

Pioneer Iowa Coal Operators

By MORGAN THOMAS*

In his report made in 1852, Dr. David Dale Owens, of the United States general land office, was the first to attract the attention of the public to the fact that there were localities in Iowa where rich deposits of coal could be found. It seems, however, at that time, or prior to 1858, there was but little interest manifested in developing the coal fields of the state, at least there are no records or references either verbal or written whereon we can base calculations of any kind that would be reliable in regard to coal.

There probably were some small mines—drifts or slopes opened and coal dug for domestic use only. It is presumed that the demand for coal at that time was of little consequence, as the majority of the early settlers of the state were former residents of a timbered country. Consequently, they sought localities near the timber tracts, believed to be the only reliable resources for fuel.

But as the population increased, the prairies were developed into farms, villages grew into towns, towns into cities, and factories and railroads were built. Then it was that the demand for fuel made it necessary for them to either import or produce their own coal, with the knowledge, therefore, that the state was blessed with material to do the latter. Hence, subsequent results show that enterprise and capital became convinced that the coal industry was destined to become an important factor in Iowa's future commerce.

The first attempt made in collecting and compiling statistics of coal produced in the state was in the eighth United States census report of 1860. This report shows the total number of short tons produced in 1859 to be 48,263, valued at \$92,180. This is the first historical record we have of the production of Iowa coal. The

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next was the ninth United States census report of 1870, which gives the amount of coal produced in the year previous as 283,467 short tons, valued at a little more than \$500,000.

In collecting these notes and reminiscences of the early days when the production of coal was a rarity in Iowa, I have endeavored to select nothing from references or data except that which I believe to be authentic and reliable. There will be nothing included here in regard to mines and operators except the shipping mines in the different parts of the state that were opened and operated prior to 1875.

The Iowa state census report made in 1875 gives the number of tons of coal produced at 1,231,547 tons, valued at \$2,500,140, showing a gain of five-fold in product and value in five years. I have no doubt that the statistics collected were from the local as well as shipping mines, but there are no tables compiled giving names of operators or amount of coal each produced annually, so we are compelled to seek information from different sources.

IN APPANOOSE COUNTY

The first railroad mine operated in Appanoose county was in 1872, located on the southwest branch of the C.R.I. & P. railroad. The mine was known as the Watson Coal and Mining Company, with C. O. Godfrey president, and James Brown superintendent. Mr. Godfrey came here from Boston and was engaged in several mining enterprises in the state at that time, but at present he is a resident of St. Louis, Missouri. Mr. Brown was experienced and had a practical knowledge of mining. He left Iowa in 1875, going to Brazil, Indiana, and shortly afterward was killed by accidentally falling down a shaft while engaged in mining at that camp.

The next mine in the county of any importance was opened in 1873, by Cope and Glenn, of Bloomfield, Davis county, located near Cincinnati on a branch of the C.B. & Q. railroad. In the same year the third

mine was opened by the Appanoose Coal and Mining Company located on the old M.I. & N. road, known now as the Keokuk & Western railroad. J. W. Summers, of Keokuk, was president of the company at that time. The mine at the present time is owned and operated by the Centerville Block Coal Company. In following year Oliver & Dargavelle opened what is known as the Diamond Coal Company mine, at Centerville near the C.R.I. & P. railroad.

IN BOONE COUNTY

There was some local mining done in Boone county prior to 1865, but in a very limited way. In that year the C. & N.W. railroad reached the county, opening transportation to other markets and was an incentive to enterprise in developing the coal field. The first shipping mine in this county was a slope opened in 1867 by T. N. Canfield and C. S. Taylor just west of Boonesboro. Shortly afterward they sunk a shaft 242 feet deep and the company, with but one change in its organization, has continued in business at this place for nearly thirty years, hoisting coal out of the same shaft, for the first few years hauling their product to the railroad in wagons, a distance of three miles. In 1874, the company was re-organized with Delos Arnold, president; C. H. Sherman, manager; and T. N. Canfield, treasurer. The company then built a railroad at their own expense from the mine to Boone, connecting with the main line of the C. & N.W.; eventually it was purchased and is now operated by the railroad company. In 1867, the Moingona Coal Company opened a mine at Moingona, on the C. & N.W. railroad, with John Hall, of Cedar Rapids, president, and W. Blythe, superintendent. John A. Blair, of Jersey City, was also a stockholder. At one time this company operated six mines in this vicinity, and for several years did an extensive business, their output being from eight to nine hundred tons per day. As soon as the C. & N.W. railroad reached Council Bluffs, they shipped the principal part of their product to that

