

The Everett Massacre:
Solidarity, Brutality, and Tragedy

A Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation
Undergraduate History Program of the University of Washington Tacoma

by

Ayrek Shoot

University of Washington Tacoma

Professor William Burghart

Acknowledgments

I extend my sincerest gratitude to my professor, Dr. Burghart, for his assistance, patience, and help which has been beyond value for me. I would also like to thank my roommates for tolerating my frequent absence from household responsibilities and spontaneous cleaning frenzies. I thank my parents and my sister for their patience and for reading my essay many times and providing feedback.

Abstract

The Everett Massacre of 1916 was a fatal tragedy , a gun battle between members of the Industrial Workers of the World and the Sheriff's deputized vigilantes. The shooting left at least 7 dead and many more injured. Historians past have explored the Everett Massacre and its contextual events to better understand the causes of this bloody labor conflict, but I seek to show that the Everett Commercial Club is ultimately responsible for the strife and crippling the Timber Workers' Union. By November of 1916, the Commercial Club had undergone three schisms after which only the mill owners, bankers, industrialists, doctors, and other privileged Everett citizens remained. The interests of labor, once represented in the Commercial Club, were suppressed by the mill owners who used strikebreakers, hired ruffians, city ordinances, and law enforcement to undermine union efforts. Sheriff Donald McRae was a member of the Everett Commercial Club, and he sourced his deputy vigilantes from the Club. Mayor Dennis Merrill, a member of the Commercial Club, illegally passed a city ordinance forbidding public speaking along Hewitt Avenue. This ordinance was used as justification for the unlawful violence against and deportation of the IWWs. The massacre ended the ongoing Timber Worker's Union strike which lasted six months. Who fired the first shot cannot be determined definitively, but the Sheriff and his deputies were trained, armed, and positioned for battle before the shooting began. Their fellow Commercial Club members benefited financially from the massacre which ended the strike and severely weakened the interests of labor within the city. "By 1921 there was no significant labor movement in Everett at all", the mill owners had removed or silenced all opposition to their greed.¹

¹ Norman H. Clark, *Mill Town: A Social History of Everett, Washington, from Its Earliest Beginnings on the Shores of Puget Sound to the Tragic and Infamous Event Known as the Everett Massacre* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1970), 230.

Introduction

The Everett Massacre on November 5th, 1916, was a bloody shootout between 140 deputized vigilantes armed with rifles, shotguns, and pistols and 250 passengers on the steamship *Verona*. The passengers on the *Verona* were mostly union members belonging to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), whose members were commonly referred to as Wobblies or just Wobs for short. Accounts from the court trial of this shooting place between two and twenty-nine handguns, most likely revolvers, total aboard the *Verona*. The deputies had more (and more powerful) guns, more ammunition, and better positions. The difference in fire power is reflected in the number of casualties with at least five dead but most likely several more and thirty-one injured aboard the *Verona*. On the docks one deputy, Charlie Curtis, lay dead and twenty more injured; one deputy, Jefferson Beard, died the next day from his wounds. The deputies who were injured on the dock were likely struck by friendly fire from other deputies, Jefferson Beard was shot in the back, and both him and Charlie Curtis were likely hit with rifle rounds.² Several other deputies reported being struck by friendly fire and later a deputy claimed that he was the one who accidentally killed Charlie Curtis.³ Court evidence shows that the deputies were stationed on docks and boats on both sides of the *Verona*, the IWW's and the deputies on the city dock, including Sheriff McRae, were in the crossfire of other deputies.⁴

² Ibid., 212.

³ *Verona: The Story of the Everett Massacre*, directed by Denise Ohio (Virgil Films, 2017), 1:21:22 to 01:21:32, <https://tubitv.com/movies/508068/verona-the-story-of-the-everett-massacre>.

⁴ Anna Louise Strong, "Brutal Treatment by Authorities," *New York Evening Post*, April, 1917, Anna Louise Strong Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections Division, Seattle, WA, 2, <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/pnwlabor/id/8/rec/2>; ; Anna Louise Strong, "Boat Raked by Bullets," *New York Evening Post*, March, 1917, Anna Louise Strong Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections Division, Seattle, WA, 6, <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/pnwlabor/id/6/rec/1>; Ohio, *Verona*, 01:24:30 to 01:25:00.

City authorities claim that the Wobblies were coming to Everett to cause trouble, burn Everett, enact violence, and sabotage industry.⁵ The Wobblies claim that they were going to Everett to support the striking shingle weavers' union and to protest free speech restrictions.⁶ The local shingle weavers union had been on strike since May 1st, 1916. The strikers and their families faced starvation as the months passed without concessions from the mill owners. The strikers faced violence from strikebreakers and hired guards, often considered thugs by locals. Millowner Neil Jamison had hired a dozen such "guards" to keep the picketers away from his mill. On August 19th Jamison and a group of 70 or more strikebreakers and "guards" attacked ten union picketers beating them severely with fists and clubs.⁷ The city police watched but did not intervene until later that evening when 150 union men came for revenge; then, the city police fired shots and one striker was wounded.⁸ Primary sources such as court evidence substantiates the Wobblies' claims while evidence displays the armed lawlessness and brutality of the deputy vigilantes.

