

2020 SPRING NEWSLETTER

Did You Know?

BIDDLE MINE

No clinkers in our coal!

by Bob Cupp

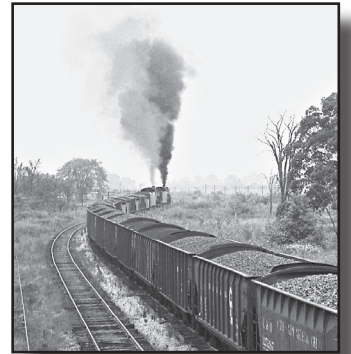


*We're celebrating
25 YEARS
of conserving history!*

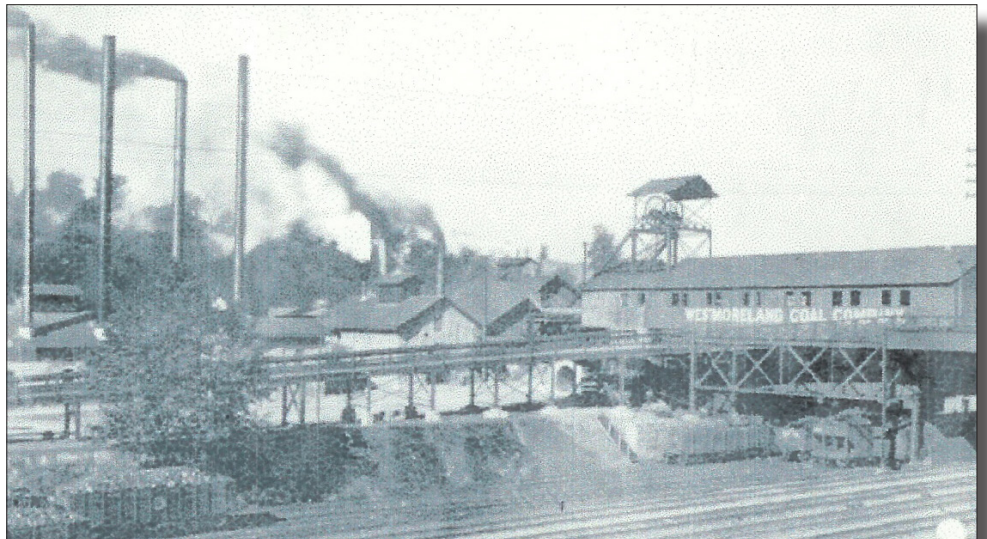
The Norwin Historical Society was formed in the Fall of 1994. It was the vision of local residents Bill Kunkle, Connie Downey, and Jim Drylie to explore the idea of having such an organization to promote and preserve our local history. Seed money was available from the Norwin Chamber of Commerce when another local group, formed to save the site of Fort Walthour, ended their efforts to do so.



The introduction of coal mining in Westmoreland County resulted in vast and permanent changes in the Irwin area. Railroads were built to transport the coal. Then more coal had to be mined to fuel the trains. In 1872, the Westmoreland Coal Company opened the Westmoreland Shaft Mine (Biddle Mine) and constructed the company town of Biddle near the present-day Pennsylvania Turnpike, where it crosses over PA Route 993, between Shafton and Westmoreland City.



As it was their practice to name company towns after directors of the company, the town was named after E.C. Biddle, second president of the Westmoreland Coal Company - 1854 to 1884. Towns like Biddle were built near the mines to house the influx of miners and their families.



Biddle Mine: This mine was originally known as the "Westmoreland Shaft Mine." The name was changed to "Biddle Mine." Before the mine closed in 1955, it was said to be the oldest working mine in Pennsylvania. (Photo courtesy of Harry McCracken, deceased.)

(continued on page 2)



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Norwin School Principal Ron Peduzzi was alerted to the idea of an historical society and provide for a meeting at the Norwin High School Library. In addition to those listed above, Norwin High School Librarian, Dolores Walker, and Social Studies teacher, Carl Huszar, were asked to attend. The origin of the Norwin Historical Society dates to this event. As a result of this gathering, strategic steps were undertaken to make the Norwin Historical Society a reality.



(continued from page 1)

The mine employed 460 men in 1904, producing 439,000 tons of coal in 300 days. By 1910, Westmoreland Coal Company owned the Criterion Mine, Export No. 1 Mine and Export No. 2 Mine, the Larimer Mine, the Westmoreland Shaft Mine (Biddle Mine) and the Magee Mine, all in Westmoreland County. By the mid-1920's, the Biddle Mine employed 234 persons who produced nearly 263,000 tons of coal per year.



These Biddle miners were photographed around 1935, in front of the Biddle Mine Pump House after working a ten-hour day. (L. to R.) John De Zorzi, Louis De Zorzi, Unidentified, Ben Susin, Unidentified. This scene was painted from the photo (courtesy of William De Zorzi, from the book, "Who We Are," Norwin Chamber of Commerce, 2000) onto a mural along Irwin's Pennsylvania Ave. It was painted by artist Wayne Fetto for the Lincoln Highway Heritage Association, depicting Irwin's coal mining heritage.

