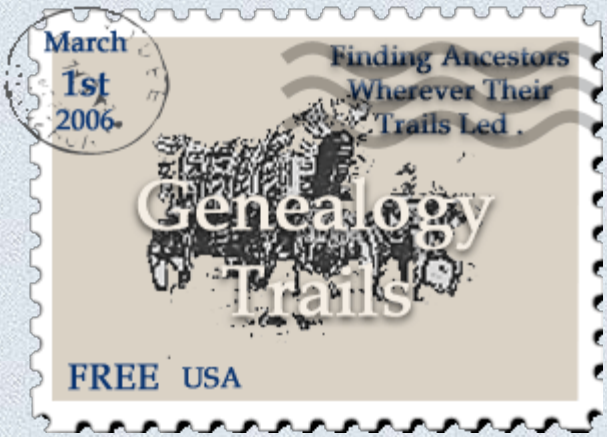


Athens County Ohio

Hocking Valley Coal Mines

Strike, Strikebreakers, Evictions and Violence
1884-1885 Workers' Strikes

Another Strike of Ohio Miners

Columbus, Dec. 26, 1880 - Word reaches here that there is a general strike of the coal miners at Nelsonville, Shawnee, Straitsville and Corning. The ostensible reason for the strike is a demand for the payment of wages twice each month. The Hocking Valley Co. today brought all their engines and cabooses away without coal trains, and they will be kept here until the strike ends. It is hardly probable that the strike will last longer than a few days.

In 1882, Ohio coal miners formed the Ohio Miners' Amalgamated Association.

In 1883, several mine operators and iron concerns in the Hocking Valley united into the Columbus and Hocking Coal and Iron Company, known to the miners as "The Syndicate". In 1884, the Ohio Miners' Amalgamated Association crossed swords with the Hocking Valley coal syndicate while consolidation of mines by the Ohio Coal Exchange and the Hocking Valley Coal and Iron Company was going on. The difference in the thickness of the seams in the northern part (ten feet) and in the southern part (six feet) of the valley resulted in too many laborers being in the thick seam and causing others to clamor for a chance to work it. The competition of workmen enabled the coal syndicate to force reductions from seventy cents per ton to sixty cents and then to fifty cents. It was the policy of the operators thus to hold the market. The average monthly wage in one of the Ohio Coal Exchange mines ran — **March, $27.53; April, $ 18.55 ; May, $19.95; June, $12.83.** In one of the Hocking Valley Coal and Iron Company mines the average monthly wage from January to June was **$17.84**. The average yearly wage was **$239.17 (***Source: "Report of Secretary of Internal Affairs of Pennsylvania, 1882-83,CONCILIATION AND ARBITRATION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY OF AMERICA BY ARTHUR E. SUFFERN, M.A., 1915")*

The miners of the Hocking Valley decided to strike. When the Syndicate brought in 250 Italian replacement workers and, shortly thereafter 1,250 additional replacement miners,

violence erupted. Strikers set seven mines on fire and destroyed three railroad bridges. The Governor of Ohio was forced to call out the militia to maintain order and the mine owners were required to hire Pinkerton detectives to guard their operations. The strike finally ended during the spring of 1885, when the workers agreed to the Columbus and Hocking Coal and Iron Company's terms.*(Source: "Wikipedia")*

TITLE: Ohio - the mining troubles in Hocking Valley - scene in the town of Buchtel - the striking miners' reception of "Blackleg" workmen when returning from their work escorted by a detachment of Pinkerton's detectives / from a sketch by Joseph Becker 1884; Hyde.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

On October 11, 1884 the out-of-work miners' anger boiled over. They placed timber in coal cars, soaked them with oil and kerosene, ignited them, and pushed them into five separate mines near New Straitsville. Most of the fires were extinguished very quickly, but several were not brought under control and continue to burn to this day. The burning coal soon became a conflagration. The Coal Trade Bulletin (1918, v. 39, no 12, p. 60) reported that " The blaze is an inferno and the draft forces the flames nearly 100 feet and it can been seen for miles along the hills, resembling a volcano." With the burning coal came remarkable reports of homes being vacated by residents with crumbling foundations, people who were able to make coffee and tea with the water they pumped directly from their wells, and one farmer who dug roasted potatoes directly out of his garden *("Time Magazine", 1936).*

