

June 15th, 1876
Seattle Coal Mine

My Dear Ellen,

I take this opportunity of writing to you again. I stopped three days at Renton, and could not get anything to do, so I came up here Monday night, and I got a job yesterday morning working on the new bunkers. I am started at \$2.00 per day. I could get \$3.00 per day if I had had my tools with me. We work 1 1/4 day in one day. We start in at 7 and work to 12, commence at one and work to 9 so I make \$3.12 1/2 each day, but I think I will have \$3.00 per day of 10 hours before long.

There are over 300 men in this camp and all of them at work; tonight is pay night for the month of May and there is a great crowd round the paymaster. He is paying off since 6 o'clock p.m., and he will not get through until 11 or 12. I think we will get along very well here after a while Ellen. I have not got an answer to my last letter to you. I guess it is at Renton, but I have no chance to send for it just now. This place is 16 miles from Seattle.

I will send for you Ellen just as soon as I can. Next time I travel I mean to have Willie and you along with me, as I miss you and him very much. Tell me how you are fixed there, and if you don't like to stop much longer there, I will try and send for you very soon, but I could not get any house to live in here. Every house is filled; lots of families here; two or three families boarding and sleeping in the company cook house. The cook house is a large building, and the upstairs part of it is filled with beds and rooms-single rooms. They charge only \$8.00 per week for a man and his wife, board and lodging so Jim McDonnell told me.

Tell me about Willie and yourself and Susan when you write. I must go to bed. It is after 10. Good night my darling Ellen, and kiss Willie for me.

Address
John McKnight
Seattle Coal Mine
Seattle, W.T.

By 1880 Newcastle had a population of 650. People were coming from foreign countries as well as from the eastern part of the United States. There were 117 houses, and the business section included a store, a boardinghouse, a saloon, a blacksmith shop, a carpenter shop, and a sawmill. The Oregon Improvement Company had taken over by this time, and there were more than 200 persons on its payroll, at least 100 of whom were miners and most of these were family men. Two schools had been built for the 100 children of school age. A church had been erected, and services were held each Sunday by visiting ministers from Seattle. Any demonstration represented among the miners could use the church, but only one denomination per Sunday was allowed to hold services. A number of lodges had been formed, including the Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Good Templars, and the United Workmen.

Washington in 1881 was looking eagerly to its coal mines for the wealth and prosperity they would bring. Reverend G.F. Whitworth, sensing the coming era, wrote:

It is indeed true that the principal wealth has thus far been derived from (lumbering), and that it has had much to do with bringing population and capital to our western border. In the future it will not occupy so prominent a place but must share its power and influence with the treasures which have been so long hid in the bowels of the earth.

It was a disappointment to the original pioneer that the wealth of the mines soon fell into the control of foreign corporations.

Fortunes have been made out of King County coal, but...most of the wealth produced went to the men who later obtained possession (of the mines), and, because of their money, were able to do the development work - the original locater being forced to step aside and see others reap the benefit of his early toil.

The early owners had a continual struggle against the disadvantages of inadequate capital and the steady and active opposition of powerful capitalists in San Francisco. For every \$100 invested by the foreign producers, thousands flowed into their pockets. Their dividends annually reached a sum greater than the amount paid to miners for wages in the King County mines. The Seattle Coal Company and the Seattle and Walla Walla Railroad both came under the control of Henry Villard, the head of the Oregon Improvement Company.

During the next ten years production remained at a high peak. In 1883 55 per cent of the total coal produced in the territory, and 22 per cent of the production on the Pacific Coast, came from the Newcastle mine. the following year the seams produced an excellent domestic coal, but because the coal trade was dull, the tonnage sold decreased 30 per cent. This dip was not due to a lack of production in the mines. The prevailing slogan was "Washington Territory-the Pennsylvania of the Pacific Coast."

There was an unexpected low year in 1886 because of labor troubles, and during this time the mines were closed for several months. This year, too, the hoisting works at the mouth of the mine caught fire. the fire spread to the mine itself and burned for several months; forcing the mine to close down for a time. By the end of the year 1887, notwithstanding labor troubles and fire, output had reached a grand total of 1,740,000 tons. The mine was producing 150 to 200 tons per day; demand for coal was strong, and prices were high. Coal sold at \$5.00 per ton, which was \$1.00 higher than at any time during the previous ten years. Mining inspectors found the mines in good condition during this period; no serious accidents occurred because of working in pure lignite coal without coal damp.

Mining laws during the 1880's were practically nonexistent. Inspectors depended on mineowners for their salaries, which were paid out of a tax levied on coal output. If these funds were insufficient, the inspectors went unpaid. Inspectors needed territorial backing and should have had a set of regulations to enforce. As it was, they were left too much on their own, and observance of such regulations as there were depended on the cooperation of the individual miner who, after all, was interested in his own safety in the mine.