

# Labour and the Commemorative Landscape in Industrial Cape Breton, 1922-2013

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Article abstract

*Labour landmarks are monuments, memorials, plaques and other sites that commemorate the past experiences of workers in society. These sites are also manifestations of the collective memory of labourers. In industrial Cape Breton, which has a long history of labour and class struggle, an analytical survey of labour landmarks reveals how the industrial past has been remembered and memorialized. This overview reflects the narratives that have been attached to these sites, the ways in which historical memory has been localized and constructed in industrial Cape Breton, and the new layers of meaning that are revealed as these communities transition into post-industrialism.*

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LACHLAN MACKINNON

## Labour and the Commemorative Landscape in Industrial Cape Breton, 1922-2013

### Résumé

Certains monuments, mémoriaux, plaques et autres sites sont dédiés au travail pour commémorer l'expérience passée des travailleurs dans la société. Ces lieux et monuments constituent aussi des manifestations de la mémoire collective des travailleurs. Dans les régions industrielles du Cap Breton, qui a connu une longue histoire de lutte des classes et de luttes ouvrières, une analyse de ces monuments révèle la façon dont on se souvient du passé industriel et dont on le garde en mémoire. Ce survol tient compte des récits qui se rattachent à ces sites, de la façon dont la mémoire historique a été localisée et construite dans les régions industrielles du Cap Breton, et des nouveaux niveaux de sens qui se révèlent au moment où ces communautés effectuent leur transition vers l'ère postindustrielle.

### Abstract

Labour landmarks are monuments, memorials, plaques and other sites that commemorate the past experiences of workers in society. These sites are also manifestations of the collective memory of labourers. In industrial Cape Breton, which has a long history of labour and class struggle, an analytical survey of labour landmarks reveals how the industrial past has been remembered and memorialized. This overview reflects the narratives that have been attached to these sites, the ways in which historical memory has been localized and constructed in industrial Cape Breton, and the new layers of meaning that are revealed as these communities transition into post-industrialism.

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This survey and analysis of labour landmarks in industrial Cape Breton is intended to reveal existing narratives of people, places and events of the past, while also exploring how local communities have chosen to commemorate their history of labour in the face of industrial loss. Historian Pierre Nora writes that sites of memory are crystallized when *milieux de mémoire*, or real places of memory, no longer exist (1989: 7). In industrial Cape Breton, a significant expansion in the commemorative landscape of labour corresponds with the decline of the area's coal and steel industries in the late 20th century. Such a correlation reveals a transition away from the "real environment of memory" that Nora articulates, but it also reflects an intent to protect the place

of workers in regional historical narratives. Industrial Cape Breton, for the purposes of this article, is defined as the eastern portion of Cape Breton County, comprising the communities of Dominion, Glace Bay, New Waterford, North Sydney, Port Morien, Sydney and Sydney Mines. I have identified twenty-one monuments to workers in these areas. I prepared the survey through archival and library research and community outreach efforts.

Each of the monuments in this study represents what folklorist Archie Green has termed "labour landmarks." These sites are manifestations of material culture that are designed to recognize the social importance of workers; they can take the shape of memorials,

burial scenes, mosaics or art exhibits (Green 1995: 28). Green argues that labour landmarks celebrate the contributions of all workers “to the mosaic of [national] tradition” and are expressive of workers’ shared culture or “laborlore” (Green 2001: 27). They also help to enshrine working-class collective memory within local, regional and national identities. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs writes that collective memory is the shared conceptualization of the past that emerges within groups; it exists within nations, religions, linguistic groups, geographies, families and social classes (Halbwachs 1992 [1950]: 169-73). As reflections of working-class collective memory, labour landmarks reveal the place of workers, class struggle and organized labour in the history of the communities in which they exist. It is also important to recognize that these sites can take on new meanings well beyond the date of their erection; James Young, writing of the shifting meanings of Holocaust memorials in Europe,

argues that “the reasons for memory change with every generation” (Young 1993: 285).

The relationship between labour landmarks and working-class collective memory has been explored in other Canadian contexts. In New Brunswick, historians David Frank and Nicole Lang examine a number of occupational sites of memory to reveal the place of workers in provincial identity. Their discussion of New Brunswick coal communities describes the importance of memorial monuments at Springhill, Westville, and New Glasgow, Nova Scotia. The authors write, “The era of coal mining has come to a close in recent years in Central New Brunswick, but the legacy of the community has remained highly visible.... Whatever the future holds for the area, the shared legacy ... will not be forgotten” (Frank and Lang 2010: 33-34). In Kirkland Lake, Ontario, Bernie Jaworsky argues that a local miners’ memorial monument memorializes workers killed on the job while also reflecting the struggle

| TITLE  | LOCATION      | YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT | INDUSTRY         |
|--|---------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Miner’s Monument   | New Waterford | 1922                  | Coal             |
| William Davis’s Grave                                      | New Waterford | 1925                  | Coal             |
| Port Morien First Mine Monument                            | Port Morien   | 1930                  | Coal             |
| Sydney Mines Miners’ Monument                              | Sydney Mines  | 1969                  | Coal             |
| Glace Bay Miners’ Memorial                                 | Glace Bay     | 1980                  | Coal             |
| Ronald Winston McDonald Memorial                           | Glace Bay     | 1984                  | Coal             |
| Miners’ Fatality Monument                                  | New Waterford | 1985                  | Coal             |
| Earl Leadbeater Monument                                   | New Waterford | 1985                  | Coal             |
| William Davis Memorial Monument                            | New Waterford | 1985                  | Coal             |
| Sydney Labour Monument                                     | Sydney        | 1985                  | Workers; general |
| Sydney Steelworkers’ Memorial Monument                     | Sydney        | 1986                  | Steel            |
| Dominion Miners’ Monument                                  | Dominion      | 1987                  | Coal             |
| Sydney Mines Princess Colliery Disaster Monument           | Sydney Mines  | 1990                  | Coal             |
| McLachlan Monument   | Glace Bay     | 1992                  | Coal             |
| Sydney Steel Ladle Monument                                | Sydney        | 1995                  | Steel            |
| Jake Campbell Monument                                     | Glace Bay     | 2002                  | Coal             |
| Johnny Miles Monument                                      | Sydney Mines  | 2008                  | Athletics        |
| Colliery Lands Park, Davis Memorial Monument               | New Waterford | 2009                  | Coal             |
| Whitney Pier Melting Pot Monument                          | Whitney Pier  | 2010                  | Steel            |
| Port Morien Fishermen’s Monument                           | Port Morien   | 2011                  | Fishing          |
| 1917 Explosion Cemetery Commemoration                      | New Waterford | unidentified          | Coal             |
| <i>Table 1. Labour Landmarks in Industrial Cape Breton</i> |               |                       |                  |

for workplace health and safety in the province. (Jaworsky 2001). An overview of these types of memorial sites in industrial Cape Breton not only reflects the occupational memories of their creators, but also provides insight into how the residual memory of industrial work continues to shape local identities as they transition through the processes of deindustrialization.

