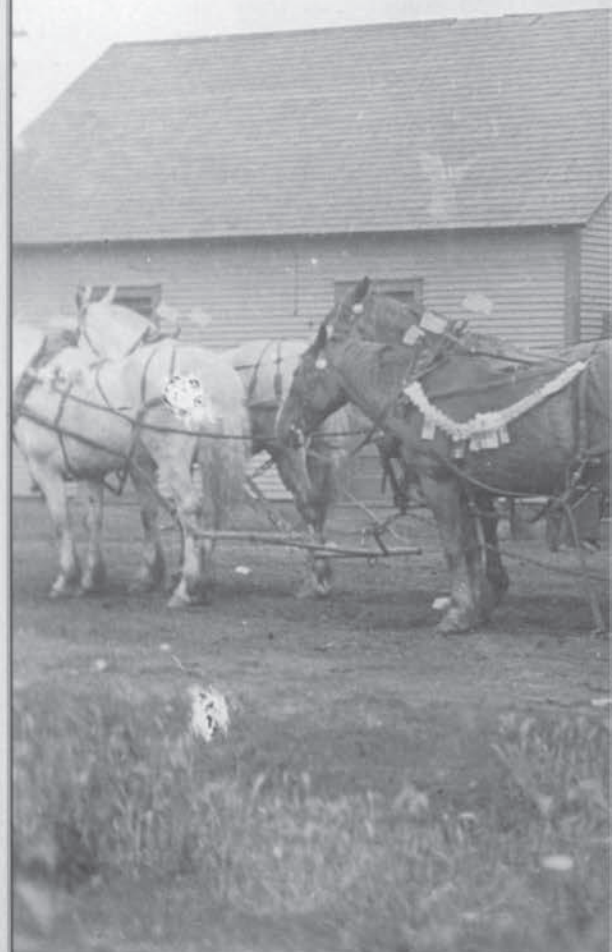


**I**N 1919 RED LODGE BUSINESSMEN set to work mining the town's only public monument. In this little coal town, that monument was, appropriately enough, a huge chunk of bituminous coal—6,600 pounds worth dug out of the extensive mine tunnels that honeycombed the earth beneath the town's straight, sidewalked streets. For over six years the giant monument had stood proudly on Red Lodge's main street, a symbol not only of the town's thriving coal industry but also of the power wielded by its mostly immigrant workers and their prosperous and decidedly foreign communities.<sup>1</sup>

In the bitterly cold winter of 1919, though, when the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) went on strike, Red Lodge merchants started hacking off nuggets from that monument to heat their homes and businesses.<sup>2</sup> Bit by bit, as the strike went on, the hunk of coal disappeared. Like that block of coal—quickly chopped up and carted away—mining itself would soon vanish from Red Lodge, in large part due to the wartime labor tensions that forced residents to negotiate their immigrant identities in new, often defensive ways and finally snapped the town's comfortable relationship between coal workers and coal operators. When the Red Lodge mines shut down in the 1920s and 1930s, no official public monument remained to commemorate the coal industry and the cohesive and often insular ethnic communities that shaped the town's early public identity.

Created in 1887 by executives seeking a source of coal for the hungry engines of the Northern Pacific Railroad, Red Lodge entered the twentieth century as a town defined by coal mining and coal miners—"coal slack" and "foreigners" as one early entrepreneur put it. Coal, quite simply, dominated the town's early years. In 1900, 65 percent of the adult males in this town of 2,152 people worked in the mines. In September 1905 alone, the Northwestern Improvement Company (NWIC), a subsidiary of the Northern Pacific, pumped \$50,000 in wages into the town as its 600 employees put out about two thousand tons of coal a day from its two Red Lodge operations, the East Side and West Side mines. United almost from the beginning under various labor unions, these miners forged a strong workers' community in Red Lodge, marked physically by the impressive three-story Labor Temple standing watch over the north entrance to town.<sup>3</sup>

Created southwest of Billings, Montana, in 1887 to produce coal for the Northern Pacific Railroad, Red Lodge entered the twentieth century as a town defined by coal mining and coal miners. Indeed, the two massive chunks of coal taken from the Northwestern Improvement Company's Sunset Mine that were paraded through town on July 4, 1913, on the float pictured at right embodied Red Lodge's *raison d'être*. Awarded first prize for best exhibit, the impressive coal monument stood for six years on Red Lodge's main street as a silent testament to the "magnitude of the city's chief industry" (*Red Lodge Picket-Journal*, December 17, 1919).





Many of these union workers were foreigners. Wandering along the streets of Red Lodge in the early 1900s, one could not help but notice the diversity of the town's immigrant population. Slovenians, Finns, Italians, Russians, Austrians, Germans, Norwegians, Croats, and Greeks all intermingled under the towering stacks of the NWIC mining works. By 1910 almost three-quarters of the town's residents were immigrants or the children of immigrants—

many of whom spoke little, if any, English.<sup>4</sup> The discordant hum of conversations in various languages, shop signs in Finnish and Italian, and the powerful smell of garlic coming from some residences (and residents) gave the town a decidedly international flavor. These foreign workers created their own distinctive neighborhoods—Finn Town and Little Italy—even as they integrated themselves into the unionized workforce at the town's two mines.

## 'NOTHING UP HERE BUT FOREIGNERS AND COAL SLACK' WORLD WAR I AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF RED LODGE







MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

By 1910 three-quarters of Red Lodge's population were immigrants or the children of immigrants who settled in their own distinctive neighborhoods and often spoke little English. When the United States went to war in 1917, many of them came under attack for not being "100% Americans." Above, Red Lodge residents demonstrate their patriotism, turning out in May 1917 to bid farewell to the first group of local volunteers to leave for the war.

