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CHAPTER FOUR

THE ASCENDANCY OF COAL

IN THE LATE nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, coal was king of the industrial world. The black dusty mineral not only fired the boilers of locomotives, factories, and ships, but it also fueled the generators of the new electric power plants and warmed the homes of the urban middle class. In its processed form (coke), coal was a critical element in the manufacture of iron and steel. Until it was dethroned by the rise of oil and gas after World War I, coal was the primary source of cheap energy for the United States and much of Europe. Without the ready availability of coal, the American drive for industrial maturity after 1890 would have been considerably slowed.

The fifty million acres or so of coal lands in the Appalachian South was the nation's largest supply of bituminous coal, and in the heyday of industrial expansion it was inevitable that these mountain reserves would be tapped. Railroads had opened up the region in the 1870s and 1880s, but economic conditions had delayed the large-scale development of coal mining. The financial panic of 1893 drove coal prices down, and early in 1894 they reached their lowest point in twenty years.[1] Thereafter, however, the nationwide business recovery and the war with Spain began to generate an increased demand for coal, and the Appalachian fields entered a period of unparalleled growth. By 1900, coal production in the region had tripled, and in the next three decades it multiplied again more than fivefold, coming to account for almost 80 percent of national production.[2]

The penetration of the Great Lakes markets by southern coal companies paved the way for the emergence of the coal boom in the mountains. Prior to the turn of the century, most of the coal used in

1. Joseph T. Lambie, *From Mine to Market*, 59.
2. Compiled from figures in U.S. Bureau of Mines, *Mineral Resources of the United States*, 1900 and 1930.

the upper Midwest was supplied by mines in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Southern Appalachian coal was restricted primarily to the eastern markets and the transoceanic trade. By 1898, however, southern operators began to challenge this division of markets and to attempt to capture a share of the lucrative Great Lakes trade. The southern operators had several advantages over their northern competitors. Not only was Appalachian coal of better quality than the northern product, but it could be delivered to the consumer at a lower price. The geological location of mountain coal seams made mining easier and less expensive, and railroads usually charged lower freight rates for long hauls. Above all, the coal operators extracted more work at less pay from mountain miners, and this substantially lowered their cost of production. The labor differential became a major factor after 1897, when a successful United Mine Workers strike forced the northern operators to set mining wage rates by collective bargaining. Southern coal operators bitterly resisted unionization and used their cheaper labor costs as a wedge into the Midwest markets.[3]

The success of the mountain coal barons in gaining entry to the Midwest markets was extraordinary. In 1898, for example, southern West Virginia shipped only about 40,000 tons of coal to the Great Lakes, or less than 1 percent of the total market. But by 1913, its shipments had increased to over 6 million tons, or 23 percent of the total. Nonunion eastern Kentucky entered the lake trade in 1909, and by 1921 it was supplying over 2.6 million tons.[4] The tremendous growth of the coal market resulted in rapid overdevelopment of the industry in the mountains, as more and more operators sought to profit from their competitive advantage by expanding production. After 1900, capital that had previously gone into the northern coal fields was increasingly diverted into the southern mountains, and new mines were opened on the creeks and in the hollows every year.

Another factor contributing to the sudden growth of mining operations in the mountains was the relatively small capital investment needed to open a mine in the region. "All that was required," recalled

3. See Thomas, "Coal Country," 140–44; Cubby, "The Transformation of the Tug and Guyandot Valleys," 267–74; William Graebner, "Great Expectations: The Search for Order in Bituminous Coal, 1890–1917," *Business History Review* 48 (1974), 50.
4. Edward Eyre Hunt, Frederick G. Tryon, and Joseph H. Willitts, *What the Coal Commission Found* (Baltimore, 1925), 233.

a coal operator, "was to build houses for the miners, a store to supply them, and a tipple structure to dump the coal into railway cars."[5] Little machinery was required, and the men provided their own tools. Coal mine leases were easy to obtain at the turn of the century, since land companies and railroads were eager to develop their properties. Many companies were organized with no more than $20,000 to $30,000 subscribed by a few men, with money borrowed from banks or wealthy friends.[6] The ease with which a mine could be opened led to the establishment of hundreds of small mines throughout the region, adding to the competition and instability of the industry.

The development of coal mining facilities was so rapid in the first decades of the new century that many journalists revived the old booster spirit of the 1870s and 1880s, predicting prosperity and industrial greatness for the region. The editor of the newspaper in Beckley, West Virginia, spoke for many local leaders in 1907 when he described his faith in the magic of king coal.

> Towns and cities springing up where before stood dense forests or waving fields of grain; thousands of coke ovens gleaming along the pathway of the iron horse and clouding the noon-day sun with their endless streams of smoke; armies of men collected together from every quarter of the globe to dig his vast treasures from the mines; heavily loaded freight trains plunging through mountain fastnesses, fording great rivers and spanning wide canyons to carry to the world its precious supplies of fuel—these are some of the accomplishments of old king coal, who is working out the miracle daily before our eyes.[7]

These sentiments were shared by other journalists inside and outside of the mountains, but no one more ardently promoted the new age in the region than Richard Hathaway Edmonds, the editor of the *Manufacturers' Record*. From the late 1880s, Edmonds was an outspoken advocate of the industrialization of the Appalachian South. "In this great Appalachian area," he argued, "are great latent resources, awaiting development, resources great enough to enrich empires." The region, he claimed, was like a central bank, "the richest on earth, more feasible of financial development than any-

5. Tams, *Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia*, 24.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Raleigh Register* (Beckley, W.Va.), 7 Nov. 1907, quoted in Thomas, "Coal Country," 272.

thing on the American continent."[8] When he was not using the pages of his Baltimore-based journal to urge capitalists to tap that bank, he was traveling throughout the region and the East Coast speaking to businessmen, commercial clubs, and other groups about the great natural wealth of the mountains. In 1910, he challenged the Appalachian Press Association in Knoxville to lead the way in making known to the world the vast resources of their section, and he urged a meeting of the Appalachian Engineering Association in Washington, D.C., to unlock "by means of the proper keys rightfully in [your] possession vault after vault" of this greatest of all natural banks. "There is probably no other area of its size on earth," he believed, "capable of furnishing so broad a foundation for the support of a dense population under the most advantageous conditions of health and comfort and for the creation of wealth . . . as this Appalachian region of the South."[9]

At least a few of those who read his journal or listened to Edmonds speak took up his advice and moved to the southern mountains to participate in the revolution taking place there. A disproportionately large number of engineers became owners, superintendents, or managers of mines in the Appalachian coal fields, using their skills to overcome the natural barriers which had so long guarded the mountain wealth.[10] In 1908, a number of these engineers and coal operators founded the *Appalachian Trade Journal* to serve as a regional version of the *Manufacturers' Record*. The *Appalachian Trade Journal* was established in Knoxville "to advertise the kinds, quality, and commercial value of the wealth" of Appalachia, and, together with the *Manufacturers' Record*, it became an effective means of communications and propaganda for the outside technicians who organized the transformation of mountain life. In 1910, the *Appalachian Trade Journal* became the official organ of the Southern Appalachian Coal Operators Association.[11]

8. Richard H. Edmonds, "Latent Resources of the South," *Appalachian Trade Journal* 4 (May 1910), 20.
9. *Ibid.*; R.H. Edmonds, "Engineers' Opportunities in Southern Appalachians," *Manufacturers' Record* 56 (18 Nov. 1909), 47. See also "The Future of the Appalachian South," *Manufacturers' Record* 48 (4 Jan. 1906), 207; "Millions for Development in the Appalachian South," *Manufacturers' Record* 50 (3 Jan. 1907), 627.
10. Based upon biographical analysis of a sample of 140 coal operators in the Appalachian South. See ch. 6.
11. *Appalachian Trade Journal* 2 (June 1909) and 4 (Feb. 1910). In the 1920s,

The decades after 1900, therefore, witnessed the final arrival of the industrial age in Appalachia. The ascension of coal to the throne of the region's economic, political, and social life was made possible not only by increased national demand, but also by the penetration of new markets and the ease with which mining operations could be undertaken. While the power of the new order was based upon exploitation of mountain resources and people, the minions of King Coal sought to obscure the terms of his rule with acclamations of "progress" and "unbounded future wealth." The managers and technicians whom the king drew around him established effective control over the expanding empire, and for a time they were the lords of the new regime.

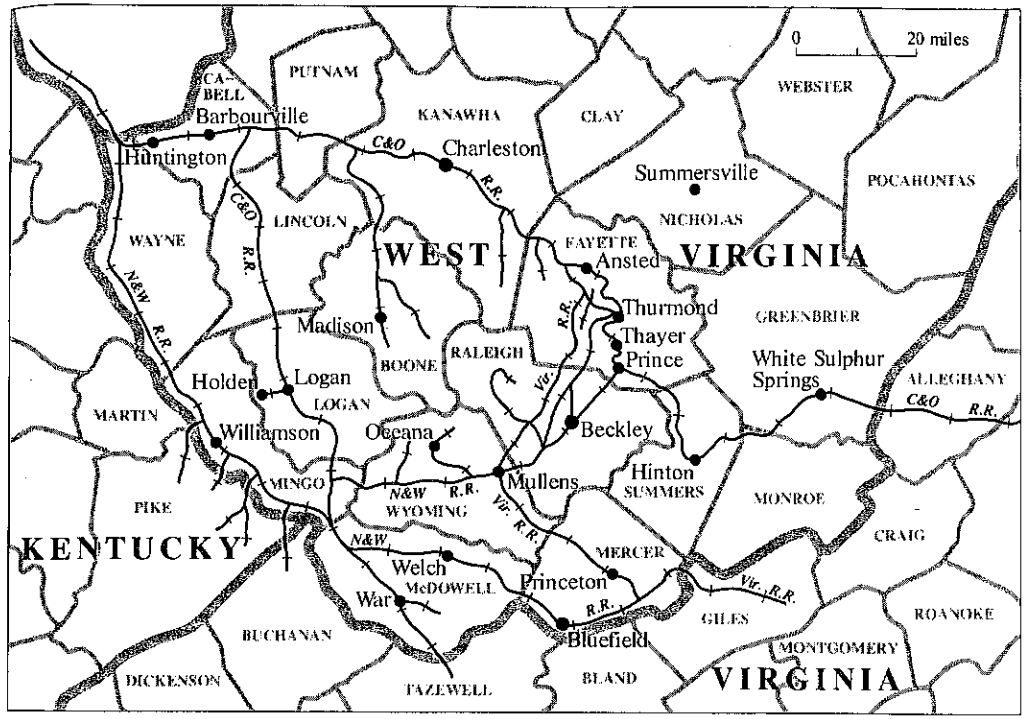
WEST VIRGINIA

> "Medieval West Virginia! With its tent colonies and bleak hills! With its grim men and women! When I get to the other side, I shall tell God Almighty about West Virginia."[12]

No other section of the Appalachian South experienced a more intense transformation with the rise of coal than southern West Virginia. After 1910, eastern Kentucky would become the scene of dramatic and sweeping events, but in the first decade of the twentieth century the greatest assaults of the coal men came in the Mountain State. In the 1870s, the C&O Railroad had opened the New River coal fields in Fayette, Raleigh, and Kanawha counties, and in the 1880s the N&W Railway had begun to ship coal from parts of Mercer and McDowell counties, but it was not until the completion of the N&W's Ohio Branch through Mingo County in 1892 that large-scale development of the area commenced. The extension of the N&W to the Ohio River enabled coal operators in southern West Virginia to introduce their product in the Great Lakes markets, and by 1900 the three counties of Mercer, McDowell, and Mingo were producing

the magazine moved its headquarters to Cincinnati and also became the official organ of the Appalachian Logging Congress.

12. Mother Jones, quoted in Neil Pierce, *The Border South States* (New York, 1975), 168. A half-century after Mother Jones made her statement about the Mountain State, journalist Neil Pierce found that the despotic politics and economy of West Virginia continued to make it "The Saddest State" of any in the Union.



7. Southern West Virginia

almost as much coal as the entire state had in 1890. In 1905, McDowell County became the largest coal producer in the state, and over the next two decades coal output in the southern counties ballooned by over 300 percent. By 1920, the nine coal-producing counties south of the New River accounted for about two-thirds of the total production in the state.[13]

The increase in coal output was matched by an equally spectacular rise in the population of the southern counties. In 1890, large portions of southern West Virginia were still unsettled, but with the coming of the coal boom, that area witnessed an inrush of population unparalleled anywhere in the region. Between 1890 and 1920, the population of the area increased more than fourfold and in some counties

13. U.S. Bureau of Mines, *Mineral Resources of the United States*, 1900, 1920.

more than ninefold.[14] McDowell County experienced phenomenal growth. In the decade from 1900 to 1910, McDowell's population burgeoned by some 30,000 inhabitants for a rate of 155.3 percent, while the state average for the decade was only 27.4 percent. During that period, six of the nine coal-producing counties of southern West Virginia had population growths of over 50 percent.[15]

A major share of the increased production and population growth in the region resulted from the arrival of hundreds of independent coal operators, who established mines on land leased from the big absentee land companies. In some counties, the proliferation of small, independent mines led to a concentration of coal camps, one after another, for miles along the narrow hollows. Most of these mines employed from 10 to 300 men and produced on the average about 200,000 tons of coal per year.[16]

Despite their numbers, however, the independent operators produced only a fraction of the coal mined in the area. In fact, a few giant coal companies came to dominate the field. As coal production revived after 1900, syndicates of northern bankers, industrialists, and other capitalists again began to acquire vast tracts of coal land in the mountains and to organize new companies or consolidate the interests of smaller firms. The purpose of these enterprises was to control production in a given area or to provide a continuous supply of coal for the parent firm. Mines in the latter category were usually called "captive" mines, since they produced coal for the parent-consumer rather than for the open market.

One of the three largest coal companies to be established in southern West Virginia at this time was the U.S. Coal and Oil Company, the forerunner of the Island Creek Coal Company. Most of the capital behind this venture was provided by Colonel William A. Coolidge, a Boston attorney and financier, and Albert F. Holden,

14. "Southern Appalachian Population Statistics, 1890–1900," Horace Kephart Journals, vol. 1, pp. 90a–90c, Western Carolina Univ; Southern Appalachian Studies (in cooperation with the Univ. of Georgia), *Number of Inhabitants of the Southern Appalachians, 1900–1957*, Population Data Series No. 1, (Athens, Ga., 1959), Table 19.

15. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, III, Population (Washington, D.C., 1913), 1013.

16. Compiled from West Virginia Department of Mines, *Annual Reports*, 1900, 1910; U.S. Bureau of Mines, *Mineral Resources of the United States*, 1900, 1909–1910; Tams, *The Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia*, 40.

a wealthy engineer whose family owned the Cleveland (Ohio) *Plain Dealer*. In 1901, Coolidge and Holden purchased about 30,000 acres of coal lands along the Middle Fork of Island Creek in Logan County and incorporated the U.S. Coal and Oil Company to develop the property. The company was capitalized at over six million dollars, and the land was estimated to contain more than 500 million tons of high quality coal.[17] At the turn of the century, Logan County was still untouched by railroads, and most of the land acquired by Coolidge and Holden was yet undeveloped. When the two capitalists came to inspect their property in 1902, the town of Logan Court House had a population of only about two hundred. According to a company history, however, the men were undaunted by the "wilderness," and after walking over the property, they "retired to their tent, donned dinner coats, and, gentlemen to the core, ate dinner in isolated elegance."[18]

To reach their new coal properties, Coolidge and Holden organized the Island Creek Railroad Company and began the construction of a line from Logan Court House through the U.S. Coal and Oil lands to connect with the Ohio Branch of the N&W in Mingo County. In 1903, they established the mining town of Holden and by the end of the following year began to ship coal to the Midwest markets.[19] The opening of the U.S. Coal and Oil Company mines stimulated the rapid development of the Logan Coalfield, as other northern companies acquired land and organized mining companies.[20] Overnight, the town of Logan became a boom town, complete with stone sidewalks, electric lights, and a sewage system.[21] By 1910, Logan County mines were producing over two million tons of coal per year and employing almost 2,400 miners.[22] In that year, the U.S. Coal and Coke Company was reorganized as the Island Creek Coal Company, but Albert F. Holden remained the company's president. Island Creek Coal Company later acquired extensive coal lands in neighboring Pike County, Kentucky, and in

17. *Manufacturers' Record* 48 (20 July 1905), 3; Thurmond, *Logan Coal Field*, 54.

18. Raymond E. Salvati, *Island Creek: Saga in Bituminous* (New York, 1957), 9.

19. Cubby, "The Transformation of the Tug and Guyandot Valleys," 232; *Manufacturers' Record* 48 (20 July 1903), 3.

20. Thurmond, *Logan Coal Field*, 31–35, 41.

21. *Manufacturers' Record* 48 (20 July 1905), 2.

22. U.S. Bureau of Mines, *Mineral Resources of the United States*, 1909–1910.

time became the second-largest coal mining and marketing operation in the country.[23]

While the U.S. Coal and Oil Company was shaping the development of the Logan Coalfield, other northern capitalists were investing heavily in the Flat Top–Pocahontas Coalfield, the largest coal-producing district in southern West Virginia. Beginning shortly after the turn of the century, a group of capitalists associated with the United States Steel Corporation and the Pennsylvania Railroad acquired control of a majority of the coal land in the Flat Top–Pocahontas district. By 1910, through a system of interlocking directorates, they dominated production in that important field. Both the U.S. Steel Corporation and the Pennsylvania Railroad were linked to the New York banking firm of J.P. Morgan and Company. The steel corporation was directly controlled by Morgan interests, and the railroad was tied to Morgan and Company through the Girard Trust Company of Philadelphia.[24] Together, U.S. Steel and the Pennsylvania Railroad constituted the most powerful economic force in Appalachia.

The Pennsylvania Railroad acquired an interest in southern West Virginia coal lands in 1898, when the line purchased control of its two major southern competitors, the C&O and the N&W railroads. Through this new "community of interest," the Pennsylvania Railroad sought to stabilize the coal transportation industry by increasing freight rates and dividing coal markets.[25] As part of its acquisition of N&W properties, the Pennsylvania Railroad gained control of the 300,000 acres of coal land belonging to the Flat Top Coal Land Association in the Pocahontas Coalfield. In 1901, a syndicate of New York men led by Elbert H. Gary, chairman of the newly formed U.S. Steel Corporation, exercised an option to buy the Flat Top lands and subsequently organized the Pocahontas Coal and Coke Company. The Gary syndicate hoped to develop these lands in order to provide a continuous supply of fuel for its steel mills. Within two months, however, the N&W reacquired all of the stock of the

23. *Manufacturers' Record* 60 (16 Nov. 1911), 56; Cubby, "The Transformation of the Tug and Guyandot Valleys," 274.
24. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Hearings Before the Committee on Education and Labor*, 67th Cong., 1st sess., Senate Hearings vol. 181, "The West Virginia Coal Fields," vol. 2 (Washington, D.C., 1921), 640.
25. Allen W. Moger, "Railroad Practices and Policies in Virginia After the Civil War," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 59 (1951), 452–57; Thomas, "Coal Country," 137.

