

# North American Archaeology

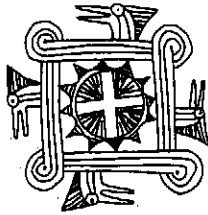
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## Labor and Class in the American West

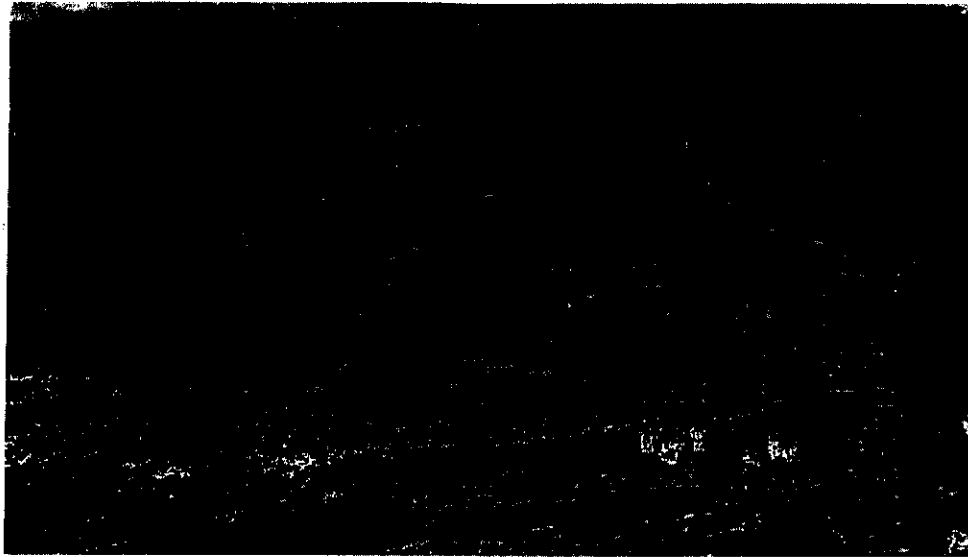
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*Dean J. Saitta*

Historical archaeology has become increasingly identified with study of the structures and rhythms of global capitalism (Delle et al. 2000; Leone 1995; contributors to Leone and Potter 1999; Little 1994; Matthews et al. 2002; Orser 1996; Paynter 1988). This approach foregrounds social divisions and conflicts – around class, power, ethnicity, gender – and their embodiment in material culture. It has balanced inquiry and produced more complete accounts of the past. Just as importantly, it has encouraged self-consciousness about the social value and political utility of archaeology (Leone 1995). This orientation offers new possibilities for connecting archaeology to contemporary life and for diversifying archaeology's public audience. This is to the good for a discipline that must be ever vigilant about its public image.

Historical archaeology in the American West has been caught up in this wave of redefinition and self-reflection. Ten years ago historical archaeologists began to shift their focus from classic, "Wild West" sites like forts, stagecoach stops, and battlegrounds to "counterclassic" studies of "wage earners, women, minorities, urbanization, and industrialization" (Hardesty 1991:4; see also Wylie 1993). Parallel development of a similarly reflexive New Western History (Limerick 1991) encouraged this shift. The ensuing years have witnessed a maturation of such studies, with archaeologists accomplishing what the New Western Historians did not: namely, integration of historical and archaeological records into more comprehensive understandings of the past (Wylie 1993). Today, Western historical archaeology is bringing together a variety of concerns around class, ethnicity, conflict, social transformation, and the local and global processes that shape them (e.g., Van Bueren 2002; Wurst and Fitts 1999).

Since 1997, I have been helping to extend this project with my colleagues Philip Duke, Randy McGuire, and a dedicated group of students from around the United States and the world. We have been working on mining camps and striker tent colonies associated with the 1913–14 Colorado coal field strike. Our central focus



**Figure 15.1** Ludlow Tent Colony, 1913 (Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, Z-193)

is the Ludlow Tent Colony, a National Historic Register site located just north of Trinidad, Colorado. From September 1913 to December 1914 the site was home to striking coal miners and their families (Figure 15.1). They were striking the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, one small part of the John D. Rockefeller Jr. industrial empire.

The Colorado coal field strike was one of the most violent in United States history. It resulted in an estimated 66 deaths and an unknown number of wounded. The defining events were the Ludlow massacre of April 20, 1914, in which 25 people, including two women and 11 children, lost their lives during a Colorado state militia assault on Ludlow, and the subsequent Ten Days' War in which armed strikers seized control of the mining district. Although the strike was eventually broken in December of that year, the events of the strike and, especially, the deaths of women and children, outraged the American public. The resulting Congressional inquiry forced some key reforms in management-labor relations and was a turning-point in worker struggles for union recognition. Indeed, Ludlow was crucial for delivering many of the workplace rights that we enjoy today.

Although the events in southern Colorado were not unusual for the time, they represent a particularly dramatic convergence of industrial-era tensions and struggles around class and power. Indeed, the Colorado coal field strike has been described as the best example of open class warfare in United States history. While well known in union and labor history circles as an archetypal example of industrial struggle, the Colorado strike is not well known outside of these circles. This was forcefully demonstrated by our 1997 survey of visitors to the Ludlow Massacre

Memorial. Nearly 70 percent arrive at Ludlow expecting to find a monument to an *Indian* massacre or some other episode of the Indian Wars. They rarely expect a monument to American Labor Wars. This is powerful testimony to public ignorance of the cultural and historical processes that shaped the American West. Ludlow is surely an important part of the "hidden history" of the West, and the United States generally (Walker 2000).

In this chapter I discuss how archaeology is helping to draw out, fill in, and establish the relevance of this hidden history. In first part of the chapter I present a background history of the coal field strike. I do this in some detail precisely because the events in Colorado are so widely unknown. Indeed, they never fail to elicit audible gasps when described to professional and public audiences. Next, I situate Ludlow in a wider global context. I then consider its place in a typology of historical narratives for making sense of the past. These narratives can be described as official, vernacular, and critical. They are shaped and reshaped through time to fit the interests and demands of contemporary society (Foote 1997; Trouillot 1995). In the fourth part I summarize what archaeology is contributing to a critical history of the Colorado coal field strike. Finally, I consider why this research matters against a backdrop of issues in contemporary American industrial life. A key point is that the issues struggled over at Ludlow are still in play today. Thus, archaeology in this context is well positioned to educate the public in ways that have contemporary relevance and that can help to perpetuate the discipline.

### **Southern Colorado Coal Field History**

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#### *Prelude to a strike*

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The southern Colorado coal field is on the east side of the Rocky Mountains. It lies in two southeastern counties, Las Animas and Huerfano. The coal seams occur in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Range. Coal mines were located up canyons where the coal seams were exposed by erosion. These fields were a major source of high-grade bituminous coal that was used to produce coking coal, or coke. Coking coal fueled the new industrial capitalism, especially the steel industry that supplied rails for the expanding United States transportation network.

In 1913 Colorado was the eighth largest coal-producing state in the United States (McGovern and Guttridge 1972). Because of the railroads' need for a steady supply of coking coal, the southern field was heavily industrialized. It was also dominated by a few large-scale corporate operations. The largest of these operations was the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, or C.F.&I., based in Pueblo. Founded in 1880, C.F.&I. produced 75 percent of Colorado's coal by 1892. It became the largest coal-mining, iron ore-mining, and steel-manufacturing enterprise in the West, earning the moniker "Pittsburgh of the West." In 1903 C.F.&I. was acquired by the Rockefeller corporate empire. In 1906, the *Engineering and Mining Journal* estimated that 10 percent of Colorado's population depended on C.F.&I. for their livelihood (Whiteside 1990:8-9).

