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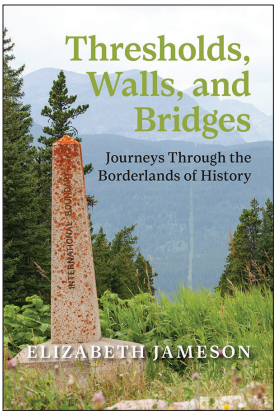


# THRESHOLDS, WALLS, AND BRIDGES: JOURNEYS THROUGH THE BORDERLANDS OF HISTORY

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# The Heart of Gold: Working-Class Voices from the Cripple Creek Gold Mining District

## April 2, 2002

I am a sucker for historical anniversaries. In 2002, I was already anticipating the centennial of the Colorado Labor Wars, a series of brutal strikes during 1903–1904 that rocked Colorado's coal and hardrock mining industries. The conflicts began as local labor disputes, but became linked through the aggressive responses of mine owners and the state. Governor James H. Peabody repeatedly sent state troops to strike areas to ensure that union miners suffered disastrous defeats throughout Colorado.[1] If this seems an odd anniversary to anticipate, the Labor Wars had preoccupied me for over three decades, since I began researching hardrock miners and their unions. My dissertation was a working-class history of the Cripple Creek, Colorado gold-mining District, where organized labor fought a pivotal battle in these conflicts.[2]

Gold was discovered in Cripple Creek in 1890. Within a decade it was famed as "The World's Greatest Gold Camp," producing over $20 million annually. By 1900, the District's ten towns housed some 30,000 people, most of them miners drawn by the promise of steady work at good pay.[3] Stable mining and steady employment drew married men with families, who organized to protect their jobs and benefits. Bookended by two crucial Western Federation of Miners (WFM) strikes in 1894 and 1903–1904, the District was an organized labor stronghold. The WFM was the keystone of the local labor movement, renowned for its strikes, its endorsements of the Socialist Party, and its leadership in founding the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Founded in 1893, the WFM's first major victory was the Cripple Creek strike of 1894, which established the eight-hour day,

$3 minimum daily wage, and the right to organize for District miners.[4] The victorious miners supported other crafts that by 1902 had organized a majority of workers in all trades in some fifty-four local unions.[5]

Organized labor held substantial political, social, and economic power throughout the ten District communities: Cripple Creek, Victor, Goldfield, Independence, Altman, Cameron, Anaconda, Elkton, Lawrence, and Gillet. Unions influenced wages, hours, and working conditions, provided for the health and welfare of their members, organized the local holidays, established libraries and reading rooms, and published a daily newspaper, the *Victor and Cripple Creek Daily Press*, which boasted that it was "The Only Daily Newspaper Owned By Organized Workingmen."

Labor's power ended with "the" Cripple Creek strike of 1903–1904. That conflict began in August 1902, when the WFM organized Colorado City Mill and Smeltermen's Union No. 125. Its members worked in the Standard, Portland, and Telluride Mills in Colorado City that refined Cripple Creek ore, laboring twelve hours for a $1.80 daily wage. The anti-union Standard hired a Pinkerton detective to infiltrate the union. The Pinkerton Detective Agency was an anti-union agency that employers hired to help break unions, either by identifying union members and leaders or by staging illegal acts that could be falsely attributed to union members. The detective who infiltrated Local No. 125 identified forty-two union members to the company, which promptly fired them. The WFM requested their reinstatement, a $2.25 daily minimum wage, and the right to union membership. The Standard refused to negotiate, and the mill workers went on strike.[6]

Between August 1902, when the smeltermen organized, and February 1903, when the Standard refused to bargain, Coloradoans went to the polls to decide a pivotal and hotly contested election. Democrats and Populists won a combined majority of the votes, but Republican James Hamilton Peabody took the Governor's office by a plurality. During his two-year term, major strikes rocked the northern and southern Colorado coal fields, the mills and smelters of Denver and Colorado City, and the hardrock communities of Clear Creek County, Telluride, and the Cripple Creek District. Over the protests of local authorities, Peabody dispatched the National Guard to strikes in Telluride, the southern coal fields, Colorado City, and the Cripple Creek District.[7]

The strike spread from Colorado City to Cripple Creek in March 1903 when the miners refused to work on mines that shipped ore to the unfair plants, attempting to dry up the ore supply to support the mill workers.

The WFM was an industrial union, committed to organizing all the workers in the vertically integrated mining industry into one union to match owners' power. The major District mine owners also owned the mills and smelters, and the railroads that hauled ore from their mines to their refining facilities in Colorado City. Competition among owners who supported and opposed organized labor became a crucial submerged factor in the strike. The president of the Portland Mill, James Burns, had been a plumber before he discovered gold on Battle Mountain above the city of Victor. He did not discriminate against union labor, and his Portland Mine remained open throughout most of the strike, as did other union properties that did not supply non-union mills. The strike became, in part, a struggle for industrial control among pro- and anti-union employers.[8]

The strike dragged on for fifteen months. For much of that time the District was under martial law. Over the objections of local authorities, Governor Peabody sent the National Guard, led by Adjutant General Sherman Bell, a local mine superintendent who announced his intention to destroy "this damned anarchistic federation." Bell took the job only after mine owners agreed to make up the difference between his $1,800 annual salary as Adjutant General and the $5,000 he had earned managing the Moffat mines in the Cripple Creek District. The troops cost over $400,000, which the mine owners advanced in return for certificates of indebtedness from the state at 4 percent interest. The local anti-union Citizens' Alliance was mustered in to help as Company L in the National Guard.[9]

Periodic violence—some major, some minor, some staged—became the justification for the armed force. A carpenter, Thomas Stewart, was beaten as he built a fence around a non-union mine. Someone took spikes from the tracks of the Florence and Cripple Creek railroad; the track walker was tipped off and the incident passed without mishap. On November 21, 1903, an explosion in the non-union Vindicator Mine killed two men. The Vindicator lay within the perimeter of the military encampment and was well guarded at the time. On January 26, 1904, faulty machinery severed the cable hauling miners to the surface of Stratton's Independence mine; one man was thrown clear and fifteen plunged to their deaths. All sides pointed fingers, alternately blaming union miners, Mine Owners' Association (MOA) hirelings, or incompetent non-union labor.[10]

