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VOL. II

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COAL DEPOSITS



IOWA
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

VOLUME II.

COAL DEPOSITS OF IOWA

BY

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
Members of the Geological Board	3
Special and Temporary Assistants	4
Contents	5
List of Illustrations	11
Preface	19
CHAPTER I.—Introduction	29
CHAPTER II.—Origin of Coal	41
Sources of Materials	41
Conditions of Deposition	44
Associated Beds	52
CHAPTER III.—Carboniferous Basin of the Mississippi Valley	55
General Geological Features	57
Structure	57
Geological Provinces	60
Continental Interior Previous to the Carboniferous	65
Major Members of the Carboniferous	67
Mississippian, or Lower Carboniferous, Series	69
Derivation of the Limestones	70
Use of Term	72
Geographical Distribution	73
Geological Delimitation	74
Biological Definition	83
Subdivisions of the Mississippian Series	85
Upper Mississippi Region at the Beginning of the Coal Measure Epoch	90
Pennsylvanian, or Upper Coal Measure, Series	91
Occurrence of Coal	91
Coal Fields of the Interior Basin	94
CHAPTER IV.—General Geology of the Coal Region	99
Geographic Limits of the Iowa Area	99
Topography	100

CHAPTER IV.— <i>Continued.</i>	PAGE.
Geological Formations of the State	103
General Geological Relations of the Coal Measures of Iowa	112
Geological Subdivisions of the Coal Measures	118
CHAPTER V.—Lithology of the Coal Measures	123
General Considerations	123
“Lower” Coal Measures	126
Shales	126
Sandstones	131
Calcareous Beds	135
Coals	136
“Upper” Coal Measures	137
Shales	137
Limestones	138
Arenaceous Materials	138
Coal	139
CHAPTER VI.—Stratigraphy of the Coal Measures	141
Introductory Remarks	141
General Sections	142
Form of the Coal Basin	143
“Lower” Coal Measures	144
Description of a Detailed Section in Central Iowa	145
Variability of Strata	152
Unconformities in the Lower Coal Measures	152
Thickness of Lower Coal Measures	153
Summary	154
“Upper” Coal Measures	155
Typical Section	155
Deformations	156
Thickness of Upper Coal Measures	159
General Conclusions Regarding Local Stratigraphy of the Iowa	
Coal Measures	160
Coal Horizons	162
CHAPTER VII.—The Coal Beds	173
Extent of Individual Seams	173
Character and Number	175
Interrupted Continuity	177
Irregularities of Deposition	178

CHAPTER VII.— <i>Continued.</i>	PAGE.
Erosion	181
Carboniferous Troughs	182
Preglacial Channels	183
Postglacial Valleys	185
Dislocations	186
Clay Seams	189
Availability	190
Insufficient Thickness	190
Depth	192
CHAPTER VIII.—Description of the Coal Beds Now Operated in	
Northcentral Iowa	195
Humboldt county	196
Webster county	197
Hamilton county	211
Hardin county	214
Carroll county	218
Greene county	219
Boone county	225
Story county	236
Marshall county	237
CHAPTER IX.—Description of Coal Beds in Central Iowa	241
Guthrie county	242
Dallas county	253
Polk county	267
Jasper county	294
Poweshiek county	300
Madison county	304
Warren county	306
Marion county	317
Mahaska county	340
CHAPTER X.—Description of the Coal Beds of Southeastern Iowa,	357
Keokuk county	357
Lucas county	366
Monroe county	374
Wapello county	383
Jefferson county	393
Wayne county	402

CHAPTER X.— <i>Continued.</i>	PAGE.
Appanoose county	406
Davis county	424
Van Buren county	429
CHAPTER XI.—Description of the Coal Beds of Southwestern Iowa	435
Harrison county	436
Shelby county	437
Audubon county	438
Pottawattamie county	439
Cass county	440
Adair county	441
Mills county	443
Montgomery county	443
Adams county	445
Union county	450
Clarke county	451
Fremont county	452
Page county	453
Taylor county	457
Ringgold county	461
Decatur county	462
CHAPTER XII.—Carboniferous Deposits of Eastern Iowa	465
Grundy county	466
Delaware county	467
Linn county	467
Jones county	468
Jackson county	468
Clinton county	469
Johnson county	469
Iowa county	470
Scott county	470
Muscatine county	475
Washington county	478
Henry county	480
Des Moines county	483
Lee county	484
CHAPTER XIII.—Composition of Iowa Coals	491
Introductory	491

CONTENTS.

