Removing Reds from the Old Red Scar: Maintaining and Industrial Peace in the East Tennessee Copper Basin from the Great War through the Second World War

William Ronald Simson
Georgia State University

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This study considers industrial society and development in the East Tennessee Copper Basin from the 1890s through World War II; its main focus will be on the primary industrial concern, Tennessee Copper Company (TCC 1899), owned by the Lewisohn Group, New York. The study differs from other Appalachian scholarship in its assessment of New South industries generally overlooked. Wars and increased reliance on organic chemicals tied the basin to defense needs and agricultural advance. Locals understood the basin held expanding economic opportunities superior to those in the surrounding mountains and saw themselves as participants in the nation’s industrial and economic progress, and a vital part of its defense. The study upends earlier scholarship contending local industrial concerns acted proactively to challenges from farmers harmed by industrial pollution; investigation shows firms hesitated to initiate new production processes and manipulated local elections. Partisan developments woven amid all this underscore errors in assuming ancient regional affinity for Republicans. Confederate heritage gave Democrats an historic advantage that fractured before New Deal progressivism and expanding basin Republican power.

Markets forced basin firms to merge and embrace technological change affecting working people’s relationships, forcing workers to improve skills or settle for low-skill jobs.
Excepting TCC managers and supervisory staff, provincialism ruled; suspicions and competitiveness among workers grew as most miners lived a few scattered villages and most managers and craftsmen settled in the basin’s “Twin-cities” district. Early union efforts collapsed before union mismanagement, rational management and a company union based upon Sam Lewisohn’s ideals. Management managed to wrest control of its industrial relations despite the effects of Depression and the New Deal’s empowerment of workers. Workers’ infighting, reflecting neighborhood demographics and ideological differences, benefitted TCC; it convinced locals TCC could best protect industrial peace. The submissive AFL union installed fit of ownership’s nationally recognized program for industrial relations reliant on federal power.

After competition crippled local industry, locals continued their reliance on government: to investigate the medical consequences of extraction work and coordinate environmental restoration. Recent regional anti-government populism makes the basin’s peculiar historic reliance on federal help engaging.

REMOVING REDS FROM THE OLD RED SCAR:
MAINTAINING AN INDUSTRIAL PEACE IN THE EAST TENNESSEE COPPER BASIN,
FROM THE GREAT WAR THROUGH THE SECOND WORLD WAR

by

WILLIAM R. SIMSON

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William R. Simson

Committee Chair: Michelle Brattain

Committee: Krystyn Moon

Charles G. Steffen

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
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DEDICATION

To my Family,

-whose experiences in the mill towns of Western Pennsylvania shaped my understanding of the world, helped to ground my values, gave me an appreciation of the environment, instilled in me a fascination with industrialization and life in industrial towns, encouraged me to do well in school, and have supported my aims as long as I can remember.
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Countless friends, associates, and colleagues whose counsel gave refuge and who bid me to persevere.
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Introduction

This dissertation is about the social and labor history of the East Tennessee Copper Basin. As such, it will also address the industrialization of the region and the accompanying political and environmental consequences. Its main purpose is to expand our understanding of Southern mountain and industrial history by focusing on the great changes affected on the people and industry of eastern Polk County, Tennessee, from the 1910s thru the middle 1940s. Located in the southeastern most corner of the state—within a larger region known as the Tri-state, that includes North Georgia and Western North Carolina—the Copper Basin is unique not only as a mineral rich geographical region in the Southern Appalachians, but because capitalist extraction industries established there differed from the lumber, coal, and textile industries usually associated with Southern mountain industrialization.1 Furthermore, owing to industrial emissions trapped by the surrounding hills that rise to nearly 2000 feet, and the heavy rains typical of the Southern Mountains, a vast deforestation and erosion ensued that denuded some 55,000 acres of the Copper Basin by 1900. The phalanx of capitalist and natural forces removed not only forest cover, but also washed away some four feet of topsoil leaving a raw, red clay landscape that prevented any natural repair of the hills. Even two generations after state-sponsored law suits forced local companies to change their production techniques, further erosion and regular, if accidental emissions prevented healing and the raw red hills remained. The area became a renowned example of all that unregulated capitalism could work upon the Earth. It was said the Copper Basin’s wound in Appalachia could be seen from low orbit, the scarring being so

provocative that it gave the region a peculiar distinction for tourists as “the only desert east of the Mississippi River.”

For most outside observers and visitors to “Ducktown,” an older, popular name for the Copper Basin, environmental devastation pretty much summed up any historical importance the area may have held—certainly that perspective dominated the bulk of popular literature. Some few bothered to learn that the region had undergone booms, busts, and boom again over a hundred years and then finally whimpered into a gradual decline as national copper found richer ore reserves in lands far from Ducktown. That process saw pragmatic decisions to shut down extraction mining in the Copper Basin by the late 1980s. Even scholarly discourse has seemed fixed on the shocking landscape. Granted, to study the region and ignore the denuded landscape and its origins would be akin to ignoring poor land husbandry’s role in the Dust Bowl. But, in fact, national and local attitudes about conservation and reclamation changed dramatically just as the Copper Basin’s industry was winding down. It was no longer satisfactory to merely live with The Old Red Scar—at one point one of the major copper companies ran a farm to demonstrate that one could practice successful agriculture in the region (according to one account, the farm was a supplier of local produce for Basinites—but just how much subsidy it took to maintain this “farm” was not revealed). By the late 1960s the ravaged land and its toxicity could no longer be ignored and additional projects commenced as state, federal, and private concerns began righting the great environmental wrong wrought in Polk County. Earlier renovations began under the New Deal but real success wasn’t too noticeable until the late 1970s; progress was slow.

Meanwhile, as the sulfur blasted crust of The Old Red Scar began to vanish under a new

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2 This description of the Copper Basin was regularly repeated by locals and although I have not found its origin popular literature that delved into the origins of the region’s notorious nude hills also recorded common sentimental feelings Copper Basin residents held for their beloved Appalachian desert. See for instance, Edwin Teale, “The Murder of a Landscape,” *Natural History*, October, 1951: 352-356; and, Grady Clay, “The Roving Eye: Copper Basin Cover-up,” *Landscape Architecture*, July 1983: 49—54 and, 94-95.
covering of what some locals call disparagingly, “the common green”—kudzu, trash trees and sundry pines, wild flowers, and more kudzu—so too did more and more of the infrastructure and activities that once defined the Copper Basin as the one of the most critical industrial dynamos of the South.3

The study’s narrative tells the story of the Copper Basin from the Great War through the Second World War. Its main focus is on the copper concerns and those whose lives shaped and were shaped by the nation’s need for the region’s particular contributions to the metals, munitions, and chemicals industries. Those contributions, particularly in the area of sulfuric acid production and an collection of other ferrous and non-ferrous products became internationally known, created a boom-town economy, saw the employment by the copper companies of rationalized personnel schemes and the harnessing of constant upgrades in technology and plant. Corporate organization and technological advance galvanized the extraction and smelting workers to unionize and defend their industrial liberty in the face of concentrating corporate and federal power and influence. As the nation moved from war to peacetime to war again, the Copper Basin’s industry became ever more tied to US defense needs, federal programs, and lucrative munitions contracts all of which increased the main local employer’s ability to quell challenges to the local industrial peace as it added to the local economy and promoted its own goodwill.

The nature of US and international copper markets demanded constant mechanical advances that in turn forced the working-class to maintain its flexibility and improve or expand skills sets necessary to support expanding product line. This was particularly true for the chemical and smelting sectors of the Copper Basin firms. But the enormous amounts of ore needed for production—owing to Ducktown’s relatively low ore grades—saw huge investments

3 Observations based upon a summary of material on display at the Ducktown Basin Museum.
in underground machinery to get to the necessary tonnage. As David Montgomery and others have shown, capitalism’s drive for technological change to protect profit margins drove innovation that greatly affected working people’s relationship with their employers: they had to keep themselves useful—that burden could be even greater during downward slides in the economy when economic troughs might provoke a company to upgrade once again. In the Copper Basin change in the copper markets was manifested in a need for more foremen, engineers, chemists, leadburners, carpenters, electricians, and myriad other skilled craftsmen who regularly retooled their abilities.

Meanwhile, as financiers and owners merged copper concerns, labor markets tightened. At Ducktown most men in the extraction industry had come to work for the Tennessee Copper Company by the early 1930s. Miners, laborers, and various daily wage men lived in a couple of mining villages of the central Basin, while most craftsmen lived on its southern rim, in or near Copperhill, Tennessee and an adjacent sister town, McCaysville, Georgia. The towns sat astride the Toccoa/Ocoee River—a waterway whose name changes crossing the state line from Georgia to Tennessee. Unpaved roads connecting these communities were rough and used far less often by locals traveling from town to town than is common in the Basin today. Excepting for company managers and supervisory staff, provincialism ruled; suspicions and competitiveness grew among the workers; folks tended to stay put in their own neighborhoods after work and aside from sporting or major company meetings generally did not associate much with one another. The circumstances became ripe for some major disagreements about how workingmen could best protect the interests of their families, communities, and personal industrial liberty. Ironically, it would be the very federal programs of the 1930s designed to assist such men in their organizing that would rend its several communities and empower the corporate coppermen.
Little of this is remembered regionally beyond the reminiscences of some surviving descendants. In fact, aside from the rusting hulk of the last of the great plants at Copperhill, a solitary mine head mid-Basin, sundry memorials, a dozen or so copper colored lampposts and the contents of a fine, if small local museum in Ducktown at the old Burra Burra mine, much of what is being forgotten is going fast, fading like the rusting entry signs that once proclaimed proud entry into The Copper Basin. With the sensational ruins of The Old Red Scar greening up, interest in the region as a former industrial center has nearly disappeared.

The study differs from other Appalachian histories in that it describes a facet of New South industrialization generally overlooked in the literature or limited to a brief mention in the discourse about Polk County. Taking a different approach, the study acknowledges that locals perceived the Old Red Scar in a very different way. For many of them, the denuded hills were a symbol of jobs and economic opportunities superior to those in the surrounding agrarian counties. Regional farmers sued and sometimes won damages as a result of the toxic emissions expelled from the great stacks at Ducktown, but within the Copper Basin smoke meant jobs. The first immigrants to the Basin were not usually people who had been farmers; in fact, the Copper Basin had never been an agricultural region of much note. Residents had not seen their world turned upside-down by industrialization; they came to the sulfuric acid-laced billowing clouds because they wanted to earn money through industrial enterprise. The first boom occurred long before a railroad linked the Copper Basin to city markets and so it dissipated as a result. Those craftsmen who stayed and found work at other industrial sites in the Tennessee Overhill did so because there were simply few good jobs in the agrarian towns that made up most of the upcountry. Later, when the entry of the railroad returned the boom economy, even farmers joined the workforce.
Today, local civil authorities are doing what they can to transform eastern Polk’s wide, white water rivers under clear blue skies amid the step hill-country’s blanket of green into a tourist and vacation destination. But those efforts represent a post-industrial attitude. To interpret The Old Red Scar simply as the product of selfish, misguided industrial action is to perpetrate anachronism and ignore the then predominant capitalist values that attracted workers. Thus the study builds on an approach scholar M. L. Quinn outlined when she provided a distinct account of the Copper Basin that respected the proactive and pragmatic responses of the railroad era copper firms to state-sponsored lawsuits (after early ore processing destroyed North Georgia orchards and crops). This is not to say that this study’s approach to the region, nor that embraced by the copper firms stand as simply relativist. This study differs with Quinn for instance regarding assessment of the firms’ willingness to enact change—clearly the clean up that is now being done in the region is testament to changed social values. What it does mean is that this study is not out to scold or admonish the copper concerns as simply the bad guy. The real story is more complex.

And as such it will upend central assumptions of the historiography. For example, the study will challenge some of the broad historical generalizations often made about the mountain regions’ responses to the New Deal. While much of the industrial half of Polk County seemed to approve the era’s federal programs, its county seat, set in a primarily typical upcountry agricultural region, was not so gung-ho about the federal programs. The welcome given the New Deal by the Copper Basin’s merchant and professional class reminds us that small town industrial Appalachia was ready to dine on FDR’s alphabet soup, gulping down with enthusiasm each new program, especially those connected with the NIRA, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. All three would have a major impact on the Copper Basin
and this study describes some of these developments. With the coming of the Second World War, the federal presence, now promoting defense industry contracts, became even more omnipresent and popular. Throughout this entire period however, newspaper editors in the county seat at Benton, Tennessee attacked the New Deal programs as expensive wastes of money tied to Big Labor, Big Business, financed by Big Money all on the backs of the Little Guy. The “little guy” was apparently a group that included housewives, farmers and small businessmen, but these were all persons who had benefitted from elements of the New Deal, so the constituency for these editorials was likely a more general anti-government populism. The “little guy” was apparently not one of the hundreds of regional workers who benefited from the copper works and mines energized by the New Deal—the editorials were strident in their attacks on the Wagner Act. Scholar George Tindal argued that “the little guy” was really that set of county-seat elite: bankers, landlords, small-town manufacturers and others who benefited from the older dependency system that had long favored their class across the South before the New Deal.4

Despite conceptions of the upcountry as Republican since the Civil War, this was not the case in Polk County. The county’s ancient industrial importance to the Confederacy sealed local loyalties to the Democrats. This last point reflects the observations of scholar V.O. Key who argued that Tennessee state party lines had long been fixed owing to ancient resentments from the Civil War and Reconstruction eras. Since slavery had never been very profitable in the state’s mountain counties East Tennessee Republicans had controlled local politics since 1861; their party later benefitted from “interparty arrangements” born of the intense competition among Democratic politicians who controlled the balance of the state. Key suggested that an “equilibrium [existed that was] not unlike what the economists call ‘monopolistic competition.’”

4 See for example front page political cartoons, “Hornets’ Nest” and “Keep to the Right!” Polk County News, 4 August, 1938 and 3 November, 1938; and, George Tindal, Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945, Volume 10. (Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 618.
The respective parties came to “follow a ‘live and let live’ policy.” Scholar Gordan B. McKinney showed that within this dynamic increased use negrophobic appeals by East Tennessee Republicans during the industrialization of the mountains in the late 1800s were intended to expand party control beyond its historic boundaries. Many mountain Republicans supported industry’s advance. And yet, despite industry’s influence in Polk County, race appeals and support for industry alone did not dislodge Democratic control. What happened in Polk County during the early to mid-twentieth century was a transformation away from the old Democratic county-seat elite control of the county that was already being challenged by industrial interests tied to the Republican Party. New Deal Democratic progressivism challenged the party’s old political elite and simultaneously empowered the industrial work force. The change and its reaction set the foundation for a later, conservative Republican control of this sector of the upcountry. Much of the dynamics that occurred in Polk County antedated the labor and political campaigns across larger Dixie a generation later. Little of the current scholarship describes this kind of change in southern mountain communities and none of it looks at industrialization’s impact on politics in the Tri-state.5

Union organizing in the Copper Basin began in the same decade that the railroad came to Ducktown. Early union efforts by localized, raucous, short-lived associations centered at Ducktown Sulphur, Copper, and Iron Company, Ltd, in the village of Isabella, focused on the most immediate problems with management and resembled more a mob than a confederation of craftsmen.6 Consistency in safe and efficient working conditions did not originate among

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5 The topic is due for a reinvestigation of the subject by the current generation of scholars. For general observations see, V.O. Key, Jr., Southern Politics in State and Nation (New York: Random House, 1949), 76 and 79; and, Gordon McKinney, Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865-1900: politics and the Appalachian Community (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 124 and 138.
6 Miners Indulge in Threats. “Six hundred miners are on strike and the company has arranged to put men in their places today…. The miners are armed and guarding he mines and refuse to allow new men to enter [and they have] secured a lot of whisky and are becoming boisterous,” New York Times 9 November 1899.
organized workmen in the Basin, but from the copper concerns especially after it became clear that even war’s boom-time economic conditions did not guarantee continued prosperity or maximize shareholder investment. The Great War, for instance, had allowed the copper companies in Polk County a fantastic opportunity for profit, but not one of them was able to avoid some measure of crippling mismanagement, misappropriation of funds or to maintain dependable control over local labor in the War To End All Wars. Mismanagement and unstable labor markets led to the entry of a more radical and organized union with national connections: The International Association of Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers first came to the Basin during the Great War. Mine, Mill secured a contract in the late teens from Tennessee Copper Company but its fortunes dimmed during the post-war slump. But that passing after 1921 cannot simply be attributed to weak copper markets and limp labor markets. Some woes came as a result of the divisive leadership in the union’s international, but the real mortal blow to Mine, Mill in the Copper Basin came from Tennessee Copper’s simultaneous embrace of industrial rationalism and an expanded production array.

When Taylorism, welfare capitalism, and company unions came to the Basin they came after Tennessee Copper reorganized its finances and attempted to amend the chaotic mismanagement that so misappropriated investor capital during the Great War. Workers’ initial prejudice against the new regime faded as stable management took the helm, improved safety and general working conditions, and raised pay. When the metals market was hit hard in 1920-1921, Copper Basin firms continued to operate owing to the nature of metals production: shutdown expenses outweighed the expense of risking skilled labor’s exit from the Basin and the

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costs associated with restarting furnaces—indeed, wages remained relatively stable into the twenties. Also, TCC expanded into the agricultural chemicals field. As conditions improved, the dominant firm, Tennessee Copper, extended its welfare capitalism and local workers’ material expectations rose. The dynamic that ensued reflects on a much smaller scale one observed by Lizabeth Cohen in Chicago. Tennessee Copper Company’s (TCC) pragmatic management during the 1920s seemed to secure workforce loyalty to the company so that when the Great Depression hit nationally, TCC worked to keep as many of its workers on the payroll as possible. Again, the nature of the metals industry saw to it that it was more practical to continue production. But resentments grew in the early 1930s as Copper Basin firms tried to reduce labor costs through manipulation of man-shift production and reduced crew-size in the mining sector. As industrial historians of the period have noted, some of these cuts were going to happen anyway owing to the industry’s continued embraced of technological advance.

The company union scheme, however, did not hold. New Deal labor legislation stimulated union organizing in the Copper Basin, but as labor rallied it did so to a resounding chorus that demanded any labor organizing must maintain and protect the racial status quo and cherished conceptions of personal ambition even as unionizing required collective action. By 1933, local craftsmen and the mining class called for Mine, Mill to return. Three Mine, Mill locals were established, one each in the main sectors of the Basin and within a year, this revived Mine, Mill—boosted by protections in the National Industrial Recovery Act—soon secured contracts with TCC. All this occurred just as TCC absorbed DSC&I facilities (the Isabella firm)
and crew. But the new Mine, Mill locals did not necessarily demonstrate the progressive ideals the union is generally known for especially in regard to race. True, its organizers sought to lift all working men of TCC through improved wages and working conditions, but when it came to attempts to garner support among all TCC workers Copper Basin Mine, Mill locals reflected local, mountain, working-class values. In light of Mine, Mill’s history in Southern Metal’s industry the entry of Mine, Mill to a region where white supremacy was the cultural law of the land seems curious. As a defensive move in the late 1910s by labor organizers in Birmingham, Alabama who were determined to organize blacks but keep them separated from more highly skilled white workers white union organizers encouraged unskilled and semi-skilled blacks in the metals industry to join Mine, Mill. However, white organizers could neither control blacks in this manner nor the prerogatives of Mine, Mill as the union competed for control of all regional metals workers. As will be further discussed in this study, race played a central role in ensuing rivalry between competing unions in that town which limited workers ability to create a united front before management. In the Copper Basin, though it held a nearly lily-white population, the specter of race and radicalism would affect solidarity among workers.\(^\text{12}\)

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, by the 1930s, the various Copper Basin communities held distinct ideas of just how best to advance the fortunes and secure the industrial liberties of each little burg’s rank-and-file. Ideas of how best to accomplish this reflected not only the kind of work done by the workers but also how those workers saw themselves before the balance of the metals industry workforce. Many craftsmen who did specialized, dangerous work, with relative autonomy viewed industrial organizing schemes that sought a democratization of union control as insulting if not presumptuous. Certain sectors had more

craftsmen than others; mining required for instance highly specialized operatives trained to use the increasingly large drills and other underground machines, but mining also included many men who were known as merely “laborers,” who could do many simple tasks either under or above ground, but who were not recognized with the title “miner.” It appears that many of these men did mining work, but over time, the increased mechanization of the mines required fewer “miners” and more mechanical engineers, supervisors, craftsmen and lesser-skilled day laborers. As a result of these changes, the Mine, Mill locals in the mining villages of Ducktown and Isabella sought an expansion of the union’s membership to a broader field of workers, whereas in Copperhill, craftsmen remained loyal to a craft-based volunteerism ideology that allowed them to use their special skills as leverage to obtain better wages. The conservatives’ way was the old Gompers way and it relied on a hierarchical union organization that often assisted employers in organizing work.13

Meanwhile, nationally, Mine, Mill no longer found itself comfortable in the trade-dominated American Federation of Labor; the nature of American copper being what it was, more and more workers leaned toward the industrial approach to organizing. When the International Union of Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers fled the Federation’s House of Labor in the middle 1930s, the different goals sought by the various locals in the Copper Basin came to the fore. Elections supervised by National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) officials failed to settle the issue and the CIO/AFL national split soon ended what little local fraternity had

remained. Copperhill laborites voted to leave Mine, Mill and return to the Federation whereas the Ducktown and Isabella locals rallied behind the CIO.\textsuperscript{14}

The origins of the labor split are important to understand because much of the conventional historiography on labor during this period has interpreted the difference in terms of progressive actions taken by the CIO especially in regard to racial integration. But in the mountain setting of the Copper Basin, it is clear CIO organizers attempted to project a different image, and tried to create solidarity among local working people as protectors of racialized regional stereotypes and white supremacy. The CIO’s reputation as racially progressive was in fact a disadvantage, since it likely reminded many Copper Basin folk of historic threats African Americans once posed to the local labor markets. Despite the fact that only a handful of blacks then lived in the Copper Basin and that only a couple of these folk were connected at all to the copper business, the specter of race invasion rose. As well, the collective, leveling tactics and rhetoric employed by CIO organizers, usually in a very public manner, made them vulnerable to AFL charges that such action represented evidence of communism. In fact, the overt racist attitudes promoted among the CIO unions at Ducktown and Isabella were employed along with appeals to protect working class families from AFL accusations that CIO sympathizers were all a bunch of communists set on destroying the patriotic, Christian, capitalistic values cherished by white Basinites.\textsuperscript{15}

All this underscores another area which distinguishes the study, because it will support recent scholarship that argues that nearly all-white Appalachia was the result of a long campaign by mountain folk to secure a white republic distinct from the mixed demographics common in


\textsuperscript{15} See various articles on all this within \textit{The Copper City Advance}, April 1938 thru December 1939, \textit{passim} and \textit{The Polk County News} during this same period.
the piedmont and flatlands of Dixie. Certainly my research found that a race purity campaign had long been waged in the Copper Basin from the days of Cherokee removal to the maintenance of local lore that warned blacks never to let the sun set on them in the Copper Basin. Racist symbols employed by CIO members/organizers would thus have been familiar, perhaps even considered *respectable* in the upcountry of the early to mid twentieth century. They should be understood also as overtures to the local middle and upper class of professionals, businessmen, and industrial managers: potent, symbolic weaponry taken up to neutralize cries that CIOs brought a threat to peace in the larger community.

Meanwhile, Tennessee Copper exploited the circumstances by giving clandestine financial gifts to the sheriff’s campaign to rid Polk County of the CIO.16 Tennessee Copper also used the circumstances established by federal labor legislation. By influencing the NLRB election process to harness workers’ energies, the company harnessed the hatred behind the labor split to its own advantage. The company’s actions provided de facto support for the Copperhill-based AFL. The labor war in the Copper Basin encouraged later, more aggressive open-shop and anti-union campaigns to thrive regionally by the late 1940s. What happened as a result of the labor split in Ducktown would happen on a larger scale throughout Dixie during the next generation as conservative AFL dominance allowed for the growth libertarian and pro-Chamber of Commerce *anti*-unionism—a marvelous footing for later Republican proselytizing.17

**III-Historiography**

This study of the Copper Basin grounds itself in a perspective that acknowledges the importance of geographical place and environs. William Cronon once remarked that at some

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17 *Knoxville Labor News and Polk County News* editorials middle 1940s, passim.
point, in all histories, the place where a narrative unfolds must be acknowledged. The story of the Basin’s environmental devastation is clearly significant for my study, but Cronon also encouraged scholars to adopt a more complex view of people’s relationship to their environs. Various scholars have noted the physical impact of industrial capitalism on the Basin, but of additional interest here concerns other kinds of questions Cronon asked: “What do people [most] care about [in the area]? … How do they assign meaning to that world? How does the earth respond to their actions? What sorts of communities [do the people and nature] create together? How do people struggle with [one another for control of the region]? And [as a metahistorical concern] what is the mutual fate of the people and their world?” The environmental story is not the only one, but the study will keep these questions in mind within the regional narrative with a discussion on the nature of the copper industry, its workforce in the first half of the twentieth century and assessments of the local impact of organized labor’s regional and national actions. The study also chronicles the scope of state and federal power in the industrial economy, especially as a result of progressive, associative-state, New Deal, and World War initiatives. Federal programs born during these periods combined with industrial enterprise dominated the lives of Basinites. But to acknowledge that does not mean it would be correct to presume these people merely acquiesced to the impact of federal programs or the machinations of the larger copper industry. Nor did they resign themselves to the designs national laborites may have had for their lives. Ironically, even today the Copper Basin is being transformed by yet another combination of federal, state, and private initiatives bent on renovating the resources once exploited for these interests. Though they are far less noticeable than in the past, this triumvir of corporate, state and federal government agencies lay behind the massive reclamation projects of

the area and studies examining the long term effects industrial toxins have had on the environs and inhabitants of the Copper Basin. As one child of Copper Basin folk told me recently—“those people are always sickly up there.”

Another theme that runs throughout this study is labor’s various degrees of success in surmounting challenges posed by constant technological change. Because this was a trend that was both national and local the study approached the subject by considering general studies of American copper, research on technological change in the industry over time, and labor’s response. Despite the fact that Copper Basin enterprises extracted and processed hundreds of thousands of tons of ferrous and non-ferrous ore, none of the major histories of American copper discuss Polk County operations beyond brief mention, peripheral comment, or as a mere isolated listing on a production table. The main focus of non-ferrous industrial and labor history has been on the industry’s vast holdings in the Far West and Great Lakes regions; however, industrial trends from the general narrative can be seen at Ducktown such as the national slump in the copper markets that followed Great War. That sharp recession of 1920-21 ended a copper boom begun in the late 1800s when the American industrial plant converted to electricity from steam power. Massive investments and profits made during the war boom of the mid-1910s allowed for the processing of lesser quality ores that production costs had once prohibited. In the war’s wake cut-throat competition prevailed and forced mergers despite American industry’s

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20 Summary of the copper industry during the era comes from a survey of the following key industrial histories: George Hildebrand and Garth Mangum, Capital and Labor in American Copper, 1845-1990 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991); Charles Hyde, Copper for America: the United States Copper Industry From Colonial Times to the 1990s, (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1998; and Thomas Navin. Copper Mining and Management (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona, 1978).
general amenability to cooperation through associationalism during that era. It took a massive infusion of European battlefield scrap copper to force non-ferrous industry leaders to associate, but they only did so for a short while: once domestic stockpiles had been reduced by the early 1920s, the fragile association ceased, territorial practices, and mergers resumed. Only the most pro-active firms invested in further mechanization and rationalization of production regimes. In the Copper Basin, on the heels of Great War fiascos of mismanagement, local firms returned to the proactive behavior they had demonstrated earlier in the century, an approach that helped them survive the anemic metals markets of the New Era. The most dynamic of the firms reorganized in earnest to survive by expanding production arrays, embracing Taylorism, and extending welfare capitalism.21

Of all the accounts on the non-ferrous industry, this study relies most heavily on patterns in American copper outlined by George Hildebrand and Garth Mangum.22 They described an industry led by firms that embraced technological advance and scientific management. Of great interest were the copper companies’ regular manipulations of local labor markets, propelled by the regular alliances of mine owners, corporate agents, local and state regulatory and police officials. The coming of the New Deal did not see these trends end and the tenacity of the corporate-local government alliances survived as a backdrop to progressive federal legislation aimed at uplifting working class agency as it tried to curtail cut-throat industrial competition. Corporate efforts in the 1920s drained the coffers of the Western Union of Miners (the predominant union among the non-ferrous workers) and those of its heir, the International Union of Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers, but they did not snuff out workers’ organizing ambitions. The study extends Hildebrand and Mangum’s thesis to the southeast by demonstrating how their

21 See Barclay, The Copper Basin, 13-14; 25-31, 42-44; 46-47.
22 Hildebrand and Mangum, Capital & Labor in American Copper, 127-146.
general observations about the transformation of the non-ferrous extraction and smelting industry and its workforce held true for the Copper Basin.

Notable studies on union activity in the fuller copper world are thick with chronicles of radicalism and the defensive acts of mining barons. The most ambitious of these books are by Vernon Jensen, founder of Cornell’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations, who recounted in great detail the vicious battles that took place repeatedly between mine and smelter owners and the Western Federation of Miners. Useful for understanding of the intricacies of labor’s political drama, Jensen’s works stand as an archetype of cold war liberalism: his studies are as magnificently reverent to the primary sources as they are dismissive of any benefit the Left (or anything he deemed “communist”) may have given to rank-and-file non-ferrous unionization.23 They also tend to be quite thin on the significance of technological change for labor or the importance of copper markets and ignore the East Tennessee Copper Basin.24

The best labor histories which chronicle the fight American workers endured to gain living wages and to improve and maintain respectable standards of living also examine how workers like those in the Basin fought to control their working environment and formed various associations and coalitions. Through this they forced capitalists to reckon with working people’s ambitions. We learn from these general studies the degree to which working folk participated in the nation’s expanding consumer culture, rejecting upper and middle class conceits that people


24 See for instance Steve Rosswurm, The CIO’s Left-led unions (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992); and, most important, the more sympathetic recent account of leftist labor influence during the mid-twentieth century, Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin, Left Out: Reds and America’s industrial unions, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). These two works by no means represent all the pertinent scholarship on leftist influence on labor organizing in the United States and more discussion about labor and left will follow both in this prospectus and in the study, but these sources do serve as a beginning point and underscore the dismissive nature all too common in labor history about the positive effects of leftist influence.
who worked in industry generally needed to be prudent and niggardly in their spending.\footnote{Lawrence Glickman, “Inventing the American Standard of Living: gender, race, and working class identity, 1880-1925,” Labor History (Spring-Summer) 1993: 221-235; and Glickman, A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Daniel Jacoby, Laboring for Freedom: A New Look at the History of Labor in America (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998); Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989); and, Cohen, Making a New Deal.} A mere cursory review of Copper Basin newspapers would be enough to recognize the thriving consumer culture extant during the interwar years in the Copper Basin; myriad advertisements competed for the attentions of the working people of Ducktown, Isabella, Copperhill, and sundry outskirts. The payroll of local copper was big too: by the 1930s millions annually poured into the Copper Basin economy through the pay of TCC’s employees.

But workers could not garner the power they needed to secure reliable living wages in an era of constant technological upgrades and ever-more powerfully concentrated corporate torque alone. In the 1920s, to thwart unionism and encourage loyalty, many firms turned to welfare capitalism that buoyed workers’ living standards and established new standards of expectation. When tough times came, the firms generally pulled back on their extensive welfare capitalist programs, often reduced hours or simply laid folks off. All this left workers feeling betrayed as they experienced economic hardship. The consumer driven economy many had just begun to enjoy was now slipping away. Panic, depression, anger set in for hundreds of thousands.\footnote{Cohen, 8 and chapters 3-6, passim.} State and federal authorities came to realize in the 1930s large sectors of the American populace were losing their liberties owing to the refusal for corporations to change their ways of doing business and so to protect those liberties state and federal authorities reduced the liberties of capitalists so as to avoid the development of a permanent labor class.\footnote{Jacoby, Laboring for Freedom, introduction, passim.} This study chronicles the effects of welfare capitalism and federal programs in the Copper Basin that initially seemed to mitigate corporate power as they uplifted working people. But as this study will argue, the Basin’s main
employer also learned it could manipulate the new federal oversight to its own advantage even if working people would be organized and that the government would enforce collective bargaining rights.

Just because workers organized did not mean they spoke with a single voice and studies, like those done by Steve Fraser, underscore the fact that class and skills set distinctions rendered absolute labor coalitions impossible.\(^{28}\) By the late 1930s it was all too clear to older-style American Federation of Labor loyalists that the judicial rulings of the new National Labor Relations Board sought only the largest possible industrial bargaining units for labor representation. As one scholar noted, these rulings “infuriated” the “skilled-elite” craftsmen of the AFL. As the New Deal advanced into the Appalachians, traditionalist ethnic and religious reactions arose in some circles against what was perceived as pro-Catholic, integrationist, atheistic labor organizing of the CIO.\(^{29}\) This study will examine what, upon preliminary research, appear to be similar reactions occurring among working people in the Copper Basin especially in light of its growing numbers of craftsmen.

Studies on Southern and Southern mountain industrialization have generally overlooked the Copper Basin or if they mention it at all they tend, like accounts in the popular literature, to remain fixed only on the region’s notorious devastation while they ignore the thousands who relied on its enterprise.\(^{30}\) In fact, Appalachian industrial history has long remained focused on well known locales: coal towns, lumber camps, and textile communities. Despite their limited scope, important conclusions and observations from Southern industrial historiography inform my study. Regional studies by Betty Duggins and M.L. Quinn somewhat correct oversight of the

\(^{28}\) See Fraser, “The Labor Question,” in Fraser and Gerstle, \textit{The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order}, 55-85.
\(^{29}\) \textit{Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order}, 71-73.
Copper Basin in their examinations of the East Tennessee Overhill District, of which Polk County is a part. Duggins produced a brief, well-written, illustrated introductory survey of the area’s industrial history that included the Copper Basin’s extraction, smelting, and chemical industry.\(^{31}\) Quinn’s studies deviate from the typical pattern by avoiding the predictable and relentless indictments of the Basin’s copper firms. Instead Quinn emphasized proactive responses by the copper companies to the environmental damage wrought by early ore roasting techniques.\(^{32}\)

Quinn’s studies however end around the time of the Great War and thus do not consider the continuing damage that periodic emissions from the copper plants foisted on local farmers for over a generation after World War I. Nor did her studies consider long-term health issues endured by workers and their neighbors or lasting stresses on the environment. Like Barclay, Quinn focused mainly on the companies themselves and had little to say about the working classes, their communities, and their respective engagement with the industrial advance roundabout them. This study takes a cue from her approach by continuing to account for the aggressive innovation employed by the Basin’s copper firms, but will do so for an era that saw the entire production and working regime of the Copper Basin’s labor force change, with corresponding transformations in their towns and societies. As a result of merger, increased production and product diversity, ever-changing technological schemes, a galvanized, if not always united, labor force empowered by protective labor legislation, and the stimulus of a second World War, a regional prosperity was enjoyed by the population. However—as will be


shown through the larger study—many were left behind, seemingly powerless before the combined forces of corporate interests, national labor campaigns, federal intervention, and local police harassment.

The scholarship of Harry Caudill, John Gaventa, Douglas Flamming and Bryant Simon also informs my study; these scholars considered Appalachian or upcountry industrial communities during the early to middle twentieth century. Caudill, through his early 1960s “biography of a depressed area,” the Cumberland Mountains of eastern Kentucky, became the grand-daddy of Appalachian study. Caudill indicted capitalist barons and their minions, absentee owners and others who exploited a naïve population and his Appalachians are victims of ruthless capitalism as coal and timber companies invaded the hollows of independent and hardscrabble folk and left them dependent and impoverished. Gaventa’s Appalachia—he studied a neighboring region that stretched from Eastern Kentucky south into Eastern Tennessee—was seen through his Marxist interpretation. He described a land where capitalists resembled illusionists: so great was their control of events and circumstances that the working class and their municipal leaders were distracted from seeing the real challenges that beset their coal mining communities. Powerlessness for Gaventa was the result of a kind of bewitchment over a people who were just as pathetic as Caudill’s mountain proletariat, but it was not distinctly a mountain phenomenon, for Gaventa saw the exploitation as typical of any community affected by corporate, globalizing capitalism.

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Caudill’s model became the dominant one for observers of Appalachia and it served as an important catalyst to bring Great Society change to the region as national attention returned to an area of the country largely forgotten since the New Deal era. The problem with the model is such approaches are largely condescending and paradoxically serve to encourage continuation of the “dumb hillbilly” stereotype. ³⁴ Victimization was not a common theme voiced by the many Basinites when interviewed. This study will serve as a counter to renditions of Victim Appalachia—though it was tempting upon first encountering images of the ravaged environment and tumbledown former mining villages that once typified the Copper Basin to presume an evil grinding capitalism must have exploited workers and stripped them of their dignity just as their hills were stripped bare. The popular press repeated as much in the indictments of capitalists and collaborating Basin residents that were written when environmentalism was just beginning to sell copy. ³⁵ Such simple judgments, however, obscure a more complex story. Exploitation in the Copper Basin certainly occurred, but blame for it ought not to be laid only at the front door of TCC’s Smelter Hill corporate office. It is important to remember that capitalism is a collective enterprise in a commonwealth. Any presumptions that colonial power structures dominated Eastern Polk County faded once investigation moved beyond the cursory. The major copper concerns located in the Copper Basin were absentee-owned, resembling the culprits in Caudill’s and Gaventa’s studies—but locally residing management kept up regular communications with owners and local managers took a keen interest in the civic affairs and general prosperity of their community. Industrial relations in the Copper Basin were never perfect; terrific conflicts

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³⁴ This paradox was recently chronicled in a three-part television survey of the region’s history, the PBS production, Nashville Public Television, *The Appalachian Mountains* (Nashville, Tennessee: Evening Star Productions, 2005).
occurred, the copper companies periodically used whatever means at their disposal to manipulate circumstances for their benefit, and grudges are still held among people convinced that one neighbor or another assisted management for selfish reasons. In some instances, the relationship between the corporations and the communities in the Basin resembled the kind of exploitation observed by Caudill and Gaventa. But, the national importance of the Copper Basin’s sulfuric acid production kept the region under more scrutiny than was likely experienced in the hollows of the Cumberlands. Most important, such exposure and federal labor legislation augmented the Copper Basin’s working class in their efforts to force an engagement with management which ultimately benefited not a few Basinites.

The study also draws on the broad literature examining the shape and changing character of Southern labor. In particular, Douglas Flamming’s study of Dalton, Georgia and Bryant Simon’s examination of upcountry South Carolina textile towns have shaped my research. Flamming considered the influence of industrial paternalism, the effects of ongoing industrial technological upgrades, and the rise of a galvanized industrial workforce. To do so he looked to the larger community beyond mill villages, relied heavily on the local literature of the communities—newspapers, local histories, etc.—and interviewed residents. He found that workers considered themselves partners in the town’s industrial enterprise as opposed to being merely employees. Both studies illustrated how competition between mills provided workers with leverage to maintain white control over jobs in Southern industry. Similar dynamics existed in the Copper Basin: A generation before my study begins, whites violently removed desperate blacks shipped in by coppermen. This forceful shaping of the labor market by white workers was not owing to empowerment born of myriad employment opportunities, but fears that African

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36 Flamming, *Creating the Modern South*, passim, xxii-xxxi.
American entry into the limited local labor market would reduce wages. The attitude was maintained through the development of local lore that warned upcountry blacks to avoid lingering in the Copper Basin. By exploring the racialized conceptions of acceptable labor markets, my study extends cultural studies of working-class racism because it shows yet another example of how race panic existed in the South even in regions where whites had long dominated the labor landscape. The study will also reinforce recent work by Larry Griffin, Barbara Ellen Smith, John Hartigan, Jr., and Mary Anglin suggesting that Appalachia can be viewed as a determined construct wherein regular efforts were employed to maintain a white man’s republic. That process began in the Copper Basin with the removal of nearly all the Cherokee in the 1830s.38

This dissertation builds upon a significant literature documenting the endemic, internecine, labor struggles associated with the emergence of the CIO at the local level. Scholars have documented the effect of John Lewis’s alleged tolerance of communists in the CIO ranks, the extent to which left-leaning union organizing in the CIO was discredited despite the organizing enthusiasm of the left, and how American Federation of Labor frustration with the National Labor Relations Board hardened it against the CIO’s industrial, leveling style of union organizing.39 In the Copper Basin I have found all these trends. The most potent manifestation

38 For general introductions to the concept and significance of whiteness see David R. Roediger’s Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class (New York: Verso, 1991 and 1994), 3-15. Additional whiteness studies consulted for this study include the following—the relevance of my study to these will be explained in the prospectus. Journal of Appalachian Studies, 10:1 & 2. Fall 2004—special double issue: Whiteness and Racialization in Appalachia. Within this double volume see especially, Mary Anglin, “Erasures of the past: culture, power, and the heterogeneity in Appalachia, 73-84; Larry Griffin, “Whiteness and Southern identity in the mountain and lowland south,” 7-37; John Hartigan, “Whiteness and Appalachian studies: what’s the connection?”58-72; Barbara Ellen Smith, “Degradations of whiteness: Appalachia and the complexities of race,” 38-57.

was anti-CIO action anchored to a race fear married to strident anti-communism. Studies of the interwar years that look at the national struggle between those who believed labor ought to be organized by craft versus those who sought the broader unionization within industries have found that the racial and political conservatism of the Southern white rank-and-file severely limited the advance of industrial unionism in Dixie. Where industrial unionism did succeed in the South it relied heavily on federal help as the National Labor Relations Board attempted to create a level playing field in areas where AFL craft unions had previously dominated. Industrial unionism did well where companies were subsidiaries of much larger national firms that had decided that it was more pragmatic to work within NLRB rulings or had other shops under contract with CIO unions in another area. Mine, Mill’s final success in securing collective bargaining rights at Tennessee Coal and Iron workers at Birmingham, Alabama came as a result of NLRB pressure and Supreme Court support of the Wagner Act. As well, TCI’s parent company, US Steel, wishing to regain the economic momentum the company had enjoyed in 1936 and early 1937 had made agreements at its northern facilities to recognize metals unions from the CIO’s Steel Workers Organizing Committee in the late 1930s.

In the Copper Basin neither DSC&I nor the parent company of Tennessee Copper Company appears to have made agreements with national Mine, Mill or any CIO union. Once Mine, Mill left the AFL and joined the CIO, TCC relied on divisions within its workforce to stall

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contract negotiations. TCC management did state that they were willing to work with whoever the workers chose to represent them before the NLRB, but then the copper company did as so many companies did throughout Dixie. When CIO organizers came to town, Tennessee Copper Company worked clandestinely to manipulate workers’ decisions despite NLRB election certifications. Then the firm relied on local police authority to augment AFL pronouncements that CIO control of Copper Basin workers would result in an end to the industrial peace and threatened the traditional—read: racist and capitalist—conventions of local society. The CIO organizers who came to the Copper Basin were led by veterans from the TCI- Alabama struggles such as Mitchell C. Anderson; these men apparently decided to embrace racist symbolism in an attempt to promote fraternal camaraderie and garner validation from all levels of Copper Basin society. The weakening effects of such racist tribalism on white working-class solidarity and working-class liberty have been illustrated by the scholarship of David Montgomery and Michelle Brattain. Both refused to romanticize white craftsmen’s racism and accounted for the historical foundations of racism in national labor unions. Populist anti-labor campaigns drew strength from race-baiting among laborites.

This study adds to this scholarship acknowledging the immense power of race among Americans. Race often served as both personal refuge and identification, permitting workers to demonstrate a supposed superiority while it tragically reduced collaborative effectiveness before corporate power. Race fear combined with other trends in the local culture to undermine working

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class solidarity, such as existing divisions within communities. Anger manifested into fears of anti-Christian, anti-capitalist agitation.\textsuperscript{44}

Although labor historians have traditionally relied upon interpretations of the nationally-defined strategies associated with the AFL and the CIO, this study found that the rivalry was driven by much more local concerns and locally-based perceptions of each organization.\textsuperscript{45} A problem with studies that emphasize AFL “radicalism” in the early twentieth century is that they cannot account for the profoundly conservative image and behavior of the AFL unions in the Copper Basin of the late 1930s. Those AFL locals did not merely challenge a rival union but were born of conservative secessionist movement in Georgia which attacked all CIO unions and relied on community race convention and relationships established across the business, police, and managerial elite of the copper town to form a coalition against mining village workers. For an organization bent on defending industrial democracy, the AFL in the Copper Basin made a mockery of it. The study extends observations made by Tindal and others that Southern, organized, craftsmen “had achieved a degree of legitimacy and public acceptance” —a respectability—that they did not want compromised by radical laborites.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} Scholar Bryant Simon drew similar conclusions in his aforementioned study of South Carolina’s upcountry textile towns. There the working-class race panic manifested itself in extreme attacks on CIO organizers as being “communist”—a catch-phrase meant by the accusers that affiliated CIO supporters were low class, anti-Christian, anti-workers’ liberty in employment, anti-progress and business, and most damning, anti-white supremacist, integrationist—perhaps even miscegenationist. Simon’s conclusion was that as much as workers supported the New Deal, they never supported any race liberalism that some in the New Deal coalition sought to promote. The race fear limited workers effectiveness in creating a more powerful united labor front statewide, Simon, \textit{Fabric of Defeat}, 4, 7 and 9. Race fear was not always a determining factor in labor organizing nationwide—studies on labor upheaval in Hershey, Pennsylvania, support notions that what rent communities when CIO organizers came to Chocolatetown had little to do with race fear and more to do with distinctions in occupation, ethnic and community traditions, corporate benefits to suppliers, even religious convictions. Some of these attitudes existed in the Copper Basin as mentioned but they combined with race fear. Roy Bangartz, \textit{American Heritage}; Harper, “Bittersweet Experience” \textit{Journal of West Virginia Historical Association}, 34-51.

\textsuperscript{45} Howard Kimeldorf, \textit{Battling for American Labor: Wobblies, Craft Workers, and the Making of the Union Movement} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 11-14, and 16.

\textsuperscript{46} Tindal, \textit{Emergence of the New South}, 332.
The study’s cultural analysis of Ducktown resident Carl McConnell’s “Grocer’s Film” shot during the Copper Basin strike of 1939-40 will also extend the scholarship on strike processions.\textsuperscript{47} Workers from the mining villages of the Copper Basin used strike parades and public processions to garner local support and in all this relied heavily on the participation of women and children. The existing literature has established the significance of such rituals: Processions were at once festival and phalanx wherein workers empowered one another and drove the reality of their passionate support for a strike into the heart of the larger community. Strike processions also served as defensive measures as workers or workers families needed to appeal to the patriotism and family connections of the broader community. Flag waving, public demonstrations of one’s civic participation were all designed to show that protesters were in fact true defenders of American values, and those who opposed them were not. The festival nature of the strike parade could also enlighten the community and warn of consequences if the strike failed. The parades nearly always include a mobile drama that narrated the circumstances for the larger community. Women were particularly important for such events because their conventional roles as defenders of the family were juxtaposed to public roles of defiant Mothers of the Republic and Defenders of Liberty whether they were actual members of the work force or not. Children’s inclusion heightened the drama as the innocent were lifted up before the community as those who would be sacrificed by defeat.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{47} Carl McConnell, \textit{The Grocer’s Film}, 1939-40. Ducktown Basin Museum collection. The director of the Ducktown Basin Museum, Ken Rush, made a copy of this unique, silent black and white 8mm film available for this study. Its contents will be further discussed in chapter four.

Some contemporaneous Appalachian industrial communities saw workers take to the streets, demanding their rights to organize and improve their lot. Basin processonals conformed to similar patterns, although women played different roles. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall attested in one study that sexual tension was part of women’s participation in the labor unrest at Elizabethton, Tennessee; this study did not see evidence of sexual tension in the Copper Basin labor war, no doubt because local women did not make up any significant part of the TCC labor force. Still, other similarities existed. In both places women’s support for their striking men meant that women took to the streets, used alternately patriotic gesture and family symbols. They marched arm in arm during a 1939 CIO strike parade at Ducktown behind American flags and dressed in their Sunday best. Daughters, moms, aunts, sisters, and children following public recital of the Pledge of Allegiance (to appeal to the region’s broader working and middle classes) participated in CIO public assemblies, marched en masse, or joined noisy car processionals that drove boldly and noisily through Copperhill, challenging their working class opponents.49

As is known, federal legislation emboldened industrial workers to unionize in the 1930s, but the New Deal played an even more expansive and significant role in Appalachia. Because the Southern Appalachians felt the full force of state and federal policies that infiltrated even the most remote hills through agencies like the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Civilian Conservation Corps, the scope of this study required a deeper look into the subject than merely focusing on the effects of the NIRA and Wagner Acts. Regional and national studies have determined certain trends in regard to the power of the state. A main concern here was to locate assessments of how state and federal actions affected Copper Basin industry and labor markets;

the study thus consulted assessments that summarized the history of progressive legislation in the South, identified groups and trends that encouraged its advance and where opposition to progressive reform arose. The study tests how well these trends hold up for Polk County and the Copper Basin.\textsuperscript{50}

Most Southern national politicos came to embrace the New Deal owing to the desperate times and Roosevelt’s popularity. But as Tindal shows, resistance to the New Deal sprang up across the region among “county-seat” elites:

“The New Deal jeopardized a power that rested on control of property, labor, credit and local government. Relief projects reduced dependency; labor standards raised wages; the farm programs upset landlord-tenant relationships; government credit bypassed the [local] bankers and merchants; new Federal programs skirted the county commissioners and sometimes even state agencies.”\textsuperscript{51}

True enough for many areas and for Polk County’s seat, Benton, but as this study will show there was little evidence of Copper Basin small-town elites attacking New Deal programs. Far from it, their enthusiasm no doubt encouraged local labor’s embrace of New Deal legislation. Certainly progressive action burned in the mountains. The tenor of the New Deal ignited passions among progressive activists throughout the hills as activists and laborites met in an array of activity to enlighten the public, train local leaders in effective tactics, and embolden one another’s initiatives. The CIO began conducting special training camps for labor organizers at the Highlander Folk School near Monteagle, Tennessee. There it trained thousands in “labor history, economics, strike tactics, public speaking, current events, and parliamentary law.” These acts provoked conservative locals to organize vigilantes to thwart what they feared would be

\textsuperscript{50} Tindal, \textit{ibid.}, 446-47; see also, Reed L. Engle, \textit{Everything Was Wonderful: A Pictorial History of the Civilian Conservation Corps in Shenandoah National Park}, (Luray, Virginia: Shenandoah National Park Association, 1999), 23-29. Engle’s study provides an excellent overview of CCC life and the activities of the corps in mid-Atlantic Appalachia. The present study also reviewed correspondence between TCC executives and officials of both the Tennessee Valley Authority and Civilian Conservation Corps pertaining to Copper Basin and Ocoee River projects; correspondence contained in Forest Department files, National Archives, Atlanta Division.

\textsuperscript{51} Tindal, 607-609; 618, 631, 633, 635-636.
social revolution. Meanwhile, in Chattanooga, a town that became renowned for its industrial labor organizing, communists and socialists organized initially through Christian associations and small popular fronts then did so independently.\(^{52}\)

Progressive legislation aimed at industrial reform was not a novel movement in the Southern mountains of only the 1930s. Earlier in the century, public pressure had forced Tennessee’s State Assembly to lay down in law legislation regulating labor and capital relations. Legislation concerning extraction industries was extensive owing to the industry’s notorious operations in the eastern part of the state. But enthusiastic public calls for change diminished once the laws were enacted that to many folks in the middle class looked as though they would curtail capitalist abuses and settle labor unrest. If the laws passed had been followed to the letter they would have ended the script pay system, made it illegal for companies to require workers buy only from company stores, established regular pay periods, set minimum wages and minimum standards to maintain healthful working environments in factories and mines. These acts also laid down early provisions for workmen’s compensation for employers of ten or more persons. But the interpretation, implementation, and enforcement of regulation relied on rulings dominated by conservative courts and were limited still further by the attitudes, abilities, capacities, and intentions of administrators. There also tended to be significant loopholes in the laws because many employers could simply elect not to participate in workmen’s compensation programs without fear of retribution from the state. Mine safety regulations, extensive as they were on paper, had no real bite in Tennessee and the state bureaucracy lacked the capacity for adequate administrative oversight. Enforcement was inconsistent and wanting and, as one

\(^{52}\) Tindal, 633-35.
scholar on the topic noted as late as the mid-1940s, Tennessee had passed no “little Wagner Act” to protect the working man.\textsuperscript{53}

Some scholarship concludes that an omnipresent conservatism was the primary determinant of the mid-20th century defeat of progressive ideas both in government and in the unions themselves. This appears to be the case in capital-labor relations oversight. Studies challenge any notion that the New Deal made for truly equal bargaining between capital and labor. Part of the job of the government was to secure industrial peace thus placing government naturally on the side of business: “The institutional architecture used to achieve peaceful labor-management cooperation… serves to reinforce managerial domination… by narrowly confining unions to the role of fiduciaries of an imagined societal interest in industrial peace.”\textsuperscript{54} Owing to this inertia, the National Labor Relations Board shifted from promoting industrial democracy to simply seeking industrial stability.\textsuperscript{55} There may have been no conspiratorial attempt by government and capital to establish industrial peace at any cost. Nor does it appear that government sought to co-opt the power of trade unions and reduce their democratic power by systematizing collective bargaining. In fact, as scholar Melvin Dubofsky observed, the “relationship between the state and labor [was] far more ambiguous” than any determined conspiracy. But, “workers and their unions… gained from positive state intervention [only] at particular junctures in American history.”\textsuperscript{56}

The evidence suggests that in the Copper Basin, federal government officials, when overseeing capital-labor relations, rarely served either directly, but neither were they fully

\textsuperscript{53} Virginia Holmes Brown, \textit{The Development of Labor Legislation in Tennessee.} A Study of the Bureau of Public Administration, Issued by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, For the Division of University Extension, 1945. 12, 31, and passim.

\textsuperscript{54} Christopher Tomlins, \textit{The State and the Unions} (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 195.

\textsuperscript{55} Tomlins, \textit{The State and the Unions}, ibid.

disinterested and impartially honest brokers. The aim of local, state, and federal government agents collectively was to establish stability and social peace and so they tended to be antagonistic to all forms of upheaval. Jurisdictional prerogatives made a difference as to how personally the power of the state would be welded. For instance, whereas Federal NLRB officials and the FBI agents who became involved in Copper Basin labor relations did so with national interests in mind such as promoting industrial peace or securing justice against those who would destroy federal property, local police authorities were more concerned with maintaining respect for their offices and promulgating county-seat elite ideas about proper—read, conventional—capital-labor relations. Federal authorities did not stop local police efforts that led to the regular hounding of CIO laborites in the Copper Basin, nor did the feds directly intervene in trying to manipulate local labor representation outcomes. But neither did they investigate claims made by locals and outsiders that AFL affiliated laborites were regularly colluding with Tennessee Copper, that local police authorities clandestinely become mercenaries for TCC, or that allegations and incarceration set on CIO organizers helped end the union’s effective campaign to organized industrial workers across all TCC.57

In fact, this last point underscores studies that have looked at open-shop campaigns and how libertarian rhetoric has been used to bolster anti-unionism and embolden pro-business forces. In the Copper Basin, the labor market became so riven by fears of “communism,” that labor rivalries likely encouraged regional open-shop campaigns that claimed that all union affiliation was a detriment to industrial peace and individual achievement. Even if unionism was not rejected completely, the atmosphere allowed TCC to promote itself to the larger Copper Basin and surrounding communities as a reasonable paternalistic entity ready to help Polk County folk prosper once Labor decided to settle down.

IV-Methodology and chapter summary

To tell this story of social, industrial, and environmental change the study relied on the rich cache of local sources, including local newspapers, personal accounts, interviews, federal, state, and corporate records, and photographic and film materials produced by private citizens and federal agents located in the Library of Congress, Georgia and Tennessee State archives, and various Polk County repositories. The materials include the collection of the Ducktown Basin Museum. Of special interest was a film produced by local grocer Carl McConnell which captured the activities workers and police authorities during an extended walkout in the late 1930s. The film stands as a rare glimpse of Southern workers in an organized action. All these sources flesh out the storyline of the Copper Basin with a level of detail unusual for histories of many small industrial mountain towns in the South. Other important sources consulted for the study include regional and national labor publications, trade magazines and major metropolitan newspapers. Mention of Copper Basin developments in these sources underscored the region’s significance to within the labor movement and to outside investors.58

Analysis for the study included review of a considerable body of local literature. Though primarily anecdotal and not sharing the interests of academics regarding cultural, industrial, and social history, the literature held accounts of local business and church concerns. This is not to say it was unimportant. The anecdotes, personal stories, reminiscences, and other items from local primary material enriched the narrative. Polk County itself for instance has produced some fine compilations of reminiscences and photo essays. Owing to the efforts of the director and staff of the Ducktown Basin Museum and others, the complex industrial production history of

the copper companies is now on display. How the industrial history of the Copper Basin actually affected the local population and what kind of agency those persons had, was an area most in need of additional assessment.

Locally produced corporate industrial history of the region and in particular, perspectives from copper management were great assets to this study. Locally, the most famous amateur historian was a man prominent in the management force of the Basin’s dominant firm, the Tennessee (Copper) Company. Robert E. Barclay stood as the company’s chief clerk for a generation, became fascinated with local events, and was a respected force in local civic affairs. Barclay summarized developments in the Copper Basin through regular articles and public appearances—even radio interviews. Barclay’s several privately published accounts (though the first appeared out of Chapel Hill in 1946) chronicled much of the industrial history from the Civil War era forward. Barclay described in detail the challenges that met the early Copper Basin industrialists and working people prior to the coming of the railroad. Barclay laid out the impact

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59 The author highly recommends a visit to the Ducktown Basin Museum if scholars want to know about the tasks and production skills daily employed by the coppermen and miners of the area. Ken Rush is the museum’s current director. New Deal era history of the Copper Basin comes from the United States Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 179, Origin of the Copper Deposits of the Ducktown [Basin] Type in the Southern Appalachian Region, by C.S. Ross (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935); Polk County published copper extraction industry histories include A Tribute to the Miners: Copper Basin ore mining, 1843-1987, c. 1990; and Daniels, Tennessee’s historic Copper Basin area: an overview. No 1 in a series, 1992 (there was apparently no number two); see also Sulfuric Acid Production: from ore to acid (Benton, Tennessee: Polk County Publishing, c. 1990); and, Polk County Scrapbook: 150 Years of Memories—Vol I (Benton, Tennessee: Polk County Publishing, c. 1990). Regional histories include Blue Ridge Kiwanis Club, Facts of Fannin: a history of Fannin County, GA, 1989. The internet has several amateur sites the give general histories all of which rely heavily on direct or paraphrased version of the Robert E. Barclay accounts—indeed, that trait is common to nearly every history on the region, another reason this study will be important: it provides the first major assessment across the breadth of the Copper Basin’s primary sources in nearly a generation.

60 The local literature mostly considers events and persons in the incorporated towns of Copperhill and McCaysville with little discussion of the Copper Basin’s several mining villages. Fire can be blamed for some of the thin accounting: A blaze in Ducktown in the late 1910s destroyed much of that community’s civic records. But much of the absence seems owing more to circumstance, social attitudes, and convention—As I have experienced with my own family’s Western Pennsylvania industrial heritage, very few people ever wrote their own histories or talked much about their jobs to their children or grandchildren in a manner that allowed much record. Sports teams images and rivalries: Ducktown Basin Museum photo collection both on display and in storage. The Copper City Advance and Polk County News, passim—during the era.

* The Tennessee Company was reorganized by the 1920s as the Tennessee Copper Company (aka TCC in this study); throughout it was owned by the Lewisohn Group as a subsidiary of the Tennessee Corporation.
of the locomotive’s entry, and provided excellent biographical information about the key industrial concerns and personalities whose efforts so marked the region. He focused especially on the machinations of early Copper Basin industrialist Julius Raht and on the significance of J. N. Houser, who transformed the Tennessee Copper Company after the Great War era.\(^{61}\)

Barclay’s collective account (from all three of his volumes) extends well into the mid-twentieth century and it’s clear that his research required considerable time mining local libraries and newspaper repositories. His literature is problematic though because the narratives, while always interesting, are somewhat disjointed chronologically—it’s clear that much of material was put together from notes, but not comprehensively edited. As well, for all the attention Barclay paid to the minutia of regional corporate history his panorama is too removed from the day to day life of the workers. Only occasionally does he appear concerned with the responsibilities or circumstance of the Copper Basin working folk. He tended to be dismissive of labor organizing, especially the efforts of the CIO. Barclay’s diaries and personal papers provide more revealing information about management’s perspectives on labor.\(^{62}\) In sum Barclay’s histories and personal papers stand at once as primary and secondary materials and the study relies on them because they point the way to forgotten Ducktown, Isabella, and Copperhill-McCaysville communities.\(^{63}\)

Chapter one places the Copper Basin’s industry within the larger economy of the Southern mountains; it considers the region’s most important communities of Ducktown, Copperhill, and Isabella and the most important firms Ducktown Copper, Sulphur & Iron and the


Tennessee Copper Company. The narrative begins with the antebellum discovery of the Basin’s riches and continues through the embrace of new mechanical technologies and rational management in the New Era. A review of the producers’ ferrous and non-ferrous industrial activities that included mining, smelting and chemicals production also considers consequent effects of local industry: deforestation, erosion and toxic emissions. Tennessee Copper Company’s progressive owners, the New York based Lewisohn Investment Group, and forward-thinking management, led most impressively by J.N. Houser, distinguished the firm by setting in motion long range plans for utilizing the region’s low grade ores. Operators made these efforts after local farmers forced expensive damage suits on producers whose emissions destroyed crops in nearby North Carolina and Georgia. Whereas previous scholarship argued TCC was environmentally proactive in this regard, this study found that the company stalled in its response until its competitors implemented techniques that captured most of the toxic emissions and began paying reparations to local farmers. In the meanwhile, the placement of rail lines and an expansion of production arrays initiated in response to the smoke suits shifted the most dynamic industrial and commercial hub of the Basin southeast; the move diminished the significance of the region’s two oldest industrial centers.

A major accomplishment of the study is its account of previously ignored regional labor history and the tenacious efforts of workers to secure their industrial liberty in spite of an evermore competitive cadre of industrial firms and changing technology. Reflecting the advances of organized labor nationally, mistreated Copper Basin workers organized an American Federation of Labor local that initiated regional walkouts and forced some producers to agree to better conditions and wages in the era prior to the Great War. When the Copper Basin’s World War I boom came it was unlike anything experienced in the Southern Mountains since the gold
rush days of the 1830s. But, stunning corporate mismanagement, price wars and the near-collapse of TCC during World War I—despite its impressive contracts with czarist Russia—aggravated shifting labor markets. In response, workers secured the presence of the more aggressive International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, a union within the AFL’s confederation. Intensifying specialization changed the nature of work in the respective communities throughout this period by reducing the number of skilled workers in the mining villages and increasing the number of craftsmen and supervisor staff located in TCC’s main hub. Corporate records and workers’ testimonials reveal that on-going changes in production protocols in mining, smelting and chemical manufacturing at once required that workers continually retool their skills and encouraged management to neutralize the workers’ union. While some Basin firms retained strident anti-union efforts, TCC management used a more sophisticated approach that relied on the establishment of a de facto employee representative plan, which coordinated a safety campaign in partnership with a nationally recognized trade journal. TCC’s EMP dominated the workplace after economic pressure and poor internal leadership within Mine, Mill left it powerless and all but dead.

Another accomplishment of this study is its placement of the Basin’s political, social, commercial, leisure, educational, and religious life within the Southern mountain heritage. Chapter two thus examines the Copper Basin’s partisan political moorings building on general observations of the region made by scholar V.O. Key and recent scholarship suggesting that whites constructed Appalachia as a republic generally free of Indian or black competition. Reflecting the specific nature of the Copper Basin, the study chronicles copper barons’ domination of Tri-State politics, the willingness of locals to protect their white industrial republic from incursions of blacks into the local labor market and the east-west struggle that emerged
within Polk County between copper interests and the county’s agrarian elite. A dynasty emerged during this era as the Biggs family used its alliance with copper companies at the expense of industrial workers to establish a Democratic force in Polk through the sheriff’s office and other positions. The Biggs’ dynasty possessed statewide influence through the first half of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{64}

The roots of a damaging parochialism grew from the diverse natures of the Basin’s several communities and the divergent east-west economic interests of Polk County as reflected in local periodicals. While the commercial and industrial hub of the twin cities of Copperhill and McCaysville held diversions enjoyed by all Basin folk, the twin-cities experienced rapid infrastructure change and an expansion of possible occupations as the automobile age advanced during the New Era. The latter was a change not experienced as broadly in the mining villages of Ducktown and Isabella. Meanwhile, TCC’s neo-feudal managerial grange known as Smelter Hill experienced its most prestigious renown as company operators allowed an expanding class of local citizens to enjoy the compound’s special amenities. Reflecting national trends in education, the Basin’s civic elite commenced a campaign to improve Polk County’s school system. These efforts lifted the local school system out of the era of the one-room school house and established impressive local facilities but could not overcome tenacious problems of truancy or a local paradox: The very industrial sector that provided community leaders with resources to make the Copper Basin’s school system superior to most surrounding communities competed with educators’ plans to uplift local young men, frustrating plans to establish a regional college. Beyond a limited number of specially trained chemists, supervisory staff and management at the

copper firms, the enticing wage system of the Basin’s industrial enterprises persuaded most young men to establish industrial careers and limited the number of them willing to embark on advanced education. Industrial life was hard for workers, but energies directed toward sports channeled parochial competition and inspired pride. Competition appears to have been especially fierce between the Basin’s mining communities and other industrial centers in the Tri-state. In a similar manner, religious communities provided a centripetal force that could temper the frustrations and despair arising from industrial work with their calls for transcendent service. But, reflecting scholars’ observations for other Southern regions, the establishment of holiness sects in the Copper Basin aroused fears among established Protestant congregations that the new “holy rollers” would challenge industrial-capitalist economic conventions.65

An examination of the debilitating impact of the Great Depression on the Basin’s industry and communities comprises chapter three; it includes substantial evidence demonstrating that in contrast to Republican criticism of federal intervention in the marketplace now dominant in the Tri-state, a bi-partisan embrace of the New Deal existed that crossed economic demographics. Support among locals emerged because they saw legislation such as the National Industrial Recovery Acts and the establishment of the Tennessee Valley Authority and Civilian Conservation Corp as hopeful paths out of the depression’s debilitating trough. TCC’s diversification of its product line assured the company’s stability and allowed it to absorb its last significant rivals in the Basin. In a manner similar to those observed by scholar Howell

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John Harris, TCC acted in a pragmatic manner to make New Deal labor relations mandates work for the company. Under New Deal era management, TCC tolerated workers’ re-empowerment under new federal mandates that protected union organizing and collective bargaining. A revived Mine, Mill secured contracts from TCC for a few years, but when the union left the Federation to join the new Congress of Industrial Organizations, conservative Basin workers connected with a Georgia Federation secessionist movement bolted Mine, Mill, established new AFL Basin locals and in the process complicated TCC industrial relations.

As chapter four explains, a Mine, Mill affiliated with the CIO and led by veteran organizer Mitchell C. Anderson challenged management’s labor-relations prerogatives. Furthermore, economic opportunities made possible by the commencement of the Second World War convinced TCC management that it could not afford the costs of a continuing labor war. TCC operators resolved to use legal and illegal means to enjoin the Biggs dynasty, local civic elite and conservative craftsmen in order to neutralize CIO influence. In a manner similar to actions taken by General Electric as observed by scholar Lisa Ann Kannenburg, TCC then used the opportunity of the labor war that ensued among workers following the CIO-AFL split to highlight the company’s importance to the nation and the Tri-state. TCC won sympathetic goodwill through a public relations campaign that stood in contrast to the antagonistic rhetorical war being waged by the unions. Meanwhile, the CIO had organized a crippling walkout for which it attempted to gain camaraderie across union lines through public processionals. One of these demonstrations challenged progressive conceptions of the CIO by relying on appeals to


white solidarity. TCC’s public relations campaign however established the company as more responsible to the citizenry than the squabbling unions; it also allowed TCC to dislodge the CIO and secure a conservative AFL union that assisted the company in managing workers.

Post war reports described in chapter five revealed how TCC used the AFL to advance its munitions and chemical production through World War II. Created by Sam A. Lewisohn and TCC manager T.A. Mitchell, the reports outlined how J.N. Houser’s rational management evolved successfully during wartime. TCC manufacture of critical war chemicals and Sam A. Lewisohn’s influence with the Roosevelt Administration garnered the company impressive war contracts; its workers won national recognition from the Army. WWII commenced the most profitable boom yet for local citizens and made possible TCC’s successful thwarting of another CIO challenge. The AFL adopted a paternal role toward workers that relied on hierarchy and secured the maintenance of TCC production quotas, but it could not squelch miners’ ambitions to bring back Mine, Mill. TCC’s parent company Tennessee Corporation strengthened patriotic goodwill through promotion of TCC products that supported the government’s Victory Garden campaign. TCC further burnished its local reputation by utilizing both the TVA and CCC to commence re-vegetation efforts in the Old Red Scar. Efforts to cover the Basin’s notorious Martian environs eventually met with much success but proved expensive and required private, state and federal resources. Clean-up costs and competition eventually prohibited the mining and processing of local ores. Evidence revealed these efforts did not deliver local folk from the long-term debilitating effects of working in a region still too toxic in many areas for general habitation despite re-vegetation’s creep of common green kudzu and pine.68

Chapter 1 Tri-State Industry: The Copper Basin’s Land, People, and Economy, 1890s through World War I.

The industrial history of the East Tennessee Copper Basin during the first half of the twentieth century teaches much about Southern mountain industrial culture and labor relations beyond the familiar regional discourse on King Coal, timber, and textiles. Key players in this Copper Basin narrative include the region’s industrial communities, the competitive local metals concerns and their management, the region’s industrial working class, labor leaders and their advocates—both local and national—local merchants, professionals, county police authorities and other members of the civic elite. Federal programs and their respective officials constituted the national agents that influenced change in the region. Another important cadre who helped to determine the significance of developments in the region included outside observers bearing various stripes and agendas whose commentary alternately brought attention to the Basin’s resources or highlighted industrial effects on the local environs and its residents. Important as these last outside agents were in the narrative, a major accomplishment of this study is a more thorough consideration of regional developments that moves beyond the industrial impact on the environment and instead focuses more keenly on the people living, working, and transforming the Copper Basin through the first half of the twentieth century.

