

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

POCAHONTAS MINE NO. 1

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: POCAHONTAS MINE NO. 1

Other Name/Site Number: Baby Mine/Pocahontas Exhibition Mine

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: Route 659, Reedsville Hollow

Not for publication: N/A

City/Town: Pocahontas

Vicinity: N/A

State: VA County: Taswell Code: 185

Zip Code: 24635

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X
Public-Local:
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property

Building(s):
District: X
Site:
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

2
1
3

Noncontributing

buildings
sites
structures
objects
0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 3

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

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**4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Certifying Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Commenting or Other Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

**5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_\_ Entered in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_ Determined eligible for the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_ Determined not eligible for the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_ Removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_ Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

Historic:	Industry/Extraction	Sub:	Extractive Facility
Current:	Recreation & Culture Commerce/Trade	Sub:	Museum Warehouse

**7. DESCRIPTION**

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: No Style

**MATERIALS:**

Foundation: Stone  
Walls: Stone, Brick  
Roof: Asphalt  
Other:

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form **Page 4****Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**

Pocahontas Mine Number 1 is an inactive semi-bituminous coal mine located on the west side of Tazewell County Route 659 near where it intersects with Tazewell County Route 644 within the town of Pocahontas, Virginia. It is situated in an area of low mountain ridges and hills in northeastern Tazewell County less than one mile from the West Virginia state line. The mine opening is at an elevation of about 2400 feet above sea level, with adjacent hills cresting at 2700 feet. It is located at the southern terminus of Reedsville Hollow, historically known as Coal Branch Valley. Today the area is known as Machine Shop Hollow for the machine shops built there around 1920 to repair machinery for the mines. A small stream, Coal Branch, runs along the east side of Route 659 and joins Laurel Fork approximately 100 yards downstream from the mine. Laurel Fork meanders through the town of Pocahontas, joining the Bluestone River about a mile across the state line in West Virginia.

An extensive mine dump, at least 100 feet high in most places, was developed over the years on the opposite side of the stream from the mine. During the period of the dump's development it covered up hundreds of coke ovens, which for many years were quite productive and a vital part of the mine operation. They had been mostly phased out by obsolescence by 1920. While the dump area has been vegetatively reclaimed, that area bears no resemblance to its historic appearance when there were in that location over 400 coke ovens and miles of railroad tracks laid side by side to move the coal to the ovens and to move both coal and coke to market. The ruins of three coke ovens, overgrown with trees, are all that remain today to remind one of the extremely important role the production of coke played in the operation of the mines.

Within two years from the opening of the first mine, Mine Number 1, there were two additional openings, the West and East mines. There had also been constructed a coal tippie for loading the coal into railroad cars, as well as hundreds of beehive coke ovens. An additional tippie was added soon thereafter. The tipples are gone. Railroad tracks passing under the tippie to the West Mine have been removed and the space allotted to making Route 659 a two-lane road, rather than one-way which existed during the mining days. The entrances to both the West and East mines have been sealed and are heavily overgrown with vegetation.

The overall scene has changed greatly since the mine closed in 1955. What remains of the historic scene are three contributing resources: Mine Number 1, the ca. 1900 fan house, and the ca. 1906 power house with a stone bathhouse added later to the rear. Attached to the bathhouse, and considered part of the same structure, are the ruins of the former steam generating plant. Within the ruins can still be found a large boiler and steam pipes. The fan house serves as the entrance to the Pocahontas Exhibition Mine and the office for the staff who provide visitor services. The power house/bathhouse is owned by Consolidation Coal Company, Inc. The power house is used as a warehouse by Consolidation Coal and the bathhouse is used as rest rooms for visitors to the Exhibition Mine. The mine and fan house are owned by the Pocahontas Land Corporation, a subsidiary of Norfolk and Southern Railway (formerly Norfolk and Western), and leased to the town of Pocahontas for tours.

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The entrance to Mine Number 1, Baby Mine, is topped by a brick archway with rough stone walls the height of the top of the archway extending out approximately ten feet on either side. The fan house is a brick and stone structure with a rear tower and a large arched opening. It is covered with an asphalt roof. Near the entrance to the fan house is a 13-foot high outcropping of Pocahontas seam no. 3 coal. This feature can be seen without entering the Exhibition Mine. The powerhouse is a large one-story structure with stone walls and a steep hipped roof with clerestory lighting topped with another hip roof. The attached bathhouse is a one-story stone structure with a shed roof.

Mine Number 1, so named because of its being the first commercial mine opened in the Pocahontas coal field, achieved another "first" in 1938 when it became the first exhibition coal mine to be opened in the United States. At that time, active mining ceased in part of the mine and passages connecting that section with the West Mine were sealed allowing mining to continue in the remainder of the original mine. The fan house opening became the entrance and the original mine opening became the exit for people touring the mine by way of automobile or walking. Visitors touring the mine today still enter through the fan house opening and exit through the original entrance, but cover the one-quarter mile tour by walking rather than driving. Automobiles were discontinued about 1970 because of the damage auto emissions were causing to the roof of the mine.

Since the Exhibition Mine first opened in 1938 more than one million people have visited it. The mine is very popular with local schools extending as far away as Roanoke, Virginia. In fact, a tour through the Exhibition Mine is a requirement all students of the Tazewell County schools must meet before they graduate from high school. Tours for school groups are designed primarily for grades 5 & 6.<sup>1</sup> The 45-minute escorted tour of the mine acquaints visitors with an account of the geologic history of coal formation using outstanding examples of fossilized ferns and large trees to illustrate that story, tells the history of coal mining and coke production at Pocahontas, and provides an opportunity for visitors to see various pieces of mining equipment and exhibits which explain the evolution of the extraction process. On display are tools ranging from basic hand held tools to the powerful electric coal cutting machines. All aspects of work in the mines are covered including discussions on safety, with reference to mine tragedies such as that which occurred in 1884 when 114 miners were killed by an explosion. The tour also covers the moving of the coal through the mine beginning with the early years when mules hauled the coal to the tippie where it was loaded into rail cars. By the mid-1890s, the mine was using a combination of mules and electric motor driven cars to move the coal. By the time the tour ends visitors have acquired a fairly comprehensive understanding of Pocahontas coal from its formation to its mining and its importance in the industrial development of this country.

