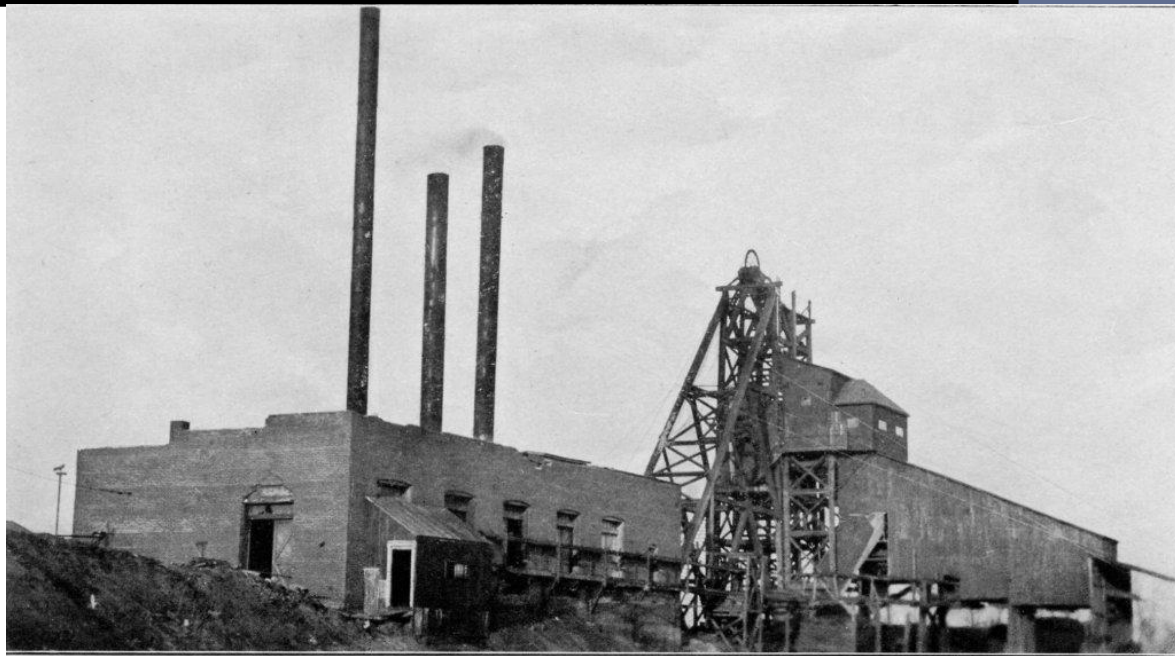




St. Ellen Mine History



ST. ELLEN MINE

A Report on the History of St. Ellen Mine and the importance of mining in O'Fallon, Illinois

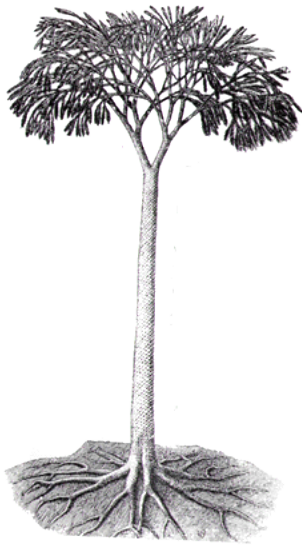
February 7, 2017

O'Fallon Historic Preservation Commission

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St. Ellen Mine, O'Fallon, Illinois

Ancient History



A Lycopod tree.

The story of the St. Ellen mine begins some three hundred million years ago, in the Late Paleozoic period, when gigantic 100-foot tall tree-like club mosses called “Lycopods” filled our local woods. Periodically the forests were flooded by inland seas, and the trees did not decay when the water covered them, pressure and heat eventually building up over millions of years to transform the plant material to coal, which gave its name to the period: Carboniferous, or coal-bearing.

Once home to primordial forests, Illinois has the largest reported bituminous coal resource and the largest strippable bituminous coal resource of any state in the United States. Its richest seam is called the Herrin, and it is part of the Herrin seam that our miners mined: a bituminous coal, not as hard as anthracite, but relatively low in sulfur content.

Early Days: Alma

Alma, later known as Carbon, was a village built and owned by the Gartside Coal Company. It was located just west of Venita Drive along the old O(Ohio)&M(Mississippi) Railroad Line.

