

Archaeological Significance for the Ludlow Massacre Site

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In many ways the Ludlow Massacre site is the perfect archaeological site, a short-term occupation destroyed by fire. The catastrophic abandonment of the tent colony and subsequent burning create a “Pompeii”-like situation. Objects that would normally have been taken with a family when they moved were left behind in the rush to escape the violence and fire. The excavations of the Colorado Coal Field War Project have defined the nature of the archaeological deposits, demonstrated the archaeological integrity of the site, confirmed the data potential of the remains and identified important research questions that can be answered there. There has been very little post occupation deposition over the site and the occupation surface of 1914 lies only about 10 to 15 centimeters (4 to 6 inches) below the surface. There are numerous latrine pits, trash pits, and tent cellars that are filled with artifacts. The tent cellars have a depth up to two meters (6 feet). The camp dump was along the edge of the wash at the north end of the UMW property. Here there are undisturbed deposits of up to one meter (3 feet) in depth. The only significant disturbance of the archaeological deposits occurs around the memorial monument and the adjacent parking lot. Approximately one acre of ground has been disturbed here. Water in the wash has eroded portions of the dump but substantial deposits remain. A caretaker’s house existed on the property though the 1930s. The remains of this house are visible past the western edge of the first strike camp. Archaeological excavations have cleared two cellars and one latrine pit.

The striker’s use of cellars for storage and protection ultimately became the record of their family’s lives and customs. All of the family’s possessions would have been in the tent and cellar. As the tent burned all of these possessions ended up charred in the cellar. Before or during the construction of the second camp the strikers filled in the open cellar holes with debris and earth thus entombing a material record of the family that lived there. This provides us with a highly unusual opportunity to examine the material possessions of early 20th century working class families. We also can use items such as religious and fraternal medals to identify the ethnicity of the family. These deposits provide a vista on the everyday lived experience of early 20th century working class families that virtually cannot be replicated at other archaeological sites of the period. The Colorado Coal Field War Project has used materials from the site to address questions of how working class families formed and manipulated identities of gender, ethnicity and class in their day-to-day lives. The project has focused on how this process led to the formation of the class-consciousness necessary for the strike.

Fieldwork

During the field seasons 1998-2002 the Archaeology of the Colorado Coalfield War Project surveyed, mapped, and excavated at the site of Ludlow and the company town of Berwind. At Ludlow, we established twenty-three loci resulting in the identification of one possible privy, seven cellars, and seven tent pads. Of these features identified, two cellars (Features 73 and 74), one complete (Locus 1, Tent 1, Feature 21) and six partial tent pads (Features 50, 44, 77, 78, 99, and 101), and one privy (Feature 70) were excavated. Mapping, survey and excavation at the site of Berwind was conducted during the 1998, 1999 and 2000 field seasons only. Pre and post strike areas were identified as Areas K and B respectively. In

addition, excavations in a yard area, Area S, and the African American barrio, Area T, were also conducted.

At Ludlow the project gained more information on the layout of the colony by overlaying a historical panorama of the colony over the current landscape, using this method in conjunction with GPR, auger testing and excavation. These methods revealed the layout of the colony, and exposed several tent pad locations, a possible privy and cellars. Excavations of these features allowed project archaeologists to better understand the layout, community, and life of strikers in the tent colony. We now know that the colony was laid out on a 45 degree angle with the road facing the junction between the main county road and those leading up to Berwind and Delagua canyons. The tents were laid out in a systematic manner that contrasts with the haphazard and hasty manner of construction. Cellars were indeed dug under the tents along the south side of the camp. These were used for storage as well as protection. Upon destruction of the camp, they were also used as trash dumps for the surrounding area. Feature 73 provided information regarding the life of one family at the tent colony.

