

UNDERGROUND COAL MINING

In Western Maryland

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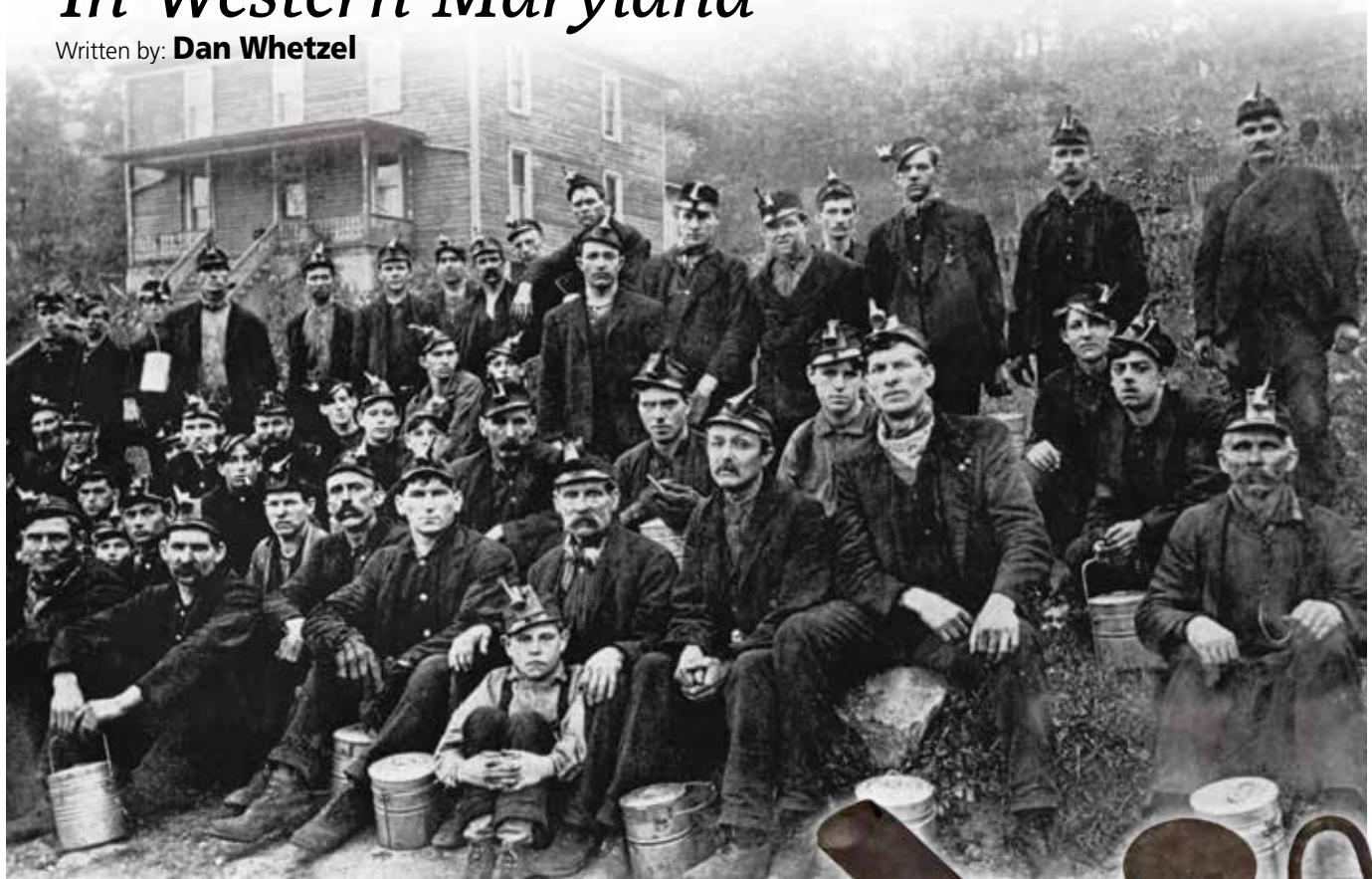


PHOTO COURTESY FROSTBURG MUSEUM

*Oh come all you young fellers so young and so fine
 Seek not your fortune in a dark dreary mine
 It'll form as a habit and seep in your soul
 Till the stream of your blood runs as back as the coal*

— Merle Travis

The Early Days

Western Maryland coal miners worked in the Appalachian Coal Field, part of an enormous coal bed over 900 miles in length and larger than all of England. The area within the coal field known as Georges Creek is located in Western Maryland and between two parallel mountains, called Dans and Big Savage. It was in the 100 square mile valley and the upper reaches of the Potomac River that thousands of miners toiled to earn a living. The coal mining story of Western Maryland is one of sacrifice, hard work, determination, and inspiration that began more than two centuries ago.

A precise date and location for the first coal mine in western Maryland has not been established, but it would be reasonable to speculate that explorers and early settlers along Georges Creek, Jennings Run, and



The open-flame, oil wick cap lamp was commonly used by Georges Creek miners from the 1860s to 1920s and could be purchased or made at home. The lamps resembled a small kettle and contained a mixture of paraffin wax and mineral oil that soaked into a wick. This style lamp, commonly called a "Sunshine Lamp," produced a sputtering and dim light.

Frostburg resident Frederick Zais manufactured wick lamps in his tinsmith shop in Frostburg, Maryland, starting in the 1870s.

His sons carried on the production until carbide lamps became favored by miners.

The lamp above was owned by Earl Evans, courtesy of his daughter, Leona Shaffer. Photo by Lance Bell

the upper Potomac River happened upon exposed seams of coal called outcroppings. Extracting the coal for personal use would have been practical and easy.

The outcroppings did not quickly evolve into commercial enterprises because bulk transportation was limited to wagon travel over rough mountain trails. Even though the coal deposits appeared to be unlimited and easy for the taking, transportation limitations caused it to be priced by the 80 pound bushel.

References to coal deposits first appeared in the 18th century with Benjamin Winslow's map (1736) that marked a coal mine near Savage River. Katherine Harvey, author of *The Best Dressed Miners*, summarized additional 18th century letters and maps describing coal deposits in Western Maryland.

In 1789, the first historical reference to a commercial coal mine in Allegany County appeared in a newspaper story. The writer provided a description of coal being prepared for shipment at a location along Wills Creek, just north of Cumberland and later to be identified as the Sheetz farm. Between 1789-1802 the mine supplied coal to a Cumberland glass factory, Hagerstown nail factory, and the United States Army Arsenal in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia.

Other sources, including a reference in *Underground Coal Mining in Western Maryland*, states that historical tradition places the beginning of commercial mining to a location near Frostburg. In a similar way, a Maryland Historical Trust cultural survey conducted in 2001-2003 found that oral traditions relating to the locations of the first mines along Georges Creek remain valued and honored by residents.



The open-flame carbide lamp was developed in the late 19th century and used by the early 1900s. The lamp contained an upper chamber that was filled with water and a lower chamber filled with carbide. A drip valve on the top controlled the flow of water into the lower chamber.

As the water dripped onto the carbide, a gas-acetylene was produced that burned with a bright white flame. The open flame system could be dangerous in underground mines where gases accumulated. Many mining disasters were attributed to the igniting of gas by open-flame lamps.

The carbide lamp was replaced by battery operated lights that are still in use today.

