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# *Long Shadows*

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In the Lone Tree Cemetery on the east side of Telluride, Colorado, stands a monument that casts a long shadow, both when lit by the evening sun and in history. Erected in memory of a man, it also commemorates a tumultuous era in the region's history.

The man was Johan Bertillis, born in Kovjoki (present Kovik), in southwest Finland. By 1901 he was twenty-seven years old and working as John Barthell at the Smuggler-Union Mine in the Marshall Basin several miles northeast of Telluride. On May 2 of that year, Telluride's Miners' Union Local No. 63, the "16 to 1," of the Western Federation of Miners, went on strike against the Smuggler-Union over the contract system of mining just introduced by the company's Cornish-born general manager, Arthur L. Collins.<sup>1</sup>

Initially calm prevailed, but when the company resumed operating after six weeks with replacement miners, union miners reacted. At daylight on July 3, a large contingent of union men occupied the hills surrounding the Smuggler-Union before the start of the day shift "with the purpose of inducing the non-union men to quit work until the strike was settled," as Telluride's union-sympathetic newspaper the *San Miguel Examiner* expressed it.<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of the confrontation, Barthell, one of the union miners, climbed upon a rock to demand the surrender of the strike-breakers and was felled either by the

opening shot or in the first exchange of gunfire. "It is difficult to say just how the fight started," stated the *Examiner* three days later. "The rumors have to be sifted for details. One has it that it was precipitated by the Union. Another, that the deputies and guards first opened fire. Taking the circumstance of the past month into consideration, it is generally accepted that the latter was the case."<sup>3</sup>

The shooting continued for most of the morning, "the office at [the] Smuggler [being] riddled



with bullets.” The unionists were reinforced as the day wore on by brother members who had walked out of the Liberty Bell and Tomboy mines that morning. The union’s leadership, however, seems to have been taken by surprise. Local 63’s president, Vincent St. John, started from Telluride for the mine only after word of the battle reached the town. The union’s men had blocked the trail to the Smuggler-Union and St. John was reportedly fired at, at least as a warning, before being identified. So too Telluride’s Dr. J. G. Sheldon, who was grazed on his right hand by a bullet while climbing to the site to treat the wounded. Once identified, however, the union men provided Sheldon with an escort and assistance, and, he said, treated him with every courtesy.<sup>4</sup>

By the time things quieted down, the casualties totaled three dead and four wounded. Barthell died first, and two non-union trammers were also killed in the battle. “Mexican” trammer J. Lujan died at the scene, while Ben Burnham was brought down to town and treated for an abdominal wound, but died the next day. The four wounded included Superintendent Charles Becker, shift boss John Nicholson, company miner Will Jordon, all seriously, and striker A. J. Pierson, accidentally slightly wounded that afternoon.<sup>5</sup>

General Manager Collins being out of town, St. John eventually negotiated a midday truce with other Smuggler-Union officials, including Collins’ brother, Edgar. This ended the fighting and closed the mine pending a settlement. Once the truce was declared, union miners descended upon the property. Sixty-eight replacement miners were rounded up, in some cases roughed up, and then walked by an armed union escort over thirteen-thousand-foot Imogene Pass toward Ouray and warned never to return.<sup>6</sup>

The settlement, reached three days later, was another union victory. The company agreed to a three-year contract restoring the three-dollar, eight-hour day. It also promised not to discriminate against union men and to permit the union’s secretary to conduct business on company

grounds, provided that he did not interfere with operations. In exchange, the union agreed not to molest non-union miners at work on the property.<sup>7</sup>

By the time this settlement was achieved, the union had buried John Barthell’s body with great ceremony. On July 5, following his funeral at the First Congregational Church, more than five hundred union men from Telluride and the area escorted Barthell’s body to the cemetery. Five months later, word appeared in the local newspapers that Telluride’s miners’ union had purchased a memorial for Barthell’s grave. Costing about six hundred dollars and weighing several tons, the marble monument “required two or three drays to convey it to the cemetery.” It was erected in early December, with the intention that it be dedicated during Christmas week.<sup>8</sup>

