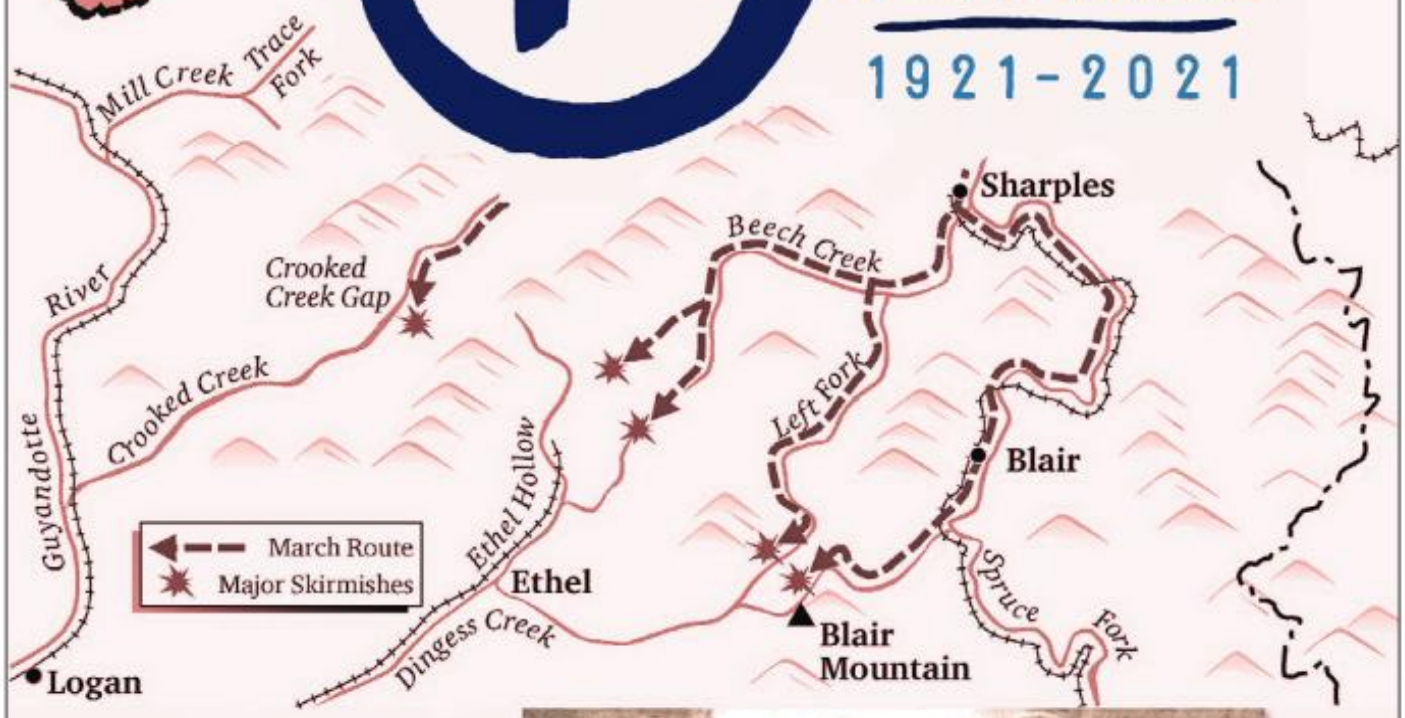
BATTLE of BLAIR MOUNTAIN CENTENNIAL 1921-2021

> The time has come for me to lay down my Bible and pick up my rifle and fight for my rights.
>
> - Rev. John Wilburn

Quote on the wall at the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum



UMWA to recreate historic 'Miners March' over Labor Day weekend

By DYLAN VIDOVICH
HD Media

IN LATE August 1921, thousands of union supporters marched from the outskirts of Marmet to the foot of Blair Mountain, which culminated in the violent clash known famously as the Battle of Blair Mountain.

Wikimedia Commons

On Aug. 1, 1921, Sid Hatfield, who was considered a hero among the miners for his role in the Battle of Matewan a year earlier, was shot by detectives of the Baldwin-Felts detective agency on the steps of the McDowell County Courthouse in Welch. Fueled by anger over Hatfield's murder and other events with the Mine Wars that had been ongoing since 1912, an estimated 7,000 union supporters began a march toward Mingo County on Aug. 24, 1921.

Their intent was to overthrow the martial law that had been imposed on Mingo County and free the striking miners who had been arrested in the process. In order to get to Mingo County, the marching miners had to cross over Blair Mountain in the northern end of Logan County.

That's when they were met by the forces of the infamous anti-union Logan County Sheriff Don Chafin. The resulting clash became what is now famously known in the history books as the Battle of Blair Mountain, which remains the second largest civil insurrection in American history after the Civil War.

100 years after that historic march, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) is organizing a three-day event that aims to recreate it. The recreated march will be part of the several other centennial celebrations known as Blair 100.

Those involved in the march will walk approximately 15 miles per day.

The march is scheduled to begin in Marmet at 8 a.m. Friday, Sept. 3, and participants will march to Racine. The march will pick up the next day on Saturday from Racine to Madison, and it will end on Sunday at approximately 5 p.m. at the Local 2935 Union Hall at Sharples. A mini celebration will be held at the Union Hall at the end of the march.

According to the Blair 100 website, the deadline to RSVP for the event has already passed, but questions or concerns about the event may still be directed to the UMWA by emailing Activist@umwa.org.

To learn more about the Blair 100 project, visit www.blair100.com.

HD Media news reporter Dylan Vidovich can be contacted via email at dvidovich@HDMediaLLC.com.

SCHEDULE OF CENTENNIAL EVENTS INSIDE

Logo courtesy of Blair Centennial Project

WVPB

Above and left: Striking miners surrender their rifles to federal troops following the Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921.

