COLUMBINE MINE PROGRAM 11/19/88 - LIBRARY

GARY COX
Okay, children, somebody said that the kids are outnumbered by the grownups here tonight. I'm Gary Cox. Some of you know me from other programs we have done. I'm with the Colorado Labor Forum. Colorado Labor Forum is members of several different unions and we like to do these labor history programs. We've done them around the state. And we also do some work with people who are on strike, helping them.

Tonight, we want to dig into some - you've got some very rich labor history in the Lafayette-Erie Area and we're going to talk a little bit about that. I joined the IWW in 1968 and some of the people back here joined in the '20s so I'm still wet behind the ears as far as they're concerned.

This strike we're going to talk about tonight that we're going to talk about tonight was the Wobblie Strike, and IWW strike. In the IWW, we've got a slogan that's "In November, we remember" because so many tragedies happened in the labor movement in the IWW in November. A hundred years ago, in November, 1887, the Haymarket Martyrs were executed. For those of you who don't know who the Hatmarket Martyrs were, they were labor leaders who were executed because they were organizing for the eight hour day and not more than that, that they were executed for. Joe HIll was executed in Utah. Joe Hill was, for those who don't recognize the name, the most famous IWW song writer. He was executed in Utah in November of 1915.

In 1917, Wesley Everest was killed. He was killed by vigilantes - hung out in Centralia, Washington. For those of you who saw the IWW movie that we brought up here, you'll remember the Verona when it was attacked by vigilantes when it came into port in Everett, Washington - that happened in November. A lot of Wobblies were killed.

Right here in Lafayette, the Columbine Massacre that we're going to talk about tonight, happened 60 years ago this Saturday - the 21st of November, 1927.

Mother Jones - I know a lot of you remember her - she was the miners' angel. She died November 30th, 1930 - she was 100 years old.

So November is a month that we like to remember those people who sacrificed their lives for us. But I think we also need to remember that some people are made heroes out of, for what reason I don't know - actually, it is the rank and file that do most of the fighting and dying and struggling - and we don't know their names. But there's a lot of them here tonight and I, for one, would like to show my appreciation and my thanks to those miners who are here tonight who were in those struggles

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in the early '20s and the '30s because a lot of the freedoms, the freedom of assembly, the right to speak, freedom of speech, the decent salaries that we're getting today, our retirement programs, our vacations with pay, Social Security, retirement pay - we take those things for granted and they were fought for and won by those people back in the early '20s and '30s and we're living on that inheritance. I would just like - and I don't want to embarrass any of you - I'm not going to ask any of you to speak or we're not going to bite you - but I'd just like for those of you who were in those struggles back in the early '20s just to hold up your hands. I'd like to give you a big hand! (APPLAUSE)

The next man I'm going to introduce has fought for labor all his life. He's a young man of 80. He's a retired journalist and he reported on a lot of those struggles and he came here tonight to speak to us to fill us in a little bit on the history of the era so that the video that we're going to see - the "Hard Times, Soft Coal" about the Columbine will make a little more sense to you. It will give us a little background. Sender Garlin is a veteran labor journalist. He worked on Peoples World in San Francisco, the Labor Defender in New York, the Coaldigger which was an organ of the National Miners' Union in Pittsburgh. He has spoken on many, many occasions at the Colorado University. He's asked by a lot of the professors to come in and speak to them because he knows more about labor history, probably, than all of us in this room put together. And so I'd like to introduce to you for the next 45 minutes, my good friend and fellow worker: Sender Garlin.

SENDER GARLIN:

Thank you very much. Ladies and Gentlemen, fellow workers. I regard it as a high honor to be asked by the sponsor of this meeting to tell about my - to share my particular experiences with you and I want to thank the City Fathers, and the City Mothers, nowdays, - when I was a kid, there were no City Mothers, only City Fathers. And the folks in the library for their help in organizing this event tonight.

I won't start with 1927 or with 1887, but with June 1st of this year when one of the editors of the ambiguously liberal Boulder Daily Camera wrote in connection with the strike at Safeway. She said, and I quote, "Because the West does not have the strong labor traditions that existed in the East and Midwest, we aren't used to picket lines". I won't read any more. I just read the pertinent part of it - that the West did not have labor traditions. I think she needs an

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elementary course in American History, in spite of her high office of associate editor of the Boulder Daily Camera.

What I want to tell you about first, is that one evening, exactly 60 years ago, I believe it was in September, or October -probably October - I was walking home from work in New York and on the corner of 14th Street and Broadway - those of you who have ever been in that overpriced, wicked city from which I'm a refugee, along with my wife, will know that neighborhood -- I saw a handsome young man trying to speak from the street corner and he had no speaker stand. So I walked over to him and we got acquainted and I said, "I will get you a speaker stand". There was a labor school nearby where I studied and also taught and I went over there and commandeered a speaker stand and carried it over to the corner and then he gave me his name. His name was A. S. Embry. He was the leader of a strike in this community 60 years ago. He was a very charming, well spoken, handsome young man who told me about the strike that was going on in Colorado - not only here but in the other fields - strikes both in the Northern and Southern Fields. And I stayed and listened to his talk from the speaker stand and then I took it back to the school. The impression I got of Brother Embry was not the impression that a writer in one of the Denver papers had of him on November 2, 1927 - I couldn't trace the source of that article - it was in one of the Denver Area papers and I want to read it to you: "A.S. Embry, strike leader and IWW Chief, has a long record as a troublemaker. He's a Wobblie leader and agitator who is taking an active part in IWW activities in the Southern Colorado strike fields. He is a general, all around undesirable character (not like Ed Meese - but a different kind of a character) - an alien (he was from Canada) and not a citizen of the United States". Isn't that terrible? If it hadn't been for the non-citizens of the United States, we wouldn't have a country. Because, as you all know, it's the non-citizens who built up our great country. Anyhow, "He's an undesirable citizens according to reports reaching Denver from many sections of the country". And this guy continutes: "He was always a troublemaker. Embry has been in jams with federal, state and city officials in several sections, it is said. And he has been convicted of criminal cynicalism and has served time in the Idaho Penitentiary for that offense."

Now my assignment tonight, is to talk about the bloody massacre that took place here 60 years ago but I think it's my responsibility also to fill in with a little background. It's true that Embry was a troublemaker. He spent many years in various prisons in various parts of the country. But the

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trouble that he stirred up was not the trouble that bothered what we called "ordinary people" - that is, people that - who - are not in high, well paid offices. He was a troublemaker for the mine operators, for the bond holders, for the stockholders, for the people at 26 Broadway,in the offices of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company - he was a troublemaker. And I hope that my grandchildren remember that I, in spite of my mild exterior, is also a troublemaker. As the chairman has indicated to you - I've tried to make as much trouble as I could, in pointing out the disparity between truth and falsehood, between justice and injustice - between those who are exploited and those who live off the exploitation of most people. Now, Embry was a leader of the IWW. I remember the IWW when I was a kid. I had the great honor to listen to a speech by a man named Big Bill Haywood of Colorado in Philadelphia in a small hall in a basement, not as beautiful a hall as this, a nice comfortable hall, in 1920, in the summer of 1920 when I graduated from high school.

