



Words to Know

Anthracosis – the disease, pneumoconiosis, caused by the inhalation of anthracite coal dust over time; also known as black lung.

Ballad – a narrative form relating a dramatic event that can be sung or recited. Folk or traditional ballads are ballads that originally were passed down orally from one singer to another generation after generation. This method of dissemination meant that both the lyrics and tune might change over time and result in many different versions of one song.

Boarder – a worker who rented a room in a mine patch.

Breaker - the building where coal was sorted.

Breaker boy - a boy who worked in the breaker.

Butty - a helper who worked in partnership with another miner.

Canary – in the early days, caged canaries were kept in the mine. Their behavior could warn the miner if dangerous gasses were present.

Coal landowner – men who owned the coal land and received royalties on coal extracted from it.

Coal operator – men who leased land from coal landowners. The operator had the mining rights to the land, built the coal collieries and villages, and hired the miners.

Colliery – the entire mine plant.

Company house – houses built and owned by the mine company and rented to the miner and his family.

Fire boss – worker who checks the mine for dangerous mine gasses before miners report for work.

Hunky, hunk – term used to refer to Slavic immigrants, usually in a derogatory manner; comes from the word Hungarian.

Knockdown – refers to portion of pay envelopes taken out by colliery boy workers before handing them over to their mothers.

Nipper -- the boy who opened and closed the mine door.

Patch – a mining village, usually built and owned by the coal company.

Scab – a worker called in by the coal company owners to replace miners who are striking.

Scrip – instead of actual wages, this was payment given by the coal companies in the early years of mining to the miners for use in the company store.

Sprag – round stick of wood that is inserted into spokes of mine car wheels to slow and stop them.

Spragger - the boy who controlled the speed of the mine cars with a sprag.

Strike – a work stoppage by miners in protest against unfair working conditions and labor practices.

Union – collective bargaining group to represent and protect the miners' against unfair labor practices.

United Mine Workers of America – the miner's union.