

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Petersburg Coal Mining Project

Coal Mines in Petersburg

O. H. 230

IRVEN BROWNLEE

Interviewed

by

Bernice Mercer

on

June 30, 1978

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Petersburg Coal Mining Project

INTERVIEWEE: IRVEN BROWNLEE
INTERVIEWER: Bernice Mercer
SUBJECT: Location of Mines, Working Conditions
DATE: June 30, 1978

M: This is an interview with Mr. I. W. Brownlee at his home at 12500 Youngstown Road on June 30, 1978 at 10 o'clock a.m. This interview is by Bernice Mercer for the Oral History Program of Youngstown State University.

Mr. Brownlee, we were talking about mines in various places, and I asked you about mines around here. As I recall you said that most of them have already been striped over by this time. I want you to react to what Mr. Shaw told me. As a child he remembered people who were in the mines say when they were mining underneath this Old Route 90 which is now Route 70 that they could here the horses and wagons over there heads. Did you ever hear anything like that?

B: That's true. I think they used to call that the Old Livingston Mine. That was across the road from our place. At one time the Ohlins had mines over there. I heard some of those men who were in the mines say that they could hear the trucks going up Route 90. They called it Route 90 back in those days.

M: Did they employ quite a lot of people?

B: That was before my time, I couldn't tell you. But one of the Ohlins, and a man by the name of Bryan were mining a lot of coal over there during the depression. They had quite a few men working over there then. They were shaft mines as I remember.

The older mines were all slope mines. They went into a side of a hill.

M: Evidently, the one across the road was that type.

B: No, I believe maybe that was a slope mine because they took cannel coal out here. The father of these Ohlin boys around here now used to dig coal over there, that cannel coal. I know he is the one whose slope mine headed west going towards our place.

M: That could have gone under the road?

B: I'm sure it did.

M: Was there ever any problem about them being under your place?

B: That's a question now. They never had any rights to mine coal over here. We never leased any land. I've never gone in the mine to check; an old slope mine is not too safe.

M: That frequently comes up. Mrs. Harris brings that up that it occasionally happens without knowledge.

B: Pardon me for interrupting, but they were within their rights to cross under the road and mine coal because they had a lease on what used to be part of the old Eckert farm, where Flickinger, and Crespo, and those people lived, right in front of our place. That was part of the old Eckert farm. The section line was the property line, my property line.

M: Mr. Scholl thinks that some of that mining went in the other direction, too. If there was a shaft there, would there be a possibility that the shaft might still exist?

B: I think, Bernice, that all that mining area that they used to mine has been stripped over. They uncovered the coal and took what was left, like the posts.

M: They would have, of course, left parts of the coal?

B: Sure. They left the posts to hold up the roof.

M: Did you ever hear anybody talk about robbing crops of coal?

B: No.

M: It really wasn't ever heard of? Did you ever hear any of the miners talk about what their job was like, how they felt about their job? This is part of the focus too. Was it a very, very low ceiling?

B: To the best of knowledge, that coal varied between 30, 32, 34 inches thick.

M: That is quite thick?

B: That's about average for this vein.

M: It wasn't very comfortable?

B: No.

M: You didn't have to lie down?

B: Oh yes. That's less than three feet.

I've heard those old miners say that there was clay underneath the coal. I guess they took out some of that. They always had to lie down on their sides to mine the coal. Most of the time it was wet, too. There was water in there.

M: It was a very unhealthy situation.

B: I guess most of them, what they tell me, were on their sides, mining on their sides, picking up that coal, and loading it on these cars. It must have been a miserable job, let me tell you.

M: What did they use, that you heard about, to pull it out? Did they have a little engine?

B: No. They had a little pony.

M: You've seen the little pony? Were you ever down in one of those mines?

B: I never was, I didn't want to. I was afraid of the mine.

M: Is there any other area around here . . . Did you know about the mine that was on State Line Road that had to be checked and shut down?

B: No, I'm not acquainted with that one.

- M: I was wondering, it has been, evidently, a pretty long time ago when Mr. Scholl saw that. It was abandoned for many years.
- B: There was a shaft mine down there on the old Greiner place. You can still see the spoil, and slate, et cetera back there now.
- M: Whose place?
- B: It is where Earl Schiller now lives. The shaft has been filled in. You can very readily see where the shaft was.
- M: You're sure it was filled in?
- B: Yes, I've walked over it lots of times.
- M: Of course, there have been places where the impression was that they were filled in, when what they did was cap them.
- B: That's true. That's true.
- M: You could walk over top of them. That's what happened at Hilda Avenue. . . one of them capped over for so many years . . .
- You wouldn't know the name of the one on Schiller?
- B: There again, I think it was one of the Ohlin's.
- M: Maybe some of the older ones were mining coal then?
- B: Oh, I'm sure they were.
- M: You were going to tell me something about Brownlee Woods, which would be of more interest to our project.
- B: I can't be very specific about that. When I was a young boy, I used to visit there. That was my grandfathers farm there.
- M: Brownlee Woods was your grandfathers farm?
- B: Over towards Lake Park Cemetery, I remember there was a mine shaft there. I can, just as a small boy, remember seeing the spoil piled up back there. There was an article in the Vindicator here last year that listed the known mines in the Youngstown area. I know it mentioned it.

M: It mentioned that one?

B: The Brownlee mine, Brownlee shaft.

M: They may have a map of it?

B: I'm sure they do.

M: Of course, it was abandoned by the time you were there, or was it working?