In the early 20th century C.F.&I. and the other large southern field operators had nearly total control over the economic and political life of Las Animas and Huerfano counties. Most of the miners lived in company towns. They rented company houses, bought food and equipment at company stores, and bought alcohol at company saloons. Many of these expenses were automatically deducted from a miner's wages. Although it was illegal by 1913, scrip, a form of currency redeemable only at the company store, was still in use in the southern Colorado coal towns. Company store prices could be as much as 30 percent higher than those at independent stores outside the coal towns (Long 1985). Doctors, priests, schoolteachers, and law enforcement officers were all company employees. The company selected the contents of town libraries and censored movies, books, and magazines. Entries to the towns were gated and patrolled by armed mine guards (Beshoar 1957:2; McGovern and Guttridge 1972:23). Contemporary accounts described the situation as feudal (Seligman 1914a, 1914b).

The Colorado mines themselves were notoriously unsafe. They operated in flagrant violation of several state laws that regulated safety and the fair compensation of miners. Miners died in Colorado at over twice the national average (McGovern and Guttridge 1972:66; Whiteside 1990:74-75). Hand-picked coroner's juries absolved the coal companies of responsibility for these deaths almost without exception. For example, in the years from 1904 to 1914, the juries picked by the sheriff of Huerfano County, Jeff Farr, found the coal operators to blame in only one case out of 95 (Whiteside 1990:22). Instead, victims were accused of "negligence" or "carelessness" (Yellen 1936). One of the great ironies of the 1913-14 strike is that workers were probably safer during the period when state militiamen were shooting at them than they would have been had they still been toiling in the mines.

The mine workforce itself was largely "third-wave" immigrant labor from southern and eastern Europe, including Sicilians, Tyroleans, Tuscans, Cretans, Macedonians, and others. In America these ethnic groups came to be lumped as "Italians" and "Greeks." Mexicans and African Americans also contributed to the ethnic mix. These workers had been brought into Colorado as strikebreakers in 1903, replacing an earlier, second wave of immigrant miners from Ireland and Wales (Beshoar 1957:1; McGovern and Guttridge 1972:50). In 1912, 61 percent of Colorado's coal miners were of "non-Western European origin" (Whiteside 1990:48). Before the 1913 strike the United Mine Workers of America, which sought to unionize these workers, counted 24 distinct languages in the southern field coal camps.

This mix of ethnicities obviously had consequences for organizing the miners and maintaining unity during the strike. It is well documented in the papers of Lamont Bowers, C.F.&I. board chairman and CEO, that the company would purposely mix nationalities in the shafts so as to discourage worker communication and solidarity (Clyne 1999; Long 1989b). The ethnic mix also resulted in the strike and its violence being seen - at least in the context of some official histories - as the result of a belligerent Greek and Balkan culture, rather than the working conditions that existed in the southern Colorado coal fields.

The United Mine Workers of America was founded in 1890 and made its first appearance in the Western states in 1900 with a strike in Gallup, New Mexico. In 1903, the UMWA led a strike in the southern Colorado coal field. This strike failed as operators successfully employed replacement labor and strikebreaking agencies (Vallejo 1998). This defeat did not extinguish the union spirit, however, and organizing continued in a variety of covert ways. In fact, Long (1989a) provides a strong basis for disputing the recent argument of Clyne (1999:8-13) that the union in southern Colorado was "like a comet," streaking through and then flaming out with every episode of labor unrest. Union organizing, like tactics of resistance generally, often "covers its tracks" (Paynter and McGuire 1991; Scott 1985). It is thus likely that union activity had a more sustained history in the southern coal field than Clyne allows. Clyne does, however, raise the interesting issue of the relationship between union organizing and the activities of the various Old World fraternal and ethnic organizations or "lodges" that organized workers in the company towns (Clyne 1999:75-76). These organizations may have collaborated with the union to foster worker solidarity during times of labor unrest.

In 1912 the coal companies fired 1,200 southern miners on suspicion of union activities. In the summer of 1913 the UMWA, spearheaded by national organizers such as Frank Hayes and John Lawson, opened its biggest push yet in the south. In September of that year the UMWA announced a strike when the operators would not meet a list of seven demands:

- 1 Recognition of the United Mine Workers union.
- 2 A 10 percent increase in wages on the tonnage rates. Each miner was paid by the ton of coal he mined, not by the hour.
- 3 An eight-hour working day.
- 4 Payment for "dead work." Since miners were only paid for the coal they mined, work such as shoring, timbering, and laying track was not paid work.
- 5 The right to elect their own checkweighmen. Miners suspected, generally with good reason, that they were being cheated at the scales that weighed their coal. They wanted a miner to check the scales.
- 6 The right to trade in any store, to choose their own boarding places, and choose their own doctors.
- 7 Enforcement of Colorado mining laws, some of which already addressed a few of these demands.

Approximately 90 percent of the workforce struck, numbering around 10,000 miners and their families.

Those who lived in the company towns were evicted, and on September 23, 1913 they hauled their possessions out of the canyons through freezing rain and snow to about a dozen tent sites rented in advance by the UMWA. The tent colonies were placed at strategic locations at the entrances to canyons in order to intercept strikebreakers. Ludlow, with about 150 tents holding 1,200 people, was the largest of the colonies and also served as strike headquarters for Las Animas County. The UMWA supplied tents and ovens, and provided the strikers with food, medical attention,

and weekly strike relief. This amounted to \$3 per week for each miner, \$1 for each wife, and \$0.50 for each child. Many important personages in American labor history became involved in the strike on the side of labor, including Mary "Mother" Jones, Upton Sinclair, and John Reed.

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*Confrontation and conflict*

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The coal operators reacted quickly to the strike. Replacement miners were imported from across the country and abroad. Baldwin-Felts detectives – specialists in breaking coal strikes – were brought in from West Virginia. Violence characterized the strike from the very beginning, with both sides committing shootings and murders (Beshoar 1957; McGovern and Guttridge 1972; Papanikolas 1982). The first casualty actually occurred in advance of the strike on August 13, when a young Italian American union organizer named Gerald Lippiatt was shot dead on the streets of Trinidad by a Baldwin-Felts detective (Long 1989b).

The coal companies soon mounted a campaign of systematic harassment against the strikers. This harassment took the form of high-powered searchlights that played on the tent colonies at night, surveillance from strategically placed machine-gun nests, and use of the "Death Special," an improvised armored car that periodically sprayed the colonies with machine-gun fire. The first exchange of gunfire occurred at Ludlow on October 7 (Long 1989a). On October 17 the armored car fired into the Forbes tent colony, about 5 miles south of Ludlow, killing and wounding several people. On October 24 mine guards fired into a group of strikers in Walsenberg, killing four of them (Foner 1980; Vallejo 1998). The purpose of this harassment may have been to goad the strikers into violent action, which would provide a pretext for the Colorado Governor to call out the state militia. This would shift the financial burden for breaking the strike from the coal companies to the state. With violence escalating and the operators pressing him, Governor Elias Ammons called out the militia on October 28, 1913.

In November Governor Ammons issued an order allowing militiamen to escort strikebreakers into the coal towns. This indicated to the strikers that state power had joined the side of the operators (Long 1985). During the strike, C.F. & I. billeted militiamen on company property, furnished them with supplies from the company store, and advanced them pay (Adams 1966). On a visit to the strike zone, Colorado state senator Helen Ring Robinson observed militiamen entering the offices of C.F. & I. to receive paychecks (Long 1989a:290).

