

The Livingston Coal Mine

About 1903 the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad better known as the "Big Four" built a railroad from Hillsboro to East St. Louis passing through Madison County. It was in Olive Township along this rail line that a mine was sunk in September, 1904. J.E. Rutledge, who was president of the Trenton Coal Company of Trenton, Illinois in Clinton County, organized this new company. Land and coal rights were purchased from the John Livingston estate and from Henry Burns another farmer in the area.

Mr. J.P. Hebenstreit who had been working with the Consolidated Coal Company sinking mine #14 in



New Staunton Coal Company. 1921.

Staunton left that position and went with J.E. Rutledge to take charge of the sinking of the New Staunton Coal Company. Two shafts were sunk – a main shaft and an escapement shaft.

Description of Mine and Equipment

A hoisting shaft 8 ½ x 17 feet with three compartments, two for hoisting men and coal and one for electric cables and pipes was built. The depth of the mine was two hundred, eighty-seven feet to the top of the coal, the coal being six feet deep. The main shaft was timbered with timbers measuring 8 x 12 inches. The air shaft was 15 x 9 feet, the air chamber being 10 x 9 feet, and escapement 5 x 9 feet and timbered the same as the main shaft. The hoisting was done by a two-cylinder 24 x 36 inch engine which was purchased from Danville Foundry and Machine Company in Danville, Illinois. The drum was eight feet in diameter and the ropes were of one and a half inch crucible steel purchased from Leschen and Sons Rope Company of St. Louis, Missouri. The cages which were purchased from Ellison Machinery and Foundry Company of St. Louis were of the Bonds patent, self dumping with sheave wheels measuring eight feet in diameter. The electrical equipment consisted of a one hundred K.W. Goodman generator driven by a McEwen engine 16 x 16 inches. The four Brownell boilers were 6 x 18 feet with seventy-two, 4-inch flues, two McDowen pumps, 7 x 5 x 10 inches, and one two-thousand horse power cochran heater.

The tippie that was built of wood was seventy-five feet from the ground to the sheave wheel at the top. Four grades of coal were furnished by the shaker screens – lump, egg, nut and pea.

Each track was equipped with an eighty-foot scale furnished by Moser of St. Louis. The scales were installed in a concrete sealed pit.

The coal was dumped into a hopper in the tippie and was weighted by an automatic scale that was also purchased from Moser.

Danville Foundry and Machine Company provided the ventilation fan which was six feet wide and twenty feet in diameter and was driven by an engine with 12 x 18 inch cylinders.

All buildings were fire proof except the tippie that was made of wood. The engine rooms and powder house were constructed of brick. (See picture at right.) The shop, fan house, boiler rooms and oil house were built of corrugated sheet iron. The machine shop was equipped with lathes, drill press and pipe machines which were necessary to every mine.



New Staunton Coal Company engine rooms and powder house. 1921.

At first the coal was mined by hand and mules were used in the mine to pull the cars of coal. At one time there were forty mules in this mine. The mules were brought out of the mine only if the mine was to be idle for quite some time mainly in the summertime.

In 1905, J.P. Hebenstreit left the mine in charge of his sons, Thomas as superintendent and Joseph A. as assistant superintendent. J.P. went to Ziegler, Illinois, to take charge of the Joseph Leiter Mine that had lost fifty-eight men in a gas explosion.

In 1906, the mine installed electrical haulage. In 1910, a briquette plant was erected for briquetting its fine coal. A briquette is a small block of compressed coal dust used for fuel or kindling. This plant had a capacity of two-hundred fifty tons in eight hours. New shaker screens were put in covering four tracks. Also installed were two new boilers 18 feet by 7 inches with flues.

In March 1911, drillers who were boring for coal discovered gas. The drillers were down about five-hundred feet when gas was struck. It spouted as high as thirty feet and had one-hundred pounds of pressure. When one of the drillers lit a cigarette the gas exploded burning two men. Mr. Rutledge of St. Louis, manager of the company, came out to investigate the situation.

In the fall of 1911, Livingston broke a record with an average of 4,029 tons per eight-hour day for thirteen days. On September 29th, 4,264.90 tons were hoisted that amounted to 1,492 hoists per day or one hoist every 186 seconds. It took one hundred five railroad cars to hold this amount.

