

A Most Commendable Spirit:

A Dialectical Examination of Labor Militancy, Conservatism and
Community Formation in Aspen, Colorado 1893-1918

By

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Dedication

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On June 4, 1912, 18 of the 300 workers at Aspen's Smuggler mine walked off the job to protest a wage reduction of fifty cents a day. Residents of Aspen awoke the next morning to a bold-typed announcement in the *Aspen Democrat-Times*: "The Great Smuggler Mine Closed This Morning by Order of Superintendent Champion." The new wage policy affected timbermen and their helpers by differentiating the compensation paid to them. Both timbermen and their helpers had formerly earned \$3.50 per day. The new policy reduced the pay of helpers by fifty cents. Since there were only nine timbermen and nine helpers, the mine manager expected that the total effect on the mine would have been a mere \$4.50 in savings per day. But, instead of the mine's operating expenses decreasing by a small amount on the new payroll, the timbermen all left the mine in protest and the following day the entire mine shut down, throwing all 300 men out of work.¹

Immediately, people began to take sides and Aspen's residents started to debate the stance taken by town's most important employer. On June 6, an editorial in the *Aspen Democrat-Times* called for an arbitration meeting to settle the dispute. Meanwhile, miners from Pitkin County Miners Union Local No.6 of the Western Federation of Miners² met in the mining hall to discuss the closing of the mine and to develop a plan of action. They chose a committee of five men to represent their interests and to meet with the mine owners. On June 7, officials at the Smuggler stated their position. In an article in the *Aspen Democrat-Times*, W.W. Davis, the manager of the Smuggler, pointed out that the company had voluntarily instituted raises of 15-20 percent in April. Davis argued that the mine managers were being as fair as possible, but that under current economic conditions, the Smuggler could not be run profitably. Davis called for management and workers to cooperate for the benefit of the town, the mine, and everyone involved.³

Unlike some more infamous mining communities in the West, Aspen had not had a history of violent conflict between miners and mine owners. As *The Aspen Democrat-Times* noted:

¹ *Aspen Democrat Times*, June 5 1912.

² Pitkin County Miner's Union Local No.6 and Aspen Miner's Union Local No.6 are interchangeable names for the same local of the Western Federation of Miners.

³ *Aspen Democrat Times*, June 6-7 1912.

It is certain that the Aspen miners are as fair a bunch of men as has ever been in one community . . . They are men who believe in the “give and take” theory and that principle has been carried out to perfection more than once in the Aspen district.⁴

The article pointed out that the managers of Aspen’s mines had always been fair to the miners as well. The *Aspen Democrat-Times* was sympathetic to unionism and to workers but it was not entirely in the union’s camp. An editorial in the June 10th paper, for example, enumerated the failings of socialism, a political system advocated by the miner’s union. Although the *Aspen Democrat-Times* sympathized with the miners, the paper felt that a primary part of its civic duty was to help maintain peace between the miners and mine owners, to help “manage” the conflict.

The miners may have been “fair,” but they were not about to budge on their demands. Initially the strike occurred because the timbermen and their helpers did not want different wages. Now that the strike had pulled in all 300 men, the workers’ goals changed. During the union meeting, the miners decided that the most important issue was that everyone working underground be paid a minimum of \$3.00 a day. Formerly, unskilled laborers -- the muckers, who loaded the ore into the carts, and the trammers, who pushed the carts in and out of the mines⁵ -- were paid \$2.75 a day. On June 11, The Committee of Miners Union Local No.6 issued a statement that read in part:

After full discussion of the matter as above stated, the miners unanimously decided to insist upon \$3.00 per day for muckers and trammers, and agreed not to go to work until the demand was granted or conceded by management of the Smuggler Leasing Company.⁶

Although the hard line taken by the miners had the potential to create a long labor-employer struggle, this did not happen in Aspen. Unlike some other conflicts between miners and

⁴ *Aspen Democrat Times*, June 10 1912.

⁵ Ronald Brown, *Hard Rock Miners* (College Station and London: Texas A&M University Press, 1979), p.70. Sometime the job mucking and tramming were combined where a single employee both loaded and pushed the ore cart.

⁶ *Aspen Democrat Times*, June 11, 1912.

mine owners in the mining West, Aspen's workers and employers rarely fought long battles. By June 14, the miners and the Smuggler Leasing Company had come to an agreement.⁷

The existence of an active union at this time in Aspen may strike some as surprising. In 1912, Aspen was a community experiencing a prolonged economic decline, one that had started approximately twenty years earlier. Since the silver crash of 1893, Aspen's mining industry had suffered a steady contraction. No other industry had stepped in to replace mining and to provide jobs for Aspen's residents. Under these conditions, one would expect individual job consciousness to have been high. When jobs are scarce, people are often more concerned about their own welfare rather than that of the collective. Unions typically do not fare well under such circumstances.

Employers often used poor economic conditions to break union solidarity by accentuating divisions among the working class. Because difficult economic conditions make some groups more vulnerable – particularly new immigrants and minorities – individuals from these groups will often take work in order to insure their own survival, even if it means being a strikebreaker or leaving the union. Typically, unions were ineffective in these economic circumstances, yet in Aspen, the union remained an integral part of the community's fabric.⁸

Aspen's economy posed another problem for the union. Many people had left Aspen in search of other job opportunities. As the town suffered population loss, fewer workers remained behind to support an active union. Aspen was no longer the community that had boomed from non-existence in 1879 to almost 14,000 people by 1893.⁹ In the wake of the

⁷ *Aspen Democrat Times*, June 10-14, 1912.

⁸ Periods of economic decline usually placed unions in a weaker bargaining position. James Barrett, for example, argues in *Work and Community in the Jungle* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987) that the high unemployment rate in post World War I era severely weakened the bargaining position of Chicago's packing house workers and was one of the main reasons for the failure of the 1921 strike. Furthermore, according to Barrett, many national strikes between 1919 and 1922 "were, in effect, life and death battles for the unions involved. More often than not, such battles were lost." See pages 255-262. Melvyn Dubofsky also concurs that although economic hardship might make workers more susceptible to union organizers during the late 19th century, "unions, barely able to survive in prosperity, often collapsed at the first hint of depression." Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), p.11.

⁹ Compendium of the Eleventh Census, 1890. Aspen Historical Society. Frank Wentworth, *Aspen on the Roaring Fork* (Denver, 1976), p.206. Thomas Kimmell, *A History of Rocky Mountain Silver Camp: Aspen Colorado 1879-1910*, (Bachelor's thesis, Harvard College, 1975), p.3. Malcolm

1893 Silver Crash, Aspen's population had dropped to fewer than 2,000 in 1910, as people left the town for the more prosperous boom gold-mining communities such as Cripple Creek and Telluride.¹⁰ The strength of the Aspen miners' union, in a community dramatically weakened by economic hardship, seems counterintuitive.

Despite the economic factors working against them, however, Aspen miners remained active members in the community and despite their small numbers, they remained powerful. The fact that a wage reduction imposed on only nine workers shut down Aspen's largest employer gives evidence of their effectiveness. Given that the union's strength in Aspen should not in theory have been strong, and that the Smuggler's management seemed both reasonable and determined, it is even more noteworthy that the union appears to have won some concessions in the encounter. According to the *Democrat-Times*, the miners won a 25 cent daily increase for all unskilled workers. Although the timbermen and timbermen helpers accepted different wages, the union had achieved its primary demand – a minimum pay of \$3.00 per day for all underground workers.¹¹

Aspen veers from the traditional paradigms of labor history in other respects as well. Much of the labor history concerning this period has focused on violent confrontation between workers and mine-owners; the peaceful resolution of the incident suggests that we look again at Aspen's labor-management relations. In Colorado between 1870 and 1920, strikes -- with accompanying violence -- occurred in Cripple Creek, Victor, Telluride, Ludlow, and Leadville. The tradition of violent conflict between workers and mine owners continued as late as the 1920's, when United Mine Workers of America and Industrial Workers of the World led coal miners into battle against the Colorado Coal and Iron Company in the so-called "Colorado Coal Wars." Almost all of these encounters involved confrontations between mine owners and the Western Federation of Miners¹² (WFM). Although the miners of Aspen belonged to one of the founding member locals of WFM and had remained active members throughout the town's economic decline, Aspen's unions avoided violence. Indeed, during a period when labor unrest in Colorado caused the United

Rohrbough, *Aspen: The History of a Silver Mining Town: 1879-1893* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.173.

¹⁰ Compendium of the Eleventh Census, 1890. Compendium of the Twelfth Census, 1900. Compendium of the Thirteenth Census, 1910.

¹¹ *Aspen Democrat Times*, June 14, 1912.

¹² In some cases confrontation in the West between mine workers and employers occurred with a related union organization such as the Industrial Workers of the World or United Miner Workers.

States government to undertake a serious study into the matter,¹³ Aspen appears to have remained a haven of conciliation.

This thesis will explore why Aspen's union remained influential in 1912, despite the decline in mining employment. It also considers the background leading to the union's strike against the Smuggler Mine, and how this strike was characteristic of, and emerged from, the labor-management relationship in Aspen during the twenty years following the silver crash. A primary argument of the thesis is that the Struggler Mine strike is significant because it differentiates Aspen's labor-capital experience from that of many better known Western mining towns. Aspen shared some characteristics with these towns. The town's workers emerged from a radical labor heritage and they actively kept that heritage alive. This tradition manifested itself in political movements, such as the Populist and the Socialist Parties, and in workers' active involvement in the unions of the Knights of Labor and the Western Federation of Miners. Despite the radical tradition present in Aspen, which could have resulted in violent confrontations such as occurred in some other Western mining camps, a confluence of factors enabled Aspen to avoid this type of labor conflict.

Although Aspen began like many other mining camps, its history diverged from them in important ways. First, the pattern of immigration to Aspen – both into the mining camp before 1893, and away from the town after the crash of 1893 – created a self-selected group within the town. These people, particularly those who remained after the crash, made Aspen their “home.” Since they became stable, long-term residents, Aspenites placed more value on the community aspects of the town than residents in other mining camps who sought to make their fortunes and then move on.

In Aspen, workers, managers, and owners all shared a commitment to the community. This sense of shared community manifested itself in a number of local organizations and activities. Aspen had a good school system, a local fire department, the Citizens Hospital, and a welfare organization. A plethora of local activities -- sporting events, summer picnics, and local dances, for example, -- provided residents with a shared set of experiences that bonded the community together. As a result of these mitigating conditions, the relationship between labor and capital evolved differently in Aspen from then it did in the mining camps that have been more prominent in the historiography of Western labor and mining. On one hand, the tradition of radicalism in the town created the

¹³ U.S. Senate, Document 122, Commissioner of Labor, *A Report on Labor Disturbances in Colorado*

underpinning for a labor movement. On the other hand, the residents' commitment to the community acted as a balancing force that prevented violent conflict from occurring in Aspen.

While in some mining communities, different backgrounds exacerbated the cultural divide between workers and owners, in Aspen, some of the leading mine owners and managers were deeply involved in the town. In *All that Glitters: Class, Conflict and Community in Cripple Creek* Historian Elizabeth Jameson argues that a primary reason for the success of the WFM in that camp between the years 1893 and 1903 was the sympathy of a number of the leading mine owners. These mine owners, led by former prospector, small mine operator, and Cripple Creek millionaire Winfield Scott Stratton, shared a working class background with their employers. Not unexpectedly, they tended to be more sympathetic to unions and more supportive of workers' demands for reasonable pay and working conditions. Although they represented only a minority group among the camp's mine owners, they formed a wedge dividing these mine owners. In particular, Stratton's unwillingness to support a hard line against the workers facilitated the WFM's success in the 1893 strike. It was not until his death that the remaining mine owners organized a successful counter-offensive that destroyed Cripple Creek's WFM union in 1903.¹⁴

Like, Cripple Creek, Aspen also had a variety of backgrounds among their economic leaders. Three different kinds of social elites played a role in Aspen's development. The first groups included those from wealthy backgrounds who had some level of commitment to the town's social development. This level of commitment ranged from Jerome B. Wheeler, an outside investor who spent virtually no time in the town; to Charles A. Hallam, an early settler, who spent summers in Aspen; and to Henry B. Gillespie, whose family members were year-round active participants in Aspen's society and community. All of these people participated in Aspen's social activities to some extent. A second group – led by H.P. Cowenhoven, D.R.C. Brown, and J.D. Hooper – came to Aspen under modest circumstances, made their fortunes in the town, and continued to be leading participants in Aspen's social elite. Finally a third group, investors such as David Hyman, David Moffat and J.J.

1903-1905, *Inclusive, With Correspondence Relating Thereto*, 58th Congress, 3d Sess., 1905.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Jameson, *All that Glitter: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), pp.41-61.

Hagerman, had economic interests in the town, but little or no involvement in the community itself.¹⁵

While Hyman, Wheeler and Hagerman lived in Cincinnati, New York and Colorado Springs, respectively; Brown, Cowenhoven and Hooper all maintained their residences in Aspen. This second set of town fathers came from a different social set than the absentee investors. Cowenhoven arrived in the camp in 1880 with two wagons loads of goods. From these modest beginnings he established his retail business. Brown arrived at the same time as Cowenhoven's clerk. Both men built extensive fortunes in Aspen. Importantly, Brown and Cowenhoven remained active members of the community. Although they may have had different interests than the town's workers, they shared an investment in Aspen's economic, cultural and social success.¹⁶ As economic leaders and active participants in the town's everyday life, they helped support the development of institutions that facilitated the amicable relations between workers and employers in Aspen.

Further, after the 1893 crash, the town's economic situation supported more peaceful relations between workers and owners. The community's survivors – those people who stayed through the crash and remained during the long period of economic decline (including both Brown and Cowenhoven) – recognized the need to work together to maintain Aspen as a viable entity. The marginal profitability of the mines and the low wage rates meant that both workers and owners were less willing to sustain protracted strikes. An illustration of this commitment occurred when new ownership took over the Smuggler Mine in the spring of 1912. Since management had recently made a substantial capital outlay in purchasing the mine, it was unwilling to let its new investment go unused during prime mining months. Instead, management and union workers quickly reached a compromise so that both sides could continue to make some money, albeit not as much as some of the more profitable locales such as Cripple Creek.

Together, the economic situation and the immigration pattern may also have helped create the social services network. Workers in Aspen made less money than miners in other Colorado mining camps. Aspen mine wages, for example, tended to be at least twenty-five to fifty cents lower per day than those in nearby Leadville mines. Both mine-owners and miners were aware of the disparity. Yet, other factors such as the good school system and

¹⁵ Rohrbough, pp.123-127.

¹⁶ Rohrbough, pp.24-30 and p.203.

the town's adherence to an eight-hour workday compensated miners for the lower paying jobs. Mine owners probably supported these social benefits because they recognized the need to provide non-wage amenities to retain the labor force. Particularly in the years after 1900, a family population dominated Aspen's demographics. These people made use of Aspen's social organizations and were willing to accept the lower wages in the town in exchange for "quality of life" benefits. Hence, both sides made certain sacrifices to keep Aspen alive during the difficult economic conditions.

What evolved in Aspen after the silver crash was a town centered around a number of community organizations and activities. Organizations such as the Miner's Union, the school system, the Socialist and Democratic Parties, the Methodist Church and Citizens Hospital provided a social net for the town's residents. The many local activities – dances, sporting events, and picnics – created a shared sense of community. Finally, the mine owners supported these activities, both directly and indirectly, contributing to an amicable relationship between workers and employers. This combination of factors explains why the strike of 1912 was settled within ten days, demonstrating both sides' desire to see a quick resolution to the situation. And while in the context of the existing historiography of the labor conditions in the state, region and nation, the rapid strike settlement appears surprising, this type of labor relation may be representative of similar experiences of many previously unexamined Western mining towns.

Traditional labor histories have often focused on violent conflict which resulted in an emphasis on certain kinds of analysis – explanations concerning the nature of violent resistance. To understand how Aspen's labor-capital relationship differed from that of Leadville, Victor, Cripple Creek and other more familiar Western mining towns, an overview of the larger labor narrative will be useful. Several labor historians have sought to explain the development of an American union movement and a working class community and many of their insights are usefully applied to Aspen. The historian Herbert Gutman argues that the transformation from pre-industrial society to industrial society created social tensions and that those tensions became visible in rituals surrounding work and compensation. In *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America*, he demonstrates how successive waves of immigration from pre-industrial to industrial society occurred in the United States continually during the years between 1815 to 1919. Gutman writes that "a profound tension existed between the older American pre-industrial social structure and the

modernizing institutions that accompanied the development of industrial capitalism.”¹⁷ Furthermore, Gutman contends that over these 100 years, the “state of tension was regularly revitalized by migration of a diverse pre-modern native and foreign peoples into an industrializing or fully industrialized society.”¹⁸

Gutman’s work, however, primarily focuses not on the development of unions, but on the working people’s culture from which those unions developed. Gutman’s argument is useful in demonstrating the emerging tensions that existed during the evolution from a pre-modern to an industrial society; David Montgomery’s analysis, however, points more directly to the Western labor experience. In “Workers’ Control of Machine Production in the Nineteenth Century,” Montgomery indicates that workers resisted the changes brought on by industrial capitalism because they sought to maintain their control of the work process. For Montgomery, this resistance to loss of worker control became the basis for union organizing. Before the advent of industrial capitalism, workmen and miners controlled the work process. The primary duty of the manager was hiring or firing employees, while the workmen set their own work pace and responsibilities. As radical labor organizer and former miner, “Big Bill” Haywood put it, “The manager’s brains are under the workman’s cap.”¹⁹ Montgomery argues that workers’ strongest resistance occurred as managers attempted to take control of the work processes from them, resulting in union organization and strikes.²⁰ When the miners in Aspen controlled the workplace, as they did before the advent of heavily capitalized mines, unionism remained limited.²¹ When large scale mining operations became the dominant form of employment, many miners joined the WFM. So while Gutman would suggest looking at the nature of Aspen’s working class, Montgomery might argue that the more important factor in understanding the strike and its resolution was the workers’ “shop floor” experiences.

¹⁷ Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1976), p.13.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ William Haywood and Frank Bohn, *Industrial Socialism* (Chicago, n.d.), p.25. Found in Daniel J. Leab, *The Labor History Reader* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p.107.

²⁰ David Montgomery, “Workers Control of Machine Production in the Nineteenth Century”. Found in Daniel J. Leab, *The Labor History Reader*.

²¹ In fact, the initial miner’s union, formed in Aspen in July 1881, focused not worker-employer relations but on the protection of mining claims. Kimmell, p.62.

Both of these methods are relevant in examining how Aspen's story mirrors and diverges from that of other mining towns. The town's circumstances were essential to the development of strong community commitment. After the silver boom ended abruptly in 1893, the working class culture provided support to the town's residents. Over the next twenty years, Aspenites developed a sense of attachment to the community that enabled the town to continue to function as viable entity. Yet, the existence of unions in Aspen resulted from the workers "shop floor" experiences. The rapid revolutionary changes in mining created an opportunity for the Western labor movement and the emergence of the WFM in Aspen.

In much of America, the change from pre-modern to an industrial society and the accompanying transformation of work processes took place over a couple of generations. In the mining West, however, the industrializing experience was accelerated. The boom-bust cycle in the mining camps' development caused population explosions and their subsequent declines to take place over a single generation or less. The change from the "pre-modern" grub-staking miners to a large wage-working mining labor force happened virtually overnight. In Aspen, ten years encompassed the evolution of a local mining camp to a booming industrial center to a city in decline.

Aspen's miners, like those of many western towns, reacted to the rapid change in working conditions by forming unions. In *We Shall Be All*, Melvyn Dubofsky argues that the rapid change from frontier conditions to corporate dominance made the West particularly fertile ground for the emergence of a radical union movement. As "full-blown industrial cities replaced frontier boom-camps and substantially capitalized corporations displaced grub-staking prospectors," tensions developed over the changing conditions.²² The coming of capitalism to western towns transformed the relationship between workers and the means of production. Furthermore, the changes which capitalism wrought happened at a pace that far exceeded the national rate, resulting, if one follows Dubofsky, in a more radical Western labor movement than the national one.

People's reactions to the speed with which the new industrial conditions permeated Western towns was one factor creating the more militant Western labor movement, while another important element for people were the existing traditions of protest. These existing traditions, primarily those of the Knights of Labor and the Populists, fostered a culture of

²² Melvyn Dubofsky, "The Origins of Western Class Radicalism" *Labor History*, VII, Spring 1966.

resistance to capitalism. Both of these organizations articulated a challenge to industrial capitalism. Western people's exposure to the philosophies of the Knights and Populists made them more receptive to radicalism. In addition, the dramatic abruptness of the economic changes in the West provoked greater unrest, conflict, violence, and radicalism.²³

And yet, if Aspen and other Western towns were distinctive in the speed of this shift, the transition itself made them anything *but* distinct. Aspen, like colonies around the world, had been connected to a global capitalist system. The new system meant that factors far outside local control often greatly affected workers. The precipitous drop in the price of silver in 1893, a direct result of many factors – all of which were beyond Aspen residents' ability to control – caused more than two thousand of the town's people to lose their jobs. Investors in the distant East made decisions that impacted which towns would be connected to railroads, which would have smelters, and even which mines would be developed. Mine managers changed working conditions and wages to maximize profits and satisfy investors from all over the world. Modern capitalism changed people's lives, creating a system in which actions far outside their local environment impacted people daily. Capitalism caused a displacement, real and perceived, between individuals' former control over their working lives and the control they could presently exercise. As people felt the loss of this control, they resisted – the formation of political parties and labor unions were two common forms of protest.²⁴

Although western working class radicalism sometimes turned to violence, which played an important role in shaping the conflict between workers and employers, radicalism primarily represented an attempt by workers to articulate an alternative to the emerging capitalist order. In this context, radicalism was a social and economic system counter-posed to capitalism. It represented workers' attempts to form an alternative system that had its roots in the ideas of the Populists and the Knights of Labor. The strength of these two previous reform movements laid the basis for the development of Western Federation of Miners. Whether the means of protest were cooperatives, employed by the Knights of Labor and the Populists; strikes, such as those utilized by WFM and Industrial Workers of the World; or legislation, such as the organization of the People's Party and the union's drive for

²³ Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, pp.5-26.

²⁴ Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), pp.12-38 and pp.66-75. James Patterson, *American in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), pp.24-26.

an eight-hour workday law, workers sought to mitigate the effects of capitalism's control over their lives.

This protest culture was intertwined with the community life of Aspen. Not only did the town provide the state with Colorado's only populist governor, but Aspen was also a charter member of the WFM. Their initial membership in the WFM suggests that Aspen's miners were receptive to radicalism. Violent confrontations between the WFM and mine owners often made national news during the thirty-year period of 1890 to 1920. In 1896, Leadville erupted into violence when mine owners imported non-union workers from Missouri to break a strike. Another violent incident in Telluride broke out in 1901 when union members exchanged shots with strikebreakers. Violence was narrowly avoided in 1893 in Cripple Creek when Governor Waite sided with the union, forcing the mine owners to back down before the situation had reached a breaking point. As Cripple Creek mine owner, Eben Smith, recalled in a note to a business associate about the incident: "you and I bought 100 rifles and ten thousands rounds of ammunition."²⁵ While the WFM is associated with militant action, and rightly so, an another side of the story appears in Aspen.