Here's what John Read, the greatest journalist in American History - even greater than Johnny Carson - it's hard to believe - he didn't earn one-thousandth of this character, Carson, earns on TV, thank God, there was no TV in those days, and no radio. Our lives were a little quieter. Maybe we weren't as misinformed then as we are now, but we didn't have those dubious gifts of modern civilization - here's what John Read wrote about the IWW: "Wherever in the West there's an IWW Local, you'll find an intellectual center. A place where men read philosophy, economics, the latest plays and novels, where art and poetry are discussed." I wish I could say that about the faculty of the University of Colorado, but I'm afraid I couldn't. William A. Douglas, distinguished member of the United States Supreme Court,who should not be confused with the two recent non-candidates of the Supreme Court - here's what he had to say about the IWW, and he knew something about it; he was a member of the IWW, this distinquished member of the United States Supreme Court. He spent many summers harvesting crops around Yakima, Washington. I know Yakima, Washington; I spoke there two or three times, in a most novel place - even more novel than a library - I spoke in the armory. He remembered his harvesting crops in Yakima, Washington; he recalled the IWW gatherings, and here's what he wrote in his autobiography: "A hungry man was always welcome under that railroad bridge. Not only was he offered food, but there he could feel that he was an equal of everyone", Douglas wrote. And he wrote further, a half century later, after spending five years as Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission and three decades in the United States Supreme Court atmosphere and

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striking contrast to the jungles of the IWW where they used to get their food together over a hot bonfire and where Douglas shared these meals, Douglas wrote: "I traveled extensively with the IWWs and came to know them as warm hearted people who seemed to me, even then, had higher ideals than some of the men who ran our banks and were the elders of our church. (He should have added the elders of our government) My heart was with the impoverished, restless underdogs who were the IWWs".

Embry, this fellow I met on 14th Street and Broadway, who didn't have a speaker stand, - he was one of these hated Wobblies. Over the previous ten years, I learned later, he didn't tell me this, he had been in jails in Arizona and Montana. Embry's own words written in person, indicate the attitude of most of the Wobblie leaders on the feelings they had about their organizing efforts, not only in Colorado, but elsewhere. Embry said, "The end in view is well worth striving for. But in the struggle itself, lies the happiness of the fighters". Now the men who died and struggled in this area, in the Columbine, the word I heard for the first time 60 years ago from this great man, Embry, - they weren't all on speaker platforms. Very few of them were interviewed or honored or got honorary degrees. Most of them spent their lives in the pits of the mines. Some of these mines, I saw myself, not so much in Colorado, but in Pennsylvania and Illinois and Kentucky - and when I had the honor and privilege of working for $6.00 a week as editor of the Coaldigger, the official organ of the National Miners' Union in the early '30s in Pittsburgh - these men and women, I don't leave out the women because they suffered along with the men, as you know; they were on the picket lines with them and they were the ones who had to maintain a household whether there was money coming from the mine operators or not; it all depended on how honest or whether there was a check weighman. Most of you know what a check weighman is - the fellow is supposed to give an honest count to the coalminers - and most of the time were cheated. The check weighman was always one of the fundamental demands of the coalminers throughout the United States.

The point about that IWW was - in the AFofL, where unions did exist, and in my day there were only about six million members in the AFofL - it was long before the CIO was organized in 1936 - it was all based on a craft system. For example, people working on different jobs,within the same industry, belonged to separate unions. Can you think of anything more imbecilic than that? The results would be, that in the building trades, there were unions for plumbers, plasterers, carpenters, electricians, stone masons, all working on the same job, belonging to different unions, and if they were

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lucky enough to have contracts, the contracts would expire on different days, on different months, on different weeks, so no unified action was possible on the part of these people. If they wanted to go out on strike, they wouldn't have a very hefty effect on the employers. The Wobblies had a notion that this was a sort of ridiculous system and their view was to have one big union. For example, in my trade, I'm a member of the American Newspaper Guild. I have the honor of being one of the founding members of that union. If the newspaper men go out on strike in Denver, the people (now, of course, they don't even have printing presses) but the pressmen would continue working. They linotypers would continue working. Of course, now we don't need either linotypers or pressment because they've got these devilish machines called computers where all the reporter does is look into the computer to see if his brilliant words are reflected accurately in that computer.

There was a great deal of talk in my day, and even now, less now, about the violence on the part of unions. Unions were always creating trouble, burning down buildings, dynamiting people. Poor Bill Haywood spent 19 months in Boise, Idaho on a trumped-up charge of murder. He was acquitted. Acquitted because he found an honest jury and he found a great lawyer. He found Clarence Darrow, who was his lawyer. But Bill Haywood wasn't the only one that was framed on all kinds of hideous charges, mostly dynamiting, killing, ordering, if not doing it themselves, doing it through a surrogate - hiring somebody. And usually the guy that was charged with hiring, turned out to be a Pinkerton Agent whose story was very convincing because he knew both sides to the fight. To give you an idea of how violent the workers were, I want to read to you from the Denver Evening News, a Scripps-Howard paper no longer in existence, of October 28, 1927, 60 years ago and two weeks: "Mounted guard breaks wrist of young chieftain". And I quote: "Milquasavlish(sp?) 19, Joan of Arc of IWW, fell before an armed company guard today after leading 220 miners on an unsuccessful drive to picket the Ideal Mine of the CF&I (that's the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company) owned mostly by John D. Rockefeller, the guy that used to hand out dimes to the kids, the old fellow that only ate graham crackers, nothing else, couldn't eat up his millions of dollars -.) "The guard rode her down. He grabbed her by the wrist from his seat in the saddle and dragged her half a block. The girl crumpled. Her wrist was broken,and at Lamb Hospital in Walsenburg, bruises were found on her body. It is believed she may be internally injured." A 19 year old girl. Now this is power against power. This was this young Milquasavlish (?), 19, and the guys on horseback with their daggers and with their guns and whatever other instruments of murder they carried with them quite legally.

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In this area, in connection with this strike, the strike that Embry told me about - and he had come to New York, not to practice elocution - he came to New York to 14th Street and Broadway and to other corners where he might be allowed to speak - in order to collect a few nickels and dimes and quarters for the starving coalminers in and around Lafayette and in the Southern Fields of Colorado. I don't know how successful he was, but there was a great deal of sympathy for that strike, as I recall vividly - as I recall - not from reading, but from my own experience. There were 12,000 miners out on strike in the state at that time. All they wanted was a small increase, a dollar or dollar, fifteen cents a day for their work. All they wanted was a check weighman, an honest check weighman who would not cheat them out of their terrible toil in the mines. And they wanted safety precautions. One of the main demands of the strikers here and elsewhere was some guarantee of minimal safety of life and limb. And I can assure you, I'm not a fiction writer.

I want to read to you from the house organ paper, the company paper, the Rockefeller paper of the colorado Fuel and Iron Company about their honor roll. I'm not going to read all of it, but just enough to refresh your recollections of some of you veterans in the hall and of the younger people who are not familiar with this particular era in American labor history: "Between 1901 and 1910, twice as many miners were killed in Colorado than the national average". That's a rather dubious honor, I would say.

From the paper called Plant and Camp of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, here's the honor roll: "Anderson, S.F., who was admitted to the hospital March 12th on account of an injured hand caused by a premature explosion of dynamite is nearly well."

"Augustin, Joel, who was admitted to the hospital February 26th, fractured leg, is now on crutches."

"Conte, Dana of Coal Basin, who was admitted to the hospital March 21st with two broken legs, had an operation to wire his right leg. He is doing nicely." (not as nicely as the coal operators, but according to the medical bulletin, he was doing nicely. I'm not going to weary you with any more of that).

