

National Mines #2 & #3

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The National Mining Company, a subsidiary of United States Steel, opened its National No. 1 mine near Bridgeville in the early 1900's. As the mine advanced westward, additional mine portals were opened to reduce the distance coal had to be hauled before being brought to the surface for shipping. National No. 2 was opened in Cecil Township, with records showing it operating as early as 1905.

Very little information is available for National No. 2. In its early days, it was probably accessed through the Mine No. 1 entries. When the Montour Railroad completed its Mifflin Extension in 1914, a tippie was built for National No. 2 to load coal on the Montour. This mine entry was at trail mile 25.6, just behind the current Kurnick Trailhead site. The mine tracks connected with the Montour main line east of Papp Road and west of Tarr Heights Road. The stone bridge abutments at Papp Road show a second track just a few feet away from the trail bridge, which was the Montour main line. West of Tarr Heights Road, remnants of a concrete bridge can be found crossing a small creek near the trail.



Loading tippie at National Mine No. 3 in Muse, PA. Photo courtesy U. S. Steel Company

Further west National No. 3 was opened in 1921 to access additional coal land and the coal reserves remaining in National No. 2 were reassigned to Mine No. 3. A spur from the Montour main line was constructed to service the mine. The junction was just east of the yellow steel bridge at trail mile 24.1 and the Muse Branch ran along the edge of the current McConnell Trails housing development. The town of Muse was built to support the mine operation with miner's homes and rooming houses, stores, offices and a school. Muse was larger and newer than many mine villages in the area and boasted amenities not seen in other coal villages.



The company store at Muse in 1937 included an automobile service station.

The coal seam at this point was 230 feet deep. The typical mine set-up was constructed with two deep shafts dug to the coal seam. One shaft was used for men and supplies to access the mine and for waste material to be brought out for dumping on the surrounding land. The other shaft was primarily for bringing the coal to the surface to be loaded into railroad cars.

Operation of National No. 3 was transferred from U. S. Steel to the H. C. Frick Coke Company in December, 1942, who operated it until at least 1947. When the mine was closed in 1955, it was again owned by U. S. Steel, but when that return transfer was completed is not known. In 1947, the coal company started allowing miners to buy their homes instead of renting them. This ownership helped the company by insuring the miners would stay in the community and thus work in the mine. It also eliminated the company's costs incurred by having to maintain the homes when the miners were only renting from the company.

National No. 3 was closed in July, 1954, putting over 600 employees out of work. As the tipple and tracks were being scrapped, the United Mine Workers Union insisted there were 5 million tons of coal remaining to be mined. Later reports state there were only 1.5 million tons of coal left. Because of public uproar and meddling by various government officials, U. S. Steel stopped dismantling the tipple in December, 1954, but the mine was eventually sealed and abandoned in 1955.



Views of the Chemicals & Solvents Company in Muse, 1980. Gene P. Schaeffer photos.

After the mine was closed, a chemical reclamation company leased some of the mine buildings and land until the Montour Railroad stopped servicing the site in 1982. When

railroad operations ended, a train of 82 surplus box cars from the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie RR was stored on the Muse Branch from April, 1982 to September, 1983. Official abandonment of the branch was approved in 1983, the stored cars were removed and the rails were pulled up.

This column appeared in the March-April, 2021 Montour Trail Newsletter.
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