

Cork Mother Jones Lecture, 1914

By James Green

It's a great honor to be here with you tonight to present the Mother Jones lecture at the start of this grand festival you have planned.

Thanks to the Cork Mother Jones Committee from me from my wife Janet Grogan and our son Nick for treating us with such great kindness and hospitality.

When I told my 92 mother I was coming to Cork, she told me that her grandfather came from Ireland after he settled on a farm in Wisconsin, but she wasn't sure where he came from over here. We made some inquiries with distant relatives who told us that her grandfather, Cornelius O'Keefe, was born somewhere in Cork County in 1860. I hope to find out where. Of course, such a discovery makes this visit even more special.

The Boston, the city where I have worked for past 36 years, has, as you know, has been shaped in profound ways by the Irish who came there from County Cork and from all over Ireland. You may also know that Boston is a strong trade union town, like Cork.

For many years, I worked as a labor educator and union supporter with my old University comrade Terry McLarney, who is here tonight, AND

with a whole host of Irish American trade union activists in the Boston area, including Jeff Crosby, who is here also here tonight.

Jeff has been a bold and visionary union leader in Massachusetts for years and now he has taken up where Terry I left off as labor educators.

Speaking of Irish-American labor leaders from Boston, I am happy to bring you greetings and special citation from our mayor Martin J. Walsh, the son of an immigrant laborer who became head of the Building Trades Council, served in the state legislature, and then won election to city hall by forging an effective coalition of blue color whites, African Americans and immigrants.

Tonight I am going to tell you some tales of Mother Jones and her adventures in the wild and bloody coal mine fields of West Virginia and to show you why the mine workers of the Mountain State became her favorite sons.

Most of you know the story of Mother Jones's amazing life, but just in case some of you don't, I'd like to offer a few highlights from her story.

Mary Harris was born in 1837 and raised by poor Irish parents who lived off and on here in the city of Cork and on a country farm not far from here. When she was nine years old, Mary's kinfolk talked in hushed tones of the blight on the potato crop and the stench that rose from the fields.

A year later, when the Great Hunger spread, she boarded a ship with her father bound for Canada—two of the two hundred thousand people who left their island homes seeking a new life overseas in the year the Irish called “Black 47.”

When Mary’s mother arrived in Toronto to join them, she sent her daughter away to a convent school. After two terms, the girl displayed an independent spirit by setting out on her own to make a living as a schoolteacher in Michigan. Prior to the Civil War, this adventurous young woman moved to Memphis, where she met and married George Jones, an ironworker and union man. She gave birth to four children and raised them in the poor white area of Memphis known as “Pinch Gut.” Soon after her fourth child was born in 1867, foundry owners took advantage of an economic downturn to close their shops and lock out their union men. George lost his job, and Mary had to find a way to nourish three youngsters and an infant.

As the Jones family struggled to make ends meet, yellow fever raced through the river districts. Wealthy people fled the city, but poor folks in Pinch Gut stayed put and prayed that the angel of death would pass over their houses.

Few were so blessed and many succumbed to what people called the “strangers’ disease,” so named because the fever struck immigrants hardest. One by one, the Jones children fell ill with the disease. First came the chills and aches, and then came the nausea, cramps, and, finally, hemorrhages. One by one, Mary held her babies as they died; one by one, she washed their little bodies and readied them for burial. Then her husband caught the fever and died. “I sat alone through nights of grief,” she wrote in her memoir. “No one came to me. No one could. Other homes were as stricken as mine.”

All day and all night long, she sat in her shanty listening to the grating sound of the death carts’ wheels. The experience could have destroyed this thirty-year-old widow, but it didn’t.

Leaving Memphis to the dead, Jones made her way to Chicago, where she earned a living sewing dresses for wealthy women until she lost her shop in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. She picked herself up and started again, but before long a depression gripped the economy and hung on for three years. She suffered through the hard times with her working-class neighbors, all the while hating the aristocrats who employed her because they ignored the plight of the jobless masses wandering the streets.

