

## **The American Miner's Association** **by Jim Steinberg**

It was the year in which Abraham Lincoln was elected president, South Carolina seceded from the union, and in November there was a financial panic which ultimately led to a depression. It was 1861 and In January, the collieries of Saint Clair County, Illinois reduced the coal miner's pay per eighty pound bushel of coal from 2 1/2 cents to 2 1/4 cents. The miners did not fight this. Within weeks, an additional reduction of a quarter cent was made.

This action initiated a nearly spontaneous strike which began in the week of January 21, 1861. The entire coal field was shut down. Within days, an organization was growing in West Belleville, Illinois. Originally formed to direct the strike, it evolved into a permanent miners association to look after the miner's interests. The miners made it clear that they were only striking against the wage reductions and not looking for pay increases. They also made a major case for fair weights and measures. With the support of a community organization, a miner's bill became Illinois law on February 20, 1861. This law created a system of standards and enforcement to assure that the miners were paid properly for each bushel of coal.

Once the collieries saw that this law could not be stopped, they conceded and repealed the pay reductions. On February 16, 1861, Daniel Weaver, the first secretary of the Miner's Association announced the victory of the union and the end of the strike. The first president of the union was Thomas Lloyd.

The Miner's Association was looked upon favorably in Belleville and prospered. Miners in adjacent counties quickly joined the new union and soon it expanded into Missouri. At the first statewide convention of the Miner's Association in 1863, it became the American Miner's Association. In 1863, the union began publishing its own paper called The Weekly Miner. Also in 1863, the American Miner's Association expanded into Ohio and Pennsylvania.

The decline of the American Miner's Association probably began in the Blossburg District of Pennsylvania. In early 1865, after a lockout of over five months, the union in that coal field was destroyed. By September of 1865, the publication of The Weekly Miner had been suspended. In December of 1865, it was replaced by The Miner and Artisan, but this publication failed in July of 1866.

With the Civil War over, the national economic adjustment to a peacetime economy was too much for the American Miner's Association. It began to disintegrate. The mining business was on shaky legs and the miners were forced to accept substantial wage cuts. The lack of a union paper made it harder to communicate with the miners to inform them of struggles, successes, and a sense of solidarity. Through the late 1860s, the American Miner's Association experienced some victories and a number of defeats which crushed more regional lodges of the union.

Early in the 1870s, miners began to organize with increasing vigor into district and larger units. In the fall of 1873 in Youngstown, Ohio, the miners and the surviving loges of the American Miner's Association joined together to form the Miner's National Association of the United States of America. It's first secretary was John James, an earlier victim of one of the crushing defeats of the American Miner's Association.

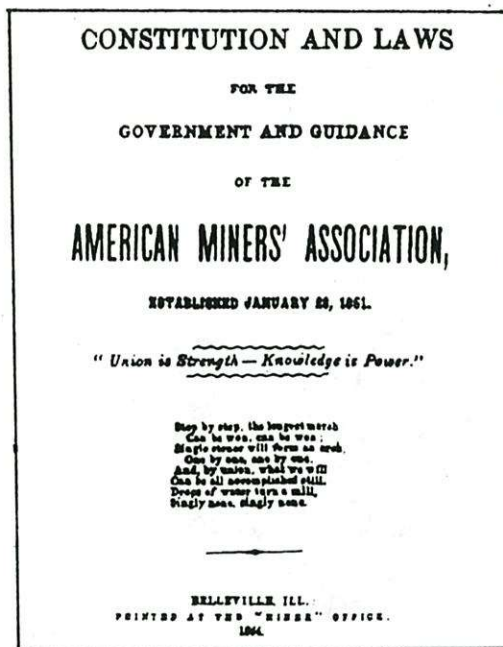
Following is the poem and speech Daniel Weaver gave exhorting the miners to form a union. The poem preceding his speech was written by Charles MacKay from "Voices from the Crowd" published in 1846.

What might be done if men were wise -  
 What glorious deeds, my suffering brother,  
 Would they unite,  
 In love and right,  
 And cease their scorn for on another.

Oppression's heart might be imbued  
 With kindling drops of loving-kindness,  
 And knowledge pour,  
 From shore to shore,  
 Light on the eyes of mental blindness.

All slavery, warfare, lies and wrongs,  
 All vice and crime might die together;  
 And wine and corn,  
 To each man born,  
 Be free as warmth in summer weather.

What might be done? This might be done,  
 And more than this, my suffering brother -  
 And more than the tongue  
 Ever said or sung,  
 If men were wise and loved each other.



The necessity of an association of miners, and of those branches of industry immediately connected with mining operations, having for its objects the physical, mental, and social elevation of the miner, has long been felt by the thinking portion of the miners generally.

Union is the great fundamental principle by which every object of importance is to be accomplished. Man is a social being, and if left to himself, in an isolated condition, would be one of the weakest creatures; but, associated with his kind, he works wonders. Men can do jointly what they cannot do singly; and the union of minds and hands, the concentration of their power, become almost omnipotent. Nor is the all; men not only accumulated power by union, but gain warmth and earnestness. There is an electric sympathy kindled, and the attractive forces inherent in human nature are called into action, and a stream of generous emotion, of friendly regard for each other, binds together and animates the whole.

If men would spread one set of opinions, or crush another, they would make a society. Would they improve the sanitary condition of our towns, light our streets with gas, or supply our dwellings with water, they form societies. From the organization of our armies, our railroad and banking companies, down through every minute ramification of society to trades' associations and sick societies, men have learned the power and efficiency of cooperation, and are, therefore, determined to stand by each other. How long, then, will miners remain isolated-antagonistic to each other? Does it not behoove us, as miners, to use every character, but obliterating all personal animosities and frivolous nationalities, abandoning our pernicious habits and degrading pursuits, and striving for the attainment of pure and high principles and generous motives, which will fit us to bear a manly, useful and honorable part in the world? Our unity is essential to the attainment of our own rights and the amelioration of our present condition: and our voices must be heard in the legislative halls of our land. There it is that our complaints must be made and our rights defined. The insatiable maw of capital would devour every vestige of labor's rights; but we must demand legislative protection; and to accomplish this, we must organize. Our remedy, our safety, our protection, our dearest interests, and the social well-being of our families, present and future, depend on our unity, our duty, and our regard for each other.

In laying before you, therefore, the objects of this association, we desire it to be understood that our objects are not merely pecuniary, but to mutually instruct and improve each other in knowledge, which is power, to study the laws of life; the relation of labor to capital; politics, municipal affairs, literature, science, or any other subject relating to the general welfare of our class. Has not experience and observation taught us what one of the profoundest thinkers of the present day has said, that "all human interests, and combined human endeavors, and social growth in this world, have, at certain stages of their development, required organizing; and labor - the grandest of human interests - requires it now. There must be an organization of labor; to begin with it straightaway, to proceed with it, and succeed in it more and more." One of America's immortals said, "To me there is no east, no west, no north, and no south," and I would say, let there be no English, no Irish, Germans, Scotch or Welsh. This is our country and

"All men are brethren - how the watch words run!  
 And when men act as such is justice won."

Come, then, and rally around the standard of union - the union of states and the unity of miners, and with honesty of purpose, zeal and watchfulness- the pledge of success- unite for the emancipation of our labor, and the regeneration and elevation physically, mentally and morally, of our species.

Yours, on behalf of the miners, D.W.

Reference: "The American Miner's Association," by Edward A. Wieck, 1940, Russell Sage Foundation, New York.