



COAL-MINING CAMPS

RECORDS AND RESOURCES AT THE LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

Shortly after 1865, southern speculators sought northern capital to cultivate a Virginia coal trade that had a history dating to the early eighteenth century. By the 1880s in southwestern Virginia, large mining companies replaced entrepreneurs digging coal outcroppings and sinking shallow shafts. Mining company owners looked to the native population of hard-scrabble farmers for the necessary labor force. Soon a boom in coal, fostered by the westward expansion of railroad lines, brought a flood of new inhabitants into the previously homogeneous region. Immigrant

miners from southwestern Pennsylvania and West Virginia moved into the area as the demand for labor grew. Early in the twentieth century, blacks from the Deep South and Piedmont regions moved into the area in search of jobs, and, to some degree, an escape from Jim Crow laws.

As in many other coal-mining areas, the coal companies in southwestern Virginia dominated the towns they founded and their inhabitants. Despite divisions along the lines of class, race, and national origin, these towns often had a sense of community. If they could find nothing else in common, families found solidity in the hardships of mining coal. Husbands, fathers, and brothers of white and black families lost their lives in the mines. Poles, Hungarians, and native inhabitants weathered the financial ups and downs of the coal industry. In spite of this often-trying daily life, traditions involving family and community grew from the scarred coalfields. Neighbors brought food in times of unemployment or the loss of a family member. Families grew vegetable gardens out of necessity but tended them with pride. Company-sponsored baseball teams brought an element of leisure to the coal camps. Finally, coalfield families work today to preserve the memories of coal town life long after many companies and mines have closed.

The manuscript and published items listed below represent an overview of Virginia's coal heritage at the Library of Virginia.

ARCHIVAL AND MANUSCRIPT MATERIALS

Church River Coal Company (Tazewell County, Virginia), Daily Earnings and Deductions Ledger, ca. 1900, Barcode 1129986.

This ledger book contains monthly accounts of pay and advances to miners. It illustrates the payroll and deductions system typical in a mining operation. A miner's pay envelope in the ledger lists deductions for supplies, rent, insurance, coal, doctor fees, and the like.

Hotchkiss, Jedediah, Papers, 1828–1908, Film 1660.

This collection provides a detailed account of Hotchkiss's careers as a student, geologist, cartographer, lecturer, schoolteacher, engineer, soldier, and historian. Hotchkiss wrote many letters discussing land and mining ventures in Virginia and West Virginia, especially those with the Gauley Coal Land Association, the Guyandot Coal Land Association, and the North Flat-Top Land Association.

Moody, James H., Insurance Policy on Slave Robert Moody, 1847, Personal Papers Collection, Accession 34643.

This 1847 document is an original insurance policy taken out by James H. Moody, acting as guardian for Sarah E. Moody, on the life of Robert Moody, a slave. The policy is for a one-year period while Robert Moody is put to work in the Clover Hill Pits, Chesterfield County, Virginia.

Office of the Governor, Record Group 3, Executive Papers, Governor Charles T. O'Ferrall, 1894–1898, State Records Collection.

The correspondence in Governor O'Ferrall's executive papers covering the period of January 1895–June 1896 includes information on the coal strike at the Pocahontas mines (ca. May 1895). Coal operators feared outside "agitators" loyal to "Mother Jones" intended to incite a strike in the Pocahontas coalfields. The operators convinced Governor O'Ferrall to send the state militia to Tazewell County to quell the potential violence. The militia occupied Pocahontas for three months until the coal company employed the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency to deal with labor unrest.

Prestonsburg Coal Company (Tazewell County, Virginia), Minute Books, 1908–1952, 2 vols., Business Records Collection, Accession 35140.

This collection includes the minutes of the Board of Directors and the minutes of the stockholders.

Richmond Coal Basin Project File, 1811–1953, Personal Papers, Accession 34213.

