A MISSING MOUNTAIN MEMORY: THE MARION MANUFACTURING MILL STRIKE OF 1929

by

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ABSTRACT

MEGAN STEVENS. A Missing Mountain Memory: The Marion Manufacturing Mill Strike of 1929 . (Under the direction of DR. DAVID GOLDFIELD)

In Marion, North Carolina, the local residents of the city and surrounding region have forgotten a tragic strike that took place at one of the local mills in 1929, though it was possibly the deadliest textile mill strike in the South. The strike, which officially took place between July 11, 1929 and October 2, 1929, was in response to inhumane labor practices and unsatisfactory pay. While the strike was supported by the United Textile Workers, it was primarily organized by the local strikers who were unhappy with their working conditions. While the UTW was not affiliated with the Communist Party, and the strikers in Marion were decidedly anti-communist, past and present criticisms of the strike revolve around the inaccurate perception of the strikers being led by communists, which turned their neighbors against them. The strike ended on October 2, 1929, when a group of deputies fired into a strike-line, killing six men and injuring an untold number of others. Rather than reconcile and heal from this event one could call the residents of the town, including the mill workers, experts at forgetting. Shame, misinformation, and an unease toward perceived communist ties have fueled this forgetting fire. Not only has this event been ignored in local history, but it also is missing from the study of labor history, labor in the South, and the history of resistance in Appalachia.

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The completion of my thesis and degree would not have been possible without the constant and reliable support from my friends and family. The difficulties I encountered along the way were no match for the persistent encouragement that my family, especially my parents Bill and Missie Stevens, provided me throughout the process. Everything that I have accomplished on this journey is to honor those who have helped me become who I am today. The list is too long to thank all of those people individually. I am grateful for a

family who loves and supports me, friends who counsel and cheer for me, and the community that raised me.

I dedicate this work to my niece, Abigail Jones, who dutifully napped and played by my desk throughout the writing of this thesis. I also dedicate it in memory to the members of my family who are no longer with us, specifically, “Papaw” Edward Stevens, “Mamaw” Alice Penland, and Ronnie Lail, who gave me my love for history and remembrance. Lastly, I dedicate it in honor of the men killed in the strike and the families who were ostracized from their communities in the name of labor rights.

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On October 2, 1929, the local sheriff and his deputies fatally wounded six men and injured an unknown number of others during a strike at the early morning shift change of Marion Manufacturing, a textile mill located in an idyllic small North Carolina town situated in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. One of three local mills, Marion Manufacturing employed approximately 650 workers, approximately 80 percent of them unionized. While the jury cleared the names of those who shot into the crowd three months later, the community has forgotten the names of the strikers who died in the shooting that ultimately ended the labor unrest in Marion. This short-lived strike, a second segment of a strike that started in July of that year, was more than broken- it was destroyed. The police involvement and the National Guard's presence made it clear to the lintheads of McDowell County what their options were when it came to organizing. The Marion strike coverage occupied many local, regional, and national newspapers and served as the topic of a Sinclair Lewis work and a large segment of a Thomas Tippett book regarding southern mill strikes. Why then is the only talk of the Marion Massacre that exists in that town today hushed whispers, spreading misinformation and historical inaccuracies? The community has not healed from a wound it doesn't even know it has, and the effect of that nearly century-old wound is evident in the life of its citizens today.

From making a conscious effort to quell the conversations that come up about the strike to fervently denying any attempt to share information that goes against the community's accepted narrative, the inaccuracies and ignorance that define the strike's memory are hard to miss. The shame surrounding it has led to the 1929 strike being a dismissed and controversial topic, one that is clouded in mystery, with the potential to

call into question long-held beliefs. This shame exists in the community and influences its identity and memory and would be forgotten altogether if the majority's efforts won out. This could be due to the embarrassment and regret of those who did not support their neighbors in the strike, were motivated to take the company's side from fear or the ignorance of those who did not understand the strike and stood against a cause because they were fearful of change. Most importantly, the Marion Manufacturing Strike of 1929 is a taboo topic today due to the disbelief and denial of the treatment and living conditions of the mill workers and the belief that the Communist Party led the unionists.

The Marion Manufacturing strike of 1929 is not only important to the community and regional history but deserves to be included in accounts of Appalachian resistance, labor history, and southern history, as it is a defining moment in North Carolina History as one of the deadliest textile mill strikes in the South. Its importance does not stop there, and these fields of academia should include this monumental, yet historically overlooked, union effort in western North Carolina.

FIGURE 1: Marion Manufacturing 1909, used with permission from McDowell County Historical Society

The Marion Manufacturing Company, built in 1909 and operated until 2008, is still partially standing, having seen use as a textile mill, a storage facility, a short-lived family fun and game center, and a music venue.[1] The mill houses are still occupied, many with the descendants of the millhands whose lives revolved around the tall mill smoke stack visible through most of the area, a reminder of the extent of the mill's influence.

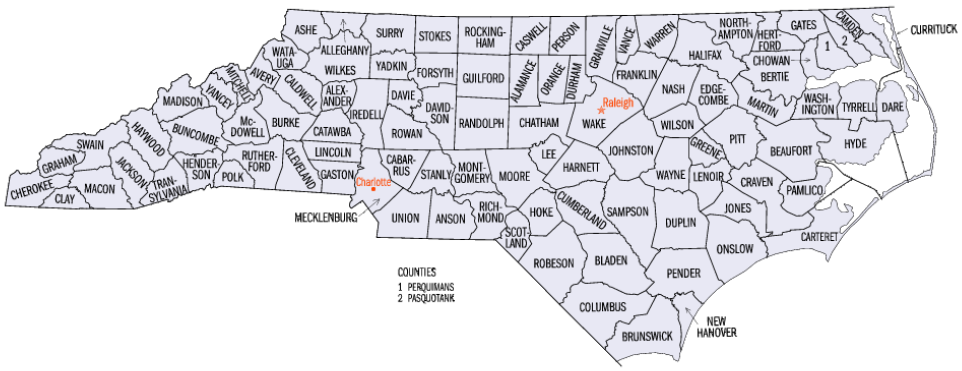

FIGURE 2: Marion is the county seat Of McDowell County, located in Western North Carolina. Used with permission from McDowell County Historical Society

You load sixteen tons, what do you get?
Another day older and deeper in debt
Saint Peter don't you call me 'cause I can't go
I owe my soul to the company store

[1] To date, a large portion of the mill has been demolished, leaving one building of the original structure and the smoke stack, still towering 175 feet above East Marion. Harmon Strickland, who maintains the property, declined giving any official interview or statement regarding the strike, even anonymously, for worry that he would jeopardize his position as the grounds keeper by discussing such a controversial topic. Even though he was unwilling to comment, Strickland gave me a tour of the main building, showing me some of the century-old equipment that still as housed in the remaining building, and the original clock that hung in the spinning room. Strickland worked for the mill while it was in operation, up until its closing. (Mike Conley. "Marion Manufacturing demolition set unless new use found." The McDowell News, August 14, 2010) (Hickory Record Staff, "Textile Company to Close Marion Plant," McDowellNews.com, August 15, 2008

While Tennessee Ernie Ford's song, "Sixteen Tons," is about the life of a coal miner, the similarities in the lifestyles of the laborers are evident.[2] Like coal miners, mill owners heavily influenced the lives of the workers, and in Marion's case, that was Reginald Baldwin. Due to the involvement of the mill in every aspect of their day to day life, workers simultaneously supported and relied on the company. While they could choose to leave the industry, they often did not have a full elementary education, which meant very little hope in finding alternative work that would not end them in a tighter spot than where they started.

Undeniably, the spark that lit the flame of the labor revolution in textile mills was the implementation of the stretch-out. This was a way that mill leadership could ensure that they maximized profit and minimized cost, particularly, payroll. The stretch-out allowed for a minimum number of employees who were assigned to multiple machines and would be responsible for the work of more than one worker. Often, there would be a time-keeper on site who would time the number of minutes and seconds needed for each action and aspect of the job, report those times, and any worker who did not meet them or produce the amount that was expected of them in that window stood at risk of having their pay docked or possibly losing their job. Longer hours, with more intense labor, for little pay began to take a toll on the workers of the textile mills in the South.[3]

This technique had been used in the northern mills and proven successful. When it was introduced to the southern industry, it became the "match to the powder of the slow

[2] Summer Apostol, "'Sixteen Tons': Merle Travis, Tennessee Ernie Ford, and Beyond," Birthplace of Country Music, November 7, 2017, https://www.birthplaceofcountrymusic.org/sixteen-tons-merle-travis-tennessee-ernie-ford-beyond/.
[3] Jeffrey Leiter, "Hanging by a Thread", 90-91.

irritation and restlessness…" that the workers were experiencing.[4] This led to an increase in production, and coupled with generalized pay cuts, the South's industry became more competitive with that of the North, despite the plunging of prices at that time in the textile and tobacco industries.[5]

Even if the pressures of the stretch-out were disregarded, the mill workers were already teetering on the brink of rebellion due to their living conditions. While Sinclair Lewis recognized that Marion's mill village and mill worker lifestyle was possibly worse than the conditions of other Southern mills, there are hard to deny similarities between all of the mills and their treatment of their employees. Every action and response by the mill owners and their supervisors were made in the interest of profit more times than not, disregarding the safety and health of the people they employed. As Tippett pointed out, the mill did not care about the lives of the employees, beyond them showing up for work.[6]

Tippett documents that "…the mill conditions might be placed in the average or perhaps the lower bracket…12 hour shift, extremely low wages, night work, children of illegal age, and the stretch-out…"[7] The company store, much like the one mentioned in Ford's song, had a "sharp practice of fleecing the operatives" and "the majority of operatives were always in debt to the company."[8] The unsanitary conditions in the mill village led to regular sickness, such as tuberculosis, and with no sewers and only shared outhouses, pestilence was hard to control. The individual homes had no running water

[4] Tippet, "When Southern Labor Stirs", 352.
[5] Stillman and Miller, 235.
[6] Tippett, 113.
[7] Ibid., 111.
[8] Ibid., 112.

and no solid foundations.[9] Lewis corroborates Tippett's descriptions of the living situations in Marion, also stating that the charge per week was twenty cent per room, which would be taken out of the mill worker's pay. "The houses are of the cheapest and flimsiest construction…I have tried to pry the clapboards apart, and have found that it could be done with my little finger." In these homes, Lewis witnessed up to twelve people sharing four rooms, three of which were bedrooms and living areas, and the last being a shared kitchen.[10] While free electricity was provided to the homes, Lewis found the workers were "too tired to burn lights."[11]

Lewis reported the mill worker's wages to "average less than $13 a week," and from his experience staying in Marion during his reporting, he cites the low wages and lack of transportation as reasons why the mill workers did not often leave the mill village areas to come into Marion's downtown. There were open meetings for the union membership at the courthouse in the beginning of the movement, but the unionists eventually met in an area between the Clinchfield and East Marion mill villages. This allowed them to easily attend and those on strike could easily access the resources that the union could provide.

[9] Ibid.
[10] Sinclair Lewis, "Cheap and Contented Labor", 18.
[11] Ibid., 20.

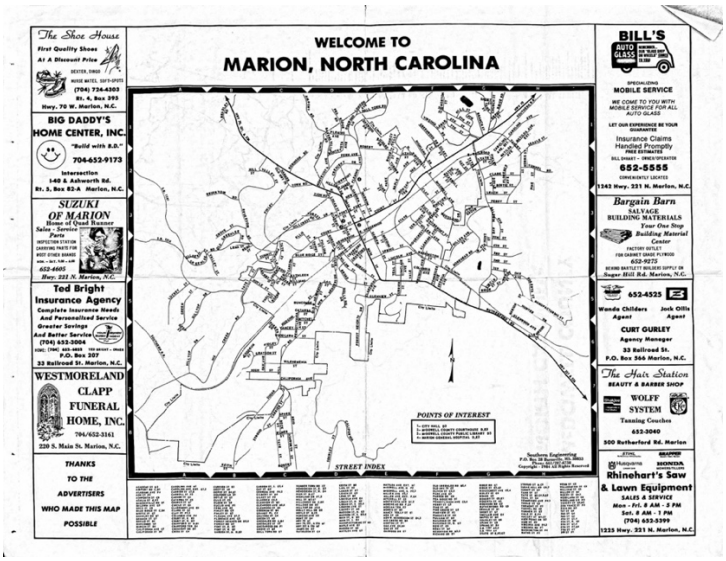

FIGURE 3: Marion, NC 1984. Map provided by McDowell Public Library, the Abe Simmons Genealogy and North Carolina History room.

Tippett observes that the town of Marion had "no glaring poverty in evidence," but that "on the edge of the town…there is a different Marion. This other part is two miles away in physical measurement, but the distance is far greater than that reckoned by any other mode of calculation." Tippett goes on to describe the living conditions, as Lewis detailed above, as well as present personal testimonies of the conditions inside the mill. One woman he interviewed said that "Everybody spits on the floor…many tuberculosis patients work in the mill…the mills are swept while we are working and fill our breathe with lint and dust full of lint and germs…the toilets are filthy and ill-smelling…Water is out in the toilet room…all the workers in one room drink from the same dipper…many of the workers wait until after they go home at six o'clock to drink water."[12] This is just one account of the conditions that hundreds of people on several different shifts worked in, and this situation was not unique to Marion. These conditions of both the mill village and the mill work rooms were very different than those of the living conditions of Reginald W.

[12] Tippett, 114.

Baldwin, the absentee owner of Marion Manufacturing who lived on what was known as "Bossman's Row." "His house [in Marion] is built on a hill with just enough shrubbery and trees standing between to hide the ugliness and unsanitary conditions of the place where the operatives live…his residential strip of land is well kept…Everything there is beautiful and luxurious."[13] Baldwin knew the conditions in which his employees were living and according to Tippett's account, did what he could to prevent it from being an eyesore to himself.

Marion's mill strike was not the only labor movement occurrence in North Carolina at the time. In Gastonia, seventy-five miles southeast of Marion, a strike began at Loray Mills early in 1929, supported by the Communist Party. The death of two people, one law enforcement officer and one unionist, defined the event and left a lasting mark on the community. In Elizabethton, Tennessee, almost seventy miles northwest of Marion and deeper in the Appalachian Mountains, a strike was taking place around the same time at the Bemberg-Glanzstoff Rayon Corporation that was initiated by female employees and supported by the same union that would attempt to aid Marion.

These different communities have handled the memories of their labor movements in various ways, some doing marginal work to preserve the memory of the strike, though none fully recognizing the importance behind the monumental movements that took place. The biggest impact on the mills of the twentieth century today is the way in which they are being used across the state today, in some cases, being demolished, and in others, being repurposed.

0.1 Mill Village Gentrification

[13] Ibid., 116.

The importance of using mill and mill village spaces for the community while also preserving the rich history of textile industry in the area is essential to understanding the need for labor movements in the past, and labor history now. Today, the buildings, homes, and neighborhoods that were previously mill-related have been repurposed for a different use. In certain cities, such as Gastonia, Hickory, and Charlotte, North Carolina, large structures previously used as textile mills have been turned into luxury housing, apartment buildings catering to the growing need for housing as these areas grow in population. In Gastonia, where the historically significant Loray Mills strike of 1929 occurred, apartments are available starting at $1,214 a month, for a nine hundred square foot, one bedroom and bathroom apartment. While they do have a history museum on the main floor of the building, the information provided on the website reads subjectively, and contains bias against the communist union and the impact it had on the town.[14] The response to these changes from the neighborhood surrounding the mill, the homes previously a part of the mill village, is largely positive. The neighbors felt that the mill was an "…eyesore. The grass often went uncut, vagrants sometimes broke into the building and over time, the mill village deteriorated as homeowners moved out, slum lords came in and crime in the area increased…."[15] Though it may have brought up the value of the area and drawn slight attention to the labor history of the town, not all gentrification or reimaging of these historical spaces is seen positively. At a price-point

[14] The museum in the mill is currently inaccessible due to COVID-19, without a projected reopening date. The section of their history online regarding the strike is simply "The Communist Textile Workers Union led a strike in 1929 that laid siege to the town and resulted in the death of Gastonia Police Chief Orville Aderholt and worker's rights champion Ella May Wiggins." (Loray Mill, "Loray Mill," Loray Mill History | Apartment Lofts and Event Hall, accessed August 28, 2020, https://www.loraymilllofts.com/history.aspx.)
[15] Gwendolyn Glenn, "Block by Block: Loray Mill's New Life Sparks Hope For Old Neighborhood," WFAE, October 12, 2015, https://www.wfae.org/post/block-block-loray-mills-new-life-sparks-hope-old-neighborhood.

that no linthead would have ever been able to afford, even when accounting for their wages with inflation, these renovated spaces with high-ceilings and natural light serve a completely different purpose and audience than they were originally created for, which based off a weekly pay of $13, and the approximate 93% inflation between 1929 and 2020, would take more than six weeks to pay for a month of rent, with no other expenses included.[16]

Much like the mills themselves, mill villages have seen an influx of new residents completely unlike that of their original tenants. In areas such as NoDa, a community in Charlotte notably known as the art district of the city, mill village homes have been reimagined into spaces and structures that would never reveal their meager beginnings. On the central street that runs through the neighborhood, and from which it gets its name, North Davidson Street, there is a large YMCA, originally built in 1948 by the mill owners "to inspire worker loyalty."[17] Across from this large structure, there is currently an upscale tattoo parlor, a sustainable and fashion-conscious consignment shop, a farm-to-table restaurant, and a vegan restaurant, all of which are in mill-built housing. The average price for a one-person meal at the farm-to-table restaurant is around $19.50, which would cost ten percent of a week's worth of pay from the mill employees in today's world.[18]

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[16] US Inflation Calculator. US Inflation Calculator, September 11, 2020. https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/.

[17] Tom Hanchett, "NoDa Tour." https://www.historysouth.org/noda-tour/.

[18] "Modern American Food: Dinner Menu: Top Restaurants in Charlotte, NC." The Goodyear House, August 2020. https://thegoodyearhouse.com/food/.

During the protests that took place in Charlotte in 2016 surrounding the killing of Keith Lamont Scott by CMPD, gentrification and the root of high-crime areas in Charlotte also came into the spotlight. Brandon Miller, a Charlotte activist who works with at-risk youth, spoke before the City Council in an effort to engage with them and voice the communities concern for the changes that were going on around them. Miller's primary focus was the NoDa community, saying that "Before there was a NoDa, there was North Davidson Street," using this neighborhood as an example to the other previous mill villages in Charlotte, such as Optimist Park and Villa Heights. When these areas experience gentrification and are redeveloped, "there was nowhere in the new neighborhoods where the former residents could afford to live…longtime homeowners who stayed sometimes found themselves gradually priced out as property taxes rose in their whole neighborhood."[19] While gentrification can be a blessing and a curse to a community, there is more work that can be done to positively change these industrial spaces. In Charlotte, the Johnston Mill in the NoDa community is being transformed into an apartment building with a goal to combat these issues. This project seeks to take action against the high housing rate by providing a percentage of their tenants with affordable housing. This is one example of the direction in which mill reimagination can assist the community it exists in and is the first step towards the balance between gentrification and preservation of neighborhoods.[20] This balance is important in the current neighborhoods where these changes are taking place, as it will create a precedent

[19] Ely Portellio, "In 10 Words, He Described a Changing Charlotte – and an Overlooked Root of the Protests," (Charlotte Observer, September 30, 2016)
[20] Katie Peralta, "45 Years after It Closed, the Historic Johnston Mill Building in NoDa Will Soon Get New Life," (Charlotte Agenda, September 21, 2020)

of how to deal with these spaces that are often overlooked in their historical importance. While Marion is not currently grappling with this issue first hand, it is only a matter of time before the situation effects the area as population growth and tourism cultivation continues. If the memory of the strike is not preserved and dissipated, new developments and gentrification could aid in the forgetting of the events that took place.

