

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Mining Project

East Palestine Area

O. H. 650

STANLEY TAUCHER

Interviewed

by

Samuel Kirkland

on

February 28, 1981

STANLEY TAUCHER

Stanley Taucher was born in an area east of East Palestine, Ohio, known as "Little Austria," a community composed of Austrian immigrants who worked in the Mullin's State Line Coal Company Mine. Stanley's parents and relatives had come to America in 1907 to escape the treachery and poor living conditions in the Austrian - Hungarian Empire.

Stanley grew up in what is considered the stereotype of "Coal Towns" or "Company Towns" where each home was exactly the same as the next and where each community member's head of household worked in the "pits." At the age of seven, Stanley's family moved to a farm near East Palestine. And at the age of sixteen, Stanley joined his father in the mines as an apprentice miner.

Mr. Taucher worked in the mining industry until the late 1950's when underground mining no longer existed in his home area. His days at work consisted of every detail of mining; from "undercutting the face" by hand with a pick; to drilling "powder holes" with a "Breastauger" for blasting; to rolling his "black powder" in newspaper for sticks of explosives; to setting the charge with a "squibb"; to loading the loose coal into mine cars by hand. He experienced such common occurrences as having to clear methane gas by igniting it and having it explode out the "room" or having overcharged an explosive charge and having the roof fall in upon detonation. Luckily, he experienced only minor accidents in the mines where he

worked and recalls of no major Ohio fatalities.

Mr. Taucher was forced to leave his underground mining career due to the fact that large surface mining equipment began to revolutionize mining where the seams were near the surface, which is what is prevalent in Columbiana County. At that time, in the late 1950's, he found employment with the National Rubber Company in Columbiana, Ohio, where he worked until he retirement in 1976.

At the present, Mr. Taucher is enjoying his retirement by tending the property which his family purchased in 1918, and assisting Professor Anne Harris of Youngstown State University on a research project in mining of the region.

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INTERVIEWEE: STANELY TAUCHER

INTERVIEWER: Samuel Kirkland

SUBJECT: child labor, mine conditions, hand loading,
black powder

DATE: February 28, 1981

K: This is an interview with Stanley Taucher for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on mining, by Samuel Kirkland, at 6411 Jimtown Road, East Palestine, Ohio, on February 28, at 2:00 p.m.

T: I lived in Pennsylvania in company houses where the mine was located where my dad worked. I was seven years old when we moved from there. In all that time my dad worked in State Line Mine until 1912 when they had the strike.

K: State Line Mine, who was that owned by?

T: The Mullin people from Pittsburgh. They owned the railroad, I guess. The Mullins were big backers of the railroad. They opened that mine, and that coal that came from that mine was furnished to run the trains when they would come from Pittsburgh. That is where they would stop and fill up their hoppers. There was no custom coal or anything like that. It all went to the railroad.

K: What was it like growing up? Was that like a coal mining town?

T: Everybody there worked in the mine.

K: What do you remember about the town?

T: All the people that were there came from Austria. It was the Austrain-Hungarian Empire, and there was Slovenian, Croatia, Slovak, and Austrian that spoke German. Everyone that came from the Austrian-Hungarian Empire could keep their own language, but they had to learn to speak the German

language. My dad was in the Austrian Army and all of his commands were in German. They were taught two languages when they were going to school.

K: What year did your dad come here, do you know?

T: 1907.

K: Do you know the reason why he came?

T: To work in the mines.

K: Had he been a miner in Austria?

T: He helped build a tunnel that went from Austria through the Bavarian Mountains. It is probably still in use. He had that mining experience plus he had an uncle here that had been here for thirty years before that. My dad got ahold of his address and he needed \$36 to buy a ticket for the passage. After his service with the armed forces in Austria his sister lent him the money to come here and get a job working in the mines with my uncle. When he got here they sewed his name and address on his coat because he didn't know how to speak English. When he landed in New York they looked on his jacket. You had to have a physical exam before you were allowed into the country. If you had diptheria, lung disease, or heart trouble they would ship you back. He made it because he came out of the Army over there. They looked at his address on his coat; the man that took the \$36 put his name there. He went to East Palestine and my uncle knew that he was coming and they walked from East Palestine to where he lived on the hill.

