

THE FIRST COMMERCIAL COAL MINES IN WISE COUNTY, VIRGINIA

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Coal has been king in Wise County, Virginia for a century and a quarter. The history of its first commercial coal mines is largely forgotten. The authors believe that it is a worthy project to reconstruct this history to the extent possible, so that it may be preserved for future generations.

As part of the process of locating the site of the first commercial coal mines in Wise County, it was necessary to outline the sequence of ownership of the land on which they were located, as well as the corporations that either owned or leased this land. Corporations are formed by men, and they are an integral part of that first mine's history, also.

In seeking to document the first commercial coal mines in Wise County, one immediately runs into problems with definition and conceptualization. The early geologic surveys of the area, as well as still existing oral tradition, document common private family mines in the area at the beginning of exploration by professional geologists and coal companies. It would be expected that the coal from such personal mines might have been locally bartered among neighbors. Early geologic reports also show that there were several short lived failed attempts at mining coal for the national market. While noting these historic attempts at commercial coal mining within Wise Co., Virginia, we wish to focus more on the first commercial coal mines that were successful on a sustained basis.

Commercial coal mining was intimately associated with railroads. Capitalists aspiring to mine coal built railroads to make that mining possible. In early 1890 there were three railroads racing to extend the national rail network into Wise County. The Norfolk and Western, with origins in Roanoke Virginia, was seeking to extend its Pocahontas Division in from Bluefield, Virginia. The Louisville and Nashville, with connections at Corbin, Kentucky was coming in from the southwest, and the South Atlantic and Ohio was coming in from Bristol, Virginia to the east. All three arrived to the county lines later that year, but the N&W was the first. It would have been expected that the first commercial coal mining would occur along its tracks in the St. Paul to Norton area. It took until 1892 for commercial mining to start in the county, however. The earliest successful operations will be presented.

Virginia City
Russell Creek Coal Company

“On Russell Creek the Russell Creek Coal Company, near Virginia City, is the only commercial opening so far made on this bed” (the Jaw Bone Seam of coal) (1,2). The date of construction of Virginia City is unknown, but the N&W RR had passed by there in 1890 on the way to Norton, which it reached in 1891(83). The post office at Virginia City was opened June 1891. “The first load of coal was removed from Wise County in 1892” but the month for starting production at Virginia City is not given. The mines operated continuously until 1921, and sporadically thereafter until 1928. Toward the end Virginia Iron, Coal, and Coke Co. had bought the mines (1,2, 83). The lack of knowledge of the month is important, because several mines became productive in Wise Co. in 1892.



THE ORIGINAL TIPPLE AT VIRGINIA CITY WAS OF THE STYLE USED IN THE PENNSYLVANIA ANTHROCYTE FIELDS, AND WAS CALLED A 'BREAKER' - THE COAL CARS FROM THE MINE TO THE LEFT WERE PULLED UP THE RAMP BY CABLES BEFORE BEING DUMPED

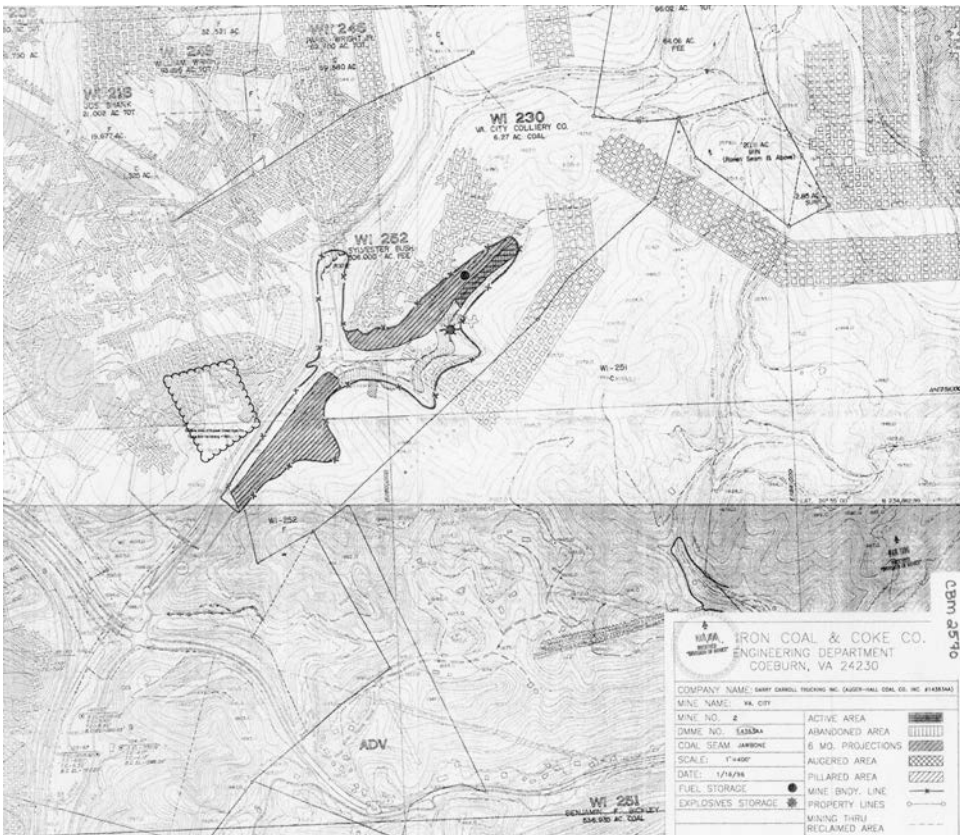
A Mile East of Tacoma
Greno-Bodine Coal and Coke Company

“The Greno-Bodine Coal and Coke Co. operate (1892) this coal (mine) by a slope a short distance east of Tacoma”. “(The company has) a mine in the Kennedy seam (1). “One mile east of Tacoma this seam (the Widow Kennedy Seam) has been worked by the Greno-Bodine Coal Company. The mine is a slope but at 600



FOLLOW THE EAST-ERNMOST RR TRACK GOING NORTH FROM VIRGINIA CITY TO THE RECTANGULAT DOT NEAR ITS WESTERN END, AND YOU WILL SEE THE TIPPLE OF THE FIRST COAL MINE AT VIRGINIA CITY

USGS topographic map of Bristol Virginia-Tennessee of 1897



THE SQUARE BOX WITH THE SCALLOPED EDGES IN THE LEFT OF CENTER SHOWS THE MINE PASSAGES IN THE JAWBONE SEAM WHERE THE FIRST MINE AT VIRGINIA CITY WAS LOCATED. IT COINCIDES WITH THE TOPOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION ABOVE

DMME map of the mines in the Jawbone Seam at Virginia City

feet the coal pinched out.” The stratae between Tacoma and Little Tom Tunnel are very folded and interfere with mining. “The sharp dips around Tacoma show that the rocks are thrown into folds, and this folding is very apt to squeeze the soft beds on the haunches of the arch. As the coal is more yielding than members of the rock series, it suffers most, and in such locations is frequently too much crushed and contorted to mine”. This document states further that this seam of coal was not identified correctly, and that it had been abandoned because the coal had “pinched out” 600 feet from the entrance (3).

However, in 1894 the N&W RR built this coal company 2,040 feet of side track (4).

The Greno-Bodine Coal Company was but one of the ventures of Hiram D. Bodine and C. J. Greno documented in various Google articles. In 1910 this mine was operated by the Bond Coal Co. of Tacoma (84). Its demise is not documented.

Banner The Virginia Gas Coal Co.

As noted in a geology report by 1892 the Virginia Gas Coal Co. had commercially mined coal from the Kennedy seam at Banner, but had abandoned the effort. “A considerable amount of the coal (had been) shipped eastward to New York, where it gained a high reputation for gas purposes; but the irregularity of the seam has led to its abandonment The report further noted that the West mine entry (was found) on March 20th (1892) (to have been) been extended about 1000 feet.” “In the East Mine the slope at the same date (had been extended) down 500 feet.”(1)

“At Banner, the Virginia Gas Coal Co. (had) endeavored to develop the Kennedy seam, but without success, as the coal varies from a feather edge to 8 or 9 feet in thickness.” “.... The Virginia Gas Coal Company (had) opened the Lower Banner coal above their opening in the Kennedy seam.” “Opened” in this context means “exposed” and not “mined” (5).

A 1904 map in possession of Neil Knox (1) shows the property lines of the Virginia Gas Coal Co. at Banner, are the same as the property lines on other maps indicating that this property belonged to Robert Fleming or the Dingee Coal Company. This suggests that this corporation was the operating company of Fleming (6). This situation is confirmed as of 1910 (84).

Robert Fleming was born in Scotland in 1855. Little is known about him except that later in life he had been connected with the Banner Coal Co., Virginia Coal Co., Norton Coal Co., and had had experience in Illinois, Iowa, Tennessee, and Virginia. (7) Another reference documents him operating at Banner “number 1 mine in the Lower Banner (seam)” under the name of ‘Robert Fleming and Co.’ in 1919 (8).