0.2 Setting Aside the Shame

This thesis is organized into two chapters surrounding the events of the strike and the ways it has ultimately affected the town of Marion, and the importance of the event locally and nationally. In chapter one, I provide a brief primer of the Elizabethton and Gastonia strikes and the comprehensive history of the strike at Marion, examining the outcomes of the strike and trials. In chapter two, I delve into the small existing historiography, and examine the memory and efforts being made to preserve it. This is possibly the most impactful section of the thesis as it shows the recognition of the importance of preserving this difficult memory and what healing and reconciliation could do for the community in understanding itself.

The Marion Mill Strike is not only historically significant, but personally significant. I work to present the following arguments and evidence without any personal bias, but the story of the strike, the mill, and the town itself are close to my heart. Both sides of my family grew up working in the mills of Marion in some fashion and many lived their entire lives in the mill villages. Most notably, my paternal great-grandmother began working there when she was thirteen, when the need in her family for the financial support she could contribute outweighed the need for her to finish her education. Every opportunity I have been afforded in my academic life has been attained by the hard work

and wherewithal of my fore-elders, many of whom were uneducated, unprivileged, and underserved. Without their efforts in providing for their families and descendants that they would never know, I would not be in the privileged position I am today. When I was a child, this topic was highly discouraged conversation, if ever mentioned at all. Now, it has largely been forgotten by anyone younger than seventy and is facing the possibility of slipping from our town's memory altogether, which, for reasons I will discuss, was seemingly the goal of many Marionites. I am motivated by this personal aspect, as well as my curiosity and duty as a historian, to present as accurate an account as possible. Very few academic works have focused on the entire event, and fewer still were written by historians utilizing facts and primary sources. This story is one that should be recognized and well known, not only by the locals who live across Baldwin Ave in renovated mill houses, but by anyone interested in the unionism in the South, mill strikes, or the micro-revolutions that have happened in Appalachia.

CHAPTER ONE: WHAT THE FOOTHILLS FORGOT

"Oh all these young people, they don't know anything about it."[21] Vesta and Sam Finley were active, unionized strikers who worked in Marion Manufacturing, and lived in East Mill Village during the strike of 1929. In 1975 Mary Frederickson interviewed the Finleys as part of the Southern Oral History Program Collection. While they discussed their upbringing and life in the small community of Marion, a large portion of their interview revolved around the Mill Strike of 1929. This is the only interview in this collection that mentions the mill strike with first-hand accounts from individuals who participated. Sam was in charge of the union's relief food distribution and Vesta was one of the strike organizers. Both of them gave detailed accounts of mill life, before and after the strike, and took great pride in having been a part of the union, even with the negative stigma that still follows the memory of the event. While oral histories are an essential aspect of history, they also have their shortcomings. This interview was conducted forty-six years after the strike, and neither person was at the shooting that occurred on October 2nd that ended the strike and led to months of trials and political action. Being so long removed from the strike itself, how reliable are these accounts? While the Finley's shared account of their past lives is not in contradiction with any established facts that are known about the strike of 1929, we do not have many other interviews or accounts from their fellow mill workers to add to the understanding of what happened at Marion Manufacturing. This is largely due to the choice that many workers made in regard to

[21] "Oral History Interview with Vesta and Sam Finley, July 22, 1975. Interview H-0267. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007)," Documenting the American South: Oral Histories of the American South, https://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/H-0267/excerpts/excerpt_7220.html)

remembering the strike- discussing it and passing around the information could cost you your livelihood, which many employees had seen stripped from their neighbors who had fought for the union. Any mention of the strike could be seen as criticism of the mill and the authorities involved, and that criticism was discouraged aggressively. The strikes in Gastonia and Elizabethton faced this same issue, though Gastonia may have had better documentation due to their ties to the Communist Party and the resources that they could provide. In order to correctly contextualize the Marion strike, one must understand the existing labor efforts and tensions that surrounded them in the region.

1.1 1929 Southern Strikes

While historical events surrounding unions and labor movements are often viewed from the perspective of the better-known strikes of the North, there are several textile strikes that occurred in the South that have been growing in documentation and recognition in both this field of history, as well as in their regions. To say that they are well-remembered would be overly generous, but there are groups taking action to make the information regarding these events more common-place and accessible. There were strikes taking place in Gaffney, SC, Belmont, NC, Kannapolis, NC, and Concord, NC as well, but the strikes at Elizabethton, TN and Gastonia, NC are more comparable and have tangible connections to the strikes in Marion.

1.1.1 Elizabethton, TN

The Bemberg-Glanzstoff Rayon Corporation Strike in Elizabethton, Tennessee, was one of the first officially recognized union-backed efforts in the Appalachian region and the South, having made the national news as five thousand mill workers walked out on strike. In the words of Thomas Tippett, this is where and when “the labor storm broke

out."[22] The walkout, primarily over low wages, began on March 12, 1929, led by Margaret Bowen. It spread throughout the other shifts, leading to the plant closing on the 14th. The United Textile Workers Union of America (UTW) had been involved in the area two years before when there were rumblings of a strike, but it was not active at the time of the walkout in 1929. The president of the plants Dr. Arthur Mothwurf refused to recognize the union, but eventually pledged his support for the agreement that was reached with the mediation of Charles Wood and Paul Aymon, both of whom were representatives of the Tennessee State and Labor departments. Mothwurf did not follow the terms of the agreement, and the American Federation of Labor sent Edward F. McGrady to follow up on the case. Union officials McGrady and Alfred Hoffman were abducted by anti-unionists, which caused outrage among the strikers. This spurred a second strike that began on April 15th, and Mothwurf continued to be uncooperative with the efforts of the strikers and the union for mediation. The plant reopened on May 6th, with support from the "Loyal Workers of Bemberg," though it is unknown how many of the workers that worked after the reopening were returning employees, or strike-breakers. Similar to Marion's Baldwin, Mothwurf asked for Tennessee Governor Henry Horton to send National Guardsmen to the area and Horton complied. Their presence led to hundreds of arrests and several violent altercations, including home and businesses explosions. Mothwurf did pledge to rehire the union members and strikers, and on May 25th an agreement was met. Mothwurf, as reported from several accounts, left for a vacation to Germany and never came back. Discrimination of unionized workers

[22] Tippett, 25.

continued at the plant, and many years of unstable union recognition and mediation followed.[23]

FIGURE 4: Bemberg Plant, October 2020.

While there were no deaths associated with this strike, it was discussed in national media throughout the country, and added to the list of recognized labor movements of the time. One of the lasting legacies and impacts of the strike center around the fact that the primary organizers and participants were women. Though the plant employed both men and women, a woman led the walkout, as well as spoke out against discriminatory practices that were targeted at female plant employees.[24] In her article *"Disorderly*

[23] Marie Tedesco, "Elizabethton Rayon Plants Strikes, 1929" , Tippett, *When Southern Labor Stirs,* "Elizabethton Rayon Plant Strikes of 1929," Tennessee Historical Society
[24] Ibid.

Women: Gender and Labor Militancy in the Appalachian South," Jacquelyn Dowd Hall argues for the recognition of the vital role that women held in organizing and implementing strikes, as their influence and action in these situations have often been dismissed or downplayed. Hall uses Ella May, the martyr of the Gastonia strike, as an example of a female leader who "has been more revered than explained."[25] She argues that the roles and presence of women in labor and trade union history is often overlooked, and that the women who participated in strikes, particularly those at Elizabethton "pioneered a new pattern of female experience, and created for their post-World War II daughters an environment far different from the one they, in their youth, had known."[26] Hall's work on women's roles in labor, particularly Appalachia, is unique and important in the historiography of labor movements in the South. The strike in Elizabethton, while not what one could refer to as well-known, does have several online and printed resources that depict the event. It is remembered as an aspect of East Tennessee history, and found mentioned in school history books, websites, and labor histories of the region.

The Elizabethton mill strike had much in common with both of the strikes in Gastonia and Marion, but more so Marion, mostly due to the shared union that organized and supported them. The strike in Elizabethton closely effected the organization efforts in Marion, and Roy Price, Dan Ellis, and Lawrence Hogan traveled as a chosen mill hand delegation to the Tennessee strike to ask Alfred Hoffman for support.[27] Hoffman ultimately agreed to help, but needed to focus the efforts on the Elizabethton strike,

[25] Jacuelyn Dowd Hall, "Disorderly Women", 355.
[26] Ibid., 356, 382.
[27] Tippett, 118, Holcombe, 50.

which led to the Marion representatives taking organization into their own hands at the start of their labor movement.

1.1.2 Gastonia, NC

On April 1, 1929, the Loray Mills strike in Gastonia, North Carolina began, with one thousand workers walking out of their jobs. Wanting equal pay for equal work between women and men, better living conditions, better overall pay, and a cessation of the stretch-out, the Loray mill employees carried a similar torch to that of the Elizabethton strikers, who were still fighting for their rights at the start of Gastonia's efforts. Organized by the National Textile Workers Union, the assistance that could be provided to striking workers was greater than what had been seen in other mill situations, and it was the first action of a communist labor movement in the South.[28] The locals who were looking to organize did not show much hesitancy in coupling with such a movement. At this time, unions were looked down on in the South, but the AFL's UTW was particularly judged by the Loray employees, as it had backed a failed attempt at organizing this mill a decade before.[29] Partnering with the NTWU led to increased criticism from the local community, based not only on the striking that was occurring, but the ideology on which it was founded. The local paper, the *Gastonia Gazette* "warned of atheism, race mixing, free love, and revolution" that would come from communism and the city made it a criminal offense to picket. The narrative against the union began as soon as the union organized, which correlates with the opinion held in the area today. In an interview between Tippett and a female striker, he asked her if the things the *Gazette* had said were beliefs that she aligned with. Her response was one of disbelief and anger,

[28] Dashiell Coleman "90 Years Ago, a Gastonia Strike Was World News"
[29] Tippett, 82, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Like a Family,", 214.

saying “Listen to me. These people are helping us. They are feeding us. That paper is a liar, and so are you, if you say things like that.”[30] The polarizing effect of the union and strike on the town was made worse by the local news, the introduction of the National Guard, and the mob of vigilante locals, who wanted to scare away the union and take what they considered justice into their own hands.[31] The strike was not strictly kept to the Loray Mill in Gastonia but spread to other factories in Gaston County, which was third in the country for its textile production.[32] Governor Max Gardner responded in the same fashion as he had for the other North Carolina labor strikes by sending in the National Guard when it was requested, and the company began to evict families from the mill villages on May 7th. The first controversial event of the strike, which caught the regional and national eye, was the killing of the Police Chief, D.A. Aderholt. Those who had been evicted from their mill homes had created a tent village, using resources they received from the union to set up the living essentials for the strikers- food distribution, a hospital, and a meeting place for the union. In a raid on the tent village, Aderholt was killed, and sixteen union members were charged with his murder. When the trial failed, local community members took the act of justice upon themselves, and began to harass and attack the unionists. In the skirmish, Ella May was shot and killed in the street in the middle of the day. No one was convicted of her murder, and a second trial was held for the killing of Aderholt, in which seven union members were charged and convicted, ultimately leading to the demise of the strike at Loray Mill.

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[30] TIppett, 84.
[31] Ibid., 88.
[32] Hall, “Like a Family,” 214.

FIGURE 5: Loray Mills, September 2020.

The Gastonia strike may be more well known to the labor side of academia, but as far as local or regional history, it is nearly as forgotten as the Marion strike. For example, the commemorative gravestone of Ella May, the martyred mill worker, carries important inaccuracies. On the stone, her name is "Ella Mae Wiggins," though her name was actually spelled "May" and she chose to go by "Ella May" and remove the "Wiggins" as she was no longer married. This headstone was dedicated and put into place fifty years after her murder. There is a foundation in her honor that works to raise awareness of May, but very little is able to be accomplished in an area where people would rather forget the mistakes of the past.[33] Gastonia and Marion's lack of recognition of the tragedy of these strikes that had deadly ends may be the deepest and most disappointing

[33] The foundation that fundraises and fights for her recognition continues to use her last name in an official capacity, despite her not keeping that name herself. They are comprised of a "a group of individuals with family, academic, community and historical interest in Ella May Wiggins and our textile heritage," who are working to reclaim the negative narrative and replace it with one of a "mother-heroine" to properly place May and Gastonia in the larger picture of the labor movement and social justice. ("The Committee," Ella May Wiggins Memorial Committee)

similarity.[34] In 1986, a staff-proposed highway marker was approved to memorialize the strike, but it was resisted and eventually dismissed by the mayor and town council of Gastonia. Mike Hall, the former Research Branch Supervisor of the NC Office of Archives and History, notes that "NC is the least unionized of the fifty states. There are many reasons for this but the lingering efforts of the strike at Gastonia, and other strikes in that period including one at Marion in 1934, should not be discounted."[35]

In recent years, Wiley Cash, a Gastonia local, wrote a fictionalized retelling of Ella May's life, including factual aspects of her upbringing, her role in the union, and her untimely death.[36] In telling the story, and leaning on the truth of the events that occurred in 1929, Cash successfully brought to life a narrative that has been largely ignored and discouraged. In an article in the *New York Times* about his work, it said that "Cash, with care and steadiness, has pulled from the wreckage of the past a lost moment of Southern progressivism."[37] Using his work in fictional writing to make information accessible and interesting to the average reader, Cash gives agency to a hometown folk hero that otherwise may be even more forgotten.

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[34] Eric Wildstein, "Martyr of Loray Mill' Remembered on 90th Anniversary of Her Death," Gastonia Gazette.
[35] While Hill's year was inaccurate for the Marion strike, his message clearly recognizes the importance of these efforts, and is just one example of how academic record and analysis of the various North Carolina mill strikes are integral to the understanding of the sentiment towards unions today. Michael Hill email exchange with Sarah Schneider, 2013. Appendix, 103.
[36] Cash, *The Last Ballad*
[37] Amy Rowland, "A Novelist Revisits a Deadly Textile Union Strike From 1929," The New York Times

FIGURE 6: Ella May's Tombstone, September 2020

As a whole, the communist-involved union in Gastonia had more resources and networks than the AFL-connected union of Marion. Fred Beal, the organizer and spokesperson for the union at Gastonia, was a well-known communist and had dedicated his life to speaking out against capitalism and helping form the "new democracy," a crusade that would eventually gain him several prison sentences that he fled.[38] Beal spent time in New England as a communist labor organizer, then came to Gastonia, and eventually absconded to the Soviet Union, and spent time between there and America, before returning several years later to serve his prison sentence in North Carolina. Beal held significant influence, and in 1937, wrote and published *Proletarian Journey: New England, Gastonia, Moscow*, which detailed his time and compared the working and living conditions in these areas. In Charlotte, when Beal first came to the South, he was

[38] Beal, *Proletarian Journey,* xi.

told, “If you succeed in organizing the workers at Loray, you’ll organize the South.”[39] The motivation for Beal to give every effort and utilize every resource to make Loray Mill a poster child for the revolution he believed could happen motivated him to get as much exposure for it as he was able. Beal received assistance from the union regularly, in the form of additional organizers, resources for the strikers, and propaganda, both locally and nationally distributed through their political presses.[40] The access to these resources did not keep every striker from going hungry, or losing their homes or jobs, and they did not guarantee a successful strike. They did allow for more primary sources to be created and the memory better preserved than that of the strike in Marion, though this was not the goal for the union at the time. There is still much work to be done in remembering and educating about the Gastonia strikes, but the connection to the Communist party allowed for the primary information to be preserved.

The similarities between the different strikes are easy and important to note. Like Elizabethton, Marion is not near a major city center, which could have made the events that were taking place there easier to ignore. As for the strike in Gastonia, the unionists were held on trial in nearby Charlotte, the largest city in North Carolina. As the state’s center of commerce and trade, the public eye was easily accessible in Charlotte, allowing for greater exposure of the situation in Gastonia.

It is also very possible that the Marion mill strike, and any other strike in 1929, was lost to regional and national memory due to the time period when it took place.

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[39] Beal, 120.

[40] Ibid., 126, 148. Beal did not always find it easy to work with the Communist Party organizers, though he agreed with their ideology. He was increasingly critical of the ways that they handled themselves through the Gastonia strike, and had to fight for the resources he was given. Image of the “Labor Defender” (Patrick Huber, “Up Beat Down South :’’Battle Songs of the Southern Class Struggle’’ Songs of the Gastonia Textile Strike of 1929.” *Southern cultures* 4, no. 2 (1998): 109)

Occurring a few months before the Great Depression, and being geographically removed from what would be considered the areas with a spotlight on the labor cause, it was easy to forget about the turmoil of a town and a people that were not easily accessible and relatable. With what seemed to be a new tragedy in every month and an incoming national economic event that would upset the living situation of nearly every American, the dismissing and forgetting of important events of 1929 and 1930 is easy to understand.

The time has passed for gathering interviews and having the mill workers of 1929 speak out for themselves about their actions. With these strikes taking place over ninety years ago, no one who worked there or lived in the mill village at the time can give their account of the events. We are at a crucial point in remembering these movements, as our most valuable perspectives and accounts will come from the descendants of the workers if their parents have chosen to recount the strike to them. Even these accounts have been rare and hard to find, but hopefully, we have not missed the opportunity to collect them.[41] Beyond this, we have lost hundreds of voices that lived through a critical, formative time in the region. Using what resources we have, I aim to provide agency to the lost accounts of those who were a part of the Marion movement as well as give the community an opportunity to become educated and heal from an event so very few know about.

1.2 What Happened: A Narrative Account

A comprehensive timeline of the strike is essential to this study, which in most accounts, stops at the shooting on October 2nd. I have chosen to include the trials that followed the shooting, and describe how the outcomes affected the town at the time, as it

[41] Jake Frankel, "Mountain Shame: Remembering the Marion Massacre," Mountain Xpress, September 1, 2014, https://mountainx.com/news/community-news/033011mountain-shame/)

helps to provide a greater context for understanding why the collective memory of the strike is what it is today. Including these reactions of the town also provides evidence that Marion had deep divisions along class lines which also contributed to the living and working conditions of the mill employees. An incomplete narrative and timeline has been part of the trouble with remembering this event in local and regional history. The timeline constructed here uses a combination of newspaper articles, court proceedings, church announcements, and personal accounts to craft an accurate narrative. A full account of the event, presented with factual backing and as objectively as possible, allows us to examine the strike and the shooting in its most transparent form.

This strike is essential to several different areas of history, and it is a story that deserves to be told and remembered objectively at the local, regional, and national level. When looking at the local history of Marion, one can see the negative mark that the strike left and the division it caused, which has been largely ignored. If this alone were all that would be accomplished by researching and working to educate others regarding the strike, it would be worth it. To add to the importance, the Marion Manufacturing Mill Strike was the deadliest textile mill strike in Appalachia, and one of the deadliest in the South. It introduces a new account to the labor history of Appalachia, which has primarily focused on coal mining strikes, and the recognition of this strike's importance will hopefully bring notice to other strikes in the region, such as the textile mill strike at Elizabethton. Nationally, the history of unions is often seen as a series of failures in the South and successes in the North. While this may seem true, to not have all of the accounts of unionizing in the South and the impact that they had on different communities takes away from the overall story of labor in the South. Marion's mill strike

also stands alone when considering mill strikes in the South, as the Marion unionists were more resistant to communist organizers, while the organizers at the Loray Mills were welcomed by the millhands. Every account of the workers and reporters, including the writings of Sinclair Lewis and Tom Tippett, make it clear that communism was not an organizing or driving force in the Marion picket lines, despite the beliefs of the anti-unionists in Marion.

