

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Mining

Personal Experience

O H 903

GILBERT MACKALL

Interviewed

by

Samuel Kirkland

on

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K This is an interview with James Gilbert Mackall for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Mining, by Samuel E. Kirkland, on February 25, 1981.

Were you in the service at all?

M No

K Where were you born?

M In Negley, Ohio

K Tell me a little bit about what you remember about your younger years? What your dad did, the kind of family you had, how many brothers and sisters you had, things like that

M I had eleven brothers and sisters. My dad was superintendent of the clay mine until his death. I started at the clay mine when I was sixteen. We lived on a farm early in my life. They were stripping back then, too. There was the White Coal Company

K This was in Negley?

M No, this was right across the line in Pennsylvania

K What did your dad do?

M We had a deep mine in Negley there, a clay mine

K What was the name of that?

M At one time it was Saratoga Fire Clay Company. They had one in Lisbon, one in Negley, and one in Carrollton, and one in New Gallilee. Then they sold out and each mine went individual. The one in Negley became Negley Fire Clay Company

K That would have been during the First World War, right?

M No. That was about 1926 or 1927.

K What did your dad do for the mine?

M He was superintendent

K How many men worked there?

M: I suppose it went to thirty miners, and four or five out in the mill where they ground the clay up to put in boxcars. Most of the clay went to Canada

K: What did they use it for? Brick?

M: I suppose I really do not know

K: Where in Negley was that located?

M: On the east side of the state, about a mile from the Pennsylvania state line

K: You said they also stripped clay at the same time?

M: No That was later. Back when I was a kid, four or five years old, they were stripping from the farm I lived on

K: When you were young, your dad was superintendent of that mine?

M: Yes

K: Did any of your brothers and sisters work there, too?

M: My older brother did

K: Was Negley mostly a mining town?

M: I would say that. Either coal mine or clay mine, most of them, before the brickyard came there

K: Do you remember any of the other coal mines around the area?

M: There was Jones Coal Mine

K: Where was that located?

M: Up Bull Creek, toward Route 16 from Negley

K: How big a mine was that?

M: I suppose at one time they had three hundred miners there. They had a railroading loading dock right in there in Upper Negley They hauled coal down in old Model T trucks

K Was that mostly pick work mine?

M Yes

K No machines?

M. I do not think they had machines in there.

K That would have been number six coal, right?

M Yes.

K Was it pretty good coal?

M. I think it was pretty fair coal

K. Was it primarily for the railroads and power companies?

M. I have no idea where they shipped it to

K While your dad was at the clay mine, do you remember anything significant that might have happened during that time when you were younger, before you went in the mine?

M What do you mean?

K Any problems with the mine flooding, or economical problems where they might have had to shut the mine down?

M Not really The clay mine was not too hard to keep dry You had the height

K Was it eight or ten feet?

M I drove an entry about eight feet and then the rooms ran about eleven feet high

K You said you went in to the mine at sixteen What prompted you to go into the mines?

M My dad worked there

K You needed to help support the family or was that what everybody did at the time?

M. We worked back in those days

K You did not go through school, the twelve years?

M No

K. Your dad just said it was time to go to work one day?

M I do not know I was around the mine ever since I was a kid.

K You would go out there and play and watch him work?

M I would go in the boxcars, even when I was younger.

K Tell me what that was like as a young kid

M In the boxcar they had a belt coming out into the door There was a belt coming back also, and it would put a pile on each corner of the boxcar in the back end To fill it up, you had to mount in back like you would hay It was really dusty

K. Tell me how they mined the clay at that time

M They had mules to pull the cars out They would pull two cars at a time There were fifty-two hundred pounds on a car. At that time, we got \$1 04 a car. I used to load ten cars a day

K You are talking about hand loading?

M Yes In shooting, you would shoot a rock across the top, angled up toward the coal We would use powder and drill in a straight bench shot and drill downhill on the bottom We used dynamite on the vents in the bottom

K So you shot on the solid?

M Yes

K How wide were the rooms?

M Approximately thirty feet

K How was the roof?

M It was a coal roof

K That held pretty good?

M Yes

K The return came down the air course in the rooms?

M Yes We ran bud entries out so far and when they quit, they would put an air thing in there. As we went up so far with a bud entry it would be tied in to made a circulation of air There were not fans in there

K Was there a main fan outside?