Instead, the dedication came on the afternoon of July 3, 1902, the first anniversary of Barthell’s death. The commemoration started in town, with the town band marching up Colorado Avenue “soon after 1:40 playing a lively march.” The *Examiner* reported that the band was followed by

an immense parade of the organized labor bodies of the county [which] made a most imposing spectacle. At 1:30 in the afternoon members of the Telluride and Ophir Miners['] Unions, Federal and Carpenters’ Unions met at Red Men’s hall and headed by the band started a procession, four abreast, that extended over the entire length of Main Street. There were from 1,500 to 2,000 men in line.<sup>9</sup>

Telluride’s *Daily Journal*, less sympathetic to unionism, estimated participation at “nearly 1,000 men,” reporting that “the last section of the parade was composed of the local Telluride Miners’ Union No. 63, 728 men being in line, lead [*sic*] by President St. John.”<sup>10</sup>

The ceremony lasted a little more than an hour, with the principal speakers being John M.

O'Neill, a socialist and industrial unionist who in 1901 had assumed the editorship of *Miners' Magazine*, the Western Federation of Miners' national newspaper, and Father Thomas J. Hagerty, a Catholic priest sympathetic to socialism and industrial unionism. Each spoke for about half an hour, and "both gentlemen delivered eloquent speeches," said the *Examiner*, "after which the dedicatory ceremonies were proceeded with. Following this all returned to town when [*sic*] the first event of the [Independence Day] celebration, a boy's drilling match, took place."<sup>11</sup>

The monument they dedicated was inscribed:

ERECTED BY  
16 TO 1 MINERS UNION  
IN MEMORY OF  
JOHN BARTHELL  
BORN IN KOVJOKI WORA, FINLAND  
DIED AT SMUGGLER COL.  
JULY 3, 1901  
AGED 27 YEARS

Underneath this inscription appeared a stanza from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1838 poem "A Psalm of Life":

"In the world's broad field of battle,  
In the bivouac of Life,  
Be not like dumb driven cattle,  
Be a hero in the strife."

Summing up the Independence Day festivities opened with the Barthell monument's dedication, the *Examiner* noted that "business has practically been suspended for a week but the steady grind will be resumed Monday." The newspaper urged "a long pull, a strong pull, and we'll all go through a good summer in harmony and prosperity." That summer of 1902 saw perhaps the apex of the Telluride Miners' Union No. 63, Western Federation of Miners, but the community's harmony did not last.<sup>12</sup>

On the evening of November 19, 1902, while playing cards with friends at the company's office at Pandora, just east of Telluride, the Smuggler-



Union's general manager, Arthur Collins, was shot in the back through a window. Whether Collins' anonymous murderer was motivated by union discontents or by some other grievance has been debated since, but the Federation would find Collins' replacement, Bulkeley Wells, even less congenial. "The threatening letters received by Manager Collins were similar to those received by other managers and superintendents of this district," noted Golden's *Colorado Transcript*. "What effect the assassination of Mr. Collins will have upon their actions remain[s] to be seen."<sup>13</sup>

Management's opinion was articulated by Thomas A. Rickard, the mining engineer and prolific writer who assumed editorship of the *Engineering and Mining Journal* in 1903. Rickard, who had served as Colorado's state geologist from 1895 to 1901 and knew Collins personally, wrote that his assassination "shocked the whole profession of which he was so honorable a member."

In his 1903 book *Across the San Juan Mountains*, Rickard also lambasted the Telluride Miners' Union and Barthell's monument, writing of the events of July 3, 1903, that "a body of strikers attacked the mine, shot indiscriminately into the bunkhouses, offices, and other buildings, succeeding in killing eight [*sic*] non-union men and in driving the remainder over the range. In this cowardly assault one striker was shot. It is his tombstone that so conspicuously adorns the Telluride cemetery." Rickard declared the use of Longfellow's verse on Barthell's monument "the prostitution of poetry! Remember, too, that no one has ever been punished for the murdering of the eight [*sic*] miners killed on that same day, while the one murderer, killed in the act, is commemorated in marble and in poem! This intolerable outrage emphasizes the conditions of affairs in this district."<sup>14</sup>

