

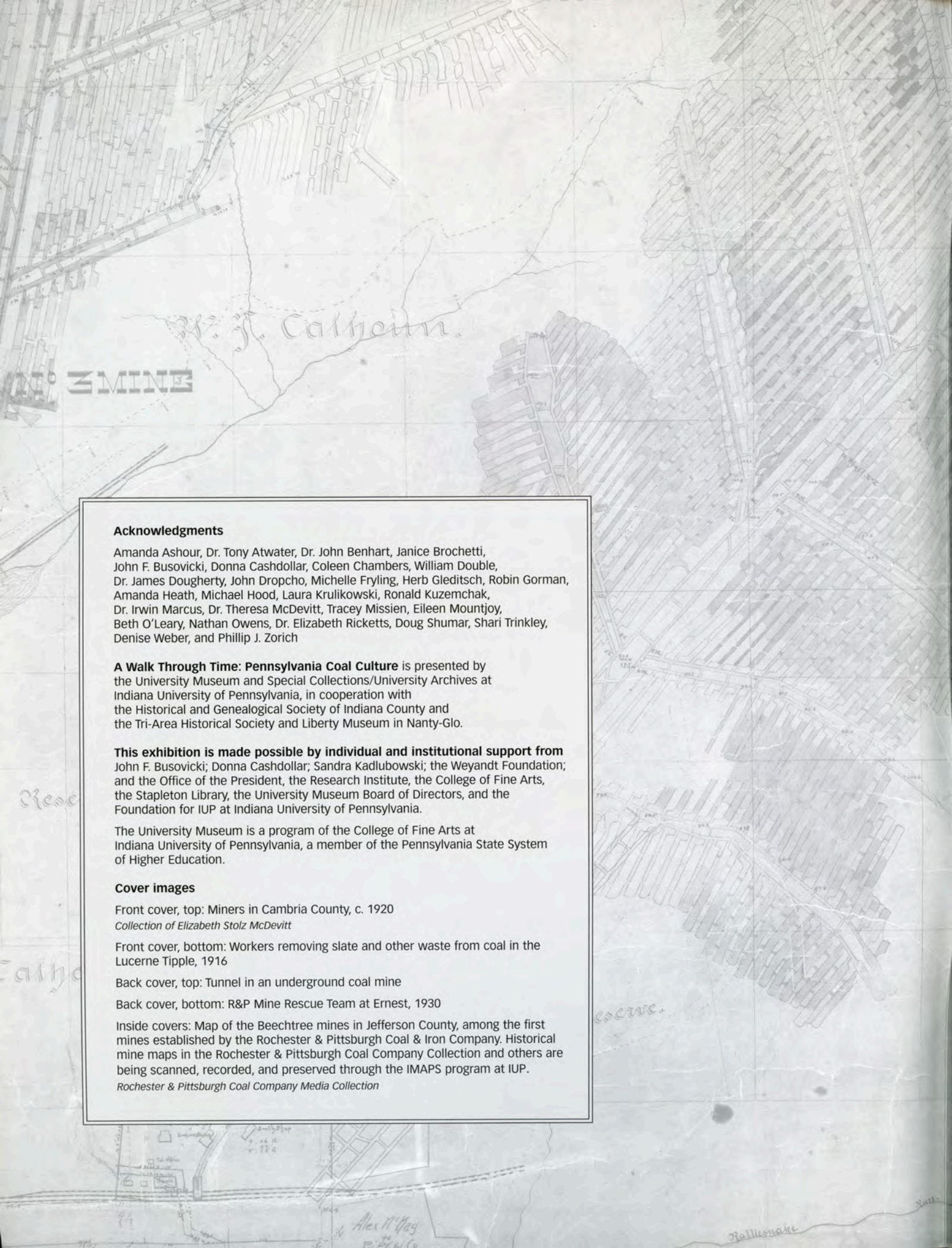


A Walk Through Time Pennsylvania Coal Culture



*Featuring the Rochester & Pittsburgh
Coal Company Collection*

THE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM • INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA



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Amanda Ashour, Dr. Tony Atwater, Dr. John Benhart, Janice Brochetti, John F. Busovicki, Donna Cashdollar, Coleen Chambers, William Double, Dr. James Dougherty, John Dropcho, Michelle Fryling, Herb Gleditsch, Robin Gorman, Amanda Heath, Michael Hood, Laura Krulikowski, Ronald Kuzemchak, Dr. Irwin Marcus, Dr. Theresa McDevitt, Tracey Missien, Eileen Mountjoy, Beth O'Leary, Nathan Owens, Dr. Elizabeth Ricketts, Doug Shumar, Shari Trinkley, Denise Weber, and Phillip J. Zorich

A Walk Through Time: Pennsylvania Coal Culture is presented by the University Museum and Special Collections/University Archives at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, in cooperation with the Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County and the Tri-Area Historical Society and Liberty Museum in Nanty-Glo.

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The University Museum is a program of the College of Fine Arts at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, a member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

Cover images

Front cover, top: Miners in Cambria County, c. 1920
Collection of Elizabeth Stolz McDevitt

Front cover, bottom: Workers removing slate and other waste from coal in the Lucerne Tipple, 1916

Back cover, top: Tunnel in an underground coal mine

Back cover, bottom: R&P Mine Rescue Team at Ernest, 1930

Inside covers: Map of the Beechtree mines in Jefferson County, among the first mines established by the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal & Iron Company. Historical mine maps in the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company Collection and others are being scanned, recorded, and preserved through the IMAPS program at IUP.
Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company Media Collection

A Walk Through Time Pennsylvania Coal Culture



***Featuring the Rochester & Pittsburgh
Coal Company Collection***

Harrison Wick and Rhonda Yeager, *Curators*
Special Collections and University Archives

Foreword

by Michael Hood, Dean, College of Fine Arts at IUP

The University Museum annually mounts a series of exhibitions designed to celebrate the art and culture of the region in its galleries in historic John Sutton Hall at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. With the assistance of an energetic and committed University Museum Board of Directors, and the ongoing support of the Office of the President and the Office of the Dean of the College of Fine Arts, the museum regularly seeks partnerships with other entities on and off campus to provide the university and its surrounding communities with a wide range of exhibit offerings. We have taken particular pleasure in helping to tell the story of our communities and their people in a number of exhibits, including among others *The Jewish Business Community of Downtown Indiana*, *From Italy to Indiana County*, *Far Eastern Religions in Western Pennsylvania*, and *Life in the Valley: Streams of Coal*.

We have partnered with members of the community, worked across disciplines and institutional divides, and have opened many doors in pursuit of mutual understanding and accessibility to all. Now we partner in a truly ambitious project, speaking to *A Walk Through Time: Pennsylvania Coal Culture, Featuring the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company Collection* and the history of a company that was, for more than 100 years, one of the most influential and important social and economic drivers for Indiana County and beyond, the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company.

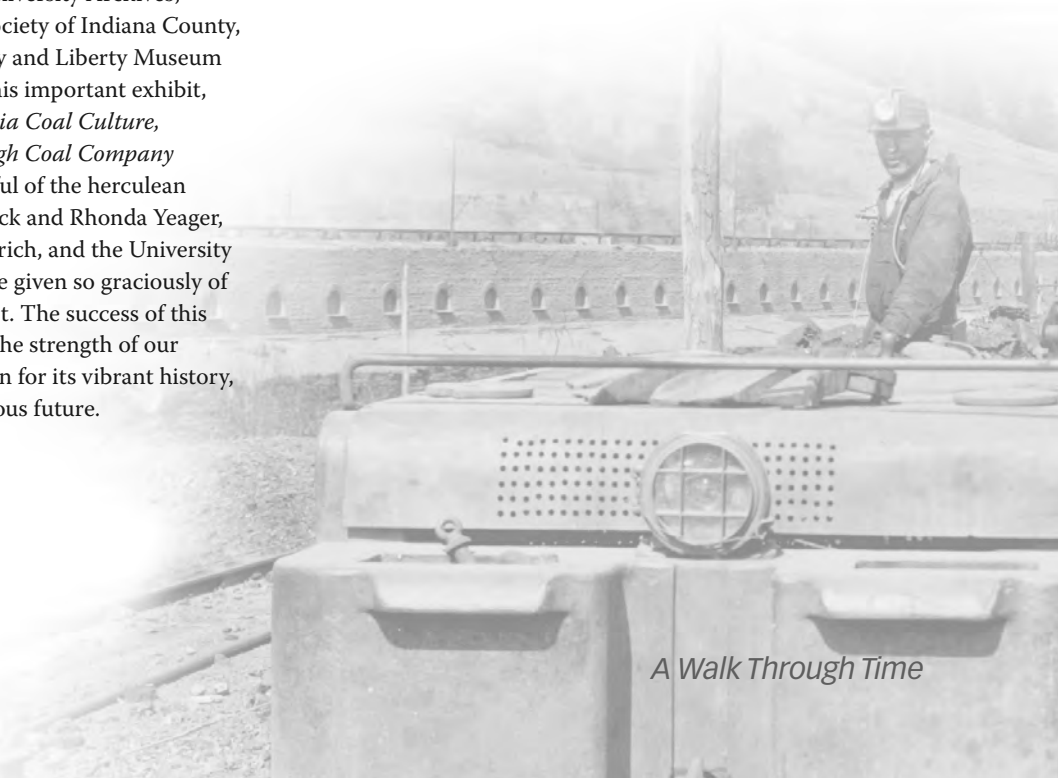
I congratulate and commend the University Museum, the IUP Special Collections and University Archives, the Genealogical and Historical Society of Indiana County, and the Tri-Area Historical Society and Liberty Museum in Nanty-Glo on the occasion of this important exhibit, *A Walk Through Time: Pennsylvania Coal Culture, Featuring the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company Collection*. I am particularly mindful of the herculean efforts of co-curators Harrison Wick and Rhonda Yeager, and Dr. John Benhart, Phillip J. Zorich, and the University Museum board members who have given so graciously of their time in support of this project. The success of this combined effort is a testimony to the strength of our region, and our shared appreciation for its vibrant history, its exciting present, and its ambitious future.

Introduction to Coal Dust: The Early Mining Industry of Indiana County

by Dr. Irwin M. Marcus, Professor Emeritus, IUP

The coal regions of Central Pennsylvania were at one time the hub of a mighty industrial complex whose activities produced national and international reverberations as well as a domination of the regional economy. Often linked with major railroads and leading steel companies, the largest coal companies played pivotal roles in the industrialization of the United States. The counterparts to their wide geographical outreach were the company towns, which housed the miners and their families who produced the coal that powered the national industrial engine. These communities, which often featured company stores and company houses as well as churches, mining facilities, and local unions of the United Mine Workers of America, were sites of both fragmentation and solidarity. Ethnic and religious divisions and labor-management struggles produced strife, while community loyalty, often symbolized by the local baseball teams, provided a common bond.

Eileen Mountjoy's collection of articles, which focus on the company towns of the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company (R&P), offer readers and researchers a valuable body of evidence which presents the coal story from the "bottom up." These newspaper articles, using research funded by a grant from R&P, depict life in coal towns based on company records, local newspapers, and numerous interviews; describe the joys and sorrows of life in this special environment; and contribute significantly to the ability of current and future historians to heed the advice of Herbert Gutman and Staughton Lynd to study working class history from local as well as national venues.



Introduction to Pennsylvania Coal Culture

by Harrison Wick and Rhonda Yeager

Coal permeates the history and culture of many communities in Pennsylvania. The development of coal operations in western Pennsylvania is the story of mining companies which created company towns, brought immigrant families from across the ocean searching for work and a new life, and built an industrial empire. This story has emerged from oral history interviews with miners and their families, the records of coal companies and mining artifacts, and photographic images preserved through the efforts of the archival institutions and individuals which have conserved this past.