Colorado was the scene of more mine strikes than any state in the union. There were strikes, as you know, in Leadville, 1880; Cripple Creek,1894; Leadville again in 1896; Lake City, Jan, 1901;

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two strikes of miners in Cripple Creek; smelter men in Denver; mill men at Telluride, etc.

During that period, the State Militia was called out by the various governors of this state to break strikes 10 times. Imagine, the State Militia, according to what they teach in college and I suppose in law school, that their purpose is to safeguard the health, welfare and security of the citizens of the community who are paid to maintain this national guard and all the armories and all the phony officers who put on their uniforms when they go to the masked balls. But in Colorado, in 10 years, these guys were used for the purpose of helping to destroy unions whether they were Wobblie unions or United Mine Workers of America or the Western Federation of Miners or any other organization. And these patriots, headed by a fellow called General Sherman Bell, chief of the national guard - here's what he said, "To hell with the constitution. I came here to do up the damned anarchist federation - meaning the Western Federation of Miners." By curious coincidence, this great patriot, who probably got an honorary degree from some university, I hope it wasn't CU - by coincidence, he used to collect under the table, $3,000 a year from the mine owners. Presumably, he was working for you, he was working for the state, he was working for the citizens - not for the mine operators. But the mine operators, being kind-hearted and generous, gave him $3,000 a year.

Now, at that time, the wage scale was about $6.50 or $6.75 - how many miners are there in the room, ex-miners, I mean, would you raise your hands? Will you correct me? I got these figures out of books and articles, so if they're not accurate, you can correct me.

The newspapers, almost universlly, were opposed to the miners. Papers such as the Rocky Mountain News, the Denver Post, the Trinidad Chronicle News, the Walsenburg Independent, and that advertising sheet called the Boulder Daily Camera - they all launched fervent attacks, not only on the Wobblies, but members of any other union. They didn't like unions. And they laid the basis - I mention the newspapers because they happen to be the trade in which I operated, although I always worked on the poor side of the street, not on the rich side. The rich papers were never clamoring for my services and I was never eager to offer them my services. But there's a thing I prize more than anything else; it's my conscience. If I worked for one of those high paid papers, I would have more money in the bank but I'd have much less of a conscience. They laid the basis for this assault on the miners that took place 60 years ago and when the miners were marching on their picket lines on November 21, 1927 and they were attacked by the state police and the National Guard who had gotten steel helmets the night before and who had

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been mobilized to attack the coalminers. The pickets did not molest anybody. They didn't attempt to move on any kind of property. They were picketing peacefully in front of the mine as they had done for days before and suddenly, the police open up with a barrage of tear gas, attempting to halt the miners who were pouring through the gate. In retaliation, the strikers - and this is from a contemporary record - threw back the grenades that were thrown at them. And this is one of the charges that was made against them - that they were violent against the police. They threw back the tear gas bombs which had dropped among them without exploding. Although there is no tangible proof that a lawyer could use in court, it was believed by the strikers that the National Guard and the local police used at least two machine guns on the miners. And when the miners attempted to rush to their wounded, they were barred by the police. As a result, six coalminers, as you know, were murdered at the Columbine Mine and more than 20 injured. Strikers have estimated that there were between 600 and 1,000 approaching the mine a little past 5:00 in the morning; they were there every day for many days. They started singing and then gathered around the outside gate to begin their parade through the mine property. Pickets were unarmed and carried no blackjacks, billies, etc. as some of the company representatives reported later on. Adam Bell, one of the leaders of the strikers, motioned to his followers and said, "Let's go through". (That is, let's go through the gate.) As Bell attempted to climb over the gate, he was clubbed over the head by members of the state police and fell to the ground, bleeding.

Now the newspapers that have stirred up all this hysteria against the miners, were a little chastened after the massacre. And when a strike report was issued soon after the massacre, the Denver Evening News, a Scripps-Howard paper no longer in existence, was a little softer in the treatment of the strike than they had been before. And here's what they wrote, "The Methodist have issued a report favoring the workers and denouncing the employers. The coal strike report of the Social Service Commission of the Methodist-Episcopal Church impresses us as being the most sensible statement which has been issued on the Colorado wage controversy. The present strike was the direct result of the fact that the miners were without means of presenting their grievances and their demands. The miners' union had been outlawed by the operators. The miners lacked confidence in the company unions which were put up as a substitute under the Rockefeller Plan. This Rockefeller Plan was cooked up by a fellow named McKenzie King who was imported from Canada and later became a Prime Minister of Canada. He was what was called a Labor-Management expert. They have such courses at CU too - Labor-Managemnt. In fact, the former president was an expert on that. Labor-Management means how - Labor-Management Relations means how

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can employers manage labor. That's how it works. It has nothing to do with relations at all. At any rate, the miners around here in this area, and even those in other parts of the state, didn't cozy up to this Rockefeller company union plan. They knew what a company union was from their own experience.

After the massacre, one of the professors at CU discovered that two of his absentee students were members of the State Militia. At that time, or soon after, he wrote an article Cervi Magazine, a copy of which I found in the Great Western Collection in the basement of the NorlinLibrary in Boulder. This professor, Irwin F. Meyer, wrote an article to this Cervi Magazine which was a liberal, sort of a social worker publication. The article appeared on February 25, 1928 and he said, "I write this from data gathered that afternoon and in subsequent interviews with miners, guards and witnesses as well as from testimony at the inquest of the murders of six miners." When Professor Meyer received $50. from Cervi Magazine for this article as an honorarium, he sent it to the Relief Committee of the IWW strike leaders and he recieved a reply acknowledging the receipt of the $50. in which they said,"Until recently, the endeavor was made to supply each miner with the sum of $3.00 per week. His wife, with an additional dollar a week and each child with 50¢ each", signed, Art Lange, Treasurer, Colorado Strike Miners' Relief and Defense Committee.

Now, these kids who were in the State Militia - you know, they liked these uniforms they wore and some of them didn't have the faintest idea what they were in for. They were told that they were patriots and had to defend this country from insurrection by land, sea and air. And of course, there were the Russians. The Russians had been in power for 10 years at that time, in 1927. And of course they were scared of the Russians. My first visit to the Soviet Union took place in 1931, but I was unable to interview Gorbachev? as I had interviewed other famous men like Bill Haywood and Clarence Darrow. The reason I couldn't interview Gorbachev was that he was only eight months old and that was one scoop that I lost.

Anyhow, two of the students of Professor Meyers' of CU were in this National Guard in the Militia, on duty, at Columbine. The professor assigned them the job of writing essays on their experiences and I had the melancholy privilege of finding copies of those essays in the Norlin Library. One of the students had a lot of fun explaining that his duty in the Militia set back his work on assigned reading of Plato's Republic and the other was full of remarks on the initials of IWW - he thought it meant "I Won't Work" and various other whimsical characterizations were made of that great organization. I don't think that the kid or his father ever worked for an honest living

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or he wouldn't have had the gall to write the way he did.

During the Lawrence Strike in 1912, led by Bill Haywood, the Harvard students were in the National Guard and had strike duty. And they explained that this offered a change from the boredom of studying at Harvard. "Besides", one of them wrote, "We rather enjoy having a fling at this people and putting them in their proper places". He was talking about poor, oppressed, exploited, Russian, Polish, Lithuanian, Italian, Greek, textile workers that were working for a lousy five or six dollars a week in Lawrence, Massachusetts.

