

TEXT FOR THE LUDLOW MASSACRE MEMORIAL INTERPRETIVE KIOSK

History Panel

Looking onto this prairie, you see one of several places where striking coal miners lived during the 1913-1914 Colorado Coalfield Strike. Among the miners' demands were the right to organize, better wages, an eight-hour working day, and a safe workplace. After the United Mine Workers of America called the strike in September 1913, thousands of miners and their families were evicted from their homes in company-owned towns. The UMWA provided tent colonies to house the striking miners. Ludlow was the largest of these colonies, with about 200 tents and 1,200 people.

Company towns were built in the canyons just west of this location. Miners were forced to buy their provisions at company stores, live in company housing, and send their children to company schools. Entries to the towns were gated and patrolled by armed guards.

Local Hispanic people and immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe provided the majority of the labor force. Twenty-four distinct languages were counted in the southern coalfield camps. This culturally diverse group maintained its solidarity throughout the duration of the strike.

Coal companies reacted quickly to the strike, bringing in strikebreakers and the Baldwin Felts detective agency from West Virginia. Amid steadily escalating violence and pressure from the coal companies, Governor Ammons sent the state militia to the coalfields in 1913. Guard commanders were decidedly sympathetic to the coal companies.

On April 20, 1914, hostilities came to a head. Throughout the day, gunfire was exchanged between the militia and miners. Lives were lost on both sides. By evening the tent colony was in flames and the militia were looting the colony. Among the fatalities were two women and eleven children who suffocated in a cellar dug beneath a tent. This is now known as the Death Pit. The Death Pit and the monument are maintained at this site as a memorial to those who lost their lives in the Ludlow Massacre.

Archaeology Panel

Archaeologists are investigating the sites from the 1913-1914 Colorado Coalfield Strike, including mining towns and tent colonies, in order to recreate the living conditions of the miners and their families. Archaeology is more than just excavations. Lab work—cleaning, identifying, and analyzing artifacts—is a vital part of the project. This work is ongoing. By combining information about artifacts and their location, archaeologists can draw conclusions about daily life in the Ludlow colony.

In 1997, the first year of the project, the goal was to determine the size and layout of the colony and whether anything remained of it beneath the ground surface. Archaeologists accomplished this by mapping artifacts on the surface and using Ground Penetrating Radar to identify features such as deep pits. Using this information, they excavated a short trench in an area that looked promising. This work showed that surface artifacts reflected the street plan of the colony and that there were subsurface remains of tents and other structures.

The Colorado Coalfield War Archaeological Project is conducted by the University of Denver, the State University of New York at Binghamton, and Fort Lewis College (Durango, Colorado).

Artifacts found at this site are curated at the University of Denver, Anthropology Department, courtesy of the UMWA. The objects are often seen at public exhibitions and lectures.

In 1998, archaeologists expanded their work. Removing topsoil, mapping soil stains, and recording locations of the artifacts, they were able to find and excavate one of the tent locations. The tent is marked by drainage ditches, burned wood, and lines of nails. Another interesting feature they found was a deep pit that may be one of the original cellars the strikers dug beneath their tents.

Legacy Panel

The coalfield strike ended in December, 1914, when the UMWA was forced to abandon its organizing efforts. The miners' actions led to important changes in American labor relations. The deaths of women and children outraged the American public and focused national attention on labor conditions. Corporate management policies began to turn from violent confrontations with strikers to more negotiated settlements. "Public Relations" became a priority for Big Business. The Ludlow strikers paved the way to many rights that we now take for granted, such as a safe workplace and eight-hour work day.

What happened at Ludlow remains an important and powerful part of labor history. The disciplines of history and archaeology now work together to keep alive the public memory of what happened in the southern Colorado coalfields. They remind us that the rights of working people have often been won at a terrible cost. Today, Ludlow stands as a symbol for those who continue to struggle for basic rights and dignity in the workplace.

Since 1914 the UMWA, like Local 9856, have engaged in other strikes to protect their rights. Educational outreach supports such efforts. The

Women's Auxiliary of Local 9856 maintains the Ludlow Memorial, provides scholarships for the sons and daughters of coal miners, and hosts students and interns from around the nation.

*This research is made possible through the contributions of the
Colorado Historical Society - State Historical Fund*

United Mine Workers of America

*Humanities Institute and the Walter Rosenberry Fund of the Divisions of
Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, The University of Denver*

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