WVPB

West Virginia coal miners during the era of the Mine Wars worked under dangerous conditions for low pay. Efforts to organize coalfield workers were met with resistance by coal companies and state officials.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

BATTLE OF BLAIR MOUNTAIN CENTENNIAL 1921-2021

On Sept. 3, vocalist Doris Fields, better known as "Lady D," and West Virginia's "First Lady of Soul" will perform as part of the official program at the Charleston Coliseum Theater celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain. *Courtesy photo*

Blair Footsteps: Interpretive Signage

Through Sept. 10, signs will be placed along the route of the Miners March

Blair Footsteps is a series of pop-up, 3-D exhibits that will illuminate key areas of the 1921 Miners March to Blair Mountain. These interpretive signs will give locals and visitors alike, a history of the emergent details culminating in the Battle of Blair Mountain.

The faces of Blair Mountain — A free photo exhibit

Through Sept. 11 at Chief Logan Lodge and Conference Center

Reflect on the human aspect of this epic conflict by looking into the faces of the people involved in the Battle of Blair Mountain. This exhibit is part of Appalachian Heritage Days. Photographers share their vision of a time and series of events that have relevance for today.

LUNCH WITH BOOKS: Labor Heritage Week — A conversation with Denise Giardina

Tuesday, Aug. 31, from noon to 1 p.m. at Ohio County Public Library

The Ohio County Public Library 's Lunch With Books program, in conjunction with the Reuther-Pollack Labor Heritage Week 2021 and the Battle of Blair Mountain Centennial, will discuss Storming Heaven (a novel of Blair Mountain) and other works with West Virginia writer, Denise Giardina. This event is free and will be presented simultaneously at the library and broadcast online.

Drawing the Battle Lines: Editorial cartoons from the West Virginia Mine Wars

Wednesday, Sept. 1, to July 1, 2022, at the Mineral Resources Building at WVU's Evansdale Campus at Morgantown

This exhibit at West Virginia University's Watts Museum features editorial cartoons depicting the divisive issues that triggered the West Virginia Mine Wars. Using sources that range from the mainstream to the radical, Drawing the Battle Lines explores the role of print media in the struggle for labor rights. As miners, politicians, citizens, and soldiers took sides in this decades-long fight, these illustrations reveal how cartoonists expressed their own views on clashes in the coalfields, while also shaping public perception of the events.

Labor Film Festival

Thursday, Sept. 2, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Joan C. Edwards Performing Arts Center in Huntington

This one-day film festival will be held at the Joan C. Edwards Performing Arts Center at Marshall University in Huntington. Selected films in each category will be screened on Sept. 2. Films will also be screened online for those who cannot be present at the event.

Retracing the miners march to Blair Mountain — Organized by the UMWA

Friday, Sept. 3, at 8 a.m. to Sunday, Sept. 5, at 5 p.m.; march begins at Marmet

Over a three-day period, UMWA members, President Cecil Roberts and interested individuals will re-create the miners march that ended in the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain. One hundred years later, marchers will commemorate this heroic effort starting on Friday, Sept. 3, at Marmet, walking 15 miles a day, and ending in Sharples, on Sunday, Sept. 5. The listed times are estimated. Check the website, *blair100.com*, for updated information.

Blair Day at Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine

Friday, Sept. 3, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine

Beckley has declared Sept. 3 as Blair Day. All the tours will include added commentary of the significance of the mine wars and the Battle of Blair Mountain. Plus, visitors will get a free gift of the Blair Commemorative Journal. This hands-on exhibition and underground coal mining tour offer wonderful opportunities for visitors to learn, explore, interact and share.

Tours and screenings at the Boone County Coal Heritage Museum and Arts Center

Friday, Sept. 3, from noon to 5 p.m. at the Bituminous Coal Heritage Foundation Museum

Join the Boone County Coal Heritage Museum for a day of tours and rare film screenings in Madison. You can watch for the UMWA reenactment marchers to come through town. The museum contains memorabilia of the early coal mining days to the present, including a simulated coal mine, company store, miners home, and the Upper Big Branch Disaster. Admission is free, but donations are accepted.

Battle of Blair Mountain Centennial kickoff event

Friday, Sept. 3, from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Charleston Coliseum & Convention Center

Kick off the Centennial weekend with us in Charleston! The Battle of Blair Mountain is a history that can't just be told, it must also be sung. Music and poetry were more than moral support for striking coal miners; they were a vehicle by which the suppressed history of the Mine Wars and Blair Mountain were passed from one generation to the next. Come learn about some of these proud traditions with us, and kick off the Centennial weekend with us.

"Pray for the Dead, and fight like hell for the living"

Friday, Sept. 3, at 4 p.m. to Saturday, Oct 2, at 10 p.m. at the Monongalia Arts Center

The Monongalia Arts Center will be hosting a visual arts exhibition commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Blair Mountain. This exhibit will show the fight for labor rights, the culture unique to West Virginia created by our long history of absentee ownership and its interests in the extraction industry, history and folk culture of the coal miners, and of course the interpretation each individual finds in a work of art regardless of context or intent.

Museums, Labor, and Social Activism: A symposium presented by the West Virginia Association of Museums

Saturday, Sept. 4, from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Museums and historic sites are active places of discovery and learning, and these sites aren't just for interpreting the past, but they can also take on an active role in social and political events. Join the West Virginia Association of Museums for a two-session panel on the morning of Saturday, Sept. 4, to learn how events are contextualized and passed down through generations, and what roles a museum should or could take on in modern day.

5th annual Reuther-Pollack Labor History Symposium — Remember Blair Mountain

Saturday, Sept. 4, from 10 a.m to 3 p.m. at First State Capitol Building at Wheeling

Did you know that the Mine Wars didn't just occur in southern West Virginia coalfields? There were mine wars in the northern panhandle of West Virginia, too! The 5th Annual Reuther-Pollack Labor History Symposium will be centered on the 100th Anniversary of the Battle of Blair Mountain, highlighting the stories of regional labor organization, struggles, successes, and failures as well as solidarity with northern West Virginian miners and industrial workers.