The Copper Basin sits deep in Southern Appalachia in an area now called the Tri-State that includes Polk County, Tennessee, Fannin County, Georgia, and Cherokee County, North Carolina. Political boundaries determined that only a small portion of the Copper Basin sits in either Fannin or Cherokee counties; therefore, while there were some notable exceptions, happenings in Polk had more influence on the Basin than did those in the other two counties.69

69 A general history of this section of the Southern Mountains that holds a special focus on industrial development can be found in Duggan, From Furs to Factories.
As early as the antebellum period, local business exploits in the region’s extraction industry periodically made national news. Since the 1870s the Copper Basin non-ferrous and ferrous extraction and smelting industry had been important for the nation’s industrial and military advance. By the end of the interwar era the county’s approximately 15,000, nearly entirely native-born white inhabitants lived primarily in two rival regions: one east, one west; each region held nearly equal population. The county seat of Benton, sat in the agricultural western half of Polk. Separating it from the small industrial burgs to the east were high ridges, river gorges, poor roads, and a very different economic culture tied to fluctuations in the Copper Basin’s extraction industry and the national metals markets. According to Copper Basin residents and the attitudes reflected in historic newspapers, the two sections jostled for power in “friendly” sports rivalries and in more serious political rivalries for control of the county.70

The Marietta and North Georgia Railroad opened the region for development in the 1890s. After the Great War this system became part of the Louisville & Nashville rail system serving central and eastern Tennessee and north Georgia. The rail line connected both districts of Polk County to southerly Georgia towns like Mineral Bluff, Blue Ridge, and Tate. To the extreme south alone the line sat Marietta, Georgia, not far from the larger Atlanta transportation hub.71

Decreasing remoteness after the introduction of the railroad allowed for an extraction industry boom that became self-perpetuating as more and more firms competed to exploit the

70 A general narrative of the region may be found in Robert E. Barclay’s amateur local history republished by the family, *The Copper Basin*, chapters 1-4, *passim*. Privately published by the family Barclay’s work stands as a significant primary source. It is evident it was not edited by a large, national publisher nor is it a product of scholarly review: Much of its contents, rich as they are in detail and critical for this study, tended to be collected in a sometimes disjointed manner. The *New York Times* and the *Atlanta Constitution* contained regular mentioned of the metals industry and labor relations in the region and their reports were critical in revealing the region’s history; individual articles of all the aforementioned publication are cited later in this study. Sundry discussions with local residents and a review of *Polk County News*, Copperhill periodicals, 1930s, *passim.  

71 Robert E. Barclay, *The Railroad Comes to Ducktown*, 178
region’s extensive natural resources. Labor markets improved as the new firms provided jobs first for hundreds of workers and later thousands. When local labor markets could not satisfy industry’s needs, companies imported workers from Atlanta and Europe. Copper Basin industries produced critical war products both in metal and chemicals. Munitions needs associated with the initial bloom of the Great War boom brought huge investments, substantial war contracts, and myriad opportunities for profit to Copper Basin firms and their employees, even as corporate hubris and mismanagement threatened the flush times. The intense war economy and international competition reduced the number of important Copper Basin firms to two. Additional economic stress cut that number to one by the middle of the 1930s. During the early interwar period, one major firm collapsed and another was crippled by prematurely and poorly negotiated war contracts. To salvage the industrial potential of the region (just in time for the sharp post-war slump) determined U.S. copper barons, Adolph Lewisohn and his son Sam A. Lewisohn hired a team of trained industry experts who introduced a rationalized management scheme that reorganized industrial relations and the production array.72

Copper Basin industrial workers, many of whom came from great distances to man the mines and plants, were clearly men who were not going to be ignored or suffer ill-treatment by management.73 Their actions and protests echoed in the canyons of Wall Street. Each time local workers pushed back against management Wall Street investors felt the effects. The significance of the Basin is hard to comprehend now in light of how obscure it became by the late 20th Century, its current popularity among whitewater enthusiasts, hikers, and wandering tourists notwithstanding. Regular reports in the *New York Times* underscored Wall Street and London’s interests in the region’s militant workers who by 1900 were already well on their way to

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establishing a reputation of fierce independence and absolute determination to protect white men’s working class liberties.\footnote{R.E. Barclay, \textit{The Copper Basin}, 20. See reports on “Ducktown” and Tennessee copper companies listed in both the \textit{New York Times} and the \textit{Atlanta (Daily) Constitution} that date from the 1870s forward. Until the end of the Second World War, when much of the copper market turned its focus increasingly on international copper, “Ducktown” regularly made its way to the financial and sometimes even political sections of these important regional newspapers.} In the Great War’s tight labor market, workers took advantage of their power and brought in radical national mining and metals union, The International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers.\footnote{History of the local unions has been gleaned from several sources for further discussion later in the study. The arrival of a metals union is noted in company reports; see especially, T.A. Mitchell, “Labor Relations” Pinehurst Meeting, 10.28.1946, Tennessee Copper Company records, Ducktown Basin Museum, and in Barclay’s discussions of early Isabella, Barclay, \textit{The Copper Basin}, 14.} 

The industrial and political change occurring throughout the nation in the era that stretched between the two World Wars also transformed the several communities of the Copper Basin. New development commenced in eastern Polk County during the munitions boom of the Great War. But the failure of local metals firms to properly manage their opportunities prompted an introduction of scientific management and a simultaneous expansion of production diversity.\footnote{More on this subject will follow. Barclay, \textit{The Copper Basin}, 3, 25 and 28.}

This first chapter of the study will provide an overview of the Copper Basin’s Appalachian environs and its significance within the larger narrative of the copper industry. It will include an introduction to the several communities that arose as a result of the extraction industry and region’s two most important copper firms, Ducktown Sulphur, Copper & Iron, and Tennessee Copper (later reorganized as the Tennessee Copper Company within the Tennessee Corporation). A chronicle of the industrial and labor history of the region through the Great War era discusses management methods introduced by the firms after the war.\footnote{Barclay, \textit{The Copper Basin}, 1 and 23.}
A major theme appearing throughout this study concerns management’s intention to control not only regional industrial relations between capital and labor but between itself and the local citizenry. In an age where the media increasing focused on the abuse of the public at the hands of large corporations and when organized labor learned it could manipulate public opinion for its own advantage, the management of an image was recognized as important by a larger and larger share of industrial owners and managers. Many came to see the management of their firm’s image as critical for the success of the company. Learning from the coordination of industrial activities by the U.S. government during World War I, a number of “center firms,” the largest and most influential U.S. corporations in any given industrial sector of the economy, embraced a more scientific, at times even progressive management style after the Great War.\textsuperscript{78}

The approach included a combination of techniques that developed independently during the Age of Reform and in response to the needs for increased technological skills, aggressive organized labor and a public more aware than ever before of how companies were affecting communities overall. A “new factory system” resulted that included the use of scientific management (Taylorism), the use of scientific personnel administration to establish stable labor relations and improve worker skills, and welfare capitalism to win increased loyalty and dependence of workers through non-wage benefits.\textsuperscript{79}

Most firms that employed this newer collection of managerial techniques did not however abandon older, more belligerent tactics used to prevent unionization or to limit the power of established unions. The management set saw all unions as a divisive, confusing influence. Even the most conservative and malleable craft unions of the American Federation of Labor split workers’ loyalty, dividing the workforce between those workers who were for the union and its

\textsuperscript{78} Harris, \textit{The Right to Manage}, 15-18.
\textsuperscript{79} Harris, \textit{ibid.}, 17.
advantages and those who were not. Split loyalties and resentful workers limited profit margins by curtailing supervisory and managerial prerogatives. The purpose then of the new factory system was to keep industry free of unions or to re-direct the purpose of any established union to the advantage of management.80

The Tennessee Copper Company, a division of Tennessee Corporation after 1919, was in a particularly advantageous position to affect a positive image as it had both owners and management in agreement that old-school, belligerent attitudes toward industrial and community relations no longer worked in an era of more self-aware workers and observant public. Tennessee Corporation executive and part owner Sam A. Lewisohn was one of the most outspoken men of his generation regarding the employment of the new managerial methods. Lewisohn gave speeches supporting the new management style that were often reprinted in the publications of the Academy of Political Science, New York, and later collected in volumes aimed at scholars in the new industrial technical colleges and universities. He trumpeted the need for corporate owners to replace company operators who bore only broad business training and experience and to instead secure trained managers that would humanize the management of industry. Lewisohn’s thoughts on proper labor and industrial relations evolved as union power re-emerged during the Great Depression. For now it is enough to say that by the time of the Great War, Lewisohn was keen to require his managers to treat workers with more dignity than his competitors in the Copper Basin.81

Another major thread in this narrative about the Copper Basin concerns the development of a populist radicalism within the region’s industrial workforce. Occupational histories

80 Ibid., 17-18.
contained in this chapter include those of some of the extraction and smelting industry workers employed in the Copper Basin metals firms. These personal narratives underscore workers’ constant need to upgrade their skills set in light of technological advances in U.S. mining, smelting, ore processing and chemical production and they reflect the new production regimen initiated by management’s renovation of the most important Copper Basin firm during the interwar years. In a dynamic familiar today, it was workers’ constant need to re-tool one’s skills that created new opportunities, but also added to workers’ frustration. Those who could not keep up with changing demands were limited in their opportunities to advance or cast aside.82

Understanding the development of worker radicalism also requires a brief discussion about the Copper Basin’s several industrial communities, Isabella, Ducktown, and Copperhill. Two of the communities, Ducktown and Isabella were considerably older than Copperhill. Ducktown’s founding as a Cherokee settlement antedates the industrial era. Isabella was the site of the Basin’s first large-scale copper mining and processing firm established a generation before the entry of the railroad. The defining demographics of each community reflected not only the firms at each site but also the kind of work associated with each enterprise. Miners made up most of the population of Ducktown and Isabella though ore processing plants at Isabella required an array of metals and chemical craftsmen to live nearby.

The two most important firms in the Copper Basin’s second generation of non-ferrous and ferrous extraction and smelting industries were London-owned Ducktown, Sulphur, Copper & Iron (DSCI) and the aforementioned Tennessee Company. Often referred to by locals and historians alike as simply the “Tennessee Copper Company” (TCC), the firm had many name changes. DSCI’s headquarters were at Isabella but its facilities also extended to Ducktown.

TCC’s main hub was in Copperhill, but it too came to own significant facilities in Ducktown through merger. Isabella and Copperhill were part of the string of towns that made a necklace of little railroad-nourished boomtowns—or hoped-for boomtowns—that sprung up across north-central Georgia and southeast Tennessee.\(^8\)

Ducktown Sulphur, Copper & Iron and Tennessee Company managed to survive through economic Darwinism; they were among at least a half dozen other firms that came after the railroads opened the Tri-State. Weaker firms in the Basin were nearly all absorbed by the First World War era. The Lewisohns controlled TCC twice. From the firm’s incorporation until 1910 control went to James Phillips, but mismanagement during World War I led the company back into Lewisohns’ hands. There it remained through the 1950s. During the Lewisohn’s first tenure as owners they sent agent J. Parke Channing to buy up a collection of mines and smaller copper firms that had perished in the rough economic years of the 1870s and 1880s. This wise purchase allowed the company to expand faster than its competitors.\(^4\)

The populations of mining burgs themselves reflected the hiring practices of the dominant companies. TCC especially was responsible for bringing in “large numbers of employees of foreign extraction [including] Slavs, Poles, and Italians.” The company housed these men and their families at Ducktown and Copperhill. Reports for DSCI in this regard are scant, but that firm likely followed a similar pattern of immigration to satisfy its labor needs in the early 1900s. That said, the majority of workers for all firms in the region came from the nearby mountains.\(^5\)

\(^8\) Barclay, *The Railroad Comes to the Copper Basin*, 179; and, *The Copper Basin*, 2 and 23-25.

\(^4\) Barclay, *The Railroad Comes to Ducktown*, 184. The first generation of copper firms died young owing to disadvantageous transportation costs, Barclay, *The Copper Basin*, 2, 66 and 95.

Isabella, Tennessee was never a large settlement and its main employer, DSCI never had a crew much larger than 400. By the standards of the era, Isabella was the most frontier and rough of the tiny burgs even though it was the oldest. Copper mining and processing had begun in this town long before the railroad and until the 1930s it was the home of DSCI (reorganized as Ducktown Chemical and Iron in the 1920s). DSCI must have built some of the workers homes, but pictures show these to be rough and barely adequate housing. The community sat low in the Basin and the fumes and filth from its mines and copper processing plants settled all around its people. Isabella never possessed what one might call a downtown. Village roads were dusty clay that meandered willy-nilly among the scattering of small stores, homes, and plant facilities. As the interwar era wore on competition among the various copper companies shifted the Basin’s main production centers away from Isabella.86

Small as their village was relative to the other Basin towns, Isabella’s residents had possessed extreme loyalty to their community and held fiercely defiant attitude. Locals noted that workers in Isabella fought often with management. Since Isabella workers actually built their town and works they possessed a sense of ownership in DSCI and when pushed too hard, reacted in organized action.87

Meanwhile, as the other communities of Ducktown and Copperhill became ever more important they also diverged in their primary industrial responsibilities. Ducktown, centrally located in the Basin and west of Isabella, became the most important mining village in the Basin, though it too was not incorporated. The town held one of the most important of the eight major shafts that eventually drove down thousands of feet into the Basin’s ore deposits. Some of these

86 Pictures from the era show that even at times at high noon, the area was regularly darkened by the industrial pollution, Ducktown Basin Museum. R.E. Barclay, The Copper Basin, 14 and 117; and Barclay, The Railroad Comes to Ducktown, 179.
87 R.E. Barclay, The Copper Basin, 14.
would reach 3000 plus feet by mid-century. The Burra Burra mine sat just on the edge of Ducktown; its mine-head towered on the bluff overlooking the community. Between Ducktown and Isabella lay three other shafts, McPherson, Eureka, and Isabella. The maze of mines between Isabella and Ducktown eventually connected the two settlements below ground. All down the western and northern hill’s of Ducktown from the Burra Burra mine and across a small gap in the tree less ridges intersected by one of the central highways of the Basin were strings of miners’ homes built by Tennessee Copper. The village’s main street cut across the highway up the slopes on either side. Along this wide and muddy thoroughfare sat a line of company related establishments, private enterprises, and community institutions that included a commissary, churches, even a hotel. As was the case with the roads at Isabella, the main street remained rutted and unpaved for most of its history. As the most important transportation hubs moved away from this community, many who might have come to Ducktown went to other more bustling nearby burgs. Ducktown’s dwindling population soldiered on in their industrial responsibility.88

South of Ducktown by about five miles lay Copperhill. Known originally as “McCays” the community split into Copperhill, Tennessee and McCaysville, Georgia along the Tennessee-Georgia line. The Twin-Cities, as they were often called, lay diagonally across Toccoa-Ocoee river valley and combined had the most important commercial district in the Basin. TCC’s massive industrial grange at Copperhill, holding sites absorbed in the acquisition of Pittsburg and

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Tennessee Copper, became a cutting edge smelting and chemical production center. TCC designed its works over the years to wring every penny possible from the low grade ores of the Copper Basin. The advance of technology in the Copper Basin and at other sites made the nation’s copper barons rich. Observed one TCC official, the Basin’s industrial advance allowed investors, managers, and workers to share “fully in the general activity and prosperity of the country.” DSCI competed directly with TCC and through the interwar years the Isabella company made some upgrades to its works, but not as aggressively as did TCC. The discovery of new ore reserves by Tennessee Copper led to further expansion that required an ever-ready and adaptable army of men. These workers possessed a great variety of operational, mechanical, engineering, and chemistry skills. Copperhill, more than any of the Basin communities, came to hold the highest concentration of these technicians, craftsmen and their families. The town had several satellite workers’ villages sitting to the north known as New Town, Cole Town and Bell Town; they all lay over the ridges behind the TCC management and residential grange, a neighborhood called Smelter Hill.  

Tri-State copper power and the “smoke” wars

The effects of industry in the Tri-state reported in local papers made industrial pollution and conservation important topics. Most people had ignored these consequences of industry in the 19th century, but progressive legal and legislative action in the early 1900s followed reports that alternately praised and denounced the effects of exploitation of Southern mountain resources. World and domestic competition in the copper and chemical industries drove corporate technology and managerial method upgrades. The embrace of new methods was

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critical for firms that wanted to survive slow periods. Copper Basin companies, while small in comparison to the copper giants of the American West were able to demonstrate considerable agility for most of the first half of the twentieth century, responding quickly and effectively to legal demands by Georgia farmers who protested the devastating damage to their lands. For a time, however, it seemed local reaction to extraction industry pollution might shut down local industry. Primitive “heap roasting” ore-processing and poor husbandry of local woodlands were to blame. In the early years companies built massive, open-air sheds that covered scores of roasting ore piles laid over corded wood. While the ore cooked for weeks, toxic emissions filled with sulphur dioxide (“SO2”) gas then wafted over the Basin’s edges decimating orchards, forests, and farms in the Tri-State. The half dozen furnaces in the Basin required daily capacities of hundreds of tons of roasted ore and the companies built three large yards filled with long heap roasting sheds to feed the furnaces. Introduction of pyritic smelting ended the use of the sheds by 1904, but the more efficient metallurgic process did not stop the toxic emissions. No longer “lazily” rolling about the Copper Basin, the new process funneled the smoke into ever higher stacks, sending the emissions to ravage orchards and fields farther away. By the early 1900s most of the Basin’s vegetation had been either killed by the emissions or been used for roasting shed fuel. Meanwhile, law suits brought against the copper companies by Georgia farmers from the surrounding hills made their way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Court’s judgment on the matter forced the companies, under threat of injunction, into action.\textsuperscript{90}

Historian M.L. Quinn argued that too much discourse on the Copper Basin’s industry has focused on the environmental damage copper firms wrought as a result of primitive ore}

\textsuperscript{90}Barclay, \textit{The Copper Basin}, 7. For court cases, see for instance, United States Supreme Court, \textit{State of Georgia v. Tennessee Copper Company and DSCI} May 5, 1915 and May 17, 1915; summaries of the court battles and company adjustments can be found in Barclay, \textit{The Copper Basin}, 37 and 41-42; and, W.H. Emmons et al, \textit{Geology and Ore Deposits of the Ducktown Mining District, Tennessee}, 8.
processing methods of the late 1890s. Quinn points out that DSC & I and TCC had been pro-active in employing less damaging production schemes once local people and the court system threatened to shutdown operations.91

However Quinn may have been overly positive about the companies’ good intentions and pro-active efforts. Company influence over the region seems to have been more of a determinant in quelling farmers’ anger and their demands for new production techniques than threats of injunction. The fact was that a thriving set of communities was necessary to man, maintain, and serve the mines and smelter works. DSCI alone shipped 632,000 pounds of copper by 1893. Pressure to maintain production by investors, operators, and many local civic leaders was strong. As the territory affected by toxic emissions grew exponentially the number of cases brought by farmers rose exponentially—so too did the notoriety of the damages in local reports. So while DSCI general manager W.H. Freeland is credited with developing some of the techniques that led to the end of heap roasting and the companies did change their production techniques to somewhat less damaging ones, it took in fact a combination of technological innovation and sustained legal pressure by angry outsiders over two decades to transform the two major Copper Basin firms into models of industry. The firms lessened, but never halted their emissions.92

Revealing and darkly amusing proof that Copper Basin companies initially dragged their feet in addressing the emissions problem came from TCC Chief Clerk Robert E. Barclay’s

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91 Barclay, The Railroad Comes to Ducktown, 181-182; M.L Quinn, Technology and Culture, 586-589 and 599; see similar discussion within, Quinn, Environmental Management (1991). Two examples of the kinds of overly critical reportage Quinn argued were far too focused on environmental damage without recognizing industry’s reactions to its impact on the Basin development are, Teale, National History, ibid.; and, Wilton Barnhardt, Discover, 34-42, passim.

accounts on the matter. He described a DSCI report commissioned by the company to investigate the conditions of the surrounding crops and timber. Finding that local gardens “were good, growing crops were green and healthy, and forests and orchards were unharmed” the report, according to Barclay, read like one made by “a shrewd horse-trader” who was “trying to sell by mail.” Reservations about the wisdom on investing in new techniques slowed down the embrace of new smelting processes. Cautious TCC operators chose not to adopt pyritic smelting until after DSCI proved the techniques successful.  

Each company tried to minimize the costs associated with damage awards by stalling and adopted more conciliatory relationships with farmers only after the courts forced the firms to pay reparations. DSCI began compliance in 1903. General Manager Freeland wrote his London office that he would pay damages owed to William Madison, Margaret Madison, and J.A. Fortner; all were residents of a small community that sat just east of the Basin. The check Freeland sent to the judge overseeing the awards was $193.50 or about $3,000 in 2007 dollars. “The log-jam of evaded decrees had been broken,” said Barclay about these first reparations. By the mid-1900s it was clear to management it could no longer fight the courts and locals because by now even Copper Basin residents who directly benefitted from local industry had joined in suing the copper companies for damages.

Meanwhile apocalyptic erosion caused by the toxic emissions had denuded some 55,000 square acres of the local Appalachian landscape. The ongoing process destroyed local fishing and later threatened the efforts of the region’s first hydroelectric power company as reservoirs downstream filled with silt.

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93 Barclay, *The Copper Basin*, 76.
94 Barclay, *ibid*.
In its reaction to the smoke emissions catastrophe TCC had set upon a two pronged strategy. In 1905-06 Tennessee Copper shot a 325 foot brick smoke stack upwards from its Copperhill citadel like some gigantic industrial minaret. This tremendous stack could be seen from beyond the Copper Basin. Simple in design it was intended to cast residual sulphur dioxide fumes up and away from the Copper Basin and immediate farming villages. The fumes made it into the upper atmosphere. TCC’s great stack worked magnificently but created another set of problems: Now toxic clouds destroyed farms even further away than before. Dozens more law suits ensued in a smoke war now waged between the allied interests of Tennessee corporate capitalism and local businessmen—determined to maintain their vital economic interests—and the agricultural folk of Georgia and North Carolina. More had to be done.96

TCC then erected a towering garrison of broad, ninety foot high container tanks on a bluff west of Copperhill that condensed much of its smelter emissions into sulfuric acid. The acid containers were completed by 1907. DSCI copied TCC in erecting its own acid plant by 1909. The firms’ conversion of the emissions into sulphuric acid was a resounding success, bringing in enormous profits. Within a few years TCC and DSCI were known collectively as the largest producers of sulphuric acid on earth. Owing to the acid’s importance in munitions manufacturing, the region’s production of acid would earn international notoriety.97

Meanwhile, defoliating “accidental” emissions of SO2 (“white gas”) still settled with regularity across orchards and gardens all around the Basin and in counties downwind, mostly in Georgia. A team of legal agents from TCC joined forces with New South, pro-business political elites. Political careers were made and broken in the continuing smoke wars. Enabled by an indulgent court system, the controversy over “smoke” lingered well into the interwar years; the

96 Barclay, ibid., 40-41.
courts refused to shut down the economies of whole communities once the companies had shown attempts to relieve the damages. One letter published in the *Atlanta Constitution* during this era illustrates the anger and frustration many farmers had about it all. Will H. Shippen, of Elijay, Georgia complained bitterly about the costs imposed upon farmers and North Georgia politicians in trying to defend their property through the extended legal wrangling of the emissions suits--suits that were supposed to have been settled by the U.S. Supreme Court some years before.

“How long will the Georgia legislature permit its valuable time to be taken up by the paid lobbyists and attorneys of a foreign corporation [DSCI], making a football of this matter… On the one hand we have the state, whose domain is being ravaged, and her citizens whose timber, orchards and crops are being destroyed and on the other hand the Ducktown Sulphur, Copper, and Iron Company… eagerly working to make big dividends for its wealthy stockholders. Our property owners are sick and tired of being hauled to every legislature by the copper company in their efforts to undo the United States supreme court’s [sic] decree in this important matter.”

TCC created a special office devoted to address damages from SO2 emissions. The company hired men whose sole duty was to inspect damages and pay reparations to local farmers. Proactive as some of these actions have appeared to some scholars, bundles of law suits remained stacked in abandoned TCC buildings years later; just how the company handled these cases is unclear. For a poor farmer whose crops had been ruined, company estimates of “losses” may well have been too late and not enough.

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When the Lewisohns regained control of TCC in the mid-1910s they recognized that newer methods had to be employed to deal with the region’s low grade ore and the smoke emissions nuisance. The changes made at TCC affected industry in the entire Basin and served the strongest firms politically and economically. Thus goodwill was a consequence, but not initially a driving force behind the Lewisohns’ efforts. To make a profit from the region’s low grade ore demanded production array diversity and innovation. Ever tenacious and optimistic about how to make the area’s resources work, Wall Street investors repeatedly supported the purchase and development of new technologies so as to grind out every possible penny from local production. Of course by then the most severe denuding of the region was complete. An astonishing four feet of topsoil was eventually washed out of the Copper Basin according to some reports, never to be replaced. The erosion created the basis for Basin’s sentimental if cynical nickname, “The Old Red Scar.”

Early unionism in the Copper Basin

When it came to labor issues, Isabella workers, like their Ducktown and Tri-State neighbors had little hesitation to taking on the copper companies when the need arose. Within the first few years of their company’s founding DSCI workers went on strike for better wages and working conditions. In fact, it was in reaction to DSCI management that workers first chose to form an AFL local in 1899. Local lore and newspaper reports suggest that from tiny Isabella tenacious labor radicalism spread across the Basin through Ducktown and eventually to Copperhill. To provide themselves with a measure of privacy from corporate headquarters, the

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Atlanta Constitution, 7 September 1926. Francis Pledger recounted that a relative of hers worked as a smoking inspector for TCC, Francis Pledger telephone interview, November, 2004. M.L. Quinn argued the TCC and DSCI were proactive in their attention to the environmental damage wrought by early ore roasting methods in Quinn, Technology and Culture, 34: 575-612. The author of this study saw these piles of law suits in 2000 in an abandoned wash-house at the Burra Burra Mine, Ducktown.

100 Quinn, Technology and Culture, ibid; W.H. Emmons, F. B. Laney and Arthur Keith, Geology and Ore Deposits of the Ducktown Mining District, Tennessee, 32; and Barclay, The Copper Basin, 5-7 and 89-93.
AFL union first organized at Ducktown. About 350 miners joined the new local. Initially all local firms refused to hire the AFL men, but when skilled employees organized a strike and refused to work they shut down local works; the companies capitulated, some more quickly than others. DSCI tried to remain resolute in refusing to bargain and the battle it waged with its workers alarmed investors who demanded regular reports of the developments.\(^{101}\)

The actual records for DSCI are no longer available for review, but workers’ circumstance can be reconstructed from the sympathy they elicited from even pro-business commentators such as local historian and chief clerk of TCC, Robert E. Barclay. In recounting the battles, Barclay pitted DSCI workers against a management he described as “inflexible” on the union issue, refused to budge on wages that were “invariably below” rival firms. He commented more than once on workers’ conditions at Isabella and suggested this was why they went on strike so often, but that even when such action resulting in shutting down the works strikes “always ended unfavorably for [DSCI] workers.”\(^{102}\) Contemporaneous *New York Times* and Ducktown *Polk County Republican* accounts lend credence to Barclay’s observations. A letter in Barclay’s account from DSCI management to the company’s London owners acknowledged management’s actions against the AFL men.

> “Growing suspicion that we have been ‘posted’ by the union men discharged, but I know you will uphold me in preventing unionism from gaining a footing, or recognition of any kind on your premises, even at the expense of temporary hindrance to work in hand.”\(^{103}\)

Local wage differences between companies were known to the workers; when wages did not match from one company to another the workers might just strike. Certainly this was true

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\(^{101}\) “Ducktown May Have Strike: Tennessee Companies Refuse to Employ Union Men,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 September 1899.


\(^{103}\) W.H. Freeland to DSCI London management quoted in Barclay, 14; “Miners Indulge in Threats,” *New York Times*, 9 November 1899; and “DSCI Mary Mine Strike Only One Day,” (Ducktown) *Polk County Republican*, 4 February 1916.
later when in 1916 DSCI workers went on strike to obtain wages matching Tennessee Copper workers’ pay. By comparison, Tennessee Copper workers at this time earned more on average than industrial workers anywhere in the East Tennessee Overhill. The company tended not to fight unions and its wages measured favorably in a comparison.104

The AFL union forced a settlement on DSCI in 1916, one of the very few union contracts the company ever agreed to. TCC settled with its miners and gave them a ten percent raise. The AFL’s early success in the Copper Basin garnered credit among workers. For the next generation periodic demonstrations of union power made local and national headlines. It appears there was some connection of this AFL union to more radical western Federation brotherhoods, but the records are unclear. One important distinction about this union should be noted: there was no one particular craft or set of trades associated with the new local; it was an industry-wide amalgamation of men from the various job-types used in local extraction, smelting and chemical productions. As such it was not organized along the lines typical of the western non-ferrous, metals and mining AFL brotherhoods.105

Resentful of what it considered union incursions, DSCI soon returned to its strident anti-unionism and remained so. It may have done so through blacklistimg and the purging of union men over time, but the records on not clear on this subject. Certainly supervisory and managerial personnel would have known exactly who organized DSCI workers. Depending on the critical nature of their work at DSCI these men may or may not have been allowed to return. But this does not mean that workers were powerless in the face of DSCI’s reaction. Into the 1920s they found employment in one of the several other firms. Into the 1910s, the half-dozen firms in the region held plenty of employment opportunities: besides the aforementioned DSCI and TCC,

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those firms included Pittsburgh and Tennessee Copper, No. 20 Copper Mining Company, Ocoee Copper (later owned by Chattanooga Copper), and Copper Pyrites Corporation.\textsuperscript{106}

The local labor market was made up of many desperate men in from the farms looking for better wages. Many in this potential pool of workers had a willingness to work hard but were unqualified to take on the skilled jobs required at the local mines and works. Some men made the farm-to-industry transition quite successfully but the man who had experience at a trade held considerable leverage with operators.\textsuperscript{107} DSCI’s reaction to the AFL notwithstanding, market competition and labor needs appear to have dissuaded local firms from organizing another joint offensive against union men for a while after the AFL’s victory. The firms no doubt also realized the union might help them. Even though a union competed with companies for workers’ loyalty an AFL local could organize work crews and train employees. The union being a part of the Federation likely also assisted in tempering some measure of leftist ideology in the rank-and-file that may have challenged capitalism.\textsuperscript{108}

During these years, workers’ loyalty to protecting their jobs can be explained in part as a reflection of the work they put into constructing their works and towns and as a consequence of the specialized skills they developed. Workers’ attitudes towards their companies, even for those employed by DSCI, reflected the kind of loyalty members of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers had once held for the notorious Carnegie Homestead Works at Homestead, Pennsylvania. Those men had built the works, their homes, and their lives around the works. Managerial annoyance was accepted as just another job hazard. Divorcing oneself

\textsuperscript{106} Barclay, \textit{The Copper Basin}, 14 and, “Other Copper Companies,” 49-59, \textit{passim}.

\textsuperscript{107} Biographies of workers who migrated from local farms to work in Copper Basin industry can be found in sundry reports from “They Have Been Around,” \textit{TC Topics}, Tennessee Copper Company magazine, 1950s, \textit{passim}. Barclay

\textsuperscript{108} Barclay, \textit{The Copper Basin}, 14; For discussion of AFL “pure and simple” company organizing of working regimens for management to prevent leftist radical influence in the workforce, see Kersten, \textit{Labor’s Home Front} 13-14.
from familiar settings was often simply too difficult. This was especially true if workers had families. To quit or get fired from one firm and move to another company nearby would be difficult enough. Any seniority earned would be lost. Word of a man’s particular working habits no doubt would have been exchanged among managers, even competing managers. This would have been particularly true if one were a known troublemaker.

In addition worker loyalty could also be a function of logistics. It should be remembered that TCC had brought in many men of foreign extraction to man its mines and works. Before the age of the automobile, travel itself was difficult. But even into the automobile age most workers continued to travel by foot or on hoof to their jobs unless it was their business to use the company rail line. Horses had always been expensive; cars remained so for many despite Mr. Ford’s contributions. Both these travel options were out of reach for many men. Only a family man who had the best of jobs could entertain joining the new automobile class. Therefore, just to up and go for most fellows was too radical an option until they were somehow betrayed by their company or were offered a guaranteed position with another firm. For all these reasons, the seeming abundance of opportunities that might lay before a man in the Copper Basin during era of the intensely competitive copper firms was in fact more limited than it might seem. Frustrations in these circumstances no doubt contributed to men remaining in their communities for years on end, sticking with their companies out of necessity. Such men might join a union in the hopes of affecting added security.109

The Great War changes everything: From boom to bust to rational management

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109See the table of general TCC wages in this chapter; also Barclay, “Ducktown Sulfur, Copper & Iron,” and 35, The Copper Basin; and, photographs of life in the Basin, Ducktown Basin Museum.
The outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 revealed several things about the copper industry: it was now global, “sensitive to international affairs” and it was susceptible to its own “prince-and-pauper nature” that underscored the boundless and sometimes misguided optimism of investors. The war boom was short and white hot; it gave copper-mining companies profits “the equivalent of a 200 to 300 percent return on their 1915 book value.” Since its two major firms produced *oleum*, a high-powered sulphuric acid critical element in the creation of TNT and other munitions, the war seemed to be a golden opportunity for copper Basin firms and workers.\(^{110}\)

Wars are effectively economic revolutions and as such difficult to control; the dynamics of war aggravate already risky variables and in regard to Copper Basin firms, those variables affected some particularly ill-fortunate mutations. The possibilities for profit offered by the war’s mass death notwithstanding, marriages between capitalist and war-making interests made during this era were not always advantageous. Unforeseen economic consequences of the war contracts dampened the giddiness of investors. The hollow American neutrality of the early years of the Great War allowed the international reputation of Tennessee Copper’s sulfuric acid production capacity to catch the eye of imperial investors from Russia. In 1915 the company made an agreement with the Czar of All the Russias, Nicholas II. Hammered out in Atlanta one September day between TCC agents and representatives of the Artillery Department of the Imperial Russian Government, General A. Sapojnikoff, the contract stated that “the manufacturer agreed to manufacture, sell and deliver and the purchaser to buy and take and pay for 4.8 million pounds of Trinitrotoluol [TNT].”\(^{111}\)

With the czar’s investment of $1.5 million, Tennessee Copper Company built Nicholas his own TNT plant in the Copper Basin. Meanwhile, DSC & I sealed its own war acid deal

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\(^{110}\) Navin, *Copper Mining and Management*, 121 and 123.  
\(^{111}\) *Agreement between Tennessee Copper Company and General A. Sapojnikoff, Representing the Imperial Russian government, dated September 30, 1915*. A copy of this contract is hanging in the Ducktown Basin Museum.
which seemed advantageous when signed. These deals awed Wall Street and locals as reports
told of the wonderful deals. Ducktown soon swarmed with thousands of pairs of eager hands
ready to partake in the boom’s necessary building and swim in what promised to be a sea of good
wages. Within a few short months the payroll of TCC trebled into the thousands and the
population of Copperhill swelled. One report claimed the excitement coming out of Ducktown
in those first months after the announcements of the war contracts was “like gold fever days.”
The new rush for copper-based product brought in 5000 new people by May 1916. Housing
opportunities dried up and the shortage instigated a building boom to keep up with rush of
incoming families. “I do not know how many new buildings are going up,” said one witness,
“but all are two-storey brick, and very good buildings.” TCC advertised for “white” brick layers
and lead burners and for other jobs needed at its sites. The brick layers were going to have to lay
“ten million brick” claimed W.H. Eaves of Copperhill. The response to labor advertisements
overwhelmed local facilities so much that TCC had to run special trains 13 miles back and forth
to outlying towns every night just to give men a place to lay their heads. Men on the make
making money seemed everywhere. For a time, the flood of cash, high wages, and new
construction and supply opportunities seemed endless. The ecstatic labor market led organizers
from the International Union of Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers to the Tennessee hills.112

TCC then got itself stuck in a pricing war with one of its customers when the price of
acid shot high in the commodities markets. TCC wanted a better price for its product than its
contract with International Agricultural Corporation would allow. TCC closed down its
production for a time claiming it had been forced to “make repairs” for several months, but when

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asked TCC’s president Utley Wedge said the repairs were to allow for a substantial increase in production. This last comment was likely referring to the expansion necessary to support the Russian investment, but the reports are unclear.¹¹³

In June 1916 Tennessee Copper Company announced it would pass on its quarterly dividend owing to “perplexities.” In light of all the attention and critical importance placed on the Copper Basin to help protect civilization from the Hun, nervous Wall Street investors suspected all was not happy in the Old Red Scar when rumor of work stoppages and unpaid bills hit the market. Corporate disclosure revealed catastrophe and confusion in the Tennessee copper fields; the “perplexities” had in fact been “owing to the situation brought about by the fire at Copperhill, which has not yet been adjusted, and also to the expenditures needed for other construction.” Subsequent reports showed that TCC managers misappropriated the Russian funds and used much of them to build a substantial grange of other structures in addition to the czar’s TNT plant.¹¹⁴

More revelations ensued. The “fire” had in fact been a massive blast that flattened the czar’s new TNT plant. The mysterious nature of this incident was all the more in light of the fact that the place had been under guard. Initially it seemed company insurance protected all losses, but Russia’s money in the affair was, as one report put it bluntly, all “burned up.” TCC maintained it was not blame for the fire, but Russians disagreed and sued TCC for $1.3 million. Had not the intervention of two political revolutions in 1917 distracted Russians and given Bolsheviks a victory that November TCC may well have been pinned with the costs of loss. Meanwhile at TCC a revolution of its own took shape. The toxic whiff of “convenience” hung

over the entire Russian affair and this fact was not lost on many. Bills for TCC had been and remained due. No one was getting paid beyond a surety company and managers in the Copper Basin who appeared to be lining their own pockets. Company official R.E. Barclay claimed evidence of myriad misappropriations and the pocketing of cash lay everywhere at TCC. In his account of this reckless period in the company’s history, local management “approvals” of an “orgy of” unnecessary, poorly executed construction projects were as much to blame as any “fire” had been: “Men in squads and platoons [who] worked on building that would never be used, on contractions that were never completed, on unloading supplies and materials that no one knew for what purpose they were ordered [accompanied] men receive[ing] pay checks for labor and salaries never performed.” The losses both financial and in reputation from all this buffeted Tennessee Copper and almost capsized a firm that just a year earlier one paper had called the “most winsome of the ‘war brides’ of 1915.”

Economic shocks from the blast at TCC’s Russian plant were even more damaging and surprising in light of the company’s reputation as a money-making engine. Tennessee Copper had paid respectable dividends regularly in the general copper boom as national industries one by one electrified themselves. Since 1913 Tennessee Copper had been on a roll, paying dividends at a rate of “75 cents a quarter on shares of $25 par value, or at the annual rate of 12 per cent.” And remember, all this had occurred during the high water mark of the smoke emissions war.

After the U.S. finally declared war in April 1917 and the Wilson Administration realized it had to closely administer the nation’s industry to meet war needs, copper firms benefitted from passage of the Federal Reserve Act, which secured an environment where banks were willing “to

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provide 90 day loans for copper in process.” Now commodities markets became even hungrier for the red metal. The War Industries Board set copper prices at 24 ½ cents per pound through the balance of the conflict. But the boom only lasted a couple years and when the war ended, there was nothing to stop a plummet in the commodities price of copper. Hundreds of millions of tons of un-purchased copper overwhelmed the market. Countless other tons of scrap copper now lay on old battlefields. War needs for oleum disappeared. The fact is that copper cannot be put back into the ground once dug up. Slow response time on the part of non-ferrous producers made matters worse; it took between 90-120 days for many to respond to the slackening needs. In response to the world oversupply, the largest producers formed a cartel, the Copper Export Association. Made legal by Congressional action in the 1918 Pomerene Act that “exempted export cartels from anti-trust law,” the cartel sought to limit production and protect producers from cut-throat competition. Through the twenties, the cartel managed to keep copper prices around 14 cents per pound, far below war highs of 29 cents, but much better than if the producers had competed with no cartel at all.117

TCC’s oleum production served as its saving grace during the war, but could not save management after the Russian fiasco. Adolph Lewisohn and his sons regained company control in late 1916. By that point, the company’s stock prices had collapsed to $42 per share from earlier highs of $70. The Lewisohns folded TCC into their Tennessee Copper and Chemical Corporation. The company thus finished the war under new management and eked out some profits. Tennessee Copper and Chemical (later called Tennessee Corporation) had its offices on Broadway in New York City and included these subsidiaries: TCC, Capital Fertilizer, Southern Agricultural Chemical, The New Haven Copper Company, U.S. Phosphoric Products, North

117 For an excellent summary of the copper markets and general trends in the industry during this period see Navin, Copper Mining & Management, chapters 10 and 11, passim; see also, Hildebrand and Mangum, ibid., 105-107.
Carolina Exploration Company and the Mining Exploration Company. This realized profits of over $1.3 million in 1917 and $477,512 in 1918 demonstrating the Lewisohns’ know-how in corporate organizing and oversight. Not wanting to make the same kinds of mistakes the company endured early in the war, the Lewisohns then instituted a rational management and production regimen that would become an industry archetype and transform the lives of TCC workers.\footnote{118}

**J.N. Houser reorganizes TCC within the Lewisohn model**

The man given charge of Tennessee Copper from 1919 onward was “J.N.” Houser. As General Manager of TCC until his death in 1949 Houser was also a member of the Tennessee Corporation’s board of directors. Houser administered the overhaul of the company’s product line building on the work accomplished by a clean-up managerial team sent to the Basin immediately after the Lewisohns regained control of the firm. The team fired TCC’s acid plant superintendent and chief engineer. Houser took charge of TCC. Houser hired a new management cohort that included a mine captain, mine foremen, carpenter foremen, time keepers and supply clerks, a civil engineer, master mechanics and mechanical engineers. This team in miniature represented the same kind of new, more finely focused rational management the best U.S. metals firms adopted during the Progressive era. Added later to this team was a trained manager who oversaw a new Personnel Department.\footnote{119}

The new GM understood the company’s challenge was as great in the late 1910s as it had been during the smoke crisis twenty years before. His answer to the challenge would be to

\footnote{119} Barclay, *The Copper Basin*, 31, 42-43 and 47.
expand the company’s production array through a comprehensive building and product development program. Known as the All-Milling Program and approved by the New York office, this “tremendous undertaking” would extend facilities to process the notorious low-grade ore in the Basin. One of the main goals of the project was the “eventual elimination of the blast furnace as the keystone in the recovery process” owing to inefficiencies. The immediate post-war slump of 1920-21 slowed progress on the project but by 1923 conditions had improved enough for the erection of a new acid production concentrator and the construction of a selective flotation plant near the company’s London Mine. Selective flotation “is based on the counter-intuitive phenomenon that occurs when heavy metallic substances cling to the bubbles of an oily froth and rise to the top, where they can easily be skimmed off.” The chemical reaction process removes about 94% of copper from ore and was thus perfect for use in the Copper Basin. Adding to all this, by the end of 1924 Houser called for the “erection of [new] four roasters and a sintering plant [sat] at Copperhill.”

These developments by 1930 gave TCC the ability to produce in addition to copper, commercial and textile acids, sodium hydro, ferric sulphate, copper sulphates (for use in fungicides and insecticides), iron sinter, zinc concentrate, sundry organic chemicals, and granulated slag. Copper use in electrification and for conventional metals products for this era is known. Birmingham fabricators used TCC iron sinter just as scrap might be used. The balance of TCC’s products reflected the Lewisohns’ new interest in chemicals. The expanded array of products made possible by Houser’s All-Milling Program reinvigorated optimism among local businessmen.

120 Barclay, ibid, 41-43, passim
121 Navin, Copper Mining and Management, 46; Barclay, ibid.; use of iron sinter explained in Tennessee Copper Company magazine, TC Topics, June 1952.
Houser maintains industrial peace

Houser accompanied this production overhaul with efforts to maintain industrial peace by way of welfare capitalism and rationalized personnel management. Keen on limiting the power of an independent union, but unwilling to make direct attacks on it, Houser “loved the union to death” by recognizing it had a right to exist and then circumventing its mission by establishing a new chain of communications for employees. The GM’s efforts here rested on a de facto company union or employee representative plan (EMP). Houser bolstered the legitimacy of the EMP by making sure around TCC mines and works that “the Manager’s door was always open.” The EMP was typical of those established by progressive firms during this era that wanted to dissuade workers from joining independent unions. Houser’s efforts built on those of his predecessor, H.T. Harper who had placed guards around new, more-dangerous pieces of machinery. Harper had also adopted uniform safety measures in all TCC mines. The upgraded system’s primary focus was to institute better safety habits among all men by crew. But it also instilled greater loyalty among workers once the system proved it could truly reduce accidents and death on the job. The EMP improved the company’s bottom line by reducing the expenses associated with misused machinery and lost “man-hours” owing to injuries or death.122

The EMP tamed arrogance among a certain set of workers who tended to hold onto procedural ignorance out of a misplaced sense of masculinity. Pride born out a the independent natures useful in the Southern Mountains frontier society often made it difficult to train men in safety and efficiency protocols. This is not to argue that the new EMP system was perfect. It apparently relied too much on an administrative hierarchy intimidating to some workers and

condescending to others as will be shown. But it had its good effects and was much better than
the disinterested, bottom-line only approach TCC employed during the Lewisohn’s interregnum.
Company officials also claimed the EMP provided workers a place where they could forum.
TCC manager T.A. Mitchell recalled the twenties under Houser’s new system. “During that
period of 10 years, it was the practice to hold frequent meetings with large groups of employees”
to encourage more worker input in safety procedure effectiveness, disseminate policy change,
and discuss production quotas. Workers could also discuss new wage schemes and were
“encouraged to discuss with their supervisors and the Personnel Department any grievance or
other matters about which they had concern.” In this manner, the EMP affected exactly what
Houser’s boss and TCC owner Sam A. Lewisohn believed was necessary when Lewisohn argued
that a modern manager had to be sensitive to the circumstances of his workers so as to
“humaniz[e] the management of industry.”

So successful was the Houser EMP program that it made the pages of the national trade
magazine, *Explosives Engineer*. Reflecting the associationalism common during the Republican
controlled, pro-business administration of the twenties, the Hercules Power Company periodical
joined the U.S. Bureau of Mines to assist Houser’s commencement of a “Sentinels of Safety”
campaign at Tennessee Copper Company. Mining companies and men who demonstrated the
safest work habits received an annual award from the magazine in a public ceremony addressed
by representatives from the Mining Bureau. The trophy was an evocative sculpture of a woman
holding a baby aloft designed to remind workers that it was their personal embrace of safety on
the job that would allow them to return safely to their dependent, vulnerable families. The

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123 Barclay, ibid, 67; and T.A. Mitchell, “Labor Relations,” ibid; and Sam A. Lewisohn, (then) Treasurer of Miami
Copper Company, “Humanizing the Management of Industry,” an address given before the Academy of Political
Science, New York City, 6 December, 1918. Contained within *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in
magazine’s own notoriety added even more legitimacy to the EMP’s mission to purge TCC of the old-fashioned every-man-for-himself mentality that formerly characterized a miner’s life.\textsuperscript{124}

At a Ducktown presentation of the trophy that had been typical of such events, U.S. Mining Bureau official W.W. Adams gave each man on TCC’s recent winning crew “certificates of honor.” Men interviewed about the safety campaign approved of it. Blaster T.W. Davis, from the Burra Burra Mine, when asked, “expressed his appreciation to the management for what they had done to forward safety in mining and to the Explosives Engineer and Bureau of Mines for the trophy and certificates.” The Sentinels of Safety campaign highlighted the fact for workers that they did not operate alone in this world. A driller named I.H. Verner likely typified miners when he said that “looking at the trophy… he was reminded that he had a wife and youngsters at home confidently expecting him to return safely at the end of each day’s work.”\textsuperscript{125}

Granted, as a for-profit venture for a blasting powder company, the Explosives Engineer could have cherry-picked men’s reactions to the safety campaign and the whole event may have intimidated men dissatisfied with management nannying on the job. But these caveats aside, the establishment of Houser’s safety-focused EMP and the Sentinels of Safety program underscored certain facts about mining life and the mining industry in Tennessee not addressed prior to Houser’s tenure at TCC: Progressive Era legislation in Tennessee had simply not been enough to end the danger for Copper Basin industrial workers that lurked everywhere on the job. Too many injuries still occurred on jobsites in the early twenties. The state’s inspection system was too susceptible to corruption and full of holes even after a generation of reform. Laws sat on the books that stated that the state’s Chief Mine Inspector could shut down any mine deemed unsafe for non-compliance of state regulations, but actual implementation and enforcement depended on

\textsuperscript{124} The Explosives Engineer, ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} The Explosives Engineer, ibid.
the personal prerogatives of too few inspectors. Houser and the Lewisohns understood the costs associated with injured or lost man-hours and that laws alone would not protect workers. Most important, TCC operators knew that not all accidents could be blamed on unsafe properties. Men made impulsive decisions that led to accidents more often than did substandard facilities. To institute a private safety program would also keep government officials, workers’ advocates, or sundry concerned citizens from establishing intrusive government regulation. Furthermore, the TCC program followed patterns embraced by much larger firms that also included functioning pumps, good lighting and adequate ventilation in underground systems.126

The situation at TCC before the installation of the EMP had not been pretty regarding safety. A sampling of injuries at TCC from 1914 gives us a good comparison. For the three months of October, November, and December thirty-two TCC men met injuries that ranged from strained backs and bruised ankles to neck dislocations lacerations of the hands, chest, and hip, amputations, fractures of arms and legs, crushed fingers and toes and myriad “contusions.”127 With regularity, men injured themselves or were victim to falls, being crushed by ore “muck,” rock falls, wrecked motors, and all the sundry rock-and-hard-place opportunities mining work allowed.128

In contrast to these figures, within ten years of the commencement of the EMP and Sentinels of Safety campaign crews at the Burra Burra mine and other TCC facilities had worked over 300K hours without any lost time for accidents. One measure of popularity among the men

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126 Mine safety laws had been on the books in Tennessee since the early 1900s, but as Virginia Holmes Brown alluded in her mid-century assessment of the legislation, much of it was veneer to protect companies from law suits and satisfy a well-intentioned, but effectively ignorant middle-class. Virginia Holmes Brown, *University of Tennessee Record* 48:6, 29-41, and 64. A summary of “progress in safety” for the era can be found in, United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Mines, Work Projects Administration, National Research, Project Report No. E-12 by Y.S. Leong et al, *Technology, Employment, and Output Per Man in Copper Mining* (Washington: Government Printing Office, February 1940), 15; and in, Navin, *ibid*, 34

127 “Record of Personal Injuries at Mines of Tennessee Copper Company, Copperhill Tenn. For months of October, November, and December 1914,” January 11, 1915, Ducktown Basin Museum Collection.

128 “Record of Personal Injuries at Mines,” Ibid.
was the buy-in of workers to the program. At Ducktown there was considerable success; the
eighbourhood’s mining team became the company’s safest crew.129

Houser’s safety program, good as it was, did not vanquish all the hazards of mine and
smelting work. Periodic reports from the interwar years in the Copperhill paper told of tragedies
such as that which befell Clarence Crawford, a 42-year brakeman and popular vet among the
TCC crews who, while riding on the back of one of the company’s train cars, was crushed
between two of them. Four cars had snapped loose and rolled down a grade into an awaiting car.
Crawford had been in between. That he survived for anytime time at all was astonishing. The
rescue team worked feverishly to save popular “Horsefly” as he was known by his TCC pals
using steel torches to cut him loose from the wreckage. Despite the efforts and his “iron nerve”
Crawford succumbed to his multiple amputations and crushed chest. Horsefly Crawford left
behind his widow, two daughters and a host of local kin spread from Copperhill to Blue
Ridge.130

Such tragedies became more uncommon at the Basin’s mines and works in the thirties.
The year 1923 saw 288 injuries at TCC per million man-hours worked. Following installation of
the Houser EMP safety program that rate fell to 169 per million man-hours and by the middle
thirties it had dropped to zero per million man-hours. Miner Samuel Sharp quoted himself on the
subject. “Every man in the mining department is convinced that if everyone will think about
safety, talk about safety, and try to work safely, we will continue to enjoy the great achievement
of having few or no workmen maimed or crippled at their work.” Sharp acknowledged miners
had once held great doubts about the program, but that it had been proven effective. No system
could be could ever be fool proof. Scholar Thomas Navins argued that even the best systems

129 The Explosives Engineer, ibid.
130 “Injuries Fatal to Clarence Crawford,” Copper City Advance, 10.29.1937.
could be compromised by all-too-human obstinate attitudes among workers. “Miners may be provided with health-protecting measure, but if they are reluctant to incur discomfort…health measures are difficult to enforce.”

Houser’s employee representative plan co-opted a considerable amount of the energy that lay behind the Copper Basin’s union movement—a result no doubt that had been assumed in the general manager’s original calculus. Once shown successful for miners, Houser extended the program across the TCC works to electricians, railroad operators, smeltermen, leadburners, chemists—in short for all company crews. Their influence notwithstanding, the EMP’s establishment cannot be given complete credit for union impotency in the Copper Basin during the twenties. Unions had plenty of interior challenges that led to dormancy: political infighting, fizzled membership rolls and shrunken treasuries. Additional clandestine efforts to erode union power by the general manager may not have been necessary since the EMP was used in conjunction with other aspects of rationalized management: reasonable wages and ongoing incentives for men to upgrade their skills before advancing mining and processing technology.

The nature of the work in extraction, smelting, and chemical facilities

As for the men who manned the region’s copper company mines and processing plants, reports and interviews published by Tennessee Copper Company and interviews conducted

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131 Ibid. Note the program continued for the next generation—see the note in the 4.1954 TC TOPICS wherein the Explosives Engineer editor attended the awarding of the Sentinels of Safety Trophy to a Calloway-Mary Mine crew; Navin, ibid., 35.
132 Jensen, Heritage of Conflict, 452. For an example of records set by the expansion of the Houser-initiated safety program to other trades at TCC during the interwar years see “10,000 Safe Days by Our Lead Crew,” TC Topics, Tennessee Copper Company, April 1954.
during this study reveal much about the spectrum of skills and attitudes toward work embraced by some of the companies’ hundreds of men. Some of these men were the kind sought out by the unions; others had been in the union movement, but were later removed from official membership rolls owing to their positions as foremen, chemists or supervisors; still others had no intention of ever joining a union or found unionism a hindrance to their personal ambitions. Consideration of the conditions under which these men worked and an acknowledgement of their ability to master the skills their jobs demanded of them provides a better understanding for how pride in work might combine with the necessity of work, emboldening these men to defend their industrial liberty. Copper company rolls represented an assortment of workers some of whom represented low-skilled, lesser wage day-laborers while other possessed many industrial skills. TCC chief clerk Robert E. Barclay summed up the top tier of Copper Basin workers among the several firms as being a collection of master mechanics, locomotive, civil, and mechanical engineers, copper mining and smelting experts, carpenters, time keepers, supply clerks, commissary management, even a surgeon.\textsuperscript{133}

One of the most telling things about work in the Copper Basin was that it was not at all uncommon for a man to hold a dozen different jobs during his career. He might work for DSC & I or Pittsburgh Copper for a time and then later for Tennessee Copper Company. Upgrades in mining and production methods became regular features of working life which required men to retool their skills. As mentioned, dangerous circumstances were nearly omnipresent underground. The extremely high temperatures and pressures exerted in the extraction, smelting, and chemicals production wore equipment down fast and required a vigilant maintenance and

\textsuperscript{133} Information about the working men in this section from Barclay, \textit{The Copper Basin}, 32-33 and workers biographies recounted in TCC magazine articles “They Have Been Around,” \textit{T.C. Topics}, 1950s, passim; see also, “Skill and Age Requirements,” Y.S. Leong et al, \textit{Technology, Employment, and Output per man in Copper Mining}, 181
repair that only increased upon the adoption of new production methods. Any yet, even though men might change their jobs and take on new ones that required a different set of skills a paradoxical regimen could set in. For many, their daily tasks became mundane owing to the company’s non-stop production, which ran twenty-four hours, seven days at week, 360 days a year. Repetitiveness could become a danger as men might do nearly exactly the same job over and over again, not unlike a hazard that faced assembly line attendants. Attention to detail and safety could wane; failure to maintain vigilance in focus led to accidents.\(^\text{134}\)

Many Copper Basin miners enjoyed the relative autonomy of their work. Even when they were in teams, individual work was done in a manner that left each man to do his own task. Said Mockingbird Nelson about his TCC mining work, “nobody interfered with you.”\(^\text{135}\) He worked on and off in the mines for nearly forty years beginning during the early Houser years of the 1920s. He said that “he thought he’d try the work and found that he liked it.”\(^\text{136}\)

The dark, sometimes even dank mines were cool year round. It may even have been much better to work underground than to work topside despite mining dangers that included regular ore dust inhalation, periodic cave-ins and explosions or accidental electrocution. You could choose your hells to some extent in the Copper Basin: working in the threatening but cool world below ground or in the acid-emissions blanketed world above. The latter was made worse in summer’s searing heat in a landscape of barren hills shorn of shade trees. Top-side work also meant usually working with hot, dangerous equipment in un-air-conditioned environs. Such as they were, for all their possible dangers, mines had at least ventilation requirements set by law.

\(^{134}\) Y.S. Leong et al, *Technology, Employment, and Output per Man in Copper Mining*, 8, 32, 88, 105, and “Some Effects of Technologic Changes on the Miners” ibid., 179-183; Barclay, ibid; and *T.C Topics*, ibid.


\(^{136}\) Mockingbird Nelson interview, *A Tribute to the Miners*, ibid..
Many work areas, up or down, would have been loud. LOUD with a cacophony of men yelling
over the on-going, clank-and-banging, the pulling, grinding, rolling, and hauling of “muck,”
sundry machinery, hoists, trams, belts, locomotives and motors running day in and day out.\textsuperscript{137}

So to some extent, a miner’s world thus seems protected, even sheltered. Pay lured many
underground. Contract men “received extra pay for extra production.” Extra effort brought
home extra money and it was done without the fetter of someone else’s needs or complaint. The
work could be dangerous, yes, and many miners recounted how they escaped being killed or
severely injured as gravity worked against them, but most chose to stay underground
nonetheless. Take George Swanson for instance. A miner for over thirty years, Swanson
recounted that he was once trapped for over two and one-half hours by a twenty-ton rock. The
incident did not prevent him from going back; in fact, neither did bats that swooped down
occasionally in men’s faces scaring some men silly and encouraging ghost story telling among
the lot. Foxes too made their homes in the mines and sometimes the men fed the critters scraps.
Most miners took it all in stride.\textsuperscript{138}

The legacy if not loyalty of some mining families to the Tennessee Copper Company was
captured perfectly in one of the biographical reports in \textit{TC TOPICS}, the company magazine.
“There aren’t many places where you will find three generations working for the same company
at the same time—much less the same department.”\textsuperscript{139} Harvey, Virgil, and Sony Ledford had
that distinction; they’d worked in the Basin for years at TCC and as of the early 1950s still
worked for the Mining Department. The patriarch, Harvey had been born in 1876 and at 75
dutifully reported to regular work. He worked through both the First and Second World Wars
without missing a single shift. Most of the years he spent underground he worked a as a trammer

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\textsuperscript{137} Mockingbird Nelson interview, ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} A Tribute to the Miners, ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} “Three Generations of TCC Mining,” \textit{TC Topics}, July.1952, 4-5.
\end{flushright}
(a man who loaded raw ore into underground tram cars), then as a dumper, and a skip helper—
these were lift assistants. In fact, Harvey did not start working mining yard maintenance topside
till his early seventies. When he first began working for TCC he used to walk eight miles each
day to and from his job sites. His son Virgil had worked for TCC since 1919—he was as old as
the century when he begun work with TCC. Since the late 1920s Virgil had worked
underground. Harvey had once worked at the bottom levels of the mines making his daily rounds
as a motorman on the electric trains used underground to move ore. His day had began at 7 am,
picking up mine cars loaded with ore and delivering them to the shaft stations for hoisting
topside. After work he returned to his Turtletown home just north of Ducktown. The youngest
Ledford, Sony, worked in the mines before going into the Air Corps in the early 1950s and had
been in the Mining Department in the Ducktown shafts.140

A surprising primitivism survived at certain Copper Basin work sites. Reports of mine
work show that as late as 1927 miners at Isabella still had to use wheelbarrows to load ore from
some of the smaller mines to truck beds for transport to the processing plants. In the larger
Copper Basin mines which at this time ranged to 500 to 1000 feet deep, men guided mules well
into the century to haul the broken “muck.” Electric locomotives when installed eased the burden
of hauling ore to the surface but they were not added until the 1930s.141

Introduction of new technology could completely change working conditions. By the
1920s compressed air drills in the mines had replaced the sledge hammer and for blast holes,
dynamite replaced blasting powder. One of the constant problems in the Eureka mine had been
caused by pit-mining techniques that ripped a huge hole in the surface; rain water raced into the
underground shafts and threatened flooding the mine. Massive pumps had to be installed that

140 TC TOPICS, July 1952, ibid.
141 Tribute to the Miners, 3; and, Ducktown Basin Museum, photographic collection.
could remove 850 gallons of water per minute to prevent flash flooding of the mines which could come up without any warning whatsoever in Appalachian summers.\footnote{142}{Tribute to the Miners, 4.}

Miners who actually worked on developing new areas of the mines, either in the blasting crews or who used machinery to extract the tons of raw ore, never worked alone. These men worked in 3 crew shifts over 24 hours—the day, evening, and what were known as “hoot owl” shifts. Day men were responsible for production drilling, maintenance, and repair while the other two shifts and who were responsible for loading ore into mine cars and hauling or motoring ore to dumps for hoisting to the surface and for whatever repair work still needed attention. The smallest crews worked the “hoot owl” overnight shift.\footnote{143}{TC Topics, March 1953, 3.} Mine jobs outlined in TC Topics included various levels of skills, but all miners developed an array of skills and abilities so they could be ready to pick up other tasks when necessary. Mine jobs included those of electricians, balk ground men, drill men, powdermen, blastmen, trackmen, timbermen, drag operators, “stope” or drilling head production foremen, and perhaps most essential, the skip or hoist conductors. These men manned the machines that hauled men up from the depths. Skips had to be ever vigilant as to the conditions of the machinery; equipment failure on a watch could mangle men or leave them dead.\footnote{144}{“Eureka Mine: A Picture Story of Tennessee Copper Company Mining,” TC Topics, February, 1953, 5.}

Electricians, such as Waldo Brookshire were responsible for cleaning and maintaining electric motors used throughout the mines for hauling ore and for keeping generators humming. Compressed air was used to clean such equipment and by the 1950s workmen used masks to keep the dust out of their nose, throat, and lungs, but for much of the previous fifty years this had
not been the case, the air hanging with particulate matter. As men cleaned the machinery they filled their own lungs with mineral, exhaust and lubricant detritus.  

Electricians also installed and maintained miles of electric wiring in each of the many Basin mining shafts—the danger here being electrocution from exposed lines, poor lighting, pools of water and wet equipment. Connections thus had to be absolute and solid. Nearby someone like balk groundman Steve Anderson used long pinch bars to pry off scaly rock in hallways where mine cars operated; balk ground men were “one of the few miners who performed most of their work by themselves.” They patrolled ladder shafts and hallways constantly looking for loose rock or reinforcing weak areas with roof bolts. Shooting lines were used to set off the explosives used to open new extraction sectors of the mines. Safety in the mines for blasters would come to be a constant concern in the years after the mid-1920s, but for years all these tasks were learned no doubt on a one-to-one basis; procedural independence was fiercely guarded as a man’s own way of doing his job. Overseeing it all would have been a man like Edgar Rose, who, as general foreman, had a job that landed him a reputation for being “on the exacting side.” But his responsibilities for keeping everything in the mines operating smoothly “come hell or high water” explained his attitude.

Another veteran of mine work, who after nearly forty years in mining got a job topside as a change house man, was C.V. Cain. Cain was born in a small burg just west of the Copper Basin in 1890 and when he was twenty-two, Tennessee Copper hired him to load “green ore” (raw ore) into stockpiles near the mines. Within a year he was underground and he said the life took some serious adjustment. Terror chased him out of the mines. He only returned when the Depression of ’21 forced him to abandon his band saw work at a North Carolina lumber mill. Through the

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145 TC Topics, ibid, 5.
146 TC Topics, ibid.
147 Ibid.
nineteen-thirties he worked underground again, sinking new shafts to the 15th level as a driller. Eventually the toll on his body was too much and his rheumatism crippled his ability to “lead the scrambling, active life of a miner.” Remarkably, he’d gone for more than thirty years without any lost time for accidents. He and his family were residents just outside of Ducktown.  

Cain, his family, and other miners’ kith and kin likely shopped at a TCC commissary, like the one run by H.L. Greenway in Ducktown. For over thirty years Greenway managed one of several Tennessee Copper Company Smelter Stores as they were known. Ninety percent of his customers were TCC employees. Like Cain, Greenway had come to copper in the slump of 1921 having been previously employed by a small chain of banks centered in McCaysville. The future store manager up and took his family to Ducktown where they’d lived ever since. The work was necessary, reliable, and paid a respectable income. So successful was his run as Smelter Store manager that he’d been able to send all five of his children to either college or university.  

Leadburner Ernest Wagner’s more than thirty-year career at TCC makes for a good example of the kind of innovation workers themselves had to sometimes demonstrate if they wanted to fix aggravating problems around the plants. For over twenty-five years, day-in and day-out, Wagner and some other leadburners inspected the water pipes that sprayed down into the cavernous, 90 foot high sulfuric acid contact chambers at Copperhill, the whole complex of which covered an area the size of a football field. The Copper Basin’s regular erosion muddied the waters used to cool the steaming gas that would condense inside the massive containers; mud would clog the pipes and if not attended they could rupture. The leadburners had the “disagreeable” chore of unclogging the pipes, a task that required men to walk wooden runways

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148 Ibid.
150 “Store Manager,” TC Topics, ibid; and, “Leadburner,” TC Topics June 1952, 4-6.
while avoiding where the hot pipes entered the tanks. Each man had to pull up the nozzles for cleaning. “Acid-laden gas would rush out like a miniature volcano.” The extremely hot conditions did not permit consistent inspections and thorough cleaning. Frustrated by the heat and inefficiency of the process, eventually Wagner tapped into some skills he had learned simply by watching men in the mechanical shops. He devised spring-hinged flaps that automatically shut over the holes in the tank. Wagner added this innovation in the 1940s—but this means that before Wagner’s fix TCC crews for the previous forty years had endured geysers that would have made the god Vulcan proud.¹⁵¹

Wagner’s story underscores a paradox common in the metals industry: While there had indeed been great technological advance in production and processing methods embraced by Copper Basin industries in the first four decades of the century, much work still entailed slow, pre-industrial hands-on innovation and mechanics. These conditions remained even after Houser’s extensive production initiatives and rationalization of the work place. For instance, owing to site specific criteria used around the works, leadburners throughout the 1920s and 1930s still had to hand cut huge sheets of lead that were then pounded, rounded, and welded together to make the company’s ducts. Such work held countless opportunities of incurring lacerations and other injuries—as well as the possibility of ruining the project itself by accident.¹⁵²

Blacksmiths working in TCC’s Forge Shops regularly employed the kind of pre-industrial work that was still in demand for industrial maintenance and repair. Elmer Patterson worked in the shops for thirty years and the narrative of his career clarifies how flexible many men were expected to be in picking up new skills. When they did, it advanced their pay scale.

¹⁵¹ “Leadburner,” TC Topics, ibid.
¹⁵² “Leadburner,” TC Topics, ibid.
Early in the century, Patterson had worked on and off for both TCC and DSCI; he did so at the latter as a trammer and drill helper. When he was hired at Tennessee Copper he started as a bricklayer and assistant in the paint shop. At some point he developed skills to be a blacksmith and moved into the Forge Shop; there he remained. Smithies were to fabricate and maintain items used throughout the plant, from small tools and fittings, to massive pieces such as railroad car axils, fan shafts, or crane hooks. Throughout the first third of the twentieth century smithies used smoky, coal-fired forges. Poor ventilation kept the shops filled with choking emissions and in low light. In his shop, half a dozen smithies pounded on old-style anvils and relied not on thermometers but their own trained eyes to gauge metal temperatures in the forges; they gauged the hot metal by color as it went from red to pure white, each color representing a precise phase in the heating when a particular kind of work might take place. Exactitude was required for the smithy. “He knows that at 900 degrees Fahrenheit, steel looks black red; then as the heating continues the steel becomes in turn, dull red, bright red, salmon, mild yellow, light yellow, and finally at about 2400 degrees –white hot.”¹⁵³ Steel quality that is common today was quite rare in the twenties and thirties so blacksmiths only placed fine steel on tool heads. In each era, smithies had to keep up with newer fabricating methods company scientists developed to create newer metals and alloys that improved metals hardness. Smithies thus resembled de facto metal chefs having to learn about the nature of manganese, molybdenum, tungsten, chromium, nickel, silicon, vanadium, and other alloys.¹⁵⁴

Young Querry, a smelting expert, joined Tennessee Copper Company during the Depression. During his twenty-odd year tenure with the firm he had not experienced one accident. He was one of only a few TCC men who had gone to college (Robert Barclay and chief

¹⁵³ “Blacksmith” TC Topics, June 1952 5-6.
¹⁵⁴ TC Topics, ibid.
draftsman, J.B. Monty Moncrief were two others). After high school, Querry attended Tennessee Wesleyan College at Athens for a time, but then transferred and graduated from Georgia Tech as a chemical engineer. By the 1950s he had become the Smelting Department’s assistant superintendent. He began at TCC as a chemist and worked at the firm’s Isabella works. Like many of the foremen’s class he had been active in his community’s civic life, as a member of the Epworth (Fannin County) Men’s Club, as head of the Morganton Association Baptist Training Union and as a member of the local school board. Also like many TCC supervisors he had benefitted from the company’s merit system. Querry’s excellent memory allowed oversight of purchasing, specification, construction, and repair details about the range of equipment used in the smelting process. A company chemist, Querry could never be a union man within Mine, Mill after that union’s secession from the AFL. Sources do not indicate whether he supported the union movement in the Copper Basin, but we can be assured that he represented the upper tier of TCC employee skills. He would have enjoyed a comfortable salary that allowed him a respectable place in the region’s middle class.155

George W. Grizzle also worked in the Copperhill smelter works; he did so as a repair leader and for over thirty years had mended conveyor belts and maintained the great ore roasters. The works’ high temperatures placed enormous stress on its metal structure and so demanded essential and regular maintenance of precision and timely efficiency. It was “hot, hard work.” Into his sixties Grizzle continued at his job, though in his later years he admitted that he did not “have quite as much wind as he did three decades ago.” Grizzle was raised on a farm. Prior to coming to TCC, he had worked with the Louisville & Nashville Railroad (the L&N). In fact he helped build the TCC Copperhill rail yards. After TCC hired him he worked first as a trammer—

155 “Smelting Expert” TC Topics, April 1954.
that jobs seems to have been a sort of vetting task for so many men—but was then recruited to
tap blast furnaces and eventually became a shift foreman.156

The heat of the work must have gotten to him and for a time Grizzle had returned to his family down the L & N from the Copper Basin to grow cotton at Talking Rock, Georgia. Desperation in the Depression brought him back to TCC. Work at TCC had allowed him to keep the family homestead but he could not afford to leave TCC for the risky world of cotton farming despite the farm’s “powerful call” away from the poisons and pain of working in the Basin. Once he had become a foreman Grizzle would have been ineligible to follow Mine, Mill in its migration from the AFL, and thus may have favored the Federation controlling local shops. Grizzle’s influence over other men’s lives at the company could have helped determine the potency of any union they joined.157

John Deal was another boy would come to the copper fields from the farm. He been a resident his entire life in the region and watched the great iron horses puffing their way through the valley from a bluff on his family’s farm. The trains he knew hauled freight and passengers to and from the Copper Basin day in and day out. From his home he could also see the great TCC emissions stack towering hundreds of feet over the valley, the firm’s monster acid plant and smelters looming just beyond. As an adult, Deal spent nearly his entire career of almost 50 years working with TCC locomotives. He loved his life on the rails so much that he married his wife in the open air beside the “camp train” that served as his lodgings. The same love of trains apparently extended to his son who for a while served on Deal’s own engine as a railroad fireman. Later the boy became an engineer for TCC in his own right—just like Pop. During the interwar years, the locomotives in the Basin were, like everywhere, those great steam behemoths.