**I**n April 1917 America was suddenly a nation at war. To rally public opinion in favor of a foreign conflict that seemed only peripherally important to American interests, the government waged a virulent propaganda campaign that defined the war in black-and-white terms: good versus evil, democracy versus tyranny, America versus all that was bad in the world. Since any red-blooded, "true" American would of course support a war to save democracy, anyone who could oppose the war effort, it followed, could not be a "real" American.

World War I propaganda revolved around the concept of "100% Americanism"—that in order to win a victory over tyranny, all Americans had to give total support to the government's efforts. "100% Americans" did not speak foreign languages (our enemies spoke foreign languages,

after all); they did not go on strike (that would hurt the war effort); and they did not criticize anything the government (national, state, or local) did in time of war. Basically, "100% Americanism" meant acting like middle-class, white capitalists. Or, it meant not being a foreigner or union supporter, which, of course, were the most prominent public identities in Red Lodge at the time. Red Lodge's shifting public identity in the late 1910s and 1920s had everything to do with changing public attitudes toward "Americanism" in these turbulent years.

Only in the troublesome years immediately following the Panic of 1893 had Red Lodge residents previously wielded the rhetoric of Americanism as a weapon. In that case entrepreneurs used "American" to attack foreigners who fled the town during its economic downturn or,

1. Parades folder, Photograph Collection, Carbon County Historical Society Collections, Red Lodge, Montana (hereafter CCHS); *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket-Journal*, December 17, 1919.

2. *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket-Journal*, December 17, 1919.

3. Erika A. Kuhlman, "From Farmland to Coalvillage: Red Lodge's Finnish Immigrants, 1890-1922" (master's thesis, University of Montana, 1987), 21-22; *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, September 21, 1905.

4. United States Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Population*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C., 1913), 1160; Kuhlman, "From Farmland to Coalvillage," 25-26.

5. *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, March 24, 1894. See also *ibid.*, April 9, 1892. The hostility toward immigrants who returned to Europe after earning money in the United States was widespread. See Neil Larry Shumsky, "'Let No Man Stop to Plunder!' American Hostility to Return Migration, 1890-1924," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 11 (Winter 1992), 56-75.

6. *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, March 10, 1894.

7. On unions using patriotic symbolism in parades, see *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, September 7, 1900; *Carbon County (Mont.) Republican*, September 6, 1907. For Irish and Italian marching in Fourth of July parades, see *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, July 11, 1896; and *Carbon County (Mont.) Republican*, July 5, 1907. On Budas, see *Carbon County (Mont.) Republican*, October 26, 1906.

8. This kind of "frivolous" celebration of the Fourth of July was quite popular in the early twentieth century. See Raymond W. Smilor, "Creating a National Festival: The Campaign for a Safe and Sane Fourth, 1903-1916," *Journal of American Culture*, 2 (Winter 1980), 611-22; Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York, 1993), 105, 256; and John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J., 1992), 83-86.

9. See, for example, *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, May 23, 1896, July 3, 1897; *Carbon County (Mont.) Gazette*, June 8, 1905; *Carbon County (Mont.) Republican*, May 10, 1907.



even worse, sent what earnings the town still provided back to the Old Country rather than spending them in Red Lodge. The language employed was typical of that coming from other towns and cities grouching about whom to blame for the tough times. Some places blamed African Americans, others attacked Chinese or Japanese immigrants. In Red Lodge boosters targeted eastern European workers. "These people," the editor of the *Red Lodge Picket* argued in 1894, "are just precisely the kind that have brought poverty and distress to the workmen of this country and until congress passes a law to prohibit them from landing here we can expect to see American workmen remain in their present condition."<sup>5</sup>

Local merchants became enraged, for example, at news that the Finnish community was forming a cooperative mercantile business that would take business away from established downtown stores. The *Red Lodge Picket* fumed against the Finlanders who received American wages and yet tried to confine their trade within their own nationality group. "This is not just," the editor stated flatly, "or in accordance with the principles of this government." He urged the mining company to deny the Finns employment if they persisted in this heinous pursuit because "There are plenty of competent men who would be glad to get employment and who have the welfare of this country at heart and hold our laws and customs inviolable."<sup>6</sup> Americanism, at least according to the *Red Lodge Picket*, meant supporting the interests of the town's business class. The language of Americanism, thus, divided the town between good and bad, investor and transient, American and foreigner.

After good times returned, however, local demonstrations of Americanism tended to be inclusive rather than exclusive. The newspapers no longer used "American" to attack immigrant workers. Indeed, town and union leaders began to use Americanism to draw the community together. Workers, for example, draped their various

Labor Day celebrations in the Stars and Stripes to emphasize the Americanness of labor organizations. Invariably Italian and Irish immigrants waved dozens of American flags as they marched en masse in main street parades. And Swedish-born Albert Budas, running for county treasurer in 1906, sold himself as the epitome of the American dream—a poor immigrant boy who rose to prominence nurtured by the freedom and capitalism of the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Significantly, though, this kind of Americanism did not seem to exert much pressure on residents to become unreserved patriots. Unlike the Italians and Irish, for instance, most Finns and Slovenians chose not to demonstrate American patriotism at public celebrations, and their choice not to participate drew little overt criticism. Patriotism, while voiced and celebrated publicly, had not yet taken on the sharp edge of passionate conviction that mine owners and businessmen would use to terrorize anybody who questioned their business practices during the war. Even in the town's most prominent public expression of Americanism—the annual Fourth of July celebration—patriotism took a back seat to an overriding emphasis on boosterism and fun. Red Lodge, like many working-class towns across the nation, used this holiday less for a solemn commemoration of grand national ideals than as a chance to indulge in parades, baseball games, fireworks, and fun field sports.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, often the day seemed more about the economics of selling the town than about Americanism. Organizers simply wanted to create an enjoyable event that would prove that Red Lodge was a "live" town, a

Both photographs Carbon County's Peaks to Plains Museum, Red Lodge, Montana



Red Lodge's immigrant communities learned to temper their "foreignness" by engaging in rituals of patriotism such as buying war bonds and participating in Liberty Loan drives and war rallies. At left, the Finnish ladies' band poses in 1907, and above, residents of Little Italy gather in their neighborhood on the northern fringe of Red Lodge.



