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A union man: the life of C. Frank Keeney

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A Union Man

The Life of C. Frank Keeney

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Table of Contents

The problem with West Virginia is that it is not controlled by West Virginians. For over a century coal operators, who do not make this state their home but rather the source of their income, have controlled the destiny of West Virginia and its people. Historian Barbara Rasmussen wrote, "Appalachia is economically distressed because residents and resources were consciously exploited by identifiable others."[1] In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, these "identifiable others," coal, railroad, and timber companies from New York, London, and other metropolises, came and took the land from its inhabitants. The native mountaineers, unaware of the wealth beneath their feet, were either scattered throughout the state or became coal miners themselves.[2] Since that time all West Virginians, not merely coal miners or former land owners, have been subjected to the will of out of state companies because they not only control the mines and the land, they control the state government. C. Frank Keeney experienced this exploitation and sought to bring West Virginia back under the control of the people that lived there.

Before the French and Indian War, the Keeney family settled in what is now Greenbrier County. After over fifty years of frontier conflicts with Native American tribes of the Ohio Valley, Moses Keeney sold much of his land in Greenbrier County and migrated to the Kanawha Valley where he purchased close to 3000 acres around Cabin Creek.[3] Moses' son, Michael, operated a sawmill on Cabin Creek and fathered fourteen children. One of those children was Charles

Franklin Keeney. Charles F. Keeney worked with his father on the sawmill and in the flatboat business. Michael died sometime before 1880 and Charles died in 1882, less than a year after his son, Charles Franklin Keeney Jr., was born.[4]

During this decade the coal and lumber companies came and took the land from the Keeney family. The Keeney family was not the exception. All throughout West Virginia in the 1880's and 1890's companies from the northeast claimed the lands of clans that had farmed and hunted on them for over a century. In the 1780's, the state of Virginia gave out huge amounts of its western lands to soldiers that had served in the Revolutionary war. When many of these new landowners refused to pay their land taxes, the state reclaimed the land and sold new deeds to the people who had already settled there. But in the second half of the nineteenth century, industrialists bought the original deeds to the lands and claimed that they were the rightful owners. With aid from bribed federal court judges, the capitalists took the land of the settlers. This method was most likely used to take the Keeney land. Families such as the Keeneys simply could not afford to battle the huge companies in the courts. As a result some families moved, while others were thrown off their land.[5] Once the companies controlled the land, subjugation of the people followed.

Frank Keeney was a defiant man, unwilling to bow to these powers that controlled the land and men around him. Journalist Winthrop Lane, in a 1921 interview with Frank Keeney, observed that "his experience is his philosophy."[6] As a boy, Keeney grew up with the knowledge that the land belonging to his

forefathers was taken from them unjustly. He grew up with the shattered remnants and stories of a culture that was swept away by the rising, unmerciful tide of industrialization. As a young man he slept under a company roof. His adolescence saw the oppression of the mine guard system. His occupation caused him to work beneath the earth and his employers treated him like it. Out of these conditions, a man of defiance arose.

An early example of Frank Keeney's character comes from a conflict within his own family. In 1900, Frank Keeney fell in love with Bessie Meadows, a coal miner's daughter. Keeney's mother Elizabeth, who had supported the family by knitting, strongly disapproved of Bessie and forbade her son from marrying her. Frank Keeney, however, told his mother that if she rejected Bessie as her daughter then she must reject him as her son. The young man would not bend and in 1901 Elizabeth capitulated and Frank and Bessie were married.[7] During all of Frank Keeney's early years, his mother represented the main authority in his life. Yet, Keeney defied her, willing even to withdraw fellowship from her because he refused to compromise his beliefs. Frank Keeney's life unfolded as a long series of conflicts between his beliefs and his surroundings. This study will show the evolution of Frank Keeney's beliefs and actions as he moves from conflicts with the mine guards, union officials, coal operators, the United States government, John L. Lewis, his family, and ultimately with himself.

Another theme of Keeney's character is revealed from this incident. Simply stated, Frank Keeney believed that his views were always correct. More

importantly, however, he felt that if other individuals were properly exposed to his point of view, they would inevitably be converted. In the conflict with his mother, Keeney believed that his mother should have loved his fiancé simply because he did. When his mother did not comply, he immediately shifted to a dramatic stance and threatened to cut himself off from his family. This method not only worked, but it set the standard for many actions that Frank Keeney would take in years to follow. From this incident, he carried with him the view that he could get his way by declaring his point of view in a dramatic fashion. From his rank and file leadership on Cabin Creek, to Blair Mountain, and on through the West Virginia Mine Workers, Keeney's uncompromising personality, his unflinching confidence in his own point of view, and his conviction that the dramatic actions will get results appear over and over again. This study illustrates themes of a single man's personality which shaped West Virginia history.

During my childhood, my father introduced me to the Mine Wars with stories of Frank Keeney's exploits and I was told that my great grandfather was an important figure in West Virginia history. In the eighth grade, West Virginia history was one of my required courses. I remember searching the textbook for Frank Keeney's name only to find it mysteriously absent. In fact, less than two whole pages of the text dealt with the Mine Wars. They included a brief mention of Blair Mountain and Sid Hatfield. Confused, I asked my teacher, "Where is Frank Keeney?" She shrugged her shoulders. She had never heard of him.

Eleven years later, in 1999 I found myself as a substitute teacher covering an eighth grade West Virginia history course. Curiously, I examined the new text that had replaced the ones in my classroom. Although the text devoted more attention to the Mine Wars, Frank Keeney, Bill Blizzard, Fred Mooney, and Don Chafin were missing from the narrative while Mother Jones and John L. Lewis were prominently mentioned. Unfortunately, West Virginians are still not the focus of West Virginia history. If outsiders consumed our state's land and government, is it necessary for them to also consume the pages of our own history?

This is not to say that all West Virginians are ignored. One can certainly look at our modern eighth grade texts of West Virginia history and read about Mary Lou Retton's gold medals, Chuck Yeager's famous flight, or Pearl Buck's famous books. Although these individuals are important and should be noted for their success, they have had no real effect on West Virginia history. They cannot tell us who we are as a people and a culture. Instead, they seem to be included in the texts for our young people so that they can have some measure of pride in their state. Students are not told about the Red Neck Army or the tent colonies that once dotted the hills. Instead they are told that George Washington once owned land in the Ohio Valley.

During his presidency, Keeney said, "Who are you, you dirty despised people who can't walk into Charleston because you'd give them a disease? That's what they say. It's no disgrace to dig coal. Coal makes civilization possible. You

ought to know that. Quit hanging your heads."[8] Frank Keeney felt no shame about his origins and his place in the world. Evidently, this message has been overlooked in the textbooks of West Virginia's public schools. It seems as though many West Virginians suffer from an "identity crisis" – one that is fostered by the way history is taught in the state. Many residents often voice a lack of pride in the state to the extent that they appear ashamed of West Virginia. I will endeavor, throughout this study, to eradicate that notion of shame by presenting a more accurate view about West Virginia and its history. Recent works such as the PBS documentary *West Virginia* and Lon Savage's *Thunder in the Mountains* have helped the progression towards finding a more complete history of West Virginia. My hope is that this work will be another forward step in the completion of that process.

Winthrop Lane also wrote that "Keeney is the embodiment of the union's spirit and purpose in West Virginia."[9] Lane was correct but not complete. Many studies of the Mine Wars such as David A. Corbin's *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields*, Howard B. Lee's *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, and Richard D. Lunt's *Law and Order vs. the Miners* have spoken of a uniqueness of these struggles in southern West Virginia. The Mine Wars are the most violent labor conflicts in United States history. Furthermore, they do not merely deal with "bread and butter" issues but with more fundamental issues such as recognition of the union, freedom of assembly, and property rights.[10] But why were the Mine Wars so unique, if unique at all? Lunt counts the isolation of the mining camps as

playing a key role.[11] Lee and Corbin focus on the oppressive mine guard system and the company towns.[12] While these factors certainly played enormous roles in the development of these events, a revision of Winthrop Lane's earlier remarks clarify the situation. Keeney was not merely the embodiment of the union's spirit and purpose in West Virginia, he was the embodiment of the spirit and purpose of West Virginians. The Mine Wars were unique to labor history because they were about more than labor; they were about West Virginia.

Frank Keeney and other leaders of the miners exemplify this point. Many of the men and women who participated in the Mine Wars were not from West Virginia. Many of them were blacks imported from the south. Companies also took advantage of newly arrived, unemployed, and naïve European immigrants as they arrived at ports, promising them a job and sending them to the coal camps.[13] But these were not the men who led the charge against the companies. Rather, the leaders, those who inspired the miners to rise up and challenge their employers were native West Virginians. Frank Keeney, Bill Blizzard, Fred Mooney and Sid Hatfield all came from families who had been in West Virginia for generations. Their families had seen their land taken; their families had seen their culture vanish, and it was no accident that members of these families were to become the most outspoken leaders during the Mine Wars.

Thus, the problem with West Virginia was that it was not controlled by West Virginians. Keeney, Blizzard, and the others recognized this truth and believed the solution was to reclaim the rights that had been taken from them.

Keeney was the embodiment of the spirit and purpose of West Virginians. Because when coal became King Coal, the land, the government, and the people became its subjects; therefore, all West Virginians became subject to the business interests of absentee landowners and coal operators whether they dug coal or not. In this light an understanding of the Mine Wars and Frank Keeney becomes crucial to understanding West Virginia history because the conflict between coal operators and their employees shaped the twentieth century for West Virginia – as it now proceeds to shape the twenty-first century.

This biography of Frank Keeney is divided into four chapters and will follow the struggle of the miners through the eyes of their leader. The first chapter will cover the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike and Keeney's rise to power in the UMWA. I will focus on why and how Keeney rose to power, as well as why these years set the foundation for Keeney's actions and his followers in latter decades. The second chapter will cover Keeney's presidency of district 17 of the UMWA from 1917 to 1924. Of course Blair Mountain will be a crucial point of study, and I will attempt to shed light on a number of questions: To what extent were the union leaders involved in the armed marches? Did they support the march on Logan initially and drop their support when the United States Army arrived? What role did Keeney play in organizing the march? Did he encourage it and just let it unfold or was his role more precise? What did Keeney hope to gain by the Armed March on Logan? Surely he didn't expect to, "hang Don Chafin from a

sour apple tree."[12] Or did he? The development of Keeney's leadership and personality will also be examined in this chapter.

The third chapter covers 1925-1933. These are the anti-Lewis years in which Keeney formed his own union and labor party. An extensive look at Keeney's ideology is essential during this period. David A. Corbin has argued that although Keeney and many other miners became socialists, they never adopted nor fully understood the socialist ideology.[14] My own research leads me to conclude otherwise. In the final chapter, we will observe Keeney's involvement with the Progressive Miners of America and his later years.

"I am a native West Virginian." Keeney once said. "There are others like me working in the mines here. We don't propose to get out of the way when a lot of capitalists from New York and London come down here and tell us to get off the earth. They played that game on the American Indian. They gave him the end of a log to sit on and then pushed him off that. We don't propose to be pushed off."[15] Frank Keeney knew that the problems of his home could be solved only if the people managed to regain control of their own destiny. He spent his life's journey in an attempt to rectify this situation. The purpose of this biography is not to exalt Frank Keeney as a hero. Certainly to some, he was a hero, to others he was a cutthroat, a drunkard, and a traitor. However, he did want freedom for himself and the men whom he led. When he left his role as a union leader he left his journey uncompleted; out of state people still controlled the land and the government, and out of state people controlled the union. Yet this is a journey

well worth examining. This biography will retrace Frank Keeney's journey, not only so that we may understand the Mine Wars in a more clear light, but also so that we may better understand West Virginia, and one-day complete the journey that Frank Keeney began.

Chapter One

Foundations of a Union Man

Frank Keeney was a workingman's hero. Frank Keeney was a killer. Keeney was a radical socialist, and he was a democratic administrator. He was a school dropout, but he was a student. Frank Keeney controlled the actions of thousands of miners, but he couldn't control his own temper. He was fearless, and he was feared. He was dramatic and dynamic, but he had a soft voice. Keeney was powerfully charismatic, but he was a poor father. Keeney was branded a revolutionary and branded a traitor. He was perhaps the single most important figure in the history of the West Virginia Mine Wars, and he was a drunk. Frank Keeney was a union man. This is his story.