The question was called in September, 1903, when the Telluride local went on strike at the

Tomboy Mine after the company staffed its new mill with non-union workers. This time the owners were able to convince the governor to deploy the Colorado State Militia to Telluride, beginning in January 1904. This time it was the union miners who were apprehended, assaulted, and expelled from the district. The Federation's national president, Charles A. Moyer, was imprisoned at Telluride without due process from March to July, 1904. By 1905 both the strike and the Federation local had been broken at Telluride, as well as in the Cripple Creek District and at Colorado City.<sup>15</sup>

Thus the long shadow cast by a monument to an obscure man in a remote mountain cemetery. The Western Federation of Miners' bitter defeats in Telluride and elsewhere would push the union toward greater radicalism. In 1905, the Federation became the most important force behind the formation of a nationwide revolutionary syndicalist industrial union.

At the beginning of January, twenty-two radicals met in Chicago and produced the "Industrial Union Manifesto" that became the foundation document of the Industrial Workers of the World. Father Thomas Hagerty was one of those individuals; *Miners' Magazine* editor John O'Neill was another. That June the IWW was organized at Chicago, drawing its members largely from the ranks of the Federation. Charles Moyer attended both of the Chicago meetings and would serve on the new union's first executive board. But the IWW's most significant member in its first decade, the man who would hold its highest office of secretary-treasurer for six years, from January 1909 through December 1914, would be the former president of the former Telluride Miners' Union No. 63, Vincent St. John.<sup>16</sup>

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## Notes:

1. Karl G. Olin, "Vora Man Martyred at Telluride," [www.genealogia.fi/emi/art/article54e.htm](http://www.genealogia.fi/emi/art/article54e.htm)
2. Dave Southworth, *Colorado Mining Camps* (Wild Horse Publishing, 1997), 280; "Settlement in Sight," *San Miguel Examiner* (Telluride), 6 July 1901.
3. "Settlement in Sight," 6 July 1901.
4. "Settlement in Sight," 6 July 1901; "Three Men Are Dead—Four Are Wounded," [*Telluride*] *Daily Journal*, 5 July 1901.
5. "Serious Trouble at the Smuggler Mine," *Daily Journal*, 3 July 1901; "Three Men Are Dead—Four Are Wounded," 5 July 1901; "Local Chronology," *San Miguel Examiner*, 8 Mar. 1902 [confirms the dead of 3 July 1901].
6. "Settlement in Sight," 6 July 1901.
7. Carl Abbott, et al., *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005), 140; "Settlement in Sight," 6 July 1901.
8. "Funeral of John Barthell," *Daily Journal*, 6 July 1901; "Barthell's Tomb," *San Miguel Examiner*, 7 Dec. 1901; Untitled, *Daily Journal*, 14 Dec. 1901.
9. "Out in the Rain!," *San Miguel Examiner*, 5 July 1902.
10. "First Day of Telluride's Big Celebration," *Daily Journal*, 3 July 1902.
11. "Out in the Rain!," 5 July 1902; "Telluride's Celebration," *Telluride Journal*, 10 July 1902.
12. "Out in the Rain!," 5 July 1902.
13. "Immense Reward for the Slayer of Arthur L. Collins," [*Golden*] *Colorado Transcript*, 27 Nov. 1902.
14. T. A. Rickard, *Across the San Juan Mountains* (New York: *Engineering and Mining Journal*, 1903), 40-1. Rickard had previously opined on Collins' murder and "the spirit of lawlessness which has prevailed at Telluride for the past two years" as a contributor to the *Engineering and Mining Journal*: "Tragedy at Telluride," *EMJ* 74 (29 Nov. 1902): 704-5.
15. Southworth, *Colorado Mining Camps*, 280; Perry Eberhart, *Guide to the Colorado Ghost Towns and Mining Camps* (1959; reprint, Swallow Press, 1984), 322.
16. Eric L. Clements, "Pragmatic Revolutionaries?: Tactics, Ideologies, and the Western Federation of Miners in the Progressive Era," *Western Historical Quarterly* XL, no. 4 (Win. 2009): 449-52.

