

TOWN OF COLVER  
Ebensburg Coal Company  
Colver  
Cambria County  
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-329

HAER  
PA  
11-COLV,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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PA  
11-COLU,  
2-

Location: Off of T480, Colver, Cambria County,  
Pennsylvania

Date of Construction: 1911-1921

Present Owner: Various private owners.

Present Use: Residences.

Significance: The town of Colver was built between  
1911 and 1921 by the Ebensburg Coal  
Company. The partners of the company,  
John H. Weaver and B. Dawson Coleman,  
named the town from a combination of  
their last names (**Coleman and Weaver**).  
Colver remains one of the most intact  
coal company-built towns company in the  
region.

Historian: Margaret M. Mulrooney, 1989.

Project Information:

This historical report is an excerpt from a larger study of coal  
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the contents of this report have been transmitted to the Library  
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photos collected during the project were transmitted to the AINP  
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University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705.

Colver is among the most typical coal company towns of those studied by HABS/HAER in southwestern Pennsylvania. The company provided for its employees in every way, from churches and houses, to the hospital, school and theater. Yet it also used its position as landlord and employer to maintain tight control over the miners and their families. Unlike other coal operators, however, Colver's founders indicated an awareness of the industrial-housing reform movement and a certain willingness, albeit limited, to incorporate these reforms into the town plan. This included building mostly detached houses instead of semi-detached houses, hiring a noted architect to design the more prominent buildings instead of an in-house engineer, and offering incentives for improving the landscape. When interviewed in 1916, company President J. H. Weaver explained: "If you would make your business a success, you must get good service from your workmen; and if you would get good service from your workmen, you must make it worth their while to serve you." Nevertheless, Colver residents lacked indoor running water, were segregated by ethnic group, and were prohibited from any kind of union activity. As several retired miners noted, it was "worth their while" because of plentiful work and good wages, not because of the company's professed interest in their welfare. This chapter will show how the housing and labor policies of the Ebensburg Coal Company at Colver embody all of the characteristics of the typical southwestern Pennsylvania coal company town.

### The Company

In 1909 John Heisley Weaver, a successful coal operator and broker from Williamsport, Pennsylvania, became partners with B. Dawson Coleman of Lebanon, Pennsylvania. The two men immediately bought a mine owned by the Nanty Glo Coal Mining Company in Nanty Glo, Cambria County. Very quietly, so as not to draw the attention of other speculators, the men started to acquire mineral and surface rights just north of Ebensburg, the county seat.<sup>1</sup> By late 1910, a new mine was opening under the Ebensburg Coal Company, a subsidiary created by Coleman and Weaver to oversee their operations. The mine and its associated workings were called Colver, for both Coleman and Weaver. At the same time, the partners bought and refurbished a small logging railroad, the Blacklick and Yellow Creek. Rechristened the Cambria and Indiana Railroad in October 1911, it hauled coal from a temporary tipple set up at the Colver mine to the Pennsylvania Railroad mainline. Soon, it was extended to other Coleman and Weaver mines at Manver and Rexis in Indiana County.<sup>2</sup> By 1912, the C & I served the mines at Nanty Glo also.

During its first year, the Colver mine produced 22,300 tons of coal and ranked twenty-fifth in its district. Since the mine had only one opening and a 3'-6"-thick seam, its high volume of production was considered unusual. Because of the vast quantity and quality of the coal beneath Cambria County, the Colver mine was able to maintain a high level of production throughout its lifespan.<sup>3</sup>

Spurred on by this success, Coleman and Weaver opened a new mine near Bakerton in 1916 called Nanty Glo No. 2. They then organized the Heisley Coal Company to manage the Nanty Glo mines.<sup>4</sup> Excavation of another large mine began the following year. Located a few miles south of Colver, it was called Revloc (Colver spelled backwards), and administered by the Monroe Coal Company.

Coleman and Weaver dissolved their partnership in 1922. J. H. Weaver retained control of the Heisley and Monroe coal companies as well as a 60 percent interest in the C & I Railroad. In 1948, these holdings were bought by Bethlehem Steel Corporation. The Ebensburg Coal Company remained under the control of B. Dawson Coleman until his death in 1933. Coleman's heirs sold the mine to the Eastern Associated Coal Corporation ca. 1956. His 40 percent share of the C & I was sold to the Clearfield Bituminous Coal Company, a subsidiary of the New York Central Railroad and another prominent Cambria County coal firm.<sup>5</sup> Eastern ceased its large-scale mining operations at Colver in the late-1970s but continued to lease mineral rights to a few small coal dealers for several years. Currently, all mining at Colver has ceased.

### Planning and Development

Situated on a gently sloping hillside, Colver overlooks miles of scenic farmland. It is still relatively isolated from other settlements; there is only one road to Colver and it is poorly marked. Standing in the center of town, the overall effect is one of space. The houses are arranged closely in identical rows, but the wide backyards and streets offer expansive vistas in every direction. A central park is sparsely but carefully landscaped, and shade trees line the southwest end of Reese Avenue. Around the periphery of town are naturally occurring clusters of trees and low vegetation. Thus, from its present appearance, Colver seems to reflect many of the housing-reform ideals promoted in the early twentieth century.

When originally planned, the town associated with the Colver mine was called Colver Heights. Some early C & I timetables refer to

it as Mount Colver. Its rectilinear grid plan was designed by the C & I engineering staff under the direction of Chief Engineer S. H. Jencks. Importantly, Jencks was a prominent figure in Windber, having been employed by the Berwind-White Company from 1897 to 1905 as an assistant engineer under Heber Denman.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore likely that Colver's plan reflects certain influences from Berwind-White's "Great Enterprise." Designed and approved during the summer of 1911, Colver's plan remains unaltered (Figs. 1 & 2).

There are five named streets--Francis, Coleman, Reese, Weaver and Long avenues--crossed by ten numbered streets. Reese is the main thoroughfare, running east to the community of Tripolo and west, down the hill, to Twenty Row, the C & I shops and the mine site. Reese Avenue is Colver's "Main Street." Between First and Fifth streets, it is lined with the town's most pretentious homes and its few commercial buildings, all company-built. These include the hotel, company store and a theater. There is also an old company office building, a fire house, an abandoned gas station, and a small, single-cell jail, now used for storage. At the far end of Reese, near Eighth Street, is the Presbyterian church and a brick garage. And on the corner of Third and Reese are the remains of a complex that once contained a hoist house, shaft house, bathhouse/laundry, and steam plant (Fig. 5-3). This particular shaft was used only to transport men and supplies. Its location in town enabled company officials and miners to reach the mine quickly and easily in the event of an emergency. It also decreased the distance between home and work site, especially for those miners working at that end of the mine.