With these reports, the mine fires soon began to draw national attention as people began to travel to New Straitsville to see for their own eyes these remarkable events. Two tour

concessions soon opened up and began to compete for business and the Ripley's "Believe It or Not" radio show broadcast from the mine fires. Over the last 123 years it is estimated the fires destroyed many square miles and millions of tons of coal (Crowell, 1995) and New Straitsville and the surrounding area continues to suffer from subsidences near underground voids created when the coal was consumed

These telegrams were sent by members of the Ohio National Guard, stationed in Hocking and Perry counties during the Hocking Valley coal strike of 1884. The one-page telegram, dated September 1, 1884, was written by members of Company A of the 17th Regiment. The men ask Governor George Hoadley to be excused from duty in the area because many of them are coal miners and "have relatives and friends in the Hocking Valley mines."

THE WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPH COMPANY

Received at COLUMBUS,O. 2:05 AM Sept 1, 1884

New Lexington, O Sept. 1
To: Hon Geo Hoadly, Gov.
In view of our close proximity to New Straitsville and the fact that many of the members including the Captain of Company "A" 17th regiment are coal miners who have relatives and friends in the Hocking Valley Mines, we respectfully suggest that our company be excused from service in the pending difficutly.
John W. Free J.F.McMahan
Orrin Macker J.G. Huffman

4-22-1885
ORDERS
COLUMBUS, O., April 9. - The Columbus & Hocking Coal & Iron Company gave official notice to their miners, in the Hocking Valley, that in accordance with the law recently passed by the Legislature abolishing the truck system, they will issue no merchandise orders after April 15, and that the miners will be paid in cash on Wednesday of each week all amounts due up to Tuesday evening of the preceding week. All orders heretofore issued by this company and not yet presented at the stores will be redeemed in merchandise on presentation at any of the store of this company.
This is the result of the passage of the bill introduced by Jones, of Jackson, abolishing the truck system. It will necessitate in the case of the syndicate the immediate outlay of at least $75,000, and the ability to pay workmen at least a month for digging coal before it is even shipped. This is a hard strain, and a small company could not stand it. There are many of them all over the State, and during the pendency of the bill in the Legislature they brought a hard pressure to bear upon the syndicate to fight the bill. The latter made no effort to have it defeated, however. The consequence of the weakness of the smaller companies will probably result in their bankruptcy, for none of them will be able to give credit and live, and as they are not allowed to continue the "truck" system, they will not be able to keep enough men to do their mining. The bill is the most important measure in the interests of workingmen that has passed the Legislature this session, although it is claimed by some the cash system will be a hardship to miners, who are unable to hold money, and will necessarily suffer without credit and a place to anticipate their wages.
The Legislature's committee to investigate the causes of the Hocking Valley strike, recommends the entire abolition of the truck or order system. In all future disagreements

between operators and employees arbitration, either under the Ryan law or other laws, is recommended. The report further urges legistalion to prohibit corporations from compelling employees to sign ironclad contract such as those used bye the syndicate and coal exchange in the Hocking Valley during the recent strike.

COLUMBUS O., Nov. 17, 1885 - All the coal operators of the Hocking Valley held a meeting this forenoon, with the exception of W.P. Rend, of Chicago, who is reported as having granted an advance to his miners, who would all be at work today. Operators say they have received no information of an advance by Rend except at Straitsville, where the men were preparing to go to work this morning, but the drivers struck for an advance to the $1.75 per day and nice hours, which has caused another delay. The miners were only asking an advance to 60 cents, and operators here think that the statement attributed to Rend that he had agreed to pay 70 cents is a mistake as he could have no object in doing so. Operators hold another meeting to discuss the situation this evening.

COLUMBUS O., Nov. 16, 1885 - At a large meeting of Hocking Valley miners at Buchtel today some of the miners were in favor of returning to work, while others were opposed. It was talked among them on the streets at Buchtel and Nelsonville that if they expected to preserve the union they must go to work, as, if they did not as a body, some of them would return as their necessities demanded. It is said the Hocking Valley miners are beginning to realize that they have been imposed upon by the other mining districts where the miners went in again.

