yellow fever epidemic. Attempting to recover from this tragedy, Jones eventually found her calling in the labor movement. She took a particular interest in miners, embracing their issues, which focused on a living wage and safer working conditions. She traveled the country to encourage their militancy, lived with them in shanty towns, and offered aid and comfort to their families. Everywhere she went, people knew her as the “Miners’ Angel” and began to call her Mother Jones. Coal company owners found her unstoppable. Denounced on the floor of the U.S. Senate as the “grandmother of all agitators,” she responded that she “hoped to live to become the great-grandmother of agitators.”

Mother Jones led strikes in coalfields from West Virginia to Colorado; she also joined striking garment workers, steelworkers, and railroad workers in their labor actions. She worked many years as a paid organizer for the United Mine Workers Union, helped to found the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and was a lecturer for the Socialist Party of America. She led a group of women armed with mops and brooms to rout strikebreakers in the Pennsylvania coalfields. She also organized a group of children to march all the way from the textile mills of Kensington, Pennsylvania, to Theodore Roosevelt’s home on Long Island to call attention to the problems of child labor.

Jones’ biggest successes can be attributed to her skills as a strike organizer, her personal charisma, and her grand sense of theater. Her women’s and children’s marches brought national attention to the plight of child laborers and the desperation of families who tried to make ends meet on inadequate wages. She was arrested and jailed on many occasions and once convicted of conspiracy in a murder case. Officials commuted her 20-year prison sentence after an investigation found that the charges against her were false.

Jones was a small woman whose speeches were known for their emotional appeal and their humor, but occasionally she astonished audiences with her towering rage against injustice. Asked once to describe herself, she said, “I am not a humanitarian. I am a hell-raiser!” Mother Jones always claimed she had been born on May 1, 1830, and that is the date she recorded in her 1922 autobiography. Historians believe she aged herself by more than half a decade, however, so that when she died in 1930, most people thought she was 100 years old.

The assumption that she had lived a century raising hell in service to the cause of social justice became an aspect of the Mother Jones mystique.

SEE ALSO
Industrial Workers of the World; Mining; Labor unions; Strikes; United Mine Workers of America

FURTHER READING