The tour allows visitors to see first hand the actual mine with its 13-foot seam of glistening semi-bituminous coal made world famous because of its superior qualities. The Pocahontas Exhibition Mine is open daily from the last Saturday in April through the last Saturday in October.

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<sup>1</sup> Woody Milliner, Interview with John W. Bond, at the site, August 11, 1993 and numerous telephone conversations between that date and October 20, 1993.

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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide: \_\_\_ Locally: \_\_\_

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A X B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D \_\_\_

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):

A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D \_\_\_ E \_\_\_ F \_\_\_ G \_\_\_

NHL Criteria: 1

NHL Theme(s):

- XII. Business
  - A. Extractive and Mining Industries
    - 3. Other Metals and Minerals
- XIII. Science
  - B. Earth Science
    - 2. Geology

Areas of Significance: Industry

Period(s) of Significance: 1882-1943

Significant Dates: 1883, 1887, 1893

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: N/A

## State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

### SUMMARY

Pocahontas Mine Number 1 is located in the low hills of northeastern Tazewell County, Virginia, within the town of Pocahontas and less than one mile from the West Virginia state line. It is nationally significant in the history of earth sciences and business because of its association with economic geology. The discovery of an extraordinarily thick seam of very high quality semi-bituminous coal in this section of southwestern Virginia led to the broad surveying of coal resources there and in southern West Virginia and to the realization that there was at that location one of the richest coal fields in the United States, if not the world, waiting to be developed. This coal field, known in Virginia as Pocahontas and in West Virginia as Flat-Top, soon came to be known as the Pocahontas-Flat-Top coal field.<sup>1</sup>

Mining engineers, in particular, realized the value of what had been discovered and, in the 1870s, began a vigorous campaign to entice eastern entrepreneurs to invest in opening a mine in an area known as Powell's Bottom in northeastern Tazewell County and to develop a rail line to carry that coal to market. The opening of what became known as Pocahontas Mine Number 1 in the spring of 1882 led to the completion in March 1883 of a branch line of the Norfolk and Western Railroad from Radford, Virginia, to the new town of Pocahontas and to the mine.

The extension of the railroad to Pocahontas provided the means of getting the coal to market, hence, allowing the quality of the coal to speak for itself as it was being used and compared with other coals, especially those coming from the Pennsylvania mines and from the Midlothian mines near Richmond, Virginia. The extent of the Pocahontas-Flat-Top coal field, as well as the superior quality of the coal coming from the Pocahontas mine, were facts that were becoming well-known to eastern financiers, notably several wealthy individuals from Philadelphia. Finding interested investors from the North was fortuitous because Virginia was still recovering from economic problems resulting from the Civil War.

The knowledge that such a great expanse of coal reserves existed in the Pocahontas-Flat-Top coal field brought experienced mine operators and miners from Pennsylvania as well as from Europe to the area. Soon the operation at Pocahontas had a mix of ethnic groups: native black and white Virginians and West Virginians, as well as Hungarians, Germans, and Welsh.

From the time of the opening of the Pocahontas mine and the coming of the railroad it was only a short period until mines began to open in rapid succession elsewhere in the richest coal field in the country. Pocahontas Mine No. 1 is especially important because it was the catalyst that resulted in a frenzy of mining activity in the region; within 12 years from the opening of that first mine there were 37 additional mines operating in the Pocahontas-

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<sup>1</sup> Persifor Frazer, Jr., "Classification of Coals," contained within Andrew S. McCreath, *Second Report of Progress in the Laboratory of the Second Geological Survey of Pennsylvania*, (Harrisburg, Pa.: Board of Commissioners, 1879), p. 131. Frazer was assistant geologist on the staff of J. Peter Lesley, Director of the Second Geological Survey of Pennsylvania. Frazer classified semi-bituminous coal as that coal having between 12 and 18 percent volatile matter or gases. Andrew McCreath was the chief chemist on the Pennsylvania Survey.

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Flat-Top coal field.<sup>2</sup> Although expansion of that coal field came at a time when the northern coal fields were adequately supplying the national demand, Pocahontas coal had several things in its favor when it came to the competition from established coal fields. It was a superior coal which did not produce smoke or foul odors as was the case of most bituminous coals—hence, the title "smokeless" coal—and the absence of impurities made it an outstanding coal for producing coke. It was readily accessible due to the way in which the seams were laid down, allowing for drift mines rather than shaft mines, and it was an exceptionally thick seam, presenting fewer problems in extraction than in the more shallow seams. Finally, it could be mined at a lesser cost because of a combination of the above factors and the availability of cheap labor.