Everett during the early 20th century was ruled by the "Sawdust Barons" the wealthy mill owners and industrialists who operated out of the Commercial Club, a club for the business interests of Everett's elite that at one time had been open to a broader swath of the communities

⁵ Anna Louise Strong, "Second Week of IWW Trial," *New York Evening Post*, March, 1917, Anna Louise Strong Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections Division, Seattle, WA, 1-2, <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/pnwlabor/id/159/rec/10>; Clark, *Mill Town*, 202; E. B. Wight, interview by Edwin S. Parker, December 13, 1951, Edwin S. Parker Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections, Seattle, WA, 106.

⁶ John Leonard Miller, interview by Richard Berner, March 11th, 1974, Oral History Collection, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, 36:20 to 36:56, <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/ohc/id/117>; Strong, "Brutal Treatment by Authorities," 4.

⁷ Clark, *Mill Town*, 180; Ohio, *Verona*, 00:46:56 to 00:47:24

⁸ Clark, *Mill Town*, 180.

population including labor leaders.⁹ The Commercial Club was founded as a merger between the Businessmen’s Association and the Chamber of Commerce, “which had for years been the lair of the founding capitalists”.¹⁰ While the Commercial Club served the interests of capital it also included many different community leaders and groups until the 1916 election of Mayor Dennis Merrill. Merrill represented the “business crowd” who shortly after the election reorganized the Commercial Club’s membership structure away from its representative system to a stock system, massively undercutting the power of labor interests in the Club.¹¹ Many of the vigilantes deputized in the months leading up to the massacre were deputized at the Commercial Club, often without the Sheriff being present. The deputies trained and drilled in the Club. The Commercial Club and city authorities used egregious and unlawful violence to undermine union efforts and maintain the pre-strike status quo for which they never faced any consequences. The vigilante deputies and the millowners’ imported ruffians created an environment of fear in Everett and the massacre foreshadowed future violence for the IWW.

Methodology

The Everett massacre is a well-documented event with a plethora of primary sources: mugshots, court transcripts and exhibits, photographs, newspaper articles, diagrams, maps, testimonies, and interviews. The University of Washington Everett Massacre of 1916 digital collection has many newspaper articles written at the time, and the Everett Public Library has an Everett Massacre collection in their archives, which contains many photographs and articles. The University of Washington Civil Rights and Labor History Consortium contains an IWW History

⁹ Clark, *Mill Town*, 154, 171-172, 176, 185; Ohio, *Verona*, 00:54:30 to 00:54:50.

¹⁰ Clark, *Mill Town*, 125.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 171-172.

Project which collects numerous primary and secondary sources about the Industrial Workers of the World. This project contains several interactive maps depicting events involving the IWW, local IWW unions, IWW newspapers and periodicals, IWW strikes, arrests, persecutions, beatings, killings, and other violence involving the IWW. The Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University has an IWW collection which holds many primary sources related to the IWW and their activities. These archives and collections provide many primary sources useful for understanding the IWW and the Everett Massacre. One such source is an interview with Wobbly John Leonard Miller. Miller was present at the Beverly Park incident on October 30th and aboard the *Verona* on November 5th and gives his recount of both events in an interview dated March 11th, 1974.¹² My methodological lens is that of labor history, within my primary sources I am searching for how the Everett Massacre affected Everett, the IWW, and the American Labor Movement.

Literature Review

Unfortunately, scholarship on the Everett Massacre itself is lacking in quantity, but the sources that have explored the topic are of good quality. In the broader discussion of labor history and labor violence, most mentions of the Everett Massacre are brief acknowledgments as one of the bloodier conflicts of the era, often sharing no details and focusing on other events, such as the Ludlow Massacre or the Coal Wars. In contrast, scholarship on The Industrial Workers of the World is plentiful and rich in depth. Many sources focus on the IWW and their culture, methods, and ideology with emphasis on their social movement and actions. In general scholars of the Everett Massacre have built upon the work of Norman H. Clark, author of *Mill*

¹² John Leonard Miller, interview by Richard Berner, March 11th, 1974, Oral History Collection, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/ohc/id/117>.

