Coal Wars

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Unions, Strikes, and Violence in Depression-Era Central Washington

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Preface and Dedication

The struggle for recognition of a new labor union—the Western Miners Union of America—in a remote community of coal miners in central Washington State in the 1930s is the story of America's struggle to rebuild the nation's economy in the depths of the worst economic crisis the United States has ever faced. It is the story of the struggle to bring fair wages and safe conditions to workers who risked their lives to fuel the wheels of national progress, the struggle of local leaders who stood against powerful federal and labor interests.

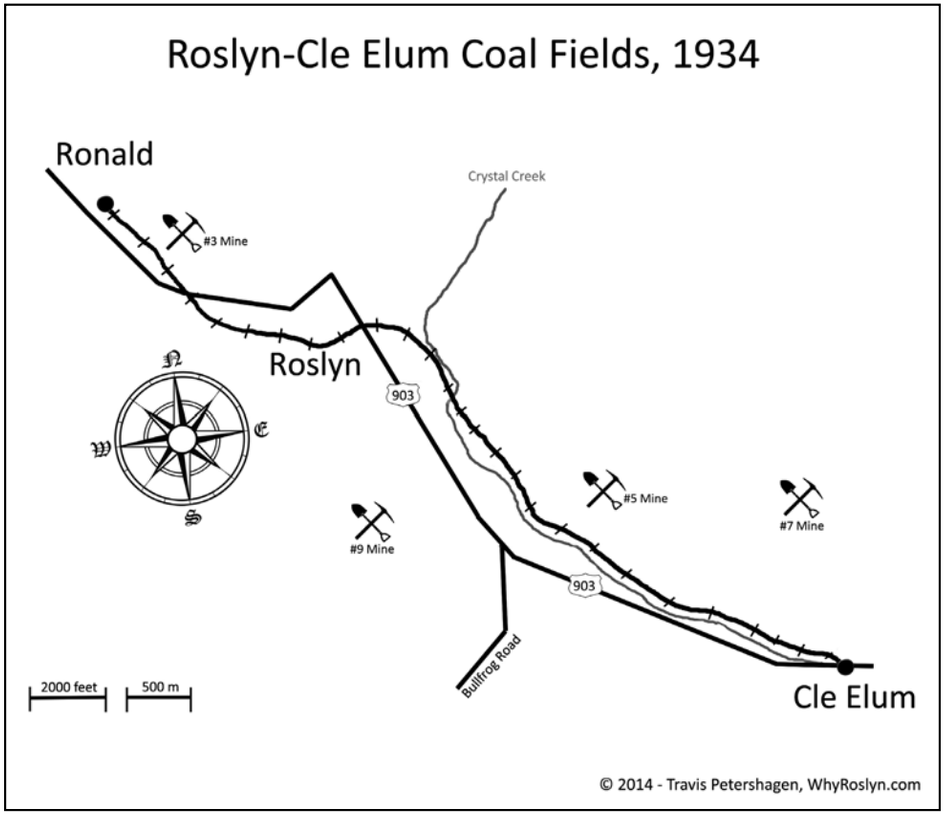
But it is also the story of simple, hard-working families, transplanted far from relatives, homes, and familiar customs, seeking the promise of work and a better life for their children, pulled into a conflict that they did not fully understand and acting to protect their families, their jobs, and their lives.

My grandfather, Herman Swanson, was one of those miners. He died eight years before I was born. I knew nothing of his life in mining. Visiting his grave in Roslyn, Washington, I have wondered about his life. My quest brought me to the story of the Western Miners Union.

Herman's daughter, my mother Hannah, wrote a personal history that included childhood memories of Roslyn. That history has provided a rich context of life in Roslyn in the 1930s. Herman's son, my uncle Clarence, also shared with me, through numerous hikes and stories, his love of the mountains and the history of the land. Family events and conversations in this book have been created to aid the narrative and are noted in italic type. All other information was obtained from documented sources and is footnoted.

My mother's family never discussed the Western Miners strike; perhaps they would have if asked, but we children did not know to ask. Herman's participation with the United Mine Workers is based on information from a long-time family friend, Harry Georgeson.

This book is dedicated to the miners of Roslyn. In telling this dramatic episode in Roslyn's history, I hope to honor the community and the families who struggled through those tumultuous times.



Prologue

The six-month saga of the Western Miners Union in Roslyn, Washington, began in hope and determination, but ended in bitter disappointment and frustration. Communities were torn apart, friends became enemies, and memories of abuses festered for generations.

Why did it happen? What caused the movement to flourish for a time and then to fade into obscurity? What factors pressured miners to take such risks with their friendships and their futures? What prompted the federal government to impose such drastic changes to its economic and labor policies? Why did coal operators refuse to negotiate with a union representing an apparent majority of the miners? What prompted the violence that erupted between mining families in formerly peaceful communities?

Answering those questions requires an investigation of the situation from such diverse perspectives as the miner in Roslyn and the mine owner in St. Paul, Minnesota; the union president in Washington, DC; and the Communist organizer in Seattle. All influenced the events in Roslyn in the spring of 1934 in ways that changed the community forever.

Roslyn was not alone. Similar battles occurred in hundreds of communities across the nation in the early 1930s. Workers in steel mills, auto factories, and garment shops were facing unemployment, wage cuts, long hours, and unsafe and unfair conditions.

With the nation's economy in collapse and banks shuttering their doors, Franklin Delano Roosevelt assumed the presidency in March 1933, with the promise to America's workers of a New Deal—a promise of fair wages and a revitalized economy. His inauguration initiated a 105-day period of frantic bureaucratic innovation seeking work for the nation's one-in-four unemployed workers and cash flow for their employers.[1]

The dreams of Roslyn miners for better wages and hours were ultimately bound to the nation's recovery efforts of those 105 days. Yet a closer look at their struggle reveals dissatisfactions that existed long before the Depression or the promises of recovery from the Roosevelt Administration.

King Coal

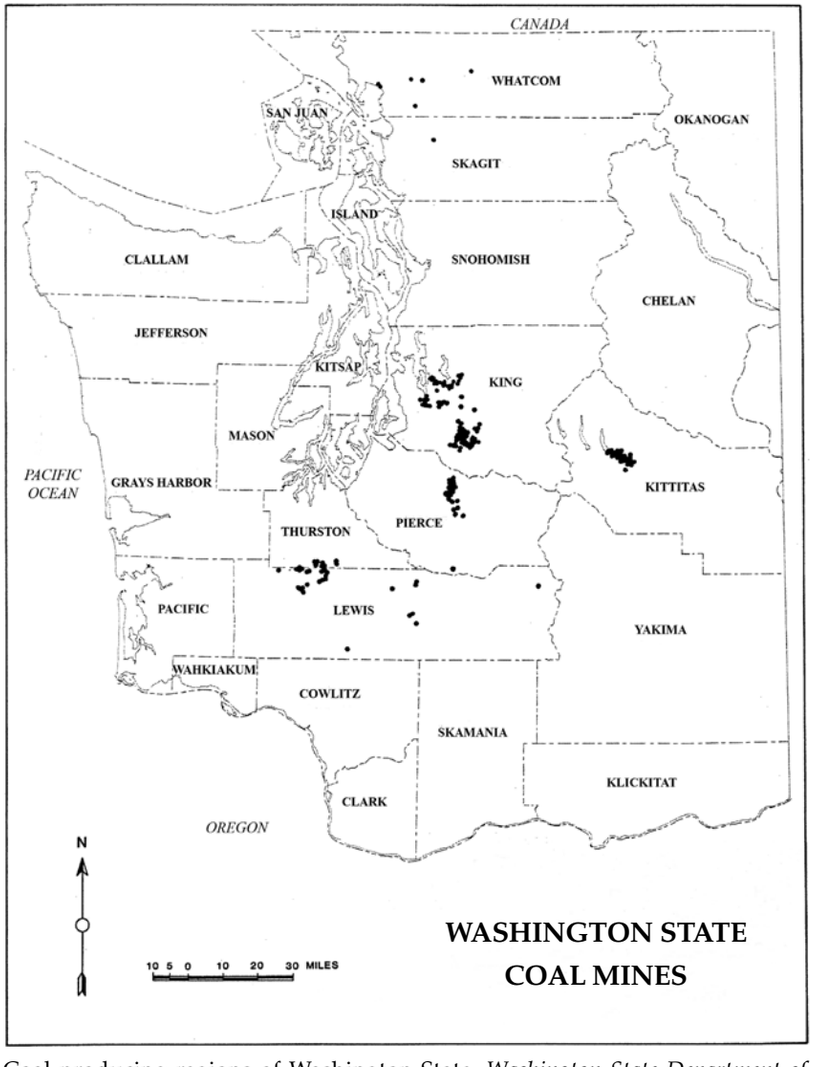
The life of a Washington State coal miner in the 1930s was anything but easy. The work was heavy, dirty, confined, dusty, exhausting, and dangerous. Miners earned living wages when the mines were working, but demand for coal was declining, and idle days were becoming more numerous.

