
The Peerless Coal Mines

BY A. PHILIP CEDERLOF

NO OBJECTIVELY WRITTEN ARTICLE CAN ever tell the story of a coal mine. To me every coal mine has not only a story but also a distinct personality. It is discovered, is born, lives, and dies.

The original Peerless coal land is located on an arrowhead-shaped mountain point that juts east toward Helper, Utah, as one goes up Spring Canyon. There is nothing left of the town now. The tramway grade, which went up to the two mines, has been taken over by nature but is still visible. High up on the cliffs to the northwest and

Mr. Cederlof (1908-80) was general manager of the Peerless Coal Company. He completed a history of the Peerless coal mines in 1975. The article published here is a shortened version of his original manuscript. It is published with the kind permission of Mrs. A. P. Cederlof of Salt Lake City. The editors also extend their appreciation to Dr. J. Eldon Dorman of Price, Utah, a member of the Board of State History, for his interest in seeing this project to its completion.

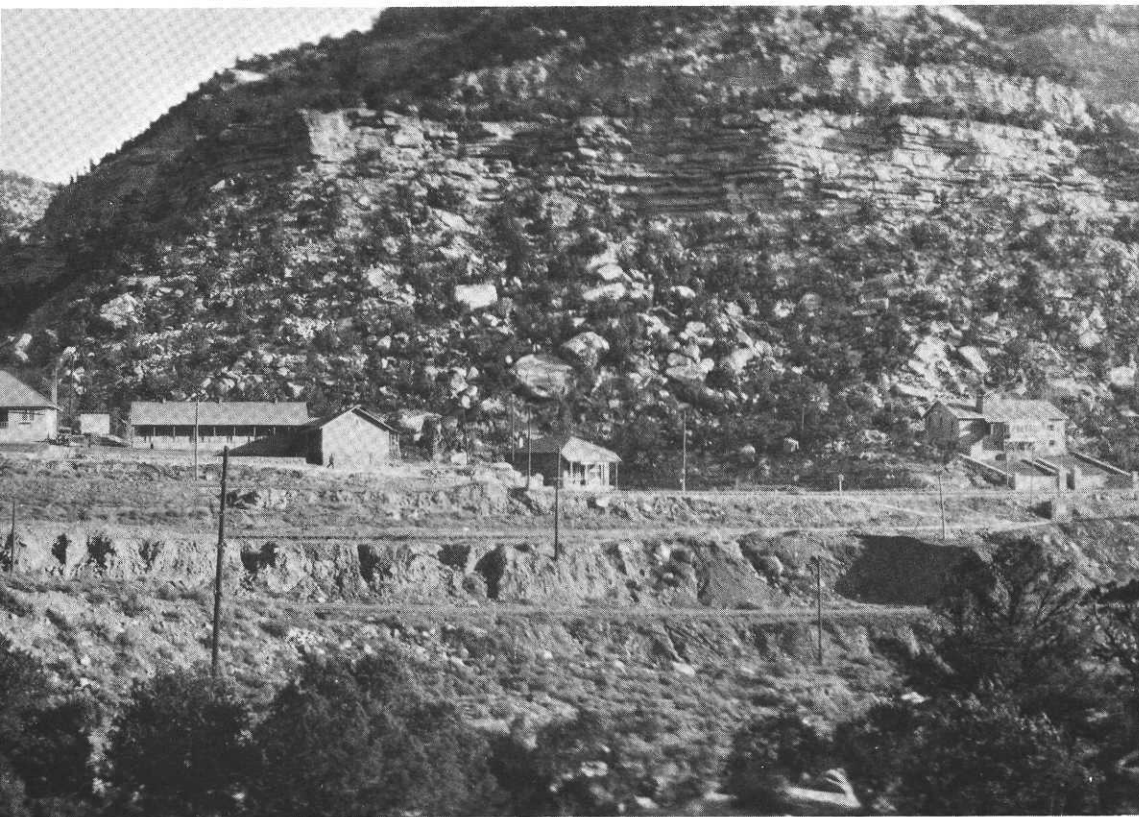


northeast you can see the black streaks that are the No. 3 and No. 2 subseams that were mined in the 1930s through the early 1950s. The No. 2½ subseam further up the canyon appears as a streak of a few inches at Peerless.

The Starpoint Sandstone underneath forms the floor of the subseams. Much higher, about 150 feet, lies the famous Aberdeen Sandstone on top of which is the Castle Gate "A" seam where the old Peerless mine operated. This seam, one of the most consistent in the field, was worked by a number of mines in Carbon County.

The Peerless coal land east of the tramway was owned in 1916 by the Crystal Coal Company. So far as I know, this company did not operate a coal mine. Crystal sold the land and the townsite in the canyon below to William H. Sweet and Charles N. Sweet, brothers prominent in the Utah coal industry. Another brother, Victor, later developed his own mine in the Gordon Creek area.

Peerless ca. 1925 with, from left, Greek coffeehouse and Japanese bunkhouse, school and single dwellings, tippie, boardinghouse, bunkhouses, store, and superintendent's house (the cottage). Photographs are from the author's manuscript history of Peerless.



In 1916 the Sweets developed the Peerless property, building the tramway and the tipple, opening the mine on the "A" seam, and bringing the production up to 500 tons a day. Then in 1917 or 1918 the mine was sold to the newly organized Peerless Coal Company. The principals were Ezra Thompson, one-time mayor of Salt Lake City, and James Murdoch. Both men were prominent in Utah metal mining and in Salt Lake real estate. A key figure in the acquisition and early operation of the mine by Peerless Coal Company was former state coal mine inspector Robert Howard, a friend of Thompson and the mine's first superintendent.

Engineering reports estimated coal reserves in the Castle Gate "A" and "B" seams at 6 million tons. Although it was not anticipated, burned coal was encountered as mining progressed, and recoverable coal estimates were revised sharply downward. Ultimately, only ninety-seven acres (less than one-third of the projected amount) were found mineable in the "A" seam and but a small amount in the "B" seam. The company did not expect to recover its \$300,000 initial investment. However, favorable market conditions during World War I made it possible to "pay out" and leave a surplus to help finance a new mine elsewhere.

