JOHN H. KEISER

The Union Miners Cemetery
At Mt. Olive, Illinois

A Spirit-Thread of Labor History

John H. Keiser is an assistant professor of history at Eastern Illinois University, Charleston. He was born in Mt. Olive, Illinois, graduated from Eastern, and received his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Northwestern University. He was the author of "An American Communist Reports from Russia, November, 1922," which appeared in the Summer, 1967, issue of this Journal, and has written for a dozen or more other historical publications. He is currently working on a history of Illinois from 1865 to 1898 for the Illinois State Historical Society under a grant from the Illinois Sesquicentennial Commission.

Since 1899, October 12 has been Miners Day in Mt. Olive, Illinois. Located near Route 66 midway between Springfield, Illinois, and St. Louis, Missouri, residents of Mt. Olive, and of many of the surrounding towns, spend the day honoring the coal miners buried in the Union Miners Cemetery a short distance north of town. Even though the last coal mines in the immediate area were closed in the 1950’s, local citizens are still unwilling to grant Christopher Columbus a share in the memorial day normally considered to be his. For the first half of this century Mt. Olive hosted, on October 12, an average of four thousand coal miners, as many as thirty thousand on one occasion, for a parade to the cemetery, speeches, and a day-long celebration. Sixteen-page souvenir programs were printed detailing the events. Trapper boys, too young to
be considered full-scale miners, valued the honor of holding one of the strings to extend the union banners in the parade more than they valued the fifty cents they received for the task. Area miners marched or the union fined them; schools were dismissed and the children marched; every vacant lot held a lunch stand; and the saloons attempted to satisfy the miners’ perpetual thirst. Many staggered to the cemetery, but everyone made the annual trek.¹

It is the only union-owned cemetery in the nation, and it contains the remains of those who participated in most of the early major events of coal unionism in Illinois. One stone marks the grave of the flamboyant “General” Alexander Bradley, who in his Prince Albert coat and silk top hat marched from mine to mine to help the United Mine Workers of America win their first great strike in 1897. After that the union, organized in 1890, could no longer be considered a paper organization. Close by are headstones commemorating the four Mt. Olive miners killed at the Virden riot on October 12, 1898, which demonstrated the determination of the miners to enforce the contract won the previous year. (In addition to the Mt. Olive men, three others were killed at Virden.) Most striking is the great granite monument dedicated October 1, 1936, to “Mother” Mary Harris Jones, the colorful and profane crusader with the big heart who participated in many of organized labor’s crusades for over fifty years. By her own request she was buried near “her boys” in Mt. Olive upon her death, November 30, 1930.

On the speaker’s platform in 1940, for example, was William Green, a coal miner and president of the American Federation of Labor, which had recently expelled the UMWA from its ranks. Also on the program was Joe Ozanic, of Mt. Olive, executive board member of the Progressive Mine Workers of America, which had taken over

¹ The author spent the first twenty years of his life in Mt. Olive, marched in some of the parades, and interviewed many persons who had participated in the celebrations from their inception.
the UMWA's jurisdiction within the AFL upon the former's expulsion.² The PMA was founded in September, 1932, after the large caravan of miners from central Illinois was repulsed at Mulkeytown as they attempted to spread a strike against a contract they opposed but that was approved by John L. Lewis. The Progressives had constructed the granite monument. It bore the names of twenty-one of their "martyrs," some killed in jurisdictional troubles with the UMWA. Smaller stones recounted the fates of miners who had met death under falling rock, in explosions, or from cave-ins. Their obituaries appeared in the Annual Coal Reports. A typical account reads:

Oscar Fleming, miner, aged 58 years, was killed November 22, 1898, in the Consolidated Coal Company's Mine No. 10, Mt. Olive. He was killed in the face of a room by top coal falling on him. Top coal had been left up for about seven feet back from the face of the room. The coal had been shattered by previous shots. Fleming was standing in a mine car prying off some coal left by the last shots at the face; when this coal fell it relieved the top coal, when it fell and caught him, pressing his head down on the end of the mine car, killing him instantly.³

No wonder that the cemetery was hallowed ground to the rough men who were crowded into it to listen to the eulogies. On the way back from the ceremonies in 1940 Green asked to become a member of Local 35, PMWA, in Mt. Olive. He was admitted but subsequently expelled in October, 1943, by the Progressives, who accused him of "dual unionism" when the UMWA was readmitted to the AFL.⁴

² Souvenir Program, 42nd Annual Memorial Demonstration, Mount Olive, Illinois, Oct. 13 (occasionally, for the sake of convenience, the celebration was not held on Oct. 12), 1940, pp. 4, 8. UMWA was expelled from the AFL, Feb., 1938. AFL granted a charter to the PMA (which changed its name to Progressive Mine Workers of America at the time), May, 1938. UMWA seceded from the CIO, Oct., 1942, and was readmitted to the AFL, Oct., 1943.


⁴ Interview, June 30, 1968, with Joe Ozanic of Mt. Olive, who was president of PMWA, 1938 to 1941.
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Thus the cemetery's story embraces acts of heroism in organizing campaigns, the everyday tragedies involved in the coal miner's job, and the vicious infighting among the miners themselves.

The Union Miners Cemetery was first laid out in September, 1899, when the donor of the land for the Mt. Olive city cemetery objected to the demonstrations the union held on the property to honor the men killed at Virden. The Immanuel Lutheran Cemetery nearby did not want the bodies moved there because, to the churchmen, the riot victims were "murderers." Adolph Germer, then a coal miner in Mt. Olive and later a well-known socialist leader who would arrange for Eugene Debs and other radical speakers to attend the October 12 celebrations, reported the matter to the members of the local union (Local 728, UMWA) and suggested that they purchase their own plot. The union bought one acre for this purpose. Additional land was acquired in 1902 adjacent to the original site, a wooden rail fence was built around the cemetery, and a wooden arch with "Union Miners Cemetery" painted on it was erected over the gateway.

In 1918 the size of the cemetery was doubled with the acquisition of property across a rock road immediately east of the first graves. One portion of the deed, to satisfy the Homestead Exemption Laws of Illinois, made certain that the union could not become an "owner" of coal property. It read: "The coal underlying the above described tract of land has been sold and is not included in this transfer." A small plot was added in 1931 to

5. Interview, July 5, 1968, with Fred Wenschoff, Mt. Olive, who was present at the meeting and has been at every parade since 1899.
7. The deed is dated Nov. 14, 1902. It was recorded on Dec. 8, 1902, in Warranty Deeds, Book "GM," p. 361. The fence and sign have been taken down.
"Mother" Mary Harris Jones, who lived more than a hundred years and was buried with her "boys" in the Union Miners Cemetery at Mt. Olive.

make room for the proposed "Mother" Jones monument.

