Preface

This manuscript is the product of a tape recorded interview conducted by Kevin Corley for a special project, "Illinois Coal: The Legacy of an Industrial Society." The project was sponsored by the Illinois State Historical Society and funded in part by the Illinois Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Additional support came from the Oral History Office of Sangamon State University. Joyce Fisher transcribed the tapes and Susan Jones edited the transcript.

Ola Ridley was born in Liberal, Missouri on May 30, 1905. When Mrs. Ridley was 21 she married Bill Ridley and moved to St. Louis. Mr. and Mrs. Ridley eventually settled in Taylorville where Mr. Ridley worked as a coal miner. In this memoir, Ola Ridley discusses her family history and her education. Mr. Ridley discusses the miners returning to work in 1932 and the pit committees.

Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Sangamon State University and the Illinois State Historical Library are not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

Ola Ridley, Taylorville, Illinois, July 18, 1986.

Kevin Corley, Interviewer.

Q: Mrs. Ridley, will you please state your full name?

A: Ola Irene--you want my maiden name?

Q: Yes.

A: Barnes Ridley.

Q: Barnes. Okay. And what was the time and place of your birth?

A: Liberal, Missouri, in 1905, May 30.

Q: Okay.

A: That's old! That's a long time ago. (laughter)

Q: Where were you . . . was your family from Missouri originally?

A: Yes. I was born there in Missouri. My father was a farmer, farmed, and we lived on a farm there, close to Liberal, Missouri, until I was oh, I guess I was in the eighth grade when we moved from there. We moved to--well, the farms weren't doing very good and we got out of that--and we moved to Minimines, Missouri and that's where I finished up my school, eighth grade through high school there.

Q: Okay. Well, how big a town was Liberal, Missouri?

A: Oh, gosh, I don't know. It was a pretty good size little town.

O: [Mr. Ridley] About 2,000.

A: What?

Q: Two-thousand?

O: Two thousand.

A: Was that it? Two-thousand I guess. I really don't know, don't remember.

Q: Okay.

A: But then we moved to Minimines which was just a little small place. It was just a mile from the Kansas line in Missouri.

Q: Did your father do better there?

A: Well, he did hauling like hauling coal and whatever was to be hauled. He had, at that time they had horses, you know, and he used those horses and did some hauling. Worked on the railroad. He did odd jobs.

Q: Yes. What are your first early childhood remembrances?

A: Well, I expect five years old would be my first. That's when my mother died, when I was five. We still lived on a farm then, and I remember that. We had a rather hard life. We didn't have very much. The farms there aren't like they are in Illinois, the rich soil, sort of sandy soil. Could have a failure there any year almost.

Q: Yes.

A: I went to the country school there, Prairie Star School.

Q: Was that a one-room school?

A: Yes.

Q: Describe that to me.

A: Sir?

Q: What was that like?

A: Oh, it was nice, real nice. I enjoyed it. Of course, I started school there and from my first grade up until my eighth grade I went to school there. My first teacher, first grade teacher, her husband--I mean her brother married my sister, and they lived just about a quarter of a mile from us in the country there. I didn't know much about the coal mines for sure, I just, you know.

Q: Yes. Well, how many children were in that school?

A: Oh, probably . . . oh, you mean in that little school?

Q: In that little school.

A: Oh, there . . . oh, I don't know, it was from the first through the eighth grade. Oh, I imagine there was about sixty.

Q: Oh, my! How many teachers were there?

A: One.

Q: Just one teacher to handle sixty kids!

A: Yes, and she taught all those grades. Of course, we didn't have all the different subjects that they have now. The curriculum wasn't what it is now, but reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Q: Yes. Okay.

A: That was about it.

Q: Yes. Well, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

A: There were three brothers and five girls in our family.

Q: Where were you located among them? Were you in the middle?

A: I was third from the baby.

Q: Okay.

A: I was one of the younger ones. Well, I was just five when my mother died. Then there were two younger than me at that time, and we'd lost one boy, so there was seven of us left for my father to take care of.

Q: My goodness!

A: So we had kind of a hard time. One of my older sisters quit school and took care of us, the small children. So she was like a mother to me.

Q: How did your mother die?

A: Well, I don't know. The doctor said it was measles but we never were satisfied with that. That's what they said it was.

Q: How old was the youngest when she died?

A: How old was she?

Q: Yes.

A: Forty.

Q: Well, how old was the youngest child?

A: Oh. Ten months.

Q: Ten months old.

A: Yes, ten months.