For the next two decades, the widowed dressmaker witnessed wave after wave of protest by Chicago's working people. Jones was there during the depression year of 1874 when the unemployed marched on city hall demanding "Bread or work!" and she was there three years later when the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 rocked the city and the police killed more than thirty men and boys, most of them Irish Catholics.

No city experienced more massive labor unrest during the Gilded Age than Chicago and no city produced more radicals. Mary Jones was destined to be one of them.

After a baptism of fire during a bloody railroad boycott in 1894 Jones left Chicago for California. Another depression had descended on the land and she wanted get relief for the unemployed from the government. Somewhere in the west she linked up with a column of unemployed workers as they marched toward Washington, DC. When she joined the tramps that year, Mother Jones kicked off a journey that would put her on the road for the next twenty-five years.

Three years later, when the United Mine Workers of America (UMW) declared a general strike in the Pennsylvania coalfields, Jones rushed from one coal patch to another, where she demonstrated a captivating speaking ability, organized food donations from local farmers,

staged parades with strikers' children, and mobilized wives and daughters to harass strikebreakers. In miners' lore, women brought bad luck or even death to the miners if they were seen around the pits, but President Michael Ratchford was so impressed with Jones's work that he ignored this taboo and hired her to work as a "walking delegate" for the union; then he sent her off to West Virginia to agitate among mountaineer miners.

The 1897 strike failed in West Virginia but it got spectacular results in the Northern coal fields, where coal operators agreed to a historical trade agreement with the UMW; this pact promised to end strikes in the industry by creating an industrial parliament of owners and workers, and by granting miners a host of rights they had demanded for decades.

From the very start, however, there was "a gun pointed at the heart of the industrial government in the northern coal industry." This was cheap, clean-burning coal that had flowed north from nonunion mines in West Virginia during the 1897 strike. That year, nineteen thousand men produced roughly 12 million tons of fuel in the Mountain State, enough to win some customers away from the Midwestern coal companies shut down by the great strike.

During the next fifteen years, however, those shipments would appear as little more than ripples in the river of coal that would flow out of West Virginia's collieries; in that period of time, the workforce would expand by fifty thousand and production would rise by more than 1,000 percent.

With this threat pressing on his union, UMW president John Mitchell promoted Jones to the rank of "international organizer" at a yearly salary of \$500; then he sent her to West Virginia on another vital organizing mission. In her autobiography, Jones provided a harrowing account of what happened when she entered the field that year, a place where union sympathizers were threatened with death if they distributed handbills for her talks. After a few months of work, she left the mountains with a heavy heart, saddened that "the sacrifices men and woman made to get out from under the iron heel of the gunmen were so often in vain!"

But when she addressed the UMWA's convention early in 1901, Jones told the delegates gathered in Indianapolis that West Virginia's miners were not the dumb hillbillies and "scabs" other northern organizers made them out be. "You may say what you please about the West Virginia miners being no good," but "I wish you could see how they live." These men worked and lived in wretched conditions and were oppressed by fellows who made the czar of Russia seem like a "gentleman,"

But these mountaineer miners were, she said, “some of the noblest men I have met in all the country.” In closing, Jones urged the union delegates not to betray these fellow workers. “My brothers,” she concluded, “I shall consider it an honor if, when you write my epitaph upon my tombstone, you say, ‘Died fighting their battles in West Virginia.’”

The story of Mother Jones in West Virginia begins in a little mining town on the Great Kanawha river that flows from high the mountains down to the Ohio and the great Mississippi. By 1901, this river town had become a bustling commercial center, serving hundreds of mine workers who lived and worked in the new collieries located above the village where the Kellys Creek Coal Mining Company had built houses for the miners and several tall wooden houses on the hillsides for the superintendents. A railroad from the original mine cut the town in half, and on one side of the tracks there were rows of company-built shacks spilling down to the river.