Reenactment: Murder of Sid Hatfield & Ed Chambers, McDowell County Courthouse

Saturday, Sept. 4, from noon to 1 p.m. at McDowell County Courthouse

On Aug. 1, 1921, "Smilin'" Sid Hatfield, the Sheriff of Matewan, and Ed Chambers, an organizer with the United Mine Workers of America, were gunned down by Baldwin-Felt Detectives on the steps of the McDowell County Courthouse in Welch, right in front of their wives. Come see this free short reenactment, and learn how this event helped spark the Battle of Blair Mountain. No tickets necessary. Just arrive at the steps of the Courthouse a few minutes before noon.

Screening of the movie "Matewan" in Welch

Saturday, Sept. 4, at 1:30 p.m. at Pocahontas Theatre

"Matewan" is the 1987 film written and directed by John Sayles and starring Chris Cooper (in his film debut), James Earl Jones, Mary McDonnell, Will Oldham and David Strathairn. The film dramatizes the events of the Matewan massacre, and the events that led to the Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921.

New books about the Mine Wars: A reading and discussion with authors

Saturday, Sept. 4, from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. at Taylor Books

The story of the West Virginia Mine Wars has provided inspiration to artists, writers, and scholars for decades. Their books, films, and visual artworks have fueled the public's fascination with this little-known episode in our nation's labor history. Chuck Keeney, Ginny Ayers, and Anne Lawrence—three WVU Press authors—will take part in a panel discussion, with author Catherine Moore as moderator.

Appalachian labor music and history

Saturday, Sept. 4, from 3:45 p.m. to 5 p.m. at Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Charleston

The West Virginia IWW will be playing Appalachian music and discussing West Virginia labor history through song to show the struggle of workers in West Virginia and Appalachia to have a better world. The story of Blair Mountain lives on in the actions and music that led up to the event, as well as proceeded it and they are excited to show the history and relevance of some of their favorite labor songs.

The Legacy of the red bandana

Saturday, Sept. 4, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Charleston

The red bandana was the key, unifying symbol in the march on Blair Mountain in 1921. But what is the legacy of the iconic image today?

Join modern day historians, community organizers and activists for an interactive conversation about not only the history of the red bandana, but also the ways in which the bandana is being revived in modern day struggles as a symbol of solidarity and Southern pride. Free event; donations will be accepted.

'Terror of the Tug'

Saturday, Sept. 4, at 8 p.m. at McArts Amphitheater

"Terror of the Tug," written by Jean Battlo, is an outdoor drama based on the West Virginia coal mine wars and the story of the murder of Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers on the steps of the McDowell County Courthouse. The backdrop of the story is southern West Virginia miners' fight to join the UMWA, resulting in the murder of Hatfield and Chambers on the steps of the Courthouse in Welch on Aug 1921. This is a pivotal event in the struggles of the miners and their families that later led to the Battle of Blair Mountain. This is a must-see to understand both the historical and dramatic impact on the lives of so many in West Virginia history.

Solidarity supper, storytelling, and songs

Sunday, Sept. 5, from noon to 3 p.m. at Big Laurel Learning Center

Join us for supper, storytelling, and songs! Enjoy a delicious, home cooked, locally sourced meal and an afternoon of traditional folk music with lyrics that tell the story of West Virginia and coal mining history. Entertainment includes: Carrie and Michael Kline, Ginny Ayers and Tom Breiding.

Guided walking tour of historic Matewan

Sunday, Sept. 5, from 4:45 p.m. to 5:45 p.m.

Hosted by the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum, the tour will span the time from the feuding days of the Hatfields and McCoys, to the coming of the railroads, to the time when Matewan became ground zero for the union movement in Bloody Mingo. For the miners who marched south from Charleston in 1921, Blair Mountain was not their destination. The Red Neck Army intended to advance to Mingo County to relieve their striking brothers and sisters and destroy the Mine Guard System. The heart of this story is at Matewan.

SEE EVENTS, 3

EVENTS

FROM PAGE 2

'I Come Creeping,' new paintings by Chris DeMaria

Sunday, Sept. 5, from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. at WV Mine Wars Museum (exhibit up until June 2022)

"I Come Creeping," New Paintings by Chris DeMaria is a new art exhibit consisting of original paintings. "I Come Creeping" will be installed inside the Solidarity Gallery at the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum in Matewan, and will be on display through June 2022. Chris describes this series of work as "love letters" to those who stood up against a system of injustice during the Mine Wars, including his own ancestors.

The People's Church: A dissident coalfield worship experience

Monday, Sept. 6, from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Coalfield Jamboree Theater

In the spirit of our ancestors' religious uprising, join us for a morning of worship as act of resistance, honoring the legacy and spiritual significance of what happened a century ago at Blair Mountain and serving as a spiritual call to action for the people of the Coalfields today in our continuing struggle for true freedom.

Blair Centennial finale hosted by UMWA at the Annual Labor Day Rally

Monday, Sept. 6, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at John Slack Memorial Park

Join us for the official wrap up event of the Battle of Blair Mountain Centennial at the UMWA's Annual Labor Day Rally. The UMWA played a pivotal role in the history of the Battle of Blair Mountain and subsequent improvements in the lives of miners and their families since then. Join us as we honor the men and women who put their lives on the line, and also have some fun at this once-in-a-hundred-years event.

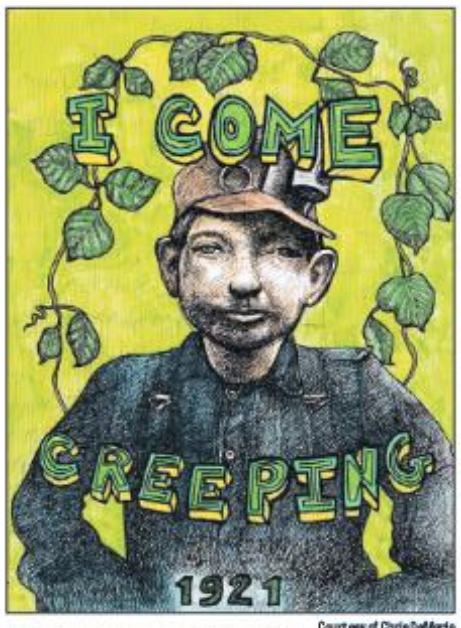
Blair Mountain Lecture Series

Series launches at Sept. 8 from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.; final lecture is Nov. 17. Hosted by the UVA-Wise College's Center for Appalachian Studies and the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, at the Cantrell Banquet Room; for updates go to blair100.com.

