

# Michigan Every Day

By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberly

Sept. 10, 1913

## *“Big Annie” Clemenc arrested in Calumet*

Ana Clemenc, over 6-feet tall and a striking-looking woman, was the heart and soul of a long miner’s strike in Calumet. Clemenc, married to a miner, supported the workers after most joined the Western Federation of Miners who went on strike for better wages and working conditions in 1913. She carried an enormous flag, leading daily parades held by the miners.

While strikers used violence to prevent strikebreakers from entering the mines, Clemenc used speeches and persuasion, urging workers to honor the picket lines. Clemenc and other sympathizers, however, were known to snatch the lunch pails of workers heading into the mines or brush them with a broom that had been dipped in sewage. Although Clemenc watched the stream of men file into the mines, at times she was able to persuade a few to turn back. This led to confrontations with strikebreakers hired by the mining companies. There are various accounts of numerous police arrests of Clemenc.

One incident occurred when she successfully stopped a man from entering the mines. She was ordered off the street by police. Her response: “No, I’m not going. I have a right to stand here and quietly ask the scabs not to work.”

Several officers then grabbed her as she resisted and forced her into a car that took her directly to jail. She was convicted of assault and was sentenced to pay a fine and spend time in jail. Clemenc became nationally famous after a confrontation in Calumet between police and a union parade when soldiers and strikers fought. Clemenc draped herself in an American flag, taunting the soldiers to harm her. Newspapers around the country began to follow the exploits of “Big Annie.” Clemenc also helped organize a Christmas pageant that year. She and

other women realized the holiday was bound to be gloomy for families of the striking miners.

This event turned tragic and is the subject of the Dec. 24 entry. After the strike and following her jail sentences, Clemenc divorced her husband and married one of the newspapermen who had come to Calumet to cover the strike. She moved to Chicago and had a daughter. She died in 1956.