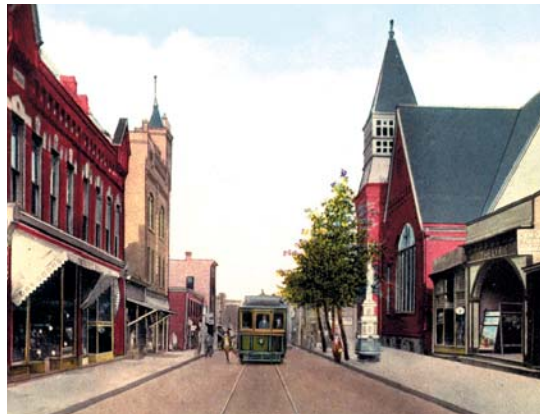


FALL 2017

NORWIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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

Did You Know? Coal Mining in the Norwin Area

By Bob Cupp

Millions of years ago Irwin was part of the shoreline of a vast tropical sea that filled the Mississippi basin. By a series of vast upheavals of the earth's crust, the lush vegetation that formed in the salty marshes became trapped under the earth's surface. Molten rock surged upward through the fissures burying and compacting the decaying plant life. Erosion covered what was left with sand and silt. These actions formed the salt, gas, oil and famous six foot Pittsburgh Coal Seam as well as the smaller Redstone four foot seam above it. Coal is the reason Irwin was founded. (From "Tales from Tinker Run")

1857 – Shafton Mine Opened, First Deep Shaft Mine in US / 1866 – Southside Mine Opened



Larimer Mine, mid-1800's included North Huntingdon, Penn and Sewickley townships, parts of Salem, South Huntingdon and Hempfield townships, as well as Irwin, Murrysville, Export and Delmont.

This part of the Pittsburgh seam wasn't as well suited for making coke as was the Connellsville coal field, but it was ideal for producing gas. The Irwin Gas Coal Basin coal also differs from the other Westmoreland County coal basins (Greensburg, Latrobe and Ligonier) in terms of thickness, quality and physical attributes.

Two of the largest coal companies in the Irwin basin were Westmoreland Coal, established in 1854, and Penn Gas Coal, formed in 1861. These two companies grew rapidly, acquiring independent mines and opening new ones throughout the area.

(Continued on Page 2)



The arrival of the Pennsylvania Railroad in Westmoreland County during the mid-19th century resulted in the rapid development of the coal mining industry here. Coal was converted into gas for the gasworks at Philadelphia and other eastern cities. To meet that demand, gas coal mines were developed in the area known as the Irwin Gas Coal Basin. The basin

Coal Mining (continued)



Small towns, known as “coal patches,” were established to house the large number of immigrants who arrived here from Europe with hopes of finding a better way of life. Because transportation was very limited, it was necessary to house workers close to the mines. A shortage of houses prompted the coal companies to construct their own.

Miners paid rent to the company for their housing and purchased all their food and mining equipment at the nearby company store; it was generally the only store in town. Since the immigrants arrived with little money and they could obtain credit at the company store against future pay, they quickly became indebted to their employers. As a result of these tactics, the coal companies were able to maintain a certain amount of control over the miners.

Coal mining was a tough way to make a living; miners worked long hours for low wages. The work was dirty and dangerous; hundreds of miners died or were seriously injured in mine accidents. If you quit working in the mines, you could no longer live in a company house. If a miner was killed in an accident, his family was forced to move.

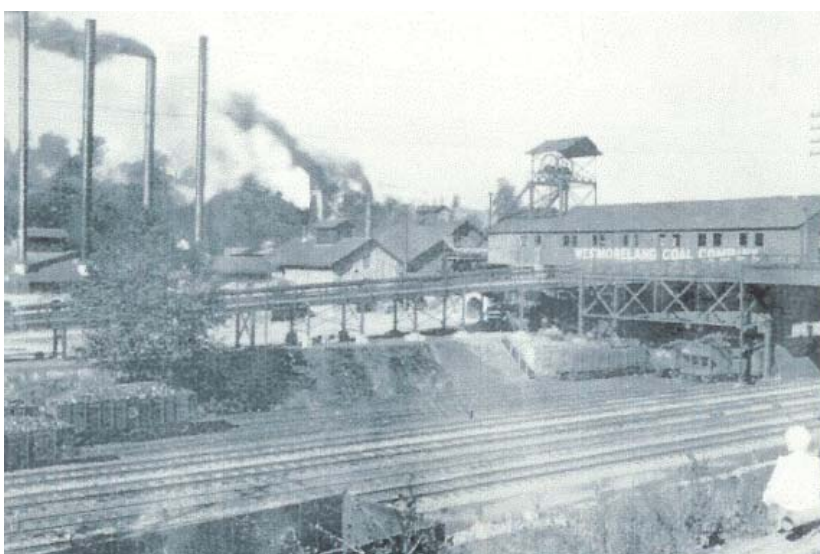
The “Golden Era of King Coal” occurred in Pennsylvania between 1880 and 1920 with a profound impact on the region’s economy. Pennsylvania produced more bituminous coal throughout this period than any other state.

