

2018

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Recommended Citation

Penn, Allie (2018) "Female Agitators: The Women of the 1913-1914 Keweenaw Copper Strike," *Upper Country: A Journal of the Lake Superior Region*: Vol. 6 , Article 5.

Available at: https://commons.nmu.edu/upper_country/vol6/iss1/5

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Female Agitators: The Women of the 1913-1914 Keweenaw Copper Strike

Allie Penn

The Keweenaw Peninsula, located in the Michigan's Upper Peninsula, was a thriving place in the early 1900s. The population was large, with successful mining enterprises that encouraged the building of libraries, hospitals, and even an opera house. However, the success was achieved by paying low wages in exchange for the rich copper ore mined from the area. The miners were overworked and underpaid immigrants who came to the United States in search of the American Dream. In 1913, they challenged the Calumet status quo with the 1913-1914 Keweenaw Copper Strike, which lasted from July 23, 1913 until April 14, 1914.

The Western Federation of Miners had organized the copper miners in 1913. Its demands were union recognition, higher wages, a shorter work week, and preventing the implementation of the one-man drill, known as the "widow maker," because of its safety risks. The strike lasted over eight months and had a contradictory outcome. Mine companies granted a shorter work week and higher wages, but implemented the one-man drill and refused union recognition. Instead, the mine companies required workers to turn in their union booklets following the strike in order to return to work.

A key feature of the strike in the Keweenaw Peninsula, or "Copper Country," was the women who participated in the strike. They gained both national attention and support for the striking miners. However, these "female agitators" were not the first women to join strikes, but were an essential ally for the men of the Copper Country.¹

The women participated daily in the parades and completed picket duty. At times, the women notoriously used aggressive tactics to deter scab workers from heading to the mines. As a

result, they were both harassed and arrested by Houghton deputies and National Guardsmen. The efforts of the Keweenaw “female agitators” were crucial to the longevity of the strike, which would have ended quickly without them.

Origins of the Strike

In its early years the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) was an institution known for its unorthodox measures. Following the 1903-1904 strike in Colorado and the 1905 trial of the union’s leaders, the organization reevaluated the tactics used during strikes. While the organization was known for its more radical methods, the conservative members, like Charles Moyer, convinced leadership to scale back these tactics. By the time the WFM reached the Keweenaw, it had become more conservative and showed this leaning through the strike methods it instructed Michigan miners to undertake.²

The WFM attempted to organize the Keweenaw copper mines in 1909. Initially it was unsuccessful because of language barriers and the belief that conditions were not all that bad. The wages were fairly competitive at the time, but the real issue came with how wages were calculated. Calumet & Hecla, one of the larger mining companies in the Keweenaw, used a payment system based on how much work was done rather than the number of hours worked. Additionally, Calumet & Hecla raised and lowered wages depending on the market and their profit margins.³

One difficulty in organizing the Keweenaw copper mines was the long-standing company paternalism that existed. This “benevolent paternalism” meant that the mines both employed the majority of the men in the area, and owned the town’s land. Moreover, they owned the homes of the miners and rented them out to the workers so long as they were employed by the mine. Copper both built and owned the town. In Calumet, with housing dependent on mine

management, it was difficult to convince men and their families to risk their homes and livelihoods to fight the company that fed and housed them.⁴

In 1912, the Bingham Mines in Utah went on strike. The WFM represented the workers. This strike gained the attention of Michigan copper mine companies and miners. Both groups believed the strike was a sign of things to come to Michigan. The final straw for Upper Peninsula copper miners was mine management's decision to implement the one-man drill. The drill was an attempt to reduce production costs by cutting the workforce in half. This new drill, on top of already dangerous working conditions, long hours, and inadequate pay, came together to open the door to the WFM to unionize the Michigan mines.⁵

The men of the Keweenaw were prepared to go on strike before WFM management in Colorado. The men knew how cold and unforgiving the Upper Peninsula winters could be and wanted to start the strike in the spring. After Colorado management continued to stall, the Michigan men decided it was now-or-never and sent a letter to mine management in mid-July, 1913. The letter was less than adequate in the eyes of the union leadership, being more antagonistic and less neutral than the WFM would have preferred.⁶

Mine managers were unwilling to compromise on working conditions and certainly resisted the union. The WFM's letter went unanswered. As a result, the men held to their promise. On July 23, 1913, they called for a strike. By the end of the day on July 24, 1913, the mines closed. Mine management and the striking miners each used their own tactics in efforts to break the other. Both were ultimately unsuccessful.⁷