In 1932, as area miners grew dissatisfied with John L. Lewis and the UMWA, the two UMWA locals in Mt. Olive, 728 and 125, took steps to remove the cemetery from UMWA jurisdiction. It was deeded to a local union official and his wife, and when the two locals formed the amalgamated Local 35 of the Progressive Miners of America, the cemetery was deeded to it. The cemetery became the property of the national union, Progressive Mine Workers of America, and is today one of the few tangible properties of that paper organization. Never incorporated, the cemetery is taken care of by the trustees of the Progressives, which

9. The deed is dated April 24, 1931. It was recorded on May 7, 1931, in Misc. Records, Vol. 360, p. 539.
now means by volunteers or by whoever has the time. Lots are no longer available, miners' families having long ago obtained theirs for $12 to $16.

The spirit-thread of the Union Miners Cemetery like a rosary connects Bradley, Virden, "Mother" Jones, Progressives versus UMWA, as beads which are recited annually by orators on October 12. Most of the "heroes" involved were poor, united by their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the cause of improving conditions for coal miners. None of them really understood the broader economic, political, or social forces which affected them. They were tacticians at best, and there are no Samuel Gomperses, Philip Murrays, or John L. Lewises there. Yet without the Bradleys, "Mother" Joneses, the forgotten men who stood their ground at Virden, and their kind, unionism never would have been established in the United States. Historians have taken only scant notice of these persons, and none have recited the beads of the Union Miners Cemetery. To do so helps to capture the spirit of rank-and-file unionism of an earlier day as well as to collect the loose ends of a fascinating story.

The saga retold on October 12 begins, like continuous coal unionism in the United States, in the summer of 1897. Alexander Bradley is first on stage. He was born in England in a coal miner's family on November 29, 1866. In 1873 the Bradleys settled near Collinsville, and at the age of nine "Alex" was picking slate at Devil's Hole, a mine near the city. Within a short time he learned the frustrations of local strikes and of lack of unity among the miners. He overheard his father and friends whispering of organization, and, as he expressed it, he "stored up in his soul a bitter hatred of the oppressor and a great longing for the time when the miner should stand up and face the mine-owner and insist on fair treatment and a wage sufficient to permit him to live like a human being."12

Within a few years the family moved to Mt. Olive, and the elder Bradley and his son found work in the nearby coal mines. Their small house was on the east side of the Illinois Central railroad tracks, a section filling with Slavic- and Croatian-Americans who joined the older German-American population in the mines. Bradley's mother was the forceful member of the family. To supplement the income she peddled vegetables from her garden door-to-door and ran a one-room store in the house. A large, pipe-smoking woman with a vocabulary of colorful profanity that was easily loosed on anyone in her presence, she was awe-inspiring in her huge full skirt that billowed to the tops of her pit shoes. Children entered the store with some trepidation for a penny's worth of candy, but older citizens remember her as a kind woman who gave away as much to hungry miners as she sold to them.15

When work was slack in the summer, "Alex" took to the road, attracted by the fascinations of Hinky Dink's place on Chicago's Clark Street and Tom Allen's saloon on Market Street, St. Louis. He met other unemployed coal miners lounging beneath railroad water tanks or along the Wabash or Kaw River, and the men shared bitter stories of the working conditions and wages in the mines. "Alex" was one of "General" Coxey's first recruits and most constant followers. He was one of those driven off the grass in front of the Capitol in Washington, D.C., when the hobo army finally reached its goal on May 1, 1894.

Back in Mt. Olive the miners called him "Coxey" to his great pleasure. He became a self-appointed organizer for the UMWA, which in the middle 1890's claimed as members fewer than 400 of Illinois' 35,000 miners. Atop a tree stump or wagon he directed the miners' lusty rendition

May, 1926, pp. 69-70. This article is reprinted in The Progressive Miner, Oct. 14 and 21, 1932. There are lengthy comments about Viriden and "Mother" Jones in the same issues.

15. The Bradleys' house is still standing. Many older citizens remember the family.
of a ballad he had learned on the road to Washington. It expressed the need for strength through union:

For might was right when Caesar bled upon the stones of Rome,
And might was right when Joshua led his men o'er Jordan's foam,
And might was right when German troops poured down into Paris gay,
'Twas the logic of the ancient world, 'tis the gospel of today.

You must prove your right by deeds of might, of splendor and renown,
If you would march through flames of hell to dash opponents down,
If need be, die on scaffold high, in morning's mist of gray.
For liberty or death is still the logic of today.

The UMWA gave miners like Bradley across the nation an opportunity to test their commitments when they called a countrywide strike for July 4, 1897. That day, in the woods near Mt. Olive, Bradley held a secret meeting, attended by the more militant miners. They resolved to uphold the UMWA but recognized the futility of their action unless the big fields in southern Illinois went out, too. Bradley and another Mt. Olive miner rushed to Belleville, and at two mass meetings the young leader spoke such “large, divine and comfortable words” that the Belleville miners voted to strike. But as soon as he returned to Mt. Olive, word reached him that the leaders could not keep the men from returning to work. Bradley was infuriated and shouted to his local followers, “I was there and they gave me their word of honor to stick with us. Something crooked! I’m goin’ down there again and I’m goin’ to take you fellers along! We’ll all march down, by God!”

14. Information on Bradley to this point is based on Wieck’s article. Bradley apparently told his story to a newspaper reporter, and it appeared in pamphlet form. It is mentioned as “The Great Coal Miner’s Strike of 1897” in the unpublished papers of the Federal Writers’ Project at the Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield. A wide search, including the Wieck papers at Wayne State University and among the many miners who knew Bradley, has failed to uncover a copy. Information about Mt. Olive, the Union Miners Cemetery, and Bradley is in the Illinois volume of the American Guide series: Federal Writers’ Project, Illinois: A Descriptive and Historical Guide (Chicago, 1939), 596-97.
So began the march south. Other marches were going on throughout the country. But this one was different because it was led by Bradley and because it was generally successful. The miners left Mt. Olive at 10 P.M., Thursday, July 15. They could not afford train fare, and they could not turn public opinion against them by capturing a train. They must dramatize their efforts. They would walk. A commissary wagon filled with whatever food had been collected was pulled by two mules, a bay and a flea-bitten gray. The food supply was to be replenished by donations from sympathizers or by “the general fund,” held by Bradley and made up of contributions from the miners. They marched through the night; a band met them at Staunton and marched with them a few miles out of town. Miners from that city and Worden, already on strike, fell into line. By 5 A.M. on Friday some three hundred miners had arrived in Edwardsville, twenty-four miles from Mt. Olive. During the day the Edwardsville miners voted to strike, even though they had just returned to work from a local strike of several months’ duration. The caravan then left for Glen Carbon, six miles from Edwardsville, and miners straggled into town throughout the evening.15

