Cherry Mine disaster and coal mining

an Oral History Interview

Peter Donna, Interviewee
Of LaMoille, Illinois

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Narrator's name: PETER DONNA
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Interviewer's Name: DONALD R. NORRIS
For: STARVED ROCK LIBRARY SYSTEM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Q: I'm Donald Norris from LaMoille, Illinois and I have been asked by the Starved Rock Library System to come and interview Mr. Peter Donna of Cherry, Illinois, who as a lad of 16, was in the Cherry Mine, deep in the ground, third vein, at the time of the disaster that he remembers clearly as being on Saturday, November 13, 1909. Mr. Donna, I'd like to start by asking who you father and mother were and when, if they did come from Italy, when they came and how old you were and just let's give the people a few of your, some of your early background history, alright?

A: In was born in the State of Illinois in 1893, October 20 and I was born and raised in _____ Illinois for one year and I moved to _____ Illinois, about two miles from there--where there was another disaster happened. And then finally in 1909 we come to Cherry, in the spring of the year, and worked in the Cherry Mine. My father come to this country here in 1899 and my mother come down here in 1890. He worked in Braidwood and Coal City on those mines there, that was the first mines in the State of Illinois. . .until, until we come to Cherry.

On that morning, on Saturday morning, we went down to work and we got on the big cage--it took us down to the second vein. We got off there and walked about a hundred feet on the main bottom and walked over to the third vein cage and got another ride down there to the third vein to work. . .and to, towards out on the face of the coal. We had three car loaded by the time the fire had happened about 11:30, but didn't know

A: we had one loaded and needed the fourth one, we'd load one more to make it five, for that Saturday. Why my father got everything, all his, all his props and everything to set up to hold up rock. We waited and the smoke is starting to come. So I went out, started walking, walking out to the bottom to see what was wrong. I walked through canvasses, that's just like a door, and here the smoke got thicker. When I got to the bottom there, a man by name of John Brown, the cager, was there. He told me there's a fire burning down in the slump, or in the third vein. So run back and my father wanted to still put his props up but we had our tools all locked and I grabbed all the tools I could and put them in a box, and I knew he had a key on his vest so I cut it off. And I locked the door and away I went. And he was mad, he wanted to set the props up. But he finally come out. We started out and. . .

Q: Mr. Donna, before we get into, far into the fire and how you escaped, I think everybody would like to know about the wage scale. How much you got an hour or how much a ton. Tell us how you were paid.

A: Why we was paid by the ton, and we got one dollar and eight cents a ton and the best we could do was get about five cars a day and the cars, after they were weighed on top, would be around about, after they were bedded over--the top some chuncks of coal, would be, would weigh around about twenty-six or twenty-eight hundred.

Q: Then your total check would be, you and your father's total check for the day, for eight hours, would be about how much?

A: Well, you can figure that out, from a dollar eight cents a ton, and you get five cars in there, you know, you figure out how much it would be.

Q: I see.

A: Oh, so we'd get round and about three dollars and a half a day.

Q: Apiece?

A: Apiece. So that was our daily wages. It was weighed on top of the ground and at night we'd pick up our check again--our number--each one had a number. And we'd go to work and that's what we got. But we got paid every two weeks.

Q: Mr. Donna, tell us just what was involved when you say you mined coal. How did it happen? How did you. . .

A: Well, the height of the coal would be around about, it runs from about 38 inches to 48 inches--it just varies you know--all the time.. .

Q: Deep?

A: Thick.

Q: Thick? Yes.

A: Thick. And we mined it under there about, oh say about, two feet under there and we'd sprag it and leave it set all night.

Q: What do you mean by sprag?