The sympathies of the militia leadership exacerbated the tensions. The militia commander, a Denver ophthalmologist named John Chase, had been involved in suppressing a 1904 miners' strike at Cripple Creek (Jameson 1998). Following the pattern set at Cripple Creek, Chase essentially declared martial law in the strike zone. This period of unofficial and illegal martial law included mass jailing of strikers, the suspension of habeas corpus, the torture and beating of prisoners and, on January 22, 1914, a cavalry charge on a demonstration of miners' wives and children in downtown Trinidad. Women and children were important contributors to

the miner's cause throughout the strike, specializing in picketing of mine entrances and verbal abuse of militiamen (Long 1989a). In this instance they were marching to demand the release of Mother Jones, who had been jailed earlier in the month for her organizing activities.

On March 11 the militia tore down tents at the Forbes colony. To one UMW official this indicated the beginning of a reign of terror designed to drive the miners back to work (Long 1989b). By spring 1914, as the cost of supporting a force of 695 enlisted men and 397 officers in the field gradually bankrupted the state, all but two of the militia companies were withdrawn. The mining companies replaced the militiamen with mine guards and private detectives under the command of militia officers. With this move the neutrality of the militia was completely destroyed and it now became little more than a strikebreaking force (Sunsier 1972).

### *Massacre*

The exact sequence of events on April 20, 1914 is uncertain. As McGovern and Guttridge (1972:344) point out, little has been written of the events that led to the Ludlow massacre that is not emotional and distorted. The principals – coal operators, union leaders, militiamen, miners – have been cast in both noble and sinister lights. Much depends on preconceived attitudes about management and workers, and the way that one constructs, filters, and relates historical facts.

Rumors of an impending militia attack on the Ludlow tent colony had circulated for some days prior to April 20th. The earlier militia attacks on Forbes and at Walsenburg provided a justification for striker paranoia (Vallejo 1998:96; Yellen 1936:234). At 9 a.m. on April 20th militia activity increased around a machine-gun nest located on Water Tank Hill, approximately 1.5 km to the south of the Ludlow colony. Those miners who were armed took protected positions in a railway cut and prepared foxholes to draw machine-gun fire away from the colony. Our archaeological excavations at Ludlow indicate that strikers were armed with a variety of weapons, including Winchester rifles and shotguns. The militia detonated two bombs, perhaps as a signal to troops in other positions. Within minutes militiamen and miners were exchanging gunfire.

After a few hours of firing one of the survivors noted that the Ludlow tents were so full of holes that they looked like lace (O'Neal 1971). In the colony there was pandemonium. Some colonists sought refuge in a large walk-in well where they stood knee-deep in freezing water for the rest of the day. Others took refuge behind a steel railroad bridge at the northwest corner of the colony. Many people huddled in the cellars they had dug under their tents. The camp's leaders worked all day to get people to a dry creek bed north of the camp, and from there to the home of a sympathetic rancher. Many colonists ultimately bivouacked in the Black Hills to the east of Ludlow.

In the early afternoon a 12-year-old boy named Frank Snyder came up out of his family's cellar and was shot dead. As the day wore on the force facing the miners grew to almost 200 militiamen and two machine guns. At dusk a train stopped in



front of the militia's machine guns and blocked their line of fire. The train crew restarted the train in response to militia threats, but by then most of the people in the colony had fled. By 7 p.m. tents were in flames and militiamen were looting the colony.

Toward evening Louis Tikas, the Greek leader of Ludlow Tent Colony, and two other miners were taken prisoner by the militia. They were summarily executed. Implicated in the murders was a militia lieutenant named Karl Linderfelt. Linderfelt was a professional soldier, Spanish American War veteran, and former head of mine guards for C.F.&I. He had also been present at Cripple Creek as a company guard. Linderfelt commanded Company B, which consisted entirely of mine guards and was the most despised of all militia units stationed in the southern coal field (Papanikolas 1982).

During the battle four women and ten children took refuge in a cellar dug beneath a tent. All but two, Mary Petrucci and Alcarita Pedregone, suffocated when the tent above them was burned. The dead included Mary Petrucci's three children and Alcarita Pedregone's two children. This cellar became infamous as the "Death Pit," and is now preserved in concrete at the Ludlow Massacre Memorial. The known fatalities at the end of the day were 25 people, including three militiamen, one uninvolved passerby, and 11 children (Figure 15.2).

When news of Ludlow got out, striking miners at the other tent colonies went to war. For ten days they fought pitched battles with mine guards and militiamen

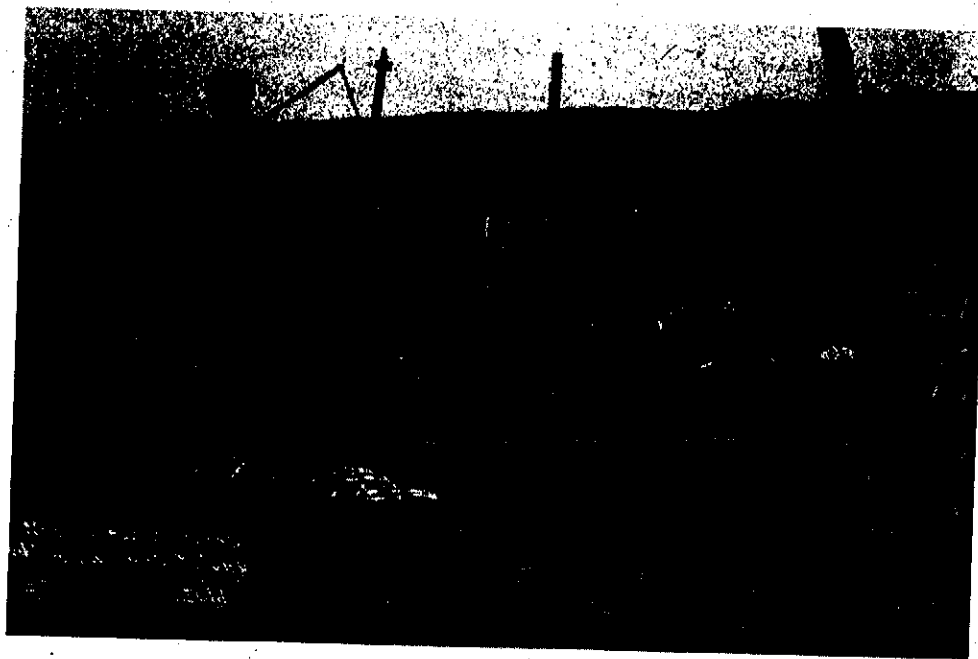


Figure 15.2 Ludlow Tent Colony after the Colorado state militia assault, April 20, 1914 (Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, Z-199)

along a 40-mile front between Trinidad and Walsenburg (Figure 15.3). In largely uncoordinated guerrilla attacks, the strikers destroyed several company towns and killed company employees.

The fighting ended when a desperate Governor Ammons asked for federal intervention. President Woodrow Wilson complied, and on April 30th sent federal troops to Trinidad to restore order. The army confiscated guns from both sides, and gun shops and saloons were closed. The army also had orders not to escort out-of-state strikebreakers into the coal towns. However, C.F.&I. president Jesse Welborn later testified that strikebreakers came freely to Colorado from other states and were protected by the army as they took jobs in the coal towns (Long 1989a:299).

After order was restored the Ludlow Tent Colony was rebuilt and the strike dragged on for another seven months. During this time President Wilson sought to broker a settlement between the coal companies and strikers (Yellen 1936). His efforts were unsuccessful. The strike was eventually terminated by the UMWA on December 10, 1914. With strike funds depleted and new strikes called in other parts of the country the UMWA could no longer support the Colorado action. Some strikers with families remained on UMWA strike relief until February 1915. Others with families were rehired by C.F.&I. (Scamehorn 1992:51). Many drifted out-of-state, and still others joined the ranks of the unemployed.

