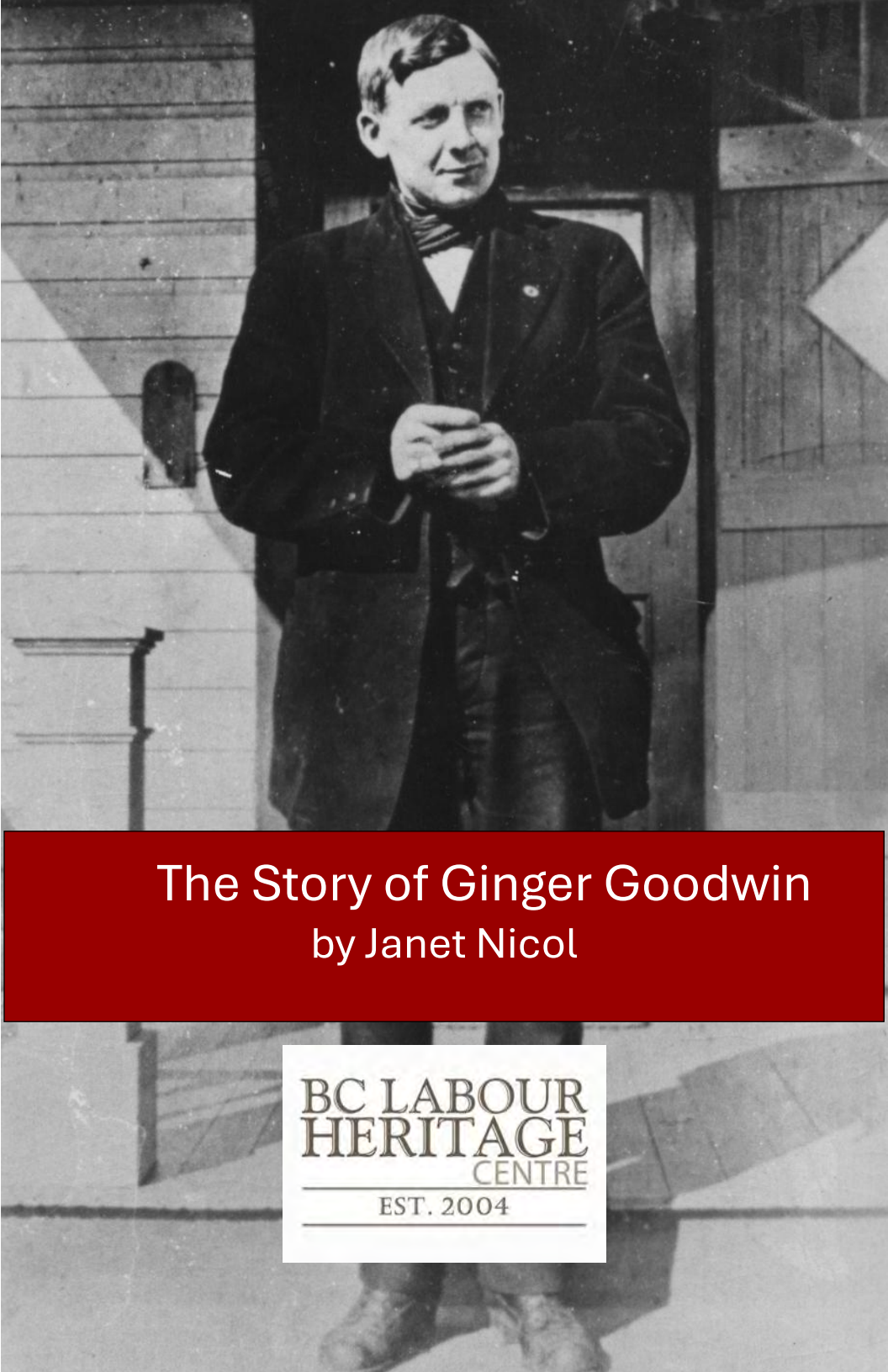


The Story of Ginger Goodwin

by Janet Nicol

BC LABOUR HERITAGE CENTRE

EST. 2004

A Wanted Man

Ginger Goodwin was a wanted man when he left the town of Trail in British Columbia's Kootenays region in the spring of 1918. A miner, labour activist and socialist, Goodwin had opposed Canada's participation in the 'Great War' since its outbreak in 1914.