Since the early 1890s, coal production had become a major component in the region's economic development. While Washington State's coal production would never challenge the output of the Appalachia fields of the eastern United States, Washington was the second-largest coal-producing state in the West during the first third of the century.[2] And the Roslyn coal field was the largest single coal-producing region in the state, generating 40 to 50 percent of the state's annual coal yield during that era.[3]

Between 1890 and 1900, U.S. coal production had nearly doubled from 118 million to 212 million net tons annually, and then doubled again by 1910 to 417 million net tons. Coal usage, however, began to level off after 1910 in the face of competition from electricity, oil, and natural gas. World War I produced a bubble in demand, and U.S. coal production peaked at 579 million net tons in 1918.[4] Demand tapered downward from the post-war highs to a nationwide production level of 305 million net tons in 1932.[5]

Coal production in Washington State during those years closely followed the national trend. Mines in the state produced two million net tons in 1900, and that number doubled by 1918. After the war bubble, demand declined steadily, pushing production down below two million net tons in 1931.[6]

Coal deposits in Washington State were distributed chiefly along the western slope of the Cascade Mountain range. Important coal fields were located in Whatcom, Skagit, King, Pierce, Thurston,



Coal producing regions of Washington State. *Washington State Department of Natural Resources*

Lewis, and Cowlitz counties on the western side of the Cascades. The Roslyn-Cle Elum coal field in Kittitas County was the single major field east of the Cascades, but it contributed nearly half of the state's annual coal production during the 1920s and 1930s.[7]

Coal is generally classified into four broad categories or ranks reflecting density and carbon content as deposits are, over centuries, subjected to increasing heat and pressure.[8]

- *Anthracite* is the hardest coal with the highest carbon content. It produces the highest levels of heat, up to nearly 15,000 BTU/lb. It burns without a flame and was widely sought for home heating. It was mined prominently in Pennsylvania and used in iron and steel production.
- *Bituminous* coal is a harder black or striped coal. The most plentiful of all coals in the United States, bituminous coal is used in electrical power generation and was in wide use for home heating and rail transportation. Its heat content ranges from 11,500 to 14,000 BTU/lb.
- *Subbituminous* coal is a softer coal and can appear from dull brown to bright black in color. Its heat content ranges from 8,300 to 11,500 BTU/lb.
- *Lignite* is the softest brown coal and is the youngest and least developed of the coal types. With characteristics between peat and coal, it produces the least heat per pound (less than 8,300 BTU/lb.). The Northern Pacific Railroad strip-mined lignite from Rosebud County in eastern Montana beginning in the mid-1920s and called it Rosebud coal. Inexpensive and available in mass quantities, it was referred to by locals as "burnable dirt."[9]

Washington State coal varied from lignite to anthracite with the highest grades of coal coming from the state's mountainous regions. Much of the coal from the Kittitas fields was a high grade bituminous coal, providing some of the highest energy ratings of bituminous coal mined anywhere in the state (12,240 to 13,250 BTU/lb.).[10]

Unfortunately, as the nation's demand for coal dropped in the early 1920s, production capacity increased as speculators drove investments in new mining ventures. The government did little to limit mining investments during the period, so coal mines continued to open. Coal operations, however, were not as responsive to market forces as other industries. Opening a new mine required a major investment of capital. If a mine was not constantly maintained, its shafts could deteriorate rapidly as water filled chambers and beams and ceilings began to crack. So while coal production increased, coal demand and prices dropped, leaving owners to face losing their initial investment or producing at a loss. Many kept producing.[11]

This overproduction of coal pushed prices downward through the 1920s and, along with it, the wages of miners. The number of commercial mines in the country peaked in 1923 at 9,331, but that number moved downward through the 1920s. By 1932, the number of producing mines in the nation had dropped by nearly half that number to just over 5,000. The number of employed miners declined from 700,000 to around 500,000 during that same span.[12] Between 1926 and 1932, the average number of days a coal miner worked per year fell from 215 to 146, and average earnings dropped from seventy-six cents to fifty cents per hour.[13]

Mining Technologies

New technologies in mining were, at that same time, affecting the availability and price of coal. The coal miner of the 1890s performed a number of tasks by hand—chipping slots along the bases of walls of coal with a hand pick, drilling holes for dynamite with a hand auger, preparing charges and blasting the rock surface, and then shoveling the broken coal into a coal car and pushing the loaded car to a passageway to be hauled out of the mine.

One of the major advances in coal production in the early 1900s was the use of coal cutting machines. These chainsaw-like devices cut a path into the base of a coal face with more speed and depth than could be achieved by hand. Their electric motors were intended to prevent sparks from igniting in the gas-filled mines. The machines completed the tedious undercuts much more quickly than hand picks, and the deep undercuts allowed miners to use less dynamite to bring down the coal. With a smaller charge, less coal was blasted into dust and more remained in marketable chunks. The electric cutting machines quickly gained wide industry use; in 1900 machines cut 25 percent of U.S. tonnage, but by 1930 that number had risen to 81 percent.[14]

Cle Elum miner Art Pasa shovels coal onto a jig conveyor in No. 5 mine in 1942. A vertical coal cutting machine at rear left was designed and built by Northwestern Improvement Company engineers and mechanics in Roslyn to accommodate the steep sloped conditions in the mines. *Courtesy of Roslyn Public Library, Roslyn Heritage Collection, by permission of Frank Schuchman*

The introduction of machine mining changed the workplace for coal miners. Mine operators could train unskilled workers in a specialized phase of mining such as cutting, drilling, blasting, or loading. Teams of men operating machines took over the mines, and experienced miners who prided themselves on possessing a wide range of skills saw their value dropping. Miners' pay transitioned in this era from an incentive-based system where they were paid for each ton they produced to a flat-rate system where they were paid by the day.

Another transformation in coal production was the expansion of pit mining. These open-earth operations could employ workers with less skill and experience, many of whom were willing to work without union contracts. Facing declining demands for coal and with a surplus of unskilled workers, mine operators around the country sought in the 1920s to break the backs of the coal unions by

Miners operate a shortwall mining machine in Ronald's No. 3 mine. The use of coal cutting machinery did not come to the Roslyn-Cle Elum coal field until the late 1920s since the machines were designed for use in relatively flat areas. The slope of many of the state's coal fields presented difficult engineering challenges. *Courtesy of Roslyn Public Library, Roslyn Heritage Collection, by permission of Frank Schuchman*

offering work opportunities to miners who would agree to not join a labor union. Membership in the United Mine Workers of America dropped from half a million in 1923 to just over 100,000 by 1931.[15]

Many immigrant workers who came to the United States in the 1910s and early 1920s found good jobs in the mines. They developed specialized skills only to find their incomes and hopes for the future plummeting in the 1930s. Some miners left the fields in search of brighter opportunities, but many in isolated communities like Roslyn were unwilling to pull up stakes and move again to new communities or take up new lines of employment. With a low turnover rate among miners, Washington State had the most stable work force of any coal-producing state in the nation.[16]

Radical Politics

Beyond the numerous work-related and financial concerns vying for a Washington coal miner's attention in the 1930s was a milieu of social and political influences agitating for radical labor reform.