Simultaneous with the opening of new mines in the region was the development of an important coke industry. The coal extracted from the Pocahontas mine was the first in the region to be used in the production of coke. By May 12, 1883, 420 beehive coke ovens existed at Pocahontas.<sup>3</sup> Pocahontas coal was of such high quality that it produced a grade of coke that was highly sought after in this country and abroad for the manufacture of steel and for steam generation. Pocahontas coal and coke were so much in demand, particularly during the last decade of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century, that one can say that Pocahontas coal/coke played an extremely important role in the industrial and economic development of the United States.<sup>4</sup>

As the mines developed in the Flat-Top Mountain area of Mercer, McDowell, and Wyoming Counties in West Virginia, the Norfolk and Western Railroad was quick to extend its rail lines to the mines in order to deliver the highly prized coal and coke to eastern markets and to Norfolk, Virginia for foreign export. By 1892 the Norfolk and Western had not only reached the mines in the Pocahontas-Flat-Top coal field, it had built lines into the coal fields of Logan (including what became Mingo County in 1895) and Wayne counties in West Virginia and had reached the Ohio River at Kenova, West Virginia. Unquestionably, the opening of Pocahontas Mine No. 1 directly led to the western expansion of the Norfolk and Western rail lines. Within nine years after reaching Pocahontas, the Norfolk and Western had gained access to the Ohio River and had opened up the upper Mid-West as a market place for Pocahontas-Flat-Top coal and coke.<sup>5</sup>

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- <sup>2</sup> Isaiah A. Welch, "The Pocahontas-Flat-Top coal field: A Brief History of Its Location and Development," *Daily Telegraph, Industrial Edition*, Bluefield, West Virginia, November 1, 1896, p. 1.
  - <sup>3</sup> Map, "Plot of Tract of Land Conveyed by the S.W.Va. Imp Co. By Deed of May 12, 1883 to the Norfolk and Western RR. Co."
  - <sup>4</sup> Michael E. Workman, "Historical Context for the Coal Heritage Survey," Institute for History of Technology and Industrial Archeology, Morgantown, West Virginia. June 1991, p. 2.
  - <sup>5</sup> Jack M. Jones, *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas, Virginia* (Lynchburg, Va.: Jack M. Jones, 1983), p. 18.

Development of the mining/coke operations at Pocahontas in southwestern Virginia and the 37 other mining/coke operations in the Pocahontas-Flat-Top region in West Virginia contributed greatly to the settlement and economic development of a large section of sparsely populated and economically underdeveloped section of Appalachia.<sup>6</sup>

## HISTORY

The presence of coal in southwestern Virginia and what became southern West Virginia was first written up by Dr. Thomas Walker, a physician, surveyor, and adventurer from Albermarle County, Virginia, following a surveying trip in the spring of 1750 to what is now Kentucky, southwestern Virginia, and southern West Virginia. Walker did not do much more than acknowledge the existence of coal. His writings, however, did get the attention of mining engineers more than 100 years later.<sup>7</sup>

The first serious attention given to coal in the general area of the present day Pocahontas-Flat-Top region was that provided by Virginia's first state geologist, William Barton Rogers. He did so in the first year's report of his six-year survey, undertaken from 1836 to 1841. Rogers identified an area, including the "great Flat Top mountain," as belonging "to a group of formations distinguished not only in America but through the world, as being the chief depositories of bituminous coal."<sup>8</sup>

While Rogers' work was not widely circulated, it was well known to the geologist J. Peter Lesley, the country's leading authority on coal. That recognition came from Lesley's authorship in 1856 of the definitive work on coal, *Manual of Coal and its Topography*,<sup>9</sup> and his work in surveying the Pennsylvania coal fields under the direction of William Rogers' brother, Henry D. Rogers. Henry Rogers was the Director of the First Geological Survey for the state of Pennsylvania at the same time as his brother was doing the survey for Virginia. Through the close collaboration between the brothers and much comparison of what was being discovered, there was general understanding among the respective survey staffs of the resources in both states. After publication of his *Manual of Coal*, Lesley was widely sought after in this country and in Canada as a consultant on coal.

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<sup>6</sup> David A. Edwards, John S. Salmon, "Draft National Historic Landmark Nomination, Pocahontas Historic District," July 1992, pp. 62-63. Quoted from Jerry Bruce Thomas, "Coal Country: The Rise of the Southern Smokeless Coal Industry and Its Effect on Area Development, 1872-1910," pp. 76-77.

<sup>7</sup> Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> William Barton Rogers, *Report of the Geological Reconnaissance of the State of Virginia; Made under the Appointment of the Board of Public Works* (Philadelphia, Pa.: DeSilver, Thomas and Co., 1836), p. 117.

<sup>9</sup> J.P. Lesley, *Manual of Coal and Its Topography* (Philadelphia, Pa.: J.B. Lippincott and Co., 1856); Benjamin Smith Lyman, "Biographical Notice of J. Peter Lesley," *Transactions of the American Institute of Mining Engineers*, October 1903, pp. 13-15.

Because of Lesley's reputation as a geologist, he was engaged by the Shenandoah Railroad in 1870 to examine a part of the Allegheny Mountain Range between the New River in Virginia and the Tennessee line "for the purpose of determining the nearest possible approach to a workable coal region of a contemplated railway from Harper's Ferry on the Potomac to Knoxville in Tennessee."<sup>10</sup>

Lesley referred to the area that is now Pocahontas as part of the Abb's Valley coal fields. He noted that, "to get over into Abb's Valley coal fields, two mountains must be crossed, or rather, steep stony hills, consisting of all the formations from the coal down to the limestone." He referred to a mine being dug by James Smith close to the Jefferson and Tug/Sandy Turnpike. Ten miles east of Smith's mine he observed a coal bed being mined which he judged to be the same bed and that it was ten feet thick.