Findings

Our research supports several notions about life in Berwind and Ludlow before, during and after the strike. Community organization in both Berwind and the Ludlow tent colony was subject to not only the natural landscape, but also the social requirements demanded by daily life and ideological control. The natural landscape was the primary force in determining the spatial layout and design of the communities under study. It provided the limits and opportunities for community development. The existence of coal resources in the region determined the actual settlement of the mining camps. However, daily life and social practices in the coal camps led to a spatial organization that although linked to the natural landscape, was also independent from it. Sanitation and health systems, along with shelter, structured the basic living conditions for inhabitants of both Berwind and the Ludlow tent colony. Beyond basic needs, miners, their families, and managers established systems for the promotion or deterrence of ethnicity, education, corporate communities, and social amusements. The success or limitations of such systems led to the conflict of the 1913-1914 strike and ultimately how the public observed the use of space in both the company towns and the tent colonies. Ethnic and religious differences were played out in people's interactions in space. The location of ethnic groups helped to determine with whom people interacted. For the company, the manipulation of such interactions could be beneficial in promoting company policy and influencing labor relations. In the tent colony, such interactions determined the level of solidarity and the management of the colony. For the individual, it helped establish social identity through what the surrounding community allowed in ethnic practices.

Both Ludlow and Berwind were subject to social constraints established by either the UMWA or CF&I as well as by daily life and the natural landscape. In Berwind, early investment by the company in shelter, infrastructure and amenities resulted in a haphazard and ephemeral nature to the camps. All housing was self-constructed and designed. This also resulted in poor sanitation. However, this allowed for more control over space and architecture by miners and their families to suit their individual and ethnic needs and tastes. During the sociology period, a drastic change in company investment in housing resulted in the loss of freedoms for the miners and their families. More corporate control over space and ideology was imposed through standardized company owned housing and rules regarding living arrangements. The sociology department actively worked to control identity through housing and services (such as

kindergartens). Despite these programs company investment in infrastructure, amenities, and sanitation remained meager. After the strike, the company enacted the Rockefeller plan, which instituted dramatic improvements to sanitation, infrastructure, amenities and housing. Company control over ideology was perhaps even more rigorous.

Studies of space and shelter in Ludlow address very different issues. There, the project was more concerned with practical issues related to function in the tent colony. How a family survived in a single tent depended on how they structured their living and storage space. Spatial analyses suggest that corners of the tents were used for storage of daily use items such as food and dishes. Cellars were also dug under tent floors to increase storage space and provide additional living space as well as shelter from the elements and occasional gunfire. Amenities in the camp included a doctor, jungle gym and social activities such as dances and movies probably provided in the large community structure.

Ethnicity and religious segregation was more rampant in the Berwind company camp than in the Ludlow tent colony. Early on the company invested little at Berwind for religious and ethnic control. Ethnic diversity grew steadily until the late nineteen teens when the World War I inhibited immigration. However, by 1910, 24 different ethnicities were recorded in the census for Berwind. The company deliberately integrated work crews and housing to prohibit barrios and control organization efforts. Despite these restrictions, ethnic barrios were recorded during our oral histories. In Ludlow, more solidarity across ethnicities was seen although differences were celebrated in language, cultural customs (such as games and music) and holidays.

With regards to health and sanitation, medicine did change dramatically over time in the town of Berwind. A decrease in the frequency of patent medicine bottles could reflect changing social practices and attitudes. Changes in the law also affect the use and distribution of patent medicines in the early 1900s. However, use of patent medicine differs greatly between Ludlow and pre-strike Berwind with much less use of these home cures at Ludlow. This difference may reflect a decrease in disposable income, fewer ailments related to occupational hazards, or a greater reliance of the union supplied doctor. Changes in sanitation with the institution of the Rockefeller plan at Berwin did result in improvements to sanitation and services. Improvements in the construction and cleaning practices of privies and the instillation of piped water into the Berwind improved health and helped to curb outbreaks from waste and water borne diseases such as the 1901 typhoid outbreak in Tabasco.

The examination of defense focused on the tent colony for obvious reasons. The project examined several different aspects of defense. These include: community layout, rifle pits, cellars, and ammunition and firearms. The placement and orientation of the tent colony aided the strikers in policing the activities of the militia and replacement workers. National Guard accounts indicate that rifle pits were present at Ludlow during the strike. Our archaeological evidence does not support this. Cellars were used as storage caches for ammunition and arms as well as for protection during conflicts. The analysis of ammunition confirms the presence of caches in the tent colony. The ammunition analysis also supports historical documentation related to the events of the 20th of April. These accounts place a gunman along the northwestern edge of the colony in the vicinity of Locus 1.

