

## **Seems Like Yesterday: Community Memory and the Michigan Copper Strike, 1913-2013**

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In 2013 and 2014, important years for Michigan history, the discussion of commemoration and memory is on the minds of local historians, community groups, and residents in Michigan's Copper Country, located in the western Upper Peninsula (U.P.). 2013 marked the beginning of the centennial of the Michigan copper miners' strike of 1913-1914 as well as the centennial of the Italian Hall tragedy, a common focal point of strike discussions. While the history of the copper range in Michigan U.P. has been investigated through various perspectives before, little has been explored in terms of historic memory. To be sure, collective and individual memory studies as well as memory's impact on history is a relatively new field in history, but there is no better time to explore issues of memory than in the context of important years and centennial events. Centennial events encourage an entire community to consider the past by creating exhibits, sponsoring lectures, and promoting the past on a large scale. By examining how communities embrace the past during a centennial, disseminate historical knowledge, and remember those who came before them it becomes possible to see how memory shapes how individuals and groups conceptualize the past as well as how they incorporate historical narratives into an understanding of the present.

The eminent local historian Arthur W. Thurner felt the 1913 Copper Strike “left a heritage of bitterness” in the Copper Country.<sup>1</sup> Born in 1924 and raised in the town of Calumet, Thurner, who believed that people were the driving force of history, wrote one of the first scholarly examinations of the strike, *Rebels on the Range*.<sup>2</sup> Despite growing up in Calumet, where many of the major events of the 1913 Copper Strike took place, such as the Italian Hall tragedy, Thurner remembered few community members discussing the strike in his childhood years and picked up on a sense that “what was done was done and there was no need to discuss it.”<sup>3</sup> Steve Lehto, attorney and writer with roots in the Copper Country, recalls visiting Calumet in the mid-twentieth century, as a child, and that—when the Italian Hall was mentioned—“ conversations shifted into hushed tones, and among the older generation, into Finnish. It [the tragedy] bordered on the unmentionable.”<sup>4</sup> Having grown up in the Copper Country myself, born in Hancock and raised in Tamarack City, a small mining town a few miles south of Calumet, my recollection about strike memory is much different. Born in 1982, just a few years before the Italian Hall building was torn down, I recall much local discussion about the long-gone mining boom days, the strike, and especially controversies about the contested memory of the Italian Hall massacre.

This paper aims to make sense of the amnesia and memory about the 1913-1914 strike, especially the most often discussed tragedy at Italian Hall. Beginning with a look

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur W. Thurner, preface to *Rebels on the Range: The Michigan Copper Miners' Strike of 1913-1914* (Lake Linden, MI: John H. Forster Press, 1984), xi.

<sup>2</sup> “Arthur W. Thurner Obituary,” *Daily Mining Gazette*, January 26, 2013: <http://www.mininggazette.com/page/content.detail/id/528566/Arthur-W--Thurner.html?nav=5007> (accessed April 29, 2013) and “Arthur W. Thurner (1924-2012),” *Waterloo Cedar Falls Courier*, December 13, 2012: [http://wcfcourier.com/lifestyles/announcements/obituaries/arthur-w-thurner/article\\_e6139aec-455f-11e2-8927-0019bb2963f4.html](http://wcfcourier.com/lifestyles/announcements/obituaries/arthur-w-thurner/article_e6139aec-455f-11e2-8927-0019bb2963f4.html) (accessed April 29, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Thurner, xi.

<sup>4</sup> Steve Lehto, *Death's Door: The Truth Behind Michigan's Largest Mass Murder* (Troy, MI: Momentum Books, 2006), 2.

at Woody Guthrie's 1941 song, "1913 Massacre," and then transitioning to commemorative efforts in the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, an exploration of various heritage endeavors will provide a glimpse into how community memory and identity have been defined in the Copper Country. The jump from Guthrie's song to the late twentieth century is mainly due to the sources available at Western Illinois University.