Mining conditions in the "A" seam were good. There were no gas or water problems, and the roof was satisfactory. The seam pitched a few degrees northeast. The main mine slope was served by an outside hoist that dropped the trip of six coal cars around a half-circle to the left at which point the big tramway hoist hooked on and dropped the trip down a 16 to 22 degree grade to the tipple. The mine cars were pulled from the working places in the mine to the "parting" by horses.

In the earlier days of mining the miner undercut the coal by hand. With a pick he cut a tapering slot into the coal seam at the bottom. This provided a space for the explosives to shoot to. To shoot coal "off the solid" was dangerous and illegal. Shooting was done with black powder. It made nice lumpy coal, but the flash was dangerous. When so-called permissible powder was developed the use of black powder was forbidden by law.

Until the early 1930s coal was loaded by hand with the aid of a shovel (which I have heard miners call a "banjo"). First the big lumps were picked up by hand and loaded into the mine car. Then the smaller coal was shoveled in.

Louis Vuksinick, a former mine superintendent, started in the

mines in 1926 at age eighteen. He described the old Peerless mine in a letter to me:

. . . John Selan, age 83 . . . started at work in Peerless in 1919. He told me his brother Frank worked in the slopes for a year or two, undermining with a pick. I understand they did have some shortwall cutters in 1917. For drilling they used hand augers. . . . The first electric drill I saw was in 1929.

There was some shooting off the solid in early days, mostly in pillar work, but I didn't see a lot of it. I used black powder in one mine and also used carbide lamps, although I believe electric lamps were being used in 1924-1925.

The miners loading coal were paid . . . 79¢ a ton, but they bought their own powder and caps, set their timber, laid their track and made their own dummies.¹

The horse driver would bring one car at a time to a miner working in a room. . . . Later, when the mine had electric motors, the miner had to take two cars at a time. . . . On "idle" days the miner would take a horse and pull his own coal. . . .²

All miners were given a check number — then given about 12 metal checks. They would place one in the empty car on a hook, then load the car. At night when the car was dumped the check was placed on a board. The miner picked the checks up at the bulletin board and got the weights of his cars. But if you loaded too much rock you were docked for the whole car.

A good miner would load 14 to 16 tons a day. Some would load more. . . .

Ott Burton, mine clerk for four years in the early 1920s, remembered what remarkable creatures the mine horses were. They literally ran, at times, and the light was sometimes poor. They had to step between the ties where chuckholes would be worn. Irritating dust would get under their collars. Some mines brought their horses or mules outside daily. Other mines had barns inside and brought the animals out less frequently. Coming into daylight was difficult, but with the aid of blinders the horses' sight adjusted in a matter of days.

The Peerless townsite was located at the foot of the tramway and around the tipple, both above and below the highway. Some of the buildings, including the Greek coffeehouse and the "Jap" (so-called then) bunkhouse, were torn down or removed about the time the old Peerless mine closed in 1930-31.

¹A dummy is a bag filled with sand or clay for tamping or for separating two charges in a double-loaded bore hole.

²Idle days were days when the mines were not running the tipple and dumping coal.

Ott Burton recalled the Greek coffeehouse and pool room where the Greek miners socialized and smoked their long-stemmed pipes. He said the Japanese had a large wooden tub in which several at a time would sit for a bath. A Japanese boss looked after the interests of the Japanese miners. The Austrians and Italians mixed considerably, according to Burton, but the Greeks and Japanese were inclined to stay with their own groups.

The nationalistic spirit and the grouping of large numbers of immigrants were characteristic of this period, not only in the coal camps but also in other large industrial settings in the state and in the country. Most of the immigrants were single men or men with families left behind. Many were Greeks, but there were also Japanese, Italians, and Austrians. Lesser numbers came from other countries.

The immigrants were not assimilated readily into community life. They spoke their own languages and had their natural leaders. They were good workers and not unfriendly. However, with the different groups, outside influences, and the general wage situation and labor turbulence of that period some strikes occurred, notably in 1922. Peerless had its problems along with the other camps.

The changes brought about by the automobile and improved roads in the late 1920s were very pronounced and significantly affected the makeup of the work force and working conditions in general. The day of the unmarried immigrant worker passed. In 1932 the Peerless boardinghouse and bunkhouses were closed and did not operate again except for a period during World War II. Available houses in camp were always occupied and in demand, but most of the miners commuted from the surrounding area.

In 1922 a school was set up in Peerless for the small children. The older children walked about half a mile up the canyon to Storrs. The following year a company store was built in Peerless. Ben Deal was the manager and also the postmaster. Another store a quarter of a mile down the canyon, the Square Deal Store, was owned and operated by Gus Winkelried. The miners' families also bought from Helper stores, especially one operated by John and Joe Quillico who took orders and made deliveries once a week to Peerless. In good weather farmers from Utah County drove to the camps with truckloads of farm produce.

There was intercamp socializing in Spring Canyon, especially among the married people. For instance, the Spring Canyon Dance

and Bridge Club consisted of about twenty couples who met every Saturday. Ott Burton remembered the boxing and wrestling matches put on in the Spring Canyon area in the early days of Peerless. Top flight athletes were brought in, and on one occasion Jack Dempsey was in attendance.

Baseball was also big in the coal country in the twenties and earlier. All of the larger camps had teams. Competition and interest were keen. The superintendents and mine management went to great lengths to get good players. Both local and outside men were sought for their playing skills and could get a job anytime. The men, women, and young people in the camps enthusiastically supported their teams.

The company, anticipating the exhaustion of old Peerless, negotiated a lease in the mid-1920s to develop a large property in Price Canyon, adjacent to the Royal mine at Rolapp. This land was on a federal lease held by brothers Emmett and Culbert Olson. Emmett was a well-known Carbon County engineer and coal man. Culbert, a lawyer, served in the Utah State Legislature and later became governor of California.

