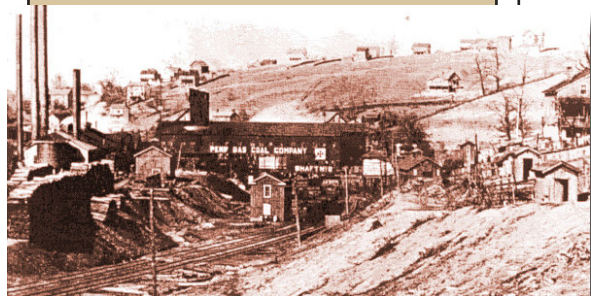




Most of the company houses built on Adams Hill during the 1910-1911 miners strike remain today above Hahntown's Main Street, North Huntingdon Township. The houses along the highest street (Carmelott) were built more recently – long after the mine closed. (Route 30 can be seen at the top of the photo.) (Photo courtesy of Adams Hill resident, Betty Bucan Kostic)



Penn Gas Coal Company's Shaft No. 2 was opened in 1872. The mine was located in Hahntown at the base of Adams Hill across from what is now the Korner Tavern. (Photo courtesy of Helen Pilipovich / "Who We Are" by the Norwin Chamber of Commerce)



Adam's Hill . . . *Did You Know?* Memories of a Coal Patch Town

by Bob Cupp

The Philadelphia-based Penn Gas Coal Company opened its Shaft No. 2 (Adams) Mine in 1872 after it completed the Youghiogheny Railroad from Irwin through Hahntown and Rillton to the Youghiogheny River at Gratztown. The mine was located just south of Irwin on the west side of Hahntown along Tinkers Run. The mine buildings included an office, foundry, engine house, boiler house, lamp house and blacksmith shop. A thirty-stall brick mule barn was destroyed by fire in 1988. The mine and tippie stood at the base of Adams Hill near the rail line. The company, initially, constructed ten workers' houses on the west side of Main Street in Hahntown, and three houses for its mine managers on Adams Hill.

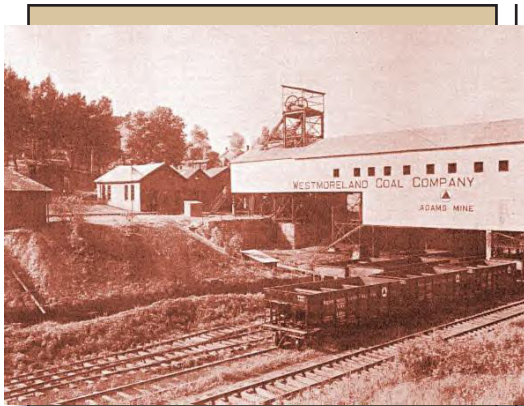
Although most coal mining structures in Westmoreland County have disappeared, the company houses built by the mining companies for their workers have frequently survived. Coal "patch towns" were built for a variety of reasons. Since transportation was limited in the early coal mining days, the companies needed to house their workers nearby, and by renting the houses, the companies could also generate profits and exercise some control over their employees who could be evicted at the company's discretion.

Penn Gas Coal Company Shaft No. 2

The coal patch community on Adams Hill, above the mine, was developed for a different reason. In 1910, the United Mine Workers campaigned to organize the Irwin gas coal basin mines. The union sought an eight-hour day and a wage scale in Westmoreland County comparable to the one in the Pittsburgh coal district. Along with Westmoreland Coal and the Keystone Coal & Coke Company, Penn Gas Coal strongly resisted the unions' efforts. When the workers struck, the coal companies fired them and evicted their families from the company houses. Tent communities were established by striking miners and their families at Irwin and Hahntown; soup lines became common.

The Penn Gas Coal Company constructed about 30 two-story wood-frame houses on Adams Hill, near the mine and away from Hahntown,

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The Adams Mine (formerly Penn Gas Coal Company's Shaft No. 2) was acquired by Westmoreland Coal Company through the purchase of Penn Gas Coal in 1918. The mine closed on August 11, 1953. (Photo from "10 Score, North Huntingdon Township, 1733-1973")

where it housed replacement workers from Southern and Eastern Europe. The company recruited the "strikebreakers" with the promise of a job and housing for their families, and paid their passage to America. Most of the houses on Adams Hill were built during that time period. Striking miners at Irwin and Hahntown referred to the new community as "Scab Hill."

