

# Philadelphia Writer Looks At Anthracite Area And Makes Some Interesting Observations

By JOHN C. CALPIN

It is often good to read what others think of us, whether it stimulates our pride or stirs us to do something about ourselves and get down to business. Such is the article written some weeks ago by John C. Calpin for the Philadelphia Bulletin.

Here Mr. Calpin looks at the area we call home and comes up with some interesting revela-

tions. One of his recent articles is reprinted here with the kind permission of the Bulletin—Editor

Every Friday night, the roads leading to Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Hazleton, Pottsville and their suburbs in the anthracite region resemble a busy anthill.

Cars are coming, bumper to bumper, over Routes 611, 6122 and the

Northeast Extension of the Turnpike, back from a weekly migration. Joe and Mike and Steve, husbands, fathers and sons, are returning home for the weekend, many of them from hundreds of miles away.

Then, on Sunday night, late, or early Monday morning, the migration goes the other way—to Philadelphia, Bridgeport, Conn., Wilmington, Del., or Binghamton, to name only a few of the places where former miners seek work.

For five days, they have to leave their Marys, Julies and Kates behind, tending the children, and often working in garment factories, as well.

But the money these "migrants" make in their distant jobs helps keep the anthracite region, one of the five worst depressed areas in Pennsylvania and the country, afloat.

Also, these migrants, along with their brothers or neighbors who make shorter trips daily—50 to 100 miles round-trip—to get to their jobs, are among the staunchest boosters of plans to bring new industries to the coal region.

Too long a reliance on anthracite once the prime industry in five Pennsylvania counties, has turned their area into one with surplus labor.

### Many Young Have Left

Many of the best of the region's men and women in the 25-to-45 age bracket have left the region, some never to return. Others like Joe and Mike and Steve return for short weekends. They hate the rooming houses in which they live away, and the double costs. But they endure it.

The glut of anthracite has changed the way of life for upwards of a million people in the coal regions.

The change has helped to keep the region a going concern, despite its problems.

These people are diverse, but united in a common loyalty to their counties and area, which include Lackawanna, Luzerne, Carbon, Schuylkill and Northumberland counties in the heart of the district.

The exodus began in earnest in the mid-30's. Particularly, young people left. Girls with high school educations turned to the nursing and teaching professions, and left the area, never to return.

Half the nurses today in Philadelphia seem to speak with that "coal region" inflection, an up-and-down cadence and the elision of certain consonants.

And the boys in Pottsville were pretty upset last June when Ray Baeyer, head of the Pennsylvania Employment Service office, got jobs in the Library of Congress for 85 girls in the graduating classes of the area high schools.

Most of the people past 30 years of age have felt they had to stay, because of homes, families, advancing years, or even work habits which kept them from industrial skilled jobs in the cities.

Nearly every family has an automobile. They are needed to take the 5,000 or more Jack Brennans and Bill Joneses and Frankie Sicilianos 40 or 50 or 60 miles to work every day, in Allentown, Bethlehem, Reading, Pottstown, Harrisburg or any place that hires the mechanical talents so many of these people have.

During World War II, when the region supplied so many boys to the shipyards, the tank and automobile and aircraft factories. Many broke the pattern of daily or weekly commuting, marrying city girls and establishing new lives and families.

### Still 'Coal Crackers'

No matter how long they stay away, though, they are united in a common loyalty to their counties and their region. It is an honor to them, at home or away from it, to be known as "coal crackers". But they have a wry joke they tell to each other. They say the "coal region is a good place to be from" with the emphasis on the "from".

The wry joke conceals a real love for the region, and a sense of solidarity which has helped to carry the anthracite country through a long stretch of bad years. This feeling grows out of the history of the region.

The natives are an amalgam of half the countries of middle Europe, and of the English, Irish and Welsh who came before them.

English and Germans were the first settlers, and they are now the merchants and farmers for the area. Welshmen came over to drive the shafts for the new mines in the mid-1800's.

Irish immigrants came next, leaving their famine-ridden country in

the middle of the last century, gravitating to the mines. Next came the Poles, the Lithuanians, the Hungarians and the Italians in successive waves of immigration. Jewish merchants went to the area and were assimilated into the whole. It was never a haven for Negroes and only a handful are there.

At first the nationality groups kept to themselves, while they learned the customs of the new country they had chosen. Because they were all poor, they huddled together in the "patches," the clumps of houses which fringe every larger community.

Many had to live in the "company" stores and had little at week's end to put by with the customary thrift they had brought from their peasant forebears.

### Communities United

Schools, religions and the common ground of work in the mines threw them together.

The fact that the great percentage of the young immigrants were unmarried and that there were at least 11 men for every nine or ten young women promoted romance. Inter-marriage between national groups followed.

Some strains stayed to themselves, but many other natives have Irish-Welsh, Irish-Polish, German-Polish, Polish-Lithuanian, Italian-Irish combinations of parents. Social caste or strata is almost unknown.

Many had big families. With many mouths to feed, two things occurred. The boys went to work early, and the girls and women, when freed of housework, were also available for jobs.

It wasn't new. The people from Europe brought with them the idea that there was nothing wrong about both fathers and mothers working if it was necessary. They had done it in the "old country."

