

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Coal Mining Project

Tippecanoe Area

O. H. 636

ELPHA OAKLEY

Interviewed

by

Judy Rasmussen

on

May 13, 1978

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Coal Mining Project

INTERVIEWEE: ELPHA OAKLEY

INTERVIEWER: Judy Rasmussen

SUBJECT: size, location of mine, type of shaft,
shutdown

DATE: May 13, 1978

R: This is an interview with Mrs. Elpha Oakley for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Mining, at 10:00, May 13, 1978, at 1617 Bancroft Avenue.

Mrs. Oakley, you used to play in the mines in Austintown?

O: I used to run around them when I was small. I played around them, but I wasn't allowed to go down in them.

R: Whereabouts were they located?

O: They were located from Four Mile Run Road down to Racoon Road on the north side of Mahoning Avenue.

R: Do you have any idea how big they were?

O: No, I really don't, because I was just in grade school. It wasn't of any interest to me at that time.

R: Have you gone back to see where they were?

O: No, not exactly, because I don't know anybody out there now. When my aunt and uncle lived there I went out there. That was all the farther I went though.

R: Your family used to own a lot of land out by Canfield, were there any mines located out there?

O: On Tippecanoe Road there was. It's right across from the Tippecanoe Country Club. I used to play around there because that was my grandmother's farm. We were always around there.

- R: Can you remember how you found out they were mines when you were little?
- O: It had a regular mine shaft with wood and everything. We were taken down to see where the mines were and told to stay out of there. I went down just a little bit into them.
- R: Did they look very deep?
- O: Yes.
- R: Had you heard about any other mines?
- O: I don't know if they were mines; they were called tunnels. They are out on Route 224, past Tippecanoe. It used to be the Huffman Farm on the left-hand side. It ~~was~~ the first house after Starr's Corners. They used to bring the slaves in ~~from~~ from the south. They closed it up not too long ago. It was an underground tunnel, like a railroad tunnel where they used to bring slaves up from the south. They have it closed now. When I was in grade school they went down and showed us where it was.
- R: The mines that you've known, do you have any idea how much area they take up underneath the ground?
- O: I don't know how many tunnels, no.
- R: How big they were; how much land they took up?
- O: On Four Mile Run Road it would be all that section through there from Four Miles Run up to Racoon Road, which is quite a ways. It slants off in different directions. I don't know how many acres of that my family owned.
- R: When you moved out there can you remember if your parents remembered?
- O: They knew a long time even before I was born that they were there. They were there for years, those mines.
- R: Did your parents use them to get coal?
- O: On Tippecanoe they did. We had somebody else in there mining them. As far as the mine on Mahoning Avenue, all my relatives got it, but not us, because we had one on Tippecanoe. We had our own free supply of coal; I wish we did now. When my grandparents died we sold that. Now they are building houses there and I'm wondering if their houses are going to be safe.
- R: Did your dad build any outhouses on the farm?

O: We had a modern farm.

R: Mrs. Oakley, how long ago did you live on the farm?

O: We moved in when I was in junior high school. Every time I get a chance I go back. I have a lot of relatives on farms, and I like it and go back every chance I get.

R: Is a lot of your farm still intact or is it divided up?

O: Portions of it are.

R: Can you remember how they got the coal out?

O: They drilled for it.

R: They went down inside the shaft?

O: Yes. I can remember faintly that they drilled it on Tippecanoe. I know some of the men went down on ropes and boards.

R: Once they mined the coal, how would they get it up?

O: They pulled it up in a basket.

R: How many men would usually work on it?

O: Usually ten. It wasn't a big mine. They worked in one shaft or something.

R: Was it very far away from your house?

O: No. If you walked across the field it would be about a fourth of a mile. You could see it from my place on Route 224 where we lived. You could see them working down there.

R: Do you remember if it was a company that came in to mine your coal, or did your father hire some men?

O: It was a company, but I don't remember the name.

R: Did you ever exchange the coal with your neighbors for labor or anything else?