156. “Repairman,” TC Topics, September, 1952 5
Life on the rails, Deal said, had seen radical technological change come with the diesel engines after WORLD WAR II. These new beasts had been initially resented as ending the traditional life ways and curtailing the responsibilities of engineers who had long prided themselves in being able to handle all the complex tasks necessary to keep steam engines running properly. The danger and adrenaline associated with the steam engines was a constant: “With the old steamer you had to keep the amount of water in the boiler just right.” If the water was too low the engine might blow up and if it was too high there wasn’t enough power for the engine. The thousands of gallons of water used every hour by the engines required constant vigilance and men like Deal lived anxious lives as a result.\footnote{TC Topics, ibid.}

Grizzle’s and Deal’s stories were not atypical of craftsmen who had come in from family farms and even after years of working for the copper companies, yearned to return to the quieter acres of the farm. The hard scrabble life of farming at once prepared them for the rigors of the industrial crafts, but the pay these men received kept alive hopes that they might one day return to the farm. Such accounts seem to be much rarer among miners in the Basin though. Most of these men appear to have come from families that had long ago left the farm or had little to no history of farming. Distinctions among the region’s industrial workers arise when we compare number of men employed in the mines relative to the number of men employed at other locations in the copper fields and plants. According to the census reports, a higher percentage of craftsmen chose to stay in Copperhill and McCaysville than in any of the other communities of the Basin. In 1920 the percentage of craftsmen to miners in the Twin-Cities was almost even at 26% and 21% of the total workforce respectively; these workforce percentages held true across the Basin, though it must be said that Ducktown and Isabella always had more miners than craftsmen, representing 50% and 32% of the villages’ total workforce respectively in 1920. 

the course of the 1920s, even though the absolute number of craftsmen increased, TCC craftsmen represented only about 21%. In mining by 1930 the number of miners living in the Basin constituted about 37% of the total workforce or a little over 600 men. None of these figures includes the scores of men who had moved outside the Copper Basin, but they do show certain things. Technology required craftsmen, but until huge production increases necessary for defense in the late 1930s, the number of craftsmen as a percentage of the population dropped. These men became concerned about their relative power in a workforce increasingly filled with miners—many of whom did not have the same level of skills. This fact helps us understand why loyalty to the AFL was stronger among the tradesmen of the smelter and acid plants and why Federation loyalty remained high in the Twin-Cities.159

Copper Basin industrial wages

It is difficult to determine wages across the whole spectrum of TCC jobs, but most measures suggest they were high for the region. Certainly that was the reputation lingering among descendants of TCC workers and management who were interviewed for this study. Conflicting information from TCC Mining Department reports suggests that some men worked five days a week and others worked six. National census reports on the Southeast’s nonferrous metal mines—the Copper Basin and North Carolina (Fontana) mines being the only significant nonferrous mines in the region during the interwar years—state that workers tended to have 5

day work-weeks. Later reports from the Depression era state that the same workers had shorter work weeks, but that many also received time-and-a-half owing to long shifts. Other sources claim however that workers often worked six days per week. The census officials themselves acknowledged that getting accurate work information from many employers was difficult. Moreover firms could very quickly adjust their production regimens or the size of their crews even in industries like extraction and smelting where the typical costs of renewed production tended to limit shutting down production completely. If workers at TCC worked a five-day, 48 hour week, total weekly wages would have been substantially higher. But even if Copper Basin workers worked six day weeks, their wages would have been still been above wages earned in the neighboring farming communities.\footnote{Beyond the aforementioned Mining Department reports, wage and work week information came from, \textit{Report on the Ducktown (Tennessee) Dynamiting Convictions, Lampell Report}, The National Committee for People’s Rights, New York, December 1941, 4.}

As national markets allowed, Houser lifted miners’ wages to $4.14 per miner, per man shift. The post-war slump had its effects though. By January of 1922, the average rate per man excluding staff was at $3.81 and for underground workers, just under $4.00 (or 39 cents/hour). Men who worked underground made about 25 cents more per hour than men above ground during the first decade of the Houser years. But the wage plan was strict and, as was the custom in many industries, men were not paid when they arrived on company property, but when they reached their job site. This convention remained till May 1937.\footnote{Wage information comes largely from combing extant TCC Mining Department records. Records from the pre-Houser days are thin, no doubt proof of the poor accounting during the Russian boom and the managerial accountability that improved upon the Adolph Lewisohn’s installation as TCC president in late 1916. Records examined here come from the years 1918-1923 currently housed at the Ducktown Basin Museum.}

In light of Houser’s scientific managerial approach and the kinds of supervision of workers he set in motion in the 1920s, it seems unlikely that he would have deviated from industry-wide work-week conventions. Given the demands of the Great War, workers may have
taken advantage of the region’s tight labor markets and temporarily secured a five day week; this seems especially likely during the Russian investment boom. By 1920 (at least at TCC), Mine, Mill locals had been able to shorten shifts from 10-12 hours to eight. Houser did have his influence on working regimens it seems. Five day work-weeks were not regularized by TCC till the New Deal era. When wages were converted to 2007 dollars a better measure of just how well TCC workers fared is revealed. Of particular note is the rise of wages for TCC men after the company signed labor contracts with Mine, Mill in 1919. The study will return to this subject in later chapters.
Wage calculations for TCC employees. The wage notes below apply to the Mining Department at TCC only. Wages for men at other TCC facilities are not available in the sources. Note that after 1922 wages are divided by above and below ground jobs. The wages do not include the salaries earned by TCC foremen and staff. Note too that wages earned in the Copper Basin generally went further than those earned in urban settings owing to a lower cost of living.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jan 1918</th>
<th>2007 equivalent**</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>per week/per hour</td>
<td>per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12 hour 5 day week</td>
<td>$15.77/ $ .26 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12 hour 6 week</td>
<td>$18.93/ $ .26 hr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dec 1919 (after Mine, Mill contract)

- “8 hour” 5 day week $21.70 / $.54 $573.56/ $858.00
- “8 hour” 6 day week $26.04/ $.54 688.27/ 1029.00

Jan 1922 (after 1921 Recession)

- “8 hour” 5 day week $19.08/$19.90 undgd* .49 hr $561.75/589.03 / $864.00
- “8 hour” 6 day week $22.90/$23.88 undgd .49 677.82/706.83 / 1036.00

Jan 1923

- “8 hour” 5 day week $20.70/$23.65 undgd .59/hr $565.50/646.09 / $851.00
- “8 hour” 6 day week $24.84/$28.38 undgd .59/hr 678.60/775.30 / 1022.00

*Underground workers

**Calculations made with an application on www.Measuringworth.com. The site compares values only through 2007. Each figure in the last column represents two values: 1) that of the “consumer bundle” or how far the wages would go in purchasing basic goods and services; and 2) “unskilled wages” in light of historical inflation. So-called “8 hour” shifts at TCC before 1937 did not include the travel time it took men to get to their job sites, which could be considerable in light of the depths of the mine or difficulty in traveling on foot or via company rail.
Unionization further considered: The AFL’s relationship with leftist, “western” radicalism

Geographical remoteness and great distances from the larger metals fields of the Far West and the Great Lakes region did not deter American Federation of Labor union activity in the Copper Basin following on the heels of the railroad. The presence of the AFL and tenacity of this union to see organized labor’s goals to empower metals workers and miners underscores national labor leaders’ belief that Ducktown was a critical part of the nation’s metals industry. This early AFL local was robust enough to coordinate labor actions across the Copper Basin metals firms beginning in late summer 1899 that made the pages of the *Atlanta Constitution.*\(^{162}\)

Reports state that the union was organized in part to respond not to poor pay, but to trouble with DSCI’s abusive use of a doctor. Just what that meant is unclear from these accounts, but Tennessee labor law suggests what angered DSCI men about the use of a doctor. A new Tennessee labor law passed that same year, 1899, “affected the use of ‘company doctors.’” The act made it unlawful for a company to require its employees to use a doctor hired by the company. Employees were to be allowed their own choice of doctors: “A company cannot withhold wages for payment of a company doctor without full consent of the employee.” The point of the law was to prevent company intimidation that would affect medical treatment in workers compensation cases. That said, enforcement of such laws was lax and even if officials found companies operating outside the law the penalty for violating these rules was a mere ten dollars.\(^{163}\)

It seems likely that DSCI, notorious for its oppressive exploitation of its workers, would have used the same kind of “company doctor” forbidden by the new legislation: a doctor who


\(^{163}\) Brown, *University of Tennessee Record,* Volume 48, No 6: 30.
possessed little real objectivity when it came to workers’ health, safety and condition. The company could use such a fellow to weed out troublesome, pro-union workers. The labor actions taken that late summer and fall by the new AFL local actually had two parts to it. The first part was settled when Dr. H.H. Rogers tendered his resignation to the DSC&I and the company posted notices that from that point forward no man would have to pay for any doctor’s care while at work. During the first strike, only eight non-union men in the company’s employ and at local mines came to work. For a time things appeared settled, but only to those who did not live in the Basin. The second labor outburst began just about a month later when the union claimed that it had not been properly recognized by either DSCI or Tennessee Copper and that the companies had begun firing union men. The AFL brotherhood then ordered a second strike and this time 500 men or more left work from both firms. This action left only 20 non-union men doing any work for the companies. Initially the copper companies began firing workers and claimed that they would hire only non-union men. This occasion brought the Polk County sheriff owing to “desperation being feared” among the men.164

The fears were well placed. National and regional accounts of the strikes underscored the region’s importance to the nation’s economy and the investor class. In light of the copper companies being the only firms in the region that could provide many men with a decent living, violence joined with frustration and what likely appeared economic terrorism was directed at any who opposed the union—not solely at the local business and political elite. The copper firms secured their own private mercenary army of about one hundred men to thwart the brigades of the AFL. The union posted its own guard around the companies’ yards to protect the property—to protect what many men likely saw as partly their property—and no doubt to harass any strike breakers. Said one New York Times report about the level of anger now common among the

164 Atlanta Constitution, 29 October 1899.
workers, “the miners are armed and guarding the mines, and refuse to allow the new men to enter.”

Conventional firearms were not the only weapons welded by angry union men. The New York Times reported that some of the strikers’ more potent weaponry came from stills in the surrounding hill-country. “The strikers have secured a lot of whisky and are becoming boisterous.” It would seem this “Mountain Dew” fortified the strikers’ spirits. Their strike lasted until just before Christmas. Ducktown Sulphur, Copper & Iron fired more strikers, discharging all union men from its Mary Mine. But at Copperhill, enough pressure was put on Tennessee Copper when hundreds of men left their jobs that the firm agreed to the AFL’s demand for a ten percent pay hike and an eight hour day. The union was not successful in getting DSC&I to agree to the new conditions despite persuading furnace bosses to quit and workers “occasionally show[ing] some violence.” One foreman even had his horse shot out from underneath him before the AFL and TCC came to an accord. Workers returned to their jobs unsatisfied at Isabella, but followed the armistice anyway. Just why they did return is unclear, but apparently the union decided that the TCC contingent of the union represented it bulk; those men must have had the deciding vote on whether to continue the strike or not.

Reports as to the make up of this late 19th Century AFL union are sketchy at best but what can be said of it was that at this time in the metals industry, they were likely to be skilled because the skills-set required of individual miners and metal workers was greater than would be required in the more highly mechanized age to follow. The precise number of men organized in the ranks of the union is unclear, but it is clear that hundreds of men participated in the Copper


\[^{166}\text{Atlanta Constitution, ibid., 21 December 1899}\]

\[^{167}\text{Atlanta Constitution, ibid.}\]
Basin actions. Records do not reveal just how they were organized or whether there existed membership exclusions. Based upon the available sources however, some speculation seems permissible. AFL brotherhoods typically organized craftsmen and only occasionally included the unskilled. At Ducktown, the union was not organized by job or task, nor by company, but only by region. It is likely that its ranks were significantly smaller than the total population of men employed in the metals industry of the Copper Basin. Employing traditional AFL strategies of having the craftsmen lead a strike probably increased the effectiveness with the firm’s management. As well, AFL unions did not participate in “indiscriminate” strikes and usually preferred collective bargaining; when a union local chose to strike it was owing to management’s intransigence. Just what happened to the Basin’s AFL local in the many years intervening before the Great War era is unclear too. It does not appear to have remained a vibrant local through the early 1910s although there was some strike activity centered once again at DSCI. Local accounts say “the union” initiated a short strike that “had been a good [strike] because no real work time was lost.”

Despite its organizing of strikes and earlier aggressive labor activity, the brotherhood as it was first organized in Ducktown and Isabella did not satisfy some men. Local division in the Basin mirrored the intensely bitter ideological feuds that arose in the more organized and politically radical copper fields of the American far west. One of the great mining internationals which formed in the labor battles fought on those fields was the Western Federation of Miners, founded in 1905—six years after the AFL had come to the Copper Basin. This organization had a tumultuous relationship with its adoptive parent, Gomper’s American Federation of Labor. Many within the WFM were sympathetic to communism or socialism or some variation of leftist

168 Kersten, Labor’s Home Front, 10-11; “DSCI Mary Mine Strike only one day,” 2.4.16, Polk County Republican
political ideologies and as such resented what they saw as an acquiescent leadership in the Federation too pro-capitalist in its leanings. These men considered the AFL’s embrace of volunteerism (aversion to government interference in labor relations) and pure and simple unionism (a focus on economic gains through wages versus challenges to the political system) as ideologies that were stultifying, suffocating, divisive, short-sighted, and weak-willed. To underscore the differences, the Federation refused to financially support some WFM actions. Resentful, the WFM’s rank-and-file chose to leave the AFL and joined the International Workers of the World and “the Wobblies” efforts to establish a brave new world of One Big Union.

The WFM remained in the IWW until 1908 when the miners’ union leadership decided to leave the Wobblies over a combination of jurisdictional disputes and ideological differences. By now there were at least a half-dozen or more unions competing for workers’ loyalty each with varying shades of ideological purpose ranging from the most conservative AFL craft unions to the radically communist IWW. Owing to AFL influence in the western copper fields, the WFM had been drifting toward a more craft focused and less industrial organization of its rank-and-file. This drift led to more jurisdictional confusion among the competing unions and no doubt confused members of the union’s rank-and-file. This change notwithstanding, in general WFM members held onto their varying degrees of leftist ideology. More important in determining their effectiveness was the view in the public’s mind that the WFM was still connected with the IWW—and with radical communism. This perspective held true for the public even after formal separation from the Wobblies and WFM re-affiliation with the AFL in 1908. The public’s perception and IWW leadership’s intention to raid union organizing meetings and wrestle control of the miners’ union away from pro-craftsmen organizers did much harm to the WFM. Jurisdictional competition between the IWW and WFM only increased during the Great War
boom. WFM membership rolls dwindled to perhaps 17,000 members because the union was unable to excite as many workers as did the craft unions and IWW organizers.\(^{169}\)

To distance itself from its IWW reputation, maintain its integrity, and vivify its ambitions, WFM leadership reorganized their union as the International Union of Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers (Mine, Mill). The leadership also abandoned the union’s mission to restructure society or to instigate The Revolution. The latter can be seen in the union’s 1916 preamble, which toned down its predecessor’s radical fixation on class struggle, placed more focus on improving working conditions and economic circumstance, and supported civic efforts that would uplift working people:

> We the workers in the metal industry are united for the purpose of increasing wages, shortening hours, and improving working conditions by removing or providing as far as may be, the dangers incident to the work, eliminating as far as possible, dust, smoke, gases, and poisonous fumes from the mine, mill and smelter: to prevent the imposition of excessive tasks; to aid all organization of working people in securing a larger measure of justice, and to labor for the enactment of legislation that will protect the life and limb of the workers, conserve their health, improve social conditions and promote the general well-being of the toilers.\(^{170}\)

In the Copper Basin, the contortions of its war economy in the wake of the Russian TNT plant explosion and the general topsy-turvy labor market of the late 1910s wrecked and frustrated industrial relations. The lives of enough workers had been tossed about so that many demanded action. For a short time the local economy had held great promise, then crashed, and then… stabilized only for a short while before it slumped again in the early 1920s. The economic ups and downs left working people vulnerable to their employers. Perhaps in such an atmosphere the AFL was not as aggressive as some men wanted. The Federation tended to falter at just such times and become too cozy with management. Its brotherhoods had done so time and again in the western non-ferrous mines and smelter works and many men no longer trusted the Federation to

\(^{169}\) Hildebrand and Mangum, ibid., 127 and 141-42; Jensen, Heritage of Conflict, 377

\(^{170}\) Jensen, ibid.
protect them before their employers. Certainly this had been true for men loyal to the WFM-now IUMMSW. 171

Whatever the reasons, the International Association of Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers came to the Copper Basin upon request by some of the workers by 1916. This must have happened just after the destruction of the Russian TNT plant and right on the heals of the International’s reorganization as Mine, Mill. Locals were established according to TCC reports at Copperhill and Ducktown, but not in Isabella. Whether these new Mine, Mill locals simply absorbed the old AFL union—that did have representatives from Isabella—sublimated the AFL, or merely competed with the jurisdiction of the earlier union is unclear. None of their activities were recorded in the local press beyond strikes initiated during the war itself. According to company records, Tennessee Copper Company did not formally recognize Mine, Mill until 1919; those same records say nothing about a separate AFL craft-based local. In light of the late-WFM now Mine, Mill’s drift toward increased influence of craftsmen in organizing the rank-and-file, absorption by Mine, Mill may not have been a difficult process. The company established contracts for a brief while with Mine, Mill before all union activity at the Copper Basin went dormant in the 1920s. There is no word if DSCI ever recognized this new union. It probably did not. In light of Barclay’s summary of DSCI management’s antagonistic relationship with labor, it’s doubtful that the London-owned company ever maintained a formal relationship with Mine, Mill or the more conservative AFL brotherhood. 172

It should be remembered that wide-spread and potent anti-union and anti-communist sentiment arose in the late teens. That fact makes it tempting to assert that the combined effects of the Red Scare and the post-war slump did in Mine, Mill for a time in the Copper Basin. Red

171 Kersten, ibid., 158.
172 Mitchell, “Labor Relations.”
Scare vitriol would have battered Mine, Mill in the Old Red Scar just as it might anywhere else. But scholars who chronicle the demise of Mine, Mill in the twenties do not blame Red Scare passions alone; instead they lay blame on internal union politics and a moribund leadership that was petty and still stuck in pre-war organizing methods and—this last point is particularly damning in light of Mine, Mill’s heritage—the International Union of Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers lost membership nationally to the IWW during the twenties. The Wobblies enjoyed very strong growth owing to their larger treasuries that could fund the far-flung organizing campaigns typically required for organizing workers in remote mining and smelting communities. There was no IWW component to the Copper Basin labor movement. Houser’s EMP would dominate labor at TCC at least until needs arose and opportunities for resurrection came in the Great Depression. As for DSCI workers, they had to endure the “inflexible” anti-union labor policy that kept wages “invariably below” that of TCC and terrific mismanagement which brought that firm low.  

173 Hildebrand and Mangum, ibid, 141; Barclay, ibid., 14-15.
Chapter 2 Living in the Copper Basin: Politics, class and culture 1910s-1940s

Reasoning exactly how seemingly disparate aspects of community life may affect one another to bring about social change has been a central concern of social scientists for over a century. Yet identifying exact cause and effect relationships that transform communities is often elusive owing to the complexities of social groups and the factors working within and without them. The purpose of this sector of the study is to assess general trends located in some key facets of the Copper Basin life that at once came about as a result of the advancing industrial economy and which affected industrial relations; subjects discussed here include local attitudes toward race that affected political partisanship, the development of the Biggs political dynasty, commercial life and changes in local infrastructure, the transformative effects from the advent of automobile age, campaigns to improve educational opportunities, the breadth and significance of popular diversions and leisure activities and the impact of religious communities.

It should be remembered that unlike generally sustainable industries such as forestry and farming, the extraction industry by its very nature will always end at any given site once the costs of extraction exceed profitability for a sustained period. Prohibitive costs may or may not precede exhaustion of the given region’s natural resource reserves. In the Copper Basin the arc of profitability in extracting and processing the region’s ferrous and non-ferrous ores lasted about a generation beyond the main period assessed in this study, but this was only owing to continuation of the kind of technological investments outlined thus far in the study that never dismissed how the new technologies reduced labor costs. That said the social and cultural life described in this chapter reflected the high points of community life in the region which could not be sustained, because over time fewer and fewer workers were need to get and process the
ore. In fact, there was really only one generation that experienced a broad application of the best opportunities the Copper Basin’s extraction industry economy could provide. The fragility and fleeting nature of that economy was likely not something that all workers or even management though of on a daily or perhaps even a yearly basis. Once the industrial concerns in the region had stabilized and began providing most workers and those in supportive industries a foundation for enjoying a generally vibrant working class and middle class life expectations that such a life ought to continue or should be expanded became the main concerns of working people. Behind alternately every striking worker’s picket or defensive conservative tradesman’s stance against “radicalism” were folk who wishes to maintain not only their industry liberty, but also their political liberties, familiar community demographics, community security, opportunities to enjoy leisure time with family and friends, and an ability to worship in a manner that fortified and sustained them in difficult times or allowed rejoicing for industrial abundance.

White racism, political trends and mountain partisanship

Whites in the Tri-state, and especially in the Copper Basin, worked hard to maintain the racial purity of their white, industrial republic. These efforts were in keeping with similar efforts affected throughout Appalachia. But, the anger and violence associated with the maintenance of white dominance in Polk County adds credence to broader claims that its citizens held a general aversion toward outsiders and rallied quickly to fend off perceived threats.\textsuperscript{174}

\textsuperscript{174} Studies supporting all this include, Larry J. Griffin, “Whiteness and Southern Identity in the Mountain and Lowland South,” 7-37 and Barbara Ellen Smith “De-Gradations of Whiteness: Appalachia and the Complexities of Race,” 38-58 both in the \textit{Journal of Appalachian Studies}, Volume 10, numbers 1 & 2: Spring/Fall 2004. Local reports regarding the Copper Basin’s reputation “for running off blacks” comes in part from interviews with local residents in local histories, Blue Ridge Kiwanis, \textit{Facts on Fannin}, 27.
After the elimination of most Cherokee, whites periodically took action when they believed their economic liberties were being threatened. Establishment of a black community employed in the railroad shops at Blue Ridge, Georgia, kept alive fears among negrophobic whites that black infiltration into local labor markets would continue as the industrial economy expanded deeper into the Southern Mountains. Several notorious, widely-reported, late 19th century incidents at Isabella and in the Ocoee River Gorge, just west of the Basin, demonstrated the region’s antagonism toward blacks. In each, whites perpetrated violent and sometimes lethal action against African-Americans. In some of these incidents whites claimed they were entitled to protect economic opportunities they believed to be threatened by employment of blacks. At other times the incidents stood out as sensational wanton acts of race hatred. The national importance of the region to the metals industry meant that sensational accounts of white harassment of blacks periodically made the pages of the *New York Times*. These reports also underscored the dangers that lurked in a mountain backcountry which still held elements of frontier instability. One such report described the fate of a young black mail carrier who was killed in an attack on his regular run from Parksville, Tennessee to Ducktown. “Contractor G.B. Carter of Cleveland, Tenn., thinks that the colored boy who drove the rig [had] been murdered and his body thrown over the rocks” reported *The New York Times*. The drive team fared no better than the boy; lashed together, the animals were forced into the raging Ocoee to drown.175

Resembling the rise in lynching that occurred during this same period, white violence in the Basin demonstrated an aggressive sense of white political and economic entitlement. Sometimes it was spontaneous, but more often it was premeditated. The intention by white vigilantes and politicos to maintain the color-line in public lead to an acceleration of attempts to

reverse any economic and political advance blacks had gained in the region since Reconstruction. White-supremacist activity built on Jim Crow legislation, but it was revived in the late Progressive Era under the Wilson Administration, an unapologetically white-supremacist political regime.  

In the Copper Basin, the intention of white workers continued to be what it had always been: keep the region lily-white, and protect white workers’ economic opportunities. Sources reveal other factors were at work on the region beyond racial solidarity: Political partisanship and the forces advancing the region’s industrial transformation intersected with battles for local control among elites. At the same time cultural conventions and new popular culture influences informed and transformed Copper Basin communities from the 1890s through the interwar years. 

An April 1894 episode provides a revealing, if disturbing example. Resentful whites organized to fight against what they considered an intolerable incursion by black workers into the local community. Charles Livingstone, builder of three miles of railroad spur for the local Pittsburg and Tennessee Copper Company, brought in fifty black men to Isabella Station “after waiting in vain two weeks for white labor to do [the rail-laying] work.” Livingston’s employment of the blacks sent local whites into a fury. Any substitution of blacks that white workers considered work reserved for them could not be tolerated; they threatened Livingston, making evident their intentions to do him harm. Ever-more-shrill threats at once underscored the builder’s vulnerability and wounded his pride. Livingston pledged to hire whites to assist in finishing the job. But before he could act an armed band of dozens of local whites went on a night time rampage through the PTCC camp, shooting it up and wrecking the place as they chased terrified blacks through creeks and out of the Basin. Determined to protect his managerial prerogative, himself, and his black workers (who by this time were fleeing for their

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176 Tindal, 145.
lives), Livingstone went to local police authorities to try and secure the services of the Polk County sheriff and constable. There he found little help even in spite of offering a $100 reward “for the arrest and conviction of all or any one of the party, especially the leader.” The offer of this impressive sum had little effect on local white solidarity and garnered no confessions.177

The tenor apparent in local historian R.E. Barclay’s later telling of this same incident underscored a tenacious racism still typical among local elites. And it suggested the story itself had become a popular local parable warning anyone who might risk the possible consequences by trespassing upon local race conventions. Additional details revealed by Barclay clarified two things: First, local white workers sometimes were unwilling to work under the conditions demanded by the new industrial regimen; and second, those workers would impede regional industrial advance if they believed that certain actions threatened the character of the local labor market. Apparently, the work Livingstone wanted completed was exceptionally difficult and consisted of laying rail on a winding grade. He decided to use more blacks than whites because even though he would pay both races the same wages, he calculated that blacks, being more economically desperate than local whites, “would trade-up their earnings at the company’s commissary.” This fact that blacks would be willing to barter instead of take direct cash wages meant it would take “but little cash to meet the payroll earnings of the colored employees.”178

Resentful whites apparently saw the terms of exchange as attack on white supremacy and local customs. That the matter occurred before the Basin’s economy expanded in World War I to include thousands of workers meant that job opportunities were still limited. Although there were craftsmen recruited from outside the Basin manual labor was one of the only ways local men could enter the new extraction and smelting economy of the Copper Basin. Replacing local

178 Barclay, ibid.
whites with imported black workers therefore bred intense resentment. Race integration of the Copper Basin could not be allowed to happen. The resulting offensive on the PTCC camp was of a character not seen in the region since the expulsion of the Cherokee. Though armed themselves, Livingston and his foreman could not halt the advance of fifty white workers who toted rifles and other weapons. In Barclay’s description:

“The invaders then moved forward and surrounded the camp [and] as they did so called out loudly for the now thoroughly frightened blacks to come out running and to keep running, and not to come back… the colored men were [now] itching for the open road… the camp … disgorging a mass of tumbling, fleeing men… the avalanche began rolling, guns began blazing…. The mass cascaded… from there it thinned… in the direction of the nearby Ocoee River. When the river was reached some began swimming, some wading, while through the pale darkness some of the more earnest fugitives [my emphasis] could be seen taking off in mighty [sic] effort at leaping entirely across the hundred foot wide stream.”

Barclay claimed not one of the blacks had been shot or injured, but this is difficult to confirm with certainty as whites controlled the town’s newspapers. It’s clear that the black men lost not only their jobs and whatever wages may have been owed to them, but any property left behind. Moreover, they would have had to make their way south through a notoriously unsympathetic Piedmont where they could easily have met with more white wrath. Barclay finished his retelling in the same manner a proud white mountaineer might recount tales where Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett or Old Hickory fought an Indian menace. The terrified blacks took off and “while they ran, they prayed…. The triumphant posse could see standing out against the skyline, the forms of Livingstone and his companions as they moved about on a hill above the railroad. A few sticks of light dynamite tossed up the hill cleared [the ridge and] the negroes [sic] did not return.”

179 Barclay, *ibid.*
Raw statistics reveal certain demographic characteristics of the Basin’s population. Some Copper Basin residents had mixed white and Cherokee heritage. Many more were descendants of Scots-Irish, Germans, Welsh, and English extraction-industry specialists of the first generation of industrial workers later joined by the Slavs, Poles, and Italians who came to build the industrial works at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. That said, the vast majority of Copper Basin people by the late 1800s, 98% in fact, were native-born local whites. Whites from nearby North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee assisted in refurbishing the older mines, digging them deeper into ever more complex systems and constructing the elaborate smelter and chemical plants. Many never left the area. Fewer than 300 people in all Polk County were African-American and of these, 144 were men. In Fannin County, there were even fewer black men, 76. The Basin itself had less than a half-dozen black residents. The only town near the Copper Basin that had any sizeable black population was Blue Ridge, Georgia wherein nearly 190 African-Americans lived. The adults in that community worked at the Louisville and Nashville rail yards and repair shop or as domestic help to white families from the North who came to nearby Mineral Springs for health reasons and built grand houses. Some of these wealthy white families had as many as five black servants per household. But as Mineral Springs fell into disuse and after L & N yards relocated to Etowah, Tennessee, blacks began to leave Fannin County. By the end of the 1950s just over a dozen blacks resided in all of Polk County and thirty years later only a handful remained in the old hub of Blue Ridge. By this point apparently no blacks lived in the Copper Basin.¹⁸¹

A few brave blacks lived in the Copper Basin during the interwar years despite the region’s negrophobia. Former Copperhill mayor Bob Barclay, Jr. recalled that a black couple

¹⁸¹ Barclay, The Copper Basin, 35; Facts on Fannin, p 35-36; United States 1910 and 1960 United States Census, Historical Census Browser, University of Virginia Library.
took care of the Cowanee Club on Smelter Hill and that a black man served as an assistant to the Basin’s Doctor Strauss. Barclay remembered that his father used to drive the family’s African-American domestic servant back and forth to her home in Blue Ridge; she did not usually spend the evenings in the Copper Basin. It was common knowledge, according to Ms. Edna Dickey, longtime African-American resident of Blue Ridge and former cook to another manager’s family of the Tennessee Copper Company, the Longworths, that the Copper Basin, Copperhill especially, was hostile to blacks. Black visitors would have met even more suspicion. Dickey had lived for a time on the third floor of the Longworth Smelter Hill mansion. When she first started working for the family she was afraid to go any further than the garbage can, but came to learn that people would be nice to her once they knew who she worked for. Still, the town’s reputation lingered and she knew not to risk too much presumption. Dickey claimed that there used to be a sign when one entered Copperhill that warned blacks to stay out. “They also said that if a train stopped as it went from Atlanta to Knoxville [on the old L & N line], they would pull the shades on the train windows while it stopped in Copperhill so folks wouldn’t see the colored people in the train.”

These stories reveal much about racial attitudes that affected labor relations in the region. As historian David Roediger has argued, white working men of the industrial era came to measure the integrity of their manliness and wage security as freedom from Native American (in these hills, Cherokee) and African competition. Over time, the general absence of non-whites in most of Appalachia fostered a conviction that the region had avoided racial problems more common to the cities and to the flatlands of the South. Scholars Larry Griffin and Barbara Ellen Smith have argued that Appalachian whiteness incorporated neo-Confederate attitudes forged over the generations in a white industrial republic constructed through the process of purging.

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182 Facts on Fannin, 37; and; interview with Bob Barclay Junior, Copperhill, Tennessee, 3 September 2000.
non-whites. White residents of Appalachia worked diligently to maintain the mythology of their innocence from perceived taint of colored labor or association.\textsuperscript{183}

The fact that minstrelsy, one of the most popular forms of American entertainment in the 19th century lingered well into the twentieth century as a popular, indeed, respectable entertainment style for Copper Basin folk suggests the people’s casual acceptance of a condescending white supremacist attitudes. A June 1933 solicitation for the public to partake in permissible mischief at “the Busy Men’s Bible Class” “black-faced comedy” beckoned from the front page of the \textit{Copperhill City Advance}. The First Baptist Church of nearby Elijay, Georgia sponsored the show, which featured well known “Copperhill talent” and would entertain all comers as “Mr. White and His Black Parade… buck and wing danced.” Enticed the ad: “those who are in the know, claim that this dark complected [sic] troupe is the most hilarious aggregation of black-faced fun makers that has ever shown throughout this section of the country.”\textsuperscript{184}

Minstrelsy, as has Roediger explained, served the American white working-class exceptionally well because it at once allowed for complete segregation of the races—only whites were allowed to portray the stereotyped black characters—but the masked faces allowed for a kind of anonymous tom-foolery and sexual energy usually forbidden on the stage in respectable theatres. Minstrelsy crowds could enjoy how the shows often spoofed elites and those who ridiculed such entertainment as low class. Empowerment based on social class and neighborhood identity grew among audience members. Most important, the stereotypes strengthened whites’ conceit that they were superior to blacks in morality and work ethic. Minstrelsy’s continued

\textsuperscript{183} Roediger, \textit{The Wages of Whiteness}, 8, 45, 97 and 99.
\textsuperscript{184} Roediger, \textit{ibid}, 96-97; and, “Busy Men’s Bible Class to Sponsor Black-Face Comedy,” \textit{Copper City Advance}, 6 June 1933.
popularity discredited any local racial innocence as pure myth. When paired with the history of actual violence, it suggested the local population’s commitment to maintain the white industrial mountain republic’s racial integrity.¹⁸⁵

Race fear informed the eternal partisan competition. The Republican Party, having long since abandoned any notion that it might uplift blacks, pulled hard to loosen a firmly rooted agrarian Democracy. The Grand Old Party only used blacks in the Appalachians when it found large concentrations of black voters beneficial to maintain office-holding. Typically, upcountry Republicans were just as racist as the Democrats—perhaps more so in light of the GOP’s defensiveness regarding its sponsorship of Reconstruction and its periodic use of the black electorate. Violence associated with anti-black attitudes, according to one scholar, was “quilt like” in the mountains. Mountain towns that had sizeable black populations attracted by boom economies saw violence whenever economic unpredictability aggravated white resentment of black labor. But the fear of itinerant blacks coming in and taking jobs spread beyond areas of sizable black populations. In short, whites wanted to make sure they would benefit economically and politically from any change entering the mountains. In some areas, white dominance quieted racial animosity as white labor kept its control over black labor. It appears however that despite the overwhelming presence of whites in the Copper Basin, paranoia of a return of black labor kept racist attitudes very strong.¹⁸⁶

Unlike other Southern regions in this period that saw strains of Progressivism arise from Populist Movement activism, Polk County retained a pattern of rivalry between the older

hegemonic interests. George Tindall referred to the older power structure as “county-seat ‘elites’”; this agrarian lot competed with an industrial power structure coordinated from the faraway Northeast or London. Certain progressive efforts did manifest in the region, in education and through what one might call “progressive” legal efforts mounted by agrarian coalitions who fought against the debilitating effects of the Copper Basin’s industry. But often the leaders of the legal attacks were fierce defenders of the economic status quo. Few measures beyond those for education reform and improvements to civic infrastructure taken by local leaders look very “progressive” in this study. Few grand movements by local politicians or civic leaders made any defense of the common man before the power of industry beyond union activity existed. Rather, the “better sort” of respectable, well-connected civic leaders that Tindall found leading Progressive efforts in other regions, Copper Basin elites sought to shut down the incorporation of “radical” organized labor or joined forces with big copper to manipulate elections.¹⁸⁷

Tri-State agrarian interests were not anti-industry per se; they understood the new industrial extraction economy filled holes that the old hard-scrabble farming could not. The coming of the railroad helped by tying the area to urban markets and led to both the introduction of better farming technology and access to export markets (for fruit, for instance). But the wave of the industrial expansion in the 1890s swept over the region on a scale never before seen. Boom towns popped up all along the railroad’s advance and brought scores of new immigrants to

¹⁸⁷ This study on the Copper Basin did not find evidence—beyond education reform and community infrastructure improvements—of the kind of general Progressivism George B. Tindall observed across the face of the Southern political class and its civic leadership for the first half of the twentieth century, though it did find similarities in the agrarian-based resistance by “county-seat ‘elites’” to the advance of the power of industry experienced in the Tri-State. It did not however find any evidence of the region of local people protesting the Copper Basin’s industrial connection to the munitions industry or how such an industry might imperial the lives of Southern farm boys at war. Tindall, 618. For Southern contributions to the Progressive movement, see chapter I, “In the House of Their Fathers”; for a discussion on Southern opposition to direct economic involvement with the warring powers during the Great War, see, “World War I: Southern Horizons Expand,” 40-41; 46-47.
the region; many had little interest in farming. The dynamism promised a lot of fast money, sometimes hard earned. All this was not without cost: The immense financial power that lay behind the industrial advance threatened to overwhelm agricultural interests altogether. To many residents faithful to their farming society, the careless, impersonal and debilitating manner of industrialization all had a Republican cast. Deforestation and crop destruction angered many Tri-State farmers and benefitted few.188

George Tindall observed the development of another set of resentments as industrialism advanced in the South during this period. “A widely prevalent rural-progressive opposition” developed against sectors in the new economy connected with “a scheme for the profit of munitions makers and financial interest.”189 Such an opposition no doubt existed somewhere in the Tri-State in light of the widely publicized ties of Copper Basin industrial firms to the munitions industry during the Great War era. But there is little evidence of objection to local industry’s connection with national defense in the Basin. Certainly none appeared in the local papers or it seems unlikely among the thousands who responded to the Great War boom. If anything, a proud regional patriotism contributed support for the Basin’s munitions contributions.190

Polk County’s voting record in national elections reflected local concerns about which party or candidate would best suit people’s interests in the new industrial order. Only a few

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188 This fact remained true even after TCC began producing agricultural organic chemicals. Barclay, *The Railroad Comes to Ducktown*, 172-184, *passim*.
189 Tindall, 40-41
190 Large local public processions underscored the region’s patriotism and industrial management understood how important it was to maintain these civic rituals by allowing them to be done on company property. TCC’s company magazine included photos of such patriotic parade marching on Smelter Hill. Said the caption to “From an Old Album: Armistice Day, 1923,” the “name of the photographer is unknown, but one thing that is known is that some long-time TCC employees will remember the parade and the marchers.” *TC Topics*, October 1953, 7. Coverage of huge Basin munitions investment contracts always made the pages of the *Atlanta Constitution*; see for instance, “Russians to Spend Millions in South,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 February, 1916. Chapter four will discuss patriotic industrial work in more detail.
elections looked anything like a landslide. In general, from the late 19th through the mid-20th century, the Democrats upheld their party’s regional support for agrarian interests and the Republicans were known as the party of copper and its allies. Both fought for the loyalties of working people. The 1890 election returns show the railroad’s mark on Polk County’s reinvigorated industrial east. Republicans Harrison, McKinley, Roosevelt, and Taft captured voter loyalty through 1908 and Republicans would have won again in 1912 had not the GOP’s vote been split by the advent of Teddy’s Bull Moose Party and Wilson’s Southern heritage. But Wilson never appeared to have the Copper Basin vote despite his Southern ties. The string of New Era Republicans from Harding to Hoover won the electorate’s favor though in 1924 Davis of the Democrats almost defeated the Yankee Coolidge. Farming was already troubled by the middle twenties and the up and downs of the copper markets may have also had some effects here. The decline of unionism in the face of TCC General Manager J.N. Houser’s renovations at Tennessee Copper during this period may have pushed some votes toward the more solidly pro-labor stance of the national Democrats.  

These statistics are important when reflecting on national contests, but it’s important to place the partisanship of the Copper Basin and Tri-State within the context of the Southern Mountains and look more closely at how local contests actually affected the citizenry. East Tennessee north of Polk had been a Republican stronghold since the 1860s and had remained so. Democrats swept federal offices in the center and west of Tennessee owing to old Confederate loyalties. East Tennesseans regularly placed Republicans in position of local government control. The arrangement suited both parties because the political power in each supported low taxes and conservative government, with little regulation on industrial development.

191 “Polk Voter and Presidential Preference,” Polk County Scrapbook, 28
192 Key, ibid.
Republicans eventually came to control some North Georgia regions but typically in Georgia the agrarian power, strengthened by Tom Watson-inspired populism (that included his later negrophobic appeals), remained Democratic and overwhelmed the politics of the towns, even the industrial towns in some North Georgia counties. The county unit-system also “deflat[ed] the vote of the larger counties and balloon[ed] the influence” of the small ones. Resistance to Democratic control was weak in much of the state as a result.193

But in Fannin County and Polk County industrial activity had always had kept the Republicans competitive. The Copper Basin made this Tri-state region an odd man out politically. Before the war, Polk County had no slavery of any consequence, thus limiting the number of blacks coming to the area. Fannin had some slavery, but not in its northern extreme within the Copper Basin. Since the Copper Basin was an important antebellum metals center, locals wanted to remain connected with their Southern markets and thus stayed loyal to the South. During the Civil War, the Confederacy relied upon the Copper Basin’s metals industry; local people held true to the CSA government and remained Democratic. After the Union victory, the return of industrial development brought Republicans back to power in the Copper Basin while tarnish on the Democratic brand temporarily removed them. Because of the surrounding region’s agrarian economy, Democratic (that is, Conservative)-Republican competition remained fierce. In gubernatorial elections from 1896 onward Polk went Republican and remained so until the Great Depression.

193 Key, 117-120. The unit vote is explained in Numan V. Barley, From Thurmond to Wallace: Political Tendencies in Georgia, 1948-1968 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1970), 14-15. “Each county was allotted tow unit votes for each member that it elected to the Georgia House. All counties chose at least one representative to the lower house… and the more populous counties elected either two or three members. Consequently, the 121 least populous counties cast two unit votes each (242); the middle 30 counties, 120 votes; and the top eight counties, only 48 votes.”
Partisan competition increased in Fannin County, revealing the new power of copper in the Tri-State. Though Fannin had voted Democratic in the gubernatorial election of 1900, this dominance did not last long. In the 1910 election, “Big Copper Men Frederick Lewisohn [sic—brother of Adolf Lewisohn and one of TCC’s owners] and C.W. Renwick” used their money and local industrial influence to bring about a Republican “revolution” to the region, casting Democrats out of nearly every post from county coroner, through tax collector, school superintendent, and on up to state representative. The Fannin victory for copper was near total. National and regional papers carried news of the sweep. Republicans ousted Democratic officials in Fannin who had in some cases held office for twenty years and more. “Only the state senator remained in his seat,” noted one report on the sweep from the *Atlanta Constitution*.\(^{194}\) Here was a story of American electioneering fascinating in and of itself for the level upon level of alleged—and likely genuine—incidents of political corruption. The *Constitution* alleged that bribery, intimidation, and vote buying were part of the Lewisohn “revolution.” Political change provoked resentful Democratic officials to launch an investigation which flung indictments hither and yon. The list of the Republican guilty, according to a besmirched and stinging Democracy, included the leading business and professional men of this section. Frederick Lewisohn had apparently been watching local elections for some time and wanted to end Democratic resistance to his industrial aspirations. He was also keen on curbing continued legal annoyances and stopping hostile court attention to TCC emissions. Democratic farmers lay behind most of the suits and Democratic politicos championed the interests of local farmers in very public ways to benefit themselves. The “smoke” suits had already forced TCC and Ducktown Sulphur Copper & Iron to adopt expensive, more efficient, somewhat cleaner technology, but it’s clear from the reports that the Lewisohns simply wanted more industry-

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\(^{194}\) “Fannin Stirred by the Victory of Republicans,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 November 1910
friendly men in local government. The investigation’s final report concluded that Frederick Lewisohn and his allies had been engineering elections in Polk County for these reasons and charged that they wanted to expand the sway of the copper firms south.¹⁹⁵

Unnamed witness accounts given before a grand jury in Fannin included one former loyalist to the Democrats. This man said flatly that had it not been for three ten dollar bills he would have voted as he always had, for the Democratic Party. His account underscored the new power of copper as it changed the common-man’s fate in the Tri-State. Having saddled up a mule and started his journey to the polling place the witness recounted he ran into an old pal who tried to get him to vote Republican. When persuasion failed to change his vote, his proselytizing friend had pulled out a roll of bills and remarked, “how about that note you owe the bank over there in Copperhill? Are you ready to pay it when it falls due next week?” Shocked that anyone had “the slightest idea [he] owed the bank a dollar,” the man was further stunned when his GOP-sympathetic pal peeled off several bills and said he would pay the Copperhill note if our man would not vote at all. “I didn’t vote, and that note is paid.”¹⁹⁶

Some “paying apples” also made sweet rounds too in that season’s harvest of the local electorate. An Atlanta Constitution report on the bribery employed by local Republicans to influence the election began routinely enough for such accounts: “By no means was the election a cheap one; on the day of the election, money was on evidence at every poll.”¹⁹⁷ But the paper went on to reveal the innovative nature of the Republicans’ reliance on the region’s well known orchards. Word went out to possible attendees of a mass meeting where there would be discussion about some “mighty good, juicy apple[s]” on the GOP ticket. Partisans distributed

¹⁹⁵ Atlanta Constitution, ibid.
¹⁹⁶ Atlanta Constitution, ibid.
¹⁹⁷ Ibid.
Republican election tickets and directed voters to their payoff. “After you vote that ticket, eat that apple!” Each apple contained a $5 bill.\textsuperscript{198}

Another witness to this same election claimed,

“A worker [for the Republicans] would stop the voter en route to the booth and hand him a ticket, telling him to vote that ticket and then go to his home and ask his wife for a note to some one. The voter would vote and then call at the home indicated and be handed a sealed envelope. In that envelope the man who had cast the vote indicated on the ticket would always find a piece of money.”\textsuperscript{199}

Despite such obvious welding of well-heeled Republican influence, the rural vote still mattered just enough in Polk and Fannin Counties to keep contests competitive. Democratic-leaning county seat power refused to disappear completely in the wake of industrial intimidation. While Republican weight mattered a lot in the Copper Basin, to its west and at the county seat of Benton, agrarian power smoldered, despite Lewisohn influence. The uncertain economy after the Great War eroded the Republican influence held during the boom and within a year of the Great Depression’s onset, the Democrats regained control of Polk County, sweeping Polk County offices “with good majorities.”\textsuperscript{200}

**The Biggs Dynasty: vassals of the copper companies**

Persistent influence of Democrats in North Georgia and Polk County during the twenties reflected a rejection of the industrial economy it is important to remember that the Democratic Party dominating Southern 19\textsuperscript{th} Century post-bellum agricultural towns was also the party of New South boosterism. While party leaders could and would periodically denounce the power of unbridled capitalism to co-opt certain Populist strains in the electorate, they were just as likely to ally with industrial interests if it aided their political agenda. This kind of periodic shifting of


\textsuperscript{199} *Atlanta Constitution*, *Ibid*.

\textsuperscript{200} “Democrats Win in Polk County,” *Polk County News*, 6 November 1930.
support for competing camps appears to have been employed by the Biggs political dynasty that came to rule Polk County from the 1930s to the late 1940s. The election of 1930 marked a reinvigoration of the family’s political clout that had begun in the early 1900s and which by the end of World War II saw the Biggs hold “virtual total control” over Democratic Party affairs. Biggs men, led by patriarch Burch E. (“B.E.”) Biggs, Sr., and carried on by sons Broughton and Burch, controlled Polk’s Democratic Party machinery through the offices of police chief and sheriff. Old man B. E Biggs was elected sheriff seven times and his sons themselves served terms between those of their father. B.E. Biggs maintained power even while out of office, and served as the local state representative to the Democratic National Convention. Over the years there seemed always to be a Biggs man in charge sitting on sundry boards and commissions, such as the county’s election commission and rationing board during WORLD WAR II. Control of local police authority gave the family an especially powerful position from which it could maintain its influence over county affairs by navigating between the set powers at the county seat and the municipality’s industrial east. But Biggs political influence did not end at the county line. The elder Burch Biggs also served as the Tennessee Senate’s sergeant-at-arms from 1939-1941, during which time the senate gave him a medal for being “All-American Sheriff Number One.”

The Biggs family would be dislodged only after the concerted efforts of the local Good Government League that arose after WORLD WAR II. Led by none other than Robert E.
Barclay himself, who stood as chairman of the League from 1946-1957, it was he who reasserted Republican partisan control over the county. He argued that the Biggs’ rule over Polk had become a threat to the greater interests of the community. Some of this resentment is difficult to understand in light of the Biggs’ determined efforts to maintain an industrial peace in the region as will be discussed below. But it may simply have been the style with which Biggs men held control over the region. Thousands would attend rallies of the Democrats while the Biggs were in power. By the early 1940s the Biggs faction of Democrats could pull in state congressmen, senators, commissioners, even the governor for barbeque and speechifying, including a 1942 local glad-handing affair considered “the most distinguished political group ever to visit Polk County” by the local press. That Polk County’s Democratic Party leaders were hardly champions for the industrial working class makes the competition between the Biggs crowd and Barclay’s efforts that much more difficult to decipher. Again, it may have been a difference of opinion about form and leadership style rather than substance.

Biggs family alliances with the Copper Basin industry began early in the century. During the first years of the smoke litigation suits against the copper concerns, Ducktown, Sulphur, Copper & Iron hired T. T. Biggs to serve on a committee charged with surveying emissions’ effects on local agriculture. R.E. Barclay later derided the repot as being a most transparent ploy for the copper company. The circumstance was one in which Biggs men took advantage of over

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202 “Democrats Plan Barbecue July 18” Copper City Advance, 7.17.1942; see also, “Burch E. Biggs Sr.” New York Times obituary, 13 September 1954; and “Democrats Make Gains in Nation” and “Democrats Win in Polk County,” Polk County News 6 November 1930; “Broughton Biggs re-elected Sheriff of Polk County: Entire Democratic Ticket Elected,” Polk County News, 4 August 1938; “Democrats to Meet in Convention Saturday” Copper City Advance, 5.6.1938; “Democrats Win All Offices in County” Copper City Advance, 8.12.1938; “Judge hicks Speaks to Ducktown Club: Law and Order Program Given Tuesday Night” (Biggs was in attendance as a “special guest” of the community, Copper City Advance, 5.19.1939; “150 years of elected officials” Polk County Scrapbook, Polk County Publishing, c. 1989, 27; and, Robert E. Barclay, The Railroad Comes to Ducktown, Knoxville, Cole Print. & Thesis Svc., Inc., 1973, preface.
the years, but which also tended to heighten tensions between the farming and industrial communities.203

In office, Biggs men wielded a tough law-and-order approach popular with many Polk citizens who wanted a check on the rougher elements in the industrial workforce. Biggs support was apparently supported some few folk living in the mining towns who were fearful of miner violence and attraction to radicalism. The respectability of order was seductive. To keep their rule secure, a Biggs could usually be found at public assemblies where dignitaries emphasized the benefits of education lest the young men and women of the Copper Basin become juvenile delinquents. Local reports showed that while routine deployments of the law by the Biggs to shut down illegal stills riled only the inconvenienced, more questionable actions taken by a Biggs dominated sheriff’s department did upset citizens. In several cases deputies were accused of killing unarmed citizens. In one such case during 1936 after the killing of a North Carolina contractor at Isabella in controversial circumstances, the wife of the dead man sued Burch Biggs and two of his deputies for $100,000 in damages. Though acquitted in the criminal case, there was apparently enough evidence in the hands of the widow’s attorneys to allow for a case of conspiracy to be brought against Biggs. The case was dismissed but not until a federal judge directed the jury to do so under circumstances that some locals suspected as all too convenient for Biggs. The case underscored for many local people that Biggs men would not hesitate to do what it took to uphold the sheriff’s authority and protect his interests even if that meant manipulating the legal system.204

203Barclay, The Copper Basin, 76.
204“Polk’s Sheriff Gets Operators At Still” Copper City Advance, 5.5.1933; “George Ledford is killed at Old Fort: Deputy E.D. Price is Jailed on Charge of Murder” Copper City Advance, 3.19.1937; “Court Clears Birch Biggs in McFadden Death Lawsuit,” Polk County News, 3 February 1938.
The Biggs faction inflamed local passions and garnered national notoriety when it commenced “a bold and uncompromising fight against repeal of the poll tax.” The dynasty had held a lock on controlling this tax. During the Depression and through the raucous years of labor unrest in the 1930s, the sheriff’s office helped maintain the peace by intimidating outspoken miners and farmers through manipulation of the poll tax. Apparently until midway through the Second World War, Barclay and other municipal leaders had supported Biggs in these efforts for a time because Tennessee Copper Company benefitted. But after the war Broughton Biggs’ nearly total control of the local party politics bred resentment. To many returning veterans and a collection of “already embittered Copper Basin Republicans” the Biggs dynasty appeared to stiffle change. A move to oust the Biggs had grown to a movement by 1946. By the end of the decade it was over and the Biggs clan had been ousted, though national reports show that vitriolic and sometimes lethal partisan rivalry continued in Polk County well into the 1950s.205

Community and Town Life in the Copper Basin

Though actually filled with low rising ridges, most of the Copper Basin does not appear like a valley in the traditional sense. The notoriously denuded character of the Copper Basin from 1900 through the mid-twentieth century distorted perceptions of distance and height. Photos from the era reveal the once treeless terrain exaggerated the real height of the towns’ adjacent hills. Today, about a quarter mile down the Ocoee from the center of the twin cities of McCaysville/Copperhill sit the remains of the once massive Tennessee Copper Company plant. Through the mid twentieth century the whole TCC complex and its rail yards along the Ocoee resembled an ominous, impenetrable, rusting and snarling dragon’s lair, an image that rang

205 “Poll Tax Hearing Set For April 27” Copper City Advance, 4.23.1943 See Lillard’s full chronicle of the Polk County violence and the efforts of the Barclay-led Good Government League into the 1960s, The History of Polk County, 197-205, passim.
especially true for locals when the company dumped its hot slag at dusk from giant belching iron buckets and glowing ooze flowed down perimeter bulwarks. Excursions to view the molten rivers were popular among locals.206

Life in this mineral upcountry of the Tri-state was an especially rough one in the early years following the advance of the railroad up from Blue Ridge. An explosion of population in the Copper Basin never occurred because the copper concerns of the 1900s through the mid-1910s didn’t need a large workforce. Furthermore, rival upcountry towns all had claims of future bustle of their own. Boosterism for the new towns was regular, rampant and sometimes downright silly from our perspective. Claims by some enterprising folk that sulfur toxins suspended in the Copper Basin air, the “sulfurettes,” initially led to Ducktown being promoted as a health resort. However, the truth about those emissions and the consequence of other toxic wastes from local industry could not have been farther removed from the fantastic claims that the sulfurettes benefitted one’s health. The region’s industrial emissions took an enormous toll on the local people. Young or old routinely fell ill and upon each fell the most dangerous maladies, including silicosis, and a host of diseases not even recognized in the early 1900s. Due to a combination of ignorance, a lack of resources, and analytical technology it was not until the last years of the twentieth century that locals got extensive studies conducted on the long term consequences of living in the Basin.207

Other booster claims and billboards along greener stretches of the rail routes lured green immigrants as well as many on the make who came to take advantage of the frontier town

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207 Barclay, The Railroad Comes to Ducktown, 172-177, passim; and, primary sources reprinted in, The Copper Basin, 102-03. More on this subject will appear in the last chapter of this study, but for now it is enough to say that the list on illnesses suffered by residents included much more than maladies than miners’ silicosis. See for instance, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, “Health Consultation: Copper Mining District, Copperhill, Polk County, Tennessee, EPA Facility ID: TN0001890839,” Atlanta, Georgia, 24 May 2005.
conditions in the Basin. Some local claims among the mineral towns were actually based on substantiated economic fact. Blue Ridge, Georgia, for instance had established itself as an upcountry railroad hub and repair works and nearby Tate’s marble quarries held enough of the sparkly pink rock to satisfy regional needs for “the next 30 generations.” But many a way-station town’s dreams of being the next “Queen City” of the South faded as their inhabitants dwindled away to some of the few hubs that could sustain themselves.\textsuperscript{208}

The Copper Basin itself had seen a number of “towns”—hamlets really, a station, a string of workers quarters, a post-office that served as a town center—but many of these vanished with the fortunes of failed companies. Even among the surviving burgs, pictures show these “crude little mining village[s]” well into the 1920s resemble the quintessential wild west towns: raw wooden, generally unpainted, structures scattered willy-nilly across what had perhaps been a farm or Indian path, covered with dust, collections of the rougher sorts of men underemployed, or worn-weary and impatient after 10-12 hours in the smelters or dark-to-dark shifts in the mines, whisky-riled, hanging out in the men’s haunts of barbershops, pool halls, fearing little retribution given the lack of an organized police force. Violence and robbery had in fact, spurred tiny McCaysville when it had just barely become a settlement, to incorporate as early as 1904. Just across the state line the wealthier set in Copperhill kept incorporation at bay to avoid the costs and responsibilities incorporation would require, but their resistance had a price: Copperhill endured public menaces typical of towns with sizeable transient populations.\textsuperscript{209}

Street fights were regular especially on paydays. In the dry South where barrooms were a rarity, imbibing of locally distilled “white lightning” served men’s indulgence. According to

\textsuperscript{208} Barclay, \textit{The Copper Basin}, ibid. Full discussion of these effects lay in chapter five.
folks to who grew up in neighborhoods like Buzzards’ Roost, the amount of drinking among the miners—especially on weekends after payday—forced many mothers to keep the kids away from drinking men-folk and forced many a wife to find a husband before all the family’s money went to mountain dew.210

Travel remained laborious for most Copper Basin folk despite the coming of the rails and the slow invasion of the automobile. Traveling by horseback or wagon still dominated local commercial and industrial traffic into the Great War era. And while things changed in the interwar years with increases in car-ownership regional parochialism did not disappear. Few roads were paved. Even Main Streets around this hilly district alternated between sloppy quagmires, torrents, and choking dustbins. For most folk, walking remained the standard mode of transit well into the forties and was a popular way to go to various itinerant diversions, football and baseball games, shopping at company stores or the retail strip of downtown Copperhill, and of course, to church each Sunday. Prior to the Second World War, Bob Barclay, Jr. remembered that animals roamed freely about eating the refuse tossed from homes and stores and that kids used to chase them around the neighborhoods. Between Copperhill and McCaysville, no major bridge crossed the Ocoee/Toccoa till the 1910s and even that new bridge was designed primarily for wagons, not automobiles or heavier trucks. For years Basinites had to travel over thirty-five miles through the Ocoee River Gorge and then north, to a regular court at Benton, Tennessee along what was known as the Old Copper Road, some of which is now Route 64—but most of this route remained unpaved through the interwar years. Until the state legislature saw fit to allow for a regular court at Ducktown, Benton’s economy relied heavily on the inconvenience of those who had to appear before a judge—someone had to feed and house these people while they dealt with the court. The new Ducktown court slashed Benton’s

210 Interview with Dawna Standridge, 15 October 2000.
monopoly and precipitated increased western county enmity toward the Copper Basin that festered as the century wore on.\textsuperscript{211}

Interestingly, the ability to use local river power brought utility companies early to both Copperhill and McCaysville. The sister towns obtained phone service by 1900, a local electric company by 1906, and water and sewage systems by 1917. New Era projects improved the infrastructure of Copperhill: The city managed to finish paving its streets by 1929 and a stronger concrete span crossed the river to McCaysville by the mid 1930s. Advances such as these instilled pride in many locals but according to R.E. Barclay, well into the century the best of the Basin’s burgs still resembled a “hastily drawn-up mining town” where flood and fire slowed in-migration; the isolated mining villages of Ducktown and Isabella had even less development, let alone much the smaller hamlets and neighborhoods of New Town, Coletown, Belltown, Chancey Town, Postelle, Ducktown Station, Reesetown, Newton, McGeetown, McAllister Hill, and Buzzards Roost.\textsuperscript{212}

The denuded local hills contributed to devastating flooding along the Ocoee, the worst being in 1906—most of the Twin Cities went underwater. Before townspeople could fully rebound from that disaster a city-wide fire in December 1910 at Copperhill turned to ashes nearly all the major structures and left most of the population homeless and exposed. Aid in materials and supplies came instantly from The Tennessee Copper Company, improving the company’s goodwill with the people, but rebuilding still took years. Had it not been for the construction of a dam up river in Blue Ridge in the early 1930s, the Ocoee would have devastated the Twin Cities again. As it was, even with the new dam, local boy scouts and

\textsuperscript{211} Barclay, \textit{The Copper Basin}, 104-107; Polk County Board of Education minutes, funding dispute notes; interviews with Bob Barclay, Jr., 9 March 2000; Lorin Myers, 10 October 2000; Polly Morgan 7 October 2000; and, Michael Morgan, 15 October 2000.
\textsuperscript{212} Barclay, ibid.
townspeople had to pitch in to prevent an overflowing Ocoee from destroying the towns in the rainy summer of 1938. Downstream, that same deluge over-washed the great Parksville Dam by six feet, flooding the farm valleys beyond.  

By 1920, the total population of Fannin County, Georgia and Polk County, Tennessee, 26,346 was actually slightly less than it had been in 1910 despite the Great War’s boom. One might attribute this stagnation as collateral damage from the Spanish Flu pandemic, but reports show that only a small percentage of local people died from flu—though Polk closed its schools. A more likely reason was the tenacious, frontier character of the region where volatility in copper markets during the post war economy almost shut down national copper markets, severely affecting the local labor markets and dashing many men’s dreams no doubt born of fantastic booster claims. The truth was that the region’s greatest proportional influx of population had followed the introduction of the railroad. Memories of busts made men cautious and appears to have limited the influx of workers even during the boom times of the World Wars. Government contracts garnered by the copper concerns and additional opportunities supplied through regional TVA and CCC increased regional work opportunities in the 1930s. The need for professionals expanded throughout this period, especially in areas of education and various kinds of public work. By 1930, the number of non-industrial jobs in the Copper Basin rose to over 478 from just 239 ten years before. When fortune returned generally in the late thirties (as copper use increased for reasons later explained), the previous decade’s hardship had already forced considerable contraction in industrial opportunities. As a result the population had decreased 959 persons in the 1930s. Between 1900 and 1950 the population of Polk and Fannin counties rose by less than seven thousand. This occurred in spite of the fact that families

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213 Barclay, ibid.; and, “Heavy Rains Send River Out of Banks: Total of 11 inches of Rain Falls here last Week,” Copper City Advance, 7.29.1938.
of the lower working class (where men held jobs recorded by census takers as “miner,” “laborer,” and “odd jobs [man]”) typically had between four and six children.\textsuperscript{214}

Other demographic characteristics distinguished the region. The large number of children in these families diminished the general age of the population; in both counties over fifty percent of the population was less than twenty years of age during the interwar years. Both Polk and Fannin counties had slightly more men than women, reflecting the copper industry’s need for highly skilled workers. This was clear in the Copperhill and McCaysville reports which showed a considerable number of single men living in boarding houses. More than a third of the adult male population worked in the skilled crafts connected with the extraction industries and another or within the professional and merchant communities.\textsuperscript{215}

Changes in the demographics of the local labor force provide some insight into local labor relations. Census reports can produce conflicting information, but figures captured trends in occupation change among Copper Basin workers for the first half of the interwar years. While certain figures suggest that the nature of work remained steady, examination of specific communities revealed considerable change in occupations and increased community specialization through the twenties and thirties. In 1920, of the 810 local industrial workers recorded by census workers, the percentage of those who lived in McCaysville, Copperhill, Ducktown, and Isabella and employed in the mines, smelters, and local railroads stood at 70% or 571 workers; the balance of the workforce worked in supportive enterprises with just 4% of these persons being employed in professional and public work. In 1930, even though the number


of persons in the work force had risen by 180% to just over 1481 persons, the percentage of persons working at the Copper Basin’s industrial works dipped slightly to 67.5%. There was a slight increase in the number of persons working at professional or public jobs to 6.5%, but the total number of persons working in such areas had risen to over one hundred. This change reflected a general increase during the twenties for professional work such as doctors and dentists, but also for work in education and new utilities.\footnote{216}

A comparison of figures by community reveals considerable differences that underscore the changing natures of the towns and the expansion of the professional and non-industrial work available in the Twin-Cites of McCaysville and Copperhill. The table below provides a quick comparison of the numbers.

\textit{Copper Basin job-types 1920 and 1930 from U.S. Census reports}\footnote{217}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1920 McCaysville</th>
<th>Copperhill</th>
<th>Ducktown</th>
<th>Isabella</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>84/ 61%</td>
<td>175/ 67%</td>
<td>101/ 84%</td>
<td>211/ 73%</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profess/public</td>
<td>2/ .01%</td>
<td>18/ 6%</td>
<td>9/ 7%</td>
<td>2/ .07%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>52/ 38%</td>
<td>70/ 27%</td>
<td>11/ 9%</td>
<td>75/ 27%</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>138/ 100%</td>
<td>263/ 100%</td>
<td>121/ 100%</td>
<td>288/ 100%</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1930 McCaysville</th>
<th>Copperhill</th>
<th>Ducktown</th>
<th>Isabella</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>264/ 57%</td>
<td>162/ 49%</td>
<td>298/ 82%</td>
<td>279/ 87%</td>
<td>1003</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profess/public</td>
<td>23/ 5%</td>
<td>38/ 11%</td>
<td>35/ 9.5%</td>
<td>5/ 2%</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>178/ 38%</td>
<td>132/ 40%</td>
<td>32/ 8.5%</td>
<td>35/ 11%</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>465/ 100%</td>
<td>332/ 100%</td>
<td>365/ 100%</td>
<td>319/ 100%</td>
<td>1481</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1920, the percentage of total industrial workers living in McCaysville and Copperhill was between 61-67%; by 1930 these percentages had dropped to 57% and 49% respectively. Meanwhile in Ducktown and Isabella the percentage of industrial workers remained high and either steady (Ducktown, 82%) or rising substantially; at Isabella, the percentage of total

\footnote{216}{United States Census 1920 and 1930, ibid.}
\footnote{217}{United States Census 1920 and 1930, ibid.}
industrial workers rose from 73% to 87% of the employed. As a consequence of the increased significance in the mining burgs’ industrial workforce the overall percentage of persons in supportive enterprise decreased. This was most apparent in Isabella. There, even though the number of professionals or persons doing public work increased by a factor of two, the overall percentage of the workforce in professional or public work dropped to below two percent. In Ducktown the percentage of the workforce in professional and public work dipped slightly though the number of actual workers tripled.218

These figures underscore that the overwhelming majority of workers in the mining burgs would have been sensitive to changes in industrial policy, much more so than in Copperhill and McCaysville which both had considerably more diversified workforces and thus more stable economic structure. While categorization of job-type changed in census reporting differed from 1920 to 1930 with the latter being more specific, a comparison of the non-industrial jobs underscores the broader diversity in the workforce in the Twin-Cities. For example Isabella, the total number of different categories of non-industrial jobs increased from 7 to 15 by 1930; in Ducktown similar figures show that the number of different non-industrial job-types doubled to almost 20 occupation types.219

In both McCaysville and Copperhill, the number of non-industrial job-types by 1930 had increased as well, but had been twice as varied as in the mining burgs already reaching 43 and 46 respectively; the broader array included all those occupations found in the mining burgs plus a collection of vocations typical for small prosperous industrial towns of the era. But the list also

218 United States Census 1920 and 1930, ibid
219 Census reports show that non-industrial jobs done by residents in the mining burgs included boarding house owners, dressmakers, telephone operators, electricians, YMCA operators, furniture and miscellaneous store managers and clerks, teamsters, school teachers, butchers, pharmacists, miscellaneous domestic laborers and painters, several truck farmers, four taxi drivers, two doctors and a banker, a postman, a deputy sheriff, and a barber.
United States Census 1920 and 1930, ibid.
included certain other occupations, like a Coca-Cola bottling works and automobile dealerships, which underscored the importance for the community to the Tri-State economy. Such diversification in the Twin-Cities no doubt exposed industrial workers of the copper fields to a broader spectrum of possible responses to the era’s economic challenges than did the narrower array of workers who lived in Ducktown, Isabella and the region’s cadre of other smaller industrial hamlets. The broad array in job opportunities also would have given the Twin-Cities a labor market dynamic where fewer people would have been attracted to a union unless they were craftsmen; even then, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the differences in trades practiced in TCC smelter and acid works favored AFL organization over the industrial-style organizing embraced in the mining communities. The Twin-Cities’ business class engaged competitively in commerce and would have seen such competition as normal; they were not typically involved in collective enterprises to advance their personal economic advantage beyond membership in the Kiwanis Club—and this organization appears to have been made up of the more affluent members of this class. This everyman-for-himself attitude survived among the commercial class in the Twin-cities until crippled by the Great Depression.²²⁰

Smelter Hill—Tennessee Copper Company creates a place for those above the rest

On a ridge west of the Copperhill cemetery sat Smelter Hill, TCC’s old managerial and residential compound for its executives and middle management. Begun just after 1900, construction on Smelter Hill continued through the Great War boom and then saw another spurt

²²⁰ The list of businesses found in the census included the following: grocers, jewelers, candy-makers, music teachers, hoteliers and restaurateurs, gas station operators and employees, auto-mechanics and salesmen, lawyers, stenographers, pastors, beauticians, real estate agents, blacksmiths, bakers, milliners, tailors, department store managers and clerks, electric power company employees, theater owners and operators, shoemakers, construction workers, pool parlor operators, nurses and hospital workers, photographers, and one employee of a nearby cotton mill (location unknown). US Federal Census reports, 1930, ibid. As will be explained in chapter three, the Depression forced local businesses to form a coalition supportive of New Deal NRA codes.
of building in the early 1920s. The grange sat high and proud above all the surrounding communities; its planners had laid the compound out in a neo-feudal manner, stringing a grange of company offices and residences across the Basin’s barren ridges like a great necklace of crown jewels for the Ocoee. The better one’s position in the company, the higher one lived in elevation. Local resident Roy Lillard once summarized the significance of the Smelter Hill grange.