#### *Aftermath*

The Ludlow massacre electrified the nation. Demonstrations and rallies protesting the killing of women and children erupted in cities all across the country (Long 1989a:296). Nearly every newspaper and magazine in the country covered the story, with pro- and anti-company editorials appearing side by side (Figure 15.4; see Long 1989a:308). John D. Rockefeller Jr. was excoriated in the national press and demonized in the eyes of the American public by such prominent progressives as Upton Sinclair and John Reed. In early 1915 a spectacular series of Congressional hearings exposed Rockefeller's role as a leading strategist in dealing with the Colorado strike (Foner 1980; Yellen 1936:220).

The widespread national reaction to Ludlow focused attention on living conditions in the Colorado coal towns and on workplace conditions throughout the United States (Adams 1966; Gitelman 1988). Rockefeller engaged labor relations expert W. L. Mackenzie King, who later became prime minister of Canada, to develop a plan for a series of reforms in the mines and company towns of southern Colorado. Known as the Colorado Industrial Plan, these reforms called for a worker grievance procedure, infrastructural improvements to company towns (e.g., construction of paved roads and recreational facilities such as YMCAs), enforcement of Colorado mining laws, and the election of worker representatives to serve with management on four standing committees concerned with working conditions, safety, sanitation, and recreation (Adams 1966; Gitelman 1988). The plan also forbade discrimination against workers suspected of having been union members in the past. However, it did not provide for recognition of the UMWA or agree to the principle of collective bargaining (Adams 1966).

## The Setting of the Coal Field War 1913-1914

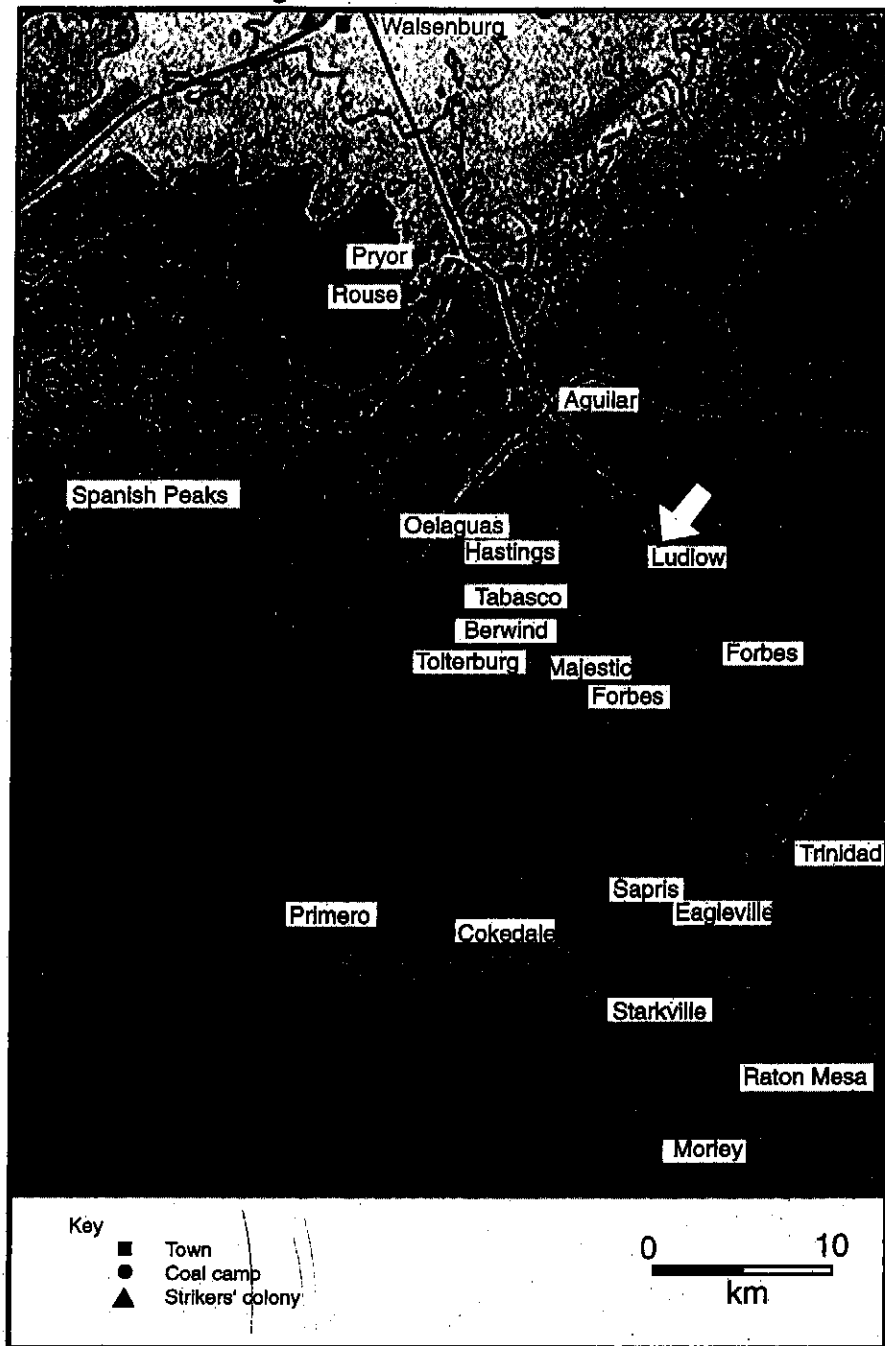
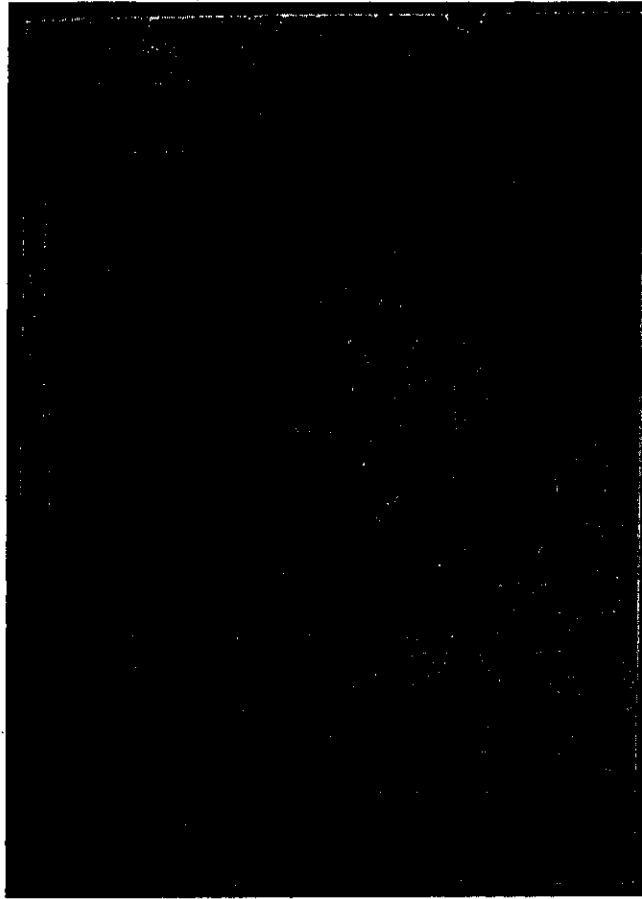


Figure 15.3 Map of the 40-mile front between Trinidad and Walsenburg



**Figure 15.4** Cover of the periodical *Masses* (Denver Public Library, Western History Collection)

The Colorado Industrial Plan effectively established a company union. Feeling that there was little alternative, Colorado miners accepted the plan. It became effective on January 1, 1916 (Scamehorn 1992). But critics such as UMWA vice-president Frank Hayes condemned the plan as “pure paternalism” and “benevolent feudalism” (Adams 1966). Mother Jones declared the plan a “fraud” and a “hypocritical and dishonest pretense” (Adams 1966). Still, it served as the model for many other company unions, which spread across the country and by 1920 covered 1.5 million workers, about 8 percent of the workforce.