9

CHAPTER XIII.— <i>Continued.</i>	PAGE.
Kinds of Coal	492
Graphite	492
Anthracite	492
Semi-Anthracite	493
Bituminous Coal	493
Lignite	495
Peat	496
Physical Properties	496
Fracture	496
Hardness	498
Chemical Analysis	499
Determinations Made	499
Methods of Analysis	499
Moisture	501
Volatile Combustible Matter	501
Fixed Carbon	502
Ash	502
Sulphur	503
Analyses of Iowa Coals	504
CHAPTER XIV.—Waste in Coal Mining	511
Waste Due to Methods of Mining	512
Waste in Removal of Coal	513
Waste in Fine Coal	515
CHAPTER XV.—Extent of Coal Industry	521
Growth of Production	522
Number of Mines and Value of Product	525
Localities	525
Present Territory Supplied	527
Markets	527
INDEX	529

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

PLATE.

- i. Coal Fields of the United States.
- ii. Geological Map of Iowa.
- iii. General Geological Section of Iowa.
- iv. Unconformity of Coal Measures and St. Louis Limestone. Keokuk.
- v. Carboniferous Sandstone in old Devonian Gorge. Iowa City.
- vi. Typical Development of Coal Measure Shales. Des Moines.
- vii. Elk Cliff; Coal Measure Sandstone. Rousseau, Marion County.
- viii. Quartzitic Concretions in Redrock Sandstone. Marion County.
- ix. Cross-bedding in Coal Measure Sandstone. Redrock Quarry.
- x. Overhanging Ledge; Basal Sandstone resting on St. Louis Limestone. Keokuk.
- xi. Lower Coal Measure Limestone. Mystic.
- xii. Upper Coal Measure Limestone. Earlham.
- xiii. General Cross Sections of Coal Measure Basin of Iowa.
- xiv. Detailed Geological Section in Central Iowa.
- xv. Diagram showing Growth of Coal Production.
- xvi. Map of Iowa, showing Relative Production of Coal by Counties.
- xvii. Top Works of Typical Slope Mine. Evans, Mahaska County.
- xviii. Top Works of a large Shaft. Hiteman, Monroe county.

FIGURE.

1. Section of peat swamp of northern Iowa.
2. Ideal section of peat swamp after being covered by sediments and compressed.
3. Section of small coal basin in Redrock quarry, Marion county.
4. Changes of the Carboniferous shore-line.
5. Generalized section along Mississippi river from Minnesota line to mouth of the Ohio, showing geological relations of formations.

FIGURE.

