

Exploring the Fan House at the Huber Colliery

by Tom Stranko

The Huber Colliery stands in Ashley, PA. just a little south of Wilkes Barre on the west side of interstate 81. If you were at all interested in anthracite coal mining and you lived in the area like I did, you couldn't help but want to explore the buildings. The container that holds the 35mm slides from that trip has a 12/84 date on it and I clearly remember it was Christmas day--I dragged my wife away from our visit to my mother in Scranton for a "fun day" checking out the Huber. She froze in the car while I shot 3 or 4 rolls all over the place.



The fan house, 1984.

Later in the week I drove behind the main area and discovered the ventilating house sitting beside an out-of-the-way city street (not fenced in !!-- the good old days) I just parked the car, grabbed my camera and disappeared for a half an hour. My feelings on entering the abandoned fan house were like Howard Carter on seeing King Tuts tomb for the first time "Things, wonderful things!" ¹



Left: Corless one-lung steam engine. Right: etching on fan housing.

The high efficiency Corless type single cylinder steam engine looked like all it needed was a touch of oil and some hot steam to come back to life. The engine was a 40HP type according to the data plate on the engine. There was an etched builders name plate mounted high up on the big fan housing that stated "Buffalo Forge". I have an 1897 Buffalo Forge hard cover catalogue but there are no Corless engines listed so I assume the Huber engine dates from around WW1. Basically, the big steam engine was direct connected on the same shaft to two fans: the main fan (closest to the engine) was about 18 feet in dia. The picture of me standing on the fan drive shaft shows the appx. size. This was a centrifugal fan that drew air from the mine through its center and expelled it out around the rim.



Standing on the axel of the centrifugal fan.



The picture at left shows the funnel like exhaust air vent that directed the old air upward. The fan blade as seen below with me standing in for scale, is about 12 feet in diameter and is constructed like a household electric fan with radiating blades with a heavy pitch. This fan was completely housed inside a separate building that communicated with the upward running air shafts.





There were big steel shutters (see two photos left) that went floor to ceiling (at least 20 feet) and could be opened or closed to adjust the "suction" in one of the two main upward shafts. I wish I had done a better job of documenting the mechanical insides of these areas but I was hampered by not having a flashlight and by the realization once I was inside, that there must be shafts down into the mine inside here that I couldn't see and did not wish to fall down into. I'm a nut about old steam and gas engines so I spent some time around the engine itself as can be seen from

the "engine" pictures. As I recall, the piston would have been about a foot in diameter.

There was a wooden rack that had electrical connections for charging the 1940s style Edison lamps. Apparently, they used the building as a lamp room as well. All these buildings and machinery are now buried and bulldozed.