Building the National Highway near Eckhart (1814-1815) was a boom to the infant coal industry because it led to new discoveries and provided a paved surface to Cumberland. It was near Eckhart and the headwaters of Jennings Run that commercial mining became viable in Allegany County. Vagel Keller, historian, noted that in 1829, 14 of the 15 recorded coal mines were located at those locations. The historical record supplements Mr. Keller's conclusion.

The Hughes map, dated to around 1836 and recently uncovered in the British Museum, identifies the locations of the Hoyes, Eckhart, and Porter mines at Eckhart. During the same year an accompanying report to stockholders of the Maryland Mining Company identified the names of additional coal mines that were operating in the Eckhart area.

The National Highway increased the coal trade but did not provide a satisfactory solution for bulk transportation of the commodity to markets east of Cumberland; wagon travel caused the price of coal to increase significantly with each successive stop along the way. The early alternative

Miner's tin lunch pail (shown closed and in sections). The bottom of the bucket was for tea and the top of the upper section was a compartment for sandwiches. Inside the coal mines the temperature never varied, so the temperature that the food was as it was brought to the mines stayed the same temperature.



This lunch pail, circa 1902, can be viewed at the Frostburg Museum, 50 East Main Street, Frostburg, Maryland. It belonged to Edgar Michaels (1892–1962). Photo by Lance Bell



mode of bulk transport proved to be a risky business that is sometimes lost in the coal mining story.

Boatmen assumed the vital job of delivering coal to towns along the Potomac River and the terminus in Georgetown. Prior to 1842, the commodity was often delivered by wagon and stockpiled in Cumberland where shippers awaited high water in the Potomac River. Crudely built 80-foot boats, constructed by local lumbermen, were loaded with 60-70 tons of coal. Small fleets anchored in nearby Wills Creek created an event for residents who anticipated the launches into the nearby Potomac River. Similar launches were common farther upstream, particularly near Westernport.

Despite the best efforts of the four man crews to maneuver the flat boats, they were no match for the river's rocky bottom. Reports described that even casual contact with obstacles caused the crafts to break apart. Crew members fortunate enough to conclude the journey sold their boats for scrap lumber and walked home. Dependence on

Above: Loaded cars in Potomac Hollow, to be taken to railroad siding in Barton, Maryland.
Photo courtesy of Jack Ayers

Left: From 1850 until about 1915, miner's headgear generally consisted of cloth or canvas hats with leather brims and lamp brackets. Caps protected the miner's eyes from smoke or soot and their head from dust, but its main use was as a mount for their lamps.

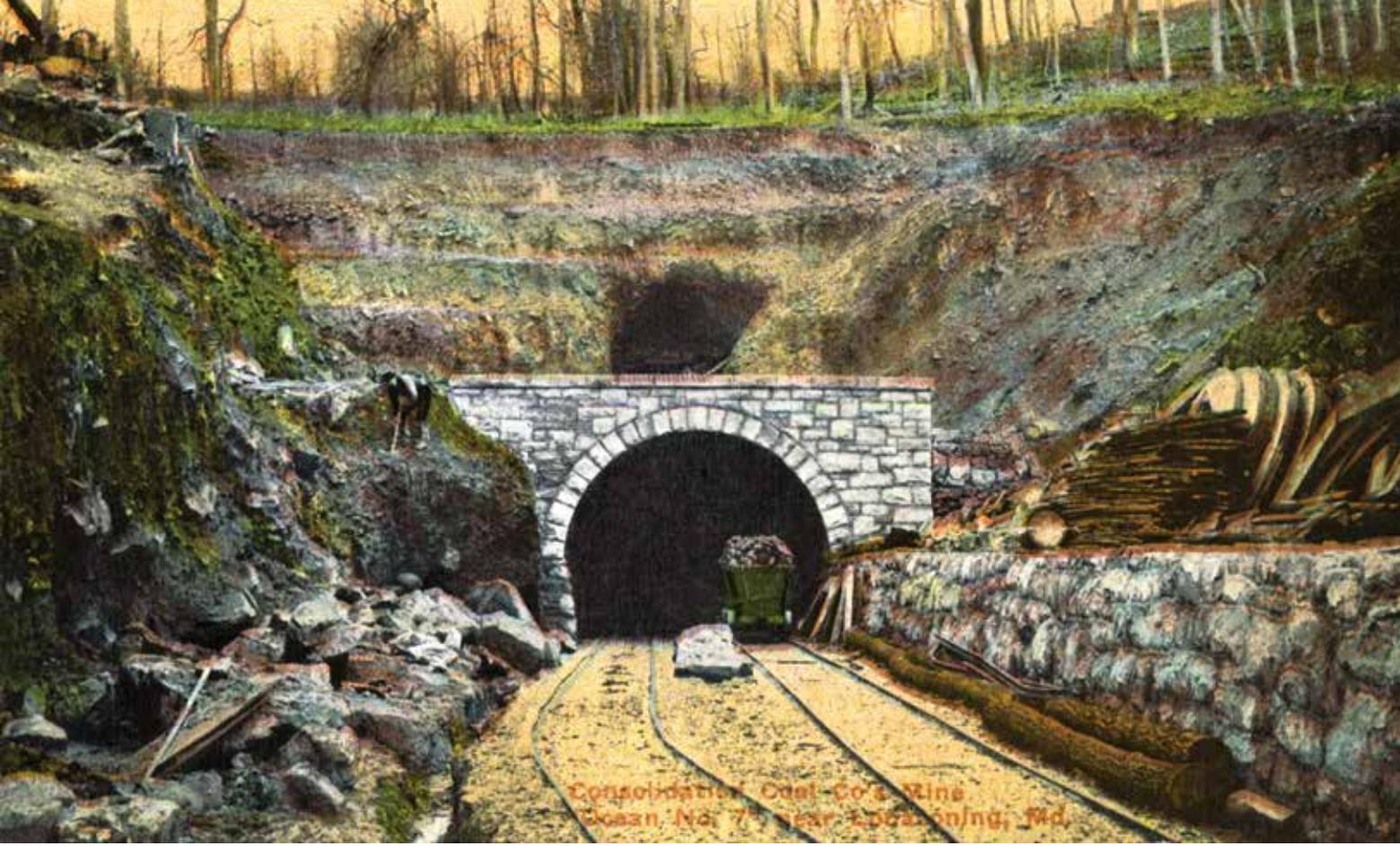
The Flexo Band Cool Cap (right) was distributed by the Portable Lamp & Equipment Company of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, during the 20th century. This cap is made of reinforced leather with a dome comprised of upstanding ribs allowing for protection and ventilation.

A leather and metal lamp bracket could have held an oil-wick (Sunshine) lamp or a carbide lamp.

Both of these caps can be viewed at the Frostburg Museum, 50 East Main Street, Frostburg, Maryland. Photo by Lance Bell

wagons and dangerous boats meant the coal industry could not realize its full potential.

Commercial coal mining reached a mile stone in 1829 when the Maryland Mining Company was incorporated by the state of Maryland, the first such act in the region. The Eckhart landowners were permitted to live on the property as tenant farmers, while the new company assumed responsibility for coal production. Following the initial



charter locally controlled and family owned mines increasingly gave way to corporations that were able to purchase considerable amounts of real estate. Between 1828 and 1848, twenty-eight additional coal companies received charters from the state.

The three earliest company-owned towns in Allegany County, Eckhart, Lonaconing, and Mount Savage,* were originally fashioned after towns in England where many necessities of life had to be provided by the employer. A paternalistic system developed that required employees to live by strict rules governing work schedules and personal behavior; ensuring workers First Amendment rights was not a priority for the owners.