Company housing provided instant recognition of status in the company. The more important the employee, the bigger his house and the better its location [and likewise his home’s conveniences and furnishings]. Even though the miners were highly skilled, many of their homes did not have indoor plumbing until mid-century, in contrast to management housing. For the ranks of management, a step up in position meant [literally] a move into a new home higher up the hill.221

In its original plan, a shaker-sided craftsmen-style mansion crowned Smelter Hill. Corporate owners intended this place for their General Manager. As the top local official for the firm the TCC General Manager in the early years could look forward to returning each day to a servant-catered 13 room home with a massive front porch under a sombrero of roof tiles, its welcoming reception room and grand staircase warmed by steam and fireplaces that ran up and downstairs. Two lavatories and a culinary triumvirate of a formal dining room, pantry and kitchen attended to the master’s needs where after dining he and his managerial associates might retire to the billiard room while the ladies retired to the parlor. Overnight guests and children could be easily accommodated upstairs in the extra chambers and the nursery.222

222 Photographic collection and Tennessee Copper Company, Smelter Hill architectural plans, Ducktown Basin Museum.
The company replaced this home with an even grander neo-Federalist manor in the twenties. It was balanced, elegant in design and it is likely a generation of managers lived in the home. General manager J.N. Houser never did. The punishing nature of the Basin withered the company’s lofty intentions for the neighborhood. Smelter Hill was, like its surroundings, almost completely stripped of trees and vegetation—and this situation remained well into the 1940s. Bob Barclay Jr., who grew up on Smelter Hill recounted that as grand as many of the homes and facilities were his mother found the neighborhood trying. A non-native to the region, she never got used to having to wage constant battle with the Basin’s red dust which covered her home’s furniture, walls, rugs, and flooring. And it was hot, hot like a blaster furnace at times. Reports claimed the summer temperatures could reach 115 F. This inferno was cooled only by mountain breezes which of course brought more of the infernal red dust. Perhaps Houser’s wife had visited some of the managers’ homes on Smelter Hill and refused to live under the regime of the Basin’s oppressive overlords: SO2 gas, dust, heat, and constant industrial noise. Whatever their reasons, the Housers chose to remain in cooler, greener, more genteel Knoxville; when needed at TCC, Houser simply took the train to Copperhill.223

The Smelter Hill grange also included company offices—rebuilt in the thirties—a hospital and some lovely accommodations: a set of dormitories, the Cowanee country club and tennis courts. Three superintendents’ homes lay in order below the general manager’s house down the slopes of Smelter Hill in a manner suggesting the Visitation of the Magi. Residences averaged eight to ten rooms in size, many with turrets, beveled glass and various degrees of Stickley-era ornamentation. Thirteen more of them strung loosely nearby around the grounds of the local country club all set in a grouping known as The Circle. Some of these houses wore

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223 Ducktown Basin Museum collection, ibid; Barclay diary, ibid; and, Barclay interview, ibid; Lillard, History of Polk County, 183.
picket fences around their yards adorning them like Indian headdresses. Inside many homes were sliding door-partitions, full-fixture lavatories, and kitchens all providing the finer luxuries of the day.224

A small platoon of homes for other company officials and clerks ran back up the ridges away from the main TCC works and toward the workers’ neighborhood of Coletown. At one time, between Smelter Hill and Coletown, a modestly grand, thirty-eight room company dormitory known as The Blue Goose kept a roof over the heads of the firm’s “unmarried” executives. Before “The Goose” stood an impressive band pavilion. Other single men working for TCC were scattered about in the dozen or so boarding houses around Copperhill, McCaysville, Ducktown and Isabella. For years these finest structures in the regions built of the best masonry and wooden materials crowned Smelter Hill as a Stickley era acropolis.225

Smelter Hill’s grandeur lay not only in dimensions but also in conveniences. The compound had its own power and water supply. The company installed central steam heating and electrification for all the managerial and executive buildings. TCC equipped the whole of Smelter Hill with a special and expensive dual water system. Springs supplied clean water for interior use, while water pumped up from the Ocoee allowed for use around the house. This last amenity was likely an early gallant attempt to promote the growing of suburban-styled lawns.226

These details stood in marked contrast to workers’ far simpler housing in places like Coletown or Newtown. It is unclear who built the workers’ homes as there are conflicting reports. Many were torn down and replaced with better accommodations. But in the neighborhoods like Coletown and Newtown a typical worker’s home was single leveled,

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224 Museum collection, ibid.
225 Museum collection, ibid.; Interviews with Joyce Allen, Bob Barclay, Jr., Michael Morgan, Lorin Myers, Francis Pledger and Dawna Standridge, ibid.
226 Museum collection, ibid.
sometimes designed for one family but many were duplexes or dorm-styled. Rents came directly from workers’ pay. Few of the separate homes had more than a few rooms and very few had lawns or trees to speak of. Originally none had plumbing. Until mid century only the rarest of homes had a yard of more than raw dirt or clay. The few trees that grew were stunted by the elements. Other workers’ housing stood out as being of a better grade. TCC records show the company built a lot of housing stock which contained between four and six rooms, generally bearing sinks and stoves. But few of these appear to have had steam heat, electricity or kitchens, let alone running water or lavatories when first constructed. The company did however regularly paint the little houses and strings of them lay over the Basin’s hills. Many of these modest structures remain in neighborhoods now on the National Register of historic places.\textsuperscript{227}

Barren as the Copper Basin was for decades, TCC management and their families could find some fun not only on Smelter Hill but also in the lovely woodlands of region, especially the Ocoee River Gorge along which ran the Old Copper Road. When they could spare the time, many went on trips to the great metropolis of Atlanta on the L & N. Social life on Smelter Hill lasted according to locals well into the early 1960s. A lot of the gaiety revolved around events at the English-styled Cowanee Club. Founded in 1909, its first quarters sat near fume-laden Isabella, but the Cowanee sought better quarters on the Smelter Hill heights. Elevation did provide some advantages, such as relief from bottomland flooding and a general relief from the low lying clouds of sulphuric emissions. But even this new site remained far from picturesque. Photos from the 1920s demonstrate the marvelous juxtaposition of this genteel artifice for aristocrats sitting inglorious before the smoking heap of The Company’s industrial pile.\textsuperscript{228}

\textsuperscript{227} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{228} Ibid.
The Cowanee Club’s five or six dozen active members orchestrated myriad annual events that included about sixteen band-serenaded dances. Formal dinners were a regular occasion as were bridge parties and open house soirées for extra-managerial guests. “Smokers” provided a special time at this former most sophisticated institution in the Tri-State. Though intended originally solely for the enjoyment of management, depression and war wore down the ability of TCC’s elite to flaunt its distinction above the hoi polloi. Notices from as early as 1912 show that the Cowanee was open at times for the benefit of the company workers and the citizens for such affairs as an annual Halloween dance and other fetes because, as “hereby constituted,” the purpose of the Cowanee was for “the promotion of social enjoyments and of athletic and gymnastic sport of every kind including, baseball, tennis, polo, trap shooting, boxing, fencing and other sports of like nature.”

The Cowanee held its “terrific” dances nearly every Saturday night for over thirty years. Lorin Myers remembered that when he was a sophomore he played the Cowanee as part of a Copperhill and Isabella ensemble of trumpet, banjo, and piano. The guys got five bucks for a three hour evening gig. Yet for all the dancing and merriment, the Cowanee had one tenacious annoyance for the drinking class: not a drop of liquor or any alcoholic spirits could be consumed within its walls, house rules. It was rumored that the Lewisohn family, the New York Jewish family who owned TCC and kept the Club’s Reading Room filled with quality books, had ordered the prohibition. All was in keeping with Lewisohn paternalism. The Cowanee also maintained its respectable tee-totaling was also a respectful nod to local Protestant custom. Copperhill was not a dry mountain town, but you could not buy any more than beer—legally. Still, local puritanical conventions had their limits. Folks remembered trotting out to their cars

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229 Cowanee Club Halloween dance notice, *Copper City Advance*, November ? 1912; Charter and By-Laws of the Cowanee Club, Copperhill, 1953
between favorite songs or on band breaks where they imbibed on mountain spirits tailgate-style or piled into someone’s Plymouth or Ford. \(^{230}\)

While generally off-limits to kids without chaperones, the Cowanee still provided many delights for some little folk, unless like young Bob Barclay and his buddies they sneaked in. Upstairs executive suites, private lavatories, billiards rooms, reading and “ladies” room filled the floors. A large gang kitchen and walk-in refrigerator served the staff. But for kids—and the young at heart—the really treasured spots of this old place lay on the ground floor: adjoining an exercise and locker room was a heated indoor pool and a small bowling alley. Kids delighted in these on many an afternoon. On scorching days, the cool of the basement’s attractions provided a rare lair for local tournaments and mischievous escape.\(^{231}\)

Behind the Cowanee Club, on a small plain before the Circle’s residences, lay perhaps the only facility on Smelter Hill perfectly suited to the site. Here was a clay-surfaced tennis court where white pants probably lasted only minutes before being soiled either by Basin’s fouled air or red dust. Shouts of “love” and “deuce” from sweater-clad, Gatsby-looking fellows would be extremely rare in these parts today, but in the first half of the 20th century, tennis was a popular game and the young elite played in tournaments as crowds cheered on their favorites. On less formal, but no less important sites on the Hill sandlots served as clay “diamonds” where local boys crisscrossed on their bikes between rousing innings of America’s favorite past-time.\(^{232}\)

One hero among the Smelter Hill set was TCC landscape technician, Jacques L. Schneider. “Jack” managed some success in the ongoing war with the Basin’s toxic elements winning back some desired green to a few local yards. His must have seemed a queer occupation

\(^{230}\) Loren Myers interview, October 2000.  
\(^{231}\) TCC architectural records; Robert E. “Bob” Barclay, Jr. interview, 9 March 2000; and, Myers interview  
\(^{232}\) Photos, Ducktown Basin Museum and “Tennis Finals will be held at Epworth Sunday” which described the finals of the Copperhill Tennis Tournament, *Copper City Advance*, 7.7.33.
to a lot of Basin people not only because his expertise was rare in these parts, but also because his fine skills might have seemed to some wasted on the Martian environs. Jack’s presence made a real difference though. For years locals could only muster growth of a trashy triumvirate of privet, Bermuda grass and red cannas, but Jack worked landscape miracles. Lawns and bushes greened-up and thrived, fortified you can bet with genuine TCC chemicals. His own garden was known for its hardy tomatoes.\textsuperscript{233}

Despite the Basin’s omnipresent desert and rare spaces of green, company officials willfully constructed and maintained a golf course for management and other gentlefolk by the 1920s. Rare photos of play on this still-extant and bizarre facility indicate that though popular with Smelter Hill management, its “greens” appeared to have no green grass. Perhaps it was just poor photography, but fading images appear to show a lack of grass on the course. Wanting greens notwithstanding, the new Copper Basin Gold Club soon sponsored regular tournaments in which, R. E. Barclay himself competed along with other members of the area’s well-to-do.\textsuperscript{234}

Over the years, the notoriety of Smelter Hill residents and the compound alike alternately soared and soured. Reflecting the shifting turns of jealousy and pride locals held toward the site’s comparatively fine residences, accommodations, and perceived residential privileges some called the place “Snooty Hill.” Others became convinced that Smelter Hill kids got favored in games, in school, in life generally. In light of the opportunities most managers’ children probably got just owing to differences in economic class, it is understandable how such resentments arose. In interviews, a variety of opinions existed but it seems Smelter Hill had always been a somewhat controversial place. After mid-century, the slow decline of the region’s industry and changing attitudes took a great toll on Smelter Hill’s prestige. It seems too that more and more managers

\textsuperscript{233} Photos of Jacque L. Schneider from the Ducktown Basin Museum; Bob Barclay, Jr., interview, 2000.

\textsuperscript{234} “Golf Tournament in Copper Basin,” \textit{Copper City Advance}, 7.14.33. Col. William Butt of Blue Ridge won the affair—there were fourteen entrants in the event. \textit{CCA}, 7.28.33.
moved out of the Basin and lived in greener nearby hills. What had once been allowable
distinctions for management no longer were acceptable. When Cities Service bought Tennessee
Copper Company in the early 1960s Smelter Hill appeared far less comely than the Camelot it
may have once seemed; one of the first things the firm did was to level all the lovely buildings
that crowned Smelter Hill. Locals then raided the ruins to grab what pretty remnants of the
citadel they could. But destruction of the old grand grange is not really the end of Smelter Hill’s
story because neither its raising nor the passing of decades lessoned the stigma some folks placed
on former “Snooty Hill” residents. A mayor of Copperhill recounted that he shied away from
admitting he grew up there. It was just too upsetting to people, he said, and they were not sure
how to act around him, so he just kept quiet.235

**Society and commerce beyond the industrial mines and works**

Copper Basin town life, diversions, and the collection of services, occupations, and
employment opportunities beyond the region’s industrial mines and works came alive through
census returns, periodicals, local reports, photographs and reminiscences. Interwar census
reports reveal that one of the contributing factors informing change in the local political climate
was the expansion of the merchant and professional classes during the interwar years. Through
the 1920s the number of persons employed in the merchant and professional classes, and what
was then known as “public work”—civic and utilities employment—increased. This last sector
refers not only to government jobs, but also to those in utilities, education, public safety or in
various federal and state agencies. The 1920 U.S. Census figures show that of the over eight
hundred working people in Copperhill/McCaysville, Ducktown, and Isabella, one third of the

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communities’ non-industrial jobs were in the merchant-professional classes. By 1930 those percentages had increased in Copperhill/McCaysville; nearly 20% of the total working population there was now employed in the merchant and professional classes. A comparison with the mining villages is stark; in those communities, the percentage of merchant and professionals had fallen to a mere three percent of all working people.236

Census rolls indicate support services and enterprises for the copper companies increased and yet there was a decrease in the number of general laborers not connected with industry. Mechanization and the advent of the automobile had a hand in this. Significant growth also occurred in the retail trades. More restaurants and hotels sprang up in the region demonstrating the increase in visitors and transient folk in the community likely connected to expanded works in the non-ferrous industry. Trades associated with electrical work, carpentry, plumbing flourished. The number of school teachers and administrators living in the Copper Basin grew. In contrast, the census shows a contraction in the agricultural sector of the economy. What little farming was still being done in the Copper Basin through 1920 had vanished ten years later, only a few truck farmers remained.237

Growth in the number of local merchants and salesmen of every sort was the most startling change in local employment in the 1920s. The total number of persons who owned or worked in retail shops, groceries and other small shops in the Copper Basin by 1920 was about sixty persons; by 1930, despite the Crash of ’29, that number had risen to 131 sellers—a more than 118% increase. Some eight-five percent of these jobs lay in the twin cities. In the little

236 Polk County Board of Education records, April 1909-1926 passim, Polk County School Board, Roll 48. Tennessee State Library and Archives; and, The Fifteenth and Sixteenth United States Censuses, (1920 and 1930 respectively) for Polk County, Tennessee, and Fannin County, Georgia. Figures reflect calculations culled from a review of every single one of the individual, handwritten census forms filled out by the census workers who went door to door in the several electoral districts of the two counties, 1920 and 1930. Census material may be found online at www.Ancestory.com, last accessed, 2.1.08.
237 US Censuses, ibid.
burgs of Ducktown and Isabella, the number of such occupations actually went down; in Isabella they fell by one-half.238

The Copper Basin’s mercantile community was typical for early twentieth century small-town America, their advertisement filling local papers. Family-owned businesses dominated the line-up of local enterprises. Many of these had become beloved or at least familiar legacies by the interwar years. Occasionally a local cadre of merchants and small businessmen organized special booster campaigns. Some of these campaigns were rather creative, combining patriotism, civic mindedness, and an American, can-do spirit with consumerism. One of the more entertaining of these communal capitalist crusades occurred in the springtime of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Administration. Following passage of the 1933 National Recovery Act and the government’s introduction of the Blue Eagle Campaign, merchants of Copperhill, Ducktown, and Isabella combined their efforts to put on a local beauty pageant to select “Miss Copper Basin” over two nights at the Cherokee Theatre, Copperhill. The pageant “being sponsored … by the city’s best families” was conducted by the Jordan State Beauty Show who employed out-of-town judges to assure objectivity. The prize was to be “a beautiful silver loving cup” given to the newly crowned mountain beauty who would then go to Nashville the following September to compete in the Miss Tennessee pageant. From there the possibilities for the young miss would be truly dazzling: she might advance to the Atlanta City finals and radiate before thousands in the national Miss America contest.239

Some general reflections on the local press serving the Copper Basin are in order. As was not atypical of small town papers, both of the region’s most important newspapers, out of Copperhill and Benton, Tennessee, took to their booster duty as holy mission. Reflecting the

238 Ibid.
239 “Miss Copper Basin will be Selected” 6.2.1933.
interests of their respective communities, each filed regular reports for the citizenry about various good things happening in regional and national commerce and industry. The reports varied in their actual reflection of the nation’s economy; the degree of veracity and strident optimism varied with the depths of any given recession or depression. Most items intended to keep locals abreast on the health of the national economy also seemed always to declare the Tri-state’s industry or economy was on the mend, if not already cured. Few statistical reports lay in their pages. The determination of *The Copper City Advance* to keep its editorial compass pointed toward recovery held true even during the Depression winter of 1933. Positive economic spin in the papers could be found throughout the year, but editorial boosterism was especially apparent in both publications through the Christmas season to New Year’s.²⁴⁰

One memorable piece in *The Copper City Advance* illustrating entertaining consumerism came in the form of a poem by Dorothy and Bunzie Strauss. In verse that originally contained some thirty-four stanzas, the Strausses accounted for the many ways local establishments served the consuming public of Copperhill and McCaysville. Here is an excerpt from poem.

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There’s a town down on the border
Of southeast Tennessee
The name of the good town
Is well known to you and me.

In a certain place one never finds
Gloomy, sour company,
But you’re always greeted with a smile
At the Tennessee Power Company...

You may shout it from the housetops,
But don’t slip off the roofs,
About the bargains you will find
When shopping at Maloof’s

Now don’t let your money
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²⁴⁰ See for instance “Brightening Skies” *Copper City Advance* 4.7.1933 and similar optimistic summaries of the metals industry, *Copper City Advance*: 6.16.1933; 8.11.1933; and 11.10.1933
Grow musty and dank—
Start a savings account
At the First National Bank.

On down the street
Is where Mom fixes up for Pop,
When she spends a half hour
At the Ocoee Beauty Shop…

You’re sure of a friendly greeting
Tho’ looking for a coffin or a bed
When you call at Abernathy’s Furniture
For the living and the dead.

If you’re feeling down and out
And your nerves are all a twitter
Relax after the daily grind
Down at the Cherokee Theatre…

A notable establishment among the many mentioned by the Strausses was Maloof’s. This general mercantile establishment run by a family of Lebanese origin began their mercantile trade through the selling of notions at the Ducktown Sulphur Copper & Iron commissary in Isabella. Family lore had it that the their patriarch came to Copperhill in the middle 1910s because the town had four times as many cars as did his original place of business, Andrews, NC. At that time Andrews had only one automobile. Run for years by old man Maloof until his sons Louis and John Maloof took over in the late 1930s, the family business plied in the retail trade around the Copper Basin for three generations. Just before the Great War the family built brand new accommodations by going into considerable debt and added a ladies department, the first such specialty for Copperhill it seems. Older Copperhill customers complained however that the twenty-five steps to the second floor store were too burdensome. Reacting to these complaints and hoping to entice more customers in the post-war slump, the family completely remodeled

\[241\] Full version of the poem can be found in *The City Advance*, March 1938, replicated in a handout available at the Ducktown Basin Museum.
their store. That rough patch in the early twenties had taught the Maloofs enough shrewd skills to keep them in business through the even more difficult years that followed.

Boosterism notwithstanding editorial selectiveness could not overshadow the stark economic realities experienced during the Depression as revealed in one annual assessment. Printed in *The Copper City Advance* the list of Polk County properties up for auction owing to failure to pay back-taxes underscored the impact of hard times. By 1942 such lists held a staggering number of properties, each one identified by the owner’s name and lot. The size of the properties up for auction varied from dozens of acres to small lots. Although the 1942 assessment did not include delinquencies before 1938, it still held the properties of hundreds Polk County citizens. Most had not paid their taxes throughout the thirties, but many others had only recently joined these embarrassing ranks by falling behind on their taxes by a mere one or two years. Local papers never investigated the particular circumstances that lay behind the myriad delinquencies. The weak farming economy of the era had had its effects. As this kind of auction was a regular occurrence at Benton’s Chancery Court throughout the interwar years, the length of the list was all the more remarkable. It provided an indirect record of how many people still could not catch up from the economic ruin of the Depression despite the late thirties higher wages and increased opportunities in the late 1930s. The delinquent tax list also pointed to other community realities. The repetition of names included in the delinquent tax rolls from year to year reflected a resistance by locals to buy a neighbor’s property. The shared experience endured during the Depression limited opportunism in part because there was no anonymity in these hills. Few would have wanted to be known as someone who pulled a man’s land out from

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242 *Copperhill City Advance*, “Down with Depression” 1.2.1933; “Miss Copper Basin will be Selected” 6.2.1933; and “Dedicated to the Merchants and Professional Men of Copperhill” 3.(?).1938; *Facts on Fannin*, 410.
underneath him. Furthermore, wretched property conditions owing to poor maintenance would have had their affect on salability too. Investment in a failed farm was too risky.\textsuperscript{243}

Legend and local myth reinforced understanding of the harsh economic conditions experienced in the still somewhat frontier Tri-state. Residents recalled some merchants in the Basin needed cash so badly at times they even resorted to the selling of their children. These affairs were not slave auctions though and while it may seem the stories were passed down in jest, locals recall them as fact. The tales themselves illustrate the blending of Appalachian custom and rigors demanded by a desperate kind of capitalism. Local proprietors would sometimes market their daughters as best they could before the marriageable (and well-paid) young engineers and craftsmen who came to work in local industry. Grayson Newman, a retired US Marine major who wrote for the \textit{Polk County News}, described one peculiar transaction type occurred thusly during one rough period in before World War II: A merchant’s daughter “would be given the best room in [the store owner’s] house, the one with the store-bought furniture and nice vanity dresser and a pretty counterpane bedspread. The idea was that if a prospective husband came [sic] calling he would be impressed by the housekeeping abilities of the girl.” Merchants got the idea to promote the feminine assets of their families from an “earlier, rumored local custom wherein marriageable girls were given a new pair of shoes each Christmas and enough material to make herself a new dress.” With these new togs the young ladies of the mountains could better package themselves to proper suitors.\textsuperscript{244}

As workers’ pay increased in the late 1930s and early 1940s grocers and retailers could offer better products for local consumers. H. L. Greenway, manager of the Ducktown Tennessee Copper Company “Smelter Store” (a company commissary) noticed how buying habits had

\textsuperscript{243} “Delinquent Land Tax Sale” \textit{Copper City Advance}, 7.10.1942.

\textsuperscript{244} “Grayson Newman,” \textit{Polk County News}, 6 March 1990. Newman did not specify when exactly this took place, but it seems likely that it was either during the 1920-21 slump or the early years of the Great Depression.
changed in his three decades working for the company. Earlier in the century Smelter Stores carried only the most basic of goods in bulk for workers. Folks still made nearly all their own meals from a limited assortment of starches and proteins, supplemented by seasonal fruits and vegetables. Owing to a lack of electricity for most, they preserved little. Throughout the interwar years, Greenway had stocked his store with twenty-five and fifty pound bags of flour, shipped in by railcar load. He shipped in some bread during this period, but sold few loaves because most folks still made their own. As for meats, despite the proximity of farms, salt pork was one of the mainstays for miners and their families. Workers families were often too poor for regular cuts of beef, but “the Ducktown store bought 2000 to 3000 lbs of salt side meat at a time.” Smelter Stores also carried supplies and gear useful to miners and other workers: work-clothes, candles, ropes, and sundry industrial tools. Women saved money by buying piece goods and cottons for homemade dresses. In the late thirties things began to dramatically change in local eating customs and for women as wages improved. Working families stocked-up on fresh meats and purchased store-made bread as a sign of their prosperity. Company commissaries began selling manufactured dresses; working-class women snatched them up. Changes in the textile industry during the 1950s really changed fashion opportunities for locals. Smelter Stores expanded and began to carry the latest styles for their customers made from lower-priced synthetics.245

The Automobile Age commences

The impact of industrial expansion in the Tri-state coincided during the interwar years with the advent of the automobile age. No longer would the railroads be the only method of quick transport beyond galloping hoofs. The combined impact of motor cars and trucks on the

245 “Store Manager,” TC Topics, March, 1953, 5. The 1950s also saw TCC construct a huge new Smelter Store just north of Copperhill that resembled an early K Mart. The building still remains, though now it sells fireworks.
economy and labor markets was remarkable; locals wanted more and more of them. They also demanded better roads to connect them with outlying regions; when completed the roads would extend the reach of local industrial enterprise and arose new interest in the unique attractions of Tri-State environs. A 1917 report in the *Atlanta Constitution* announced that “prominent citizens of Ducktown, Tenn. Plan[ned a] Circuit Road Through North Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina.” This road project was to be a massive affair, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars; it would open up the Southern Mountains in a manner even more impressive than the rails had done a generation before. The “big loop,” as it was called, would run from Atlanta, through North Georgia, to Mineral Bluff then up to North Carolina and back west into Tennessee, through the Copper Basin and link back onto itself at Blue Ridge, Georgia. Proponents of the project wanted captured World War I German soldiers to do a lot of the heavy construction work and state monies to finance the pike. One report in the *Atlanta Constitution* described a possible future. “The entire highway will consist of some 1,000 miles, practically all of which will be macadamized [paved] and approximately 75 miles of which will extend through the forest reserves and copper districts of Tennessee.” By the early twenties it was almost all done and this new “Panorama of Incomparable Mountain Scenery” prompted *Constitution* reporter James A. Hollomon to opine at length. Great treasures of Appalachian scenery were now available for willing Atlanta tourists. If the earnest took the trip—which would have taken about half a day’s driving at best—Holloman told readers they could view not only mountain splendor, but “the celebrated copper mines” and “the only place where one can see what approaches the bad lands of the Dakotas” before venturing beyond to the virgin forests of North Carolina.  

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246 “Ask German Labor On Great Highway” *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 July 1917; “Highway Developments in Central North Georgia Open a Panorama of Incomparable Mountain Scenery,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 October 1923. The roads are still there, though they have been somewhat modified and widened and route numbers have changed through the years. The big loop connects most of upstate Georgia with the areas in the original plan.
The advent of the automobile age led to a transformation in the Copper Basin’s labor market. In the twin-cities of Copperhill and McCaysville over thirty men worked as car salesmen, mechanics, or for petroleum companies. Other jobs connected with the automobiles grew in number as well, especially in the transport industries of trucking and taxi services or as highway department officials and employees. The total jobs resulting from this new sector of the economy represented 11% of the labor market or about sixty persons. Such jobs represented new niches that would only grow as the century advanced and offset some of the contraction of jobs in the older industrial economy occurring as technology displaced workers in mining, smelting, and chemical work. Contraction in the job market became full collapse in some sectors like wagonning. By 1930 there were no longer any men employed as teamsters in or beyond the region’s industrial mines and works. Likewise, fewer and fewer horses now delivered groceries. All this had not been the case in the 1910s. Period photos showed DSCI teamsters trekking across company granges through the Great War. But TCC company records chronicled the replacement of horse teams with trucks. Wrote Superintendent of Mines H.B. Henegar in a 1919 monthly report to new General Manager J.N. Houser, “on September 23rd we started using a Packard 3 ½ ton truck at the mines. This will eventually replace one team each of mules and horses and eliminate the stable expense.” In short, for industry and the community at large new automotive-era jobs allowed some folk to remain in the Basin that might otherwise have been forced to immigrate to more prosperous labor markets. Alternately, the new economy forced many men to seek alternative occupations.247

Photographs from the 1930s illustrate the changes wrought upon the village and town streets when the car came to town. Copperhill’s main street became choked with cars; other images show cars jammed along the dirt streets around Ducktown and Isabella. Nearly every photo of town scenes in the region after the 1910s holds a car or truck somewhere in view. Soon, only Benton rivaled the twin cities along the Ocoee as an automotive center in Polk County. It is difficult to determine from reports exactly what influence the increase in the number of cars meant for such things as intown property values, but there was clearly some connection here. Commuting increased among the workforce and the old requirement that one live within the community where he worked broke down. An increase in the number of men employed at TCC in the boom years of the 1940s did not match the total number of workers who actually lived in the Basin. As well, there was an increase in the number of real estate agents. The class of workers most able to take advantage of greener, more sublime and less toxic environs would have included the upper tier of craftsmen, chemists, engineers, foremen, and managers; the latter no doubt continued their flight from Smelter Hill as the opportunities arose, their new cars speeding them on their way.

For all its benefits, the new automobile age would also cut deeper the lines of parochial and class division. Ride-sharing as a general custom almost certainly began in the first weeks of the automobile age. But most workers in the lower economic echelons, such as miners and day laborers, did not possess the financial means to join personally in the new transportation revolution for some years—even though the Ford Motor Company cut the costs of some of its models to less than $300. For many left in the mining villages and industrial hollows of the Copper Basin, the distinction (and shame) of being a working male, head-of-household who did not own a car would have increased as the interwar years progressed. As soon as families could

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248 Ducktown Basin Museum photographic collection.
get a car they did. Film and photographic records of Ducktown from the late 1930s show the town’s streets were jammed with cars during a workers’ demonstration.249

Automobiles and trucking allowed for more travelers, independent haulers and salesmen to come to even the most remote villages. Many of those remote locales had no local inns for flatfoots. Ducktown managed to hold onto its little hotel, owing to businessmen who came to tour the town’s mines and works; traveling salesmen took advantage of these places too. The newer facilities were not as grand in conception as some of the first generation of resort-styled inns and hotels had been; but fortunes at these early enterprises had long since faded along with any belief in the once fantastic and ignorant claims that the toxic “sulfurettes” from local industry had been good for respiratory illness.250

Employment in service sectors related to the hotel trade expanded too. The number of persons employed in hotels and restaurants doubled to over sixty by 1930. Beauticians’ services also expanded and remained an important and stable part of the economy throughout the Depression years. Women, while they may not have had a lot of money, maintained their spending on hair-care—the beautician’s parlor (or home in most instances) was a place for socializing and maintaining important contacts with ladies around the town. Taxi services depended upon women who had no cars or who depended on others who could drive. R.E. Barclay recounted now and again in his diary about driving women here or there, home, or shopping.251

**Progressive Education efforts**

249 Carl McConnell “Grocer’s Film,” Ducktown, 1939, Ducktown Basin Museum.
250 Advertisement for an early Copper Basin resort hotel, Ducktown Basin Museum collection.
During the early years of the second industrial boom private schools dominated local education. These were few in number, but bold in their claims. Ducktown academy principal L.D. Patterson boasted that the educational opportunities at his Hiwassee High School were the finest in the Southern hills. For a fee, ranging from $1 to $2.50 per term not including “contingent fees” of a dime per month, students from the first through tenth grades would be educated in geography, arithmetic and higher math, English and Latin, composition and rhetoric, Tennessee geography, natural philosophy, civil government, chemistry, general history and that of Antiquity. And for those seeking education in truly practical arts, Patterson included bookkeeping and the theory and practice of teaching both without extra cost to the student. The textbooks employed were comparable to those used at public schools and Ducktown’s polymath principal offered “special inducements to clubs of young men and young women desiring to prepare for teaching.” Copper company management may certainly have taken advantage of Patterson’s offer; for many miners, these fees may have been a bit extravagant. Records are unclear as to how successful Patterson was, but within a few years public schools became the norm in the Copper Basin.  

A review of Polk County Board of Education minutes, local histories, and newspaper reports from the early 1900s through the 1920s—records for the late interwar years are spotty at best—revealed that a coalition of local elites joined with certain business interests to enact progressive educational reform that were in keeping with the best efforts statewide and throughout the South.  

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253 Polk County Board of Education records used in this section in board minutes, April 1909-1926, passim, Polk County School Board, Roll 48. Tennessee State Library and Archives; Polk County Scrapbook, 150 years of Memories, Volume 1 c. 1990. Polk County Publishing, Benton, Tennessee, 10-11. Comparative studies on this subject include, “Education,” Tennessee: A Guide to the State, Compiled and Written by the Federal Writers’ Project of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Tennessee, American Guide Series, December 1939, Department of Conservation, Division of Information. (Hypertext Edition, New Deal Network, 1996); Edgar W.
Typically mountain communities, Polk and Fannin counties included, had small local school houses; usually these facilities were not much more than a one room schoolhouse without electricity or indoor plumbing, maintained by the immediate community. Wealthy families in the Southern Mountains always had the ability to send their children private nearby academies—if they existed—or out of the hills for formal education in the cities. For the rest of the inhabitants of the hill country, the conventional manner of family-centered education and experience sharing reflected agricultural economies and “provided continuity for the culture, reinforcing traditional values and beliefs.”

Neither Polk nor Fannin County citizens were innocent of formal schooling. Polk County records reveal the development of educational opportunities there. By the 150th anniversary of Polk County’s founding in 1839 over 70 different schools had served the citizenry (some being tiny, typical one room affairs and others multi-room structures). By 1990 consolidation had reduced that number to only six schools serving the needs of the county’s young people.

Schooling for the copper communities of Isabella, McCays (the later distinct towns of Copperhill and McCaysville), Ducktown, and Turtletown began respectively in 1860, the late 1890s and the 1910s—dates that reflect the economic ups and downs of the region prior to the Great War. A high school was established for a short time at Isabella, but by the 1910s only Ducktown and Copperhill held one. The county’s third high school was established at the county seat in Benton.

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Knight, PhD, “The Present System: Its Tasks and Tendencies,” *Public Education in the South* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1922), 433, 436, 439, 447 and 449. See also George Tindal, who discussed the advance of Southern education and the public schools for grammar through high school; this section includes a discussion on the effects not only of federal legislation, but also that of the “good-roads era,” Tindal, “The Emergence of Public Services,” *The Emergence of the New South*, 258-264, passim.

254 Eller, Miners, Millhands, and Mutineers, 29-30. George Tindal also discusses the advance of Southern education and the public schools for grammar through high school; this section includes a discussion on the effects not only of federal legislation, but also that of the “good-roads era,” see Tindal, “The Emergence of Public Services,” *The Emergence of the New South*, 258-264, passim.
in 1913—a point which underscores the fact that the industrial communities in the Copper Basin had more resources to advance educational opportunities among their citizens than did the county’s agrarian west.\textsuperscript{255}

Important promoters of county education included Dr. John Brewer, who served as principal of Polk County High School from 1912-1937 and as local school superintendent during the First World War. Brewer represented a new era of professionally trained educators whose university education and participation in statewide educational associations led to higher regional teaching standards that included “a well-rounded curriculum… with emphasis being given to athletics, agriculture and the library.” He also developed a character-building program for Polk students noted for its accomplishments by the Boston Journal of Education. According to local historian Roy Lillard, as a result of Brewer’s work, Polk County’s high school was the twelfth to be certified by Tennessee and for years set the standard for excellence in teaching statewide.\textsuperscript{256}

For two decades the active county board oversaw regular increases in teacher and principal salaries that became an envy of the region; they also consolidated old one room school houses into finer, more modern structures, all fortified by corporate gifts and public goodwill. As a result Polk County schools developed a regional reputation that enticed many good teachers to come work in the Copper Basin who might have normally eschewed its remote and intimidating surroundings. By the end of the thirties, the general experience of school children in the Copper Basin was no longer one of sitting on long, rough wooden benches using hand held slates and chalk in buildings without electrical wiring or plumbing. Now new brick multi-room edifices sat high in each community, their tall windows augmenting electric lights, their teachers improved by regular attendance at professional development conferences held at East Tennessee

\textsuperscript{255} Polk County Scrapbook, 150 years of Memories, Volume 1 c. 1990. Polk County Publishing, Benton, Tennessee, 10.

\textsuperscript{256} Lillard, “Some Outstanding Citizens,” Polk County Scrapbook, 11.
State Teachers College. Board and school officials knew how to maintain proper budgets, use standardized tests, compare and apply new pedagogical practices that incorporated world events into classroom instruction and regularly kept clear typed records for official and public scrutiny.\textsuperscript{257}

Literacy rates in Polk and Fannin counties show that illiteracy for persons over twenty-one collapsed between 1910 and 1930 from 21\% and 18\% respectively to 3\% and 9\%. These declined more slowly than statewide rates initially, then rose above state improvements in the 1920s, and stalled during the Great Depression. To establish a nearly completely literate populace would take considerable time. Over a thousand persons above age of ten were still illiterate in Polk County by 1930. Fannin records show that it had only a third that many illiterate citizens. Why Fannin County did better was difficult to determine, but it may be that Georgia enforced attendance more strictly than Tennessee. School buses and stronger compulsory laws whittled down the size of the educationally innocent in the thirties; by the end of the decade fewer than six percent of citizens in both counties had experienced no schooling whatsoever.\textsuperscript{258}

Polk County paid its principals quite well. Salaries for principals for the 1920s show that W.B. Rucker and Dr. Brewer of Benton and Copperhill earned $3,240 and $3,940 respectively. The equivalent of the best of these salaries in today’s dollars would be over $130,000 per year. In the mining villages, salaries appear to have been much lower—especially for Isabella. J.C. McAmis earned $2,280 at Ducktown’s smaller academy and the Isabella principal earned a mere

\textsuperscript{257}Polk County Board of Education, 1920s minutes, passim; see also the pamphlet from the East Tennessee State Teachers College County and Superintendents conference, June 23-25, 1926.
$100 a month. Both pay grades highlight the general affluence in the Twin-cities which allowed for opportunities for improvement limited in the mining villages.259

Teachers were paid initially by the day in Polk County. In the middle teens teacher salaries stood at around $2 per day or about $146.00 in 2007 dollars; over one month this would be about $2900 for twenty days of teaching. Until well into the 1910s pay by the day was still the norm for teachers, reflecting the sporadic nature of Polk teaching schedules. This pay method held for a time even after the state passed compulsory education laws in 1913. War inflation forced the Board to increase teacher pay to $50-$60 per month by 1916--ranging $3600-$4380 in 2007 money. Over the years, teachers’ changing economic circumstance as measured in the real value of money reflects changing fortunes in Polk generally. So while teachers saw their monthly pay increase in the late teens and early 1920s to from $80 to $90 per month, this was the equivalent in many cases—owing to inflation—to a reduction in the actual teacher salaries for the highest paid instructors of hundreds of dollars per month. The trend through 1920 reflected the tempered Copper Basin and agrarian economy of the period as the local economy went from the flash of the war boom into the post war industrial and agricultural slump. There were no records for teacher salaries into the late twenties and thirties, but it seems likely salaries would have continued to fluctuate—when the Copper Basin flourished, teachers benefitted.260

By the middle 1930s, the progressives had managed construction of a remarkable and rare symbol for that region that crowned the high educational aspirations they held for local students. When completed near Ducktown, the Kimsey Junior College represented not only the most impressive new public structure in this sector of the Tri-State, but also “one of the finest

259 Polk County Board of Education minutes, 5 May 1920 and 15 April 1926.
260 Polk County Board of Education minutes, 10.2.1909; 5.30.1916; 8.19.1916; 4.7.1919; 5.5.1920 and 4.15.1926. Information about the fashion for smoking cigarettes driven forward by the Great War’s consumer culture, see Raymond Tallis, “Unlucky Strikes,” a review of Allan M. Brandt’s he Cigarette Century, in the Times Literary Supplement, 28 September 2007, 7.
school buildings in the South.” Locals named the building after Lucius E. Kimsey—a most popular and respected early local doctor in the area and a man who had been an influential and progressive power on Polk’s education board. Made of the finest and most modern materials of its day, the vast new structure sat on a 160 acre tract of land controlled by one of the local townships. The broad parking area in front of the school lay ready for platoons of cars. A deal had been struck to help pay for the project through a lease that had allowed school authorities a percentage on all copper mined there.  

However, certain truths about the limits of educational reform were apparent long before the general decline of local industry and their existence suggested why the Kimsey College failed to become a working institution. For one thing, progressive reforms had never been successful in creating a large population of students who had the financial means, interest, or willingness to go college in the Copper Basin. In fact, for many, High School graduation remained the mark of making it—and not everyone found that an important goal. The typical size of graduating classes in Ducktown and Copperhill was just a few dozen students per year. Limited financial resources, outmigration, family concerns, the seductive promise of industrial wages, aversion to the toxic industrial environs or the combined effects of some composite of these factors kept the Kinsey College building from ever holding college convocations let alone graduating commencements. Impressive as it was—the “collegiate-gothic” structure remains on the National Historic Register—the “college” served for a time as a high school and then eventually became a local elementary school. In the minds of some residents the Kinsey Junior College had been an  

261 “Junior College Built at Ducktown,” Copper City Advance, 7 July 1933; see also images of the school in Ducktown Basin Museum collection.
extravagant, if misplaced appropriation of funds and a sober reminder of the limits the Copper Basin’s industrial economy and culture placed on local educational aspirations.262

But despite the energy and monies put behind these efforts and slow improvement in the number of Tennesseans who attended public school regularly during the interwar years, cultural inertia limited any real hope of establishing a functioning college. One of the persistent local challenges for educators and their supporters was truancy, which remained a tenacious problem among older children in the Copper Basin as late as 1939. When asked about the effects a new high school building in McCaysville would have on Copperhill High’s attendance, the Copperhill principal said it would reduce truancy, but he knew that new buildings along were not the answer. Other than some Georgia “riff-raff” who had dropped out of Copperhill High and about a dozen or so McCaysville kids who would be leaving, the remaining student body of 160 to 180 students would now be entirely Tennessean. Were Tennessee to actually enforce its own compulsory laws, he added, Copperhill attendance might rise to 200 enrollees. The principal had little patience for anyone who might argue that working-class boys did not need a high school education.263

Truancy existed even after the passage of compulsory attendance laws and Polk Country responded with improved prevention mechanisms. Truant officers, such as W.N. Morgan were paid $3 a day and were “to be called upon by any member of the board when needed.”264 By late 1919 the Board decided to increase incentives for truant officers who were now given two cents for each student in their district who would complete their grammar education and a penny for

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262 The building is considered one of the finest example of the era’s school buildings and is now listing on the National Register of Historic Places, “Kimsey Junior College,” Archiplanet.org http://www.archiplanet.org/wiki/Kimsey_Junior_College last accessed 4.12.08. The building is now used as the Ducktown Elementary School.
263 Copper City Advance, 5.19.1939.
264 Polk County Board of Education minutes, 9.4.1916.
every student who had previously completed grammar school. The seeming slightness of the incentives did not so much reflect limited county funds, but the large pool of truant kids upon whose “reform” an officer might build a respectable salary.265

These efforts had mixed success. Copper Basin students seemed to have been more susceptible to skipping school than kids in rival Benton, Tennessee. An annual attendance assessment done for county grammar schools in the middle 1920s shows Ducktown and Copperhill schools had a much lower average attendance rate than did Benton—the former being on 81% and 77% compared to the county seat average attendance of 92%. An exception to the poor showing in the Copper Basin happened in of all places, Isabella—generally the poorest of the Basin’s little industrial burgs. Someone must have been throwing the fear of God into the tikes of Isabella; the community had a 91% average attendance out of 301 enrolled students. Other statistical facts deserve recognition here as well. The Copperhill School, with about 630 students, stood at nearly twice the size as the Benton academy. When it came to general attendance, Copperhill percentages were significantly higher than Benton’s. Ducktown and Copperhill grammar school attendance was on par with regional norms.266

Moral education was an accepted part of the curriculum and no doubt supposed to limit seduction of certain activities for potential truants. Education Board members were keen to prescribe scriptural prophylactics when they could. A receipt from an offer to sell Polk County scores of Lamar and Barton’s King James Version Teacher’s Bible no. 7848 for a ten percent discount below the regular catalog price of six dollars lay in the Board records. That summer, the Board bought the bible stock to supply school rooms in the Copper Basin.267

265 Ibid, Polk County Board of Education.
266 Ibid, Polk County Board of Education records, school attendance assessment, 6.10.1926.
267 Polk County Board of Education minutes, 10.6.1919; See Board of Education records, Lamar and Barton receipt, July 1926
administrators also relied on important local divines to advance young people’s moral instruction on public property. At one such session, “the much beloved minister” A.B Couch of Atlanta visited Copperhill High to deliver an inspired commencement sermon. A former resident of Copperhill, the Right Reverend had been quite popular when a preacher at the local First Baptist and as his reputation grew throughout the Southland, so it was said many locals wanted to come hear his advice and admonitions to another crop of young men and women from CHS.268

Certain other patterns in Copper Basin culture slowed educational reform which seems to have peaked during the Second World War boom. Economic hardship owing to mismanaged funds (the board incurred an enormous debt of $50,000 owing to failed bond schemes in the 1920s), the general effects of the Great Depression, and a certain degree of class-based anti-intellectualism augmented by the seductive appeal of local industrial jobs (that sometimes required little book learning) all had a part in limiting education outcomes for the Copper Basin’s students. The enormous indebtedness incurred in Polk during the twenties appears to have led to a legal battle in 1929-30. Local resident Roy Lilliard reported that “several members of the Board of Education were charged with misconduct.” These developments may be the reason Polk Board of Education records for the late twenties and thirties are mostly nonexistent.269

That is not to say Copper Basin educational reform simply stopped or that county officials did not take advantage of new pedagogical techniques when they could afford to do so. The copper concerns also gave money on a regular basis too, but the details of these kinds of

268 Copper City Advance, 5.5.1933; 5.19.1939
269 Polk County Board of Education minutes, undated, within late 1920s records. County courts had the right to oversee Board budgets, but apparently the bond scheme had been approved and still failed for reasons never given. The Board proposed that special levies be enacted to pay for the old debt, but the increase was going to require action by the State Assembly. Nothing further about this debt lay in the minutes. Lilliard, History of Polk County, 197.
gifts did not lie in the records. Former resident Barbara Holder remembered however that when she was a kid, the Tennessee Copper Company regularly supplemented incomes for Copper Basin teachers and coaches; the company likely gave considerable monies for other school related activities. The Copper Basin had long since developed a reputation for having great teacher pay. Holder said it was not uncommon for young women to come to the Copper Basin as teachers attracted by the good wages “and then marry young engineering bachelors.”

Local papers kept alive excitement about school-related developments in every issue. These reports even included details on personal affairs budding in the school hallways or born from chance meetings at sporting events and underscore the aspirations of communities where parents hoped their children might get educational opportunities not previously so pervasive. But post-war international competition to local industry after the 1940s reduced employment opportunities in local industry and this affected education jobs as well, making other labor markets more attractive to young teachers.

Diversions for young and old

Even in the leanest years there were many ways one could part with his or her money or find amusing free entertainment in the Copper Basin. All the diversions soon described reflect the vibrant nature of the Twin-cities during flush times, but also the fleeting, parochial nature of many of the activities in an economy especially susceptible to market whims.

Lest one get the impression that Copperhill held ceaseless opportunities to enjoy delights through a procession of itinerant circuses, freak shows, movie openings, minstrel, dramatic, choral, band, gospels, revivals, and other performances, it should be noted that these diversions rarely crowded local calendars. In fact, the sporadic nature of their occurrence no doubt would

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270 Polk County Board of Education minutes 5.30.1916; 5.19.1919; and 5.5.1920. Periodic mention in local papers of school led fund raisers lay scattered throughout the era. Barbara Holder telephone interview, 10 August.2006.

271 “School News” was a regular feature in the Copper City Advance throughout this period.
have seemed absolute proof that the Old Red Scar was a true *Sahara of the Beaux-arts*. Aside from the pool and dance halls, ice rinks, Cherokee and Doradelle theaters few commercial diversions existed. Outside of work, life was routine, family-centered and typically ran at a much slower pace than now. The dearth of diversions helped focus attention to any development out of the ordinary. The personal nature of participation erased any anonymity possible in larger communities. When, as will be described in later chapters, union organizers turned to public demonstrations of power, the lack of other diversions would have fixed locals’ attention to picketing, strike parades or other actions.

For those who were looking for something to pass the time between mining shifts or as part of a young couple out on the town Grayson Newman ran the Idle Hour Café, Dance hall, and Roller Rink where one could skate or dance the evening away. The regularity of politicos peddling their promises in the Basin always precipitated storms of partisan barbecues fired hot by pandering blowhards. Tamer fare could be found at family reunions, American Legion square dances, or meetings of a most tenacious Twin-City Garden-Club which held annual flower shows. Choral performances of popular and immortal song by Sunday, elementary and high schools, sundry service organizations, and countless fund raisers joined locally produced musicals and the aforementioned minstrel shows in a manner not atypical for small Southern towns. New picnic grounds opened along the Jack’s River at nearby Gavelly Gap along a new Forest Service Road. The grounds allowed locals a chance to enjoy forests like those that once covered the Basin. Reported the *Copper City Advance*, “clean toilets, cold mountain spring water, fire places, plenty of wood, and fine picnic tables” made idyllic enjoyment of the beautiful local waterfalls, ample fish and brisk mountain air possible.272

272 Miscellaneous social events, *Copper City Advance* 7.10.1933; 1.21.1938; and 9.2.1938; photograph of Newman’s cafe, *Facts of Fannin*, 447; “Beautiful Picnic Area is Opened,” *Copper City Advance*, 10 July 1939.
For the young, relief from boredom could come from pen pals. Third grader Ruth Robinson wrote to The Letter Writer’s Club based in Atlanta announcing in her hopeful letter of introduction that she was the only girl among a family with three brothers. Ruth loved her teacher, her classmates, was studying reading, spelling, English, arithmetic and geography. “I want to join your happy band,” she pleaded. “Some of you boys and girls write me and I will answer all the letters I receive.”

For most kids the new “talking pictures” at Copperhill theaters stood out as being the most predictable way to find amusement and thrills. Major Newman recalled the excitement, neighborliness and periodic mischief that accompanied these activities.

“On Saturday afternoons… all the mothers got a break because the kids all went to the newly opened talking picture show, the Cherokee Theater in Copperhill. The streets were full of kids, some with show fare, some without. After the kids with fare entered, a kindly old traveling photographer, Mr. Burger, told the ticket lady to count the kids without show fare and let them enter. When [done and] after seating the less fortunate kids, she looked around for Mr. Burger to pay. The old gentleman was gone. He hadn’t said he would pay, He’d said ‘count them and let the ones in that have no show fare’.”

The railroad brought a number of itinerant novelties to Copperhill not experienced anywhere else in the Basin. One traveling enterprise featured a “corpse” that reports described as “alive and well.” Grayson Newman said that the so-called deceased had been “ceremoniously buried in downtown Copperhill in a vacant lot [where] a stand-up pipe ran from inside the coffin to a place above the grave.” The pipe allowed the public to look down on the ‘corpse’ resting in peace. Proprietors of this attraction hoped that by viewing the dead man one might be inspired to “drop a coin.” Sometimes iterant novelties were not intended. One dead celebrity appeared by

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273 Niva Brewer from Ducktown also wanted new pals. At twelve, Niva said she was already a reader of the *Atlanta Constitution* and this earnest eighth grader wanted to correspond with other “bookworms.” Likely an odd bird in Ducktown, Nina devoured books and yet was taunted about her poor vision that made her look like “a grandma at 12 years of age” despite her love of fishing in local creeks. “The Letter Writers’ Club, Copperhill, Tenn., Ruth Robinson,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 April 1926; “The Letter Writers’ Club, Niva Brewer, Ducktown, Tenn,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 July 1926.

way of a “nameless gambler” who died suddenly in Copperhill. Taken to the Center & Abernathy funeral home, the proprietors “propped the body up in the window” hoping—apparently—for someone to recognize the corpse.275

Circuses rode regularly into Copperhill on the L & N. The Sun Brothers troupe and Jack Hoxie’s Big 3-Ring Circus were just a couple. Hoxie’s troupe advertised itself as “America’s New Big Circus.” With two complete shows, it featured among its 200 members “the famous screen star” Jack Hoxie and “his wonder horse Scout” along with “thrilling modern circus performances… a mammoth tent city… 100 arenic stars [sic--of the arena?] 27 dancing horses, a tribe of Indians, a herd of elephants, wild jungle beasts, and clowns galore.” A telling qualification in the advertisement underscored the small audience base. Hoxie’s extravaganza of pachyderms and pageantry would be in town for a single late April night—and a Wednesday one at that.276

Basinites reserved a special pride toward the Boy Scouts owing to locals’ claim of organizing the first troop in Tennessee in the early 1900s. Certain nights saw local scout troops show off the stuff in through entertaining fund raisers. Isabella Girl Scouts sponsored amateur nights with local celebrities, and a “crack Copper Basin Band” and beauty pageants for the little ones.277 For adults, good health, vivacious music, and Christian camaraderie could be had at the

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275 No such luck. A picture showed him in quiet repose and locals retold stories of his passing through town (as it were) time and again. Reports say the undertakers kept the body in the back of their store for several months and then buried it in a nameless grave that likely gave local kids ample opportunity to make up grisly tales about the Secret Grave. Grayson Newman, “Copperhill, 1920s,” Polk County News, 4 October 1989; reports on the Center & Abernathy, “corpus delecti” from Ken Rush, Ducktown Basin Museum, 1994 Copper Basin Heritage Calendar, “December,” reverse.
276 “Jack Hoxie B 3-Ring Circus” advertisement, Copper City Advance, 4.16.1937: and returning, Copper City Advance, 7.22.1939
277 Though the Troop No. 1 designation was taken through political maneuvering in the Scouts later, according to Ken Rush, Ducktown Museum director, a claim concurred by others interviewed, the troop’s original meeting house now sits on the property of the old Burra Burra Mine, in Ducktown, Tennessee. “Amateur Night at Isabella Friday,” Copper City Advance, 10 July 1939.
Ducktown YMCA or playing in its band. Other clubs in the Copper Basin during the interwar years were typical of an aspiring middle class and included the Ducktown Columbian Literary Society, the Copper Basin Music Club, the Mine City Masons, and the Myrtle Chapter Eastern Star. The most notable service organization in the Basin was the local chapter of the Kiwanis. Founded in the 1910s as a business networking association, it began to assist the poor. Copperhill’s chapter organized in the early twenties and turned its philanthropic attentions to the local needy and raising funds through patriotic and entertaining affairs. Its membership included many of the town fathers and its band seemed to be at any major holiday affair.

Radio performance stood as the era’s standard to measure celebrity. Copperhill’s High School Orchestra became locally famous after it performed over WDOD, Chattanooga, sponsored by Abernathy’s Furniture Company. Not missing a chance to brag on their city and region’s bounty, city fathers took the band’s good fortune as an occasion to feature the “historical background and commercial progress of Copperhill and the Copper Basin.”

By the late thirties the combination of automobiles and railroads allowed more opportunities than ever to escape the doldrums of the Old Red Scar and the weekly chronicles of locals’ to-and-fro could be found in the City Advance’s “Local Happenings.” The society column summarized the importance of visitors and the many social events at a time when folk rejected social anonymity in the pursuit of bragging rights as these announcements served as a sort of barometer of one’s social standing; they elicited admiration and envy, scrutiny and

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278“The YMCA Band of Ducktown,” Tennessee, Ducktown Basin Museum photographic collection; Bob Barclay Jr., interview, 2000. Copperhill had a YMCA building, but no chapter. No real reason could be found for this odd occurrence in light of the larger population of the Twin-Cities, but Copperhill did not let the building go to waste. A handsome, brick structure, its upstairs auditorium served and the main hall for local basketball games for years and later the structure served as City Hall.

279 Lillard, Polk County History 186-187. It seems that it was mere coincidence that the Cowanee Club on Smelter Hill had a similar name to the Kiwanis. No evidence of any direct connection could be found, though some of the same folk attended the affairs of each institution, the Cowanee Club being the more exclusive of the two.

280“Copperhill Talent on WDOD Friday: High School Orchestra to Play in 30-Mnute Program,” Copper City Advance April 1 1938
celebrity. Likewise, Atlanta papers reported when wealthy Copper Basin visitors came to the Queen City for special social occasions or simply wanted to escape a slim array of local diversions by taking the L & N to Atlanta for high shopping and theater.281

Little enmity directed towards those affluent enough to escape the routines of the Old Red Scar appeared in local papers. However, the same could not be said when outsiders came to the Basin and then went home to tell sensational tales about the Basin’s notorious red hills. That kind of condescension met with quick retorts and admonishment in the defensive local press.

“By Ginger!” exclaimed the Copper City Advance one summer day after one Atlanta report called the Basin the “Great Copper Desert” and a “painted waste” and accompanied the ridicule with a half-page of miserable photographs “of the most barren spot that could possibly be found in this vicinity.” Such “trifling exaggeration” could be amusing admitted the Copperhill editor, but to locals, even though “our hills cannot be described as beautiful in the strictest sense of the word, they have a picturesqueness [sic] all their own… We can disparage them, but woe unto the outsider who does so!” In an amusing if serious defense of their home, City Advance editors comforted their readers with verse by poet A. Guiterman that underscored local pride for the Copper Basin’s precious, sometimes jarring distinctions:

“I never loved your plains!
Your gentle valleys,
Your drowsy country lanes,
And pleached [braided] alleys.
I want my hills—the trail

281 In an age when such events bespoke a level of sophistication people proudly announced, one long list of patrons attending a performance of the New York Metropolitan Opera in Atlanta included a young R.E. Barclay, Fred Shelton, and Miss Ann L. Dillard, all of Copperhill. Local education reformer Dr. Brewer of Benton also attended. See any issue of the paper during this era. “Local Happenings” were broken down by locale, Ducktown and Isabella having their own society page listings; “Many Out of Town Opera Patrons here” Atlanta Constitution, 22 April 1923. The report made no mention if the three travelled together. Advertisements for the tragically-fated Winecoff Hotel that sat in the middle of the city’s old theater district on “Atlanta’s Most Famous Thoroughfare” Peachtree Street ran as a regular feature in the City Advance. For rates that ran as high as many miners made in a day, the hotel offered sundry luxuries including its “excellent Coffee Shop and Dining Room” and it proximity “nearer than Anything to Everything.” “Hotel Winecoff” advertisements, Copper City Advance, early 1930s, passim.
That scorns the hollow.
Up, up the ragged shale
Where few will follow!
High on my hills of dream—Dear hills that know me!
And, then how fair will seem
The lands below me!"\(^{282}\)

**Copper Basin Sports Life**

It was likely that anyone in the Copper Basin rich or poor who enjoyed a good ball game, tournament or general conviviality could find friends, fun and high spirits—if perhaps not always friendly competition—at the regular sporting events. Local sports rivalries with Copperhill teams intensified after the merging of Ducktown and Isabella high schools. The mining-football alliance soldered DSCI and TCC families through pigskin wars, on the diamond, over the net or between the hoops. Season after season, year after year, Ducktown High kids battled their southerly neighbors from Copperhill. Battles with McCaysville were intense too, but local reports gave the author the impression the Ducktown-Copperhill games saw the most intensity. Rivalry sustained community parochialism, but also took team members to towns and villages they might not go otherwise, broadening their experiences, expanding career opportunities, making new friends (and enemies) and perhaps landing a courtship with a possible future husband or wife. The centrality of local sports in small town life would be hard to overstate. Issues of the *Copperhill City Advance* and the *Polk County News* regularly featured accounts of these clashes and the Ducktown Basin. *The Atlanta Constitution* regularly reported on competitions with Copper Basin teams, a reportage common for all regional papers out of Knoxville and Chattanooga. The Ducktown Basin Museum’s cache of photos was replete with images of the myriad town teams, male and female, youth and adult.\(^{283}\)

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\(^{282}\) Guiterman verse, *By Ginger! Hills!* in “By Ginger!” *Copper City Advance*, 10 July 1939.

\(^{283}\) A simple perusal of local papers during these years is proof enough of these assertions.
The local teams tended to be smaller than are typical today. Many were barely nine in number. Beyond the obvious support that came from local fans and family, evidence pertaining to exactly who subsidized these teams is scare. For all the popularity of sports in the Copper Basin almost no financial reports could be found. Locals recounted that the Tennessee Copper Company contributed a significant amount of money to local teams, but these remembrances are more anecdotal than substantive. Company subsidies notwithstanding, TCC’s needs superseded local baseball team necessities. One of the few shots of a baseball game held near Copperhill showed a diamond where the company began later began to dump its slag near the Ocoee rail yards. The games likely went across the river to fields in McCaysville or behind the old Copperhill High School.284

The limits of social conventions being what they were did not limit locals’ enthusiasm for girls’ teams. A plethora of reports and team pictures support this assertion. Town papers carried word of girls’ sports victories and defeats just as they did for the boys. Some social conventions remained to distinguish the teams by sex, but a 1924 basketball team picture showed girls had abandoned wearing the smocks, skirts, and huge bow-tied head dresses common in the early years of the century. This Copperhill High School girls’ basketball team made for a fierce set of eight young lasses, decked out in smart uniforms. A photo of the Copperhill boys’ basketball team of the same year shows that while they too enjoyed the benefits of official uniforms, theirs was a more scrappy and fierce looking lot. These boys were not the towering giants so common in the sport today; many looked to be just about 5 ½ feet at most. Their short height may have

284 Ducktown Photographic Collection, sports teams and games.
been a factor of the toxic environs, but they could just as likely been a result of being kin of mountain Scots-Irish.285

Accounts in the pages of the City Advance tell of fans and players giving their all to beat their rivals. In the twenties, fierce showdowns between Ducktown and Tate, Georgia in baseball developed that brought unusually high crowds. There seems to have been an especially rivalrous air among competing mineral towns of the region. The passions ran hot in these series and if players did not exert this effort, editors like Ed Middleton, would let them know he disapproved in sometimes merciless coverage. Middleton was also the first to come to a player’s defense if circumstances warranted journalistic justification, intercession and protection of hometown honor. At times these reports captured hints of the notoriously defensive character attributed to locals. In one such piece Middleton excoriated the Copperhill Copperheads for sloppy basketball playing and carelessness. But then Middleton came to his team and town’s defense when Athens, Georgia editors accused the Copperhill boys of unsportsmanlike behavior. The editors claimed a certain slap was not only to an unfortunate referee, but to all Athens fans. The claim riled Middleton’s local pride. He stated flatly that the charges did not “exactly come as a handful of orchids to Copperhill fans. We do not intend to encourage players’ hitting referees, but there are two sides to every question.”286

Within months of that winter game, Copper Basin folk would find themselves embroiled in a labor war that revealed a defensive anger and determined effort in common with Middleton’s. Workers of the Tennessee Copper Company plant would take sides along lines that matched those demarcating sports teams and which pitted the mining village folk against a

285 Ibid.; a typical report on a girls’ team lay in “Basketball Season is Opened Monday,” Copper City Advance, 17 December 1937. The girls took top billing over the boys’ game.
286 “Canton Defeated by Ducktown” 21 June 1924; “Strong Tate Team Beats Ducktown,” 13 June 1924; “Tate Shuts Out Ducktown Nine,” 12 July 1924, Atlanta Constitution; Ducktown Basin Museum photographic collection; and, “Copperheads Win One, Drop Two” Copper City Advance, 21 January 1938.
Copperhill phalanx. Throughout that era, local sports continued, but the battles waged on diamonds, courts, and fields took on even greater significance for fans, families, and players while the labor wars flared hot.

**Religion in the Copper Basin—Holiness comes to Baptist hills**

The myriad passions resulting from sports and hard work resemble those given to religion and can be alternately cooled, harnessed, or strengthened by it. Direct connections to all three are difficult for any study of the Copper Basin owing to a rarity of printed testimonials. God appears thus everywhere in the records and yet no where can He be pinned down. Getting to the heart of religion’s importance to folk is difficult because few comments beyond descriptions of general moral uplift and guidance exist. Local newspapers reveal certain aspects of church life like Sunday school fundraising contests and sermon notes in every issue. Church histories recall long and intricate chronicles of vigorous faith-based communities that shied away from recounting the spiritual mechanics of lives rooted in religion. For many the purpose and value of it all must have been plain, needing no explanation. Claimed one witness of his church, it stood, he said “on the principle of doing Bible things Bible ways and calling Bible things by Bible names.” Another religionist stated a broader, yet all encompassing kind of approach for his church. Congregants were part of …

“…a mission-minded church that believes strongly in spreading the gospel at home and to the ends of the earth. From among [its] membership, preachers and other Christian leaders have gone out to serve in other places. But of great significance, too are those who follow. Many faithful members practice principles of Christian service and stewardship day by day. They are saints, those good and faithful servants who have experienced the floodtides of God’s love and have been motivated by the fires of His Spirit. Through them the history [of their church and community] has been lived out since … 1900.”

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287 “Church of Christ, Macedonia” and “McCaysville First Baptist Church,” *Facts on Fannin*, 144
Such declarations represented a religiosity common in the region alternately demonstrating strength, determination, absolute faith and dutiful acquiescence; they also outlined the proud heritage many congregations enjoyed in the Copper Basin in a world where lines separating church and state blurred.  

This study will not duplicate summaries of previous assessments done by local historians that chronicle the Copper Basin’s religious history except to comment on the general nature of the religious communities and their influence on local society. Polk County published a list of the churches established in the area. Yet as long as this list was—it contained more than ninety house of worship—the editors admitted it was “undoubtedly incomplete.” The list shows the Copper Basin held a cache of high and low churches; Mainline Protestant presence was certain and came with some of the first industrial enterprises. Episcopal and Northern Methodist religionists came in this wave. They joined an already established community of mostly Baptists that included independent and so-called primitive congregations which had thrived for generations. Much later Pentecostal and Church of God congregations organized. The overall mix in the Basin was broader than was typical for the Southern Mountains though some of these religious communities had no an actual house of worship until midway through the twentieth century. The Episcopal Church for instance never had many members, perhaps a only few dozen. Catholics may have had a small home but there are no surviving records.

Overwhelming percentages of citizens were in Baptist congregations and this fact remains to this

288See for instance, “Bernard Smith Host to Dr. Cutts [Bible study] Class,” Copper City Advance, 1 April, 1928; “Baptist Church… Baptist World Alliance” notice and “Church of Christ” Apostolic tent meeting notice, Copper City Advance, 21 July 1939. Solicitation of bibles, Lamar & Barton, Agents for Teachers Bible no. 7848, to Polk County School Board, July 1926. Correspondence with vendors revealed the local school board’s interest in purchasing bibles; it was simply assumed by school officials that the public school system should augment church and Sunday school teachings through bible lessons in the classroom.

289For a history of McCaysville, Georgia churches see Facts on Fannin 142-148; Polk County religious history may be found in “The Pulpit and the Pew,” Lillard, History of Polk County, chapter IV, passim.

290“Churches,” Polk County Scrapbook: 150 Years of Memories, Volume I, 7.
day. The Methodists and Church of God congregants, the next largest contingent of religionists, made up less than ten percent of the populace by mid-century.291

Well into the first half of the twentieth century, outside baptisms were still regular rites of passage for many folk of the Copper Basin—especially during the warmer months. Images from the turn of the century and through the interwar years show hundreds gathered for baptisms on the margins of the Toccoa/Ocoee near the Twin-Cities. Preacher Hampton presided over one of these dunkings in 1924. Children lined the river banks, sitting in rows, their legs folded in sitting Indian-style to watch the miracle; others lined up barefoot to dutifully watch older brothers and sisters become purified in the waters. Dressed in their Sunday best, many prepared for dunking into salvation at locales long since overrun by commerce. A photo taken earlier in the century near one site captured a strange juxtaposition of wet and dry: a huge baptismal service was held near, as someone scrawled on the photo, a “blind-tiger,” an enterprise that sold “intoxicants illegally.”292

Many preachers and ministers were reliant on charity of sorts and nearly all did other work to get by. Even as late as the 1920s the McCaysville Methodist ladies had to go door to door to get enough groceries to provide for their pastor’s family. Some congregations appeared to have garnered enormous wealth over the years. The affluence generally of the local Baptist community was evident in the size of their churches. McCaysville Baptists built an enormous new house of worship that opened in late 1926. The imposing classical structure had no steeple, but it massive columns and proud pediment would have compared favorably in size to any respectably sized town’s city hall.293

291 Polk County Scrapbook, ibid.; and, Lillard, ibid., 114-115.
293 “McCaysville First Baptist Church” and “McCaysville United Methodist Church,” Facts on Fannin, 144-145.
While a general religiosity was accepted and encouraged as normal and healthy, certain sects were not welcomed owing to their populist, charismatic enthusiasm that tended to attracted what some saw as a dangerous element among the poorest members of the working class. When Holiness adherents tried to organize their congregation six miles east of Ducktown, over 100 citizens of Shoal Creek, North Carolina, rose up in rebellion against a sect they saw as blasphemous for “preaching sanctification or the second blessing.” Scholar George Tindal summarized certain reasons for the aversion by many to Holiness. The makeup of these new believers were folk on the religious fringe who “substituted ‘religious status for social status’ … and [wished to] abandon this hopeless world.” Holiness theology was seen by many as attacking the very heart of the capitalist system, American governing conventions, and the spiritual détente American Christians had accepted as part of the natural order. As challengers to the status quo followers of the new “holy roller” sects had to be dispersed before their contagion took root their critics claimed. The righteous mob at Shoal Creek burned that Holiness Church “while a Methodist minister preached a sermon to the infuriated mob.” Afterwards locals passed public resolutions forbidding the sect to build any new structures in the county. “Serious trouble is feared” from all this, warned the Atlanta Constitution.

Condemnation of Holiness theology and its radical challenges to the social order came from the very top of established religious orders in the South. Holiness theology took direct aim at older theologies because its followers believed the older sects had become tainted with materialism, compromised by sin, and had abandoned missions to help the downtrodden. In reports that would have been read by Copper Basin faithful, Bishop Warren Candler of Georgia attacked and ridiculed Holiness followers at a Columbia, South Carolina Methodist conference.

294 “Burned a Holiness Church” Atlanta Constitution, 31 July 1900.
295 Tindal, 197.
296 Atlanta Constitution, ibid.;
Prejudice against the sect remained for a generation after the most violent acts, Holiness believers referred to this period as “The Persecutions.”

Holiness did represent something new. Changing times had called forth a transformative theology that responded to the extremely difficult and unpredictable industrial life ways of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Scholar Wayne Flint concluded that the emergence of such sects throughout the South resulted in even clearer class lines. “In many mill villages and mining camps, churches represented distinct classes, with Methodists and Presbyterians most frequently enrolling middle and upper classes, Baptists split and Pentecostal and Holiness congregations tending toward lower class.”

