

The Union Pacific Coal Company

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Probably no single event more greatly influenced the development of the Rocky Mountain area and the Great Basin than the coming of the railroad in 1868. The route of the Union Pacific from Omaha, Nebraska through the Rocky Mountains and into the Great Basin where it joined with the Central Pacific Railroad at Promontory Point, Utah was governed mainly by topography. As luck would have it, crossing the continental divide just east of Rock Springs, Wyoming the UP was entering one of the greatest coal fields in the Rocky Mountain area.

Coal was known to exist in southwestern Wyoming in the early 1800's, having been found by the trappers and mountain men who entered the area. Jim Bridger is said to have used coal for fuel at his trading post along the Black's Fork river in southwestern Wyoming shortly after it was established in 1843. In 1850 Captain Howard Stansbury, upon returning from his survey of the Great Salt Lake for the Bureau of Topographical Engineers, traveled through southern Wyoming and noted coal outcrops from the present day site of Evanston eastward, "...virtually the entire length of Wyoming". Especially noteworthy were the large outcrops in and around Rock Springs in southwestern Wyoming.

The arrival of the railroad brought the initial demand for coal. Control of the coal along the route wound up in the hands of the UP by virtue of the land grant made to them by the Federal Government in the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862 and as amended in 1864 granted the railroad 20 miles on either side of the right-of-way. Initially, an agreement was struck with outsiders to mine coal on the UP's holdings and as a result the Wyoming Coal and Mining company was formed in 1868. The first mine to open was located at Carbon near the present site of Hanna, Wyoming. Subsequent mines were opened at Rock Springs and Almy near present day Evanston. By 1870 more mines were opened along the Bitter Creek valley east of Rock Springs.

In wasn't until 1874 when Jay Gould took control of the UP that the mines originally founded by the Wyoming Coal and Mining Company became the nucleus of the

1869. May 10th. 1869.

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 - OF THE -

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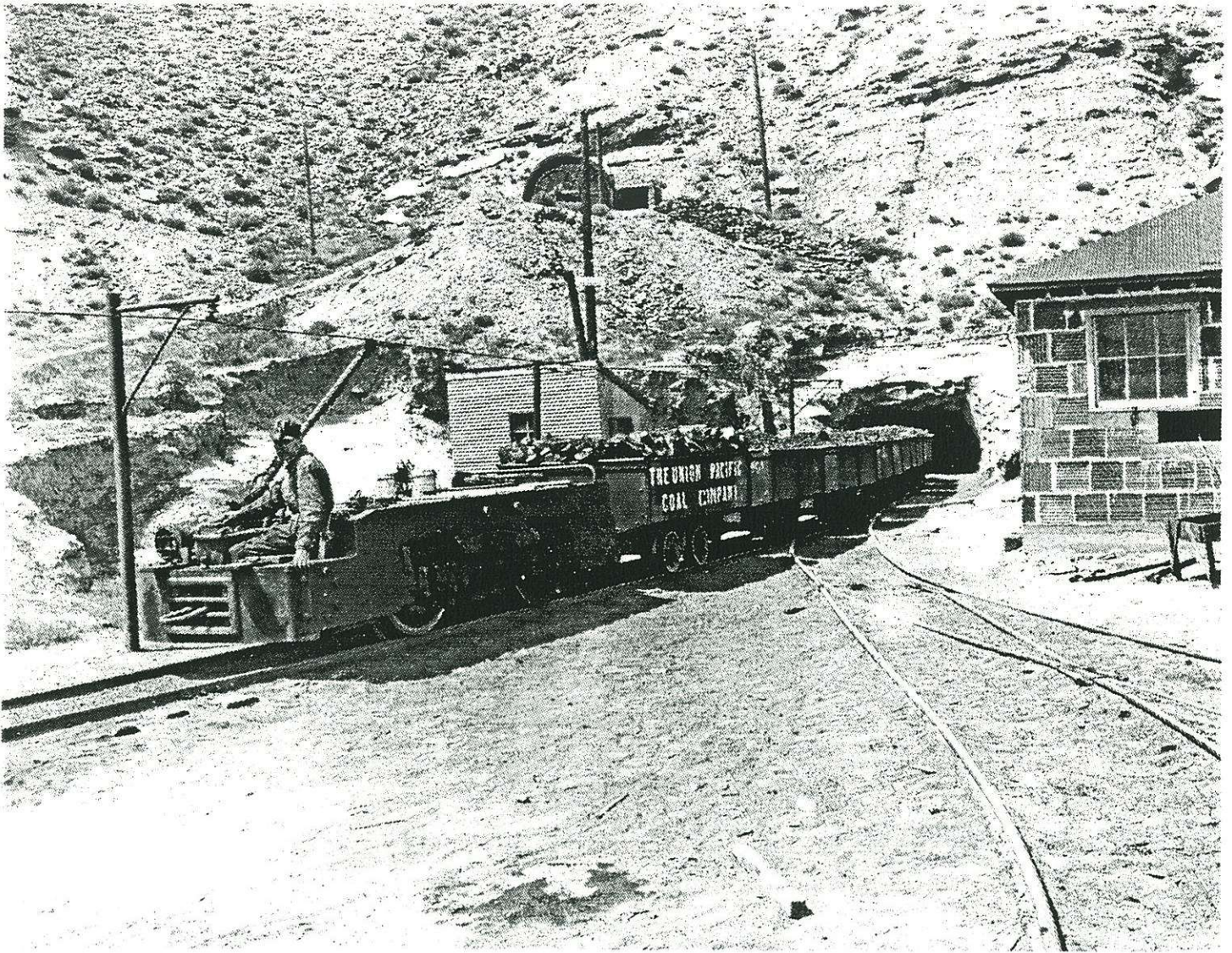
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The Union Pacific Coal Company No. 8 Mine, Rock Springs, Wyoming. The Motorman pictured is F.L. McCarty who later became Superintendent of UP's Superior operation. July, 1927.

