

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Coal Mining Project

Coal Mining

O. H. 133

HENRY J. DAVISON

Interviewed

by

Ellen Daniels

on

May 21, 1978

## HENRY J. DAVISON

Henry Davison was born in Salineville on August 6, 1909. He attended school until sometime during the seventh grade, at which time he quit going to school and started to work in the coal mine. Henry's parents were William Davison and Olive Rhea Twiss Davison.

Mr. Davison married Pearl Beadnell who was from Carroll County. They had five children whose names are: Audrey Johnson, age 52, William Henry Davison, age 45, Helen Beadle, age 41, Doris Brown, age 37 and Evelyn Manning, age 36.

Henry was employed by the John M. Hiarst Company from 1925 to 1961. After he left the mine he went to work for Chester Hoist in Lisbon from 1961 to 1974. He retired when he left Chester Hoist.

Henry joined the Army mechanized part of the TRC in 1945. The reason for joining late was that he worked in the mines and the Army would not allow miners to join until late in the war. He was discharged the same year that he joined - 1945.

Henry belongs to the American Legion and has a very specialized hobby. He enjoys working with wood, especially repairing antiques and making original furniture.

Mr. Davison described the mine that he worked in with his father and brother. In the interview he explained how to blow the coal, the cost of the powder which was paid for by the miner, how to bore a hole to put the powder into, what machines were the mode of transportation in the mine, the

length and width of the mine, the different jobs that the miner had, his eating habits, the arrival of federal and state mine inspectors and the ownership of the mine.

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SUBJECT: Coal Mining

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ED: This is an interview with Henry J. Davison for the Youngstown State University History Department Coal Mining Project by Ellen Daniels at 120 High Street, Salineville, Ohio on May 21, at 2:25 p.m.

Mr. Davison, what can you tell me about working in the mines?

HD: Well, how it works?

ED: Yes, how it works and what it is like as a miner to be down in a mine.

HD: Well, it is just the same as being--after you get used to it--just the same as being inside or outside. It don't make no difference to me, as far as that goes. It's cool in there. You don't have to worry about the weather. It's the same weather in there day and night and year-round. It gets a little warmer in the summer because the air coming in is a little warmer, and cold air in the winter time. It's about anywhere from 28 inches to 42 inches high and ours was all done by hand. I just had to cut machine the motor. We had to load it with a shovel, take our load up to the cars, lay her on track, had the motor come and get your car. And then he took it to there and then the bigger motor come and got it. That's the motor that took it out on the entry, and then the other motor come and got it out from there. And then they took it to the car and then the bigger motor took it from there outside. It was approximately, oh eight mile back in, from headed towards the bank

mouth or tepple. They had cut machines.

ED: What type of cut machines are you referring to?

HD: The Jeffrey, that's what they used, the Jeffrey cut machines.

ED: All right, what is the Jeffrey cut machine?

HD: Well, it is just practically like a chain saw, laying on the side, and it cuts timber, only in a bigger form. It weighed 8,600 pounds. Just had a chain on it, just like a bar on a chain saw, that cuts timber, only it laid on its side instead of standing up.

ED: And it cut into the coal then?

HD: Yes. It went back in anywhere from five, to five-and-a-half feet. And then you would drill three or four holes in that, and shot it down.

ED: What do you mean, shot it down?

HD: Well, we used to use black powder, and then it took us from black powder to permissable unflamable powder, and you just take it, well it took about anywhere from seven to eight inches of that powder, and it was an inch, I think an inch and three-eighths. In the first place, we used black powder, we had to roll up newspaper, take a newspaper and roll that around the old-fashioned curtain poles is what we rolled it on, and then poured that black powder in there, and pushed it back, and put a needle in it. Just the same as a needle that you use anyplace else, only it's longer and it's copper. Then you had a tamper. It had a groove in it, and it would fit it on top of that needle, then you would throw slack in there and tamp it back with a tampbar, after you drilled your hole. You had to drill the hole first though. It drilled about, somewhere around four feet back, four, four-and-a half. They had to drill that by hand. You had to turn the handle eight times to the inch, and then later we got electric drills. Now they don't drill holes in the drink anymore, only in smaller mines.