Socialism

The socialist movement in the United States can be traced back to 1877 with the establishment of a Marxist political party in New Jersey that fought for such worker benefits as an eight-hour work day, employer liability, a graduated income tax, government ownership of vital industries and services, and protective laws for female and child workers.[17]

Early socialists hoped that successful utopian communities, where residents worked together for the benefit of the group rather than for wealthy capitalists, might provide the springboard for further growth. Sparsely populated regions of Washington State attracted several such groups. The Puget Sound Cooperative Colony sprang up near Port Angeles in 1887. Although this first colony was short-lived, other colonies were established in the state at Equality, in Skagit County, and Burley, in Kitsap County, in the late 1890s.[18]

A Socialist Labor Party was founded in Washington State in 1890 in Tacoma with nineteen members. But as with the national movement, state socialists suffered fractious internal divisions over such issues as whether they should join with other groups seeking change. Such divisions kept membership low and effectiveness limited.[19]

In the late 1890s, an eloquent socialist leader emerged on the national scene. Eugene V. Debs rallied workers to become involved in politics and to use their votes to effect change. He admired the efforts of utopian communities in the state and found Northwest workers who shared his views on worker oppression:[20] "I am opposing a social order in which it is possible for one man who does absolutely nothing that is useful to amass a fortune of hundreds of millions of dollars, while millions of men and women who work all the days of their lives secure barely enough for a wretched existence."[21]

Some factions of socialist thought believed that Marx had provided scientific proof that a movement toward a socialist society and away from capitalism was inevitable. Others believed more direct means of reform or revolt were required. These divisions undermined efforts at compromise among the several factions of the movement.[22]

One vision did manage to bring together various forces in the socialist movement—a vision to unite workers from all industries, both skilled and unskilled, around a central labor organization in contrast to the conservative American Federation of Labor, which organized skilled workers into hundreds of individualized craft unions. Socialist leaders believed that mass strikes would carry greater impact and eventually bring about systemic reform. A number of prominent socialists met in Chicago in 1905 to form a union for the common worker—the Industrial Workers of the World. Bill Hayward, who headed the Western Federation of Miners, opened the organization's founding convention with these words:

> We are here to confederate the workers of this country into a working class movement that shall have for its purpose the emancipation of the working class from the slave bondage of capitalism…The aims and objectives of this organization shall be to put the working class in possession of the economic power, the means of life, in control of the machinery of production and distribution, without regard to capitalist masters. The American Federation of Labor, which presumes to be the labor movement of this country…does not represent the working class.[23]

Eugene Debs ran for president as a Socialist five times and polled over 900,000 votes nationally in 1912 and 1920. Washington State gave the candidate some 40,000 votes in 1912, and Socialist candidates in the state captured city council offices in Everett, Edmonds, and Pasco as well as one state legislative seat. Party membership peaked in 1913 with some 3,335 members in more than two hundred locals.[24] Nationally, the party elected two U.S. Representatives, a number of state legislators, and more than one hundred mayors.[25]

Socialist voices against American involvement in the World War in 1917–18 provided fodder for those who sought to silence the movement; Debs' last campaign in 1920 was waged from a prison cell. Persecution followed socialists even after the war ended.[26] A *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* advertisement illustrated the sentiments of Northwest business owners in that era: "We must smash every un-American and anti-American organization in the land. We must put to death the leaders of this gigantic conspiracy of murder, pillage

and revolution. We must imprison for life all its aiders and abetters of native birth. We must deport all aliens."[27]

In the face of such opposition, socialist activity declined for a time. Yet there were those in mining communities of Washington State who resonated with the 1928 Socialist Party platform statement: "We stand now as always, in America and in all lands, for the collective ownership of natural resources and basic industries and their democratic management for the use and benefit of all instead of the private profit of the privileged few."[28]

The socialist movement can be credited with providing an organizational incubator for those envisioning labor reforms. In fact, many of the original goals of early socialist groups were absorbed into the programs of the New Deal. The movement also spawned more radical perspectives.

Industrial Workers of the World

One of the most radical of labor interests operating in Washington State in the early 1900s was the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the "Wobblies." Established in 1905, the IWW set as its goal to enlist working-class wage earners into a single large industrial union that, through a series of strikes, would bring a general strike among workers and force the downfall of capitalism.[29]

The IWW promoted a perspective that saw industry and government coming under the control of labor unions or federations. Some leaders advocated the use of violence and sabotage to achieve their objectives.[30]

Even though IWW members were allowed to hold membership in other unions, the movement received limited support among organized workers, never holding more than 5 percent of all trade union membership nationally.[31] The IWW gained little serious traction among miners in the Roslyn coal fields, but the group did produce a notable following in the early 1900s among nonunionized timber and dock workers.[32] The IWW established a union hall for a short time in Cle Elum, Washington, in 1917.[33]

Wobbly efforts in Spokane in 1909 to recruit lumbermen through street corner speeches prompted mass arrests and led to an organized free-speech demonstration. As soon as police would arrest one speaker, another would step in and continue speaking. Noted Wobbly organizer Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was among more than five hundred jailed during the demonstrations.[34] The free speech action in Spokane preceded numerous similar demonstrations around the country.[35]

Two other events, which came to be known as the Everett and Centralia Massacres, illustrated an intense distrust and hatred of IWW activity in the state. In 1916, more than forty Wobblies in Everett, Washington, were arrested and then handed over by police deputies to a group of vigilantes who beat them savagely. When Seattle IWW members heard of the beatings, they set out by boat for Everett, some two hundred and fifty strong, to rally support for their beaten members. Their boat was met by two hundred deputized Everett businessmen who opened fire on the IWW members, killing at least five and injuring scores more.[36]

Three years later, a group of American Legion members in Centralia, Washington, raided an IWW hall intent on destroying it, but were met by armed IWW members. In the ensuing melee, four Legionnaires were killed and another wounded. One of the alleged IWW shooters was later forcibly removed from jail by vigilantes and lynched.[37]

Between these two events, another devastating blow to IWW effectiveness came during the First World War. Numerous radical leaders voiced opposition to U.S. entry into the war, urging resistance to the draft and recognition of the Bolshevik government in Russia. Many interpreted those ideas as subversive threats. More than one hundred IWW leaders were convicted of sabotage and imprisoned, with sentences up to twenty years. With the loss of leadership, the organization foundered.[38]

In 1919, U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer ordered Socialists, Communists, and Wobblies who were not U.S. citizens to be deported to the Soviet Union as subversive aliens. Several additional IWW leaders in the state were captured and deported.[39]

Publicity from the massacres and deportations colored perceptions of the IWW for years to follow. Many saw the Centralia Massacre as

part of a planned IWW conspiracy.[40] In the post-war "Red Scare," the state passed a law in 1920 making it illegal to belong to the IWW, and state IWW leaders were forced to work in secret. Some joined forces with Communist labor efforts while others refused, thus splitting the movement further.[41]

Communism

On the heels of the IWW activist period, the work of the Communist Party formed another significant element of Northwest labor history. Communists shared concerns similar to the IWW over worker exploitation and oppression under capitalism. Communists believed that worker dissatisfaction would lead to increasing labor unrest, to numerous strikes, and eventually to cataclysmic nationwide revolt and the overthrow of the government. Following the collapse of the government, Communists envisioned workers establishing a workers' and farmers' government.[42]

Two Communist groups formed in the United States after the Russian revolution in 1917. One group attempted to take over the existing Socialist Party, but their attempts failed and they were expelled. The group then re-formed in September 1919, as the Communist Labor Party, and they attracted a following largely among native-born radicals. Another group formed as the Communist Party of America and attracted a significant following of foreign-born members.[43]

Members of the Communist parties in the early 1920s included former Wobblies. Historian Daeha Ko notes: "Indeed, the Communists hoped to replace the IWW as the militant voice of the Left and worked hard to recruit in the lumber camps and skid-roads where the IWW had been strong."[44]

The Communist Party worked to establish professional revolutionaries in communities, and these individuals dedicated their lives to teaching and promoting the Communist perspective, often at great risk of arrest and persecution, and often without financial support. The party organized into districts, with nuclei groups established among workers. Typical party work included running political campaigns, organizing demonstrations, circulating literature, and raising funds.[45] While the party attracted few members, the work of its professionals carried an impact felt in large and small communities around the state, including Roslyn.