A blockhouse in the chain of forts for defense against the Indians had been built nearby in 1811. Coal had been discovered in St Clair County, so the story goes, by a citizen of American Bottoms who had seen smoke rising for weeks from the ground along the bluffs. Bluff outcroppings were the first to be mined.

Joseph Gartside sank the first shaft at Alma in 1851. The 1881 History of St Clair County records three shafts averaging 200 feet deep with 7 foot veins of excellent quality coal.

In 1881 the coal mining village of Alma consisted of 100 two-story homes. Looking very much alike, they were arranged in five double rows with ten numbered houses on each side of the street. There was also a Post Office, General Store, owned by Joseph Taylor, a saloon, and a boarding house. The coal company had a machine shop, blacksmith shop and carpenter shop. The population is recorded as 200 men. O'Fallon's 1880 population was 960.

Alma was most likely named after the Battle of Alma, an English victory during the Crimean War of 1854. Most residents were English immigrants or their descendants: Joseph Gartside first owner, Joseph Taylor store operator & later mine owner, Dan Gartside and wife Helen Taylor

owners, William Skinner engineer, John Bell pit boss, Thomas Millet superintendent of the mine, and James Ward who in 1873 became County Inspector of Mines.

Alma had a two-story frame public school employing two teachers. Charles Thompson was principal in 1880. In 1881 the building was totally destroyed by fire. It was replaced by a “better” building. There were two schools in the district: Alma School at Alma, and Franklin School at Booster. In 1927 they were consolidated into Central School so named because it was halfway between the two communities.

There were religious services in the community. Villagers also attended Unity, Bethel Baptist, & O’Fallon churches. The Reorganized Church of the Latter-Day Saints of St Louis had a branch in the village. In 1866 there were 9 members, in 1873 32 members, and in 1880 56 members.

A Globe Democrat reporter following the tornado of 1877 described Alma as “four streets graded with coal dust, 100 begrimed hovels, a church, and a saloon.” On the stoop of a store several men were loitering, smoking pipes and “wishing for a drink.”

Four streets graded with coal dust, 100 begrimed hovels, a church and a saloon – Globe Democrat depiction of Alma in 1877.

Unknown numbers of dirty little children ran in and under the blackened houses “like prairie dogs.” Alma survived the tornado with the loss of several decrepit chimneys and a blown down bake oven. Trees were not a problem as there were none.

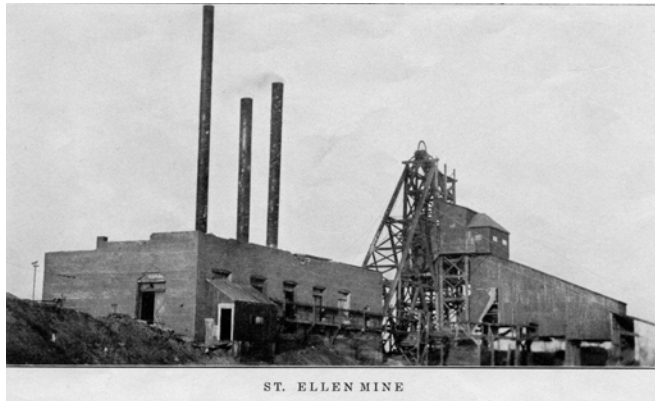
Alma was the first mine in the vicinity, followed by Carbon Mine in 1856. Carbon was closed on April 1, 1937. It was the oldest mine operation in the state. Carbon Mine operated 24 years without a single fatal accident delivering 2,304,172 tons of coal.

Joseph Taylor



Joseph Taylor was born in Oldham, Lancashire, England in February 1840. He was a coal miner and immigrated to the United States at the age of 21 with his brother Thomas. He and Thomas worked in mines in Pennsylvania for 5 years before Joseph moved to Alma, IL to work in the local mines. About this time, he brought his parents to the US from England. His wife Mary was also born in England, in the same town as Joseph, though 12 years earlier. She first married Eli Gartside in England and immigrated to St. Louis. He died in 1865 and Mary came to live with relatives in Alma. Joseph and Mary were married in November, 1871, and 3 years later they bought the general merchandise store and saloon in Alma. The profits from this venture allowed him to purchase the Alma Mine in 1877, soon followed by the Taylor and Ridge Prairie Mines. His brother Thomas was living in Colorado at

the time and in 1888 Joseph asked him to move to O'Fallon to take charge of his mines here. The couple moved to O'Fallon in 1889, and the following year moved the store as well. In July of 1903, the Thomas and Stafford families granted a 25-year lease to Joseph Taylor to sink a coal mine southwest of Carbon Mine along the trolley line. St. Ellen Mine, named after Taylor's mother, Ellen, formally opened August 12, 1903.