As casualties mounted on the battlefields of France, the Canadian government passed a conscription law, effective August 29, 1917. Goodwin, aged 30, was called before the draft board. A coal miner most of his working life, he had advanced tuberculosis. The board classified him as 'Class D'– unfit for military service.

At this time Goodwin was Secretary of the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), representing 1,200 workers at the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada (CM&S) in Trail. The company provided materials vital to the production of ammunition.

When Goodwin led a strike at the smelter in November of 1917, the union was up against an uncooperative employer and the patriotic fervour of the public. Eleven days into the strike, Goodwin was recalled by the draft board and classified as 'Class A'– fit for military service.

"To the miners and the labour movement generally, this was an obvious attempt to behead the strike and the miners' union."

Man Along the Shore! p. 48.

The smelter strike was short-lived, ending in defeat. Goodwin filed an appeal to the draft board in January 1918 and again in April but was turned down. He left Trail soon after, seeking refuge at his former stomping ground, a coal mining community on Vancouver Island.



Ginger Goodwin led a strike at the smelter in Trail, BC in 1917. Eleven days into the strike, he was recalled by the draft board and classified as "fit for military service". Trail Museum & Archives, 6766.

Joe Potters' pool room in Cumberland was a place for war-resisters to exchange information about the back country and to arrange food drop-offs from sympathetic residents. Goodwin was likely there before packing his hunting rifle, fishing rod, books, pen and paper and heading to the mountains west of the village. His thirty-first birthday on May 10 was spent camping out on the Forbidden Plateau with fellow fugitives, Arthur Boothman, Frederick Taylor and James Randall.

Heading the sweeps for draft evaders in the Comox Valley was William John Devitt, 49, of the Vancouver-based Dominion Police. His orders were to arrest 'defaulters' under the Military Service Act and hand them over to the appropriate authorities. Devitt had detailed descriptions of the four men hiding out in the region's mountainous terrain. The profile of Ginger Goodwin reads, in part: a single man, 5-foot six with a thin build, about 145 pounds, reddish brown hair, clean shaven, a fair complexion with freckles, has some gold-filled teeth, walks with a slight stoop and "socialistic."

Taking a Stand

Albert "Ginger" Goodwin was born in Trenton Village, Yorkshire, England in 1887. His father was a hewer, cutting and breaking coal with a pick at a local mine. The occupation was dangerous, the threat of explosions and

deadly vapours ever-present. Goodwin left school at age 12 to work in a coal mine and walked his first picket line in 1902. Four years later he immigrated to Canada, taking up employment at the No. 2 Dominion coal mine in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. In 1909, he experienced first-hand a strike that saw widespread evictions of mining families from company homes.

Moving west in 1910, Goodwin laboured in coal mines in the Crowsnest Pass region and was a member of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). In the fall he travelled to Vancouver Island and was hired at the No. 5 coal mine in Cumberland. Joe Naylor, fourteen years his senior and a fellow miner, trade union activist and socialist, became an important mentor and ally.