"Marion is as barbarous as I say…." Sinclair Lewis dedicates full pages of a series of pamphlets focused on the deplorable living situations and conditions that existed for the mill workers that were employed by Marion Manufacturing. Lewis spent a lot of time in Marion and used the city as an example of how unions were a necessity in the South. To do that, it was in his best interest to sell the city as the "Mud Fairyland" that he describes, and quotes the Marion Kiwanis pamphlet that discusses the progressive and developed nature of life in the city. "…Marion is an ideal happy town, with a fairyland around it in which they [children] may frolic and grow sturdier," to which Lewis added "Happy Fairyland, where an eight-year-old girl frolics on bare sun-bitten red clay, after only seven or eight hours a day of washing, combing, feeding, quieting her four smaller brothers and sisters, with no older person there to help…."[42] The validity of Lewis's account could be called into question, as his presence and reports are one of the more criticized aspects of the event. As terrible as the living conditions were, the workers did not want to lose what little security and lodging they had. Looked down on by society, often referred to as lintheads by those above their social class, the mill hands had

[42] Lewis, 30.

nowhere else to turn, and more often than not, had to make decisions in the interest of their large families.

1.2.1 Timeline

The rumblings of resistance began earlier in February of 1929, with an alleged explosion at the home of Baldwin, the suspected cause being a dynamite scheme devised by unhappy workers. John Peel, the vice president of the State Federation of Labor, responded that he did not "attribute this outrage to any of the people who have been refused employment by either the Clinchfield or East Marion Mills, due to their Union Affiliations."[43] Most accounts do not reference such an early union affiliation, instead depicting it as a loose and last-minute occurrence. There are three distinct periods in the labor movement of Marion: The First Strike, The Second Strike, and the Aftermath. The First Strike took place from early 1929 to September 11th, 1929, while the Second Strike was the confusing and complicated day of October 2nd, and the Aftermath are the reactions to the shooting on October 2nd, including the trials and developing public opinion.

1.2.2 The First Strike

While there is no official record of when the first union meeting took place, we know through several sources that men from the Marion Manufacturing Mill approached the union organizers present at the Elizabethton strike. Wanting to organize both Marion Manufacturing and the nearby Clinchfield Mill, the union representatives explained that they were stretched thin, and would need to wait on representatives to come to them.[44] On May 23rd, the *McDowell News* published an article on the Union meeting in Marion

[43] Ibid.
[44] Tippet, 118.

led by Thomas F. McMahon, who was the president of the United Textile Workers, the textile union affiliated with AFL. "An enthusiastic audience, mainly textile workers, filled every available foot of space in the McDowell County courthouse…and effort will be made to organize the workers in Marion's mills.…"[45] The strike officially began less than a month later on July 11th with no official support from the union, as the UTW was still focusing on the Elizabethton.[46] On July 12th, Baldwin said in response to the beginning of the strike that "in the event of trouble, those not joining the union would be amply taken care of by the mill, while those who became union members would be evicted from the company-owned houses."[47] Two hundred and thirty families were in danger of being evicted from their mill village homes, with little-to-no legal options or support. Many resisted leaving, and the occupants viewed the evictions as a tool of intimidation that the mill owners threatened to use against its workers, forcing them into complacency.[48] The next day, local business owners and public authorities urged Asheville Lawyer J. Will Pless to intervene and diffuse the strike. He reluctantly agreed, but it is evident from his interview that he was not exclusively on the side of President Baldwin, and that he would "certainly take sides with the strikers if the management does not listen to them sympathetically and understandingly."[49] It is important to note here that Pless was the only western North Carolina local who owned stock in Marion Manufacturing, and is the primary focus of Travis Byrd's monograph *Unraveled*. Pless ended up supporting the workers to the point of defending their actions and their demands

[45] 'Launch Drive for Unions in Marion,' Massacre Scrapbook, 5.
[46] Tippet, 109.
[47] 'Marion Workers Hear Ultimatum,' Massacre Scrapbook, 5.
[48] Joseph Shaplen. "LABOR DAY PARADE BANNED AT MARION.", September 2, 1929.
[49] 'J Will Pless is Asked to Seek Solution,' Ibid.,6.

at a mill board meeting in New York, and he was "removed from the board and faded from the controversy."[50]

Reports were circulating that the strike had begun on July 18th, and eighteen strikers were arrested for "conspiracy to assault, beat and wound one, R. W. Baldwin, president of the Marion Manufacturing Company and other employes."[51] The next day, an article ran in the same local paper, The *Asheville Citizen*, arguing that no civil rights had been violated, and that Baldwin could not identify any of the men who allegedly attacked him. In response to this event, Judge N.A. Townsend signed an injunction on the 23rd against the seventeen mill workers, and one union organizer Alfred Hoffman, which restricted their picketing, meeting, or "agitating" around the mill's property.[52] The next notable event was on August 3rd, when sources reported that the "parades" that the strikers had been conducting through the mill village would continue, despite the injunction against their picketing on mill property.[53] This continued involvement with the courts and police department did not give the strike a good image with the authorities or townspeople, which was made worse by the rumors spread by the anti-unionists maintaining that the Marion strikers were tied to the Communist Party. On August 12th, Clinchfield, East Marion's neighboring mill, told its workers that they had no job after having a short closure due to their strike. The UTW did not encourage both Marion Manufacturing and Clinchfield to strike at this time, as they did not believe they could take care of both groups of workers and their families, but millworkers took matters into their own hands, which was characteristically different than other strikes going on in the

[50] Tippet, 117
[51] Massacre scrapbook, 9.
[52] Ibid., 10.
[53] Ibid., 16.

area. Four days later, the mill leadership called Sheriff Adkins and his deputies to remove striking workers from their Clinchfield mill village homes, but as the papers reported, "Clinchfield Mill Strikers Refuse to Leave Homes…SITUATION IS TENSE…Strikers Say There Are Not Enough Deputies in McDowell County To Evict Them from Their Homes, and Where They Stay."[54] The strike continued at Clinchfield, with picketers on the 18th arriving with their bibles in hand, organizing groups to watch over the safety of both strikers and non-strikers who were at the protest. In order to maintain the mill during the shutdown, "Passes have been issued to the maintenance men of the Clinchfield plant to allow those employes to enter the mill to fire the boilers of the plant as specified in insurance policies…."[55] This shows the true nature of the strikers and their goals, not to harm or injury any of their fellow workers, or even to destroy their company, but to receive the rights they stood for, and ending the injustice they were fighting against with minimal harm overall to everyone involved. The news reported on August 19th that Clinchfield would attempt to reopen on the 20th, and that scabs, non-union workers brought in to break the strike, would be called in.[56] At this point, Judge Townsend of Marion acted against the strikers by calling "two military units of the North Carolina national guard…to be brought to Marion."[57] As one article that ran on the 20th stated, "It is the history in North Carolina that the presence of national guard troops in strike territory means the defeat of the strikers."[58] This was not the case with the Marion strike, and the introduction of the National Guard did not foreshadow how the mill strike would

[54] Ibid., 14.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 21.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.,21.

be defeated. By all accounts, the Clinchfield Mill quietly returned to operation on the 20th, contrary to many of the predictions.[59]

Over the course of August 22nd-27th, Judge Townsend, as well as several local business people and representatives from the mill, met with union representatives at the suggestion of Governor Gardner and after several delays and deliberations, did not settle on an agreement that suited everyone present.[60] During these meetings, on the 24th, unrest was building as someone shot two union strikers, as well as shattered the windows of homes and the mill store, and set off explosions heard throughout the mill village.[61] After these talks concluded, on the 29th, authorities uncovered another dynamite scheme, this time with the Rev. J.N. Wise the alleged intended target. Wise was a Methodist Minister, who had "conducted an active anti-union campaign."[62] One of the most significant threats to the lifestyle of the mill workers going on strike was the possibility of being rejected and removed from membership by their church. In a small community without many social opportunities for low-class workers, the only thing closer than church family would have been their blood relatives, and in some cases, the church relations may have been more intimate. As Tippet observes, "There were churches everywhere, partly subsidized by the mills. No social activity outside the church services, no moving pictures, no dance halls, and no parks were found here."[63] The churches in the mill village that the workers attended accepted funding from the mill owners, meaning that the

[59] 'Clinchfield Cotton Mill Re-Opened in Marion with Situation Quiet,' Ibid.
[60] Ibid.,26-36.
[61] Ibid, 40.
[62] Ibid., 39.
[63] Tippett, 112.

leaders of these congregations would be expected to take whatever side of the conflict represented the mill's best interest as a business.[64]

The union representatives once again stood by their statements that no union striker would be responsible for the explosions in the mill vilage. Through all of the allegations and finger-pointing, Governor Gardner remained silent on the course of action he thought was needed to deal with the "Marion Situation."[65] Gardner himself was a mill owner, and this influenced his reaction to the strikes that took place across the state during his term in office. The first strike ended on September 11th, though "no written agreement or statement was signed by the union and the company." Judge Townsend said that the terms of the agreement were that "each mill operate on a 55 hour per week schedule and that the pay per hour and per piece shall remain as at present…" mentioning the possible renegotiating to longer hours in the future, as well as "no discrimination against the employes because they belong to the union." [66] This final point became the reason for further striking, despite understanding of settlement. According to the union, the Marion mill did not rehire one hundred and fourteen unionized workers, and "all this led to strong discontent which was manifest on October 1st, the day before the second strike, since it was felt that the company had in fact broken its agreement…."[67]

[64] "The Strikes at Marion, North Carolina", 11.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Information Services, 5.
[67] Ibid., 6.

1.2.3 The Second Strike and Shooting

In the early morning of October 2nd, a second walkout occurred. The exact time of the occurrence is one of several ambiguities in accounts of this day. Some sources say that the strike began, unplanned, at 1 am when the power was shut off to machines by an enraged worker, and the workers walked out and waited together to "picket the gates and inform the day shift that a strike was on."[68] Every account of this event differs, either through the lens of news reports, church newsletters, personal accounts, mill documentation, court records, or police reports. Still, one key factor remains the same throughout the accounts: there exists uncertainty over whether or not the strikers were armed and prepared to use deadly force against the sheriff and his deputies. Besides the statements of the strikers and pro-union witnesses, which all cling to the belief that the strikers were unarmed, the accounts of the anti-union forces made ambiguous statements, most likely to justify the actions of the authorities.

In a newsletter that circulated called "Information Service" by the Department of Research and Education at the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, distributed on December 28th, 1929, it was reported that "No one of the sheriff's forces was shot, although deputies testified that the strikers shot at them, and one said that the bullet grazed his head. No guns were found on the strikers, although testimony was given that shots came from both sides."[69] No account can be settled as correct or objective, so the question of who shot first, or who was armed, will continue to be a mystery of this event. Other disputes come from the number of men that were killed or injured that day. According to the church newsletter, four died on-site, while two died later, and fifteen

[68] Ibid., 7.
[69] Ibid., 7.

were wounded.[70] According to the *New York Times*, there were 24 wounded, and that one of the injured was a woman, though other sources do not mention this. The article goes on to say that "the strikers wounded, with few exceptions, were shot in the back," insinuating that they were fleeing from the gunfire, rather than returning it, which many accounts support. [71] In other articles, it is reported by eye-witnesses that the sheriff said "clean them up, clear them out," and that he and his deputies "looked like they shot to kill anything they could come to."[72]

When injured and dying strikers arrived at the hospital, they were denied access to medical treatment at the due to their union-involvement. The excuse was that they could not provide medical care without a guaranteed method of payment, as the insurance the mill held would not be responsible for the expense of strike-related medical care. To be denied of services at the local hospital where many of the mill employees donated money to aid in its construction showed what side the hospital was on in regard to the strike. Bill Ross, one of the local organizers and leaders, "had to telegraph to New York to beg money so that the men would not be turned out. But all of that has been resolved now, because most of the men who were taken to the hospital after the little fracas with the Sheriff are dead."[73]

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[70] Ibid.
[71] From a Staff Correspondent of The New York Times. "3 DIE IN STRIKE RIOT IN NORPH CAROLINA; TROOPS GO TO MARION." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*. New York, N.Y.: New York Times Company, October 3, 1929. http://search.proquest.com/docview/104885161/.
[72] Special to The New York Times. "CONSULT GOVERNOR ON CAROLINA STRIKE." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*. New York, N.Y.: New York Times Company, October 6, 1929. http://search.proquest.com/docview/104873944/.
[73] Lewis, 16.

1.2.4 The Aftermath

The series of events that took place on October 2nd is where the majority of accounts stop, but a fair assessment of the strike cannot be presented without including what followed the massacre. The outcomes of the trials of those involved in the shooting, and more importantly, the impact that the entire incident had on the strikers and their families deserve to be a part of the narrative of this tragedy. This part of the timeline has been crafted based on news reports, both local and national, that are accessible at this time.[74] On October 4th, a funeral for four of the men killed on October 2nd took place in a vacant lot near the mill village where the union meetings had taken place all summer. The caskets sat on sawhorses by the speaker's area, and flowers had been arriving all morning.

When the time came for the striker's funerals, no church officials were willing to speak or attend. After the shooting, those in charge of the local congregations were quick to distance themselves from the situation. As the church newsletter stated, the official statements about the churches' role in the strike were ambiguous and distancing. Distinctions were made by the authors of the pamphlet between the town churches and the churches in the mill villages, trying to split hairs to remove their selves from scrutiny.[75] The circular went as far as to claim that "efforts were made in the short time available to secure prominent southern churchmen to speak at the joint funeral of the strikers killed by the sheriff's forces." Still, other records show that the anti-union sentiment was more likely what caused local churches and preachers to refuse to take part

[74] The most accurate sources for the trials are currently unavailable due to the shutdown of several public institutions during the 2020 pandemic.
[75] Ibid.

in the funeral. The authors of the pamphlet made further statements to remove blame from the churches for their decisions regarding their lack of involvement with the funerals. Still, the primary sources do not corroborate these claims, and they are not discussed in the existing historiography.[76]

With the mill churches having removed strikers from their membership, none of the mill church leaders were willing to speak at the funeral, leaving union leaders, fellow strikers, and two preachers- Mr. Hicks from a local unaffiliated congregation, and the other, a mountain preacher named Cicero Queen- to oversee the affair.[77] Over one thousand mill workers from across Marion and their families attended, singing, praying, and grieving in a makeshift parade of mourners, without a proper venue to remember their dead. The closing prayer delivered by Cicero Queen encapsulates many of the feelings of the mourners:

Oh Lord Jesus Christ,
here are men in their coffins,
blood of my blood,
Bone of my bone.
I trust, O God,
That these friends will go to a place better
than this mill village or any other place in Carolina.

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[76] Ibid, 11. The church newsletter suggests that a local church official by the name of Mr. Hicks on behalf of the self-organized Yancy Street Church took part in the funeral, which it has been confirmed by one newspaper source that he led the opening prayer at the joint funeral. More evidence of the churches who belonged to this group verses the mill churches was the reporting of the special considerations the mill churches received from the mill owners, such as free rent, coal and a hefty stipend to the pastors of the congregations. Along with this, the reports of the mill living conditions detailed in this newsletter, and the reporting of the Marion mill's finances, it is clear that this newsletter was published as a way to remove this group of churches from blame, while also not supporting the strikers and keeping themselves as uninvolved as possible, rather shifting the blame onto the company. In their final statements, the Commission states that "the tragedies at Gastonia and Marion, North Carolina, have appalled all who accept the respective ethical teachings of our religions" and that they "condemn such a course unqualifiedly"(15). These are sentiments that would have been helpful at the start of the strike, where their influence may have had more impact on the mill officials and the authorities than after the fact, taking a stance when it was convenient.

[77] From a Staff Correspondent of The New York Times. "STIRRING RITES HELD FOR MARION VICTIMS." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*. New York, N.Y.: New York Times Company, October 5, 1929. http://search.proquest.com/docview/104888275/. In some accounts, Cicero's last name is either Queen or Quinn.

Dear God, What would Jesus do if he were to come to Carolina?[78]

FIGURE 7: Striker Funeral, used with permission from McDowell County Historical Society

On October 10th, Sheriff Adkins and his deputies all testified that the strikers shot at them first and had character witnesses defending their actions from the most respectable of the community.[79] The next day, eight deputies were held under $3,000 bonds on charges of second-degree murder, under a superior court that would meet in Marion on November 11th. Baldwin petitioned Governor Gardner on October 25th to allow the National Guard present in Marion to stay "until the remaining undesirables in his and the neighboring Clinchfield village are removed."[80] On November 10th, Governor Gardner ordered the withdrawal of the troops from Marion to take place the next day. The strikers who had

[78] There are several different reportings on the words to Queen's prayer, but this version is the most common one that can be found.
[79] Special to The New York Times. "MARION DEPUTIES ADMIT SHOOTING." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*. New York, N.Y.: New York Times Company, October 11, 1929. http://search.proquest.com/docview/104879162/.
[80] "TELLS GARDNER MARION STILL NEEDS TROOPS." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*. New York, N.Y.: New York Times Company, October 26, 1929. http://search.proquest.com/docview/104885335/.

been "ousted" from the local Baptist church would win a victory, as the church decided to host an open meeting where union representatives would plead their case for their members there, rather than formally at the courthouse. One hundred and nineteen more strikers were scheduled to be tried on the 11th for various charges, "ranging from assault and murder to rebellion." The *New York Times* ran an article detailing different stories of the workers who would be evicted, highlighting the struggles and hardships they experienced in the mill village. [81]

Two days after the troops were removed, Sheriff Adkins was exonerated for his involvement in the shooting, and the courts charged thirty-seven workers with resisting authorities and rioting. By all accounts, one of the hardest aspects of the trial had been putting together a jury that best represented the peers of those on trial. Over 100 people were questioned, and still, there was worry that more would be needed.[82]On November 19th, testimony was heard against Hoffman regarding the encouragement to use dynamite as a way to get what they wanted and proposed brutality towards non-union workers, and the prosecutors interrogated several witnesses to these conversations. All four men who were on trial pleaded not guilty to all of the charges against them.[83] The jury retired for the night of the 29th, settling on an 11 to 1 verdict for conviction, because J.O. Hudson, a

[81] 'EJECTED STRIKERS WIN CHURCH TRIAL, TRIALS OF 119 BEGIN TODAY,' Massacre Scrapbook, 32.
[82] From a Staff Correspondent of The New York Times. "45 ARE INDICTED IN MARION RIOTS." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*. New York, N.Y.: New York Times Company, November 14, 1929. http://search.proquest.com/docview/104681939/.
[83] From a Staff Correspondent of The New York Times. "HINT OF DYNAMITE RELATED AT MARION." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*. New York, N.Y.: New York Times Company, November 20, 1929. http://search.proquest.com/docview/104843672/.

farmer, was unsure that the strike would have been an illegal gathering without the involvement of the sheriff and his deputies.[84]

On the morning on November 30th, the headlines read "Strikers Convicted of Riot." Four men, including Hoffman, were given a guilty of rioting verdict. This was the second time in as many weeks for these men to have been on trial. When the charges of insurrection didn't stick, the courts tried them for rioting. The judge sentenced the men to work on the public roads, with the longest punishment lasting six months. With these convictions, there remained fifty more men to try for rioting and four for the alleged dynamiting scheme, which the courts had not yet scheduled. It was announced at this time that the deputies, eight in total, who were on trial for the shooting on October 2nd would stand trial on December 10th. At the trial of the deputies involved in the shooting, the judge and jury acquitted all eight, ruling that their actions were conducted in self-defense and as a "justifiable use of force in the enforcement of the law."[85] These are the facts as accurately as can be known. From the minute the shooting ended, actions were taken to manipulate how this event was seen. To understand how and why the memory was transformed or forgotten we will examine memory and identity.

The Marion Strike's most considerable importance lies in the fact that it stands at the intersection of southern history, Appalachian history, and American labor history. While some of these disciplines have been studied more thoroughly than others, growth in any of these subjects is important and stands as reason enough to investigate this strike. Though the strike ended in what looked to be a loss for the worker, things did change for

[84] "STRIKE CASE GOES TO JURY AT MARION." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*. New York, N.Y.: New York Times Company, November 30, 1929. http://search.proquest.com/docview/104835799/.
[85] Information Services, 10.

the better in the mills after the strike was defeated, which aids our discussion on collection memory.