Pocahontas Coal and Coke Company, so as to prevent the overdevelopment of mines along its tracks and thus protect the stability of its freight rate structure. The sale was contingent upon the lease of over 50,000 acres of land to the U.S. Steel Corporation.[26]

Having secured mining rights in the Pocahontas field, the steel corporation then organized a subsidiary company, the United States Coal and Coke Company, and began extensive mining operations in McDowell County. The N&W ran a branch line up the Tug River from Welch to the company's new mining town of Gary, and by 1907, U.S. Coal and Coke was operating sixteen different mines within a few miles of Gary, with expectations of fourteen additional mines.[27] By 1918, U.S. Steel's subsidiary had become the largest single producer of coal in the state of West Virginia, putting out nearly five million tons annually and employing almost 3,900 men.[28] The corporation continued to expand its operations in the southern mountains, leasing and acquiring property throughout the region. In 1923, the United States Coal Commission found that the Morgan affiliate and its auxiliary companies controlled over 750,000 acres of Appalachian coal lands.[29]

Other leading coal companies in the Flat Top–Pocahontas field were also tied to the Morgan interests. The second-largest producer in the field was the Pocahontas Fuel Company, which employed about 2,000 miners. The president of this company was Isaac T. Mann, one of three wealthy capitalists in the original Gary syndicate. After 1901, Mann moved to the coal fields, where he became the head of a coterie of men living in Bramwell, West Virginia, who controlled a number of banks and coal companies in the southern part of the state. In addition to his interests in the Pocahontas Fuel Company, Mann was a shareholder in the Red Jacket Consolidated Coal and Coke Company dominated by E.T. Stotesbury, a partner of Morgan and Company and a director of the Girard Trust.[30] The third-largest producer was the New River and Pocahontas Consolidated Coal Company owned by Edward J. Berwind, a member of a

26. *Manufacturers' Record* 40 (17 Oct. 1901), 209; *ibid.* 40 (5 Dec. 1901), 337; *ibid.* 40 (9 Jan. 1902), 422; Lambie, *From Mine to Market*, 237–38.
27. Edward O'Toole, "Pocahontas Coal Field and Operating Methods of the United States Coal and Coke Company," *Coal Age* 23 (8 March 1923), 400.
28. *Manufacturers' Record* 52 (22 Aug. 1907), 147.
29. Hunt, Tryon, and Willitts, *What the Coal Commission Found*, 90–93. See also *Coal Age* 19 (7 April 1921), 634.
30. Senate hearings, "The West Virginia Coal Fields," 643.

wealthy Philadelphia banking family. Berwind not only held large acreages in the New River and Pocahontas districts but had over 100,000 acres of coal lands in Pike County, Kentucky, as well. In Pennsylvania, he had virtual control of sales and coal belonging to the Pennsylvania Railroad. A director of the Girard Trust, in 1907 Berwind had been a large shareholder in the syndicate organized by J.P. Morgan to acquire the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company on the behalf of U.S. Steel.[31]

The sudden rush of activity by northern capitalists after the turn of the century launched a general coal land consolidation movement in southern West Virginia. In areas outside the Pocahontas and Logan coal fields, the Morgan interests and other syndicates sought to gain monopolies on coal production by buying out smaller independent firms. A Morgan group, for example, in 1901 acquired 32,000 acres of highly volatile coal in Kanawha County and thereafter operated under the name of the Kanawha and Hocking Coal and Coke Company.[32] Early in 1906, all but two of the coal companies on Paint Creek were purchased by Scranton, Pennsylvania, capitalists and reorganized as the Paint Creek Collieries Company.[33] The following year, Samuel Dixon, with backing from Scranton and Boston financiers, consolidated twelve mines in the New River district, but Dixon's New River Company was itself absorbed in 1913, when English investors created the Ajax Coal Company to operate ninety-six mines on over 550,000 acres of land in Fayette and Raleigh counties.[34] On Cabin Creek in Kanawha County, other absentee capitalists consolidated eleven mines into the Cabin Creek Consolidated Coal Mining Company.[35] Although there were too many collieries and too many interests for complete consolidation to be achieved, by 1915 the consolidation movement had swept most of the mining companies into the control of a few dominant firms. The higher capitalization of the new consolidated companies, however, increased the pressure for high-volume production, adding to competition and creating an oversupply of marketable coal.[36]

31. *Manufacturers' Record* 48 (3 Aug. 1905), 61; *ibid.* 60 (16 Nov. 1911), 56; Senate hearings, "The West Virginia Coal Fields," 643.
32. Thomas, "Coal Country," 151.
33. *Manufacturers' Record* 49 (18 Jan. 1906), 13.
34. *Ibid.* 51 (12 March 1907), 275; "English Investments in West Virginia Coal Properties," in *ibid.* 64 (23 Oct. 1913), 53.
35. *Ibid.*, 51 (7 Feb. 1907), 99.
36. See Thomas, "Coal Country," 157–58.

As expansion and consolidation induced greater production in the older coal districts, other forces were working to open up the last remaining coal fields in southern West Virginia. With the C&O controlling coal shipments along the New and Kanawha rivers on the northern flank of the area and the N&W controlling the Flat Top–Pocahontas and Logan County fields to the south, Pennsylvania Railroad interests had established a monopoly on coal transportation in the southern part of the state. Yet, the interior sections of Raleigh, Fayette, and Wyoming counties remained untouched by the railroads, and it was here that the greatest threat to the power of the Pennsylvania capitalists was introduced.

In 1902, Henry Huttleston Rogers, a key figure in John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company, secretly acquired ownership of the tiny Deepwater Railway on the Kanawha River above Charleston and began to extend the road south into the heart of the coal fields. The new railroad left the line of the C&O at Deepwater and traveled up the Guyandot Valley, across Fayette, Raleigh, and Wyoming counties, and to the Virginia line. When the C&O and N&W—not appreciating the competition with the mines along their tracks—refused to give the Deepwater Railway a reduced rate on the coal to be hauled, an angry Rogers constructed his own railroad across Virginia to Norfolk.[37] In 1907, the Deepwater and the new Tidewater Railway were merged to become the Virginian Railway. The completion of the Virginian opened up the extensive coal lands of the Winding Gulf district of Raleigh and Wyoming counties, effectively ending the monopoly of the two older railroads. Within a decade, the independent coal operators of the Winding Gulf were adding millions of tons to the glut of coal pouring out of the Mountain State.[38]

The last of the untapped coal fields of southern West Virginia was reached in 1911, when the C&O completed a branch line up the Little Coal River in Boone County.[39] Land speculation in Boone County had been intense since 1904, when former Governor William A. MacCorkle of West Virginia and Senator William C. Sproul of Pennsylvania bought large tracts of coal and timber lands along the headwaters of the Little Coal River. The two politicians organized a land company and began construction of the Coal River Railroad into

37. Tams, *Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia*, 21–22.
38. *Manufacturers' Record* 55 (1 April 1909), 55; Lambie, *From Mine to Market*, 264; Thomas, "Coal Country," 168–72.
39. Thurmond, *Logan Coal Field*, 51.

their properties.[40] Other speculators flocked to the area, including capitalists from Philadelphia and Milwaukee who purchased nearly 60,000 acres of land. But the development of coal-operating companies awaited the arrival of the C&O, which built branch lines up many of the tributaries of the Little Coal.[41] In 1914, the Lackawanna Coal and Lumber Company of Scranton, Pennsylvania, acquired 30,000 acres of land along Laurel Creek and constructed the company mining town of Griffith.[42] Later, the Colonial Timber and Coal Corporation of Chicago began logging and mining operations on large holdings in Boone and Raleigh counties.[43] By 1925, there were more than sixty mines in Boone County, producing over 4.5 million tons. In that year, coal production peaked in West Virginia at 176 million tons; over 66 percent of that production was in the southern part of the state.[44] The nine coal counties of southern West Virginia produced more coal than any other area of the South.

KENTUCKY

The coal boom was slower to arrive in eastern Kentucky, although that section was destined later to become the second-largest coal-producing area in the mountains. When development did begin to accelerate at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the growth was phenomenal. In 1900, for example, most of the coal mined in Kentucky was produced in the western part of the state. Eastern Kentucky produced only 1.3 million tons, or about 38 percent of the state total. By 1910, that percentage had increased to 41.5, but five years later it had jumped to 64.3 percent, and in the following decade it rose to 78.5 percent. By 1925, three-fourths of all the miners in Kentucky were employed in the Cumberland Plateau, working in over 570 mines.[45]

The rapid growth of the eastern Kentucky coal fields after 1910 was made possible by the extension of railroad branch lines into the

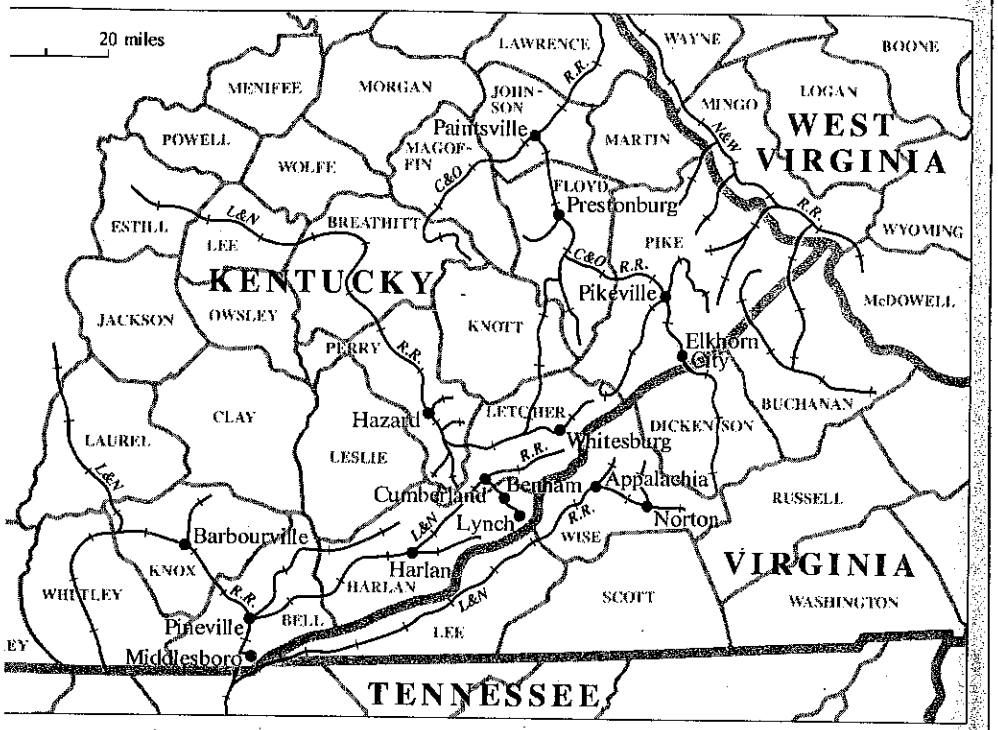
40. *Manufacturers' Record* 49 (22 March 1906), 249.
41. *Ibid.* 48 (3 Aug. 1905), 62; Thurmond, *Logan Coal Field*, 51.
42. *Appalachian Trade Journal* 12 (Feb. 1914), 30.
43. *Manufacturers' Record* 75 (15 May 1919), 85.
44. West Virginia Department of Mines, *Annual Report of 1925*, 100.
45. Isadore Frisch, "Twentieth Century Development of the Coal Mining Industry in Eastern Kentucky and Its Influence Upon the Political Behavior of the Area" (M.A. thesis, Univ. of Kentucky, 1938), 15; U.S. Bureau of Mines, *Mineral Resources*, 1900, p. 393.

area's three major coal districts. In the north, the C&O constructed its Levisa Branch from the head of the Big Sandy River into the Elkhorn district of Pike and Letcher counties. From the south, the L&N built the Wasioto and Black Mountain line into Bell and Harlan counties. And from the west, the eastern Kentucky branch of the L&N was extended from Breathitt County into Perry and Letcher counties in the heart of the Hazard Coalfield. Because of the late development of these districts, many of the mining companies and coal operators in eastern Kentucky came from the older coal fields, especially those in West Virginia, and consequently the area experienced a somewhat greater concentration of the large consolidated or captive mines than was the case elsewhere.

Prior to 1910, most of the coal mined in eastern Kentucky was dug in the southeastern portion of the state. Whitley County in the Jellico Coalfield was the second leading county in Kentucky in coal production between 1890 and 1902. The only other significant production in the Cumberlands was in neighboring Knox and Bell counties.[46] With the opening up of the Great Lakes markets after 1898, these counties became the center of great activity. In Knox, a syndicate of Pennsylvania capitalists constructed a short-line railroad into the Brush Creek district, providing connections for a number of new mining companies. By 1906, there were more than forty operations located in the area.[47] The revival of the coal market had a similar effect in Bell County. The "magic" city of Middlesboro was reborn with the new interest in coal mining, and by 1903 it was home to fifteen mining companies and a population of over 3,000. Elsewhere in the county, new mines were established "by the dozens," and for a short time Bell became the third-largest producer in the state.[48]

As was the case in West Virginia at this time, much of the steady rise in coal production resulted from a general consolidation movement. Beginning about 1907, many of the older operations were absorbed by larger, more highly capitalized corporations. In Bell County, one of the largest of the new consolidated companies was the

46. James Hayden Siler, "A History of Jellico, Tennessee," unpublished MS, Mountain Collection, Berea College, 20–21.
47. *Manufacturers' Record* 48 (28 Sept. 1905), 261; Howard, "Chapters in the Economic History of Knox County, Kentucky," 87.
48. *Manufacturers' Record* 43 (12 March 1903), 153; "Magic Middlesboro: The City That Has Come Back," *Appalachian Trade Journal* 7 (Sept. 1911), 32; U.S. Bureau of Mines, *Mineral Resources*, 1909–1910, p. 141.



8. Major Railroads of Eastern Kentucky

Continental Coal Corporation of Wyoming. Between 1909 and 1913, Continental acquired fifteen mines operating on over 35,000 acres of land leased from the American Association, Inc.[49] Farther north, in Breathitt and Knott counties, capitalists from Ohio and Pennsylvania purchased mines and coal properties around Jackson. And, anticipating the extension of the railroad, G.S. Beckwith and Company of Cleveland acquired nearly 80,000 acres of land in Knott and Letcher counties.[50] In 1911, coal operators from Connellsville,

49. *Manufacturers' Record* 55 (13 May 1909), 48; *ibid.* 57 (11 May 1911), 58; *Appalachian Trade Journal* 10 (April 1913), 17. Continental was itself absorbed in 1911 by Consolidation Coal.
50. *Manufacturers' Record* 52 (15 Aug. 1907), 127; *ibid.* 62 (12 Sept. 1912), 57.

Pennsylvania, consolidated a number of small tracts into a holding of over 175,000 acres in Knott, Perry, and Magoffin counties.[51]

Developments in the older coal districts, however, could not keep pace with the expansion of mining into new areas, and with the arrival of the railroads in the deeper mountain counties, the older fields slipped in the ranks of coal production. The first challenge to the older districts came in 1904, when the C&O began constructing its branch line up the headwaters of the Big Sandy River. The line ran from Louisa in Lawrence County, up the Levisa Fork, and through Johnson, Floyd, and Pike counties to Elkhorn in Letcher County, opening some of the richest coal lands in Kentucky to exploitation. By August 1905, there were already several large operating companies beginning to establish mines along the Levisa Branch.[52] Most of the coal land in the new district—the Elkhorn Coalfield—was controlled by two land companies, the Big Sandy Coal Company and John C.C. Mayo's Northern Coal and Coke Company. The Big Sandy Coal Company was owned by Charles E. Hellier, a Boston attorney who had begun to acquire Elkhorn coal lands in the late 1890s. By consolidating ownership of a number of tracts, Hellier eventually controlled over 130,000 acres.[53] Together, the Hellier and May interests held the title or mineral rights to more than 500,000 acres of Elkhorn land.

The completion of the railroad opened the way for the organization of a large number of mining companies in the Elkhorn field, but the most spectacular developments began with the arrival of the Consolidation Coal Company, a giant Maryland-based corporation with extensive holdings in Pennsylvania and northern West Virginia. In 1909, Consolidation entered the southern coal fields by purchasing 31,000 acres of land along Millers Creek in Johnson, Martin, and Lawrence counties. The following year, the company acquired 100,000 acres of land at the head of Elkhorn Creek in Knott, Letcher, and Pike counties.[54] The Elkhorn land was adjacent to the Hellier properties and to land which Edward J. Berwind had acquired in addition to his southern West Virginia investments.[55] The Millers

51. *Ibid.* 60 (9 Nov. 1911), 55.
52. *Ibid.* 48 (3 Aug. 1905), 60.
53. *Ibid.* 50 (19 July 1906), 3.
54. Beachley, *History of the Consolidation Coal Company*, 54.
55. *Manufacturers' Record* 58 (10 Nov. 1910), 50.

Creek property was purchased from John C.C. Mayo, and the Elkhorn property was acquired from the Northern Coal and Coke Company, of which Mayo was a major shareholder. One of Mayo's associates in the Northern Coal and Coke Company was Senator Clarence W. Watson of West Virginia, chairman of the board of Consolidation Coal.[56]

Soon after gaining control of the Elkhorn coal lands, the Consolidation Company began construction on its own railroad, the Sandy Valley and Elkhorn Railroad, running from its properties to a connection with the C&O above Pikeville. At the headwaters of the Elkhorn Creek, the company built a model mining town called Jenkins to serve as the center of its Kentucky operations. Later, the town of McRoberts was constructed, and by 1922 the company had established additional mining operations on lands in Knox and Bell counties, in Tazewell and Buchanan counties, Virginia, and in McDowell County, West Virginia.[57] Its original expenditures in the Elkhorn field add up to over $40 million, and, according to the *Manufacturers' Record*, they were "planned on a larger scale than any mining undertaking ever projected in this country for an initial development." Consolidation estimated that the Jenkins mines would have an output of more than 25,000 tons a day.[58]

The dominance of the Consolidation Coal Company in the Elkhorn field was assured in 1913 with the incorporation of an affiliated firm, the Elkhorn Fuel Company, to operate on 285,000 acres of land adjacent to the Jenkins property. The president of the new firm was Clarence W. Watson, and its board of directors included Mayo, George W. Fleming of Baltimore, George A. Baird of Chicago, West Virginia Senator Johnson N. Camden, and Virginia Congressman C. Bascom Slemp.[59] The coal lands of the Elkhorn Fuel Company were purchased from the Northern Coal and Coke Company and lay mostly in Letcher and Floyd counties along Beaver Creek. With the outbreak of war in Europe, the Elkhorn Fuel Company was reorganized as the Elkhorn Coal Corporation, and production was increased to full capacity to meet wartime demands. By

56. Beachley, *History of Consolidation Coal Company*, 59; *Manufacturers' Record* 63 (20 March 1913), 54.
57. Beachley, *History of Consolidation Coal Company*, 62–67.
58. *Manufacturers' Record* 63 (13 Feb. 1913), 51.
59. *Ibid.*; *ibid.* 64 (24 July 1913), 57; *Appalachian Trade Journal* 10 (Feb. 1913), 40.