World War I propaganda revolved around the concept of “100% Americanism,” and ostentatiously buying war bonds was an important component of being a patriot, as were speaking positively about the war, working for the Red Cross, and laboring diligently to provide the nation with essential products. As participants in these activities, Red Lodge’s immigrants were less targeted by zealots than were labor radicals and those who openly criticized the war.



Detail, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

place on the move.<sup>9</sup> (A more sanctimonious generation in 1919 dismissed these early celebrations as too commercial, held simply to “pry the visitors loose from the largest amount of loose change.”)<sup>10</sup> Patriotism, in the prewar years, remained a relatively minor consideration in the town’s public life.

World War I dramatically altered this rather lax commitment to patriotism and Americanism in the public sphere. With the nation plunged into war, Red Lodge residents quickly adopted a much more aggressive public definition of Americanness that did not allow groups like the Finns to “sit out” patriotic language and displays. Like the rest of the nation, local residents embraced an Americanism that demanded public conformity to an idealized version of “American.” This conformity pivoted around public performances: always speaking positively about the war, ostentatiously buying war bonds, harassing those who did not ostentatiously buy war bonds, working for the Red Cross, and laboring diligently to provide the wartime nation with essential products. Not engaging in these rituals of patriotism was tantamount to being a traitor, “un-American.”<sup>11</sup>

10. *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket-Journal*, April 23, 1919.

11. The Montana Seditious Act of 1918 actually made it a crime to speak against the war or conscription; Congress modeled the federal Seditious Law on this Montana act. K. Ross Toole, *Twentieth-Century Montana: A State of Extremes* (Norman, 1972), 139-56. In Red Lodge there were at least three court cases involving charges of sedition or “criminal syndicalism” against men who had allegedly spoken against the war. Ben Kahn, a salesman from Billings, was sentenced to up to twenty years in jail for stating that “This is a rich man’s war and we have no business in it.” Kahn also claimed that the United States was warned about the *Lusitania* carrying munitions. *State of Montana v. Ben Kahn* (1918), no. 457, Criminal Records, Carbon County District Court, Red Lodge, Montana (hereafter Criminal Records, CCDC). See also *State of Montana v. Nels Lahti* (1918), no. 463, Criminal Records, CCDC; and *State of Montana v. Frank B. Rakstis* (1918), no. 475, *ibid.* On conformity to “100% Americanism,” see Hans Vought, “Division and Reunion:

Ethnicity, interestingly, had little to do with this kind of Americanism, whose zealots targeted labor radicals and those critical of the war more than they harassed those with foreign accents. In fact, for many local immigrants, the war with its emphasis on making everyone good Americans actually made possible greater inclusion in nonimmigrant community affairs. As John Higham has pointed out in his classic study of American nativism, *Strangers in the Land*, to “a remarkable degree the psychic climate of war gave the average alien not only protection but also a sense of participation and belonging.”<sup>12</sup>

In the interest of community participation, Red Lodge civic leaders began for the first time to invite members of immigrant groups to participate in community activities, making them part of events like Liberty Loan drives and patriotic rallies. Foreign-born entrepreneur Albert Budas, for one, took charge of the county’s Liberty Loan program, and at least three dozen Finnish businessmen and workers and a sizeable number of other immigrants signed onto the new Liberty Committee formed in the fall of 1917 to ferret out disloyal townspeople.<sup>13</sup> Some immigrant groups also seized the wartime opportunity to make their own community-wide statements in favor of

Woodrow Wilson, Immigration, and the Myth of American Unity,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 13 (Spring 1994), 24-26; and Lawrence H. Fuchs, *American Kaleidoscope: Race, Ethnicity, and the Civic Culture* (Middletown, Conn., 1990), 57-61.

12. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1955), 215. For general works on wartime hysteria directed toward immigrants and radicals, see *ibid.*; and Ronald Schaffer, *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State* (New York, 1991), 13-30.

13. *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, April 11, 1918. A list of the Liberty Committee members is in the papers of H. A. Simmons, former district attorney for Red Lodge. This list includes Finnish names like Emil Hekkola, M. T. Koski, and Nestor Makela. Folder 15, box 5, Manuscript Collection 204, H. A. Simmons Collection, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena (hereafter MHS).



Ultranationalists terrorized anyone who opposed the war effort, focusing particularly on Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) members who dared to publicly disagree with American involvement in the conflict. In Butte vigilantes lynched IWW organizer Frank Little (below) on August 1, 1917, and in Red Lodge the local Liberty Committee tried to drive active IWW members, or Wobblies, out of town.

America. Serbian Americans, for example, staged several dramatic parades and rallies to display publicly their support for the American war effort; and an Italian fraternity publicly expelled a member for criticizing the war, publishing its justification in *English* in the local newspaper.<sup>14</sup>

Significantly, though, for much of 1917, Finnish-American residents of Red Lodge as a group made little effort to announce publicly their Americanness. Their lack of effort stands out not only because Finns were the largest immigrant population in the city but also because of the contrast with Serbians and Italians, two other sizeable ethnic groups who made very prominent assertions of American loyalty as soon as the United States joined the war. Individually, Finnish Americans helped out the Liberty Loan drives or joined other patriots in the Liberty Committee, but as a group the Finns did not really alter their prewar apathy toward public displays of Americanism.