The Aspen experience suggests that in a Western mining town, union miners can be radical but not militant. During the 1912 strike at the Smuggler mine, Aspen's miners and the Smuggler management maintained a working relationship. The peaceful nature of this strike was emblematic of Aspen's history of interaction between labor and capital. Mine explosions, union-forced deportations of non-union men, deportations of unionized men by mine owners' enforcement agencies – none of this happened during the 1912 strike or in any other Aspen strikes. Instead, the miners and Smuggler's management came to an agreement in a little over one week of negotiations. While perhaps towns like Leadville, Victor, Telluride, and Butte painted a picture of violent conflict between organized labor and capital, Aspen's example represents an alternative – a Western mining town that avoided it. Indeed, it may be the case that Aspen represents many Western mining communities. If Aspen's lack of violence offers a less compelling narrative, perhaps it is more representative as an example of small, relatively peaceful mining towns. This thesis will seek to analyze and explain why that was so.

²⁵ Mark Wyman, *Hard Rock Epic* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), pp.171-172 and p.240.

Chapter 2: A Mining Camp Like Any Other

In 1879, seven prospectors in two different groups set forth from Leadville, Colorado in search of mineral wealth. Traveling west over the Continental Divide, they reached the Roaring Fork Valley. Following up on the reports of the Hayden geological surveys of 1873-74, they laid ten claims, each 1500 by 300 feet. Within a year these prospectors had sold their claims to men who would later play important roles in the development of Aspen – Henry B. Gillespie, David M. Hyman, and Charles A. Hallam.¹

From these beginnings would emerge some of the most prosperous silver mines in the world. In one nine-month period in 1891, for example, miners extracted silver from the Mollie Gibson mine valued at \$1,645,000. Even more impressive, however, is the fact that during those nine months, the average concentration of silver ore shipped from the mine never dipped below 600 ounces to the ton, an extraordinarily high concentration. In conjunction with this rich strike, Mollie Gibson stock prices skyrocketed from 50 cents a share to \$10 a share in less than a year -- a two thousand percent increase.²

In 1884, J.D. Hooper secured a lease on the Aspen Mine and in the course of sixty days, he pulled out silver ore with a market value of \$643,000. He mined so much silver during those two months that mule trains could not ship it out of the town fast enough. As a result, he had to hire men twenty-four hours a day to guard a town lot on which he stored the excess ore. The Aspen Mine subsequently became one of the most valuable mining properties in the state. In the five years between 1887 and 1892, the Aspen mine produced silver worth \$11 million, with net profits of over \$6 million.³

A third operation, the Smuggler Mine, made world news in 1894 when miners extracted the largest silver nugget in the world, weighing 2,350 pounds. The silver boom spurred a rush to invest in Aspen. According to local mine owner and developer David

¹ Malcolm Rohrbough, *Aspen: The History of a Silver Mining Town: 1879-1893* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.3-10 and p.56.

² Rohrbough, pp.183-190.

³ Rohrbough, p.75.

Hyman, town lots that had sold for \$10 in 1880 reached a value of \$8,000-10,000 by the early 1890's.⁴ During Aspen's early years, fortunes could be -- and were -- made overnight.

The years between 1879 and 1893 marked a period of rapid industrial growth in Aspen. From the original seven prospectors who ventured into the Roaring Fork Valley in 1879, the population had ballooned to 8,929 residents by 1890.⁵ In 1893, Aspen was the third largest town in Colorado, its population estimated at between 11,000 and 14,000, trailing only Denver and Leadville. Residents believed the town to have a significantly higher population than reported because of the large transient workforce associated with the mines and uncounted by census takers. Perhaps as many as 5,000 additional residents passed through, worked, and resided in Aspen.⁶ In that same year, the town directory listed 10 hotels, 22 retail grocers, 31 saloons, three banks, five newspapers and one opera house.⁷ In those fourteen years, especially from 1887 to 1893, Aspen was truly a boom town.

Making a fortune in Aspen, however, relied on the continuation of the high value of silver. In 1872, silver traded for \$1.32 an ounce. During the depression of 1893, the price of silver fell to less than half that amount, \$0.62 per ounce. The falling price of silver and the 1893 depression halted Aspen's boom. Instead, that year marks the beginning of Aspen's "quiet years." A period of decline in the town's economic fortunes ensued, and it did not reverse its course until the recreation industry and cultural expansion led by Walter Paepke in the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's turned Aspen into the economically successful ski town it is today.

Yet, unlike other nearby mining towns such as Ashcroft and Independence, Aspen did not become a ghost town. Mining continued, albeit at reduced levels, over the next thirty years. Although many miners left the town, many also remained, and they continued to play a role in the town's future. Under these conditions -- twenty years after Aspen's boom had ended and many miners had left the town -- the remaining workers at the Smuggler launched their strike.

⁴ David Hyman, *Romance of a Mining Venture* (Manuscript original in the American Jewish Archives, copies at Aspen Historical Society, Western Collection at Denver Public Library), p.18.

⁵ Compendium of the Eleventh Census, 1890. Aspen Historical Society, hereafter referred to as AHS.

⁶ Compendium of the Eleventh Census, 1890. Frank Wentworth, *Aspen on the Roaring Fork*. (Denver: World Press Inc 1950), p.206. Thomas Kimmell, *A History of Rocky Mountain Silver Camp: Aspen Colorado 1879-1910* (Bachelor's thesis, Harvard College, 1975), p.3. Rohrbough, p.178.

⁷ Aspen Business Directory, 1893, AHS.

Aspen's growth between 1879 and 1893 mirrored national expansion. During the last thirty-five years of the nineteenth century, the United States' economy exploded. American industrial output tripled between 1865 and 1900. Think, for example, of steel production -- a good indicator of economic activity. A rapidly expanding industrial society caused steel production to rise from 68,000 tons in 1870 to 4 million tons in 1890. A large portion of this steel expansion helped push the burgeoning railroad industry westward. Growth of western towns and cities coincided with the national expansion. Denver, Chicago, and Kansas City all became major metropolises in the years immediately following the Civil War.

Between 1865 and 1920, the Second Industrial Revolution ushered in many changes for workers in America. In *The Search for Order 1877-1920*, Robert Wiebe documents how the twenty-five years before and after the turn of the century transformed American society. Wiebe argues that the evolution from a rural agricultural economy to an urban industrial one caused a loss in community autonomy. The Second Industrial Revolution altered the economic fabric of society. The pace of technological change and the growth of the production capabilities outstripped the rate of growth in demand. As a result, cyclical depressions and recessions occurred regularly during the 1870's, 1880's, and 1890's. This economic upheaval displaced many people from their previous economic positions. Wage earners lost their jobs or experienced a deskilling of their positions. Even if they maintained their employment, their earnings often declined. Small businessmen and farmers suffered from bankruptcies. Individuals' struggles to maintain a sense of independence in the midst of a changing social system created social upheaval. As a result of these conditions, people resisted the new system through a variety of means. These included their participation in the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, the formation of the Populist Party in 1889, and the creation of unions such as the Knights of Labor and the Western Federation of Miners. By the 1920's, a new social system had evolved, in which control was centralized in large institutions, corporations, and the federal government, instead of with individuals and local communities.

Wiebe's perspective of society evolving from a rural agricultural economy applies directly to the rapid transformation of the mining West. While in much of industrial America, this process took place over a generation, in Aspen and other mining camps, the process of change happened over five to ten year periods. The result of the transformation was the same throughout the nation -- a loss of individuals' control over their daily lives.

What made the Western experience distinctive was the rapidity of this change which caused the transformation to be more visible than in the East. The rapidity and visibility of these changes made western workers' responses starker and more profound than those in the remainder of the country. The rapid economic changes that took place in the West created conditions that made a distinct "Western" labor movement possible. The quickness of the change from a pre-modern society to an industrial one meant that workers' loss of control of the work process happened in a single generation. Only a few years earlier, miners could make a fortune with one lucky strike, but after industrial capitalism came to the mining West, workers could no longer look forward to such an occurrence. Instead they would labor for someone else, with no hope of striking it rich. The perception of the changing conditions suggests that many Western workers resisted the transformation more militantly than their eastern counterparts.⁸

The particular conditions in the West accelerated the pace of these changes. With the arrival of a railroad, a small mining camp might become one of the major cities in the state, virtually overnight. Capitalism altered the landscape of the mining camp, changing it into an instant urban center. Aspen's town life, for example, was much different in 1884 than it was in 1890. Before 1884, Aspenites did not use electric lights or telephones. Nor did they enjoy adequate sanitation services, police services, fire protection, or public transportation. In fact, the town lacked such basic urban qualities as street names and house numbers. By 1884, this began to change. In early 1884, Aspen purchased its first fire engine and the town, supported by local businessmen, undertook to build cisterns with a total capacity of 10,000 gallons for fire prevention. In late 1884, following a downtown fire, the New Claredon Hotel was built. It offered its guests many modern conveniences such as electric lights and piped gas. In 1885, managers of the Spar Consolidated mine installed the town's first telephone. During the same year, the Aspen Electric Light and Power Company had begun construction to supply electricity to the town. The Aspen Water Company, founded by D.R.C Brown and H.P. Cowenhoven, began service in March of 1886.⁹ By 1887, Aspen had put in place the infrastructure to become an urban city instead of a mining camp.

⁸ For discussion of the pace of change in the West creating a different labor experience see, Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, pp.19-22 and Dubofsky, "The Origins of Western Working Class Radicalism". For tensions over the perceptions of change, see Wiebe, pp.12-38.

⁹ Rohrbough, pp.108-121.

As in many western towns, frontier conditions in Aspen had created a more egalitarian society -- or at least the illusion of one. Before 1885, a clear division between mine owners and mine workers had not become well defined. The historian James Wright comments that in the mining West:

miner was a generic term used to describe everyone engaged in the industry. Prospectors, partners working small claims, mine laborers, supervisory personnel, small capitalist, and bonanza kings, described themselves and were described simply as *miners*. Relatively high mobility and optimistic visions of success reinforced this typology. Class distinctions were vague.¹⁰

Furthermore, Duane Smith writes that “the miners and the mine owners, in the early days, were hardly distinguishable, and to move from the ranks of one into the other was always possible.”¹¹ Prospectors, miners, and mine owners were often the same people, all searching for the strike that would lead to wealth. Although everyone may not have had the ability to move from one class to the other, the successes of a few lucky people supported the belief in the myth of opportunity.

In addition to the more pervasive belief in the “myth of opportunity” in western mining towns, western lifestyles differed from those in developed cities. Since many of the conveniences of urban life -- schools, fire departments, hospitals, and modern transportation -- were not available in 1884, people in Aspen still lived with primitive conditions. Transportation to the camp was long and arduous, and urban development remained limited. Mine shipments left the camp by mule train and food supplies arrived in the same manner. The lack of conveniences and the difficulty in reaching the camp meant that, although a certain amount of capital investment and outside investors had entered the town, many big businesses or individuals had not yet committed their resources to Aspen. But by the early 1890’s, the belief in these egalitarian relations was fading as industrial capitalism came to Aspen.

¹⁰ James Wright, *The Politics of Populism: Dissent in Colorado*, p.18. Found in Michael Neuschatz, *The Golden Sword: The Coming of Capitalism to the Colorado Mining Frontier* (New York: Glenwood Press, 1986) p.14.

¹¹ Duane Smith, *Rocky Mountain Mining Camps*, p.202. Found in Neuschatz p.14.

The 1882 arrival of Jerome B. Wheeler proved to be the first step in the transformation of Aspen from mining camp to industrial center. Wheeler was the first significant eastern investor to show an interest in developing Aspen. A former top manager at the New York department store of R. H. Macy and Company, Wheeler brought considerable resources into the camp. After his initial \$20,000 purchase of the Morning Mine in November 1882, he poured money into Aspen. Over the next fifteen months, Wheeler invested \$500,000 in the town, opening a smelter and a bank, in addition to his mining investments. Although these investments did not radically alter life in Aspen, they set the stage for the upcoming boom and the pending dramatic changes.¹²

The boom period between 1885 and 1893 radically changed Aspen from frontier town to urban center. The successful large mining operations -- the Smuggler, the Aspen, the Mollie Gibson, the Durant, and the Compromise -- had spurred the investment of eastern capital. In conjunction with the town's growth -- or perhaps driving it -- two competing railroad lines connected Aspen to the outside world. The arrival of these two lines, The Midland Line and The Denver & Rio Grande Line, made transportation to and from the city easier and less expensive. Since the railroads could transport large quantities of ore, Aspen's miners could now develop previously unprofitable veins. The addition of a town smelter further spurred industrial development. The smelter lowered transportation costs by enabling mine owners to concentrate their mineral product and thereby reduce the amount of ore shipped. The large mineral strikes, the coming of two railroads, and the opening of the new smelter ushered in a new industrial era for Aspen.

Aspen's growth coincided with the national economic expansion. And yet, although the national economy was expanding at a rapid rate, economic growth during this period was erratic. Recessions or depressions were regular phenomena during the 1870's and 1880's, and business failures occurred at an extremely high rate. Some contemporary historians have calculated the rate of business failure over these two decades to be 95 percent.¹³ One of the most severe depressions occurred in the middle of the 1890's, just as Aspen's boom peaked. Ironically, the national economy plummeted at about the same time as the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago celebrated American progress. Economic concerns over the

¹² Rohrbough, pp.67-71.

¹³ Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), p.80.

currency question -- the choice between a hard currency backed by gold or a bi-metal currency of gold and silver -- created an atmosphere of financial uncertainty.

The national political debate over free silver versus maintenance of the gold standard was a prominent topic of the day. Since the United States Congress' demonetized silver in 1873, the government had provided price supports for the silver industry. The most recent legislation, the Sherman Silver Purchase Act was passed in 1890, and provided for the United States Government to purchase 4.5 million ounces of silver each month. This Act had helped slow the decrease in the price of silver but many people felt that free silver coinage – the reinstatement of silver as legal US currency – was now needed to reverse the falling trend in silver prices. The Populist Party capitalized on this issue to gain a brief moment of political ascendancy in the early 1890's.

Populism emerged from the Farmers Alliance as an agrarian response to the advent of modern capitalism. The Farmers Alliances were community organizations formed to help create farmer cooperatives. These cooperatives sought to place economic control back into the hands of farmers. As the farmers became involved in the cooperatives, they were also exposed to populism. The historian Lawrence Goodwyn explains: "The cooperatives recruited farmers to the Alliance, and the Alliance made them Populist."¹⁴ Initially non-political, the Alliance educated farmers. But, as farmers in the South and the West came to understand the inability of the cooperatives to mitigate the effects of capitalism, they took the next step, and organized a new political party -- the People's Party. To fight the loss of control over their daily lives, the Populists articulated a political platform that incorporated a broad range of reforms. Populists resented those agents of capitalism who removed control from their lives – the grain elevator operators, the railroads, Wall Street bankers, eastern middlemen. Their reforms were aimed at these groups and included currency reform, government control of railroads and telegraphs, a system of equitable taxation, governmental economy, and a sub-treasury plan.

In the West, Rocky Mountain populism differed from its Southern cousin. While in the South, currency reform was one plank in the party platform, in the mining states of Colorado, Idaho, and Nevada, silver and gold policy took a pre-eminent place in party issues. Although some of the Populist ideas from the South and middle West were still present, farmers could not provide a large enough electoral base to win elections in the rapidly

industrializing Mountain West. Consequently, in order to attract the large miner population in these states, the Populists emphasized the so-called “silver issue” – a policy to expand the money supply by instituting the free coinage of silver at a 16 to 1 silver to gold ratio. Farmers, western hard-rock miners, and debtors all supported free coinage of silver, while bankers and creditor-bondholders, and to a certain degree, urban dwellers, favored maintenance of the gold standard. With the free-coinage of silver, the money supply would expand, driving up the prices of farm produce and allowing farmers to repay their mortgages with less valuable currency. Since many miners’ livelihoods were dependent on the profitable extraction of silver, a natural alliance in the West between the farmers and miners emerged over the currency question. These two groups formed the support base for the Populists in the Rocky Mountain West.

The linking of farmers’ and miners’ voting interests in Colorado – the miners in the Rocky Mountains and the farmers from the eastern plains – enabled the Populists to elect Aspen resident Davis Waite as governor in 1892.¹⁵ Before he became governor, Waite edited the *Aspen Union Era* from September 1891 to August 1892. The *Union Era* was the only union paper published in Aspen, and Waite used it for “fulminations on behalf of labor and the working class” and encouraged a “connection between labor and politics.” In September 1891, he became the first chairman of the Pitkin County Populist Party. Around town, Waite was known as a long time civic reformer. Waite’s obvious sympathy to the working class did not deter, and perhaps encouraged Aspenites to support him. He captured seventy-seven percent of the town’s vote in the 1892 elections. Aspenites’ substantial endorsement of Waite demonstrated their support of the Populist Party and their working-class leanings. By comparison, in the state-wide vote, Waite only won forty-seven percent of the popular vote.¹⁶ A year after being elected governor, Waite played an important role in preventing the mine owners from breaking the first strike launched by the Western Federation of Miners. Not only did Waite protect the fledging union at a critical junction, but Colorado’s -- and Aspen’s -- roots in Populism helped lay the groundwork for the emergence of the WFM.

¹⁴ Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America*. Found in Robert McMath, *American Populism: A Social History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), p.15.

¹⁵ Richard White, *It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), pp.370-375.

¹⁶ Rohrbough, pp.198 and 214-217.

Meanwhile, many bankers and creditor-bondholders pushed for a tight money policy that would be supported by maintenance of the gold standard. Since these people had helped finance the Civil War by purchasing government bonds, they stood to lose substantial profits if the United States adopted free coinage of silver. Many people believed that free coinage of silver would mean inflation, and bankers feared that they would be repaid with less valuable dollars than they had loaned. City residents benefited from the low prices of farm products and worried that free silver coinage would cause inflation and hurt their purchasing power.¹⁷

The tension between these opposing philosophies of monetary policy came to a dramatic turning point in 1893. Although underlying economic conditions remained relatively unchanged in the 24 hours between April 21 and April 22, many people's perceptions changed radically. On April 22, gold reserves dipped under the \$100,000,000 mark. This was a widely perceived danger threshold level, and panic struck the nation's financial markets.

As the panic seized Wall Street, the government took action. President Grover Cleveland favored the gold standard, and the failing economy provided a strong reason to push for the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act. The repeal of the Sherman Act would be particularly harmful to Colorado and Aspen. Since the Sherman Act required the government to make monthly purchases of silver, it gave significant price support to western mining operations. Because Colorado's industry was largely reliant on mining, the state benefited greatly from these price supports. In 1892, Colorado mines produced 24 million ounces of silver, leading the country in silver production. In that year, Aspen alone had produced \$9,299,300 in silver. At an average price of eighty-seven cents per ounce, Aspen miners had extracted 10.7 million ounces of silver, accounting for one sixth of all silver mined in the United States.¹⁸ This heavy dependence on silver meant that any significant drop in the price of silver had dramatic effects on Colorado's economy.

Despite government attempts to mitigate the falling price of silver during the last 30 years of the 19th century, silver prices had steadily declined.¹⁹ Mining operations, like

¹⁷ Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp.9-12. White, pp.375-385.

¹⁸ Rohrbough, p.172.

¹⁹ In fact, this decline in silver prices was one of the main reasons for the push for free coinage of silver. When the United States had demonetized silver in 1873, silver demand was high in relation to

many sectors of the US economy, were expanding at a rate that outstripped demand. As prospectors discovered new mineral deposits and corporations employed better mining techniques, production levels soared. The growth in mining production far exceeded the demand for silver. As in classic supply-demand theory, over-supply pushed down silver prices.

As economic growth exceeded the growth of the money supply, prices fell throughout the United State's economy. Price deflation impacted mining and farming harder than many other sectors of the economy. Silver prices had fallen from \$1.32 an ounce in 1872 to \$0.93 at the end of 1888 and averaged only \$0.87 in 1892.²⁰ In June 1893, with fear rising over anticipated government action on the Sherman Act, silver declined to 83 cents per ounce. By the end of that month, the silver situation was desperate. In the last week of June, the Indian Mints, then a major consumer of silver, stopped purchasing the metal, causing a panic in the silver markets. By the beginning of July, the impending crisis pushed silver prices down to a low of 62 cents per ounce.²¹ Although the price rebounded slightly to 75 cents by July 6th, silver prices continued a downward trend that would not halt until World War I.²²

Fear over the impending repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act and anxiety over the country's dwindling gold reserves caused a financial panic, which quickly escalated to an economic depression that ended the boom cycle. Throughout 1893, economic conditions continued to deteriorate. Over the next four years, as many as a fourth of the population in the national labor force lost their jobs. Bank failures rose to a level surpassed only during the Great Depression.²³

The economic depression spurred President Cleveland to action and in August 1893, Cleveland called a special legislature to overturn the 1890 Sherman Silver Purchase Act. The battle to overturn the Sherman Purchase Act was hard fought, particularly in the Senate where silver had strong backing. By November, however, President Cleveland had

silver prices. Since the open market prices for silver in 1873 were higher than the currency value, demonetizing of the metal had little or no effect on silver prices. However, as production soared over the next twenty five years, silver prices fell and the 1873 Coinage Act came to be known as the "Crime (or conspiracy) of '73", by silver's supporters of course.

²⁰ Rohrbough, p.211.

²¹ *Aspen Daily Times*, June 30 1893.

²² *Aspen Daily Times*, July 6 1893.

marshaled enough support to stop government purchase of the metal. With the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, silver's value was guaranteed to remain low for years. A single, far away action in Washington changed the lives of many people living in Western mining towns. Aspen, as one of the major producers of silver in the United States, suffered more than most.

The panic of 1893 had profound effects on the United States' economy. The depression was severe, far-reaching, and long lasting. By the end of the summer, stock prices of many of the country's largest companies had declined 25-50 percent and some companies' values fell much more substantially. The financial panic decimated leading industrial corporations' stock prices. National Cordage, for example, fell from 138 at the beginning of the year to 7 on August 25th. American Sugar dropped from 111 on January 1 to 81 in July. United States Rubber opened the year at 46 but by August had fallen to 17. Railroads, particularly Western ones, were hit hard. The Atcheson, Topeka and Santa Fe lost 74% of its market value, while the Chesapeake and Ohio lost 45% and the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul lost 41%.