Company officials used Reese Avenue to segregate the native-born Americans and those of English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish extraction from the Southern and Eastern Europeans. Max Vassanelli, a retired miner of Italian descent, said the latter families--called "Hunkies"--were deliberately assigned to the smaller houses south of Reese Avenue.

The town plan also included a large park across from the company store on the corner of Fifth and Weaver. The park had swing sets and slides for children, and a wooden bandstand/dance stand for adults. The opposite corner was reserved for Colver's school. A small Catholic church was built on one end of the school lot. A Greek Catholic church stood on another corner across the street. The rest of town is residential (Fig. 5-3).

Most residential lots measure approximately 45' x 145'. Lots for management housing are somewhat larger and vary according to the status of their occupants. The lots on each side of Reese Avenue

are oriented perpendicularly to that street. A narrow, 30'-wide street runs behind the blocks fronting Reese Avenue and separates them from the rows of miners' housing. Lots for miners' houses run parallel to the named streets and face the numbered streets. Most of the blocks are divided into twelve lots and are bisected by 14'-wide alleys. These alleys permitted easy access to the interior of the blocks for trash and cinder removal. By dividing the blocks into halves, they also served as firebreaks.

Early photographs reveal muddy and dirty streets, no shrubbery and few trees. The C & I trains, heavily laden with coal, came up the hill from the southwest and passed just behind the houses at the southeast corner of town. Passenger trains followed the same route but went into a switchback, through town to a siding next to the company store. The mine and railroad shops, located less than a quarter-mile down the hill, produced large quantities of dust, soot and smoke. A massive waste pile, still visible from the C & I shops, grew steadily, stretching from the tippie near Preisser's Crossing to just behind Twenty Row. Clearly, Colver in its heyday was a dirty, noisy, busy place, far different from the town it is today. Only three decades ago Colver had a population of more than 3,000.<sup>7</sup> But like many coal towns, it changed drastically once the decline of the industry set in. By the 1960s, production slowed and people moved away in search of other jobs. Nonetheless, the rows of identical houses remain standing, residents still go to the post office to pick up their mail and shop at the store for groceries, and the C & I still hauls coal. Despite the changes it has undergone, Colver survives as a uniquely intact example of the early-twentieth century coal-company town.

### Workers' Housing

The first houses built by the Ebensburg Coal Company comprised the communities known as Twenty Row and Shanty Town. Built by April 1911, the twenty houses at Twenty Row were detached, frame structures with four rooms each. Shanty Town consisted of another twenty one-story dwellings that were described by a local paper as "for the occupancy of the foreigners employed by the company." Historic photographs show small, three-room houses with post foundations, horizontal siding and composition-paper roofs lining both sides of a dirt road. Both groups of housing were situated at the bottom of a hill to be near the mine site and railroad shops. The "better houses" were to be erected on top of the hill, reflecting the company's conscious decision to locate the town away from the dirt and noise of the mine (See Fig. 1).<sup>8</sup>

In 1912, an article titled "Colver Booming, Many New Houses, 200 More This Summer" appeared in the Mountaineer Herald reporting that the Pennsylvania Lumber and Construction Company of South Fork had just put the finishing touches on 166 houses, a stone hotel and a large store.<sup>9</sup> By 1913, the hotel, store and amusement building were operating and the new houses were occupied.

Except for twenty-five structures at Twenty Row, all of the houses in Colver are detached. Housing authorities noted that "the detached house meets with general approval from native American workmen, because it typifies the traditional tendencies of selective American housing, which have come down to us from the pioneer days."<sup>10</sup> But while generally considered "the ideal residence" by architects, the single house was too costly, too labor intensive and "beyond the means of the low-paid, unskilled workman." Therefore, although often used for management housing, employers traditionally rejected the wide-spread use of the detached house in a company town setting. By the twentieth century, however, companies began to bow under pressure from industrial-housing reformers who advocated the single house as a solution to poor living conditions. In addition to "the possibility of cross-ventilation and a greater amount of sunlight," the detached house offered a greater degree of privacy and was favored over the semi-detached or tenement house by the average laborer. By 1911, when Colver was built, three factors coincided to make the detached house a possibility: the industrial-housing reform movement was at its height; the coal industry had become increasingly competitive; and technological innovations in mechanization and mass-production had reduced the cost of construction. It therefore seems likely that the preponderance of detached houses built at Colver reflects Coleman and Weaver's awareness of what was needed to attract labor, and their willingness to implement the necessary steps to do so.

Miners' housing took two basic forms: the four-room or six-room detached house. There were 158 four-room houses in the community, including the original twenty at Twenty Row. Each had a parlor and kitchen on the first floor and two bedrooms above. A staircase located in the kitchen led upstairs; under the stairs was a small pantry. Originally, the houses had only a crawlspace beneath them, but when families bought their homes in the 1940s, most added cellars and installed another stairway through the pantry floor. Some people put a commode in the cellar until a full bathroom could be added upstairs. Other families still used outhouses as late as the 1950s. The four-room houses rented for \$6 per month or \$3 per paycheck throughout the 1910s and 1920s. Later, during World War II, rent was increased to \$9. It was

deducted in the payroll office. Although rent increased, the

actual value of the houses decreased. In 1913, each four-room house was valued at \$800, but by 1931, they had decreased to \$500; the four-room houses sold for \$750 in 1948.<sup>11</sup>

Ninety-six six-room houses were also built. Each had a parlor, dining room, kitchen and three bedrooms. Arthur Price, who lived in a six-room house from ca. 1921 to 1955 while serving as principal of the Colver school, said they had full bathrooms on the second floor, as well. All rented for \$9 per month in the 1910s and 1920s but increased to \$11. Like the four-room houses, their value declined from \$926 in 1913 to \$600 in 1931. Such a marked decline in less than twenty years suggests that, after the initial expenditure, little money was reinvested in the Colver houses.