In the early 1900s a Church of God congregation began out of a rented store building in Copperhill. Its popularity became so great that the congregation had to move to a larger building in McCaysville. By 1912, the congregation had their own, plain, unornamented worship house where they could practice the behavior-centered, text-legitimated theology of that sect. Like many Church of God congregations, the new congregation suffered discrimination and recrimination. Church “Evangel Records” describe “the persecutions” as a time where believers were apt to collect themselves against oppressive forces in their communities. Studies on the sect show these folk were also apt to join unions in efforts to uplift the common man. Church of God communities challenged the industrial hierarchy in the boom towns. Some capitalists would have none of it. “Owners tried to keep [Church of God and Pentecostal churches] out of their villages.” Church of God communities responded to attacks led by industrial operators by assisting striking workers and dispensing charity; they used Biblical instruction “to mobilize

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against the oppression of the poor by the rich.”\textsuperscript{300} These would have been exactly the kind of congregations some of the most pro-union, radical laborites might join for religious comfort and communal support in the Tri-State. Reports clarify that the arrival of the Church of God in the early 1910s coincided with the revival of an aggressive labor movement in the Copper Basin during the Great War era.\textsuperscript{301}

\textsuperscript{300} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{301} Lillard, \textit{History of Polk County}, 122.
Chapter 3 New Deals come to the Copper Basin

The Great Depression’s impact

The machinations of foreign and domestic copper markets, the actions taken by producers and the effects of government officials determined to resuscitate the nation’s economy all had a significant impact on the Copper Basin’s industry in the 1930s. As the full impact of the Great Depression’s contraction settled upon its residents; however, Copper Basin company managers, civic and commercial elite, and working people developed different conceptions about what an appropriate response to the crisis should be. Industrial management, businessmen, civic leaders, and workers all wanted stability and protections against further erosion of their economic circumstance. Rejection of certain New Era standards began as companies now demanded increased government protection from foreign competition. Workers did too, but they also lost faith in rational management approaches designed to counter union organizing. Despite their differing prerogatives, by 1933 desperation led nearly all the key players among capital and labor in the Copper Basin throw their support behind New Deal initiatives and mandates designed to assist industrial management, small businessmen and working people; these groups did so with great fervor and in the hope that a different collection of strategies might yield results. The strategies embraced by these groups all involved some sort of collective enterprise, but ultimately, the ambitions of management and local businessmen diverged from those of many workers. All would have to come to terms with new federal mandates that allowed more legal maneuvering by organized workers than ever before, but which also sought to restore vitality to the nation’s industrial producers.
When the boom of the New Era died in the copper commodities markets, it did so in spectacular fashion. The speculative price of this most important metal for an age of electrification collapsed in 1931 to about 6 cents per pound, down from highs above 18 cents just the year before. As a result, in 1931, Tennessee Copper and Chemical profits (the name Lewisohn operations in the Copper Basin assumed for much of the twenties) collapsed from over $1 million to just over $5,000.302

Then the news got even worse because over the next couple of years the contraction only continued. A report from March 1933 stated that U.S. consumption stood at only 27% of 1929 figures. Overseas consumption fell by a third. Corporate losses sustained at Tennessee Corporation were over $759 thousand in 1932 and another $97 thousand in the first year of the New Deal. The latter number may reflect tempering effects of new NRA pricing and production codes but only peripherally since it took producers months to redirect their production levels.303

To improve their own positions after the collapse the commodities markets, US copper producers eventually took advantage of federally-mandated associationalism. But, this had not been their first response. Intense competition among producers had regularly compromised the efficacy of their cooperation. Improving markets—however fleeting—had typically revealed the fragility of such associations and producers returned all too soon to cut-throat competition. However, the 1929 Crash and subsequent price collapse in copper shut down many smaller producers and precipitated near panicked calls for protectionism by the industry’s leaders. Further economic deterioration ensued in the copper markets after Congress capitulated to pleading copper barons and threw up the tariff wall of the Hoover era: domestic stocks burgeoned as foreign governments retaliated with their own protective tariffs. In spite of an

302 “Other Corporate Reports” New York Times, 7 September 1931; and 12 April 1932.
embrace of impressive mechanization in the industry and rationalization in its management, the
copper industry as a whole needed reforming. Yet even under the intense stress placed upon it
during the early 1930s producers came to cooperate only reluctantly. When they did join the
Roosevelt Administration’s association schemes as allowed through the National Recovery
Administration, they did so on their own terms. Constant wrangling among copper producers
over price and production quotas limited short-term benefits to the industry.304

Tennessee Copper Company managed to wrestle much from contracting copper markets
despite the Depression’s grip. It used its superior position to overtake its stumbling local
competitor through merger and finished the consolidation of non-ferrous production in the
Copper Basin. It advanced still further into agricultural chemical production to buoy its bottom
line. Regarding labor relations, the goal of TCC management was to preserve the rational
organization of production and labor relations established in the 1920s by J.N. Houser at the
direction of Sam A. Lewisohn. The Lewisohn-Houser regimen had depended upon a de-facto
company union that centered on job safety. Foremen and other supervisory staff directed work
through the craftsmen. A phalanx of efficiency made up of smelter, mine, and chemical
craftsmen had joined with foremen, engineers, and chemists; together their efforts reduced
injuries on the job and had allowed expansion of the company’s production array. As long as
copper prices remained strong, wages substantial, and job security somewhat secure this system
seemed to work well enough to maintain an industrial peace—despite technology driven
decreases in the need for skilled miners and corresponding increases in unskilled workers. The
collapse of the economy in the thirties put enormous stress on the Lewisohn-Houser scheme.
Management instituted a stretch-out to prevent desolation of employment rolls but some workers

304 Hyde, Copper for America, 177-180; Navin, 26-27; and, Hildebrand and Magnum, 143 and 146-47.
thought management could do better. Miners and craftsmen responded positively to their chance to organize on their own terms under the New Deal’s federal protections.  

When the Roosevelt Administration announced and Congress passed the National Industrial Recovery Act in spring 1933, the typically resolute, upbeat, now careworn, Copper Basin civic and business leaders leapt at the chance to support their President—and revitalize local aspirations. For some while, Copperhill and Benton, Tennessee editors had been admonishing citizens not to heed cynical, negative voices of “depression.” Regular turnover of local newspaper ownership during the early thirties, especially at Copperhill, reflected the failure of this admonishing tactic. Offering hope and collective support through a much more engaging campaign than any scolding could provoke, the New Deal gave these men a chance to leave behind emptier, booster sophistry. A flourish of optimistic patriotism helped galvanize a resolute coalition of Copper Basin businesses. They would do their part in healing the national economy. Periodic Cassandra condemnation of New Deal expense and inflationary pressure sometimes crept into Copperhill editorials, but more of this came from the editor at the county-seat whose constituency had more to lose from the New Deal’s erosion of the rural ancient regime. In the industrial east of Polk County and throughout most of the Tri-State, a general assent to the federal government’s invitation for businessmen to adopt certain NRA codes stood as a prelude to locals’ later enthusiastic support for federal programs like the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Civilian Conservation Corps and US government munitions contracts.

Workers too had an opportunity for empowerment under the New Deal, first through the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act and then through the 1935 Wagner Act and subsequent supportive court decisions. Workers took more immediate advantage of these NIRA

306 “Success to the New Administration,” Copper City Advance, 4.7.1933; and, “Copperhill and McCaysville Fall In Line with the NRA Movement,” Copper City Advance, 8.4.1933.
opportunities than had their managers, quickly organizing into unions and putting to the lie any myth management may have come to tell itself that workers had been fully satisfied with company unions or employee-representative plans instituted in the 1920s. But, by the late 1930s, it was clear that Copper Basin workers could not agree on the best way to protect their interests. Some sought refuge in the new CIO and its industrial organization of workers, while others preferred AFL-style volunteerism and pure-and-simple unionism that sought to maintain a special voice for craftsmen. 307

Division in the workforce resurrected anti-communist attacks from within and without labor. Management became frustrated with the intensifying internecine squabbling and used the schism to its advantage. TCC owner, Sam A. Lewisohn had long held that labor ought to be able to organize and that it was critical that management treat labor with respect and consideration of the workingman’s circumstances. Years later, Lewisohn acknowledged there could also be a place for government to enforce mandates guaranteeing workers collectively bargain with employers. For his opinions and for his philanthropic work which underscored his devotion to community uplift, Lewisohn was recognized by the Roosevelt Administration as a model, moderate statesman in the industry. His discussions on the subjects of industrial relations, rational management, and proper wage schemes from the Great War era forward determined not only his company’s policies, but set standards in other industries as well. 308

307 Mitchell, Labor Relations, ibid.
However, for all his defense of the workingman as a respectable component of industry, Lewisohn’s opinions of how much power a union should have changed over time. Though allowing latitude at his works in the early New Deal, by the late thirties it was clear that Lewisohn and his management team at TCC were increasingly uncomfortable with some of the demands put forth by Mine, Mill union workers. Lewisohn did not want a union or workers advocates dictating national wage rates for copper workers, nor should unions demand too much control of the shop floor. Wages were to be locally determined based upon particular circumstances, regional labor markets and commodities prices. Closed shops were not to be allowed and seniority based solely upon time on the job made little sense to him.  

As a result of Lewisohn’s positions, TCC let it be known through its supervisory staff that the company preferred an AFL union over one allied with the CIO. The company then coordinated a phalanx of conservative workers supported by commercial, civic, and police authorities to a push-back CIO influence. Members of this confederation saw the future of the TCC as key to their own prosperity. While the warring unions defended their efforts and competed for sympathetic support among workers and local citizens, Tennessee Copper took advantage of the circumstances. The company managed to forge a new public image for itself that would over-ride earlier perceptions of the company as an exploitive firm, guilty of destroying countless acres of Appalachia. TCC came to be seen by influential local citizens as the most reasonable voice among an antagonistic, ever shriller, cacophony of organized workers.

**Commercial and civic support for the New Deal**

An April 7, 1933 *Copper City Advance* editorial pointed readers toward the “brightening skies” over the nation since the installation of its new president. Summarizing the enthusiastic,

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309 Lewisohn, “Factors in Wage Determination” and “What the Employer Can Do,” ibid.
bi-partisan support that existed among the region’s businessmen and citizens for Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “New Deal,” editor Don King admired the president’s “quickness and aggressiveness” in addressing the staggering depression—a crisis now in its fourth year.

Roosevelt had already impressed King with his handling of the banking crisis the month before since. The president’s actions appeared to herald a new era of balanced budgets and reduced taxes. Prices in the agricultural markets were on the rise: dairy products, hogs and cattle, cotton and tobacco prices, all were going up. “Better days for the farmer,” he reminded readers, “means [sic] better days for the towns… [which] means more sales for merchants and more work for carpenters and bricklayers.” It seemed to King that the nation should follow this man Roosevelt. “Toward every issue he has touched he has exhibited candor and fearlessness.” In wishing the man success King seemed particularly relieved FDR was “laying permanently to rest the fear he might pursue an occasionally radical course.” The presumed direction taken by Roosevelt was important to King. As architect of this “New Deal” King was cheered Roosevelt seemed mindful of certain proven conventions of the American economy; policies would be vast in scope and aim, but also considerate of the associationism initiated in the Hoover era. Its pragmatic, proactive course, directed by what came to be known as the Brains’ Trust, included advice from businessmen and professional economists. King believed many of his Republican readers could heave a sigh relief over the intentions of the new president. Communism and fascism had alternately already seduced millions of Europeans, but the new American president had not fallen for these false charmers. Standing like a barometer before his readers and linking health of the economy to the health of the public generally, Don King sent communal salutations from the Copper Basin to the administration. “To wish success for President Roosevelt is simply to wish success for one’s state, one’s business, one’s self.” Well wishes aside, King told his readers he
would stay keen however to any aspects of the new administration’s policies that smacked of
dangerous, superficially tempting, anti-capitalist ideology.  

For its part, TCC operators took the lead in July by ending a stretch-out, returning to a
five-day work week and providing a 12 ½ percent raise to all workers. The Copper City Advance
said that general manager Houser had decided to take this action in support of NRA codes.
Local businesses followed Houser’s lead but with much more enthusiasm. By August that year,
the contagious acclaim and excitement behind the New Deal was evident in local headlines. A
chorus of local businessmen heeded the president’s call to action as outlined through National
Recovery Administration mandates. Full page notices announced the Twin-Cities’ business
community support for the Blue Eagle campaign and locals’ intention to adopt NRA codes on
operating hours and fair competition. An “Honor Roll for Copperhill, Tenn. and McCaysville,
Ga.” listed forty-one of the most important enterprises, banks, offices, shops, grocers, and
service stations of the surrounding environs. Kincaid’s Meats and Groceries, A. Maloof & Sons
Dry Goods and Clothing, Center & Abernathy Furniture and Hardware, and a dozen or so
smaller companies joined with the First National Bank of Polk County, TCC Smelter Stores,
local proprietors of the Atlantic & Pacific Tea and Standard Oil companies to proudly stand with
their president. Having met in a mass meeting of merchants and civic leaders, the body had
pledged its “100 percent cooperation” to the campaign, though it acknowledged that restaurants,
drug stores, barber shops, garages, and filling stations were to set their own conditions.
Operating hours across the Basin now became standardized under this “blanket code”: 7:30 AM
to 5:30 PM through the work week, Saturday not included. Patriotic symbolism filled the pages
of the paper as it announced the new regimen. “We pledge allegiance to the President’s
Program!” announced the business confederation in the Copper City Advance. Recognizing the

311 “Brightening Skies” and “Success to the New Administration”, Copper City Advance, 4.7.1933.
seriousness of this advance, businessmen admonished citizens to rally to this cause: “Service to one’s country in peace is as deserving as service in war!” Acknowledging the importance of the working man in this new scheme, the City Advance announced it was important for all to remember that a new accord could exist between capital and labor if all followed a “live and let live [policy] thoroughly in accord with the intent of the NRA.” Retailer A. Maloof was all for the Blue Eagle campaign and all its components. “We believe in the NRA 100% and will cooperate to the limit.”

The national devotion and community-spirit evident in all this stood in stark contrast to the fury some Basinites had expressed earlier that year when an angry, armed mob of 150 men shutdown local highway work to protest imported work crews. Rioters failed to heed threats by the road company (“Reconstruction Finance”) that their officials would call in the state militia. The crowds only retreated after Polk County Sheriff Broughton Biggs explained the level of expertise required for the work. This incident underscored just how angry the Depression’s desperate times had made Tri-State mountain workers. It was also a reminder that local folk had little fear of organizing and arming themselves en masse when their interests appeared threatened. They would defend what they saw as justice in their economic rights.

Other signs of the Depression abounded. While it would not be official for some years, the number of persons in the county who could not pay their taxes had exploded, For the year 1931 alone, over two hundred properties went delinquent in Polk County, nearly all these went

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312 “Improvements Noted with Tennessee Copper Company,” Copper City Advance, 7 July 1933; “Copper Company Increases Wages,” Copper City Advance, 28 July 1933; “Mr. President! We are Cooperating!” Copper City Advance, 8.4.1933.
for auction. In many cases, the taxes owed amounted to less than ten dollars or about two days work, but even this seemingly meager amount represented too much for scores of locals.\(^{314}\)

People who could not pay their taxes did not shop as much as they had in the past. Times being what they were, it should be no real surprise that the heavily Republican merchants and business class initially collaborated to support FDR’s actions. They had not abandoned capitalism; they had just become desperate and so joined ranks to cheer the Blue Eagle. But, it also seems plain that this same alliance of local businessmen saw NRA measures as a temporary fix. “Together we are going to put this thing over” they made plain. If they had been successful in vanquishing the depression locally all on their own it would have been an impressive feat, together, their numbers only represented five percent of the working population.\(^{315}\)

As established by many historians, the enormity of the economic wound created by international crisis was deeper and broader than any single New Deal program could handle. Local leaders had to do something they believed and this explains why aspects of the New Deal benefitting industry had broad support in the Copper Basin. Fannin and Polk County census figures illustrate how the circumstances in both the farming and industrial sectors had eroded and how tenuous any recovery actually was in spite of any optimism that might flow from an editor’s pen. The post-war farming slump of the twenties had certainly not helped matters in a sector of the economy that was already weak and which had only benefited a little from President Wilson’s farm loan bills during the war. The hard-scrabble nature of so many of the tiny farms of the region took its toll. One in ten farms in Polk were less than ten acres in size. In 1920 more than a third of local farmers were tenants. The percentage of tenants was as high as forty-three percent, down ten percent from the 1910 census, but by 1930 that percent had again risen above


\(^{315}\) *Copper City Advance*, 8.4.1933, ibid.
fifty percent. Fannin County’s number of tenants had crept up as well. With farmers making up twenty-seven and eighteen percent of the counties’ population in the 1930s, under-employment and hard times for them simply aggravated pressures on the total population of gainful workers. According to the census of 1930, approximately twelve percent of Fannin County men and fourteen percent of Polk men were underemployed (partly employed, laid off, or unemployed).316

But these figures may be too conservative, and thus misleading, for several reasons. The worst part of the Depression did not hit until Fall-Winter of 1932-1933, although editorial comments in local papers suggest that the years 1929 and 1930 had been particularly rough. In the decade’s first few years, the biggest employer in the region, Tennessee Copper Company, relied on a version of the stretch-out. In it TCC official reduced workers’ assigned shifts and claimed they did so in order to keep men on the payroll, but those who remained complained that they had to do more work to make up for the reduced crews. Few men were allowed to work full-time, officially.317

Despite the several extensive programs initiated in the Tri-State by New Deal legislation such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Civilian Conservation Corps, underemployment and unemployment remained a tenacious problem. Things actually got worse for many people. Records for 1937 show that nearly twenty percent of the male workforce in both Polk and Fannin counties were still listed as either fully unemployed or only working part-time. The actual

317 Lampell Report” NCPR, 4.
number may be higher still however, given the pride of local men and reluctance for people to admit to their being fully unemployed.  

The City Advance kept watch on the Blue Eagle’s attack on the Depression. In late August 1933, the Copper City Advance reported businesses were hiring extra hands to help reap a new consumer harvest; the hiring fortified hopes. Editor King kept up a good watch and knew he needed to. A number of previous editors of the Copperhill news had failed to rally local commerce and so the responsibilities of local journalism fell to new owners.

Apparently rallying support for a revival of business optimism even in the early New Deal was not an easy task. For all its potential Tri-state readership, which ran into the thousands, the Copperhill newspaper appears to have been always just on the edge of going bust in the early thirties. Editors tried various methods to at once promote business and relay the news while turning a profit. Success was fleeting. Clarion calls by Copperhill newspaper editors during the first years of the crisis had tried to warn readers away from destructive pessimism that would drag the country down further still. “Down with Depression” heckled one editor while another commanded readers recognize their duty. “Now was the time to spend” he said illogically, the ongoing banking and underemployment crises notwithstanding.

When the economy first began to contract so severely, the editor of the Copperhill paper, Fred Sheets, believed the attack on consumer confidence to be as dangerous as any invading force. Sheets had seen little to hope for after the 1930 election failed to change local

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320 “Down with Depression, “ The Copperhill News, 1.2.1931; and “Now is the Time to Spend,” Copper City Advance, 5.26.1933.
representation. He put a new onus onto Copperhill’s citizens to change their fortunes stating flatly that they must take matters into their own hands and decide their own fate among the possibilities. Sheets was not supporting any particular candidate or even any particular protocol beyond calling upon readers to take a personal interest in better their own lives; the responsibility for economic recovery lay at their own feet: “Prosperity is [now] up for election, running to overthrow depression…. It’s time for the people to decide which will be chosen.” Sheets’ charge failed to energize local consumer spirits in spite of his impressive credentials—he held membership in the East Tennessee Press Association, the Tennessee Press Association and (“since 1930”) the National Editorial Association. The editor’s boosterism and barking did little more than scold readers. Local consumption consumerism alone was not going to fix the problem of the Depression—and most readers knew this. Shortly after Sheets’ notice, the Copperhill paper (then known as simply The Copperhill News) got “new management.”

The paper changed its name in 1933 to the Copper City Advance and with the new name came a new, more vigorous spirit to promote “the development of various resources of Polk County.” This was when Don King took over management of Copperhill City Advance, a position he held until Spring 1933. Assisted by Mrs. M.C. King, Don King engaged local businessmen to fight the depression and instructed the populace on Roosevelt Administration beliefs that inflation might be the cure for the economy. Unfortunately, the editorial team’s upbeat mood and Don King’s hard work rallying local businessmen failed to bring in revenue substantial enough for him to hold onto the paper and editorship changed once again.

Mr. R.E. Cross, of Clayton, Georgia took over publication in June 1933 and held the paper through summer and fall. It is clear from his editorials that he realized the winds buffeting

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322 “Now is the Time to Spend,” Don C. King, noted as editor, The Copper City Advance, 26 May 1933.
the Copper Basin’s industrial works hailed from far, far away. Administration experimentation with the economy was a necessary evil, Cross argued, and collaborative action across industry and at home would also be necessary. Patriotism and collective action would now be a single gesture, led by the president. It was Cross who oversaw the business community’s embrace of the NRA in the summer of 1933. His August report on the success of the NRA in the Basin among merchants was as vague as it was selectively optimistic, focusing mostly on developments at the local A & P while claiming other businesses were experiencing “steady… considerable… improving… increases.” Cross appeared to be an avid New Dealer, but his editorials held contradictions: He trumpeted support for the New Deal, but made clear his opposition to business regulation; his concern for workers’ safety reflected Taylorism rather than any humanitarian concern. Government need not regulate safety he claimed; instead he argued safety was an inside job and the accident prone had to change their ways. For all his organizing of the local business community to support the NRA codes, Cross failed to garner necessary revenue and the paper slipped from his hands.323

Just before Christmas 1933 a man familiar with captaining the Twin-cities’ paper returned to its Copperhill helm. Frank L. Middleton, lately of Athens Tennessee, had worked for Fred Sheets. This all around “general-newspaper man” brought his considerable experiences to as a former printer and linotype operator. Precocious in the business, he held a state record by being an editor and a publisher by age sixteen at the Byromville, Georgia Herald. Calling himself a “South Georgia man” in his greeting to his readers, he was, he reminded them, “by no means a stranger to the Copper Basin, having lived here for years.” Middleton and his wife had a young son and thus understood the challenges endured by many local families during the hard

323 “New Management Publishes Advance” 1 June 1933; “Copper Basin Businessmen Report Splendid Improvement,” Copper City Advance, 8.26? 1933; and “Make it a Safety Year,” Copper City Advance, 2 June 1933.
times. But the couple intended to expand reportage during the crises, not allow it to limit them. They wanted to report on the news of the day beyond the difficult developments of the Depression. Mrs. Middleton announced she wanted to expand the society pages; the addition would highlight the considerable life and activities goings on about the Basin in spite of the downturn’s hardships. The couple also expanded sports coverage in the *City Advance*. Local people took to the Middletons and the paper prospered; the couple kept control of the *Copper City Advance* through the Second World War, refreshing the look of the weekly early in the war. Throughout the period, the editorial stance of the paper remained true: It supported government programs that helped the extraction, smelting, munitions, and chemical industry, local commerce and in turn the general citizenry of the Copper Basin.324

By Christmas 1933 things were looking up enough in the Basin, with the passage of New Deal legislation and the accompanying sense of optimism, that Frank Middleton was able to report that local consumers had been opening their wallets and purses for some impressive holiday shopping. Local holiday business had shown a big increase over 1932 with “more than $10,000 spent” just the Saturday before Christmas. Middleton gave a lot of the credit for the revival to the influence of $4,000 in weekly payroll streaming in from local Civilian Works Administration projects. Several local towns experienced similar boosts in commerce, some with increases as high as thirty to forty percent greater over 1932 figures.325

Meanwhile, beyond the red hills of the Basin, John Shamblin and his wife Eula put out the *Polk County News* from the county seat in Benton, Tennessee.326 The News was a much more conservative organ than the *Copper City Advance*. Except for support of the Civilian

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324 “New Management Publishes Advance,” Copperhill City Advance, 12.22.1933.
325 “Christmas Business Shows Big Increase,” Copperhill City Advance, 12.29.1933.
326 Sundry publications of the Polk County News 1930s-1946. For an example of typical cartoons of the era in the *Polk County News* see, “Keep to the Right,” 3 November 1938.
Conservation Corp, under Shamblin’s leadership, the paper remained a strident critic of the New Deal and stood as an advocate for often reactionary positions into the forties. Every issue held political cartoons on the front page, often by Nat Collier, that drummed home the message that the New Deal was part of a march toward socialism and communism—ideologies Shamblin never tried to distinguish. Indeed the paper conflated communism, socialism, “John L. Lewis-ism,” closed shop advocates, officials of the National Labor Relations Board, taxation, deficit spending, and sundry government regulators, regulations, and officials. Shamblin’s editorials, augmented by Collier’s cartoons and the editor’s selection of imported special features highlighted an ongoing menace. If left unchecked, Shamblin warned, this collection of ideologies, institutions, and personalities advanced by the New Deal and its advocates threatened the liberties of decent, right-thinking people. The editorial tenor of the PCN anticipated the reactionary opposition to the New Deal set in many Southern county seats as observed by George Tindall. Fearful of policies that threatened their ancient hegemony, county elites, Tindal argued, resisted efforts that eroded their control of “property, labor, credit, and local government.”

Though holding at times contradictory positions through the thirties and forties, Polk County editors did not engage in an editorial war. In fact, while both papers were quick to report labor trouble neither paper supported the CIO-movement or were willing to report on the many alleged instances of police brutality, company exploitation and intimidation, or the dire economic circumstances endured by many Copper Basin workers.

**Tennessee Copper Company in the Depression: a model Lewisohn subsidiary**

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327 Tindal, 618.
In the twenties and thirties rationalizing schemes adopted by many non-ferrous firms combined investment in new technologies with pragmatic scientific management. At the Tennessee Copper Company rational transformation had included better use of the Basin’s low-grade ores and production of “blue stone” copper sulphate used in the manufacture of agricultural chemicals. Parent company Tennessee Corporation had set up a guaranteed customer for TCC blue stone by establishing Southern Agricultural Works adjacent to the Atlantic Steel Works in Atlanta.328

Despite logical advantages to rationalization, when the strategy was extended to the possibilities for associationalism, non-ferrous companies were far more resistant. In fact, competitors regularly damaged domestic markets through development of their overseas reserves. The American Bureau of Metals Statistics reported that development of foreign reserves in late summer 1931 led to new highs in refined copper stocks from South America despite cuts in domestic output. A meeting in Brussels the following December among some of the most important world producers resulted in a 26% reduction to maximum production capacity. Limiting the effectiveness of such international “agreements” were self-serving moves by major domestic and some foreign producers to circumvent production quotas established by the (relatively weak) international Copper Exporters cartel. Phelps Dodge Corporation for instance managed to get an exemption for certain “individual producers” which permitted them to “sell at prices lower than the established quotation.”329


There is no indication Tennessee Corporation let alone Tennessee Copper would partake in this kind of an exemption. Nor did parent company Tennessee Corporation participate directly in overseas development beyond selling. However, the Lewisohns’ proactive expansion into the chemicals markets likely saved TCC from the fate of many small companies in the early thirties who had fewer customers. Rationalization at TCC through implementation of the Lewisohn-Houser’s work regimens served as an additional bulwark against the onslaught of the first waves of the depression in 1930, but could not hold back some over-wash during the worst years of the storm, hence the provocation for the TCC’s use of the stretch-out. Although managers referred to this policy as “spreading employment,” the result was a four-day work week and some reduction in workers’ wages, though the exact amount is unclear in the records. Ducktown Basin workers began to suffer greatly, but at least many of them had a job.\textsuperscript{330}

To stem the debilitating effect of foreign stocks on domestic markets, Sam A. Lewisohn directed Tennessee Corporation vice president Emory H. Westlake to speak to corporate shareholders about the desperate circumstances foreign producers forced upon their domestic competition. The speech was typical of those given in an industry-wide campaign by domestic producers to get Congress to approve protective tariffs. Claiming the non-ferrous industry and copper producers were on the brink of catastrophe, Westlake described how the state of Arizona was just about to go bust owing to reductions in copper company tax revenues. He then outlined how outsized foreign reserves threatened whole communities of Americans. His portrait of the situation existing in the Copper Basin did not resound with strains of defiant corporate greed or arrogant exploitation, but instead as comments by one who had to direct painful decisions that affected the fate of workers under his employ.

“For thirty-three years [in the Copper Basin] the Tennessee Corporation has been able to give steady employment to their workmen and a settled community has grown up with permanent investments in all the modern necessities of a prosperous American community. The new low price of copper and lack of purchasing power of the farmer have compelled us to greatly decrease the scale of operations and to reduce the number of men employed in Southeastern Tennessee and Northern Georgia. Despite our best efforts, many families have been deprived of their accustomed earnings and the community is suffering from unemployment.”331

Westlake went on to argue for at least a five cent-a-pound import tax on copper because most producers could survive only if the price rose to 9-10 cents per pound. “People in the East do not realize that the clamor for an import tax on foreign copper has reached the proportion of a crusade, “ he concluded, “people facing want and destitution are looking to Congress for aid in their great distress.”

Westlake’s speech and others like it got lawmakers to act; Congress imposed a four cent import tax “but only on copper brought into the US for purposes of consumption (as opposed to copper brought in for refining and reshipment to Europe).”332 Foreign buying of copper increased for a time “in anticipation of the tariff’s implementation.”333 The brief turnaround gave some optimists proof that a recovery in the domestic markets was in the making. Sam A. Lewisohn was among those who heralded an end to the depression. He declared in late 1932 that “in spite of our large American stocks and the disorganized foreign market [no doubt referring to the Copper Exporters cartel], copper is undoubtedly at the beginning of an era of recovery.”

Lewisohn even went so far as to declare that perhaps the severe downturn had been a good thing for producers and the nation’s economy: “Necessity is the mother of invention and in this age of

332 Navin, 133.
electricity the depression is prodding our engineers and inventors to use their ingenuity to find new uses for electrical devices…. Copper will share in that increase.”

Lewisohn’s prophecy was over-optimistic. Once prices stabilized after the implementation of the four cent tax, “imports resumed their competitive threat.” It would take NRA production quotas to rein in production. For about thirteen months these quotas held, but fears among the largest producers that the quotas would limit them if recovery returned, severely hampered any real rationalization of production across the industry. So copper went up and down even as it began to recover. That said, since copper markets did not enjoy the quick and robust recovery hoped for, much of the good fortune the Lewisohns achieved with Tennessee Corporation and TCC came from a diversified use of the Basin’s resources.

The *Copper City Advance* grasped for whatever good news about the non-ferrous industry might come its way. An August 1933 headline declared with enthusiasm, “Copper is Coming Back!” The improvement was the bounce experienced in many commodities markets owing to effects of the New Deal and investor optimism, but the article gave credit elsewhere. Improvements in the copper markets reflected actions taken by the nation’s largest producers, the editor dutifully reported. More incentive was needed though to improve the markets and make them stable. Opined the paper, “the mining states [need to do] everything in their power through friendly legislative and tax policies to help the industry readjust itself to changed conditions.” The paper reiterated its support for protective tariffs. Interestingly, in light of all the recent local excitement over the NRA codes among the business class, little was said about national producers’ struggle to establish workable production codes. Perhaps this was because word had

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334 Lewisohn, quoted in the *New York Times*, 20 November 1932, ibid; and, Navin, 132.
335 Navin, *ibid*.
336 Ibid.
337 “Copper is Coming Back,” *Copper City Advance*, 8.11.1933
gotten back to the Basin from Washington that the copper producers were making a hash of the NRA code negotiations. Certainly the dissolution of the Copper Exporters cartel underscored producers’ inability to resolve the problem of excess stockpiles.\textsuperscript{338}

Copper markets and improvements owed to several developments: increasing overseas demand, the embrace by most domestic producers of NRA production codes, additional domestic need created through the effect of Public Works Administration and naval projects and expanded domestic use of copper for homes, automobiles, and appliances. Embrace of the NRA codes was important because it signaled a new willingness on the part of producers to cooperate to save their industry. Companies signed onto the new NRA price and production codes, codes which admonished producers to remain committed to federally mandated association: “No member of the industry shall engage in destructive price cutting.” By the summer of 1934 “virtually [the] entire industry” had agreed to a 9-cent per pound price for copper by limiting production. A “rising tide” of consumption commenced and domestic stock levels dropped 450 thousand tons in a year a half. “Profits Replace Losses in Copper” extolled one jubilant report. The good news provided proof that the NRA codes benefitted industry; still, most industry leaders chose to benefit from the codes and keep silent on the issue of quotas because they remained uncomfortable working together. Copperman and industry leader R.H. Houston did not. He joined the few who praised the codes and claimed that their existence would assist the United States into leading “the greatest prosperity ever known.”\textsuperscript{339}

\textsuperscript{338} Summary of the copper cartel’s action may be found in, Adelaide Walters. “The International Copper Cartel,” \textit{Southern Economic Journal}, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Oct., 1944), 133.
TCC benefitted from other developments in the thirties. New Deal agricultural programs helped farmers, encouraged the use of non-ferrous based agricultural chemicals and thus helped TCC’s bottom line. Perhaps even more important though were expanding demands for copper overseas. Aggressive military buildups by imperial Japan and Hitler’s Germany increased tensions abroad that provoked a rush among nations to expand their defenses. These actions sucked up a lot of foreign metals stocks. US copper producers representing “virtually the entire industry” relied on NRA copper prices and production quotas until the U.S. Supreme Court declared the program unconstitutional. Industry did not return to completely to its old ways in the wake of this judgment. Producers established a new, more disciplined foreign copper cartel that managed production levels. Meanwhile, military rearmament continued through the thirties by the most aggressive nations. As a result of all this, the price of copper never dropped below 9 cents a pound for the rest of the thirties, but this was just a few pennies above production cost. So, overall it was not a very good decade for any producers, especially for those who were limited in their production array. Non-ferrous business scholar Thomas Navins commented that “managing a copper company during the Great Depression must have been a dismaying experience. All the major forces bearing down on the industry were beyond anyone’s control.”

Given these conditions, TCC’s experience is distinguished all the more and underscores the wisdom of the Lewisohns’ choice to diversify. Even in bad times then they could expand their holdings. Tennessee Copper Company operators managed to use the relative weakness of its last major competitor, Ducktown Chemical & Iron—the former Ducktown, Sulphur,

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Chemical & Iron (DSCI)—to finish consolidation of the Basin’s non-ferrous and ferrous extraction and production. The irony of the outcome was that earlier in the century, it had been TCC that lagged behind the technological advance of its old Isabella rival. But, poorly negotiated war-contracts had weakened DSCI’s position in the Copper Basin. By the mid-1920s, “7,000 acres of land, mines, and mining equipment” owned by Ducktown Sulphur, Copper & Iron had been sold for $5 million to a Delaware firm by its London founders. Reorganized in 1925 as Ducktown Chemical & Iron Company (DCI), the firm’s new investors had plans to expand production of iron sinter to take advantage of the Chattanooga metals industry which had formerly purchased iron sinter at Cincinnati and other points. DCI wanted to “supply local foundries and consumer of pig iron.”—and to follow TCC’s example.  

Within a couple years of this change, DCI absorbed the smaller Copper Pyrites Company in Ducktown, a merger that brought “two-thirds of the copper land in the Basin under one control, the other third being owned by (then) Tennessee Copper and Chemical Company” (TCC). Tennessee Copper Chief Clerk R.E. Barclay later stated. “There was a period of some four or five years following these events when the outlook for the Isabella [firm] was probably never brighter.” The problem for DCI was that despite its ownership of more land than Tennessee Copper it was in much worse financial shape. Agreements with federal and local authorities as to what would be the legal amount of toxic emissions had not gone in DCI’s favor; damages from emissions were still draining company coffers. The firm had also never fully recovered from getting unfavorable acid contracts during the Great War and fallen behind its rivals who garnered much better wartime profits. Furthermore, a distracting circumstance in the early 1920s led the company to protest against a local electrical utility merger that DCI officials

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341 “5,000,000 Iron Mine Deal”
342 “copper Properties United” New York Times, 8 May 1927
343 Barclay, The Copper Basin, 13.
believed would negatively affect their profit margins. There’s no evidence that TCC management found the merger a problem. In the end DCI lost its fight against the merger, but the episode’s real effect was to highlight DCI’s vulnerability to changes in local utilities markets; failure to influence the deal stood as more proof of the firm’s loss of clout in the region. Details are scarce as to the exact financial concoctions weakening this firm, but corporate reports in the early 1930s show DCI was hemorrhaging. Apparently, instead of concentrating on new innovations and developing its managerial and workers’ skills owner decided to engage in a lot of the complex, speculative tricks all too common in the New Era. DCI’ annual losses grew to the hundreds of thousands of dollars and unlike TCC, DCI was not able to rely on diversified markets to ease the catastrophe of the Depression or on the kind of creative and proactive management that had gotten through the difficult years in the early 1900s.344

Other matters were operational and concerned Isabella’s notorious labor relations. Barclay had little good to say about the management, owners, or accountants of DCI or DSCI for the last two decades of the Isabella firm’s existence. When owned by the British the firm had never treated its workers with adequate respect; when taken over by an American investment group, the firm suffered from ownership by men who engaged in dismissive treatment of the workers and financial “hi-jinks” that R.E. Barclay called a kind of “pyramiding of ownership.” What he meant by these remarks it seems was that DCI owners were involved in some shady creative accounting of assets that finally could no longer be sustained: holding companies within holding companies all owned by the same men. In the end, the company had come to have little real value as a player in the field except to disguise improper management. DCI’s compromised fiscal circumstances forced the Isabella firm to first sell its prized Fontana, North Carolina mine

344 “Ducktown Copper Co. Forbidden to Increase Sulphur Ore Burned,” Atlanta Constitution, 9 May 1917; “Agreement on Claims Between Georgia and Ducktown Company,” Atlanta Constitution, 9 January 1919; and Barclay, The Copper Basin, 10-11.
to TCC (the discovery of this mine had been a local sensation just a few years before). Then the early thirties dealt a mortal blow to DCI’s bottom line; not even its sales of iron sinter could save the company from being absorbed. For about ten years Barclay said, rumors of TCC acquiring the old Isabella firm had made the rounds in business circles. It would not have been a huge purchase. DCI and its production facilities were never large; average employment stood by the mid-1930s at about four hundred persons. Actually, the biggest risk for TCC in acquiring the Isabella works was the scar on its labor force. Accounting and depreciation schemes could handle obsolete technologies, necessary renovations, and salvages; it was the unstable labor relations of Isabella that might cause the most harm in any acquisition. DSCI and later DCI management had always held onto the kind of rigid, anti-labor attitude that the Lewisohns considered reactionary.\textsuperscript{345}

Meanwhile, Tennessee Copper had been gobbling up smaller mine companies around the Copper Basin. The firm had the power and financial clout of the Lewisohns investment group in Tennessee Corporation to make it all happen. In 1936, with the assistance of additional capitalization granted through the issuance of $1.6 million in fifteen-year, six percent debenture bonds, Tennessee Copper Company acquired Ducktown Chemical & Iron. Its workers no doubt cheered being saved by a company whose pay scales they had often held up as a measure of decent pay in the Basin, one run by relatively benevolent operators. But to management, the DCI purchase resembled necessary surgery; the patient, by this point, was only the remnants of a once considerable rival. R.E. Barclay tended in his journal to dismiss the mostly redundant works at Isabella as simply “that place.”\textsuperscript{346}

\textsuperscript{345} Barclay, \textit{The Copper Basin}, 14-15.
Lewisohn influence on industrial management and TCC

Further investigation into the Lewisohn investment group that owned Tennessee Corporation and TCC provides a fuller understanding of the difficulties in placing them within any reactionary camp of industrialists. Sam A. Lewisohn had followed his father and uncle into the non-ferrous business after graduating from Princeton. Patriarch of what came to be known as Adolph Lewisohn & Sons ("the Lewisohn Group"), father Adolph Lewisohn and his brother Leonard moved into copper mining in the late 1880s and for a time the team was part of the powerful set of early copper barons who established the greatest of the non-ferrous firms. The Lewisohn were present, for instance, at the establishment of American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) in the late 1890s and over time sold considerable mining interests to Anaconda Copper. Aggressive takeovers of many of their properties (not-atypical in this most competitive of commodities businesses) moved the Lewisohn into the second tier of copper mining and smelting firms; Guggenheims, Phelps-Dodge, Calumet & Hecla and other more powerful interests established themselves as the first division of copper companies in the first decades of the century. Still, by attending to the refining and selling of copper in Europe and concentrating on developing their operations, the Lewisohns came to oversee a considerable collection of works and held a respected voice in the industry.347

Their most extensive holdings lay at Miami mine, Arizona and in the Copper Basin, but they had significant holdings at smelters in New Jersey and production facilities in Atlanta and substantial foreign interests through the South American Gold and Platinum Company. Ore qualities at both the Arizona and Tennessee locations were low; however the Lewisohns made

the best of this fact by relying on smelters and shared-interest customers that could process such ore into multiple products. In Tennessee, as has been said, the Lewisohns directed an aggressive move by TCC into the agricultural chemicals business. Eventually their TCC works alone produced some thirty-six different products ranging from non-ferrous metals and derivatives to iron sinter.348

Adolph Lewisohn remained the key executive officer in the group until his son took over officially in 1938, but it appears that Sam had been effectively in charge since the twenties. Both father and son set fine examples as philanthropists renowned for their extensive gifts to educational, medical, penal, religious, and artistic institutions: Just a short list of their gifts is impressive: $300,000 to Columbia University’s School of Mines, construction of the 6,000-seat Lewisohn Stadium and sponsorship of much-acclaimed and subsidized concerts in that colonnaded arena through the mid-century; $300,000 to Mount Sinai Hospital, an impressive German library and art collection to New York City College that included early editions of Goethe’s works; and “hundreds of unrecorded” artistic and philanthropic gestures by father and son which further distinguished them. “I love the beautiful,” wrote Lewisohn. 349

In the realm of civic life, Adolph had “worked ceaselessly for improvement in prison conditions” at Sing Sing and Auburn prisons and stood on commissions directing the use of public lands to assist the poor. For all these contributions and many more, the Mayor of the City of New York, John F. Hylan gave Adolph Lewisohn, then 70, “a large American flag in

recognition of his patriotic and public services.” Not immodest about his contributions
Adolph Lewisohn said of his role in business and society,

“Whatever I have undertaken has been successful… there have been difficulties, but I have been able to overcome them. My aim in life has always been to do something that in my opinion makes an improvement in the world or in the people, to improve the condition of people in all the different walks of life, according to my opinion.”

Lewisohn’s philanthropic work in the prison system provides insight into how Adolph Lewisohn intended his workers be treated. He demanded prison labor be paid fair wages “so that the delinquents would not lose their self-respect and he continually worked for hygienic conditions in the penal institutions of the country.”

Sam Lewisohn’s contributions to the civic and artistic realms of New York life continued after the death of his father. Though his work, characterized as “magnanimity of spirit,” was cut short by a fatal heart attack in 1951, Sam Lewisohn had long since developed a reputation as a businessman “tolerat[ing] no pettiness or triviality, no pretense, no pompousness about place or power.” For thirty-five years, like his father, he gave enormous sums of money and energy to help orphans, prevent juvenile delinquency, and comfort and improve the lives of the mentally ill.

Concurrent to establishing all this public goodwill Sam Lewisohn earned a reputation during the Roosevelt Administration for being a “statesmen of industry,” a term used to describe those business leaders whose approach to business and labor relations as took a “long view,

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351 New York Times, 18 August 1938, ibid. The Lewisohn Stadium, “long a central part of City College life” was dedicated in 1915 and, sadly, demolished in 1973 for a new arts center; see, “Adolph Lewisohn” City College Fund, http://www.citycollegefund.org/ccny/Timeline/Articles/Lewisohn.html last accessed 6.27.08; an example of notices for the Stadium Concerts placed during the New York World’s Fair of 1939 described the venue as a locale bearing “a view unsurpassed on Manhattan for thousands that there have sight of the City, the Sound and the stars on clear nights.” From, “The Stadium Concerts” New York Times 30 June 1939.  
353 “Lewisohn, Sam A.” several mentions in “Obituary No. 1, No Title,” New York Times, 15 March 1938; and “800 at Rites Here for Sam Lewisohn: Dr. Tead Cites Service to Mankind” New York Times, 20 March 1951.
instead of a short cut.” United States Assistant Secretary of Commerce, Ernest G. Draper declared Sam Lewisohn among industry’s statesmen. Draper considered Lewisohn part of a select few industrial capitalists who exhibited the kind of attention to employee needs and generosity in public service that would “engage in enriching the many as well as reward the few.” In Draper’s eyes these were qualities too many corporate owners and managers had neglected prior to the Great Depression. Lewisohn corporate non-ferrous and chemical product was well known and the Lewisohns used their clout and reputation as industry leaders in product development, management protocols and philanthropy to land some very fine government contracts; government financing that accompanied these allowed the Lewisohn Group to further develop its holdings.354

Just how good a friend to the New Deal was Sam A. Lewisohn? It depended on the subject. Lewisohn had, for instance, been selected by FDR himself to participate on a team to formulate “recommendations for social insurance” considerations that led to the development of Social Security. But this friend of the New Deal was no radical-left member of the Popular Front. Regarding the Social Security Act, though he had some problems with it in its final form he did not publically condemn it. On many other issues of the day, his opinions reflect commonly held conservative notions. For instance, Lewisohn argued against a regular or permanent distribution of a direct dole to the unemployed believing such a regimen threatened the character of good men and could lead to inflationary pressure in labor markets. Nor, he stated, should any unemployment insurance be solely overseen by the government; instead Lewisohn advocated that the public establish a trust paid for by bonds that could be called upon for a rainy day. As for other aspects of the New Deal, this study found no direct mention by Lewisohn on his opinions of the considerable influence of the TVA and the CCC on the labor

markets in the Tri-State, but it would not be too difficult to speculate what he might say based upon other comments he had made. Lewisohn agreed with New Dealers that there was a place for government-run public works projects, but only as a necessary evil owing to the emergency; they should not be a regular feature of the economy, because again, they were inflationary and pulled good workers away from industry.  

A summation of Sam A. Lewisohn’s considerable public comment on subjects relevant to industrial relations illustrates how he built on his father’s embrace of science and technology to move the business forward. It is important to note that in their public comments about industrial management the Lewisohns always put people before profit. Adolph Lewisohn had argued that all work in establishing solid and respectable industrial and labor relations was for the greater good of society. The goal was to secure better pay for workers while simultaneously earning a good profit. Toward that end the Lewisohn brand of corporate management relied on the incorporation of scientific management into production regimens reliant on the latest mining and processing technologies. Sam Lewisohn said in various address and reports from the Great War era forward that in light of the logistical difficulties inherent in modern corporate ownership, managerial organizations must not only include “specialized… technically equipped managers” (capable of maintaining and improving plant and production technology), but must also include a professional, college-trained, personnel department. The latter was a new addition for many firms in the twenties. Lewisohn demanded that his personnel department be staffed by men trained in “enlightened” communications skills, building on sociological observations just then coming into vogue at the nation’s major universities. This new class of personnel managers was to then to listen to and be pro-active in respecting workers’ needs. Old-fashioned, dictatorial

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management models had to go. Lewisohn understood that expensive production problems and a waste of human resources provoked by “insensitive” management had been especially bad in mining; as a result, strikes, violence, sabotage, and slowdowns had been regular features of the industry.

“When put in charge of plants, such [reactionary] men resist the introduction of modern methods in handling labor and even though they finally consent to an employment manager being put in charge, they do not give him the proper support or encouragement and are inclined to be obstructive….even if they are willing, it is difficult for them to cooperate intelligently.”

As to the issue of wages, Lewisohn argued against national, “living” wage standards by insisting that the statistical data employed to argue for such regimens failed to consider the particularities of local labor markets. If used improperly to set national wage schemes, the practice would allow reactionary, free-market “extremist” critics to attack the wages with “quack economic theories.” The data used to determine national wages, he argued tended to assess cost of living expenditures based on expensive urban centers of the East. To set “living wages” on these figures would place “false hopes” into the public mind and raise unrealistic expectations. Lewisohn stated time and again that wages need to be considerable and substantial, but that they had to be determined based upon the particular skill set of the workers and the wage levels earned in local farming sectors. Often his suggestions, while sounding humane and reasonable, were vague in their notions and susceptible to self-interested interpretation. Living wages, he said, should be capable of supporting a “decent life” for workers and represent a level “every enlightened person desires that a workman should have.” There is no direct evidence to sustain allegations that Sam Lewisohn’s rhetoric was merely a cynical attempt to raise false specters which he could then use to keep wages lower at his own facilities and thus allow for more funds.

to support his notable philanthropy. Granted, the costs of “doing good” can be considerable.

Wage levels at TCC, though only average for the non-ferrous industry as a whole, were higher than most Tri-State industrial or farming wages. But it is clear from the record that Lewisohn did not support wage schemes determined only through what he called “the haggling [sic] of the market.” Good wages, wages that respected workers’ skills levels in a particular labor market had to have input from enlightened businessmen, civic leaders and workers’ advocates. Otherwise wage regimens failed to do the public good.357

Sam Lewisohn’s reputation for progressivism on labor relations among Washington and Wall Street’s elite did not temper his aversion however to industrial unions. His attitudes allowed TCC to embrace a surprisingly reactionary response to the CIO movement and the company made pragmatic use of New Deal institutions to secure a more conservative union. Lewisohn-influenced corporate management simultaneously employed a progressive program of civic responsibility and a cutting-edge use of public media to shape a positive corporate image in the Tri-State. A comparison of TCC policies and actions to much more reactionary anti-union efforts taken by other copper companies, places TCC managers into a group scholar Howell John Harris described “the Realists” These “realists” were firms where management was “compelled to accept unionism as a fact, often after strong opposition,” but did so “reluctantly, under pressure, and with ill grace.” Realist owners and management “were acutely conscious of the

union as an infringement upon their power, and supported political action to amend public
policy, and propaganda to reorient public opinion."\(^{358}\)

In the Copper Basin, Lewisohn’s ideas about proper management determined TCC’s
choice to stand behind the AFL, but only because the company saw the CIO movement as the
worst of two evils. To its credit TCC’s labor relations policies appeared far less anti-union than
those taken by companies such as Phelps-Dodge and Ford Motor Company during the early
thirties. Once labor relations were settled TCC used the union to maintain industrial peace and
lifted wages on a regular basis as markets allowed. But TCC’s actions also reflected the rising
conservative tide that Harris identified as setting in as the New Deal’s power appeared to wane in
the 1937-38 recession and as labor’s “window of opportunity was slowly being shut”; the latter
resulted in part from efforts by a coalition of “resolutely anti-labor Republicans and southern
Democrats” who were determined to shut down powerful labor and New Deal programs that
threatened their power. TCC’s reaction was however neither complete nor swift. Nor did it
herald a full resurrection of twenties’-style anti-unionism. National belligerency towards unions
among industrialists faded in one company after another after the Supreme Court upheld the
Wagner Act’s protections on organizing and collective bargaining rights and as the war economy
empower government’s oversight of labor contracts. But management teams increasingly
demanded that unions be responsible, bureaucratized, and no longer part of a revolutionary
vanguard.\(^{359}\)

Reflecting the Lewisohn brand of industrial relations, the company used to its advantage
a continuation of pragmatic scientific management whenever it could, advanced production
regimes, expanded product diversification and shrewdly manipulated the media—both directly

\(^{359}\) Harris, *ibid.*, 37-38.
and indirectly. As a result TCC worked within the new order established by the New Deal but on its terms, not those dictated by a union.360

Signs of the owners’ influence upon company policy exist in several kinds of sources: company reports, newspapers and periodical articles, and observations made by federal agencies, such as reports of the National Labor Relations and reports made by social observers investigating Copper Basin labor relations. Comments made by TCC Assistant General Manager T.A. Mitchell as he looked back across twenty years of labor relations provided one summation of Lewisohn influence. Mitchell outlined key aspects of the employee representative plan established at TCC by J.N. Houser (at Lewisohn’s directive) in the mid-1920s; the plan remained a central component of the company’s welfare capitalism. Mitchell recounted it had been “the practice to hold frequent meetings with large groups of our employees [wherein] those attending … were selected from all departments.” Houser “would discuss the company’s program and any subjects of interest, including wage rate changes” All communication with management went through crew superintendents and [the newly established] Personnel Department.“ Mitchell concluded the result of this new system meant that workers could always find satisfaction if disgruntled because “the manager’s door was always open.”361

Interestingly, a most important aspect of Houser’s employee representative plan, supervisory oversight of safety training, remained a part of the company’s organization of its crews even after the return so-called independent unionism in the early thirties. Company Mining Department reports typical of the era contain regular assessments by the mine

superintendent on operating staff that “maintained the mines, machinery and equipment in good condition.” In a similar fashion, after mass meetings wherein management disseminated general policies, selected foremen or mine engineers coordinated the aforementioned safety program by training small crews of 4-6 men in proper safety protocol.362

Reliance on crew heads and specialized tradesmen to coordinate work and training was not uncommon in industry; management often used such men to assist in organizing the workforce. But even though the use of skilled tradesmen to organize and supervise had been increasing, other trends in industry were limiting job opportunities. The Lewisohn insistence that the latest in technological processes be implemented had its costs. Assessments by the Work Projects Administration on the interwar transformation of the copper industry confirmed that rapid technological change embraced by operators cut opportunities for skilled workmen; meanwhile the number of unskilled positions rose. The change frustrated men working in copper mining and smelting who just a generation before could rely on a strong set of skills to provide them leverage in negotiating wages. Now they saw their negotiating power eroded as companies embraced the newer processes.363

Lewisohn influence on J.N. Houser can be observed through the general manager’s response to TCC workers’ choices in union representation in the thirties and forties and were plain in the record. The company preferred the conservative American Federation of Labor over any union allied with the Congress of Industrial Organizations. The Federation’s historic support for organizational hierarchy controlled by powerful tradesmen and its “pure and simple”

362 Lamar Weaver to F.J. Longworth, Mining Manager, Copperhill, Tennessee Copper Company Mining Department, 9.18.1939.
volunteerism did not threaten company labor relations prerogatives as did the industrial unionism
promoted by the CIO. Lewisohn’s ideas about what defined proper labor relations clearly
informed his Copperhill management team. This proved important because while the AFL
harnessed regional anti-communist feeling, it was company actions that determined the outcome
of an internecine war in TCC’s rank-and-file. Company financing of police authorities and
regular managerial and supervisory acceptance of on-the-job worker intimidation assisted in
neutralizing the CIO movement in the Copper Basin. So while Sam A. Lewisohn could outline
in broad terms progressive industrial and labor relations schemes before the public or through
articles in major social scientific and industrial periodicals of the day—and he had been doing
since the Great War era—it was the actions of his management team at Copperhill that
determined just how those policies would be implemented.

Those actions did not exactly put the lie to Lewisohn’s rhetoric, but they did show some
essentially conservative intentions. They thus resemble other historic nexuses where the rhetoric
of celebrated captains of industry who outlined progressive labor relations tended to diverge
from their own corporate actions toward workers. Lewisohn was no reactionary. His company
did not fight the return of unionism just as it had never fought unionism when he was owner of
Tennessee Copper. But Lewisohn’s general manager, J.N. Houser, as described, had in fact
neutralized union activity in the twenties by providing a more reliable and effective alternative
through a very successful welfare capitalism combined with rational management scheme.
However Houser had done so in an era when the leadership of the major non-ferrous unions
suffered from petty infighting and, so distracted, failed to keep up with new worker needs.\footnote{Jensen, \textit{Heritage of Conflict}, 452,461 and 464.}

The labor policies implemented at TCC during the 1930s underscored several areas
where management refused to allow unions or other outside institutions to intervene too much:

\footnote{Jensen, \textit{Heritage of Conflict}, 452,461 and 464.}
wages, job assignment and training. Never fully acquiescent to the mandate given by New Deal legislation to the new National Labor Relations Board, TCC management and supervisory staff stalled and complained about NLRB decisions when these were determined to be not to the company’s advantage. Likewise the same cadre at TCC used the Labor Board when it needed to install a conservative union, a union upon which management could rely on to refrain from interfering with the protocols employed in the Houser safety and training crews.

A most important qualification on the influence of the Lewisohns on the Tennessee Copper Company is in order, lest Sam A. Lewisohn be described in an ahistorical manner as a micro-manager. There is no evidence of any kind of that TCC General Manager J.N. Houser was Sam A. Lewisohn’s shill or that Lewisohn had a great deal to do with any day-to-day matters that lay before Houser and his team in the Copper Basin. In fact, the record do not reveal a single instance where Lewisohn came to the Copper Basin for even a short visit to the properties. Money, influence, and opinion he sent, yes, but Lewisohn himself stayed out of the Old Red Scar. As corporate owner and executive officer Lewisohn was certainly made aware of some of the more questionable actions Houser took to route the CIO from Ducktown and Isabella, but if he disagreed with Houser’s actions nothing in the records confirms this. He was, as he had once described himself to be, an absentee owner, but not a wholly disinterested one. Therefore, Sam A. Lewisohn shaped the parameters of corporate standards, but he appears to have let the final forms and specifics of policy up to Houser, his trusted, enlightened, rational manager, to the staff of the Personnel Department, and supervisors over workers at the Tennessee Copper Company.

Radical miners vs. conservative tradesmen
Revived in the 1930s, the International Union of Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers, naturally gravitated to the CIO movement’s promotion of industrial organizing within the Federation. The 1937 Supreme Court decision supporting the constitutionality of collective bargaining measures in the Wagner Act further emboldened the union. Whereas in many areas of the far west where Mine, Mill’s reputation was one of intense radicalism associated with violent disagreements between polemic conservative and leftist workers, Copper Basin workers who had called Mine, Mill to organize locals during the Great War had not had this experience. The reputation of the union may have helped it secure written contracts with Tennessee Copper Company in 1919 through 1922.365 Scholar Vernon Jensen argued that similar success at other sites owed to Mine, Mill locals’ establishment “in virgin territory,” in places where the union did yet have a long history of antagonism with workers in a given labor market.366

As the union regained it footing in the thirties memories of the substantial pay hikes once garnered by the union excited the ambitions of Mine, Mill rank-and-file. Pay hikes in the late 1910s at some locales had been as much as 34.6% pre-war levels; for salaried men the increase was as high as 116.5%. Mine, Mill understood that the economic climate had changed dramatically from the heady days of the First World War—the amount of contract work in the domestic non-ferrous industry had increased by 515% during the Great War—but its leadership wanted to take advantage of the new legal protections for collective bargaining established under the New Deal. Mine, Mill recruitment took off; men flooded into the revived union across the nation. The number of Mine, Mill locals expanded from “a few weak [mostly Montana-based] locals” with a “skeleton crew of officers” often using their own funds, to twenty-eight within months of the passage of the NIRA. It would be some years before the ranks of the union

366 Jensen, Heritage of Conflict, 452.
swelled into the tens of thousands, but in the Copper Basin a Mine, Mill “committee from the mines and flotation plant” at Ducktown was fully functioning by November 1933 and by the following April, “a Copperhill local was ready to do business.” Soon the union forged a joint council to consolidate negotiations with TCC.367

During the first years of the New Deal the labor relations between the Tennessee Copper Company and the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers appeared generally peaceful and productive. But this accord depended on a combination of circumstances, none of which remained stable in this tumultuous decade: cooperative management, reasonable union demands and continued support for hierarchical systems among the workers which assisted operators in producing, developing resources, and improving markets.

In actions that support a view of TCC as being pragmatic and not reactionary TCC management decided not to challenge NRA production and labor codes nor the later Wagner Act labor relations mandates. Cooperation, indeed taking a lead in the region underscored why Lewisohn’s popularity among some New Dealers was no accident. At TCC his general manager’s choice to take the lead among businessmen in embracing NRA wage and operations codes is illustrative of a company willing to allow the new programs a chance. TCC owners and management understood the economic crisis of the thirties had threatened their entire industry and that the workers had endured an incredibly harsh period. From their perspective, the stretch-out had been a necessary evil. Unlike some of their larger, more obstinate competitors, TCC chose initially to go along with the new government-company-worker cooperation that drove New Deal ideology. Fighting workers was always an expensive proposition. Such actions could lead to shutting down operations, making economic and social circumstances in the Basin still worse. The pleas Westlake had made to legislators to enact legislation to help the industry had

been passed, but there were strings attached: federally mandated labor relations and oversight. TCC could live with some of this as long as an empowered labor did not indulge too heartily in controlling labor.  

Improving commodities markets allowed management to be more generous and TCC raised wages in mid-1933; this was the first increase since the Crash. TCC workers got a wage increase of 12½ percent, but this raise does not appear to have been as a direct result of Mine, Mill pressure, though pressure may have been indirect. General Manager J.N. Houser had decided in late July 1933 to initiate support among the local business class for the Blue Eagle campaign. His actions and the raise provided TCC workers with a minimum wage of $14 for a forty-hour work week. Houser also increased the number of men from 775 to about 825.  

But the extraordinarily swift revival of Mine, Mill must have had a stunning effect on TCC management and the company cooperated with the new union. That said, while industry representatives pleaded in Washington to reset federal anti-trust laws (so producers could secure limited output and assure themselves higher commodities prices) producers also wanted to make sure that an empowered labor would not overwhelm them. These men understood federal authority might even protect the efforts of “the most militant and powerful” unions and their advocates. There was reason for concern. Many workers now believed their President wanted them to organize and were becoming more and more willing to demand control of conditions on the shop floor, wages, and whole sectors of labor relations traditionally governed by management. NRA code-setting hearings in Congress gave organized labor an additional forum. Mine, Mill put forth its own opinions for industry standards, but, thanks to an industry push-

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369 “Copper Company Increases Wages,” Copper City Advance, 28 July 1933.
back, the union had little success; the union had proposed a five-day, thirty-hour week with a minimum wage of $36. In light of such aggressive, coordinated labor proposals, companies like TCC decided that if unionism was going to come it would be best if they could rally conservative workers and tradesmen on the producers’ side instead of allowing the ideology of the workforce to shift radically left.370

Reasons for Mine, Mill’s revival and its evolution toward radicalism in the late thirties are many. First, for all its practical assistance to workers in reducing accidents and saving lives, Houser’s employee representative plan must have intimidated enough workers that when they had the chance to establish forums where they were more in control of they took it. Furthermore, notwithstanding the reduction in broken limbs, burns, and assorted other averted mishaps, the general living and working conditions in the dusty, toxic, “only desert east of the Mississippi” just wore people down after a while. At least that was the impression of outside observers who came and investigated working conditions in the area.371

Other frustrations came from the effects of TCC’s merger with Ducktown Chemical and Iron, the old Ducktown, Sulphur, Copper and Iron Company. Reports are unclear, but indications are that TCC, after absorbing DCI crews, did so in a manner that was denigrating to “new” crew of Isabella workers. In fact, in light of later complaints by Isabella men, it seems TCC folded the DCI men into the established employee representative plan, but that the firm seems also to have made the mistake of assuming Isabella men would not resent the consolidation. DCI men’s concerns appear to have been channeled indirectly through TCC craft workers. Their resentment would help explain the later popularity of the CIO in Isabella. There was one improvement in

371 *Lampell Report*, NCPR, 3-5.
these men’s lot though: As part of TCC, the absolute anti-unionism that had once prevailed at Isabella was no more.372

Mine, Mill meetings allowed workers to speak more freely than at the Houser EMP affairs. Without the fear of supervisory eyes and ears bearing down on them, the men could speak out and learn from union leaders about their rights as workers and hopes for ever more empowerment. For a time, the big-tent of the union’s ideology of far left and far right (that is, before Mine, Mill bolted from the AFL) would have seen radical and conservative miners and tradesmen side by side. This is not to say it was a workers paradise at the Mine, Mill meetings, but freedom from management’s keen ear would have made ideological pluralism easier to endure.

Workers attending Mine, Mill meetings could discuss the frustrations that had been arising for some while: the effects of lay-offs owing to TCC’s embrace of new technology or the fact that as TCC diversified its products—into agricultural chemicals for instance. Most opportunities seemed to benefit other workers and not miners. New sintering plants came online and the floatation plants near the London mine were expanded. Additional apprehension grew around the size of the company as TCC increased its power over mining and production works at Isabella. The absorption of DCI shaved down competition, consequently reducing employment opportunities in the local labor market. If a man could not get along with TCC supervisors, where was he to go? Barclay himself acknowledged that the Isabella merger had been a real blow to the psyche of the village’s workers.373

There were other smoldering concerns about the red hills according to CIO advocates, The National Committee For People’s Rights. In its investigation of local labor conditions,
which included an investigation of court records, dozens of interviews—including Sheriff Biggs and local law enforcement officers—the NCPR reported workers were still angry years after TCC’s stretch-out ended. Unsettled matters abounded: workers alleged they were owed back pay. Their slimmer wages in the early thirties had brought enormous shame and discomfort; some families could barely pay for food or rent; living conditions deteriorated as housing maintenance suffered. These experiences would have been especially hard to endure after the generally rising incomes in the 1920s. A number of miners said their pay had been as low as $8 for six-day weeks of double shifts during the stretch-out. Sympathizers and family of these miners believed TCC owed them compensation since commodities prices were on the rebound.374

These claims could have been true. Exact pay records for the era are scarce except for the TCC mining department, but it is clear that TCC paid crews who worked below ground more than new hires or above-ground men throughout the 1930s. Furthermore, until the union demanded it and the company changed its policies under contract in 1937, it had been common not to pay men until they reached their worksite, not when they arrived on the property.375

Additionally, workers’ perceptions of the company’s economic health would have been somewhat confused in the thirties owing to the tumultuous markets. The downturn of the early thirties had been horrible. Things appeared to improve for copper in the first several years after FDR’s inauguration but were still not a certainty. Workers would have been keen to read reports on business improvement in the steel, metals, machinery, flour, textiles, retail, and apparel industry, all of which The Copper City Advance claimed, would “affect the dinner pail, dividend

374 Lampell Report, NCPR, 1, 4-5.
375 Tennessee Copper Company Mining Department records, 1930s; and, T.A. Mitchell, Tennessee Copper Company, Labor Relations, 5
checks and tax bills of every individual.” International or national concerns were “inseparable from local welfare” workers learned.376

Headlines from the middle thirties heralding the significant rebound in copper and non-ferrous markets were encouraging in some respects, but many men already understood these improvements relied on companies curtailing their production capacity. Furthermore, word of rebounding commodities markets no longer guaranteed men would be needed to extract and process the Basin’s ores as in the days of the Great War. It seemed technology was limiting the number of men needed even in good times. A comparison of man-days required for production from the highs of the late twenties—a period already being transformed by technological efficiency—to the industrial revival just prior to the Roosevelt Recession showed that necessary man-days stood at about one third of 1929’s need.377

Granted, some improvement came to Copper Basin workers when Houser raised wages and increased employment rolls in support of New Deal initiatives. But there was uncertainty that this improvement could last. In fact, it was somewhat short-lived. While TCC’s parent company experienced the best year in 1934 than it had since 1930, the year 1935 saw corporate profits contract. Additional uncertainty accompanied the Supreme Court’s declaration of NRA codes as unconstitutional. The decision brought uncertainty to the copper and chemicals industry and killed the optimistic, collective and patriotic Blue Eagle campaign. Just as was experienced by management, workers experienced powerlessness before uncontrollable outside developments which must have frustrated workers and their families and seemed never-ending. So while even if the most well-informed workers might have understood the dynamics now affecting them, this did not mean they would have been happy about the situation.

376 “Economic Highlights,” Copper City Advance, 7 April 1933.
The period had been better for owners and management. Code adherence by the Lewisohns meant money could be made again. Tennessee Corporate profits leapt to $230,000 in 1934 and by 1937 the company enjoyed earnings it had not had since the middle twenties. The year 1937 saw profits of $937,000. There was also now plenty of money for corporate salaries. According to the New York Times reports of salary figures filed with the new Securities and Exchange Commission, Tennessee Corporation Executive Vice President E.H. Westlake made the equivalent of over $1 million in 2007 dollars while his miners earned nineteen times less. Meanwhile, the minimum wage in the middle thirties for TCC miners stood at about 3-4% of what company top executives made, or around $672. Wages increased over the 1930s, however, significantly as the union gained strength. Average wages for January 1938 stood at nearly twice what they had been in 1933.378

In the thirties, the International Union of Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers, joined forces with John L. Lewis’s committee within the AFL to expand industrial union organizing. Mine, Mill’s actions in all this revived leftist sentiments among many of its rank-and-file who saw the New Deal as a chance to rollback corporate power after the reactionary twenties. The Federation’s resistance to industrial unionism angered Mine, Mill leaders and rekindled union rank-and-file suspicions of AFL conservatism. Mine, Mill leadership came to see the AFL as being dangerous to the interests of miners and smeltermen. At the same time, among more conservative craft workers, the actions of Mine, Mill’s leadership were alarming. But according to National Labor Relations Board examiners, workers in Isabella and Ducktown shared many experiences on and off the job which bound them together. Miners’ working experiences in crews, often underground, forged in them a collective will to protect themselves from perceived

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threatening corporate prerogatives. At Copperhill’s diversified industrial works smaller crews had always promoted autonomy and preserved higher status among the many trades manned by a class of generally more conservative craftsmen. Furthermore, men working in Copperhill TCC facilities had been directly benefitting from the expansion of the company into agricultural chemicals since the 1920s; there were now more opportunities for advancement that apparently still allowed for considerable autonomy on the job. Advancement into quasi-managerial roles like foremen and engineers appears to have been easier in Copperhill. So a lot of workers in the agricultural and smelting sectors of TCC did not appreciate Mine, Mill’s push for industrial unionism. Conservative craftsmen had much less empathy for workers in mines at Ducktown and Isabella. Only a few of these men saw miners daily or left Copperhill for assignments. As such, Copperhill men came to have their own concerns and saw aggressive moves by Mine, Mill as being driven by miner resentment, jealousy and sour grapes and led by a rougher sort of worker.379

Aggravating circumstances further, national Mine, Mill leaders began calling for “closed shop” union organization so there would be no jurisdictional confusion within the workforce of non-ferrous mines and works. Mine, Mill leaders also restated their commitment to democratic treatment of the rank-and-file in opposition to hierarchical power structure typical at Federation locals. Mine, Mill leaders claimed their approach and their interests with the CIO represented equal power-sharing among mine and smelter workers on all issues, from the shop to union governance, and a rejection of hierarchy led by senior tradesmen. At first the CIO insurgency in the Federation prompted admonishing remarks of caution by union President William Green. He replaced these with outright attacks when it was clear Lewis and his allies would not retreat from

their demands for organizing reform. Eventually controversy led to violence and a vote by the majority of AFL rank-and-file decided against industrial unionism. Green went even further and expelled CIO unions including Mine, Mill. Now independent, the mission of the CIO stood in direct competition with the Federation for workers’ hearts and minds. Many CIO unions tore up their old Federation constitutions and composed new ones that “broadened representation, strengthened accountability, and provided guarantees against the kinds of organization abuses suffered [under] AFL organizers.”380

Mine, Mill’s leadership also shifted left at this time. Union men pushed aside their “elderly leaders” whose fiscal ineptitude and resistance to young men taking charge of recruitment and organizing campaigns had “stood in the way of progress.” In 1936, Reid Robinson won the election for union president and he moved the union toward the left. Scholar Vernon Jensen said Robinson had not always sympathized with the left, but that he was soon “courted by” leftists, vulnerable as a consequence of his own ambition.381

How Mine, Mill’s original approach would have changed the local meetings, protocols and traditional tradesmen’s power over the Copper Basin rank-and-file is unclear. Missing from the record are summaries of the kinds of ideological positions held by the rank-and-file. What was said in union halls, in speeches by local organizers or in conversations on the job as workers diligently completed their assigned tasks, passed a tool to one another, huddled in skiffs, or chatted between shifts and shared a cigarette remains a mystery. Other than limited copies of union papers printed by the CIO, most Mine, Mill records are missing and may have been

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381 Jensen’s allegations about Reid stand only as so many bricks-without-straw since the scholar gave no supporting evidence for his assertions, but the general consensus of scholars on the subject of workers during this period was that New Deal enthusiasm encouraged leftist sentiments in Mine, Mill. Jensen, *Collective Bargaining in the Nonferrous Metals Industry*, 20, and *Nonferrous Metals Industry Unionism, 1932-1954*, xiv; Hildebrand and Mangum, 143 and 146-147;
purposefully destroyed. Testimony and witness to workers’ frustrations comes from outside sources, reports from federal agencies, court records, R.E. Barclay’s commentary in his diary and local histories, and local newspapers.\footnote{382 R.E. Barclay diary entries, 1938-1940 passim; Sundry reports from the New York Times, Copper City Advance, Knoxville Journal, and Chattanooga Times specifically identified below and Ducktown Basin Museum records, including, The CIO News, Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers Edition, 8.28.1939.}

What is certain though from examination of these sources is that in the Copper Basin, Mine, Mill’s list of demands for stretch-out compensation, for a closed shop, and the union’s new association in the CIO, became a flashpoint for company owners and operators. Neither the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act nor its constitutionally more robust descendant, the 1935 Wagner Act guaranteed the legality of the “closed shop.” Unions demanding closed shops met with strong opposition from managements that decided to stall in the collective bargaining processes.\footnote{383 Kersten, ibid., 50-51; and, Harris, ibid., 22-39 passim.}

The most heated anger over the course of Mine, Mill’s actions likely was expressed by Copperhill workers who by early 1938 wanted to bolt Mine, Mill, seek shelter in conservative AFL ranks and then go on to rid the Basin of the “reds” and “communists.” They insisted communists filled Mine, Mill and the CIO’s ranks. Mine, Mill’s renewed interest in bringing about industrial organizing across Copper Basin labor markets infuriated the conservatives.\footnote{384 All studies about the nature of Mine, Mill concur that the union had significant communist influence. See also, “Two Hundred Communists Employed As Organizers For the C.I.O.” Copper City Advance, 2 September, 1938.}

The kind of split seen among workers in the Copper Basin had to do with the way union activity in the Basin had evolved from the beginning. The establishment of Mine, Mill in the Basin during the Great War has always seemed odd in light of the previous AFL local in the region. Did Mine, Mill merely lay itself jurisdictionally across the Basin and absorb the AFL locals extant before the late 1910s? If that was the case, it is very unlikely that there ever existed
a true synthesis of needs and demands among unionized Copper Basin workers—the particularities of company and location in the region worked against sustainable amalgamation. Scholars Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin contend that “unions… organized independently by a mix of Reds, radicals, and ‘pure and simple unionists’ competing both to organize the unorganized and to win their trust provided the conditions in which rival blocs or caucuses could flourish.”385

Factional self-interest at once intensified rivalry and yet paradoxically limited executive, international union leadership power. What this meant was that interests remained parochial. Therefore, in the mining villages, paranoia about Copperhill’s ascendancy limited trust between TCC’s diversified crews. As debate intensified, Mine, Mill men questioned the legitimacy of union dues accounting conducted by certain Copperhill tradesmen. Likewise, conservative tradesmen in the Basin viewed the growing relationship between the Mine, Mill and the CIO as a threat to their interests. The intensity of these men’s hatred of alleged communism in Mine, Mill and the CIO betrays a real fear of communist influence in the labor movement.386

Editions of *The CIO News, Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers* chronicled the challenges union rank-and-file and their families endured across the nation at the hands of AFL thugs and recalcitrant company operators. Metals industry workers stood in the thick of these battles. *The CIO News* reported their union president’s efforts in the Copper Basin. Ducktown and Isabella folk could take heart that they stood side by side in their battles with conservatives alongside their brothers and sisters fighting for power against the most powerful firms in the industry: Anaconda, American Smelting & Refining, Kennecott Copper, National Lead, and others.

