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Coal Mechanization and Migration from McDowell County, West Virginia, 1932-1970.

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Coal Mechanization and Migration from McDowell County, West Virginia, 1932-1970

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ABSTRACT

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The economy and population of McDowell County, West Virginia, drastically decreased between 1950 and 1970. The increased reliance of the coal industry, McDowell County's primary industry, on labor saving machinery resulted in a loss of employment opportunities. This study seeks to investigate the reasons for the reliance on coal and the results of the mechanization movement in the coal industry on McDowell County. Using production and employment data of two representative McDowell County coal companies, it is clear that the introduction of continuous mining machines, which combined the cutting and loading of the coal into one step, allowed companies to mine more coal with fewer workers. Because the economy of McDowell County was so coal-intensive, the increased unemployment caused by mechanization forced many miners to migrate to such midwestern industrial centers as Cleveland or Columbus.

DEDICATION

To Heather, without your love and support, this would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

During the twentieth century, coal powered the industrial plants that lifted the United States to industrial supremacy and helped win two world wars. West Virginia provided much of the coal that led to the industrialization of the United States. By the early twentieth century, West Virginia's economy depended on coal. Coal became more than an industry for the people of West Virginia: it evolved into a way of life. The state's dependence on coal caused the state legislature to take steps to attract investors and protect the coal industry. With the help of pro-business, anti-union, state and local governments, the coal industry blossomed in West Virginia.

McDowell County, the southernmost county in West Virginia, became the leading coal producing county by 1920. Coal mining opened up southern West Virginia to development, drove the economy of the region, and altered many social and political institutions. As the century progressed, changes in the coal industry, primarily mechanization, created many problems for the economy of southern West Virginia. By the early 1990s, large scale underground coal mining had disappeared from the county, causing the people of McDowell to leave the region in droves. As economic stagnation set in, it was unclear what the future held

for McDowell. Why did the economic disaster that affected McDowell County take place? Where did the county's people go?

The migration of former miners from McDowell County was similar to the larger migration affecting the rest of the southern Appalachian region. Between 1950 and 1960, the southern Appalachian region lost more than one million people through migration. People left their homes throughout the region because of the opportunities available in other areas. The similarities between the migration in McDowell and the rest of southern Appalachia end there, however. The southern Appalachian region is not an entirely homogenous area. Different parts of southern Appalachia have different values and social patterns, nullifying any opportunity for a sense of unity that could classify them as belonging to a region. Rather, southern Appalachia is an arbitrary grouping of diverse areas that are not closely related culturally or economically.[1]

In regard to migration, there are two specific sections of note in southern Appalachia. Migration from McDowell County is similar to migratory patterns of Appalachian coal mining areas, specifically eastern Kentucky, West Virginia, and southwest Virginia. As the number of men employed in mining declined in

[1]James S. Brown and George A. Hillery, Jr., "The Great Migration, 1940-1960," in Thomas R. Ford, ed., *The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1962), 54-55.

the coal fields, out-migration increased. My study is a case study of the effect mechanization had on the demographics of coal mining areas. Other areas, including western North Carolina and East Tennessee, included people who farmed for a living. Farmers realized that higher wages and better lives could be found in the city. The migration of farmers from Appalachia exemplified the nationwide trend of moving from farm to city.[2]

Study of the population loss in the county is significant for two reasons. First, because the county relied so heavily on the coal industry, there was no available work for unemployed miners. Secondly, the subsequent migration of McDowell County's youth resulted in an upward shift in the average age of its population. The best and the brightest migrated, causing the county to become in many ways, a dependency of the federal government. If future generations understand that exclusive reliance on one industry is economically dangerous, then it is possible to restore McDowell's economy. Many migrants would have gladly returned home if stable employment was available to them.

The coal industry of the mid-twentieth century was an industry of change. As the technology of coal evolved from hand loading to machine loading to continuous mining via machine, employment levels declined. It is clear that mechanization did not affect the economy of the county until the period from 1955

[2]Ibid., 58, 61.

to 1960. The continuous mining machine, which combined the tasks of cutting and loading coal into one process, gained widespread use by the late 1950s. The continuous mining machine was the single most influential invention causing unemployment in the coal industry and the migration of people from McDowell in the 1950s and 1960s.[3]

Several reasons caused the increased use of machinery in the coal mines. New Deal legislation led to development and implementation of labor-saving machinery. The passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act(NIRA) in 1933 included a section that guaranteed the right of workers to collective bargaining. The collective bargaining clause of the NIRA resulted in the successful organizing drive of the United Mine Workers(UMWA) in the previously non-union coalfields of southern West Virginia, raising labor costs in the process. Although the NIRA was declared unconstitutional in 1935, Congress passed the Wagner Act to protect miners' rights to collective bargaining. To offset the loss suffered by rising labor costs, coal operators increasingly turned to machinery. The introduction of coal loading machines changed the coal industry, yet it did not affect

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[3]Ronald L. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 178-180; Curtis Seltzer, *Fire in the Hole: Miners and Managers in the American Coal Industry* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 65; Crandall A. Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 204.

McDowell County. The problems facing the county in the early 1930s were a result of the economic collapse that precipitated the Great Depression.[4]

There were many different types of machinery available to coal operators during the first half of the twentieth century. Early cutting and loading machines, such as the one developed by Colonel Edward O'Toole, were predecessors of the continuous mining machines. The early machines were not successful because of the room and pillar method of mining used in the coal industry in the 1920s and 1930s. The room and pillar method divided the mine into different areas, leaving a miner in charge of an individual area. The miner controlled all aspects of the mining process, from cutting, blasting, and loading the coal to taking any necessary safety precautions. The most important mechanical development during the 1930s was the Joy loader, invented by Joseph Joy. The Joy loader was a scoop that loaded the coal after it had been blasted by the miner. By the 1940s most coal-loading machines used in McDowell County were built by the Joy company.[5]

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[4]Robert F. Himmelberg, *The Origins of the National Recovery Administration: Business, Government, and the Trade Association Issue, 1921-1933* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1976), 207; Jerry B. Thomas, *An Appalachian New Deal: West Virginia in the Great Depression* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 106.

[5]Keith Dix, *What's a Coal Miner to do? The Mechanization of Coal Mining* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 35-

Production and employment of McDowell County mines demonstrate the effect of World War II and mechanization on the mines of McDowell County. My study focuses on two McDowell County coal companies. The Carter Coal Company operated three mines around Coalwood and Caretta: Olga #1 and #2, and Caretta. The Peerless Coal Company operated in Vivian. In terms of production and employment, Carter Coal was a reasonably large company, but Peerless was a somewhat small operation. The records of both companies give insights about mechanization and employment demographics of their mines. The statistics reveal that increased use of machinery and the development of continuous mining machines led to the termination of many miners. Many of the smaller operations did not have the capital necessary to mechanize and could not produce the tonnage of coal necessary to keep up with the competition nationwide. By 1960, the coal industry quit being profitable for small operations and forced many of the small mines, including Peerless, to close.[6]

The cutbacks caused by mechanization forced many former miners to make tough decisions for their families. Some decided to stay in McDowell County and take their chances, but many more packed up and left the county. The destinations for most

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38, 65-68.

[6]State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* (Charleston: 1960), 62-63.

Appalachian migrants were midwestern, industrial cities. For McDowell migrants, the common destinations were the cities of Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio. Both cities offered industrial jobs and a chance at a better life. Although discrimination and poverty were constant aspects of the migrant's life, life was much better for migrants who resided in the cities than it was in the decaying towns of McDowell. Migrant children could receive a good education, which was an important opportunity that was valued greatly by many migrants. Migrants received good jobs with good wages, and the possibility of home ownership was a reality for many of them.[7]

Residents left behind in McDowell County faced a tenuous situation. Although the coal industry improved by 1970, many areas of the county became mired in poverty and despair. The problems facing Eureka Hollow, an obscure McDowell County coal camp, was an example of the hard times faced by many who stayed in McDowell. Jobs were nonexistent. Money was tight. Welfare dependency was rampant. The promise of a better tomorrow did not exist for the inhabitants of places such as Eureka Hollow.[8]

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[7]Chad Berry, *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 104-105; John Photiadis, *Selected Social and Sociopsychological Characteristics of West Virginians in their Own State and in Cleveland, Ohio* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Appalachian Center, 1970), 56-61.

[8]Bill Peterson, *Coaltown Revisited: An Appalachian Notebook* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1972), 4-6.

The aforementioned issues are paramount to the dramatic population loss in McDowell County from 1950 to 1970. Most importantly, it is pertinent to examine the development of the coal industry in the county. To fully understand the results of mechanization on the residents of southern West Virginia requires comprehension of the rise of the coal industry. The coal industry grew in McDowell County for many reasons, leading to the domination of McDowell's economy by coal.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND OF A COAL ECONOMY, 1880-1932

State government officials knew of the existence of coal in the western part of Virginia as early as the eighteenth century. The extent of coal deposits were so immense that Thomas Jefferson wrote in *Notes on Virginia*, "In the western country coal is known to be in so many places, as to have induced an opinion, that the whole tract between the Laurel Mountain, Missisipi, and Ohio yields coal."[1] The exact value of the coal reserves, however, would not be known until the beginning of the industrial age, when the needs of the steel industry provided an impetus to development of the coal industry.[2]

The state first promoted its untapped wealth of natural resources as early as 1864. In 1870 the state sponsored the publication of the *West Virginia Handbook and Immigrants Guide*. Written by Joseph H. Debar, the handbook encouraged new immigrants to the United States to come and work in the West Virginia coalfields. It was essential for West Virginia to encourage industry because there were few economic opportunities available in the mountainous sections of the state. Many

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[1]Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Pedan (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 28.

[2]David Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 2.

developers and state officials believed that promotion of the natural resources of West Virginia could overcome geographical barriers of communication and transport. But, the early advertising promoting the coal industry was largely ineffective in southern West Virginia. At the end of the 1870s, southern West Virginia still was an isolated and agrarian region. Farmers, hunters, and extended families-sometimes called clans-occupied the region. It was not until the entrance of the railroad into southern West Virginia in the late nineteenth century that the state became largely industrialized. The growth of the coal industry in southern West Virginia transformed the region into an industrialized and economic colony of outside forces that possessed the capital needed to infiltrate the region. The coal industry replaced the traditional family values of the native population with new industrial values that were designed to consolidate the power of coal companies amid the influx of thousands of immigrants.[3]

Despite the possibilities afforded by the vast coal deposits of southern West Virginia, the coal industry was not the first industry in the Southern Mountains. The timber industry entered McDowell County before coal could gain a foothold. The wealth of

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[3]Ronald Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 46-47; John A. Williams, *West Virginia and the Captains of Industry* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library, 1976), 166. Corbin, 1.

virgin timber attracted many businessmen to invest in timber. Major lumber companies entered McDowell County and had reached peak production by 1895. Although the railroad transported most timber in McDowell, railroad officials primarily built the Norfolk and Western Railroad to take advantage of the enormous coal reserves. The promotion of coal by the state government as a more profitable industry hindered the progress of the timber industry and tied the future of McDowell to coal.[4]

The state's promotion of the coal industry, while significant, was not the most influential factor at hastening the development of coal mining. Private speculators knew that a fortune could be made in coal lands, and so they threw enormous amounts of energy into promoting the coalfields. Speculators had their eye on McDowell County and began to enter remote areas of the county during the 1880s. In order to gain control of the land, and more importantly, mineral rights, land speculators resorted to unscrupulous methods. The arrival of speculators who would do anything to gain control of the land resulted in a land boom unseen before in McDowell County.[5]

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[4]Phil Conley, *History of the West Virginia Coal Industry* (Charleston, WV: Education Foundation, 1960), 228; Ronald L. Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 60.

[5]Eller, 48, 52.

To evict the native landholders, speculators found a local federal judge who, for a bribe, agreed to rule that the "deeds" held by speculators were the original and legal deeds. Despite the support of the United States Supreme Court, many of the county's natives could not afford the legal fees necessary to appeal local decisions. The unscrupulous methods used to evict the native landowners began a long tradition of economic and political corruption in the coalfields of southern West Virginia.[6]

The ease of mining coal in McDowell County aided the growth of the coal industry. Large seams and hillside exposure made entry easy. Flooding, a common mining dilemma, was not a problem. Elevation of the mines made pumping water unnecessary because the hills provided excellent drainage. Geography helped mining coal in another way. The slopes eased the hauling of the coal out of the mines. Without these advantages, the coal industry in West Virginia may not have developed as extensively as it did.[7]

There was one major barrier that had to be crossed before widespread industrial growth of southern West Virginia could begin, that of transporting coal to market. The lack of adequate transportation out of the region rendered the southern West

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[6]Corbin, 3.

[7]Ibid., 5.

Virginia coal useless. In the early 1880s, officials of the Norfolk and Western Railroad began construction of a rail line into the coalfields of the Flat Top region, an area that included the Pocahontas and Winding Gulf coalfields, and encompassed McDowell, Mercer, Wyoming, and Raleigh counties.[8]

In the early 1880s, however, railroad companies neither possessed the technological knowledge nor the finances to penetrate the mountains. No capitalist was willing to commit large sums of money to a railroad project in West Virginia without reasonable hope for profit. During this decade railroad companies learned more effective tunneling techniques that allowed the railroads to cross the mountains through an extensive network of tunnels, and notable financiers, among them John D. Rockefeller, paid for the building of railroads. The first wave of railroad construction in the late 1880s opened up to development the Flat Top coalfield of Mercer and Raleigh counties. Soon after the construction of the first railroads, speculators bought the majority of land in southern West Virginia, and thereafter speculation became a distinguishing characteristic of the early industrialization of the region.[9]

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[8]W.P. Tams, *The Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia: A Brief History* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library, 1963), 19; Joe William Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 12-13.

