

Jan 1880 - Hawks Nest Strike

First time state troops used to restore order/end strike

1902



Bill Blizzard in June of 1923 shortly before his trial for treason at the Jefferson County Courthouse. West Virginia University

Unionist William “Bill” Blizzard (September 19, 1892-July 31, 1958) was the son of Timothy Blizzard and activist Sarah Rebecca “Mother” Blizzard. He became one of West Virginia’s most influential and controversial labor leaders of the 20th century. Born in the Cabin Creek district of Kanawha County, Blizzard first became involved with the United Mine Workers of America during the bloody Paint Creek-Cabin Creek strike of 1912–13. During the next decade, he rose from the rank and file along with Frank Keeney and Fred Mooney.

In 1921, Blizzard played a key role in the Miners’ March on Logan. While District 17 President Keeney and Secretary-treasurer Mooney managed events behind the scenes, Blizzard led the miners in the front lines of the fighting at Blair Mountain. After the Battle of Blair Mountain, Blizzard was tried at Charles Town for treason and murder, defended by T. C. Townsend and Harold Houston, and found not guilty on both charges. However, the District 17 officials had lost favor with UMWA President John L. Lewis, and in 1924 Keeney and Mooney were forced to retire. Blizzard remained in the union but lost much of his influence.

Blizzard returned to prominence in 1931 when he led the UMWA’s struggle against Keeney’s West Virginia Mine Workers Union. Blizzard became a close associate of union leader Van Bittner and together they made the UMWA a powerful political force in West Virginia. In 1945, Blizzard was appointed president of District 17 and served for 10 years. John L. Lewis forced Blizzard to resign after learning of a fistfight between Blizzard and Lewis’s youngest brother, Raymond Lewis. Blizzard died of cancer, reportedly having come to regret his long association with the Lewis forces inside the UMWA. (e-WV)

Bill Blizzard was born in 1892 into a staunchly pro-union mining family. His father supported the United Mine Workers (UMW), the nation’s primary labor union for miners during the late 1800s and early 1900s, from its early years in the state and was subsequently blacklisted from working in the mines because of it. Despite their own hardship, Blizzard’s family supported the striking miners in 1902, and Bill even trapped game for the suffering mining families who were forced to live in tent camps. His family continued to support the union struggle into the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike (1912-1913). Sarah Blizzard, his mother, led a group of women who destroyed the train tracks after the deadly night of the Bull Moose Special, an armored train car carrying machine guns that were fired into a tent colony of striking miners by mine operators. According to historian James Green, Bill Blizzard followed in his parents’ footsteps and became an active union member at the age of ten. While some considered him to be too rash, the teetotaling Blizzard gained the respect of miners and organizers for his maturity and dedication to the union cause. (NPS)

Kanawha (and New?) River - 7000 miners organized with help from Mother Jones, but forced out soon after

(1903 - Mother Jones led march of mine and mill children from Philadelphia to NY – Teddy Roosevelt)

Battle of Stanaford:

At dawn on Wednesday, February 25, 1903, Deputy U.S. Marshal Dan Cunningham, Raleigh County Sheriff Harvey Cook, and Howard Smith of the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency led a posse of armed men into the village of Stanaford near Beckley. They were after striking miners who, on the previous Saturday, had stopped Cunningham, John Laing, and Baldwin-Felts agents from serving court papers. On Tuesday, strikers had marched from Fayette County and, after an incident involving Baldwin-Felts guards at mines near Beckley, held a rally at Stanaford. The same day, Cunningham with a 30-man posse returned to Raleigh County, where he joined forces with Sheriff Cook's armed volunteers and the Baldwin-Felts men.

Both the striking miners and the posse spent the night in Stanaford. The miners were ambushed the next morning when they arose. Shots were fired into G. W. Jackson's home, where he, his wife, four small children, and eight miners were sleeping. When the firing ceased, there were three dead men in Jackson's house; one from a bullet in the back of his head. The Jacksons were an African-American family, and the men killed there were black. Elsewhere, three white miners were fatally wounded.