James Goodwin, secretary of the New Straitsville Relief & Distributing Committee, wrote this letter to R.M. Haseltine, chief inspector of mines, on August 16, 1897. Goodwin asks for relief for the 800 miners in the New Straitsville area. In a lengthy postscript, he denounces the violence against mine owners in the region and tells Haseltine of a resolution passed by the miners of New Straitsville to protect the property of miner owners, without a fee. The 1897 strike was one of a number of labor disputes between coal miners and mine owners in the Hocking Valley region between 1880 and 1940

Western Union Telegram

New Straitsville
Aug. 16, 1897

To R.M. Haseltine

Honoured Sir
At a meeting of the mines commitees held here I was elected secretary of the New Straitsville Relief and Distributing Commitee I was requested to write to you for aid for the starving 800 miners and mine laborers of this section of the Hocking Valley. We have been idle as you well know and we have received no relief from anywhere with the exception of food donations that we have generously received from the business men and store keepers of our town which we issued to the needy. Last Saturday we partially relieved one half of the distressed that came.

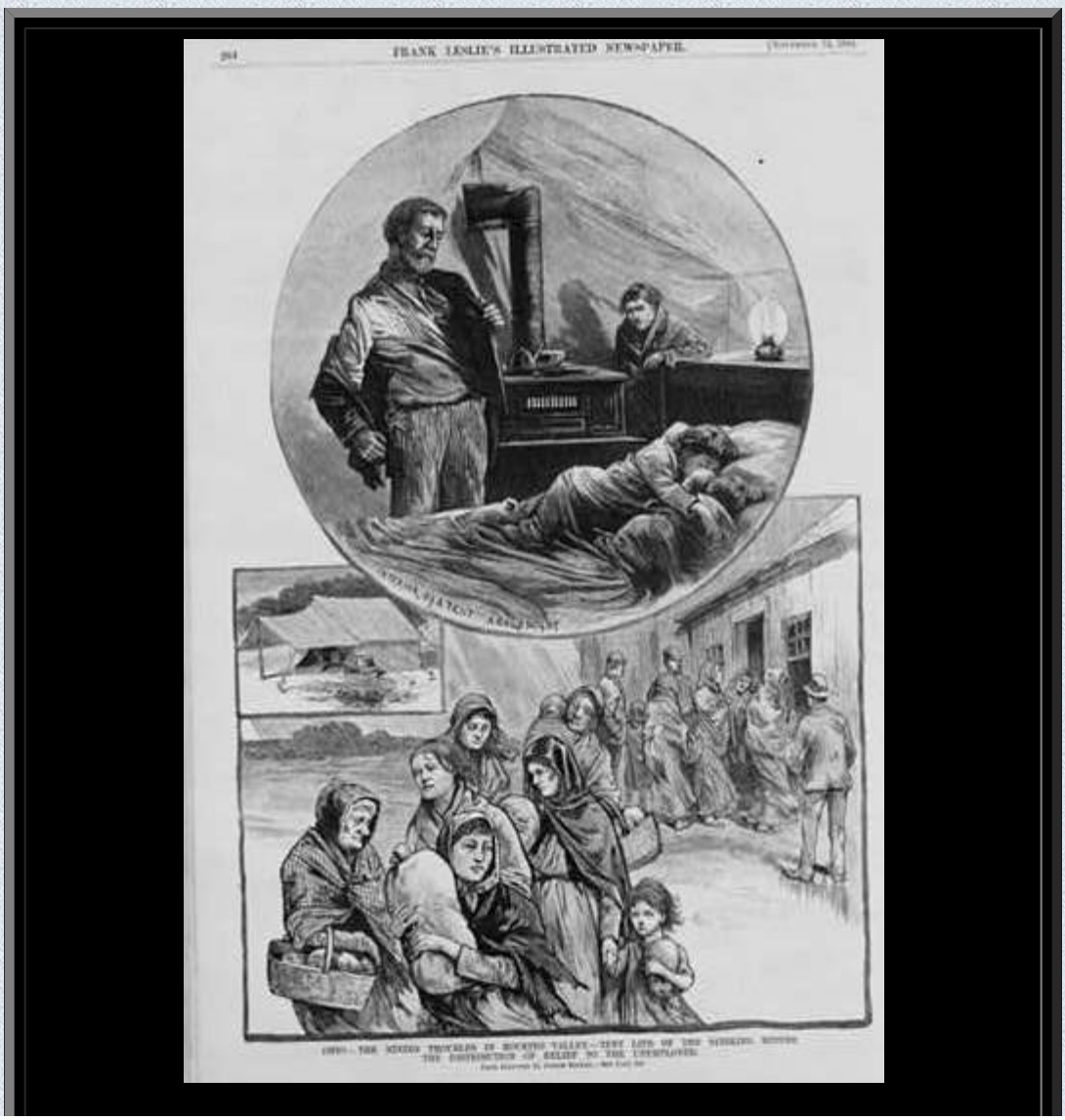
Pg.2
We the comitee would feel gratefull for any contributions in the way of food supplies such as flour, meat, tea, coffee, sugar, beans and soap and any other article of food that you might send to us. Please write as soon as this comes to hand. Hoping you will send us speedy relief. We remain yours in behalf of the distressed miners and their families of New