Town: A Social History of Everett, Washington, from Its Earliest Beginnings on the Shores of Puget Sound to the Tragic and Infamous Event Known as the Everett Massacre. This book written in 1970 is likely the most cited work on the Everett Massacre. Clark establishes the history of Everett and details the October 30th Beverly Park incident and the Massacre on November 5th, 1916. Clark details the lives of many community members and leaders, from the sawdust barons to IWW speakers. Clark’s analysis begins with the founding of Everett and ends with the dreary years that followed the Massacre. In the decades following *Mill Town* scholars have discovered small misconceptions and made new observations from newly discovered primary sources, but most of the important details of November 5th, 1916 remain largely unchanged from Clark’s book.¹³ Scholars agree on many key details, the mystery of where the first shot came from, the lack of consequences for Sheriff McRae and his vigilantes, the numerable consequences for the Wobblies, the uncertainty of the death count, and the sensationalism of the tragedy in the region.¹⁴ The Everett Massacre foreshadowed future violence for the IWW, such as the Centralia Tragedy in 1919, and also significantly weakened the labor movement in Everett.¹⁵

Any analysis of the Everett Massacre would be incomplete without Norman H. Clark’s *Mill Town*. Clark tells the story of Everett from the speculations of its founders and first investors to the tragedy on November 5th, 1916, and the following years of consequences and hardship. Clark explores the industrial and political development of Everett but focuses on the

¹³ William J. Williams, “Bloody Sunday Revisited,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (April 1980): 51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40490021>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 50-51; Clark, *Mill Town*, 214, 217-218; John G. Richardson, “Mill Owners and Wobblies: The Event Structure of the Everett Massacre of 1916,” *Social Science History* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 183-185, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40267998>; Ohio, *Verona*, 01:16:07 to 01:17:37.

¹⁵ Clark, *Mill Town*, 230-235.

social conditions and changes in Everett across time. Clark presents the massacre as the culmination of months, even years, of discontent.¹⁶ *Mill Town* provides essential context for understanding the volatile conditions in Everett in the months preceding the Beverly Park Incident and the Massacre on November 5th. The timber industry, like many extractive industries of the era, was highly unstable with frequent layoffs, wage cuts, and generally harsh and dangerous working conditions. Severe workplace injuries such as losing fingers, limbs, and lives were all too common in the mills of Everett and elsewhere. Many mill workers suffered from cedar asthma caused by the sawdust of the Western Red Cedar trees that the mills turned into shingles. Cedar asthma can have many painful and uncomfortable side effects, and little was done to minimize the risk of sawdust exposure. The uncompromising sawdust barons who refused to give even the smallest concessions to their workers created a tense environment in Everett.¹⁷ Clark hammers a point that later scholars often cite the repercussions for the Massacre on November 5th as well as earlier events fell unequally on workers and union members.

What happens – their [union] leaders could now ask in every mill town – what happens in the lumber industry when workers attempt peacefully to protest and to demonstrate their grievances? The rhetorical answer seemed beyond challenge: they get their asses shot off; they get killed... And what happens to millowners who shoot workers? Nothing; absolutely nothing. No legal action was ever taken against any member of the Commercial Club for events of November 5.¹⁸

Clark concludes that by the early and mid-1920s there were only a few long-term winners in Everett, the uppermost elite remained rich and powerful but most below them suffered barely adequate wages and withering or non-existent job security.¹⁹ Even some of the timber industrialists lost in the long run as their mills became obsolete in the wake of electrified

¹⁶ Clark, *Mill Town*, 146, 150-151, 170-171, 186-191, 194,199.

¹⁷ Williams, “Bloody Sunday Revisited,” 50.

¹⁸ Clark, *Mill Town*, 218.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 233, 235-236, 238-239.

machinery. The timber industry, infamous for its volatility, claimed countless limbs, lives, and fortunes. Clark's *Mill Town* is essential to understanding the historical and social development of Everett and the violent class conflicts that took place there.

In "What is it About the Wobblies?" Steven C. Beda explores the appeal of the Wobblies to people living during their heyday up to people of the present. Beda notes that the IWW has been and remains the subject of an extraordinary amount of writing, both inside and outside academia.²⁰ He presents the tale of the IWW in the Pacific Northwest as more a tale of tragedy than triumph, with events such as the Everett Massacre and the Centralia Tragedy overshadowing the successes of the IWW.²¹ Nevertheless, the IWW continues to be appealing to a broad audience. Beda argues that the Wobblies inclusivity, feminism, vehement defense of free speech, and environmental consciousness attracted many writers from the IWW's earliest days to the Great Depression then the 1960's social movements and up to activists and scholars of today.²² The unions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries primarily served white skilled workers, excluding almost entirely women, racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, and so called unskilled workers. When the poorest, most unfortunate, and oppressed were ostracized by most unions, the IWW and their social movement ideology embraced them. The Wobblies appealed greatly to migrant workers, these hoboes were often Wobblies themselves and as they rode the rails together across America, they sang songs and cultivated solidarity. The Wobblies created culture, and were quite good at it, some of their songs and slogans remain in use over a century

²⁰ Steven C. Beda, "What Is It about the Wobblies: Recent Literature on the IWW in the Northwest," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 114, no. 4 (Fall 2023): 135, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27320393>.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 135

²² *Ibid.*, 136.

after their downfall. Wobbly culture found a home with the hoboes and in the timber camps with the lumbermen.