After Jones arrived in town on a flatboat, only a few early risers noticed the strange woman meandering through the streets with a shawl covering her shoulders and the top of her embroidered dress. She had a pretty face with bright blue eyes and white hair that fell down on her rosy cheeks, and she wore what one observer described as “a nice-lady black pot

hat.” A woman of average height, sturdily built but not fat, she appeared to be in her fifties, but she marched along like someone much younger.

When the visitor saw a lamplight flickering through a window of a grocery store, she knocked on the door, and the proprietor invited her into a back room and offered her some breakfast. She thanked him for his hospitality and then introduced herself as Mrs. Mary Jones, a “walking delegate” for the UMWA. At that moment, the storekeeper realized that he was sitting face-to-face with none other than the notorious Mother Jones, the agitator who had been raising hell up north. “All the time he was frightened and kept looking out the little window,” Jones later wrote of the grocer. He told her that if the mine owners knew she was in his store, they would close it down; nonetheless, the shopkeepers offered to help his famous guest by telling her how to get word out to the miners that she would hold a secret meeting on a hillside that night.

At nightfall Jones trudged up the creek bed behind a young miner carrying a kerosene lantern. When she came to the designated spot on a mountain slope, a group of forty men waited for her in the midst of some boulders. While her comrade held a light over her head, Mother Jones spoke about a great union movement that had lifted Pennsylvania coal diggers up out of poverty and railed about the men and boys who had been “murdered”

in a mine explosion at Red Ash by greedy West Virginia mine owners who valued profits more than human lives.

That night after she arrived, Jones trudged up to a slope above Kellys Creek, Jones where bunch of miners waited for her. As a young miner held a kerosene lamp above her Jones called upon her listeners to stand up and act like men, “not like cringing serfs.” She carried on until the time was right to ask who among them would come forward and take the “oath of obligation” to the miners’ union. To her delight, all of them lined up, and then one by one each man came before her and raised his right hand and swore to honor the principles of brotherhood; forbear any act of discrimination against a fellow worker on account of creed, color, or nationality; and “defend freedom of thought whether expressed by tongue or pen.”

Mother Jones retired for the evening feeling pleased with her work, but when she awoke the next morning, a miner burst into her room with terrible news: There had been spies among the miners who took the union oath the night before, and when the men who had taken the pledge reported for work that day, the pit boss told each one to step aside; then he ordered them to go clear out of the company’s houses. None of them would ever work in the valley again.

“This started the fight,” Jones noted years later. It was a fight she would carry to many other coal towns that fall and winter. It was a fight that would brand her “the most dangerous woman in America,” a hard fight that would link her purpose on earth to the destiny of West Virginia’s coal miners, the men she would always call her “boys.”

As soon as Jones heard that the Kellys Creek Coal Mining Company had fired all the miners who had taken the union pledge, she planned a protest. When word of this agitation reached company headquarters back, the general manager hurried down on his special railroad car and held a meeting of his own in front of the company store. When he told his miners they should be ashamed of being led around by an old woman, several of them defiantly shouted “Hurrah for Mother Jones!”

The next day was Sunday, and after prayer services ended that morning, Jones sent runners up the valley with word that she would hold a rally to support the men who had been fired. When the miners and their families walked down Kellys Creek, Jones gathered them in front of the company’s hotel and yelled for the general manager to come out. “He did not appear,” she recalled in her memoir, but “two of the company’s lap dogs were on the porch. One of them said, ‘I’d like to hang that old woman to a tree.’ ‘Yes,’ said the other, ‘and I’d like to pull the rope.’”

“On we marched to our meeting place under the trees,” she remembered. “Over a thousand people came and the two lap dogs came sniveling along too.” Jones began to speak under the crimson cedars, but then stopped suddenly and pointed at the two men who followed the parade. She put her back up against a big tree and called out to them in a stage voice: “You said that you would like to hang this old woman to a tree! Well, here’s the old woman and here’s the tree. Bring along your rope and hang her!” Jones excelled at this kind of theatrical performance, and her antics thrilled and amused the crowd. By the time the meeting ended, she had gathered even more colliers into her flock.