In addition, there were twenty one-story, three-room, L-plan houses that probably contained a kitchen, a parlor and a bedroom. These three-room houses were purportedly brought to Colver from the town of Starford, a Coleman and Weaver property in Indiana County.<sup>12</sup> Nine Row, a group of nine two-story frame houses overlooking the railroad shops, was built between 1911 and 1913 and served as the first bosses' houses until the new structures on the hill were finished. They have six rooms each but are the only houses in Colver with clipped front-gable roofs. Twenty-five semi-detached houses were built at Twenty Row in the late 1920s. Each side had four rooms: kitchen, parlor and two bedrooms. Both units together were valued at \$1000 in 1931.<sup>13</sup>

All of the miners' houses had balloon frames covered with weatherboard siding. All interior surfaces except floors were covered with lath and one rough coat of plaster. Walls were painted, or papered if the family could afford it. Wallpaper was available at the company store, but miners with cars drove to stores in Ebensburg or Carrolltown where goods were cheaper. The company paid only for exterior paint; all of the houses were gray with white trim and they were repainted infrequently. To reduce maintenance costs, the company began applying green asbestos shingles in 1928. Company houses contained few furnishings because families could afford only the bare necessities; the company provided only an enamel sink in the corner of the kitchen. Coal stoves in the kitchen and parlor provided the only heat and individuals had to pay for fuel. By contrast, the "big shots" on Reese Avenue had steam heat piped in from the boiler house on Third Street.<sup>14</sup>

There is a great distinction between the housing of C & I employees and that of miners; the C & I houses are brick-veneered and line Reese Avenue between First and Fourth streets. There are six more on First Street between the superintendent's house and the hospital. This group, built between 1917 and 1919, are large, detached structures with six rooms and a bath. They have gable fronts and segmental window and door arches. The front porches originally had simple square pillars with vertical slat railings. The ten detached brick houses on Reese Avenue are similar except for hipped roofs with dormers. Three of these used beige brick instead of red. All ten date from ca. 1918. Farther down Reese Avenue are six semi-detached brick dwellings that have side gables, dormer windows and double porches. The C & I houses are further distinguished by shade trees that the company planted in their front yards. Because Coleman and Weaver provided them with superior dwellings, one may conclude that railroad employees were considered more skilled, and therefore more valuable, to the coal company than miners.

Regardless of their status, families were encouraged to keep gardens. The company paid to have them fenced in and even offered prizes for the best garden. Most households kept chickens and some had cows and pigs, too. John Smylnycky, who grew up in Twenty Row, recalls hunting for berries and nuts in the woods as a child, and having fresh bacon and pork when the family pig was slaughtered each fall. By raising their own vegetables and livestock, Colver families were able to supplement their diet without paying company store prices.

Inside, all of the houses had electric light. Each room had one naked bulb suspended from the center of the ceiling. Electricity and water were free. Running water came from spigots placed between every two houses. In the winter, the spigot handles had to be propped open to keep the water from freezing. Indoor plumbing was not added until the 1940s when the houses were sold to individuals. Almost immediately after purchasing their homes, employees added bathrooms and began altering the exterior appearance.<sup>15</sup>

A 1913 map shows 224 houses in Colver, while the Pennsylvania Bituminous Mine Reports for the same year indicate a staff of 703 men (including everyone from superintendent to doorboy), or an average occupancy of three men per house. Adding together women, children and all of the C & I staff, the number of people per house is much higher. By 1914, the number of mine employees reached 1,000 but the number of houses did not increase substantially until after 1920. In 1924, Sanborn Fire Insurance maps indicated 405 houses and a population of approximately

2,000. The number of houses never increased again, yet Colver's population almost doubled by World War II. Several of those interviewed recalled families of ten or more living in a

four-room house. And as smaller families took in boarders, crowded living conditions remained the norm until after the mine closed.

Overcrowding probably contributed to sanitation problems. Colver had a planned drainage system, but it was far from adequate. Kitchen sinks, for example, drained through a small pipe set in the wall. Water and refuse flowed through the pipe and onto the ground outside, where it ran into open ditches. Similarly, each house had only one outhouse to serve all of its occupants. According to one resident, the company employed local blacks to clean them out periodically. Some of the waste was transformed into compost material, but more often it was buried in the piles of coal waste, or "boney," around town. Trash and cinder removal were provided by the company as well, but only once a year. The rest of the time, refuse accumulated along the back alleys.

### Management Housing

For the most part, Colver's management personnel lived in undistinguished six-room houses. Only the two superintendents' houses stand out. The mine superintendent's house sits on one corner of the Reese and First Street intersection; it is the largest house in Colver and has brick walls with concrete lintels and sills, a low hipped roof and wrap-around porch. The house was designed by the engineering staff in the spring of 1913 but built by a private contractor. The superintendent, F. D. Clark, had a great deal of input regarding the plans and construction and was apparently very hard to please; he moved in by the end of the year.<sup>16</sup> A small, two-story garage has since been converted into a residence. Located across First Street, the railroad superintendent's house has three floors and a gambrel roof. Its decorative features are the same as all other C & I houses. Both superintendents' houses have large corner lots.

### Commercial Buildings

The company store is located on Reese Avenue between Third and Fifth streets. Begun in late 1911, the building was designed and constructed under the supervision of Chief Engineer S. H. Jencks. The original store was built with stone blocks taken from a

quarry the company opened nearby. Historic photographs, taken soon after its completion in April 1912, reveal a handsome facade divided into two unequal parts by a full-length stone pier. The door, flanked by high, narrow windows, was located in the first floor of the larger, western side; picture windows filled the lower portion of the eastern half. In 1914, the company engaged Philadelphia architect Horace Trumbauer to design an addition to the store. Attached to the western side, the new addition had brick walls and a stone facade that matched the original. By 1916, the store covered 28,000 square feet, employed nineteen clerks, and contained over \$40,000 worth of merchandise. It also had several sheds attached to the rear and a small brick stable and slaughterhouse next door.<sup>17</sup>

Like most company stores, it sold everything from fresh produce and meat to clothing, furniture and mining supplies. Most of the fresh food--such as butter, eggs, meats and vegetables--were grown on a company-operated farm nearby. Pre-packaged foods and other manufactured items were brought in by train and unloaded from the railroad siding along the eastern side of the store.<sup>18</sup>

There were three ways to purchase goods at the Colver Store: regular charge, budget system and lease system. The regular charge applied only to food and gasoline, and was deducted directly from the employee's paycheck every two weeks. Customers brought items to the proper counter in each department where a clerk wrote the price on a slip of paper. The paper was placed into an overhead basket which ran on tracks to the office in the back. There, another clerk would add the amount of that purchase to the employee's outstanding balance. The slip was then sent back to the employee for his records. The budget system was used to buy clothing, hardware and similar items. Like today's credit cards, payment proceeded on an installment plan. The lease system applied only to furniture and large appliances. The employee paid this bill in installments also, but presumably the company could repossess these items.<sup>19</sup>

