BACK *to the* LAND

Arthurdale, FDR's New Deal, and the Costs of Economic Planning

C. J. MALONEY

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For Moma and Casey

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Acronyms Used in the Book

AAA	Agricultural Adjustment Administration
AFSC	American Friends Service Committee
CWA	Civil Works Administration
DSH	Division of Subsistence Homesteads
FDR	Franklin Delano Roosevelt
FERA	Federal Emergency Relief Administration
FSA	Farm Security Administration
MCCA	Mountaineer Craftsmen's Cooperative Association
PWA	Public Works Administration
RA	Resettlement Agency
RFC	Reconstruction Finance Corporation
WPA	Works Progress Administration

Here we sit in a branchy row, thinking of beautiful things we know,

Dreaming of deeds that we mean to do, all complete in a minute or two—

Something noble and wise and good, done by merely wishing we could!

By the rubbish in our wake, and the noble noise we make,

Be sure, be sure, we're going to do some splendid things!

—Rudyard Kipling, "Road Song of the Bandar-Log,"
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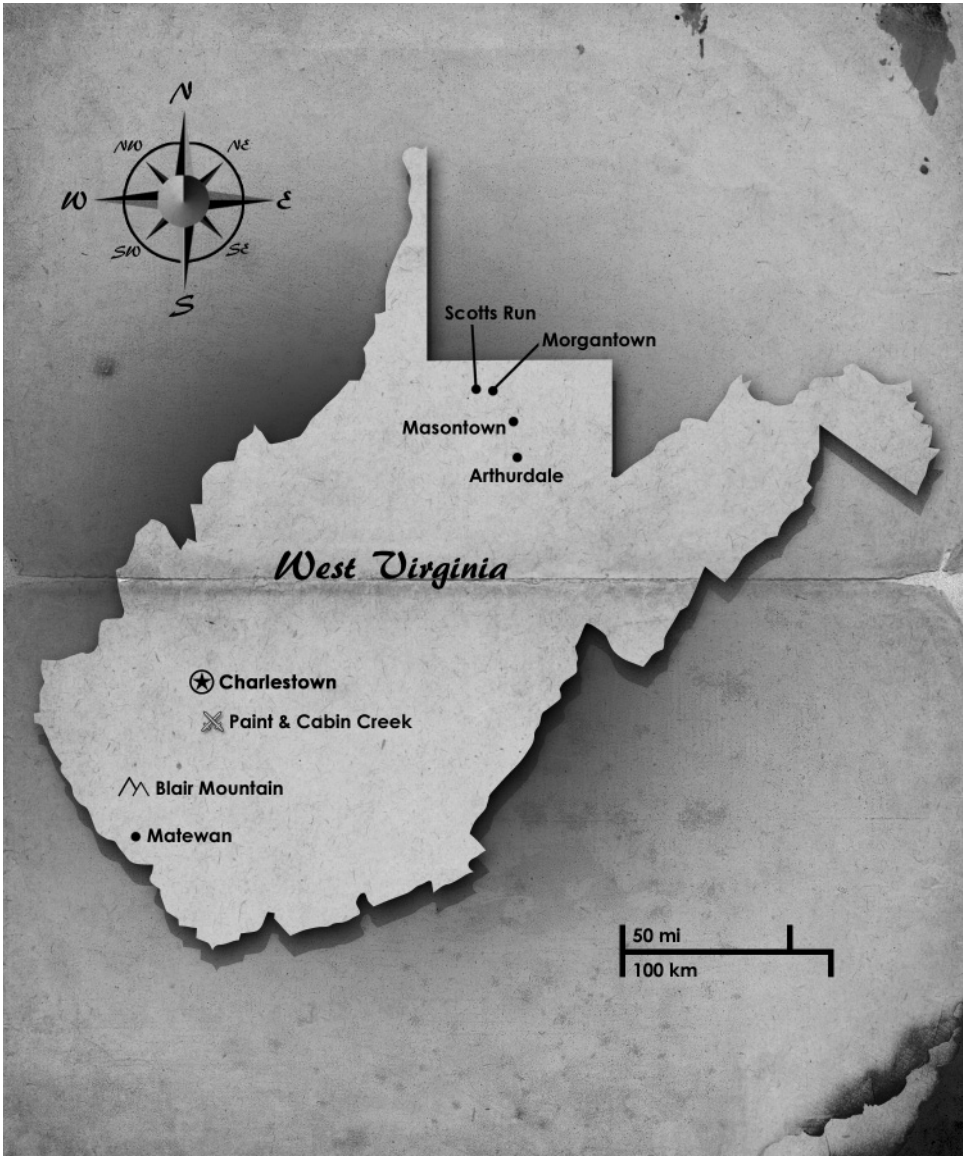