ED: After you cut through, and it is you know, blown out, what do you do? Do you just pick up the coal by hand or do you have shovels?

HD: No, shovel. We shoveled it in the car. You took your road up, and come up through the middle of your room,

what they called a room, and then they took and shoveled in there and filled your car up.

ED: All right, was the room tall enough that you could stand up in?

HD: No, it never run over 42 inches high. I've worked in 28 inches high, and to get the height big enough to get in, you have to shoot slate down, or take clay out. You take the clay up with the bumpers of the car. It wouldn't go up over the top of it. And you had to get certain how low your coal was. It had about anywhere from eight to fourteen inches of dirt on top of that coal and that is all the coal you had left. The higher the coal, the more dirt you had. If you had 42 inches high, the rest of them was bone coal, the extra height. If your coal was down around 32 inches high you would only have about eight inches of bone coal. You would throw that bone coal back, and then sometimes you would have a draw slate, that would come down, you would have to throw it back. It would run anywhere from one inch to whatever. I never seen one over four inches, as a rule you don't have it. Then you have a snap coal in there. You don't drill it, or shoot it or nothing. You just cut it.

ED: Okay, what did you cut it with?

HD: The cut machine. The machine would come in and cut it, and after it would cut it, it would just start to snap and bang and the coal would just come right out. Just hit it with a pick, and it would just snap all over and just come off. Sometimes, when the cut machine would come down, cutting it, it would come down on the cut machine and have to get it back out again. I only seen one or two of them drove that way. There is some in there though. My dad had one right along side of me. Mine had some, but not very much, nothing like his. He hardly ever, he drove a room, they drive a room up approximately 250 feet, and it would be somewhere around 26 to 28 feet wide. He drove that whole room up. I don't think he ever drilled over three or four holes, and that was just little ones, short ones. Mine, right along side of him, I had drilled everyone of mine. But that snap coal is dangerous, boy, it's really rough. There'd be chunks come off, well, maybe three or four feet long, and however high the coal was, and it would just drop right down. It cracked. I can't tell you, I think it would put you to mind, what it sound like, it's the way the coal snapped.

ED: Did you get paid, you know per day, or . . .

HD: Oh yes, you got paid by the ton. You put a check on your, when they load your car you had a round brass check, with a hole on it, and on the end of your car you had a nail. It stuck out and bent up and you put that on. Then the guy out at the tipple, he'd take that check off and put it on your number, and the weight that that car weighed. They weighed the coal. They didn't weigh the coal in the car; the car was dumped and then it was weighed into a bucket, a bin, and then it was weighed. It wasn't weighed in the car. Your cars would run anywhere from one to four or five hundred pounds difference in weight. It was weighed out of the car. If they sold it for domestic, they run it out there and weighed the whole car and then took and weighed the empty car then. Some they didn't dump in there, they would take it out on a special track and dump it in.

ED: Do you remember how much they paid you per ton?

HD: Anywhere from 28 cents a ton to \$2.05 a ton.

ED: Does that differ because of the type of coal?

HD: The different weight, different scale of time in 36 years. When I started there, I forget just what I started at, but during the time of the Depression, along about 1930 we loaded for 28 cents a ton. When things got good in the time of war, we was up to \$2.05 a ton. It was only up there just a few pays, then it dropped down to \$1.97 I think, and then down to \$1.86, and just kept going down. Then the men started getting different jobs different places and things started to get better. Then you couldn't get anyone to work the mine. It was too far back in: it took too many day men. The one that run the motor, they wasn't on by the ton; they was on by the day, by the hour.

ED: Like an hourly wage?

HD: Yes, they got the same per hour as we did per ton. Of course, on piece work, if they give you the cars why you could make more than that, but that's what you got per ton. If you only loaded enough to make that day's wages, some days you wouldn't even make day wages. If there was something happened, a wreck or anything in the mine, why you go in there maybe all day and maybe only make a couple dollars, and maybe the next day you get some cars, why you'd make better; it was all piece work. The cut machine was piece work. You got so much a ton

for cutting it. Like two machine men, they had a crew of men of about twelve to fifteen men, and everything was loaded on them there numbers. Why that was how the machine men got paid, by the ton, they was paid by the ton too. The rest of them, the motor men, the track layers, and all them other ones, was all by the hour.