On March 1, 1912, Livingston again broke a record with 4,393 tons in seven hours and fifty minutes. The "Big Four" railroad gang of seventy-five men arrived in Livingston to extend the mine tracks to make facilities for getting out more coal.

In 1914, the mine built a 20 x 32 foot brick addition to the power plant and installed a 75kw D.C. Goodman generator which was built in Chicago. March 1914, brought about the hoisting of 103,694.6 tons of coal with only fifteen hours lost that month due to lack of cars and the funeral of a man killed in the mine.

To increase the output of coal in 1915 a new double type thirteen-ton mine locomotive with two ninety horsepower motors was put into operation. A new fan engine was installed to increase the efficiency of the fan. A severe storm which swept through the area on June 12th struck the smokestacks and blew them on the boiler and engine room roofs severely damaging the roofs. The men were put to work building new fireproof brick smokestacks. The mine resumed operation on July 12th.

A new washhouse twenty-eight by seventy-two feet and equipped with hot and cold water and lockers was built in 1916.



From left: Walter Karger, Tacky the Mule (pack animal used in the mine), and Noble Smith.

The mine was closed for ten days in January 1917 because the drivers wanted to work eight hours and be paid for nine. The company wouldn't grant that request so the miners voted to go back to work. A new coal crusher was installed with a capacity of five hundred tons per hour.

On March 9, 1918, a fire destroyed the old washhouse. It was thought that the fire originated in a carbide lamp placed in a locker. The loss was between \$1,000.00 and \$2,000.00 including clothes of the men who were in the mine. The fire occurred during a high wind, but the firemen of Livingston were able to keep the flames from spreading to other buildings.

Improvements in 1918 were a new washhouse, twenty by sixty feet; a thirty by forty-two foot brick building to house the new 300kw generator and engine; storage shed, thirty by forty feet; a thirteen ton Goodman motor, and a Mancha storage battery motor for gathering.

In April 1930, orders were received from St. Louis to close down the mine. The mine ceased working on April 2nd with no duration of shut-down given. On August 25th, Superintendent J. A. Hebenstreit received word to immediately begin preparing to seal the mine. A crew of men removed the electrical equipment that would be damaged if left in the mine for a long period of time. The mine employed approximately four-hundred men of which ninety per-

cent lived in Livingston. Other men employed came from Staunton, Worden and as far away as Troy and Carlinville. It was a big blow to the Livingston residents since the mine was the sole industry from which residents derived their livelihood. It also hurt the Staunton businessmen because Livingston people did business with Staunton merchants. The reason given for the shutdown was inability to secure sufficient business to warrant working the mine.

On September 8th, a group of Livingston men went to St. Louis to talk with the management of New Staunton Coal Company about reopening the mine, but were unsuccessful.

After being without work during part of 1930 and all of 1931 in January, 1932, a group of ten Livingston businessmen formed a new company named Livingston-Mt. Olive Coal Company. The firm

planned to purchase all of the property of the New Staunton Coal Company through an arrangement to pay ten cents per ton hoisted – five cents was for coal taken from the mine and five cents toward purchase price of the company. The officers of the new coal company were D.E. Aylward, president; Henry Malench, secretary/treasurer, and M.I. Ashmore, J.S. Alfeld, and Alfred Bononi, board of directors.

Plans were to open the mine by the middle of February. Joseph Hebenstreit was selected as superintendent and former bosses and employees were offered their jobs back. The company produced hand-mined and cleaned coal which they sold through Midvale Company of St. Louis.

The entries at the bottom were walled up when the mine shutdown. The walls were broken down and fans placed in operation to expel the gases that had accumulated during the shutdown. After the air had circulated for a few days, an inspection was made and the mine was found in good condition.

On March 22nd, the first day, coal was sold to local trade only. In October a new wage scale was produced with men making between three and seven dollars a day depending on their job.

Tragedy struck again when fire partially destroyed the tipple on November 17, 1937. It was spontaneous combustion that caused the blaze. The Livingston fire department was assisted by departments from Staunton and Worden. The fire was seen for several miles due to the height of the tipple which was almost one-hundred feet. There was \$15,000.00 damage but luckily the truck shakers were not damaged and the loss was covered by insurance. Within a week the mine was working again with coarse coal being sold to trucks and fine coal loaded on railroad cars for the St. Louis market.

