

10/78

THE CABIN BRANCH MINE

AS ONE WALKS THROUGH THE PRINCE WILLIAM FOREST PARK TODAY ONE CAN HARDLY REALIZE THAT SOME 75 YEARS AGO THIS FOREST WAS A MINING COMMUNITY EMPLOYING SEVERAL HUNDRED WORKERS, AND BRINGING A SUBSTANTIAL ECONOMY TO DUMFRIES AND THE SURROUNDING AREAS.

MEN FROM AS FAR SOUTH AS STAFFORD COUNTY WALKED TO THIS MINE EACH DAY, WORKED 10 HOURS, AND THEN WALKED HOME...

IT WAS ABOUT 1890 THAT PYRITE WAS FOUND IN QUANTICO CREEK. A SHAFT WAS SUNK TO VERIFY THE PRESENCE OF THE ORE AND THE TEST PROVED POSITIVE. FROM 1908 TO 1920 MORE THAN 200,000 TONS OF PYRITE WAS SOLD FOR MORE THAN \$1,168,513.00.

SCHIST, CONTAINING QUARTZ AND HARNBLEND MAKE UP THE ROCK OF THE MINE AREA. THE PYRITES IN LEN SHAPED DEPOSITS ARE AMONG THE SCHIST. THE CABIN BRANCH LENS IS 1000 FT. LONG AND UP TO 14FT. WIDE SITTING ON AN ANGLE OF 60°. SULPHUR CONTENT OF THE MINE ORE IS 40% TO 50%, CONSIDERED QUITE HIGH... BECAUSE OF ITS SIMILARITY IN APPEARANCE TO GOLD, PYRITE IS SOMETIMES CALLED "FOOL'S GOLD"...

PYRITES ARE MINED FOR THE MANUFACTURE OF SULPHURIC ACID. THE 1916 PRE-WAR PRICE WAS \$4.64 PER TON, THE 1917 POST-WAR PRICE ROSE TO \$15.75 PER TON. VIRGINIA HAD OUT-PRODUCED ALL OTHER STATES AS OF 1917 WITH 37% OF THE TOTAL U.S. PRODUCTION.

CABIN BRANCH MINE WAS A TOTAL OPERATION ALMOST

Read before Dumfries Historical.

SELF-SUFFICIENT. IT WAS THE SOLE SUPPORT OF DUMFRIES DURING ITS PRODUCTION YEARS. — .

THE MINE HAD THREE SHAFTS, NOS. 1, 2, 3. NUMBER 1 AND 3 WERE VERTICAL WITH NUMBER 2 ON AN INCLINE OF 25° TO 55°. NUMBER 3 SHAFT WAS THE DEEPEST - 2,400 FEET ACCORDING TO TWO SOURCES. A DOCUMENT WRITTEN IN 1917 REPORTED THE DEPTH TO BE 1800 FT. WHICH LEAVES A POSSIBILITY OF EXPANSION TO 2,400 FEET BEFORE 1920.

A NARROW GAUGE RAILROAD CONNECTED THE MINE TO THE WHARVES ON THE POTOMAC RIVER AT BARROWS SIDING ABOUT SEVEN MILES DISTANCE. CONTRARY TO SOME REPORTS THIS NARROW GAUGE RAILROAD WAS NOT PART OF OR CONNECTED TO THE R. F. & P. RAILROAD. AT THE MINE SITE THIS RAILROAD CONNECTED THE SHAFT, CRUSHER MILL, AND OTHER BUILDINGS. THREE STEAM ENGINES RAN ON THE TRACKS, THE DEWEY, VIRGINIA CREEPER, AND THE DINKEY NAMED BECAUSE OF ITS SIZE. ALSO AT THE MINE WAS A SKIFF NAMED BECAUSE OF ITS SIZE TO HAUL ORE UP AN INCLINE TO THE HEAD FROM WHERE THE ORE WAS GATHERED BEFORE BEING PROCESSED. . . .

THERE WERE ABOUT 70 BUILDINGS AT THE MINE INCLUDING A BLACKSMITH SHOP, CARPENTER SHOP, WORKERS QUARTERS, SAWMILL, COMMISSARY, SUPT. HOUSE, AND THE DETRICK HOUSE. TODAY LITTLE REMAINS TO SHOW EVIDENCE OF A ONCE THRIVING ECONOMY.