point, and sold it to the Union Pacific Railroad Company. After the coal mines at Carbon, Wyoming, were opened, the Moingona company had to seek other markets for their coal. At the present time, there is but little mining done there, but in its palmy days it was the scene of great activity and one of the largest camps in the state.

In 1874, the Northwestern Coal and Mining Company was formed with J. F. Duncombe, of Fort Dodge, president; Oliver Ames, of Boston, and Gen. G. M. Dodge, shareholders. I have been unable to ascertain who was the first superintendent of the company at this point. A few years afterward a reorganization of the company took place, when Gen. G. M. Dodge became president of the company, and W. D. Morgan, superintendent. The mine did quite a shipping business for several years. While mentioning the name of Gen. G. M. Dodge as president of this company, we wish to vary from coal business long enough to call the attention of those interested in relics of the late war to the fact that there is now in Boone county the desk that was used by Gen. Dodge during the Rebellion. It has the stamp of U.S. on it in several places. It was sent here for use in the company's office, and is still in the county. I believe it would be a valuable addition to the collection of relics in the state historical department.

HARDIN COUNTY

There was a mine opened near Eldora, Hardin county, in the year 1868, by a company that had C. C. Gilman as president, and William Phillips, superintendent. The mine was successfully operated for some time, but the vein of coal was below the bed of the Iowa river and the consequence was that water gave them a great deal of trouble and expense, especially when the water was high. Finally the company was compelled to abandon the mine and seek other coal fields in the state that could be operated to a better advantage and at less expense. Mr. Phillips was an experienced miner and came to Hardin county in 1867, from Mary-

land, where he had previously been a successful mine operator for many years.

JEFFERSON COUNTY

The Jefferson County Coal Company opened a mine at Perlee, on the Chicago & South Western Railroad in 1868. Sen. James F. Wilson, of Fairfield was president of the company, and R. H. Herford, superintendent. The mine did quite a lucrative business for a number of years.

JASPER COUNTY

The Watson No. 1 was the first shipping mine in Jasper county. A company was formed in 1871. They elected John Aberhardt president and James Miller superintendent. In that year the company developed the above mine located four miles east of Colfax and about three miles south of the main line of the Rock Island railroad. A switch was built connecting the mine with the road over which the principal part of the product was shipped to markets outside of the county. The mine had a good run and the company did a prosperous business for a number of years. They eventually sold the mine to C. F. Godfrey & Company.

The Couch mine, located three miles south of Newton, was put in operation in 1873. F. Griggs and D. S. Couch were the owners and operators. A switch was built from the mine to the Rock Island road. D. S. Couch was the mine superintendent, and has been interested in mining in the county until recently.

MAHASKA COUNTY

The first mine in this county of any importance that we have any authentic account of, was located about half way between Oskaloosa and Beacon, on or near the public highway that connects the two towns. John and James Burdess opened the mine and put it in successful operation in the year 1862.