It was originally reached through the Ridge Prairie Mine. In November 1915, the Joseph Taylor Coal Co. went into receivership resulting in the auction sale of St. Ellen Mine on November 13, 1916 to Henderson and Fisher of St. Louis for \$46,100. In April 1931, the wooden tipple, the structure used to load the coal into railroad cars for transport, was destroyed by fire at a loss of \$100,000. Work was resumed with the replacement of the

tipple two months later. Another fire in February 1939 destroyed the engine room causing damage totaling \$75,000. A new \$200,000 coal washer was put into operation in 1938. After World War II, the mine was modernized. The improvement program included a new slope in which coal was brought to the surface by a 42" conveyor belt instead of being hoisted up the shaft in mine cars. A new wash house was constructed and the shop and underground equipment were modernized. The wash house or wash plant would remove soil and rock and crush the coal into graded chunks to prepare for transport to the market. The more waste material removed would raise the market value and lower transportation costs. The use of large timbers to support the mine tunnels, was discontinued with the installation of four roof bolting machines. Roof bolts are steel rods, normally 3' to 6' long and 1" in diameter, that are inserted into holes drilled in the mine roof. Early bolts all used some kind of mechanical anchor at the back of the hole and were tensioned between the anchor and the head. In 1954, the mine employed 300 miners and 26 supervisory and clerical personnel. It operated two shifts per day and averaged 2,600 tons per shift. St. Ellen Mine's last owner, Peabody Coal Co., closed the mine at midnight May 20, 1960 because it was becoming unprofitable. It was believed to be the oldest operating mine in the state at the time and was O'Fallon's last operating coal mine. According to the Illinois State Geological Survey, it produced 21.2 million tons of coal from 1904 to 1960. After the mine closed, the slag heap that remained in the area between Hartman Lane and Old Collinsville Road south of Route 50 was the cause of much consternation for local residents. Blowing coal dust was a significant problem, at times obscuring visibility on the highway. Efforts were made to reclaim the coal in the slag heap, but the problem was never fully solved until the area was converted to St. Ellen Mine Park.



Taylor was a director and original stockholder of the First National Bank, a director, treasurer and original stockholder of the O'Fallon Building and Loan Association, served as the O'Fallon City Treasurer for 10 years and as Mayor of O'Fallon from 1909-1911. He built over 100 houses for his employees and built Taylor's Opera House. The couple had no children. Mary died in 1909 at the age of 80; Joseph died in 1925 at the age of 85.



Economic Impact

There were a number of coal mines in and around O'Fallon, in addition to St. Ellen. Among them were Prairie, Ridge Prairie, Taylor, Carbon, Tin Can (O'Fallon Coal Co.), Darrow, Bennett, Van Court, Alma, Cross Roads, Henry Taylor, Great Western Taylor, Nichols, Bond, Menter and the Black Eagle Mines.

Number of employees (miners and others)

From the arrival of the railroad in the early 1850's through 1960, mining in O'Fallon affected the lives of many residents. For most of those years in the 20th century, around 10% of the population was employed by a mining company. If an average of 3.5 people/household is factored, 35% of the population depended on mining. This does not include related economic activity (grocery stores, barber shops, etc.)

Concerning company revenue, gross revenue averaged lows of \$500,000 to highs of \$5,000,000 during the final years when over 1,000,000 short tons/year were the norm. (selected average coal prices: \$2.50/short ton during 1920s; \$4.75/short ton during 1950s).

The mines were a major employer of area residences, below is a table of the number of employees that St. Ellen Mine employed over the years.

