

## TALK AMONG FRIENDS

January - February - March 2016



### Return to the Appalachian Coalfields with us for the NWS 2016 Convention!

The N&W Historical Society's 2016 Convention "Return to the Appalachian Coalfields" will be held from May 19th through the 22nd with the convention headquarters being at the Hilton Garden Inn in Pikeville, KY. This year's convention chairman will be Jeff Hensley. Jeff, originally from Williamson, WV is a 3rd generation N&W conductor on the Pocahontas Division who spent his last years working as Norfolk Southern's General Yardmaster at Weller Yard near Grundy, VA.



Ed Painter photographed NS 8922 leading No. U69 across the Levisa Fork with coal loads from CONSOL Energy's Buchanan 1 operation on April 19, 1911. Immediately after crossing the river the train will enter the east end of Weller Yard.

**Area Railfanning and Coal Operations** - From a Norfolk Southern (former N&W) railfan prospective Pikeville is located 35 minutes from Williamson, WV and 45 minutes the center of the Buchanan Branch's operations at Weller Yard near Grundy, VA. Additionally it's 45 minutes to Norton, VA and 1½ hour from Kenova, WV.

The Buchanan Branch currently originates the highest volume of coal (including coke) traffic of any segment of the Pocahontas Division. Six local jobs operate each day out of Weller Yard while multiple loaded and empty trains operate to and from Williamson and Bluefield daily. All loaded trains leave westbound from Weller Yard and are pushed by 3-unit pusher sets up grade through Raitt Tunnel to Hurley, VA. Empty trains come to Weller both by way of Devon, WV on the Pocahontas Division mainline (eastbound) and from Richlands, VA on the Clinch Valley over the Wyatt Cutoff (westbound). Loaded trains never operate over the Wyatt Cutoff eastbound.

Located on the Buchanan Branch, CONSOL Energy's Buchanan 1 Mine at Oakwood, VA is the single largest active coal mining operation on the Pocahontas Division. In addition to the Buchanan 1 operation other active load-outs on the Buchanan Branch include Booth Energy's Kyber, APEX Energy's Big Creek, that are both located in Pike County, KY and Wellmore's Buc 2, and Buc 3 located at Strict, VA. A fifth load-out operated by Booth Energy, Race Fork is located just west of Hurley, VA. SunCoke's large coke production

### Features

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SunCoke's 134 coke ovens at Vansant, VA are impressive at night with their orange and red flames, steam, and smoke belching from the stacks. They are just as impressive during the day when the scope of the true scope of the facility can be seen. Ed Painter 2014 photographs



At the end of the Levisa Branch, NS 8137 No. U72 begins flood loading operations at Big Creek load-out in Curb, KY on March 23, 2014. With fading light on the same day, Ed Painter photographed NS 9059 No. U73 passing Buc 1 and Buc 2 at Stric, VA near the beginning of Levisa Branch.



What the Heartland Corridor is all about! NS 8868 No. 233, heading from Norfolk to Chicago daily, passes N&W CPL's at DeLorme, WV on January 25, 2015. On the same day, NS 8042 No. U06 was pulling empty hoppers westbound, heading back to the mines, when it was photographed passing the N&W passenger station in Williamson, WV. Both photographs by Ed Painter.

facility is located at Vansant, VA that also incorporates a coal load-out facility.

Williamson, though a far cry from the past, still has a large yard and mechanical operations. The Pocahontas Division mainline through Williamson is part of the Heartland Corridor. On this mainline during peak volume days, NS operates up to six intermodals, seven merchandise/time-freights, two or more ethanol trains, two or more grain trains, two autorack trains, and while usually significant, a diminishing number of coal and hopper trains.

As for coal operations on the mainline east of Williamson is the Delorme Branch that crosses the Tug River into Kentucky. Active on this branch are Solomon Mining's Jamboree and Sunny Ridge load-outs. To the west of Williamson the Noland Branch also crosses over into Kentucky to serve Alpha Natural's Sydney prep plant and load-out. Further west at Naugatuck, WV the Lenore Branch staying in West Virginia serves CONSOL Energy's Miller Creek Mine, Arch Coal's Ragland prep plant and load-out, and Alpha Natural's Ruby load-out. West of Naugatuck, at Kermit, WV, the Wolf Creek Branch again crosses the river into Kentucky to serve Czar Coal's Pevler operation.

As for CSX, Pikeville is located on C&O's former Big Sandy Sub-division. Only a few months ago the line was part of a major CSX north-south route that included the former Clinchfield, but today due to CSX management cutting back operations in areas of diminishing coal traffic, it only handles a local coal, hopper, and freight business. Active coal operations are located both near Pikeville in Kentucky and further south of Elkhorn City, KY in Virginia. At Shelbiana, KY, just south of Pikeville, is the only significant CSX yard operation in the area.

**Other attractions/opportunities** - Only 20 minutes from Williamson is Matewan, WV, famous for its Hatfield-McCoy feud history. In fact, Mingo County, WV and Pike County, KY are the battlegrounds of the feud with lots of related history. South of Pikeville and west of Grundy is The Breaks Interstate Park. Park headquarters is in Virginia, but the park is in both Virginia and Kentucky. The park has beautiful vistas, camping, and hiking. Additionally, visitors will be presently surprised with Pikeville. It is a very nice and well-maintained college town. This area abounds with multiple good places to dine and relax.

**Looking ahead** - All in all, we hope to make this a very enjoyable and educational convention. In addition to clinics and presentations there will be tours of SunCoke's facility at Vansant, and we are working to have a similar tour at a coal operation. Plenty of railfanning action can be enjoyed throughout the convention. Matewan and the related Hatfield-McCoy feud will provide an historical opportunity for those interested and the Appalachian mountains are always beautiful.

*Ed Painter*



This 2012 photograph shows just part of CONSOL Energy's Buchanan No. 1 mining operation at Oakwood/Page, VA. Constructed in the early 1980s, the mine as a capacity of about 400,000 tons of coal per month. Read about this mine and the other mines on the Buchanan/Levisa/Dismal Creek Branches in the short history of mining on the branches included with this eTAF. Ed Painter photograph

## Call for Nominations For Board of Directors

Each year, the terms of three of the nine Directors of the Society expire and the seats come up for election to a three-year term of office. All members of the Society are eligible to run for a seat on the Board of Directors and the Society encourages all members who are interested in running and serving the Society. To this end, Ron Davis, the NWHS president, is seeking nominations of members to be candidates in the up-coming elections. Nominations can be made through the end of February 2015. All nominations should be sent to Ron at [davis@nwhs.org](mailto:davis@nwhs.org). The election will be held in the spring of 2015 with the new directors announced at the general membership meeting at the 2015 Convention.

### Description of the Duties of a Director

Collectively, the Board of Directors assumes fiduciary, legal and philosophical responsibility for all N&W Historical Society activities. The Board of Directors is responsible for establishing society policy, approving the annual budget and determining the goals of the Society in accordance with its mission statement.

A Director should have a strong interest in the society's purpose and goals and in serving the membership. In addition, a members experience in or knowledge of administration, finance, program development, marketing, media communications, railroad and regional history, railroad modeling are useful strengths that can be directly applied to the administration of the Society and its projects and plans.

### Book Review

#### *Norfolk & Western in Ohio ~ Scioto Division 1890-1930*

Mining was very important to the Norfolk & Western Railway, providing coal and ores that were transported east to Norfolk, north and south to a variety of points, and west into Ohio for interchange with many other railroads.

Mining is also very important to Alex Schust, who has mined the N&W Historical Archives for large amounts of data about the Norfolk & Western. His latest book, "Norfolk & Western in Ohio -- Scioto Division 1890-1930," covers an area that may not be familiar to many who don't know much about the railroad that extended beyond the Pocahontas Division and Williamson, W.Va.

While the end points of the railroad, Columbus and Cincinnati, may be familiar as the destinations of The Pocahontas and the Powhatan Arrow, and Portsmouth is known as a major yard, there are many locations along the lines to those points that were served with the same precision as any town in Virginia or West Virginia. This book provides details of all those locations.

The book begins with information about how the Norfolk & Western was able to greatly expand its goal of westward expansion to provide another outlet for West Virginia coal by reaching interchange points on the Ohio River. Instead of

stopping at the river, the N&W was able to reach deep into Ohio, to Columbus, with the timely purchase of an already-built railroad. In 1890, even before construction of the Ohio Extension through West Virginia had been started, the N&W purchased the Scioto Valley and New England Railroad, running between Columbus and Portsmouth, Ohio. The early history of this line is covered, followed by its integration into the N&W.

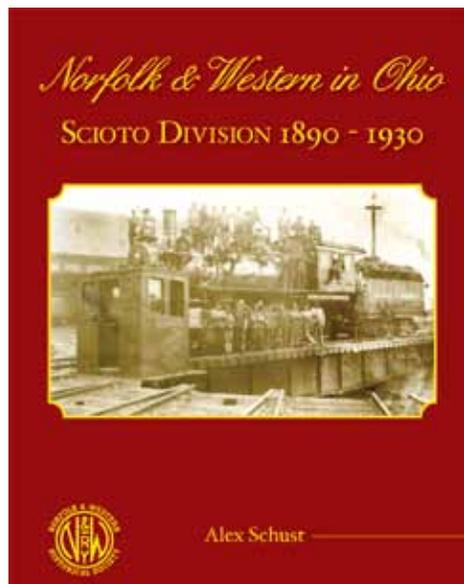
Another expansion occurred when the N&W gained entry to Cincinnati through purchase of another existing railroad, the Cincinnati, Portsmouth, and Virginia Railroad Company. The book relates the early history of that and its predecessor railroads, and the addition of the lines into the Scioto Division of the N&W.

"Norfolk & Western in Ohio" then goes into the details of the area that make this a field reference for rail historians and local historians alike. Like the other branch line books in this series, this book isn't one to read then put on a shelf. It should be an active reference manual for what was where along these rail lines. The details of stations and other facilities, with photos, maps, track charts, and information the ICC Valuation Reports, should enable anyone interested to say "this is where the station stood" and to understand the local history of the many small towns along these lines.

The book closes with detailed histories of two important locations on the line -- Portsmouth and Columbus (there is information about Cincinnati, but it was the lesser of the three points in the division). Portsmouth grew from the terminal of the Scioto Valley and New England Railroad to the operational center for the Scioto Division, as the meeting point of the Kenova, Columbus, and Cincinnati districts. The expansion of the yard and supporting facilities and the shops are detailed, up through the 1950s. The Joyce Avenue Yard in Columbus was the end of the line, where coal and other freight was set up for interchange with the other railroads in the city. Its growth over the years is also covered up through the 1930s, which was pretty much the end of changes until the coming of diesel engines.

"Norfolk & Western in Ohio" doesn't list the operation of freight and passenger trains on this division, or relate colorful stories about people and events associated with the lines. It just provides a wealth of data that should be useful to historians (N&W and otherwise), to those who want to learn a little more about this important part of the Norfolk & Western Railway, and to modelers who are looking for maps, photos, and drawings to help them add authenticity to their models and layouts.

*Bruce Harper*



## Archives Report for September - October - November Work Sessions

We had 14 attendees at the work session in September, 12 in October, and 17 in November. We had a cadre of 13 members who made two or more of the work session at Salem Avenue. This cadre included: Jim Blackstock, Harry Bundy, Ron Davis, Landon Gregory, Gordon Hamilton, Larry Hill, Chris and Harold Hunley, Roger Link, Skip Salmon, Charlie Schlotthober, Joe Shaw, Dave Stephenson.

Six of our members made at least one of the three archive work sessions. These members were Bob Cohen, John Garner, Eddie Mooneyham, Ben Shank, John Swann, and Dean Taylor.

All NWS members are welcome to attend the Archives work sessions, which are held on the second weekend of each month. Session hours are 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and 12:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. Sunday

### Specific Research Requests

Archive volunteers handled 24 specific research requests over the August, September, October time period. We have handled 106 specific requests over the past 12 months. Ron Davis, Roger Link, Alex Schust, Joe Shaw and Dave Stephenson worked on research requests.

### Database Archives Activities

Some of the data base work from the three work sessions included:

Joe Shaw worked on adding various maps, N&W and Wabash box car details, Big Sandy line track plans and profiles, dispatching track charts, old N&W Railroad track plans from 1887 to 1892, freight car vendor drawings for box cars and covered hoppers (ex-NKP and N&W), post-merger stenciling for VGN DE-S diesels (H16-44), ALCo and EMD locomotive details, NKP equipment indexes and diagrams, painting and stenciling diagrams, lining arrangement for N&W box cars, VGN H16-44 wiring diagrams, details for class B22 box cars, and details for C10 and C10A cabooses.

- Roger Link worked on drawings from Library of Virginia collection, Class J photos from the Tom Dressler collection, details for passenger cars, scanned and entered parts of Accession 2014.006 from Jim Brewer, as well as slides, postcards, and photos, and Gregory Smith photos from the Jim Brewer collection.
- Ron Davis worked on entering track plans from the HS-E series drawings, bridge drawings, HS-CC series drawings for Shenandoah Valley RR (1882), and changes to Roanoke passenger station (1917).
- Jim Blackstock entered data on details for GP7, GP9, RS11, RS36 and RSD12's, bridge drawings over N&W and C&O tracks near Columbus, Pier N record of concrete piles, and HS-D series drawings from the Library of Virginia collection including structures and details for the Roanoke area.
- Skip Salmon entered data on the Alco maintenance manual for N&W T6's 10-49, electrical arrangements for VGN H254-66's, freight car resistance charts, and Friends of the Virginian calendars, 2012 through 2016.
- Alex Schust, working from home, entered data from Field Notebooks in the BB (Bankers Box) series including the 1916 Valuation Surveys for parts of the 12-pole line, Clinch Valley and Big Sandy Districts, and Pocahontas Division.
- John Swann entered data from Hol-01020 (booklets, drawings). He continued cataloging the library in the general railroad group through Hi Tech Trains (locator GEN.HIT.01). John worked at the Archives from 9/22 through 9/24 rather than during a scheduled work session.

### General Archives Activities

Charlie Schlotthober and Larry Hill scanned and printed drawings for sales orders.

Landon Gregory and Harry Bundy continued to press and trim drawings, although volume was less this month. Aside from right-of-way maps of the Levisa Branch, most drawings prepared for input were related to the coal and merchandise piers at Lambert's Point, e.g soundings. In addition some drawings that had to be taped because they were torn. There were 20-some size "D" topographical maps of Bluefield, WV dated 1921 that were readied for computer entry. Landon and Harry also processed multiple drawings assigned to one project. Drawings covering Scioto Division projects dominated: (1) 1931 drawings from Vera (Portsmouth, OH) north showing the proposed alignment of U.S. 23 paralleling the N&W; (2) multiple drawings covering effects on N&W's right-of-way Kenova to Matewan if the water levels of the Big Sandy and Tug Fork had been increased to accommodate barge traffic; and (3) the 1950's curve reduction near Hanging Rock resulting in the re-routing of U.S. 52. The AFE for this project had been approved by H. C. Wyatt. The eastward main track was placed next to the Ohio River, which has taken a tack toward the river. In wet weather, eastbounds usually got a slow order and the telephone poles list toward Ashland, KY. On the railroad, it's known as "Wyatt's monument".

Dave Stephenson worked on printing and organizing research requests, completed accessioning of Louis Newton's donation.

Roger Link checked on some digital order scanning. He scanned approximately 150 B size NW mechanical drawings in batch mode for testing.

Harold and Chris Hunley refiled drawings that had been pulled for scanning

Ron Davis hosted visitors, assisted Joe Shaw and discussed changes to the web site. He also scanned 60 CC-sized drawings from GOB East.

Dean Taylor came by to discuss organizing a model train show in Roanoke next spring. He is looking for someone to help him make phone calls.

Gordon Hamilton researched an article for The Arrow.

Ron Davis, John Garner and Dave Stephenson started a project to document the August Thieme N&W tape recordings at the archives. They reviewed the entire donation and John made a detailed inventory of the recordings. There are 15 reel-to-reel (RTR) tapes and nine copy cassettes. Most of what we believe to be the original RTR tapes were stored in steel movie cans, and are in excellent condition. The remaining tapes were stored in boxes and had some minor condition issues. The cassettes were in their original plastic boxes and appeared to also be in excellent condition. The content of the tapes was contained in a list developed by Mr. Thieme. Dave made a comparison between the recording sequences in the field tapes and the copies to check for consistency. Contacts are being made to find a source for digitizing the tapes.

## **Salem Avenue Archives Drawing of the Month**

The drawing of the month for September was HS-D01702 - alterations to the Stratford Hotel for annex to General Office Building (Roanoke). It was dated January 14, 1918. This was a four-story brick building to be purchased and remodeled for offices. Drawing shows the pedestrian connection between the two buildings above Centre Avenue. In 1931, the annex was replaced by GOB-North.

The drawing of the month for October was HS-E00545. It shows the road crossing at Elam, VA. This is a station 6 miles east of Pamplin along U.S. 460 on the now-abandoned Farmville main line. On March 13, 1951, a Prince Edward County school bus was struck by No. 8, 50 minutes late. There were 9 deaths and 11 injuries to the students. The bus driver survived and stated that he had never seen a train at that location at that time of day.

The drawing of the month for November was HS-D01805 - actually 30 sheets of statistics relative to the concrete piling at Pier N, Lamberts Point. For each piling, the length, depth driven, and 13 other characteristics are recorded. Pier N was supported by 5406 concrete piles, so there are 81,090 entries. HS-D01805 is available to N&WHS members for \$195.00 (plus shipping).

## **GOB East Archives Activities**

We had four attendees at the August GOB-East work session: Ron Davis, Joe Shaw, Rob Ervine, Gordon Hamilton. Rob worked on flattening, sizing and repairing drawings, Ron and Joe performed data entry, and Gordon continued his research.

We had five attendees at the September GOB East work session: Ron Davis, Rob Ervine, John Garner, Roger Link, Joe Shaw. The first order of business was cleaning up the mess left over when a ceiling tile collapsed onto the flat file cabinets and flattened drawings staged for data entry. A pipe from the floor above leaked onto the ceiling tile causing it to fall. Rob and John took charge of cleaning up the immediate mess and performed other general cleanup of the area. Also, they both worked on flattening, sizing and repairing drawings. Joe and Roger worked on data entry.

We had six attendees at the October GOB East work session: Ron Davis, Rob Ervine, Gordon Hamilton, Bruce Harper, Joe Shaw, Stephen Warren. Gordon continued his research for a future Arrow article. Bruce resumed his work digitizing the index to the correspondence files. Rob worked on flattening, sizing and repairing drawings. Ron performed data entry on E size drawings. Joe sorted, sized and performed data entry on large rolled drawings.

## **September – October – December Visitors**

Rex Teese and Peg McGuire visited the Archives in September to continue work on projects for VMT. Tammy Owen also visited the archives to research information in Bankers Box BB-00002.69 Special Surveys-Alignment notes through War, WV.