It is not clear what direct, practical impacts the Colorado Industrial Plan had on the lives of miners and their families. Some scholars see such industrial-era reforms as little more than corporate welfare, or an attempt to control immigrant workers by “Americanizing” them. The conventional wisdom is that the plan produced some real material gains for workers in the company towns (Crawford 1995; Roth 1992).

However, more research is required to settle this issue, especially archaeological research, since many of the claims for improvement originate with the coal companies themselves. Certainly the reforms were limited, as is indicated by the fact that throughout the 1920s the southern coal fields continued to be embroiled in strikes. Widespread union recognition in southern Colorado only came with New Deal legislation of the 1930s.

### **The Coal Field Strike in National and Global Context**

Although especially dramatic, the hostilities at Ludlow were not unique for the times. They typified a period of industrial violence that defined the first couple of decades of the 20th century. This period is generally – and paradoxically – known as the Progressive Era. During the Progressive Era industrialization was established as the driving economic force in American society. Resources, human labor, and machine technology were brought together in largely urban contexts of factory production. Industrial production was accompanied by a deepening social class division between those who owned the technological means of producing wealth and those who contributed labor for its production. Progressive Era violence was thus sparked by two conflicting, class-based visions of workplace relations. Capital's vision privileged ownership as the most important party, on the assumption that business takes all the risks in producing national wealth. Labor's vision saw workers as central, given that worker effort directly creates national wealth.

Progressive Era clashes between capital and labor were as intense in the United States as in any nation faced with rapid economic and political change. Strikes, riots, and massacres punctuated the time period at regular intervals across the country (Foote 1997). On May 3, 1886 police killed four strikers and wounded many others during a violent confrontation between unionized workers and non-union strikebreakers at the McCormick Reaper Works in Chicago. This incident preceded by one day the bombing in Haymarket Square that killed and wounded several police and protestors. On July 6, 1892 Pinkerton security guards opened fire on striking Carnegie mill steelworkers in Homestead, Pennsylvania. Eleven strikers and spectators and seven guards were shot dead. On September 10, 1897 19 unarmed striking coal miners and mine workers were killed and 36 wounded by a sheriff's posse for refusing to disperse near Lattimer, Pennsylvania. On June 8, 1904 a battle between state militia and striking miners at Dunnville, Colorado ended with six union members dead and 15 taken prisoner. On December 25, 1909 a bomb destroyed a portion of the Llewellyn Ironworks in Los Angeles where a bitter strike was in progress. On February 24, 1912 police beat women and children during a textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Numerous other examples from across the nation could be cited. Ludlow's distinctiveness in this context of industrial violence stemmed from its relative geographical isolation on the Western frontier and the number of women and children who were casualties there (McGovern and Guttridge 1972).

Ludlow was also distinctive in terms of its especially high concentration of immigrant labor. Immigration combined with industrialization to form a volatile context for Progressive Era conflict. Many immigrants to America came to establish new lives, but others were looking for income that they could use to improve their lives back in their homelands. Whatever their motives, Progressive Era immigrant workers, like immigrants during earlier periods of American industrialization, largely came from rural, pre-industrial backgrounds. They were new to industrial production, and thus they brought work habits to the factory gate that could frustrate discipline- and cost-conscious manufacturers (Gutman 1977). American work rules and the idea of the "work week" also conflicted with a variety of other old-country cultural and religious practices. Gutman (1977) provides a number of examples. A Polish wedding in a Pennsylvania mining or mill town lasted three to five days. Eastern European Orthodox Jews held a festival eight days after the birth of a son without regard to what particular day that was (Gutman 1977:23). Greek and Roman Catholic workers shared the same jobs but observed different holy days, an annoyance to many employers. A chronic tension thus existed between native and immigrant men and women fresh to the factory and the demands imposed upon them by the regularities and disciplines of factory labor (Gutman 1977:13).

Industrialization and immigration opened the doors to intensified exploitation of working people by corporate interests all across the United States. There were no laws protecting workers' rights or union activity in 1913-14. Workers in many places were denied freedoms of speech and assembly. While labor's cause to redress these conditions has not always been a noble struggle for justice (Foote 1997), in almost every instance the fight between capital and labor was unequal. Capital was able to mobilize tremendous resources, from control of railroad and telegraph to control of local police and government, to further its agenda and suppress labor's cause (Harvey 1996). Progressive Era political and economic discourse came to be dominated by, as framed by Gitelman (1988), the Labor Question: "Can some way be found to accommodate the interests of Capital and Labor, or is their conflict - often violent and almost always incendiary in its emotional charge - bound to breach the existing order?"

The hostilities at Ludlow were also of a piece with processes and conflicts extending deeper into the history of the American West. As indicated earlier, the American West has long enjoyed romantic, mythic status as an open, empty region where rugged, bootstrapping individuals could make their fortunes unfettered by the constraints of class and ethnic background. The scholarly work of Frederick Jackson Turner, especially his 1893 essay *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, did much to advance this classic, "triumphal" narrative of Western history (see also Turner 1920). While Turner's work was crucial for legitimizing the study of Western history, it left much out of the story. New Western Historians, among others, have challenged the romantic Turnerian image (Cronon et al. 1992; Limerick 1987, 1991; see also Nash 1991; Smith 1950). They have demonstrated the embeddedness of Western life and culture in larger, global historical processes of conquest, ethnic conflict, population migration, economic exploitation, and

political domination. They have shown the effect of these processes on *all* sectors of society and on a variety of ethnic groups.

Indeed, even the West's great iconic symbol of economic free agency and self-sufficiency – the cowboy – is now known to have been shaped by capitalist class relationships emanating from the industrialized East and beyond. Many cowboys were wage laborers in the employ of ranches often organized as joint stock companies. Many didn't even own their own horses. As Papanikolas (1995:75) puts it, "Strip a cowboy of his horse . . . [and he was] but one more seasonal worker attached to the industrial world by railroads that led to Chicago stockyards and ranches owned as often as not by Eastern bankers or Scottish investors." The freedom of the cowboy was simply the freedom to choose his own master or to starve (McGuire and Reckner 2002:46). Most Americans have heard about the 1881 gunfight at the OK Corral; far fewer have heard about the 1883 Texas "Cowboy Strike" in which several hundred cowboys walked off their jobs at five major ranches (Curtin 1991:56–59), or the 1885 cowboy strike on Wyoming's Sweetwater (McGuire and Reckner 2002; Papanikolas 1995). Wallace Stegner, arguably our leading chronicler and writer about Western life, notes that "Cowboys didn't make the West; they only created the image by which it is mis-known. People like Louis Tikas made the West . . ." (Stegner 1982).

Class struggle of the sort that would explode with particular ferocity at Ludlow is thus deeply embedded in the history of the West and in a broader set of national and global processes. As noted earlier, Ludlow is generally regarded as the best example of open class warfare in American history. In the words of George West, a federal investigator of the coal field strike, "This rebellion constituted perhaps one of the nearest approaches to civil war and revolution ever known in this country in connection with an industrial conflict" (quoted in Long 1989a:170). This is an astonishing fact for many Americans. Astonishing, because we Americans need our myths, especially myths of simpler, timeless places that can serve as an antidote to the economic uncertainty and political insecurity of modern times. New Western Historians have connected belief in a West devoid of conflict and struggle to modern economic and political anxieties that require, for their containment, seamless, mythic, triumphal narratives (Cronon et al. 1992). These and other narratives are the subject of the next section.