Q: Well, how did your father get along, what did he do?

A: Well, he just was good.

Q: Well, who took care of the kids, your older sister?

A: Yes.

Q: She was how old then?

A: She was about fourteen or fifteen I guess then.

Q: Now, did he remarry?

A: No, never did. We asked him one time why he didn't ever remarry, and he said, well, he could have, but we were all happy and he was afraid that something might, you know, bringing somebody else. Maybe at that age we might have resented but I don't know if we would. Afterwards, we certainly wished he had've because we were all gone then and he was alone.

Q: Yes. Well, how many bedrooms did you have when you moved after you were five?

A: After?

Q: Yes, after you moved from Liberal.

A: Oh, after we moved from Liberal, from the farm?

Q: Yes.

A: Oh, I don't know, probably three bedrooms. There was only . . . my two brothers went to work and they were gone. I mean they weren't home, just to visit once in awhile. Well, just the girls mostly, at home.

Q: Yes.

A: We had three bedrooms.

Q: So what kind of work did they get, your brothers?

A: Oh, gosh. I don't remember. One worked in a gravel company in Oregon, went to Oregon.

O: One was a crane operator.

Q: Oh. Okay.

A: What did he say? I didn't hear what he said.

Q: He said one of them was a crane operator.

A: Oh.

O: In St. Louis.

A: Oh, yes. Yes, he went to St. Louis. Was married and went to St. Louis.

Q: Did any other relatives ever move in with you to help out?

A: No.

Q: Okay. Well, how did the housework go? Who made or mended the family's clothes?

A: Oh, well, my sisters. I had two older at home. One was married, got married, and there were two older than me that stayed at home and they did it.

Q: So they did all the housework and stuff.

A: Yes. And then after I got older, you know, in the eighth grade, I was getting old enough that I could help too. Then they went out to work and I was the one that stayed home and went to high school. I would come home and fix my dad's supper and my youngest sister's supper, rush back to school, rush back for basketball practice. We had girl's teams then, real good teams.

Q: Well, what sort of task did you have to do around the house?

A: Well, regular housework, washing and ironing and cooking. I had to work.

Q: Yes.

A: There wasn't much to do there, you know, really like there is nowadays. We just didn't have all the activities like they have now. We played basketball, just school activities, you know, and they didn't have a lot of that then.

Q: Yes. Since your older sister was only fourteen at that time, did she do a lot of things like baking bread and canning?

A: Yes. Oh, yes, she baked bread practically every day.

Q: Did she take care of the garden, or did you have a garden?

A: Yes. Well, she and my dad did most of that. Oh, I had to get out and hoe in the garden, I had to hoe corn, I did all those things, milk cows. I did all that that you do on a farm when I was younger.

Q: Well, how did you spend your Sundays?

A: Sundays?

Q: Yes.

A: Usually went to church. Oh, we'd just meet at different houses and just . . . I don't know. There wasn't much . . .

Q: Which church did you go to?

A: The Christian Church.

Q: Okay. And then afterwards you say you met at different people's houses?

A: Yes. You know, like a bunch of girls would get together and we'd just, you know, gab and have fun. Nothing much to do.

Q: Yes.

A: Maybe somebody had a car, but there weren't very many cars either then.

Q: Yes.

A: You know, young people didn't have cars like they do now.

Q: Yes.

A: Once in awhile we'd find somebody with a car and they'd take us for a ride or something, that was the big thing.

Q: Yes. Well, did you have a happy childhood?

A: Well, yes, really I guess. Didn't have very much, you know, had to do without a lot of things that maybe some of the other kids would have. But we understood, there was just too many of us for my dad to work for. But then we girls started to helping out. We would like babysit and things for other people. I finished school there in Minden, when we moved to Minden mines. Then I was married there. I went to Springfield State--well, at that time it was Springfield State Teacher's College in Springfield, Missouri. I went there and then was married.

Q: Did you want to be a teacher then?

A: I was going to be, yes. Physical education.

Q: And never had a chance to do that?

A: No. I didn't go on. At that time, I could have taught without a, you know, degree. And then our principal moved from the Minden schools to another school and he told me that if I would stay and go to school for another year, then I would have a job where he was going, as a physical education teacher. But I got married and I had a different job.

Q: Well, what age were you when you were married?

A: What age?

Q: Yes.

A: Twenty-one.

Q: Okay. How long did you go to college then?

A: Just a . . .

Q: Just a year?

A: . . . a semester.

Q: Okay. How long had you known your husband then when you married him?