The Price Canyon property, obtained on an overriding royalty basis, contained two seams, Castle Gate "B" and "D", twenty-four feet thick and sixteen to eighteen feet thick, respectively. Two slopes (tunnels) were driven from a point near the highway on a 30 degree incline to the seams, a distance of some 2,500 feet and some 1,100 feet below the level of the Price River. Yards for the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad were put in, and a modern McNally-Pittsburgh steel tippie was built. Both seams were worked for approximately two years, until June 1931. Production grew until it approximated that of old Peerless which was accordingly phased out.

The new Peerless mine made gas. An explosion there in March 1930 on the night shift killed five men. Three miners survived, one of them reporting that he saved himself by huddling over a leak in a compressed air line with his coat thrown over his head.

When the new Peerless shut down in June 1931 during the depression everybody was out of a job. Robert Howard, Sr., who had been superintendent at new Peerless, and Robert J. Turner, a mining man from Price, formed a partnership and leased old Peerless. Their plan was to mine the remaining pillars and sell coal to trucks. Trucking coal was, with a deepening depression, growing rapidly.

Turner ran the mine and Howard kept the books and handled the business end from his home in Salt Lake City. They soon found that they needed some help in selling and handling carloads of the off sizes produced. They offered jobs to me and a former salesman at new Peerless. I was paid \$150.00 a month, and the salesman was paid a salary plus traveling expenses. We rented a small office in the Newhouse Building where we handled the orders, billings, and the accounts receivable ledger.

When Howard, who had been in failing health, died, Turner, the surviving partner, decided to try to buy old Peerless. This meant opening the low seams. Peerless Sales Company was incorporated with 100 shares of no-par stock, of which Turner had 40 shares;³ Ezra P. Thompson, 40 shares; Mrs. Howard, 10 shares; and Jack Jones, 10 shares. Jones was the mine foreman and very valuable to the organization. The new corporation paid Peerless Coal Company \$16,000 for the property.

Turner decided to work the No. 3 (bottom) subseam which had been experimentally opened by the old company in 1929. But the lower seam had problems: a rock band in the middle, a bony streak near the roof, and, perhaps worst of all, a roly, sticky floor. It was dirty coal. The mine workers, inside and outside, fought it and cursed it. The railroad customers quit buying the slack and nut sizes.

The first year in the bottom seam we hand-loaded the coal into old mine cars. We lost \$6,000. We drilled and shot that sticky bottom coal. It was not just rough, it was impossible. Louis Vuksinick described it:

Two men worked in each room. We had to push our empty cars to the face, put a check inside the car, load it and let it run out. It went out by gravity, but we had to go with it and block it so the rope rider could pick it up.⁴ Each room had two tracks. We were paid 50¢ a ton for loading coal and 35¢ a hole for drilling by hand. We took care of track, set props and made dummies. We got the dirt out on the entry to fill the dummies. The coal was cut with a CE7 shortwall but due to the rolls in the floor a lot of bottom coal was left, so Jack Jones got us a breast auger. With a breast auger you did not need a post. It was simple. You put it up to your breast and turned the auger with a crank. We could drill a hole from 6" to 12" for shooting up bottom coal. No pay for this drilling. If you did not shoot up the bottom coal the place would get lower and lower. We also had to pick the rock band off the coal. The coal was 4 feet

³ Ezra P. Thompson was a son of Ezra Thompson mentioned early as one of the original organizers of the Peerless Coal Company.

⁴ A rope rider sees that cars are coupled properly and inspects ropes, chains, links, and all coupling equipment.



Left: Ezra P. Thompson, president of Peerless, was the son of Ezra Thompson, mayor of Salt Lake City in the early 1900s. Right: Jack and Betty Jones. Jack was superintendent of Peerless during 1936-41.

high with a 3" to 4" rock band. The top was good. It was too much to clean a place a day with all the other work so we would pick the coal off the rock and throw it back while waiting for the cars. The coal in this seam was hard drilling by hand. Jack put a man on to go behind the miners and repick the rock off the coal. He got paid \$1.00 a ton but he did not last long because he could not make any money.

Although we had broken and gouged out the tramway and built our generators and shops on the No. 3 level, the only thing to do was to go into the No. 2 subseam, 30 feet above, and abandon No. 3. We ran a tunnel to No. 2. The coal was clean, the roof and floor good, but in forty-two inches height we couldn't get our old wooden mine cars in. We used a few old low steel cars and pushed the back wheels

off the track so we could squeeze the coal in. We couldn't long continue to push the cars to the face and off the track. We decided to take up two feet of bottom in the entries and buy some conveyors for the rooms. We bought some Eickhoff air-driven shakers in the fall of 1933. The conveyors came but they lacked enough "kick" to move the coal, and at times the miners had to push the coal along them in low spots. In 1935 we bought some Vulcan shaking conveyors in Denver. They cost less and came well recommended, but they didn't do well in our conditions. We muddled along.

When we heard about Jeffrey chain conveyors that would go up as well as down the pitch, Jack Jones and I went to Colorado in 1936 to see some in operation. We bought some. They were pretty good. Our hand shovelers loaded on them, and later our mechanics made some face conveyors that cut down the throw to the room conveyors.

Ezra Thompson and Robert Turner did not see eye to eye in the management of the company. Turner agreed to sell his shares to Thompson. Mrs. Howard's and Jack Jones's stock were bought later.

In our second year — the year of the open winter and the drought — we lost \$18,000. At income tax time old Mr. Abbey, our CPA, looked over the top of his glasses and said, "Hm — you have an impairment of capital; you're insolvent." For three or four years we had not paid our Carbon County property taxes, thereby making our mine and equipment subject to a tax sale by the county. We also owed for power.

Our equipment was obsolete. I remember especially that we lacked an electric arc-welding machine, without which our mechanics were severely handicapped. We had to load boxcar orders by hand, lacking a loader. Our cutting machines were old and slow Sullivan chain models, the old CE7s. Some of them must have been in use in the early days of old Peerless. However, they were a great development and improvement in the industry in their time. They carried us and owed us nothing. Our drills were old and slow. Our mine cars were old, comparatively small, wooden, worn, and leaked fine coal along the tracks in the mine. This had to be shoveled up regularly as it was a safety hazard. One of our most serious equipment deficiencies was our miners' cap lamps. We had inherited them from the old company. They were obsolete, gave poor light, and wouldn't hold a charge long.