In a domino effect, the breakdown in the financial markets engendered a widespread distrust of the financial system. The financial anxiety, in turn, triggered an extensive run on banks. During the first nine months of the year, 415 banks, loan and trust companies, and mortgage companies, with approximately \$100,000,000 in assets and liabilities, closed or suspended operations. The financial panic, loss of consumer confidence, and tightening money supply reverberated into the mercantile and industrial sectors of the economy. In addition to railroad and bank failures, 15,242 businesses filed for bankruptcy in 1893, defaulting on \$346,779,889 in liabilities.²⁴

Although recovery from the 1893 depression began in 1897, its effects on the national economy remained until after the turn of the century. As late as 1899, non-agriculture unemployment levels remained above 10 percent. The country did not reach full capacity production until 1907. This depression ranks as one of the five worst in United States history in the 100 years following the Civil War.²⁵ Although the rest of the country

²³ Charles Hoffman, *The Depression of the Nineties: An Economic History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1970), pp.3-5.

²⁴ W. Jett Lauck, *The Cause on the Panic of 1893* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1907), pp.99-109.

²⁵ Hoffman, pp.3-5.

rebounded from the depression over the next ten years, Aspen remained in a gradual decline that encompassed the next thirty to forty years.

The depression affected Aspen differently than its eastern counterparts. Since the town's fortunes were linked so closely to silver prices, this issue dominated Aspen's economic development. Aspenites were concerned about the currency question but as long as silver prices remained constant, and relatively high, the town continued to function as a growing mining community. As late as March 1893, the *Aspen Daily Times* was promoting the upcoming year as one with a bright future. As one might expect from a local Western paper, boosterism remained an important component of the news. Despite the gradual decline in silver prices, the paper proclaimed that 1893 held "prospects for a marked increase in business in Aspen." Furthermore, the paper claimed that with the passage of free silver coinage "Aspen would soon have a population of 20,000 people, and electric railways and many other public improvements would be a necessity."²⁶ Confidence in the town remained high as mining operations continued to run at full tilt. Through the first six months of the year, Aspen's mines produced 34,689,452 ounces of silver, nearly seven times the amount produced only five years earlier.²⁷ But by late March, even the *Daily Times* was beginning to sound nervous. On the 22nd and 23rd of March, silver prices fell to 82 and then 81 7/8 cents per ounces, which the paper noted were all-time lows.²⁸ Still, the impending change in the economic conditions remained unforeseen. The Hotel Jerome, the city's premium hotel, advertised table board at the relatively luxurious rate of \$9 per week. The *Daily Times* ran prominent advertisements for luxury items such as silk shirts, jewelry, wallpaper, fancy groceries, and fine suits and millinery.²⁹

As the dark cloud of economic depression began to descend in New York, Aspen showed some evidence of a recession's effects. By late April, the nation's gold reserves began to dominate front page headlines. Daily reports on the amount of gold reserves and the meetings of New York bankers became local news. Bank failures began to seep into

²⁶ *Aspen Daily Times*, March 1, 1893.

²⁷ *Aspen Daily Times*, Sept. 26 1893. Charles Henderson, *Mining in Colorado* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926), p.201.

²⁸ To understand the effects small drop in the price of silver could have on a town of Aspen's size, consider that a five cent drop in silver prices would have cost the mining industry in Aspen approximately \$1.73 million dollars in the first six months of 1893. Given that the mining work force was around 2,500 men and the average wage was approximately \$3.50 per day, that five cent decrease could have paid the entire workforce their salaries over the first half of the year.

reports. Retailers advertised recession level prices on everything from shoes to suits to couches. A price war among railroad fares pushed the price of a Denver to Chicago fare to \$40 and then to \$25.

As long as silver prices continued to hold steady Aspen remained isolated from much of the effects of depression. The last week of June, however, changed Aspenites perceptions of the economy and their activities. On the 25th of June, bar silver was quoted at 80 1/4 cents per ounce, leading the *Daily Times* to remark that "If silver keeps going down it will be more appropriate for the people of Aspen to drape their houses and go into mourning rather than to celebrate on the Fourth."³⁰ On Tuesday, June 27th, Aspen endured a severe blow when David Moffat, the prominent Colorado mine owner, announced that he could no longer operate his mines under the present conditions. Moffat's mining interests throughout the state included joint partnerships with local Aspen developer David Hyman. When the India Mints suspended purchase of the metal on June 28th, silver went into free fall. By Friday the 30th, the price had reached 62 cents an ounce.

In light of these circumstances, all of the major mine operators in the state ceased operations. By the first week in July, mining employment in Aspen had fallen from 2,250 men to approximately 150-200 men.³¹ Aspen's unemployed were in good company, as the panic of 1893 had caused total unemployment in Colorado to rise six-fold from 8,000 to 47,000.³²

By the end of July, Colorado residents began searching for alternatives to the situation caused by the crisis. Instead of remaining in a state whose major industry was dependent on the price of silver, many left Colorado to return to the East. On July 27, *The Aspen Daily Times* reported that 250 men left Colorado looking for work on an eastbound train, only to be told to keep moving on when they arrived in Kansas. Two days later, the paper reported that officials in Kansas City, Missouri were now enforcing a law forbidding the railroads from bringing in destitute people.³³ *The Daily Time's* reports informed Aspenites of the national mood, but the paper also wanted to encourage residents to wait out

²⁹ *Aspen Daily Times*, April 17-18 1893.

³⁰ *Aspen Daily Times*, June 25-30 1893.

³¹ *Rocky Mountain Sun*, July 18 1893, p.3.

³² Harold Knight, *Working in Colorado: A Brief History of the Colorado Labor Movement*, (Boulder Center for Labor Education and Research, University of Colorado, 1971) p.33.

³³ *Aspen Daily Times*, July 27-29 1893.

the panic. According to the *Daily Times*, life was not much better anywhere else. In fact, the paper noted with pride that “Easterner people seem to be surprised to see Colorado holding on with all her mines closed and all other branches of businesses paralyzed.”³⁴

Yet, despite the local paper’s attempts to put the best possible face on the situation, Aspen residents could not ignore the effects of the depression. The first and most profound effect of the falling price of silver occurred when all of the mines suspended operations, throwing the largest employed group in the city out of work. While the second half of 1893 affected mining operations and employment levels, business also suffered. Since mine owners regularly paid their workers on a monthly basis, many retailers sold to their clientele on credit. With mine work virtually at standstill, retailers were unable either to collect back debt or to make much in the way of new sales. These conditions forced businesses to give significant discounts for cash payments.

Aspen’s already jittery businesses reacted quickly to the downturn. On the last day of June, the Hotel Jerome lowered weekly table board \$2 a week to \$7, while D.E. Lutes and Company, a boot and shoe store, proclaimed a 1/3 off sale and changed to a cash-only policy. By the second of July, all the mines had ceased operations. The lack of business forced W.E. Turley, a dry goods merchant, to join the price cutting as an advertisement in *Daily Times* proclaimed, “Twenty per cent Reduction for Cash . . . We Must Have Money.” Miners, who made up the largest block of employees in the city and twenty to thirty percent of the population, had no source of income to support Aspen’s businesses.

Soon the depression’s effects on Aspen became more pronounced. On Independence Day morning, Aspen residents were greeted with the announcement of the failure of Leadville’s American National Bank. Within the week, the paper had announced five other bank failures in the state. But the biggest bank failure shock to Aspenites came on July 22, when the J.B. Wheeler Bank suspended operations. The loss of one of Aspen’s two banks was a major blow to the town and the emotional shock shook the town’s residents. Since J.B. Wheeler was the first and one of the foremost investors in Aspen, his bank’s failure hit residents hard. As the *Rocky Mountain Sun* noted, “The name of J.B. Wheeler is held in the greatest esteem and veneration by the people of Aspen.”³⁵

³⁴ *Aspen Daily Times*, July 27 1893.

³⁵ *Rocky Mountain Sun*, July 22 1893. Found in Rohrbough, p.220.

The emotional shock to Aspenites at the closure of the J.B. Wheeler Bank was compounded by the continuing struggles of Aspen retailers, who were reeling from the effects of the mine closures. On Independence Day, Weiberg Clothing announced that it was no longer accepting credit and was reducing all prices by 20 percent. Although silver prices had rebounded from the panic inspired by the closure of Indian Mints, the mines had not resumed operations. With silver still hovering below 80 cents to the ounce, many mine owners preferred to wait for higher prices before reopening their mines. By the end of the month, Hunts and Chicago Bazaar, a dry goods merchant, had joined in lowering prices and giving discounts for cash. Meanwhile, the situation for W.E. Turley became more desperate, as a later advertisement proclaimed "‘Money or Bust,’ 25 percent discount for all cash payments."

Soon Aspen's residents witnessed their co-workers, friends and business associates abandoning the once-prosperous mining camp for potentially greener pastures. As businesses continued to struggle to survive, many left Aspen to look for work and opportunities elsewhere. In August, D.E. Lutes and Company announced its bankruptcy sale. Men could still find some work in Aspen -- the Famous Mining and Tunnel Improvement Company was hiring family men or widowed wives -- but the compensation offered was wood for the winter and \$2 a day.³⁶ These wages represented a significant drop from the \$3.00 to \$3.50 a day (and sometimes much higher), that mining had previously paid. Under these difficult circumstances, it is not surprising that Aspenites began to leave the city and search for other opportunities. Some headed off to Cripple Creek to try strike it rich in the new and booming gold mining town.³⁷ So many of Aspen's miners and men emigrated to Cripple Creek over the next two years that at least one employer in Aspen felt the effects of a labor shortage. According to that mining camp's paper, *The Cripple Creek Free Press*, Manager Bruton of the Cowenhoven tunnel at Aspen sent out blacklists to mine managers in the Cripple Creek District "in order to prevent certain old time Aspen boys from securing employment here."³⁸

While the rest of the country eventually recovered from the crash of 1893, Aspen did not. Unlike eastern towns, Aspen's fortunes were still intimately linked to silver. The depression in the price of silver meant that mining operations would never be the same in

³⁶ *Aspen Daily Times*, Sept. 2 1893.

³⁷ *Aspen Daily Times*, Sept. 27 1893.

Roaring Fork Valley. Although many mines re-opened in the fall of 1893, employment levels remained well below previous levels. Furthermore, the enticing stories of the poor prospector making a rich discovery and finding wealth gave way to less a glamorous picture -- one of daily survival based on wage labor.

Over the first fourteen years of Aspen's existence, the town's history was similar to that of other mining camps. While 1884 marked a significant year for Aspen because it put in place the infrastructure for the advent of industrial capitalism, and 1890 to 1892 marked the transition from predominantly pre-modern miners to a wage labor system, 1893 marks a turning point in development of Aspen's community. The immigration pattern to the camp may have had some effect on creating more peaceful relations between workers and mine owners. Yet, although the labor-capital relations were more amicable in Aspen than in Leadville, the town had not yet established the cross-class commitment to community that characterized, and differentiated it, from other mining camps.

Aspen's economic reliance on silver meant that crash affected the town more dramatically than many other western towns. The overnight loss of a large portion of the town's residents shocked the community. The booming immigration pattern was replaced by an equally striking pattern of out-migration. As a result, the town's populace became a "community of survivors." These survivors came to recognize similarities among themselves that bridged the gaps that might have developed between workers and owners. They shared interests in the town's economic health. During this period of long-term economic decline, neither workers nor owners were "getting rich." Instead, the marginal profitability of business operations in Aspen encouraged both groups to seek to avoid expensive confrontations. At the same time a number of town-wide activities helped establish a group identity. Through these activities and the struggle to maintain Aspen as economic entity, the town's residents developed a sense of communal commitment.

In the experience of many Western mining towns, the evolution of industrial capitalism created tension between workers and owners. In Leadville, Telluride, Cripple Creek, Coeur d'Alene, Butte, and other mining towns, this tension dominated worker-capital relations. Aspen emerged under similar conditions as these mining camps, yet avoided their experiences. Aspenites' active participation in labor unions and their strong populist heritage provided the underpinning for a possible militant labor movement. But a second

³⁸ *Cripple Creek Free Press*, April 12 1895.

dynamic – that of the community development across class lines – enabled the town to prevent the violent confrontation that engulfed other mining camps.



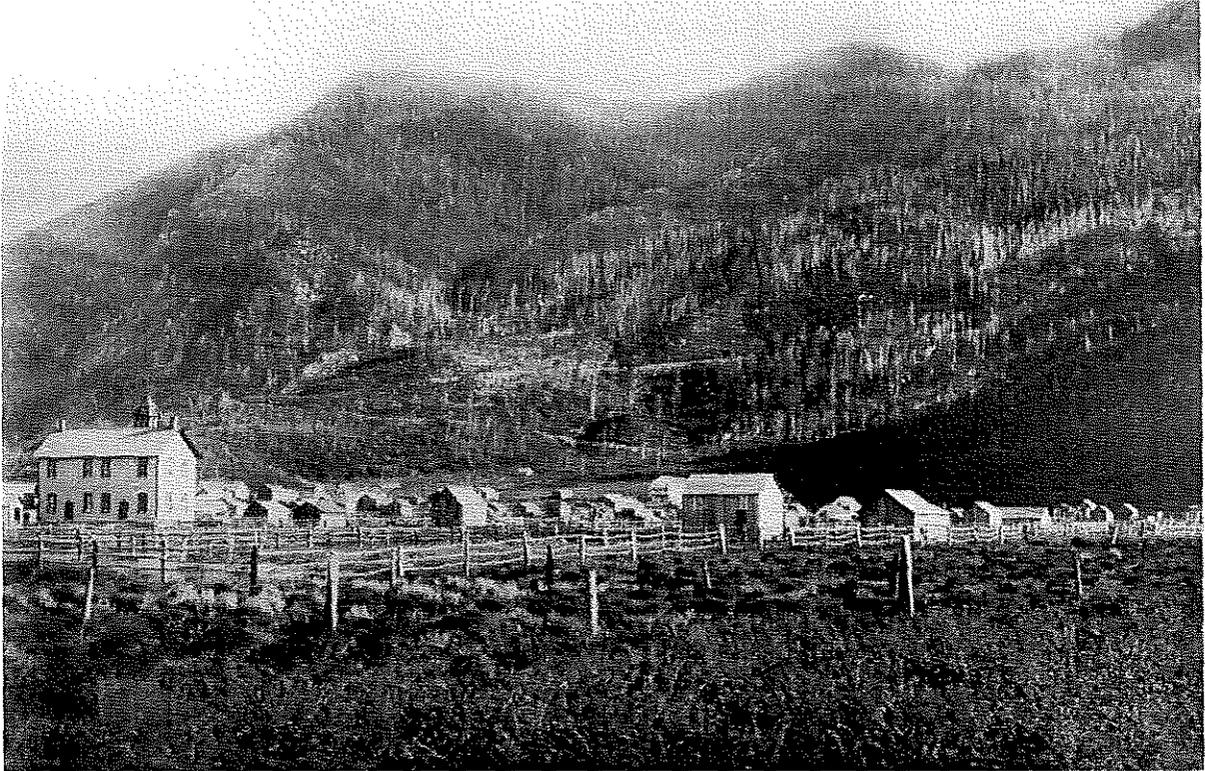
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Figure 1: A group of “pre modern grub-staking” miners at their homestead circa 1880. Single and small groups of miners controlled their own pace of work and divided the profits among themselves. Photo courtesy Aspen Historical Society.



72.9.11

Figure 2: The day shift, Upper Durant Mine, circa 1893. After the advent of industrial capitalism in Aspen, the mines ran three eight-hour shifts per day. Since this picture shows only one-third of the work force, the Durant probably employed 400-500 men at the time of the photograph.
Photo courtesy of the Aspen Historical Society.



75.14.9

Figure 3: Aspen looking up towards Aspen Mountain, circa 1882-1885. The prominent large building on the left is the town's new school house. Photo courtesy Aspen Historical Society.



63.44.101

Figure 4: Aspen looking down from Smuggler Mountain in 1893. For a frontier town, Aspen had the look of an urban city. The smokestacks in the bottom center come from the Smuggler mine, which was just above (on the mountain) the Mollie Gibson mine in the lower left corner. The industrial nature of the city is further evidence by the railroad tracks in the foreground and the smoke billowing out from Holden-Marolt in the background. Photo courtesy Aspen Historical Society.

Chapter 3 - A Union Not Like the Others

From the end of June 1893 until mid-November of the same year, the mines in Aspen remained closed. Nearly 2,500 miners were left without work. Although all residents in the town struggled during the depression of 1893, perhaps none were more poignantly affected than the miners. In October, Aspenites attempted to address their economic problems -- the first step in that process was the reopening of the mines. On October 2, business owners held a meeting to attempt "to place miners and mine owners on equal footing," the goal being the return of the miners to work.¹ Silver was no longer at rock-bottom prices and many in the town were desperate for the infusion of money that the reopening of the mines would bring. Mine owners, however, were using the poor economic conditions to push for an increase in the workday from eight to ten hours. On October 4, miners and mine owners met to discuss their differences. The eight-hour work day issue emerged as the pivotal issue.

Aspen miners had been unionized for some time, and both the miners and the community felt strongly about maintenance of the eight-hour work day. Although many miners had left Aspen, Pitkin County Local Union No.6 still maintained a sizable presence in the community. The local paper attempted to keep tensions low between the union members and the mine owners. In an oft-echoed refrain, the *Aspen Daily Times* stated that "For years there has been the best feeling between miners and mine owners in this camp."² The paper called for an arbitration board to settle the difference between the two groups.

The 1893 strike illustrates the paradox of Aspen. In light of national and Western labor experiences, conflict between labor and capital could be expected. On a local level, Aspen's tradition of protest and rapid change from a frontier community to industrial center explains why this action occurred. Yet, at the same time, the residents' commitment to the community was also apparent. Aspenites recognized the importance of an agreement between miners and mine owners in keeping the town alive. The *Aspen Daily Times* used its position in the community to ameliorate the relationship between the two sides. Not only was the newspaper part of the community fabric, but it also served as an active agent in the

¹ *Aspen Daily Times*, October 3 1893.

² *Aspen Daily Times*, November 1 1893.

creation of a set of common interests. Thus, the strike demonstrates both the labor-capital conflict and the existence of shared sense of community within the town that helped offset this inherent conflict.

By the beginning of November, the two sides were meeting to discuss conditions under which mining could be resumed. Since many miners had left Aspen and those remaining had been unemployed for five months, the union was bargaining from a position of weakness. Still, the miners rejected the mine owners' offers of \$2.75 for a ten-hour day and a second offer of \$2.25 for an eight-hour day. Following the mine owners' proposal, the union took action, sending "large delegations . . . from mine to mine yesterday morning for the purpose of preventing miners from going to work . . . no acts of violence took place, although their presence may have had an intimidating influence."³ By the end of first week's negotiations, however, the union and mine owners had settled the dispute.⁴ Although the solution was not favorable to the miners, that they obtained any concessions from the mine owners at all was an achievement.

While many mine owners around the state had used the economic conditions of 1893 as an excuse to attempt to drive unions out of their mines,⁵ the two groups in Aspen appear to have maintained a cordial relationship. The mine owners conceded the eight-hour day to miners, who in exchange accepted a pay cut. Although the miners' pay of \$2.37 for eight hours work was a significant drop from the pre-crash wages, the agreement also established a sliding wage scale based on the price of silver. If silver prices were to increase above 90 cents to the ounce, the miners would be making more than they had been during the previous spring. Aspen miners had been out of work for over four months yet they still managed to negotiate some concessions from management. Despite their tenuous economic position, the miners' strength in the negotiations was augmented by support from the community. Since the town's residents – business owners, miners, and mine owners – all shared the belief that keeping the mines operating was of paramount importance, the community supported a quick and non-violent resolution to the strike.

The strike in 1893 set the stage for labor-management relations that were later repeated in 1912. The miners and the mine owners were both members of the Aspen

³ *Aspen Daily Times*, November 1 1893.

⁴ *Aspen Daily Times*, November 1-4 1893.

⁵ Merle W. Wells, "The Western Federation of Miners", *Journal of the West*, V12, pp.23.

community and both groups had a vested interest in the continuation of the town. Further, the marginal economic position of both groups made them less willing and able to maintain a long drawn-out work stoppage. As a result of these common purposes, strikes in Aspen remained peaceful in nature. Both the mine owners and miners worked to protect their interests, but neither was willing to cross the line to violence that bound the community together.

And yet, Aspen's unionized miners were lay participants in a larger labor movement in the United States. They *were* radical in their critique of capitalism. It is this radicalism that makes Aspen's situation so striking for it continued to exist even as it was ameliorating by the close nature of Aspen community. As the Second Industrial Revolution had altered the fabric of much of American society, labor-employer relations were forever changed. In the mining West, the arrival of modern capitalism drastically altered worker's positions in their communities. Melvyn Dubofsky writes that:

Into these mining communities the modern corporation intruded to disrupt local peace and to drive a wedge between workers and their non-working allies. The 1890's was an uneasy decade for American business, and none more so than mining, milling and smelting. The falling price of silver, the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, the inherent instability of extractive industries made mine owners and smelter operators eager to reduce production costs and consequently less tolerant of labor's demands . . . Capitalists found it easier to make savings by substituting capital for labor . . . Technological innovations increased productivity but in so doing diluted the importance of traditional skills and disrupted established patterns of work . . . it [technological change] tended to lower piece rates and to reduce formerly skilled workers to unskilled positions with lower earnings potential.⁶

Miners found that under these new conditions they could no longer exercise their traditional control of the work process. While a few years earlier, a miner might set his own work hours, now a mine manager decided how long and when miners worked. Before the arrival of the modern corporation and the accompanying technological changes, even in wage-labor

⁶ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, p.27.

or leased-labor mines, workers enjoyed much greater control over job assignments and divisions of labor.

These three changes -- the emergence of powerful corporations, a growing perception that individual autonomy was decreasing, and rapid technological advances that transformed the workplace -- profoundly affected the position of workers. Labor, in general, resisted these forces through three forms of protest. In many cases, resistance took the form of militant action, visible, for example, in the Railroad Strike of 1877, the Pullman strike of 1893, and the Seattle General Strike of 1919. In the years between 1881 and 1905, 37,000 strikes took place involving 7 million workers.⁷ In order to effect collective action, such as strikes, and to consolidate their bargaining position, workers adopted a second strategy -- they organized into unions. The years between 1869 and 1905 saw the rise and decline of The Knights of Labor, the establishment of the conservative American Federation of Labor, and the appearance of various radical alternative trade union movements such as the Industrial Workers of the World and the Western Federation of Miners. Finally, workers also turned to political action to express their discontent. During the 1890's, the Peoples' Party enjoyed a brief moment of ascendancy in the elections of 1892 and continued to play a political role in the mining West during the remainder of the decade. Later, the Socialist Party gained wide support among the working class.

