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Early Days in the Village of Mark

Written by Mary Miglio in 1968



The Village of Mark is situated in the northern part of Putnam County, west of Granville, Illinois. Division Street divides the two villages. Now, in the year 1968, it has a population of approximately 450 people. What remains to tell the story of the once prosperous St. Paul Coal Company's shaft, which was instrumental in developing the Village of Mark, is the three clay dumps, the rock foundation of the boiler and engine room buildings, the red, wooden office building (which is now being occupied by the State Highway Department), the dilapidated, red mule barn, and the sump dumps. One dump remains to tell the story of the B.F. Berry Coal Company's Slack Washer.

Mark today is comprised of residential dwellings, a few business houses, a schoolhouse, a post office, a greenhouse, a gas station, a beauty parlor and a village hall.

The Village of Mark, being situated in the heart of what was once the rich coal fields of Illinois, depended for its support, for its very existence, on the St. Paul Coal Company's mine. When the mine closed in the 1920's, many of the miners and their families moved to other mining camps or to manufacturing cities, such as Nokomis, Benld, Rockford, Detroit, Highwood, and the Denver, Colorado, Roundup, Montana, San Francisco, California regions. The families that remained here commute daily to the neighboring cities to work and with the completion of Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation (J & L) near Hennepin, Illinois, many of the Markites are looking forward to employment there.

It was an important day for Granville, when at 2:00 o'clock, June 25, 1903, the new mine of the St. Paul Coal Company was dedicated and Superintendent James Cherry began to sink the shaft that very day. James Gately, a machinist, arrived from Ladd, Illinois, putting the engines in order, while workers on the switch grade, extending from the coal shaft to the Indiana, Illinois and Iowa railroad track (3-1) wide enough for four tracks part of the way, was progressing rapidly.

By the middle of the year, the hoisting shaft was up, the dump trestle was ready, the engine mounted, the water was in the boilers, the dirt was thrown out to a depth of 16 feet, and the timbering was started. A week later, the shaft was down 40 to 50 feet. When the 87 foot level was reached, water came in, pumps were installed, but the workers thought no serious damage would result. At a depth of 100 feet, water coming in at 60 gallons a minute, was pumped out by the three pumps in operation, but they were not sufficient. Two more pumps were installed, but due to water and quicksand, Superintendent Cherry suspended work on Number One Shaft and ordered his men to bring their tools to the surface.

Meanwhile, the thirty-one section gang was completed the 1200 feet of the coal switch and the steel crew was due any day.

The bridge and building departments of the St. Paul Coal Company were given orders to build 20 houses as soon as possible, for many of the men were married and wanted to bring their families here. Fifteen houses were completed.

The water was under control at the shaft and Frank Serrine, Sr. and Newton Colby, drilled a test hole 150 feet deep near the shaft, so the

sinkers would know what they would have to contend with as they went down.

It was decided to abandon Shaft Number One, sink a new shaft, and use Number One as an air shaft.

By November, the carpenters were busy building temporary shelters for workmen getting ready to start sinking the new shaft, which was located across the ravine and over the tracks, about 300 feet north and a little east of the first shaft.

At this time, Mr. Wightman, General Superintendent of the mines for the St. Paul Coal Company, severed his connections with the company and W. W. Taylor, Chicago, was appointed to the position.

Work continued through the bitter cold months of February and March of the following year. The carpenters building the 15 company houses on the Alex Moore land, Elliott's Park, north of the present village of Mark, were forced to quit work at times due to the intense cold. George Packingham, Harry Brown and Charles Scott were among the builders employed.

During these cold months, the sinkers worked diligently. Soon they reached the 90 foot level in the new shaft and everything was running satisfactorily. The sinkers were now down to the 200 feet, and expected to reach the first vein of coal at the 225 foot level. At 228 feet the first vein, a vein of exceptionally good quality coal 3 feet 6 inches thick, was reached. By March 1904, the second vein was passed. The superior quality of the coal in the first and second veins was gratifying to the company.

Meanwhile, machinery and supplies were arriving daily. A large 152 H.P. hoisting engine was returned, because it was not strong enough and a larger one was ordered. A blower engine arrived and a fan was installed to furnish air for the workmen below.

After passing the second vein of coal, the sinking crew was ordered to go down with the shaft as rapidly as possible. If good luck still favored them, they expected to reach the third vein by June.

A. J. Robinson delivered the first load of props for the St. Paul Coal Company's mine. These props or timbers were mostly oak or hickory.