The worst abuses of company towns never prevailed for an extended period of time in Western Maryland, as they did in more remote areas of Appalachia because the mines were located near settlements where a variety of economic opportunities existed. Frostburg and Westernport, towns at the beginning and end of Georges Creek, were the best examples of communities in the coal region that offered diversified business environments.

The largest of the local 19th century coal corporations organized for the purpose of bringing about

*Mount Savage and Lonaconing company towns were involved in iron ore, as well as coal.

OCEAN MINE NUMBER 7 — One of the most noteworthy coal mines in Georges Creek was Consol's Number 7 at Klondike (Lord). The operation became the largest mine in Maryland during the early 1900s and the largest semi-bituminous mine in the world in 1907. The Consol drift mine tapped the "Big Vein" in 1897 and annually produced more than one million tons for several years until 1911.

Total production from Consol Number 7 amounted to nearly 9½ million tons. A company report on Number 7 (1898) provided an interesting insight into the mine's appearance and how it was being worked soon after opening.

"The entrance is arched with fine cut stone over an opening 12 feet in height and 17 feet in width. Back of the arch is lined with stone and brick masonry for a distance of 250 feet up to the solid coal...here a man of full stature can walk upright and without fear of collision with the roof beam overhead for the coal is full 10 feet thickness."

At about half a mile underground, we come to the 'face' or end of the tunnel. Here in a space about 10 feet wide and 9 feet high the miners are toiling with pick and bar, breaking down the coal...here is no blasting with powder because that shatters the coal and breaks the lumps. The Georges Creek miners have for their tools only picks, shovels, and wedging bars."

It is interesting to note that traditional pick and shovel mining methods were still in use during 1898. In more recent years surface mining has uncovered the marks left behind by "pick and shovel" miners more than a century ago. The workings show remarkably straight walls.

The traditional methods did not last much longer because by 1904 mining machines were in use at Number 7, and black powder blasting techniques became widely used throughout Georges Creek as a means to break coal from the tunnel face.



An important section of the Cumberland & Pennsylvania Railroad along Georges Creek was called Carlos Junction. A branch line from the C&P crossed Georges Creek at Woodland and made its way to Carlos and mine Number 7 at Lord (later called Klondike). The area was of sufficient prominence to require an engine house where locomotives were assigned on a permanent basis. The engine house may be seen behind the track side shanty. The photograph likely dates to the early 1900s. *Photograph from Harry Stegmaier Collection*

an orderly and profitable price structure for coal; cut-throat competition had become common place as the industry grew in the mid-1800s. If the supply of coal could be regulated, the market price would become more favorable to operators and shareholders.

To achieve control of the valley, a New York based corporation with the appropriate name Consolidation Coal Company (1864) acquired 55% of the Georges Creek coal companies, and at a later date, all railroads that serviced the valley.

Consolidation's (commonly called "Consol" by residents) attempt to create a monopoly was never realized because a few large companies and many small ones managed to withstand the challenge. According to Vagel Keller, 338 mines operated in the region between 1876 and 1977, most of them small, limited production businesses.

Consol's strong influence was not only felt by direct attempts to limit competition, but also by the practice of providing favorable shipping rates to its own coal operators. By controlling rail service, Consol placed itself in a dominant but not exclusive position in the Georges Creek valley.

Railroads

The only efficient means of moving coal over long distances is by rail, a means of transportation that became available to Allegany County in 1842

with the Baltimore & Ohio's arrival to an excited citizenry in downtown Cumberland.

The B&O's extension spurred the development of short line railroads to local mines. First was the Mount Savage & Cumberland Railroad (1844) that followed Jennings Run from Mount Savage to the Cumberland Narrows. In quick succession came the Maryland Mining Company's Eckhart Railroad (1846) and the Georges Creek Railroad from Piedmont to Lonaconing (1853). The later chartering of the Cumberland & Pennsylvania Railroad (1864) meant that in addition to coal shipments, regular passenger service was available to Frostburg and Georges Creek residents who sought long distance travel on the B&O Railroad. Consolidation of the various railroads under the C&P flag lead to an unbroken line of rails from Cumberland, through Georges Creek, to Piedmont. It was only at a later date (1888) that the Georges Creek & Cumberland Railroad challenged the C&P's rail monopoly in the valley.

Railroad service to the coal fields generated positive results, as shown on the table below:

Date	Event	Coal Production
1842	B&O Railroad arrived in Cumberland	2,104 tons
1848	Eckhart Branch Railroad	98,032 tons
1853	Georges Creek Railroad to Piedmont	65,862 tons
1864	Cumberland & Pennsylvania Railroad	755,764 tons
1871	Consolidation of railroads under C&P	2,670,338 tons

The Maryland Development Bureau, 1932

Building rail lines to the upper Potomac River valley was a difficult task because of rugged terrain. Henry Gassaway Davis opened the valley with the West Virginia Central & Pittsburg (no "h") Railroad in the 1880s. Coal mining and timbering operations prospered for the next several decades.

Chesapeake & Ohio Canal

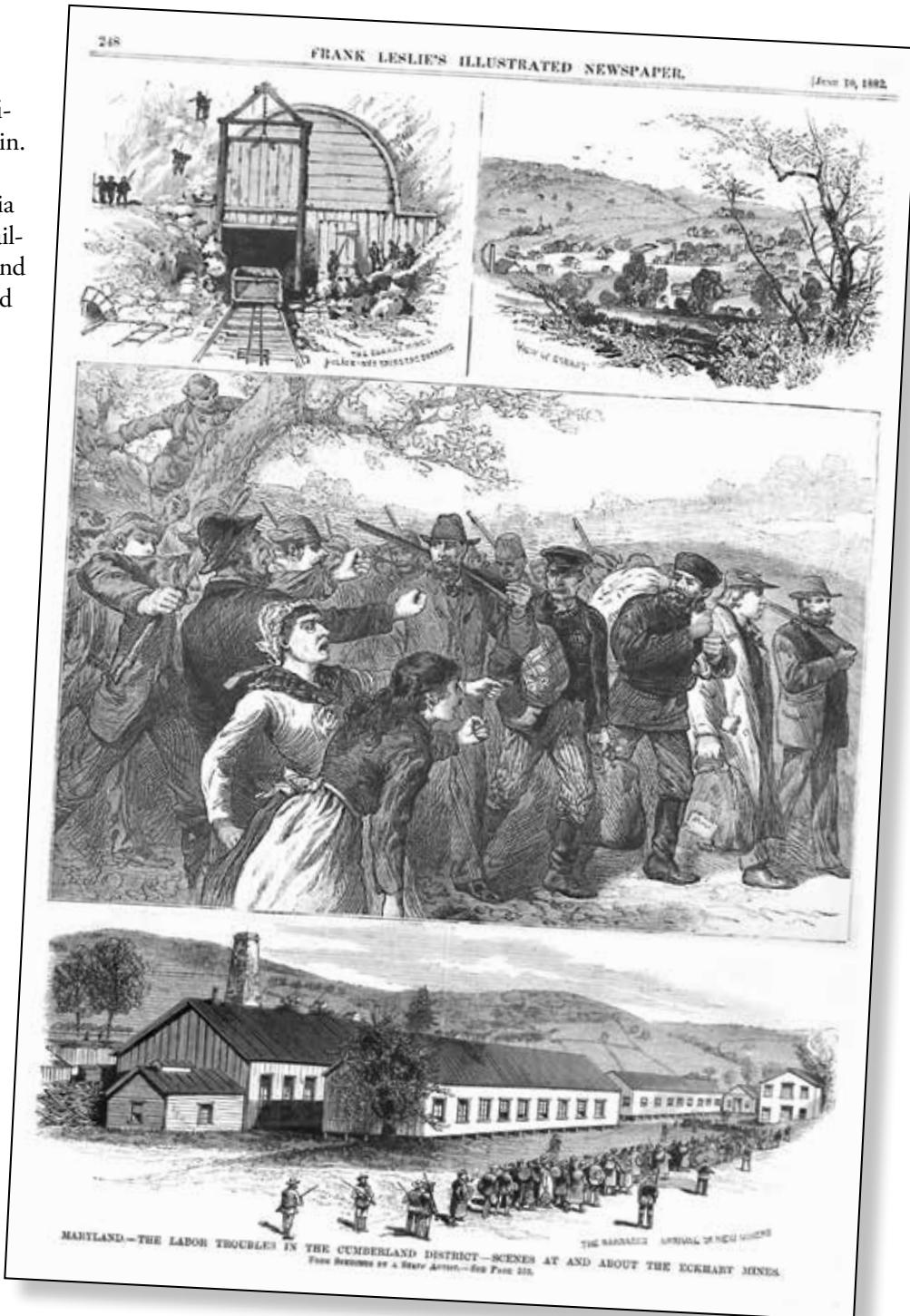
In 1850, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal reached the city of Cumberland and added an additional shipping option for coal operators. The canal, while a major carrier, was nearly unnecessary when completed and struggled financially through the decades. Winter freezes and periodic flooding prevented the boats from competing with the more reliable rail service. Only 25-33% of coal from local coal mines was carried by the canal company. One historian concluded the canal was "almost redundant before ever being completed."