1916, two large company towns had been constructed at Haymond and Wheelwright, and the company was employing hundreds of immigrant miners brought in to work in the Elkhorn mines.[60] Through its own properties and those of the Elkhorn Coal Corporation, the Consolidation interests controlled almost a million acres of southern Appalachian lands, "probably the greatest principality in high-grade coal lands owned by two affiliated interests in the world."[61]

About the time that the Consolidation Coal Company was expanding its operations in the northern part of Letcher County, the L&N Railroad was rushing construction of a branch line from the west into the Hazard Coalfield of Perry and Letcher counties. In 1913, the Lexington and Eastern Kentucky Branch of the L&N was extended from Jackson in Breathitt County to a terminus at McRoberts in Letcher County. As the new line progressed up the North Fork of the Kentucky River, extensive mining operations were undertaken around Hazard, and suddenly the quiet village was transformed into a boom town of 2,000.[62] The first coal was shipped from Perry County in 1912, and by 1916 there were over twenty operations in the Hazard field.[63] The arrival of the railroad in Letcher County brought so many changes between 1913 and 1918 that to one native resident it didn't "seem like the same country. So many new towns, people and coal companies. We have about twenty through freights daily and two locals and four passenger" [trains].[64] By 1920, Letcher and Perry counties ranked third and fourth respectively in coal production in the state.[65]

Unlike the Elkhorn field, no single corporation dominated production in the Hazard district. The largest landholding company was the Kentucky River Coal Corporation, a Virginia company formed by the consolidation of five smaller firms in 1915. The company was

60. *Manufacturers' Record* 70 (24 Aug. 1916), 52; Chapman, "The Influence of Coal in the Big Sandy Valley," 163–72.
61. *Manufacturers' Record* 63 (20 March 1913), 54.
62. B.H. Schockel, "Changing Conditions in the Kentucky Mountains," *Scientific Monthly* 3 (Aug. 1916), 109; Duff, "Government in an Eastern Kentucky Coal Field County," 6–8.
63. *Manufacturers' Record* 69 (9 March 1916), 52; *ibid.* 70 (24 Aug. 1916), 52. *Manufacturers' Record* reported that "a large number" of the operators in this section were from West Virginia, Virginia, and Tennessee coal areas.
64. Whitaker, *History of Corporal Fess Whitaker*, 120.
65. U.S. Bureau of Mines, *Mineral Resouces*, 1920, p. 588.

owned by Congressman C. Bascom Slemp of Virginia, who was also one of the original directors of the Elkhorn Fuel Company. The Kentucky River Corporation controlled over 140,000 acres of rich coal and timber lands and leased to a number of different operating firms.[66] Among the bigger operating companies were the Blue Diamond Coal Company, the Hawey Coal Company, and the Bluegrass Coal Company on First Creek; the Ashless Coal Corporation and the Kentucky Jewel Coal Company at Lowthair, and the Diamond Block Coal Company on Buffalo Creek. The Kentucky River Power Company built a large generating plant at Glowmar to provide electricity for mining and other industrial developments in the area.[67]

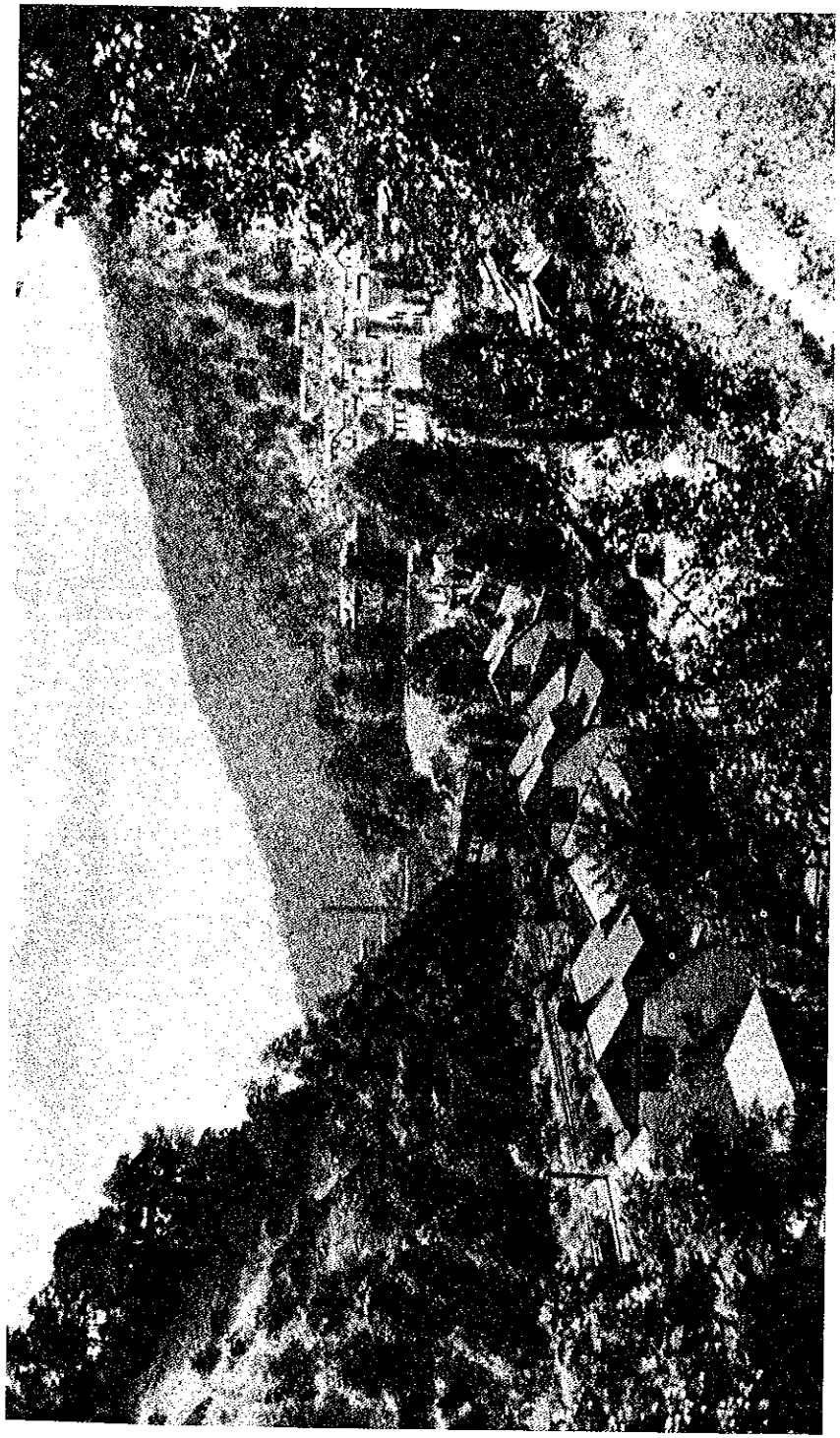
The final opening of the eastern Kentucky coal fields came when the Wasiota and Black Mountain Branch of the L&N was completed to the head of the Cumberland River in Harlan County. As early as the turn of the century, northern capitalists were sending land agents into the Harlan Coalfield, but the absence of adequate transportation prevented its early development.[68] In 1907, Thomas Jefferson Asher of Pineville began construction of a short-line railroad up the Cumberland River in Bell County to reach coal lands that he had recently acquired. Three years later, that line was taken over by the L&N and extended some twenty-seven miles to Benham, above the town of Mount Pleasant.[69] The first coal was shipped from Harlan County in 1911, and by 1914 production had reached over a million tons annually. As coal activities increased, the town of Mount Pleasant changed its name to Harlan, and thousands of miners poured into the district from the surrounding hills. Between 1910 and 1920, the population of Harlan County tripled, and it doubled again the next decade. By 1920, Harlan had become the leading coal-producing county in Kentucky.[70]

The largest coal operations in the Harlan Coalfield were established near the town of Benham. In 1910, the Wisconsin Steel Company, a subsidiary of the Morgan–McCormick International Harvester Company of Chicago, began mining and coking activities on about 20,000 acres of land which it had acquired several years earlier.[71] Benham was constructed "almost over night" from materials hauled in from Virginia before the Wasiota and Black Mountain Branch was completed; by 1915, it contained over two hundred mining houses, a YMCA building, and "other modern conveniences."[72] Two miles east of Benham, at Lynch, another Morgan affiliate, U.S. Coal and Coke, built one of the largest coal-mining plants in the South. Operating on about 60,000 acres of land adjacent to the Wisconsin Steel property, U.S. Coal and Coke constructed some 2,000 buildings to provide for a population that reached 10,000 in 1919. All of the coal produced at the Lynch mines was shipped for coking to the U.S. Steel Corporation's mills in Gary, Indiana.[73]

A second major area of the Harlan field was located along Martin's Fork near the town of Harlan. About 86,000 acres of the mineral land in Martin's Fork was controlled by the Kentenia Land Corporation of New York. The Kentenia Corporation was organized in 1910 by the Davis Estate of Philadelphia, which had acquired the land in the late nineteenth century. Promoters of the Davis property were influential in soliciting the extension of the L&N Railroad into Harlan County, and after 1911 the Kentenia lands became the site of several large mining operations.[74] Other large holdings in the Martin's Fork district were controlled by Judge W.F. Hall, a local politician who owned and leased a nine-foot coal seam—one of the largest in the field.[75]

In 1921, Harlan County produced about 30 percent of all of the coal mined in eastern Kentucky, and together with Pike, Perry, and Letcher counties, accounted for nearly 80 percent of all of the coal

66. *Manufacturers' Record* 67 (25 March 1915), 38; *Coal Age* 23 (3 May 1923), 713.
67. *Manufacturers' Record* 69 (9 March 1916), 52; *ibid*. 69 (24 Aug. 1916), 52.
68. *Manufacturers' Record* 45 (9 June 1904), 462.
69. *Ibid*. 58 (4 Aug. 1910), 69; W.R. Peck and R.J. Sampson, "The Harlan Coal Field of Kentucky," *Coal Age* 3 (24 May 1913), 796.
70. Peck and Sampson, "The Harlan Coal Field," 796; Frisch, "Twentieth Century Development of the Coal Mining Industry," 13; Paul Frederick Cressey, "Social Disorganization and Reorganization in Harlan County, Kentucky," *American Sociological Review* 14 (1949), 390.
71. *Manufacturers' Record* 45 (9 June 1904), 462; *ibid*. 59 (8 June 1911), 50; *Appalachian Trade Journal* 4 (March 1910), 22.
72. Peck and Sampson, "The Harlan Coal Field," 799; *Manufacturers' Record* 67 (4 Feb. 1915), 52.
73. *Manufacturers' Record* 72 (11 Oct. 1917), 68; *ibid*. 75 (9 Jan. 1919), 77; *ibid*. 75 (10 April 1919), 98.
74. *Manufacturers' Record* 71 (22 March 1917), 60; *Appalachian Trade Journal* 6 (Aug. 1911), 14; John Watts Hevener, "A New Deal for Harlan: The Roosevelt Labor Policies in a Kentucky Coal Field, 1931–1939" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State Univ., 1971), 5.
75. *Manufacturers' Record* 71 (22 March 1917), 60.



Lynch, Harlan County, Kentucky, Scene Looking West from East End. Source: Postcard in possession of George Stevenson, Emory, Virginia.

shipped from the Cumberland Plateau. Over the next decade, the production in Harlan County would more than double, reaching a peak of 15 million tons in 1929.[76]

The increased production of the 1920s, however, came primarily from the expansion of existing mines. The only major new enterprise to be undertaken in that section after 1920 involved the acquisition of coal and timber land in Harlan, Bell, Perry, and Leslie counties by the Ford Motor Company. During the war, Henry Ford had become interested in southern Appalachian coal lands as a source of cheap fuel for his expanding automobile factories in the Midwest. In 1920, he purchased the mining properties of the Banner Fork Coal Corporation in Harlan County. And with his acquisition two years later of the lands of the F.S. Peabody interests of Chicago, Ford came to control more than 165,000 acres of valuable coal lands.[77] Most of the Ford property was in Leslie County and included a number of previously opened mines. With the development of these properties, the last of the great coal fields of eastern Kentucky entered the Industrial Age.

VIRGINIA AND TENNESSEE

The expansion of the coal industry in southwest Virginia and eastern Tennessee after 1900 was similar to the growth in West Virginia and Kentucky, although on a much smaller scale. Mining had been carried on in parts of Virginia and Tennessee since the 1870s and 1880s; after the turn of the century, production increased rapidly as a result of consolidation and the opening of new and larger mines. By 1910, production in these two states had more than doubled, and in the next decade it increased nearly fivefold. Virginia was the larger coal producer of these two states, having an output of about 45 million tons in 1920 and employing 14,000 men. Tennessee produced 26 million tons and employed 11,000 miners.[78]

The largest coal-producing county in Virginia was Wise County, which consistently produced from 50 to 60 percent of the coal mined in the state. Wise County was opened up in the early 1890s by the Clinch Valley Branch of the N&W Railway, and by 1897 it had

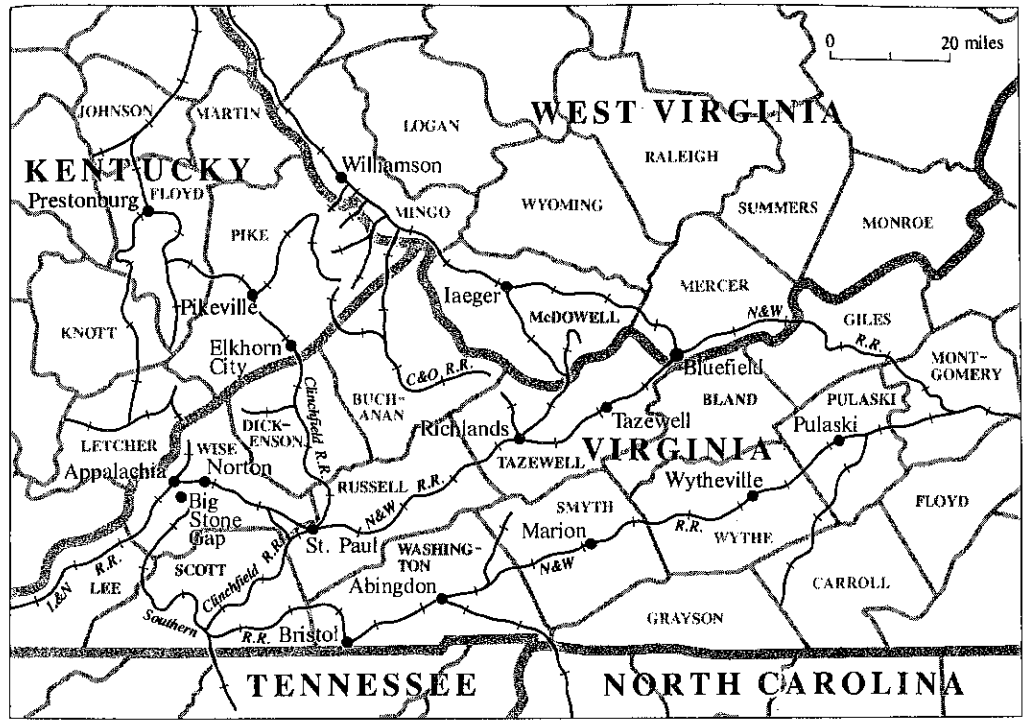
76. U.S. Bureau of Mines, *Mineral Resources*, 1921, Pt. II, 592; Cressey, "Social Disorganization and Reorganization," 390.
77. *Coal Age* 23 (29 March 1923), 534; *Manufacturers' Record* 78 (22 July 1920), 92.
78. U.S. Bureau of Mines, *Mineral Resources*, 1910, 1920.

surpassed Tazewell County in total annual production.[79] The Wise fields continued to be dominated by a few large operations, including the Virginia Iron, Coal, and Coke Company, the Virginia Coal and Iron Company, the Stonega Coal and Coke Company, and George L. Carter's Carter Coal Company. The latter was sold in 1922 to the Consolidation Coal Company, when that multistate firm entered the Wise fields.[80] In 1920, the county contained almost half of all the miners employed in Virginia.[81]

A major factor in the growth of the Virginia coal industry in these years was the penetration of the Clinchfield coal district, which lay between Wise and Tazewell counties. Since the 1880s, promoters had attempted to finance a railroad that would reach the Clinchfield area on a direct route from the Midwest to the coastal cities of the Southeast. The Charleston, Cincinnati, and Chicago Railway was organized to undertake the task, and it completed a portion of the roadbed before succumbing in the financial panic of 1893. After the turn of the century, the project was taken up by George L. Carter, who succeeded in attracting the financial backing of James A. Blair and Company, bankers of New York. In 1902, the Blair interests organized the South and Western Railway and, under Carter's direction, constructed a short line from Dante to St. Paul in Russell County, opening that area to coal mining.[82]

The Blair interests, however, had larger plans for the South and Western. In addition to its control of that road, Blair and Company also controlled the Seaboard Air Line Railway, one of the major trunk lines in the Southeast. Shortly after the completion of the South and Western, the company began to chart the extension of that line to connect with the Seaboard in South Carolina. In 1905, the Blair syndicate established the Clinchfield Coal Corporation and began acquiring coal lands and mining operations in southwest Virginia. The Clinchfield Corporation eventually consolidated over 400,000 acres of coal property in Wise, Dickenson, Russell, and Buchanan counties and gained a virtual monopoly on coal production in the Clinchfield district. One of the directors of the new company was

79. *Ibid.*
80. *Manufacturers' Record* 57 (28 April 1910), 57; *ibid.* 63 (9 Jan. 1913), 61; *ibid.* 81 (16 Feb. 1922), 54; *Coal Age* 17 (4 March 1920), 437.
81. U.S. Bureau of Mines, *Mineral Resources*, 1920.
82. *Manufacturers' Record* 49 (7 June 1906), 579; *ibid.* 52 (1 Aug. 1907), 73; *ibid.* 55 (11 Feb. 1909), 47.



9. Southwest Virginia

Isaac T. Mann, president of the Pocahontas Fuel Company in southern West Virginia and associate of the Gary interests at U.S. Steel.[83] Two years after acquiring the Clinchfield coal lands, Blair and Company reorganized the South and Western Railway as the Carolina, Clinchfield, and Ohio Railroad and began construction of that railroad from Spartanburg, South Carolina, to Elkhorn City, Kentucky.[84]

The main objective of the Clinchfield Railroad was to tap the coal reserves owned by the Blair interests and to provide for the transpor-

83. William Way, Jr., *The Clinchfield Railroad: The Story of a Trade Route Across the Blue Ridge Mountains* (Chapel Hill, 1931), 95–97; *Manufacturers' Record* 55 (8 July 1909), 43; *Appalachian Trade Journal* 4 (May 1910), 25.
84. *Manufacturers' Record* 52 (1 Aug. 1907), 73; *ibid.* 55 (11 Feb. 1909), 47.

tation of that coal to the expanding textile mills of the Southeast and the coal piers of the Seaboard Air Line in Charleston. In order to reach the coal fields, the company had to lay its tracks almost three hundred miles over the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina and Virginia. Although construction began in 1907, completion of the line was delayed for several years by the difficulty of building in the rugged mountain country. For eight miles along the Clinch River, the roadbed was hewn out of solid rock from the sides of projecting mountains. Fifty-five tunnels had to be punched through the Blue Ridge, eighteen of them in one 18-mile section.[85] The line finally reached Elkhorn City and the Big Sandy Branch of the C&O in 1915, just in time to meet the rising coal demands of World War I.[86] With the completion of the Clinchfield Railroad, the heart of the coal fields at the headwaters of the Big Sandy River in Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia was opened to full development. Over two million acres of coal lands in that area, among the richest in the world, had come under the control of three giant corporations—the Consolidation Coal Company, the Clinchfield Coal Corporation, and the U.S. Steel Corporation.