Ez tried to borrow \$7,000 to pay the Carbon County taxes. He tried banks in Salt Lake City and Carbon County. He offered to give

a mortgage on the whole mine as security. Such was the condition of the company, the industry, and the country that no one would lend us the money. Late on the day we were to be auctioned off on the steps of the courthouse in Price, Ez came to our house. I was resting in bed because of a heart problem. His hat was still on as he stood at the foot of the bed smiling and waving back and forth the receipted tax notices. We were redeemed. I asked him how he had done it. He said that he had taken a thousand dollars and bet on a horse race at Hollywood Park and had won.

Many years later, after the mine was worked out and closed and Ez had long since passed away, I was reminiscing with my brother Burke who had been our bookkeeper. I said how wonderful it was that that horse had won and saved the mine. Burke said, "Ez didn't win that money on a horse race. He just told you that. He scraped up everything we had and could get from our dealers and went down and paid." Burke was surprised that in all the years that followed I had never learned what happened. I had never questioned it, and no one had ever told me.

How we got through that summer I will never know. I borrowed on my insurance and went to California on doctor's orders to recuperate. I doubt that anybody got paid anything until August or September, at least in the office. We had all "sweat out" other periods, but when I was off sick my check came.

Not only did we owe for taxes, we also owed for power and for additional royalty because of a survey error in plotting our original boundary. In a routine check, based on a shot at the North Star, the government discovered the error, and the subsequent correction put a sizeable quantity of fee coal into our government lease ground. Besides, we owed local bills for material and supplies. The Square Deal store down the canyon gave our miners food on a payroll checkoff basis. I guess Gus Winkelried got some credit from the wholesalers. This helped. It is tough in the months when you are losing money to still push development in order to have anything to sell when business opens up in the fall. We were not the only organization that had a hard time during this period. Many there were, large and small, for whom it was "root, hog, or die."

In 1933 I became our outside salesman, and Leona Savage was hired as secretary for the office. Ez and I drove to Spokane. After we called on our dealer there, Ez left for Salt Lake by train. I had a list of the dealers who had bought from us before, but I had no sales



Left: Dr. A. R. Demman, company doctor for Peerless, filled an important role in the company, for heavy industry, especially mining with its many hazards, requires competent, on-site medical care. Right: A. Philip Cederlof, Peerless general manager.

training or experience. The competition was intense. There was pressure on prices, and cut-rate deals were made that we could not meet and live. The delivery capability of the big mines was hard to match. Also, they had good advertising. Washed coal in the small sizes was a strong sales point. Probably most telling of all was the quality and quantity of sales personnel. Their men were seasoned and personable. I had only modest success in the three years I was on the road, although we sold all the coal we could mine in the coal season. Later, we hired Frank Bletcher as a salesman for the territory, and I stayed in Salt Lake as manager. Frank had operated a mine in the Rock Springs area for several years and had been a salesman for Independent Coal & Coke Company, a big Utah operator.

When Turner left we had no superintendent. Jack Jones, our mine foreman, and his wife Betty were living in the superintendent's cottage. He was upset by the turn of events. We decided that we should hire a veteran superintendent. We moved the new man and

his family into the cottage and moved Jack and Betty into a four-room frame house at the other end of the camp. The new superintendent made some good suggestions and looked after general operations. Jack took good care of the mine, but he was unhappy. After a number of weeks we heard that Jack was going to quit. Ez and I went to Peerless and up to the mine. Jack was right in the middle of things, swinging a pick and ordering the men around. They were just opening the airway to No. 2. Whether unhappy or not, Jack did the job. He didn't particularly resent having a superintendent over him, but he needed a free hand and was chafing. We could see that it wouldn't work out. Without any pressure from Jack, we made him superintendent, and he and Betty moved back into the cottage. Geno Ori was made mine foreman.

Jack spent most of his time in the mine; that was his forte. He had good assistants, a good mechanical staff, a strong outside crew at the tipple, and Evan Jones in the office. Though he operated in a quiet way, Evan Jones's work and influence were felt throughout the company. He was conscientious, a born diplomat, and tops in his craft. Jack Huntsman was a seasoned, top-flight master mechanic. Harry Draper, his assistant, was full of energy and talent. In the ranks were some of the best miners and specialists in the field. If a man wasn't good he didn't last long in that low coal.

However, we lacked first-class equipment. The chain conveyors we bought were a big step in the right direction, but we were still hand-loading. In 1935 we installed Viking equipment to oil-treat our stoker coal. We were one of the first in the field to do this. In 1938 we bought four Joy face conveyors, but it was still hand-loading. That winter we bought our first arc welder. Each year we bought more Jeffrey chain conveyors and small used electric locomotives to serve them. In 1939 an Ottumwa boxcar loader became available in the county and we snapped it up. It saved a lot of arduous, costly labor at the tipple. It isn't hard to visualize the difficulty of loading a forty-foot boxcar with big lump coal.

In the latter part of Jack Jones's time a calamitous thing happened. Our large DC generator in the mine was destroyed. It furnished the power to operate our haulage locomotives. The outside man who operated the generators threw the wrong switches, and the generator was overspeeded and literally tore itself to pieces. Jack called me, very upset, and said, "We have been sabotaged." Before I could even arrive on the scene the mine people had located an old converted steam generator in Sanpete County for \$600. It was

powerful and in good condition, only 600 RPM. It was so big that we had to set it up outside, adding to our shop building and putting in a concrete foundation. In addition, we had to buy hundreds of feet of scarce and expensive armored cable to carry the power into the mine. While all this was going on our production was badly cut. We had only a small outside generator set and could move only small trips of coal out of the mine. Our market suffered and we lost tens of thousands of dollars. I never did know who caused it all, but from my distance I felt that the system should have been fail-safe.