The exhibit was a collaborative project between the Special Collections and University Archives and the University Museum at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, the Historical & Genealogical Society of Indiana County, the Tri-Area Historical Society and Liberty Museum in Nanty-Glo, and private collectors. Featuring artifacts and photographs documenting western Pennsylvania coal culture, the exhibit depicts the lives of miners and their families in company towns, community activities including baseball games, the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company (R&P) and other mining operations, mine disasters, strikes, and the struggle for unionization. The exhibit incorporates the boom years of coal mining up to World War I, and the decline of company towns after the war, during the Great Depression, and World War II. Many of the miners, company towns, and coal companies featured in the exhibit are highlighted in the catalog, including articles and photographs of Clymer, Commodore, Coral, Ernest, Heilwood, Iselin, Nanty-Glo, Sagamore, Yatesboro, and Lucerne.

Indiana University of Pennsylvania actively promotes coal culture through the Special Collections and University Archives, IMAPS, University Museum, and the Center for Northern Appalachian Studies. The Rochester & Pittsburgh

Coal Company Records is the largest and most comprehensive coal company collection housed in the IUP Special Collections and University Archives. Located on the third floor of the Patrick J. Stapleton, Jr., Library, the IUP Special Collections and University Archives collects, organizes, preserves, and makes accessible historical information about western Pennsylvania. Collections include university history, manuscript collections, Pennsylvania books, and rare books. The R&P collection documents the history and operations of the company's existence from 1881 to 1998. It includes unique mine maps, blueprints and plans for company towns, exploration projects, various ledgers, executive and business records, labor union materials, photographs, and mining memorabilia. R&P was once one of the largest producers of bituminous coal in the United States. These company records represent an important part of the industrial heritage of the local community. This collection provides researchers and scholars with primary materials and unique insight into the Pennsylvania coal mining industry. Visit the IUP Special Collections and University Archives website, www.iup.edu/archives.

The Institute for Mine Mapping, Archival Procedures and Safety (IMAPS) at Indiana University of Pennsylvania is a multi-disciplinary group of faculty, staff, and students who work together to digitize, record, and preserve historical mine maps. The goal of the institute is to use state-of-the-art digital technology to provide access to the digital map images for research, and to prepare safety professionals in the use of this information in the specialized area of mine safety, while preserving the original mine maps. The institute became fully operational in 2005 with the acquisition of a Cruse scanner, which is a digital-imaging camera capable of scanning large-format media at high resolution. IMAPS has digitized more than 500 maps including the large-format mine maps housed in the R&P collection, and IMAPS is developing a web-based, searchable database of Pennsylvania mine maps. Additional information is available at www.iup.edu/minemaps.

Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company

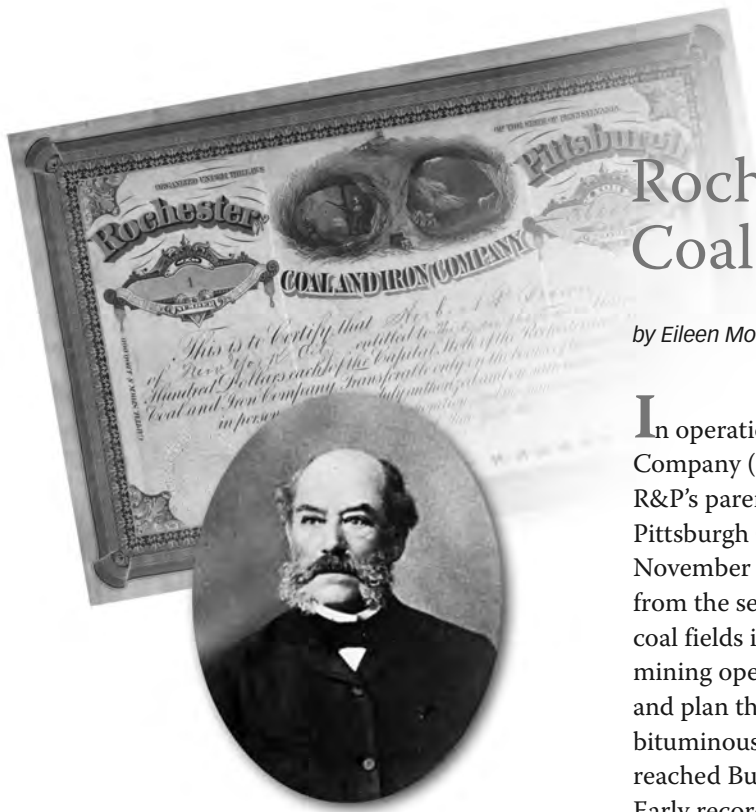
by Eileen Mountjoy

In operation for more than 100 years, Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company (R&P) became one of the largest employers in Indiana County. R&P's parent company was founded by Walston H. Brown as Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal & Iron Company (R&PC&IC), which was incorporated in November of 1881. Franklin Platt and his brother W. G. Platt, geologists from the second geological survey, mapped and determined the extent of coal fields in Pennsylvania. R&PC&IC would eventually own many coal mining operations. The company began to develop, purchase land, and plan the layout of mines in 1882. In 1883, R&PC&IC started to sell bituminous coal commercially. On July 1, 1883, the company's railroad reached Buffalo, New York, and the company made its first coal shipment. Early records indicate the first mines owned by R&PC&IC were the Beechtree and Walston Mines in Jefferson County. In 1884, the R&PC&IC built houses for miners near the Beechtree Mines at a cost of \$250 per house, and the company houses were rented to miners' families for \$60.00 per year. The Walston Mines were known for making coal coke for the steel industry.

In 1885, despite initial prosperity, the railroad company went into receivership, and its property and the stock of the R&PC&IC were purchased by Adrian Georg Iselin, a Swiss investment banker in New York City. Franklin Platt was elected president of the company in 1886. Over the next 10 years, the R&PC&IC amassed large tracts of land to develop as mines to meet the nation's growing demand for coal. New mining operations opened in Armstrong, Jefferson, Clearfield, and Indiana Counties.

Lucius Waterman Robinson became president of the R&PC&IC in 1899, and he remained company president for 20 years. He purchased large tracts of land in White Township and Blacklick Township in Indiana County. In 1899, plans were under way to move the company headquarters from Jefferson County to Indiana County. In 1900, electricity and electric haulage systems were installed by R&PC&IC in the mines at Walston, Florence, Adrian, London, Sykesville, Trout Run, Eleanora, and Helvetia. In 1907, the electric haulage system used at the Yatesboro Mines was considered by mining engineers to be the highpoint of modern technology.

On November 23, 1927, the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company was incorporated under Pennsylvania law for the purpose of mining and selling bituminous coal. The new company resulted from the consolidation of the R&PC&IC and the Jefferson & Clearfield Coal & Iron Company. After World War II, bituminous coal production in the United States hit an all-time high of 631,000,000 tons in 1947. In 1948, Dr. Charles Jackson Potter began his 22-year tenure as president of Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company. In order to retain their portion of the market, R&P began



Top to bottom:
R&PC&IC stock certificate; Adrian Georg Iselin;
Lucius Waterman Robinson; and
Lucerne Mine No. 1, 1906

Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection

to seek new coal fields as older operations were mined out. Several new mines were leased from other Indiana County operators, and R&P placed a new emphasis on surface mining. The company expanded operations into West Virginia, where the company acquired the coal rights to 7,500 acres of land. By 1955, production at O'Donnell, their largest West Virginia mining operation, had reached 998,728 tons annually.

In 1950, the Mahoning Investment Company became the last company to merge with R&P. During the 1950s, R&P struggled to offset the losses of another major slump in the coal industry due to competition from non-union fields and alternate fuels. In 1954, the company joined with the Vitro Corporation of America to form the Vitro Mineral Corporation. For several years, Vitro Minerals mined uranium, silver, feldspar, and titanium at sites as far away as Canada, French Guiana, Columbia, and Alaska. The Vitro Minerals Corporation was dissolved in 1962, and R&P again concentrated on the coal fields of Indiana County.

After Vitro Minerals was dissolved, Pennsylvania Electric Company (Penelec), a major consumer of coal, announced a plan to build the Keystone Steam Electric Generating Station. Penelec planned to build this station near the abundant coal fields of central Pennsylvania. R&P was approached to supply coal for the new energy station. By 1964, R&P and Penelec had reached a coal supply agreement, and several new mines were under development by R&P to reach the terms of this agreement. By 1969, a second energy station similar to Keystone had been constructed near Homer City, Pennsylvania, which was also fueled by R&P coal.

The 1960s were bleak days for the coal industry. R&P was forced to close many of its operations. Entering the 1970s, R&P had successfully altered its fundamental business strategy from selling coal commercially to selling virtually its entire production under long-term contracts to only two customers, the Keystone and Homer City generating plants.

In 1981, R&P celebrated its centennial, commemorating 100 years of continuous coal mining production. Financial control of the company had remained in the Iselin family since 1885 until R&P was acquired by CONSOL Energy in 1998. The Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company Records were donated to the Special Collections and University Archives at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The R&P collection continues to serve as a valuable resource to researchers and historians from diverse fields including business, genealogists, geography, geology, labor relations, mine safety, regional planning, safety science, and surveying.



Top: Dr. Charles Jackson Potter, president of R&P, 1948-1970

Above: R&PC&IC office in Indiana, Pennsylvania, 1920

Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company Media Collection



The Community of Iselin

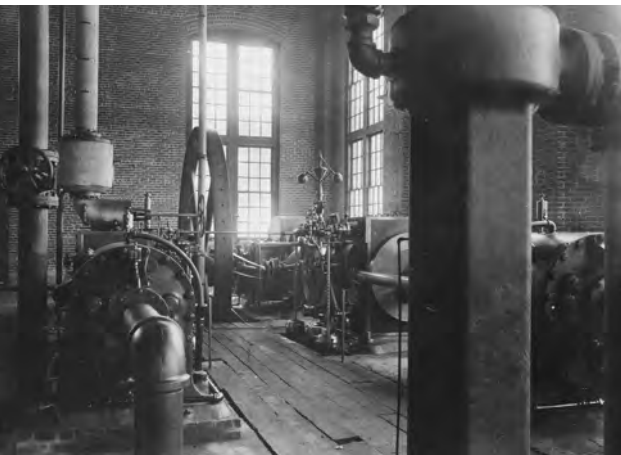
by Eileen Mountjoy



Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh Railway (BR&P) crews labored on the railway extension from Jefferson County to the new town of Iselin in 1903. During construction, the laborers lived in hastily built camps of shanty houses set up along the proposed railroad line. Life as a laborer on the Elder's Ridge Branch of the railroad was difficult. Most of the labor was done with pick and shovel. Many men only stayed on the job a few weeks, but some of the men who worked on the railroad extension remained to populate the new town at the Elder's Ridge site.

The firm of Hyde-Murphy won the contract for building houses in the new mining town. By the end of September, 1903, 12 houses were completed one mile northwest of Elder's Ridge, and the community was named Iselin in honor of Adrian Georg Iselin, the owner of Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal & Iron Company (R&PC&IC) and the BR&P. By early 1904, Iselin was transformed from a labor camp into a coal company town. Full train service encouraged the growth of both the mines and town. Tipple, boiler house, carpenter, blacksmith, and machine shops soon stood ready to handle increased coal production.

Inside the mines, electric motors hauled coal to the tipple. In June of 1904, Charles Rowe secured the contract for a hotel building. The three-story structure, owned by Ross Mahan, contained 39 rooms and cost \$9,000 to build. A school, theater, and brick company store were added to the town. By 1905, 440 men worked underground at Iselin mines No. 1 and No. 2. The next year, two additional mines opened at nearby Whiskey Run. Iselin Mine No. 4 was known as Nesbit Run, a tiny community with only 14 houses by 1925, stood near the opening. After 1910, the Pittsburgh Coal Company also opened two more small mines at nearby Big Run; these mines were called Fritz mines No. 1 and No. 2. By 1914, the Iselin mines had a total daily output of more than 6,000 tons of coal. With the opening of Iselin mines No. 3, No. 4, No. 5, and Fritz mines No. 1 and No. 2, the Pittsburgh Coal Company's need for miners doubled. In 1904, total employment at Iselin mines No. 1 and No. 2 was 513 men. By the end of 1908, total employment rose to 1,203, and by 1910 there were 1,695 employees.



