

A "LITTLE BIT" THE COAL MINES AND THE COMPANY

I know of four coal mines that were in production at one time. One was a Wise County Coal Company mine and the others were Bridgeport Coal Company mines. Where Acme Brick is now located was the # 2 mine---it was a double shaft mine with concrete walls and is still there. I was told it is covered with 2" sheet iron. The # 3 mine is a drift mine and is located on the Cowling place. It was operated till all the coal was depleted. The Cacklebur mine is located in west Bridgeport at Helen and Houston streets. It was named Cacklebur because the field in which it was dug (sunk) was covered with cacklebur bushes. The bur is about the size of a small pecan with small needles all over and can be very painful if stepped on with bare feet. The mine didn't last long because the water from the # 2 mine broke into it and it became unworkable. Pumps were installed and the water was pumped out in order to give the # 2 mine some relief. On the east side of Bridgeport on the Northeast corner of the Bridgeport Building Center was the # 1 drift mine. The main tunnel was dug into the east side of the hill with other tunnels running north and south from the main entry. Another mine was started in the hill in front of the former Hudson Butane. This mine was stopped by the Texas Highway Department as it was going under the highway through town.

In north Bridgeport in the area of 10th and Wooten was the very first coal mine which belonged the Wise County Coal Company. It was designated as the # 1 slope mine and it is on the Harvick property I am told. The bathhouse for the miners still remains on the property which does belong to the Harvick family. This mine was operated for several years--why it was abandoned I do not know. The shale that came out the mine was used to make brick and this was the beginning of the first brick company. The shale from the coal mine behind the Bridgeport Building Center was hauled from there by wagons to the "new brick plant". Some of the plant can be seen off 9th street on Turkey Creek Road. The first experiment with clay tile was here and a deep hole was dug to obtain materials for this tile---it later became known as "shaler hole" and a place where kids went swimming. The tile experiment failed as it was not durable enough for construction of buildings. The shale from the # 2 & # 3 mines was transported to the plant that is now Acme Brick.

In order for the miners to have "air" in the mines, airshafts were dug. A shaft was dug over a mine tunnel and a huge electric fan was placed over the shaft hole and air was drawn through the tunnels from the main shaft---this kept the air circulating. In the smaller mines a shaft was also dug over a tunnel but instead of a fan, a fire was kept burning at the bottom of the shaft and the fire would draw the air up the shaft. This was just a "giant chimney". Entering a mine was done in four different ways: (1) Double shaft mines have two elevators--they were called "cages"--one cage went up while the other went down. The cage size was approximate 8ft. x 18ft. (2) Single shaft mines had only one elevator (cage) approximately 8ft x 10ft. in size. (3) Slope mines were dug (sunk) at about a 30 degree angle---the angle depended on the mine location. The coal cars were pulled out of the mines with an electric motor, a mule or a horse. The tunnels were approximately 5ft.x 7ft.in size. (4) Drift Mines were dug into the side of a hill and the coal cars were pulled out by a horse, mule or by a man--one car at a time. The tunnel at the bottom of a shaft or going into a slope or drift mine is called The Main Entry--it is about 6ft. high and 4 to 5 ft. wide. The tunnels going off the main entry are called Places, which goes to the coal that the miner digs. The miner has 17 ½ feet on each side of the tunnel to mine the coal. The size of this tunnel is about 5ft. high and 4 ½ ft. wide. Coal is loaded in the small cars and pushed to the main entry for the pusher. A pusher is the man that comes and gets the car and takes it to the bottom of the shaft so it can be taken out and weighed and posted to the miners number given to him. In the double shaft mine a mule was used to pull the

cars to the shaft opening. The mules stayed down in the mines until the humane society stopped this. The miners were happy about this--but management was not. The mines went on strike in 1922 over the price of blasting powder, I was told.

The mines were operated by non-union miners. These people were called "scabs" until 1929. Oil was discovered and the railroads began converting their engines to oil.

The smaller mines began to operate in the early thirties. Mr. Tom Byrnes was one of the first--he was a "boss" in the larger mines. He was very well liked and most of the miners that worked for him were local men that he knew. The great depression had started and this gave jobs to people who were out work. Mr. Byrnes first mine was named the "DEAD RAT". When a new mine is dug it will settle and this is called a "squeeze". The mice and rats in the mines will squeal and run to the bottom of the shaft and get out---when a miner hears this he drops everything and gets out himself. It is a miner's law to fine and even prosecute anyone that kills either one of these rodents. Miners always left food and water for them. Coal was sold to locals, truckers and even shipped by rail to various places. The truckers would haul cattle from Oklahoma and west Texas to the Fort Worth stock yards and then come by Bridgeport and pick up coal and sell at their locations. This offset their expenses. During that time the miners were getting \$1.50 a ton for their efforts--average weekly wage was about \$15.00 to \$25.00 and he worked for every cent as coal mining is very hard work. His work place is very uncomfortable---you never stand up. You are on your side, back, kneeling and sometimes on your stomach. Lighting at first was with oil and later the "modern light" was carbide lamps. Lunches were carried in a miners bucket which was in three layers or compartments--bottom held the fluid, about 3 quarts, center held the food and the top held desert. Liquid was either black strong coffee, dark tea, beer or what ever. Water was carried in a quart jar-food was salami, steak, cheese, chicken, polish sausage or whatever. Their desert was pies and cakes and a miner always ate some kind of fruit. On the weekends the miner loved his baseball and beer. They had their own baseball team which later became the Bridgeport town team.

The last coal mine to operate was the Singleton mine and it closed in the early 1940's. Some of the coal mines were-- Byrnes, Upperman, Singleton, Carrier and the Grill. There are more but I do not know their names.

In or about 1939 a test was ran on the coal taken from the Tom Byrnes mine which was located east of the last house going to St. Johns Catholic Church, on the north side. Some fifty different minerals came from this coal. Believe it or not, perfume and two kinds of tar of which one would not burn.

The vane of coal in Bridgeport runs all the way from Strawn through here to McAlester, Oklahoma. After the test of the coal a "new double shaft" mine was sunk (dug) just off the lake road and the coal from this mine was to be used for the by products. At this time World War II began and the coal mining ended.

Frank G. "Petie" Bordner

Company Policy

Most of the miners lived in company houses and traded at the company store. They were paid in company skrip--not U.S. money. The company store had groceries, a meat market, hardware, clothing and a small bank. The miners had to charge everything--which sometimes meant there was no skrip left. No skrip meant you went without the rest of the week. Those who had skrip left could change it for U.S. money and go to town. The merchants did not accept skrip at first, but later made a deal with the company to do so. The old saying "I OWE MY SOUL TO THE COMPANY STORE" was pretty much so.

Other History

Back in the earley days (1890--1910), there were two saloons. One was on the west side in front of the company store and the other was one block east on Cates street where a car wash now stands. Beer was hauled in by the railroad on flat cars. The bottom of a miners bucket (about 3 qts.) cost a quarter (25cent) In back of that saloon was a domino hall. The owner allowed my dad to have a shoe shine chair and he told me he would make as high \$15.00 on a Saturday. He was Pete Bordner and he is the one who told me about the past. And at the corner of 3rd and Greathouse my grandparents. John and Mary Bordner had two large boarding houses of which miners and railroad people stayed. Back then it was boarding houses and hotel and not motels.