[9]Tams, 19; Corbin, 2.

The coal industry did not enter McDowell County and the Pocahontas coalfields on a large scale until 1892 and 1893, with the completion of the Norfolk and Western Railroad's Ohio Branch, which traveled through Mingo County to Kenova on the Ohio River. The construction of the line gave McDowell County mines an opening in the coal markets of the Great Lakes because it connected McDowell County with the industrial centers of the Midwest. The new markets gave operators more flexibility by allowing them to sell coal to different markets.[10]

The United States' entry into World War I in April, 1917, brought a new vitality to the coalfields. War industries, primarily in the Midwest, needed to produce large amounts of munitions and other wartime necessities. The new munitions factories required coal and because there was a shortage of coal, the industry expanded. Many new mines opened and older mines expanded. Throughout the United States, the number employed in coal mining rose from less than 200,000 in 1890 to more than 600,000 in 1920. After the war, there were two other reasons for the continued solvency of the coal industry in southern West Virginia. First, a coal shortage in war-torn Europe allowed McDowell County coal to keep its domination of coal production in the world market. Second, a nationwide strike of union miners in

[10]Tams, 19; Eller, 132.

the early 1920s took these mines out of competition with the non-union mines in McDowell.[11]

The industrialization of southern West Virginia affected traditional ways of life by destroying the extended family clan.[12] Clans developed because of the isolation of the mountain regions during the nineteenth century. The support system provided by the clan allowed families to thrive in the wilderness. The Hatfield family, involved in the famous Hatfield-McCoy feud, was the quintessential mountain clan. But the family clan could not survive in an industrializing economy. By the 1890s, a general perception formed in the media about mountaineer culture as lawless and unsuited to the march of civilization. The media popularized the idea of mountain culture as anarchical by publishing sensational accounts of mountain feuds. The *Wheeling Intelligencer* argued that "Capitalists refuse to come and prospect because they say they are afraid of our outlaws. You cannot get them to go into the interior to

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[11]O.E. Kissling, "Coal Mining in the South," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 153 (January 1931): 88-89; Malcolm Ross, *Machine Age in the Hills* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1933) 50-51; Morton Baratz, *The Union and the Coal Industry*, Reprint ed. (New York: Kennikat Press, 1973), 52-57.

[12]In this work, the word "clan" is used loosely to describe mountain families before industrialization. For further information, consult: Altina L. Waller, *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

inspect our timber and coal lands for fear they will be ambushed."[13]

The eventual industrialization of the region destroyed the clan and forced families to make tough decisions. The Hatfields, for example, found themselves on opposite sides of the miner-operator dispute. Some became politicians. Henry D. Hatfield served as governor, 1913-1917, and as United States Senator, 1929-1935. Others became coal operators, while some became miners.[14]

The native, white population of southern West Virginia could not supply a work force adequate for the needs of the growing coal industry. In 1880, McDowell County had a population of 3,078, of which 3,071 were white. As the coal industry entered McDowell County, the needs of coal companies required that labor be imported from other areas. By 1890, McDowell County's population had risen to 7,347, of which 5,260, or 71.7 percent, were white. By 1910, the McDowell County population rose to 47,856, of which 25,196, or 52.6 percent, were American-born whites. The preponderant majority of whites living in McDowell County were migrants themselves, as the native whites living in

[13]*Wheeling Intelligencer*, 23 November 1889; Waller, 232.

[14]Waller, 232; Corbin, 7.

McDowell in 1880 could not have reproduced the numbers necessary to support the large population increase.[15]

To meet their labor requirements, coal operators brought in African Americans and immigrants from such nations as Russia, Italy, and Romania. Operators recruited both African Americans and Europeans because they worked for significantly cheaper wages than did native whites. The operators influenced labor recruits by offering them a way of life better than that they had known previously. Although the recruitment of African American miners increased the rate of black migration, blacks soon formed their own immigration networks. It was difficult for married men to migrate because they invariably left their families behind until they could afford to join the men. Paying African American and European migrants sub-standard wages not only kept operating costs down and profits high but also continued the exploitation of McDowell County miners.[16]

The bituminous coal mined in southern West Virginia beginning in the early twentieth century quickly became renown for its superior quality.. West Virginia coal had the highest heat unit, which is the amount of heat energy produced as coal is burned, and produced the best steam in the United States. It had a low content of ash and sulphur, which made it the most fuel

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[15]Trotter, 19.

[16]Ibid., 24-25.

efficient and best cooking coal in the country. West Virginia coal became so popular with both industry and the general public, that the region's mines captured the most profitable national markets. For instance, the midwestern industries and the United States Navy both preferred West Virginia coal. McDowell County was probably most affected by the increase in demand. Coal output in McDowell rose from 246,000 tons in 1889 to 3.5 million tons in 1899, to 12 million tons in 1910.[17]

The effort to organize coal miners into a labor union determined the economic success of McDowell County. The United Mine Workers of America(UMWA), organized in 1890 as a result of the merger of National Trades Assembly 135 of the Knights of Labor and the National Progressive Union, initially was a weak union. A successful strike in the coalfields of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania in 1902, resulted in the acceptance of collective bargaining in those coalfields and gave the union new life. Membership steadily increased from a low of 33,000 members in 1897 to more than 400,000 in 1917. Many miners came into the union because of the desire for increased benefits and improvements in their quality of life.[18]

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[17]Rita K. Hessley, John W. Reasoner, and John T. Riley, *Coal Science: An Introduction to Chemistry, Technology, and Utilization* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1986), 81; Corbin, 4-5.

[18]Gary M. Fink, ed. *Labor Unions* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 228; Baratz, 52-57.

UMWA activists realized that industrial democracy meant the right of the majority to make decisions. The union leaders also realized, however, that an oppressive system, controlled by a strong minority, could trample on the rights of a weaker majority. John L. Lewis, who rose to the presidency of the union, exemplified the belief system of the UMWA. When he attended school, Lewis was one of six boys entrusted to carry coal for the school. The boys felt that they should be paid to do the work, so Lewis suggested they strike. The principal knew about the plan and punished the insurrectionists. The principal knew that the boys had a legitimate grievance but argued that they should have spoken to him first. The event taught Lewis much about timing which would aid him in future negotiations for the UMWA.[19]

The UMWA sought to unionize all coal miners in the United States. Yet, before 1920, the union did not make much progress in its efforts to organize southern West Virginia because one of the primary issues that concerned the union was that of uniform national wage rates. The southern West Virginia operators believed that the union was illegal, moreover, after learning of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, they saw it as a communist

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[19]Martin Dubofsky and Warren Van Tyne, *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: Quadrangle, 1977), 13-14; John Hutchinson, "John L. Lewis: To the Presidency of the UMWA," *Labor History* 19 (Spring 1978): 187.

plot to destroy American industry. Most importantly, however, because the union could not secure agreements for uniform wage rates from southern West Virginia companies, these producers could pay lower wages and market more coal in important markets such as those on the Great Lakes. The failure of unionization was one significant contributing factor to the industrialization of McDowell County.[20]

There were many small mines that lined the hollows of McDowell County. They dominated the landscape, yet many mines did not have the technology nor the capacity to mine a significant tonnage of coal. Throughout the history of McDowell County a few companies produced most of the county's coal. The larger companies had the resources to hire significant numbers of workers, to keep them satisfied with social improvements, and to use machinery to increase the rate of production.[21]

One of the most important companies in McDowell County was the United States Coal and Coke Company(U.S. Coal and Coke), which operated mines around the town of Gary, West Virginia. U.S. Coal and Coke, a subsidiary of the United States Steel corporation, had the resources to open many mines in the Gary area, so that by 1923 the company had become the largest coal

[20]Baratz, 46.

[21]Eller, 134.

producer in West Virginia. The company would be central to the economy of McDowell County for many more years.[22]

U.S. Coal and Coke pioneered mechanization of McDowell County mines. The company instituted the first successful cutting and loading machines in the county in the early 1900s. The cutting machines undercut the coal before a charge of powder was detonated to loosen the coal. The undercutting machines were electrically driven, short-wall mining machines.[23]

The early machine movement did not decrease the number of mining jobs available in McDowell County. Most of the machines did not cause mass terminations of workers because they were designed to aid the workers, not to replace them.[24] Each miner's responsibilities included all operations within a certain area of a mine. The miner undercut the coal seam, blasted the coal, loaded the coal, and made any necessary safety precautions. It was not until the widespread use of loading machines and

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[22]Edward O'Toole, "Pocahontas Coal Field and Operating Methods of the United States Coal and Coke Company," *Coal Age* 23 (8 March 1923): 401-402.

[23]Conley, 36; Carter Goodrich, "Machine and the Miner," *Harper's* 154 (April 1927): 649; O'Toole, 403.

[24]Besides the undercutting machines, other machines that entered the mines during the first couple of decades of the twentieth century included the moving belt, the electric drill, and loading machines.

continuous mining machines of the late 1950s that many jobs were lost to machines.[25]

Beginning about the turn of the century, McDowell County experienced rapid economic growth never before seen in the region. Economic historian Mancur Olson argued that rapid economic growth led to political and social instability. This was true in West Virginia. The political instability that characterized southern West Virginia led to a coalition of pro-coal politicians and businessmen gaining control of local and state governments. The political factions that controlled West Virginia politics during the early twentieth century were deeply connected to the coal establishment. Throughout the early years of the industry, the political establishment protected the interests of coal operators by controlling both members of the United States Congress and the governor. Moreover, the political-business coalition controlled the important committees of Mines and Mining, and Labor and Immigration in the West Virginia state legislature. The leaders of the establishment included dynamic political figures as Governor William A. MacCorkle, and Senators Henry G. Davis and Stephen B. Elkins. Until the dawn of the New Deal, McDowell County coal miners could

[25]Keith Dix, *What's a Coal Miner to do? The Mechanization of Coal Mining*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 81-82.

expect little political help for any grievances they may have had against the coal companies.[26]

The rapid economic growth of southern West Virginia led to a significant increase in violence in the Southern Mountains. For example, the union's efforts at organizing led to violence. In 1912, thousands of non-union and union miners, supported by the UMWA, walked out of their jobs in the Paint Creek district of Kanawha and Fayette counties. The miners formed a militant solidarity that captured the imaginations of radicals and socialists throughout the country. The solidarity formed amongst the miners came at a cost, however. Both sides of the strike committed atrocities: Mother Jones, for instance, held up the bloody coat of a wounded mine guard and screamed: "This is the first time I ever saw a goddamned mine guard's coat decorated to suit me."[27] Mine guards attacked the tent towns of the striking miners and sprayed them with bullets, not caring who was hit, be it women, men, or children. The violence that occurred at Paint Creek was characteristic of the violence that affected much of southern West Virginia before the New Deal.[28]

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[26]Mancur Olson, "Rapid Growth as a Destabilizing Force," *Journal of Economic History* 23 (December 1963): 529-552; John Alexander Williams, *West Virginia: A Bicentennial History*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976), 121-122; Corbin, 13-14.

[27]*Coal Age* 2 (14 September 1912): 364.

[28]Corbin, 87-88.

Despite being controlled by the coal establishment, the West Virginia legislature passed several laws to aid miners. Among them were several dealing with the use of scrip. Scrip was a form of payment that could only be used in the company store. The goal of the scrip system was to sell the miner necessary goods at inflated prices. Thus, the system took a miner's wages and gave them back to the company. The exploitation of this system was so obvious that the legislature took action to ease the miners' plight. One law, passed in 1887, required that coal companies pay their workers in lawful money. A second law, passed in 1891, took a further step and outlawed scrip outright.[29]

But the laws passed by the legislature giving miners relief from exploitation were ineffective. The coal operators had enough political power to ignore the laws passed against scrip. The companies still paid miners in outlawed forms, and did so until the New Deal. The laws against scrip were not the only state laws ignored by operators. Other laws ignored included requirements to keep a checkweighman on the tipples. A checkweighman ensured that the operator paid a miner accurately for the load of coal he produced. From the 1880s to the 1930s, miners were paid by how much they produced, not by the hours they

[29]Winthrop D. Lane, *Civil War in West Virginia* (New York: Arno Press, 1969): 27.

worked. Without a checkweighman on the tipples, the company could–and often did–shortchange the miner.[30]

Operators also ignored a prohibition, enacted by the legislature, against interfering with peaceful efforts of a union to organize workers. Prior to the New Deal, operators saw the UMWA as a plot that was un-American and harmful to business. The connection between the coal establishment and political leaders worked to control the miners and, thus, destroy the unionist movement. Because of the lack of political power held by the miners, the state legislature passed laws that seemed to aid the miners, yet were victories for the operators. For example, the state legislature passed a Workers' Compensation law in 1913. The legislation seemed to be a significant victory for the miners, but the law exempted operators from damage suits by injured miners. The statute protected the operators because previous damage suits often were won by the miners. The political power of the operators was such that the bills that passed the legislature had the blessing of the coal establishment.[31]

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[30]Lamar Epperly to Justin Collins, 21 July 1925, Collins Papers, West Virginia Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown.

