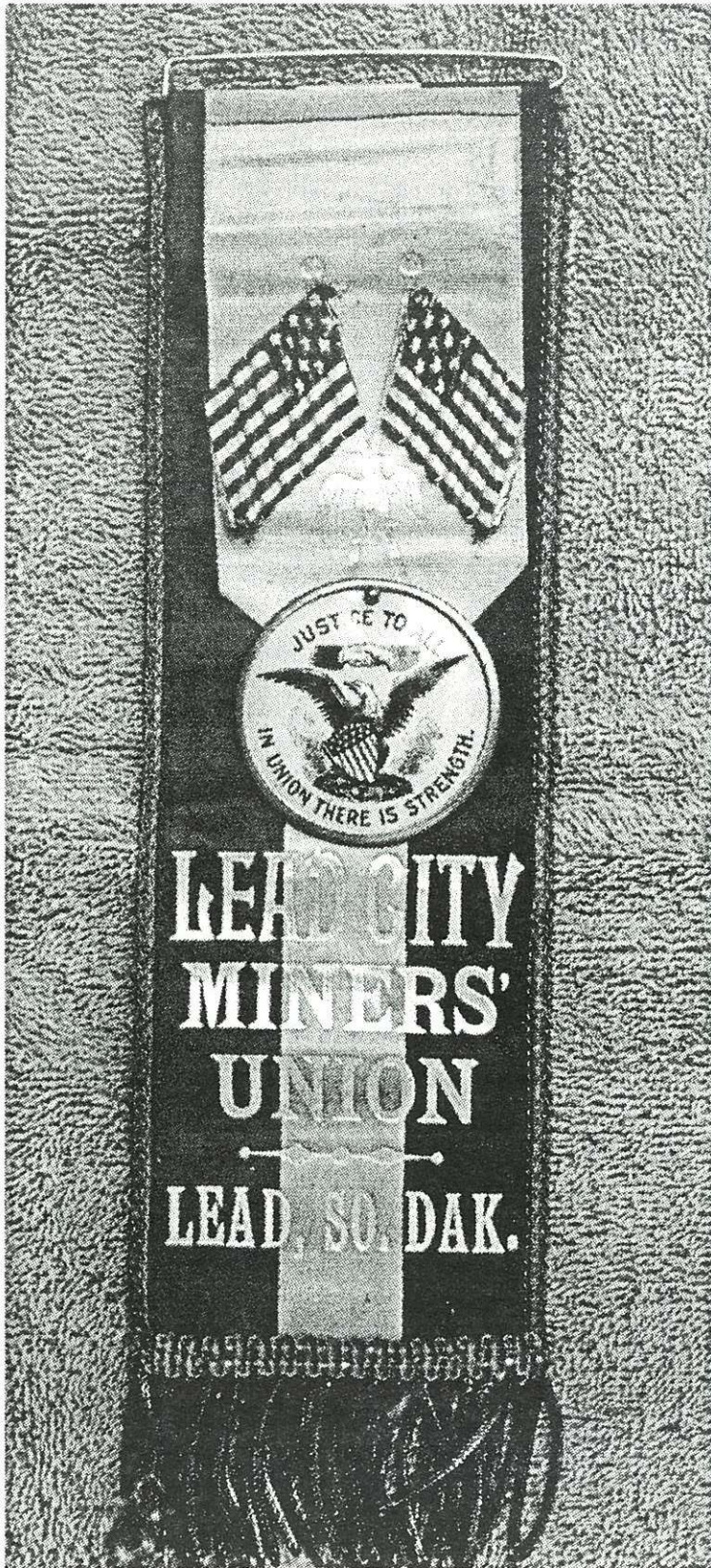


Lead City Miners' Union

Len Gaska



The Lead City Miners' Union was formed in 1877 shortly after the discovery of gold in Gold Run Creek in the Black Hills of South Dakota. In February, 1876, Thomas E. Carey had been placer mining in Deadwood Gulch and crossed the divide which separated that gulch from Gold Run Creek where he found richer placer deposits. A short while later, "Smokey Jones" and twenty other miners entered the area. On July 10, 1876, they laid out the town of Washington. In the spring of 1877, the town began to expand with the first attempts to reduce the gold quartz and outgrew its first survey. A new and larger town was laid out and named Lead (pronounced Leed) after the many leads or outcroppings in the area.

In April of 1876, Moses and Fred Manuel discovered the ledge which subsequently became the greatest gold mine in history: the Homestake Mine. The claim was named the Homestake because one miner reportedly said that "Sure, there's enough here for all of us to make a homestake in." Because the area was so rich, it experienced rapid growth and attracted the attention of speculators and capitalists from around the country. The rapid growth was probably responsible for the formation of a miners union so quickly after the initial gold discovery. Although my knowledge of early mining labor history is very limited, I suspect that the Lead City Miners' Union was one of the very early unions in the mining field. Its formation predated the Western Federation of Miners by about 16 years. In 1880, the union was chartered by the Dakota Territory as a "charitable and benevolent organization". The union lasted until 1909-1910 when it was virtually destroyed by a lockout by the Homestake Mining Company. Thanks to the Black Hills Mining Museum for providing the essential details on the union. A fairly good history of the region and the Homestake Mine can be found in "The Bonanza Trail", by Muriel Sibell Wolle, Indiana University Press, 1958.