CHAPTER TWO: STILL SHACKLED

The strike and tragedy in Marion has been overlooked by the vast majority of academia, and the people of the community in which it took place, leaving valuable historical analysis out of the overall picture of labor in the South. It has been under-researched, possibly because of the lack of recognition of its importance, but more likely, due to the inaccessibility of the few primary and secondary sources that exist. The importance of fully examining the current historiography, the memory of the strike, and the solutions that are being pursued by certain members of the community cannot be stressed enough.

2.1 What Has Been Said: Strike Silence

In 2004, Mike Lawing published *The Marion Massacre*, which gives a general popular history perspective to the event, but it reads more like a novel than an academic analysis. While the writing style and narrative are easy to follow and understand, the monograph was printed in such a small quantity that it is inaccessible to most, and unknown to the majority. In addition, Lawing did not provide specific citations or transcripts from his individual interviews with the locals. As an author, he tells a captivating story, but does so in a way that is distinctly biased and lacking objectivity. Lawing had family involved in the strike efforts and wrote in such a way that made the reader aware of the side that he took, being pro-union and anti-police in this instance. This evident bias could lead one to believe that in not including the transcriptions of his interviews, Lawing may have manipulated the information given to him in order to fit the narrative he was wanting to portray

In 2015, Travis Sutton Byrd wrote *Unraveled: Labor Strife and Carolina Folk during the Marion Textile Strikes of 1929*, which focuses broadly on the labor strikes that were happening in North and South Carolina at the time, and contextualizes Marion's strike in this larger solidarity movement. Byrd focuses on a local politician and part-owner of Marion Manufacturing, J. Will Pless. He has a unique role in the strike, not only sharing the interest of the mill owners, but also the interest of the workers, as he worked to bridge the gap between the two.[86] Byrd presents the strike through the lens of the development of the "New South," and the impact that industry had on Appalachia. To date, this is the most comprehensive and complete account of the strike, though it does not focus on the strike exclusively.

While very little historiography exists for this strike, other graduate-level theses have examined the strike from different academic disciplines. Several of the older works hold self-conducted interviews that other writers have not referenced, most likely due to the fact that they did not have access to them or know of their existence. These interviews are essential to this and any further study, as having only the interview by the Finleys on official record from the time means that their statements are harder to corroborate.

Ransom Ellis Holcombe wrote "The Textile Strikes in Marion, North Carolina, 1929: A Challenge to the New South" in 1971, at East Tennessee State University. He self-conducted interviews in 1970, which are not documented or cited in other writings on the Marion Mill Strike. Holcombe focuses on the implications of the mill strikes in Marion, the concept and development of the New South, and the politics arising from the labor unions in the southern textiles industries. Holcombe also observes that the strikers

[86] Travis Sutton Byrd, *Unraveled*, 17.

in Marion were resistant to working with the communist organizers that had visited from Gastonia, and this led to their meeting with Alfred Hoffman, the UTW organizer based in Asheville.[87] Holcombe provides cited economic and business information that inform and add to the context, which other accounts lack.

Sam Watson Howie wrote *The New South in the North Carolina Foothills: A Study of the Early Industrial Experience in McDowell County* in 1978. Howie also had several self-conducted interviews from mill employees who were present or participated in the strike, which added further testimony and corroboration to the existing accounts of the strike. Howie's primary arguments focused on the legal situations that surrounded the strike and provided interpretation and insight to the injunctions and other legal actions taken against both the union and the mill as the drive for progress. He argues that the industrialization of the New South took its toll on this small mountain town.[88]

More recently, Monica Wilson wrote "The Marion Strike and Massacre of 1929*,"* a senior thesis at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, to complete her Bachelor's degree. While this is undergraduate work, it is important to include in the historiography of the strike, as it is a current non-monographic scholarly work dedicated to the strike written in 2012. Wilson had access to more sources than any of those who wrote theses before her. She did an excellent job of utilizing the tools to present a complete, objective image of the strike, with very little analysis. Not only does this help build the meager historiography, but it is an example of how this topic is still relevant and important to add to our regional and national history, as Wilson says, "The Marion

[87] Ransom E. Holcombe, "*The Textile Strikes in Marion"*, 51.
[88] Sam Watson Howie, "*The New South in the North Carolina Foothills"*, 117.

Massacre was one of the most brutal massacres in labor history."[89] Yet, none of the historiography she presents focuses purely on this strike. Recognizing its importance by writing her senior thesis on it, Wilson does the work to try and bring attention to an important event in Appalachian and Southern history.

In 2019, Korick Sisomphone wrote his Master's Thesis, "Martyr's Local: Publics, Violence, Memory-Making and Ramifications of the Commitment to Progress through Rhetorics of the Marion Massacre, 1929-Present." Sisomphone focuses on the massacre through the lens of Appalachian Studies, and relies heavily on Appalachian State's Special Collections and their collection of Oral Histories to make his argument about the crafted public memory and violence that surrounded the event. His approach has significant sociological influence, which allows him to successfully examine the drive of "progress" in the New South, and how it led to the counter-publicity that occurred following the massacre. Sisomphone focuses less on the strike and its context rather focusing primarily on rhetoric that came from the shooting. Unlike Sisomphone's sociological work, my thesis focuses on the strike through the lens of comparative historical analysis and the history and development of the memory of the strike, or in this case, the lack of the memory.[90]

There is very little analysis beyond basic reporting of the event, the economic importance of the mill to the town, and the role of the idea of the New South in the event. There are no great debates in academia over the events of the strike, as it is largely unknown in the fields it would be examined in. The largest debate in regard to the strike

[89] Monica Wilson, "*The Marion Strike and Massacre of 1929"*
[90] The evidence of the lack of memory, or misremembering of the event can be found in the social media posts in the appendix, as well as in the interviews of Holda and Bradburn.

itself is whether or not the strikers were carrying firearms, and if they were, who fired first? This question may never be answered, as anyone present has passed, many without leaving behind any record of their account. My thesis adds to the body of work in the analysis of the event in a chronological method, which is not found in any of the other works to this scale. Other works have also not explored why the strike has been ignored by the locals and the community nor have they highlighted the importance of the event being added to the larger body of work on labor history. Marion Manufacturing's strike of 1929 has been shrouded in misunderstanding and mystery due to the community's role in ignoring the event. Shame, disappointment, and disagreement have all influenced the currently held view of the strike and the shooting, leading the average local to have an inaccurate understanding of the strike, which can be corrected by an accessible account of the events, investigating the causes and strains behind the lack of memory and shame, and by exploring the solutions that several community members have worked to enact to change the current understanding of the strike, the strikers, and the town's role in the early labor movements of the South. While the authors of these sources are not all trained historians, but all contribute to the overall picture of the strike. There is also value in using them together as resources, different books and theses pull from various disciplines and provide different perspectives through which to look at how the memory of the strike is written about in academia.

2.2 What is Memory?

Memory, simply defined, is the remembrance of a past event or circumstance. While literal, and not inaccurate, memory in relation to history and historical events is more than just remembering. In the case of the mill strike, the lack of collective memory

affects the local community by erasing a monumental tragedy from history and leaving in its wake inaccurate accounts and misinformation that takes away any agency that the mill workers of Marion could have had. Collective memory is, as Adam Brown would say, "a community's shared renderings of the past that help shape its collective identity."[91] In a collection of essays focused on resistance in Appalachia, Stephen Fischer explains the activist spirit of Appalachians. He argues that part of the reason cultural studies have not been as prevalent in the area is due to the stereotypes and generalizations that often surround the region and its people. That being said, "Appalachian scholars are coming to recognize the existence and importance of such resistance in Appalachia's history and to understand that it has most frequently occurred in struggles to preserve traditional values and ways of life…."[92] This strike is a prime example of this, and along with other resistance in the region, deserves recognition.

Collective memory and identity are focused on in this chapter, such as how it is used in historical study and the importance of how the lack of a collective memory surrounding the strike has negatively affected the community's identity. The majority of southern studies regarding memory and identity in history center around the Civil War and the formation of southern identity. This same ideological process can be applied to the strike and subsequent shooting, and how the community has reacted and dealt with it, short and long term.

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[91] Adam D Brown et al., "Memory's Malleability: Its Role in Shaping Collective Memory and Social Identity," Frontiers (Frontiers, July 5, 2012), https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00257/full),1

[92] Stephen L. Fisher, *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 4.

Why has history overlooked this event? How does something that can add to the narrative of so many different subsections of history be overlooked? The facts of this strike have been long obscured by community shame and those in local power at the time of the strike. They hid a narrative that is a story of empowerment, collective activism, and an example of the will of the working class in the region. Forgetting resistance and activism has also occurred in other parts of Appalachia, when it comes to other events, but the importance of these studies is recognized. "Resistance in Appalachia should involve an examination of regional culture as a force that informs the construction of class consciousness, gender relations, regional identity, and community life."[93] By uncovering the event, its details, and its effects, we need to place it historically where it belongs, and use it as a stepping stone to learn more about the people of the region, and the importance of the labor movement in Appalachia and the South. It tells a story that will be important to more than just the local community, that also deserves justice and understanding in this unique and important strike.

The study of memory in the South in particular has focused on much larger-scale events, such as the Civil War. The memory of the Civil War, with recorded facts that should be able to be presented objectively, remains a significant source of contention and dispute in some communities, particularly those in the South. The ability to misremember certain events to support a personal or political agenda is not uncommon, and this is evident in the narrative of Civil War-era events, as well as the Marion Mill Strike.

[93] Ibid., 10.

The demonizing of the union in Marion was fueled by the anti-labor sentiments that existed and continue to perpetuate in the South. It is a long-held notion that unions thrived in the North due to the level of industrialization that was there and did not blossom in the South due to the economic focus on agriculture.[94] There was also the assumption that many held, and still do today, that all unionists were communists. They feared that the ideology threatened their way of life, pushing the average southerner further from the union.[95] There are many pressures in the early twentieth century that could have aided in the development of the anti-union sentiments, but one undeniable was racism. In one interview, Lawing was told that the reason for organizing Marion through the UTW was that "The Gastonia crowd was communist and the communists wanted Negroes in the union and in the cotton mills. The Marion crowd wasn't communist and certainly didn't want a union with blacks."[96] Marionites saw unions as not only communist influencers, but as interracial allies, which added to the desire to keep the unions out of the mills, and labor sympathizers out of town. This continued to be an issue in organizing into the 1950s, with organization efforts failing continuously in the South.[97]

Fitzhugh Brundage, a prominent historian of southern history and memory, addresses these issues throughout his extensive list of works. In one of his edited works, a

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[94] Ken Green, "Why Organized Labor Struggles in the American South." UnionTrack, January 27, 2020

[95] In Mary Fredrickson's *Looking South: Race, Gender, and the Transformation of Labor from Reconstruction to Globalization*. *Looking South*, Fredrickson unpacks these and many other pressures that existed on the organization of the south in the early 20s and 30s. She does mention Marion, but does not diversify her sources on it, using mostly her interview with the Finleys to base her understanding of the Marion strike off of. This is a succinct and important resource in labor history in the south, but misconstrues some of the details of the Marion strike.

[96] Lawing, 15.
[97] Minchin, *What do We need a Union for?, 43.*

collection of essays entitled *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity*, historians evaluate different groups, and how memory has shaped their identities. From Mississippi to the Great Smoky Mountains, history and memory are used by and affect different groups in different ways. Tourism plays a large part in the adaptation of memory and tradition, and the question of what is authentic and what is politically driven is central to these arguments.[98] In his essay, specifically regarding southern memory, Brundage argues that "Struggles between groups to define some social memories as authoritative and others as trivial fictions are also contests over who exercises the power to make some historical narratives possible and silence other."[99] This statement, and his argument throughout the article support what is evident throughout the history of the Civil War and southern history in general. It directly relates to how the current lack of accurate information regarding the Marion mill strike has led to a lack of collective memory, largely due to those who had interest in keeping the event a secret and the outcome of the strike. In his book *The Southern Past,* Brundage discusses at length the economic and political pressures on memory, and how counter-memory is born from an inaccurate and biased collective memory.[100] A growing negative attitude towards the mill could have proven detrimental to the community, as the economic success of Marion did in part rely on the mill's success.

Alongside Brundage, many other historians debunk the myths and misinformation that is remembered regarding the time surrounding the Civil War. Kenneth Greenberg was the editor of a collection of essays entitled *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History*

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[98] W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Where These Memories Grow.*
[99] W. Fitzhugh Brundage "Southern Memories." 9.
[100] W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past*

and Memory in which various historians examine the little that history knows of Nat Turner, who led a pivotal rebellion that was a defining moment in American history. Having little knowledge of Turner has led to various types of narratives and perspectives surrounding him, leaving much to interpretation and little room for facts.[101] In another collection of essays, *The Memory of Civil War in American Culture,* the role that politics played in the remembering of the Civil War is investigated, whether by commemoration or public memory. Brundage reviews this collection favorably, recognizing that these essays present a wide view of the issues that surround giving the right amount of importance to the Civil War. Greater attention to the memories of individual southerners will reveal the ways in which historical memory informed day-to-day life."[102] This thesis is an attempt to add to the needed scholarship that Brundage proposed.

2.3 Where We Stand: Current Social Memory

In Marion, one would be hard-pressed to find anyone who could tell you any factual information about the mill strike today. Without access to the information about the mill strike, that will not change. While there is a short paragraph giving brief details about the strike on the Marion Wikipedia page, there are no outward links to further information.[103] On the official Marion city website, the mention of the three mills that operated in the city during the twentieth century is that;

> The mills not only provided jobs, they were responsible for installing water and sewer infrastructure, streets, sidewalks, parks and homes for employees and their

[101] W. Fitzhugh Brundage and Kenneth S. Greenberg, "Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory," *The Journal of Southern History* 70, no. 2 (January 2004): p. 424, https://doi.org/10.2307/27648419)

[102] W. Fitzhugh Brundage. "Contentious and Collected: Memory's Future in Southern History." The Journal of Southern History 75, no. 3 (August 1, 2009), 74.

[103] While Wikipedia is not a scholarly, academic source, it is where the average person would begin to search for answers in many cases. Accessibility is essential and important in regard to this event. ("Marion, North Carolina," Wikipedia)

> families. Though the mills are no longer in operation, the neighborhoods known as "mill villages" have flourished. Many former employees and their families still call these areas home, and share an unwavering pride for their community with fellow neighbors.[104]

This statement is a strong example of the forgetting of events for political agendas that impact the town to this day. While this statement is factual, it is not contextualized in its presentation. It could mislead the reader by ignoring the problematic and inconvenient truth of the mills and the events that led to those improvements.

This also serves as an example of how there is limited general knowledge of the event, but when it is remembered, it is surrounded by mystery, ambiguity, and negativity. In one particular exchange, a man from Marion replied to a social media post regarding the mill village, mill life, and very briefly, the strikers, with hostility and misinformation. In a recent Facebook post regarding the history of Marion, the original poster referenced the Sinclair Lewis account, writing that "Sinclair Lewis was not a journalist, he was a leftist hack who hated the South and small-town America for which he had a loathing.…"[105] Many McDowell locals have echoed this sentiment, on this public post and dozen others, and are exemplary of the present negative attitude, as well as a misinformed community.[106] The root of this attitude is not unique to Marion, and calls back to the belief in Marion's communist ties, that most assumed were closely related to the Gastonia strikes as well.

Mike Lawing, who authored *The Marion Massacre*, is credited as having "succeeded in getting this story home to the folks in Marion and McDowell County whether they want to talk about it or not." His view on the memory of the mill strike was

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[104] "Marion's History," About Marion, http://marionnc.org/Marion/pages/marion.html
[105] John Field Pankow/Joneric Bruner exchange, Facebook post, appendix, 100.

that "It was as if both sides were ashamed of what had happened, and nobody wanted to talk about it.…"[107] While he did conduct several interviews and helped shed light on the existence of this event, his contributions are not exclusively positive.

Examining the town's reaction and efforts to forget the strike allows one to clearly see the importance of ideological agreement over other social divisions. With the "othering" of the strikers, anyone who was anti-union could be grouped together, regardless of the socioeconomic or class distinctions that usually stood with in the community. This designation shows the importance of the social hierarchy that existed in Marion at the time, and is still evident today. The memory that was saved and believed was the memory that the majority chose to have, either quieting the pro-unionists and sympathizers by threatening their livelihoods, or by running them out of their homes or town all together.

2.4 Music and Memory

Very few strikes and labor movements have staked their claim in the memory of popular culture in America. From the innumerable amount of protest songs, with possibly the most recognizable among all union activity being "Solidarity Forever," the spirit of the worker and the mistreatment that individual laborers have experienced is present in music through the twentieth century. This song has been changed and molded to fit a variety of struggles by several different protest groups, from the Women's Movement to the Civil Rights Movement.[108] Marion has a song written about its strike, entitled "The

[107] Perry Deane Young, "Reliving a Massacre," INDY Week, April 13, 2005, https://indyweek.com/news/archives/reliving-massacre/
[108] "Solidarity Forever." Solidarity Forever | Industrial Workers of the World.. https://www.iww.org/history/icons/solidarity_forever.

Marion Massacre," by social activist and musician Woody Guthrie. For undocumented reasons, there is not an existing recording of the song sung by Guthrie, and it has largely been overlooked, much like the event that inspired it. The importance of protest music to the labor movements of the early twentieth century has been a newer line of study that has furthered the understanding of strike culture, and Marion's strike is not alone in its influence on the subject.

Protest music has been recognized as a critical aspect of demonstrations and social revolutions, having its own genre and featuring famous artists and groups such as Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, Black Flag, Green Day, Beyoncé, and countless others. Much like the protest music of today, the goal of strike songs in the early twentieth century was to spread a message and unite those protesting. Not only a method of practical, external expression, protest music has had proven mental benefits and has spoken to the shared experience across time of the worker in industrial America. "Although labor and strike songs were most often the creation of one individual, sometimes two, they communicated shared feelings, thoughts, and values." In *Strike Songs of the Depression*, Timothy Lynch does not explicitly mention the Marion strike, but references the Gastonia strike and martyr Ella May's famous resistance song, "The Mill Mother's Lament." May's anthem was one that included everyone working and struggling in the mill, and spoke to the shared community and identity that spurred and encouraged the movement. [109] Her role, and the role of music in general, was integral to the strikes of 1929.

We leave our home in the morning,
We kiss our children good-bye,

[109] Timothy P. Lynch "*Strike Songs of the Depression*", 3.

While we slave for the bosses,
Our children scream and cry.

And when we draw our money,
Our grocery bills to pay,
Not a cent to spend for clothing,
Not a cent to lay away.

And on that very evening,
Our little son will say,
"I need some shoes, dear mother,
And so does sister May."

How it grieves the heart of a mother,
You everyone must know,
But we can't buy for our children,
Our wages are too low.

Now listen to me, workers,
Both women and men,
We are sure to win our union,
If all would enter in.

I hope this will be a warning,
I hope you will understand,
And help us win our victory,
And lend to us a hand.

It is for our little children,
That seem to us so dear,
But for us nor them, dear workers,
The bosses do not care.