In addition, the party spawned a number of organizations—sometimes labeled "fronts" by their detractors—that provided services such as legal assistance to striking or imprisoned protestors (International Labor Defense), youth education (Young Communist League), and relief of starvation in Russia. Typical of most Communist activity, these organizations were controlled directly by the party.[46]

The two Communist factions united in 1921, but their work began to attract the attention of local and state authorities. Party members were rounded up along with IWW members and other radicals following the Centralia Massacre, and some were arrested and deported. To limit exposure, the party called themselves "The Workers' Party." But much of their work had to move underground, and when they did organize public activities they faced constant scrutiny by state authorities.[47]

Seattle Mayor Frank Edwards voiced a sentiment felt among concerned citizens when he ordered the arrest of Communist leaders in Seattle in anticipation of possible violence during an Armistice Day parade:

> I will tolerate no inciting of riots, no demonstrations against our government, no raising of the red flag of anarchy or any other move to destroy the peace and tranquility of our citizens and to make a mockery of the rights of peaceful assembly and free speeches guaranteed by our constitution. These people do not attempt to avail themselves of the constitutional guarantees; they deride them, mock at them, use a pretense of privileges for wanton license of disorder. That we cannot tolerate—not in Seattle.[48]

Communists in the state continued to work, through the mid-1920s, to assert control over the Seattle Central Labor Council, an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Their attempts were rebuffed by AFL leaders who demanded that the Seattle group expel known Communists. The party fell into decline in the state in the late 1920s.[49]

In 1928, the Communist leadership turned to a different tactic to stir labor unrest. Instead of attempting to gain control of existing labor unions, the party's focus turned to building their own party-controlled unions and establishing unemployed councils.[50] The role of these councils became public demonstration and agitation for government relief.

Police in the state took a hard line on Communist activities, often arresting leaders whenever they held public meetings. Leaders were charged with vagrancy or criminal syndicalism and threatened with deportation.[51]

When it could, the party fanned the flames of unrest wherever it was occurring among workers by publicizing strikes in party newspapers, providing legal defense to strikers, and soliciting funds for striking families.[52]

Radicals in Roslyn

Labor tensions were a fact of life for Roslyn coal miners from the beginning of mining operations in the region, as they were for miners everywhere.

Roslyn's mines began operation in 1886. The Northern Pacific Coal Company operated the mines as a subsidiary of the Northern Pacific Railroad whose transcontinental lines ran through the area. Abraham Lincoln signed the railroad's charter in 1864, granting the company sections of land adjoining the rail line as an incentive to build a northern transcontinental line. The railway sold some sections, logged others, and mined coal to fuel its steam locomotives from mines in Montana and Washington.[53]

In the early 1880s, the railroads used Chinese workers to complete their transcontinental lines. The Northern Pacific alone imported some 15,000 Chinese laborers willing to take on the demanding and dangerous work.[54] As rail lines were completed, the Chinese sought other work in the region. Unemployed whites became angered at seeing Chinese workers taking jobs, and in 1882 the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, shutting down Chinese immigration for a decade.[55]

In September of 1885, white miners at the Newcastle mines east of Seattle set fire to the sleeping quarters of Chinese coworkers. A month later some three thousand Tacoma workers drove the Chinese from town. Seattle workers followed, forcing the territorial governor to declare martial law in the city.[56]

A growing industrial labor union, the Knights of Labor, started as a secret society in Philadelphia in 1869, but built a nationwide following among workers after a successful railroad strike in 1877.[57] By the mid-1880s, the Knights represented some 700,000 workers in a number of industries including coal mining, and was described as a "somewhat radical group of industrial unionists," increasingly active in Oregon, Idaho, and Washington.[58]

In the Northwest, the Knights of Labor fanned smoldering fears of a Chinese labor insurgency as a tactic to rally white miners.[59] Roslyn miners organized under the Knights of Labor banner shortly after mines opened there in 1886, but mine operators of the Northern Pacific Coal Company refused to recognize the union and threatened to fire workers who joined.[60]

As tensions simmered in mining camps throughout the region, the Knights of Labor called for a strike in Roslyn in August 1888, demanding an eight-hour day instead of company's required ten or more hours. The coal company refused to recognize the demands of the Knights of Labor and instead imported some three hundred black miners under armed guard to work the mines. The striking miners were forced to yield without a single concession from the coal company, and many strikers were not hired back.[61]

White miners were less than gracious to the black strike breakers. They were known to assign them the toughest mine jobs at the worst locations.[62] But black miners remained an active force in the Roslyn community, constituting 22 percent of the town's population in 1900.[63]

For more than a decade after the unsuccessful strike, the coal company refused to recognize a miners' union in Roslyn. The Northern Pacific Railroad went bankrupt in the economic panic of 1893, but was reorganized and continued operation. The Northwestern Improvement Company (NWI) purchased the Northern Pacific Coal Company in 1899 and managed coal, irrigation, and land investments

of the Northern Pacific Railroad for decades after.[64] The NWI, however, was no more inclined to recognize a coal miners' union than its predecessor.

The pathways that brought miners to the Roslyn fields, however, ran for some through the hard rock mines of Colorado and Idaho where a radical industrial union had formed in 1893. The Western Federation of Miners (WFM) took a hardline stand in labor negotiations, leading to notable violent clashes with mine operators.[65] At its 1901 convention, the union proclaimed that "complete revolution of social and economic conditions" was "the only salvation of the working classes."[66] Many considered the WFM the most militant labor organization in the country, and by 1903 the WFM had recruited some four hundred miners in the Roslyn fields.[67]

After the demise of the Knights of Labor movement in the early 1890s, a large number of miners gravitated toward another more moderate and growing miners' union, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). Recruiters of the UMWA began enlisting Roslyn miners in 1901, and within three years claimed a statewide membership of 3,000, nearly half of them from the Roslyn field. The NWI coal company came to the realization that a failure to recognize the stable and powerful UMWA might encourage miners to move into the ranks of the more radical Western Federation of Miners. So, to avoid further labor unrest, the NWI recognized the UMWA in a formal agreement on September 1, 1904.[68]

Under the leadership of John Mitchell, the UMWA remained committed to building a stable working environment that brought better wages and working conditions for miners.[69] Miners accepted a wage freeze and a no-strike clause during the World War.[70] But a postwar wage freeze prompted a period of upheaval for the UMWA and a change in leadership that would affect miners for generations to come.