[31]E.P. Monts to A.B. Fleming, 1 March 1904, Fleming Papers, West Virginia Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown; Samuel Gompers, "Russianized West Virginia," *American Federationist* 20 (October 1913): 869.

The coal operators, determined to keep the union from organizing the southern West Virginia coalfields, unified to oppose the UMWA. Coal operator George Wolfe explained the new policy in a letter to his colleague Justin Collins: "The operators of the Pocahontas coalfield unanimously agreed by 100% of the tonnage that this District would make a determined fight against the impending invasion by the United Mine Workers of America."[32] In addition to flaunting their political power, the coal operators used other methods to keep the union from organizing the southern West Virginia coalfields. Many of the operators in the Pocahontas coalfield–which includes McDowell County–forced their new employees sign a contract known as a yellow-dog contract. The yellow-dog contract was so exploitative that the state court system characterized it as a contract between master and servant. There were several types of yellow-dog contracts, but the most commonly-used one specified that the employer would not employ a member of a union, and that the employee would neither join a union nor aid in the organization of a union. The operators thus tried to get as many employees as possible to sign yellow-dog contracts: then, if the union persisted in organizing McDowell County, the operators intended

[32]George Wolfe to Justin Collins, 25 June 1920, Collins Papers.

to secure injunctions against the UMWA for "interfering" with their labor.[33]

The operators could require their workers to sign yellow-dog contracts because the nature of the coal camps allowed the operators to exercise their power over the miners.[34] The camps were unincorporated, so the operators had control of everyday life. Within the towns company officials filled such diverse roles as mayor and school superintendent. The mine operator scrutinized every move made by the miners. Operators suppressed political activity among the miners and censored miners' mail to further control their towns. The miner lived in company housing and if a miner lost his job, his family would be put out into the streets. Thus, a miner's job was much more important than a paycheck. His family's survival was at stake.[35]

If the company suspected a miner of harboring union sympathizers or of aiding the establishment of a union, the company could, and did, search miners' houses at will. If any unauthorized activity was found to be occurring, the companies

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[33]Ibid.

[34]Both coal camps and coal towns are adequate terms to describe the settlements constructed by the coal companies. The settlements were largely self-sufficient and both terms are used interchangeably in this work.

[35]Betty Cantrell, Grace Phillips, and Helen Reed, "Widen, the Town J.G. Bradley Built," *Goldenseal* 3 (January 1977): 4; *Coal Age* 4 (12 July 1913): 66.

could evict the miners without due process of law. The company sent the mine guards to remove the miners and their families from the premises. Guards willfully damaged miners' personal possessions when they roughly dumped miners' belongings into the street. Guards--thugs really--evicted the miners without concern for life or property. The eviction process was so inhumane that, for example, during the Paint Creek strike, mine guards evicted a pregnant woman who was in labor.[36]

Despite the control exerted by the operators over miners' lives, miners still protested oppressive working and living conditions. Geographic mobility was the most effective protest. Miners drifted from town to town in search of higher wages, improved living and working conditions, and enhanced opportunities for advancement in the workplace. African American miners moved in order to escape racial prejudice. The mobility of southern West Virginia miners eventually led to the development of a strong, collective mentality because miners worked and lived in many places. Each miner was a member of a large coal mining community that encompassed the five coal fields of southern West Virginia. More importantly, common experiences with operators and camp life brought miners together.[37]

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[36]*Coal Age* 4 (12 July 1913): 66; Corbin, 9-10.

[37]Isaac Hourwich, *Immigration and Labor: The Economic Aspects of European Immigration to the United States*, Reprint ed. (New York: AMS Press, 1972), 421; Corbin, 40-42.

The coal operators sought to slow the rate of migration among their miners by hiring married men who had families and were more willing to work harder and longer to support their families. The cost of moving from town to town was so great, and so stressful on the families, that married men were significantly less mobile than single men who had no ties to a specific area. Operators also stemmed the tide of migration by improving conditions in the coal towns.[38]

Mobility became an important form of protest primarily because of the failure of the UMWA. Without the protection afforded by organized labor, miners had few other options to protest the exploitation of the coal town system. While it is true that political control of the state government by the coal operators adversely affected unionization, the primary reason that miners did not begin to unionize before 1912 was that the union raised concerns, such as higher wages and shorter hours, that were not yet significant to the miners of southern West Virginia. The important issues to the miners were those that they believed affected their families, jobs, and way of life: including the mine guard system, free trade, the checkweighman, and the scrip system. The union's priorities did not gain support in southern West Virginia because of the traditional

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[38]Crandall A. Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 49.

working of the mine system. Higher wages and shorter hours were not important because the miners did not work set hours and were paid by the amount of coal mined. Without addressing the concerns that directly affected the miners, the union had little chance of success in southern West Virginia.[39]

The emergence of coal towns on the landscape of McDowell County defined the importance of the coal industry to the miners' way of life. Companies built coal towns because, when the coal operators began to enter McDowell County, the area was desolate. The isolation of the area required the construction of company housing. Because few settlements could support the influx of laborers pouring into McDowell County company towns sprang up and, beginning around 1900, began to dominate the landscape.[40]

More miners lived in company housing in West Virginia than in any other state in the union. The isolation of the mountain mines and the domination of the landscape by the company towns made them an integral part of life. The town quickly became the dominant influence on community and social life. The social institutions included in the towns, stores, churches, recreational facilities became a form of social power. The companies owned the towns and controlled them in such a way that

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[39]Corbin, 26-33.

[40]Walter Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library, 1964), 64.

upheld the interests of the company. The emergence of the coal town constituted another example of the transference of social power from traditional sources to the new industrial power, the coal companies. The price of economic success for southern West Virginia was political and social control by the companies.[41]

Another reason that company towns were so important to the coal officials was that before 1900 mountaineers only worked seasonally, when they could leave their farms. These early miners never thought of coal mining as a career. They considered mining as a way to make extra money to supplement their seasonal farm incomes. To combat the labor shortage and to persuade the mountaineers that mining was the best way to make a living, the operators tried to invoke a sense of stability with social institutions such as schools, churches, and civic clubs. The ultimate goal of the coal operators was to secure a more permanent, family-based labor force.[42]

Once the labor force was in place, the companies had to ensure that their workers would not have a reason to leave. The continued migration of unhappy workers forced the operators continually to improve social conditions in their towns. By the mid-1920s, conditions improved considerably in the coal towns.

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[41]Shifflett, xv; Eller, 162.

[42]P.J. Riley to Collins, 3 June 1907, Collins Papers; George Wolfe to Collins, 30 July 1916, Collins Papers.

Operators installed baths and electric hookups in miners' homes. Such recreational facilities as theaters, restaurants, dance halls, bowling alleys, pool rooms, and baseball fields, constructed by the operators, improved the quality of life in the coal towns of McDowell County. Operators also built clubhouses to house bachelors and newlyweds. The facilities built by the companies helped to soften the sting of the miners' lot in life, yet only larger companies, such as U.S. Coal and Coke, offered such amenities. The smaller operators did not have the capital to offer such benefits to their workers, so it was very difficult for them to keep workers for an extended period of time. Miners simply moved to the larger towns, where houses had indoor plumbing and electric lights.[43]

Operators knew that leisure activities were paramount to the satisfaction of the miners. Thus, most of the coal camps, even the smaller ones, fielded a baseball team that traveled from camp to camp to play ball. Operators built the ballfields, bought the uniforms, and subsidized road games to keep the miners satisfied and to keep the union out of McDowell County. Baseball games were very popular, as crowds of several hundred people attended the games. By the mid-1950s, Welch continued the coal field baseball tradition by fielding a professional baseball team, the

[43]*Coal Age* (4 February 1914): 295; 6 (22 August 1914): 311-312; O'Toole, 407; Eller, 186.

Miners, who played in the Class D Appalachian League.[44] In a historical sense, the importance of baseball to the residents of the coal towns was another example of the importance of coal not only to the economy but also to the way of life of the residents of McDowell County.[45]

Another example of the impact of coal on the society of McDowell County was the influence of the immigrants who entered the county. In addition to the native white mountaineers, the migrants who entered McDowell to work the mines were black southerners, and southern and eastern Europeans. The interaction of these three groups of migrants contributed to the society of McDowell County.[46]

After the Pocahontas mines opened in 1892, African Americans from Virginia and North Carolina entered the coalfields. After 1900, operators recruited blacks from Alabama to work in the southern West Virginia coalfields. Many times operators sent professional labor agents south to persuade African Americans to come to West Virginia. Often these agents doubled as guards

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[44]Even today, baseball is a popular pastime for McDowell County, Mount View high school has a solid baseball program, with several state championship berths in the last decade or so, and the little league programs are surviving, despite overall lack of interest in baseball nationwide. These connections between the past and the present show that the county still continues with many traditions of the past.

[45]Tams, 56.

[46]Eller, 165.

hired by Baldwin-Felts, the preeminent mine guard company in West Virginia. While Baldwin-Felts men coerced a small number of African Americans into moving to West Virginia, most African Americans willingly migrated to West Virginia. Despite their common origin in the tenant farming system, blacks migrated to southern West Virginia for several different reasons. The first being that African Americans could make a better living as coal miners than as tenant farmers. The second, and probably the most important, reason was that West Virginia had no official Jim Crow laws. True, many public facilities were separate, but, unlike other southern states, facilities for African Americans and whites were similar in quality. African Americans worked in both skilled and unskilled positions. Because of the inherent race prejudice in the larger society, blacks rarely assumed positions of authority in the mines(e.g. mine foreman). Race relations were intimate and friendly due to the close proximity in which the miners worked. White and black miners worked and ate together. Systematic white discrimination of black miners did not occur because there was no separate pay scale for white and black miners.[47]

[47]James T. Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," in *Blacks in Appalachia*, ed. William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 72-77; Trotter, 21.

Because of the equitable pay scale, there was a decrease in race consciousness in favor of an increase in socioeconomic class consciousness. Many of the miners formed a cohesion because they perceived themselves to be members of an oppressed class. Both white and black miners had to support one another because the coal companies politically and socially oppressed all miners, regardless of race. One interesting example of good relations between African American and white miners was found in the "Cinder Bottom" section of Keystone, a merchant town in the eastern section of McDowell County. Cinder Bottom was famous for its brothels. Some brothels in Cinder Bottom catered to black patrons only, some to white patrons only, but most were not particular about the race of their customers. In contrast, a resident of Tazewell County, Virginia, when visiting Keystone in the early part of the century, was appalled because the white prostitutes entertained African American miners.[48]

Black residents also held considerable political influence in parts of McDowell County. The white officials of Keystone had to cater to the whims of the black community, else they would find themselves voted out of office very quickly. From the mid-1920s to 1995, McDowell County sent at least one black member to

[48]Kenneth Bailey, "A Judicious Mixture: Negroes and Immigrants in the West Virginia Mines, 1880-1917," *West Virginia History* 34 (January 1973): 157-158; Ronald Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 148-149.

the West Virginia House of Delegates. The African American community of the county even published its own newspaper, the *McDowell Times*. There were many opportunities for hard-working black miners in McDowell County. Things were so good that the editor of the *Times*, M.T. Whittico, stated that West Virginia was "a veritable Eldorado for the industrious Negro."[49]

Because of the quality of race relations and the number of opportunities available to African Americans in McDowell County, the county quickly had the largest concentration of black labor in the coalfields. For instance, in 1908, McDowell County had 11,483 miners employed in their coal mines. Of these 11,483 miners, about 5,000, or 43.1 percent, were black. In 2000, McDowell County still has a large percentage of black residents, and in general, race relations are good.[50]

The influx of African American miners into McDowell County showed the prosperity of the McDowell County coal industry. McDowell County grew for several other reasons. The knowledge of state officials that the state's vast mineral resources would encourage the economic growth of the state, the advancement of new technologies, and the demands of World War I led to the development of a unique coal society that dominated the way of

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[49]Editorial, McDowell *Times*, 22 September 1916.

[50]Sterling Spero and Abram Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement*, First Atheneum Edition (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 217.

life for residents of McDowell County. The coal companies built towns and various recreational and civic institutions which gave the people of the county a sense of cohesion the likes of which they had never seen before. Although life was good for miners in many of the towns, the lack of political power caused miners to develop a sense of oppression at the hands of the operators. As mentioned previously, the early machine technology developed by the 1920s did not cause a significant loss of jobs. The early mechanization of the coal industry did not result in a mass migration from McDowell. The situation soon changed, however, as economic crisis gripped America.