Straitsville and vincinity including No. 3 Rock Run Mine, also Lost Run Mines and all the small mines.
H.C. Begland President
Alex Porter Treasurer
James Goodwin Secretary

Please address all communications to :
Jas. Goodwin
New Straitsville, Perry Co. Ohio

Pg. 3

P.S. Dear sir
Between the hours of 2 and 6 oclock on Saturday morning some party or parties set fire to Blacks Mine hoppers and Ed Call Co. hoppers, both of Rock Run. We the Relief Commitee on Saturday evening held a mass meeting presided over by the Mayor of our town. We the citizens and miners of our town indignantly denounced the act as cowardly and atrocious to the best interests of our strike. Also we the miners offered our services to guard the property of the mine owners free gratis. Resolutions sent to 4 principal news papers. Yours, Jas Goodwin



Ohio - The mining troubles in Hocking Valley - tent life of the striking miners--The distribution of relief to the unemployed / from sketches by Joseph Becker.
CREATED/PUBLISHED: 1884 - Illus. in: Frank Leslie's illustrated newspaper, v. 59, 1884 Nov. 15, p. 204 - Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

"*Strikebreakers, Evictions and Violence*"

Tensions between Hocking Valley coal miners and coal mine operators certainly antedated the start of the Hocking Valley coal strike of 1884-1885. Miners complained about the high prices charged by the company store, unfair work rules and the lack of steady work. They thought nothing good could come of the increasing monopolization of the valley's mines. With the decline in the local ownership of the mines, operators joined together in the spring of 1883 and consolidated their holdings under one company, the Columbus and Hocking Coal and Iron Co., derisively called "the Syndicate" by the miners.

At roughly the same time, operators created the Ohio Coal Exchange to handle their labor relations in a centralized manner. Corporate offices in Cleveland now dictated labor policies in the Valley. Miners thought the Syndicate out to rob them of their traditional rights. Local miner Andrew Brown believed that the Syndicate wished to break the "American miner down to the level of the pauperized miner of Europe. Christopher Evans, President of District One of the Ohio Miners Amalgamated Association, considered the Syndicate a gigantic monopoly "bent upon crushing poor humanity." Sharp and unilaterally imposed wage reductions precipitated the Hocking Valley coal strike of 1884-1885. In March 1884 operators slashed the rates for coal mined from 80 cents to 70 cents per ton. Given the soft demand for coal and the increasing competition from out-of-state fields miners reluctantly accepted the pay cut. One month later the operators asked the miners to accept another reduction, this time down to 50 cents per ton. The miners refused to agree this time, and they continued mining coal at the old wage rate until late June. The operators then decided to unilaterally cut the rate to 60 cents per ton and on Friday evening, June 20, they posted the new tonnage rates at the mines.