When a Raleigh County jury questioned the actions of the posse and its leaders, Federal Judge B. F. Keller exonerated the posse, ruling that they were acting to arrest men who had violated his August 1902 injunction and who had been indicted by a federal grand jury in January 1903.

The Battle of Stanaford was a concluding episode in the 1902 New River Coal strike, and a precursor of bloodier events to follow during the West Virginia Mine Wars. (e-WV)

Excerpt: After the Battle of Stanaford

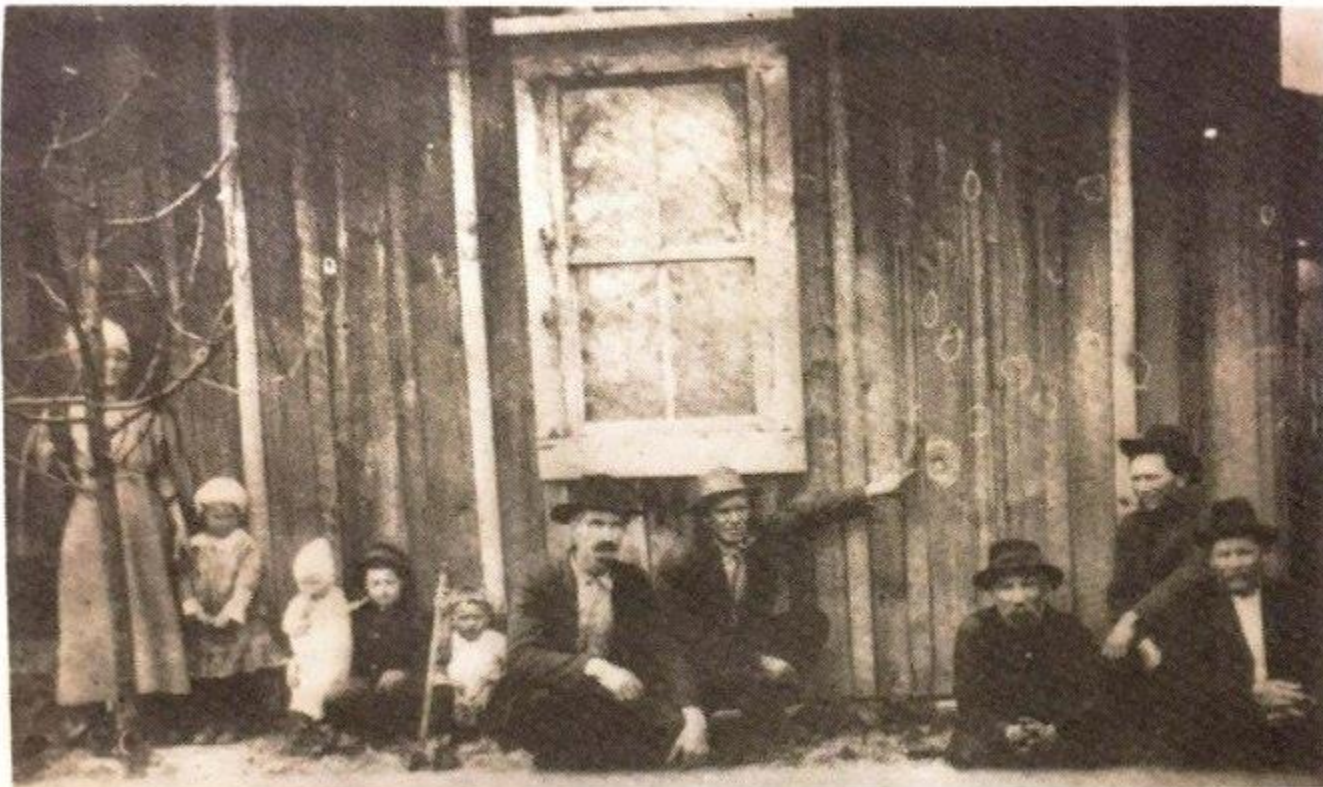
"I took the short trail up the hillside to Stanford [sic] Mountain. It seemed to me as I came toward the camp as if those wretched shacks were huddling closer in terror. Everything was deathly still. As I came nearer the miners' homes, I could hear sobbing. Then I saw between the stilts that propped up a miner's shack the clay red with blood. I pushed open the door. On a mattress, wet with blood, lay a miner. His brains had been blown out while he slept. His shack was riddled with bullets.