Now, I'm not a professional professor at the university; I don't want anyone to suspect that. And I didn't come here to give you a lecture and grade you, I came here at the invitation of Brother Cox to introduce this program. You're going to see a film of it later on; and to take part in the discussion. I just want to add that nowdays, one of the sad things about the students at universities,not only this university - CU is not the worst university in the country; it's one of the better ones. But they're all the same. If you want to be a lawyer, you have to go to the university; if you want to be a dentist,a doctor, an engineer, you have to go to the university in order to get that training, in order to qualify for those particular specialized professions. One of the saddest things in my experience and I've spent a lot of time at universities - not necessarily as a student or as a teacher - my status in Boulder, I described as an untenured street person - but I like universities because they have libraries. But one of the saddest things about our generation and - I mean the present generation and earlier ones is that their education is completely detached from life. I'm going to speak on Joe HIll on campus on January 25th and in order to promote this talk, I tell the students I'm doing a survey. Ever hear of a mannamed Joe Hill? Well, one fella thought he was an astronaut, which is pretty good. Well, have you ever heard of Bill Haywood? I said, "I'm not trying to embarrass you; until only two months ago there was not even a course on labor history in Colorado. I'm not trying to embarrass you, I'm trying to check on what you know about these people. Ever hear of Mother Jones?" "Oh, yeah, my girlfriend, she subscribes to it". I said, "I don't mean the magazine, I mean Mother Jones, the great labor leader", who as Brother Cox has already mentioned, died at the age of 100, in 1930.

So, the reason I find it particularly pleasing to be here tonight, although the subject is not a pleasing one; it's a very sad one. I'm very pleased to see so many people interested in the subject - labor history - which is not fashionable either in our public schools, in the high schools or the universities. Now, I'm going to end without an eloquent _____ and let Brother Cox take over from here. I'll be very glad to answer your questions later in the evening. Thank you very much.

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Side 2

GARY COX:

I'm going to let Donna Carbone set this thing up. I don't want to be charged with breaking it. Before we see the video, there's just two things I'd like to say. One, they talk a bit in the video about the IWW may have been brought here by Public Service Company to force a strike on the coal mines so that they could sell their gas. Well, let me tell you that the IWW was maybe one of the only unions in this country that has never sold out to the corporations. If they had have, they wouldn't be the ones being hung and put in prisons over the years.

The other thing I'd like to mention; he talks a bit in here about, in a jesting way, that the union let Indians work cheaper in New Mexico. They sometimes worked overtime for pop, he'll talk about. And I found this objectionable because I think it's a racist statement. I've worked in the mines with Indians and they're as good of miners as anyone else. And, I'd just like to make the observation that when you allow another race of people to work cheaper than you do, you cut your own throat. Because, it's not long and your mine is shut down and theirs is running overtime. It's just like they're doing right now in South Africa; the miners down there get $3.00 a day. They're shutting down coal mines here and buying it from South Africa. So, I just would like to make that point; whenever you allow some other race to be exploited and think it doesn't affect you, it does; because they'll shut your mine down and buy it where it's cheaper.

I would also like to mention - all of you, I know, are interested in miners' history or you wouldn't be here. There's an excellent film showing -"Matewan". It's about the West Virginia coal strikes in 1921 and if you haven't seen it, do see it. The only objection I have to it is that it takes a small slice of a very long war. And it doesn't explain - it doesn't put it into perspective so that you really leave the movie, wondering what happened.

I don't know how many of you have - I'm sure most of you have - stopped up here at the Lafayette Miners' Museum. They've just done a tremendous job of trying to keep the really rich history that you have in this area. We have some people here that were good enough to bring down the tools and things and I think they'd like to explain what they are real quick.

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NANETTE IATESTA:

We've brought down several things. Most of them have been in a cabinet in the library on display there. We show several dozens - or several hundred, I guess, - elementary students - every year they come to the Museum and take a tour and listen to the demonstration. We tell them that in order to understand early Lafayette, they have to understand mining. And in order to understand mining, they have to understand - or have a feel for the tools that were used. So, through the generosity of former coalminers - and a lot of them are here tonight - who have donated a lot of their old equipment - their lunchbuckets and breast augers and battery packs and things. We have them on exhibit at the Museum and I think it's worth being proud of and if you haven't seen it, you need to come and take a look. So tonight, I'm not going to give a demonstration of mining tools to a bunch of coal miners. I spent four hours in a mine one time and that was long enough. I wanted to take out a double life insurance policy, I was so frightened over it.

Most of you know what they were used for, but I think the fascinating thing about the coal mining tools are the lights. We point out that these men worked underground for hours and hours a day, especially the early miners, with very little light at all. So we point out some of these real primitive tools. I know some of you aren't old enough to have used some of these tools. And we point out that an early candle like this was stuck into the timbers and they worked by the light. Then, a soft cap, lard oil lamp like this - did any of you use this kind of light? Probably the carbide; so this is really an early type lamp. If you lived near the coast, you used lard oil and if you lived in Colorado, you used beef tallow. So this was some of the early type lighting that we have. Then, most of you here, I'm sure, used the carbide lamps. We point out to the kids how the carbide was put into the bottom and water in the top and how it works. So they're all learning to understand that it wasn't easy to be a miner; it was a difficult life.

Also up here, we have some of the cannisters that were used to carry the carbide and to carry the lard oil and we point out that there were two hole cannisters and one hole cannisters and if you were working by yourself, you'd have to have a two hole. One for the oil to put in your lamp and one for the matches in order to re-light your lamp. If you were working with someone else, you could just have a one hole cannister and borrow the light from your fellow miners. So some of these are kind of interesting.

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NANETTE IATESTA:

I'm not real sure about who gave us this, J.D., do you know? Was it Ray Burt? This is supposedly the whistle from the Columbine Mine and it has a little dent in it and we hear tell that that's from some of the bullets that were flying in the film that you just saw.

This is just a fraction of the material that we have here. You'll recognize all of these. We have squibs, we have breast augers, lunch buckets. This is one of my favorite things. When the kids come down, they're required to find this.

If you haven't been to the museum, come and visit and look at some of the equipment we have tonight. You can come up and feel free to take a look. And, above all, if you have pictures in your attic or your basement or if you have some of this mining equipment - if you have carbide lamps and you think, "Well, who would want a carbide lamp or a lunch bucket or a breast auger"; or whatever you have, we'd love to have it and preserve it so that other people can enjoy it, so when you're dead and gone, your great grandkids won't say, "What's this piece of junk?", and throw it in the trash because that's really what happens. So you come by and take a look and I think you will enjoy some of the things.

GARY COX:

Cotton, can you tell the story about the guy who was out at the mine and had already broken one arm and then got shot in the other one?

COTTON FLETCHER:

Yeah, that was George Mazzini. He got one shoulder broke out in the mine a couple days before they went out on strike. Then when they had the shootin' up there, he got shot in the other shoulder. So he was runnin' around with both arms like this.

GARY COX:

Do any of the other miners here remember that era or anything that you'd like to tell us and share with us about that strike?

CARL WILLIAMS:

Yeah, I lived in the Columbine when that was goin' on and I'd like to ask the historian here - he said that the militia shot those people. We only had a dozen guards that were hired by the company there when the strikers broke the wall and came over. I wonder where they got that the militia was up there?

GARY COX:

You didn't hear that Sender? He said that as far as he knew there was only a dozen guards at the mine that morning and he wonders where the story came from that the militia was at the mine.

