



## THE PRICE OF COAL: LIFE IN THE COAL MINING TOWNS 1880S -1950S

by Joann Condellone

Illinois holds part of the largest coal reserve in the country, 200 billion tons and 37,000 square miles of coal. Much of Madison County's farms and prairies, river bottoms and villages have coal seams beneath their soil.

In the industrialized world of the 1880's, coal became the primary energy source. St. Louis, one of the country's 50 largest cities, and Alton, Illinois' fastest growing city, were surrounded by fertile bottom land, prairie farms, navigable rivers, new factories and industries fed by new technologies, and an ever expanding system of railways that all demanded coal. In fact, all of America was hungry for energy. Coal would reign as king until the 1950s when petroleum products took the crown.

Today, there are no longer any active coal mines in Madison County, but there is evidence of that heritage everywhere. Occasional incidences of mine subsidence are a reminder that the mines are still beneath our towns and fields. The Miners Institute on Collinsville's Main Street, now



*Sculpture depicting coal miners on the Miners Theater in Collinsville, Illinois (Condellone)*

the Miners Theatre, stands as a reminder of the miners who came here and worked hard in the mines. And last, but not least, are the many families, still here, who came for the mines but continue to contribute to the betterment of Madison County communities.

### Early Madison County Mines

The first Madison County coal mine was likely the McCrea mine in Fosterberg which closed around 1860. In Collinsville, two mines were producing coal by 1862. Octavius Lumaghi, a physician from near Turin, Italy, who lived in St. Louis, opened the first of his four Collinsville area mines in 1871.

The Madison Coal Corporation, a group of three St. Louis businessmen, opened the first of their four mines in 1891. Madison Coal dug three mines in Glen Carbon and purchased a fourth, the Wolf Brothers Mine, in Edwardsville.

By 1910, there were 29 working mines; only four Illinois counties produced more coal than Madison

*Cont. on page 4*

## MCHS - AROUND THE COUNTY WITH FESTIVALS, PROGRAMS, EVENTS AND MORE!



MCHS attends events around the county, but even when it is not an MCHS event, the Society often provides resources. Above are just a few of "our" events in the last few months. From left, 1. Joe Hutton opens the time-capsule at the Clock Tower in Edwardsville on May 13. MCHS scanned the contents after it was opened. 2. MCHS President Fred Faust working a booth at Collinsville's International Horseradish Festival on June. 3. Thomas Jefferson at the Wildey Theatre, cohosted with Friends of the Wildey. 4. The newly restored West End Service Station, a Route 66 Information Center operated by Rivers and Routes Tourism Bureau. MCHS assisted with photographs and history. (Cindy Reinhardt)

### Hours

Wed - Fri, 9 a.m.- 4 p.m.  
Sunday 1- 4 p.m.

Madison County History Museum  
and Library  
801 N. Main Street  
Edwardsville, IL 62025

### Contact us:

Library: 618-656-7569  
Society: 618-656-1294  
Email: [info@madcohistory.org](mailto:info@madcohistory.org)

## RECENT NEWS

### FIRST PHASE OF LOYET PROJECT COMPLETE

The Loyet Collection, consists of 439 slides taken by Granite City native Wilbur Henry Loyet. For Loyet, born in 1927, the slides and tapes were his correspondence with his parents when he served in the Korean War and while serving in the Peace Corp in Ghana.

The Loyet's slides have now been digitized and cataloged thanks to a project that was supported in part by an award from the Illinois State Historical Records Advisory Board, through funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, National Archives and Records Administration.

Those interested can view the Loyet collection slides on the MCHS website at: <https://madcohistory.org/archival-library/archival-resources/>

The Society plans to apply for another grant to digitize and transcribe the audiotape "letters," which will provide additional information about the slides.

### WEIR HOUSE PROGRESS!

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, but many MCHS members went a step further and took advantage of the "Take a Peek" open house to see progress at the Weir House museum building up close and personal. There's still much to be done, but it was wonderful to see it filled with people again. Thanks for coming!