"In five other shacks men lay dead. In one of them a baby boy and his mother sobbed over the father's corpse. When the little fellow saw me, he said, 'Mother Jones, bring back my papa to me. I want to kiss him.'

"The coroner came. He found that these six men had been murdered in their beds while they peacefully slept; shot by gunmen in the employ of the coal company.

"The coroner went. The men were buried on the mountain side. And nothing was ever done to punish the men who had taken their lives."

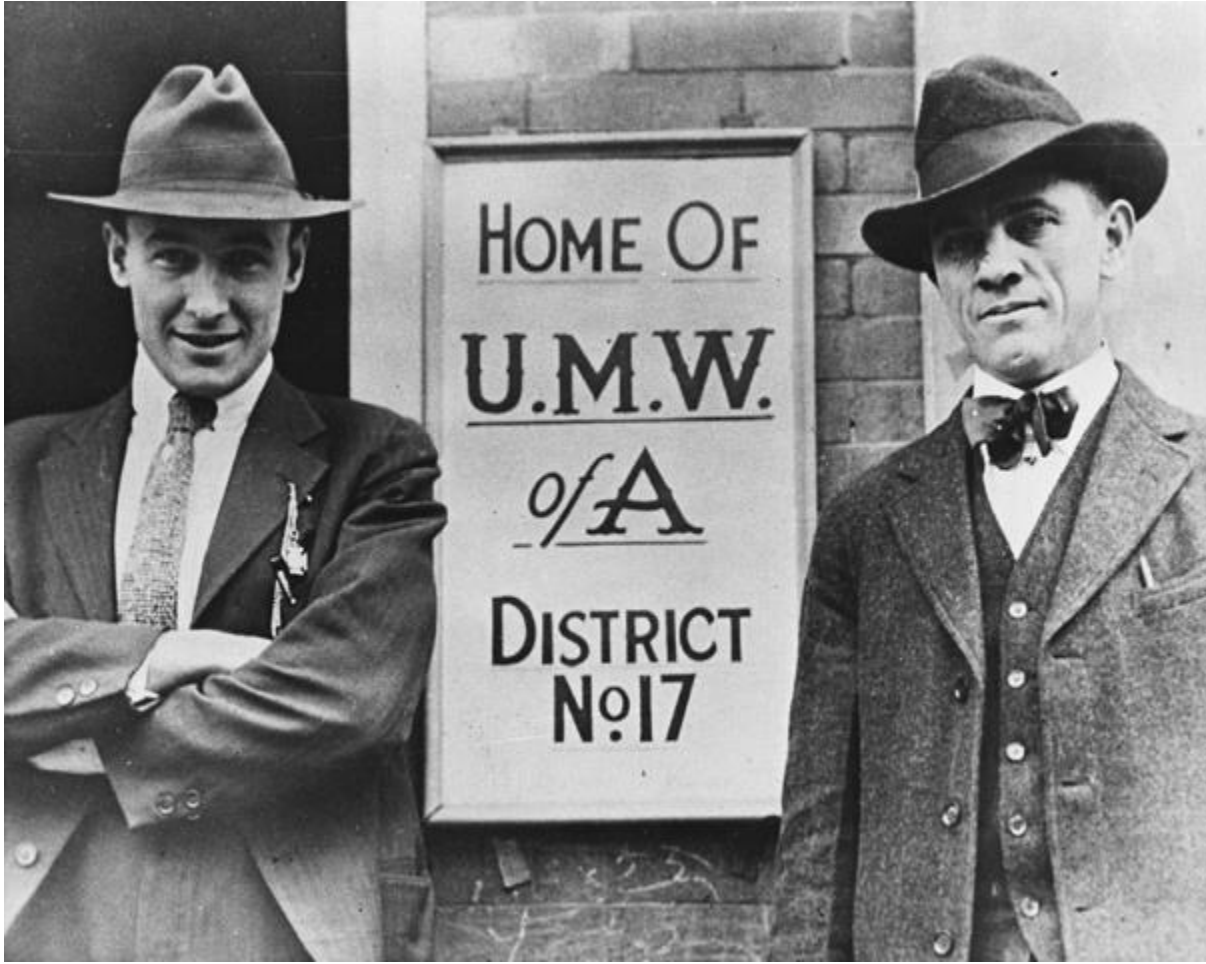
Source: Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, *The Autobiography of Mother Jones* (1925).