Hard times produce hard men. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Eskdale, West Virginia, provided the setting for Frank Keeney's youth. Remembering Keeney's hometown, Fred Mooney wrote, "The only beautiful thing about Eskdale was its name. It was smoky, sooty, and grimy."[1] Not a company town, Eskdale had a mayor, a town council, and a police force. Nevertheless, Cabin Creek coal towns surrounded Eskdale and during the Paint Creek, Cabin Creek strike, it became a haven for the striking miners.[2]

Within a year of his birth, Keeney's father died. Elizabeth, his tiny, but feisty mother, supported Frank and his two older sisters, Ella and Minnie, by sewing and selling quilts, coats, and dresses. In 1894, young Frank dropped out of school and went to work in the mines to help support the family. Working in the mines proved both difficult and dangerous for a twelve-year old boy. Soon after he began work in the mines, an angry mule nearly crushed him to death against the

wall of a mining tunnel. Unable to push the mule off of him, the young boy fastened the mule's ear between his teeth and bit down as hard as he could. The mule yelped and pulled away. Keeney spit out a chunk of the ear and continued working.[3]

Elizabeth couldn't bear the idea of her young boy working in the dangerous conditions of the mines and forced him to quit within a year. Keeney returned to school until 1900, when he married thirteen-year old Bessie Meadows and once again left school for the mines.[4] Throughout the next three years Keeney spent less time with his family and more time with his wife's family. His two sisters married two brothers and Elizabeth spent the bulk of her time with them. Life in Eskdale was not ideal for the young couple, but it was not life in a coal town either. Fortunately, Frank and Bessie owned their own home. Bessie continued in school and eventually became a schoolteacher herself. On weekends, Bessie went to church while Frank spent time in the poolrooms and drank.[5] Until 1903, their life together seemed destined for mediocrity, but then the union came to Cabin Creek.

Two years before, nearby Paint Creek had been organized by the United Mine Workers of America. By 1903, the UMWA decided to branch out into Cabin Creek. Young Keeney, somewhat discontented with mining conditions listened to organizers with interest but didn't join. Hearing that a famous organizer had come to the West Virginia, Keeney traveled to Paint Creek on a Sunday afternoon and met whom he later called, "the most foul-mouthed woman

that ever lived." Her name was Mary Harris Jones, but everyone called her "mother."[6] Mother Jones later recalled her first meeting with Frank Keeney.

> I remember when that boy (Keeney) was a little fellow. I gave him a book one Sunday and said to him and a few more, "Go up under the trees and read. Leave the pool room alone. Read and study and find out how to help your fellow miners." And he did it.[7]

The exact name of the book that Mother Jones gave Keeney is unknown. This incident did, however, inspire Keeney to seek an education. He began to read as many books as possible and became particularly fond of William Shakespeare, whose plays he read and reread until his death in 1970.[8]

Two other factors further aided Frank Keeney in his education. His wife, a schoolteacher, helped him with his reading skills and introduced new books to her husband. Lastly, in the years before the Paint Creek, Cabin Creek strike, Keeney met a tall, white haired, radical socialist by the name of Harold Houston. These two men began a lasting friendship that would endure for the rest of their lives. Houston believed that the only thing preventing Keeney from becoming a great man was his lack of education. In this way, Houston became a mentor to Keeney and helped him with his personal studies.[9] This education would prove invaluable to him as he rose to leadership in the UMWA.

Mother Jones' advice alone was not enough to motivate Frank Keeney to become a labor activist. After the UMWA came to Cabin Creek, Keeney stood by and watched as the coal barons crushed it. He saw the mine guards arrive at the

company towns. He saw the strikers evicted from their company homes and driven off company property. He saw tent colonies and starving families. He witnessed the union fire cooling in the winter snows of 1904. The mine guards soon stamped out what sparks of the union remained. Meanwhile, sparks erupted in Frank Keeney.[10]

While the union went away, the socialist party beckoned. The Cabin Creek district contained one of the highest concentrations of socialist voters in the state. Eskdale, with a socialist mayor, was at the center of this radical activity. Thus, before he became a union man, Frank Keeney became a socialist man.[11] During the early stage of his ideological development, Keeney did not fully comprehend Marxist ideals. Initially, his firsthand experience of the class warfare on Cabin Creek prompted him to join the party. As the decades progressed, his ideology evolved and eventually blossomed during the Great Depression.

From 1905 to 1910, Keeney saw conditions on Cabin Creek steadily worsen. The companies forbade even the presence of union organizers. Men who discussed the union were blacklisted and fired. Companies cheated miners by fixing the scales that weighed the coal that they dug. Since coal miners were paid by the ton and not the hour, the operators saw fit to tamper with the scales so that miners actually had to dig a ton and a half to two tons of coal when the scales indicated that they had only dug one ton. The infamous company scrip rewarded their labor rather than American money and the only place that would accept company scrip was, of course, the company store.[12]

In the meantime, Bessie gave birth to three children, Syble Ruth, Henrietta, and Frank Vincent Keeney. The couple had become a family. Frank, now with children to support, realized that something needed to be done. Since his job barely supported his family, he searched for opportunities outside West Virginia. In 1911, the young family and their in-laws moved to Arkansas and bought a cotton field. But their lives as cotton farmers would be short lived. Within months after their arrival, the entire family, with the exception of Bessie, caught small pox. Unable to run the farm, they moved back to Cabin Creek.[13]

When the Keeneys moved back, they no longer had a home in Eskdale and Frank Keeney, securing another job in the mines with the Wake Forest Mining Company, now lived in a company house. Unlike before, when the Keeneys were subject only to company money and company stores, they now lived on company property. Under these circumstances, the company reserved the right to search their home and property at any time. In addition, the company read their incoming and outgoing mail.[14] By early 1912, Frank Keeney found his family stripped of land and liberty.

These issues of land and liberty weighed heavily on Keeney's mind. He had grown up with stories about the long history of his family in West Virginia and how the coal barons robbed them of their land. By 1912, the issue had truly hit home with Keeney. He wanted land, but he found that he didn't even have rights to secure his own land. Keeney and others began to realize that they would have

to make a stand. Harold Houston, Keeney's good friend and later his attorney wrote:

> What the times demand is men. It demands men who know their rights; men of lofty thoughts, thoughts of truth and liberty. It demands men who scorn the role of servant, and whose manhood refuses to bend the knee to a master. It demands men intelligent enough to see the class struggle. . . . It demands men with a genius for freedom, men who can boldly hurl defiance into the face of capitalist masters, and the times are producing such men.[15]

Frank Keeney was such a man. When the miners of Paint Creek went out on strike on 18 April 1912, the non-union miners of Cabin Creek, including Frank Keeney, joined them. In Paint Creek, the miners struck because the companies refused to honor their union contracts. The Paint Creek miners also desired a two and a half-cent pay raise per ton, the same wages already given to other union miners in the Kanawha Valley. In Cabin Creek the miners went on strike themselves. Some of the demands presented by the Cabin Creek miners were: 1) acceptance of the union; 2) freedom of speech and assembly; 3) termination of blacklisting; 4) freedom to purchase goods at places other than company stores; and 5) ability to hire a check-weighman to ensure that the miners were getting paid accurately by the ton. Interestingly, the miners did not ask for a wage increase.[16]

Immediately, the company fired Keeney and evicted his family from his home. The UMWA supplied tents for the miners to live in at Eskdale and Holly Grove, two places still not owned by the coal companies. Frank Keeney and his family moved into a tent at Eskdale along with about 7,500 other Cabin Creek

miners and their families. In the meantime, the coal operators hired over 300 mine guards from the notorious Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency. The mine guards patrolled the streets and prevented miners or their families from walking on company roads or crossing company bridges. The mine guards carried out evictions with brutal animosity, destroying furniture, beating protesting miners, and forcing the strikers into the hills at gunpoint.[17] The climate grew tense. On 1 May 1912 an unknown striking miner was shot dead at the coal town of Winona and became the first casualty of the strike. Ironically and prophetically, authorities found the body on the bank of Keeney's Creek.[18]

In Charleston at District 17, union officials' enthusiasm for the strike quickly faltered. They had little money to fund the strike and now faced the burden of supporting 7,500 non-union people on Cabin Creek who were not even a part of the Paint Creek union strike. Thomas Cairns, president of District 17, and International Board member, Thomas Haggerty, ran the union's activities in West Virginia. During the summer of 1912, they tried to negotiate a settlement with the coal operators. The operators, believing that they could crush the union in Paint Creek, as well as keep it out of Cabin Creek, refused to compromise. The union fire appeared to dwindle yet again.[19]

Frank Keeney grew desperate. By July he realized that union support from Charleston had all but ended. Living in a tent with his children still sick from small pox and with his wife eight months pregnant, he could stand by and watch no longer. Keeney boarded a train for Charleston and went to District 17

headquarters. He confronted Cairns and Haggerty asking them to accompany him to Cabin Creek to organize the miners. They refused. Furious, Keeney told them that he would take charge of the strike himself and went on to say, "I will find someone with nerve enough to go with me, for if you men are afraid to make the trip, there is a woman who will go!"[20]

Keeney stormed out of the office and tried to learn the whereabouts of a certain old lady that he had met a decade before. Mother Jones had been sent by the international office of the UMWA to Charleston and had just arrived. Mother Jones later recalled their second meeting as well.

> I remember one awful night when [Frank Keeney] came to see me at one o'clock in the morning. It was in 1912. He came to me with tears in his eyes and said nobody would come to them. He asked if I would come. I was thinking it was time to break in there anyhow, so I said I would go. He said, "But they might kill you." I said I was not afraid, that I could meet no more glorious death than fighting those thieves and robbers. We went up [to Cabin Creek] that morning.[21]

When Frank Keeney returned to Cabin Creek with Mother Jones, the entire struggle altered dramatically. Mother Jones made speeches and rallied the miners. Equally important, she endorsed Frank Keeney as their new leader. The miners would not forget that Frank Keeney, not President Cairns or Thomas Haggerty, brought Mother Jones to Cabin Creek. Keeney enlisted the aid of his friend and fellow striking miner, Fred Mooney, to help him lead. Together, these two men spearheaded a movement from the bottom up to wrestle away control of the strike, and eventually the union from the district officials.

While the personality and drama of Mother Jones grabbed headlines across the country, Frank Keeney's fiery personality directed the background of the strike. Mooney wrote, "Keeney was all fire and dynamite. He asked for and showed no quarter."[22] Edmund Wilson later wrote, "Keeney is a true leader of his people. He has the hypnotic influence of power."[23] Winthrop Lane said, "There is a suggestion of the tiger in Keeney's personality. He seems always ready to spring . . . you feel in danger of being seized and torn."[24]

Yet despite these impressions, Frank Keeney was a small man. His height totaled about six feet. He was skinny with piercing eyes. He smiled a lot and in conversation maintained a soft voice. Certainly there was nothing soft about Keeney's intentions. He wanted his family and friends out of the tents and into a better life, and he was prepared to do anything to get it.[25] Largely because of his personality and charisma, the other miners responded and willingly followed.

Although the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek strike remains one of the most violent labor conflics in American history, Mother Jones, Keeney, and Mooney did not immediately lead the miners to violence. On 10 August, Bessie Keeney gave birth to a daughter in the tent colony. They named her Geraldine. Certain of the baby and his wife's health, Keeney went into Eskdale and appealed to Mayor G. W. Williams for help. Williams, a socialist, designated twenty-five special officers to protect Eskdale and the striking miners from the mine guards. Now with official support of the local town, Keeney traveled to Charleston to join

Mother Jones, Fred Mooney, and hundreds of other miners for a demonstration at the state Capitol.[26]

The demonstration came on 15 August. Miners carried banners and signs which read, "Cut the heads off the Baldwin thugs," and, "Nero fiddled while Rome burned. That is what the governor of West Virginia is doing." Mother Jones spoke to the demonstrators and demanded a meeting with Governor William Glasscock. The miners wanted the governor to act against the mine guards who continued to deny their constitutional rights of speech and assembly. Mother Jones threatened that the miners would take matters into their own hands if Governor Glasscock refused to act. Glasscock did not meet with Mother Jones or any of the miners. He did, however, meet with another delegation that supported the mine guard system. Refused an audience, the bitter demonstrators returned to Cabin Creek, while Governor Glasscock prepared to declare martial law.[27]

President Cairns of District 17 and Haggerty did not oppose the Governor's proclamation of martial law, despite the obvious favoritism that the state militia showed towards the coal operators and their mine guards. The militia came to Eskdale and arrested Mayor Williams and his deputy sheriff. They disbanded the special officers who meant to protect the miners. Eventually the militia placed dozens of miners and even Mother Jones under arrest. With their spiritual leader in prison, Keeney and Mooney took action.[28]

Keeney and Mooney led the miners to war. They were organized and militaristic in their approach. The many pitched battles and shootings that took

place throughout the strike did not result from random, independent acts. Keeney and Mooney directed every incident with precision – a pattern that would continue for the next decade. With the Socialist Party supplying guns and ammunition, Keeney and Mooney divided the miners into groups of "minutemen" – men designated to retaliate when the mine guards attacked the tent colonies.[29]