Map of West Virginia.
Source: Thomas Maloney, 2010.

Introduction

Arthurdale today does not, at least on first glance, seem to be much of a place at all.

—Michael Byers, *Preservation*[1]

The story of Arthurdale begins just outside of Morgantown, West Virginia, in a five-mile long hollow* called Scotts Run. Like almost everything wretched, the tragedy that was visited upon the people who lived in Scotts Run was birthed in the turmoil of war, specifically in this case World War I, fought mostly in Europe from 1914 to 1919. Historian Niall Ferguson wondered aloud in *The*

*Like a valley; just with a notable depth to the bottom and steepness to the mountainside.

Pity of War why America does not seem to take much of an interest regarding that conflict's "effect at the time on American society."[2] He is correct; we have yet to take full measure of what President Woodrow Wilson's crusade cost us.

War of a modern scale continues to claim victims long after it ends and far from where it was fought. So it was that on a cold winter day in 1932 America a writer for the *New York Times* witnessed the burial of a little Scotts Run girl—she had died of exposure, a condition brought on in her case through a fatal combination of bitter winter and a lack of warm clothing.[3] Without a doubt, although she was born long after the Guns of August had fallen silent, it would have been entirely accurate for her family to say "She died in the war." If the innumerable contemporary accounts of all that took place in that hollow are to be believed, she was far from the only one.

The immense suffering experienced by the coal-mining peoples of America, a cataclysm that centered on West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky, was a direct result of that conflict. The war that at first seemed a blessing for the miners became a biblical plague upon those who could, for the most part, only wonder what in the world had happened. When the Roosevelt administration stumbled across Scotts Run during 1933 and the first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, saw firsthand the miners' destitution, she demanded of her husband, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, that something be done for them. The town of Arthurdale, West Virginia, created and sustained expressly on FDR's command, was that something. The town took life as part of one of the New Deal's lesser-known but most influential components—the Division of Subsistence Homesteads.

Arthurdale was the culmination of a long-cherished dream for population resettlement held by FDR and the circle of like-minded men he had gathered about him as he ascended to power. Despite being dressed with the thin veneer of "charity," the town was something else entirely. Through careful planning of the physical environment by the federal authorities and education of the resettled (both young and old), the town was to introduce a "new American way of life," in the vision of its sponsors it was to build a new American man.

Openly touted by Eleanor Roosevelt (the town's most prominent booster) as a "human experiment station,"[4] never before (or in many

ways since) have federal politicians ever meddled in the intimate details of the people's everyday lives to such a degree as at Arthurdale. Never have a group of American citizens been subject to such an "experiment." In the vast, discretionary powers allowed to the political class, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads was a battle between the ideals of the Old Republic and those of the New Deal.

The small band of dreamers who brought the town to life—FDR, the land economists Rexford Tugwell and M. L. Wilson, along with their allies—were not the kind to let a crisis go to waste, so to speak, and Arthurdale owes its very existence to Scotts Run. Without the tragedy that took place in the hollow, without all its gun battles and dynamite blasts and hungry children with distended bellies, Arthurdale would have remained just a dream for those who would eventually build it.

It was mostly from the pool of destitute coal miners in Scotts Run that it was populated, all the families resettled as part of a larger federal program that would build around 99 similar colonies across the nation.*

Arthurdale was the first, the most lavish, and the most publicized of the resettlement colonies built by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads. With the maturation of still photography and the growth in the movie industry during the early 1930s, stark images from the Run were broadcast nationally, as was the emergence of Arthurdale. The Run would become the poster child for the horrors of the Great Depression; Arthurdale the poster child for the beneficence of the New Deal and the man, FDR, who made it possible.