Mine management sought to wait out the striking miners. They had enough money saved up and enough copper ready to ship that they could endure the loss of mining production. They continued to pay their loyal employees while seeking to starve the disloyal strikers. By not

recognizing the right of these strikers to complain about their conditions, management insinuated that the men were not, in fact, human beings but rather machines used to do the company's bidding. This blatant disrespect incited the men to defend their manhood. Violence is often a method by which men assert their masculinity, and the striking miners of Copper Country headed to mine property to let their feelings be known. The strikers arrived on company grounds, knocked over tools and machinery, and destroyed the company's property. These actions quickly brought negative public attention to the strike.⁸

The July 23 edition of the *Calumet News* announced the strike, noting so far it was quiet with no disorder yet. The following day, however, chaos had broken out. Despite the advice of WFM officials, strikers brought iron bars, wooden clubs, and other items to the mines. Acts of violence occurred at the different locations. Calumet saw the worst of the violence, as a mine captain was hit and knocked unconscious by a rock. The striking miners took up tactics discouraged by WFM leadership. They threw bottles and rocks, attacked non-striking workers and mine management, and conveyed the image of uncontrollable workers who needed to be policed. Further, the attacks tarnished the cause of the strikers in press reports. The strike became a battle of public opinion, and the strikers needed to steer clear of violence and disorder to garner public support.⁹

Publicly, the mine managers, such as James MacNaughton, head of Calumet & Hecla Mining Company, decried the violence and called on the governor to send in the National Guard. MacNaughton reported that the district was unsafe. Despite the strike, he argued, business must be allowed to carry on. In private, he was thrilled by the violent tactics used by the strikers. In a letter to his supervisor Quincy Shaw, MacNaughton wrote: "If we had planned the whole affair beforehand, we could not have played into our own hands any better than the strikers did. The

mob violence practiced by them put us in the best possible position. Outside of the ranks of the strikers themselves there is absolutely no sympathy for them anywhere.” Calumet & Hecla and other companies benefited from the negative attention the strikers received. By attacking the mines, the strikers portrayed themselves as out-of-control rather than oppressed workers pushing for better conditions.¹⁰

By employing more violent tactics, the miners risked public support, both socially and economically, which they needed to continue their fight. Striking miners needed funds to support their efforts. Few were willing to support unruly miners. Ordinary citizens feared their money used for drink or other vices. People were more willing to support well-organized workers striving to better their lives. Luckily for men, the women were willing to pick up the slack. They began the tactics for which the strike became known: parades, pickets, and rallies. They projected the peaceful protest image and showed that behind the striking men were women and children, also fighting for better lives. Despite their positive contributions, the women of Calumet also were caught up in violent incidents--pushing back when soldiers, Houghton County deputies, and the Waddell-Mahon strike breakers harassed them.¹¹

Here Come the Women

The women of the Keweenaw became crucial to the strike’s success. While women were not part of the mine workforce, they were the wives, sisters, mothers, and friends of miners. They were willing to take up aggressive stances and positions to gain better lives for their families. Although the women did not work in the mines they knew what went on in the mines, the risks, and the demands. The women cooked, cleaned, and took care of miners. They understood the specific needs and fears of miners. Miners faced a high risk of death, which could

instantly leave their family with nothing. When these women struck they fought for the men and themselves.¹²

On July 24, 1913, Houghton County officials requested the National Guard to maintain order. Mine management, the WFM, and the strikers used the opportunity to gather public support for their side. Strikers hosted large parades and rallies. They recruited labor-friendly speakers to come to Copper Country to build morale. Among the speakers were Clarence Darrow, Mother Jones, and Ella Reeve Bloor, who spent more time in the Keweenaw than the others. Ella Bloor had a large influence on one of the most prominent individuals of the strike—“Big” Annie Clemenc.¹³

Annie Clemenc was born in Michigan. She returned with her parents to Slovenia when she was a young girl. She lived there for nine years before moving back to the United States with her family. This experience strengthened her Slovenian identity. Clemenc was a member of the Slovene National Benefit Society (SNJP) and its female counterpart, *Nada*, the Slovenian word for hope. When the two groups merged together, women were excluded from leadership roles. As with her future experience with the WFM, Clemenc’s group, *Nada*, brought women into leadership roles within the male-dominated SNJP.¹⁴

In 1910, Clemenc was elected president of SNJP, the first woman of Slovene identity to hold this position. This role prepared her for her future position as president of the Western Federation of Miner’s Women’s Auxiliary. Many of the women who belonged to *Nada* and SNJP followed Clemenc to parades and joined in other work with the WFM. Clemenc was not alone, nor was the Women’s Auxiliary made up solely of women attached to their Slovenian community. Bloor wrote, “The most striking feature of the Michigan miners’ struggle is the fact that the women of Copper Country have organized their forces into auxiliary unions . . . there

were Finnish women, Austrians, Swedes and Italians. Young and old united in the great struggle for a better life.” Bloor described how the strike included a diverse group of women throughout Calumet, but also acknowledged that it was the women who gathered additional attention to the strikers’ cause.¹⁵