Coal and iron police were brought in by the coal companies to protect their interests. The strike lasted from April 1910 through July 1911, but the Penn Gas Coal Company was able to maintain coal production at a reduced level. The strike finally ended in victory for the company; some miners returned to work, while others, blacklisted by the company, sought work elsewhere.

The Miners

One of the Adams Hill miners was Marko Javor, who emigrated from Croatia with his wife, Catherine Svetic Javor in 1910. They raised eight children in Penn Gas Coal's Company House No. 48. Their youngest son, Mike Javor, gave me a tour of the neighborhood where he grew up. He pointed-out the red-brick blacksmith shop and lamp house, still standing near the bottom of Adams Hill, as well as the houses that were originally built for the mine managers, and the spring where the residents obtained their drinking water.

Mike's brother, John "Yow" Javor, operated the cage that was used to transport the miners into and out of the mine, as well as bring the coal up the shaft. Another brother, Steve "Jazzie" Javor, worked at the mine tippie. His sister, Mary, the oldest of the eight children, was the last of the Javors to live in the family's house on Adams Hill.

Javor explained that there was a bath house near the blacksmith shop. "Many of the men, including my dad, would bathe there after a

10-hour day in the mine, leaving their coal dust-covered work clothes in a basket hung-up by a hook for use the next day. There was no running water in the company houses on Adams Hill in those days. Sometimes my dad would sneak me in to get a shower."

A Community Where Everyone Knew Everybody

By the time the Adams Mine closed in 1953, all the company houses had been sold to the residents. Javor remembers when his father purchased their house from Westmoreland Coal Co. (which had purchased the Penn Gas Coal Co.) "My dad paid \$575 for our four-room house. They wanted \$600, but agreed to

(continued on page 3)



The United Mine Workers Local 6080 (Adams Mine) met in the basement of what is now the Korner Tavern in Hahntown (building on the right). In those days, it was owned by Stanley Brevic and known as "Stanley's Tavern." Adams Hill miner, Marko Javor, is the fourth man from the right in the last row. His sons John "Yow" Javor and Steve "Jazzie" Javor are seated near the front on the right. The building in the center was the Adams Mine Laboratory where the coal was tested for gas content and impurities. (Photo courtesy of Adams Hill native, Mike Javor)



Remains of Penn Gas Coal Company's Blacksmith Shop, above, and Lamp House, right.



At right, Carl Huszar's grandfather, George.



The Adams Hill residents bought their groceries on credit at Pete Perretto's neighborhood store, formerly on the corner of Hahntown's Entry Road and Main Street.

deduct \$25 because the wall behind the house needed repairs." Driving along streets named Entry, Slate, Mineral, Carbon and Mineview, it was readily apparent that this was a mining town.

Javor's old neighbor, Theresa Waszczak, was born on Adams Hill and lived there all her life. Her father, John Yurisiniec, who emigrated from Austria-Hungary, worked as a coal loader at Adams Mine for 32 years. He died of black lung in 1948 at the age of 63 after collecting only one month's pension. Waszczak reminisced about growing up on Adams Hill. "Every two houses shared an outhouse, as well as a cistern for water to wash clothes and, later, a pump for drinking water. Before we got the pump, we had to carry all our drinking water up the hill from a spring below."



Waszczak's friend, Betty Kostic, also lived here since she was a child. Her father, John Bucan, worked in the mines all his life; her husband, John Kostic, also worked in Adams Mine. Betty described what life was like back then. "When the men got laid-off they went from one mine to another. I remember my dad bringing home a \$3.00 pay. We had to pick our own coal, climbing up on the coal cars to get the good lumps of coal. I used to pull a wagon full of coal or push a wheel barrel. It was hard living, but we survived."

As Kostic rattled off the names of her old friends and neighbors on Adams Hill, it became clear that a strong sense of pride and unity still exists in the little community that was developed to provide housing for replacement miners. "Everybody knew everybody; everybody helped everybody."

Perretto's and the Korner Tavern

She spoke with lasting gratitude about the man who owned the neighborhood grocery store. "Pete Perretto ran the store at the bottom of the hill across from the Korner Tavern. If it wasn't for Pete giving us credit, I don't know how we would have survived. God rest his soul – that Pete was one hell of a good friend to us poor people. He gave us credit when we needed it. He would give us a bag of penny candy every time we paid a little bit on our bill. He also had a beer garden on the other side of the building. The streetcar went right past the place and, when it did, the whole building would shake."