The town was massive, readymade, and luxurious, comprised of 165 homes set on multiacre plots laid out around a community center, school complex, factories, and administrative buildings, perched high and isolated in the Appalachian foothills of Preston County just south of Morgantown. The entire project, and the idea behind it, was a radical departure from anything ever before attempted by federal-level politicians. Although now long forgotten, Arthurdale was "one of the most open breaks with the individualistic tradition in American history"[5] as well as "one of the most far-reaching social organization efforts ever attempted by the federal government."[6]

*Depending on your definition, that number could rise to a bit less than 200.

I had stumbled across its existence as one trips while walking—by pure accident. It was a passing reference in a history book that sparked my interest,* then I became intrigued and began to dig deeper. Then I became obsessed. What lay before me was not just the story of the town's creation, fascinating in its own right, but the creation of the only America I have ever known.

The town helped serve to "introduce the new frontier of a regulatory welfare state then being blazed by the New Dealers."[7] To read of America before the New Deal is not so much to read of another time but of another country altogether. Arthurdale was the tipping point—every American born after its birth knows nothing of life in a republic.

Look about you today; much of the America you see had its genesis in Arthurdale.

Down the Memory Hole

> *Arthurdale was never studied, we never talked about the importance of Arthurdale.*
>
> —Deanna Hornyak, executive director, Arthurdale Heritage, Inc. (1993)

America is covered from sea to shining sea with old battlefields, especially throughout its southern part, where one can hardly swing the arms without hitting a display of cannon. Some fields, such as Gettysburg, are visited often and held in reverence while others, such as New York City's Prospect Park, are visited often but no one sunning in the grass knows, or cares to know, that they are lying atop the bones of dead soldiers. And some battlefields, such as Arthurdale, are rarely visited and mostly forgotten. Arthurdale, in fact, is not even considered to have been a battlefield at all.

Admittedly, it looks nothing like an old battlefield; yet there is no better term but "battle" to describe what took place in the small mountain town. Because there were no pile of dead bodies or machine

* Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *Three New Deals*, specifically.

gun nests to be seen some would argue no battle took place, but they are wrong.

It was fought on a plane other than the physical. At Arthurdale one side was led by charging bureaucrats, armed with houses, food, indoor plumbing, and electricity, reinforced with impoverished coal-mining families resettled into the town's world of material plenty. Arrayed in feeble opposition stood the long-decayed remnant of the American republic, armed with warnings against putting expedience over principle and security over liberty. In the midst of a crushing Great Depression, the latter were easily overwhelmed and a new concept of America arose, that of one with a "progressive" government, using the New Deal as its blueprint.

Arthurdale was where the New Deal rubber hit the road, where the self-styled progressive intellectuals who reshaped America put their fondest dreams to the test. The Division of Subsistence Homesteads is one of the lesser-known of the New Deal's myriad projects, despite having had the intimate, deeply personal interest of both FDR and his wife, Eleanor. Animated by the back-to-the-land movement, whose anti-urban disciples called for politically engineered migrations from the city to the countryside, the idea attached itself onto the immense National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 (through the personal efforts of President Roosevelt) with a treasure chest full of $25 million to get things started.[8]

Construction began in late 1933; the town was built in three stages over a four-year period under the authority of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads. At first Arthurdale was subordinate to the Department of the Interior but spent much of its life passed around repeatedly within the New Deal's swollen belly. From its creation until it faded within a few years to its current obscurity, Arthurdale was deluged by a stream of visitors from every corner of these United States and lay at the fore-front of America's attention. Newspapers, magazines, and newsreels trumpeted or condemned every twist and turn of the town's initial years. For the resettled, it was like living in a fishbowl. Now all is silent and forgotten. This may lead us to try resettlement colonies again, to tout an old idea as new.