K: The company town that you lived in, did it have a special name?

T: They called it "Little Austria"; that's the only name it had.

K: If you were to go there today where would it be located?

T: It's over on State Line Road between Palestine and Negley. When my dad got here he had the job already. He had to go to buy his own mining clothes and tools. He went to Skarbald's to buy his clothing; the man was German and he could speak with him. His store was in East Palestine. Then P. C. Hawke had the hardware store where he bought the miner's tools. Skarbald went with my dad over to Hawke's store, which was right next door, and did the talking for my dad to Hawke. He bought the tools and ~~took~~ took them straight to the mine and left them there and the next morning went to work.

K: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

- T: There were eleven of us all together.
- K: Were you the baby or the oldest?
- T: I was next to the oldest.
- K: While you were growing up in "Little Austria" you didn't have any brothers or sisters working in the mine?
- T: No. When I was seven years old we moved to the farm where we're at right now. There was Ulbrich Mine up here; that was custom coal. My dad, in the meantime, got a job in McGraw Rubber Works from 1914 to 1923.
- K: Where was that located?
- T: Right in Palestine where Nash used to be.
- K: Did he go out of the mines because of the strike in 1912?
- T: Yes.
- K: Do you remember the strike? What was it like?
- T: The strike lasted ten months. When the strike first came in 1912 my dad got a job down in Washington County, Pennsylvania. He worked down there about a month or two and he couldn't make ends meet so he came back home. He had to send \$1.75 back all the time he worked down there to pay his board.
- K: The State Line Mine, how many guys would have worked there?
- T: At one time there were 400 men working there.
- K: Did they work three shifts?
- T: No, just one shift. Being that it was all pick work, a good, top producer in the mine was five ton in a day. It was a lot of hard work.
- K: Do you remember what they would have made in 1921?
- T: Seventy cents a ton.
- K: Was that two men loading that ton?
- T: One man. All he got was 70¢; there was no hourly rate, guaranteed rate, or anything.
- K: Did he get paid for slack?
- T: No. That is what the strike was about in 1912 for run-of-mine coal. They loaded run-of-mine coal, but when it was

taken out and it was dumped into the hopper, which was your scale and there was a screen that the coal slid down over, all of the fine slack went through the screen and the rest stopped in the hopper and that was what you got in weight is what went over the screen. The miners wanted pay for that coal that they loaded out of the mine. They had no other incentive pay or anything.

K: As a little boy did you ever run up to the mine and meet your dad after work?

T: Yes.

K: What was that like when the whistle blew?

T: They didn't have a whistle. Every miner carried a pocket-watch, one of the dollar watches; he kept his time. When you got in there you had your carload and everybody got a turn. Then they would start back and you would get another turn. About five to six cars made five tons of coal. In between while you were waiting for cars you were getting ready for another shot.

K: When you fired did you use black powder and squibs?

T: Yes.

K: When you were undercutting with a pick did you have to go down on one knee?

T: No. You sat down when you first started. You put your shovel under one knee. You were in a horizontal position when you were doing it.

K: How far back could you reach in there?

T: About three and one half feet.

K: How wide of a cut would you make with your pick?

T: First you took a cut about ten inches deep and about three inches high across. Then you would take another cut about three inches high and about ten inches deep and you would snub down again. You were going down on a taper. Then you would take another ten inch cut, which made about thirty inches, and you would snub down for the last time. You had about three inches left. Your last draw you took across you took as deep as you could. That would make that pretty close to forty inches deep and three feet and a half. A shovel handle was three feet and a half; when you shoveled the coal out from under where you made the cut with your pick the handle would be about flush with the front of it.

You had to do that so you could figure your powder. If you didn't go deep enough you didn't need as much powder to blow the coal out. If you went deeper then you had to add another inch or two of powder. On your planker shot you had a scraper to scrape the hole after you drilled it to put your powder in.

K: How hard drilling was it?

T: Not too hard. You would lay that scraper. If you had good shooting coal you would take about a half of a pick handle on the hard. You eliminated about three or four feet in the middle that you didn't have to dig at any time. You had to give it a little extra powder.