SENDER GARLIN:

Well, it wasn't denied even by the papers who were sympathizers of the coal operators. I mean, I'm not an expert on military involvement, but I'm sure the various techniques of concealing people for the purpose of intimidating, without serving notice in advance. I'm not going to argue the point, certainly not with a participant. I wouldn't argue that point at all but I'm convinced by the historical evidence, I wasn't there, wasn't there as a reporter or as a coal miner, but I'm convinced by the scholarship that was done in this field and if you go to the western collection in Boulder at the University of Colorado, there are 500 boxes, 500 boxes, of documents dealing with strikes in the State of Colorado, and in the west, generally. I'm afraid I can't answer your questions satisfactorily.

I did want to make a point that I neglected in my talk among other things because I was too busy with this cold I've got. And, that is that the owner of the mine, as some of you probably know, was the Roach Family. I think it was mentioned; maybe mentioned in the film. And the daughter of the owner, Josephine Roach, went east to college; she went to Vassar. And there, became influenced by a lot of reform - liberal ideas; the new ideas, that working people were not just mules to be employed by big companies and she acquired a humanitarian, sympathetic attitude toward working people and she came back to this area and soon after she came back, her father died. Now, she called - she would have the majority of the stockholders - she didn't do the negotiating with the miners; she had, I think a lawyer, or a labor management expert representing her. But she expressed to her friends and everybody around her that if there was any violence around the Columbine Mine that she was going to sell her interest. Now this was no secret to the Rockefeller interests who wanted to put their paws onto this mine. They wanted a complete monopoly of all coal mining in Colorado. Ludlow wasn't enough for them. And so some historians believe that the violence that was engendered and encouraged and utilized by the guards - one of its purposes was to convince Josephine Roach that she couldn't be a miner owner without violence because the Rockefeller interests wanted to get - - now, that too - this is not a flat fact that can be demonstrated - you know, like the number of a motor in an automobile - I can't prove it - but the historians that I have consulted all feel that that was one of the major factors in the baffling violence in this

SENDER GARLIN:

situation. Of course, when I say, "baffling", I have to qualify because those of you who know what happened 13 years earlier in Ludlow when 19 women and children were burned to death by the State Militia when Louie Tikilus(sp?), a Greek miner, graduate of the University of Athens, was slugged on the head with a gun and then bayonetted to death - I mean those things are not fiction - those things happened. The violence that occurred in the labor movement, you could say, staggers the imagination. It was based on the fact that the employers may have been very nice guys at home, kindly husbands and good fathers - the conception of the working man was so arrogant, so contempuous - it was so easy to get labor because labor was not sufficiently organized - it was at such a disadvantage - that these horrifying details that we discussed tonight, 60 years later, that seem monstrous to us now - to say now, well, nothing like this is happening in Boulder, you know, it didn't happen with the Safeway strike - things like that wouldn't happen in Lafayette now - it's an entirely different situation. They don't need the State Militia that much now. They don't need the armed guards now. They've got one of the best strike breakers they can think of, free of charge. There are a couple of lawyers in the hall and if I make a mistake in my facts, I think they'll be good enough to correct me. the biggest strike breaker they've got is Article 11 of the Bankruptcy Act. That works great. You have an ironclad agreement with the company to run for three years. At the end of a year and a half, the company goes to Article 11 of the Bankruptcy Act. The times have changed, not because the employers are more kindhearted, but because the techniques of dealing with labor, either by bribery, cajolery, bribery of labor leaders, cajolery of workers and the influence of the press, radio and television is such that the consequences have changed and are less physically violent but they're just as effective as you can tell - as the brother over here can tell you, much more authoritively that I - the kind of mahem that was performed all mill workers in Minnesota.

DONNA CARBONE:

I'd like to turn this into a lighter vein - Cotton, I hate to pick on you, but I had the pleasure of interviewing Cotton; we have an oral history file in the Library and my latest was Cotton - and union organizers, as you've seen there - and there's Mr. Graham, I'm sure can talk - and I hope, Jimmy that you will say a few words here tonight. It was not easy, as I understand it, they had cards, but they snuck in - the UMW fellows snuck into their meetings. If they found out you were union, you were out and they used to have an old union

DONNA CARBONE:

hall up here catty-corner from the new Library Theatre and Cotton tells a story of an organizer that was in the union hall and was it the Militia, Cotton, that was out - do you want to take over from there? Come on, you say it so much better. Well, the way I understand it, there was a union organizer in the union hall up here and -

COTTON FLETCHER:

That wasn't here, that was in Longmont. They were meeting in that big building in Longmont and when the meetin' was over, the Militia was there with their rifles with bayonets on them and crossed like that and you had to walk through them to get out. And there was one old guy, Simpson was his name, and they were after him - the guy they was after. But the women got together and one would take off a little piece of clothes and another one and finally, they dressed him up like a woman and got him home.

DONNA CARBONE:

Cotton, were you in the area when the Columbine - when the shooting occurred? You weren't at the mine, but you aware - did they bring the wounded and some of the dead into Erie?

COTTON FLETCHER:

Oh, yeah, I held the door open for my buddies to carry a third buddy into Dr. Bixler's office and his brains were running down the back of his shirt. So you know what the camp looked like up there.

DONNA CARBONE:

How about you, Jimmy?

FRANK DEBORSKI:

Well, I was there at that point too.

DONNA CARBONE:

That's right, Frank, I'm sorry, I didn't see you.

FRANK DEBORSKI:

The day before, we were supposed to go up there to picket. And I don't know if you know Mrs. Parkin? And what was his name that used to run that little store here on Main Street- Clemens,

FRANK DEBORSKI:

Mr. Clemens - they had a little meetin' up there and they got all these people together and they says, "All you nice people, tomorrow morning, we'll have some hot coffee and doughnuts at the mine". And the people all got together and I was one of the fools too. We got out at the mine and we didn't get doughnuts and coffee, we got hot bullets. That's what we got. And there were two that were walkin' together and a bullet just scraped the both of their backs, just like this, just scraped them. We layed in the ditch there. And we had these roofing nails from the house, you know, and we took and scattered them all the way down the road and then we didn't get to go up there any more. They wouldn't let us go up there and picket. But we didn't get no coffee or doughnuts, after layin' in that dirt. That was three times that I was up there and I had to be in that one when they was doin' that shootin'. And them bullets were comin' at you just like they was an orchestra; there was more than one machine gun.

DONNA CARBONE:

The coffee and doughnuts - they were supplied by - Andy, you said something?

ANDY DEBORSKI:

The Morrison, they was givin' them coffee and doughnuts in the mornings, too, after they came back from picketing.

DONNA CARBONE:

Frank, you have a story about a play that you took down to Denver to raise money.

FRANK DEBORSKI:

Yeah, we were trying to help the people there, you know. A bunch of us kids got together and we used to be just like a bunch of miners. We made a thing like a shaft, like a tunnel with sacks, you know, And I was supposed to be, what was his name - the big shot in the Wobblies - so we put on that little show and we was doin' pretty good, you know, in these little towns. The kids would end up - you know, they'd buy a loaf of bread for somebody who needed it or something like that. And then we went to Denver, we got there, and we got good there. Before we got done, the Militia was there with them horses and they came right in that building with them horses and just trampled everything down. And that was the end of our show. But we did get some money there - we got quite a few Jews in Denver there that came and watched us play it. A lot of people. I was makin' that -

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FRANK DEBORSKI:

I was buildin' that there - by a creek - and what'd you call them - the Militia? - said, "What the heck you buildin' there?" I said, "I'm just buildin' a little dog house; why, what's the matter with it?" He said, "If you're buildin' a dog house, okay". So we moved it to the hall up there and we were okay until we got to Denver the last, and then they come in there with them horses right inside the building, opened the doors and come right in. If the people didn't get out of the road, they run right over them. But we made it though; we helped a lot of people.