In solidarity with the Battle of Blair Mountain series in Fall 2021, UVA-Wise College's Center for Appalachia Studies is hosting a series of lectures on topics related to the Battle of Blair Mountain. Speakers include Dr. John Hennen on Blair Mountain and larger efforts to unionize in southern WV, Lloyd Thomlinson on the response Blair Mountain warranted from coal operators in southwest Virginia, Dr. Rebecca Bailey on the conditions and events that led up to Blair Mountain with a focus in Matewan, and Dr. Bob Hutton on the brutal mine guard system that stoked coal miners and their need to unionize.

DYLAN VIDOVICH | Logan Banner

On Sept. 10, join the Logan Women's Club for tours of the Don Chafin House which will begin with the Honorable Judge Josh Butcher, portraying Don Chafin, greeting guests on the front porch and presenting a short monologue.



Courtesy of Chris DeMaria

"I Come Creeping" -- New Paintings by Chris DeMaria is an art exhibit consisting of original paintings. "I Come Creeping" will be installed inside the Solidarity Gallery at the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum in Matewan and will be on display through June 2022.

Coalfields Heritage Festival

Sept. 9 - Sept. 12 at Welch

The Coalfield Heritage Festival will be a special four day festival held on the historic streets of Welch. Special education day tied to the Battle of Blair Mountain Centennial, with storytellers, living historians, musicians, vendors, a carnival, special performances of "Terror of the Tug," and more.

Tours of Don Chafin house

Friday, Sept. 10, from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

Logan County Sheriff Don Chafin was a key figure in the Battle of Blair Mountain. He was known as the infamous "Czar of Logan," and was a leader of the defending forces during the Battle of Blair Mountain

For the first time, members of the public are invited to tour his home. Chafin lived in this house from 1920-1933 and resided here during the Battle of Blair Mountain. Currently, Chafin's home is the only structure in Logan County listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

PHIL PERRY | Coal Valley News

On Sept. 3, join the Boone County Coal Heritage Museum for a day of tours and rare film screenings in Madison,.

Appalachian Heritage Days

Sept. 10-11 in downtown Logan; on Friday, Sept. 10, Taste of the Coalfields will run from 4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at Courthouse Square; at 7 p.m. there will be a concert at Coalfield Jamboree; Saturday events run from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Chief Logan Conference Center

A two-day event to celebrate Appalachian Heritage. Experience the sights, sounds and tastes of the southern coalfields of West Virginia. There will be a small charge for tickets to the Taste of the Coalfields to taste foods from the various vendors. All other activities are free. A great family event and a perfect opportunity get to know folks from this dynamic area.

INAUGURAL Redneck 5K Run *(in conjunction with Appalachian Heritage Days)*

Saturday, Sept. 11, at 8 a.m.

Here's a novel way to commemorate the Battle of Blair Centennial — run the path of the Battle in Logan County, a part of the U.S. lovingly called "hill country." The race will host about 150 people for our INAUGURAL Redneck 5K Run. It's a challenging race and embraces the unique heritage of the area.

Earlier virtual events

- The West Virginia and Regional History Center held a virtual event June 20 on "The Road to Blair Mountain: Commemorating the West Virginia Mine Wars."
- A virtual round-table discussion, "Battle of Blair Mountain 100 years later -- significance for working people today," was held Aug. 19. The lineup of authors included Chuck Keeney, Shaun Slifer, Catherine Moore, and Barbara Ellen Smith.
- The Mother Jones Heritage Project hosted a virtual discussion, "We shall rise -- a #Blair100 conversation," on Aug. 26.

Videos of these events can possibly be found by searching online.

Read about the
Battle of
Blair Mountain
and other events
of the West Virginia
Mine Wars at
wvencyclopedia.org

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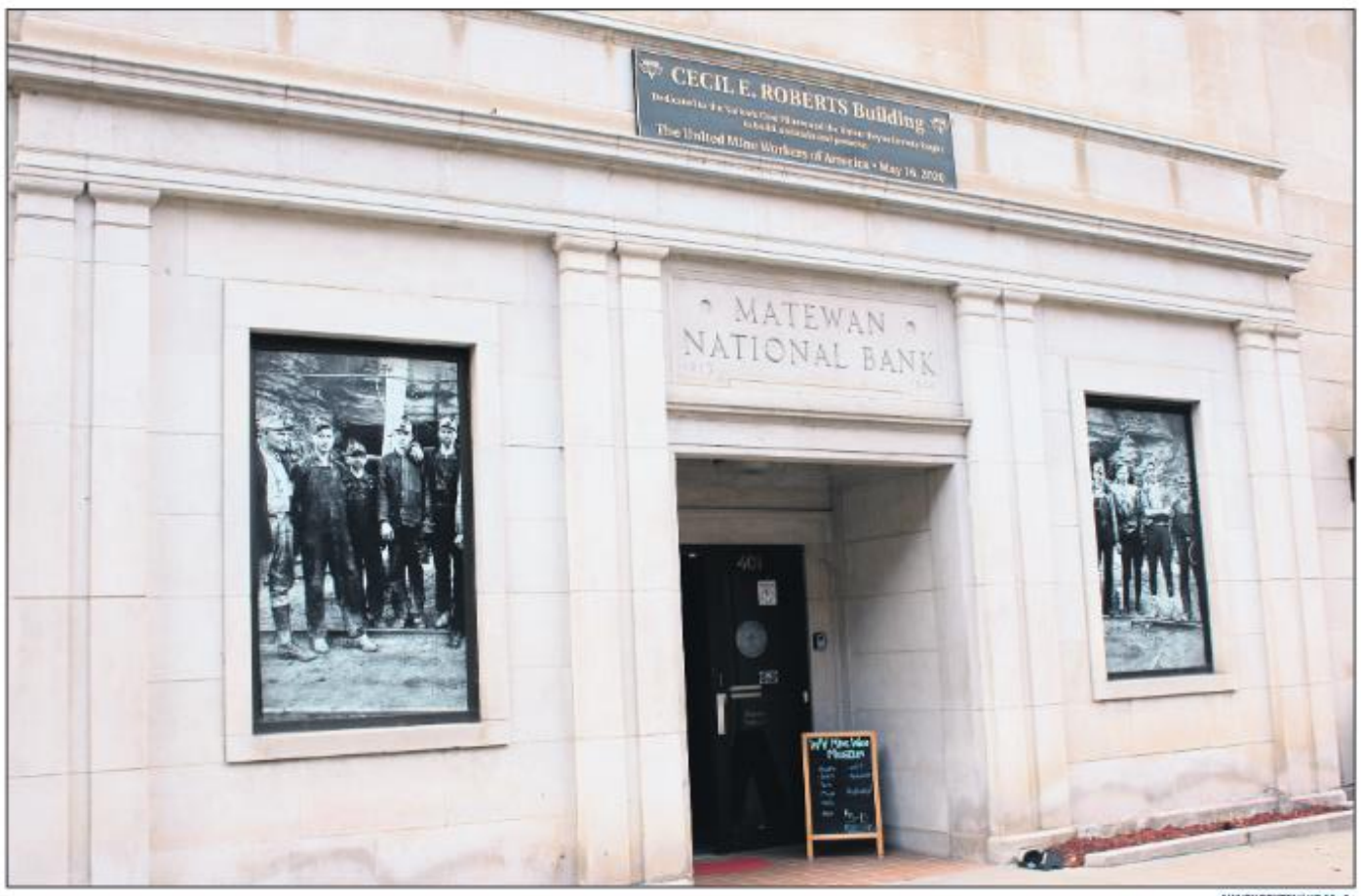