Of course, the Finnish homeland, unlike Italy and Serbia, was not clearly an American ally. Russia, one of the Allied Powers, had, after all, occupied Finland by force; Finns hated the czar more than they disliked the kaiser and could not really be expected to embrace the war as joyously as did the local Serbs (who hoped for an independent Serbia) or Italians (anxious to prove Italian manhood on the battlefield).<sup>15</sup> So, Finns made no public group effort to announce local Finnish-American support for the war. There simply did not seem to be a need to do so in the early days of the conflict when the campaign for



Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor



From *Solidarity*, August 4, 1917. MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

public Americanism appeared fairly benign. By the end of 1917, though, the actions of the Liberty Committee would change all that.

Red Lodge's Liberty Committee, formed in late 1917, represented the most concerted local attempt to impose a very public "100% Americanism" on the community. This group, like most of the Americanism effort in Red Lodge, emulated a larger, national movement. From Maine to California

such organizations bullied or terrorized anyone who seemed to threaten the war effort, focusing particularly on Socialist and Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) "agitators" who actually dared to disagree publicly with America's involvement in the conflict.<sup>16</sup> In Montana almost every county and major city had its own Liberty Committee to take care of these dangerous, antiwar radicals.

Some of their efforts, as noted by historian K. Ross Toole, were laughable. Committees, for example, investigated numerous reports of black German dirigibles floating over the mountains of western Montana spying, apparently, on the state's sheep and cattle herds. Other groups denounced as German agents any residents who failed to contribute to Liberty Loan drives or pressed charges against those who conducted church services in

cans made a point of emphasizing the masculinity of their soldiers; for a good example of this pride in combat, see the testimony in *Steve Roman v. Societa Italiana*.

16. For a discussion of World War I in Montana, one of the best sources is Toole, *Twentieth-Century Montana*, 139-93. According to Toole, almost every small town in the state had Liberty Committees, which became "the local arbiters of patriotism." *Ibid.*, 140. Other states also organized local and statewide patriotic organizers created to ferret out opponents of war. Schaffer, *America in the Great War*, 17-23.

14. For the Serbians, see *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, April 13, 20, 27, June 8, July 6, 1917. On the Italians, see *ibid.*, November 16, 1917; and *Steve Roman v. Societa Italiana E Fratellanzadi Mutuo Soccorso, a Corporation* (1918), Criminal Records, CCDC.

15. P. George Hummasti, "World War I and the Finns of Astoria, Oregon: The Effects of the War on an Immigrant Community," *International Migration Review*, 11 (Fall 1977), 340-41. For the Serbians, see *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, April 13, 20, 27, 1917. Local Italian Ameri-



German. Ridiculous as some of these allegations were, these groups and other, less formal vigilante-type organizations, had darker sides that rightfully frightened local residents who might be suspected of any kind of un-American wrongdoing. In Butte, for example, anonymous vigilantes seized IWW agitator Frank Little from his boardinghouse, tied him to a car, hauled him far and fast enough to take off his kneecaps, and then summarily hanged him from a bridge, leaving a message warning other radicals of similar treatment.<sup>17</sup> “100% Americanism” was serious, even violent, business.

In Red Lodge, as in Butte and much of the rest of America, ultranationalism translated largely into attacks on radicals, particularly members of the IWW (nicknamed “Wobblies”), rather than on members of specific immigrant groups. Indeed, the Red Lodge Liberty Committee took pains to assure the community that its efforts were not directed against immigrants. Their work, according to one spokesman, was not against “any particular race. The action of the committee will be directed against any man of whatever race or creed who is reported or thought to be a German sympathizer.”<sup>18</sup>

Wobblies, since they spoke out most stridently against the war, were clearly “German sympathizers” who needed to be crushed and driven out of Red Lodge. Committed to a vision of working-class brotherhood, these Wobblies insisted that the war was simply a capitalist ruse, nothing, certainly, that need draw workers into a death struggle with each other. Driven by their faith in world socialism, Red Lodge Wobblies, most of them Finnish Americans, publicly defied the demands of wartime Americanism. They handed out brochures on street corners denouncing the war and protesting the arrest of national IWW leaders; they even ventured onto the main streets of smaller towns in the county spreading their message against conscription.<sup>19</sup>

**A**lthough their numbers in Red Lodge were never great—perhaps a few dozen active IWW members lived in Red Lodge at any one time—the Wobblies’ public stance infuriated patriotic Liberty Committee members, particularly retired newspaper publisher Walter Alderson and former sheriff Fred Potter (who wildly estimated the number of local Wobblies at over nine hundred, or about 75 percent of the local mine

workforce). Alderson and Potter, who assumed the leadership of the local committee, focused the group’s efforts specifically against these agitators, vowing to drive them all from Red Lodge.<sup>20</sup> Their actions, though, had much wider implications for the town and its residents.