Project data and analyses indicate that the perceived order and organization of the colony was used to support the arguments and agendas of both sides of the conflict. The company and militia indicate that it was disorderly and unorganized to justify policing the colonies and their inhabitants. On the other hand, the spatial analysis conducted by the project recognizes a sense

of order and organization. This helped colonist create a feeling of community and home in their temporary habitation.

Consumption patterns in Berwind suggest a greater economic self-reliance in the post-strike context. Increases in the quantities of fence wire in the post-strike artifacts confirm Rockefeller plan efforts to increase fenced yards and gardening. An increase in gardening is also reflected by the proliferation in canning jars and the decrease in pre-prepared foods. Families appeared to have engaged in more home canning after the strike. There is also a decrease in liquor and wine consumption and an increase in beer drinking. This may reflect prohibition in Colorado and the strikers' reaction to dry laws by engaging in more home brewing. In contrast, there is an increase in the amount of prepared and packaged foods in Ludlow during the strike. We suggest that this may be the result of union or locally supplied items in support of the strikers. Faunal remains from Ludlow support local support through amateur butchering of local cattle and inexpensive cuts of meat. There is also a marked increase in alcohol consumption at Ludlow than seen in Berwind. Household ceramic consumption patterns in Feature 73 indicate Tuscan style dining and an eclectic assemblage of serving and dining vessels. This may reflect an ethnic preference for that household.

Overall, the analyses were successful in addressing our overall research questions. The analyses related to spatial organization and community, which an emphasis on shelter, health and sanitation, and amenities show some minor improvements over time. Many of these were outlined in the Rockefeller plan of 1915. Issues of ethnicity suggest that the company tried to exercise increasing control over ethnic and religious relations over time in an attempt to restrain organization and dissention. Consumption patterns indicate that after the strike families became more economically self-reliant. This may have been a response to the ultimate loss of the strike.

Conclusions

Our research contributes to a small but growing database of archaeological investigations of company towns in the US. There is little historical information on life in these towns, and even less archaeological information available. Most of the extant documentation comes from the companies themselves or from the architectural firms they hired to design the towns. The use of such firms became common after Ludlow as companies became more concerned about living conditions in their towns. Archaeology can supplement or even correct the available historical documentation.

The work at Berwind focused on examining the differences in archaeological material from the pre and post strike contexts identified during our survey and excavation in two residential districts. Area K appeared to date to the period of occupation before the strike (ca. 1895-1914), and Area B to the post-strike period (ca. 1915-1931). In each locus a midden and privy were examined. This work identified a number of differences between the pre- and post-strike sites at Berwind. However, research related to changes made after the implementation of the Rockefeller Plan in 1915 support these findings. There also appear to be substantial differences in hygiene. The Area K privy was an earthen hole that was filled in with trash when it became unusable, while the Area B privy was concrete-lined and, presumably, regularly pumped out.

The archaeological assemblages suggest that in the later period there was a decreased emphasis on canned food and drink with a shift to domestic food preparation and cooking (or home canning and ranching). This may reflect demographic shifts in the camps from single male workers to more families or it may be the result of broader supply options after the strike (i.e.,

more than just canned goods being available). Another trend was a significant decline in the amount of liquor bottle glass, probably the result of the post-strike prohibition. Interestingly this decline in liquor glass was matched by an increase in beer bottle glass.

