
Book Reviews

David Bullock. *Coal Wars: Unions, Strikes, and Violence in Depression-Era Central Washington*. Pullman: Washington State University Press, 2014; 220 pp., 21 b&w illus., 2 maps, notes, bib., ind., paper, \$25. ISBN: 9780874223255

In addition to his documented sources, David Bullock had another authoritative source that most historians will envy. His mother's family lived through the events depicted in *Coal Wars*. When his grandfather, a skilled Roslyn coal miner, decided to stay loyal to the United Mine Workers of America, he and his family were threatened and called filthy scabs by those in favor of a new labor union—the Western Miners' Union of America.

The locality of the story is the Roslyn-Cle Elum coal field in Kittitas County, Washington, on the east side of the Cascade Mountains. This field was the largest single coal-producing region in the state, and contributed nearly half of the state's annual coal production during the 1920s and 1930s. The Northern Pacific Railroad was the major consumer of the high-grade bituminous produced from the Roslyn-Cle Elum mines. The railroad delayed the introduction of diesel locomotives to its line because of its large reserves of coal, but the writing was on the wall, and it wasn't written in coal dust.

The prologue familiarizes the reader with the state of the U.S. coal mining industry during the early Depression years. Bullock gives an account of the lingering influence of socialism, the IWW, communism, and the political radicals that infiltrated the early unions. It was a time of rapid development of new technologies, although some of these came later to Roslyn than to other mines in the country. By the late 1920s, mechanical coal cutting and drilling machines that required fewer

miners had been introduced. In 1900 machines cut 25 percent of U.S. tonnage, but by 1930 that number had risen to 81 percent.

Franklin Roosevelt assumed the presidency in March of 1933 with the promise to America's workers of a New Deal—a promise of fair wages and a revitalized economy. That spring he created the National Recovery Administration (NRA), setting broad powers for representatives of business, labor, and government to negotiate fair prices, wages, and working hours.

Labor leaders took this move as a government endorsement of unions and enlisted workers around the nation. Membership in the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) had dropped from half a million in 1923 to just over one hundred thousand by 1931, but it rebounded to nearly four hundred thousand during the summer after the creation of the NRA.

Stimulating support for labor union membership prompted an acceleration in the number of work stoppages. The number of work stoppages doubled from 841 in 1932 to 1,695 in 1933, and increased again in 1934, when 1,856 strikes involved more than 1,470,000 workers. The Western Miners' strike at the Roslyn-Cle Elum coal field was one of those actions.

In the 1930s, John L. Lewis led the UMWA, the most powerful labor union in the nation. A popular story in Roslyn was that three pictures hung prominently in many miners' homes—those of Jesus, FDR, and John L. Lewis. By some accounts, Jesus' picture was not always the highest; such was the respect for Lewis.

However, during the early years of the Depression, many miners were starting to lose faith in their great leader and the UMWA in general. In 1932 miners were asked to take yet another

pay cut—a 20 percent reduction to \$5.40 per day. The six-hour workday had been on the United Mine Workers' agenda through the 1920s and early 1930s, yet no progress on the issue was being made. Much dissent also existed about the use of electric coal cutting machines, both as a safety and a jobs-reducing issue. By 1932 the UMWA seemed incapable of achieving the demands of its miners.

Frustrated miners in the Roslyn coal fields talked openly of taking their union back. Andrew Hunter, a socialist with a sharp mind and serious approach to issues, drew the notice of his mining peers. He was the man most responsible for leading the new union movement at the Roslyn mines. Many of the miners joined the Western Miners' Union and then decided to strike.

Workers joined the new union for reasons as varied as their diverse backgrounds. Immigrant miners who could not read or write English were undoubtedly swayed by the convincing speakers calling for better pay, better working conditions, and a six-hour day. Many felt the pull of family and friends, while some joined because they felt their safety could be better protected by a local union. Still others preferred a local union because they felt it was wrong for capitalists in the East to profit from their sacrifices in the mines.

Some miners, to ensure being on the winning side, signed with both the UMWA and the WMU. With the exception of a murder, the two unions fought mostly a verbal battle of threats and insults between members and their families. The fight intensified on April 3, 1934, when some miners tried to cross the Western Miners' Union's picket lines to return to work. The state police were called in to squelch the riots and UMWA miners went back to work without a better deal. Hard feeling would exist between families of the competing unions for years to come.

The six-month saga of the new union's struggle for recognition began with hope and determination, but ended in bitter disappointment and frustration. The Western Miners' Union was

abolished and some of its leaders were barred from working in the mines—not a good position to be in during the Great Depression, with unemployment at 25 percent.

The ability of the author to weave his family's stories into the account makes this mining history highly personal. As Carlos Schwantes put it—“This is labor history as it should be done.”

Bob Weldin

Spokane, Washington

Paul A. Handverger and the Clarkdale Historical Society. *Clarkdale*. (Images of America series.) Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014; 128 pp., numerous b&w images, paper, \$22. ISBN: 9781467131391

In recent years Arcadia Publishing has produced an “Images of America” series of paperback books containing the history and pictures of various towns or regions throughout the country. I have bought several of areas that interested me—mines, of course—and found them to be entertaining and sometimes useful for their photographic content. Some have contained historical inaccuracies, but I figure that is the price you pay for a book filled with historical pictures.

I recently purchased one of the series that is a pleasant exception to the quality of most of these books. *Clarkdale*, by Paul A Handverger and the Clarkdale Historical Society, is well organized, crammed with many historical photos of the Jerome-Clarkdale area, and full of good, accurate historical facts. Having very recently given talks on this area, I found this book to be an excellent supplemental source of information. I highly recommend it to anyone interested in the history of the Jerome and Clarkdale Arizona area.

Bill Hawes

Humboldt, Arizona