Glen Carbon was neither the largest nor the most important city on the march, but because it was exclusively a coal-mining town it magnified the plight of the miners. The Madison Coal Company controlled the town. Miners were compelled to live in company houses, all alike, and were charged $2.00 a month for each room, even a summer kitchen built at the miner’s expense. The rent was withheld from the monthly wages. Men were paid in scrip equal to their debt at the company store; the remainder of the pay was in cash. There was little of that. Not every town represented by the miners who marched into Glen Carbon on July 16 had a company store, but all the miners in the area were forced to buy their powder, oil, squibs,

15. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 15 (p. 6), July 16 (p. 1), July 17 (p. 3), 1897; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 17, 1897, p. 2.
“General” Alexander Bradley attired in his favorite costume — Prince Albert coat, top hat, and umbrella (he sometimes substituted a cane). This picture was probably made when he was in his early thirties, at the time when he reached the peak of his career.

and other supplies from the company at inflated prices. Miners in Glen Carbon, as in most of the district, were paid by the box of coal mined. Each box was supposed to hold a ton, most held more. The miners were docked if they did not fill the boxes “above the timber,” as instructed. Pay per box varied from mine to mine. Frequently boxes would be enlarged with sideboards with no increase in pay for the coal that they contained, the owner explaining it as necessary to meet competition. Work had averaged little more than one day a week in the six months before the July strike. Coal was still weighed in the mine instead
of at the top in spite of a state law to the contrary. Often miners were paid for their coal only after it had been "screened," losing credit for the fine coal and slack that fell through. Payment for gross tonnage, or all material sent to the top by each man, was perhaps the primary concern of most miners at the time. It would be the basis for a uniform wage scale with differences for hand or machine mining.  

Many of the middle class in the towns throughout the area sympathized with the miners. Storekeepers recognized that miners paid grocery bills only when they got paid, and for merchants to survive miners had to have a living wage. The mayor of Mt. Olive and the city government consistently supported Bradley and his crusade. The president of the Belleville bank observed that "the miners of the Belleville district are worse off than the Negro slaves before the war, for they, at least, had plenty to eat."  

At Glen Carbon on July 16 and 17 there appeared another element of the pattern that was to form in each city visited. Bradley had no desire to wield power once an organization had been formed; indeed, he lacked the knack for administration. He was, as one reporter put it, "an itinerant excuse" for local leaders to bring their men out. At Glen Carbon the leader was George Horne, a ponderous, powerful, and methodical man. He had been through forty strikes and was marked from fights with "scabs" and guards. He had been crushed and narrowly escaped death under falling coal. His head had been pushed out of shape by a cave-in of a mine shaft, and he had lost one eye and several fingers from premature blasts. He went with Bradley and added some system and regularity to the march, and did the same for his local when he returned to Glen Carbon.  

Such leaders were awakened in each town, but they

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needed Bradley to stir them and their followers to still another struggle.

With the Glen Carbon miners out, the marchers left the town at 3:30 P.M., on July 17, and pushed on to Collinsville. Bradley’s “army” was now attracting attention, and reporters from the St. Louis papers began to send in more complete stories. They told of Bradley’s address before the Collinsville miners who assembled to hear him at Bohemia Park. “We plead with you as brothers,” he told the miners, “and ask you to help us, because we are working for the common interest of all the coal miners of America. If the men of Collinsville, O’Fallon, Belleville, Murphysboro, and DuQuoin will join us, the victory will be won, and you will be back at work by a week from Tuesday with living wages. We are going to win, but we need your help, and we are going to stay right here with you until we get it. In the name of suffering humanity, quit work!” Bradley’s confidence led the men to overcome their hatred of strikes and what they meant to their families, to forget that the Staunton miners had refused to walk out when the Collinsville men asked them to do so three years before, and to look upon the Consolidated Coal Company’s offer to restore a recent 10 percent wage cut as a union-breaking bribe. The men left the mines, and the marchers left the city on Monday afternoon for Belleville by way of O’Fallon, where they spent the night.

Rain fell heavily during the march to O’Fallon, and the miners struggled through the mud, footsore, with shoes tied around their necks. Although farmers’ orchards were loaded with fruit, and chickens ran loose, there were no incidents of looting reported. The marchers plucked blackberries from the roadside, ate the yellow Mayapples in the woods, or shook a mulberry tree on the roadside, but they made every effort not to molest private property. After resting the night of Monday, July 19, in O’Fallon, Brad-

ley's men piled into seven covered wagons provided by the townspeople to take them through the mud to Belle­ville. The "General," as the newspapers called him now, rode at the head of the procession in a two-horse spring wagon displaying the American flag, the banner of the UMWA, and a second banner presented to Bradley by a young lady in Glen Carbon. The inscription, "Peace On Earth; Good Will To All Men," had become the motto of the crusade. In the same wagon was his staff — "Major" Joe Futsieck, "Colonel" James Taylor, and the newspaper­men. The wagons were covered with tree branches, holly­hocks, and sunflowers. The miners made their headquarters at the city ball park, the most comfortable accommodations they had had on their trip.21

During the march and his stay at Belleville, Bradley's free-wheeling activities developed into a legend repeated in coal-mining camps for years. Physically he was striking in appearance — tall, smooth-faced, his short hair pompa­dour — altogether, generally handsome. His clothes were also striking; "picknicky" the reporters called his costume. He arrived in Collinsville, for example, wearing corduroy trousers, a light blue coat, white shirt, brown straw hat, toothpick (narrow and pointed) shoes, at least three em­blems of secret societies, and several rings on his fingers. He carried a light cane or a furled umbrella. Bradley ad­dressed everyone as "brother"; he was generous with his funds, and his crude eloquence appealed to the miners. He attracted attention; he was the perfect traveling excuse to bring the miners in the district out of the pits. He was an egotist with a flair for publicity, and it was obvious he had no personal ambitions for union power that might alienate ambitious local officials. His confidence was con­tagious. Bradley wanted the miners to think of him as "fearless and true." They did.