M No We had no fans

K It was natural ventilation?

M Yes

K Did you get pretty good air?

M Yes

K Did the barometer seem to affect your air much?

M I do not think so It was about the same temperature Most of the miners stripped to the waist to work If you sat down to eat a sandwich, you had to put a jacket on It was about sixty-five degrees in there

K How far in the hill were you?

M Probably a mile

K Was it pretty good work?

M Yes

K Did you ever work in an underground coal mine?

M Yes

K How did the clay compare to that?

M That was pretty big, I did not like that coal

K Where did you work in the coal mines?

M One time my buddy and I worked for Montico

K How high was your coal there?

M About four feet.

K Was that Number eight?

M I am not sure

K How was the roof there?

M It was really rotten It was soap stone.

K How did you support it, with timbers and posts?

M Yes We had posts and then we put iron across and had boards on the roof

K Was this before you worked at the clay mine or after?

M After

K What made you go down there?

M Looking for work, I guess

K Did the clay mine shut down?

M Yes

K Why?

M I do not know if the clay mine shut down or if another company took over and I left there.

K Your family lived in Negley at the time?

M. Yes

K After you left the house, did your family stay in Negley, then?

M. My mother stayed in Negley for a while and then she moved to East Palestine. We had a filling station there and she sold it and moved to Palestine

K Did most of your brothers go into mining?

M Ray is the only one

K: What did your other brothers do?

M Sam is a millwright for B & W Ed stayed around the strip mine Kenny has been weighmaster at a strip mine

K When the most of the boys from Negley either finished their grade school or whatever, did most of them go to the mines at that time?

M They went to high school

K After high school, what did they generally do?

M There were not too many mines around Negley at that time

K That would have been about the 1930's when you were in high school?

M. Yes The rest of them were all younger.

K Thinking back to the 1920's when you were in Negley and your father was working, can you think of any significant names of people in Negley, some of the more prominent people at the time that your father might have known that organized the mine?

M [No response ]

K Where was Jones Mine?

M Southwest of Negley

K Were there any mines toward Palestine?

M There was Southern Coal Company

K Let's get out of deep mining and into stripping When did you leave deep mining?

M. About 1930

K Where did you go then?

M Down to Cattis

K When did you get into stripping?

M Not until 1937

K You worked for Russ Engineering?

M Yes

K What made you leave Cattis and come up to Russ Engineering?

M I guess I just got along with Montico

K: Was this a union mine?

M. Yes, I imagine.

K Was he a hard operator?

M I did not work in the big mine I worked where he had his lime quarry He had a steam shovel pouring limestone out. We pick worked the coal to run the steam shovel; that was all we did There were two miners in that mine, me and Glen We wheeled it out in a car and dumped it in a hopper. They had a little train that hauled the coal up to the steam shovel

K: So you and this other fellow ran the mine pretty much lock, stock and barrel?

M We were the only two in there, yes It was all pick work.

K How high of coal was that?

M That was about four feet

K Did he pay you in script or cash?

M I always got paid in cash

K Was it piece work?

M: So much a car, yes.

K You had to buy stuff at Monico's store?

M: The company store, yes.

K: What was his store like?

M: He had everything you wanted in there. There were shoes, school books.

K: Did most of the people in the town buy there?

M: Yes. Most of the people that worked for him actually owed him money at the end of two weeks. They would not have enough money coming to pay their store bill, that is what I heard.

K: Did he seem to charge a little bit more than other stores?

M: Yes. We would buy almost two sacks of flour for one there.

K: Did you ever hear of Piney Fork?

M: Yes.

K: Did you ever go down there to the dances?

M: Yes. One night I was coming up that road and a cyclone was right behind me. Where the road turns and goes up over the hill, I turned that corner and the cyclone went right up over the hill. It ripped out trees and everything.

K: Did they have that preparation plant in Piney Fork at that time?

M: I think they did.

K: Getting to Russ Engineering, what did they do?

M: They put electric furnaces in, blast furnaces, seamless tube, seamless continuous for hot strip. They did all steel mill work.

K: For which companies?

M: We worked Republic Steel, Sheet & Tube, Briar Hill plant, Campbell Works.