In October Rex Teese, who is working on the 611 documentary for VMT, stopped by the Archives to look at the 16mm film from the Thieme collection. It turned out there was no film. It was all audio tape sealed in metal cans. Our two other visitors in October were Burt Saint John from Old Dominion University who came by to check out the N&W advertising and public relations material for research he is doing and Trey Davis from the FireUp611 committee who came to tour the Archives.

Stephen Warren visited the Archives in October and November to continue his research on the Rohrer Mines in Roanoke.

We had a number of visitors in November as Deena Sasser from VMT brought drafts of display panels on the freight station. She is looking for a better map of the N&W system. Brian Putman, NS's Principal Design Engineer, was looking for more detailed clearance info on 611 for the new required high level passenger platform in Roanoke. Eddie Mooneyham found an uncatalogued NS 611 Clearance Diagram, HS-D00346/NS No. 16-D-117, from May 1983 with the needed curve "kick-out" info. Larry Hill scanned and copied the drawing for NS. Steve Smith and Fred Boettner came by to do research for a modeling project. Peg McGuire researched early N&W history for the documentary on the recent 611 restoration. Fran Ferguson from VMT also came by in November to interview several attendees as part of an article about the Archives for VMT's new 611 Magazine.

### NWHS Helps Put Tracks On Branch Lines ~ A ride on the Virginia Creeper Trail

Well, not really the tracks you may be thinking of, but on September 19, 2015 a group of members rode the Abingdon Branch or as it is known to everyone else, the Virginia Creeper Trail. As part of some new things we are doing at the NWHS to promote fun and the sharing of knowledge plus to build fellowship among the members, nine members met up in Damascus, VA and boarded a van for the top of White Top Mountain, then started our trip down the line. As we gathered ourselves together on the top, we looked though the station at White Top, the highest point served by a standard gauge railroad in the eastern US. The tour guide told us about the many wooden bridges we would cross, the location of the turntable, stories of the three-foot gauge logging railroad that had some of the line dual gauge and, some of the rules of the trail. After leaving White Top we rode down three miles to Green Cove station, the site of the famous Link photograph of Maude bowing to the steam engine, and the place where Mr. Link himself was married. Keeping in mind how steady the engineers' hands needed to be on the brake handle, we left Green Cove and rode down to Creek Junction, the place of a rather large bridge and water tank. In that seventeen mile ride a funny thing happened. On the ride down we started talking and sharing ideas, in essence, became friends as we laughed and joked with one another. As we got closer to the outfitter, we had a bit of a sad feeling that it was coming to an end. A couple of us who had worked to make the event happen, who had tried an idea to see if people wanted to do something a little outside the normal activity, would enjoy it. Well, it seems like they really liked it, and we talked about other trips to come. So if you were not able to make it this time, no need to worry, we have planned to do similar future rides next year, not to mention a few other activities planned for the enjoyment and promotion of fellowship. We would like to thank all of the people who came along on the ride.

*Dean Taylor*



# NORFOLK AND WESTERN MAGAZINE

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*SANTA'S NEW REINDEER*

DECEMBER, 1923

# NORFOLK AND WESTERN MAGAZINE

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SANTA STRAYS  
INTO  
ROANOKE SHOPS

DECEMBER 1927

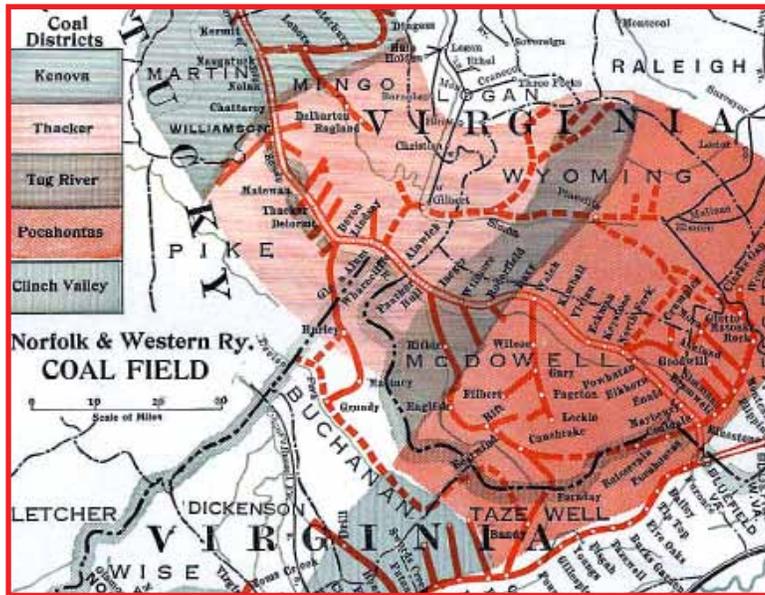


flooring, which was packaged and loaded into standard gauge boxcars for shipment. At the time of BS&C's purchase by N&W, it was expected that while the timber-related production would continue for a number of years, it would gradually lessening as the timber was cut down.

The N&W did not buy the BS&C for the timber traffic, it bought the BS&C to open the vast coal field which lay underneath Buchanan County. The Virginia Geological Survey published Bulletin No. XVIII "The Geology and Coal Resources of Buchanan County, Virginia," in 1918. Authored by Henry Hinds, one of the introductory paragraphs noted, "The survey upon which this report is based was undertaken primarily because of the great potential value of the coal resources of the region and the lack of detailed knowledge concerning them. The county lies on the southeast border of the central part of the great Appalachian coal field and contains about 12,000,000,000 tons of high-grade, coking, bituminous coal in beds of minable thickness. Although great quantities of coal are mined annually in McDowell County, West Virginia, and mining activity in neighboring parts of Virginia and Kentucky has recently received great impetus, practically no Buchanan County coal has ever been mined for other than local consumption. The explanation lies in the lack of transportation facilities, a lack which could be remedied without great difficulty."

The N&W was used to building mountain railroads and its prosperity was based on hauling coal. The potential of 12 billion tons of untapped coal reserves was a long-term opportunity for the coal hauling railroad.

Between 1923 and 1928 the N&W surveyed nearly all of Buchanan County to develop all practical railroad lines. These



N&W Coal District Map dated December 31, 1927

lines were staked and a considerable amount of right of way was purchased during that time. When the N&W's 1927 Coal District Map was published it showed a proposed route through Buchanan County, into West Virginia, and connecting with the Dry Fork Branch at Bandy in Tazewell County.

The N&W Engineering Department decided early on that an entirely different route would be required in crossing the mountains from Hurley to Grundy. The original BS&C route over Slate Mountain and along Slate Creek used sharp curves and up to six percent grades that were impractical for a standard gauge railroad. The new route followed Lester Fork in a southerly direction from where it branched off Knox Creek at Hurley to the mountain divide. A 4,000-foot tunnel was planned to carry the railroad through the divide to Home Creek. The new route followed Home Creek, as it ran southwest to its mouth on the Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy. A new line paralleling the existing narrow gauge lumber railroad between Grundy and the Virginia/Kentucky State Line would be built eastward and up-river to Grundy. The old

route through Blackey was abandoned in its entirety once the timbering was completed by the W.M. Ritter Lumber Company. The 1927 N&W Coal District Map showed the proposed new route along Lester Fork and Home Creek.

Preliminary surveys of the BS&C showed that it was impractical to convert the narrow gauge line as it existed to standard gauge. Authority was secured on July 31, 1928, to reconstruct the narrow-gauge BS&C running from Devon to Hurley, a distance of 13.46 miles. Approval was also given to construct a new standard-gauge extension from Hurley to the Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River, a distance of 14.08 miles. Finally, consent was granted to relocate and reconstruct the narrow gauge to standard gauge along the Levisa Fork extending between Grundy and the Virginia-Kentucky state line, a distance of 13.3 miles. The entire project represented a distance of 39 miles and the projected cost was \$8,360,000.

The BS&C stockholders (N&W owned 100 percent) approved the conveyance of all BS&C railroad property to the N&W on April 8, 1929. The N&W stockholders approved the acquisition of the BS&C on April 11, 1929. The ICC approved the transaction on November 11, 1929. However the N&W elected to continue to operate its new acquisition as the BS&C.

By March 1929, construction work was underway with reconstruction from Devon to Hurley being the most difficult part of the undertaking, because it was adjacent to the narrow gauge BS&C which had to be kept operating for three reasons. First, The W.M. Ritter Lumber Company was using the narrow gauge railroad to haul cut timber to its mills and lumber products to the N&W interchange at Devon. Second, the narrow gauge BS&C was used to haul all of the construction material for rebuilding the standard gauge railroad. Third, the BS&C was operated as a common carrier and had to be kept open at all times. In this first section, the contractors included W. W. Boxley & Co. of Roanoke, who was responsible for constructing the bridge over the Tug River and the small tunnel to Lower Elk, Kentucky. The segment from Lower Elk to Hurley, Virginia, was awarded to Sturm & Dillard Co. of Columbus, Ohio.

Construction began from a wye installed at MP N-445 +2,250 feet at Devon. The legs of this wye extended across the Tug Fork on Bridge No. 2500, and joined to enter Lower Elk Tunnel as a single track. The inside height of Lower Elk Tunnel from the base of the rail to the crown of the arch was set at 27 feet in order to allow enough room for catenary

should the branch be later electrified. The south portal of Lower Elk Tunnel marked the end of the Boxley contract.

In order to maintain continuous operation of the existing narrow gauge, the new standard gauge track generally stayed on the east side of Knox Creek and the old BS&C remained on the west bank. However, in the first mile or so, the tracks ran side by side on the left bank. Lacking the proper equipment and with clearance problems it was necessary to move some of the bridge girders into position with hand labor. The track then reached southward along Knox Creek, ending in a switch located on the east side of the track.

This switch extended into a 175-car siding along the east side which continued past MP D-5. Here on the west side of the track the location of "Argo" was established and improved with a cinder platform for loading. Just north of this point and prior to this new construction the area was served by a station site on the BS&C named "Burke." Past Argo, the new right of way crossed the Kentucky/Virginia state line. The rail construction work then proceeded across Knox Creek on Bridge No. 2506 at MP D-6.

The new right of way followed alongside Knox Creek in nearly continuous curvature to MP D-8 at Kelsea. A switch extending off the west side formed a stub-ended siding for Kelsea. The rails then crossed Knox Creek and continued to a switch on the left side. This track extended into a runaround track at a location near the former BS&C station at Pine Oaks. The short siding continued to MP D-9, where it rejoined the main line of the branch as it passed further southward.

Gradient increased slightly as the right of way climbed alongside the creek to a switch which almost immediately extended from the west side and continued to form a siding. A short runaround track was located on the east side of the track. The main line of the branch continued southward to MP D-10, the location of North Hurley. The right of way then crossed Bridge No. 2510 and continued to MP D-11. The S-curve located at this point marks the location of the northern yard limit at Hurley.

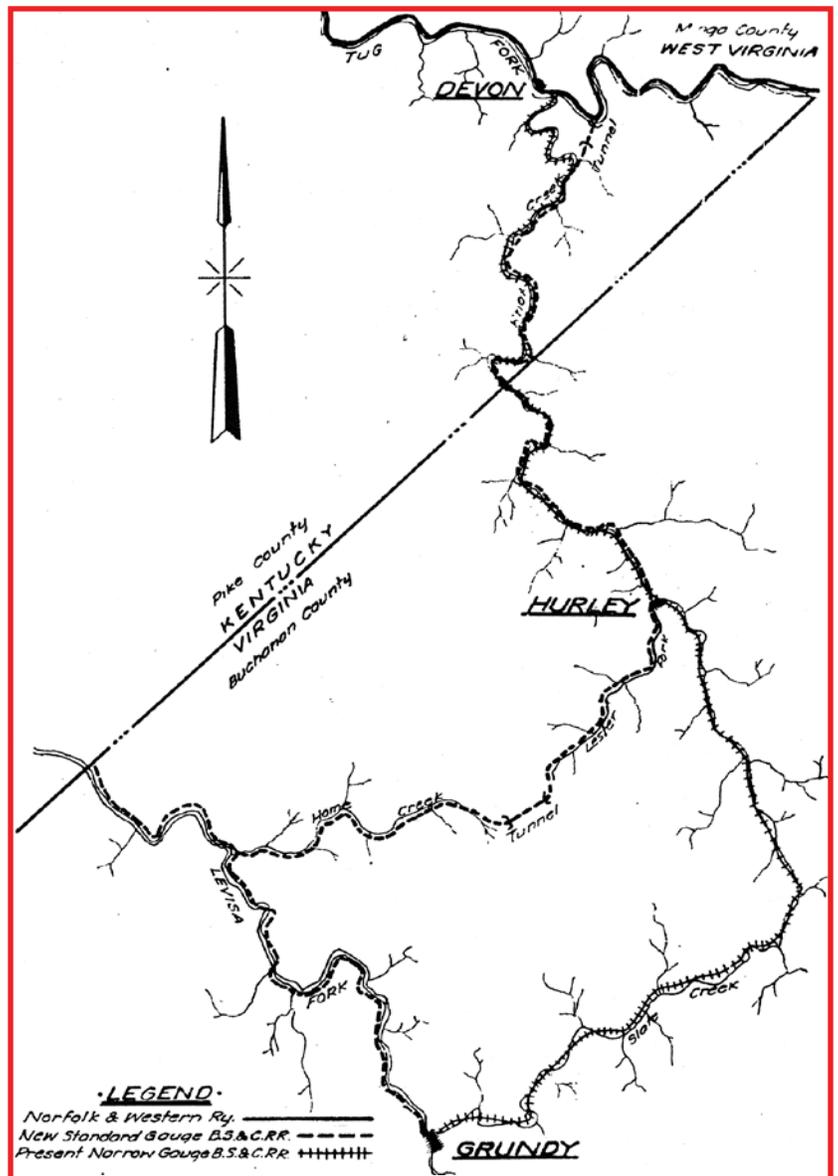
At MP D-11, a switch was installed on the south side to form a short stub-ended track. The right of way continued over Bridge No. 2511 over a roadway as gradient increased slightly. A switch extending off the west side formed a 168-car siding. Both tracks ended at the south yard limit board for Hurley near MP D-12. Near this point, the standard gauge portion of the line assigned to Sturm & Dillard Company for construction ended.

This 12-mile portion paralleling the existing narrow gauge not only hindered construction by the need to maintain service over the BS&C for the W.M. Ritter Lumber Company and because it was a common carrier, it also encountered the need to raise the level of the old line in stages for a distance of about four miles so that fills for the new grade could be completed. The need to keep the BS&C running was estimated to have cost N&W an additional \$400,000.

The March 1929 *Norfolk and Western Magazine* included a drawing (shown to the right) of the existing and planned routes of the BS&C.

H.W. Nelson Company, Richmond, Virginia was awarded the contract to build the railroad from Hurley to the mouth of Home Creek and from Grundy to the Virginia/Kentucky State Line. H.W. Nelson Company subtracted the initial eight miles of this construction along Lester Fork to the Walton Construction Company of Roanoke. This included the line up Lester Fork, the 4,000-foot tunnel and about a mile of line on Home Creek. Clearing of the right of way began in March 1929.

The climb to the summit began at MP D-12 on a 1.85 percent grade which continued to the top of the mountain. The right of way was cut out of the hillside high above the west bank of Lester Fork. Near the summit on the north side, a 6,000-foot 132-car passing siding was laid down that continued up to MP D-17.



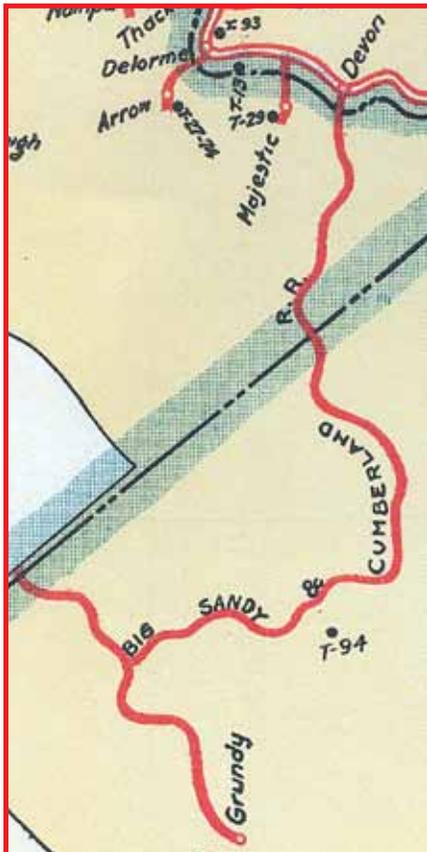
Assistant Engineer J.W. Raitt, who was responsible for preparations for the 4,000-foot tunnel, died during this time, and the N&W named the tunnel "Raitt Tunnel" in his memory. The roof of the tunnel was designed high enough to accommodate catenary, should it be decided to electrify the line. Summit of the line was designed to be located at the south portal to better accommodate loaded northbound trains. Here, the grade briefly leveled off and then began descending. The railroad followed the twisting path of Home Creek on a ledge cut out of the eastern hillside and this path continued downgrade to Thomas. The wye at Thomas formed the start of the Levisa Branch at 26.51 miles from Devon.

The standard gauge line was constructed alongside the existing narrow gauge BS&C built by the W.M. Ritter Lumber Company from Grundy to the Virginia/Kentucky State Line. The standard gauge line was built in both directions from Thomas. Construction over this segment also had to take place without interfering with the operation of the lumber road. The new rail route was built on a river grade 3.76 miles westward to the state line and 9.71 miles eastward to Grundy.

About 1.4 miles east of the Thomas wye an assembling yard was created by the filling and leveling of a considerable area. In 1931 the yard was known as "Home Creek Yard," . The yard had two tracks, each 3,000 feet long, to handle the expected coal development. Later on the yard would be renamed Weller Yard (MP D-27.93).

The rail line was constructed eastward up river to Bridge No. 2514 and past MP D-28. The construction of this bridge was a difficult undertaking. The steel girders were shipped in to Lower Elk on the new standard gauge line where they were transferred to the narrow gauge line. Three narrow-gauge flat cars were required to transport each one of the girders the 43 miles over the mountains to the bridge site. On the way, the girders climbed the six percent grades and edged around the 40-degree curves of the BS&C line. It required two locomotives to transport each of the girders over the mountain. No crane existed on the project that would be able to get the steel off the cars on their arrival at Levisa. A false work beside the piers was constructed, and the girders were skidded over to them. They were then raised up with jacks for installation.

From Bridge 2514 over the Levisa Fork at MP D-28, the rails continued along the river to a switch marking the start of the Bull Creek spur. The main line continued to Bridge No. 2515, a 100-foot span over Bull Creek. This brought the track past MP D-29 to a bridge over Poplar Creek. The track then continued upstream past MP D-33 to the Grundy town limits. The western yard for Grundy was located near a switch extending off the north side along the Levisa River, and extended in front of the station site. A switch near the east end ran back north of the station to form a stub-ended station track and team track. A second switch on the south side also formed a runaround track. Both of these sidings reconnected with the main line of the branch at MP D-35.