The completion of new railroad lines also contributed to the steady rise of production in East Tennessee. The extension of the L&N Railroad from Jellico to Knoxville after the turn of the century stimulated mining activities in Campbell and Claiborne counties on the Kentucky border near Middlesboro.[87] For the next three decades, Campbell was the leading coal-producing county in Tennessee, and Claiborne followed, a close second. The Clear Fork section of Claiborne County was opened up in 1906 by an extension of the Southern Railroad, and that district became the location of several large mines. Most of the land in the Clear Fork district—as in much of Bell County, Kentucky—was owned by the American Association, Inc.[88] In 1910, Campbell and Claiborne counties were the only counties in Tennessee producing over a million tons of coal a year.[89] After Campbell and Claiborne counties, the next most important coal-producing areas in Tennessee were in Anderson and Morgan

85. *Ibid.* 55 (11 Feb. 1909), 47; Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina*, 265.
86. *Manufacturers' Record* 68 (8 July 1915), 40.
87. *Ibid.* 48 (27 July 1905), 34–35.
88. *Ibid.* 49 (17 Feb. 1906), 121.
89. U.S. Bureau of Mines, *Mineral Resources*, 1909–1910, p. 198.

counties. The latter county was the home of the only state-owned prison mines in the southern Appalachians. At its two mines on Brushy Mountain, the state of Tennessee employed convicts to produce about 350,000 tons of coal a year.[90]

South of Morgan County, coal production was limited almost entirely to Hamilton and Marion counties in the Walden's Ridge section above Chattanooga. Although the proportion of coal coming from this district declined significantly after the turn of the century, actual production in the field increased, as most of the older mines were consolidated into larger firms. In Marion County, for example, about 300,000 acres of coal land were consolidated in 1906 by the Cumberland Plateau Corporation of New York, which in turn leased its property to several small coal operations near Anderson.[91] In 1910, a group of Baltimore and New York capitalists organized the Durham Coal and Iron Company to operate several mines on more than 66,000 acres of land near Soddy. The Durham Company owned thirteen of the fourteen coal mines in Hamilton County.[92] Like many of the smaller mines of East Tennessee, these operated at peak production during periods of high demand for coal, but they often closed down when the market tightened, unable to compete with the better quality coal and greater production of the mines in other parts of the Cumberland Plateau.

BOOM AND BUST

The demand for coal increased steadily after 1900, stimulating the rapid growth of the mountain coal industry. Throughout the region the rising trend of production was characterized not only by the arrival of the giant coal corporations like those in the Elkhorn and Pocahontas fields, but also by the proliferation of many smaller producers. Because of the relatively low capital requirements for opening a mine, the number of coal mines in the southern mountains grew in proportion to the rise in market demand. And at times during this period the demand was almost unlimited. Between 1909 and 1919, the total number of coal mines in the United States increased by

90. *Appalachian Trade Journal* 3 (Sept. 1909), 7.
91. *Manufacturers' Record* 50 (1 Nov. 1906), 396.
92. *Ibid.* 58 (17 Nov. 1910), 60; *ibid.* 59 (16 Feb. 1911), 62; *Appalachian Trade Journal* 9 (July 1912), 17.

more than a third, and the largest percentage of that increase came in the South.[93]

Many of the mines opened during the coal boom were marginal operations, often employing only a handful of miners and sometimes working only on a seasonal basis. Such producers might open their mine in the fall months, operate for a few weeks, and then close down, having realized enough profit during that period to pay for their comparatively small investments. These mines were usually called "snow birds," because they ordinarily operated when there was snow on the ground and the demand for coal was at its peak. Other small producers operated all year, competing with the larger companies for markets and coal cars. Profits in coal mining were big, averaging from 15 to 25 percent on investment, and one-fourth of the operators averaged over 25 percent.[94] This prospect helped to entice hundreds of speculators into the field, increasing the competition and instability in the industry as a whole. The largest increases in production and mining operations, moreover, came during the war years, when artificial demands induced the expansion of the industry beyond the limits which the national economy could justify during times of peace.

Beginning in 1915, as American factories geared up to make munitions and other war supplies, coal prices and production rose dramatically. Within a year, coal for steam purposes rose from about eighy cents per ton at the mine to as much as six or seven dollars per ton for prompt shipment. Coal operators in Virginia were getting from ten to twelve dollars per ton for whatever quantities of coke they could produce. A correspondent to the *Manufacturers' Record* reported in 1916 that "this wild chase for enormous profits" was the "greatest prosperity producers [had] ever known," and it was attracting "many operators into the Appalachian fields."[95] Prices were finally stabilized in 1917 when the United States entered the war, but demand remained unlimited. The Federal Fuel Administration set the price for soft coal at $2.58 per ton, "enough to return a profit to any moderately well run mine."[96] The only factor limiting production was a national shortage of railroad cars. Any operator who could get a supply of cars could sell his coal.[97]

93. *Manufacturers' Record* 80 (25 Aug. 1921), 62.
94. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the United States Coal Commission*, 2632; E.A. Goldenweiser (Federal Reserve Board), "Incomes of Bituminous Coal Producers," *American Statistical Association* 17 (June 1920), 206–7.
95. *Manufacturers' Record* 70 (14 Dec. 1916), 45.
96. Malcolm Ross, *Machine Age in the Hills* (New York, 1933), 51.

In the intense competition of the war years, southern producers had a number of advantages over their northern counterparts. The Fuel Administration allotted railroad cars on the basis of mine capacity, and the newly opened mines in the mountains shared equally with older northern mines in the daily supply. Most of the increased demand for coal came from the war industries of the Midwest, and the South had been gaining ground in that market since 1898. In fact, the penetration of the Great Lakes markets was a major stimulus in the opening of the eastern Kentucky coal fields, which expanded more rapidly in this period than any other coal field in the country. Southern coal operators were also aided by an already existing freight rate structure that permitted access to the northern markets. Finally, the South had a larger labor reserve than the northern mining districts, where large numbers of miners were departing for urban industrial centers.[98] These factors contributed to the accelerated expansion of coal mining in the southern mountains during the war years, when mines and company towns were constructed by the hundreds, and mountain farmers left their fields in droves to work underground.

The phenomenal growth of coal mining during World War I is best illustrated in eastern Kentucky. In Floyd County, for instance, the number of mines increased from sixteen in 1916 to sixty-two in 1920; the number in Pike County increased from eight to forty-five.[99] In Bell, Harlan, Perry, Letcher, Floyd, and Pike counties, coal mining became the chief means of employment for a majority of the population.[100]

The high prices and unprecedented demand for coal continued until early in 1923. The armistice in Europe and the mild winter of 1918–1919 left large stockpiles of unused coal in the North, causing a drop in demand that lasted into the summer of 1919. Orders began to pick up by the fall, however, and the savage competition in the coal industry resumed. In November of 1919 and again in 1921 and 1922, major strikes hit the union coal fields, just as France and Italy were

97. O.E. Kiessling, "Coal Mining in the South," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 153 (1930), 89.
98. *Ibid.* See also *Manufacturers' Record* 70 (20 July 1916), 62a.
99. Chapman, "The Influence of Coal in the Big Sandy Valley," 221.
100. U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Economic and Social Conditions*, 86–87, 121–24.

beginning to recover from the war and were increasing their demand for American coal. Nonunion southern mines took advantage of the situation and gained a greater share of the market, thus maintaining for a time their expanded level of production.[101] At a point in 1920 when the demand for coal was greatest, moreover, the Fuel Administration withdrew its controls on price, sending coal into a runaway seller's market. Within a few weeks, coal for the Great Lakes was selling at ten dollars a ton, and coal for export brought more than fourteen dollars a ton.[102] The great boom was set back slightly by the recession of 1921–1922, but by the spring of 1923 the coal industry was again producing at such a frantic pace that it taxed the capacity of the railroads to handle the product. In eastern Kentucky, the C&O was hauling 3,500 coal cars per week on its Big Sandy Branch, but the production of the Big Sandy mines was over twice that amount.[103]

Bituminous coal production in the United States reached its height in 1923. In that year there were over 700,000 men working in nearly 12,000 mines, with a possible annual production of nearly a billion tons.[104] Yet, just as coal reached the pinnacle of its power, inherent weaknesses in the industry became apparent and began to take their toll. The first sign of trouble came in the fall of 1923, when orders for winter fuel supplies began to decline. The European mines' return to production and slower growth rates in midwestern industries caused a sharp drop in the demand for American coal. The slump was aggravated in 1924, when coal consumers continued to utilize the large reserves they had accumulated in anticipation of a possible labor strike. The strike was avoided, but the market remained dull throughout 1925.[105]

The effect of the coal depression was to intensify the rivalry between northern and southern producers. The Jacksonville Agreement of 1924 between the union and most of the northern operators tied the latter to a fixed wage scale, whereas the southern operators were free to adjust wages and thereby gain a larger share of the reduced market. As early as the 1890s, southern mine owners had

101. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the U.S. Coal Commission*, 2008–10, 2354–65; Kiessling, "Coal Mining in the South," 89.
102. Ross, *Machine Age in the Hills*, 51.
103. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the U.S. Coal Commission*, 1286.
104. Ross, *Machine Age in the Hills*, 53.
105. Kiessling, "Coal Mining in the South," 90.

followed the practice of lowering production costs by cutting wages. Since labor accounted for about 60 percent of the cost of producing coal, mountain operators frequently pared wages in order to undersell their northern competitors. After the Jacksonville Agreement was signed, most of the nonunion operators reduced wage rates, first to the 1919 level and later to the prewar level and even lower. By the end of 1925, practically all of the mines in southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, southwest Virginia, and eastern Tennessee were operating nonunion. Whereas the standard daily wage in the union fields was $7.50, the nonunion mines were paying only about $5.00 per day and were increasing production to unprecedented scales.[106]

In 1926, the coal market revived briefly when a general strike in England threatened a coal shortage, but the increases were temporary and the competitive advantage remained with the nonunion districts. Increasingly, the coal business was diverted from the northern to the southern fields, and in an effort to survive, the union districts sought to reduce their wages as well. Strikes and violence ensued in the North, and the union was eventually defeated in most fields. With the last check on wage reductions removed, the operators slashed prices far below the cost of production and engaged in cut-throat competition. The lower wages and fewer days of employment drove many miners from the northern coal fields to find work in Detroit automobile plants or in the steel mills of Ohio, Illinois, and Pennsylvania. Between 1923 and 1927, over 200,000 miners, mostly from the union districts, left the American coal fields.[107]

The southern Appalachian producers continued to capture a greater share of the production, providing almost 80 percent of the bituminous coal output in 1930, but prices also plummeted.[108] After 1927, production in the mountains commenced a sharp decline, sending the region's once booming coal industry into the abyss of depression. The first mines to close were the smaller operations, the snow birds and those unable to compete with the output and quality of the giant corporations. Hundreds of coal companies in the mountains went bankrupt or simply boarded up their mines, abandoned the company towns, and left the region. Some of the larger companies

106. *Ibid.*, 90–91; Ross, *Machine Age in the Hills*, 54–55; *Manufacturers' Record* 89 (18 March 1926), 91.
107. Ross, *Machine Age in the Hills*, 53.
108. Homer L. Morris, *The Plight of the Bituminous Coal Miner* (Philadelphia, 1934), 14.

continued to make money because of their locations, investments, and the value of their coal, but even they reduced the size of their work force and allowed their facilities to deteriorate. By 1930, unemployment, destitution, and despair stalked the coal fields. Although coal production recovered again with the outbreak of World War II, employment in the Appalachian coal fields never again reached the levels of the halcyon days of the twenties.

In the mountains, the collapse of the coal industry brought the new order to its knees. King Coal had never been entirely healthy in the region, having suffered almost continually from chronic overproduction. The ease of entry, high prices, cheap transportation, and cheap labor costs made mining in the mountains one of the most profitable ventures in that period of capitalist expansion and contributed to the crass overdevelopment of the field. Since no local markets were available, southern mountain coal producers intruded on the markets of other coal districts, generating intense competition in an industry subject to rapidly fluctuating demand. The spurious markets of the war years drove profits higher, stimulating producers to add more capacity than the nation could normally consume. When the inevitable shrinkage of demand came in the early twenties, operators tried to protect their profits by taking losses out of the miners' paychecks, but this resulted only in violence, strikes, and further instability. The fierce competition only drove prices lower. By 1920, the industry was so overexpanded that there were over 6,200 companies actively mining bituminous coal.[109]

Other factors, moreover, came together in the 1920s to complicate the king's illness and to assure his ultimate demise. Prior to 1926, the southern producers had enjoyed a favorable freight rate differential on the long-haul transportation of coal. This differential had allowed them to enter the profitable Great Lakes markets, much to the irritation of northern operators. In 1926, pressured by intense competition, constricted demand, and the Jacksonville wage agreement, the northerners brought suit before the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to alter the existing freight rate structure. Pointing out that the existing rates had deprived them of their former markets in the Midwest, the northern operators requested a 20-cent-per-ton reduction in their freight rates to the lake ports. Southern operators ob-

109. Glen Lawhon Parker, *The Coal Industry: A Study In Social Control* (Washington, D.C., 1940), 12.

jected to any change in the current structure, arguing that the loss of the lake trade would strike a devastating blow to the southern industry and that the "economic ashes" of the northern districts were attributable not to the rate differential but to inefficient management and the "excessive wage scale" of the union mines.[110] On 28 May 1927, the ICC ruled in favor of the northern producers, despite angry protests by the southern coal men.[111] The loss of competitive advantage in the Great Lakes markets came at a critical time for southern production and contributed significantly to the depression of the industry in the mountains.

The problems of overproduction and increased shipping costs were compounded by a general decline in the market demand for coal, as consumers in the postwar period turned increasingly to cheaper fuels such as oil and gas. The inroads of the petroleum industry began to be felt as early as 1919, when a number of northern factories, including several large iron and steel mills, converted to fuel oil.[112] The high price of coal and the uncertainty of supply, due to frequent labor strife, caused many industrial users to switch to fuel oil; moreover, gas and oil were cleaner than coal for household heating. The use of hydroelectric power doubled in the decade from 1917 to 1927, further driving coal from the markets, and research and development on new technology made possible more efficient consumption of coal in industrial boilers and in the generators of electric power plants. For example, the railroads, among the largest users of coal, learned to cut their consumption by millions of tons a year through the introduction of better locomotive fireboxes.[113]

Ironically, technological progress also played a role in overproduction. Not only did science teach industries how to use less coal, but it also invented new ways of mining more coal and of lessening the demand for human labor. The introduction of mining machines and the improvement of underground haulage systems increased the amount of coal that a miner could dig in a day and reduced the number of hands needed on an operation. The mechanization of the southern Appalachian mines proceeded rapidly after 1915, and by 1930 most

110. *Manufacturers' Record* 90 (28 Oct. 1926), 53–54.
111. *Ibid.* 91 (9 June 1927), 60–79; *ibid.* 92 (25 Aug. 1927), 55. The decision was known as the Great Lakes Cargo Freight Rate Case.
112. *Manufacturers' Record* 77 (Jan. 1920), 156.
113. *Manufacturers' Record* 92 (24 Nov. 1927), 79; Ross, *Machine Age in the Hills*, 56–57.

of the larger operations utilized some form of mining machines.[114] During the peak years of production, from 1915 to 1926, much of the growth in total output was due to the introduction of mining machines.[115] After the collapse of 1927, many of the larger companies were able by effective mechanization to continue mining at a profit. At the onset of the Great Depression, the Island Creek Coal Company, for example, decided to abandon the hand loading of coal into mine cars and to install mechanical loading devices. Money to pay for this move was available because the "management of the company had prudently accumulated a very substantial liquid surplus from the profits of the twenties, and this money was now employed to produce further profits."[116] Such practices usually resulted in significant reduction of the work force in a mine at a time when unemployment was already high and many miners had nowhere else to turn.

King Coal, however, had never expressed a deep concern for the mountain people. Like the timber barons before them, the coal men came into the region for the sole purpose of extracting the natural resources of the mountains, as quickly and as profitably as possible. Any benefits that might come to the local population were supplemental. The investors measured success not by any improvement in the quality of life, but by the accumulation of material wealth. The opportunity for great profits had brought them to the mountains, and those profits would have to be maintained, whatever the cost. "Since 1907," wrote the general manager and vice-president of Island Creek Coal Company, "Island Creek . . . has always operated at a profit, and its management holds steadfastly to the determination that its problems must be solved without marring this record. We still live by the precept that profits and progress are inseparable."[117] By 1930, "progress" had been at work in the mountains for over four decades, transforming a "backward" and "primitive" society into an integral part of the modern world. The ascendancy of coal had brought sudden and dramatic changes to the land and people of the hills—changes that would not disappear with the passing of the old king himself. The mountaineers had partaken of progress, but for most, the profits had somehow failed to accrue.

114. Keith Dix, *Work Relations in the Coal Industry: The Hand Loading Era, 1880–1930* (Morgantown, W.Va., 1977), 20–21.
115. *Manufacturers' Record* 80 (25 Aug. 1921), 62; *ibid.* 84 (16 Aug. 1923), 93.
116. Salvati, *Island Creek*, 14.
117. *Ibid.*

COAL, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY: LIFE IN THE COMPANY TOWNS

As you look out of the train window, riding up the Guyan River Valley, through the heart of the Logan County coalfield, you see on either side camp after camp in which the houses are little more than shacks to keep the weather out. Some of these houses are propped up on stilts; many of them are unpainted. . . . The camps look like the temporary quarters of some construction gang at work far from civilization. Yet they are permanent residence towns.

—Winthrop D. Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia*

WINTHROP LANE's graphic account of social conditions in the strike-torn coal fields of southern West Virginia in 1921 was a profound indictment of the new industrial order in Appalachia.[1] The transformation of the region had come quickly. Less than thirty years earlier, the mountains had stood in solitude. Great forests of oak, ash, and poplar covered the hillsides with a rich blanket of deep hues, and clear, sparkling streams rushed along the valley floors. No railroad had yet penetrated the hollows. The mountain people lived in small settlements scattered here and there in the valleys and coves. Life on the whole was simple, quiet, and devoted chiefly to agricultural pursuits.