A: Well, I was in high school when I met him. I guess a year.

O: About a year.

Q: How did you meet?

A: At a dance. We met at a dance. He came to Minden Mines to the dance. They had dances every Saturday night. That's one of the things we did go to, and I loved to dance, and he did too. Or he just happened over there and we met at the dance.

Q: Yes.

A: Our first date was the seventeenth of March. What is that?

O: St. Patrick's.

A: St. Patrick's?

Q: Oh, is it?

A: Yes. That was our first date, St. Patrick's day. We went to the dance.

Q: Normally when you dated after that, what type of things did you do?

A: That's it, dance.

Q: Just went to the dances. (laughter)

A: That's about all there was to do. Shows, you know, we went to shows and dances.

Q: Okay. What kind of family did your husband come from?

A: Well, they were miners, most of his . . . well, not all of them, but his former generations were miners. His grandfather in England, I think he mined in England didn't he?

O: Yes.

A: And on down, most of them were miners.

Q: Okay. Well, did you save up money before getting married?

A: No. We didn't have anything. We just got married and we were just lucky that he had a job, got a job right away. Then the mines went down, I think went down for about three months at that time, right after we were married. We went to St. Louis. My brother lived in St. Louis and we went there. We both got jobs there and we were there, it wasn't too long and when we went back home, the mines had started up again.

Q: Well, where did you live when you moved back there, what kind of home?

A: In the . . .

Q: When you went back to the mine, yes.

A: Oh, we had a nice little house. We rented it, and then Bill, like he said in his interview there, that he came to Springfield and Ernie Minson who had gone to school with him in Mulberry, Kansas, saw his name in the paper as a delegate and so he went to Springfield and they got in touch with each other, and so that is what brought us to Taylorville. So really I've lived in Taylorville longer than I ever lived . . .

Q: And where else.

A: . . . anywhere. So this is home.

Q: Yes. Okay. Describe your children. How many children did you have, when were they born?

A: Two.

Q: Okay. Names?

A: Joanne Corley and Bill Ridley.

Q: Okay. And what years were they born?

A: In February, both in February. Joanne was born the eleventh of February and Billy was born the second of February.

Q: Okay. What year were they born?

A: Joanne was born in 1932 and Billy in 1934.

Q: Okay. All right, tell me a little bit about the household after you were married. Who controlled the money?

A: Well, I guess Bill did. I don't know . . . he did I guess. Well, it seems like at first, when we first came, the mines would work awhile and then, well, they were just working one or two days a week when we first came here. And so I got a job then. I worked at the Woolworth store for the first job I had, and I ended up as a cashier at the telephone company.

Q: Did you buy new furniture when you first were married?

A: Yes. We bought furniture. We sold that when we came to Illinois, we sold our furniture and bought a car. We didn't have a car.

Q: Oh.

A: We sold our furniture and bought a car and came out here with $50. That's all we had. We got an apartment, two-room apartment on West Main. I think it was seven dollars a . . .

O: Five dollars a week.

A: . . . five dollars a week, yes.

Q: Okay. What about doctor bills and things, did you have a lot of those?

A: Well, not at first. I was in the hospital for quite a bit. Well, off and on, nothing serious I guess.

O: We paid the doctor two dollars a month for the whole family.

A: Yes. Had a mine doctor, you know, Dr. Miller. That's when Bill was in the UMW of A.

O: All the miners had checked off their paycheck.

Q: Yes. I heard a lot about Dr. Miller. He must've been a pretty popular doctor around here.

A: Well, he was the mine doctor.

O: Well, he was the company doctor and they all came to the house to see you. They didn't send you to the hospital, they came to the house to see you.

Q: I see.

O: They soon stopped that.

Q: Okay. Well, did you get good friends when you came to Taylorville?

A: Oh, wonderful. They're still friends. Of course, the Minson's, now I didn't know Ernie or his wife. Bill knew them. We didn't know them, but first we got here on Saturday evening and he [Ernie Minson] had told his wife--was working at an auto shop here, Cornbelt Auto Company, at that time, and it was down there where the Farm Bureau is right now. It was a garage, big garage. He had told us that she worked there and to go there and she would see us, meet us. So we went, she happened to be home, sick, so we went--they had an apartment on Cherokee Street--so we went down there and this lady happened to have an extra room. So we got that room for that night, and the next day then we found an apartment. They were the first one's we met, then the Hardy's, the Sharrocks, the Fosters.

Q: The Hardy's, the Bill Hardy, the mine manager?