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385 Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, *ibid.*, 73.
386 These are general comments summarizing the entire span of workers’ discontent through this period. See for instance, the AFL warning of Communist influence and national Federation support in, “To the Workers of the Copper Basin,” *Copper City Advance* 26 August, 1938. Other specific references to each point will be cited below.
Corporate profits were rising, announced *The CIO News*, but the paper reminded workers that “producers [were] still in the saddle” controlling working people’s fate. With their allies in the National Association of Manufactures, producers in anti-labor drives eroded the intent of the New Deal and ignored “laws which the majority of the people deem wise and necessary.” Through all this, union leaders and their sympathizers shaped Mine, Mill’s association with the CIO as akin to the struggle engaged by revolutionary patriots of old.387

Patriotic appeals made by CIO and Mine, Mill advocates did not convince conservatives. For them the CIO insurgency was working now to end much more than work-related institutions such as “bureaucratic” business unionism, the so-called cozy relationship enjoyed between tradesmen and supervisory staff for which many workers had worked hard to achieve. The new radicalism seemed like a revival of the kind of Bolshevism that advocated abandonment of long-cherished social conventions. Communists in labor’s ranks were now advocating “specific minority rights” to uplift the circumstances of blacks and Mexican workers. To sometimes hysterical conservative white workers these calls seemed to be precursors for demands for the confiscation of property, the promotion of Jewish overlords, and atheistic attempts to banish Christianity.388

Scholars’ conclusions about the nature of Mine, Mill’s leadership and of the ideologies many western rank-and-file members held substantiate charges by conservatives about communists’ influence. Jensen described the union’s leadership as being “closely knit and active group of Communists and sympathizers” empowered further by CIO affiliation.389 Although none of the Copper Basin sources investigated here revealed direct evidence of any union

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388 Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, ibid., 70.
member being a communist or of union leadership advocating “communist” ideology. Still, it was *perception* among locals that mattered. Actions taken by those who wanted to curtail Mine, Mill’s influence and shutdown the CIO Movement are most critical to this narrative. Conservatives in the Copper Basin took Mine, Mill’s alliance with the CIO seriously. They were thus unwilling to separate actions taken by the union’s locals in the Copper Basin from the conduct of Mine, Mill’s international or the CIO. Mine, Mill’s radical-left heritage and its concentration of left-leaning leaders left locals no room for doubt. Studies examining the impact of communists in the labor movement similarly have seen the communists’ in Mine, Mill as critical for reviving the union and the CIO movement in the thirties. To these scholars, through “hard work, courage, commitment, and sacrifice to organize the unorganized” the communists and their sympathizers had provided energies without which “the CIO could well have been stillborn.”

Fear that CIO affiliation might lead to a reordering of society prompted conservatives tradesmen to turn on their old Copper Basin ally. In the most immediate sense, the traditional values of the Federation held out more possibilities and stability than did Mine, Mill’s leftists or any imagined benefit that might come via a Lewis-led confederation in the CIO. Conservative tradesmen of the Copper Basin knew that as the oldest and most powerful national union, the American Federation of Labor had as one of its “founding beliefs” the idea that a union should be exclusive and focused directly on conditions at work and on wages. To reach these ends, the union had to be dominated by tradesmen who led the rank-and-file and kept close association with supervisory staff and company management. As such, Federation unions were to be organizations of workers “with the same problems, the same purposes and the same needs.”

Federation membership historically “provided the key to … a worker[‘s] apprentice training,

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390 Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, 72.
employment, contracts, and representation in disputes between employers and between
unions." 391 Industrial unionism was a threat to this kind of an approach. The CIO Movement,
by splitting the labor movement, stood as an attack on all working men. 392

CIO and Mine, Mill efforts at organizing black workers was a particular point of
contention. The AFL “clung almost religiously to policies that excluded people of color and
women.” In this way, the Federation could continue in its mission to promote the interests of
white manhood. 393 It was a reason the union leadership had been so adamant it its attacks on
open immigration and had assisted in the passage of the Immigrant Act of 1924. The AFL
position of defending the color line absolutely contrasted with a number of actions taken by CIO
unions. Where it suited the new confederation of internationals, CIO unions would work with
people of color and at times have integrated unions. On a number of occasions, the CIO
organized African Americans, Latinos and other persons of color, as well as immigrants and
women. In fact, the union had even allowed for the creation of some desegregated unions in the
North and West of the nation and a scattered few in the South. This is not to say that every CIO
organizing campaign during this period sought to end the color line or promote racial and gender
equality in the workforce. The discourse on this aspect of the CIO’s efforts in the labor
movement in fact shows quite the contrary—especially in regard to race. In many instances,
where it suited Southern CIO organizers, they bent to local social conventions of color and either
kept the color line or exploited blacks to uplift whites. As one historian summarized, “the CIO
was a broad church, and the racial record of its member unions varied enormously.” The more
leftist unions within the CIO promoted the most liberal racial policies, but others simply “felt

391 Kersten, ibid, 14.
392 Ibid, 150.
393 Ibid., 14 and 145-165, passim.
that blacks needed to be organized" to prevent blacks from taking actions that might limit the interests of the organized labor in general.\footnote{Timothy J. Minchin, Fighting Against the Odds: a History of Southern Labor since World War II (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 27.}

Instances where the CIO did allow for or promote a relaxation of the color line in employment or in organizing became notable or notorious depending upon one’s opinions on integration. In the South of the 1930s and 1940s, any relaxation of the color line in union organizing, such as CIO attempts to empower black and female workers in Memphis, Tennessee, stood out as “radical” challenges to the dominant social conventions. Radicalism, like communism, became a code word used by critics not only against the CIO but against any group or person that challenged the status quo. Be the threats real or imagined, “radicalism,” “communism,” “socialism,” or any other “ism” deemed dangerous, all had to be stopped. These ideas were all defined as being innately anti-American. In the South, since the majority of persons were affiliated with Calvinist Protestantism, any organized group that challenged social and economic conventions was seen also assumed by many to be anti-Christian in nature as well, and thus particularly dangerous because they were against God. That some evangelical Protestants like the aforementioned Holiness sect led union movements in the region did not necessarily help the image of the CIO because such folk were usually of sects dominated by the poorer members of the working class. Economic prejudice stepped in to assist hysterical reactions over the presence of God-less, communist, radicals.\footnote{Scholarship on the significance of new Protestant sects, such as the Pentecostals and Church of God congregations, in the labor movement described their respective congregants’ devotion to a Christian mission determined to uplift the common man and protect his family. Attacked by more established Protestant sects, the new wave of evangelicals often stood right at the center of labor agitation. As a result, not only were their congregants considered representative of a lower economic class, but as vaguely anti-American threats to the social order. They were usually not welcomed by the civic and economic elite of industrial communities. There were several such congregations accessible to Copper Basin working folk. A summary of the influence of these sects may be found in, Wayne Flynt, “Religion for the Blues” Evangelism, Poor Whites, and the Great Depression,” Journal of Southern History, Volume LXXI, No. 1 February 2005.} In contrast to the negative
perceptions of and reactions to the CIO movement in the South, the AFL always had an easier
time in Dixie. The AFL’s support of conventional social relations and its historic rejection of
communism and socialism usually resulted in the union garnering some protections by the local
political and capitalist power structure.396

Rhetorical warfare in the national labor war

The rhetorical viciousness demonstrated by AFL President William Green and John L.
Lewis during the 1930s labor war trickled down to lesser vassals and the rank-and-file,
sabotaging attempts to negotiate any lasting peace. Not even President Roosevelt was successful
in his efforts to bring the two sides together. For the first several years of the conflict FDR
worked behind the scenes on the problem, allowing Labor Secretary Francis Perkins to attempt
to mend the schism. But as the thirties wore on and FDR became increasingly concerned that
AFL-CIO war would hurt the nation’s ability to defend itself, he contacted Green and Lewis
personally. Despite administration attempts, the best the President could wrangle from either side
were pledges of interest in peace, but dual unionism and jurisdictional raiding continued and the
AFL in particular took aim at destroying the credibility of CIO affiliated unions. Lewis in fact,
became so aggravated at Roosevelt in the course of all this that he declared re-electing the
president would be “a national evil of the first magnitude.”397

At industrial localities where conservative tradesmen could get it they garnered support
from the Federation organizers, company management, and local interested citizens to route the
CIO. Many among the public saw organized labor’s divisiveness as an additional threat to their

396 Kerten, ibid, 149; Minchen, Fighting Against the Odds, 32; and Roger Biles, “Ed Crump versus the Unions: the
Labor Movement in Mephis During the 1930s,” in The Law and the New Deal, edited by Melvyn Dubofsky and
397 Lewis, quoted in Kersten, Labor’s Home Front, 150-51 and 156.
precarious economic circumstances. For these persons, aggressive union action came to represent, anti-social, anti-business dangers to their communities. Corporate leaders benefited from such perspectives. Sometimes management operated in a clandestine manner to encourage these attitudes, but just as often companies tried to cast themselves as defender of the American way of life or at least as reasonable members of the community, anchors of the local economy in contrast to those who would wage war upon it. The method worked especially well when during any collective bargaining a company or the local pro-business press could portray an active union as demanding too much power over labor at the expense of other working people. This capture of the public’s trust by a company over an increasingly shrill cacophony between the CIO and AFL was how TCC maintained its power in the Copper Basin. By some accounts, the late thirties saw “labor’s moment… passing” as the public became increasingly frustrated with the ongoing strikes and union wars.\footnote{Harris, ibid., 24-25 and 37; Kersten, ibid, 139-49, \textit{passim}; Kannenberg, \textit{The Product of GE’s Progress}, 4-5.}

Other pertinent regional reactions to the CIO and Mine, Mill, in Birmingham, Alabama, Memphis, Tennessee, and Hershey, Pennsylvania provide some insight into the history of the Copper Basin. The cases point to the origins of Mine, Mill’s checkered reputation in the minds of conservative whites and anti-labor interests who would see the union’s affiliation with the CIO Movement in the thirties as part of a full-on assault on race relations and conventional regional labor relations. In some of these cases it was attempts by Mine, Mill to organize black workers that aroused conservative white reaction. In other instances, reactions came from challenges to political hegemony within established capital-industrial relations. In nearly all of them where unions were allowed to remain, the AFL ultimately benefitted and burnished its reputation as protector of the economic and social status-quo.
In the Birmingham metals industry of the late 1910s, AFL leaders encouraged Mine, Mill to organize black workers; the Federation’s reasoning was that if organized under Mine, Mill, the workers would be less susceptible to management’s whims and thus less likely to hurt the economic prerogatives of white workers. The fact that most black metals workers were “unskilled and semi-skilled mine and furnace workers” made them a good fit with Mine, Mill and allowed white metals tradesmen to remain in AFL craft unions. But, as Mine, Mill’s recruitment efforts became more successful company owners used racial hatred to their advantage by encourage white workers to join a company union. Through all this conservative white tradesmen and others who stood against any organizing of black workers reacted with direct animus which at once reduced the power of Mine, Mill in the city and diminished its respect in the Alabama Federation of Labor.  

Mine, Mill was down in Birmingham after this last incident, but revived under the New Deal and was especially reinvigorated by the CIO’s efforts in the city. With the additional assistance of US Department of Labor and government mandates regarding NLRB oversight of collective bargaining processes, Mine, Mill was able to strike a blow against an all-white company union at Tennessee Coal & Iron. Conservative whites had flocked to the firm’s employee representative plan, the so-called Brotherhood of Captive Miners, with the idea that as whites they would be treated better than if affiliated with Mine, Mill—at this point still considered a “black” union by most city workers. The AFL’s role in all this was to maintain its support for white-only trades unions and to remain recalcitrant in its stand against the CIO’s recruitment efforts. Mine, Mill men at TCI who had tried to win access to collective bargaining had been fired, but the union continued in its efforts to garnered collective bargaining rights. It finally won these from NLRB examiners who found evidence of company favoritism.  

399 McKiven, Iron & Steel: Class, Race, and Community in Birmingham, Alabama, 125-27.
investigations found clear evidence of violations of workers and CIO advocates’ freedom of speech in the affair at TCI Birmingham; the findings embarrassed the company. In the meanwhile, TCI’s northern parent company concluded contract negotiations with Mine, Mill and ordered its Birmingham subsidiary to do likewise.400

. These victories were huge for Mine, Mill and the CIO in one respect, but for conservative whites (who were the majority of white Birmingham workers), Mine, Mill and the CIO’s gain was their loss. Any victory for black union workers was seen as a direct threat to these men and the long-established status of white industrial workers over black ones. Mine, Mill’s leadership had by now embraced a national policy to organize workers across racial lines where necessary. That fact alone would have resounded among its enemies in the South. As a result, it would take some years for Mine, Mill to garner any trust among white workers, and this happened only after the collapse of the company union. That said, the new—limited--support by some white workers came with strings attached: Prejudiced whites questioned the capabilities of black union leaders and over time had many blacks officials removed. However, as Mine, Mill was growing in power many whites saw this as a negative development. To most whites in Birmingham, those who joined Mine, Mill’s “nigger union” in its efforts to integrate organized labor were seen as traitorous betayers of the white solidarity and society and as “communists.” White concerns and fear of Mine, Mill’s possible expansion of black rights anywhere would have made it very difficult for the a lot of white workers in the Copper Basin to consider the union anything other than a “communist”—read integrationist—institution. Mine Mill therefore stood as threat to the social status quo.401

Along the Mississippi, at Memphis, CIO efforts to organize black workers in the tire industry ran smack into a coalition of anti-union politicos, Chamber of Commerce allies, a pliant AFL confederation of craft unions, and a xenophobic and negrophobic white working class. White race prejudice provided the foundation for anti-CIO actions here, because most whites had long supported black workers’ disenfranchisement in civic life and at the workplace. Led by Tennessee’s most powerful politician, “Boss” Edmund Hull Crump, the anti-CIO forces kept the town free of “radicalism” and “communistic” “nigger loving” labor advocates.402

At Hershey, Pennsylvania, a labor narrative unfolded that illustrated how economic, not racial conservatism among the general public beyond the immediate ranks of industrial employees determined the fate of the CIO. At Chocolate Town, as it is popularly known, two generations of workers had benefitted from innovative chocolate baron Milton S. Hershey’s paternalistic control over his clean and modern “industrial dream city” filled with respectable workers’ housing, churches, and commercial conveniences. Workers at Hershey’s plants received on average three times the typical pay rate for American candy workers. Through the years, Milton Hershey’s intimate style with nearly all of his workers had earned him their trust, but he grew even more esteemed in their eyes when during the first years of the Great Depression, instead of firing or laying off workers, Hershey set upon a massive building program employing many locals laid off in other businesses. Consumer demand for sweets in the depression at first remained strong, but these eventually shrank before the economy’s overwhelming contraction—as did the great welfare capitalist program Hershey had used to keep out unions. The company began to lay off workers out of desperation. The circumstances attracted CIO organizers who came to town and rallied workers to fight for increased wages and

a closed shop. Led by a local football hero, the new United Chocolate Workers claimed all but
500 of Hershey’s 2600 employees and chased out non-union workers when it commenced a sit-
down strike in the summer of 1936.403

The strike directly impoverished Amish farmers who had been selling Hershey their milk
for years; indeed, it was known that the Amish milk was the reason for the company’s especially
fine milk chocolate and caramels. Furious at the CIO actions, the farmers and thousands of other
locals put on anti-CIO parades in neighboring towns. Placards carried by anti-CIO folk read
“CIO equals Communistic Idiot Organization.” Empowered by an overwhelming support among
local people and now unwilling to negotiate a peace with the union, Amish men and boys raided
the Hershey chocolate plant, dragged out CIO strikers and forced them to run the gauntlet down
the middle of the city’s streets. These actions made it impossible for the CIO union to survive.
For a time workers organized an independent union, which was eventually replaced by an AFL
one. Confused about religious particularities, but quick to report on the incident, the New York
Times blazoned the incident in its headline reports: “Mennonite women in little black bonnets
and their men folk in broad-brimmed black hats and long coats… joined in bruising and
walloping [the striking CIO sympathizers], spanking many unionists as if they were misbehaving
children or pummeling them with fisticuffs.”404

Failure to garner local support beyond its immediate ranks was a critical weakness for the
CIO in each of these cases, making the union vulnerable to charges of “communism.” Used by
anti-Mine, Mill and anti-CIO forces, the charges reflected the pliable nature of the label
“communist.” As regularly described in Dixie, “communist” usually meant integrationist and

West Virginia Historical Association, 14 and 43.
404 “Farmers Oust 500 Sit-ins in Battle at Hershey Plant,” New York Times, 8 April 1937; and, Roy Bongartz,
promoting the rights of unskilled and semi-skilled workers; at Hershey, Pennsylvania, “communist” meant anyone challenging the established industrial relations of the community. Only in the latter TCI Birmingham case, did “communist” CIO union organizers win contracts in spite of conservative working class community reactions. But this victory occurred only after outside help came to organizers in the form of both government enforced collective bargaining mandates and public embarrassment of the company at the national level. The actual number of real “communists” in the ranks of these unions (despite some specious “proof” in the scholarship of ideological leanings at the international level) was probably not that important. No sources examined here can reveal such percentages anyway. Perception, however, did matter.

In the Copper Basin, Mine, Mill and CIO organizers and sympathizers would have to try and defend their standing among TCC workers before an increasingly hostile craft union and a public fearful of the union’s “communism.” Representing largely Isabella and Ducktown workers, Mine, Mill and CIO folk would try to increase positive public sentiment, but they would do so without substantial government or corporate support. A paradox in all this was that these workers’ advocates would marshal their efforts during a period when economic fortunes in the Copper Basin seemed poised for another boom.

Collateral damages: The Georgia Federation secession movement and Copper Basin labor

When it became clear that Mine, Mill’s migration to the CIO would be permanent, conservative tradesmen in the Copper Basin established alternative AFL locals. A larger AFL secession movement against CIO influence in the Georgia State Federation supported the Copper Basin tradesmen. Georgia Federation leaders then assisted in a Copper Basin campaign to shut
down the CIO through the use of intimidation and propaganda financed by Tennessee Copper Company and augmented by local and federal police authorities.

While the Mine, Mill locals at Isabella and Ducktown revived quickly in 1933, the Copperhill local did not come back fully till 1936. This was indicative of the reluctance of tradesmen there to risk jeopardizing their close associations with TCC management. But opposition to Mine, Mill soon arose in response to CIO and Mine, Mill integrationist actions at Birmingham and in Memphis that were perceived as part of a larger CIO campaign to remake the labor and social relations in the South. AFL concerns were not unsubstantiated. Real action was being taken by CIO organizers and their sympathizers. As George Tindal has shown, by 1937 CIO organizers were holding meetings at the Highlander Folk School, near Monteagle, Tennessee where union sympathizers taught young radicals to advance both industrial unionism and race integration. In the following decade these CIO classes trained some 6,900 labor sympathizers in “labor history, economics, strike tactics, public speaking, current events, and parliamentary law.” The exact influence of all this on the CIO’s campaign in the Copper Basin cannot be known, but it is probably true that Copper Basin labor organizers not only knew about the school, but obtained literature and lessons from it for dispersal at union meetings. Furthermore, the actions taken by Mine, Mill in the Copper Basin reflect exactly the kind of actions and demonstrations attendees at Highlander would have learned.406

As a result of such events, fear among conservatives grew. Granted, CIO and Mine, Mill-led integrationist action occurred in cities with large black populations. Therefore one might not expect race fear to be of such concern in the Copper Basin. But as has been shown, locals had long before determined their home would remain nearly lily white; their repeated and

405 Barclay, The Copper Basin, 67.
resolute maintenance of the white dominance in eastern Polk County underscored the tenacious power of race fear among the population. In spite of the near total absence of black workers, when the CIO sent veteran Mine, Mill organizer Mitchell Clifton Anderson, of Bessemer, Alabama to the Copper Basin in 1938, opponents to the CIO claimed that Anderson’s efforts in the Copper Basin were typical of outsider agitation and would result in workers aligned with the interests of “red” unionism—and thus possible integration. 407

Anderson was known to CIO enemies for his outspokenness against TCI attempts to destroy Mine, Mill gains through the firm’s manipulation of its white-only employee representative plan. Anderson claimed, and NLRB examiners had agreed, that in Birmingham, TCI “dominated and interfered with” the company union and thus that union was not truly representative of workers’ needs. His mere presence then represented (to conservatives and management) a threat to property and the possibility a serious labor challenge to corporate industrial relations. To social conservatives, Mine, Mill’s advocacy of blacks’ interests in Birmingham leant credence to fears that Anderson would threaten the racist social conventions and erode white privilege in the Basin’s labor market. 408

Convincing the workforce and the public at large that a CIO presence in the Copper Basin could not be tolerated became the main focus of Mine, Mill’s enemies and conservative tradesmen through the late 1930s. Local efforts were undoubtedly aided by the February 1938 official split between the CIO and the AFL at the national level. All peace efforts in the labor war were now blocked. 409

408 Huntley, ibid; Barclay, ibid; and, Mitchell C. Anderson quoted in, “NLRB Cites Tennessee Coal,” New York Times, 24 October 1937.
Later that February, Leo Carter, an AFL organizer, and James F. Barrett, a Federation publicity director gave a talk in Copperhill entitled, “The Truth and Facts” on the AFL and CIO in the Copper Basin. The public was invited to attend. The meeting was a public advertisement for AFL membership as an alternative available to those workers troubled by the CIO Movement; it occurred after the AFL petitioned the National Labor Relations Board “for an election to determine the bargaining agent in the Basin.” In light of what had become now two competing union factions in the Tennessee Copper Company workforce, the meeting was critical in that the company had yet to announce which labor organization it would recognize.\(^\text{410}\)

Though the new AFL efforts had established a new local for workers in the twin-cities of Copperhill and McCaysville and would also oversee the establishment of one at Ducktown, the moves were part of a larger movement directed from Georgia that occurred before the national AFL-CIO split. Instigators of the Georgia AFL secessionist movement had determined the CIO influence in their federation represented only the latest in a long series of dangerous invasions by outsiders into Dixie. The new national labor mandates rekindled for these workers mythical memories of invasion by forces intent on imposing their will on a defiant people. Real courage was now required by conservative tradesmen to separate themselves from “communist” radicals who were set upon destroying the Southern workingman’s way of life. The actions taken by Georgia Federation men to resist CIO influence included pleas to AFL President William Green. Reacting to Georgia Federation President Steven Nance’s support for CIO textile workers, conservative tradesmen fled their old Georgia Federation and established a new one. They claimed their new organization held authentic American Federation of Labor values: pro-

\(^{410}\) “Labor Leaders to Speak at Meeting,” *Copper City Advance* 18 February 1938.
capitalist, volunteerist, and most important, anti-communist, pure-and-simple unionism. Thus, for a time in Georgia there were actually two AFL state federations.  

The new state federation held the mass of Georgia’s rank-and-file AFL men. The new AFL locals established at Copperhill and in Ducktown were connected to this insurgency owing to McCaysville’s location on the Georgia-Tennessee border. Francis J. Dillon as leader of the state defection said the actions by anti-CIO men represented a necessary divorce, which “finally and definitely” separated loyal AFL men “from all individuals and organization which have been classified as dual and antagonistic to the laws, principles and policies of the great American Federation of Labor.”

Secessionist reorganizing of the Georgia Federation of Labor relied heavily on reigniting passionate Confederate and Lost Cause patriotism. This was a rather ironic development in light of the AFL’s historic patriotic support for the United States. Georgia AFL loyalists had managed to portray CIO influence as if it were an invading army. To defend themselves, just as their forefathers had once done against a similar invasion, brave union men in the AFL would have to thwart these new Yankees and affiliate with the new conservative federation led by Dillon. Dillon’s explanation of these terms led to Green’s recognition of the legitimacy of the new federation. “We are truly marching through Georgia with the Labor banner high,” Dillon bragged to Green.

It is telling that the Copperhill-McCaysville AFL movement had its office in the First National Bank of Copperhill; the location underscored the historically cozy relationship conservative Twin-cities tradesmen had with the local commercial and banking elite as

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413 Ibid.
upstanding members of the community. This relationship would remain a crucial one as the new AFL locals took on the CIO in Ducktown and Isabella.414

One month after AFL leaders Carter and Barrett held the first of their “truth” meetings, George L. Googe, a Southern Federation representative and personal assistant to William Green, spoke at the event held in the Copperhill High School. Googe had also been present at the AFL’s coming out “truth” meeting, but on this occasion he lectured local workers about the necessity of a new NLRB election that would determine which union would be the sole collective bargaining agent for all TCC workers. In a most embarrassing move for Mine, Mill and the CIO, the AFL trotted out former local General Counsel for Mine, Mill, John Busby who joined Googe in trying to win over the crowd. Busby said he had left Mine, Mill when it went CIO. As one of the key men who had helped initiate Mine, Mill’s second incarnation in the Copper Basin in 1936, Busby would have been well-known to these men. His abandonment of their old union than stood as particularly damning. Devoted in his anti-communism, he could no longer stay in Mine, Mill.415

Meanwhile, Mine, Mill local leaders protested any new collective bargaining representative election. In their minds the dust had settled on the issue and the AFL’s moves were the radical ones. Mine, Mill claimed it already stood as the rightful representative for all workers having secured contracts with the company since the early thirties. Migration to the CIO had not changed the character of the union one iota, its leaders argued; the CIO affiliation simply placed the union within the right confederation to fight for workers. It should be noted that until the secession by conservative craftsmen, TCC executives and local management

414 “Labor Leaders to Speak at Meeting,” Copper City Advance 2.18.1938; and, “CIO Strike Closes All Plants in Copper Basin,” Birmingham Labor Advocate, 29 July 1939.

415 Copper City Advance, ibid.
appeared to have had little real trouble accepting an AFL affiliated Mine, Mill. This fact was
admitted before NLRB examiners and Mine, Mill Reid Robinson during Labor Board hearings
on the disputes. Though company officials likely resented the diminished importance of
Lewisohn-Houser employee representative plan, they had been working directly with Mine, Mill
since 1933. When the internecine labor war began, TCC claimed “neutrality” on the
representation question. But the AFL secession muddied the labor relations waters and provided
the company with an opportunity. Said the Copper City Advance on the subject of
representation, TCC managers “want[ed] the question decided so they will have an authorized
organization to deal with.” Company reports summarized a now peculiar circumstance of trying
to negotiate with five union locals as “impossible”: The two new AFL locals at
Copperhill/McCaysville and Ducktown joined the three original TCC Mine, Mill locals at
Isabella, Ducktown and Copperhill, with 183, 184 and 176 numbers each respectively.416

416 “Labor Dispute Hearing is Ended,” Copper City Advance, 21 January, 1938; T.A. Mitchell, “Labor Relations,”
See also, Barclay, The Copper Basin, 67.
Chapter 4 Conflagration and the CIO Strike of 1939-40

Mitchell C. Anderson and Mine, Mill in the late 1930s

Mitchell C. Anderson led Copper Basin Mine, Mill locals through what must have been their most exciting and challenging years. As a former skip tender at Tennessee Coal & Iron Anderson had lived, worked and raised a family in Alabama mining communities and therefore understood first-hand the hard life and tenuous domestic and industrial economics that bound working people in a common culture. A tried and true veteran of Mine, Mill actions, Anderson had worked tirelessly in Birmingham toward ending circumstances where a company union had “dominated” miners. He had lately served over three years as TCI’s Mine, Mill president. What met Anderson in the Copper Basin was nothing new for him. He had fought and won again Federation anti-CIO efforts which benefited a select class of tradesmen and management. His good nature augmented his credentials as an organizer, many said. Key company and government officials acknowledged Anderson had an ability to establish a special rapport among workers and their families.417

During the late thirties Anderson’s personality and helpfulness grew in renown in the mining villages. Even some TCC executives later agreed that Anderson was a fair-minded man; they complimented his handling of problems among working families during the roughest years, even though they tried to thwart his union’s attempt to increase workers’ power in the workplace. Said a local druggist about Anderson in the direct manner of mountain folk, “He is an honest man, I’ll say that; Yes, sir. I’d trust him.”418

In spite of Anderson’s best efforts though, fear and resentment set in among the people of the mining villages. Incited by AFL rhetoric—and the kind of anger and disappointment that can only arise in domestic disturbances wherein both parties live in close proximity—peaceful intercourse between union men could not be sustained. This was particularly vexing to Mine, Mill leaders in light of what they had been able to accomplish over the previous several years: The trio of Mine, Mill locals and Tennessee Copper Company had signed a contract “in joint negotiations” in 1933.\textsuperscript{419} The contract was the first for Mine, Mill in the Copper Basin since early twenties. Only certain classes of workers fell under the terms of the labor contracts. Supervisory and clerical employees, foremen, chemists, and engineers of TCC were excluded from being allowed active membership in Mine, Mill as these people were not considered \textit{producers}. Non-union company employees had individual employer-employee contracts with Tennessee Copper. \textsuperscript{420}

One big irony about Mine, Mill’s fate in the Copper Basin in the late thirties would be that while the union’s international was having more and more success in establishing locals and winning NLRB elections, Mine, Mill in the Copper Basin hit a wall. Scholar Vernon Jensen credited the national success of the union’s international to the expansion of the defense industry after the war in Europe commenced. An economic boost accompanied nonferrous producers’ general decision not to resist unions and to accept NLRB rulings even when Mine, Mill won collective bargaining elections. Houser and his team complied with NIRA and Wagner Act federal mandates until the union decided to support their international’s decision to join the aggressive CIO movement for industrial unionism and ultimately remove itself from the

\textsuperscript{419} NLRB Case No. R-574, “The Appropriate Unit,” 772.
\textsuperscript{420} NLRB Case No. R-574, 768 and 770.
conservative AFL. At that point, TCC management established an initially tacit alliance with conservative workers and refused to acquiesce.421

Business was going well for TCC in the late thirties. Copper and fertilizer markets had improved even after the sharp downturn of late 1937 due to rearmament programs overseas, increased opportunities for use of copper and derivative alloys in home building and the expanding use agricultural chemicals. Lewisohn-owned companies made more money than they had since the late 1920s. A rise in the price of copper from a modest 9.5 cents per pound to 12.5 cents by spring 1937 allowed Tennessee Corporation’s owners to share the wealth with shareholders and employees. To add another fiscal feather in its cap and to advance corporate facilities development, Tennessee Corporation got approval from its shareholders to raise $5 million via the sale of debenture bonds. The funds’ purpose was to retire an earlier bond issuance that had been employed for expansion of corporate operations. The move reflected the kind of investment in technologies that allowed Lewisohn firms to emerge from the Depression with ever more diverse products.422

A March 1937 new Mine, Mill contract gave TCC workers an additional 32 cents increase per day. This was the second raise the union had gotten within a year; TCC workers had been given a Christmas gift raise of five percent in late 1936. Within just a few weeks of the March 1937 raise, Tennessee Copper gave it workers another twenty-four cent raise per eight-hour shift. The company announced this last increase on the same day the New York Times

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421 Jensen, ibid. 22; and, NLRB Case No. R-574, 768 and 770; “Copper Company Increases Wages” Copper City Advance, 28 July 1933.
422 “Other Corporate Reports” New York Times, 1 April 1939 and 2 April 1940; Copperhill City Advance, ibid, 3.5.1937; Copperhill City Advance, ibid., 4.9.1937; and, “$5,000,000 Loan Planned: Tennessee Corp. to Ask Approval of Issue at meeting on April 22,” New York Times, 24 March 1937; “$5,000,000 Loan Approved,” New York Times, 23 April 1937.
reported parent-company Tennessee Corporation profits for the previous year were the best the firm had seen since 1930; they were even better for 1937 at nearly $1 million after taxes.\(^{423}\)

The direct effects of all this on workers’ pay lay in the records. Though wages had run lower for a time, Mine, Mill contracts could now garner TCC workers better pay on average than they had seen since the Depression began. While exact statistics are missing for TCC smelters and chemical works, the *Copper City Advance* noted that additional wage increases for all company employees followed those given in 1937. By January 1938 average wages for workers ran at $5.66 or about $28.30 per week\(^{424}\).

By early 1938, it seemed the second incarnation of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers had done its duty for local workers. As substantiated by one outside report, over the years, Mine, Mill in the Copper Basin had been “strong enough to get a contract providing for an eight-hour day, abolition of the task system, and substantial raises in the wage scale.”\(^{425}\)

Company reports recorded additional Mine, Mill victories: men now were paid for half the travel time to and from a job, schedules had been worked out to allow men more efficient access to the mine-shaft cages (cutting wasted commuting time to their job sites). “Holidays were increased to four” from the two given through the early thirties and beginning in January 1938 a new vacation system “for day wage employees was begun.” Other TCC workers got vacation benefits too by receiving “one week’s vacation with pay” equaling “five shifts at straight time rates.”\(^{426}\)

\(^{423}\) “Lampell Report” NCPR 4; and “Corporate Reports” *New York Times*, 9 April 1937 and 1 April 1939.

\(^{424}\) “T.C. Workers Get Another Increase,” *Copperhill City Advance*, 3.5.1937; “T.C. Men Given Another Increase,” *Copperhill City Advance*, 4.9.1937; and, Tennessee Copper Company Mining Department report, “Summary of all mines for the Month of January 1938” C. H. McNaughton, Superintendent of Mines, to Mr. F.J. Longworth (manager), 7 February, 1936

\(^{425}\) NCPR, 4.

These union victories were substantial, but reports from 1938 also show erosion in TCC workers’ power and provide additional insight into miners’ angst. Average wage rates actually declined in 1938-1939 standing at only $5.26 by July 1939. This was a seven percent average drop from late 1937 early 1938 levels. While the company had not lost money during this period, corporate profits declined 63% from their middle thirties peak. What explains this reversal? Very likely it was a combination of technological advance and the effects of the Roosevelt Recession. Contractions in miners’ average pay may reflect all these developments, but average pay also reflects a statistical paradox born of the union’s success. From 1936 forward, Mine, Mill’s international sought to organize “all persons working in and around all mines (except coal mines), mills, smelters, refineries… open pits… power shovels… and reduction plants.”427 Consequently the newer agreements between TCC and Mine, Mill likely included a broader spectrum of job types and more unskilled labor. The change increased the number of workers on contract and thus affected the average pay at TCC mines.

Managing their image: competing unions and TCC

The contract benefits and wages Mine, Mill secured through the middle thirties for TCC workers were simply not enough to quell conservative tradesmen’s fears that any union associated with John L. Lewis’s CIO would continue to threaten their hard-earned special status before TCC management and supervisory staff. Broader coverage of TCC’s workforce had diluted craftsmen’s stature and many feared they would be dragged into sit-down strikes like those breaking out at other non-ferrous facilities. One such action took place at a former Lewisohn-owned smelter in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. The strike had pulled 1,500 workers off

427 Vern Jenson quoted in “Hildebrand and Mangum, 205; and, Tennessee Copper Company Mining Department records, “Summary of all Mines for the First Half of July 1939,” L. Weaver, Superintendent of Mines, to Mr. F.J. Longworth, 7 August 1939.
the job for eleven days. In the end, workers got only a small increase; the company had pushed back and forced workers to take much less than they had hoped for. It was days before smelter workers could immediately return to work even after the settlement because the furnaces had been shut during the strike.428

It should be remembered that such actions came during the disquieting times of the Roosevelt Recession which toppled commodities prices. While TCC would survive through this period, that outcome could not yet have been known. Union actions like those take by Mine, Mill and the CIO at Perth Amboy frightened and angered management and seemed risky to conservative workers—neither of whom wished to see the hard times of the early thirties return. As a result conservative TCC tradesmen sought solace in new AFL locals.

AFL loyalists in late November 1937 petitioned the NLRB to investigate collective bargaining arrangements in the Copper Basin. In light of the establishment of new AFL local no. 21164 in the Twin-cities the Labor Board obliged. After notice was given to TCC and to Mine, Mill leaders, hearings on the matter occurred in Chattanooga before the case trial examiner, Earl S. Bellman. Bellman and other NLRB officials determined certain conditions for collective bargaining representation in the Copper Basin including what they saw as the appropriate kind of unit for TCC workers and who could be included in such a unit. The AFL contended that a single unit “composed of all the employees of the Company, except supervisory employees… in the mines, plants and facilities … of the Ducktown Basin… is the appropriate unit for the purposes of collective bargaining.” But Mine, Mill wanted three separate units, “corresponding to the locals which it originally chartered in the Basin… and that not only supervisory employees, but

also clerical employees, chemists, and technical engineers should be excluded” from the union.  

According to NLRB examiners, at TCC “the high degree of interdependence and division of labor among [its] several mines and plants” The company also “observed a seniority rule” and regularly transferred certain kinds of workers “among the several locations.” Thus the Labor Board determined that a single unit should cover TCC’s entire workforce. That unit would not include some craft workers that AFL organizers so desired in their ranks: there would be no supervisory employees, chemists, or technical engineers. As to who could vote, the Board said company employment rolls as of 19 November 1937 would determine qualification. The election deciding which rival union would get collective bargaining rights occurred on March 18, 1938.  

The Federation petitioned and received approval from the Labor Board that an option be removed from the ballot that would have allowed workers to select “neither union.” To remind workers of the power of the Federation’s national status, AFL leader John Deal and others made certain that the ballot read “American Federation of Labor” instead of the much more parochial designation “American Federation of Labor union No. 21164.”

The AFL won the election 543 to 488. The ballots included twelve where men wrote in “for neither” themselves; election proctors tossed out four votes for being either improperly filled out or “challenged” for reasons not explained. But the victory was pyrrhic. Of the eligible 1122 workers, seventy-five men chose not to vote for reasons not explained, though it may have been due to the allegations that Mine, Mill and CIO sympathizers now made against the AFL and

430 NLRB, Case No. R-574, March 3, 1938, ibid.
431 NLRB, Case No. R-574, ibid.
the company. The CIO demanded that the election results be found void. After an investigation
the NLRB agreed; examiners had found “substantial” evidence which “raised material issue with
respect to the conduct of the ballot.” Notice was given to all parties and the hearings began. The
evidence against the AFL and the company was considerable to say the least, consisting of a
half-dozen separate complaint categories that involved intimidation, threats, misinformation, and
a general collusion between AFL loyalists, TCC supervisory staff, and a company management
that turned a blind-eye to the goings on.432

The NLRB reports made something else quite plain. Tennessee Copper managers were
not going to be victims in the continuing labor war between the CIO and the AFL. What TCC
management actually allowed and supported was a considerable stretch from the rhetoric of
company’s progressive owner. From the beginning of the dispute between the AFL and the CIO,
TCC managers had clearly favored the AFL. If the company was going to have to deal with the
reality of organized labor under the regime of the New Deal’s mandates, the corporation
preferred to do so on its own terms. TCC wanted to maintain control over how many of the men
would be unionized, what kind of power those unionized men could hold and what ideological
notions that workers’ association would advance. Company official Barclay made it plain in his
journal entries during this period that any union affiliated with the CIO would not be a favorite
of management.433

The NLRB reports substantiated claims by the CIO of AFL favoritism at TCC. While a
direct link to particular TCC executives could not be found, it was to clear that the Board’s
examiners did not doubt TCC operators directed or allowed supervisory staff to help squash CIO
sympathy among the workers. At hearings held after the first disputed TCC election, witness

after witness admitted before the Labor Board his part in trying to manipulate the outcome of NLRB elections.434

Testifying with pride, indeed often demonstrating a sense of duty, TCC supervisory staff and workers recounted how they had engaged in regular intimidation and interference intended to strengthen AFL support. They all considered themselves loyal Tennessee Copper Company men. They concentrated their anti-CIO efforts on Isabella and Ducktown workers where they knew where company loyalty was weakest. Workers from the mining burgs testified as well and described how they had been targets. In many instances those accused of unlawful actions had no remorse and saw their actions as patriotic. By putting down CIO influence, conservative workers believed they were protecting their livelihoods and ridding the Basin of radical labor ideas. They all held fears of John L. Lewis as a would-be labor dictator. The logic and ideology espoused by AFL sympathizers tended to be simple: They wanted to continue working in the manner they had been accustomed to at TCC and within the Federation. To them, those arrangements were the very essence of Americanism. CIO-style organizing was collective and limited a man’s own destiny.435 What is fascinating is how these men appear to have believed Mine, Mill had suddenly changed once it joined with the CIO. Any regard or loyalty these former members of Mine, Mill may have once held for their old union evaporated once it left the Federation.436

Truck foreman Arthur Dalton and labor foreman Ed Donaldson for instance had each decided it was time to shut down the CIO. Both fellows were strong supporters of the AFL and each admitted he had engaged in open electioneering and lecturing of employees they supervised. Assistant general foreman Young Querry likewise argued the benefits of the AFL to

434 NLRB Case No-574, Second Supplemental Decision and Second Direction of Election, ibid.
435 NLRB R-574, Second Supplemental Decision and Second Direction of Election, ibid.
436 NLRB, ibid.
his Isabella men. Walter Loudermilk remembered these exchanges. Querry had told him, “if the
CIO won John L. Lewis would call the employees out on sympathetic strikes.”

Querry, like many anti-CIO men, had become convinced CIO affiliation would pull TCC
workers into fights that were none of their business in a larger war to establish a collective
workers’ society. D. B. Epperson, an Isabella general foreman had been sizing things up. He
then set upon his men, telling them “he would know what was what soon before long,” implying
their ballots would not be kept secret. In a world where armed violence often accompanied pride
in conflicts, such vague threats disturbed a man. Epperson declared he wanted no part of a
union, but were he to join one it would be the Federation and not Lewis’s dictatorship. If you
vote for the CIO, he claimed, you vote away your jobs. Foreman O.K. Lyle informed associate
Noah Parris summarized the CIO as “un-American.” “If the CIO wins,” the Lyle had threatened,
“employees would have no jobs.”

The concept of “industrial unionism” was not one that many of these men understood
very well. To them it was a just a new kind of “bolshevism”—and promotions of it conjured up
stories from newsreels shown at the Cherokee theater and newspapers of violent overthrow of
society and the confiscation of private property. It was clear from the intensity of the actions
recorded through the NLRB hearings that a true sense of panic lay among rank-and-file
Federation loyalists in the Copper Basin. Copper sulphate foreman Arthur Bellew told David
Queen that “he had done everything he could” before the election to make his men vote AFL.

In Noah Parris’s mind, to align with the CIO would be to align against the company and
opportunities for capitalist employment. General rigger Marion Hamby let his suspicions be

437 Ibid.
438 Ibid.
439 NLRB R-574 Second Supplemental, ibid.
440 Ibid.
known about men he knew who had gone CIO. “I understand you lined up with them Ducktown boys,” he had threatened some. “You better lay off that bunch there. The CIO isn’t anything to have here [in Copperhill].” Hamby’s point was a class-based fear. The specter of life with the CIO meant an end to the kind of middle class status and distinctions enjoyed in the Twin-Cities.  

In the hearings, not a single foreman denied any charge of illegal interference. NLRB examiners were somewhat taken aback by the pride demonstrated by these men and the intensity of the men’s attitudes as expressed in their raw emotions surprised official too. The number of incriminating accounts by workers such as Wes Helton, Isaac Turner, Carl Panter, Gus Nelson, A.J. Harper was large enough that Board officials found it easy to conclude that other instances of interference by foremen existed. Concluded the Board, the “uncontroverted evidence previously described established such employer interference as to require a new election.” Supervisory employees engaged in “threats of reprisals” and Board examiners ruled that any defense of these actions as simply examples of workers protecting their livelihoods was “unsatisfactory and alarmist.” As a result of the aggressive acts, the Board ruled the AFL election victory in 1938 “null and void.”

The rhetorical war moved into a new phase when news of a new election made the rounds among TCC crews. Through the summer and fall of 1938 rhetorical barrages from the opposing sides flew across the Basin’s red hills. Copperhill AFL local President John Deal and his secretary J.P. Chastain, launched the first offensive volley. Warning time and again about

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441 Ibid.
442 NLRB R-574 Second Supplemental, 579.
dangerous repercussion were TCC workers to allow Mine, Mill full regional control, he urged workers not to break from the Federation’s powerful forces in labor’s war against its foes.443

In light of the substantial benefits Mine, Mill wrung from TCC operators in the thirties, AFL leaders had a considerable challenge before them. How does one convince workers to abandon a union that had clear advantages for miners and for men with fewer skills than the craftsmen? Copper Basin AFL leaders met this challenge by ignoring Mine, Mill victories and instead exaggerated the danger of “communism” for working people. In doing so the AFL redirected public debate from reality to fear.

Deal and Chastain summarized CIO complaints over the election as sinister tactics, proof of pro-communist ambition by Mine, Mill sympathizers and typical of communist actions taken nationally. The had the Copper City Advance post a warning “To the Workers of the Copper Basin.” The long notice was an appeal to all TCC workers not just AFL sympathizers. Deal and Chastain hoped that a listing of the dangers of CIO affiliation would persuade practical TCC men to see why the Federation must prevail in the collective bargaining struggle. Deal chronicled recent developments in the union war and where CIO challenges had been met by advance forces of the Federation. The battle in the Copper Basin had gotten so important, Deal said, that AFL officials far away had grown keenly interested and were doing what they could to aid TCC men. In the nation’s capital, Joseph Padway, Chief of the AFL’s Executive Council, had been urging National Labor Relations Board officials to recognize that “the majority” of TCC men did not want the CIO. The full Executive Council, having met in Atlantic City, sent notice to Copper Basin men that workers had most benefited while their union had been in the AFL family. It was not Mine, Mill that had been most beneficial to workers, Deal claimed, but the Federation itself.

443 “To the Workers of the Copper Basin,” Copper City Advance, 8.26.1938
“Every advancement that Labor has made—in any industry,” stated Federation officials from Atlantic City, “has been made under the leadership of the American Federation of Labor.”

Such unsubstantiated assertions required no proof; they stood as fiat declarations and were wholly improvable one way or another, but that fact never mattered. This method of attacking the CIO, maintained throughout the late thirties, relied on emotional appeal, not rationality.

To rally more support among the local rank-and-file, Deal announced the imminent arrival of certain labor personalities. Gerald Foley, President of the Tennessee Federation of Labor and secretary-treasurer of the Chattanooga Labor World, and AFL representative and Knoxville Labor News editor W. Clay McKenzie were both coming to have direct talks with the working men of the Copper Basin. Foley’s office stated the members of the Tennessee Federation’s Executive Board would “do all in their power for the workers in the Copper Basin.” Chattanooga AFL men joined up too: Tommy Cuthbert threw in his support as editor of the Chattanooga Labor World.

All this outside support had increased AFL popularity in Copperhill, which Deal claimed was growing everyday. It should be noted in all this that it was never okay in the minds of their enemies that CIO “outsiders” might come to Ducktown and organize for Mine, Mill’s “communistic” organization, but it was perfectly fine and indeed stood as proof of powerful, regional camaraderie that AFL men from outside the Basin were willing to come to Copperhill and rally the conservative cause. AFL men never let obvious hypocrisy in their own actions interfere with their campaign.

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444 Copper City Advance, ibid., 8.26.1938.
445 Copper City Advance, ibid.
“Nearly one hundred good men” joined the new AFL local in a single week claimed Deal. This occurred in spite of new allegations by a CIO union organizer Deal dismissed as “Pitiful Little Pegues.” “Pegues”—whose first name lay nowhere in the record—had attacked the integrity of the AFL’s bookkeeping in the pro-CIO People’s Press. Deal derided the article as being just another example of propaganda from a “communistically-colored rag…as red as the shirt worn by [any] CIO” lawyer.446

CIO rhetorical attacks on the AFL focused on the Federation men’s often overly cozy relationships with important local businessmen. The CIO also sought to remind workers that craft unions historically operated as “social clubs” sometimes “organized by employers.” The location of new Twin-Cities AFL local within The First National Bank fueled more suspicion among CIO sympathizers. AFL unions had seen a lot of embezzling and in an era of considerable economic hardship, any alleged abuse of precious dues money became a scandal. CIO leaders were intent on portraying the AFL as a selfish organization, one abusive of others’ interests. In defense, Deal tried to assure locals that transparency in AFL accounting had been arranged. “We have invited Brother Payne, secretary of the CIO local at Ducktown to come in and examine our books.” In fact, Deal offered, “we shall be glad to have any reputable member of the Ducktown or Isabella Locals to come in and examine our books.”447

Deal then returned fire on the CIO. He asserted that Mine, Mill’s International and its friends in the press were “constantly planning methods whereby the money in [Mine, Mill Copper Basin locals] would be wrested away” to finance communist activity in other places.

446 Copper City Advance, ibid.
447 Copper City Advance, ibid. 8.26.1938; and, Hildebrand and Mangum, 205.
CIO claims of AFL financial insecurity, he argued, were a smoke screen to distract from Mine, Mill’s own thieving.”

AFL assertions were a collection of contradictions. On the one hand, Deal wanted workers to be aware that the AFL was watching out for their ambitions while the CIO tried to destroy the interests of organized labor. “The [AFL] Committee in Washington is bringing out, every day, evidences of the diabolical plots of Communists to destroy America, and these Communists are all active officers in the CIO.” But in other remarks Deal claimed the CIO movement as disintegrating. “Read your daily papers, listen to the Radio. In the automobile industry the CIO is split into factions, each cussing the other side out, both charging that the other side is filled with Communists.” “Throughout the country,” Deal went on, “today and everyday the CIO is folding up like cornshoots!”

AFL supporters printed and distributed flyers with such rhetoric throughout 1938-1940. They all held hysterical appeals that had gained a great deal of potency from the public’s reaction to the Dies Committee Congressional investigations held in August 1938. One notice placed by local AFL organizer James F. Barrett, cited AFL President William Green’s assertion that testimony from recent Dies Committee hearings “shows that [the] CIO organization has two hundred Communists employed as organizers.” This horde threatened “the wives and the little children in the homes of the workers.” Labor officials and the common man must join forces to reveal the true nature of the CIO. “The man who faithfully performs...[for] workers, their wives and little children MUST tell the Truth.”

Barrett’s immediate purpose had been to respond to recent attacks made by Copper Basin Mine, Mill men that it was in fact the AFL where communists lurked. Barrett called on Mine, Mill leaders to admit to being written up in

448 “Two Hundred Communists Employed As Organizers For the C.I.O.” Copper City Advance, 9.2.1938.
449 Ibid.
450 “Two Hundred Communists Employed As Organizers For the C.I.O.” Copper City Advance, 2 September, 1938.
Pittsburgh communist newspapers and that according to Green the CIO was “dominated and controlled by communists.”\footnote{Ibid., \\emph{Copper City Advance}, 2 September, 1938.} 

Green attacked the CIO later that month using another tactic by claiming that the NLRB was regularly disobeying Congressional intent by consistently siding with John L. Lewis and the CIO. In a conspiratorial manner Lewis was now using “Federal Government agencies as recruiting agents” for CIO unions. Referring to a recent NLRB decision as an example that granted the CIO collective bargaining rights over coal mines in Harlan County, Kentucky, Green claimed that Lewis’ tactics in influencing the NLRB effectively disenfranchised the working man. CIO tactics thus stood in contrast with those of the AFL “which operates on democratic principles as the true representative and choice of the miners.” Green equated CIO membership with being a mere vassal under a labor despotism.\footnote{“Green Charges Against the NLRB,” \emph{New York Times}, 29 August 1938.}

The Congressional hearings of the Dies Committee (known more commonly as the House Un-American Activities Committee) had been covered in regional papers and likely too in local radio reports. In one report from the hearings, John P. Frey, head to the Federation’s Metals Trades Department—a direct jurisdictional competitor with Mine, Mill—declared the CIO and Mine, Mill was “honey-combed with Reds.” Frey admitted the CIO leadership itself was “opposed to communism” publically, but that it used communists to the union’s advantage. “280 Communist party members were or had been on CIO pay rolls as organizers and officials” Frey had said. These circumstances could not be allowed to continue unnoticed by the public. It was, he declared, “time the public knew the truth about the efforts of the Communist Party in the United States to carry out the purpose of Moscow and the Third International, whose purpose is revolution.” Frey went on to condemn CIO tactics like the sit-down strike and mass picketing as
“frontline” actions in the “trenches” of this revolution. To alarm religious Protestants, Frey linked the communists who had infiltrated the CIO to Soviet efforts attacking religion. Then Frey went further by claiming the American Communist Party had been trying to enlist working class Catholics. As with nearly all such anti-CIO attacks, Frey did not attempt to provide specifics or absolute proof in his testimony. His rhetoric stood mainly as pure allusion and suspicion, the links vaguely possible and always conspiratorial. Most important, they were as impossible to disprove as they were to prove and thus worked to weaken public trust in the CIO.  

Anti-CIO and anti-communist rhetoric was not of course limited to AFL loyalists. Partisan politics supplied additional opportunities to exploit fears of a red menace. Republicans and other pro-business conservatives used the fear of the CIO and communism to their advantage in combating the policies of the New Deal. As well, local papers caught the anti-communist fever which was sometimes combined with attacks on the New Deal. Both the Copperhill and country-seat newspaper, the Benton-based *Polk County News*, appeared to be run by Republicans, but of the two, the *Polk Country News* was by far the most regular and strident critic of the New Deal. The paper ran a special *Picture Parade* feature, “Communism, 1938 Variety” which reported on recent investigations done by the Dies Committee. The report stated that “while American Communism of 1938 is less red-bearded than a decade ago [and] less of a threat to national security than popularly supposed… this does not minimize its importance in the American scene.” The article provided images and short summaries on the office and activities of the American Communist Party, based in New York City. Granted, the tenor of the article was mostly one of fascination and sensationalism but given the regular editorial pitch in

the pages of *The News*, the article was not intended as a casual conversation piece. It was intended to remind locals—especially Copper Basin workers, no doubt—of the threat communism posed to them. The article contributed to the anti-organized labor sentiments in the Tri-state the *Polk County News* had been promoting through its editorials and front page political cartoons for years. Throughout the next decade the paper continued its attacks on liberal policies, federal expenditures, “communism” and organized labor.455

In a last plea “to the employees of the Tennessee Copper Company,” published by the *Copperhill City Advance* a few days before the scheduled NLRB election in late fall 1938, local AFL organizer James F. Barrett made a very long and exhaustive plea. He echoed national Federation allegations of NLRB favoritism toward the CIO and summarized the Federation’s past ability to deliver to workers. Barrett warned men their power to garner favorable contracts would lessen if they chose the CIO over the AFL. Barrett said the Labor Board was merely a tool of the CIO and part of Lewis’s attempt to gain complete control over national labor which in the end would only benefit Lewis. The Labor Board’s previous decision to ignore the will of TCC workers had been, he said, “one of the strangest and most flagrantly unjust decisions ever handed down by any tribunal.”456 Barrett announced an AFL plea for an injunction, which he hoped might lead a federal court to intercede and shut down the election. But were the election to take place, each man must remember that he would have to live with the consequences.457

Barrett questioned CIO accounting practices and warned that if given the chance Mine, Mill would levy assessments at will. He also reminded TCC workers that Mine, Mill had been

455 *Polk County News*, 1930s and 1940s, passim. See previous discussions of local newspapers’ editorial stance within this study.
456 “To the Employees of the Tennessee Copper Company,” *Copper City Advance*, 10.29.1938
457 *Copper City Advance*, 10.29.1938, Ibid.
unable to secure a new contract since the representation controversy had begun. Wasn’t this proof of CIO impotency? Most important, he alleged if the CIO won,

“You will be working under orders and directions of the Communists, for there are so many Communists in positions of power in the CIO that all International and all local unions affiliated with the CIO are under control of these Communist leaders. In fact, there would be no CIO if it weren’t for these Communists.”458

In contrast Barrett argued Federation men were churchmen and members of fraternal orders and this “fact” stood in stark relief to the values embraced by CIO organizers, whose way of life would destroy conventional morality. “Communism,” he claimed, “destroys the churches and is making every effort to wipe out religion.” Finally, Barrett asked the men to think about the power of connections they would lose if the AFL went down before the power of the CIO. No CIO workers’ organizations stood between the Copper Basin and Atlanta. In fact, no organized labor groups in Atlanta were CIO, nor in Knoxville nor even in Chattanooga. If Copper Basin workers joined the CIO movement they would be alone. But if they went AFL, they would have huge regional organizations in Tennessee, Carolina, and Georgia that would support them. These claims contradict the evidence, but this does not seem to have made a difference to Barrett, who may have figured a lot of men would not know the difference.459

Barrett then offered an olive branch to his opposition. No matter what the outcome of the 4 November NLRB election, it was his hope all persons involved remember:

“The majority ought to rule in every instance in this land of ours… we may differ in our opinions as to the best way to go, but I want to say to you fine men in this Copper Basin that as Almighty God is my judge I wish for each one of your good health, happiness, and of those things that will best contribute to your happiness and to the happiness of your wives and children.”460

458 *Copper City Advance*, 10.29.1938, Ibid.
459 Ibid.
460 Ibid, *Copper City Advance*, 10.29.1938.
Barrett’s last ditch at graciousness may have been owing to his suspicions of how the election would turn out. Too many disgruntled miners knew that the copper industry was on the rebound; the mere fact of the CIO movement’s existence was a kind of defeat to conservatives. For all its efforts, the Twin-cities-based AFL secession-movement from Mine, Mill had been not been a successful in the mining villages. At some point all TCC men would have to come together and begin to heal their wounds.

When the votes had been counted after the 4 November 1938 election it was clear hundreds of men among Tennessee Copper’s 1,122 eligible workers remained loyal to Mine, Mill and the CIO and they now stood as the majority of workers. For these 516 men, affiliation with the CIO would now mean even unskilled men would have a say in labor negotiations and that the craftsmen were not going to control the union. Still, fear had remained strong among many workers: over one hundred men avoided the polls and twelve men again voted for no union whatsoever. NLRB officials considered several complaints and appeals made by TCC and the AFL, but found them all wanting. Mine, Mill was declared victorious in January, 1939. Suspicions about the election’s outcome must have been keen among AFL sympathizers and CIO critics. Mine, Mill had the *Copper City Advance* print word for word NLRB Chairman Warren Madden’s “Certification of Representatives” in hopes that would quiet any dispute.461

It is clear Mine, Mill wanted now to mend relations among the war crews as soon as possible. The certification notice in the paper was accompanied by a Mine, Mill union membership application and an invitation to all TCC workers to join the “reorganized” Copperhill Mine, Mill Local 176. Everyone was invited to a mass meeting wherein the whole

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community could discuss the next step in regional labor relations. Union membership was being offered at a discount for a very limited time—just two days!—at $2; reinstatement for wanderers would be $1. The deal was a good one given that regular membership cost $4 and reinstatement, five bucks. To further entice locals, union organizers said “good music, singing, eats, and speaking” could be enjoyed at the meeting to be held in the “Copperhill High” school auditorium: “Everything is free!” “At last peace can rule in Ducktown Copper Basin, instead of bitterness, strife and turmoil” announced a hopeful Copperhill Mine, Mill. “As the old saying goes, ‘United We Stand, and Divided We Fall.’” 462

No uniting commenced however, neither between warring factions in the workforce nor between Mine, Mill and TCC. The last negotiated contract expired in April 1939 and negotiations remained bogged down. By early summer 1939, it was clear Mine, Mill was having real problems getting AFL loyalists to join efforts in coordinating a united front for collective bargaining with TCC. Buried in a late June issue of the Copper City Advance lay a notice “to whom it may concern,” by Local 176 President Clarence Sutton and his secretary Freed Townsend. The two wanted to remind workers who had not yet joined Mine, Mill that their Local 176 now had a new constitution and by-laws. Now was time to take advantage of another round of reduced union initiation fees. Meanwhile, AFL loyalists remained active advocates of their union, refusing to give up the fight to oust the CIO from the Copper Basin. 463

Fed up: Anderson and Mine, Mill call for a walkout

Believing it had secured a mandate from local working people, Mine, Mill set about demanding that TCC provide back-pay from the stretch-out era, and that every worker’s paycheck now include payday deductions of union dues. More important for overall company

462 IUMMSW notice, Copper City Advance, 10, February 1939.
463 Lampell Report, NCPR, 4. Local 176 IUMMSW, “To Whom It May Concern,” Copper City Advance, 30 June 1939.
relations, the union complained that TCC was not supporting the results of the January election. Mine, Mill accused TCC of refusing to let the old AFL-CIO conflict lie and stalling contract negotiations. “As we see it,” wrote Anderson to J.N. Houser in a letter summarizing the union’s frustrations that summer, “if democratic principles of majority rule had been adhered to in its entirety with no concession or encouragement given to the minority, then at the present time we would not be faced with the situation we have today.”

Believing TCC had backed it into a corner, Mine, Mill employed radical measures; the union called for a mass walkout in mid-July to protect the interests of its rank-and-file and their communities. The strike demonstrated the breadth of Mine, Mill support in Ducktown and Isabella, the devotion of the rank-and-file to their union, and that the cohesion NLRB observers described between the mining communities was real. But the strike also revealed persistence of divided loyalties. Although this was a Mine, Mill strike, both unions publically advocated on behalf of their respective rank-and-file. Both the CIO and the AFL supported the families of their respective membership in lieu of regular pay. Each union put on public displays of support for their cause, which included rallies, pamphleteering, processionals, picketing and appeals to the local citizenry for support. Although the walkout had been peaceful, the disturbance of the region’s industrial peace—the most extensive one in a generation—was frightening to many citizens and they demanded local police authorities step in to calm tensions. Sheriff Broughton Biggs found in the disturbance an opportunity to ingratiate himself with citizens while garnering largess from TCC by leading a deputy army.

R.E. Barclay’s diary stated that by the summer of 1939 rumors in the mining towns were strong that a strike was pending. His comments betray an understanding that all was not happy.

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among the mining folk of Ducktown and Isabella despite previous TCC contracts with Mine, Mill. “The miners have been threatening to strike for several years,” Barclay claimed. “The CIO, headed by an outside organizer named Anderson [was] engineering the discontent.” Mine, Mill called for the strike while Houser was in California for the week, the CIO strike against Tennessee Copper Company commenced on July 14 and in response acting manager F.J. Longworth shut down the plant. “There is no dispute about wages, hours, or working conditions,” Barclay claimed in his diary. Further ignoring facts, he claimed that “the CIO is in the minority [but] Longworth shut the whole pant after the CIO had served its strike ultimatum.”

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Barclay may have thought he knew Mine, Mill’s demands, but either he was ignorant or simply dismissive of CIO complaints. Others investigating the strike stated Mine, Mill organizers told them that working conditions and back-pay were in fact central complaints against TCC. Mine, Mill wanted guarantees about shift schedules and “no more violations of the eight-hour day”; the union also wanted improved safety conditions—Houser’s focus notwithstanding. The union claimed that mine hoist cages had too few men overseeing operations and since these requirements were now the law in Alabama, Mine, Mill wanted the same protections brought to Ducktown. Regarding grievance reporting, Mine, Mill claimed the current system was too favorable to TCC and requested “all disputes be turned over to the Conciliation Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor.” Furthermore, the impoverished living conditions of a lot of the poorest miners demanded attention.

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It was no surprise then that the strike’s heart beat most furiously in the struggling mining communities and not in Copperhill. The strike began without violence though Mine, Mill

466 R.E. Barclay, diary, 13 and 14 July 1939
467 Lampell Report, NCPR 4-5.
installed collections of union men as guards and pickets at all the mining and plant facilities. The CIO’s main strike headquarters sat in a hut below the General Office at the foot of Smelter Hill where a dozen pickets stood as sentinels. Only TCC train crews “and a few other men” continued to work delivering cars to the L & N, but eventually almost everyone went home. 468 Pump men remained to keep the mines from flooding and company firemen stayed on the job at all TCC facilities to protect the property from fire. No interruption of electricity or water occurred. The strike did not affect any salaried men, “but all day pay men are out” recorded Barclay; as a result he noted salaried men could do “no work of any production or maintenance nature.”469 By 17 July Barclay was lamenting the state of operations: “The old plant as quite as a tomb … for the first time in longer than anyone care[d] to remember operations at the Tennessee Copper Company has ceased.”470

One week after the strike commenced no negotiations had yet begun, but Mine, Mill men did not abandon what they saw as their duty to assist TCC Mining Department managers in maintaining machines and safety. The Copper City Advance made no mention of union cooperation in this regard and instead warned of the dangers risked by encouraging the strike to go on; the paper reminded all interested parties that “the plant was the only means of livelihood for thousands of people in and around the [Copper] Basin.”471 Pickets had remained peaceful in all the towns, but the circumstances among “merchants and professional men here have [been] keenly felt as business has been at a standstill.” The paper said you could call the troubles either a shutdown or a strike “use either if you prefer,” but the fact was that “several families are

468 Barclay diary, 7.14. and 7.15.1939
469 Barclay diary, 7.15.1939; Lampell Report, NCPR, 4-5.
470 R.E. Barclay, ibid; “Tenn. Copper Co. Ceases Operations: Plant Shut Down by Officials Due to Labor Troubles,” Copper City Advance 7.21.1939
471 Copper City Advance, 7.21.1939.
already destitute.” The rival unions both claimed they would take care of such people. Records indicate they did.472

The AFL did not sit idly by during all this and took advantage of what it saw as miscalculation on the part of Mine, Mill in calling for a walkout. The union may also have helped Mining Department officials in stowing explosives in surface magazines. AFL organizer James F. Barrett sought outside assistance. He told the *Copper City Advance* that he planned to appeal to the regional Tennessee Federation for help. His assistant, A.A. Crabbe, spoke before a crowd of locals in Copperhill and received a round of applause when he said that he hoped the whole affair could be settled without violence. “I am praying that the strike will be settled without a fist doubled, a knife opened or a pistol drawn.” AFL officials ingratiated themselves to locals by informing workers and their families that “various local churches” would be praying for their welfare and “asking for divine providence to take a hand in the situation.”473

Mitchell C. Anderson’s well-honed administrative skills were especially noted during his oversight of Mine, Mill’s relief efforts. Apparently a meticulous record-keeper, he earned the trust of his International which assisted him by sending in $30,000 worth of groceries for use during the walkout. This was a huge sum and Anderson remained true to form in his administration of this relief. He accounted “to the penny” the distribution of $1,000 of union goods to Mine, Mill men and their families each week for the duration of the strike.474

During the strike the warring unions and local police authorities used organized processionals to try to persuade local people to rally round their respective cause. For instance, AFL leaders put on a huge parade in downtown Copperhill that galvanized their support in the

472 Tennessee Copper Company Mining Department records, Lamar Weaver, Superintendent of Mines, to Mr. F.J. Longworth, Manager, Copperhill, Tennessee, 7 August 1939; and, *Copper City Advance*, ibid.
473 Tennessee Copper Company Mining Department records, Lamar Weaver to F.J. Longworth, ibid.; and, *Copper City Advance*, ibid.
474 *Lampell Report*, NCPR, 8
Twin Cities. The union reminded local people that it was not on strike, that the AFL was abiding by the law, sticking with the company and concerned with the people’s needs. The strike and its terrible consequences were the CIO’s doing. Barclay said the AFL action was “followed by a mass meeting at the school house.” Photos of the town taken during the strike show a prominent banner supporting the AFL hanging across the Copperhill’s main street. Despite a dearth of reports, it seems likely that public AFL actions would have resembled other conservative labor processions of this era. The Federation parade would have likely had an anti-communist theme and featured the families of AFL sympathizers. During the Hershey labor disturbances, for example, anti-CIO families, that later supported an AFL local, rallied in a patriotic manner showing their support for capitalism, Christianity, and for their employer.

AFL support in the region had been growing as a result of the Copper Basin union war. In late July 1939 a contingent of union men from Tennessee Corporation’s North Carolina Fontana mine came to Copperhill to announce their new allegiance to the Federation having just withdrawn from Mine, Mill. To maintain the momentum of their cause AFL leaders held rallies at the Basin’s recently completed Johnson “College” building as paydays got ever slimmer and the economic effects of the strike hit hard. Reports are unclear, but Mine, Mill efforts notwithstanding, not all workers received aid during the strike. Some anti-union workers refused CIO or AFL help, while others may have been too isolated or proud to ask for help. Others in the Basin seemed detached from the immediacy of the strike’s hardships. Barclay, for instance, remained at work and was convinced that his superiors would prevail. In his journal he

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475 R.E. Barclay, diary, 7.17.1939.
477 Barclay diary, 17 July 1939; Copper City Advance, 21 July 1939, ibid; and 28 July 1939.
down-played the effects of the shutdown and claimed that among the general public there was “little uneasiness over the ultimate outcome of the strike.”  