Determined to quash the public presence of the IWW in Red Lodge, the Liberty Committee went to work in October 1917, striking a series of blows against the town’s “German sympathizers.” Significantly, in spite of early assurances that ethnicity was not an issue, the committee almost invariably targeted Finnish-born workers for “questioning” and punishment. The group’s actions started out simply enough; the Liberty Committee ordered a public boycott of the Finnish-owned Workers’ Hall, reported to be the headquarters of the town’s IWW faction. But the committee’s activities quickly moved beyond such benign actions. Perhaps imitating the terror tactics of the Butte vigilantes, the Red Lodge Liberty Committee started to verbally then physically threaten local Finnish Americans. According to at least one Wobbly report, members rounded up suspected IWW leaders one at a time, subjecting them to threats and abuse until they confessed their allegiance to the One Big Union and gave up the name of at least one other member of the organization. When Jalmar Winturri refused to give in under verbal threats, a selected committee took him to the basement of the Elks Lodge where they strung a rope around his neck and hauled him up three times before he finally admitted that he was a Wobbly and provided names of other members. Three of the men so examined by the Liberty Committee—Winturri, Jack Ollila, and Jacob Lindquist—fled Red Lodge within the week; all three, according to IWW reports, were family men who had lived in Red Lodge for ten to fifteen years.<sup>21</sup> Their forced confessions initiated a new round of Liberty Committee harassment of supposed IWW radicals with tragic consequences to one family and significant repercussions for the town’s immigrant populations.

Angered by a continuing Wobbly presence in the town, the Liberty Committee gathered up a new group of suspected subversives in late November 1917, among them Finnish-born miner Emile Koski. After a night of threats and questioning, Koski, who had lived in Red Lodge for fifteen years, returned home to his wife and two children, shaken and frightened and unsure what would happen to him next. Scared, defensive, and armed, Koski would not

17. Toole, *Twentieth-Century Montana*, 140-43, 148-54; Arnon Gutfield, “The Murder of Frank Little: Radical Labor Agitation in Butte, Montana, 1917,” in *Montana’s Past: Selected Essays*, ed. Michael P. Malone and Richard B. Roeder (Missoula, Mont., 1973), 370-90.

18. Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 215-18; *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, November 23, 1917.

19. When Nels Lahti, one of the town’s sidewalk orators, was arrested for criminal syndicalism in 1918, he had a list of those pledging financial support for Wobblies imprisoned during the war; the list and all the

names on it were Finnish. In his trial and in Liberty Committee proclamations, Finns and Wobblies became publicly and prominently intertwined. *State v. Nels Lahti*.

20. In an investigation of the Liberty Committee’s accusations against the county draft board, the County Council of Defense concluded that the Liberty Committee “is an organization which was originally conceived through patriotic motives, but which has evidently deteriorated into a one or two man affair [led by Alderson and Potter] which is detrimental to the best interests of the Government and the community and



Violence against Wobblies in Red Lodge created a pervasive unease among the ethnic communities that lasted long after the war ended. The group at right, identified as Red Lodge's Croatian Orchestra, likely followed the advice Croatian-born Steve Blazina gave to his son: "Keep quiet."



answer the door when Liberty Committee men arrived at his house late on the evening of November 28. When committee members forced the door down, Koski drove them back by firing his shotgun into the ceiling. In the ensuing gun battle the intruders fired at least two weapons at the house. Kaisa Kreetta Jackson, who rented rooms from Koski, returned home late and walked into this scene. Koski, believing her to be one of his attackers, shot and killed her. Then, distraught over his act, the weeping Koski surrendered to authorities.<sup>22</sup>

Public reaction to the shooting was immediate and widespread with long-lasting ramifications for Red Lodge's public ethnic identity. Violence against suspected Wobblies spread fear among many residents, especially those in the working class and especially Finns. Overnight, immigrant residents readjusted how they and their children moved and acted within the town. Anyone, it seemed, could become the next victim of the crusade against radicals. Senia Kallio, whose Finnish-born parents ran one of the town's public saunas, recalled that the family quickly cleared everyone out of the bathhouse upon hearing the shots fired and "for a long time we couldn't go [out]. [T]he minute it got dark, my folks put the drapes down, the shades down." Parents were afraid to let their children talk to outsiders or even venture out of the house for fear of what the Liberty Committee might do next. Steve Blazina, a Croatian-born resident, told his son to just ignore any tormentors, to come straight home when he was taunted about being a "Hun" or a "Hunky." "Just don't say anything," Blazina instructed, "Keep quiet." Res-

idents remembered this sense of pervasive unease long after the war ended. For the first time these community members feared for their welfare, even their lives, *because* of their ethnic identities.<sup>23</sup>

The shooting finally shook the local Finnish-American community and other nationality groups into a new and long-lasting public stance on Americanism. Finnish-American leaders, especially, took decisive and immediate public action. They used local newspapers, town meetings, and the court system to assert themselves as patriotic, loyal American citizens. Instead of condemning the actions of the vigilance group, local Finns strove to meet the committee's loyalty requirements, to prove to everyone that Finns were real patriots. In public, at least, the Finns did all they could to create themselves as "100% Americans." Finnish community leaders readily and publicly announced their cooperation with the Liberty Committee. "We have no other purpose," stated one prominent Finn, "than that of the Liberty Committee, to find out who is and who is not loyal to our country, and to pledge the rest in an obligation that is binding." Finns planned a giant rally to "demonstrate by words and deeds our fidelity to the government in its present important work of war, and its ultimate aim of peace." Organizers put a full-

should no longer exist." Council of Defense, "Report of Proceeding had at Meeting of Council of Defense, Carbon County, State of Montana, 1918," folder 1, box 6, Record Series 19, Council of Defense Records, MHS (hereafter RS 19). On the number of Wobblies in Red Lodge, miner Ollie Anderson insisted that there was "very little" IWW activity in the town, although "there was a lot of them that got blamed for that, you know, during the war years." Ollie Anderson oral history, p. 2., OH 302, MHS.

21. *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, December 14, 1917.

22. Koski's killing of Jackson was ruled accidental. *Ibid.*, December 21, 1917.

23. Senia Kallio oral history, pp. 18-20, OH 357, MHS; Edward Blazina oral history, pp. 23-24, OH 1485, MHS.

24. *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, December 21, 1917; *Solomen Homi et al. v. Workers Building Association et al.* (1918), Criminal Records, CCDC.





