

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Coal Mining Project

Mining Experience

O. H. 106

LEONARD WARNER

Interviewed

by

Ellen Daniels

on

June 6, 1978

LEONARD WARNER

Leonard Warner was born in New Waterford on January 5, 1918. His parents were Michael Warner and Prosper Marie DeJerome Warner. During his youth, his family moved to Lisbon and he graduated from David Anderson High School. Warner served in World War II as an Air Force Sergeant in the Communications section from August of 1942 until November of 1945. Some of the awards that he received while in the service were Unit Citation, Asiatic Pacific, and Bismarck Archipelago.

After the war, he married on May 1, 1946. Warner and his wife, Lee, had three daughters--Carol Rhodes, age 30; Cathy Scaary, age 23; and Marsha McGaffic, age 20. He was employed by the Standard Oil Company for thirty years before he decided to be self-employed. Mr. and Mrs. Warner own Crosser's Diner in Lisbon, Ohio. He also belongs to the V.F.W., American Legion, and D.A.V., Disabled American Veterans.

Warner was first introduced to the mines by a relative who worked at a mine in the Lisbon area. This mine was a seasonable job because the coal was only mined in the winter, when it was used in the homes. He explained how the coal was removed from the mine.

This included the actual blowing of the coal as well as the size of the rooms that the miners worked in. Also mentioned were some of the tools that were used and the carbide light which was worn on the hat.

Mr. Warner lives at 317 East Chestnut in Lisbon, Ohio.

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INTERVIEWEE: LEONARD WARNER
INTERVIEWER: Ellen Daniels
SUBJECT: Mining Experience
DATE: June 6, 1978

D: This is an interview with Leonard Warner for the Youngstown State University, Coal Mining Project by Ellen Daniels at 317 East Chestnut on June 6, 1978 at five after seven.

Leonard, why did you decide to go into or even try coal mining?

W: My cousin was living with us. That was back around 1930 and he was working south of Lisbon here at, I think, it was at Joe Scrogg's. He was a ground mole, they call it in coal mining, but you walked in the entrance. He took me one day down there to go see it. So I said, "Well, I'll go in and help you."

I kind of liked it at first, but after you're in the mine for awhile you kind of lose interest in mining. You get more scared than you do mining. But I helped him for a few days. It was so low in there you had to sit on your haunches, on your knees, and you dug the coal that way.

I think at that time, they were getting around thirty-five cents a ton for mining it. I went in several different days. In fact, we only had one car in the whole family. I'd drive him down there, take the car back and drive him down, stay with him, help him mine, and then come back. But it was interesting.

What they call mines today are like walking into a living room. What they called mines in those days: You walked in the entry, there was a place for two or three mine cars that they pulled in. It was that small of a mine. They didn't even have the mules or the ponies then.

And you walked into this mine. It went about a half-a-mile in. Then it went into your rooms. And the rooms were about--if I remember correctly--maybe twelve foot, something like that and go back until the vein aches, we call it.

D: It's no longer there?

W: Yes, there's a name for it. Not wears out; when a vein works itself out. The only thing I didn't like about it, while you're sitting there and they were getting ready to drill holes, to blast, it was so silent in there and they were doing this drilling you could hear the roof cracking.

And in those days, what they used for mine posts was only about three foot, three-and-a-half foot. That's all the higher it was in those mines then. You were really humped over.

But until I started hearing the roof crack, why it didn't bother me. I didn't mind working in there with him but when I heard that, why that was about my last day. I think the day I left or the day after I left part of that room caved in. And then you have to do all that work all over again.

The way they worked then--I don't know how they do now--when you went into the mine then you took up slate, and if it fell back down you took up slate and it was all free gratis work. All you got paid for then was just hauling the coal into the mine cart and then taking it out. You got paid when it was dropped outside [in the bin] after they weighed it.

I liked it, for something to do. But I wouldn't want to make a living at it at that time. Today, I've talked to different fellows that work in these big mines. You go in there in cars. [The rooms are enormous]. I don't know if you've been in any of the new ones. I haven't but I've talked to different guys who've been in them. They go

in there in cars, they ride in, they ride out. The room is about ten, twelve foot high. If they had seven inches, ten inches of coal they had plenty of coal. But I've been in different mines, even in strip mines where they had twenty-four or thirty-six inches of coal. But in those days around here it was more like crop coal than it is like number seven or six vein or like that.

I'm not sure, but I think down on old Route 30 where the Scrogg's home is, where Joe lived, down over the hill is where the mine was. And we used to go down over that hill. I don't know if they've closed it up or not.

D: Is that what it was called, the Scrogg's mine?

W: Joe Scrogg's mine.

D: Was it just like a seasonable job, just worked in the wintertime?

W: Yes, it was just a winter job. This Joe Scrogg dabbled in everything. He drove a school bus, had mines, junk dealer; he did everything. At that time, back in 1929 and 1930 there was no work around anywhere. My cousin worked there. I don't know what kind of money he made, but he didn't make too much money. Three bucks a day, he was making a fortune.