Union Pacific Coal Company. Over the years that followed additional mines were opened at Superior, Reliance, Winton and finally Stansbury which was the last of the UP mines to open shortly after the start of World War II.

With the introduction of the diesel locomotive in the 1940's and 50's the end of coal mining was in sight and in 1957 the Stansbury mine north of Rock Springs closed followed by the D.O. Clark Mine in Superior in 1962. The last remaining mine of the Union Pacific Coal Company, the No. 8 mine in Rock Springs, ceased operations on August 28, 1962, just six years short of their 100th anniversary since the founding of the Wyoming Coal and Mining Company.

During the life of the Company many memorable events occurred in and around the UP coal camps. Perhaps the most memorable was the Chinese Massacre of September 2, 1885, which occurred in Rock Spring. Chinese labor had been imported to support the construction of the railroad in the 1860's by both the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific. In 1875 the Company needed to produce more coal to meet the current demand. The miner's union, The Knights of Labor, refused to meet the Company's demands. A strike followed and the Company brought in the first Chinese miners. When the strike was over, 50 white miners were employed along with 150 Chinamen. By 1885 the Chinese miners had increased in number to 331 compared with 150 white miners and the situation had become explosive. On

Wednesday, September 2nd, 1885, white miners gathered outside of Chinatown in Rock Springs and set fire to anything that looked Chinese. When the dust and smoke had settled, nearly 500 Chinamen had been driven from town. The official death toll was listed as 51, although only 25 bodies were ever recovered. The Army was called in to restore order and the town eventually returned to normal - a sad commentary on the history of Rock Springs and the Union Pacific Coal Company.

The *Rules and Regulations for the Government of all Employees of the Union Pacific Coal Company*, dated September 1, 1939, contain a number of interesting statements which reflect an earlier period of coal mining. Reference is made to a Wyoming State Law; "The laws of this State require that this Company provide and furnish every employee a sufficient and satisfactory supply of timbers to be used in securing the roof in his working place...". Stablemen are instructed that they "...must not allow any animal to be ill treated or over-worked...", and further that "The best fire fighting equipment is a large, full water trough and six good bucket." Shot Firers are cautioned that "No charge of powder in any mine will exceed the permissible limit, viz., one and one-half pounds of permissible powder

[per hole], except where, by written permission of the General Manager, this limit may be increased." Miners are also limited to no more than one day's worth of explosives in the mine at any time. This last rule resulted from a number of explosions which occurred when an inordinate amount of powder was either accidentally or intentionally detonated and the concussion, raising dust throughout the mine, provided the fuel for one or more secondary explosions.

During the early period of the Company two wage scales were in effect - one for white labor and one for Japanese and Chinese labor. In 1890, white miners received from \$2.16 to \$3.00 per day while the Orientals were on a scale of \$1.35 to \$3.00 per day. By 1911, when the race differential ended, white miners were receiving \$3.40 compared with \$3.10 per day for the Orientals.

The Knights of Labor had been the miners union through the turmoil of the 70's and 80's. From 1890 until 1907 the Company was union free. Then, on September 1, 1907 the first U.M.W.A. contract went into effect. And with it, a reduction in the workday from 10 hours to 8 hours, six days a week. The workday was further reduced in 1934 to a 7 hour day, five days a week. The



Loading coal underground in Superior, Wyoming using an early mechanical shaker built by Eichhoff of Bochm, Germany. Note the car check on the end of the coal car. July, 1926.



The Stansbury Mine tipples, ca. 1945, located north of Rock Springs, Wyoming.

8 hour day, 40 hour week, didn't begin until the advent of World War II.

The Union Pacific Coal Company has been gone now for nearly 33 years and little remains in Rock Springs and the other camps today as a reminder of that era. There are still substantial reserves of coal in the area however, and a number of mines, both surface and underground, are once again supplying the country with low sulfur, western coal. The Stansbury Mine north of Rock Springs has been renamed the Pilot Butte Mine and is once again producing coal under a new operator.

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