Labor

The arrival of the B&O Railroad in 1842 spurred economic activity in Allegany County, particularly the timber and coal industries. Census figures show the results of the boom. Between the years 1860-1870, the population of Allegany County increased from 28,348 to 38,536, while the number of miners tripled to 2,712 in 1870. The number of miners continued to increase until peaking at 5,778 in 1910.

Who were the coal miners working in western Maryland?

Census data is helpful in identifying racial and ethnic groups.



THE GREAT STRIKE OF 1882

The Knights of Labor, the first important national labor union, successfully recruited more than 1,700 miners in western Maryland prior to 1880. Union support for improved mining regulations and pay increases prompted a major strike in 1882. The precipitating incident for the strike occurred in March when coal operators announced a pay cut. More than 3,000 local miners refused to work.

Consolidation Coal Company constructed buildings with a six-foot encircling stockade at Eckhart to accommodate recently immigrated workers. The workers who arrived from Austria, Poland, Hungary, Germany and Sweden were hired as strike breakers and were protected by a recently sworn in "state police" force.

Two groups of strike breakers arrived in Eckhart where they were initially greeted by curious onlookers. When the workers entered the mines, however, the situation became more serious, as community members chose sides and some clergymen offered support to the union cause. Additionally, C&P Railroad workers refused to haul coal mined by the immigrants.

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, a national publication, depicted the strike scene at Eckhart with a series of drawings.

Approximately 95% of the population was identified as "white," a figure that remained relatively constant over the years. Because the majority of workers were listed as white does not mean that African Americans were not employed in local mines. Lester Clifford, African American resident from Piedmont, recalled his own experiences working in the Georges Creek mines and those of his family and friends, many of whom were employed on the West Virginia side of the Potomac River.

Workers immigration status can be determined by census data. Foreign born workers accounted for 21% of the county's population at the outbreak of the Civil War, but not all those individuals would have been employed in the mines.

Between 1870 and 1910, the peak of underground coal mining in Allegany County, the immigrant population in the coal mining district arrived primarily from England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland.

In 1910, there were 689 individuals in Allegany County who listed their country of origin as Italy. A few workers also arrived from Russia, Poland, and Yugoslavia. Southern European immigrants continued to arrive in later years, although in much smaller numbers than during the peak years of the late 19th and early 20th centuries when northern European workers arrived in the United States.

As a percentage of the total county population, foreign born residents made up 20% in 1860, but declined to less than 5% in 1920.*

*Allegany County included present day Garrett County until 1872.



Well into the 20th century, coal miners brought canaries into coal mines as an early-warning signal for toxic gases, such as carbon monoxide or methane. Signs of distress from the bird indicated to the miners that conditions were unsafe.

Carbon monoxide, a by-product of combustion, killed people in poorly ventilated spaces. John Scott Haldane, a Scottish physiologist famous for discoveries of the nature of gasses, noted the fact that when carbon monoxide combined with hemoglobin in the blood, the resulting combination stained the tissues of the poisoned bright red. When coal miners mysteriously started dying, their faces flushed and red, Haldane put two and two together and realized carbon monoxide was the culprit. He suggested a canary be used as a carbon monoxide detector. *Canary cage supplied by Julie Nicholson*

A state sponsored report from 1932 provides some insight into how local immigration figures compared to other coal regions in the United States during the late 1920s to early 1930s. The Maryland Development Bureau stated: "the western Maryland mines... (are) composed almost entirely of native born white persons," and that such a demographic profile was unique when compared to other coal producing areas in the United States.

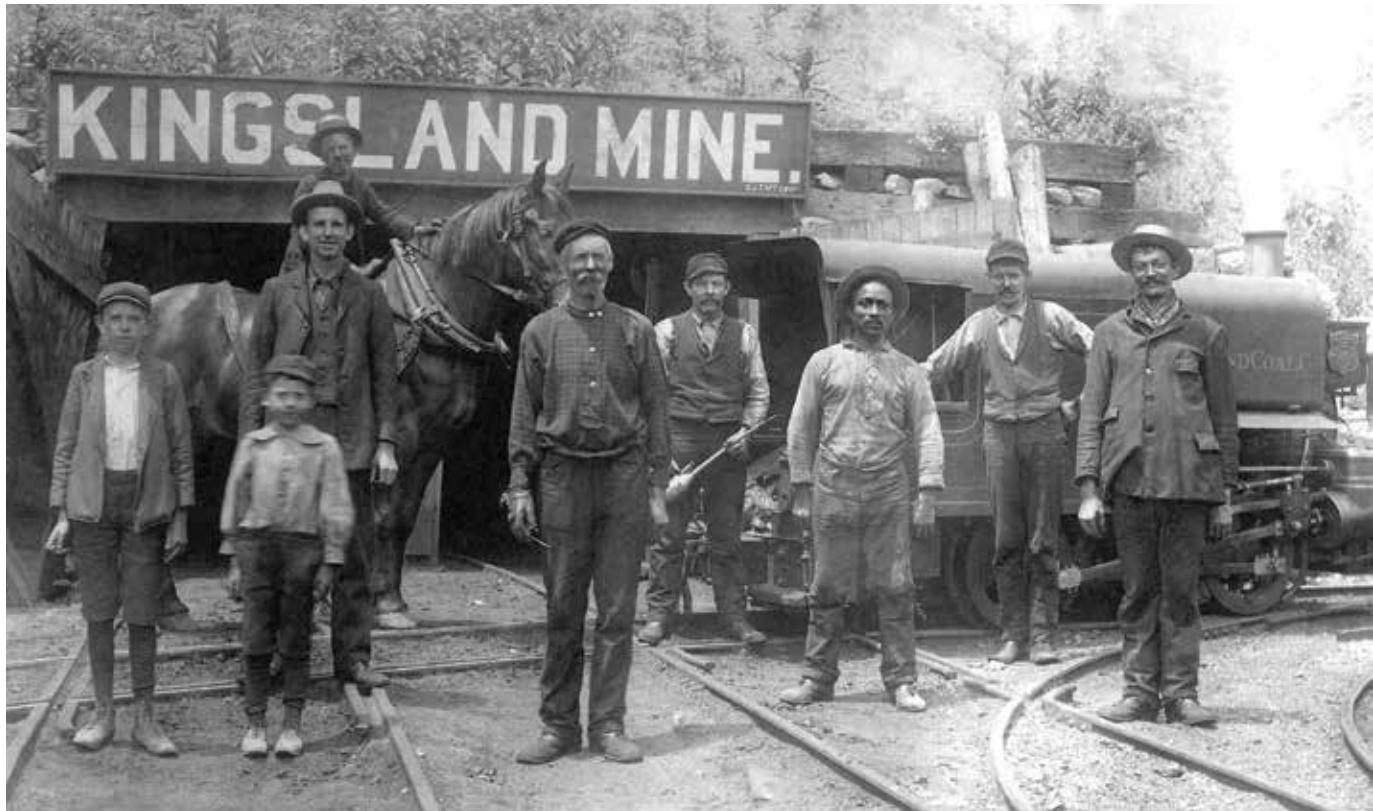
A Maryland Historical Trust survey published in 1991 reached the same conclusion regarding the racial and ethnic characteristics of the coal mining districts of the county during the productive years.