A: A piece, blocks of wood, block on the clay to the coal, to hold it up, of our mining you know along, we'd let it pop out. And then the next day we'd just take it down, and we'd throw it out up to the face of the coal, the road, and we'd load the cars again. Well, we had to go to work and shovel that coal twice probably, from inside, on each side, right side or left side, and what we got out was _____ so we'd throw it into the car. And finally I _____ it in, into the wall, work, a little ways. We'd order a tracker to come in to lay a rail for us--to bring it up close to the coal to load. Well, to load

A: that coal in the car, the car was about 12 feet high, we'd have to load it up. Of course, it would stand in the railhead there, and throw it in the car until we had it loaded. Then the drivers come and pull it, finally, when he gets our turn, you see.

Q: Well now, you say the driver. Who, what propelled the car? Did you have a nice modern little tractor or something?

A: Oh, no, we had a mule ahead of it, to pull the car. But to push the empty back in, we'd have to push it ourselves, see. That's just the way that worked.

Q: Well, Mr. Donna, you said you got paid--who were you working for? Who paid you?

A: We was paid by the Chicago and Milwaukee Coal Company and we worked in the depth of the mine--where I worked was 535 feet.

Q: That was the third vein?

A: Third vein--top to bottom.

Q: I see. Well now, it must have been pretty dark down there. How did you get around?

A: Why we had what you call a pit lamp.

Q? Pit lamp?

A: Pit lamp. You had, you'd hook it onto your cap, [illegible]. you know, on your pit cap. Go up there and we'd burn what is called miner's oil in there. Or a kind of a grease, burn through wicking. And finally, a year or so after, we got these carbide lights.

Q: I see.

A: That was different altogether again.

Q: Well now, did you feel any heat from that pit lamp? I mean on your forehead?

A: Oh not much, no. There wasn't much heat in it at all because you had to be moving all the time, you know.

Q: I see. What, how, did you fasten this pit lamp on to your cap?

A: In front of your cap was a bracket that holds it. You had a hook on the lamp and it hooked right in there, and it stayed there stationary--right in front of your forehead.

Q: Well, was it heavy, did it weigh. . .

A: No, No, it wasn't. It was just a small apparatus. Oh, it was only about three inches high and it wasn't very big. . .

Q: It would hold about. . .

A: . . .with a spout on it.

Q: How much, how much oil or grease?

A: Oh, that would hold maybe, oh I don't know, maybe a half a cup.

Q: But it would. . .last all day?

A: No, it wouldn't last all day.

Q: You'd have to. . .

A: It was last two or three hours.

Q: You filled it up several times?

A: Yes, and then you'd fill it up and light it again.

Q: And it gave you enough lightto, so that you would walk around?

A: Oh, yes, plenty of light, enough light anyhow. Oh, you'd get bumped once in awhile around.

Q: I see.

A: Yes.

Q: Mr. Donna, after you got your car filled up with coal then what happened?

A: Why when our turn come the driver would come in, he would lead the empty out and switch, empty, and he'd come in with the mule. He'd holler haw, the mule would turn right to the left and right around and he'd hook it up and he'd pull it out, and away he went. We went out and got an empty and brought it back in and started loading again.

Q: Now the mule had a driver?

A: Oh yes, one man, the driver, certainly.

Q: And he didn't have lines or. . .

A: No lines, all he had to do when he wanted the mule to go to the right, he'd holler gee, and when he wanted to go to the left, he'd holler haw. And that's the way the mule is trained.

Q: I see.

A: But when they break a mule in they go to work and use the line first and a bit in his mouth, but finally they take it off.

Q: How long does it. . .before. . .

A: Oh, it takes maybe a couple of months before you could break him in pretty good. But if he ain't broke in they sometimes they'd have two mules and one driver. And sometimes they had five mules ahead which when they had big trips and they called this a lead mule, and the lead mule he'd be in the front and whenever he'd come to the bottom to leave him go, they'd hustle him up and when he get down so far he'd holler haw and they'd all turn to the left and come right out and the cars could go on.

Q: Well, if you had five mules hitched on you probably had four or five cars.

A: They have made as high as fifteen cars.

Q: Is that right?

A: Easy. Yes.

Q: Mr. Donna, now we've gone through the procedure of filling up you coal cars and you and the rest of your people in the mine, you made quite a hole there, I mean, what do you do for safety?