ED: You mentioned you laid your own track in the mine. All right, did you use a large rail?

HD: No, just a small one. I'd say it was about two inches high. And you didn't use wooden ties, you used iron ties. They had lugs on them so that to keep from spreading and turning over. You took your own road up, but that's counted in on your tonnage. You done that for nothing. You laid your road and towed your dirt back for nothing. You only got paid for doing your . . . Now in the air course, naturally you got paid for, if you didn't have anyplace to put your dirt, you had to load it. You got paid for loading it, you got so much a car. If the entry for the motorists to get in was low, why they had to shoot a foot of slate down because the motor, the big motor couldn't get in if they didn't. Now they had to load them slate cars. They got so much for slate; they got paid yardage for slate in the entry. I never worked entry only about a couple years, something like that. I didn't like it. I would rather be in the air course. I drove the air for the entrymen the biggest part of the time. Then I was on cut machine for awhile. I was on day work for a little while, 36 years, you can change around a little bit. If I'd had four more months, I would have had 36 years in. I started in November and quit in July.

ED: When you were shooting your black powder and so forth, was that supplied by the company?

HD: No, we had to buy it. For awhile there, I don't know, I can't mind this at first, but there for awhile the company paid half of it. Of course we were the company so what was the difference.

ED: Oh, in other words, you were the company. You owned the mine. All the miners, or just . . .?

HD: We owned the mine, yes. More or less it was in that way. It belonged to the Sterling Coal Company, and then John M. Harst and company men bought it. It was still under them but they all went together. There toward the last why they paid half of it and you paid the other half.



Your tools were the same way. No, tools you had to pay, all you had to do was pay the cost of them. Whatever the company got them for that's what you got them for. Your gloves, a lot of them used gloves, a lot of them didn't. I used them part of the time and part of the time I didn't. They got awful expensive; a pair of gloves you wear them out in two days. Them there red faced gloves, you've seen them, fuzzy, maybe, and I got a whole bunch of gloves there that I didn't use them. And I got three of the ends of my fingers taken off and I started using them again then.

ED: Yes, that's a good reason.

HD: Cut them off with a saw. I never lost a day's work with them, cut the ends off all three of them. One of them took the edge of the bone off, and the other two didn't.

I don't know, is there anything else that you can. . .

ED: You mentioned beforehand, before we turned the recorder on about the air shafts, and also about the farmers. They could go out a different entrance way?

HD: Yes, there is two entries the farmers can go out. One was where they, where the entries hold out in the hollow, and that's where the fan house used to be at first. And then they got so far back in, and so, big hills, that they had to make another air shaft because of getting too far away from the fan, and you could go in and out them anytime. Anybody could go in and out them that wanted to. Of course I guess it was bad to get down in when the fan was running, but you could, you could hold on tight to the ladders. I forget how many thousand cubic feet of air were going down there a minute: just like a big bullet, that fan was. I don't think I ever went up and down, well, maybe I did the one time whenever I walked over there, but I can't mind of it today. The big fan wouldn't have been in, like it was toward the last. They say this new fan was in, that they put in there, that you just had a hard time getting up and down there with it running, especially in the winter time. Summertime it wasn't too bad I guess, winter time it would be so cold. If that fan house was, if anything got plugged up, it would blow the top right off of it. I guess they had, toward the last, they had some kind of a safety thing, and if it got too much pressure back against it, it would stop the fan.

ED: What got you into mining, originally?

HD: Well, I didn't like school, was the biggest thing. (laughter) My dad was in the coal mines and he had worked in the mines all his life. He started when he was eleven, nine or eleven years old, I forget which, eleven I think. He went in with his brother. He started when he was nine; he started in the coal mine when he was nine years old.

ED: Now were you in the same area where he started or. . .