Beda's "What is it About the Wobblies" helps explain why public opinion in Everett was split on the issue of the IWW. The Commercial Club and its cohort very vocally opposed the IWW and made great use of the perception that the Wobblies were saboteurs, arsonists, and foreign invaders.²³ In contrast many working men and women in Everett were sympathetic to the Wobblies, they may have believed the rumors about the IWW, but they felt the free speech fight was righteous. Many Everett locals did not necessarily support the IWW, although some certainly did and even joined, but many were greatly agitated with Sheriff McRae and his goons who terrorized the streets each night, indiscriminate in their violence. The Wobblies, despite their bad reputation, held the moral high ground in Everett while the supposed forces of law and justice brutalized Everett citizens and Wobs alike. The Wobblies were good at getting sympathy and their words appealed to many working people who felt that they could have better lives if their working conditions were safer with greater pay and fewer hours. The appeal of the IWW outlasted the influence of the organization itself. Despite their downfall in the 1920's, The Industrial Workers of the World remain relevant, and their actions, ideas, songs, and writings continue to inspire workers and writers alike.

"Beautiful Losers: The Historiography of the Industrial Workers of the World" by Bob Black delves into the historiography of the IWW, examining and analyzing existing scholarship about the IWW.²⁴ Black makes it clear that some older sources about the IWW are biased against

²³ Clark, *Mill Town*, 183-184, 193-194, 199-200; E. B. Wight, interview, 105.

²⁴ Bob Black, "Beautiful Losers: The Historiography of the Industrial Workers of the World," March, 1998, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/beautiful-losers>.

the IWW and lacking in depth. Black argues that the early culturalist approaches to IWW history are shallow and severely lack nuance and scope.²⁵ Black encourages the study of local IWW history and notes that the Wobblies created a lot of cultural material which in many ways outlasted the IWW's influence. Black notes that the IWW had a reputation for violence, but scholars have shown that reputation was undeserved.²⁶

William E. Forbath's "The Shaping of the American Labor Movement" provides crucial context to the conditions the IWW developed in and provides clear reasons why groups such as the IWW chose direct action rather than reform through legal channels. Forbath argues that despite what earlier historians have claimed, the American labor movement was far from apolitical, and politics and government played a significant role in the labor movement. Forbath argues that State intervention in labor disputes via judicial courts played a significant role in pushing labor organizations to seek solutions outside of legislation.²⁷ Court injunctions and the invalidation of labor laws directly influenced groups such as the IWW to take direct (often militant) action. This article situates the Beverly Park Incident and the Everett Massacre within the larger context of the American labor movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In this larger context, it is clear that the Everett Massacre was not an anomaly, but rather one of many violent class conflicts which pervaded the era.

Norman Clark's *Mill Town* was the most comprehensive account of the Everett Massacre from 1970 when it was published until 2017 when filmmaker Denise Ohio released the

²⁵ Ibid., 30-31.

²⁶ Ibid., 14.

²⁷ William E. Forbath, "The Shaping of the American Labor Movement." *Harvard Law Review* 102, no. 6 (April 1989): 1111-1113. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1341293>.

documentary *Verona: The Story of the Everett Massacre*. *Verona* is the successor to *Mill Town* as the most complete and up-to-date history of the Everett Massacre. *Verona* expands upon Norman H. Clark's work, even featuring him several times throughout the documentary. *Verona* also features commentary from David Dilgard and Margaret Riddle, historians of the Everett Public Libraries' Northwest Room. Denise Ohio provides a more accurate number of vigilante deputies present on the docks, 140, while other accounts provided rough estimates often 200 or more. Denise Ohio spent nearly twenty years working on *Verona* digging up many small but valuable details. Ohio's *Verona*, Clark's *Mill Town*, Richardson's "Mill Owners and Wobblies" as well as Williams' "Bloody Sunday Revisited" all present the Everett Massacre as the culmination of tensions, disputes, and antagonisms which formed over the course of months and years.²⁸ Ohio's *Verona* too makes the claim that the Everett Massacre was the beginning of the end for the IWW.²⁹ The Wobblies staunchly opposed WWI and American involvement in the war and this had massive repercussions for the IWW. Using the Espionage Act federal authorities raided IWW halls across the nation and arrested Wobbly leaders, the first Red Scare in 1919 would be the final nail in the coffin for the IWW.³⁰ Accompanying the documentary is Denise Ohio's website, The Annotated Everett Massacre which contains a wealth of information on the Everett Massacre, including biographies of IWW members, photographs, and Walker C. Smith's book *The Everett Massacre*.³¹

²⁸ Ohio, *Verona*, 01:02:34 to 01:03:57; Clark, *Mill Town*, 146, 150-151, 170-171, 186-191, 194, 199; Richardson, "Mill Owners and Wobblies", 183-184; Williams, "Bloody Sunday Revisited", 50.

²⁹ Ohio, *Verona*, 01:28:13 to 01:30:00.

³⁰ Ibid., 01:28:38 to 01:29:53.

³¹ Denise Ohio, "The Annotated Everett Massacre," accessed November 13, 2024, <https://www.everettmassacre.com/>.