A: Well, we had what we call props. It would be about four foot long, four and a half. We'd go to work and we'd get the measurement and we'd cut it a certain size and we used a cap piece on top of it. But first we'd go to work and we'd test that rock. If it rang kinda, rang a sound, we could tell if it was solid or not. If it sounded hollow then we'd go to work and put a prop under it.

Q: Did you hit it with your pick or your hammer?

A: We'd test the rock with the pick, you could tell right away if--by the ring of it. And we'd take a prop and set it up there for safety. And the prop stayed there stationary all the time.

Q: I see. Now you said cap piece, tell. . .was it. . .

A: Well, we put a cap piece on top so it would wedge up there good and tight for a wedge, we'd call it, we'd put it up on top and we'd hammer it in with our sledge.

Q: You'd tap the prop and then the wedge?

A: And the wedge to get it tight.

Q: And they all go in together"

A: Exactly.

Q: And it stays there permanently?

A: Permanently, all the time.

Q: Now you got paid for this extra work?

Q: No, we did not. That was all in the--you got paid tonnage, and

Q: It all came out of the dollar eight a ton?

A: Exactly. We put in about eight hours work in there.

Q: I realize that we are jumpping around here but we're giving these ideas. . .just. . .we're trying to get them down as they come out. And Mr. Donna, what, tell us a little bit about the wage scale and say what other people were getting there and worked for the company.

A: At the time of the disaster there in 1909 there was only about one thousand men on the payroll, that's counting bosses and men paid by the hour--all told--and by the tonnage too, miners and all on the job. A trapper, a young boy, maybe fourteen year old, sixteen , he'd be a trapper, opening doors for the drivers to get through. He was paid ninety cents a day. Now a timber man or driver was paid two dollars and fifty-six cents for eight hours work. And a helper down below. . . well, the track layer was paid two dollars and fifty -six also. . . and the cager was paid two fifty-six. But the helper in there anywhere at all he'd, by the hour, he was paid two thirty-six. And that's it about wages.

Q: I see. Well, Mr. Donna, we're ready to go to the cage with a loaded car, coal, now will you tell us about it?

A: Why after the driver picks up about three or four cars he goes out at the bottom, he's on the low track, there's a double track there at the bottom. And he just leaves the full cars there and then the cager will take care of them, and put them on the cage. He picks up his empty and goes back and gets some more. When this trip in the bottom is made up around about ten or twelve cars another driver takes it from there and on the run-around the east side of the bottom in the third vein and goes on to the bottom, er second vein, and to the

Q: Well, Mr. Donna, anybody that drives along the Plank Road in the vacinity or comes to Cherry at all sees two enormous big slag piles. Now tell us, tell us how slag piles got there.

A: Why I could tell you. If I told you. . .that was all done by hand. . . before it got up there, loaded down below in the mine and loaded in cars and them dumped into another car that takes away to the top and is dumped there. . .and that was all done by hand. . . a person, I wouldn't believe it.

[illegible].

A: Surely wouldn't.

A: But that's what, that's what happened on that rock pile.

Q: That accumlated over how many years do you think?

A: Well, I would say from 1905 to 1927 when they closed the mine down. That's the end of it. But after that, during that time, was all smoke coming out of there, big cloud of smoke all the time. That would be your accumulation of the heat underneath there all the time, burning, you see.

Q: The heat escaping from the slag pile:

A: From the slag pile.

Q: Mr. Donna we're talking about the third vein in the mine, what was the situation in the second vein?

A: The second vein was a bigger vein of coal. It run about four and half five foot high and that was run the same as your Southern mines are, what we call Roman pillar work, and that's room work, you need pillars on each side of your room and that_____ permanently.

Q: To support it?

A: All the way through, Roman pillar work. To support it. Well, in

A: mine, the same thing.

Q: You used props in the third vein?

