

Buxton Project: 424-2104
Narrator's Name: Mike Onder
Tape Number: 68B
Date Of Interview:
Place of Interview:
Interviewer's Name: Joseph Hraba

Q. What did he sell? Hotdogs?

A. Yeah, I think he had hotdogs and pops, peanuts, candy bars. I don't know whether he sold tobacco or not. I don't think them days you had to have tobacco liscense much. I don't know whether they did or not. That's been quite a while ago.

Q. Did they drink at the ball games?

A. Yeah, pop.

Q. Alcohol?

A. Yeah, if you want to sneak your bottle in there. You could take a sip.

Q. But they didn't sell it there?

A. No. That was prohibifion I believe. They quit selling.

Q. Did the churches have much influence in Buxton?

A. No I don't think so. They did, just like they do now, well something that's kind of bad they just kind of ignore it. They just kept it to themselves. Go to church and that's it. No they didn't have anything like that.

Q. Now which mines did you work in?

A. I worked at 18. They called it 18 Buxton and then I went to 19. And they started 20 but then 20 broke up. Ben Buxton, young Ben or somebody the company give him the money to auction all that coal land out there, buy it or something and they lead the strike out there. Cause I remember when they lead the strike pass 19 and after they got it about half sunk by gosh they stopped it. Got it about half sunk by god and then they stopped it and that was it. It's still out there. They pulled the track and that was it. But then I quit about 1924. That's when 19 was breaking up anyhow. I think they broke up in 1925

Q. Then what did you do then?

A. Well then I went to Bussey. I worked at Bussey for a while and then from Bussey, well I just quit before I got married. I married in 25 and I just quit not too long before that. Got married in 25 and from Bussey I went to _____ and from _____ to Rex 5. Then from Rex 5 I started my own mine

Q. What was the name of that?

A. Just Onder-Coal.

Q. Onder Coal. Where were you mining?

A. Just 4 miles west of Lavilla. And then on one corner, then I sunk the other one just 3 or 4 miles straight down the road on the other corner. See Shooler owned that. But then when Buxton broke up, before the strike out, I went to Rex 5, that flood come, that 4th of July flood, washed part of the track out and that's all that was left on this end. So they pulled all the track out and Shooler had to go cause the company pulled the track out. But then they left quite a bit of coal in it. Well that's where I got my _____ cars and track and everything else. Sunk it on the other corner. There was 240 acres in there. I had that what, 6 or 7 years and then I sold it.

*On the old _____ place.

Yeah on the old m _____ place.

Q. Do you remember a guy name Earl Smith down there?

A. Do I know him? I'd like to smack him in the mouth a few times, which I have. Everybody down there, Earl Smith. That's mama's buddy.

Q. You know Earl too?

A. *Oh yeah.

Him and my brother were buddies.

*Yeah he run with Mike's brother.

He lived right next to the ball park. That's the big one up here, the first park.

Q. You started mining when you were 13 you said Mike.

A. Yeah.

*Then he had to quit.

Yeah I worked the mine about a year or so.

Q. What do you mean you had to quit?

A. I had to quit. That's when they passed that law. I don't know when it was they passed that law, you had to be 16. It liked to killed the old man. Man I was just bumming around. But just as soon as I got 16, went back down there.

Q, Liked to killed the old man huh?

A. He wasn't getting that pay day. He'd take the money and give a dollar on pay day. Yeah, that's true man.

Q. Did you work with him?

A. I trapped and _____ and cut the cars and you could trap. That's the guy that open the doors for the, see them entries is just like streets. Well then you see the air goes up one entry and then them rooms is all off just like houses. They got break throughs. They pump that air in there and if that's door is open and cuts through there to the other where it goes out, well these guys don't get no air. They got that trapper there to open and close them doors and you keep it closed. You don't open it too much and that's where the drivers go through. They would pull that coal.

Q. You started as a trapper?

A. A trapper and a _____ and started trailing, that's just like a switchman on the railroad. Pretty soon you running the motor. Done everything in the darn mine.

Q. When did you start mining itself? Being a miner? When you're 16?

A. Oh no. Well digging coal I wouldn't know. I couldn't keep track of it. Me and my brother worked there. The old man wanted the boys to go with him. He was cupping on the bottom. That was a pretty good job. The old man said I'll take Mike, and that's where I learned how to dig coal. I could dig it too. I'm like that war raven. When he said that _____ coal mine.

Q. _____ had a good reputation as a coal miner too?

A. Yeah, he was the entry driver. That's what they said _____.

*That mine that they owned out there is where all those men were killed.

You know here about, how long it's been, 20 years? And I had it all fixed perfect too. I had a good mine out there. But this guy O'Brian didn't know too much about it and they had a good air shaft. You walk down a hundred feet down you got steps. You walk just like you were walking around. Had a good air shaft, a good fan. All you had to do was start it and pump the air in there. And I don't know. The mine inspector told them not to go down there. Two of them went down there and they never come back, then two or three more, about five of them you know went down there and they all. But that was it. Yeah, show him that book there

Q. _____ picture.

A. That's after I sold it to O'Brian. I was in Des Moines then. I sold it to Fleming from Hamilton and he died. He died in the mine too didn't he, Fred Fleming.