Regardless of race and ethnicity, underground coal mining was hard and dangerous work. Many stories relating to the unhealthy conditions have been passed down through the years.



Miners referred to fuses as squibs. When working in the mines, an auger was used to drill a hole into the coal where a charge of black powder would be set. The hole was filled with dirt or coal dust using a tamping rod and needle. When the needle was removed, a small tunnel remained that led back to the explosive. The miner would set the squib at the end of the small tunnel where it would be ignited with a flame from his mining lamp. It acted like a bottle rocket and shot through the tunnel and into the black powder. The explosion shattered the coal into pieces, so it could be loaded by the miner.

The squibs and tin container above, owned by Earl Evans, are courtesy of his daughter, Leona Shaffer. Photo by Lance Bell



- Family members returning from the mines in freezing weather wore trousers that could stand by themselves because there was no escaping the underground water in some sections of the valley.
- Kneeling to undercut and load Little Vein coal was tough work.
- Collapsing tunnels and rooms, called “falls” by the miners, happened quickly and unexpectedly.
- Setting black powder charges was always dangerous.
- “Miner’s asthma” took a toll on workers long before it became known as black lung disease.
- Dangers of the invisible and deadly “black damp” were ever present.
- Runaway mining cars killed and maimed quickly.
- Explosions, caused by the ignition of accumulated gases, took lives in the valley.

Research by Bucky Schriver and Polla Horn, Allegany County residents, have brought to light stories of mining tragedies that occurred over the years. Their efforts through the Coal Miner Memorial Statue Committee resulted in a weekly newspaper column that details the terrible human costs borne by widows and children who suffered the long term consequences of losing the sole wage earner. To date, the researchers have documented 630 coal mining deaths in Allegany County.

Kingsland Mine, Lonaconing, Maryland (above) — Identified in the photo are Charles Buckholtz, John Buckholtz, John Ternet, Bob Hamilton, Charles Buckholtz, Sr., Billy Brown, Will Shriver, and John Shaffer.

Miner’s Check Tags (inset) — The brass tags went by different names depending on location. Miner’s checks, pit checks, and pit tags were also common terms. Miners carried the tags with their number. The tag was placed on loaded cars and sent to the weighmaster where proper credit was recorded.

Child Labor



One of the unpleasant facts surrounding coal mining in the 19th and 20th centuries was child labor. Boys were routinely employed as trappers (regulating ventilation), mule drivers, and miners.

Coal companies are sometimes condemned as prime exploiters of child labor, but the industry was not alone in the practice. A variety of industries routinely hired boys and girls in large numbers. The Klotz Throwing Company, better known as the Lonaconing Silk Mill, is a local example of an early 20th century textile mill whose labor force in Lonaconing, Cumberland, and other locations was predominantly composed of what would today be termed under aged workers. Throughout Europe and the United States children working in factories became commonplace during the Industrial Revolution.



Ocean mine Number 1, located near Midland, MD, was one of the oldest mines along Georges Creek. Operations at the site began prior to the Civil War and continued under several owners until 1960. Ocean Mine Number 1 also played a key part in the water drainage system that was completed in 1909. The Hoffman Tunnel drained water from Number 1 and surrounding areas to a location near Clarysville.

Coal operators permitted children to work under an arrangement called the “half turn,” meaning that a son could accompany his father into the mine where an extra car would be provided for loading. One extra car would significantly increase the father’s wages

since he was paid according to the weight of loaded coal car(s). In effect, the son was subcontracted by the father, and the son’s pay was not reflected on the father’s pay envelope. This practice provided economic incentives for the use of child labor during a time when social and economic safety nets did not exist. Mining families typically included many children who required food and clothing.

The miner’s financial needs partially explain why their labor union during the 1880s, called The Knights of Labor, not only accommodated half turning, but listed it as a worker’s entitlement. After 1880, the union insisted on providing the half turn option for miners. Such a demand likely reflected the requests of union members.

Age limits depended on the coal operator and circumstances at the time. Children between the ages of 9-12 were sometimes hired, but employment over

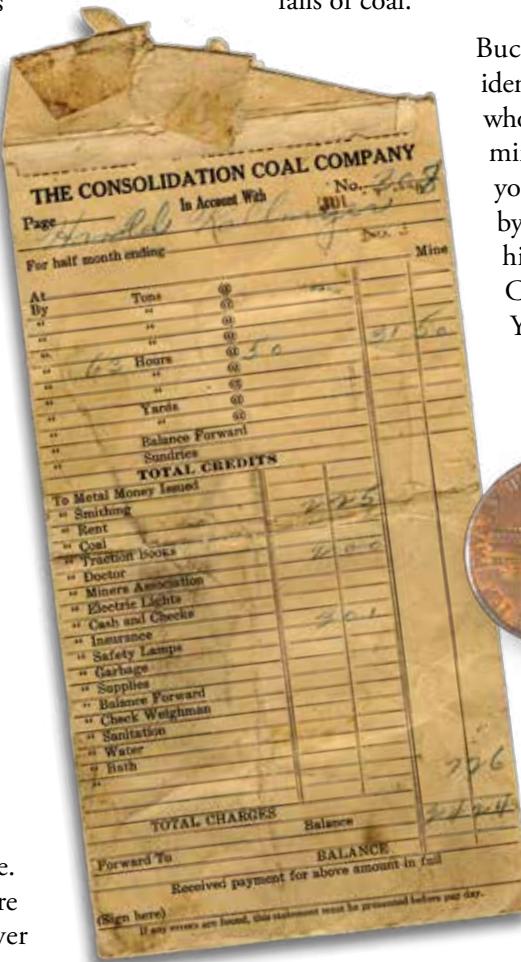
the age of 12 was more typical. To complicate matters, the “minimum age” kept changing because it was determined by companies before state regulations started to define the term.

Census data and reports on child labor show that between the years 1880 and 1890, hundreds were working underground. Of the approximately 3,700 miners in Allegany County during 1880, 512 were children. That number fell to 129 in 1902.