By the 1920s, however, evidence of change was to be found on every hand. Coal-mining village after coal-mining village dotted the hollows along every creek and stream. The weathered houses of those who worked in the mines lined the creeks and steep slopes, and the black holes themselves gaped from the hillsides like great open wounds. Mine tipples, headhouses, and other buildings straddled the slopes of the mountains. Railroads sent their tracks in all directions, and long lines of coal cars sat on the sidings and disappeared around

1. *Civil War in West Virginia: A Story of the Industrial Conflict in the Coal Mines* (New York, 1921), 39.

the curves of the hills. The once majestic earth was scarred and ugly, and the streams ran brown with garbage and acid runoff from the mines. A black dust covered everything. Huge mounds of coal and "gob" piles of discarded mine waste lay about. The peaceful quiet of three decades before had been replaced by a cacophony of voices and industrial sounds. "Civilization" had come into the mountains and had caught up the mountain people in the wellspring of progress.

Few aspects of this new order were more symbolic of the transformation than the company towns. Born in the 1880s, the child of necessity and boom, and nourished on the profits of industrial expansion, the company town became for thousands of mountaineers the dominant institution of community life—a vital social center around which the miners' world revolved. Not only was the coal camp the site of one's work, the source of one's income, and the location of one's residence, but for many it also provided an introduction to organized community life and the setting in which new attitudes, values, and social institutions evolved. Completely owned and tightly dominated by the coal companies, the mining towns also reflected the underlying transition in land ownership and social power which had swept the region with the coming of the industrial age. And when they were abandoned by their creators to die and decay in the depression days of the late 1920s, the company towns came to represent in the popular mind the tragic dilemma of Appalachia itself.

Privately owned industrial towns accompanied modernization in other parts of the United States—especially in the northern coal fields and in Ohio, Indiana, and the far West—but in no other area of the country was the influence of the company town more profound and long-lasting than in the soft-coal fields of the southern mountains. Casting its shadow over the lives of almost every mountain family, it directly or indirectly defined the nature of community life in a large part of the region during a critical period of cultural change. At the height of the coal boom, for example, almost four-fifths (78.8 percent) of the mine workers in southern West Virginia and over two-thirds (64.4 percent) of the miners in eastern Kentucky and southwest Virginia lived in company-controlled communities. This compared with 50.7 percent of the miners in the bituminous fields of Pennsylvania, 24.3 percent of those in Ohio, and only 8.5 percent of the miners in Indiana and Illinois. At that time, there were almost five

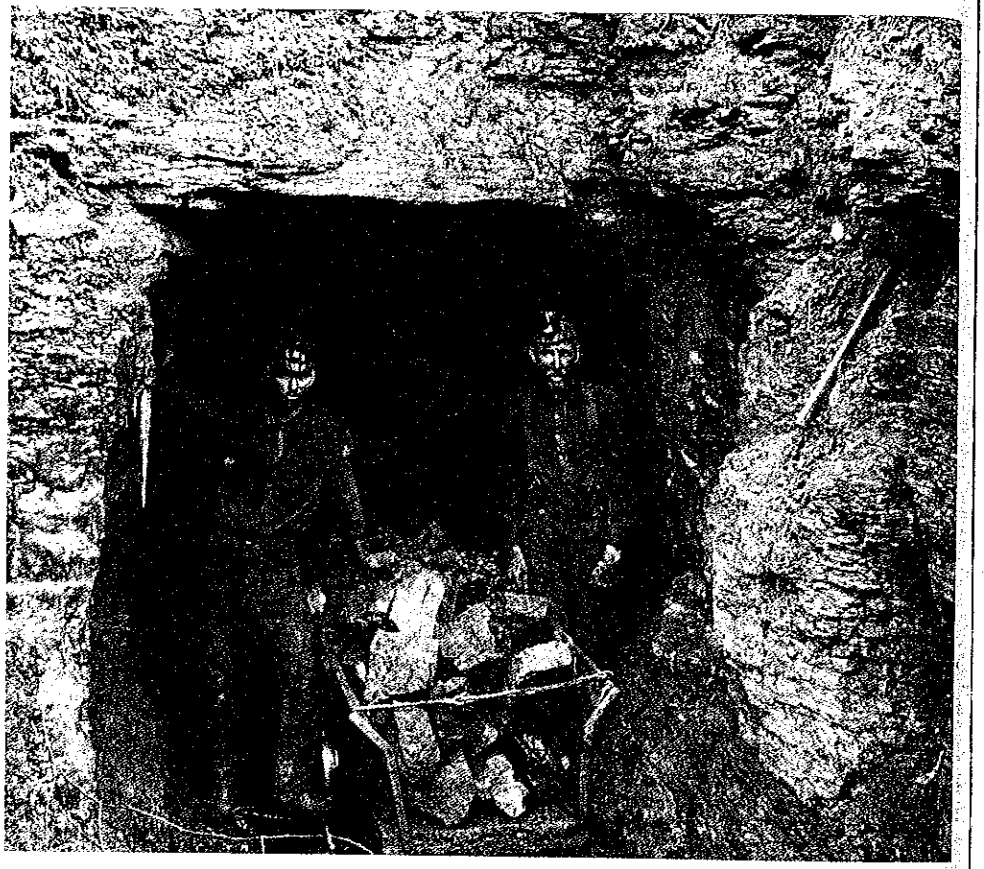
hundred company towns in the southern Appalachian coal fields, but less than one hundred independent incorporated towns.[2]

The preponderance of company towns in the southern coal fields was in part a response to physical and demographic conditions within the region itself. Unlike the northern fields where collieries arose in areas already fairly settled, where villages and towns were already established, and where the coal industry fitted more naturally and normally into community life, mining operations in the mountains commenced in an area of scattered settlements and few organized villages and towns. Good roads were sparse, and miles of rugged forest prevented the daily transportation of large numbers of employees. Pioneer coal operators in the region, therefore, had to develop their own communities to house their labor supply. The company town became a logical and expedient answer to industrial needs. It provided efficient and inexpensive housing for a large labor force, and it contained the added prospect of company control over the activities of the miners themselves.

Opening a mine in the mountains during the early years was often a challenging task. Pioneer operators lacked the financial backing of later town builders and had to manage and direct construction activities themselves. Having secured a lease or—more rarely—purchased the land, the early operator moved to the site of the outcropping and began to build his town. Since most coal seams were located up steep hillsides, in creek valleys, or in inaccessible ravines far from a village or major thoroughfare, the first order of business was to open a tram road on which to transport men and supplies.[3] A work gang then pulled a steam engine and sawmill over this narrow trail and began cutting timber for mine props and colliery buildings. Crews gave first priority to erecting a tipple, administrative offices, and other structures necessary to the operation of the mine and only later considered the construction of miners' houses. Often, the mining plant and the railroad tracks (which arrived soon afterward) consumed all available land in the restricted valley area, and houses

2. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the U.S. Coal Commission*, Table 14, p. 1467; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population*, II, 717–19, 927–28; III, 1023.

3. Branch lines of the railroad usually arrived shortly after mines had been opened, and they were often the only means of communication between the mine and the outside world. Mining camps were often more isolated than independent towns.



An Early Coal Mine, Miller's Creek, Kentucky. Courtesy of the Appalachian Photographic Archives, Alice Lloyd College.

had to be strung out along the creek bank or placed on stilts along the mountainside. A hard-working operator could open a mine under these conditions with a small initial investment, and in less than six months he could be producing and selling coal.

Between 1885 and 1927, independent operators and large corporations repeated this pattern of community development in countless hollows and valleys throughout the southern mountains. Expanding slowly at first, the construction of company towns surged after the

turn of the century and reached its peak in the years prior to World War I.[4] By 1920, company mining settlements dotted the landscape, having transformed it from an area of small, scattered farms into a region of discrete and isolated self-contained social units.

THE MINERS

After opening the mine shaft and beginning construction on the company town, the early coal operator then turned to the problem of recruiting a stable labor force. Most of the miners who were attracted to the southern Appalachian coal fields belonged to one of three distinct groups: (1) white Americans from the mountains and from the older coal fields, (2) black Americans primarily from the non-mountain South, and (3) recent immigrants from southern Europe. Although they were initially reluctant to enter the mines, the native mountaineers eventually accounted for the majority of the coal miners employed in the region.

The first coal-mining operations to be established in the mountains were small, and operators initially looked to the surrounding population for labor. In addition to a few resident white miners, the early mines employed a large number of black laborers who had come into the mountains to construct the railroads and who stayed on to work in the burgeoning coal industry. In the 1880s and 1890s, however, the number of mines grew, this local labor supply proved insufficient, and the mine owners began to recruit men from the older coal fields of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. When the Norfolk and Western Railroad, for example, opened the Flat Top–Pocahontas coal field after 1883, the mining companies there faced a labor shortage from the outset and regularly turned to the older fields for experienced miners. Most of the latter, moreover, were young and single, and this reduced the need for housing and other facilities in the early coal camps.[5]

Many of the local mountain residents at first were hesitant to leave their farms for work in the mines. Former landowners who had been reduced to tenancy by the acquisition of timber and mineral lands often resented the intrusion of industrialization on their traditional

4. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Housing By Employers in the United States*, Bulletin No. 263 (Washington, D.C. 1920), 56.

5. Tams, *Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia*, 61; *Coal Age* 17 (15 April 1920), 779; Thomas, "Coal Country, 175–76.

way of life. Many abhorred the noise, the smoke, the destruction of the land, and the general disturbances created by coal mining. Some regarded industrial life as degrading, and others were frightened by the coal mines themselves.[6] Eventually, however, many were drawn into the mines by necessity or the lure of "big money." As land values rose around the turn of the century, the increase in farm rents drove hundreds of families into the mining camps and mill villages. Later, prior to World War I, the decline of agriculture and the rise of miners' wages enticed young mountaineers into the pits, in the hope of making enough money to buy good land and return to farming.[7]

During the early years of the industry's growth, a few local farmers reluctantly accepted employment in the mines during the winter as a means of supplementing farm income. Such miners were unwilling to live in the company towns because of the congestion and the frequent poor housing conditions, and they abandoned the mines in the summer months for work on their own farms. This practice caused additional problems for the coal operators, who were left with a labor shortage each spring as the farmers returned to their fields.[8] As a result, many operators complained that the local population was unsuited to industrial employment. "They make good woodsmen and guides," wrote one mining engineer, "but their shiftless methods of living have not accustomed them to continuous and sustained labor and very little suffices. In short, they resemble the negro in their desire for frequent periods of 'laying off' . . . never having known or dreamed of anything better than the wretched surroundings of their everyday life, they are supremely unconscious of their own misery."[9]

6. Verhoeff, *The Kentucky Mountains*, 33–35; Herman R. Lantz, "Resignation, Industrialization and the Problem of Social Change," in *Blue Collar World: Studies of the American Worker*, ed. Arthur B. Shostak and William Gomberg (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1964), 261; George Fowler, "Social and Industrial Conditions in the Pocohontas Coal Field," *Engineering Magazine* 27 (June 1904), 387; Floyd W. Parsons, "Coal Mining in Southern West Virginia," *Engineering and Mining Journal* 84 (9 Nov. 1907), 883. This reluctance to enter "public work" was also found in noncoal areas; see Sara Evelyn Jackson, "Ashley Weaver: Microcosm of Appalachia" (unpublished paper in author's possession), 40; *Manufacturers' Record* 69 (29 June 1916), 45; Schockel, "Changing Conditions in the Southern Mountains," 130.

7. Watson, "Economic and Cultural Development of Eastern Kentucky," 54–55; Ross, *Machine Age in the Hills*, 15.

8. *Manufacturers' Record* 78 (29 July 1920), 98; *Coal Age* 17 (15 April 1920), 779.

9. Fowler, "Social and Industrial Conditions," 386–87.

Like many other preindustrial workers, the mountaineer found it difficult to adjust to the routines of industrial production.[10] "It has been his wont," an early sociologist observed of the mountaineer, "to work during the favorable time, or when the larder is empty; and to rest during the unfavorable season, or while provisions are at hand." These habits, he added, were not readily broken when the mines, the manufacturing plants, and the lumber mills came to the region, making the local worker "at once the despair and menace of the employer."[11] The tendency of mountain laborers to take off during certain times of the year to participate in farm activities and traditional customs was especially irritating to the mine operators. It was not uncommon for early miners to lay off for planting, harvesting, funerals, and family reunions, and to go hunting and fishing. Occasionally, a miner might work only enough to make sufficient money to keep his family the rest of the month before taking leave of the mine for home. Coal-mine owners found it difficult to reconcile these traditional customs with their own work ethic and the need for continuous production. To many an operator "time was money," and time spent in such "non-productive" activities was a waste of the operator's money.[12]

Absenteeism, however, was only one way that the mountaineers rejected the industrial norms of the mine managers. By ignoring work schedules, mining routines, and other innovations which worked at cross-purposes with their traditional way of life, they sought to maintain their individualism and freedom from authority. In this manner, they hoped to benefit from the economic rewards of industrialization without sacrificing their long-held cultural values.[13] As Ellen Semple noted at the turn of the century, the mountaineer did not easily surrender his independent spirit.

> At all times very restive under orders, when they have taken employment under a superior, their service must be politely requested, not

10. See Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society*, 1–78.

11. Schockel, "Changing Conditions in the Southern Mountains," 130.

12. Semple, "The Anglo-Saxons of the Kentucky Mountains," 581; Douglass, *Christian Reconstruction in the South*, 317; *Manufacturers' Record* 69 (29 June 1916), 45; Leo Joseph Sandman, "Social Effects of the Mining Industry in Eastern Kentucky" (B.A. thesis, Univ. of Kentucky, 1915), 10; Herman Lantz, *People of Coal Town* (Carbondale, Ill., 1958), 37.

13. See Lantz, "Resignation, Industrialization, and the Problem of Social Change," 262.

> demanded. If offended, they throw up their job in a moment, and go off regardless of their contract and of the inconvenience they may occasion their employer. Every man is accustomed to be his own master, to do his own work in his own way and his own time. . . . He has little sense of the value of time. If he promises to do a certain thing on a certain date, his conscience is quite satisfied if he does it within three or four days after the appointed time.[14]

Gradually, many of the mountaineers were obliged to adjust to the new industrial system and made their way to the coal camps, but in the highly competitive years after 1900, the mine owners were unwilling to wait for mountain ways to change.[15] Operators increasingly searched for a more permanent labor force that would take no "vacations" and could be relied upon at the mine throughout the year. As many of the miners from the older coal fields, moreover, began to leave the region for higher paying jobs in unionized fields, labor demands became so great that operators cast their nets far afield for workers. Between 1900 and 1920, coal company agents were sent into the South and as far away as Europe to lure potential miners to mountain coal fields. Attracted by glowing descriptions of comfortable housing and steady work at good wages, thousands of southern blacks and European immigrants were brought into the region on railroad labor trains to supplement the local labor supply or to serve as strikebreakers during times of labor strife. The cost of transporting these men was usually charged against them and deducted from their first few months' wages.[16] In this way, the ethnic composition of the mountains began to change again at the turn of the twentieth century, almost as drastically as it had at the turn of the nineteenth.[17]

Blacks had worked in southern Appalachian mines from the opening of the first collieries. As early as the 1850s, slaves were mining coal in the Kanawha Valley, and after the Civil War many of the black laborers who constructed the railroads found employment in

14. Semple, "Anglo-Saxons of the Kentucky Mountains," 581.
15. This cultural change would never be entirely complete, as mountain people continue to cling to many of their traditional values to the present day.
16. Tams, *Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia*, 61.
17. See also Phil Conley, *History of the West Virginia Coal Industry* (Charleston, W.Va., 1960), 88–90; Howard B. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia: A Story of West Virginia's Four Major Mine Wars and Other Thrilling Incidents of Its Coal Fields* (Morgantown, W.Va., 1969), 4–8; Nell Pierce, *The Border South States*, 180–81; Thomas, "Coal Country," 177–97.

the mines.[18] Yet the black population was never very large in the mountains until the coal operators began to recruit extensively in the southern states. By 1907, black miners composed about 35 percent of the labor force in the Flat–Top Pocahontas coal field and proportionately less in the other coal fields of the region.[19] In 1920, 43 percent of the black miners employed in the United States worked in West Virginia, and the vast majority of those lived in the southern part of the state.[20] McDowell County, for instance, had the largest concentration of blacks in the Appalachian coal fields. At the height of the coal boom, over 45 percent of the miners in McDowell were black, and one of the major towns of the county, Keystone, was predominantly black.[21] From 1904 until 1913, the black community in McDowell County published its own newspaper, the McDowell *Times*, which reached about 5,000 subscribers.[22]

Most of the nonresident miners who arrived in the mountains after the turn of the century were recruited by labor agents hired by the railroads, a coal company, or a group of companies. Some of the agents were mine guards, and a few were employed directly by the Baldwin-Felts Agency, a leading mine security and strikebreaking firm out of Bluefield, West Virginia.[23] The agents generally traveled in pairs and were well armed and well financed. Those who were sent into the South were usually accompanied by a couple of black "recruiters" who were carefully selected for their eloquence and their willingness to disregard the truth. Once the agents reached their destination, the recruiters went to work in the black community, describing the opportunities to be found in the coal fields. When a sufficient number of volunteers had agreed to make the journey, the

18. Otis K. Rice, "Coal Mining in the Kanawha Valley in 1861: A View of Industrialization in the Old South," *Journal of Southern History* 31 (1965), 415–16.
19. Gillenwater, "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements," 35.
20. Sterling Spero and Abram L. Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (New York, 1931), 217–19.
21. Thurmond, *Logan Coal Field*, 60; Kenneth R. Bailey, "A Judicious Mixture: Negroes and Immigrants in the West Virginia Mines, 1880–1917," *West Virginia History* 34 (Jan. 1973), 158; West Virginia Department of Mines, *Annual Report*, 1910 and 1920.
22. Thomas, "Coal Country," 184. See also Charles Thomas Davis, *The Autobiography of Charles Thomas Davis and a History of the Town of Pocahontas, Virginia* (Pocahontas, Va., 1948), the account of a black miner who worked in Pocahontas for almost sixty years.
23. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 4n.

new laborers were loaded aboard a train and the doors were sealed and guarded until they reached the mines.[24] Solicitation of black workers was also carried on through the press, with full-page advertisements appearing in some black newspapers. These advertisements typically promised a wide range of opportunities in the mountains, no racial discrimination, and the possibility of earning from two to five dollars a day in the mines.[25] As a result of such efforts, on the eve of World War I black farmers were said to be leaving parts of the South in such large numbers to work in mountain coal mines, that a major southern business journal warned of severe labor problems for white farmers if the trend was not reversed.[26]

Despite this success, however, not all of the southern blacks who came to the mountains arrived voluntarily. In some areas of the Deep South, county and municipal authorities could be enticed with enough funds to open their jail doors for any convict who would board the labor train to the north. During times of extreme labor shortage, agents were known to empty entire jails of their black prisoners. Crowded into boxcars for days with little to eat or drink, some men never made it to the coal fields. Prisoners who demanded to be let off or tried to escape were frequently shot.[27]

Once the new black recruits reached the mining towns, they were quickly confronted with the drudgery of coal-mining life. Coal operators usually segregated the black population into "Colored Towns" consisting of the least desirable houses in the camp. Schools and churches, where provided, were segregated, as were recreational facilities, restaurants, and saloons. Because of the racist attitudes of most mine managers, blacks were never placed in positions of authority, and opportunities for upward mobilty on the job were few. Contemporary white beliefs effectively restricted black workers to the ranks of pick miners and loaders of coal. As George L. Fowler observed from the Pocahontas coal fields,

> Here, as elsewhere throughout the South, the negro is the predominating figure, and we find him employed in all grades of labor where cool

24. *Ibid.*, 4–6.
25. Charles Phillips Anson, "A History of the Labor Movement in West Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of North Carolina, 1940), 66–67.
26. *Manufacturers' Record* 70 (3 Aug. 1916), 65.
27. See Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 7.