Women Lead the Parades

The parades began almost as soon as the strike. While the parades were not a new strike tactic, they were an efficient one. The women of Copper Country quickly joined the ranks of striking miners and acknowledging themselves as invested in the strike efforts as the men. It did not take Annie Clemenc long to assert herself as a leader of the strike, quickly becoming a key participant of most parades. She was not the only woman marching as she brought with her large numbers of women, who then brought their children with them, taking over the Calumet streets with support for the strike.¹⁶

Labor leader Mother Jones arrived in Copper Country to boost morale and encourage the striking miners. Jones had previously visited the Keweenaw to help unionize the men, but she thought they were not ready to fight. She returned during the 1913 strike in an “attempt to fan the flames of a fierce struggle there.” She encouraged the miners to continue to persevere by sharing her own tales of being held by authorities in West Virginia while picketing. Taking Jones’ message to heart, striking miners and their female counterparts marched almost every day, showing support for the strike as well as their strength.¹⁷

A July 31, 1913, article in the *Detroit Free Press* expressed the wishes of Mother Jones to help organize the women of Copper Country. “Immediately upon her arrival in Calumet the woman agitator will plunge into the midst of activities with her customary ardor. The wives of

the strikers will be organized at once. Street parades in which the women will march carrying their young children in their arms or pushing them in go-carts will be arranged.” The newspaper depicted Mother Jones as an agitator who came to stir up the women of the Keweenaw. The *Detroit Free Press* failed to note that the women were already central to the strike efforts. Mother Jones simply reaffirmed that the women were exactly where they needed to be. They already were agitators.¹⁸

Clemenc became a key leader of the strike not only for her organizing abilities, but for her constant presence at the front of the marches, or—as the strikers called them—parades. The parades were important to the strikers as they reaffirmed the goals of striking miners. They wanted the mine owners and management to see workers as human beings, rather than machines. By marching every day, they reminded the mine companies that the strike was about more than just money. It also was about respect. Moreover, the women were able to get around the same injunctions that prevented the men from taking action. The women continued to show the importance and presence of workers by parading daily. However, as the strike continued, the police arrested the women for violating the injunction.¹⁹

The parades were choreographed. The WFM’s national publication, *Miner’s Magazine*, complimented the military precision that the strikers exhibited. They also noted the large presence of women within the ranks. The publication remarked, “Women are learning the step of liberty too, and hundreds of them, some with children in their arms, others pushing baby carts, are in the processions.” The women did not ignore their domestic responsibilities to be a part of the strike. Rather, these marching women took their domestic responsibilities with them, showing their commitment not only to the union, but to a better life for their families.²⁰

Further, the strikers would not be deterred. They wanted their message heard, regardless of whatever obstacles stood in their way. The *Calumet News* stated, “A parade of several hundred strikers, accompanied by women and children, formed at an early hour, and despite the downpour of rain and cold, raw winds, the procession remained intact.” Despite the poor weather, they marched to their predetermined destination, with no disturbances occurring, showing their capacity to be peaceful yet undeterred.²¹

The strikers marched and paraded for months, each with hundreds of participants. The women and children marchers were offensive to some Calumet residents, deputies, and even the National Guardsmen. The male strikers were proud of the work of their women. A *Detroit Free Press* reporter quoted a striker to the effect that “if the strike were won, much of the credit would belong to the workers’ wives who ‘are heart and soul in the cause. They urged us not to give in.’” The male striking miners understood and valued the efforts of their wives. Their wives were focused not only on their husbands, but on the future. The same *Detroit Free Press* reporter noted “On a streetcar the reporter heard a woman say, as she pointed to her small lads, ‘these are the ones our men are fighting for. You don’t want to see them bent and crippled before their time do you?’” The women fought to protect their husbands and also their children. Many of the women had lived in Copper Country for generations. They had watched their fathers, brothers and husbands go to work in the mines day after day and saw the harm that could come to them. The women fought to give their children a better life.²²

Women and Strike Violence

The women gained attention for their presence and tactics used to strike and fight scab workers. This latter action, picketing scab workers, was important. The women of the Keweenaw

stopped workers on their way to the job, asking them to return home and support the strike. Picketing for women was often easier as many thought that the women would suffer from less harassment and violence than their male counterparts had. Women picketers received some deference but over time the guards and police became more aggressive in response to the female agitators.²³

On August 28, 1913, the *Calumet News* described the striking women's activities for the day. The women gained attention for their pummeling of workers, taking of dinner pails from non-union men, and other actions against current mine workers. The article stated the women became more violent and aggressive in the tactics they employed to stop scab workers. The women protesters implicitly rebelled against gender stereotypes, being out in the streets rather than at home completing their domestic responsibilities. Instead they assumed a more public role in defying the status quo for both women and immigrant workers.²⁴