Carbon County's Peaks to Plains Museum, Red Lodge, Montana

Fear compelled Red Lodge's ethnic groups to publicly voice their allegiance to the United States and participate in activities to reinforce and prove their loyalty, but they tended to do so within their own ethnic communities. One such group was the Finnish auxiliary of the Carbon County Red Cross pictured at left.

take part in community activities and performances that would reinforce and prove that loyalty.

These changes, however, were not as sweeping as they might at first have

seemed because the town's hyphenated Americans (as the foreign born and their children were called) articulated an Americanism still rooted in the strong ethnic bonds of Red Lodge's Finnish, Italian, and Serbian neighborhoods. Although these immigrants and their children voiced a public Americanism, they tended to do so as part of a specific ethnic group: the Italian *fraternity* declared its support of America, 400 Finnish Americans rallied to show their patriotism, the local Serbians marched *together* to prove their loyalty.

This behavior fits with larger, national trends. As historian Gary Gerstle has pointed out, Americanism of this period tended to center around public rhetoric. Those groups interested in any form of public power (or protection) in their community had "to couch their programs in the language of Americanism." In Red Lodge, as elsewhere, immigrants and others learned to speak in new ways as they publicly defined themselves and their actions in reference to Americanism. Although no officials went into ethnic neighborhoods to drive out foreign customs, clothes, or music, the war caused immigrants to rethink their public attachment to these traditions. Fear added impetus to some immigrants' adoption of the language and

page advertisement in local newspapers announcing, in both English and Finnish, the "Meeting of the Loyal-to-America Finnish People." Over four hundred "Finnish born patriots," all of them naturalized citizens, attended the meeting, made public pledges to support the American government, and denounced the "small minority of our race, that have been misled by agitators so far as to forget the fulfillment of their duties to their adopted country." And, almost immediately after the shooting, moderate Finnish Socialists ("respected citizens of the community, loyal and patriotic") initiated legal proceedings to remove the title of Workers' Hall from the more left-wing Socialists who had taken over its management and "permitted disloyal and unpatriotic meetings" to be held there.<sup>24</sup>

Out of the fear created by the Koski shooting, Finnish residents created new and public avenues of ethnic expression that conformed as much as possible to the "100% Americanism" demands of the Liberty Committee and other patriotic organizations. The war thus changed public expressions of ethnicity in Red Lodge, altering how the town's "foreignness" looked and sounded. Nationality groups like the Finns, often for the first time, felt compelled to voice publicly their allegiance to America and to

25. Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City* (Cambridge, U.K., 1989), 8. Gerstle found that in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, too, the cultural diversity of immigrant residents and their children had begun to narrow by the 1920s, in part because of the sweeping anti-Socialism-Americanism movements that started during World War I. *Ibid.*, 1-4.

26. In minutes of the May 1, 1917, organizational meeting for the Carbon County Red Cross there was only one name listed that seemed Finnish, a "Miss Haaland." Mrs. Heikkala had joined the group by October 8, 1917, and she assumed the liaison position between the new

Finnish auxiliary and the original Red Cross group. The older group assigned Mrs. Joe Romersa, Mrs. Julio, and Mrs. Curto "to see to the Italian ladies" and gave them charge of the Thursday evening workroom meeting. Red Lodge Red Cross minutes, May 1, October 8, 1917, January 3, 1918, CCHS. The women of the Finnish association Kalevan Naiset Mielikintupa No. 1 took the initiative in forming the leadership for the new Finnish ladies' auxiliary. *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, December 28, 1917. The Finnish and Italian auxiliaries marched in uniform in the 1918 Fourth of July parade. *Ibid.*, July 4, 1918.



symbols of Americanism, as in Red Lodge, where immigrants and their children created a new American identity as a defense shield against the terror of “patriotic” organizations. Importantly, though, the larger community accepted and even encouraged this kind of attenuated Americanism. It was all right for these immigrants to declare their Americanism as a group, as long as they declared it loudly and publicly.<sup>25</sup>

The Italian and Finnish auxiliaries of the Carbon County chapter of the American Red Cross provide one example of this process of group adoption of sanctioned “American” rhetoric and activities. After the Koski incident, foreign-born women wanted to prove their loyalty through direct action, by joining the Red Cross. But in many ways the local Red Cross was as much a social club as it was an aid organization—women gathered in the library basement to knit socks and stuff packages while chatting about neighborhood scandals and children’s marriages. To sidestep the difficulties of working and socializing with people who could not communicate across language barriers, the Italian and Finnish women—with the blessing and support of the nonimmigrant county organization—arranged to have their own separate, ethnic chapters. They worked for the patriotic cause, but they continued to speak Italian or Finnish while doing their own stuffing and knitting.<sup>26</sup> They made public their support for America even while remaining within the ethnic group.

World War I and the actions of the Liberty Committee, then, jolted local immigrants into announcing a public American identity and forming groups that, while separate from nonethnic committees, initiated some of the first steps toward greater community cooperation. The Italian and Finnish women, after all, did associate with a traditionally Anglo group when they affiliated with the Red Cross—an important move toward integrating into the public life of the town. Another product of World War I, the Italian Girls Victory Club, a charitable and social organization composed of Italian-born women and their daughters, would stride even further. This group, devoted to raising money for cross-ethnic community causes, survived the war years to take the lead in forming ever stronger public alliances between immigrant groups and the rest of Red Lodge. Their work contributed to the formation of several multicultural festivals in the 1930s and eventually to the town’s Festival of Nations in 1951, in which residents celebrated the unity of community purpose among the town’s varied nationality groups. Through the Festival of Nations, local people would try to recapture a taste of the town’s immigrant identity that was so tangible and pervasive in the pre-World War I years but which was already beginning to evolve into a more general “Americanness” by the 1920s.