NANCY PEYTON | HD Media

The West Virginia Mine Wars Museum now finds its home inside the Cecil E. Roberts building, owned and operated by the local United Mine Workers of America chapter 1440.

Museum embraces legacy of Blair Mountain, beyond

By NANCY PEYTON
HD Media

SOUTHERN West Virginia's history is ingrained with labor movements and class struggles, especially in relation to the coal industry. The West Virginia Mine Wars Museum in Matewan is working to reclaim the narratives of that history and preserve them for future generations.

The museum first opened its doors in 2015 after receiving a combination of grant funding and public donations. The museum now finds its home inside the Cecil E. Roberts building, owned and operated by the local United Mine Workers of America chapter 1440.

"Matewan is really ground zero for the birth of the American labor movement," said Museum Director Mackenzie New-Walker. "It was just the perfect place to tell the story."

The museum is a walk through what times were like for miners during the mine wars with highlights of key moments in the movement. It has grown over the last six years to become the largest publicly accessible collection of artifacts related to the mine wars.

"We tell the story of the West Virginia mine wars through some permanent exhibits that focus on life in the coal camps," New-Walker said. "It talks about some major strike actions that happened during the mine wars, such as the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike... We also have exhibits on the Battle of Blair Mountain and the three sides that were involved with the redneck army, the Logan defenders, as well as the federal government."

The Battle of Blair Mountain exhibit specifically includes an artifact from an archeological dig that New-Walker said highlights the importance of these digs for preserving the history of the battlefield.

"One of our highlight artifacts is an 1873 Winchester rifle that was used by miners during the battle," New-Walker said. "Someone had actually buried that gun with intentions of coming back and getting it I imagine. This rifle was discovered in 2002, so it was 81 years after the Battle of Blair Mountain. It's the largest archeological find on display that we have in the museum."

Tent colonies were established during the strike at Eskdale and Holly Grove to house the families evicted from coal camps. These continued to be utilized throughout the mine wars.

New-Walker said on the interesting aspects of this rifle is that when it was discovered by Elmer Stone, it still had all eight rounds loaded in the chamber. The ammo is also on display alongside the rifle.

Another item within the exhibit is a replica of the bombs used by police to target the miners during the battle.

"Don Chafin had hired private air guards at this time to drop makeshift pipe bombs essentially," New-Walker said. "We have this replica on display, and that's one thing that when folks come through they're like 'wait a second, they dropped bombs on people?' It's something that I think a lot of visitors are surprised about."

The different weapons on display within the Battle of Blair Mountain exhibit indeed show the disparity between the three sides involved.

"It also showcases what a disadvantage the miners were at," New-Walker said. "When you walk into the Battle of Blair Mountain exhibit you can see the opposing arms essentially that each side had. You look and you see Don Chafin's army had machine guns and bombs; miners had Winchester rifles, hunting rifles, pretty much anything that they could grab. And then the federal government had machine guns. So you can see what miners were up against, I think it really brings the story to life."

New-Walker said they often get visitors who question the aftermath of the Battle of Blair Mountain, and what happened to the key players who were involved.

"We also talk about the miner treason trials that happened after the Battle of Blair Mountain, which is something folks always ask," New-Walker said. "'What happened after Blair Mountain?' So a lot of the miners went on trial for treason or for murder. Many were indicted."

One of the newest additions to the museum is bars from one of the jail cells at the Jefferson County Courthouse that held the miners during the treason trials.

The museum focuses on more than just the Battle of Blair Mountain, as this uprising in 1921 was not an isolated event. In order to understand its culmination, it's also crucial to look at events such as Bloody Mingo.

"We also have a section about World War I and of course Bloody Mingo," New-Walker said. "In our Bloody Mingo exhibit you can look out the window and see the exact place where the Battle of Matewan happened 101 years ago."

After exiting the museum, a short walk across the street shows bullet holes from the Battle of Matewan still in the back of the building located on the corner there.