Labor protested the excesses of the militia, which arrested union leaders and held them without charge, suspended the right of habeas corpus, invaded a court room in Cripple Creek with armed troops and trained a Gatling gun on the courthouse rather than obey a court order

to surrender imprisoned union leaders, and denied freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and the right to bear arms. Bell's lieutenant, Thomas McClelland, announced: "To hell with the constitution, we aren't going by the constitution."[11]

The strike ended tragically early on June 6, 1904, when a bomb exploded beneath the platform of the Independence, Colorado train depot, killing thirteen non-union miners coming off shift. Who set the dynamite and who paid them remain fiercely debated.[12] What followed the tragic explosion is clear. Within hours, mine owners and the Citizens' Alliance forced elected officials to resign—they told the Sheriff he could resign or be hanged—and seized control of local governments and the investigation into the explosion. They smashed union halls and four WFM cooperative stores that had provisioned the strikers. The militia deported over 200 union leaders to Kansas and New Mexico; hundreds of others left in fear or were violently driven away by armed masked mobs. The MOA imposed an owners' hiring card and banned union labor from the District.[13]

During the strike many mines that employed union miners were forced to fire them. On June 9, 1904, the militia occupied the largest remaining union property, James Burns' Portland Mine. Accusing Burns of "employing and harboring large numbers of dangerous, lawless men," Bell announced, "I anticipate Mr. Burns will be permanently deposed, and I hope obliterated from that vicinity." On June 19, an anti-union faction deposed Burns as president of the mine he had discovered and the company he had founded.[14] In November, two MOA gun thugs intimidated people from voting by killing two union poll watchers, one of whom was a key witness in the investigation of the Independence Depot explosion.[15]

The strike still sparks arguments about competing versions of events, and particularly about who was most violent. Over a year after the strike's chaotic climax, Harry Orchard, a former member of the Altman WFM local, confessed that he had murdered Frank Steunenberg in Caldwell, Idaho, on December 30, 1905. A sheep rancher in 1905, Steunenberg had been the governor of Idaho during an 1899 WFM strike in the Coeur d'Alenes. Orchard implicated an "inner circle" of the WFM in the Steunenberg murder, particularly WFM President Charles Moyer, Secretary-Treasurer W. D. (Big Bill) Haywood, and George Pettibone, a Denver merchant who had been a WFM activist in the Coeur d'Alenes. The three were abducted to Idaho, imprisoned for over a year and a half, and finally acquitted. In his confession, Orchard also alleged that the "inner circle" had hired him to set the explosives at the Vindicator Mine and the Independence Depot.[16]

Whether Orchard in fact blew up the Depot, whether he acted alone, and who hired him were all hotly contested at the time. These questions remain unresolved.[17]

I was first drawn to this history in 1969 during an undergraduate internship that gave me the extraordinary opportunity to organize the archives of the Western Federation of Miners-International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers. I wrote my undergraduate history thesis on the Western Federation of Miners and the Radical Labor Movement.[18] That project left me wondering what difference the union made for the thousands of miners it represented, and for their families, a question that led me to Cripple Creek, and to the period between the two crucial miners' strikes.

One of the challenges of a history that is really about tens of thousands of people is giving it a human face, a human voice. My questions about the human value of the unions and the human consequences of the strikes led me to people who had survived the struggles, and their descendants, who generously shared their stories with a very green young historian. While many histories have focused on organized labor and the lessons it took from its 1904 strike defeats, the survivors I interviewed in the 1970s told more personal stories of the conflict. I developed a particularly close relationship with May McConaghy Wing, from our first interview in 1975 until her death in 1980. Born in 1890, the daughter, wife, and mother of hardrock miners, May Wing lived most of her ninety years in the Cripple Creek District. In our last recorded interview, she voiced the challenge that animates my work. "I lived the history that I can tell," May told me. "And of course, the history today, in books that's written a lot, is not really the true thing, as it was lived."[19]

Writing history as it was lived has been difficult for the best-intentioned historians because sources and memories were among the spoils of the strike. The *Daily Press* folded just as the strike began, after which the Victor *Record* became the only remaining pro-union paper in the District. One night the militia rounded up the *Record*'s workforce and took them to the military bullpen. Emma Langdon, a union printer whose husband was among those arrested, sneaked in, printed the paper, and delivered it to the commanding officer, the ink still wet, its headline blazing, "Slightly Disfigured But Still In the Ring." The *Record* offices were sacked in the aftermath of the strike; after that it abandoned its pro-union stance.[20] Union records were seized or destroyed when mobs poured coal oil on them as they attacked the union halls in the June 6 rioting. Some memories

left with the leaders forced from the District. Controlling sources and memories becomes part of the history of the strikes and how they have been interpreted.

The story of Cripple Creek has appeared in multiple versions with multiple leading actors and plots. In none of them would May Wing have played a leading role. Competing versions of the history appeared throughout the strike and immediately afterwards. In 1904, the Colorado Mine Owners' Association published *The Criminal Record of the Western Federation of Miners from Coeur d'Alenes to Cripple Creek*, charging the WFM with virtually every crime committed in the gold and silver camps for a decade. The WFM countered with its *Category of Crimes of the Operators' Association: 851 Murdered in Less Than Four Years*, which blamed all mining-related deaths on owners' negligence. Emma Langdon published her pro-labor history in 1904 and 1905.[21]

The counter-narrative appeared in the first academic history, Benjamin McKie Rastall's *The Labor History of the Cripple Creek District*, published in 1908 from his 1906 University of Wisconsin dissertation.[22] A resident of Colorado Springs, home of many of the major mine owners, Rastall had close ties to local business. He somehow secured some of the few surviving union records, which remain at the Wisconsin State Historical Society. For Rastall, the strike was unreasonable because the miners struck innocent mine owners with whom Rastall maintained they had no grievance. He ignored the vertical integration of mines and smelters. He characterized the District as a "Little Mining Monarchy, shut off from the rest of the world by a high mountain range . . . with its own separate political organization, the power in the hands of the miners, the unions controlled by a minority, the strike power in the hands of a clique." It was an "anomaly," "a very recent frontier district, of a highly developed industrial center, which has kept most of its frontier aspects."[23] The mine owners' forcible takeover of the local government and the courts thus "civilized" the frontier.[24]