A: Yes, and in the second vein you didn't. You might use a few sometimes. But here with this mine as far as I know was the first mine in the State of Illinois. At the same time, it just about went one direction, mostly southwest. That's where they took most of the coal out, they couldn't go any further the other way. Where the coal starts cropping out it's dangerous work and they call that rock as _____. You've got to watch it very close. In some other states they have down below, they have what's called a_____ and you've got to be careful down there too because they'd tell you down in one of them mines, they'd say, watch that_____ . You might touch it with your pick to find out if it was solid or not and you'd turn your head and it would hit you. Whever that cuts you, it leaves a black streak in you that will never leave your skin.

Q: Let's go back to that day in November in 1909, Mr. Donna when this great Cherry disaster started. Tell us again your first record of as you remember while the fire started.

A: Well, as far as I, that day. It was supposed to have started there up on the second vein when they were leading the day down to feed the mules in the third vein. But during the time, they had no electricity. Their big generator that they had run for electricity was on the hummer and they used torches made of pipe and burned oil in that for lights down in the bottom.

Q: These torches were sticking in the side of the wall?

A: The torches were hanging up in the timbers above the carloads of hay and the hay was in these pit cars--baled hay--and when they tried to push it on the cage to go down to the third vein, in the second there, it knocked this torch down into the hay and it caught on fire. And that's what started the whole work going. But they kept hoisting coal and hoisting coal and they tried bucket after bucket of water but I guess it got the best of them. They might have put it out, I don't know.

Q: And no fire equipment for fighting.

A: No, no fire equipment whatever. And at the same time, they might have had it out, but baled hay, you think you've got it out and it's started all over again. But anyway it got so far, far ahead, that the next thing you know it got too far. . One carload was thrown down the hole to the third vein into the slump.

Q: One carload of hay?

A: They put it out down there. There's water down there, you see, and--in the hole.

[illegible]

Q: And they unloaded, the dumped the burning hay into the. . .

A: From the second vein, but the rest was still up there, the other fire you know, there's two fires there. And it caught the timbers, started burning and got the best of them. And it shot out towards the main shaft and burned the timbers out there and when you start burning timbers out, even the mule barns and everything, it all caved in.

Q: Mr. Donna, do you mean to tell me that they loaded coal after they knew that there was a fire in the main shaft?

A: In the second vein they kept hoisting coal all the time.

Q: You mean for an hour or two or. . .

A: Oh yes, in there somewhere, I would imagine, yes. But it got so far ahead that they, I, some didn't know which--where--they were going. But what did happen, on top of your mine you have what you call a big fan that drives air down to all the miners and that's run by stationary steam engine and there's only one valve that turns it off and on. Now somebody reversed that fan, it was never known who it was, and next thing you know it drew all that fire right there where it happened up the air shaft and burned the whole thing out.

Q: It became a suction instead--instead of a downdraft?

A: It sucked it out. I think, if they just let, whoever it was I don't know, but had only let that turn the steam off a little bit and cut off that power on that big fan it would have kept that fire down, you see. Now from the second vein where the fire actually started, the fire was on, there is an excape shaft all the way up from the third vein clean to the top, the surface. But where the fire started, after they reversed that fan, it caught that stairway and burned the whole thing out at the time. But the stairway was allright from the third vein up to the second vein as far as you could go--any miner. And we had to come around those two run-arounds, east to the west side, to get to the main bottom, to get to the other gate to get up on top. As far as we got, my father and I. From my part, how I got out,

A: after we left our place and we walked the bottom, Mr. Brown was there and he told us, you can't escape, you can't get up that shaft--the gate. We went up the escape shaft and when we got to the second vein we had to go through a trapdoor that was in there. And we got through the trapdoor--I got so far, the fellow ahead of me, he lets it down, hits me and I went down eight steps, just rolled down, didn't get knocked out or anything. I picked myself up and up we goes again.

Q: Where was your father?

A: Right behind me. We got up into the second vein, we started going out. There are mules in the neck there where two roads branched off and we couldn't get by them.

Q: Why couldn't you get by them?

A: Everytime we tried to get by he'd just twise right over.