But understand, all workers,
Our union they do fear,
Let's stand together, workers,
And have a union here.[110]

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[110] May's most famous song was sung to a tune of another ballad that she most likely heard in her upbringing, Little Mary Phaghan. She was the single mother of four children, having been abandoned by her husband, John Wiggins. After he left, she dropped Wiggins from her name, and worked as much as possible to provide for her children. In her own words, the motivation for "Mill Mother's Lament" is clear. ""I'm the mother of nine. Four of them died with the whooping cough, all at once. . . . I asked the super to put me on the day-shift, so I could tend 'em, but he wouldn't. I don't know why. So I had to quit my job and then there wasn't any money for medicine, so they just died. I never could do anything for my children, not even keep 'em alive, it seems. That's why I'm for the union, so I can do better for them." ("Ella May

Ella May arguably reached more people with her heartfelt songs about the plight of the mill workers than any paid union representative did with their speeches of solidarity. Songwriting was an already present institution of expression, especially in rural or mountain communities, and was one of the more relatable and accessible means of entertainment to mill workers. Taking into account the presence and importance of the radio as a form of communication and "leisure-time activity," it is no wonder that one of the richest resources of accounts of mill workers and their plight came from resistance music, written by their fellow laborers. [111]

In Vincent J. Roscigno and William F. Danaher's book, *The Voice of Southern Labor: Radio, Music, and Textile Strikes, 1929-1934*, Marion's strike receives more attention than one might expect. The culture of the Marion strike is closely compared and often grouped with that of the Gastonia strike. However, the authors draw appropriate lines to understand the ideological differences between the two. Despite the differences between the strikes in North Carolina, much of the spirit of resistance was the same; several musicians traveled between Marion and Gastonia, singing and supporting the morale as best they could. "An oppositional culture was no doubt already present in Gastonia and Marion, but the musicians who performed and created new songs helped forge, if not legitimate, this protest repertoire…."[112] The "Marion Massacre," is one among many valuable primary sources that need to be utilized in understanding the

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Wiggins and 'Mill Mother's Lament' Protest Songs For Change," North Carolina Arts Council, June 10, 2019)

[111] Vincent J. Roscigno and William F. Danaher, *The Voice of Southern Labor Radio, Music, and Textile Strikes, 1929-1934* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 45, 64.

[112] Voices, 80-81.

culture of the strikers, and are a useful way to corroborate accounts that we have describing the mill conditions, and how strikers expressed them.

A story now I'll tell you,
Of a fearful massacre,
Which happened down in Dixie
On the borders of the sea.

'Twas in Marion, North Carolina
In a little mountain town,
Six workers of the textile mills
In cold blood were shot down.

'Tis ever the same old story
With the loborers of our land.
They're ruled by mighty powers,
And riches they command.

It started over money,
The world's most vain desire,
Yet we realize the laborer
Is worthy of his hire.

These men were only asking
Their rights and nothing more,
That their families would not suffer
With a wolf at every door.

Why is it over money,
These men from their friends must part,
Leaving home and loved ones
With a bleeding, broken heart?

But some day they'll meet them
On that bright shore so fair,
And live in peace forever,
There'll be no sorrow there

There'll be no sorrow there
There'll be no sorrow there,
There'll be no sorrow there,
In heaven above,
Where all is love,
There'll be no sorrow there.[113]

[113]Norm Cohen "*American Folk Songs a Regional Encyclopedia*".

2.5 Where did the Memory go?

From official local accounts to national newspapers, there is no denying the weight of the mill strikes and tragic shootings that rests on the city of Marion. The only place in the area that has any record of the strike, beside a seldom-opened and nearly inaccessible wall display at a nearby business, is the McDowell County Historical Society, overseen by Patti Holda. In a recent interview, Holda provided a unique perspective as the head of the Genealogy and Local History room at the McDowell County Library, she comes in contact with almost anyone who is interested in the history of the community. When anyone, local or visiting, is looking for information on a lesser known McDowell event, such as the strike, Holda is the place to start. In this position, she is able to gauge the knowledge that has been distributed throughout the community, and is an advocate for educating and correcting any misunderstandings and mystery that surrounds the strike. Holda didn't know about the strike until she began working at the McDowell County Library, and overseeing the local history and genealogy room in 2008. In 2011, she joined the McDowell County Historical Society armed with a history degree, but learned most of her local history on the job, due to the limited amount of information on our local history. Her knowledge of the strike originally came from people coming by the library and sharing their stories with her. She has been an integral part of the formation of different exhibits, community talks, and events that surround the strikes, and has seen both sides of the reactions that people have to it. In one particular exhibit, hosted at the county library and partially funded by researcher Mike Blankenship, Holda watched previous mill employees travel from distant communities to reminisce on their

time in East Marion. While this group was not involved in the 1929 strike, they were an example of the interconnected and tight-knit community that was present in the mill village, still referring to one another decades later by the nicknames that they gave one another as children.[114] Holda believes that while the average Marionite may have some knowledge of the strike, it is not necessarily accurate, and that the truth would be difficult to represent completely. "You can't make an accurate judgement on something if you don't have all the facts, and the facts were not clear, even in the trials they had, it was really never very clear who had weapons and who fired first."[115] Despite not being able to completely rely on the information that is documented, Holda also believes that the discussion and education about the strike are important, and it should not be something that is forgotten. She refers to the community, particularly those who had family in the mill, as "private," having worked for almost a century to avoid that conversation. Due to the conflict between wanting better conditions, and not wanting to, as Holda puts it, "upset the applecart," people would rather ignore it than face the truth of the strike. She believes that "…change did happen after that [the strike], although horrible things happen and men died, they actually should be brought up and thanked for the role that they played."[116]

2.6 The Attempt at Forgetting

Locally, the work to cover up the living conditions of the mill village and circumstances surrounding the shooting began immediately after it took place. The next shift of workers were pushed past the injured and remaining strikers and directed to

[114] Holda interview, appendix, 95.
[115] Holda interview, appendix, 96.
[116] Ibid., 2, 5.

continue in their jobs as usual. As Holcombe explains why the "business-as-usual" attitude was so important in his 1971 thesis, "Masters of the mill, bosses, and stockholders were dependent on cheap labor and the maintenance of the status quo…community interests—such as small businessmen, realtors, and fringe elements depending on the cotton mill…were opposed to the strikes."[117] As the media carried the story of the shooting, photos of the mill village and mill employees began to be published in national newspapers, which led Baldwin to institute improvements to the village, most notably, plumbing and running water for the homes. While the strike technically failed, some of the complaints that led to the unrest were being addressed, though more to keep up the image of the leadership rather than to help the employees.[118] Even though it has not always been readily apparent, many aspects of life in Marion revolved around the Mill, beyond just the lives of the people who were employed there. For example, the Marion Police Department, founded in 1844, based their patrol schedules on the mill's shift schedules.[119] The connections between local business owners, town leadership, and mill leadership were cemented from the beginning of the industry in Marion and still are remembered today, long after the mill has stopped operating. Forgetting the strike meant that the sheriff and deputies involved in the shooting would not have to defend their actions to the local public, and that the status quo could remain the same in the community, benefitting everyone except the millhands. This is also possibly part of the motivation for the strike being actively excluded from local memory, as Holcombe points

[117] Holcombe, 92-93.
[118] Ibid., 87.
[119] "History," Marion Police Department

out "Politicians, preachers, and various echelons of mill management and ownership helped formulate, at all costs, public opinion for the industrial dream."[120]

2.7 Help from Anyone but Communists

"We was looking for help; we didn't care where it came from," Sam Finley proudly said in his interview in 1975, though that does not seem to be entirely accurate.[121] While the question of party affiliation could be pushed aside, communism was not welcome on the picket lines of the Marion strike. One of the most detailed primary documents of the mill conditions and strike came from Tom Tippett, a well-known communist and labor rights activist. In his book, *When Southern Labor Stirs*, Tippett writes about the strikes that took place in Elizabethton, Gastonia, Danville, and Marion, dedicating two entire chapters to Marion alone. Tippett primarily wrote about the textile workers themselves, their living and working conditions, and the future that unionism had in the South.

Despite Tippett's involvement and thorough documentation, the people of Marion did not embrace his political leanings. The United Textile Workers contributed and organized the Marion strike, which was known to be anti-communist. The UTW was already stretched too thin but gave "a vague promise of assistance." The UTW offered what they could, which was very little, to the Marion organizers, even at times discouraging walk-outs due to their lack of resources and ability to support more workers if they went out on strike. Cletus Daniel writes in his book *Culture of Misfortune* that "With little more than advice to offer, UTW representatives observed rather than

[120] Holcombe, 93.
[121] Finley interview, excerpt H-0267

directed."[122] When asked about their knowledge of the Gastonia strike, Sam Finley knew of the National Textile Workers Union to which he replied, "We heard about them, but we didn't have much to do with them. We didn't like the tone of their voice. They were communists. They were too much communist, and we were warned not to have nothing to do with them."[123] The Finleys also held very firmly that they felt that the UTW was behind the strikers at Marion, and they felt what support UTW could offer. This anti-communist attitude did not seem to exist in Gastonia, where the party was, in large part, the driving force of the strike and was able to provide better resources to their union members and be a present and active force in the strike. The rejection of communist organizers is the most significant difference between the Marion mill strike and the Gastonia mill strike, and the lack of communist ties could be one of the reasons that it is overlooked historically. The NTWU had more resources and organizers than the UTW, as well as a party ideology to help drive and support them. While the lack of communist ties could be seen as a point of pride for the community, the misinformation that remains regarding the ideology of the strikers prevents this. It was too easy to lump these groups together, making an enemy out of neighbors and friends, basing it off of political beliefs rather than a belief that many secretly shared as well: the need for a better work and living environment.

In Gastonia, the NTWU supported the strike at the Loray Mills by sending Fred Beal, who was backed and funded by the Communist Party. The Communist Party had several circulars and newsletters to spread the news of their accounts in Gastonia, with a tone and audience that often differed greatly from that of the official town paper. Beal

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[122] Daniel Cletus, *Culture of Misfortune, 86.*
[123] Finley interview, excerpt 7212.

was educated and well-spoken, known for his encouraging and empowering public speaking skills that emboldened workers to join the movement and be loyal to the cause. In addition to Beal, Ella May became an integral aspect of spreading knowledge of the strike. She became an image of resistance, and the songs that she wrote, as exemplified earlier this chapter, helped to embolden the workers and remind them what they were fighting for. She was instrumental to the cause in both her life and death. These powerful voices that spoke out in the strikes were often seen as speaking for any and all strikers, and it was easy for those on the outside to categorize all strikers, as communists, though it evidently was not the case.

2.8 The Long-Term Effects

Though the shooting effectively ended the strike with what seemed to be a complete defeat, change did quickly follow, from the village upgrades to the silencing of truthful voices, and public opinion began forming. This is where we see the current memory that Marionites hold born. One published account of a Marion native, William Douglas Cooper, describes his experience as a "town kid" growing up alongside "mill kids" in Marion, and relating it to the overall experience of Carolina mill towns. Even in his childhood, he could recognize the lines that were drawn among the population of Marion and the defining factor was class, as dictated by the mill:

> In the pre-World War II period, Marion, like the state's other mill towns contained three, segregated, populations… a middle class of doctors, lawyers and merchants who lived in the town and were dependent on the continued profitability of the mills, but wished to socially and geographically be separated from both the mills and their mill villages. The populations of Marion's mill villages were, generally, restricted to white mill worker families. In addition, Marion, like other mill towns, had a "colored" section where blacks, except for providing services to the middle class of the town as domestics, janitors, etc. lived in separate isolation from the white communities. The "correctness" of this

> separation had general acceptance across the class consciousness of the typical mill town in the Piedmont Carolinas and was the case in Marion.[124]

Cooper holds the opinion that many locals share about the strike and its validity- that the workers involved in the strike were "highly motivated by emotion and did not have a real grasp of the potential economic consequences of their actions."[125] The strike hurt the city and those in the upper class who had tied themselves financially to the success of the mill, even if they were not directly related to its operations. He goes on to say that the hardships of the millhands were exaggerated and were described not by the mill workers themselves, but by people from the outside looking in, and that the mill workers "didn't consider their conditions to be so bad."[126] While Cooper does have credible evidence for the economic statements he makes in regard to the mills and their place in the Carolinas, he does not provide any sources for his statements on the strike, besides Sinclair Lewis's work and Mike Lawing's book, neither of which mention this view. In providing this published account, Cooper gives a documented and thorough representation of this long-lasting opinion. To many, the strike was a creation of outside forces and failed, as it should have. There was not a necessity for change, while, in fact, most mill workers "…considered their quality of life substantially better than the one from which they had come…comparatively comfortable. The mill had provided a new YMCA that offered leisure time facilities that were superior to any in the town of Marion." This sentiment was also held by the locals and authorities in McDowell during the strike. Lewis reports that "every prosperous and reasonable man says…I guess we

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[124] William D Cooper, "The Life Cycle of a Typical Piedmont Carolinas Cotton Mill Town," Belk College of Business, 2012
[125] Ibid, 11.
[126] Ibid.

wouldn't like it so well to live there. But you gotta remember that the folks in these houses are just down from the mountains and, to them, these houses are a luxury."[127] Lewis did not agree considering the log cabins that he had seen throughout the local Appalachian range.

Holcombe also refutes this opinion, recognizing that while the financially, well-paying jobs in the mountains were less available, their homes "had glass windows and wooden floors…" which were higher quality than the mill village homes. Education was also touted as being a motivator for mountain folk to leave their hollows and find housing and employment with the mills, but "people who came down from the mountains to work in Marion were often better educated than the second and third generations of cotton mill people."[128] Cooper is perpetuating the truth about the event as he was taught it, a town kid who would have only heard the story that was accepted by the town- the mill strike was doomed from the start, unnecessary, and needs to be forgotten. Much like Cooper, the local people of today's Marion hold beliefs that are influenced by the false narrative that started to spread after October 2nd. Whether it is a false pride in a town that would never entertain communists or unionists, still often considered one-in-the-same, or a shame that is easily forgotten when darkest events in town history are buried, there is a determination in some locals to discourage this conversation.[129]

In the case of another local weighing in and representing the opinion of the community, Sandy Carter, who was raised in the East Marion mill village from 1945 to

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[127] Lewis, 21.
[128] Holcombe, 44.
[129] As noted in the appendix, screenshots from various Facebook threads exemplify the falsehoods and denials that are what exists of the current memory and shows the social climate of Marion's opinion on the strikers and union.

1967, did not hear about the mill strike until Lawing's book was published in 2004. Her father worked for Marion Manufacturing, and when he was put in charge of the 1959 50th anniversary edition of their newsletter, *Picks and Hanks*, he included a timeline of the history of the mill.[130] This timeline did not mention the strike, as Carter says, it "was a black eye for the ownership of Marion Mfg," and it was "never discussed during the time I lived in East Marion."[131] Carter adds that while she believes the workers were in their rights to strike, and that it was the "fault of both sides." Carter brings up the reason for the stretch-out being a miscalculation on the part of Adam Hunt, who managed the plant for Baldwin. This is the only mention of the occurrence, but due to Hunt having "gummed the works in installing the new system," the mill lost $40,000 in materials that the stretch-out was implemented to make up for.[132] The Marion stretch-out would have been unique in this case, as it was not implemented to add to the productivity and minimize the payroll budget, but to make up for a mistake of an executive. Hunt's solution to the problem he created was to cover the "deficit" by "the addition of twenty minutes to the 12-hour shift. The workers were to come ten minutes before six-o'clock and remain until ten minutes after."[133] The addition of this lesser known fact by Carter along with the corroboration from Tippett to the narrative of why the strike had to happen helps to full contextualize the points for which this labor union fought.

In addition, the lack of education in regard to the history of the strike at all levels, but particularly regional, is a disservice to the cultural heritage and identity of the area. The classic Appalachian stereotypes abound in the community, with the epicenter of

[130] Pick and Hanks timeline, appendix, 103.
[131] Carter interview, appendix, 98-99.
[132] Tippett, 117.
[133] Ibid.

these prejudices focusing on the previous mill villages, known as Stumptown, East Marion, and Clinchfield.[134] The homes that originally served as mill worker housing are now family homes, some renovated and visually unique in the neighborhood, others staying as similar as they were when built for their original purpose. All three neighborhoods combat their share of drug addiction, theft, and higher crime than other areas in the county.[135]

2.9 Small Town Solutions

In light of the evidence regarding the lack of an accurate memory of the mill strike in Marion, there is without question work to be done to educate people about this overlooked event. There is very little historiography surrounding this event and neither of the published monographs written about the strike were authored by members of the community their subject surrounds. The idea of shared community identity is not a requirement to understand the strike or the importance that it has to the histories that it should be a part of, but it is important to take into account when looking for solutions to the education and discussion of the strike. There are local efforts being made in the community to recognize and commemorate the events.

An important contribution that knowledge of this strike would bring is giving justice to previously forgotten union workers and helping to contextualize industrial

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[134] The stereotypes ascribed to those in the Southern Appalachian region and the concept of the 'Hillbilly' are well known and in that do not need to be explicitly listed. That being said, they can be summed up as Appalachia being "poor, backward, and white." (Sarah Baird, "Stereotypes Of Appalachia Obscure A Diverse Picture," NPR (NPR, April 6, 2014) This is largely due to the portrayal of this region in media, which has has not been developed by Appalachians themselves, for the most part. Depictions of the region in films such as *Deliverance* and in books such as *Hillbilly Elegy* do not create a full and complete view of the complexity of the population and culture of the region.(Tom Porter, "Portraying Appalachia: How the Movies Can Get It Wrong," Bowdoin News Archive)

[135] Coupled with the listed issues, additional housing rules have been put in place in an effort to keep homes that are unfit to live in from being used by the homeless or delinquent. (Mike Conley, "City of Marion Enforces New Minimum Housing Rules," The McDowell News, July 28, 2018)

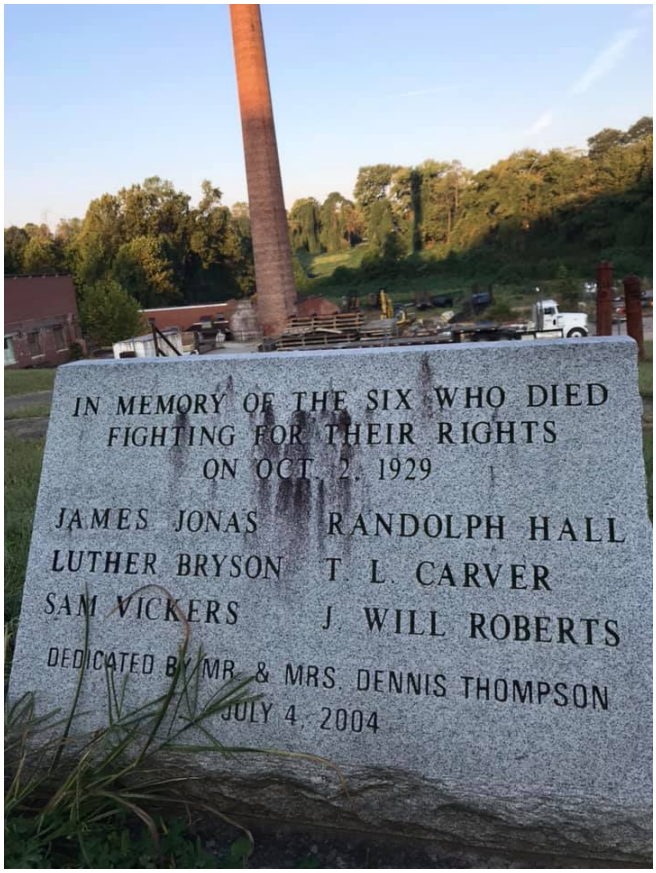

FIGURE 8: Strike Memorial, October 2019

development in the South and Appalachian region. Completing a full understanding of local history in Marion will give voices to the men who were killed, the people who were expelled from their churches and families, and eventually driven from the area due to their involvement in the strike and a belief in a better life.

Currently, the only memorial to the men murdered in the Marion Massacre is a barely accessible stone. Placed at the edge of the mill yard, the stone reads “In memory of the six who died fighting for their rights on Oct. 2, 1929” followed by the names of the men who were shot and killed by the sheriff and deputies, as well as the dedicators, Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Thompson on July 4, 2004. Very little is known about the memorial,

though there was a short and vague *McDowell News* article about the dedication.[136] The shame surrounding the event is evident in the article, and it provides a small window into the social tensions that existed around the strike, reporting that "there was one family whose pro-union sons would cross the street to avoid their anti-union father," and quoted one millworker who was on his way to work at the time of the shooting as saying "I didn't want to think about it anymore, it was my friends that got killed around there. The sooner I could forget it, the better off I was."[137] As the majority of the Marion Manufacturing mill was torn down, and the Clinchfield mill has been completely demolished, the lack of visual reminders or information could be part of the reason for the lack of remembrance of this tragic and quintessential event in Marion's history.