Bullet holes circled with chalk indicate the intensity of the Battle of Stanaford on 25 February 1903 between a special force of U. S. marshals and striking coal miners. - Photo courtesy Beckley Newspapers

1912 – 13

Paint Creek/Cabin Creek Strike



Fred Mooney and Frank Keeney (right). WV State Archives (WVSA), Coal Life Collection



Frank Keeney in 1922 during the treason trials in Charles Town, West Virginia. Library of Congress

Frank Keeney https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/media/29163?article_id=1172

Unionist Frank Keeney (March 15, 1882-May 22, 1970) was born on Cabin Creek, Kanawha County. He first entered the mines as a boy. He emerged as a rank-and-file leader during the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike of 1912–13, when he led the opposition to efforts by United Mine Workers officials and Governor Henry D. Hatfield to end the dispute with a compromise settlement.

Keeney became president of UMW District 17 in 1917. Within three months, 2,000 new members were enrolled, 12 new locals organized, and District 17 had the largest membership in its history. In 1919, he announced his intention to organize the remainder of southern West Virginia, including the bastions of anti unionism, Logan and Mingo counties. The coal operators were equally determined to keep the union out. Consequently, Keeney's tenure as district president was marked by the years of bitter, bloody, industrial warfare known as the West Virginia Mine Wars. Keeney and 550 of his fellow miners were indicted for murder and treason resulting from the 1921 Miners' March on Logan. Keeney was acquitted.

In 1922, realizing that the coal companies were unable to continue paying the war-inflated union wage rates, Keeney agreed to temporary wage cuts. The UMW's national leadership disagreed. Asserting the union's position of "no backward step," UMWA President John L. Lewis dismissed Keeney and withdrew the autonomy of District 17.

By March 1931, the UMWA membership in southern West Virginia had dwindled to less than 600 members. Keeney formed an independent union, the West Virginia Mine Workers Union, and within a few weeks had organized an estimated 20,000 miners. The independent union lasted for two years until it collapsed due to lack of finances. Keeney continued his labor activities with the Progressive Miners of America. After the collapse of the Progressive Miners of America, Keeney left the

labor movement. He owned and operated a nightclub in Charleston, and later worked as a parking lot attendant. He died at age 88. – (e-WV)

Frank Keeney was the president of UMW District 17 from 1916-1924. Although he was born into a farming family in the small town of Cabin Creek in 1882, financial troubles forced Keeney's widowed mother to take him out of school and send him to work in the mines at the age of ten. For eleven hours every day, the young Keeney worked as a trapper boy—sitting in the dark waiting to open and close the tunnel doors for the coal miners. His experiences in the mines led Keeney to become an avid socialist and a staunch unionist. Keeney was involved in every major event of the West Virginia mine wars (1912-1921), beginning with the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike (1912-1913). It was then that Keeney developed a strong but ill-fated friendship with famous union organizer Mother Jones. Although he was nowhere near the fighting on Blair Mountain, his leadership position in the UMW led to his indictment in the wake of the march. As with other defendants, Keeney was indicted on multiple charges but ultimately was either acquitted at trial or had his indictments dismissed. – (NPS)