Cultural memory, which refers to the texts, ceremonies, and monuments designed to memorialize important events, allows the public to engage history by shaping how they think and talk about the past.<sup>5</sup> In the case of the Copper Country, the narratives, stories, and texts created through song, heritage space, exhibits, and film purposefully construct and organically shape how community audiences think about what happened in the nine months of the strike. Those songwriters, filmmakers, historians, archivists, and public history professionals who write songs, create films, pen histories, and manage heritage spaces do so with a specific interpretation of the past. In doing so, they shape a dialog that allows for community memories of the past to be interpreted and contextualized in different ways.

As is true in the case of the 1913-1914 Copper Strike and the events at the Italian Hall on December 24, 1913, memories of historical moments of great tragedy are most contested. While communities affected by tragedy hope for scholarly history and public memory to reflect the true past, the struggle for the possession and interpretation of cultural and historical memory often means different things to different people.<sup>6</sup> Cultural

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<sup>5</sup> Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies," *History and Theory* 41, no. 2 (May 2002): 182.

memories, as shaped by cultural texts, not only have the power to offer meaning in various social, cultural, and political contexts but can also create new meanings.<sup>7</sup> By examining specific instances of collective memory, which represent certain points of view, it is possible not only to interpret what strike memorials mean but also how they help conceptualize the past and the present.

While there is a broad range of perspectives through which to examine the strike, from digital archives and travel guides to films, this essay will explore four specific instances of memory. The Italian Hall disaster, due to its sensational and tragic story, figures prominently in strike memory. The major primary sources to explore strike memory will be: Woody Guthrie's song "1913 Massacre;" the Italian Hall heritage site in Calumet, Michigan; the Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections' traveling exhibit "Tumult & Tragedy;" and a recent film, *1913 Massacre*, by Ken Ross and Louis V. Galdieri. These pieces of commemoration provide unique, powerful, and relevant tools through which to examine the social memory of the strike.

While some historians described a social amnesia and secrecy in the years after the strike, Woody Guthrie's "1913 Massacre", written and released in 1941, can be credited with revitalizing discussions about the Copper Strike in the local community. In the aftermath of the Copper Strike, community leaders and mine companies encouraged residents to put the strike behind them. However, this was difficult due to the fact that much of the community was divided over the issue of the strike, both during and in its

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<sup>6</sup> David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (1989): 1127.

<sup>7</sup> Kansteiner, 182.

immediate aftermath.<sup>8</sup> For example, conflicting newspaper accounts in the wake of the Italian Hall disaster helped illustrate the existence of dissenting public attitudes; the conservative *Daily Mining Gazette* headline proclaimed “80 Perish in Christmas Eve Tragedy at Calumet” right next to an article that accuses Western Federation of Mining (WFM) President Charles H. Moyer of capitalizing on the tragedy while the radical Finnish paper, *Tyomies*, had a headline that read “83 Murhattu!” (83 murdered).<sup>9</sup> In a testament to official desire to subdue tensions among strikers after the Italian Hall, *Tyomies* staff members were quickly arrested.<sup>10</sup> Officials in the copper district were feeling pressure to subdue animosity, even after the strike itself. Discrimination against those connected with the strike was rampant during and in its aftermath. Labor leaders from the WFM left or, in Moyer’s case, were violently run out of town. After the strike many of the locals shut down operations, with the last local in Mass City, fifty miles south of Calumet, closing in 1916.<sup>11</sup> As the community was moving forward as best it could and things were returning to business as usual in 1914, there was little mention of the strike or the Italian Hall tragedy. Prosperity slowly returned to the region, with an increase in demand of copper during World War I, mining company profits rose, and the number of mine employees increased to 17,205 in the first year after the strike. As the first year anniversary of the strike was approaching, there was little or no mention of this in the community records. On Christmas Eve 1914, one year after the Italian Hall tragedy, there was no mention of the disaster or the victims in the local media. There was mention of major companies like Calumet and Hecla paying employees before the

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<sup>8</sup> Thurner, 238.