When the N&W's Coal Districts and Mine Map was published in May 1932 the Home Creek Smokeless Coal Company (T-94) was the only mine load out shown on the map and the railroad was shown at the BS&C.

Construction was finished on June 30, 1931. The N&W placed the line in operation on July 1, 1931 as the Buchanan Branch and Levisa Branch. The cost of construction was \$8,400,770.92. The deed for the railroad, property and franchises of the Big Sandy and Cumberland Railroad Company (including the lease of the railroad and property of its subsidiary, the Knox Creek Railway Company), which the N&W had taken over and placed in operation on July 1, 1931, as the Buchanan Branch and the Levisa Branch, was acquired by the N&W on October 26, 1932. The Big Sandy and Cumberland Railroad Company was officially dissolved on December 7, 1932.

*(Note: When the Buchanan Branch and Levisa Branch were officially opened they were joint use branches with the N&W and the W.M. Ritter Lumber Company between Hurley and Conoway. The N&W operated on the branches between 5 am and 5 pm and the lumber company operated on the branches between 5 pm and 5 am.)*

### Coal comes to the Buchanan Branch

Once the railroad was operational the coal operators moved into Buchanan County. The N&W assigned the new Buchanan Branch/Levisa Branch coal operations to the Thacker Coal District and the new operations were numbered with the "T" prefix. By 1931 there were only 42 remaining coal load-outs of the original 93 coal load-outs in the Thacker Coal District. However, since the N&W did not reuse coal-load out numbers, the new Buchanan Branch/Levisa Branch coal operations load-out numbers started at T-94

The first operation established on the Buchanan Branch was the Home Creek Smokeless Coal Company (T-94), which was organized on October 13, 1931, in Bluefield, West Virginia. The organizers were three experienced coal operators. C.W. French was president, Captain E.L. Bailey, a former N&W conductor, was the vice-president and Guy D. French was the secretary-treasurer. The new company leased 600 acres on Home Creek, and in October 1931 was erecting a modern tippie which included a cleaning and preparation plant.

The Home Creek Smokeless Coal Company track layout, located near MP D-19.89, consisted of two load tracks that expanded into four tracks under the tippie. These four tracks reformed into a single line that extended up the

hollow to the east to store empty cars for loading. The Home Creek Smokeless Coal Company, started shipping coal in early 1932, with initial production being about 10,000 tons per month. Later on the capacity was increased to about 1,250 tons per day from the Home Creek Mine which operated into the Clintwood coal seam that was 62 inches thick.

The coal production in Buchanan County in 1932 was 41,000 tons.

The second coal operation was the Lynn Camp Coal Corporation (T-95) located near MP D-25.23. It was drift mine operating into the Clintwood coal seam that was 60 inches thick. It had a daily capacity of 1,000 tons.

The Buchanan County Coal Corporation Mines No. 1 (Operation T-96) and No. 2 (Operation T-97) were in operation by October 5, 1933, because on that date the company's employees went on strike.

Buchanan County Mine No. 1 was located at MP H-0.81 and Mine No. 2 was located at MP H-2.27 on the Levisa Branch,. Both drift mines operated into the Clintwood coal seam that was 48 inches thick. The community was referred to as Big Rock and mines had 600 employees in October 1935.

The Virginia Lee Coal Corporation (T-98) was established near MP D-19 in 1932 or 1933. The Virginia Lee Mine was a drift mine operating into the Darby coal seam that was 38 to 40 inches thick. It had a daily capacity of about 500 tons.

Buchanan Smokeless Coal Corporation (T-99) was established near MP H-0.8 on Levisa Branch in 1932 or 1933. It was closed by 1941.

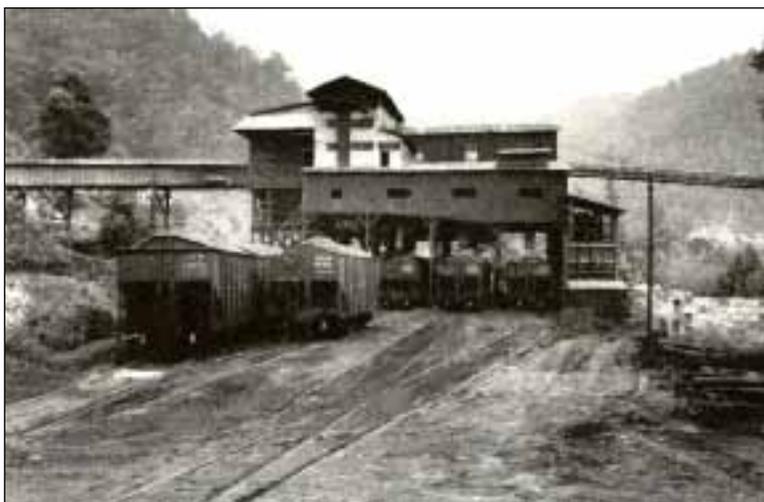
The Panther Coal Company was opened by the William Leckie interests which had multiple coal mines in West Virginia and Kentucky. The community became known as Roseann, Virginia which was named for the coal company's Roseann Mine.

In August 1933, Walton-Sudduth Company, of Bluefield, Virginia, was awarded a contract to build a short spur of about 0.7 mile and Bridge No. 2511-A to cross a county road to reach the planned operation of the Panther Coal Company (T-100) on Buchanan Branch that was located just beyond the Raitt passing siding at MP D-18.37.

The Panther Spur expanded into three tracks, two of which were a holding area for loads. These three tracks expanded into five tracks under the Panther Coal Company tippie. These five tracks than merged into a single track and run-around before expanding into two empty car holding tracks that continued up the hollow to end of rail.

The Roseann Mine was a drift mine operating into the Clintwood coal seam that was 65 inches thick and a daily capacity of 2,000 tons daily. The tippie included a cleaning and preparation plant. It is assumed the Panther Coal Company started shipping in 1934.

In December 1934 a 3.5 mile branch was completed up Bull Creek to serve the H.E. Harman Coal Corporation (Operation T-101). This was the Bull Creek Spur. The spur track left the Buchanan Branch at MP D-29.79 and climbed in elevation upward in a southerly direction past a point where the N&W ownership ended. These rails were owned by the H.E. Harman Coal Corporation. The track extended to a switch on the east side that led into three tracks near MP 3. Two



Top to Bottom: Buchanan County Coal Corporation No. 1 (T-96), Buchanan County Coal Corporation No. 2 (T-97), and Panther Coal Company Operation No. 1 (T-100) were photographed in August 1956 and published in the September 1956 *Norfolk and Western Magazine*.



The Harman Mine (T-101) [above], was located 3.26 miles up the Bull Creek Spur. The Conoway Mine (T-102) was shut down between 1938 and 1941, but it reopened as the Margaret Ann Coal Company (T-102) [below] by August 1942. Both mines were photographed in August 1956 and published in the September 1956 *Norfolk and Western Magazine*.



additional tracks were added under the Harman tipple as grade increased to 2.5 percent. The three tracks continued upward into an S-curve before becoming a single track that was used to retain empty cars for loading.

The Harman Mine was a drift mine operating into the 48 inch Bull Creek coal seam. In 1945 the mine operated two shifts daily, had 1,250 employees, and had a capacity of 5,500 tons daily.

The last of the original coal operations on the Buchanan/Levisa Branch was the Conoway Coal Corporation (T-102) located near MP H-3.02. A siding led off the south side and expanded into three tracks under the tipple of the coal company. A long load track continued alongside the main branch to the Virginia/Kentucky border. The Conoway Mine (T-102) was shut down in April 1939 because of a labor dispute, but it reopened as the Margaret Ann Coal Company (T-102) in January 1942. The Margaret Ann Mine was a drift mine operating into the Splash Dam coal seam that was 66 inches. The daily capacity was about 500 tons.

When the N&W's *Coal & Coke Operations List No. 10* was released on March 1, 1936, these original nine coal operations were the only ones shown on the list/map for the Buchanan/Levisa Branches as shown on the map below. With nine mines operating the coal production totaled 2,235,000 tons in 1936.

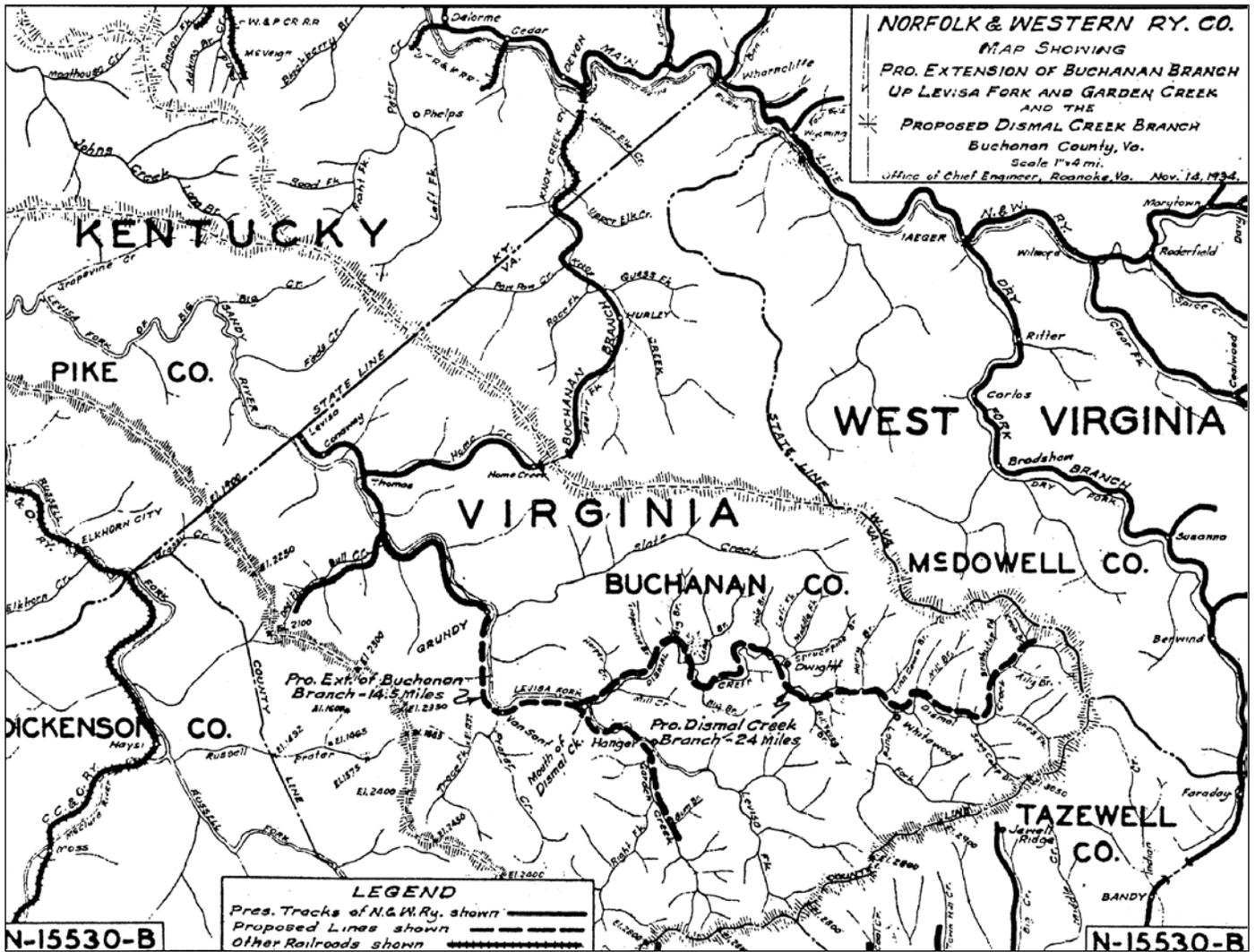
However, regardless of the slow development of mining operations on the new standard gauge branch lines, the N&W pushed ahead with its plans to extend its branch lines in Buchanan County.

### Extending the Branch Line in Buchanan County

After the \$8.4 million undertaking to reconstruct the BS&C to standard gauge, it was less than four years before the next phase of work was begun to open up additional coal and timber lands in Buchanan County. The September 8, 1935 *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* reported:

“Word reaching Richlands early Friday morning was to the effect that the Norfolk and Western railway had secured all right-of-ways on the new extension from Grundy, tapping the coal deposits on Dismal and Garden Creek. When these veins of coal are tapped Buchanan county will be known as one of the richest coalfields in America.

“The new line extends from Grundy up Levisa River to Garden Creek, and up Dismal Creek to Knob



N&W Drawing N-15530-B, dated November 14, 1934, shows the proposed Buchanan Branch Extension and Proposed Dismal Creek Branch being built east from Grundy.

Branch, which is about seven miles northwest of Jewell Ridge. At that point the Jewell Ridge Coal corporation is installing a model mining town on which work has been progressing rapidly. The railway company in its formal representation to the ICC said that 400 million tons of coal underlies the area to be tapped, and that the amount of coal tonnage within five years will be 3,500,000 tons and annual freight revenue \$2,600,000."

The N&W finalized its plans for the Buchanan Branch Extension and Dismal Creek Branch on November 14, 1934. The Interstate Commerce Commission granted the N&W the authority to proceed to extend the Buchanan Branch for the purpose of opening up additional coal and timber lands, on January 16, 1935. Clearing 220 acres of timber and underbrush began on March 16, 1935.

The Buchanan Branch Extension project was divided into five separate sections with different contractors working on each section. Sections one and two were the Buchanan Branch Extension which were about 14.2 miles in length. Section one began about a half mile up stream from Grundy and extended 6.8 miles along the Levisa Fork to the Mouth of Dismal Creek. Haley, Chisholm & Morris of Charlottesville was awarded the contract for this part. A wye was built at the Mouth of Dismal Creek to allow direct train movements from one branch to another and the turning of trains. Two steel deck plate girder bridges, constructed across the Levisa Fork formed the legs of the wye.

A new yard (Dismal Yard) and engine terminal were built along Levisa Fork just prior to reaching the Dismal Creek wye when coming from Grundy. The flat terrain for the yard was created by moving the channel of the Levisa Fork a considerable distance northward in order to fit the railroad between the river and the mountain. Dismal Yard was constructed with four tracks, each of which was built long enough to accommodate 153 cars (in 1936), or about 600 cars total. Dismal Yard was used as an assembling point for coal loads coming from operations on both the Buchanan Branch Extension and the Dismal Creek Branch. The engine terminal at Dismal Yard had seven tracks (aggregating about 0.5 mile in length), coal and ash hoists, a sand house and tower, an inspection pit, a shop building, and watering facilities. It was used primarily for light repairs to road engines and shifter locomotives handling loads from the mines. Originally some classification was done at Dismal Yard, but most of it was eventually moved to Weller Yard.

The 7.6 mile second section of the Buchanan Branch Extension was built along the Levisa Fork to Page, VA and the Page Pocahontas Coal Company. The second section, built by W. W. Boxley & Co. of Roanoke, included a spur along Garden Creek to the Oakwood Smokeless Coal Company.

From the wye at Dismal Creek, the Buchanan Branch Extension follows the Levisa south and east up the valleys and through the mountains, for about five miles to a small town on Garden Creek named Hanger. Here, the main line diverges to follow Garden Creek up to Page to each a large coal operation. At Hanger, a spur turns off to follow the Levisa up to Oakwood, scene of another coal operation. Another wye was built at Hanger, or Garden Creek Junction, similar to the other ones on the Buchanan Branch using two steel bridges for each leg to cross the creek. These bridges, nearly 300 feet long and 28 feet above mean water level, were slightly longer and higher than the ones at the wye for the Dismal Creek Branch.

The third, fourth and fifth sections were the construction of the Dismal Creek Branch. The third section began at the Mouth of Dismal Creek and went 7.5 miles east to the end of a passing siding near Big Vein. This section was built by the firm of Boxley Brothers of Orange, VA. From Big Vein, section four ran seven miles to the lower end of a passing siding at Whitewood. Sturm & Dillard of Columbus, OH, built this section. The fifth section was built by Morris, Gray & Hunter of Roanoke. Section five extended 9.7 miles from Whitewood to the Jewell Ridge Coal Company operation tracks at Jewell Valley. Jewell Valley was the end of the 21.99 miles long Dismal Creek Branch

A great deal of clearing, excavation, and grading were required to carry the rails 21.99 miles from the Levisa Fork to Jewell Valley. About eight miles below Whitewood, at a place named Dwight, Dismal Creek makes a horseshoe bend around a peculiarly shaped ridge. A 236-foot tunnel was drilled here to save more than a mile in track length. Because the creek rises for a net elevation of 30 feet going around the mountain, there is a one percent grade through the tunnel heading east.

Two passing sidings of about a half mile in length were built on the Dismal Creek Branch. One is located at Upper Big Branch and the other at Whitewood. A 2.55-mile spur track known as Long Spur left the main line at Long Branch to serve the original Sycamore Coal Company coal operation at Patterson.

Additional work was required on some of the existing facilities of the original Buchanan Branch to handle the expected increased coal tonnage. At Hurley, two sidings were built north of town to hold 260 northbound loads, and another siding was constructed south of town to accommodate 160 southbound empties. A fourth siding was built at the southern end of Raitt Tunnel to hold an 80-car train of southbound empties moving over the mountain.

At Weller Yard the two existing tracks were extended to hold 110 cars each, and two additional tracks of the same length were built, bringing the total storage capacity up to 440 cars. In addition, a track for road trains was laid that would accommodate 167 cars. Additional engine facilities were built which included a coal hoist, an ash hoist, a sand house and tower,

two stand pipes, an inspection pit and shop building, and the necessary engine terminal tracks. Also, three employee dwellings and a yard office were constructed.

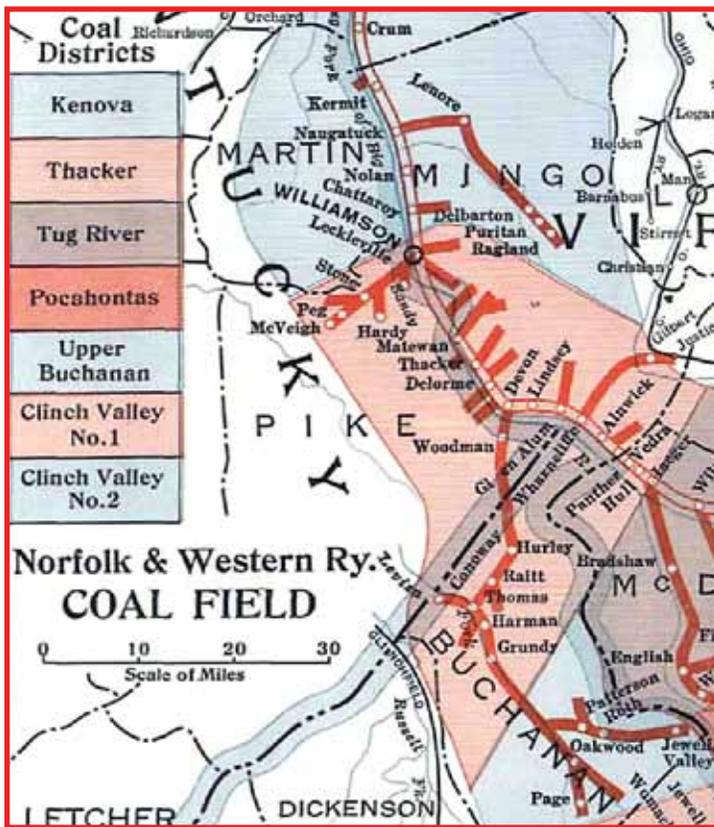
The price tag for all of the work associated with the Buchanan Branch Extension and building the Dismal Creek Branch was \$4.5 million when the line was opened in October 1936.