Q: M ules were panicked ?

A: Yes. And I tried to get out the other side, he'd twist over and wouldn't let me by. So one man come up there name of Thomas Hewitt, he was the mule boss down there/ I told him, I said, you try to get by and I see if I can get by. He tried it so I snuck by and then I got hold of a piece of timber there and Iknocked them both back so the rest of them could come out.

AXXXMXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Q: Knocked the mule back?

A: Made them come back so we could get by. You got out so far, there's plenty of light on account of the fire, there's lots of smoke. But we couldn't hold no lights, shaft wood's flying, it's out so far we couldn't hold no light on our forehead whatever.

Q: Because there wasn't enough oxygen?

A: On account of that fan is going and it draws everything up. You couldn't hold it, it's like a wind. So what I'd do, I'd just put my foot on the rail. There was Mr. Vickers, Mr. Derrier, and Mr. Hewitt comes up with me and my father. There's five of us. Just put my foot on the rail and I follow the rail out. I hit a trapdoor and didn't get hurt and then I hit the rim and when I come to the main bottom we had to climb over cars, loaded cars and a five mule team was already laying down.

Q: From the smoke?

A: From the smoke and everything.

Q: Did you have over your noses and faces anything?

A: No, we got out to the main bottom and the loaded track is a little higher than the empty track and where we went in in the morning, in that passageway went to work, and big flames are coming out there allready. And that's where we got our hair singed, you know and our eyebrows, you see.

Q: Is that right?

A: We see a light at the bottom where the big cage is at --we didn't wait for no signal whatever we run right on the cage. And we went on top. Well, being excited we kept on a going all the time. But I knew there was lots of smoke and everything else and were men on the side of the road even, coughing from that smoke, and burning that way, and wood, shaft wood flying. When we got in the cage whoever was on the other side of the bell wasm I don't know. But signals is what a person's got to remember. The state law will call for that. When men comes out to go out the cages down there in the bottom he goes to work and he bells three times to the engineer on top and he gets the signal back, one ring, and then goes on the cage, and then he, when you're on there, you

A: ring one and he'll go slow with the men up. When it's coal or rock just one bell, you're gone. Goes down see. And to lower is two bells. And that's how we happened to get on top. I turned around, the sun was shining, and I missed my father. And a man by the name of Williams was on the other side and he says he's not here, but I say I'm going to go back down there again. But the cage we come up on had went down. I was going to get in the other cage but he wouldn't let me on but when they come up again, there was my father. He had one other man on there. He'd tumbled over there, and we missed him.

Q: Mr. Donna, after you got to the top safely with your father what time was that and how many hours later was it that they sealed off the mine?

A: Well, it was around about a quarter to two when I got on top there and I hung around there a little while. But between just about three-thirty they sealed it off altogether. The smoke coming out of there as high as, oh, I'd sat, two hundred feet/ It got so thick you couldn't see nothing at all. But the last cage from up there was the cage of the rescuers/ There was 14 men went down there from the village and they all burned up. They were burned up in the cage.

Q: The rescuers were burned up?

A: The rescuers, yes.

Q: The rescuers were burned up?

A: That's the ones I was telling you about that they were on the cage, and that's why they wouldn't hoist the cage because the signals, the fire got the best of them down below, and the engineer couldn't get get right signal==didn't know what was happening. And when they got

A: orders from the superintendent to raise that cage, he did, but they were all dead. And that's when they sealed the mine.

Q: Mr. Donna, tell us how many men lost their lives in this disaster and also what do you mean by the Eight Day Man?

A: Well, after the mine was closed. . .

Q: At what time of day?

A: Around about at three-thirty.

Q: Saturday?

A: Saturday, it was sealed, Saturday, November 13.

Q: 1909?

A: 1909. And a week afterwards they opened it up again and they went down below and they found where 21 men had barricaded themselves.

Q: How far back? Way back as far as they. . .

