

Early Strip Mining in Hopkins County

Written by J Harold Utley

Thursday, 11 December 2008 06:52



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The first written reference to coal in the United States was in 1679 when Father Hennepin, a French Jesuit Missionary, recorded the site of a “cole mine” on the Illinois River near the present site of Ottawa IL. On April 13, 1750, Dr. Thomas Walker was the first representative of the Caucasian race to record the discovery of coal in Kentucky.

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Records show that in 1804 coal was dug from the bottom of a creek near the city of Lancaster PA. This was man’s first attempt at strip mining in the United States. From this time until 1866, miners worked the outcrops with picks and shovels and hauled the coal away with wheelbarrows.

In 1866, near Danville IL, true strip mining was born when a mine was opened at Grape Creek. The overburden was plowed and scraped away with a team of mules and a slide scraper. This type of strip mining continued until 1877 when the first attempt at applying a mechanical device to strip mining was made. Near Pittsburg KS, an Otis steam shovel was used where stripping was previously done with plows and scrapers. The steam shovel boom

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proved to be too short and its use was abandoned.²

Probably the first strip mining in Western Kentucky was in 1820 when William McLean opened a mine on the family farm near Paradise on the Green River in Muhlenberg County. In 1826 a surface mine on Sugar Creek was opened in Henderson County.³

Mechanical strip mining, using horse-drawn equipment, probably had its beginning in Kentucky in 1870 when Christopher Pitman opened a strip mine in London KY.

Kentucky's first strip mine, using mechanical equipment, was opened at Lily, Laurel County, in 1907. Two Vulcan railroad-type shovels were used, one to remove the overburden and the other to load coal.³

The annual report of the Kentucky Department of Mines and Minerals for 1923 contains the following information on strip mining:

Strip operations in the First District, which we have no jurisdiction over as they come under the head of quarries, and we lose data on statistics to the amount of 1,600,000 tons

THE MIDSTATE CO, Mortons Gap, KY.

This mine is located on the L & N RR four miles from Mortons Gap, and the I C is now building a new line that will connect with the mine, and is working No 9 Seam

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D B GARE COAL CO, Providence, Ky.

I M Robertson, Supt.

This mine is located on the I C R R, and is working No 9 Seam.

HAWLEY-McISAAC CO, Dawson Springs, Ky.

Charles R Hauley, Supt, Carbondale, Ky.

This mine is located on the I C R R, and is working No 9 Seam.

DEMPSTER COAL CO, St Charles, Ky.

Thos Dempster, Manager.

This mine is located on the I C R R, and is working No 9 Seam.

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BUDDIE-PAWELL COAL CO, Madisonville, Ky.

James B Baddie, Pres.

This mine is located on the L & N R R 4¹/₂ miles southeast of Madisonville, Ky and is working No 9 Seam.

SUNLIGHT MINING CO, Madisonville, Ky.

Jere Beam, Supt. Is located on the L & N R R 4 miles southeast of Madisonville and is working No 11 & 12 seams, and has a daily output of 2,500 tons per day.

DAWSON DAYLIGHT COAL CO, Dawson Springs, Ky.

W J Barries, Supt, and is located on the I C R R. Just preparing to start operations, will work No 9 Seam

ILSLEY MINING CO, IIsley, Ky.

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S S Lanier, Manager, and is located on the I C R R, and is working No 6 Seam.

MAGIC COLLIERIES CO, Ilsley, Ky.

S S Ganier, Manager, and on the I C R R and working No 6 Seam.

□

Several names in the annual report are incorrect and mis-spelled. The correct names and spelling will appear in the listing of the individual mines.