Analysis

The Wobblies were not uninvolved in creating fear, their grisly reputation alone scared citizens who were disconnected from the material reality beyond the city. The Wobblies were often lumbermen, unwashed, odorous, rough in appearance and likely demeanor too. The Wobblies appeared scary only in part due to their actions, their undeserved reputation as arsonists, murderers, and saboteurs created fear in Everett. The Wobblies themselves were surprisingly non-violent and in the age before Gandhi popularized non-violent resistance the Wobs practiced non-violent resistance in the cities and the lumber camps.³² The IWWs even utilized a method of protest recognizable to the present, similar to “quiet quitting”, the Wobs in the lumber camps did eight hours of work in a ten hour shift and feigned ignorance and incompetence leading to reductions in efficiency and profitability.³³ In this way they could protest and “bring the strike to work” without facing violence or starvation. The Wobblies were not blameless in the creation of an environment of fear, but the Wobblies themselves contributed no violence until the shootout on November 5th, 1916.

John Leonard Miller (other sources including his mugshot refer to him as Jack Leonard³⁴) was a Wobbly who traveled from place to place in search of work. In 1916 he found himself in Everett with his comrades, with the mission of assisting the striking shingle weavers.³⁵ Miller sailed into Everett on October 30th, 1916, only to be promptly arrested along with the other

³² Clark, *Mill Town*, 227-228.

³³ Clark, *Mill Town*, 287-288.

³⁴ *I. W. W. Prisoner 4863. Jack Leonard (aka Jack Miller)*, November 5th, 1916, Photograph, Everett Public Library, Northwest History Room Archives, Everett, Washington, <https://nw.epls.org/digital/collection/EvrtMassacre/id/39/rec/64>.

³⁵ Miller, interview, 36:20 to 36:54.

Wobblies and taken in private cars to Beverly Park on the outskirts of Everett where he and the other Wobblies were forced to run a gauntlet of vigilantes who beat them severely with various tools and weapons.³⁶ Miller returned to Everett on November 5th aboard the *Verona*, taking shelter and waiting out the gunfire below deck. After the *Verona* returned to Seattle, Miller was arrested along with many other Wobblies and held in a cell at the city jail before being transferred with 73 other Wobblies to the Snohomish County jail in Everett. All 74 men were charged with first degree murder. Miller describes the insufficient quantity and poor, even inedible, quality of the food given to the detained Wobblies and how the Wobblies protested the food situation by leading strikes and dismantling and breaking parts of the jail.³⁷ Accusations of treating prisoners inhumanely and even brutally have been made by other Wobblies and citizens of Everett.³⁸ Miller experienced firsthand the brutality at Beverly Park, the terror of the storm of bullets that rained upon the *Verona*, and the inhumane treatment within the Snohomish County jail. The legal defense of the Wobblies, headed by lawyer George F. Vanderveer, demanded separate trials for the Wobblies, and on March 5th, 1917, the trial *State of Washington vs Thomas Tracey* began.

Anna Louise Strong, a journalist, activist, author, and world traveler, typed draft articles for the *New York Evening Post* detailing the events of the IWW trial, *State of Washington vs. Thomas Tracey*. These drafts were never published but Strong remained in the court week after week when other journalists stopped covering the trial.³⁹ Strong typed several drafts on different

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 36:20-39:20; Strong, "Brutal Treatment by Authorities," 7-9.

³⁷ Miller, interview, 45:00 to 52:58.

³⁸ Strong, "Brutal Treatment by Authorities," 2-3,6.

³⁹ Ohio, *Verona*, 01:25:00 to 01:25:23.

weeks of the trial recording information presented in the courtroom. Strong notes the evidence and claims presented by the State and by the defense and the impact of the evidence presented. On the second week of the trial assistant prosecutor Veitch said, “It is not alone an individual who is on trial for murder. It is an organization which is on trial, for criminal conspiracy leading to a murder.”⁴⁰ The prosecution supported this bold position with a lengthy drama including the I.W.W.’s history in the country.⁴¹

Strong’s writing notes how the evidence and arguments presented by the State became unconvincing due to the cross-examinations of the defense which led to Everett’s mayor and McRae’s deputies contradicting themselves and admitting to unlawful behavior.⁴² The deputies all agreed that the first three shots came from the *Verona* but all gave different locations as to where the shots came from; half the deputies were unable to claim seeing a gun aboard the *Verona*, others claimed to have seen many, but none could identify a single armed individual on the ship.⁴³ Cross-examination by the defense determined for each policeman, deputy, and official that the Wobblies never resisted arrest nor used violence only verbal protests and threats.⁴⁴ The questioning of Mayor Merrill solidified that of between 300 and 400 Wobblies arrested not a single one resisted arrest, and none were ever given a trial for violating the street speaking ordinance.⁴⁵ Mayor Merrill’s admission of illegally passing city ordinance making it illegal to

⁴⁰ Anna Louise Strong, “Second Week of IWW Trial,” 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2-5.