On Monday, June 23, the miners stayed home. According to Christoper Evans, three thousand miners and one thousand helpers struck, closing down forty-six mines in the valley. It was a long and grueling strike, "the bitterest strike in the entire mining industry of America," wrote economist Edward Bemis in 1888. Lasting for over nine months, the strike ended in total defeat for the miners when on March 18, 1885, the last strikers announced in **New Straitsville** that they accepted the operators' terms. The work stoppage lasted so long because of intransigence on the part of both the operators and the miners. Under heavy competition from other coal fields, especially those in the Pittsburgh area, southern Ohio coal operators used the strike to win a more favorable market position by breaking the miners' union and reducing their wage bill. In sharp contrast, the miners sought to maintain their old wage rates and conditions of work and prevent the operators from forcing them to become "voluntary serfs and miserable menials." In its general outlines, then, the Hocking Valley coal strike of 1884-1885 resembled many labor disputes of the Gilded Age and closely followed the pattern of the big Hocking Valley coal strike of 1873-1874. In that conflict the operators had successfully used strike-breakers to end the strike, and in 1884 they again recruited strike-breakers to keep their mines in production and thereby break the economic power of the miners' union.

On July 14, a few weeks after the miners refused to work for lower wages, the first group of strike-breakers accompanied by one hundred Pinkerton Guards entered the Valley. The operators had initially tried to hire skilled coal miners as strikebreakers, but they were unsuccessful, and most of the first group of three hundred strikebreakers were unskilled Italians. "All members of our Order," the Knights of Labor declared, "will stay away . . .until the difficulty is settled." The operators were forced to rely upon unskilled laborers, mainly Italians, Germans, Poles, Hungarians, Swedes and some Virginia Negroes to fill their labor needs. The arrival of strikebreakers and their armed guardians caused little trouble. The pro-labor Hocking Sentinel considered the new laborersa "social ulcer in our midst," but most Valley miners also agreed with the paper's advice to "keep cool, be peaceable, orderly and respect all offices and conduct themselves according to law." The reception accorded the strikebreakers was so mild that the operators sent the Pinkertons away on July 26.

As the strike entered its second month the strikebreakers appeared safe and unmolested. Valley miners did not believe the strikebreakers "menacing and terrible" as Jack London would later describe them. Instead, local miners viewed the strikebreakers as misguided and uninformed, but morally innocent. The operators used "disreputable methods" and misrepresented the conditions in the Valley to lure foreign-born strikebreakers into the mines, stated union leader John McBride. Not only were the strikebreakers deceived, but they were thought by Hocking Valley strikers to be the epitome of exploited and servile labor. Miner J. A. Donley sympathized openly with their plight. "They don't lead a very happy life," he stated, "they are starving about half the time . . . and when a man is hungry, I don't think his life is very happy." Two other perceptions held by miners tended to lessen antipathy toward the strikebreakers. First, proud Hocking Valley coal miners refused to believe that unskilled foreign laborers could take their places, despite the fact that the operators had imported the latest machinery to aid the unskilled strikebreakers. One newspaper report stated, "the general opinion among older miners is that the Italians will prove a failure." The miners, perhaps blinded by craft pride, refused to believe themselves replaceable. Another factor worked against reprisals upon the strikebreakers. The miners believed that their strike was being fought for basic human rights as well as wage increases.

The miners were engaged "in a decisive battle between monopoly on the one hand and organized labor on the other." Miner R. H. Miller characterized his profession and the Syndicate's greed more poignantly. Miller accepted physical injury and degredation as part of the price that miners paid for defying nature's laws. Nature punished miners for taking her precious minerals by making them "humpbacked, undersized, and bowlegged." But Miller was repelled by the Syndicate's attempts to humiliate further the poor and physically degraded miners by refusing to pay them a decent wage. Consequently, the miners perceived the strikebreakers not as machines or villians but as pitiable men robbed of their basic human dignity. Striking miners uncovered in the slavish strikebreakers the human misery that they themselves sought to avoid. Their empathy toward the immigrant strikebreaker increased with reports that the newcomers were voluntarily leaving the mines or rebelling against the operators. At the end of July the Athens Messenger reported that "lately imported Italian miners are abandoning work. . in a body." The former strikebreakers, the story continued, were then taken "in hand by the strikers" and given breakfast and the assurance of transportation out of the valley. The Hocking Sentinel devoted considerable space to the shooting of an Italian strikebreaker by a Pinkerton guard. Apparently, the strikebreaker had become noisy after heavy drinking. Unable to quiet the Italian down, the angry Pinkerton shot him to death. After this incident many enraged Italian miners left their new jobs. The newspaper account characterized the strikebreakers' "job action" in terms that must have elated striking miners. "The uprising of the Italians in defense

of an injury to one of them," the paper stated, "shows conclusively that they will be as vigorous in their demands for justice as have been those who labored in the mines before them."