THE MINING PROCEDURE WAS EXPLAINED WITH GREAT DETAILS AS MR. CECIL GARRISON REMINISCES.

THE FIRST STEP WAS TO CONSTRUCT THE NECESSARY BUILDINGS AND BEGIN TO SINK THE SHAFT. UNLIKE SOME OF THE

OTHER MINES IN VIRGINIA, CABIN BRANCH SHAFTS HAD TO BE TOTALLY SUPPORTED BY TIMBER DUE TO THE COMPOSITION OF THE COUNTRY ROCK. ABOUT EVERY 100 FEET OR SO A HORIZONTAL "LEVEL" WOULD BE CUT INTO THE POCKET OF ORE.. THESE LEVELS HAD TO BE SUPPORTED BY TIMBERS.

TRANSPORTING THE ORE IN EACH LEVEL WAS ACCOMPLISHED BY HAND PUSHED WAGONS ON TRACKS. THESE WAGONS WERE PUSHED TO THE SHAFT WHERE THEY WOULD BE DUMPED INTO A BUCKET SUSPENDED BY A CABLE FROM AN 80 FOOT HIGH "PITHEAD" BUILD DIRECTLY OVER THE SHAFT OPENING. THIS BUCKET WAS NOT ONLY USED TO HAUL ORE, BUT ALSO TO TRANSPORT THE WORKERS TO AND FROM THE DIFFERENT LEVELS. VARIOUS BELLS SIGNIFIED THE DIFFERENT LOADS: MEN, EMPTY OR ORE. WHEN THE BUCKET REACHED A CERTAIN SECTION OF THE PITHEAD IT WOULD AUTOMATICALLY DUMP THE ORE INTO A WAITING RAILROAD CAR.

AT ANY ONE TIME THERE WERE 200 TO 300 MEN WORKING AT THE MINE (ABOVE AND BELOW GROUND).

THE UNDERGROUND MINING PROCESS WENT ON 24 HOURS A DAY WITH ^{Three} ~~two~~ SHIFTS PER DAY. HUGE CIRCULATING FANS AND WATER PUMPS RAN CONTINUOUSLY TO KEEP THE UNDERGROUND NETWORK CLEAR OF POISONOUS GASSES AND SEEPING GROUND WATER. —

ON EACH LEVEL WORKED A "CREW" WHICH WAS SUPERVISED BY A BLASTER. THIS BLASTER WOULD GET PAID FOR THE NUMBER OF FEET HE COULD PROGRESS IN ONE DAY. THE BLASTER

WITH A GOOD CREW COULD MAKE QUITE A GOOD SALARY.

SOME OF THE MEN IN EACH CREW WERE: THE "DRILLER", WHO DRILLED THE HOLES FOR THE DYNAMITE; THE "MUCKERS", WHO LOADED THE ORE INTO THE WAGONS; THE "TIMBERMAN", WHO MADE SURE THE ROOF WAS PROPERLY SUPPORTED; AND THE "POWDERMAN", WHO CARRIED THE DYNAMITE FROM THE POWDER HOUSE TO THE LEVEL WHERE IT WAS NEEDED. . .

AFTER THE ORE WAS BROUGHT UP TO THE SURFACE IT WAS TRANSPORTED BY THE NARROW GAUGE RAILROAD TO THE ORE BINS. FROM THE ORE BINS, THE PYRITE WAS HAULED UP THE INCLINE OR RUNWAY TO THE HEAD FRAME WHERE THE MILLING PROCEDURE BEGAN.

THE MILLING PROCEDURE IS GENERALLY EXPLAINED AS FOLLOWS: THE PRODUCT WAS DIVIDED INTO THREE CLASSES: LUMP, SPALL AND FINE. LUMP WAS FIRST GRADE THAT REQUIRED NO SORTING. SPALL WAS FIRST GRADE ORE BROKEN TO PASS A 2.5 INCH RING AND FREED FROM FINES BY SCREENING. FINE ORE WAS UNDER $\frac{3}{8}$ INCH IN SIZE IN THE MILLING PRACTICE AT THE CABING BRANCH MINE. THE ORE FROM THE HOIST WAS DUMPED ON A 2.5 INCH GRIZZLY. OVERSIZE ORE GOING TO A LUMP STORAGE BIN. HAND SORTING SEPARATE THE SLATE FROM FIRST CLASS LUMP WHICH WENT TO A SPALLING FLOOR. THE FINER IMPURE ORE WENT TO A ROLL-JAR CRUSHER. THE LARGER LUMPS WERE BROKEN BY HAND AND SHIPPED WITHOUT FURTHER TREATMENT. THE UNDERSIZE FROM THE GRIZZLY WAS TREATED IN A 3 COMPARTMENT HARTZ JIG OR SIEVE. CLEAN PEEBLE ORE WAS SHIPPED AS SUCH. MIDDINGS FROM THE JIG WERE TREATED BY ROUGHING

ROLLS OF TWO GRADES AND WERE FINALLY TREATED IN 2 COM-
PARTMENT JIGS.

THE HAD SORTING PROCESS MENTIONED WAS PERFORMED
BY YOUNG BOYS FOR 50¢ A DAY. THIS IS WHERE MR. CECIL
GARRISON STARTED HIS DAY AT THE MINE.

THE JIGS OR SIEVES WERE DEVICES WHICH SEPARATED
THE COUNTRY ROCK FROM THE ORE BY VIBRATIONS AND A WASHING
PROCEDURE. JIGS WERE LOCATED IN THE MILL AND ALL OF THE
TREATMENT WAS DONE IN THE MILL. ALL PRIMARY CRUSHING WAS
DONE IN THE CRUSHER HOUSE.

FROM THE MILL THE ORE WAS LOADED ON THE NARROW
GAUGE CARS OR RAILROADS AND DELIVERED TO THE DOCKS AT
BARROWS SIDING NEAR POSSUM POINT.

I THINK WE ALL KNOW THE CABIN BRANCH MINE WAS
THE MAJOR SUPPORTING INDUSTRY OF DUMFRIES FOR A 30 YEAR
PERIOD FROM 1890 TO 1920..

THROUGH RAILROAD DEEDS AND OTHER RECORDS ONE
MAY GATHER THAT THE CABIN BRANCH HAD OWNERSHIP FROM 1899
TO 1916 AND THE AMERICAN AGRICULTURE CHEMICAL COMPANY
FROM 1917 to 1920.

THE ORIGINAL OWNERS WERE THE DITRICKS AND THE
BRADLEYS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

AROUND 1919 OR 1920 IT WAS FOUND THAT A HIGHER
CONTENT OF PYRITE COULD BE MINED MORE CHEAPLY IN SPAIN
THAN IN THE UNITED STATES. DURING THIS PERIOD OF ECONO-
MICAL UNCERTAINTY, THE MINERS WENT ON A STRIKE FOR A PAY
INCREASE FROM \$4.25 PER DAY TO \$4.50 PER DAY. THE SUPER-

INTENDENT RESPONDED BY CLOSING THE MINE DOWN, SAYING THAT HE WOULD LET THE CABIN BRANCH MINE FILL WITH WATER AND THE FROGS JUMP IN BEFORE HE WOULD RE-OPEN IT.

OCCUPATION OF THE AREA BY THE CIVIL CONSERVATION CORPS IN THE EARLY 1930'S RESULTED IN COMPLETE DISMANTLING OF THE MINE. BUILDING MATERIALS WERE USED FOR THE CABIN CAMPS AND THE SLATE DUMPS WERE USED AS ROADBED MATERIALS.

THE ECONOMY OF DUMFRIES WAS GREATLY ENHANCED BY THE OPERATION OF THIS MINE. THE TOWN OF DUMFRIES PROFITED AS FAMILIES MOVED IN, BOARDING HOUSES OPENED UP AND STORES DID A THRIVING BUSINESS.

TODAY CABIN BRANCH MINE IS ONLY A MEMORY RECORDED ON THE PAGES OF HISTORY.

A. L. MOUNTJOY

References:

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