<sup>9</sup> Lehto, Photo insert.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Thurner, 238-39.

Christmas holiday and church services for holiday worship, but not so much as a prayer or minor remembrance of the Italian Hall victims was advertised in the local news. While it is possible that private vigils or family gatherings discussed the tragedy on its first anniversary, it is shocking that the tragedy did not receive any mention in the local record. Apparently the community had to put blinders on. These blinders stayed on for several decades.<sup>12</sup> While community memories about the strike were discussed in hushed tones in the 1920s and 1930s, or not at all as Calumet native Thurner recalled, Guthrie's "1913 Massacre" relit the candle of memory.

Written and first performed in or near 1941, "1913 Massacre" by Woody Guthrie takes a decidedly pro-labor stance to the public memory of the Italian Hall events and the strike. Guthrie, an important singer/songwriter of the era, was the author of "This Land is Your Land" the year prior to "1913 Massacre", and many of his songs were very sympathetic to the lives of ordinary people, the poor, strikers, unionists, etc. "1913 Massacre", which commemorates the death of striking miners' family members, mostly children, at a Christmas party in Calumet on December 24, 1913, was first inspired by an autobiographical account of the tragedy. Ella Reeve Bloor, also known as Mother Bloor, wrote about the Italian Hall tragedy in her autobiography *We Are Many*, published in 1940. Fellow folk musician Pete Seeger said Guthrie was inspired to write about the events after reading the book.<sup>13</sup> Bloor, who witnessed the tragedy, had been working in Calumet as part of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), which hosted the Christmas party for children of striking miners.

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<sup>12</sup> *Calumet News*, December 23, 24, 25, 1914, 1915, 1916, 1917; *Daily Mining Gazette*, December 23, 24, 25, 1914, 1915, 1916, 1917.

<sup>13</sup> Ken Ross and Louis V. Galdieri, "Woody Guthrie's 1913 Massacre," 1913 Massacre: A Film Inspired by a Woody Guthrie Song, <http://1913massacre.com/about-the-song/> (accessed May 1, 2013).

The Christmas Eve party at the Italian Hall was designed to bring some cheer to striking miners and their families. Many families were struggling to survive on meager striker benefits. Organized by local labor organizer Annie Clemenc, the party was on the second floor of Italian Hall in Calumet and included fruits and candies, presents, and music for the children. According to testimony and the post-incident reports, at some point during the activities a man yelled “fire” in the second story ballroom, which caused a panic for the stairs. One headline from the event claimed, “joy is turned to sorrow, men, women, and children who gather for Christmas celebration sacrificed in a mad rush; man who gave the false alarm is unknown.” When all was said and done, 73 bodies were carried out of the Italian Hall stairwell. Many strikers believed that this tragedy was perpetrated by a member of the antiunion Citizen’s Alliance, a group of local business owners against the strike, or a strikebreaker. Others, particularly community officials and mine company management thought it was a tragic accident without any explanation. An official inquest went as far as to blame the strikers themselves for the tragedy. No matter who is to blame, the stampede’s aftermath left the community in turmoil and the Italian Hall disaster is one of the frequently discussed moments of the strike era.

The false cry of fire, that prompted the stampede on the stairwell from the second floor to the first floor doors and resulted in seventy-three people being smothered to death, and the overall impact of the tragic event, has been hotly debated in community and social memory. “Big” Annie Clemenc of Calumet was in charge of the party and after a man called “see, see, back, fire! Fire!” she looked about for fire and, according to the Houghton County Coroner’s Inquest, upon seeing no smoke or fire Clemenc hollered

for the people not to go, there was no fire.<sup>14</sup> This snippet from the coroner's report finds its way into Guthrie's song Clemenc is the lady referenced in the verse below:

The copper boss' thugs stuck their heads in the door,  
One of them yelled and he screamed, "there's a fire,"  
A lady she hollered, "there's no such a thing.  
Keep on with your party, there's no such thing."<sup>15</sup>