USGS topographic map of Bristol Virginia - Tennessee of 1897

THIS MAP SHOWS THE LOCATION OF THE NORFOLK AND WESTERN RAILROAD TRACK IN EASTERN WISE COUNTY. NOTE ITS ENTRY FROM THE EAST IN THE SOUTHEASTERN CORNER OF THE MAP AT ST. PAUL, AND ITS TRAVERSE TO THE WEST PAST COEBURN. AT THE VERY WESTERN EDGE OF THE MAP ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE TRACK IS WHERE THE GRENO - BODINE COAL MINE WAS LOCATED. COMING EAST ALONG THE TRACK TO PAST COEBURN ONE CAN SEE THE RAILROAD SPUR AT BANNER, WHERE THE VIRGINIA COAL GAS CO. MINE WAS.

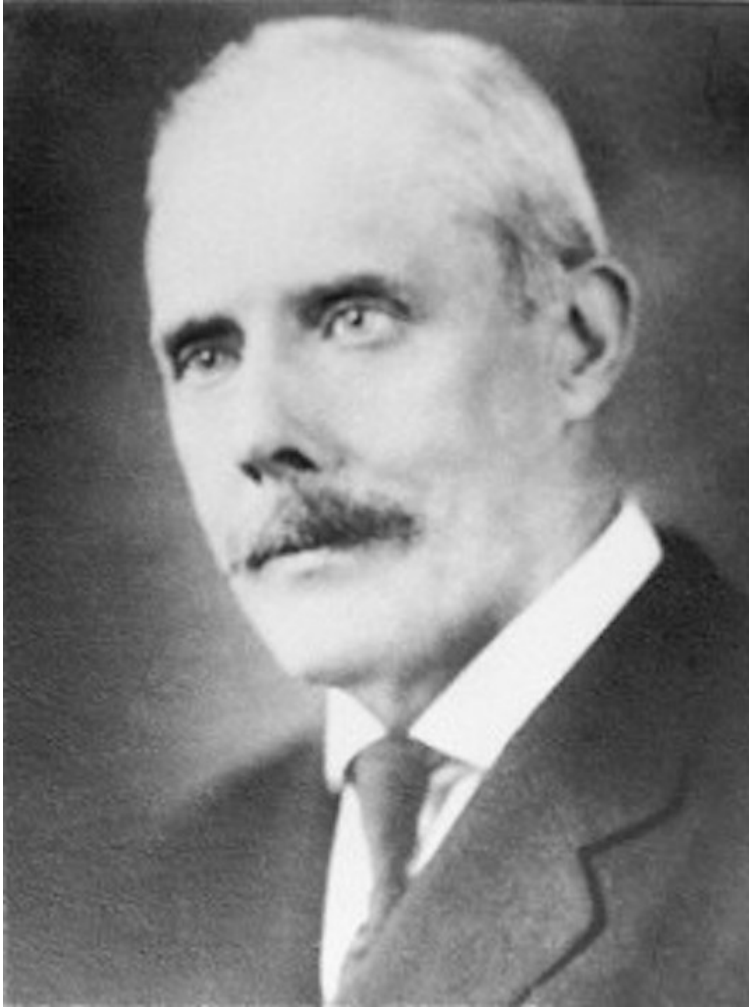


THIS IS AN EXCERPT OF THE ABOVE MAP, AND SHOWS A MAGNIFICATION OF BANNER AND THE SIDING LEADING TO THE VIRGINIA COAL GAS CO. MINE.

The ownership of this property passed to Addington, and then Pittston. VIC&C never owned this land, which passed to Coastal Coal Co., and then to El Paso Energy Co. VIC&C did mine land north of the Fleming tract. Alpha Natural Resources acquired the operating assets from El Paso, but the mineral rights were purchased by Natural Resource Partners, and the surface and timber rights went to Heartwood.

(6).

Coal gas plants in the large eastern cities burned coal in an anoxic environment, a process that emitted carbon monoxide, hydrogen, and methane. This gaseous mixture was used for lighting, and for heat. New York State shut down its last gas plants in the 1950's (9).



GEORGE
L.
CARTER

The Virginia Gas Coal Company had ties to the foremost of national coal and railroad capitalists. For example, John H. Dingee, George L. Carter, and John Fleming founded the Dingee Coal Co. at Banner (Dingee) about 1890 (10). Dingee was from Philadelphia, and started off life as a banker. By 1912 he had acquired 20 years experience in developing coal and iron interests in Kentucky, West Virginia and in Virginia (11).

He was Secretary - Treasurer of the Virginia Investment Assn. of Roanoke, and Secretary and General Manager of the Virginia Land Company (12). Even more provocatively, he was Secretary of the Keystone Coal and Iron Co. of Big Stone Gap, Virginia. George Burnham was its President (13). Burnham was owner of the famous Baldwin Locomotive Works, and a capitalist in the coal industry (14). Carter had close ties to the iron industry extending from Radford to Lee Co., including the iron furnace at Big Stone Gap. He was a major owner of the South Atlantic and Ohio Railroad, Virginia Iron, Coal, and Coke Co., and the Carolina, Clinchfield, and Ohio Railroad (15). Provocatively, an individual named F. A. Dingee, also of Philadelphia,

was President of the Pennsylvania Gas Coal Co. of Westmoreland Co., Pa in 1882 (16). A familial relationship to John H. is presumed, but not documented.

The entangled relationships among VIC&C, the Keystone Coal and Iron Co., Carter, the SA&O RR, Burnham, and the mines at Looney Creek are explored in detail below.

These three endeavors compete with the honors of having been the first successful commercial coal mine in Wise County. There is no further documentation as to which of these was the actual first. The here-to-fore competitor for this honor has been the Looney Creek Mine at Inman owned by the Virginia, Tennessee, and Carolina Iron and Steel Co. on land it leased from the Interstate Coal and Iron Company. It is well documented that this company first shipped coal out on the South Atlantic and Ohio Railroad in Oct.-Nov. 1892. This operation was later bought by VIC&C, and operated by Blue Diamond Coal Co.(91) Of the competitors, only the reopened Fleming operation at Banner, and the Virginia City operation of Russell Creek Coal Co., later bought by VIC&C, stayed open into the 20th century.

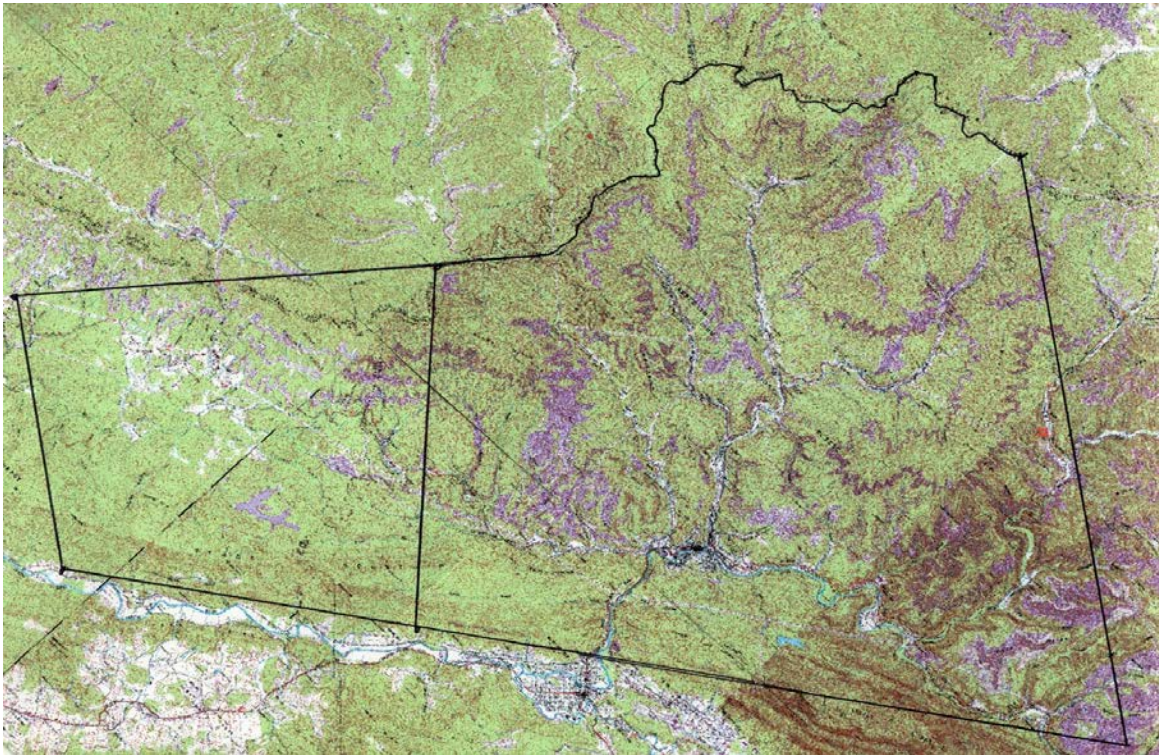
The Looney Creek Mines The Virginia, Tennessee, Carolina Steel and Iron Co.

The Indians owned the land at Looney Creek until Jan. 13, 1796, when the Commonwealth of Virginia granted it (17) to a partnership consisting of Fields, Taylor, and Johnson. The survey of this grant included the entirety of the watersheds of Pigeon Creek and Looney Creek near the present Town of Appalachia. The deed and its survey did not note any 'exclusions' of any land owned by others within its limits.