Rastall insisted that everyone he knew in the District knew that the union had blown up the depot. We clearly talked to different people. Rastall's version dominated local histories, which focused on the entertaining antics of fun-loving, hard-drinking young mine owners, especially those who won control of the District after the strike.[25]

The selective memories and erasures that inscribed different versions of a still-contested history reverberated throughout the centennial commemorations. Commemoration implies a shared understanding of events, a shared set of symbols, a common cast to memorialize. Histories of the

Colorado Labor Wars had established no such common ground. Seeking to explain the WFM's socialist endorsements and the violence of many western miners' strikes, historians have concluded variously that the miners' politics were the product of the frontier[26]; of brutal strike experiences[27]; of the lack of a local middle class[28]; of rapid industrialization[29]; of the dangers of underground work[30]; of loss of control to management[31]; of diminished opportunities for self-employment[32]; of failure to secure an eight-hour law in Colorado[33]; or of the defeats of the Populist Party and the Knights of Labor.[34] For some, the strikes became insignificant because they were not ordinary daily occurrences. As one historian put it, their significance rested in the false assumption that "the WFM's defeat in Cripple Creek was merely the experience of Tincup, Silver City, Lump Gulch, and Tonopah [mining towns] writ large."[35]

Perhaps not. One could argue—and I have—that Cripple Creek was, both materially and symbolically, more significant than Tincup in shaping working-class agendas and in the lived experience of tens of thousands of miners and their families. Violent confrontations did not have to occur in every mining town to influence workers' understandings of their options, because when mine owners broke strong unions, the outcomes shaped relationships throughout the industry.[36]

The lived histories I recorded held this bitter legacy. People told stories about working-class life before 1904 that their children and grandchildren often had not heard. To work in Cripple Creek after the 1904 strike defeat, miners had to hide any hint of union allegiance. By the 1970s, when I interviewed them, most survivors who remembered the union era were elderly women whose fathers had been union miners. Still girls during the strike, they married men who did not begin mining until after the WFM was driven out and so had never belonged to a union. They could still be blacklisted, so it was dangerous to talk about organized labor and the strike. When people agreed to talk to me, the mines were closed, the men had died or retired, and the survivors did not want their memories to die with them.[37] Their narratives varied enormously from both the mine owners' version of the strikes, which blamed the unions for violence, and from labor historians' emphases on the consequences for organized labor and for working-class politics. Few histories said much about what the strikes meant to the strikers and their families.

My work has its place in the longstanding debates about the strike and about who was most responsible for its tragic outcome. But rather than debate the debate further, let's consider what the strike meant for Cripple

Creek "writ small"—not for Tincup or Lump Gulch, but for one miner who could represent many others, and for his extended family.

His name was John Welch. Born in 1864, the son of a Vermont coal miner, he entered the coal mines after his father died in a mining accident on July 4, 1875—hardly an Independence Day for the eleven-year-old who quit school to take his father's place underground. Sometime in the 1880s, John Welch moved to Leadville, Colorado, a silver-mining town, like many coal and lead miners who sought the higher wages and lesser dangers of western hardrock mines. There he met and married Hannah Doran.[38]

Hannah Doran's parents, Edward and Catharine Doran, could represent many immigrant mining families. Born in Ireland in the early 1830s, they married young, probably during the disastrous famine years, 1845–1849. They left Ireland, to settle for a time in Wales; perhaps Edward worked the coal mines there. Catharine began long years of childbearing with the birth of their first son, James, in 1852. Sometime between 1854, when Thomas was born, and 1858, when Mary arrived, the Dorans immigrated to Shullsburg, in Wisconsin's lead-mining region. Edward worked as a lead miner. Catharine cared for their ever-increasing family—she bore twelve children in nineteen years, nine of whom survived. All the Doran children attended school well into adolescence, an important achievement, especially, we might imagine, for Catharine, who could neither read nor write. By the 1880s, lead mining declined, and the new silver mines around Leadville drew many Shullsburg miners, including the Dorans.[39]

Most of the Doran sons mined; the daughters, like Hannah, married miners. Kate Doran married James McConaghy, an Irish immigrant hoist engineer. Their daughter May was born in Leadville November 25, 1890. Three months later Kate died, and in 1893 James took three-year-old May to Victor, in the Cripple Creek District. James' brother John McConaghy moved there, too. So did his brother-in-law Ed Doran, with his wife Mary.[40]

In 1893, John and Hannah Welch followed. John Welch joined the WFM; he and Hannah participated in both Cripple Creek strikes. Their daughter Kathleen dated the first strike in family time with her older brother's birth. "In 1894 Tom was born," she told me, "and that's when the Bull Hill strike was." The strikers, surrounded by an army of sheriff's deputies, entrenched themselves on Bull Hill, the center of union activism. They built a mock fort and pretended to be well armed. Kathleen Welch Chapman recounted her mother's story:

> There wasn't too many people up there, you know—and the men went out and they had their wives come along with them. And Mama said she wrapped Tom in a blanket and went along. And the men took their coats off, and their hats, and put them up in a tree and put the guns up in there. And then, of course they were milling around, you know, and oh, they just thought that the *world* was up there, this militia did, when they seen them. . . . And when they could look up there and see all them guns shining through with the sun on them, boy, they stopped and they turned around and went back to Colorado Springs *on the run*![41]

After the first strike, the Welch family moved to a new home they built in Goldfield. Kathleen was born there in 1895, then Edward, Annie, and young John. The Welches' income, welfare, and social life were all connected to John Welch's union membership. Kathleen Chapman remembered the union era for the union men who brought sick benefits when her dad couldn't work, the union Labor Day parades and picnics, and a secure family life. John Welch was, she said, "a great union man. He always believed in that union—for people and among people."[42]

One of the first tasks of local unions was providing for sickness and death. Unions paid sick benefits, cared for widows and orphans, organized funerals, shipped bodies out of the District for burial, and hired doctors and nurses for their members.[43] Kathleen Welch Chapman fondly recalled these union benefits as part of what her father meant when he said that unions were "for people."