While Lesley did not make specific mention of having seen a coal mine at what became Pocahontas, it is obvious from his report that he was broadly familiar with coal resources in the general area. He spoke of a coal bed being dug into by the farmers at several places on the hillsides of Laurel Fork and that a Mr. Cochrane had dug coal on the Laurel Fork where it was a good seven feet thick. "From these coal outcroppings just back of Abb's Valley," he went on to say, "the coal field of West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky extends, without a break, to the Ohio River." He identified the south edge of this coal field as being the north ridge of Abb's Valley. The town of Pocahontas extends into this ridge and is only two or three miles from the eastern end of Abbs Valley. Lesley's recommendation for developing a rail line to reach this coal field was to have it enter the western end of Abb's Valley, making connections with Jeffersonville (Tazewell).<sup>11</sup>

The person credited with discovering the Pocahontas coal seam was a Civil War veteran and experienced miner by the name of Jordan Nelson, who moved in 1866 from Boone County, West Virginia, to a farm in northeastern Tazewell County, Virginia. Nelson found on his farm an outcropping of coal measuring 13 feet in thickness. He began to use it in a blacksmith shop he operated there and sold some coal to neighbors for their home use.<sup>12</sup>

The existence of the unusually thick seam of coal on Nelson's property came to the attention of Staunton, Virginia mining engineer Jedediah Hotchkiss. Hotchkiss, also a Civil War veteran, was familiar with Rogers' 1836 report<sup>13</sup> which called attention to rich coal resources in the Flat Top Mountain region and he probably was familiar with Lesley's April 1871 report of his visit of the previous year to Abb's Valley which was published by the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia.

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<sup>10</sup> J.P. Lesley, "The Geological Structures of Tazewell, Russell and Wise Counties, in Virginia," *American Philosophical Society, Pamphlets*, v. 392, no. 5 (Philadelphia, Pa.: American Philosophical Society, 1871), p. 1. Lesley made his report to the American Philosophical Society on April 21, 1871. He noted that this paper was a continuation of his description of the "South Virginia Coal Region of Montgomery and Wythe Counties, read before the Society in 1862."

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>12</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, Bluefield, West Virginia, Special Centennial Edition Honoring the Pocahontas coal field, 1983. p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> George P. Merrill, *Contributions to a History of American State Geological and Natural History Surveys* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1909), Smithsonian Bulletin No. 109, p. 512. In 1884 Hotchkiss edited Rogers' original survey reports and had them published by D. Appleton & Co.

The Jordan Nelson coal mine was brought to the attention of an associate of Hotchkiss, Capt. Isaiah A. Welch, whom Hotchkiss had engaged to conduct a survey of mineral and timber resources in a 480-square mile tract of land in southern West Virginia known as the Wilson-Cary-Nichols land grant. Although Jordan Nelson's land was not part of the land grant, Welch thought it had relevance to what could be found elsewhere in the area. In his 1896 account of the broader survey Welch wrote of visiting Nelson and seeing for the first time the unusually thick seam of coal:

I entered upon the property of Laurel Creek, then the residence of Jourdan [sic] Nelson.... Mr. Nelson was a blacksmith and had outcropped a bed of coal for use in his shop, which when fully driven under cover, showed a thickness of thirteen feet.... Interested in such an unexpected discovery, the continuity of the bed was traced down the valley of the Bluestone River, having it outcropped at the various tributaries... which take their sources in the Great Flat-Top range.<sup>14</sup>

Welch immediately realized the significance of his unusual discovery. His findings confirmed what Rogers had said in his report and added to what Lesley had reported. It further strengthened Hotchkiss' theory that the West Virginia beds, which included the Pocahontas mine, were of the same geologic series as the bituminous coal recently discovered in western Pennsylvania. The Pocahontas-Flat-Top coals, however, were thicker and more practical than the Pennsylvania coals.<sup>15</sup> The way in which Pocahontas coal was laid down allowed for the development of drift mines where openings were made directly into the seams and extraction was done by tunnelling rather than having to dig a shaft. This meant that the Pocahontas coal could be extracted quickly and with considerably less labor costs. The thickness of the Pocahontas seam no. 3 coal was hard to believe because it was commonly understood among mining authorities that a bed of coal seldom exceeded six feet in thickness.<sup>16</sup> This led Welch to seek to determine just how extensive the seam was. His survey demonstrated that an extraordinarily rich coal field with potentially great financial profits had been discovered in Pocahontas and extended into southern West Virginia.

It was also realized at an early date that the Pocahontas coal burned unusually clean, with almost no smoke and no odor. The excessive smoke and the foul sulfuric odor which were associated with other bituminous coals made those coals considerably less desirable than the Pocahontas coal.<sup>17</sup> J. Peter Lesley in his *Manual of Coal* emphasized that where there are iron crystals in coal they are almost always sulphuret, and "Nothing is worse for the reputation of a mine than its being reputed to abound in crystals or nodules of iron pyrites." The presence of sulphur produced a "noisome smell of coal gas."<sup>18</sup> Fortunately, Pocahontas coal was free of iron and very low in sulphur, making it exceedingly well suited for producing coke.<sup>19</sup> Hence, a broader industrial use of Pocahontas coal was foreseen.

When Jedediah Hotchkiss and Isaiah Welch fully comprehended the potential of this vast

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<sup>14</sup> Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Salmon, *op. cit.*, p. 50. Quoted Thomas, "Coal Country," pp. 46-49.

<sup>16</sup> Lesley, *Manual of Coal and Its Topography*, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Jed. Hotchkiss, ed., "The Pocahontas Coal Mine Explosion," *The Virginias*, Serial No. 51, vo. 5.—No. 3, Staunton, Virginia, March 1884. p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Lesley, *Manual on Coal and Its Topography*, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Hotchkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

coal field they began to promote its development. Hotchkiss, especially, became an ardent promoter in this country and in England. He successfully brought the value of the coal to the attention of a Philadelphia entrepreneur, Thomas Graham, who already was a major stockholder in Virginia railroads. To attract potential developers, Hotchkiss sent samples of the coal to Philadelphia where Graham exhibited them at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876. Soon, Graham sent his son John to Tazewell County to investigate the coal field first hand.