When Jack Jones retired in 1941 he was succeeded by Jack Huntsman, our master mechanic. The resourcefulness, devotion, and endurance of Huntsman, Harry Draper, and our other mechanics were essential to the successful running of a mine like ours. When something vital broke down they were on the job early and late and stayed until we were going again. Breakdowns occur most often, particularly outside, in very cold weather. The broken equipment, especially on the tibble, is heavy, cold, and dirty. In the early days we didn't have a shop at the mine portal. I remember one time a locomotive broke down outside. We were shut down. The mechanics worked far into a bitter winter night up on that mountain to have us going by morning.

In 1941 we bought a good used thirteen-ton Jeffrey locomotive. The seam pitch in our dips gave us an 8 percent grade to pull up with loads; 5 percent is about all an engineer likes to see. We had no choice. I went to Pittsburgh and bought the Jeffrey from the Moorhead Equipment Company. The men at the mine liked the Jeffrey and soon had it operating.

The following year Jack Huntsman and I, and, I think, Harry Draper went to the Lion Coal Company mine at Rock Springs, Wyoming, to look at Goodman duckbills (automatic, power-loading, shaking conveyors). We bought two duckbills and shaker units for delivery in August and also ordered a new Joy 12BU loader (one and a half tons per minute). So started a mechanization program.

The duckbill was an ingenious but simple coal-loading device made up of a series of steel troughs on the end of which was a trough flared out like a duck's bill. A ratcheting device would thrust the duckbill under the pile of shot-down coal, and the coal moved down the trough line. The duckbill was moved from side to side by a man who simply stuck a crowbar under the flare of the duckbill. The back-and-forth action did the rest. This device lent itself to a tight

cycle of continuous mining. Millions of tons of coal were efficiently produced around the country with duckbills.

After we had installed our two new duckbills a bad cave came down on one of them. Huge blocks of the sandstone roof rested on the damaged duckbill and troughing. Harry Draper said that if we got the duckbill out he could fix it. A miner volunteered, but mine foreman Harry Greenall said he wouldn't ask any man to do something he wouldn't do himself. If the duckbill came out, he would get it out. Besides his other abilities, Greenall was an expert rock man. The job looked tough to me, but I knew what the decision had to be. The duckbill came out, was worked over in our shop, and loaded coal again.

One day Harry Greenall, Jack Huntsman, and I went in the bottom (No. 3) seam to have another look at its possibilities. A little square door had been provided in the cinderblock wall that sealed the entry. Harry went in last, carrying his safety lamp. If gas was present the flame in the lamp would increase in size but would not cause an explosion. The safety lamp went out. Jack and I sat on the floor while Harry went to the shop to fix it. Suddenly my heart started pounding and I said, "I feel funny." Jack jumped up and scrambled out the hole. I was close behind, not stopping to wonder why — bad air. Thus ended, for the time being, the bottom seam exploration.

Something should be said about operating conditions during World War II. They can be summed up in a few words: a good market, controlled prices and profits, shortages of materials, and a shortage of labor. As to materials, the government gave the industry priority ratings that enabled us to secure sheet steel, welding rod, steel shapes, etc., from supply houses. Manufacturers of metal products such as wire rope, machine parts, electric wire and cables, mining equipment, etc., had their own priority ratings. We did quite well in getting what we needed, but we did have to get specific government approval on some items and we did have to anticipate on major items. A difficult item to obtain, for instance, was armored power cable which contained steel, lead, zinc, copper, and jute. Our experience was that government and industry did remarkably well in keeping us supplied and operating.

As for manpower, we had to let our rank-and-file men go when their draft numbers came up. Key top men were deferred, in most cases, upon petition and representation from the company. The

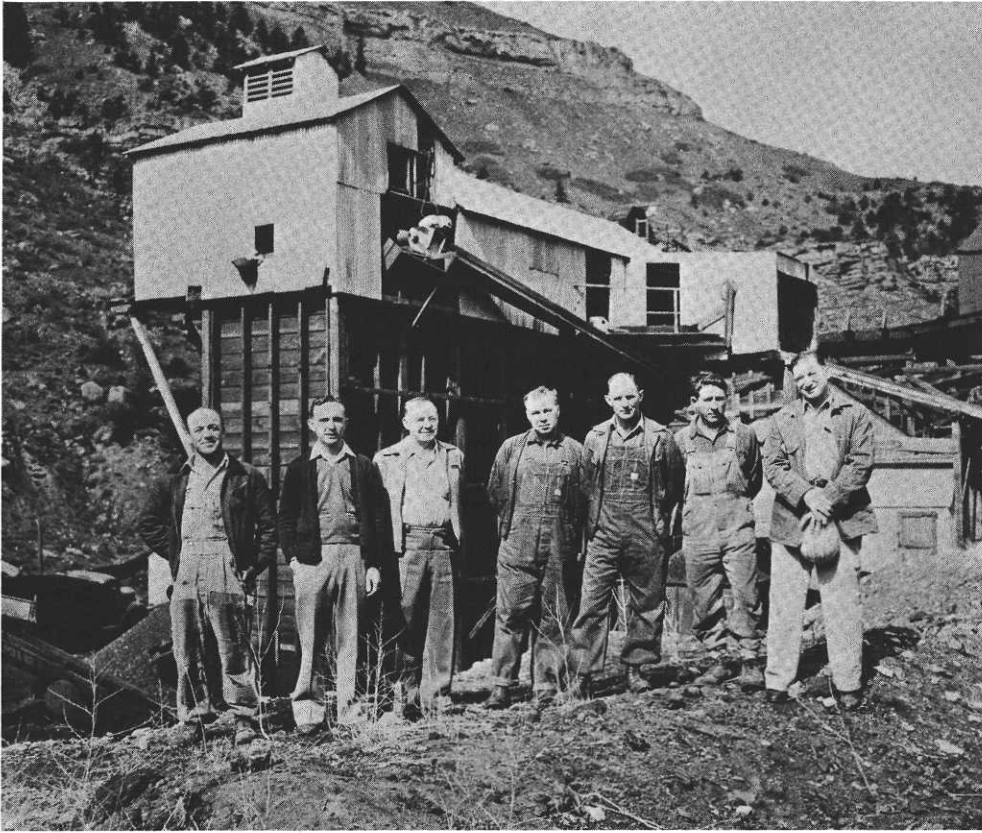
government gave us suggested methods of scheduling in advance our manpower requirements and position. They also gave courses and developed trainers within industry and among management. Courses included job instruction, job methods, job relations, and program development. These courses, in our area, reached their peak late in the war. Wonderful in conception and simplicity, the courses formed the basis of much development after the war.