The identified labour landmarks in industrial Cape Breton are outlined in Table 1 (p. 57). The only major community not represented in the survey is North Sydney, where no markers were identified. A number of general conclusions can be drawn from an examination of this table. The majority of commemorations are devoted to memorializing the experiences of steelworkers and coal miners. Moreover, the majority of labour landmarks were erected during or since the 1980s. Each of these factors requires close examination, as does the role of individual and communal commemorations, and the localization and specification of the commemorative landscape that has occurred since the 1980s.

The coal and steel industries are strongly represented in the commemorative landscape of industrial Cape Breton, with fifteen monuments dedicated to coal, three to steel, one to the fishing industry, and two to other topics. The prevalence of these industries reflects their significance in the history of the region; during the 20th century the coal mines and steel plant were the primary employers on the island. Labour organizations such as the United Mine Workers of America (UMW) and the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) have been instrumental in erecting many of these monuments. The ability of unions to organize and fund the creation of labour landmarks is perhaps partially responsible for the dominance of these industries in the commemorative landscape. Non-organized workers did not have the same access to funds or the organizational structure that is required to undertake these projects. Each of the coal and steel monuments reflects a developed occupational consciousness, an awareness of the industrial past, and a desire to mark the historical experiences of Cape Breton's workers. This is also true of the three labour landmarks that are not explicitly dedicated to the coal and steel industries: a monument dedicated to all workers in Sydney, a memorial in Sydney Mines to the lo-

cal man who won the Boston Marathon in 1926, and a monument to fishermen in Port Morien. In general, these monuments represent the hopes of workers, unions and other community organizations that working-class consciousness and local labour history will be remembered in post-industrial Cape Breton.

The earliest markers reflect the importance of the coal industry. The Miner's Monument, erected in 1922 by the UMW in New Waterford, was dedicated to miners who had been killed in that town during a mine explosion in 1917. This monument reflects the importance of the union in the early 20th century, the development of a class-based local identity and the dangers of work in the local collieries (MacKinnon 2013a; Fig. 1). Seven of the twenty-one labour landmarks



**Fig. 1**  
*Miner's Monument,  
New Waterford. (Photo  
by author.)*

**Fig. 2**  
*First Mine Monument,*  
*Port Morien. (Photo by*  
*author.)*



are found in New Waterford, where workers commemorated their experience much earlier than in any of the other industrial communities.

In 1930, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) erected a cairn and plaque in Port Morien to memorialize “Canada’s Coal Industry” (Fig. 2). The plaque reads:

Two thousand feet south-easterly of this place are the remains of the first regular coal mining operations in Canada, established by the French in 1720 from the modest beginning of those early days this industry has become one of national and imperial importance [*sic*]. This site donated by Dominion Coal Company, erected 1930.

Unlike the Miners’ Memorial Monument in New Waterford, this labour landmark does not explicitly recognize the role of workers in the coal industry. Instead, the pre-modern history of the Cape Breton coal industry is juxtaposed with the contemporary operations of the Dominion Coal Company to present an industrial march of progress in which the French, British and Canadian regimes are represented.

Contextually, this monument can be read as a reaction on the part of the HSMBC to the development of Maritime regionalism during the first two decades of the 20th century. The

Maritime Rights Movement, which developed in 1919, was a regional protest movement that sought to assert the political and economic rights of the Maritimes against central Canadian hegemony (E. R. Forbes 1975: 66). Actors within the HSMBC were aware of this populist sentiment; W. C. Milner, a board member from the Maritimes, was vocal in his insistence on increased regional representation in the national commemorative landscape through the 1920s (MacLeod 1983-1984: 92). Although it does not focus explicitly on workers, the coal industry monument in Port Morien represents a progressive attempt to recognize the economic importance of eastern Canadian industry. It indicates the emergence of a national commemorative shift that became more inclusive of regional identities and the contributions of areas outside of Ontario and Quebec.

During this study, no labour landmarks were found that had been erected between the years 1930 and 1969. There could be many reasons for the lack of commemorative efforts in this period—for one, union leadership seemed to be focused on other methods of influencing community consciousness. Advances in social policy, such as the 1937 *Nova Scotia Trade Union Act*, were influential in maintaining a forward-looking, policy-oriented attitude among workers and their organizations (Fudge and Tucker 2001: 218). In this context of developing institutional power, workers turned their attention to fighting for further gains rather than commemorating previous successes.

A cultural shift in the 1950s and 1960s popularized the value and importance of workers’ history. During this period, a number of regional scholars turned their attention to the disciplines of social and labour history (Buckner 2000: 6-7). It was also at this time that the HSMBC approved a number of historical development projects across Canada, including the reconstruction of the Fortress Louisbourg in Cape Breton. C. J. Taylor refers to this decade as “the Era of the Big Project,” which he argues drew further attention to the ways in which history, including regional and local history, is publicly represented (Taylor 1990: 177-82).

Cape Breton was not insulated from these developments. In the early 1960s, Nina Cohen proposed the creation of a miners’ museum in





*Fig. 3 (left)  
Miners' Monument,  
Sydney Mines. (Photo  
by author).*



*Fig. 4 (right)  
Miners' Memorial,  
Glace Bay. (Photo by  
author.)*

Glace Bay. This was partially in response to the 1960 Royal Commission on Coal and the 1966 Donald Report, both of which questioned the viability of the coal mining industry in Cape Breton and called for economic diversification (Beaton 2010: 44). The miners' museum opened in 1967, and was marketed as a tourist attraction (Beaton 2010: 46). Guided tours of a mine shaft conducted by former coal miners were a major feature in the new museum; these tours implicitly revealed the importance of workers' experiences in the representation of local industry.

Two years after the official opening of the Glace Bay Miners' Museum, a labour landmark was erected outside the town hall in the nearby community of Sydney Mines. The monument, a black granite shaft topped with the bust of a coal miner, stands at a height of about nine feet. The inscription reads: "To honor departed members and to pay homage to those who have given their lives to the coal mining industry. Erected 1969

by members of the United Mine Workers of America. Sub District No. 2 Northside" (Fig. 3; Davis Day memorial 1990). This monument is significant not only in that it represents the first addition to the commemorative landscape of labour after nearly thirty years, but also because it reflects a period when popular attention was once more focused on workers' historical experiences.