A: John Hardy, John and Margaret.

Q: John, okay.

A: And we still have been friends all these years. She's living in California right now, with her granddaughter. But we're still close friends.

Q: What occupations did most of those friends of yours have?

A: Miners.

Q: They were mostly miners.

A: They were all miners.

Q: Were they members of the management or were they rank and file?

A: They were . . .

O: He was the mine manager.

Q: Which one was that?

O: Johnny.

Q: Johnny, yes.

O: I worked for him for 22 years.

Q: Yes. Okay. All right. Let's see, what type of things did you and your friends do when you got together?

A: Oh, we had dances at that time, and we'd all meet at one of our houses. Then we'd all go to the dance. It was usually about six couples I'd expect. That's about our main thing that we did. And everybody was awfully nice to us when we came here, because I didn't know anybody, you know, and I'd never been away from home, and I got real homesick.

Q: Okay.

A: But we stuck it out and we're still here.

Q: Yes. Okay. All right, I think I'll stop here for a minute. (tape stopped)

A: After we came, then the mines here weren't working very good either.

O: Yes. We were on strike for six months.

A: So we had hard times here too.

Q: Yes.

A: You couldn't save anything. If you did, you'd spend it all those months that they were out. You never could save anything.

Q: Well, how did you get by during those months that they were out?

A: Well, we . . . we were renting at that time a furnished apartment, and he helped the lady that owned the apartment and we didn't owe any rent when the mine went back to work. We owed a $135 grocery bill and we soon paid that off. But it was hard living, paying what you, keep you going, you know, and paying it back. We just wouldn't have anything left. (phone rings and tape is turned off)

Q: You were talking about going in debt and things during the strikes and whatever. Was there a certain grocer that you went to?

A: Yes.

Q: Did he extend you credit?

A: Yes.

Q: Who was that?

A: Ancil Titron. Thelma and Ancil Titron, they were friends of ours.

O: Red and White Stores.

A: And they had . . .

Q: Red and White Store.

A: . . . the Red and White Store at that time. They formed the Jewel Shopping Center later. Or, she remarried after mister--they separated, the Titron's did, and she married Floyd . . .

O: Jewel.

A: . . . Jewel and then they . . . I don't know what you'd say, they started the Jewel Shopping Center out here. They moved their store out there, their Red and White Store, and then it was always called the Jewel Shopping Center.

Q: Did they extend credit to a lot of the other miners too?

A: I imagine they did.

O: Oh, yes, they carried several miners.

A: I'm sure they did.

Q: Were there a lot of other stores that did the same thing, extend credit to them?

A: Well, I think yes. They were privately owned stores.

O: Yes, I think they did.

Q: Do you know what some of the names of the stores were and what the people's that owned them were?

O: Well, Podeschi had a store, his brother had a store . . .

Q: What was Podeschi's first name?

A: It was Paul.

O: Pasco.

A: Paul Podeschi he had a store.

O: Paul and Pasco and . . .

A: Paul had one before Pasco I think, and then Pasco Podeschi.

O: Tony had a wholesale business down here, grocery wholesale.

Q: Okay.

O: Oh, there were several stores that gave credit.

Q: Yes. Okay. Were there any stores that helped out the Progressives?

A: Oh, I don't know about that. I really don't know.

O: No, not much around here.

A: I don't think, you know, Taylorville as a whole were against them.

O: Well, you see, a business man couldn't take sides.

Q: Yes.

O: That's the poorest thing to do whenever you're in business, and they probably had one, two, or three, somebody. There wasn't too many Progressives in Taylorville, there was some, but not too many.

Q: Yes. Well, I know out in Langleyville, the Fabri store dealt with the Progressives.

O: Yes, that's right. But when you're in business, you can't take sides like that.

Q: No. Okay. All right, let me stop here. (tape turned off momentarily)

A: That was a real nice ladies store.

Q: So you say Calloway's was a ladies store?

A: Yes, and Duer's, and those were . . .

Q: What was Duer's?

A: It was right there, it was mostly ladies. They had children's, and they had yard goods, yardage, just a general store, you know.

Q: When you say a ladies store, what does that mean?

A: That means clothing, you know, ladies ready to wear. No mens.

Q: Okay. All right. (tape turned off momentarily) I'm talking to Mr. Ridley now, and I just mentioned that mine 58 I'd heard worked a lot more than some of the other mines. What was the reason for that?

O: Well, they must've had a better contract than what we had. You see, each mine had so much coal to ship to different places and it could be that they had a better contract.