By this time, many tales of Mother Jones’s bravery had circulated on Kellys Creek with accounts of how she once “walked right by a copperhead and never paused,” and how she strolled past an unsuspecting foreman and into the mine “with a carbide lamp on a miner’s hat she borrowed.” Jones found “her boys, sat with them on the gob pile [of slate], and organized while they shared their beans and fatback and cornbread with her.” On another occasion, she “had to get out of one mining camp at night because her boys found out that the superintendent and his men were plotting to kill her and an organizer who was with her, burn them in coke ovens . . .”

It occurred to a woman who observed her at work on Kellys Creek that Mother Jones behaved like “a woman who had replaced her past with a zeal for what she was doing, as if she had already died and had nothing left to fear.”

During the winter of 1902, Jones tested her limits by venturing back into the mountain hollows to preach the union gospel to coal town “wage slaves.” One rainy night, when she was heading down a steep goat path to a rally, she slipped and slid most of the way down. “My bones are sore today,” she wrote to the union president Mitchell, who replied like a worried son. He pleaded with her to take care and save her strength for this drive, because, he wrote, if the union failed in West Virginia this time, it would suffer the consequences in its next round of bargaining with the midwestern coal companies.

Mary Jones had reached the age of sixty-five in 1902—at a time when the life expectancy of American women was forty-eight—but she took pride in defying her age, ignoring her sore bones and carrying on. A fellow organizer, who admitted he often whined and thought the battle not worth the effort, reported that Mother Jones never complained:

“No mountain seems too high, or path too rugged as long as she can find a receptive audience.” As winter turned to spring that year, she found many receptive audiences in the Kanawha coalfield. “Our people are responding like braves,” she reported to Mitchell that spring. “After three weeks of hard work I feel Kellys Creek is ours . . .”

Mother Jones’s “invasion” of Kellys Creek represented one of the many grassroots campaigns trade unionists were conducting in minefields, rail yards, garment districts, factory towns, and seaports across the land. Prosperity had returned, unemployment had declined, and organized labor was on the march. Strikes and boycotts had never been more effective. By the end of the year, membership in the unions affiliated had doubled in the span of just three years and the UMWA had emerged as one of the nation’s largest, most diverse labor organizations.

Mother Jones moved on to a host of other causes. Ten years passed and the union held on to the West Virginia locals Jones had organized in places like Kellys Creek. Peace prevailed in that unionized district during that decade until the spring of 1912 when coal operators in the Paint Creek Valley refused to give UMW members a tiny pay raise that other companies had granted their employees. A routine work stoppage followed, but what happened next was anything but routine.

When private mine guards started evicting families from their homes, union miners took to the hills and launched repeated attacks against these Baldwin-Felts agents.

A few weeks later, fighting broke out over the ridge in nearby Cabin Creek valley, and by midsummer of 1912, union miners and their employers were engaged in what would become one of the longest and deadliest labor conflicts America had ever experienced.

When word arrived that she was needed back in the Mountain State, Mother Jones had been speaking on the West Coast rallying support for railroad shop men on strike against the owners of a huge railroad system. “I cancelled all my speaking dates in California, tied up all my possessions in a black shawl—I like traveling light—and went immediately to West Virginia.”

After a grueling cross-country trek, Jones reached West Virginia, where she told a reporter that when force was used to hinder a worker who was fighting for gains that were rightfully his, he had the right to meet force with force. After she left her calling card in the state capital, Jones took a short train ride up to Paint Creek. On the way, the brakeman told her the story of how the operators put the miners out of their houses at gunpoint, how shots were fired on the strikers’ tent camp,

and how the miners armed themselves and were ready to fight. The brakeman warned Jones to turn around and take the next train out of town, but she never paid heed to these kinds of warnings.