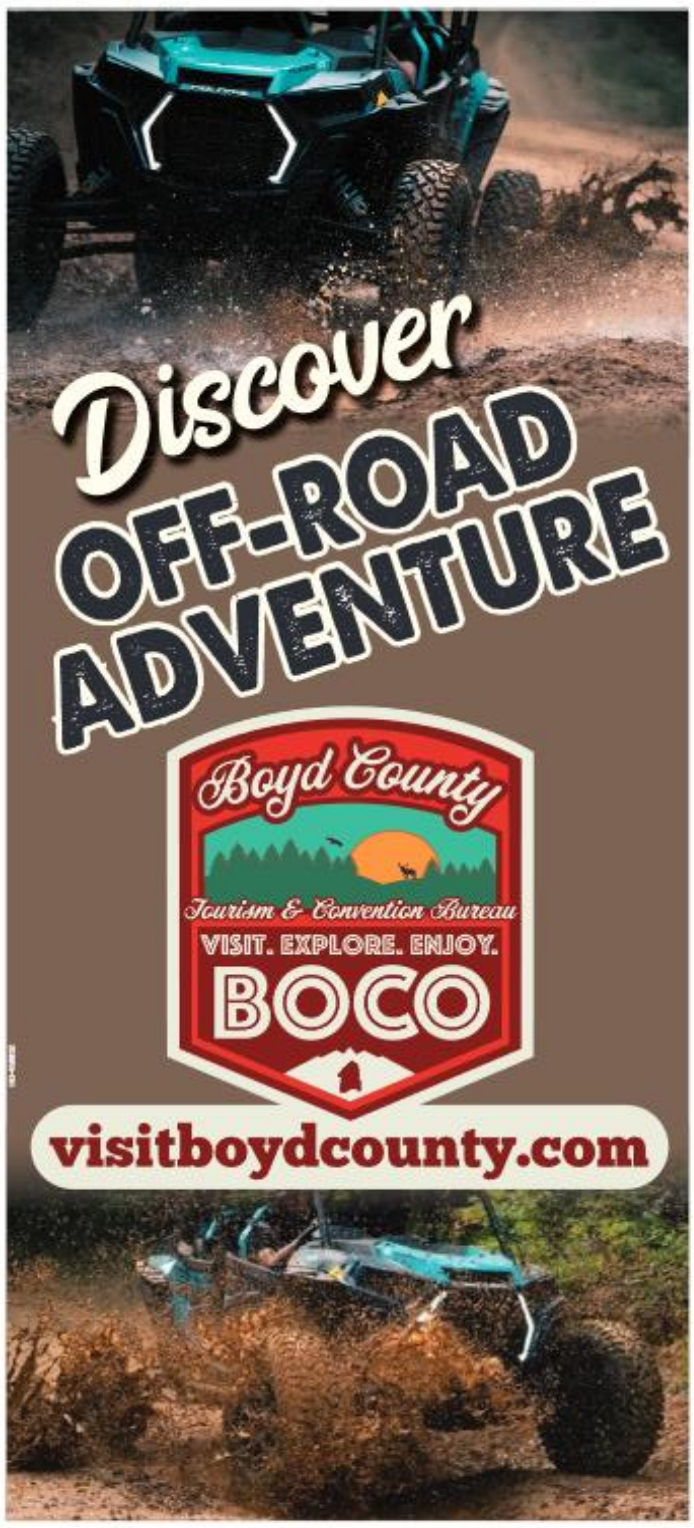
The museum, in telling these stories, also wants to ensure all voices are heard – especially those who were not broadcast as prominently 100 years ago.

"We talk about women's resistance and how women were critical to the story," New-Walker said. "They helped break up railroad tracks, they helped fight off scab workers, they helped wash the clothes, grow gardens, make dinner. They got by with very little."

New-Walker also serves as project coordinator for the centennial celebration of the Battle of Blair Mountain. Alongside planning events to educate the public about the Battle of Blair Mountain, she and others are also working to showcase the lasting legacy of the battle. This continuing story is also showcased within the museum.

"We also have a section about the memory and the legacy of the mine wars and how the spirit of Blair Mountain has been

SEE **MUSEUM, 6**



A TRIBUTE TO

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF BLAIR MOUNTAIN

1921-2021

They were 13,000 strong that August of 1921, marching to Bloody Mingo, singing the songs of the union. Tired of chafing under the cruelties of the coal companies they marched. They marched because of Matewan and the memory of Sid Hatfield barely cold in his mountain grave. They marched because of the bitterness they felt by being told how to think, how to vote, how to live and how to die. Against the coal companies and their private armies of strikebreakers and Baldwin-Felts goons, the West Virginia miners marched.

Crowd of Coal Miners during Blair Mountain in 1921 – Photo from collection of Kenny King

RHODODENDRON OFFICAL FLOWER OF WV.

The companies called them communists. Bolsheviks. Reds. But they were simply proud West Virginia coal miners who wore the face of America, made up of Scots-Irish, Slavs, Greeks, Italians, Spanish and the descendants of slaves, looking for a better life than in the share-cropping South. Many had served our country across the seas. Brothers all, under the black dust of the mines, they sought a chance at something better. In 1921, this Redneck Army marched to meet the company forces.

Picture them with their red bandannas, armed with nothing more than shotguns and hunting rifles. Picture the private armies of the companies, tucked into machine gun nests, perched high on the hillsides so they could see the miners coming. Imagine the drone of the planes, warning of the bombs about to fall—tear gas bombs and bombs packed with nails for shrapnel. Bombs dropped by Americans on Americans.

In the end, it was the companies that prevailed, but that tragic victory wouldn't last forever. The miners eventually put power to their dreams and sound to their voices.

Blair Mountain is a sacred place, a protected memorial to the miners who were willing to die for a chance to live like free men. May their sacrifices live long in the memory of every citizen of the Mountain State.

*By: L.M. Sutter**

SAVE THE DATE!

BATTLE of BLAIR MOUNTAIN CENTENNIAL 1921-2021

Battle of Blair Mountain Centennial Kickoff Event

Location has changed!

- Friday, September 3, 2021
- 4:00 PM - 9:00 PM
- Charleston Coliseum and Convention Center
  200 Civic Center Drive
  Charleston, WV 25301

Learn more about Matewan & Blair Mountain on wvminewars.org

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**L.M. Sutter©*
Ball, Bat and Bitumen: A History of Coalfield Baseball in the Appalachian South
New Mexico Baseball: Miners, Outlaws, Indians and Isotopes
Arlie Latham: A Baseball Biography of the Freshest Man on Earth

*The term Redneck came from miners who wore red bandanas at the Battle of Blair Mountain as a code to identify that they were not company infiltrators.

