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## August Groh Memoir

**G894. Groh, August** (1898-1987)

Interview and memoir

1 tape, 82 mins., 31 pp.

### ILLINOIS COAL: THE LEGACY OF AN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

Groh, immigrant from Austria-Hungary, discusses his work in the coal mines near Pawnee, Illinois, mine wars between the United Mine Workers and the Progressive Miners of America, coal mine operations, and his contribution to the construction of the Number Ten slope mine in Pawnee. Also discusses his education and training in electrical engineering, living and working conditions for miners, and the role of women in the mine wars.

Interview by Kevin Corley, 1985

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## 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.

August Groh was born in Rashichia, Austria-Hungary in 1898. He immigrated to the United States with his family in 1904 and began work in the coal mines at a young age. While working he completed high school through the International Correspondence School and became interested in electrical engineering. He worked in this field as a repairman in the mines and was instrumental in building the Number Ten slope mine in Pawnee, Illinois.

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.

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August Groh, Pawnee, Illinois, November 27, 1985.

Kevin Corley, Interviewer.

Q: Mr. Groh, would you please state your full name for me?

A: August E. Groh.

Q: What does the E stand for?

A: Earl.

Q: Earl? When were you born?

A: August 26, 1898.

Q: That would be 1898?

A: Yes, 1898.

Q: All right. And where were you born?

A: I was only about five years old when my folks left Europe. I was born in Europe.

Q: Where in Europe were you born?

A: Austria, Hungary.

Q: Okay.

A: That's two states. Austria Hungary was one providence at one time until World War I and they made two states out of it, Hungary and Austria.

Q: I see.

A: But when I was born, they called it Austria Hungary.

Q: Right, okay. Where you born in the country?

A: No, at a small village.

Q: Okay. What was the village's name, do you remember?

A: It sounds French--Rashichia.

Q: Rashichia?

A: R-A-S-H-I-C-H-I-A I think it is.

Q: Okay, all right.

A: It's just a foreign name.

Q: All right, I see. You lived there until you were five years old you say?

A: Five years old, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: My dad worked in Lincoln at that time. He came to this country a year before we did. After he was here a year he sent for us and we came over . . .

Q: Okay.

A: . . . on a ship named Hamburg.

Q: The Hamburg.

A: Hamburg. We departed from Hamburg, Germany, and we landed at Ellis Island. Of course we talked German, see, and at that time, the porters all knew German. Mother had tied on Lincoln, Illinois. I had a sister older than I. The three of us, these porters took care of us and showed us where to go. We couldn't talk English any and they routed us to Chicago. Then from there on to Lincoln where we stayed about six months. My dad worked in a mine there at Lincoln and he heard that Peabody was going to start a mine here at Pawnee, Illinois. So he decided to come down here and try to get work down here. He was lucky enough, he got a job, and that's when we came here, somewhere in late 1904.

Q: I see.

A: We bought a little house out here and my dad kept working in the mines. We moved over to this place in about 1905. I was sixteen years old then and my dad thought maybe he'd try to get me to working.

Q: So you started working in the mine when you were sixteen.

A: Yes. You want to know what I was doing?

Q: Yes, what were you doing in the mine?

A: At that time I was what was called a trapper. A trapper takes care of the main haulage lines where they pour the coal. I opened the door for them to get through, and after they were through, make sure the door was closed due to the fact that a door is there to circulate the air. If I left that door open, then the men inside would be deprived of that much air. So I had to keep the doors, when they weren't going through it, I had to keep the door shut.

Q: I see.

A: I did that for I'd say a year or so, and I got big after that so that I could load coal. So my dad got a room, that's a term for the working place for the miner, the room.

Q: The room?

A: Yes. So I stayed there, worked for my dad I would say four or five years, loading coal, hard loading. We loaded two ton cars, the cars would hold two tons of coal.

Q: I see.

A: At that time the wages was \$1.08 a ton.

Q: That's what you got paid when you first started, a \$1.08 a ton?

A: A \$1.08 a ton, but the cars would hold two tons, I think. That would throw you over two dollars, each car you loaded.

Q: I see.

A: I did that for, like I said, two or three years. Then I wanted to get out by myself, so I got a job at the same mine driving a mule hauling coal.

Q: How old were you then?

A: I wasn't but seventeen years old.

Q: Okay.

A: That was a very unique occupation, driving a mule.

Q: I see. Was that dangerous?

A: Well, it was to a certain extent, yes. They always say a mule is contrary animal. Have you ever heard "contrary as a mule?"

Q: Yes.

A: They had a crate that we'd put on the cage. They always kept the mules up on top and they'd ride them down below. They would all ride on that cage on down. We'd be down there and if our mule came down, we'd take it on inside to the working place. Our job was pulling, driving the mule. We had to take an empty car into the men who were working and in turn pull the loaded coal out. We had to pull it to what we called a parting. It was nothing but a double track about five hundred feet long. The double track, the purpose of that is the road from the bottom, the road for the main line motor, came from the bottom with the empties. He put his empties on an empty track and we in turn, when we pulled the coal, we put it on the other track and road motor would take it on up from the bottom. It wasn't dangerous, but some of those mules would get

contrary and they'd go any certain place because it was dark down there and they had no way of seeing anything.

Q: I see.

A: They was always looking at the dirt. Sometimes they would get contrary . . .

Q: I'm sorry, they'd what?

A: They'd get contrary.

Q: Oh, get contrary, yes.

