

Henderson Mine

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The Montour Railroad built its Mifflin Extension from North Star to Bethel Park in 1914 to service several coal mines being opened along that route. One of those mines was owned by the Henderson Coal Company. The Henderson Mine and its surrounding town of Hendersonville is at Mile 27 on the Montour Trail.

The mine was the typical two vertical shaft variety found in the area. One shaft brought men and supplies into and out of the mine and the other was used to bring coal out of the mine and into the tipple building for sorting, cleaning and loading into railroad hoppers for final shipment. The mine site was where the current ballfield is now located.



Henderson Mine, circa 1914. Photo courtesy Pam Nixon.

On either side of the ball field are two chain link fence enclosures. These are the locations of the two mine shafts, filled in and sealed after the mine closed in the late 1940's. Rail yards on either side of the mine complex held empty cars delivered to the mine and loaded cars to be picked up by the Montour Railroad. A siding ran along the Montour main line tracks from the west side of Morganza Road to about where I-79 crosses overhead today. After the mine closed, the siding remained in operation until 1980, when railroad operations ended in this area. Waste dumps on either side of Morganza Road can still be seen today. The slate and rock were dumped by larry cars running along the valley on an overhead tramway.



The Henderson Mine tippie building. The tracks at lower right carried larry cars to the waste dump across Morganza Road. Photo courtesy Paul Katrencik.

Coal mining is a dangerous occupation, as was evidenced on the morning of March 13, 1917, when a methane/coal dust explosion rocked the Henderson Mine, killing 14 miners. The explosion was attributed to a build-up of methane gas that resulted when ventilation doors were left open during a shift change. The gas may have been ignited by a spark from an overhead electric wire as a coal-cutting machine was being moved.

The town of Hendersonville grew up on the three hills around the mine. It was a typical coal patch community and had businesses to serve the miners and their families. The coal company built the miners houses. There were boarding houses for the single men, a post office, tavern, social hall and company store.



Archibald Malcolm McIntyre and Luke Dunwoodie pose in front of a Hendersonville boarding house. Photo courtesy Pam Nixon.

The mine produced 228,500 tons of coal in 1936, with 292 employees. In 1942, the mine was sold to the Pittsburgh Coal Company, which at that time allowed the miners to buy their homes, thus taking the expense of maintaining them off of the company's books.

As was the case at several mines in the area, mules were used in the mine to pull the mine cars to the tippie shaft. When there was no work, the mules would be brought up and let out to pasture on the hillsides above the miner's homes. The use of the mules also indicated that the coal seam was thick enough that the miners could stand upright in the mine.



Circa 1938, Mary and August Katrencik visit mules which have been let out to pasture while the mine was idle. Photo courtesy Paul Katrencik.

One of the few remaining mine buildings is the brick home across the street from the ballfield. It contained the mine lamp house and the company doctor's office. On top of the hill were two large wooden water tanks to supply water to the town. In the hot summers, the wood would dry out and the tanks would leak. By August the tanks would sometimes run dry.

After a century of use, the company store is still being occupied, owned now by the Tandem Connection bike shop. It is one of the few remaining wood structure company stores in the area. As a company store it was run by Federal Supply Company and later by Champion Stores, subsidiaries of the coal companies. The three story store had everything that the miners' families needed. As at most mining communities, the

store gave the miners a credit line for their purchases and payment would be deducted from their paychecks.

Across Morganza Road from the store was the Shangri-La, a tavern and bar which had some boarding rooms and a dance floor, lasting into the 1970's. On the other side, across Georgetown Road was a social hall, known as Dreamland, which was used for meetings, movies and social gatherings. The post office was in the old house on Morganza Road with a gas station across the street, making the corner of Morganza and Georgetown Roads the main gathering spot of the community.



Everyone had chores in a coal patch town. Marion Katrencik feeds the chickens at her home overlooking the Henderson Mine. Photo courtesy Paul Katrencik.

Thanks go to Pam Nixon and Paul Katrencik for their pictures and remembrances of life in Hendersonville.

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