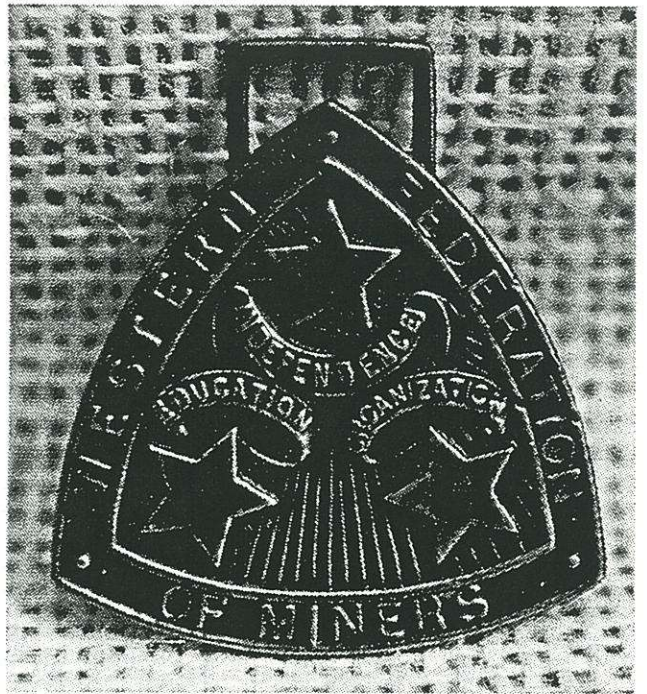


Western Federation Of Miners

Dave Johnson

While not the earliest miners' union, the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) was one of the two major unions to represent miners and other mine workers beginning in the late 1800's, along with the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA).

The Western Federation of Miners was organized on May 15, 1893 in Butte, Montana. The union's first test came in January of 1894 when miners struck over a 50 cents per day reduction by Cripple Creek, Colorado mine owners. The striking miners prevailed and the 50 cents was reinstated. This victory won many new union members in new locals across the West.



WFM Fob.



I.U.M.M.S.W. Fob

For more information on the Western Federation of Miners I recommend the following source book:

Roughneck: The Life & Times of Big Bill Haywood
W. W. Norton & Co. NY, NY (1983)

The early Western Federation of Miners was led by President Ed Boyce, a radical unionist. Another early leader was William "Big Bill" Haywood who signed up as a charter member of Local 66 in Silver City. Haywood actively advocated "the overthrow of the profitmaking system". Haywood was elected Secretary/Treasurer at the WFM's 1901 National Convention. He actively opposed AFL President Samuel Gompers's conservative policies and pushed to withdraw the WFM from that organization. In 1901 the WFM motto was: "Labor produces all wealth; all wealth belongs to the producer thereof". This philosophy was in line with that of American Socialist Party leader Eugene V. Debs, who was actively supported by Haywood.

Unlike the United Mine Workers, the Western Federation of Miners sought to organize mill and smelter workers as early as 1902, rather than just miners. This philosophy led to the reorganization of the Western Federation of Miners to become the International Union of Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers as can be seen on the 1916 watch fob pictured here.