Thomas Graham and three of his personal friends, J.D. Sargent, Richard Wood, and Dr. Louis Rodman, formed a syndicate for the purchase of coal lands in the Pocahontas area. To further the goals of his group, Graham was able to get the Virginia Legislature, on March 9, 1880, to charter the Southwest Virginia Improvement Company. Headquarters of the company was in Philadelphia.<sup>20</sup> Graham's group proceeded to buy up some of the best coal land around what became the Pocahontas area and began construction of a narrow gauge railroad from the New River in Virginia toward the coal field in northeast Tazewell County.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, Graham and his associates were acquiring controlling interest in the failing Atlantic, Mississippi and Ohio Railroad, which had been established by a group of Virginians to operate across Virginia from Norfolk to Bristol.<sup>22</sup> The AM&O Railroad soon passed through foreclosure into the hands of the Philadelphia banking house of E.W. Clark and Company, with Frederick J. Kimball, President of the Shenandoah Valley Railroad, being one of the partners.<sup>23</sup> The newly acquired railroad was reorganized into the Norfolk and Western Railway, and Frederick Kimball became the dominant personality in the new organization.

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<sup>20</sup> Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Nan Rickey, "Draft Special Resource Study, Reconnaissance Survey, Bramwell, West Virginia" (Philadelphia, Pa.: National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, 1992), p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Barnett, "The Railroad Connection," *Bramwell Aristocrat*, Summer 1989, p. 1.; Jones, *op. cit.* p. 25. It was the Shenandoah Railroad which in 1870 engaged J. Peter Lesley to survey portions of southwestern Virginia for potential railroad development to the coal fields in that region.

Kimball was so impressed with what he had heard about the coal fields which Isaiah Welch had surveyed and which had been so diligently promoted by Jedediah Hotchkiss that he visited the region in May 1881. He was able to see for himself the incredible 13-foot coal seam at Jordan Nelson's and inspected part of what Welch had surveyed elsewhere in the area.<sup>24</sup>

Realizing the need to provide a transportation link for this great coal field, Kimball was instrumental in having the Norfolk and Western purchase the road bed Thomas Graham's group had already gotten underway for a narrow gauge railroad to the coal field. In November 1881, a partnership was formed between Norfolk and Western and the group headed by Thomas Graham. The new firm took the name of the Southwest Virginia Improvement Company. At the time of the merger the railroad and the coal land came under the same ownership. Soon the Norfolk and Western began construction of a 70-mile branch line from the main line at Radford, Virginia to the mine, utilizing the road bed recently purchased from Thomas Graham and partners.<sup>25</sup>

The next step in opening the Pocahontas coal field was to select someone to supervise the opening of a mine and to direct all that entailed including developing a town to provide housing for the workers and services for the mine and the residents. For this complex job the Southwestern Virginia Improvement Association selected as its Superintendent of Mines, 27-year-old William A. Lathrop, a mining and civil engineering graduate of Lehigh University of Easton, Pennsylvania. Lathrop and his wife, Harriet Eliza, arrived in Abb's Valley on November 26, 1881, boarding with a local family until quarters closer to the coal field could be located.<sup>26</sup>

For a town site, Lathrop selected a valley on the Laurel Fork of the Bluestone River, about a mile east of where he proposed opening the first mine. The site chosen for the town consisted of bottomland covered with trees and a farmstead called Powell's Bottom, sometimes described as being an "impenetrable jungle of hemlock and rhododendron."<sup>27</sup> The new mine superintendent worked with architect C.W. Bolton, another transported Pennsylvanian, in laying out the town and producing drawings for workers' houses, various mining related structures including the fan house, the tipple and coke ovens, and whatever else was needed to get the mining operation underway.

Workers had to be recruited. There were Hungarians, Welsh, and Germans coming from the mines in Pennsylvania. Others were immigrants directly from Germany and Hungary who were recruited at the point of their entry into the United States at Castle Garden in New York City. Upon arrival in northeastern Tazewell County, most were put to work opening Mine Number 1, the "Baby Mine," in the spring of 1882.<sup>28</sup> While the miners were opening the first commercial mine in the Pocahontas coal field other workers were clearing the land and working at the sawmill cutting lumber for all of the construction getting underway.

On June 30, 1882, even before the first house was finished, the town was officially named Pocahontas when postal authorities approved a post office by that name. Unofficially it had been known by that name since the previous year. In October 1882, the first house was

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<sup>24</sup> Salmon, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 17; Salmon, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

completed and the mine superintendent, William Lathrop, and his wife moved in.<sup>29</sup>

While mining and town building were underway in Pocahontas, workers were busily engaged in extending the Norfolk and Western Railway from the main line at Radford, Virginia, to Pocahontas. That long awaited day finally came and amidst great celebration the first train arrived at Pocahontas on March 10, 1883.

By the time of the arrival of that first train, William Lathrop's labor force had mined 40,000 tons of coal and piled it in Coal Branch Valley.<sup>30</sup> As early as January 1883 the miners were producing 1,000 to 1,200 tons of coal per day. By that same date, the tippie and railroad sidings had been completed and construction of 200 coke ovens was well underway.<sup>31</sup> The first railroad car of Pocahontas Mine Number 1 coal was loaded on March 12, 1883, shipped to Norfolk, and presented to Mayor William Lamb by Frederick J. Kimball, President of the Norfolk and Western. Lamb, a coal dealer, readily foresaw the impact the opening of the Pocahontas coal field and the extension of the Norfolk and Western railroad line would have upon his city. Lamb's prediction that Norfolk would become "the most important coaling station on the Atlantic Coast" became a reality.<sup>32</sup>

By mid-May 1883, the Southwest Virginia Improvement Company had opened the East Mine across Coal Branch creek from Pocahontas Mine Number 1, had completed approximately 420 beehive coke ovens, and had developed extensive railroad sidings.<sup>33</sup> The first commercial shipment of coal and coke went from Pocahontas to the Crozer Iron and Steel Company of Roanoke, Virginia, in July 1883.<sup>34</sup> By the end of the first full year of operation, the Southwest Virginia Improvement Company had shipped 103,618 tons of coal and 19,805 tons of coke.<sup>35</sup>

With one mine successfully operating, interest intensified in the opening of additional mines in the same coal field and extending the rail lines. Much of this activity was coordinated by an associated land owning company. The pioneer land owner in what became known as the Pocahontas-Flat-Top coal field was the Southwest Virginia Improvement Company, which from 1880 to 1883 purchased about 40,000 acres of land in Tazewell County, Virginia and McDowell and Mercer Counties in West Virginia. Beginning in 1883, various other land companies were established with the founding of the Flat-Top Land Trust with offices in Pocahontas. It was soon determined that because most of the coal lands were located in West Virginia a more appropriate location for the principal land holding company would be a short distance over the state line at a place where the town of Bramwell would be developed. Headquarters for the land office was established in what became Bramwell, West Virginia in 1884.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 15.