"When the coal company was selling these houses, Pete lent us the money to buy ours. We were lucky to get it for \$575. These houses may not be much, but they're still here after all these years. We thought we were big shots – buying our own houses. Before that, you always had to pay rent to the company."

(continued on page 4)



Modern-Day Korner Tavern



Adams Hill resident, Theresa Yurisinec Waszczak, displayed a miner's hat and lamp, as well as the milk bucket and lunch bucket her father, John Yurisinec, carried to work as a coal loader in the Adams Mine.

Photo at Right > Miners' Tools Donated by Tom Agnew. From top l to r: Miners lunch pail with water compartment, mine safety light methane detector, canary bird cage to detect carbon monoxide, oil head lamp, carbide head lamp, belt worn breathing apparatus, miners hard hat with reflective stickers, coal "candy" from mine museum, and a modern combination methane carbon monoxide oxygen level sensor.

Kostic explained how the neighborhood became known as 'Scab Hill.' "These guys would go to work in the mine, but the ones over in Hahntown wouldn't cross the picket line; they called the Adams Hill guys 'scabs,' and that's how it got the name 'Scab Hill.'" Animosity over the events of the strike and the "scab hill" name remained for decades after the strike ended.

A Melting Pot of Workers

Theresa Waszczak added, "People came here from Italy, Serbia, Croatia, Slovakia, Russia, Austria-Hungary and Poland. It was a real melting pot of men who were desperate for work; they did what they had to do to feed their families. Large families were common in those days; the Fomich family had 14 children, Esasky's had 11 and Dobosky's had nine."

"People on this hill made something of themselves and they never asked for any recognition." Many of their children became professional people. Dr. Norman Venzon (a well-known and respected Penn Township family physician) was raised on Adams Hill. Others became teachers, police officers and business owners." Mike Javor also pointed out that, "Westmoreland County Judge Debra Pezze's grandfather, Joe 'Peppy' Pezze was a coal miner from Adams Hill."

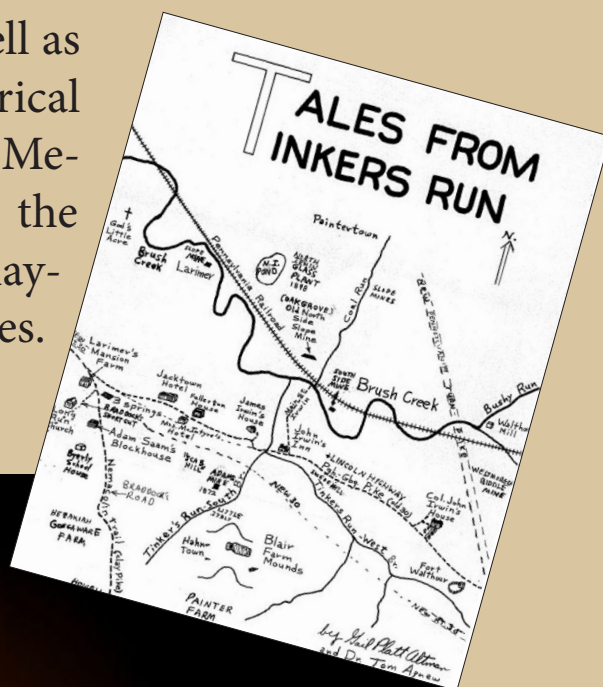
Recently, the Norwin School District built a new elementary school on Adams Hill on land adjacent to the Norwin High School campus. Named Hahntown Elementary, one of the potential names considered by school board members for the new school was "Adams Hill." As Theresa Waszczak explained, "It isn't 'Scab Hill' anymore!"



Author's Note: Since this article was first written in 2005, some of the people quoted or referenced have passed away, but their memories live on as part of the history of Adams Hill.

REMEMBERING DR. THOMAS I. AGNEW

We remember Tom Agnew as a friend, historian, and ardent supporter of the Irwin area. Tom was a charter member of the Norwin Historical Society and served in a variety of positions for over 25 years. He gave presentations on the coal industry to schools, clubs, and special interest groups around the area on innumerable occasions. He was an avid local historian and author, with interests in both local issues and long forgotten facts. He served on multiple Society committees, as well as being a member of the Norwin Historical Society Military Honor Guard. At Memorial Day services, Tom enriched the experience for those attending by playing his beloved bagpipes. He will be missed.



IN MEMORIAM

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