6. Bennington section (Marion county), showing inclination of coal strata.
7. Composite section showing structure of Lower Coal Measures of Iowa.
8. Ideal cross-section of the Iowa Carboniferous rocks.
9. Popular idea of the relations of the Lower and Upper Coal Measures.
10. Actual relations of Lower and Upper Coal Measures as now understood.
11. Stratigraphy of coal beds.
12. Coal horizon at time of formation ; parallel to shore-line.
13. Coal horizon as it now exists ; parallel to shore-line.
14. Coal horizon viewed at right angles to shore-line.
15. Stratigraphical arrangement of Iowa coal beds.
16. Uneven character of surface upon which coal was deposited.
Markham mine, Marion county.
17. Ideal section across Mahaska county, showing unevenness of Coal Measure floor.
18. "Horseback" in Craig slope. Kalo, Webster county.
19. Extraneous sediments in coal seam. Garfield mine, Oskaloosa.
20. Carboniferous erosion : sandstone occupying "cut-out" in coal seam. Smoky Hollow mine, Avery, Monroe county.
21. Preglacial erosion : drift occupying small gorge. Old Polk county mine, Des Moines.
22. Postglacial erosion : gorge of Des Moines river at city of Des Moines.
23. Fault. Bloomfield shaft, Des Moines.
24. Step-fault. Davison mine, Newton, Jasper county.
25. "Wedge" fault. Appanoose shaft, Cincinnati, Appanoose county.
26. "Roll." Thistle mine, Cincinnati.
27. "Pinch." Mendota mine, near south line of Appanoose county.
28. Fissure filled with clay. Christy mine, east of Des Moines.
29. Section across Des Moines river valley, showing arrangement of geological formations. Ft. Dodge, Webster county.
30. Coal beds near Johnson mine, north of Ft. Dodge.
31. Section at clay pit of Ft. Dodge Pressed Brick Works. Ft. Dodge.

FIGURE.

32. Coal bed at the Martin shaft. Tara.
33. Portion of shaft at Collins mine, No. 4. Coalville.
34. Cannel and bituminous veins at the Johnson mine. Kalo.
35. Bed of cannel coal at Irvine drift. Kalo.
36. "Horseback" in Craig slope. Kalo.
37. Coal bed at Crooked Creek mine, No. 3. Lehigh.
38. Section of coal at Crooked Creek, No. 1. Lehigh.
39. Section of Bluff near the Silver mine. Below Webster City,
Hamilton county.
40. Coal bed at Stockdale opening. Ten miles below Webster City.
41. Bluff at Gilman drift. Steamboat Rock, Hardin county.
42. Coal bed at Chaffin mine. Eldora.
43. Coal bed in Dale and Goodwin mine. Grand Junction, Greene
county.
44. Section of Kennedy shaft. Rippey.
45. Tripartite seam at Kennedy mine. Rippey.
46. Bed in Angus mine. Near southeast corner of Greene county.
47. Section of bluff near Bussey drift. Southwest of Rippey.
48. Coal seam in Hughes mine. Near southwest corner of Greene
county.
49. Part of shaft in Angus mine. Angus, Boone county.
50. Bed in Dalby shaft. Angus.
51. "Creep" in Dalby mine. Angus.
52. Coal seam, at Potter slope on Des Moines river. Below
Moingona.
53. Vein at White Smoke mine. Moingona.
54. Bottom of shaft, Milford mine. Boonesborough.
55. Section in McBrinie shaft. Boonesborough.
56. Coal bed in Hutchinson mine near Squaw Creek. Zenorsville.
57. Section of coal in Johnson shaft. Gilbert, Story county.
58. Bed at Mormon Ridge mine. Near Albion, Marshall county.
59. Coal bed at Greenbrier mine. Jamaica, Guthrie county.
60. Bluff on Middle Raccoon. Near east county line of Guthrie.
61. Bluff at Dygart drift. Panora.
62. "Clay seam" in Reese mine. Panora.
63. Section of Scott shaft. Fansler.
64. Bed at Eclipse mine. Fansler.
65. Coal seam at Eureka mine. Bayard.

FIGURE.