Late one night, Mother Jones heard a knock on the door of her hotel room, she opened it and saw the vaguely familiar face of a young man who introduced himself as union miner named Frank Keeney. He had tears in his eyes when he told her nobody from the district office would come up to Cabin Creek and help the miners. Would she come? Of course, she answered.

On August 4, Keeney and his fellow organizers gathered their followers at a baseball park in Montgomery, a railroad town on the Kanawha River near the mouth of Cabin Creek. After a glowing introduction by Keeney, Mother Jones mounted a platform and began to speak by recalling her last visit to the region, when “gun thugs” murdered three strikers in their beds. She whirled around a wooden stage like a dancer as her audience sat in a circle enjoying the performance. “When I came here ten years ago, we marched into those mountains,” she said, pointing to the hills above. The mine owners had threatened to get rid of her, but she stayed until the bloody end and she would do so again. “We have some men that will run away,” she said, “but you will never get me to run, don’t worry about it at all.”

Two days later, the residents of lower Cabin Creek looked up from their chores to see Mother Jones passing by in a buggy driven by a coal miner preceded by a detail of National Guardsmen. A UMW official had persuaded the Governor to send the soldiers along to ensure that no harm came to “the miners’ angel” as she was known by now.

A big crowd had already gathered at the coal town of Eskdale when Jones and her party arrived at noon. A UMWA official opened the meeting by asking the miners to be patient and let justice take its course, but Jones leaped up and objected, insisting that it was time to rouse all the miners on Cabin Creek. At the end of her speech, she told union members to go home, go to sleep, then wake up and put on their overalls, go to work in the mines and bring the rest of the men out. The next morning, a Cabin Creek mine manager remembered being stunned as he watched his employees walk out of the drift mouth. He blamed all the trouble on Jones. After her “highly inflammatory speech,” he said, “We never turned another wheel.”

This strike dragged on through the fall of 1912, when the Governor was forced to send in the National Guard. The Baldwin-Felts guards-or gun thugs-replaced were ordered out of the valleys, but employers kept importing scabs who were protected by militiamen. The standoff continued into the winter of 1913.

By this time various observers were reporting on the remarkable solidarity this diverse body of working men and women achieved. Most of the strikers were Americans of Scots-Irish descent, but the refugee camps also had a strong contingent of African Americans, Italians and Hungarians, who had been segregated when they lived in company towns.

This unity was so impressive to the radical poet and organizer Ralph Chaplin that he wrote a song about this strike – “Solidarity Forever” – a tune that later became the national anthem of the American labor movement.

In February 7, 1913, a local mine operator and a county sheriff call up a special armored train into the strikers’ camp at Holly Grove. The train was known as the Bull Moose Special, and it was equipped with a machine gun which opened up on the strikers’ camp, killing a miner named Casco Estep and wounding several others.

Eleven strikers had already been killed in the fighting on Paint Creek and Cabin Creek, but the death of Casco Estep enraged the miners far more than any of the others. The man had been trying to save his wife and baby when a machine-gun bullet, fired from what strikers called the “death train,” destroyed his face.

The Bull Moose Special's lethal run made sensational headlines that morning and the startling news generated a wave of sympathy for the strikers. One merchant was so horrified by the news that he sent several cases of Springfield rifles and ten thousand rounds of ammunition to the strikers. The assault on Holly Grove provoked outrage far beyond the state's borders as well. In New York, the *New Republic* cited the event as a prime example of the tremendous odds workers faced in their struggle for democracy.

On February 9, 1913, friends, neighbors, and union brothers attended the funeral and burial of Cesco Estep next to the graves of his two children in the little cemetery at Holly Grove. His pregnant wife, could not attend because she had been taken to Sheltering Arms Hospital, but Mother Jones appeared to give Cesco Estep's eulogy. According to one reporter, she "sent Cesco on his way to heaven," then told the mourners to get their guns, find the watchmen, and "shoot them to hell."

Whether Jones said this or not, bands of armed strikers launched a full scale assault on the mine guards holed up in their fort. One company man died in the assault. Once again, the National Guard appeared and strikers were arrested almost randomly and held without charges.