Top: Iselin company store and post office

Above: Iselin power plant interior, 1920

*Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection*



Victor Fello was four years old when his parents brought him to Iselin in 1911, from a small village in Hungary. His family and other immigrants were met at a New York port of entry by a labor agent. Upon learning there were jobs in Iselin, the Fello family boarded the BR&P train for Pennsylvania and a new life in a coal town. When Victor saw Iselin for the first time, he faced a town of about 300 houses, and every house had at least 12 boarders. Meals were difficult to prepare for so many people. Victor Fello said, “They didn’t have dining rooms then as they do now. The tables were made of the heavy wooden boards used for making mine cars. The company would give the boards to the miners to make tables and benches.” For some miners, living as a boarder was only temporary.

Exposure to the realities of life came early to children in company towns. Victor Fello was 11 years old when he went into the mines at Iselin. “My dad used to smuggle me into the mines to help him load coal. The track would fill up with coal and you had to load it to keep the cars and motors from wrecking.” Although working hours were long and difficult, Victor Fello fondly remembered his youth in Iselin: “This was a prosperous town and a good town to live in.”

Mrs. Caroline Kaminski recalled living most of her life in Iselin: “I came here in 1912, and then the town was booming! My dad was working here, and he heard that the mines at Iselin were safe mines.” Her father, John Michalisczyn, whose name was shortened by emigration officials to Miller, lived two years alone in Iselin before he could send for his wife and three daughters in Austria. During the two years alone at Iselin, he was once buried in a mine cave-in for two days. Mrs. Kaminski remembered the day she and her family arrived in Iselin: “What a shock! No sidewalks, no bathroom, nothing! Coal stored under the porch. And the outside toilet was four boards, two holes, and a catalog hanging on the side!” Once settled in Iselin, the family rented rooms to 10 boarders.

The end of World War I brought a decline in the demand for coal and marked the end of an era for Iselin. As the post-war economic slump gradually lowered Iselin’s coal production, a few families began to drift away to other occupations. As the number of boarders in each house declined, life in the town grew less hectic. The population stabilized, and the refinements of community living were enjoyed in earnest. The Iselin baseball team thrilled the crowds.

C. Merle Craig went to work in Iselin in 1930 as chief clerk in the mine office. “It was non-union then,” he remembered, “and a lot of picketing was going on.” In addition to labor-management problems, economic hardship struck the town at the same time: “By 1932, it was common for the mines to be operating only two days a month due to lack of demand for coal.” Merle Craig said the good spirits retained by the people of Iselin during these hard times was remarkable. “People kept cows and planted gardens, and kept on playing baseball.” By 1934, however, the change from steam to diesel-powered locomotives made Iselin’s coal an obsolete product and the mines closed down. “Fortunately,” Merle Craig noted, “the mines at Coal Run had just opened and provided employment for Iselin miners who needed a job. Others went to the steel mills.”



Top: Iselin Italian Band, 1910
Above: Iselin First Aid Team, 1916
*Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection*

Ernest: Life in a Mining Town

by Eileen Mountjoy



Top: Ernest company store, 1906
Above: Ernest Mine office, 1905, with houses
under construction behind it
Below: First Holy Communion Class,
Assumption Roman Catholic Church, c. 1917

*Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection*



Four miles north of Indiana is the company town of Ernest, established by the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal & Iron Company (R&PC&IC). In 1903-1904, R&PC&IC moved from Jefferson County to Ernest in Indiana County. The R&PC&IC mines of Jefferson County had been leading producers of coal for making coke, which was then sold to Pittsburgh iron manufacturers. The coal supply in Jefferson County was nearly depleted by 1904, but some of the coal veins in the new Ernest location measured six feet thick. In 1904, the R&PC&IC began deep mining in Ernest. In its infancy, Ernest was known as a model mining town of 156 houses, two churches, a school, and a community center. During the first years of development, the coal company opened four drift mines in the upper Freeport coal seam and built 274 beehive coke ovens, which by 1909 had an annual production of 17,946 tons. By the close of 1906, more than 1,000 men worked at the operation.

The R&PC&IC hired carpenters to build single and double frame houses for the workers. Many miners and their families followed the company from Jefferson County, but more immigrated from Europe. By 1909, the melting pot of America was truly realized in Ernest when 13 different nationalities were represented in the new town. The growing population needed other buildings and, in 1905, R&PC&IC built a two-story public school, and a community hall furnished with kitchen facilities. Churches were centers of community activity dating from the same year, when Amos Cravener organized the American Sunday School Union. In 1909, aided financially by the coal company, the congregation built the Protestant Union Church. The Roman Catholic Church was built in 1911, and the first priest, Father Emilio Farri, remained in Ernest until 1947. Church suppers provided a source of fellowship in the community and were attended by all faiths.

R&PC&IC opened a doctor's office in Ernest, and hired a qualified physician and nurse to care for company employees and their families. The coal industry required certain structures, and soon a tippie, power house, bee hive coke ovens, machine shops, and company office were added to the site. The company built wooden sidewalks to protect pedestrians from the mud and refuse in the streets. By 1916, Ernest was a thriving mining community with a school, two churches, a barbershop, and a company store so large that it served as a warehouse for other company stores in Indiana County.

On February 5, 1910, an explosion of coal dust and accumulated gas occurred near the face of No. 5 room off Ernest Mine No. 11 entry, resulting in the death of 11 men. County Coroner James S. Hammers held



an inquest in the weeks that followed, and the jurors determined that the dead miners had succumbed to a mixture of gases in the mine.

Ernest's worst mine disaster occurred on February 11, 1916, when gas ignited in the No. 2 mine. Several improvements in the years preceding 1916 had made mining somewhat easier and safer for the men working in Ernest Mine No. 2. That year, R&PC&IC purchased 21 electric cutting machines, greatly reducing the amount of work done by hand. With the increased availability of electric cap lamps, only certain portions of the mine were worked with open carbide lights. Many of the miners who entered the No. 2 mine on the morning of Friday, February 11, 1916, were not, however, wearing the safer, battery-operated cap lamps. The new electric cap lamps were cumbersome to wear and the batteries often leaked acid. Besides, the men who worked in room No. 15 of headings three and four felt safe working with the older carbide lights since gas had never before been discovered in this part of the mine.

At the time of the explosion, no one on the outside heard a sound, as the blast occurred at the end of a three-mile-long underground tunnel toward Indiana. Motorman Jimmy Moody first brought the news of the disaster to the surface. Rescue teams formed rapidly at the mouth of the mine as word of the explosion spread to Indiana. All available doctors and nurses from the Indiana Hospital rushed to Ernest, together with Dr. C. Paul Reed of Homer City and Dr. F. F. Moore of Lucerne. Officials of the coal company and the Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh Railway hurried to the scene in a special train from Punxsutawney, arriving in Ernest shortly before 8:00 p.m. F. M. Fritchman, general superintendent of the coal company, was on the scene and assisted in the direction of the mine rescuers. The first crew to report back told of barriers of tangled debris, but fortunately there was little fire due to the lack of oxygen at the scene of the explosion. The bodies of 27 miners were recovered, and most had died from asphyxiation. Friends and relatives held funerals for the miners, and some were buried in a common grave in the cemetery of St. Bernard's Roman Catholic Church in Indiana.

R&PC&IC sealed Ernest Mine No. 2 after the explosion but, in the manner of coal companies at that time, little compensation was awarded

Above: Miners' houses in Ernest, 1905
 Below: Fan house for mine ventilation, 1906
 Bottom: Ernest Mine Rescue Team, 1940
*Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
 Media Collection*





Top: Miners were paid according to the amount of coal they mined. A metal tag, or "check," was attached to each coal car, identifying the miner who had filled the car with coal.

*Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection*

Above: Boys working in a Pennsylvania coal mine, 1908. Federal child labor legislation in the 1930s ended the custom of allowing children as young as six years of age to work in mines and factories.

*Lewis Hine
Library of Congress*

to the families. However, miners' widows were permitted to remain in the company houses if they could afford to pay the rent. Some of them took in washing and turned their homes into boarding houses in order to keep their families together. The fact that the widows of the men who died in the explosion of 1916 managed to survive without their husbands' salaries speaks eloquently of the spirit of these women living in company towns.

With the outbreak of World War I, munitions factories needed great quantities of coal and coke, and miners all over the country did their share by keeping the mines open seven days of the week. Prosperity marked the mining industry in Ernest in the years following the war. In 1920, a miner worked hard for his money, and sometimes had little to show for his labor. In those days, a man dug coal with a pick and shovel and hand-loaded it himself. The company, in 1920, paid 38 cents per ton, and on a productive day a man could mine 10 tons. At the end of each shift, a supervisor at the tippie weighed the coal, and each miner knew exactly how much money he had earned. Many deductions, however, were taken out of the miners' pay envelopes. In 1925, when a miner earned an average of \$20.00 a week, \$6.00 each month went for rent on the company house, \$1.25 for house coal, and \$3.00 was deducted for health care, ensuring the miner and his family could see the company doctor as often as necessary. Most of the rest of the paycheck went to the company store, usually before the miner ever had a dollar bill in his wallet. In 1931, more than 1,200 men worked in the mines and coke ovens at Ernest.

Popular folklore paints a mental image of the company store taking unfair advantage of coal town residents, but in Ernest things were different. People who lived in Ernest in the 1920s and 1930s recall that better shoes, clothing, household items, and groceries could not be found elsewhere. Ernest citizens were not forced to buy at the company store, but with only the hourly streetcar to Indiana for transportation, trading in their hometown seemed practical. In addition to food and clothing, each miner bought his own dynamite and headlamp carbide at the same place. In its heyday, the Ernest company store employed two butchers and six clerks. With a post office as part of its services, the store made a fine place for neighbors to meet and discuss local events.



Sometimes, a miner's deductions equaled or exceeded his weekly pay, and a wiggly black line known as a snake was the only notation beside his name on the payroll. The paymaster notified the company store, and the miner's family would find its spending severely limited. Families in Ernest supplemented their company store orders with visiting local farms and growing vegetable gardens. Most early coal town residents kept chickens, geese, or pigs. Families gathered together to make sausage, bacon, and scrapple. Huge vegetable patches filled yards around company houses. For many years, the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company (R&P) held annual garden contests with cash prizes for the best garden in each Indiana County company town. When strikes or layoffs exhausted all these means of survival, the company store could usually be counted on to give away free bags of flour and produce to families in need.

In winter months, the company sponsored sleigh rides for the whole town, and created a skating pond by damming up the creek behind the store. The distinctly American sport of baseball caught on early in Ernest as it did in all the other coal towns, increasing in popularity until R&P created its own league in 1930.

Before the 1930s, when federal legislation banned child labor, boys could enter the mines at age 14. Some residents worked in Indiana factories such as the Diamond Glass Works. Glass company employees commuted to work by trolley for a job which, in 1925, paid 17 cents per hour for a workday lasting from 7:00 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. Other young women went to Indiana to do housework for families who paid them an average of \$3.00 per day.

The Ernest mines continued to produce a good grade of bituminous coal through the 1950s but, by the 1960s, it proved too expensive for the company to transport coal the nearly 14 miles to the surface. R&P began to taper off its Ernest operation until the mine finally closed in 1965. The company attempted to mitigate the economic loss to the community by relocating as many jobless miners as possible. Some men found employment in other mines. Others were ready for retirement and took their pensions. As the company houses came up for sale, residents were able to buy the homes in which their families had lived for so many years. Large deposits of coal still lie underneath the town of Ernest.



Top: Ernest tipple for coking coal, 1958

Above: Coal cars at the Ernest coke ovens, 1950

Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection

Yatesboro and Numine

by Eileen Mountjoy



Top: Church Street in Yatesboro, c. 1900

Above: Yatesboro company store, 1930

*Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection*

In 1899, officers of the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal & Iron Company (R&PC&IC) organized and incorporated the Cowanshannock Coal & Coke Company (CC&CC). This company comprised the R&PC&IC's Armstrong County holdings. A small railway, the Rural Valley Railroad, served the Yatesboro mines and transported the coal to the Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh Railway line (BR&P). Most of the coal mined at Yatesboro was sold to the famous camera magnate George Eastman, for use at his New York manufacturing firm. This was the result of Eastman's close friendship with his Rochester, New York, neighbor, Lucius Waterman Robinson.