1891 USGS
TOPOGRAPHIC
MAP

Taxes having not been paid on this property, in 1836 Lee County (the Powell River watershed of Wise County was originally part of that county) sold the property to John C. Olinger II ⁽¹⁸⁾. In 1880 John C. Olinger III, having inherited the western portion of the property, sold it to E. K. Hyndman, who in turn sold it to Tinsalia Corporation, of which he was a significant stockholder. This company in 1881 resold to E. K. Hyndman, who sold it to Virginia Coal and Iron Company ⁽¹⁹⁾. In 1884 J. P. Wolfe, working for Virginia Coal and Iron Co., surveyed the land of J. J. Kelly, Sr. ⁽²⁰⁾, which lay on the lower reaches of Looney Creek at present Appalachia, Virginia.



THE COMPLETE TAYLOR & JOHNSON GRANT
THE EASTERN PORTION IS THE 'OLINGER SURVEY' SOLD TO TINSALIA

There were several flaws brought to light by Wolfe's survey. The Commonwealth of Virginia had mistakenly sold LO 60-259 to Zachariah N. Wells, Sr., which adjoined Kelly, and which covered the current junction of Looney Creek with Pigeon Creek, after it had sold it to Fields, Taylor, and Johnson. It was also noted that unspecified 'citizens' lived within the bounds of the Olinger Survey. These people were commonly referred to as 'squatters'. Virginia had passed a law protecting the rights of ownership of these people, commonly referred to as the law of 'squatter's rights', but more properly called 'the law of adverse possession'. A later court case documented that there were "2,223 acres of prior claims" within the Olinger Survey ⁽²¹⁾. It was also noted that the Olinger Survey contained "many more acres" than it was thought when Olinger sold the land to Tinsalia. The stakeholders in this situation agreed to a compromise in 1891 ⁽²²⁾ whereby the corporation paid

Olinger additional money, and Olinger gave up any right to sue over the situation (23, 24, 25, 26, 27).

At the core of this story are the Imboden brothers, Confederate General John Daniel Imboden and his younger brother, Francis Marion – called ‘Frank’ by family and friends, but usually identified in his corporate life as ‘F. M.’(28). John was the chief promoter and facilitator of the development of what turned out to be the largest independent coal company in the world, which went through various



GENERAL JOHN DANIEL IMBODEN

corporate names and structures, but most recently was known by the related Penn-Virginia & Westmoreland Corporations. His vision was to use the natural resources of coal, iron, and timber to finance the construction of a railroad from the Yadkin Valley of North Carolina to the Ohio River Valley. Frank was his chief operative implementer. Another feature of this duo was Frank’s wife, who was the sister of the richest man in Southwest Virginia after the Civil War, George Washington Palmer. Palmer was the chief owner of the Salt Works at Saltville during the Civil War (29, 30).

The Imbodens allied themselves with Rufus Ayers of Gate City, Virginia, who had been Attorney General of Virginia, and with several Northern industrialists who had made themselves wealthy in the coal business as part of the military-industrial complex that supported the Union army during the Civil War. To this strange collection of bedfellows they added the former local Confederates Colonels C. B. Slemm and Auburn Pridemore of Lee County, and Ohio Valley capitalists such as Rogers Clark Ballard Thruston. Money poured into Wise County as coal, iron ore,



FRANCIS MARION IMBODEN

and timber lands were purchased, and the Bristol Coal and Narrow Gauge Railroad was started into the area from Bristol, Virginia, where the Southern and Norfolk and Western Railroads provided national connections via the Valley of Virginia. This railroad ran out of capital when it reached the North Fork of the Holston River between Phillips and Mendota. (15)

General John Daniel Imboden went north to recruit capital from northern industrialists. Chief among them was John H. Inman, who was a former Confederate from Tennessee, who had gone to New York City after the war, and had established himself as a leading capitalist. He was especially instrumental in the development of iron, cotton, and railroads in the South. He invested over \$5,000,000 in the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and RR Company, which was the driving force behind the development of the iron industry around Bessemer and Birmingham, Alabama. Inman also invested heavily in the Imboden brother's project, the South Atlantic and Ohio Railroad, which connected the Wise and Lee County coalfields with the national rail system at Bristol, Virginia (31).

In the meantime, General John Daniel Imboden's first corporate embodiment of the nascent coal industry in Wise County, the Tinsalia Company (58), dissolved over the issue of whether it was primarily a railroad building venture, or a coal and iron company. This company had been organized in 1880 by Imboden, the Virginia politician and industrialist Rufus Ayers, and the Pennsylvanian coke and coal industrialists A. O. Tinstman, C. S. O. Tinstman and E. K. Hyndman. Imboden was bought out for 1/5th of the company's worth, to be taken out as ownership of much of the Pigeon Creek watershed. This excluded its modern day major

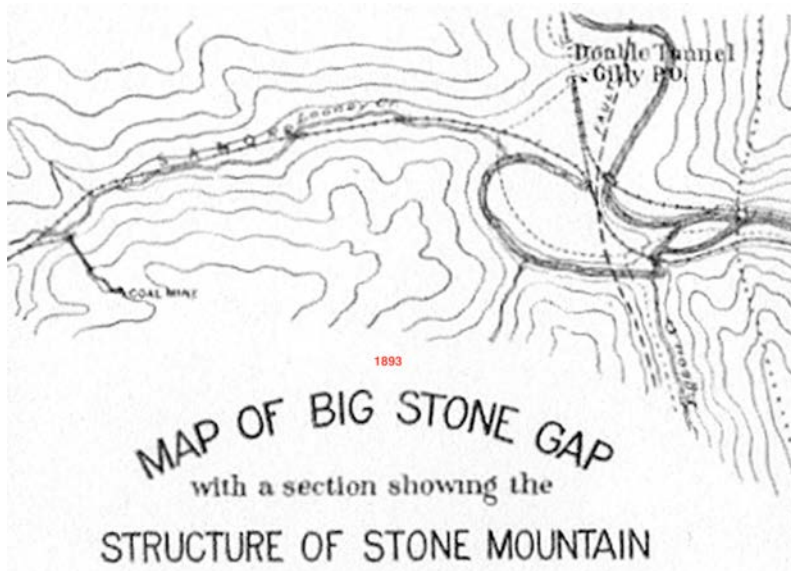
RUFUS
A.
AYERS



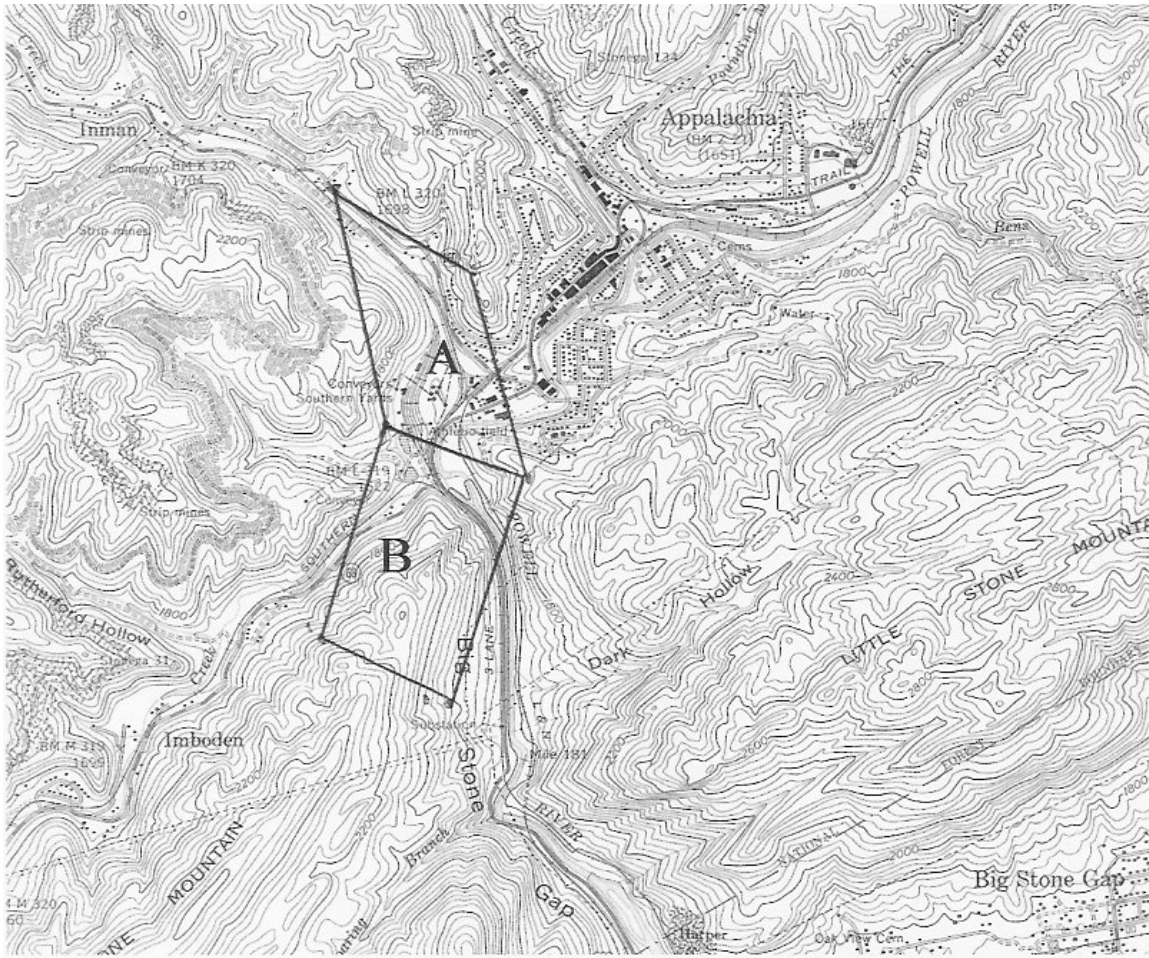
tributary, Looney Creek. The original configuration of Powell River in the bottom where it was joined by first Looney Creek, and then by Pigeon Creek constituted a huge oxbow starting at the L&N tressel at the southern end of Appalachia, and cutting to the northwest to pick up Looney Creek alone, and then turning back to the south to pick up Pigeon Creek (32, 33, 34, 5, 35). Virginia Coal and Iron Company was the other surviving moiety of the breakup of Tinsalia Co.