The majority of labour landmarks in industrial Cape Breton were erected during the 1980s. Throughout the decade, monuments and memorials were unveiled in Sydney, Glace Bay, New Waterford and Dominion. This phenomenon could have been the result of the developed power of unions in the Cape Breton coal and steel industries or a communal recognition of the "larger themes of memory, commemoration, regional economic development and tourism," which Meaghan Beaton argues was the result of the 1967 opening of the Miners' Museum (Beaton 2010: 57). Another possibility is that

industrial decline in Cape Breton prompted workers to commemorate their own memories and events before they disappeared altogether. The steel and coal industries both faced existential threats during the decade; the steel plant in Sydney had been under provincial control since 1967 and by 1980 had fallen behind its Canadian competitors, and the mining industry was also in decline.

The first monument of the 1980s was unveiled on June 11, 1980, in Glace Bay by two local coal miners, Steve Warcop and Fred Binder. The date is significant. It is a local holiday known as Davis Day in Cape Breton, which began in 1926 to honour William Davis, a New Waterford coal miner who was killed during the 1925 strike. The monument in Glace Bay, produced by John D. Steele Company in North Sydney and funded by the union, is composed of a tall, black granite shaft topped with the bust of a coal miner (Fig. 4). The bust that sits upon the monument is an exact replica of the bust that tops the miners' monument in Sydney Mines. An inscription reads:

Miners' Monument. Erected in grateful memory to the coal miners from Glace Bay and surrounding areas who have lost their lives in the coal industry. Their contributions to our industrial society have been incalculable, their sacrifices great.

The dedication ceremony began with a rendition of "O Canada," followed by an opening prayer and the unveiling. After the dedication, read by Rev. Terrance Power of St. Leonard's Parish, those present joined together in a minute of silence in remembrance of miners who had been killed in the local collieries (Glace Bay erects

miners' memorial 1980). This was an especially sombre occasion because the previous year, on February 24, 1979, an explosion at the Dominion No. 26 Colliery in Glace Bay killed twelve men and seriously injured four others (Twelve killed in colliery explosion 1979). The Glace Bay Miners' Memorial commemorates the men killed in this explosion, as well as many other citizens in the community who had been injured or killed in local collieries.

In 1985, New Waterford erected several labour landmarks. It was in July of that year that the Colliery Lands Park was opened on the site of the former No. 12 and No. 16 coal mines. In the early 1980s the Town Beautification Committee was created to improve the aesthetic quality of life in the area. This committee was tasked with beautifying the remnants of surface workings at a number of former mine sites; Simon White, the Director of Development and Public Works for the Town of New Waterford in 1985, describes the area surrounding these sites as "look[ing] like almost the surface of the moon ... ugly, ugly, ugly" (White, interview, July 19, 2011). The federal government pledged \$1.9 million to the town of New Waterford for the creation of a green space (Colliery Lands Park opening 1985). The park was officially opened on July 21, 1985, with an audience of more than 600 people present, and the *Cape Breton Post* reported that the resulting sentiment in the town "was one of pride, aggressively looking toward the future and cooperating to move ahead" ("Colliery Lands Park opening" 1985).

At the centre of Colliery Lands Park stands the Miners' Fatality Monument (Fig. 5). This monument is composed of eight grey granite

**Fig. 5**  
*Miners' Fatality Monument, New Waterford. (Photo by author.)*



markers inscribed with a total of 307 names. Each name is that of a miner who lost his life in the New Waterford mines. The list was compiled using a record book that is currently on display at the Miners' Museum in Glace Bay, which includes all of the fatalities mentioned in the provincial Mines Reports. This number is conservative, as fatality records from the early 20th century are often incomplete. The names of countless miners who died of work-related illnesses, such as black lung, are also not included. A large mural stands between the fourth and fifth granite markers. It is a reproduction of a painting by local artist Terry MacDonald and presents a series of images depicting a day in the New Waterford coal mines, specifically at the No. 12 colliery as it would have appeared in 1935 ("Local artist designs miners' mural" 1985). The image in the middle of the mural shows a number of workers riding the cars into the open mouth of the pit. Another series of images portrays the death of a worker in the mine.

Immediately behind the mural and granite markers stand the modern national flags of Canada, Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Romania, the United Kingdom, Russia and the United States. Men from each of these

countries have perished in the New Waterford coal mines. These flags symbolize the wide range of ethnicities, experiences and cultures that came together in New Waterford to form a cohesive community, indicating that each group was able to contribute to the development of class-consciousness, often in the face of ethnic tension. The flags also speak to the importance of multiculturalism at the moment of the monument's erection. Multiculturalism became an official policy of the Government of Canada in 1971, and was later cemented in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (H. D. Forbes 2007: 27).

Taken as a whole, the Miners' Fatality Monument represents workers' experiences in New Waterford through the past century. The inscribed names, the flags and the central mural all serve to memorialize both those who have died and those who have spent their lives working underground. Each name represents the life and death of a man employed in local collieries, an insight that is furthered by the images depicted on the central mural. Although the individual life-stories of these men are not available on the face of the monument, they make up a large portion of the community's conceptualization of the industrial past. While the Colliery Lands Park



**Fig. 6**  
*Miners' Monument, Dominion. (Photo by author.)*



project was ongoing, separate funding allowed for the creation of a black granite monument to a William Davis. This monument was erected on Plummer Avenue in the central part of town, also in 1985.

In 1987, the town of Dominion commemorated its industrial heritage by establishing the Miners' Memorial Park at the centre of town. At the heart of the park, surrounded by benches and shrubbery, is a monument that memorializes miners from Dominion who were killed on the job (Fig. 6). This memorial consists of three granite blocks, each engraved with the names of workers who had been killed, including the date of death; there are 102 names. At the centre of the monument is another engraving, which reads, "Miners' Memorial Park. This memorial erected by the citizens of Dominion to honour the memory of those who lost their lives in the coal industry." At the top of the central granite pillar is the image of a miner, and on the reverse side is the engraved image of the No. 26 Colliery in Glace Bay, where many workers from

**Fig. 7**  
*Princess Colliery  
Disaster Monument,  
Sydney Mines. (Photo by  
author.)*



Dominion found employment. Local historian Len Stephenson researched each of the names on the monument, although he has cautioned that the list is likely incomplete due to a lack of records for the early years of the coal industry (Len Stephenson 2008). Stephenson also argues that the location of the memorial monument is significant; in a 2008 interview he stated, "The town hall was here, the school was here. This [site] is part of the history of the community" (Len Stephenson 2008).

The quick succession of coal industry commemorations in the 1980s also reflects the localization of historical memory. Although Sydney Mines had established its first memorial monument in 1969, after Glace Bay erected a monument in 1980 the other communities in industrial Cape Breton soon followed suit. As each community commemorated the experiences of its workers, citizens of surrounding towns realized that their unique experiences also deserved recognition. This has resulted in an increased specification of the commemorative landscape; as more monuments were erected to the general experience of workers, specific experiences appeared distinctive, interesting and ripe for commemoration. In 1990, citizens in Sydney Mines decided that another labour landmark devoted to a specific event in the town's history, a 1938 disaster in the mine, would better represent the particular conditions of work in their town.