The first of the Yatesboro mines opened in 1899 and was named for Arthur G. Yates, then president of the BR&P Railway. The mine continued to produce until 1932. By 1907, the Yatesboro mines had four openings, produced 781,329 tons of coal, and employed 998 men. That year, the state mine inspector noted in his report, "This Company has one of the most modern and complete mining plants in the state. During the year they put in a large electric plant of the alternation current type run by turbines made by the General Electric Company."

By 1909, the Yatesboro No. 5 Mine opened and had the company town of Numine at its edge. The mine was fully developed by 1928, and had an average capacity of 1,500 tons of coal. The mine continued to produce until 1953.

According to a report by Guy Kanable, an electrical engineer for the company during the 1920s and 1930s, electricity was introduced at Yatesboro in 1899, when a 150 KW steam-driven generator was installed at the plant to furnish power for electric haulage locomotives. This was the first electric haulage installed at any of the plants of the R&PC&IC or its related companies.

R. J. "Jim" Craig of Indiana grew up at Yatesboro, where his father (James Hunter Craig) was general manager. "These mines," Craig explained, "were jointly owned by Arthur G. Yates, president of the BR&P Railway; the Iselin family; and Lucius Waterman Robinson. My father worked under Robinson as a superintendent when L. W. Robinson was general manager of Bell, Lewis & Yates. My father came from Scotland in 1881. His name was James Hunter Craig. In Scotland, he was trained as a boilermaker. Because of his skills, he established rope haulages in four mines at Yatesboro. They were run by steam, made in huge boilers. I was often, as a boy, out around the mines when L. W., as we called him, came on his inspection tours. He had a self-propelled railroad car he called 'Ruth,' after one of his daughters. It was a sleeper, dining car, and portable

office. There was a special shed for the car at what became R&PC&IC's maintenance department. The 'Ruth' traveled on the tracks of the BR&P to Indiana. Often, other parties of officials arrived by train and together they'd travel out to the various mining operations."

Unlike the Iselin family of New York, who gave generously to Jefferson and Indiana County churches and built two hospitals, Robinson showed little interest in the communities named for him. "He wasn't very visible when he came around," Craig said. "When the Iselins came to Yatesboro, the Yatesboro Union Church ladies had dinners for them, with lots of homemade dishes. The Iselin family always mingled with the group and thanked the women who had prepared the meal. They always seemed concerned with what was going on in the town."

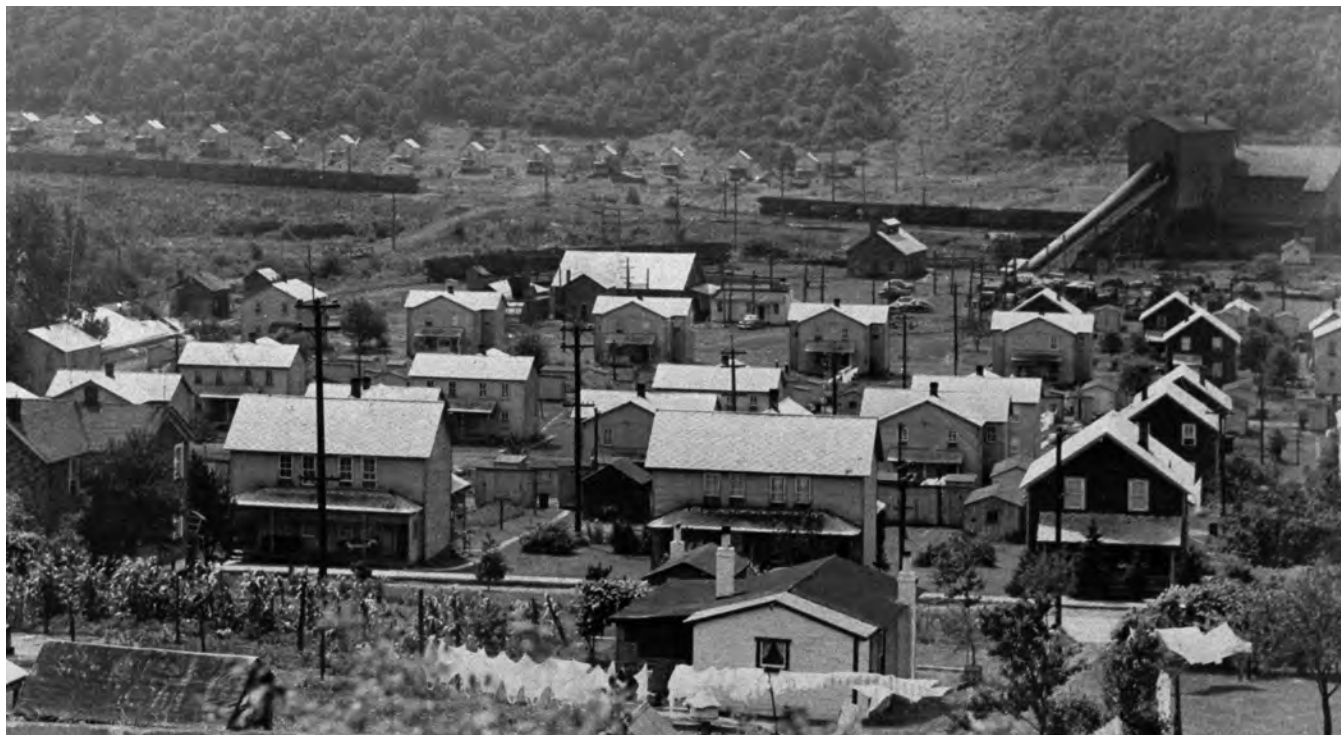
"In time," Craig continued, "L. W.'s son, Lucius, Jr., became involved in his father's coal companies, and was vice president of the R&PC&IC for awhile. He was a very courteous and pleasant young man. But he really wasn't very interested in mining. I was working with my father at that time and it was my job to take young Lucius underground. I remember that he was very anxious to get outside once his tour was over."

James Hunter Craig, as general manager of the Yatesboro Mines, directed both the opening of the mines and the building of the company town at the site. In the 1920s, James and his son, Jim, worked together on the opening of the nearby Margaret mines and company town at that location. The Margaret mines and the town were named for Margaret Patterson Craig, wife of James Craig and mother of Jim Craig. James retired in 1932, and Jim succeeded him as general manager of the Cowanshannock Coal & Coke Company.



Above: Pick and shovel were among the miner's earliest tools, effective even in tight quarters.

Below: A view of Numine, c. 1945
*Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection*



Clymer: Looking Back

by Eileen Mountjoy

Throughout the history of Clymer, fires, floods, ice jams, and Indiana County's worst mine disaster were interwoven with civic pride to achieve a community worthy of the ambitions of its first settlers. Clymer Borough was named at the suggestion of John S. Fisher in honor of George Clymer, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. The main street was named Franklin Street in honor of Benjamin Franklin; in fact, most of Clymer's streets were named after American Revolution patriots. Clymer was planned as an open town. Clymer grew to be the largest coal mining town in Indiana County. The borough was incorporated on February 29, 1908.

The first large-scale mining in Cherryhill and Green Townships was undertaken by the Clearfield Bituminous Coal Company (CBC). In 1900, CBC purchased 15,000 acres in Indiana County, and opened up their first mine in Rossiter. In 1905, mines were opened at Clymer and Barr Slope. In Dixonville, Clymer No. 1 Mine known as Sample Run and Clymer No. 2 Mine were both just outside the town.

One of the first in a long tradition of gala occasions began on the morning of July 20, 1915, with a homecoming and fireman's carnival. On the following day, in observation of Clymer's tenth anniversary, a letter from John S. Fisher, who later became governor of Pennsylvania, was read aloud: "It is known to all of us that the town had its inception in the purchase by large operating companies of the rich coal deposits in what is known as the Dixonville Field. In these purchases I had an active part for the interests directly connected with the New York Central Railroad. At first, the thought was to build what is commonly known as a coal town. As is the usual case with christenings, the naming of the new town received a good deal of consideration, and it was my good fortune to suggest the name which was finally adopted, Clymer, to honor one of the Revolutionary Patriarchs. In 1906, almost overnight there sprung up dwellings, stores, stations, and all kinds of buildings essential to the life of an active community. So rapid was the growth of the borough that when the census of 1910 was taken, Clymer was the third largest town in size in Indiana County, being only surpassed by Indiana and Blairsville."

New train transportation was supplemented by trolley in April of 1908. The fare from Indiana to Clymer was originally 25 cents, but when the trolley entered the new borough, five cents was added to the toll. In 1909, state health officials completed their census of Clymer and reported that "the new borough has 1,662 inhabitants in that bustling little town. There are 412 buildings, which include a number of handsome dwellings, several stores, and an opera house."



Top: CBC No. 1 Mine
Above: CBC machine shop, 1920
*Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection*

Below: Flame safety lamps (left, 1935; right, 1950)
tested mine air for oxygen levels and the
presence of methane gas.

Collection of Joe Maloney



During Clymer's boom years, a second industry followed closely behind coal production as the economic backbone of the town. From early surveys, investors knew that a vein of fire clay lay beneath the seams of coal underneath Cherryhill Township; this led to establishment of the Clymer Brick and Fire Clay Company, formed with John S. Fisher as president. Early in 1908, the new company began building a brick-making plant about a mile southeast of Clymer. The average production was 70,000 bricks per day.

Just before midnight on December 19, 1909, a driver from the Neeley livery stable noticed fire coming from the Opera House. By dawn, the fire had destroyed four stores, two apartments, and five houses before being brought under control. Sadly, many of the persons who incurred losses had little or no insurance on their property. Entertainment was soon available in the Knights of Pythias Theatre, and the State Theatre opened in November of 1923.

By 1915, Clymer was the largest town in Cherryhill Township with a population of 2,000. Coal mined at Clymer was shipped at an average of 2,500 tons per day in 1915. Two hotels, the Neeley and the Clymer House, and several boarding houses served those without a permanent home. There were 32 stores and shops, and two schools and four churches completed the town. By the end of World War II, all of Clymer's mines were equipped with the latest in ventilation, cutting, and loading machinery with less than six percent of the company's output produced by pick mining. Equipment included 71 locomotives, 19 scraper-loaders, two Joy mobile loaders, and a belt conveyor system.

The streetcar line, while providing convenient transportation, was the scene of at least two dramatic incidents before the automobile brought about its abandonment. In August, 1915, A. R. Wyncoop of Clymer was fatally injured when a New York Central Railroad train collided with a trolley at the Sample Run Crossing. Another trolley in 1924 was robbed by bandits who stole the Russell Coal Company payroll. Inside the trolley bound for Clymer were company paymaster Alexander Caldwell and Clymer chief of police Tony Askey, guarding the payroll totaling \$23,750. On the afternoon of June 17, an occupant of the stopped trolley jumped to his feet and fired a shot through the roof. The rest of the robbers, planted in strategic seats, pointed their guns at Caldwell and Askey. The bandits secured the cash and escaped.