### VOLUNTEERS

#### ALWAYS NEEDED - ALWAYS APPRECIATED!

It's festival season and MCHS is looking for volunteers to help staff the MCHS booth at these events. The work is easy and fun! The booth consists of a 10-foot canopy tent and two six-foot tables to exhibit items of historical interest (a book of plats, albums of photographs, etc.), and information about MCHS, and upcoming Society events. Lots of people stop by to chat, and it's always fun to learn about their Madison County stories.

In addition to these events, many of our volunteers are working on the Probate Project which will provide innumerable opportunities for volunteers for many years to come. Call 618-656-1294 to become a MCHS volunteer!

At right, Steve Rensberry at the MCHS Route 66 Festival booth.



From the Loyet Collection (MCHS)



Above, Mayor Art Risavy, Robert Daiber and Robert Clouse at the June 11 Open House. (Reinhardt)



### OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEERS!

We are grateful for several new volunteers (\*) since the last newsletter. Welcome and thanks to all of you for what you do!

Donna Bardon  
Craig Becker  
LaVerne Bloemker  
Betty Byrd  
Lynn Engelman  
Mike Featherstun  
Susan Featherstun  
Gary Forshaw  
Laura Fowler  
Nick Hoffstetter\*  
Bill Iseminger  
Charles Jorgenson\*  
Damon Kirk\*  
Cherrie Kuhn  
Marty Lane  
Shirley Malench  
Steve Rensberry  
Mike Reinhardt  
Connie Royston  
Ellen Thorson  
Gregory Thorson  
Sue Wolf

Volunteers assist with the Probate Project, take care of the MCHS grounds, help plan exhibits and much more!

#### MCHS BOARD

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#### PUBLICATIONS

##### MCHS NEWS

6 issues annually  
Cindy Reinhardt, Editor  
[cindy.reinhardt@madcohistory.org](mailto:cindy.reinhardt@madcohistory.org)

#### VOLUNTEERS

There are abundant and varied opportunities for volunteers at either the Museum or the Library. If interested, please call 618-656-7569.

#### MEMBERSHIPS

Several membership levels are available to those interested in supporting the work of preserving Madison County history through a MCHS membership. Memberships run on the calendar year, Jan 1-Dec 31. Applications are available on our website, or at the Library.

THE Madison County Historical Society is a 501(c)3 charitable organization.

## RECENT NEWS

### EDWARDSVILLE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

#### AWARDS GRANT FOR SUMMER CAMP

MCHS was pleased to learn that the Edwardsville Community Foundation awarded the Society a \$2,500 Challenge Grant to provide for supplies and equipment related to the Summer History Camp.

Pamela Farrar, Executive Director of the Foundation, said, "These hands-on, immersive learning experiences are a great option for children throughout Madison County."

This is the second year MCHS has partnered with the Madison County Regional Office of Education to offer a children's camp geared towards teaching local history in a fun and engaging way. The activities differ each year, but the concept is the same: four days of field trips and learning activities.

### TAYLOR STUDIOS

After reviewing proposals from five firms, the MCHS Board has hired Taylor Studios of Rantoul, Illinois, to develop a plan for the exhibit spaces in the museum.

Taylor Studios will create a plan for the museum story and themes. Their interpreters and designers will work with MCHS preparing sketches, designs, and models, which we could then use for fund raising as well as in the finished museum. The Board has met with them several times already to provide information for a design that mirrors what the Board has in mind for museum exhibits.

### EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

MCHS has an Educational Outreach Committee, chaired by Carol Manning, that goes beyond the walls of the Library and Museum to share Madison County history.

Regular events are the annual MCHS Speaker Series and the "Write Your Own Story" workshop at the Main Street Community Center, but representatives are also sent out to represent the Society at festivals, farmers' markets and at meetings of local organizations.