<sup>30</sup> *Daily Telegraph, Semi-Centennial Edition*, Bluefield, West Virginia, 1939. p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, Bluefield, W. Va., November 1, 1896. p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> Salmon, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>33</sup> Map, "Plot of Tract of Land Conveyed by the S.W.Va. Imp. Co. by deed of May 12, 1883 to the Norfolk and Western RR. Co."

<sup>34</sup> *Daily Telegraph, Semi-Centennial Edition*, 1939., p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, November 1, 1896, p. 13; Rickey, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

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A general consolidation of most of the land holding companies occurred in 1887, with the Flat-Top Trust assuming principal ownership of the lands held by the several land holding companies, including the Southwest Virginia Improvement Association. At that time, the Southwest Virginia Improvement Association became a lessee of the Flat-Top Trust, but continued to operate the Pocahontas Mine and to develop the town. In 1888 the name of the land company was changed to the Flat-Top Coal Land Association. The new company, still headed by the E.W. Clark interests of Philadelphia, now controlled most of the land in the vast Pocahontas-Flat-Top coal field, consisting of almost 200,000 acres.<sup>37</sup>

A separate subsidiary company of the Norfolk and Western, known as the Pocahontas Company, was established in 1895 to market the coal and manage the distribution of railroad cars for the shipment of coal and coke as well as to provide general fiscal management for the coal operators who had leased coal lands.<sup>38</sup> Construction of coke ovens was strongly encouraged, even in excess of the number to be actually fired, because the number of railroad cars allotted to a coal/coke operator depended upon the number of coke ovens at the particular operation.

Mining development in the Pocahontas-Flat-Top coal field expanded so greatly that by 1895 there were 30 coal/coke operations on the Elkhorn River on the west side of Flat-Top Mountain and eight on the east side of Flat-Top, including operations at Pocahontas, Virginia and Mill Creek and Simmons Creek in Mercer County, West Virginia. Isaiah Welch, who made the original survey of the Pocahontas coal field, estimated in 1896 that the coal field had 204,800 acres underlaid with coal averaging six feet in depth and that if the 1894 rate of extraction continued, it would take 474 years to exhaust the field.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, November 1, 1896. p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

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Simultaneous with the opening of mines in the Flat-Top Mountain area, the Norfolk and Western Railway was pushing its lines into that extended coal field. In 1887, N&W began its Ohio River extension and entered the Elkhorn Valley by tunneling through the Flat-Top Mountain. By 1892, it had entered the coal fields of Logan and Wayne counties and what became Mingo County. By that year it had also reached the Ohio River at Kenova, West Virginia, giving the "Pocahontas coal and coke an outlet to Ohio River boats and railroad connections to Chicago."<sup>40</sup> A writer for the *Norfolk and Western Magazine*, in addressing the "retirement" of Pocahontas No. 1 in 1955, attributed great significance to Jordan Nelson's mine and to the first commercial mine in Pocahontas: "And that hole in the hill is a direct cause of the Norfolk and Western's western expansion, the building of a branch up the New River which was to become the main line to Ohio."<sup>41</sup>

The rapid expansion of the coal/coke operation deep into the heart of southern West Virginia can be attributed to the excellent reputation Pocahontas coal and coke earned for their unusually high quality. In 1893, Pocahontas coke received a Medal for Special Merit at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. That award, extolling the qualities of Pocahontas coke, read:

The coke is of an excellent quality for Blast-Furnace purposes: it is hard and very strong. The cellular structure lets the gases into the interior and therefore, though it is porous, it bears heavy burdens. It is very resistant against abrasion and has only a very small amount of ashes. It is made near Pocahontas, out of the coal of the Flat-Top seam, the coal being neither crushed nor washed, but going direct into the coke ovens in the state in which it is lifted from the Colliery. It is coked in beehive ovens, the gases going into the air. The average coke is composed of 0.347 per cent water, 0.597 per cent volatile matter 92.550 per cent fixed carbon, 0.597 per cent sulphur, 5.747 per cent ash. The output in 1892 was 390,829 tons.<sup>42</sup>

This Special Merit Award called attention to the outstanding quality of Pocahontas coke. In summary, Pocahontas coke had all of the qualities desirable in the production of steel: it contained a maximum of fixed carbons and a minimum of impurities such as phosphorus and sulphur and was low in ash. Its low percentage of phosphorus and sulphur were "unsurpassed and enable[d] the Bessemer producer to meet the stringent requirements of the consumer even with an ore mixture otherwise considered 'off' in character."<sup>43</sup> Undeniably, the one thing which contributed most to the quality of Pocahontas coke was the quality of Pocahontas coal.

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<sup>40</sup> Arthur Peel, Letter to Sir Julian Pauncefote, February 1, 1894, *Daily Telegraph*, November 1, 1896, p. 11. Peel was at that time Second Secretary to the British Ambassador to the United States, Sir Julian Pauncefote.

<sup>41</sup> "Pocahontas No.1 'Retires'," *Norfolk and Western Magazine*, September 1955, reprint. No author or p.n.

<sup>42</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, November 1, 1896, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> George D. Hull, "Pocahontas Coke," *Daily Telegraph*, November 1, 1896, p. 15.

