

Local Union Banners

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Banners have long been a way of announcing organizational affiliation. The earliest known examples of banners, at least if we believe Hollywood, were used in the days of the Roman Empire. In more recent times universities, public schools, fraternal organizations, police, firemen, and political parties have carried banners at parades, or hung them on the wall at meeting places to show solidarity. Unions were no different and the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) and the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers (IUMMSW) used them.



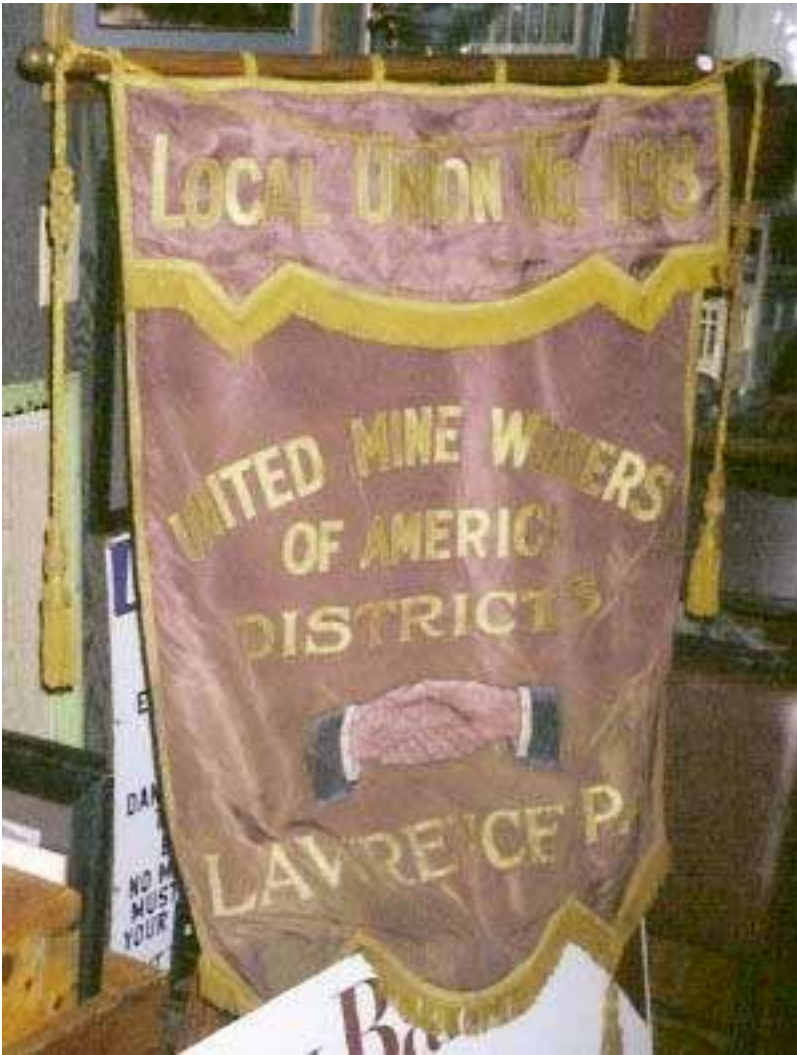
Figure 1: Local No.1098, Moss No. 2, Moss, WV

Collecting banners is somewhat difficult as most are located in private collections or museums. In 2003, at the Johnstown, PA show, I was able to purchase a banner for the UMWA Local No. 1098 at Moss, WV (figure 1). Moss is located in Gilmer County at the western edge of the West Virginia bituminous coal belt. By 1908 coal mining was becoming important in Gilmer County and by 1964 production peaked at just over 1_ million tons. Coal production has apparently fizzled since then. I was unable to find any information about mining at Moss on the internet and the town now appears to be nothing more than a ghost. The banner is 36 inches high by 32_ inches wide, regal purple satin with gold side tassels and trim. Unfortunately the banner had some sun damage, small holes and a missing number. The repaired banner is shown here.

John Konat, a UMWA coal miner from Ruffs Dale, PA has provided me with photographs of four additional banners. The Apollo, PA banner is in his collection (figure 2). The Apollo Mine is located in Westmoreland County. Apollo, itself, is located just across the Kiskiminetas River in Armstrong County. The mine was owned from about 1878 to a time prior to 1892 by the Apollo Iron Company of Apollo, PA, and later (about 1892 to an unknown time by the Maher Coal & Coke Company of Freeport, PA. The Local Union No. 6986 banner is approximately 38 inches tall by 21 inches wide. It's blue, yellow and beige with yellow fringe.



Figure 2: Local No. 6986, Apollo, PA



The Lawrence, PA banner (figure 3) is in the collection of Brice Rush in Carmichaels, PA. The Provident Mine was located in Washington County at Lawrence and owned by the Provident Mining Company for an undetermined time beginning about 1898. The Local Union No. 1198 banner is approximately 48 inches tall by 36 inches wide. It's purple with white lettering and gold tassels and trim.

A wooden banner was used to tout UMWA Local Union No. 6305 in parades (figure 4). The Alicia banner can be viewed at the Brownsville Historical Society museum (Flat Iron Building) in Brownsville, PA. The Alicia No. 2 Mine was developed around 1916 and operated until sometime before 1920 by the W. Harry Brown Company. Two other companies owned and operated the mine beginning in 1920 (Pittsburgh Steel Company) and in 1936 (Monessen Coal and Coke Company). There is no record of when mining ceased. The banner is about 18 inches tall by 60 inches wide and was meant to be carried by two men.