The grading outfit that did the work on the new shaft tracks arrived and set its six tents west of the shaft. J.H. Flick of Davenport, Iowa, had the contract. About forty men and sixty horses expected to complete the work in the sixty to seventy days. The grading consisted of work for several tracks from the west village line to Elliott's east line, a distance of one-half mile. A double track ran west from the shaft to the coal company's west line to be used for the empties. Each track held 22 cars. These tracks were constructed on the gravity plan so that all the cars would run to the shaft empty and from the shaft loaded on the incline.

On August 19, 1904, the shaft was 500 feet deep. The diggers had struck bottom. It was a shaft 19 feet 3 inches by 11 feet 6 inches. The main roadways or entries below were 7 feet high, 6 to 8 feet wide and perfectly dry. From the cage one could go north and south to the east and west entries. The shaft was now completed and the men worked in the third vein.

A large, roomy stable, housing 20 mules, was cut out of the solid rock with plenty of food and bedding for the miner's faithful helper, the mule. It was a cliff dweller and dwelt in the darkness and solitude. Several mules were kept in the pasture, north of the shaft, to replace the mules that would go lame or were worn out from work. When they were taken to the surface, they were blind-folded to keep them quiet and calm and so their eyes could adjust from darkness to the light. When the blindfolds were gradually removed and they were turned out, they ran wild about the pasture kicking up their heels.

At this time 24 men were hired to work below in three shifts, eight during each eight hour shift. Four hundred fifty tons of coal were taken out in the one month.



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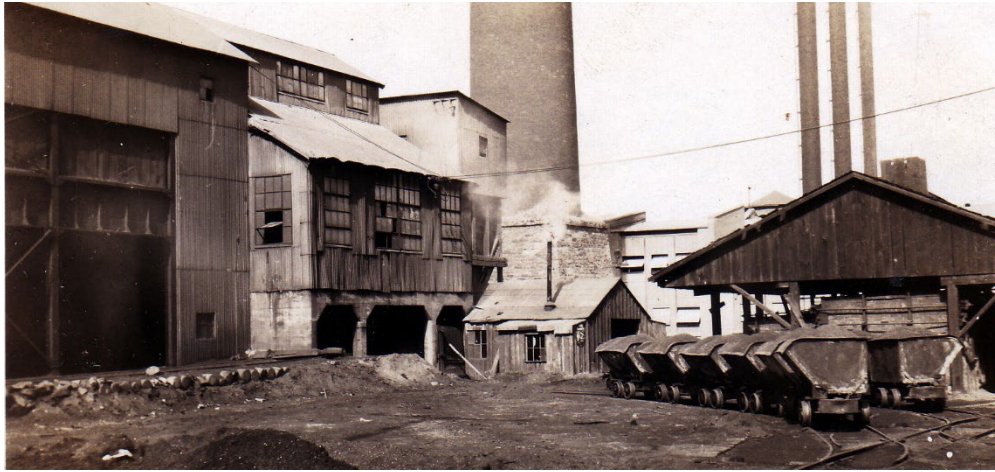


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Mr. Birkenbuel, of Peru, Illinois, had the contract for building out of brick on a stone foundation (the stone foundation still exists at present) a boiler room 49 feet by 58 feet by 30 feet, and an engine room 31 feet by 56 feet by 36 feet. His camp consisted of three tents with ten masons and helpers, and eight local workmen.

An office building 26 feet by 40 feet was erected by the company, west of the main shaft, which still exists.

Meanwhile, besides the construction of the company houses for the miner's dwellings, situated in Elliott's Park, Joseph Gariglietti's two buildings were progressing nicely. Directly west of the northwest corner store, Fred Helmer was constructing his home (which is now the Art Piccioli residence), making his family a roomy, airy dwelling. On the south side of Hennepin Street, toward John Elliott's residence, a two-story building 24 feet by 60 feet was constructed.

By the end of 1904, the business men of Granville raised \$700.00 and proposed moving the fifteen company houses from northwest of the shaft to Hayslip's land east of the mine to join the town site. The first Superintendent had intended to isolate the miners from the village, have the coal company own the land, the dwellings, the school and churches needed by their employees, but this did not materialize.

So Frank Serrine, Sr. with the help of Kunkel, was given the contract of moving the company houses from Elliott's Park to Hayslip Heights. The land was platted with lots 50 feet by 130 feet, with 20 foot alleys and 60 foot streets. About twenty more houses were built by the company for the miners and their families. Rent for these homes was \$7.50 a month and it was deducted by the company from the miner's pay check.

At this time, the only alternative a man had moving to this locality, if he didn't want to work in the mine, was to work on the railroad ten hours a day for \$1.00 a day or start up in business for himself.

The St. Paul Coal Company was hoisting between 400 to 500 tons of coal a day. The miners were paid semi-monthly. The company moved their offices from over the bank to the new office building erected for them, near the shaft. The officers and clerks had cozy rooms in this building. The St. Paul Coal Company established a general store in Granville for the miners.

James Steele, Sr, was transferred from Cherry, Illinois to replace John Cherry, as pit boss, who was going to the Berry Coal Company of Standard, Illinois.

Lump coal was now selling for \$2.75 a ton at the Granville mine with an additional 50 cents a ton for delivery.

Now the St. Paul Coal Company wanted to annex the company houses to Granville, but not the shaft. It was thought that the entire quarter should be annexed. The question now arose, will there be a new village incorporated.

In December 1905, the Village of Mark was organized with Fred Helmer, Village President, William Forney, Clerk, Joe Chirillo, John Ariano, Fred Meyers, Tom Osmondson, Sebastian Faletti and Peter Giacherio as trustees. It was named Mark after Mark Elliott, son of Mr. and Mrs. John Elliott, who resided on a farm on the western edge of the village.

Mark was building up very rapidly. It wasn't putting up fine residences but smaller houses and many of them. The houses were being occupied and that's what made up the town. Concrete sidewalks were constructed on the prominent streets of Hennepin and Milwaukee, by the Village Board at their expense. New buildings were going up. A hall was built for the council meetings, including a steel cage in which violators were housed until justice was meted out and a tower with a pull rope bell to warn the firemen of a fire or meeting.

Every day someone began a cottage, which meant five to ten additional people added to the population. Many of the miners were building their own homes and were here for life or as long as there was work. Mark still had no schoolhouse nor church. But the most important building going up at the present was the Berry Coal Company's Slack Washer, which was located south of the St. Paul Coal Company's Shaft. Standard didn't have the water and the Granville mine had plenty of water to wash the screenings from Number One Shaft, which was filling with water. Pumps were installed and the water was pumped out to the pond for a reserve.

The Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad now reached the mine by a switch from the 31 Railroad to the west side of the coal company's property. A switch was built to and from the slack washer.

The mining camp now included the steel tippie (tower and shed), the brick power house and other necessary shops and miscellaneous buildings.

The shaft was only large enough to hoist one pit car. A double deck cage was used to hoist two pit cars at the same time. The cage had to be stopped at the landing floor for the first pit car to be pushed off and then hoisted a few feet higher so the second car could be pushed off. An empty

car was pushed on at the same time the loaded car was pushed off. The cars were then run by gravity down into the dump, then to the switch load and carried by gravity to the rear of the shaft where it was raised by a transfer table to a point ready to be pushed into the cage again by the steam pusher.

At this time, 220 miners and 109 company men were employed. The miners were paid by the tons of coal they mined, while the company men were paid a daily wage.

Below, the main entries or roads were 7 feet high and 8 feet wide and had double tracks for hauling the loaded cars to the cage and the empties back to the miner. The main entries were north and south from the shaft. The road beds were perfectly dry and the ceiling was quite smooth. Every road led to the shaft and no miner could get lost if he watched the leadings of the entries which were 42 feet apart. Twenty-one feet of coal was worked out on each side of the entry. Air ducts allowed plenty of fresh air for comfort.

If the empty cars did not arrive to be filled with coal, the mine would close down and work would resume when the supply of cars arrived. At this time 600 tons of coal were mined daily.

In June 1906, Mark had a postmaster. The government wanted the postmaster to pay the mail carrier out of his salary and he couldn't see it that way so the Mark people were still getting their mail at Granville, Illinois.

The Twin City Park, which was situated north of Monkey's Nest and west of Division Street, was initiated in 1906, with a football game in the afternoon and a dance in the evening. Spring Valley Cornet Band and Halm's Orchestra from Peru furnished the music. Good refreshments were served and good order prevailed throughout. Dances were now held every Wednesday and Saturday nights. John Mitchell, of Spring Valley, Illinois, President of the United Mine Workers, was guest speaker at a gathering held at this park. Later, Twin City Park was abandoned and the Mark societies built Association Park north of the St. Paul Coal mine and on the south side of Hennepin Street. During World War I, a dance was given here and all proceeds went to the Red Cross. At various times, benefit dances were given, the proceeds used to help some unfortunate member of their societies that was destitute due to a lingering illness or an injury in the

mind. Dances and festivities continued at this Park until the St. Paul shaft was closed down. Shortly after Association Park, too, was torn down.

In the spring of 1906, a discussion of school and where to locate it was begun. A ballot was taken to select a site in Elliott's plot southwest of Gariglietti's store, a couple of blocks and about the same distance southeast of Elliott's residence. It was decided to locate the school district 6 in Block 5 of the coal company's subdivision in the Southeast Quarter of the Northeast Quarter in Section 8, Township 32 North, Range 1 West of the Third Principal Meridian. John Elliott, President of the school board, donated this site which was valued at \$1,000.00. Four thousand dollars was voted for the school building which was planned according to the specifications of Architect Richardson of Ottawa, Illinois.

The children were then attending the Moore school, a one room school, situated west of John Moore's farm residence. It was taught by Thos. M. Kennedy. Mr. Kennedy was called home by a death in the family, and did not return to his teaching position. Mr. Gibbons was hired to finish the term. He was rehired for the coming year. At this time the first and second grades attended school in a hall above a grocery store in the Village of Mark and were taught by Miss Rosa Thurston (the late Mrs. H. B. Anderson) and Miss Fannie Wescott of Granville, who walked daily to and from school.

Over cinder walks and through dusty or muddy roads the children trudged along on their way to school in high buttoned, or laced shoes, carrying their scanty lunches in tobacco buckets for there were no busses nor hot lunches in those days. Some children had to walk from one to two miles to school. Many a lasting friendship was formed on these walks.

With the increase in population, the question arose as to where the children of the company houses and the east end of Mark should attend school for there was not enough room in the Mark classrooms for all of these children.

The St. Paul Coal Company donated three lots on Hopkins Avenue in Granville, just west of the Ware farm home, as a site for a church for the west side miner's families. A church formerly used by the Presbyterians was donated and moved by A.W. Hopkins from the Granville Park to this location. It faced south and was four blocks west of the bank. A full sized basement was built out of fine Joliet stone. The basement ceiling was eight feet high, the floor was concrete and the walls plastered, making a fine

basement for Sunday school classes or socials. A furnace was installed in the north end, which was partitioned off by a brick wall. A well was dug and a pump installed.

In September 1906, the Mark School board rented the basement of the West Side Church for a school for the children of the company houses and the East end of Mark. Miss Mary Clark of Henry was hired to teach this classroom, consisting of the four lower grades. In October 1906, the West Side Church was dedicated as a day school and Sunday school.

Meanwhile, a steam shovel was removing thousands of yards of dirt in making tracks to the St. Paul mine, and in grading for an overhead bridge on the east village line, now Division Street. A cut wide enough for five or six tracks was made and a gravity grade for the washer. The overhead bridge does not exist at present for it has been torn down, the tracks underneath have been removed and Division Street continues at ground level.

The mine was progressing nicely. During September 1906, the St. Paul Shaft hoisted 976 tons of number one Granville coal. In one year it had hoisted approximately 254,672 tons of coal.

Some of the earliest settlers of Mark when the village was incorporated were such families as the Fred Helmer, John Elliott, Alex Moore, Martin Panier, Peter Giacherio, John Miglio, Frank Moran, John Ariano, Joseph Gariglietti, Thomas Sacco, Peter Gaddo, Dominic Barto, Sebastian Faletti, Thomas Osmondson, Jack Gustat, Dominic Demestri and others. Most of these settlers came from Spring Valley and the surrounding towns.

Societies were formed in Mark by these early settlers, such as the Foresta (Foresters of America), Bandiera di Italia (Flag of Italy) and the Brasigliara. Every summer each of these societies would hold a celebration that would last two or three days, which was enjoyment and days of entertainment for the entire village. The festivities began with a parade made up of the American and Italian flag bearers followed by the Mark bank and the society members. The parade terminated at the park. This was the opening of the dance and festivities which would entertain not only the people of Mark but of all the surrounding towns.

Most of the children and their parents from the company houses attended church services and Sunday school at the West Side Church. There were no churches in Mark and there still are no churches. Most of the people attended and are now attending the Sacred Heart Catholic Church and the Congregational Church, now the United Church of Christ, in Granville.

Some of the teachers that gave freely of their time and help to the families that attended the West Side Church were Mr. and Mrs. George Hunt, Mr. and Mrs. Herman B. Anderson, Mrs. Fred Beers, Mrs. W.E. Hawthorne, Mrs. Charlotte Fox, Miss Bertha Fox, Miss Ida Miller, Mr. Hugo Lindig and Mr. John Dysart. Besides teaching Sunday School, the teachers would prepare the children for a Christmas program. What delightful memories were imprinted on these children through the contacts of these wonderful people!