D: Yes, for that time.

W: Yes.

D: So then you decided after you heard the cracking of that slate that that was it?

W: That convinced me to get out of that mine. You're sitting on your haunches, you're really not doing anything. You're not doing any picking or shoveling or anything. And they're drilling to set the blast off, the dynamite off, and then you sit there.

Then another nice thing, there's shoe rats running around, a little water running around. It was really damp in those mines.

D: Did you push the cars out?

- W: You pushed them by hand. Of course, those cars only held about a ton. But if you pushed two or three cars, you're pushing a load. And then they didn't have rails. It was rough-cut lumber like two-by-fours or four-by-fours, I think it was. Four-by-fours. There were no rails in those old mines then. It was a homemade rail, made out of wood.
- D: For both rails on both sides?
- W: Yes. [Two-by-four nailed to four-by-four or two-by-four made the rails.]
- D: And you got paid per ton of coal?
- W: Per ton of coal. I think, if I remember correctly even when you broke entry into a room, you didn't get paid for that. All you got paid for was just getting the coal out. All of the hauling of the dirt and everything else was for free.
- There really wasn't any money to be made. Well, it was money in those days. If you made three dollars a day, you were making a lot of money back in the 1930s. Now they won't even look at a pick for three dollars. They don't even pick anymore. They have all machinery.
- D: Did you use the pick?
- W: Yes, I picked in the mine.
- D: Could you stand up in the mine that you were in?
- W: You went into the entrance. I suppose the coal was about ten inches to the most. Then there'd be slate at the bottom, slate at the top. And you had to take all that top off to get to the coal. I don't remember seeing a very large vein of coal, what they would call a large vein of coal, like thirty-five, forty inches of coal in different places. But down in there I doubt if there was twelve inches to the most at any time. It was really crop coal.
- D: Was the height maybe three feet or four feet in there?

- W: Just high enough for you to crawl in there and sit on your haunches. You couldn't stand up erect--no way. They didn't even have ponies to pull, it was so low. No, he didn't have any ponies or mules or nothing because it wasn't high enough to even walk through there. When you walked out you had to walk stooped over coming out of the mine itself. [Entry to mine may have been five feet, no more.]
- D: Did you eat in there, your meals, and so forth? Was that an interesting experience?
- W: Yes. You had the old aluminum bucket. You put your tea, coffee, milk, whatever you had in the bottom of it and just like on the order of your tool box, you take your top tray out. Your top tray was your food and the bottom tray was your liquid, whatever you had in it. There was no such thing as a Thermos bottle then.
- And sandwiches--I don't think there was such a thing as waxed paper then unless you got the wrapping off of paper. They couldn't even afford waxed paper. They just wrapped it in anything. That was your sandwich. That's all you did get was sandwiches. I know we had coffee. He'd drink black coffee and I couldn't go for that.
- D: Did you have any difficulty with your digestion at that time when you were in there?
- W: No. I was only fourteen years old! I didn't have any problem. (laughter)
- D: Well, is there anything else you think you could add?
- W: That's all I can think about. Oh, yes. That's right, I forgot. You did have to have a carbide light on your head, on the hat that they wore then. In fact, someplace around this house I think there is one of them, The old hat, carbide. It had the handle on it that fits down in your hat. They have the closed lights now. But that was just an open flame, too.

Of course, it wasn't so far under that they had so much trouble with gas. It was more just the slate cracking. In your deep mines like they have now, they've got gas problems. We didn't

have to worry about gas or anything. I never heard any of these local mines around here going deep enough to run into gas,

Light--we didn't have electricity in there either like they have today,

D: Did you have an ample supply of air?

W: Yes. They had a fan for that.

D: The fan would be run by electrical generator?

W: It would be outside pulling or pushing. But there's none inside. Or they might have a shaft down into the mine. But there would be no electricity in the mine at all. There was never any electricity in those days. Say about modern, that was real modern! That's about all I can remember about. The rails were wooden. The mine wheels--there were little dinky mine wheels. On the mine cars, the wheels were about, if I remember correctly, maybe about ten inches, these real small wheels. Ten inches, that'd be plenty big.

Just down in his coal mine most of the cars were all built by hand anyway. It was all wood, and real heavy. Really, what they did to run it out to the end of the mine; You'd pull your front gate off and tipped it by hand. That's another thing I forgot to say. When you take your car out there, it was like a counterbalance. When you drive your car out there, the only thing that helped you, it had a pole on the end of this tilt table where you raised the pole and it dumped the car. It tilted the car and the coal fell out the front end, and you just picked that car up. That's another thing. You got to the top [for unloading] you couldn't dump only one car at a time. You pulled the car back and run another car up and then tip it out. That's all I remember about it now. I forgot about that tipping that car.

END OF INTERVIEW