In the last six weeks, a MCHS representative has organized a Summer History Camp for children, attended the opening of a time-capsule in Edwardsville and recorded the contents, provided a program on Madison County history in 1918 at a Collinsville Senior Living facility, taken their Building History Workshop to Dorsey, given a local history program to the DAR, provided a step-on guide for a tour bus from St. Louis, attended the International Horseradish Festival in Collinsville and the Route 66 Festival in Edwardsville, and attended the grand opening of the West End Service Station, a new Route 66 Tourist Information Center and Museum in Edwardsville.

Members of the committee also plan events hosted by the Society. In thank you letters sent to members when they renew, it always says, "We welcome your ideas for programming and newsletters," and we mean it! Often members know pieces of our history that have been long forgotten. Need a program? Call 618-656-1294.

JULY NEWSLETTER SPONSORED BY

ILLINOIS COAL MUSEUM

UNION MINERS CEMETERY - MOTHER JONES MUSEUM

*Thank You!*

The three sponsors for this issue, combined, offer the public an excellent overview of the history of coal mining in this region. They are close enough for a great field trip, all in one day.

#### Union Miners Cemetery

The Union Miners Cemetery, dedicated in 1899, is the only cemetery that was established and administered by a labor union. Miners Day is celebrated every October at the Cemetery, and May Day is celebrated every May. Address: Old Route 66, Mt. Olive, Illinois (Exit 44, I-55)  
For information on tours and programs call 618-659-8759.

#### Mother Jones Museum

The Mother Jones Museum is located in the Mt. Olive City Hall, 215 East Main St., Mt. Olive, Illinois. The museum is open 8:30 to 4:30 Monday through Friday. For more information:

Website: <https://www.motherjonesmuseummtolive.org/>

Facebook: Friends of the Mother Jones Museum

Email: [friendsofthemotherjonesmuseum@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofthemotherjonesmuseum@gmail.com),

Call 217-999-4261 (Mt. Olive City Hall)

For information on tours and events call 618-659-8759

#### Illinois Coal Museum

The Illinois Coal Museum in Gillespie, Illinois, tells the story of South/Central Illinois coal, the people, the coal towns, and so much more with a simulated mine, thousands of images, and hundreds of artifacts. Since 2022, they have worked with the UMWA whose members volunteer to build exhibits. The organization has also donated many artifacts to benefit the museum.



#### ILLINOIS COAL MUSEUM

121 S. Macoupin Street

Gillespie, IL 62033

833-228-8603

<https://www.gillespiecoalmuseum.org/>

Tuesday, Thursday-Friday 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

ADMISSION IS ALWAYS FREE

## THE PRICE OF COAL: LIFE IN THE COAL MINES (CONT. FROM PAGE 1)

### The Company Town

Mine owners built small rental houses for miners with a few rooms, access to a water pump and a privy. Company stores sold all the provisions that a mining family needed.

Historian John Keiser describes the Madison Coal Company town in Glen Carbon.

"Miners were compelled to live in company houses, all alike, and were charged \$2.00 a month for each room, even for a summer kitchen built at the miner's expense. The rent was withheld from monthly wages. Men were paid in scrip equal to their debt at the company store; the remainder of the pay was in cash. There was little of that."

Scrip was a currency printed by the company that was not transferable to dollars. It could only be spent at the company store.

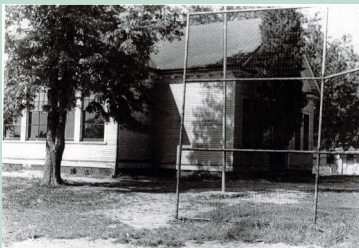
### The Mining Town

There were also villages surrounding the mines that did not belong to the mining company.

Donkville, also called Cuba, was built up the hill from the Donk Brothers Mine #2 in Collinsville Township. The mine was on N. Keebler Road near Woodcrest Drive. Miners built small houses, dug wells, raised chickens and goats, and grew their own food in large gardens.

Along Woodcrest there was a tavern with a wide lawn where families met on Sundays. It was also where they gathered to share their grape harvest and make wine for the winter.

There was a boarding house, and a two-room school. Cuba School, aka Donkville School, was built for the children of miners and local farmers on Junghans Drive. Everyone in a miner's household continued to work simply to pay for the basics, but there was a school nearby.