The state of Maryland began regulating child labor in coal mines by the early 1900s, although by contemporary standards the measures were weak. In 1902,

the age of 12 was established for mine employment, but the law failed to identify what type of work could be performed. Katherine Harvey reported that boys were crushed by mine cars, dragged by mules, burned by explosive, and killed in falls of coal.

Bucky Schriver and Polla Horn have identified 35 children, age 16 or younger who became fatalities in Allegany County mines. Andrew Walker, age 9, was the youngest fatality. Andrew was injured by a fall of top coal while working with his father in the New Lord Mine in Carlos Junction, and died on New Year’s Day, 1900.

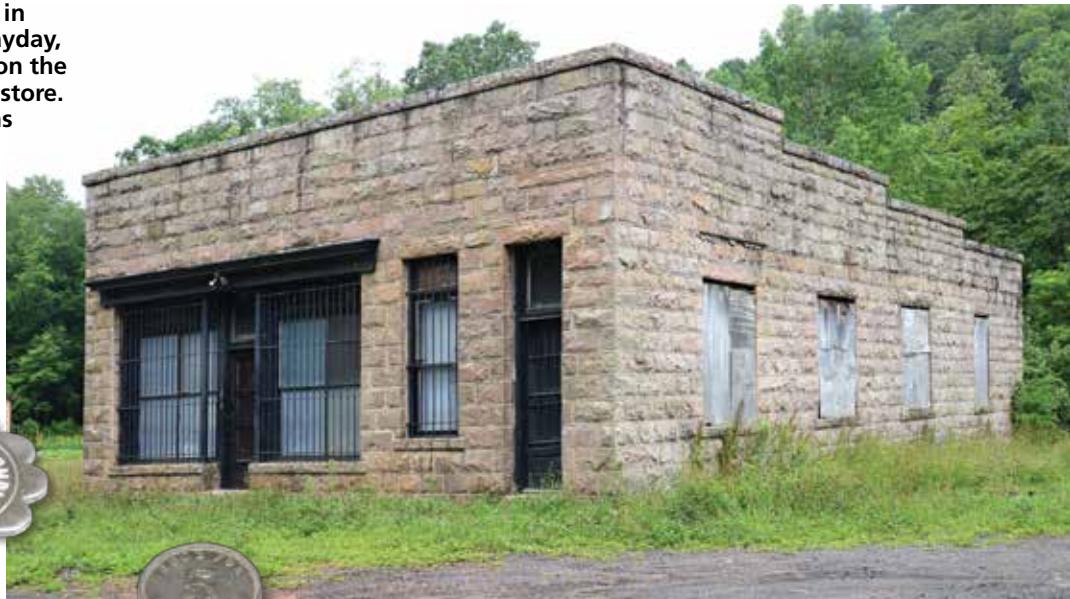


Above: Early mining companies issued scrip tokens for use at their company owned stores as noted by the stamped initial indicating that particular mine. The state of Maryland required that wages be paid in cash in 1880, but scrip continued to be used for credit.

Left: Typical pay envelope from The Consolidation Coal Company.

Wolf Den Company Store in Shallmar, Maryland. On payday, miners would form a line on the right side of the company store. The company store remains remarkably preserved.

The Aberdeen Supply Company scrip (below) was good for 50¢ in merchandise. The Aberdeen Coal Co. operated in Steyer between the years 1917-1922. The small community is located about 2 miles east of Gorman in Garrett County, MD.



For the opportunity to face underground dangers, wages paid to children under the age of 17 ranged between 75 cents per day in 1885 to \$1.06 in 1889. By 1907, the average weekly wage for children under the age of 17 was \$4.46 per week. Those wages would have been for jobs other than loading coal.

Child labor in the mines decreased by the early 1900s and continued to decline because of stronger labor laws, increased educational opportunities at public schools, and a general decline in underground mining.



The Great Decline

Allegany County coal production peaked in 1907 at 5,532,000 tons and steadily declined thereafter. One exception was the increased demand during World War I that caused coal producers to invest in equipment and boost production. Problems quickly surfaced following the war, as prices fell and labor unrest increased.

Reasons for the great decline have been attributed to several factors, including organized labor and the strikes of the 1920s. But the problems associated with the industry were larger than Georges Creek and reflected a fundamental imbalance between coal production and consumption. John L. Lewis, United Mine Workers' president, summarized the issue from a miner's perspective to a US Senate Finance Committee in 1932.

An interesting reminder of coal mining towns and companies is scrip.

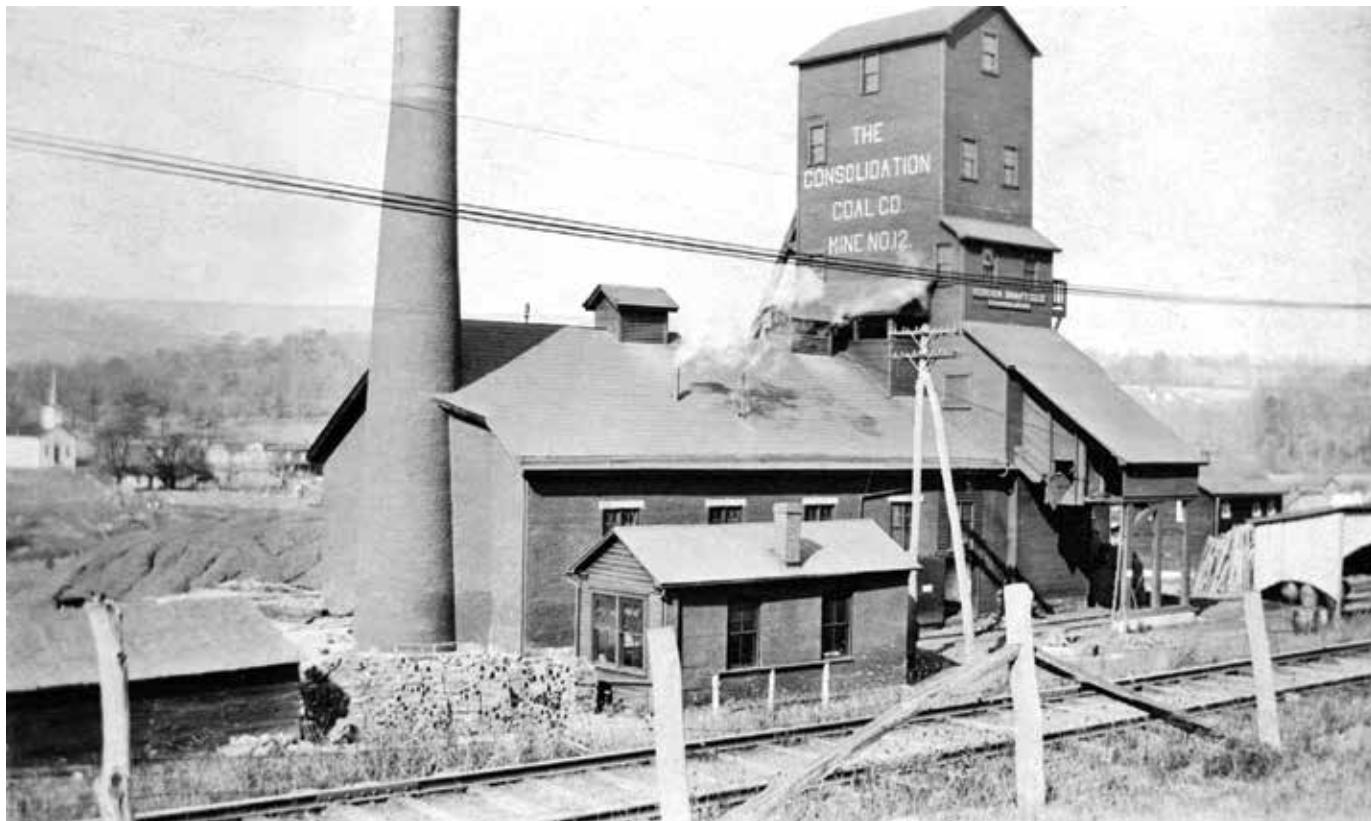
In many cases coal mines were located in remote areas where United States currency was difficult to keep on hand. Some early mining companies issued scrip tokens as payment for wages (instead of United States currency). Scrip could be exchanged at the company owned store for food, clothing, housewares, and novelty items. As with any closed economic system, abuses occurred. A few companies required employees to shop at the company store where goods were marked up to excessive levels. Scrip could also be issued in advance of payday, causing negligent miners to be habitually in debt to the company—a basic credit system. Tennessee Ernie Ford's hit song, "Sixteen Tons," serves as a reminder of the miner's plight. Another unfortunate practice occurred when scrip was traded at a steep discount for United States currency, thereby further devaluing miner's wages.