The only other representation that mentions the strike in town is housed across Baldwin Avenue at the local temporary employment placement agency, JobLink. The building that was at one time the executive offices for the mill, and Jerry Broome coordinated the exhibit with McDowell County Historical Society and local historians who could help provide artifacts and accurate information. The exhibit covers the entire history of the mill, and while this could be an asset to educating the community and visitors to the area, the exhibit does not have available hours for viewing.[138]

Kimberly Wright is an administrator and prominent member of the "You know You're from Marion, NC" Facebook group where many of the social media screenshots

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[136] The short article is one of the few that appears in the *McDowell News* that talks candidly about the strike, including two interviews by people who were children at the time of the shooting. It does not detail why Tina Thompson wanted to place the marker, but it is clear from the wording of the marker and her comments in the article that she holds a pro-striker opinion of the event.

[137] 'Like Hail on a Tin Roof': Memorial Honors men shot and killed during '29 strike. *McDowell News.*

[138] The exhibit, which is said to briefly mention the strike, is inaccessible at this time. The contact information for Broome is no longer accurate, and due to COVID-19, the organization that is housed in the building is not taking calls or visitors. (Mike Conley, "Photos Tell Story of Marion Manufacturing Plant, Mill Village," McDowellNews.com, October 10, 2012)

in the appendix have been gathered.[139] Wright facilitates conversations surrounding the general history and culture of McDowell, and creates an open and accessible space in which locals or other interested parties can learn about the county's history. When asked about her knowledge of the mill strike, she mostly deferred to the facts that she has been posting on the page, feeling that she did not have much more to contribute. She mentions that when she does post about it, "a lot of people give [her] a little pushback on it…it's a sore spot for some people…I'm surprised that a movie hasn't been made about it."[140] She does not understand people's resistance to learning this history, and she recognizes that it is a dirty spot on our town history, but worth remembering. Wright encounters these exchanges daily, such as one local woman who follows the page and commented on more than one post that the strikers killed were not local mill employees, rather, union agitators. While this is not a new opinion, as it is held by many regarding unions, the determination at which she pushes the false narrative ninety-one years after the event is just one example of the efforts that are still being made to deny the strike and massacre. In one particular post, Wright was told that "It is best we let this story stay where it belongs, in the annuals of history. It is VERY controversial, hurtful, and disturbing to many people."[141] Wright herself is a native Marionite, and did not learn of the strike until the placing of the memorial stone in 2004**,** when the effort was spearheaded by local community member Tina Thompson.[142] While Wright knows that history may be hard to believe, and the shame that people feel over the strike is still alive and well, she continues

[139] Facebook documentation, appendix, 101-104.
[140] Messenger exchange, appendix, 103.
[141] Wright/Heard exchange, appendix, 102-103.
[142] Tina Thompson has written an unpublished book that details a local's journey into researching and cataloging the mill strike. Very little is documented about the placement of the monument, or the hurdles she may have encountered, but Sandy Carter (interview in appendix, 99-100) mentioned that it was a difficult accomplishment.

to provide sources and perspectives of the time as they become available. In her responses to the backlash, one thing is always the same- she is dedicated to educate rather than embarrass. “Ignoring the bad things that happened does not make it non-existent. It is part of the fiber of the community…there’s a lot of things that have happened in our history that were inherently wrong, but we don’t need to sweep them under the rug and pretend like it didn’t happen.”[143] Wright is known throughout our community for her active engagement and positive view of our community, and though not a trained historian or educator, she is arguably doing the most effective work to educate folks on the strike.

Freddy Bradburn, a local folk artist and scholar, also has a plan to educate the local community about the occurrence of the strike through a musical that he has written. Bradburn fictionalizes some aspects of the strike, focusing on characters that he created as the center of the production, but was inspired by event and the accounts that exist from it. Having grown up working in a mill in Marion himself, Bradburn is now a champion for preserving the local folk ways, having taught culturally-focused classes at the local community college before his retirement and playing his music and sharing folk tales of the region in any venue that will have him. During the quarantine and social distancing precautions of COVID-19, Bradburn has hosted a weekly hour of folk music on social media, which is where he first shared the strike-centered musical and started explaining the event to anyone who tuned in. Bradburn’s father worked at Cross Cotton Mill in Marion during the Marion Manufacturing and Clinchfield strikes and he points to the nature of Cross Mill being the reason there was never a strike there. The owners were

[143] Wright/Heard exchange, appendix, 103.

locals, and while there was a great deal of paternalism, it worked out positively for the mill hands at Cross Mill, providing them with better living and working conditions than their fellow lintheads on the other side of town. Bradburn did not hear about the strike until later in life, finding out about it on his own. He thinks we as a town have forgotten it, saying, "I think that was the big part of suppressing the story here…people didn't want to remember."[144] Bradburn came to find out about the mill strike through listening to and learning about Woody Guthrie, whose role in protest music has been discussed. Bradburn became impassioned about the strike, and having written two musicals at that point, decided it was time that the people of Marion learned about what happened in their own backyard. He blends the historical timeline and people who were involved in the situation with a few fictional characters that allow him to express the humanity behind the strikers and unionists. He has not received much push back to the play, in his opinion, because people do not know the full content of what he is writing yet. "I hope it burns people up- if it doesn't, I haven't done my job…If they're not shocked and surprised, or angered, or call me a communist or whatever, then I haven't done my job."[145] Bradburn's dedication to telling the story of the strike is in part motivated by the relevance that it holds to today. He recognizes that the town has always been "anti-union," and that "there are so many false arguments coming in, from the shallow pool of history, [where] people don't want to hear anything bad about America…"[146] The play could possibly be performed with social distancing in place and Bradburn is hoping to see it on stage in the near future.

[144] Bradburn interview, appendix, 90.
[145] Ibid., 91.
[146] Ibid., 90.

Though unknown to most, Bradburn's untested musical is not the only theatrical creation inspired by the event. In 1993, Billy Ed Wheeler wrote *Voices in the Wind,* a play for the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of McDowell County. Wheeler is an Appalachian native, known for writing dozens of plays and books, and as well as songs for Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Neil Young, Kenny Rogers, and many others. Wheeler is in the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame and several of his outdoor dramas are still performed today. *Voices in the Wind* was performed by the Foothills Community Theatre and included original songs inspired by local history, and included a narrative on the living conditions and circumstances of the strike. In a recent interview, Wheeler did not recollect any push-back or negativity from the local community, but admitted that in his advanced age, he had forgotten much about the play itself, besides the fact that there was no information about the strike available to him other than the testimony of a few mill village locals. Wheeler's lack of memory of the content of the play that he wrote and the event itself is indicative of where much of the memory has gone- the fallible human mind. This is another example of the importance of a local view, such as that provided by Freddy Bradburn, rather than a regional artist brought in to fulfill a need. Bradburn believes in the importance of the message that he has found and wants to spread it, whereas Wheeler did the research as a matter of a commission, with no personal ties to the outcome. Much like we see in Wheeler's lack of remembrance of the play, when those with first-hand knowledge of the strike felt the social pressures to refrain from discussing it passed, so did their part in the shared experience and account.

The topic of a dramatization or musical in memorial of the event being produced has sparked much controversy. Holda mentioned that Blankenship had also suggested a

theatre production as a possible way to commemorate the strike.[147] Blankenship believed that "The bloody strike of 1929 and the events surrounding it should be remembered through an exhibit, a documentary and a commemorative event…this is not entertainment…This is all about setting the record straight. The people of McDowell County are noble people." [148] He held a meeting at the McDowell Arts Council Association, which drew a few locals who were interested in the history, and people who have been championing the knowledge of the strike on their own, such as Holda, Kim Clark, and Ann Swann, all local historians. The project never took off with Blankenship at the helm of the efforts, though he argued that "Marion and McDowell County could use the history of the strike to help boost tourism and build its economic future."[149]

This manner of memorializing is not uncommon and at the time Blankenship most likely did not know about the existence of Wheeler's *Voices in the Wind.*[150] The theatrical commemoration of an event such as this has not been attempted in the same manner, but the idea behind it has been used in the region regarding other subject matter. *Unto these Hills,* in Cherokee, North Carolina, debuted in 1950, and covers the history of the Cherokee nation from 1780 to present-day, with a central focus on the Trail of Tears. In recent years, it has been updated to be more culturally aware, and will not be performed this year for the first time since 1950, due to COVID-19.[151] Another regional example is *From This Day Forward*, a drama that chronicles the settling of the Waldensians to the area, and the hardships and trials that came with finding their new home, Valdese. This

[147] Holda interview, appendix, 93-97.
[148]Mike Conley, "Historians, Others Recall Strike of 1929," The McDowell News, June 30, 2011
[149] Ibid.
[150] Jake Frankel, "Mountain Shame"
[151] "Trail of Tears"

year, despite the pandemic, they will be holding their 52nd production of the play.[152] There have been opponents to both of these productions, the most criticism being waged against *Unto these Hills.*[153]

Kim Clark, a local historian who is known in the community as having a vast knowledge about the small area, produced "Strike," which was a week-long five-episode radio program detailing the Marion strike.[154] Clark has worked with many different people in a variety of capacities in the town to preserve and educate others about the history of McDowell County.[155] Clark has often relied on publicly sourced information to compile the histories that she keeps, and she has become well-known for the effort and dedication that she has for the importance of McDowell History.[156] This method of oral history has worked well for Clark, as her grandfather, who was part of the organizing efforts and her research, has allowed his story to be told and remembered. Had her grandmother not given birth on the morning of the strike, her grandfather would have been at the walk out on October 2nd, possibly being injured or killed with the others in the Marion Massacre.[157] Much like her own story, Clark has gathered and saved narratives from people who otherwise would not have had their story told, and is integral to the community in her preservation work.

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[152] "From This Day Forward: Historic Outdoor Drama of the Waldenses"
[153] Criticism against the outdoor Cherokee Nation-based drama has risen from local media as well as academia. Heidi Ness ('Indian' Summers: Querying Representations of Native American Cultures in Outdoor Historical Drama") says that Native American focused outdoor dramas involve "representations that have historically tended toward reinscriptions of unhelpful stereotypes." In 2006, the Cherokee Historical Association chose a Cherokee artistic director to assist in re-writing the entire show, to more accurately depict the nation and use correct vocabulary and imagery. There were also goals put into place to have an entirely Cherokee cast and crew. ("Time for Change at Cherokee's 'Unto These Hills'")
[154] "1929 Textile Strike," McDOWELL COUNTY ORAL HISTORY
[155]Mike Conley, "Pictorial History Takes Readers Back in Time"

[156]Mike Conley, "Help Needed in Compiling Old McDowell Photos for New Book"
[157] Holda interview, appendix, 96.

Old Man Jonas was an elderly millhand, who was a unionist and an eventual martyr of the massacre. He walked with a cane and had worked for the mill his entire life, and on the morning of October 2nd, was shot in the back, handcuffed, and transported to the hospital where his medical care was delayed due to his involvement in the strike. Jonas died, with his handcuffs still on, while on the operating table at the Marion hospital that day. Marion is "still shackled," just as Jonas was at the time of his death, to the memory and tragedy of the strike, whether the town recognizes it or not.[158] Ignoring the history of a local labor movement that had a deadly end does not erase the fact that it happened. For every interview or perspective presented in this thesis, there were at least five community members who declined comment, or outright denounced and denied the strike, the union, and the Marion Massacre. Local leaders, such as Steve Little, the Marion Mayor, have declined interviews and the opportunity to contribute to the ultimate vision of educating the local community about the strike, which sets a counterproductive example to others in the community on the importance of these efforts.

[158] "Still Shackled" comes from a reporting of the aftermath of the strike shooting, where a man was at first denied medical treatment until someone pledged to pay for his expenses, and then he died on the operating table, still handcuffed from the altercation. (Lewis, 10)

CONCLUSION: THE SOONER I COULD FORGET, THE BETTER OFF I WAS

"Labor in McDowell County is plentiful and willing, and of a most intelligent, loyal and desirable kind. Under no more than reasonably fair treatment of its help, every factory or branch of industry is certain to be able to secure adequate, satisfactory and contented labor."[159] This direct quote from the Kiwanis Club's pamphlet, formulated in the 1920s to draw industry to McDowell County, promised not only the loyalty of the operatives, but the assistance of the police and local business owners in the economic success of the prospective mill, in a move that Ransom Holcombe deemed "economic prostitution."[160]

The Marion Mill Strike is not mentioned in the classrooms of the schools in McDowell County. There is not an initiative that focuses on local history, and there is no drive to change that. The only memories shared of the event are on locally overseen Facebook pages and personal conversations, which often start with the facts and devolve to baseless claims that turn the strikers and those killed for the cause into anti-American no-good communists.[161] The strikers who suffered at the hands of the mill owners and local law enforcement have lost the battle of remembrance to time and ambivalence. From the town's political leaders, led by the influential mill bosses and owners, to the neighbors of the strikers, no one stood in defense of the workers and their right to a fair, safe, and clean work environment. This truth is made evident in the court proceedings and in the legacy that follows the event.

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[159] Kiwanis Club pamphlet quoted in Sinclair Lewis, Cheap and Contented Labor: The Picture of a Southern Mill Town in 1929 (Philadelphia: Women's Trade Union League, 1929), 30.
[160] Holcombe, 30.
[161] Facebook examples, appendix, 101-103.

The city flaunts what it believes to be its patriotic history throughout the town, utilizing historical markers and signs detailing the past important events that have taken place there. From the legacy of the founders and first settlers of McDowell County being involved in the Revolutionary War, most notably, the Battle of Kings Mountain, to the nearby Civil War battle grounds and local folktales that have endured time, this is the history that McDowell County wants to claim. While loudly exclaiming its proud involvement in these battles of freedom and treason, the community has actively worked to ignore a less glamourous battle that it had a part in- the battle of workers rights and freedoms. Yet, when actions are taken to educate and learn about the sacrifice that took place at the mill, the reaction is anger, indignation, and actions to cease the attempt. While the commemorative marker is hardly visible from the roadside, or well-known to many in the town, its placement has led at least one person to search for information regarding an event that they had never heard of, despite growing up in the town.

The McDowell County community identity and memory have grown to avoid the sore spot that was left by the dwindling recognition of the event, insufficiently attempting to forget this watershed moment in Marion's past. Instead it allows for rampant misinformation and incorrect assumptions to be the only available education of the strike. My aim through my research has not only been to learn about this important event that I am personally tied to, but also to correct an oversight and bring agency to men and women who have been misrepresented for almost a century, creating an accessible account and analysis of their struggle for workers' rights.

As discussed in the introduction, there are already many ways in which mills and mill villages have changed and been repurposed to fit the needs of the areas that they

have created. Gentrification has taken hold of several of these communities, driving away many of the descendants of the mill workers, making it economically impossible to afford housing in structures that, at one time, were seen as low-class or undesirable. There is also hope for a balance between the two extremes, and there should not be a demonization of the efforts that are being made, but rather a hope for better recognition.

The Marion locals of today hold beliefs that are influenced by the whispers and rumors that surround a purposely forgotten tragedy. A full account of the strike has the power to provide proof of what few in the community believe- that this strike was a homegrown and local-led attempt to secure workers a lifestyle that they could maintain and survive. While some opinions may never change, and many may cling to the purposefully spread misinformation that has lasted the ninety-year test of time, those who listen and reevaluate their previous knowledge will gain a new perspective, not only in regard to the men who died, but also in the resilience and determination of those who came before us in the community. Having a relatable and understandable account will help the already existing efforts to rewrite the narrative that surrounds the mill strike, changing the hushed whispers of incorrect accounts to a loud story that is told to our neighbors, our community, our region, and hopefully, the entire field of labor history. Shining light on this purposely hidden event will dispel the shame that surrounds it, leaving in its place a pride for a section of the community that took action when they worked together for the common good. The work that local community members such as Freddy Bradburn, Kimberly Wright, Patti Holda, and Kim Clark are doing currently relays the importance of memory, and not only brings light to the strike and the victims of the massacre, but also uses methods that are accessible and available, such as social

media, musicals, and library exhibits to educate those who have no knowledge of the strike, and revise what Bradburn called the "shallow pool of history" that surrounds it- they work to provide the hard answers, when the easiest path would be to ignore it all together.[162] The strike did not succeed when judged on the basis of reached agreements or settlements, but it can succeed now, nearly one hundred years later, if the accurate and unbiased story is told to the descendants of the lintheads who fought for their rights despite the promise of defeat.

[162] Bradburn interview, appendix, 90.

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APPENDIX

Interview with Freddy Bradburn, local musician and retired educator.
September 27, 2020, via phone. Permission given to record.
(catching up, small conversation, pandemic effects on the process)
M: How many plays have you written?
F: I've had two that have been staged, at the community theatre. One was for the 175th birthday of McDowell, I think that was 2017 in September, and that was Spirit and Bone which took stories from the Carson house…I just retired…I was doing some volunteer kinda stuff at the Carson House and learning the claw-hammer banjo a little bit and the fiddle, and I got enamored, just like with the mill store, I get enamored by the stores that aren't told…and about the Carson house, it applied to, so we did that one. And the next year was Selkie and the Witchboy which I had had for a while which is a kinda the Irish fable of the selkie that is part human part seal myth. Those two I have…I have four plays that are actually staged, what I'm working on now is the Cherokee legend…That's Cherokee Rose…it's tentative title.
M: Thank you for being willing to talk to me about this, I just have a couple of basic questions, feel free to add anything you'd like to, that's a big part…some background on what I'm doing, my Master's Thesis is focused on the strike, largely focusing on how it has or hasn't been remembered. 91 years next month, so most people, almost everyone who would have been involved in any kind of way, uh, has passed, a lot of people who had knowledge of it have also passed, and they also never passed it on to their family members. So I feel like especially in my generation, you taught me at community college, I'm turning 28 next month, most of the people in my group have no clue what has happened, and what our parents…that's the same thing we hear from them. It really got me thinking, of like, why are other things like this remembered, like the labor movements in other areas, I could tell you ten of them, but I cant tell you about ours, which is arguably more important, to the South. It deserves more, in my opinion, than it gets, and I think that that starts locally. And so I've been trying to look into different efforts by different locals, like Kimberly Wright who has posted so much on the Marion page about the strike, people give her a lot of push back, Patti Holda has been a great help, and Lindsey Terrell put me in your direction, she's working on her MA at UNC and it focuses on Appalachian culture so we talk a lot about, you came up. My first question is, when did you first know about the strike yourself?
F: That's really interesting, because I had no idea either, when I was growing up and through high school. My father was working at Cross Mill at the time, during the strike, I was a late baby he was about 43 when I was born, and he was working at Cross Cotton Mill, and uhm, and it was never mentioned. Of course, Cross mill didn't strike. Growing up and stuff, the paternalistic aspect of living at cross mill, being a smaller, family run mill, it seemed like that kind of ….people would look at cross mill village in that paternalist way, it was a good thing, a good job, and all that. My dad never mentioned it…I never….It was probably, I can't exactly remember how I came across the story, you know, it is likely I was in my thirties or forty or so, I became very enamored of Woody Guthrie, I did a lot of research, a lot of…my band does a lot of Guthrie songs so I know all about Woody Guthrie and the labor movement at the time. I've always been a history

geek, I've always liked history, and I like those kinds of stories…of kind of underdog worker, and the people that Guthrie championed, so I'm not exactly sure but it was late, and it was through reading or music that I became aware of it, and I started looking around for stuff, and of course there is not a lot. I got most everything form the little book…
M: Mike Lawing, Marion Massacre?
F: Yes, from that little book, and of course I began to teach it, because I taught Southern Culture [at McDowell Technical Community College] and I began to teach those, I kind of reveal history on the darker side of things, and I think that was a big part of suppressing the story here…was people didn't want to remember. People have always been more anti-union so, it was, I just kind of stumbled across the story and began to follow and be interest in it. When I started writing plays, I did as much research as I could stand.
M: That makes good sense, and it leads us into our second question- I was just wondering what pushed you to write a play about it specifically?
F: Well I became impassioned about the story, I'm passionate about it, and it's certainly always relevant, it's never more relevant than it is now with the, uh, again, it's always the relevance of oh the outside agitators coming in, there is so many false arguments coming in, from the shallow side, the shallow pool of history, people who listen to just the cursory stuff and believe it, don't want to hear anything bad about America, oh we're the greatest. But history tells different stories, so I'm very passionate about those things and with music, of course I was a big Bob Dylan fan, John Prine, people who uh, kind of have a more slightly altered view, of history and things, because they dive deeper into it. So I just became…I started writing plays, I've been writing for 30 or 40 years pretty fanatically, so that's just how it evolved, and I started writing songs in groups, songs to the strike and the story and the uh, once I get 5 or 6 or 7 songs in, then I just keep going until I've got enough songs to create the story, and try to uh tell the story as best I can with mainly just songs. Selkie was an opera, there was no dialogue. Spirit and bone had dialogue. The one I'm writing now has songs and monologues, I started writing it in the pandemic, and I was thinking how can you tell a story or possibly perform a story that's socially distanced, something feasible that can be done. I'm just very passionate about, because I think there is so many false narratives out there, in the mainstream.
M: You were at the top of my list for people to talk to, uhm, because I have a whole section in my first chapter where I really outline the strike, all the way up to the indictments of the deputies, and I have a solid section on resistance and strike music and protest music and I discuss Ella May from Gastonia who came to Marion and sang at one point, which is…
F: Which is great, I can use you as a resource, because in my play, as a second draft, I bring Ella may to Marion and mix that up a little bit. Two of my fictional characters are union representatives from Gastonia, and when the sheriff there gets killed, there's, I think the times kind of coincide, I tried to keep my timelines kind of straight, accurately, historically, but these two fictional characters are coming from Gastonia to lay low, kind of helping, laying low in Marion, and Ella May also makes…she's in my play.
M: Anything you need from me, I'd love to help. That was the point really, in my motivation, I didn't want to write a thesis that no one would ever read, or no one would care about. I wanted it to matter. And, uh, no offense to Mike Lawing, he did a great job

uncovering some stuff that we wouldn't have had otherwise, access to before hand, but he doesn't provide a transcript for his interviews which leaves the question of what could have been said and what could have been missed. And I mean, his family was from here, but he wasn't from here. Byrd wasn't local either, so it's a more unique view to be able to see your play as someone who grew up in the area, my thesis is by someone who grew up in the area and had family in the mill at the time, it's the more homegrown in a little different way, but no the protest music really did lead me this way. Reading about Guthrie, cool dude in my opinion, it's awesome that you found out about some of this through that, uhm, how have people responded to you saying that youre writing this play, or when you're tryting to get people interested in it?