### **Ludlow, Public Memory, and Official History**

As noted previously, Ludlow and other sites of American industrial struggle are important to labor historians and unions but are generally erased from public memory. Public memory is a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand its past, present, and future (Bodnar 1992:15). We can better understand the erasure of sites like Ludlow by drawing on Bodnar's distinction between *official* history and *vernacular* history. Official history is nationalistic and patriotic, emphasizing citizen duties over citizen rights. It emphasizes social unity and the continuity of the social order, and glosses over periods of contradic-

tion, rupture, and transformation. Official history is progressive and triumphal. The ugly and violent events addressed by official history – like the Civil War – are usually presented as always having resulted in a better nation. Official history is publicly funded and professionally managed.

In contrast to official history, vernacular history is diverse and changing. Vernacular histories are local rather than national in orientation. They ultimately derive from the first-hand, everyday experience of those “ordinary people” who were directly involved with history’s events. Vernacular histories are “passed around the kitchen table.” In Bodnar’s words, vernacular histories “convey what social reality feels like, rather than what it should be like” (Bodnar 1992:14). They thus threaten the sacred and timeless nature of official history. Vernacular histories of Ludlow are pro-union. They emphasize the militia’s role in starting the shooting on April 20th and implicate the militia in many more atrocities against colonists on the day of the massacre. They also count many more casualties in the conflict, suggesting, for example, that additional bodies were removed from Ludlow during the three days that elapsed between the militia’s closing of the burned camp and the arrival of Red Cross relief workers.

The distinction between official and vernacular history is, of course, ideal. How much vernacular history is expressed in public memory is a matter of negotiation between official and vernacular interests in communities. However, it is usually official history that wins in the end. Labor conflict and struggle, and vernacular histories generally, lack the onwads and upwards tendency of official history. As described by Foote (1997), labor’s history is one of fits and starts, precedents and setbacks. It is a movement that has lurched from one crisis to another, trying to wrestle change out of diversity. It is a story that does not readily yield to grand, unified narratives. Labor conflict has little visibility in official history, and thus tangible evidence of this past – monuments and memorials marking labor’s struggles – are few and far between. Labor’s tangible memorials tend to be “homemade” and controversial in larger social circles. Memorials erected in crucibles of industrial conflict – like Harlan County, Kentucky and Windber, Pennsylvania – are often destroyed by civic authorities (Beik 1999; Scott 1995).

The silence of official history on the subject of labor struggle is not simply a case of powerful interests dominating the writing of history. Rather, it is often a case of the struggle being subconsciously ignored (McGuire and Walker 1999). In contemporary American ideology the United States is a classless society. Except for a few people who are very rich or very poor, Americans are all “middle-class.” Cultural leaders in the United States, including those who produce and represent history, come from the ranks of middle-class professionals. They are purveyors of loyalty to larger political structures and existing institutions (Bodnar 1992:15). Thus, events that bear a resemblance to class warfare or even draw attention to the existence of classes are not easily squared with America’s ideology of classlessness. Interestingly, this was not necessarily the case in the 19th century, when Americans commonly described their society in terms of class (Long 1989a). For example, in 1901 the Colorado Commissioner of Labor raised few eyebrows when he noted that “the absurdity of the old-time asininity that the interests of the laborer and the



capitalist are identical is apparent to all intelligent people who understand the real cause of the conflict between the classes" (quoted in Long 1989a:53).

To see history as narrative and to recognize the existence of different kinds of histories is not to say that history is myth, or to take a relativist stance toward historical fact, or to bow to the gods of revisionism and political correctness. Such criticisms are fashionable today as researchers of hidden histories find more room to work within colleges, universities, and other institutions of cultural production like museums and heritage organizations. Rather, to see history as narrative is to say that facts and events are selectively filtered, screened, and interpreted in keeping with theoretical preconceptions and existing social realities. This is a central proposition of what we might call *critical* history. History, practiced well, is aware of this filtering process and the controlling biases of race, class, gender, and nationalism (Gorn 2000; see also Trigger 1984). Well-practiced history also recognizes conquest, conflict, exploitation, and domination. It looks squarely at the past, "warts and all" (Limerick 1998). Good history is "knowledge of painful things, painfully arrived at" (Gorn 2000).

At present, institutions of cultural production in southern Colorado privilege official history by emphasizing the area's place in romantic, mythic narratives of the "Old West." For example, Trinidad's civic leaders capitalize on their remarkably well-preserved late 19th-century downtown – the Corazon de Trinidad ("Heart of Trinidad") National Historic District – to celebrate its status as a rest stop on the Santa Fe Trail. Here, wagon trains could pause and recoup before heading over Raton Pass into New Mexico. Westward expansion and growth are the dominant themes of this official history. Histories of coal mining, company towns, and labor struggle – while not totally erased – are nonetheless marginal.

When coal mining history is addressed, it is through a soft-focus lens. That is, the history is sanitized, romanticized, and redefined as "heritage" (see also Brooke 1998; Lowenthal 1996; Poirier and Spude 1998). Such is the case at the town of Cokedale, a well-preserved company town located to the southwest of Ludlow. Here, the homey details of coal camp life are emphasized, along with the benevolent paternalism of the coal companies (but see Clyne 1999 for a demythologization, albeit indirect, of this homey image). Labor struggles, when mentioned, are attributed to outside agitators. This is in keeping with trends seen in other deindustrializing regions of the United States, such as the coal mining and steel towns of Pennsylvania (Abrams 1994; Brant 1996; Mondale 1994; Staub 1994; Stewart 1997). This trend is disturbing because it does not serve the cause of accurate history.

### **Colorado Coal Field Archaeology**

The scholarly goal of the Colorado Coal Field War Archaeological Project is to produce a more complete, and thus more accurate, history of industrial process on the Western frontier. Official histories of Ludlow, when they address this episode in American industrial relations, focus on famous people and events, and the organizing activities of the UMWA. We have only anecdotal information about

the everyday lives and relationships of the ethnically diverse population that comprised the labor force. Archaeology can flesh out their side of the story, address official history's blindspots, and help produce a fuller understanding of cultural and historical process.

Our approach is informed by a relational view of class (Wurst 1999). Class is understood as a fluid set of processes that govern the appropriation of surplus labor, and that articulate in complex ways with non-class processes governing flows of property, power, and meaning. Class relations are historically situated and overdetermined by kinship, community, gender, and ethnicity. We are interested in the specific class and non-class strategies that workers used to resist exploitation, build solidarity across ethnic boundaries, make a living while out on strike, and interrelate with wider communities.

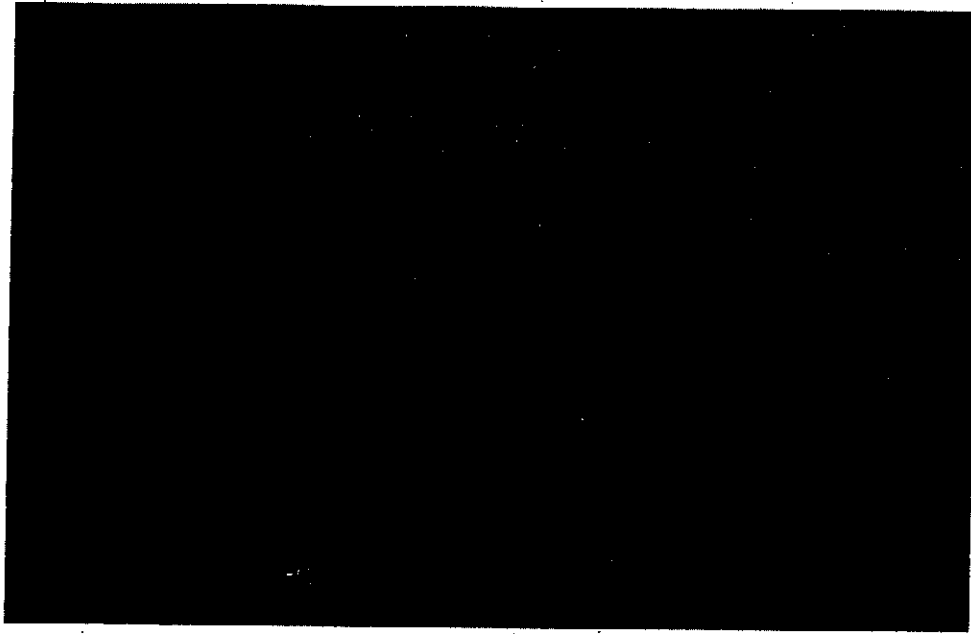
Specific research questions include the following. To what extent did the shared domestic experience of women and children in the company towns reinforce the class solidarity built up among men in the mine shafts? Once on strike, how did families support themselves, especially given minimal strike relief? How was the considerable ethnic diversity of the tent colonies integrated so as to defuse tension and foster a collective class consciousness that could sustain the strike for 15 months? To what extent did coal camp life really improve following the strike?