At a rally called to protest the arrests, Mother Jones discouraged further acts of violence. She told the miners to go home and promised them she would lead a committee to visit the governor and to protest the arrests.

When Jones arrived the state capitol with her delegation, she was arrested and placed her under round-the-clock guard in a lodging house with several other women who had been accused of harassing strikebreakers. The next day Jones learned that she and 47 of her followers would be placed before a court martial and tried before a military tribunal on charges of planning and carrying out a conspiracy to attack the mine guards' fort and commit murder.

The military judges banned the press from the proceedings, but the word got out anyway, and the court martial of a 76-year old woman caused a national uproar. Mother Jones managed to send letters out of what she called the "Military Bastille" where she was held. And some of these messages reached friends in Washington, notably the influential Republican Senator from Idaho, William Borah. Jones told Borah that when the governor of West Virginia made her a military prisoner, he did just what the old British monarchy did to her grandparents back in Ireland.

The military tribunal gave Jones a stiff sentence for inciting an insurrection, but in the glare of national attention, the Governor of West Virginia decided to release Mother Jones. The next day she appeared in the Senate gallery and applauded when a call for a federal investigation of the West Virginia mine war passed by a voice vote. Acting largely on her own, one woman had done more than the nation's top union leaders to alert Americans to the suppression of civil liberties in industrial America.

(Three weeks later, the New York City Socialist daily *Call* carried an announcement of what was “expected to be one of the most memorable meetings in the history of the city;” it would take place at Carnegie Hall when “Mother Jones...the ‘angel’ of the miners will tell the story of the great strike of the coal diggers of West Virginia and the suspension of the Constitution and...the reign of terror in that State...” At the packed hall Mother Jones declared that West Virginia was on trial before the nation. She said suspension of habeas corpus, the court martial, and the suppression of the free press represented a first move by the ruling class to have the working class tried by military tribunals and not civil courts. “It is up to American workers,” she cried, “to make sure it is the last.”)

In June of 1913, Governor forced the Paint Creek mine operators to accept concessions to the union they had fought against for nearly a year.

The settlement made national news, because it ended what the *New York Sun* described as “probably the most bitter and protracted industrial struggle of the kind in the history of the country.”

Mother Jones would return to West Virginia again in 1920 when a second mine war erupted in Mingo County, the same place where the Hatfields and McCoys bloodied the soil in their notorious feud. The cause of this brutal conflict was a decision by coal operators in that county to refuse to recognize the union, to lockout anyone who joined the UMW, and to demand that those who returned to work signed a contract swearing never to join the union. Many of you will be familiar with such extreme measures, for these were same kind of actions the employers’ association of Dublin took in 1913 when workers throughout the city answered the call of Jim Larkin’s call and supported the tramway workers who were on strike.

I know that this year you are celebrating the memory of Larkin and the solidarity of Dublin working class on the centennial of the lockout. There are many ways we can compare of Larkin and Jones, these two working class icons. But I will leave to my friend Rosemary Feurer who will speak to you on Thursday.

Now let’s return to Hatfield McCoy country West Virginia in 1921,

where the strike zone was placed under military rule, men were clapped in jail without charges, armed vigilantes were formed by businessmen, strikers were confined to camps, and freedom of press and freedom of assembly were banned. Newspapers carried headlines about the civil war in West Virginia that year about news of the Irish war for independence, including the report that two IRA volunteers were shot in Cork by British soldiers and five others were executed on February 28.

That spring a US Senator rose and demand a federal investigation of what caused mine war in Mingo County. Referring to an incident in which a state police constable shot an unarmed miner, Senator Hiram Johnson compared the tactics used by the West Virginia state police to those used by British troops against the Republicans in Ireland. If the stories Johnson had heard from southern West Virginia were accurate, he would have to conclude that there had never been “in our history . . . anything like the conditions that obtain to-day in this territory at our very doors.”