According to various Colver residents, prices at the company store were generally higher than at stores outside of town. In fact, new employees were forced to sign an agreement permitting the company to make payroll deductions if they wanted a job. The deductions for merchandise and supplies were then taken biweekly. There were also three grocers and a dry goods store in "Jewtown," a small group of private dwellings situated beyond Twenty Row. These merchants delivered goods from house to house via horse and buggy. They extended credit to customers, but collected in full every payday. These businesses were closed by the 1940s.<sup>20</sup>

The charge systems continued throughout the Ebensburg Coal Company's lifetime and into that of Eastern Associated Coal Company. Payroll deductions were also continued at the Colver store until 1977, although it has been privately owned and operated since 1963.<sup>21</sup> Few changes have been made to the store exterior. The interior was extensively remodeled in the 1950s but retains its pressed-tin ceiling and tiled butcher shop. The Colver Store still offers a wide variety of food stuffs along with clothing, shoes, hardware, furniture, school supplies, bicycles, and carpeting.

The Ebensburg Coal Company broke ground for the Colver Hotel in late 1911. Rather than use their own engineering staff, the company hired architect Horace Trumbauer of Philadelphia to execute the design. Trumbauer is perhaps best known for his work on the Philadelphia Museum of Art and at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. According to Trumbauer's ledgers at the Athenaeum in Philadelphia, he also designed most of the company houses at Revloc, the stores at Revloc and Nanty Glo, and an addition to J. H. Weaver's residence in Merion, a suburb of Philadelphia. Trumbauer also designed Edward J. Berwind's palatial mansion "The Elms" at Newport, Rhode Island, in 1899.<sup>22</sup>

In company towns, a hotel was usually intended to provide lodging for visiting salesmen, and company officials and their guests. Therefore, it often received a somewhat higher degree of architectural attention and detail. Indeed, the hotel utilized the same stone as Colver's other prominent buildings but included several Georgian Revival elements. For example, each dormer window had a round-arched opening surmounted by a broken pediment. This combination was repeated in the Reese Avenue entrance but with the addition of a keystone and fanlight above the door. The original porch had a similar level of ornament with Doric columns and a simple entablature. The porch, dormers and door surround have since been removed.

The company clearly intended that the hotel mimic as closely as possible the better hotels of nearby cities. To that end they hired Robert Zweisele, who had managed several "high-toned" clubs in Washington, D.C. and came highly recommended. Thus, the hotel dining room and bar, with their high, arched windows, soon sported potted plants, linen tablecloths and gleaming wooden surfaces.<sup>23</sup> When the hotel bar opened to the public on June 27, 1911, it was considered "a red letter day for Colver." But as S. H. Jencks described it:

No member of the common herd dare enter unless  
apparelled in their Sunday best. In time (and it took

time) Zweisele discovered that to run an exclusive joint in Washington, patronized mostly by those who had their fingers in the public trough was all right there but not at Colver, where men worked to keep the country on an even keel.<sup>24</sup>

Lodging rooms occupied the second and third floors. Although at first reserved for visitors, the need for housing prompted the company to rent rooms to single employees. Since there were no other restaurants, the men had to patronize the hotel dining room and bar. This, and the rather small "high-class" clientele, probably prompted Zweisele to relax his standards. Nevertheless, most miners patronized the ethnic clubs down the road in Tripolo instead. The upper floors of the hotel were converted into nineteen apartments, and in 1955 the public rooms on the first floor were closed. The hotel currently serves as the community senior center and as apartments.

Colver also had its own movie theater, called the Nickelodeon. Begun in October 1912 by the Colver Amusement Company, a subsidiary of the coal company, it was finished in four months; the first movie was shown on January 18, 1913.<sup>25</sup> A simple red brick building, it also housed the bank and an ice cream parlor replete with potted palms, curved metal chairs and soda fountain. A central, recessed alcove gave access to all three establishments. A thin, denticulated cornice ran above the doorway and its flanking windows. The second floor contained meeting rooms and offices at first, later a basketball hall and dentist's office. Local residents remarked that the theater usually offered first-run shows, and a common trick among the miners' children was to throw a handful of pennies on the counter and run in before the attendant could finish counting. During the era of silent films, a local girl would play musical accompaniment on the piano. The theater closed soon after World War II. At present, the building houses Ralph Costello's barber shop and Conigy's restaurant. The first floor of the facade has been covered with a combination of aluminum and asbestos siding.

The Eensburg Coal Company built its administration building next to the theater around 1914. The main block of the building is brick and three stories high. The street facade, however, was laid in stone to match the store and hotel. The ground floor has three doors; the one to the east leads into the post office, which has been located there since the building was constructed. The other two doors lead to offices on all three floors. A pent roof separates the first and second floors, above which are five rectangular windows. Only the windows of the third floor have round arches, and they have since been bricked over. To the rear

of this main block is a one-story, wood-frame ell with brick infill. Only one other building in Colver, a supply house at the C & I shops, was constructed in this manner.

### Institutional Buildings

The hospital was originally built in 1914 as the mine office.<sup>26</sup> Because of the size and complexity of the Colver mine, the administration of mining-related activities soon outgrew this structure. In 1915 the company built a new office on Reese Avenue and decided to use the old office as a community hospital. Previously, the hospital occupied two connected six-room houses on the south corner of Reese Avenue and First Street. When it opened, the Colver Hospital had eighteen beds in two wards and several private rooms. There was also an infant nursery, operating room, clerical room and doctor's office. Two doctors have played important roles in the history of the community: Dr. A. W. Beatty, who ran the hospital from 1911 to 1928, and Dr. A. D. Martin, from 1928 to 1965. The UMWA bought the hospital in 1940 and kept it open until the state closed it in 1974. Community support soon led its reopening as a private clinic. Named in honor of Dr. A. D. Martin, the clinic still operates.<sup>27</sup>

Because of its wide ethnic and religious diversity, Colver supports three churches. The Presbyterian Church is by far the most prominent. Designed by architect Horace Trumbauer, the structure took more than three years to complete. Situated on the corner of Eighth Street and Reese Avenue, it is the first public edifice one encounters upon entering town. Built of stone, the church has a steeply pitched gable roof, buttressed walls and Gothic-arched, stained-glass windows. A small vestibule projects from the nave toward Reese Avenue. Financed mostly by Coleman and Weaver, the final cost was estimated at \$10,000, not including a \$2,500 pipe organ. The church was dedicated on October 1, 1915.<sup>28</sup>