But AFL men apparently saw things differently and claimed that many families suffered during the strike; there is little detail as to just how the Federation responded beyond acknowledgements that it did. Disaffected men and men who had never wanted union membership were in a particularly dire position as they had no assistance from any union and likely had to rely on local charity. In one of its rare non-editorial accounts of the strike, The Polk County News said that some 1,500 people had applied for unemployment compensation as a result of the strike. This figure included more than just TCC’s employees and underscored the fact that unemployment relief would have been especially essential for men who had attempted to remain independent from all unions. For such independent souls, having to rely on public assistance must have been humiliating. Dozens of other working people who relied on income from support industries at TCC must have been included in the 1500 persons.

The use of public processionals was not a strategy limited to AFL union organizers. Sheriff Broughton Biggs burnished his Polk County police authority during the strike in part by organizing a processional of “deputies” to remind local folk that he was on the job to provide law and order at a dangerous time. There was some cause for alarm in light of the recent violence by angry workers. According to a report on the strike in the Birmingham Labor Advocate, several local AFL men sustained attacks that autumn. The paper attributed the attacks to “CIO thugs” but it gave no names and no arrests had been made. The report also recounted another incident. “One man was shot with a shotgun and two members of the CIO were charged with the

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478 Barclay diary, 17-19 July 1938
shooting.” As was typical of its coverage on the issue, the AFL-sympathetic Birmingham paper provided no names of the attackers or evidence that they were indeed members of Mine, Mill. In fact, there is nothing in the evidence to indicate that only CIO sympathizers were responsible for the violence endured by locals in the Copper Basin at this time.

During the strike, The Copper City Advance continued its anti-CIO coverage of events. Proposals put forth by Mine, Mill officials, the paper said, would require every working man at Tennessee Copper Company to join the union, pay a fee for the privilege and have pay withheld by TCC for the CIO. Proposals to TCC had been delivered, the paper said, to the company by none other than Clarence “Red” Sutton. In its reportage on Mine, Mill’s rival, the City Advance presented Federation proposals as reasonable in nature. Federation officials stepped in and proposed a settlement that would benefit the company and themselves. Their proposed status quo antebellum: All men were to return to work just as they had done up to 13 July 1939 and, “that within five days both the A. F. of L. and C.I.O. unions [would then] agree to enter into a consent election…. Which ever party receives the majority of votes cast shall be the sole bargaining agency for one year and that the losing party agree [sic] to withdraw entirely for one year from the date of the election.”

The CIO refused to accept any self-serving AFL olive branches. Mine, Mill leaders decided instead they had to tighten control over TCC facilities to strengthen their position; the union dug in its heals, joined the AFL in passing around circulars, and prevented more men from reporting to work. Mine, Mill did the latter by narrowing its list of allowable work at TCC plants and mines. Pickets now refused to let TCC chemists go to their laboratories. The number of supply house men allowed to report for duty was cut to three. Supply house clerks would be

480 “CIO Movement at Copperhill isVanishing,” Birmingham Labor Advocate, 7 October 1939.
481 Copper City Advance, 28 July 1939; and, “Ask New Election At Tennessee Copper Co.,” Copper City Advance, 4 August 1938;
required to pass through a more rigid security. Rumors spread that soon all clerks would be barred from the plants in Ducktown, Isabella, and Copperhill. Given the extensive maintenance needs of vast and various TCC facilities, these CIO actions fully shut the company down.\footnote{Barclay diary, \textit{ibid} and 10 August.1939.} Meanwhile, the crowds of CIO sympathizers that had been gathering at the picket huts and company property gates grew in size. Men began to spend their idle time around the huts as the strike settled into a kind of routine: whittling. Indeed, as captured on film, because of the extensive whittling done by these men the grounds around the picket huts lay covered in wood shavings several inches deep in some places.\footnote{Carl McConnell, \textit{the Grocer’s Film}.}

The rival unions rejected each other’s proposals to end the strike. Neither union had taken a position that would allow for the establishment of a true middle ground and neither side was willing to compromise because both sides had defined the other’s position as not merely incorrect, but unjust. The AFL had been especially sharp in its attacks, but to leaders of both unions, compromise equaled surrender. As a result of their intractable positions, paydays came and went and no pay went out for most men. What few men who did get pay saw their earnings dwindle. Barclay said TCC remained like “a graveyard” and local municipal and business elite now saw the strike as killing business and frustrating citizens. Thousands of dollars that typically rained down upon local businesses were not forthcoming. The Copperhill paper described the town as a land of idle hands as a result of union “deadlocks” and “flat rejection.” In this region, so informed by an overwhelming Calvinist religiosity, idleness itself was too close to willful sinfulness to excuse without suspicion; for CIO detractors idle hands were just another reason to condemn the union.\footnote{“Unions Reject Each Other’s Proposals: Men Wit for Compensation as Strike Goes into Third Week,” \textit{Copper City Advance}, 7.28.1939; Barclay diary, 21 and 24 July.1939.}
Tennessee Copper’s public campaign: “A Pictorial Outline of the Ducktown Basin”

One of the few direct windows into management’s role during the strike came from R.E. Barclay’s mid-level administrative perspective. Too important to management to be sent home given his responsibilities in overseeing company paperwork, but not important enough to delegate day to day responsibilities to other men, R.E. Barclay remained at work and watched the action unfold. TCC sent most of the upper management from the mines and smelters on “vacation” during the walkout; these salaried men were to stay away from company works—getting their regular pay no doubt—and only “return as needed.” Barclay’s own office work slowed to a crawl; he noted he could do nothing but complete the regular reports to his superiors and hang out at his office with a few middle managers, E.C. McCay and Homer Wehunt from the Acid House, Robert Kilpatrick from the Mining Office, and “Ritchie” from the Smelter Office.

According to Barclay, official company policy during the first several weeks of the strike was to resist direct confrontation with the CIO. But in truth, the company held almost all the cards in this game of industrial relations poker. The fact that 1,500 men showed up to replace strikers is one indication of the weakness of the local labor market. In Barclay’s mind, provoked and provocative union men would have to return to work at some point, but his comments on this require qualification. Barclay did not know all the strategies his superiors might employ and he does not appear to have been a confidante of members of the inner most circle of Tennessee Corporation or TCC corporate heads. As a result, his remarks were merely reactions and were not always consistent. One day all appeared to be fine with the company in spite of the walkout and a few days later a sense of alarm bursts forth from his journal. Barclay, it seems, got his

485 Barclay, diary, ibid; and, 7.19 and 7.26.1939
information on a need-to-know basis. Therefore, he tended to convey company positions in the manner of someone trying to explain events. His circumstance as a middle level administrator left him often speculating without any specific reference to a source. One telling instance lay in his remarks about company strategy: “Enough rope is being let out to insure a complete ‘suicide’ on the part of those responsible for the wholly uncalled-for strike—or at least this seems to be the belief generally.”

General Manager J.N. Houser did put Barclay to work on one very special public relations project during the strike. Barclay was to review the conditions of the facilities and then work a Knoxville reporter to create a multi-page insert for the *Knoxville Journal*, a popular Tri-State newspaper that had tens of thousands of readers. The full title of this masterpiece of corporate propaganda included a reminder for the public of the Tri-State: It was “A Pictorial Outline of the Ducktown Basin… in which is located one of the largest of the major industries of East Tennessee.”

Barclay’s historical expertise and renown among locals appeared everywhere in the multi-page spread. Its purpose was to advance TCC’s corporate image and to position the company as the most reasonable force for industrial peace in the Tri-State. To prepare for the insert, TCC management told Barclay to take sympathetic reporters and local photographer T. S. Weaver on a tour of TCC’s facilities. The timing of the piece coincided with an editorial report in the same issue of the *Journal* condemning the effects of the ongoing national union war between the AFL and CIO. The *Journal’s* editors and TCC left it up to readers to make the obvious connection between the significance of both pieces. The day *The Pictorial* appeared was important too, a Friday. This timing allowed readers a weekend to consider and discuss the

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486 My emphasis within the quotation. R.E. Barclay diary, 18 July 1939
consequence of a CIO union destroying the critical and benevolent company _The Pictorial_ described.488

The _Pictorial_ advanced the idea—without a direct attack on organized labor—that it was Tennessee Corporation through the Tennessee Copper Company that deserved the public’s trust in these uncertain times of radical labor strikes at home and increasing threats to the nation’s security. Once the public was informed of TCC’s significance to the region, the company would appear more trustworthy than either quarreling unions or meddling, vaguely socialist-leaning, “outsider” government officials.489

New South boosterism at its finest, _The Pictorial_ provided Tri-State readers with a combination history lesson and company hagiography. The text and illustrations had a friendly, if instructive manner about them. In a section of the piece perfect for high school geology instruction, the insert explained how a single lump ton of ore—made to resemble a comic book superhero—had been transformed through the magnificence of TCC production into valuable products: 500 lbs. of Sulphur; 17 lbs. or zinc; 23 lbs. of copper; and 700 lbs. of iron. Other illustrations outlined the benefits TCC granted the people: the hundreds of thousands of tons of raw ore taken from the mines, the thousands of cars of materials that kept cities like Birmingham churning out steel and allowed towns to pave their roads in concrete; the vast amount of payroll money which poured into the local economy, the vast amounts of annual revenue the company spent on local companies for its supplies, and the critical importance TCC tax monies gave to local county and state treasuries, revenues that totaled at least $200,000 to those institutions annually. All this was chronicled, illustrated, and drawn in the most flattering of terms. Friend of

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489 _Pictorial, Knoxville Journal_, 7.18.1939
the farmer, businessman, steel and iron worker, forestryman, industrialist, and even the humble gardener, TCC benefited them all and thus you.490

Tennessee Corporation’s oversight of TCC’s image through the Pictorial Outline of the Ducktown Basin reflected efforts by other progressive companies contending with empowered organized labor. General Electric, which throughout the 1920s and 1930s held a reputation for progressive cooperation with organized labor had to change its industrial relations when unions shifted strategy and sought inroads into areas traditionally controlled by the company. When, GE’s management team decided it was necessary to contain the power of organized labor it did so through a public relations campaign designed to strengthen the public’s perception that the ambitions of the corporation were synonymous with the health of a community and that notions of free enterprise were synonymous with American concepts of freedom. In this way GE was able to build on anti-communist sentiment to neutralize union power, but at a price. In the end the home town of GE, Schenectady, New York, once absolutely loyal to General Electric, was not rewarded with prosperity. In spite of GE’s rhetoric, corporate loyalty to the town was weak and GE ultimately shifted to more profitable operations centers.491

In contrast to TCC’s magnificent public relations barrage, Mine, Mill sympathizers could rely on only a limited number of advocates to publish any positive accounts of striking TCC workers and their families: the union’s paper and the reportage of the CIO-allied National Committee For People’s Rights. As for the AFL, beyond some brief accounts of that union’s assistance to striking workers, Federation coverage of the Ducktown Basin war was limited to the union’s regional publications. With its greater resources and connections in the print media,

490 “Pictorial,” Knoxville Journal, ibid.
491 Kannenberg, The Product of GE’s Progress. 1-6 and 8.
TCC was doing a fine job trouncing its competition in garnering support among the general public.\textsuperscript{492}

**TCC and Mine, Mill during the strike**

The Mining Department at Tennessee Copper managed to advanced the development of the firm’s extraction resources and maintain respectable production levels throughout the summer of the strike. The manner in which the company organized its workers from foreman to supervisor to miner lay behind its success. Mining department officials relied on new company production techniques that reduced costs and improved rates of development throughout the strike while operators steered clear of labor politics. In company reports there was little mention of striking workers beyond acknowledging their absence and the costs inflicted upon production. In light of the detail contained in the reports it is unlikely that managers would not have reported union-related difficulties at job sites had those occurred.\textsuperscript{493}

Inventories of work completed in the mines the summer of the strike were impressive. Some was routine maintenance. But in place of striking miners, operating staff operated surface and underground pumps for drinking- and fire-water. At Ducktown, new timbering of shafts allowed completion of safe haulage tunnels where once lay unpredictable possibilities for collapse. New blasting, maintenance, and production regimens had been going so well by mid-summer 1939 that Superintendent of the Mines Lamar Weaver bragged: “Foremanship [sic] has improved and a fine spirit of cooperation with the crew on the job and with the union committees

\textsuperscript{493} Tennessee Copper Company Mining Department records, L. Weaver, Superintendent of Mines, to F.J. Longworth [manager], Copperhill, Tennessee, 7 August 1939
has been experienced.” Weaver’s comment and others like it in his reports illustrated the cooperation Mine, Mill gave to company operators so that the union could not be criticized as being irresponsible.494

The company tried to advance resource development and site maintenance, but the effects of the walkout on production were stark. The strike allowed only 8 full days of work. Monthly ore production levels, which had been near or above 50,000 tons of ferrous and non-ferrous material, dropped to just over 15,000 tons in July. Mine clearance and advancement collapsed by two-thirds. As a result, production costs per tons skyrocketed upwards of twenty-five percent.495

In the meanwhile, world events determined how much patience TCC owners would exhibit while Mine, Mill tried to makes its point about the necessity of democratic principals in labor relations. Owing to increased tensions in Europe and East Asia, demand for copper took off and prices soared. In Washington, the Roosevelt Administration, chaffing at the limits set by the Neutrality Acts, announced that it wanted US manufacturers to sell arms during wartime. TCC owners decided that market opportunities now outweighed arguments for appeasement with Mine, Mill; management considered how to affect a more aggressive stance in the dispute and end the strike.496

Back in Ducktown, anxiety and impatience grew among Mine, Mill sympathizers. Incited by AFL rhetoric—and the kind of anger and disappointment that can only arise in domestic disturbances wherein both parties live in close proximity—a peaceful intercourse between union leaders could not be sustained. By mid-August fist fights were breaking out all around the Copper Basin between rival union members. The CIO’s response was to reinforce the pickets.

494 Tennessee Copper Company Mining Department records, L. Weaver to Mr. F.J. Longworth, 7 July and ibid.
495 Tennessee Copper Company Mining Department records, 7 August 1939, ibid.
Rumors spread that a mass attack on the CIO was immanent, by whom, no one could say—AFL? Anti-union men? Hired thugs? Other reports flew around town that CIO sympathizers were arming themselves by trucks “presumably” coming from Ducktown. A battalion of CIO men at one point began marching around the General Offices. Mine, Mill stated the men took the action “to prevent some one from ‘sneaking’ onto Smelter Hill to fire down upon the mass of pickets below.” Again, the company did not interfere. Armed, locked, and loaded, the CIO sentinels and loyalists argued that they were the true maintainers of the peace. If trouble were to come, it “will come from others.”

It should be noted that the CIO-led Mine, Mill strike of 1939 now stood as the single largest and longest action ever taken by organized men in the Copper Basin. There had been previous actions taken by organized workers in the Copper Basin and in many instances those men had been unionized, but never had as many men been involved and never had the actions involved the entire Basin. Usually the actions had been localized, involved perhaps one firm among the many that once operated in the Copper Basin. Many of these previous actions had started in Isabella, a town under the thumbs of a notoriously anti-union management team. But now radicalism seemed to boil out of the mining villages, going from town to town, from one end of the Basin to another.

The CIO met in mid-August and elected to continue the strike; leaders reassured their rank-and-file they had the International’s support. The vote to continue the strike was overwhelming according to Barclay. Mine, Mill’s International then sent in President Reid Robinson to the Copper Basin to end the strike. His job was to negotiate a peace among the

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497 Barclay diary, 12 and 19 August 1939
498 Barclay, ibid.
arguing rank-and-file. Stated the CIO News, Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers Union Edition about the visit:

Workers from any of the more enlightened sections of the country where AFL and CIO unions are cooperating in brotherhood and amity probably could not believe their eyes if they visited the Ducktown Basin and witnessed the fink back-to-work activities of what masquerades locally as an AFL union.499

A tone of false surprise lay in this report because nearly every paper in the nation was filled with stories of AFL/CIO rivalry. That said, the report did include a point by point rundown on Federation activities in the Copper Basin. Careful reading of the CIO News account reveals the aggressive efforts of the AFL to turn the strike into an opportunity to eliminate the CIO and strengthen the AFL’s ranks. Emboldened from their home base in Copperhill—where banners flew declaring the town the “Headquarters American Federation of Labor: Membership of those eligible and who desire to return to work solicited”—Federation loyalists worked hard to rid their Basin of “reds.” They marched provocatively through the mining villages and according to CIO reports were up to no good. After some digging when the Federation men departed, “Mine, Mill men found three truck loads of clubs that they were sure were to used against striking miners.” This stash was allegedly going to be used in an attack directly on the CIO.500

As the strike wore on towards September CIO men knew they had to take even bolder action. They engaged in what appears to have been a multi-pronged strategy to control as much of the territory of TCC’s plant as possible, maintain the loyalty in the mining villages and improve the union’s reputation among the public—something CIO leaders understood was critical for their success. Some of the approaches worked, but others backfired. It is unclear whether Mine, Mill President Reid Robinson had set Mitchell Anderson on this course. To

500 CIO News, ibid.
further secure company property and prevent vandalism by Mine, Mill’s enemies, CIO men
Elmer Williams and James Denton started requiring all TCC salaried men from the manager and
superintendents on down to sign passes when entering or exiting TCC property. Mine, Mill men
themselves stood guard off the TCC property as a general rule. Management’s choice it seems
was to allow the CIO a heavy presence around company gates, even near the main offices. The
leniency would have worked in TCC’s favor: Picketing Mine, Mill union men looked as if they
had taken over the mines, smelters, and sundry TCC works and were holding the Basin hostage.
Company leniency would have given credibility to AFL arguments that the CIO movement was
in fact an occupation force.\footnote{Ducktown Museum photographic collection and scenes from Carl McConnell’s, “grocer’s film”; and, Barclay
diary, 17 July and 10 August 1939}

In another attempt to enlist public support for their union and its cause, Mine, Mill
leaders flooded the Basin with propaganda in response to similar actions taken by the AFL. Each
pamphlet argued the rightness of the union cause and pled for a compassionate public to assist in
ridding the Copper Basin of scourges to working people. These flyers would have framed their
position just as their international did, in terms of the strike being an action for democracy, for
workers’ liberty as they fought for the rights of the common man against a discriminatory AFL
hierarchy. Mine, Mill bragged about its generosity. The union’s Ducktown executive board had
even sent aid to a faraway \textit{Federation} strike: Mine, Mill men “voted $50 to aid striking AFL
unions at the Green Mountain Dam in Colorado” where “vigilantes shot seven strikers and
threatened to break [the AFL] strike.” The point of this last report was to demonstrate the
willingness of the Mine, Mill to work with it rivals on a compromise.\footnote{“Pres. Robinson to Ducktown; AFL in Strikebreaking Role,” \textit{The CIO News, Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers Union Edition}, 8.28.1939.}
TCC management and the AFL were not impressed by CIO demonstrations of amity, concord and goodwill. According to Barclay, the only real impact CIO circulars had on the disputes was to increase local tensions and incite more anger between the warring factions—making cooperation between the AFL and Mine, Mill more difficult to achieve.503

The CIO strike on film

The official CIO strike would last into spring 1940. A film record of it exists from mid-fall 1939. Noticeable seasonal changes in the scenery suggest that it captured events until the walkout ended. Grocer Carl McConnell had been on a hand during the strike and with an 8 mm camera captured scene after scene of strikers at Ducktown outside the village’s mines, and sundry sectors of TCC and the Copper Basin –some not easily identified. Referred to here as “the grocer’s film” it holds remarkable imagery of striking men, their families, and union activities over the great arc of the strike. It reveals how much of this labor conflict took place in very public spaces and thus underlines the significance of community in the success or failure of this and other 1930s strikes.504

McConnell’s film stands as rare footage of an organized labor action in a Southern industrial community complete with scenes of the men at pickets or welding signage and placards, engaging in Appalachian folkways or employing various tactics used in that era by strikers. Poignant scenes abound some of which must have been the most exuberant moments for Mine, Mill folk. Others captured somber moments of anticipation where union families

503 Barclay diary, ibid.
504 Carl McConnell, Grocer’s Film” Fall 1939-Spring 1940? Ducktown Basin Museum collection. The director of the Ducktown Basin Museum made a copy of this unique, silent black and white 8mm film available for this study. Additional images of the strike used here taken by Farm Securities Administration photographer Marion Post Wolcott, came from American Memory, Library of Congress, htt://memory.loc.gov.ammem/index.html last accessed 2008; see also a related study on this film by William Simson, “Parades Amid the Standoff in the Old Red Scar: Interpreting Film Images of Striking Industrial Operatives in the East Tennessee Copper Basin, 1939-1940,” Journal of Appalachian Studies, Volume 7:2, Fall 2001: 227-255.
waited for relief from Anderson and his crew. Finally, the frames hold silent images of toppled picket huts made void of their sentinels.\footnote{Grocer’s Film, ibid; some of the scenes appear to be near Mary Mine.}

The images of a restless queue before Mine, Mill’s storehouse gave visible proof of the efforts the union took to keep its rank-and-file from enduring economic hardship during the walkout. Unfortunately McConnell did not capture Mitchell Clifton Anderson who personally distributed a lot of the provisions supplied by the CIO. It was, as has been mentioned, a service for which Anderson got considerable recognition—even from company managers.\footnote{Grocer's Film, ibid; and NCPR, \textit{Lampell Report}, 7-8}

Behind the scenes Anderson was doing even more. According to reports by the National Committee For People’s Rights, Anderson had to contend with belligerent Polk County school officials who were trying to shutdown the CIO. When the public schools stopped providing government relief lunches to the children of striking Ducktown and Isabella workers Anderson knew he had to contact the proper authorities in Washington D.C. Anderson’s efforts got the Surplus Bureau in Washington to intervene, correct school officials’ illegal actions and to restore the meal program for the children.\footnote{Ibid.; and, NCPR “\textit{Lampell Report},” ibid.}

Mass demonstrations organized by Mine, Mill at Ducktown and captured on the film hold holiday-like revelry. These lively scenes likely record the beginning of the strike, when the weather was warm and hopes were high for a quick CIO victory; in them bands of smiling strikers cavort and laugh; others mill about round tents along the pickets. Often the scenes resemble more a family reunion than charged labor offensives. There are even barbeques put on by the strikers like those enjoyed at any summer fair. But whereas fairs or fetes would be filled also with women and children, in many images of the strike the grocer caught only the men folk tending to their union duty. McConnell panned his camera across sites where dozens of
determined strikers manned their stations outside TCC gates set throughout the Copper Basin. They were part of a community in civil war and dutifully watched out for sabotage, invaders, and scabs.

But not all the time spent among the pickets reflected defensive actions against possible AFL incursions or heckling strike-breaking scabs. To pass the long, slow days as the strike wore on, strikers played horseshoes in the streets, laughed and joked with one another, dealt cards and gambled and more than anything it seems from the film, the striking men whittled. Indeed, whittling appears to have been a nearly universal skill among the strikers, their kindred Appalachian roots conjoining in the clay hills as they created great piles of wood shavings. One man set about whittling copies of an entire set of tools a typical miner would have used on the job deep underground: picks, hammers, drill bits, flash lights, clips, claws, vice grips and more.  

The absence of women and children in most of McConnell’s film owed more to the cameraman’s timing than to actual events according to witnesses. Barclay alluded in passing to women and children visiting their brothers, uncles, fathers, cousins, and grandpas at the pickets. Women and children brought food and likely relief from boredom. There were certain times when women kept their kids away from the men folk, such as when the men passed around bottles of local spirits and got too raucous, exchanging rough humor as they rolled their own smokes.

McConnell also managed to film a collection of threatening signs and placards made by Mine, Mill sympathizers during the strike. Plain words, in hand-painted letters, splayed sometimes catawampus across rough-hewn boards and sheeting, admonished the ambivalent and

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508 Grocer’s Film.
509 Grocer’s Film.
warned potential strike-breakers of the shame that would befall callous souls that crossed CIO’s pickets. “Any man going through [the] line is a scab,” “Men don’t scab, be loyal to your fellow man,” “Don’t have your kids say Daddy’s a scab.” More damning yet was one that read: “A scab is yellow to the core.” One sign queried patriotic, “what would the old US be if everyone scabbled?!”

Police authorities featured prominently in the film. Led by Sheriff Broughton Biggs, a TCC-subsidized “deputy army” displayed a completely different nature than did striking workers. Circumstances resulting from the strike and its reactions had provided Biggs an opportunity to demonstrate power he had only recently, and narrowly, secured by defeating a electoral challenge to his family’s dynastic power in Polk County. At once head of the local Democratic Party and the top police authority figure, Biggs acted as protector of conventions that maintained Southern county-seat elite and TCC control over Polk.

Made up of hundreds of men, most from outside the Copper Basin, Biggs’ “deputy” army appeared comical on film despite their rifles, pistols and bats. It was said they came from the lowest sort in the Tri-state and their clothing reflects their general impoverishment. Disheveled, baggy, unkempt, some “deputies” came suited in jacket and tie, hats akimbo; others wore their farming togs. All of them got $5 a day for the privilege of marching with Biggs. Many partook in a series of over-the-top theatrics and arbitrary actions intended to intimidate folk in Ducktown and Isabella. Allegedly the deputies walked into homes without any warrant, broke open car-trunks and searched property at will on a whim. Intending alternately to threaten or

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510 McConnell, “Grocer’s Film,” ibid; Ducktown Basin Museum photographic collection; and Wolcott photographs, *American Memory*, ibid.
511 “Broughton Biggs Re-Elected Sheriff of Polk County,” *Polk County News*, 4 August 1938.
512 Grocer’s Film; *Lampell Report* NCPR, 2 and 5-7; and, Tindal, 332 and 618; Tindall himself considered Mine, Mill as being “infiltrated by communists,” was radical, violent, and had been proselytizing in the region since the early thirties; the spread of Mine, Mill provoked “radical demonstrations and retaliatory brutalities from police and vigilantes,” 507.
incarcerate—it mattered little—they sought out and entrapped the suspicious and surly among the CIO’s “radicals” and “communists.”

It is difficult to determine from the record just how effective Biggs’ march was. Some sources say there was a thinning of the strikers’ ranks after the deputy army’s show of force. Barclay claimed that “the public [was] much pleased at the presence of the deputies” and he predicted there would be little more trouble from the CIO. However the deputies also undoubtedly elicited some negative reactions. Biggs split his men up and assigned the groups special missions all around the Copper Basin, but it was easy for this amateur police force to step over the line and abuse the citizenry. In light of Biggs’ admitted attitude toward the strikers, crossing that line happened a lot. One report summarized the conduct of Biggs’ deputies: “Over five hundred affidavits testify to violence, to threats, and illegal searches of strikers’ homes and cars by [the] deputies.”

**TCC offensive and Mine, Mill strike parades**

In mid August 1939 TCC operators decided it was time to present their workforce, strike sympathizers and others alike, with an ultimatum. J. N. Houser composed an open letter to Anderson that Barclay called “a masterpiece of diplomacy and self-restraint, but its meaning was unmistakable.” The chief clerk and his crew reproduced and stamped copies of Houser’s edict to employees in “an all-night job.” Barclay then sent them “at a cost of two cents to local men and six cents to workers who lived beyond the Copper Basin.” Thirteen-hundred of the letters went in the mail. Barclay said in his diary, the “gist of the letter was that unless the CIO rescinded its demands for the closed shop and agreed to terminate the strike within the next few days the Company would disregard the union and resume operations.” The note further informed all TCC

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513 Grocer’s Film; and, National Committee For People’s Rights, *Lampell Report*, 5-7 passim.
514 Barclay diary, 25 August 1939.
515 National Committee For People’s Rights, “*Lampell Report*” 7.
workers that they needed to decide their own fates. Any man not returning to work would lose his job.\footnote{Barclay diary, 19 August 1939}

Furious at this new provocation Mitchell C. Anderson replied to Houser indirectly in the only media forum that would allow an objective CIO report. Through an interview printed in the Chattanooga Times, Anderson repeated Mill, Mill accusations that the company failed to compensate workers for work done during the early thirties stretch-out, laid out a chronicle of TCC stalling and lambasted the company’s failure to respect the NLRB election results. Anderson then accused the company of committing a number of additional sins, the most damning of which was colluding with AFL sympathizers through intimidation and threats by supervisors. In a most important detail, found nowhere else in the records, Anderson reminded Houser that all had been well between Mine, Mill and TCC until 1936 when “the American Federation of Labor chartered a group of skilled employees at your Copperhill plant, headed by one of your foremen.”\footnote{“Company Blamed for Copper Strike: Unionist Charges That Plant Fostered Conditions Which Brought About Walkout,” Chattanooga Times, 21 August 1939}

This last, perhaps critical assertion may have been true, but Anderson’s claim regarding the birth of an AFL local in Copperhill is unsubstantiated by reports. NLRB examiners concluded that AFL secession in Copperhill did not occur till the summer of 1937—the time of the Georgia Federation secession movement. Barclay dismissed Anderson’s claims in the Chattanooga Times as “misstatements of fact,” indicative of the organizer’s character. In a statement that likely reflected his superiors’ opinions, Barclay claimed Anderson himself had
failed to address the General Manager’s requests. But just exactly what those demands were beyond dropping the closed shop and payday withholding Barclay did not say.518

Barclay recounted in his journal, however, an event that does cast Anderson in a much less favorable light. Anderson apparently failed to show for a scheduled mid-August negotiation meeting between J.N. Houser and Mine, Mill organizers. It should be remembered that Houser did not live in the Copper Basin. Meeting attendance required that he travel from Knoxville. About 150 picketing Mine, Mill men had stood outside the meeting place, their presence adding to Houser’s humiliation and furor when Anderson and his team failed to arrive. Why Anderson acted in this manner is unclear. Perhaps the CIO leader had been trying to give Houser a bit of his own medicine in light of Mine, Mill frustration with TCC’s stalling tactics. Perhaps Anderson had been delayed or sick and TCC officials never got word. Whatever the real reasons, Mine, Mill men further aggravated the circumstances by leaving the scene in a noisy, dusty cavalcade of about one hundred cars and trucks. TCC officials found the retreating processional irksome even if harmless, but the bluster must have really angered Houser. The GM responded by ordering the letter containing the company’s ultimatum. The notices informed all who might be concerned that TCC “operations would resume at 7 am, Monday morning, August 28th.” Barclay said that among most people in the Copper Basin, “except [for] those in the CIO,” Houser’s “determined” actions “were hailed with delight.”519

Biggs’ “deputies” and Houser’s ultimatum had their effects on withering CIO support among the general public. Certainly the Copper City Advance was excited by these developments. In earnest reports the paper stated Mine, Mill President Reid Robinson had retreated to Denver, but said little more on the subject of negotiations with the company. The

518 “Copper Workers Are Adamant on Checkoff,” Polk County News, 20 July 1939; Chattanooga Times, 8.21.1939; Barclay, 8.21.1939
519 Barclay diary, 22 August 1939
paper reminded citizens however that as a result of Houser’s order local merchants would soon
be seeing the fruits of revival of the company payroll. Families could once again “buy
necessities… and in many instances, pay debts accumulated” during the CIO strike.\footnote{520}

After operations resumed, one sympathetic report to the AFL trumpeted with glee in the
\textit{Birmingham Labor Advocate} that the “CIO Movement At Copperhill [was] vanishing.” The
report also claimed that TCC’s facility had seen a “nearly 100% return” of its workforce. The
claim was an exaggeration, but it was echoed by reports in the \textit{Polk County News}, that said that
1000 men had gone back to work in the Basin.\footnote{521}

Frustrations among the Mine, Mill men around the Basin now grew even more heated.
CIO members Clyde Huffman and George Earley were arrested and placed in the Blue Ridge,
Georgia jail after they allegedly hit coworker G.M Queen with a shotgun blast while Queen
walked to work one morning. The victim of the shooting had just returned to work at Tennessee
Copper—as ordered— joining hundreds of AFL workers who supported Houser’s re-opening of
the TCC works. More violence would follow.\footnote{522}

TCC Reports on August work in its mines reflected the positive effects of the new
company offensive. Superintendent Lamar Weaver mentioned that in the wake of some \textit{de facto}
blacklisting and replacement hiring “two very interesting safety meetings” had been held with
“the new Crew to explain our plans and procedure in applying safety first on the job.” Each of
the new men were assigned in “groups of four to six… to instructors, foremen or mine
engineers” for “a more detailed job of training these new men at their several work places.”\footnote{523}
Men were put to work to supply ore for blast furnaces and to return the works to full production. Weaver enthused about the new men and said cooperation among the new and returning men was excellent, allowing management “to completely reorganize crew safety and build up the production as needed.” Soon the company even managed to set aside thousands of tons of smelter ore at Copperhill solely for emergency use.\textsuperscript{524}

Anderson and his Mine, Mill leadership attempted to remain a potent force in spite of these new developments. They placed their hopes on NLRB intervention and an investigation in what Mine, Mill determined was illegal manipulation of the workforce. They held onto this hope even though the last meeting of company officials and union leaders conducted through the NLRB had led to nothing.\textsuperscript{525} Accounts of Anderson and Mine, Mill’s actual strategy get sketchy from this point forward. Before Reid Robinson left the district, he went on the radio at Chattanooga to try and persuade listeners of the goodness of the CIO cause. He used the term “scab” time and again in his address to drive home his point that the AFL and other enemies of the working man were at work in the Copper Basin. Barclay dismissed the address as being full of as many “misrepresentations of the facts” as it was of the word “scab.”\textsuperscript{526}

Reflecting the embittered mood of many workers, Labor Day 1939 came and went with no regular community celebration. The absence of festivities was notable in a place where for a generation people had used the day as a proud marker which put the working man in the center of community life. The CIO tried to replace the normal festivities by putting on another strike parade of thirty-nine cars filled with strikers and their families from Ducktown and Isabella. Anderson’s car led the “parade” and the rest, according to Barclay, were filled with noisy women and children. “It was a bedraggled looking outfit” he said in condescension. Barclay noted that

\begin{footnotes}
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\item[524] Tennessee Copper Company Mining Department records, 18 September 1939.
\item[525] Barclay diary, 26 August 1939.
\item[526] Barclay diary, 27 August 1939,
\end{footnotes}
the CIO caravan travelled as far north as Epworth. The motorcade seemed to impress Barclay as being as predictable as a regular summer rainstorm “with much thunder and lightening” that closed that day.527

Other images of strikers taken by Farm Securities Administration photographers like Marion Post Wilcott, reporters with the National Association for People’s Rights and McConnell were more positive. The images captured by these folk provide insight into how determined Mine, Mill families were to show solidarity and to win the support for their efforts among their Copper Basin neighbors. The people of Isabella were especially determined to trudge on. According to Barclay almost none of the miners from that town had returned to work.528

But for some families in Ducktown and Isabella, there was no longer much choice. Some few men had never supported the strike, but of the men that did return, it is most likely they could no longer afford the luxury of not reporting. TCC swung its hammer hard once it realized it had a nearly bottomless well from which to draw replacements in the Tri-State. The company fired foremen and all the Isabella and Ducktown commissary clerks of the company’s Smelter Stores for failing to come to work. Word spread of the dismissals and fear grew fast. A day after the plant opened, men from the mining burgs began the slow trickle back to work, each day increasing the Tennessee Copper rolls. The second day after the ultimatum twenty men came back to work at Burra Burra—eleven alone from Isabella. The pressure to keep their jobs in the face of the massive response by TCC and the competition from desperate men in the Tri-State frightened many strikers back to their jobs. When some men went back to work, they were met with violence and scorn. Anger aimed at presumed betrayals led to some homes being fired upon by angry neighbors. Men who saw others cross pickets saw them as Judases, treasonous to

527 Barclay diary, 4 September 1939
528 Barclay diary, 28 August 1939; and 6 September 1939
the cause. Other men, once back on the job, came under attack by men who had never wanted a
strike or who had been loyal to the AFL. The damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don’t
experiences of workers aggravated wounds from the strike still further.529

TCC remained determined however and as every day passed, more and more men were
hired to replace strikers. By early September Barclay stated there was “little doubt now” that
TCC would be able “to continue operations on a gradually increasing scale.” The production
increase at once improved the company’s image among local citizens who wanted things to get
back to normal. In contrast to the company’s success, the works’ reopening cast Mine, Mill’s
leadership as impotent agitators. Barclay laid all future random acts of violence during this
period at the feet of Mine, Mill. “The CIO is showing its true colors now that the strike is lost,”
he declared.530

There appeared to be fewer and fewer people willing to stand up and sacrifice for the
Copper Basin’s beleaguered miners. While their union’s leadership was determined to fight on,
it was clear that many miners could no longer afford to maintain the walkout. They were
trickling back to work. Adding to this painful fact was management’s diminishing interest in
Isabella workers and the industrial works in this oldest of the copper towns as the full costs of the
merger with DCI hit TCC’s bottom line. One of Barclay’s comments made shortly after the
resumption of operations made this attitude clear: “With the old men who returned to work and
new men hired, there is now nearly a full crew at the mines. The Isabella plant is still closed
tight, but little concern is felt over that place.”531

529 Barclay ibid, “Miner Ambushed, 2 Suspects Held,” Atlanta Constitution, 2 September 1939; “”Two Bound Over
in Shooting Charge,” Copper City Advance, 8 September, 1939.
530 Barclay diary, 29 August 1939
531 Barclay diary, 29-31 August 1939.
In late summer 1939, in this most desperate point in the strike for Mine, Mill, Anderson and union leadership determined that another, more awesome and engaging strike parade should occur to protest the reopening of the plant and to garner public favor. Ducktown grocer McConnell got this parade on film too. CIO leaders hoped a special processional of miners’ families would convey both the personal significance of the miners’ demands to the public while also reminding working people of their common dignity. The great parade would be a tool to unite kith and kin of working husbands, fathers, sons, and uncles, wives and children and show that the miners represented the same kind of respectable, patriotic, hard-working lot as those who claimed loyalty to the AFL. It was also intended as a reminder that Copper Basin folk were bound by race loyalty.

It was this last message which is most essential to grasp when assessing the nature of this particular CIO strike processional. Certain aspects of this parade by CIO families as captured on film appear unique in the history of the union as is generally told by labor historians. Not because it was women and children marching, although typically men manned the frontlines in a strike owing to the possibility of violence, but because it shows how workers relied on racial symbolism in trying to establish camaraderie with Copper Basin working people by employing racist symbology. By late August 1939 Anderson and his team had endured years of attacks by conservative laborites and anti-union forces for being affiliated so-called “communists” and “radicals”—malleable terms which in this region of the country were also used to attack anyone supporting racial integration at the workplace. It mattered little that there was not much chance of integration happening in the Basin owing to its long heritage in maintaining a lily-white society. But exaggerated fears that the CIO might demand employment of black workers could have been active. By this point, many root-causes fed irrationality in the anti-CIO camp.
Anderson had to contend with coded propaganda and misconception. He had to remind local people of the common white humanity of their cause. Being CIO he also held a deep conviction about the importance of democratic demonstrations of the will of the people. For all these reasons it seems Anderson approved employment of the race card in the strike parade, or at least, and equally significant, he did not object to a message of white solidarity delivered by miners’ wives and children, the local CIO Ladies Auxiliary. This tactic was at once innovative and rooted in Appalachian loyalty to family. For although the use of women and children as the featured members of an organized strike parades was nothing new—women marched upstate in Elizabethton, Tennessee in the 1920s when their textile union was under siege—the use of women and children as symbolic members of the white industrial class, representing Appalachia’s greatest and most vulnerable treasure, had not been typical of the Mine, Mill’s tactics in Dixie. The tactic was also one building on TCC’s Sentinels of Safety program which relied on men’s duty to provide for their families by employing safe work practices. Anderson and union leadership hoped that the march by the Ladies Auxiliary would promote a neighborly, respectable side of the Mine, Mill community, underscoring links between the union (and its demands) and the common values of Copper Basin society.

McConnell’s film caught provocative images of young children apparently dressed in blackface. In the Mine, Mill parade led by the union’s Ladies Auxiliary, nestled among the throngs of women and children dressed in their Sunday best who marched arm-in-arm, surrounded by hundreds of their men folk who lined the streets of Ducktown, there marched a small band of black-faced “scabs.” Having just recited the Pledge of Allegiance, the procession led these “enemies of the people” through the town, like some French Revolutionary

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533 Grocer’s Film.
sans culottes’ band. The enemies to the white working people were wore the raggedy duds of hobos and ne’er-do-wells. The kids had “scab” signs hanging around their necks. Through costume these dearest members of the community had been transformed into familiar symbols of dark enmity recognized instantly by Appalachian whites. The image created by these black-faced “scabs” would have stood at a nexus familiar to those who had an understanding of how enemies of working people had used blacks to shutdown white opportunity in the past. For two generations, blacks had been used by white management to shutdown white workers’ protests as black strikebreakers neutralizing white working peoples’ challenges to tyrannical management. The specter of the black strikebreaker would have been well known to working people even in a region where there were so few blacks and perhaps even more so in light of the region’s notorious racism. Children dressed as scabs alone would have been at once sympathetic and terrifying.534

Crowded streets and sidewalks filled McConnell’s scenes of Ducktown during the parade, onlookers’ continence festive, if determined. This must have been the high watermark of Mine, Mill hopes and aspirations. Things were really were going to change as the people of the mining villages took their destiny into their own hands.535

In spite of such enthusiasm, the Copper City Advance wrote nothing on the parade. The Polk County News report on it was short saying only “more than 200 women paraded in Ducktown” to protest the reopening of TCC. The article made no mention of the hundreds of onlookers caught on film. Editor Shamblin of the News, never sympathetic to the CIO movement or the strike, understood exactly how to dismiss the parade as being little more than a gathering. The paper was also silent on the black-faced “scabs.” Shamblin focused on other

534 Grocer’s Film.
535 Ibid.
strike developments: Sheriff Biggs and his men had been on hand keeping order during this “disturbance.”

The thinness in local reportage doomed the effectiveness of the CIO’s last great strike parade in the Copper Basin. It all came and went with little public fanfare beyond Ducktown. If locals heard much about it, it would have been limited to hearsay. In an era before television however, the persuasive power of this kind of an exhibition was limited by its extreme parochialism. Fearful perhaps that an AFL-controlled and Biggs army-occupied Copperhill might greet such a processional as a provocative act of war, Anderson and his CIO sympathizers chose to hold their parade only at Ducktown. This was a terrible public relations mistake though at the time it may have seemed pragmatic given the animus AFL men had for Mine, Mill in Copperhill and the fact that there were lots of guns in the hands of angry, frustrated and quarreling workers. So, although throngs of Mine, Mill supporters came to Ducktown from the mining villages and surrounding districts carloads at a time, the fact was that the spectacle was seen only by a sympathetic audience. Barclay penned a dismissive comment on the parade in his diary: The whole affair had been “much more barking than biting.”

Regaining TCC command of industrial relations

The tactics the company employed during late summer and fall had been multifold. Tennessee Copper kept the Isabella plant closed into September, thus limiting the number of men there who could get an income from work. Lack of pay to the men weakened Mine, Mill’s treasury. In contrast, TCC continued to pay Biggs’ deputy army to occupy the several Copper

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536 “Sheriff Biggs on the Job at Copperhill Disturbance: Copper Workers Go Back to Work,” Polk County News, 31 August 1939
537 “Sheriff Biggs on the Job at Copperhill Disturbance: Copper Workers Go Back to Work,” Polk County News, 31 August 1939; and Barclay diary, 23 and 19 August 1939.
Basin communities. The company’s tacit support of the AFL emboldened the Federation and men joined its ranks. Tennessee Copper gave no public support of either union, but neither did its management condemn the Federation. TCC still went through the motions of negotiating an end of the strike with Mine, Mill leaders through fall but by this point the company was awaiting the Labor Board decision to hold another election. Barclay recorded the state of TCC production and his assessment of company efforts to meet NLRB obligations after one of these negotiation meetings with the CIO:

"The strike conference convened at about 10:15 AM and continued until noon. Went into solemn session again at 1:00 pm and “negotiated” until about 4:15 pm. The only result was the setting of a date for another meeting, on Sept. 28. Meanwhile the plant is operating as though no strike was on. New men are still being hired to take the jobs of the CIO strikers.”

Total average wages were about twenty percent less than before the strike; these lower rates continued till late Spring 1940. The wage rates reflected not only a reduction of wages for returning men, but the reduced rates paid to the new hires, because one way that TCC maintained support for the returning men to return was to pass on the benefits of rising copper prices owing to the European war’s effect on the copper markets. In early October, TCC granted returning employees a twenty cent per day raise. Salaried men saw their incomes jump $5 a week.

TCC had managed to turn the strike to its advantage and was now actually profiting from the walkout. By May 1940 the company’s mines were churning out 5000 tons more per month than they had the previous April. The safety record had been maintained. For over four months not a single hour was lost to accidents and since the resumption of operation the previous August only two lost time accidents had occurred. In a rare tragedy, employee T.S. Green had died from falling in the shafts, but fellow miner Clyde Bellow had recovered since from his “slight hernia.”

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538 Barclay diary, 15 September 1939
539 Barclay diary, 6 October 1939; and, L. Weaver to F.J. Longworth, Tennessee Copper Company Mining Department reports 9 October 1939; 7 November 1939; 7 December 1939; 5 January 1940; 7 February 1940 and 8 May 1940, passim.
The safety-on-the-job emphasis reminded workers that the company was looking out for their needs.\textsuperscript{540}

Christmas 1939 found Mine, Mill paralyzed by circumstances in the Copper Basin. Meeting after meeting with Houser or other TCC representatives ended in nothing for the union. TCC was merely going through the motions until the NLRB could be convinced that a new election was needed. Barclay called it “an incongruous situation, made so by the labor laws.”\textsuperscript{541}

CIO members had long been replaced by new, non-CIO men. If Barclay’s opinion is any measure of how TCC regarded the NLRB arbitrators, let it suffice to say that company officials had little regard from what they saw as small men manipulated by a whining CIO.\textsuperscript{542}

Never a player on the frontlines of the labor war, R.E. Barclay himself had remained a popular figure in Copperhill during the strike. Just how popular he was among the mining villages is unclear from the reports. There is little doubt that the chief clerk shared his general disdain for the CIO around his friends and with management. Yet comments by his son and later accounts of his life portrayed Barclay as a friend to the working man. Certainly his prestige had not diminished during the strike at the company’s hub in Copperhill. He stood as local sage for many citizens when he waxed eloquent on the importance of events within the greater history of the Copper Basin, on Armistice Day 1939. He gave a talk at Copperhill High School on the meaning of the national memorial. There is no record of any remarks on the strike at this time; he penned more perspective on the cause and results of the labor war years later. But in his diary, on the last day of 1939 he did opine. It had “been a tumultuous year, fractured by wars, strikes, drouths [sic] and other disasters.” Through it all though, Barclay said, business had

\textsuperscript{540} L. Weaver to F.J. Longworth, ibid.
\textsuperscript{541} Barclay diary, entries for 12 and 27 October 1939; The 16 November 1939 entry described what Barclay saw as routine, if pointless, meetings between TCC, Anderson, and NLRB conciliators.
\textsuperscript{542} Barclay diary, 27 October 1939 for instance.
“revived.” His hope for his community was simple. “May the decade of the forties be better than the one just ending.”

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543 Barclay diary, 31 December 1939.
Chapter 5 War and Redemption: Taming labor and tending to the Old Red Scar

Determining appropriate wartime labor relations

Business reports revealed how the Roosevelt Recession of 1937-38 “stunned” industry and indicated why owners and management were so keen on protecting their interests against aggressive organized labor. Stated one account, “corporate income, except in aviation, dropped to [the] lowest level in five years.” A nervous US Congress and President had returned to conservative government budgets, cutting expenditures and in turn, devastating commodities markets. “The general business depression became one of the swiftest and most severe in the history of the country,” according to the New York Times.\(^{544}\)

Global commodities markets remained tough well into 1939 even though the International Copper Cartel corralled most producers to shore up pricing. But imbalances in world demand led to more price slides. Price collapse ensued in spite of increasing European use of copper in part because US consumption had dropped by nearly 50% for 1938. New reserves in Arizona and South Africa promulgated further declines. Although the outbreak of the European war encouraged speculation through late summer and fall 1939, most producers experienced a rough end to another volatile decade.\(^{545}\)

Then in mid-1939 heavy foreign copper purchases sparked a new round of speculation as French, English, Polish, Japanese and German manufactures began buying enormous amounts of ore and processed copper “for military operations.”\(^{546}\)

Domestic use for the red metal began to rebound at this time too, not only from a renewal of government spending in public works.

\(^{546}\) New York Times, 26 August 1939, ibid.
projects, but also from an improved housing industry. The Secretary of the Copper and Brass Research Association of New York, Bertram B. Caddle, stated that consumption of copper for roofing, brass pipe and tubing increased 40% in May 1939. Caddle attributed the use to recognition of the metal’s special resistance to corrosion making it essential for use along the seacoasts, inland waterways and the Great Lakes regions. Caddle also mentioned the importance of copper in the manufacturing of agricultural chemicals, which, when properly used, could create a shield in the war against insects. “Insects destroy about $50,000,000 worth of property annually throughout the United States according to Government statistics.”

Advances in consumption encouraged copper producers, but soon after war commenced in Europe US domestic policy makers responded to the crisis by passing legislation designed to prevent a repeat of the speculative markets seen during the Great War. That World War I system had begun well, the government’s choice to allow speculation encouraged even the smallest producers to run at full capacity; the war’s sudden end in 1918 made apparent the catastrophe of not limiting the creation of enormous excess stocks chasing record profits. During the subsequent sharp slump few producers benefitted from the kind of proactive and rational corporate renovations Sam A. Lewisohn and J.N. Houser commenced at Tennessee Corporation and subsidiary Tennessee Copper Company. As has been shown, the TCC leaders’ approval of production and labor relations schemes led to improved industrial relations through the New Deal era until ideological and organization differences among workers led to a challenge management’s prerogatives. During the same period more reactionary producers had seen their works repeatedly paralyzed by aggressive union activity.

Industry’s experience during the Second World War differed from that of World War I in part because by the late thirties the nation had become generally more tolerant of government regulation and intervention in the marketplace. It was clear from the start of World War II that the government should continue in its role to shore up markets. Throughout World War II, domestic producers had to accept prices set at prewar levels of 11 cents with government “bounties paid to companies that could not produce at 11 cents.” The major producers could do this, but for smaller ones—like TCC—“most bounties fell within the 11-17 cent range.” Further limiting profiteering, the government imposed “stiff excess profits” taxes “based on an average profit in recent years.” Despite government mandates protecting workers’ interests, TCC could not afford to lose opportunities in the new war economy by allowing aggressive union activity to shape corporate destiny.549

Adoption by TC and TCC of rational management and product diversification into several metals products and agricultural chemicals shielded the firms from the worst effects of the Roosevelt Recession. Tennessee Corporation profits had plummeted 42 % in 1938, but they dropped only slightly to $349,000 for the next year. Contraction rates at TC equaled those experienced by the top four domestic copper producers. TCC was an integral component in this performance. The same corporate attributes that buoyed the companies through the 1938-1939 storms put the firms in a wonderful position to take advantage of the burgeoning war economy.550

Corporate diversification notwithstanding, TC and TCC had experienced almost two decades of off-again-on-again profits and could not afford to allow the 1939 CIO walkout at TCC to set a pattern in labor relations that might limit opportunities in the accelerating war economy.549

549 Corporate Reports, New York Times, 2 April 1940.
commodities markets. TCC management had to end the strike as soon as possible with the least amount of damage to its works and corporate image. It would then work to prevent future unrest by harnessing the energy that underlay the labor unrest and channel this toward focused, patriotic production; this task would become easier as national defense circumstances deteriorated and the public’s patriotism increased. By the middle of the war, it was clear that TCC had fully renovated its image and stood as a fine corporate citizen. War work allowed TCC to build upon the positive image the company promoted through its public relations, which in turn had helped the firm maintain its control over organized labor. During the war, a mostly tamed work force assisted the company in burnishing its reputation still further by producing record amounts of critical munitions materials, supplying materials used in the manufacture of LOMA brand agricultural chemicals (useful for nurturing Victory Gardens), and by rejecting a CIO campaign to wrestle control of collective bargaining rights from the AFL.551

Two important post war reports, one by TC President Sam A. Lewisohn and TCC Manager T.A. Mitchell revealed how Copper Basin operators maintained effective industrial relations and kept the power of organized labor in check. Lewisohn’s assessment “What the Employer Can Do: An Employer Charts the Roads He Believes Will Lead Toward Peace Between Industry and Labor” appeared in the New York Times. Mitchell’s report, given at a managerial conference, contained an historical account of thirty years of TCC labor relations. These reports outlined the kind of “successful strategic planning” attributes TCC adopted which scholar Thomas Navin argued many other copper producers lacked during the Second World War. These attributes included “management depth” in numbers and attention while running day-to-day operations, “expertise in management… beyond the immediate requirements of running the company,” willingness on the part of management to delegate to lower management, 

an ability to “think and plan in terms of interactive ‘systems,’ maintenance of a strong financial base and the use debt in proactive ways as “a competitive tool.” Overall, Navin argued, executive management should exhibit a “venturesome leadership.”  

Lewisohn’s and Mitchell’s remarks provide keys for understanding workers’ experiences in the Copper Basin. They outline management’s efforts to affect a profitable industrial peace, fortify a positive corporate image during the war and set a course for sustainable post-war industrial relations. As described by Lewisohn and Mitchell, TCC modified Houser’s rational EMP plan for use during the war. The company established worker-management crews that harnessed workers’ production energy while fulfilling federal labor mandates which protected workers’ ability to form unions for collective bargaining and grievance reporting.

Sam Lewisohn had taken control of Tennessee Corporation as its chairman following the death of his father Adolph Lewisohn in 1938. He also now served as chief officer of TCC and president of Miami Copper Company. Throughout World War II he had continued his public defense of “give and take” managerial approaches that eschewed anti-union reaction and defended collective bargaining, by appealing to management “to shoulder responsibility for cooperation in labor relations… and to take the initiative in promoting good-will between employers and employees.” In “What the Employer Can Do” Lewisohn summarized the success his firms achieved during the Second World War. His summary represented an update of the comparatively progressive views he had promulgated twenty years earlier in support of “enlightened” and “compassionate” company management.

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The best managerial tactics to employ to affect an industrial peace, Lewisohn said, should not “inveigh against government or union interference.” Recalcitrant businessmen who sought to limit government presence in industry were wrong. Government could play an important role in nurturing industry through training supervisory staff to direct efficient production regimens and to secure fair collective bargaining opportunities. But Lewisohn also understood that government could assist management in defining the limits of union power. Were workers to choose a union, trade unions supplied management with the most effective means to engage workers in collective bargaining and respond to workers’ grievances. But Lewisohn did not think unions should be responsible for taking on roles traditionally assigned to foremen and supervisory staff such as initiating teamwork or overseeing the “the proper adjustment of the individual to his job.” In light of his firms’ positive experiences he believed managers should bear the primary responsibility for developing effective on-the-job safety regimens, promote the enhancement of workers’ skills, and provide opportunities and facilities for healthful worker recreation. The summary was classic Lewisohn welfare-capitalism shaped and extended by New Deal mandates and war economy realities.554

A most important opportunity for management-union cooperation lay in what Lewisohn referred to as “the constructive fields” or what would be called today personnel development. Developed in the 1940s through the War Production Drive Division of the War Production Board as “labor-management production committees,” these units had impressed Lewisohn by improving the production efficiency of eight million workers in 4600 war plants. Lewisohn wanted to see labor-management committee model extended into the post-war because it had proven capable of efficiently addressing “manpower utilization, absenteeism, accident

prevention, suggestion systems, quality of work, and conservation of materials as well as quantity of output.” While he acknowledged two-thirds of these committees “were affiliated with unions,” committee effectiveness was not dependent on any connection with a union, but on its engagement with a manager. “What he puts into them in ability and interest,” said Lewisohn. For the astute manager, incentives, training, and promotion made the difference. Lewisohn did not specifically state one obvious fact about labor-management committees: use of them allowed management some navigation around union power. The labor-management committees also clearly performed similar duties assigned to New Era employee representative plans established at TCC through the Sentinels of Safety program.

Lewisohn’s experience in the thirties and during the war had proven to him that unions could have certain powers in negotiating wages, outlining workers grievances, and assisting in personnel development and production standards. But these responsibilities did not mean the corporate chairman was comfortable with all union demands then popular among organized labor’s advocates. For instance, Lewisohn had little use for seniority. He believed the practice protected bad work habits and assailed union insistence on the matter. “The excessive weight now given in union contracts to the mere priority of the date on which a person is hired is a deplorable trend toward [industrial] rigidity and stagnation [in the labor market].”

TCC Manager T.A. Mitchell provided another perspective on the effects of adopting the model Lewisohn had outlined and which J.N. Houser, as TCC general manager had implemented. During a managerial retreat at location in Pinehurst, North Carolina in October 1946, Mitchell read his report on the evolution of company labor relations and the benefits now

556 “Safety Work at Tennessee Copper Company,” The Explosives Engineer, 317.
provided for workers. As management was known to enjoy its golf, “Pinehurst” was likely the famous resort in the sandhills of central North Carolina designed by Frederick Law Olmstead and professional golfers—its comfy and expensive environs being far from anything in the red-scarred hills of Polk.

Mitchell’s report included the dates of official recognition by the company of local unions, contract outlines and “special provisions” made by the firm owing to union demands such as improvements in travel time pay to and from work, vacation and overtime pay, general statements about the company’s life insurance program, seniority and probation practices, and present policies on union dues. The report continued with a summary of wage hikes from 1940, the number of workers employed, eligibility for collective bargaining representation, and a comment on the general state and hopes for labor relations.

It was clear from Mitchell’s report that while Lewisohn’s rhetoric on the subject of industrial relations had always included a general respect for the working man, his firm’s managers in the Copper Basin held their prerogatives for shaping labor relations dear. Granted, the company had officially recognized Mine, Mill as early as 1919 and had, under pressure from the union, agreed to shorter work days, overtime pay, and compensation for “emergency work on Sundays.” But as soon as General Manager Houser could, he had installed the rational management plan, co-opted union power and secure more oversight on job performance and production schemes. During the union interregnum there was no back-tracking by TCC on previous agreements, but little progress was made to increase workers’ benefits beyond safety improvements and life insurance “for death or total disability” until union power returned in the New Deal. As indirectly described by Mitchell, Houser’s system had not been air-tight and had

560 Ibid., 1-10, passim.
unable to prevent the resurrection of Mine, Mill, but it was clear management was proud of the way the company neutralized the union when it went CIO in the later thirties.\textsuperscript{561}

Mitchell does not appear to have made any direct attacks on the CIO during the war years, however certain comments he made on the subject were rather revealing. Furthermore any opinions he held of the AFL appear to have been condescending at best: “I can state that our relations with the union are active.” But then Mitchell qualified this statement with rhetorical questions and anecdote:

“Are relations running smoothly, or beset with troublesome interference with management?” If a person has a painful acute physical ailment which might prove fatal, and also at the same time has the itch; and he finally, after much suffering, is relieved of the painful serious ailment, he feels that he can endure the itch indefinitely. We had the serious affliction several years ago, It was apparently arrested, and it shall be our endeavor to prevent a recurrence.”\textsuperscript{562}

Mine, Mill’s demands to management after the union’s exit from the business-friendly AFL represented the “painful… ailment” afflicting TCC management in Mitchell’s story; CIO affiliation disrupted TCC’s cozy influence over the union’s leadership. When Mitchell alludes to unionism itself as being “an itch” it begs the question as to how long it might be before the company might scratch \textit{any} union that agitated management. As one of the Copper Basin’s more important civic and business leaders Mitchell had a special interest in securing industrial peace in the region because his responsibilities went beyond his managerial duties at TCC. T.A. Mitchell was one of three Twin-cities bank directors and therefore a key custodian of local assets and a leading member of the Kiwanis. His labor relations report contained what Mitchell and management agreed now constituted an appropriate relationship with a union, one where union leaders deferred to management’s interests for the good of the firm and for the entire community.

\textsuperscript{561} Mitchell, 5-7.
\textsuperscript{562} Mitchell, Labor Relations, 9.
“We have encouraged the union officials and committees to give the proper attention to their duties and handle justifiable grievances promptly and efficiently. Over the years there have developed workman skilled in the art of negotiation. They are sensitive to criticism from the members [of the union] and at times are inclined to ‘go the limit’ on any fancied grievance, whether or not it has merit—in other words, pass the buck to the management for the final say.”

The war narrative: TCC munitions production

US Labor Secretary Francis Perkins made public her hopes that a war economy would end the nation’s bitter domestic political squabbling and that new job opportunities in the defense industry would distract Americans from “knifing each other.” Joining in Perkins’ optimism was Chamber of Commerce President W. Gibson Carey, Jr. and US Army Brigadier General Frank M. Andrews, assistant chief of staff in charge of operations and training. These officials wanted to impress upon the public and feisty leadership in organized labor the importance of supporting the war effort; the government intended that labor assist the maintenance of an industrial peace through a policy of “equality in sacrifice.”

Copper Basin workers quickly learned how they would be a part of the re-energized industrial economy. News of promising industrial production expansion came to TCC in Spring 1940. In preparation for what it expected its role might be for shoring up the nation’s defense TCC had began construction of a new “reverberatory furnace” and had plans to “start on a pit and handling equipment for iron calcites” at Isabella. Near the Basin’s ancient Boyd mine, now revived after being abandoned for nearly ninety years, the company extended the mine to connect with Ducktown’s Burra Burra shafts. Near Boyd, TCC erected a hoist house and new mine head-frame so as to better access ores. The company got a new Service Department at

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565 Kersten, Labor’s Home Front, 1-2.
566 “NLRB Examiner Hears Testimony of Unions”; and, “T.C. is Operating At Full Capacity,” Copper City Advance, 31 May 1940.
Copperhill to better attend personnel work and prevent accidents. Extension of Houser’s All-Milling Program would have to be suspended again owing to all this, but the exponential expansion of production necessary for World War II made that postponement much less bothersome. In conjunction with increased needs nationally for copper and ferrous products sold in Alabama, production expansion had put TCC back at full capacity.\(^{567}\)

Additional good news rained down like manna from heaven in first weeks of 1941. The National Defense Advisory Commission (NDAC) announced that new amortization rules would allow defense manufactures tax advantages for the construction of new plants for next five years. Tennessee Copper was among these most recent sixty-seven firms awarded “certificates of necessity” by the NDAC; nationally 875 firms had applied for the tax breaks. TCC stated that it would use some of the savings to construct $1.1 million of new facilities in the Copper Basin. News of the expansion came just as locals were readying for a “big day of fun” at Ducktown that would include skating, bowling, tennis, baseball, music, and myriad patriotic speakers for the July 4\(^{th}\) holiday.\(^{568}\)

The biggest news though came as a result of the Lewisohns’ adept promotion of the corporate facilities and their connections with the Roosevelt Administration: The War Department announced in early summer 1941 that Copperhill would get a new $2.3 million acid plant. Local Congressional Representative Estes Kefauver contacted editor Frank Middleton of the *Cooper City Advance* immediately with this good news for Tennessee. The new Copperhill facility would make only *oleum*, the “high test” sulfuric acid used in TNT manufacture. TCC would ship its oleum to a new TNT plant being built in Ooltewah, Hamilton County. The U.S. Government would actually own the plant, but TCC would operate it and it would employ forty

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\(^{567}\) *Copper City Advance*, 31 May 1940; Barclay, *The Copper Basin*, 45 and 47.

men. The facility would sit adjacent to the main sulfuric acid plant already at Copperhill. The anticipated war boom was on.\textsuperscript{569}

TCC finished construction and began running the government’s new East Tennessee Ordinance Works (ETOW) within a year. It is unclear from the records whether the AFL represented the workers at this plant, but management did maintain a management-labor safety plan and likely debuted the kind of labor-management committees Lewisohn praised after the war. By 1943 the new works had helped advance “a successful Third Front” against the Axis while maintaining a strong safety record. “Since the local plant… began operation in July 1942, there [had] not been a lost-time injury reported.”\textsuperscript{570} The \textit{City Advance} noted that the safety record was of particular importance “in face of the fact that in 1941 industrial accidents were responsible for a nation-wide loss of 460,000,000 man days or enough time to make 11,000,000 Garand rifles.” Lieutenant Colonel Donald K. Hyde, first officer of the acid plant, stated that this was the same amount of time it would have taken to make all the war equipment for outfitting two hundred thousand soldiers. Hyde credited the local plant’s record to the “eternal vigilance” of the safety programs of the firm’s overseer, TCC and regular surveys by the firm’s safety engineers.\textsuperscript{571}

No records could be found as to exact amount of materials TCC produced for the government throughout the entire war, but newspaper accounts suggest that the War Department relied on TCC to satisfy critical munitions production quotas and the company’s reputation as the greatest sulphuric acid producer in the world remained solid.\textsuperscript{572} In an early 1945 announcement, Captain C.E. Middleton, commanding officer of the East Tennessee Ordinance Works stated the

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{569} “Copperhill To Get Big Defense Plant,” \textit{Copper City Advance}, 27 June1941.
\textsuperscript{570} “War Plant Near Safety [sic] Record,” \textit{Copper City Advance}, 24 September 1943.
\textsuperscript{571} \textit{Copper City Advance}, 24 September 1943, ibid.
\textsuperscript{572} “Acid Production at All-Time High,” \textit{Copper City Advance}, 21 December 1944.
\end{footnotes}
Army planned to expand oleum production. To do so, the government would add to the existing plant at ETOW. Here then was an opportunity not only for non-ferrous craftsmen and engineers, but also men of the construction trades. Although a Baltimore firm would be responsible for the actual construction, local men would make up much of the crew, augmenting work overseen by the US Army Corps of Engineers. The *City Advance* stated that at least three hundred men “from this area” would be needed to get the building done.⁵⁷³

Headlines in August 1943 captured an excitement and pride in war work among Basin workers that had not been seen since the CIO walkouts of 1939. TCC-managed plants had been setting production records and were now earning national notoriety. The War Department awarded workers at the East Tennessee Ordinance Works the Army-Navy “E” for excellence; it was not one “lightly bestowed” because said one army representative, “all angles of a war contractor’s contribution to the arming of the nation [were] explored.” Underscoring the august nature of the August 1943 ceremony, war hero Corporal Frank King of the Army Corps of Engineers came to pin the “E” award on local outstanding workers. The soldier had recuperated from war wounds in nearby Swannanoa, N.C.; his harrowing experiences in the war had aroused locals’ patriotism and secured their empathy. “Shot in the legs, arms, back, head, and stomach during a 45-minute machine gun battle with three Axis planes,” the *Copper City Advance* reported, King was “the recipient of the Silver Star, Purple Heart, and Oak Leaf Cluster.”⁵⁷⁴

TCC officials L.H. Long and H.F. Keener of Ducktown and Harry McNally and A.C. Duncan of Copperhill represented the company at the affair. General Manager Houser was to attend the ceremonies too as this was known to be the grandest event ever held in the Copper Basin, but unfortunately Houser fell ill and had to remain in Knoxville. Before a vast crowd for

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⁵⁷³ “ETOW to Expand Acid Plant Here,” *Copper City Advance*, 11 January 1945.
⁵⁷⁴ “War Hero to Pin ‘E’ on Copper Co. Men,” *Copper City Advance*, 8.6.1943.
the region of some three thousand people, field director of Army ammunition plants, Col T.C. Gerber, stated that he had the honor to represent War Department Secretary Robert Patterson and Undersecretary of the Namey James Forrestal. 575

Throughout the ceremony army officials and management applauded workers’ success, but cautioned them to avoid slacking off after winning the award and, indirectly, to avoid aggressive labor organizers who might get between them and winning the war. What workers had been doing, they were told, had worked and they needed to stay on task. They were not to interfere with management’s intent to maintain industrial peace.

Said Col. Gerber to the crowd,

“This award… is symbolic of your success… let it ever be a constant reminder to everyone engaged in the war effort to subordinate everything to the winning of this war… Every wasted moment, every lost hour, every careless action reduces the effectiveness of our splendid manpower and aids the enemies of our way of life. Works such as these display eloquently our cooperative spirit… workers, management, government, [and] enterprise.”576

By following Lewisohn-Houser prerogatives of management through labor-management committees, TCC workers had not only exceeded production quotas at Copper Basin mines and works, but had also shown a strong “general all-around performance” achieved through “proper utilization of equipment, effective management [that included monitoring of] labor policy, and absenteeism.”577

Money poured into the Copper Basin from the federal government’s choice to expand facilities in the Copper Basin. The history of the afore-mentioned new Copperhill acid plants reveals this. In autumn 1941, TCC signed contracts with Leonard Construction and the War

575 “3000 See ‘E’ Awards Given Copperhill Plants Monday,” Copper City Advance, 8.13.1943.
576 Copper City Advance, 13 August 1943.
577 “Army-Navy ‘E’ Given Tenn. Copper Col, And ETOW,” Copper City Advance, 22 July 1943; and “‘E’ Awards Conferred on 23 More Plants,” New York Times, 22 July 1943; and, Copper City Advance, 22 July 1943
Department to provide $2 million for the construction of an oleum plant at Copperhill. The final cost of the plant would be $3.3 million. The new plant would be larger than a new plant that had just gone up in Isabella and its product would be shipped to Chattanooga to make TNT.

“Tennessee Copper Co. has moved into front-line defense with some half dozen vital priority products… she leads the world with the biggest sulphuric acid chamber plant in existence,” wrote an awestruck Knoxville News Sentinel editor Lee Davis in a two-page on TCC’s contributions to the national defense appearing less than two weeks before Pearl Harbor.578

Upon permission by J.N. Houser, Davis had been given a special tour of just what TCC was up to in protecting the United States. Through “its own little defense army” of 1600 workers, Lee claimed that even Horatio Alger would have been impressed with the possibilities TCC Copperhill provided for any young man interested in becoming part of a company payroll that added $2 million to the local economy. TCC’s magnificent cache of products was being sold to firms like the Indiana Ordinance Company for the production of smokeless gun powder. With TCC’s help, Indiana Ordinance made over 100,000 tons annually of the stuff annually. Davis expounded on the important role the “strings of tankers” from Copperhill had in “moving out ammunition for democracy from nature’s own vast underground arsenal.” On each shift, “unending tests” by “company researchers at Copperhill” continued to strengthen the company’s advance against national enemies. But Lee’s article did not focus on the workers who made all this happen, but on the Company as the savior of the republic. Dismissing its massive workforce as incidental, Lee gave the credit for the company’s output to its impressive technology.

578 “Use of Sulphuric Acid in Manufacture of Explosives,” Copper City Advance, 17 October 1941; “Contracts Signed for Acid Plant,” Copper City Advance, 31 October 1941; and, “Every Product of Copperhill Plants Is Punch At Hitler,” Knoxville News Sentinel, 23 November 1941, reprinted in The Copper City Advance, 28 November 1941.
“Personnel totals… give no idea of operational scope… the bulk of work is done by electric, mechanical, and chemical agents, and the human ones, by comparison, are relatively few.”