UMWA and Communism

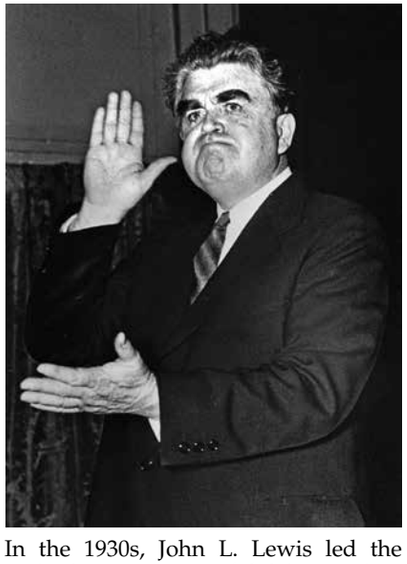
Communist labor organizers in the United States worked to "drill from within" to establish connections and elect sympathetic leaders within the United Mine Workers of America from 1919 to 1928.

The Trade Union Educational League, directed by William Z. Foster, promoted radical change by working from inside existing unions.[71] They attempted to educate workers about the benefits of collective action, and to push for the election of candidates sympathetic to their ideologies. Their attempts to influence the UMWA were met with determined resistance from the organization's leadership.[72]

John L. Lewis

John L. Lewis was perhaps the most dominant force in the labor movement of the 1920s and 1930s, and his leadership shaped the face of the coal industry from the time he assumed the presidency of the United Mine Workers of America in 1920 until his retirement in 1960.

The son of an Iowa coal miner, Lewis had ten years of formal schooling before entering the mines at age fifteen. He became involved in miners' causes in several coal regions before being elected president of the local UMWA in Panama, Illinois, in 1909. His work on behalf of mining safety and fair compensation caught the eye of national labor organizers, and he served as field representative for the American Federation of Labor for six years. After becoming a vice president of the UMWA in 1917, Lewis took control of the largest union in America, with nearly 500,000 members, in 1919 as acting president before being voted as president the following year.[73]



In the 1930s, John L. Lewis led the nation's most powerful labor union. His dynamic and defiant leadership gained the respect of miners across the United States but also earned him many enemies among those who disagreed with his tactics as head of the United Mine Workers of America. *Permission of United Mine Workers of America*

Lewis's work on behalf of coal miners brought many improvements to their lives—shorter working hours, safer

working conditions, better health and survivor benefits, the end of child labor. To millions of mining families, he was a saint. For years after he left the national scene, Roslyn families received their "John L." as they referred to their mining pension checks. A popular story in Roslyn suggested that three pictures hung prominently in many mining homes—Jesus, FDR, and John L. Lewis. By some accounts, Jesus' photo was not always at the top; such was the respect for Lewis.[74]

Lewis was not universally loved, however. He made as many enemies as friends during his tenure with the UMWA. And his enemies viewed him as something of an egomaniac, a pugnacious demagogue, a leader who wielded unchallenged power for his own ends.[75] Photographs of Lewis during his tenure as mining union leader depict a rugged fighter who could command the respect and fear of miners.

Dual Unionism

Confronting Lewis as he took the presidency of the UMWA was a concerted effort among socialist and communist organizers to elect sympathetic miners to key positions within the union. From 1919 to 1922, Lewis sought to cement his hold over the union and to throw out such dissenters. He often referred to those who disagreed with his perspective as "dual unionists," and he was given authority to revoke the charters of any local union chapter that refused to follow his authority. He used the dual unionist label often in reference to any effort to organize a second union to represent mining interests, and often solely as a derogatory epithet against anyone who questioned his authority.[76]

When miners in Illinois walked out to strike against the postwar wage freeze, Lewis revoked their local charters, and a UMWA publication labeled the strikers as dual unionists.[77] Leaders expelled from the UMWA frequently joined forces with Communist organizers attempting to win control of the union.[78]

Lewis's purges made it difficult for those holding radical views to organize a resistance to his leadership. By 1928, Communist organizers abandoned "drill from within" and adopted a dual union strategy. The Trade Union Unity League was established in 1928 as a Communist-controlled labor federation.[79] The mining element of that federation became the National Miners Union.[80] The union found support in the anthracite fields of Pennsylvania between 1928 and 1931,[81] but it failed to attract sufficient support as a national union and was abandoned in 1934.[82]

National Recovery

As the nation's economy worsened in the early 1930s, so did the plight of Roslyn miners. Unemployment brought a downturn in sales, and fewer goods being shipped by coal-powered railroads meant fewer days of work in the mines. The election of 1932 brought a spark of hope to the nation, and the new president's promise of a new deal energized miners with hope of better pay in the nation's economic recovery. Hopes were sparked further with congressional passage of a recovery bill that promised workers greater powers in negotiating fair wages.

The National Recovery Administration (NRA) was established in June 1933 as a major industrial component of the New Deal. The act that created the NRA set broad powers for representatives of business, labor, and government to negotiate fair prices, wages, and working hours in various industries. The goal of the act was to limit the fierce competitive industry practices that economists saw as driving down prices, fueling unemployment, and stimulating overproduction.[83]

The act also established protections for the rights of workers to join unions of their own choosing without discrimination from employers. Labor leaders took this language as a pro-union government endorsement, and they set out to enlist workers around the nation. Membership in the United Mine Workers of America rebounded from 100,000 members to nearly 400,000 during the summer following the bill's signing.[84]

NRA leaders set out to establish codes of fair competition in a number of key industries including coal, but, as in other industries, coal producers were reluctant to accept government interference in their private sector affairs and continued to drag their feet in the negotiations.

NRA chief Hugh S. Johnson, saw that code negotiations could take months or years to coordinate. Seeking swift action, Johnson introduced a blanket code setting basic wages of $12 to $15 per week for a thirty-five to forty-hour work week. The code was mailed to every business owner in the nation. Owners who pledged to abide by the code could post a sign in the window of their business, a blue eagle over the words, "We Do Our Part."[85]

The symbol of business participation in the National Recovery Administration was the NRA Blue Eagle. Business owners who complied with federal wage standards displayed the symbol in their windows, and shoppers were encouraged to shop only at those businesses. *Public domain*

In late June 1933, the NRA launched a massive thirty-day propaganda drive to rally public support and to pressure businesses to comply with the blanket code. The effort included mass rallies and parades, speeches, and press publicity, along with a presidential Fireside Chat on July 24.[86] Citizens were urged to shop only at businesses where the blue eagle was displayed.

Talks over a coal code dragged through the summer, forcing President Roosevelt to intercede by demanding that talks continue seven days a week until an agreement could be reached. At the president's urging, the coal for code was established in mid-September at the rate of $5.40 for an eight-hour day and a forty-hour week, despite the union demand for a six-hour day and thirty-six-hour week. Miners did earn the right to union dues check-off (which allowed miners to designate payroll deductions of union dues), an end to child labor, assurance of cash wages, and an end to the company store monopoly.[87]

The NRA was established as an emergency economic measure, set to expire in two years without further legislative action. But before the close of the second year, the U.S. Supreme Court had found the NRA unconstitutional, ruling unanimously that the act infringed on the separation of powers under the constitution.[88]

Historians have concluded that the NRA did little to create jobs or to stimulate economic recovery. The agency, while speaking to the interests of consumers, mostly aided larger corporations in building profits while raising prices for wage earners.[89]

In stimulating support for labor union membership, the legislation prompted an acceleration in the number of work stoppages; 1933 saw an uptick in strike days lost that was higher than any year since 1921.[90] The number of work stoppages doubled in one year, from 841 in 1932 to 1,695 in 1933.[91] The numbers only moved upward in 1934 when some 1,856 strikes involved more than 1,470,000 workers.[92]

The strike of the Western Miners Union in Roslyn was one of those actions.

The Northwestern Improvement Company store in Roslyn was the largest general store in the area, providing food, clothing, equipment, and furniture to families in this remote mining community. Mining families were encouraged to shop for all their necessities at the company store with expenses charged against the next paycheck. *Courtesy of Roslyn Public Library, Roslyn Heritage Collection, by permission of Frank Schuchman*

Chapter 1

Unhappy Days

Herman Swanson bounded up the eight stairs to his front porch and swung into his living room in an uncharacteristic hurry that mid-March evening. He'd been chatting with a neighbor down the street about the economy and the Roslyn Bank closing. The neighbor mentioned that the president was about to speak on the radio, and Herman raced back home to catch the broadcast.

