



# The Sons of Molly Maguire: The Irish Roots of America's First Labor War

*Mark Bulik*

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**A gripping history that peels away layers of myth and misinformation surrounding the "Mollies" to cast brilliant new light on one of the nation's longest and most murderous industrial conflicts**

Sensational tales of true-life crime, the devastation of the Irish potato famine, the upheaval of the Civil War, and the turbulent emergence of the American labor movement are connected in a captivating exploration of the roots of the Molly Maguires. A secret society of peasant assassins in Ireland that re-emerged in Pennsylvania's hard-coal region, **the Mollies organized strikes, murdered mine bosses, and fought the Civil War draft**. Their shadowy twelve-year duel with all powerful coal companies marked the beginning of class warfare in America. But little has been written about the origins of this struggle and the folk culture that informed everything about the Mollies.

**A rare book about the birth of the secret society**, *The Sons of Molly Maguire* delves into the lost world of peasant Ireland to uncover the astonishing links between the folk justice of the Mollies and the folk drama of the Mummerys, who performed a holiday play that always ended in a mock killing. The link not only explains much about Ireland's Molly Maguires where the name came from, why the killers wore women's clothing, why they struck around holidays but also sheds new light on the Mollies' re-emergence in Pennsylvania.

The book follows the Irish to the anthracite region, which was transformed into another Ulster by ethnic, religious, political, and economic conflicts. It charts the rise there of an Irish secret society and a particularly political form of Mummery just before the Civil War, shows why Molly violence was resurrected amid wartime strikes and conscription, and explores how the cradle of the American Mollies became a bastion of later labor activism. Combining sweeping history with an intensely local focus, *The Sons of Molly Maguire* is **the captivating story of when, where, how, and why the first of America's labor wars began**.

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