To answer these questions we are taking a comparative perspective on coal camp and tent colony life. The Ludlow excavations provide the strike context, and we are excavating in pre- and post-strike contexts at the Berwind coal camp above Ludlow, from which many of the Ludlow colonists came. We are looking to test documentary and vernacular accounts of life in the coal camps and tent colonies as well as to investigate other ways – unrecorded by history – in which miners might have been coping with their circumstances.

The archaeological contexts have good integrity and abundant remains. The assemblages at Ludlow – clothing, jewelry, children's toys, bullets, cartridges – speak to a hurried, catastrophic abandonment. We have only begun to analyze the material, but a few observations provide a sense of how our findings compare to the historical record and the expected responses of labor to strike conditions.

From photos of burned and demolished tents we know that the tents were constructed over wooden joists laid directly on the ground to support a wooden platform and frame. Our excavations have uncovered one of these platforms, defined by stains in the earth and rows of nails that followed the joists (Figure 15.5). A wide variety of artifacts associated with the floor – men's and women's clothing, toys, diaper pins – indicates occupation by a family. The assemblage also includes a suspender part bearing an inscription in Italian of "Society of Tyrolean Alpinists," and several Catholic religious medallions. This suggests Italian Catholic ethnicity, and provides a reference point for reconstructing the spatial organization of the camp. Future study will attempt to determine the extent to which the spatial organization of ethnic groups in the tent colony duplicated or departed from the ethnic segregation of the company towns.

Historical photos also indicate that cellars were dug beneath the Ludlow tents. Historians suggest that these cellars were used as shelter from gunfire. Excavation



**Figure 15.5** Excavated tent platform (courtesy Mark Walker)

of tent cellar locations reveals a variety of uses beyond protection, including storage and possibly habitation. Sub-floor features range in size from small pits to "full basements" measuring  $2 \times 2.5 \times 2$  m deep. They are very well prepared – hard-packed and/or fabric-lined – with wall niches for storage. Thus, the miners were clearly dug in for the long haul.

We are especially interested in what dietary remains at Ludlow can tell us about patterns of local interaction and support, specifically the extent to which strikers may have drawn on local merchants and other sources. Our trash pit and midden excavations reveal an enormous reliance on canned foods, much more than what we see in working-class contexts at Berwind (Figure 15.6). Some of this canned food is undoubtedly union-supplied. At the same time, some features contain lots of evidence for home canning, such as mason jars. This would certainly imply access to local farmers or gardens for fresh vegetables and fruit. Similarly, cow bones showing up in Ludlow deposits may suggest local supply from area ranchers. Further faunal analysis may disclose patterns of meat-sharing within the tent colony.

It is interesting to consider the strikers' use of national brands in canned food and milk as a possible cover for local support in the form of prepared foods and garden and ranch products. The tent colonies were subject to search, and thus any distinctive, locally produced goods could have been traced to particular merchants. In his work on marginalized households in Annapolis, Mullins (1999) shows that

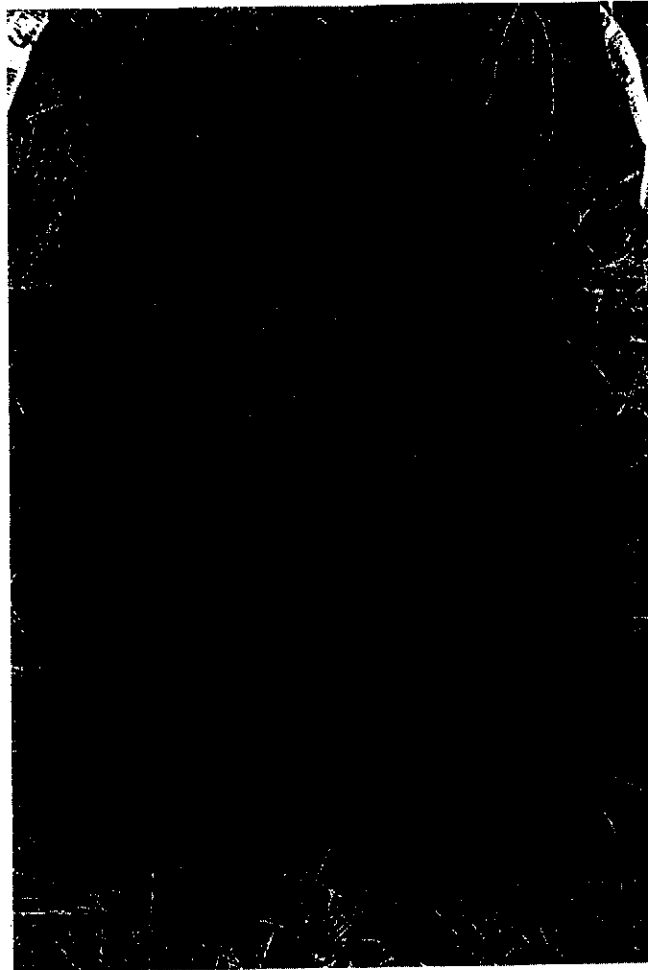


Figure 15.6 Excavated trash pit with cans

African Americans purchased national name brand, price-controlled foods as a way to avoid exploitation by local merchants. Strikers at Ludlow may have done the same, but in this instance as a strategy to protect local, striker-friendly merchants from harassment by coal company operatives and state militiamen. This would make sense as part of labor's commitment to using *place* – understood as social ties of kin and community that link workers to family and friends employed in local business, health care, and law enforcement – as a way to offset capital's greater command of *space* through control of markets, telegraph, railroad, and other technologies (Harvey 1996).

Our most direct evidence of local connections lies in beer and whiskey bottles, whose embossing and labeling reflects Trinidad origins. The frequency of alcohol bottles is higher at Ludlow compared to what we see in the working-class precincts

in Berwind. Social drinking is an important part of male working-class culture. Corporate control of the company towns meant control of leisure. Greater alcohol consumption at Ludlow reflects either the greater freedom of workers from company surveillance given their control of place or, alternatively, efforts to relieve boredom and stress under strike conditions. Companies certainly pushed prohibition after the strike, as reflected by the relative paucity of liquor bottles in excavated post-strike assemblages at Berwind.

Comparisons of pre- and post-strike coal camp deposits reveal some interesting changes in household strategy over time. Wood's (2002) study of the Berwind remains shows how working-class women in the company towns were able to raise families on miners' wages that would not even feed two people. Trash dating before the strike contains lots of tin cans, large cooking pots, and big serving vessels. Families took in single male miners as boarders to make the extra income and women used canned foods to make stews and soups to feed them. After the strike the companies discouraged boarders but the wages still remained very low. The tin cans and big pots disappear from the trash to be replaced by canning jars and lids, and the bones of rabbits and chickens. Women and children who could no longer earn money from boarders instead produced food at home to feed the family. As noted earlier, it remains to be seen whether post-strike contexts suggest an overall improvement in worker living conditions over time.