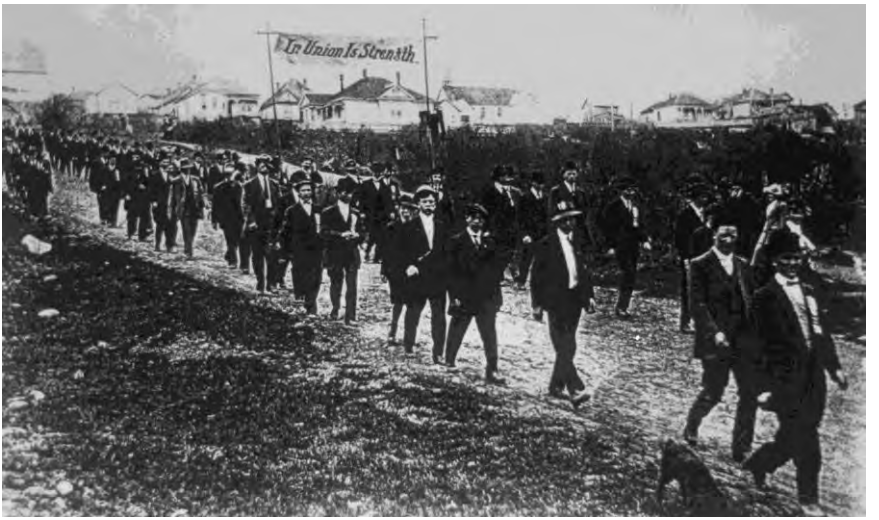


Cumberland miner Joe Naylor mentored Goodwin on union organizing and socialism. Cumberland Museum & Archives C192-030

Goodwin began honing his skills as a union organizer, writing articles and gaining a reputation as an effective orator. He underscored the value of a workers' education in an article for the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) newspaper.

> *"All I know is this, that in every phase of society, whenever a change took place, it was the outcome of force which determined the winning side, so what we want is to educate you to your power, Mr. Workingman and when we realize it, we have the power and the lever to overthrow this existing society."*
>
> Ginger Goodwin, "The Iron Heel," *Western Clarion*, 1912 August 10, p.1.

The power of workers was on full display in September of 1912 as coal miners from Ladysmith to Cumberland downed their tools. Organized into the UMWA, the miners demanded improved safety conditions. When the employer brought in strikebreakers to do their jobs, picket lines became violent, mass arrests of striking



Miners' union parade in Ladysmith, c. 1913.
Ladysmith Archives, 2007.034.2578.

miners occurred, and harsh prison sentences were meted out. Strikers persisted into August 1914; despite the economic hardships they endured. Goodwin, an active participant, served as a delegate at two BC Federation of Labour conventions and a UMWA convention.

This is no sentimental movement and the masters can howl; we do not hide our intentions for we are what they have made us—the dispossessed class that is out to overthrow them.

- A. Goodwin, "Capitalism the Leveller*", Western Clarion,* 1913 August, p. 1.



Cumberland Museum and Archives, C261-009.

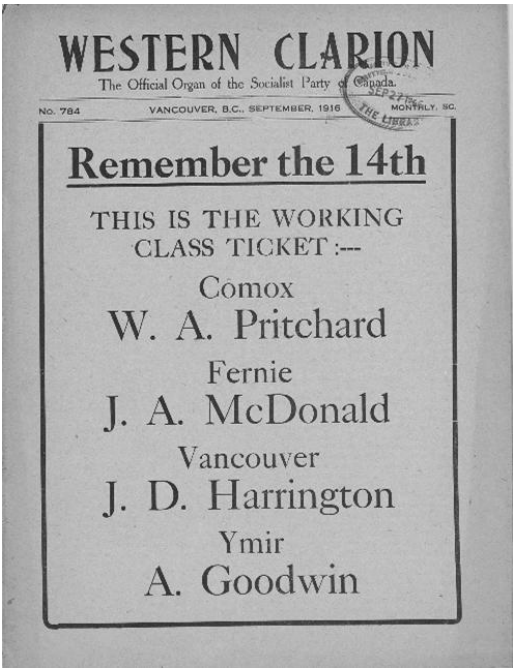
Goodwin was an avid soccer player and enjoyed social activities to buoy people's spirits.

"Up in Cumberland the union built a hall during the strike, and they used to have a dance or perhaps three dances a week. We had a piano player and a fiddler, two strikers. The women would bring sandwiches. They didn't worry much about clothes; you went with what you had."

- Lynne Bowen, *Boss Whistle*, p.148.

The miners' strike ended in bitter defeat soon after the war broke out. Goodwin was among the dozens of workers placed on an employer's blacklist. Unable to find work, he moved back to the mainland, working at the coal mine in Merritt and then Coal Creek.

In 1915, he settled in Trail, employed as a smelter man at Consolidated Mining and Smelting (CM&S). Not long after, he was elected secretary of the Trail Mill and Smeltermen's Union, part of the Western Federation of Miners.



WESTERN CLARION

The Official Organ of the Socialist Party of Canada.

No. 784 VANCOUVER, B.C., SEPTEMBER, 1916 MONTHLY, 5C.