Comparison of Ludlow with the Berwind sites showed some of the ways the mining families dealt with the conditions in the tent colonies. The most significant differences were in those artifacts related to food and drink. The families at Ludlow were thrown back on mass-produced preserved food, as shown by the sheer number of cans and preserve and condiment bottles recovered at Ludlow. Comparatively little in the way of faunal remains were recovered although the preservation conditions at Ludlow are quite good, suggesting that these were not a large part of the diet. Liquor consumption at Ludlow appears to have increased dramatically, while "soft" alcohol consumption such as beer and wine declined. It also not unreasonable that as the strike dragged on, liquor consumption increased in the colony as the strikers combated boredom and tension. A final notable trend was the decline in patent medicine use at Ludlow, possibly as the UMWA was supplying a doctor for the strikers.

In conclusion, both Ludlow and Berwind are significant sites that have the potential to contribute important information to our understanding of life in early 20th century company towns in southern Colorado and probably nationally and how this life changes as a result of reforms that were instituted after the wave of labor violence in the early decades of the century. Ludlow is an important site as it documents how strikers coped with the brutal long-term strikes that were characteristic of this period. These strikes had a major impact on working and living conditions throughout the US. Ludlow is the first such strike camp to be archaeologically investigated.

Management Recommendations

Berwind is privately owned and is currently undergoing residential development. Most of the land has been divided and sold since our archaeological work in 1998, 1999, and 2000. The work at Berwind has identified the boundaries of the town, mapped the surface evidence and tested two specific areas. These areas, Loci B and K, currently possess archaeological integrity and have the potential to yield significant information on life in the coal camp before and after the strike. We anticipate that further development of the area will compromise this integrity.

The archaeological work at Ludlow thus far has demonstrated that this site possesses both horizontal and vertical integrity, and has the potential to yield even more significant information on the lives of working families in early 20th century Colorado. Five additional cellars were identified, but not excavated, during the last season of fieldwork. Ludlow is owned by the United Mine Workers of America, and has been since 1916. The site has been protected from major disturbance as the UMWA preserves the site as a memorial to the workers who lost their lives here and as a reminder of the costs of labor struggle in the United States. There has been some minor disturbance. The field outside the monument area was been leased for training horses and cattle grazing. The edges were graded and the parking lot has recently been paved. Given the lack of relief at Ludlow, the grading was probably significant. The site is also used for grazing cattle, which has resulted in vertical disturbance and trampling to the top few inches of the site. A second source of disturbance is low-level artifact collection by visitors, who wander over the site. There is also at least one metal detecting club that makes regular trips to the site. They have so far done little digging and have not disturbed any deep features. A third threat to the site is the erosion of Delagua Arroyo. The south bank of the arroyo was a large trash dump

for the colony. The erosion is cutting into the midden deposit and significant sections have been lost. We have been sampling the midden each season.

Overall under the stewardship of the UMWA the threats to the site of Ludlow are low-level and minimal. The Union has made efforts to minimize disturbances at the site. The major threat is the erosion of the colony midden. The work at Ludlow has demonstrated the significance of archaeology to very diverse audiences, both inside and outside the academy and outside the usual audience for archaeology. For example the work has been presented at labor history conferences, union halls, published in popular forums (the United Mineworkers Journal, Labor's Heritage) as well as academic ones. The project also provided the stimulus for a teachers institute on the labor history of coal mining in southern Colorado and a mock debate.

Ludlow is a significant site that has the potential to contribute important information to our understanding of working class life in early 20th century southern Colorado and probably nationally. Ludlow is an important site as it documents how strikers coped with the brutal long-term strikes that were characteristic of this period. These strikes had a major impact on working and living conditions throughout the US. Ludlow is the first such strike camp to be archaeologically investigated. In terms of understanding the 1913-1914 coal strike, Ludlow is a unique archaeological site. It is obviously unique because only here can we study the massacre but more importantly it is a unique record of working class life. Other strike camps did exist in southern Colorado but only Ludlow was destroyed in a Pompeii like fashion. At the other camps, when the strike ended the miners and their families gathered up their belongings and left little to show that they had been there.

Map List

Map 1 – Ludlow Striker’s Colony in Relation to Trinidad, Colorado

Map 2 – Ludlow Striker’s Colony in Relation to Ludlow Vicinity

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Photo 2 – Excavations at the Ludlow Site – 1999

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Photo 7 – Feature 73, Tent Cellar, Excavated

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