⁴³ Strong, “Second Week of IWW Trial,” 3-5; Strong, “Boat Raked by Bullets,” 5.

⁴⁴ Strong, “Second Week of IWW Trial,” 4; Strong, “Boat Raked by Bullets,” 1-4.

⁴⁵ Strong, “Second Week of IWW Trial,” 4.

give public speeches on street corners and his admission that the Commercial Club gave his authority to Sheriff McRae in combination with the deputies' contradictions in their description of events seriously weakened the case against Thomas H. Tracey and the other Wobblies.⁴⁶

McRae held the power and authority of the Snohomish County Sheriff, the Everett City Police, and the mayor of Everett. Additionally, he was the leader of the Commercial Club's semiprivate army of deputized citizens. Only the millmen of the Commercial Club held power over McRae; he could and indeed did act with impunity. This rather excessive amount of authoritative power enabled Sheriff McRae to operate freely within city limits, where the city police usually have primary jurisdiction. In 1913 McRae declined to serve arrest warrants in the city because he would not go over the head of the chief of police, but by 1916 the conditions in Everett changed dramatically and so too did McRae's authority.⁴⁷ McRae's authority and impunity empowered him and his deputies to seize, beat, arrest, and deport Wobblies and suspected Wobblies without trial.

The first week of the trial was dedicated to deciding a jury while the next three weeks belonged to the prosecution. Despite the prosecutions' best efforts, the cross-examinations of the defense painted a different picture than what the prosecution intended, and by the end of week four the defense's case seemed stronger. Beginning in the fifth week of the trial Strong records the case presented by the defense, which claimed that Sheriff McRae and his deputies were the aggressors. The defense presented many witnesses, men and women, Wobblies, and ordinary citizens alike, who testified about the use of violence by Sheriff McRae and his deputies prior to November 5th. Many Wobbly speakers were beaten severely, one elderly widow was punched in

⁴⁶ Strong, "Second Week of IWW Trial," 3-4; Strong, "Boat Raked by Bullets," 5.

⁴⁷ Clark, *Mill Town*, 134.

the side by a deputy and knocked off the sidewalk, and a mother narrowly escaped arrest for reading the Declaration of Independence on a soapbox after all the Wobbly speakers were arrested at the same spot.⁴⁸ According to an interview of a saw filer, George Davis, a twelve year old girl was knocked down by the deputies.⁴⁹ Edwin S. Parker transcribed in his interview notes: “Mrs. Davis said it was not safe for women to listen to the speeches at Wetmore and Hewitt because the cops were not too choosy about whom they hit when they broke up the meetings”.⁵⁰ Wobbly speaker James Rowan was beaten and severely lashed across the back with a thorny plant called devil’s club and the photos of his maimed back were used in court.⁵¹

Perhaps the most brutal of actions came not from Sheriff McRae but rather from Everett Mayor Merrill. A man named Louis Skaroff who was in the Snohomish County jail on the night of November 6th, 1916, testified that Mayor Merrill and a nightwatchman took him from his cell then into an officers break room where he was beaten then had his hands placed under the legs of a bed.⁵² The nightwatchman and the mayor jumped on the bed, crushing his hands, Skaroff cellmates testified that they “heard the worst screaming they ever heard in their lives” and that Skaroff returned later with his hands dressed for wounds.⁵³ Later, the defense brought a witness,

⁴⁸ Anna Louise Strong, “Claim Sheriff and Deputies were Aggressors,” *New York Evening Post*, April, 1917, Anna Louise Strong Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections Division, Seattle, WA, 5-8, <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/pnwlabor/id/9/rec/3>.

⁴⁹ George Davis, interview by Edwin S. Parker, September 3, 1951, Edwin S. Parker Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections, Seattle, WA, 30.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵¹ Strong, “Claim Sheriff and Deputies were Aggressors,” 5; Jake Michel, interview by Edwin S. Parker, December 28, 1951, Edwin S. Parker Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections, Seattle, WA, 70.

⁵² Strong, “Brutal Treatment by Authorities,” 6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

a passenger on the *Verona* on November 5th who was unaffiliated with the IWW, who testified that the first shot came from the docks near Sheriff McRae.⁵⁴ This witness was not the only impartial witness to place the first shot coming from the docks but so many claims contradict each other it is impossible to conclude definitively where the first shot came from. Ultimately the jury acquitted Tracey and the charges against the other 73 Wobblies were dropped⁵⁵. The defense of Thomas H. Tracey established in court that Sheriff McRae, his deputies, and city authorities had a history of unlawful violence, arrests, and deportations without trial.