### The first Coal Operations in the Upper Buchanan District

Concurrent with the N&W's construction of the Buchanan Branch Extension and the Dismal Creek Branch, the coal operators were making their own plans for the new coalfield.

The Oakwood Smokeless Coal Corporation (No. 302) was organized on January 8, 1936, in Bluefield, Virginia by experienced coal operators. The new mining operation was to be located at the mouth of Garden Creek on the Levisa River where a large tract of land had been leased from the W.M. Ritter Lumber Company, and the Yukon Pocahontas Coal Company and Sawyer Coal Company, both of which were located near War, WV.

The new operation was planned to have an initial operating capacity of 2,000 tons daily, with an expected gradual increase in production. It will mine the Carey low volatile seam of coal. By mid-January plans were underway for the construction of a modern tippie, a company store, employee housing and other necessary buildings. Plans were that new tippie would be ready for operation when the N&W reached the new community of Oakwood in August 1936.



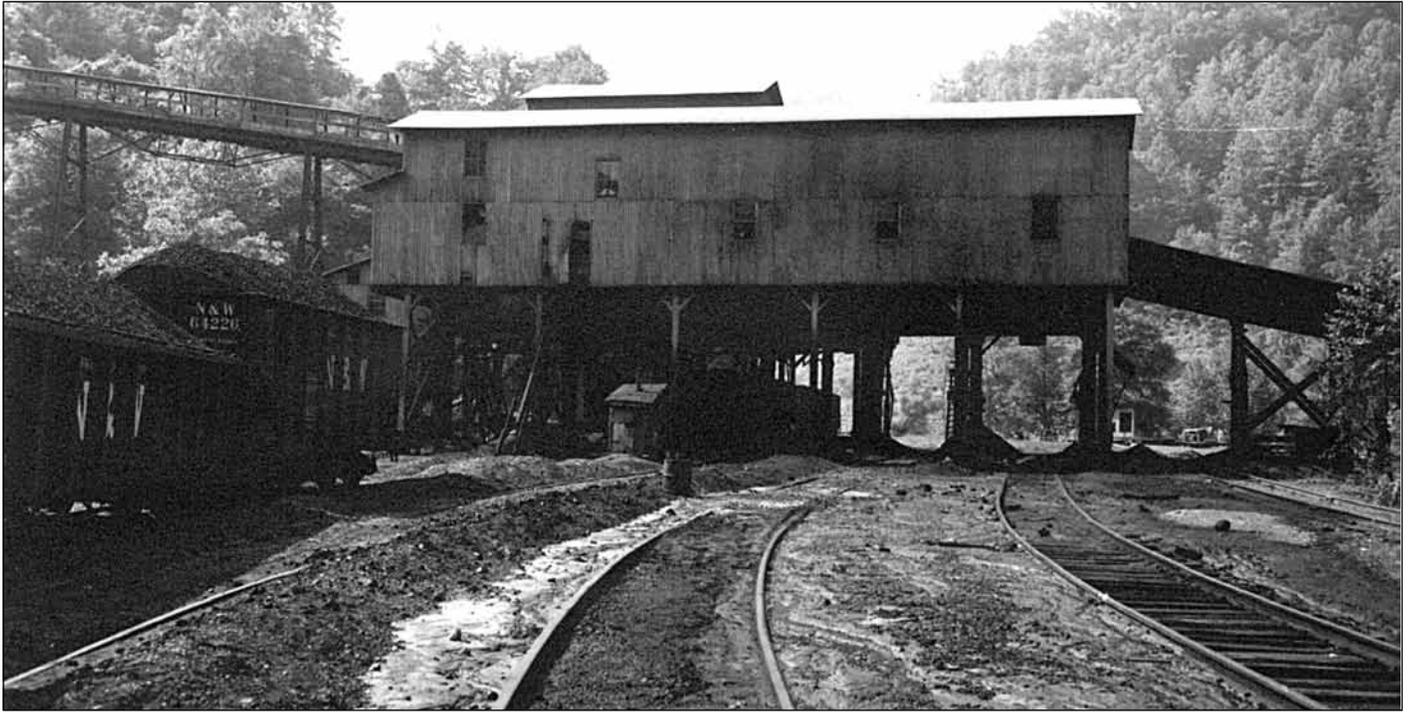
When the N&W constructed the Buchanan Branch Extension and the Dismal Creek Branch, it created a new coal district known as the Upper Buchanan Coal District which was published on the 1937 N&W System Map. Coal load-out numbering in the new district started at No. 300.)



The original Buchanan Branch, constructed in 1929 -1931 is shown in purple, and the Buchanan Branch Extension and Dismal Creek Branch, constructed in 1935-1936 are shown in blue. Map does show the entire route. Map courtesy of DeLorme and was previously published in the April-May-June 2007 issue of "The Arrow."

The actual operation of the Oakwood Smokeless Coal Company was located on the Hanger Spur which joined the Buchanan Branch Extension at MP D-47.8. The original 1.88 mile spur, constructed by W.W. Boxley & Company, crossed over Garden Creek and followed the Levisa River to the Oakwood coal operation. A switch on the north side extended into a run-around siding and a five-track load yard for the Oakwood Smokeless Coal Corporation. On the main spur, a switch on the south side continued alongside the main stem to MP 1.03. The line and operation tracks served tipples located on each side of the hollow. On the north side, the Oakwood tipple was served by two tracks that rejoined and led to a three-track empty car storage yard. On the south side of the spur, the Oakwood tipple served five tracks that extended to a single track rejoining the spur. An empty car track was reached by a switch on the south side. The Hanger Spur was later extended to 2.24 miles in length.

The new \$135,000 tipple of the Oakwood Smokeless Coal Corporation did not go into operation until October 20, 1936, making it the third shipper on the Buchanan Branch Extension. The company drove 47 prospect openings before deciding



The first shipper on the Buchanan Branch Extension was the Page Pocahontas Coal Company with load-out No. 300. The Cambridge Smokeless Coal Company bought the Page Pocahontas Coal Company on July 30, 1956.

The first shipper on The Dismal Creek Branch was the Jewell Valley Mine (No. 301) shown in the middle photograph. The bottom photograph shows the Sycamore Coal Company's Buccaneer Mine (No. 303) located on Long Spur. The Buccaneer Mine was the second shipper on the Dismal Creek Branch.

The mines were photographed in August 1956. *Norfolk Southern Corporation collection*

on the tipple location. None of the prospect openings had less than 48 inch coal seams and the maximum was 86 inches.

The first shipper on the Buchanan Branch Extension was actually the Page Pocahontas Coal Company (No. 300), [headquartered in Welch, West Virginia] which shipped their first coal in August 1936. This company operated a drift mine into the 62 inch Cary Seam and had a daily capacity of 1,200 tons.

The second shipper in the new Upper Buchanan District was the Jewell Valley Mine (No. 301) at Jewell Valley on the Dismal Creek Branch. This operation was part of the Jewell Ridge Coal Corporation operating in the Clinch Valley District. This mine went into operation in October 1936

The fourth shipper was the Sycamore Coal Corporation's Buccaneer Mine (No. 303) near Patterson, VA on Long Spur of the Dismal Creek Branch. The mine opened before December 1936. Long Spur Junction with the Dismal Creek Branch was located at MP DC-5.55. The original 2.55-mile Long Spur was constructed between June and September 1936 and laid on a 2.5 percent compensated grade. The track

led into the Sycamore Coal Corporation's Buccaneer Mine at MP 1.97. The lead expanded into five tracks that continued underneath the tipple. The grade increased to 2.9 percent as the five operation tracks merged into one long track that

continued alongside the spur as the lines extended up to end of track.

The other original operations on the Buchanan Branch Extension/Dismal Creek Branch were the Red Jacket Coal Corporation Keen Mountain Mine (No. 304) and the Crystal Block Coal & Coke Company Operation No. 5 (No. 305). The Red Jacket Mine opened in November 1937 and Crystal Block Mine No. 5 opened in September 1938. Mine No. 304 was located on the Buchanan Branch Extension near MP D-47.19 and Mine No. 305 was located near Roth Siding on the Dismal Creek Branch near MP DC-6.91.

### **Coal Operations 1938 to 1944**

When the N&W's *Coal & Coke Operations List No. 11* was released on November 1, 1938, the original mining operations, Nos. T-94 to T-102 in the Thacker District and Nos. 300-305 in the upper Buchanan District were still listed. However a 16th mining operation had been opened and closed between March 1, 1936 when the N&W's *Coal & Coke Operations List No. 10* was released November 1, 1938 when List No. 11 was released. There are two clues to this elusive mine T-103.

The first clue is a paragraph in a June 19, 1938 *Bluefield Daily News* article about Buchanan County that noted,

"The first coal operation, the Home Creek Smokeless Coal company owned by Bluefield Interests, came into Buchanan county in 1931. Since then, the total has been raised to *sixteen*, employing 6000 men and having a daily output capacity of 15,000 tons. Red Jacket has the largest coal tippie in the world. The Jewell Ridge Coal Corporation has the most modern, up to date, coal tippie in the world. The H E Harman Coal Corporation, during October 1937, shipped more coal than any mine on the Norfolk and Western, and more coal than any other mine in Virginia. During the year of 1937 a total of 60,357 cars, or approximately 3,250,000 tons of coal were shipped from Buchanan County."

*(Note: Virginia coal production records indicate 3,602,000 tons of coal were produced in Buchanan County in 1937)*

The second clue is a May 15, 1938 *Bluefield Daily News* article on the death of a miner who had been injured in a slate fall at the Buchanan County Coal Corporation Mine near Roseann, Virginia on April 4, 1938. This would indicate that Buchanan County Coal Corporation opened a third mine (T-103) near the Panther Coal Company operations.

When the N&W's *Coal & Coke Operations List No. 13* was released on June 1, 1941 no new mines had been added to the Upper Buchanan District, but three of the original mines on the Buchanan/Levisa Branches had been closed. These were the Virginia Lee mine (T-98), Buchanan Smokeless Coal (T-99) and the Conoway mine (T-102).

As was noted previously mine load-out T-102 was reopened in January 1942 at the Margaret Ann Coal Company. The Margaret Ann Coal Company received its charter in West Virginia on December 31, 1941.

### **Levisa Branch Extension in 1944 and 1945**

The N&W's Levisa Branch stopped at the Virginia/Kentucky State Line in 1929 because the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad's subsidiary, Levisa River Railroad, owned the property and ICC authorization to build a railroad from Millard, KY to the Virginia/Kentucky State Line. The Levisa River Railroad's proposed route along the Levisa Fork to get to Virginia was the same route the N&W would have used to get into Kentucky. However, The Levisa River Railroad never built it proposed railroad to the state line.

The impetus behind the N&W's Levisa Branch Extension was the successful negotiations of the H.E. Harman Coal Company to lease 5,000 acres of coal land between Feds Creek and Big Creek on the Levisa Fork in Pike County, KY. The N&W petitioned the ICC on October 7, 1943, to extend its Levisa Branch across the Virginia/Kentucky State Line to reach the H.E. Harman Coal Company property. The N&W's proposed line was on the opposite side of the Levisa Fork from the Levisa River Railroad's proposed. The N&W surveyors laid out a line that followed the Levisa Fork downstream in a northwesterly for a distance of 9.3 miles to where Big Creek flows into the Levisa Fork. From that point the railroad turned east along Big Creek, following the creek upstream for about three miles.

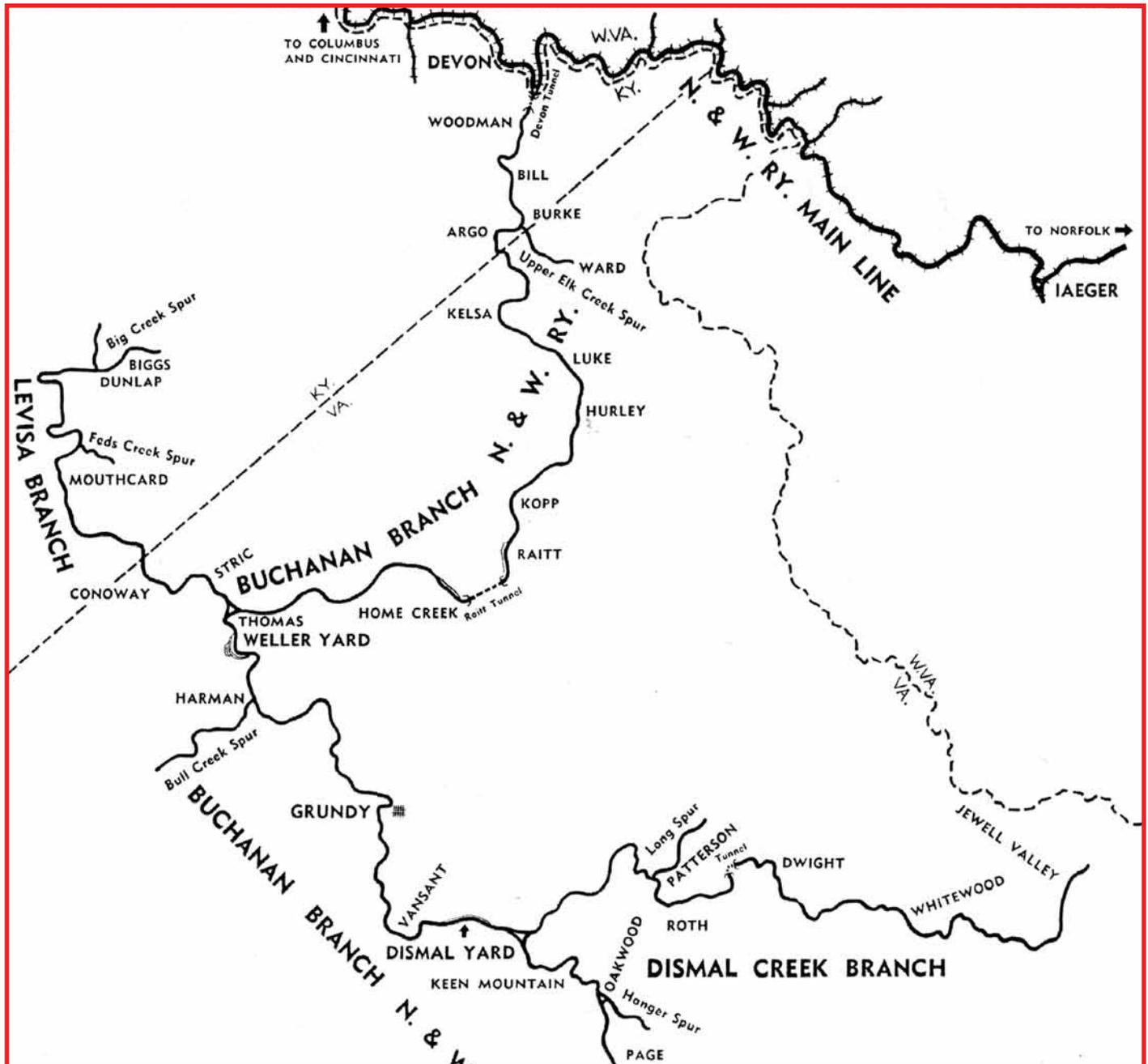
Once the N&W's surveyors had taken to the field, the Levisa River Railroad started awarding contracts to build its proposed line. The ICC authorized the N&W to build its proposed Levisa Branch Extension on May 6, 1944, and at the same time revoked the authorization of the Levisa River Railroad to build along the same route. The ICC also gave the N&W the rights to purchase from the Levisa River Railroad all rights to the property along the 9.3 miles to Big Creek.

Construction of the Levisa Branch Extension cost \$982,000, with the Perkins and Barnes Construction Company of Blackstone, Virginia, contractor for the project. The Levisa Branch Extension started at the Virginia/Kentucky State Line, on the east side of the Levisa Fork, and extended 8.53 miles to the mouth of Big Creek where the Levisa Branch ended at MP 12.31. The Big Creek Spur then followed Big Creek for 3.3 miles. By the end of 1944 the grading was about 75 percent complete over the entire extension, and 132 pound rail was laid to a point just past MP H-6. The basic extension was completed in early 1945, but work continued as spurs were built to new coal operations.

### **Coal Operations 1944 to 1948**

The first coal operation on the Levisa Branch Extension was the Feds Creek Coal Company Feds Creek Mine (T-110) which was part of the H.E. Harman owned properties. The mine opened on October 15, 1945 with J.E. Biggs, Jr. as the company president and Biggs, Kentucky as the shipping point.

The track for the Feds Creek Coal Company began at a switch off the south side of the Big Creek Spur near MP BC-1.5 which extended into three loaded car holding tracks. The holding tracks formed into five tracks underneath the tippie and then converged into three delivery tracks. These empty car tracks rejoined the Big Creek Spur near MP BC-2.6. A



The Buchanan, Levisa and Dismal Creek Branches as constructed in 1945

run around track was constructed on the north side of the spur from about MP BC-1.6 to MP BC-3.0. The mine operated into both the Clintwood and Elkhorn coal seams that varied from 38 inches to 48 inches thick. The mining operation included a coal preparation plant and had a capacity of 4,550 tons per day when operating two shifts.

The D.J.B. Collieries DJB Mine (T-112) opened in August 1946 once the N&W completed its Fed Creek Spur to the new operation. The September 1, 1946 *Bluefield Daily News* reported, "The D.J.B. Collieries, Incorporated, has just recently started producing coal at their new mine in Pike county. Kentucky, 20 miles west of Grundy, Va., on the new extension of the Norfolk and Western railway. This plant is fully mechanized with the most modern mining machinery and equipment available, representing an investment of over \$350,000.00 ... The company has leased sufficient acreage of high quality Bituminous coal to maintain a daily production of 1,500 tons extending over a period of fifty years.

A switch installed at MP H-8.34 off the north side of the Levisa Fork Extension led into the Feds Creek Spur that was built to serve D.J.B. Collieries DJB Mine. In-plant trackage began near FC-0.3 at a switch that extended off the east side of the spur to form a loaded car holding track which extended into three tracks located underneath the tipple. These tipple tracks reformed into a single track delivery track that paralleled the Feds Creek Spur. The delivery track rejoined the Feds Creek Spur near MP FC-0.7 which continued to just beyond MP FC-1.

The DJB Mine was a drift mine operating into the Clintwood coal seam that varied in thickness from 45 to 55 inches.

The modern tipple had been completed in December 1945, even though the tracks were not built 1946. The plant had a daily capacity of a 1,000 tons.

