

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Coal Mining Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 989

OLIVE L. ZITTO

Interviewed

by

Ellen Daniels

on

May 15, 1978

OLIVE LUCILLE ZITTO

This is an interview with Olive Zitto for Youngstown University History Department, Coal Mining by Ellen Daniels. Olive Zitto was born on September 29, 1921 in Salineville, Ohio. Her parents were William Davison and Olive Rhea Twiss Davison. She is the sister of Henry J. Davison, who also has been interviewed seperately.

In this tape, the underground mine is discussed. It is a slope mine. Her father and brothers worked at this mine outside of Salineville. Olive discussed the mine and what her father did in it. This included the size of the mine, the mode of transportation into and out of the mine, electric generators, her father's eating habits, the importance of the rats in the mine, and what her father looked like when he came home.

Currently, Mrs. Zitto lives at 232 West High Street in Lisbon, Ohio, where she is employed by the Lisbon Exempted Village School District. She is the Head Cafeteria Cook for the Lincoln Elementary School. She has been married, but her husband is dead. Mrs. Zitto has two children. She and her children both graduated from David Anderson High School in Lisbon, Ohio. The names of her children are Linda Vermillion, age 34, and Richard Zitto, age 33. Mrs. Zitto belongs to the Christian Church and the VFW Auxiliary.

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INTERVIEWEE: OLIVE L. ZITTO

INTERVIEWER: Ellen Daniels

SUBJECT: Coal Mining

DATE: May 15, 1978

D: This is an interview with Olive Zitto, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Coal Mining Project, by Ellen Daniels, on May 15, 1978, at 232 West High Street, in Lisbon, Ohio, at 3:00 p.m.

What do you remember about your father working in the mine?

Z: In what sense do you mean? I just remember him getting up real early in the morning and going. I remember the opening of the mines and how the opening wasn't real large. They would get in these little train cars and have to bend over real far--I mean they couldn't. The mine wasn't very high, it was only about 28 by 42 inches high. They would have to practically lay down in it to go back in. They went about eight miles back in. It was a slope mine.

I don't know, just things that. . . . I can remember their dinner buckets that they used to bring home. They were so different than the regular people that worked, because they had to carry their own water back in; and their dinner buckets had a water bucket part in the bottom and a place in the middle for their sandwiches. Then at the top, it had, like what we would call, like a cake pan, now. That is where they kept their desserts. Then, their lid was on it. They were altogether different.

And they showered at the mines. My dad came home and washed. He wouldn't wash up at the mines, but my brothers took their showers up there. Right off hand, I can't think. I don't know just what else. Can you think of anything that you can. . . ?

D: What was the name of the mine? Do you know?

Z: Yes. It was, at one time, called the Sterling Mine in Salineville. It was changed to John M. Hirst Co. It was just right out of Salineville. I can't tell you what route it was on.

D: Was it going down toward Carrollton?

Z: Yes, I believe it was going toward Carrollton. I believe it was Route 39. I'm pretty sure that was the number.

I can remember the big tipples, when the coal came out, and how the cars would overflow. A lot of the fellows would go up and get the coal. [They would] take trailers on their cars, go up and get the coal, and bring it home for themselves, you know, to use at home. We didn't have to buy the coal for our old pot-bellied stoves we had at home.

I can remember how dirty. . . . My dad would come home from work so dirty. Oh, he would be so black, and their dirty work clothes that they worked in. . . ! Oh my! You just can't believe how dirty they are when they get home. You have to get water ready--in those days, we didn't have inside facilities.

D: Like our automatic washers and dryers?

Z: The bathroom facilities. . . . We didn't have any of that inside. We would have to take an old wash tub, put it on the floor, and heat the water. Then, dad would get in there and take his bath. We put newspapers down to lay his dirty clothes on, because you didn't dare lay them on the floor.

I remember him bringing home . . . you would have to buy black powder. I don't know whether you call it dynamite. They called it black powder anyway. [It was used] to blow up parts of the mine to get the coal loose. They would have to pay for that.

D: What do you mean "they" had to pay for that?

Z: They had to pay for their own powder. See they owned. . . . I think, the way I understood my dad at the time, they each owned sort of . . . not an interest; but you worked, and you got paid for how many car

loads that you sent out. If you sent ten car loads out, you put a round metal number--I can't think what they were called--but each person had his own number. He had so many of these metal things, and he would take them back with him. As he sent a car out, he would stick one of them on that car. As they would send them back and forth each day, that would be his number. Then, at the end of the day, they would count your number. That was how cars you loaded that day . . . whatever amount of those you sent.

When they would get this black powder ready, they would roll up newspapers some way. They would take a copper needle with an eye and a squib some way. I just don't know exactly how my dad meant it, but I remember hearing him talking about it. And, they would thread that eye with a squib, I believe, light that, and blow that powder. That would loosen the coal all up. I remember them telling us that, whenever the rats would leave--if the coal got too loose and it was going to fall, before you know, if you are back in there, there might be a cave in. If you would see all the rats running, you would get out in a hurry, because the rats hear the sound mostly before you do. There is always lost of rats in the mines. That is a good sign when there are rats back in there. You just go ahead and feed them. They don't bother you; they won't hurt you. The real big ones are as big as cats--some normal size cats, not an extra large cat.

