Virginia during the early part of the 20th century.

⁸⁶ Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 245-246.

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[Charles Crawford witnessed the strike on Paint and Cabin Creek first hand. In his thesis he generally maintains a secondary source format, but on occasion he uses the 1st person perspective to describe an event he witnessed or participated in. Therefore, in fitting cases, I used it as a primary source as well as a secondary.]

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