As capitalism was transforming American society, western mining operations changed as well. Profit margins became narrower as the price of silver fell. The high costs associated with discovering, extracting and processing metal ores led inevitably to large scale business operations. These larger businesses could more easily finance the geological surveys and supply the necessary capital investment to mine the discovered ores profitably. As massive accumulations of capital rarely occurred in western towns, absentee corporate ownership became the norm. In the West, as Dubofsky has pointed out, the "divorce between the ownership and local management and the geographical gulf between worker and his ultimate employer led to violent industrial conflict."⁸ The result of the changing economic conditions and technological revolution was a "new order in labor relations,"

⁷ Trachtenberg, p.80.

⁸ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, p.22.

visible in the violent confrontations at Telluride, Victor, Leadville, Coeur d'Alene and other mining camps.⁹

In Aspen, as in the rest of the country, these changing conditions severely impacted workers' lives. By the late 1880's and early 1890's, technological advancement in refining techniques and the growing railroad industry allowed western mining to expand operations significantly. Formerly only the richest, most easily accessible veins could be mined profitably. Independent or small groups of miners could mine these veins with limited capital outlay. Since many of the western mining towns were located in mountainous areas that were difficult to reach, transportation to and from the mining camps proved expensive. Mule trains provided the dominant means of moving goods between the camps and the cities. Because of the difficulties in moving ore out of the camps, miners only worked the most profitable veins with the highest concentration of valuable minerals.

These limitations helped shape Aspen's early growth. Before capitalization made intensive mining practice possible, the high silver concentration of ore in Roaring Fork Valley allowed a small number of independent miners to make money. As a result of this under-capitalization, Aspen's early development had taken a less intensive route. Since few people could undertake *intensive* mining operations, Aspen's mining operations were *extensive*, with single men and small groups working mines all along the Roaring Fork Valley, on Red Mountain, near Ashcroft and Independence, all over Aspen mountain, and in the surrounding areas. The most famous of those Aspen early mining success stories -- J.D. Hooper's lease on the Aspen mine, which produced \$643,000 of silver in November and December 1884 -- spurred growth in the city. Although Hooper was already well off and influential since he was the camp's mayor, a former miner, E.T. Butler, who owned a third of the mine also became a man of means overnight. David R.C. Brown, who owned another third of the mine and was later to play an important role in Aspen development, also benefited substantially from the strike. Although mining remained a risky business in which most ventures failed, success stories such as Butler's and Hooper's supported peoples' belief in the myth of opportunity. The chance for great success and the limited mining activities meant that as long as mining operations were dominated by small groups of miners and prospectors, mining labor organizations remained unnecessary and minimal. Furthermore,

⁹ Nueschatz, pp.49-59.

during these early years, the rich veins, controlled by small groups of locals, made absentee ownership less likely in Aspen.

In mining camps like Aspen, which did not have large-scale business investment or capital, owners, miners, and prospectors developed ways of spreading the costs and risks associated with mining. Mining development was often undertaken on a lease basis, whereby the owner of the claim would agree to share a portion of the proceeds in return for work. The lessee (or lessees) would work the claim, providing labor for the actual mining and developmental work in exchange for an interest in a profit sharing system. Although the terms on the leases varied, some more favorable than others, the chance for a miner to strike it rich provided incentives to the lessees. The mine owner benefited by receiving free developmental work, which could not be undertaken without more capital outlay under a wage labor system. In these early years, Aspen and many western mining towns had, as Michael Nueschatz argues, a

mixture of miners working alone for their own account, groups of miners working together, successful miners employing hired hands to work alongside them, and proprietors who employed workers and managed the property themselves, or even occasionally had hired managers supervising their works.¹⁰

Later, when industrial capitalism finally came to Aspen, these varied practices became less prevalent, causing a transformation of the workforce in Aspen. Before the advent of capitalization, miners had used their employers' reliance on their skills to gain leverage over the pace and conditions of work. Combined with the labor shortages in the mining camps, this skill advantage also had allowed miners to enjoy high wages.

But capitalization and technological advances altered this traditional work process everywhere – including Aspen. As smelters increased in numbers and advances in smelter techniques lowered transportation costs, mining in the West began to change. The lower transportation costs enabled profitable mining of both high grade and low grade ores, making investment in the mining camp more attractive. As mining output increased, railroads expanded into the camps, thus making transportation of large ore tonnage possible. Train lines replaced the outdated mule carts connecting the mining camps to the outside world. In

¹⁰ Neuschatz, pp.12-13.

addition to opening up new mining ventures, the change from mule carts to train lines hastened the industrialization of Western mining towns. As they lowered costs for ore transportation, the trains also made consumer goods more readily available, immigration simpler, and town development more attractive. The change from mining camp to town and eventually to city brought outside investment into these local communities. The infusion of capital into the mining camps led to rapid development – new mines, deeper shafts, greater industrialization, new buildings, more support services, and larger and more complex transportation and communication systems. Together these factors meant higher demand for labor and a larger labor force.¹¹ Furthermore, not only did the mining camps require larger labor forces, but increasingly, businesses employed larger individual labor forces. Particularly in mining operations, capitalization meant that the independent miners and prospectors were replaced by large mine operators who employed in Aspen wage labor forces of 25 to 500 men.

All these changes had the effect of shifting the balance of power away from miners and towards employers. The railroad service meant that new workers could more easily reach the mining camp in the event of labor shortages. The new mining technologies tended to reduce the reliance on individual miner's skills, thereby concentrating the working process knowledge in the hands of management. "Big Bill" Haywood described the changes:

When the power drills were introduced the work of the miners was changed. The men did not object to the installation of the machinery, but many skillful miners were not physically capable of handling them; they were put to work running cars, shoveling ore, or as roustabouts at fifty cents a day less than the miners had been receiving.¹²

Accordingly, management used the gained leverage "to break workers' formally and informally organized means of collectively controlling the process of labor."¹³ Furthermore, the larger wage labor forces meant that individual miners no longer had the chance of making the "lucky strike." As a single worker in a group of one hundred or more,

¹¹ Nueschatz, pp.41-49.

¹² Haywood, *Autobiography*, (New York: Farrar and Rinehard, 1935), p.80.

¹³ Nueschatz, pp.57-60. For how workers informal controlled the work process, also see David Montgomery, "Workers Control of Machine Production in the Nineteenth Century". Found in Daniel J. Leab, *The Labor History Reader*

a miner could hope for little more than his daily wage. As a result of the changed working conditions and the change in the balance of power between workers and management, miners organized into more militant unions to try to regain their former position, or at least protect their wages.

In Aspen, the industrialization process occurred quickly, starting with Jerome B. Wheeler's opening of the smelter on July 4, 1884. As late as 1883, Aspen's mines produced only \$250,000 in annual silver production. With the opening of Wheeler's Aspen Mining and Smelter Company, the town's production level jumped to an annual rate of \$1,250,000. After the famous strike in the Aspen mine in 1884-85 that made fortunes for locals David R. C. Brown, J.D. Hooper and E.T. Butler, the pace of industrialization in the town rapidly accelerated, bringing with it both outside investors and railroad connections. The lure of the silver town captured the interest of James J. Hagerman, who had made a fortune in the iron business as head of the Milwaukee Iron Company. Hagerman used his own financial resources to purchase control of the Colorado Midland Railroad; he then raised an additional \$1,300,000 to connect the line from Leadville to Aspen. Spurred on by a competing railroad, the Denver & Rio Grande also undertook the challenge of connecting their line to Aspen. As neither railroad wanted the other to have exclusive access to the emerging silver camp, by the fall of 1887, Aspen had two railroad lines connecting the town to the outside world. With modern transportation, Aspen's mining development and production soared. In 1888, Aspen's mines shipped 2,700 tons of ore per week. By 1892, that level had reached 4,000 tons per week and the mines employed 2,500 men. In addition, another 500 workers labored at Holden Works in mine support services. Between the years of 1888 and 1892, Aspen's average mineral production exceeded \$8,650,000 per year.¹⁴

The sudden economic boom wrought significant changes on the community. As one might expect, unions arose as workers responded to Aspen's changed work conditions. Although the Second Industrial Revolution greatly affected the entire country, in the East the change from frontier communities to urban industrial ones had taken place over the course of generations. In the mining West, this change happened in a matter of years. Leadville, for example, grew from a population of 200 in 1878 to over 14,000 in 1881. When prospectors discovered gold in Cripple Creek in 1892, the town exploded, boasting 10,000 residents,

¹⁴ Rohrbough, pp.150-160.

three railroads, trolleys, and electric lights just eight years later.¹⁵ Overnight, the mining camps changed from primitive conditions becoming similar to eastern cities. As Melvyn Dubofsky writes:

These mill and smelter towns, with their shoddy company houses and stores, their saloons, and their working-class populations, bore a distinct resemblance to their Eastern industrial counterparts.¹⁶

Although Aspen was never a company town, by 1893 the industrial change had altered the town's labor environment from what it had been seven years earlier. Capital investment and more intense mining operations forced workers to labor under very different conditions.

By 1893, Aspen had been transformed. Instead of single or small groups of miners and prospectors, large employment forces now worked the mines. In 1891, for example, J.B. Wheeler's two major mines, the Emma and the Compromise, each employed over 100 workers and the Smuggler more than doubled that number. In total, the six largest mine properties employed 664 workers, well over a third of the total mining labor force. By 1892, the Aspen mine alone employed 400 workers, or nearly twenty-five percent of all miners in the city.¹⁷ Like eastern factories, mining in the Roaring Fork Valley became the work of large-scale heavily capitalized businesses.

One of the most important of the changed conditions in mining was an increase in mortality and disability rates. The transformation from primitive mining techniques to industrial mining operations meant that miners risked life and limb on company time instead of their own. The change to large-scale mining brought with it deep shaft mining – sometimes as deep as 3,000 feet – and the heavy use of explosives, and there can be no doubt that these two factors significantly increased the dangers of mining. Hard rock mining was dangerous throughout the West. During the height of Aspen's mining operations in 1891 and 1892, for example, miners died at the rate of one per month, while injuries and disabilities occurred in much greater numbers.¹⁸ Companies rarely provided any benefits to injured miners and provided only minimal burial expenses. The shared health risks provided a key element for union organization.

¹⁵ Dubofsky, "The Origins of Western Working-Class Radicalism 1890-1905", p.133.

¹⁶ Dubofsky, *We Shall be All*, p.21

¹⁷ Rohrbough, pp.161-162.

Aside from the change from frontier communities to urban ones, Colorado also underwent demographic shifts that enhanced the development of union movements. The rapid industrialization in Colorado between the 1870s and the late 1890s had brought with it a dramatic increase in population. Between 1870 and 1890, Colorado's population multiplied tenfold. Although wages throughout the mining camps had remained high through most of this period, as the population expanded, a surplus labor pool developed, and this in turn drove down wages as mine owners took advantage of the situation by increasing hours and lowering wages.

After 1890, this population growth rate slowed substantially, increasing only 30 percent by 1900. Perhaps more importantly, the labor force grew even more slowly in the mountain towns, as a larger portion of the new immigrants settled on the Eastern plains and in Denver.¹⁹ Even as the repeal of the Sherman Silver Act was providing a disincentive to invest in mining operations, the mining owners were beginning to feel the effects of labor shortages. Yet, when the labor surplus no longer existed, the mine owners were resistant to reversing their earlier course and raising wages. The combination of the labor shortage and the tensions created by changing work conditions fostered a growth in union organization.

Even after the silver crash in 1893, labor benefited from a favorable supply-demand relationship. The Colorado mining industry did not go into decline but continued to grow. Although the low price of silver meant that mining was not as profitable as before, new technological advancements helped offset some of the reduction in profit margins. The new capital-intensive technologies not only altered the work process and changed traditional jobs but allowed mining of previously unprofitable ore. Since much of the most easily accessible ore had already been mined, new mining tended to be "concentrated in narrower and more deeply buried veins, requiring a disproportionate increase in construction costs, which tended to be more highly labor intensive."²⁰ In addition, Colorado's increase in gold mining helped offset any decrease in silver operations. Since much of the labor force was interchangeable between gold and silver mining, the demand for hard rock miners as a whole increased over the decade of the nineties. Although the effects of the labor shortage would have been felt in the gold camps, a certain degree of spillover to the silver towns could be expected as well.

¹⁸ Rohrbough, p.197.

¹⁹ Nueschatz, p.22.

²⁰ Nueschatz, p.23.

Aspen's demographics also help explain the formation of the miner's union. During Aspen's boom years, 1890 to 1893, the population was heavily weighted toward native-born Americans. In 1890, 80 percent of the population were native-born Americans. Furthermore, many of the immigrants came from English speaking countries – Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. In 1885, approximately two-thirds of the immigrants spoke English as their native language.²¹ Since 80 percent of the population were native-born American and two-thirds of the foreigners came from English speaking countries, approximately 92 percent of Aspenites spoke the same native language. As a result, workers in Aspen often shared common backgrounds and language. The homogenous population made organization of unions easier since there were fewer ethnic barriers to overcome.

This demographic breakdown was remarkably similar to that of Cripple Creek during the height of that town's union strength. In 1900, Cripple Creek was also 80% native-born American, while 60-70% of the immigrants came from Canada, England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland.²² In *All That Glitters*, historian Elizabeth Jameson argues that this heavy leaning towards a native born population helped Cripple Creek avoid "the interethnic discord that divided European immigrants in earlier mining camps." Furthermore, the geographic distribution of residents in Cripple Creek created a highly integrated community facilitating the breakdown of ethnic prejudices – mainly anti-Irish and anti-Catholic.²³

A similar situation occurred in Aspen as well. A sampling of ten consecutive entries from the 1900 census data revealed five mixed ethnic households and included representation from Ireland, England, Germany, Scotland, and Wales as well as native-born Americans.²⁴ In fact, of the 664 entries examined, only nine consecutive entries comprised definitive ethnic grouping – 29 new immigrants from Austria and Italy. Although a national increase in immigration from Austria and Italy occurred during the next ten years, Aspen continued to have diverse neighborhoods. In the 1910 census, two groups of entries – one group of 25 Austrians and Italians and another group of 25 Italians – were the only recorded neighborhoods of possible non-diverse ethnic populations. In sum, they only accounted for 16 of the 338 entries examined. By 1920, a single identifiable neighborhood enclave of

²¹ Kimmell, pp.57-58.

²² Jameson, P.79.

²³ Jameson, p.142.

²⁴ Since census takers worked on a house by house basis, consecutive entries indicates who lived next to each other.

Austrian-Slovene existed which consisted of 50 immigrants from that background interspersed with native-born Americans.²⁵ Although prejudices most assuredly still existed in Aspen – the town’s leaders barred Chinese from even entering Aspen²⁶ – ethnic divisions between Germans, Irish, English, Scottish, Swedish, and the other immigrant groups were not prominent in public discourse and did not have an adverse affect on union development.

Unions probably immigrated to Aspen along with miners across the divide from Leadville. Leadville was home to the first hard-rock miner’s assembly of the Knights of Labor in Colorado. Only ten years before Leadville’s union began organizing workers, Uriah Stevens founded the national organization in Pennsylvania in 1896. The Knights became the first broad-based labor movement to challenge the rising power of corporations in America. The organization grew gradually at first, claiming only 100,000 members by 1885. In 1886, however, membership exploded to over 700,000 members, making the movement a powerful, albeit short-lived, force in national politics. The Knights were unique at the time because they envisioned a broad association of workers bound together regardless of their craft affiliation. The Knights’ agenda was based on the philosophies of anti-monopolism, producerism and greenbackism and was closely related to populism.²⁷ Given the proximity of Aspen to Leadville and the overlap of workers between the two mining camps, there is a good probability that former Leadville miners founded the Aspen chapter of the Knights of Labor.

Challenges to monopoly power had great appeal to the western miners who suffered from dual problems: large mining corporations controlled the growing industrial towns and railroads controlled transportation to and from these locales. As a result of these particular western conditions, the Knights maintained local assemblies in western mining towns long after the national Knights’ movement had subsided and entered its period of decline. As late as 1892, for example, the *Aspen Union Era* sponsored lectures from Knights of Labor speakers.²⁸

²⁵ *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States Census, Colorado, Pitkin County. 1900.* Collected by Richard E Cowling, AHS. *Population Schedules of the Thirteenth Census of the United States Census, Colorado, Pitkin County. 1910.* Collected by Richard E Cowling, AHS. *Population Schedules of the Fourteenth Census of the United States Census, Colorado, Pitkin County. 1910.* Collected by Richard E Cowling, AHS.

²⁶ Rohrbough, pp.132-133.

²⁷ McMath, pp.62-80.

²⁸ Rohrbough, p.198.

In both Leadville and Aspen, the Knights served a dual function – organizing workers and providing members with a community support group. Not only did the union offer a critique of the wage labor system and attempt to organize worker cooperatives, the Knights gave union members an alternative set of institutions based on the ideals of mutuality and solidarity. The Knights’ assembly halls, picnics, parades, dances, lectures, and other social events helped established a collective commitment to the community. Although mostly defined by class, the union allowed all producing classes to become members. Small businessmen and farmers could participate, expanding the overall involvement of the population.²⁹ In a town such as Aspen, prospectors and mine owners of small local operations as well as workers probably participated in Knights of Labor functions.

Although the geographical distance between the two chapters was not far, the Aspen’s Knights’ experience was much different from that of Leadville’s. Leadville’s Miner’s Cooperative Union gained prominence due to its militant action and charismatic leader, Michael Mooney. As early as 1880, Leadville miners at Chrysolite Mine struck over their working conditions and in an attempt to maintain the \$4 minimum daily wage. The tradition of conflict continued in Leadville even after the silver boom had ended. As late as 1896, a strike over maintenance of a \$3 per day wage resulted in violent conflict in Leadville. After mine owners brought in strike breakers, union workers attacked the non-unionized men. The conflict culminated with the dynamiting of the Coronado Mine and a union-launched attack on the Emmett Mine. The problems continued long enough for government troops to be activated to crush the strike, which lasted until February of 1897.³⁰

These frequent incidents of violence between Leadville’s mine owners and workers helped push certain kinds of people to Aspen. Many of these people – both mine owners and miners – probably came to Aspen seeking refuge from the violence in Leadville. Aspenites recognized this peaceful heritage and were proud of it. Editorial comments in the *Aspen Democrat*, such as those published during the 1912 strike detailing how both the miner and the mine owners are “fair bunch of men” demonstrated that the residents valued Aspen’s “quietude.” In Aspen, although the Knights organized workers and exposed residents to an

²⁹ American Social History Project, *Who Built America: Working People & The Nation’s Economy, Politics, Culture & Society*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), pp.109-118.

³⁰ Wyman, pp.162-172.

important critique of capitalism, the community-building functions were a vital function of the union.

As the Knights' power began to wane, another labor organization entered the national scene. Founded in 1881 as the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) reached prominence as a labor organization in the late 1880's and early 1890's. Between the years of 1897 and 1903, the AFL quadrupled in membership. Although its position did not go unchallenged, the Federation claimed the right to "define legitimate union behavior."³¹ Under Samuel Gompers, the AFL made protection of wages the centerpiece of its working class program. Instead of challenging the economic and political system, the AFL tried to work within existing conditions to improve skilled craftsmen's position in society. Operating from a conservative labor union position, the AFL used unions and strikes as "vehicles of integration rather than agents of insurrection."³²

Although it is not clear if AFL chapters were chartered in Aspen, some local unions did organize under craft, instead of industrial, lines. By 1892, unions of printers, barbers, clerks, tailors, carpenters and joiners, musicians, and engineers all existed in Aspen. The Aspen Typographical Union, formed in 1886, for example, survived a lockout in 1887 and launched a strike in 1893.³³ The national organization of the Knights of Labor received more coverage in local papers but the AFL's actions were reported as well. For example, the *Aspen Daily Times* reprinted Gompers' year-end address to the union on December 13, 1893.³⁴ In 1893, although Aspen's traditions of Populism and the Knights of Labor exposed the community to the radicalism characteristic of the mining West, the specific direction of Aspen unions was, as yet, undetermined.

One of the challenges to the AFL emerged from Western Federation of Miners. Building on traditions of the Knights of Labor and western Populism, the Western Federation of Miners was founded in 1893. Following unsuccessful strikes in Cripple Creek and Leadville, Colorado, and particularly Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, western miners formed a new labor organization to protect their interests. After spending time in jail for their

³¹ David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp.5-6.

³² Trachtenburg, p.95.

³³ Kimmell, pp.64-67.

³⁴ For examples of Knight of Labor reports see *Aspen Daily Times*, November 17, November 24, and December 10, 1893. For the Gompers' address see the *Aspen Daily Times*, December 13, 1893.

activities in Coeur d'Alene, "Big Bill" Haywood and Ed Boyce led the formation of the WFM, which unified separate miners' unions in Idaho, Colorado, California, Nevada, and the Southwestern territories. At its inception, the WFM was not substantially different from the AFL. The WFM's initial goals were to increase and protect wages, improve safety standards, limit the use of Pinkerton detectives, and assure preferential hiring of union members. The WFM, however, came from a different philosophical position than the AFL and their aims quickly diverged. Disenchantment over the AFL's unwillingness to provide support to miners during the 1896 strike in Leadville led the WFM to break with the AFL.³⁵

A consequence of the WFM-AFL rupture was that miners embarked on a more radical course of unionization. As Melvyn Dubofsky has argued:

Around the Western Federation of Miners rallied America's radical dissidents, those dissatisfied with things as they were - with McKinley, Roosevelt, Bryan, and the political parties they represented, with Samuel Gompers and the craft unionism, and especially with corporate capitalism.

The WFM members were often former Knights of Labor. They had attended Populist schools and supported populist candidates. Later they would be among the staunchest supporters of the Socialist party. The miners of the WFM were not willing to settle for "pure and simple" unionism. Instead they attempted to articulate a challenge to the emerging capitalist order.³⁶

The founding of the Western Federation of Miners in 1893 coincided with the period when Aspen was at the height of its importance in the mining community. Silver was still the primary mineral being mined in much of the West. Aspen's existing union, which was organized (or re-organized) as the Aspen Miners Union in 1890, claimed 1,300 members in 1892.³⁷ Previous to the 1890 formation of an independent miners union, many of the miners probably were Knights of Labor members; after the founding of the Aspen Miners Union, they probably still maintained dual membership with the Knights of Labor. The town's importance as a mining center, its Populist influence, and its established union meant that Aspen was a good candidate for a chapter of the newly formed WFM union. And, in fact, Aspen was one of four Colorado mining towns to join the WFM at the organization's

³⁵ Wyman, pp.170-172. Dubofsky, "The Origins of Western Class Radicalism".

³⁶ Dubofsky, "The Origins of Western Class Radicalism".

inaugural meeting in Butte, Montana in 1893. Pitkin County Miner's Union Local #6 arose from the remnants of the Aspen Miners Union and was infused with the anti-capitalism of the Populists and Knights of Labor.