In addition to alluding to Big Annie, Guthrie's reference to the thugs of copper management makes no qualms about who he believed was responsible for the false claim of fire. Guthrie's interpretation reinforced a popular belief among strikers and strike sympathizers about the tragic evening. Witnesses and the community quickly circulated a story that a man wearing a Citizen's Alliance button, an organization of local businesses that opposed the strike and supported the mining companies, was responsible for the cry of fire and the subsequent disaster. Big Annie's eyewitness story, in an interview with Houghton's *Daily Mining Gazette*, claimed that she saw the Citizen's Alliance button on the man who yelled fire, and this version gained traction in papers as far as Chicago in the *Chicago Record-Herald*.<sup>16</sup> *Tyomies* also publicized this version before the staff was arrested, as can be seen in a cartoon (see Figure 1 in Illustrations list) that depicts the Grim Reaper holding a scythe that says "Citizen's Alliance" on its edge, with the coffins of the dead from Italian Hall in the background.

However, despite the widespread account of the Citizen's Alliance supporter yelling fire, other accounts that lay blame on a drunkard who saw the Christmas tree

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<sup>14</sup> Thurner, 145.

<sup>15</sup> Woody Guthrie Archives, "1913 Massacre," Woody Guthrie Archives, [http://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Nineteen\\_Thirteen\\_Massacre.htm](http://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Nineteen_Thirteen_Massacre.htm) (accessed May 1, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Thurner, 152.

lights and falsely believed it a fire. According to historian Arthur Thurner, some believed a woman was shouting for water, which sounds similar to the Slavic word for fire, *watra*, which caused the confusion in a crowd of mixed languages and ethnicities. However, this version is not commonly discussed in community memory.<sup>17</sup> What Guthrie's song did was to popularize one interpretation, albeit a reasonable one, of a confusing historical event. Whether there were malicious thugs or strikebreakers who incited the panic and held the doors, creating the stairwell stampede, or whether it was a tragic misunderstanding, may never be resolved. However, the song and the debates are evidence of a contested memory, a memory of a war between capital and labor that manifested "in a struggle over the story of what really transpired that Christmas Eve" and in the strike events in general.<sup>18</sup> While Guthrie's song survived, available on multiple albums and covered by many artists, from his son Arlo, to Ramblin' Jack Elliot, to Bob Dylan at Carnegie Hall in 1961, the memories of the strike and the Italian Hall took on new meaning in the 1980s.<sup>19</sup>

The concepts of collective memory and historical truth took on new dimensions as the events began to be interpreted in terms of physical landscape. Stuart McConnell, in a contribution to a volume on Civil War memory, contends that "memory has [a] geography."<sup>20</sup> Thanks in part to the birth of social history in the 1960s and also in part to advances in the concept of public history, by the 1980s it was commonplace in historical discourse to account for many different versions of the past.<sup>21</sup> Just as new understandings

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 151-52.

<sup>18</sup> Ross and Galdieri, "Woody Guthrie's 1913 Massacre."

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Stuart McConnell, Epilogue to *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture* edited by Alice Fahs & Joan Waugh (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 258.

of history were becoming available, such as cultural history and an appreciation for the holistic historical landscape, the historical landscape in the copper district was in a phase of transition. Despite the perceived importance of the buildings of the copper mining towns and contested spaces of the strike, such as the Italian Hall building, the architecture and the physical landscape of the Copper Country was falling into ruin.