Working in the Biddle Mine could be hazardous to your health; serious accidents were common. A review of a partial list of miners who worked there, compiled by the "Coal Miners Memorial," revealed that between 1885 and 1916, at least 48 miners suffered broken bones, while a multitude of others suffered burns, cuts and amputations. The records also indicated that, during the same period, accidents claimed the lives of 23 miners.

The majority of injuries and deaths resulted from the "fall of slate" from the mine ceiling. The slate waste was separated from

the coal and hoisted through the shaft to the tippie where it was diverted by an aerial tramway to a slate dump. Any remaining slate content in the coal was referred to as a "clinker" since it wouldn't burn. Therefore, the best quality coal had "no clinkers."

The 200 ft. deep shaft mine was situated at the lowest point in the Irwin Coal Basin, and flooding of the mine tunnels became an increasingly serious problem. Water flowed from other connecting mines into the Biddle Mine. A water pumping plant was constructed inside the mine to remove the water; it had a capacity of 12,400 gallons a minute. The water was pumped to the surface through 12 inch diameter holes. For each ton of coal mined, 50.5 tons of water had to be removed. Flooding eventually forced the Westmoreland Coal Company to close the Biddle Mine in 1955 with over 1,000 acres of coal left behind. Before it closed, it was said to be the oldest working mine in Pennsylvania.

The town of Biddle was bordered by the Biddle Dam Reservoir, a source of steam and power (the remains of which can be seen below Route 993, just west of the intersection with Brush Hill Road), the railroad, the mine, and the mine buildings. At one time, the town was fenced-in with a gate at the en-

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Carl Huszar sought direction from the Western Pennsylvania Historical Society, followed by asking for local volunteers to form a Board of Directors. By December of 1994, the Norwin Historical Society was officially incorporated by the State of Pennsylvania. Our first location was at the Norwin Chamber of Commerce building.

Since our inception, the objectives of the Society have remained constant. We strive to preserve, to promote, and to educate our Norwin Community about our local history.



(continued from page 2)

trance which was patrolled by the Coal & Iron Police during labor stoppages. The four most prominent homes in the plan were built for the mine superintendent, a later superintendent's home and those of the pit and fire bosses.

The Westmoreland Coal Company provided the residents with a park, known as "Welsh Park," for their Sunday recreational activities. Children were called out to be viewed playing when visiting mine officials came from their Philadelphia headquarters for inspections.

Although the mine complex was demolished long ago, surviving are the Westmoreland Coal Company Store and about fifteen company-built houses. The remaining houses have been remodeled and renovated over the years by some of the original owners and by their descendants.



The peaceful Village of Biddle (2005 Photo).

The building that originally served as the company store is a two-story wood-frame building with aluminum siding covering the original clapboard exterior. The building measures 63 ft. x 26 ft. and contains a gable roof and a concrete-block foundation. The store was originally operated by W. R. (Bill) Milburne; and his assistant, Dan Marsh, who later became a director of the Irwin Bank and Trust Co. Later serving as the SNF Lodge 64 (Serbian Club), the building has had numerous alterations and an addition.



A one-room building at the site of the picnic pavilion was a first aid station for the mine. The building was later used by Irwin's Immaculate Conception Church for catechism classes.



This sign is located along Route 993 East, between Shafton and Westmoreland City. If you turn left past the sign heading East, or right heading West, you'll enter the Village of Biddle.

Many area residents have probably never visited the quiet Biddle neighborhood. The employment opportunities provided by the mine are long gone. If you take a walk around the peaceful village today, it's hard to imagine the magnitude of the buildings and mining equipment that existed here during the peak years of coal production. What clearly remains is the community spirit of the hardy miners' descendants from that bygone coal mining era.

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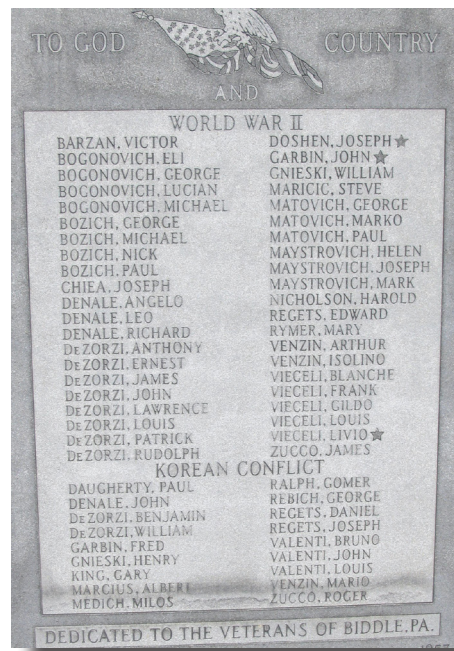


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The Biddle War Monument, dedicated in 1957 to veterans of World War II and the Korean Conflict, is located near the old company store. The number of names on the monument with multiple veterans from the same families is amazing for such a small community. There were 42 World War II veterans from Biddle and 18 from the Korean Conflict, including a total of 10 from the DeZorzi family alone (8 W.W. II and 2 Korea). An annual meeting of World War II veterans over Labor Day weekend and a homecoming for former Biddle residents from all over the country for many years confirmed that, although the Biddle Mine closed 65 years ago, the Village of Biddle remains alive and well.