K: What years would this have been?

M: 1937.

K What do you remember about that work? Was that all contract work for the mills?

M Yes. I either drove a truck or worked on mechanical crew

K Were you unionized?

M No, that was before the union

K Did the mills have unions at that time?

M No They had that strike of 1937 while we were there

K What was that strike about?

M The union.

K That was when they were organizing?

M Yes

K What do you remember about that? Some of the names of the people?

M I do not remember any names of people I know that whoever was in the mill stayed there because there were rifles up on the Struthers side and Campbell side and they would shoot down into the mill If you were in the mill, you could not get out. If you got out of the mill, you did not go back to work

K How long of a time would they be in there?

M I think it lasted about thirty days

K. Was it the union organizers on the hill with the rifles?

M I do not know We did not fool around there, we stayed home

K In 1937 you came to East Fairfield Coal

M Yes, the last part of 1937

K Who owned East Fairfield at that time?

M Jim Russell and Tony Ross

K When did you first remember the strippers starting to move in the area? What was the first strip mine, other than the clay?

M. They moved in about 1934 East Fairfield had a steam shovel

K What other equipment did they have in the pits?

M. I think they had a steam loading shovel

K What was stripping like at that time? What was your cycle?

M Muddy Do you mean height or what?

K You had to prepare the hill Did you drill it and shoot it?

M They did not shoot anything there. It was only fifteen feet of copper

K What would be the cycle? He would load the dirt and you would load it out?

M Right

K Did you do any kind of reclaiming at all?

M. Not at all

K. What other companies were there at that time?

M Most of them had quit in the late 1920's, that had been stripping

K Do you remember any stripping up in this area?

M I do not think there was any stripping here until East Fairfield came up here.

K Most of it was around Lisbon, Salineville, West Point, and East Palestine. Did it seem that the strippers did away with all the old deep mines and dog holes?

M No, there were mines after that. It seemed like those mines started up during World War I and quit in the 1920's.

K. What are dinkies?

M Narrow-gauged railroad with a small engine pulling coal cars in and out of the pit They would lay a track out in the pit and load the coal on these cars I think Carbon

Limestone still has the same system

K: You said that stripping at that time was pretty wet. You did not pump?

M: We did not build the roads back there and all I can remember is mud. We did not build the roads we do now.

K: You had the machine on tracks so you did not have to, right?

M: I was thinking of hauling out.

K: Do you remember when other companies started popping up in this area?

M: Marshall Mining was the first one to move in here, I think.

K: Do you remember anything about the steel companies doing their own stripping?

M: Sheet & Tube did.

K: Where did they strip?

M: They stripped down Route 7 toward East Liverpool. When they finished up there, they went to Grove City.

K: Were many of these companies able to get a good lease on their coal so they did not have to move from place to place quite a bit?

M: I think they moved around a good bit.

K: You left Fairfield in 1939 and went to Burnright. Where was Burnright located?

M: We stripped in Columbiana County mainly.

K: Did they start to take more hill at that time?

M: Yes.

K: Yes.

M: Which veins were you stripping?

M: Seven and six.

K How much cover did you have?

M I suppose we were taking up to seventy feet of cover.

K When do you remember drag lines coming into existence?

M We bought a drag line in 1948 and put a shovel front back on it because nobody was going to let it run

K The strippers from Harrison County north went to drag lines and the people down there stayed with shovel What is the difference?

M The drag line has a better chance of taking more cover because it is sitting on top

K Did you ever run shovel?

M That is what I broke in on, shovel

K So you went from an oiler to a shovel operator?

M Yes

K What was the job like?

M Loading coal

K Did they push you pretty hard?

M I was loading coal on trucks.

K What was a day like? Did you sit there all day?

M We had a low cover. We loaded a lot of coal a day We put one thousand tons of coal on a truck with a three-fourths yard bucket You hustled when you did that

K How big was the coal?

M Our Number six was about forty-one inches to thirty-eight inches above the line The Number eight ran twenty-four to twenty-eight inches

K You loaded that into semi-trucks?

M Straight trucks first, and then semi's started coming in

K Where was most of the coal being sent? To the power company?

M. Most of our coal went to Firestone in Akron

K This is from Burnrite?

M. Yes.

K Did you work in the mines through World War II?