A: You didn't dare use a whip on them because if you did, the mules are onery and he'd remember you. I found it this way with mules, if you treat them right, they'll treat you right. If you mistreat them, they've got a memory a mile long and if they get a chance they'll kick the daylights out of you.

Q: So if you whipped them, then they would turn around and try to kick you.

A: Not at that time, but then a little bit later, the first shot they got. That was when they'd do that part of it.

Q: How did the company feel about the mule drivers and the mules?

A: They made everything as convenient as they could because that was the only source of that coal getting up from the bottom.

Q: I see.

A: They would do to the best of their ability--that is the bosses down below--so that they'd be sure to get that coal out of that bottom because the coal sitting inside didn't do them any good. I did that for eight or ten years I guess.

Q: So you were a mule driver for about eight or ten years?

A: Yes. In the meantime, I decided that when I graduated out of grade school I didn't have the opportunity to get an education at that time. My father couldn't afford to send me. Well at that time, there was very, very few students in high school. I decided that if I wanted to get myself an education, I could. At that time, we had no electricity in our house, old coal lamps. So I kind of scouted around for a school, correspondence school. They was in Scranton, Pennsylvania and they sent me the work see. But it was hard that time working in the day time, and I studied by coal oil lamp, see. But I stayed with it.

Q: So you were working in the daytime in the mines, and then at night you would come home and study?

A: Study, yes.

Q: What grade education did you have when you started this correspondence school?

A: What grade?

Q: Yes, like what level were you when you started that?

A: I was in grade school. There were two girls and I were one, two, and three. Every time when I say, "Well, we all went through school together," it seems just like either one of the girls or I was number one. It was that way all through school.

Q: Did you have like a ninth grade education when you started the correspondence school?

A: No. I just had a sixth grade education.

Q: Sixth grade education when you started.

A: But I explained that to the correspondence school, and they said they would teach me accordingly. As I progressed, they elevated the schooling in according to the seventh grade and on like that. It took me a year of that schooling and at the end of that year the subject that I wanted to take after I got the schooling, I wanted to learn a subject, mechanical engineering.

Q: I see. Why did you take that?

A: Because I always favored engineering.

Q: You liked engineering.

A: I liked engineering.

Q: Was that going to help you in the mines?

A: Well, I didn't intend to stay in the same mine all my life. I looked forward to something else whenever I got bigger enough to get away from my dad and away from home.

Q: Yes.

A: So I seemed to do pretty good, you know, and then I'd get a little note of encouragement from the people of the work.

Q: How old were you when you started the correspondence school?

A: Oh, let's see. I went to grade school eight years, six years when I started, I was about seventeen years old.

Q: Okay. How far did your education go when you were through with it? Did you get a high school diploma?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, good.

A: The International Correspondence School was the name of it.

Q: International Correspondence School.

A: It's in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Q: Okay.

A: But they're saying now that they're not in business for it. They've started a university or something like that. But even now it's a correspondence school. They're not in business anymore. But I just sent in my work once every two weeks, and that's all there was to it. Mathematics was my favorite subject. I had mathematics, history, and spelling, geography. They reminded of something in school. Like I say, every once in awhile I'd get an encouragement, encourage me for it. Of course, I was doing all right. I imagine that the purpose of it was that if a boy like that way of doing the old work would get discouraged a little bit, he'll have to stop.

Q: Yes.

A: So that kept him encouraged.

Q: Do you feel like the education paid off?

A: Yes. Oh yes. At the end of my school, they wanted my permission, if I cared if they'd use my grades and my way with the school for an advertisement. I said, "Oh, you can." And they honored me. The education I got, the heading they put on it says, "What a coal miner can do if he had the mind to, while working in the daytime and studying at night and still get top grades."

Q: Well, that's great.

A: Always turned towards electricity, I liked electricity. I took up electricity after that, but I didn't go to school, I just went to school under men that worked with electricity and studied under them. So by that time, well, yes I was living here then. My dad, in the meantime, had got hurt in the mine and passed away. I had my mother and two brothers to support. So I did that.

Q: How did he get hurt in the mine?

A: He had an accident. Him and another fellow was carrying a big heavy rail, a sixteen foot rail, and they were carrying it. This other man dropped his end for a minute and when he dropped his end, that made a surge on my father. He had the whole weight on him, and he ruptured himself.

Q: Oh. Did your family get any benefits from that?

A: Yes. Very little, very little. So I was staying at my mother's when he passed away on the seventh day of November in 1918. He was buried the tenth day of November, the day before Armistice.

Q: Here in Pawnee?

A: Here in Pawnee. That's when the world war was going on. So I told my mother, I said, "Well, Ma, I'm going to enlist." She said, "Son, what will we do, your two brothers and I?" I said, "We'll do something."

Q: You had two brothers you say?

A: Yes. No, a brother and sister. I went to Springfield and I enlisted for the army on the twelfth day of September, 1918. We were the next group of them goes going to the service. But at that time maybe you did hear, the flu epidemic that was so bad?

Q: The flu epidemic?

A: Yes. Remember it, 1918?

Q: No. Was that big here in Christian County or Sangamon County?

A: That was all over the country, world-wide.

Q: Okay.

A: General Black was in charge. I passed the examination and we were the next group to go. It was about that time General Black closed all the camps due to the fact, he said, "I want no more men sent in any camp. We're losing more men with the flu than we are on the battlefield." So therefore, there was no more men. That was in September, and in November the Armistice was signed, so . . . (laughs)

Q: You missed out on it.

