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Rock detectives help mend 1918 memorial to Ludlow victims

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Eleven children were huddled in a cellar beneath a colony of tents when Colorado National Guard soldiers doused the tents of striking coal miners with kerosene outside of Trinidad on April 20, 1914.

The children's bodies were found with arms clasped. The charred bodies of two mothers lay on top of them. Five others in the camp were shot to death.

It became known as the **Ludlow Massacre**, inspired congressional hearings and helped spark a labor movement that gave workers the freedom and rights they enjoy today. Outrage over the deaths of the children - as young as 3 months and as old as 13 years - helped drive the reforms.

Today, the reconstructed 1918 Ludlow Monument north of Trinidad that honors the 18 victims will be rededicated 25 months after it was desecrated.

The granite figures of a miner and a woman cradling a child were decapitated - likely by a sledgehammer. The left arm of the woman's figure was severed. The figure of the child was undamaged.

The vandal wasn't caught and the lost pieces were never recovered despite a \$10,000 reward. There was no evidence to suggest whether anti-union sentiment or mindless vandalism motivated the crime.

The monument's mutilation angered locals, many of whom have historical and emotional ties to the southeastern Colorado coal fields.

"It's almost like they massacred them again," said Gayleen Fatur of Trinidad, whose family has looked after the monument for two generations. "The people who did this had no heart or soul, just like the murderers 91 years ago."

Money poured in from miners worldwide to pay for the \$80,000 restoration, said Bob Butero, regional director of United Mine Workers of America.

"I thought the memorial was a revered place in just our little corner of the world," Butero said. "But this affected people worldwide."

"This is our Vietnam Veterans Memorial, our Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, our Lincoln Memorial," said United Mine Workers president Cecil Roberts.

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But it took a bit of detective work to piece together the 87-year-old statues. The figures were erected four years after the massacre, but the sculptor and the kind of granite used were mysteries.

Union archives at Penn State University revealed it was made by a Springfield, Ill., company from granite mined in Barre, Vt. California stone conservator John Griswold and carver Marcel Maechler found nearly matching gray Barre granite at the original quarry after several tries.

"We got most of the information we needed to replicate the missing parts from archival pictures and the sculptures themselves, especially the work on the child's face," Griswold said.

They abandoned modern computer and laser techniques for traditional sculpting tools to create an accurate duplication.

The miners had gone on strike in September 1913 for safer working conditions and better wages after John D. Rockefeller's Colorado Fuel & Iron Mines refused to hold talks with the union.

The 1,200 miners and family members, evicted from company housing, pitched a tent camp near the Ludlow rail stop and weathered a bitterly cold winter.

Many families dug cellars under their tents to protect themselves from "the Death Special," a company-sponsored armored car mounted with a machine gun used to periodically spray the camp and erode the will of the strikers.

It was in one such cellar that the 13 women and children died in the conflagration.

The last known survivor of the massacre, Irene Micheli Dotson, died in Colorado Springs in 2003. She was 2 when she fled the fire with her parents.

Today's rededication comes as University of Denver anthropologist Dean Saitta continues an analysis of the first excavation of the Ludlow site.

Saitta's team has turned up thousands of artifacts since 1997 that were forgotten under the surface of the parched field a mile west of Interstate 25. In the cellars, researchers found a coffee pot pierced by a bullet, doll parts, playground marbles, a sewing machine, a Hamlin's Wizard Oil medicine bottle, sardine cans and a sewing kit tucked into a tobacco tin.

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