The oxbow at the junctions of the Powell River, Looney Creek, and Pigeon Creek became the geographic focal point of economic development in

the area. Its first settler of record was Zachariah N. Wells, Sr., who moved there in 1805, even though he did not purchase his land until 1810 (36). In 1818 John Jackson Kelly, Sr., a relative of the Wells, bought land adjacent to them (37). His son, Mathias, bought 236.9 acres nearby on Pigeon Creek (38). Mathias put a sawmill on his property, and sold a right of way for a railroad to Tinsalia Co. in exchange for a side track to his mill (39). His father aggressively bought the claims of squatters, and others with land titles of various legalities, all the way to the Dan Fields on top of Black Mountain at the base of Road Spur (40, 41, 42). Much of this secondary land that had been bought by the Kellys had 'tainted' titles. Much of it was, in turn, bought by Hyndman, who turned it over to Tinsalia. This wound up in the possession of VCI, who spent much time and money in subsequent litigation over it (43).



Kelly had bought out Wells on Looney Creek and Pigeon Creek. William D. Jones and wife from Pennsylvania had bought the Kellys' land near the oxbow. Jones and siblings, either through inheritance or early purchase, had owned all of present Middlesboro, Kentucky. They sold it to an English syndicate

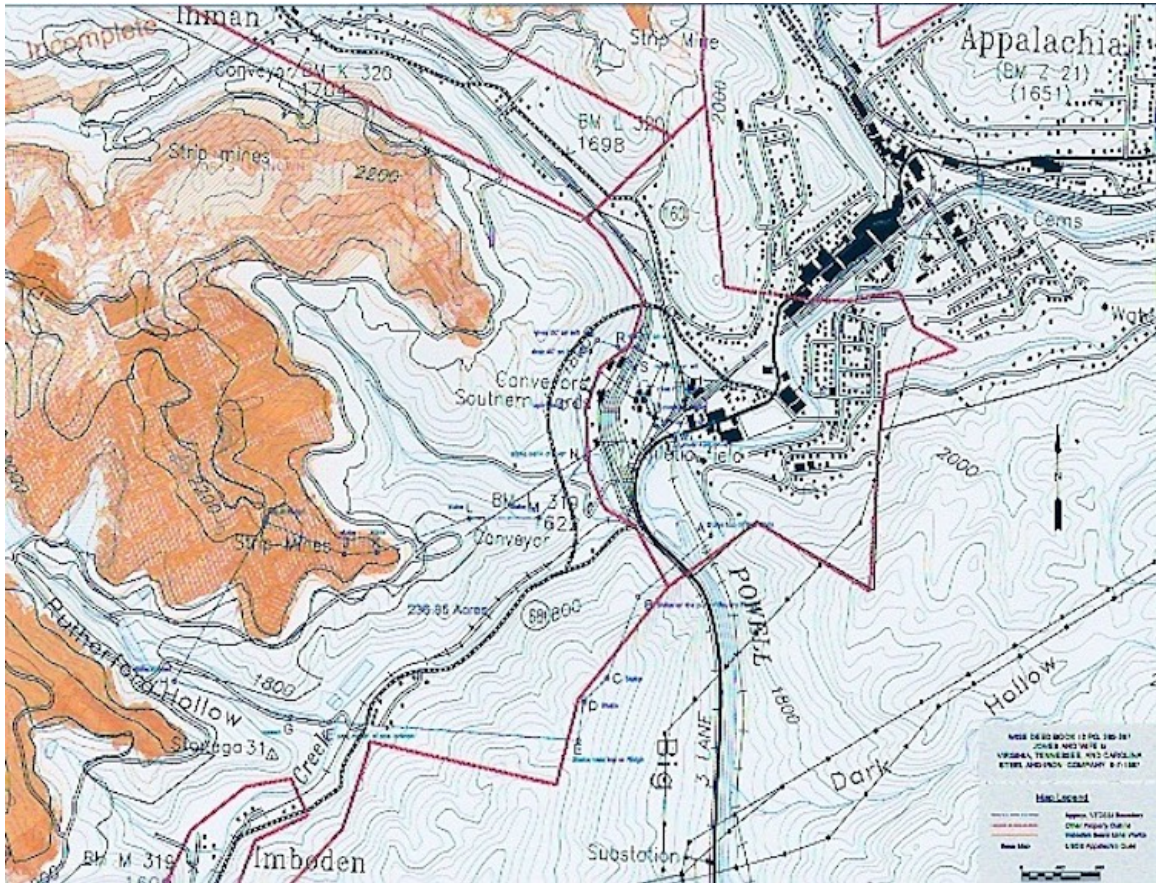


B LO 60-259
ZACHARIAH N.
WELLS, SR.

A LEE DB 3-PG 394
J. J. KELLY

Placement of 8-18-16

NOTE THAT THIS MODERN TOPOGRAPHIC MAP DOES NOT SHOW THE RIVER IN ITS ORIGINAL OXBOW CONFIGURATION, AS IT HAD BEEN AT THE TIME THESE GRANTS WERE ISSUED



W. D. JONES & WIFE TO VIRGINIA, TENNESSEE, & CAROLINA STEEL AND IRON CO. 6-7-1887
 THE NORTHEAST LINES WERE AGAINST THE RIVER AS IT THEN RAN

for \$300,000.00, and Jones moved to Philadelphia. He became involved with the Imboden brothers and their corporate entities, such as the SA&O RR and the Virginia, Tennessee, & Carolina Steel and Iron Company (44). He became a front man for those related companies, and using his insider information about their proposed routes, he bought up land and resold it to the companies he had stock in. For example, he bought Natural Tunnel in Scott Co., and sold it to VT&CS&I for \$4,000 (45). Similarly, he bought up the J. J. Kelly property in the Town of Big Stone Gap along the southwestern lip of the gap in Stone Mountain, and sold a right-of-way through it to the L&N RR. (32). He bought the land that was to be the route of the L&N RR out of the Town of Appalachia to its northeast from W. K. Kilbourne and Jerome Duff under the name of Virginia-Kentucky Land Association, and the land laying between Looney Ridge and Callahan Creek as far north as the end of the original town limits. He bought the Gilley farm in the present Town of Big Stone Gap and formed the Big Stone Gap Construction Company, which laid this land out into the first street grid of the town (46).

General Imboden, and others, such as Rufus Ayers and John H. Inman, set up a tangle of related companies such as the South Atlantic & Ohio Railroad (VCI claimed ownership of the SA&O (24)); the Virginia, Tennessee, and Carolina Coal and

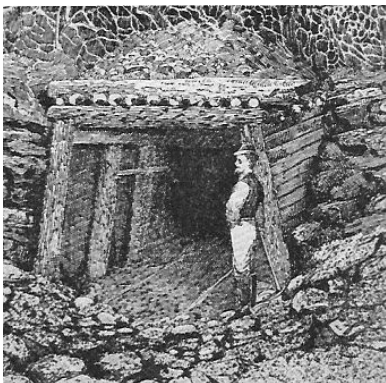
JOHN H.
INMAN



Iron Co.; and the Virginia, Tennessee, and Carolina Steel and Iron Co (15). Jones sold the Kelly land to the Virginia, Tennessee, & Carolina Steel and Iron Company (47). These companies built railroad yards within the oxbow, and opened the first commercial coal mine in western Wise Co. on Looney Ridge at Inman.

That mine operated for about six months, when the parent companies went into bankruptcy. Jones died at this point, and all these ventures became tied up in the bankruptcies of the VT&CS&I Co.'s Supreme Court case (48, 49, 50, 46). After years of litigation, the court decreed that for legal purposes these companies were all one, and further stipulated

that their land on Looney Creek be sold to the Interstate Coal and Iron Co. (32). One assumes that this was because ICI was the major creditor, being owed for royalties for its lease to VT&CS&I. On May 23, 1899, as a result of the court decree, J. C. Haskell and H. Peyton Gray, 'Special Masters', or receivers of the bankrupt companies, sold 1470.74 acres to VIC&C, who agreed to build 150 bee hive coke ovens on that property. All the buildings, fixtures etc. (including RR tracks) would revert to ICI when the lease terminated. There was an option to buy (69). On July 14, 1899 ICI leased to VIC&C 'Looney Creek Mines', including 1470.74 acres of land (41). On Jan. 1, 1913 ICI sold all the J. J. Kelly, Sr. and Mathias Kelly tracts to VIC&C. This is the last record of ICI's involvement in Wise County (42).



