June Walker Crandall (1878-1910)

June Walker Crandall was born on December 1, 1878, in Richmond, Madison County, Kentucky, the fifth of Jerome Bonepart and Juliana (Rice) Crandall's eight children.

June Crandall had little, if any, formal schooling. He was largely self-taught. His *Pantagraph* obituary stated that he was "a student of economics and devoted all his **leisure** time to enlarging his own information on the questions of the day. With few advantages of early education, he **acquired** his information by his own efforts while following his daily **toil** in one of the hardest kinds of labor."

In 1896, Crandall moved to Atlanta, Illinois and worked for the Atlanta Coal Mining Company. Sometime in early 1898, he made his way to Bloomington. He looked for mining work and signed on with the McLean County Coal Company, his employer for the next 12 years.

Shortly after his arrival in Bloomington, Crandall met Mary Carlson and they were married in her parents' home in Bloomington, on December 10, 1898. June and Mary had one child, a daughter they named Beulah, on July 4, 1899.

The Crandall's lived at several addresses during their life in Bloomington. All of the Crandall residences were on Bloomington's West Side, not far from Crandall's employer, the McLean County Coal Company, (which was located just north of West Washington Street and near the Chicago and Alton Railroad mainline).

The McLean County Coal Company operated from 1867 to 1929. The company generated 700 tons of coal per day, accounting for nearly 70% of the coal shipped out of the county. Coal was the principal way to heat homes, create steam for locomotives, and operate industrial plants. The company employed roughly 350 people at any given time during its operation.

Work in coal mines, in the latter 19th and early 20th Century, was a dark, dirty, and a dangerous operation. Ten-to-16-hour workdays were the norm, with men being expected to work six or seven days per week. And in an age when no **child-labor laws** existed, young boys could often be found working in coal mines.

Miners worked in cramped, dimly lit spaces several hundred feet below the ground, used crude hand tools—such as pickaxes and shovels—and worked under the constant, but far from unreasonable, fear of cave-ins, fires, and the **asphyxiating** "black damp." And any accident meant time off work without pay, not to mention the risk of serious injury or death. At least 20 fatal incidents occurred in McLean County mines between 1883 to 1909. Miners did not receive a set wage, rather they were paid based on the coal they produced. In 1893, for example, miners at the Mclean County Coal Company received between $1.50 to $2.25 per day (which would be between $416.00 and $616.00 in 2022).

The long-term effects of mining were, perhaps, of greater concern. Poor **ventilation**, combined with the mine's incessant belching of coal dust and toxic gases, made for not only unpleasant working conditions but **chronic respiratory ailments** and, as a result, shortened lives.

Workers at the McLean County Coal Company organized the Bloomington Miners Union, which eventually became the **United Mine Workers of America** (UMWA) Local #753. Crandall became active in the local **union** almost immediately after his arrival in Bloomington, and was elected to various leadership roles. He was not only an avid supporter of his union, and a tireless worker for the people it represented, but he saw the importance of spotlighting their accomplishments by volunteering to organize annual celebrations of Labor Day and labor's achievement of the eight-hour workday.

Crandall ran but never succeeded in being elected to a public office. He ran as a **socialist**. He evidently had no **qualms** about placing himself, over and over again, on the altar of public scrutiny. In 1903, he ran for Bloomington city treasurer. In 1905, 1907, and 1909, he ran for mayor of Bloomington. In 1906 he entered the race for Illinois state representative and, two years later, for Illinois state senator. He never received more than a handful of votes in his various races. In his bid for the house and the senate, he received 1.1% and 1.3% of the vote, respectively. Undeterred, he pursued office until the bitter end. He threw his hat in the ring for McLean County Clerk but died before the primary election.

In April 1910 the McLean County Coal Company closed its shafts temporarily. Crandall was able to find work at the Bloomington Water Works and worked there the entire summer. However, on August 29 of that year, at the age 31, his life ended tragically in a **preventable** accident. On that fateful day he was one of four men working to **fortify** a wall in a 13-foot-deep hole. At about 4:00 p.m., the four men were building supports near the coal sheds. Crandall and his gang were caught by a "caving bank" of dirt. His three colleagues escaped with minor injuries, but Crandall was "crushed about the chest" by the "falling mass of earth" and had to be extracted, unconscious, from several tons of dirt. Witnesses testified at the **coroner's inquest** that, before the collapse, Crandall had shouted "look out" to warn the others, and they managed to dodge the wall of dirt. He was not so fortunate. Crandall had just enough time to turn away from the massive wall of dirt and it hit his back, bending him over. Doctors were summoned and Crandall was transported to Brokaw Hospital "in the city ambulance." It was reported that "skilled physicians and medical science" did everything they could "in his behalf," but he was pronounced dead several hours later, having never regained consciousness.

Following a brief service in his home, Crandall's formal funeral was held at the Park Methodist Episcopal Church on the afternoon of September 1, 1910. The service was, **predictably**, well attended. The organizations of which he was a proud member –UMWA Local #753, the **Improved Order of Red Men** (a fraternal organization comprised of descendants of the **Sons of Liberty**), and the **Knights of the Maccabees** (a fraternal benefit organization)— were represented and provided pall bearers. June Crandall was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.

The celebration of his life did not end with his funeral. Frank Albert Walker of Normal (writer and fellow **Temperance** advocate), offered a **poignant eulogy** in the form of a poem entitled "Fulfillment," which was published in *The Pantagraph* newspaper. Several newspaper articles honored him, describing him as a self-made man, natural leader, well-balanced in temperament, intelligent, sound in reasoning and judgment, fair minded, an exemplary citizen, and fiscally conservative.

June's wife, Mary, and their daughter, Beulah, continued to live in their home on West Grove Street after his death. Mary outlived her husband by nearly a half century, passing away on August 16, 1958, at age 79, having never remarried. She is **interred** with her husband at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.