F: that's a funny question, because trying to get people interested in an original play is a task, in and of its self, even in our community. Getting people to audition, for spirit and bone and selkie…I haven't had much reaction at all because most people don't know the content, that most people don't know that it's sympathetic to the strikers, I've just tried to…it's important to me, like in spirit and bone, to be true to history, and in the order of the events and things that happened…but you don't, it's hard to get a real picture of the human character, its hard to get a human being to come through because there is just not enough the material and their personal journals just don't really exist. So it was important for me to create human characters that…I use, it's a mix of functional and historical characters in that way. I'm sure, there will be a backlash from it. I really wanted to play, this…it is with the foothills, no one is particularly interested in original work around here it seems. I have a band, and people who have done the other two plays, but I haven't had any real interested. Almost no one….I will share the script with you, I meant to earlier, but google share thing, trouble with that. But uh, so I haven't have any reaction much at all, but again because no one has seen it.

M: I think it will be interesting to see that, once you get more into the concrete phases of it, whenever its time, to put it on

F: I hope it burns people up- if it doesn't, then I haven't done my job, certain aspects. If they're not shocked and surprised, or angered, or call me a communist or whatever, then I haven't done my job.

M: That's kind of how I feel about writing this, every time I post anything about it, I went to the mill last year on the 90th anniversary and took some pictures and uh talked to a couple of people who didn't want their name in anything, which is exactly what I'm trying to prove, essentially I posted about it and I'll say 80% of reaction was people my age saying I had no idea, or my family lived there forever, and I share information. The other 20% were some people who messaged or commented, this is inappropriate, why do you keep bringing it up, this is lies, so surprised! They're so bold.

F: especially after all this time. The circular nature of history, we find ourselves in a weird place where this would get more visceral negative, reaction if I did the play now from that side. They don't want to hear it, they don't want to believe it. Things are happening now in the street right in front of us, just like this did. And the strikers were shot by vigilantes, for the..it was a vigilante justice for the most part, it seems to me.

M:I think it will be interesting to see…I'm excited about your play, if I can help in anyway, I'm definitely on board.

F: I'd love to have you be a part of it. Because of my work, I can stay a little…I would love to get as many people interested in some way or another as it goes along.

M: I did have another question, you brought this up on the McDowell Folklore page I think, uh, when you were sharing your mica town hour? It's been the background sound of me writing, my motivation to get through, but you mentioned that Billy Ed Wheeler had written a play, previously, and I had never heard that there was anything written about it, and I found the title page and his is cited in 93, could you tell me a little about that?
F: Yeah, Billy Ed is quite the character, I should have a whole script somewhere. It was the150th anniversary, Sandra Everson enlisted Billy Ed to write a play about the history of McDowell County. I was in the play, my ex wife was in the play, it was outdoors at some little church in Old fort on site because people come out of the graveyard…voices in the wind? That's the name of it?
M: Yes, that's the name
F: Yeah, and there is a section in there about the strike, not huge I recall. And, uh, so, uh, there was some talk of when…Spirit and bone led to some talk of redoing voices of the end, but there were issues where they abandoned that idea.
M: I think that's really interesting, because like I said, I had never even really heard of it, I didn't know something like that had exited. I did talk to Billy Ed on Monday an he didn't know what I was talking about?
F: (laughs) How old is Billy Ed?
M: He's 88, I know, I was really hoping I could get some insight from him but he has just written so much that it was just a little commission play to him.
F: I agree, this was someone basically from the outside, that they hired, I think they paid him well, I'm sure he doesn't, I can see that he wouldn't remember much about it, or was impacted by it at all. He did a little research and wrote the history of McDowell and it was very vignette kind of way.
M: when we got off the phone he just honestly told me that he didn't know what he was talking about. I don't even remember writing it. I was like, okay, that's fine, I'm just shaking a bunch of trees right now, because amazingly people don't want to talk to about it…that's the best I've been able to do right now, because what you've told me so far about Voices in the Wind was more than Billy Ed could have told me. So that was really helpful.
F: I might have a script.
M: No harm no foul with him, because he's written so much and he's at an advanced age and I can understand why it didn't make a huge impact in his memory. I'm so grateful, thank you for being willing to talk about this…
(end of interview, agreed to send him primary sources)

Interview with Patti Holda, local historian and coordinator of the McDowell County Historical Society.

March 17, 2020, via phone. Permission given to record.

(Before questions- non-consequential conversation about COVID operations at the McDowell County Library)

M: Last time we talked, when I came to the local history room, I had been kind of beating around the idea of my thesis, so um, I have just a couple questions for you, I'm trying to gather up some different people to talk to and get different perspectives, I'm using a lot of social media posts, because Kim Clark makes a lot of posts, and a lot of other people. Some of the comments that are on those posts are really peculiar to me, it seems like a lot of misinformation has kind of passed around, and you know.

P: That's quite true, especially when you get that social media on there. Some of the local sites, there is a lot of misinformation out there, and I try to stay away from it, because I get so agitated when I read it.

M: That's something I've found myself as I'm researching. I know a little bit more than maybe I should just trying to find the facts, and it makes it really hard to comb out the facts.

P: I understand that one of the things you were questioning was the um, attitude of people. You're talking about through all the years after the fact?

M: That's actually one of my questions, let me start with my first one and we can go through them together.

P: Sure.

M: So, um, before you joined the McDowell County Historical Society, what was your knowledge of the strike?

P: Well, uh, let's see. I joined the society in 2011, and I uh, uh, my job at the library began at 2004. And then, in 2008, the lady of the NC room retired, and I was fortunate enough to get the position down here. So I was here a few years before, uhm, I was a history major so my local history was a little limited frankly. So I've been learning a lot on the job, as you do, and I have been blessed with a lot of people who have shared information with me, and Kim Clark among one of them. She has told me a lot of information about her family, I think I shared that with you perhaps. Her grandfather was involved with the union before the strike, and his wife was very pregnant. She went into labor before the strike, so he was not present for the strike. He likely would have been shot or killed himself, had he been there, since he was so involved himself. But he was home with his wife, who gave birth to Kim's father that night, and he…I hope I'm telling this correct…you could get more out of the horses mout I'm sure…from what I understand, her grandmother died in childbirth so it left him having to care for her father. He ended up moving out to Morganton, I don't know if he was ostracized or what exactly, it became more difficult for people who had been involved in the strike. There was also a gentleman here, his name was Mike Blankenship , he had come here to me and uh Kim Clark and Anne Swann. He wanted to see about…he was with the…let me start with he had a scrapbook that he said that Ruth Greenlee had given him. Now frankly, from what he had told me, he was working on a paper, his ancestor had been involved

with the strikers as well. This man was very kind hearted man, he is sense deceased, it weighed heavy on his heart that his ancestor was involved in this strike that six men died. So he had spoken to Ruth Greenlee because he was wanting to do a paper, so she let him take the scrapbook from the county that she had done on the strike where she had collected all kinds of papers, regional, and even New York papers, and she let him use it for his paper. I may be wrong……(redacted quote)
P: He ended up with the scrapbook, and I thought he was gifting it back to me, but he took it back and gave it to Mountain Express to digitize it, and he donated it to UNCA. I've never seen the whole thing since, and it's not been properly digitized as far as I know. I mean, Mountain Express tried to, they left it in the sleeves, but they did not unfurl the articles and people attempted to read it online couldn't read the whole article because it was folded up over itself.
M: Have you seen that scrapbook?
P: I have, I tried copying it while it was in my possession for two weeks before he took it back, but I couldn't get it all copied. It was getting brittle and I was afraid to handle it too much too. That might be why they have not scanned it too. It's from 1929. But it was from those newspapers of that 1929 era. Mr. Blankenship was wanting to get with us, and he was sincere in his wishes to try and make amends in some way for something his ancestor had done, which he should not have had to feel that way, you know? He was so tenderhearted. He wanted to do, uh, a something like a "Unto these Hills" type outdoor play thing that would benefit tourism and help the county, and he said to have dancing and stuff like that. But Anne, Kim, and I all knew our community had not discussed this. Much in public. It was a bad time in history for them, and the people who lived through it didn't want to talk about it. IT was a very very sad time and people had died, and when those men died, there were places that were afraid of burying them, or doing the services. That also was painful. So, uh, I don't think people outside understood how people here felt. They were conflicted with the strike issues, and they…that's..that's how unionism has been in this county, really. You want things better, but yet, you don't want it done in a militant way, and they felt it was done in a militant way at that point, you know? But change did happen after that, although horrible things happen and men died, they actually should be brought up and thanked for the role that they played, especially in that they lost their lives and their familes in turmoult, overall that, but they…uh, you know. It did make changes. It was such a horrible time. The mill villages got better, uh, services, they got new sewage systems and all kinds of things fixed up in the community…power, better for the employees, and I think a lot of stuff did improve as a result of that horrible time.
M: I think that's a great perspective, a lot of what I'm reading is that this is something that has been largely overlooked, not just on a local level, which is what I'm studying, but I have a case full of books behind me right now that focus on Appalachian studies and labor history in the south, and very rarely is Marion mentioned at all.
P: I know, have you seen the Woody Guthrie song? Heard it?
M: Yes! So I actually have heard it and I have two books, if this might be of interest to anyone else, they're great about radio and music and the depression and strikes, and they actually mention Marion quite frequently because of the musicians that traveled through Marion.
P: Marion was a little bigger of a community back then too. I don't know if it was the textile industry or what, but also, I think the roads… people from Spruce Pine used to

come down to Marion because it was the place to go. You could see marion was very active on Main street back in the day.
M: Yeah the pictures that yall share make me think of a time, kind of nostalgic for a time I never got to experience
P: Yes exactly
M: I really appreciate the work that the society does to share those things and spread that message because I think we don't have a whole lot of town pride anymore. Personally, I'm trying to get back, I'm working to get back and become a part of the community and uplift and educate and that sort of thing. That's part of the reason my thesis focuses on us, and doesn't look at it so much form a national or regional history, but a micro-history, locally. In your opinion, does the average local know about the strike? Or do they know accurate information about the strike?
P: Well, I think like you touched on it earlier about the social media, these days people seem to preferring to sit there in their pajamas and tell history and get it off line and uh, rather than from the sources. You know, like you as a researcher, you understand this, you need to go to the original sources. So many people are going by what their grandparents said, and a lot of that stuff gets lost in translation and changed through the years. I'm not discounting oral history, of course, it's just that a lot of that…my grandma said this…there is a lot of that…I get very upset with some of these sites about Marion that the person that goes through and takes things from several different places will on occasion give their sources , some do not. Sometimes just changing the wording around and not giving any citing, it grates on me a bit. When you're not getting the original documents or the original sources, I know for a fact…I don't know if you read Travis's book, I may have mentioned it to you. He did extensive research, he came here a lot, I had a lot of ledger books here, but I had since taken them to Oteen
M: Western Regional?
P: Yes, WRA, they have them now, Heather South has all of them out there.
M: I have been up to Oteen, me and Heather have made some connections, so I'm planning a research trip up there once this virus stuff passes.
P: I'm sure she will let you look through those ledger books.
M: She has been so helpful.
P:I believe they…they were gorgeous leather bound volumes, but they had something called red rot on them I think they said, so they likely have cut those books up and thrown that part way and just kept the wording and stuff for safeties sake. They know what to do properly. So those resources there may be very helpful to you. I know for a fact that one there had the renters of all the factory….owned the houses, everybody rented the buildings from them, they had the names of the people. And one thing that really disturbed me though, when we went and retrieved them and blueprints and things out of the factory before they tore it down, there was health records in the infirmary there, that was a huge amount of records, with people still living, with personal information, and uh, I don't know what happened to those. I called the city and that something should be done, burned, destroyed, or shredded or whatever, because they didn't need to be left in there. I don't know what happened to them. Possibly, if the city didn't do anything, the people probably just took them and trashed them. I don't know if they're in the landfill. We didn't want that, people's personal health records or their social security numbers which would have likely been on that, as well.

M: So, correct me if I'm wrong, you'd say the majority of what people know has come from social media?
P: I think so, yes. Some may be just passed down form their families, but there weren't…really…I don't know, for example, I didn't know a lot of it myself until I came here. To the library. So, there are a lot of people out there who don't know about it. Especially people who have just moved here, they're living here now, who didn't know a thing about that. IT's not discussed much.
M: Exactly, I completely agree with that. I don't know, if I mentioned this the last time we talked on the 90th anniversary and got to talk to a person who was there and took some pictures, I made a post about it, that was shared a little around, and I got some pretty ugly reaction from people, the idea of "we don't talk about that" or "that didn't happen that way" a lot of denial, or shame maybe…not to interpret what they say, but my friends who grew up there had never heard of it in their entire lives
P: That's really odd aint it?
M: That's what my argument is based on- why don't we know about this? I don't think we can heal as a town or accept what this is if we don't know.
P: Yes, that's true. Well… Mike Blankenship helped fund the exhibit that we had here at the library, he and mountain gateway museum did us some display boards and things, and Kim Clark worked on it..Swann worked on it, I worked on it, and the library received a certificate of recognition from the library services program award for it. And we didn't do it for that reason, but when we had the exhibit here, people were very distraught and upset about it [the mill] being torn down, and um people from the community that used to work there. We had people that had since moved come in from far and wide the exhibit and they shared their stories and stuff, and I had photographs there and I had a lot of people identified. They came and it was more like a reunion, it was…they were talking good old days, they were really close coworkers, they had nicknames. They had nicknames for each other and they continued to call each other that, Ken Morgan would be a great person for you to talk to about that. He is from Rutherfordton…I hope I have his phone number…
M: Any suggestion that you have for talking to someone I would love to hear, because that…kind of give me perspective and more voices in the mix. My goal ain't just to pass and get my masters or write a thesis, one of the biggest things is that I had family in the mill at the time of this and I had never heard of it in my whole life. So,
P: That's just it! It was so painful for people back then. Some of these people were their friends that die. And yet some of them, they may have been conflicted, they may have been involved with the strikers, they may have thought differently of it, but still felt horrible it happened…any time you see people die, you know, that's horrible. Someone that you worked with…it's a very disturbing thing to think about, and they were very close at that factor. The strikers only wanted to make life better for all of them. And I think that's what the people in the community realized, they needed and wanted a better life, but they were fearful of going against the man. You know? And it was a scary time, and you had the depression coming up and all that hard times there. It made things better, it got children out of the factors, made it older for uh ages for those children to be in there. But they were just trying to put food on the table, but children didn't need to be in there. Some enjoyed it too, I'm sure, as they were raised as hard workers.

M: Part of my goal with all of this, I adore our community, we have a lot to give and a lot to offer and I know you feel the same way about that, but one of my goals is to compile resources that will be accessible to everyone so people can be educated about this a little bit easier. So, um, I'm trying to create a very accurate timeline, so, in which to kind of…Travis Byrd did a great job but there's all these things…using that scrapbook, and maybe some sources that we haven't used before, creating a start to finish complete to add to what the strike was, what happened, and why it matters. That's my biggest undertaking right now.
P: I agree with you, it's kind of an odd thing that people really don't discuss it. But that's the way this community is, they're very private, and I think fact of the matter is people were conflicted. They wanted better lives, better things, but they didn't want to upset the apple cart, you know? They didn't want to go against the man like I said, they enjoyed their life and their friends, but they didnt want to upset things, but that's how it had to be, to make changes. And it's like if you look at Vietnam…it's similar thing. People protested against the war, but people still had family going to war. You have people demonstrating and avoiding the draft…my brother went to Vietnam twice. I didn't feel like protesting a war my brother was fighting. His child was born while he was in Vietnam…there were a lot of instances like that. It's the same thing with Iraq and Afghanistan today. There's a lot of men who have missed out on their families lives, they had it then but they have a name for it now, they have PTSD. So, yeah, that is a parallel you can make to something like that. You want to do it, but you don't, you know? And that avoidance is sometimes better than fighting, and I think that is the way it was here, uh, and you'll also notice up in Yancey and the mountainous counties, there were some people who had union leaning but the families were confederate folk or vice versa. Those families were conflicted, they didn't talk about it. They avoided it. It's kind fo the same thing. When you don't want to face something you avoid it. That is key to what this thing was. If you don't talk about it, it's under the rug, you don't have to deal with it.
M: That's a great way to put it. Do you think the average person in McDowell knows about the strike?
P: Uh, probably the average person does. Around here. That grew up here.
M: Do you think what they know is accurate?
P: Not necessarily. I don't know if anyone knows for sure exactly the truth though, you know? It's still a big mystery.
M: Anyone I've talked to about it so far has left that edge of I'm missing a lot of information at the same time.
P: You cant make an accurate judgement on something if you don't have all the facts, and the facts were not clear, even in the trials they had, it was really never very clear who had weapons and who fired first. It's like the shot heard around the world. We learned that in history class first year haha. But honestly, you just don't know for sure and you can only speculate. You can put blame all you can on everybody, and you do end up, you know, I hate to say it, but sometimes the fat cats end up the winners. The government wins. So that's the way it usually goes, but there is always that conspiracy theory in the back of peoples minds with a lot of things, you're always going to be left wondering if we will ever know, when we go to our reward we will know hopefully.

