

Morris Mine

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

Trail traffic on the Westland Branch has been increasing in the past few years. One of the sights first encountered along the branch, after crossing Route 50, is the large pile of mine refuse across the creek from the trail. Along with the adjacent Weavertown supply lot, this was the site of the Morris Mine.

The Gilmore Coal Mining Company was incorporated in 1920 by Mr. S. A. Gilmore, Mr. C. Ebershuger and Mr. E. I. Morris, for whom the mine was named. The Morris Mine was built in 1922 on property leased from Mrs. Anna Burgan who owned a large tract of coal land in the vicinity.



The Morris Mine tipple building in 1922, looking east toward Rt. 50. Three loading tracks operate under the tipple while the far left track is the Montour main line.

Photos courtesy Iva Mae Lose Hinton/Alan Hinton collection.

Morris Mine was described in detail in a 1922 article in Coal Industry magazine:

“The Pittsburgh coal seam underlies the whole of the property, and a number of bore holes have shown the coal to be a uniform thickness of five and one-half to six feet and fairly free of impurities. As in other parts of the field there is little pitch to the vein. The roof is slate and an occasional vein of clay tends to make a somewhat bad top.

At this point the coal lies at a depth of approximately 140 feet, necessitating shaft mining. The hoisting shaft is 130 feet in depth, two compartments, and concreted throughout its depth. The air shaft is located a short distance from the hoisting shaft, an exhaust fan being located at the mouth of

the former. In addition, a slope shaft is provided for the use of men and material. This is likewise concreted, and lies at an angle of 25 degrees, being 525 feet in length.

The arrangement at the bottom of the hoisting shaft is simple. A double track for loaded cars leads to the shaft, the empties being taken off on the other side. A motor takes the cars back to the working faces in an entry around the shaft.

With this arrangement the hoisting capacity is three cars every 70 seconds, which will be more than sufficient to take care of the mine's output. The cars used hold approximately three tons each.

The entire plant is designed and guaranteed to operate making three sizes of coal at the rate of 325 tons per hour."



Men and supplies entered the mine using tracks laid into the sloped shaft at this portal. The waste dump would grow on the hillside above the portal.

The coal company also built housing for employees and miners near-by, including a company store. Some of those houses are still standing along Rt. 50. The single houses on the north side of the road was "Bosses Row" where company supervisors lived. On the south side of Rt. 50 were several streets of houses for the miner's families. Most of the miner's houses were single family homes, as opposed to the typical duplex houses built at other mine patches in the area.

The Montour Railroad built a 2,200 foot spur from a point named Gilmore Junction, along Southview Road, to reach the new mine. This spur was later extended to reach another mine at Westland.

The Morris Mine tipple included three loading tracks for different sizes of coal produced by the mine. The sizes were known as Nut, Egg, and Slack (or Run-Of-Mine) indicating their relative size. The mine used its own sorting and cleaning tables to prepare the coal for shipment by rail cars. Slate and

refuse from the cleaning process was loaded into a tramway at the tibble and dumped on the hillside across the creek, creating the large pile still evident today.

Morris Mine went through a stormy history of closures, sales and bankruptcies by several companies attempting to mine the coal. By the 1970's, production had significantly declined and the mine was closed. However, the abandoned tibble buildings remained in place until 1982.

Morris tibble was dynamited on November 16, 1982 using plastic explosives. It took three separate attempts, as both the first and second tries made loud bangs and knocked a ton of dust loose, but did not bring down the tibble. A third attempt actually made the tibble lean to one side, but not totally collapse. A steel cable pulled by a bulldozer finally knocked the life out of the old rusted hulk and down it came. The shaft was filled and sealed.

Thanks go to Bob Ciminel for supplying much of the information in this article. Visit montourrr.com for more.

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