A: . . . I missed out on it. I was twenty years old and that's when I decided after that, I decided, well, I had that mechanical engineering education. So I decided to try to get in the mines again. I was just fortunate that at that time they were recruiting young fellows to learn this mining machinery and mine work.

Q: What kind of machinery?

A: We'll come to that.

Q: Okay.

A: So I was lucky enough that they picked me. When I first started there, I didn't even see a machine yet. They said that they hadn't got the company machine repaired, would you hang suspension wire, and I said sure.

Q: Hang suspension wires?

A: Yes, all over the mines, you know, for the cutting machines and the motors.

Q: Down in the mine?

A: Yes. So I did that for over a year. In the meantime while I was doing that wire hanging, I got well acquainted with the chief electrician. He kind of took a liking to me. He said, "August, how would you like to repair machinery?" I said, "Ed, I'm sure glad you asked me," and I told him where I got that from International [Correspondence] School and, "Well, that will come in handy." So I was doing odd jobs around the shop down below and I just worked myself up gradually. I did that for let's see, fifteen years.

Q: Fifteen years.

A: Fifteen years. I worked myself up from the bottom up to the top.

Q: So your job, in the beginning, was fixing machines?

A: Yes, repairing machines.

Q: And then you worked your way up to--what would it be called, foreman of the . . .

A: No, not foreman. They just had the chief electrician.

Q: Chief electrician.

A: Yes. They had three shifts, see, and the third shift electrician, he moved to another line. They wanted me to take the chief electrician and run for sheriff but I turned it down due to the fact that my wife didn't want to stay by herself at night. Then we had one child, and I really didn't like the line. I said, "Well, if that means leaving the shop because I wouldn't take the chief electrician, that's up to you." "Oh, no," he said, "we don't want to lose you. We just . . ."

Q: When you say leaving the shop . . .

A: I thought maybe they'd let me go because I refused to take the chief electrician. I thought maybe they would fire me or something like that, but they didn't. They said, "No, we aren't going to fire you."

Q: Did that happen a lot, did they fire people because they wouldn't take a certain position?

A: Not too often. They could make it kind of rough on them until they quit.

Q: How did they do that?

A: Giving them jobs they didn't like and they could shuffle them. But that didn't happen very often because maybe just like working in the garage, you become friendly, buddies. Then we never had no trouble because of that.

Q: When you first started doing this type of job, were you down below most of the time?

A: Yes, all the time, all the time.

Q: And so there was a lot of repairs to be done?

A: Oh, yes. I started at Number Nine. Like just like accutriggers, I could tell some time ago, but I don't imagine they had twenty machines, cutting machines at that mine. They broke me in the cutting machines and I got to where I could go up there and take them apart blindfolded.

Q: What type of repairs did you usually have to make on a cutting machine?

A: The biggest trouble would be the cutting chains that cut the coal, because there's so much impurities in the coal that the little, what they call nuggets, little chunks of greased slate, like . . .

Q: Clay?

A: No, slate.

Q: Slate.

A: Slate and the impurities, it was like a solid ball. When they hit that it would break the chains, you know.

Q: Yes.

A: Of course, they had the electric controllers, speeded the machines. You know anything about motors, do you?

Q: No, not too much.

A: You know what an arbiter is don't you?

Q: Arbiter?

A: Arbiter, yes, that's the big part of the machine. That's what drives everything.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: They'd blow once in awhile and we'd have to change that. We'd have a cable that would blow once in awhile. You just splice the cables around.

Q: So you were there when the cutting machine first came in then, into the mine. Is that right?

A: There was some of them. They had some there, but while I was there, you had three or four different varieties of machines.

Q: Different varieties?

A: But that was about 1921. That's when they started changing everybody's machine, you know, they invented a machine that would do more work.

Q: What year did the cutting machine come in itself? Into the mine.

A: They had some cutting machines there.

Q: Yes, when you started.

A: Before I started.

Q: Yes. But you're saying the variety started changing and they improved them?

A: Yes, they improved, better machinery all the time.

Q: I see.

A: Then of course, I grew up with the new machines in all the time, see.

Q: Yes.

A: I knew them pretty well, and I got so I could do anything they wanted us to do on them. Seems like when the other mines would shut down, they always sent me to the other mines to help them out. At one stage, the mines at Springfield there stopped and they needed a man in there because they had gotten some from the southern part of the state. They wanted somebody there to assemble them, so they sent me up there.

Q: To sample them you say?

A: To assemble them.

Q: Oh, assemble them, put them together.

A: Another fellow and I went there and we stayed there all summer. Just off and on that way.

Q: What kind of pay did you get when you started as an engineer?

A: Well, you wasn't classified as no engineer then.

Q: Okay.

A: Machinery repairman.

Q: Machinery repairman.

A: The chief electrician by the name of Ed Gillespie, a wonderful man, he knew everything there was to know about electricity. He could take a piece of machinery, you get new machinery that he had never seen before. Seems as though he had a vision that could penetrate through steel because whenever that machine would break down or not work right, he never seen it before, the inside of the machine. He could tell you just exactly where to go and where the trouble was at.

Q: And he'd never seen the machine before?

A: And he never had seen it. He was that kind of a man.

Q: Yes.

A: He was the smartest man around mining machines that I ever saw, and he was at Number Nine before he passed away. George Mosey knows him well.

Q: George Mosey knows him?