Cuba School aka Donkville School

County. Soon there were also mines in Alton, Bethalto, Worden, Wood River, Godfrey, Troy, Livingston, Maryville and Donkville, now part of Collinsville Township.

There was work for experienced and new miners, as well as opportunities for businesses that supported the mines and miners. Farriers, mule handlers, grocery and dry goods store owners, physicians, midwives, bakers, seamstresses, clerks, and more; all came looking for work in the coal towns.

Miners seeking work came from the anthracite fields of Pennsylvania, the isolated hollows of West Virginia, the United Kingdom, Northern, Southern and Eastern Europe, and Russia. Madison County's population grew from 51,575 in 1890, to 143,830 in 1930. In 1890, 1,290 miners lived in Glen Carbon. Of those, a third were American-born, and 805 were listed as German, Italian, Bohemian, Danish, Irish, Welsh, English, Russian, Scottish, French, Belgian, and Hungarian immigrants.



Dr. Lumaghi encouraged immigrating Italian miners to work for him in Collinsville. A majority of the Italian miners who worked in his mines were from his home region of the Piedmont in Northern Italy. Pictured is one of the Lumaghi Coal Company mines.

(Men of the Mines)

The 1920 Illinois Survey of Immigrants Commission reported that in 1899 Italians were the largest foreign group in coal mining communities followed by Poles, Lithuanians, Slovaks and Croatians.

## THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

Mining families left home to make a new life, to find work that made it possible to support their families. They were escaping economic depressions, wars, changing borders, or working conditions that displaced or impoverished workers. Most could not hope to own a home, a farm, or a business, nor could they expect to attend school for more than a few years. Mining meant opportunity.

The miners often immigrated alone, with male relatives, or with friends from their native village. Women and children typically came later, after the miner had found work and saved enough money to pay their passage.

In the 1890s, the immigrant miner travelled across the Atlantic in steerage, below deck in crowded quarters, typically arriving at either Ellis Island or New Orleans, although some entered the country through Canada. At Ellis Island, they went through a variety of exams to verify their physical and moral fitness to enter the country, and then usually rode a train to their final destination. From New Orleans, immigrants took a riverboat to St. Louis. The length of the journey varied from 4-6 weeks in the 1880s, to approximately a week by 1920.

Often a relative or fellow villager met and shepherded the new immigrant through the hiring process at the mine, and helped him find lodging, a church, tools, and supplies.

The immigrant likely boarded with a family who lived in a village near the mine or, if in a company town, in housing owned by the mining company and rented to miners and their families. A boarder paid for a sleeping room that did not always include a bed, but was a warm, dry space to sleep. Immigrant miners also paid for meals and laundry services, and sought help with translating documents and instructions from someone who, sharing their language and culture, could help them make their way in a new country.

Single miners might also live in a boarding house or a hotel that rented rooms and offered dinner and laundry services. They shared crowded rooms with countrymen and saved money to send home to families.

When the miner's family arrived, they rented a house in the company town or nearby village, and took in boarders of their own. Miners who remained single and had no family in America sometimes lived as boarders all their lives, and became "uncles" in the household.

## WORKING IN THE COAL MINES

Few miners were unionized before 1898, which meant each man signed an individual work contract with the company that detailed his duties, responsibilities, and work hours. The contract also forbade him to organize or join a union. A miner who went to a union meeting or talked about a union would be fired and his last pay forfeited.

Jobs in the mine were plentiful, but dangerous, and wages were variable. The price of coal depended on the state of the economy. In 1897, a miner worked a ten hour day, 179 days a year. He was paid 35 cents for a ton of coal and dug around 3 tons a day. There were no sick days, no health insurance, and death benefits were paid only if the miner died in the mine. Miners who died of black lung disease received no compensation. The risk of accident or illness, missed work days, along with the loss of pay that came with reduced demand for coal in hard times, meant that miners were always in debt. While they worked hard, they could not always feed their families.