The third operation to open on the Levisa Branch Extension was the Kentland-Elkhorn Coal Company's No. 1 Mine (T-113) which opened in November 1946 at Dunlap on the Second Fork Spur. Dunlap was named for the company president, Charles E. Dunlap.

The N&W track charts and the N&W *Stations and Sidings List* are inconsistent with regards to the location of Dunlap. The track charts put Dunlap (as a shipping point) on the Second Fork Spur, whereas the *Stations and Sidings List* place Dunlap (as a geographic location) on the Big Creek Spur.

At the end of the Levisa Fork Branch at Curb the tracks were built back to east along Big Creek. Near MP BC-0.4 a switch on the north side led into a passing siding that rejoined the Big Creek Spur near MP BC-1.03. However, a switch located at the west end of this passing siding marked the start of the Second Fork Spur. The Second Fork Spur departed at MP SF-0 and a switch near MP SF-0.03 marked the beginning of the industrial track for the Kentland-Elkhorn No. 1 Mine. The drift mine operated into the Lower Elkhorn coal seam that was 48 inches thick and was equipped with a modern preparation plant.

When the N&W's *Coal & Coke Operations List No. 16* was released on July 1, 1948, Mines T-110, T-112, and T-113 were the only new mines included for the Levisa Branch Extension. One new mine was included on the Buchanan Branch, mine T-108 of the Correale Mining Corporation located near Ward, VA on the Upper Elk Creek Spur near MP 1.74. The 2.19 miles long spur left the Buchanan Branch at MP D-5.65. It can be assumed the Correale Mining Corporation got its start when the Correale interest from Hazleton, PA bought the Hamill Coal corporation interests in Virginia on June 4, 1948.

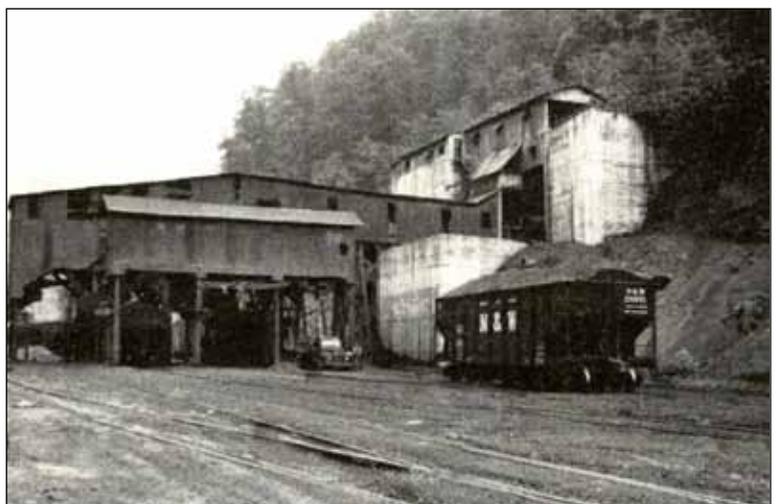
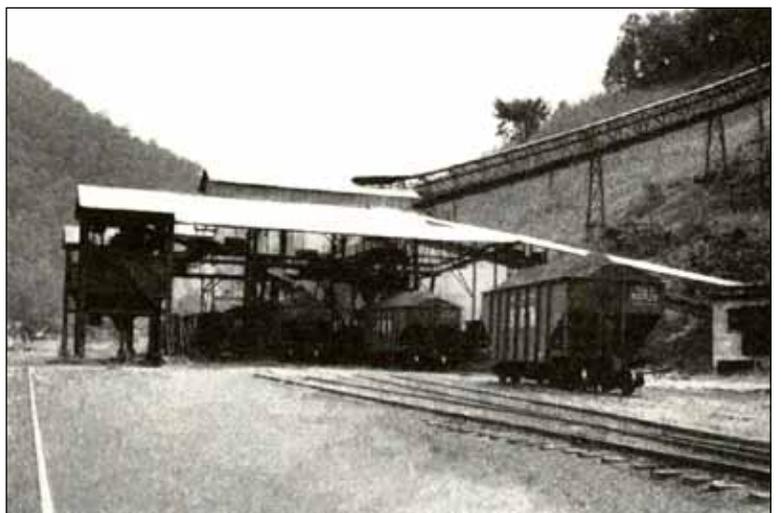
Other changes in the Thacker Coal District included the The Buchanan County Coal Company being sold to the Ames Mining Company of Charleston, WV on August 6, 1947. At the time Buchanan County Coal Company was operating four mines and loading from two tipples with a monthly production of about 50,000 tons. The sale included 50 company houses and two company stores.

In 1945 over 5.55 million tons of coal were shipped from Buchanan County mines, with the Harman operation (T-101) on Bull Creek shipping 1.658 million tons. The Red Jacket Keen Mountain Mine (No. 304) shipped 726,093 tons.

In 1948 the N&W was serving 10 mining operations in the Thacker District on the Buchanan/Levisa Branches and six in the Upper Buchanan District. The Oakwood Smokeless Mine (No. 302) was closed in 1947, but Jewell Ridge Coal added a second mine, Operation No. 3 (No. 306) at Seng Camp in 1947 or early 1948. The total of 16 mining operations was an increase of one over the 15 mining operations in the two districts in 1938.

### **Coal Mining on The Buchanan/Levisa/Dismal Creek Branches in the 1950s**

Coal production reached an all time high in the United States in 1947 of 630.6 million tons and that



Feds Creek Mine (T-110) (top) was the first mine to open on the Levisa Extension. The second mine to open was the DJB Mine (T-112) (middle) and the third was the Kentland-Elkhorn Mine No. 1 (T-113) (bottom).

Photographs were taken in August 1956. *Norfolk Southern Corporation collection*

was followed by 600 million tons in 1948. But those high production years were followed by a post-war conversion slump in 1949 that lasted until 1954 and included nation recessions in 1952 and 1954. Coal production in 1954 was 391.7 million tons. While a coal production recovery started in 1954 due to the increased demand for electricity, a third national recession started in 1958. The country recovered briefly before a fourth nation recession that started in 1961 and lasted into 1962.

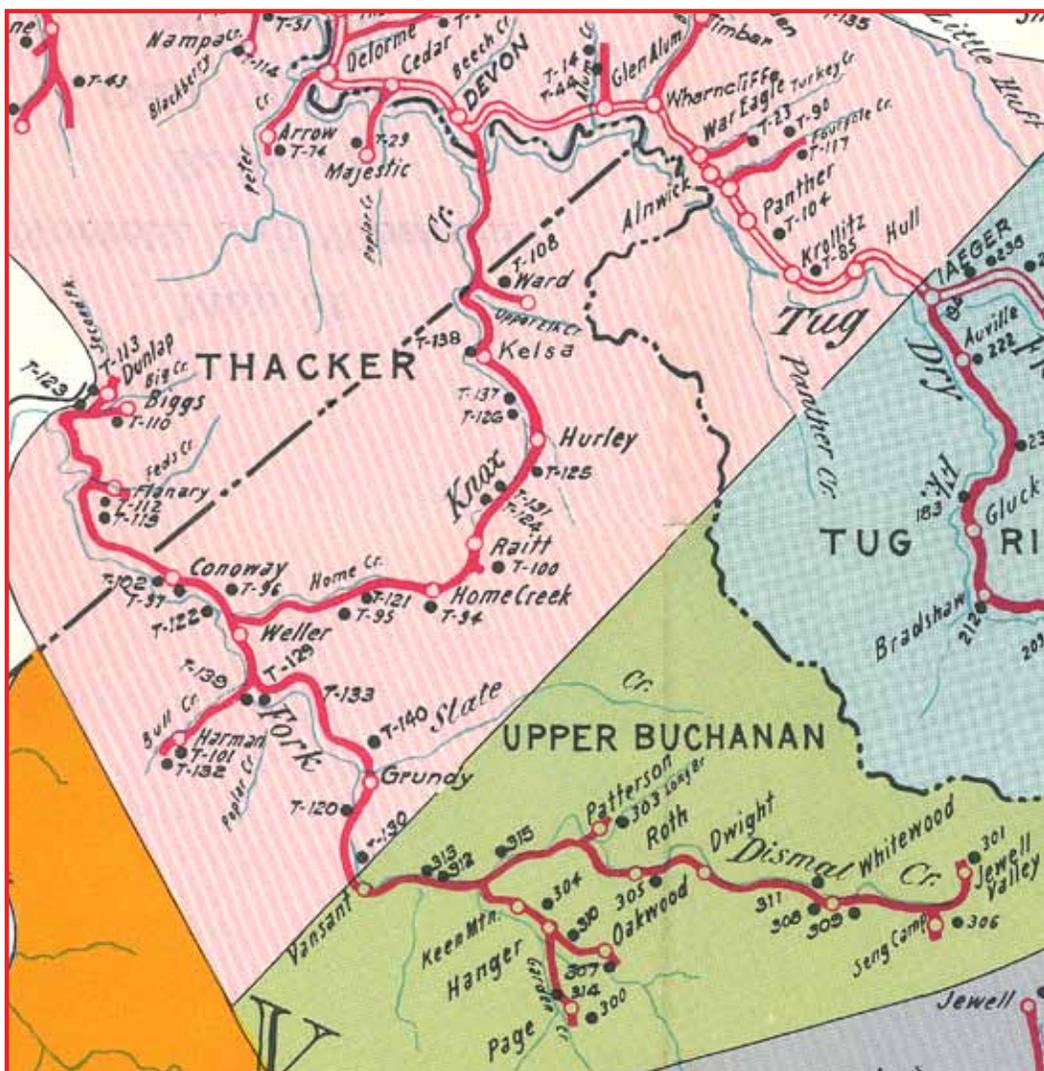
There were multiple reasons behind the drop in coal production, but most of them had to do with consumption patters. In 1948 the railroads used 128 million tons of coal to fuel steam locomotives, but the rapid conversion to diesel dropped consumption to 14 million tons by 1956 and by 1961 diesel replacement was complete. In 1949 the retail industry consumed 166 million tons of coal. By 1956 that number had dropped to 64 million tons. In 1946 the steel industry used 139 million tons of coal, but the consumption was down to 110 million tons in 1956. By the late 1950s fuel oil and electric heat replaced coal as a primary heating source. Another factor in coal's demise was it became an unreliable fuel source because of labor strikes. On the other side of the ledge, mechanization beginning in the early to the mid-1950s reduced production costs.

In spite of these production woes, the Buchanan/Dismal Creek Branches saw five new operations (Load-Outs Nos. 307,308,309,310, and 311) started between 1948 and 1953. In the Thacker District on the Buchanan/Levisa Branches nine new operations started between 1948 and 1953 (Load-Outs Nos. T-119, T-120, T-121, T-122, T-123, T-124, T-125, T-126 and T-129). The locations are shown on the 1957 Coal Districts and Mine Map.

An additional 12 load-outs were added between 1953 and December 1957, bringing the number of coal operations on the Buchanan/Levisa/Dismal Creek Branches to 43 at the end of 1957, up from 16 in 1948.

It was in the 1950s that the large corporations also began buying the independent operations, such as Island Creek Coal buying Red Jackets Keen Mountain Mine (No. 304). The sale of the Red Jacket properties to Island Creek Coal was effective on January 1, 1956.

*(Note: Coal production was relatively consistent in Buchanan County from 1940 through 1950. The 1940 production was 4,874,000 million tons and the 1950 production was 5,324,000 tons. The peak production was 5,979,000 tons in 1942.)*



Coal Mines operating on the Buchanan/Levisa/Dismal Creek Branches in 1957

UPPER BUCHANAN DISTRICT	
Mine No. on Map	NAME OF OPERATOR
300	Cambridge Smokeless Coal Corp. (Cambridge)
301	Jewell Ridge Coal Corp. (Jewell Ridge No. 2)
303	Sycamore Coal Co. (Buccaneer)
304	Island Creek Coal Co. (Keen Mountain)
305	Sprucepine Smokeless Coal Corp. (Sprucepine)
306	Jewell Ridge Coal Corp. (Jewell Ridge No. 3)
307	Universal Coal Co. (Mills Smokeless)
308	Laurel Ridge Coal Co., Inc., The (Laurel Ridge)
309	Paragon Jewell Coal Co., Inc. (Queen)
310	Panther Red Ash Coal Corp. (Operation No. 3)
311	Jewell Smokeless Coal Corp. (Coronet)
312	Preston Mining Co., Inc. (Preston)
313	Vansant Coal Corp. (Vansant No. 1)
314	Diamond Smokeless Coal Co. (Diamond)
315	Jewell Smokeless Coal Corp. (Oper. No. 2)

THACKER DISTRICT	
Mine No.	Name of Operator
0945	Dawn Mining Co., Inc. (Dawn)
0955	Lynn Camp Coal Corp. (Lynn Camp)
0965	Buchanan County Coal Corp. (Operation No. 1)
0975	Tackett Coal Co. (Tackett)
1005	Black Watch Coal Corp. (Black Watch No. 1)
1015	Harman Mining Corp. (Harman)
1025	Margaret Ann Coal Co. (Margaret Ann)
1105	Feds Creek Coal Co., Inc. (Feds Creek)
1125	Apache Coal Co. (Flanary)
1135	Kentland-Elkhorn Coal Corp. (Kentland No. 1)
1195	Clintwood Coal Co. (Levisa River)
1205	Levisa Fuel Co. (Levisa)
1215	Wise County Coal Corp. (Bonnie Bess)
1225	Briar Coal Co. (Briar)
1235	Woodruff Coal Co. (Lampliter)
1245	Little Buddy Coal Co. (Little Buddy)
1255	Knox Creek Coal Corp. (Knox Creek)
1265	Race Fork Coal Corp. (Race Fork)
1305	Edith Fay Coal Corp. (Edith Fay)
1315	Southwestern Virginia Coal Corp. (Wolfpen)
1325	Clintwood Mining Co. (Clintwood)
1335	Black Watch Coal Corp. (Black Watch No. 2)
1375	Five Oaks Coal Corp. (Pine Oaks)
1385	Quality Coal Sales, Inc. (Quality)
1395	Bull Creek Coal & Dock Co. (Bull Creek)
1405	Wellmore Coal Corp. (Cumberland)

## Coal Mining on The Buchanan/Levisa/Dismal Creek Branches in the 1960s to Mid-1970s

When the N&W's Map of Coal Districts and Mines was published on May 1, 1960 the only significant change from the 1957 map was that the coal load-out numbering system had changed because of the merger with the Virginian Railway. Under the new mine numbering system, in the Thacker District, the "T" prefix was dropped and a "5" was added to the end of the mine number. For example, Mine T-140 under the previous system became Mine No. 1405. In the Upper Buchanan District a "3" was added to the end of the existing number. As an example, Mine No. 300 became Mine No. 3003. However, by June of 1962, two significant changes came to the Upper Buchanan District.

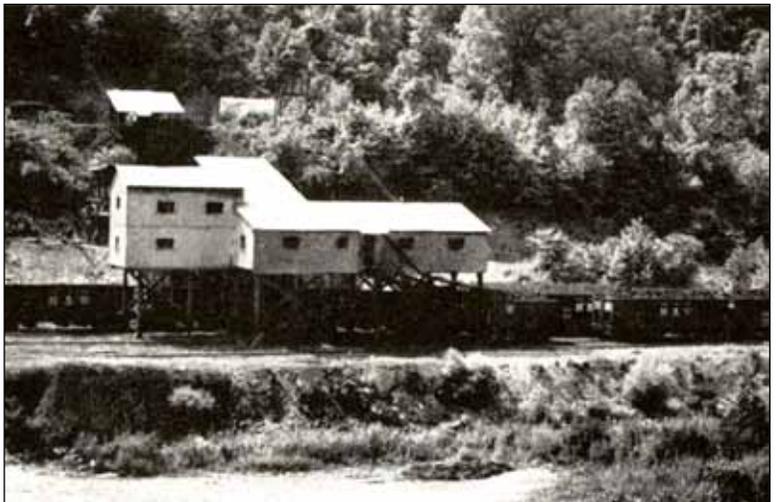
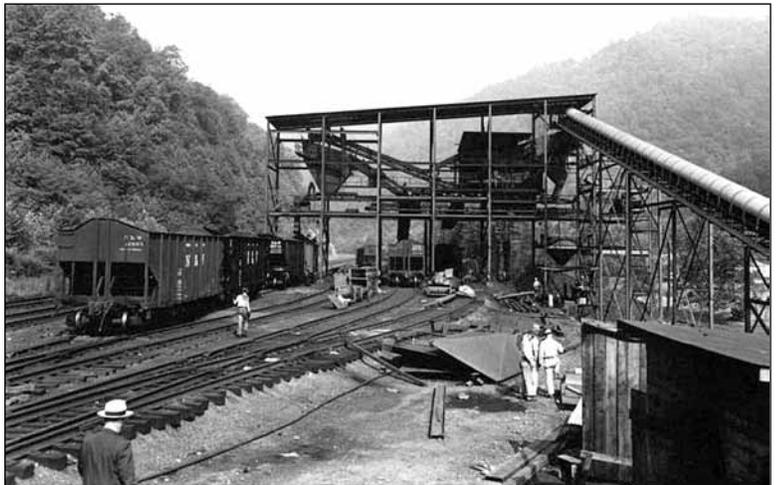
On June 9, 1961, Republic Steel and Island Creek Coal Company announced the creation of a new coal company, Beatrice Pocahontas, to mine coal in Buchanan County's Upper Buchanan Coal District. The financial and charter arrangements of the new company were completed by August 23, 1961, and officers for the new company were elected. What was unique about the planned Beatrice Mine was it was going to tap the Pocahontas No. 3 coal seam that was about 1,350 feet below the surface near Oakwood, VA. Oakwood was only 1,371 feet above sea level. When completed the mine would be the deepest in North America and was expected to have an annual capacity of 1,200,000 tons. Beatrice expected to recover at least 60 million tons of the estimated 75 millions available on the lease. With an expected 50-year operating life, the new Beatrice Pocahontas Coal company was planning a multi-million dollar investment in the operating plant. Coal from the Beatrice mine was planned to be used by Republic Steel at its steel plants in Cleveland, Youngstown, Warren, Canton and Massillon, Ohio; Chicago, Illinois, and Buffalo, New York.

Beatrice Pocahontas began work on its new mining operation in September 1961. Although the new mine did not expect to reach full production until June 1965, it actually began commercial production on February 17, 1964. At the time three of the planned seven shafts were in operation. One was a 1,340-foot air return shaft. Another was a 1,480-foot skip shaft that was the main production outlet for the mine and extended 135 feet below the coal seam. The third shaft was a 1,370-foot supply shaft used to convey men and materials to and from the coal seam.

To serve the Beatrice Mine (No. 3203) located at MP 1.08 on the Hanger Spur, the N&W built four delivery tracks and four 90-car capacity loads tracks.

The second major event occurred in May 1962 when the Jewel Smokeless Coal Company announced it was going to build a coking plant near the Mouth of Dismal Creek to supply blast furnace coke to the McLouth Steel Company which operating three steel mills in Detroit, Trenton and Gibraltar, Michigan. The coke supply contract between Jewel Smokeless Coal and McLouth Steel was for 15 years.