66. Section of bluff on Deer creek. Stuart.
67. Coal with clay parting, in Suggert mine. Stuart.
68. Bluff near Pritchard drift. High Bridge, Dallas county.
69. Bluff near Raccoon river. One mile east of Van Meter.
70. Bed of Van Meter and Chicago mine. Van Meter.
71. Section at Chaney drift. Four miles north of Adel.
72. Bluff on Raccoon river. Near Dawson.
73. Coal seam at Tudor shaft. Dawson.
74. Section on Bulger creek. DeSoto.
75. "Hanging Rock" section. Redfield.
76. Bed at old Leeper mine. Redfield.
77. Coal vein near Redfield mine. Redfield.
78. Bluff at Cotton drift. Linden.
79. Clay seams in Keeler mine. Linden.
80. Bluff on Des Moines river above mill dam, at city of Des Moines. Shows coal seam separated by sand bands.
81. Terrace Hill section. Des Moines.
82. Railroad cutting near Rose Hill mine. Four miles west of Des Moines.
83. Coal vein in Proctor mine. Des Moines.
84. "Horseback" in Proctor mine. Des Moines.
85. Section showing undulatory character of the coal seam in Bloomfield mine. Des Moines.
86. Fault in Bloomfield mine. Des Moines.
87. Ironstone band and roof of coal seam, Bloomfield mine. Des Moines.
88. Ironstone nodules in roof of coal bed, Bloomfield mine. Des Moines.
89. Ironstone mass, in coal bed of Bloomfield mine. Des Moines.
90. Bluff on Des Moines river. Near High Bridge.
91. Shaft of Giant mine No. 1. East Des Moines.
92. Part of shaft of Coal Hill mine. North of Avon.
93. Railroad cutting. One mile north of Avon.
94. Railroad cutting. One mile east of Hastie.
95. Preglacial channel in coal bed, at Acme mine. Runnels.
96. Railroad cutting near east county line, below Runnels.
97. Shaft of mine, at Altoona.
98. Shaft of Black Oak mine. Lynnville, Jasper county.

FIGURE.

99. Bed at Davison shaft. Newton.
100. Coal at the Cooke mine. East of Mitchellville.
101. Coal seam at Jasper county mine. Colfax.
102. Coal at Smith and Barrowman mine. Searsboro, Poweshiek county.
103. Section near old Petit mine.
104. Seam in Evans shaft. Near south county line of Poweshiek.
105. Coal at Clocks stripping. Southeast of Earlham, Madison county.
106. Bluff on Middle river. Near Patterson station, Warren county.
107. Coal bed at Lumsdon slope. Carlisle.
108. Bluff on Middle river. Summerset.
109. Section of shaft at Bennum mine. Summerset.
110. Bluff on Des Moines river. East of Ford.
111. Tripartite seam at Randolph mine. Five miles southwest of Indianola.
112. Seam at Mitchell mine. Milo.
113. Coal bed at Miller pit. Lacona.
114. Bluff on Whitebreast creek. Lacona.
115. Section at Hickman slope. Lacona.
116. Section along Des Moines river, near Bennington, Marion county.
117. Bluff. South of Dunreath.
118. Cliff. Opposite Redrock.
119. Railroad cutting. North of Coalport.
120. "Rise" in Markham mine. Pella.
121. Section at Coalport.
122. McElrea drift. Near Star P. O.
123. Shaft at Gambel mine. Knoxville.
124. Coal bed in Rollins mine. Flagler.
125. Bed in Rollins mine. Flagler.
126. Bluff on Cedar creek, near Staats mine. Marysville.
127. Bluff on Cedar creek, showing Coal Measures resting on St Louis limestone. Near Bussey.
128. Coal bed in Williams mine. Near Sharon, Mahaska county.
129. Seam of coal in Columbia shaft. Rose Hill.
130. Coal bed, having erosive channel filled with drift material. Carbondale mine. Oskaloosa.
131. Coal bed with clay partings, in American slope. Evans.
132. Fault in American mine. Evans.

FIGURE.