Everyone in a mining family worked. Boys as young as nine went into the mine. Girls helped their mothers with cooking, cleaning and laundry. The work at home and in the mine made it difficult to go to school or to learn a trade beyond mining.

Women cooked, canned foods, gardened, took in laundry, raised chickens and cows, and worked as seamstresses and midwives.

A miner's day began early with breakfast at home, his tin bucket filled with lunch, and a walk to the mine with his fellow workers. He worked in a room dug out of the coal supported by coal or wood timbers. It was dark, wet, often

with standing water on the floor. The ceiling was low, many miners could not stand as they worked. There was constant spray from the cutting and blasting of the coal seam, and the heavy work of loading the coal on the mule-drawn carts.

Boys worked alongside the men. Children could get into small places and were paid one half of adult miner's wage. It was dangerous work for men and boys. They were injured and killed by gas explosions, electrocuted by faulty equipment, crushed by cave-ins or coal filled wagons. Black lung, a pulmonary disease that resulted from the inhalation of fine coal dust and silicon, destroyed the lungs. It killed tens of thousands of miners and continues to disable and kill miners today.

In the mining household everyone got up early. The children helped make a fire to cook breakfast or heat water for laundry. They carried coal buckets to the railroad siding and picked up lumps of coal that had shaken off the cars, filled their buckets and brought home the coal to warm their families. They hauled drinking water from a well or pump, tended the garden and the chickens, cooked and swept floors, and aired linens. Girls often did needlework, embroidery or hand sewing. Few children were able to attend school.



Child miners. (Mother Jones Museum)

**"The price of coal is paid in bone and blood."  
Springhill Disaster, Peggy Seeger**

## COMMUNITY BEYOND THE UNION

Crowded coal towns continued to grow. Although people from many countries and cultures worked together, often their family and social lives remained with their first language and family groups. Community organizations and aid associations were organized. Many families came alone which meant their children often had no grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins in America. The cultural organizations founded locally became their family.

However, there were other ways to find "family." Margherita Burgassi relates in her oral history that she was literate in Italian and English and translated documents or letters, interpreted at meetings, and during legal proceedings. Margherita and her sisters had only their parents in America, and never met their grandparents. The youngest sister, Afrodite, and an elderly Bohemian mother of a miner, who had no grandchildren, shopped and embroidered together. They took the street car to shop for thread and fabric. Although they did not speak a common language, they managed to sort out car fares, pay for sewing supplies, and had cookies and tea every week, becoming surrogate grandmother and granddaughter. Afrodite kept the gifts her Bohemian grandmother gave her all of her life and passed on little painted dishes to her daughter as family heirlooms.

World War I brought new tensions to the coal towns. Coal production was increased due to the war and mine owners pushed for worker concessions as proof of patriotic duty and loyalty to the government. An independent govern-

ment propaganda agency, the Committee on Public Information (CPI), attempted to influence public support for the war effort. Miners, among others, were encouraged to demonstrate their loyalty and to detest the Hun. Although miners were usually exempt from service, many miners enlisted in the military and attended loyalty rallies.

There were two instances of violence involving miners during WW I, both in Collinsville. At a local dance hall, two miners who worked in the same Lumaghi mine, one Austrian and one Italian, argued over a flag. The Austrian shot and killed the Italian.

In the second incident, Robert Prager, a young German immigrant baker, who wanted to be a miner, was accused of planning to set off an explosion in a mine. He was lynched in April 1918, by a group of men including miners, while some of Collinsville's most respected citizens stood by. All were acquitted at an Edwardsville Court House trial.



*Narodni Sin, known as Czech Hall, was built in 1906 on East Vandalia Street in Edwardsville. It was a lodge where Czech immigrants met for socialization and to preserve their culture. Meetings were held in the Czech language until it disbanded in 1958. Most Czech immigrants were either miners or farmers.*

(City of Edwardsville)

# THE MAKING OF A UNION

From the early days of mining, attempts to form a union were met with mixed success. In 1890, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) was established from two earlier unions. Of the more than 30,000 miners working in Illinois, fewer than 400 belonged to the UMWA. Miners struggled to make safer working conditions and earn better pay, but were locked into their individual contracts and had little power without collective action.