He headed across his living room straight to the arched cherry radio cabinet on the oak table. As he clicked on the set to warm the tubes, he called out to his wife, Anna, to get the children and come hear Roosevelt.

Anna was just finishing putting dishes away in the kitchen. Daughters Hannah and Mildred were handling the washing and drying. The meal had been one of Anna's usual Sunday feasts, a four-pound roast with mashed potatoes and gravy. The kitchen cook stove was still warm, and the hot water tank next to it was full and ready for baths in the claw-footed tub.

Anna went to the back door and called out for Clarence, their son, who was up the wood-planked path at the coal shed filling a fresh bucket for the morning fire.

Herman adjusted the radio dial for a clearer signal. As a coal miner, he was more accustomed to brute physical force than to fine tuning a radio knob. His stout arms and legs attested to the physical strains of the work; his blackened knuckles to the persistence of coal tar dust despite abrasive cleansers.

As he settled into his rocker and pulled on his reading spectacles, he read a newspaper headline about the bank closings. Roosevelt had been sworn in as president just seven days ago, and he had ordered an immediate banking "holiday" as he chose to call it—a festive term, Herman thought, for shutting down the nation's financial system in the midst of the worst economic crisis the nation had ever faced.[1]

President Hoover had chosen to call the economic situation that erupted in the fall of 1929 a "depression," in hopes that it would be seen as a minor dip in the economic roadway. He had hoped to avoid the more loaded terms of "panic" or "crisis" used to describe previous economic downturns.[2] Four years later, however, Hoover's word choice had taken on the ominous overtones that would come to define the era—perhaps emotionally as well as economically—as the Great Depression.

Banks in Roslyn and the rest of Washington State had been closed for more than a week by the orders of Governor Clarence D. Martin. Nervous investors had been attempting to redeem gold-backed bank notes for gold. Banks in King County and throughout the country were unable to meet the demand and closed their doors. With banks closed, stores had resorted to accepting checks in payment for merchandise and issuing store checks in change.[3] The Ellensburg newspaper began issuing scrip to pay its employees.[4]

Herman's family trailed into the front room—Anna picked up the crochet needles by her rocker, Clarence sat cross-legged on the floor. The girls started a game of Chinese checkers. The announcer intoned:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States."

Then Roosevelt's cheerful yet penetrating voice filled the room, the first time an American president had spoken so personally and directly into the home of this or any American family:

"My friends: I want to talk for a few minutes with the people of the United States about banking—to talk with the comparatively few who understand the mechanics of banking, but more particularly with the overwhelming majority of you who use banks for the making of deposits and the drawing of checks."[5]

It was March 12, 1933. The nation's economy had been struggling for nearly four years, punctuated by the precipitous stock market crash of 1929. But the economy of Roslyn had been on a downhill slide for more than a decade. Virtually the only work in town was with the Northwestern Improvement Company (NWI). The company owned land and mineral rights in several states, including a large portion of a coal reserve in the Cascade Mountain range of central Washington State called the Roslyn-Cle Elum field.

The town of Roslyn had grown up around the site of the first coal mine to be opened by the railway company in 1886. Of nine major shafts the NWI eventually developed in the coalfield, seven were located in or near Roslyn, and much of the coal was processed there. Worker homes were built close to work sites, mostly wood framed structures from the abundant forests of the surrounding mountains. Most homes were not painted though, adding a sense of rough frontier impermanence to the town.

At the height of coal production, Roslyn's population peaked at nearly 4,000, and the town served as a commercial and cultural center for the other communities of the coal field. But as demand for coal slacked through the 1920s, the population slid as well, to a number that Hannah Swanson would remember long afterward—2,222, matching the town's elevation. In 1933, the NWI was operating the No. 5 mine between Roslyn and Cle Elum and was developing its last active mine, No. 9, about a mile west of town.

While Roslyn's population was declining in the early 1930s, the town of Cle Elum was on the upswing. Situated just three miles southeast of Roslyn, Cle Elum sat directly on the main east-west artery, Highway 10. Ninety miles west was the growing metropolis of Seattle. The highway to Seattle led over Snoqualmie Pass, at 3,022 feet in elevation the lowest mountain pass over the Cascade Range, just thirty miles west of Cle Elum. But the highway was not yet fully paved, and the gravel pass could be treacherous in wintertime.

Cle Elum had another geographic advantage. It sat directly on the lines of two transcontinental rail lines to Tacoma—the Northern Pacific Railway and the electrified Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific, which hubbed in neighboring South Cle Elum. In addition to its growth as a transportation center, Cle Elum was also the site of the NWI's No. 7 mine. With the 1930 census, Cle Elum's population count of 2,500 had officially surpassed that of Roslyn's.

The third community in the coalfield was Ronald with about three hundred residents. The site of the NWI's No. 3 mine, Ronald was located two miles northwest of Roslyn. Just beyond Ronald was the independent coal mining operation of Archie Patrick, employing another fifty miners. A number of mining families lived

in a community just outside Ronald called Jonesville. The communities of the coalfield stretched in a line along a two-lane highway spur that ran northwest from Cle Elum—three miles to Roslyn and another two miles to Ronald and Jonesville.

Heading out of Cle Elum along Highway 10 about twenty-five miles to the east was the center of government for the region, the Kittitas County seat of Ellensburg. Situated in a fertile valley at just over 1,500 feet in elevation, Ellensburg had developed a strong agricultural economy. In addition to its role as a center of government for the region, Ellensburg also housed a growing state college for teacher education.

The distance between citizens of the upper county of the Roslyn-Cle Elum coalfields and those of the lower county around Ellensburg was more than geographic. Educated civic leaders in Ellensburg tended to view the immigrant laborers of the upper county with a fair measure of disdain and distrust. Hard working miners of the upper county, set on protecting jobs and financial security for families, held the slick lawyers, judges, and policymakers of Ellensburg in similar disdain.

The Northern Pacific Railroad was a major consumer of the coal supplied by its mines, and the Roslyn-Cle Elum mines were no exception. Surplus coal was shipped to other parts of the state and to California to supply electric utilities, coke plants, smelters, and manufactured gas plants.[6] But most of the coal mined in the coal field was used to power steam locomotives along the rail lines that ran through Cle Elum.

Production of coal from the Roslyn-Cle Elum fields hit an all-time high of 1.8 million tons the year Herman brought his family to Roslyn in 1920, but the demand for coal began to step downward year by year until it fell to under a million tons in 1930. Over that decade, Roslyn lost six hundred residents, a full 20 percent of its population.[7] The number of coal workers in the state had fallen by one-half to 2,500 over the decade. In 1933, about 950 miners lived and worked in the Roslyn-Cle Elum field.[8]

As the president neared the end of his thirteen-minute address, Roosevelt encouraged his listeners, "I can assure you that it is safer to keep your money in a reopened bank than under the mattress."

Herman looked up at Anna, a wry twinkle in his eye. Just that morning he had discovered a stash of three silver dollars in the top drawer of her dresser. The Swansons had a small savings account at the Roslyn Bank, but they were living month to month for the most part, trying to keep ahead of the dreaded snake—the S-shaped symbol a miner would see on a paycheck when the balance at the company store exceeded wages.

They had moved into their two-story, wood-framed house on Northwest B Street four years earlier. It seemed to fit their family well. Two bedrooms upstairs, a larger room for the two girls, now ages 16 and 13, and a smaller sleeping room for their 15-year-old son. Downstairs a large master bedroom opened off the living room. A dining room housed the coal-burning heating stove. A single bathroom, the family's first indoor facility, had been added to the house, a half-step down from the dining room. A long kitchen had room for a table across from the cook stove. There was a pantry too, that held spices and jars of canned fruit. A washroom behind the kitchen had space for a washer tub with a wringer and lines for drying clothes, boots, and coats during the winter months.