CHAPTER 3

THE NEW DEAL AND MECHANIZATION, 1933-1941

By the mid-1920s, the McDowell County coal industry held an important place in the markets of the world. Migrants who poured into the region to find work in the coal mines settled into the company towns that dotted the landscape. Coal mining had become a way of life. On the surface it appeared that the economy of McDowell was strong, but industry analysts knew that the coal industry was already in trouble. A depression in the bituminous coal industry began in 1919. The coal industry recovered from the downturn, but the industry remained unstable. The instability found in the coal industry resulted from the very cause of the expansion of coal mining in McDowell County, World War I. The needs of war industries led to the opening of new, marginal mines. As war industries downsized at the end of the conflict, the nation's coal mines overproduced. As a result, many mines closed and coal prices fluctuated. Because of the importance of mining to West Virginia, the problems in the coal industry set the stage for the depression well before 1929.[1]

Although wartime expansion was the primary cause of the growth of the coal industry, certain factors influenced the

[1]Thomas Longin, "Coal, Congress, and the Courts: The Bituminous Coal Industry and the New Deal," *West Virginia History* 34 (January 1974): 101; Jerry B. Thomas, *An Appalachian New Deal: West Virginia in the Great Depression* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 8; *Charleston Gazette*, 16 September 1929.

development of an unstable industry. The operators in the Pocahontas coalfield defeated postwar organizing efforts by the United Mine Workers. Widespread success in southern West Virginia during the 1920s evaded the UMWA. Southern West Virginia coal was still popular in commercial markets because of its low-sulphur content and smokeless burning. Both the lack of union success and the quality of the coal encouraged the opening of new mines, which in turn inundated the market with more coal than could be sold.[2]

The problems facing the national coal industry during the 1920s were very complex. The supply of coal increased during the decade, but demand fell during this period. Although downsizing of wartime industries constituted the major reason for the decline in demand, there were other reasons for the drop in demand. Increased output and productivity of the oil and natural gas industries made oil and gas cheaper alternatives to coal in many regions of the country. The invention of the diesel engine, for instance, led to oil replacing coal as the preferred fuel for the railroads. Demand for coal shrank and as the growth rate of consuming industries grew slowly, it became difficult for

[2]Thomas, 8.

mines to sell coal at a price which covered production costs.[3]

The labor strife that resulted from continued UMWA efforts to organize non-union fields added to the problems facing the coal industry in the 1920s. Labor strikes, external competition, and the inability to achieve industry-wide unity of purpose led to chronic losses for the operators and frequent failures of mines. Production, which declined during 1919 because of the national strike conducted by the UMWA, caused shortages and drove prices upward. The rise in prices encouraged the opening of new mines. When prices began to drop in 1923, however, operators were hit hard. To prevent bankruptcy, operators reduced wages or used labor-saving machinery. The reduction of wages led to a near starvation existence for many of the miners. Many smaller mines closed and left many miners out of work. The mining community, therefore, suffered consequences of overproduction.[4]

Coal employment and production nationally declined during the 1920s. Employment peaked at 121,000 in 1923, but fell to

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[3]Ibid., 8-9; Longin, 102; Harold Barger and Sam H. Schurr, *The Mining Industries, 1899-1939: A Study of Output, Employment, and Productivity* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1944; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1972), 78(page citations are to the reprint edition); James P. Johnson, *The Politics of Soft Coal: The Bituminous Industry from World War I through the New Deal* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 122.

[4]Ellis W. Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly: A Study in Economic Ambivalence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 205-206; Stanley Vittoz, *New Deal Labor Policy and the American Economy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 51-52; Longin, 101; Thomas, 8-9.

107,000 by 1929. Production peaked at 146 million tons in 1927 and then began to fall. The future in West Virginia seemed bleak. When West Virginia became the leading coal producer in the nation in 1928, the state's newspapers cheered the news, despite the obvious downturn in the entire industry. The *Charleston Gazette* took an optimistic approach when it declared that downward trends in the industry "cannot mean anything but that the coal business is readjusting itself and lopping away the deadwood."[5] The *Clarksburg Exponent*, on the other hand, took a realistic approach when it noted that in 1928 production declined, companies failed, and the numbers employed fell. It was clear to the editors of the *Exponent* that coal was a sick industry and that the economy of West Virginia was on tenuous footing.[6]

The crash of the stock market on 29 October 1929 ushered in a period of economic hardship unknown before in the United States, a period later called the "Great Depression." The economic collapse hit the entire country; banks closed, men and women lost their jobs, and a general sense of hopelessness settled upon the landscape. The depression struck West Virginia hardest in the struggling coal industry. The slump of the 1920s depressed the industry enough to allow it to collapse after the

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[5]*Charleston Gazette*, 16 September 1929.

[6]Thomas, 8.

crash of October 1929. Coal production fell forty percent from 1929 to 1933. This drop in production, in and of itself, would not have been a problem if market demand had remained steady. But demand did not remain steady, instead, it fell proportionally to the drop in production. As a result of the drop in both demand and production, wages fell because prices remained steady. Coal families faced economic hardships never seen before.[7]

The Great Depression particularly damaged McDowell County. Because of the importance of the coal industry to the people of the county, the continued downturn in coal, along with the overall economic malaise, created a sense of despair among the miners of the county. During the depression, thirty of the county's ninety mines closed; 5,000 of McDowell's miners lost their jobs; and the remaining 14,000 worked only a few days per week. At best, a mining family could barely expect to survive on the reduced wages miners earned. At worst, a family faced the prospect of starvation and homelessness, because the dominance of coal in McDowell did not allow laid-off miners an opportunity to find other work. Migration was not an option because jobs were scarce throughout the nation. Mining families had to find ways to survive their predicament.[8]

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[7]John Alexander Williams, *West Virginia: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976), 164.

[8]James S. Olson, "The Depths of the Great Depression: Economic Collapse in West Virginia, 1932-1933," *West Virginia History* 38

As the depression deepened in West Virginia, conditions developed statewide that were among the worst in the United States. Some 33,000 coal jobs disappeared as statewide coal production fell from 146 million tons in 1927 to 83.3 million tons in 1932. Throughout the state, coal families lost their homes and became trapped in a culture of hopelessness. Relief for the suffering families became a top priority for local government officials.[9]

Local governments and relief agencies exerted much effort to find aid for the suffering citizens of West Virginia, yet budget problems and the scope of the crisis rendered them helpless in the effort to provide relief. Every county dealt with the crisis in its own way, because fiscal conservatives controlled the state legislature and refused to aid the counties in their relief efforts. In McDowell, the county court met in November 1930 to discuss the burgeoning problem. After the meeting, the court asked the coal operators of the county to divide available work among each family head so that everyone had an opportunity to work each week. The commissioners further argued that "it should be the responsibility of the large coal companies to prevent

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(April 1977): 223.

[9]West Virginia Commissioner of Labor, *21st Biennial Report of the Department of Labor*, 6 in Thomas, 27.

suffering in their camps whenever possible," and urged the companies to cooperate with charitable organizations.[10]

Some government officials believed that relief efforts were not necessary. A sense permeated American society in the 1930s that assistance could easily lead to a welfare society. Conservative Americans argued that people, if given aid of any kind, would not work and contribute to society. Every relief organization struggled with the problem of identifying those who were only interested in a "free ride." In McDowell, the county court sought assistance from the coal companies in identifying those worthy of assistance. Identification by the coal operators of needy applicants, who were willing to work if given the chance, resulted in a denial of aid to loafers so the assistance could go to those who were truly worthy.[11]

As the economic crisis deepened in McDowell County, coal mining employment continued to decline. County and private relief efforts could not help everyone in need. Many of the people who usually contributed to relief efforts quickly found themselves on the relief rolls. Conditions deteriorated so much that county officials petitioned the state for funding to cover growing assistance needs. The problems in McDowell influenced

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[10]*Welch Daily News*, 6 January 1931; James T. Patterson, *The New Deal and the States: Federalism in Transition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 26-27; Thomas, 42-43.

[11]*Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, 9 November 1930.

many areas of life. Six thousand children of McDowell County could not attend school due to a lack of clothing and books. Sanitation and nutrition diminished for those who still lived in coal camps. An alarming growth in the incidences of typhoid, diphtheria, and dysentery were reported in McDowell County coal towns.[12]

As the election of 1932 approached, there was no end in sight for the economic crisis. The Republican administration of Herbert Hoover supported traditional relief programs, those provided by private individuals and charities. It was clear that the approach of the administration was not working. In the election of 1932, the voters of West Virginia supported the Democratic presidential nominee, Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt of New York. The election of the Democrats in 1932 indicated that West Virginians realized that the Republican approach was not working and government relief programs were necessary. Riding the tidal wave of discontent, Roosevelt defeated the incumbent, President Herbert Hoover, in the presidential election of 1932. Immediately, President Roosevelt began to change the way in which the country helped those affected by the economic collapse. The New Deal, as Roosevelt's program came to be

[12]Thomas, 115-116.

called, was a set of initiatives designed to stabilize the economy, aid in relief efforts, and stabilize industry.[13]

The relief programs were radical in nature. When Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes visited Shepherdstown in October 1933, he declared that the election of 1932 had signaled a social revolution. Ickes also argued that the election marked the passing of the old order and the rise of a new order committed to the common good. The new philosophy of a commitment to the welfare of all citizens allowed a change in the rights of working people.[14]

Was the New Deal actually radical? Some scholars argue that the New Deal was conservative in nature because it saved capitalism. Louis Galambos, in his work *Competition and Cooperation*, argues that the NRA, despite the philosophy of industrial control, was actually controlled by what he calls "businesscrats." The subcodes for the thread industry were not able to win final approval until the committee writing the codes removed all provisions dealing with price and production control. The lack of price and production control made the special codes virtually worthless. In *Testing of the New Deal*, Janet Irons agrees with Galambos' assessment of the New Deal as conservative.

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[13]Ibid., 69.

[14]*Shepherdstown Register*, 26 October 1933; *Martinsburg Journal*, 2 November 1933.

Irons' argument focuses on the failure of the general textile strike of 1934 that affected much of the South. The failure of unionization and the blacklisting of workers, along with the rising influence of business-oriented policymakers, was evident after the Supreme Court ruled that the NIRA was unconstitutional in 1935.[15]

The passage of the NIRA in 1933 influenced industry in several different ways. The NIRA set forth a general procedure for the formation of industrial wage and price codes. The establishment of the industrial codes fell under the National Recovery Administration(NRA). The NIRA did not, however, provide guidelines as to the type of provisions to be found in the codes. The only specifics required to be included in the codes were those dealing with labor. The rest of the industrial codes were negotiated by labor and industry. Section 7 of the NIRA stipulated that the codes would set minimum wages, maximum hours, and appropriate working conditions for the workers. Section 7A outlawed yellow-dog contracts and guaranteed the right of labor to collective bargaining. The NIRA gave operators privileges as well. Businesses which accepted the industrial code agreements

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[15]Louis Galambos, *Competition and Cooperation: The Emergence of a National Trade Association* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), 273-275; Janet Irons, *Testing the New Deal: The General Textile Strike of 1934 in the American South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 178-179.

would be exempt from antitrust laws. Widespread acceptance of the codes served as a stabilizing agent for the coal industry.[16]

The NIRA was significant because it was the first peacetime attempt by the national government to regulate industry. During the latter part of 1933, representatives of various industries promulgated codes of fair practice under the direction of the NRA. The negotiations were tense in most industries, however, because business and labor representitives had different ideas concerning how to solve the nation's economic problems. Business negotiators wanted to protect business, government officials wanted to protect competition, and organized labor wanted to protect labor interests. The NIRA ultimately failed for several reasons. First, the NRA tried to accommodate too many contradictory interests. Second, the federal government did not have the resources to regulate business adequately. They left that to the trade associations. The lack of capable government support of the NIRA doomed it to failure.[17]

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[16]Robert F. Himmelberg, *The Origins of the National Recovery Administration: Business, Government, and the Trade Association Issue, 1921-1933* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1976), 207; William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 57-58; Hawley, 31-32; Thomas, 92.

[17]James A. Hodges, *New Deal Labor Policy and the Southern Cotton Textile Industry, 1933-1941* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 5; Irons, 177-178; Longin, 105; Thomas, 92.

The coal industry found the task of enacting the industrial codes difficult because mining and wage standards varied in all thirty-three mining states. The differences of the coal mining states in regard to unionization impeded the future negotiations of the coal code. Another problem was the lack of knowledge General Hugh Johnson, head of the NRA, had of the coal industry. Johnson's ignorance retarded the debates on a code of fair competition rather than aiding them.[18]

The negotiations for a code of fair competition were going fine until Johnson, on 22 August 1933, stated that he would clarify section 7A. The southern operators believed that Johnson threatened their interests and immediately refused to bargain further. Consequentially, negotiations came to a halt. There was also dissension among the operators. Because the Illinois and Indiana coal fields were unionized, it was very difficult to get the operators to agree among themselves on anything. Southern operators wanted regional codes in order to protect their interests. Northern operators and the union argued for a single national code in order to achieve parity and unionism in the South. General Johnson worked diligently to coerce the industry representatives to sign the code, but the debates dragged on through the summer. On 14 September 1933, President Roosevelt told representatives that if they did not come to an

[18]*Charleston Gazette*, 10 September 1933; Thomas, 97.

agreement within twenty-four hours, he would impose one. The committee reached agreement one hour before the deadline, but the pact would prove to be a very fragile one.[19]

The code was a compromise between operators of union fields and operators of non-union fields because it required a national board, pursuant to the wishes of the union operators, yet the code also allowed for regional boards to handle disputes, which the non-union operators advocated. The code provided for five regional divisions and fifteen wage districts. A national board governed the industry and each division had its own labor board to handle disputes.[20]

Together with the code agreements, the committee also signed the Appalachian agreement on 21 September 1933. The Appalachian agreement was a labor compact which gave the code national recognition. The agreement provided for an eight-hour day and forty hour week, the right of the miners to choose their own checkweighmen, the end of compulsory purchases at the company store, the abolition of scrip, the end of required housing, the

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[19]*New York Times*, 18 June; 10, 11 July 1933; Hugh S. Johnson, *The Blue Eagle from Egg to Earth* (New York: Doubleday, 1935; Reprint, New York: Greenwood, 1968), 150; Irving Bernstein, *Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970), 44; Longin, 105; Thomas, 97-98.