K: Did you use less powder to get bigger lump coal?

T: Yes.

K: Was it easier to load that way?

T: The more lumps the better. They didn't care if it was slack at all. Since we had the run-of-mine contract we had to load it out. They had to pay you for loading it.

K: I see why they didn't pay you for run-of-mine. That's easier to load and if they paid you for it you would get more run-of-mine coal. If you didn't then you would have more lump coal.

T: Right.

K: Did you ever have any bad shots?

T: Yes. When you had a bad shot you had to pick it off if you had to mine wedge. Maybe it came loose a little bit from the ceiling, but then you put your wedge in there and wedged it down. That is what they called a sticker. After you dug two or three of those shots down and you didn't get another shot made until the next day, you didn't load any coal and make any money.

K: So you were sure to get that shot down?

T: You always gave it an extra half inch of powder.

K: Did you ever blow through on anybody or see anybody get hurt with powder?

T: No. There were accidents where a miner lit his shot and it didn't go. He waited and waited. The rule was that if the second shot didn't go, go home and forget about it, and come back the next day; then shoot it the next night.

You could only shoot when quitting time was coming up on account of the smoke, so it could clear out of the mine during the night. This one guy went back that night and just as he got up to the end of his room neck the shot went off, and it threw coal in his face and almost blinded him.

K: What year would that have been?

T: Around 1920.

K: That was State Line Mine?

T: Yes.

K: What about your air, did you have good air?

T: Yes. Most of the mines had a shaft. State Line Mine had fans, steam-driven fans. They generally had a boiler there to fire to run that steam engine and that would run the fans.

K: How deep was that coal?

T: State Line Mine had started out about five and a half feet thick. When they got here two miles away it was down to about four feet.

K: That is still pretty nice coal. Would that have been No. 6 coal?

T: Yes. It was lower Pittsburgh. No. 8 vein was Pittsburgh coal. We never had any 8 here. There were signs of it on the big hills, eighteen to twenty-four inches, but it was too dirty.

K: You had pretty good air up in the rooms though?

T: Yes. The air varied from the way the weather was outside. If we had damp and heavy air and no wind blowing it would get a little bit foggy in the mine. You could tell it was raining or something and the air was still. On a windy day the air would be as clear as a bell. When a room was finished it was filled off with dirt so that the air went to the next room. The entry would always be two or three rooms ahead. Sometimes the air would get bad up in the entry because he was 50 to 75 yards ahead of the air. The entry had to be driven all the time. When a miner finished a room he took the next room off the entry. There were rooms opposite each other.

K: You had two entries right, an intake and a return?

T: No, one entry.

- K: What was your return air? How did they bring the air into the sections?
- T: The air would enter on the air course side and then it would come to the entry. The air traveled to the entry and then back through the air course. Your air shaft was on the air course return; it wasn't on the entry. That is what drew it out.
- K: The fans were out on the shaft outside?
- T: If they used a fan. Most of the small mines that only went 300 or 400 yards didn't use a fan. State Line went miles; it was seven and a half miles long all together.
- K: Did State Line have a bathhouse in the office for the men?
- T: No.
- K: Did they have men in different sections?
- T: Yes. A butt entry was six feet wide. One hundred yards down was another entry. There were about twenty rooms on one side. Driving a butt entry wasn't hard to do because the face went with the butt entry. It was harder to shoot, to get your shoot to knock it down. You had narrow work.
- K: Your family moved to the farm seven years after you were born. What year would that have been?
- T: 1919.
- K: Was the State Line Mine still working then?
- T: It finished up. After the war was finished they started pulling the rails and track.
- K: Was your dad paid in cash or script?
- T: I don't know.
- K: Did they have a company store in "Little Austria"?
- T: No.
- K: What was it like being a kid in this little coal town? What did you do for fun?
- T: Mostly we had wagons to pull ourselves around in the summertime and sleds in the wintertime.
- K: My dad said he got one pair of pants a year, right before school.

T: You got a pair of pants, a shirt, and new shoes. That was to last you all winter for school.

K: What did you do with shoes in the summer?