> judgment, high personal responsibility, or reliability are not required . . . his shiftlessness, adding thereto the belief that he belongs to an inferior race—that he ordinarily matured in early manhood and does not grow after that time. In short, that he is a child in his actions and ways of thinking, and is an adult in physical strength only. . . .[28]

Notwithstanding such attitudes, the black miners were not totally unprepared for their experiences in the coal-mining towns, and they carved out for themselves a place in the life of the coal community. By 1900, in many parts of the South, black farmers had already become accustomed to the wage system, the use of "scrip" money, and purchasing supplies at the plantation store. The evolving patterns associated with "the factory in the field," as well as the longstanding forced tradition of overt subservience to white authority, eased the adjustment to the routines of the company town.[29] Blacks also had their own churches, dances, and lodges, and in some mining towns, black lawyers and doctors wielded a degree of political influence. Blacks in West Virginia, for example, could vote, and the Democrats often charged the Republican coal operators of southern West Virginia with the colonization of blacks for political purposes.[30]

Social relationships with white miners were often ambiguous. Incidents of racial violence were not uncommon in the coal fields, especially during the early years, when lynchings and assaults were frequently reported in the local newspapers. The fact that many black workers were brought into the region as strikebreakers did not ease the tensions. The coal operators also chose to recruit black miners as a means of creating a "judicious mixture" of whites, blacks, and immigrants, in order to forestall unionization by segregating the men and playing one group off against another.[31] Nevertheless, a relatively high degree of harmony existed between the races at a personal level. Working side by side in the mines, the men came to depend upon each other for their own safety, and the lack of major differ-

28. Fowler, "Social and Industrial Conditions," 384–85. See also Parsons, "Coal Mining in Southern West Virginia," 883; Donald T. Barnum, *The Negro in the Bituminous Coal Industry* (Philadelphia, 1970), 16–17, 45.
29. See George Brown Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes, 1877–1900* (Columbia, S.C., 1952), 92–123.
30. Bailey, "A Judicious Mixture," 157–59; Thomas, "Coal Country," 90.
31. Bailey, "A Judicious Mixture," 157; Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*, 222–25; Barnum, *The Negro in the Bituminous Coal Industry*, 19.

ences in housing, pay, and living conditions mitigated caste feelings and gave rise to a common consciousness of class. Many of the white mountaineers had never developed a deep prejudice against blacks and had often extended them a measure of social equality. White and black miners freely visited each other's homes, churches, and physicians, and the races mixed openly at rallies, recreational events, and union meetings.[32] In fact, a higher level of racial mistrust existed between blacks and immigrants, whose cultural backgrounds were more clearly diverse.

Immigrants composed the final third of the ethnic mix in the coal fields. Their presence was most noticeable in the newer coal districts of eastern Kentucky, the Logan and Winding Gulf fields of southern West Virginia, and the Clinchfield area of southwest Virginia. Many coal operators preferred immigrant labor to native white or black workers because, they believed, the immigrants would work harder and were more dependable, predictable, and easily controlled.[33] The mine owners of southern West Virginia claimed that their immigrant miners worked from five to ten hours per week longer and produced a substantially higher daily tonnage of coal than any of their American miners.[34] Between 1900 and 1915, the mines of the southern mountains eagerly accepted all of the immigrant laborers they could obtain, and some larger companies predominantly employed foreign-born miners. Almost two-thirds of the work force at the U.S. Coal and Oil Company's mines in southern West Virginia, for example, were recent immigrants.[35] In eastern Kentucky, the U.S. Steel Corporation and the International Harvester Corporation both imported large numbers of foreign miners to their respective facilities at Lynch and Benham.[36]

The methods of recruiting immigrant labor were similar to those used to lure southern blacks. During periods of labor scarcity, the coal companies hired agents to go to Europe and to eastern cities in

32. Ralph D. Minard, "Race Relations in the Pocahontas Coal Field," *Journal of Social Issues* 8 (1952), 31–36; Joseph T. Laing, "The Negro in West Virginia," *Social Forces* 14 (1936), 422; Semple, "The Anglo Saxons of the Kentucky Mountains," 567; Fox, *Blue-Grass and Rhododendron*, 161. Minard found the highest degree of racial prejudice to exist among the management classes.
33. Lantz, *People of Coal Town*, 38.
34. Thomas, "Coal Country," 182.
35. Cubby, "The Transformation of the Tug and Guyandot Valleys," 256.
36. Watson, "Economic and Cultural Development of Eastern Kentucky," 51–52.

the United States to attract potential miners to the region. In the late nineteenth century, expert writers and translators were employed to prepare brochures in several languages, which might be used by European agents contracting laborers for the new world, but this practice became illegal with the passage of new immigration laws.[37] Thereafter, agents concentrated their efforts on Ellis Island, New York, and the ethnic communities of New York City and other northern towns. In West Virginia, coal operators received the help of the state commissioner of immigration when John H. Nugent was appointed to that position in 1907. Although the commissioner of immigration was not given an official salary, Nugent's expenses and salary were provided by the coal companies. In his numerous trips to Europe and England, Nugent carried recruitment propaganda bearing the official endorsement of the state commissioner and testifying to the favorable working and living conditions to be found at the coal mines.[38] When the unsuspecting immigrants arrived at Ellis Island, they would be met in the detention rooms by labor agents and interpreters and rushed on trains to the coal fields. The transportation expenses for the worker and his family, including the agent's fee, were advanced by the company, and upon arrival at the company town, the family was assigned to a house and provided with furniture, tools, and food. All this was charged on credit.[39]

As with black miners, many of the immigrants who arrived in the coal fields were not happy with their new life. Some had been recruited through urban labor brokers or "padrones" who had clearly misled them about the location and nature of the work for which they were being hired. Once they detrained in the coal fields, however, they lived under the constant presence of armed guards until they had "worked out" the cost of their transportation. In some instances, companies hard pressed for labor used extreme levels of intimidation and force to keep the men in the mines. Reports of forced labor conditions in the mountains became so prevalent that in 1903 the New York Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants sent an agent to the region to investigate complaints of alleged maltreatment. His report, published in the *Outlook* in June 1903, condemned the labor practices and working conditions that he found existing among

37. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 6.
38. Bailey, "A Judicious Mixture," 148–50.
39. Chapman, "The Influence of Coal in the Big Sandy Valley," 166.

Italian miners.[40] Later, after further investigations, the Italian ambassador to the United States complained to Secretary of State Elihu Root that his countrymen were being held against their will in West Virginia. Finally, in 1907, the governor of the Mountain State revealed that Americans and foreigners had been forcibly held by mine owners and the William M. Ritter Lumber Company in the southern part of that state.[41]

The largest ethnic group to immigrate to the mountains were the Italians, although large numbers of Poles, Hungarians, and Slavs arrived as well. The high point of Italian immigration to America was the decade from 1900 to 1910, when over two million Italians arrived in the United States.[42] At the end of that decade, there were 7,600 Italian miners in West Virginia alone.[43] In addition to being recruited for the coal mines, Italian laborers were also consigned to railroad construction crews. The Carolina, Clinchfield, and Ohio Railroad employed hundreds of Italians in the construction of its line through Virginia and North Carolina, and many of the workers remained in the region to become miners in the Clinchfield coal district.[44] Their experience with life in the company towns was, for the most part, similar to that of the native American population. Most of the immigrants had come from rural areas of Europe, and their agricultural backgrounds and traditional culture eased their assimilation into mountain society.[45]

The flow of immigration into the Appalachian coal fields reached its peak in the years before World War I. With the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, thousands of Italian, Hungarian, and Greek miners left the mountains to return to their native countries to fight.[46] Others were attracted to expanding northern steel mills, where they could find higher pay and better living conditions. By 1916, the coal operators were once again faced with a serious labor shortage, and as wartime demand for coal production burgeoned, the companies

40. Gino C. Speranze, "Forced Labor in West Virginia," *Outlook* 74 (13 June 1903), 407–8.
41. Bailey, "A Judicious Mixture," 147.
42. Margaret Ripley Wolfe, "Aliens in Appalachia: The Construction of the Clinchfield Railroad and the Italian Experience," in Emmett M. Essin, ed., *Appalachia: Family Traditions in Transition* (Johnson City, Tenn., 1975), 83.
43. West Virginia Department of Mines, *Annual Report*, 1910, p. 104.
44. Wolfe, "Aliens in Appalachia," 83–88.
45. Thomas, "Coal Country," 197; Wolfe, "Aliens in Appalachia," 87–88.

turned increasingly to southern blacks and to the sons of the mountaineers who had been so hesitant to enter the mines.[47] After 1920, the black mining population also began to decrease in the mountains, as blacks too joined the migration to northern cities.[48] During the boom-and-bust period of the twenties, the population that remained to bear the brunt of the industry's collapse was the native mountaineers, but a few blacks and immigrants stayed on in the region to become a permanent part of mountain life. Today, one can find a sprinkling of Catholic churches and missions in the coal camps and mountaineers with Slavic and Italian sounding names—the last reminders of the thousands of immigrants who once played a major role in the region's history.

THE MINER'S WORK

For the rural whites, blacks, and immigrants who came to work in the mountain coal mines, the greatest adjustments in their lives came not so much from the nature of their work as from the industrial organization and the feudal living conditions which accompanied that work. Mining, unlike factory employment, continued to provide contact with the land. It required some skill but primarily physical energy, and in the early years the miner enjoyed a high level of independence on the job. The work was dirty and usually tiring, much like that to which they were accustomed on the farm. Yet, the work routines, job discipline, safety conditions, and environment of the company towns were in marked contrast to traditional agricultural life. To a degree, coal mining reinforced old cultural patterns while it introduced new social attitudes, behaviors, and problems.

The most striking fact about the miner's job in the early years of the coal industry was that almost all of the work was done by hand. Mechanical undercutting machines which helped to loosen the coal from the seam were invented as early as the 1870s, but they were slow to gain acceptance in the nation's coal mines. By 1900, only 25 percent of American coal was mined by machines. In 1915, that figure reached 55 percent, but as late as 1930, 20 percent of the U.S.

46. Bailey, "A Judicious Mixture," 151–53.
47. George Wolfe to Justus Collins, 30 July 1916, Justus Collins Papers, West Virginia Univ.; *Manufacturers' Record* 70 (3 Aug. 1916), 65.
48. Chapman, "The Influence of Coal in the Big Sandy Valley," 223.

coal production was still being mined by hand.[49] Many of the smaller mines, of which there were hundreds in the southern mountains, did not begin to mechanize until after World War II. The loading of the coal into the mining cars, which was the most time-consuming part of the miner's job, continued to be done by hand throughout the period from 1880 to 1930. While mules and later locomotives were used to haul the loaded cars to the mouth of the mine, the most arduous and dangerous part of the production process was done at the face of the coal seam by the miner himself.

Most southern Appalachian mines were of the drift-mine variety, which allowed for easy entry and minimized the need for expensive ventilation and transportation equipment. The coal seam of a drift mine was located on a hillside above the valley floor, and the workers entered the mine laterally rather than through the vertical shafts characteristic of other American coal fields. The drift mine not only drained well and was less gaseous, but because it required little machinery, operations could be undertaken with very little initial investment. This low cost contributed significantly to the rapid overexpansion of the industry in the mountains, as well as to the heavy reliance on cheap human labor. During the early years, moreover, the ease of entry into a drift mine gave miners considerable freedom to leave their workplace as they pleased, but as the mines penetrated deeper into the hillside and as company discipline hardened, this advantage was lost.[50]

Once the coal seam had been penetrated, the miners set to work cutting and loading the coal. The mining process was relatively simple. Generally, pairs of miners worked in small rooms off the main entry tunnel. The rooms were separated from each other by pillars of coal left standing to support the roof, and coal car tracks were extended into each of the rooms from the main haulageway. After the coal was removed from the seam and loaded into a coal car, it was pushed to the room entrance, where mules or locomotives gathered the cars and transported them to the loading tipple outside. When all of the rooms in a section had been mined, the pillars were carefully removed as the men retreated toward the main shaft. "Pillar drawing" was extremely dangerous, as it often resulted in the collapse of the overburden in the room, but it was seen as a necessary

49. Dix, *Work Relations*, 20, Table II.
50. *Ibid.*, 1–3; Thomas, "Coal Country," 210.

part of the operation. Proper pillar removal reduced the amount of coal left in the mine and lost to production.[51]

The miner's day started long before daylight and often ended well after dark. In the early morning hours, the miners would set out for the mines carrying their lunch pails and water bottles and wearing lard oil lamps to light their way. The procession, "like fireflies all around the mountain," disappeared into the mine about 6:00 A.M.[52] At the coal face, the miner and his helper or loader began work by undercutting the coal seam. This he accomplished by making a horizontal or wedge-shaped slit with his pick at the bottom of the seam, so that the coal would fall when blasted from above. The miner had to do most of this undercutting lying on his side swinging a short-handled pick into the coal seam. He had to be constantly aware of the condition of the coal he was mining, since there was always danger of coal falling from the face onto the worker below.[53] After taking two or three hours to make an undercut, the miner then drilled holes in the coal, loaded the holes with black powder, and fired them, bringing down the undercut coal. When the dust settled, the men pushed empty mining cars into the room and began the task of loading the coal, being sure to separate out the pieces of rock and slate to prevent being "docked" for loading dirty coal. Several hours after the process began, the miners pushed their loaded cars to the room entrance to be hauled away. Near the bottom of the car the workers placed a brass check bearing the laborers' payroll number. The check was removed by the "check man" at the tipple and the tonnage credited to the proper men.[54]

The miner's job, however, was not finished when the car was removed from the workplace. Wasted rock and debris had to be removed from the room and steel track laid from the main entry to the new facing. In most mines, the miners themselves were responsible for setting their own timber safety props in place to support the roof from falling on the workmen. It often required hours to carry and install these posts, and the procedure was done entirely at the miner's

51. Dix, *Work Relations*, 4–7.
52. Florence Reece, Ellistown, Tenn., quoted in Kathy Kahn, *Hillbilly Women* (New York, 1973), 4.
53. John Brophy, *A Miner's Life* (Madison, Wis., 1964), 43; Dix, *Work Relations*, 8.
54. Tams, *The Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia*, 35–36; Dix, *Work Relations*, 8–10.

expense, since he was paid by the ton of coal loaded, not by the time spent on the job. After these preparations were made, the cycle would begin again with undercutting, drilling, blasting, and loading. In mines where drainage was a problem, the miner's clothes often got wet with the first undercutting, and he had to work the remainder of the day in damp clothing.[55] The end of the shift usually came about sundown, and the wet, dust-blackened miners trudged home to a tub of water and a few hours' rest before the next day's work began.

Under these conditions, the average pick miner could earn about two dollars a day at the turn of the century, and an exceptionally hard-working miner might earn as much as three dollars.[56] Wages varied greatly from time to time and from area to area in the mountain coal fields. During the 1920s, some coal operators in southern Appalachia paid wages higher than the national average in an attempt to squelch unionization, but on the whole, the region's wage averages lagged behind those of the rest of the nation. In order to compete with northern coal companies, mine owners in the mountains sought to reduce the price of their coal by cutting miners' wages and other expenses. A pick miner in southern West Virginia, for example, was paid an average of 38.5 cents per ton in 1912 for run-of-the-mine coal, while the statewide average was 48 cents. In the coal fields of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Pennsylvania, miners' wages ranged from 57 cents to $1.27 per ton. Rates in the southern fields, moreover, were based on "long tons" of 2,240 pounds, but those of the northern fields were figured on "short tons" of 2,000 pounds, "hence the wage differential was even greater than it appears."[57] In addition to the marked difference in net wages, a higher percentage of miners in southern Appalachia lived in company towns, and thus a larger share of their wages was returned to the coal company for housing, tools, education, food, and other expenses. The gradual introduction of cutting machines in the years before World War I dramatically increased coal production in the mines, but the miners themselves received only a small share of the gains from increased efficiency.[58]

While wages remained comparatively low in the coal fields, coal

55. Dix, *Work Relations*, 11–12.
56. Tams, *The Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia*, 41.
57. Cubby, "The Transformation of the Tug and Guyandot Valleys," 261–62.
58. Thomas, "Coal Country," 202.

mining continued to rank as one of the most dangerous occupations in the United States. In fact, the introduction of machines and electricity actually added to the perils of the mine. Mechanical haulage systems and low-hanging electrical wires became major factors in mine safety, and the higher levels of dust raised by the new cutting machines created new explosion dangers and health hazards.[59] Despite the passage of "progressive" mine safety laws in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the rate of mine fatalities per thousand in the coal industry actually increased steadily after 1906. Over the next thirty years, mine workers in the United States lost their lives in underground accidents at the rate of about 1,600 per year.[60]

The most feared and well-publicized mine accidents were the dramatic explosions that sometimes killed dozens and even hundreds of men. Although most of the southern Appalachian drift mines were relatively free of natural gases, the accumulation of explosive methane gas and coal dust was an unavoidable by-product of coal mining. The gas could be removed from the mine by adequate ventilation, and the coal dust could be rendered nonexplosive by treatment with water or rock dust. But in the hectic days of the coal boom, many of the companies were unwilling to spend additional money on mine safety, and many of the miners were too pressured by the demands of production to spend time on safety precautions. As a result, mine disasters in the mountains increased sharply after 1900.