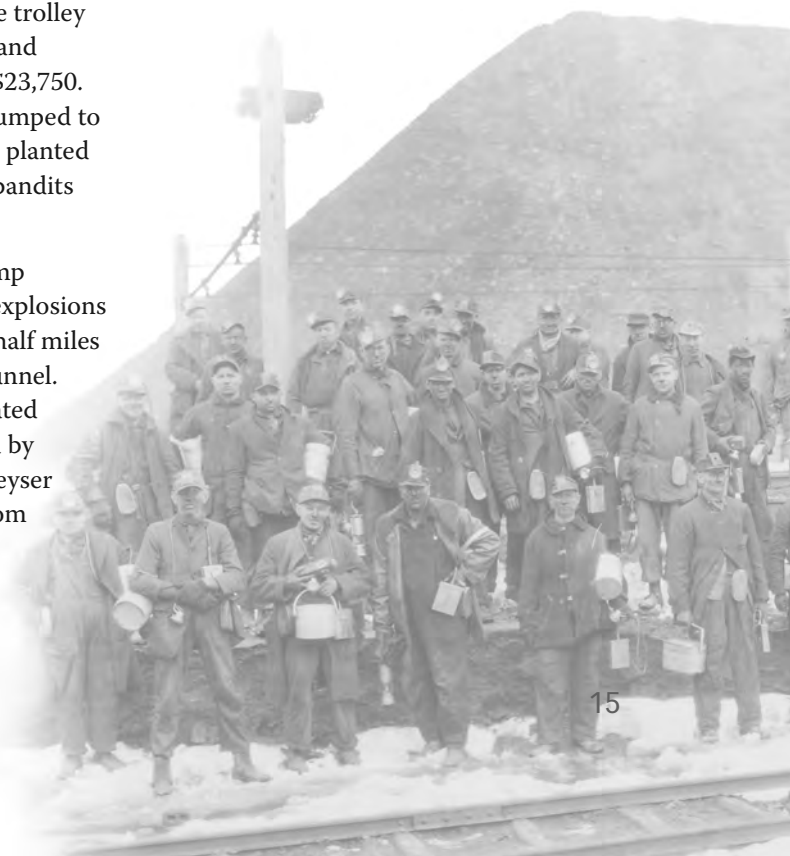
By the 1920s, Clymer miners were adjusting to the economic slump preceding the Depression. At 1:00 p.m. on August 26, 1926, two explosions rocked Clymer No. 1 Mine, located at Sample Run, one and one-half miles southwest of Clymer. The first explosion occurred off the main tunnel. Five minutes later, a second explosion ripped through the devastated mine. With the force of a hurricane, flame and coal dust, expelled by the immense pressure, billowed out of the mine and blew like a geyser more than 100 feet into the air. Forty-four men, ranging in age from 17 to 52, were killed. The plaque in front of the Clymer Borough Building remembers the terrible explosion at Sample Run Mine.



Top: CBC planing mill in Clymer, 1923

Above: Company house construction on Jefferson Street, July 1923

Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company Media Collection



Commodore: A New Kind of Company Town

by Eileen Mountjoy



Top: Superintendents' houses in Commodore

Above: Company houses in Commodore were built of solid cement blocks over wood frames.

Residents said the houses were warm in winter and cool in summer.

*Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection*

Indiana County's great mining boom lasted throughout World War I. During this period, the Clearfield Bituminous Coal Company (CBC) struggled to keep pace with the nation's demand for coal. The end of the war and peacetime conditions helped create the setting for one of the area's model company towns, Commodore, built by the CBC. CBC was an unusual coal company as it did not sell coal; all coal was used as locomotive fuel for the New York Central Railroad.

By 1919, CBC mines in Indiana County produced three-fourths of the company's total output, and officers of the corporation, headed by President F. E. Herriman, relocated their main office building to Indiana. At the same time, the town of Commodore was planned. Construction began late in 1919. The close proximity of corporation officials, a relaxed post-war atmosphere, and the improved technology available by 1919 combined to make Commodore a new type of company town. Commodore mines No. 1 and No. 3 were drift mines, and No. 2 was a slope mine. Commodore is located on Two Lick Creek, near the old coal town of Lovejoy. Paul Gill was the engineer who laid out the town: "We named it for Commodore Vanderbilt, founder of the New York Central Railroad." Visitors to Commodore are still struck by the unusual solid cement-block construction of the houses. "Indiana contractor John Klingsmith suggested those blocks to the company," said Paul Gill. "They were solid cement." Lumber for wooden building frames came from CBC's mill in Clymer.

By January of 1921, 100 company houses were completed. The cement-block dwellings had electric lighting and running water, and were rented to miners and their families for \$14.00 per month. Miners' families marveled at the conveniences available at CBC's modern facility in Commodore. Instead of the outhouses synonymous with coal town living, company houses were provided with chemical toilets, which were remodeled in 1924, and "converted into a sanitary sewer system," said Paul Gill. "It was only the third of its kind in the state."

By 1921, the CBC built the Green Township High School, in response to the town's population growth. In 1924, the men of Commodore, assisted by the CBC, used their few spare hours to build a non-denominational church. Daily life at Commodore did not develop in quite the same way as older coal towns, where lack of transportation created a need for a self-contained community. One long-time inhabitant of Commodore explained, "We had at least a few cars right from the first. We could go to Indiana or to Clymer without too much trouble, except for the muddy roads in the winter." For those without cars, Mrs. Ella Seanor of Indiana, Pennsylvania, said, "When I was a girl, the streetcar went from Indiana to Clymer every hour and a half. From there, it was only six miles out to Commodore. Plenty of people

walked it.” Another of Commodore’s residents agreed, “We had a close relationship with nearby towns, especially Sample Run, Barr Slope, and Clymer. There was another company store in Clymer.” The availability of automobiles contributed to Commodore’s new look. Paul Gill said, “When the town was built, we put up garages for some people. As the years passed and more families owned cars, residency in Commodore was no longer required for miners.” By the 1930s, one retired CBC official said, “many of our men were commuting 30 to 40 miles to work.”

Although a serene community life and modern housing attracted many miners to Commodore, working conditions at the mines were of paramount importance. In 1923, 281 men mined coal in Commodore. Andrew Hudzick, Sr., started working at the mines when he was 11 years old. He said, “I was big for my age and worked in a country bank mine near Eleanora, in Jefferson County, every day after school until 10:00 p.m. It was hard work, and we only got 17 cents a ton.” He came to Commodore and was pleased with conditions there.

Keeping underground operations running smoothly and safely required the combined efforts of many men. A. E. Long came to CBC in 1925. In 1931, he became a mechanization engineer, and was general superintendent by 1945. Long said, “Commodore was classified as a gassy mine, and all our miners had to wear electric lamps and self-rescuers.” Commodore was mined by hand and early cutting machines, but CBC began to mechanize in 1931.

In the 1920s, the combination of comfortable housing and efficient mining methods made Commodore one of Indiana County’s most successful company towns, but widespread labor-management problems reached mining communities across the nation. “Here in Commodore, we held onto our union longer than some towns,” recalled a retired miner, “but CBC couldn’t compete with non-union wages. Then there were Coal and Iron Police in Commodore, and the company brought in strikebreakers. But my dad wouldn’t leave. He said that if he had to mine coal non-union, he’d as soon do it in Commodore as anywhere else.” A miner’s wife commented, “The only trouble we had in Commodore was when the union was broken in 1927. There was bitter resentment against those scabs. The ones with families moved into vacant houses; they must have been desperate to come here. I really pitied their children as all the town kids made their lives miserable.” At nearby Barr Slope, non-union miners were guarded by police.

In 1932, a new union was formed. As tension left the community, Commodore residents again enjoyed baseball, picnics, and church activities. The mines continued to produce coal for the New York Central Railroad until after World War II, when trains switched to diesel. In 1950, 132,000 tons of coal were mined in Commodore for station heating and power plant use. Tonnage dropped to 67,000 in 1951; mines officially closed in August, and 2,000 CBC workers were laid off. As the company houses were offered for sale by the CBC, many families who were able to find work bought their own homes.



Above: A miner’s hard hat with electric lamp and battery, early twentieth century

Below: CBC No. 1 Mine in Commodore

Bottom: Mechanized coal loaders increased mining productivity.

Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company Media Collection



Nanty-Glo: Valley of Coal

by John Dropcho

Nanty-Glo, or the original Welsh spelling, Nant-y-Glo, meaning streams or valley of coal, lies in the Blacklick Creek valley and is located in the heart of vast deposits of bituminous coal in Cambria County. The large valley area was first granted to Thomas Falls in 1794; then it was sold to Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. The property was gradually broken up and bought by early settlers: the Wagner, Davis, and Adams families c. 1830. It was at the time a thick, dark forest of hardwood trees, cut by the Blacklick Creek. The early settlers came from Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and England. However, as late as 1896, there were only 13 dwellings along the banks of the creek. Nanty-Glo naturally began as a lumber camp, which lasted about 10 years. Farming followed on the cleared land. Vast deposits of coal were soon discovered, which drew large numbers of eastern and southern European immigrants. At one point, approximately three-quarters of the population were of Slavic nationalities. The coal boom had begun! The coal mined was used to heat homes, generate electricity for manufacturing and steel industries, and fuel the transportation industry, moving goods by rail and water.

Nanty-Glo, the largest community in Cambria County second only to Johnstown, had its coal production and population peak of 6,240 residents just before and during the 1940s. During these years, there were five large commercial mines operating full time in Nanty-Glo alone; in addition, there were approximately eight or nine smaller house-coal mines in operation. Heisley Mine, the largest, alone employed 1,130 miners. According to Pennsylvania state statistics, this was the largest concentration of coal mines in one town, in all of Pennsylvania! Jackson and Blacklick Townships and Vintondale Borough, which the Tri-Area Historical Society and Liberty Museum represent, had at least one fair-size mine operating in each town.

The Great Depression popularized the social documentary photograph. In 1937, the Farm Security Administration (FSA) hired photographers to document the plight of the poor and oppressed in rural and small towns across America. In eight years, they produced more than 270,000 photographs.

Photographer Ben Shahn, known for his murals in government buildings and his paintings of street life, the Sacco-Vanzetti trial, and social injustice in general, was already working for the FSA. In 1937, Shahn came to Nanty-Glo to document the area's social injustice and the plight of the poor during the Great Depression. Looking closely at his photographs, people could observe the troubled faces, resignation, and worn, patched clothing covered with black, oily coal dust.



Above (Detail): Two boys gathered burnable coal from the boney pile in Nanty-Glo, 1937.

Ben Shahn
FSA/Library of Congress

Below: During a strike, miners lined up in the basement of UMWA Hall for sacks of potatoes, 1950.

Tri-Area Historical Society and Liberty Museum



Alfred Eisenstaedt, in 1936, was one of the very first photographers to be hired by the newly formed *Life Magazine*. Because of his special eye for ordinary people, he was thought to be the father of photojournalism. In 1943, Eisenstaedt was sent by *Life Magazine* to Nanty-Glo to document the impending miners' strike for fair wages and safer working conditions. Nanty-Glo was featured in a seven-page article in *Life Magazine*, dated May 10, 1943, and also in *Time Magazine*, dated May 10, 1943. During World War II, mining families suffered because of wartime inflation of prices of food, clothing, and all the necessities of daily life, without a raise in their meager wages. Because of the impending strike, the miners were frequently portrayed in the press and especially by mine operators as unpatriotic. However, a higher percentage of miners bought United States war bonds than the mine owners and operators. The miners also consented to have \$1.00 deducted from their paychecks for the Red Cross War Relief Fund, and also raised money for USO centers. Nanty-Glo had the reputation as a very strong United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) union town and for protest policies and patriotism.

As in all coal patch towns, the miners were tightly controlled by the coal barons, who employed their own armed, mounted police force, the Coal and Iron Police. The police were used to prevent union meetings, strikes, protect scabs, and enforce strict company rules. In the 1920s, the coal barons also imported groups of the Ku Klux Klan to intimidate miners' families—especially the Roman Catholics and eastern European immigrants.

Nanty-Glo's early businesses were a passenger train station serviced by the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Cambria & Indiana Railroad, five schools, four hotels, chemical works, soda bottling works, two music stores, tannery, cigar factory, saw mill, blacksmith shops, and many family-owned stores. During the 1940s, Nanty-Glo was a busy and thriving community with a population of more than 6,240, served by six Protestant and two Catholic churches, one Finnish church, and a synagogue. Businesses then included two lumber yards, feed mill, restaurants, two dentists, four doctors, two funeral homes, bowling alley, dress factory, two schools, three company stores, two hardware stores, four fraternal organizations, two pharmacies, three meat markets, two department stores, bakery, four auto dealerships, jewelry store, two banks, five grocery stores, a weekly newspaper, police force, volunteer fire company, and three movie theaters—the largest seated 1,000 and was air-conditioned. Nanty-Glo was home to a very talented baseball team, the Cambria County Industrial League, and two major league players. James "Rip" Collins played for the St. Louis Cardinals and the Pittsburgh Pirates. Charlie Metro played for the Detroit Tigers and Philadelphia Athletics, and was a coach for the Cubs. World War II flying ace Lieutenant Colonel Boyd "Buzz" Wagner was from Nanty-Glo, but that's another interesting story.

Both Ben Shahn and Alfred Eisenstaedt, along with anonymous amateur photographers in Nanty-Glo, captured a vivid record of ordinary people, historic time and place, and individual strength in a very unsettled time.



