

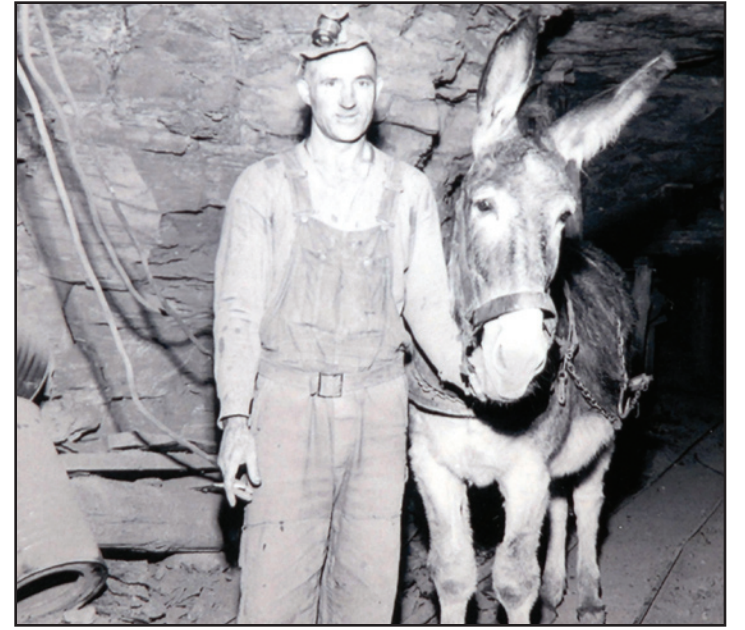
the 7 Wonders of Osage County

Coal Mines



Group of miners pose with their mules in coal mine #14 at Scranton, circa 1910-1925.

Courtesy Kansas State Historical Society



Courtesy Schuyler Museum
Burlingame's Schuyler Museum is one of the last places in Osage County to see the history of coal mining in the county. Featured coal mining exhibits include numerous photographs such as these, above and right, and mining artifacts including carbide lamps, tools and machinery. Burlingame was home to Bell Mine No. 4, which operated until 1964.



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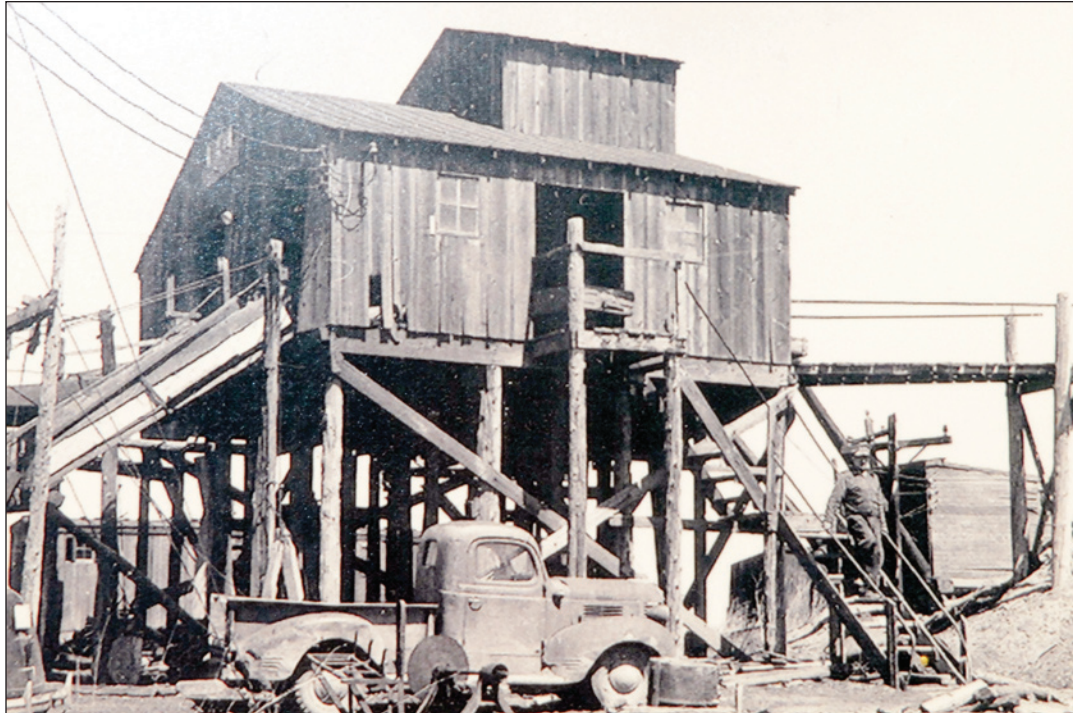
Burlingame Railroad's use of Osage County coal also peaked during this time.

Eventually, Osage County could not retain its market because of the high cost of its coal. The reason for the higher rate was due to the railroad rate structure for shipping. Osage County mining companies paid higher freight charges for coal shipments than most major competitors.

The high prices, loss of trade area, slack work and little pay threatened Osage County mine fields. The railroad reduced miner's wages from \$2.75 a ton in 1873 to half that amount in 1893. Along with low output per man each day and less active days, the miners had to tighten their belts. In 1914, the Kansas Public Utilities Commission intervened, but by then it was too late to restore production back to the level it once had been.

Strip mining began in Kansas in 1876, but eventually stopped. In the 1930s, strip mining again became the preferred method of mining coal. Coal beds too thin to be mined underground were stripped with power shovels, some of which dug to depths of 100 feet.

Strip mining left deep ditches and high ridges, some of which can still be seen today in the county. As the shovels removed the dirt, trenches of 100 feet wide by 100 feet deep were created. Originally, the land was abandoned and left to grow back to trees and



Courtesy Corinne Dubois
Burlingame's Bell Mine No. 4 was the last coal mine shaft in the state to be closed.

brush, while the trenches filled with water.

The 1969 Kansas Legislature passed regulations requiring coal companies to reclaim land. More stringent federal regulations were enacted. Today strip mines must be converted back into useful productive land. The companies must smooth out the ditches, replace topsoil and plant grass or crops similar to what was there before the mining started.

Jean Timms, of the Osage County Historical Society, assisted in the research of this story.

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Contact Sherrie Heaney for more information



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