In 1950 and 1951 Everett local Edwin S. Parker sought to write a novel based on the Wobblies and Everett called *Timber*. *Timber* was never published but Parker interviewed many of the surviving figures or their children and his notes can be found at the University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.⁵⁶ Most notable interviewees were Chester Beard, son of deputy Jefferson Beard who died on November 6th, George Davis, a saw filer at a co-op mill, millowner Joseph Irving, Everett local Jake Michel, and mill executive E.B. Wight. Parker interviewed many people, mostly Everett locals who had a broad range of opinions, but most were sympathetic with the IWWs, and few blamed them for the violence. One woman claimed that the Wobblies had started fires in local fields with phosphorus, another woman claimed that the millowners and strikebreakers set their own mill on fire and blamed the Wobblies. Many were displeased with or even resentful of Sheriff Donald McRae. McRae and his deputies were often indiscriminately violent, beating, and arresting Everett citizens, even women and children.

⁵⁴ Strong, "Claim Sheriff and Deputies were Aggressors," 7-8.

⁵⁵ Clark, *Mill Town*, 211-212; Richardson, "Mill Owners and Wobblies", 184; Ohio, *Verona*, 01:26:00 to 01:26:25.

⁵⁶ Edwin S. Parker, 1950-1951, typescript interviews, Edwin S. Parker Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

Elof Norman, born to Danish immigrants in 1894, moved to Snohomish County in 1900. Norman worked at a salmon cannery a block north of the docks on the day of the massacre, November 5th, 1916. While Norman was a shingle weaver for some time before working at the salmon cannery, he was not a Wobbly nor on strike on November 5th and was by all means an ordinary citizen of Everett. Norman describes hearing the shooting and running out of the cannery to see what was going on; he claims to have seen vigilantes firing downward from the docks into the water, presumably at the Wobblies who fell overboard.⁵⁷ Norman recalled being clubbed in a restaurant that night by a goon with an armband (one of McRae's deputized citizens) for asking what the shooting was about.⁵⁸ Norman described the vigilante patrols armed with nightsticks that walked the streets of Everett at night questioning anyone outside and chasing them off the streets. Elof Norman's account matches other sources which detail the strange and scary presence and behavior of the Commercial Club's army.⁵⁹ Elof Norman was one of many citizens of Everett, unaffiliated with the IWW, to be subjected to violence from the semiprivate army of deputies under McRae's command.

Six days after the Massacre on the *Verona* the Everett Shingle Weaver's union issued a statement and ended their strike which had been ongoing since May 1st, 1916. The Shingle Weavers ended their strike without concessions from the mill owners, in the name of industrial

⁵⁷ Elof Norman, interview by David Dilgard and Margaret Riddle, November 7th, 1974, cassette recording, Everett Public Library, Northwest History Room Archives, Everett, Washington, 1:10 to 1:30, <https://nw.epls.org/digital/collection/EvrtMassacre/id/209/rec/19>.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:25 to 3:23.

⁵⁹ Ahmed White, *Under the Iron Heel: The Wobblies and the Capitalist War on Radical Workers*. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 51; Clark, *Mill Town*, 207.

peace and public welfare.⁶⁰ Several church leaders sought to personally convince the mill owners to give some concessions to the strikers so their strike would end and industrial relations could return to peace, but the millmen again refused to give any concessions.⁶¹ The shingle weavers, despite gaining nothing from their employers, decided that peace in Everett necessitated an end to the strike, and so on November 11th the strike was called off. Unfortunately calling off the strike meant a return to the status quo, one that provided them with too little and the mill owners too much. The exploitation of mill workers continued without the promised wage increase. The massacre and its aftermath made it clear that the Commercial Club and its members, including Sheriff McRae, could use violence to assure their control and suppress objectors. Not only could they use violence, but they could also do so with impunity, only the Wobblies and the people of Everett faced consequences for the violence.

While the Wobblies escaped conviction, they were beaten, killed, imprisoned, and deported en masse. The Wobblies faced violence in other places too, such as in Centralia, Washington. The Centralia Tragedy on November 11th, 1919, was a gun battle between IWW members and members of the American Legion which resulted in six deaths and the lynching of Wobbly Wesley Everest. Another event of note is the Bisbee Deportation of 1917, on July 12th, 1917, mine owners in collusion with the Cochise County sheriff kidnapped and deported more than a thousand miners (including Wobblies and members of other unions) 200 miles from Bisbee, Arizona to Tres Hermanas, New Mexico. Wobblies frequently faced deportations and violent expulsions across the U.S., in Snohomish County McRae and his men chased many

⁶⁰ Shingle Weavers Act For Industrial Peace, November 11, 1916, Everett Massacre Collection, University of Washington Libraries, Microforms and Newspapers Collection, <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/iiif/pnwlabor/249/full/full/0/default.jpg>.

⁶¹ Clark, *Mill Town*, 216.