> Now, if there was a family that was very hard up or very tight for money, why [the unions would] help them out. . . . I can remember people in Victor coming to Goldfield when Papa'd maybe have a cold or be sick or couldn't go to work or something. There'd be maybe a half a dozen men come at night to see if he was getting along and if he needed anything.[44]

The unions organized social life as well, hosting balls, socials, picnics, and holidays. The two big local holidays were the Fourth of July and Labor Day. All the Welches took part in the three-day Labor Day celebrations. To little Kathleen Welch, the annual Labor Day picnic at Pinnacle Park was a wonderland of merry-go-rounds, ball games, horseshoes, picnics

shared with other union families, speeches by the Governor of Colorado and other "people like that you know, that was really worthwhile."[45] In 1903, the speaker was WFM President Charles Moyer, who lambasted Governor James Peabody for sending the militia to strike areas throughout Colorado.[46]

Labor Day began with a parade. An estimated 3,000 union members marched in the 1899 parade, 5,000 in 1901 and 1903. John Welch marched, though, not with his local union but with his religious fraternal association, the Knights of St. John. He "always wore his uniform," Kathleen Chapman remembered, "and, oh, them were great."[47] She did not remember if her mother belonged to the WFM Women's Auxiliary, but Hannah was, she said, "always quite a church member," and she remembered with great fondness the local priest who sided with the union during the second strike.[48]

Despite the Welches' union allegiance, after the 1894 strike John had generally cordial relations with his employers, the Woods Investment Company. The Woods family were Baptists who believed, apparently, in the stewardship of wealth. Unlike most District mine owners, they invested some of their wealth in the District and were widely perceived as generous and egalitarian for their contributions to working-class social life. The Woods family built Pinnacle Park, the vast picnic ground, zoo, and amusement park that they annually donated for Labor Day.[49]

The Woods Investment Company built a clubhouse for its employees, opposite its Gold Coin Mine in Victor. The two-story building held a library, a large athletic room, a bath room, where men could bathe when they came off shift, a billiard hall and chess tables, and a few bedrooms for company employees. The Club was dedicated with an elaborate party in February 1900. John and Hannah Welch were there. Their daughter remembered the night vividly.

> Papa worked on the Gold Coin there in Victor. . . . And I can remember that night so well. I wasn't very big. Mama and Papa went. I can remember how nice they looked. They got a baby-setter to come in and set with us. . . . We lived in Goldfield, and they went up to Victor to the opening. And . . . they said they had such a good time. Well, they danced and had a big banquet.[50]

Not surprisingly, Kathleen Chapman remembered parades, baby-sitters, and union committees that came to her house when her father was ill, but not what happened at the union hall, or her parents' political affiliations. I don't know, therefore, whether John Welch shared the Populist politics of many District miners in the 1890s, or whether he, like an influential minority of the union leadership, joined the Socialist Party when it was founded in 1901.

In many regards, though, John Welch resembled his co-workers, many of whom shared the heritage of coal mining, who frequently associated with men of other classes in the local lodge halls, saloons, Asian Exclusion campaigns, and political parties. Like John Welch, union leaders and local businessmen alike were likely to belong to at least one lodge or fraternal association, frequently to the same one. They sometimes belonged to the same political parties. Organized labor exerted considerable influence in District politics, and almost a third of the political activists I could identify belonged to unions.

Whatever John Welch's politics, he shared a great deal with the union leadership. They were frequently, like him, married homeowners in their thirties and forties; many lived in the smaller towns, like Goldfield.[51] And like him, they had amicable relations with their employers, provided the employers treated workers with respect. Otherwise, they struck or boycotted businesses unfair to workers in other crafts that sold non-union goods, or that refused to honor labor's demands for wages, hours, and working conditions.[52]

Even the high regard for the Woods Investment Company had its limits. In 1901, the town of Cripple Creek denied the Woods Company a franchise for electric lights. The company retaliated by refusing to employ residents of the town. The Trades Assembly protested the policy as "tyrannical, iniquitous, and totally unjustifiable." The *Press* reported "much ill feeling and indignation" because "the Woods people had acquired all they own in this district right here, by a stroke of good fortune . . . they found it in the ground where God (not the Woods) deposited it; and . . . now they propose to use the power of this wealth to oppress the people—to crush and trample underfoot the liberties of the citizens."[53]

Labor approved and mingled socially only with those owners and managers who supported union labor. Friendly labor-management relationships could always change if employers undermined the local unions. Between the major conflicts in 1894 and 1903–1904, numerous local disputes were settled easily. During 1899–1903, the *Press* reported at least

thirty-four minor strikes, primarily over wages and working conditions, most of them quickly negotiated.[54] Workers felt sufficiently powerful to push their demands, and each success increased their faith in collective action.