Mother Jones returned the mountain for the final time late in August of 1921 when thousands of union miners had assembled in a remote hollow, armed and ready to launch their “grand offensive” on Mingo County to liberate their union brothers from martial law.

Fearful that her boys would be slaughtered, Mother Jones came out to the rebels' camp hoping to discourage them. It was a difficult role to play for she had done so much to encourage them for so long. But by now, her boys had become men with modern weapons in their hands and anger in their hearts.

This huge uprising of citizens, unprecedented in modern American history, culminated in a three-day battle on Blair Mountain between an insurgent army of at least eight thousand armed workers and a force of three thousand deputies, volunteers, and conscripts, which had been mobilized to stop the miners' army from invading company-controlled territory.

The miners surrendered to the US army believing-falsely-that the federal government would bring justice to West Virginia. The slaughter Mother Jones predicted had not occurred and for that she was relieved. But, her advice had been ignored even scorned by her boys, and she left West Virginia never to return.

On November 30, 1930, word passed through the coalfields that Mother Jones had died in Silver Spring, Maryland. She was mourned by thousands of Americans, especially the nation's hard-pressed coal miners, who were prominent among the forty thousand people who listened on loudspeakers as a Catholic priest eulogized her before she was buried at a

miners' cemetery in Mount Olive, Illinois. A young cowboy singer from Texas expressed the sorrow many Americans felt in a song he composed to her memory. That fall, Gene Autry performed his ballad "The Death of Mother Jones" on the *National Barn Dance* radio program and then recorded it.

During this time, no group of American workers attracted more sympathy from reformers than West Virginia's coal miners—thanks a large part to the work of Mother Jones. And no group stood to gain more when Congress granted industrial workers the right to organize in June 1933. Within days after the law changed, UMW activists motored through the Mountain State's company towns, sweeping aside all opposition while they organized nearly every coal miner in West Virginia without a shot being fired in anger. If only the miners' angel had lived to see this, the triumph of all she had fought for. But, of course, the religious people of coal country believed the miners' angel was looking down from heaven on this great victory.

After more than three decades of struggle and two deadly industrial wars, West Virginia's miners had achieved the kind of freedom they had been striving for since the days of Mother Jones. The Bill of Rights finally

had real meaning to the people who lived and worked in the coal country of West Virginia.

In 1972 some activists and students came up into the hollows of southern West Virginia to interview some of elderly mine workers and their spouses who had survived the mine wars. To their delight, they met quite a few people who had known Mother Jones. “She was the cuss ingest woman you ever heard,” one of them recalled, “but the miners loved her,” and “they’d do what she said,” he added. “She wasn’t afraid of the devil and all of his angels,” said a coal miner’s widow. “She’d come up Cabin Creek here and call out for all the men that wanted to be let out of slavery to follow her. And they did, scores of them.”

These are some of the stories of Mother Jones’s adventures in West Virginia I wanted to share with you tonight. Thanks for coming and thanks for listening.

The 2014 Cork Mother Jones Lecture delivered by Professor James Green of Massachusetts College, Boston at the Spirit of Mother Festival on Tuesday July 29th 2014 at the Firkin Crane Centre, Shandon, Cork.

Professor Green founded the Labor Studies BA degree program and the Labor Resource Centre, teaches history and has directed the public history

graduate program. He is a well-known author, his book “Death at the Haymarket” (2006) is the definitive account of the events at Chicago in May 1886. He has made a remarkable contribution to the story and the documenting of the history of working class and trade union and social movements.

See jamesgreenworks.com

The lecture is based on Professor Green’s forthcoming book. *“The Devil Is Here in These Hills: West Virginia’s Coal Miners and Their Battle for Freedom”* available from on- line book sellers in the US and Canada, Feb. 3, 2015.

The Cork Mother Jones Committee wish to record our thanks and appreciation to Jim, Janet and Nick for making such a positive contribution to the 2014 Spirit of Mother Jones Festival.