[20]*New York Times*, 8 September 1933; *Coal Age* 38 (September 1933): 317; Johnson, *The Blue Eagle*, 159-160; Berstein, 44-45; Longin, 105; Thomas, 98.

institution of a minimum age of seventeen to work in the mines, and the right to collective bargaining. The right to collective bargaining in the Appalachian agreement was significant because it was the first time that the non-union operators agreed to transfer this right to miners.[21]

The NIRA aided the UMWA in its efforts to organize the southern West Virginia coalfields. Section 7A gave a languishing organization needed momentum to conduct a largely successful organizational drive in southern West Virginia. The success of the membership drive did not derive only from the changes instituted by the NIRA. Even before the passage of section 7A, John L. Lewis, president of the UMWA, began planning the most extensive unionization movement in West Virginia history. It is clear that the success of such a movement, in the absence of section 7A, was doubtful. During the drive, many organizers told the crowds, "The president wants you to join the union." The tactic of invoking the president seemed to make joining the union synonymous with patriotism, yet when asked, organizers admitted that they meant the president of the union. Before the organization drive by the UMWA, wages in southern West Virginia were as low as $1.50 a day. After the Appalachian Agreement was signed, wages were about $4.20 a day, only about fifty cents

[21]Paul Salstrom, *Appalachia's Path to Dependency* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 87-88; Johnson, *The Blue Eagle*, 159-160; Berstein, 44-45; Longin, 105; Thomas, 98.

below the minimum for the Central Competitive Field. More importantly, changes resulting from the NIRA produced a higher degree of labor stability in the coal industry, or so it seemed.[22]

On the state level, the NIRA had many economic, social, and political consequences. In keeping with the spirit of the NIRA, the state government of West Virginia struck several blows to the old order. In October, 1934, Governor Herman Kump ordered Sheriff Maginnis Hatfield of McDowell County to disarm and disband the 195 deputies who had public authority, but were paid and controlled by the operators. In 1935, the state legislature abolished the mine-guard system, approved a prevailing wage-rate law, amended workmen's compensation, and provided compensation for victims of silicosis. Within a five-year period, it seemed that miners in West Virginia were freed from the yolk of oppression by the operators. Yet, problems still existed in the coal industry.[23]

Despite the apparently harmonious relationship between labor and industry in West Virginia, defenders of the old order did not disappear. At the twenty-seventh annual meeting of the West

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[22]Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: Quadrangle, 1977), 184-186; Bernstein, 41; Longin, 106; Salstrom, 87-88; Thomas, 92.

[23]Charles H. Ambler and Festus P. Summers, *West Virginia: The Mountain State* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1958), 462; Thomas, 101.

Virginia Coal Mining Institute, for instance, William Beury, vice-president of Algoma Coal Company, defended practices outlawed by the NRA. Beury argued that it was necessary for coal operators to be patriarchs for their miners. Companies required camps because the areas where coal could be found were so desolate that adequate housing did not exist. After the coal industry expanded, the camps kept the workers satisfied. Beury argued that payment in scrip protected families because wages could be used for liquor or labor racketeers,(i.e. union organizers). Beury continued the tradition of "paternalism" by arguing that miners would not or could not provide for their families. Beury also believed that mine guards were superior to elected officials because they were controlled by the company.[24]

The NRA failed to address a number of problems common to the coal industry. Overproduction was the most serious of these difficulties. Price increases exacerbated overproduction by giving the small operators incentive to open marginal mines. The reduction in hours by the NRA lowered non-day production and increased hourly wages. These factors led to a large increase in the cost of labor. Because of higher labor costs, operators

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[24]William Beury, "The Social Aspects of Coal Mines," in *Proceedings of the West Virginia Coal Mining Institute, Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting, Bluefield, West Virginia, December 5-6, 1933* (Morgantown, 1933), 63-77; Crandall Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 54-55.

began to strip mine and to use mechanized loaders in the underground mines. The use of mechanization, once begun, intensified until machines replaced most of the underground miners by 1960.[25]

By the mid-1930s, the UMWA had entered into a national contract with the coal industry. Minimum labor costs were thus set. If a company wanted to lower its prices, it had to reduce costs of production, not by lowering wages, but by employing cost efficient machines. New Deal policies alone, however, did not explain the spread of mechanization in the 1930s. Low interest rates and capital costs, an increase in the demand for coal in 1934-1935, the concentration of large-scale production in the larger mines, and the selection of machinery offered by the mine supply industry all aided the spread of mechanization. The decrease in interest rates and the increase in the demand for coal influenced operators to invest in the new machinery developed by the mine supply industry. Because production was concentrated in the larger mines which had the capacity to implement new machine technology, the mechanization movement affected more miners in the 1930s than ever before.[26]

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[25]Johnson, *Politics of Soft Coal*, 191.

[26]Keith Dix, *What's a Coal Miner to do? The Mechanization of Coal Mining* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 198-199; Thomas, 99.

The onset of mechanization inevitably led to the loss of jobs. If anything could have stopped the mechanization movement, it was the UMWA. The union, led by John L. Lewis, supported mechanization because it believed that the evolution of the coal industry required mechanization. The rank and file of the UMWA did not agree with this assessment. At the UMWA national convention in January, 1934, a delegate proposed that the union oppose all mechanized mining. The delegate thought that it was the union's place to protect the jobs of all members of the union. In response to the motion, Lewis shouted in protest, "You can't turn back the clock!"[27] The opposition of Lewis to the motion brought the audience under control and killed the motion.[28]

Lewis favored mechanization because he believed that it would stabilize the industry in the long run. He promoted mechanization for many years prior to 1934. In his book, *The Miners' Fight for American Standards*, Lewis elaborated on his views that the values of the UMWA necessitated mechanization.

> Fair wages and American standards of living are inextricably bound up with the progressive substitution of mechanical for human power. It is no accident that fair wages and machinery will walk hand in hand...The policy of those who seek a disruption of the existing wage structure

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[27]*Coal Age* 39 (February 1934): 83; *New York Times*, 25, 26 January 1934.

[28]Johnson, *The Politics of Soft Coal*, 184; Thomas, 99-100.

> would only postpone mechanization of the industry and perpetuate obsolete methods.[29]

Lewis probably was correct in his assessment of the influence mechanization would have on the coal industry. Yet the miners, particularly the African American miners, who lost their unskilled jobs to machines had every right to be dismayed with the progress of mechanization.[30]

What did the New Deal mean to West Virginia? West Virginia did benefit from the New Deal, but long-term improvement was impossible because of the nature of the state's economy. The economy forced over-dependence on an extractive industry that destroyed natural resources and followed historical patterns of boom and bust.[31] The NIRA was significant because it improved the quality of life for miners. The NIRA set in motion progressive measures that promoted collective bargaining and abolished the restrictions of the old coal-town system. Despite the advantages created by the NIRA, the legislation also caused many more serious problems. The protection of collective bargaining provided by the NIRA introduced new realities to the southern West Virginia coalfields. The introduction of collective bargaining into the coalfields of McDowell County set

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[29]John L. Lewis, *The Miners' fight for American Standards* (Indianapolis: Bell Publishing, 1925), 108.

[30]Dix, 161; Dubofsky and Van Tine, 289-290.

[31]Thomas, 239-240.

labor costs and, because of the problems facing the coal industry, required cuts in production costs in order for companies to survive. Cuts in production meant an increase in machinery. It is clear, however, that the early machines, primarily loaders, did not have an impact on population and employment in McDowell County. McDowell's coal production and employment grew because of the onset of World War II and the subsequent expansion of industry. Once the wheels were in motion, however, it was impossible to stop implementing labor-saving devices. The new developments subsequently took away many miners' jobs.

CHAPTER 4

COAL AND MECHANIZATION, 1941-1960

An adequate analysis of the effect of coal mechanization on McDowell County must first take into account the different technological advancements of the industry. Because of the problems of overproduction facing the coal industry in the 1920s, inventive effort in mechanical loading increased within the industry. Machines held the promise of accelerating the pace of mining and reducing labor costs, thus raising profits for the operators. The first machines introduced in the coalfields in the early 1900s were undercutters. Undercutters were devices, usually mounted on track, which used a chain blade to notch the coal at the base of the seam, thus relieving the miner of the job of notching coal at the base of the seam. By 1915 undercutters produced sixty percent of West Virginia's coal. Productivity rose from 3 to 4 ½ tons per day, per miner, as a result of the use of undercutters. Although it was true that the cutting machines alone did not adversely affect the miners, the machines increased the need for hand loaders and, later, for mechanical loading machines.[1]

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[1]Curtis Seltzer, *Fire in the Holes: Miners and Managers in the American Coal Industry* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 12-13; Crandall A. Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 203.

Coal operators and industry analysts were interested in manufacturing machines for coal loading. Some analysts believed that the movement for a coal loading device resulted from the control miners had over the production rate. The traditional room and pillar method, which gave the miner total control over production in their particular area, impeded the production rate. In 1918 E.N. Zern, editor at Keystone Publishing, presented a paper on loading machine technology to the Coal Mining Institute of America. Zern argued that the industry's labor problems caused mechanization. He did not know whether the problem was "due to the scarcity of labor, its indifference, its inefficiency, or its antagonism," but "the fact that it exists is sufficient."[2]

Zern's analysis is too simplistic to adequately explain the social and economic forces that contributed to the introduction of labor-saving machinery. The inventive effort to replace obsolete machinery preceded World War I and the labor problems caused by the war. The significance of Zern's argument is his reasoning behind the use of machinery. Zern believed that mechanization exemplified a progression within the coal industry. In 1924 the industry journal, *Coal Mine Management*, reported that there were twenty-seven mechanical loading machines that had been

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[2]Keith Dix, *What's a Coal Miner to do? The Mechanization of Coal Mining* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 33.

tested underground. Through manufacturers' advertisements and articles in trade journals, coal operators became aware of the advantages of mechanization and the numerous loading machines available.[3]

Early loading machines varied in many different ways. Conveyors had to be fed by hand, while other machines loaded the coal after it had been blasted from the face. Still other devices, forerunners of the modern continuous mining machine, mined and loaded coal in one motion. The only similarity among these early machines was that most of them used an electric-powered chain conveyor.[4]

Colonel Edward O'Toole of U.S. Coal and Coke claimed that he had developed and built the first "real" cutting and loading machine in the early 1920s. O'Toole told an industry convention in 1925 that his work on machinery lagged because of the "excessively low labor rates prevailing at the time."[5] O'Toole stated that the labor costs of the wartime era required some sort of labor-saving device. Working in the U.S. Coal and Coke machine shops in McDowell County, O'Toole devised a system that involved a cutting chain mounted on a long cutter bar that was

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[3]*Coal Age* 25 (17 January 1924):66-71; *Coal Mine Management* (June 1924): 38 in Dix, 33-34.

[4]Dix, 34.

[5]*Mining Congress Journal* 11 (June 1925): 301 in Dix, 37.

used to cut and load simultaneously. In back of, and parallel to, the cutter bar was a conveyor that loaded the coal into a car. The interesting feature of this machine was that it did not require drilling and blasting, but rather it used the weight of the rock to crush the coal as it was cut. The broken coal fell onto the conveyor as the machine worked. The O'Toole machine required a long-wall, retreating system layout in the mine instead of the traditional room and pillar layout. Miners worked long-wall rooms out to a distance of about 600 feet, with pillars of coal left between each room. Besides the pillars of coal, roof support was provided by hydraulic jacks and collapsible timber cribs. As mining progressed, miners removed the cribs set behind the jacks and allowed the roof to cave in.[6]

The O'Toole machine did not succeed in changing the way miners dug coal. Because the coal industry was firmly committed to the traditional room and pillar method of mining, O'Toole's system received little attention from the industry as a whole. The O'Toole machine, and other early mining and loading machines like it, can be considered the predecessors of the continuous mining machines, but they did not aid the evolution of mobile loaders, which changed room and pillar mining.[7]

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[6]C.E. Lawall, I.A. Given, and H.G. Kennedy, *Mining Methods in West Virginia* (Morgantown: West Virginia University, 1929), 36-39; *Coal Age* 27(28 May 1925): 783-87.

[7]Dix, 35-38.

Operators introduced loading machines after World War I, but in the years prior to 1933, their use was confined to northern, union coalfields. After the passage of the NIRA in 1933, machinery rapidly entered West Virginia. For example, during that year, coal loaded by machines in West Virginia constituted less than one percent of total production, but by 1940 the proportion had risen to over seventy percent. During this period of rapid expansion of mechanical loading, the favorite machine of the industry was one that could be moved from room to room and was adaptable to different mining conditions. Joseph Joy, a miner, invented such a machine. The Joy loader became synonymous with coal mechanization and became the most widely-used loader in the coal fields of McDowell County.[8]

Joseph Joy was, by far, the most prolific contributor to mine mechanization. Between 1902 and 1944, Joy received 106 patents on different types of mining equipment. The most important of Joy's inventions was the coal loader, conceptualized in 1903, which dominated the market for years.[9]

Joy designed his first invention in 1903 to undercut the coal face. Joy received a patent for his machine, but he never

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[8]*Coal Age* 47 (February 1942): 66-68; Floyd Hendricks, interview by author, Vivian, WV, 8 March 2001; Herbert R. Northrup, "The Coal Mines" in William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell, *Blacks in Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 168.