A: Well not too far back, quite a ways, in an old dead road, you know, see, where they pull that _____ and take it out. I, I they had nothing to eat. What they're drinking, I don't know. But they finally come out and they got them out eight days aftwewards. There's one dead out of the 21, a Frenchman, a French fellow. But twenty lived, lived it out. Of course right now, not anyone left anymore, they're all dead. But that's eight days after the 21 come out and twenty come out alive and one dead.

Q: They call them Eight Day Men because. . .

A: That's what we called them, Eight Day Men just because eight days after they come out.

Q: They survived for eight days?

A: They survived the eight days down there.

Q: And they evidently had enough air to breathe and to. . .

A: Must have, yes.

Q: But nothing to eat?

A: Nothing to eat or drink. What they drank or anything, I don't know. As they brought them up, they brought them up one at a time, on a cage, they had blankets over their heads, they had to walk them out, oh, I would say half a block, where we had rail cots, railroad cars there--coaches--and nurse and doctors in there and they examined them and give them stimulants, I suppose. But, and I was at the side there with one of these old time coaches we used to go to funeral with from the livery barn, and take them home.

Q: A team of horses, probably?

A: A team of horses, on there, oh yes. And one little fellow come out his name was Halatchuk, he lived in what we used to call the long row, and he walked home, he wouldn't ride home, he walked home and two days afterward he died. And this little fellow he had what they called miner's asthma.

Q: He refused. . .

A: He refused to ride, he wanted to walk. So that's it, the rest I did take home.

Q: He was really tough.

A: Yes.

Q: Well, Mr. Donna, tell me how many lives were lost in this disaster.

A: Well, i could tell you, there was 259 was lost in the mine disaster. But was left down there I don't know, I couldn't tell you. That is who worked there all day and who was left alive, you know. There was 259 left, was dead in the mine at that time.

Q: All the snimals were left there of course?

A: All the, everything was left down there. Oh, yes, nothing came out.

Q: I see. Tell us, tell me Mr. Donna, about how long after the mine was closed before they started to remove the bodies?

A: Well, when they opened it up again about three months afterwards, but during that time militia from Kewanee had pulled in there and roped her off so that nobody could go around there you see, excepting you had a badge and they told you you could get in there, to fine anything out. Well, I had one of them, I could ask any question I wanted to and bring it back to these reporters.

Q: You're a messenger?

A: A messenger and I could fetch back any answer to that they could send into the paper in Chicago. There's a reporter right at the depot, everywhere. But had to keep on the Kewanee militia in there at the time. And not matter where I went, I could go from say two hundred yard, not even two hundred yards to the depot and come back and give them an answer and he'd hand me a two dollar bill. Money was no object. Now to get in to identify a man that was taken out of there three months afterwards a jury of four men and the coroner there and he was the State's Attorney of Bureau County and his name was Len Eckert Deckert. And the jury was John Thompson, a lovely young man, and a farmer name of Timmy McDonald Donnell, a another farmer name of Joe Nat Atcher, and a barber in town by the name of John Senstrum. And that was the name of the jury. In ~~identifying~~ identifying the men, and one time alone there were 69, in a tent just on top of the surface there near the mine all wrapped in canvas tied around the neck, in the middle of the body and at the feet. And you would identify them, they looked just like petrified wood, or anything petrefied, you couldn't tell by face, so there'd be a check in their pocket, or by a sock or a good tooth in their mouth seen by some women, and that's the way they'd identify them.

A: identified, name and everthing, they'd take and put a shroud over in the coffin the same as were there and put a shroud over their face and the lid was put on and that was it. And take them to the graveyard. They'd take them out to the graveyard, the company had given about two _____ or so over there, and they dug big trenches and they buried them side by side. B-t in time, relatives come and get them again and fetch them to different graveyards where they wanted them to go. And I seen one funeral that there was seven in the procession, leaving from Cherry, going to the Peru Cemetery.

Q: How soon, Mr. Donna, after the fire did the publis know about it and what happened then?