I was trying to think of anything else that I can remember. My dad got hurt in the mines. The mine was so low that there were places when you went in that you had to lay down below the height of the coal car that you rode in on. He raised his head up once just a slight bit and got hit on the head. Then, of course, he had a cerebral hemorrhage from that and never worked no more. That was back in 1939.

Now, like I said, parts of it were only 28 by 42 inches high. That would be around 3 feet. Eight miles back is how far back they went. That was over almost to Brush Creek and down close to Irondale, over in there. I think that is how far back they went.

D: Now does that mine still exist?

Z: It has been closed up. I don't think there is any way at all to get into it. I think the tipple and everything is all gone. Now, there is other mines down around there, and I don't know whether any of them are open or not. I would have to ask Henry, my brother, and see. That's why I was saying I wished he was here. He could just tell you so much more. He could even show you one of those metal things that you put on the

cars; but, they are just numbers. Each person, like I say, has a number. When it comes out, "Number so and so, that's Henry Davidson. Number so and so is Bill Davidson, and number so and so is Earl Davidson," and so forth. Numbers would be their names.

D: Do you remember how much they made per car?

Z: No, I don't remember that, because I wasn't old enough to remember too much about the money part of it. I used to think they dug money in the coal mines. I can remember that. That was really something that I just thought of myself, because sometimes there would be change in the dinner bucket when we would get ready to wash it. I guess it was just change that they had, and they had no pockets to put it in. You couldn't get straightened up to put it in a pocket anyway, so they just put it in their dinner bucket.

Miners always had so much trouble with indigestion and that. I can see why, because they could never straighten up to eat. They always ate all curled up in a ball. I know my dad used to take an awful lot of baking soda and stuff to work with him. We would measure out teaspoonfuls of baking soda and wrap them up in little pieces of waxed paper. Then, we would put about four or five of them, everyday, in the dinner bucket. They would just pour them in their mouth and take a drink of water. That was after they would eat, because there was just no way to get that food to go down right. You just sat in such a cramped position. I don't know how they ever worked. I really don't, because my dad was real heavy. My dad was 250 pounds, and then, my brother was 6 feet something tall. He wasn't so heavy, but he was real tall. How he ever got down on his hands and knees and crawled around in there, I don't know. But, they did.

D: Amazing. You said it was eight miles in length. Was there just one tunnel that went in, or was there more than one tunnel?

Z: I think there was a lot. You mean branches out like?

D: Yes.

Z: Yes, I think there was different places that branched off. It was sloped. It wasn't like straight back in. It was sloped different places. I know because Henry told me it was a slope mine. I've heard him mention that different times.

D: Did you ever get a chance to even get near the mine, or even to walk in?

Z: Just in the entrance, and the entrance was enough. It was so coal black looking back in there. [There was] no lights. I wouldn't go no further. I could have gone in it at one time. They allowed you to go back in years ago, but towards the last few years that the mine existed, they wouldn't allow you to go in. But, I never had no desire to go in. Of course, I was quite young when I left home, so I didn't have any desire to go back in there.

D: Now, they said there were cars that brought it out. There was no animals used at all to pull the cars out?

Z: Not when I knew it. Now, maybe years before that when my dad was first in the mine. I can remember hearing him talk about using the donkeys to bring it in or out . . . or ponies to bring coal in and out; but, in my time, it was all electric.

D: Did your dad say if there was very much possible water in the mines?

Z: Oh yes, there would be water. A lot of water at times. Sometimes, you would run into an awful lot, and then you would have to use a pump to pump it out. They had shafts different places. Air shafts came down at different places along. I don't know just where they all are. There is different places out in the country where there would be an air shaft driven down in to let air come down into them mines.

D: Was the mine . . . it must have been an active mine for quite a long period of time. Am I right?

Z: Oh yes. I think that mine was there for years. Now, I couldn't just tell you right off hand. If you wanted to know, I could call down home and find out, but I just don't know. I never thought of asking Henry about it the other day. He would probably be down there now.

D: Can you think of anything else?

Z: I just can't right now. Do you want to know how long it has been there?

D: I think I can probably find out, or we can find out a little bit later.

Z: Yes, I was going to say it is quite old. I know that because it has been closed up for quite awhile now.

D: On the Civil War section, you had a relative that led Morgan's group up. What was his name? Tell me a little bit about him. . . .

Z: It was my grandfather, Jimmy Twiss. He was a young boy of fifteen when General Morgan came up into Monroeville, Ohio. He came to what would be my great-grandparents house. He just went right up, took all the bread and food that they had in the house, and put it in their knapsack. He had my grandfather, a fifteen year old boy, take him and show him how to get to Lisbon, down over Salineville, then over to New Lisbon. He was captured out there by Gaylors. That is about all I know about him. I don't know whether he was forced to go or whether they just asked him to show him how to go, but I guess they went by horseback.

D: What happened to the boy when Morgan was Captured? Do you know?

Z: Well, I think he just showed him part way, and then, you know, guided him along the way; and then, [he] came back home, as far as I can remember my parents and them talking about it.

D: Okay. Then later, your family moved to the Salineville area?

Z: Yes.

D: Okay, thank you.

Z: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW