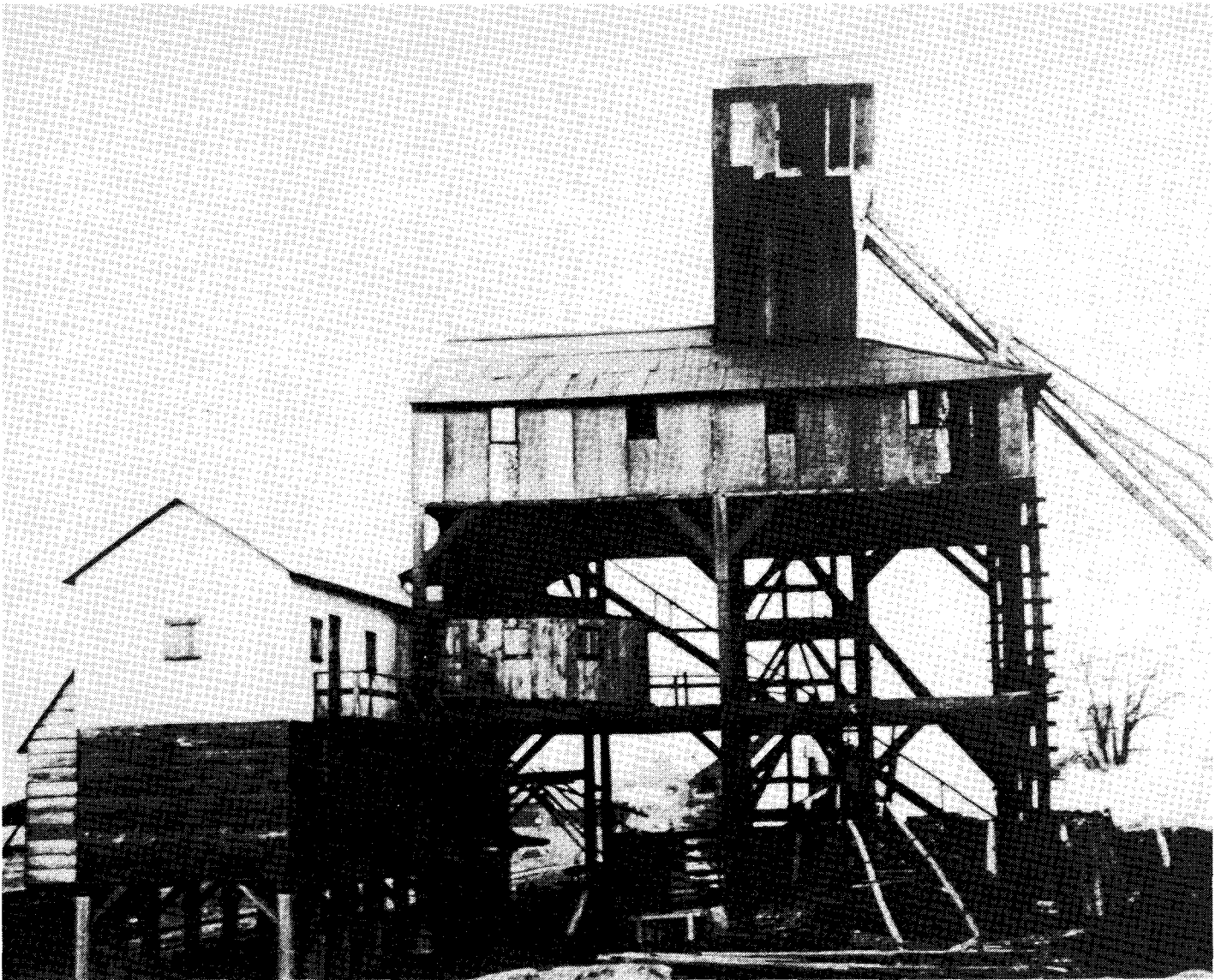


## CHAPTER 6

# The Coal Mine

By Betty Shaw



This is the entrance to the mine shaft and the tippie.  
Picture courtesy of Josephine Coffman.

"Coal! We've Got 'er! 7 Feet! 540 Feet Deep!  
 "Crow! You Rascal, Crow!  
 Jollifications! Saturday Afternoon and Night!  
 Ain't She a Daisy? Now you Crow!  
 We Howl a Whoop! Yea Verily!  
 We Yip a Yawp!  
 We'll Paint the Town Red!  
 Read About It!"

Thus the uninhibited journalistic language of the October 3, 1889 edition of the MOAWEQUA CALL-MAIL announced the first discovery of coal in the village of Moweaqua.

The prospective search was first mentioned in 1886, but it was not implemented until a group of interested businessmen hired the firm of Samuel Warner and Son to drill for coal. The first bore was made on land owned by William Whitworth, about 150 yards west of the Illinois Central Railroad tracks and two blocks north of the depot with the first stroke of the drill occurring on July 25, 1889.

The company formed to operate the prospective coal mine was The Cochran Coal and Mining Company. James G. Cochran, an enterprising citizen of Freeport, Illinois, brought his search for coal to the village of Moweaqua on the advice of the former general manager of the Illinois Central Railroad. James Cochran promptly broached the subject to some of Moweaqua's leading citizens and the company was formed. Upon calculation of the depth to be reached and the cost per foot, the company asked for donations from interested citizens in order to raise the two thousand dollars needed to make the test. The newspaper encouraged everyone to make a contribution for the good of the town, and every edition during that time carried the list of subscribers and the amounts subscribed, ranging from one dollar to one hundred dollars. After the initial excitement, however, there was apparently no active effort by the company to sink a shaft and develop a mine.

Aside from periodic drum-beating by the MOAWEQUA CALL-MAIL, there was no serious talk of a coal mine until the newspaper announced on November 12, 1891, that The Moweaqua Coal and Manufacturing Company had been formed and had leased one thousand acres of land. Mr. Charles White, a veteran coal operator of Pana, was at the head of the mining operation and subscribed to half of the stock. Enthusiasm ran high and the CALL-MAIL stated it this way: "Get out of the way croakers, this town is sure to go!"

Early in December of 1891, an organization meeting elected a board of directors. The seven gentlemen were: J. E. Gregory, president; C. J. White, mine superintendent; V. Snyder, Jr., vice-president; A. J. Combs, secretary-treasurer, and additional directors C. J. White, J. T. Duncan, and C. F. White. The newly-formed company purchased an acre and a half of ground lying just north of the fairgrounds next to the railroad right-of-way. The land was purchased from Mrs. M. K. Duncan for the sum of six hundred dollars. It was to be used for the location of the shaft, and with the arrival of the boilers, work began immediately. The ground-breaking ceremony took place on December 21, 1891, with Mrs. A. J. Combs, wife of the secretary of the company, turning the first shovelful of dirt.

Two shifts of men began digging the shaft. Dave Mesonett, Cliff Winchell, James Ahl, F. R. Baldwin, Walter Pritchard and John D. Hayes made up the night shift, with the day shift consisting of Pat Galvin, Fred Kitch, John Morris, H. D. Boggett, Conrad Winchel, and Patrick Dowd.

The latter digger had the dubious privilege of having the first injury due to a roll of wire cable falling on his foot. The monthly payroll amounted to nine hundred dollars.

By late January of 1892 the shaft reached the eighty foot level and the site was visited by a party of young people. Two of the party, Flo Goodwin and Lizzie Armentrout, were the first women to go down into the mine.

On April 7, 1892, at a depth of 180 feet, the first coal was struck, and with this encouragement, work at the pit continued at a feverish pace. The digging went on all summer long, complicated to some extent by salt water collecting in the shaft. There were some injuries caused by falling rock, and one workman was reported off work because of a "gathering" in his head, but by August 4, the diggers had reached 500 feet and had collected a sixty dollar bonus for reaching that depth.

On September 1, 1892, there were red headlines in the Moawequa CALL-MAIL that told of striking three veins of coal of good quality and almost six feet thick. The first coal was offered on the market on September 16. Nut coal was \$1.25 per ton and lump coal was \$1.50. The first ton of coal taken out for the market was given to the editor of the CALL-MAIL in appreciation for all the boosting his paper had done. The editor of the Assumption paper had also done considerable boosting, and there seemed to be much friendly rivalry as to the merits of each town's coal mine.

During this period, another prospective coal mine called the American Coal Mining and Manufacturing Company was formed by William and Bella Whitworth of Moweaqua and Thomas Crankshaw of Decatur. They proposed to open a mine on Mr. Whitworth's property where the original test shaft was dug. This company sold stock, and there are tantalizing suggestions of friction between the two companies in the newspapers, but the new company was unable to raise enough money to complete their project, and there was no further mention of this venture after 1893.

Work continued on all of the equipment needed to put the mine in action during 1892. The office of the coal mine was built and scales were installed. The 65-foot tippie and the engine house were under construction, the engines and boilers already having been delivered. During this time, the Illinois Central Railroad created a bad press because they agreed to lay a switch to the mine only if they were repaid the \$2100 cost. Finally everything was ready, including the whistle, which gave its first loud toot on February 1, 1893, when the first coal was hoisted to the top. Twenty-five to thirty tons of coal were hoisted daily as the mine began to produce the "black diamonds" so long awaited.

During this period, eight miners moved their families from Pana to Moweaqua, and by June of 1893 there were fifty-four men at work in the mine. Some of them were buying property in the town. John Potsick bought a small house near the mine for \$450, cash.

The mining company had obtained permission from the town to mine under the streets and alleys, with the stipulation that adequate supports would be constructed so that there would be no danger of cave-ins occurring. But accidents of another nature did occur, and in 1893, George Hayden was crippled when struck by falling slate. He later brought suit against the mining company, but the suit was dismissed when the company agreed to pay him \$100 damages.

A business recession was overcome in 1894 with the discovery of a new vein of coal, and a shaft was dug so that the new coal could be mined. That year the miners celebrated the Fourth of July with a parade and picnic at Snyder's timber, northwest of town. That day also marked the occasion of the first work stoppage as the result of a dispute over wages. 1894 was also the first year that mules were taken into the mine to be used for hauling coal cars. The newspaper reports that the first mule caused a "regular circus" until he became accustomed to the mine. This year also marked the second serious mine accident when, on December 17, Andro Tomi, George Evensha, and Peter Jura were badly injured in a blast. As a result, Andro Tomi lost an eye. And in 1894, with a sizeable Catholic population in Moweaqua, four lots were purchased from Mr. Prescott and construction started on the Catholic Church.

The next few years saw additional veins of coal discovered and the use of coal-cutting machines to aid the mining process. Business was good, and there were over one hundred miners employed, with regular advertising for more. Newton B. Storer of Chicago was hired as a traveling coal salesman, and with the resignation of Superintendent White, who went to Alabama, A. J. Combs was named to replace him. The company also, during this time, dug an air shaft in the mine.

The first death in the Moweaqua mine was due to falling slate which took the life of Jacob Spitz, a German miner. He died on January 18, 1897 and was buried in the city cemetery. A morose man who had come to town in December, Mr. Spitz left no family, and at his death, his personal property consisted of \$2.97 in cash. Shortly after his death, three Italian miners were injured in a fire, and as a result of injuries sustained in the mine accident, the CALL-MAIL noted that they had been taken to the poor farm.

The first prolonged labor strike began on July 7, 1897, when the Moweaqua miners joined a sympathy strike for other miners in the nation. A miners' union was organized in August and the company discharged all miners who refused to load coal for the local trade. The strike ended on September 16 when miners and operators agreed to a new pay scale of 45 cents a ton for pick-mining and 28 cents a ton for machine-mining. Around this time, the monthly company payroll amounted to \$4600.

The town was also making progress. C. W. O'Dell started telephone service, and a telephone was installed in the coal company's office. After a robbery of twelve cents from the coal office and because of other robberies in town, the city fathers invested in a pair of bloodhounds to assist in investigations.

In April of 1898 the local union No. 94 of the United Mine Workers held an eight-hour-day celebration and dinner which netted them \$57.33. August of that year found John Cairnes replacing A. J. Combs as mine superintendent. Around this time, rumors were circulating of trouble brewing at the Pana mine, where the management was reported to be contemplating the importation of Negro miners.

In 1899 the mine set a new production record, hoisting 600 tons of coal in eight hours. They also built an electric light plant at the coal shaft, used additionally to supply electricity to some of the townspeople. By October 1899, there were three electric mining machines in use, and electricity was used to power a coal-moving car in the main shaft, the electrically-powered car to be used in conjunction with the

mule-driven cars. At that time, there were eight to twelve mules in use in the mine. The mules were taken down in the cage about one month prior to their use in order to acclimate them to the darkness of the mine. They were stabled in the mine and generally well-treated and respected by the drivers. They were clever animals that quickly learned the mine routine. They would open the gates, wait for the driver to unhitch them, then step quickly aside to let the coal cars rumble past. When the mine closed during the summer, the mules were pastured one half mile north of town on the land where Willis Sprague now lives. Here they were kept inside the barn for another month until their eyes again became accustomed to the light.

The CALL-MAIL reports several interesting and amusing news stories for the year 1899. One concerned an Italian miner, Raffaello Corti, who resided in the old hotel building with several other families. He had some trouble with the law, and was in jail overnight. During this time, \$310 in gold was stolen from a trunk in his room at the hotel, and upon discovering the loss, he had several of his fellow Italians arrested on suspicion. Upon their release, they promptly had Corti arrested for carrying a concealed weapon. In a later development in the case, a young Italian boy from Springfield was arrested for the theft, but since no charges were proved, the case was dropped. Not content with this, Corti proposed to fight a duel with the boy if the judge would choose the weapons. The judge declined.

Another tender and amusing story concerned a middle-aged couple who were married in a church ceremony, with their wedding announced in all the papers. They were both European-born, and the bride had newly arrived with a very limited understanding of English. She had been married before, but believed, because of a visit to the county clerk, that she had obtained a divorce. In fact, she had not, and as a result the couple was arrested for bigamy. They were soon released on bond, and four months later they were remarried after the lady obtained her divorce.

A second marital mix-up occurred when a sixteen-year-old girl came to Moweaqua from Sandoval with matrimony on her mind. Her prospective groom declined marriage, so she ate an apple laced with strychnine. Her suicide attempt was thwarted by the doctors and upon her recovery she had the man arrested "on very serious charges". The man spent two days in jail — long enough, apparently, to reflect upon his choices — and the couple was married on his release.

Labor activities in the community increased during this time. The coal miners' union held an eight-hour-day celebration at Ribelin's Hall, 100 North Main, which stood on the corner that is now the Ayars Bank parking lot. The day began with a parade led by the Moweaqua Cornet Band, marching to the town depot where the guest speakers had arrived by train. These august orators were conducted to the hall where they spoke "with wit and eloquence" during the day, and the celebration concluded with a grand ball. Several local miners made trips to other cities during this period acting as representatives of UMW Local No. 94.

The second death in the Moweaqua mine was that of Charles Karloski, an aged German coal miner, who lost his life in a slate fall. John Cairns, the mine superintendent, was the third fatality. New boilers had been ordered for the mine, and Mr. Cairns had jumped to the flat car which delivered them to help guide them into position. When he saw that they were going to scrape the building, he jumped down into the car, became entangled with the boilers, and

was nearly decapitated by the steel boiler head. Shortly thereafter, he died at home.

James Heriot of Spring Valley was appointed mine superintendent in September of 1901. His time in office was fairly uneventful. Business was good, especially local trade. Grain wagons would drive into town, unload their grain at the elevator, and fill their wagons with a load of coal for the return trip. The semi-monthly payroll for the mine was the largest ever, over \$5,000. Mr. Heriot, however, did not get to savor prosperity very long. He died of a sudden illness in 1905, and Charles Ahl, who had been bookkeeper for the mine, was named to succeed him.

Shortly after Mr. Heriot's death, the fourth death occurred in the mine, Thomas McCray was crushed between coal cars. His parents later brought suit against the mining company, as did a miner named John M. Henderson who had been crippled in a mine accident.

On July 3, 1905, Mrs. Bella Whitworth, publisher of the MOWEAQUA REPUBLICAN, and on whose land the test bore had been made, died. She had been a lady of strong will, and her obituary stated in part, "For reasons all her own and known only to those of her own household, she has given little attention to the social and religious life of the community". In today's terminology, it might be said, "She did her own thing".

Railroad car shortages and work stoppages marked the period between 1905 and 1908. The railroad came in for many harsh words because they were unable to supply enough coal cars to keep the mine working. This was true despite the fact that Moweaqua had been made a coaling station for the railroad. During this period, also, the two damage suits against the mine were settled, the Henderson claim for three thousand dollars and the McCray for four thousand five hundred dollars. And, according to local reports during this time, the wife of one of the miners was declared insane and committed to the Jacksonville State Hospital. Apparently, she had a mania for kissing and hugging men and had created "much merriment" among the persons about the Court house.

In 1909 occurred the first report of miners being overcome with black damp, and in that year, also, Moweaqua had its first sensational murder, when Orlie Hill shot and killed Leon Scarlette. Hill was the manager of a nickelodeon picture show at Ribelin's Hall, and when customer Scarlette became obstreperous and was asked to leave, a scuffle occurred and in the ensuing confusion, Hill pulled a pistol and shot Scarlette. Hill was later put on trial, found guilty, and sent to the penitentiary.

On August 24, 1909, a fire thought to be started by a faulty wire connection to a water pump, caused the death of eight mine mules and the mine was closed for a month while repairs were done to some damaged timbering.

The MOWEAQUA NEWS carried a long list of contributors to the fund for the Cherry mine disaster that occurred in the southern part of the state, and the hazardous nature of mining was demonstrated several times during this period: Stephen Potsick, age 21, was killed by falling slate on November 5, 1909; Tony LeCounts, age 17, died of powder burns on November 19, 1910; Joe Nanni was crushed by falling slate on December 1, 1912; and Jacob Newman, who had been injured when the cage dropped on him, died in the Decatur and Macon County Hospital in June, 1921.

The coal mine was doing a very good local business, and on many days there were over a hundred wagons and trucks to be filled. Farmers would arrive in town at three o'clock in the morning to assure themselves of a good place in line at the coal yard. The average payroll in 1924 was ten thousand dollars, and the average daily output was 650 tons of coal. At that time, there were one hundred fifty men employed at the mine.

There was a chapter of the Ku Klux Klan in Moweaqua during this period, and in December of 1922, the MOWEAQUA NEWS printed a letter of appreciation from Mrs. Maggie Cooley, a miner's widow, who had been the recipient of a twelve dollar gift from the Klansmen.

In September 1924, the Moweaqua Hospital opened its doors, and grateful miners donated a modern operating table to Dr. and Mrs. Sparling.

About 1926, the mine began a practice of closing for the summer months, with assurances from E. C. Foster, mine manager, that all employees would be rehired in the fall when the mine reopened. This practice was followed until 1930. That year, Mr. Foster chose to give the employees a day-long weiner roast. It was so successful that by evening there was no bread left in town, and there had been several hurried trips to nearby towns to replenish the weiner supply.

During this period, the MOWEAQUA NEWS carried a curious story concerning the discovery of a block of coal in the middle of a vein. The coal block was found to bear the figure 6666 in two-inch high numbers, looking as if they had been carved there. There were no later reports to explain this phenomenon.

During these years, the Depression was being felt severely, and the mine management decided that it was no longer profitable to keep the mine open. This was disaster for the community, as there were no jobs to be found elsewhere. After a great deal of public discussion, a cooperative was formed by the miners and townspeople, and money was obtained by subscription to help reopen the mine. On September 17, 1931, the mine was reopened by the Moweaqua Coal Corporation. The board consisted of Dr. J. L. Sparling, president, Frank Moore, vice-president, Prof. J. F. Hickman, secretary-treasurer, and members D. A. Adamson and John Thomas. At this time, the miners voted to break away from the United Mine Workers of America, and later affiliated themselves with the Progressive Mine Workers.

The final Chapter of the Moweaqua coal mine was written at 8:15 a.m. on December 24, 1932, when an explosion of methane gas blew through the mine, killing fifty-four men who had just reported for work there. Only two lives were spared, those of the cagers, Frank Floski and Ibra Adams, whose work kept them near the bottom of the shaft. The other miners were proceeding to their work farther into the mine when caught by the explosion. The exact cause of the explosion was never determined, but there was one unusual circumstance that must have been a contributing factor. On the morning of the 24th, between eight and eight-fifteen, the barometric pressure had taken a sudden .3 dive. This would have caused gas, always present in a mine, to be forced out of unused areas into the main entries. Gas was evidently present in a sufficient quantity to ignite, and it was believed that this had happened either when one of the miners threw the light switch or when one of the miner's open lamps came into contact with the gas. There had been a fire in the mine on Friday, and men had worked all night until 6

o'clock on Saturday morning building "stoppings" to wall off and smother the fire. Charles Smith, mine inspector, had inspected the work and found it satisfactory. He stated that there had been a smell of smoke but he detected no gas before he signed out at 7:30. Mr. Millhouse reported that he thought it possible that a seal had been broken to the abandoned part of the mine during the work on the fire stopping, thus allowing accumulated gas to seep into the mine entry. In any event, the effect was disastrous for everyone. The twelve men who were riding in the mine cars were killed instantly when covered by tons of falling rock. The remainder of the miners were killed by the fiery blast and the after damp that followed. Some of the men had attempted to run towards refuge, but none was able to escape the deadly gas that swept through the mine. The two cagers, Floski and Adams, hadn't heard the explosion, and their first intimation of trouble was the rush of air flowing out of the mine instead of into the passage, carrying dust particles in the current. They immediately notified Will Heriot, mine manager, who arrived with Charles Smith, inspector. They proceeded down the shaft and down the tunnel about one-half mile from the central entrance, where they found a large fall of dirt, coal, and slate barricading the tunnel mouth. There they discovered an ominous fact: the overcast, which carried fresh air into the tunnel had been torn down by the blast. This meant that if the men trapped inside were still alive, there would be no source of fresh air for them.

Knowing that help would be needed, Mr. Heriot ordered that Glen Shafer of the Pana mine be called, as well as the State Director of Mines, John G. Millhouse. Since the Moweaqua Coal Corporation had leased the mine property in a royalty agreement from Mr. Shafer, he was owner of the property at that time. He came from Pana with a crew of his own men and, as he was more experienced than Mr. Heriot, took charge of the rescue operation. The crew arrived at the scene around 10:15 a.m. and began work immediately. Mr. Shafer alerted other mine rescue teams, and as news of the disaster spread, miners from the surrounding area flooded into Moweaqua to offer their services.

Mr. Millhouse, who came from Springfield with the state rescue team and three assistants, directed the miners and they began work to unblock the fall in the passageway. They proceeded to rebuild the walls at the scene of the collapse and force a passage through which air could be pumped to the trapped men. The rescue team worked continuously all day Saturday and through that night. It was not until Sunday, Christmas Day, at ten o'clock that they reached the imprisoned men, where they found twelve men in their mine cars covered with an immense fall of dirt and rock. Hope grew dimmer that any of the miners would be found alive.

On Monday, December 26, twenty-seven bodies were found during the morning and at eleven-thirty that night a body thought to be that of Tom Jackson, the town Santa Claus, was found. On Tuesday, the 27th, seven more bodies were found in a car in the north entry, and on the 28th, the last seven bodies were discovered on the north parting. It was an ironic twist of fate that the first body brought to the surface was that of Andy Potsick, Jr., and the last was Andy's father, Mike Potsick. All of the bodies were eventually recovered and the last ones were brought to the surface on December 29. The bodies last recovered were embalmed and placed in caskets which were then sealed and removed to a barn close by the mine where they remained until the funerals.

The scene at the surface was chaotic. The rescue squads were coming and going; the Red Cross had established head-

quarters near the mine and was supplying food around the clock; cables had been stretched to keep the road open for the rescue squads and the families of the trapped miners kept a silent vigil at the ropes throughout the ordeal. The Illinois Central Railroad brought six cars and placed them on the siding for the use of the rescue parties. There were a cook and lunch car, two bunk cars and three passenger cars. The Red Cross moved into the lunch car and also used one of the passenger cars as a supply base to issue cots, overcoats, blankets and overalls to the workers. The other cars were used as sleeping quarters for exhausted workers. The town was crowded with the concerned and the curious. Every newspaper for miles around sent reporters to the scene, and it was estimated that there were ten thousand people in town during the week following the disaster. Every able-bodied person in town offered service in any capacity needed, and relief committees swung into immediate action. Some stories about the disaster were full of misinformation: one reporter, who had evidently never seen Moweaqua, described it as a typical mining town in Bloody Williamson County, with miner's huts straggling about the hills, and Moweaqua received some strange pronunciations on the radio news broadcasts.

The magnitude of the disaster to a town of 1500 people is realized as the roll of the dead is called:

James Birley — 46 — married — 5 children dependent  
 Tom Birley — 44 — married  
 Kenneth Board — 25 — single  
 George Burrell, Jr. — 27 — married — 1 child dependent  
 Ed Campbell — 50 — married — 4 children dependent  
 Charles Campbell — 21 — married a few days before  
 the disaster  
 Jules Castignolia — 46 — married  
 Roy Catherwood — 39 — married — 2 children dependent  
 David Cooley — 65 — married  
 Andy Corby, Sr. — 55 — married  
 John Corby — 28 — married — 1 child dependent  
 Andy Corby, Jr. — 25 — married — 1 child dependent  
 Chester Cravens — 50 — married  
 Joe Krall — 59 — widowed  
 Mike Krajnack — 52 — married — 1 child dependent  
 Zelva Davis — 40 — married — 2 children dependent  
 Arthur Dove — 48 — married  
 Earl Dowd — 36 — married — 5 dependent children  
 Mike Floski — 25 — married — 1 child dependent  
 Lynn Green — 24 — married, just returned from his  
 honeymoon  
 Leonard Hartman — 35 — married — 5 children  
 dependent  
 Charles Hartman — 23 — single  
 John Hartsella — 28 — married — 2 children dependent  
 Oliver Hudson — 25 — married — 2 children dependent  
 Thomas Jackson — 55 — married  
 Mox Jurick — 45 — single  
 Joe Jurick — 48 — married  
 Andy Kapilla — 30 — married — 2 children dependent  
 Charles McDonald, Sr. — 64 — married — 2 children  
 dependent  
 Charles McDonald, Jr. — 18 — single  
 Carl McDonald — 23 — single  
 Mike Negri — 25 — single  
 Joe Negri — 22 — single  
 George Ondes — 41 — married — 2 children  
 Mike Potsick — 54 — married — 7 children dependent  
 Andy Potsick — 18 — single  
 Ross Portwood — 50 — married

Charles Roff — 45 — married — 1 child dependent  
 James Roff — 19 — single  
 Roy Reatherford — 40 — married  
 Mike Raugellis — 46 — married — 5 children dependent  
 Raymond Sarver — 21 — single  
 Verne Sarver — 22 — single  
 Sam Sigloski — 26 — single  
 Andy Smorado — 60 — married — 1 child dependent  
 John Supinie — 42 — married — 3 children dependent  
 Andy Supinie — 19 — single  
 Hugh Thompson, Jr. — 20 — single  
 Andy Tirpak — 19 — single  
 Mike Tirpak — 49 — married — 8 children dependent  
 Charles Woodring — 25 — single  
 Charles Yonikus — 60 — married  
 William Davidson — 58 — widowed (from Stonington)  
 Louis Tabacchi — 41 — married — 2 children  
 dependent (from Stonington)

Almost every family in town was affected by the disaster. There was a normal complement of about eighty miners who worked every day but, as they worked on a tonnage basis, the miners who worked on the straight west entry had dug their tonnage on Friday and so were not asked to report for work on Saturday. Due to some advanced Christmas celebration, some miners did not report for work and others took the day off to prepare for the holiday. Angelo Tintori decided, on the spur of the moment, to go out into the country to find a turkey for Christmas dinner. Bob Campbell was on his way to help his father and brother in the mine when he felt the tremor in the earth that signaled disaster to the town. There were several pairs of brothers and also many fathers and sons. A touching story was told of finding the bodies of Andrew Corby, Sr., and his son with their arms about each other. Tom Jackson, who delighted in playing Santa Claus for the children of Moweaqua, was looking forward to his annual role at the Christmas party to be given in town on Christmas Eve.

The economic impact of the tragedy was enormous. The largest amount of insurance paid to any of the survivors was \$5500. The claims were figured on the basis of four times the miner's yearly earnings. For some unknown reason, Moweaqua was unable to qualify for federal or state aid, and many of the widows had to do their best with a stipend of seven-fifty a week. There were several private relief funds, with many contributors, but in the end it was left to the citizens themselves to pick up and reassemble the pieces of their lives.

In July of 1933 the mine reopened with cleaning and repair work being done by miners who worked without pay to open the mine. The first cutting of coal was on December 27, 1933. The mine operated for two more years, and finally closed for good. Some of the miners left to work in other mines, and others stayed, finding work at other occupations in Moweaqua and nearby communities.

There was sporadic talk of working the mine again, but it proved to be too expensive, so finally the shaft was filled, the buildings were razed, and the Moweaqua coal mine, producer of the famous "Erie Sootless" coal for 43 years, was no more.

The mine is gone and so are many of the miners, but those who are gone and those who remain contributed fully

as much to the quality of Moweaqua as did the earlier pioneers. For the immigrants, too, were pioneers who came on creaky, uncomfortable boats instead of covered wagons. From England and Scotland, Poland, Russia, Hungary, Austria, Italy and Czechoslovakia they came, drawn by the same spirit that drove the early settlers across the plains. They brought very little in worldly goods, but they brought honor and courage and a dogged determination to make a better life for themselves and their families. They were, sad to say, regarded with suspicion and mistrust by some of the residents. They spoke little English, they had many children and strange customs, and they labored like moles in the ground. One of the miners' children put it this way, "I felt we had four strikes against us: we lived in the south end of town, we were Catholic, we were miners, and we were foreigners".

The Southenders learned their territorial limitations and stayed within them; however, the melting pot process and the passage of time brought the familiar results. As in the past, this wave of hard-working immigrants won the respect of their fellow citizens and their own place in the community. Among the many stories of quiet courage and strength of the immigrant families are those of Mary Tirpak and Mary Supinie.

Mary Tirpak lost her father in a mine disaster in Pennsylvania when she was eighteen. Her mother died of an illness two years later, and Mary was left at the age of 21, with the full responsibility for six younger brothers and sisters. She had promised her mother that she would not break up the family, and she kept her vow until the ready-made brood could fend for itself.

Mary Supinie's story is a shining example of the immigrants' pioneer spirit. She followed her widowed father to America from Austria-Hungary when she was 16, bringing a sister and two brothers with her. They spent four weeks on and three days on the train before they finally reached Blue Mound, where their father worked in a mine. Mary married John Supinie in 1913, and shortly after that her father was murdered under mysterious circumstances in St. Louis. When Mary, her brother Steve Novota, and her family returned to Europe to settle her father's estate, they were trapped by the first World War and were unable to return to America until 1921. There were four children by then, and in the interval between her husband's return to America and Mary's own journey, two of the children died. When the family was reunited, they settled in Moweaqua, where they lived hard but uneventful lives until the fateful morning of December 24, 1932, when John Supinie and his 19 year old son, Andy, were killed in the mine disaster. His widow was left with three children and seven dollars every two weeks with which to support them. She baked and cooked, and her children also helped. In her own words, "We did the best we could. Now, at 82, she lives alone in a modest house in the "south-end" of Moweaqua. Good-natured and cheerful, she wastes no time bemoaning her lot in life. Her life and the lives of other immigrant families reflect the meaning of a quotation that headed the mine disaster report of John G. Millhouse, 1932:

#### Moweaqua

"Honor and shame not from conditions arise;  
 Act well your part. Therein the honor lies."