The Princess Colliery Disaster Monument was unveiled in Sydney Mines on Davis Day in 1990 at the site of the former colliery. This monument resembles the entrance to a mineshaft, and is composed of a brick base with a pulley system standing on top. Placed on the monument is a memorial plaque, which reads, "To the memory of the miners who lost their lives during the Princess Mine disaster in 1938 placed by Town of Sydney Mines and Prince Local 2183 UMW of A this 11th day of June, 1990" (Fig. 7). The approach to the monument consists of a stone walkway, which passes by the 1969 memorial. This monument memorializes the worst accident in the history of the Princess coal mine and, like many other disaster monuments, asserts the importance of workers' struggles for workplace safety.

The disaster occurred on December 6, 1938. More than 250 miners were seated on the riding rake, waiting to travel down into the mine for

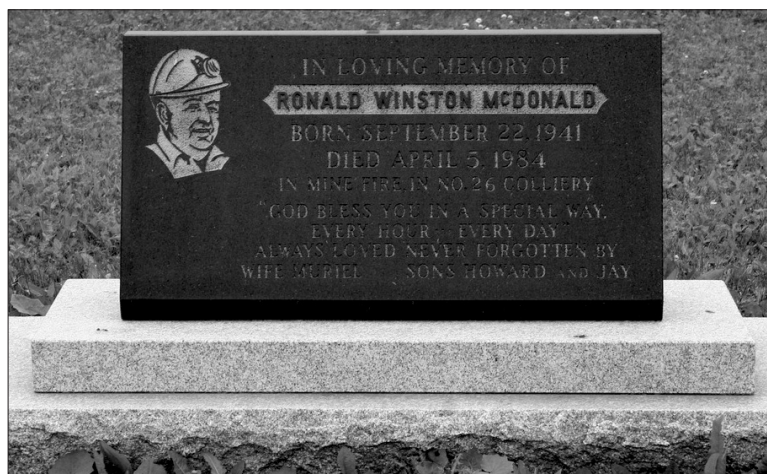
their shift. As the rake began to descend, it suddenly broke away from its rope and gained momentum as it sped down the incline into the pit. A number of miners jumped off the runaway rake, but when it crashed into the wall at the end of the slope more than 50 men were injured and 16 were killed (Disaster at Sydney Mines 1938a). Another man, 26-year-old William Luffman, died of his injuries the next day (Disaster at Sydney Mines 1938c). Cass MacLellan, a miner who had been able to leap off the runaway rake, described the scene of the crash: "I saw some terrible sights when I was overseas during the World War, as a member of the 3rd Montreal Heavy Siege Battery, but at no time did I ever experience anything like I saw in Princess Colliery yesterday morning" (Disaster at Sydney Mines 1938c). The importance of this event for the town of Sydney Mines, and the permeation of coal mining into the fabric of the town's existence, can be seen in the community roles of many of the men who were killed. Counted among the dead on December 6 were two Sydney Mines town councillors, the former manager of the nearby Florence Colliery, and "many others prominent in the civic and sporting affairs of the town" (Disaster at Sydney Mines 1938a, 1938b).

The 1990 memorialization of the 1938 rake disaster in Sydney Mines reflects a commemorative turn towards specialization and localization. Other factors, such as the uncertainty of the eastern Canadian coal industry, the personal and communal impacts of deindustrialization, and generational turnover from those who had experienced the event first-hand all played a part in the decision to commemorate the disaster. During the dedication of the monument, retired UMW district president Bill Marsh addressed some concerns of deindustrialization directly. He criticized the local environmental movement for opposing a planned power plant at Point Aconi. Marsh argued that, without the power plants, further downsizing of the local coal industry was likely (Davis Day memorial 1990). The interconnections between historical memory and present activism become clear in this moment; Marsh called upon the collective memory of the community, reflected in the dedication of the monument, to strengthen local resistance to the processes of industrial decline.

In 1992, the importance of workplace safety and workers' rights was once more thrust into the public sphere. On May 9, a blast tore through the Westray coal mine at Plymouth, Nova Scotia. Eleven bodies were retrieved from the colliery immediately, and by the following week the death toll stood at 26 (McCormick 1999: 13). Teams of draegermen were sent from all areas of Nova Scotia, including Cape Breton, to aid in the rescue efforts (Disaster at Westray Mine 1992).

A disaster at Westray was not unforeseen. Cave-ins were an almost daily occurrence, pressure for miners to increase production was intense, and equipment failures were common. On the day of the explosion, the device used to test for methane gas, the methanometer, was broken (Jobb 1994: 37). Although the UMW made a union drive in early 1991, there were fears that the substandard conditions at the mine would require it to close if it came under union protection. Westray ultimately rejected membership in the UMW (Jobb 1994: 196). In the months after the Westray disaster, an inscription was added to the Sydney Mines miners' memorial. The inscription reads: "Dedicated to the Draegermen from Prince Colliery [at Point Aconi] who demonstrated their bravery at Westray Mine, May 1992." The inscription is followed by a list of 22 local men who had aided in the rescue efforts. This addition links together the events of Westray, the community response, and the importance of continued struggle for workplace safety standards in local industry. The Sydney Mines Miners' Monument now embodies a duality—it recognizes the challenges faced by local miners during work in the collieries, but also

**Fig. 8**  
*Ronald Winston McDonald Memorial, Glace Bay. (Photo by author.)*





the occupational training and professionalism made evident by the draegermen's actions at Westray. The monument is both funerary and celebratory. It highlights the dangers of the industrial workplace, but offers agency to coal miners by representing them as highly skilled professionals.

Each of the above-mentioned labour landmarks commemorates Cape Breton's coal miners collectively, but there are also several monuments dedicated to the experiences of individual workers. In 1984, a commemorative stone was erected just outside the gates of the No. 26 Colliery in Glace Bay (Fig. 8). This stone, a small grey granite marker engraved with the image of a smiling coal miner in the upper left corner, reads:

In loving memory of Ronald Winston McDonald. Born September 22, 1941. Died April 5, 1984 in mine fire in No. 26 Colliery. "God Bless you in a special way. Every hour, every day." Always loved, never forgotten by wife Muriel, sons Howard and Jay.

**Fig. 9**  
McLachlan Monument,  
Glace Bay. (Photo by  
author.)

This marker resembles a gravestone. It memorializes 42-year-old Ronald McDonald, whose

body was never recovered from the mine after a fire broke out underground in 1984. As the fire spread, the decision was made to seal sections of the mine to deny oxygen to the flames (Labour Canada Mine Safety Office 1984).