The article described a woman, the wife of a striking miner, who had been arrested and charged with assault and battery for harming her neighbor, William Johns, a non-union man. The article reported, "Feeling ran so high between them that Mrs. Widas finally this morning seized a broom, it is alleged, dipped it in some filth, and struck Johns across the face with it." Widas pled guilty. Having no money for bail, she served thirty days in jail. Her sentence, like many of the sentences given to strikers, was suspended. It was conditional, requiring her to agree "to behave in the future and on observing that she had a few months old baby in her arms when brought to court." The court threatened with her full sentence and additional time if she was arrested again.²⁵

On August 29, the *Calumet News* reported that two women were charged with assault and battery stemming from an altercation that occurred. The victim, Hawke, was hit in the head with

a rock, which caused a painful wound. The *News* claimed that the severe injury resulted in a larger attack. The women waited over an hour for the workmen to appear. When they arrived, the women leapt at them hurling, “a shower of missiles,” likely rocks similar to the one that hit Hawke. The article continued, “a mob of women in riotous mood broke a manner of windows at Painesdale last night and when an attempt was made to stop them, a tirade of abuse was heaped upon by-standers. These activities followed a visit of agitators to Painesdale yesterday. It is said they congratulated the women for their militancy and encouraged them to continue their rampage.”²⁶

The women made greater efforts to prevent scabs from going to work. They undertook tactics that were more difficult to ignore than the parades. By directly bringing the fight to the scabs, they attempted to force men to stay away from work. In the case of the human waste covered broom, it is clear what Widas thought of scab workers. The increase in and undertaking of more serious activities showed not only the frustration of the women but revealed their commitment to the strike as they began to be arrested and charged.

Another incident occurred on September 1, 1913. Women planned an early picket to discourage scabs from going to work. The women began marching around 6:00 a.m. and headed towards Kearsarge, a town northeast of Calumet. On their parade, they met with a large group of deputies, similar to those who had shot at the boarding house during the previous month. Their anger at men who threatened or endangered women and children escalated. Tensions flared between the two groups, and insults were exchanged. Reports stated: “Several witnesses heard the gunmen tell the women to ‘go home and make breakfast.’” Some women responded, “maybe they would be better served if they went home and made their own breakfasts.”²⁷

The encounter escalated, resulting in an unknown deputy shooting a fourteen-year-old girl. The incident showed the risks that women marchers took by heading out to the picket lines. If a fourteen-year-old girl could get shot while on picket duty, what guarantee of safety was there for anyone else? Despite this lack of safety and threat of violence, pickets and parades continued. Still, when a union meeting was held, speakers encouraged the striking miners to stand up and protect their women. James Oliver, a WFM official from Butte, Montana, told the men “not to stand idly by and see their women ‘beaten by deputies’ and to ‘lose your lives if necessary.’” At the same time, women of the Keweenaw continued to show that they were capable of taking care of themselves.²⁸

The women pushed back even against National Guardsmen. When Governor Ferris called for the National Guard a few days after the strike began, he feared being a strikebreaker and an opponent of unions. However, he had a responsibility to protect the citizens of the Keweenaw. Both James MacNaughton and Sheriff Cruse of Houghton County requested the National Guard. It was the incidents that occurred in the first days of the strike that forced Ferris to send in the Guard.²⁹

Despite Governor Ferris’ wishes, Clemenc and the other women had multiple run-ins with the soldiers breaking up their pickets and parades. On September 11, 1913, six women, part of a larger group of strikers, were arrested. Two were charged with assault and battery, and the other four charged with resisting and interfering with officers. The *Miners Bulletin*, the union newspaper, confirmed the number arrested, but it gave a more in-depth look at the incident. In an article likely written by Annie Clemenc herself, the story explained the women marching went over to a scab worker. She asked him not to go to work. Two or three soldiers arrived and told the woman not to talk to the worker and that the women picketers had no business there. She

continued to say that soldiers chased them down the street and surrounded them. They attempted to arrest the women and escort the women to jail, but when they realized there were sixteen of the women and that they would not all fit in the automobile, alternate accommodations had to be made. The women sat in jail, huddled around the flag singing. The girls were released but stated, “we were overjoyed to have the chance to see a jail, we will march tomorrow as we certainly had a good time today, but we will bring a lunch as they are very stingy, they wouldn’t even give us a drink of water.”³⁰

Clemenc had another run-in with the National Guard on October 7, 1913, while she was working to convince scab workers to join the strikers, rather than go to work. The deputies chased the workers she was talking to shouting that the men were scared of women and that is why they were not going to work. The deputies questioned the scab worker who was in charge, thereby challenging his manhood, if he let the women control him. The deputies then dragged the scab off to work. A soldier who had witnessed the whole incident then arrested Clemenc. He stated, “she should be at home, not on the road harassing scabs.” Despite Ferris’ wishes that the soldiers not be used as strikebreakers, they inevitably were as they carried more authority than the deputies and imported strikebreakers.³¹