Q. When was this? How many died and when did it happen?

A. 5

*1953, March 31.

Has it been that long?

*Yeah.

Show him the picture of it. That's the last one they had. Yeah, see that's the _____ . That's where they dug the coal. _____ just like they was when I left there.

1610

Q. Well I'll be darn.

A. See the slopes down here and you pull it up there, the slopes down here you see, pulling up. You can't see, well I guess maybe you can see but it's all covered about a hundred feet. But see you pull it up here _____ and you dump it just the way it was. And then had a big _____ catch your steam coal. Had that fixed pretty good. Then O'Brian bought it. Now they're stripping all that. What was left they're stripping. Got a great big coal wash out there _____ now.

Q. Yeah, West Lavilla.

A. Just right there where the mine was at. _____

Q. What is this, by the way?

A. *This book?

Q. Uh huh.

A. *It's _____ Lavilla, a hundred and 25 years. That's all about the town of Lavilla.

Q. Can I see that for a second, please?

A. *Sure.

Q. The title was called Breaman?

A. *Breaman was the name of Lavilla first started.

Q. Breaman to Lavilla? Compiled by Katherine Ross and Ellie Safranco, I know them.

A. She went to school _____

Q. This was their history of Lavilla?

A. * _____

Where they come from, Indiana.

Q. That's a nice little book isn't it? Thank you. Let's see. Was there much labor unrest, much labor trouble there in Buxton?

A. No, there was none there. But they finally got a union. See then if you don't belong to the union. John L. Lewis see he was the head man of the union there and what he said there went and the people just went by it. No they never had no strikes. What busted up 19, there was trouble over the housing. Houses wasn't but \$6 a month rent then, that's when I quit. But I didn't live in the house. I just had m. a place downtown, a pretty good little place, right downtown there and I paid \$10 for mine. But the miners they wanted to get the rent cheaper. It was over the houses and the men didn't want to do it and so by god the company says okay. They put a lot of coal, they had motors underground, track and everything, all they done was pull the mules out and they shut the got darn thing down and that's it. Now by god for a couple of dollars on rent a month. The company just shut it down. Took it off the income tax. I guess that's the way the do it. Yeah, and that was a good big mine too.

1611

- Q. What about the work there in the Buxton mines before they shut down. Did it go all year round? Did miners work all year?
- A. Well not too much in the summertime but they did in the wintertime. But they used some of the coal for heat. _____ some of the old plants.
- Q. _____
- A. No that belonged to the Northwestern. They'd burn they own coal.
- Q. Okay, it was for the railroad right?
- A. No, see the company owned the mines themselves.
- Q. I know.
- A. They used their own coal. They didn't have to buy any.
- Q. Right. But did the miner at Buxton mines relatively to mines around there work more year round than other miners did?
- A. Yeah well naturally. But there was a lot of them little mines like Cricket and there was several, Hoovers and Frakers. There was a lot of them little mines. It was Rex 5, _____ and Rex 4. They were all off the Northwestern but the company buy all their coal. But in the summer, sometimes they didn't work what you call too good but they worked pretty good. Them other mines didn't. But some of them t other mines I believe shipped their coal someplace else. But right on the Northwestern the company bought all their coal. They had a lot of them steam engines. They burned a lot of coal.
- Q. Yeah, right. But during the summertime, how many days a week would miners average?
- A. Oh they worked 3 or 4 days a week. They mined 4 days, they might loose a week.
- Q. I've heard a lot of stories Mike about miners going fishing in the summertime and kind of lollygagging around.
- A. On the weekend maybe. Maybe they worked Monday, Tuesday, maybe Wednesday or sometimes maybe they didn't work on Friday. Well then they pay, them guys have Friday, Saturday, and Sunday to go fishing some place. Yeah, that's the way they done that. No they worked 3 days anyhow.
- Q. Were pay days big days in Buxton?
- A. Yeah, I guess it was cause everybody had money so I guess it was alright.
- Q. We've seen photographs Mike of people really dressed up there at Buxton.
- A. Oh they used to dress. Most of them colored guys boy they really dressed. That's no kidding. What he see, he was working, makes no difference how much, he'd buy it at the store, they'd have their regular clothing place, had the hardware place and anything you wanted, big department stores and they bought the best. They really dressed, I'm not kidding.