The program of “100% Americanism” initiated during the war would also set in motion another transformation

World War I and Liberty Committee actions jolted members of Red Lodge ethnic groups into acknowledging an American identity and initiating steps toward greater community cooperation. Several multicultural festivals were held in the 1930s, and the Festival of Nations began in 1951. Below is a scene from the German-night program that featured traditional songs and dances.



Flash's Studio, Red Lodge, Montana





MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

The war years also eroded labor-management relations in Red Lodge's coal mines. The Northwestern Improvement Company used the wartime ban on striking to diminish workers' wages and rights, and management's endorsement of the local Liberty Committee was well known. Postwar strikes, led by United Mine Workers of America president John L. Lewis (right), pictured in 1940 with Burton K. Wheeler (left), signaled the end of coal mining in Red Lodge.

of public identity in Red Lodge. Within a few years of the war's end, Red Lodge's identity as a coal town began to slip away, as workers' smoldering resentments against wartime repression destroyed the stable labor-management relationship of the town's earlier years. Starting in 1919, workers erupted into a series of strikes that ended, eventually, in the closing of the Red Lodge tunnels and the end of the industrial workers' town of the early twentieth century.

World War I prompted this transformation in several ways. First of all, the war provided the Northwestern Improvement Company with a golden opportunity to impose greater control over its workers than it had been able to attain through close relations with the United Mine Workers of America. The company started the process by freezing or even reducing workers' wages, citing a patriotic need to produce coal more efficiently for the war effort.<sup>27</sup> Since the federal government had banned strikes in vital industries such as coal mining for the duration of the war, this unilateral decision by management left workers simmering with frustration but unable to retaliate.

Then, the operators went even further. Company officials pressured local leaders into restricting working-class amusements in Red Lodge because the war demanded fit and able workers. The NWIC had long complained of men failing to show up for work "on account of certain places

of amusement," specifically brothels that served alcohol. Spurred by the demands of the NWIC, town and county officials closed down places of prostitution and arrested all "vagrants and women of ill-fame" within the town limits. When the NWIC requested that all saloons close at 10 P.M. so that miners would show up for work on time, local authorities jumped to attention, ordering not only the 10 P.M. closing but also shutting down all saloons and clubs that served alcohol (the Elks Club as well as the Workers' Club) from Saturday night until 1 P.M. on Sunday. Measures of social control that could not have passed earlier now swept through the town and county councils under the rationale of "war work" and "necessary coal production" and with the strong encouragement of the area's coal operators. Limiting workers' rights and pleasures—and thus making them more efficient laborers—was in the best interest of Americanism, according to mine managers. And the workers—legally forbidden to strike and socially constrained from protesting against these restrictions—had to bide their time and wait for the chance to regain their former position of power.<sup>28</sup>

Local workers also recognized the hand of the coal operators behind the antiradical activities of the local Liberty Committee and this too became fuel for the fire of resentment and disquiet. It did not take much to connect mine officials with the Liberty Committee's drive to terrorize the community's Wobblies or to see it as a first step toward silencing all labor protest at the mines. William Haggarty, the NWIC mine foreman, for example, led the Liberty Committee faction that dragged suspected IWW members to inquisitions at the Elks Lodge. Liberty Committee cofounder Fred Potter was widely known locally

27. This was part of a larger, national effort to control miners' wages. Joseph A. McCartin, *Labor's Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997), 125; Kuhlman, "From Farmland to Coalvillage," 73. Union leaders, of course, countered with the assertion that the patriotically celebrated "American standard of living" meant that workers needed to be paid well enough to enjoy that ideal. James R. Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930," *Journal of American History*, 79 (December 1992), 1009.

28. *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, September 19, 1918; *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket-Journal*, September 19, 1918; William Glancy oral history, pp. 53-54, Manuscript Collection 204, MHS; Anderson oral history, p. 20. The local district attorney immediately began to close down alleged houses of prostitution. See, for example, *State of Montana et al. v. Lola Hannula, alias Blanch Webber* (1918), Civil Cases, Carbon County District Court, Red Lodge, Montana; and *State of Montana et al. v. Pearl Petrea, alias Pearl Davis* (1918), *ibid.*





Frank's Studio, Red Lodge, Montana

Inspired by John Lewis's leadership and infuriated by local managers, Red Lodge workers sometimes went beyond national union strike plans, holding out longer than their counterparts in other areas of the country. Above are typical Red Lodge coal miners.

as someone with strong procompany sentiments. The other cofounder, Walter Alderson, actually published in the local newspaper a letter from the NWIC superintendent that praised the Liberty Committee for purging the mines of Wobblies. And, a year after the war ended, the NPRR provided \$1,000 to support Liberty Committee members defending themselves against a civil suit brought by a Finnish Wobbly.<sup>29</sup>

Local people readily noted these links between management and the patriotic organization. Daniel S. McCorkle, for example, a minister who lived in nearby Chance, Montana, fingered a "few of the worst labor hating employers" for sponsoring most of the violence in their desire to destroy labor organizations. The coal operators' public

29. Kuhlman, "From Farmland to Coalvillage," 95-97; *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket*, December 14, 1917. After the Koski shooting and the Finnish town meeting, the Liberty Committee degenerated into a one- or two-man operation led by Alderson and Potter. These men largely discredited themselves in 1918 when they called upon state authorities to investigate the local draft board on charges of bribery and corruption. Attacking prominent local authorities—sheriff George Headington, county clerk H. P. Sandels, and physician E. M. Adams—was not so easy as intimidating Finnish Wobblies. "Investigation of the Carbon County Draft Board, 27 June 1918," folder 9, box 1, RS 19, MHS; Kuhlman, "From Farmland to Coalvillage," 99-100.