Perhaps the most famous incident involved “Big Annie” and her flag. In a showdown, Clemenc and the other flagbearer, Frank King, faced off against the National Guard. Michigan National Guard Captain Blackman reportedly thought it was disrespectful to see the flag in the hands of strikers. He ordered his men to remove the flags. Ordered to drop the flag, King replied: “I’ll die first before I’ll give the flag out of my hands.” Clemenc too fought against releasing her flag. Being stuck with two bayonets, she said, “Go ahead now, do your work, shoot me, I am willing to die behind the flag. If you don’t respect the flag, I do.” To her and the other strikers,

the flag represented America and its opportunity. She had the power it gave her when she held it and the freedom it represented. She was not willing to give that up.³²

More frequently the women fought with the local “deputies” in the area. Following the announcement of the strike, Sheriff Cruse of Houghton County deputized pro-mine men throughout the county, giving them powers to arrest individuals and, more importantly, disrupt the strikers. These men had no training or experience. They were mostly used to protect scab workers and mine property. Numerous incidents occurred where the new deputies used violence against the women strikers. In an incident on September 6, 1913, Annie Clemenc reported that she and a group of picketers were attacked by deputies. The deputies hit the women with clubs and threw rocks. The women had no weapons of any kind. Clemenc stated that some of the deputies came by the strikers, “one saying that he would like to kill the big lady (and of course that meant me).” A group of soldiers came by, who then scared the deputies off. The soldiers were no kinder to the women, stating that “if we were nice girls we would not do that.” After the soldiers left, the women continued in their efforts. They followed scabs, encouraging them to not go to work. They were chased by deputies again, who took them to jail. Many women picketers were arrested and charged. Assault, battery, and intimidation were the most common offenses. Clemenc herself was convicted of assault and battery; she appealed the decision.³³

In addition to pickets and marches, the women worked towards boosting morale hosting events for striking miners and their families. The women hosted speakers, such as Mother Jones and Ella Reeve Bloor, to encourage the men to continue striking. The women worked to maintain visible strike solidarity and labored behind the scenes to strengthen the spirits of union men and their families.

The Christmas Party

By December of 1913, the Keweenaw Copper Strike had been on for four full months. Union funds were depleted, and there was no end in sight. Trying to keep morale high, the Western Federation of Miner's Women's Auxiliary hosted a Christmas party for the miners and their families. They hoped that they would be able to provide each child with at least one Christmas present. Further, they decorated a tree, planned entertainment, and prepared for a visit from Santa Claus.³⁴

To provide presents for the children, the union women solicited town businesses for items or money. They collected oranges, nuts, and other goodies for the children. The women donated their labor and time knitting mittens, gloves, and hats for the children. Elin Lesch, a Women's Auxiliary member, recalled that they received money from the WFM, but that they needed additional funds to provide more gifts, so they went to the public requesting money. In all, they received three hundred stockings, fifty-seven dollars, and candy from the WFM, and sixty-four dollars from the public.³⁵

The union Christmas party took place in the afternoon on December 24 at the Italian Hall in Calumet. Many of the women of the Auxiliary arrived in the morning to prepare for the party, which began in the mid-to-late afternoon. Some reports claimed that guests were required to present their union card at the door, but individuals arriving later in the afternoon said they simply walked in. Elin Lesch later testified that she had watched the door. She had to turn people away because they did not have their union book on them, or that their parents were not on strike. Later, when she assisted with gift distribution the responsibility of watching the door fell to someone else.³⁶

The women of the Auxiliary worked throughout the hall. Some were on the stage distributing presents or organizing the children to receive their gifts. While others prepared food in the kitchen. The party continued until around 4:00 p.m. At that point, a man rushed in to the Hall and twice shouted “fire.” Panic ensued. People fled towards the stairs trying to escape the Hall, while the women on the stage shouted that there was no fire. Despite the announcement and pleas to stop rushing, the damage was done. The Hall had been filled with hundreds of people but there was one main staircase and an ill-marked fire escape. The horrific result of the false cry was seventy-three dead, trampled by the crowd attempting to exit the Hall. Of the deceased, more than fifty were children.³⁷

When the cry rang out, the women immediately reacted. They testified at the Coroner’s inquest that they immediately responded to the cry of fire knowing it was false. Clemenc stated she was on the stage, far from the door, unable to see the man who had caused the panic. She was unable to do anything except shout there was no fire and hope people could hear her. “I was on the stage and a small girl come in and said ‘It’s full of deputies, there’s something doing.’ [Clemenc] went there and a deputy gave me a child. I poured some water on it, but it was already dead.”³⁸