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There was no question as to the superiority of Pocahontas coal. That widely accepted assessment of the "Smokeless" Pocahontas coal was aggressively proclaimed by its principal distributor, Castner and Curran of Philadelphia, working with the local marketing staff of the Pocahontas Company in Bramwell, West Virginia. With branch offices in eight American cities such as New York, Boston, and Chicago, and in London, England, Castner and Curran proudly announced in its advertisement that,

Pocahontas coal today enjoys the unique distinction of being the only coal in the world that has been officially endorsed by the Governments of Great Britain and the United States.... It is conceded to be the Best Fuel for Locomotives and Stationary Engines, and its supremacy as a Steam Fuel is now established beyond dispute.

The advertisement went on to note that Pocahontas coal was being used exclusively by Cunard and White Star Steamship Companies and that the U.S. War Department had reported in February 1896 that tests made by that Department "show the Pocahontas to have an equivalence superior to any other coal tested by this office since 1880."<sup>44</sup>

While the high quality of Pocahontas coal was being praised by the Second Secretary of the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., it caused him to express concern that "our coal markets may some day be flooded with supplies from the fields of Virginia and other districts." Following a trip to the Pocahontas coal field, Second Secretary Arthur Peel reported on February 1, 1894, to his superior, British Ambassador Sir Julian Pauncefote, that:

A considerable increase in the production of coal from this region may be looked for in the future, as it is undoubtedly one of the best coals mined in America for the generation of steam, its superiority being shown by the extremely small quantity of ash and sulphur and very large percentage of carbon....<sup>45</sup>

Peel called attention to the importance the United States Government had placed upon Pocahontas coal by stating that in August 1889 a general order was issued by the U.S. Secretary of the Navy to the commandants of Navy Yards, directing them to use Pocahontas coal on all trial cruisers.

Accompanying Peel's report was a detailed chemical analysis of Pocahontas coal which had been made by Mr. J. Pattison of the Laboratory and Assay Office, Newcastle-on-Tyne, January 14, 1889. Pattison's analysis showed that the Pocahontas sample contained, carbon, 86.51 per cent; hydrogen, 4.44 per cent; oxygen, 4.95 per cent; nitrogen, 0.66 per cent;

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<sup>44</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, November 1, 1896. p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Peel, *op. cit.*

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sulphur, 0.61 per cent; ash, 1.54 per cent; and water, 1.29 per cent. The analyst's summary evaluation was, "This coal is of high calorific power, being in this respect equal to the best Welsh steam coal, and is excellent coal for steam-raising purposes."<sup>46</sup>

The British chemical analysis was overall better than the one produced by A.S. McCreath, chief chemist of the Second Geological Survey of Pennsylvania. McCreath compared a sample representing a complete section of 11'8" of the Pocahontas No. 3 seam (sample No.1), with bituminous coal from Midlothian, Virginia (near Richmond) (sample No. 2), and bituminous coal from Connellsville, Pennsylvania (sample No.3).

	<u>No. 1</u>	<u>No. 2</u>	<u>No. 3</u>
Volatile matter	20.738	38.23	30.107
Fixed carbon	73.728	54.27	50.616
Sulphur	0.618	1.54	0.784
Water	0.932	1.03	1.260
Ash	3.984	9.47	8.233

This analysis was included in a special report by Jedediah Hotchkiss on the catastrophic explosion which occurred in Pocahontas' East Mine on March 13, 1884, in which 114 miners lost their lives. The analysis was presented as a means of emphasizing the low percentage of volatile matter, consequently a lower level of dangerous gases. Hotchkiss called attention to the fact that Pocahontas coal had nearly 18 per cent less volatile matter than the Midlothian "which is so subject to fire-damp and in which there have been so many fatal explosions." He went on to say that the composition of the Pocahontas coal "removes it from the lists of highly self-inflammable or of self-gas-producing coals under ordinary atmospheric influences."<sup>47</sup> The exact cause of the explosion was never determined.

Following the explosion, the mine caught fire, making all attempts at rescuing the trapped miners futile. When it was realized that the fire was not going to burn itself out and there was no chance that any of the miners could be alive, Superintendent Lathrop ordered all entrances to the mine sealed and the mine flooded. It was a month before the water had drained out enough to open the passages and remove the bodies.<sup>48</sup> Pocahontas' cemetery on the hillside northeast of town was started with the burial of the 114 miners in a mass grave. That gravesite is a grim reminder of how dangerous work in the mines was. Lesser explosions occurred in the Pocahontas mines in 1901 and 1906, but nothing matched the magnitude of the 1884 tragedy.<sup>49</sup>

Even with the dangers inherent in coal mining, it continued to attract workers, many from abroad. A wide range of ethnic groups in addition to the native black and white Virginians and West Virginians worked the Pocahontas mines. At the outset, Hungarian, German, and Welsh miners were the principal foreign workers for the opening of the first mine. Later, Russians, Italians, and other immigrants from Eastern Europe joined the Pocahontas labor force.<sup>50</sup> A sense of the ethnic mix at Pocahontas can be achieved today by observing the names on the headstones and the design features of the grave markers in the Pocahontas Cemetery.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Hotchkiss, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> *Daily Telegraph, Semi-Centennial Edition*, 1939. p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-117.