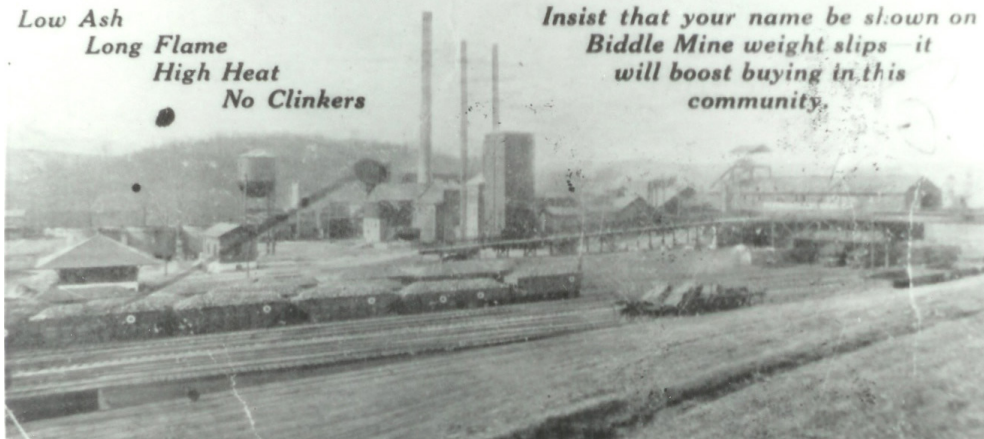


Biddle War Monument: This War Monument is located in front of what was originally the Biddle Company Store and, later, the SNF Lodge. It was dedicated in 1957 to the Biddle Veterans of World War II and the Korean Conflict (2005 Photo).

The Mine serving this Community that good Biddle Coal

*Low Ash
Long Flame
High Heat
No Clinkers*

*Insist that your name be shown on
Biddle Mine weight slips—it
will boost buying in this
community.*



This post card advertisement boasts of the virtues of “good Biddle coal - Low Ash, Long Flame, High Heat, No Clinkers.” A “clinker” is a piece of coal that has slate content. The slate won’t burn; it’s waste. It was separated from the coal and transported to a slate dump. (Photo courtesy of Harry McCracken, deceased.).

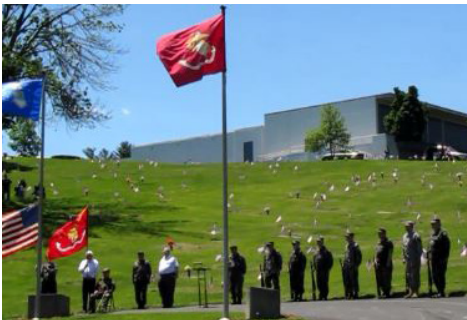
Annual Memorial Day Honor Guard

Sunday, May 24, 2020, 1:00-4:00 PM

The following sites will be visited by the Honor Guard, with a wreath laying and a 21-gun salute:

- Penn Lincoln Cemetery, Route 30 @ 1:00 pm
- Brush Creek Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church Cemetery, Leger Road @ 1:45 pm
- North Huntingdon Township Veteran's Memorial, NHT Townhouse @ 2:30 pm
- Westmoreland City Veteran's Memorial, Westmoreland City Fire Dept @ 3:15 pm
- Biddle Veteran's Memorial, Biddle Road @ 3:30

The honor guard members are military veterans from the Norwin Historical Society, the Irwin VFW Post 781, the Manor American Legion Post 472, and active members of the U.S. military.



Please consider supporting the Norwin Historical Society!

We continue to preserve our local history, promote the history of the Norwin Community, and embrace the opportunity to educate the Norwin area about the people, places and events that comprise the history of Irwin, North Irwin and North Huntingdon Township.

We are presently located at 219C Main Street, across the street from the Lamp Theatre in Irwin. Our mailing address is PO Box 623, Irwin, PA 15642 and our email address is info@norwinhistoricalsociety.org.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Donation: \$ _____

NORWIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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219 Main Street
Irwin, PA 15642
724-309-1161

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*Newsletter
design and production
by Sandy Carlson.*

2020 SPRING NEWSLETTER



TO:

*Your gift to the
Norwin Historical Society
helps to preserve our history!*