During the time of Arthurdale's birth, a Professor R. W. Murchie noted, "In all times of economics stress and industrial disruption the

cry of 'back to the land' is certain to be heard."[9] Currently mired in our own depression, the idea that created the town can always resurface, as it has repeatedly throughout our nation's history. We need to tally the costs and benefits of our past endeavors to see if it was worth all the time and trouble—and not only in pure materialistic terms but in something far more valuable: in its effect on our body politic and the rule of law.

As in the New Deal that spawned it, the ideology behind the back-to-the-land movement was "basically conservative, or even reactionary."[10] For all its "progressive" credentials the idea that created the town was centuries old, going back even to the time of Rome's Emperor Tiberius (A.D. 14–37) who instituted a similar project, with similar results.[11] In more recent times, the idea of planned farm communities predates the very birth of the American Republic, when a young Benjamin Franklin authored a land settlement bill for the English province of Pennsylvania,[12] and from 1820 to 1850 scores of settlement colonies, most founded on the socialistic ideologies of Robert Owens and Charles Fournier, were built across the young nation.

The instability engendered by communal ownership hastily destroyed them. From Michigan to New York, they gasped for air a few sickly years before expiring.[13] These settlement colonies (and all that were to follow, including Arthurdale) were animated by the central tenet of the back-to-the-land movement—a strict policy of forced "cooperation," particularly when performing whatever economic activity the colony was to engage in. Charles Fournier's insistence on communal ownership and that "each worker was to be given produce according to his needs"[14] preceded Karl Marx and his *Manifesto* by years.

At first, the federal politicians stayed out of the entire land settlement business, except, of course, for their chosen task of exterminating almost every Indian they came across, herding the survivors onto desolate land that no one else wanted, and giving the now-empty land away under the Homestead Act of 1862.[15] It was not until the 45th Congress of 1877–1878 that legislation was introduced to provide "federal aid to industrial workers, stranded by the depression"[16] in the form of three separate bills, all of which went down to total defeat on constitutional grounds.[17]

One of the sponsors, a Pennsylvania congressman named Hendrick B. Wright, announced after his bill slipped under the waves "that he did

not suppose for a moment that the bill would pass, but merely wished to point the way for the future."[18] That future would move closer when the Newlands Reclamation Act was passed in 1902. Then, for the first time, federal authorities "assumed a responsibility for improving the land before sale."[19] It was a small first step toward Arthurdale.

The biggest push to federal involvement in settlement colonies was given by America's entry into World War I. It has always been a tradition, in this country and others, to reward returning soldiers with land, and "from 1916 to 1922 there was always at least one colonization or soldier settlement bill before Congress."[20] Above all it was a trio of men—the irrigation expert Elwood Mead, Franklin K. Lane (head of the United States Department of the Interior), and Senator John Bankhead from Alabama—who eagerly pushed for settlement legislation that would not only help returning soldiers but something more—it would improve and inaugurate "his economic and political life."[21]

Franklin Lane borrowed the specifics of his soldier settlement bill directly from the work Elwood Mead had performed along those lines while in Australia. Funded with taxpayer money and ready built so the new settlers placed therein could get cracking right away, the proposed colonies were not only a significant departure materially from past settlements but ideologically as well. For the first time, the politicians would task themselves with creating a "better world," with the colonists as the test subjects. The idea that would culminate at Arthurdale was now mature.

Their proposal resulted in a full-scale national debate with Mead and Lane the public face of its supporters. Despite the fact that no soldier settlement bill made it out of Congress alive, the ideas the bills expressed were becoming mainstream in America's intellectual parlors as the 1920s came to an end. Even before the onset of the Great Depression brought the idea into the realm of actual policy, it permeated American discourse, and with the hard times beginning in 1929, "never before in the history of the United States had back to the land been so popular, so frequently discussed, and so susceptible to crackpot schemes."[22] The ground was now fertile for Arthurdale's birth.

Wanting to see the town for myself, I first visited in 2009, when the residents were celebrating the 75th anniversary of its creation. I

drove south up the mountain roads of Route 7, past the beauty of a countryside painted with occasional rows of rundown houses wedged in between the road and the wall of mountain behind them. Once you crest the hill that marks the boundary of Reedsville, the town just to its north, you see Arthurdale before you, pleasant looking and comfortable, and you understand why so many of those resettled there used "heaven" to describe what it was like to escape Scotts Run, to ascend 1,800 feet higher, 20 miles south, and a world away from the wretched hollow.

