

Student Handout 3-Coal Patch Houses



Image of company-owned row houses
Courtesy of the Johnstown Area Heritage Association,
<http://www.jaha.org/>



Tenement housing in Johnstown.
Courtesy of the Johnstown Area Heritage Association,
<http://www.jaha.org/>



Multi-family tenement house in Johnstown.
Courtesy of the Johnstown Area Heritage Association,
<http://www.jaha.org/>



Back yard of a tenement house.
Courtesy of the Johnstown Area Heritage Association,
<http://www.jaha.org/>



Coal patch company house in the town of Windber.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Coal patch house in Windber.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Coal Patch Houses - More Pictures



Patch town residents and houses
Courtesy of Historical Society of Schuylkill County



Mining town
Courtesy of the Pennsylvania State Archives



Coal patch houses in Windber
Courtesy of the Special Collections and Archives, Indiana University of Pennsylvania



Town of Collier, Pennsylvania
Courtesy of the Pennsylvania State Archives



Company-built, two family outhouse
Courtesy of Chris DellaMea, <http://www.coalcampusa.com>



A double company patch house - Lemont, PA
Courtesy of the Coal and Coke Heritage Center, Penn State Fayette,
<http://www.coalandcokepsu.org/>

Coal Patch Houses Stories

FOOTDALE. "The house and its facilities were very crude. A 'heatrolla' was used to heat the living room, the cast iron stove kept the kitchen warm. All the rooms were furnished in a simple manner; only an old leather davenport and a single table in the living room; plain wooden table and chairs in the kitchen; one bed in each of the bedrooms with a trunk to store clothes. The floors were rough wood, with throw or 'spot' carpeting. Each room was lit by a single bulb hanging from a 'rag' or cloth cord. Each double house also had a double 'outhouse.' The company or mine owners took care of the houses."

Kimberly Collins, page 39-40.
Patch/Work Voices

CONTINENTAL #1 "Living in a patch wasn't very pleasant, especially in the wintertime. In summer, you had a garden and made a nice yard and fixed it up, and you had your vegetables fresh all the time. But the house in wintertime was cold. All you had to heat it with was a fireplace. I'd never want a fireplace now because all I can remember is the grates we used to have in every room. You used to put a grate in on the coal and wood and that's all you had for heat. You'd stand on the front of it, and you'd get too warm while your back would be freezing. You couldn't go to the corners of the room because it would be too cold. And you had to fire up your kitchen stove -- it was alright in the winter time, but in the summer time it wasn't very nice to fire up a coal stove to even heat the little bit of water you had to have for your dishes and your cooking or pot of tea or coffee. You would have a porch that you could go out and sit on. Most of the houses were built on hills -- that made it nice in the summer but sure did make in cold in the winter. You'd be scrubbing your kitchen floor and the first thing you knew, before you got one place wiped, the place where you just scrubbed would be frozen ice."

Viola Ryan, page 41.
Patch/Work Voices

"There was nothing in town but the mine. When the mine was opened, around 1890, the company had had twenty or so frame houses put up by the lumber company that logged the area. A few were doubles, with four or five rooms on a side, but some were singles, of different sizes. They were frame boxes, set on wooden foundation posts, with no porches, no running water, and no plaster. The walls were covered with wooden siding inside and out, sometimes lined on the inside with a thinner finishing board. This did not provide such good insulation against cold as plaster, but it could have been worse, and in some mine camps it was worse. Rent for these shacks was four or five dollars a month, deducted from the pay along with the bill at the company store."

Brophy, page 28.
A Miner's Life

Brestensky, Dennis F., Hovanec, Evelyn A., and Skomra, Albert N. *Patch/Work Voices: The Culture and Lore of a Mining People*. Patch/Work Voices Publishing, 2003

Courtesy of the Coal and Coke Heritage Center, Penn State Fayette, Uniontown, Pa.

Brophy, John. *A Miner's Life, An Autobiography*. Copyright 1964.
Permission of the University of Wisconsin Press.

Coal Patch Houses More Stories

“Our first house in Urey was a two-room shack, but as work slacked some of the miners left and we were able to get a four-room house. Each house had an outdoor privy and coal shed behind it. Water was drawn from wells by a bucket on a windlass. Three to six houses shared the use of each well. We had a cookstove in the kitchen and a small stove for heat in the front room. Two rooms upstairs where we slept were unheated, lacking even registers to let warm air up from below.”

Brophy, page 28.
A Miner's Life

“The houses are made much as a bag is made, to hold in rather than to look pretty. They are square, bare, cheerless looking frame structures for the most part, hideously painted and guiltless of ornamentation. They stand in long, stiff rows, without a line of beauty, and if it were not for the multitude of plump, rosy children perpetually tumbling about the streets of a mining village it would be about the least picturesque thing on earth.”

News article “The Bones of Coal”, page 12.
Common Lives of Uncommon Strength

“We used kerosene lamps for light, though they got relatively little use, except in winter. The rule was early to bed and early to rise. Work began in the mines no later than seven o'clock in the morning, and sometimes earlier. If the men were to get a night's sleep, they had to get to bed soon after supper. The house was furnished with the few castoffs we brought from Philipsburg, to which we added very little for years. Besides the stoves, we had beds, a table, a cupboard, and some chairs. That was enough to get by with, and just about as much as we could afford.”

Brophy, page 28.
A Miner's Life

“We lived for a while in “Sunshine Row,” a straggling line of double houses painted a hideous red. The row began near the mine tipple and fronted the railroad siding to the Pennsylvania's four-track main line. There was so little space between the tracks and the steep hillside behind the houses that there was scarcely any yard. Coal sheds and privies were less than fifteen feet from our kitchen windows. Dust from the tipple, smoke and noise from the passing trains, and other smells, made this the worst place we ever lived in.”

Brophy, page 69.
A Miner's Life

Brophy, John. *A Miner's Life, An Autobiography*. Copyright 1964.
Permission of the University of Wisconsin Press.

Hovanec, Evelyn A. *Common Lives of Uncommon Strength: The Women of the Coal and Coke Era of Southwestern Pennsylvania 1880-1970*. Patch/Work Voices Publishing, 2001
Courtesy of the Coal and Coke Heritage Center, Penn State Fayette, Uniontown, Pa.