The United Mine Workers of America was formed in 1890. In neighboring Allegheny County, labor leaders had been bargaining collectively with the coal operators since 1898. However, prior to 1910, Westmoreland County miners weren’t unionized and wages weren’t standardized in the Irwin Gas Coal Basin.

STRIKE! Unrest had been building among the Irwin basin miners for some time. Union organizers campaigned for an eight-hour day and a wage scale comparable to wages paid in the Pittsburgh coal district.

The coal companies used the Coal and Iron Police to protect their property and the strikebreakers who were hired to keep the mines operating. This “police force” was commissioned by the state and paid by the coal operators. Striking miners called the Coal and Iron Police “yellow dogs” and referred to the strikebreakers as “scabs.” Deputy sheriffs were appointed and state police were also used in an effort to maintain order.

The Penn Gas Coal Co. constructed about 30 two-story, wood-frame houses on Adams Hill near their Penn Gas No.



(Continued on Page 3)

Biddle Mine

Coal Mining (continued)

2 Mine at Hahntown to house European replacement workers. The company recruited them with the promise of a job and housing for their families, and it paid for their passage to America. Hahntown residents subsequently referred to Adams Hill as “Scab Hill” in reference to the replacement workers who lived there.

The Westmoreland County coal strike of 1910-1911 was also known as the Slovak Strike because about 70% of the miners were Slovak immigrants. The strike was more like a war than a labor dispute; it resulted in the tragic deaths of an untold number of miners, strikebreakers, police and coal company officials; scores of others were injured. In addition to the loss of lives, it was quite costly to both sides. The union contributed \$25,000 to the strikers for the purchase of tents and construction of shanties, and more than \$1 million for relief funds.



Southside Mine

After 16 months, on July 1, 1911, the UMW International Executive Board finally called for an end to the strike. The work stoppage ended in defeat for the union; some workers returned to the mines, while others were “blacklisted” by the coal companies and were forced to seek employment elsewhere.

At the time, this 1910-11 conflict was described as “the most stubborn strike in the history of American labor.” The UMWA continued its efforts to organize the Westmoreland County miners, and the coal companies were determined to remain non-union. Although it lost the battle, the UMWA eventually won the war, successfully representing Irwin Gas Coal Basin miners and evolving into the largest, most powerful labor union in the country.



The Awesome Holiday House Tour

SATURDAY DECEMBER 2

This annual event has been a tradition in our area for over 20 years! It is the Norwin Historical Society’s main means of financial support.

The homes on the tour range from **VERY LARGE** and historic to **VERY NEW** and fabulous!

Watch for tickets to go on sale in early November at the Norwin Public Library and Norwin Chamber of Commerce.

YES, there will be a VIP shuttle available again this year!

Cost of each:

TOUR: \$18

SHUTTLE: \$35



PLAN NOW, to join your friends and neighbors to tour these beautifully decorated homes this year!



Norwin Historical Society
PO Box 623
Irwin, PA 15642

TO:

BOARD OF
DIRECTORS

Carl Huszar, President
Tom Witman, Vice President
Geraldyn DeFelice, Secretary
Diane Holderbaum, Treasurer
Tom Agnew
Sandy Carlson
Robert Cupp
Bill Hawley
Regis Holecko
Brian Jovan
Sharon Lunn
David Sinclair
Richard Siniawski
Noreen Turkowski

info@norwinhistoricalsociety.org
412-759-9771



FALL 2017

**Stop by the History Center
to take a look at the
coal mining display
in our window!**

*Come visit us
under the
clock tower
during special
downtown events!*