A: Yes. See, George Mosey and I, when Number Nine shut down one year for repairs, they sent me to Number Eight. That's at Tovey. George Mosey was bossing at Number Eight then, and that's when I got acquainted with him. He was what they called a face boss, that's in the mine, you know, where they mine coal inside. I worked in the shop at the bottom but I got acquainted with George there.

Q: Did you become friends then?

A: Oh yes. Then when they shut down, they transferred him to Number Nine and he became face boss in the same section that I was repairing in.

Q: When you say it, you're saying face boss?

A: Face boss. That's what they call that boss that worked inside, face boss. That's what they call the inside of the mine, the face of it or the front of it.

Q: Oh, I see, like F-A-C-E.

A: Yes, okay.

A: It's at Number Nine.

Q: What year did you become friends with him?

A: That was in the 1920s.

Q: Late 1920's?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you stay friends during the 1930's then?

A: I didn't see him very much. See, I belonged to Number Nine. Of course, when Number Nine started up again, I came back to Number Nine. He stayed at Number Eight.

Q: I see. Okay.

A: But then when he came to Number Nine, when Eight shut down, doing the same job he did at Number Eight, and I was doing the job around him all the time.

Q: I see.

A: George is a pretty nice fellow.

Q: All right. Let's move on a little bit to the mine wars for a second. The mine wars when they started in 1932, you know, between the Progressive Miners of America and the United Mine Workers?

A: You mean the trouble they had?

Q: Right. Did you become a Progressive?

A: No, no.

Q: Were you considered part of the management by then?

A: No. I'd been offered officer but I always wanted to stay a buck private.

Q: A buck private?

A: Yes. When that trouble broke out, I wanted no part of the trouble due to the fact that they was unreasonable in my opinion. Another thing was I decided that if I started anything like that, if any trouble broke out, I'd be bucking them people that I worked with.

Q: You'd be going against some of your friends.

A: Sure. So I didn't want anything like that to happen. In the first place, I didn't think they had any reason to be out on strike.

Q: What effect did the wars have on you then?

A: Nothing. That was in 1932, yes, in 1932.

Q: Right. August, 1932 I think it all began.

A: Yes, and I never did, I didn't take sides. I just thought we had officials that was supposed to take care of the stuff like that, try to settle up, you know, what they had. Just the men themselves, they had no jurisdiction over anything like that and there was no sense in getting involved in something you have no authority in.

Q: Did you continue to work then?

A: No. I was out three months I think, until they went back to work. I went back to the same old job.

Q: Were you harassed at all by the Progressives?

A: No. Well, yes, I'll take that back. One time, it happened right out here in front, see I drove back and forth from Number Nine from home.

Q: From Homer?

A: From here, home.

Q: Oh, from here, at home, I see.

A: I was an electrical and they figured if they could stop the electricians from going to work, if they kept them here, that that would kind of set the coal company back and they might settle up quicker.

Q: It'd stop the machines in other words.

A: Yes. So I didn't budge. I said I wasn't going to get mixed up with that trouble.

Q: So what did they do, they came . . .

A: I went one morning, and some of those men, they stayed with us, see, the Progressives. They kind of catered to these Progressives, and the union had something to do with that. At that time, I think it was in 1932, our contracts ran out. That's what started the Progressive movement, our contracts ran out, our officials signed up and that group didn't like it. So then they tried to take us down too. So I stayed out of it quite awhile. The only harassment I got, me and the machinery repairman. I had another man that I worked and I drove back and forth to work--you know where our high school is here?

Q: Yes, in Pawnee.

A: We used to go down there even before they had that hard road. We didn't have [Highway] 104 until 1932.

Q: I see.

A: So we'd go backway and there was a group of men with shotguns in the middle of the road.

Q: With shotguns?

A: Yes. They shot at us and said you can't go to work. I said, 'Well, if you have to have a shotgun to go to work, I won't go to work.' (laughs)

Q: Just turn around and went back home.

A: Went right back home. Then later on after that, they must've got wind of how we'd go to work. They had a chance, the Progressives, to settle the thing, and it backfired on me. I got up one morning and there was a group of men out in the front of my yard with shotguns on their shoulders. "No, you ain't going to work."

Q: So that was part of the reason you stayed home for those three months?

A: Yes.

Q: I understand that. (laughs)

A: You have radical people in all walks of life. If they're working and say that the official that you're working under signed up for a certain wage or something like that, maybe they thought they'd turn up for more than one year, better conditions. You can't satisfy everybody. The good Lord was on this earth and he couldn't satisfy everybody.

Q: Do you feel that the people in this area of these mines were maybe a little bit more radical than other groups of people?

A: No, no. The company imported some strike breakers in, and they even got the militia to come in. That made them more aggravated than ever, so they decided to stay out until the company backed down. But since those days we haven't had any trouble. Now when the contract runs out and we're off a few days while our officials are signing up and everybody is satisfied.

Q: Was there a lot of friction between people who had been friends or family members?

A: Oh yes, yes. In Tovey, one case where the father was on one side and the son the other.

Q: Other, yes, different side?

A: Yes. Of course, that was due to the effect of our friends too, but you can't play both sides against the middle. I couldn't see any sense in doing that. There was old man killed over here. The militia shot and killed him.

Q: Andy Gynes?

A: Andy Gynes, yes. You heard about that?

Q: Yes, I did. Were you there when that happened?

A: No. I was home. I don't know why the company, well he went to state and asked for the militia in to help break the strike, but they didn't do it, they just caused more friction.

Q: What role did women play at that time?

A: The women had, in Tovey here, they used to have a group, a committee. This committee would just get out and they would picket these few who were working. Then they had the soup kitchens and they took care of the food for the miners that were on strike and their families.

Q: Did they march the picket lines themselves?

A: Yes, some of them did.

Q: How did the opposing side feel about that?

A: They didn't like it but they didn't dare touch a woman.

Q: They wouldn't touch them because they were women?

A: Yes.

Q: So did the women kind of use their weight?

A: Well, their persuasion.

Q: Their persuasion?

A: Yes, and then I think that some of the Progressives kind of softened up and they started listening to each other a little bit then they would hop back over to the union side.

Q: So some of the women you feel helped to influence the Progressives to come back to the UMW?

A: Yes. It looked to me like they did.

Q: Like their wives or other people?

A: When these men's wives heard that was going on, they might've had some influence on their husband.

Q: Who were some of the women that you remember as being active at that time?

A: I don't know of any. That's been a long time ago. I wanted to forget the whole thing.

Q: Do you remember Emma Cumerlatto?

A: Yes, I knew her.

Q: Yes, when she was shot in 1932?

A: Yes.

Q: There was a big funeral around this area for her?

A: Yes, I knew her and I know the Cumerlatto family there in Kincaid.

Q: Okay.

A: That was all uncalled for. Father against son and brother against brother.

Q: What about the children, how did they take it?

A: Some of the kids would take it to heart and others, they went ahead playing with each other like they always did. The only reprimand they got was from their own folks for associating with the other kids.

Q: Do you remember when the Kincaid high school students went on strike in October, 1932? They went on strike because the high school was using coal that was mined by Peabody.

A: I remember that but I still don't have the memory.

Q: I just wondered if maybe your children were about that age to remember it.

A: No. We was always here in Pawnee. We didn't even fun around over there.

Q: Okay.

A: The only place they had any trouble was Kincaid, Tovey, and Bulpitt because your jobs was off a ways from there, had that trouble out there. But Tovey and Kincaid, they had mine trouble.

Q: Yes, okay. We could stop there for today I think. (tape turned off and back on again) Okay, go ahead.

A: 1932 was the yearly election, big election, and my wife used to run an elevator at the Leland Hotel. She got acquainted who was the Secretary of State by the name of Ed Hughes. Of course, he used to see her everyday, you know, going in. Before the primaries in 1932, my wife and I were walking into Springfield to do shopping and we ran across him. He stopped and talked and she gave me an introduction to him. He asked me, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, nothing now," I said, "with all that, mine trouble and I don't want to get mixed up in it." He said, "I'll tell you what. If you help me out as much as you can among the coal miners and I'm in, they'll have to take care of you."

Q: He said if you would help bugging the coal miners?

A: No, help him be elected.

Q: Oh, be elected.

End of Side One, Tape One

Q: He wanted you to help him get elected?

A: Yes. That was before the primaries. So I didn't go back to work, I stayed out and I did all I could for him, Natalie and I. Of course he was nominated. He got in touch with us and he wanted to know if we'd continue doing the good work. I said, "Sure." I wasn't doing anything anyhow. I had no idea of going to work for the state, so he was elected. We still wasn't settled up on the work. That was way after the election. So I stayed unemployed until . . . oh, the primaries was in April and about March I was still out.

Q: That was March of 1933?

A: 1932.

Q: 1932, okay.

A: No, 1933.

Q: 1933, yes.

A: So this other man and I, we wasn't working. This other man and I were together working for Hughes as much as I could. He said, "Well, you just sit back and I'll take care of you." So time went on and went on into April. A lot of my friends had political jobs with the electric company. Look around a bit with friend of mine from Williamsville. He's sitting there at the motel and I was there with him and I was about asleep. He nudged me, "Hey Augie, that man over there's trying to get your attention." So I kind of woke up and see him. So I went over to him . . .

Q: Okay, this was Mr. Hughes?

A: Yes. He said, "You go up and see Nellie Walsh." He was in charge of all the patronage for that time. Tell him you're the guy I was talking to him about." I went up there. He said, "Well, we've got something for you." He said, "But when you go home, don't you tell nobody about this," because at that time there was so many men was out of work, you know. All of them would be hounding them for jobs. "When people give help like that, we take care of you." That was in April. So the eighth day of May, the next month, I got a call to come up there and I got that with the highways.

Q: A job on the highway?

A: No. In the Centennial Building. Engineer's assistant.

Q: You got a job as an engineer's assistant?

A: Yes.

Q: How long did you do that then?

A: Until 1941.

Q: From 1933 until 1941 then.

A: Yes.

Q: What was your job then? You said engineer's assistant, what did you do?

A: We took care of the road lettings and repairs to be done on the highways and stuff like that. They had two blueprint machines in that department, and we had a multi-graph, a multilith, and an addressograph and addresstypewriter, all that machinery. I stayed there until 1940. At that time all the mine trouble was settled down. Worked for the state but they paid as little as they could. You know what I started work for? One hundred dollars a month.

Q: One hundred dollars a month when you were working for the state, for the highway?

A: Yes. That's what it was when I started. They was starting everybody at that, and I worked myself up to \$175.

Q: Did you like doing that?

A: Yes.

Q: Why did you go back to the mines?

A: Because it paid more money.

Q: Okay.

A: Gee whiz, they paid about four times what I was making there.

Q: So really, by not becoming a Progressive and by keeping your nose clean and helping with the . . .

A: That's right.

Q: . . . then it helped you get this job, this political job.