The contract called for 750 tons of coke per day, seven days a week. Jewel Smokeless Coal noted this would require an additional 35,000 tons of coal per month above the existing production at its two mines - Coronet Jewell No. 1 (No. 3113) and Coronet No. 2 (No. 3153). Construction on the 250 non-recovery (beehive-type) coke ovens began in April 1962, with a requirement that the first 210 ovens be operational by January 1963.



Keen Mountain Mine (No. 304) (top) was the fourth mine opened in the Upper Buchanan District. The Vansant Coal Company's No. 1 Mine (No. 313) (middle) was opened near between 1952 and 1957. The Universal Coal Company Mills Mine (No. 307) (bottom) was opened between 1948 and 1953.

Photographs were taken in August 1956. *Norfolk Southern Corporation collection*

## UPPER BUCHANAN DISTRICT

Mine No.	Name of Operator
3003	Cambridge Smokeless Coal Co. (Cambridge)
3013	Jewell Ridge Coal Corp. (Jewell Valley)
3033	Buccaneer Coal Co. (Buccaneer)
3043	Island Creek Coal Co. (Keen Mountain)
3053	*Sprucepine Smokeless Coal Corp. (Sprucepine)
3063	Jewell Ridge Coal Corp. (Seng Camp)
3073	Universal Coal Co. (Mills)
3083	Highlands Coal Corp. (Laurel Ridge)
3093	Paragon Jewell Coal Co., Inc. (Queen)
3103	Oakwood Red Ash Coal Corp. (Oakwood Red Ash)
3113	Jewell Smokeless Coal Corp. (Coronet Jewell No. 1)
3133	Vansant Coal Corp. (Vansant No. 1)
3143	Diamond Smokeless Coal Corp. (Diamond Smokeless)
3153	Jewell Smokeless Coal Corp. (Coronet Jewell No. 2)
3163	Vansant Coal Corp. (Vansant No. 2)
3173	*Anchor Red Ash Coal Corp.
3183	Anchor Red Ash Coal Corp. (Anchor Red Ash)
3193	Newhouse Branch Coal Co. (Newhouse Branch)
3203	Beatrice Pocahontas Co. (Beatrice)
3213	Island Creek Coal Co. (Va. Pocahontas)

\*Inactive

The coking plant was a success and in April 1966 Jewell Smokeless Coal initiated a \$4,000,000 expansion program at the plant which was completed in by April 1967. The coke plant was unusual in that it was a non-byproduct recovery plant. Similar plants in the Pocahontas Coalfield had been closed by the early 1930s. The N&W load-out number for the coke plant was No. 0013, indicating it was the first such plant in the Upper Buchanan District.

When the N&W's *Coal and Coke Manual* was published in November 1965 five new mines had been added to the Upper Buchanan District. These were No. 3163 (Vansant No. 2), No. 3183 (Anchor Red Ash), No. 3193 (Newhouse Branch), No. 3203 (Beatrice Pocahontas) and No. 3213 (Virginia Pocahontas which was just being developed by the Island Creek Coal Company). Fourteen new mines had been added to the Thacker District. These 19 new load-outs brought the number of load-outs on the Buchanan/Levisa/Dismal Creek Branches from 43 in 1957 to 62 in 1965.

Two of the new mines in the Thacker District were Nos. 1615 and 1625 shown on the dotted line in the 1965 map of the coal operations on the Buchanan/Levisa/Dismal Creek shown below. These mines were on the C&O spur that had been built to the Kentland-Elkhorn No. 1 Mine (No. 1135) in 1945. A new dam isolated this trackage from the C&O in the 1960s and the N&W used it to serve the two mines. N&W formally leased the tracks from the C&O in 1967.

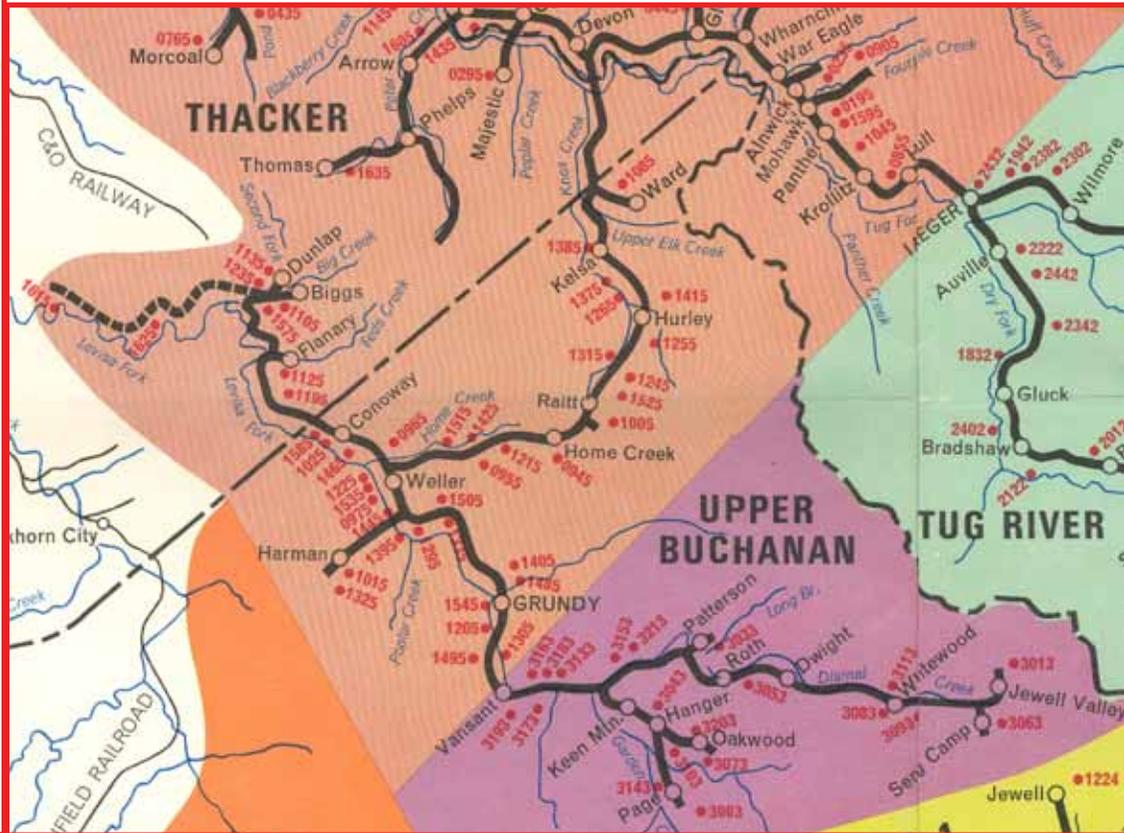
Because of the new coke plant opened by the Jewel Smokeless Coal Corporation and the opening of the Beatrice Mine, and the 19 new mining operations added between 1962 and 1964, the N&W enlarged Weller Yard in 1964 to increase the efficiency of operations. Four additional tracks, nearly a mile in length, were constructed to hold approximately 125 cars per track. One previously existing track was also extended to accommodate a 190-car train. These new tracks increased the yard capacity from 650 to 1,190 cars at a cost of \$745,000. This included the cost of relocating the channel of the Levisa Fork for more than a half mile. All of the excavated material was reused to make new fill for the additional tracks.

A third significant event came to the Upper Buchanan District in 1965 when Island Creek Coal Company announced it was going to develop four large mining complexes similar to the Beatrice Pocahontas Mine to mine its near 500 million tons of coal reserves in the Pocahontas No. 3 coal seam.

The Island Creek Coal Company announcement of four new mine, coupled with

## THACKER DISTRICT

Mine No.	Name of Operator
0945	Dawn Mining Co., Inc. (Dawn)
0955	Lynn Camp Coal Corp. (Lynn Camp)
0965	Buchanan County Coal Corp. (Operation No. 1)
0975	Tackett Coal Co. (Tackett)
1005	Black Watch Coal Corp. (Black Watch No. 1)
1015	Harman Mining Corp. (Harman)
1025	Margaret Ann Coal Co. (Margaret Ann)
1105	Feds Creek Coal Co., Inc. (Feds Creek)
1125	Apache Coal Co. (Flanary)
1135	Kentland-Elkhorn Coal Corp. (Kentland No. 1)
1195	Clintwood Coal Co. (Levisa River)
1205	Levisa Fuel Co. (Levisa)
1215	Wise County Coal Corp. (Bonnie Bess)
1225	Briar Coal Co. (Briar)
1235	Woodruff Coal Co. (Lampfliter)
1245	Little Buddy Coal Co. (Little Buddy)
1255	Knox Creek Coal Corp. (Knox Creek)
1265	Race Fork Coal Corp. (Race Fork)
1305	Edith Fay Coal Corp. (Edith Fay)
1315	Southwestern Virginia Coal Corp. (Wolfpen)
1325	Clintwood Mining Co. (Clintwood)
1335	Black Watch Coal Corp. (Black Watch No. 2)
1375	Five Oaks Coal Corp. (Pine Oaks)
1385	Quality Coal Sales, Inc. (Quality)
1395	Bull Creek Coal & Dock Co. (Bull Creek)
1405	Wellmore Coal Corp. (Cumberland)
1415	Lester Coal Co. (Kelsa No. 2)
1425	Little Bear Coal Corp. (Bear No. 1)
1445	Black Diamond Coal Sales, Inc. (Black Diamond)
1465	Little Bear Coal Corp. (Bear No. 2)
1485	Riverside Coals, Inc. (Riverside)
1495	Melrose Coal Co. (Melrose)
1505	Lee Town Coals, Inc. (Lee Town)
1515	International Coal Co. (International)
1525	Knox Creek Coal Corp. (Knox Creek No. 2)
1535	Old Virginia Coal Corp. (Thomas)
1545	Bostic Coal Co. (Bostic)
1575	Kentland-Elkhorn Coal Corp. (Spruce Fork)
1585	Star Coal Co. (Star)
1615	Potter Coal Co. (Kem)
1625	Woodruff Coal Co. (Lick Creek)





The Beatrice Pocahontas Company's Beatrice Mine (No. 3203) at Oakwood, Virginia was photographed on February 17, 1964. *Norfolk Southern Corporation collection*

the fact there were 42 coal load-outs in the Thacker Coal District on the Buchanan/Levisa Branch and 20 in the Upper Buchanan Coal District on the Buchanan/Dismal Creek Branches in 1965, contributed to the N&W considering another outlet for the Buchanan Branch. In addition there was the coking plant near Dismal Yard. Plus the mines had higher production rates than those of the 1930s and 1940s.

### **The Clinch Valley District Connection**

The Buchanan Branch Extension and Dismal Creek Branch Extension were no sooner completed in October 1936 when concern was raised about the connection at Devon being the only way onto or off the branch. Speculation turned to a connection with the Clinch Valley District's Big Creek Branch near Jewell Ridge which was only eight or nine miles from the terminus of the Dismal Creek Branch at Jewell Valley.

Two other possibilities mentioned were a connection at Raven Red Ash on the Coal Creek Branch and near Drill on the Lewis creek Branch. The Buchanan Branch Extension at Hanger was only about eight miles from Raven Red Ash and on Garden Creek the railroad was only about four miles from the terminus of the Lewis Creek Branch near Drill. The White Oak Lumber Company had operated a lumber railroad from Drill up to Garden Creek and then to the Levisa Fork. Speculation centered on the Lewis Creek Branch. A connection with the Clinch Valley District would allow a separate access to the Pocahontas Division via the Dry Fork Branch which connected the Clinch Valley District to the Pocahontas Division between Cedar Bluff and Iaeger, WV. Drill was considered the most plausible connection because of its superior grade. However at the time the N&W was reluctant to consider any connection between the Buchanan Branch and the Clinch Valley District because of the vast amount of tunneling necessary. In addition it was still the middle of the Depression and coal development along the Buchanan/Levisa/Dismal Creek Branches had not really tapped the potential of the region. The existing railaraod was adequate to serve the needs of the region.

In October, 1966, N&W President Herman H. Pevler announced the construction of a new 8.4-mile connecting line between the Buchanan Branch and the Clinch Valley District. The cutoff was intended to provide better service for the existing mines for those being planned along the Buchanan/Levisa/Dismal Creek Branches. The proposed connection would extend eastward up Laurel Fork from Whitewood on the Dismal Creek Branch to a 3,100-foot tunnel under Smith Ridge. From there it would join the Clinch Valley District's Big Creek Branch near Jewell approximately 7 miles from Richlands.

While there was no rationale for a connection in October 1936, thirty years later Pevler explained, "At present eastbound coal comprising 70 percent or more than 120,000 cars yearly of Buchanan traffic travels as much as 65 miles west and north before reaching the main line and turning toward the seaboard. Completion of this direct line would also enable us to give better service on westbound coal. But even more important it will provide ample capacity for traffic from future mines in the rich Upper Buchanan coal field." It was estimated the cutoff would reduce distance traveled by 48 miles and transit times by one day.

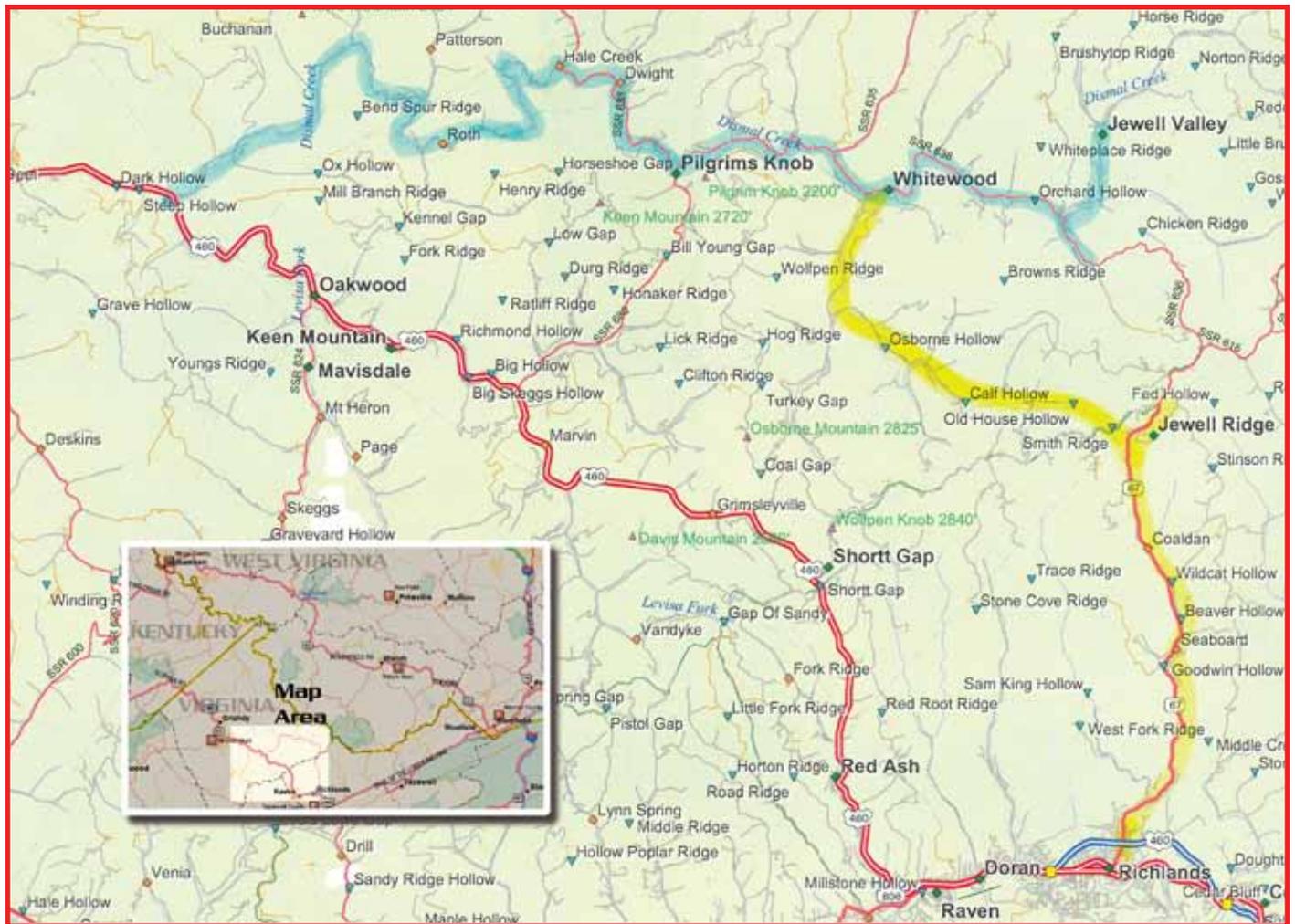
The project in 1966 was no less difficult than the one discussed in 1936. The challenge was the rugged terrain. The

contract for building the Wyatt Cut-off was awarded to Codell Construction Company of Winchester, Kentucky. Grading and masonry work began in May 1967. Construction of the new line started at Whitewood on the Dismal Creek Branch at an elevation of 1,765 feet. The rail line ascended from Whitewood on a 2.0 percent compensated grade up to the tunnel. The rail line penetrating the Smith Ridge at an elevation of 2,418-foot level. The grade reduced to 1.5 percent inside the bore. From the east portal, the railroad descended on a 2.2 percent grade to a junction with the Big Creek Branch at Jewell. The maximum grade against loaded traffic was 2.0 percent compensated for the maximum curvature of 12 degrees. On the west side of the tunnel a horseshoe curve, approximately 1,900 feet long, extended from one mountainside up Trace Fork and then over a fill at Carter Branch to the other mountainside.

Excavation work at the tunnel began on September 21, 1967, by Wiley N. Jackson Company of Salem, Virginia. On July 27, 1968, the 3,084-foot tunnel under Smith Ridge was "holed through." The August 11, 1968 *Bluefield Daily News* announced the tunnel had been holed through and noted the tunnel was being built to speed Island Creek coal east from the Upper Buchanan District. The final name given to the bore was Blair Tunnel.

With the tunnel holed through, steel erection for the bridges began in September 1968 and track work in November of 1968. Construction of the connecting railroad included two bridges. The 488-foot long Bridge No. 1426 crosses over State Route 635 and Laurel Fork at a height of 90 feet. Bethlehem Steel Company furnished the steel for and erected the viaduct. Bridge No. 1426-A, 135 feet long deck girder bridge, also crosses Laurel Fork.

The Wyatt Cut-off was inaugurated on September 15, 1969 with GP9 742 and four other units pulling 3,756 tons of coal from the Virginia Pocahontas No. 1 Mine up the 2.0 percent compensated grade from Whitewood through Blair Tunnel. The transit time from Whitewood to Richlands was little over an hour. The newly completed connecting line shortened the route from Southwest Virginia to Bluefield and the export piers located at Lamberts Point in Norfolk by about 46 miles.