M: That'll be on my list of things to ask, for sure. I have one last big question for you. Patti I can't thank you enough for all the help you've given me, with this. Anyone you have to suggest, pass my number around at this point.
P: Ken Morgan is really someone…he bops in every now an then, just out of the blue. He has had some health issues lately…but uh, he's an older man, and the women, they wont be around forever, which is why you're doing the good thing getting in touch with as many people as you can, me, I see a lot of people but I cant get out and interview these people hardly because I'm working all the time.
M: That's one thing that I was going to say, if you hear of anyone who wants to share their story or their perspective, please feel free, I'd love to be the boots on the ground, helping with that as much as possible, because I think every story helps with our community story, and I don't mind to be that. We have that in common. My last question- how do you think lack of knowledge, or lack of accurate knowledge, has affected our town? What would you think it would look like if everyone knew the true story of the strike? Or if it was something that we talked about in a healthy way?
P: That's a good question. People are going to think what they want to think and believe what they want to believe anyway. I think a lot of people in town, due to the books produced so far, people think they know all of our history, but frankly, at the historical society, we know that there is some history that needs to be rewritten. And we have discovered a lot of things historically that are kind of inaccurate. That people today think yeah that's the way it was, but they may never accept something different. Like, uh, my vice president and I are trying to do some research on De Soto coming through this areas and Zuollo, and we've read several accounts of them coming through Old Fort. So, we have questions there about stuff, and we're trying to go to the colonial and state records to determine stuff, and get archaeologists interested in doing some uh, digs. I don't know if it'll ever happen, but theyre focused in Morganton. Anyway. We don't have archaeology degrees. We aren't the big wigs. It may be hard for our little research group to just…make a difference
M: Yall do so much good, you're very inspiring to me as an upcoming historian, you make me want to come back and work with yall so badly.
P: I would love for you to! What are you learning toward? Research or teaching?
M: My end goal is to come back and teach at the community college and, because I feel like it's a gold mine of place to help our community.
(Discussion continues about working with the society and Carson house in the future)

Sandy Carter Interview- via email

Megan Stevens September 16, 2020 at 9:59 AM MS

1929 Mill Strike- Megan Stevens

To: wecarterjr@gmail.com

Good Morning Mrs. Carter,
Kimberly Wright gave me your contact information when I asked her about people who may have some account/stories/knowledge about the mill village, and the strike that happened in 1929. I'm currently writing my Master's thesis at UNC Charlotte, though I am from McDowell and still very close to the community. If you'd be willing, I'd love to get on a phone interview or interview you over email about how the mill strike is remembered.
Thank you so much for your time!
Megan Stevens

September 16th, 2020, 10:57am

Megan,
I grew up in East Marion from 1945 to 1967. Father worked for Marion Mfg and was editor of the monthly news magazine called "Picks and Hanks".In March 1959 he published an issue for the 50-anniversary of the company founding by Carroll Baldwin in 1909. There is a timeline in the edition but no mention of the October 2,1929. Since the " incident" was a black eye for the ownership of Marion Mfg, he was probably told not to include it for the anniversary issue. It was never discussed during the time I lived in East Marion.
I really first heard in 2004 when Mike Lawing penned a book about it called,"The Marion Massacre". There was even a song published by Woody Guthrie.Even drew national attention when Sinclair Lewis showed up from California to report on it. A lot of opinions and a lot of facts skipped by Mike Lawing. He had some bias as his family was involved.
In 2015 a writer from Asheville, Travis Sutton Byrd wrote a more factual account of the incident with a book called, "Unraveled". He gave a history of the background of labor unrest in the 1920's. He also describes a timeline of events leading up to Oct 2,1929 and actual people involved. One note before October was the "Summer of Dynamite" at Clinchfield and East Marion.
I will let you borrow the book if interested. Send mailing address.
Will also copy some pages from the 1959 Picks and Hanks. Marion Mfg history is important to put every thing into proper context.
Regards,
Sandy Carter

September 18th, 2020, 3:56pm

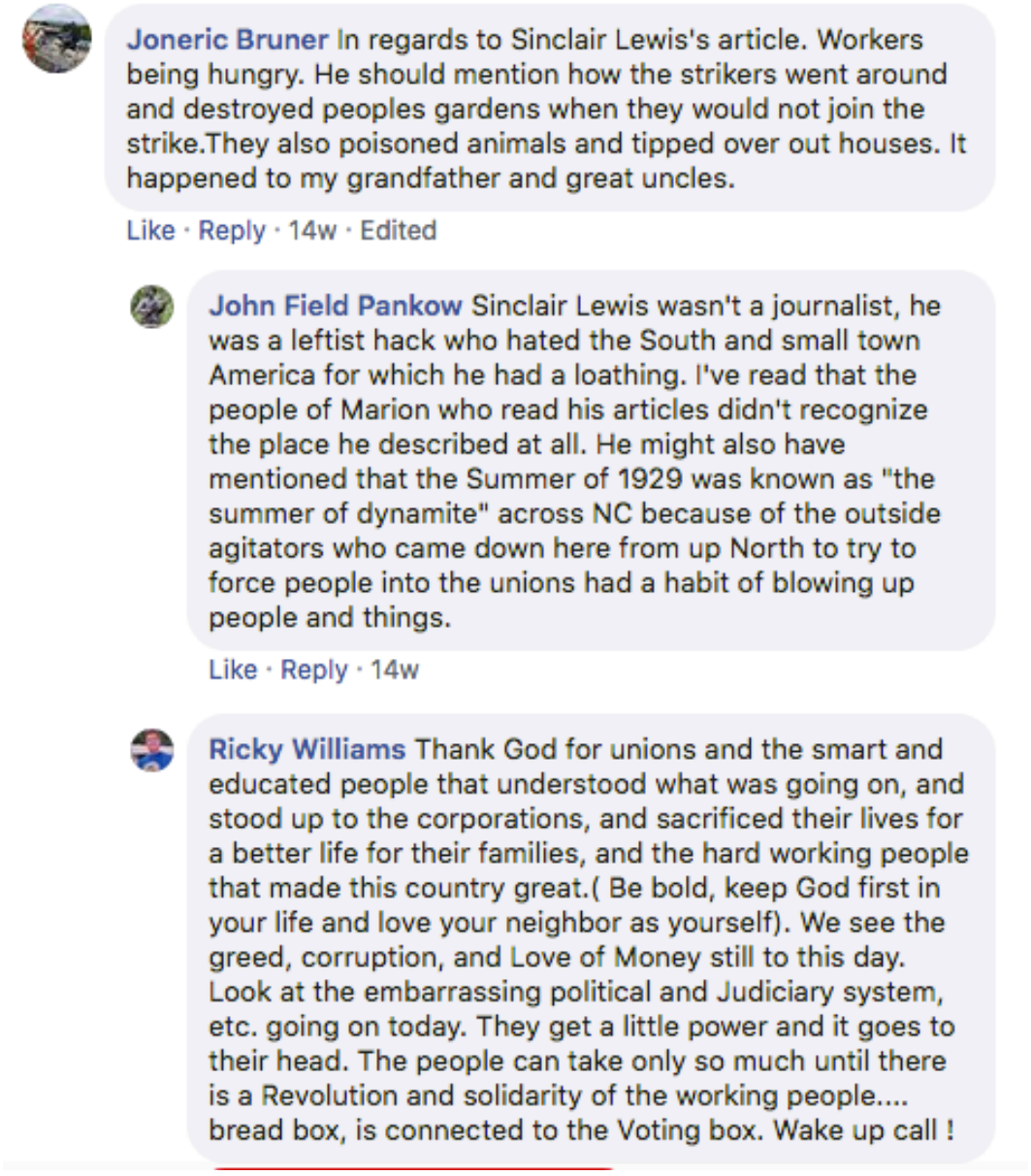
Mrs. Carter,
Thank you so much for your information, and willingness to share!
I have both "The Marion Massacre" and "Unraveled" at my disposal, and from what I've read and learned myself, I completely agree with your assessment.
I would love the copies if you wouldn't mind, that would help me greatly.
My current address is 1409 Crescent Ln Apt 1409A Matthews NC, 28105
Thank you so much again!
In your opinion, why do we (as a community) not want to remember the strike?
Have a great day!
Megan

September 18th, 2020 4:30pm

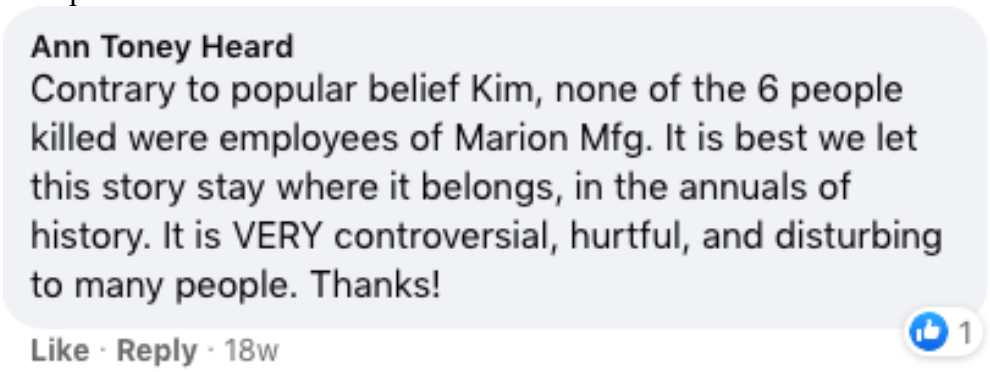
Ok
If I were you Travis Sutton Byrd has a more accurate report on the event than Mike Lawing. Byrd has no bias in his reporting-just facts based upon interviews.
Adam Hunt made some mistakes in management at the plant. His poor treatment of work hours and pay led to the folks appearing at the gate to prevent 1st shift employees from entering the plant at 700AM on Oct 2. He called in Oscar Adkins and his deputies to break up the picket line at the gate. But Adkins threw a 2nd canister and the old man,George Jonas hit Adkins hand with his cane.Loss of control and in the smoke/gas the deputies begin to fire into the crowd.
Fault of both sides IMHO.
Also Reginal Baldwin, President at time was not one to be in charge trying to manage the company from Baltimore after his cousin Carroll Baldwin had passed 10-years earlier. Later the house he used on Copeland Drive was dynamited.
Then you do not need my copy of "Unraveled"?
I will send copies from "Picks&Hanks".

Facebook documentation:

John Field Pankow/Joneric Bruner commentary- neither would consent to an interview/discussion regarding the mill. This exchange took place on November 16th, 2019, and the entire thread can be found here- https://www.facebook.com/groups/200385480017996/permalink/2703433713046481

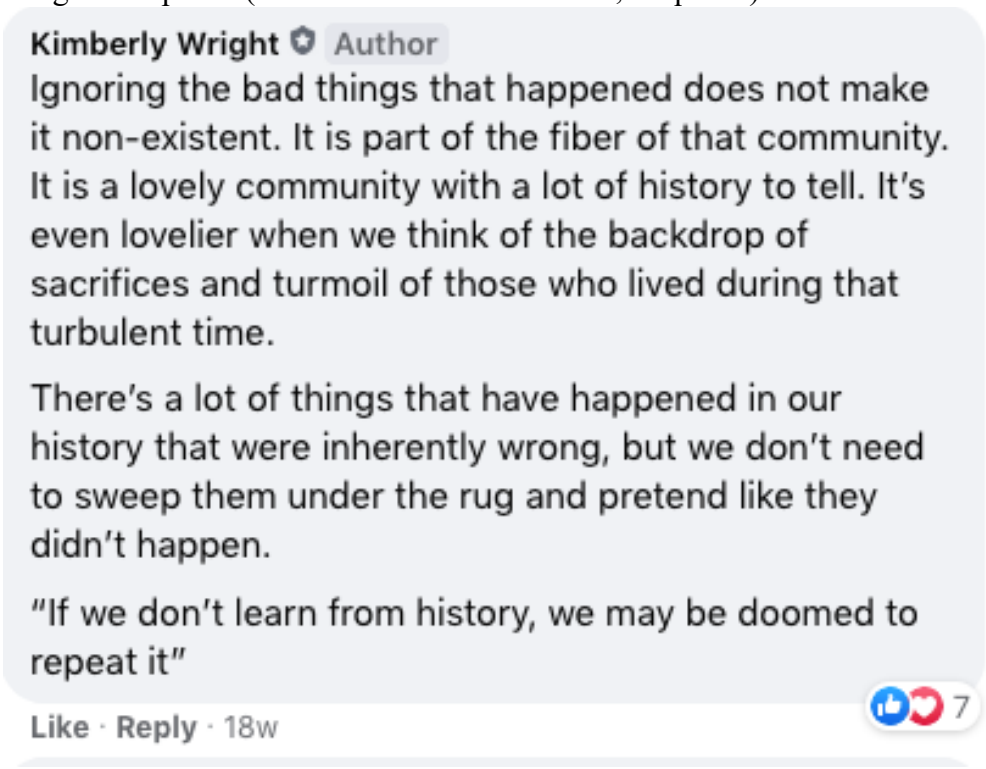


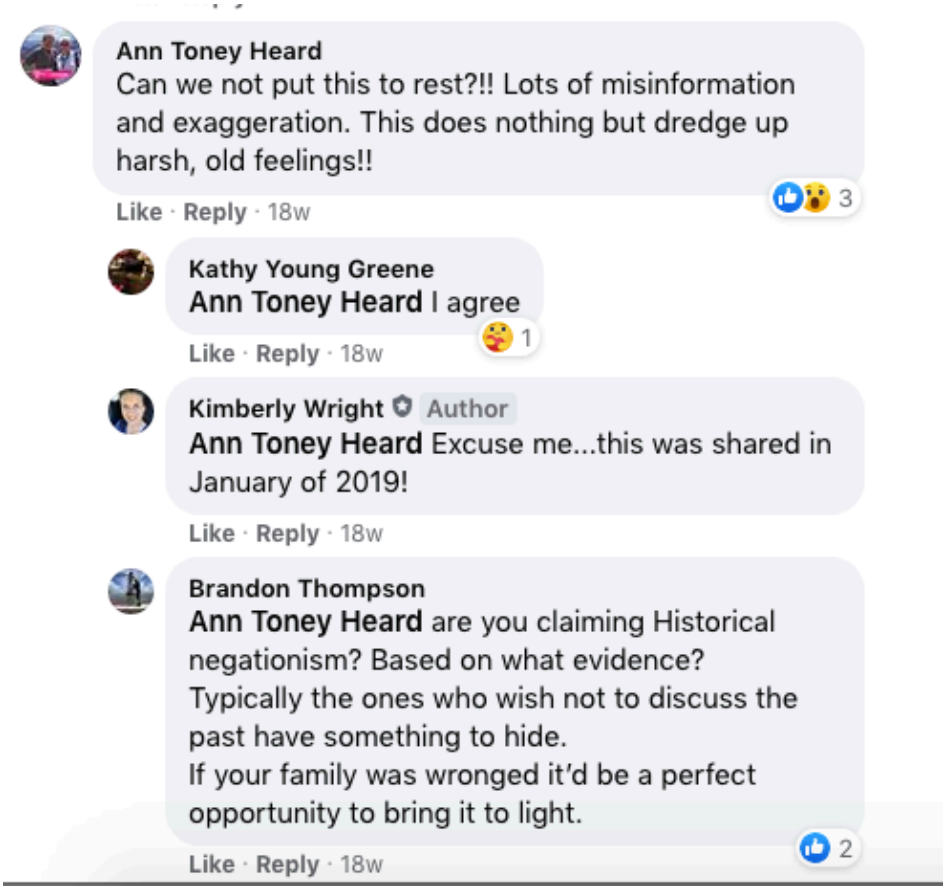
Wright/Heard Exchanges: as mentioned, there were several attempts by different locals to continuously comment and deny the truths of the strike, for example, Mrs. Ann Toney Heard. The following exchanges are just a few of many occurrences, accompanied with their permanent location links.



https://www.facebook.com/groups/200385480017996/permalink/3138926036163911

Wright's response (on the same thread as above, as quotes):





https://www.facebook.com/groups/200385480017996/permalink/2164918356898022

Messenger exchange with Kimberly Wright

50th Anniversary timeline from "Pick and Hanks"

The photograph on the left wasn't taken in 1909, but on April 25, 1953 when the East Marion Woman's Club held their annual banquet. The ladies had just dressed up to celebrate the occasion in an old-feshioned way.

A Brief History Of The Company

1909 .. Marion Manufacturing Company founded by Carroll Baldwin. Messrs. Carroll Baldwin, W. E. Wall, A. W. Smith, W. S. Glenn, H. F. Little, D. D. Little, J. L. Morgan, T. J. Gibbs and George I. White elected to first board of directors. D. D. Little elected the first company president. Hugh F. Little appointed first mill superintendent.

1910 .. Mill constructed and one shift in operation. The first overseers were A. F. Hunt, Weaving; James Frye, Carding; Walter Stone, Spinning; John Lytton, Shop; and a Mr. Grant, Cloth room.

1912 .. First expansion of original plant.

1917 .. W. A. Black succeeded H. F. Little as mill superintendent.

1918 .. A. F. Hunt appointed mill superintendent.

1921 .. Rignal W. Baldwin became mill president.

president on Oct 2, 1929

1923 Mill began to operate two shifts.

1928 Carroll Baldwin Hall constructed and building opened.

1929 Modern sewer and water systems installed in village.

1932 Company started its group life insurance program.

1937 Samuel M. Hamill became mill president.

1938 First rayon cloth woven in the mill. Before this there was only cotton manufactured into cloth.

1940 R. W. Twitty appointed mill superintendent to fill vacancy left when A. F. Hunt retired after thirty years service. Mill began to run three forty-hour shifts.

1941 Company started its group hospital insurance program.

1943 R. W. Twitty was made Vice-President and plant manager. T. L. Richie became mill superintendent. Terry A Moore was elected Secretary.

1944 First Aid department established. Mrs. Diora Westmoreland employed as Industrial Nurse.

1945 Construction of extension to mill and other changes made. Smoking rooms and overseers offices put in main mill tower. This work completed in 1947.

1946 R. W. Twitty elected mill president, Samuel M. Hamill became Chairman of the Board of Directors. First issue of **Picks and Hanks** given out in April.

1947 Production and Standards department set up in plant. Morgan Baldwin became first manager of this office.

1948 Company store closed. New job titles set up. J. E. Peppers became superintendent of Carding and Spinning. James Wyatt became superintendent of Weaving and Slashing. XD looms purchased to replace E-models. New spinning frames bought, and new spooler equipment set up. East Marion Ball Park built and equipped with lights.

1949 Main offices of company remodelled and construction completed in 1950. Company began to buy power from Duke Power Company after making its own for 40 years Teletype machine installed in company office. Marion Textile Specialty Co. formed March 1 to take care of affairs relating to Fiber Meter patented by the company, R. W. Twitty, T. L. Richie and Oren Greene.

Email exchange- Michael Hill

Hill, Michael

From: Hill, Michael
Sent: Thursday, June 06, 2013 11:52 AM
To: 'Sarah Schneider'
Subject: RE: Loray Mill Strike

Hello, Sarah,

I am happy to respond to your e-mail. I know that time is short to incorporate changes to your National History Day exhibit but will share what I have.

As Jo Ann indicated I have some interest in the mill and strike. In 1986 I initiated plans for a state highway historical marker on the topic. The city objected at that time and only this year on April 28 did the marker go up. Two newspapers articles published in recent weeks give more details:

http://www.gastongazette.com/loray-strike-finally-gets-historical-marker-1.132840

http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2013/04/27/4008075/gastonia-remembers-deadly-nc-strike.html

The city fathers, that is, the mayor and town council, in 1986 opposed the marker or at least the text approved by our advisory committee, a group of historians. Consequently, the nomination was shelved. In recent years, as work progressed toward finding a developer for the building, the city asked us to renew the effort.

Your other question dealt with how North Carolinians feel about unions. Today NC is the least unionized of the fifty states. There are many reasons for this but the lingering effects of the strike at Gastonia, and other strikes in that period including one at Marion in 1934, should not be discounted. "Outside agitators," that is, organizers who came into North Carolina, many of them members of the American Communist Party, are often blamed for the disruptions and for the anti-union sentiment.