Strikes were a last resort. Generally, unions simply announced their wages and hours and boycotted businesses that refused to comply. Using the *Press* to publicize banned goods and establishments, organized labor won six o'clock closing for retail clerks, prevented laundries from shipping clothes out of the District to non-union shops, made boarding houses and restaurants hire union help, established the six-day week for cooks and waiters, eliminated non-union products from saloons, groceries, and other retail houses—in short, enforced demands for union recognition, wages, and hours for most District workers.[55]

Boycotts worked for trades that sold consumer goods or services that working-class patrons purchased. But boycotting gold was not an effective labor tactic because few miners could afford to buy the gold for which they risked their lives underground. Instead, WFM organizers often relied on social pressure. One effective tactic was for the secretaries of WFM locals to check miners' union cards as they went on shift and let peer pressure do the rest. John Welch was probably starting his shift at least once when WFM officials checked cards at the Gold Coin shaft house. When Jerry Kelly, financial secretary of Victor Miners WFM local No. 32, checked cards at the Gold Coin in May 1900, only one miner refused to join, saying that he "cared nothing for the Miners' union or its representative." The rest of the miners refused to ride down in the cage with him, creating a stalemate that ended only when the superintendent paid the man's dues.[56]

I don't know if John Welch refused to ride down in the cage with a non-union miner. I don't know his political allegiances, or how he voted. I know that he walked out with other strikers in 1903 and he stayed out. Despite some images of married homeowners as working-class conservatives and despite assumptions that working-class radicals were young single hotheads, that was not the case. Whether they were hotheads or conservatives, single men could more easily simply leave during the strike, which was waged largely by married men with community ties who stayed. The stalwarts during the 1903–1904 strike were, like John Welch, married men and homeowners—those who had the most to risk and the most to lose.[57]

However romantic strikes may seem in history books, they are simply hard in practice. John Welch stuck it out for fifteen months. The Welches

made do with union benefits, stretching the union's support to help Hannah's widowed mother, Catharine Doran. The militia considered John Welch important enough to be slated for deportation. He left the District with his brother-in-law Ed Doran, one step ahead of the soldiers.[58]

Kathleen Chapman remembered the strike, and the militia camped on the hill above her home. She stood with other children, waving at trainloads of deportees. She remembered her parents helping a pro-union soldier sneak out of the District, fortified with a lunch Hannah made for him. And she remembered: "Papa had to get ready, him and Uncle Ed, and left, things got so bad. Somebody come and give 'em the word that they were going to get them the next trainload they took out. . . . And so they got ready, and they left in the middle of the night, the two of them. And they went to Leadville and went to work."[59]

After John left, Hannah Welch continued the family's union allegiance. May Wing fondly recalled the strike heroism of her grandmother Catharine Doran and her aunts, Mary Doran and Hannah Welch:

> I did have an uncle that lived in Goldfield. His name was Ed Doran. And Grandma was there, Aunt Mary was expecting. So Uncle Ed, of course, got out. Well, he got word that they were going to raid the house. Of course, the militia had the way of doing, in the middle of the night they'd come after the men and take 'em to the bullpen and then they'd send 'em out. But Uncle Ed got word that they were going to come that night, so he left. Grandma never said just exactly where he went or where he hid. But she was there when they came, and they tore that house to pieces! They even looked in the breadbox. Well, that got Grandma's goat. And she said, "Shure'n he's not little enough to put in the breadbox! Now every God blesset one of you get out of this house and leave this woman alone!" She said, "You can see what condition she's in. Now," she said, "git!"
>
> Then I had another aunt that lived there. Her name was Hannah Welch. . . . And she had two great big butcher knives, and she kept those knives razor sharp. And she always said if one of those militia men ever come in her house in the middle of the night, they'd leave with less than they brought in![60]

Finally, though, Hannah Welch took the children to join her husband in Leadville, after the militia harassed her son Tom and her nephew, Eddie Bulger, as the boys were going fishing. Kathleen Welch Chapman recounted:

> [T]he militia drove up there and stopped them. And they wanted to know where they were going. They told them, and [the soldiers] said, "Oh, no, you're not. You're hauling out food for the union men someplace." "Oh no," Eddie said, "We're not. We don't have anything, only our lunch." Anyway, they pulled the two kids down off the horse. Eddie was about six years older than Tom. . . . And pulled them down, took their lunch, throwed it down on the grass. Took the saddle off the horse and every little nook and corner of that saddle they went through to see if they were taking something. Well, they just put the saddle back on the horse and come back down home. And, you know, that made a wreck out of Tom. He was about, I'd say, ten, eleven years old. . . . And he was just a wreck. He couldn't sleep at night. . . . He'd scream in his sleep, you know. So Mama said, "Well, I can't stand that." So she packed us up and took us to Leadville, where Papa was, until the darned thing would quiet down or get over. And we were up there for over a year and a half. Then we came back to the District.[61]

Hannah Welch and the children stayed in their home in Goldfield. John Welch worked in mines outside the District and visited his family when he could, because "a union man couldn't get a job and he wouldn't work on them scab cards for anything." He came home after being buried in a cave-in that crushed his chest and injured his legs. Unable to mine, he worked as a watchman at a small mine that resisted the Mine Owners' Association. Finally, though, he became too ill to climb the hill to the mine or to do much work. Young Tom Welch left school after grade eight to take his father's place. Just as John Welch entered the workforce when his father died in a Vermont coal mine, Tom Welch, born in a tent during the 1894 strike, became the family breadwinner. In time, Kathleen contributed her wages as a housekeeper and laundry worker. John Welch died of his injuries at age forty-eight. His children remembered the union benefits, the social support, the vibrance and power of the union community their father had helped build. They knew what they had lost.[62]

During the decade of union strength, John Welch could act on his working-class allegiances without significant conflict with his church, lodge, or employer. Union benefits allowed him to get sick without starving; union wages helped him buy a home. John Welch risked his job, his home, his family, his local church, lodge, and community to give other workers the right to organize.

When the unions were smashed, and with them the institutional base for working-class power, miners turned to the fellowship and social support of their lodges and fraternal associations. They turned especially to the families for whom they risked everything, and for whom they stayed. The miners of the Cripple Creek District risked the daily dangers of mining for the things that drive most of us: to support their families, to keep their kids in school, to work in dignity, to go home to a house they owned. Years later, the survivors recalled the strike defeat in terms of domestic loss. Asked what difference the 1904 strike defeat made for working people, Kathleen Chapman replied:

> Oh my, it changed it awful! You've been through Goldfield. Well, you should have seen the homes that was up there in Goldfield. They were beautiful, some of them. Well, people just got up and left, you know, and left their homes like it was, and lots of them never come back to them. People would go in and destroy the homes and pick up what they wanted, and the homes went to wrack, and they tore them down, and—oh,—it just, it just used to make me sick all over.[63]

For Kathleen Chapman, May Wing, and countless others, Cripple Creek was more than the name of a dramatic strike. It was home. Their treasure was not the gold buried beneath the District's slopes, but human relationships and their memories of an empowered working-class community.