Keeney and Mooney also chose a select group of miners to carry out special attacks and named them the "Dirty Eleven." Comprised of nicknamed men such as Few Clothes Johnson, Bullethead, and Bad Eye these men, often joined by Keeney and/or Mooney, specialized in some of the most violent incidents of the strike. Keeney sauntered with them because of his bitterness against the mine guards and to provide leadership. In Keeney's mind, Mooney went along because he enjoyed it. In later years Keeney often recalled Mooney as being "crazy mean."[30]

Keeney and his men directed all violence towards the mine guards, never towards state militia or civilians. Before the battle at Mucklow, the miners leaked information to the townspeople that there would be an attack. Families left by train in the two days preceding the battle. Those who stayed behind hid underneath their houses. During the battle, and others like it, the miners attacked from the hillsides with rifles. One miner in each company of minutemen would have a pair of binoculars. This man would spy the town and point out a mine guard to the miners so that fire could be concentrated on him. Then, the miner

would search for other targets and the pattern would continue, usually until the miners ran out of ammunition.[31]

The miners often ran low on ammunition because of the frequent skirmishes and the amount of hunting necessary for food. During the three declarations of martial law in 1912 and 1913, the miners were unable to get ammunition through Eskdale because of the state militia's presence. Miners from Boomer in Fayette County traveled up Morris Creek and over the mountains to Paint Creek taking ammunition and supplies to the Cabin Creek miners. The miners from Boomer, often pro-union Italian immigrants, left bullets, gunpowder, and dynamite at designated spots to be picked up later by minutemen scouts.[32]

Frank Keeney wanted dynamite for two reasons. First, he felt it a point of necessity that they disable the Cabin Creek mines from further operations during the strike. Not long after the strike, the operators began importing scabs to replace the striking miners. By randomly exploding mine tipples, striking miners prevented scabs from working and preserved their jobs. Second, Keeney wanted to dynamite railroad tracks. Perhaps the most widely known incident of the strike is the Bull Moose Special raid. After the February 1913 raid, in which the Holly Grove tent colony was machine gunned by a passing train, the miners retaliated by blowing up or attempting to blow up railroad tracks preventing trains from entering Paint Creek or Cabin Creek. These attempts mostly met with failure because mine guards patrolled the tracks. Keeney himself was nearly gunned down one night while attempting to lay dynamite on the tracks.[33]

In 1913 Henry Hatfield, nephew of "Devil Anse" Hatfield, became the new governor of West Virginia. Realizing that the coal operators and the miners fight had only intensified in the past year, he ordered the two sides to reach an agreement or he would dictate a settlement himself. Despite Hatfield's threat, Cairns and Haggerty stood firm on the miners' demands while the coal operators firmly intended to squash the union. Hatfield then took action. He released the military prisoners held under martial law, gave the union thirty six hours to end the strike, and dictated his own settlement.[34]

The settlement, signed by union officials and the coal operators on 1 May 1913, became known as the "Hatfield Contract." It granted the miners a nine hour work day, which the miners didn't ask for because they were paid by the ton not by the hour. It granted the Paint Creek miners their 2½ cent raise, and allowed the miners to hire their own check-weighman. However, the union failed to be fully recognized and the mine guards remained. Local headlines read that the strike had concluded and Governor Hatfield, President Cairns, and Thomas Haggerty were congratulated for their bold efforts and compromise.[35] Finally, the bloody conflict ended. Apparently, someone neglected to tell this to Frank Keeney and Fred Mooney.

Keeney and Mooney not only embodied the rank and file aspect of the strike, but also the radical element of the strike. From the time that Keeney took over the strike, the struggle developed into a more revolutionary, even socialist movement. The miners became willing to fight and even kill for their rights and

the livelihood of their families. After spending over a year in a tent, Keeney had no intention of agreeing to a dictated settlement that did not meet the strikers' objectives.

Governor Hatfield, Cairns and Haggerty not only recognized but also feared this radical element sweeping over the coal camps. They blamed this radicalization on socialist rhetoric. After the implementation of the "Hatfield Contract," Governor Hatfield shut down two local pro-socialist newspapers, the *Socialist and Labor Star* of Huntington, and the *Labor-Argus* of Charleston. Disregarding freedom of the press, he believed that these newspapers were "inciting to riot and giving aid and comfort to the enemy."[36]

Cairns and Haggerty publicly supported the termination of these newspapers. The editor of the *Labor-Argus*, Charles Boswell, called Haggerty, "a traitor and a Judas to the miners" because he had agreed to the Hatfield Contract. Haggerty retorted by blaming the *Labor-Argus* for many of the problems in the strike district and went on to say that the Hatfield Contract was accepted by "an exceedingly large delegation of miners from the entire strike zone."[37] Frank Keeney would soon prove Haggerty's words incorrect.

Quietly, almost nonchalantly, Keeney led the miners back into the hills. Yet the strike zone remained quiet for nearly two months. Then, on the evening of 7 July, gunfire exploded into the Ohley mining camp just a few miles from Eskdale. Throughout the rest of the night and the following two weeks, squads of minutemen emerged from the thickly forested hillsides at different points along

Cabin Creek and peppered the towns with gunfire. Turmoil had returned to Cabin Creek, and it now became evident to everyone involved that the union officials had no control over the miners.[38] In a public statement, Haggerty said, "I am reasonably certain that a 'dark horse' is responsible for these petty differences between operators and members of our organization recently."[39]

Cairns and Haggerty retaliated against this "dark horse" by threatening to revoke UMWA membership of any strikers that refused to return to work. Yet the strikers remained in the hills and continued their guerrilla warfare until the end of July. The union officials also created the *Montgomery Miners Herald,* a pro-union publication that praised the local union officials and veered away from socialist rhetoric. But the socialist tide had already swept through the miners. In the newly founded District 29 in West Virginia the first elected officers were all recognized socialists. Even the coal operators attempted to stem this tide by creating the Operators Protective Association of Southern West Virginia. This legal group, with a defense fund of $1,000,000, proposed to "oppose the growth of socialism among their mines and employees."[40]

Significantly, Frank Keeney and Fred Mooney spearheaded this radical movement among the miners of southern West Virginia. The Cabin and Paint Creek miners accepted the leadership of the rank and file over the union officials. By the end of July the coal operators, unable to employ their mine guards because of a Senate Investigative Committee sent to Cabin Creek by the Federal Government, capitulated to the miners' demands.[41] Keeney and Mooney had led

the miners to victory. Because of that victory, the Kanawha County miners remained loyal to Keeney and Mooney well into the Great Depression.

The Paint Creek and Cabin Creek Strike firmly established the UMWA in the Kanawha Valley and propelled Frank Keeney to the status of hero among the region's miners. Keeney's charisma and radical tactics directed the miners to victory. These radical tactics proved unique among the labor conflicts of the time. Certainly the Mine Wars of West Virginia were not isolated from the larger labor conflicts across the nation. Indeed, the very same newspapers that narrated the bloody battles of Paint Creek and Cabin Creek also told of riots and strikes in Michigan, Ohio, and even South Africa. In 1914, Baldwin-Felts guards were even transported to Colorado and ran strikers into tent colonies in the Rocky Mountains.[42]

Although these strikes often had riots and damaged property, none of these events matched the violence of southern West Virginia. In Michigan, strikers marched in the streets and fired bullets into the air. On Cabin Creek, strikers marched in the hills and fired bullets into people. The issues of land and liberty weighed on Keeney's mind in addition to issues of labor. This made the difference. Hard times produce hard men, and hard men produce hard tactics. The strikers of West Virginia were more violent because they felt they had no other alternative. To Frank Keeney the union itself was not the ultimate goal, but a means by which the miners could achieve their ultimate goal. At the end of the

strike, Keeney refocused his goal on the union leadership in West Virginia and prepared to complete his rise to power.

Chapter Two

President Keeney

Three main personality characteristics Frank Keeney possessed led to victory on Cabin Creek: he was uncompromising, he believed that he was always right and because he was right, he would prevail, and he believed that dramatic actions would get results. From 1914 to 1917 this pattern repeated itself yet again. By the end of the first major Mine War in West Virginia; Keeney felt that only he could lead the union movement in the state. He would not compromise this belief, and he would use dramatic actions to get to the presidency of District 17.

Despite their victory on Cabin Creek, the coal operators blacklisted Keeney and Mooney. Encouraged by Harold Houston they both began studying law, but within a year, they both dropped out of their classes and refocused their attention on the UMWA.[1] Keeney had always been suspicious of President Cairns and Thomas Haggerty, and he never trusted them after their failure to support him when he first visited district headquarters in 1912. The gap of trust further widened in the spring of 1913 after the union officials signed the "Hatfield Contract." By the end of 1913, Keeney and Mooney had the loyalty of the miners while Cairns and Haggerty still had the official power. Clearly, the union in West Virginia was hardly united. Before Frank Keeney could continue his war on the coal operators, he needed to consolidate power within District 17.

At a district convention in early 1914, the union delegates, including Keeney and Mooney, debated different strategies and methods of obtaining new wage agreements with the coal operators. The debates went nowhere while Cairns

and Haggerty refused to negotiate a new wage agreement with the operators, stating that any attempt would be futile. During the debates, delegate Charles Lusk approached Keeney and Mooney with a letter that he had acquired. The letter, from one coal operator to another, mentioned secret wage agreements already settled with Haggerty and Cairns. Mooney introduced the letter to the convention and, in his words, "pandemonium broke loose."[2]

Eventually the convention appointed a committee to investigate the charges. The committee found that Haggerty held stock in some of the coal companies. Charges of election fraud followed this investigation. District meetings became perilous, with fistfights and brawls a normal occurrence. In 1915, a delegate stabbed Mooney in the lung. Mooney survived and the radicals pushed on. Despite the fact that Cairns and Haggerty had lost tremendous prestige, they still held their union positions. The International Board of the UMWA delayed in acting on the charges against Cairns and Haggerty.[3] Impatient and demanding action against what he believed to be corrupt and incompetent union officials, Frank Keeney resorted to his old tactics – he used drama to get results.

In July of 1915, Keeney and his supporters formed their own UMWA district and called it District 30. Frank Keeney was elected president. Mooney, although privately supportive of them, did not join this new district. During this period, Frank Keeney's most powerful ally became Lawrence Dwyer, a radical socialist and union organizer who had lost his leg in a mining accident. He walked with one wooden peg and became known as "Peggy" Dwyer. Keeney and Dwyer

were denounced by Cairns and Haggerty as parading "wolves in sheep's clothing" who tried to seduce the West Virginia miners for their own selfish purposes. The International Executive Board refused to recognize District 30 as legitimate and warned miners not to join the district.[4]

Keeney then responded with even greater drama and formed his own union, The West Virginia Mine Workers. Although this organization lasted only two months, it worked to Keeney's advantage. The new union gained a large following among the miners and negotiated a wage agreement with coal operators better than the current UMWA wage agreement. Unlike the officers of District 17, Keeney allowed local committees of miners to add input to the wage agreement instead of dictating the agreement himself. These developments forced the International Executive Board to act. Mother Jones intervened and eventually a settlement was reached. The West Virginia Mine Workers disbanded as its members voted to return to the UMWA. Meanwhile, President Cairns and Haggerty were suspended from their positions until new elections could be held in the late fall of 1916.[5]

Dramatic action had again served Frank Keeney's purposes. Although his new union failed he had earned more respect from the miners. The union members already knew that he had been a capable leader during the 1912-13 strike, but now they knew that he could be a capable administrator as well. Keeney showed the miners that he was a man of action. He quickly negotiated a better wage agreement for the miners than Cairns and Haggerty were able to

obtain after over a year of negotiations. Furthermore, Keeney showed that he was a democratic administrator. During the wage negotiations he allowed local committees to have their say on what they wanted. Add these elements to Keeney's dynamic charisma and speaking ability, and he quickly made a formidable candidate for president of District 17.

In the fall of 1916, Keeney, Mooney, Lawrence Dwyer, and a handful of other union men met at Eskdale. They decided that Keeney would run for president and Mooney would run for secretary-treasurer. In Dwyer's words, "If we can get [Mooney] and Keeney elected . . . we don't care who is elected vice president and executive board members. [Mooney] and Keeney can hold the others in line."[6] Throughout the fall, the campaign grew bitter and furious, the final clash of four men who had battled since 1912. On 12 December 1916, the votes showed Keeney and Mooney victorious. The radical element, Haggerty's "dark horse," had finally risen from the tent colonies of Cabin Creek to the district offices in Charleston.[7] Cairns and Haggerty would no longer have any say in UMWA policy in West Virginia.