A HISTORICAL COAL MINING SERIES ON WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY - BLAIR MOUNTAIN BY WOLFE, WILLIAMS & REYNOLDS.

NANCY PEYTON | HD Media

One of the newest additions to the museum is bars from one of the jail cells at the Jefferson County Courthouse that held the miners during the treason trials.

Winchester rifle used during the Battle of Blair Mountain.

Collection of publications and textbooks showing how long after the battle it took for the mine wars to be included in history books.

ABOVE: Items belonging to Gen. Harry Hill Bandholtz, part of the United States Army presence during the Battle of Blair Mountain.

LEFT: A replica of the bombs used by police to target the miners during the battle. On the wall above is a newspaper clipping with a photo of the actual bomb.

MUSEUM

FROM PAGE 4

remembered 100 years later," New-Walker said. "We have some artifacts from protest marches that have used the red bandana as well as newspaper articles."

One resent resurgence of the red bandana that was made synonymous to the labor movement by the redneck army was the West Virginia teachers' strikes in 2018 and 2019.

"In recent years the red bandana has re-emerged as the symbol of solidarity," New-Walker said. "We saw teachers wearing red bandanas during the teacher's strikes. Many of them would say 'this is in our blood.' I think we've seen today that it's been taken up by organizations who are fighting for social and political change, in West Virginia and beyond. One hundred years later, this symbol is still a marker of class solidarity and union struggle."

New-Walker said as the daughter and granddaughter of union coal miners, she knows first-hand how crucial the preservation of the history of the coalfields is for future generations.

"The museum is very special because we tell the story of the mine wars through the perspective of miners and their families," New-Walker said. "We aim to uplift their voices, voices that are often left out in retellings and historical accounts. It's a really beautiful thing to honor working people and highlight the roles of women, immigrants and African Americans as well."

Blair Mountain and the mine wars have left a lasting legacy on labor movements both within West Virginia and beyond.

"Blair Mountain is such a powerful story because it's this one example in 1921 when folks banded together across racial lines, across ethnic lines, across gender lines to come together and fight for the greater good," New-Walker said. "It's really special for us to be able to tell this story 100 years later."

The West Virginia Mine Wars Museum is open every Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is a suggested donation of $5 to $10.

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>
> — MacKenzie New-Walker

HD Media reporter Nancy Peyton primarily covers news in Lincoln County.

Behind the Second Battle of Blair Mountain

Book gives insider's account of the fight to save historic coalfields crusade site

By ROBERT SAUNDERS
HD Media

The first Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921 was a bloody chapter in Appalachian history. The armed uprising of miners against coal barons and anti-union lawmen lasted five days, beginning with scattered skirmishes and ending with three days of heavy fighting.

The Second Battle of Blair Mountain lasted nine years, and was a different kind of conflict. It's this second battle that historian Charles B. Keeney focuses on in his book, "The Road to Blair Mountain," published by West Virginia University Press.

The book details the efforts to get Blair Mountain listed on the National Register of Historic Places, considered essential to preserve the 100-year-old battlefield from surface mining by coal companies.

The story is a complex one, with many twists and turns. The mountain was listed briefly on the National Register in 2009, only to be removed months later. A grassroots organization, Friends of Blair Mountain, formed a coalition with environmental groups, took legal action and launched a campaign to raise public awareness.

The book gives a blow-by-blow account of the struggles and setbacks of the effort, which finally paid off when a U.S. district judge ruled in the coalition's favor, and Joy Beasley, National Park Services Keeper of the Register, placed Blair Mountain back on the national list in 2018 as a protected, historic site.

Keeney, who has served as president of Friends of Blair Mountain, has deep family ties with Blair Mountain and the West Virginia Mine Wars. His great-grandfather, Frank Keeney, was president of the United Mine Workers union's District 17 during the 1921 uprising. His fiery speeches kept the union spirit alive, and he helped organize the "Red Neck Army" as it was called because of the red bandannas the miners wore.

But Charles "Chuck" Keeney heard very little about his great-grandfather while growing up in Southern West Virginia. "Most of my family did not see my great-grandfather as a hero. Frank Keeney came out on the losing side of the Mine Wars," he writes. "Teachers did not cover the Mine Wars in history class."

Eventually, Chuck Keeney learned more about the Battle of Blair Mountain and his family's role in it.

In late August of 1921, thousands of armed coal miners (estimates vary from 7,000 to 10,000) gathered at Marmet and began a trek south through the coalfields. The goal was to relieve families who were being terrorized by private mine guards hired by the coal companies.

Hostilities broke out in Logan County, an anti-union stronghold, where some 3,000 men led by the county sheriff and state police were entrenched on Blair Mountain. This militia set up machine gun nests along the ridgeline and fired down on the advancing miners.

The standoff ended when federal troops arrived on Sept. 2. The miners either surrendered or dispersed. Casualties are unknown; estimates range from as few as 20 killed to as many as 100. The miners followed a code of silence afterwards, and participants left no written accounts. Frank Keeney and other union leaders spent several months in a Logan County jail. Some miners were imprisoned.

Early in his book, Keeney tells the story of Kenny King, a grandson of a miner who fought at Blair Mountain. King began exploring the battlefield in the 1990s looking for relics. Using a metal detector, he found hundreds of shell casings, buried guns and other artifacts. "He had found an archaeological gold mine," writes Keeney, one that told a "forgotten chapter in American history."

At the same time, at least three surface mine permits threatened the battlefield. Mountaintop removal mining is a type of surface mining where coal seams are extracted by first removing the land above the seams. If mining took place, Blair Mountain would be razed, any remaining archaeological artifacts destroyed.

Keeney chronicles the beginnings of the movement to save Blair Mountain. On March 9, 2011, organizers held a press conference to announce a protest march that — like the Red Neck Army 100 years ago — would begin outside Charleston and end at Blair Mountain. Keeney was one of the speakers at the conference, along with former U.S. Congressman Ken Hechler.