(Great Grandson, Chuck Keeney, is one of the founders of the WV Mine Wars Museum - www.minewars.org)



Fred Mooney in 1922 during the treason trials in Charles Town, West Virginia. Library of Congress

Fred Mooney https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/media/29164?article_id=2028

Unionist Fred Mooney (January 23, 1888-February 24, 1952) was secretary-treasurer of United Mine Workers of America District 17 from 1917 to 1924 and was a radical leader in the West Virginia Mine Wars. He was born in a log cabin on Davis Creek, Kanawha County. He began work in the local mines at the age of 13, as a trapper boy operating the trap doors which controlled underground ventilation but managed to attend school until he was 18.

Mooney was among the miners' leaders during the most active period of the Mine Wars, a time including the 1921 armed march on Logan and Mingo counties and the Battle of Blair Mountain. His name is often linked with that of Frank Keeney, president of District 17 during Mooney's term as secretary-treasurer.

Perhaps his most lasting contribution is his book *Struggle in the Coal Fields: The Autobiography of Fred Mooney*. Here he gives firsthand accounts of key events of the Mine Wars, including the trials following the armed march, when more than 500 miners were indicted for treason and murder. Almost all, including Mooney and Keeney, were acquitted. Mooney struggled alongside such notable figures as Mother Jones and Bill Blizzard, as well as Keeney, and the characters in his book and his life read like a directory of West Virginia labor history. Fred Mooney committed suicide in Fairmont. - (e-WV)

Born in 1888 in Kanawha County, Fred Mooney became a miner like his father at a young age. After marrying at age twenty, Mooney moved into a company town and experienced the exploitation of living in company-owned housing firsthand when he and his family were evicted after he was caught looking into moving to another coal mine. Like his fellow union organizers Frank Keeney and Bill Blizzard, Mooney's first involvement with the labor unrest was during the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike in 1912-1913. In the aftermath of the strike, a bitter feud broke out in UMW District 17 between the conservative leadership and the pro-democracy socialists including Fred Mooney and Frank Keeney. With the support of the national UMW leadership, the union held an election in 1916 in which Frank Keeney was elected president and Fred Mooney was elected secretary-treasurer. - (NPS)

Mine Wars Trailer <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/minewars-trailer/>

96 mines: 41 Paint Creek – 55 Cabin Creek ~ 7500 miners

Paint creek/cabin creek https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/media/29199?article_id=1798

Paint creek – WV 150 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JZeBg2FGvo>

Mining images <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/minewars/>

Company towns - vid <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/minewars-coalcamps/>

Coal Miners and Coal Camps <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/exhibits/16>

Mine Wars Machine Gun Nest <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5r7oqW-Q8M>

Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike

The Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike of 1912–13 was one of the most dramatic and bloody conflicts in the early 20th-century labor struggles in southern West Virginia known as the Mine Wars. The strike began on April 18, 1912, when the coal operators on Paint Creek near Charleston rejected the demand of their unionized workers for a wage increase. As the strike spread to nearby Cabin Creek and other nonunion mining sections, the dispute focused increasingly on the larger issue of unionization. While economics remained important, more of the strikers' demands focused on recognition of the United Mine Workers of America as their bargaining agent and sought an end to the use of mine guards, black listing, and the denial of workers' rights to free speech and assembly.

Claiming that the UMWA was a tool of their competitors in the Midwest, the coal operators were determined to break the strike and drive the union out. The mine district quickly became an armed camp as the operators brought in hundreds of Baldwin-Felts detectives, built machine gun emplacements, evicted strikers, and began importing nonunion workers. The miners secured weapons of their own. Inspired by labor activists such as the fiery Mother Jones and aided by the Socialist Party, they took the offensive. Guerrilla warfare and pitched battles at places such as Mucklow, Dry Branch, and Eskdale inflicted significant casualties to both sides by early 1913.