On December 15th, which was termed Christmas Payday, things were desolate because the miners only had seven hours work on their checks. The continued operation of the mine was uncertain due to the death of Mr. Gilbert one of the stockholders of the old company. Even if the mine should continue to operate very little work was expected because the tipple could not be repaired in the winter.



New Staunton Coal Company
Paul Schultze on right



Pictured from left to right: Joseph A. Hebenstreit, assistant superintendent; Thomas Hebenstreit, superintendent, and Thomas Moss, manager.

The children of Williamson received two Christmas packages each year – one from the mine and one from the village. They decided to give one of their packages to the Livingston children so they would have a better Christmas. Additional funds were raised by the citizens of Williamson so every child in Livingston would receive a package. Things were so bad that miners had to get food from relief rolls, a federal government sponsored program, even while working. Others worked on WPA which was also a government program. Many of the youth participated in CCC camps that built state parks such as Pere Marquette Park.

In May 1938 several coal dealers from Chicago were negotiating with W.J. Mahon trustee of the estate of the stockholders and D.E. Aylward president of the present operating group to purchase the mine. In July 1939, two-hundred twenty-five interested miners formed a cooperative and purchased the mine for \$20,000.00. The three officers of the mine were President Ben Prosser, Vice-president Bert Dunlap and secretary/treasurer John Kopuster. Most of the coal was shipped to other markets. The sales agency in St. Louis was handled by Ben E. Morgan and in Chicago by Lafayette Coal Company. The annual wage of a miner in 1920 was \$1,830.00, but by 1938 that wage fell to \$250.00.

On December 22, 1954, about two in the morning, fire completely destroyed the hoisting tippie at the Livingston-Mt. Olive Coal Company Mine. The Livingston, Williamson, and Staunton fire departments responded, but nothing could be done and efforts were confined to saving the other buildings. The cause of the fire was unknown. The four men working in the mine at the time of the fire were informed of the fire and escaped by climbing the stairs in the air shaft. The loss was estimated to be \$200,000.00 which was only partially covered by insurance. There were one hundred, forty men employed, most of them in the upper age bracket.

Employees of the mine, local residents, and area farmers volunteered to help clean up the debris. A steel head frame and sheave wheel were purchased from Schien Metal Works and Supply Company of Carlinville. The equipment had been used at the old Berry Mine near Carlinville. The mine reopened sometime around April.

To help the mine tippie rebuilding fund, one businessman donated \$1,000.00, a former resident sent \$100.00, the homecoming association donated their entire proceeds from the homecoming that year and the Woman's Auxiliary of the Progressive Mine Workers of America held a dance with proceeds going to the mine. An amateur contest under the direction of Chaw Mank was held to raise money. Prizes were given to the best in these categories: 3 to 6 age group, 7 to 10 age group, 10 to 15 age group, 16 to 20 age group, and adult group. The prizes came from money collected by Mrs. John Kopuster, Mrs. Clifford Lovejoy and Violet Smerk from the businessmen. Some of the contestants were chosen to appear on the Johnny Rion television show.

Johnny Rion of television station WTVI of Belleville and radio station KSTL of St. Louis made a personal appearance along with Brenda Kieffer a polio-stricken vocalist from Farmington, Missouri who sang from a wheelchair.

From 1908 to 1919, the New Staunton Coal Company produced the most coal in Madison County. In 1962 to 1964 Livingston was the only shipping mine in Madison County. Lumaghi Coal Company #4 in Collinsville was still working, but it was a local mine meaning it sold to truck trade only.

The mine closed in February 1964 with only forty-four employees.

Many miners suffered black lung or miner's asthma which was a disease suffered only by underground coal miners. The inhalation of coal dust inflamed the lungs, causing shortness of breath, fatigue, and sometimes death. Black lung increased in the 1900s because of the dust generated by new mining machinery. Many miners in the 1960s applied for black lung compensation and received a check each month from the government

The following were Livingston Mine Superintendents: Joseph P. Hebenstreit, Thomas Hebenstreit, and Ellis Vallow. Joseph A. Hebenstreit, who was assistant superintendent, became superintendent after his brother Thomas retired

Mine managers were: Thomas Moss, LeRoy Pollett, Otto Scroggins, Mike Tomso, Ralph Sawyer, John Monschien, Robert Archibald, John Connolly, Ralph Baugh, Thomas McCulister and Tony Tarrach.

Information on mining came from the Annual Coal Report of Illinois, 1904-1964 and the Staunton Star-Times newspaper.