The 2003–2004 strike commemoration, like the strikes themselves, was at least partly about who controls history. The story is always in danger of being lost, buried, or trivialized. Though I have published my own version of these events, including circumstantial evidence that might support labor's contention that owners were responsible for the carnage at the Independence Depot, I do not think anyone still living really knows what happened. Perhaps the evidence no longer exists to settle that debate. But whatever else this history is about, it is not, for me, about who was most violent.

Whether or not they staged the fatal accidents at the Vindicator, Stratton's Independence, and the Independence Depot, the Mine Owners' Association, Citizens' Alliance, and the militia fomented the Victor riot that caused two deaths, destroyed union property, arrested and deported people charged with no crimes, deposed elected officials, and at least tacitly approved assaults and the violent mobs that drove men from their homes. They took deportees hundreds of miles from their homes under military guard and left them in the middle of nowhere without food or shelter. If one believes union members staged the bombings, it is still difficult to determine blame as MOA detectives heavily infiltrated the local unions and even the WFM Women's Auxiliary. Even Harry Orchard, whose truthfulness should be subject to doubt, allegedly said that he worked for the Pinkerton Detective Agency during the Cripple Creek strike.[64]

The strike violence magnified a prevalent culture of masculine violence, where prize fights were popular entertainment, and where miners lived with the constant threat of violent death underground. The strike record testifies that men on all sides habitually prepared for violence, and either carried guns or hired them. Even Hannah Welch "kept her knives razor sharp." In terms of the historical outcome, the question of who planted the dynamite at Independence Depot is less important than whose explanation was accepted, and how that justified the consequences.

The casualties of the Colorado Labor Wars went far beyond a destroyed union movement, and far beyond individual lives, to a shared social vision and collective history. Fear of company retaliation was so profound that some people never shared childhood memories and family stories of the strike or union era; many of those memories died with them. Since the employers controlled contemporary press reports and seized union records after the Independence Depot explosion, they controlled not only events, but the history of the conflict as well. The mines closed in the early 1960s, and elderly residents felt free at last to tell their stories.

The history they wished to preserve was not a nostalgic romantic past or a tale of tragic loss. It was about complicated people who lived complex mundane lives. They sought neither romance nor riches, but schools rather than wage work for their children, and a community that they could shape, where work would be honored, and workers dignified. The survivors remembered a world in which union labor won social standing, industrial power, and political influence. Historians may continue to debate the origins of strike violence and how to assign blame. But the most urgent testimony to the importance of the Colorado Labor Wars came from John

and Hannah Welch, Kathleen Chapman, May Wing, and countless others, who lived the history that they could tell and told the history they helped to make.

## NOTES

I presented a portion of this lecture for the Colorado History Group 25th Autumnal Rendezvous, held in Victor, Colorado, September 12, 1998 in the auditorium of the Victor Elks Hall (Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks). This was the building used as the National Guard Armory during the 1903–1904 strike, from which the attack on the Victor Miners WFM Local No. 32 was launched June 6, 1904. The room where I spoke was the room where Victor Sheriff Henry Robertson was given the choice of resigning his office or being hanged. On June 5, 2004, I presented portions of this talk at the Pike's Peak District Library in Colorado Springs as part of the Centennial Commemoration of the strike and then led a 2 a.m. vigil at the site of the Independence Depot explosion the morning of June 6, 2004, and a walking tour in Victor that day of key strike sites. Those presentations were published as "History, Memory, and Commemoration: The Cripple Creek Strike Remembered," and, "Talking the Walk: The 1903–1904 Strike Centennial in the Cripple Creek District," in *The Colorado Labor Wars: Cripple Creek 1903–1904*, ed. Tim Blevins, Chris Nichol, and Calvin P. Otto (Colorado Springs: Pikes Peak Library District, 2006) and appear here by permission. I am grateful to the staff of the Pikes Peak District Library for hosting the commemoration and to Ed and Cherie Hunter for facilitating the vigil at the Independence Depot site. My greatest debt for this lecture is to the people of the Cripple Creek District who shared their stories and their hospitality with me. For their contributions to this essay, I am enduringly grateful to May McConaghy Wing and Kathleen Welch Chapman, and to the entire extended Wing/Chapman/Pryor family for their hospitality over the years.

1 See George G. Suggs, Jr., *Colorado's War on Militant Unionism: James H. Peabody and the Western Federation of Miners* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972).

2 Elizabeth Jameson "The Creatures of Discontent: The Western Federation of Miners and the Radical Labor Movement, 1893–1911" (BA thesis, Antioch College, Department of History, 1970); Elizabeth Ann Jameson, High Grade and Fissures: A Working-Class History of the Cripple Creek, Colorado, Gold Mining District, 1890–1905 (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1987); Elizabeth Jameson, *All That Glitters: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998). This lecture provided some of the groundwork for conference presentations at the Social Science History Association, Western History Association, and the Pikes Peak Regional Library commemorating the strike centennial, and two articles, Elizabeth Jameson, "History, Memory, and Commemoration: The Cripple Creek Strike Remembered," in *The Colorado Labor Wars: Cripple Creek 1903–1904*, ed. Tim Blevins, Chris Nichol, and Calvin P. Otto (Colorado Springs: Pikes Peak Library District, 2006), 3–34; and Elizabeth Jameson, "Talking the Walk: The 1903–1904 Strike Centennial in the Cripple Creek District," in Blevins, Nichol, and Otto, *The Colorado Labor Wars*, 101–16. For the 1903–1904 Cripple Creek strike, see Jameson, *All That Glitters*, 199–225. The city of Cripple Creek was the main commercial center in the Cripple Creek District. In this article I use "Cripple Creek" and "the District" to refer to the Cripple Creek District, not the city.