Figure 3: Local Union No. 1198, District 5, Lawrence, PA



Figure 4: Local Union 6305, Alicia, PA

The Jacobs Creek, PA banner (figure 5) is in John Konat's collection. Jacobs Creek is located in Westmoreland County across the Youghiogheny River from Van Meter, PA. The Darr Mine, located on the west side of the river near Van Meter was owned and operated by the Pittsburgh Coal Company. Mining started around 1903 and continued until December 19, 1907. On that day the mine experienced a great gas and dust explosion killing 239 miners many of whom lived in Jacobs Creek. Only one man escaped the disaster. The first bodies to be recovered were near the point where the explosion was estimated to have occurred, at least 5,000 feet from the entrance to the mine. In fact no one was able to agree on where the explosion first occurred. Most of the miners, over 200, were found another half mile deeper into the mine. Rumors persist that not all the bodies were recovered. Interestingly enough this disaster occurred only two weeks after the Monongah, WV disaster which claimed 361 miners. Many more miners would have been at the mine but they had taken the day off without pay to be at St. Nicholas Day holy day services at the Russian Orthodox Church in Jacobs Creek.

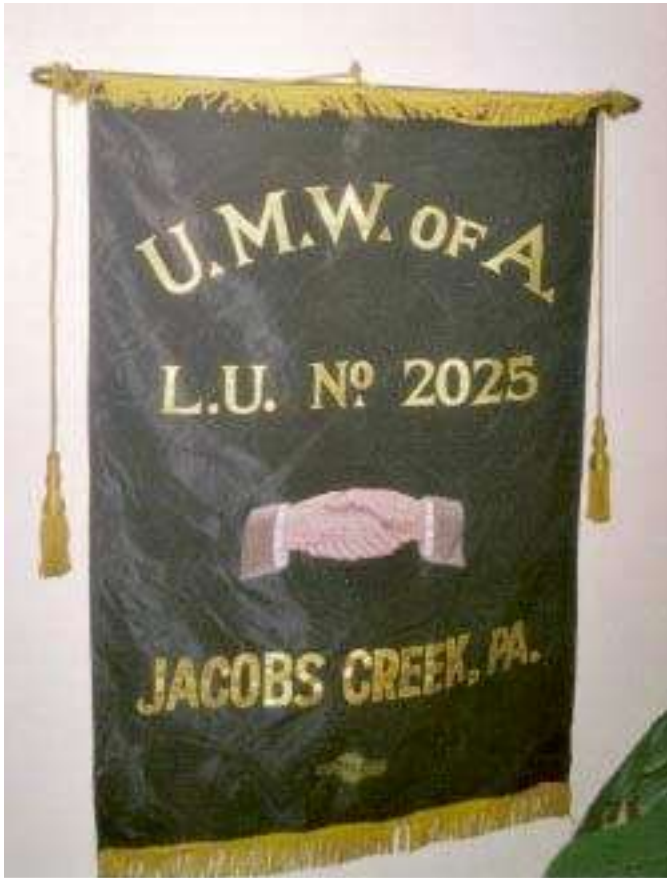


Figure 5: L. U. No. 2025, Jacobs Creek, PA

One of the Jacob's Creek victims was a mine foreman who had pestered the company about the gassy condition and poor ventilation in the Darr Mine. It was at his urging that a new ventilation shaft had been sunk. Just one day before the disaster the miners were nearing completion of a section of tunnel that would connect with the new ventilation shaft but had not finished the job with only 40 feet to go. True to bureaucratic nature the mine company was found not to be at fault. Findings of the investigation blamed the union miners for entering an area marked as unsafe by the fire boss. Of course the miners disagreed and blamed the company for using black powder and not controlling the coal dust. It was noted by the mine inspectors that company management still allowed the use of open flame lamps at the time of the explosion, a practice discontinued after the incident at the Darr Mine. The mine was repaired by the coal company and reopened in 1910 with no name. It was now identified as just another entrance to the Banning No. 3 Mine. By 1913 the mine employed 350 persons. In 1919, with only 227 employees working at the Banning No. 3 Mine, reduced operating time, and a production of only 30,000 tons, Pittsburg Coal Company decided to close the mine.

Shortly thereafter the company closed the Banning No. 3 Mine and the former Darr Mine entrance. The Local Union No. 2025 banner is 42 inches tall by 29 inches wide. It's black with gold lettering and trim and gold tassels.

Photographs of other local union banners have been published and if you have the time you may want to check them out: UMWA Local Union No. 4583, Clarksville, PA, Mining Artifact Collector, Summer 1993, pages 36-37. UMWA Local Union Nos. 7557, New Victoria, Nova Scotia, Canada, and 8078, Stansbury, WY (Eureka!, October 1993, pages 36-37); UMWA Local Union Nos. 5991, Glen White, WV, and 5770, Eccles, WV, (Stan Cohen, King Coal, page 86); and IUMMSW, Butte Miners' Union No. 1 (Don James, Butte's Memory Book, page 36).

I would like to thank John Konat for providing me with photos of his banners.