It was difficult to replace our losses of men to the draft and to normal attrition. We had to equip and start up our bunkhouse and boardinghouse again. Some, or most, of the men who came rustling for jobs were marginal workers or were drifters. So scarce were men that Evan Jones, our mine clerk, and I made a recruiting trip through Sanpete County and down as far as Richfield. We had some handbills printed and put them in or on mailboxes in the towns and along the country roads. They told about our good jobs and conditions and where those interested could meet us. We picked up a few men, a couple of them good, experienced ones.

During the war, in 1944, we bought our first modern 7B rope-type Sullivan shortwall undercutter. The high seam mines were going to mobile rubber-tired undercutters (10RUs), and this was releasing 7Bs. They were great machines for us — fast. The rule of thumb was that your cutter bar could be as long as the seam was high. Our seam was three and a half feet high. We figured we could trim the ten-foot cutter bar down to six feet or so in our shop, but the mine staff decided to try it first at ten feet. They found they could get away with it. The coal shot satisfactorily. Here was 50 percent more coal per cut and much faster. We picked up several more 7Bs as we went along. We now had faster cutting, faster drilling, and mechanical loading.

Taking up the two to two and a half feet of tough sandstone bottom (floor) everywhere our entries went was hard, slow work and had to be kept up. In 1945 we learned about a used Goodman hydraulic shovel. It was a heavy brute of a machine. We bought it for a song and later another one for parts. It worked like a giant hand shovel. It would lift the shovel full of rock, turn around, and push the rock off into the gob. Almost human.

In November 1945 Ezra Thompson, our president and owner, had a heart attack and died. In all the years since 1932 we had talked over in detail our problems and our solutions. His drive and decisiveness and his enthusiasm and courage carried us over many



Peerless supervisory staff, from left: James Ori, night foreman; Albert Fossat, assistant clerk; Evan Jones, chief clerk; Charles Jones, outside preparation foreman; Henry Draper, master mechanic; Vic Fossat, mine foreman; Louis Vuksinick, superintendent.

rough spots. He had a unique way in his relationships with employees and dealers or anyone — young or old, black or white. His standards of friendly, yet dignified, treatment of people rubbed off on others and filtered down through the organization.

We were now on our own. His wife became president; I was the secretary; and with his children, Ezra Junior, and Enid, the four of us formed the Board of Directors.

It is difficult and costly to run the “outside” works, especially the tipple, at night. Although some large preparation plants are set up for multiple shifts, it would have been hard, if not impossible, for us to dump, screen, clean, and load coal at night and especially to balance our railroad and truck business. If only we had about a hundred or so mine cars, we thought. We had the space and trackage in the lower seam to store them.

In March 1946 our superintendent and I went to Ohio to see 100 three-ton cars at the M. A. Hanna Coal Company, a huge operator. The cars were strewn on a muddy hillside. Their paint was gone and they were rusty. Both the cars and our tippie would have to be modified to accommodate them. I was bearish about the deal, but our superintendent was in favor. He said that if we didn't buy these we would never have any good cars. Without different cars our plans for a big night shift would never materialize. I knew he was right. Harry Draper and his mechanics liked the cars when they arrived at Peerless, and they knew just what to do. It was a beautiful sight, on my next trip down, to see some of the cars cleaned up and painted yellow and all the fittings adjusted.

A young mechanical engineer from Salt Lake planned the tippie changes to accommodate the new cars, and our men did the work. Nearly half a day's production could be mined and loaded and stored in the mine at night. The tippie could take all the coal we could throw at it next morning.

A person standing at the tippie and looking up the tramway might wonder what would happen if a trip of mine cars broke loose from the cable and ran away down the tramway. It happened. As the cars go onto the tippie bridge there is a bend or offset in the tracks to prevent a runaway from going through the tippie. This offset worked, for when a trip of six empty cars ran away on one occasion they jumped the track at the bend and sailed off the bridge. They sailed right over a truckload of powder that was being unloaded at the foot of the tramway, coming so close that they tore a board off the top of a box of powder. What might have happened had they hit a few inches lower is beyond comprehension. The cars, pinned and chained together, hurtled on, striking a miner's new Ford pickup and damaging two or three passenger cars. They crossed the highway, swinging and fishtailing, went over the railroad tracks, over a dirt bank, and finally stopped by the side of our slack bin. Even now I can only shake my head in amazement. Our insurance company had stipulated that explosives would not be permitted in the vicinity of the tippie. After we had explained that we must at times load powder there for transportation via mine cars to our magazine located halfway to the mine, the insurance company had relented and inserted in the policy a substitute provision that we would have explosives there only "in such quantities and at such times as the exigencies of the business require." One load of powder maybe every two or

three months. One runaway in over twenty years. Impossible odds. But that's coal mining.

In 1946 Louis Vuksinick, who had succeeded Harry Greenall as mine foreman, was promoted to superintendent. He had worked under Jack Jones, a great underground man, and under Geno Ori and Harry Greenall, both top-flight men. He had survived the tough bottom seam and had worked all the shifts, hand-loaded coal, shot and hand-loaded rock, and drilled. He had also been a machine helper, loaderhead man, motorman, material man, shot firer, pillar man, and even rock duster. Vic Fossat, a young but capable and experienced man, was appointed mine foreman.