O: I think we all shared. Only one or two families lived there that weren't related to us. We helped each other out with milk or something else. Nobody was really poor there; we did it to be neighborly.

R: What time was this?

O: Up to 1941.

R: You lived there through the world war?

O: Yes.

R: Was there enough coal that you could sell for World War II?

O: No. It was going out at that time.

R: Do you think there is any coal down there now?

O: At that time they closed it I don't think they went in any farther. There could very well be. They didn't go back in as far as they probably should have.

R: How did they close it up? Were you there?

O: They just put boxes in; I think you could still find it. I don't know what they did when they sold the farm. Until they sold the farm you could go there and look down in it. They closed it up to where they just put boards and things across it. When the contractor started to build I don't know how they closed it up. It would probably be a lot of work to reopen it. You would have to drain all that water out. I think people thought it would be expensive and they just closed it up and sold it in lots.

R: Did they dump anything inside of it?

O: No, they just put the boards and things across it. They probably filled it up with dirt and things.

R: Do you remember how deep if you looked down . . .

O: You couldn't see the bottom.

R: It would be pretty frightening as a kid.

O: No, not really. I think it would be more frightening now. Kids don't think of the depth of that thing.

R: How much longer after they closed up the mine did you leave the farm?

O: It was still open when I left the farm.

R: Did you go back?

O: I went out and visited there once in a while. They quit working on it shortly after we left.

R: You mentioned that the mine started to empty out. Do you

- think there were any other reasons why they decided to close it up?
- O: No, I don't think so. They probably just didn't want to keep on digging because it would be more expensive. At that time there was other fuel coming in that they could use. I think they ran out of money or something.
- R: Do you remember any accidents happening around there?
- O: No. There weren't that many accidents a long time ago in small mines like that. Probably in these big mines there were accidents, but when there were so very few men working there wouldn't be so many accidents because they would watch out for themselves.
- R: Would they work a full day on your mine just getting it out?
- O: Yes.
- R: Eight or ten hours?
- O: They would probably work six to eight hours.
- R: After they brought it up how would they get it away?
- O: Trucks. They had a coal mine right across from my grandmother's where we would take the coal. They would sell some of it.
- R: Can you remember how much it was going for?
- O: No. I wish I did. It was probably a dollar a load. I think they stopped it because gas and oil were coming in and it was expensive. I don't think there was that much coal to worry about it.
- R: Your supply in the mine, what the men dug out would support you and your relatives?
- O: Yes. It was enough at that time. Then I think it was deleted.
- R: Can you remember what kind of tools they used, what kind of tools they took down into the mines?
- O: Picks and shovels.
- R: Have you ever heard about them using dogs to take coal out of the mine?
- O: No. They only had watchdogs.

R: Can you remember at all about the men who were the miners?

O: They were just ordinary men. They had coveralls on and were grubby looking.

R: Do you have any idea who dug out the mine?

O: No. It was probably my great-grandfathers. My relatives probably just kept doing it then.

R: Do you know how long it lasted, how many years?

O: No.

R: Can you remember the Tippecanoe mines?

O: Yes.

R: Was that shaft like the one at your house?

O: That was the same one.

R: There is another mine that you were talking about?

O: It was Tippecanoe too, right across from my grandmother's. They dug the coal up.

R: Do you know if it is closed up?

O: Yes, it has been closed up for a long time.

R: Was it an open shaft like the one near your house?

O: There was a shaft, but it wasn't open where you could walk into it.

R: Would the same men work on that one?

O: I believe so. That is where they took most of the coal when they dug anyway. I remember trucks going in there and picking up the coal.

R: Do you have any idea where they took it?

O: They sold it. I don't know if they sold it to the different coal companies or whether they sold it to private dealers.

R: Do you remember seeing the other mine?

O: I remember seeing both of them.

R: How would they get it out?

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O: They would just dig it with picks and things. It was more or less on top of the ground than down under.

END OF INTERVIEW