Frank Keeney wasted no time upon his election. "We are here to fulfill a very important mission and grave responsibilities devolve upon us . . . we must not lightly disregard those fundamental principles that constitute the basis of our organization."[8] In the first three months of his presidency, Keeney conducted over 100 local meetings, added over 2,000 members to the union, and organized twelve new local districts. In the months that followed Keeney, along with international

UMWA president, John P. White, negotiated a new wage contract for District 17 that Lawrence Dwyer referred to as the best contract of the previous twenty years. Mother Jones also traveled to West Virginia to aid in the new union surge. Keeney sent her and Dwyer to the New River area to organize. Throughout the spring of 1917, they made numerous speeches, held many meetings, and met with enormous success.[9]

The United States' entry into World War I also aided Keeney's organizational efforts. Like many socialists, Keeney did not support the war. To a friend he confided, "I hope that any troops that this government sends overseas to fight this rotten war are killed. That is the only thing this country will understand."[10] From the socialist point of view, the Great War in Europe had only succeeded in bleeding a generation of working class men for the profit of capitalist masters.

Despite the fact the Keeney shared this view, he publicly supported the war effort because he believed that if the union showed itself to be patriotic then they would receive more government support after the war. Surely, once the government had seen how the miners rallied for their country, their country would abolish the mine guard system and force companies to recognize the union. To show his support, Keeney urged miners to put aside any conflicts with operators and produce all the coal they could. "A new world is in the making," Keeney said, "and I am satisfied that the United Mine Workers will be equal to the task of furnishing all the coal . . . that is necessary to usher in that new world with a

vibrant throbbing democracy that will establish the principles of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man."[11]

Keeney also publicly supported the drive for the purchase of war bonds. In April 1918, he served as the grand marshal of a parade through Charleston that began the push for war bonds in the state. Keeney looked back on this time with irony. "They didn't call me a radical when circular after circular went out from my office during the war, urging miners to waive their rights and produce all the coal they could."[12] The miners obeyed their president, dug all they coal they could, and union membership in West Virginia soared higher than at any other time in history.[13] But, when the war ended, very little had changed in the coal fields of West Virginia. Thus, the Mine Wars rekindled with greater intensity than before.

Mingo and Logan Counties provided the setting for the 1919-1921 Mine Wars. The stringent mine guard system and unflinching determination of the coal operators to keep the UMWA out of these counties represented an even tougher obstacle than had the operators at Paint Creek and Cabin Creek. Secretly, Keeney sent organizers such as Charlie Kiser and John Patrick to Logan and Mingo counties. Meetings were often held in secret under the guise of church services. Men used passwords to get into the meetings such as, "together we stand, divided we fall." Slowly and quietly, the union made progress.[14]

Learning that Keeney had sent organizers to Logan County, Sheriff Don Chafin, paid by the coal operators, went to District 17 headquarters in Charleston to warn Keeney to call back his men. When Chafin arrived, he found the office

deserted except for Bill Petry, the district's vice president. Heated words were exchanged and both men went for their pistols. Chafin's speed proved no match for Petry's and the sheriff was shot in the chest. Chafin stumbled onto the street and managed to get to a hospital. The sheriff survived and returned to work in Logan County with a renewed vigor to keep the union out.[15] Keeney issued his own warning, "If our organizers come back in pine boxes neither heaven nor hell will be able to control the miners. Organize Logan County we will, and no one shall stop us."[16]

Union organizers didn't come back in pine boxes, but they did come back bruised and bleeding. Chafin usually had union sympathizers jailed and sometimes his deputies assaulted and beat organizers. In September 1919, rumors circulated that women and children had also become victims of the rising violence in Logan County. In response, about 5,000 armed miners assembled at Lens Creek, just south of Charleston, and prepared to march to Logan County. Keeney, at a union meeting in Fairmont, received a telegram from Governor John J. Cornwell asking him to hurry to Lens Creek and stop the marchers.[17]

Keeney went to Lens Creek but then rushed to the capitol to tell the Governor that his attempt had failed. Cornwell asked him to try again. Frank Keeney returned to the scene and again failed. Mooney called the Governor and begged him to come to Lens Creek himself. The Governor did so and, with Keeney behind him, addressed the crowd and promised to personally investigate

the conditions in Logan County. The miners shot their guns into the air to salute the Governor and dispersed.[18]

Governor Cornwell credited Keeney with playing a key role in stopping the 1919 March. However, other evidence suggests that Keeney himself organized the march. John L. Spivak, a New York journalist on assignment in Charleston, had spent several months with the union officials and accompanied Keeney and Mooney when they went to confront the miners. Spivak indicated that a confrontation between Keeney and the miners seemed staged because at the end of the "heated" confrontation between Keeney and one of the "leaders" of the miners, Keeney turned back and grinned at the miners and many of them grinned back. As they drove away, Spivak told them how amazing it seemed that all those miners would just "spontaneously" arrive at an appointed place and at an appointed time. Sitting between them in the car, Spivak said, "There must be a lot of telepathy in these hills." Keeney and Mooney silently glanced at each other and then they both burst into laughter. Mooney patted him on the shoulder, "There sure is." He said.[19]

Again drama had surfaced in Keeney's strategy. He wanted to make a dramatic demonstration that would force the state government to act on behalf of the miners. Keeney had direct control over the actions of these miners and had the power to disperse them at any time he wished. Spivak noted that in the days preceding the march, Harold Houston had spent a great deal of time at District headquarters. He also noted the presence of a conspicuous looking man with a

peg leg that met privately with Keeney in his offices several times within a week of the march.[20] The presence of Keeney's old radical allies at district headquarters just before the attempted march has obvious meaning. Keeney gave the orders while Dwyer and Houston distributed them among the miners. Then, for the sake of appearances, Keeney and Mooney headed for Fairmont just before the miners assembled. By making the march seem like a spontaneous event carried out by the miners themselves, Keeney dramatized the situation in his favor. These miners were responding to injustice; if the government didn't do something, then war might ensue.

Keeney's two "failures" to persuade the miners to go home are also of importance. It is interesting that Keeney twice seemed unable to stop 5,000 miners from marching in 1919, yet with one speech in 1921, he was able to stop over 10,000 miners from continuing the march when they were within just a few miles of Blair Mountain.[21] Frank Keeney recognized the most prudent times for the miners to heed his advice. Keeney wanted to make the situation appear out of his hands. Therefore, he simply could not persuade the miners to disband without Cornwell's help. Nevertheless, Cornwell's promise to investigate the situation in the southern counties proved a shallow one. Governor Cornwell did appoint a commission to investigate the counties, but from then on the Cornwell took no action to rectify the situation. The intolerable conditions continued in Logan and Mingo Counties.[22]

While the Mine Wars heated up, Frank Keeney mediated conflicts among the high officials of District 17. Bill Blizzard, from Cabin Creek, served as president of Sub-District No. 2. He and Keeney became good friends during this time period. Keeney had known Blizzard's parents, who served as union organizers, since the Cabin Creek strike. Young Blizzard had grown in prominence since that time, and by 1919 he had passed adolescence. Energetic, feisty, and hot-tempered, Blizzard contained similar characteristics to Keeney. Blizzard began spending a great deal of time at union headquarters in Charleston and became well known by the miners of the region.[23]

Not everyone was happy with Blizzard's rise to power; Fred Mooney and Bill Blizzard shared a mutual dislike for one another and both of them competed for influence with Keeney. One day, Mooney unexpectedly invited Blizzard to go squirrel hunting with him. Keeney became alarmed and privately told Blizzard, "Don't you go with him. He'll get you into the woods and shoot you." Unfazed, Blizzard responded, "If anybody gets shot, it won't be me." Not heeding Keeney's advice, Blizzard went with Mooney. To Keeney's relief, they both returned safely.[24]

Keeney remained loyal to both Blizzard and Mooney despite the fact that they hated one another. He realized that their talents would be crucial in the months and years to come as the conflict in Mingo and Logan Counties escalated. In the next year, the union called a major strike in Mingo County. Inevitably, the number of mine guards increased, the tent colonies returned, and Mingo County

became "Bloody Mingo." During this conflict, Keeney found help from another prominent, and quite unlikely, source.

"Devil Anse" Hatfield was a union sympathizer. More accurately, Hatfield hated Don Chafin, the sheriff of Logan Country. Devil Anse, finding a means by which to spite his enemy, offered Keeney his help. The Hatfields lived near the strike zone which put them in a position to help. At night, Keeney went into the strike zone on horseback. Eventually, one of the Hatfields would meet and escort Keeney to Devil Anse's home. Strikers used light signals with lanterns to indicate whether or not Keeney's route was clear of mine guard patrols. Because of the frequency of the patrols, Keeney never came in and out the same way.[25]

Once at the Hatfield home, Keeney and Hatfield sat on the front porch and drank moonshine together while Devil Anse supplied Keeney with information. Hatfield let Keeney know where the mine guards were putting their machine gun emplacements, how many men and how much material they had, as well as if any attacks were planned in the near future. Devil Anse also smuggled Keeney into Logan County so that Keeney could personally help organize the miners.[26]

Numerous writers have documented the bloody escapades of 1920 and 1921. The Battle of Matewan, between Sid Hatfield and the Baldwin-Felts Detectives which left ten people dead, the Three Day Battle of the Tug, and the state militia's attack on the Lick Creek tent colony all embody the desperation and brutality of the struggle. But the action was not confined to Logan and Mingo Counties. In front of a bank in Charleston, a coal operator saw Keeney and yelled

that he was a criminal and an outlaw. Keeney punched the operator out and kicked him down the stairs of the bank. If he could not fight in Mingo County, he could fight in Charleston.[27]

At that time Keeney and his family lived in a house on Edgewood Avenue in Charleston's west side. Bessie had given birth to two more children, Elaine and Charles Belmont. During these times, Frank Keeney spent very little time at home and Bessie practically raised the children on her own. The children often went several days at a time without even seeing their father. Yet, while their father was away, the Mine Wars stayed close to home. Keeney received a number of death threats during this period, and it became customary for three to four miners to guard their house with rifles at nights during Keeney's absence. In addition, Frank gave his wife a pistol and instructed her to always keep it under her pillow. As a father, Frank Keeney remained mostly absent, but he did endeavor to see that any mine guards that might venture into Charleston could not harm his family.[28]

Meanwhile, in McDowell County, Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers prepared to go to trial for their alleged involvement in a shootout in Mingo County. Harold Houston, the union's official attorney, prepared their defense. Everyone knows what happened next. On their walk up the courthouse steps, Hatfield and Chambers met death at the hands of Baldwin-Felts detectives. Murdered in front of their wives, Hatfield and Chambers instantly transformed from heroes to martyrs.[29] On 7 August, 5,000 miners met at the state capitol in Charleston. Mother Jones, Keeney, Mooney, and Blizzard all spoke before the enflamed

crowd. Keeney's words summarize the mood. "You have no recourse except to fight. The only way you can get your rights is with a high powered rifle!"[30]

That same day, Harold Houston sent a letter to the local union at Lens Creek. Houston assured the miners that guns were on their way and money was being pulled from the union's special, "funeral fund" to aid in the coming march. Houston also notified the recipients of the letter to destroy it upon reading it. Lawrence "Peg-Leg" Dwyer also resurfaced. From Beckley he secretly delivered an old machine gun and 3,000 rounds of ammunition to the miners.[31] As demonstrated before, where Houston and Dwyer were found, Keeney was somewhere nearby.

Frank Keeney had decided to finish what they had started in 1919. To him it became obvious that the state government, controlled by the money of the coal operators, would not help him. Perhaps, if the miners could capture the attention of the entire country and make Americans see their plight, public opinion would demand that the federal government intervene to abolish the mine guard system. In Keeney's mind, the American public would undoubtedly identify with men taking up arms to secure their own freedom. Drama had worked for Keeney on Cabin Creek, it had worked against President Cairns in 1916, and it worked for him again in 1919. Keeney had no reason to believe that his tactics wouldn't work one more time.

In order to get the attention of the country, Keeney needed an act bigger and more dramatic than in 1919. The miners would have to go all the way to

Blair. He knew that they would be willing. Union miners all over the state were in a fit of perpetual rage. The ill feelings harbored against the mine guards and coal operators over the past three decades had now climaxed. Now was the appropriate time. But who would direct the miners in the field? Keeney himself could not lead the march. The march had to appear as a spontaneous action led by the miners. The public knew Frank Keeney too well, and he needed to be in Charleston, ready to talk to reporters. He would condemn the violence in public, direct the violence in private, and tell the miners' story of oppression to any out of state reporter that would listen. Mooney, also well known, could not lead the marchers, either. Keeney needed someone known by the miners but not known to the general public. He needed someone he trusted. He needed Bill Blizzard.