Q: Now, were they mechanized at the same time as the other mines?

O: Of course, they didn't produce as much coal as we did.

Q: Yes. Why not?

O: Well, they wasn't equipped for it.

Q: What do you mean not equipped?

O: Well, it was an older mine, smaller cars and one thing and another. You see, Number Nine was based on 5,000 tons a day. Well, Fifty-eight didn't produce that much. See, every time they sunk a mine, they sunk it with more production.

Q: Yes, okay.

O: And Number Nine was sunk for 5,000 ton a day. That was what the capacity of the hoisting engine was supposed to do.

Q: Yes, okay.

O: But they got a little more now and then.

Q: Yes. Now, Number Nine was the first one to go back during the mine war right? During 1932?

O: Well now, they took all the personnel from all four mines and brought them to one mine to get started.

Q: Right.

O: Well, after they got one mine started, then the men started coming back.

Q: I see.

O: Then eventually all four of them got going.

Q: Now, were you the mine boss when they first started in 1932, when they first started back? What were you doing then?

O: Yes, I was the boss. I was boss during the strike. I started bossing at number nine in September of 1930, on the night shift.

Q: Okay. All right now, when they first reopened in 1932 after the Progressives had gone out, did you start hauling coal immediately? Were you able to haul coal as soon as you opened up?

O: You mean down below?

Q: Yes.

O: Oh yes.

Q: Okay. Were there . . .

O: Well, they'd worked during the day now until they got so many men, they'd fill so many cars, you know, and then at night I had one man. Him and I would gather all these cars up and put them on the pardon, fill the bottom, and then they'd have that much to start hoisting the next day. And we done that until eventually other men came back and eventually all four of them got started.

Q: Yes. So you didn't have enough workers at first, when you first opened?

O: Oh, no, I only had one man.

Q: One man.

O: That's all.

Q: Just the two of you were doing it then.

O: Just the two of us.

Q: All right.

O: That's all I had.

Q: How long was it before you had a complete staff?

O: Oh, it wasn't too long.

Q: December?

O: Well, I don't know just what month it was, but I'd say three or four weeks practically all of them had come back.

Q: Well, tell me this, did you ever . . . the Progressives obviously didn't want you to work, to bring coal up. Did you ever try to trick them into thinking that you were bringing coal up by just emptying out empty cars? Just bringing up empty cars?

O: Well, they might've run the cage up and down, you know.

Q: To make it sound like you were bringing coal up?

O: Yes. They did a lot of things to make them believe that things was getting better and better. It was just like I told you before, if that strike had lasted two more weeks, this place would've went Progressive.

Q: Yes. And W.C. Argust had told you that, you said.

O: I had heard him say it.

Q: Okay. Well, would Peabody have allowed that?

O: Oh yes, they didn't care just as long as they got the coal going.

Q: Did you ever meet the Peabody's?

O: Of course, they had a contract with the United Mine Workers you understand.

Q: Right.

O: And if these fellows had all went back Progressive, there wouldn't be any other way but to just accept the contract of the Progressives.

Q: Did you ever meet Mr. Peabody?

O: No, I met the boy.

Q: The boy, which one was that?

O: Oh, I forget his name. Sylvester I think is his name.

Q: Okay.

O: Sylvester Peabody.

Q: Okay, what was he like?

O: He was all right.

Q: Well tell me, that was kind of a tricky thing you were doing there to make the Progressives think you were hauling coal by having a hoist go up and down. Did you ever try anything else to make them think . . .

O: I never did.

Q: Yes.

O: Of course, it was just me and this one man, that's all. We had to work like the devil to get all this coal on the bottom or on the pardon and take it up and run here and run there. We had all we could handle.

Q: Yes. Why was Number Nine the first one to open up?

O: I don't know why that would be. They just all decided on Number Nine. It was more in between see, in between the four mines.

Q: So all the workers could come from all the different mines?

O: Yes. You know, you couldn't loiter around uptown during the evenings because you had the soldiers here.

Q: Yes.

O: You had to put up with them, and people didn't go to town much. Unless you really had to have something.

Q: Well, what percentage of your workers when you first started opening the mine were strike breakers? Not strike breakers, I mean people from outside the Taylorville area?

O: Well, the people in Taylorville, none of them went back to work right away. Until we got this one mine going.

Q: So your first workers you had were from out of town?

O: No. We had some people come up from the south.

Q: Yes. How many?

O: But we had a lot of people here that didn't even go back to the mine ever again.