A nice part of life at Peerless in our time were the dances. The employees fixed up an old stone building near the highway that had been the camp store. The company supplied the material. A new hardwood floor was put in, among other improvements. We found a good used jukebox, and records were provided by the mine employees. Polka music was often played. The favorite dance tunes were recordings by Frankie Yankovic and his orchestra. The most popular tune was "Charlie Was a Boxer." Other favorites were "Just Because" and "You'll Be Sorry from Now on." Louis and Zelpha Vuksinick joined in the dances and other camp activities and events. They very generously sent me several great polka records that became a valued part of my collection.

Knowing the potential tonnage in our bottom seam (No. 3), and despite previous failures there, we were constantly looking for a means of working to produce reasonably clean coal at a livable cost. At first blush the Sullivan 10RU mobile, rubber-tired undercutter looked like a perfect answer. We visited a mine in West Virginia that was using the machine on a job similar to ours. With chalk we marked the coal face to show where our shale band was. We could not get the cutter bar into the shale band. That was that. Jeffrey's similar type cutter wouldn't do either. Finally we visited a mine at Johnstown, Pennsylvania, that was using Goodman's top-cutting shortwall. Hydraulic jacks positioned the whole machine. It fit our job, so we ordered one for delivery in several months at a cost of \$9,000.

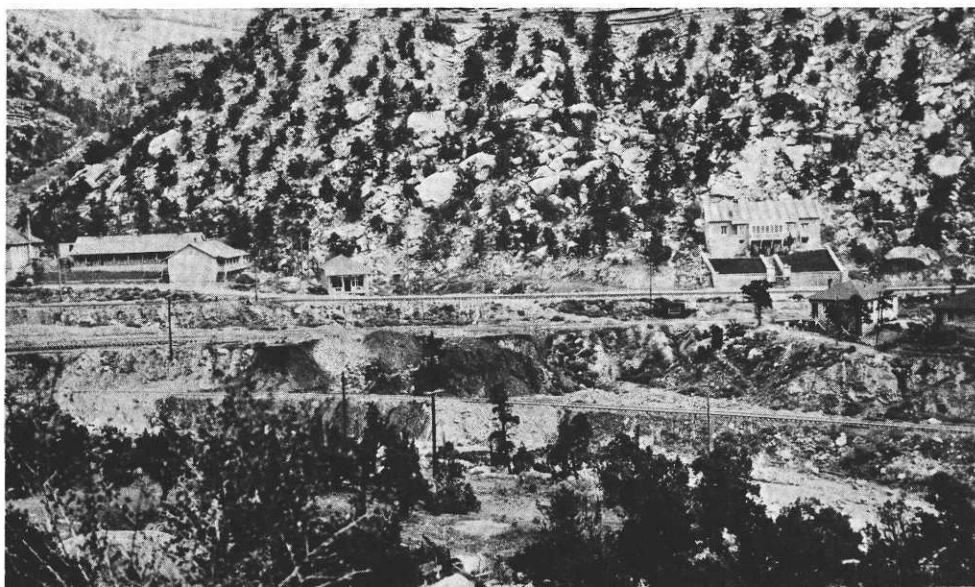
The final step in mechanization was a fast loader, Joy's 14BU. It was low, wide, and heavy, but it was fast — five tons a minute. All the elements in the mining cycle were now speeded up — cutting, drilling, loading, and conveying.

We made improvements in the preparation plant, too, including big bins and a big crusher to size lumps and take them down as far as 1½ by 3 inches. A smaller crusher would take 1½ by 3-inch nut down to slack. We could screen out 3/16 by 0-inch from our stoker coal. We also had a new tramp-iron magnet and new oil treating equipment.

Well equipped inside and outside, we also had excellent mine leadership and crew. We had survived the financial storms, paid our bills, and established bank credit. Now, however, we had to worry about coal reserves.

We hoped that the coal would continue through all our land to the northeast and east, but it didn't. It pinched down until it was only twenty-seven inches high in the northeast. This would just clear a shortwall mining machine. We stayed with it, hoping it would come up, but it didn't and we had to give up there.

We had three 40s (120 acres) in our dip country that we had leased from Utah Fuel Company. This was six years' work for us and hopefully more coal land beyond. We had high hopes for this dip area, although we knew that the Diamantis had struck a "want" or barren area in their workings to the east. No coal had formed in a



Partial view of old Peerless showing bunkhouse and store at left, cottage and new single dwellings at right. In 1953, its coal almost gone, the company liquidated its holdings, including the buildings at Peerless. Nothing now remains of the town in Spring Canyon, Carbon County.

“want” in the primeval swamp or forest. A pond or lake may have drowned out the vegetation, and when the area sank during the coal-forming process the pond or lake filled with onrushing dirt — thus a “want” in the coal seam, unknown until you hit it in mining or drilling. We hoped that the Diamanti “want” did not extend into our ground or that we could get around it or through it.

Louis Vuksinick called me one evening and said, “The coal is gone.” That was it. We diamond drilled and we drove in rock and we drove over into the Spring Canyon boundary on the west, all to no avail. This left us with only the dirty, tough lower seam and the remaining known reserves in the No. 2 seam.

On the remaining reserves in the No. 2 seam we did well. The modern equipment paid off, and we operated at a steady, albeit a modest profit until 1953. In the interim we looked in both the Book Cliffs and in the Wasatch Plateau for a “good proposition” within our capability. We found nothing to fit our situation.

Using our 712 Goodman topcutter we mined a quantity of coal from our No. 3 seam and had an exclusive dry run through the tipple on this coal. We cleaned it and sampled it for analysis. Carl Westerberg of Utah Fuel, their preparation engineer and a widely recognized expert, assisted us. Carloads of the various sizes were shipped to our retail yard in Salt Lake. When the results were in — mining problems, costs, preparation and quality factors, and finally markets — the company decided that the lower seam could not be successfully worked. With less than a year’s coal left in the No. 2 seam we decided to liquidate.⁵

I had the unhappy duty in March 1953 of driving to the mine and making the announcement. I shall never forget my feelings as I drove up Spring Canyon and stopped for a few minutes on a little rise before reaching Peerless. The sun was setting on the rocky cliffs of the canyon. Trails of smoke were rising from the chimneys of the houses in camp.