Convinced that the strikebreakers were capable of noble sentiments, the strikers pursued a peaceful policy toward these new men. Immediately upon entering the Valley the strikebreakers were greeted by strikers' verbal appeals that they return home. The initial confrontation between striker and strikebreaker was peaceful. A man identified as a leading **Nelsonville** striker told the Athens Messenger that the strikers would use persuasion and not force to convince strikebreakers to leave the mines. Thus the newspaper reported that while foreign laborers "continue to arrive in this valley by squads, they are not here long before being induced by the strikers to abandon work."

The striking miners believed their "persuasive eloquence" would work, and remarkably, this strategy succeeded for a time in convincing many strikebreakers to leave. But such a tactic was doomed to failure, because for every handful of strikebreakers who left, hundreds more arrived to take their jobs in the mines. By November 1884 over 1,500 strikebreakers were at work in fifteen Hocking Valley mines. Perplexed by the failure of their arguments to convince more strike breakers to leave, some miners resorted to psychological intimidation of the newcomers. In January 1885 strikers were reported to be arming themselves. According to an observer, the miners intended the guns for show and hoped that the strikebreakers in the **Nelsonville** area would be frightened into leaving their jobs. Such incidents remained few and they usually failed, however.

The introduction of strikebreakers into the Valley had failed to provoke a violent confrontation either with the operators, their hired Pinkertons or with the replacement labor force itself. When violence did start it came from another quarter. Many miners lived in housing owned by the Syndicate and at the end of July the news quickly spread that the operators would soon begin evictions of those still on strike. Local observers were convinced that such action was designed to inflame the miners. The Hocking Sentinel believed that the purpose of the evictions is to provoke men whose wives and children are driven into the storm to a breach of the peace . . . so that the state authorities can be called to aid in forcing the outrage which the lousy Italians and the armed Pinkertons failed to accomplish. Eviction is dangerous in downtrodden Ireland. It is not an American system and had best not be enforced.

The miners vowed to resist forcefully evictions and the Syndicate's "total disregard of the rights of others." Operators were warned that their property would be destroyed if they evicted miners from company housing. Despite these warnings, the operators on July 31, 1884, evicted some miners and sued in court to remove all strikers from company-owned housing. By August 2, violence flared as miners assaulted mine guards and fired at a Hocking Valley train. Sporadic violence continued for a few days, but then subsided. Most miners and their families ignored their eviction notices, and, faced with widespread civil disobedience, the operators feared to act. The evictees also had their day in court before Judge Elias Boudinot, a man openly sympathetic to their cause. Boudinot ruled that the rental agreement signed by the operators with the miners was not voided by a strike. To rub salt on the operators' wounds, Boudinot forced the plaintiff, a Syndicate-affiliated coalmine owner, to pay all of the court's costs.

The question of the operators' right to evict strikers from company-owned housing remained the key to violence in the Valley. After another court on August 25 allowed the operators to evict strikers, close to four hundred miners rioted in **Buchtel** . Still another court ruled on

August 28 against the miners' right to remain in company-owned houses during a strike. When miners are discharged, the court ruled, the house rental contracts cease to be in effect. Immediately after this decision was rendered, one observer predicted that "trouble may be expected." The evictions of the final days of August and the early part of September coincided with widespread conflict and disruption. A number of strikers attacked the camps of strikebreakers at **Lonstreth, Snake Hollow** and **Straitsville** . In the attack some two or three hundred shots were fired. Later, near Straitsville, strikers set the hopper of Mine Number Seven on fire.

The New York Times contended that the bloodshed and destruction resulted from miners being "goaded to madness" after having been driven from their homes. The strikers' violent acts forced local law enforcement officials to declare life and property in imminent danger. Hocking County Sheriff J. J. McCarthy wired Ohio Governor George Hoadly, "I am worn out . . . All means in my power are exhausted to repress disorder and protect life and property. Please send militia immediately and save further bloodshed."