A: That's right, yes. Because they look up your history. The first thing he told me, he said, "Well, I see you've kept your nose clean." I got acquainted with the chief of police. He said, "Augie, I want you to come work for me." I said, "No, I don't want a police job."

Q: What year was that?

A: 1938 I think. I didn't want no police job.

Q: Yes.

A: I stayed there until 1940 when Dwight Green was elected governor.

Q: I'm sorry, what was that?

A: Dwight Green?

Q: Dwight Green, yes.

A: He was elected governor.

Q: Elected governor, okay.

A: Don't you remember that?

Q: Right. So that was in 1940.

A: 1940. When he got over there he was starting to weed out the people you know, get his side of the fence going.

Q: So did you get cut because of that?

A: No. I beat him to it.

Q: You beat him to it?

A: I went back to the mine. I was going to go back anyway because at that time they settled up and I went back to the mine.

Q: So you went back to the mine in 1940 or 1942?

A: 1941.

Q: 1941, okay.

A: I went back to Number Nine.

Q: What did you do when you went back to the mine in 1941? Did you go back as an electrical engineer again?

A: No. At that time, they didn't have any openings and I did odd jobs for about just a month or two. I was pretty well acquainted with the generators that made power for the mine. So Ed Gillespie, he was still chief of police, he seen me one day. He said, "Augie, you've got to come back." I said, "If you want me to come back, talk to them."

Q: To machinery repairs?

A: Yes.

Q: So how long did you do that then, from 1941 to . . .

A: To 1951.

Q: . . . until 1951.

A: That's when we started the Number Ten mine. I was transferred from Number Nine to Number Ten. But before I left Nine, Nine shut down and I had to help hoist all the machinery out of the inside to the bottom. We hoisted some of it, and Number Nine had holes through underground to Number Seven. My job was to get the machines from other parts of the mine, haul it over here and run through hole from Number Nine to Number Seven, underground. I moved all the machinery across underground.

Q: You moved it all across from one mine to another?

A: Yes.

Q: Underground?

A: Underground.

Q: How far was that?

A: A side of mine at Number Nine was quite a ways by the time I went over to Number Seven. That's quite a ways.

Q: Yes.

A: So I did that until Nine shut down in 1951. The superintendent, a man named John Hardy--division superintendent was William Stark.

Q: William Stewart?

A: Stark.

Q: Stark, okay.

A: That was before Nine shut down. This Mr. Stark, he very seldom went into the workings. He always stayed above ground in the office and see everything that the manager did was right. But this day, I was inside working on a machine and I noticed that he came in. "Hi Augie, how're you doing?" I said, "Okay, Bill. I'm working, busy on this machine." I said, "If you want to talk to me, why, you talk to me while I'm working." I said, "I've go so much to do." I had a big job. I had the machine torn down and it was going to take me an hour, two hours to get it back together. So he sat down on a chunk of coal and we talked for a long time.

Q: What year was that did you say?

A: That was in the 1930s.

Q: What did he ask you about? What did he talk about?

A: He asked me if I didn't want to take a job as chief electrician. I said, "No, I'm not cut out to be no boss."

Q: Why didn't you want to be a boss?

A: Because I don't like to order people around, I never did. Another reason is I've been among the average public, around workers where you've got ten or twelve good workers, you've got one or two drones in it.

Q: What do you mean by drones?

A: Fellows that won't work.

Q: Yes.

A: They're there to draw their pay, you know, and they're in the way of everybody else. So if I was chief electrician and a fellow would lay down like that, I couldn't take it. I'd fire him right then.

Q: Yes.

A: So rather than have all those fellows who were my friends, even if they were my friends, they wouldn't work like they should because it was nothing to me, then I would just work by myself. But I'd have to be a boss over them fellows that I worked with for years and I knew that they didn't like to work, they won't work unless they have to. I wanted nothing to do with it that would put me in a spot, see.

Q: Yes, I see.

A: So I said, "I thank you partner," I said, "no." "Well, we'll hold it up a week or so. Maybe you'll change your mind." I said, "No, I don't think I will." So they kept after me for another week. Everytime he seen me he'd say, "Are you going to take it?" and I'd say, "No." I said, "Does it make you mad because I said no?" "No, no, no. We can see your point."

Q: So you stayed on that job from 1951 until . . .

A: Until 1951. Until then. That's when Nine shut down and they transferred me to Number Ten.

Q: And how long did you work at Number Ten then?

A: Until 1967.

Q: Is that when you retired?

A: Yes. You see, when I worked at Number Ten, I had the same job working on the machinery. Of course, they were just starting up. This was a new mine, they weren't in very far and the workers were close by. A man by the name of John Danko, he was chief electrician and I got acquainted with him. I had to start on the night shift and I stayed on nights about six to eight months. I saw the mine manager and I said, "Hey, it's about time I get transferred over to day shift, isn't it?" "First chance we get somebody equivalent to your experience and can handle your job, we'll put him on nights and put you on days." That was the division superintendent who told me that, a fellow by the name of Joe Craggs.

Q: Yes.

A: You know him?

Q: I've heard of him, yes.

A: Joe, his dad was mine manager at Number Nine and also Number Eight, I had worked at Number Eight under Bill Craggs, that's Joe's dad and Joe knew that. I told Joe, I said, "I'd like to get back on days." "Yes Augie, just hold your horses." So about two or three months after that, I went to the wash house where we changed clothes in, "You're supposed to report on the day shift immediately." So I repaired machinery like machinery that I knew and I think it was Craggs said, "Augie, we're going to make a slope mine."