[9]Dix, 61.

marketed it because his device did not contribute much to the current undercutting technology. That same year Joy sketched out plans for a mining and loading machine that revolutionized the loading of coal. Because Joy did not have the necessary funds to build his machines and no job would allow him to use company property and funds to pursue his goal of constructing his machines, Joy could not market the machine for twenty years. Joy continued working in the mines as a mechanic and continued thinking and conceptualizing ideas for new and better machinery until it became possible to pursue design work fulltime.[10]

In 1913 Joy left his job as a mine superintendent to work for the Jeffrey Manufacturing Company. Although his new job required a cut in pay, Joy knew that he would be in a position to persuade a manufacturing company to pursue his ideas. Joy gained practical experience which aided him in the design of his own device. When he believed that the machine was ready, Joy showed the plans to some Jeffrey engineers. The engineers knew that the invention had potential, but company executives refused to listen to Joy because of possible conflicts with their own designs and discouraged him from pursuing any more work.[11]

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[10]U.S. Patent 772,152; *Federal Reporter* 295 F.943 in Dix, 62-64.

[11]*Federal Reporter*, 295 F.943 in Dix, 64.

Joy's breakthrough came when he was sent to the mines of the Pittsburgh Coal Company to test Jeffrey products. This assignment was opportune for the inventor because Pittsburgh Coal was experimenting with several different types of loaders in the hope of mechanizing their mines. Joy took a hand-operated model of his machine and demonstrated how it worked to the vice-president of Pittsburgh Coal, John A. Donaldson, who was so impressed with Joy's model that he requested a machine be built based on the prototype. Jeffrey officials had no alternative but to comply, because Pittsburgh Coal was one of the nation's largest coal producers. The loader that Joy showed to the Pittsburgh Coal executives was unique. It included two gathering arms at the front of the conveyor. One arm on each side swept out and gathered the coal into a conveyor, from where the coal then was loaded onto a hopper for transport out of the mine.[12]

In the fall of 1916 Joy left his job at Jeffrey to work for Pittsburgh Coal as a consulting engineer. During the next two years Pittsburgh Coal built four loading machines in its shops, using Joy as a consultant to supervise construction. Surprisingly, Pittsburgh Coal decided to discontinue its work with the Joy loader. It is unclear why the company made this decision, but Keith Dix argues that there is some evidence that labor resisted the new technology. In the years after World War

[12]Dix, 65.

I Pittsburgh Coal was part of the Central Competitive Field of Western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, organized by the UMWA. Despite the lack of success in southern Appalachia, the UMWA in the Central Competitive Field experienced success and became quite militant in its activities. During the war years, 1916 to 1918, the UMWA conducted more strikes than ever before. Employers were forced to make concessions, thus facilitating Pittsburgh Coal's decision to slow mechanization in its mines.[13]

When Pittsburgh Coal ceased using Joy as a consultant, he decided to organize his own company to manufacture and market his machines. Joy was able to do this because the U.S. Patent Office granted him a patent for his unique loader about five months after he formed the Joy Machine Company. The patent he received in 1919 contained the basic design on which the Joy loader was built. The patent protected Joy Machine in the manufacture of these loaders until 1941.[14]

The first real success enjoyed by the Joy company came with its 4BU loaders. The difference between the 4BU and the earlier Joy loaders was that Joy decided to replace the wheels of the machine with caterpillar treads. The change allowed the loader to easily move around the underground terrain of the mines. The

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[13]*Coal Age* 17 (May 1920): 902; Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: Quadrangle, 1977), 34; Dix, 65-68.

[14]Dix, 69.

development of his next model, the 5BU, ushered in the new era of loading technology. The 5BU was the first model to use steel casings and the conveyor assembly was powered horizontally so it could move ninety degrees in each direction.[15]

Corporate financial problems led to Joy's resignation as president of the company in 1925; in 1928, the company was reorganized as the Joy Manufacturing Company. Despite his resignation, there is little doubt of the importance of Joseph Joy to the development of mine machinery. When miners of the 1940s and 1950s thought of loaders, they immediately thought of Joy. His innovation and determination began the movement to complete mechanization of the coal industry.[16]

Machinery did not impact the coal industry in West Virginia prior to World War II. In 1934, for example, the *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* for the state reported that of the ninety-eight million tons of coal produced by the state, over eighty-seven million tons were hand loaded into cars. None of the coal produced in 1934 was loaded by machine. Continued effects of the Great Depression, the lack of available capital,

[15]Ibid., 71-73.

[16]Ibid., 74.

and the use of cheap labor, caused the lack of machinery being used in West Virginia mines in 1934.[17]

Historians have disagreed about whether southern West Virginia waited too long to mechanize its mines. Richard Simon, for instance, has argued that West Virginia coal operators waited too long to automate because of "destructive competition" among the coal operators.[18] Simon believed that competition delayed automation and that southern West Virginia operators harmed their position by refusing to mechanize. In his work, *Appalachia's Path to Dependency,* Paul Salstrom debunked Simon's argument. Salstrom stressed that southern West Virginia would not have been economically developed to the extent that it was if the people of southern West Virginia had not been willing to mine coal for lower wages than did northern workers. Coal operators would not have been willing to enter southern West Virginia because of the high costs of transporting the coal out of the region. Mechanization came exactly when it should have, when operators could mine the coal more cheaply by using machinery.[19]

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[17]State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* (Charleston: 1940), 22; There was also a small amount of coal still being mined by hand in 1934, about ten million tons. Pick mining would not be eradicated until the start of World War II.

[18]Paul Salstrom, *Appalachia's Path to Dependency: Rethinking a Region's Economic History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 72-73.

[19]Ibid., 73.

In the late 1930s, the beginning of another war in Europe caused increased production of war materiel in the United States. Higher production resulted in a significant rise in the amount of coal mined in West Virginia. By 1940, coal production in West Virginia grew to over 126 million tons. An expanded movement towards mechanization occurred during the period before the United States' involvement in World War II. In 1940 West Virginia miners loaded over thirty million tons of coal by machine. Both hand loading from machine-cut coal and hand mining decreased significantly by 1940. A movement towards mechanization of coal mining in West Virginia was evident by 1940.[20]

By 1940 McDowell County's coal production followed the same patterns as the state's production. The mines of the Carter Coal Company, Olga #1, Olga #2, and Caretta, for example, relied on machines to cut their coal, although miners still hand-loaded the coal into cars. The Carter mines in 1940 had fifteen cutting machines in use and produced about 3.7 million tons of coal. By contrast, the Peerless Coal and Coke mines in Vivian were in the process of phasing out hand mining, that is, mining in which the miner was responsible for both blasting the coal and loading it, in 1940. The company's production that year was over 700,000

[20]State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* (Charleston: 1940), 22.

tons, of which about half was still hand-mined. The other half of Peerless's production was mined by five cutting machines and hand loaded into cars.[21]

By 1940, neither coal company had made the move to mechanized loading. Peerless began incorporating cutting machines by this time. The lack of mechanized loading was also evident in McDowell County as a whole. In 1940 McDowell County mines produced over twenty-five million tons of coal. Of this total, over nineteen million tons were cut by machine and hand loaded into cars. Hand mining was still a portion of McDowell County production in 1940. Almost three million tons of coal were hand mined in the traditional room and pillar method of mining. Of the remaining total, over two million tons were hand loaded onto conveyors and, a little over one million tons were loaded by machine, continuing the pattern seen within the entire state.[22]

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor affected the industries of the United States, especially coal. Despite the increase in production of war materiel since the onset of the European war in 1939, the United States still was not fully mobilized for war production. The entrance of the United States into the war also led to a new, yet familiar problem, that of a labor shortage.

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[21]Ibid., 42-45.

[22]Ibid.

The coal industry had suffered the effects of labor shortages during World War I and the shortages impaired the coal industry. During World War II labor shortages were not as intense for the industry. As miners went off to war, coal companies needed to find ways to increase production with fewer miners. There were two developments that aided the effort of the coal companies. First, the continued use of oil and gas actually helped the coal industry by relieving the pressures the war effort placed on the industry. Second, mechanization allowed coal companies to increase production with fewer miners. For those mines that still used traditional methods of mining, there was a need to increase production and to mechanize in a timely manner.[23]

The problem facing the West Virginia coal industry in 1941 was the need to increase production by mechanizing its mines. From 1940, when coal production was about 127 million tons, to 1944, when coal production peaked at 165 million tons produced, the machine-loaded portion of the state's production rose forty-two million tons, to about seventy-two million. During the period from 1940 to 1944, hand mining was completely eradicated and coal loaded by hand, on either cars or conveyors, fell from about seventy-six percent of the total produced to about fifty-six percent of the total. In 1945, when the statewide production

[23]Shifflett, 199-206.

fell to about 152 million tons, the coal loaded by machine actually rose, to about seventy-four million tons.[24]

Coal companies made further efforts to mechanize the coal mines in McDowell County. The Carter mines, which had no mechanical loaders in 1940, had twenty among the three mines in 1945. The loading of coal for the Carter mines portray the acquisition of the mechanical loaders. At the two Olga mines, in Coalwood and Caretta, about 2.1 million tons of the total production of approximately 2.4 million tons produced by the two mines was loaded by machine. Olga miners still loaded the remaining 300,000 tons by hand, but the Olga mines began a major effort towards complete mechanization of the mining process. At Vivian, Peerless bought three mechanical loaders and three conveyors between 1940 and 1945. The movement towards mechanization at the Peerless mine began with the introduction of the new machinery. Of the about 600,000 tons produced by Peerless in 1945, miners only hand loaded about 334,000 tons into cars. Miners either loaded the remaining coal by hand on conveyors or with mechanical loaders. Although lagging behind most of the other mines in McDowell County, Peerless also strove to mechanize in the early 1940s. In McDowell County as a whole, mechanization continued, yet still trailed the rest of the state

[24]State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines*, (Charleston: 1945), 12.

of West Virginia. Of the approximately twenty-five million tons of coal produced by McDowell County mines, miners loaded approximately nine million tons, or thirty-five percent by machine. Miners loaded the rest by hand, either on cars or conveyors.[25]

The labor shortage symptomatic of the coal industry during World War II did not impede West Virginia mines. Total employment in West Virginia in 1940 was 106,311. By 1943 the number employed in West Virginia had risen to 111,746. It is clear that manpower needs of the U.S. military did not lead to lower employment in the coal industry. By 1943, however, mechanization of the West Virginia coal industry was in full swing. The result of the increased reliance on machinery to load the coal was a significant and rapid decrease in jobs in mining West Virginia coal. By 1945 employment in West Virginia fell to 97,220 workers, a decrease of 8.6 percent.[26]

Employment in McDowell County followed a similar pattern. The eradication of hand mining and the rapid utilization of mechanical loaders influenced McDowell County in a more demoralizing and destructive manner. The three Carter mines, for example, had a total employment of 2,072 miners in 1940. Of these 2,072, 1,033 were hand loaders and the rest were either

[25]Ibid., 42-43.

[26]Ibid., 12.

cutting machine workers or general inside labor. By 1945 the Carter mines employed only 1,235 miners, with only 136 miners still classified as hand loaders. These 136 hand loaders at the Carter mines produced 547,165 tons, while only 65 mechanical workers loaded over 2.1 million tons.[27]

Peerless's employment did not decline as much as Carter during the period 1940-1945. The total number of inside workers at Peerless decreased from 403 in 1940 to 335 in 1945. A large layoff did not occur in 1945 at Peerless because of the sheer amount of coal still being loaded by hand at the mine. While the Carter mines, by 1945, were close to phasing out completely hand loading, Peerless still relied on the practice for well over half of their production. Peerless employed, in 1940, 132 pick men, or hand miners, and 131 hand loaders, out of a total of 403. In 1945, the acquisition of conveyors and mechanical loaders allowed some of the job losses to be absorbed by the creation of crews to man the new machines. Sadly, however, many of the new jobs went to skilled miners, those already working as hand loaders or cutters. Many of the pick miners were casualties of progress.[28]

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[27]Ibid., 98-101; State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* (Charleston: 1940), 82-85.

[28]State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* (Charleston: 1940), 82-85; State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* (Charleston: 1945), 98-101.

