Student Handout 2 - Food in the Coal Patch

Miners with lunch buckets & battery lamps ready to enter the hoisting cage at Collier Mine
Courtesy of The Coal and Coke Heritage Center, Penn State Fayette, http://www.coalandcokepsu.org/

Woman cooking on a coal stove
Courtesy of The Coal and Coke Heritage Center, Penn State Fayette, http://www.coalandcokepsu.org/

Grandmother and granddaughter feeding the chickens
Courtesy of The Coal and Coke Heritage Center, Penn State Fayette, http://www.coalandcokepsu.org/

A miner’s lunch bucket
Courtesy of the Special Collections and Archives, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Young girl baking bread in an outdoor oven
Courtesy of The Coal and Coke Heritage Center, Penn State Fayette, http://www.coalandcokepsu.org/

The three pieces of a miner’s lunch bucket
Courtesy of The Coal and Coke Heritage Center, Penn State Fayette, http://www.coalandcokepsu.org/
“We always made a fifty-gallon barrel of sauerkraut. My dad would get a mountain of cabbage heads late in the fall . . . Well, he’d get the cabbage and cut it up on our cabbage shredder. Then he would say ‘Annie has the long legs. Toni is too short. When Toni gets in the barrel you can’t see her head; and Mary won’t do it.’ So, I’d sit there and wash my feet and wash my feet in many waters. I washed them over and over and then sat there with my feet in salt water. They’d fill the barrel full of cabbage. Then they’d put a chair next to the barrel, and I’d step on the chair and into the barrel. And I jumped around and around and tramped the cabbage down. Then they’d lift me out and put me back in the salt water. This continued until the barrel was filled. . . Then they’d put the barrel in the storehouse out back, and the kraut would ferment, and then they’d clean the brine off. By then the apples were in season, and we picked them and put them on top of the kraut. Then a big rock was put on top of it all, and it was covered with a clean cloth. It was ready to eat, and you could smell if a mile off.”

Ann Vrobel, pages 61-62.
*Patch/Work Voices*

“[When we butchered the hog we’d make many things.] To make kolbassi we’d cut all that pork up into little cubes. Daddy never ground it. So we had to sit there for days, for two days or more, and cut that meat. We’d put salt and pepper and garlic and that would have to soak for two days in that wooden bucket. First, we used the clean our own casing [the intestines.] That was such a dirty mess. Well, Daddy got more modern, and he would go to the little meat market on Peter Street to get them. We had to make this into a sausage and he’d be so particular. They [the sausage-like kolbassi] had to be a certain size and so firm. Then we’d cut them [the stuffed casings] and tie them and put them on a broomstick. When it came time, when they were all ready, Daddy had a barrel out in the yard, and he dug a trench, and he put them in. Then he got the wood and he put the wood in the fire. They couldn’t be smoked too hard or they would burst. You had to do it slowly. After they were brown and smoked, Daddy would take them out. They were hung on sticks in the barrel, and the kolbassi hung down in the barrel over the fire, and the smoke came up and smoked them.”

Rose Duran, pages 63-64.
*Patch/Work Voices*

“My mother [Mrs. Henry Dantzler] canned sausage patties. She would fry the sausage patties and put them in a jar and then pour the grease into the jar. Then she’d put the top on and turn the jar upside down so the grease would be on the top. When we were ready to use them, we’d just take them out of the jar and warm them.”

*Patch/Work Voices*

“Out of the bread recipe, the leftover dough we left it go for pampuski. We’d made a big pan of that and sprinkle it with sugar. [To make pampuski] you get yourself a piece of dough, and you cut it in squares or however, and let it raise a little bit. And you got your hot grease in the skillet, like the fried doughnuts. And soon as it would brown on one side you turned it over on the other. Then you’d put them in a great big bowl. Oh, a heaping bowl and sprinkle them with sugar, and have them with coffee. And, oh, that was really good. You eat four, five, six of them. We made them when we made bread, and we made bread out of 25 pounds of flour in the wooden tub.”