The Swartwout family, who owned local coal property, collected this information about the Richmond area coalfields. Included are general reports on the Richmond coal fields, Gayton coal mines, property owned by Old Dominion Development Company, Richmond Coal Mining and Manufacturing Company, Manakin Iron Works, Carbon Hill mining tract, Railey-Heth Coal Pits in Chesterfield County, and Coalbrook operations. Some reports also include sketches of the coal basin strata. Reports, newspaper articles, and letters by Decatur Axtell, B. F. Bush, S. Harris Daddow, E. V. D'Invilliers, Conway Moncure, William Barton Rogers, Edward M. Tierney, P. L. Torrence, H. A. Treadwell, F. R. Wadleigh, John I. Werth, T. M. Wortham, and John P. Yeatman balance out the collection.

Richmond Coal Mining and Manufacturing Company (Richmond, Virginia), Letter Book, 1887–1888, Business Records Collection, Accession 29636, Miscellaneous Microfilm Reel 565.

Letters by William Wilcox, secretary of the company, make up the majority of this collection. Wilcox writes to Ware B. Gay, president of Richmond Coal Mining and Manufacturing Company, and to H. C. Skinner, treasurer of the firm. Some of this correspondence includes memoranda of bills received and paid and reports documenting the progress of mine operations. The collection also includes information on the operation of the company store. Volume 1 covers the period from 19 April 1887 to 22 June 1887, and Volume 2 includes the time period of 7 January 1888 to 28 June 1888.

Russell Creek Coal Company (Wise County, Virginia), Minute Books, 1890–1948, Business Records Collection, Accession 35139.

The records of the Russell Creek Coal Company include minutes of the meetings of the board of directors and minutes of the stockholders' meetings. The company began in 1890 as the McQuail Coal and Coke Company in Tazewell County but changed its name and location the following year.

Secretary of the Commonwealth Records, 1853–1884, State Records Collection, Accession 22988.

This collection contains contracts for convict labor released to work for the James River and Kanawha Company, New River Mining and Manufacturing Company, and Bristol Coal and Iron Narrow Gauge Railroad Company.

Slavery in Ante-bellum Southern Industries. Series A: Selections from the Duke University Library, ca. 1775–1865, Business Records Collection, Accession 34901, Miscellaneous Reels 1282–1309.

This collection includes the archival materials of the Joseph Belknap Smith Papers, Jeremiah T. Jones Papers, Mary G. Franklin Account Books, Tillinghast Family Papers, James Redding Grist Business Records, Richard H. Riddick Papers, Dismal Swamp Land Company Records, William Weaver Papers, and Francis Thomas Anderson Papers. It focuses on issues surrounding the industrial phase of slavery, including the practice of hiring slave labor, task systems or quotas in production, compensation, accounting practices, treatment of slave workers, slave resistance, working and living conditions, and health problems.

Virginia and Tennessee Coal and Iron Company (Washington and Wise Counties, Virginia), 1894–1896, Business Records Collection. Report on a Portion of the Property of the Virginia and Tennessee Coal and Iron Company, Big Stone Gap, Virginia, 21 March 1894, Accession 13817.

This report was submitted to the president of the Baltimore Trust and Guarantee Company, Baltimore, Maryland, by Gouverneur Morris. Morris examined the coal company's property lying in Wise and Dickenson Counties on the waters of Big Tom Creek and its tributaries and covered by a deed of trust to the Baltimore Trust and Guarantee Company. The report comments on the mines and the quality of coal produced by seven leases operated by the following companies: Coeburn Coal Company, Jones Coal and Coke Company, Kentucky Coal and Coke Company, Pine Run Coal and Coke Company, Sexton Coal and Coke Company, Speedwell Coal and Coke Company, and Swansea Coal Company. Morris also examined operations of the Clinch Valley Coal and Coke Company and the Wise County Coke Company.

Description of the Virginia Property of the Virginia and Tennessee Coal and Iron Company, Abingdon, Virginia, 2 March 1896, Accession 13819.

This report describes the main seams mined by the Virginia and Tennessee Coal and Iron Company in Wise and Dickenson Counties (Edwards, Imboden, Jawbone, Kennedy, Lower Banner, and Upper Banner). Also included is a discussion of the reasons for acquisition of the property by the company and an analysis of the various coals produced by the different seams.

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Cover image from the Library of Virginia's Picture Collection.