With this background, it was normal, when hard times arrived, for the wife to become the breadwinner, if need be. For the textile and silk throwing industries, looking for cheap, abundant female labor, had put small mills into almost every community.

It was the accepted thing for boys, nine and ten years of age, to be "picking slate" by hand in the breakers which crushed and graded the coal. At 11, a boy could be tending the mule teams which hauled the coal cars deep in the mines.

Some boys got into the mines at that age and stayed there until "miners' asthma" or rheumatism or injury claimed them when they were 50 or 60.

They went to work early in the morning with their lunch pail and tea bottles clanking on shoulders, with headgear marked with their badge of office, the miners' cap. Once they were lighted with candles, then by carbide gas and then by electricity.

Mid-afternoon, having mined their "six tons," they would trudge home, stopping off at favorite pubs for a couple of beers to ease the dust from their throats, before and during prohibition.

This was the life they knew when disaster struck their region.

### When Disaster Hit

First, there was underemployment. The work became seasonal, then sporadic. Fifty days of work a year was pretty good. Even the mine operators didn't know when they would get orders which kept the mines open.

Colliery whistles would sound in some localities, at a fixed time, to summon the miners to work the next day. "Natalie works tomorrow" or "Sayre is working" the word would pass. The newspapers and radio do the Paul Revere for the whole counties or areas, in these times.

Soon the women had to work harder, in the small factories which themselves were not too stable, and working on financial shoestrings.

Synthetics took the place of silk, and textiles sought even cheaper labor in the South. Another industry, tobacco and cigars, had a brief run, died out and returned recently, to be a mainstay in some places.

As late as 1920, there were 150,000 miners turning out 89,000,000 tons of anthracite, and supplying many railroad men with work, as well.

Last week, there were fewer than 10,000 men in the mines and strip-pings.

In Schuylkill County, unemployment is a terrible 13.5 per cent of the working force. Scranton and Lackawanna County have more than 12 per cent unemployed, while Wilkes-Barre-Hazleton-Luzerne County have only 8.6 per cent of its available people at work.

Only ten per cent of the jobless are women who want to work, which shows the extent to which unemployment has bitten into the family lives.

By nature, these people dislike federal doles, but need compels them to take the surplus foods which the government is distributing in distressed areas.

Most of them are good trenchermen, who used to eat heavily of beef in every form, sausage and other hearty foods. Many in the small communities have had their own cows, which roamed the mountaintides until mine cave-ins, strip-pings and motor cars made it too dangerous.

Now older men can't get work in the mines, and younger men run the big shovels which do the strip mining. But older women seem to be preferred in the garment factories and cigar plants, as seamstresses, machine operators and supervisors.

### Garment Plants Help

Actually, the garment industry is the crutch to the economy. Some officials estimate that the five counties, collectively, make up the second largest garment center in the United States.

Officials have tried, without too much success, to convince the men that garment making and cutting is not a woman's job alone. Some have taken jobs, but many won't. They stay home and keep the house. It is literally true, as well as figuratively, that the men "wear the aprons" for some parts of the year. Even if other industries come in,

some of the idle men could not be trained to handle it.

Where other workers have Social Security, and the railroad men have their national pension, to which they pay, the miners had the pension fund of the United Mine Workers. But hard times have forced the UMW to cut the anthracite pension in half, from \$100 to \$50, as declining production cut the income from the 70 cents premium paid on each ton mined in the big collieries. The independents and bootleggers don't pay it.

Relief payments and unemployment compensation keep many families going. Last year, \$11,575,000 in unemployment compensation went to the region. A grand total of \$90,088,000 has been paid out since 1950, while an average of 12.5 per cent of the workers have been unemployed over those years.

An average of 10,000 people in Lackawanna County alone are now currently on relief, or 4.2 per cent of the populace. They have received \$44,054,448 since 1950.

But the money earned by those who are working, and those who bring it home weekends, or those who send it home to Pop and Mom, and maybe even a little from the relief check, is being cheerfully added to big sums, to get new industry for the region.

# Tommy Andrew Shows Rabbits

## Takes Many Prizes At Maryland Show

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Andrew, Shavertown, exhibited their rabbits at the Baltimore County Rabbit and Cavy Breeders Spring Show, Sunday, in Hebbville, Maryland.

Mr. Andrew is the Art teacher in Plymouth Public Schools and conducts the T-Bar-A Rabbitry as a hobby. He is a licensed judge and a director in the American Rabbit Breeders Association with headquarters in Pittsburgh.

At the recent show he garnered two third place ribbons, one fourth and two fifths with nine of his pedigree American Standard Chinchilla Rabbits. He exhibits at all the major shows along the eastern seaboard and is well known throughout the East as an authority on rabbits. This coming Thursday he will lecture and present a display of the many novelties they make at T-Bar-A to the Lions Club of Wilkes-Barre, at Carousal Restaurant.

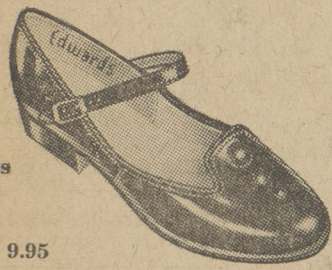
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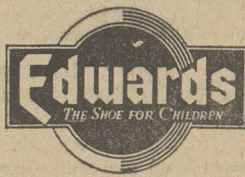


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