Q: That's right, yes. Well, how many of them came from down south?

O: Oh, there was quite a few. But they had trouble down there too, you know.

Q: Yes. Well, did you have over a hundred?

O: Oh yes. Yes, I'd say in all four mines there was at least that much.

Q: Were there more than fifty percent of them from out of town then, when you opened up in 1933?

O: No. No, I wouldn't say that. You're getting pretty close though.

Q: Yes.

O: There was a lot of people came from Kansas up here. Some of my folks came up here. That was after all the trouble was over. No, it was a touchy thing.

Q: All right. So when you had to deal with, as a mine manager, when you had to deal with out of town people and the people from town, were there any differences in them, did they act different?

O: Oh, they held a grudge against one another, you know.

Q: They did? Why?

O: Oh, because some of them went back to work and some didn't, and some never did go back. I know one fellow here in Taylorville, his name was Morgan, he never did go back to the mine. Zeke Morgan they called him. I think he had a boy who worked in the post office.

Q: Well, what about the workers that were in the mine, how did the out of towners get along with the people that were from Taylorville?

O: Oh, they got along all right. Some of them didn't approve of the people coming in here and going to work, but what could they do?

Q: You mean the townies didn't like the out of towners coming in?

O: No, they didn't approve of it, but they eventually got to where they were pretty good friends.

Q: Yes. All right. As a mine boss, did you ever treat the townies different than the out of towners?

O: No, I never treated them any different.

Q: Did you want to keep the townies working to help draw other townies back into the mine?

O: What do you mean, other people?

Q: Yes. To get more people within the community coming back into the mine.

O: Oh, yes, I'd rather see the people of this community go back to the mine, but a lot of them, they just wouldn't do it.

Q: Yes. I just wondered if maybe you might've treated them a little bit different to try to get more of the community people back into the mine. Maybe treat them a little bit better?

O: No. We'd try to induce them to go back to work because they was fighting a losing battle, and a lot of them were just too bull headed, they wouldn't go. But you had to fill these positions in the mine if you wanted to operate your coal mine.

Q: Yes.

O: And the first one there got the job.

Q: Okay.

O: It blew over quicker than I thought it would.

Q: Yes.

O: Because there was a lot of people here that owned homes, you know, and one thing and another, and wouldn't go back to work. But that's their business. If I had a family and a home to buy, I'm going to think twice about going back to work, because how else you going to pay for this stuff? There's a lot of things you don't like to do, but you've got to swallow your pride once in awhile.

Q: Yes. Now, who was the superintendent at that time at Number Nine?

O: Bill Starks.

Q: Okay. Did he ever put pressure on the mine bosses to . . .

O: No.

Q: No, never did?

O: I never worked for a better fellow in my life.

Q: Did any of the superintendent's pressure them a little bit to . . .

O: No.

A: Not you anyway.

O: Not me, no.

Q: Well, did some of the pit committeeman, did you ever see a situation where they were being kind of manipulated by the management or the superintendent?

O: Well, that went on before the trouble and after the trouble, because if you had the pit committee on your side, you know, you could win a lot of cases.

Q: Yes.

O: But they were pretty evenly matched. I'd say they were pretty good as far as settling cases is concerned.

Q: The pit committeeman was elected by the workers.

O: That's right.

Q: How was the management able to get a hold on him?

O: Well, there's a lot of ways you know.

Q: What were they? Money?

O: No, not exactly under the table. But if the committee came to the superintendent and say "I've got a friend I'd like to get a job," that's the way they'd swap around. And he'd hire that man to pay for the pit committee, see.

Q: Oh, I see.

O: That's the way they worked.

Q: Well, how did they get the pit committeeman elected?

O: The miners done that.

Q: Yes, but the miners surely would've known that the superintendent or the mine bosses wanted . . .

O: No, they didn't know what was--see, the committee didn't work, all he did was come to the mine and when all the men had gone down in the mine and gone to work, he went back home. He didn't work in the mine. He was just one man. Now, if they'd had a three man committee, that couldn't happen. You see, but one man, you can control pretty good.

Q: Okay.

O: Down where I come from, District Fourteen, we always had three man committees. You see, one of those three is going to watch the other guy.

Q: I see.

O: You see what I mean?

Q: Yes.

O: But one, you've got more chance to make him do what you want him to do than you would by having three man committees. So that's the way they operated. They favored one another. I know a lot of things that went on that I didn't approve of, but it was none of my business. Long as they treated me right I'd treat them all right.

Q: What type of things was that?

