

## Friends of Blair Mountain

Posted on June 13, 2012 by Rosemary Feurer

The Friends of Blair Mountain are going to publish the statement below in a new journal dedicated to Blair Mountain. We will also be sending it to all the West Virginia legislators, and if we can afford it, we would like to publish it as a full-page ad in the Charleston Gazette. [Update on the statement.](#)

Please read the statement over, and if you would like your signature to appear along with other historians' and scholars' signatures that endorse this statement, please email [Louis Martin \(wvulou@yahoo.com\)](mailto:LouisMartin@wvulou@yahoo.com) clearly stating: "Yes, I would like my name published with this statement." Then include your name and title as you would like it to appear in print. See our names below for examples.

Chuck Keeney, Board of Directors, Friends of Blair Mountain

John Hennen, Professor of History, Morehead State University

Lou Martin, Assistant Professor of History, Chatham University

Mark Myers, Assistant Professor of History, The Indiana Academy, Ball State University

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Blair Mountain, West Virginia, stands at the center of American labor history. At the start of the twentieth century, the United Mine Workers of America was one of the most powerful unions in the nation but had not yet organized the southern West Virginia counties. Coal operators there were determined to keep labor costs low by any means, including repression of the rights of their workers. The struggle by those workers for a union in 1921 was a struggle for basic civil liberties in the coalfields.

The Battle of Blair Mountain, where ten thousand armed miners fought the forces of Sheriff Don Chafin, who had machine gun emplacements on top of the ridge, was the culmination of a decade of armed conflict. Never before nor since have so many American workers taken up arms to fight for their constitutional rights. Blair Mountain has been discussed at dinner tables in the homes of countless miners' families and in thousands of labor history courses at colleges and universities across the country. But the American public is still only dimly

aware of the historic significance of this place in Logan County and those bloody events of 1921.

Now there is a battle for the very existence of Blair Mountain. West Virginians today have an opportunity to influence the future of Blair Mountain. The signers of this petition are committed to developing an economy based on the integrity of local history and culture. We as a society should not permit the mountain to be blown up. We should not allow the people around Blair Mountain to lose their homes and their community. We should preserve one of America's most important historic sites and make it the cornerstone of a national battlefield park.

The Friends of Blair Mountain have drawn up plans for Historic Blair Mountain Park, a 1600-acre park in the mold of Colonial Williamsburg or Gettysburg National Military Park. The plan envisions a Welcome Center with multimedia presentations and museum exhibitions, battlefield tours, restaurants and lodging, research archives, and seasonal events. Colonial Williamsburg generates an estimated \$500 million per year, and Gettysburg National Military Park brings in an estimated \$380 million to its local economy. It required committed citizens with a vision to build those parks that will continue to draw large crowds for many decades to come. West Virginia has the potential to build a more sustainable economy in Logan County, but mountaineers must stand up now, recognize the historic nature of Blair Mountain, and begin the work of building the future of Logan County and southern West Virginia.

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If you would like to join the Friends of Blair Mountain, see their [membership form](#).

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## **Update on Support Statement for Historic Blair Mountain Park**

To all of you who agreed to have your signatures published with the statement supporting Historic Blair Mountain Park:

First, thank you! There were more than 100 of us on the statement, including historians, archivists, and labor activists. Also, thanks to Cindy Hahamovitch and Rosemary Feurer for helping to spread the word about this statement.

We wanted to let you know what we did with the statement. Last week, Chuck Keeney and Kate McComas of the Friends of Blair Mountain sent the statement to every legislator in West Virginia.

They also sent the statement to Paul Nyden of the Charleston Gazette, who did a story on it: <http://wvgazette.com/News/201206250093>.

Radio host Bobby Nelson of WRVC in Huntington, WV, also spent an hour talking about the statement and the ongoing struggle over Blair Mountain.

Our statement is contributing to a changing political climate and its timing could not have been better. If you did not already see it, two weeks ago, Sen. Jay Rockefeller gave a speech on the floor of the US Senate that criticized the coal industry's propaganda campaign and expressed support for the EPA's new mercury pollution regulation, a dramatic change for the senator.

<http://blogs.wvgazette.com/coaltattoo/2012/06/20/rockefeller-coal-must-boldly-embrace-the-future/>.

With signers from some 20 different states as well as Canada and New Zealand, our statement shows legislators in West Virginia that Blair Mountain's historical significance is widely recognized and has the potential to draw visitors from far and wide.

At this time, the Friends of Blair Mountain does not have enough money (some four thousand dollars) to publish the statement as a full-page ad in the Charleston Gazette. If it becomes apparent that doing that would be effective, perhaps we will have a fund-raising campaign.

Thank you again!

In solidarity,

Chuck Keeney, Board of Directors, Friends of Blair Mountain

John Hennen, Professor of History, Morehead State University

Lou Martin, Assistant Professor of History, Chatham University

Mark Myers, Assistant Professor of History, The Indiana Academy, Ball State University

## Author



[Rosemary Feurer](#)

Rosemary Feurer is Professor of History at Northern Illinois University. She is the author of *Radical Unionism in the Midwest, 1900-1950*, among other books and essays. She is working on *The Illinois Mine Wars, 1860-1940* and a new biography of Mary Harris "Mother" Jones.