B: It was so long ago, Bernice. I don't know.

M: You were just a little kid?

B: Just a little bit of a kid. I can remember seeing that spoil pile back there.

M: Mrs. Harris says that today if you want to find out where the holes are, you go stand around and just look in after little kids. They will lead you right to them. Their parents don't know. Isn't that true?

B: Sounds logical doesn't it?

M: You have no other type of information about it? Did you ever talk to anybody about this? Did your grandfather ever say anything about that? Do you remember that mine?

B: No, my grandfather died when I was about twelve. I suppose his sons, my uncles, could have mentioned it. I don't remember much about it.

M: There wouldn't be anything that you could remember?

B: No.

M: If that old mine was around about there, there would be a spoil pile back there, too.

B: There was a couple of shafts. They brought soil up into the mine.

M: The rest of the time there wasn't any soil around. They took out all the coal, and that was about all there was once they got going out sideways, right?

B: I guess so.

M: Could you locate that, you already have partly.

B: No, I couldn't, Bernice. I think they have a map in the Youngstown and Mahoning County files.

There is this article I read in the paper that mentioned it.

M: So they know about that one. It's really kind of important to study this, because as the place develops, and as the cold weather and wet spring work on it, it might open up. It is pretty important.

B: About the only mine I know of around here is a shaft mine over on Monroe Myers farm.

M: I don't know about that. Tell me about that.

B: That's Mabel Myers' father. Do you know the Myers?

M: Right. Maybe you remember the first Myers family?

B: I can remember when Myers used to shear sheep here long years ago. That land has been stripped over.

M: It's no problem now?

B: There is no problem.

M: Of course, if there's a strip mine, it's a long time before anybody feels ready to put any buildings on it right away.

B: Yes. I don't know whether it would be advisable.

M: It's all right to have this on the record. It has been stripped down, but that doesn't necessarily eliminate it if it was a big shaft.

Do they go down as far as the strip mining equipment into these shafts?

B: Now, there you got me. I really don't know how deep these shafts were.

M: You don't remember when that was working over there? Did you say you remember?

B: Monroe Myers?

M: Yes.

B: Yes, I remember when they were selling coal over there. They sold cannel coal.

M: You don't remember the people who worked there, by name, any of them?

B: I don't know. I don't think that that was a very large operation. I think that maybe Monroe Myers dug some of that coal himself. I don't know for sure.

M: Then we'll get a hold of Mabel on that.

B: Yes, Mabel could tell you.

Just across the road there was a mine, up Honey Creek Road. They used to call that the John Ernst farm, then a Burkey had it, then a Padureen had it, and they mined a lot of coal over there. There were quite a few fellows from Petersburg that used to dig coal for Padureen. The Marshall Mining Company stripped over that area.

M: Again, which road? You know what, I mixed up these roads. Is Honey Creek Road down south, or east of here?

B: You know where the old Monroe Myers farm is?

M: Yes.

B: Where Mabel Myers lives?

M: Right.

B: There's a road that comes out to the Columbiana-New Castle Road.

M: That's the Honey Creek Road?

B: That's the Honey Creek Road. It swings around, and comes out on the Harman Road. The Harman Road is right west of there.

M: Billocks had part of that, maybe? Do you remember the people?

B: Billocks, yes.

M: They stripped some.

B: They stripped the same area. Billocks bought from the Padureens, I think.

M: The same area?

B: It's the same area, yes.

M: I would be lost up in there because there's too many mine shafts. It has a lot of coal to sell. If somebody was really quite ambitious, and skill-full, they could get quite a little coal out by themselves.

B: Oh yes, but when Padureen had that he had several men working in there.

M: This is the same place?

B: The same place as the Billocks.

M: Really?

B: Yes, I think maybe Billock had that after Padureen.

M: Then that would be fairly recent. That was thirty years ago?

B: I'm not even sure of that.

M: These names will be on our papers. We'll contact these people who might know more about it. I get the impression of scads of mines, mines all over.

B: Yes, I recollect another abandoned mine is up on Rich Baun's place. It is across Harman Road from our place. I think there's a man by the name of Meyer that lives there. That's Harman Road. You know Harman Road.

M: I was there once when I was young.

B: I can remember a little bank up there, but that mine has been abandoned ever since I can remember.

M: If it's that close to the Monroe Myers' then Mabel might know about that one?

B: She undoubtedly would.

M: The way things are going now, this could easily be a populated area in another twenty years. We're interested in names of people that used to dig coal.

B: Jack Beight lived right beside the Presbyterian church in Petersburg. Do you remember that little

house? The church bought it, and tore it down. That's where Jack Beight, and his wife, and his daughter, Lillian, lived. Jack was an old coal miner, I know that.

M: Is that right? Lillian would know something about that.

B: Certainly.

M: She lives down here yet?

B: Yes, she lives on Same Street. She married Raymond Sheely.

M: Good, now there's another. She might be able to shed a little . . . You never know when a little piece of information that you've been looking for will come from an unexpected source.

B: All the time I knew Jack Beight, he was a coal miner in one of these local mines around here. I'm sure Lillian could give you some information.

M: That's good. Now, as you can see, I have four other victims. (Laughter) I can get into this. It's been pretty interesting. I want to thank you very much for helping us out with this, Mr. Brownlee. It's an interesting project, not only right now, but for the future development of this area.

B: It certainly would be. I can understand that project being interesting.

M: Yes. Thanks again.

END OF INTERVIEW