By the early 1980s, Calumet, Michigan, the city where the Italian Hall resided, threatened to demolish the building because the owner, Helen Smith, was unable to keep it up.<sup>22</sup> Despite the establishment of a community group to save the building, the costly repairs, estimated at over \$500,000, meant there was little hope for a financially depressed community to raise such funds. Citing a crack in the façade of the building and noting a lack of funding to preserve the space, the decision to tear down the Italian Hall building was made and the structure was torn down in 1984.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the financial burden, the emotional burden of the strike conflict and the tragic deaths at the site loomed large in the decision to tear down the hall. While some keepsakes of the building were saved--such as floorboards, chairs, and bricks--the most important thing saved was the doorway arch that quickly was turned into a memorial to those who died. While the decision to tear down the building created controversy in the local community, with some residents wondering why the building had to be demolished, memory of the Italian Hall continues one hundred years after the strike.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>22</sup> Alison K. Hoagland, *Mine Towns: Buildings for Workers in Michigan's Copper Country* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 228.

<sup>23</sup> Michigan Technological University Archives, "Long Memory," Tumult and Tragedy: Michigan's 1913-1914 Copper Strike <http://www.1913strike.mtu.edu/memory.html> (accessed May 4, 2013).

Despite attempts to provide a factual and unbiased discussion of history, the signage at the Italian Hall site contributes to the contested memory of the past. The Italian Hall arch, and the accompanying plaques and narrative sign, makes for an engaging study in the memory of the tragedy and the strike. The narrative sign, which strives to project a neutral point of view, while not explicitly siding with labor or management, reads as follows:

Michigan Historic Site, Italian Hall: On December 24, 1913, area copper miners had been on strike for five months. The miners were fighting for better pay, shortened work days, safer working conditions and union recognition. That day, during a yuletide party for the striking miners and their families, someone yelled, "Fire!" Although there was no fire, seventy-three persons died while attempting to escape down a stairwell that had doors that opened inward. Over half of those who died were children between the ages of six and ten. The perpetrator of the tragedy was never identified. The strike ended in April 1914.<sup>25</sup>

This narrative stands alongside several other texts, placards on the doorway arch itself, that have phrases such as legendary labor activist Mother Jones' quote, "Mourn the dead, fight for the living" from the U.P. Labor Council, "In honor of the Italian-Americans who contributed greatly to this community," "Gone but not forgotten," and "Suffer the little children to come unto me."<sup>26</sup> Textual sources, like the narrative sign and placards, have an inherent tendency to present settings, events, and characters into a coherent and particular perspective.<sup>27</sup> Despite attempts at neutrality, this is an impossible goal. By

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<sup>24</sup> As made clear in interviews from the film 1913 Massacre and as detected in my own experience talking with locals and recollections from growing up, many community members have opinions about what should have happened to the building as well as what actually happened on that night.

<sup>25</sup> Lindsay Hiltunen, "Italian Hall Narrative Sign, Italian Hall Heritage Site," December 29, 2012, from the author's personal photo collection.

<sup>26</sup> The textual information for this section was written down upon a visit to the Italian Hall site in December 2012 by the author of this essay. The narrative sign at the Italian Hall was changed in 2013 and has since taken out the inaccurate information about the Italian Hall doors.

<sup>27</sup> James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 123.

including certain information, some would argue misinformation, and by leaving out other information, the site projects a certain point of view that shapes how visitors conceptualize the past and how the strike and Italian Hall is remembered.

One major way that the signage contributes to the historical memory of the strike is about the description of the Italian Hall. The question of whether the Italian Hall doors opened inward, opened out, or were folding doors and also whether they were blocked from opening by the stampede or if they were locked or blocked by unknown agitators outside, such as the Citizen's Alliance or strikebreakers, has generated decades of controversy. The heritage narrative at the Italian Hall memorial contends that the doors opened inward and this one fact shapes how one interprets the events of that night.<sup>28</sup> In the film *1913 Massacre*, inspired by Guthrie's song, many local residents, some descendants of eyewitnesses, and some actual survivors who were children at the time of the tragedy, all agree that the doors opened inward. One interviewee states, "the doors actually opened in, so they all got jam-packed in there."<sup>29</sup> Many local shopkeepers and residents support this position, as is depicted in the interviews in Ross and Galdieri's film.