DONNA CARBONE:

What was the age when you went down into the mines? Anybody?

Answer: 14. That wasn't a law; they could be there when they were 12 too. If they were 12, they could work. If they were 12 years old and they were strong, they could work.

FRANK DEBORSKI:

I worked on top for a year; picking the rock out of the coal. And after I got that, I said, "Hell, I'm pickin' up to make a little more money".

DONNA CARBONE:

Mr. Graham, I know that you did some organizing. Do you have anything you'd like to say? We'd sure like to hear from you. Anything on the mines, at all.

JIMMY GRAHAM:

Well, there were many instances of all these things that you've already heard about. I was employed by the United Mine Workers to help organize Southern Colorado. That was after Josephine Roach recognized the union. I met a lot of good people in Walsenburg, Trinidad in those mines. And I think we were fairly successful. The need was great. McKinsey broke the company union that the miners never went for. Well, it was just like fruit ripening on a tree; the job was not hard. There were plenty of miners in those districts that were just anxious to organize and get something settled. That's been so many years ago, I've probably forgot half of it.

GARY COX:

I'd like to ask Frank - there some question brought up about whether there were 12 guards at the mine or whether the Militia was there. What did you see and how many?

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FRANK DEBORSKI:

The Militia was there. I don't know how many. But, I'll tell you when they started shootin', they were just like a band out there playin'. That's how those bullets would go by. They were on the water tanks and on the tipple.

WINSTON MORGAN:

Frank, when did you see the Militia there, after the shooting or before?

FRANK DEBORSKI:

After the shooting.

WINSTON MORGAN:

Yeah - the Militia wasn't there at the shooting?

FRANK DEBORSKI:

Well, I don't know; I won't say that.

They didn't come in until after the shooting.

I'll tell you, the guy that was operating the machine guns was later warden of the state penitentiary.

Was he a mine guard?

Yes.

DONNA CARBONE:

Hired by the company?

Yes.

CARL WILLIAMS:

They had 12 men there. Us kids used to call them rangers. They

CARL WILLIAMS:

were just hired people; I suppose they had experience in guarding. But two or three weeks before the shooting, when they started picketing the mines, they used to come up and they let them through the mine, and they'd march through in a column every morning. And it was a big thing for us kids to go along with them and sing their songs and they'd go out peacefully. I don't know what happened, but I guess Ted Pirott(sp?) who was the boss then, Williams, or one of those guys, said, "Let's keep them out". So they put a barricade up there and they wouldn't let them march through that morning. And these rangers went up and I think there was one machine gun but they did have rifles. And they put the machine gun on the water tower there - it had a cement base on it - they put a machine gun behind that and I don't know - I wasn't up at the shooting - but I got up there after all the noise and screaming subsided and everything was over. And the rangers were back at the mine site. And that afternoon, the Militia came in. I think they got there that night because the next day, they were all in - it was the old horse gallery and they just put their tents around the camp. All they did was guard it. There wasn't shootin' after that.

CARL WILLIAMS:

The Militia wasn't qualified to handle the situation and they called in the regular army. They put different groups of military here than was down at Ludlow. Ludlow, I understand, was just a bunch of ruffians they gathered together and put in a uniform and turned them loose. They weren't trained military people. And they had no discipline. No one knew how to take care of that mob. But out at the Columbine, they were disciplined military. The calvary was there. I used to make a lot of mnney from those soldiers. I remember I could get 10¢ for a length of stove pipe; and I stole stove pipe all over town.

WINSTON MORGAN:

Carl Williams, you mentioned Ted Pirott(sp?). Do you think he manned a machine gun over there?

CARL WILLIAMS:

No. He might have told the guards to just hold them out, you see. He was in charge of that.

WINSTON MORGAN:

How come the PIrott(sp?) family left the area?

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CARL WILLIAMS:

Well, wouldn't you? I don't know, I think that the Roaches finally saw the light and the bosses in Denver. Because all of those people - Jakie Williams - do you remember him - and my dad was Tom Williams, you might know him - and he was the top boss out there and the head blacksmith for many years.

WINSTON MORGAN:

Who did the shooting that morning, was it the guards?

CARL WILLIAMS:

The guards.

WINSTON MORGAN:

The company guards.

CARL WILLIAMS:

Yeah. They didn't have any militia before the shooting. They didn't have anybody in there.

WINSTON MORGAN:

I was a student over at the university. One of those students assigned the essays, the labor of writing the essays covering the strike. And I remember well, the armory across the street from Mackey Auditorium and they mobilized the company, the militia company, in Boulder that morning after the shooting took place. And that company was sent to Erie. That was an infantry company. It wasn't a cavalry company. And they guarded the streets in Erie. I've heard stories about men of World War I, veterans, that scared those militia kids half to death over in Erie on the streets over there. The Militia took on, you might say, the World War I veterans in the streets in Erie that morning, verbally.

COTTON FLETCHER:

I seen some of that. I live right on Main Street.

WINSTON MORGAN:

Most of those kids from Boulder, I know they were frightened half to death. I saw them leave over there. I wasn't one of the Militia, myself, or any of that way. But the armory was just across the street from where I was when they mobilized them.

And they sent them over to Erie. And they were mobilized that morning after the shooting. They didn't get there - well perhaps an advanced company might have gotten there that same day - but it was the next day that the Militia appeared over there.

GARY COX:

Well, I think, from the reports I've read on it - there's a confusion over the word "Militia" and "Rangers" because there was no longer a state militia. What they did was, call out a military group called the "State Rangers".

WINSTON MORGAN:

No, the State Rangers were what evolved into the state police today, the Courtesy Patrol. The Militia was a military company.

GARY COX:

Well, what they called the "Militia" here was actually the regular army.

WINSTON MORGAN:

No, the regular army was never called in on this.

CARL WILLIAMS:

They might be referring to that regular army and called it "Militia". What Cox is trying to say. It was really the old Calvary. They had an old company calvary back then.

WINSTON MORGAN:

Well, they had calvary come in, but it wasn't from Boulder. The calvary came in from Fort Logan. And a Brighton Company was over there and they weren't calvary. In fact, there was an old army airplane flew over that afternoon that excited the place before the cavalry got there. Of course, we didn't see that many airplanes in 1927. It was an oddity to us.

PAUL ROADS:

How did the cavalry get there?

CARL WILLIAMS:

Well, they came on horseback.

DONNA CARBONE:

Chuck, did you have something?

CHUCK WANEKA:

Well, I was pretty small at the time but I lived just east of Lafayette on the road to the Columbine Mine. And when the news hit us, you know, everybody was extremely shocked by it. And my brother and I, all that day I remember, were out playing in the yard and these two army trucks - and I'll remember them as much as all the fellows that were in them - because they were all in uniform - but they were the old White Trucks, make White, not the color white - with these solid rubber tires - and how scared we were when we looked up and saw these two truckloads of soldiers going down the road. Oh, it just scared us kids to death. The regular army scared the militia but this militia sure scared some of us kids.