Although the inscriptions and imagery of the monument specifically refer to the events of April 5, 1983, and the significance of that day for the McDonald family, they also serve as a reminder of the dangers of the coal mining profession well into the 20th century. The No. 26 Colliery never reopened after the fire in 1984. The monument to Ronald McDonald, erected as a memorial to his life and death, thus also symbolizes the decline of the coal mining industry in the community. This monument contains a duality of personal and public meanings; it signifies not only the approximate resting place of McDonald, but also the deindustrialization of Glace Bay because of the mine's subsequent permanent closure. Although the monument is located far from the city centre, its placement outside of the gates to the No. 26 mine indicates a strong connection to the workplace where many men and women in the town found employment. While it is unlikely that this monument, placed on an inconspicuous patch of grass off of "One B" Road, will be stumbled upon by visitors or tourists, for those who know of its existence it holds a great deal of personal and collective importance. To the friends and family of the individual miner, the monument commemorates their personal memories as well as their loss. To other members of the community, the memorial symbolizes the sacrifices of coal miners and their families, the identity of Glace Bay as a coal community, and the end of industry in the town (McNeil 2010: 95; Nugent 1996: 71-72).

Another monument devoted to an individual was erected in Glace Bay on Labour Day, September 7, 1992. It commemorates the life of labour leader J. B. McLachlan with a memorial stone placed at a location known as Campbell's Corner in the middle of town (Fig. 9). The effort to create the monument was undertaken by the McLachlan Commemorative Society and chaired by coal miner Terry McVarish (Glace Bay erects monument to McLachlan 1992). The plans for this monument had begun in 1989, when members of the committee met with representatives of the UMW and the Canadian



Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers to discuss whether a bust, statue or plaque for McLachlan would be most appropriate. The group gathered funds for the monument from individuals, local businesses and labour organizations. Several hundred people turned out for the unveiling ceremony, which included a parade from the Miners' Forum to the site of the memorial where a family picnic was held (Glance Bay 1992).

The McLachlan monument, built from Canadian and European granite by John D. Steele and Sons Ltd., stands eight feet tall. There are four major blocks of inscription on the monument. The first inscription, occupying the left side of the monument facing the street, reads "J.B. McLachlan 1869-1937," and provides a number of biographical details. The final paragraph of this inscription reads:

A powerful speaker, a learned man, a radical, an individual completely committed to the cause of the worker. The epitaph on his gravestone, from the Old Testament reads: "open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy."

Occupying the frontal right of the monument is an inscribed image of McLachlan seated in a chair with his hand on the shoulder of a young boy; below the image is a quotation from McLachlan that reads:

I believe in education for action. I believe in telling children the truth about the history of the world. That it does not consist of the history of kings, or lords, or cabinets. It consists of the history of the mass of the workers, a thing that is not taught in the schools. I believe in telling children how to measure value, a thing that is not taught in any school.

On the reverse of the statue another two inscriptions are present; the first is a piece of verse from early 20th-century Cape Breton writer Dawn Fraser, who often wrote of the local labour struggles. The poem is titled "Away False Teachings of My Youth," and it reads:

Away, false teachings of my youth,  
It's now a crime to speak the truth;  
This man of law has so decreed  
That it's a base and foul deed  
Well meriting the dungeon cell  
For anyone to boldly tell.  
Yes it's a crime for me or you  
To state a thing we know is true.

Three more stanzas of the poem are also included, all referring to the events of October 1923, when McLachlan was charged with seditious libel for his authorship of a letter calling for the removal of federal troops and provincial police from a steelworkers' strike in Sydney (Frank 1999: 330; Fraser 1992 [1926]: 40). On October 31, 1923, McLachlan was sentenced to two years in Dorchester Penitentiary (Frank 1999: 320-21). The final inscription on the rear of the monument reads: "The J.B. McLachlan Society wishes to thank the following contributors" and includes a list of individuals and businesses that donated to fund the monument.

The McLachlan monument succinctly ties the historical labour struggle in Cape Breton to the modern concepts of social justice and workers' rights. Two days before the unveiling of the monument, one commentator in the *Cape Breton Post* wrote:

It is tempting to conclude that with so many battles won on pay and working conditions and the dignity of workers, the days of J.B. McLachlan have truly faded into history. But then Westray blows up, undermining all assumptions about how far the coal mining industry has come and how secure the gains really are. (Glance Bay 1992)

The disaster at Westray, which occurred just a few months before the unveiling of the McLachlan Monument, highlighted the importance of these themes and imbued the McLachlan Monument with another layer of contemporary significance; the deaths of 26 workers proved the modern relevance of workers' struggles. At the dedication ceremony Eddie MacNeil, president of the Cape Breton Building Trades Council, referenced the Westray disaster and the importance of union membership. He argued that the labour movement has much to learn from the example of McLachlan and must turn its attention toward matters of education, women's issues, homelessness and the environment. Gerald Yetman, a former Canadian Union of Public Employees representative and former president of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, echoed these arguments by asserting that the labour movement has become too accommodating: "We may have gotten too far away from J.B. McLachlan," he said (McLachlan monument dedicated 1992). Again, this speech reflects how union members



and workers in Cape Breton use these sites of memory as spaces of resistance. Yetman and McNeil both called for renewed labour activism and struggle against the forces of deindustrialization; the dedication of a labour landmark offered the opportunity to highlight the successes of past agitation and the importance of industrial work for local and regional identity.

The importance of all workers, past and present, is also symbolized by the inscribed quotation on the McLachlan monument that describes the value of the working class in historical narratives. An editorial in the *Chronicle Herald* argued that McLachlan “remains a symbol of the dignity, the majesty, and the strength of all who are the workers in our midst” (Disaster at Westray Mine 1992). In this way, the marker extends its meaning from the memorialization of an individual to the collective empowerment of an entire group. This monument is a reassertion of the same values that McLachlan attempted to instill in society during his own lifetime. The inclusion of his story in the tapestry of collective memory in Glace Bay ensures that these themes are remembered as that community completes its transformation into a post-industrial society.

Workers in the Cape Breton steel industry also began to commemorate their history during the 1980s. In 1986, the Steelworkers’ Memorial Monument was established outside of the USWA

Local 1064 union hall on Prince Street, although it was later moved to the site of the former plant. This monument includes the names of 308 steelworkers who had been killed at the Sydney steel plant during the 20th century. Temporally, this monument fits into the wave of commemorations that swept industrial Cape Breton during the decade. It is also another example of localization. As workers in the mining communities erected monuments to their history, steelworkers in Sydney wanted to commemorate their own occupational memory as well (MacKinnon 2013b).