Q: A slope mine?

A: Yes. Number Ten is a slope mine. See, Number Nine and Seven, they were cage mines, cages went up and down them. But this is a slope mine at Number Ten. I said, "Well, how steep is it going to be?" "A sixteen percent grade, and when the slope is done, it will be nearly 300 feet long from the bottom to the top." He said, "Although you're working and your're no boss, but you can be the shift manager. I want you to take it over and see that everything runs like a Chevrolet."

Q: I'm sorry, say that again?

A: He wanted me to take over making that slope. My job was to hang your power line, air line and water line. See, they used jack hammers to drill with, they had to have electricity to power and run the machines. They had to have air for the jack hammers too. Air and water for the jack hammers and power for the machines. So I put that in for him and he had what they call a slusher special built.

Q: A slusher.

A: Yes. It was a regular coal cutting machine, but they took the caterpillars off of it, the conveyor part of it off it. No, they left the conveyor part on it. They bolted it on another chassis. It was special built to go up the slope on wheels in place of the cats. They had a drum, a metal drum, it's special built, see. So he puts a big drum that they wound the steel cables around it and they had two shovels like they use on hard roads, scoop shovels with the two handles on them that can go up and down, you know.

Q: Yes.

A: Got two of those, and they hooked one end of the cable on the shovel because the shovel had a handle with a loop on the end of them, besides the wooden handles. They could, you know, flop the shovel over upside down. They put cables over this drum and they send men with jack hammers, they would drill and they would face the solid rock going up the slope because the coal would run all the way to the bottom.

Q: Now, are they starting from down in the mine and making the slope up to the surface?

A: Yes. That was my job to service that. Of course, I couldn't tell nobody what to do because there was the boss there. As they went up, they'd get the machinery all set, two men and jackhammers, and they would drill on in there. They would shoot that solid rock with dynamite. Then that slusher, he would pull that shovel up there and another lever, pull it down, one on each side, each corner of the room. Then the men up there could reverse it. After they load their cars out, they was supposed to shovel over the middle of the room and get that stuff there. They'd pull that middle there to that shovel over there so it would pick up that rock.

Q: How'd they pick it up, with the shovels?

A: Yes, the power shovels.

Q: The power shovels.

A: Yes. They were there, they'd turn it upside down and make it quick ways to get it loaded up. The operator, he'd move it and they just pull that shovel into this machine. The machine had a conveyor on it and it was a coal loading machine with conveyors. Then the man there would turn the shovel over when it cut all the machine on ahead of it and then that would fall on the conveyor. It came to another battery motor. It was on track alongside the slusher that run into that battery motor. Then the other one, the other shovel would come down and do the same thing. They drilled the shute and of course, the top, it was, well, it goes straight like that, your slate more or less and your coal, and that by nature lays flat.

Q: Why does it lay flat?

A: Nature, nature caused that because coal was nothing but a . . . during the dinosaur days.

Q: Yes, so it's in seams like.

A: Yes, seams, and they lay flat. Then when you're going up like that, you were cutting into that flat part, making it weak. It had a tendency to cave in all the time.

Q: Yes, I see.

A: So then they had another man and two welders, and they used I-beams.

Q: I-beams, yes.

A: The welders would cut these measures, what they called a leg, put it on an I-beam and cut an I-beam for the roof on the top, from side to side. Then they'd cut a leg with that welder, cut that I-beam off and prop it on the leg.

Q: Yes.

A: That's what you call a leg.

Q: Yes, I see. Okay.

A: They did that all the way up the slope. Right today if you go up there, you'll find an I-beam about every six feet.

Q: Now, you got trapped into being a boss is what happened, didn't it?

A: Yes, but I had no authority.

Q: You didn't get any extra money for that probably.

A: No, I didn't. But Joe Craggs, he knew me, see. This battery buggy, it's on this . . . what they haul coal with.

Q: It's a battery buggy?

A: Yes. It's operated by batteries.

Q: Yes. Now, what year is this?

A: That was in 1951.

Q: Okay, so you're building this slope in 1951.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: We built that slope, we started building that slope, the lines went down in 1951. They started building that slope in 1952.

Q: 1952.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Had a battery buggy, because as a rule, all these other mines all had electric operated motors, operator to run the motors. But they couldn't use the motors going up the slope, because the battery buggy, it'd have wheels on it, tired wheels. They took those off, the rubber tires and made track wheels on it. Wheel with phalanges on it.

Q: Phalanges, yes.

A: Yes. They laid track as they went up the slope, they kept adding more track. But they started laying the track from the bottom, and the battery buggy ran on that track, see.

Q: Yes, I see.

A: That battery buggy was hooked onto this slusher. It had a big steel cable about three-quarter inch thick fastened onto the end of the slusher, and the slusher, it had a shive wheel.

Q: I'm sorry, what?

A: A shive wheel.

Q: A shave wheel.

A: Shive.

Q: Shive, okay.

A: That's a wheel with phalanges on it. The steel cable that was fastened on the buggy through the shive and on to, they had a great big motor at the bottom of the slope. It was a big motor, it's about 440 or 400 horse motor. Just like the generator. Then they laid the slusher, it ran on track. But it was controlled and held up by this cable, that big motor held it up. Then in turn, this buggy, it was hooked onto this shive wheel also. I'll take this back. It was hooked onto that big motor. When that slusher would dump, would swing the conveyor and dump that rock on it into this buggy.