CARL WILLIAMS:

They might have brought those horses in by railroad. I don't know, I just woke up one morning and there was a whole string of horses down the street - the old fashioned ones - with one line down the middle and horses on either side and soldiers all over the place.

JACK DAVIES:

Well, when the train come in and brought them troops in there, they threw the lights off at the Hiway Mine - where the Hiway Mine is - and they never turned them on until they got until they got to the switch over here this side of Erie and come on in on the spur to the Columbine. That's what they did. And after that, they put guards on the switches. And the bridge down between the main line and the Columbine, they had a bunch of tents out there - Militia in there. And the section men, which I was on of 'em, we had to supply the coal to keep them guys warm. We'd come up to the mine, and fill the dummy (?) full of coal and take it down and distribute it. We didn't like that, but we had to do it.

CARL WILLIAMS:

Well, it's kind of interesting to me, and thanks to the speaker, about the interest he's trying to generate about the history of labor. Because my dad was a coal miner all his life - he went in the mines when he was nine. His stepfather, Johnson, had a

coal mine over by Platteville and that's where my dad went in the mine first. But he moved over here in 1905. My Grandpa Williams came from England in 1882 - 1881 and they settled in Erie. And those were the days when they needed a union, when they really took advantage of the old miners but there were some interesting episodes in the history of the coal mining in this area that was never - well, it's kind of been forgotten, I guess, because of the ethnic groups that came in. The Welsh people who came first started most of these mines and the English people and Welsh - and Erie used to be the center of all of this focus in the 1880s and '90s in the coal mining. And they had a great Welsh choir that used to sing down there. They'd sing in Denver and all over the country. Then the Italians came in. The Italians came in first, I understand, in Trinidad and around the lower part of Colorado and then migrated up here. But at the turn of the century, they were very prevalent here. In my own experience in the Columbine, my dad opened that mine in the early '20s with a lot of old timers and we lived up there when, just after the shaft was sunk and my older sister, Bernice, worked for the company when she was 21 years old. And she died from an operation and my folks came back to Lafayette. But, in those early days when they had just two or three hundred houses out there, they used to go down to the Mexican border and, I understand, they would get Mexican labor and bring them up and put them in this work area that we had of the company store and keep them sort of captured labor. And then the Mexican people would bring their families up and in the early days, I think there were 12 white families lived out there and about, oh, three or four hundred Mexican families and the other people that worked the mine lived in Lafayette and Erie. Those were interesting days to a kid because of the kind of frontier attitude we had out there - the old casino and the dances they used to have, and the action that went on. (Laughter) Somebody knows something about that

WOMAN:

The fever affected everybody in the family; it wasn't just the men that went down the mine. We were digging out our basement and we found some papers and it was all done in childish handwriting and it said, "The Union Forever". And it was signed, "Ellen C. Clark, who was my aunt. And so I said to her, "Aunt Ellen, I found this paper". She said, "Not only that", she said, "I organized the kids at Sunday School when they brought that scab teacher in, we went on stike.

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DONNA CARBONE:

That's good! Cotton tells the story - again, Cotton, you're not getting away from us - Cotton tells the story of how he was just a young fella and the first time he went to stop - I get confused is it Red Neck or Black Leg, what's Red Neck?

COTTON FLETCHER:

Your Black Legs were the boys that were workin' and the Red Necks are the boys that had the red handkerchiefs around their necks.

DONNA CARBONE:

And they're the ones that were on strike, right? Okay, so when the Black Legs were coming in on the road, Cotton was just a young fella and they would stop these cars. And what would you do to these cars when you stopped them?

COTTON FLETCHER:

I turned them around and sent them back.

DONNA CARBONE:

And he was telling me he was scared to death but after while he got to liking it.

Tape #1087

CARL WILLIAMS:

Down at the old Standard where they struck earlier, there used to be quite a community down the road that goes to - what's that road - Flagg Drive. There used to be quite a community down there. The miners - the scabs - when they'd walk from Lafayette down there, the kids would all get up and throw rocks at them. And the Mathias boys, Welchie and Joe, remember them, they were pretty ornery guys. And my dad always had a hard feeling toward the Mathiases.

JACK DAVIES:

Carl, weren't the Channel's and the Nickel's in on that too?

CARL WILLIAMS:

Well, all these guys back here, I know they know people of the Welsh families and Mexican families and Italian families and the Greeks. It was quite an interesting childhood experience

CARL WILLIAMS:

to be raised in such a conglomoration. And, surprising enough, as I grew up, there was never a color barrier in my mine. Everybody was the same. I guess we ought to start out this way again.

TOM LOPEZ:

I don't know if you recall, I never knew the boy, but I heard a lot of stories about him - Pat Chacon - and he grew up with the word "scab" - he recognized the scabs and he'd stand by the wash house, waiting for them to come in and he'd call the "scab" and he'd throw rocks at them and they'd have gardens and he'd go down and steal the garden and give it to the miners.

DONNA CARBONE:

He did his own union work in his own way.

CHUCK WANEKA:

I just heard a confession - when he was about six years old, he and Pat Chacon blew up the powder house at the Standard Mine. Pat was going to show him how they worked the powder at the mine so they got a fuse out and the dynamite, or black powder, I guess it was. And they blew up the powder house. He lives in Chicago now and he stopped in this summer to see me and he said, "I always wanted to tell you this".

CARL WILLIAMS:

There's a lot of old timers here that can remember when the Ku Klux Klan used to walk through the camp.

CARL WILLIAMS:

That was in '21. They burned a big cross out there.

GARY COX:

Donna, I was just going to say, he talked about the Welsh Choir. I remember my grandfather talking about that. He worked in the mines in Kentucky and there were a lot of Welsh miners there. There were Welsh miners all over then. He said he could remember - it was just brought back to my memory - he said he could remember them coming up out of the mines and they'd sing. And you could hear them coming a long time before they'd come up out. It was just beautiful; it was almost eerie.

CARL WILLIAMS:

We had one Welsh family here - Jack Davies - his father had the most beautiful tenor that I ever heard and after about four cans of beer - four quarts of beer - yeah them big cans.

WINSTON MORGAN:

You were all invited to go to the Museum a while ago and see the relics the miners have up there. There's a picture of that Welsh Choir. Anyone that knows the faces on that picture shoud go up to the Museum and help identify those people - a lot of those names have been lost.

CARL WILLIAMS:

Well, is that the picture that Bill Davies had taken? (I don't know who had it taken) Well, it was lost for a long time and we couldn't find it. (Well we got it from the Jones family here in town - but it was the Welsh Choir in this area is what it was and their picture is in the museum - at least go up there and try to identify those people).

DONNA CARBONE:

Cotton, you knew some of the fellas?

COTTON FLETCHER:

Yeah, if it's the same three Welsh people from Erie, I know. I wouldn't know the pictures because it's been how many years?

DONNA CARBONE:

I bet you would. You know, when you talk about drinking - the thing I found interesting was when they described the miners' buckets to me - and they've all been very kind and generous with me - because, I tell them, you know, did you work an eight hour day and where did you eat your lunch? They do not say, "dumb woman" - they say, "Donna, we ate right there, right where we dug". But anyway, when I was asking about the water bucket and that, they tell the tale of when they would come home, they would take the lower part of that lunch bucket and go up and get their brew in that. And I thought that was interesting.