O: Well, working conditions, and if I ever wanted to favor . . . I got a lot of people jobs here. I got my two brothers a job, I got my step-father a job, and several guys.

A: Your uncle.

O: What?

A: Your uncle, uncle Joe?

O: And I got old Odie's brother a job, and they done me a lot of favors too.

Q: Did the superintendents, when a new superintendent came in, did he often bring in his own crew of management?

O: No. No, they didn't switch around like that. See, when Mr. Starks was superintendent . . . well, in 1930 when I started out there, he became Director of Mines and Minerals for the state. Well then, when he took that job, Johnny Hardy the mine manager moved up to superintendent. That carried on until I left Number Nine and went to Pana. And he was a good fellow to work for, the best I ever worked for.

Q: Tell me this, sometimes when a worker won a grievance through the pit committeeman or whatever it might be, the mine manager still had to work for him. Let's just say in an instance didn't like this worker winning a case. When the worker came back to work, would he change his relationship with him, would he make him work a little harder? Did you ever see that happen?

O: Well, I don't get what you mean.

Q: If a mine manager didn't like a worker winning a grievance, would he mistreat him afterwards? Did you ever see that happen?

O: You mean if he lost the case?

Q: Yes.

O: No, he wouldn't . . . he'd probably hold a little grudge against him. That was just natural.

Q: Yes. Could he give him harder work?

O: Oh, he could probably change his job. As long as he didn't change his wages he could change his job.

Q: Where would he put him?

O: Anyplace he wanted to.

Q: Where would be the worst place to put a worker?

O: Put him in a dirt gang.

Q: Yes. Did that happen a lot?

O: Well, it'd make him realize what he's up against.

Q: Yes.

O: They had different ways. I know two fellows that when I was running a dirt gang on the night shift, I had several fellows from Langley working with me. There was two guys that Johnny had trouble with, and their names were Fred Pickard and Bill . . . what's Bill Ray's wife's first husband's name?

A: Dacon?

O: What?

A: Dacon?

O: Dacon, Bill Dacon. They were always . . .

A: They were Progressive weren't they?

O: What?

A: Didn't they go Progressive?

O: They were Progressive, yes. They were always causing trouble, see, and he put them on the night shift on the dirt gang, my gang. Well, I didn't have no grudge against them and Johnny would say, "See that they work," and I'd say, "I will. They'll have to do just like the others do." And I never had no trouble with them. But they stayed on there for about three or four weeks and that kind of tamed them down a little bit. They didn't like it. They wanted to go back to their other job. But that's the way they had of punishing them.

Q: Yes.

End of Side One, Tape One

O: . . . to kick them back into.

Q: Yes.

O: Yes, I had a lot of guys from Langley working for me. The Castolic boys, Kraepin--do you know the Kraepin's?

Q: No, I don't. Did they ever go Progressive?

O: His name was Nester Kraepin. Oh, they stayed out awhile but they eventually came back in. When they seen the mine was going to go to work, they come back and got their job. Louie Castolic, Abey, you know them?

Q: No I don't. Are they still around?

O: No. Abey I think is in Arizona. Louie, he passed away. Nester Kraepin, I imagine he passed away, and then Fioni--you know Fioni?

Q: Heard the name.

O: I think his wife still lives out there. He worked for me. He worked for me over at Pana. We called him Gabby.

Q: Yes. What were those Langleyville workers like?

O: They was all right, they done the work. Did you know Poison?

Q: What was the name?

O: Poison.

Q: Who's Poison?

O: He was an Italian kid.

A: Well, that was, Poison, that was his . . .

O: He was Aldo Bernadini.

Q: That was his nickname, Poison?

O: Yes. We called him Poison.

A: Why did they call him Poison?

O: I don't know. That's all I ever heard.

Q: Let me stop here just a second. (tape stopped)

O: Let me see, didn't Stormy get pit committee?

A: I don't know, Bill.

Q: What I asked was when the pit committeemen were less manipulated by management..

O: Well, they've all been manipulated ever since I remember. They was always manipulated a little bit.

A: Wasn't uncle Joe?

O: No.

A: Thought he was.

O: He was an officer in local.

A: Oh.

Q: What about Frank Wingo? He was there in the 1940s.

O: Frank worked over at Pana when I was there.

Q: Yes. Was he the pit committeeman?

O: No, I don't think so.

Q: Okay.

O: They had the committee from Pana. Frank, he was living in Taylorville.

Q: Well, didn't they later have a system where the pit committeeman was checked out by a district person, like a steward or something?