While the Steelworkers’ Memorial Monument explicitly memorializes the sacrifices of steelworkers in Sydney, another monument presents a more general narrative of the role of steelmaking in the community. In 1995, on the corner of Ashby and Victoria Roads, Mayor Vince MacLean presided over the dedication of a memorial monument and plaque dedicated to the city’s steelworkers. This monument is composed of two sections: the first is a discarded steel ladle from the plant (Fig. 10), and the second is a plaque inscribed with a dedication. The ladle, grey and resting on a painted blue frame, stands at over 3 metres tall. The plaque at the front of the ladle reads:

Steel has been Sydney’s major industry since 1899. Men and women from all over the world, followed by their children and grandchildren,

**Fig. 10**  
*Steel Ladle Monument, Sydney. (Photo by author.)*





**Fig. 11**  
*Moving the Ladle,  
Sydney. (Photo by  
author.)*

worked at the Sydney Steel Plant. Their rich and varied experiences included work which was often hot and dangerous, but always full of comradeship [sic]. The Steelworkers' culture of work is based not only in the work place, but also in the ethnically diverse communities of Cape Breton and in their class struggle for equity and justice throughout the industry's history in Sydney. Sydney's steelworkers have made significant contributions to innovation in the industry, to their communities and to the North American labour movement – Dedicated, Vincent J. MacLean, Mayor of Sydney, 1995.

The original location of the monument, Ashby Corner, was the dividing line between two of the city's working-class neighbourhoods—Ashby and Whitney Pier. The same park contained a local war memorial. The juxtaposition of a monument to Sydney's war dead with a memorial to its workers indicates the bottom-up orientation of historical memory in the city, which is also indicated by the 1986 steelworkers' monument. With the framing of these monuments in the same community space, the city implicitly placed equal value on both of these groups. The steel ladle monument represents the industrial culture of the community, and it also links ethnicity and class-consciousness to the geography of working-class neighbourhoods

in the city. Like the Steelworkers' Memorial Monument, the steel ladle and plaque are an attempt to enshrine the collective occupational memory of Sydney's steelworkers within the collective narrative of the city's history.

The malleability of commemorative narratives became even more explicit on July 4, 2013, when the steel ladle monument was moved from Ashby Corner to a new location near the site of the former plant (Fig. 11). The monument now sits at the entrance to the Open Hearth Park, which is a green space that was developed on the site of the former steel plant. The park officially opened on Labour Day Weekend, 2013, and includes a bike trail, a sports field, a concert venue and walking trails. Henry Glassie writes that vestiges of working-class material culture are contextually driven; it is necessary to consider the shifts in meaning that can occur when these objects are removed from their intended use and framed through the experiences of the viewer (Glassie 1999: 41-45). When the steel ladle was initially removed from its function within the plant and placed at the intersection of two working-class communities, it commemorated the everyday experiences of working-class people in an industrial city.

The current location, at the entrance to a community greenspace on the site of the former workplace, holds a different set of meanings. Community members who have been involved in the development of the park sometimes hold contrasting views of the site's meaning. Donnie Burke, the Project Director for the Sydney Tar Ponds Agency, writes that the new location for the ladle "presents a more prominent area for public display" and "brings this piece of steelmaking heritage closer to its original home" (See you ladle 2013). Others have taken a more forward-looking position; Keith MacDonald of the Cape Breton Partnership asserts that the site "[showcases] Sydney as a great and green place to live, work and do business.... It will further encourage various forms of local economic development, ranging from tourism opportunities to commercial development" (Sydney Tar Ponds Agency 2013). Such a re-positioning of working-class heritage within a framework of economic development and tourism has been critiqued by labour historian Lucy Taksa; she writes:

Such "rescue operations" have important collateral effects. Not only do they celebrate manual labour and aestheticize the labour process in ways that deny its inherently conflictual nature, they also fabricate new environments, which "can be seen as the epicentre of a whole new cycle of capitalist development" ... a re-colonizing of what were previously industrial spaces. (2003: 406)

Whether such a re-conceptualization is occurring in Sydney is unclear. Although the park uses the language and imagery of the industrial past in a firmly post-industrial setting, other labour landmarks in the city and the region continue to draw attention to residual cultures of work and to challenge the impacts of deindustrialization.

The continued importance of workers to the city's identity is reinforced by another monument in the city's downtown. In August 1985, the City of Sydney celebrated a Salute to Labour Week. This celebratory week was organized to coincide with the city's bicentennial celebrations and culminated with the dedication of a labour landmark and small memorial park on Bentinck Street in downtown Sydney. The bicentennial celebrations are interesting because, although these were not specifically labour celebrations, the

importance of the industrial past was nonetheless highlighted.

The monument, a grey granite block, contains an inscription commemorating the city's tradition of labour and an image of two working people. The memorial reads:

Sydney Memorial Labour Park. Erected in recognition of the working men and women of Sydney who played such a vital role in the founding and growth of our city. This park was developed by the Sydney Bicentennial Labour Committee and Dedicated August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1985.

At the dedication, Gerard Docquier, the National Director of the United Steelworkers of America, called the park "a memorial to the men and women who have built not only a city but a region that has established the industrial structure of Canada as we know it today" (Sydney labour park opens 1985).

This labour landmark commemorates the value of unionism and workers' organizations in Sydney throughout the 20th century. The decision to erect this monument during the city's bicentennial also has symbolic value; it cements the stories and experiences of workers and their families into the community identity of the City of Sydney. This coincided with the emergence, during the 1980s, of a number of distinct narratives regarding the industrial past of the steel plant in Sydney. Many of the environmental and public health problems that resulted from a century of steelmaking were becoming known, which in some ways threatened the established narrative of the steel plant as the economic backbone of the community. This monument represents a re-affirmation of the importance of the steelmaking industry for the city.