His purposes were not specific. "We expect," he said,

21. Ibid., July 20, 1897, p. 3; St. Louis Globe-Democrat, July 20, 1897, p. 9.
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“to free the mine workers of America from the terrible thralldom in which they have been held by operators for many years.” This he would do by marching anywhere and persuading the miners to express their solidarity through membership in the UMWA. He would do this peacefully. “Remember,” he told the marchers, “no nonsense and no violence. Any overt act will be maligned and misconstrued. Let’s go about the business we have on hand soberly and peacefully. . . . We will win but not by force.”22 When the procession reached Belleville at dusk on Tuesday, July 20, the men were invited to stop at the Star Brewery for free beer. But Bradley declined for the miners. “It would be misconstrued,” he said. “The people would say that the first thing we did when we got to Belleville was to visit a brewery and tank up. We are after bread, not booze.”23

By Friday, July 23, most of the Belleville miners had poured the oil from their lamps for the duration of the strike. John Green, a respected and able local leader, assumed the task of establishing a permanent organization of the Belleville miners. After congratulating a meeting of some 1,200 miners Bradley was forced to decide upon his next step.24 The miners in District 7, especially in Murphysboro and DuQuoin, had to come out to make the strike complete. The marchers were too weary to make that seventy-mile trek; Bradley left for DuQuoin by train on the twenty-third to try his luck alone. He had telegraphed to Mt. Olive for his Prince Albert coat and silk top hat, and thus was splendidly attired, but he was broke. Nevertheless, he headed south. His efforts met with little immediate success, but the DuQuoin miners promised to leave the pits in a week when their contracts expired. These contracts

24. *Belleville Weekly Advocate*, July 23, 1897, p. 1; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 20 (p. 9), July 21 (p. 1), July 22 (p. 9), July 23 (p. 1), July 24 (p. 1), 1897; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 20 (p. 3), July 21 (p. 3), July 22 (p. 3), July 23 (p. 7), July 24 (p. 7), 1897.
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contained an “iron-clad” or “yellow-dog” clause committing them to refrain from joining a union.

On July 25 Bradley “swung onto” a freight to return to Belleville, but a hostile brakeman forced him off at Pinckneyville. The next day he spent his remaining funds for a ticket. On the train he was approached by two strangers who commented on his success and told him he needed a rest. They invited him to St. Louis and promised something to help the cause. He expected “a five or ten spot,” but his new acquaintances were more affluent. They provided him with a room at the Planter’s Hotel, and dined him at Tony Faust’s restaurant. Finally one of the two offered Bradley $250 to go back to Mt. Olive and forget the strike. Bradley’s answer: “This ain’t enough. Look at me. Think who I am. I am the General!” The final agreement was for $500.25

Back in Belleville on Tuesday, July 27, the miners shared the “General’s” wealth, as he strutted through camp distributing bills and exclaiming, “Here’s shoes for you, brother.” Bradley had accepted the money as a “contribution,” not as the bribe it was intended to be. He gave most of the money away to his followers but added to his wardrobe and jewelry with the remainder. On July 28 and 29 the residents of Belleville were treated to the amazing sight of the dudish “General” promenading in the square in full regalia. They marveled. On the twenty-ninth he left for Murphysboro to speak to the miners there. The next day he addressed several meetings, held conferences with leaders in a hotel room, and spent the night in an “exhilaration.” Police arrested him at a bawdy house; he was jailed, tried before Judge Loosely, and released the next day. The “General” passed off the episode as a plot on the part of the operators,26 and no harm was done:

25. Ibid., July 28 (p. 3), July 29 (p. 6); Wieck, “General Alexander Bradley,” 72.
26. St. Louis Globe-Democrat, July 28 (p. 1), July 29 (p. 8), 1897; St. Louis Post-Dispatch, July 31, 1897, p. 3.
the miners gave him an overwhelming vote of confidence on his return to Belleville; and the Murphysboro and Du-Quoin miners left the pits as soon as their contracts ran out on July 31.27

But Bradley was not permitted to relax for long. Word reached him that the miners at Coffeen, a small town east of Mt. Olive, had gone back to work. The Mt. Olive miners led by Bradley left for Coffeen the first days of August. They found the mines guarded by special police, and deputy sheriffs prevented the marchers from entering the city limits. They therefore set up a camp in Wood's pasture just outside town and prepared for a long siege. The "General" resented being shut out of Coffeen and the imposition of martial law by the local authorities without a real threat of violence.28 Consequently, he went to Springfield to see Governor John R. Tanner to explain that the strikers were peaceful men who intended to obey the law.29 He asked the Governor to provide the miners with a pass into town. The Governor commended Bradley on the lack of violence but pointed out that he could not give his men the right to parade on the streets of Coffeen. He said that the sheriff and mayor had been hasty in their call for the National Guard; on Sheriff Randall's request for troops, he said, "Some county sheriffs ask for the militia very much like a country merchant telegraphs to the wholesale dealer in a city: 'Send at once two boxes of soap and 1,000 cigars.'" When the sheriff heard of the remark, he exploded with, "Damn it, Tanner knows I used to be in the grocery business."30 When Governor Tanner sent an investigator to report the conditions at Coffeen, he was unable to find any cause for sending the militia. Much to the disgut

27. Ibid., Aug. 1, 1897, p. 19.
28. St. Louis Globe-Democrat, Aug. 5 (p. 3), Aug. 8 (p. 8), Aug. 9 (p. 4), 1897; St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Aug. 8, 1897, p. 1.
of the sheriff and the mayor, Tanner’s agent, B. B. Ray, contributed $5.00 to the strikers’ fund before he left.31

“Camp Taylor,” named by Bradley after Coffeen’s mayor, was a colorful but peaceful place. Bradley’s mother had arrived with a wagonload of provisions for the men and stayed to cook for them.32 Although there was no violence, there was considerable tension; by August 14 there were five hundred men in camp and more arrived daily. According to a reporter for the Illinois State Journal:

The strikers are careful to conceal their firearms if they have any. The only implements of death on view in the camp this morning were a couple of the rifle barrels which an Italian joker called Garibaldi by his facetious mates had wired to a couple of billets of wood hewed down with a hatchet until they rudely resembled gunstocks. Garibaldi also added to his martial aspect by making himself a cap out of a salmon-colored ham sack, into which he stuck a long green weed for a plume. His pipe was also fashioned as a revolver butt. With his pink cap as high as a drum major’s shako, homemade rifle and his tin drinking cup swinging to his belt, Garibaldi marched up and down in front of the entrance to the camp, forcing all visitors to salute the United States flags which flutter from the gate posts of the wire fence enclosing Woods’ Grove.33

As the days passed without action, the tension grew. The city officials remained adamant, and the mayor explained to the leader, “As long as you are ‘General’ Bradley, you must keep out. When you become Mr. Bradley you may not only come into town, but you will be welcomed at my house, but you must first resign from command of your army and dismiss your men.”34 For days the “General” had formed his men into ranks, eight abreast, and marched in silence to the cordon of deputies, stopping immediately in front of the nervous officers who were protecting the Coffeen miners as they changed shifts. Finally, at 3:30 P.M. on Tuesday, August 17, the “General” entered Coffeen.