The map above shows the Dismal Creek Branch in blue to Jewell Valley and the Wyatt Cutoff between Whitewood and Jewell Ridge in yellow. The railroad between about Coaldan and Richlands is the Clinch Valley District's Big Creek Branch. By 2007 the Wyatt Cutoff was being used primarily to bring empty hoppers back from Bluefield via the Clinch Valley Line. In actuality the grades and curvature of the Buchanan Branch favor taking loads out through Devon. The Wyatt Cut-Off is generally used for loaded coal trains only when there are problems or undue congestion between Thomas and Devon. *Map courtesy of DeLorme and was previously published in the April-May-June 2007 issue of "The Arrow."*

The project also included the construction of three storage tracks near Dismal Yard. An extension to the Whitewood passing track was put in to accommodate 200-car trains. A storage track was also constructed adjacent to the Big Creek Branch. This began at the east end of the tunnel and required a minor line change in the Big Creek Branch with a relocation of the creek channel.

### **Island Creek Coal Company's Five Shaft Mines**

When Republic Steel and Island Creek Coal Company formed Beatrice Pocahontas Company, Island Creek was given the responsibility of managing the coal operation. On March 9, 1965, Island Creek Coal Company announced plans to build a \$15 Million coal complex in Buchanan County, the first of four planned shaft mines reaching to the Pocahontas No. 3 coal seam. Each mining complex was being designed for a 40 year life with an annual production of 2 million tons.

Construction of Virginia Pocahontas No. 1 (Mine No. 3223) was started in July 1965 on the site of the former Dismal Creek County Club. Dravo Corporation of Pittsburgh, which had built the Beatrice Mine shafts, was awarded the contract to sink the three mine shafts for production, air and moving men and supplies. All three shafts were started on September 20, 1965 toward the coal seam located 1,150 feet underground.

In November McNally-Pittsburgh Manufacturing Company was awarded the contract to build the coal preparation plant. Basically, the plant was planned to consist of three separate cleaning circuits, with each designed to process a specific size of coal. A mechanical mixer was planned to blend crushed coarse cleaned coal and thermally dried fine coal prior to loading into railroad cars. Sufficient storage was planned to allow tonnage to accumulate so a super collier could be loaded at Lamberts Point. Cars to be loaded at the plant were planned to be moved past the loading point by radio controlled locomotives in 40 car units.

The June 5, 1966 *Bluefield Daily News* reported the 20-foot diameter production shaft bottomed out on June 4, 1966, at 1,170 feet. The two other shafts, one for men, supplies and fresh air and one for exhaust air, were started at the same time and were scheduled to reach the coal seam later in June. The annual 2,000,000 tons production rate of the Virginia Pocahontas was expected to be met by the use of continuous miners and later the mine would be converted to long-wall type mining.

Island Creek Coal Company announced in October 1966 that the Virginia Pocahontas No. 1 Mine would start production in February 1967. It required 111 employees initially, with a full employment of 377 when the mine reached full production. The mine would be mining the 54-inch Pocahontas No. 3 coal seam. The company had six long term contracts that would guarantee production for at least 10 years. However, a blast in the mine shaft killed two men on January 25, 1967. The mine went into initial production in the spring of 1967.

Island Creek Coal Company announced on November 22, 1966 it would start sinking the shafts for the Virginia Pocahontas No. 2 Mine (No. 3223) on January 20, 1967. This mine became a joint venture with the Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation when that company bought a 25 percent interest stake in the mine on April 30, 1968. The shafts were going to be 1,340 feet deep which would make them 30 feet deeper than the Beatrice Mine. By December 1966, Corte Construction Company from Kimball, WV was grading the site. By September 1967 a contract for the preparation plant Virginia Pocahontas No. 2 was awarded to McNally- Pittsburgh Manufacturing to duplicate the coal preparation plant the company built at the No. 1 Operation. The plan was for the plant to receive coal at the rate of 750 tons per hour which would be stored in a 5,000 ton raw-coal silo. The coal would be withdrawn from the silo at the rate of 625 tons per hour and sent to the preparation plant.

On January 23, 1968, Island Creek Coal Company "bottomed out" the production shaft for the No. 2 Operation at 1,350 feet. The other two shafts were expected to reach the coal seam in mid-February and early March. The mine was scheduled for completion by the end of 1968 and in full production by 1971.

In March 1968 Island Creek Coal Company announced it was ready to start building another \$20,000,000 operation near Vansant. The new mine would be a replica of the Virginia Pocahontas No. 1 and No. 2 mines.

On March 16, 1968, Island Creek Coal Company announced the creation of its new Virginia Division of Island Creek Coal Company with headquarters at Keen Mountain, VA. The new division included all of the Keen Mountain preparation plant, the Beatrice Mine, and Virginia Pocahontas Mines Nos. 1 and 2. These mines had previously been managed from Holden, WV.

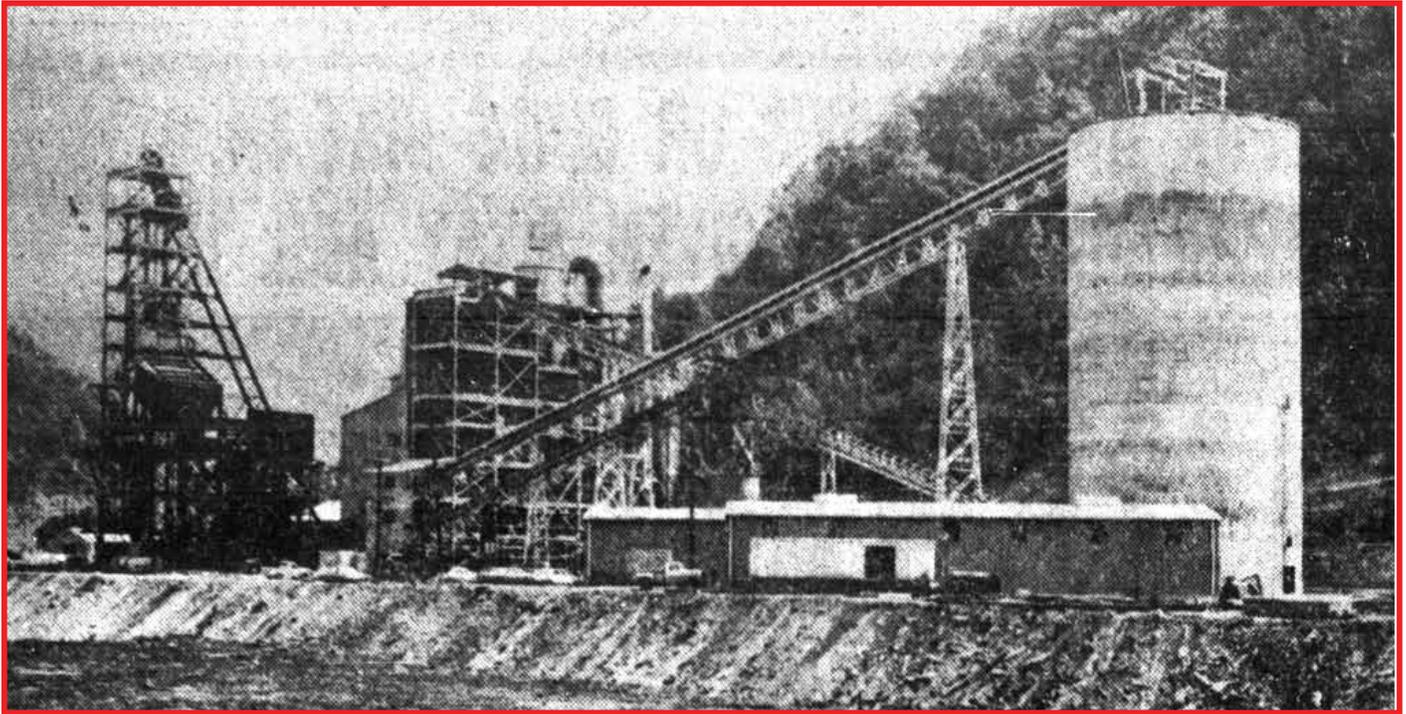
By May 18, 1968 the site for Virginia Pocahontas No. 3 (No. 3233) was cleared, graded and drilling for shaft grouting had begun. This mine would be identical to Virginia Pocahontas No. 1 and No. 2.

In June 1968 Island Creek Coal Company told the Buchanan County Chamber of Commerce it planned 6 more mines in addition to the two in operation and the one being built. The coal company stated it had depleted the nearby-by labor force with its current operations and needed 1,600 to 1,700 new families to work in its proposed mines.

By December 1968 the main shaft Virginia Pocahontas No. 3 (No. 3233) was being sunk by Centennial Development Company of Eureka, Utah. The production shaft was 20 feet in diameter and was planned to be 1,370 feet deep. The planned completion date was March 1970. The two other shafts were also under construction.

Virginia Pocahontas No. 3 began limited production in January 1970 with the coal taken out through the air shaft and processed at Virginia Pocahontas No. 1. The preparation plant and mine ventilation system was completed in August 1970 and the mine went into production in September 1970 with 100 employees. Full production capacity of two million tons annually was expected by December 1971, with a full employment of 400.

Virginia Pocahontas No. 4 Mine (No. 3243) was located at the Mouth of Spruce Pine on Dismal Creek near Dwight, VA. Construction of the new mine was already underway when, on December 24, 1969, Nissho Iwai Company, of Japan and



Virginia Pocahontas No. 3 was photographed by Rachel Riggsby in August 1970 and was published with her article on the mine in The August 9, 1970 *Bluefield Daily News*. Rachel Riggsby provided a number of articles to the *Bluefield Daily News* about Buchanan County and this section on Island Creek Coal building the Virginia Pocahontas shaft mines is adapted, in part, from her articles.

Occidental Petroleum, parent company of Island Creek Coal announced a contract of \$23 Million to finance the Virginia Pocahontas No. 4 Mine. As part of the deal Island Creek Coal would provide 30 million short tons of Pocahontas coal to the Japanese firm over a period of 15 years. This would be the first Japanese financed coal mine in America.

Drilling operations were begun at the site in December 1969 by the Centennial Development Corporation. By November 1970 drilling for the air shaft had reached down 632 feet and was expected to bottom out at 1,319 feet in January 1971. The production shaft had been drilled to 346 feet and the supply and man shaft drilled down to 214 feet. Both of these shafts were expected to bottom out in February 1971, at about 1,320 feet.

The expectation was limited production would begin in June 1971 when the company began connecting the three shafts, with full production in March 1972.

By November 1970 construction had also begun on the concrete 5,000 ton raw coal silo. Just like the other three Virginia Pocahontas mines coal was to be brought out of the mine and into the silo and from the silo to the preparation plant for final cleaning and preparation. McNalley-Pittsburgh Manufacturing was building the coal preparation plant.

Island Creek Coal Company noted it expected to employ approximately 410 union employees and 63 supervisory personnel at the new operation, bringing the total Island Creek Coal Company employees in Buchanan County to about 1,700.

When the *1973 Keystone Coal Industry Manual* was published all four of the Virginia Pocahontas mines were listed. Virginia Pocahontas No. 1 was listed as producing 1,184,455 tons of coal in 1972 with a daily capacity of 8,000 tons. Virginia Pocahontas No. 3 was listed as producing 755,145 tons in 1972 with a daily capacity of 7,500 tons of cleaned coal. Virginia Pocahontas No. 4 was listed as still in the developmental stage, but having produced 93,072 tons.

Virginia Pocahontas No. 2 was listed as a separate company, presumably because of the joint venture relationship with Jones and Laughlin Steel. Virginia Pocahontas No. 2 produced 495,286 tons in 1972 with a daily capacity of 7,500 tons of cleaned coal.

The fifth Island Creek Coal Company managed mine in Buchanan County, Beatrice of the joint venture Beatrice Pocahontas Coal Company, produced 1,194,950 tons with a daily capacity of 8,000 tons.

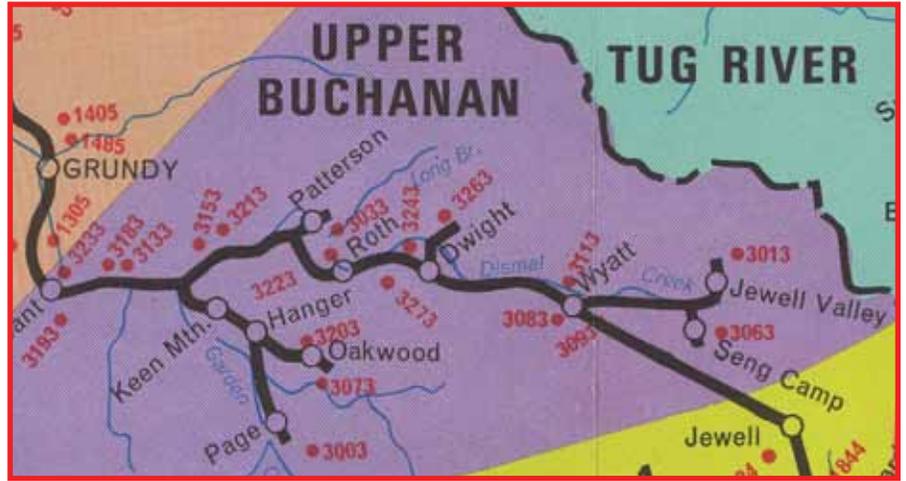
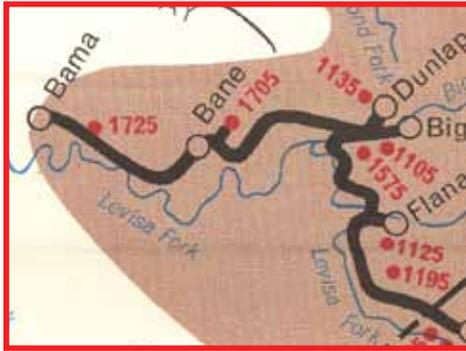
The only other mines in Buchanan County to exceed the 750,000 ton threshold was the Harman Mining Company (No. 1015) which produced 752,948 tons in 1972 and Jewell Ridge Coal Corporation's No. 12 and 12A Mines (No. 3083) on Laurel Fork which produced 751,820 tons in 1972. Mine No. 3083 started operating in January 1969.

In the Thacker District, Kentland-Elkhorn (No. 1135) produced 948,755 tons through its preparation plant in 1972. By 1972 The Feds Creek Coal Company (No. 1105) had merged with Kentland-Elkhorn and that mines production was included in the Kentland-Elkhorn number.

When the N&W's *Coal Districts and Mines Map* was published in July 1972 it showed that six mines had been shutdown and five new ones had been added in the Upper Buchanan District. Mine Nos. 3043, 3053, 3103, 3143, 3163, and 3173 were closed and Mine Nos. 3223, 3233, 3243, 3263, and 3273 were added.

Mine No. 3043 was the original Red Jacket Keen Mountain that was opened in 1936 and bought by Island Creek Coal Company in 1956. However Island Creek Coal Company opened three new mines. These were Virginia Pocahontas

These two excerpts show the relevant new mines on the N&W's 1972 Coal Districts and Mines map



No. 2 (No. 3223), Virginia Pocahontas No. 3 (No. 3233), Virginia Pocahontas No. 4 (No. 3243). Mine No. 3263 was Jewell Ridge Coal Company's Jewell No. 18 that opened in January 1969 and Mine No. 3273 was the Jewell Coal & Coke Company's Spruce Pine Creek Mine.

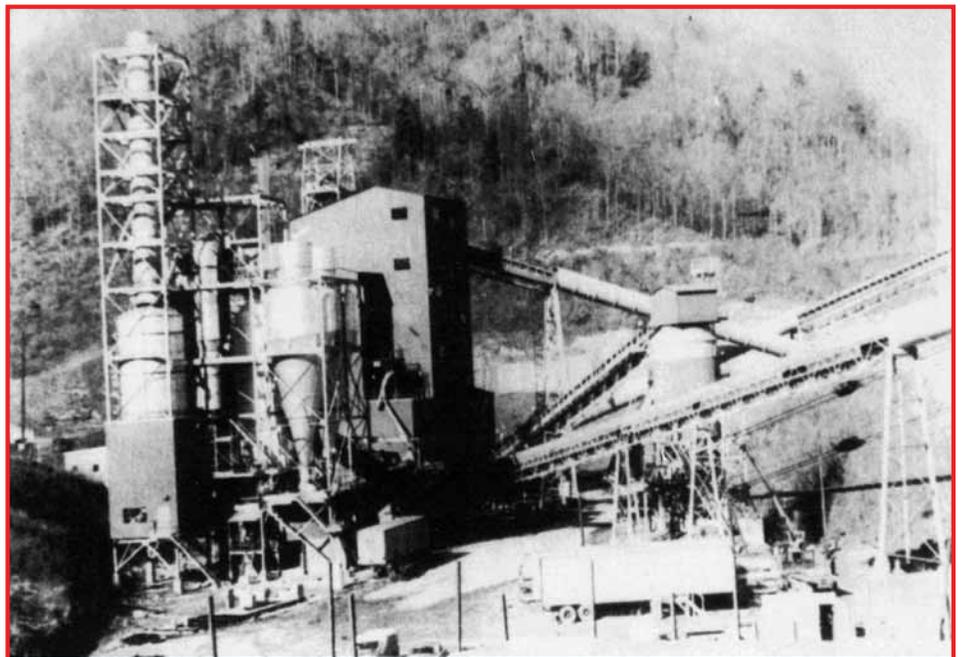
In the Thacker District seven mines were closed and three were opened. Mine Nos. 0945, 0965, 1205, 1235, 1545, 1615, and 1625 were closed. Mine Nos. 1705, 1725 and 1755 were opened. Mine No. 1705 was the Apache Coal Company and Mine No. 1725 was the Crescent Coal Company and both were on the N&W's leased C&O spur in Kentucky. Mine No. 1755 was opened by the Race Horse Coal Company.

While the national coal production figures may have been bleak in the 1950s, Buchanan County coal production was on the rise. Coal production jumped from 5,910,000 tons in 1954 to 9,135,000 tons in 1955 and continued growing. The county produced 10,629,000 tons in 1960 and then had an average increase in production of 1,000,000 tons per year up to 1966 when 16,306 tons were produced. After 1966 production started dropping, reaching a low of 12,300,000 tons in 1971 before it started rising.

### Coal Mining on The Buchanan/Levisa/Dismal Creek Branches in the Late 1970s to 1990

The latter years of the 1970s and the early years of the 1980s for the Upper Buchanan and Thacker District were years of new mines coming on line and years of struggle when the demand for coal dropped. Coal production reached 16,7651,000 tons in 1977.

Island Creek's Virginia Pocahontas No. 5 (No. 3253) was producing developmental coal by April 1978 with full production expected in 1981. Also in April 1978 Island Creek's Virginia Pocahontas No. 6 (No. 3293) located near Skeggs, VA on the Right Fork of Garden Creek was in full development. Centennial Construction of Omaha, Nebraska was sinking the three main shafts. As of December 1977, the main air shaft was sunk to a depth of 1,083 feet, the production shaft was down 880 feet, and the supply shaft was down 605 feet. The coal seam was approximately 1,500 feet below the surface. Plans called for developmental coal production in 1980. The mine was dedicated in December 1980, with full production planned for 1983 with full employment of 500 people.