O: You mean a board member?

Q: Yes. When did that happen?

O: Well, I don't know--did anybody tell you about Duke Livesay?

Q: A little bit, not much. What about him?

O: Well, he was committee at Number Ten. Now, they manipulated him.

Q: They did.

O: Oh, yes.

Q: The superintendent did?

O: Oh yes. Anybody could manipulate him. He was no more for the men than the man in the moon.

Q: Yes. Well, why did the men vote for him?

O: Of course, I wouldn't want you to quote me.

Q: Why would the men vote for him then?

O: Well, I don't know. He just had a way of getting by with them. But I know he was manipulated.

Q: Did anyone ever buy him off?

O: Very much.

Q: Did he ever get bought off?

O: What?

Q: Did he ever get paid for it you think?

O: I don't know. They gave him a lot of stuff from the mine. If he wanted something . . .

A: Would you like a glass of tea?

O: . . . that would've done away with it.

Q: The three man committee?

O: That's right, because one would be watching the other ones.

Q: Yes. Why didn't that get passed?

O: Heck, they couldn't afford three men, you know.

Q: Yes. Oh, that's why they didn't do it, because they couldn't afford it?

O: I imagine that's the reason why, because down home where I come from, District Fourteen, but they worked at the face. The only time that they had these cases, they would do it after work hours. Then the local union would pay them for what time they spent settling cases.

Q: I see.

O: But here they just had the one man and they just paid him straight wage. He didn't have to go to work. He didn't have to work in the mine.

Q: Well, who was it that tried to get a three man committee, the union?

O: Quail Whitlow and Stormy Dixon.

Q: Yes. What year did they try to do that?

O: Right after they come up here from after the trouble.

A: Bill, do you want something?

O: No, thanks.

Q: Okay, so was that in the 1930s then?

O: Yes, that would be in the 1930s.

Q: And why weren't they able to get that, because the company couldn't afford to pay it.

O: No, the local. The company wouldn't have had nothing to do with it. The local would have to, if they hired a three man committee, the local would have to take care of it.

Q: Was Stormy Dixon in charge of the local? Was he one of the local representatives?

O: No, I don't think so. I think he ran for committee one time at Number Nine. I don't know whether he won it or got beat, I don't know. Can't remember.

Q: He's still around. I'm going to try to talk to him.

O: Oh, yes.

A: You know where he lives?

Q: Yes, I've got his . . .

O: You'll have to go out to the golf course to get ahold of him. (laughs)

Q: Oh yes?

A: I don't think he plays as much since he had his heart attack.

O: He's a carter.

Q: So he tried to get the three man committee and was unable to.

O: I think he did. I'm not sure now. I think him and Coil Whitlow.

Q: Now, why wouldn't the local want it? You say the local . . .

O: Well, they had to pay three men.

Q: I see. All right.

O: And the couldn't afford it.

Q: But they didn't think of . . .

O: Now, if they had made them work down below and settle their cases after work hours, well then that would've been a different thing.

Q: Yes.

O: Pay them for what time they put in.

Q: Yes. Do you remember anything about job sharing? I think I might've asked you that before, but I know down in Buckner mines--I just found this out yesterday--they . . .

O: Job sharing?

Q: . . . yes, they . . .

O: They never had it while I was in the mines.

Q: The workers never tried to, when the machines came in, to spread the work out among more men and reduce the hours?

O: No.

Q: Okay. Never thought about that. Okay. Must not have been a local thing around this area then.

O: See, the machines came in here in 1929. The year before I came here. After I came here.

Q: They still had hand loaders?

O: Some of them. They had machines and then they had hand loaders too. But they didn't keep them very long.

Q: I wanted to ask you if you'd ever seen or heard about miners paying for a job. Did they ever come in and say, "Here, I'll give you a couple hundred or something to get me a job?"

O: Well, it could've happened. I've heard about it happening, and of course I've heard about these foreigners, you know, giving the superintendents or mine managers so much liquor.

Q: Oh, really?

O: You know, favored.

Q: Yes. And then they would get a job. Which superintendent did they do that to?

O: Well, they done it down home mostly.

A: You mean in Kansas?

O: Yes. I used to run around with a fellow, he was a mine manager, and he never drank a drop when him and I was running around together. But when he started mine managing, things changed, and I know good and well he was getting it for nothing.

Q: Yes.

O: They favored, those Italian people, they had ways of trying to get a job.

A: Like Poison? (laughter)

End of Interview