T: Barefoot.

K: What about haircuts, how many of them did you get a year?

T: I got a haircut before I went to school and a haircut in Spring and Fall.

K: What kind of haircut did you get in the Spring?

T: A bald head.

K: Did you ever work in the State Line pit, go in with your dad at all?

T: No, but I was in it when I was a kid, just before they shut down. It was during the war in 1918. It was just before we moved. They were drawing stumps.

K: What do you remember about it as a kid?

T: The man had a place in there that would fill up with water over the weekend, maybe 400 or 600 gallons of water where they were working at the time. On Sunday night he would get a mule and a cart and go into this place where there was a tank water car. He would haul this water out. Me and two other kids wanted to go with him. He took us back to where he left the cart and then he went in about 100 yards to load his tank car. We sat there in the dark bawling. We could hear him, but we couldn't see his light. He would take it to where the water would run out of the mine. He had a powder keg that he had the end knocked out of to get the water into this car. The powder keg held about two gallons of water. He made four trips and it took him a little over a half of an hour for each trip. He put the water tank car away into a siding and then came up with the mule and hooked it onto the other end of the car and brought us back out.

K: They didn't have pumps?

T: No, they got pumps later. After the 1912 strike they didn't do anything but take stumps out of the mine.

K: When did you start in the mines?

T: I started working at Red Hill Coal Mine when I was thirteen years old.

K: Where was that?

- T: It was a continuation from State Line in Ohio to State Line in Pennsylvania. Mullin Coal Company sold out all the holding that they had on State Line that was on No. 6 and No. 7. The No. 7 just started in 1912.
- K: The No. 7 seam?
- T: Yes. It was the Laughlin Coal Company on this side of Red Hill in Pennsylvania and then it was Wilson & Beagle who bought out the Mullin holdings in State Line Mine. They started to mine over there in 1912.
- K: Why did you go to work in the mines? Did your parents tell you you had to quit school and help support the family?
- T: That was the rule. When your summer vacation came in school if your dad wanted you to go into the mine you went in with him because he got an extra return, a boy's card they called it. My dad would get an extra return because he had a boy. He would make another dollar a day more. They paid every 1st and 15th; that would be \$15 a pay more every pay.
- K: That would be 1924 that you went in?
- T: Yes.
- K: Did you decide not to go back to school then?
- T: I sort of liked to go in the mine with my dad in the summer time. When my dad quit at Red Hill he got a job at Southern Mine.
- K: Where is that?
- T: It's on Negley's side of Rt. 170. There I even went in on Saturday's with him. My dad worked there about three years and then he worked in the Patty Murphy Mine.
- K: He worked at the Southern Mine from 1924?
- T: No. I worked at Red Hill one summer and then I was fourteen and I went to the Southern Mine. The coal that we dug there went to electrical factories in Palestine to fire their kilns.
- K: When did you leave Red Hill?
- T: I left Red Hill in 1925. Then I went to Southern and worked there through 1927. I was sixteen years old then. From there I went to the brickyard in West Darlington, Pennsylvania. The brickyards at that time ran from March 1st to November 1st. Then they shut them down for four months during the winter. Those four months in the wintertime I went to work in the mine for Ed Ulbrich. I drove ponies. My dad was working

in there driving entry. Negley Coal Mine had been mined out and my dad was driving through a break that came up from the No. 6 mine up the No. 7. They had drawn the stumps in No. 6 and the bottom of No. 7 dropped down. He told me he had a good room for me in the mine and he gave me a room in that break. I was sixteen and wasn't allowed a room by myself until this age.

K: State Line pit and Southern were all non-gassy mines, right?

T: Right.

K: Did the foreman ever have bud lights that he tested for gas?

T: No, we used carbide light, open flame.

K: He never carried a bud lamp?

T: No.

K: Do you remember any fires in the mine?

T: No, not here. The big mines were State Line Mine and Prospect Mine in Jimtown.

K: How many men were at Prospect?