Colver's other two parishes are the Holy Family Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Ascension Orthodox Church. The presence of the two Catholic churches is typical of most southwestern Pennsylvania mining towns and reflects substantial numbers of southern and eastern Europeans. Holy Family's simple brick church was dedicated in 1912 and served the local Italian and Polish families. Holy Ascension occupies a small stucco-covered brick building with a central tower. The tower is capped with a traditional onion dome and orthodox cross. The parish was founded in 1914 by Colver's Slavic community.<sup>29</sup>

The first public school in town was a 50'-long structure that contained some seats, one table, and a coal stove but no blackboards. Taught by one teacher, Miss Parrish, there were ninety-eight children in grades one through seven in 1912. After seventh grade, students went to high school in Ebensburg. The school was open to all residents of Cambria Township and came under the administration of the township school board. Although the coal company contributed funds, the school board paid for its construction. The company managed to exert influence indirectly, as several of its highest officials sat on the board, including the mine superintendent.<sup>30</sup>

By 1912 the school required two more teachers, and by the following year, a larger brick school had been built to replace it. The number of children continued to grow steadily and before the year was out, four more classrooms were added to this building. An auditorium and two more classrooms were added in 1921, and in 1927, a larger school was built next door. The 1913 school has been torn down.

### Recreation

Because of Colver's isolated locale, the Ebensburg Coal Company made certain provisions for entertainment and recreation. Chief among these was the construction of the amusement building in 1912, but for the most part, the company merely financed activities that the residents planned themselves. Baseball teams are a good example. The town had its own mens' ball team, the Colver Colts, and each street supported a boys' team. There was also a basketball team. The company provided uniforms and equipment, arranged games between other companies' teams, and set up a playing field. One miner, recruited by Coleman and Weaver in 1933 specifically for his skill as a catcher, was offered a better place in the mine and more money. He said good ball players could name their jobs.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the company financed a band for recitals and dances. Band members and leaders also had better jobs.

There were ethnic clubs and lodges such as the Sons of Italy and the American Slovak Club. Some met in rooms above the theater, others met in Tripolo. Colver had a gun club with a shooting range outside of town, while in town, annual competitions took place between the first aid teams. Gardening was popular, too, particularly when the company began offering cash prizes ranging from \$2.50 to \$25.<sup>32</sup> Children enjoyed scouting and baseball.

Among the men, drinking was a common activity and continued with the aid of homemade stills during Prohibition. Residents said the company police went crazy trying to find out where the liquor came from!

### Transportation

Coleman and Weaver purchased the Blacklick and Yellow Creek Railroad in 1910 to service their new mines in Cambria County. New extensions and additions to the "rickety logging railroad" continued throughout most of 1910 and 1911. The short-line reached Coleman and Weaver's new Colver mine by October 1911 and commenced shipping coal from the mine to a connection with Penn Central's main-line railroad. Because the railroad would serve Coleman and Weaver mines in Indiana County, too, the line was rechristened the Cambria and Indiana Railroad on April 20, 1911.<sup>33</sup>

The C & I shops were built just south of the present town of Colver at the bottom of a hill. Passenger service to Colver Heights, as the town was then called, began in 1912 via a complicated series of switchbacks leading from the shops up the hill to the company store. For a small fee, Colver residents could ride to nearby Nanty Glo or Ebensburg, but since the C & I was a company-owned railroad, their comings and goings were closely monitored. Passenger service ended in 1931 as a result of Depression-era cutbacks, but the C & I still functions as a short-line, common-haul carrier. Bethlehem Steel has been its primary stockholder and operator since 1950.

### Labor Relations

Coleman and Weaver were consistently anti-union before, during and after their partnership and made no exceptions when it came to suppressing pro-labor sentiment. The first instances of trouble in Colver occurred in 1912, not even one year after the mine opened. It is unclear exactly what happened, but according to S. H. Jencks' chronicle, the problems created by the labor organizers and agitators were so great that "the company gave up thoughts of selling lots in the town of Colver as was done in Windber."<sup>34</sup> Although retaining ownership of all property in town may have given the Ebensburg Coal Company a hold over their employees, it could not dispel the miners' demand for unionization.

Union activity in Cambria County was centered in Nanty Glo, the hometown of UMWA leader John Brophy. Located only a few miles

away, Colver soon reflected its influence. Trouble started again in earnest in early 1915. By April E. F. Saxman, a stockholder and friend of Weaver, came to Colver to "take a hand in management," the labor situation being disturbed by agents sent by the union. On October 20, Saxman routed a carload of these persons from the hotel, using his fists on a few "to show he meant business." Then, taking Jencks and two others with him, Saxman followed the men to the Metropolitan Hotel in Ebensburg and cautioned Jencks to keep an eye out for these "disturbers of the peace." Jencks later noted that "this was the beginning of real trouble with the miners' union."<sup>35</sup>

Labor problems plagued all of Coleman and Weaver's mines. In response, the company brought in the Coal and Iron Police to patrol the streets. These "Gestapos" or "pussyfoots," as residents call them, stopped all persons entering or leaving town for questioning. Many persons were turned away, including outside delivery men. Fritz George remembers being stopped and questioned simply for going to visit a friend who lived down the hill in Nine Row. Evictions began at the same time, and curfews were established. Riding on horseback, the police literally chased people inside at 9 PM.<sup>36</sup> Labor relations deteriorated further through the rest of the decade, and came to a head during the nationwide coal strike of 1922.

