We’re developing a series of community-created public monuments within the rural Appalachian landscape that memorialize a history that was explicitly removed from educational curricula and that rarely appeared in history books. Why was this dramatic story suppressed? Because it was critical lived example of the power of cross-racial, multi-ethnic solidarity. 

— Shaun Slifer, Lead Designer, Courage in the Hollers

poster for first community planning meeting, design: Shaun Slifer

Monument site: George Buckley Community Center, Marmet, West Virginia, marquee outside our first community meeting, February 11, 2022.

photo: Shaun Slifer

Monument site: United Mine Workers (UMWA) Local 2995 union meeting hall, Clothier, West Virginia

photo: Shaun Slifer
Wilma Steele, founding board member of West Virginia Mine Wars Museum, chats with Mark Totten, director of Chesapeake & Ohio Railway Historical Society at first community meeting in Marmet, WV
photo: Shaun Slifer

Historian Chuck Keeney chats with team member Bobby Starnes and community members Lou Anne Bolyand & Marty Bolyand at our first community meeting in Clothier, WV
photo: Ric McDowell

Barbara Ellen Smith, West Virginia Mine Wars Museum board member, helps with brainstorming activities at a community meeting in Clothier, WV
photo: Ric McDowell

Slideshow + discussion of global examples of monuments with team members at first community meeting in Marmet, WV
photo: Shaun Slifer

Community meeting schedule poster for both communities. These were distributed to homes and businesses around both towns.
design: Shaun Slifer

First Community Meetings: Listening + Building Trust
February, 2022
Mackenzie New-Walker, team leader and director of West Virginia Mine Wars Museum, leads a community brainstorming meeting on monument content in Marmet, WV.

Community members contribute and review results of brainstorming activity in Marmet, WV.

Historian Paul Rakes (above) and other community members review a historical educational handout prepared by team member Kyle Warmack at a community meeting in Marmet, WV.

February - April, 2022

Lead designer Shaun Slifer, creative director at West Virginia Mine Wars Museum, logs group “shout-outs” during monument content brainstorming meeting at Clothier, WV.

Community Process: Content
Mackenzie New-Walker, team leader + director of West Virginia Mine Wars Museum, walks through potential monument sites with community members in Marmet, WV.

Lead designer Shaun Slifer, creative director at West Virginia Mine Wars Museum, presents phase two monument designs at community meeting in Marmet, WV.

Phase 2 design proposals for Marmet + Clothsier, WV. These were distributed at each meeting and produced as large posters on which feedback was documented.

design: Shaun Slifer

April - June, 2022

Community Process: Design
Several community members volunteered to take part in a costumed photo shoot, using actual artifacts from the era + other elements, as the first step in creating silhouettes of characters that would eventually be cut from COR-TEN weathering steel for the final monuments.

Photo shoots were organized for both towns in mid-June, 2022. Photos: Mackenzie New-Walker + Shaun Slifer.
Laser-cutting of steel silhouettes and other elements was contracted to a union steel shop in Pittsburgh, with joinery and structural fabrication work done by public artist Ben Grubb.

Clothier community members Greg & Kate Butcher in design process from costumed photo, to vector outline, to laser-cut COR-TEN weathering steel.
Public Unveiling Events

Labor Day Weekend, September, 2022

Hundreds attended the unveiling events on September 3 in Clothier, WV and September 5 in Marmet, WV. Speakers at the events included UMWA President Cecil Roberts, and (middle column, top to bottom) team members Mackenzie New Walker + Shaun Stiffler of the West Virginia Mine War Museum, community member and teacher Myla Davis, and team member Brian Lacy, Vice President of UMWA District 17.

Cake baked by community member Myla Davis for Clothier unveiling event.

Photos: Dylan Vidovich
Community members and installed monument in Marmet, WV
photos: Stef Bernal-Martinez + Dylan Vidovich

The Monuments:

Marmet, West Virginia
Community members and installed monument in Clothier, WV
photos: Dylan Vidovich + Ben Grubb

The Monuments:
Clothier, West Virginia
Before *Courage in the Hollers*, only one historical marker existed in the landscape, at a remote location on the side of the highway at the base of Blair Mountain. It has gone missing many times over the years.

*Courage in the Hollers* brings three new interpretive panels each to two locations, telling the story of the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain and the struggles that led to it within the landscape in which it happened. This work happened in collaboration with historians, artists, organizers, and, critically, the people who live there now.

Roadside wayfinding signs were installed in both locations.

Community members and installed interpretive signage in Clothier + Marmet, WV
photo: Dylan Vidovich + Shaun Slifer

Public artist Ben Grubb regards the only state-sanctioned public historical marker for the Battle of Blair Mountain.
photo: Shaun Slifer

Roadside wayfinding signs were installed in both locations.
photo: Jeff Bernal-Martinez

*Courage in the Hollers* mapping the miners’ struggle for a union
A PROJECT OF THE WEST VIRGINIA MINE WAR MUSEUM