

INTRODUCTION

John Hale, Pioneer Coal Miner

There are different kinds of men born on the earth. Men, who by their placement at birth, put on rich clothing. There are men, who because of the time of birth, are caught up in the times and events which become a part of them from the moment they open their eyes. Some men die early. Miriam knew that when she watched her baby brother, Moses. Because he was born in a slave labor camp he was to die in the River Nile.

John Hale was born a slave. The shanty darkies sang and gave thanks to the Lord for the baby. The plantation owner poked his head in the door and recorded the baby boy as part of the days counting of cotton and beans. John Hale's parents were sold to another plantation; he was raised by his grandparents. Civil War and coal mining were in his future. He worked in the mines for fifty years.

His muscles gleamed in an expression of power. With a young family he traveled to the new State of Washington near the Pacific Ocean.

John Hale learned, when a gun was placed in his hand near Franklin, Washington, that people sometimes shade the truth to gain the strength of the Negro. Live with the past, with the times of new things; railroads, and colored men with white men working together in the mines. Feel the unhurried time of water pumps and hitching posts.

My grandfather laughed when I said I couldn't tell who was who when you came from the mines. "See, Ernest, when you go into the mines, you can't tell the difference if you are black or white until you get to the surface and pour water from your canteen on your hands and face to wash up. If you don't turn white as snow, you're different, even if you had just shared your lunch from the same bucket."

I was the third generation of coal miners with my footprints walking in the coal dust of my grandfather, John Hale.

Ernest Moore