The march took place June 6-11, with the numbers of participants fluctuating from about 250 to 275 along the way. On Saturday, the final day, an estimated 1,100 people attended the rally at Blair.

The protest received a lot of media attention, both local and national. But organizers knew it was just a first step. Further efforts to save the mountain were necessary. Years of work lay ahead.

While progress on preserving Blair Mountain was frustratingly slow, another project got off the ground relatively quickly. Keeney and others stressed the need for a museum devoted to the region's history. The Mine Wars Museum opened at Matewan in 2015.

The museum consists of artifacts and exhibits that tell the story of labor and West Virginia's mine wars. There are replicas of the guns used by both sides, and a replica tent of the type miners and their families lived in during strikes. The original location was in a former hardware store on the street where the infamous shootout occurred in 1920 between Matewan Chief of Police Sid Hatfield and Baldwin-Felts detectives.

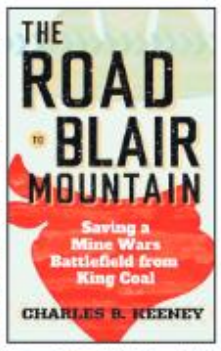
In 2020, the museum moved to a larger location at the old Matewan National Bank on the same street.

"Many aspects of contemporary life in Appalachia reflect the consequences of erased history," Keeney wrote in the preface to his book. To him and other historians, this absence of knowledge can be dangerous. What West Virginians choose to remember, and what they choose to forget, can make a difference in society, culture and politics.

The Second Battle of Blair Mountain has kept the mountain from becoming erased history. What its preservation will mean to future generations remains to be seen.

Whatever happens, the mountain will be there, indifferent to the warring over its fate, a silent witness to the blood shed on its slopes 100 years ago.

CHRIS DORST | Gazette-Mail
Marchers on their way to Racine during the June, 2011, protest to save Blair Mountain.



"The Road to Blair Mountain," published by West Virginia University Press

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Efforts to get Blair Mountain listed on the National Register of Historic Places were considered essential to preserve the 100-year-old battlefield from surface mining by coal companies.

Go to blair100.com for more information about the Battle of Blair Mountain Centennial.

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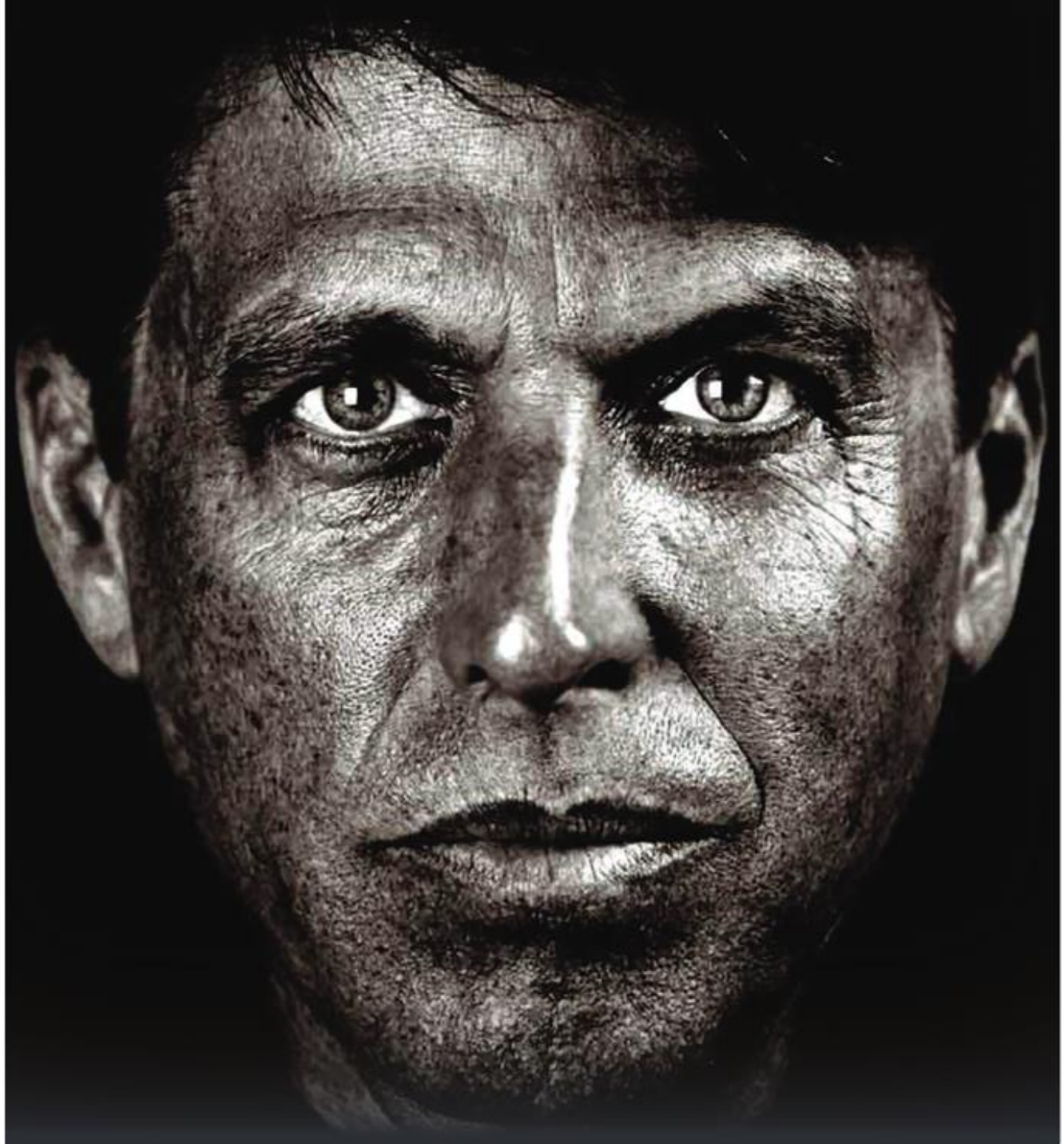
100 Years ago, coal miners in West Virginia stood tall at the Battle of Blair Mountain.



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