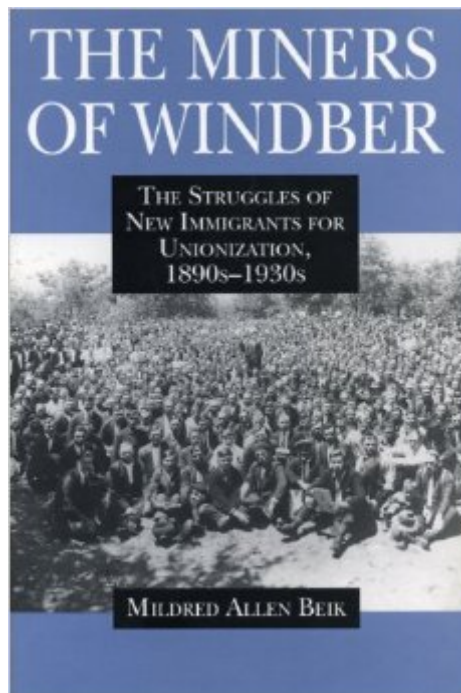


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# The Miners Of Windber: The Struggles Of New Immigrants For Unionization, 1890s-1930s



## Synopsis

In 1897 the Berwind-White Coal Mining Company founded Windber as a company town for its miners in the bituminous coal country of Pennsylvania. *The Miners of Windber* chronicles the coming of unionization to Windber, from the 1890s, when thousands of new immigrants flooded Pennsylvania in search of work, through the New Deal era of the 1930s, when the miners' rights to organize, join the United Mine Workers of America, and bargain collectively were recognized after years of bitter struggle. Mildred Allen Beik, a Windber native whose father entered the coal mines at age eleven in 1914, explores the struggle of miners and their families against the company, whose repressive policies encroached on every part of their lives. That Windber's population represented twenty-five different nationalities, including Slovaks, Hungarians, Poles, Italians, and Carpatho-Russians, was a potential obstacle to the solidarity of miners. Beik, however, shows how the immigrants overcame ethnic fragmentation by banding together as a class to unionize the mines. Work, family, church, fraternal societies, and civic institutions all proved critical as men and women alike adapted to new working conditions and to a new culture. Circumstance, if not principle, forced miners to embrace cultural pluralism in their fight for greater democracy, reforms of capitalism, and an inclusive, working-class, definition of what it meant to be an American. Beik draws on a wide variety of sources, including oral histories gathered from thirty-five of the oldest living immigrants in Windber, foreign-language newspapers, fraternal society collections, church manuscripts, public documents, union records, and census materials. The struggles of Windber's diverse working class undeniably mirror the efforts of working people everywhere to democratize the undemocratic America they knew. Their history suggests some of the possibilities and limitations, strengths and weaknesses, of worker protest in the early twentieth century.

## Book Information

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## **Customer Reviews**

This is the best example of a group of people who were committed over many years to gain Union representation. How the Company and the Union used the people for it's own benefit. The Union allowing the workers to believe that if they stuck their neck out and went on strike that they would gain Union membership, but the Union ultimately abandoned them for years, while the Company used the workers and their families. It is especially interesting to read about all the things that we have forgotten as a society as this book reminds us that people like these miners were once basically owned by the Company and in some cases worse off than slaves. This is a recommended read to all who are interested in Union/Company relationships and why Unions came to be. It is especially worth noting the safety of the mines and how common death and serious accidents were (worth reading at Safety and Union Meetings), people are also reminded how lucky they are today because of the sacrifice of others. This book should be a mandatory read for all Union leaders in all occupations (also for management as well).

Extremely well researched and written history of my home town. The hardships and abuses endured by the immigrant coal miners during the late 19th century and early 20th century makes one wonder how corporate industrialists could feel good about themselves. This book tells it like it was: the good, bad and the ugly in a true planned and controlled company town.

I grew up not to far from Windber thus found this book very interesting. The author did a great job of weaving all aspects of the miners lives who lived under the corporate repression of that company town. By talking about the miners religion, ethnicity, family and struggles under almost slave-like rule, the author gives a real insight of what those hard working people went through to gain a "fair shake". If you ever wonder how or why unionism came to the forefront during this time period, this serves as a classic example. A fantastic read.

I am helping an elderly neighbor research her family's American roots which first took place in the town of Windber, Pennsylvania in the early 1900's. She had this book in her collection. I am finding it an awesome read. Ms Beik is an academic in the truest sense. Her research is impeccable. If she

repeats herself, as one reviewer was quick to point out and criticize, it is done to keep the flow of information going without losing a train of thought because you mentioned a fact early on. If your ancestors came from or at one time worked in the coal mines of south/southwest Pennsylvania, you should read this book. We all tend to forget that it was coal that fueled America and in some cases still does. Many look at coal as an unfriendly environmental disaster known more for being dirty rather than necessary. I would rather know about how our country was formed through its people and industry than criticize an author who took the time and effort to bring the facts together.

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