T: About 200. Then they had the Negley mine and there were about 200 men that worked there. There was the New Waterford Mine; I think they carried around 150 men. This is before the 1920's. New Waterford Mine and State Line Mine, if one didn't have coal for the railroad the other one did. When the railroad first went through here in 1868 right after the Civil War, they had to get fuel someplace, so they picked up the coal. When they went through the west they had lumber men cutting lumber to fire their engines.

K: That's when these mines started here?

T: Yes, when the railroad went through. Before that almost every farm around here had a little mine to mine their own coal for their own domestic use.

There was also the Negley Coal Mine, Powers & Moore. Powers started the mine in Negley.

K: Were most of the mine owners hard to get along with?

T: No. Jimmy Southern was a nice man as was Patty Murphy. Powers & Moore owned it, but Patty Murphy was the superintendent of the mine.

K: What about union, were you a UMW man?

T: Yes. That came back after Roosevelt came in. We had no union around here, but they still paid for run-of-mine coal to the mine. We had no union until Roosevelt got in though. If you were working and driving an entry you got yardage; you got a little over \$2 a yard. You could only load about two ton of coal a day; that would be \$1.40. The coal was 70¢ a ton once you loaded it. On yardage on the entry you got \$4.50 a yard for narrow work. For turning your room from the entry you got \$12 yardage, and 70¢ a ton for all coal that you took out. Then they paid you so much to set these posts, like a cent or a cent and a half. When you took out coal you brought up your posts up close to your shot because you shot that off.

K: What year was it the unions came in here?

T: 1933. The strip mines came in around 1935, and that was the end of mining around here, deep mining.

K: Do you remember who one of the first strippers was around here?

T: Fred Eskire.

K: What did you underground miners think of the strippers?

T: Nothing; we were glad to see them come in because we got a job working in the strip mines.

K: What about the union, do you remember how you guys were organized? Did you ever see John L. Lewis come around?

T: No, he didn't come here; we weren't big enough. The most that we had after we organized was about 70 men. They were from all the mines around Waterford and Negley, Rogers, and Darlington. Some mines only had three or four, others had a dozen men.

K: What did you guys think about the union?

T: Fred Warner in 1918, 1919 was the last president of our local here. When we reorganized again in 1933 Fred Warner was picked again as the president.

K: Where was Fred Warner from?

T: He was from Palestine. He was a miner all of his life.

K: Where you worked in the mines did many guys get killed?

- T: No.
- K: What did your dad think about you going into the mines? Did he think that was what you ought to do?
- T: Every miner over there who had a boy thirteen years old that wasn't planning to go through school was already working in the mines. When you got your three years in you got your own room and you were automatically a miner. My dad never worked me hard, but he kept me moving.
- K: What about the people in East Palestine, did they look at the miners like any other worker or did they look down their noses at the miners?
- T: Palestine was a miner's town. Almost everybody knew how to dig coal.
- K: Is that why all the industry came to East Palestine because of the mines and the railroad?
- T: Themines were coming to an end and the men were there. Miners were good, hard workers.
- K: What about the other towns around like Lisbon?
- T: Those were all mining towns and they picked up little companies that came into town. The biggest industry was coal, and then pottery. Pottery became first after the miners finished up. I think pottery came here in 1893. By the time the pottery got built up to where it could hire 300 or so people it was after the First World War. It took them about twenty years to get up to that stand. Those were all old miners from back in the 1800's yet.
- K: Looking back over your mining career, what would you have liked to have done different? What would you have liked to have seen done different? What didn't you like?
- T: I was in on the tail end of it so much. It was the Depression and strip mining was just starting to be talked about.
- K: You would have liked to have gotten into mining sooner then?
- T: I'm glad I didn't get into it where I could have gotten in a bad mine where the air was bad and I could have gotten emphysema or a wet mine where I could have gotten rheumatism.
- K: Looking back what are the things that really stick out in your mind?
- T: My dad was disappointed when the mine finished up at Red Hill because you didn't have to do much digging. My dad

could almost shoot that all off. The coal that was around here stuck to the roof so tight that if you didn't get your hole up into the roof, you wouldn't shoot it; it would stay up. The bottom would drop off, but the coal was tight against that roof that it would come off. Over there, if you shot the bottom off the top would fall.

END OF INTERVIEW