The strike's continuing bloodshed and the attempts by two West Virginia governors to curtail it brought national attention. In an unprecedented exercise of military rule during peace time, Governor Glasscock imposed martial law on the district three times. More than 200 miners and their allies, including the 86-year-old Jones, were arrested. And, in what the union maintained was a flagrant abuse of their rights to be tried in civil courts, a hundred or more of these civilians were court-martialed and sentenced to prison terms. Many thought that Glasscock's successor, Henry D. Hatfield, acted in a heavy-handed manner when he imposed a settlement on the strike. Although Governor Hatfield pardoned the majority of the court-martialed defendants, he kept the most radical strike supporters in jail without charges and sent the National Guard to close the Socialist newspapers in Charleston and Huntington. Hatfield's actions helped ensure an inquiry into the strike in 1913 by the U.S. Senate, the first investigation into the actions of a state government by a committee of Congress.

The Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike was also notable for producing a group of new leaders in District 17 who would influence labor relations in southern West Virginia for several decades. Fueled by continuing discontent with the Hatfield settlement, Cabin Creek miners led a revolt which resulted in the election in 1916 of rank and file activists, including Frank Keeney as president and Fred Mooney as secretary-treasurer. Keeney and Mooney led District 17 miners in the dramatic struggle of the early 1920s, culminating in the massive armed march on Logan and the Battle of Blair Mountain. (*e-WV*)

Sarah "Mother" Blizzard



Labor leader Sarah Rebecca "Mother" Blizzard (1864-1955) WV State Archives (WVSA), Blizzard Collection

Labor activist Sarah "Mother" Blizzard (October 6, 1864-September 28, 1955) was born Sarah Rebecca Rogers in Edmond, Fayette County. She spent her early life on the family farm and witnessed the advent of coal mining in southern West Virginia following the coming of the railroads in the 1870s and 1880s. Blizzard was deeply involved in the United Mine Workers of America, from the organization's early beginnings in the late 19th century. She encouraged her husband, Timothy Blizzard, and her children to participate in union activities. Her support for the 1902 coal strike led to her family's eviction from their home in Kilsyth, Fayette County.