Keeney approached Blizzard about the march. He wanted Blizzard to be in charge of the miners from Marmet to Blair. Keeney and Mooney would organize the affair, making sure the miners had supplies and that they assembled at the appropriate times and places. Blizzard needed to guide the marchers along and make sure that the march proceeded according to plan. In addition he could send informants back to district headquarters as the marchers made progress. Blizzard agreed. The miners would depart Marmet on 24 August.[32]

Before the miners could depart from Marmet, however, Mother Jones arrived and implored them to abandon their undertaking. In this famous incident, she claimed to hold a telegram from President Warren G. Harding. The telegram promised that if the miners disbanded that he would personally look into the mine

guard situation. The telegram was a fraud and Keeney knew it. He told the miners to ignore the telegram. The miners loved Mother Jones, but they were loyal to Frank Keeney. The miners marched.[33]

Within days the miners, whose numbers had swelled to over 10,000, reached Danville, in Boone County. President Harding dispatched General H. H. Bandholtz to Charleston. Arriving on 26 August, Bandholtz ordered Keeney and Mooney to turn the marchers back or face treason charges. The two officers caught up with them in Danville and held a meeting at the town's ballpark. No one was allowed in the meeting except for the miners, who used a password to get in. Afterwards, Keeney approached members of the media and told them what happened. Then, Keeney invited the journalists to ride with him back to Charleston and spoke of the mine guard system and the miners' struggles the entire way back.[34]

Frank Keeney's exact words during the Ballpark Speech remain a mystery. Most likely, Keeney ordered the miners to hold off on the march until Bandholtz returned to Washington. Nevertheless, a shootout between state police and marchers at Sharples caused the marchers to resume their trek to Blair Mountain. As the march continued, the Mingo County sheriff issued warrants for Keeney and Mooney's arrest, claiming that they had murdered someone during the Three Days Battle of the Tug. Keeney and Mooney fearing for their lives if they were taken to Mingo County, fled the state to Columbus, Ohio.[35]

Keeney failed to receive the public support that he expected. The union leaders and the marchers were branded as a, "violent, murderous, and treasonous mob." An editorial in the Charleston Daily Mail exclaimed:

> The people of our own state . . . are threatened by a greater danger than the hateful German power threatened in 1918. . . . The enemy not only dares to shed the blood of peaceful citizens, but he would shatter our government. . . . The lives of our peaceful citizens are precious enough, but there is a thing more precious, and the enemy would destroy it. That more precious thing is our free government.[36]

Only labor leaders such as Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, publicly supported the march. Gompers stated that the true story of the miners' struggle had not been told and the media had misrepresented the whole incident. Gompers' statement contained some truth. Indeed, Keeney and the marchers had no intention of taking over the state government. Yet, to the general public, the marchers were a threat and the Battle of Blair Mountain would only succeed in exhausting the finances of District 17 while the mine guard system remained intact. The miners even failed to make it to the town of Logan. They were turned back from Blair Mountain after a few days fighting when federal troops arrived.[37]

Keeney and Mooney eventually returned to the state and, along with Bill Blizzard and Bill Petry, were arrested by the authorities. From late 1921 to January of 1922, the union officers spent 109 days in jail in both Logan and Mingo Counties.[38] While in the Logan County jail, Don Chafin subjected Keeney and the

others to numerous threats and humiliations. Chafin charged 25 cents a person for townspeople to go in and observe the prisoners in their cells. Bill Blizzard claimed that Chafin shot a teenage boy in front of them and told them that the same thing would happen to them if they didn't start talking.[39] Despite the dangers, Bessie actually traveled to Logan and brought four-year old Belmont to visit his father in jail one afternoon.[40]

Keeney, Mooney, Blizzard, and 525 marchers were charged with murder, conspiracy to commit murder, accessory to murder, and treason. The trials began in April 1922, in Charles Town, in the eastern panhandle, with Blizzard the first target of the coal operators. Harold Houston and T. C. Townsend headed up the defense. To sway the locals, who would obviously make up the jury, Houston and Townsend hired about thirty men two months before the trial to go to the Charles Town area and pose as Bible salesmen. The men traveled from house to house selling Bibles. When they entered homes they would tell stories about Don Chafin and Logan County, claiming that Chafin would not let them sell Bibles in Logan. The jury found Blizzard not guilty. Keeney's trial was transferred twice and finally dismissed by the discouraged coal operators.[41]

In 1922, Keeney was elected president of the West Virginia Federation of Labor. At first, Keeney refused to accept the position because of the treason trials. However, delegates from the Federation convinced him to take the position. Although the trials prohibited Keeney from giving the Federation presidency his full attention, his term conveyed the fact that the UMWA had become by far the

most influential labor group in the state. Even in the West Virginia State Federation of Labor, participation of the UMWA had become essential to success. Keeney became the first UMWA member to hold the office of president, and his high status as a labor leader in the state outweighed the fact that he wouldn't be able to give the Federation his full attention. Nevertheless, Keeney was forced to balance the trials and run two labor organizations simultaneously.[42]

During the trials, John L. Lewis publicly supported Keeney and the other defendants. Privately, he was furious with Keeney. Lewis visited the Keeney household for dinner in 1922. The dinner was not pleasant. Lewis believed that all union activities should be directed from the international office while Keeney believed that union activities should be handled on a more local level. Lewis felt that Keeney should have consulted him before organizing the march.[43]

In contrast, Keeney believed that Lewis felt he had grown too powerful in the West Virginia labor movement. At that time Keeney also served as president of the West Virginia Federation of Labor and was easily the most powerful labor leader in the state. In 1924, Lewis and Keeney disputed over Lewis' "no backward step policy." Consequently, Lewis called Keeney and Mooney to Illinois and ordered them to resign or be fired. They resigned. That same year, Keeney's mother, Elizabeth died. Since 1922, she had moved into her son's home, too ill to take care of herself. With Keeney always away, the very woman whose marriage to her son she had opposed, cared for Elizabeth until she died.[44]

Dejected over the failure of Blair Mountain and his dismissal, Keeney felt that he had been forced to leave with his work incomplete. Since the summer of 1912, Keeney had led the miners of West Virginia. He began this leadership with hopes of making the lives of the coal miners better. He led them to war against the out of state businessmen who had stripped them of the power to control their own destiny. But now destiny had taken a turn for the worse. By 1924, Keeney's union had become exactly like his state, outside forces controlled them both. Bitter towards John L. Lewis, Keeney vowed to return to his miners and take back what they had lost – and return he would.

Chapter Three

Frank Keeney's Mine War

In the middle of downtown Charleston, on the corner of Summers and Lee Street stood an orange drink stand. Within the space of a year, Frank Keeney had gone from union president to orange drink salesman. His wife and his daughter, Geraldine, helped run the stand. Florida oranges, just becoming popular at the time, were imported for the drinks and the stand profited for awhile. The Keeney family scraped by, but Frank Keeney remained discontented.

Within a year, Keeney abandoned the orange drink business and bought a grocery store in Charleston. Failing to bring in enough customers, Keeney also retreated from this enterprise after about a year. Geraldine sighed when recalling these years. "My father was not a good businessman," she said.[1]

Since his business enterprises failed, and he was blacklisted from both the coal industry and his union, Keeney decided that the oil industry might be his calling. Despite being forced out of the presidency of District 17, Keeney remained very close friends with Harold Houston. Since the tumultuous days of Blair Mountain, Houston had married Sallie Starr Chambers, widow of Ed Chambers who was murdered on the courthouse steps beside Sid Hatfield. Houston had been Chambers' attorney. They married in December 1926. Houston owned some land in Kentucky and suggested that he and Keeney try to drill oil in the state. So, for his third occupation since being union president, Keeney became a "wildcatter." Unfortunately, his oil drilling days were short-lived. Keeney and Houston found little oil and little profit.[2] Clearly, Frank

Keeney found no place in the world outside the coal mines and the union for which he fought. Without them he merely drifted from one occupation to another without purpose. But by the late 1920's Keeney had found a way to reestablish himself as a union leader and take up his cause once more.

Keeney did not stand alone in his resentment of John L. Lewis. A growing number of union leaders had grown disconcerted with Lewis' authoritarian tactics and his "no backward step" policy. In Illinois, a faction of the UMWA formed the Save the Union Committee, initially headed up by John Brophy.[3] Members of this committee contacted Keeney for his help and without hesitation he agreed. From 1926 to 1929, Keeney spent most of his time in Illinois and even edited a labor newspaper entitled *The Coal Miner.* When Brophy ran for president of the UMWA, Keeney supported him and made speeches during his campaign. When the campaign failed, Brophy left the Save the Union Committee while Keeney and other members continued to press on.[4]

The situation of the UMWA had grown exceptionally desperate. The UMWA membership fell from 384,617 in 1924 to 98,039 in 1930. In West Virginia, worse conditions prevailed. A 1924 UMWA contract negotiated in Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, and Indiana made production costs so high in those states that many operators opened new mines in West Virginia, where they could maintain mine guards and keep the union out. In 1927, the West Virginia courts upheld injunctions against the UMWA, and the union nearly lost all of the ground that it had gained during the Mine Wars. When the Depression struck, the over

expanded industry collapsed, leaving two-thirds of the state's miners out of work. By 1929 the UMWA claimed less than 1000 dues paying members in West Virginia.[5]

The next year, union leaders such as Alexander Howatt and John H. Walker formed the Reorganized United Mine Workers of America. It attempted to overthrow the "dictatorship" of John L. Lewis and appealed to the court system to be recognized as the legitimate UMWA. Keeney attended the opening convention, held in March 1930 at Springfield, Illinois, and returned to West Virginia as a delegate of this new union.[6]

That spring, Keeney's car pulled up to the Blizzard household. Keeney asked his old friend if he would like to go for a ride. Blizzard took his son along, and the three went for a spin around Charleston. Keeney had a proposition for Blizzard. He offered Blizzard a position in the new union. Blizzard thought about the offer and politely turned it down. He told Keeney that he was building a new home, and with a new mortgage hanging over his head the new union didn't seem like a steady job. Disappointed, but not angry with Blizzard, Keeney accepted the explanation and the two men parted ways. Unknown to Keeney at that time, his friend would later play a role in the conflict to come.[7]

Fred Mooney was more receptive. Keeney enlisted his aid to help him organize the state. Mooney took the northern fields while Keeney focused on the southern fields. Met with rousing success in the south, Keeney held weekly meetings at nights outside of company property. The miners built bonfires,

listened to speeches, and signed up for the new union. The men of the southern coal fields knew Keeney well and rallied to his call. Within a year, 10,000 southern West Virginia miners had signed up for the new union.[8]

Mooney had a much more difficult time in the north. Van A. Bittner, president of the UMWA in northern West Virginia, organized groups of men to heckle the speakers at Mooney's meetings. The men praised John L. Lewis and accused Keeney and Mooney of being communists and supporters of the coal operators. At times, when Mooney would schedule a meeting at a designated time and place, Bittner and his men would arrive at the same spot an hour earlier and be in the process of their own meeting when Mooney and his supporters arrived. Because of this conflict, Mooney was forced to hold meeting in the backs of pool rooms, in private homes, and other obscure places. On 8 March 1931, the RMWA collapsed. Mooney, frustrated with his lack of success, left the state.[9] Thus, Frank Keeney stood alone.

West Virginia had been taken away from West Virginians. The Mine Wars had been a struggle designed to get West Virginia back. Frank Keeney believed in this struggle. In 1921 he believed that the UMWA was the tool by which he and his oppressed followers could acquire their proper rights as Americans. It seemed to Keeney that the struggle had only taken steps backward. Not only was the state controlled by outsiders, John L. Lewis had taken the union away from West Virginians. Frank Keeney approached the one man who remained at his side, Harold Houston. Fred Mooney had left. Bill Blizzard now sought his own agenda

away from Keeney. Of all the main leaders that had fought throughout the mine wars, only Harold Houston allied himself with Keeney at the end. Together Keeney and Houston decided that they would take the union back. On 16 March 1931, Keeney formed the West Virginia Mine Workers. Houston traveled to New York to seek financial aid from various liberal groups. Keeney redoubled his efforts in the southern coal fields and by May the WVMW claimed 23,000 members.[10]

Despite aid from charity organizations, Christian groups, and leftist groups, Keeney knew that he simply did not possess the current financial means with which to maintain a union throughout the state, so he centered his attention on the Kanawha coal field. This only made logical sense since Keeney grew up in the Kanawha fields. He knew the miners and they knew him. If he could gain a large following and get his union officially recognized by local coal operators, then he could extend his union throughout the state.[11]

Unfortunately for Keeney, the operators refused to meet with the WVMW. He quickly came to understand that the only method of gaining notoriety for his union would be to strike. His first opportunity came of 15 April when he called a strike for the miners of the Collieries Company at Prenter in order to acquire a check weighman. Between 250 and 300 miners went out on strike. The strike lasted two weeks and the miners returned to work after the company agreed to allow a check weighman. Keeney's first strike with the WVMW succeeded.[12]

But even though concessions were slowly being gained from the coal operators, Keeney's union faced a more bitter opponent. As a coal operator once told Fred Mooney in a good-humored way: "We don't have to bother about you, the United Mine Workers will take care of the situation."[13]

The coal operator's warning proved correct. The UMWA reaction to Keeney's union was immediate. Lewis sent dozens of new organizers into West Virginia. The union, along with the State Federation of Labor began to publicly assault Keeney and his organization with propaganda condemning him and his new union. They claimed that Keeney's tactics would lead to the starvation and ruin of the West Virginia miners. In fact, the miners were already starving and ruined; because of the depression about two-thirds of the state's miners were out of work. Many families were going up to three days at a time without food and new clothing was scarce. But these conditions had existed for nearly two years. Therefore, when Van A. Bittner, president of District 29, and Percy Tetlow, president of District 17 began their strong organization drive in 1931, they did so because of the threat that Keeney's union posed – not because of the bad conditions of the miners. No union contracts had been negotiated with coal operators in West Virginia since Keeney's presidency in 1924. Yet in 1931, Bittner began efforts to negotiate a new contract in the northern coal fields.[14]

While Bittner met with some success in the north, the southern coal fields proved to be Keeney's territory. A letter from local union 1633 to John L. Lewis best demonstrates the UMWA's frustration:

> The dual organization, headed by Keeney . . . is quite active, of which I know you are aware, and is causing the loyal members of the UMWA quite a bit of anxiety, and our efforts against this dual movement does not seem to have had the right effect because they are organizing men into their dual union every day.[15]

Lewis fought back by denouncing Keeney in the *United Mine Workers Journal*. Lewis blamed Keeney's presidency for the union's struggles in West Virginia, accused him of communism, and urged miners to stay loyal to the "true" union. Lewis' words would have little effect, however, as the WVMW continued to grow.[16] To successfully combat Keeney, Lewis needed someone on the inside, someone who knew Keeney and his tactics, someone who would be willing to trade his friendship with Keeney for a position of power in the UMW. Lewis needed Bill Blizzard.