The first big mine to walk out in Cambria County was the Maryland No. 1 shaft at St. Michael. Employees of the Maryland Coal Company, more than 200 men walked to South Fork--the nearest union town--to sign on as new members. Two hundred more sent their names. Miners throughout the county began holding secret meetings with union organizers. The Revloc miners walked out on April 6 and converged on union representatives in Ebensburg. Three days later, 4,000 more men met with John Brophy at Nanty Glo. Back in Colver, Jencks reported that mine was one of the few still open, but the situation must have been extremely tense, for the Ebensburg Coal Company was forced to suspend operations by July 10 when its miners finally walked out. Fifty eviction notices were served immediately and the miners and their families ordered from company property. The miners had to comply; there were no written leases. Those who refused to leave were moved bodily by company police. Tent colonies were set up on nearby farms. Striking miners' cows and pigs were impounded and the company store was closed to them. Soldiers, possibly the state militia, were called in by late July.<sup>37</sup>

The men were eventually forced back to work under the same conditions which had prompted the strike. Ralph Costello recounted how miners returning from the end of their shift one

Christmas Eve were ordered back into the mine for another trip. Those who refused were threatened with losing their jobs. Another retired miner noted that it was common to be cheated by the company man on the tippie when the full coal cars were weighed.<sup>38</sup> Such abuses did not end until 1933 when passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act permitted the Colver miners to join UMWA Local 860.<sup>39</sup>

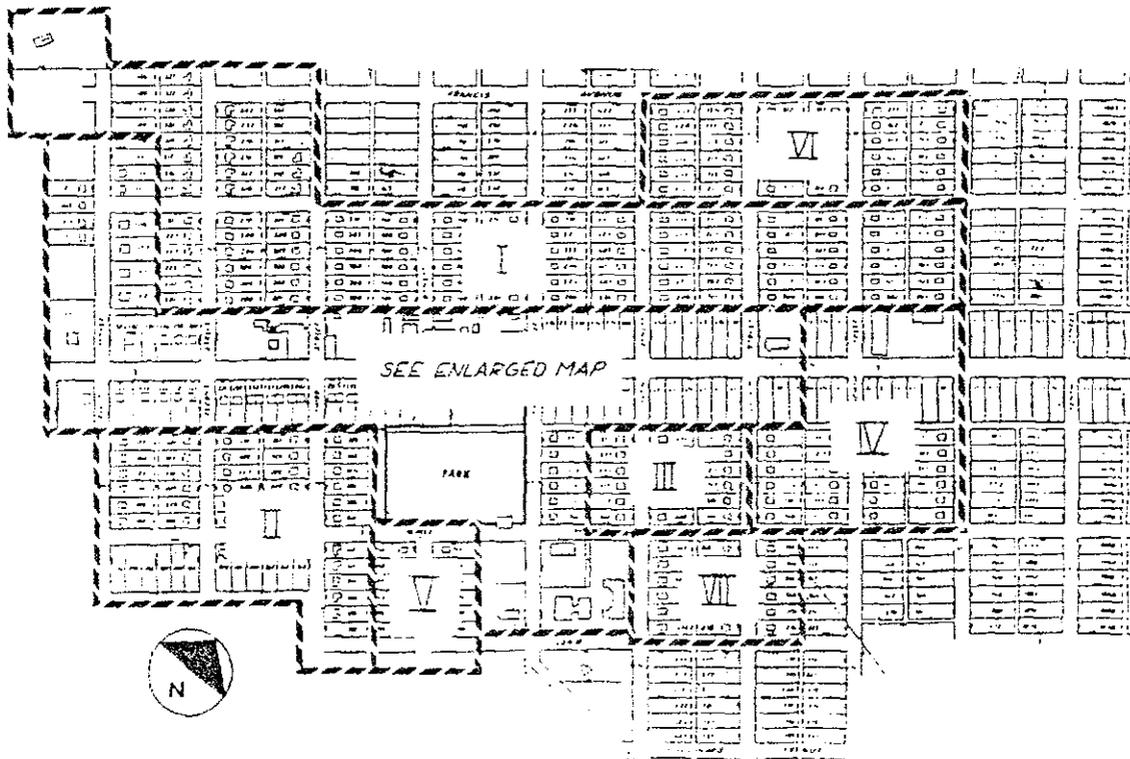
In spite of their past hardship, retired Colver miners seem to feel that the Ebensburg Coal Company was "a pretty good company" because at least there was work. Conditions were not necessarily better anywhere else and many other mines were not operating as often. Furthermore, many felt that "the law wasn't on your side, so you had to put up with it." This was especially true for immigrants, who faced greater barriers than native American miners. Steady, plentiful work and a roof overhead were the miners' primary considerations. And as long as one "didn't make waves," neither of these were in jeopardy.<sup>40</sup>

#### Past to Present

Conditions improved somewhat for Colver miners and their families in the 1930s and 1940s. Unionization stabilized wages, hours and working conditions, while giving men representation in the work place. World War II boosted the demand for coal so that Colver miners saw a marked increase in productivity and profit. Beginning in 1948, Colver residents were able to purchase their homes and make much-needed alterations. Max Vassanelli bought his four-room house for \$750 and over the years has added a new bathroom and kitchen, a new heating system, a cellar, wall-to-wall carpeting, paneling and aluminum siding. Some of the company houses, like Arthur and Martha Price's old house on the corner of Fifth Street and Weaver Avenue, are practically hidden by porches, additions and garages.

Despite such obvious changes, some aspects of life in Colver are the same. Every morning people flock to the post office to pick up mail and exchange pleasantries with neighbors. The Colver store remains open, selling everything from furniture and clothes to batteries and microwave popcorn. Ralph Costello, the town barber, is open only a few days a week now, but when it is open, his shop still serves as a social gathering place. Nevertheless, Colver is a quiet place today. Many residents are retired, while those who do work often commute long distances. Lately there has been talk of a new power plant to be built at the old mine site. It is said that the plant will convert the massive boney pile into a usable fuel and have a life expectancy

of many years. Some people hope that new jobs will mean renewed prosperity but whatever the future holds for Colver, it is certain that vestiges of the coal company town will remain.



PLAN OF  
— COLVER —

- I 72 four-room houses between the East side of 3rd St. and the West side of 9th St.; 18 six-room houses lining 2nd St. and the West side of 3rd St.; 17 three-room, ell-shaped houses on 2nd and 3rd Sts.; all built 1912.
- II 30 six-room houses; 11 three-room houses; all built 1912.
- III 18 six-room houses; built 1912.
- IV 24 six-room houses; built 1915.
- V 12 four-room houses; built 1921-23.
- VI 36 four-room houses; built 1921-23.
- VII 16 four-room houses; built 1921-23.

Figure 1. Map of Colver showing phases of development, 1911-1923. Compiled by author, 1988.