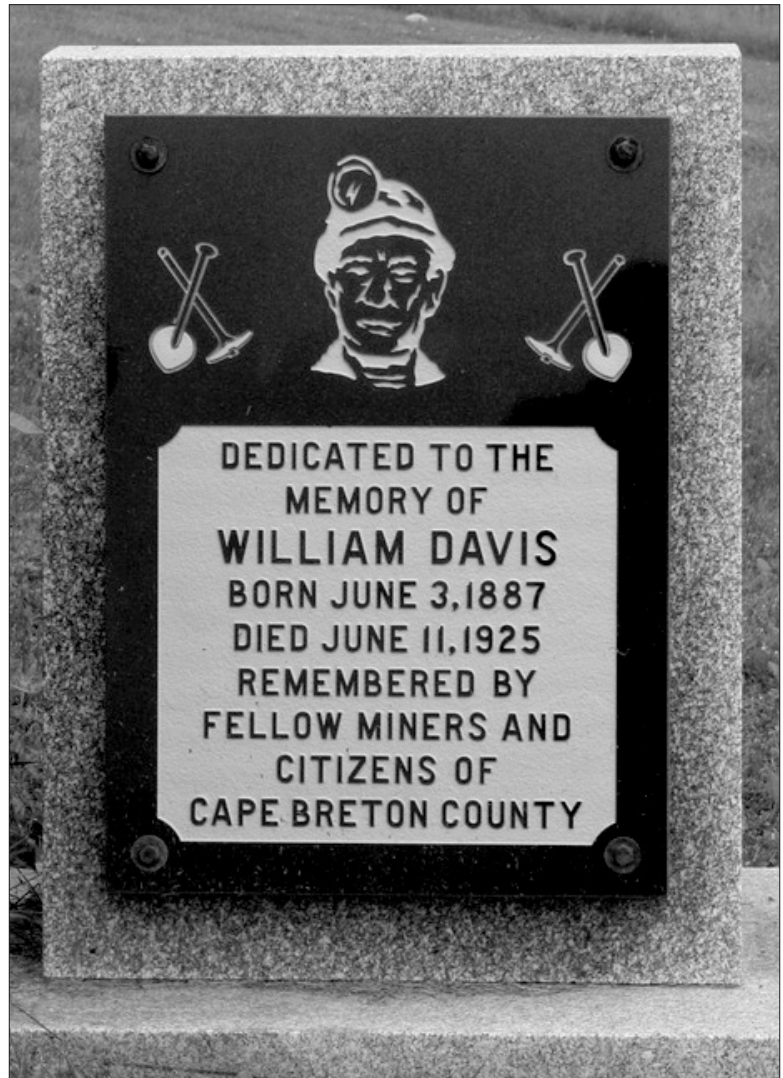
In recognizing the contributions of "the working men and women" of Sydney, this labour landmark sought to incorporate many different narratives of the industrial past into the community's collective memory. Also, this is one of the few labour landmarks in industrial Cape Breton that explicitly refers to the experiences of women as workers. For these reasons, the memorial retains much of its original meaning despite the loss of the steel industry in Sydney and the decline of the coal industry throughout industrial Cape Breton. In 2008, the monument



was moved from its original location on Bentinck Street to the newly renovated Wentworth Park in another area of the city's downtown, reaffirming the importance of workers in post-industrial Sydney.

After the mid-1990s, there were few labour monuments erected in industrial Cape Breton until the late 2000s. This decline in the frequency of workers' commemorations coincides with final decline of industry in the area; the steel plant was closed in 2001 and the coal mines had also halted most production by this time. Does this indicate a shift away from interest in the industrial legacy? Perhaps, as in the period between 1930 and 1960, this was a time in which workers and their families devoted energy to rallying for their own futures, rather than erecting commemorations to the past. It is also possible that the wave of commemorations of the 1980s and 1990s had run its course. As a result of the localization and specification of historical memory, most communities in industrial Cape Breton already possessed labour landmarks devoted to their workers and industries. Many specific events, such as the 1917 explosion in New Waterford or the Princess Colliery Disaster Monument in Sydney Mines, were also already commemorated. Nonetheless, there was an expansion in commemorative efforts by the end of the 2000s, although only two of the four monuments erected between 2008 and 2011, a fishermen's memorial in Port Morien and another stone dedicated to William Davis in Colliery Lands Park (Fig. 12), explicitly mention workers.

On September 6, 2008, local working-class sports hero and former coal miner Johnny Miles was commemorated with a life-sized statue and plaque outside Jubilee Elementary School in Sydney Mines. Miles, who grew up in the nearby community of Florence, had won the Boston marathon twice (1926 and 1929), and was inducted into the Order of Canada for his accomplishments in 1983. He passed away in 2003. Nearly 200 people attended the unveiling of the monument and witnessed the release of 14 white doves, which symbolized the number that Miles wore on his jersey when he ran. The plaque reads: "Johnny Miles, 1906-2003. Winner, Boston Marathon 1926 & 1929. 1926 World Record 2:25:40:4. 'Our Champion Running the Rails' Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia, September 5, 2008.



Artist – Doug Bamford.” Behind the plaque, Miles’s statue stands, in mid-stride, on top of a steel rail. Halifax artist Doug Bamford explains the symbolism in these terms: “The column that the statue is perched upon is made from railroad rails that were rolled at the Sydney rolling mill. In the winter Johnny would run on the trolley tracks because they were the only tracks that were cleared in the winter” (“Miles’ monument in Sydney Mines” 2008). Although the monument does not specifically mention Miles’s association with industry in Cape Breton, he began work in the Princess Colliery at the age of eleven while his father was away in the First World War. His first job, cleaning and preparing miners’ lamps, provided Miles with a lifelong appreciation and affinity for the workers of Cape Breton.

**Fig. 12**  
*Colliery Lands Park  
David Memorial  
Monument, New  
Waterford. (Photo by  
author.)*



**Fig. 13**  
*Melting Pot Monument,  
 Whitney Pier. (Photo by  
 author.)*



When his father returned from the war in 1919, Miles was able to quit his job in the mine and return to his studies. It was at this time that he began his interest in sports; he took up boxing and rugby while attending high school. It was not until 1922 that he took up competitive running (Williston 1990: 16). In an interview with historian David Frank, Miles describes speaking to older miners in his community about his plans to stop working in the mines. According to Miles, “they said no, [he’ll] never get out of the mine, once a young man gets into the mine he never gets out. This is it” (Miles, interview, May 15, 1975).

On April 20, 1926, the headline of the *Sydney Daily Post* read “John Miles Breaks World Record At Boston.” Miles defeated Finnish marathoner Albin Stenroos, an Olympic champion, to shave nearly four minutes off the previous world record

(Williston 1990: 33). When Miles stepped off the train in Sydney Mines one week later, “the uproar was let loose. Whistles blew, autos tooted, and the fire engine’s siren was kept going continuously. The din was terrific” (Miles returns to Sydney 1926). Miles repeated the feat in 1929, winning the Boston Marathon again in spite of American newspaper assertions that he was a “flash in the pan” (“Miles wins in Boston” 1929). Although Miles later moved to Hamilton, upon a visit to Sydney Mines in 1983 he spoke to a number of people who still remembered the story of the young miner who beat all the odds to win the Boston Marathon. One man who spoke with Miles exclaimed, “Sure I remember you.... You’ll never be forgot down here” (Williston 1990: 102). The success of a young man from a working-class background, a man who had spent time working in the local mines and went on to win the Boston Marathon, has been a source of pride for the citizens of Florence and Sydney Mines for nearly a century.

