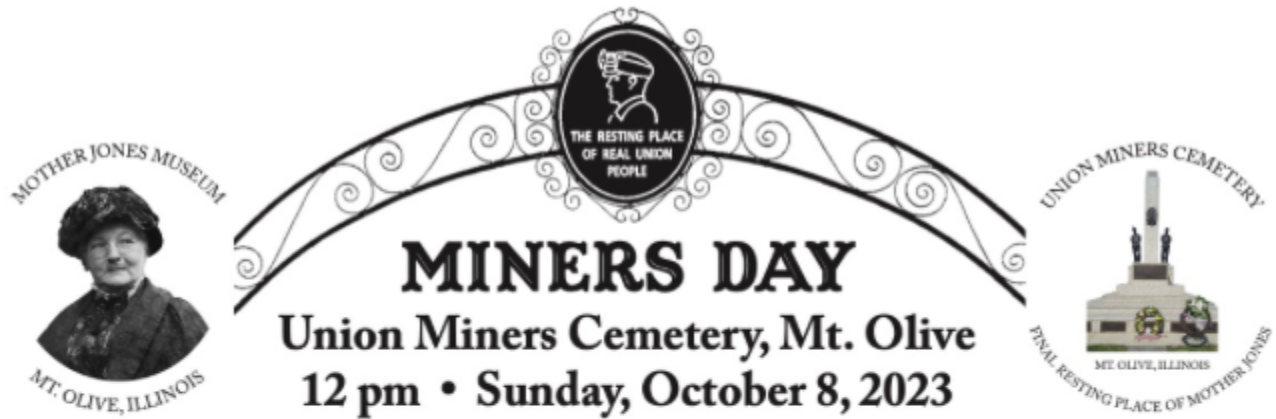


Virден Gun Battle 125th Anniversary Commemoration Sunday

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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Virден to Mt. Olive: 1898-1899



Join us as we commemorate the 125th anniversary of
UMWA victory at Virден, October 12, 1898

MOUNT OLIVE - A gun battle between union miners and armed train guards that left 13 dead was fought 125 years ago on Oct. 12, 1898, in Virden, Ill. This year, on Sunday, Oct. 8, 2023, in Union Miners Cemetery in Mount Olive, a commemoration of the battle will be held at noon.

According to the [Sangamon County Historical Society](#), “The dispute began when owners of the Chicago-Virden Coal Co. refused to honor a nationwide agreement between bituminous coal operators and the United Mine Workers.” Workers demanded a pay increase, an eight-hour workday, and a six-day work week, but company executives argued meeting those demands would price them out of the Chicago coal market.

After the workers went on strike, the mine company then recruited non-union Black miners from Alabama, reportedly without telling them about the strike, in an alleged attempt to sow division between the union and non-union miners. The company also hired 50 armed guards to protect a train carrying the “strikebreakers” to the Virden mine.

“Miner leaders said they had hoped the strikebreakers would leave the train at the depot, where the union miners planned to try to persuade them to return home,” according to the Historical Society, but gunfire broke out when the train continued towards the mine - it is not officially known who fired the first shot.

The “Battle of Virden” lasted about 10 minutes and left 13 people dead, including eight miners, four train guards hired by the mining company, and a guard for the Chicago & Alton Railroad. None of the Alabaman miners were killed in the crossfire. Instead of stopping at the Virden mines, the train reportedly sped onward to Springfield.

After the battle, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) bought an acre of land for a miner’s cemetery. It is now known as Union Miners Cemetery and, to this day, is the only known union-owned cemetery in the USA. Three of the miners killed in the battle are buried there.

The commemoration of the battle’s 125th anniversary will be held at the Union Miners Cemetery, located at 5585 Mount Olive Road in Mount Olive. For more information about the battle, visit sangamoncountyhistory.org.