Company stores were officially prohibited by the state in 1868, but indirect means of owning and operating them was typical. In 1880, the state of Maryland required cash payment for wages.

An interesting story, as recorded in the Coal Heritage Trail Cultural Survey, related how youngsters would take a 5 cent denomination token to the Wolf Den Company store in Shallmar for the purchase of one piece of penny candy. Change had to be provided in United States currency. Several such trips resulted in enough money to attend the movies in the nearby Kitzmiller theatre.

The Shallmar and Kitzmiller scrip went by the interesting names "flicker" and "chinky tink."

Lewis declared the coal industry had destroyed itself through cut throat competition where coal was sold below cost, thereby robbing workers of a fair wage. Lower coal prices did not increase consumption, particularly during the 1930s when the Great Depression caused industrial purchases to fall by 50%. The mine operators invested heavily during World War I, and believed it necessary to maintain production even if it meant selling coal below



The Consolidation Coal Company Mine Number 12 was located in Midlothian, Maryland, and it produced nearly 3 million tons of coal over the decades. The mine was unique because it was a "shaft" mine, meaning the entrance was vertical instead of horizontal like the other coal mines along Georges Creek. *Photograph from Harry Stegmaier Collection*

what it cost to produce. The net effect was a devastating downward spiral of wages and prices.

Georges Creek operators were caught in the post war/Great Depression trap but also faced a problem more particular to the valley. Most of the "easy coal" had been mined, leaving future operators to deal with more expensive methods of extraction. Increasing expenses during a time of falling prices meant that underground coal mines along Georges Creek would never return to the glory days.

As prices continued to fall, labor unrest increased throughout the Appalachia coal fields.

In an effort to end the unrest, John L. Lewis attempted to negotiate a contract with coal operators. The effort failed, and a strike was declared in 1922. Even though Georges Creek miners remained nonunion, the local miners walked out in support of the strikers.

The issue became more complicated when the UMW workers returned to work, but Georges Creek miners remained on strike. Violence occurred when strike breakers were brought in by Consolidation Coal Company.

The UMW called off support for the local miners who were then blacklisted and unable to return to coal mining.

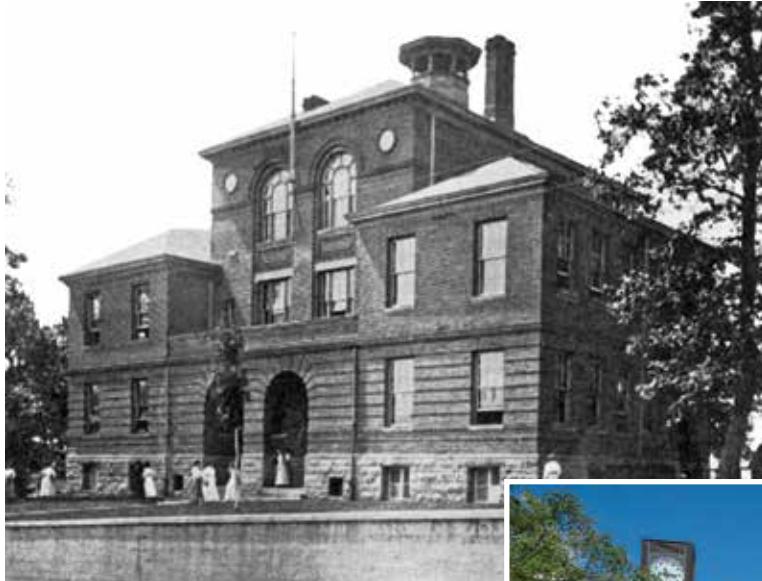
The unrest caused many small mines to close because they did not have the resources to hold out for the eight month siege. Twenty-seven coal operators closed their doors between 1923 and 1930, while the number of coal miners decreased by 1,000 between 1921 and 1930.

As stated by one historian, "General conditions in the coal industry dealt the death blow to the Georges Creek field. The miner's strike succeeded only in bringing the inevitable end a little sooner."

A symbolic ending of major underground mining operations occurred in 1944 when Consolidation Coal Company pulled out of Allegany County. Former Consol properties were purchased by the Jenkins family.

As coal production fell, the number of workers engaged in mining collapsed. Following World War II, there were still more than 2,000 men engaged in the industry, but by 1966, only 350 men remained employed. The introduction of surface mining, sometimes called strip mining, started in the 1960s and hastened the end of underground coal mining operations in Allegany County. A few small mines continued to operate, however, into more recent times.

Mines in Garrett County followed a similar pattern with a post-World War I strike and mine closures.



"Old Main," which housed classrooms and a library, was the first campus building at State Normal School No. 2 (left and above).

Photos courtesy Frostburg State University

Legacy

When asked if there was a coal mining culture or legacy, John Grant, Garrett County historian, engineer, and clergyman, quickly responded, "Yes, hard work."

Individual acts of courage were performed everyday by miners who aspired to a better life by working in an occupation where no one became rich—there are no stories of coal miners becoming wealthy by loading one-ton cars. What does live on is the collective spirit of wanting a better life and the willingness to work for it.

Katherine Harvey's excellent analysis of local mining communities highlights that residents wanted more from life than labor wages—they wanted the finer things in life too. Civic clubs, church organizations, patriotic assemblies, sports teams, and educational endeavors were an integral part of the "best dressed miners" culture in Allegany County. James Oppenheim's memorable poem written about the Lawrence textile mill strike speaks for coal miners as well—"Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!"

One example of the coal miner's attitude toward life was their support of Frostburg Normal School, now known as Frostburg State University.

The suggestion for the school came from the editor of the *Frostburg Mining Journal* who penned an open letter in 1898 recommending that State Normal School #2 be built in Frostburg. The idea was not well received, as opposition came from Cumberland residents who felt the county seat was more appropriate for the institution. The state legislature was not warm to the idea either, even though some



State Normal School No. 2, now known as Frostburg State University, continues its pursuit of excellence, a tradition that spans more than a century.

Photo by Lance C. Bell

Frostburg citizens had lobbied for the school. Fortunately, an amendment to a General Appropriations bill made its way through the proceedings.

The amendment provided \$20,000 for the school building but no money to purchase land that would obviously be required. When a site became available, the issue quickly became one of money—how could a sum of \$2,000 be raised?