I had expected the town to offer a small museum, a few buildings maintained to a greater or lesser extent, and, I hoped, an old resident or two who might remember what took place so many years ago. I figured my chance of meeting anyone like that was virtually zero; but I could not have been more wrong. Described by a writer as "one of several surviving artifacts of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads,"[23] the town is a "living museum" in every sense of the word. Many of the current residents are direct descendants of the families that the New Deal resettled there.

The night I arrived the town was holding its annual reunion dinner for those who had graduated from its high school, and I had purchased tickets for my family. Arthurdale is a small Appalachian community where everyone knows everyone, and we stood out like sore thumbs. The evening's master of ceremonies asked (in a very kind, polite manner) if we wished to explain who we were and why we had chosen to visit them. Taking the microphone, I explained the why (writing a book) and was stunned by the deluge of offers to provide any information I felt I needed. The people are possessed with the openheartedness of the country dweller that always takes the city dweller by surprise. Then and on my future visits and phone calls, they struck me as thoroughly decent people, the kind you would not mind having for neighbors.

Getting "too close" to your subject is something that every writer strives to avoid, lest it affect your willingness to lay out the cards as you find them. Much of what my research revealed over the past three years does not match the happy memories of Arthurdale's later generations; some of it flies directly in the face of the image the town leaders wish to project. I have no ax to grind, no agenda to push other than to tell

the story of what happened. Sometimes you are sorry for what you have to say.

The historian Paul Conkin (who wrote the definitive book on the New Deal resettlement program)* spoke at a symposium at Arthurdale in 1994 and directly addressed my dilemma. "Present celebrations may conceal the reasons for such a sense of communal solidarity. A strong sense of community is most often the product of shared adversity . . . it is easy for later generations at Arthurdale to celebrate beginnings that they do not remember. Memory need not deceive, but it is mercifully selective."[24]

A homesteader named Andy Wolfe was interviewed years after the project was closed down and recalled, "Everybody knowed everybody. Everybody was happy. There was no selfishness."[25] Numerous government, private, and even homesteader records from the time tell us otherwise.

Today, Arthurdale has settled nicely into its role not as the gateway to some desired New World but as a bedroom community for Morgantown, the city that holds West Virginia University and most of the area jobs. Over half of the town's current homes were built during the early 1930s and have a unique distinction—they were the ones erected by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads. From the time of Arthurdale's birth, U.S. federal politicians would play an increasingly activist role in promoting American homeownership. Arthurdale was a massive federal housing project—the first in our nation—but it was also something much more, and that is what makes it so unique to our history and so important to understanding what we have become as a nation.

In 1934 a reporter from the *New Republic* said of the town, "Here the 'Roosevelt Revolution' shoots its farthest bolt and changes nothing."[26] He was incorrect; for Americans, both then and now, what happened at Arthurdale changed everything. Rexford Tugwell, who ran the Resettlement Administration responsible for Arthurdale from 1935 to 1936, was more accurate when he declared, "We have already made many commitments which are inconsistent with complete laissez faire and which clearly foreshadow the future."[27] Arthurdale was touted

* *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program.*

as not only the Roosevelt administration's answer to the poverty and violence of Scotts Run but also, more important, as the answer to what it saw as a problem with American society as a whole. Again in the words of Rexford Tugwell, it wished to "make America over"[28] and for better or for worse in that it succeeded.

The experiment conducted at Arthurdale during its period of federal control from 1933 to 1947 shaped the world of every American today. It was there the ideas that once limited and dispersed political power in America were put to rest and pushed aside, and the idea that it was possible to make men "better" via politically engineered social experiments replaced them. That concept of government is the one that rules our world; 75 years on we can imagine no other way of life. The seeds that grew into the centralized, monolithic state we live under today were planted at Arthurdale.[29] Even now the constant political efforts to improve the human material of America continue apace.