The choice of Aspen miners to affiliate with the WFM was a telling development. The growth of Aspen's unionism in 1893 was still in a state of flux – the direction of which could have headed towards either the more conservative AFL lines or the more radical WFM ones. The choice of Aspen miners to join the WFM strengthens the argument that Aspen was infused with the same radical elements as other more famous Western mining towns such as Leadville. Given the proximity between the two camps and the overlap of miners, similar labor-capital relations would not have been surprising. In fact, as chapter four will demonstrate, Aspen's WFM miners were committed to the WFM's radicalism. Local No.6 was active member of the WFM, generously supporting the union's eight-hour workday drive, frequently bringing Socialist speakers to Aspen, and running candidates on the Socialist Party ticket.

Yet, Aspen's union was different from those of Leadville, Cripple Creek, Butte, and others. The WFM is usually associated with violent conflict between mine owners and miners. Despite the fact that Local No.6 did not instigate attention-getting strikes like those in Leadville, Coeur d'Alene, Victor and Telluride, this union affected the town both economically and socially long after silver declined in importance throughout the mining West. Aspen's miners were different from these other WFM chapters in that they did not become involved in prolonged, violent labor struggles. Instead, Aspen mine owners and miners had selected the town to avoid the violence that had engulfed other mining camps such as Leadville. These people, often from similar backgrounds, sought to create a mutual community in Aspen – one built around a number of different institutions that all the residents of Aspen could benefit from.

³⁷ Rohrbough, p.198.

Chapter 4: The Silver Crash and the Community's Transformation

In the year following the silver crash, employment conditions for Aspen's miners were difficult. One of the biggest changes for the miners was a decrease in wage-paying jobs. The Aspen mines that had reopened were operating under different economic conditions than they had been two years before. As the mining companies searched for ways to increase their profit margins, the methods they employed usually came at the expense of workers. In fact, since silver prices had remained at a depressed level, some companies could not profitably extract the metal using a wage labor force. As a result, many of the mines in the vicinity of Aspen resorted to leased employment practices. A miner working under leased conditions was similar to a farmer working as sharecropper. Both rented their land, paying for the use of it by sharing the proceeds of their labor with the landowner or the mine owner. The reduction of the wage workforce allowed companies to cut operating expenses by shifting costs to the lessees. Although mine workers gained more control over their working conditions, they were generally worse off economically.

When silver's value had been high and Aspen's mines were mostly undeveloped, some miners profited under a leased labor system, but the new economic conditions meant that the chance for a miner to make good profits were significantly reduced. The General Manager's report of The Aspen Mining and Smelting Company, one operation struggling to be profitable in 1894, gives a glimpse of miners' earnings potential:

April 30th, 1894: "After carefully going over the workings, I cannot see where any of our lessees can earn ordinary wages from this time on, unless new discoveries are made. Possibly the lessees of block no.32, by hard work, carefully screening and sorting their ore, may make more than \$2.25 per shift, but they work much harder and longer than if they were employed by the day."¹

A maximum of \$2.25 per day provided meager means of support and did not even reach the \$2.37 per day union contract to which mine owners had agreed the previous November. Yet, with many mines laying off their wage work force, Aspen's remaining miners had little

¹ DRC Brown Collection, (University of Colorado Archives) Box 2, October 1892-July 1896, p.279.

choice. The Aspen Mine manager was able to find men willing to work under these conditions.

But the existing compensation levels had pushed workers to their limit. Despite the fact that economics were reducing the company's profit margins, the manager of the Aspen Mine had to search for alternatives other than raising the royalty rate on the lease terms to increase the company's profits. In mid-May, the general manager reported that:

May 14th, 1894: "I do not think it would be wise to raise the rates of royalty, for in view of the present conditions of the mine, we should be unable to secure desirable lessees, or lessees who would be willing to perform dead-work."²

Similar problems faced the other major mine operators in Aspen. At the Aspen Mine, the manager shifted other expenses to workers in order to grow profits without increasing the royalty rates.

"Our next contract for the sale of ore will probably average \$2.00 per ton higher than our present contract. This advance in charges will affect the lessees only, since our royalty is based on the gross value of the ore. We can also revise the leases with regard to assaying, making the lessee pay for all assay work instead of allowing each lease block two free assays per day. This will save to the company \$100.00 to 125.00 per month. I think we can also slightly raise the charge for tramming. The receipts for tramming have always exceeded the cost of the work, but as production of ore becomes less, the cost of handling will slightly increase . . . Our lessees are working faithfully and we are piling up on our low grade dump a considerable quantity of ore which may be valuable to us some day in the future."³

To further protect the company, the mine manager also altered lease contract terms to allow the company to cancel the lease at the company's option. This change meant that the lessees were now "tenants at will." If the workers found a rich ore strike, the Aspen Mine and Smelting Company could take over the lease after a five-day prior notice. The new clause

² DRC Brown Collection, Box 2, October 1892-July 1896, pp.282.

³ DRC Brown Collection, Box 2, October 1892-July 1896, pp.283.

removed most of the upside profit potential from the lessee's contract while leaving in the disadvantages. But the bottom line was that, in June 1894, no one was going to get rich in Aspen's silver mines. At the Aspen Mine, the bi-monthly reported noted that:

June 25th, 1894: "There is no lease block which the company could take and work to a profit."⁴

After the crash, low and uncertain pay, hard work, and dangerous working conditions offered a drab picture for Aspen's mine workers.

As more and more men left the town and economic conditions failed to improve, operations at the Aspen Mine continued to decline. By August 11 1894, leased employment at the Mine was half of the level it had been during January, with only 46 men employed. The low employment level meant that miners were working only half of the company's 31 lease blocks.⁵ These conditions at the Aspen and other mines caused a general exodus as many people left the town in search of better prospects.

Aspenites left the once-booming mining town for a variety of locales. Some residents went back to their places of origin. The Reverend Ralson, for example, left Aspen in November of 1893 to return to Albany, New York.⁶ Many of the miners picked up their tools and moved to the next boom camp. At the time of the Silver Panic, the gold fields of Cripple Creek held the most promise for fortune seekers. Some even struck it rich – or at least became moderately successful - in the new town. J.M Shields, M. O'Hughes, Charles McHenry, J.S. Smith, and Andy Irwin, "all well known Aspen miners" had the good luck to make a wealthy strike at Cripple Creek. The *Aspen Daily Times* reported their successes and quoted Shield's invitation to join them at the town: "Don't take my word for but come over and see for yourself."⁷ Reports of former Aspen miners' successes, and front page headlines such as "Rich Strike in WPH Mine at Cripple," insured that Cripple Creek would remain one of the primary destinations for Aspenites on the move.⁸ Of course, the miners were not the only ones to head to Cripple Creek. After the crash, business was so poor in Aspen that some retailers also packed up shop to move to the new mining camp. In December 1893,

⁴ DRC Brown Collection, Box 2, October 1892-July 1896, p.307.

⁵ DRC Brown Collection, Box 2, August 11 1894.

⁶ *Aspen Daily Times*, November 21 1893.

⁷ *Aspen Daily Times*, May 15 1895.

⁸ *Aspen Democrat*, May 20 1904.

The Daily Times reported that “Allen’s stock (a furniture store) will be sold below cost rather than pay freight. The unsold portion . . . will be moved to Cripple Creek during the upcoming week.”⁹

By January 1895, the panic was a recent memory but the town had regained a regular pace of activities. Aspen was still struggling economically because silver had not returned to its former price levels. In fact, prices had continued to decline below the levels that existed during the panic. Silver opened the year at a mere \$0.59 per ounce and remained around \$0.60 throughout the first three months of the year. Due to the low price of silver, mining operations in Aspen suffered. Mollie Gibson mine stock, which had reached \$10 a share in 1891, opened the year at \$1.50 per share and drifted downward over the first quarter of the year, falling as low as 90 cents a share on March 2. The poor performance of Mollie Gibson’s stock cast a pall over all Aspen mining stocks. According to *The Aspen Daily Times*, “The steady drop in Mollie Gibson has practically paralyzed trading and greatly affected the quotations in other stocks, possibly more out of sympathy than anything else.”¹⁰ It is more likely that the downturn in mining stocks was only partially related to the stock price of the Mollie Gibson. A sound analysis is that stock market prices of this sector were more reflective of the underlying fundamentals in the industry. With silver around 60 cents to the ounce - as the mine manager of the Aspen Mining and Smelting Company learned - making money in the silver mining industry was very difficult. The Smuggler Mine experienced profitability problems similar to those of the Aspen Mine. As a result, the manager of the Smuggler halted much of the work in the mine and laid off approximately seventy employees in the first month of year.¹¹

During these difficult years immediately following the Silver Crash of 1893 many people left Aspen. The people who chose to remain, both workers and mine owners, recognized the economic realities of the situation. The Aspen mine manager’s direct statement that “There is no lease block the company could take and work for a profit” illustrates the owners perspective of the situation. Similarly, the fact that miners were willing to perform lease-work for \$2.25 and less per day demonstrates their limited options in Aspen. In 1895, the economic choice was clear for both groups – either leave Aspen for

⁹ *Aspen Daily Times*, September 27 1893, December 29 1893.

¹⁰ *Aspen Daily Times*, January 8 1895, March 2 1895.

¹¹ *Aspen Daily Times*, January 15 1895.

Cripple Creek or some other new boom camp, or remain invested and/or living in the town thereby sacrificing economic compensation.

Despite the drawbacks during 1893 and 1894, prosperity always seemed just around the corner. As early as January 1895, an advertisement in *The Aspen Daily Times* proclaimed “Four Good miners wanted to work under contract at the Little Annie Mine.” This was nothing compared to the seventy that the Smuggler had fired, but provided evidence that some mining operations were expanding. Furthermore, the improvement in economic activity allowed the Jerome Hotel to raise table board rates up to \$7.50 per week, which were still below the 1892 levels, but an increase from the depression period level of \$7.00 per week.¹² In the same way that the Jerome Hotel’s rates were an indicator of the economic downturn in 1893, the raising of the hotel’s prices provided a sort of barometer for Aspen’s “optimism” index. A rich strike at the Argentina-Juanita Mine (A. J. Mine), “on the seventh level richer than anything in the Mollie Gibson,” on March 29 helped confirm this optimism that the town was on the verge of a rebound.¹³ The next day brought more good news to Aspenites when silver jumped five cents to \$0.65 per ounce. With the new strike and the improvement in prices, the A.J. Mine was producing at a rate of \$100,000 of silver ore per month.¹⁴ By April 2, silver trading had reached \$.67 ½, and *The Daily Times* predicted that the price “May go above 70 cents this week.”¹⁵

As was the case with the 1893 crash, this movement in the price of silver had nothing to do with local residents’ actions but resulted from an international incident. Due to a war reparation agreement, China had agreed to pay a large indemnity - 100,000 teals of silver - to Japan.¹⁶ The international silver markets perceived that this indemnity would cause an increase in silver demand exceeding the existing supply. This belief in Wall Street, London and the other trading centers created an upward pressure on silver prices.

Residents of Aspen were aware of the reasons behind the movement in silver prices but it was the immediate effect on the town that concerned Aspenites. The town’s new-found good fortune prompted *The Aspen Daily Times* to comment that:

¹² *Aspen Daily Times*, January 2 1895, January 9 1895, January 11 1895.

¹³ *Aspen Daily Times*, March 30 1895.

¹⁴ *Aspen Daily Times*, April 6 1895.

¹⁵ *Aspen Daily Times*, April 2 1895.

¹⁶ *Aspen Daily Times*, March 30-April 4, 1895.

Aspen is in more prosperous condition than it has been for two years. While improvement is slow and not especially marked, it has been sufficient to inspire people with hope in the future of our city and camp.¹⁷

As if to support the paper's statement about Aspen's improved conditions, the Jerome Hotel raised its table board rates again – to \$8 per week.¹⁸

The confirmation of the town's new "optimism" happened over the next year as Aspen's economic conditions appear to have continued to improve. By the middle of 1896, a number of the mines in Aspen were operating. In July, the A.J. Mine was shipping 60 tons a day and employing 100 miners. The Mollie Gibson was working at half that level but with a higher concentration of silver in the ore – 200-250 ounces per ton as compared to 100-150 ounces per ton at the A.J. Mine. Furthermore, the owners of a number of other mines – the Della S, Aspen, Copperopolis, Connomara, and the Mineral Farm – all employed miners by leases and these mines also shipped ore regularly at lesser levels.¹⁹

Over the next five years, the continued improvement in mining techniques and falling transportation costs allowed mining operations to continue in Aspen even though silver prices also continued to fall. The low price of silver meant that mining was never particularly profitable, but the new mining techniques allowed operators keep the mines open. According to *The Western Federation of Miner's Magazine*, in 1900 Aspen managed to support its working miners adequately, if not luxuriously:

Nineteen hundred has opened with all indications pointing towards a very successful year. Several of the large producers of low-grade ore have tried concentration and have succeeded beyond their expectations. The Smuggler is at present handling about 250 tons of low grade ore per day, and other big low grade properties are talking of building mills, which insures a heavy production of low grade ore for years to come. Some very good strikes are being made in outside districts tributary to this place. Wages are not as high

¹⁷ *Aspen Daily Times*, May 10 1895.

¹⁸ *Aspen Daily Times*, May 3, 1895.

¹⁹ *Aspen Daily Times*, July 4 1896.

as other parts of the state, \$2.50 per day for eight hours being the scale, and good miners generally have steady work.²⁰

Two hundred and fifty tons of ore per day implied a wage labor force of between 200 and 400 men.²¹ The combination of low grade ore and the low price of silver, however, insured that miners in Aspen would have limited earning potential unless the conditions changed.

Since miners in Aspen were already paid less than most miners in the surrounding towns, they could not afford any loss of their existing wages. The narrow margin between making ends meet and failure to do so made the Aspen miners especially sensitive to wage drops. The fact that mine owners had accepted the eight-hour workday in Aspen helped relieve tensions that might have developed over the low wages, but Aspen miners could not accept any lower compensation. Thus, the occurrence and the rapid settlement of 1912 Smuggler strike illustrates the ambivalence that miners had towards the mine owners – on one hand they appreciated having work and the eight-hour work day, while on the other they needed to maintain a survival minimum wage.

The next few years brought little material change in the situation. By 1902, silver had stabilized between \$0.47 and \$0.53 per ounce, a significantly lower level than the metal had traded at just five years earlier. However, the economic situation appeared to improve. The low price of silver did not cause the town to fall into the dismal decline it experienced during 1893-1894. Instead, on December 30, 1902, the Smuggler Mine doubled its employment force from what it had been only thirty days earlier and projected that four hundred men would be working in the mines by February. The management of the Smuggler felt so confident about the economic outlook that the company leased the Mollie Gibson and Durant mines. In addition to the operations at the Smuggler, a number of other mines in the area, including the Bonny Bell, the Little Annie and the Percy Consolidated mines projected optimistic outlooks. The *Aspen Democrat* eagerly touted the expectation that both the Little Annie and the Percy Consolidated mines would soon be employing a hundred men each.²²

²⁰ *Western Federation of Miner's Magazine*, March 1900, Vol. 1 No 3 p.24.

²¹ Based on the A.J. Mine employing 100 men to ship 60 tons daily, 250 tons at the same rate of .6 tons per man per day would require a employment force 416 men. Assuming some improvement in technologies and economies of scale, a wage force of 300 men would still seem reasonable.

²² *Aspen Democrat*, Dec. 30 1902.

The opening of 1903 continued to present bright opportunities. The town's optimism stemmed from the fact that the Hunter Concentrating Mill was about to start operating. The starting of the mill, combined with Smuggler Management company's leasing of both the A.J. and the Mollie Gibson, prompted *The Aspen Democrat* to call the "Future of Aspen bright given the openings of concentrating mills."²³ By the middle of the month the headline of *The Democrat* was predicting "The Return of Old Times":

The Montezuma mine at Ashcroft will take the place of the Mollie and A.J. Mines. The Marble quarries will fill the gap of the Della S. while the Queen Gulch consolidated mines will fill the weakened state of the Aspen mine and the Aspen Mining Company. Difficult Creek, the gold district will be another Cripple Creek for to help it out it has Ashcroft, Conundrum and Maroon. The tenderfeet of Aspen's present day know nothing of the resources of Pitkin county; . . . Such are some of the hopeful times close at hand. Every thinking person in Aspen should feel hopeful for the present and the future.²⁴

Although the *Democrat's* boosterism probably overstated the case for Aspen's economic outlook, compared to the previous ten years, the town's fortunes were on the upswing. Just two days later, the amount of ore produced in Aspen forced both the sampler mill and fanning mill in East Aspen to add extra shifts.²⁵

The economy in 1904 sustained the nascent improvement of 1903. Even as residents migrated to other towns, *The Democrat* continued to boost the town's future outlook. The paper's headline on February 19th proclaimed "Unlimited Prosperity in Store for the Crystal City of the Rockies." The article further noted that due to local developer David Hyman's "heroic efforts . . . The Smuggler mine will explore new ore bodies . . . [and] Aspen will return to prosperity."²⁶ Unfortunately for Hyman, operations at The Smuggler mine were in danger of shutting down during the summer due to flooding. Aspen's community spirit and

²³ *Aspen Democrat*, Jan. 1 1903.

²⁴ *Aspen Democrat*, Jan. 14 1903.

²⁵ *Aspen Democrat*, Jan. 16 1903. All of the reports submitted to the WFM Magazine from Aspen came in the years between 1900 and 1905 indicating that town did experience a rebirth of mining activity during these years.

²⁶ *Aspen Democrat*, Feb. 19, 1904.

the other mine owners' self-interest helped avert this problem as they launched a group effort to keep the pumps operating. On June 24, *The Democrat* reported that the "Smuggler Won't Be Shut Down . . . [since a] Most Commendable Spirit of Co-Operation Shown by Aspen Mining Men."²⁷ The mine owners' group efforts illustrated how the town could act in concert to keep its collective welfare intact.

Additional good news reached the town on August 2 when the Ruby Mine in Lincoln Gulch reported that it "is shipping daily two tons of ore averaging between 300 and 500 ounces of silver to the ton . . . The work in the gulch is increasing steadily."²⁸ This favorable news prompted *The Democrat* to headline the next day's paper with "Immediate Prospects – Great Property to Give Employment – Will Ship Four Hundred Tons Weekly in Ninety Days."²⁹ Within two weeks the Ruby Mine employed 75 miners and the company expected to double that number within the next month.³⁰

Aspen newspapers were not just a useful source of information, they also acted as a key element in the building of the town's community. The first half of 1904 offers a good example of how *The Democrat* acted as both a mediator between workers and mine owners and helped encourage the development of a mutual community among them. Articles, such as the one that commended the Smuggler's management for its "heroic efforts," praised David Hyman and other Aspen mine owners for their "community spirit." Variations on this theme appeared in the newspaper on February 6, February 19, March 1, May 29, June 4 and June 24. The paper's backing of Aspen mining men served to show the workers how reasonable the owners were.³¹

Yet, despite *The Democrat's* endorsement of employers' actions, workers' rights and union support remained a central theme in its editorials and reports. Coverage of the Telluride labor conflict was extensive and sympathetic towards labor. On January 1, for example, *The Democrat* reprinted and added its support to a WFM editorial that called for an investigation into the labor situation in Colorado. On January 17, *The Democrat* blasted Governor Peabody's administration's handling of the Telluride conflict insisting that "No intelligent person can deny that our state constitution is daily violated, openly and flagrantly

²⁷ *Aspen Democrat*, June 4 and 24, 1904.

²⁸ *Aspen Democrat*, August 2 1904.

²⁹ *Aspen Democrat*, August 3 1904.

³⁰ *Aspen Democrat*, August 13 1904.

³¹ *Aspen Democrat*, Feb. 6 and 19, March 1, May 29, June 4 and 24, 1904.

by those who are sworn to protect it.” On February 14, *The Democrat* called for fairer terms to be given to leasers: “The leaser is charged exorbitant rates on royalties and is also heavily taxed to get his ore from his block of ground to the surface. These rates should be materially lowered.” Just in the first three weeks of March, *The Democrat* ran five articles sympathetic to labor and the WFM.³²

The Democrat's sympathetic stance towards labor in 1904 was not an aberration. Instead, it followed the traditions of Aspen's papers. In 1893, for example, *The Aspen Daily Times* printed extensive positive coverage of Governor Waite's October speech in Aspen which was “well attended by Democrats, Republicans, and Populists.” As always, the paper was careful to mention community activities that illustrated the unified character of the town. *The Daily Times* also ran reprints of the annual reports from Terrence V. Powderly of the Knights of Labor and Samuel Gompers of AFL. In November, *The Daily Times* endorsed Powderly's leadership of the Knights. But even during the height of union power, the paper continued to occupy a middle ground between workers and capital. The endorsement of Powderly's union leadership was partially due to his conservative stance. Two weeks later, an editorial in the December 12 paper compared the relative wages between workers in United States demonstrating that US workers were better off. The editorial concluded that American unionists should be reasonable in their demands since US workers were already doing better than the world standard.³³

Despite *The Daily Time's* support for a conservative union movement, the paper recognized the need and right of workers to strike on certain occasions. In 1895, the paper ran extensive and sympathetic coverage of a strike in Brooklyn, New York. Those Eastern capitalist were “private individuals who increase their profits through its operations by treating their workers like slaves” and the workers in New York suffered since “the center of the monopolistic East will not allow labor to triumph over wrong”.³⁴ Clearly some strikes were for the common good, particularly if they occurred somewhere else. In Aspen, though, a different situation existed. When *The Daily Times* addressed Aspen's worker-capital relationship, it attempted to ameliorate tensions between the two groups. The paper's position can be summed up in an 1895 promotion for the annual union ball:

³² *Aspen Democrat*, Jan. 1 and 17, Feb. 14, March 4, 6, 16, 17, 20, 1904.

³³ *Aspen Daily Times*, October 26, November 17 and 26, and December 12 and 13, 1893.

³⁴ *Aspen Daily Times*, Jan. 25 and 26, 1895.

The business element should foster the union, as their interests are identical and their moral assistance would go a great way toward harmonizing the working elements of this camp and also in bringing employee and employer closer in touch with each other.³⁵

The editor of *The Daily Times* believed that a portion of his civic duty was to facilitate an amicable relationship between workers and mine owners.

The result of *The Daily Times* and *The Democrat's* stances supporting both the miners and the mine owners was a lessening of tension between the two groups. And, in fact, the positions taken by the local papers reinforced existing conditions. While the middle ground that *The Democrat* and *The Daily Times* staked out encouraged greater communication between the two groups, the papers would not have been able to take this position unless the community already partially endorsed the position. Aspen's miners trusted the local papers because they supported their interests – often endorsing Socialism and the actions of WFM. Furthermore, by reporting on labor violence in other parts of the state and country, *The Democrat* and *The Daily Times* implied that Aspen's mine owners were fair in comparison. Finally, the emphasis on Aspen's mine owners' attempts to improve the community while the paper's simultaneously supported unions and workers, made both groups more sympathetic to the other's viewpoint.