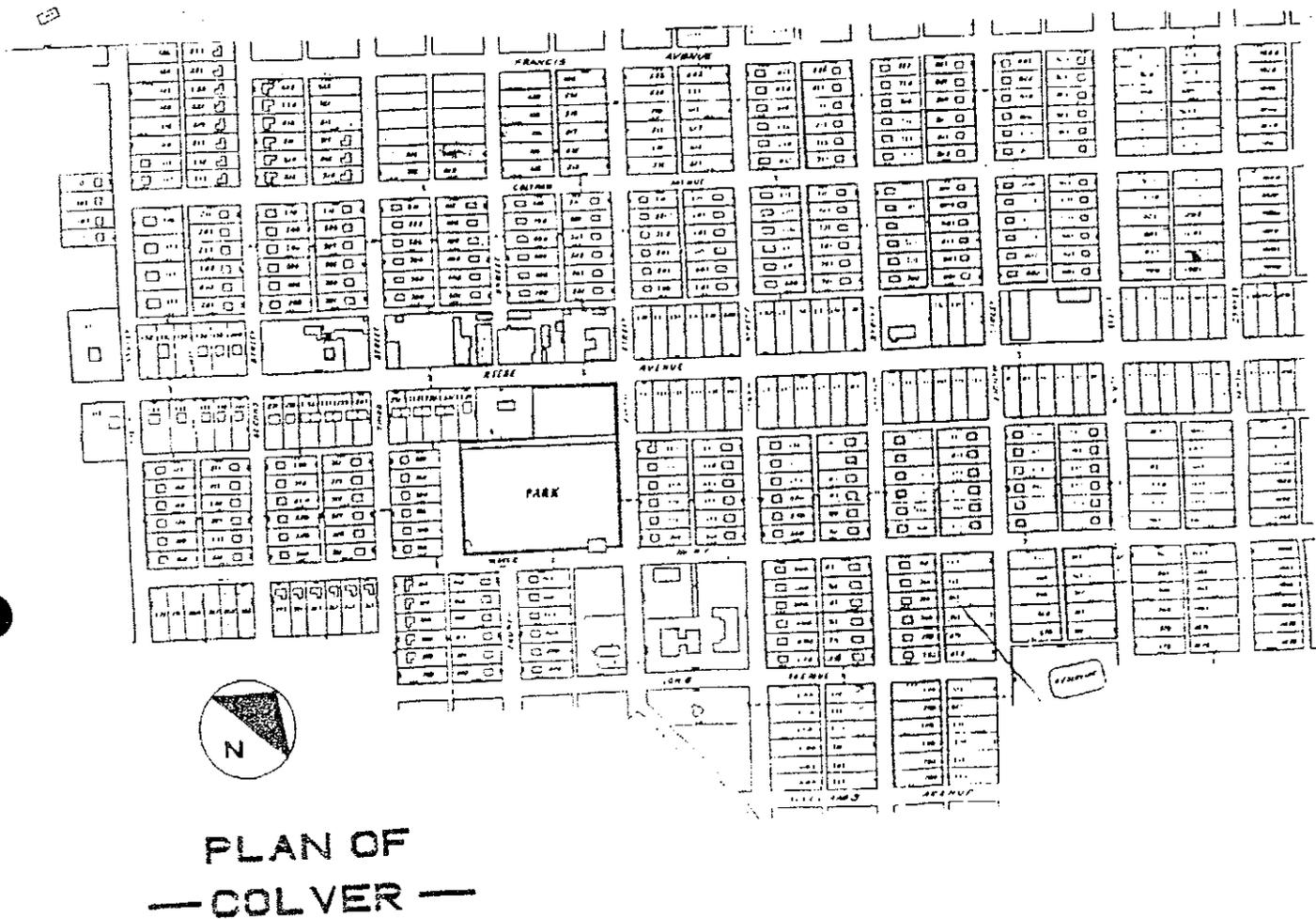


Figure 2. County plat map of Colver, 1947.