The coal mining community and civic groups came to the rescue. Miners were asked for contributions, as their work shifts ended—25 cents, 90 cents, and so on was offered. Within two weeks most of the funds were provided to pay for the lot. The names of miners and others who contributed were listed in the *Frostburg Mining Journal* and sealed in the cornerstone of Frostburg Normal School #2 when it was constructed. The local mining community celebrated when the new school opened for students in the fall of 1902.

The Western Maryland coal mining story has been passed down through oral traditions and written history for decades. Most residents of the coal mining areas know of ancestors or friends who made a living in the underground

mines. While pick and shovel mining has passed, the work that went with the job has become legendary and a source of pride for those who followed.

References and Acknowledgements:

Green Glades and Sooty Gob Piles,
Donna Ware.

Cultural Survey of the Coal Heritage Trail,
Dan Whetzel & Mike Lewis

Underground Coal Mining in Western Maryland, Vagel Keller

Above Ground and Below in the Georges Creek Region, Consolidation Coal Company

The Best Dressed Miners, Katherine Harvey

Map Showing the Cumberland & Pennsylvania Railroad, 1938

The Coal Industry of Maryland,
Fairbanks and Hamil

History of Western Maryland, Thomas Scharf

Allegany County—A History,
Wiseman, Stegmaier, Dean & Kershaw

The Devil Is Here in These Hills, James Green

Windows to the Past, Betty Van Newkirk

State of Maryland Annual Mining Reports

Journal of the Alleghenies

The Frostburg Museum

Dan Press

Albert Feldstein

For Additional Information:

For those interested in traditional Appalachian music and coal mining songs, the author recommends the recordings of Hazel Dickens.

The Frostburg Museum, located at 50 East Main Street, features a large display of coal mining artifacts.

For those persons interested in oral histories of Allegany and Garrett County coal miners, see the Coal Heritage Trail Cultural Survey Collection located in the Beall Archives, Ort Library, at Frostburg State University. Photographs and transcribed interviews are available from the two year study. In addition, Frostburg State University has digitized a large collection of coal mining maps of the region. The collection may be viewed online.

Allegany College of Maryland, 12401 Willowbrook Road, Cumberland, has available the first year collection of the Coal Heritage Trail Cultural Survey.

The library at Garrett College, 687 Mosser Road, McHenry, has available oral histories of coal miners under the title "Coal Talk."

Contemporary Coal Mining

Coal mining continues to be a part of Mountain Maryland's economy. The latest annual report issued by the state of Maryland shows that two million tons of coal were produced in Allegany and Garrett Counties during 2016. A little more than half of the coal was extracted from underground mining, all in Garrett County. Three-hundred and fifty-nine employees were engaged in coal mining, a total that excludes transportation and supervision workers.

Unlike the early days of the Industrial Revolution when Appalachian operators were the major producers, today the largest coal producing state is in the West—Wyoming's production easily outpaces the combined total of West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky and Maryland.

Today's coal mining methods differ from those used in the 19th century. Charlie Stoner, retired underground coal miner and Red House resident, states that typically there are only 5 men in each section where a "continuous miner" machine works the face of coal. The machine is equipped with a large rotating steel drum and carbide teeth that scrape the coal at a pace of 5 tons per minute; a rate thousands of times faster than traditional methods.

Mr. Stoner notes that old mine workings are still present and must be accounted for in the planning process. Breaching the old workings can be extremely dangerous because they hold water that will be released suddenly and at high pressure.



Above:
This scale model of a Joy "continuous miner" machine was built by Wayne Biser as a gift to Charlie Stoner and his wife, Loretta. One safety feature of the actual machine is a built-in "sniffer" that detects gases in the mine; it automatically shuts down with gas detections.



Charlie Stoner, retired miner, with the "continuous miner" model.

Frostburg Coal Miner Memorial Statue Fund

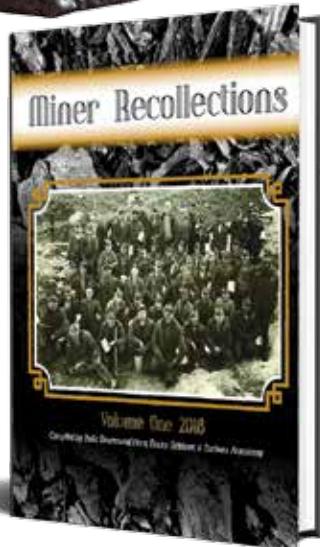
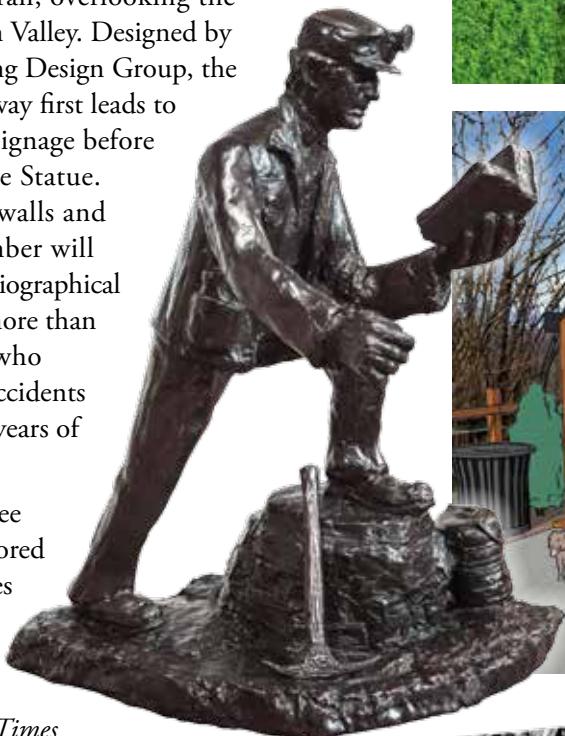
Western Maryland's coal mining heritage has been the focus of the Foundation for Frostburg's Coal Miner Memorial Statue Fund. One of the most noteworthy successes over the past several years has been the commissioning of a life-sized bronze coal miner statue that honors the history of Georges Creek and those residents who labored in the underground mines. The statue is currently on display in the studio of its creator, Alan Cottrill, until completion and delivery to Frostburg.

The statue and landscaped park will be located between Frostburg's C&P Depot and the Allegheny Highlands Trail, overlooking the Jennings Run Valley. Designed by AC Armstrong Design Group, the project walkway first leads to interpretive signage before encircling the Statue. Heightened walls and overhead timber will support the biographical sketches of more than 641 miners who perished in accidents between the years of 1838-2007.

The committee has also authored a weekly series of "Miner Recollections" in the *Cumberland Times*

and *Frostburg Express*. The first 100 stories have been compiled into book form and are available for a \$20.00 donation to the Foundation for Frostburg/CMMMF.

For those wanting to contribute to the completion of the project and preserve western Maryland's coal mining heritage, please make checks payable to the Foundation for Frostburg CMMMF. All contributions are tax deductible and are held by the Foundation for Frostburg.



Tax-deductible donations are gratefully accepted for the
Coal Miner Statue Fund & Park

Miner Recollections Volume One
book is available for a \$20 donation
(includes shipping)

For book and donations:
The Foundation for Frostburg CMMMF
P.O. Box 765, Frostburg, MD 21532

The book is available at Armstrong Insurance
(21 S. Water St., Frostburg, MD 21532)
from Statue Committee members,
or by emailing: bucky1015@comcast.net
or jph68@verizon.net