

## **UNIT II: THE GOLDEN AGE (1897-1918)**

### **Topics: Coal Mining Industry and Cultural Minorities**

#### **INTRODUCTION TO TEACHERS**

The coal mining industry in Iowa got its start around 1870. Previous to that date, coal was often locally mined along rivers and streams or where easy access was available. This type of mining provided fuel for local consumption in areas where timber was scarce.

By 1870 there was an increased demand for coal to supply the railroads which by then spanned the state linking the Missouri River to the Mississippi. The railroads [leased large tracts of land for the mining rights. Most of these lands were concentrated roughly in a line from Boone County southeast to Wapello County.

Coal mining reached its peak between 1900 and 1920. Along with this mining productivity came the mining camps which dotted the countryside of south central Iowa. Most of these camps were not well kept since the average life of a mine was only ten years. A typical mine camp consisted of several hundred small houses, a union hall, a company store, a school and a tavern or pool hall.

One of these camps, well remembered in the coal mining literature and in the minds of former residents, was Buxton. Located in Monroe County, Buxton enjoyed one of the longest periods of productivity among the coal mining camps of the early 1900s.

The story of Buxton is featured in the student materials for this unit. Included is a firsthand account of the community with its various social activities and institutions.

In addition, a narrative description of the workings of a mine is included among the student materials. The following three publications provide the core for the study of Iowa coal mining:

#### ***Coal Mining in Iowa, 1870 - 1940***

The story of mining in Iowa is briefly summarized in a narrative account structured around three main questions:

- A. How did coal mining begin and develop in Iowa?
- B. What was life like in a coal camp?
- C. What was it like inside a coal mine?

This publication provides the background information for the following two primary source materials:

#### ***As I Remember*, by Minnie B. London**

Mrs. London lived in Buxton during the peak of mining productivity in Monroe County. She recalled the way Buxton looked in the early 1900s, the businesses which thrived, the ethnic make-up of the community, and various community personalities who lived vividly in her memory.

***A Tour Through An Albia Coal Company Mine, Monroe County, 1878 (Edited Version)***

This excerpt from an 1878 history of Monroe County describes the inside workings of a room-and-pillar mine near Albia. For more information on Iowa Coal mining, the following articles and books may be helpful:

Olin, Herbert, *Coal Mining in Iowa*, The State Mining Board, State of Iowa, 1965.

Schwieder, Dorothy, *Black Diamonds: Life and Work in Iowa's Coal Mining Communities, 1895- 1925*, Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa, 1983.

Schwieder, Dorothy and Kraemer, Richard, *Iowa's Coal Mining Heritage*, published by the State of Iowa, 1973.

Schwieder, Dorothy, "*Italian-Americans in Iowa's Coal Mining Industry*," *Annals of Iowa*, Spring 1982, pp. 163-178.

Shiffer, Beverly, "*The Story of Buxton*," *Annals of Iowa*, Summer 1964, pp. 339 - 341.

Video Tape: "*You Can't go Back to Buxton*." Iowa Public Television Network, Des Moines, Iowa 50321.

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