A co-operative company was formed at Beacon in 1864 by nine men, each subscribing \$500 as capital stock for the purpose of developing and operating a

mine in the vicinity of Beacon (then called Oskaloosa station) located on the Keokuk & Des Moines branch of the Rock Island. The following were the nine stockholders in the company: J. G. Jones, E. J. Evans, D. J. Evans, Watkin Price, D. S. Davis, Daniel Davis, J. S. Morgan, Thomas Griffith and J. W. Rodefer. A tram road was built from the mine to the railroad. Mules were used as the locomotive power to deliver the coal on the track where it was dumped into the cars ready for shipment. The company did a flourishing business for about two years and then sold the mine to Thomas Haight, at Keokuk, and Wesley Redhead, of Des Moines, who gave it the name of the Iowa Oil and Coal Company Mine. A short time after this J. W. Rodefer, of Keokuk, bought an interest in the mine again and was elected president of the company. In 1872, Geo. Williams, of Keokuk, superintendent of the Des Moines Valley Railroad Company, bought out the stockholders and became sole proprietor of the mine. Simon Phillips was appointed general manager. They made some improvements and in 1873 the mine had a capacity of over four hundred tons per day, and at that time was the largest mine in the state.

In 1864, Thomas Haight and E. J. Evans opened a mine near Given and constructed a tramway connecting with the Des Moines Valley road using mules in hauling the coal to the railroad. John Baxter, who was the superintendent of this mine, is still a resident in that vicinity.

In 1869, J. W. Huggins, of Ottumwa, and Dr. A. C. Predue opened the Coal Valley Mine at Muchakinock and built one mile and a quarter of railroad, connecting with the Iowa Central at Given. Huggins was president and Predue was general manager. The company did a fair business for several years.

Mine No. 1, of the Consolidation Coal and Mining Company, was opened in 1873 in Muchakinock. The officials of the company when first organized were: C. C. Gilman, president; H. W. McNeill, general manager;

and William Phillips, superintendent. Many changes have taken place in the company since its formation, but the camp developed into one of the most prosperous and largest camps in the state. A branch of the C. & N.W. railroad connects Muchakinock with the main line at Belle Plaine, and the bulk of the coal is sent out over this line.

In 1874, the Eureka Coal Mining Company, composed of Robert Lowery, George L. Davenport, William Larabee, C. C. Cole and J. K. Graves, opened a mine one mile southwest of Beacon. They had for their superintendent H. H. Heard. The mine was connected by a switch from the Keokuk & Des Moines Valley road. They did an extensive business until they consolidated with the Consolidation Mines at Muchakinock, when the mine was abandoned.

MONROE COUNTY

This county played quite an important part in the early production of coal in the state, and does yet. In 1868, McBride, Clark and Predue opened the Avery mines three miles west of Frederick and six miles east of Albia, on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad. They had two shafts in operation, one close to the railroad track, the other one mile away from which they moved the coal to the railroad by means of an iron tramway, operated by mules. In 1870, McBride and Clark retired, and afterwards the firm was known by the name of J.W. and A.G. Huggins and Predue. The Huggins lived in Ottumwa and Predue in Oskaloosa.

In 1869, a mine was opened at Coalfield, on the Iowa Central Railroad, four miles west of Eddyville, called the Black Diamond Coal Company's mine. Thomas Haight, Keokuk; E. J. Evans, Beacon; Gov. S. J. Kirkwood, Ezikel Clark, Iowa City, and Wesley Redhead, Des Moines, were the incorporators, and did a large business for a number of years.

In 1870, at the same place, another mine was opened, with H. W. McNeill, Oskaloosa, president; William

Phillips, superintendent; and W. A. McNeill, secretary. They gave employment to about seventy-five miners at one time, but abandoned this mine when they opened the mines at Muchakinock.

POLK COUNTY

There were numerous small mines in Polk county worked principally in the winter season for a small local trade only up to the year 1871, when the Cipher Mine, afterward known as the Polk County Mine, opened up as the first shipping mine. Mr. Cipher and John Phillips were the first owners and operators. The location of this mine was one mile south of the state capitol and had a connecting switch with the Rock Island Railroad. Many changes took place and the mine was operated by several different companies before it was abandoned.