At the same time, the newspaper's perpetual optimism encouraged both workers and mine owners that Aspen might return to its pre-crash state. The nature of Aspen's historical silver strikes made the residents more accepting of this optimism. Silver strikes in Aspen were legendary – the Mollie Gibson's rich veins of 600 ounces to the ton, J.D. Hooper's \$643,000 profit on two months of lease work on Aspen mine, and the one ton silver nugget extracted from the Smuggler mine – all created the myth that Aspen mines could repeat these feats. Residents persisted in believing that a similar occurrences could happen at anytime and the local papers – *The Aspen Daily Times*, *The Democrat*, and *The Democrat-Times* – all reinforced this belief with constant comments on the approaching return of economic prosperity. As a result, the “community of survivors” remained committed to Aspen even when economic conditions deteriorated. In order to gain the fruits of these anticipated rewards, however, the town had to continue to survive. Both workers and owners made

³⁵ *Aspen Daily Times*, May 15, 1895.

certain sacrifices to keep the town viable until the “good times” returned. These people stayed in Aspen partly due to their ties to the community and partly because they believed the existing mythology and the local papers’ boosterism that return of prosperity was imminent.

Despite the locals’ optimism, the boom in Aspen did not return to its old levels. In 1893 David Hyman claimed that town lots sold for \$10,000, but ten years later, they could be purchased for a fraction of that cost. In January 1903, for example, *The Democrat* advertised two lots and a four-room house for sale for only \$225. Aspenites may have been looking forward to an improved economy but the overnight fortunes of its boom period were not to be repeated.

As late as 1904, Cripple Creek still provided the logical next step for some single miners. For example, *The Aspen Democrat* noted that Ray Baker, “one of the city’s most enterprising and industrious young men,” had chosen that gold camp as his next destination.³⁶ While in 1894-95, accounts of Aspen miners heading to Cripple Creek dominated the local paper’s reports, by the turn of the century miners looked to other camps as well. In May of 1902, for example, *The Democrat* noted that “all old boys from Aspen who had moved to Telluride had found work in the mines there.”³⁷ Likewise, the long term economic decline in the town forced other businesses to relocate in new mining camps. In February 1903, L.C. Lightfoot, the proprietor of a local dry goods store, packed up his supplies and moved to Trinidad.³⁸

Although the depression receded and the conditions in Aspen mining did improve somewhat from the crash years of 1893 and 1894, the town’s economic fortunes continued, over the long term, a gradual decline. By 1920, the conditions in silver mining had forced many to leave the once-booming town. The out-migration during the crash was the most severe. In the seven years between 1893 and 1900, Aspen’s population fell approximately seventy percent. From the high of around 13,000-14,000 residents, the 1900 census counts showed that Aspen’s population had declined to 3,303 people, while Pitkin County as a whole had only 7,020 people. As Aspen’s population was shrinking, the new gold mining camps in the state boomed. For example, in the ten years between 1890 and 1900, the towns of Cripple Creek and Victor grew from nothing to 10,547 and 5,000 residents, respectively.

³⁶ *Aspen Democrat*, May 15 1904.

³⁷ *Aspen Democrat*, May 22 1902.

By 1910, Pitkin County's population had fallen to 4,566, of whom only 1,834 resided in Aspen. The next ten years did not reverse this trend, and the 1920 census reported that Aspenites numbered a mere 1,265 of the 2,767 people living in the county.³⁹

A closer look at the nature of this out-migration suggests another dimension to Aspen community consciousness. During the early exodus in the 1893-1895 period, the residents with fewer ties to the community were the first to move on. Many of the migrants leaving the town were single miners. These people, driven by the poor existing conditions or lured by the promising prospects in Cripple Creek, left Aspen for the new gold mining camp. After this initial period, the later migrating residents choose more distant locales – perhaps after the head of the household had already established himself in the new community. Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah, and even Mexico all emerged as possible destinations. Butte, Montana's robust mining community, for example, offered better job prospects than Aspen. Fred Johnson left in May 1904 to settle in Butte and choose to live there permanently "having employment in view in the place." Two weeks later, Paddy Green and his wife chose the same route; one can surmise for the same reasons.⁴⁰

Unlike the single miners who found moving onward relatively easy, families tended to stay in Aspen longer, waiting for the economy to rebound. As silver prices remained low, however, even they began leave Aspen. By the early 1900's, some families had departed the city for new mining camps or growing western cities. Mrs. Andrew Anderson, for example, left in May 1904 for Salt Lake City to meet her husband, who had decided to locate there permanently.⁴¹ One week later, Otto Johnson packed up his family and headed off to the future capital of Utah.⁴²

On the same day as the Johnson family headed for Utah, N.R. Hunt, a fifteen-year Aspen resident, moved to Las Animas, Colorado. Hunt, who had spent the last five years working for the Durant Mining Company, had had enough of the uncertain and dangerous working conditions in the mining business and decided to go into ranching instead.⁴³ Charles Spillis remained in Aspen until 1903, at which point he moved on to "seek his

³⁸ *Aspen Democrat*, Jan. 29 1903.

³⁹ Compendium of the Twelfth Census, 1900. Compendium of the Thirteenth Census, 1910. Compendium of the Fourteenth Census, 1920.

⁴⁰ *Aspen Democrat*, May 15 1904, May 29 1904.

⁴¹ *Aspen Democrat*, May 15 1904.

⁴² *Aspen Democrat*, May 22 1904.

fortune in Nevada.” Apparently he was lucky in his endeavors in Goldfield, Nevada as he later reported that “he had had assays from the float found on his claims and they run from \$150 to \$400 in gold.” He wrote back to his Aspen acquaintances to encourage them to follow his lead.⁴⁴ On the last day of May 1904, Mrs. John Nordstrom made plans to go to Querida to join her husband “who is holding an excellent job on the Basic Mine.”⁴⁵

Even fifteen years after the crash, the reports of miners’ families moving away from Aspen continued to appear in the local paper. In 1908, W.A. Kunkie made plans to move his family from Aspen to Chihuahua, Mexico “as he is now mine superintendent at the Inde Gold Mining Company in Durango, Mexico.” Mr. Kunkie probably attained his position from another former Aspen resident, Mr. W. Rowland Coz, who was “the consulting engineer for Inde Gold Mining Company.”⁴⁶

With silver mining’s economic importance diminishing, some miners gravitated toward new endeavors. Like N.R. Hunt, farming and ranching provided possibilities for many ex-miners. Jack Leahy, a long time Aspen and Ashcroft mining man, gave up these endeavors and moved to Fruita, which suggests that he had given up mining as well and he probably had some agricultural business interest. *The Democrat* reported that his new endeavors had “set him on the road to prosperity.”⁴⁷

Miners who did not go into farming or ranching had other possibilities as well. Joseph Scott, R.A. McKnight and J. Fuggeson started the manufacture of fruit boxes, crates, and apple boxes at Montrose.⁴⁸ R.A. McKnight had given up mining after intimate involvement in the labor organizing community over the previous twenty years. McKnight had been an Aspen miner during the boom and he was probably one of the miners to relocate to Cripple Creek after the crash. There, he edited *The Cripple Creek Morning Journal* in 1894 and 1895. Although he worked in Cripple Creek, he still spent time in Aspen. Between 1900 and 1904, he submitted reports to the *Western Federation of Miners Magazine*

⁴³ *Aspen Democrat*, May 22 1904.

⁴⁴ *Aspen Democrat*, March 31 1904.

⁴⁵ *Aspen Democrat*, May 29 1904.

⁴⁶ *Aspen Democrat*, June 3 1908.

⁴⁷ *Aspen Democrat*, Jan.7 1904.

⁴⁸ *Aspen Democrat*, June 11 1908.

on mining conditions in Aspen and it is likely that he lived in Aspen during these years.⁴⁹ His and his co-workers' long term involvement in the community led *The Democrat* to note that: "Their many Aspen friends will be pleased to learn of their success" in Montrose.

But for all the people who left Aspen, some stayed. That fact is worth examining in greater detail. The post-crash out-migration pattern created a self-selected group in a similar way that the early in-migration had. While some people who came to Aspen before the crash had left Leadville because of the labor strife there, many who chose to remain in town were family members with strong ties to the community. Some miners probably left the town during the 1893-95 period, only to return to the quiet community after encountering labor problems in other mining camps. Thomas Connors, a twenty-three year old miner, worked in Aspen in 1893. Since he does not appear in the 1900 census rolls, as a young single miner he probably left the town for Cripple Creek or one of the other boom camps after the crash. Once he was married and had a family, however, he returned to Aspen and took an active role in the Miners Union, serving as president in 1907 and secretary in 1914. With a wife, Maggie, and three children, Thomas, Patrick and Winifred, one would expect that Mr. Connors had become a more conservative member of the Miners Union. Although he might still subscribe to the doctrines of Socialism, his family's welfare was his first priority.⁵⁰

The movement of so many people out of Aspen left the town as a "community of survivors." These remaining town residents were predominately family oriented. They stayed in Aspen when others left for a number of reasons. The possibility of the return to prosperity was one. Another important reason, though, was the existence of a strong family community. A good school system, an eight-hour workday, and a number of diverse social activities made Aspen an attractive place to live, offsetting the lower paying jobs and poor economic prospects. Despite these miners sympathy, and a degree of endorsement of Western working class radicalism, their families' well being outweighed these issues.

⁴⁹ *Cripple Creek Morning Journal*, 1894-95. *Western Federation of Miner's Magazine*, March 1900, Vol. 1 No. 3 p.24, December 22, 1904 Vol. 6:78, p12.

⁵⁰ *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States Census, Colorado, Pitkin County, 1900*. Collected by Richard E Cowling, AHS. Hereafter referred to as *1900 Federal Census, Pitkin County, Colorado*. *Population Schedules of the Thirteenth Census of the United States Census, Colorado, Pitkin County, 1910*. Collected by Richard E Cowling, AHS. Hereafter referred to as *1910 Federal Census, Pitkin County, Colorado*. *Aspen Democrat*, Dec. 19 1907, and *Aspen Daily Times*, Jan 29 1914.

Another miner, George Van Horn, was perhaps one of the earliest family men to migrate to the camp. At twenty-two, the Van Horn family lost their first child, Dora L., in October of 1882 in Aspen. Despite the death of a second child, Emma, in February 1898, George and his wife, Dora H., had five children listed on the 1900 census rolls. He was an active member in the Miners Union and often a candidate on the Socialist Party ticket. In June 1904, he submitted a report to the *Western Federation of Miners' Magazine* on the mining conditions in Aspen. The family remained in the town at least through 1910. In that year, his son Charles played left field for Aspen High School baseball team. The family probably left sometime later, after one of the children had established himself elsewhere. After living in Aspen for a minimum of twenty-eight years, it is probable that the Van Horn family had developed a sense of attachment to the community.⁵¹

A third miner, Chris Andersen, was born in Denmark in 1869. At the age of thirteen he immigrated to America. By 1890, he was living in Aspen, and he married Nora Shea in April of that year. Nora had also immigrated to America at young age, coming from Ireland to America in 1883 at the age of 16. Their arrival in America at such young ages makes it likely that the couple was more “Americanized” than other first generation immigrants were. Chris worked as miner until at least 1900 and probably did mine-related work into the early teens. He listed his occupation in the 1910 Federal Census as a laborer – and in Aspen laborers often worked in the mines. The Andersens *settled* in Aspen. Over their first thirty years in Aspen, they had six children, only one of whom, Bart, the oldest, had left the town by 1920. In that year, Chris, at the age of fifty-one, ran a cigar store in town. He remained in Aspen even after mining had come to virtual standstill, and he was buried in Aspen Cemetery in 1937, at least forty-seven years after he arrived in the town.⁵²

The historian Richard White identifies three main types of Western migration. The first type – a community model of migration – relies on kinship and friendship ties bringing similar people to a new locale. Swedish communities on the northern Great Plains and

⁵¹ *The Silver Queen Annual*, 1910, AHS. *1900 Federal Census, Pitkin County, Colorado*. *1910 Federal Census, Pitkin County, Colorado*. *Cemeteries of Pitkin County*, Collected by Richard E Cowling, AHS. *Western Federation of Miner's Magazine* (University of Colorado, Boulder Archives), June 16 1904, Vol.5 No.51, p.15.

⁵² *1900 Federal Census, Pitkin County, Colorado*. *1910 Federal Census, Pitkin County, Colorado*. *Population Schedules of the Fourteenth Census of the United States Census, Colorado, Pitkin County*. *1910*. Collected by Richard E Cowling, AHS. Hereafter referred to as *1920 Federal Census, Pitkin County*. *Cemeteries of Pitkin County*. *Aspen Directory 1893*, AHS. *Pitkin County Marriage Records 1882-1930*. Collected by Richard E Cowling, AHS.

native-born migrants to Oregon are good examples of this type of pattern. A second, less common migration type was the utopian settlement, such as the Mormon migration to Utah. The third type, which White calls a “modern” migration pattern, characterized many of the Western mining booming communities. Under this type of pattern, migrants moved to a place looking for wealth, and often saw the move as temporary.⁵³ Aspen’s in-migration pattern was probably dominated by people of the third type. During this early period many people came to Aspen looking to get rich. The out-migration pattern, however, followed a parallel to the first type. After the silver crash many migrants remained in the community because of kinship, friendship and community factors. Ironically, these people stayed in Aspen – in the face of massive out-migration – for the same reasons that also drew many migrants out of Aspen – family and kinship ties.

The Conners, Van Horns, and Andersens are examples of this later group. All three miner families likely would have had a strong sense of attachment to the community. They had all resided in Aspen for many years and raised large families in the town. By 1900, these people were more likely looking for a place to settle rather than trying to make their fortune and return to their homeland. All three families were either “old” immigrants or native-born Americans. In the years between 1840 and 1890 many of the immigrants to America had come from Northern and Western Europe – Great Britain, Germany, Norway and Sweden. The family staying pattern and the predominance of native-born American and “old” immigrant characterized Aspen’s population even after the large influx of “new” immigrants to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Nationally, after 1890 these “new” immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe began to supplant the “old” immigrants. These “new” immigrants were predominantly male – in some years after 1900 more than 70 percent were male. They were, as David Brody observes, seeking to “earn a stake and return to their native village.”⁵⁴ Although there was an increase in Aspen of “new” immigrants after 1900, they remained a relatively small portion of the population. Native-born Americans and English speaking immigrants never dipped below 66.7 percent of the population. Furthermore, native-born Americans always constituted greater than 50 percent of the population. By comparison, in Crested Butte in

⁵³ Richard White, *Its Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991) pp.192-193. For other perspectives on immigration that have partially shaped my discussion, see the work of Frederick Luebke and Dorothee Schneider.

1900, foreign-born ethnic groups made up seventy-five percent of the population, while “new” immigrants, Slovenians from the Austro-Hungarian Empire made up thirty-six percent of the adult population.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp.14-16.

⁵⁵ Stacey Smith, *The Marble Crisis: Sylvia Smith and the Community Politics of Western Company Towns*, (Bachelor’s Thesis, University of Colorado, Boulder, 1998) p.35.

The following table illustrates the ethnic breakdown of Aspen's population between 1900 and 1920.⁵⁶

Year	Sample Size	American, Canadian	English, Welsh, Scottish	Irish, Swedish	German, Swedes	Austrians, Italians	Others
1900	1536	1004	290		127	88	27
% town pop.	45.6%	65.4%	18.9%		8.3%	5.7%	1.8%
1910	949	531	140		101	147	30
% town pop.	51.7%	56.0%	14.8%		10.6%	15.5%	3.1%
1920	1214	783	142		110	131	48
% town pop.	96.0%	65.0%	11.7%		9.1%	10.8%	4.0%

The declining economics in the town deterred many new immigrants from choosing Aspen as a destination. Furthermore, the foreign-born residents who did reside in Aspen often immigrated to America before 1900. Their length of time living in America makes it likely that they were searching for a place to settle rather than hoping to make a fortune and return to their homeland. Of the 156 immigrant household heads living in Aspen in 1920, 82.7 percent had come to America before 1900, 14.1 percent had come between 1900 and 1910, and only 3.2 percent had arrived after 1910. The largest group of foreign-born household heads, 49 or 31.4 percent, had come to America before 1880. This high

⁵⁶ 1900 Federal Census, Pitkin County, Colorado. 1910 Federal Census, Pitkin County, Colorado. 1920 Federal Census, Pitkin County. To compile the population sample, I examined 664 household entries, 348 household entries, and 413 entries, respectively from the 1900, 1910 and 1920 census rolls. I only included entries within Aspen's township. Aspen was the major population center in Pitkin County, accounting for 40-50% of total county population. While the sample size in 1900 and 1910 represented around half of the city's population, I checked the remaining entries to insure that the pattern did not deviate significantly. In 1920, I used every entry I could (96 percent of the population) that I was sure lived in Aspen. These numbers differ slightly from other historians' census data calculations since I used the ethnicity of the household head to indicate the ethnicity of the children. Since many of children were born in America, this technique underrepresented the number of native-born Americans. However, I felt that this would give a more accurate ethnic representation of the town. Kimmell's analysis revealed that native-born Americans accounted for 77% of the population in 1900, a significantly higher percentage than I calculated using head of household technique. Kimmell's voting population percentage, however, indicated that only 63% of the population were native-born Americans, which compares closely with my figures.

percentage of early immigrant is particularly impressive since it meant that they had lived in Aspen for at least 40 years.⁵⁷

The result of Aspen's immigration and out-migration patterns was that town was dominated by long term residents. While many Western communities experienced the waves of immigration, in Aspen the majority of the population consisted of "old" immigrants. The domination of native-born American and English speaking immigrants favored the development of a particular Aspen community that was different from other mining towns. The "new" immigrants created communities in a different way than "old" established immigrants would. Since the newer arrivals often viewed their time in America as temporary, they often sought to recreate community institutions from the homeland, but they did not necessarily view their new home as a long-term commitment.⁵⁸

Since Aspen's "new" immigrant population remained small, the town was not split along ethnic lines or divided by island communities, as were many other mining camps. Instead, the Aspenites who stayed after the crash shared similar ethnic backgrounds those living there before the crash. It is also possible that the removal of many town members after the crash facilitated a reduction in ethnic isolation. As more and more people left Aspen, the remaining residents probably identified with those left, whether German, Irish, American or other. Further, instead of participating in institutions based on ethnicity, although these still existed, other community-wide institutions became preeminent. Institutions such as sporting events, summer picnics, and the public school system became as, or more, important to these residents than the institutions such as the German Social Club.

⁵⁷ I separated the groups by ten year periods after 1880 – 49 came to American before 1880, 46 between 1880-1890, 34 between 1890-1900, 22 between 1900-1910, and 5 between 1910 and 1920. *1920 Federal Census, Pitkin County.*

⁵⁸ George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano, Los Angeles 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.36. Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from Different Shores: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989). Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1982) pp. 1-2 and 46-59. John Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me: A History of Polish Americans* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) pp.12-14, 21, and 34-35.

Chapter 5: Co-Existence within the Community: Militant and Conservative

In the spring and summer of 1908, local miner George Van Horn and his family had multitude of activities to distract themselves from the unpleasant work of the mines. On May 15th, George and Dora most likely attended the fifth annual May-Day dance sponsored by Ladies of the G.A.R., a fundraiser for Lincoln School. Three weeks later they attended another dance – the Alumni of Aspen High School Annual Dance and Dance-quest was “as usual, one of the swellest events of the season.” Later that same week, the city council agreed to purchase Hallam Lake Grounds which was to be turned into an “An Ideal Pleasure Resort.” Upcoming summer events to look forward to included the Redstone Excursion, Strawberry Shortcut Days, and the Fourth of July Celebration, not to mention a full season of baseball games for the Aspen Blue Sox. Furthermore, many of the events became more accessible for working men like Van Horn, when a number of Aspen businesses, including the larger mines, decided to operate half-days on weekends during the months of June, July and August. Despite the difficult economic conditions in Aspen, a large mining family such as the Van Horns received certain community benefits from remaining in the town – local organizations, summer leisure activities, and a good public school system were some of the main pillars of the transformed community.¹

The ongoing reports of residents leaving Aspen gives a picture of a gradually declining city and indeed, such was the case. And yet, it was this pattern of out and in migration that helps explain the continued existence of the Aspen Miner’s Union and the peaceful nature of its relations with the mine owners. Since many of the early out-migrants were single miners, a larger remaining portion of the miners were family men. Family men benefited from the union – collections for widows, burial expenses, and social activities – in ways that single miners did not. These men might participate in the union even if it did not provide them with higher wages. Furthermore, since these miners had a vested interest in the continuation of the community and more at risk with families to support, militant action such as prolonged strikes was less appealing to them. Given the tenuous economic situation that existed in Aspen, prolonged strikes would more likely result in mines shutting down completely rather than improved wages. In most circumstances, working people’s options

were limited to leaving Aspen for another town or remaining and working under the existing conditions. For families, the non-wage compensation in the town helped offset the low paying work.

A prime element of the non-wage compensation was Aspen's excellent public school system. With a larger family populations, the community placed more emphasis on education. At the height of Aspen's boom in 1893, the public school system enrolled 1,083 students, while 206 attended private school – roughly 1300 of the 1497 school aged children. The student population attending school constituted 10-15 percent of the town's population. Even students who did enroll in school often missed classes. The average daily attendance was only 58.1 percent, probably due to availability of work for youngsters – either in the mines for older teenagers or in family-run businesses for younger ones. In 1893, the town's three school houses, twenty-five teachers, the administration, and student books cost Aspenites \$33,611 or 1.08% of the town's assessed property value.²

By 1900, the town's population had fallen seventy percent, but surprisingly, the number of school aged children in Aspen remained virtually unchanged, decreasing only from 1,497 to 1,461. Even more impressively, 1,294 or 88.3 percent of the children attended public school. Based on the 1900 census count for Aspen, 39.2 percent of the total Aspen population now attended school regularly. With less work available in the town, or perhaps the result of increased emphasis on education, the average daily attendance rate rose to 83.2 percent.

Furthermore, the district's financial expenditures suggest that Aspenites placed a greater value on education in 1900 than they had in 1893. Despite the fact that the assessed property value in the district had declined by 58.6 percent, falling from \$3.1 million to \$1.3 million, school expenditures increased from \$33,611 to \$41,802. Expenditures now accounted for 3.3 percent of the district's property value, meaning that Aspenites spent, relatively, three times the amount on education in 1900 than they had in 1893.³

In 1911 this pattern continued. The shifting demographics to a family community meant that more than half of the town's population was school aged, 1005 out of 1834 residents. Although a lower percentage of eligible students attended school, 64.6 percent, Aspen's school system still enrolled 35.4 percent of the town's population, nearly the same

¹ *Aspen Democrat*, May 16, June 3,6,9,10,11,19,20,21, July 4,5,15, 1908.