Q: It would drop the rock into the buggy?

A: Yes. And then that man down in the bottom--of course, he wouldn't need no partner, he'd run it by himself, he'd release the brakes on the cable and let that buggy run on down.

Q: When he'd release the brakes, he'd just do it gradually?

A: Yes, just gradually.

Q: If he tried to brake it again, would it stop?

A: Oh, yes. It would come down on it's own weight.

Q: On it's weight.

A: Yes.

Q: By gravity.

A: Yes. After they got down that way, they had to have a place to dump all that rock that they got out of the throat. So they took two loading machines and a cutting machine. That cutting machine would cut the coal first and the loading machines would load it. They set up two entries that were fourteen feet wide, and that's what they turned their rooms off of. They turned a room every sixty feet. So like I said, they had to have a room to do something with this rock that they got out of the throat. That was the purpose of running these rooms, twelve rooms off of

each entry. The entries were parallel to each other and then they turned a room off of the entry.

Q: They'd turn into other rooms?

A: Yes. They turned a room every sixty feet. They took all the coal out of them, made rooms out of them and loaded that up. It would take a long time to make the slope. Where the track is, that battery buggy runs up and down on it. They ran an entry from one of these rooms to where the track is, over towards where the slope is. Then in turn, they dug a hole from between the ties on that battery buggy track all the way down to the room down below that's about thirty feet down. They had these coal buggies that pull the coal, they used them. As the battery buggy would come down full of rock, they would stop over this glory hole they called it . . .

Q: Glory hole.

A: Yes, that's the nickname for it.

Q: Yes.

A: He would let that rock run out of his buggy and dump it down into a buggy underneath that was waiting for that rock. He in turn would take that rock and dump it into those rooms that were worked out.

Q: Yes. And that's where they stored the coal then?

A: They stored the rock. They wanted to get rid of it.

Q: Get rid of the rock, so they left it in there.

A: Yes.

Q: I see.

A: That's the process they used in making that slope.

Q: Sounds pretty efficient to be able to get rid of the rock that way.

A: It was. They really had that all figured out, some of the engineers.

Q: Okay, that's interesting. Sounds like you know a lot about that since you were right there helping to run the thing.

A: The man that was bossing there, he was sort of fidgety. He'd get excited and all that, they used to make fun of him. But it's human nature. He used to be a face boss on a coal part and they'd tease him about that. A person that's fidgety like that, well, you can't say nothing to him. You know, if you don't feel like insulting them or anything, just let it go. If you knowed him to a certain extent, he had good ideas, he knew what he was doing and what they wanted done. The best way to get along with a man like that was to do what you were told.

Q: Yes.

A: And everybody got along. Oh, we got in squabbles.

Q: You were right there watching through all this time that machines were coming in. In the process that you just described to me was a far cry from what happened in the 1920s by using machines. The continuous miner and that type of thing. What effect did these machines have on jobs and things?

A: When they got the continuous miner, that--did you ever see one of them?

Q: No, I haven't.

A: We've got to go back on our story to get to them. Before then when the men were hand loading and stuff like that, they'd turn a room and . . . solid coal is what they called a face. The men would shoot the coal, load it by hand, and your face was square. Your block of coal was square and thirty feet wide. They would take approximately the center of the face of the room and they would drill a hole on an angle like that so that the tip of the drill would be practically in the center of the room.

Q: Why did it have to be in the center of the room?

A: Well, I'll tell you why. Then that's what they called a buster.

Q: A buster.

A: Yes. The purpose of that is I'll get to in a minute. They shoot that first and the purpose of the angle like that if you drill a hole in solid and you put powder in it, it'll kick right back out of the hole. It can't do anything else because it's up against solid coal.

Q: I see.

A: You drill the buster on an angle like that and you shoot that. When they light it, it blows that coal out because they're on the beam. There's no resistance there, see?

Q: Yes.

A: Then after that, they shoot that buster out. They come along on what they call the rib shot. The sides of the room, they call them ribs.

Q: A rib shot?

A: Yes. The purpose of the buster is you've got to make room for the rib shot and after that busts out you've got a big vee there see. Then they come along the other side and shoot alongside the rib, shoot that coal out and that gives you a square face again.

Q: I see. Okay, and then they could hand load it after that?

A: Yes. Well, they hand loaded the buster out first, because you've got to get that buster out first because, see, with that buster out, they've got a chance to blow the other coal out.

Q: Okay. All right.

A: That's the purpose of that angle shot, the buster, to make room for the other shots to come out.

Q: Does the seam have a lot to do with the angle of the shot then?

A: No. There's two streaks of impurity. They have what they call a steel band and . . .

Q: A steel band.

A: It's impurities, it's just like rock about two inches wide maybe. It varies from a half inch to maybe two inches wide.

Q: It's just rock inside the coal, a seam of rock in the coal?

A: Yes.

Q: They had to get rid of that.

A: Of course, all that goes up. In modern mines like that, see that coal is all crushed, crushed with the steel in it, like Number Ten does.

Q: Yes, crush the coal.

A: It crushes the coal and then it's dumped with water into a vat. The coal floats and the impurities don't.

Q: I see.

A: Then they take the impurities out.

Q: Now, is that the way they do it nowadays?

A: Yes.

Q: But they didn't do it back then that way.

A: No.

Q: Yes, they had to hand pick it out?

A: They had to hand pick it out.

Q: Yes, okay. All right. Well, good. Let's stop here.

End of Side Two, Tape One