As a separate thread in this tapestry, after the breakup of Tinsalia Co., General Imboden had established the Imboden Coal Company, which built the coal camp of Imboden on Pigeon Creek. The seam of coal mined there was named after him. It has remained the major coal seam mined in western Wise County. F. M. Imboden sold this venture in 1908 to the Kookee Coal and Coke Company, which assumed the name 'Kookee Consolidated Coal Co.', which in

A WOODCUT OF THE 1ST
MINE IN WESTERN WISE
COUNTY

1910 sold to Virginia Coal and Iron Company. General John Daniel had died in 1895.

To go back a little bit, in 1890 the South Atlantic and Ohio Railroad had arrived on Looney Creek, and named its yards and depot that it built there 'Intermont' (15). Events moved rapidly, and were not documented as well as one would wish. The name 'Intermont', even though it unofficially has currency today, was quickly officially dropped. There is in existence an undated map showing the mining and railroad holdings on lower Looney Creek that carries the term 'Intermont Yards' on it. This dates the map to have been drawn in the early 1890's. The map is entitled 'Map of Lease of the Interstate Coal and Iron Company'. IC&I was the leaser, and Virginia Iron, Coal & Coke Co. was the lessee (68). This tract is surrounded on the map by land marked 'V. C. & I'.

The sequence of events at this point are very obscure. The Interstate Coal and Iron Company had gained ownership of some of the former squatter's land in the Looney Creek watershed (49). This circumstance suggests that there was much more 'squatter's' land within Looney Creek Hollow (and probably in adjacent Callahan Creek) than elsewhere within the Olinger Survey, and that some of it was sold to Interstate Coal and Iron Co. The origins and ownership of the Interstate Coal and Iron Company are also obscure. Due to the fact that the coal camp was named 'Inman', one would suspect a relationship to John H. Inman.

This company is first documented in a record preserved at Radford University, which shows that in 1899 Interstate Coal and Iron Company leased to Virginia Iron, Coal & Coke Co (VIC&C – not to be confused with VCI) land in both Lee County and Wise County for a period of 10 years. Of course, the Virginia Coal and Iron Company by means of the Olinger Survey remained the largest land owner surrounding Looney Creek.



VIC&C OR LESSEE
BLUE DIAMOND'S
OPERATION AT
INMAN

June 2, 1947 in a letter to Samuel T. Brown, President of Virginia Iron, Coal and Coke Company, F. A. Groseclose, General Attorney for VIC&C noted that the “original operation at Inman, in Wise County, was under a lease from the Interstate Coal and Iron Company”. He further noted that VIC&C leased and operated Linden and Laurel (Laura) from VCI, and operated both leases “until exhausted” in 1941⁽⁴⁹⁾.

Notwithstanding this documentation from company officials, who should have known the history of their corporation, there exists multiple documentations that Blue Diamond Coal Company had operated the Inman mines at intervals between the two World Wars. C. Bascom Slemph was a significant owner in Kentucky River Coal Co., and Blue Diamond was its operating company ⁽⁶⁷⁾.

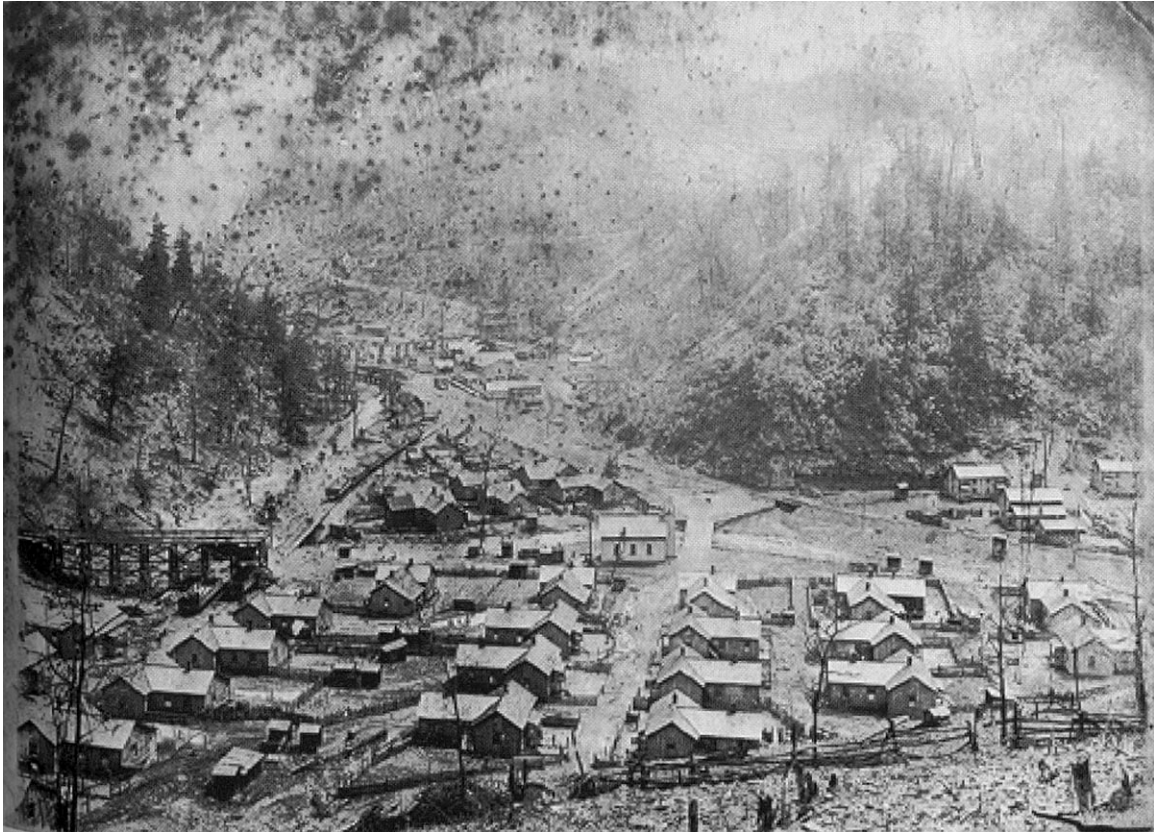
In the ‘Annual Report of the Bureau of Mines’ there is a list on page 697 of ‘Towns At which Mine Rescue and First Aide Training Was Given During the Year Ending June 30, 1919’. Under the heading of Blue Diamond Coal Company mines in Virginia, it lists Inman, but not Linden and Laura ⁽⁵¹⁾.

Similarly, in the collection of ‘Mine Inspector’s Reports for Virginia Mines’ for the dates 1922-1938 housed at the Library of Virginia, under VIC&C it lists Linden and Laurel Mines, but not Inman. Putting the information gleaned from these two government documents, it would seem that during this time period VIC&C owned and operated Linden and Laura, but leased Inman from IC&I, which it subleased out for operation to Blue Diamond ⁽⁵²⁾.

To add to the confusion of ownership of this land, a document entitled ‘Statement of Leases to the Virginia Iron, Coal, and Coke Co.’ on file at Radford University, shows that they had on lease from Interstate Coal and Iron Co. for ten years starting in 1899, land in Lee and Wise Counties ⁽⁵³⁾. One assumes the division of the land between Lee and Wise Counties was approximately the same, as the payment for the lease was the same ⁽⁵⁴⁾.

Current management of Contura Coal Co., a corporate descendant of VIC&C, says that “prior to the 1940’s VIC&C operated the mines at Inman, but then contracted with Blue Diamond to be the operating company, an arrangement that persisted through the 1950’s” ⁽⁶⁾.

These dates likely represent the lease itself, more than the dates of the operations of the mines. A former resident of Inman during the 1940’s says that the “lease with Blue Diamond was pulled” somewhere in the late 1930’s to 1941, and mining stopped there. Contura records show that VICC leased the housing at Inman to Blue Diamond in 1941⁽⁶⁾. Blue Diamond continued to lease the company houses in Inman to its miners, whose jobs were transferred to its mines near St. Charles, Va. Blue Diamond continued to operate the commissary in Inman, and to lease the houses there into the 1950’s ⁽⁵⁵⁾. The senior author, himself, can vouch for the accuracy of the dates for the commissary.