M. No, I ran an electric shovel in a blast furnace pit in Warren during the war

K What company was that?

M. Standard Slag.

K That was for the mills?

M Yes I dug the pits out of the blast furnace

K What do you remember about work through the war? Were there a lot of hours?

M. Yes, I worked twelve hours, seven days a week

K Did any women come to work at that time?

M Yes I was not around them too much I was in the pit and there were not women out there I remember one woman whose husband was the overhead craneman, she got his job when he went to the war and she was better than he was

K When you started in the pits, you came from the deep mines in Cattis up to East Fairfield How did you go about getting a job?

M I went to Russ Engineering when I came up here I was sitting in the pit one day when a truck broke down and I told him what was wrong with it and he hired me

K When you were in the deep mines they paid you piecework How did they pay you when you went to the strip?

M By the hour.

K What were you guys making about that time?

M Fifty cents an hour. The mills were paying thirty-five cents, that is the reason the mill men were there

K If you were making fifty cents per hour, what would a loaf of bread cost?

M I do not know, but you could go down to Solley's and get steak for ten cents a pound

K During the war what kind of salary were you making?

M About one twenty-five It was after the war before a shovel runner got over two dollars

K During the war you were working seven days a week How many hours a day?

M Whatever it took to do my job I had three days to clean one pit out, three days to clean another pit out, and a day to work on my machine

K That is the slag pit?

M Right

K Was your machine mounted on a track? A rail?

M No, on crawlers

K When do you remember stripping changing? When you went to drags when you remember getting other equipment in, like dozers, front-end motors, and things like that?

M They had shovel fronts loading coal and small dozers

K What was the first dozer you were on?

M [No reply.]

K When you worked for Burnrite, what was your boss's name?

M Howard Tiggle. It was owned by Mike McCurry.

K Do you remember after the war when they started stripping again?

M A lot of mines shut down during the war because they had to get on some kind of

war work They started back up after the war

K What year was that?

M A lot of them started about 1946. I think that is when we got the first drag line

K. When you came back, did you start running drag then?

M. Yes

K How did you think that compared then to what you had been doing on the shovel?

M. I ran a clam shovel and everything before, too

K Were the drags basically the same?

M Yes

K These were all diesel, right?

M Yes

K How about the safety laws Do you remember when they started to come into effect?

M Yes

K Is your work harder today?

M It takes more cover today.

K What did you like most about your job, besides the money?

M I just liked to strip mine, that is all It never bothered me to sit there and run twelve hours

K How do the workers seem today compared to what they did then?

M About the same, I would say. We have some pretty good men at East Fairfield

K Do you remember when they first started bringing in reclamation?

M I remember I was fifteen feet across the top of the spoils That must have been in

the 1950's

K That was state law that they required you to knock off the top of your spoils?

M Yes

K Did you have to plant any seedlings or anything?

M Yes, we had to plant pine trees

K They sent out inspectors to check that?

M The only inspector we had was the safety inspector

K Was there anything about draining?

M Nothing

K Later on, what did you have to do?

M. You had to dam up the face of the pit if the water was running out of it Then you had to put a tile for it to run out

K Looking back over all the years, what was the best piece of equipment you ever worked on?

M 3400 Marion

K. How does that compare to the steam shovels you used to have?

M Steam shovels were pretty good

K Are these faster?

M. Yes.

K For a small machine, what do you like the best?

M I like the Lima and the Wolf-cat

K If you look back on your stripping career from the 1940's on, what would you have liked to have seen done differently?

M: Maybe design the machines a little better. They could have been heavier and beefed up where they had problems.

K: Did you have quite a bit of breakdowns?

M: I would say so.

K: Do you remember any major accidents?

M: I remember a guy got electrocuted at the one seventy-five. They were swinging under high tension wires and draining, too

K: In talking to people, I have found out that in Columbiana and Mahoning counties, there have only been three underground facilities that they have recorded. This area does not compare at all with the rest of the country in safety. Do you agree with that?

M: Yes

K: Is there anything you would like to add that stands out in your mind about your career?

M: It was a lot of hard work and hours

K: I have heard from people that have been in mining that once you are in it, you cannot get out of it. Is that what it is?

M: I never dreaded coming to work

End of Interview