Wobblies out of the county. The Wobblies were not the only recipients of government violence in Everett as many Everett citizens were clubbed, beaten, and arrested despite not being affiliated with the IWW.⁶² The millowners imported thugs, McRae's semiprivate army of deputized vigilantes, and city police created an environment of fear and mistrust in Everett which lasted beyond the massacre itself.⁶³

Conclusion

The violence was almost entirely one-sided coming from McRae and city authorities down upon the Wobblies and innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. Before, during, and after the trial ended in May 1917, not a single member of the Commercial Club nor any of the imported "guards", deputized vigilantes, or city authorities faced legal repercussions. Despite court and other evidence clearly showing armed lawlessness, police brutality, unlawful passing of city ordinance, and numerous violations of constitutional rights the mill owners and their semiprivate army never faced any charges. Sheriff McRae never faced legal consequences, but his excessive violence used against many people came to bite him later. After facing ridicule and harassment, Sheriff McRae was socially exiled from Everett in 1917. After moving to a farm in Marysville, McRae, his livestock, and house were shot at by unknown snipers.⁶⁴ McRae's cow was shot and killed, and his dogs were poisoned.⁶⁵ McRae reportedly became consumed by

⁶² Strong, "Brutal Treatment by Authorities," 2-3; Strong, "Boat Raked by Bullets," 6; Strong, "Claims Sheriff and Deputies were Aggressors," 2, 5-8; Jake Michel, interview, 70; Elof Norman, interview, 2:50 to 3:23; Clark, *Mill Town*, 180, 182, 186-189, 197; Ohio, *Verona*, 00:46:56 to 00:47:24, 00:48:48 to 00:49:18; Richardson, "Mill Owners and Wobblies" 184.

⁶³ Clark, *Mill Town*, 182, 186-191, 194, 206-207, 217-224; Elof Norman, interview, 2:50 to 4:13; Ohio, *Verona*, 01:17:30 to 01:17:58; Jake Michel, interview, 71; Strong, "Claims Sheriff and Deputies were Aggressors," 6-7; George Davis, interview, 28.

⁶⁴ Davis, interview by Edwin S. Parker, 28; Clark, *Mill Town*, 240.

⁶⁵ Davis, interview by Edwin S. Parker, 28; Ohio, *Verona*, 00:56:46 to 00:57:15; Clark, *Mill Town*, 193.

paranoia and fear of his many victims enacting retribution upon him. His wife could not handle the stress and died early, she likely committed suicide.⁶⁶ In 1925 Governor and millowner Roland Hartley gave McRae a janitorial job in Olympia, his whereabouts after then are unknown. Sheriff Donald McRae died in obscurity. The Everett Massacre, a tale of brutality and tragedy, a tale with no happy ending of justice but instead a tale fading with time remembered mostly by historians with many present Washingtonians having never heard of it. With the strong resurgence of labor activism in the 2010's and 2020's the Everett Massacre is highly relevant and a valuable story for historians and activists.

⁶⁶ Ohio, *Verona*, 01:31:18 to 01:31:49; Clark, *Mill Town*, 240.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Davis, George. Interview by Edwin S. Parker. September 3, 1951, Edwin S. Parker Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections, Seattle, WA.
- Miller, John Leonard. Interview by Richard Berner. March 11th, 1974, Oral History Collection, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/ohc/id/117>.
- Norman, Elof. Interview by David Dilgard and Margaret Riddle. November 7th, 1974, cassette recording, Everett Public Library, Northwest History Room Archives, Everett, WA, <https://nw.epls.org/digital/collection/EvrtMassacre/id/209/rec/19>.
- Parker, Edwin S. 1950-1951, typescript interviews, Edwin S. Parker Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections, Seattle, WA.
- Shingle Weavers Act For Industrial Peace. November 11, 1916. Everett Massacre Collection, University of Washington Libraries, Microforms and Newspapers Collection, <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/iiif/pnwlabor/249/full/full/0/default.jpg>.
- Strong, Anna Louise. Anna Louise Strong Papers, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections Division, Seattle, WA. <https://content.lib.washington.edu/pnwlaborweb/index.html>.

Secondary Sources

- Beda, Steven C. "What Is It about the Wobblies: Recent Literature on the IWW in the Northwest," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 114, no. 4 (Fall 2023): 135-141. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27320393>.
- Black, Bob. "Beautiful Losers: The Historiography of the Industrial Workers of the World." *The Anarchist Library Archive*, March 1998, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/beautiful-losers>.
- Clark, Norman H. *Mill Town: A Social History of Everett, Washington, from Its Earliest Beginnings on the Shores of Puget Sound to the Tragic and Infamous Event Known as the Everett Massacre*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1970.
- Forbath, William E. "The Shaping of the American Labor Movement." *Harvard Law Review* 102, no. 6 (April 1989): 1111-1257. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1341293>.

Ohio, Denise, director. *Verona: The Story of the Everett Massacre*. Virgil Films, 2017. 1 hr., 37 min. <https://tubitv.com/movies/508068/verona-the-story-of-the-everett-massacre>.

Richardson, John G. "Mill Owners and Wobblies: The Event Structure of the Everett Massacre of 1916." *Social Science History* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 183-215. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40267998>

White, Ahmed. *Under the Iron Heel: The Wobblies and the Capitalist War on Radical Workers*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2022.

Williams, William J. "Bloody Sunday Revisited." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (April 1980): 50-62. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40490021>.