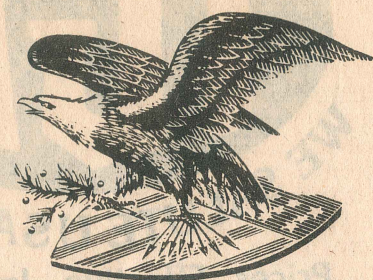


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"Remembrances of Days Gone By"

Zookspur: Once A Prosperous Mining Settlement

For many Madrid citizens the community of Zookspur brings back fond memories of Boone County life in the mid-1900's when coal mining was the main way of life. For others, it's something spoken about by their parents or grandparents. But for Mrs. Karthryn McClelland, this tiny coal mining community in southern Boone County was her life and home.

The Scandia Coal Company Mine Number 2 or the Zookspur Mine opened around 1911 and continued heavy mining operations until 1925. However, the mine stayed open for almost 10 more years, but according to Mrs. McClelland, by 1933 they knew the mine would soon be closing. It was at this time that the McClellands left their home in Zookspur and moved to Madrid.

The mine was located 1½ miles south of town and featured electrically equipped operations. H. Zook was mine superintendent until 1917 when he was replaced by Owen Reese. Coal from the mine was shipped to various parts of the state on the Boone branch of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railroad.

Mrs. McClelland recalled moving to Zookspur in 1915 when she was just 4½ years old. However, their stay here was brief because in July the family moved to Melcher where Kathryn's grandparents lived. The family remained there until November 1918, but by March of 1919, they were back in Zookspur.

By this time, the mines were booming and the settlement had a population of about 500 people. Also found here were the company owned houses, community pumps (5 wells in the center of town), a school three churches, a company store, pool hall and baseball diamond.

Many different ethnic groups made up the population of this Boone county mining camp. Croatians, Italians, Irish, Germans and a few Blacks worked side-by-side in the mine.

The "old brick schoolhouse, down by the river" was where Mrs. McClelland received her first nine years of education (K-8). The structure had four rooms with 2-3 classes meeting per room. Later on, a new schoolhouse was built for the children of the area.

After the completing the eighth grade, state exams were given and passage of these tests were required before the student could enter high school. Mrs. McClelland stated that the student had two chances to pass the exams which were given in February and May. Many Zookspur students went to Granger to take the tests.

The company store played an important part in the lives of the miners. For most, it meant a place to get

their bread and butter. The store offered the miners good quality brand products at very reasonable prices. But, with the low wages the workers earned, plus the costs of housing and living expenses, many had to use the credit system available to them. Miners could receive credit from the company store as long as they worked in the mines, but before the miners received their next pay check, the bill owed was deducted from their earnings.

Mrs. McClelland stated that daily visits to the store were made to purchase meat for the evening meal. Thirty-five cents would buy a piece of meat, big enough for a family of seven. Milk sold for 8-10 cents a quart; eggs, 8-10 cents a dozen, and bread, if purchased, sold for 10 cents a loaf. However, many made their own bread or bought it at the nearby bakery.

Zookspur Bakery

Travelling down highway 17, one passes by where Zookspur was once located. On the west side of the road a little past the first turn-off, stands the remains of the once prosperous Zookspur bakery. Many people recall this business with fond memories for almost everyone, at one time or another, stood in line to purchase a loaf of bread.

This tiny business was located in a stucco house equipped with the traditional brick oven. It was in operation for almost 28 years before it closed in the late 1950's.

Emilio Santi and Nadio Battini owned and operated the business until inflation and big business forced their closing.

Both men were former G.I. soldiers in World War and they were born in Taglioli Modina, Italy. The immigrants to the United States around the turn of the century and were first employed in the mines. Santi's first job was a trap boy, where he stood at the door of the mine entry to wave the coal cars and mules in and out to avoid congestion.

In 1918 the two friends entered the Army and were sent overseas. Emilio served in the 836th motor transport and Nadio was a member of Company D 102nd infantry division. Battini was wounded in action and earned a purple heart for his services.

When the war ended, neither man wanted to go back to the mines so they decided to open a bakery in Zookspur where they once lived and worked.

Emilio did the baking of the bread, getting up at 4 a.m. to build the fire, mix and roll the dough for the bread. Nadio, then, in his Model-T truck, made routes to Madrid, Woodward and Granger to deliver the products.

Inflation caused spiralling prices as flour rose to \$8.20 a hundred pounds, gas went to 25 cents a gallon and with their price of 15 cents a loaf, they began losing money. The wartime shutdown of gas and tires also led to their closing.

Following the bakery, the two men sought factory jobs north of Des Moines.

Churches and Entertainment

Mrs. McClelland stated that the man owning the mine allowed three churches in the settlement. Two were Protestant, one for the whites and one for the Blacks. There was no ordained minister preaching Sunday services however. The people of the settlement wanted their children to grow up with a knowledge of the Bible and God so individuals in the camp, such as Tom Gibbons, Billy White and Kathryn's mother-in-law kept the "church" going.

The Catholic children also had a place of worship, but theirs was held in the pool hall living quarters with a Des Moines couple studying for the priesthood coming each Sunday to preach.

For entertainment, the youngsters amused themselves in many different ways, most of which cost very little. Swimming in the Des Moines River was a summertime favorite while visiting friends and neighbors

was usually done each evening when the chores were completed. Othertimes, when they had some extra money, Mrs. McClelland recalled paying a dime for the train ride to town and then attending the movie run by a Mr. Evans where Matt's Lounge is currently located. The cost of the show was 25 cents.

As mentioned before, the McClellands lived in Zookspur for 14 years and as Mrs. McClelland said, "They were very happy and memorable years. I really enjoyed living in Zookspur."

She vividly recalled living in the company house which consisted of five rooms and an outside washroom for the men to wash in. The house had a kitchen, living room, dining room and two bedrooms. "The homes were as nice as you wanted them to be," she said. "We papered and painted it about every two years."

There were a few people in the camp that owned their home, and it is her belief that these were built before or shortly after the mine opened.

By 1925 the mine production was beginning to dwindle and by 1933 the residents knew the end was near, so the mass exodus began.

Today, Zookspur is a collection of a few houses that remained in the settlement after the mines closed. This scene today doesn't give any notion of the busy and active life that once existed when the mines were operating.