Following the 16,751,000 tons of coal produced in Buchanan County in 1977, in December 1978 Island Creek announced plans to spend \$25 million for a housing development on Keen Mountain known as Buchanshire for at least 1,600 families. At the time Island Creek Coal had 2,300 employees working in Buchanan

A photograph of the Virginia Pocahontas No. 6 operation was published in the March 8, 1981 *Bluefield Daily News*

County and expected to add 1,500 more.

The other big positive news in the late 1970s was Consolidated Coal expected to start developing its coal resources in Buchanan County.

The negative news for the coal industry was a 111-day miners strike from December 7, 1977 to March 25, 1978. This was followed by the coal slump of 1979. Island Creek shut down the Virginia Pocahontas No. 2 Mine (No. 3233) on August 10, 1979. Because of an 81-day miner's strike in 1981, the Virginia Pocahontas No. 2 did not reopen until August 1981. On November 25, 1981, the Beatrice Mine (No. 3203) was shut down when a fire was discovered in the shaft mine.

Buchanan County coal production dropped to 13,462,000 tons in 1978, increased in 1979, 1980 and 1981, reaching a new high of 18,782,000 tons in 1981, before dropping to 15,242,000 tons in 1982, and 12,310,000 tons in 1983. Island Creek laid off 40 percent of its work force in September 1982 and did not expect to call its employees back before January 1983.

By 1982 the only positive news for the coal was power plant coal consumption kept increasing and export coal held steady. The need for metallurgical coal kept dropping as the steel industry went through its own restructuring. Coal used to make coke dropped from 88.2 million tons in 1976 to an average of 63.4 million tons in 1980 and 1981. In 1982 only 40.1 million tons of coal were used to make coke. The average coal consumption for making coke from 1982 through 1986 was 39.8 million tons of 50 percent less than the average of 88.2 million tons consumed from 1973 through 1976. The coke figures directly affected the metallurgical coal (MET coal) produced from the Pocahontas No. 3 coal seams of Island Creek's seven shaft mines in Buchanan County, as well as other coal companies mining MET coal in the Upper Buchanan/Thacker Districts.

Jewell Smokeless Coal Company lost a third of its coke sales when Detroit's McLouth Steel Company went bankrupt in March 1982. At the time the coke plant had 95,000 tons of coke stockpiled at its coking plant and 600,000 tons of coal stockpiled at its mines. However the Jewel Smokeless Coal Company was optimistic, that with so many coke plants

shutting down, there would be an increased market for coke in future years and it went ahead with a planned expansion.

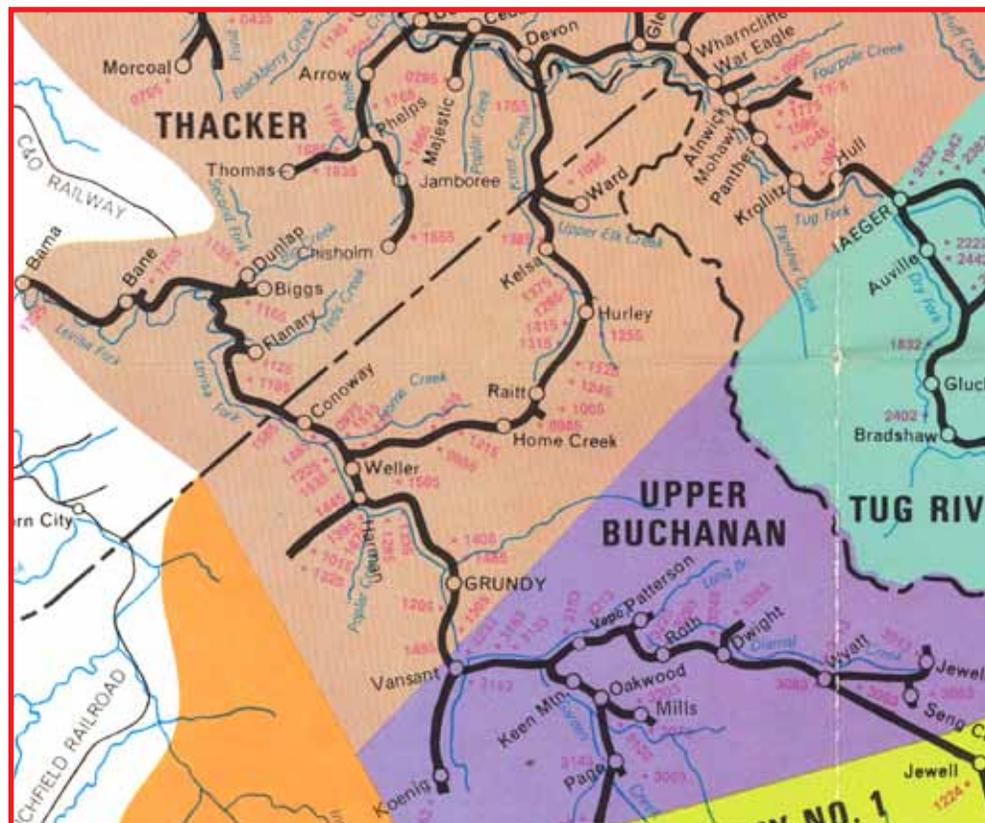
When the N&W's *Coal Districts and Mines* map (shown to the left) was published on April 1980, it included 41 mines in the Thacker District and 21 in the Upper Buchanan District, although some were operating under new names.

By 1980 the dominant coal operators were Island Creek, United and Jewell Ridge which operated 19 of the 62 mining operations in the district.

Island Creek had all of its large shaft mines in production. These included Mines Nos. 3203, 3213, 3223, 3233, 3243, 3253, and 3293. In addition Island Creek had taken over the Newhouse Branch Coal Company (No. 3193).

United operated seven Wellmore Mines. These were Mines Nos. 1215, 1225, 1245, 1405, 1465, 1485 and 1505.

Jewell Ridge operated Mines Nos.



3013, 3063, 3083, and 3263.

In 1984 the county coal production number had risen to 15,509,000 tons, but there were indications of problems. The seven Island Creek deep shaft mines which had been designed to produce two million tons annually, only produced 2,815,700 tons all together. Beatrice (No. 3203) produced 765,531 tons, Virginia Pocahontas No. 1 (VP-1) (No. 3213) produced 599,949 tons, VP-2 (No. 3223) produced 226,556 tons, VP-3 (No. 3233) produced 249,156 tons, VP-4 (No. 3243) produced 58,051 tons, VP-5 (No. 3253) produced 81,746 tons and VP-6 (No. 3293) produced 834,711 tons. In contrast, the seven Wellmore operations produced 3,910,218 tons of coal, the Permac Universal Mine (No. 3003) operating on the original Page Coal & Coke Company lease that began operations in 1937 produced 1,800,000 tons and the three Jewell Smokeless mining operations produced 1,692,580 tons. The other large producer was the Harman Mine on the Bull Creek spur that produced 910,775 tons of coal.

Buchanan County coal production steadily increased from 1984 to 1990. Production was 16,236,00 tons in 1986, 18,833,000 tons in 1987, 19,769,000 tons in 1988, 19,179,000 tons in 1989, and reached a peak of 20,834,000 tons in 1990.

**Buchanshire**

Map labels include: RESIDENTIAL, COMMERCIAL, APARTMENTS, AUG KEEN ROAD (629), MOBILE HOME AREA, CONTRARY RD (680), TO RICHMOND U.S. 460, U.S. POST OFFICE KEEN MTN., VA., ISLAND CREEK COAL CO. VIRGINIA POCAHONTAS DIV. OFFICE, KEWEL BRANCH RD (624), and TO GRUNDY.

**Buchanshire**

Island Creek announced its planned community of Buchanshire in December 1978 and proceeded with its development in 1979. By April 1983, with the project about 75 percent complete, work essentially stopped. After an expenditure of about \$10 million on the 1,223-acre site, water lines and a sewage plant had been built, roads had been graded, but not paved, and no houses had been built. Island Creek noted that further development would be slow because of the slump in the metallurgical coal market. At the time Island Creek had 1,700 furloughed employees with no expectation of production improvement before 1985.

Maple Leaf of Buchanan, A 116-bed nursing home applied for a permit to build at in Buchanshire in 1985, but its application was denied because the county representatives preferred a facility in Grundy.

Development of the planned community of Buchanshire never did restart, instead

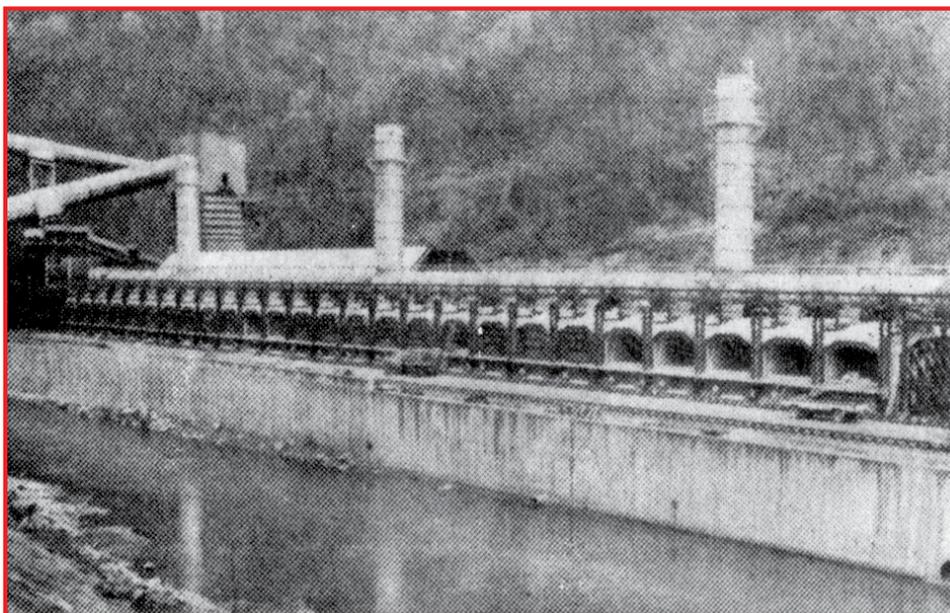
on July 15, 1987, it was announced the site would be the home of the new Keen Mountain Maximum Security prison. The site selection was attributed to all of the site preparation work that had been done for Island Creek's planned community.

Some coal producers prospered such as Jewell Smokeless Coal Company. By May 1987 Jewell Smokeless Coal Company's ultra-modern coking operation at Vansant was one of only 36 coking plants left in the United States. Twenty-two coke plants had closed since 1982. In 1987 plans were underway by Jewel Smokeless owner, Elk River Resources, to make the coke plant into a co-generation facility with the electricity the plant produced being sold to an electric utility.

Other coal operators did not, such as the Island Creek Coal Company. Island Creek produced MET coal and exported a large portion of it. Between 1988 and 1991 Island Creek idled its Beatrice, Virginia Pocahontas No. 2 and Virginia Pocahontas No. 4 Mines. The coal company said the shut-down was due to economic and mining conditions.

### Mining on The Buchanan/Levisa/Dismal Creek Branches in the 1990s

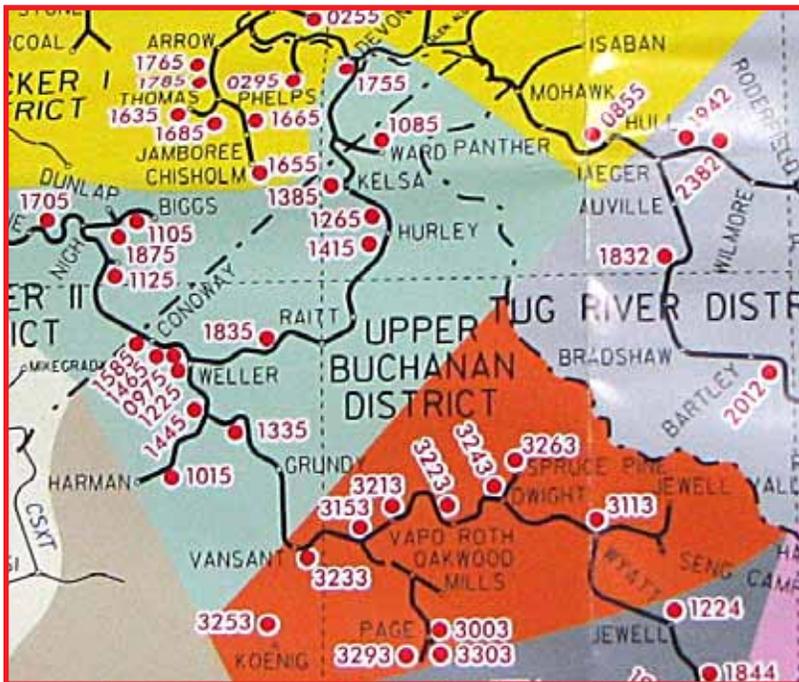
Having reached a peak production of 20,834,000 tons of coal in 1990, Buchanan County coal production dropped by 2.8 million tons in 1991 to 18,023,000 tons and then to 17,542,000 million tons in 1992.



Island Creek's Virginia Pocahontas Mines Nos. 1, 3, 5 and 6 produced over 6 million tons of coal in 1991, but its other three mines were still closed. The largest single producer was Consol's No. 1 Mine, which came on-line in 1987 and which produced 2.6 million tons in 1991. However by 1992, Island Creek's parent company, Occidental Petroleum wanted to get out of the coal business. Island Creek Coal Company and all of its producing mines was sold to Consol Energy, Inc (Consol), a holding company jointly owned by DuPont's coal group and Reheinbraun AG of Germany. The agreement was signed on April 15, 1993, and finalized on July 1, 1993. At the time Virginia Pocahontas Nos. 3, 5 and 6 were the only Island Creek mines operating in Buchanan County.

A photograph of the Jewell Smokeless Coal Company's coking plant at Vansant was published in the March 11, 1990 Bluefield Daily News. The plant had been modernized so that all of coke by-products were captured within a unique closed-circuit system rather than allowing them to escape into the air. The plants's 134 ovens were capable of producing 600,000 to 650, 000 tons of coke annually

When the Norfolk Southern's Coal Districts and Mines map (shown below) was published in July 1996 all of the mines on the Buchanan/Levisa Branches, formerly listed in the Thacker District, were in the new Thacker II District



THACKER II DISTRICT		
MINE NO.	MINE OPERATOR	MINE NAME
0975	WELLMORE COAL CORP.	WELLMORE *8
1015	HARMAN MINING CORP.	HARMAN
1085	VIRGINIA ENERGY CO.	VIRGINIA ENERGY
1105	FEDS CREEK COAL CO., INC.	FEDS CREEK
1125	APACHE COAL CO.	FLANARY
1225	WELLMORE COAL CORP.	WELLMORE *7
1265	MAPCO COAL, INC.	RACE FORK
1335	RAPOCA ENERGY CO.	BLACK WATCH *2
1385	GALE COAL CO., INC.	GALE
1415	MAPCO COAL, INC.	KELSA *2
1445	RAPOCA ENERGY CO.	BLACK DIAMOND
1465	WELLMORE COAL CORP.	WELLMORE *14
1585	KYBER COAL CO.	G-1
1705	CLINTWOOD ELKHORN MINING CO.	CLINTWOOD-ELKHORN
1755	MAPCO COAL, INC.	RACE FORK *2
1835	WELLMORE COAL CORP.	WELLMORE *20
1875	KYBER COAL CO.	KYBER TIPPLE

UPPER BUCHANAN DISTRICT		
MINE NO.	MINE OPERATOR	MINE NAME
3003	MAPCO COAL, INC.	PERMAC
3113	JEWELL SMOKELESS COAL CORP.	CORONET JEWELL *1
3153	JEWELL SMOKELESS COAL CORP.	CORONET JEWELL *2
3213	ISLAND CREEK COAL CO.	VA POCA, #1
3223	ISLAND CREEK COAL CO.	VA POCA, *2
3233	ISLAND CREEK COAL CO.	VA POCA, *3
3243	ISLAND CREEK COAL CO.	VA POCA, *4
3253	VP-5 MINING CO.	VA POCA, *5
3263	JEWELL RIDGE COAL CORP.	JEWELL *18
3293	GARDEN CREEK POCAHONTAS CO.	VA POCA, *6
3303	CONSOLIDATION COAL CO.	BUCHANAN *1

The CONSOL Energy purchase of the Island Creek mines led to a number of miner layoffs for a variety of reasons. CONSOL merged Virginia Pocahontas Nos. 5 and 6 underground in May 1994 to create Virginia Pocahontas No. 8. This resulted in laying off 240 employees. On the other side of the productivity equation CONSOL's Buchanan No. 1 Mine was producing about 400,000 tons of coal per month, whereas the Island Creek mines had been designed to produce about 160,000 tons per month. CONSOL increased the production of some of the former Island Creek properties by installing long-wall mining equipment. More efficient mining resulted in lower employment requirements. By June 1996 CONSOL was down to 750 employees and work was off and on because of the continued slump in the demand for MET Coal.

Buchanan County coal production dropped to 13,964,000 tons in 1993 and continued in the 14,000,000 ton range until it dropped to 12,089,000 in 1998 and then 10,084,000 in 1999.

When the 1996 Coal Districts and Mine map was published there were only coal 17 load-outs in the Thacker II District and 11 in the Upper Buchanan District. Six of the seven Island Creek deep shaft mines were still listed, although they were being operated by the Consolidation Coal Company. The list is somewhat suspect, because the consolidation of Virginia Pocahontas Nos. 5 and 6 into Virginia Pocahontas No. 8 is not shown.

The Jewell Smokeless Coal Corporation's coke plant was still operating, but it was now owned by Sun Coal Company.

### Mining on The Buchanan/Levisa/Dismal Creek Branches in the 21st Century

Coal production rose to 11,044,000 tons in year 2000 and then began a downward trend, rising and falling with market demand. From 2001 through 2008 the production in millions of was 9.4, 9.8, 10.5, 10.2, 7.6, 10.0, 7.5, and back up to 8.1 million tons in 2008.

By 2013 there only 7 operational mines in the Thacker II District and five in the Upper Buchanan District.

In May 2014, CONSOL, after completing a \$24 million upgrade to improve efficiency, laid off 188 workers due to a sharp drop in MET coal demand. The company also dropped one shift, cutting back to two working shifts, however the mine still produced 4,000,000 tons of coal in 2014.

By September CONSOL had reduced its work force in Buchanan County to 450 and was planning to sell its Buchanan No. 1 Mine at a public offering in the 4th Quarter of 2015, however that decision has been delayed until 2016.

As of December 31, 2015 the only operations listed in the Upper Buchanan District were CONSOL's Buchanan No. 1 Mine at Page (No. 3303) and the three Jewell Smokeless Coal Company mines (which included the coke plant), Nos. 3113, 3115, 13. Still operating in the Thacker II were Wellmore No. 8 (No. 975), Wellmore No. 7 (No. 1225, and Clintwood No. 3 (No. 1265).

*Alex Schust*