

West Virginia Mine Wars Museum:

2018 Red Bandana Awards

Award Name	Award Namesake	Awardee
Rank and File Rebel	<i>In the spirit of Dan Chain</i>	Emily Comer and Jay O'Neil
Matewan History Maker	<i>In the spirit of Sid Hatfield</i>	Johnny Fullen
History Keeper	<i>In the spirit of Carter Woodson</i>	Gordon Simmons
Hellraiser	<i>In the spirit of Mother Jones</i>	Hawkeye Dixon
Truth Teller	<i>In the spirit of Frank Keeney</i>	Doug Estepp

Emily Comer and Jay O'Neal

The Rank and File Rebel Award goes to individuals who embody the spirit of Dan Chain, also known as "Few Clothes Johnson." Chain was known for his courage in the face of long odds. He overcame fear and transcended the racism of his time, and although he was not a union official, Chain helped lead miners during the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike.

Rank and File Rebels have played a critical role in the labor movement, and this year's Rank and File Rebel Award goes to Emily Comer and Jay O'Neal, two West Virginia schoolteachers who helped organize this year's teacher strike. Last October, Emily and Jay started a private Facebook page, and by February, the page had 33,000 members and laid the groundwork for the strike in all 55 counties. After West Virginia teachers and service employees won a 5 percent increase, teachers in other states--like Oklahoma, Arizona, and Kentucky--began to follow their example. Jay and Emily were listed among Politico's Top 50 ideas and people driving politics in America today. Jay said, "Unions are standing and fighting again. We've been playing defense for too long." Emily Comer, a Spanish teacher in South Charleston, said, "33,000 people besides Jay and me made this happen." She added, "But I'm also really excited that our movement is growing, and that rank-and-file worker organizing is getting the kind of national attention it deserves." In giving Jay and Emily this award, we are recognizing the important work of many, many rank and file rebels.

Gordon Simmons

Born in 1875, the son of former slaves, Woodson got a job in the mines of Fayette County as a teenager. He later finished high school and earned degrees from Berea College and Harvard. He then became a dean at West Virginia State College and, in 1926, started what would become Black History Month. Carter's legacy of preserving neglected history lives on in Gordon Simmons and his work with labor unions and labor history. Gordon was the first elected chief steward of the West Virginia Public Workers Union, UE Local 170, in 2006, before becoming a full-time field organizer and grievance representative for them in 2008. Serving in that capacity, Gordon testified on behalf of student Katie Sierra in her successful 2002 trial when she was prohibited from starting an anarchist group on the campus of Sissonville High School.

Gordon has been a "keeper" of West Virginia labor history for nearly 35 years. He became a member of the West Virginia Labor History Association in 1984 and has served as the organization's president since 2006. The Labor History Association has participated in numerous public exhibits and historic restorations over the years highlighting the stories of Italian workers in the coalfields, Belgium glassworkers during the Industrial Era, and creating the West Virginia Labor Hall of Honor. When the Blair Mountain Battlefield was delisted from the National Register of Historic Places, Gordon led the Labor History Association as they joined state and federal lawsuits to relist the battlefield. Finally, Gordon's work extends to Matewan and he and his organization have been supporters of the Mine Wars Museum from the time of its conception to the present day.

Johnny Fullen, in memoriam

The Matewan History Maker Award goes to an individual who, like Sid Hatfield, will be remembered for their dedication to Matewan and contribution to the town's rich history. By standing up to the Baldwin-Felts agents in 1920, Sid Hatfield inspired miners and their families across the state, and his death the following year sparked an uprising of 10,000 miners who stood up for their rights. He will forever be known as the miners' hero.

This year's Matewan History Maker Award goes to a man who was equally dedicated to the town of Matewan: Johnny Fullen. Mr. Fullen graduated from Matewan High School in 1963 and served in the US Army from 1965 to 1968, earned a bachelor's and master's degree from Marshall University, and returned to Mingo County. He married Loreka Sue Ratliff, taught at Red Jacket High School, and was elected to Matewan Town Council in 1979. In 1984, he was elected Mayor of Matewan, the first African American to hold that office. He served as president of the Williamson NAACP and was received the Peace and Harmony Award in 2009. His dedication to his hometown could not be denied, and over his lifetime he helped so many and was revered by so many that it is often said, "Johnny will never be forgotten."

Charles “Hawkeye” Dixon

The Hellraiser Award goes to a person who embodies the spirit of Mary Harris Jones, also known as Mother Jones. Jones first came to West Virginia in 1897 and over the next two decades was threatened, shot at, and jailed while trying to organize miners. She often said, "Pray for the dead, and fight like hell for the living." When recalling Mother Jones' quest to organize workers and improve the lives of the downtrodden, it is difficult to imagine anyone more fitting to receive this year's Hellraiser Award than Charles "Hawkeye" Dixon.

Mother Jones did not achieve her legendary status with one action or strike, but with a lifetime of work. Likewise, Hawkeye Dixon has built quite an impressive “Hellraising” resume of his own. Over the course of four decades, Hawkeye has fought as a member, organizer, and officer of the United Mine Workers. When the future of the UMWA was at stake, as it was during the 1984-85 UMWA strike against Don Blankenship and Massey Energy, Hawkeye was on the front lines. When the pensions of retired miners were threatened because of recent coal bankruptcies, Hawkeye protested in Charleston and lobbied in Washington. When election time rolls around, Hawkeye is out there campaigning for political leaders who support working people. Even when documentary filmmakers come to Appalachia and want the truth, such as for the films *Blood on the Mountain* and *From the Ashes*, they seek out Hawkeye for answers. As many of you know, he has served as an indispensable organizer and officer of Local 1440 in Matewan for many years. And, of course, he is a founding member of the Mine Wars Museum. We think Mother Jones would be proud.

Doug Estepp

The Truth Teller Award goes to an individual who embodies the spirit of Frank Keeney. Frank Keeney served as the president of UMWA District 17 and president of the State Federation of Labor. In 1921 he helped organize the March on Blair Mountain. He often spoke truth to power. In 1913, he refused to abide by the Hatfield Agreement and led the miners back out on wildcat strikes to achieve victory. In later years he started his own union, his own political party, and edited a labor newspaper – never ceasing to tell the stories of hardship and oppression in the coal mines. Truth Tellers educate the public. They are guardians of the truth.

Doug Estepp has been a guardian of Mine Wars history for twenty years. Doug played a vital role in saving the Jefferson County Courthouse, where the treason trials of abolitionist John Brown and the treason trials after the Battle of Blair Mountain occurred. Teaming up with community members in Charles Town, Doug fought a successful nine year legal and political battle to save the the building from the wrecker's ball. In 2009, the courthouse was rededicated after a \$2 million dollar restoration. The following year, Doug created Coal Country Tours as a means to support the efforts to save Blair Mountain and as a way to share our wonderful coal heritage and Mine Wars history. Doug has made the story of West Virginia miners come to life through these tours, many of whom have come to our museum in the last three years. Doug has also generously loaned Mine Wars artifacts to our museum to help us tell the truth of this history. For his preservation work, his public education efforts, and his contributions to heritage tourism we are proud to present the Truth Teller Award to Doug Estepp.