As a result of the war contracts, Copper Basin economic life had clearly been on the rebound. Headlines in the *Copper City Advance* reporting substantial increases in the holdings of the First National Bank of Polk County show how the war boom rewarded the citizenry. As the bank of choice for many TCC workers, its reports provide a good measure of just how strong the local economy had been in the forties. The first year that the U.S. was in the war the First National Bank of Polk County showed a gain of over 37 ½ % over the previous year’s balance. Reports from the bank’s 1945 annual shareholders and directors meetings revealed that the region’s premiere financial institution now had “total resources of $3,061,140.44… the highest total in the bank’s history” and an increase of 26% over 1944. Since the effects of the Depression had been so crushing on the bank, these numbers were all the more astounding. Back in 1933, the bank only had total assets of $423,739.69, this total having plummeted a third in just over two years. But the war had turned things around and there was money to spare for patriotic investment by the workers as well. For 1944 alone, “war-time activities… included the purchase of $526,500 US Government Bonds.”

Tennessee Corporation’s balance sheet for the war era shows that Lewisohn and Houser steered a profitable course. A bump in 1943 profits reflected at once the most intensive defensive struggles in the conflict and the high point of US defense production. Tennessee Corporation made over one half a million dollars in the first six month of 1944 compared with

579 *Copper City Advance*, ibid. 28 November 1941.
580 “Bank Deposits Here Show Big Increase,” *Copper City Advance*, 16 January 1942.
581 “Bank Here Shows Large Increase” *Copper City Advance*, 11 January 1945.
583 *Copper City Advance*, 11 January 1945, *ibid.*
just over $721,000 in 1943. National industrial profits in 1944 were not at all bad and they likely buoyed the company despite some reductions in copper needs as the war wound down. By 1944 US corporate profits had risen to 329% of 1939 levels.\textsuperscript{584} Tennessee Corporation profits held firm at just over $1.1 million profit for both 1944 and 1945 as nationally war production leveled off. This was an important fact because many firms had seen a significant drop off immediately following the victory in Europe. In fact, 1946 saw Tennessee Corporation numbers rise to $1.4 million in profit.\textsuperscript{585}

**From scandal to patriotic service: “LOMA” and the “Victory Garden”**

As a major producer, TCC benefitted from the expanded need for agricultural chemicals resulting from New Deal land husbandry legislation and the war mandates promoting home gardening. New Era allowances for cartels did not immediately give way under sometimes confusing New Deal directives. During the twenties, fertilizer companies had combined their efforts to thwart the kind of cut-throat business competition that seriously cut profits during economic downturns. Similar collaboration was seen as dubious and troubling to some New Dealers who claimed the cartels limited free markets.\textsuperscript{586}

That said, as the saying goes, life itself had become impossible without chemicals. The embrace of better land use techniques by the late 1930s spurred astounding profits in the chemicals industry. Tennessee Corporation and TCC took advantage of the expanding markets. But during the depression, high profits tended to lead to investigations of possible wrong doing.

\textsuperscript{585} “Chemical Profit Shows a Big Rise: Earnings of 38 Corporations up $13,000,000 in 1941,” *New York Times*, 6 November 1942.
Government officials on the hunt for inappropriate collusion found what they had suspected among chemicals producers. According to a report done by the WPA for the Securities and Exchange Commission, for 1937 alone—despite the Roosevelt recession—nineteen of the top US chemical firms earned a profit of $192 million with dividends distributed totaling $151 million. These numbers equaled profits of roughly $6 billion and $5 billion in 2007 dollars. The increase in sales for these companies had doubled in just four years so that by 1938 annual sales were nearly $1 billion ($33.6 billion in 2007 dollars). After charges including gains and losses, prior claims, interest on loans and income taxes, profits represented just over twenty percent of sales.587 New Deal regulators cited the top chemical firms for engaging in “monopolistic methods.” Underscoring the confusing business climate as a result of the New Deal’s promotion of certain legal business cartels, there had not been a great deal of secrecy in the whole affair. Tennessee Corporation and four other chemical firms had colluded as the Agricultural Insecticide and Fungicide Association (AIFA), a group the Federal Trade Commission contended published “white lists” of “favored dealers to the exclusion of others.”588 The AIFA maintained “an understanding… among the companies… to restrain competition in the sale of their products… to fix and maintain uniform prices, terms and discounts.”589 Toward this end, “association members held regular meetings at which trade policies and prices were established and ‘distributor guides’—white lists—were shared. The FTC accused AIFA members with “suppression of competition” and “a violation of the Federal Trade Commission Act.”590

590 Ibid.
a year, the FTC ordered AIFA companies to halt the cartel practices and to stop “clearing house”
activities.591

Tennessee Corporation made a lot of money at this time even after news of the scandal
hit the streets: The corporation cleared $349,000 in 1939 with dividends of forty-one cents and
three times that much in 1940, making its profits of $1.36 per share or $1.1 million total the
finest the company had experienced since the 1929 crash. Some of this was owing to the
aforementioned increased copper commodities markets, but diversification at TCC had surely
helped. Tennessee Corporation shareholders enjoyed a dollar per year dividends. Profits rose
again in 1941 to over $1.3 million or nearly $1.60 per share and by the middle of 1942,
Tennessee Corporation looked as if it might beat its record profit of all time.592

The New York Times reported huge increases in the use of chemicals during World War
II. This was especially true in the area of organic chemicals—those used for agricultural
fertilizer and food stuff production.593 Tennessee Copper Company had a special role in this
aspect of the war economy. As a subsidiary of Tennessee Corporation, its contributed product
support for the federal government’s popular Victory Garden campaign. Begun to encourage
thrifty conservation and allow the government to funnel precious industrial agricultural products
to US troops overseas, the Victory Garden campaign directed Americans to plant their own little
plots. Soon hundreds of thousands of Americans were digging in the dirt; the campaign became
a favorite patriotic endeavor. Toward these ends, Tennessee Corporation sold the perfect pair of

Times, 7 April 1941; “Corporate Reports,” New York Times, 1 April 1942; and 26 August 1942.
593 New York Times, 6 November 1942, ibid.
products manufactured from TCC’s line of non-ferrous chemicals: a chemical fertilizer or “plant food” known as “Loma,” and a pesticide known as “Loma Dust.”

Highlighting for potential customers the patriotic use of its products, TC advertised Loma items as “important… in the maintenance of the Nation’s morale and spiritual vigor.” Loma and Loma “2-in-1” Dust helped Americans to garden successfully and kept their efforts thriving, “free of pests!” and “neat and attractive” throughout. Mindful of the rationing spirit of the age, TC reminded citizens not “waste garden materials, time, and effort [but to] plan intelligently [and] properly.” Citizens who bought Loma fertilizer—“The Quality Plant Food”—would “save money and effort” and because “a little goes a long way!” anyone could “have more luxurious lawns and gardens.” American gardeners were doing their part because “quality garden materials always mean[t] economy.” “Everywhere … quality garden supplies were sold,” consumers could purchase 100 pound bags of the miracle product for four just bucks, but more modest amounts could be had too. “For Everything Green that Grows” Loma was the plant food of choice for citizen-gardeners who aimed their green thumbs at the eyes of Hitler and Hirohito.

Maintaining the patriotic theme, Tennessee Corporation advertised the toxic non-ferrous concoction Loma 2-in-1 Dust as a “quick, easy way to ward against chewing and sucking insects” and fungi. Developed by the company’s “great Research Laboratories” yet still declared “organic” in nature, the potent pesticide saved hours of work “in minutes” as it defended “Mr. & Mrs. Victory Gardener” from a host of “fungous” growths and critters including “aphids, leafhoppers, flea beetles, fruit worms, sawflies, thrips, caterpillars, striped cucumber beetles,

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594 Tennessee Corporation also sold a product for lawns known as “Turfood,” but this item was not employed in the kind of patriotic advertising campaigns typical of “Loma” and “Loma Dust.” See, “This Year, of all years, use Loma,” New York Times, 22 March 1942; “At Last! Loma 2-in-1 Dust,” Display advertisement 52, New York Times, 31 May 1942; and “Loma Dust,” Display advertisement 179, New York Times, 21 March 1943.

595 Sundry afore-cited Loma plants foods advertisements.
Mexican bean beetles, cabbage worms, tomato worms, leaf-spot, leaf scorch, rust, mildew, blight, scab, anthracnose, and black rot.” Loma Dust was especially helpful in repelling Japanese Beetles! 596

**Defeating the CIO and taming the AFL during World War II**

TCC management’s quest to wrestle back control over its labor relations gained momentum in winter and early spring 1940 after a series of dynamite blasts shattered several Basin nights, rattling nerves, and cutting off Basin electrical power several times in the towns and throughout TCC works. Allegedly the work of CIO supporters, the explosions poisoned any chance that Mine, Mill might cultivate additional support among the public and further crippled the vitality of the walkout. Having recently just won a tough campaign, Sheriff Biggs went immediately into action, sensing an opportunity to strengthen eroding constituent support. But because the “dynamitings” had twice destroyed TVA electrical towers coming from Parksville Dam, the Federal Bureau of Investigation sent agents to the Copper Basin to join Biggs and “run down the guilty parties.” The Bureau’s presence further aggravated the ongoing local labor war. After some poking around, the FBI arrested a couple men but then let them go owing to a lack of direct evidence. Another blast and a Basin blackout for seven hours elicited demands by the public to find the perpetrators and brought a frustrated FBI Chief H.E. Plaxico to Copperhill to look into the matter himself. 597

Biggs and the FBI then undertook a dragnet relying on members of Biggs’ “deputy” army to act as foot soldiers in the ferreting out. Aiming their searches almost exclusively in workers’

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597 “TVA Towers Are Dynamited Again” *Copper City Advance*, 4.19.1940.: Barclay diary, 24 April 1940; “Blast Puts Copper Basin in Darkness Several Hours” *Polk County News*, 25 August 1940; and “FBI Chief Plaxico here in Investigation [sic],” *Copper City Advance*, 26 April 1940.
neighborhoods sympathetic to the CIO, Sheriff Biggs and his thuggish troops again intimidated folk throughout Ducktown and Isabella, inspected workers’ cars and property without proper warrant. FBI men stood back being mindful of the limits of jurisdiction and of the traditional hostility generally held by locals toward federal authorities. The “investigation” moved quickly and led to the arrest of Mine, Mill organizer M.C. Anderson one rainy late April day. He was taken from the Basin to Chattanooga, his bail set at $25,000. Bureau agents and Biggs men rounded up more “suspects” and G-men brought in “a big Grey Hound Bus” to carry away fifteen deemed guilty.  

Rumor had it that the men had confessed to the explosions while “detained” in the Copperhill jail. No reports of workers’ outrage about the dragnet, which would be made plain by witnesses in the suspects’ trials, appeared in local papers. Instead the papers went on the attack against the CIO. Highlighting a comparison of the good old days with the dangerous present, the same Polk County News issue that notified citizens of the passing of an era (in the death of beloved, local, “family physician” physician of thirty-six years Dr. William Herman Schultz), contained reports recounting the dangerous labor radicalism now spreading through the Copper Basin. The paper’s editors were convinced a more poisonous atmosphere had arrived with the New Deal labor laws. The Polk County News identified seventeen of the nineteen men arrested for the recent destruction of power lines as “CIO strikers.”

The Polk County News had long since condemned New Deal legislation as leading down the road to communism. One of the regular conservative cartoons from the paper’s front page showed a “badly warped” plank man with “National Labor Relations Board” stamped upon his chest, his body twisted all out of shape, strutting down the road with a crooked cane. Stogy-

598 Barclay diary, 30 April 1940.
599 Polk County News. 2 May 1940, ibid.
smoking, its face angry and menacing and bearing a hat, the warped plank was clearly drawn to look like CIO leader John. L. Lewis.\textsuperscript{600} The recent arrests of CIO men in the Copper Basin had given the paper more editorial ammunition to fight communist incursions and revealed its commitment to the Biggs dynasty through its support of the sheriff’s handling of the Basin’s latest troubles. The \textit{Polk County News} opined on the good fortune locals enjoyed in having a sheriff who cooperated with federal agents in gaining the arrest of all suspects and returning an industrial peace.\textsuperscript{601}

Reports on the arrests in the \textit{Copper City Advance} had the tone of a radio detective and mystery show as they recounted details of the coordinated investigation. They also contained more anti-CIO bias. “Working swiftly since their arrival in the Basin,” Biggs and his deputies “have worked night and day… to clear up the mystery” of the explosions. FBI chief H.E. Plaxico stated his satisfaction in arresting Anderson and the gang of culprits for having “feloniously conspired, combined, and confederated… to violate the laws of … and the property of the United States of America.”\textsuperscript{602}

Satisfaction filled TCC Clerk R.E. Barclay’s diary after the arrests and the entries reveal his conviction that local industry could now resume without irritating CIO interruption. In an entry characteristic of his self-appointed role as a paternal local civic leader, typically dismissive of Mine, Mill supporters’ pain, Barclay claimed “a great sigh of relief went up around here when it was learned that Anderson had been arrested and when the bus pulled out today with its cargo of suspected dynamiters.”\textsuperscript{603} Five of the fifteen men, according to Barclay, pled guilty at a

\textsuperscript{600} “Badly Warped,” \textit{Polk County News}, 23 May 1940.
\textsuperscript{602} “Nineteen Arrested in Dynamiting of Towers,” \textit{Copper City Advance}, 3 May 1940
\textsuperscript{603} Barclay, diary, \textit{ibid}. 
preliminary hearing including Feltan Woodward, Earl Hubbard, Edward Simonds, Robert “Bob” Rhodes, and David Queen. The rest of the men pled “not guilty”: Martin Simonds, Clint Huffman, Gordon Parr, L.B. Green, Tate Green, Ben Cross, John McGhee, Nayar Henry, R.S. Petelle, and Marion Ellis. Records are unclear as to whether all these men were CIO sympathizers or members of Mine, Mill though in light of the local animus against the CIO this was likely the case. A bond of $3000 each was set for each man. A May 1940 report stated that three more men had been arrested in connection with the explosions: Arthur Shillings, RM. Coltins, and Robert Bellow. None of those arrested were AFL men.\textsuperscript{604}

Its campaign in the Basin a shambles and local organizers in jail, Mine, Mill’s international responded to salvage what reputation might still remain among its TCC rank-and-file. In early May, Mine, Mill President Reid Robinson met with General Manger J.N. Houser and Manager T.A. Mitchell in Chattanooga at the Patten Hotel, where, Barclay recorded, Robinson “tentatively agreed to call off the strike.” Houser then returned to Knoxville and while Anderson languished in jail, Mine, Mill supporters met in Isabella and voted to call off the strike. Within days of the strike’s end, CIO picket sheds were tipped over around the Basin, “mute evidence of the failure of the strike,” judged Barclay. Loyal Mine, Mill men came round to salvage what they could from upset sheds and hauled them back to Ducktown as if the sheds were wounded comrades. Barclay now sneered with pleasure at the CIO’s misfortunes. “Having lost in their every appeal to the Labor Board and to the courts,” he wrote, “they were at the end of their road.”\textsuperscript{605}

For the most part Barclay had been right, but in Chattanooga some hopes prevailed. CIO lawyers got federal judges to show some mercy toward the arrested men by reducing bonds to

\textsuperscript{604} "5 Plead Guilty To Charges of TVA Blasting," \textit{Polk County News} 2 May 1940. \\
\textsuperscript{605} Barclay diary, 5 May 1940.
$1000 each. Only Anderson’s remained enormous at $25,000—an amount only slightly less than Tennessee Corporation top executive E.H. Westlake’s annual salary during this period and equal to over $800,000 in 2007 dollars.606

For the next several years, newspapers reported on the experiences of the defendants as Anderson, his arrested compatriots, the CIO, battled government lawyers in the courts to reveal exactly what had happened that early Spring 1940 regarding the explosions and the subsequent arrests. Part one in these narratives ended nearly a year after the explosions first began when juries convicted Anderson and eight other men. The men were “subject to a maximum of two years in prison and fines of $10,000.”607 The courts also convicted the aforementioned Simonds, Woodward, Hubbard, Queen, Rhodes, Ellis and Robert L. Ballew along with Anderson. Six of the men had signed statements that the F.B.I. considered “confessions” and only one of the men entered a plea of “not guilty.” Neither Anderson nor Ellis had signed such statements. The government prosecuted the men for three of the many explosions experienced in early 1940. The men’s lawyers immediately moved for a new trial claiming they had proof of malfeasance committed by FBI agents, Sheriff Biggs and the “deputies.”608

Local newspapers held only part of this story though. Before the trial had even begun, Mine, Mill had become convinced that the whole affair of the dynamitings, dragnet, and the arrests had been some kind of frame-up. The union hoped NLRB officials would refuse any attempts by the AFL to take advantage of Mine, Mill’s circumstances. But Mine, Mill leaders also sought assistance from a non-governmental ally the CIO had cultivated. The CIO called for an investigation by the National Committee for People’s Rights into the Ducktown dynamitings,

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conditions in the mining villages, alleged accusations of police brutality, lax FBI supervision and collusion, and TCC bribery of local officials. The NCPR was not some disinterested party in all this. It was, according to one report “a left-wing organization based in New York whose leadership included such well-known Popular Front figures as Rockwell Kent.” The committee investigated what its members considered particularly heinous incidents of corporate abuse of workers throughout the late 1930s and through these investigations the NCPR had developed a special fondness for Mine, Mill causes.609

The NCPR sent “trained observers” to Polk County who “talked to dozens of people including the sheriff, trial witnesses, local townspeople, defendants, and law enforcement officers.” The committee also reviewed court transcripts from the dynamiting trials and published its assessment in a bound set of reports entitled “Report on The Ducktown (Tennessee) Dynamiting Convictions.” The report was in two sections: a published account from what appears to be the NCPR magazine, National, and a typed report containing testimonials from the CIO dynamiting trial along with pertinent industrial and labor history. Investigating committee members Millard Lampell, Wellington Roe, and Elizabeth Wade White prepared this latter special section. Identified here as the “Lampell Report,” it included the team’s assessment of recent events, a brief history of Mine, Mill struggles in the Copper Basin since the Great War era and a summary of local working conditions that did not reflect the glowing reports of TCC labor relations once contained in the pages of the Explosives Engineer.610

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610 The two reports were contained within a folder called “Report on the Ducktown (Tennessee) Dynamiting Convictions” that contains both a reprint of “Tennessee Tragedy” National, PM Tuesday, November 11, 1941; and the “Lampell Report” All the work was done by The National Committee for Peoples Rights, New York, December 1941 and apparently collected together by the Committee, 11 December 1941.
NCPR investigators concluded that the Ducktown dynamiting arrests represented just some of the illegal actions taken against workers and Mine, Mill by TCC and its allies and that the arrests were unjustified. This “was not an ordinary criminal case,” declared NCPR observers. Anderson and the other men “should go free” because “no one has yet brought to light the truth about the crimes that actually have been committed and about those who committed them.”\textsuperscript{611}

In prose that typically would have aroused ire among defensive locals, NCPR writers purposely painted a disturbing portrait of the Basin with vivid descriptions designed to elicit sympathetic reactions from an audience of those who committee members no doubt hoped would be influential readers. “The eroded valley,” the report declared, “is often as hard on people as on vegetation.” An accompanying photo essay captured the cramped quarters of miners and wagers which often held as many as “four families—nine adults and 14 children…using the same clothes line.” Juxtaposed next to images of posh, tree-shaded homes of local TCC managers, who had “tennis courts behind their homes,” the photos showed that miners lived in an oppressive world where company power was absolute. “The company owns houses, streets, and store” and “prices are high.”\textsuperscript{612}

Isabella stood out in the report as a village void of all but a few trees, mired in mud, awash in winter water so deep that the only benefit was that the gully washes swept away “the accumulated trash—and odor of rot.” Some of the Loudermilk clan—no doubt kin of the same Loudermilk knifed at a CIO meeting during the strike—sat thin and crowded at a table for a supper of “grits and pork gravy, plain bread, and coffee.” Food for the family had been purchased during the strike by selling one of the kids’ few toys, a bicycle. “So now,” recounted a

\textsuperscript{611} Lampell Report, NCPR, 15.  
\textsuperscript{612} “Tennessee Tragedy,” NCPR, 11.
sympathetic NCPR investigator, “they have a home-made two-wheeled wagon, also used to haul firewood, and an old tennis ball as toys.” When offered a nickel by NCPR reporters, one Loudermilk boy exclaimed, desperately, “I want ice cream!” A specter of hunger and near starvation hovered over workers’ lives. In trying to weaken the union and intimidate Mine, Mill’s rank-and-file, Polk County officials restricted portions allocated for workers’ children through the Federal Surplus Commodity mandates; the anti-union officials had substituted small bowls of soup for more substantial meals enjoyed before the strike.613

Illustrating holes in Houser’s safety regimen and what appears to have been favoritism in the treatment of injured workers—in spite of manager T.A. Mitchell’s rosier assessment in his post-war labor relations report—NCPR reporters interviewed miners fired from TCC after they had been injured on the job. In one such case an injured man lost his employment after forty years working deep underground. In contrast to Mitchell’s claims, the NCPR stated that a number of maimed workers had received no compensation for their many years of service. The report did not specify if the men had been fired by TCC or by the more notorious DCI which TCC absorbed, but NCPR reporters laid the blame for poor treatment before TCC. It was clear from the report that association with the CIO had resulted in prejudice against some injured men. CIO men who tried to report to duty after the Mine, Mill strike had been blacklisted, told by TCC agents that they now had “physical disabilities” and could not work. “Tough guy, Wayne Henry,” former hoist engineer, as a result of one such medical appraisal now had to run a beer joint after he lost his job.614

The most damning evidence of illegal activity in the NCPR report came directly from the prosecution’s witnesses during the trials. Neither Biggs nor many of the witnesses called by the

613 “Tennessee Tragedy” NCPR, 11.
614 Ibid. 10.
prosecution appeared to express any regret for their illegal or questionable actions. Their dutiful demeanor betrayed their commitment to TCC, their anti-union sentiments, and, in the case of FBI agents and Biggs especially, their sense of entitlement. TCC’s reputation did not leave these proceedings unscathed according to NCPR assessors. Sheriff Biggs recounted that TCC had placed thousands of dollars into his personal account in the Hamilton National Bank, Knoxville to subsidize the hundreds of “deputies” used to intimidate striking workers and in the dragnet. “Technically,” reported the NCPR, these men “were employees of [Polk County] but the county didn’t pay them” Biggs paid them personally from the money TCC gave to him. At $1,000 per day this sum added up pretty quickly. Over the course of the strike this amount must have been in the tens of thousands of dollars. When asked if he intended on paying the company back for this service, Biggs seemed incredulous: “No, why should I?”

Biggs had also come to rely on a resentful and desperate mole within Mine, Mill, a man named Fred Long. According to Biggs, “Fred Long came to him with information that the [TVA] power lines… in Polk… and Fannin Count[ies] were to be dynamited at 1:20 in the morning, [of April 25, 1940].” Long claimed that about thirty men had been involved in the plan and Biggs contacted the F.B.I. The sheriff and FBI agents were still eating a late meal at the Copperhill New York Hotel when they heard the explosions. “TVA lines had been dynamited just as Biggs had told the FBI men they would be,” said Long. Because of Long’s claims, the men rounded up were “all loyal union men, of course” NCPR investigators emphasized.

The NCPR reported that the sheriff spent the next several days after the early April explosions breaking Tennessee law instead of enforcing it. According to the state statutes, officers were to inform anyone arrested of their authority and to then immediately take a

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615 NCPR, ibid, 7.
616 NCPR, ibid, 10.
617 Ibid.
defendant before a magistrate. In Tennessee authorities could only hold suspects for seventy-two hours of “questioning… before an arrest warrant must be sworn. In all cases, [a] suspect must stand before a magistrate before being locked up.” Biggs did none of this according to witnesses. Jailed suspects’ families were not notified; “in no case was anyone taken before a magistrate.”

According to Tennessee state law, if the local jail was not of sufficient size, arrestees were to be moved to the nearest local jail suitable, not some random structure. Biggs ignored this legal prescription too. For the next week the men were held without warrants and five of the men were tossed into a tiny six foot square cage and kept there for four days. Biggs kept a lot of the men at the Copperhill YMCA building and a TCC guardhouse.

Biggs, FBI authorities, and apparently police allies from North Carolina and Georgia who cooperated in all this took suspects across state line without proper protocol. In the case of Martin Simonds it was clear he had been handled with questionable, if not illegal, methods. Simonds was picked up by authorities at his North Carolina farm and pulled in for questioning after first being told to just sit in a car parked at the bottom of his property. When Simonds asked for proper identification and proof of authority, Biggs’ deputy Clyde Dale held up a gun and said simply “this is my authority” and then went and got an FBI man to help him escort Simonds to the car. Simonds was not allowed to get his clothes or any other items that he might need; he saw no warrant.

When questioned about the incident FBI Agent N.H. McCabo said sheepishly, “well, we were out there, he has a rather small place and numerous children around there and his wife and there wasn’t any suitable place to interview him.” McCabo said Simonds had not complained

618 Ibid.
619 Ibid.
620 Ibid, 11.
621 Ibid.
at all when asked if they all might go to Copperhill “for a talk” since the Simonds home was
“inconvenient” as was the deputy’s parked car at the edge of Simond’s place. Taking him to the
Copperhill YMCA allowed for a conversation where notes could be taken “without being
cramped up,” said the G-man. McCabo also claimed he had no idea that the Simond’s place was
in North Carolina—this despite the fact that NCPR investigators later saw the two large border
signs at the state line McCabo and company would have passed on their way to Copperhill.
Furthermore, the surface of the road changed from concrete to asphalt. After the “conversation”
McCabo then claimed Simonds had been turned loose but chose to stick around the YMCA
while the G-men and Biggs’ deputies ate since Simond “had nothing to hide.” The NCPR argued
the Simonds case was typical of how Biggs and the FBI played fast and loose with the law in
rounding up suspects for what witnesses claimed had been “grillings… in the YMCA.” During
all this the FBI agents made no arrests but did rely on Biggs to bring them one “witness” after
another, none of whom had been served in the proper legal manner. In this way, the FBI could
state that they had nothing to do with the treatment of the men once they were “finished” with
questioning them.622

Throughout it assessment the NCPR painted TCC in the same light as the Committee
might render hard-line industrial reactionaries and firms that would use whatever tactic they
could to shut down workers’ organizing and strikes. This was ironic seeing that TCC had been
working so hard to improve its local image and in light of owner Sam A. Lewisohn’s renowned
progressivism. But the reports underscore how subjective local reportage had become in
considering any actions taken by the most important employer in the region. The NCPR portrait
was important because it challenged the narrative supported by the local business class put forth
a perspective on Lewisohn-Houser operation of TCC rare in the history of the company. It also

622 Ibid.
underscored a darker side to Lewisohn’s management scheme. As chronicled by the NCPR, TCC management was determined to let little stand in the way of controlling the terms of its labor relations.

Yet for all its in-depth reportage, the NCPR’s damning reports overlooked a couple critical items that likely would have made a strong impact on workers, influential government authorities, Labor Board officials, and the general public. The missing subjects would have been well known already to readers of the local papers. Had their occurrence been shaped properly by Mine, Mill’s advocates, news of these developments might have garnered more sympathy toward Mine, Mill’s goals in the Copper Basin. Clarifying these incidents as important antecedents, the CIO might have explained to the public that the destructive and disruptive acts perpetrated by AFL sympathizers stood as evidence that is was more likely the AFL, and not the CIO, that was responsible for recent acts against property and the public.

The first subject concerned the use of dynamite by angry locals not affiliated with Mine, Mill. A year before the CIO strike, AFL electrical linemen who worked for local Tennessee Electric Power Company allegedly destroyed steel transmission towers. No one was killed or hurt but they certainly might have been. The blast ripped the concrete foundations of towers right next to a family residence. More blasts followed. Company officials called upon local sheriffs and police officers in a 75-mile radius to catch the perpetrators. Three AFL men were arrested, found heavily armed and bearing the equipment necessary for more destruction. Being somewhat unfamiliar with the region, NCPR investigators may not have heard of these occurrences but that’s highly unlikely. It seems more likely that the NCPR feared reminding
locals of all this because the reports could tarnish all unionism and highlight the precedent of violent acts taken by local labor.623

The other issue ignored by NCPR investigators concerned local developments in the ongoing internecine war between the AFL and CIO. In April 1940 the AFL requested that the Labor Board again investigate the representation situation in the Copper Basin. With CIO support apparently on the wane, a contentious AFL demanded action to “benefit commerce”; agreeing, the NLRB called for a hearing. Mine, Mill petitioned for a continuance claiming it had not enough time to prepare and “that it was prejudicially surprised” by AFL membership numbers, which Mine, Mill also challenged.624

Board examiners denied the CIO’s motions for continuance. Oral arguments were then heard in Washington D.C. by all parties except the International, which instead chose to file written briefs. Just why the union did this could not be determined. It may have been that at this time Robinson and Mine, Mill organizers calculated that the Copper Basin campaign needed a thorough reworking in light of the dynamiting arrests; International officials may also have been distracted by what it considered more important battles. That said, the failure to show in Washington certainly had its effects. The Board found that yes, the continued representation controversy in the Copper Basin had returned, reiterated its judgment that a single representative unit should stand for all TCC workers (excepting non-supervisory and clerical staff, chemists and engineers) and that a new election should be held. The third election for collective bargaining representation at TCC would take place by just after the Fourth of July holiday, 1940. 625

625 NLRB, Case No. R-1853, ibid. 222-223
More damaging to Mine, Mill was the Labor Board’s determination that the roll call for this vote be based upon the Tennessee Copper Company payroll as of early May 1940, the date when Mine, Mill formally agreed to end its strike. Therefore, instead of including all TCC-employed Mine, Mill at the commencement of the strike in the summer of 1939, now a whole class of workers who had lost their jobs during the strike could not vote and new hires could. This was a mortal blow to Mine, Mill’s efforts and a paradoxical turn of events in light of Reid Robinson’s agreement to end the strike against Tennessee Copper—a decision he had taken intending to save the union.626

For reasons not altogether clear, Mine, Mill’s leadership instructed the NLRB not to place the union on the ballot.627 The CIO saw this maneuver as a way to at once counter AFL claims that a new decision on collective bargaining was necessary and de-legitimate the election. Miners and CIO sympathizers won neither a Marathon nor a earned respect for a sacrificial Thermopile by employing this peculiar strategy against the AFL phalanx. Instead, the CIO tactic resembled a misguided and pouting sort of Picket’s Charge. For months the new Copper Basin AFL locals had strengthened their offensive, petitioning the NLRB and railing against alleged CIO-Moscow links. Emboldened by the consequences of the failed strike and the fear generated by the dynamitings, the AFL could count on public pressure and workers’ impatience—neither group could anymore endure CIO disruptions at a time of expanding anxiousness over the spreading World War.

The AFL won “an overwhelming victory” in the July election where polling sites had been limited to TCC’s smelter at Copperhill and to a single spot for “the Ducktown-Isabella section.” The exclusion of clerical and supervisory staff, chemists, and technical engineers had

626 Ibid, 224.
627 Ibid.
not hurt the AFL: over 950 men voted for Federation representation. Yet of the 1369 men eligible to vote, 240 chose not to vote at all and 174 checked “no union representation.” CIO supporters passing among the workers before the vote had encouraged the latter choice, but it had been a fool’s errand. The *Knoxville Labor News* greeted the AFL triumph and NLRB certification of the election with earnest satisfaction. “Hope is expressed that a permanent and lasting peace in the Copper Basin is now an assured fact.”

After the election Mine, Mill complained once again to Labor Board about a new round of intimidating actions taken by TCC supervisory staff, Sheriff Biggs and his deputies before the vote. The Board dismissed these complaints reflecting the new NLRB commitment to affect industrial peace and industrial production for national defense. According to scholarship on this period, the Board wanted “industrial disputes settled in decentralized, volunteerist negotiations between the parties rather than on terms imposed by the state… or unilaterally determined by employers.” Labor’s part in this was to provide for “strong, responsible unions” as agents for implementation of the Wagner Act. The CIO and Mine, Mill had failed to secure broad enough support among TCC workers toward this end. It seems likely that the NCPR chose not to report on the developments and outcome in the union war because CIO leaders’ actions had been so impulsive.

**The Ducktown Dynamiting Trials**

Thwarted in maintaining their collective bargaining rights in the Copper Basin, Mine, Mill and its legal team now worked to aid Mitchell Anderson and the other CIO men arrested for the Ducktown dynamitings. National reports carried news of the trials of Anderson and seven of those men. The *Knoxville Labor News* reported that Anderson’s defense attorneys had successfully argued that the dynamitings had been a collective protest against the CIO’s illegal advocacy in the union war. The jury deliberated for 24 hours before finding Anderson not guilty of forgery and theft.

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628 “Supplemental Decision and Certification of Representatives, September 6, 1940; NLRB Case No. R-1853, 84; “Ducktown AFL Union Certified,” *Knoxville Labor News*, 17 September, 1940.
629 NLRB Case No. R-1853, *ibid.*
the accused that commenced at the Chattanooga Federal Courthouse in January 1941 before
Chief District Judge Leslie R. Darr of the United States Eastern District of Tennessee, Southern
Division. By the end of the month Mitchell C. Anderson, John E. Simonds, Felton M.
Woodward, Earl Hubbard, John D. Queen, Robert L. Rhodes, Robert L. Ballew and Marion L.
Ellis had been found guilty of conspiracy to dynamite TVA lines, subject “to a maximum
sentence of two years in prison and fines of $10,000.”

CIO lawyers refused to accept the verdicts, deeming them a miscarriage of justice as is
evident in their lengthy assignments of error. Presented before the Sixth Circuit appeals, the
defendants’ lawyers claimed in their “assignments of error” that initial trial proceedings failed to
prove conspiracy, ignored evidence of collusion between TCC and Sheriff Biggs, relied on
uncorroborated confessions, false evidence, and faulty evidence obtained through mistreatment
of suspects, denial of due process of law, use of unlawful duress, sleep deprivation and the
application of narcotics.

The appeal to reverse the convictions eventually made it to the United States Supreme
Court. From comments summarized by the Court’s clerk it became clear that the first trial had
been rammed through the justice system by Judge Darr. Darr had demonstrated his disdain of
the CIO while overseeing the proceedings. He sustained the prosecution’s objections and
prevented any admission of evidence by the defense regarding collusion of the company and the
sheriff or about the employment of intimidation to garner confessions from the defendants.

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630 Barclay diary, 51 January, 1941; “Guilty in TVA Dynamiting” 8 CIO Convicted of Plot to Bar Power From Firm
prosecution and conviction of the men. His diary neither clarifies Barclay’s relationship with Biggs nor whether he
was aware of the FBI’s role in overlooking the sheriff’s bullying. Barclay may have remained silent on all this to
protect himself from being called upon to witness.

631 Mitchell Clifton Anderson, John Edward Simonds, alias, Ed Simonds, Earl Hubbard, Felton Moore Woodward,
alias, John M. Cash, Marion Luther Ellis, Robert Lee Ballew, John David Queen, and Robert Lee Rhodes vs. United
States of America, No 8100, “Assignments of Error 1-6,” United States Circuit Court of Appeals For the Sixth
Circuit, 25 March 1941.
After a substantial investigation in 1941 that entailed interviewing dozens of local witnesses—including Sheriff Biggs and many local law enforcement officers—and reviewing court records, the National Committee for People’s Rights concluded in a report holding pages of evidence—that the confessions by the CIO men came only after they had endured real physical abuse. “Each of the men who signed [confessions] had about the same story to tell—a story of inadequate sleep and food, of third-degree questioning, of misrepresentation of the papers they were asked to sign.”

Supreme Court justices investigated these claims and found the tactics employed to force the confessions unconstitutional. The Court reversed the lower courts’ decisions, and ordered Darr in March 1943 to rehear the case because, as the defendants’ lawyers had complained all along, “there was no evidence upon which a conviction might have been had and no competent evidence [brought] before the [district] Court and jury.” Furthermore the justices let it be known that they had disapproved of Darr forbidding proper questioning by the defense of Sheriff Biggs. The sheriff had deputies search the property and automobiles of the defendants without proper warrant. The sheriff’s financial relationship with Tennessee Copper was also quite suspect. In short, the justices found, Darr had sided with the prosecution by preventing important defensive questioning of key witnesses, including Fred Long. Justice Felix Frankfurter delivered the Court’s opinion that made headlines in the *Copper City Advance*. “It was error to admit these confessions and we see no escape from the conclusion that the convictions of all the petitioners must be set aside.” Darr announced reinstatement of the case in April 1943.

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633 Mitchell Clifton Anderson et al., *vs. The United States of America*, United States Supreme Court No. 1, 7 April, 1943; For Judge Leslie Darr, *United States of America vs. Mitchell Clifton Anderson, et al*, No 8100, District Court of the United States Eastern District of Tennessee, Southern Division, Chattanooga, 9 April, 1943; “Upsets Eight
The following February the retrial began again in Chattanooga. Darr summoned all the original witnesses many of whom no longer living in the Copper Basin. Fred Long, for instance, whose testimony at the first trial had not made him a very popular man in the Basin, had long since fled Isabella for the Norfolk, Virginia shipyards. Weakened by the Supreme Court’s dismissal of the confessions, the prosecution had to rely almost exclusively on Long’s testimony, which now, under greater scrutiny, seemed shaky. Long again claimed he had attended two meetings in April 1940 where CIO men had discussed shutting down TCC by dynamiting power lines. The defense poked holes in Long’s testimony, discrediting his claims of knowing certain key persons in the plot and then alleging that Long had been a paid agent of TCC and that owing to his desperate financial circumstances at the time “would swear to anything” for $25. Darr did not burden the defense team with a chorus of denied objections, nor did he let the trial drag. It all moved swiftly and within a couple of days of testimony it was clear that regardless of Long’s real integrity, the jury did not buy his accounts. Moving to Norfolk had not helped his reputation. An honest man did not need to leave. In this pro-union, working class city, the jury, which included two African Americans, took only ninety minutes to render its acquittal of the CIO men.634

A note about management’s perspective on the dynamiting affair is in order though records were virtually limited to the observations of R.E. Barclay. Beyond the arrest of “suspected dynamiters” and a passing remark that he was aware of FBI and local authorities’ “questioning” and arrest of Mitchell Anderson and “different members of the CIO,” the chief

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clerk’s diary stayed oddly silent on the dynamiting trials, convictions, and appeals. The absence of comments on all this by Barclay was particularly mysterious in light of Barclay’s preceding, regular chronicle of CIO actions. Determination of just what Barclay knew about the tactics Biggs and the FBI employed in forcing confessions was impossible from the available records, let alone whether he understood the full extent of his company’s relationship with the sheriff, but it is unlikely he was completely in the dark. The illegal subsidizing of Biggs’ proxy army and the employment of supervisory staff to intimidate workers were not the kind of actions Barclay could ever publicly approve of or admit knowing about if he wished to retain his reputation as a local historical sage. Barclay was concerned when conservative TCC workers complained to NLRB examiners in Atlanta that the Mine, Mill was “nothing but a part of Red Russia.” The chief clerk also expressed concern when a knifing at a CIO meeting resulted in bloodshed—but in each instance Barclay seemed much more concerned with the potential damage to TCC the CIO presence threatened than in the fate of miners. Still, he may have been bothered by his supervisors’ approval of clandestine efforts that did not square with Lewisohn’s public pronouncements on enlightened management. For all his regard for J.N. Houser’s production schemes and managerial approach, the shady circumstances surrounding the Ducktown dynamitings and their prosecution may have convinced Barclay to keep silent, protect his family, to keep his job and his local renown.635

**TCC contains AFL power**

Tennessee Copper Company’s sizable supervisory staff never sought sanctuary in Mine, Mill. Reward for their loyalty came to 137 of these men in June 1940 when TCC threw them a

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635 Comments in Barclay’s diary on the dynamiting and CIO actions during the period include those found for 26 February, 30 March, 7 April, 10, 15, 22, 24, 30 April; 4-6 March, 1940; and noting the beginning of the trial, 15 January 1941.
party at the fabulous Cowanee Club atop Smelter Hill. The night included supper followed by a program directed by popular Chattanooga entertainer, Vaughn Cornish. Chumminess between managers and supervisors was evident. The men expressed feigned “disappointment” when toastmaster and TCC official H.T. “Dad” Harper failed to toast himself after recognizing each member of the supervisory staff. The traditional absence of alcohol—a Lewisohn preference—did not diminish the crowd’s enjoyment of music and gaiety. As the evening wound down, Manager F. J. Longworth refocused the men’s attention to work and their responsibilities in maintaining good industrial relations, reviewed company performance and then restated “company’s policy with respect to Federal Labor Laws, particularly the Wagner Act as interpreted by the National Labor Relations Board.” Manager Longworth then pontificated about TCC’s supposed “policy of neutrality” that in fact contradicted how TCC had acted during the strike. Longworth went on to say it was critical for supervisory staff to reflect on “the company’s attitude while serving in such capacity.” Aware that a reporter from the Copper City Advance was at hand, Longworth directed his remarks not only at those before him, but also to the public at large who could then be assured that TCC practiced reasonable, if firm, labor relations designed thwart any new radicalism that might arise among resentful workers.

By this point the AFL had effectively beaten the CIO and the representative election that would follow in early 1941 merely formalized that loss. Once in position as the employees’ collective bargaining representative, it did not take long for the AFL leverage the war’s increased need for labor to the direct benefit of its membership. By the end of August 1941, AFL leadership announced they had secured a ten cent an hour raise for all TCC workers. The

636 “T.C. Supervisory Staff Entertained 137 Enjoy Dinner: Program Furnished by Vaughn Cornish,” Copper City Advance, 7 June 1940.
637 Copper City Advance, 7 June 1940
638 Copper City Advance, ibid.
minimum rate was now sixty cents an hour or $4.80 per 8-hour shift retroactive from August 1, 1941. Workers cheered AFL leader John Deal when he announced the new contract; he had led the negotiating team. 639

AFL district representative Paul Ayman, a guest speaker, also spoke, but his message was quite different than Deal’s. He began by instructing the men on the fairness TCC exhibited in the negotiating process. Ayman *then said that it was the duty of all union men to be loyal to the company*. He spoke to them like a parent to his children. This was a very different attitude toward Tennessee Copper than had been exhibited by Mine, Mill’s leaders. In fact, it is clear the real purpose of this particular AFL meeting was to instill gratitude throughout a workforce that might feel disgruntled. Such increases would only continue if workers maintained their loyalty to TCC. Union leaders had effectively taken a paternal role over the rank-and-file. They would not only be responsible for negotiating labor contracts but also for enforcing good working habits and making certain that the men understood their role in being dutiful, grateful employees of Tennessee Copper. The new regimen was in perfect keeping with Lewisohn and Houser’s concepts for proper industrial relations. 640

To spread the new gospel of appropriate worker loyalty, the *Copper City Advance* placed excerpts of Ayman’s lecture to workers prominently on the front page. “Give an honest day’s work for an honest day’s wage,” Ayman admonished workers. “Because if you don’t you are a thief [sic] and might as well steal the money from your employer’s pocket.” The Federation leader went on to demand that every union shop delegate who witnessed any sloughing off on the job was to report it to the union. Ayman also reminded the men of the benefits of sticking by the Federation. But he ground his proselytizing in fear and threats instead of hope. The tenor of

639 “Mass Meeting is Held by Union: A.F. of L. Committee Reports on Wage Increase,” and T.C. Co. Announces Huge Wage Increase,” *Copper City Advance*, 29 August 1941.  
640 *Copper City Advance*, ibid.
his remarks foretold the AFL authoritarianism over TCC workers that persisted through the war. Union leaders would side with the concerns of company operators instead of relying on a faith that men would naturally want to do their best on the job.641

There was a paradox at work here: AFL loyalists and craftsmen had recoiled at what they perceived as the communist, dictatorial, overly centralized and leveling influences on Mine, Mill from the CIO; they had chaffed at the possibility of losing their own industrial liberty if forced to work under John L. Lewis’s rigid standards and his authoritarian, autocratic and unpredictable leadership. AFL attacks on the CIO in the Copper Basin had repeatedly sought to harness the proud, some might say stubborn, independent spirit commonly reputed of mountain folk, which AFL officials claimed, had been a proud aspect of the Federation’s heritage. Yet now Federation district and local leaders implied that Copper Basin tradesmen possessed a weak work ethic that would require collective police action and mistrust of one another. Heavy supervision was the new liberty. Miners’ revulsion to all this makes complete sense and explains why CIO sympathizers did not give up the ghost. The contrast of the AFL’s effective hierarchical relationship with the rank in file with that of the CIO’s workers’ democracy and Mitchell C. Anderson’s selfless, respectful, and deferential service to Mine, Mill’s rank-and-file and their families, could not be starker. The campaign of the AFL was quite different from its actual governance once in power. The company’s so-called independent union, now to serving as company squire, bore the shield that protected the company’s image as protector of the people. The Federation in the Copper Basin would be TCC’s vassal in controlling the rank-and-file’s unfocused, suspect ambition; the AFL’s job was to galvanize workers’ efforts to make the company successful and therefore make the community prosper. This was unionism co-opted by rational managerial ambition and screened by republican, communal morality. The admonishing

641 Copper City Advance, ibid.
rhetoric of Ayman was the flipside to Lewisohn’s measured, reasonable instructions and Houser’s prescriptions.642

By late 1941 TCC now employed some 1600 men. This number would nearly double during the war and yet Federation platoons were never established at Isabella, only in Ducktown and Copperhill. The failure to establish an Isabella local appears to be, if not a punishment to workers there for their CIO support, than a recognition that Isabella facilities would be less important in the future. Had Tennessee Copper needed the AFL to organize Isabella men, a local would have been established. Instead it appears the company stayed out of this and relied on labor-management committees to oversee production regimens. The company likely took this step to avoid possible conflict between resentful miners, craftsmen and supervisory staff.643

The full extent to which the AFL organized the TCC workforce is unclear. It seems plain however that the union had little direct effect on the coordination and maintenance of the safety programs initiated by J.N. Houser. The labor-management teams, Lewisohn and Mitchell later described as the backbone of the company’s success during the war, took the lead in all areas responsible for overseeing production efficiency. The unions maintained its role in negotiating wages, outlining workers grievances, and assisting in personnel development and production standards, but it remained a responsibility of management, it seems, to oversee training and safety standards through the labor-management committees.644

A report from Thanksgiving 1940 captured the success of the system. TCC’s substantial crew of leadburners had gone fourteen years without a single accident. The company threw 125 of these cautious tradesmen and their families a party. Toastmaster Herman Key entertained the crowd in a congratulatory speech given over “a big chicken dinner by the Old Mill Grill” while a

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642 Copper City Advance, ibid.
local quartet serenaded the crowd with violin and piano. Speakers contrasted the rise in accidents outside of work and in industry generally with the TCC leadburners’ wonderful record. Superintendent of the Copperhill acid plant E.M. Jones acknowledged the men’s great accomplishment. In an amusing nod to the popular Shirley Temple film, “H.T. Harper, head of the Service Department of the Tennessee Copper Company, was introduced as the ‘Admiral of the Good Ship Safety.’”

Known as “Dad” among the men, Harper told jokes about many of the men, roasting a few. A skit followed that reminded the crowd of the “Value of a Man” and included dangerous and seductive characters such as “Carelessness” and “Gloom,” while in contrast, “Safety” and “Employer” stood as heroes. A local reverend from the First Baptist Church of McCaysville rounded out the program by praising the men and reminding them of their place in God’s plan. Finally, Mrs. Carl Abernathy closed the meeting with a solo performance of “God Bless America.” The entire affair was the quintessential Lewisohn and Houser creation: satisfied operators and supervisors, grateful, proud, and dutiful workers, in communion, all sharing the blessings of their effort.

Houser’s safety program maintained due diligence in other sectors of the company as well as production levels increased in the early 1940s; incidents of injury rose only slightly. Overall mine safety took a prominent place in mining reports being second only to total production tonnage as a concern for the company’s mining superintendent, Lamar Weaver in the monthly reports.

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645 “Leadburners Celebrate 14 Year Safety Record,” Copper City Advance, 29 November 1940.
646 Copper City Advance, ibid.
647 Lamar Weaver, Superintendent of Mines to F.W. Longworth, Manager, Tennessee Copper Company Mining Department, monthly reports, 10 February 1941, 7 August 1940 and 6 January 1942, 1 and 2.
Tragedy could still intrude though on what remained generally dangerous undertakings. The first half of 1943 proved deadly, the week following New Year’s 1943 seeing the worst mining tragedy in the Copper Basin’s history. At the end of their shift on the afternoon of Tuesday 5 January, eight men were awaiting the electric locomotive to take them out of the Burra Burra mine. Sulphite dust in the mine was set off by a “routine blasting operation, which knocked all five belts off the motor which blows fresh air into the mine.” Forty-five men were trapped below for over an hour on level 10 of the mine between Burra Burra and Boyd mines. Weaver and his rescue teams immediately went into action and got out fourteen men, but four were already dead. Another thirty-two men remained underground for about an hour and a half as word spread fast throughout the Basin and families and friends rushed to Ducktown to find out about loved ones. Eight men were killed in the blast and another fourteen were injured, mostly suffering lung burns and burnt eyes; every one of the men lived had lived in the Basin, from Copperhill and Ducktown of course, but also from little settlements long since forgotten by most people who live in the area today, from Palmer and Mary Mine. Of the eight men who sat nearest to the blast, only one survived, Arthur Brown, who miraculously had not been seriously injured. The dead included Simon Dunn, a pumpman, drillmen Tom Fritts, Homer Payne, L.G. Spurling, Elmer Pless, and Ralph Hancock. Electrician W.D. Deal and trammer Earnest Helton, who apparently had been driving to pick them up died in the blast too. An investigation by the Bureau of Mines stated that the cause of the accident was “unavoidable” owing no doubt to limits of era’s mining ventilation technology.648

Management maintained due diligence at the TCC-run East Tennessee Ordinance Works according to one report dated a year after the plant had begun operations. “Since the local

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648 “8 Killed, 14 Injured in Mine Blast Tuesday,” Copper City Advance, 8 January 1943.
plant... began operation in July 1942, there [had] not been a lost-time injury reported.\textsuperscript{649} The City Advance noted that the safety record was of particular importance “in face of the fact that in 1941 industrial accidents were responsible for a nation-wide loss of 460,000,000 man days or enough time to make 11,000,000 Garand rifles.” Lieutenant Colonel Donald K. Hyde, first officer of the acid plant stated that this was the same amount of time it would have taken to make all the war equipment for outfitting two hundred thousand soldiers. Hyde credited the local plant’s record to the “eternal vigilance” of TCC surveys by the firm’s safety engineers.\textsuperscript{650}

The CIO attempts a return

Increased national anger over aggressive unionism tarnished the reputation of the conservative AFL, diminished its reputation, and made it susceptible to attacks from within and without of the Copper Basin. Popular congressman Estates Kefauver captured the public’s disgust with strikes that affected national defense. In his column “Week in Washington,” then regular feature in The Copper City Advance, Kefauver compared the heroic actions of American in Tunisia in driving back Marshal Rommel with the selfishness of homefront AFL strikes that shutdown flying fortress production in the far west. Kefauver argued that AFL assemblymen’s walkout and their demands for a 50% pay increase represented an attitude of dangerous presumption among workers that the war was won, when instead, owing to labor strife and failure to heed pledges not to strike, “our defenses are crumbling.”\textsuperscript{651}

Closer to home, Mine, Mill sympathizers in the Copper Basin accused the AFL of timidity in negotiating contracts with TCC. The AFL’s 1940 contract with TCC had been

\textsuperscript{649} “War Plant Near Safety Record,” Copper City Advance, 24 September 1943.
\textsuperscript{650} Copper City Advance, ibid.
\textsuperscript{651} Estes Kefauver, “The Week in Washington” Copper City Advance, 5 May 1943; a summary of how the attacks on labor during the war energized the anti-union and open-shop campaigns can be found in Harris, ibid., 42.
renewed twice but was up for renegotiation in late 1944. Initially the company and the AFL claimed each had agreed to informal arrangements to continue the contract, but a lot of miners were not satisfied with this plan. In September 1944, Mine, Mill petitioned the NLRB, claiming it represented “a substantial number of the Company’s production and maintenance employees” who requested that TCC make no further agreements with the Federation until a proper bargaining agent could again be determined. The company made no reply to Mine, Mill. The company and the AFL both stated to NLRB examiners however that they had the right to inspect CIO union cards and to “cross-examine” the CIO field organizer. There was reason for doubt in light of past union shenanigans in exaggerating membership figures, but the Board decided to overlook the complaints because, in light of the enormous burdens placed on the Board during the war, it had for some while been accepting cards as “an expedient” in determining workers’ interests in a union. The Labor Board’s Field Examiner found that 561 of the 1,429 TCC employees had CIO authorization cards all of whom were then present on the company’s payroll. The NLRB also rejected claims that the AFL and the company had “automatically,” though not in writing, renewed contract agreements with its workforce. In short, workers’ best interests were not being addressed. That said, the NLRB directed that a vote be taken for a fourth time among TCC’s rank-and-file and set eligibility to vote based upon 1944 employment rolls just prior to the Board’s direction, including workers who had been ill, or had been in the armed forces and could show themselves at the polls. The new election was to be held just after the New Year, 1945.652

The unions now fought over the make up of electorate since the constituency of the workforce had changed as a result of national defense production. The Board settled on a plan whereby all TCC employees could vote excepting “clerical employees, chemists, technical employees, militarized guards, and all supervisory employees.” The excluded employees included about a dozen female high school students TCC had employed during the war as “chemists.”

Sensing the seriousness of the challenge to the labor status quo just before Christmas 1944, TCC General Manager J.N. Houser took an unusual step and spoke directly to his workers. The address was unusual for Houser because in all the years he had been TCC’s general manager his remarks had rarely been reported in the local press even though he regularly visited the works in the Basin. Houser used an occasion to praise workers for their “all time high” record acid production as an opportunity to remind them also of their patriotic duty to buy war bonds, maintain production levels and not become distracted by political or labor issues. For the millions of men and women fighting the enemy, he said, TCC copper and chemical products were critically important. Never mentioning any union by name, Houser understood that the recent national election had stirred up demands for change so he directed workers to move on and to get back to the job of winning the war. Leave the quarrels behind. “We hear the army and navy need more copper and there is a demand for sulphuric acid that cannot be met, [Therefore] we need more men to do our part and above all we need steady work on the part of those now employed.” This last point was clearly meant to be a reminder to workers of the last time there had been a challenge to the industrial peace of the Copper Basin led by the CIO and Mine, Mill.

653 NLRB Case No. 10-R-1320, ibid.
654 Copper City Advance, ibid.
Houser thus soldered patriotism and duty to mature acceptance of the results of democracy. His point was to renew cooperation among the workers and neutralize the CIO challenge to the status quo. The timing of Houser’s speech was important as well. Given in late December, just before the Christmas holiday, this was to be a time of peace, spent with families, not a time of disquieting labor unrest or worse… strikes. Houser’s call for maintaining home-front domestic tranquility in the workforce, lay situated alongside a regular feature in the *Copper City Advance* that chronicled local servicemen’s experiences in the war, *With Our Boys in the Service*. That feature’s content would have increased the collateral impact of the GM’s words, because people learned about the many empathetic letters sent to Mrs. Campbell who had lost her boy and of Copperhill Private First Class Fred Green who had been awarded the Bronze Star for heroic achievement in Italy. They cheered in reading about Clement Bailey finally coming home after nearly two years in the South Pacific, thrilled to the news of Copperhill gunner Virgil Davis flying in the turret of a B-25, or marveled at the happenstance experienced by Lt. Edward Middleton in China when he ran into some pals from Ducktown.655

Through all this locals might mull over Houser’s admonitions and charges and rethink, perhaps, whether any real change in labor representation was really needed. It may be that Mine, Mill and the CIO leaders thought it prudent and advantageous to build on miners’ frustration with the AFL. Houser’s call was also self-serving, of course. But to most other folk in the Copper Basin, to challenge to the AFL’s position during wartime weakened the efforts the community’s effort to destroy Hitler. The whole labor controversy could seem like just another example of self-centered unionism.

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655 “*With Our Boys in the Service*,” and “Election Ordered For T.C. Workers,” *Copper City Advance*, 21 December 1944. Also, “Labor Board Sets Election for 10th” *Copper City Advance*, 4 January 1945. It should be noted that not a single issue of the *Copper City Advance* during the war did not have some mention of Copper Basin men and women’s overseas accomplishments and sacrifice.
Houser and TCC benefitted from this sentiment and the CIO advance ended in a whimper as the AFL won the election by significant margin, 593 to 458. The figures do not represent the enormous increase of workers under the supervision of TCC in the Basin during the war owing to the NLRB election restrictions and, most important, because the US Army owned the ETOW, its employees were not affected by this vote. In all seventeen TCC men checked “no union,” a dozen ballots were spoiled and hundreds of workers must have stayed away from the polls completely. Their actions underscored a repetition of the unions’ failure to win over all voters that had been active in the 1940 election. Another fact that must have frustrated CIO organizers concerned the number of Mine, Mill members who held authorization cards but who chose not to vote for the union; that figure stood at roughly 18%. What was going on here? Houser’s call for restrain in his exceptional remarks before the Christmas holiday appears to have succeeded. That said, many questions about this election remain because a lot of evidence about it was missing from the records. Barclay’s diary said little and reports in the Copper City Advance carried little more than the election results. More curious though was that for reasons that this study has not been able to determine there was no follow-up report by the NLRB on this election.656

Tending to the Old Red Scar: Human and Environmental Costs

Organic chemical products made from the compounds and elements extracted from Copper Basin ore and produced in Tennessee Corporation facilities in Florida and Atlanta no doubt did the job of assisting patriotic gardeners. Folks who grew up in the Copper Basin stated time and again, there were few snakes and other things that fed on insects because the sulphuric acid in the random smelter emissions made certain that “there weren’t no bugs.” The paradox

656 NLRB Case No. 10-R-1320, ibid ; “A.F. of L. Wins Labor Board Vote,” Copper City Advance, 11 January 1945.
should not be lost then that the very ores which when smelted produced toxins destructive
even to reduce orchards and gardens to dust also had the power to make those same gardens
bloom splendidly when properly refined. Sold by Tennessee Corporation as Loma and Loma
Dust, these products could easily have also been used around the Copper Basin by the men of the
Civilian Conservation Corps and Tennessee Valley Authority in programs designed to
“revegetate” the Copper Basin’s raw red hills. TCC officials worked closely with these
organizations as field teams of mostly young men planted millions of trees and countless kudzu
plants and later spread tens of thousands of pounds of seeds throughout the Old Red Scar and
across old lumber sites in Polk County.657

Much has been written by outsiders of the Copper Basin chronicling some of these
efforts. Here it is sufficient to note that this long and ultimately greening process improved still
further TCC’s image as a benevolent corporate citizen and affected, to some extent, the dynamics
of the local labor markets. To the extent this work affected the reputations of the competing
unions during the labor war, the AFL may have gotten some peripheral benefit. The union had
successfully organized local TVA crews. The CCC on the other hand may have been seen as
unfair competition to local workers. AFL President William Green had feared that creation of
the CCC might lead to the “militarization of American youth” and drive down the wages of …
employed forest workers.” Yet government policy preventing CCC unionization helped
maintain the positive reputation this most popular program enjoyed even among the most
reactionary critics of the New Deal.658

657 The first of four CCC camps established in Polk County was responsible for improving the road along the Ocoee
River down to Parksville Dam and power station. “First Term CCC ends October 1st,” Copper City Advance, 15
September 1933.
658 William Green quoted in Engle, Everything Was Wonderful: A Pictorial History of the Civilian Conservation
Corps in Shenandoah Nation, 22.
By the end of 1933 the CCC operated four such camps in Polk. Their activities were expanded from road building and forestry preservation and conservation to “revegetating” the Copper Basin after the most necessary local road improvements had been completed. Polk County benefited enormously from both the CCC and TVA. The *Copper City Advance* praised the CCC’s “leading activity” in educating local young men, regularly applauded the work of the Corps and noted the activities at CCC anniversary celebrations. When federal officials tried to de-mobilize a local camp, a cadre of local civic groups including Kiwanis, the American Legion, and the Copperhill Local (AFL?) Union worked to keep the camp alive and 300 young men on active duty. The Copperhill paper applauded these efforts. “This [CCC] camp has been [of] much value to this vicinity in the way of forestry protection and road building and inasmuch as further profitable and beneficial work can yet be done.”

Old U.S. Forestry Department correspondence revealed another symbiotic relationship between TCC and the government beyond the munitions and chemicals industry. During the war, TCC added to its goodwill by releasing reports on company initiated environmental improvements in the Copper Basin that sometimes accompanied updates on expanding war production. Reforestation of the Basin by the CCC had commenced in cooperation with the TVA long before the war, but these expanded in the early forties. It was hoped these efforts would transform the Copper Basin into “a different looking place” and augment company efforts “in reducing the volume of escaping Sulphur gas.” “Coupled with better atmospheric

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659 Images from the Ducktown Basin Museum show CCC boys planting trees in the Basin. Years later similar mass planting would turn to kudzu, a plant that would help contribute to spread what many local refer to disparagingly as “the common green” a mixture of trash trees, weeds, and pine.
660 “Effort Made to Keep CCC Camp,” Copper City Advance, 26 March 1937.
661 Miscellaneous files with TVA records between TCC management and sundry TVA and CCC officials, 1941.
conditions,” the *Copper City Advance* continued, “these [environmental] improvements would benefit all residents of the Copper Basin.”

TVA oversaw CCC men who worked to limit erosion affecting two main creeks that ran through Tennessee Copper Company property. Potato and Brushy Creeks flowed into the Ocoee and the silt from these streams had been a problem for dams below the Basin years. According to the Associate Chief of TVA’s Watershed Protection Division, Kenneth J. Seigworth, “Mr. Mitchell [was] entirely in accord with this plan.” Mitchell’s assent was not surprising given TCC’s influence on the project. TVA press releases regarding progress on the projects went through his office so that the company had an ability to edit the mission of the CCC in the vicinity. TCC took advantage of this relationship by making certain the press releases notified other regional private property owners that TCC was not getting special treatment.

But of course the company was getting special treatment. No other surviving firm or private citizen in the area had done as much damage to the environs over the course of a couple generations as had TCC. But by stating that other private land owners could benefit from CCC erosion control and prevention work, the Company shaped its image as a good corporate citizen. Evidence of Mitchell’s use of such releases to benefit company goodwill came in one report that clarified TCC was working with the University of Tennessee in “experiments… conducted in the most badly denuded areas [of the Basin] to determine what reclamation measures will be possible there [sic].”

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662 “T.C. is Operating At Full Capacity,” *Copper City Advance*, 31 May 1940.
663 Mr. Richard Kilbourne, chief, Watershed Protection Division (Tennessee Valley Authority) from? Kenneith J. Seigworth, Associate Chief, Watershed Protection Division, 3 April 1941.
664 “CCC Camp to be Established at Copperhill, Tennessee” 137-B (Copperhill, Tenn), Forestry Department Files, TVA records, National Archives, Georgia; and, Kenneth J. Seigworth, Associate Chief, Watershed Protection Division, Forestry Relations Department to Mr. T.A. Mitchell, Assistant Manager, Tennessee Copper Company, Copperhill, Tennessee, 8 April 1941.
665 Seigworth to Mitchell, 8 April 1941, ibid.
666 “For Immediate Release—Tennessee Valley Authority, Knoxville, Tennessee,” 30 April 1941.
As a result of this convenient relationship between a federal agency and the Tennessee Copper Company, the firm could avoid the direct costs associated with the renovation of its own toxic and denuded properties. It also managed to avoid the labor problems associated with this venture and thus avoid any more negative influence on its well controlled labor relations. The same cannot be said for the CCC officials overseeing the camps charged with doing the grunt work in the Old Red Scar. Regional CCC Officer A.W. Hartman had a devil of a time keeping boys in those red hills. In a plea to his boss, Hartman complained, “the camp has been consistently low in enrollee strength and the TVA has asked that a special effort be made to build up to normal strength so that work can be pushed along more expeditiously.”

It should be remembered that the Copper Basin once had the reputation among locals as being the “only desert east of the Mississippi”—a notoriety sensational for selling postcards to shocked outsiders, if also proof to locals of their region’s industrial potency and might. But the Basin played hell on CCC boys digging and planting in late summer on the treeless, dusty, stinking, sweltering terrain around Ducktown. “The location of this camp is such that a number of former enrollees have considered it undesirable and the turnover has been rather large.” Hartman wrote, understating the brutal conditions. Still, he had little sympathy for men who complained on the public’s dime. His recommendation was to ship all CCC whiners to Ducktown from CCC camps as they were disbanded. It was a suggestion no doubt resented by boys who had hoped for CCC placement at more sylvan camps in the Shenandoah.

The CCC boys did their part in trying to re-green the red hills until the government disbanded the corps. Then TVA continued these efforts with later owners of TCC property, but it would take many years for real progress to be made. After Cities Service razed Smelter Hill

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667 A.W. Hartman, Regional CCC Officer, Memorandum for Liaison Officer Graham, 30 October 1941.
668 Hartman to Graham, 30 October 1941, ibid.
in the 1960s, a creep of green brush overtook the old grange site’s red knolls and gullies. Over
the next two decades mines shut when ores ran out or became too expensive to extract and more
and more of the old TCC works slipped first into rusting brown then greening silence. By the
early 1980s the collection of trash trees, pines, kudzu and weeds had spread so much locals who
remained after collapse of the Basin’s non-ferrous industry disparagingly called it all the
“common green.”

Although new growth aided the looks of the Basin—in least in the eyes of visitors—
contemporary government reports by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
assessed the continuing local health conditions and the threats resulting from generations of
industrial dumping and seepage into the Copper Basin’s air, soil, and water. The consequences
and warnings in one 2005 report supports the collective memories of locals who remembered
how common it was for folks around the Basin to be sick. Miners remained susceptible to
silicosis in spite of improvements in ventilation. New Deal era physicians had noticed
malnutrition among some miners’ children and had worked to improve local diets. Records were
scarce on the subject for the middle twentieth century, but residents remembered that to TCC’s
credit, the company had paid a worker’s medical bills if one became injured on the job; others
remembered that no money was ever exchanged for medical treatment at the TCC hospital at
Copperhill. Improvements in pediatric medicine improved and Copper Basin infant and
childhood mortality rates declined, but industrial workers continued to succumb, their
constitutions worn down by the toxins. Older folk had an especially difficult time of it, but local
residents of all ages contracted respiratory disease too and other chronic ailments. The list of

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injuries in recent medical assessments goes far beyond general repertory diseases and miners’ silicosis.670

In the early 2000s, owing to community concerns, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health Involvement, began a study “among former employees of the Copperhill smelter” and those who had worked as little as three years “in the smelter, mill, or sulfur operations after 1946. Local people had become convinced some diseases could be directly attributed to Copper Basin industrial emissions and waste exposure: Acute sinusitis, asbestosis, asthmas, bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emphysema, lung disease, shortness of breath, tuberculosis, hypertension, myriad hematologic (blood) disorders, immunologic diabetes, multiple sclerosis, neurologic amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig’s disease), stroke, Parkinson’s disease, liver failure, liver disease, acute hepatitis, kidney disease, psoriasis, and twenty kinds of cancers.671

Health and Human Services assessments of mortality rate support locals’ claims. Age-adjusted mortality rates in the late 1990s owing to nonmalignant respiratory disease among Polk County white males was one-third higher than for Tennessee generally and even for coal mining regions of the state; age-adjusted mortality rates for lung and thoracic cancer in white females through the early 1990s was also one third higher than in the coal regions and nearly four times more often than among Tennessee women generally; and age-adjusted mortality rates for lung

671 “Health Consultation: Copper Mining District, Copperhill, Polk County, Tennessee, EPA Facility ID: TN0001890839”
and thoracic cancer in white males stood half-again as high in Polk County than in both the coal regions and the state generally. 672

Granted, some workers smoked, abused alcohol, or ate poorly, but this was an exceptionally poisonous industrial site. Other assessments reveal the level of exposure endured by locals for generations. These were all the more astonishing because they record the amount of toxins that seeped into the water systems from former industrial sites long after most industrial work stopped in the late 1980s. Put out by the triumvirate of state, federal, and private interests who presently oversee clean-up of the region, these Basin Briefings revealed that only after extensive and expensive clean-up measures commenced in the early 21st century was it now possible to prevent almost 200,000 pounds per month of heavy metals from being dumped into the Ocoee River from Copper Basin creeks. “Put another way,” stated one report bluntly, “every day, iron and other metals that weigh as much as a full-size car are [now] prevented from entering the Ocoee River.” For a century before these clean-up efforts began, toxins constantly seeped from poisoned ground or blew as dust across the Old Red Scar and into the lives of people. 673

Markings from burial plots now much older than any living generation provide poignant reminders of the costs endured by working people in the Basin’s toxic environment. Although local folk relied on a stern Protestantism to fortify themselves when dear ones passed, the many lamb-shaped tombstones set for children in the Copperhill Cemetery make plain the pain accompanying high mortality rates among children. Their deaths must have been debilitating to their families. “Weep not father and mother” pled the markings on a stone for “Chelsey son of

672 Ibid, figures 2-4.
673 Basin Briefings, Copper Basin Site Partnership, November 2003. The Partnership “includes representatives of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and Glenn Springs Holdings, Inc. The latter owns most of the old TCC/Cities Service properties that are the focus of the clean-up efforts.
W.F. & M. L Dilbeck.” Another stone counseled that expecting perfection in this world would be vain gesture “for we fail walking for glory for Thee.” Around the grounds the remains of Copper Basin Founding Families lay everywhere underfoot. The McCays had their dead interred on this mount as did the Barclays and Sissons, the graves of the latter scattered in pieces, many made anonymous by vandalism and the elements. Other sentinels of the dead abound, for Jones, Davenports, Longs, Guinns, Bowers, and Gethers, Vellenowells, Robinsons, and Browns. 674

The juxtaposition of old sentiments for the dead carved in once glimmering marble, granite or the red-gneiss common in the hills and the present generation’s casual dismissal of this place can sadden or bring hope: “She was a kind and affectionate wife, a fond mother, and a friend to all,” “He was beloved by God and Man.” “She has gone to her home in heaven and all her afflictions are over.” It speaks volumes that this place is now in such disrepair considering how much effort people long ago put into it to make the cemetery a place for eternal memorial. That there has been little weeding of the place over the years is clear. In many places the old rawness of the Old Red Scar is exposed here—no common green covers a century of industrial battering. Most of the grave sites are in ruin and it appears that only a very few locals ever venture up to the cemetery anymore to pay respects to the dead. On a recent mid-summer’s day, only a lop-sided, Christmas star made of incandescent lights watches over the place now. Crooked, its sights set out across the valley and over the river and no longer upon this once-cherished resting place for the Copper Basin dead. 675

674 The author did an informal survey of the Copperhill Cemetery, 8 February 2009.
675 Simson, Copperhill Cemetery survey, ibid.
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