Yet today, it has slipped into an obscurity so deep that the I-68 Interstate just 10 miles to its north bears no mention that Arthurdale, the Lexington and Concord of the Roosevelt Revolution, lies but 10 miles south. Back in the late 1930s, Bushrod Grimes (the town's first federal project manager) wrote that what had happened there was "a tale that will also be told in good time."[30] This book is about what happened all those years ago high on a West Virginia mountain plateau and how we live with it effects in our everyday lives, eight decades later.

It is time that Americans grant Arthurdale the respect it deserves. Our world is the one erected by Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, and the dramatic rise of federal power into everyday life was given its purest expression in the resettlement colonies of his subsistence homestead program.

Arthurdale was that program's crown jewel; it is the cradle of modern America.

Scotts Run at the Dawn

Without Scotts Run, Arthurdale would not exist.

—Nancy Hoffman, *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Arthurdale Experiment*[31]

Scotts Run was not always the image of Dante's *Inferno* that Mrs. Roosevelt first saw in 1933 and area missionaries had been seeing from 1924 onward: The hunger, misery, and endemic poverty arrived on the scene long after the coal companies. Scotts Run was a special place because it was laid over some of the richest coalfields in the world,[32] and for a brief burst of time it had enriched many, both owners and miners. The Morgantown and Wheeling Railroad was laid up into Scotts Run specifically to help bring out the coal, and contemporary accounts claim it to have been "the most profitable short run railroad in the country."[33]

It lay just to the west of the city of Morgantown and like that city belongs to Monongalia County, in the northern part of West Virginia that lies just below the southern border of Pennsylvania. The name itself comes from the stream that wanders from the mining town of Cassville in the western part of the hollow, flows down between the steep forested ridges on each side and past the coal camps of Jere, Pursglove, and Osage, to empty into its eastern terminus, the Monongahela River.[34]

The Run morphed from a world of small family farms into a line of endless coal camps with stunning rapidity. According to one source, the area's population rose from 1,173 in 1910 to 3,160 in 1920 then rose again by 1930 to 6,857 people and numerous coal companies crammed into the narrow, five-mile-long hollow. Cass District, of which Scotts Run is a part, "became one of the three most populous districts within Monongalia County."[35] The heavy inflow of miners created a quirk in the age of Jim Crow—an extraordinarily diverse mix of racial and national groups living all mixed up together, mostly in peace.

In the mid-1920s a church group in Osage coal camp recorded a population of 162 families with 322 children, composed of native white and black Americans, Hungarians, Italians, Irish, Lithuanian, Polish, Serbian, Slovak, and Greek.[36] A survey conducted by missionaries in the area during the early 1930s put the population as majority (about 60 percent) foreign born, with native-born whites and blacks splitting the difference at 20 percent each,[37] in an area that as recently as the late nineteenth century had been a patch quilt of small family farms where "immigrants and African-Americans composed barely 1 percent of the population."[38]

Plans were discussed to create subsistence homesteads for blacks in Monongalia County in 1935, but they came to naught.[39] While many contemporaries from that time and place made note of the Run's relative harmony among the various races, that situation was quick to change in the postbubble world, and "with hard economic times came frustration and prejudice against those who were foreign born and African American."[40] Historian Jerry Bruce Thomas makes clear that "the Ku Klux Klan was very active in the state in the 1920s,"[41] and no doubt during that time in history this did not make West Virginia unique among any state in the union. The progressive's insistence that Arthurdale exclude nonwhites was one of the few decisions made by the federal planners that observers found, for the most part, noncontroversial.

The starting gun blast that set in motion the creation of Arthurdale was the bursting of the great coal bubble, pumped into a manic speculative bid by the lethal combination of America's entry into World War I and the easy money policy of the Federal Reserve Bank during the same time. The end game of that frenzy, which landed on America's great coal-mining regions in the early 1920s, established a level of misery and violence in Scotts Run that shocked and frightened outsiders who observed it. The word "revolution" was in the air. Where once President Thomas Jefferson specifically feared a *lack* of revolutions (feeling it foretold the death of liberty), in contrast Arthurdale was born from a pervasive fear *of* revolution within the Roosevelt administration.