Lewis did not recruit Blizzard. In fact, Blizzard volunteered his services. The 4 May letter to Lewis suggests Blizzard as the only person who can, "meet the situation successfully."[17] Lewis, William Houston, newly appointed president of District 17, and Bittner eagerly accepted Blizzard's help. From 1930 to 1933, Blizzard supplied information on Keeney's activities to UMWA headquarters and often gave advice to the residing union officials. In correspondence with union officials, Blizzard often mentioned individuals that had come from out of state to help Keeney's union, where Keeney was getting his money, and where the WVMW were holding meetings. Blizzard spoke at a number of union meetings against Keeney's union and regained prestige within the ranks of the UMWA.[18]

Despite Blizzard's vaunted efforts, he seemed to have had little effect on the outcome of the WVMW. Local unions still had great difficulty dealing with Keeney. Letters to Blizzard reveal that District 17 still enforced dues at one dollar a month. Keeney responding to the district's new organizational push, offered new members free membership for the first ninety days. As a result, the District's new efforts failed, and Keeney's union continued to grow.[19]

The results of Blizzard's intervention were ultimately twofold; Blizzard destroyed his friendship with Keeney, and Blizzard reinstated himself within the ranks of the UMWA. Keeney, deeply hurt by Blizzard's actions, never trusted him again. A Christmas card sent from Keeney to Blizzard in 1931 (probably sent by Bessie) was the last known contact between the two men.[20] But why did Blizzard choose the UMWA over Keeney's union? He told Keeney that a new mortgage hung over his head and Keeney's union didn't seem like a steady job. This may have contained some truth. Perhaps Blizzard fought against the WVMW because he believed it the best method of helping the state's miners. But if this was the case, then why did he join an organization that had not negotiated a contract with coal operators in seven years while simultaneously fighting an organization that had recently fought to sign new contracts?

It is also important to note that Blizzard approached Lewis and offered his help. If Blizzard had not agreed with his old friend's new union he could have merely kept silent. But by publicly denouncing an old friend for the cause of the union, and by providing information on Keeney's activities to his enemies,

Blizzard "gained the king's favor" and paved the road for his future rise in District 17. Blizzard didn't believe that Keeney could win, and knew that he could score a personal victory by seizing the opportunity to regain favor by fighting Lewis' enemy.

While dealing with this tremendous pressure from the UMWA, Keeney attempted to successfully establish his new union. Unlike the earlier Mine Wars, when the struggle was fought between the union and the coal operators, Keeney found his union fighting the coal operators as well as his former union. Influenced by the failure of Blair Mountain, Frank Keeney believed that the miners needed more than a union, they needed a political party. Only with a political party could the miners hope to change the political landscape of the state. In January 1931, Keeney formed the West Virginia Labor Party.[21]

Debate over the extent of the miners' radicalism has persisted for decades. David Allan Corbin argued that the southern West Virginia miners flirted with socialism but never fully understood nor adopted socialist ideology.[22] However, a look at Keeney's activities during this time period reveals a different picture. By the 1930's there can be no doubt that Frank Keeney was a Marxist. He understood socialism and he believed in Marxist principles. In 1931 he said, "The tools of production must be returned to the workers and a complete socialization of industry take place before we can have justice." Clearly Keeney's rhetoric had developed from the days of Cabin Creek when he used the socialists as a means to merely fight class injustice. Harold Houston also clearly understood and believed

in socialist principles. In the 1920's he ran as the socialist candidate for mayor of Parkersburg and was twice the party's nominee for governor of the state.[23]

Keeney stated that the Democratic and Republican parties had failed the working man and only a labor party could give the miners the rights that they deserved. "If a miner asks you to vote with either of the old parties, ask him to take you to his home. If he does so, look into the starved eyes of his wife, examine his underfed and ragged children . . . let him show you what else he has gained by voting for either Republicans or Democrats." His new Labor Party called for the complete nationalization of all the coal mines in the United States, and its possessions. It also called for unemployment insurance, old age pensions, and free medical service for the workers. This party intended to bring about the end of the private ownership of the coal miners.[24]

Keeney sought to educate his miners. He gave speech after speech denouncing the current political parties and the social system in America. He said the only difference between a Democrat and a Republican is that "one stands for a high tariff while the other stands for a higher tariff." In the summer of 1931, Keeney sent for a "labor education caravan" to travel up and down the coal fields to conduct meetings and debates – preaching Keeney's political doctrine to anyone who would listen.[25] They did listen, and when their leader called on them to strike and protest, they did. Later, when he told them to pick up their guns and fight, they did.

Serious obstacles still faced Frank Keeney in the summer of 1931. He had gained popular support among the miners and he had begun a new political organization. Nevertheless, he still did not have recognition for his union. In June, facing more wage cuts and needing to have his union fully recognized by local operators, Keeney boldly called for a meeting and asked the delegates of the WVMW to vote as to whether or not they would strike, forcing the operators to negotiate with the union. The delegates voted to strike. They set the date of the strike in the Kanawha coal field for 6 July 1931.[26]

The strike began on an encouraging note when around 17,000 miners answered the call to strike. Keeney knew that he had the support of his men, but he knew that his biggest obstacle would be hunger.. "In our union struggles we are compelled to surrender only if we are starved into submission. All of this we are compelled to do because we must have bread – and the coal operator controls and owns our bread."[27] In the end, the Depression became Keeney's greatest adversary.

After the union miners went out on strike, the already terrible conditions worsened. Immediately, companies brought back the mine guards and began evicting miners from company homes. The strike breakers, armed with revolvers and rifles, came into company houses of strikers, loaded their furniture and meager belongings on a truck, drove off company property, and dumped the belongings on the side of the road. At Ward, five locals tried to stop mine guards from taking away the furniture. The men were promptly arrested and sent to jail in Charleston.

At Blakely, families were not allowed to take anything from their gardens but had to leave their crops for the scabs that the company imported to take their jobs. At Hugheston, a striking miner's wife died under suspicious circumstances during an eviction. Mine guards claimed that she had a heart attack. The mine wars had returned to Kanawha County.[28]

On the second day of the strike the companies closed their company stores and refused to honor the company scrip of striking miners. Miners then had no means to shelter or feed their own families. Keeney began depending heavily for funds from such liberal groups as the Emergency Committee for Striker's Relief, the Church Emergency Committee, and the Christian Social Justice Fund of Baltimore. The Red Cross denied Keeney help because his strike was not an "act of God."[29]

Within weeks starvation became a real threat. Groups were brought in to keep up the miners' morale and numerous meetings were organized. The labor education caravan played a large role during the strike. This group of fifteen college graduates and professors, led by Mary Fox and Dr. William Nunn, professor of economics at New York University, gave lectures, sang songs, and organized demonstrations in the strike zone.[30]

The strike brought about enormous solidarity among Keeney and the miners. Keeney's followers rallied around him by writing poems and singing songs. Among the leading artistic voices of this flourishing new labor culture was Walter Seacrist. During the Paint Creek, Cabin Creek Strike, Seacrist, only a boy

at the time, carried Mother Jones' briefcase as she walked up and down the creeks visiting the miners. When he was old enough he joined the union. But in 1931 he left the union to join the WVMW. Shortly thereafter, he penned "The Coal Miner's Dream." This poem was about Judgement Day. In this version of the end of the world, coal operators, John L. Lewis, and the West Virginia Governor were cast "down the golden stair" because of their crimes against the working man. But for Keeney, Seacrist offered a kinder judgement:

Next came Frank Keeney, a man
They all knew well.
With a West Virginia Mine
Worker's Agreement
He'd followed the operators to Hell.
Then grand old St. Peter looked down
The golden stair
And told him to come up higher
It was too hot for a union man
down there.[31]

Seacrist later went on to actually record some of the songs written during the days of the WVMW, including a militant version of "The West Virginia Hills."[32] The famous labor song, "We Shall Not Be Moved" was written during this strike, with the original lyrics being, "Frank Keeney is our Leader and We Shall Not Be Moved."[33] Keeney had not only won the support of the miners, he had won their hearts. In the face of overwhelming odds they had thrown their lot in with Keeney and chosen him over Lewis and Blizzard – just as they had chosen him over Mother Jones a decade before.

Yet hunger wouldn't go away. In August, 250 men, women, and children came to Charleston from the strike zone. Keeney led the "hunger marchers" in a demonstration to take their plight to the state government. Charleston Mayor R. P. Devan along with about forty state police met the marchers at the city limits and told them to "get out of town." One miner held up a sign which read, "Why should we starve quietly?" The governor arrived on the scene and donated ten dollars to their cause. Keeney vowed to return with greater numbers if the government did not offer relief.[34]

Ten dollars, of course, proved to be insignificant help as the union's funds were depleted very quickly. Frank Keeney recognized the plight of his miners and sought to help them in any way that he could. When the strike first began he allowed as many homeless miners as possible to move into his house and sleep on the floors. When the strike began to drag on and the union's money ran out, Keeney mortgaged his house and used the money to buy food for the miners.[35]

While starvation became more and more of a threat and the companies began importing new workers to the strike zone, it is not surprising that the striking miners, almost certainly encouraged by Keeney, turned to violence. Throughout the last half of July and the early part of August several outbreaks of violence occurred in Kanawha County. Gunfights between miners of opposing unions were not uncommon. Some coal machinery was exploded and a few scab miners were shot while going to and from the mines. Striking miners hid on the hillsides and fired down on any working miners that happened to venture out into

the open. Intimidation of this sort had some effect, and at least two mines closed down because miners were afraid to go to work. But the publicity that came from the violence only led newspapers to slander Keeney's union – insinuating that he merely brought about the return to the days of Bloody Mingo.[36]

At the end of six weeks, Keeney decided that he could hold out no more and was faced with the first and only strike defeat of his life. The companies had not bargained at all with his new union. His followers were without food, shelter, and clothes. A letter from a young girl to Keeney best exemplifies the situation:

> I am writing you in regards to my daddy. He has been a union miner all his life. Now he hasn't had any work since the strike and we are in need of some winter clothes and haven't got any way at all to get them. . . . if you can, please send us some clothes.[37]

Keeney rode to each of the tent colonies that had been established in the Kanawha field. He stood on the back of empty food trucks and told them that he had failed them and to return to work. The miners met his speeches with cheers and continued to remain with the WVMW for the next two years. Although the miners attempted to get their jobs back, most were turned away. New blacklists were drawn up and the union in West Virginia seemed broken once more.[38]

In the following year, Frank Keeney led two more hunger marches into Charleston. Once he and his men were turned away. The second time they received another ten dollar donation from the governor. The WVMW still held meetings and continued to raise funds to feed unemployed miners, but they never recovered enough from 1931 to be able to mount another huge strike. In June

1933, Keeney officially disbanded the WVMW after FDR's National Industrial Recovery Act. Keeney still felt no shame, but it seemed likely that he might be leaving the miners for good. He told his followers, "We've had our parades, songs and strike – and we got . . . nothing left but debts and memory of defeat. The greatest thing you have done is to stick together and take it on the chin."[39]

Keeney also took it on the chin. A decade earlier he had failed to defeat the coal operators, now he had failed to defeat Lewis. The New Deal encouraged many miners throughout the state because they now had the right to organize and bargain collectively. Keeney still foresaw a grim future. Because the union in West Virginia remained in outside hands, locals would still have little say in their destiny. Keeney had fought hard only to suffer a bitter defeat. Now he would defy his enemies to the bitter end.