A: Why, why just after they closed everything down, in fact about the next day, about Sunday, why you couldn't, you couldn't hardly buy a sandwich on Monday morning anymore right in town, there's so big a crowd. Horses tied all over.

Q: Horses and buggies?

A: Horse and buggy tied in alleys and lamp posts and everywhere. And that kept up for two weeks at a time, night and day, and you couldn't get nowhere. Even couldn't get a streetcar to Ladd it was so crowded. The streetcar used to run up to Ladd, you know, at one time.

Q: Oh, it that right?

A: Oh, yes, and it run down to the mainline down to_____ Park and they went as far as Princeton at the time, that streetcar line.

Q: Old Interurban?

A: Old Interurban. You'd take the Interurban from here and you'd go clean into Chicago. You'd change in Joliet, and you'd take the L and J out of there, and you went to Archer Avenue, and then you'd go into

A: downtown Chicago. It would take you all day to do it. But that's how the crowd was here. You couldn't make a move at all, just all over.

Q: You kept horses in the livery barn, did you?

A: Oh, yes, we kept horses, fed them at the livery barn there and give them a drink of water and leave them a couple of bites and take them out, hitch them up and unhitch them again all day long, at night too. We just, and the horses came in and we played them out, we couldn't rent them out anymore. Yes.

Q: I might add here that I remember coming over Sunday afternoon, it must have been the fourteenth of November, with my father and mother, horse and buggy, from our farm near LaMoille, and of course just walking around on top of the mine shaft and looking at the crowd and hearing people talk and I know that it was a great occasion for me. Mr. Donna, maybe you could tell us a little big about the housing that the company provided for the miners and their families.

A: Why, they had a very big bunch of houses because they had at the mines over in Iowa, Centerville, Iowa... .

Q: Centerville?

A: Centerville, Iowa, and they had to go to work, but they went to work and cut them up in sections there and put them in flat cars and sent them over to Cherry. And then they were put up again. And we had here around about 137, those company houses. But it didn't _____ the town.

Q: Is that right?

A: Yes.

Q: Now this was on mine property?

A: This was all mine property, yes, most of it.

Q: Then all the, a lot of Cherry is been bought to private homes now the deeds go back to the coal company?

A: Well, the land would go back.

Q: The land?

A: Yes. But if bought a house now it wouldn't show that.

Q: I see.

A: They wouldn't put it on the file unless you got a what do you call it. . .

Q: In other words, the abstract of title would show that the company owned the property at one time.

A: They had bought all this property here, yes.

Q: What, about how much rent did the miners pay?

A: Why it cost them about ten dollars a month for rent.

Q: I see. How many rooms in these homes?

A: They'd average around about 5 rooms, per home. In each block, in one section of town they got what they call the long row and there was about 35 or 37 homes in there. And in one block they'd have two wells in there was all.

Q: Two water wells?

A: Two water wells. On e well for three homes.

Q: Is that right?

A: And that's the way it worked here.

Q: And they carried their water in pails?

A: In pails in the house, that's the only way they had it.

Q: As long as you mentioned the wells tell us something about the drinking water situation.

A: Well, the drinking water, they had, every house had a well here that was private owned, but these company houses, in one block there'd be about six homes, there's one well for each, for every three homes. And that's how they got their water in. The wells run about 25 or 30 foot deep, that's their drinking water. And it was tested by the state. It was allright.

Q: And the houses were heated by soft coal?

A: Oh, all coal heated.

Q: Coal burning stoves?

A: Yes, cook stove and heating stove, all coal.

Q: I suppose, would the flue pipe run up through the, up in the attic? In the. . .

A: Exactly in the middle of the house.

Q: Middle of the house, and. . .

A: Some, all these company houses, other houses. . .but mostly they come along years afterwards that, mostly they seem to be on the side you know, on the side of the home now. Of course, you've got wood and oil and gas and oil too. Yes.

END OF TAPE

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PLACE Cherry, Ill

DATE May 2 1975

Peter J Donna
(INTERVIEWEE)

Donald Morris
(for Starved Rock Library System)