Remember the 14th

THIS IS THE WORKING CLASS TICKET :---

Comox
W. A. Pritchard

Fernie
J. A. McDonald

Vancouver
J. D. Harrington

Ymir
A. Goodwin

Albert "Ginger" Goodwin was on the ballot in the provincial election in 1916 representing the Socialist Party.

Goodwin ran for a seat in the BC legislature as a Socialist Party of Canada candidate in the election of 1916. He lost, garnering a respectable 20 percent of the vote. The following January, he and fellow union activist Joe Naylor were elected to the executive of the BC Federation of Labour.

Social discontent and union strikes were on the rise across BC when Goodwin led the work stoppage at the Trail smelter on November 15, 1917. Contract demands included higher wages, better working conditions, a safer workplace and an eight-hour day. The employer refused to bargain. The strike lasted 35 days.

Al King began working at CM&S in 1932. In an account written years later, he highlights the 1917 strike.

> *Blaylock (the plant manager) warned the organizers, 'Wait until my boys come home from overseas. They'll look after you bastards!' And they did too. He refused to rehire about four hundred of the strikers and he persuaded returning soldiers to abandon the WFM."*
>
> Al King, *Red Bait!* p.32.

Goodwin's appeals to the draft board denied, he was out of legal options. On May 2, 1918, Private Goodwin, 170432, was ordered to report to No. 2 Depot Battalion in Victoria. The penalty for desertion was five years in prison with hard labour.

By the time the order was posted in the mail, Goodwin was hiding out in the mountains on Vancouver Island.

The Day Ginger Goodwin was Shot

July 27, 1918 - Boothman, Taylor and Randall parted company with Goodwin after an afternoon spent fishing. The three men were heading back to their camp above Comox Lake and took Goodwin's fishing rod and catch with them.

On his own, Goodwin moved along a thick forest trail, picking wild berries. He carried his rifle and wore a money belt containing $334.60. Inside his shirt pocket were papers, a matchbox, knife and handkerchief.

Earlier that day, Devitt organized a search for Goodwin and his companions. He had received information on their whereabouts and called in two men to assist him, George Henry Roe, 48, of the Victoria-based Dominion Police and 'special' constable Dan Campbell, 46, owner

of a hotel near Victoria and a former police officer, discharged in disgrace.

Requiring guides to navigate the mountain trails, Devitt called on Thomas Downie Anderson and George Alfred James, both Island residents familiar with the back country. The party set out in the afternoon, travelling by boat to the end of Comox Lake then hiking through trails to Alone Mountain. At this juncture, the guides left Devitt, Roe and Campbell and backtracked to their boat.

Devitt and his armed posse continued on, arriving near the confluence of Cruikshank River and Rees Creek at about 4:30 in the afternoon. Here they split up.

On his own now, Campbell made his way on rough ground surrounded by second-growth cedars, hemlocks and fir. A short time later, he spotted Goodwin from about ten feet away.

A single shot rang out. Goodwin fell to the ground. The bullet Campbell had discharged from his rifle struck Goodwin's left wrist and pierced his neck, severing the spinal cord. Goodwin's death was immediate.

Campbell pled self-defence, stating Goodwin had raised his rifle when ordered to surrender. On August 1, a coroner's jury considered the evidence and returned an

ALBERT GOODWIN SHOT AND KILLED
BY POLICE OFFICER NEAR COMOX LAKE

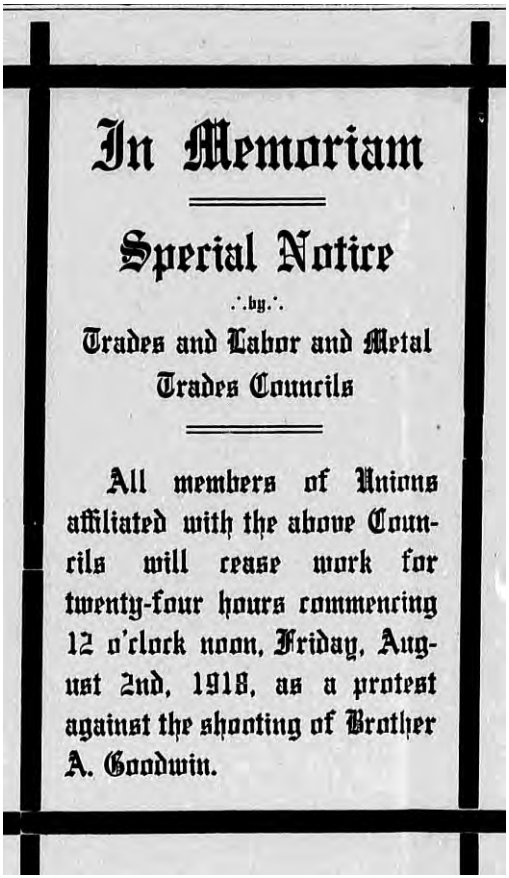
open verdict. Campbell was arrested and held over for trial.