34. Ibid., Aug. 12, 1897, p. 1.
Instead of stopping this time, the silent mass of six hundred miners came on, turned the guards aside, and marched into the city. Not a shot was fired. There was no violence. The “General” had been arrested as soon as he reached the line of deputies, but at his signal his men had moved forward without him. Bradley was released from jail in Hillsboro, the county seat, on a $1,000 bond signed by the mayor of Mt. Olive, among others. His move had been successful: the Coffeen miners came out and stayed out.

The “General” and his army made other trips to neighboring towns to strengthen the resolve of striking miners during the closing months of 1897. By the end of the year the operators were ready to negotiate, and a joint conference was held in Chicago in January, 1898. The determination of Bradley and men like him across the country had won major concessions in wages and conditions. Most of Illinois was put on a scale of forty cents per ton of mine-run coal, a one-third increase for most miners. Screening rights were regularized and pay increases were provided for workers not engaged in the actual mining of coal. The eight-hour day and six-day week were included. The settlement amounted to a major nationwide victory.

But it had to be upheld. Certain mine owners led by representatives of the Chicago-Virden Coal Company who owned mines along the Chicago and Alton Railroad south of Springfield felt that the proposed rates would prevent their product from competing in the Chicago market. Four companies submitted their case to the national executive board of the UMWA and to the State Board of Arbitration, agreeing to be bound by the decision of those bodies. After the deliberations the owners refused to agree to change the scale. By August, 1898, they had made plans

35. Ibid., Aug. 18, 1897, p. 1; St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Aug. 18, 1897, p. 3; Wieck, “General Alexander Bradley,” 73-74.

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to operate with non-union Negro miners from the South, who were expected to respond to advertisements for "good colored miners" for the mines at Virden and Pana, Illinois. 38

To the miners of Illinois the crux of the problem was the use of imported labor to break the union, and in this case the matter was tinged by the incipient racism of the area. The Slavs had performed this function previously, breaking unions by working for less than "scale," as they sought to find jobs in the mines for members of their families. (One incident involving a miner seeking a position for his brother was ironic. He told the boss: "You have job for me’ brudder? He two men strong." In this case the boss, of German extraction, replied, "He sounds like a good man. Send your ‘brudder’ tomorrow and you stay

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home.” But in the fall of 1898 the English, Welsh, German, and Slavic miners were united against still another group of strikebreakers. Yet the issue was primarily economic even though “Negro” and “strikebreaker” became synonymous among the miners in Virden. Negro miners from Springfield were among those at Virden seeking to prevent the importation of workers from Birmingham, and it seems clear that few if any of the miners recruited in the South knew the facts of the situation in Illinois. Black miners from Alabama arrived at Pana without incident. But businessmen joined the miners in protest. Governor Tanner, politically astute, sided with the miners. The depth of concern and understanding by the mine owners of their imported black laborers’ discontent at being confined in the midst of a hostile community was expressed in their solutions. One correspondent reported that “a load of watermelons has been ordered” by a manager at Pana in his attempt “to do all in his power to make the negroes contented and happy and to keep them here.”

At Virden a stockade was constructed and guards from the Thiel Detective Agency in St. Louis were imported to protect the strikebreakers on their arrival. As early as September 24 Virden was filled with angry miners. The Mt. Olive contingent of sixty miners was led by the formally affable “General” Bradley, but this time arms were in evidence throughout their ranks. The same day a trainload of Negroses was intercepted and sent on to Springfield, but violent incidents became more frequent as rumors of the presence of the black workers from the South grew. A traveler observed that “the men have the Afro-phobia so badly that the colored porters on the trains crawl under the seats when going through the town.”

42. Ibid.
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nois in October, 1898, the assumption seemed logical that any unknown black man was a strikebreaker. There was no mistaking him. On October 10 T. C. Loucks, president of the Chicago-Virden Coal Company, informed Governor Tanner that the owners were "going to operate our mines and we absolutely decline to assume any of the responsibility that the laws of Illinois place upon the executive." \(^44\) Tanner replied, "If you bring in this imported labor you do so, according to your own message, with the full knowledge that you will provoke riot and bloodshed. Therefore, you will be morally responsible, if not criminally liable, for what may happen." \(^45\) "General" Bradley announced that his mission was "peaceable" and that he proposed "to sway public opinion with his eloquence rather than by force of arms." \(^46\) By October 11, however, as the Illinois State Journal observed, it was "certain that nothing can prevent bloodshed here if the company persists in bringing in the negroes." \(^47\)

A Mt. Olive miner who was at Virden described the activities of his contingent.

We organized and divided into three groups, twenty men in a group. There were forty men on the field at all times and twenty in the barn or hayloft, that was our hotel when we were off duty. Several nights the rain poured down on us all night and the boys never left their posts because they knew that the Negroes were close and looking for a chance to slip in on us. When the boys came in in the morning the water was running off their clothes and they were half froze. . . . On the morning of October 12th all troops were ordered to be on duty at 12 A.M., and I will venture to say that every miner along the C & A was patiently waiting for the results. The train finally arrived and the war was on. \(^48\)

When the train appeared at 12:40 P.M., it steamed past the miners at the depot at forty miles an hour, and few

45. Tanner to T. C. Loucks, Oct. 10, 1898, in ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Papers of John E. Fenwick (MSS, in author's possession).
casualties resulted from the exchange of shots. But a much bloodier encounter occurred as the engineer slowed down at the stockade. The conflict was “hotter than San Juan Hill” in the opinion of a guard who was there. The advantage was with the guards, who were protected by the stockade and armed with the newest Winchester rifles; the miners were armed with shotguns, horse pistols, and hunting rifles. The shooting lasted for less than ten minutes. The engineer was wounded; he refused to unload the strikebreakers and moved the train toward Springfield. “General” Bradley, who had lost his top hat and sash during the battle, was shouting, “We want physicians. You can’t carry on war without doctors.” Forty miners were wounded and seven killed, while five guards were killed and four wounded. The youngest miner killed was Edward Long, 19, from Mt. Olive. (None of the 180 Negroes was killed; from Springfield some of them returned
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to Alabama and others made their way to Chicago and East St. Louis.) After the battle the miners descended upon the company store, symbol of coal feudalism, and trampled its proprietor almost to death before cooler heads rescued him.49

A mournful calm settled over Virden. The National Guard arrived several hours after the battle but in time to prevent other strikebreakers from leaving a second train on October 13.50 Governor Tanner was vilified by newspapers across the nation for not interfering earlier, but those in Illinois generally upheld his stand.51 The operators blamed outside agitators for the trouble and echoed the sentiments of Captain Thomas S. Quincey of the Illinois National Guard. After marveling at the heat of the battle—as expressed in the number of men killed and wounded—Quincey pointed out that no Virden miners had been injured, and added, “I believe that the vast amount of harm was done by men who came from outside the town. We have heard of the English, Irish, Scotch, Welsh, and German. No doubt they are the better class, but there is a class of men who come to this country from Slovenia [sic] whom they tell me it is impossible to educate or elevate. Those are the men who came from Mt. Olive and a hundred places one hundred and fifty strong and lined up along the railroad in broad daylight and fought that battle and those are the men who lost their lives.”52