133. Fault in American mine. Evans. Line of slip passing through irregular ironstone band.
134. Coal bed at Consolidation mine No. 7. Muchachinock.
135. Bluff at Griffith drift. Given.
136. Fold and step-fault at Pekay mine. Muchachinock.
137. Part of Quarton prospect shaft. Fremont.
138. Section at mouth of Cedar creek. Below Bellefontaine.
139. Bluff on Coal creek at Richardson mine. Three miles south-east of Ferry P. O.
140. Ideal cross-section through the What Cheer district, from Rock creek to the North Skunk river.
141. Seam at What Cheer mine No. 5. Coal cut out through erosion. What Cheer, Keokuk county.
142. Coal bed at Pioneer mine. Thornburg.
143. Coal bed at Rowley mine. North of Sigourney.
144. Seam in Smith mine. Richland.
145. Coal bed at Lucas and Cleveland mine. Cleveland, Lucas county.
146. Section on Whitebreast creek. Four miles northeast of Cleveland.
147. Section of strata on Little Whitebreast creek, at Smith mine. Near Chariton.
148. Strata encountered in "Williamson shaft". Near Chariton.
149. Coal bed at Richman pit. Northeast of Chariton.
150. Bluff on Des Moines river showing coal seam. Opposite Eddyville, Monroe county.
151. Bed in Pleasant Valley mine. Coalfield.
152. Coal in Smoky Hollow mine. Avery.
153. Part of Fredric shaft. Fredric.
154. Coal bed and "horseback" in Iowa and Wisconsin mine. Albia.
155. Fault in Deep Vein mine. Foster.
156. Bed in Davis mine. Kirkville, Wapello county.
157. Coal seam with clay parting, Keb mine. Keb.
158. Section of shaft of Phillips mine No. 4. Ottumwa.
159. Bluff in Sugar creek. East of Ottumwa.
160. Coal bed at Eldon mine. Laddsedale.
161. Bottom of shaft in Pickwick mine. Ottumwa.
162. Coal bed, with fault, in Appanoose mine. East of Blakesville.
163. Section of shaft of Washington mine. Perlee, Jefferson county.
164. Part of Jefferson shaft. Perlee.

FIGURE.

165. Section of coal seam. Coalport.
166. Coal bed at Bates mine. Fairfield.
167. Bluff on Little Walker creek. North of Confidence, Wayne county.
168. Section of Frey shaft. Confidence.
169. Coal seam in Frey mine. Confidence.
170. Coal bed in Burns mine. Confidence.
171. Part of Seymour shaft. Seymour.
172. Bed at Wingler mine. Howard.
173. Coal bed at Young mine. Milledgeville, Appanoose county.
174. Bluff on Walnut creek. Mystic.
175. Coal seam at Whitebreast No. 19. Forbush.
176. Base of Diamond shaft No. 2. Centerville.
177. Fault in Thistle mine. Cincinnati.
178. "Wedge" fault in Thistle mine. Cincinnati.
179. Fissure in seam at Thistle mine. Cincinnati.
180. "Pinch" in Appanoose mine. Cincinnati.
181. Section of Albert shaft. Cincinnati.
182. Coal bed in Pearl City mine. Four miles south of Cincinnati.
183. Seam in Dickinson mine. Hilltown.
184. Coal bed in Sickels mine. Laddsedale, Davis county.
185. Bluff on Soap creek, near old Brown cannel mine. Carbon.
186. Seam at Brown cannel mine. Carbon.
187. Bed in Troublesome mine, near southwest corner of Davis county, in Appanoose.
188. Base of shaft at Cox mine. Hillsboro, Van Buren county.
189. Coal beds at Lafever mine. Selma.
190. Section of bluff at Douds mine. Douds station.
191. Seam at Whitman opening. Bonaparte.
192. Coal veins in well on Honey creek. Bonaparte.
193. Bluff on Boyer river. Near Logan, Harrison county.
194. Coal bed in Plowman shaft. At Briscoe, in Adams, near south county line of Cass county.
195. Coal bed at Eureka shaft. South of Adair, Adair county.
196. Bluff near Glenwood, Mills county.
197. Coal bed at old Westrope mine. In northeastern corner of Montgomery county.
198. Bed at Miller mine. Briscoe, Adams county.

FIGURE.

