



## The Mules of Coverdale

By James Hultz

The two pictures above show different power sources used to mine coal. The picture on the right shows goats pulling mine cars from a portal near Beckley, West Virginia, where the mine roof or ceiling was so low mules could not be used. The picture on the left is a picture of a mule used at the Bureau of Mines. This bit of history will be about the mules that were used at the Coverdale #8 Mine, that was located where the Bethel Industrial Park is now.

I had an enjoyable evening with Mike and Jim Gregg, who gave me the following account of the mules of Coverdale. Mine #8 was opened in 1919 and closed in May, 1949, having a peak employment of 1000 to 1200 men and 18 to 20 mules owned by the Pittsburgh Terminal Coal Corporation.

To get to the root of a story you go to the horse's mouth; in this case we went to the mule skinner. Mike was in charge of the mules for a number of years, but before him, was Jim and Mike's father, Larry. Larry worked for the mining company for a grand total of \$3.00 a day and was paid for seven days a week, except when holidays or mine shutdowns occurred. The \$21.00 a week was not take-home, for there was a deduction of \$1.50 a month for the company doctor's services, including midwife and pills. Bathhouse fees of \$.50 were deducted whether you used the facilities or not.

The coal company originally bought two farms, one of those being the Gerhold farm. The Gregg Family moved into the farmhouse and Larry's title was Stable Boss. The Mules were fed and rested in the stable when they were not in the mine working. The mules, along with the miners, knew whether there would be work the next

day because at 5:00 p.m. the whistle would blow. If the whistle did not blow, no work tomorrow. At 5:00 a.m. the whistle blew to awaken the coal miner in case he had had one too many glasses of home brew the night before. The mules were fed and harnessed and the mule driver took his mule to the mine shaft some distance away.

The Coverdale Tipple was a shaft mine 375 feet deep. The mules were taught to ride a crude open elevator to the bottom and then, from the mine face where coal was being dug, pull coal cars to the main haulage way. There, electric motors would take the coal cars to the shaft and elevators would take them to the surface. The mules wore leather pads on their heads so if they touched electric wires on the roof of the mine they would not be electrocuted. The mules learned to hold their ears back after they were shocked a couple of times.

One of the stories that the Gregg brothers told, was about the time when a local Sunday School asked Mr. Gregg to give the children a hayride. The day was warm and the road rough and the wagon was

full of fun and laughter. Suddenly, *crash, bang*, the driver, mules, and children watched as a wheel rolled past them and went down the hill. Some of the bigger children chased the wheel and brought it back and reattached it. This happened on South Park Road at what is now "Ann's Restaurant"

A male mule "Billy Mule" that worked in the mine for 16 years and must have been 20 years old, at least, was light of foot and was raced at the South Park Fair for seven years in a row and won every race he entered.

Sometimes the coal miners were so tired that when they got their mules to the top of the shaft they just turned them loose and knew the mules would find their way to the barn, while the miners tried to find their way to the local watering hole. Imagine 18 mules going through the "Patch" mining houses unattended, some in gardens and some in lawns, women chasing mules with brooms, trying to keep them away from the clothes that were hung out to dry. Who needed a circus when you had mules running through the Patch? ▼



DAVID C. McNARY  
CASTLE SHANNON, PA.  
Registered Shropshire Sheep

*Allegheny County Fair  
not sure what year but  
if I look B, it was 1949*



AMONG THE FAIR LIVESTOCK was this yearling ewe entered by Dr. D. C. McNary of Castle Shannon. Shown with the ewe are Pat Gill, left, and Dr. McNary's daughter, Carol, right.

*Coverdale Mine # 8  
1919 ~ May 1949*

*Later developed by  
Dave aka Pittsburgh  
Western Land Corp.*