After World War II ended, the move towards complete mechanization of the coal industry continued. Lower demand for coal due to demobilization led to a decrease the amount of coal mined. The important statistic, however, was the percentage of coal loaded by machine. Between 1945 and 1950, the percentage of coal loaded by machine rose from forty-eight percent to fifty-eight percent. It is interesting to note that although coal production in West Virginia fell from about 152 million tons in 1945 to approximately 133 million tons in 1950, the tonnage of coal loaded by machine actually increased by about three million tons. Employment obviously suffered due to the lack of production and increased use of machinery in the late 1940s. The statewide employment of miners in 1945 was 97,220. By 1950 the number of miners employed in West Virginia had fallen to 87,769. In hindsight, as will be shown below, this decrease was not a trend that would destroy an industry, but it was important to the people laid off.[29]

By 1950 the expansion of mechanical loading continued in McDowell County. The Carter Coal Company sold its mines in McDowell County. The three mines were reorganized as Olga Coal Company, after the two main mines owned by the company. The Olga mines completely eradicated hand loading in their two major

[29]State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* (Charleston: 1945), 12; State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* (Charleston: 1950), 11.

mines, Olga #1 and Olga #2. Hand loading on conveyors continued at the Caretta #5 mine, but the output of the Caretta mine was minuscule. Production also decreased to approximately 1.9 million tons at the three mines . Peerless continued the mechanization of its mines during this period. Ninety-three percent of Peerless's production was loaded mechanically. The rest was hand loaded into conveyors. In all of McDowell County, over half of the county's total coal production of 20.8 million tons was loaded by machine.[30]

Interestingly, the total employment in McDowell County coal mines actually increased from 13,576 in 1945 to 15,812 in 1950. The same was not true for the Olga and Peerless companies in particular. The Olga mines employed a total of 1,118 miners in 1950, down from 1,235 in 1945. The Olga mines only had forty-two workers loading coal by hand and those miners worked at the Caretta #5 mine, which had always been technologically behind in comparison to the two Olga mines. The rest of the workers either worked on mechanical loaders, cutting machines, or as general inside labor. Peerless also lost employees by 1950. The total number of inside workers at Peerless fell from 335 to 287. The primary reason for the continued decrease of workers at Peerless was the final halt to hand loading into cars. In 1945 Peerless

[30]State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* (Charleston: 1950), 50-51.

listed 116 workers as hand loaders into cars, in 1950, there were no hand loaders in the Peerless mine.[31]

During the 1950s companies introduced devices that subsequently revolutionized the mining process. The most import of the devices was the continuous mining machine manufactured by the Joy company. The machine, a twenty-six foot long, eight-foot wide machine consisting of a ripper bar to tear coal from the face and place it into a central hopper, combined cutting and loading coal into a single operation. The new machine shortened the time needed to produce a ton of coal and did it with much less labor than traditional mining methods. A continuous miner with ten men produced three times as much coal as thirty men loading coal by machine. *Fortune* magazine stated that the total cost per ton to mine the coal was $5.28 for hand loading, $3.79 for machine loading, and $3.16 for continuous mining.[32] The increased production resulting from the continuous mining machine also changed the industry. Nationally, the mechanical loader caused a twenty percent increase in productivity between 1930 and 1950. During the 1950s, productivity rose about one hundred percent due to the continuous mining machine.[33]

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[31]Ibid., 124-127; State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* (Charleston: 1945), 98-101.

[32]"Continuous Coal Mining," *Fortune* 41 (June 1950): 191.

[33]Ronald L. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980* (Lexington: University Press of

Production in West Virginia declined from 1950-1955, yet the amount of coal loaded by machine increased drastically. In 1950, the tonnage of coal loaded by machine was approximately seventy-seven million tons; five years later, tonnage loaded by machine rose to about 106 million, an increase of thirty-eight percent. But fewer miners held onto their jobs, as employment decreased between 1950 and 1955. The number of workers employed in the coal industry in West Virginia stood at 89,769 in 1950, but only 47,149 in 1955.[34]

The early 1950s were critical years in McDowell County. Olga Coal Company closed the Caretta #5 mine because the mine ceased to be profitable. Production at the two remaining Olga mines increased marginally between 1950 and 1955. During the same period, however, total inside employment decreased from 1,032 to 608. Any production increase, no matter how small, with an employment decline of the magnitude of Olga's, was the result of a labor-saving device, the continuous mining machine. The continued mechanization movement destroyed Peerless. Peerless did not buy a continuous mining machine and paid dearly as a result. Production fell marginally from 1950 to 1955; employment fell from 287 to 221. Because Peerless did not further mechanize

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Kentucky, 1987), 178-180; Seltzer, 65; Shifflett, 204.

[34]State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* (Charleston: 1955), 5.

its mines, it could not produce the tonnage needed to compete with larger mines. Because of the difference between Peerless and its competitors, Peerless went out of business and closed its Vivian mine in 1960.[35]

Throughout the late 1950s the coal industry in West Virginia continued to decline in both production and employment. Production fell from approximately 126 million tons in 1955 to about 112 million tons in 1960. More importantly, employment fell from 47,149 in 1955 to 35,089 in 1960. By 1960 coal mining was almost a completely mechanized process. Of the approximately 112 million tons produced in 1960, about ninety-nine million tons, or eighty-nine percent, was machine loaded, mostly by the continuous mining machine. McDowell County also followed the path to complete mechanization. Market conditions impaired the two Olga mines: they produced only about 1.5 million tons in 1960, down from about 1.9 million tons in 1955. The increased use of the continuous mining machine caused a decline in employment from 608 in 1955, to 508 in 1960. In McDowell County, production fell by about six million tons and about 700 jobs were lost from 1955-1960.[36]

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[35]Ibid, 30; State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* (Charleston: 1950), 50-51, 124-127; James Hendricks, interview by author, Vivian, WV, 24 November 2000.

[36]State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* (Charleston: 1960), 62-63.

From the early 1940s through the 1950s, mechanization continued to affect mining operations in both McDowell in particular and West Virginia in general. Mechanical loaders, primarily the Joy loader, led to the first wave of layoffs in the late 1940s. McDowell employment dropped from 17,862 in 1940 to 15,812 in 1950. Despite the employment decline in county coal mines, McDowell's population rose to 98,887 in 1950, the third largest total in the state.[37] During the 1950s the onset of the continuous mining machine led to a significant decrease in coal mining jobs in McDowell County. By 1960 coal mining employment had fallen to 7,118, a loss of over fifty percent during the decade of the 1950s. The miners thrown out of work by mechanization had few opportunities available to them after they were laid off. They had to decide either to move elsewhere in search of work or continue to remain in McDowell. Some stayed, but most families displaced by mechanization followed the course of many others from Appalachia and migrated to industrial centers, primarily those in the Midwest.

[37]J. Howard Myers, ed., *West Virginia Blue Book, 1956* (Charleston: State of West Virginia, 1956), 434.

CHAPTER 5

LEAVING MCDOWELL, 1950-1970

The massive loss of employment caused by the mechanization of mining in McDowell County left many coal miners at an impasse. Miners had to decide whether to stay in the county and try to find another job or to leave for other industrial areas. Many miners chose to leave McDowell County in order to provide better lives for their families. The migration of former miners to the Midwest resulted in a demographic catastrophe in McDowell County.

The migration of former coal miners from the county was a part of a larger, more extensive, migration out of the southern Appalachian region.[1] The so-called "great white migration" from Appalachia began in the years immediately following World War II. As the northern economy boomed, pockets of the southern Appalachian economy faltered. The out-migration of Appalachian residents began soon after World War II and reached its peak during the 1950s. People left an economically depressed area because of the lack of economic opportunity. Chad Berry, in his work *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles*, recounted the experience of the sociologist James S. Brown and the Beech Creek community

[1]The southern Appalachian region has many different connotations. For this work, the southern Appalachian region refers to that area defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission south of the Mason-Dixon line and the Ohio River. See: Appalachian Regional Commission, *A Report to Congress on Migration* (Washington: Appalachian Regional Commission, 1971), 30.

of Clay County, Kentucky. Brown studied Beech Creek for his doctoral dissertation in the late 1940s. When he returned in 1961, he was shocked at the extent of migration out of the county. More than half of the residents living in Beech Creek during his earlier study had left the community. Even those people who still lived in Beech Creek realized the problems their children faced. When asked if their children should stay or leave the community, most Beech Creek residents said that their children should leave because of the employment opportunities available in other areas. Southern Appalachia did not offer the kind of life that parents wanted for their children.[2]

Despite the enormity of the out-migration from southern Appalachia during the 1950s, the events of the decade were only part of a more extensive migration pattern. Southern Appalachian migration occurred throughout the decades 1940-1970 and included a net loss of over three million residents. Although half of the loss occurred during the 1950s, out-migration from southern Appalachia continued throughout the 1960s, particularly from the coal mining areas. The economic situation of the 1960s did not change from the 1950s. Commercial farming was not a viable prospect for people of the southern Appalachian region. Non-extractive industries were reluctant to enter the area: coal

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[2]Chad Berry, *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 103-104.

mining continued to struggle. It was clear that although 1950s migration trends remained in effect, lower numbers of people left the region during the 1960s.[3]

Most of the Appalachian migrants who moved to northern industrial centers were young and thus gave their new employers many years of labor.[4] Extensive out-migration from southern Appalachia continued the largest economic boom in American history. The desire for cheap labor in the expanding midwestern industries allowed Appalachian migrants to find jobs easily. For example, by the 1960s, a survey of workers in Columbus, Ohio, found that a third of them were from southern Appalachia and that about half of these workers had been at their current jobs for more than six years. The survey supported the argument that the 1950s was the formative decade of the southern Appalachian migration.[5] For the southern Appalachian region, the years between 1940 and 1970 saw the loss of 3.2 million people from the region. The largest number left during the 1950s, when 784,000 people abandoned southern Appalachia.[6]

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[3]William W. Philliber and Clyde B. McCoy, eds. *The Invisible Minority: Urban Appalachians* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981), 35-39.

[4]The primary destination for southern Appalachian migrants were the Midwestern industrial centers such as Cleveland, Detroit, Columbus, and Chicago.

[5]Berry, 104-105.

[6]Ibid., 110.

Berry pointed out three important characteristics to the out-migration that occurred between 1945 and 1960. First, Appalachia was not the only area of the South influenced by out-migration, as other portions of Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia experienced out-migration. Second, kinship often characterized migration. Scholars thought that southern Appalachians were too involved with kinship relationships to search out a new life for their families. The migrants frequently brought many of their relatives along with them to the North, thus debunking the theory that kinship constrained Appalachians from seeking economic opportunity. Third, Appalachians who migrated found economic success in their new lives, thus deflating the idea that Appalachians who left became mired in poverty in the Midwest.[7]

The automation of industry in southern Appalachia had a negative influence on the region. Appalachia was unable to cope with changes in industry, because of the region's over reliance on extractive industries, such as coal and timber. For example, Harry Caudill discussed the effect of resource exploitation in the Cumberland Plateau in his work *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*. Caudill argued that the process of automation in the numerous industries of the Cumberlands led to thousands of Appalachians joining the wholesale exodus from the region. Those

[7]Ibid., 104.

people who remained had to contend with widespread unemployment and the development of welfare programs by both the federal government and the UMWA.[8]

The coal mining areas of Appalachia, including McDowell County, probably contributed more to the great Appalachian migration than any other regions in Appalachia. The operators' increased reliance on mechanization required the coal miners of McDowell to make the hard decisions required by unemployment. From 1940 to 1960 the total inside employment in McDowell County coal mines fell from 17,862 to 7,118.[9] Because the county's economy depended solely on coal, the miners who found themselves out of work turned to migration to ensure the survival of their families. In the twenty years from 1950 to 1970, the population of the county fell from 98,887 to 50,666, a loss of over 48,000.[10]

The mechanization of the coal mines and the population decrease that accompanied the wholesale loss of jobs produced by

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[8]Harry M. Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1963), 263-273.*

[9]State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines* (Charleston, 1940), 82-85; State of West Virginia, *Annual Report of the Department of Mines*(Charleston, 1960), 62-63.

[10]J. Howard Myers, ed., *West Virginia Blue Book, 1956* (Charleston: State of West Virginia, 1956), 434; J.C.Dillion ed., *West Virginia Blue Book, 1978* (Charleston: State of West Virginia, 1978), 696.

mechanization during the 1950s led to an important social change in McDowell County. Company stores closed throughout the county; movie theaters and other recreational institutions shut down; and transportation services ceased to operate. The continued migration of McDowell's residents changed life in the county. Many of the ex-miners relocated to such midwest industrial centers as Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Columbus. Many of the Peerless miners who were left without work when the company folded in 1960, went to Columbus, where many took jobs with the Joy Company which, ironically, manufactured much of the equipment that put miners out of work.[11]

McDowell residents in particular, and West Virginians in general, did not fully accept the state's economic decline as permanent. Many migrants traveled to midwestern industrial centers to find work, but planned to return home when they saved some money or when the economic prognosis back home looked promising. The miner continued moving back and forth for some time, until he realized that the coal industry was in a permanent decline and jobs would never again be plentiful in the county.[12]

Mechanization affected African-American miners much more harshly than white miners, despite the description of the

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[11]Floyd Hendricks, interview by author, Vivian, WV, 8 March 2001.

[12]Berry, 105.

Appalachian migration as the "great white migration." Much of the harsh effect of mechanization on African American miners resulted from the lack of support given them by the UMWA. The UMWA helped all miners with increased wages, better working conditions, and protection from arbitrary treatment, but did not obtain equality for African American miners in hiring practices. Companies often relegated black miners to general labor jobs or hand-loading jobs. Because these types of jobs were the first to be eliminated when mechanization began in the mining industry, African-Americans disproportionately bore the brunt of unemployment. Black miners then had to make the unwelcome choice faced by other unemployed miners, stay or leave? Most left southern Appalachia. The severe loss of black miners in the industry particularly influenced McDowell's population because of the large number of black miners in the county. Throughout southern Appalachia, the number of African-Americans declined from 42,266 in 1930, to 26,136 in 1950, to 3,673 in 1970.[13]

Contemporary studies revealed that mechanization exerted a deleterious effect on McDowell's demographics. An economic study published by West Virginia University in 1969 showed that the county's population fell from about 95,000 people in 1950 to

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[13]Ronald L. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 168; Herbert R. Northrup, "The Coal Mines," in William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell, eds., *Blacks in Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 169.

about 73,542 people in 1960, a loss of approximately twenty three percent.[14] The problems that plagued the coal industry during the 1950s continued into the 1960s, resulting in constant migration. Many coal companies tried to put a positive spin on the economic problems facing McDowell, as the United Pocahontas Coal Company did in a letter to their miners in 1965:

> United's coal tonnage and store volume have almost doubled as a consequence (of mechanization). Such expansion certainly serves to express United's faith in the coal industry's future and in the people who are United Pocahontas.
>
> Of course, the material progress made has brought with it serious problems, many of which are far from being solved as yet. However, we are confident that, with your continued loyalty, cooperation, and help, substantial progress will be made in 1966 in solving these difficulties.[15]

The optimism exuded by the executives of United Pocahontas was unfounded. Continued downturns in the coal industry and continued reliance on labor-saving machinery caused the continued migration of the people of McDowell County. By 1966, McDowell County's estimated population had fallen to 58,200, a loss of about 15,342 people in six years. The loss of 48,000 of McDowell's people led to an increase in the average age of county residents because the county's economy did not offer

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[14]Donald E. Pursell and Gilbert L. Rutman, *Selected Demographic Aspects of the West Virginia Economy, 1950-1975* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Bureau of Business Research, 1969), 18.

