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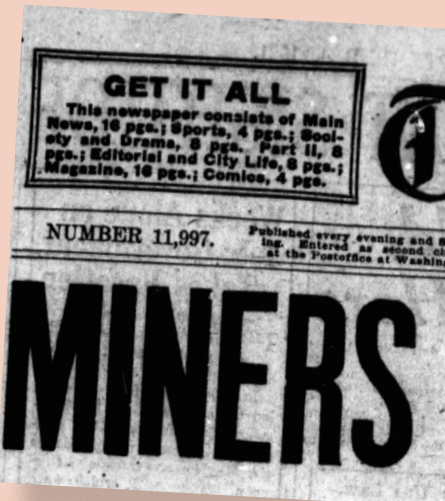
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From the Editor

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

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

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



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POUR FIRE INTO WILLIAMSON

Colorado, and West Virginia, among other episodes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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