Chapter Four

To the Bitter End

The West Virginia Mine Workers died in 1933, but Frank Keeney's determination to build a new union did not. Members of the anti-Lewis movement in Illinois that previously ran the Reorganized United Mine Workers of America created the Progressive Miners of America in 1933.[1] After Keeney disbanded his union, the PMA quickly recruited him as a field organizer. Keeney believed in the platform of this new union, which promised to give more power to local unions and allow them to elect their own officials.[2] Keeney confidently declared, "The miners of West Virginia want a union in which they have a voice and the Progressive Miners is going to see that they get it."[3]

Unfortunately for Keeney, the miners of West Virginia didn't seem interested in a democratic union in 1933. For the first time, The National Recovery Act allowed miners in West Virginia to legally join unions. John L. Lewis responded by immediately sending 100 organizers into West Virginia. The miners, thrilled to finally have the right to openly join a union, responded with enormous enthusiasm. For the first time since Keeney's presidency, the UMWA flourished in West Virginia.[4] Van Bittner, the newly appointed president of District 17, became a powerful political force in the state because he was able to direct the votes of the states' many thousands of miners. With the mine guard system obsolete, the coal operators could offer little resistance against the rising union tide.[5]

To further appeal to the states' miners, Lewis and Bittner conducted a public ceremony in honor of Cleve Woodrum, in 1933. Woodrum died during the Paint Creek and Cabin Creek strike in 1913. He had gone back out on strike with Keeney in July 1913, and was killed by mine guards in a gunfight near the Wake Forest Mining Company property. Keeney became enraged when he heard of this ceremony and stated, "If Lewis, Bittner and their gang were real union men they would be weeping at the grave of the great union that they assassinated instead of shedding hypocritical tears over a man whose heroism and loyalty made the United Mine Workers of America the great union that it once was."[6]

Lewis' strong-arm tactics to preserve his authoritarian administration appalled Keeney even more. If any local UMWA members publicly denounced Lewis or expressed discontentment because local leaders were appointed instead of elected, Lewis' hired men came and physically beat the dissenters. In Keeney's view, the mine guard system had vanished only to be replaced by a new system of "thugs" that continued to suppress the voices of the miners within their own union.[7]

Although Keeney expressed gladness that the miners finally had a right to organize, he despised what the UMWA had become. He continued to meet with miners to convert them to the PMA and hoped that they would respond to its democratic ideals. At first, Keeney met with success. Miners began expressing interest. But then Keeney himself became a victim of Lewis' strong-arm tactics. One evening in Charleston, Keeney took a stroll downtown when a group of men

suddenly appeared, drug him into an alley, and nearly beat him to death. Later that night, city police found him unconscious in the alley and took him to the hospital. The police never found the men responsible. Keeney didn't know the men, but he knew their employer. After his wounds healed, Keeney returned to Illinois.[8]

Keeney stayed in Illinois and worked with the PMA until its demise in the late 1930's. Bessie remained in West Virginia with their children. The PMA could not compete with the UMWA's political and economic power and it suffered a slow, agonizing death. It gained brief support in Illinois, but Keeney and other PMA leaders knew that their union existed on life-support. Lewis also knew this, and rejected a proposal by John Brophy to reinstate the members of the PMA in the UMWA and restore district autonomy to Illinois. Brophy knew that the leaders of the PMA had little choice but to accept the proposal, since the new union's survival appeared unlikely and the PMA miners supported the idea of district autonomy. Yet Lewis decided to bide his time and let the union die on its own instead.[9]

In 1940, Frank Keeney returned to West Virginia once again. With no unions left to join, the reality of his career's end confronted him. He flirted with other occupations. In the 1940's, he ran a nightclub in Charleston called the "Cosmopolitan Club." After the club had been open for awhile, police discovered that he sold liquor at his club, although he only held a beer license. Keeney lost

his beer license, but then took out a license in his son's name and continued running the club through the end of the decade.[10]

The 1940's proved a difficult decade for Frank Keeney. In 1943, he and Bessie separated because Frank had been involved with another woman. Broken hearted because of his affair and because of the many years he had neglected his family in favor of his miners, Bessie moved to Arizona in 1945. She lived with their son, Frank Vincent, who had just returned from serving in the European theatre during World War II. Bessie and Frank saw each other only one more time in their lives, at their granddaughters' wedding. They didn't speak.[11]

After the separation, Keeney moved into a hotel. His already heavy drinking increased. When the nightclub closed down, he became a parking lot attendant in downtown Charleston. For the next decade, Keeney parked cars, and became heavily involved with the Knights of Pythias. By this time, the Cold War had reached its height and Keeney kept any socialist thoughts to himself. But he still loved politics. Because the UMWA supported the Democratic Party, Keeney registered with the Republican Party and voted Republican for the rest of his life.[12]

The tightly knit group that ran District 17 during the Mine Wars had little contact as the years progressed. Frank Keeney outlived them all. Harold Houston retired from his law practice and moved to Florida in the late 1930's. He died there within a few years. Fred Mooney shot himself in 1952. Some claim that he had tried to kill his wife, but failed and committed suicide to cover up his crime. The man that Frank Keeney had called "crazy mean" died under circumstances as

strange as his reputation. Lawrence "Peg Leg" Dwyer remained active after Mine Wars, but he and Keeney lost contact after those battles.[13]

Bill Blizzard served as president of District 17 until 1955. Blizzard had his own conflict with Lewis when he punched out Lewis' younger brother for reading his mail. John L. Lewis summoned Blizzard to Illinois and told him that he would not be fired. Instead, Lewis offered him a pension of $400 a month if Blizzard agreed to retire. Blizzard retired but never received any pension from Lewis. On his deathbed in 1958, Blizzard told his friends that if he could have lived his life over that he would never have supported John L. Lewis.[14]

A few years after Blizzard's death, William Blizzard Jr., received a phone call from Frank Keeney. William Blizzard worked as a reporter for the *Charleston Gazette*, and remained fascinated with the Mine Wars. Keeney asked Blizzard Jr. to meet him. On a sunny evening in the mid-1960's, Keeney and Blizzard met in Charleston. Together, they sat on the steps in front of District 17 headquarters and talked about the old days of tent colonies, mine guards, shootouts, and marches. Keeney held no bitterness towards Bill Blizzard, but he had wished that Blizzard would have joined his crusade in the 1930's. After a long talk, the two men parted ways. William Blizzard never saw Keeney again.[15]

In the mid-sixties, Keeney moved to a home for the elderly called Sweet Springs. Occasionally, on weekends, he traveled by bus to Alum Creek and spent a few days with his son, Belmont. He always came with a pistol in one pocket and Teaberry chewing gum in the other. Keeney passed out gum to his grandchildren

and they gathered around him as he told them stories about Mother Jones, Don Chafin, Devil Anse Hatfield, and others. He always came and left unannounced. One day Keeney would be seen walking up the driveway to his son's home, wearing his familiar white button up shirt and smoking his Wings cigarettes. He usually stayed a few nights. The household would wake up one morning and he would be gone – only to return in a week or two.[16]

In his last years, Keeney attended a local church near Sweet Springs. Church attendance, however, didn't seem to affect his ways a great deal. He still used profanity, smoked, drank, and carried his Smith and Wesson 38 wherever he went. As his health failed, he could no longer leave Sweet Springs and family members visited him. When they did, he continually told them about the Mine Wars, wanting them to remember the conflicts that he had fought and the cause for which he had fought. By the late 1960's he felt that few people remembered the Mine Wars and he didn't want that history to die with him.[17]

Frank Keeney died on 22 May 1970, at the age of eighty-eight. He was buried at Witcher Creek Cemetery in Belle, West Virginia. To his families' surprise, dozens of miners came to the funeral. Many of them shed tears and told stories about Keeney to his family members. One elderly man approached C. B. Keeney, Frank Keeney's grandson, and told him what a great leader Keeney had been and what his life had meant to the union in West Virginia. C. B. Keeney reflected on the man's comments and said, "You must've thought a lot of him."

The old man smiled, "Son," he said, "we killed men for him." The old man then turned and hobbled away. He had a peg leg.[18]

Conclusion

Frank Keeney's personality and leadership helped shape the history of the West Virginia Mine Wars, the states' miners, and the state itself. The turning point in his life came in the summer of 1912. With sick children, a pregnant wife, no job, and a tent as a home, Keeney chose to take matters into his own hands. He took control of the strike and, as a result, the miners won. These actions as district president laid the foundations for the union movement in West Virginia. He believed in fighting the outside forces that controlled the state and his fighting spirit fueled the miners of southern West Virginia in the terrible conflicts from 1919 to 1921.

The labor career of Frank Keeney also proved crucial to the early survival of the UMWA. Since 1897, the UMWA had attempted to gain a foothold in West Virginia but met with very little success. As West Virginia became one of the leading coal producers in the country, its non-union mines sold cheaper coal and took away from the markets of pro-union states such as Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania. If the UMWA was to survive, it had to establish itself in West Virginia. Only in 1912, when Keeney rose from the rank and file, did the union establish a solid foothold in the state, thus solidifying the security of the UMWA as a whole. Without Frank Keeney, the UMWA would have struggled to survive.[1]

Keeney's faith in dramatic actions led to the armed marches on Logan. He hoped to gain the nation's attention, not necessarily to overthrow the government. However, if the miners would have managed to cross Blair Mountain and hang

Don Chafin to a sour apple tree, Keeney certainly would have approved. Indeed, if the march had assumed greater proportions and led to other worker revolts across the nation, Keeney would have also approved. In the end, Keeney mainly wanted freedom for his miners. In the end, they achieved that freedom, only Keeney could not be with them to share in their success.

Frank Keeney's career exemplified the radical nature of the labor movement in West Virginia. He was a self-educated, militant socialist who endeavored to educate his men and lead them in militant action against the mine guard system. His radicalism defied the out of state businesses that ruled West Virginia and defied notions that Appalachians were passive individuals who accepted their fate. Keeney was a proud man who refused to bend his knee to capitalist masters. He passed on this pride to the miners, who followed his lead and refused to bend their knees.

His career also revealed the true uniqueness of the Mine Wars. Unlike other regions, the union movement in West Virginia was truly a "bottom up" movement. In 1912, the miners chose Keeney's leadership over Cairns' and Haggerty's. In 1921, when Mother Jones tried to persuade the miners to abandon their march, they chose to follow Keeney instead. In 1930, they even chose Keeney over John L. Lewis. Of course, Lewis won in the end, and today, he and Mother Jones are remembered as the heroes of the labor movement in West Virginia. The problem with West Virginia was that it was not controlled by West Virginians. It should be remembered that when the West Virginians chose to

follow a West Virginian, they finally made progress in breaking the chains that had oppressed them for so many years. In 1912, Keeney took matters into his own hands. This lesson, perhaps Keeney's most important lesson of all, points to the future of what needs to be done for the prosperity of West Virginia's people.

NOTES

Introduction

1. Barbara Rasmussen, *Absentee Landowning and Exploitation in West Virginia, 1760-1920* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 1.

2. Ibid., 101-102, David A. Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 1-7.

3. Roscoe C. Keeney Jr., *2,597 Keeney Relatives* (Parsons: McClain Printing Co., 1978), 6-10.

4. Ibid., 10, 38, 65.

5. Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields,* 4-8.

6. Winthrop D. Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1921), 87.

7. Kathleen Keeney and Donna K. Lowery, interview by author, tape recording, Alum Creek, West Virginia, 14 August 1992.

8. David A. Corbin, "Frank Keeney is our Leader and We Shall Not Be Moved: Rank and File Leadership in the WV Coal Fields." *Essays in Southern Labor History,* Gary Fink and Merl Reed eds., (Westport: Greenwood, 1976), 150.

9. Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia,* 85.

10. Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields,* 26-52. Corbin's work on the Mine Wars offers the most extensive argument concerning the unique issues and struggles that developed in West Virginia.

11. Richard D Lunt, *Law and Order vs the Miners: WV 1906-1933* (Charleston: Appalachian Editions, 1992), 14-15.

12. Howard B. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia: The Story of West Virginia's Four Major Mine Wars and Other Thrilling Incidents of its Coal Fields* (Parsons:

McClain Printing Co., 1969), 23-26. Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields,* 9-18, 61-79.

13. Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields,* 8.

14. Miners marching towards Blair Mountain sang, "We'll hang Don Chafin to a Sour Apple Tree," to the tune of "John Brown's Body." The miners said that killing the anti-union sheriff of Logan County was one of their main goals of the march. Lon Savage, *Thunder in the Mountains: The West Virginia Mine War 1920-21* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990), 77.

15. Corbin, "Frank Keeney is our Leader and We Shall Not Be Moved," 151-152, and *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields,* 240-241.

16. Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia,* 88.

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2. Ibid., 26-27.

3. Roscoe Keeney Jr., *2,597 Keeney Relatives* (Parsons: McClain Printing Co., 1978), 65. James and Geraldine Jackson, interview by author, tape recording, Charleston, WV, August 1993.

4. Ibid., 66. David A. Corbin, "Frank Keeney is our Leader and We Shall Not Be Moved: Rank and File Leadership in the Southern WV Coal Fields," *Essays in Southern Labor History,* Gary Fink and Merl Reed eds. (Westport: Greenwood, 1976), 145.

5. John L. Spivak, *A Man in his Time* (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), 63, Kathleen Keeney and Donna K. Lowery interview by author, tape recording, Alum Creek, West Virginia, 14 August 1992, and James and Geraldine Jackson interview.

6. James and Geraldine Jackson interview.

7. Edward M. Steel ed., *The Speeches and Writings of Mother Jones* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 206.

8. Kathleen Keeney and Donna K. Lowery interview.

9. James and Geraldine Jackson interview.

10. Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia,* 86.

11. Ibid., *The Labor Argus,* 11 November, 1910.

12. The well-documented conditions of the southern West Virginia company towns are found in every major work on the mine wars. For the best description of these towns, see Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 1-52.

13. Roscoe Keeney, *2,597 Keeney Relatives,* 66, and James and Geraldine Jackson interview.

14. Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia, 86-87,* Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion,* 9.

15. *The Labor Argus,* 25 August 1910.

16. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia,* 18.

17. Ibid., 20-21, Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion,* 88-89.

18. *The Fayette Tribune,* 5 May 1912.

19. *Bluefield Daily Telegraph,* 13 August 1912.

20. James and Geraldine Jackson interview, Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields,* 27.

21. Steel ed., *The Speeches and Writings of Mother Jones,* 206.

22. Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields,* 46.

23. Edmund Wilson, *The American Jitters* (New York: Scribners, 1932), 169.

24. Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia,* 85-86.

25. Kathleen Keeney and Donna K. Lowery interview.

26. James and Geraldine Jackson interview, Roscoe Keeney, *2597 Keeney Relatives,* 66, *Bluefield Daily Telegraph,* 15 August 1912.

27. *Bluefield Daily Telegraph,* and 16 August 1912, *The Fayette Tribune,* 15 and 22 August 1912.

28. *Bluefield Daily Telegraph,* 5 September 1912.

29. James and Geraldine Jackson interview, Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields,* 29-30.

30. Ibid.

31. John T. Walton, interview by Michael J. Galgano, 25 May, 1976, Oral History of Appalachia, OH-64-0143, Special Collections Division, William E. Morrow Library, Marshall University, Huntington (Hereafter cited OHA).

32. Dave Tamplin, interview by Stephen W. Brown, 2 April, 1973, OHA, OH-64-0040.

33. *The Fayette Tribune,* 13 February 1913, James and Geraldine Jackson interview. For the most vivid retelling of the Bull Moose Special Raid see Howard B. Lee's *Bloodletting in Appalachia,* 38-40.

34. Joseph Platania, "Three Sides to the Story: Governor Hatfield and the Mine Wars," *The Goldenseal Book of the West Virginia Mine Wars,* Ken Sullivan ed., (Charleston: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co., 1991) , 23-24.

35. Ibid., *The Huntington Herald-Dispatch,* 3 July 1913.

36. *The Beckley Messenger,* 13 May 1913. State militia not only arrested the editors of the *Socialist and Labor Star,* but also destroyed their printing equipment and the most recent addition of the paper before it could be distributed. Charles Boswell, the editor of the *Labor-Argus,* was also arrested.

37. *The Fayette Tribune,* 5 June 1913.

38. *Huntington Herald-Dispatch,* 9 and 10 July 1913.

39. *The Fayette Tribune,* 18 September 1913.

40. Ibid., 5 May 1913 and 25 September 1913, *Montgomery Miners Herald,* September – October 1913, *Huntington Herald-Dispatch,* 12 July – 29 July 1913.

41. Ibid., 16 and 30 July 1913.

42. For accounts of the strikes and riots in Michican, Ohio, and South Africa, see *Huntington Herald-Dispatch,* 9 July to 30 July 1913. For detailed accounts of the Colorado strike see the *Mongomery Miners Herald,* August - December 1914.

Chapter Two – President Keeney

1. Kathleen Keeney and Donna K. Lowery, interview by author, tape recording, Alum Creek, West Virginia, 14 August 1992, Fred Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields* (Parsons: McClain Printing Co., 1967), 47.

2. Ibid., 41-42.

3. Ibid., 43-50. Mooney gives a detailed account of the infighting of District 17 in 1915. Also see, *The United Mine Workers Journal,* 12 August 1915 (Hereafter cited as *UMWJ*).

4. Ibid., Howard B. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia* (Parsons: McClain Printing Co., 1969), 199, *UMWJ,* 23 September 1913.

5. Fred A. Barkey, "A History of the Socialist Party in West Virginia," unpublished manuscript, 18-21.

6. Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields,* 52.

7. *The United Mine Workers Journal,* 4 January 1917.

8. Ibid., 15 March 1917.

9. Ibid., 15, March - 26 April 1917.

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11. David A. Corbin ed., *The West Virginia Mine Wars: An Anthology* (Charleston: Appalachian Editions, 1990), 68-69.

12. *Charleston Gazette,* 6 and 7 April 1918, Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia,* 87-88.

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14. Jim Backus, interview by John Hennen, 13 June, 1989, Matewan Oral History Project, 660-007, Special Collections Division, James E. Morrow Library, Marshall University, Huntington (Hereafter cited as Matewan Oral History Project).

15. Spivak, *A Man in His Time* (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), 58.

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17. Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia*, 104-107.

18. Ibid.

19. Spivak, *A Man in His Time*, 67-71.

20. Ibid., James and Geraldine Jackson interview.

21. For the most detailed narrative of Keeney's 1921 Ballpark Speech, see Lon Savage, *Thunder in the Mountains* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990), 86-89.

22. Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia*, 108-109.

23. William Blizzard Jr., telephone interview by author, tape recording, Alum Creek, West Virginia, 15 June 2000.

24. Ibid.

25. James and Geraldine Jackson interview.

26. Ibid.

27. Corbin, "Frank Keeney is our Leader and We Shall Not Be Moved," 136.

28. James and Geraldine Jackson interview. Geraldine recalled looking out her window in fright and seeing men with guns guarding her house at night when her father wasn't at home.

29. *Huntington Herald-Dispatch*, 2 August 1921.

30. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 96. Lee actually attended this meeting and gives a firsthand account of the proceedings.

31. Ibid., 97, Letter from Harold Houston to Lens Creek Local, 7 August 1921, William Blizzard Collection, West Virginia Department of Archives and History, Charleston (Hereafter cited as The William Blizzard Collection).

32. Melvin Triolo, interview by John Hennen, 27 July 1989, Matewan Oral History Project, 660-094. Triolo, who worked under Blizzard for a number of years believed that Keeney manipulated Blizzard into leading the marchers in the field so that Blizzard would be the "sacrificial lamb" if things went wrong. Also, James and Geraldine Jackson interview.

33. *Huntington Herald-Dispatch,* 24 August 1921.

34. *The New York Times,* 25 and 26 August 1921.

35. James and Geraldine Jackson interview, Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields,* 99, *The Charleston Daily Mail,* 2 September 1921.

36. Ibid.

37. *The New York Times,* 3 September 1921.

38. Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields,* 118.

39. Melvin Triolo interview, Matewan Oral History Project.

40. Kathleen Keeney and Donna K. Lowery interview.

41. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia,* 104, Melvin Triolo interview, Matewan Oral History Project, and Savage, *Thunder in the Mountains,* 165-166.

42. Evelyn Harris and Frank Krebs, *From Humble Beginnings: West Virginia State Federation of Labor, 1903-1957* (Charleston: Jones Printing Company, 1960), 166-167.

43. James and Geraldine Jackson interview.

44. Ibid.

Chapter Three – Frank Keeney's Mine War

1. James and Geraldine Jackson, interview by author, tape recording, Charleston, West Virginia, August 1993.

2. Ibid., *The Fayette Tribune,* 15 December 1926.

3. John Brophy, *A Miner's Life* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 214-218.

4. Ibid., 215. Evely Harris and Frank Krebs, *From Humble Beginnings: West Virginia Federation of Labor 1903-1957* (Charleston: Jones Printing Company, 1960), 198-199.

5. Jerry Bruce Thomas, *An Appalachian New Deal: West Virginia in the Great Depression* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 8-11.

6. Tom Tippet, "The Miners Try for a Clean Union." *Labor Age,* April 1931, 5-7.

7. William Blizzard Jr., telephone interview by author, tape recording, Alum Creek, West Virginia, 15 June 2000.

8. Tippet, "The Miners Try for a Clean Union." 6.

9. Fred Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields: The Autobiography of Fred Mooney* (Morgantown: McClain Printing Company, 1967), 142-149. The strong-arm tactics of Bittner appalled Mooney and he had difficulty coping with the fact that this was the same organization that he had fought for during the Mine Wars.

10. The WVMW Bulletin, 16 May 1931, The William Blizzard Collection, West Virginia Department of Archives and History, Charleston, Cora Cook, "The Union Returns to Kanawha" *Labor Age,* May 1931, 8.

11. Tippet, "The Miners Try for a Clean Union," 6-7.

12. *The Charleston Daily Mail,* 22 April – 30 April 1931.

13. Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields,* 147.

14. Edmund Wilson, "Frank Keeney's Coal Diggers," *The New Republic,* 8 July 1931, 195-199, *UMWJ,* 15 April and 1 May 1931, *WV State Federation of Labor: Official Yearbook 1930* (Huntington: 1930) , 70-74.

15. Local Union 1633 to John L. Lewis, 4 May 1931, The William Blizzard Collection.

16. *United Mine Workers Journal,* 1 September 1930 to 1 January 1932. In virtually every issue during that time frame, a section of the journal is dedicated to denouncing Keeney and his union.

17. Local Union 1633 to John L. Lewis, 4 May 1931, The William Blizzard Collection.

18. Ibid., Letter to Van A. Bittner from Bill Blizzard, 13 May 1931, letter to Bill Blizzard from William Houston, 6 August 1931, letter to Earl Houck from Bill Blizzard, 16 December 1931, The William Blizzard Collection.

19. See anonymous letter to Bill Blizzard, 11 July 1932, and Van A. Bittner to Bill Blizzard, 21 August 1933, The William Blizzard Collection.

20. Christmas Card from Keeney to Blizzard, December 1931, The William Blizzard Collection. Interview with Geraldine Keeney and James Jackson.

21. The WVMW Bulletin, 6 February 1931, The William Blizzard Collection.

22. David A. Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields,* 240-241. Also, "Frank Keeney Our Leader and We Shall Not Be Moved." Corbin argues incorrectly that Keeney never understood or trusted the socialists.

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24. Ibid.

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26. Pollak, 5-7. *Charleston Gazette,* 6 July 1931.

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32. Jerry Bruce Thomas, *An Appalachian New Deal,* 48.

33. David Corbin, "Frank Keeney is Our Leader and We Shall Not Be Moved." 144.

34. *The Charleston Gazette,* 5 August 1931.

35. James and Geraldine Jackson interview, Kathleen Keeney and Donna K. Lowery interview.

36. For detailed accounts of the strike violence see the *Huntington Herald-Dispatch,* 11 July to 12 August 1931. Interestingly, the Hunting paper followed the strike in more detail than the Charleston papers.

37. Letter to Frank Keeney from Hilda Landers, 17 September 1931, The William Blizzard Collection.

38. Helen Norton, "The Outcome of the West Virginia Miners' Strike." 9-10.

39. Corbin, "Frank Keeney is Our Leader and We Shall Not Be Moved." 159.

Chapter Four – To the Bitter End

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2. Progressive Miners of America pamplet, The William Blizzard Collection, West Virginia Department of Archives and History, Charleston.

3. Frank Keeney pamphlet for the PMA, The William Blizzard Collection.

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5. Charles Payne, interview by Thomas Tull, 16 December 1978, Oral History of Appalachia, OH-64-0172, Special Collections Division, William E. Morrow Library, Marshall University, Huntington.

6. *Huntington Herald-Dispatch,* 25 July 1913, Frank Keeney pamphlet for the PMA, The William Blizzard Collection.

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13. James and Geraldine Jackson interview, and Charles Payne interview, Oral History of Appalachia.

14. Melvin Triolo, interview by John Hennen, 27 July 1989, Matewan Oral History Project, 660-094, Special Collections Division, William E. Morrow Library, Marshall University, Huntington.

15. William Blizzard Jr., telephone interview by author, tape recording, Alum Creek, West Virginia, 15 June 2000.

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Conclusion

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