In 1872, the Watson and Eclipse mines were opened. The former was located east of the state capitol. A switch connected the mine with the C.R.I. & P. Railroad, and for several years it was successful and proved a good investment for its incorporators. C. O. Godfrey was president and James Brown superintendent. The mine has long ago been abandoned. The latter, or Eclipse mine, was located south of the Des Moines river about one and a quarter miles south of the state capitol. Its first officers were J. B. Yeoman, president, and Thomas Beck, superintendent. They had quite an extensive trade, shipping their coal over the C.R.I. & P. Railroad.

In fact these three mines were the only ones of commercial importance in the county prior to 1874. In that year the Pioneer and Eureka mines were established and became operative. Wesley Redhead was president and James Clark superintendent of the Pioneer Company, which was located near the Seventh street bridge on the south side of the river. The location of the Eureka mine was one mile due south of the state capitol, and was in active operation for over twenty years. Norman Haskins was president and

James Carmac superintendent when the company was first organized. The company organization was changed numerous times before the mine was worked out or abandoned. These mines were dependent upon the C.R.I. & P. Railroad for transportation of their product. John Walters, Daniel Reese and James Miller can be classed among the pioneer operators, as they were closely identified with the early discovery and development of the coal fields in this county.

WAPELLO COUNTY

This county was one of the earliest producers of coal in the state and was destined at one time to continue to be so, but she fell behind in her production, and other counties took the lead. In 1868, Wapello county had shipped 52,000 tons of coal out of one mine, which was the largest mine in the state and had shipped more coal than any other mine up to that time. It furnished large quantities of coal for the Keokuk market, and the coal was considered of first-class quality. The mine was opened in 1865 by C. J. Love, and was operated by him for a number of years. It was situated at Alpine Station on the Keokuk & Des Moines Valley Railroad.

The Union Coal Company, consisting of C. O. Godfrey, president, and James Brown, superintendent, with others, opened a mine in 1867, four miles north of Ottumwa, which was connected by a branch from the main line of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad. At this mine J. C. Osgood received his first lessons in mining. Afterward he became one of the most successful mine operators in the state.

The Hawkeye Coal Mining Company was formed and the mine was opened in the year 1873, by the following stockholders: James Harlan, Christ F. Blake and L. W. Vale. This company was afterward called the C. F. Blake Coal Mining Company, and did considerable business for a number of years.

A company was formed in Ottumwa in 1871, called the Ottumwa Coal Mining Company. The stockholders were James D. Ladd, W. W. Ladd, Thomas D. Ladd,

Amos D. Moss, W. B. Bonifield, and W. M. Kind. They opened and operated a mine in the vicinity of Otumwa for some time.

WEBSTER COUNTY

The Ft. Dodge Coal and Mining Company opened a mine in Webster county in 1870. The president of the company was J. L. Platt, and superintendent, Thomas Fleming. The mine was located on Holiday creek and about three miles south of the Illinois Central railroad. They built a tramway the entire distance, utilizing mule power in delivering coal to the road. After a few years of prosperity, it became subservient to the company's interest to widen the track and substitute steam power for that of mule, as the latter was inadequate.

The Duncombe and Richards mine was opened in the latter part of 1870, by J. F. Duncombe and Mr. Richards. In 1871, W. C. Wilson, of Webster City, opened a mine at Lehigh, and subsequently formed the Crooked Creek Coal and Railroad company. J. L. Platt, J. F. Duncombe and W. C. Wilson are really the pioneers of the coal industry in Webster county, as to them belongs largely the credit of its development in its early history.

Harnessing the Sun

A dream of the ages has been to convert the sun's energy for the benefit of mankind. This dream came closer to realization with a demonstration of the Bell Solar Battery, invented by the Bell Telephone Laboratories (1954). This battery converts the sun's energy directly and efficiently into usable electricity—has sent voices over telephone wires and operated a low-power radio-transmitter. It needs no fuel other than the light from the sun itself. It has no moving parts and nothing is consumed or destroyed. Great benefits for all mankind will come from this forward step in harnessing the limitless power of the sun.—N. W. Bell Telephone Bulletin.

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