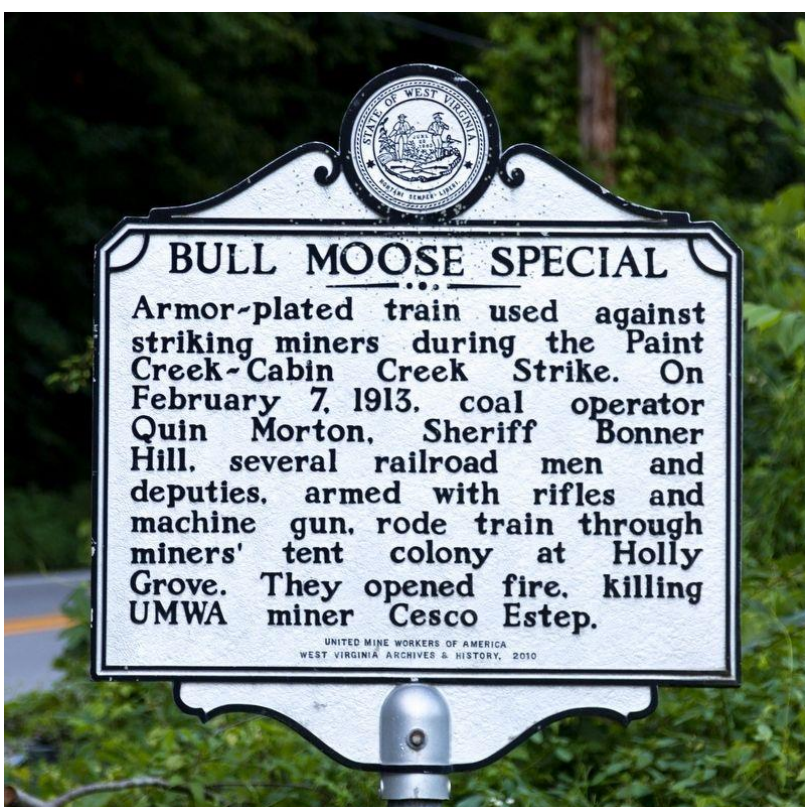
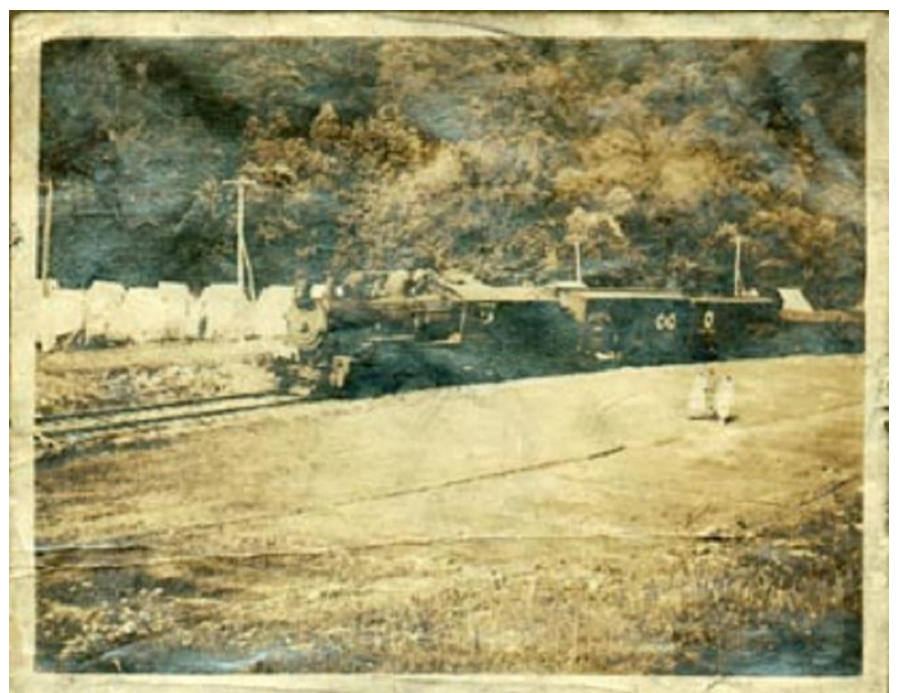
The family resettled in the Cabin Creek district of Kanawha County, where Sarah Blizzard allowed striking miners to camp on her land during the violent 1912–13 Paint Creek-Cabin Creek strike. During the strike, she participated in the umbrella march with Mother Jones, whom she knew and to whom contemporaries often compared her; on this occasion the women armed themselves with umbrellas, Jones and Blizzard allegedly striking policemen with theirs. Blizzard also organized a group of women to sabotage a rail line, blocking the return of the armored Bull Moose Special to the miners' camp.