But the miners from Mt. Olive knew their leader’s name was Bradley and the names of those killed were Long, Smith, Gitterle, and Kaemmerer. Some with Slavic names had been wounded, but at Virden they all considered themselves

52. The remark was made in Chicago at the 92nd meeting of the Sunset Club, Nov. 22, 1898, p. 21. Minutes of the meeting are in the papers of John H. Walker, University of Illinois.
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to be American miners fighting for a cause. They knew that they had prevented the strikebreakers from coming in and that they had upheld the contract. Their contribution as ordinary coal miners was greater, they felt, than that of John Mitchell, John Hunter, or Michael Ratchford — UMWA leaders who had also been at Virden. So they took their heroes home and buried them on October 14, “the saddest [day] in Mt. Olive’s History,” and re-buried them the next year in their own cemetery.53 A man could be proud to be a member of that kind of rank and file.

One of them expressed his feelings in a poem written for the third anniversary of the Virden battle:

They fell in freedom’s battle,
They died for manhood’s right,
They fought and won the struggle
But they perished in the fight;
They never knew the blessing
Of the cause they died to save,
But the final of their struggle
Was the dark and yawning grave.

There are many deeds of valor
Engrossed in history’s page,
Of a soldier’s valiant action
In the battle’s fiery rage;
And the world applauds his daring,
And his deed are worth the while,
But does history praise the hero
Of the common rank and file?

Does fame exalt the hero
In the ranks of labor rife,
Who scorneth slav’ry’s shackles,
And even gives his life
That man might live unfettered
By chains of slavery,
Who dies to gain that motive,
The light of liberty?

Ah, no! It does not know him,
He's a stranger unto fame,
Unknown his deeds of valor,
Unhonored is his name.
Though glory never crowned them
With garlands fair and bright,
In the miner's heart forever
Lives the mem'ry of their fight.

They rallied round the standard
Of unionism strong;
They strove by peaceful methods
To remedy the wrong;
They sacked but living wages,
They sought but to be free —
But would the tyrants grant it?
Oh, would they grant the fee?

Ah, no! The moneyed villains,
To give was not their will
And they bade their hired assassins
To shoot — and shoot to kill!
And they began the battle
And our heroes faced the foe,
And they did their duty bravely,
As the people plainly know.

But how sad the battle's final!
Oh, how sad the woeful sight
Of our bleeding, dying comrades
Who had fallen in the fight;
Who had faced the coward assassin,
Who had given blow for blow,
Till they fell for home and loved ones,
The victims of the foe.

Yea, they fell for home and loved ones,
For them they fought to gain
Relief from bitter hardship,
Surcease from want and pain.
But fate had doomed them martyrs
To the cause they loved so well,
And we miss their presence, sadly,
More than words can ever tell.
Yea, we miss our gallant comrades
From our mighty ranks to-day
They who fought and died at Virden —
God bless them all we pray!
God bless the weeping widow,
Who mourns beside his grave,
And bless the little orphan,
Who thou, Oh, Lord, hath gave.

Oh, peace to those brave martyrs,
Three years hath passed since, when,
They stood their ground like heroes,
And died like gallant men.
May heaven’s joy be with them,
For braver men ne’er stood
Within the ranks of labor
In noble brotherhood.

“General” Bradley joined his comrades in death in 1918. He had a lung disease which was compounded by coal dust and alcohol. His last years were spent in the mines, loading coal cut by a machine that he did not operate. Miners passed the hat occasionally to help the “General” over the hard times of his last years. His Homeric deeds had proved his courage. To his “army” he was still a hero in top hat and Prince Albert coat, and the mine owners found it no longer profitable to bribe him to go home. McAlister Coleman in his novel *Red Neck* caught the spirit of the “General” and men like him when he wrote:

And there were stories around Laurel that Houston [the father of the hero of the novel] had been in the fighting in Illinois, lying on his belly in cornfields; sniping at Pinkertons, barricaded behind rail ties alongside the tipples; marching from mine to mine, foraging as he went behind the fantastic high-hatted “General” Bradley, the mule-driver who had come out of the pits to lead an army whose battles are written in no history books but whose exploits still are on the mouths of the old men, bleary-eyed, sitting mumbling in the sun in the little Mid-West towns. Wherever Houston had gone and

54. Papers of John E. Fenwick.
55. *The Daily Advocate* (Belleville), April 1, 1918, p. 1; interview, July 5, 1968, with John G. Keiser, Mt. Olive.
whatever he had seen and done, no one could say for certain. And Houston never opened his head about those days.\textsuperscript{56}

In the years from 1908 to 1913, when John H. Walker was president of District 12 (Illinois) of the UMWA, the Illinois miners became the most powerful in the international union. During the 1920’s Walker and others who had fought John L. Lewis encouraged Lewis’s home local

in Panama, Illinois, to withdraw the union leader’s card for alleged financial irregularities; they also maintained that the tradition of district autonomy was being destroyed by Lewis.\textsuperscript{57} Violence again broke out in Illinois — this time resulting in “the Herrin massacre” of June, 1922, and it seemed that peace would never come to the coal fields. The crowds at the Union Miners Cemetery on October 12 that year were larger.

Through the years the famous labor organizer “Mother”


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Mary Harris Jones made Mt. Olive a favorite stopping-place; and after one October 12 address in the 1920’s she asked that she be buried next to her “boys” in the cemetery. She officially recorded her desire in Carlinville, the Macoupin County seat:

**Chicago, November 12, 1923**

*A Special Request to the Miners of Mt. Olive Illinois:*

When the last call comes for me to take my final rest, will the miners see that I get a resting place in the same clay that shelters the miners who gave up their lives on the hills of Virden, Illinois on the morning of October 12th, 1897 [sic], for their heroic sacrifice of [sic] their fellow men. They are responsible for Illinois being the best organized labor state in America. I hope it will be my consolation when I pass away to feel I sleep under the clay with those brave boys.