Year	No. of miners
1904	29
1905	70
1906	97
1907	144
1908	147
1909	157
1910	210
1911	205
1912	238
1913	266
1914	270
1915	127
1916	208
1917	266
1918	341
1919	399
1920	345
1921	375
1922	390
1923	382
1924	no data
1925	181
1926	290
1927	290
1928	84
1929	112
1930	79
1931	243

Year	Number
1932	169
1933	225
1934	235
1935	234
1936	273
1937	351
1938	245
1939	200
1940	258
1941	204
1942	279
1943	189
1944	180
1945	185
1946	255
1947	276
1948	223
1949	209
1950	257
1951	308
1952	299
1953	326
1954	336
1955	340
1956	343
1957	376
1958	386
1959	376

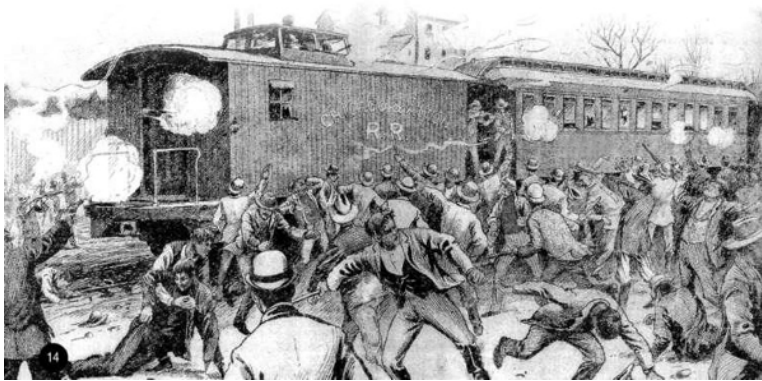
Notable comparisons:

- largest growth in employment in consecutive years +164 (1930-1931)
- largest decline in employment in consecutive years -206 (1927-1928)
- percent of city (O’Fallon) population in mining
 - o lowest 3% (1930)
 - o highest 14% (1920)
- residents in mining households (average of 3.5 people/household)
 - o lowest 101 (1904)
 - approximately 5% of city (O’Fallon) population
 - o highest 1,396 (1919)
 - approximately 59% of city (O’Fallon) population

The Mine Unions – a violent history

The UMWA was founded in Columbus, Ohio in 1890 by the merger of Knights of Labor Trade Assembly No. 135 and the National Progressive Union of Miners and Mine Laborers. The constitution adopted by the delegates to the first UMWA convention barred discrimination based on race, religion or national origin. It was one of the first interethnic and interracial affiliates of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Throughout the 1890s, organizers worked to build the union. The UMWA founding fathers clearly recognized the destructive power of discrimination at a time when racism and ethnic discrimination were accepted facts in some parts of American culture.

Despite the threat of physical harm and economic ruin, miners have constantly struggled against great odds to achieve their goals: the eight-hour day in 1898, collective bargaining rights in 1933, health and retirement benefits in 1946, and health and safety protections in 1969.

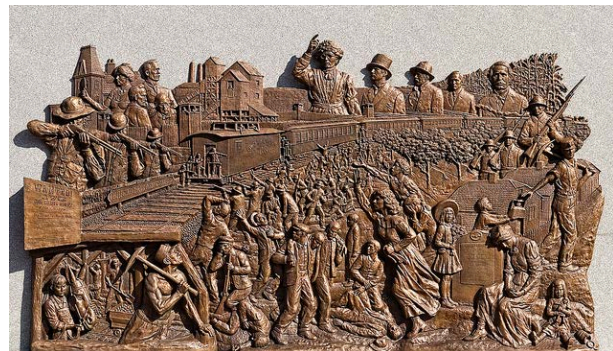


Virden massacre depiction (Courtesy of rhapsodyinbooks)

In Illinois two significant Union “massacres” occurred, one in Virden, the other in Herrin. On September 24, 1898 a trainload of potential strikebreaking African-American miners recruited by the Chicago-Virden Coal Company, pulled into Virden on the Chicago & Alton railroad and were informed by representatives of UMWA Local 693 that they were entering a strike. That train continued north to

Springfield, Illinois without incident.