In 1897, the union called for a strike. Miners from Mt. Olive, led by Alexander Bradley, began a march through Macoupin County into Edwardsville and Glen Carbon, Belleville, and O'Fallon to encourage miners to join the strike. They paraded behind an enormous flag. Mules pulled a provisions wagon. There were many stops for speeches on the need for a union and the value of solidarity. Miners wives and children brought the marchers food and townspeople joined the march. On July 16, 1897, the *Edwardsville Intelligencer* reported, "The strike, as this locality is concerned, took a new phase today. The city thronged with striking miners. The number of the delegation is given between 300 and 400...Several hundred of the miners walked to Glen this afternoon to use their influence on their fellow laborers there."

It looked as if they had succeeded in a unified response, but a few groups went back to work and ultimately the strike failed.

## The Battle of Virden

The next year, on Oct. 12, 1898, an armed struggle between union miners locked out of their work and the Chicago-Virden Coal Company changed everything. The company brought a train full of Black miners from Alabama as strike breakers. There were Black union and non-union miners throughout the coalfields. The mine owners exploited the prejudices of the time to inflame the union struggles. The Black miners on the train did not know armed miners waited for them. Many had their families on the train. They had an-

onboard the train where all the windows were shot out. Governor Tanner refused to send the state militia to support the Virden Coal Company. The miners were victorious.

Victory at Virden changed life for miners and their families. Union numbers grew rapidly. The UMWA became the miners' union across the country. Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, the Irish immigrant who crusaded to stop child labor and to build unions, called Illinois the best organized mining union state in the country. Mining remained dangerous but wages and working conditions improved. The companies no longer had absolute control over the miner's work and life.

## Union Miners Cemetery

In 1899, the UMWA bought an acre of land on the outskirts of Mt. Olive and established the Union Miners Cemetery for the Virden dead, for all miners and their families, and men and women who fought for unions across the country. They celebrated Virden Day, now called Miners Day, for the first time in 1899, and continue to commemorate the day one hundred and twenty four years later.



*Miners Cemetery in Mt. Olive.*

*(Condellone)*

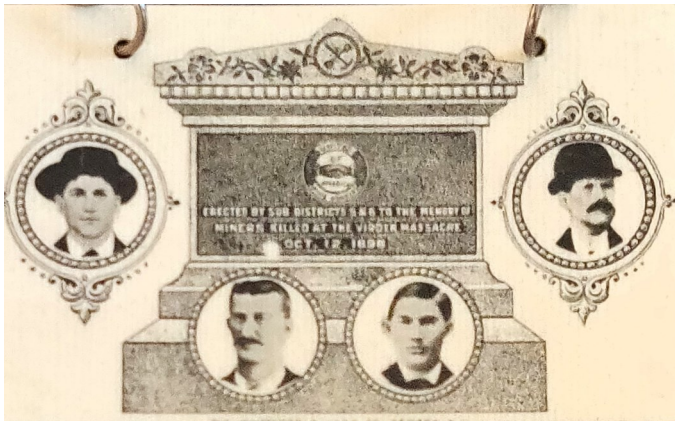
## Child Labor

It was not until the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), New Deal legislation in 1938, that there was real legal protection for children. A generation after the deaths of dozens of children in the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, and 35 years after Mother Jones led the March of the Mill Children in 1903, federal protection for children was finally the law of the land.

The FLSA set a national minimum wage, established a 40-hour work week, prohibited children under 16 from working and mandated public education until the age of 16. Children would now go to school instead of boys being sent to the coal mines at age nine and girls to the sewing factories at 13 years of age.