HD: Oh no, this mine up here, where I worked, I suppose it started about 19 . . . , no 1898, I think it was it started. I think 1901 is when they started to getting coal out to sell to the farmers, I suppose just like the country mine. Then the Sterling Coal Company bought it. I don't know what year they bought it, that would be, that was a little bit before my time to mind of anything like that. I wasn't born until 1909, so it was started before I was born. The men took it the time of the big Depression in 1918, no it wouldn't be 1918, it would be about 1920 or 1921, wouldn't it?

ED: Yes, the Depression . . .

HD: Well no, see the men took it over in 1925, so it was bad before that because they was shut down because they couldn't run; couldn't make a go of it. 1925, the men took it. It was down about a year and a half I think before the men took it over, the ones that worked there. They was just all up against it; they didn't have no place to go for that's all Salineville is, a coal mine and, well, they had a brick yard and a pottery, the rest of it was all mines. Salineville is all mines here. I mind when there was seven running here at one time. The Sterling's and then Kirk's, Foster's, Luker's, Braney's and McGarry's. I think Strabbley's was running too. I think there was seven or nine of them that ran here at one time and a brick yard and pottery. This used to be a booming town.

ED: You can tell from the area around it.

HD: I have an idea at one time this here had about 2,800 in it. Now it's down to about 1,400 I suppose, maybe even lower than that now. A lot moved out of here. I think I'm going to stick it through the rest of the time.

ED: It's a nice quiet city to stay in. (Laughter)

HD: Yes, I think I'll just stay. I don't like the big places. Whenever you went in the mines, why you got in the cars,

anywhere from four to six men in a car; you had to keep down because they're low. To ride comfortable, four was all you wanted in it. Towards the last, the inspectors stopped us from riding on the wire side where the trolley wire was. They trolley wire just run, a motor run just the same as a streetcar trolley: it just has a pole up. Today, the newer mines though, they don't. They just have what they call a buggy, and they are all on rubber tires and everything. They don't lay no track or nothing. I never worked under one of them, in the newer mines. The inspector stopped you from, because that there trolley wire was bare. It would just knock you down. I've been knocked down three or four times, but you just get up, it hit me again, knocked me back down again. (Laughter) You don't get your head too high. That's a long way, it takes about a half hour to 45 minutes to go in. You went in to what you called your entry and then you got off. Then you got on three or four entries, then went up into the room with the battery motor in it the rest of the way.

ED: You were mentioning going in the mine and so forth. Did you have to dress differently?

HD: Well, we had our own wash shanty. We had a big building there; we had 22 or 24 showers. You'd just take ordinary working clothes, your home clothes and go up there and change because we mostly wore heavy underwear in the mine. I never wore no shirt, I just wear heavy underwear and my wife would take ducking and pad the back of them up where you rub your back, kind of keep from tearing the knots off your spine back there. (Laughter) And then you worked on your knees. You'd have pads on your knees, but your knees got tough. You just, lots of days I was in there with bare knees, right down on the bare coal. It was pretty cold in there. Take a big heavy coat so if you did, anything happens, you couldn't do nothing to keep warm, why you would have something to cover up with, because you'd be sweat and mostly wet with water. I've worked in water and I've sat down and turned both legs under me and couldn't even see the leg covered with water all day. Only time you dried out was when you got up why it would run down in your boots. Used to have what they called a shoe boot. They're just between an oxford and an ordinary work shoe, the heighth, and they are rubber with steel toes. They wore heavy socks. You didn't, I think forty, oh I used to keep thermometers in there all the time and tell you what they are, but I forget what they are. There's lots of them hanging in here in the post yet.

because they're glass, they wouldn't leave. You'd find them. I think it run 42 or 46, something like that pert-near all the time, when you was way off from the fan, it would be, the temperatures of the cold air or the warm air if you're a good piece from the fan. Why it would be the ground temperature then. Whatever it is down on the ground.

I don't know of anything else to say, is there anything else you could say, why . . .

ED: You mentioned inspectors. When did the federal inspectors start to come in or were they state inspectors?

HD: They always did. The state and federal. I don't know whether I should say that or not, they are the ones that shut it down because they just, one state would come and tell you you had to do this, the next would come and tell you that's wrong you had to do something else and they're doing it right today yet too. They are just sitting there. It can't run. They would come in and tell you the rock dust, that's nothing but ground limestone, the same thing the farmer puts on his ground, then they have a machine to blow it all over the ribs in the ground, because the dust would cause an explosion. How's water going to explode? Rock dust would be in there on a foot and a half of water. You would have to rock dust water while the dust is going to explode. They had to dream it: they couldn't think of it.

