

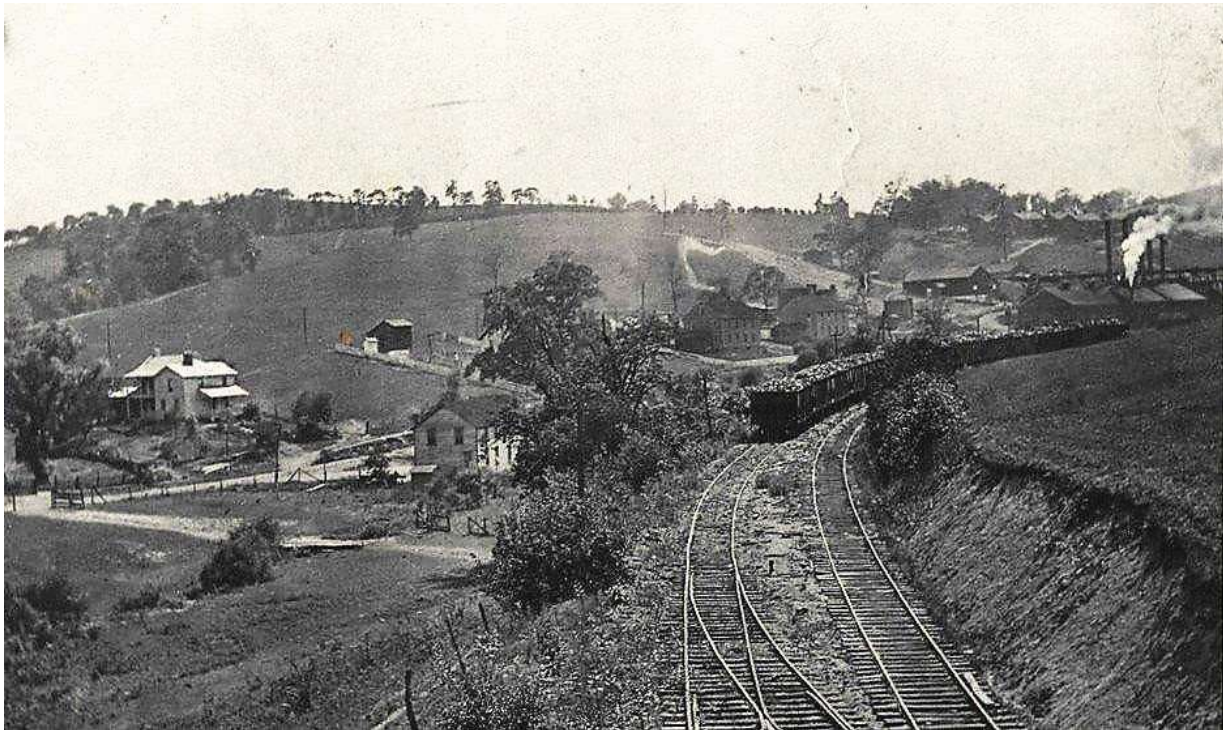
The Partridge Mine

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

At Trail Mile 9.8, where the trail crosses over Santiago Road near Imperial, is an interpretive sign designating the location of North Star Junction. At this point, the Montour Railroad split, with one line bearing to the left along the hillside parallel to Santiago Road for about a mile to North Star or Santiago. That original line toward Santiago was built in 1879 as a two-mile extension of the Montour Railroad from the terminus then at Imperial, to service the newly opened Imperial Coal Company's Partridge Mine. This right-of-way is no longer in existence. Bearing to the right at the junction, the trail follows the railroad's 1914 extension toward West Mifflin.

A wye track arrangement (basically a triangle with tail tracks at each point) was installed at North Star Junction during that 1914 extension. This allowed locomotives to be turned to increase their working efficiency. Although the original track toward Santiago was abandoned and removed after the Partridge Mine closed, the wye track section remained in use until railroad operations ended in 1984. The right-of-way including some track ties can still be found in the woods along the trail.

In June, 1813, Thomas Partridge took title to 206 acres in North Fayette Township, and called the parcel Partridge Nest, in accordance with land ownership requirements existing at that time. Partridge's land contained an outcrop of the Pittsburgh coal seam.



A scene at Santiago shows loaded coal hoppers on the railroad spur serving the Partridge Mine. The power house can be seen in the background on the right. Photo courtesy West Allegheny Historical Society.

Although the Partridge Mine was originally opened by the Imperial Coal Company in 1879, by 1898 it was owned by the Morgan, Moore & Baine Company, headquartered in Cleveland, OH, which also owned the nearby Margerum Mine. Ownership by MM&B seemed to be a prelude to the organization of the Pittsburgh Coal Company, which took over the Imperial Coal Company, its mines and the Montour Railroad in 1899 and 1900.

A major impetus in creating the Pittsburgh Coal Company was to bring the hundreds of marginal mining operations under one roof and eliminate the smaller independent mines that were driving down the price of coal. Once the mine was taken over by the PCCo, colloquially known as "The Coal Company," production and efficiency improvements began almost immediately.

The Partridge Mine would eventually extend northward and southward and become one of the largest underground mines on the Allegheny/Washington County border.

In the late 1800's, the town was called North Star, but the local post office was called Tyre. After the Spanish-American War, the town renamed itself Santiago, although locals pronounced it as rhyming with San Diego. The miners who worked at Partridge Mine called the town "Hell's Half Acre" because of the violence that went on during the great coal strike in 1928.

In the early 1900s, Partridge miners made about \$13 a week for a six-day week and about 22 cents per yard for non-production work, such as cutting breakthroughs between the rooms where coal was mined.

In 1903, the Coal Company installed an 18-foot diameter fan at Partridge to improve ventilation, and in 1913 ran a power line from the Partridge Mine to the Margerum Mine. Production in 1913 was 572,295 tons of coal, which was mined for about \$1 per ton. By 1914, the main entries extended over 9,000 feet, or nearly two miles. By 1915, Partridge Mine had four electric locomotives, 29 electric mining machines and 10 pumps to remove water from the mine. Its power house had seven boilers and generated enough electricity to supply its own power and also provide power to the Margerum Mine.

The Partridge Mine was closed sometime in the 1930's. A WPA mine map from the '30's shows the mine still in production, but aerial photos of the area taken in 1939 show the loading tipple had been torn down and the railroad spur abandoned.

Thanks to Bob Ciminell for much of the information presented about the Partridge Mine. More info can be found at Montourrr.com.

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