² Superintendent of Schools Annual Report, Pitkin County, 1893, Colorado State Archives.

rate as 1900.⁴ Since 1905, average daily attendance had not dipped under 85.0 percent and had risen to 88.6 percent by 1911. Despite the drop in both student population and the town's wealth, Aspen increased its school buildings from three to four when local mine owner D.R.C. Brown donated his old home for a new high school in the early 1900's. Education expenditures in 1911 now accounted for 3.8% of district's property value, costing the town \$29,507.⁵

³ Superintendent of Schools Annual Report, Pitkin County, 1900, Colorado State Archives.

⁴ The slightly lower attendance rate may only be a function of the "snap-shot" in time. An unusual portion of children may have been less than six years old, just missing school, or near twenty and thus more likely to work. The next year the public schools enrolled an additional 64 students raising the eligible attendance rate to 71 percent and percentage of population attending school back to near 40 percent.

⁵ Superintendent of Schools Annual Report, Pitkin County, 1911, Colorado State Archives.

The following chart illustrates Aspen's commitment to education.

Year	No. of School Aged Children	Total No. of Students Enrolled	% of Town Pop. Attending School	Ave. Daily Attendance	School Exp. Rel. to Property Value
1893	1,497	1,289 (86.1%)	9.9%	58.1%	1.1%
1900	1,465	1,294 (88.3%)	39.2%	83.2%	3.3%
1905	1,225	990 (80.1%)	N/A	84.6%	N/A
1911	1,005	649 (64.6%)	35.2%	88.6%	3.8%
1912	1,000	712 (71.2%)	40.0%	88.4%	2.8%

The expenditures for Aspen's schools are more telling given that the town had attempted to cut city costs as recently as 1910. In late 1910, the city council called a special meeting to discuss the discontinuation of the fire department. After a debate in which both H.P. Cowenhoven and D.R.C. Brown both spoke of the need "to cut expense on all city government departments," the city council chose to "eliminate the fire department and passed a motion to auction off the fire team horses."⁶ If the town was willing to sacrifice its fire department but found sufficient funds to keep improving the school system, the community clearly felt that adequate education was a necessity.

The emphasis on education demonstrates the dominance of families in the community. Although strong community institutions do not imply a weakening of class identity, they could offset tension that might develop between classes. In Aspen workers viewed the excellent school system, and other social services such as the Citizens Hospital, as non-wage benefits. These other benefits altered workers' focus from a conflict between the unions and mine owners to one of building a joint community for the benefit of all Aspen's residents.

Even with Aspen's population at less than 2,000 people in 1912, signs of the town's industry and *The Democrat's* boosterism were still evident. At the beginning of that year, *The Democrat* announced "A great industry to be established on the Roaring Fork River, eight miles from Aspen . . . Judge J.W. Dean has located five hundred acres of the finest Granite in the World and is organizing a company to quarry it."⁷ By March of 1912, *The Democrat* echoed a familiar refrain when the paper stated that "From present indications it would seem that before the summer is very old the mineral output from the Aspen district

⁶ City Council Meeting Minutes, August 21 and September 12 1910, Colorado State Archives.

⁷ *Aspen Democrat-Times*, Jan.3 1912.

will be greater than at any time in its history.”⁸ Whether the reports came from 1896, 1902, 1908 or 1912, the return of economic prosperity was always just in sight but remained just out of reach.

Despite the long term economic decline and the decrease in population, the Aspen Miners Union maintained a presence in the community. Part of the reason for the continued existence of the Miner’s Union was that, unlike many company towns, even when work was low-paying or unavailable, Aspen remained a place where people *chose* to live. R.A. McKnight reported to the *Western Federation of Miners Magazine* that “Nearly all the miners own their own homes, and a great many who work in Leadville and Cripple Creek have their homes in Aspen, owing to its splendid climate and good schools.”⁹ The favorable working conditions provided reasons for miners to remain in Aspen. Family men could spend more time with their families since in Aspen “miners have enjoyed an eight hour day longer than any other mining camp in the west.”¹⁰

The workers of Aspen were determined to continue to play a role in the town’s future. The Aspen Miner’s Union met every Monday night to discuss working conditions and plan social activities and fund raising. While many people had exited Aspen during the depression in 1893, the union had remained active and tried to help people. According to *The Aspen Daily Times*, the Miner’s Union had provided help to many people during the panic:

A great many people of this city will ever have reason to love the Miner’s Union for their good and charitable work during the panic. Thousands of dollars worth of groceries was distributed among the needy of Aspen by the union committees and this went a great way towards alleviating the suffering that otherwise would have existed.¹¹

The union’s support of the town during this period is even more remarkable since virtually all of its members were unemployed between the months of July and November.

⁸ *Aspen Democrat-Times*, March 7 1912.

⁹ *Western Federation of Miner’s Magazine*, March 1900, Vol. 1 No 3 p.24.

¹⁰ *Western Federation of Miners Magazine*, August 27, 1903 Vol. 5:9, p.8

¹¹ *Aspen Daily Times*, May 15 1895.

Although the Pitkin County Miners Union was not often in the news, the miners did organize annual events in the community. To commemorate the third anniversary of the founding of the Western Federation of Miners, for example, the union sponsored a “Grand Ball at the Armory Hall.” Bad weather dampened the turnout, but 150 couples managed to attend the function.¹²

By 1903 the town had been severely depressed by the downward spiral in the price of silver, but the 2,000 to 3,000 residents living in Aspen generously supported the WFM’s “eight hour drive.” On July 11 1902, the WFM organized an “eight-hour” fund drive to support strikes for workers fighting for an eight-hour day. Aspenites had given so generously in the “eight hour drive” that *The Western Federation of Miners Magazine* used Aspen as an example during its fundraising efforts:

The City of Aspen Colorado, where miners have enjoyed an eight hour day longer than any other mining camp in the West, holds the banner for the largest contribution to the “eight hour fund.” Aspen has been struck harder through the low price of silver than any other minuing (sic) town in the metalliferous regions, but the miners and the laboring men of Aspen have shown their loyalty to their brothers who are making a fight for a shorter work day.¹³

Residents of the town attempted to live up to this billing by continuing to make donations. During the months between July 1903 and September 1904, Aspenites made at least fourteen contributions to the WFM eight-hour drive fund totaling approximately \$1,000.¹⁴

The miners also participated in the politics of the city. The national WFM union supported the Socialist Party of America and many Aspen union members had strong ties to the local Socialist organization. The Socialists did not exercise much political power in Aspen, as the residents predominantly supported first the Populist Party and later the Democrat Party.¹⁵ Although their political power was not great, Socialists continued to

¹² *Aspen Daily Times*, May 15 and May 22 1895.

¹³ *Western Federation of Miners Magazine*, August 27, 1903 Vol. 5:9, p.8.

¹⁴ *Supplement to the Western Federation of Miners Magazine: Contributions to the Eight-Hour Fund Drive*, July 1903-September 1904. AHS.

¹⁵ Although in 1892 and to a certain extent in 1894, the Populists had a large influence in Aspen’s politics, the successful nomination of William Jennings Bryan in 1896 spurred a city-wide party over the Democrats endorsement of the silver plank on July 17, 1896. Over the following twenty years

expose people to their ideas. In 1903, *The Aspen Democrat* reported that “The Socialist party is not going to let the flame they have kindled here burn out but are going to keep things on the move if possible. This will necessitate the expenditure of money, which they are planning to raise in the near future by giving an entertainment of the best local talent. A class to study socialistic problems is also to be organized in the near future under the direction of Frank Kuntz and others.”¹⁶

The Party was at least partially successful in these endeavors. By the beginning of February, the Socialists of Aspen had organized an education class, taught by visiting lecturer James O’Neal. It appears that Aspenites were receptive to his ideas. The cost of the class was fifty cents, but that did not deter people from attending it. According to *The Democrat*, Mr. O’Neal “Held a very successful meeting at the court house . . . the lecture was listened to with rapt attention and was frequently interrupted with applause.” During the week of the class, *The Democrat* reprinted editorials by O’Neal on the values on Socialism and the ways it could improve society.¹⁷ To devote so much print to Socialism in the local paper suggests that many of the county’s residents found the discussion relevant.

By the end of the month, the Socialist Party and Aspen Miners Union had organized a Federal Labor Union for the purpose of advancing the party in Aspen.¹⁸ During the inaugural meeting in the Miner’s Hall on February 21 1903, local miners Frank Kuntz, Thomas Conners and Chris Andersen were elected President, Secretary and Treasurer, respectively. The Party’s work led *The Democrat* to predict that “a large membership will be secured” in the new organization. The first project of the new organization was to put on a dance for the following Tuesday. Aspenites were eager to support the cause and *The Democrat* reported that the event “is a guaranteed success both socially and financially . . . and tickets are going like hot cakes.”¹⁹ Despite the fact that many Aspenites supported the Democratic Party, some residents continued to endorse the Socialist Party. After O’Neal moved on, Kuntz, Conners, and Andersen continued the Party’s organizing efforts and

Aspenites supported Democratic candidates for almost every office despite divergences in the national and the state-wide voting pattern that often endorsed Republican candidates in many years.

¹⁶ *Aspen Democrat*, Jan.4 1903.

¹⁷ *Aspen Democrat*, Jan. 31-Feb. 8 1903.

¹⁸ The WFM continued to exist as an independent organization with many of its members participating in the Federal Labor Union as well. The dearth of information in the following years suggests that as Aspen’s population continued to decline, the Federal Labor Union lost interest in organizing there.

¹⁹ *Aspen Democrat*, Feb.21-22 1903.

succeeded in bringing James F. Carey of Massachusetts to speak on Socialism in February, 1904. In March, *The Democrat* editorialized on the necessity for a labor party:

We now have two parties dividing the energies of the people. There must be one great Labor-Democratic Party, representing the real honest majority, with the permanent organization of the labor unions as its militant backbone.²⁰

The Democrat had changed its stance by November and now backed the Democratic Party instead. After the conclusion of the election, the paper attacked the Socialist Party for the expulsion of local resident John Strong from the party, stating that “If this be Socialism, then the quicker it be buried the better.”²¹ The change in the paper’s stance was probably related to editor Charles Dailey’s political ambitions. Although Dailey did not run for political office in 1904, he later won a seat in State House of Representatives as a Democrat.²² In earlier writing Daily does not appear anti-Socialist, but by November of 1904, *The Democrat* was firmly backing the Democratic Party, primarily in opposition to the Republican *Aspen Daily Times*. Yet, even the attack on the Socialist Party also illustrated the paper’s interest in the community. Dailey blasted the Socialists not for their political opinions – which might have alienated union readers – but because they had excluded an upstanding citizen from the Party’s participation.

Despite the Democratic leaning of most of the town’s residents, Aspen’s miners probably helped keep a base of support for the Socialist Party. In fact, many local Aspen WFM members ran on the Party’s ticket in 1904. The party sponsored local miners George Van Horn for County Sheriff, Pat Sullivan for Senator from the eleventh district, George W. Smith for County Clerk, Rome Saurer for County Coroner, and Frank Kuntz for State Auditor. The support for the Socialists remained in the minority as the Democratic Party swept the elections; George Smith did receive some popular endorsement, however, capturing 7.7% of the vote.²³

²⁰ *Aspen Democrat*, March 20 1904.

²¹ *Aspen Democrat*, November 12 1904.

²² *Aspen Democrat-Times*, November 9, 1912.

²³ *Aspen Daily Times*, November 12, 1904. *Aspen Democrat*, November 10 1904. *Western Federation of Miners Magazine*, July 14 1904, Vol. 6:55, p.5.

It is hard to say if the Socialists did more to influence the miners, or the miners did more to support the Socialists, but by 1904 the two groups were closely related. Since 1900, the Socialists had supported the WFM's drive for an eight-hour workday. This aid had been reciprocated, as many miners supported the Socialists' political platform. By 1904, the Aspen Miner's Union was openly declaring its support for the Socialist cause. According to *The Western Federation of Miners Magazine*, on Dec 9 1904, the union decided to withdraw from the State Federation of Labor because it was not working towards Socialism, which was the goal of the WFM:

Therefore, we will be content to remain under the Western Federation of Miners' banner without other affiliations to hamper our ultimate aims and objects, viz.: Education of our members to their working class interest through their own political party - the Socialist party.²⁴

The Socialists and miners, groups which often had the same members, were bound together in their joint effort to pass the eight-hour workday law.

By 1906 the Socialist Party had made significant inroads into Aspen, and the elections of 1906 illustrated the progress they had achieved. Colorado voters elected Republican Henry Buchtel governor with 45.6 percent of vote while the Socialist candidate, Bill Haywood, received only 7.9 percent. Aspen voters, however, endorsed the Socialists to a much greater extent. Haywood captured 409 votes in Pitkin County, or 20.6 percent of the total vote, and Socialist A. Floaten received 318 votes, 16.7 percent, for Lieutenant Governor. Local Socialists' candidates, mostly miners such as George Smith, Pat Sullivan and George Van Horn, received between ten and fifteen percent of the vote.²⁵

Haywood's presence on the ticket probably helped carry the Socialist Party's success in Aspen in 1906. This year appears to be the height of the Socialists' success in Aspen's elections. Although the Party continued to sponsor candidates in the later elections, voting percentages hovered between five and fifteen percent. In 1908 for example, local miner Dave Jamison lead the Party's efforts with 6.5 percent for the County Commissioner seat.²⁶ The 1912 results were somewhat more favorable for the Socialist party as George Smith

²⁴ *Western Federation of Miners Magazine*, December 22 1904, Vol. 6:78, p12.

²⁵ Pitkin County Voting Abstracts, Colorado State Archives. *Aspen Democrat*, November 8, 1906.

²⁶ *Aspen Democrat*, November 4 1908.

captured 14 percent of the vote for a seat in the House of Representatives and Pat Sullivan garnered 11 percent for County Treasurer.²⁷ With few exceptions, however, following the Populist Party's successes in the early 1890's, the Democratic Party dominated Aspen's politics.

Aspen miners' participation and support of the Socialist Party was not unusual among Western mining towns. After 1902, the Socialist Party and the WFM became closely related in the West. In many towns where violence broke out, the two organizations were viewed as mutually responsible. However, despite the ongoing support of Socialist causes and Socialists organized activities – primarily dances and lectures – Aspen's workers did not have an antagonistic relationship to the town mine owners. Instead, Aspen Socialism remained a “tamed” radicalism. Residents discussed it, supported the idea of it, and occasionally voted for it or even ran on the ticket, but they did not agitate for it. In practice, the Socialist Party in Aspen mainly created a community organization that provided activities in which residents could take part.

Despite the fact that the town continued to shrink in size during the twenty-five years following the crash, Aspen's residents still maintained a strong sense of community. A number of local clubs and groups organized activities to provide recreation and support services for Aspenites. The WFM's Socialist-sponsored lectures and dances offer a good example, but they were many similar overlapping groups binding the community together. In addition to the Aspen Miner's Union, other institutions in Aspen included Aspen High School, the Woodsman of the World, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Methodist Church, the Socialist Party, and Democratic Party, all of whom organized events that helped build a strong sense of community.

Leisure activities occupied a prominent place among these community-building events. Some labor historians have examined leisure activities among workers, arguing that the choices of events differed along class lines. For example, Kathy Peiss's study, *Cheap Amusements*, examines how New York working women's leisure experiences reflected their distinct culture – and helped shape gender relations, popular amusement, and cultural attitudes.²⁸ Roy Rosenweig, in *Eight Hours for What We Will*, also posits that the working people in Worcester, Massachusetts, spent their leisure time much differently than the

²⁷ *Aspen Democrat-Times*, November 9 1912.

²⁸ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), pp.5-9.

managers and owners did. In fact, Rosenweig argues that some workers created a distinct culture centered around their leisure activities that differentiated their culture from the foremost American one. In Worcester, these workers used their leisure activities to endorse ethics of mutuality and collectivity as an alternative to the dominant American culture fostered by capitalism.²⁹

To a certain extent the insights of Rosenweig and Peiss held true for Aspen. Socialists and miners used leisure and entertainment devices that reinforced their labor critiques of capitalism. Dances and entertainment may well have helped articulate a collectively held sense of labor mutuality. But it is also the case that important variations between Aspen and New York and Worcester caused leisure activities to have different meanings in the different locales. The geographical and population size of these communities affected the number of leisure activities available. As a large city, New York had an extensive range of leisure options. Likewise, Worcester was more similar to New York than Aspen. As the twenty-fifth leading manufacturing city in the United States, Worcester was a substantial sized community boasting over 1,000 industrial establishments.³⁰ In these large communities a public celebration such as the Fourth of July could, and did represent class divisions. In Worcester, for example, Fourth of July celebrations became two-tiered events. The working class celebrated on the streets and in the saloons, while the managerial class held their gatherings in resorts and private houses. Rosenzweig argues that as the economic elite of Worcester withdrew from the public commemorations of the Fourth, for the remaining workers in the city, the event came to demonstrate distinct class activity.³¹

The Fourth of July Celebrations provide an excellent example of how leisure experiences differed between a Eastern-metropolitan center and Western-mining camp. While, in Aspen some managers and owners may have retreated to Colorado Springs or Denver, the small geographical nature of the town, and its relative isolation made these celebrations more community encompassing. Instead, the local events actually drew participants from many of the surrounding communities. Despite its declining importance as an economic center, people from Basalt, Glenwood Springs, Carbondale and Leadville

²⁹ Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours For What We Will*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.2-5 and pp.223-225.

³⁰ By comparison, if Aspen had 1,000 industrial establishments in 1910, every man and women over the age 18 would own at least one industrial business. Rosenzweig, p.10.

attended Aspen's Independence Day baseball games, parades, races, and fireworks. Although, a manager and business owner in Worcester might have another option – leaving town or retiring to a isolated estate – in Aspen this was not the case. The close proximity of mine owners' houses to the city center, the lack of easily accessible resort retreats, and the fact that the public celebration was the “only game in town,” made Aspen's event less class divisive than in the East.

In fact, one of the most popular shared events of the year was the annual July Fourth Celebration. On Independence Day, nearly all Aspenites turned out for the festivities.³² A typical July Fourth Celebration in 1896 opened with a 46-gun salute. After the salute, a grand parade with merchant floats, the fire department, cycle clubs, civic societies, and the First Regiment Band marched down Main Street. Afternoon activities included a number of competitive events such as Double and Single Hand drill contests, best dressed, bike, foot, hurdles, sack, and wheelbarrow races, and an afternoon baseball game between the local Aspen nine and a visiting team. For those not interested in the competitive events there was also a “Grand Picnic and Dancing at Hallam Lakes.” Of course, the day finished with a fireworks display.³³

Although Aspen's population was around half of what it had been in 1896, the July Fourth program in 1906 was similar to that of a decade earlier.³⁴ A band and parade started the day, followed by horse contest on Main Street for cash prizes. The celebration then moved to a picnic at Hallam Lake where the Horse Tug of War and the Drilling Contests took place. A selection of horse and foot races entertained people in the afternoon at the Driving Park and the party culminated with an evening fireworks display.³⁵ Although there was no baseball game played on the celebration in 1906, this was the exception rather than

³¹ Rosenweig, p.65-75.

³² According to local resident Benjamin Gilbert, the mines operated seven days a week all year long – the only holidays being the Fourth of July and Christmas. While this may have been true during some of the period or at the Hunter Concentrating Mill where Gilbert worked, other reports indicated that work schedule in Aspen after the crash were not always so strict. Benjamin Herbert Gilbert, *Early Days of Aspen*. Manuscript at AHS.

³³ *Aspen Daily Times*, July 4 1896.

³⁴ In 1906 the adult voting population was approximately 1950 people, while the 1896 count revealed around 3500 people voted in the election for State Senator, roughly a decrease of 45 percent. *Aspen Daily Times*, November 11 1896. *Aspen Democrat*, November 8 1906.

³⁵ *Aspen Democrat*, July 4, 1906.

the rule. As resident Benjamin Gilbert recalled in his memoirs, “the afternoon entertainment almost always included a baseball game.”³⁶

These Fourth of July celebrations do illustrate certain class characteristics. Events such as the Horse Tug of War, Wheelbarrow races, and Drilling contests certainly catered more to the working class than to an upper class element. But the picnic, dancing, fireworks and the baseball game could draw participation from all classes. A best dress competition in 1896 would seem to be aimed at the upper class as those who could better afford luxurious clothes.³⁷ Furthermore, a town leader such as D.R.C. Brown who came from a modest background probably participated in all aspects of the Fourth of July as did virtually all of the working class.

The Methodist Sunday School sponsored another popular annual event – the July picnic excursion. Started as a fundraiser for the Sunday School, the church planned trips to Emma, Rudi, Thomasville, Nast, Norrie, and Muckawannago. In order to allow as many people as possible to attend, the stores in Aspen would often close. The Redstone picnic in 1907 was one of the most successful excursions, and it inspired a return trip the next year.³⁸ For the return trip, *The Aspen Democrat* ran a front page banner headline announcing the plans. Reverend Hole stated his intent that “that price will be put down so that all may afford to go.” The announcement in June allowed many people to plan to attend and “at least one thousand boosters” went to the picnic on July 15.³⁹ The charter for the trip filled twelve coaches on the Colorado and Midland train. Since less than 2,000 residents called Aspen their home in the 1910 census, a turn out of 1,000 people represented a sizeable portion of the population.

People from all classes enjoyed these mid-summer excursions. Like the Socialist and WFM sponsored dances and July Fourth Celebrations, all of these events created instances where members of the working class and the capitalist class (either the mine owners, or their representatives) shared common interests. Further, these events helped create a sense of mutual community among all the people in Aspen. The establishment and growth of this mutual community helped offset the tensions that might otherwise have developed between the mine owners and the miners.

³⁶ Benjamin Herbert Gilbert, *Early Days of Aspen*, p.13. Manuscript at AHS.

³⁷ *Aspen Democrat*, July 4 1906.

³⁸ Gilbert, p.22.

Sports provided another way to build shared-community pride. Baseball, football, and basketball were all popular sports in Aspen after 1900. When finances allowed, Aspen High School had teams in all three sports. Football season consisted of three to five games, primarily against teams from Leadville, Glenwood Springs, and Grand Junction. The 1905 team went undefeated in three games, thereby earning the right to claim the Western Colorado Championship. In 1906, the team posted perhaps its most impressive victory, dominating Glenwood High School by a score of 72 to 0. After a four-year drought, the team returned to championship form again in 1909. From 1905 through 1912 Aspen's football teams were usually some of the strongest in the area. Front page reports in the *Aspen Democrat* and "large and enthusiastic" crowds demonstrated the importance of football as a November diversion. The upcoming season for the new sport generated enough support such that at least one retailer attempted to capitalize on the enthusiasm. On November 12 1904, in the upper right corner of the front page, the *Aspen Daily Times* ran a two-column, four-inch, advertisement for football pants and footballs.⁴⁰

The most popular sport in Aspen was probably baseball. Part of the reason for its popularity owed to fact that baseball games were played during the spring and summer months. Aspenites could follow the professional teams since *The Democrat* carried professional baseball scores daily on the front page, but the local teams received much of the town's attention. Although Aspen High School sponsored teams between 1908 and 1913, the local clubs teams received the larger crowds.⁴¹

A perusal of 1908 Aspen newspapers indicates how important a summer activity baseball was. In the month of June alone, the *Aspen Democrat* carried baseball stories on the front page at least ten times. That year was a particularly successful one for the Aspen baseball team, as the Blue Sox compiled a 22-4 record through August 25. Their successful season earned them a trip to Denver to compete for the state championship. Since the team traveled regularly and played 2-3 games a week, the players required an outside funding source to support these activities. Although game attendance was free, Aspenites funded the

³⁹ *Aspen Democrat*, June 3 and July 15, 1908.