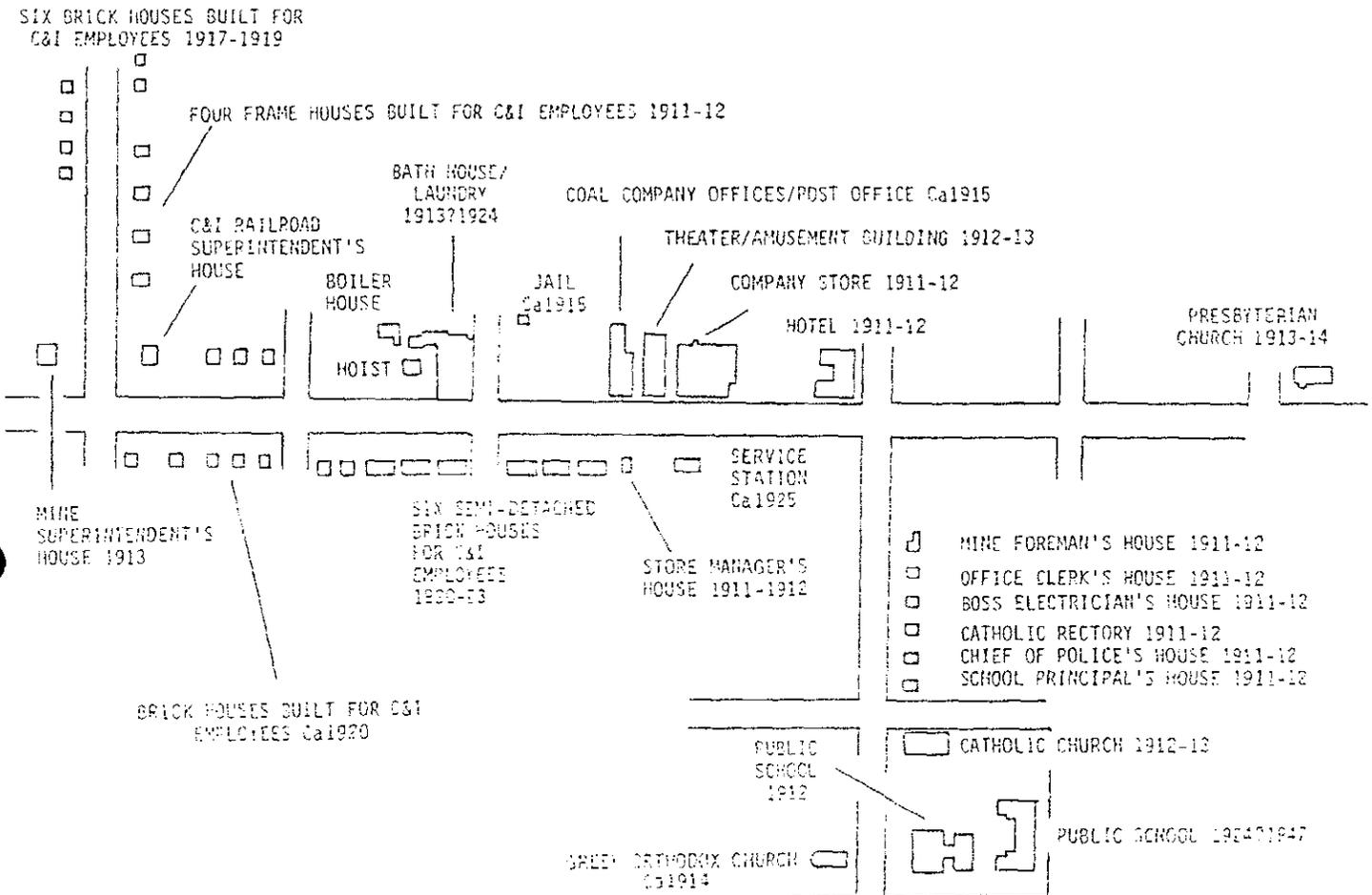


Figure 3. Town center of Colver. Adapted by author from 1947 county plat map, 1988.

ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Jerome C. White and Samuel Law, "The Coal Industry in Cambria County," Sesquicentennial of Cambria County, 1804-1954 (Ebensburg, 1954); S. H. Jencks, former Chief Engineer, Cambria and Indiana Railroad, "A History or Record or Chronicle of the Cambria and Indiana Railroad and Connections and Coal Companies in Cambria and Adjoining Counties, Pennsylvania With References to the Pocahontas and New River Coal Fields, West Virginia, from 1887 to 1944" (Photocopy, Cambria and Indiana Railroad, Colver, Pennsylvania), 19.

<sup>2</sup>David H. Hamley, "This is a Short Line?" Trains (March 1971): 39.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Internal Affairs of Pennsylvania, Report of the Bureau of Mines (Harrisburg: State Printing Office, 1911); Coal Age 6, no. 2 (July, 1914): 797.

<sup>4</sup>Hamley, 39.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 39-40; White and Law.

<sup>6</sup>Jencks, 7 and 24.

<sup>7</sup>Mildred Burket, "The Story of Colver," Mountaineer Herald (20 August 1954): 42.

<sup>8</sup>"Building Colver, Cambria's New and Bustling Mining Town," Johnstown Weekly Tribune 14 April 1911, 10; Tax Assessment Records, Cambria Township, Cambria County, Pennsylvania, 1913, Cambria County Courthouse, Ebensburg, Pennsylvania; Photographs.

<sup>9</sup>"Colver Booming-Many New Houses-200 More This Summer," Mountaineer Herald 25 April 1912, 8.

<sup>10</sup>Morris Knowles, Industrial Housing (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1920; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1974), 310.

<sup>11</sup>Tax Assessment Records, 1913-1931.

<sup>12</sup>Johnstown Weekly Tribune, 6 December 1912, 9, vertical file clipping, Cambria County Historical Society, Ebensburg, PA.

<sup>13</sup>Tax Assessment Records, 1931.

<sup>14</sup>Ralph Costello, interview by author, 29 March and 14 April,

1988, Colver.

<sup>15</sup>Costello; Max Vassanelli, interview by author, 29 March and 14 April, 1988, Colver.

<sup>16</sup>Jencks, 30.

<sup>17</sup>Jencks, 24; Frederick Platt, Elkins Park, Pa., to Cambria County Historical Society, Ebensburg, Pa., 24 November 1975, vertical file, Cambria County Historical Society, Ebensburg, Pennsylvania; "A Model Mining Town," Grit, 9 July 1916, 4, vertical file clipping, Cambria County Historical Society, Ebensburg, Pa.

<sup>18</sup>John Smylnycky, interview by author, 12 July 1988, Colver.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Jencks, 24; Platt; Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss. Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930 (Massachusetts: G. K. Hall and Co., 1985), 802.

<sup>23</sup>Photographs.

<sup>24</sup>Jencks, 28.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Coal Age (8 August 1914): 246.

<sup>27</sup>Report of the Bureau of Mines, 1915; Mountaineer Herald, 21 April 1977, vertical file clipping, Cambria County Historical Society, Ebensburg, PA.

<sup>28</sup>Mountaineer Herald, 20 August 1954, 42, vertical file clipping, Cambria County Historical Society, Ebensburg, PA.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.; Arthur Price, interview by author, 12 July 1988, Ebensburg.

<sup>31</sup>Fred "Fritz" George, interview by author, 15 March 1988, Colver.

<sup>32</sup>Report of the Bureau of Mines, 1917, 1427.

<sup>33</sup>Hamley, 39.

<sup>34</sup>Jencks, 28.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>36</sup>Costello; Vassanelli; George.

<sup>37</sup>Heber Blankenhorn, The Strike for Union (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1924; reprinted, New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 18, 142-143; Jencks, 48; Costello.

<sup>38</sup>George.

<sup>39</sup>Mountaineer Herald, 10 August 1983, vertical file clipping, Cambria County Historical Society, Ebensburg, PA; also see n.26, Chapter II. Ebensburg Coal Company employees were apparently not permitted to conduct union meetings on company property for in 1934 members of UMWA Local 860 constructed a union hall in Tripolo, just outside Colver.

<sup>40</sup>Costello.

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### Photographs

Collection of Max Vassanelli, Colver, PA.:

- 1.) Exterior of Colver company store before Trumbauer addition.
- 2.) Interior Colver Hotel lobby.
- 3.) Exterior of Colver Amusement Building.
- 4.) Interior, ice cream parlor.
- 5.) Interior, hotel dining room.
- 6.) Interior, hotel bar.
- 7.) Exterior, Colver store after addition.
- 8.) Exterior, Colver Hotel.
- 9.) Colver band and bandstand.
- 10.) Colver houses looking northwest from corner of Reese and 5th streets.
- 11.) Colver houses with asbestos shingle siding.
- 12.) Colver baseball team.
- 13.) Houses on 3rd Street.
- 14.) Houses at Shanty Town.
- 15.) Colver houses.

### Interviews

Costello, Ralph. Owner, Costello's Barber Shop, Reese Street, Colver, Pennsylvania. Interview by author, Colver, Pennsylvania, 29 March and 15 April 1988.

Dominick, Daniel. Retired miner. Interview by author, Colver, Pennsylvania, 15 April 1988.

George, Fred "Fritz". Retired miner. Interview by author, Colver, Pennsylvania, 29 March and 15 April 1988.

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