Elin Lesch testified that she had not seen the man who cried fire, but she immediately countered his claims. She stated large groups of people were pushing towards the door to escape. She yelled at them to come back and sit down. “I told them...there was no fire. They did come back, but then it was too late, the others had been killed.” She confirmed that the man was by the doorway when he cried fire.³⁹

Women’s Auxiliary member Theresa Kaisor (Sizer) stated that she was on a desk, encouraging the children not to push or hurry, when the cry of fire occurred. She was near the

man who cried fire and “caught him by the shoulder... I said ‘Theres [*sic*] no fire, keep still; theres [*sic*] no fire.’ I shook him by the shoulders and he said ‘Go out, there is fire.’” Despite her best efforts, the man got away from her and left the Hall.⁴⁰

Despite first-hand accounts of the incident, the newspapers tried to portray the Women’s Auxiliary members as the villains of the story. Much of the press used the tragedy to slander Clemenc and the other women. They also targeted WFM President Charles Moyer. They claimed that Moyer blamed the Citizens’ Alliance for the disaster. He simply requested an investigation based on eye-witness reports that the perpetrator had worn a Citizens’ Alliance button. In a not-so-subtle headline, Houghton’s *Daily Mining Gazette* wrote: “While Copper Country Mourns for Its Dead, Moyer Tries to Make Capital of Disaster.” There were numerous stories in the papers spreading false information and making claims about what had happened.⁴¹

One of those claims was that there was a fire. Newspapers around the state and country announced that there had, in fact, been a fire. The papers also described the beautiful Christmas tree with candles burning. However, Anna Wuolukka testified: “when I heard the cry of fire I came to the door and noticed everybody rushing to the door and hollered there was no fire, because I was certain there was no fire because we had no candles of any kind. We did not get candles because we were afraid the children would catch fire.” Despite her testimony at the inquest, many papers perpetuated the tale of the burning Christmas tree.⁴²

Another claim maintained that it was Clemenc who asserted the culprit wore a Citizens’ Alliance button. Her testimony at the Coroners’ inquest provides a different version of events. Clemenc was on the stage, far from the doorway, when the cry of fire rang out. In the record of her testimony, she was asked numerous times if she saw the man and if he was wearing a button. She asserted repeatedly that she did not see the man who cried fire, as she was on the stage and

he was by the door. Despite persistent questioning, Clemenc's answer never changed. She did not see the man who shouted fire.⁴³

Although it was not Clemenc who claimed to have seen a Citizens' Alliance pin, a number of witnesses saw the man who cried fire with a button on his coat. A smaller number thought it to be a Citizens' Alliance pin. Clemenc and other union members encouraged the investigation of these claims. However, the newspaper saw this suggestion of guilt as a declaration of war. It began using its columns to promote a pro-mine and pro-Citizens' Alliance stance.⁴⁴

One can hardly imagine that this would be the planned conclusion of a holiday party for children. Yet the newspapers attempted to portray the union as the villains of the story in the same manner that the strikers accused the Citizens Alliance and mine management of being the guilty party. What happened that Christmas Eve is a mystery, but seventy-three people died. This event weakened union morale. Whether intentional or accidental, the Italian Hall Disaster led to the end of the strike.⁴⁵

End of the Strike

Following the Italian Hall Disaster, the efforts of the strikers greatly diminished. Annie Clemenc became ill in January and stayed out until February. In mid-January, a court forced her to serve ten days in jail, one of her many sentences for assaulting scab workers, despite being ill. After she was released and recuperated, she went on a tour with Ella Bloor in the hopes that they could revive and reinvigorate the strike. Bloor believed it would be good for strike efforts and good for Clemenc to leave the Keweenaw for a time.⁴⁶

Clemenc was opposed to ending the strike if it did not bring total victory to the union. Despite her numerous contributions however, Clemenc and the other eight hundred women WFM members had no right to vote in union meetings. If women had been voting members of the union, one could only speculate what the vote would have looked like. The women also went hungry. They marched in the cold and faced deputies and strikebreakers. They withstood harassment and degradation by pro-mine forces. The women suffered alongside their men and contributed as much, if not more, to the strike efforts. Yet when it came time to decide to give up or keep fighting, the women were excluded from the decision.⁴⁷

Ultimately, mine management gave in to some of the demands. The end of the strike saw the implementation of the one-man drill, in addition to shorter work weeks and work days, as well as higher wages. One institution that was not sanctioned was the union. Men were required to turn in their union books in order to return to their job. Some men willing did this but were still turned away because of union activity and support during the strike. Many people left the Copper Country. Annie Clemenc left her husband and her old life for Chicago. Like many residents of Calumet and the Keweenaw, life would never be the same after the strike.⁴⁸

Conclusion

While the strike ultimately ended in failure, one thing is certain—the women of the strike were crucial to its longevity. These women strikers exhibited characteristics associated with the type of assertive masculinity discussed in Stephen Meyer's *Manhood on the Line*. They were aggressive. They challenged authority in the same manner as their male counterparts. They also were not afraid to use violence to gain their ends. They were the lifeblood of the copper strike.

