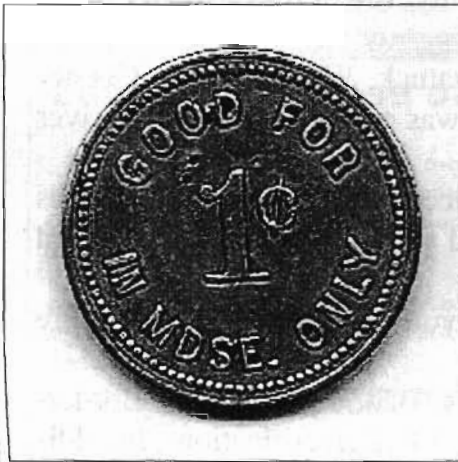


Georges Creek Coal & Iron Company

William Fugera

Years ago I lived in Cumberland, Maryland. I had heard of the Georges Creek area but never paid much attention to it. After acquiring Georges Creek Coal and Iron Company scrip, which was used in Farmington, West Virginia, from 1903 – 1909, I became curious about the company and coal mining in western Maryland. I decided to do further research.



In 1837 a group of investors from Baltimore, Maryland and London, England purchased 11,000 acres of land in the Georges Creek watershed in western Maryland. The new company was called Georges Creek Coal and Iron and was located in their new town called Lonaconing. The business objective was to manufacture iron using local raw materials of iron ore, limestone and coal. Timbering and a saw mill were also part of the plan. The Georges Creek coalfield, which was also called the Cumberland – Piedmont coalfield, is the best historically documented field in Maryland. It has been the most productive field in the state since mining began in the 1820's. George Washington in 1755 described this area as possessing, "the fuel of the future." The main focus for coal was the Pittsburgh seam also known as the Big Vein and the low volatile Upper Freeport Seam also called the Davis Seam.

GCC&IC built an iron furnace that started up in 1839 and was quickly producing 6 tons of iron per day. It took 1.7 tons of coal to make 1 ton of iron. This furnace was the first in the U.S. to successfully use bituminous coal and coke, rather than charcoal, in making iron. The coal/coke is used to remove the oxygen from the iron ore, thus converting the iron ore to iron. Many cast iron products such as farm implements, house wares, mine car wheels and rails were also made. Some iron was sold and shipped by wagon to foundries in nearby Cumberland.

The iron furnace was shut down in 1855 due to a lack of all weather transportation to move the finished products. The company was producing 1860 tons of iron per year, but the transportation issue had either overlooked or ignored. Local needs for iron products were quickly met. Inventory built up and production had to slow down. Some products were hauled to markets by wagon, but this was not practical for long-term business, especially in the winter. GCC&IC built a 9.2 miles spur railroad to hook up with the Cumberland & Pennsylvania Railroad. This spur opened on May 9, 1853, but by the time the railroad was built it was too late to revive the iron business. A near-by competitor, Mt. Savage Iron Company, already had a railroad spur and was well entrenched in the iron business. They had the early foresight to build a railroad to ship their products. However, by this time it was becoming evident that coal was more abundant than iron ore, so GCC&IC turned to mining coal as their sole interest. Other coal companies also opened mines in the area.

The miners were skilled workmen, coming from Scotland, Wales, England, Ireland and Germany. Most could read and write and paid for their children's education. This was 40 years before the state of Maryland provided free public schools. The characteristics of this work force were in contrast to other coal mining areas that employed thousands of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. English was commonly spoken in the Georges Creek area, compared to a lack of or poor English in other coal mining

areas.

Miners in the Georges Creek area and their families did not live in company houses or have to deal at the company store. Approximately 33 % of the miners owned their own homes. Many varieties of stores came into the area to satisfy the needs of the people. Transportation improved and the railroad made several daily runs to transport people and supplies while transporting coal and other products to markets. Other industries were also appearing in the area. A silk throwing mill was built in 1907. Today the mill is now a museum containing much of the original equipment. There were also brick manufactures using clay from the area.

As noted above, GCC&IC built their own railroad spur. In 1855, 225,000 tons of coal was shipped. In 1856, the rail line was extended and later sold to The Cumberland & Pennsylvania Railroad on October 23, 1863. Today this rail section is still used for some coal hauling. In 1991, 195,000 tons of coal was hauled compared to the 225,000 tons in 1855.

The year 1907 saw the height of bituminous coal production in Maryland, with over 5 million tons being mined. In 1906, the average Maryland miner worked 250 days per year for an annual income of \$497.97. Using this data from the company payroll it appears that the GCC&IC produced 268,350 tons in the 12 months beginning December, 1906. The company had a payroll in 1906 – 1907 of between 180 and 200 miners, each averaging 90 plus tons of coal mined per month. Most of the miners were paid 60 cents per ton per day. Only a few of the miners were still United Mine Workers members after the strike of 1894. Local miners accepted the 60 cents per ton in 1904. It is noted from the June, 1906, payroll documents showed 6 of the 184 miners received 72 cents per ton. Sam Brown was one of them and he was paid for 144 tons. This was considerably more production than most miners. Why some miners earned more is uncertain. One explanation was that Maryland allowed boys to work with their fathers and older brothers. Their earnings were credited to the adult member of the team. This was known as the half turn system. A turn entitled a miner to a car for removing coal he dug. A son accompanying his father could get a half turn that gave the father the opportunity to dig and load extra coal to get a turn and a half. The number of boys was reduced over time, but in 1908 some boys under 16 were still working.

From the miners pay there were deductions of 1% per ton to pay blacksmiths to sharpen picks and other tools. In addition most miners had a \$1 deduction to pay the company doctor and for fuel purchased from GCC&IC.

GCC&IC had approximately 100 support workers on the payroll in addition to the miners. They were clerks, foremen, drivers, outside laborers, watchmen, engineers, mechanics, weigh men, and so forth. There were also two surveyors that were hired to find new coal veins. The company purchased wood for the roof supports and mine car rails. The miners had to take care of these installations and maintenance functions on their own time. A private family was contracted to take care of the horses and mules. The company also provided oats and hay for the horses and mules.

In 1910 Georges Creek Coal and Iron became Georges Creek Coal Company. Around 1918 the Big Vein was depleted. By 1930 the company produced less than 3 % of coal mined in Maryland.



Story continued on the following page

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George's Creek, continued:

Getting back to Farmington, West Virginia ----- GCC&IC had a mine and 7,500 acres of land near Farmington, which boasted a company store and issued scrip. Their mining operation was from 1903 to 1909 with 400 employees. [See Edkins page 95 and Dodrill page 91.] This land was adjacent to 80,000 acres owned by Jamaison Coal & Coke of Philadelphia. Which purchased the GCC&IC operation for \$3,500,000 some time after December 22, 1909.

GCC&IC suffered a deadly explosion at their Chatham Farmington mine on December 22, 1909 killing 10 miners. This was the same date that The New York Times announced the sale of GCC&I to Jamaison.

Georges Creek Coal Company also operated mines in the Logan County, West Virginia, towns of Ethel and Hetzel. Both places had company stores and scrip. Dodrill shows a company store at Lonaconing, Maryland. Neither Dodrill or Edkins show any record of scrip being there.



Original iron furnace now a historical monument. (Guildmark of Lonaconing)