***Mother Jones***

Filed for record on the 9th day of January A.D. 1924 at 2:56 o’clock P.M. 58

No one typified the independent spirit of these coal miners better than “Mother” Jones. Just when her title was bestowed is lost to history, but it was the highest accolade the miners recognized. The outline of her life is available in many places, but there is no biography of her. 59 To the miners in Mt. Olive and many other places she represented love, loyalty, and self-sacrifice in a world that appeared devoid of those qualities. “Mother” Jones loved the miners as individual persons; she identified with them and became one of them. She represented the rank and file, and she quarreled with John Mitchell and prayed she would live to see John L. Lewis “licked.” Clarence Darrow, in his introduction to the *Autobiography of Mother Jones,*

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characterized her as "essentially an individualist" who "was always doubtful of the good of organized institutions."\(^6\)

Her "boys" in the mines could be injured, she felt, by dictatorial union leaders as well as by industrialists. On her one-hundredth birthday in 1930 she made her peace with John D. Rockefeller, Jr. She had decided that he could not be blamed personally for the actions of local officials and the militia at the Rockefeller-owned Colorado Fuel and Iron Company which resulted in the machine-gunning and burning of a tent city of striking miners at Ludlow, Colorado, in 1914. She called him "a damn good sport" for sending birthday greetings to such a longtime critic as she.\(^6\)

But for John L. Lewis, whose tremendous ego, drive for power in the UMWA, and iron-fisted, sometimes dictatorial method of handling dissent within the union seemed to her to be unrelated to the real needs of the miners, she reserved the description of "an empty piece of human slime."\(^6\)

Miners needed money for fuel to heat their shacks, for clothes for their children, and for the infrequent medical attention they sought. "The economic fight is her fight," wrote one who knew her well. "Let others dispute about religion, about 'free love,' about communism. The workers must first get bread. The battle for bread consumes her."\(^6\)

"Mother" Jones was revered by the miners. She knew that what united the miners were abominable conditions, not dogma, politics, or union power struggles. Upon her death she was said to have been a socialist, a trade unionist, an industrial unionist; and both the UMWA and the PMWA laid claim to her heritage.\(^6\)

Father John W. F. Maguire, president of St. Viator College, Bourbonnais, Illinois, in his panegyric at "Mother" Jones's funeral found

\(^{60}\) Autobiography, 5, 7.
\(^{64}\) See The Nation, Dec. 10 (p. 637), Dec. 24 (p. 707), 1930.
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a poem that caught the spirit of the woman better than any label:

And because I am of the people, I understand the people,
I am sorrowful with their sorrow, I am hungry with their desire.

I speak to my people, and I speak in my people's name to the masters of my people.
I say to my people that they are holy, that they are august, despite their chains,
That they are greater than those who hold them, and stronger and purer,
That they have but need of courage and to call, on the name of their God. . . .

No one could give a more "superb dramatization of the labor struggle" than "Mother" Jones. When a professor of economics at Princeton University invited her to speak to his class, she summarized her case for labor by placing a nine-year-old ragged and crippled breaker boy from a Pennsylvania mine before the undergraduates, saying, "There is a textbook of economics. Study it!"

When she spoke the miners responded with enthusiasm. She might have been any coal miner's wife ablaze with righteous fury when her brood was in danger. Her voice shrilled as she shook her fist at the coal operators, the mine guards, the union officials, and all others responsible for the situation. She prayed and cursed and pleaded, raising her clenched and trembling hands, asking heaven to bear witness. She wore long, very full skirts and a black shawl, and her tiny bonnet bobbed up and down as she harangued the crowd. The miners loved it and laughed, cheered, hooted, and even cried as she spoke to them.

Carl Sandburg wrote of her in 1918, "She's a wonder; close to 88 years old and her voice a singing voice; nobody else could give me a thrill just by saying that slow solemn

orotund way. ‘The kaisers of this country are next, I tell ye.’ I put this old lady past Galli-Curci.‘ Her color and spirit were recounted by a priest whom she prevented from challenging the Pennsylvania coal and iron police during the great steel strike of 1919. In the words of the priest the exchange was modified: ‘‘One of those blankety blanks sons of so and so,’ she said ‘will shoot you.’ ‘No, they won’t. They won’t shoot a priest.’ She insisted, ‘Those blankety blank so and so and so will shoot anybody.’

It was no accident that the woman whose philosophy was to "pray for the dead but fight like hell for the living" chose to be buried in the Union Miners Cemetery in Mt. Olive. She had never really fought alongside the area miners in any of their battles. When "General" Bradley was organizing the miners in 1897, she was in Washington appealing to President McKinley to pardon S. D. Warden, who was under death sentence in California for train wrecking in the Pullman strike of 1894. She was not at Virden, but she did work among the miners of southern Illinois in that year. On her trips across the country she made many stops in Mt. Olive to visit and to speak. And just as she had been beside the central Illinois miners in spirit as they fought their famous battles, she wished to rest with them in death.

She died on November 30, 1930, at the age of 100 years, 6 months, and 30 days. The occasion of her funeral overwhelmed the community. Her body came to town from Washington, D.C., on a train that followed much the same route, it was noted, as that followed by the one which bore Abraham Lincoln's remains. The body arrived on December 4 at 7:45 P.M. Thousands of people pressed around

70. St. Louis Globe-Democrat, July 26, 1897, p. 9.
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the depot. Survivors of the Virden riot bore the casket to the Odd Fellows Temple, and great crowds viewed the remains placed in the center of mounds of flowers and union banners. Free buses from all parts of the state bore miners to the city. On the day of the funeral it was impossible to get near the Ascension Church, where services were held, and loudspeakers carried Father Maguire's eulogy to a crowd estimated at ten to fifteen thousand persons. A choir of miners from Glen Carbon sang part of the Mass.

Union leaders from throughout the state and nation were present, and perhaps it was only fitting that the most prominent coal union officials were Alexander Howat, John Walker, and Adolph Germer of the United Mine Workers of America Reorganized, who at the time were in the midst of an attempt to break away from the UMWA. The ceremonies were concluded at the cemetery when a small stone was placed over the grave. Praise for the champion of labor rang out from across the nation, and even Gene Autry recorded "The Death of 'Mother' Jones" to commemorate the heroine.

Then in 1932 Walker, who had conducted an amazing about-face and was once again president of District 12 UMWA, and Lewis sanctioned a $5.00 contract that was despised by the miners in the central part of the state. They refused to accept it, pointed out that they had voted it down, and claimed that Lewis was forcing it on them. They struck in opposition. A caravan was formed in Mt. Olive and Gillespie to go south to persuade the southern miners to join the strike. An official of the UMWA in the southern fields remarked that "if those fellows show up here, what will happen will make the Herrin massacre look like a Sunday-school picnic."

Once again the Mt. Olive-area miners were crusading, fifteen thousand strong, in a line of cars and trucks nine miles long. When they reached Mulkeytown, sheriff’s deputies and police bloodied the procession with riot gun and machine gun fire. No one was killed, but over one hundred were shot or beaten by clubs and the butts of shotguns. The following day “52 automobiles were still in the ditches and fields . . . , their windows and windshields smashed, their tires flat, their gasoline tanks and radiators punctured by pistol bullets.”