⁴⁰ *The Silver Queen Annual*, 1909 and 1910. *The Crimson and Black Annual*, 1914. Yearbooks from Aspen High School, ASH. *Aspen Daily Times*, November 12 1904. *Aspen Democrat*, November 7 1908. Generally reports during the month of November in the years between 1905 and 1912.

⁴¹ Like football, baseball expenses limited its time as high school sport. *The Silver Queen Annual*, 1909 and 1910. *The Crimson and Black Annual*, 1914. Yearbooks from Aspen High School, ASH.

Blue Sox through two forms – subscriptions from local businessmen and a weekly local dance on Tuesday nights after the afternoon baseball game.⁴²

Basketball also garnered a good deal of support from the community. Introduced into the High School in 1909, the sport quickly gained popularity. One of immediate advantages of basketball was that both boys and girls could participate. In their initial season, the High School girls team won the Western Colorado League championship, defeating Leadville in the season finale 17 to 8. The girls also won league championships in 1912 and 1917.⁴³

The boys were not as successful as the girls in their first season, finishing last in the tri-city league (Leadville, Aspen, and Glenwood Springs) after losing to Leadville in last game of the league play. Both the girls' and the boys' teams played an exhibition schedule following the conclusion of league play against teams from Salida and Buena Vista. In total the teams played six games apiece in the 1909 season.⁴⁴ Even during that first year, Aspenites turned out to cheer their local team. On the front-page, *The Aspen Democrat-Times* reported that “a large and enthusiastic crowd assembled at the Fraternal Lodge to witness the first basketball game of the season.”⁴⁵ At least through 1917, these Saturday night basketball games provided the town a pleasant diversion during the long winter months of January, February and March.

Like the dances and the picnics, sports helped bind Aspenites closer together. The popularity and success of Aspen's sports teams created another instance in which the town's residents shared interests. Since many Aspenites came from similar ethnic backgrounds, they already had many common traits. The exposure to town-wide activities – whether they were attending Fourth of July Celebrations, travelling to booster picnics, or cheering on the Aspen Blue Sox – solidified their sense of belonging to the community. They also created an atmosphere in which people from different classes could socialize with each other on non-work related activities.

⁴² *Aspen Democrat*, June-August, 1908. For reports on specific games see, for examples, June 5, 9, 10, 14, 21, 22, 28, 30, July 1, and August 25, 1908.

⁴³ *The Silver Queen Annual*, 1910, pp.65-70. *The Silver Queen*, 1917, pp.40-44. *Aspen Democrat*, March 9, 1912. AHS.

⁴⁴ *The Silver Queen Annual*, 1910, pp.65-70. *The Silver Queen Annual*, 1917, pp.40-44. AHS.

⁴⁵ *Aspen Democrat-Times*, February 7, 1910.

Not only did Aspen workers participate in the activities but many businesses also supported them. In addition to helping to fund the Aspen Blue Sox with subscriptions, for example, some businesses, including the Smuggler and Durant Mines, limited their working hours by closing down mid-day on weekends during the summer of 1908 so that people could more easily enjoy the summer activities.⁴⁶ While it may not be clear that the economic elites attended all of these events, they clearly endorsed a number of them. Financial sponsorship of Aspen's baseball team, half-days from a number of mines during the summer, and supporting floats for Fourth of July Parade gives evidence of the business element's position on the community activities. In June of 1908, the city council agreed to purchase Hallam Lake Grounds and turn the land into a public park.⁴⁷ The town boosters, who certainly included some of Aspen economic leaders, met in the spring of 1912 to lay the plans for "Beautifying the Town and Providing Amusement Features for the Coming Summer."⁴⁸ Although records of upper class participation in the town-wide community events are sparse, the institutional ways in which they supported them suggests a communal commitment to Aspen that they shared with working class neighbors.

The community activities, and businesses support of them, helped create an atmosphere of cooperation in Aspen. These actions by the mine owners and the agreement to maintain the eight-hour work day, in contrast to many mine camps that had increased their workdays to ten-hour or twelve-hour, helped keep relations friendly between the miners and mine owners. The local paper reinforced and emphasized the sense of mutual community among Aspen's residents by praising both sides – workers and mine owners – in its editorial columns. The precarious economic situation of the town further facilitated a belief that "we are all in this together." Finally, since virtually all Aspenites participated in the some of the town-wide events, everyone felt ties to the community. Aspen's community enabled the town to avoid the violent labor struggles that engulfed many other mining camps. Instead, during both the 1893 and 1912 strikes, the mine owners and the miners worked to achieve a reasonable compromise between the two groups.

⁴⁶ *Aspen Democrat*, June 19 1908.

⁴⁷ *Aspen Democrat*, June 9 1908.

⁴⁸ *Aspen Democrat*, April 15, 1912.

Picture Captions:

Figure 5: A crowd in front of the Hotel Jerome watching the Fourth of July events in 1911. Aspen Historical Society.

Figure 6: Fourth of July float, the opening of the celebration with the marching band, and a horse race at the fair grounds, 1911. For a town boasting less than two-thousand people, the Fourth of July was a big event. Aspen Historical Society.

Figure 7: Baseball game, July 4, circa 1910. Aspenites took their baseball seriously. Although visitors from Leadville and Glenwood Springs often came to Aspen for the Fourth celebrations, the large crowd in stands probably represents close to the entire town's population. Aspen Historical Society.

Figure 8: Aspen high school's first football team won the tri-city league championship in 1905. Aspen Historical Society.

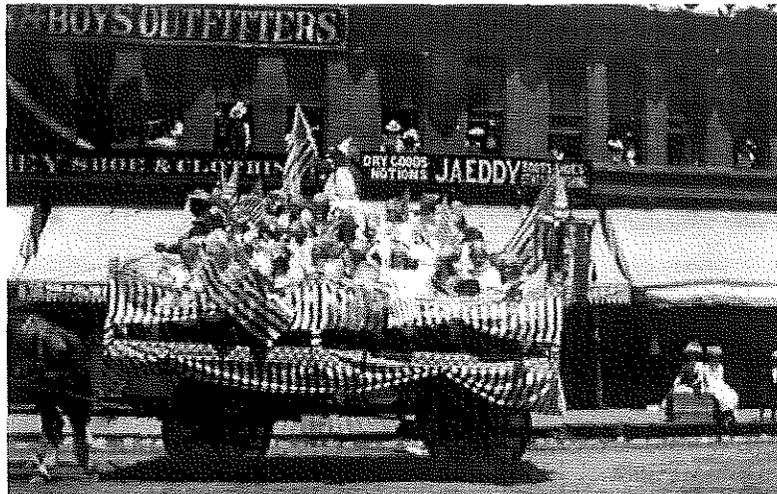
Figure 9: Aspen high school's last football team (for a number of years, anyway) in 1912. The program was cut in order to save money. It appears that some of the players' equipment was the same as the original players, only seven years older. Aspen Historical Society.

Figure 10: Aspen high school's girls basketball team enjoyed much success, winning league championships in 1909, 1912, and 1917. Notice the decent sized crowd, 100-200 people, watching an outdoor game, circa 1911. Aspen Historical Society.

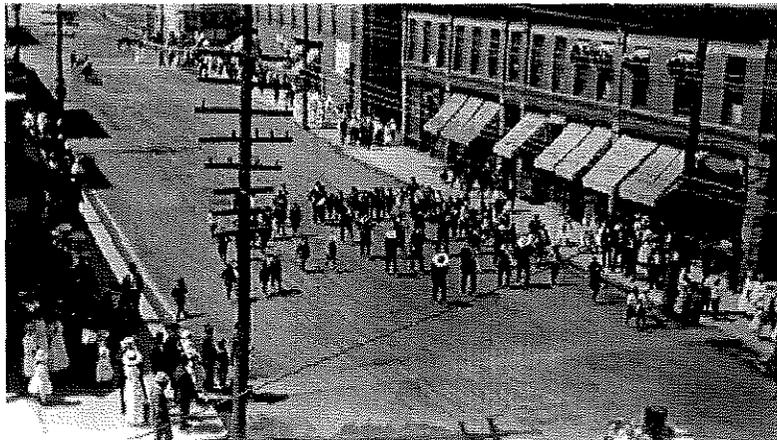


63.44.115b

Figure 5: A crowd in front of the Hotel Jerome watching the Fourth of July events in 1911.
Photo courtesy Aspen Historical Society.



94.35.95

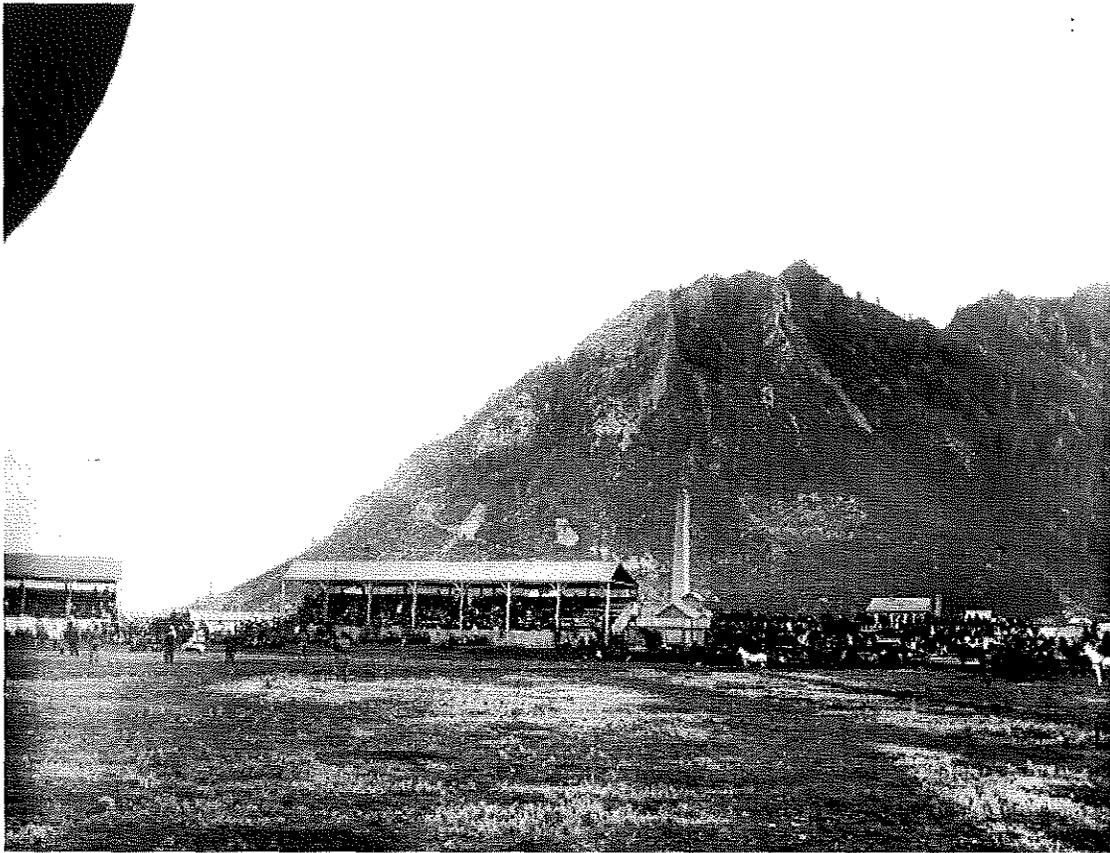


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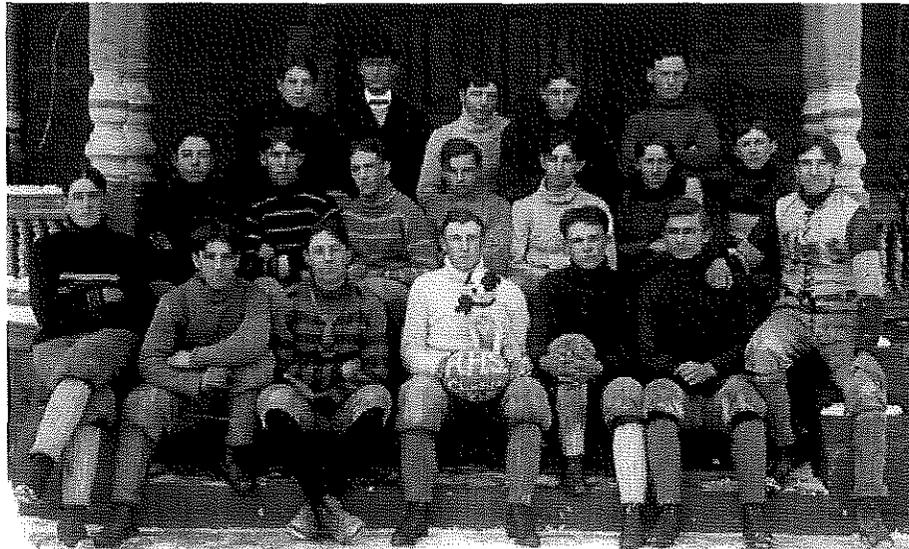
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Figure 6: Fourth of July float, the opening of the celebration with the marching band, and a horse race at the fair grounds, 1911. For a town boasting less than two-thousand people, the Fourth of July was a big event. Photo courtesy Aspen Historical Society.



74.110.589

Figure 7: Baseball game, July 4, circa 1910. Aspenites took their baseball seriously. Although visitors from Leadville and Glenwood Springs often came to Aspen for the Fourth of July celebrations, the large crowd in stands probably represents close to the entire town's population. Photo courtesy Aspen Historical Society.



73.16.1

Figure 8: Aspen High School's first football team won the tri-city league championship in 1905. Photo courtesy Aspen Historical Society.



74.68.318

Figure 9: Aspen High School's last football team (for a number of years, anyway) in 1912. The program was cut in order to save money. It appears that some of the players' same equipment was the original players', only seven years older. Photo courtesy Aspen Historical Society.



94.35.113



72.2.278

Figure 10a&10b: Aspen High School's girl basketball team enjoyed much success, winning league championships in 1909, 1912, and 1917. Notice the decent sized crowd, 100-200 people, watching an outdoor game, circa 1911. Photo courtesy Aspen Historical Society.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

From 1879 to 1893, Aspen's history is similar to those of many mining camps in the Rocky Mountain West. After the prospectors discovered rich mineral deposits in the Roaring Fork Valley in 1879, a mining camp was quickly established. During these early years most miners in Aspen were either self-employed or worked with a few other men. The camp remained largely undeveloped until an outside source of capital transformed the village.

The arrival of Jerome B. Wheeler in 1882 marked the beginning of Aspen's transition from a mining camp to urban center. After his arrival, Aspen's industrial development rapidly accelerated. By 1892, large employment forces at the Smuggler, Compromise, Durant, Aspen, and the Mollie Gibson mines had replaced the pre-modern miners. These miners worked for between \$2.50 and \$4.00 a day, although sometimes rich strikes or labor shortages might have driven the wages above these levels. During the early 1890's, Aspen provided these miners with good job prospects and decent pay, by Western mining town standards. Many miners came to Aspen for these two reasons. But a third factor also played a role in their choice to come to the town. A violent labor struggle in Leadville in 1880 led a certain cohort of prospectors, miners, and mine owners to search for an alternative location to work. These people wanted to live and work in a more peaceful community. The rich silver veins in Roaring Fork Valley offered the ideal place to start a new beginning.

Aspen provided a home to these men. Young single miners, such as Thomas Conners, came to Aspen for the wages and work. Family men such, like George Van Horn and his wife Dora, probably came for the work and to avoid the labor struggles in Leadville. Before the crash, they found in Aspen a town that was similar to other Western mining camps. A local chapter of the Knights of Labor provided a similar support group to the one they had had before migrating to Aspen. With the advent of increased capital investment, industrial mining practices arrived in Aspen. The larger labor forces and more dangerous working conditions meant that miners bound together to form unions to protect their interests. Like many Rocky Mountain mining camps, between 1891 and 1896, Populism and the silver question dominated local political concerns. Later, many of the residents shifted

their loyalty to the Democratic Party. These characteristics were familiar to miners from other mining towns, yet Aspen was distinctive.

After the silver crash in 1893 many miners left Aspen in search of work. The booming new gold camps at Cripple Creek, and later Telluride and Victor, offered attractive options to those in need of employment, but these fast growing towns had their drawbacks. In Cripple Creek in 1893, violence between mine owners and miners was barely avoided when Governor Waite called in the state troops to protect the workers. Telluride and Victor both suffered through a series of labor disturbances around the turn of the century. Some who left Aspen after the crash returned, although the numbers were not large. Others chose not to leave Aspen despite poor conditions in the mines. To these people, the sense of community in the town, and perhaps a sense of relative peace between labor and management, offset the poorer economic prospects.

The town lived a paradox. On one hand, the town's prolonged economic decline and shift from wage labor practices to lease mining suggests a decline in unionism. Yet, in 1903, the *Western Federation of Miners Magazine* commended Aspen for the largest donation to the eight-hour strike drive. Again in 1912, when the town's economic fortunes had dropped the population below 2,000, the Aspen Miners Union Local #6 was strong enough to launch a partially successful strike against the town's largest employer. The ability to keep excess underemployed miners, whose leases provided them the bare minimum of income, from taking wage jobs from the union miners had to be partially due to the community support of the union.

The town was influenced by a number of factors counter-balancing the emerging capitalist system. The state's only Populist Governor, Davis Waite, came from Aspen. In his last civilian job before his election, he edited the *Aspen Union Era*, a pro-labor paper. Aspen sent representatives to the initial convention of Western Federation of Miners. Although the Democratic Party dominated Aspen's politics after the decline of Populism, the miner-supported Socialist Party continued to exercise some power in Aspen. The Aspen Miners Union regularly ran candidates on the Socialist ticket. The Miners Union even broke its affiliation with the State Federation of Labor because the Federation did not support the Socialist Party. When "Big Bill" Haywood ran for Governor of Colorado in 1906, 20.9 percent of Aspen residents voted for him, nearly three-times the state-wide average. These actions represented a radical undercurrent in the community. Yet, the union acted conservatively in most circumstances. Strikes in Aspen were rare and generally short-lived.

Further, if time of settlement is any indication, agreements between the mine owners and the miners were achieved relatively easily.

Examining the experience of other Western mining towns is helpful in understanding Aspen, specifically because the town's history diverges from what might be expected. While the neighboring town of Leadville emerged from a similar set of circumstances, its resulting labor movement was militant, radical and violent. Yet, in Aspen the dichotomy between the radical traditions and the conservative nature of its labor-capital relations can be explained by the existence of a strong sense of community that cut across labor-capital lines. Although Aspen was quintessentially part of the Western culture of labor protest, the town was different from other Western mining camps. The historian Richard Petersen has argued that some "Western mining entrepreneurs, recognizing that a hard-line policy could sometimes result in a considerable loss of life and property and build a heritage of conflict between workers and owners, adopted policies to prevent rather than suppress the grievances of organized labor."¹ This appears to be the case in Aspen and helps explain the town's continued vitality in the face of unrelenting economic hardship. Mine owner D.R.C. Brown's gift of his former home for a new high school, for example, demonstrated his commitment to the community and helped create good will between workers and owners. The standardization of eight-hour day -- despite the mines sometimes marginal profitability - - further enhanced this goodwill. As a result, although union identification existed among the miners, workers in Aspen came to identify with the town's community as much as with their working class brethren.

Melvyn Dubofsky argued that the homogenous nature of the Western working class facilitated the development of union solidarity.² In Aspen, similar ethnic backgrounds may have helped create a sense of union solidarity before the town's decline, yet after the silver crash the population bound together as a community in ways that both recognized and transcended class lines. A number of factors played an important role in helping to create this sense of community.

The local papers actively sought to relieve tensions between miners and mine owners. During the strike of 1893, the *Aspen Daily Times* commented that "For years there

¹ Richard Petersen, "Conflict and Consensus: Labor Relations in Western Mining" p.16, *Journal of the West* Vol.12.

² Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, p.24.

has been the best feeling between miners and mine owners in this camp.”³ During the 1912 strike, the *Aspen Democrat-Times* called Aspen unionized miners “as fair a bunch of men as has ever been in one community.”⁴ And when the Smuggler mine almost shut down in 1904, the *Aspen Democrat* praised the mine owners for a “Most Commendable Spirit of Co-operation Shown by Aspen’s Mining Men.”⁵ Comments such as these helped model – for both workers and owners – appropriate behavior for bridging the gap that might otherwise have existed between them. Instead both groups valued the necessary group efforts to make Aspen viable economically.

Second, a plethora of local town functions helped build a mutual sense of community and allowed workers and capitalists to socialize with each other. Dances sponsored by the baseball team, the Miner’s Union, and Socialist Party; July Fourth Celebrations; annual picnics like the trips to Redstone and Strawberry Shortcut Days; sporting events such football, basketball, and most importantly, baseball – these occurred in abundance in Aspen. Aspenites took pride in their parties and turned out in significant numbers to support their local teams. These events created the sense of belonging to the community that compensated for the lower paying jobs.

Third and perhaps most importantly, Aspen’s residents enjoyed above-average social services. The school system was the most prominent of these social services but other city services such as Citizens Hospital and Poor Relief Rolls existed as well. After the crash, Aspenites placed a high value on education. Even when other city services were suffering from lack of funding, the public school system received an adequate amount of funds. As evidenced by the high attendance rates, Aspen residents, many of whom were working class families, took advantage of the school system. These people felt that the advantages of living in a community that shared their values for education helped offset the poor economic conditions.

The result of these factors – the reasonable actions of the mine owners, the town-wide events that created a sense of shared community, the local paper’s active participation as a mediator between miners and mine owners, and the good city social services – was a more amicable relationship between Aspen’s Miner’s Union Local No.6 of the WFM and the Aspen mine owners than existed in many other Rocky Mountain mining camps. This

³ *Aspen Daily Times*, November 1 1893.

⁴ *Aspen Democrat-Times*, June 10 1912.

relationship enabled the town to avoid the violent labor conflicts of other Western mining towns. And while some of the more infamous mining camps such as Telluride, Cripple Creek and Leadville have attracted numerous studies into their labor-capital relations, perhaps the sleepy mining camp of Aspen is representative of a broader – and largely unexamined – story of labor relations in the mining West.

⁵ *Aspen Democrat*, June 24 1908.

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