A monument in the Virden town square commemorates the coal strike of 1898 and the battle of October 12 that was its bitter end. The monument contains a large bronze bas-relief that includes the names of those killed in the battle, and a copy of a mendacious recruiting handbill distributed by the Chicago-Virden Company in Birmingham, Alabama, to recruit the Negro miners. The body of the bas-relief is made of symbolic representations of the Chicago & Alton tracks and the assault on the strikers. The guards are shown pointing their Winchesters at the strikers and their families. Atop the bas-relief is a bronze portrait of Mary Harris Jones (“Mother Jones”).



Bronze Plaque in Virden (Courtesy of rhapsodyinbooks)

Mother Jones herself is buried in the Union Miners Cemetery in nearby Mount Olive, Illinois, alongside miners who died in the conflict.

The Herrin massacre took place in June 1922 in Herrin, Illinois. Following an early morning gunfire attack on non-union miners going to work on June 21, three union miners were killed in a confrontation after the striking union members marched on the mine. The next day, union miners killed 19 of fifty strikebreakers and mine guards. A twentieth victim from the non-union group would later be murdered, bringing the death total to twenty-three.

In March 1932, the wage contract between Illinois coal operators and United Mine Workers District 12 miners expired. With coal demand and prices waning, operators sought to substantially reduce miner's pay. District leadership negotiated a reduction from \$6.10 per day to \$5.00. However, the contract was subject to rank and file approval.

A vote was held in July 1932, and the union membership soundly rejected the agreement. District President John Walker called on UMWA President John L. Lewis to come to Illinois to convince miners accept the deal. On August 6, a new election was held. Before the tallies could be made public, the ballots were stolen. Instead of retrieving the ballots or holding a new election, John L. Lewis immediately declared an emergency and imposed the \$5.00 per day



UMW chief John L. Lewis (Courtesy of minewars.org)

agreement on the workers. In protest, miners organized mass pickets in a number of coal towns in Central Illinois. On August 24, a mass march was organized to win the support of workers in the Southern part of the state. The huge caravan was met by scores of deputies and thugs at Mulkeytown, Illinois. Vehicles were upended and workers were shot at and beaten.

Eight days later, delegates representing tens of thousands of miners assembled in Gillespie, Illinois. They voted to break from the UMWA and form a new union, the Progressive Miners of America (PMA).

The PMA was more than simply a rival to the UMWA. Rejecting Lewis' autocracy, the new union adopted democratic policies and instituted measures to ensure that their leaders would be held accountable to the membership. The new union embodied an alternative definition of unionism which broadened its role beyond wage agreements and worker grievances. Labor scholar Staughton Lynd defines alternative unionism or community-based unionism as "democratic, deeply rooted in mutual aid among workers in different crafts and work sites, and politically independent"

This class conception of labor extended to include women. Historian Caroline Waldron Merithew notes, "the PMA was one of the few movements in which non-wage-earning women became leaders in organizing an industry that employed only male labor."

Agnes Burnes Wieck, the first president of the Women's Auxiliary of the Progressive Miners (WAPM), expanded the role of women to that of equals in their social justice struggle. Under Wieck's leadership, the WAPM were the primary organizers for the PMA in Southern Illinois and often proved to be more militant than their male counterparts in the PMA. However, the efforts to organize were often met with violence. Shootings, beatings and bombings were all-too-common events during that period.

In response, the union organized mass demonstrations throughout the state to protest civil rights violations and the violence perpetrated against their members. Among the largest occurred in January, 1933 in Springfield when the WAPM brought over 10,000 members to demand action from Illinois Governor Henry Horner.

However, the Governor turned a deaf ear to the plight of the dissident unionists. As violence continued to mark the subsequent years, the stance of state and federal government tilted increasingly in support of the UMWA. The PMA didn't fare much better in the federal labor bureaucracy either. While passage of the Wagner Act is commonly celebrated as a victory for organized labor, the law was unevenly enforced. The rights of the PMA to speak, assemble and organize inside and outside of Illinois were frequently violated.

Repeated demands for state-wide recognition elections by the union were also rejected by the National Labor Board. This was hardly surprising given Lewis held a seat on the board. Law Professor Jim Pope writes, "By early 1934, exit from the UMW was no longer a viable option for union miners. With the cooperation of employers and courts, the UMW had used its quasi-governmental position to withering effect against the alternative unions."³ While the Progressives were frequently blamed for the violence, the UMWA and the major coal operators benefited from its results. The shootings and bombings provided the impetus for the intervention of the state militia and the imposition of martial law in several key mining communities. With the military in control of these areas, Progressive strikes were broken as scabs worked under the protection of the state.