199. Coal seam at Spurrier opening. Eureka.
200. Section at Wyles shaft. Carbon.
201. Vein at Syfert and Jones mine. Carbon.
202. Section on east bank of Grand river. Talmage, Union county.
203. Section of bluff. Southeast of Bartlett, Fremont county.
204. Bluff at Shambaugh mill, on Nodaway river. Clarinda, Page county.
205. Section on the Nodaway river, below Bradyville. Near south county line of Page.
206. Shaft at Linquist mine. Near Nyman.
207. Section at Beynon shaft. Hawleyville, Taylor county.
208. Coal bed at Wilcox mine. Five miles north of Newmarket.
209. Seam at Anderson shaft. Newmarket.
210. Bed at Adams mine. Newmarket.
211. Section on creek. Near Spring Valley, Decatur county.
212. Coal bed at Friedley mine. Jamestown, Scott county.
213. Seam in Hanlon and Blackwell opening. Jamestown.
214. Coal at Hoor drift. East of Muscatine, Muscatine county.
215. Coal seam, near old Lieb mine. Verdi, Washington county.
216. Contact of Coal Measures and St. Louis limestone, on branch of Big creek. Mt. Pleasant, Henry county.
217. Bluff on Skunk river. Rome.
218. Coal bed at Cox mine. Hillsboro.
219. Bluff on Cedar creek. Southeast of Danville, Des Moines county.
220. Top of bluff on Mississippi river at Nassau slough. Below Keokuk, Lee county.
221. Outcrop southeast of Denmark.
222. Coal bed at old Hardwick mine. Near Westpoint.

PREFACE.

No systematic investigation of Iowa's coal deposits has ever been accomplished. The state is regarded by her citizens and outsiders alike so preeminently agricultural that usually her mineral resources are almost entirely overlooked. Yet her geological features are none the less interesting scientifically, none the less important from an economic standpoint.

The mineral wealth of a community can only be developed through a liberal appreciation of its proper functions. Geology ranking first among the useful sciences, has for one of its leading objects the investigation of the natural resources of a region. It considers the character of the different soils and their capabilities for agricultural purposes; the extent and value of the different deposits of coal and lead, iron and other ores; the distribution, properties and uses of the exhaustless beds of valuable clays; the accurate determination of the areas for artesian waters; the analysis of the mineral, well and river waters; the relative value and durability of the numerous kinds of building stones; and all kindred subjects which are of the utmost importance to the great body of the people.

Agriculture and geology are daily becoming more and more intimate in their relations. Nowhere has this interdependence been more clearly understood and nowhere have the benefits been more apparent than in certain

European countries. Some of the older states of the Union, especially those along the Atlantic border, have followed the same line of work with the most happy results. For to-day it is almost universally conceded that a good geological map of the region is practically a soil map also. The proper appreciation of the close relations of the two sciences cannot fail therefore to impress the truth of the statement.

In pointing out the various mineral deposits of Iowa a knowledge of the distribution of the geological formations is of prime importance. The sequence of strata is measurably complete, and will be briefly considered farther on.

Although the greatest factor in her mineral wealth, the coal industry of Iowa has been allowed from the beginning to take care of itself. Until recently not a single area in the state had been accurately mapped, nor the extent, thickness and stratigraphical peculiarities of the deposits made out. Surprising as it may seem, carefully made estimates show that more money is wasted in many counties every year in ill-advised and poorly conducted efforts to discover coal and other minerals than would annually support a well conducted, systematic investigation of the entire state. Throughout the region are to be seen numberless abandoned diggings, most of them the fruitless attempts to obtain coal in places where success is as utterly hopeless as can be imagined. Deserted shafts tell of useless expenditure and loss of capital that might easily have been avoided had some authoritative information concerning the geological structure of the particular localities been accessible.

The subject of coal in Iowa is so important in its bearings upon the material prosperity of the state that it

requires a careful treatment in all its numerous phases. This treatment is a work of great magnitude. It cannot be accomplished in a few months; for several years are required to make the observations, accumulate the facts, and carry on the proper tests.