Numerous accounts, both then and now, report that without the women the strike would have ended a lot sooner. Yet these women are often forgotten.

“Big Annie” Clemenc serves as one of the key figures in strike lore, but she was not the only woman. She acted as a representative to a large group of women who pushed for change before they even had the right to vote. These women are often overlooked in history, but they left an impact on the strike. The strike may not have been successful; the union may not have been recognized, but the women showed that they had power beyond their domesticity. The women of Copper Country challenged the dominant masculinity and paternalism that existed in the Keweenaw. They refused to stay home but took their children with them when they marched. Instead of being silent at the hearth they vocalized their refusal to accept the status quo. The women strikers pushed for change in ways their husbands did not. Years ahead of their time, these female agitators showed the strength of femininity and left a legacy of just what women can do when their lives are on the line.

¹ Arthur Thurner, *Strangers and Sojourners: A History of Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 192-223.

² The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) grew out of the Western Federation of Miners (WFM). The leadership of the IWW was more radical than other members of the WFM. However, as time went on, the union had to decide between the radical policies of the IWW, or its more conservative counterpart, the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The divide within the organization resulted in shifts in strike methods and tactics used by the WFM. Additionally, the union's leaders had been tried for murder in 1905; two of the three were cleared of all charges. The other served life in prison. This encouraged more conservative tactics such as less violence. A key part of this was increasing public support through parades and other publicity seeking events. See: Arthur Thurner, "Western Federation of Miners in Two Copper Camps: The Impact of the Michigan Copper Miners' Strike on Butte's Local No. 1," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 33, no. 2 (Spring 1983): 30-45.

³ Steve Lehto, *Death's Door: The Truth Behind the Italian Hall Disaster and the Strike of 1913*. 2nd ed. (Royal Oak, MI: Momentum Books, 2013), 22-23; and Larry Lankton, *Hollowed Ground: Copper Mining and Community Building on Lake Superior, 1840s-1990s*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 72-73.

⁴ Lehto, *Death's Door*, 15-17.

⁵ David L. Schirer, "The Western Federation of Miners," *Utah History Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2009). Lehto, *Death's Door*, 22-23.

⁶ Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 192-194; Lehto, *Death's Door*, 22-31; and Thurner, "Western Federation of Miners," 30-34.

⁷ There were several mine companies in the Keweenaw Peninsula, the largest two being Quincy and Calumet & Hecla. All mine managers received a similar letter for the union men, and all mine managers ignored the letters. See: Gary Kaunonen and Aaron Goings, *Community in Conflict: A Working-Class History of the 1913-1914 Michigan Copper Strike and the Italian Hall Tragedy* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 99-104; and Lehto, *Death's Door*, 28-31.

⁸ Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 193-197.

⁹ "GENERAL STRIKE BEGUN TODAY BY MINERS IN LAKE DISTRICT," *Calumet News*, July 23, 1913; and "GOVERNOR WILL COME HERE IF NECESSARY," *Calumet News*, July 24, 1913.

As previously noted, WFM leadership was undergoing shifts within the organization. More radical leaders encouraged the use of violence while the more conservative members sought to use public opinion to gain ground in the war between management and the union. See: Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 106-114; and Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 196-197.

¹⁰ James MacNaughton to Quincy Shaw, July 27, 1913, Calumet and Hecla Mining Companies Collection. J. Robert Van Pelt and John and Ruanne Opie Library, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, Michigan.

¹¹ Lehto, *Death's Door*, 46-52.

¹² Camille Guerin-Gonzales, "From Ludlow to Camp Solidarity: Women, Men, and Cultures of Solidarity in U.S. Coal Communities, 1912-1990," in *Mining Women: Gender in the Development of a Global Industry, 1670 to 2005*, eds. Jaclyn J. Gier and Laurie Mercier (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 309.

¹³ "GOVERNOR WILL COME HERE IF NECESSARY," *Calumet News*, July 24, 1913; and Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 3.

¹⁴ United States Census, 1910; Lyndon Comstock, *Annie Clemenc and the Great Keweenaw Copper Strike* (Bolinas, CA: CreateSpace Independent, 2013), 67.

¹⁵ Comstock, *Annie Clemenc*, 68-71, 185.

¹⁶ Comstock, *Annie Clemenc*, 19.

¹⁷ Jones was a part of early organizing campaigns by the WFM that began in 1904. She gave a number of speeches in Houghton, Lake Linden, Calumet, and other mine locations in the Michigan copper mine district. See: Dale Fetherly, *Mother Jones: The Miners' Angel*, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974), 78-79, 140-141; and "Situation in Michigan," *Miner's Magazine*, August 14, 1913. (Denver, CO).