The infuriated miners returned to form the Progressive Mine Workers of America on September 1, 1932, in opposition to the UMWA. They were convinced of the truth of the rumor that Lewis had spent $200,000 of union funds to halt the caravan and that Sheriff Browning Robinson of Franklin County was in collusion with him.

Thus it was that when a “fitting” monument was constructed for the “Joan of Arc of the coal fields” and for the miners who had struggled for coal unionism since 1897, it was done under the guidance of the Progressive Mine Workers of America. Local 35, PMWA (an amalgamation of locals 728 and 125, UMWA) elected a Mother Jones Memorial Committee of ten, which began soliciting funds in the fall of 1934. Within the next two years $163,393.25 was raised by PMWA locals and their white-aproned women’s auxiliaries. Legal obstacles from the UMWA were overcome, and the monument the Progressives constructed was made of eighty tons of Minnesota pink granite, twenty-two feet high on a base twenty feet by eighteen

77. Interview with Joe Ozanic, June 28, 1968.
78. Complete and Final Report of the “Mother” Mary Jones and Martyrs Memorial Fund (scrapbook in possession of Joe Ozanic).
79. A restraining order was served on Local Union 35, PMWA, and the union memorial committee by the UMWA to halt the erection of the monument. Ibid.
The original of this United Mine Workers certificate of membership is in color and is approximately 24 by 36 inches in size. It states that the member was "Called from Labor to Rest" on April 23, 1912.

feet. The granite spire in the center is flanked by two bronze statues of miners. In the center of the shaft is a bronze bas-relief plaque of "Mother" Jones; at the base are five plaques commemorating Mary "Mother" Jones (center), "General" Alexander Bradley (far right), and Joseph Gitterle, E. Kaemmerer, and E. W. Smith, who "Died in the Virden Massacre, October 12, 1898." Plaques on the left
and right sides of the monument bear the names of twenty-one "Martyrs of the Progressive Miners of America" along with the dates they were killed. The name of the sculptor of the "Mother" Jones plaque and the two statues seems to have been lost. All the labor of the actual construction of the monument was donated, and the real value at its dedication was estimated at $30,000.

That occasion, Sunday, October 11, 1936, was the grandest that the small town of Mt. Olive ever saw. Five special trains and twenty-five Greyhound buses brought miners to the event. Others came in open trucks and cars; some hitchhiked and many walked. The crowd was estimated at 50,000; and the parade itself contained 32,000 marchers.

There was a day-long program, and addresses were made by Senator Rush D. Holt, Democrat of West Virginia, who attacked John L. Lewis. Duncan McDonald, Socialist leader from Springfield, told the throngs, "I am glad you are Progressive. Keep on being Progressive." Senator Holt compared Lewis unfavorably with "Mother" Jones and called the WPA "Waste, Politics and Applesauce." North Dakota Congressman William Lemke of the Union party took the occasion to direct caustic remarks against Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes for helping defeat the Frazier-Lemke Farm Mortgage Refinancing Bill. PMWA leaders railed against Lewis. They all paid homage to "Mother" Jones, but perhaps their attacks on government and the "fascist" UMWA would most of all have pleased the embattled lady in whose honor it was done. The final speaker was Mrs. Lillie May Burgess of Hyatts ville, Maryland, in whose farm home "Mother" Jones spent her last days. Mrs. Burgess spoke only of her old friend saying that she "did express the wish that she could live another hundred years in order to fight to the end that there would be no more machine guns and no more sobbing of little children." 80

80. The Progressive Miner, Oct. 16, 1936; St. Louis Post-Dispatch,
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The dedication was covered by Pathé News and dramatized over radio station KMOX in St. Louis. Big city reporters sat on overturned boxes at the desk in the little office of the Mt. Olive Herald to send out their stories. None of them really caught the spirit behind the hoopla as well as the maudlin play presented that evening by The Progressive Players of West Frankfort, Illinois. The old miners present nodded grimly as they watched. The playbill read as follows:

“GREED VS. LOVE”
A Story of Love and Sacrifice in
The Coal Fields
In Honor Of
“Mother” Jones
and the
Virden Martyrs
Sunday Oct. 11, 1936

Written by W. O. Smith

Synopsis

Act I

Home of James Hamilton, mine owner. The miners vote to strike. The sheriff aids the strikebreakers. Richard is kidnapped. Thelma is shot.

Act II

Scene I: The mining camp seven weeks later. Frank Cole is slugged by the mine guards.

Scene II: Office of National Fuel Co. Flora pleads for her big brother. The rescue.

Act III

Home of Frank Cole. 3 a.m. Return of Richard. The guards attack the house. Death of Flora.

Act IV

Same as Act I. One week after Flora’s death. The strike is won. Right and justice triumph over might.81

Thus the Union Miners Cemetery took its final form. There were half-filled lots awaiting the miners’ widows,


81. A playbill is in the scrapbook of Joe Ozanic.
pathetic and worn by earlier crude struggles. They did not qualify for UMWA pensions because their husbands had left the organization voluntarily or under intimidation. The Progressives, limited in their membership to the Illinois fields because of UMWA opposition and decisions of the National Labor Relations Board, rapidly ran out of pension funds. Some of the miners had been killed before the Social Security Act went into effect, leaving their families without its benefits. These women who might have told so much were loath to talk about the adventures of their men in earlier years. It was not pleasant for them to wait at home for their husbands to return from organizing expeditions or to hear the mine whistle signal that an accident had taken place. They shared in the bitter strife between the Progressives and the UMWA. Communities were divided. In 1932 one of the Mt. Olive miners wounded at Virden was refused the right to march in the October 12 parade because he would not change allegiance.82 Others

82. The Progressive Miner, Nov. 4, 1932. The story of PMWA-UMWA strife is told in The Progressive Miner, The Illinois Miner, and The UMWA Journal. It is also available in two inadequate accounts of the PMWA:

Ernst Kaemmerer, one of the Mt. Olive miners who was killed in the Virden riot. This is a greatly retouched version of a photograph that probably was made when he was in his late twenties.
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were vilified for years for the same reason. The superficial story has been recorded elsewhere, but the reality of the bitterness is evident when miners reminisce today.

The Mt. Olive cemetery contains the bones of the rank-and-file miner, at peace from buffeting by nature and the economy; out of his story the historian can reconstruct the drama of a once common way of life. The cemetery deserves national monument status alongside the home of Eugene Victor Debs because it is unique in all America, because it is unlikely to be duplicated, and because labor has too few genuine, traditional monuments.