Prior to the turn of the century, there were only two major explosions in the mountain coal fields. The most tragic occurred at Pocahontas, Virginia, only a year after the railroad reached the mine of the Southwest Virginia Improvement Company. On 13 March 1884, coal dust in the Pocahontas Laurel mine exploded, killing the entire night shift of 114 men. An investigation determined that the disaster was probably caused by an open miner's lamp that ignited a small quantity of fire-damp (methane), which in turn set off a large quantity of coal dust.[61] The second disaster occurred in 1895,

59. Dix, *Work Relations*, 25.
60. *Ibid.*, 67. See also Thomas, "Coal Country," 230, Table VII-A, "Mine Fatalities in West Virginia."
61. J.N. Bramwell, *et al.*, "The Pocahontas Mine Explosions," American Institute of Mining Engineers, *Transactions* 13 (1884–1885), 247–48.

when a gas explosion ripped through the Nelson Mine at Dayton, Tennessee, killing 28 miners.[62]

As mechanization and production accelerated in the next decades, major disasters occurred with shocking frequency. In 1900, the Red Ash Colliery in Fayette County, West Virginia, exploded, killing 57 men and boys. Two years later, 184 miners were killed at the Fraterville Mine in Coal Creek, Tennessee.[63] On 6 December 1907, the largest mine disaster in the United States up to that time occurred in northern West Virginia at Monagah, killing 358 men. Between 1902 and 1927 there were serious mine explosions in the region almost every year and major disasters at Stuart (1907), Switchback (1908 and 1909), Jed (1912), Eccles (1914), Layland (1915), Beckley (1923), Yukon (1924), and Everettsville (1927) in West Virginia; again at Pocahontas, Virginia (1906); at Browder (1910) and Happy (1923) in Kentucky; and at Briceville (1911), Catoosa (1917), and Rockwood (1926) in Tennessee.[64] During these twenty-five years over 2,400 men—an average of nearly 100 workers per year—died in the mountains as a result of mine explosions.[65]

The causes of most of the mine explosions, generally the accumulation of gas and coal dust, were widely known, but coroner's juries impaneled to determine the causes of the disasters almost never ruled against the companies. According to Howard B. Lee, who served as West Virginia's attorney general during the 1920s, out of eleven mine explosions in that state, "in no case was the coal company even censured for its willful neglect or refusal to take necessary safety precautions to prevent the slaughter."[66] Most of the juries ruled that the deaths of the men were "accidental." For example, after the mine at Eccles, West Virginia, exploded twice in 1914 killing 183 miners, the coroner's jury found that the explosion had been caused by a "short circuit of air" which had allowed gas to collect in the mine. "This short circuit," the jury ruled, "was caused without the knowledge or consent of the company or any of its operating staff, and . . . the company is in no way to blame for the disaster."[67] Another jury ruled in a similar case that the victims had met their deaths as the result of "an Act of God."[68]

62. U.S. Bureau of Mines, *Historical Summary of Coal Mine Explosions in the United States, 1810–1958*, by Hiram Brown Humphrey, Bulletin No. 586 (Washington, D.C., 1960), 20.
63. William Nelson Page, "The Explosion at the Red Ash Colliery, Fayette County, West Virginia," American Institute of Mining Engineers, *Transactions* 30 (1900); Bureau of Mines, *Summary of Coal Mine Explosions*, 24.
64. Bureau of Mines, *Summary of Coal Mine Explosions*, 24–110.
65. Based on *ibid*. These figures apply only to explosions; the total number of fatalities was higher. See nn. 73 and 74, below.
66. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 83.

State and federal governments at this time did little more than the coroner's juries to hold the coal companies responsible for mine safety. The U.S. Bureau of Mines was created in 1910, but it served only in an advisory capacity and until 1941 did not have the power to enter upon the property of a mine owner without his consent.[69] Between 1879 and 1912, mine safety laws were passed in all of the coal-mining states, establishing mining codes and creating mine inspection to enforce the codes.[70] The political influence of the coal operators, however, assured that the codes remained weak and ineffective. "Apparently," wrote Howard B. Lee, "their only purpose was to protect the coal operators—the miners were forgotten."[71] The laws generally placed the sole responsibility for mine safety on the miners, and the mining codes simply established regulations for individual work patterns. The codes emphasized one general rule: "Be Careful." Enforcement was almost nonexistent. It was not until the mid-1920s that state and federal mine bureaus began to place any responsibility for mine safety on management, and even then the coal operators were protected from most liability.[72]

Although most of the public outrage that resulted in the passage of mine safety legislation was stirred by the sudden rise in mine explosions, such disasters claimed only a fraction of the total number of miners killed and injured each year. Of the nearly 48,000 fatal mine accidents in the United States from 1906 to 1935, only 16 percent of the victims were killed by gas and dust explosions, while over 71 percent died from roof falls or haulage accidents. Unlike the more highly publicized explosions that killed many miners at once, roof falls and other accidents were solitary killers, and they went unnoticed by the public.[73] Roof falls alone accounted for the majority of

67. R. Dawson Hall, "The Explosion at Eccles, West Virginia," *Coal Age* 5 (23 May 1914), 850.
68. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 83.
69. Dix, *Work Relations*, 80.
70. Bureau of Mines, *Summary of Coal Mine Explosions*, 15.
71. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 103.
72. Dix, *Work Relations*, 80–93.
73. *Ibid*., 72 and 71, Table III.

mine deaths, claiming an average of about three miners a day.[74] As with other aspects of safety, the responsibility to secure the roof of the workplace with posts was placed upon the miner, and any injury resulting from the failure to "post" was considered to be a product of his own "carelessness." During periods of low wages and management pressure for increased production, miners often waited until the last possible moment to break off from their work to begin posting. If the miner waited too long, weak shale roofs and inadequate supports might bring tons of rock down on the men, crushing them instantly. Each year, roof falls claimed the lives of hundreds of inexperienced miners, but large numbers of veteran laborers were also victims of falling coal and slate.

Low wages and poor health and safety conditions on the job were not the only tribulations of the miner's life. After the turn of the century, coal operators increasingly required their employees to live in the company towns. In many communities there was no alternative to company housing, since the coal and land companies owned all of the land for miles around. The company towns, moreover, were directly related to coal production, in that the mine managers often used forms of off-the-job control to maintain profits and enforce company discipline.

THE COMPANY TOWNS

Conditions in the company towns, as in the mines, varied greatly from community to community. In some, houses were little more than shanties hastily constructed and thrown up against the hillside with no attention to comfort, appearance, or community plan. In others, they were substantially built structures, carefully designed and fitted into an orderly social scheme. The earliest houses in the region were built of "board and batten" and were generally not ceiled or plastered inside. Running water and other internal improvements were unknown, and according to the U.S. Department of Labor, "often only one well . . . was sunk for 12 or 14 houses and only one privy provided for every three or four houses."[75] Conditions in newer towns improved somewhat with the passage of time—but not markedly. In 1925, forty years after the opening of the region's first

74. Based upon statistics provided in ibid.
75. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Housing By Employers*, 56.

coal town, the U.S. Coal Commission found that, on the whole, living conditions in the mining camps of the southern mountains were among the worst in the nation.[76]

The typical mining camp was located on the lower slopes and valley floor between two high ridges. Not much more than a crevice in the earth, this natural location provided little space for the necessary structures of a mining town and often contributed to the confined and congested appearance of the camp itself. For many mountaineers, such an environment was a decided contrast to life on the family farm, and this played an important role in their initial reluctance to enter the new mines. Nevertheless, natural location was not the sole determinant of living conditions in a company town, since the Coal Commission found examples of "attractive and well-equipped" communities in areas that seemed distinctly unfavorable for community life.[77]

In most camps, however, operators made little effort to overcome the natural obstacles of location. Houses backed on the railroad tracks and fronted on the creek or squatted on the mountainside like "great drab beetles with their stilt legs braced against the slope."[78] Dwellings nearest the tipple received a daily shower of coal dust, which turned everything a somber gray and frustrated the cleaning efforts of even the most meticulous housewife. There were few surfaced roads, and a layer of mud, black from the run-off waste of the mine, covered the ground during much of the year.[79] The uniformity of housing type, moreover, a characteristic of every company town, added a monotony to the construction-camp atmosphere of the mountain mining town.

The report of the Coal Commission in 1925 clearly documents the substandard quality of company housing in the southern mountains and gives mute testimony to the social ideals of the southern coal barons in the heyday of their prosperity. Examining 713 company-controlled communities in 1922–1923, the commission discovered that one-third of the company dwellings in the southern bituminous fields were still finished on the outside with board and batten—"among the cheapest, if not the cheapest, type of outside finish."[80]

76. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the U.S. Coal Commission*, Pt. III, 1428.
77. *Ibid.*
78. Ross, *Machine Age in the Hills*, 23.
79. Thomas, *Life Among the Hills*, 11.
80. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the U.S. Coal Commission*, Pt. III, 1470.

Among all United States mining areas, the southern fields contained 93 percent of all dwellings of this construction type. Weatherboard and clapboard was the outside finish on most of the houses, but less than one-third were plastered inside, and less than one-tenth had shingled or slated roofs. Wood sheathing covered the interior walls of a majority of company-owned dwellings, and composition paper covered the roof.[81]

The prevalent house style in the region was the "Jenny Lind," a one-story boxlike structure which rested on a post foundation and contained three or four rooms. A pot-bellied stove, centrally located and fired with company coal, provided the building's heat. Overcrowding was always a problem in such dwellings, especially since many miners took in boarders to help pay the rent. Some operators offered a bonus of one dollar a month to every family having over three boarders.[82] Immigrants and blacks suffered more from crowded conditions than whites, since the latter usually received the larger houses. As late as 1920, it was not uncommon to find an immigrant family of three or four keeping from four to ten boarders in a three-room mining house.[83]

Sanitary equipment and other "modern conveniences" were rare in the mountain mining camps. Only about 14 percent of the company houses in Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky had indoor running water, while 30 percent of those in Pennsylvania and 90 percent of those in Ohio were equipped with such facilities. Hydrants placed at regular intervals along the street supplied from a tank high up the valley side furnished water in most communities. Investigators found showers, bath tubs, and flush toilets in less than 3 percent of the dwellings surveyed. Outside privies, which often emptied directly into the creek, were the standard means of sewage disposal in both company towns and rural areas of the region, but the greater density of population in the mining camps made sanitary conditions there more hazardous to public health. Although only 2 percent of the company communities had a functioning sewer system, over 70

81. *Ibid.*, 1471, Table 17.
82. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Housing By Employers*, 58.
83. Tams, *Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia*, 67–68; U.S. Department of Labor, Children's Bureau, *The Welfare of Children in Bituminous Coal Mining Communities in West Virginia*, by Nettie P. McGill, Publication No. 117 (Washington, D.C., 1923), 13; Thomas, "Coal Country," 282.

Company Mining Town, Red Ash, Kentucky. Courtesy of the Appalachian Photographic Archives, Alice Lloyd College.

percent of the miners' homes had electric lights.[84] Hung from the ceiling in the center of the room, these single bare bulbs were one of the few amenities of coal camp life.

The absence of sanitary facilities in the coal camps and the refuse from mining operations polluted land and water resources in the coal districts, causing serious health problems in some areas. Very few company towns provided for the regular disposal of refuse, and what could not be fed to the hogs was commonly dumped on the roadsides

84. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the U.S. Coal Commission*, Pt. III, 1473, Table 19. See also Children's Bureau, *The Welfare of Children in Coal Mining Communities*, 14–17.

or into the creeks. Investigators found that "garbage, tin cans, broken crockery, and other rubbish littered almost every road in some of the camps; in some, the almost stagnant creeks contained cans, wooden crates, bottles, and even old furniture, shoes, and clothing."[85] Chickens, hogs, ducks, and geese wandered freely in many communities, adding to the general disorder and unhealthiness. In places, sewage from open privies filled the creeks that ran through the center of town or drained into hollows and stood in stagnant pools. "On a hot summer day, the stench was almost unendurable."[86] Children suffered from hookworm, typhoid, and other maladies.[87] The pollution of the creeks and rivers from human waste and from the acid runoff of the mines was so great that around many of the streams the animal life completely disappeared. Yet, the coal companies showed little interest in such problems, arguing that coal could not be mined economically if they concerned themselves with ecology.[88]

The mountaineers had used the streams and forests for both livelihood and recreation, and in the new social order the natural environment continued to play an important, although much reduced, role. According to the Coal Commission, the provision for recreation and amusement in the majority of coal communities was "so meager as to be negligible."[89] A few of the larger companies provided activity centers with moving-picture theaters, gymnasiums, bowling alleys, pool tables, and soda fountains—all available for a small fee—but the average mining town had no such facilities. Most communities had a baseball team, and most miners owned a hunting rifle, but baseball and hunting were seasonal activities, and during most of the year there was little to do in the way of recreation.[90] Almost every camp, however, had its saloon. In those hectic days before World War I, when coal was king and wages were high, the boom-town saloon

85. Children's Bureau, *The Welfare of Children in Coal Mining Communities*, 16–17.
86. Thomas, *Life Among the Hills*, 11.
87. Children's Bureau, *The Welfare of Children in Coal Mining Communities*, 15–16.
88. Thomas, "Coal Country," 304.
89. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the U.S. Coal Commission*, Pt. III, 1432.
90. A semiprofessional league developed among the coal camps in southern West Virginia from 1915 to 1930. See Tams, *The Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia*, 55–56; the testimony of C.L. Workman before the "Borah Committee," U.S. Congress, Senate, *Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee of Education and Labor*, 63rd Cong., 1st Sess., Senate Hearings vol. 39 (Washington, D.C., 1913), 767–91.

became the focal center of entertainment in the isolated mining towns. Whiskey sold for ten cents a drink and full quart bottles for a dollar. Even during Prohibition, there was always a plentiful supply of moonshine available. On paydays, professional gamblers from Cincinnati, Richmond, and Louisville came to the region, bringing their paraphernalia for faro, roulette, chuck-a-luck, and birdcage, and entire communities became famous (or infamous) for their red-light districts or gaming hotels.[91] Such a wide-open atmosphere was conducive to a high rate of crime, and, as the desire to maintain social order in the mining communities increased, operators began to assert greater control over the activities of the camp saloons.

Churches and schools, traditional institutions for social stability, came late to the mining districts. County school systems, where they existed at all, were poor, understaffed, and scarcely adequate for the educational needs of rural mountaineers, let along those of a large mining population. Early coal operators, moreover, were little inclined to upgrade the educational system, since most of their initial employees were single men. Only as the industry matured and the desire to secure a more permanent and reliable family-based labor force emerged, did companies begin to construct schools or supplement local school funds. Although colliery schools were nominally headed by county superintendents, the coal company usually provided the building and supplies and contacted the teacher—deducting an "education fee" from the miner's monthly wages.[92] The construction of churches followed a similar pattern, with the initiative, however, coming from the miners themselves. Companies matched funds raised by the miners for the purpose of building a church but retained ownership of the property to assure its "proper" use.[93] Despite the potential threat of company control, almost every mining camp had two or three churches of independent denominations. Nationally organized churches, on the other hand, were reluctant to enter the company town.[94]

91. Tams, *The Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia*, 55–56. For a fascinating first-hand description of "Cinder Bottom" at Keystone, W. Va., see Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, App. III, 103–8.
92. George Wolfe to Justus Collins, 23 Aug. 1916, Justus Collins Papers, West Virginia Univ.
93. George Wolfe to Justus Collins, 7 Aug. 1916, *ibid*.
94. John Howard Melish, "The Church and the Company Town," *Survey* 33 (5 Dec. 1914), 263.

At the hub of community life in the isolated mining village was the company store. Usually located near the center of town, this structure housed the commissary, barber shop, post office, and whatever business offices the company required. A convenient place to shop and converse with neighbors and friends, the company store became the focal point of economic and social activity within the mining camp. Most commissaries offered a wide variety of merchandise, from food to home furnishings, all of which could be purchased on credit or with company scrip. Prices in these stores varied with location, but, on the whole, they were "uniformly higher than in independent stores in the same districts."[95] In isolated areas, commissary prices ranged from 5 to 12 percent higher than in areas where independent stores were nearby.[96] Operators, moreover, discouraged competition from independent retailers by refusing to allow outside merchants to set up shop on company land or to deliver goods and services within the company town. "I take the stand," wrote one coal operator, "that our people can trade where and when they please, but no outside team of these merchants . . . can come in on our property and deliver goods."[97] While the miner was not forced to purchase at the company store, subtle means of coercion could be employed where necessary. For the most part, patronage was inevitable, for the local commissary was certainly more convenient, and there was often no practical alternative. Such a system was a constant irritant to mine workers, especially since, as pioneer coal operator W.P. Tams readily admitted, "salaried employees were usually given their store goods at cost."[98]

Although most coal producers viewed the company store as an adjunct to the total mining operation, a few greatly abused the monopoly which the situation afforded. Charging "all the market would bear," they sought to make up from store profits whatever loss they incurred from selling coal below the cost of production.[99] Some

95. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the U.S. Coal Commission*, Pt. III, 1460.
96. *Ibid.*, 1457.
97. George Wolfe to Justus Collins, 4 Oct. 1913, Justus Collins Papers West Virginia Univ. Also see the testimony of C.L. Workman before the "Borah Committee," U.S. Congress, Senate, *Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee of Education and Labor*, 767–91.
98. Tams, *Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia*, 28. It should be pointed out that Tams was himself a pioneer coal operator.
99. *Ibid.*, 25, 52; Thomas, "Coal Country," 282–83; M. Michelson,

raked off similar benefits from the miners' burial fund and from deductions for doctors' fees and nurses' salaries. With the passage of state workmen's compensation laws after 1910, the operators sought to reduce their payments into the compensation fund by contracting with private hospitals to serve their employees and then deducting a charge for this "service" from each miner's monthly check. In this way, the workers were made to pay a part of the cost of their own hospitalization for industrial accidents which otherwise would have been free to them under the compensation law.[100]

Not every operator exploited the miners in this way, but even the most paternalistic coal baron balanced the cost of social services and the maintenance of the company town against the primary goal of maximizing profits. As one producer put it, "We are doing this as a business policy. A lot of this welfare work is done with that object in view. We think that it is good business. We have had no strikes in seventeen years."[101]

Repairs and upkeep on company dwellings, the provision for schools and churches, and the maintenance of the company store, therefore, were as much a product of business policy as paternalistic concern. "In places where some pains were taken to keep the houses painted," observed the Coal Commission, "it seemed to be done usually as a measure for preserving the property rather than to increase its attractiveness, for the colors were uniform, and frequently ugly, throughout the entire community."[102]

If aesthetic aspects were a minor consideration in the maintainance of residential dwellings, they were even less important in the planning of the town itself. In fact, systematic town planning as practiced in some of the English coal fields, for example, was almost unknown in the southern bituminous fields.[103] Trade journals and government agencies often urged mine owners to plan their towns with care and

"Feudalism and Civil War in the United States of America," *Everybody's Magazine* 28 (May 1913), 620.
100. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 77–81.
101. J.M. Vest, president and general manager of the Rum Creek Collieries Company, quoted in Arthur Gleason, "Company-owned Americans," *Nation* 110 (12 June 1920), 794.
102. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the U.S. Coal Commission*, Pt. III, 1431.
103. "The 'Company Community' In the American Coal Fields," *New Statesman* 30 (15 Oct. 1927), 7; Philip Nicolas Jones, *Colliery Settlement in the South Wales Coalfield, 1850–1926* (Oxford, England, 1969), 12.

periodically offered suggestions in the techniques of town development, but many early operators lacked the initiative or the capital to employ such techniques.[104] As a result, the average mining town evolved in a random, haphazard manner, reflecting a greater concern for ease and speed of construction and economy of operation than for permanence, comfort, or appearance.