The mine staff under Evan Jones inventoried everything. With the help of Chet Whitelock of Payson we liquidated every nut and bolt, every house, every machine, rail, and timber. When everything was gone Chet shot down the portals of the mine and bulldozed dirt into the scale pits. A few concrete footings that had supported part

⁵ Over the years the Peerless mines produced 1.5 million tons in the old mine “A” seam, over 100,000 tons at new Peerless, and 1.9 million tons in the low seams, a total of approximately 3.5 million tons.

of the tipple remained and the rock wall by the cottage. Even that has now disappeared. Evan and Hazel Jones were the last to leave Peerless — on December 24, 1953.

By the following year the situation in the industry had changed. We could not then have liquidated the property nearly as well or as cleanly as we did.

Someone has said that every man has a story. I'm sure that is true. And as I said in the beginning, I think that every coal mine has a story and a personality. Beyond that, there is a romance and a fascination about coal mining that is hard to explain. Perhaps it is a combination of things: challenge, danger, gamble, capriciousness, mystery. Perhaps it is in dealing with great, even awesome forces. Perhaps it is an awareness that you are putting your hand to something that nature was a hundred and fifty million years or so in making. Scientists have studied it and explained it and understand it. But I am sure that no man can fully grasp and encompass in his mind the dimensions of the growth in the primeval swamps and forests, the enormousness of the forces involved, the repetition of the process in the many seams, the uplifting and sinking of the earth's crust, and above all the eons of time. Many will see in it the hand of the Creator. Some will not see beyond the commercial aspects of it. Be that as it may, this is another age and against the great backdrop of ages past are men whose lives are touched and molded and who rise and fall and develop and break. Men, using the tools and resources of their time, worked and struggled, often doggedly day by day and then so heroically in times of danger or crisis. Perhaps from this comes the greatest fascination of all.

If someone has never seen and felt all this in a coal mine, he could. It's there.

UTAH

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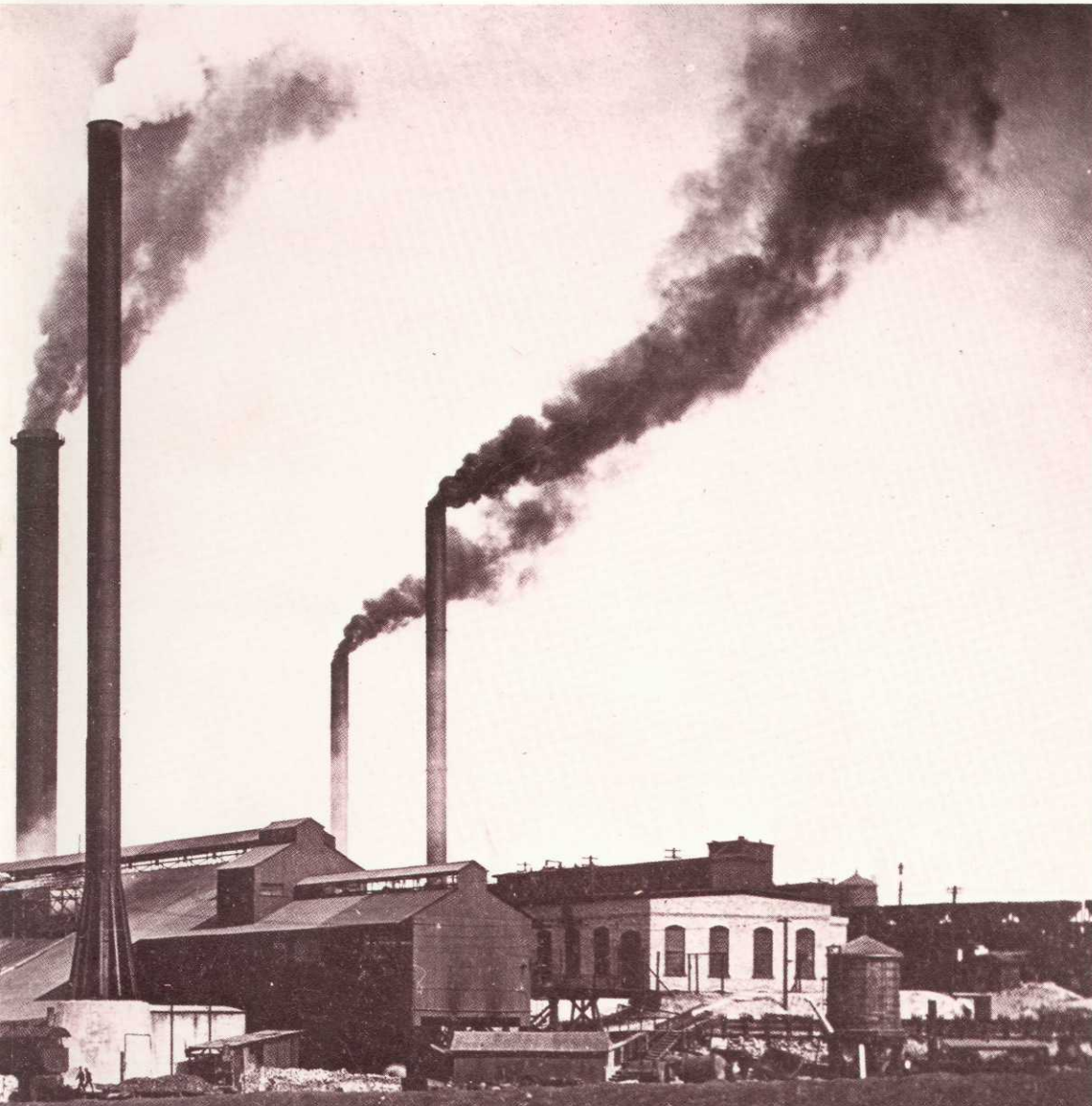
THE COVER *The U.S. Mining and Smelting Company smelter in Midvale, Utah, ca. 1905. The smelter closed in 1908 following a court suit brought by area farmers. USHS collections.*

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The Entrepreneurial Spirit