

12. MOLLY MAGUIRES, PAPERS, 1874-1885. ca. 1250 items.

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Molly Maguires - A term applied to certain men in the anthracite coal-producing counties of Schuylkill, Luzerne, Carbon and adjacent counties in Pennsylvania, who violated property rights of coal-mine operators and even committed murder during the years 1862-1876.

In those areas there had been a large immigration of Irish workers. Foreign-born Welsh and Germans were also numerous. There were draft riots during the Civil War, and the area was divided by racial religious and language barriers, anti-Catholicism and labor struggles.

Radicalism born of Chartist, Marxist and former nationalist loyalties vied with trade-union organizational attempts and with the vigorous laissez-faire conduct of mine and railroad operators during times of coal price fluctuations to make the vicinity ripe for violence.

The Irish, a surplus labour force inexperienced in mining, were often embittered by arbitrary wage cuts, Company stores, employment discrimination and blacklisting of independent spirits.

Many joined the Workingmen's Benevolent Association (an early union) in its pioneering efforts to win concessions from the Anthracite Board of Trade, the Mahony Valley and Locust Mountain Coal Association and individual operators. Many Irish Catholics were members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, a fraternal order with secret but entirely benevolent Printed ritual.

As early as 1862 a newspaper account of coal-mine violence assigned blame to the "Molly Maguire", which in Ireland 20 years before had been an antilandlord agitational group. By the mid-1870's the mine operators and much of the public came to believe that sabotage and certain murders were the work of "Mollies" and that these were local Hibernian Leaders; perhaps associated in an inner order, who were dedicated to violence.

It appears that some Hibernian Lodges in anthracite counties were then in the control of lawless men who found the "molly" label a help in local politics and in engineering deeds of violence.

Franklin B. Gowen (1836-89), president of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad and its Coal and Iron Company, placed James McParlan, a member of the National Detective agency, among the Irish Catholics of the area in 1873. McParlan gained admission to the Hibernians and won the full confidence of local leaders, reporting daily to his employers. In 1876-77, in a series of sensational trials, McParlan testified on the inner workings of the local "Mollies."

By 1880, 19 men were hanged and others imprisoned, and consequently the violent acts ceased and the society was disbanded. Some injustices may have resulted, however, as guilt by association conquered the local mind,

impressed overwhelmingly non-Irish juries and intimidated potential witnesses for the defense. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle made McParlan's exploit the subject of a dramatic story, *The Valley of Fear* (1915).

There is some justification for considering the Molly Maguire episode as an aspect of the labour struggles in the coal mines. Yet those convicted of violence were not orthodox trade-union leaders, and murders committed under "Molly" auspices often avenged personal grievances. Court convictions, publicity and more prosperous times apparently combined to bring the era of violence to a close.

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Box Folder

1	1	Correspondence, 1874-1877; Address of Mr. Franklin B. Gowen, 1885; Report of the Case of the Commonwealth Vs. John Kehoe et al, 1876.
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*Pamphlets removed to ~~Box~~
Pamphlet Collection*