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- Q. You remember, at least on occasions, black people really being dressed up there in Buxton?
- A. It wasn't no occasions, only Saturday night they have a dance and, but they dressed right along to go downtown to the YMCA and down to the company store when the miners didn't work. But most people went down to the company store, they had a great big room in there where they had a hardware department they kind, well they had a counter. You couldn't even get back in it. But I mean, yeah they just get in there and loaf. They just loaf that company store, _____ place be in there loafing. They didn't have nowhere else to go, that YMCA.
- Q. But they were well-dressed?
- A. Yeah, they dressed.
- Q. Do you remember women wearing ostrich plumes?
- A. No, they might have but I don't pay no attention to that.
- Q. When men would dress up, what would they do, wear suits?
- A. Yeah, suits and ties and hats. And by god the biggest part of them, that Red Monroe live right next to us there, man he had. That Ossie Graves, yeah. They had them \$20 gold piece hanging on in there, yeah. No kidding, you ought to see them boy. The watch chain on the vest in the pocket and that \$20 gold piece and a lot of them that give maybe just, but some of them were pretty clean people and they motor where they done pretty good, some of them had a 20, 10 and a 5. Yeah just right down in a row. Yeah I had one, that really talked out. It was okay. I kind of like to _____ myself but I was too damn poor, I couldn't.
- Q. Mike, did many of the black people who lived in Buxton, especially those who lived there as children, remember it as a very good time of there lives and was almost an ideal place to have lived for black people. Why would they say that?
- A. Well, I don't know I guess they're kind of a happy bunch of people anyway, whether they got anything or not, but the ones that I know, I don't know how they are now. But that's been quite a while.
- Q. Was Buxton special, a special place for black people?
- A. There was a lot of them there.
- Q. There were a lot of them there. What else about it?
- A. Well that's about it that I know of. There's just nowhere else to go and some of them would.
- Q. But they were paid the same as whites there weren't they?
- A. Oh yeah.
- Q. Was there any place in town that a black person couldn't go in Buxton?
- A. No, there wasn't no place.

Q. Every public place they could go to?

A. No, it wasn't anything like that.

Q. Okay. Were there any places outside of Buxton, in the other camps, the other towns nearby that blacks couldn't go to?

A. No, they all could go right through if they wanted to.

Q. Did towns like Albia and Lavilla have sunset laws where blacks couldn't be?

A. I didn't know that Albia ever had one. But Sheraton now, because that Mandy that I was telling you about, owned that livery barn at Sharpe End, he was a pretty good guy. Well he owned the place that I _____. He lived right down below me and he was a pretty nice kind of a guy. Well after 19 broke up well he had 3 or 4 houses out there and had a kind of little restaurant himself but after everybody left 19, wouldn't nobody out there. Had my mine west of Lavilla, that's where he lived at and I used to go out to the mine you know maybe in the afternoon and everything was clicking just right, I didn't have nothing to do and so I just take out there to 19 to see Mandy. He was getting pretty hard up then you see. You know wouldn't nothing coming in see and he was getting pretty old. Now he was a nice guy. So him and I used to go to Sheraton, to Melrose _____. That was a little beer joint there _____ there on the corner. Stop and get a couple of beers. So he wanted to go to Sheraton for something. I don't know what he wanted but anyhow we went there and I went to a liquor store and I got a pint of whiskey and Sheraton was a pretty good size place too. And so we went in the restaurant and we sat down and ordered a couple of cokes you know to mix our drink. He said we'll serve you said but we don't serve him.

Q. When was this Mike?

A. That was, well that was after I had that mine on _____, I mean on _____ corner.

*That was at the Bat mine.

No, that was after Bat.

*That must have been in the 30s.

Q. About 1930s.

A. Yeah, that's what they said. And then we went down to another restaurant. Maybe you could go to some of them little smaller places but this was right on the, a pretty good restaurant, same thing. So then I said well man, the hell with them. They'd serve me but they wouldn't serve him. And so then we went to _____ and then I bought 4 or 5 cans of pork and beans. I don't know what all I bought for him to take and eat, and some beacon, 2 or 3 pounds of beacon and _____. But he cut up some beacon in a skillet and put them beans in it and stir it all up and got darn we ate it. Yeah, but they wouldn't serve him.

Q. Yeah, right.

A. Now that was at Sheraton. You know I told you when I come back. Remember I come back and told you. Sheraton was a little different, I don't know why. But Albia was alright. You'd go to Albia anyplace.

Q. Now one last question I think Mike is when Buxton went into decline, was losing population, did the racial composition change? Like was there more blacks leaving than whites for instance?

A. No they were all, there wasn't no work, they ain't got no money, a lot of them went to Pershing but that's on the other side of Knoxville.

Q. You remember a guy named Eric Erickson?

A. Yeah, he was secretary of the local.

Q. I've talked to him too. He had a sister by the name of Agnes.

A. I don't know nothing about his sister.

Q. He lived at Pershing. He was an independent operator out of Pershing for a while.

A. Well wait a minute, maybe I'm thinking about another one.

Q. Okay.

A. I'm thinking about Tommy's dad.

Q. He lived at one of the Swedetowns, Erickson is a Swede.

A. Yeah he was a Swede. No because this other one, that's his boy, Tommy.

*This is not Eric.

No, because after 19 broke up he was the secretary of the local out there and I seen him up here but he's been dead now about 5.

*His name was Tom.

He died just before Tommy did, Eric. No the old man wouldn't name Tom.

*This was young Tommy.

No, the old man wasn't named Tom. Gussy, Gussy was his name. That's a different Erickson you're talking about. There were a lot of Ericksons that lived there.