ED: They couldn't ever find a perfect mine, in other words?

HD: Yes, I'll say. They put it on sides, bottom and top, blowed on with a machine. It is ground limestone to keep coal dust down to keep it from exploding. The extra dirt that was on top of your coal you had to rock dust them, they would be as white as snow, but it would only just be a few days and it would all be gone, you know, it would get wet after that, ground limestone gets wet. Why it just turns all real dark brown. There is a lot of dust in there with, on a cut machine, and then your dust whenever you shoot. The air was so strong in there the biggest part of the time, if you watched your air, it was so much air in there that it didn't stay. An ordinary carbide light if you put it against the air, it wouldn't stay lit. It just turned a little bit sideways and it would blow it out. And they're hard to blow out. There's that much air coming in there. Now after you get away from your opening there, get up ready for your other ones, why it gets pretty hot, gets pretty close. But you're walking up and down there and you're--the

the motors going in and out and things like that, and it keeps the circulation. You had lots of air if you watched, you watched your air at all, you could have good air. Where I worked anyhow, where I got, it was because we fixed out. I had a guy that worked in the entry way, and I drove air for him and we took canvas and put up the sides and put a piece of wire up on posts, and then we'd take these here clip-on clothespins, lay it over it and then let the air go up behind it. We always had good air. We made it there; we just stopped and done it for our own benefit. The inspectors come and checked your air every so often. Coneybear was one from Carrollton that come to most of our places. I don't know, a lot of other ones come, but he mostly was the one, he was a nice one. He was really a nice guy. I think he's dead though now. I never hear about him anymore. Some other ones come, some of them would come, would be nice and some of them wouldn't. Inspectors, why they was all pretty nice. It's after they went out, it's what they done. Of course they had the report to make, so I don't know. It was for our own benefit, a lot of it, and a lot of it wasn't. He always told us we kept the best air through there than anyone of them up there. We just stopped and done it.

ED: You never had any problems with poisonous gases or anything?

HD: Well there was gas there. We had lots of times they had to have a fire boss go in in the morning. I've seen a light, you know whenever we went in, we had a carbide light then, that was before we started using electric lights, and it would light. Be off, maybe be off for a couple days, you know, or three and be up above air, it would light then just go right across there and just go boom, right across the ceiling there, roof of the mine. Well, since you're there, all you do is drop your face down away to the ground, and then it just burnt itself off in a little bit. And I've seen drill holes burn. Oh they've just burned for an hour if you let them burn, just hold your hand over them, and that will put them out, got to shut the air off of them. I've done that different times, but, no gas to amount to anything. It's like these here mines in West Virginia, there was, no, we didn't have that. At one time it was right at the verge of having complete, if it went any farther, they had to have a special system come in there. They got that down pretty low, then we had to have a fire boss go in and test the gas with a Davey lantern. He had to go in every morning before you went in, even every room.

ED: Well, what did he do with the lantern?

HD: The Davey lantern won't explode. It will tell you whether there's gas in without exploding it. They're safety lights is what they are. We always just called them Davey lanterns. I don't have one of them. If I'd have just thought of it, I could have went and got one and showed it to you because I know where there's three of them, right here at my door. The guy right up here has three of them, I think. He has one back when the old miners, years and years ago he has one. Then he has one of the late ones because he was a foreman up there for a long while. Jim Bray, he just lives right up top of the hill here. He would have lent it to me for a little while. I don't have any. I got one oil light out there yet; it has the oil wick in it, but I never worked under them. Carbide lights is all I worked under. In the olden times they just had a wick that came out the spout on the side. It's on the same order as an older tea kettle only a smaller form. The wick went down in that. They used lard oil and stuff like that- carbon oil. I never worked under that. That's before my time and I'm glad of it!  
(Laughter)

I don't know of anything else, unless you could think of something. Do you want me to shut this off?

ED: No, I can shut it off.

END OF INTERVIEW