## The Miners Institute.

Union miners and the UMWA donated money to build the Miners Institute on Main Street in Collinsville. In December 1918, the beautifully designed building, with a statue of two miners over the entrance, opened its doors. Miners wanted a place where everyone could come together. The first floor held a stage and theater seating. Upstairs there was a kitchen and dining hall, classrooms and meeting rooms, all to be used by the miners' families and the larger community for entertainment, literacy and language classes, expert advice on work and immigration questions, and programs for children. It was a grand community center.



*This graphic was part of a commemorative bookmark depicting the Virden men killed in the Battle of Virden, Henry "Fred" Long, an Edwardsville native is shown at upper left.*

*(Condellone)*

swered a notice offering work.

There was a short gun fight between miners and company guards on the train. Casualties of the short battle included eight miners killed (seven at the time of the battle and one later from injuries) and 40 wounded, four guards killed and four wounded, and one railroad employee killed.

The train sped away to Springfield without unloading the strike-breakers, but there were at least two wounded

# MAKING HISTORY: GENERAL BRADLEY, SISTER KATY, AND FRED LONG

Mining families often acted with courage and determination in the mine, the union hall, and the picket line. Some of their stories are preserved in fragments – in family archives or photos, a newspaper article, an oral history, but many are lost altogether. A few, whose lives and work helped bring great change, who made life better for mining families and all working people, are well remembered.

## Alexander “General” Bradley



Alexander Bradley

General Bradley, who led the miners march through Madison County in July 1897, went on to lead miners at the Battle of Virden on October 12, 1898. Bradley and his family came from the English coalfields to Madison County in 1873. Alex picked slate at the Devil's Hole Mine near Collinsville as a nine-year-old. In 1894, he joined Coxe's Army of 10,000 unemployed men as they marched on Washington seeking economic relief from the government. He learned the tactics of the march and how to stage events for public and press attention. Bradley affected a Robber Baron costume of formal coat, top hat, umbrella and flashy jewelry. Soon the miners called him General Bradley. He led miners from Mt. Olive at the Battle of Virden and went on to speak for the union, though not as an official. He was as independent as he was charismatic and did not thrive in the union structure. The miners loved him. He is remembered for the telegrams he sent from the Battle, the most famous asks for doctors, not guns. Bradley had lung problems in middle age, likely black lung disease, drank too much and died in 1918 at age 52. There is a fine stone at his grave in the Union Miners Cemetery, a few feet from the Mother Jones Monument. She asked the union for permission to be buried with the miners that she called her “brave boys” who fought at Virden. She was buried there in 1930.

## Ernst “Fred” Long

Ernst “Fred” Long, a miner from an Edwardsville family, moved to Mt. Olive to dig coal. He answered the call to join the miners who were locked out at Virden and became one of the Martyrs of Virden, as the miners who died there were called. In 1899, when the Union Miners Cemetery was established, the UMWA erected a granite stone with the names of the four local men who died at Virden, including Fred. But Fred is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Edwardsville, his hometown. The UMWA bought his headstone and dedicated it with an elaborate ceremony that included a band and parade and speeches from city and union officials. This miner left his home to make a living, fought to protect his fellow miners, and became part of an enormous event in labor history.



Born in Edwardsville, Illinois, in 1879, Ernst “Fred” Long was the son of a coal miner who was disabled in a mining accident in 1892. Fred was killed at Virden in 1898. He was 18 years old. (Condellone)

## Caterina “Katy” Bianco DeRorre

Caterina “Katy” Bianco DeRorre, 1895-1960, came to the coalfields from Italy with her family of miners and married a coal miner. In 1932, the UMWA was the voice of miners, but the Great Depression brought pressure for wage concessions, and strong disagreement on the right response in the union halls. In September of that year, miners from Macoupin and Madison counties met to draft a new union, the Progressive Miners of America.

The miners' wives and mothers formed a sister organization, the Women's Auxiliary of the PMA. They modeled their actions and goals after Mother Jones. Katy DeRorre became a leader in the Auxiliary and worked closely with the president, Agnes Burns Wieck.