There is contemplated, therefore, in this connection a series of publications, which will eventually resolve itself into four or five categories more or less closely related. Each of the groups of facts will probably be embraced in separate parts, the first of the series appearing with the present volume. There is proposed :

(1) A preliminary report, somewhat general in its character, perhaps, but something which will supply temporarily a great and ever increasing demand for information pertaining to the coal deposits of the state. This desire for authoritative accounts of the different portions of the great Iowa Coal field is shared not only by the citizens of the state but by many persons with means who now reside in distant parts of the Union, but who are desirous of making safe investments in the state, of starting new industries and of becoming soon, perhaps, residents.

(2) A detailed account of the geological features of the coal districts. This should embrace a full description of the different kinds of beds and their associations, the minute structure of the coal-bearing strata in all its details, the exact relations of the different seams, the distances from the surface that it is necessary to go in order to reach them, the pointing out of notable and easily recognized strata which will act as guides in searching for particular seams of coal, and all kindred information of practical import.

(3) A discussion of practical mining in the state, the methods employed and improvements to be made, the kinds of machinery used and its advantages, the best methods and apparatus for prospecting and like information tending toward a greater development of the industry, including the utilization of coal dust, slack and the lignites of the Cretaceous strata of northwestern Iowa.

(4) A description of the uses and properties of Iowa coals, together with chemical analyses of all the principal varieties from the different counties, the adaptabilities of the various kinds for steam, domestic, and metallurgical purposes and for gas-making.

Since the work of investigating the coal deposits of the state has been taken up, innumerable calls have been received from persons and corporations in more than two-thirds of the entire number of counties to look into their localities "first." In addition there has been a multitude of letters asking for special information and advice and numerous personal visits made by persons residing outside, as well as within, the limits of the state. All these demands have been satisfied as far as reliable information upon the particular phases of the question would permit. But, it was clearly manifest from the beginning that it would be an absolute physical impossibility to answer every earnest call in the manner that was perhaps expected. Nevertheless every effort has been made to give advice of practical importance in the specific cases. These inquiries indicate how deep and how active is the interest in regard to the greatest of Iowa's natural resources; how urgent is the need for organized work in determining the exact nature and extent of the mineral wealth of the state.

It was foreseen at the outset that but little progress could be made in extending the examination of the coal deposits to all parts of the state in which there was any likelihood of obtaining the mineral in quantities of commercial value unless the subject was taken up in a perfectly systematic way. With this object always in view localities were visited first, which, it was thought, would furnish most readily a key to the structure, character and disposition of the coal beds over large areas. After the geological features of these districts were thoroughly understood the investigations were extended in all directions into the neighboring regions as rapidly as was consistent with accurate work. In this way the extent of territory covered and the amount of practical information secured was far in excess of that which it would have been possible to obtain in any other way.

When it is remembered that the area of the Coal Measures in Iowa is over 20,000 square miles, and that the numerous Carboniferous outliers, or isolated basins, and the regions bordering the productive coal deposits which must be gone over in determining even approximately the limits of the formation, occupy fully 5,000 square miles more, the magnitude of the undertaking and the amount of labor that has been expended may be readily appreciated. Many details, of course, still remain to be brought out, yet within the limited time allowed it is not to be expected that the work could be made symmetrically complete. However, the report is comprehensive in its nature, giving all the leading facts connected with the industry, and the occurrence and distribution of the coal throughout the state.