Rose Duran, pages 63.
*Patch/Work Voices*

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Courtesy of the Coal and Coke Heritage Center, Penn State Fayette, Uniontown, Pa.
### Food in the Coal Patch Stories 2

| “My father would go to work in the morning. Mama would fix his bucket; we had our own meat when we lived on the farm. We had chickens. She would fix maybe a slice of ham and a couple pieces of homemade bread. The bread was thick; she didn’t make a sandwich. Ham or pork usually, whatever she had for him. And down in the bottom of the bucket he took black coffee. He had to walk far to work. We could tell when he’s coming home about 5 or 6:00. We knew when Pap’s coming, and we’d be all excited, and we’d run to meet him on the road. I don’t care who went to meet Pap first, nobody got the bucket but the youngest one in the family. The youngest got the bucket, and in that bucket, he always saved a piece of bread. It tasted and smelled like carbide, but we all thought it was so good. We always went for that piece of bread he saved for us, and he never forgot.” | “A lot of times when I was a kid, and . . . There was ten of us, my mother would fry a big skillet of potatoes and make another pot with tomatoes and bacon and bread broke up in it. She always baked her own bread, and a lot of times there wasn’t much of it. Sunday we always had either chicken or roast. Always Saturday night she would bake the cake. Other than that we ate lunch meat . . . Not much of that, because that was for the bucket, the man’s bucket. We ate whatever she cooked, spaghetti, beans, a lot of beans. You’d think that I wouldn’t like them, but I do. But you know, like a meal would consist of pork chops; she’d fry them. Usually we had potatoes. If you didn’t have potatoes, you didn’t have nothing. Eggs, pancakes. She baked a lot of biscuits, bread, dumplings, beans and dumplings, pot pie. We had a lot of stuff.” |


| “But we had good things to eat. We had polenta. We had plenty of polenta. It’s cornmeal mush. We had polenta with buttermilk poured on top. Or I liked it when Mama would fry bacon real crisp, and we’d pour that over our polenta. We’d eat polenta anytime. We never had cereal. If we had chicken we had it for our birthday or on Sunday. We never had chicken, during the week unless it was somebody’s birthday. And mama always made plenty of homemade noodles. We made our own cottage cheese too. It was so thick you could slice it. And we made our own butter; we would churn it for hours and hours. Mama baked eight or nine loaves of bread everyday. The only thing we bought at the store was yeast.” | During the Great Depression: “There would be beans, that you had to cook for two days before they got soft, flour with bugs in it. But yet you sifted the flour, saved the flour and threw the bugs away. Maybe a piece of bacon that smelled so bad that you didn’t know whether to eat it or throw it out. It’s true. In the fall we got apples, and lots of times that’s all we had to eat would be apples. Sometimes I would put them in the oven and bake them. And sometimes I would just cook them on top of the stove, and if we had a piece of bread we were lucky to eat bread and applesauce. And lots of times, we just ate the baked apple and took a drink of water.” |


| “Whatever they liked you put in there [the lunch bucket]. I never put minced ham in because it would get green down there. I most generally put ham, sometimes fried pork chops, chicken and stuff like that, roast beef, and then he had his fruit and his cake, and underneath his lunch he had his water to drink. They never washed their hands [in the mine]. That was drinking water. They [would] eat all around [the food] and then that last bite [with dirty finger marks] they’d eat that too.” | Anna Billek, page 115. Common Lives of Uncommon Strength |

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Courtesy of the Coal and Coke Heritage Center, Penn State Fayette, Uniontown, Pa.
“And [then] some families would have an outdoor oven that was made from bricks, and they would put some wood in to burn and heat it up and with a wooden rake, rake out the burned wood ashes and put their pans of bread, sometimes ten or so, in one at a time. They closed the door. After an hour or so later, they took out these loves of bread all evenly browned, and the aroma would really make you hungry. They also baked nut and poppy seed rolls in these ovens.”

Elizabeth Camencheck Oravets, page 37. *Common Lives of Uncommon Strength*

“Mom packed our lunch sometimes in the winter. She would scramble an egg or two and put it on homemade bread. It was delicious. We didn’t always have a lunch brown paper bag. So Mom would wrap our sandwich in wax paper. Then she would open up the newspaper and wrap the sandwich in sheet of newsprint. Mom then tied it with a length of string that came from the company store. W always saved the string and rolled it up into a ball.
Other times we walked home for lunch and Mom would have hot soup or something very tasty prepared for us. We ate a lot of chicken soup and homemade noodles.
We kept about thirty chickens in the backyard.”

Elaine Hunchuck DeFrank, page 16. *Oral History Entry 12b*

“We’d pick dandelions and wash them in several waters and in cold water. Then we’d fry bacon in little pieces and real crisp. Then we’d throw the fat off and add some vinegar and flour to the bacon and stir in salt and pepper. Then we’d pour the gravy over the dandelions. You can prepare sauerkraut much the same way.”

Nellie Schuessler, page 62. *Patch/Work Voices*

“The railroad had not, of course, made any preparations for such a flood of early arrivals, so many of the men were forced to beg for food. My mother usually baked bread twice a week, but now she began baking every other day, and even oftener. Our house, like many others in the little town, was haunted by the hungry men until the work finally got under way.”

John Brophy, pages 65-66. *A Miner’s Life*