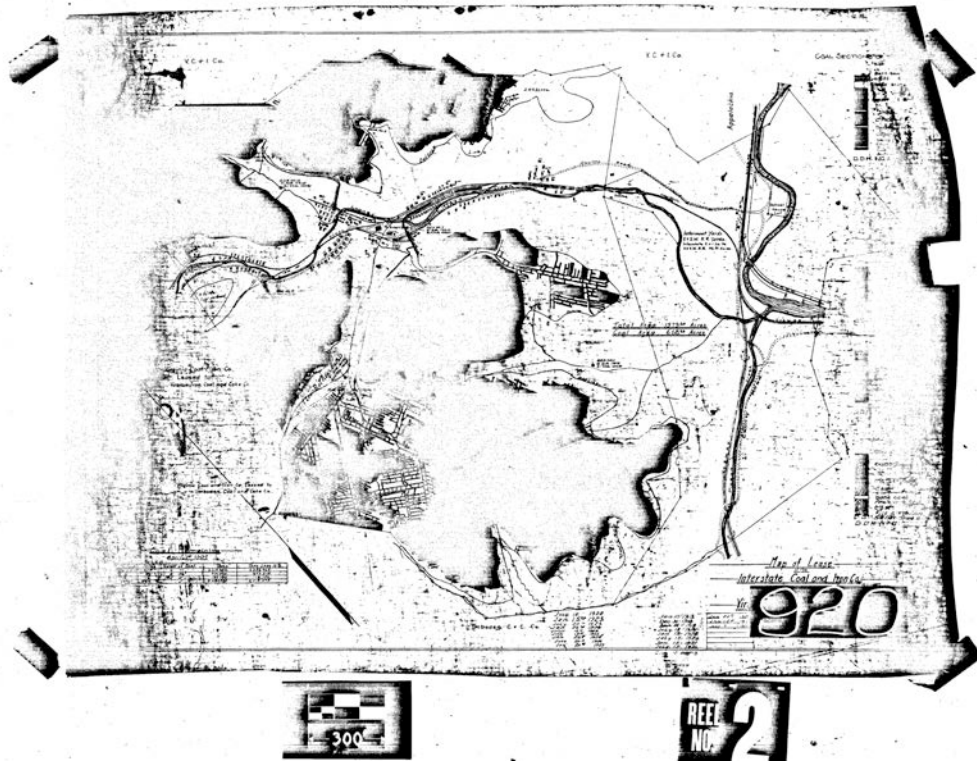


A VIEW SOUTHWEST OVER THE CHURCHTOWN SECTION OF INMAN - NOTE THE TIPPLE TO THE LEFT - THE COMMISSARY IS ACROSS THE ROAD FROM THE POINTED END OF THE CLUSTER OF HOUSES, AND RUNNING UP THE HILL AT A 45 DEGREE ANGLE BEHIND THE COMMISSARY IS THE INCLINE BRINGING COAL FROM THE FIRST MINE LOCATED ON TOP OF THE HILL



INMAN COMMISSARY 2016

INTERIOR INMAN COMMISSARY - DATE UNKNOWN



MAP OF THE INTERSTATE COAL AND IRON CO.'S LEASE AT INMAN IN 1930

In 1967 VIC&C sold the Dorchester seam of coal under the ICI tract to Penn-Va. Corp. This became the start of Bullitt Mines, which was opened on the former yards of the Southern Rail Road. On Dec. 21, 1976 VIC&C sold to Westmoreland Coal Co. (the descendant of Stonega Coke and Coal Co., and the main operating company of VCI & Penn-Va.) all the remaining coal on this property for \$300,000.00 ⁽⁶⁾. Stripping and reclamation projects were contracted to other operating companies.



ROGERS
CLARK
BALLARD
THRUSTON

There is some indirect evidence that the Interstate Coal and Iron Company may have been an operating company for the Interstate Investment Company ⁽⁵⁶⁾.

This holding company was formed in Louisville, Kentucky by Charles Ballard and Rogers Clark Ballard Thruston, who was also its manager. The Keokee Coal and Coke Company originally leased its land from Interstate Investment Co., before buying it from them. The Keokee Coal and Coke Company had bought out the Imboden Coal and Coke Co., and had reorganized as the Keokee Consolidated Coal & Coke Company ⁽⁵⁷⁾. We know that Virginia Coal and Iron Co. bought out the Keokee Consolidated Coal & Coke Company, and that it then split off the Stonega Coke and Coal Company. In Thruston's will it is noted that at his death he owned 210 shares of Virginia Coal and Iron Co., and 47 shares of Stonega Coke and Coal Co. ⁽⁵⁸⁾. It is likely that Thruston received this stock as payment for his shares of the Keokee Coal and Coke Co., and possibly for the Interstate Coal and Iron Company. References on file at the Hagley Museum (established by du Pont, but contains VCI and Westmoreland Coal Co.'s records) show that the Interstate Coal and Iron Co. was "associated" with VCI ⁽⁵⁹⁾.

VIC&C and VCI worked hand in hand in these early days. VIC&C and Interstate Investment Co. owned the iron furnace in Big Stone Gap, and in fact, Thruston became its manager ^(60, 61). In doing so, he bought the house of General John Daniel Imboden on Imboden Hill in Big Stone Gap after Imboden moved to Damascus. Furthermore, Groseclose in his letter documents that the subsequent

Inman Coal Camp and mines were operated by VIC&C, with some coal boundaries under lease from VCI.

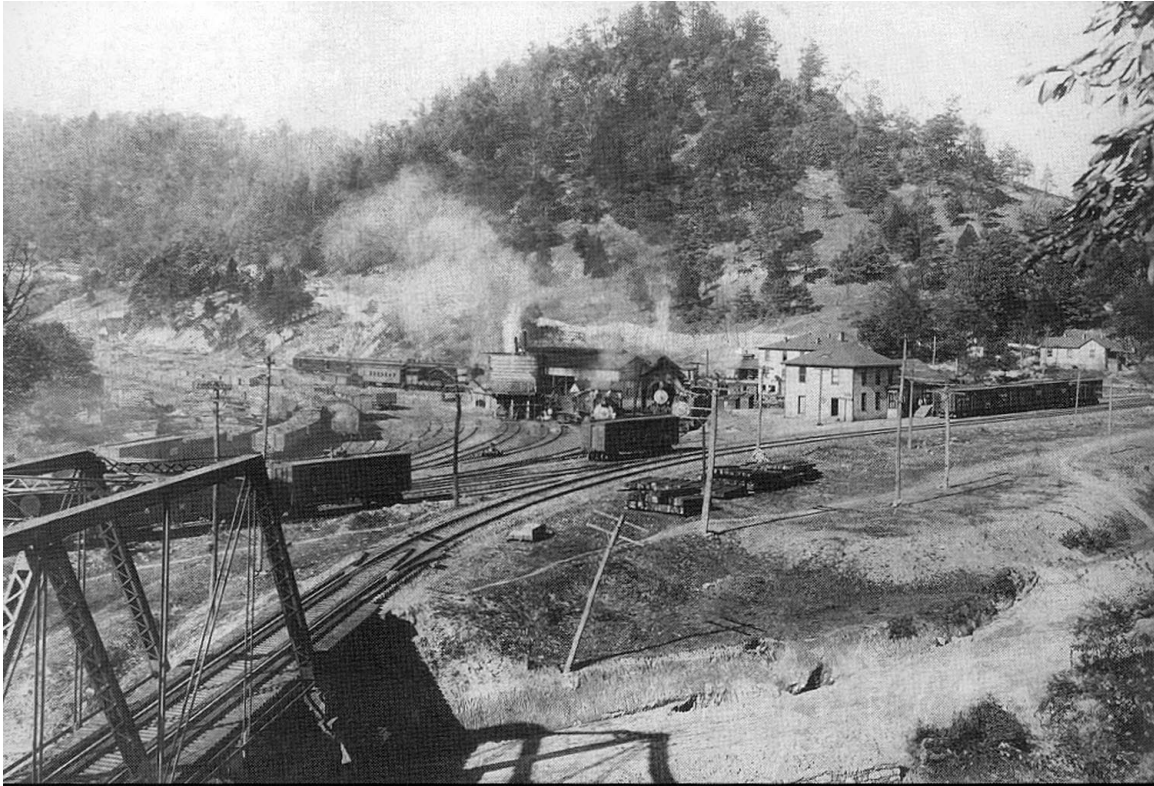
Documentation of the existence of another coal company functioning within Looney Creek Valley is added by the surveyor's calls contained within the charter of 1906 for the Town of Appalachia, which bounds the Looney Creek Coal lands. On Ison Rock Ridge there are a common surveyor's corner and line shared by the Town of Appalachia, Interstate Coal and Iron Company, Virginia Coal and Iron Company, and Keystone Coal and Iron Company (62). Recall the earlier discussion of this company in the section of the mines at Banner. There also used to be a Keystone Coal and Coke Company in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, that had no ownership nor legal ties to Westmoreland Coal Company, but they both were located in the same county, and worked hand in hand to fight the coal strike on 1910 (61, 62). Westmoreland, of course, is the corporate survivor of Stonega Coke and Coal Co., and originally was owned by substantially the same people that owned VCI (63, 64). This land was bought by VCI, mined by VIC&C (or its subcontractor, Blue Diamond) until 1941, and then by VCI and its contract mines.

Keystone Coal and Iron Co., under John H. Dingee, bought land in Appalachia from the estate of William D. Jones, and added some from VCI, and laid out the first plat for that town (63). It later became involved in a suite with VCI over title to some Black Mountain land within the Olinger Survey (64). There is no evidence that it ever actually was engaged in mining in Virginia. There is evidence that Keystone may actually have been affiliated at some level with VCI, as one of the streets on the Keystone plat in Appalachia is named after VCI's President during 1926-29, Otis Mouser (24, 73). Recall the previous discussion of concerning Keystone in the section on the mines at Banner.