crackdown on workers' pay and pleasures combined with their behind-the-scenes endorsement of the Liberty Committee created a new, dangerous tension among local workers that would snap almost as soon as the war ended. As Red Lodge miner William Glancy put it, the miners *had* to fight back against the owners because "See, the coal miners really got the book thrown at them during the First World War."<sup>30</sup>

In the postwar years local miners saw their chance to fight back. Between 1919 and 1922 Red Lodge workers' strikes closed down the local mines three times, with one strike lasting almost half a year. In this protest, local miners actually joined in a national wave of strikes after the war ended. In 1919 John L. Lewis, a towering figure in union leadership, assumed presidency of the UMWA and led the

30. Daniel S. McCorkle to Frank P. Walsh, January 11, 1918, folder 10, box 2, Manuscript Collection 59, Daniel S. McCorkle Papers, MHS; Anderson oral history, pp. 18-20; Glancy oral history, pp. 53-54.

31. On John L. Lewis, see Alan J. Singer, "Something of a Man": John L. Lewis, the UMWA, and the CIP, 1919-1943," in *The United Mine Workers of America: A Model of Industrial Solidarity?*, ed. John H. Laslett (University Park: Penn., 1976), 104-50; Priscilla Long, *Where the Sun Never Shines: A History of America's Bloody Coal Industry* (New York, 1989), 323-31.





MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

In the end, the unions' radicalism and united strength backfired. Frustrated by workers' demands and the high cost of underground mining, the Northern Pacific Railroad shifted its operations to Colstrip, about 140 miles northeast of Red Lodge. There, coal near the surface yielded to mechanized strip-mining techniques that required fewer workers (above, 1925). The company also circumvented union agreements by subcontracting, firmly establishing Colstrip as a nonunion operation.

union on a long, often contentious struggle against the nation's coal operators.<sup>31</sup>

In their oral histories, former Red Lodge miners remembered John L. Lewis as a hero of the workers' cause. Ollie Anderson, for example, credited Lewis with improving conditions in the nation's coal mines. Anderson, who had a photograph of Lewis displayed in his home, asserted, "You can thank ol' John L. Lewis, the miners can, for everything that he done for 'em." Tony Persha, likewise, admired Lewis greatly. Persha not only had a picture of himself with Lewis, he also owned a copy of Lewis's biography. Mine manager William A. Romek recalled Lewis less fondly, maintaining that Lewis maintained a tight grip over the national and state union organizations. "John L. Lewis," he stated, "was the czar over the coal industry in the entire nation."<sup>32</sup>

32. Anderson oral history, pp. 18-21; Tony Persha oral history, tape 1B, OH 305, MHS; Anthony Romek oral history, p. 17, OH 1477, MHS.

33. *Red Lodge (Mont.) Picket-Journal*, August 30, September 27, 1922; Kuhlman, "From Farmland to Coalvillage," 75-76; Anderson oral history, p. 21.


Inspired by Lewis's leadership and infuriated by local managers' actions during the war years, Red Lodge workers sometimes went even further than the national union thought necessary. In the 1922 strike, for example, local workers refused to go back to work when the UMWA ended the national strike; miners in Red Lodge held out two weeks longer than did their counterparts in other parts of the country. The men seemed eager to strike back against the "coal barons" who had deprived the workers of rights and wages during the war years. Ollie Anderson, for example, weathered all three strikes and spoke bitterly against the operators who kept pushing workers to produce more for less so the "big boys" would have more money to put in their pocketbooks. Miner Mikko Marttunen called the prolonged 1922 work stoppage "a splendid strike" against "owners [who] want to break the union and lower wages by half." Red Lodge, the stable union town, became a war zone of sorts, a place of almost continual fighting between management and workers.<sup>33</sup>

34. William B. Evans and Robert L. Peterson, "Decision at Colstrip: The Northern Pacific Railway's Open-Pit Mining Operation," in *Montana's Past*, 445-60.



In the end, though, the miners' radicalism and united strength backfired. Marttunen's joy in the miners' victory in 1922 did not last long. A relatively minor player in a much larger national operation, Red Lodge miners had clout only so long as they provided needed material for the operation of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Frustrated by workers' demands and the high cost of taking coal out through underground tunnels, the Northern Pacific decided in the early 1920s to shift part of its operations to Colstrip in southeastern Montana. Coal near the surface there yielded more easily to mechanized strip-mining techniques that required fewer workers. Also, in this new operation the railroad company could subcontract for the coal through a separate firm, skirting union agreements and establishing Colstrip as a firmly nonunion operation.<sup>34</sup>

In 1924 the Northwestern Improvement Company closed down the West Side Mine and Red Lodge lost a large chunk of its corporate payroll. Some miners found

work at the East Side Mine or over the hill at the Bearcreek and Washoe operations; many had already given up after the prolonged series of strikes. Red Lodge, the Coal Metropolis, began to shrink and draw in upon itself. The East Side Mine held out until 1932, but then the NWIC pulled out of the little town completely. The coal identity that had marked Red Lodge for over four decades was gone, leaving residents to work out new ways of defining themselves and their town in the middle years of the twentieth century. 

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In 1924 the Northwestern Improvement Company closed down Red Lodge's West Side Mine and the coal metropolis began to shrink. The East Side Mine, pictured below in 1925, held out until the company pulled out of Red Lodge completely in 1932, leaving the coal-mining city in need of a fresh identity and a new economic base.

Flash's Studio, Red Lodge, Montana