However, contrary to popular collective memory, author Steve Lehto makes a firm claim that the doors opened outward and goes even further to state that the chaos at Italian Hall was premeditated to hurt strikers' morale.<sup>30</sup> While Lehto argues the deaths may not have been intended, he claims a man in a Citizen's Alliance button wanted to "create a disturbance to disrupt the festivities," realizing that anything pleasant, such as

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<sup>28</sup> Hiltunen, "Italian Hall Narrative Sign, Italian Hall Heritage Site," photo.

<sup>29</sup> *1913 Massacre*, DVD, Directed by Ken Ross and Louis V. Galdieri, USA: Dreamland Pictures, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Lehto, 207.

the party, would only strengthen the strikers' resolve.<sup>31</sup> As evidence for the outward opening door theory, Lehto provides a photograph of the outer and inner doors of Italian Hall opening out towards the street. Larry Molloy, of Novi, Michigan, once armed with this or a similar photograph, attempted to explain the outward door theory, similar to Lehto's claims, and in his interview for the *1913 Massacre* film, he recalls being rebuffed by a friend from Calumet who denied the outward door theory. After showing his friend the photo, Molloy reports his friend replied, with a glare, "everybody knows the doors opened in."<sup>32</sup> Another interviewee in the film, Dorothy Perkins of the Houghton County Historical Society states "They always said that the doors went one way, but we knew that wasn't true," alluding to outward opening doors, despite strong community sentiment otherwise.<sup>33</sup> A third theory, based off of the conclusions of architectural historian Kim Hoagland, Keweenaw National Historical Park (KNHP) Archivist Jeremiah Mason, and KNHP historian Jo Urion contend the inner doors at the bottom of the stair were most likely folding doors.

In the context of the strike memory, the various theories of the Italian Hall doors shroud a tragic event in mystery and it remains an argument that probably never will be resolved in the social memory because of an overwhelming community belief that does not readily agree with new visual and physical evidence.<sup>34</sup> Memory, which differs from history in that it tries to provide stability and continuity for a group or a community thus informing their collective identity, is definitely at play in Calumet, despite attempts to

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> *1913 Massacre* Film.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Lehto, 205-206.

revise and reinterpret the past.<sup>35</sup> Contested memory, coupled with a demolished Italian Hall building, makes it difficult to tease out the accurate details from the foggy recollections of the past and the present.

Another way the signage at the Italian Hall memorial site influences public memory of the strike is in the way it handles the victims and the ethnic make-up of the community. Despite the diverse ethnic groups that worked in the mines, attended the party, and perished in the Italian Hall stairwell, the memorial itself makes no immediate reference to the diversity of the mining community or the attendees at the Christmas party. The only signage that relates to ethnicity is from the Italian American Ethnic Organization, which donated a plaque to remember the Italian Americans who contributed to the community.<sup>36</sup> This seems to do a disservice to history because the striking community was comprised of many ethnic groups and the same was true of the attendees at the Italian Hall Christmas party. While most of those in attendance at the Italian Hall were Finns, there were also Italians, Slovenians, and Croatians at the party, possibly a few others.<sup>37</sup> In addition to no clear information about the ethnicities of those who died, viewers at the site do not learn the names of those who died. This begs the question, how can visitors honor or remember those who died if they do not even know their names? Does one honor just a faceless mass of strikers and Italian Hall dead, or should it be expected that heritage sites like Italian Hall should make an effort to inform visitors about the personal narratives of the events as well?

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<sup>35</sup> Wertsch, 41.

<sup>36</sup> Italian Hall Site. 5<sup>th</sup> and Elm St, Calumet, MI 49913. December 29, 2012

<sup>37</sup> *1913 Massacre* Film.