¹⁸ "Mother Jones," *Detroit Free Press*, August 1, 1913

¹⁹ An injunction against picketing was put in place in Houghton County. Judge Patrick O'Brien put the injunction in place and then attempted to rescind it. The mine companies and Houghton County police appealed this decision and the injunction was left in place. However, O'Brien, a friend to labor, was hesitant to prosecute anyone in violation of the injunction and often suspended the sentences of individuals convicted. See: Comstock, *Annie Clemenc*, 25-27; and Goings and Kaunonen, *Community in Conflict*, 128.

²⁰ "Notes from the Strike Zone in Michigan," *Miner's Magazine*, August 21, 1913. (Denver, CO).

²¹ "WOMEN NOW ATTACK NON-UNION MINERS," *Calumet News*, August 28, 1913.

²² Arthur Thurner, *Rebels on the Range: The Michigan Copper Miners' Strike of 1913-1914*, (Lake, Linden, MI: John H. Forster Press, 1984), 53; and Comstock, *Annie Clemenc*, 15.

²³ Lehto, *Death's Door*, 46-52, 102, 123-148.

²⁴ "WOMEN NOW ATTACK NON-UNION MINERS," *Calumet News*, August 28, 1913.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ "To Increase the Mounted Patrol Corps," *Calumet News*, August 29, 1913.

²⁷ Lehto, *Death's Door*, 124.

²⁸ Lehto, *Death's Door*, 123-127; and "INJUNCTION CASE PUT OVER FOR A WEEK," *Calumet News*, September 8, 1913.

²⁹ "ARTILLERYMEN ARRIVE IN THE STRIKE ZONE," *Lansing State Journal*, July 28, 1913.

The National Guard had a long history of being used as a strike breaking force. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall describes the usage of them as such in her essay "Disorderly Women."

See: Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Disorderly Women: Gender and Labor Militancy in the Appalachian South," *The Journal of American History*, 73, no. 2 (September 1986) 365-368 and 370; and Lankton, *Hollowed Ground*, 197.

³⁰ "TWO MEN AND SIX WOMEN ARE ARRESTED," *Calumet News*, September 11, 1913; and "On the Picket Line," *Miner's Bulletin*, September 13, 1913. (Calumet, MI).

³¹ Comstock, *Annie Clemenc*, 39; and Kaunonen and Goings, *Community in Conflict*, 138-140.

³² "The Star Spangled Banner" *Miner's Bulletin*, September 16, 1913. (Calumet, MI).

³³ Lehto, *Death's Door*, 35-36; Annie Clemenc, "An Account of Picketing," *Miner's Bulletin*, September 6, 1913 (Calumet, MI); Annie Clemenc, "A Strike Heroine," *Miner's Bulletin*, September 6, 1913 (Calumet, MI); and Comstock, *Annie Clemenc*, 47-48.

³⁴ Comstock, *Annie Clemenc*, 79-81; and Lehto, *Death's Door*, 167-170.

³⁵ Steve Lehto, ed., *Italian Hall: The Official Transcript of the Coroner's Inquest* (Troy, MI: Momentum Books, 2007), 177-178.

³⁶ Lehto, *Coroner's Inquest*, 130; and Lehto, *Coroner's Inquest*, 70.

³⁷ Lehto, *Death's Door*, 168-170.

³⁸ Lehto, *Coroner's Inquest*, 29-30.

³⁹ Lehto, *Coroner's Inquest*, 68-71.

⁴⁰ Lehto, *Coroner's Inquest*, 10.

⁴¹ The Citizens' Alliance was an organization made up of primarily pro-mine forces during the strike. They held parades and rallies. They often met with the striking miners picketing their parades and events.

"While Copper Country Mourns for Its Dead, Moyer Tries to Make Capital of Disaster," *The Daily Mining Gazette*, December 25, 1913. (Houghton, Michigan).

⁴² Lehto, *Coroner's Inquest*, 130-131; and Allie Penn, "No News is Good News: Newspaper Reports of Calumet's Italian Hall Disaster." *Upper Country: A Journal of the Lake Superior Region* 4, no. 4 (2016): 91 and 95.

⁴³ Lehto, *Coroner's Inquest*, 27-29.

⁴⁴ Penn, "No News is Good News," 84-99.

⁴⁵ Comstock, *Annie Clemenc*, 118-122.

⁴⁶ Comstock, *Annie Clemenc*, 106-107; and Ella Reeve Bloor, *We Are Many*, (New York: International Publishers, 1940), 129-130.

⁴⁷ Comstock, *Annie Clemenc*, 117.

⁴⁸ Comstock, *Annie Clemenc*, 122-124 and Lehto, *Death's Door*, 300-304.