When the Virginia, Tennessee, and Carolina Coal and Iron Co., and the Virginia, Tennessee, and Carolina Steel and Iron Co. (and the S. A. & O RR which was owned by the former), went into receivership in 1902 & 1907 the case finally went to the United States Supreme Court. Oddly, the receivers were John C. Haskell, manager of the Virginia, Tennessee, & Carolina Coal & Iron Company, the Virginia, Tennessee & Carolina Steel and Iron Co., and the South Atlantic and Ohio RR; and H. Peyton Gray, an attorney from Bristol who also handled the bankruptcies of several iron furnace companies bought out by VIC&C (69, 76, 77, 78). In 1908 it decreed that for legal purposes the two companies were one and the same (15). The court further ordered that the Virginia, Tennessee, and Carolina Coal and Iron Co. should be sold to the Interstate Coal and Iron Co.

In 1910 the SA&O RR again went into receivership, and this time it was reorganized as the Virginia and Southwestern Railroad. The ownership changed to mostly George L. Carter individually, and to VIC&C, of which he was a major owner, and to George Washington Palmer (28). This had the practical effect of Palmer having bailed out his brother-in-law, F. M. Imboden.

This collapse of the Imboden / Inman empire was brought about by the recession of 1907, which left the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company \$5,000,000 in debt, and forced its sale, including its Bessemer, Alabama iron and steel works, to United States Steel. 1907 marked the exodus of Frank Imboden from Wise County (John had died in 1895), and 1910 was when the Interstate Investment Company's project, the Keokee Coal and Coke Company, sold to VCI. As the Interstate Coal and Iron Company disappeared in the same time period, it would seem likely that it was part of the same tangle of related companies (70).



V&SW YARDS IN APPALACHIA LOOKING AT INTERMONT HILL AND UP LOONEY CREEK
'L&N JUNCTION' ON THE SA&O WAS THE NORTHERN END OF THE TRESSEL

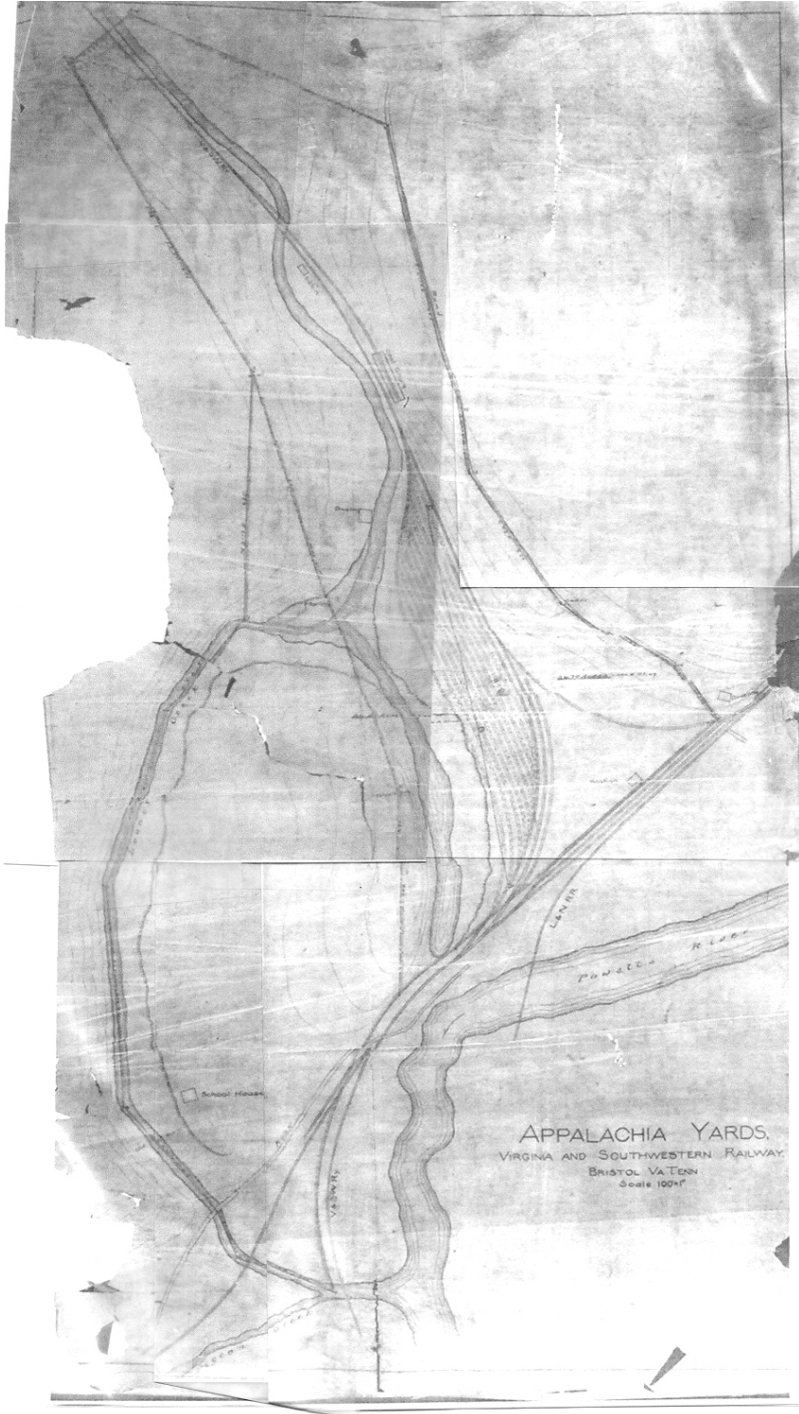
The flow of capital into these ventures is not entirely transparent today. Palmer was committed to getting a railroad up the North Fork of the Holston to meet the needs of his salt works. As parts of these schemes, the investors aspired to connect the North Fork of the Holston River with the Clinch River and further to run a railroad up its tributary, the Guest River, into Dickenson County. This venture was incorporated as the Virginia, Tennessee, and Carolina Steel and Iron Company (see above) (73). One suspects that his family connection to Frank caused some capital to flow from the Salt Works into the development of the coal industry in Wise County. Capital was raised from northern sources, but controlling interest was owned by John H. Inman (15, 28, 27, 29, 69).

No direct connections between John H. Inman, the VTCS&I& RR Co. and ICI Co. have been found other than that Inman owned controlling interest in that

V&SW
YARDS @
APPALACHIA

WISE DB
32

NOTE THE
OXBOW HAS
BEEN CUT
OFF, BUT
NOT FILLED
IN



railroad, and that the railroad operated the first commercial coal mine under lease from ICI at a coal camp whose first name was 'the Looney Creek Coal Mines', and at some undocumented point became named 'Inman'. The camp was built by VIC&C, and leased and operated by Blue Diamond Coal Co. It is obvious that the coal camp was named after John H. Inman. It is possible that he was the owner of the Interstate Coal and Iron Company. All other presences in the Looney Creek coal ventures are accounted for.

Concerning the issue of where the first commercial coal mine in western Wise County was located, one must look at data from the S. A. & O RR itself. In 1890 the S. A. & O ended its tracks coming from Bristol on Looney Creek at a

depot it named Intermont. It was 0.4 mile above 'L&N Junction' (15). A post office was set up at the southeastern edge of what was then the 'Double Tunnel', but later became 'The Cut' (5), and was named Gilly, with John J. Kelly as postmaster (72). The site of the end of the SA&O tracks can be located today as being directly under the hill from the mouth of Linden St. (better known as Slaughter Pen Hollow, the hill still known as Intermont Hill) off of Inman Road. The Virginia, Tennessee, and Carolina Steel and Iron Co. put its mine into the Imboden seam of coal (there being no

minable coal in that area outcropped below that seam) somewhere in this general vicinity.

Luther Addington states that "... the Virginia, Tennessee and Carolina Steel and Iron Company, which had started an operation on Loony Creek near Inman, shipped the first load of coal from Wise County over the S. A. & O. Railroad, in October or November 1892". He footnotes his source as "Back Home Magazine", 1912. P. 9' (71). This statement is mirrored by Prescott, who says further that "the Virginia, Tennessee, and Carolina Steel and Iron Co. ... started an operation at Inman and in October or November of 1892 (it shipped) the first coal from Wise Co., (which) went out over the SA&O RR" (24). Prescott also referenced the same article from "Back Home Magazine" as his source. In essence, this means that instead of there being two documentations, there really was only one.

Campbell (5) on page 61 states "... this coal (the Imboden seam at Looney Creek) is mined by the South Atlantic and Ohio Railroad Co. The seam is opened from a small ravine that enters Looney Creek from the west: the main entry is driven nearly due south up the dip, which is just sufficient to provide perfect drainage. The mouth of the mine is 240 feet above Looney Creek, and the coal is delivered to the cars down an incline. In the mine the coal varies in thickness from five feet six inches to nine feet seven inches ...". Between pages 38 & 39 he has a map of the gap in Stone Mountain, Looney Creek, the SA&O and L&N RRs, and the first Looney Creek Mine.