This is not to say that there is no record of those who died. The list of those who perished in Italian Hall was published a few times in the local newspapers, not only in the weeks after the strike as the list was being updated but also in recent decades. The list also exists on multiple user created webpages. In fact, there are multiple lists of those who died, some that state where they lived in the mining community, some that list their ethnicity, and some that do both. The most recent list, an insert for the *1913 Massacre* film, lists the names and ages of those who passed.<sup>38</sup> Also, as shown in the film, after the Italian Hall building was razed and the memorial site was dedicated in the 1980s, the village of Calumet arranged an event at the Calumet Theatre, which had once served as a temporary morgue to lay up the bodies of the tragedy in 1913, where the names, ages, and ethnicities of all the victims were read. As the names were read, a person the same age of that victim came onstage and dropped a flower.<sup>39</sup> The participants in the ceremony then walked over to the Italian Hall arch to dedicate it. Knowing the victim and naming the dead serve as a powerful act of commemoration.

The symbolic reading of the names is a compelling commemorative tool and the centennial of the Italian Hall tragedy also utilized it. A candlelight vigil and a reading of the names took place for the victims on Christmas Eve, 2013. Yet, if the names are so important, why are they not immortalized at the site itself? While some point to the cost of installing a second marker with the names, others feel the list itself is problematic. A roster of victims would require agreement as to how many died, 73 or 74, and how to spell the various names correctly.<sup>40</sup> While commemorative actions and memorials can

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Lehto, 207.

serve as a way to honor the dead, it can be difficult to determine the best methods for carrying out social remembrance.

While much of the public commemoration about the strike months has been centered on the Italian Hall, such as through Guthrie's song, the Italian Hall site itself, and the 1913 film, the past year has shown an upsurge in commemorative activities that relate to the entire strike and not just the Italian Hall disaster. The Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections has created a two traveling exhibits, "Tumult & Tragedy," and one dedicated to J.W. Nara, a photographer of the local landscape and the strike events, the Upper Peninsula History Conference, an annual regional conference, and FinnFest, an annual national conference often held in Michigan's Copper Country, both featured strike related discussions and lectures, and the Keweenaw National Historical Park offered site tours of strike related heritage sites, lectures, and social media outlets for commemoration.

In an effort to provide context to complex events, events that were divisive in its era as well as in the present, the "Tumult & Tragedy" exhibit chronicles the strike and explores the story and its many actors. The exhibit discusses background, mining management, the national guard, mine workers, national labor organizations, government agents, local police, and local community members; however, because of the decline in mining in the region as well as a general decline in public knowledge about organized labor in recent decades, the exhibit provides additional emphasis on the "mineworkers' perspectives at the time of these events."<sup>41</sup> The exhibit, which is twelve panels of context, roughly three feet by seven feet in size, and the online component feature images, text,

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<sup>41</sup> Michigan Technological University Archives, "The Project," Tumult and Tragedy: Michigan's 1913-1914 Copper Strike <http://www.1913strike.mtu.edu/index.html> (accessed May 4, 2013).

song lyrics, newspaper excerpts, and various other primary sources to construct the Progressive Era, the historical landscape of the Copper Country in the mining era, immigrant workers, copper company paternalism, the strike events, the Italian Hall, and the aftermath and memory of the strike. The panels of the exhibits have been traveling to local historical societies, libraries, and schools and each stop on the tour is accompanied by a lecture, discussion, or book talk as well as time to view the exhibit. As the mastery of a cultural tool, such as an exhibit narrative, rests in knowing how to use it, by exposing a broad audience to the panels as well as providing online content, Michigan Tech's Archives staff are working to mediate collective remembering in a positive way.<sup>42</sup>

Ultimately, prescribed practices of commemoration consecrate the places of memory.<sup>43</sup> Through exhibits, songs, lectures, monuments, and memorials centennial organizers, historians, and participants designate as sacred the places of the past and make it known that these spaces and events are important. In the case of the 1913-1914 Copper Strike and the Italian Hall tragedy, the ways we remember are just as complex as the events being remembered. The mining companies and the workers shaped the towns of the Copper Country, from buildings to landscapes to memories, and the strike has made its mark on the region's heritage. In the centennial year, as the community reflects on its past, it is crucial to not only recognize the meaning of this reflection, but also to recognize the various methods we've allowed ourselves to remember. Woody Guthrie, local authors, heritage sites, and institutions have preserved and presented the past. What David Halkola, a former history professor at Michigan Tech, called a watershed event of

