

Salmon Lake Wobblies

On August 2nd the mill's multinational owner locked more than 30 union employees of a talc mill near Tree Forks out of their jobs. The lockout has attracted attention since then as politicians have visited the picket line.

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) union has a long and storied presence in Montana as far back as 1907 when the lumber workers went on strike. In 1909 they were involved in the Missoula free speech fight. Beginning in 1912 they were often referred to as "Wobbly." The IWW often gets credit for causing the eight-hour workday. Lumber strikes in 1919 on river drives won clean bedding for them.

Historically, a Wobbly influence has been on Salmon Lake. One of the first pioneers on Salmon Lake was "Sourdough" Dave Madson, an early day logger who worked in the logging camps in the Blackfoot Valley. Some say he was a renegade. Some people called him an agitator during the days of the I.W.W. -- "the I Won't Work" days. But he may have come into the Blackfoot call shortly after the 1918 Wobbly Massacre in Milltown. Read about it at http://missoulia.com/news/local/story-of-wobbly-massacre-in-milltown-in-wwi-bears-scrutiny/article_f0eb7da9-484d-519b-a7d9-02ca4d8a8712.html

Dave finally was "black-balled" at the area lumber camps. It has been speculated that perhaps the owners of the logging company gave the island to Dave as a way to get him out of their hair. Others say he just wanted to live where people wouldn't bother him. The Fish and Game Department had attempted to rid the lake of "trash" fish and put Dave in charge of netting squawfish by dozens. Dave had no qualms about using the heap of fish at his back door to supplement his diet. He spent most of his days hunting and fishing near his cabins on the island, frequently inviting a close friend for a bowl of fish stew.

His cabin now serves as the pump house for the Montana Island Lodge.

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