3 The 1900 U.S. Census enumerated 29,002 people in the District. As with most censuses, this one missed some people. Census takers in 1900 were patronage employees, hired by

the local Postmasters, who were also patronage employees. In 1900 Republicans controlled the White House and federal patronage, and in my reading of the manuscript census, it appeared to me that the local census takers underestimated (or avoided) portions of the smaller towns and neighborhoods that were labor strongholds. Reliable estimates suggest that the population in 1900 was at least 32,000 and likely more.

4 For histories of the Western Federation of Miners (1893–1916), renamed the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (1916–1967), see Vernon H. Jenson, *Heritage of Conflict: Labor Relations in the Nonferrous Metals Industry Up to 1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950), Melvyn Dubofsky, "The Origins of Western Working Class Radicalism, 1890–1905," *Labor History* 7 (Spring 1966): 131–54, and Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1969).

5 See Jameson, *All That Glitters*, 62–86, 258–69.

6 *Victor and Cripple Creek Daily Press*, February 15, 1903; February 18, 1903; February 19, 1903; February 20, 1903; February 21, 1903; February 22, 1903; February 26, 1903; March 1, 1903; March 4, 1903; March 6, 1903; March 7, 1903; March 11, 1903 (hereinafter cited as *Press*); U.S. Congress, Senate, Commissioner of Labor, *A Report on Labor Disturbances in the State of Colorado, 1880 to 1904, Inclusive, with Correspondence Relating Thereto*, S. Doc. 122, 58th Cong., 3d Sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1905), 112–16 (hereinafter cited as *Labor Disturbances*); Official *Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Convention, Western Federation of Miners* (Denver: Western Newspaper Union, 1903), 115–19; Suggs, *Colorado's War*, 44–117, esp. 76–77, 81–83.

7 Suggs, *Colorado's War*, esp. 65–83.

8 Jameson, *All That Glitter*s, 54, 199–210, 209, 215, 218, 221, 242, 246–47.

9 *Labor Disturbances*, 165–66, 170–75, 147–48; *Denver Post*, December 9, 1903. Peabody appointed Bell on February 20, 1903, after the Colorado City strike had begun but before the Cripple Creek strike was called; Suggs, *Colorado's War*, 81.

10 *Labor Disturbances*, 189–93, 220–23; Defense Attorney Richardson's notes, affidavits, and related material 1906–1909, State of Idaho vs. Steve Adams, Western Federation of Miners/International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Collection, Western History Collections, University of Colorado, Boulder (hereinafter cited as Richardson Notes), 75; "The Situation in Colorado," *Miners' Magazine*, November 26, 1903, 7; *Miners' Magazine*, February 4, 1904, 3–4; "Western Federation Notes," *Miners' Magazine*, February 4, 1904, 9.

11 *Labor Disturbances*, 181–87; *Miners' Magazine*, September 17, 1903, 9; *Pueblo Labor Advocate*, September 18, 1903; "The Governor of Colorado," *Miners' Magazine*, September 24, 1903, 4–5; "The Cripple Creek Situation," *Miners' Magazine*, October 1, 1903, 7; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 50.

12 See for instance H-Net, Labor History Discussion List, October, 14, October 25, October 27, October 30, and November 3, 2001. See also postings September 11, 1998, and on H-West, October 8, 1996.

13 See Suggs, *Colorado's War*, 110–14; Jameson, *All That Glitters*, 218–25; 243–45; *Labor Disturbances*, 260–68; 274–78, 285–86, 296, 306–8, 313–14.

14 *Labor Disturbances*, 285–86; "The Situation in Colorado," *Miners' Magazine*, June 16, 1904, 10; "The Situation in Colorado," *Miners' Magazine*, June 23, 1904, 9; *Miners' Magazine*, July 21, 1904, 4; "The Situation in Colorado," *Miners' Magazine*, July 28, 1904, 9–10; "The Situation in Colorado," *Miners' Magazine*, February 16, 1905, 11.

15 "The Situation in Colorado," *Miners' Magazine*, November 17, 1904, 10–11; *Denver Clarion Advocate*, November 11, 1904, 1.

16 See Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 97–105; Harry Orchard, *The Confessions of Harry Orchard* (New York: The McClure Company, 1907), esp. 68–109, 129–48.

17 In the five years preceding my 2002 lecture, different interpretations appeared in J. Anthony Lukas, *Big Trouble* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997); Bill Albert's charming novel, *Castle Garden* (Sag Harbor, NY: The Permanent Press, 1996); Jameson, *All That Glitters*, 227–33; and a spirited online debate on H-Net, Labor History Discussion List, October 14, October 25, October 27, October 30, and November 3, 2002.

18 Jameson, "The Creatures of Discontent." I remain enormously grateful to the late John A. Brennan, the director of the Western History Collections, who entrusted a valuable collection to an undergraduate history student.

19 Interview with May Wing, Colorado Springs, Colorado, February 16, 1979.

20 *Labor Disturbances*, 261–64.

21 Colorado Mine Owners' Association, T*he Criminal Record of the Western Federation of Miners from Coeur d'Alenes to Cripple Cree*k (Colorado Springs, 1904); *Category of Crimes of the Operators' Association: 851 Murdered in Less Than Four Years* (Denver: The Miners' Magazine Print, 1904); Langdon, *The Cripple Creek Strike*.

22 Benjamin McKie Rastall, *The Labor History of the Cripple Creek District: A Study in Industrial Evolution*, Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin No. 198, Economic and Political Science Series vol. 3, no. 1 (rpt. Madison, Wisconsin, 1908).

23 Rastall, *Labor History of the Cripple Creek District*, 72–73.

24 Rastall, *Labor History of the Cripple Creek District*, 152.

25 Marshall Sprague, *Money Mountain: The Story of Cripple Creek Gold* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1953).

26 Jenson, *Heritage of Conflict*.

27 Selig Perlman and Philip Taft, *History of Labor in the United States, 1896–1932* (New York: Macmillan, 1935); Dubofsky, We Shall Be All, 49–55.

28 Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel, "The Interindustry Propensity to Strike," in *Industrial Conflict*, ed. Arthur Kornhauser, Robert Dubin, and Arthur M. Ross (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954), 189–212.