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<sup>42</sup> Werstch, 152.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas J. Brown, *The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004), 41.

local history that has frequently been embellished with a mythical quality; the commemoration of the strike era has transcended fact and fiction.<sup>44</sup> The texts and contexts perpetuated not only include fact and fiction, but also story, place, and legend, all of which are important to the ways we remember July 1913 to April 1914 in the Copper Country. These texts and contexts are important not only among Copper Country residents, but also to those interested in incorporating the Michigan copper miners' strikes into the larger narrative of twentieth century US labor history.

### Illustrations

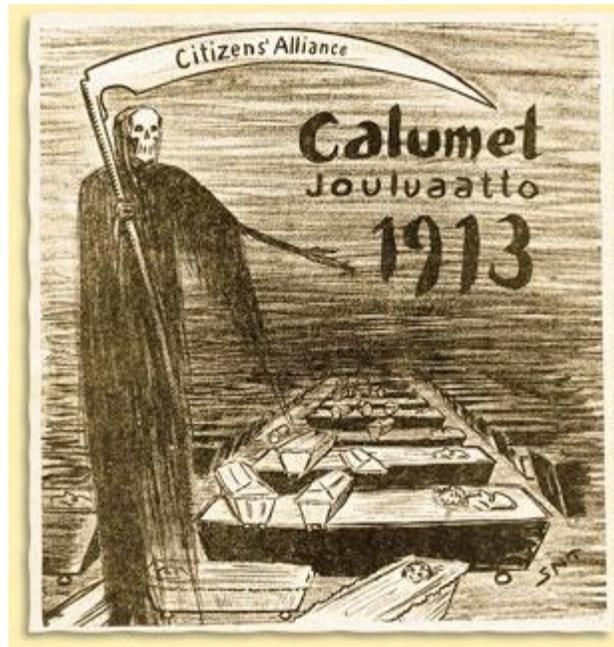


Figure 1: This political cartoon ran in the Hancock-based Finnish newspaper *Tyomies* after the Italian Hall tragedy. The cartoon states, “Calumet Jouluaatto 1913,” translated as “Calumet Christmas Eve 1913.” It makes clear what group the Finnish radicals and labor supporters blamed for the tragic events. (Courtesy of the Tumult & Tragedy exhibit by the Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections)

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<sup>44</sup> David. T Halkola, foreword to *Rebels on the Range: the Michigan Copper Miner's Strike of 1913-1914* by Arthur W. Thurner (Lake Linden, MI: John H. Forster Press, 1984), xi.

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1913â€“1914 Copper Strike in the small township of Calumet on the Keweenaw Peninsula, Upper Michigan. On Christmas Eve the local Women's Auxiliary of the town of Calumet, Michigan, was holding a Christmas party at the Italian Hall. The party was attended by about 100 people, including many striking miners and their families. The Women's Auxiliary was one of the few groups that perceived groups, communities or the nation-state as certain types of containers of memory with more or less clear-cut borders. The Michigan Copper Strike received national attention and garnered the support of luminaries in organized labor like Mother Jones, John Mitchell, Clarence Darrow, and Charles Moyer. The hope of victory was overshadowed, however, by violent incidents like the shooting of striking workers and their family members, and the bitterness of a community divided. The Italian Hall Disaster (sometimes referred to as the 1913 Massacre) was a tragedy that occurred on December 24, 1913, in Calumet, Michigan. Seventy-three men, women, and children, mostly striking mine workers and their families, were crushed to death in a stampede when someone falsely shouted "fire" at a crowded Christmas party. The Calumet and Hecla Mining Company ("C&H") was the single largest copper mining company in the copper country in the Keweenaw Peninsula of northwest Michigan. One of the