Author's photo, Bucyrus 225-B stripping shovel (1920s)

SUNLIGHT COLLIERIES COMPANY

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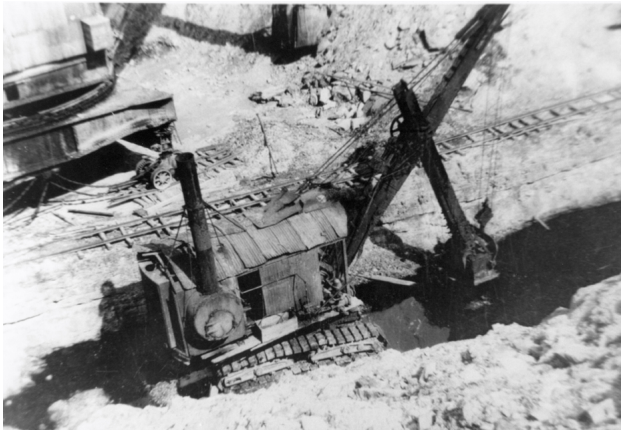
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Sunlight Collieries Company was organized as a Delaware corporation and began mining in August 1920. Partners in the venture were brothers Sterling S Lanier and Monroe B Lanier, Robert L Schlotman, Thomas Crow, Basil Ramsey and James Boddie.⁴

The mine was located about 4 miles southeast of Madisonville. The company store, tippie and mine camp were located about where the Atkinson Mine was later located. The strip pits were located on both sides of the Pennyrile Parkway where the W R Smith Salvage Yard was located.

In this operation, the overburden was removed by 2 Bucyrus steam shovels, a 175-B and a 225-B. A Marion Model 37 steam shovel is utilized to remove the limestone parting between the No 12 and No 11 coalbeds. A Bucyrus Model 35 was used to load the coal for transportation to the tippie.



Author's photo, Bucyrus 35-B coal loading shovel (1920s)

At the tippie the coal is washed to remove impurities and to reduce the ash content. The Sunlight tippie was the first wash plant in Western Kentucky and possibly the entire state. Tipples in use at this time had inclined shaker screens but the Sunlight tippie had screens that rolled much like today's rotary breakers.

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At the peak of production, Sunlight Mine employed 90 miners and produced 185,000 tons of coal per year. Sunlight Mine began production in 1920 and ceased in 1930.

In the History of Nortonville, prepared for the Nortonville Centennial, 1972, Mr Sterling Lanier said: "*Then came the panic of 1929. The coal market collapsed as industrial plant after plant closed. Norton's strip mines were shut down and dismantled. Stripping equipment costing nearly two million dollars was sold to Japan for twenty thousand dollars.*"

WESTERN COLLIERIES COMPANY, INC

Western Collieries Company, Inc was organized as a Delaware corporation in 1921. The partners were Sterling S Lanier, Jr, Monroe B Lanier, Robert L Schlotman, Jack L Harris and J G Gathier. ⁴ Western Collieries' Crabtree Mine was located west of Carbondale and north of Ilesley (Crabtree).

The mine stripped the Kentucky numbers 12, 11 and 9 coalbeds. The mine utilized both a 175-B and a 225-B Bucyrus shovels for removing overburden. The 175-B had a 75-foot boom and a 3 1/2 cubic yard bucket. This machine was available as steam or electric. The Crabtree machine was electric.



Author's photo, Bucyrus 175-B stripping shovel

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Coal was loaded by a small steam shovel into a dinky train and hauled to the tipple. Apparently 1927 was the peak year for production as 145 miners produced 257,125 ton of coal.

The mine opened in 1921 and closed in 1930.



Author's photo, Western Collieries strip area



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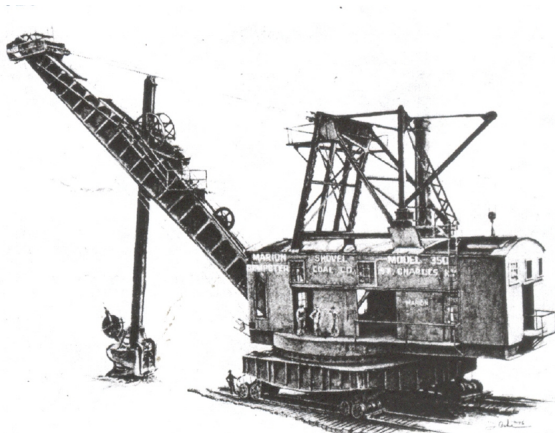
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Author's photo, Panorama of strip pit

DEMPSTER COAL COMPANY, INC

Pigeon Run Mine of Dempster Construction Company was started in 1922. In July 1924, Dempster Coal Company was incorporated in Delaware. Pigeon Run Mine and equipment was acquired by Dempster Coal Company, Inc. Equipment listed in the corporate books included a Bucyrus 225-B steam shovel, a Marion 350 steam shovel, a Bucyrus 50-B steam shovel and a Marion 37 steam shovel.