[15]Letter from Ronald C. Laither to the miners of the United Pocahontas Coal Company, 15 December 1965, United Pocahontas Coal Company Archives, West Virginia Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown.

opportunities for younger people. By 1970, the population of the county was 50,666, continuing the downturn facing McDowell.[16]

Despite the continued decline in population throughout West Virginia, the 1960s was a better decade than the 1950s, in regard to rates of population loss for the state. From 1950 to 1960, West Virginia lost 145,200 people, a loss of 7.2 percent. From 1960 to 1970, West Virginia lost 116,200 people, down 6.2 percent. The net migration rate fell from 22.3 percent during the 1950s to 14.0 percent during the 1960s. Despite the continued pessimism that plagued West Virginia, the state's residents had less reason to leave their home after the shock of mechanization wore off because the people who remained were either retired or still mining.[17]

The miners who left McDowell County, in common with other Appalachian migrants, faced many changes in their lives. The migrants adjusted to life in an unknown environment, Midwestern cities. The two primary destinations for McDowell County miners were the Ohio cities of Cleveland and Columbus. How did the former miners adjust to their new lives? What social characteristics did migrants develop in the urban centers?

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[16]Pursell and Rutman, 18-20.

[17]Appalachian Regional Commission, *Population and Net Migration Trends in the Appalachian Region* (Washington: Appalachian Regional Commission, 1971), 1-2.

After moving from their previous homes, McDowell migrants faced many difficult challenges. The decision to migrate involved many different steps. A migrant faced the severance of community ties, an identity change, and relocation. Migrants modified their value systems to gain acceptance in their new homes. With profound differences in the culture of McDowell County and that of the receiving cities, Columbus and Cleveland, McDowell migrants faced a very difficult adjustment period. Clearly, most of the demands made on migrants to conform to city life required them to change their own values.[18]

The sociologist John Photiadis conducted a study, published in 1970, that discussed sociopsychological characteristics of West Virginians who migrated to Cleveland, Ohio. McDowell County migrants were similar to other West Virginia migrants in regards to their age, educational achievement, and occupations. Many West Virginians settled in the Appalachian ghetto, located on the west side of Cleveland. The ghetto received its name because of the large number of migrants who settled there and for the poverty found there. Those people who did not move to the ghetto usually found their way to the suburbs of Cleveland. The primary determinants of whether migrants went to the ghetto or the

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[18]*Charleston Sunday Gazette Mail*, 9 October 1966; John Photiadis, *Selected Social and Sociopsychological Characteristics of West Virginians in their Own State and in Cleveland, Ohio* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Appalachian Center, 1970), 36.

suburbs were family connections, job skills, and educational level.[19]

Two major characteristics of migrants were their age and gender. Most West Virginia migrants were unemployed men between the ages of twenty and forty. In Cleveland, for example, almost twice as many men aged twenty to thirty lived in the Cleveland suburbs than stayed in West Virginia. There were almost four times as many young men in the Appalachian ghetto than in West Virginia.[20]

Education was a very important adjusting factor for the McDowell migrants. Education allowed migrants to adjust to the culture of the cities to which they moved. Migrants' attitudes towards education largely determined the economic success enjoyed by a migrant family. In Cleveland about thirty three percent of the migrants living in the Appalachian ghetto completed high school, compared to approximately sixty percent of those living in the suburbs of Cleveland. Because of the poverty found in the ghetto and the correlation between economic success and educational levels, it may be surmised that more people living in the ghetto dropped out of high school than did people living in the suburbs. In both areas, however, roughly the same proportion, about ten percent, of children dropped out of school.

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[19]Photiadis, 48.

[20]Ibid., 52.

In his study, Photiadis asked several questions about migrants' attitudes towards education. The results of the questions showed that most migrants held education in high esteem, ninety-one percent of ghetto residents and about eighty-three percent of the suburban residents of Cleveland disagreed with the statement that most young people get too much education. The problems that the miners faced at home, they realized, were the result of the over-reliance on one industry. The migrants hoped that their children could receive an education and make better lives for themselves.[21]

Besides economic gain, education also allowed Appalachian migrants an opportunity to avoid the social stigma that many poorly educated people suffered. In the West Virginia coalfields, because children were expected to enter the mines just as their fathers did. There was little support for any but the most rudimentary education. With a good education, migrant children could enter the dominant society and avoid being seen as ignorant by their peers. Many times however, the urban school system created more problems for the Appalachian children. The children of migrants entered school systems that inadequately accommodated their values and in which very little was known of their culture. Many times, negative images portrayed in the media and by educators instilled a pattern of failure in children

[21]Ibid., 56-61.

and led to the lowering of expectations. Only by overcoming the inherent adversities found in the urban school systems could migrant children take advantage of available educational opportunities.[22]

Occupational patterns for West Virginia migrants varied. Nearly all migrants who moved to Cleveland were miners. The only difference was the level of skill held by the workers. Residents of the ghetto had the largest proportion of semiskilled workers, about sixty-seven percent. The suburbanites, in contrast, had the largest proportion of skilled workers, nearly three times that of skilled workers residing in the ghetto. The suburbanites acquired most of their skills after they reached the city. Only about five percent of West Virginians living in the suburbs of Cleveland were skilled workers before they left West Virginia. Most were either coal miners or unskilled workers. In 1965, suburbanites reported having lived in Cleveland much longer than those living in the ghetto, about sixty percent had been in Cleveland longer than ten years.[23]

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[22]Johanna S. DeStefano, "Readin', Writin', and Route 23: A Road to Economic but not Educational Success," in Kathryn M. Borman and Phillip J. Obermiller, eds., *From Mountain to Metropolis: Appalachian Migrants in American Cities* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1994), 162-163.

[23]John D. Photiadis, "Occupational Adjustment in Cleveland," in Philliber and McCoy, 140-144.

The income earned by West Virginia migrants supported their decisions to migrate. After initial difficulty in finding jobs, most earned more money in the city. Cleveland migrants, for example, had a much higher income than people who stayed in West Virginia. In Cleveland, there was also a differentiation between migrants. While ghetto residents tended to earn higher weekly wages than suburbanites, steady jobs were hard to come by in the ghetto, thus allowing suburban migrants to earn higher yearly salaries. Ghetto residents who held steady jobs usually left to settle in the suburbs. Despite the differences within Cleveland, West Virginia migrants were somewhat successful in gaining jobs and adequately providing for their families.[24]

Although West Virginians left the state in large numbers during the 1950s and 1960s, they were able to make new lives for themselves. McDowell County migrants had the same ambitions as migrants from other coal mining areas in the state: they wanted to be able to provide a good living for their families. Most West Virginia migrants settled in the cities of Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio, and faced many challenges. McDowell migrants faced the same cultural obstacles as other migrants, yet they largely overcame these barriers. Migrant families were able to achieve educational goals and financial success in their new homes. Those miners who remained in McDowell County faced

[24]Ibid., 147.

different challenges. Many were able to overcome the economic downturn facing McDowell, yet the county found that the coal industry was in dire trouble.

CHAPTER 6

EPILOGUE

Mechanization of the coal industry has, therefore, been very instrumental in the history of the coalfields. In McDowell County the development of new coal technology resulted in lower employment levels in the county. Mechanization did not affect the population and economy of McDowell County until the implementation of the continuous mining machine in the 1950s. The evolution of mining technology occurred for many different reasons. The protection of collective bargaining by the NIRA, raised labor costs in southern West Virginia and caused the coal companies to turn to machinery to offset labor costs. The statistics for the two representative companies featured in my study show that production numbers did not radically increase and employment levels drop until the continuous mining machine entered the mines in the 1950s.

McDowell County of 1970 was a much different place than the McDowell County of 1950. Many county natives migrated to other industrial centers in order to provide adequately for their families. Throughout southern Appalachia, economic hardships forced people to move. Most of the migrants were able to adjust to the culture of the city, whether it was Columbus, Cleveland, or Detroit. McDowell migrants followed the same patterns of life in their new homes as did other West Virginia migrants. These

migrants believed that education was important, were young, and were able to make more money in the midwest than in West Virginia. The loss of so many of McDowell's young people impaired the county. The decline of the coal industry in McDowell and the beginnings of a welfare society using programs implemented under President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society introduced a new reality to the county.

The reliance of the McDowell County economy on the coal industry left few opportunities for people who could not get jobs in the mines. Besides mining and minimum wage jobs, the only work available for McDowell residents were service careers, such as teaching or social services. Without a college education, it was impossible for people to get service jobs.

There were miners who were determined to stay at work doing the only job they knew how to do. Some of the miners who stayed were unable to find steady work in the county. They quickly became dependent on government assistance. Many others were very successful. Floyd Hendricks of Vivian, a former Peerless miner, was such an example. After Peerless shut down, Hendricks worked in several companies throughout McDowell County. Hendricks worked until retirement and still lives in Vivian today.

Hendricks was one of the lucky miners who was able to continue working and living in his home county.[1]

Throughout the county, especially in Welch, the county seat, coal began to thrive again by 1970. The population of the county was smaller in 1970, yet coal continued to be shipped out of McDowell County in large quantities. Because of an economic boom for coal, mines owned by such companies as U.S. Steel and Island Creek Coal Companies thrived and other companies continually opened new mines. Unemployment fell to about eight percent in 1970, in comparison to the twenty-four percent unemployment rate of 1960. The migration of the 1950s and 1960s opened the way for such a low unemployment rate. McDowell County, in 1970, became, once again, a thriving economic area.[2]

Other parts of the county, however, reflected the changing reality facing McDowell during this decade. Eureka Hollow, a sometimes forgotten coal town located near the town of Keystone, suffered widespread poverty with the decline and mechanization of the coal industry. Eureka Hollow was not a coal town in the traditional sense, at least not in 1970. Eureka Hollow had neither a school nor business of any kind. Opportunities were few and poverty was high. The extent of poverty was seen

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[1]Floyd Hendricks, interview by author, Vivian, WV, 8 March 2001.

[2]Bill Peterson, *Coaltown Revisited: An Appalachian Notebook* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1972), 70-72.

countywide after the incorporation of the Council of Southern Mountains in McDowell County.[3] When the council sent a representative to survey the hollow, it found that three-fourths of the families lived below the federal poverty level. The efforts made by the council and other volunteers to improve the quality of life in Eureka Hollow was met with some enthusiasm by Eureka residents, especially the new community center located in Vivian that offered Head Start classes for the children of the hollow. Not all county residents took advantage of new programs designed to improve their quality of life. Some residents were too proud to ask for help. Others were worn down by the constant pressures of life in a dying coal town. Others appeared to be incapable of helping themselves. Because of the lack of industry and jobs, by 1970 Eureka Hollow was mired in a sea of poverty and hopelessness.[4]

The poverty facing Eureka Hollow were a precursor of what was to come for the rest of the county during the next two decades. Because of changing market conditions and transportation problems, mine after mine in McDowell closed during the 1980s. People were required to choose once again,

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[3]The Council of Southern Mountains that operates in McDowell County is not affiliated with or related to the Council of Southern Mountains that services the entire Appalachian region and is headquartered in Berea, Kentucky.

[4]Peterson, 4-6.

migrate or stay? Many more people have left McDowell County since 1970. The population of McDowell fell to 35,233 by 1990. Coal production also declined since 1970. The figures released by the West Virginia Coal Association for 1997 show that the county ranked tenth in the state in coal production, with 6,831,201 tons produced. There were only nine companies classified by the association as having major underground operations, with the largest only producing 448,067 tons. Modern mining methods, dependent on machinery, is evident in the employment figures of McDowell County. Coal mining employment, including surface mining, was 1,261 in 1997. It is clear that the coal industry is now on the periphery in McDowell.[5]

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, there were few efforts by county officials to entice industry to locate to McDowell County. There were several reasons more effort wasn't made to entice other industry to the county. First, McDowell has no four lane highways; the primary entrance to the county is along a winding United States highway, U.S. fifty-two. Without good roads to export products, no industry will enter the county. Second, the reliance on the coal industry in McDowell County did not allow the development of new industry. Today, county officials are

[5]Darrell E. Holmes, ed. *West Virginia Blue Book, 1996* (Charleston: State of West Virginia, 1996), 633; West Virginia Coal Association, *Coal Facts 1998* (Charleston: West Virginia Coal Association, 1998), 44.

working to turn the economic situation in McDowell around. Two four-lane highways are being constructed that will give the county an outlet for industry. An industrial park and a federal prison are planned for Welch. Both projects would not have been possible without the promise of quality roads. McDowell County will never again be the coal leader it once was, but the efforts underway could allow McDowell to regain some of its former prosperity and possibly entice former residents to return home.

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