Of special and practical import to prospector and miner alike are the facts brought out in regard to the stratig-

raphy of the coal bearing strata of the state. In this line of work the natural outcrops have been by far the most valuable. Records of shafts, diggings and borings have also been of value but not to the extent that might be supposed at first glance. These records have been kept by many different persons and their worth for geological purposes has varied greatly. Of the many hundreds, or thousands, of drill holes which have been made in the different parts of the state very few are of much use in checking geological observations. With the great majority of the holes put down in prospecting for coal no record of the strata passed through has been kept and as a rule only the presence or absence of coal noted. It does not appear to have occurred to many prospectors that other horizons are often just as valuable aids in the search for coal as the coal seams themselves. In nearly every coal district there are certain beds which are easily recognizable and which have a definite position in regard to the coal beds themselves; that is, their position is constantly a certain number of feet above particular coal veins. When these beds are encountered and recognized it is easy to calculate within a very short distance how far down it is necessary to go in order to reach the given coal horizon. When no attention is paid to such beds as are here considered it is possible that borings may be stopped within a few feet of a valuable coal seam without its presence being detected. The money spent in prospecting under such circumstances is of course wasted. In the same way carefully kept records of borings of artesian wells, and records of drillings for other purposes would be of great value to the community in pointing out the probable occurrence of particular mineral deposits.

There is another element in the uncertainty which usually surrounds the average drill record. Aside from the unfortunate employment of incompetent persons who really know little or nothing about the character of the rocks and the geology of the region the use of the ordinary churn drill is to be deplored. The claims of drillers are in most cases very extravagant. Even under the most favorable circumstances there is already great difficulty in ascertaining the exact thickness and the lithological character of the several strata passed through, so that only in a general way can the record be relied upon. At best every precaution must be taken to get even approximate results. The larger coal operators and those who are most successful in prospecting for coal on a large scale use the diamond drill altogether, which furnishes a core of the rocky layers passed through. By means of the core, which is essentially a small vertical column passing through the successive strata, all details relating to the composition and thickness of the different layers are readily obtained and may be referred to at all times by a simple examination of the section secured. All the important horizons may be determined, whether they are the coal veins themselves or the more persistent beds which are capable of serving as guides in determining the location of the seams. The cost of the diamond drill outfit is somewhat greater to be sure at first than that of ordinary drilling apparatus and this fact probably explains why, notwithstanding its many advantages, it is not more generally used. The record and information obtained, however, are very much more satisfactory and accurate than where other instruments are employed. There remains evidently the same ultimate cost of prospecting whatever form of apparatus be employed.

The statistics of the Iowa coal production during past years have been published independently by the statistical department of the United States Geological Survey and by the Iowa State Mine Inspectors. The former does not take into consideration country banks, and consequently a very considerable percentage of the coal production is not noted, while more than a quarter of the total number of counties producing coal are not mentioned at all. According to law the State Mine Inspectors confine their labors to only those mines working more than ten men, so that here too a very considerable portion of the annual production is overlooked. The importance of the country bank is much greater than is commonly regarded. The leading coal producing districts of to-day are in many cases simply the localities where twenty-five years ago only a few country banks were operated. The development of these fields has been in large part made possible through the building of railroads over which the product of the mines may be shipped to less favored localities. The country banks thus often determine the line along which railroad building is to be carried. The location of the deserted mines is also of importance as indicating the presence of coal. The abandonment of the old openings do not necessarily imply that the seams have been entirely exhausted. In the majority of cases, mines of this class often suggest rather that the work has been interfered with, or that the territory owned or leased, being somewhat limited, has been exhausted.

In most cases it has been found inadvisable to designate by special names the different coal seams as is done in the fields of the Eastern United States. In only a few instances are the Iowa coal seams extensive enough to warrant the application of distinctive names; though

whenever they assume sufficient prominence they are called after the leading places where they are mined.

To Professor Calvin sincere thanks are due for many kind suggestions in connection with the work. In the preparation of the chapters on the coal mines operated in the various districts the field notes of the different members of the Survey have been freely drawn upon. Messrs. E. H. Lonsdale, A. C. Spencer, A. J. Jones, C. H. Gordon, and especially H. F. Bain, have contributed liberally in the descriptive matter. The drawings illustrating the work were made chiefly by Mr. F. C. Tate. The chemical analyses have been made by Prof. G. E. Patrick, chemist to the Survey. A few other analyses have been included, among them those made by Profs. Whitney and Emory.