The federal government employees who cried alarm at the prospect of revolution from the coal camps of Scotts Run were undoubtedly correct in their worries that violence could explode at any moment. Yet a West Virginian coal camp was, for the most part, always on the verge of violence. The bloodshed of the early 1930s that so horrified Eleanor Roosevelt and others had a long, sad history behind it. What they observed in Scotts Run was just one of the series of battles that came to be known as the Coal Wars.

When it comes to labor violence, absolutely no people in our union can hold a candle to the West Virginians. Those who noticed the coal camps for the first time in the early 1930s were almost without exception stunned by the West Virginian tradition of settling labor disputes

by rifle, machine gun, and dynamite blast, not realizing they were looking on what was by then a long-established tradition.

Even to this day the people of West Virginia are some of the most distinctive of our union, but they were far more so in the early part of the last century. Being the land of the Hatfields and the McCoys, memory and blood feuds ran both deep and swift. The mountain people who came down from the hills to mine coal were an independent breed, with little understanding of the modern world, prone to lash out in violent confusion at what they did not understand and to react swiftly to any slight, real or perceived, to family honor. They set the tone for all the miners who would follow. On average, the people of Scotts Run were a volatile bunch.

The men who owned the coal mines were every bit as stubborn, intransient, and prone to violence as the rudest coal miner, and for those outside owners who were smart enough not to get physically involved on their own, armed local men were always available for the right price, eager to pitch into the fray.

Until the Civil War, what is now West Virginia was simply the western part of Virginia, one of the largest and most powerful states of our union. Coal mining has long been a part of the tapestry; even as early as 1861 it "was an important commercial enterprise in many counties"[42] throughout the area. One author described Logan County, which also lay along the Appalachian Mountain zone 150 miles or so south of Scotts Run, as "a land of high mountains, deep gorges, rushing streams, and blood feuds."[43]

Life on the mountain farms was isolation and poverty, and by the time the coal companies began to arrive in the late 1800s, not much had changed since the first settlers had pushed into the area. The introduction of the industry would engender a sea change in the lives of the mountain people—a range of new choices and knowledge were opened up to them. They eagerly flocked to that which promised a better life and, for a time, coal mining made good on that promise.

The average coal mine was usually located in an isolated area far from any modern amenities, so in order to attract workers, the coal operators needed to provide everything, from housing, to stores, to the church. The owner of the mine was employer, landlord, credit agent, and church deacon. This gave the coal operators an unusual degree of

control over their workforce, and some took full advantage. Striking miners, or any thought to be troublemakers, faced an unceremonious eviction from company housing. Evictions were often the spark to ignite violence.

The most insidious feature of the camps was the company store system and miners' wages paid not in money but in "company script," redeemable only at the store. While the company store always charged higher prices than that which might have been available in the surrounding area, they also extended credit to mine employees.[44] It was not uncommon for the company store to allow miners "a dollar or two at the end of the week to get along on."[45]

Although this may be seen as a decent gesture on the part of the coal company, as a form of charity to help ameliorate the miners' plight, it also had the effect of sinking them even deeper into debt, and over time it made miners "entirely dependent on the company store for food."[46] The ready road this provided for miners to get themselves into hopeless financial straits was frequently commented on in news reports and firsthand accounts. If competition appeared in the area, some coal companies would institute a firm policy: Shop anywhere other than the company store and you would lose your job.

It was only at the company store where miners could spend at face value the round brass discs or pieces of paper known as company script that they were "paid" with.[47] The script could be traded close around the camps but only at depreciation to its face value. This blatantly illegal and fraudulent "money" was often all that miners would see for years on end, if they were lucky.

Many miners labored for months without receiving any pay at all, so indebted to the company store had they become.[48] Between the higher prices charged for food in the company stores, the payment for labor in "money" that was utterly useless outside the camp, and company policies that would see anyone who shopped elsewhere fired (and evicted), the ability of miners to feed themselves and their families on already inadequate wages was severely compromised.