29 Dubofsky, "Origins of Western Working Class Radicalism"; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All; Richard E. Lingenfelter, The Hardrock Miners: A History of the Mining Labor Movement in the American West, 1863–1893* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 227–28.

30 Kerr and Siegel, "Interindustry Propensity to Strike"; Ronald C. Brown, *Hard-Rock Miners: The Intermountain West, 1860–1920* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1979).

31 Brown, *Hard-Rock Miners*.

32 John H. M. Laslett, *Labor and the Left: A Study of Socialist and Radical Influences in the American Labor Movement, 1881–1924* (New York: Basic Books, 1970).

33 Mark Wyman, *Hard Rock Epic: Western Miners and the Industrial Revolution, 1860–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

34 William Preston, "Shall This Be All? U.S. Historians Versus William D. Haywood Et Al," *Labor History* 12 (Summer 1971): 437–38, 442. For analyses that support the trajectory from the Knights and the Populist Party to the Socialist Party and the IWW, see James Edward Wright, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent in Colorado* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); and Jameson, *All That Glitters*.

35 James C. Foster for instance, challenged the assumption that the WFM was a radical union because "the mean number of violent, labor-related outbreaks was only 0.785 incidents in the lifetime of the average local (about seven years)." His argument assumes that all radical

movements are violent, and all violence is radical. From his figures, one could argue that every local stood about an 80 percent chance of a strike every seven years. James C. Foster, "Quantification and the Western Federation," *Historical Methods Newsletter* 10 (Fall 1977): 141–48. See also John Ervin Brinley, Jr., "The Western Federation of Miners" (PhD diss., University of Utah, 1972); Richard H. Peterson, "Conflict and Consensus: Labor Relations in Western Mining," *Journal of the West* 12 (January 1973): 1–17. The quote is from Wyman, *Hard Rock Epic*, 244.

36 Jameson, *All that Glitters*. I most explicitly addressed Wyman's statement in a paper I presented at the Western History Association conference in October 1992, "The Miners of Cripple Creek: Accommodation and Resistance, 1894–1904."

37 Underground mining in the District declined during the 1920s, revived during the 1930s, but was suspended during World War II, as the U.S. government diverted miners to non-precious metals essential to the war effort. It resumed after the war but slowly declined and had all but halted by the time I conducted my interviews. In 1994 deep pit mining was begun, and many of the former townsites, including the union stronghold of Altman, at the top of Bull Hill, no longer exist, having been excavated as the pit expanded.

38 Interview with Kathleen Chapman, Wheat Ridge, Colorado, April 17, 1979.

39 The interconnected Welch, Doran, and McConaghy family histories were provided by John and Hannah Welch's daughter, Kathleen Chapman and James and Kate McConaghy's daughter, May Wing. Chapman interview; May Wing, interviews, Boulder, Colorado, March 6, 1976; Victor, Colorado, October 21, 1978; Colorado Springs, Colorado, February 16, 1979. Further information came from U.S. Manuscript Census, town of Shullsberg, Lafayette County, Wisconsin, 1870; U.S. Manuscript Census, town of Shullsberg, Lafayette County, Wisconsin, 1880; U.S. Manuscript Census, town of Leadville, Lake County, Colorado, 1900; and The (Shullsberg) *Pick and Gad*, June 19, 1884.

40 Wing interview, March 6, 1976.

41 Chapman interview.

42 Chapman interview.

43 In 1896, for instance, the Anna Lee shaft of the Portland Mine caved in, killing eight men. Victor Miners No. 32 buried victim Michael McGuirk and shipped the body of Pat Mee to Denver for burial and the body of Thomas H. Harman to Madison, Wisconsin. *Colorado Springs Gazeete*, January 13, 1896, January 20, 1896; *Ledger, 1894–1903*, Victor Miners' Union No. 32, U.S. mss 14a, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin; *Press*, April 6, 1900, August 1, 1901, October 5, 1902.

44 Chapman interview.

45 Chapman interview.

46 "President Moyer's Address to the Cripple Creek Miners at Pinnacle Park," *Miners' Magazine*, September 3, 1903, 6.

47 *Press*, September 5, 1899, September 5, 1903; William D. Haywood, *Bill Haywood's Book: The Autobiography of William D. Haywood* (New York: International Publishers, 1929; repr., 1974), 133; Chapman interview.

48 Chapman interview.

49 Chapman interview; *Press*, June 27, 1899; January 3, 1900; January 9, 1900.

50 *Press*, June 27, 1899; February 23, 1900; "The Gold Coin Club House," *Miners' Magazine*, July 1900, 13–14; Chapman interview.

51 Jameson, *All That Glitters*, 78–84.

52 Jameson, *All That Glitters*, 68–72.

53 *Press*, October 15, 1901.

54 *Press*, passim; Jameson, *All That Glitters*, 70.

55 Jameson, *All That Glitters*, 70–71.

56 Jameson, *All That Glitter*s, 73. See Press May 9, 1900; May 15, 1900. Such tactics were common. The next day Kelly and E. J. Campbell, secretary of Cripple Creek Miners No. 40, visited the Independence Mine. See *Press* May 16, 1900; July 22, 1900.

57 Jameson, *All That Glitters*, 235–39.

58 Chapman interview.

59 Chapman interview. The soldier hid in the Welch's woodpile. John Welch helped hide him and Hannah made the man coffee and sandwiches to take with him as he escaped.

60 Wing interview, October 21, 1978. Kathleen Welch Chapman also knew these stories.

61 Chapman interview.

62 Chapman interview.

63 Chapman interview.

64 *Labor Disturbances*, 189–91; Richardson Notes, 27, 75; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 98; George E. Dickson, letter to Clarence Darrow, April 25, 1906, in Richardson Notes, 53. Dickson was a Chicago attorney who did investigative work for the defense during the Steunenberg trials of Haywood and WFM member Steve Adams. He got the story from G. L. Brokaw, who was jailed in Spokane for getting money under false pretenses and who said he was with Orchard for ten days before May 26, 1905. See also George E. Dickson to Edmund F. Richardson, May 6, 1906, Richardson Notes, 55.