Herman had bought the house for $600 and was keeping up on monthly installments to the bank. During good months there was money to spare. But there hadn't been many good months lately. Most weeks he would work two or three days. A horn at 8:00 p.m. each evening would signal which mines were working the next day. If he missed the horn, he would send one of the children down the block to check the signal lights indicating the coming day's work orders.

Then there were the strikes. Every year or two, it seemed, the union would call a strike until the next new contract could be negotiated. Sometimes the strikes were short, some went on for months. With no income during those strikes, many families harvested gardens as a primary source of food. Herman grew squash and carrots, potatoes and tomatoes every summer. And like many idle miners, he had ventured into the woods with his son to hunt deer and elk for food, and the family had known its share of fish dinners prepared from the day's catch on the Cle Elum River.

The events of 1933 signaled that change was in the wind for the nation's economy. Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal held the promise of jumpstarting a languishing economy by putting people to work.

A Democratic Congress was poised to move quickly to approve new work programs.

Herman reasoned that more people working meant more goods produced in factories and moved by rail, and therefore more coal would be required to power the trains. He subscribed to two newspapers and listened regularly to the radio news programs each evening. He knew that the demand for coal was steadily declining as the region's heating and energy needs were being met more and more by oil, natural gas, and electricity.

New hydroelectric dams along the Columbia River would supply electricity to the area in abundance, and another huge dam project, the Grand Coulee, was proposed 130 miles east of Roslyn on State Road No. 2.[9]

The Northern Pacific was delaying the introduction of diesel locomotives to its line because of its reserves of coal,[10] but the writing was on the wall, and it was not written in coal dust.

Like many people living up and down Northwest B Street in Roslyn in March of 1933, Herman's early hopes and dreams for his life had never included bending over underground to heave shovels full of coal onto coal cars. He was born 57 years earlier in southern Sweden, the second of six children in a farming family. When it became clear that there was not enough land for his brothers to share in farming, he decided to come to America in the 1890s. In America, he found work as a miner near Springfield, Illinois, before moving to Red Lodge, Montana, to work for the NWI.

Anna had come to America from Sweden just after the turn of the century, following her sister who had found work as a maid to a wealthy family in Minneapolis. On a trip to the Twin Cities, Herman met Anna, and after more visits and letters, Anna boarded a train for Billings, Montana, in 1915. Herman met her at the station, her wedding dress in hand, and they headed straight for a justice of the peace.

After four years and two children in Red Lodge, Herman developed a persistent cough. A doctor suggested the cough might be due to the high altitude. Herman had heard that work was available in Renton, Washington. The NWI had operations in both towns, so Herman went to work in Renton loading boxcars. A month later, a third baby joined the family.

But Herman wasn't happy with the work in Renton. He had invested much time and energy in learning the mining trade. Just a few years before, he had purchased half a dozen college-level textbooks from International Correspondence Schools on topics like coal drifts, blasting, surveying, hydraulics, and ventilation. Those texts were part of a mine safety instructional program established in 1890 by the editor of the Mining Herald*, Thomas J. Foster, who was compelled to help miners avoid the tragic accidents he had witnessed as a journalist in Pennsylvania. Herman was proud of his skill as a miner, and mining allowed him to better support his family. So he took the opportunity to get back into the work he loved. Loading his family on a train, he headed over the pass to Roslyn in April of 1920. Back in the mines, he worked with pick and shovel, breaking coal and loading it on cars.*

The days in the mine were grueling. Sometimes Herman would work on hands and knees following a narrow layer of coal, but in most places he could stand to his full six-foot height. Most of the mines were below the level of the groundwater and had to be continuously pumped to remain accessible. Mines left vacant by work

The Swanson family in the early 1920s (left to right): Herman, Mildred, Clarence, Hannah, and Anna. *Swanson family photo*

stoppages might take several weeks to pump out before they could be worked again.[11]

Air fans worked continuously to move fresh air to the miners. But bathrooms were remote corners of the mine, and when the air would become thick with coal dust and water dripped from cracks overhead, humidity mixed with sweat and dust to create a dense, suffocating odor. Men would come out of the mine after a day's work wearing a layer of black silt. Many would shed their mining clothes at the company-provided washhouse, shower off, and don street clothes before heading home. A sign in the washroom reminded miners of the requirement to wash their work clothes at least once per month.[12]

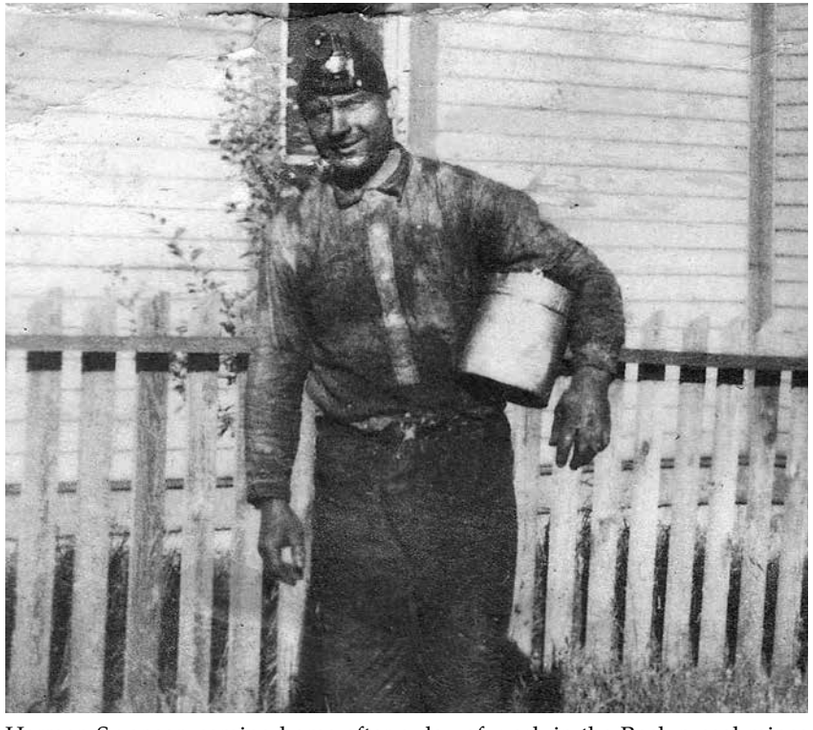
Herman preferred to bathe at home and save the $1 a month washroom fee, much to Anna's frustration. His girls had, a time or two, spotted a blackened figure heading up their front walk and had run screaming from the scary stranger—not recognizing their father after a day in the coal mine.

Some winter days, Herman would go to work before sunrise and come home after sunset, never seeing the light of day. On one such occasion, he had left his miner's lamp lit to illuminate his walk home through the snow. Forgetting to douse the lamp when he arrived at home, he headed straight to the bathroom and leaned over the sink to wash his hands, catching a bathroom curtain on fire.

Before the introduction of machinery, mining had required the miner to master skills such as drilling, blasting, setting support timbers, laying track, and loading coal. As the work progressed, foot by foot down along a wall of coal, the miner would place wooden braces to prevent loosened rock from dropping into the mine.[13]

One family legend held that Herman had once put his shoulder into supporting a ceiling timber in a mine shaft until the proper supporting brace could be driven into place. Those who knew him well could fully imagine the stocky Swede taking on a mountain.

Herman took pride in his mining knowledge. He joined the Masonic Lodge in Roslyn in the mid-1920s, both for the social connection and for the recognition of his skill as a miner. But by then mechanization was beginning to bring significant changes to Herman's workplace.