One of the other commemorations from the 2000s, a monument in Whitney Pier devoted to diversity within the community was erected in Whitney Pier in 2010. The Whitney Pier Melting Pot monument, designed by local artist Cyril Hearn, was placed outside the local fire station on Victoria Road, just blocks away from the former Sydney steel plant (Fig. 13). Although it does not directly address the experience of workers and their families, it pays homage to the culturally diverse community that they helped to build. The monument is composed of a steel base, which is an actual melting pot left over from the Sydney steel plant, with twenty-three flags protruding at the top. The topmost three flags are, in order, the Canadian flag, the flag of Nova Scotia, and an unofficial flag of Cape Breton Island. The remaining flags include those of France, Italy, Newfoundland, Russia, Spain and the United Kingdom, among others. The flags are meant to symbolize the diversity of Whitney Pier, which emerged when workers from many of these nations immigrated to Canada to find work at the steel plant in Sydney. This link to the local industrial past is established by the combination of these flags with an actual relic of steelmaking, the melting pot. The erection of this monument corresponds with an effort, spearheaded by the Whitney Pier Historical

Society, to have the neighbourhood designated as a National Historic Site by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. This effort began in 2008, when a number of community members put together an application for historic site designation on the grounds of the area's early history of multiculturalism (Whitney Pier melting pot 2008).

The newest labour landmark that has been identified is a monument devoted to those who worked in the fishing industry in Port Morien. Members of the Port Morien Development Association erected the monument on August 3, 2011, overlooking Morien Bay (Port Morien fishers commemorated 2011). The Fishermen's Monument consists of a stone cairn with a granite plaque on the front; the plaque reads:

Since the time of the Mi'kmaq, fishing has sustained the economy of Port Morien and area. This plaque honours the men and women who have dedicated their lives to the industry, and to the culture and economy of the communities that surround Morien Bay.

The monument stands next to a small park, complete with benches and green space, which provides a scenic view of the harbour. Also included in this park are a number of ornamental buoys and carved wooden statues of fishermen.

This monument can also be explained as the result of the localization and specification of historical memory. Fishing has been a major part of the Port Morien economy since the 1850s. Lobster fishing and cannery operations were a major employer in the area during the early 20th century and by the 1960s the Acadia Products lobster factory was the major employer in the town. The coal industry in Port Morien had declined during the 1950s (MacDonald 1995: 51). In 2005, the Port Morien Development Association received funds from the Atlantic Canadian Opportunities Agency for the purposes of town beautification. This project included an extension of the local boardwalk, improvements to the beach and village square, and the erection of the fishermen's memorial (Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency 2005). Although the monument was not erected until 2011, many of these other projects have already been completed within the community. This is the only monument dedicated to the fishery that has been identified in industrial Cape Breton,

although it was also an important industry to several other communities on the island. The Acadian community of Cheticamp, for example, also houses a monument to those employed in the fishing industry.

## Conclusion

This overview of labour landmarks in the commemorative landscape of industrial Cape Breton provides insight into how workers, labour organizations and other community groups have represented workers' experiences of local industry. The commemoration and memorialization of these experiences represents an attempt to insert workers' collective memory into the historical narrative of their communities. The primacy of the coal and steel industries in the commemorative landscape indicates the importance of these industries for workers in industrial Cape Breton and their contributions to the local economy. Two monuments erected before 1931, the 1922 Miners' Memorial Monument in New Waterford and the 1930 Port Morien coal monument, sought to respectively promote the contributions of workers and present a progressive narrative of Canadian identity that included the economic and social realities of regions considered "peripheral" by central Canadian interests.

A cultural shift that began in the 1960s was spurred by changing conceptualizations of Canadian identity, increased interest in regional and local history, a labour movement that had achieved significant gains, and local initiatives such as the 1967 Glace Bay Miners' Museum and the 1969 Sydney Mines Miners' Memorial. Each of these factors helped influence the perception that workers' history was valuable and deserved recognition. Despite these early efforts, the commemorative landscape began its period of expansion only during the decline of the two major industries on the island.

Monuments devoted to the memory of industry, and the general experiences of industrial workers, had been erected in nearly every community in industrial Cape Breton by the end of the 1980s. A number of individual commemorations were also erected in the decade, including the Ronald McDonald memorial in Glace Bay, and monuments to William Davis

and Earl Leadbeater in New Waterford. These individual commemorations often embody a symbolic duality; the meanings that they present are both deeply personal and strikingly collective. These additions to the commemorative landscape are also symptomatic of increased localization and specification of local collective memory. This proliferation of labour landmarks during the 1980s might also be attributed to the general decline of industry in Cape Breton during the late 20th century. Workers and their organizations feared that their occupational experiences and the history of working-class struggle in Cape Breton would be overlooked as the island transitioned into the post-industrial era.

Communities in industrial Cape Breton continued to commemorate workers' experiences during the 1990s. Two of the three labour landmarks established in the decade, the McLachlan monument in Glace Bay and the Princess Colliery Disaster Monument in Sydney Mines, commemorate specific events and people. The third monument of the decade, the steel ladle monument in Sydney, reflects the importance of the Sydney steel plant to local identity. None of these monuments makes reference to the contributions of workers in communities other than those in which they were erected. Their specificity is a far cry from the 1969 UMW monument in Sydney Mines, which "honored departed members" of the Cape Breton coal industry in general.

The noticeable slackening of commemorative efforts between 1995 and 2008 corresponds with the end of industry in Cape Breton. As mentioned, this could be the result of several factors. Without the coal and steel industries, many local workers emigrated to other areas in search of employment. Former coal miners and steelworkers, who otherwise might have taken part in commemorative efforts, focused on their own uncertain futures. Aside from the effects of deindustrialization, many communities in

industrial Cape Breton had already established monuments to the public memory of their workers by the turn of the century. These monuments, both general and individual, memorialize a wide scope of workers' experiences. It is for this reason that the monuments erected at the end of the 2000s, the Johnny Miles monument in Sydney Mines, the Melting Pot Monument in Whitney Pier, and the Fishermen's Monument in Port Morien, are focused explicitly on "the local." The Johnny Miles Monument commemorates the actions and successes of an individual, albeit one who has deep ties to working-class culture, while the monument in Whitney Pier pays homage to the multicultural neighbourhood that resulted from a century of steelmaking.

The most recent labour landmark, the Fishermen's Monument in Port Morien, recognizes an occupation that had been overlooked in the commemorative landscape in industrial Cape Breton. Although it specifically memorializes the fishers of Morien Bay, it seeks to enshrine the collective memory of another occupation into a commemorative landscape that has heavily favoured the coal and steel industries. Perhaps as these communities transition into post-industrialism, we will once again witness a broadening of the commemorative landscape. Indeed, the role of women in these industrial communities is one that deserves recognition and, to this point, has been largely ignored in commemorative efforts. Such a broadening of scope in the focus of labour landmarks would reveal alternative readings of local history, present the experiences of underrepresented and marginalized groups within the labour movement, and offer agency to those stories that have been left out of traditional markers. In this way, local historians, workers and community organizations can attempt to influence the collective memory of their region with a forward-looking, representative vision of workers' place in Cape Breton's formerly industrial communities.

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