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An undated later map from the Department of Mines, Minerals, and the Energy files copied from Penn-VA Co. shows the same incline in the same hollow, together with the original drift mouth, and the later extensions of these works by following companies (35).

The same year as the Virginia, Tennessee, and Carolina Steel and Iron Company shipped the first coal out of western Wise County, 1892, that company went into bankruptcy. Ultimately the issue wound up before the United States Supreme Court (56). In 1903 the Virginia Iron and Coal Co. bought them out (59). They built the coal camp of Inman there, and Oct. 19, 1899 the post office moved there after having closed the one at Gilly (76). One has to assume that it was named after

John H. Inman. The deep mines at Inman closed in 1941, and the land reverted to Virginia Coal and Iron Company, which leased the housing to Blue Diamond until the early 1950's. Linden and Laura reverted to VCI, and later VIC&C sold its Looney Creek Holdings to Penn-Va and to Westmoreland, who leased out strip mining sites there in the late Twentieth Century.

In 1910 the S. A. & O railroad sold out to the Virginia and Southwestern Railroad. The next year the V & SW moved its operations from Bristol to Appalachia, and put in a mile post system to facilitate identification of locations along its right-of-way. Zero milepost (originally this had been the final mile post measuring distance from Bristol, the starting point for the S. A. & O) was set at the beginning of its main track where the Inman spur track took off (the original end of the S. A. & O.). The coal companies up Looney Creek from Zero milepost owed the spur that went up that hollow to the mines at Inman, Linden, and Laura (74). In 1916 the Southern Railroad bought out the V&SW, and made it its Appalachia Division. This Division's milepost system was left undisturbed, except that the prefix 'T' was added to the milepost numbers so that these mile posts could be identified on the Southern System as being on the Appalachia Division. A cast iron sign, until recently, stood beside the track marking 'Zero T' with a simple large '0'(15).

A newly discovered riddle has been discovered, adding confusion to the relationships of the various founding companies on Pigeon and Looney Creeks. R. C. Thruston, of the Interstate Investment Co., and Keokee connections, announced in 1906 that the Black Mountain Railroad was being built from Imboden to St. Charles (79, 80). This is not surprising, as the next year The Keokee Coke and Coal Company affiliated with Thruston was to buy the Imboden Coke and Coal Company. What is surprising is that in 1907 the Interstate Railroad, which was owned by VCI, was buying railroad right of way from the Camp of Imboden to the Lee County line, and doing so from private individuals, not from the Imboden Coke and Coal Co (75). There are two provocative issues here. One is, what was VCI doing in that region when they did not own any land or mines there? The other issue is that the land being bought was in the Pigeon Creek watershed, which we have been led to believe was owned by Imboden.

It is likely that these private individuals had acquired squatter's rights to land within the Olinger Survey. At the present Camp of Exeter, along that railroad right of way, there had been a community of Indians living there ever since they had avoided deportation to Oklahoma during the 'Trail of Tears' episode of 1840. That community was known as 'Pigeon Creek' before the coming of the coal companies (81).

The corporate history connecting General John Daniel Imboden to the Camp of Imboden, to the seam of coal of that name, and to his home on top of Imboden Hill in Big Stone Gap are well known. But his connection to the first commercial coal mine in western Wise County has been lost until now.

The Imboden brothers took their profits from Wise County and resumed their quest to build a railroad into North Carolina. They built their own company town at Damascus, Virginia, and built their own railroad, best known today by its nickname, the Virginia Creeper. The goal was to harvest the timber off of Mount Rogers, and to use the profit to finish the railroad into the Yadkin Valley. General Imboden unfortunately died prematurely, putting an end to this dream. He is buried in Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, Virginia. Frank continued to try his luck in corporate ventures around Bristol, including Bristol Steel (also partially owned by VIC&C). He is buried in the East Hill Cemetery at Bristol. His brother-in-law, George Washington Palmer, is buried in the cemetery at Emory and Henry College. Rufus Ayers went on to develop Johnson City, Tennessee. He is buried in the Estell Cemetery in Gate City, Virginia. Rogers Clark Ballard Thruston retired to his avocation of keeping his family history alive. Many say the coal boom is over. It all lasted only about a century and a quarter.



PHOTO BY RICH JONES

GRAVE OF GENERAL JOHN DANIEL IMBODEN
HOLLYWOOD CEMETERY, RICHMOND VIRGINIA

ALSO THE FINAL RESTING PLACE
OF NUMEROUS OTHER CONFEDERATES
SUCH AS GENERAL GEORGE PICKETT

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**ADDENDUM #1 TO THE ESSAY
“THE FIRST COAL MINE IN WISE CO.”**

Lawrence J. Fleenor, Jr.
1-22-17

At a presentation on the original essay at the Big Stone Gap Kiwanis meeting of 1-18-17 apparent contradictions within the statement in William D. Jones’ obituary about him having been the father of the Town of Big Stone Gap, and because of an article in the “Post” of Jan. 8, 1892 which claimed that he had laid out the first street grid for that Town, were noted. It was also noted that Jones had used the Big Stone Gap Construction Company as his instrument in this matter (essay pg. 13). Bill Bradshaw and Spencer Quesenberry raised the issue that the Big Stone Gap Improvement Company was well known to have done that. Bill has a plot of this street grid hanging in his office, and Spencer’s father and Charlie Daniels wound up buying the residual of this company.

Let me recapitulate what I had uncovered concerning this issue in the original essay on “The First Coal Mine in Wise County”. I had discovered an article in a professional magazine that reviewed Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals cases for attorneys. (1) It detailed how Jones had sold his land in BSG that he had bought from J. J. Kelly 1st and Zachariah N. Wells, 1st to the Virginia, Tennessee, Carolina Steel and Iron Company; how that company was a front for the Imboden brothers, and how it had opened the first coal mine in Western Wise County, and how it had not paid its coal royalties to the Interstate Coal and Iron Company, and how it and several related companies (primarily the South Atlantic and Ohio Railroad) had been sued over this issue, and how it wound up in the Federal Supreme Court, which decided that all these companies were ‘legally the same’, and ordered all their remaining assets turned over to ICI. (6)

That article also noted that John Dingee was president of the Keystone Coal and Iron Co. of BSG. Dingee was also a Philadelphia banker, and co-owner of the Dingee Coal Co. of Coeburn with George L. Carter. It noted how Jones had also bought land in Appalachia from Wells and Kelly, and had rolled it over into both the Keystone Coal and Iron Co., and to other land development companies active in Appalachia.

I have found another article on the web (2) which is another case review, and details how Dingee and John Bullitt, and other “gentlemen from Pennsylvania” sued the Big Stone Gap Development Co. over issues relating to the case described above, and concerning the group of associated companies, such as the SA&O RR, and concerning the Big Stone Gap Development Co.’s chartered right to lay out a street grid for BSG.

Further research has shown that March 1, 1888 the General Assembly of Virginia passed an act incorporating the Big Stone Gap Construction Co., of which William D. Jones was one of the owners, and a board member. (3)

We also learn that John H. Inman was part owner of the SA&O RR. (4) We also followed the above suit concerning the bankruptcy of the Virginia, Tennessee, Carolina Steel and Iron Co. all the way from the Wise Co. Court through the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals, to the Federal Supreme Court. (6) We find that the Virginia, Tennessee, Carolina Steel and Iron Co. owned controlling interest in the SA&O RR (5) The Federal Supreme Court lumped all these above mentioned companies together in the suit, and reversed the lower courts’ rulings, and in essence declared them all to be bankrupt as of 1890, and that the assets of these corporations be turned over to the Interstate Coal and Iron Co., the owner of the coal mined on Looney Creek, and on which no royalties had been paid.

Therefore, it would seem that the Big Stone Gap Construction Co. was one of the Imboden companies that was declared to be bankrupt. We do not know what stage the development of the plat of the Town of Big Stone Gap was at that time. Those assets were ordered to be turned over to the Interstate Coal and Iron Co. We do not know who the owners of that company were, but we do know that John Bullitt was among those creditors suing the Virginia, Tennessee, Carolina Steel and Iron Co. By inference they were the owners of the Interstate Coal and Iron Co. We do know that Bullitt was one of the owners of the Big Stone Gap Improvement Co., who published a map of the Town plat under their name, and whose ownership passed to Quesenberry and Daniels in the late 20th Century.

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2 – Suit of the Big Stone Gap Development Co.

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3 – March 1, 1888 the General Assembly passed an act incorporating the Big Stone Gap, Construction co., of which William D. Jones was one of the owners and a board member

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4 – John Inman was part owner of the SA&O RR

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_H._Inman

5 – The Virginia, Tennessee, Carolina Steel and Iron Co. controlled the SA&O RR, and itself was bankrupt by 1893 (the actual bankruptcy occurred in 1890)

<http://www.worldcat.org/title/to-the-stockholders-and-creditors-of-the-virginia-tennessee-and-carolina-steel-and-iron-company/oclc/11367505?referer=di&ht=edition>

6 – US Supreme Court in 1892 heard the case involving the Virginia, Tennessee, Carolina Steel and Iron Co's bankruptcy of 1890, and lumped all the related corporations together in the suit, including the SA&O RR

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