Most insidious of all, when the mines shut down, the workers, paid (if at all) in money that was worthless outside of the coal camps were left utterly destitute and helpless. While the Joads from Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* had the U.S. dollars to go seek opportunity else-

where, all too many families in the coal camps had, at best, worthless company-issued tokens. The term "stranded" came into popular usage to describe the people in such straits. Their suffering is beyond our comprehension—the worst examples that modern America can produce give nothing comparable to the wretched postbubble coal camp.

As always, this fell hardest onto the most vulnerable members of the population—the women and children. The life of a woman in the coal camps could be particularly severe, as custom dictated strict barriers to what she could and could not do. One thing women were encouraged to do was to have children, rapidly and frequently.[49] One news reporter from the time found that "[i]t is quite usual for the girls to marry at 15 and to be having their eighth child at 27. At Crown Mine there is a young woman of 31, but she is already a grandmother."[50]

In a world with so much to despair, the combination of alcohol (available at the company store) and the ubiquitous labor strife left women exposed to physical violence, and relief workers quickly grew used to being greeted at the door by women with bruised faces.[51] The control dominating husbands had over their lives could be extreme; one relief worker noted a young woman, married at 13 and with four children (and one on the way) by age 21, had a husband who had not "let her off the hill for months." The woman could not read. The relief worker added "this [is] a general condition on Scotts Run."[52]

Life in the Run was particularly harsh on the camp children. When a Quaker relief organization entered the Run in 1932, it reported that lack of clothing and food had bred "epidemic numbers of children with bad tonsils and throats, troublesome teeth, weak eyes, and nervous disorders."[53] The typical fare for Scotts Run was dried beans, cornmeal, and fatback. If the surrounding area allowed, the children were sent into the mountains to scrounge for wild berries.[54] The average diet in the camps lowered resistance to a host of preventable diseases and lead to a mortality rate among the younger children of one in five (the average in America at the time was less than six per hundred), according to a report in *The Nation*.[55]

When child-feeding programs were instituted across the Run starting in the 1920s (using schoolhouses as distribution points), the lack of clothing and shoes made it impossible for many of the worst-off children to reach the offered supplies. For the children born into the

hardest-hit camps, all the squalor and poverty was their entire world; they knew of no other. The progressive magazine *Christian Century* commented from the Run in 1932, "[T]he children, sweet faced and beautiful seemed to have forgotten how to smile."[56]

As coal companies went bankrupt during the postbubble collapse, the coal camps took on the appearance of towns laid waste by war. Structures sagged, then fell to pieces while refuse collected into whatever catch the wind or a human hand had tossed it, to the utter delight of legions of vermin. Most camps lacked even the most basic of sanitation services.[57] When social workers visited North American and Jew Hill (on the eastern edge of the Run), they found 16 families sharing six outdoor latrines[58] and saw "rats and mice were everywhere."[59] They were joined by swarms of flies and mosquitoes that happily multiplied in the stagnant, garbage-filled creeks.

At one time long before all of this, in what must have seemed a hazy dream, the Gilbert-Davis Mining Company had kept the water supply "carefully guarded" and saw to it that "an abundant and ample supply of pure spring and well water is provided at each camp,"[60] but by the early 1930s in Scotts Run, stagnant pools of water collected the runoff from the mines and outhouses that sat farther upstream, and as for those who live along India's Ganges River, the water supply in the area was a combination toilet, washing machine, bathtub, and drinking fountain.[61] The water in the Run turned predator.

To a greater or lesser extent, the scene in Scotts Run was repeated across America's coal-mining regions. The crushing debt burdens, isolation, endemic poverty, and suffering of the coal camps created frequent strikes and long periods of labor violence between the miners and the coal operators. Two of the better-known episodes took place south of Scotts Run, one at Cabin and Paint Creek and the other culminating in the largest land battle on American soil since the Civil War—the Battle of Blair Mountain. The famous massacre at Matewan was born of the labor strife, and while colorful characters such as Old Mother Jones and Sheriff Sid Hatfield fought for union aims, equally colorful (and violent) men such as "Boss" Don Chafin and the Felts Brothers stood opposite them.

These were just a few of the larger clashes in a story known to the people of West Virginia as the Coal Wars. The conflict would soon