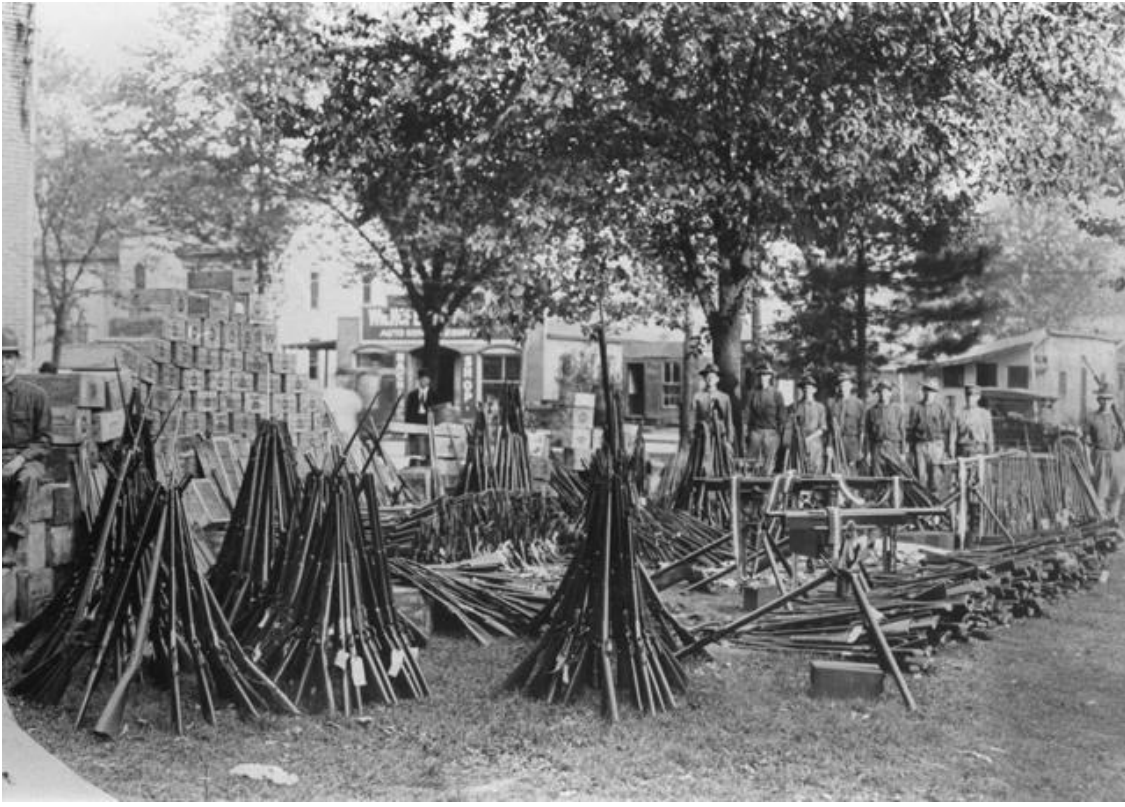
Remembered as "Mother" or "Ma" Blizzard by the miners she helped to look after, Sarah Blizzard was the mother of UMW District 17 President Bill Blizzard and great-grandmother of UMW President Cecil Roberts.

The Bull Moose Special

The Bull Moose Special was an armored train deployed by the coal operators during the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike of 1912–14. The train's name derived from the fact that the men who commissioned it were tied to the Progressive Party of West Virginia, nicknamed the Bull Moose Party after the national party's presidential candidate, Theodore Roosevelt. Outfitted at the C&O Railroad shops in Huntington, the train originally consisted of a locomotive, a passenger car, and an iron-plated baggage car equipped with two machine guns. The Special operated during the fall and winter of 1912, escorting other trains hauling nonunion workers into the strike district. Its most notorious trip came in February 1913, when the train was used to attack a tent colony of strikers at the Paint Creek community of Holly Grove.

The attack was triggered on February 7 when strikers from Holly Grove fired on a company ambulance and attacked the store at nearby Mucklow. Later that night, Kanawha County Sheriff Bonner Hill, Paint Creek coal operator Quinn Morton, a number of deputies, mine guards, and C&O Railway police boarded the Bull Moose Special armed with arrest warrants for unnamed persons. As the darkened train approached Holly Grove, two blasts from the engine's whistle apparently signaled the beginning of machine gun and rifle fire from the Bull Moose Special into the tents of sleeping miners and their families. Several people were wounded, but only one striker, Cesco Estep, was killed. Estep was trying to get his son and pregnant wife to safety. In revenge, the enraged strikers attacked the mine guards' camp at Mucklow two days later. (e-WV)





Munitions seized during the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek strike. WV State Archives (WVSA), Coal Life Collection