Analysis of coal field archaeological material is thus producing some potentially interesting leads for reconstructing labor's strategies in Western coal towns and striker tent colonies. In the next section, I take up the other, explicitly political, goal of the project: our use of these findings to engage contemporary working-class histories and interests.

### **Ludlow in Contemporary Political Context**

The last coal mines in the southern Colorado coal field closed in 1996 when capital moved its focus to the northern fields in Wyoming. Trainloads of this northern coal now rumble daily past the ruined Ludlow depot and our archaeological excavations. Although the southern coal fields are quiet, many of the everyday realities that provided context for the Ludlow massacre – workplace danger, corporate greed, chronic tension between capital and labor, and official neglect of America's working people and their histories – are still with us.

Coal mining remains a dangerous occupation. Since 1910, when the Bureau of Mines began compiling statistics, 80,400 men have died in American coal mines, and 1.5 million others have suffered disabling injuries (McGovern and Guttridge 1972). On September 23, 2001 two explosions rocked the Blue Creek No. 5 underground mine in Brookwood, Alabama, the nation's deepest at 2,140 feet beneath the surface. Thirteen coal miners were killed in the explosions. According to the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration the coal company, Jim Walter Resources Inc., has a mixed safety record. In 2000 its count of serious injuries was nearly double the industry average. Subsequent investigation into the September

2001 disaster revealed that prior to the explosions MSHA inspectors had cited Walters Resources for 31 violations – including high levels of free-floating combustible coal dust – that they allegedly never followed up on (Roberts 2002).

The Quecreek mining incident in Pennsylvania that riveted the American public and much of the world for more than three days in July 2002 is also relevant. Although it ended with the joyful rescue of nine trapped miners, it raised additional questions about mine safety in contemporary America. The number of coal miner deaths in America has risen each of the past three years. Yet, the Bush Administration is currently lobbying to cut the Mine Safety and Health Administration's budget, primarily from the agency's coal enforcement division (Roberts 2002). In light of the Pennsylvania incident, enforcement would seem to be the one area that requires beefing up, not trimming down, lest we repeat the workplace tragedies that led to Ludlow.

Perhaps the most relevant current example of the chronic tension between labor and capital is directly linked to the events of 1913–14. It concerns the current strike in Colorado pitting Pueblo steelworkers against Rocky Mountain Steel – formerly C.F.&I. – a subsidiary of Oregon Steel. The steelworkers have been on strike since October 1997 to stop forced overtime and thus regain one of the basic rights for which the Ludlow strikers died: the eight-hour workday. The Pueblo strikers have used Ludlow as a powerful symbol in their struggle. They rally at the UMW's annual Ludlow memorial service, and they have set up a symbolic "Camp Ludlow" at Oregon Steel headquarters in Portland. In fact, it is the power of Ludlow's symbolism that led Oregon Steel to change the name of its Pueblo subsidiary from C.F.&I. to Rocky Mountain Steel, as a way to distance itself from the events of 1914. But Oregon Steel is determined to break the steelworkers union and thus deprive workers of another of the basic rights for which the Ludlow strikers fought: the right to collective bargaining.

Thus, we should not be fooled into thinking that the concerns of the old industrial world have any less resonance in, or are any less relevant to, today's "post-industrial" one. On this point, Zinn (1970:100) considers three ways to read the Ludlow massacre. One reading is to view Ludlow narrowly, as an incident in the history of the trade union movement and the coal industry. On this reading, Ludlow is an "angry splotch" in the past, fading rapidly amidst new events. A second reading is to see Ludlow as a problem in personal responsibility. This reading focuses on who was to blame. Rockefeller and his corporate managers? Tikas and his unruly Greek compatriots? Linderfelt and his hired guns? A third reading sees Ludlow as a commentary on a larger set of questions concerning the structural relationship of government to corporate power, and the relationship of both to social protest movements.

It is this third reading that connects Ludlow to the present, and articulates with the concerns of a critical archaeology. Our project has embraced this reading, and in so doing has become a form of political action (Leone 1995; Ludlow Collective 2001). Our scholarship is fused with working-class interests and histories, and this anchors the various public outreach initiatives generated by our work. Our work has been featured in numerous local and regional newspaper articles and on

Colorado Public Radio. In these contexts we remind citizens that the workplace rights we enjoy and tend to take for granted today were won via struggle and paid for in blood. We share the speaker's platform with union leaders at the annual Ludlow memorial service and thereby contribute to that 85-year-old commemorative tradition – a tradition evidenced by one of the more evocative artifacts produced by our excavation, a bent, rusted wreath stand recovered from a trash-filled, still undated privy. Our Summer Teacher Institutes consider ways to incorporate Colorado's nationally and internationally significant labor history into high school curricula, and ways to fruitfully negotiate between competing official, vernacular, and critical histories. Our middle-school classroom history trunk seeks to enlighten an even younger generation about Colorado's labor history. These varied activities cultivate an audience for archaeological work and help to perpetuate our discipline while they promote critical thought about society and, at times, gently agitate for change.

Our project is also contributing in more tangible ways to public memorialization of labor history sites. We have produced an interpretive kiosk for Ludlow and a historical marker for Berwind that is modeled on Corazon de Trinidad markers celebrating Santa Fe Trail history. They remind tourists of the Colorado immigrant's role in building the West, and Ludlow's legacy for securing workplace rights. They add to an emerging commemorative landscape recognizing southeastern Colorado's mining history (e.g., Figure 15.7). In 1996 the homemade UMW signs directing tourists to the Ludlow Massacre Memorial were replaced by official brown heritage signs. In May 1997 a memorial to coal miners who died in southern Colorado mines was erected by the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in the middle of the Trinidad Historic District. All these efforts add a much-needed critical, counter-classic quality to the area's existing commemorative landscape.

## Conclusion

In 1991 a United States House of Representatives report confessed that "the history of work and working people . . . is not adequately represented or preserved" in the United States (report cited in Foote 1997:303). The Colorado Coal Field War Archaeological Project is an attempt to redress this situation in the American West. Our work has produced some promising leads for fleshing out working-class agency and history in a region long dominated by seamless, mythic narratives of territorial expansion and progress. It has also connected with political issues around work in contemporary America. Ludlow is still a place to be reckoned with in this regard. By raising public awareness of the coal field strike we narrow the gulf between past and present and make archaeology relevant to contemporary life.

Our work is also helping to enrich an impoverished commemorative landscape. Foote (1997) predicts that we will see more recognition of "landscapes of violence and tragedy" – including landscapes of labor struggle – in the years ahead. He suggests that many sites will be commemorated as a way to thwart destruction by economic development, much as Civil War sites were saved. But we might also hope that such sites will be commemorated by civic *choice* as the blindspots of official



**Figure 15.7** The Ludlow Massacre Memorial

history become too conspicuous and compelling to ignore. Archaeology can and should play an important role in this effort.

The events that took place in the southern Colorado coal field are not happy ones. By acknowledging their existence, fleshing them out via archaeological research, and analyzing them from a critical perspective we produce more complete, and better, histories. To the extent that this critical encounter with unhappy events also broadens the cast of characters involved in the making of America, we produce more democratic histories. Blind allegiance to "Fourth of July historiography" – one that celebrates heroic events and suppresses horrific ones – is not befitting a genuine democracy (Dower 1995). By struggling with the ambiguities in, and conflicts between, alternative histories of America's past we can better sharpen our skills of critical thought, evaluation, and debate. In so doing we stand to gain better histories, better students, and better citizens.



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