On Christmas Eve, the night of the program, families were seen emerging from practically every home in Hayslip Heights, carrying lanterns, talking and laughing as they walked over the snow laden road toward the beautiful lighted church on the hill, the West Side Church. A beautifully tinsel and glittering tree, which practically reached the ceiling was laden and underlaid with Christmas toys and candy for each boy and girl. Of course, there was always a Santa Claus which added to the reality of Christmas.

What a sight, when the candles on the tree were lit as the time for the program drew near! Two men would stand by the tree watching the candles, so they would not ignite the tree.

As the program came to an end, how anxiously, with wide eyes and sharp ears, each child would wait for his or her name to be called by Santa. How quickly they would march up the aisle to get their present and come back to sit near their mothers, whose eyes glistened with pleasure at the happiness of their children. For many of these children there were no gifts and sometimes no Christmas at home due to the father's low salary which was necessary to pay for food, clothing and shelter. What happiness was brought to many a family!

How bright the stars twinkled, and how the snow glistened from the light of the lanterns as these children with their parents walked happily home with their gifts and candy.

During the summer vacation, a sewing school was organized for the miner's children. The children were taught to sew and embroider by Mrs. W.E. Hawthorne, Mrs. Holsburg and Miss Ida Hurin. Socials were held for the grownups and their families. Hayrack picnics were held for these children during the summer. All would meet at the church with their teachers. With a horse drawn hayrack filled with children they would travel several miles to such places as Bailey Falls, Union Grove, Benedict's Grove and Purviances near Hennepin. After playing games and winning prizes, a lunch of sandwiches, cake and ice cream was served. Late afternoon, the hayracks laden with tired, happy children made their homeward journey.

By 1907, Mark continued to grow and the population soared to 738. The business section of Mark now consisted of saloons, general stores, a barber shop and shoe repair shop.

Mark was now threatened with the loss of her post office. No one could be found to carry the mail from Granville and postmaster Jack Gustat was ready to box up the whole outfit and ship it back to Washington. This experiment did not prove successful.

The Slack Washer building had been completed and it was ready to start work in March 1907.



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In July, 1907, C.N. Tyler was given a contract to build a schoolhouse in Mark on the plot donated by J.E. Elliott. It was to be a two story wooden structure with four classrooms, a hall and lavatory on each floor, and a basement. By October the building was progressing nicely. Two classrooms were completed.

Miss Mary Clark of Henry was here arranging for her school work. She again taught in the basement of the West Side Church until the Mark building was ready.

Mrs. Elizabeth Geng, a midwife, worked with Doctors Taylor and Joynson of Granville in delivering the babies which were all born at home. She traveled on foot with her small medical satchel from home to home assisting and taking care of the mothers and babies. Regardless of rain or shine, hot or cold, day or night, carrying a lantern and an umbrella she was seen making her rounds. She delivered many of the babies in this locality alone.

Ernst Hunger, a bachelor, section boss of the St. Paul Coal Company's railroad, lived in one of the company houses at Hayslip Heights. His hobby was gardening, not only did he raise vegetables, which he sold very reasonably to the neighboring people, but raised many varieties of flowers, among them pansies. He would give pansies to the children that came to buy vegetables. For five cents, one received a large miner's bucket of green snap beans. He was the only one who owned a phonograph in the company houses. The large horn was a marvel to all the children. On Sunday evenings, he would place the phonograph on his front porch, which was just below a steep hill and all the neighboring children would gather on this hill to enjoy music.

What once was known as Hayslip Heights, company houses, is now Nanni's Greenhouse and farm lands. Angel Nanni's home and the Nanni brothers' homes are three of the original company houses.

The first people to settle in the company houses were the Italians, Scotch and Germans. They were all mines with good sized families and children of all ages. Stores and saloons were opening up in Mark, but most of these

people did their shopping in Granville, which was a great help to Granville merchants.

During the month of October 1907, the St. Paul Coal Company miners mined 30,000 tons of coal with a payroll of \$15,500.00. As the new year came in, the miners were beginning to think and talk higher wages. John Mitchell, President of the United Mine Workers from 1889 to 1908, "A fair minded, well-liked labor leader, who was a pioneer resident of Spring Valley, Illinois, and who gained national recognition in settling the Pennsylvania anthracite miner's strike in 1902 with the cooperation of Theodore Roosevelt", wanted the operators to agree to a joint scale or mining would be suspended April 1st, which was generally the date miners went out on a strike if negotiations did not favor them. Later, when a vote was taken eight or ten favored striking and three hundred wanted to go back to work.