Author's photo, **Marion 350 stripping shovel**

Pigeon Run Mine was located about 1¹/₂ miles east of St Charles and about ³/₄ mile north of U S Highway 62. The peak year of production was 1925 when 85 miners produced 250,224 tons of coal.

The mine opened in 1922 and closed in April 1929.

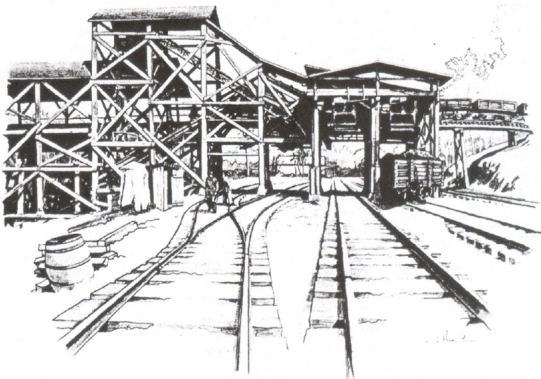
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Author's photo, Marion 350 stripping shovel crew (1920s- Miners not Identified)



Author's photo, Pigeon Run Tippie

DAWSON DAYLIGHT COAL COMPANY

In 1920, K U Megurie and Karl Jungbluth of Louisville leased coal rights from Fred Beshear and C B Hall and formed the Dawson Daylight Coal Company. They hired W J Borries, mining engineer, to come to Hopkins County and survey the area in 1921.

The company began stripping operations in 1923.⁵ This stripping was conducted in the Kentucky number 4 coalbed, incorrectly correlated as the Kentucky number 6. This author has a

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copy of the map prepared by W J Borries before mining began and a copy of a map prepared by Mr Borries in 1934, which shows the stripping areas were in the number 4 coalbed.



Author's photo, Bucyrus 225-B being erected

Information on equipment was not available but an examination of photographs indicates that a Bucyrus 225-B steam shovel may have been used to remove the overburden. This machine had an 80-foot boom with a 6 cubic-yard bucket and could handle up to 40 feet of overburden.



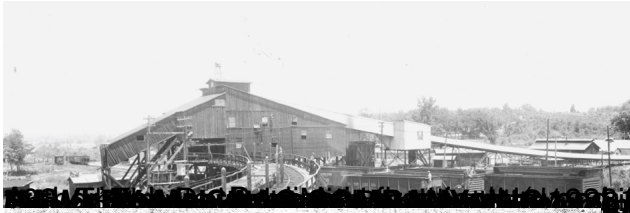
Author's photo, Pit scene showing Bucyrus 225-B at work

The company also had several small underground mines that started producing coal in 1925 so it was impossible to separate the tonnage mined. However, in 1924 the Daylight Mine produced 66,682 tons of coal with 51 miners working 96 days.

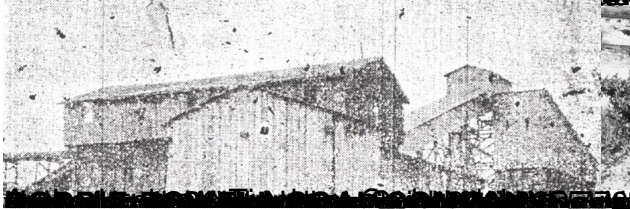
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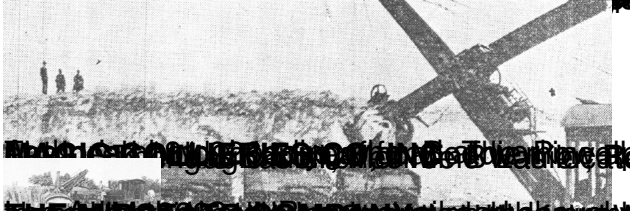
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1900 early strip mine in Charlotte, northeast KY.



1905 strip mine in Union Fork, KY.



1907 strip mine in the Pine Bluff area, KY.



1923 strip mine in the Pine Bluff area, KY.

1925 strip mine in the Pine Bluff area, KY.