Herman Swanson coming home after a day of work in the Roslyn coal mines in the 1920s. Herman preferred to wear his mining clothes and gear home each night and bathe at home rather than using the mine washhouse. *Swanson family photograph*

Machine mining came later to Roslyn than to other mines in the country, as the steep grade and narrow turns in Roslyn's mines made it difficult to maneuver machines into place. But by the mid-1920s, mechanical coal cutting and drilling machines were introduced.

The promise of good wages had brought an array of immigrants to the community. As in other parts of the country, early immigrants to the Roslyn-Cle Elum fields were mostly skilled miners from England and northern Europe. But as domestic demand for coal continued to grow, unskilled workers joined the ranks of the mining force, coming in increasing numbers from eastern Europe and Italy. Experienced miners became foremen and held the best jobs, while new and unskilled miners took the worst jobs in the mine.

A 1930 census reveals that about one in five Kittitas County residents were born outside the United States. Three groups of immigrants were nearly equally represented: eastern European (Slavic, Croatian), Italian, and English (and Scottish) with around six hundred in each group. Immigrants from northern Europe numbered around eight hundred (mostly from Sweden, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Denmark, Norway, and Poland). Approximately two hundred black residents were listed.[14]

While the communities around the coalfields of Roslyn represented a wide diversity of background and culture, they did not naturally become a melting pot. Ethnic groups clustered together, joined by common languages, religious beliefs, and cultural practices. Immigrants from eastern and southern Europe were highly concentrated in the communities of Roslyn and Ronald. A number of fraternal organizations arose to provide entertainment, social opportunities, and—when a miner was killed—death benefits to families.[15]

Strikes and the threat of strikes were a constant part of life for miners. Many Roslyn miners believed in the union as their best chance for better wages and conditions. In 1922 they joined with other miners around the nation in a UMWA-led strike for a six-hour workday. Not a single miner worked between April and early August of that year. In return, the miners were handed a wage cut with no concessions on hours.

Coal prices and miners' wages declined through the 1920s and early 1930s. Roslyn miners were paid good wages, but the cost of living in the Northwest was high. Some miners began to wonder aloud just how well their interests were being represented in UMWA wage negotiations.

In 1932 miners were asked to take yet another cut in pay—down 20 percent to $5.40 per day.[16] When the Roslyn miners voted on the contract, 476 voted against, 409 voted for the agreement, and 73½ votes were not cast. Thinking they had defeated the vote on the pay cut, the men were informed that a majority of the working membership must vote against the agreement for it to fail, and since 482½ miners had not voted "against" the contract, it was declared valid.[17]

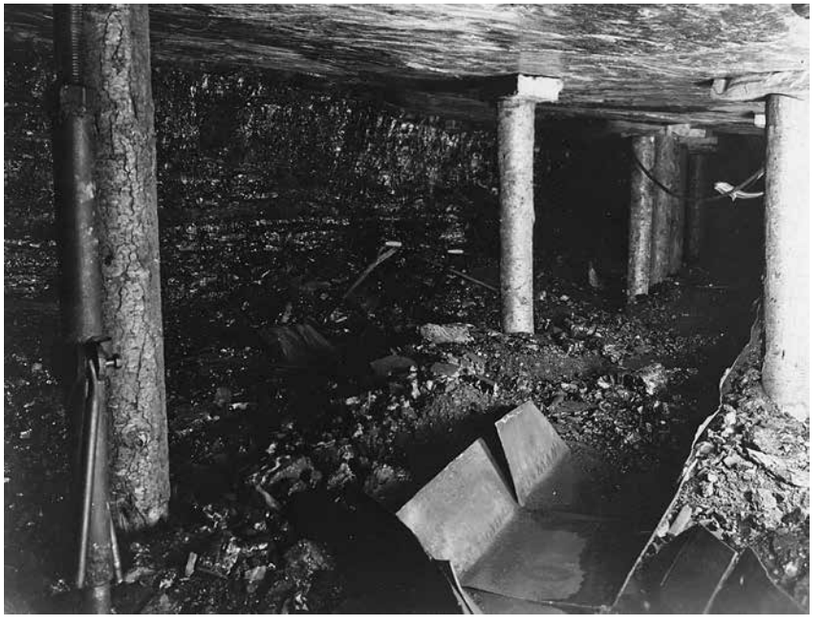
After the vote, frustration began to churn, but most miners reasoned that some work was better than none at all. The men knew that coal operators in the East were pushing union miners out and hiring nonunion workers.[18]

Miners in Roslyn began to seriously consider sharing the available work by instituting six-hour shifts. The six-hour workday had been on the United Mine Workers agenda through the 1920s and early 1930s. The original impetus for the six-hour day had been postwar mechanization that had taken tasks away from the workers. In order to keep more miners working, the UMWA had proposed to Congress a shorter work week. As the argument developed through the 1920s, the humane treatment of workers also became an issue in the physically demanding and risky environment of the mines.

Miners in the Roslyn field, like those elsewhere, worked an eight-hour day, but the clock started when the men arrived at the rock face. Dressing, preparing lights and equipment, and traveling into the mine shaft were all done on the miners' time. Some mine trips could take nearly an hour. At the end of eight hours at the rock face, the miners would begin the reverse trip out of the mines, stowing equipment, and cleaning up. Miners might easily spend ten or more hours at the workplace. To them, a six-hour day at the rock face seemed a reasonable expectation.

With more workers losing jobs in the early 1930s, the emphasis shifted back to employing more miners by sharing work hours. The 1932 United Mine Workers convention passed a resolution calling on Congress to enact a six-hour day and thirty-hour week to put thousands more miners to work.[19]

Alabama Senator Hugo S. Black—later a Supreme Court justice—proposed an even broader application of the six-hour day nationwide, and his plan was detailed in the *United Mine Workers Journal*.[20] Black's six-hour bill was passed by the U.S. Senate in April 1933 but never came to a vote in the House of Representatives, as the new president's plans for a broader labor bill, what was to become the National Industrial Recovery Act, consumed the attention of Congress in that spring of 1933.[21]



A typical workplace for a coal miner inside Roslyn's No. 5 mine. Miners in 1932 were completing a cross cut between entries in this mine when a coal-cutting machine hit a pocket of gas and sparked a fire. Five miners eventually died from their burns. *Courtesy of Roslyn Public Library, Roslyn Heritage Collection, by permission of Frank Schuchman*

Chapter 2

Spring of Discontent

"Anna!" Herman called out as he burst through the back door. "Anna, you won't believe it." He spoke with a thick Swedish accent, but he almost always spoke English. He wanted his children to have the advantage of speaking the language well.

"The governor has signed it. It's a state law now in Washington. They can't use those electric coal cutting machines in the mines anymore!" It was Monday evening, March 20, 1933, and Herman was just returning from a meeting of the miners at the Roslyn union hall.

"Herman, take it easy," she said, taking his coat. "You'll have another spell."

Anna's admonition frustrated Herman. He hated to be reminded of his need to stay calm, but he knew he should heed the advice. An accident ten years earlier left lasting effects for the burly miner. For all the dangers Herman encountered in the mines, this accident had happened in his own home. It had been just a simple errand to the root cellar to gather some potatoes for the evening dinner. But he had forgotten the low floor joist overhead. He smashed his head on the beam so violently that his glasses shattered. A shard of glass pushed into a nerve center just above his eye. The trauma threw him into an epileptic seizure, the first he had ever experienced.

Ever since that time, when he was jarred by an unexpected noise or became overly excited, he was more apt to suffer a recurrence of the seizures. His children grew up learning to be extra quiet when he was in the house and never to slam a door. The injury seemed not to affect his work, and the seizures were a rare occurrence.

Herman settled quietly into his favorite rocker near the window and pulled on his spectacles, whispering again to himself, "I can't believe it. Andy Hunter and those guys really pulled it off."

Andrew Hunter had moved to Roslyn in 1922 to work as a miner. His house was in a small cluster of homes near the No. 5 mine