The Governor dispatched the militia, and he made a personal visit to the Valley as well. In Nelsonville strikers demanded of the governor "What's to become of the people turned out of houses?" "I will send them tents," replied Hoadly. The violence abated with the moral and physical presence of the militia, the easy acquisition of tents and the willingness of home-owning miners to take in evictees. With calm apparently restored, Hoadly withdrew the bulk of the militia in mid-September. Occasional violence continued over the next few months. Significantly, much of it was directed against the company housing once inhabited by strikers. A number of company homes were burned to the ground in mid-November, including a new boarding house built to house strikebreakers near Straitsville. If violence to prevent evictions represented a "defensive" effort by strikers, violence against company property was a more "aggressive" tactic designed to help win the actual strike. On the offensive, union miners attacked poorly guarded mine buildings, tools, hoppers, shutes and bridges that were key links in the movement of coal already mined. Some actual coal mines were set on fire but since such conflagrations could burn for years this practice was soon discontinued when it became clear that such tactics permanently destroyed the miners' means of livelihood.

These skillful attacks greatly panicked the operators and their allies. A railroad president wrote to the governor of Ohio that strikers have burned coal hoppers, set fires to the mines several of which are still burning. Last night all our wires were cut, we learn through messengers that a serious attack . . . burned three of our bridges on Monday Creek and Sand Run branches. Are the operators and our railroad Company to be left at the mercy of such men or can we have the protection of the state so that the operators can work their properties & the railroad be open.

Each actual fire brought forth a torrent of rumored arson plots. The operators and their supporters thrived on rumors of anticipated violence, hopeful that they might bring large numbers of state militiamen back into the Valley. When stationed there, the militia protected the operators' property and investments at a cost substantially lower than that of an army of Pinkertons. The operators, as well as other observers, correctly analyzed the relationship between actual acts of sabotage and the miners' goal of preventing strikebreakers from mining coal. The burning of the Central Coal Company's shutes at New Straitsville just one day prior to the arrival of strikebreakers at that mine highlighted such incidents of directed violence. One newspaper concluded that the destruction of the shutes ended any need for strikebreakers in the area. Similarly, in January 1885, it was reported that the sending of

imported Negro miners to work near New Straitsville is supposed to be the cause for firing the tunnel at Bristol, as in that manner, transportation is checked, and so would be the work of the imported colored men.

The tactic of directed violence failed also. As the winter dragged on many miners were either forced to return to work or to seek jobs in other fields. Efforts by local business and civic leaders to mediate the dispute were rejected by Syndicate operators confident of their ability to maintain production with a corps of imported strikebreakers. In March defeated miners returned to work on the operators' terms. Wages in Syndicate mines started at forty cents per ton, while fifty cents was paid in other parts of the Valley.

Strike violence in the Hocking Valley coal strike followed the pattern uncovered by George Rude and other new social historians in their studies of pre-industrial violence. When conflict occurred during a food riot or strike, Rude found that it was directed against private property and not against individuals. Despite their frustration in fighting a losing battle, Hocking Valley miners conducted themselves in an essentially disciplined and humane manner. While painfully aware that the mines must be kept closed, the strikers refused to attack the strike-breakers because they saw them as fellow victims of a harsh economic system. Instead, the miners vented their anger and violence in an essentially pre-industrial mode.

Because they were perceived as unknowing pawns of the operators, strikebreakers escaped the violence that later marked mine strikes in the twentieth century. Perhaps this change in perception and action resulted from twenty years of additional labor strife; perhaps it resulted from the breakdown of community solidarity between the working class and the middle class and within the working class itself.

OHIO HISTORY "Strikebreakers, Evictions and Violence"ohiohistory.org The Ohio Historical Society Archives/Library is, by law, the archives for the State of Ohio.

Arbitraters at the Mines, c1902

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Strikes - coal miners and families, Penn.
Strikers mass meeting at Indian Mound, McKee's Rocks
August, 1909

Some of the 500 persons in the Atlantic Camp during the Penn. Coal Strike July 13, 1911

-Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

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