Top: The tipple at Heisley Mine No. 3, which dominated Nanty-Glo's landscape for decades, no longer stands.

Tri-Area Historical Society and Liberty Museum

Above (*Detail*): A girl and her mother scavenged coal from the Springfield Mine boney pile, 1937.

Ben Shahn
FSA/Library of Congress

Heilwood: A Small Coal Mining Town

by Ronald Kuzemchak



Above: A view of Heilwood, c. 1910
Collection of John F. Busovicki

Below: Miners sometimes were paid in scrip that could only be used in the company store.

Bottom: Penn Mary Hospital was the first built for that purpose in Indiana County.

Collection of Ron Kuzemchak



Penn Mary Hospital, Heilwood, Pa.

In 1850, a portion of Wheatfield Township in Indiana County was sectioned off to create Pine Township, so named because of the extensive pine forests within its borders.

It was within these forests, probably in the 1880s, that lumber man J. M. Guthrie established a settlement called Guthrie's Mills, consisting of a store, gristmill, sawmill, and about 15 houses. One of Guthrie's employees, Edward R. Sutton, coined a nickname for the area, Possum Glory, due to the preponderance of possums. Prosperity for the settlement was short-lived, and Guthrie, being in financial difficulties, was forced to sell his lands at a sheriff's sale in 1896. The property, containing the settlement of Guthrie's Mills, was purchased by J. M. Stewart of Indiana, Pennsylvania. In 1900, Stewart would sell the property to an enterprising businessman from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, named John Heisley Weaver.

J. H. Weaver was born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, in 1860. Although his father had the means to offer his son educational advantages, Weaver was educated in the Williamsport public school system. After public school, Weaver found employment with the Western Union Telegraph Company, the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, and the Williamsport Iron & Nail Company. His next employment would be as a salesman with Donaldson & Thomas, Coal & Coke Merchants of Philadelphia.

By the age of 25, Weaver was president of the West Philadelphia Bank. Not completely satisfied with the banking business, he turned back to the coal and coke business, which seemed to offer more rewards. Working as an agent representative for large mining operators, he was successful enough that in 1889 he formed his own business in Philadelphia called J. H. Weaver & Company, Handlers of Coal and Coke.

In 1899, Weaver began to purchase coal properties in Western Pennsylvania, most notably in Indiana and Cambria Counties. By 1904, Weaver had considerable holdings. With financial backing initially totaling \$100,000 from businessmen in Pennsylvania and New York, he decided to build his own model company town. It would be located in Pine Township near the former site of Guthrie's Mills on a tract of land that he had purchased from John S. Bowers. The town would be called Heilwood, a combination of his nickname Heil and possibly his first coal mine in West Virginia, Heisleywood. However, the town's former nickname, Possum Glory, remained and the railroad station was called Possum Glory Junction.

In an interview, Weaver was quoted as saying, "If you would make your business a success, you must get good service from your workmen, and if you would get good service from your workmen, you must make it worth

their while to serve you.” With this in mind, he had the plans for the town drawn up.

The town would have all the amenities necessary to attract and maintain contentment among the mine workers and their families. A company store, schools, amusement hall, churches, dairy, playgrounds, hospital, power house, and water system were all located within the immediate area. The company also sponsored a baseball team and a community band, and initiated safety programs in both the community and the schools. Various social and fraternal organizations such as the Red Men, National Slovak Society, Monte Grappa Lodge, and the Polish National Alliance were organized so that the diverse ethnic population could achieve ethnic solidarity and establish mutual aid in cases of sickness or death.

Heilwood would become a closed town; all undesirables such as union organizers, peddlers, or agitators would be denied access to the town. In addition, the mines were all captive mines, and the production would not be put on the open market, but was instead sent directly to businesses that had provided the initial capital for the creation of the town.

By 1906, Weaver had six mines in operation producing more than 112,000 tons of coal. It was at this time that he sold his operation to the Pennsylvania and Maryland Coal Company, also known as Penn Mary Coal Company, for a reported \$1.8 million.

In the coming years, additional housing would be constructed, bringing the number of houses to almost 400 and the population to nearly 3,000. The number of employees working in the mines would peak at 900, and production would rank the Penn Mary operation second in Indiana County to the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company in total tons produced.

At the February, 1913, meeting of the Sanitary Engineers in Philadelphia, the chief engineer of the Pennsylvania State Department of Health, Herbert Snow, reported Heilwood to be “the most sanitary mining town in Pennsylvania.”

By 1928, the majority of the mines in the immediate Heilwood area would be closed either due to the fact that they had been “worked out” or that the coal was too deep to mine economically. This resulted in a decided decline in the number of employees, and the townspeople found themselves out of a job and out of a place to live. Only two mines would remain in production with the number of employees totaling less than 400. Throughout the Depression years, the mines worked sporadically. The number of employees grew to nearly 500 during World War II.

Heilwood’s place in Indiana County’s coal heritage is an important one, not only for the production of coal, but as the site of the first building in the county erected (in 1909) solely as a hospital, known as the Penn Mary Hospital, and also for the establishment (in 1911) of the first Boy Scout Troop in Indiana County.

More information and photographs of Heilwood can be found at www.heilwood.com.



Top: The Penn Mary Coal Company Baseball Team, 1911

Center: The Loggia Monte Grappa Band, c. 1930

Above: Heilwood’s Boy Scout Troop, chartered in 1911, was the first in Indiana County.

Collection of Ron Kuzemchak

The Community of Sagamore

by Eileen Mountjoy

By 1900, company-owned mining towns were firmly established as a way of life. The lifeline of the early coal towns was the railroad, which transported coal as far as the Great Lakes. In 1902, the extension of the railroad from Jefferson County opened up the coalfields of Indiana County. A shanty town was hastily built, which housed nearly 700 laborers who worked on the railroad. Some early residents claim that the community of Sagamore was named in honor of a New York Indian chief, while others believe it was named after President Theodore Roosevelt's home, Sagamore Hill.

In August, 1905, the *Indiana Times* reported that the Buffalo & Susquehanna Coal and Coke Company (B&S) awarded a contract to the Hyde-Murphy Company to erect company houses near Wallopsburg. Before construction began on the houses, William Hayes, aided financially by the railroad, built the 60-room Hotel No. 19, where the company doctor, officials, and construction foremen lived in comfort while supervising the development of the new operation. In late 1905, the railroad was completed to Sagamore, and the Hyde-Murphy shipped materials to construct the first 90 company houses. According to the Hyde-Murphy's plans, double houses had five rooms on each side and single houses contained seven rooms. In 1911, the firm of Kline & Potts added 30 homes, and later erected 30 cabins in an area called Shantytown, on the edge of town. By the early 1920s, at least 500 houses were completed.

In the fall of 1905, the B&S had eight mine openings. In 1913, Sagamore mines employed 806 men, and produced on average 600,000 tons of high grade coal annually. Even at the close of 1908, during a national economic slump, the *Indiana Evening Gazette* reported, "The B&S Coal and Coke Company at Sagamore has never been more successful than at the present time." The prosperity of the mines at Sagamore made the community a desirable place to live. John Kovalchick remembered when his family moved to Sagamore in 1909. The family came from Czechoslovakia, and after several years in a Jefferson County mining town, they moved to Sagamore after hearing about the steady wages and good conditions. John Kovalchick recalled, "In 1909, Sagamore was twice as big as it is now. Houses in this popular town were at such a premium that every house—even the singles—sheltered two families, and some overworked housewives cared for as many as a dozen boarders."

A further influx of population occurred late in 1910, when the B&S abandoned its Onondaga mines near Punxsutawney. By November of 1910, B&S crews had moved all mine machinery to Sagamore. The *Indiana Evening Gazette* reported, "Practically all the miners formerly employed at Onondaga have left and gone to Sagamore."



Top: Company houses in Sagamore
Above: St. Mary's Greek Catholic Church and parishioners
Below: The hotel in Sagamore was a likely starting point for this memorial parade, 1911.
Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company Media Collection



The Keystone Store, Sagamore's company store, was built in 1905-1906. Throughout the late 1900s, A. R. McHenry served as storekeeper. By 1914, however, in spite of the company's unwritten rule that all miners must buy at the Keystone Store, the town supported seven additional stores. By the late 1920s, the number of stores grew to 18, and included Lorenzo's, Mother Richard's Candy Store, and Tallis and Evan's Clothing Store. In 1918, Roy Orr started working in the Keystone Store as a boy. He made deliveries and waited on customers when the store was crowded. Roy Orr said the company store "was like a whole group of stores under one roof," including a grocery store, drugstore, dry goods department, cashier's office, furniture store, and butcher shop. Although there were other grocery stores in town, most residents preferred to buy from the Keystone Store, where high-quality goods could be charged to the miners' checks.

Norman Coy, a retired miner, spent part of his boyhood in Sagamore. He came to Sagamore when his father was hired by the B&S to run a coal-cutting machine. Norman Coy remembered the town with great enthusiasm: "We really lived it up in Sagamore. There was something going on all the time." As a boy too young to go into the mines, he remembered the fun of growing up in the closely knit community.

While most memories of Sagamore are pleasant ones, the community had its share of tragedy. Norman Coy said, "Accidents in the mines were a common occurrence." Sagamore remained free of major explosions such as those in Ernest in 1910 and 1916. A state mine inspector's report on Sagamore for the year ending 1908 noted, "among other deaths recorded that year, of Frank Syrock, aged 17. He was working in Sagamore Mine No. 17 when he was fatally injured by a fall of coal while helping his father load a car."

Roy Blystone went into the mines at Sagamore when he was 15 years old. He recalled, "Once inside the mine, you had to nail your lunch bucket to a post or the rats would get it. They would claw the lid right off your dinner pail. But the presence of the rats was a good sign. Where the rats were, you knew you were safe."

The mines reached maximum production during World War I, and the boom continued into the early 1920s. By that date, John Kovalchick estimated that 1,600 men worked at Sagamore and the total population of the town reached 3,000. Then, in 1924, a major shutdown of the mines occurred, and most mines in western Pennsylvania remained closed for two years as a result of coal companies refusing to meet the demands of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) Jacksonville Agreement. Unionized miners received eviction notices, and company police forcibly removed people from their homes.

In 1933, the new UMWA was organized in Sagamore. Though the union improved working conditions for miners, the town never fully recovered and the population continued to decline. In 1943, the wartime demand for coal brought a brief revitalization to Sagamore when the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company leased Sagamore Mines No. 13 and No. 16 from the B&S. The mines at Sagamore permanently closed in 1950.



Top: The Keystone Store in Sagamore

Above: Ben Trunzo of Sagamore started working in the mines at age 12 as a trapper boy, opening and closing ventilation doors for the coal cars.

Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company Media Collection

Recreation in the Coal Fields: The Case of Baseball

by Dr. James P. Dougherty

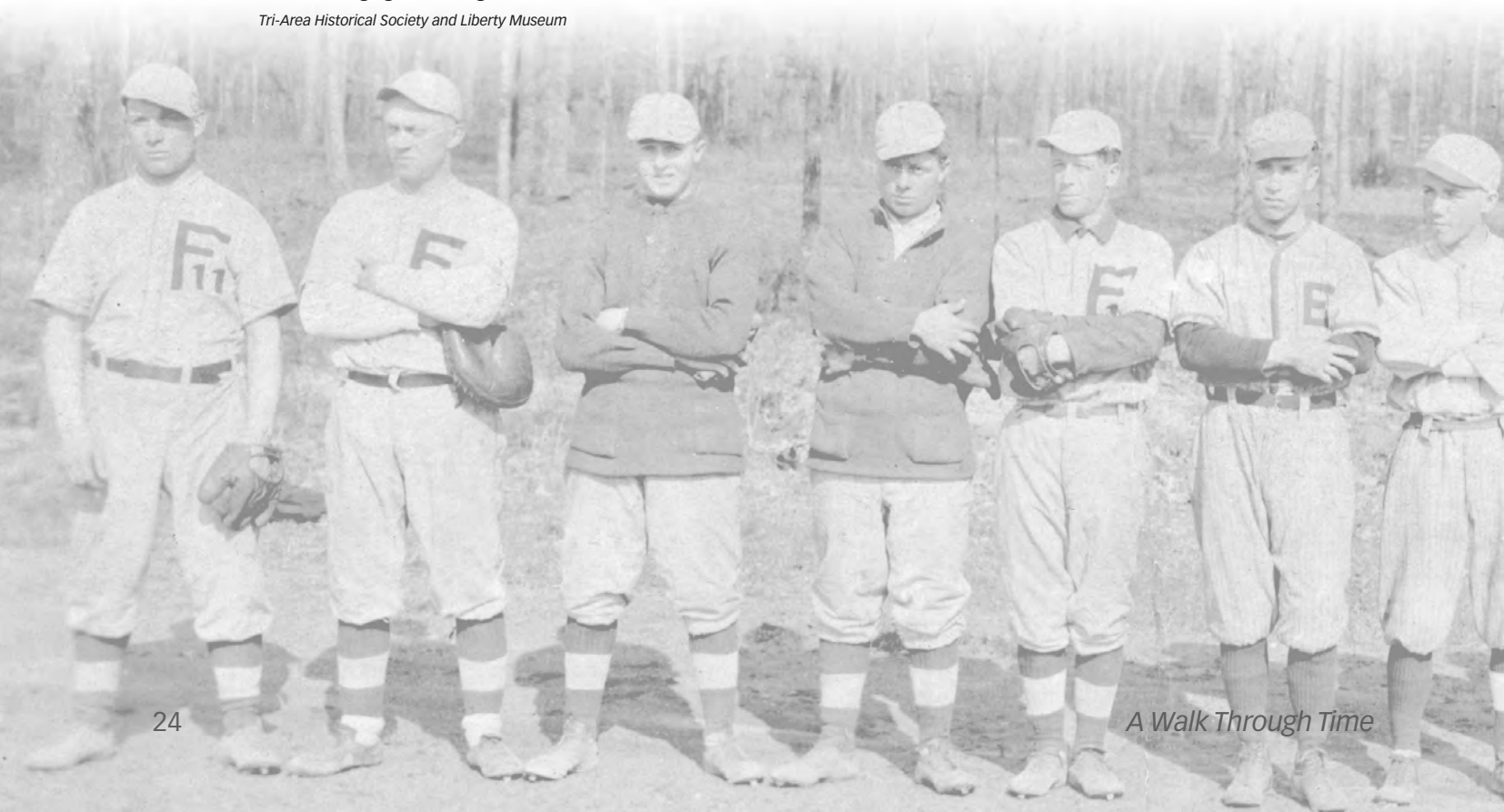
Before there was television, baseball dominated the recreational scene of mining communities throughout Pennsylvania. From the 1920s to the late 1950s, baseball teams in the Cambria County Industrial League (CCIL) played three games a week on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. These affairs were so popular that the major streets and high-ways leading to the ball fields were often clogged with parked cars and pedestrians, all vying for a prized bleacher seat or a good vantage point along the foul lines or close to the outfield wall. The crowds reflected the ethnic composition of the community as fans often cheered on their favorite teams or players in their native languages. It has been reported that some towns practically shutdown on Sundays with nearly every resident attending the local baseball game.

This event forged an interesting relationship between the coal operators and the miners. The operators paid for uniforms, equipment, ball field maintenance, and travel expenses. With the approval of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), the workers allowed operators to deduct a nominal fee to assist in defraying some of the costs. The game helped boost the morale of all community residents. It provided the miners with a haven from the daily grind of their stressful and dangerous jobs. A crucial victory or team championship could give an operator bragging rights over his coal company rivals.

Top: James "Rip" or "Ripper" Collins of Nanty-Glo went on to play major league baseball.

Above: Nanty-Glo native Charlie Metro played for the Detroit Tigers and the Philadelphia Athletics before managing minor league teams.

Tri-Area Historical Society and Liberty Museum



Recognizing their important social value, the companies made special efforts for recruiting the best players they could find from the region. To lure a high quality prospect, they gave the athlete an easier and safer job, normally outside of the mine, often at a higher wage. Many experts rank the value of the CCIL as equal to today's Single A minor league baseball. Some players used the opportunity as a stepping stone to the major leagues.

Nanty-Glo native James "Ripper" Collins spent nine seasons in the majors, playing with the St. Louis Cardinals (known as the Gas House Gang), Chicago Cubs, and Pittsburgh Pirates. He went on to lead the National League in home runs with 35 in 1934. Charlie Metro played for the Detroit Tigers and Philadelphia Athletics from 1943 to 1945. He managed in the minor leagues, for the Chicago Cubs in 1962 and the Kansas City Royals in 1970. Nanty-Glo home run legend Glen Hawkins turned down pro contracts, opting to remain in the area with family and friends.

Currently baseball is still being played on the original ball field site in Nanty-Glo. The old Memorial Field, now named McMullen Field after a former field caretaker, serves as a venue for T-ball, Little League, and the American Legion. Girls have become involved in both T-ball and Little League, with nearly every team having one or two on their squads. In addition, Blacklick Valley High School has developed a successful girls' softball program that won numerous league titles. Some of their players have gone on to receive athletic scholarships at local universities, including Saint Francis University and Indiana University of Pennsylvania.



Top: A Vintondale player up at bat
 Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
 Media Collection

Above: Nanty-Glo's Polish National Alliance team
 took the CCIL championship in 1922.
 Tri-Area Historical Society and Liberty Museum





The Ernest Grays and the Summer of '35

by Dr. Theresa McDevitt

“Ernest Grays Win Opener at Home,” “Grays Defeat Indiana,” “Ernest Grays Take Surprise Win from Rochester & Pittsburgh (R&P) Stars, 10 to 4.” So ran articles in the *Indiana Evening Gazette* in the summer of 1935. Who were the Ernest Grays and what did they do that summer to draw the attention of local sportswriters?

In the 1930s, while the Depression raged, baseball ruled in the mill towns and coal patches of western Pennsylvania. Boys spent their free time playing games with makeshift balls, gloves, and bats on fields and hillsides across the region. Men, and occasionally women, played in leagues which grew out of places of employment, worship, or recreation. In isolated coal towns, baseball was a major source of entertainment. Thousands of men, women, and children of diverse nationalities would travel great distances to attend games and socialize on the sidelines as well as watch the play. Mario Romoli “Romeo,” a star ball player in his day, recalled that spectators would gather on the hillsides near games to watch the play, making it look like the hill was covered with sheep. While the games were going on, he declared, the main streets were so deserted that “you could rob the town.”

Beginning in the late 1920s, R&P sponsored a baseball league of miner ball players with teams representing towns in Indiana and Jefferson Counties. The players reflected the diverse ethnic groups who labored in the pits. Though most players were white, particularly talented African American players could participate in the league, though they were banned from the professional baseball teams of the day. The Ernest ball team could boast of at least two talented African American players: Arthur “Arty” Harrison, who played on their championship team of the early 1930s, and Alonzo Hicks, who would eventually play for the Homestead Grays. There was also at least one independent team from the area made up entirely of African Americans: the Ernest Grays.

Ernest, founded by R&P, was booming by the 1930s. Mining jobs had drawn immigrants from at least 13 different nations as well as the mining regions of the American South. The 1930 census shows a handful of black families living in Ernest, most often with household heads from Alabama or Tennessee. Many of those names were on the roster of the Ernest Grays.

The Ernest Grays was an independent team which frequently played the teams of the R&P League. Oral history interviews conducted in the 1970s with star players from the R&P League show that these star players held the team in great esteem. One of them, Husky Hess, remembered, “They had a good team, buddy! They beat the R&P All Stars at the fairgrounds!”



Dodge Embry (seated center between his brothers Jerry and Bishop) was a star speedball pitcher for the Ernest Grays. Six feet, two inches tall, Embry helped the Grays to numerous victories over R&P League teams with his formidable pitching technique.

Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection

Newspaper articles from the summer of 1935 support the opinion of these baseball players. That summer, the sports writers of the *Indiana Evening Gazette* had high praise for the Grays. In May, the team won its opening game. The reporter praised the talents of the Grays players including Dodge Embry, a speed pitcher who been recruited from Johnstown to work in the mines; Freddy Moorfield, one of two talented brothers who kept the other teams on their toes that summer; and catcher “Boots” Smith, an all-around athlete guiding the team from behind the plate and handling Dodge Embry’s burning speeders without a mishap. It was declared that the Grays presented the best line-up ever to be seen by the Ernest fans, and that the play was a “treat” to watch.

By July, the newspaper recorded that the Grays had successfully sailed through the early part of the season and racked up a record of 24 wins. By this time, the reporter speculated that the Grays “may be considered as good as any aggregation in the R&P circuit,” and that it was “one of the best (if not the best) teams to ever represent the colored people of Ernest.”

That winning summer culminated with a game against the R&P All Stars, the best players of the predominately white teams in the league. The highly anticipated game was sponsored by the Central Labor Union of Indiana, and was to take place at the Indiana Fair Grounds on Labor Day, Monday, September 2, on a diamond specially constructed for the event.

When the game was played, it was to a huge crowd—an estimated 15,000 people—possibly “the largest collection of baseball enthusiasts...ever to witness a contest in Indiana County.” And what an upset that crowd witnessed! After playing and defeating another team that morning, the Grays served up a brilliantly executed game in which they soundly defeated the All Stars by a score of 8 to 3. Merle Angello recorded that the Grays “produced the kind of ball that outclassed their opponents in every manner,” in spite of the fact that Freddie Moorefield, the star player of the game, had an injured finger. The Grays completed the season with 36 wins and nine defeats.

At the end of that summer, Embry, the Moorefield brothers, “Boots” Smith, Arty Harrison (who had by that summer moved from the Ernest league team to the Grays), and the rest of the talented players on the Ernest Grays had demonstrated to whites that African Americans could equal and excel white players on the baseball field. More than 70 years later, Alfonso Embry, the son of Dodge Embry, still remembers the triumph of the Ernest Grays. “In those days, we didn’t have a lot to be proud of; but the Grays, they made us proud!”

This essay is the product of research begun in the 1970s by Dr. Dale Landon, Dr. George Wiley, and Eileen Mountjoy. They conducted oral history interviews with R&P baseball players. These interviews are available in IUP Special Collections and University Archives (Collection 30, Local History Projects).



Alonzo Hicks (top row, far left) played for the Ernest team in the R&P Baseball League before he joined the independent Ernest Grays. Hicks eventually joined Pittsburgh’s Homestead Grays in the Negro Baseball League.

*Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection*



A Woman's Day

by Eileen Mountjoy



When recalling the lives of early local Pennsylvania coal miners, it is important to remember the women who packed the miners' dinner pails, washed the families' clothes and kept them fed, cleaned the house, and disciplined and cared for the children. This and much more was a woman's day in a mining town.

The threat of an accident formed part of the miners' working conditions. One woman remembered that she always said a silent prayer while her husband readied his drills and dynamite in preparation for his shift. Having done all she could to guarantee his well-being, she filled the hours of his absence doing her job: keeping the family fed, the children disciplined, and the house clean, working until midnight or beyond. Mining town wives, with only a broom, dustpan, and mop, fought constantly with omnipresent coal dust. In the days before vacuum sweepers, some housewives saved used tea leaves, dampened them, scattered them on their floors, and swept them up, leaving a clean floor behind.

Apart from cooking, cleaning, and childrearing, wives were in charge of the huge garden which filled every available inch of space on its lot. Later, housewives helped each other can and preserve large quantities of fruits and vegetables to supplement the food budget.

Housewives made all their own bread, and older residents of coal towns remembered the beehive ovens which stood in many backyards, where efficient wives baked 20 or 30 crusty loaves each week. Menus reflected the rise and fall of the local coal industry, with buckwheat cakes and sausage for breakfast following a work week of five or six days, and oatmeal starting the day when the pay had been short. Miners' wives who survived the Depression years believe that years of practicing the strictest economy helped them get through the hard times with a minimum of panic.

With husbands absent for long periods of time working in the mines, miners' wives did most of the disciplining of the children. Men and women who grew up in mining towns testify that their mothers kept them so busy they had no time for mischief.

At the company store, mining town women bought bolts of the same coarse muslin used in the mines to block off dangerous or unused underground areas. From this versatile material, they made curtains, sheets, pillow slips, and towels, either on a treadle sewing machine or entirely by hand, sometimes dyeing their homemade products with coffee grounds.