The Auxiliary performed the typical roles of women in mining families. They nursed injured miners, cooked, and raised funds, but they had wider goals. Mothers and daughters, 15,000 strong, marched to Springfield, Illinois, to educate the state government on the legitimacy of their new union. They sought unemployment relief and aid in feeding hungry families. They spoke to politicians, to church groups, and civic organizations. They also wrote articles and letters and walked the picket lines with the men.

Katy, who knew hunger as a child, worked to insure there would be no hungry children in the mining towns. She set up soup kitchens that welcomed everyone, regardless of race or Union affiliation. Her only requirement was that diners bring their good manners.

Agnes, Katy, and the Auxiliary were widely recognized as effective and intelligent workers and received national and

international attention. Katy brought both Black and white miners wives into the Auxiliary and into her parlor for discussions of strategies and actions. Typically, miners who worked together and met in the union hall never ate together or met socially.

For her work, Katy was called the “Good Samaritan of the Coalfields.” A blue collar immigrant woman was unusual among women activists, who were often upper-class and highly educated. Many women in the coalfields were articulate, intelligent activists. Katy's actions brought attention to all the women who had carried on the struggle without recognition.

Ultimately the Progressives failed to get the support they needed, miners killed each other in ambushes and gun-fights, and in the late 1990s the union dissolved. The UMWA became more transparent and democratic at the local level.

Katy's death made international news. There is a monument to the Good Samaritan of the Coalfields in the Lutheran Cemetery in Collinsville. While she is largely forgotten in Madison County, public historians recognize her as a force for justice and solidarity, who fed and educated people in violent times.



Katy/Katie, in white hat, surrounded by miners' children. (Condellone)



801 N. Main Street  
Edwardsville, IL 62025

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62025

## JULY-OCTOBER CALENDAR

### MCHS Speaker Series

On Sunday, August 13, at 2 p.m. Archival Librarian Mary Z. Rose will present a program regarding a largely unknown aspect of the history of Monticello Female Seminary. From 1838 until it closed in 1971, Godfrey's Monticello was the oldest female seminary in the west.

Philena Fobes served as the school's principal from 1845–1865. She was followed by Harriet Newell Haskell, who held the position until her death in 1907.

Each of these women had a close, long-term relationship with another woman: Sara Cady Eaton and Emily Gilmore Alden, respectively, both teachers at Monticello. This program documents these relationships and makes the case for recognizing them as part of the LGBTQ history of Madison County.

MCHS Speaker Series programs are held at the Main Street Community Center in Edwardsville, Illinois. The events are free and open to the public. For additional information, call 618-656-1294.

### TRIVIA NIGHT FUNDRAISER

**Saturday, August 26  
7 p.m.**

St. Gregory Armenian Community Center  
3501 Century Dr., Granite City, IL\*  
Call 1-618-451-2611 today to reserve a table!

#### DETAILS

Doors open at 6 p.m. - Game starts at 7 p.m.  
Maximum of 8 players per table: \$25/person  
Mulligans available on site: 3/\$5 with a maximum of 12/\$20 per team

### CASH PRIZES !!!

Silent Auction - 50/50 Raffle  
Dead or Alive Game - Booze Basket Raffle  
Pastry Auction - Attendance Prizes  
Cash Bar for soda, water, beer & alcohol  
(No outside drinks or alcohol permitted)  
Bring your own snacks!

#### RESERVATIONS

For information, to reserve a table, sponsor a round, or make a donation call the MCHS Trivia Night Committee at 618-451-2611 or send an email to [hyaghchig@charter.net](mailto:hyaghchig@charter.net)  
Walk-in teams are welcome!

\*From I-270 go south onto IL-3. Turn left onto W. Pontoon Rd. (intersection at Walmart). Turn right onto Century Drive.

## MCHS FALL HISTORY EVENTS

Save the dates for these wonderful fall events celebrating Madison County history! Living History Days has expanded to include events all over Edwardsville including a Chautauqua, a vintage ball game, a quilt show, and artists and demonstrations at other historic venues around Edwardsville.

MCHS will also be participating in Harvest Homestead Days (September 8-10) in Highland and in LeClaire Parkfest (October 15) in Edwardsville.