Another thing I found very interesting - Andy, I think you remarked on this as well as Cotton - was that you didn't own your tools - well you bought them - explain that to me. I'm still mixed up.

ANDY DEBORSKI:

We never really got them paid for because by the time the winter was over, you had to give them back to the store you bought them from.

DONNA CARBONE:

And then you would go back again.

COTTON FLETCHER:

Yeah, the next fall, you'd have to go back and get 'em.

DONNA CARBONE:

And when you went down into the mine, if there was no need for coal, you didn't work - is that right?

COTTON FLETCHER:

If the turn was slow, you'd just sit there. Some days, you'd get one car and some days you'd get three or four. You got paid so much a ton.

DONNA CARBONE:

What did you do with the rock that you took out?

COTTON FLETCHER:

The rock? Throw it in the gob (?).

DONNA CARBONE:

And that was what you weren't paid for.

COTTON FLETCHER:

If you'd ask the boss about that - ask him if he'd pay you for haulin' that rock out, he'd say, "No, dig a hole and bury it".

ANNETTE IATESTA:

Donna, you might mention that the union records from the early 1900s to the 1930s are up at the Museum. They're also on microfilm at the Library. So the monthly meetings that were held, you could go ahead and look up all of this, and other things as well.

DONNA CARBONE:

Another thing that I found very interesting was - we get in our car in the morning and I live right here in town - and it takes me two minutes and I opt to drive down - and these fellows would walk, how far sometimes, Cotton? How far would you walk down the slope or whatever it is before you -

COTTON FLETCHER:

To your workin' place? Depends on how far - well some of them, I guess, as far as two miles.

DONNA CARBONE:

Two miles, and then maybe go down there and not work.

COTTON FLETCHER:

Yeah, that old Puritan Mine was bad for that. No travelin' time.

COTTON FLETCHER:

Was you there when old Matthew was Super?

ANDY DEBORSKI:

Donna wants me to talk about the ice at the bottom of the shaft. Tell them about that Cotton.

COTTON FLETCHER:

That airshaft over there at the Washington - there was water seepin' down the corners and the cage wouldn't go through. So the inspector came out and stopped the mine until they dug them out. Down here, that was our job - to get down there and chop on that ice. You'd have about four feet of slack on the rope and then all at once, it would give way and down you'd go, you know. Talk about scared.

DONNA CARBONE:

Is the cage what took you down into the mine, Frank?

FRANK DEBORSKI:

Yeah, 290 feet at the Industrial. And if anything went wrong there, we had an airshaft and we had to crawl up that airshaft. 290 feet - walk up - straight up. And in the wintertime, there was chunks of ice in there as big as cars. We had to tie our

bucket on here and then crawl up there - 290 feet.

DONNA CARBONE:

When the cage didn't get you back up?

FRANK DEBORSKI:

Well, a lot of old men just stayed down there.

DONNA CARBONE:

There's also something of a fella who would go down in - the man who went in to check the mine for the gases. Anybody want to elaborate on that for those who don't know what a fire boss is? Come on, Andy, don't be shy.

ANDY DEBORSKI:

I'll tell you what their duties were. They had to go down ahead of the miners, maybe three hours ahead, and inspect all of their working areas to make sure they were safe working areas, no gas collections or whatever. Then come on up and make a report before the miners could go back in the mine.

DONNA CARBONE:

Was gas the biggest fear then of explosions? How did he check for gas?

ANDY DEBORSKI:

They had what they called a flame safety lamp. I'm surprised you don't have one in the trophies.

CHUCK WANEKA:

They've got one up at the Museum.

ELMO LEWIS:

Going back, they used to use canaries

DONNA CARBONE:

Is that right?

COTTON FLETCHER:

On a long stick.

DONNA CARBONE:

Are you kidding me? They put the canaries on a long stick?

COTTON FLETCHER:

Well, put them in a little cage and put it on a long stick and carried that way ahead of them. And if the canary fell over, you backed out.

DONNA CARBONE:

The mules. The mules were very important in the mines and in a lot of talk, I'll hear people say, you know, if a mule died, they were very upset. If a man died, what the heck, they could get another man. Now did those mules stay down under ground all the time?

COTTON FLETCHER:

They finally had to make a law that they couldn't keep them down over - . It used to be that they went down and when they came up they were dead.

DONNA CARBONE:

Is that right? They never saw the light of day.

CARL WILLIAMS:

You'd be surprised at the mules. They weren't little mules. Those mules were big Missouri mules too. They weren't little mules that you hear about. It would depend on the coal, see, of course. But the Columbine had one of the best mule barns - well, that was the only one I was in - but it was a really good mule barn.

DONNA CARBONE:

And that was underground?

CARL WILLIAMS:

Underground. When I first went out there, the only time they brought a mule up was when he got hurt or got damaged. And we had a gully in back of the - oh down by the creek toward Erie - and they used to shoot the mules and every time us kids went swimmin' in the creek, we always had to go by that dead mule in the gully.

WINSTON MORGAN:

Those mules were ornery critters. They didn't just bring them up to die. They often brought them up because they became so unruly down there. I drove a team of them after they brought them up. One of them was called Betsy and the other was called Pony. And they brought them up because the miners just couldn't handle them - the drivers in the mine - there wasn't room down there to have unruly mules.

CARL WILLIAMS:

The mule driver was kind of a special guy.

FRANK DEBORSKI:

When I was drivin' a mule, if I didn't give him a chew of tobacco in the morning, he wouldn't move.

CHUCK WANEKA:

In 1931 I was at the mule barn at the Columbine. And everybody that we met down there was braggin' about how it was the best mule barn. And it was as light as this. It was all white washed and painted white when I was there. But a lot of mines used to pull their mules in the spring and loan them out to the farmers in the summertime just so they didn't have to keep feedin' them all summer when they weren't workin' in the mines. You'd get one of them out on top and try to work it on the farm, it was the dumbest darn animal that ever lived because they never learned to back up in the mine or step over a tongue or anything like that.

FRANK DEBORSKI:

Just gotta holler at him, "gee-haw".

They didn't work the mines in the summer?

DONNA CARBONE:

Somebody talk on that.

They didn't believe in stockpiling? They didn't stockpile coal during the summer?

CARL WILLIAMS:

Some of the best fishermen in the world are coal miners. Because they never had to work in the summer.

WINSTON MORGAN:

Most of the coal went to heat houses. There was some industrial coal mining and those in the industrial - worked in the summmer.

(Stockpiled coal would disintegrate).

ELMO LEWIS:

I have one story about the strike to climax this. One of the men that was killed had a wife and family. There were two men and they got very jealous over each other. So they went gunning for each other. And they met over to the - where the Catholics had the upper west end of it - (the building where Sister Carmen is today) - there was a grocery store there and one of the fellows in back that had the - in the back - that sold the groceries - he was back there buying groceries - and the other fellow came in and the fellow in back pulled a gun. His safety wouldn't go off and the guy in front had first chance so he shot off and he knocked the safety off. When he did, why Wild Bill killed him right there. That's the climax of 1927.

GARY COX:

Before you all leave, I'd just like to thank the Lafayette Library, number one, for inviting us up - it's been a great meeting and I would hope - I know it's a lot to ask of you - but if some of you could come down to our Saturday program to share your memories with some of the Denver people - it's what they need to hear - they need to hear it straight from the miners who lived it. So if some of you could come down, we'd appreciate it. Thanks a lot.

DONNA CARBONE:

Thank you.