The housewife knitted all her children's socks, stockings, caps, and scarves. When stockings could no longer be darned, she cut off



Top: Women in mining towns had little time for leisure.

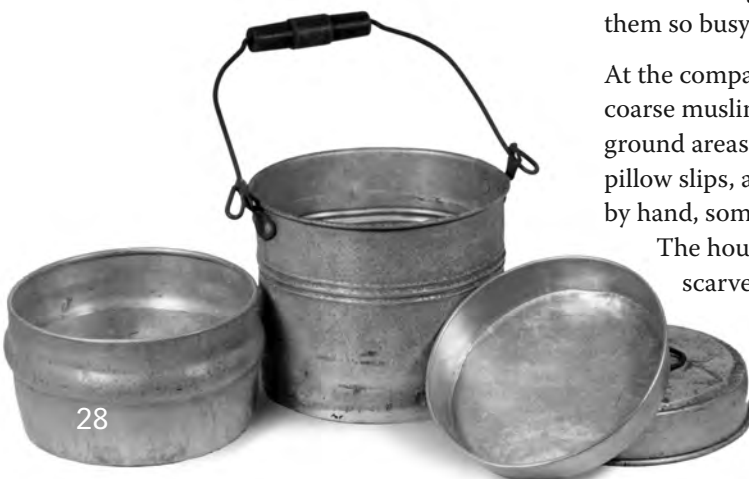
Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection

Above: The Joseph Dert family, Heilwood

Collection of Ron Kuzemchak

Below: The miner's dinner pail had several compartments and held enough food for a day or more in case the miner became trapped in an accident.

Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection



the foot part to make “tube” socks for younger children. A schoolgirl generally owned two dresses, “one on the hanger and the other on her back.” Children passed along outer clothing down the line until it wore out completely.

After clothing her family in the most economical way possible, the miner’s wife faced the problem of keeping those clothes clean in a community where coal dust permeated everything and filtered in even under the doorsills. Well into the 1930s, women in many coal mining towns carried all their own water for laundering. The coal town housewife boiled her family’s clothes in big copper kettles on the stove and then rubbed them “on the board” with homemade soap. When she hung her wash outside, she had to take it down quickly before the airborne coal dust blackened it again. In addition to washing his clothes, a miner’s wife usually washed the miner, too. In company towns all over Indiana County, a ritual was enacted daily when the men returned from work. Each miner bathed in the kitchen using a zinc tub which had been filled by his wife with steaming water.

Large families were the rule across the country in the twenties and thirties and in the coal towns, too, children formed a large part of the population. One woman who was raised in a company town recalls fondly, “Babies were the only new thing we ever got!” Women seldom consulted a physician during their pregnancies and had their babies at home, attended by the company doctor and his nurse. After delivery, the new mother borrowed a niece or capable neighbor girl and took the customary six weeks to recover from the birth. One woman remembered that during these six weeks, her mother enjoyed playing her treasured piano. But when her “vacation” ended, the busy mother firmly closed the piano lid, and the endless round of cleaning and cooking engulfed her again.

The coal companies maintained a doctor who was readily available, and deducted three dollars a week from each miner’s salary to cover the cost. Large towns had a resident physician, and a traveling doctor visited small communities, checking in at the company store to see if anyone needed him. Occasionally, a parent brought a child to the company store for examination; however, most mothers practiced a little medicine on their own, and concocted some rather strange, though evidently harmless, remedies. One mother, upon hearing of a case of diphtheria or scarlet fever in her locality, lined up her defenseless offspring and spooned into each a soup ladle full of castor oil containing nine drops of turpentine. After each child had visited the privy, she considered her ounce of prevention well administered.

For a cough, the housewife-general practitioner sliced onions, sprinkled them with sugar, baked them in the oven, and liberally doled out the resulting syrup. For sore throats, a mother spooned honey and sulfur into the sufferer. Sauerkraut juice made a fine laxative, and every former coal town child remembered his dose of sulfur and molasses in the spring.



Top: Wash day in Nanty-Glo, 1937. Mining town wives battled coal dust from the mines and the railroad in a constant struggle for cleanliness.

*Ben Shahn
FSA/Library of Congress*

Above: Resourceful housewives, c. 1900, gathered coal from the boney pile for household use.

*Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection*

Coal Strikes in Indiana County

by Dr. Irwin M. Marcus, Dr. James P. Dougherty, Eileen Mountjoy, and Beth O'Leary

In the case of Coral, seven miles south of Indiana, the fear of Bolshevism lasted longer than in other towns in Indiana County, and overlapped with the coal strike of 1919-1920. The strike began in April of 1919 when the Potter Coal and Coke Company failed to recognize the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). Lindo Brigman, post office inspector for Indiana County, accused R. E. Mikesell, postmaster for Coral, “for openly defending Bolshevik outlawry.” This allegation brought a response from Peter Ferrara, a leader of UMWA District 2, who denied that the union miners were Bolsheviks and called for the reinstatement of Mikesell.

Strikers and their families were evicted from their houses in April, 1919, and many spent the next year living in tents. Judge Jonathan Langham, judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Indiana County from 1916 to 1936, presided at a court case involving the local strike leaders. He issued a broad injunction which prohibited strikers from engaging in activities that impeded production. John Brophy and the District 2 leadership provided tents for the evicted families, and sought to negotiate with the Potter Coal and Coke Company. The strike was discontinued on April 23, 1920.

During 1920-1921, coal mine operators wanted to cut wages because the demand for coal had declined. At the February, 1922, meeting of the UMWA, delegates demanded not only the cessation of wage cuts, but a six-hour work day and five-day work week. Fifty thousand miners in southwestern Pennsylvania went on strike on April 1, 1922. Many striking miners’ families faced eviction; on April 10, 1922, newspapers reported “eviction notices received by a number of Berwind-White miners.” Two thousand Somerset County families lived in tents and barracks constructed with District 2 union funds. The families remaining in the villages set up 200 tents near company property at Windber. In August of 1923, after 17 months of sacrifice and struggle, the Somerset County strike ended.

Conditions in Indiana County mirrored the national scene. During the 1920s, Judge Langham used his judicial power to aid coal companies against striking miners and the UMWA. He issued a sweeping injunction against the coal miners and the UMWA during the Rossiter Coal Strike of 1927-1928 that brought national attention. Governor John S. Fisher had been an attorney and a director of the Clearfield Bituminous Coal Company (CBC), which operated the mines in Rossiter. He supported Judge Langham’s injunction, and he condemned the U. S. Senate Committee on Interstate Commerce for its criticism of Langham’s actions.

The expiration of the Jacksonville Agreement, a 1924 measure which set wages of coal miners at \$7.50 a day, and the widespread violation of its terms by coal operators gave urgency to the issue of negotiating a new



Top: The UMWA's *Manual of Procedure for Local Unions* was published in several languages for immigrant miners.

Above: UMWA leader John Brophy

Below: During the strike of 1919-1920 in Coral, miners and families evicted from company housing lived for months in tents erected nearby.

Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company Media Collection



agreement in 1927. Union representatives had been authorized by the UMWA convention to negotiate the best wage agreement possible based on no reduction in wages.

On April 1, 1927, almost 200,000 coal miners went on strike, beginning the largest coal strike since 1922. Representatives of the Bituminous Coal Operators Association of Pennsylvania and UMWA district officers met and agreed to extend the wage rates of the Jacksonville Agreement until July 1, 1927, or the ratification of a new agreement. A wage scale committee, selected by a District 2 convention, met with coal operators in Philadelphia in late May. At this meeting, the operators demanded a 20 percent wage reduction and declared that they would suspend operations after June 30, 1927, if no agreement was reached. The operators contended that competition from non-union fields in the South necessitated major wage reductions. The Scale Committee refused this demand and condemned the operators for violating the human rights of coal miners. The impasse in negotiations continued and the strike began on July 1, 1927. CBC operations became the focal point of the coal strike of 1927-1928 in Indiana County. However, company officials contended that CBC could not remain competitive, and demanded concessions from the miners and UMWA.

Rossiter was the main strike scene in Indiana County in 1927-1928. The CBC surveyed and named the town for E. W. Rossiter, treasurer of the New York Central Railroad, which owned the coal company. Rossiter was located in one of the richest coal fields in Indiana County. In 1917, the population peaked at 5,000, but its economy remained strong into the 1920s. On July 1, 1927, approximately 750 miners at the Rossiter Mine joined other striking miners in western Pennsylvania. UMWA Local Union 1726 adopted a resolution condemning CBC for inaugurating a reign of terror designed to destroy their union. UMWA requested the aid of Senator Lee S. North in assuring the rights guaranteed by the Constitution. By August of 1927, the problems faced by the miners increased as Sheriff J. M. Malcolm of Indiana County issued a proclamation prohibiting loitering, disturbance of the public peace, and gatherings of three or more persons. On September 19, 1927, the Rossiter Mine reopened on a non-union basis. Judge Langham issued a preliminary injunction in November, which forbade miners from picketing, marching, or gathering for meetings or rallies. It prohibited the disbursement of union funds for use by striking miners, forbade newspapers from being used to aid the strikers, and prohibited church services on lots owned by the Magyar Presbyterian Church situated directly opposite the mouth of the mine. Miners replied to the injunction by marching on non-union camps and closing the mines. The company retaliated by increasing the rate of evictions.

In February of 1928, the U. S. Senate Interstate Commerce Committee arrived in Indiana County, which placed the plight of the coal miners in the national spotlight. The committee noted abuses including the labor injunction and the frightful conditions experienced by coal miners. Senator Robert Wagner of New York co-sponsored the Norris-La Guardia Act of 1932, which severely limited the use of labor injunctions.



Top: Coal and Iron Police, photographed during the strike of 1922 in Vintondale, were employed by coal operators to protect company property and put down labor rebellions.

*Denise Dusza Weber Collection
Pennsylvania State Archives*

Center: Coal companies evicted striking miners and their families from company housing, 1905.

Above: The UMWA supplied tents to miners evicted from company housing. Miners and their families lived in tents for the duration of a strike.

*Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection*

Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company Historian

by Dr. Irwin M. Marcus



Eileen Mountjoy, 1980
Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company
Media Collection

Eileen Mountjoy defies classification and doesn't fit into any mold and cannot be pigeonholed.

Her undergraduate education was in art and art history. She also has had several avocations: pet owner, reader, and painter. In addition to cats and dogs, she has had ferrets and horses. She read much nineteenth and twentieth century literature from the English Romantics to the great nineteenth century Russian writers. Thomas Mann and Thomas Hardy were part of her library fare; however, the Bronte sisters, Virginia Woolf, and Jane Austin were her particular favorites.

Eileen is a gregarious person who interacts comfortably with a wide variety of individuals. She has the ability to converse with artists and academics, secularists and upholders of the sacred, coalminers and their families, and the top management of coal companies.

My major official role was to serve as her thesis advisor. The function was of relatively short duration and a positive experience for me. However, our friendship has lasted longer and is still ongoing.

Her personality proved to be an important asset and provided a clue to her connection with Dr. Charles Potter (CEO and chairman of the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company Board of Directors). He provided a financial jumpstart to her coal activities and opened many doors for her. Dr Potter was seeking someone to write a history of the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Company (R&P). Although Eileen lacked knowledge of the coal industry and companies, Dr. Potter realized she was the ideal person for that project. She had intelligence, adaptability, and curiosity. He not only arranged for her to get a position in the IUP archives, funded by R&P, but he also informed company personnel to be responsive to her requests. She conducted many interviews, wrote articles, and collected artifacts in addition to her activities of acquiring and processing archival materials.

Historians who study the coal history of the region will appreciate the archival materials that Eileen acquired and organized. While acquisition of the R&P papers was her major contribution, she also developed a photographic and oral history collection. Her contacts with United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) officials aided Indiana University of Pennsylvania in the acquisition of the District 2 papers of the UMWA.

The library is the hub of the university and the archives are its distinctive domain. Although acquisition, organizing, and cataloging these materials has been a group effort over a long period of time, Eileen's role in this project has been crucial to its progress.

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