On August 2, an SPC-organized funeral for Ginger Goodwin took place. The procession of mourners, led by a marching band and more than a mile long, walked from Cumberland to the cemetery. SPC members Joe Naylor, William Pritchard and Wallis Lefeaux spoke at the graveside.



Ginger Goodwin's funeral in Cumberland, Cumberland Museum and Archives, C110_001

That same day in Vancouver, the Trades and Labor Council called a 24-hour work stoppage to protest the shooting of Goodwin. About 6,000 workers in the city walked off the job. Known as Canada's first General Strike, Vancouver's labour action had a ripple effect. A year later 30,000 workers in Winnipeg walked out for six weeks and triggered sympathy strikes in towns and cities across the country.



In Memoriam

Special Notice

∴by.∴

Trades and Labor and Metal Trades Councils

All members of Unions affiliated with the above Councils will cease work for twenty-four hours commencing 12 o'clock noon, Friday, August 2nd, 1918, as a protest against the shooting of Brother A. Goodwin.

British Columbia Federationist
2 August 1918

In the autumn of 1918, Campbell's charge of manslaughter went before a grand jury in a closed session of the Assize court in Victoria. On October 2, the jury returned a "no bill" decision which meant Campbell would not stand trial.

The story of Ginger Goodwin's life and death has become the subject of fiction and non-fiction accounts, songs, film and artwork. A creek, mountain and section of highway have been named for him.

For the past 40 years, a Miners Memorial Weekend is hosted by the Cumberland and District Historical Society in partnership with local labour councils. Activities include a vigil and laying of wreaths at the graves of miners and their families. Among those mourned are Joe Naylor (1872-1946), known as "Saint Joe" and Ginger Goodwin (1887-1918), forever remembered as "a worker's friend."

"In the old days when a guy started to shape up as a threat to the establishment, they'd kill him. ...The trouble with this method was it could backfire. Ginger Goodwin's murder brought on what was I guess the first general strike in Canada's history and his name is a powerful rallying cry for labour still today."

Bill White in *A Hard Man to Beat*, p. 111.



Addendum

Ginger Goodwin was buried in the Cumberland cemetery on August 2, 1918 following a funeral organized by his comrades in the Socialist Party of Canada. His grave was unmarked. In 1937 a gravestone was carved by Vincente Pinchetti and placed on his grave by the Canadian Labor Defence League. Pinchetti was a miner who had worked with Goodwin in the Cumberland area and participated in the 1912-1914 strike. In 2025, an ad hoc group that included the BC Labour Heritage Centre, the Village of Cumberland and Goodwin's family undertook a restoration of the gravestone. Unauthorized text was removed, the date of death corrected, and a new emblem added to represent Goodwin's affiliation to the Socialist Party of Canada.

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Janet Nicol is a freelance writer and member of the Writers Union of Canada with a special interest in art, history and social justice. She taught high school history for 29 years in Vancouver and summer workshops to teachers in Mongolia, Peru and Tanzania. She has volunteered for the BC Labour Heritage Centre, Room magazine and the British Columbia Historical Federation. She has a master's degree from the University of British Columbia and was the recipient of the British Columbia Historical Federation's Anne and Philip Yandle Best Article Award in 2013.

The BC Labour Heritage Centre is dedicated to preserving the history of working people in British Columbia. We work to ensure that workers' stories continue to inspire the movement and build appreciation for labour's victories for all workers.

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