

# Guthrie sang about Calumet, now '1913 Massacre' will be film

## Documentary aims to capture story of Italian Hall deaths

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CALUMET — Lyrics from folk musician Woody Guthrie's "1913 Massacre" are the inspiration for a documentary about Calumet's Italian Hall disaster.

The idea for the project began in 1999. After the song rattled around in New York filmmaker Louis Galdieri's head for a few days, he hopped a plane to the Upper Peninsula.

"I was curious to see where Calumet, Michigan, was," Galdieri said. "I thought the story (in Guthrie's song) was about Italians, but it turned out to be about people all over the world."

On Christmas Eve 1913, copper miners of Finnish, Croatian, Italian, Irish, Hungarian and Cornish descent and their families gathered at the Italian Hall for a party. After the party started, someone yelled "fire," causing a mad rush down the stairs and to the door.

Seventy-four people stampeded to the exit and died as they suffocated or were crushed by people on top of them.

There was no fire.

The story has motivated musicians from Pete Seeger to Bob Dylan to perform Guthrie's song.

Galdieri returned to Calumet with filmmaker Ken Ross to make a documentary.

The men spent 11 days conducting interviews, filming at Michigan Tech University's Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections and researching oral history archives at Finlandia University.

They discovered a few who survived and are around to tell the



OLIVIA BARTLETT/Associated Press

**Survivor:** Italian Hall disaster survivor Mary Butina holds a photo of her parents, Mary and Gordon Greutz, recently in her Painesdale home. Seventy-four people died in the 1913 disaster in Calumet, following a false cry of "fire."

story. On Wednesday, the crew visited Mary Butina of Painesdale, a daughter of a Croatian copper miner who worked for Calumet & Hecla Mining Co. Butina, 97, attended the party with her mother and four siblings.

Butina is eager to tell her story. "A man yelled, 'Fire. Fire. Fire,'" she said. "Everyone was panicking ... they went down (the stairs) and pushed on the door, and some were suffering of suffocation."

Butina gestures with her hands to explain how the doors opened only one way — in. People became trapped as others behind them crowded the doors shut.

Some historians say, however, the door was held shut by "copper-boss thug-men," as Guthrie

writes in his song. The miners were on strike at the time.

Butina describes a roomful of miners, their wives and children darting toward the steps. She however, was told to do otherwise.

"Mother said, 'I'm going to look around. Don't move,'" Butina said. "She found a fire escape and got us out safely, then everybody followed. A lot more people would have been killed if Mom didn't find the fire escape."

Butina's cousin, 13, died. Butina recalls watching bodies being carried out. Fifty-eight of the 74 who died were children.

Both Ross and Galdieri said the documentary is a labor of love. They would like to see the film appear on public TV.