Several company villages, however, did provide alternative models for community development in the region. Usually constructed by large corporations, these "model towns" were the ultimate attempt by southern coal operators to create "an ideal industrial community in which there was perfect harmony between employer and employees and all worked together each for the interest of the other."[105] Towns such as Holden (West Virginia), Widen (West Virginia), Jenkins (Kentucky), and Lynch (Kentucky) combined the best in housing construction, the most recent modern conveniences, and carefully planned streets and parks to produce a surburban atmosphere quite different from that of neighboring mining camps. The Consolidation Coal Company at Jenkins, for example, provided garbage and rubbish collection, a complete sewer system, and a company-owned dairy in its community plan; at Widen, the Elk River Coal Company added a swimming pool, an ice cream parlor, and a "well equipped hospital."[106] Holden, which one enthusiastic observer labeled "the model coal mining operation in the United States, if not the world," had a modern theater building and a clubhouse which included showers, a library, a reading room, two bowling alleys, and even "an up-to-date squash court."[107] Such communities offered a variety of social opportunities for the miner's family and presented a stark contrast to the average mining town. Yet, they typified less than 2

104. See George H. Miller, "Plan Your Town As Carefully As Your Plant," *Coal Age* 8 (20 July 1914), 130; K.B. Lohman, "A New Era for Mining Towns," *Coal Age* 8 (13 Nov. 1915), 799–800; Bureau of Mines, *Housing for Mining Towns*, by Joseph H. White, Bulletin No. 87 (Washington, D.C. 1914), 48f.

105. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Hearings Before the Committee on Education and Labor*, vol. 2, p. 872, testimony of Walter R. Thurmond, president of the Logan County Coal Operators' Association.

106. Alphonse F. Brosky, "Building a Town for a Mountain Community: A Glimpse of Jenkins and Nearby Villages," *Coal Age* 23 (5 April 1923), 560–63; Brosky, "Sociological Works Accomplished by the Consolidation Coal Company," *Coal Age* 15 (9 Jan. 1919), 54–58; Lane, *Civil War In West Virginia*, 33.

107. Lyman, "Coal Mining at Holden, West Virginia."

percent of all the company towns in the southern Appalachian coal fields and touched the lives of only a fraction of the mining population in the mountains.

One alternative, however, not only challenged the idea of the company town but the economic system behind it as well. In 1917, a group of Hungarian immigrants led by Henrich Himler established a model cooperative mining town in Martin County, Kentucky. Himler was an ex-coal miner, visionary, and editor of the *Hungarian Miner's Journal*, who hoped to provide a model community for Hungarian nationals and to test "the ideal of cooperation between labor and capital."[108] He selected a site of 3,200 acres on the Tug Fork of the Big Sandy River upon which to construct his mining town. Most of the houses in Himlerville had five rooms, plastered walls, two fireplaces, gas and electricity, a miner's wash house, and a vegetable garden. Each room in the new houses had two windows, and all of the houses were equipped with a tub and a shower. Miners could purchase the houses or build their own and fix them according to their liking. The town had a hotel, a bake shop, a weekly Hungarian newspaper, a library, an auditorium, and a modern ten-month school. By 1921, Himlerville was a growing community of over a thousand people.[109]

The economic life of the town was the Himler Coal Company—the first known cooperative coal-mining company in the United States.[110] Every employee of the mine was a stockholder in the company and shared in the profits. Himler himself controlled only 2 or 3 percent of the shares, and the rest were held by 1,500 individual stockholders. Of the eleven men on the mine's board of directors, all except President Himler were "common miners" elected by an annual convention. Each of the miners in Himlerville, regardless of his position, shared equally in any stock bonuses distributed by the company.[111] For several years, the unique venture thrived and even acquired additional coal lands, but in the mid-twenties the company became the victim of declining coal prices and competition from larger corporations. In 1927, the company was sold at auction to

108. Chapman, "The Influence of Coal in the Big Sandy Valley," 226.

109. Eugene S. Bagger, "Himler of Himlerville," *Survey* 48 (29 April 1922), 150, 187.

110. *Ibid.*, 146.

111. *Ibid.*, 149.

private capitalists, and the only effort at cooperative mining in the southern mountains came to an end.[112]

While Henrich Himler dreamed and sought to create a more desirable environment for his miners, most coal operators accepted the dismal surroundings of the average mining camp as a matter of course. "The absence of streets, sidewalks, grass, flowers, trees, and gardens," noted the Coal Commission, "is looked upon as a necessary concomitant of coal mining."[113] Some company officials tried to brighten the camp environment by offering prizes for the best gardens, the prettiest flower boxes, and the most attractive yards, but these efforts at community improvement were usually short-lived. Often, however, coal producers simply laid the blame for lawlessness and poor living conditions on the "class" of miners employed in the field—the immigrant from Italy, Hungary, and Poland; the black from the central and deep South; and the native mountaineer, fresh from the backwoods farm. "Unfortunately for him and for all concerned," an industry spokesman complained, "his standard of living is low, and it will take time to educate him out of his present methods." The company town, he admitted, was "no paradise," but the necessities and comforts of life were "well within the reach of the wage earner, if he can only be prevailed upon to take advantage of his opportunities."[114]

The desire to control this transient and undisciplined labor force was a major consideration in the construction of company towns. In a study conducted by the Department of Labor in 1920, mine operators listed a number of grounds for housing men in company dwellings. The need to attract a better class of miners, the advantage of greater efficiency, and the convenience of having men near the mine in case of emergency or accident were reasons most often mentioned by the majority of coal producers. Yet, among operators in the southern districts, a primary reason for company housing was "to give stability to the labor supply." One mine owner emphasized the utility of such housing as a labor-control device and bluntly declared that it had always been his purpose "to have men concentrated so as to have

112. Watson, "Economic and Cultural Development of Eastern Kentucky," 48; Chapman, "The Influence of Coal in the Big Sandy Valley," 234.
113. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the U.S. Coal Commission*, Pt. III, 1442.
114. Fowler, "Social and Industrial Conditions," 396.

proper supervision over them, to better control them in times of labor agitation and threatened strikes."[115]

The problem of labor stability was a major concern for southern coal operators, and this contributed to the degree of social control they wielded over life in the company town. As was indicated earlier, managers of mountain coal mines often bemoaned the irregular work habits and the high turnover rate of the mining population. White mountaineers "laid off" for planting and hunting, and blacks "vacationed" at home in the South during critical times of the year. Drawn from colliery to colliery by higher wages and better living conditions, early miners seldom settled at a mine for more than a year or two. "I have gone over the situation here tonight," wrote a perplexed coal producer in 1916, "and find that we are practically losing men as fast as we bring them in. We pay off every two weeks and after each pay-day there is a bunch that leaves. We will be confronted next week with a loss of from ten to fifteen of our best people."[116]

Operators faced with a constant labor shortage, therefore, made every effort to secure a more permanent, family-based mining force and to encourage "a spirit of contentment with the place." Schools, clubs, theaters, and churches became means not only of attracting a work force but of rendering a degree of stability as well. Even the local saloon—traditionally a disruptive influence on community life—became an instrument of social order and control. By constructing his own saloon, the operator hoped to regulate liquor consumption within the town and thus to assure the miner's presence at the shaft after a long weekend.[117]

As companies expanded their efforts to discipline the labor force, the weight of law enforcement assumed a larger role in colliery life. Operators hired guards to protect the interest and property of the plant and financed additional deputy sheriffs to keep peace in the county and in the mining camps. Under the new system, local officials virtually surrendered their authority to the coal producers, who became the sole arbiters of justice in the company-owned towns.

The power of the mine operator was pervasive, extending over almost every facet of village affairs. If a miner was selling his

115. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Housing by Employers*, 21.
116. George Wolfe to Justus Collins, 30 July 1916, Justus Collins Papers, West Virginia Univ.
117. P.J. Riley to Justus Collins, 3 June 1907, *ibid*.

home-brewed wine, or a woman was cheating on her husband, he would "learn of it, give them a warning and, if it continued, send them out of town." He divided the community into an "immigrant town," a "colored town," and an "American town" and enforced the social barriers between the three.[118] He regulated access to the town and restricted movement within it, and he "squelched with a heavy hand" any conduct or activity that hindered the production of coal.[119] His relationship to the miners, according to the courts, was not of landlord to tenant but of master to servant, and he occasionally found the need to exercise the master's right by evicting undesirable visitors or inspecting the miners' homes.[120] Employer, merchant, and master, he sought to apply the principles of business efficiency to the social demands of the mining town. Convinced that the miners' interests were identical to those of the company, he ruled the town as he ruled the mine, without opposition or debate. Under these conditions, the company town was a closed community, and most coal operators were determined that it should remain that way.

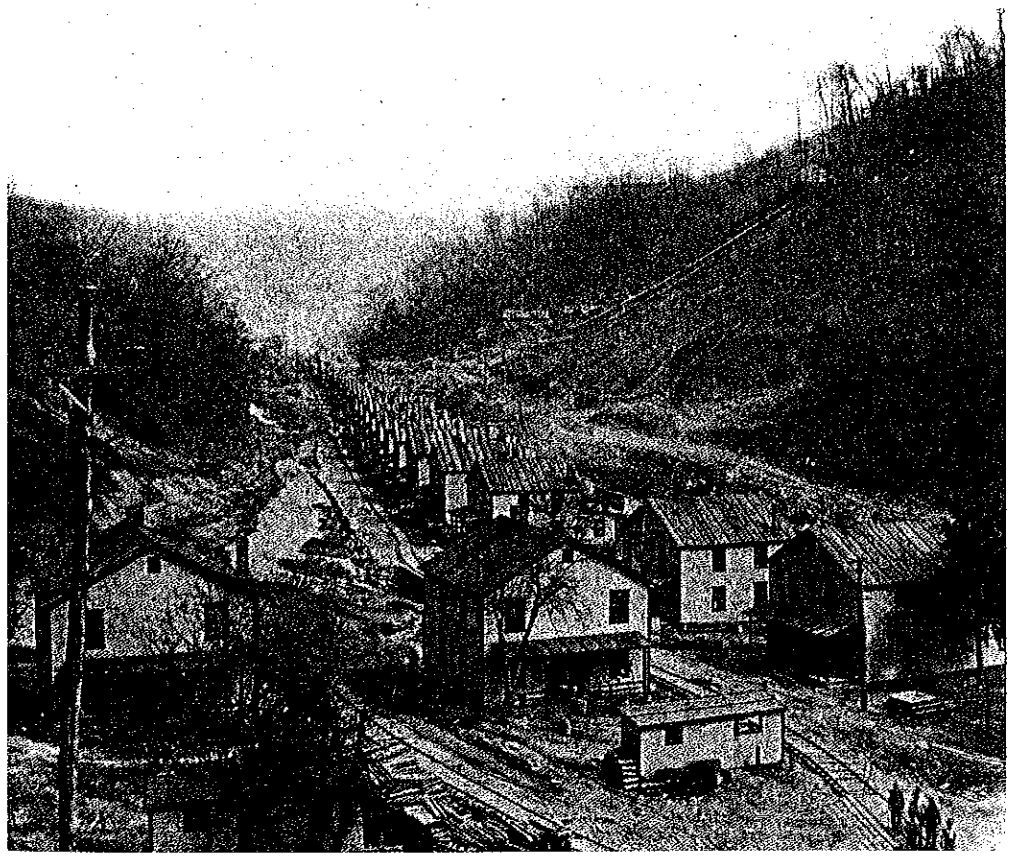
The mining settlements of Appalachia, therefore, differed greatly from other small, isolated American towns. Dominated by a single industry, the company town offered few of the amenities of ordinary community life. There were usually no public places and few public roads except the bed of the creek which flowed between the mountain walls. The company controlled or owned the land and furnished the houses, stores, churches, and schools. There were no public agencies to provide for social welfare, and residents had little voice in the management of public affairs. It was a most atypical town, one that strictly limited personal and social liberty and left its residents powerless to control their own destinies.

It was in this setting that many of the mountaineers first confronted the industrial age. While the company town reinforced many old values, it severely altered others and helped to channel the direction of new attitudes and beliefs. Preindustrial mountain society had been based upon a system of small, independent family farms, clustered together in diffuse open-country neighborhoods. There had been few established villages, and the cultural complex of rural life had oper-

118. Laurence Leamer, "Twilight For a Baron: Major William Purviance Tams, Jr.," *Playboy*, May 1973, p. 168.

119. Justus Collins to Jairus Collins, 18 Sept. 1897, Justus Collins Papers, West Virginia Univ.

120. For a discussion of the master-servant relationship, see U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the U.S. Coal Commission*, Pt. I, 169.



Haymond, Kentucky c 1914. Courtesy of the Appalachian Photographic Archives, Alice Lloyd College.

ated against the formation of organized communities. The mountaineer's primary responsibility had been to himself and his family, and his relationship to neighbors had usually been informal. His experience in the company town did little to change these traditional values, since miners were highly mobile and had no direct political control of their communities through any town elections.[121] Life on the farm, moreover, had taught him that his future depended not so

121. Even in county elections, candidates were usually "company men."

much upon his own activities as upon the impersonal forces of nature. In the company town, he realized that those impersonal forces lay outside the community—in the decisions of managers in the head office, government policies, and the fluctuations of the coal market. Except for his decision to stay or leave, persons other than himself made the decisions affecting his life. Thus, he was individualistic, fatalistic, and present-oriented, and his powerless situation in the company town augmented these traits.[122]

The impact of the company mining settlement on patterns of social organization in the mountains was predictably disruptive, since it dramatically altered the mountaineer's economic and social status. On the farm, the mountaineer had been master of his own fate, the social equal of any man in his community. In coming to the mining camp, he had exchanged that independence for subordination to the coal company and dependence upon a cash income. Under the new industrial system, he not only worked in the company's mine, digging the company's coal and taking orders from the company bosses, but he also lived in the company's house in the hollow near the tipple along with others of his rank. His "superiors" almost always lived in more comfortable housing separated by considerable distance from the houses of the mining class. Local mine owners often built palatial residences high on the hillsides overlooking the town.[123] Absentee owners and major stockholders were even more remote, economically and geographically, from the workers whose lives they controlled.

In addition to his occupation and the location of his household, the mountaineer's lack of home ownership also defined his new position in the social order. The company owned or leased all of the land in and around the mining town and consistently refused to sell or sublet to individual miners. The mountaineer, whose family and culture tied him to the region, had no opportunity, therefore, to purchase property or acquire a home. This lack of home ownership sorely disturbed many mountain residents, as the testimony of miner C.L. Workman before the Borah Committee in 1913 confirms:

SENATOR KENYON: "There is a home spirit there, is there?"
MR. WORKMAN: "Yes, Sir."

122. See Knipe and Lewis, "The Impact of Coal Mining," 25–37.
123. Gillenwater, "Cultural and Historical Geography of Mining Settlements," 87; Lyman, "Coal Mining at Holden, West Virginia," 1171.

SENATOR KENYON: "What do you say about people, men and women, becoming attached to that country up there?"
MR. WORKMAN: "They are to some extent. They seem to have the idea . . . that they are the men who used to own the land, a great many old settlers and their children, and they built up the mines, and they are living there and have lived there and have their places of residence there, and they think they should have a home there in time of peace or strike until either the coal people or the miners have settled their differences. They look on it as their homes, in the West Virginia hills."[124]

The miner's anomalous position in company housing, moreover, added to the insecurity of his status. Tenancy was conditional upon a man's service to the mine, and when a worker left his job "for any cause whatsoever," he lost the right to occupy his house as well. A sudden altercation with the mine boss might end in discharge and simultaneous loss of shelter for the miner's family.[125]

Miners reacted to this insecurity and expressed their discontent with conditions in the company towns in a variety of ways. Despite the coal operators' efforts at social control, mobility remained high in the southern coal fields throughout the period from 1900 to 1930. Miners constantly drifted from mine to mine searching for higher pay and better living and working conditions. Whereas over 90 percent of the families in the northern coal fields in 1923 had remained in the same district for five years or more, only 26 percent of mining families in southern West Virginia had lived in the same community for that long. After 1915, immigrants and blacks began to leave the mountains in large numbers, as quickly as opportunities arose. Most hoped for a better future in the urban Midwest and East.

When migration was impractical or impossible, miners vented their discontent in almost unceasing efforts to unionize the mountain coal fields. The bloody mine wars that rocked the mountains every decade from 1893 to 1933 reflected the miners' overwhelming desire for greater social freedom. Although wages and working conditions were important factors in these strikes, the elimination of mine guards, overpricing at the company store, assembly and visitation

124. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor*, 789–90.
125. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the U.S. Coal Commission*, Pt. III, 1438.

restrictions, and other issues of civil liberty were almost always major areas of concern. Urban journalists commonly attributed the violence of this period in Appalachia to some innate cultural characteristic of the mountaineers, but violence was less a holdover from the frontier than a response to the conditions of industrialism.[126] In fact, the intensity with which the miners fought the more powerful coal companies was an accurate measure of their frustration with a subservient life.

Thus, company towns, as they evolved in the southern mountains, functioned to limit the growth of social freedom and self-determination and to heighten social tensions and insecurities within the region. Unlike the industrial towns of the Northeast, the textile towns of the South, or in fact the majority of American industrial communities, the coal towns of Appalachia were new communities imposed upon a region in which formal social ties were few. They provided an expedient means of urban development but created a system of closed, artificial communities that restricted rather than induced economic growth. By monopolizing almost every aspect of community life, company towns effectively blocked the growth of local retail enterprises and diversified or supporting industries that might have accompanied coal mining. Since the profits from mining went to nonresident owners, the only benefit that might have accrued to the region itself was the miners' wages. But, under the closed company town system, these too flowed largely out of the mountains. The same modernizing forces that oversaw the transition in land ownership and the emergence of a new economic order in the mountains also shaped the new social environment of the region. And like so much accompanying industrialization, that environment was not of the mountaineer's own choosing.

126. See Gordon Bartlett McKinney, "Industrialization and Violence in Appalachia in the 1890's," in *An Appalachian Symposium*, ed. J.W. Williamson (Boone, N.C., 1977), 131–44.

PROFITS AND POWER: THE COAL BARONS

I believe that ambitious men in democracies . . . care much more for success than for fame. What they most ask of men is obedience, what they most covet is empire.

—Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

FEW American businessmen exemplified de Tocqueville's "ambitious men in democracies" better than the coal barons of the Appalachian South.[1] Carriers of industrialization into an agrarian and sparsely settled land, they were harbingers of a new age, energetic pioneers of an emerging New South. "Men of vision, faith, courage, and skill," in a few short decades they transformed "a veritable wilderness into one of the world's richest coal fields."[2] Yet, as one critic has written, "surely no group of men so symbolized all that was evil and brutalizing about the early years of industrial capitalism as did the coal barons."[3] Entering upon a region of serried hills matted in a dense forest of virgin hemlocks, poplars, oaks, and laurel, they left the land scarred and barren, covered with the black residue of coking ovens, coal tipples, and slag piles. Finding few established communities, they became the feudal lords of closed company towns in which mountaineers exchanged their traditional independence for an existence characterized by "dependency, powerlessness, and a lack of autonomy."[4]

Historians have long recognized the important role which the coal operators played in the drama of Appalachian development. Often the sole ministers of authority within the coal districts, they formed a

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, 1966), 607.
2. Thurmond, *Logan Coal Field*, 84. See also Conley, *History of the West Virginia Coal Industry*; Tams, *Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia*.
3. Leamer, "Twilight For a Baron," 114. See also Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, 112–37.
4. Knipe and Lewis, "The Impact of Coal Mining," 35.