The PMA suffered a crucial blow in 1937 when 39 members were indicted in federal court on anti-racketeering charges. Although the defense provided compelling evidence of UMWA collusion with the Peabody Coal Company, the jury returned guilty verdicts for the accused. Subsequently, 34 received federal prison sentences, many serving time in Leavenworth, Kansas.



Founding convention, Progressive Miners of America, Gillespie, IL
(Courtesy of minewars.org)

The union was also torn internally. Conservative leaders resisted the efforts of radicals to expand the alternative formation of the union. Red-baiting was adopted to attack and discredit left-leaning members. When the PMA formerly affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1937, radicals regarded it as a betrayal, believing the AFL a regressive organization, hostile to the interests of unskilled labor.

While the union formally continued to exist until 1999, its possibility to offer mine workers a genuine alternative had dissolved decades earlier. Paired against the combined forces of the UMWA, the state and federal government, and the coal operators, the Progressives were hindered at every turn.

Ludlow Massacre, by Woody Guthrie
(because a poet can sometimes express more than facts and figures can)

It was early springtime when the strike was on,
They drove us miners out of doors,
Out from the houses that the Company owned,
We moved into tents up at old Ludlow.
I was worried bad about my children,
Soldiers guarding the railroad bridge,
Every once in a while a bullet would fly,
Kick up gravel under my feet.
We were so afraid you would kill our children,
We dug us a cave that was seven foot deep,
Carried our young ones and pregnant women
Down inside the cave to sleep.
That very night your soldiers waited,
Until all us miners were asleep,
You snuck around our little tent town,
Soaked our tents with your kerosene.
You struck a match and in the blaze that started,
You pulled the triggers of your gatling guns,
I made a run for the children but the fire wall stopped me.
Thirteen children died from your guns.
I carried my blanket to a wire fence corner,
Watched the fire till the blaze died down,
I helped some people drag their belongings,
While your bullets killed us all around.
I never will forget the look on the faces
Of the men and women that awful day,
When we stood around to preach their funerals,
And lay the corpses of the dead away.
We told the Colorado Governor to call the President,
Tell him to call off his National Guard,
But the National Guard belonged to the Governor,

So he didn't try so very hard.
 Our women from Trinidad they hauled some potatoes,
 Up to Walsenburg in a little cart,
 They sold their potatoes and brought some guns back,
 And they put a gun in every hand.
 The state soldiers jumped us in a wire fence corners,
 They did not know we had these guns,
 And the Red-neck Miners mowed down these troopers,
 You should have seen those poor boys run.
 We took some cement and walled that cave up,
 Where you killed these thirteen children inside,
 I said, "God bless the Mine Workers' Union, "
 And then I hung my head and cried.

Data Obtained from Funeral Records:
Schwarz Undertaking and Wolfersberger-Meyer Funeral Home

Until 1949, there was one funeral home in O'Fallon. We extracted data from recorded deaths during the period 1908-1946, a period of extensive mining in and around O'Fallon. Acknowledging that not all funerals were served by the one funeral home, we nevertheless thought that this data would provide a good indication of the demographics of that time.

Number of deaths recorded at this funeral home 1908-1946: 338

Decedents' birth country or nationality:

country	number recorded	(excluding those whose country is unknown)
US	133	58%
Germany	70	31%
England	37*	16%
Scotland	13*	6%
France	10	4%
Italy	8	3%
Ireland	7*	3%
Lithuania	6	2%
Belgium	5	2%
others (Sweden, Australia, Switzerland, Wales)	6	2%

* Some decedents showed parents of different nationality, e.g. father was English and mother was Irish. In these cases, both nationalities were counted, thereby resulting in percentage summation greater than 100%.

Additional information extracted: 18 deaths were attributed directly to mine work, i.e. accidental versus chronic health issues incidental to mine work.

Conclusion

Because the St. Ellen Mine park represents an integral part of the history and heritage of O'Fallon, and because it is identified with men and women, including owners and workers and their families, who made significant contributions to the development of our community, the O'Fallon Historic Preservation Commission deems the site worthy of recognition as an historic landmark.

Aerial View of St Ellen Mine - 1940