<sup>50</sup> Salmon, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

Members of the different ethnic groups generally worked well together on the job and enjoyed good relations with each other in the community. Within the community, however, their housing was segregated, with the native whites occupying the choicest dwellings, the foreigners in those on the fringes, and the blacks in houses that were separated from the main cluster.<sup>51</sup> While segregation did not exist in the work place, the higher paying jobs were held by native whites. Some whites, however, were coal loaders, the lowest occupational category. Foreign workers were second on the labor hierarchy, holding some machine jobs and machine helper jobs as well as being loaders. Blacks occupied the lowest level jobs, almost always being coal loaders.<sup>52</sup>

Labor unrest was rare at Pocahontas, although it occurred in other locations within the Pocahontas-Flat-Top coal field. The first strike at Pocahontas was in November 1883. Mining Superintendent Lathrop granted part of the miners' demands, but they refused to work, so he shut down the mines. The strike lasted about ten days, then the men went back to work on Lathrop's terms.<sup>53</sup>

The first major strike in the Pocahontas-Flat-Top coal field was in 1895, lasting from April 21 until the end of August. It was the most serious work stoppage in this region up until World War I.<sup>54</sup> Although the strike was widespread in West Virginia, Pocahontas miners refused to strike. The unusual thing about this strike was that it was the end result of a chain reaction, starting with the Norfolk and Western lowering the minimum price guaranteed the operators for coal shipped to Norfolk. Consequently, the miners were cut in pay by as much as 20 per cent. It was more of a fight between the railroad and the coal operators, because the operators encouraged the miners to strike as leverage in dealing with the railroad.

The most far reaching impact the strike had upon the Pocahontas miners was the threat that the West Virginia miners would arm themselves and come to Pocahontas to force the miners there into joining the strike. Tension mounted between Virginia Governor Charles T. O'Ferrall and West Virginia Governor William MacCorkle when O'Ferrall requested MacCorkle to send West Virginia militia to the coal field and MacCorkle refused. Governor O'Ferrall responded by declaring martial law over Pocahontas and sent Virginia militia into the area to protect the miners and their families, as well as the mine and the railroad. The militia remained in Pocahontas for three months. The invasion from West Virginia never occurred. However, the governor and the residents of Pocahontas believed the threat was real. Governor O'Ferrall defended his action by saying that:

In this instance it was laboring men against laboring men—the question whether or not one set of miners who had struck because their wages were not satisfactory should be permitted to coerce another set, whose wages were satisfactory, to stop work.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.; Workman, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> Workman, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Salmon, *op. cit.*, p. 58. Quoted from *Memoirs of Mrs. Harriet Lathrop*.

<sup>54</sup> Joseph T. Lambie, *From Mine to Market: The History of Coal Transportation on the Norfolk and Western Railway* (New York: New York University Press, 1954), p. 67.

<sup>55</sup> Charles T. O'Ferrall, *Forty Years of Active Service* (New York: Meade Publishing Co., 1904), pp. 236-237.

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By late August, the strike was over and the troops were removed from Pocahontas. At that time, the 2,300 Pocahontas miners were able to work again without fear of invasion from their fellow miners from West Virginia.

Mining operations at the three Pocahontas openings, Pocahontas No. 1, West Mine, and East Mine continued to develop in the 1890s to such an extent that by 1896 they were producing 1,200,000 tons of coal and 384,000 tons of coke per year from 586 ovens.<sup>56</sup> Within 12 years of the first opening, the total coal production of the Pocahontas mines amounted to 36,532,350 tons.<sup>57</sup>

By 1896 the mines had come to rely less upon manual labor. There were eight mine locomotives for hauling coal from the mines to the tipples and for supplying coal to the coke ovens. An electric power plant, described at the time as "probably the most complete to be found in any mining operation in the world," supplied power for the mines and for street lights and residences in Pocahontas.<sup>58</sup> That power house preceded the present power house structure, which was in existence by 1906.<sup>59</sup> The earlier power plant was providing electric power for 16 coal cutting machines and eight electric drills.<sup>60</sup> "By the late 1890s, the era of the 'low-tech' operation had drawn to an end."<sup>61</sup>

It was estimated in 1896 that one half of the residents of Pocahontas were directly dependent upon the Southwest Virginia Improvement Company for a livelihood. Therefore, an author writing for the Bluefield *Daily Telegraph* proclaimed,

the importance of this industry to the community and the section can be readily understood." The author credited the Southwest Virginia Improvement Company with having developed and "so successfully conducted this, the largest and most thoroughly equipped semi-bituminous coal operation in the United States, if not in the world."<sup>62</sup>

For the remaining years of their operation, the Pocahontas mines performed pretty much as the mines in the southern coal fields of West Virginia. Since coal from the Pocahontas mines was from the same coal field as the southern West Virginia coals, any indicator of what was happening there equally applied to Pocahontas. That performance basically amounted to over production much of the time. In 1927, West Virginia ranked first in the nation in the production of bituminous coal, with most of it coming from southern West Virginia. Coal production in this area, however, exceeded demand. Over production resulted in a lower price per ton, hence sales were below that realized in less productive

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<sup>56</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, November 1, 1896. p. 18.

<sup>57</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, January 18, 1953. p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, November 1, 1896. pp. 18-19. The two-story power house measured 66x76 feet and was built of corrugated iron.

<sup>59</sup> Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 22. Photograph, dated 1906, clearly shows the present power house in operation.

<sup>60</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, November 1, 1896. p. 19.

<sup>61</sup> Workman, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, November 1, 1896, p. 19. The 1890 census showed Pocahontas having a population of 2,953. Salmon, "Draft National Historic Landmark Nomination, Pocahontas Historic District," p. 61.

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years. Consequently, coal operations, including Pocahontas, were producing more and enjoying it less.<sup>63</sup> After the peak year of 1927, and especially after the beginning of the Great Depression, coal production declined. The result was an accelerated reduction in job opportunities for miners in Pocahontas as well as in southern West Virginia. Coal production boomed again, however, with the beginning of World War II.<sup>64</sup>

While the coal segment of the Pocahontas operations had its cycles of boom-and-bust until 1955, the production of coke at the mine site had essentially phased out by 1920 as a result of the introduction of the by-product oven. The new ovens, which more efficiently utilized the by-products given off by the coal as it was being coked, were located close to the iron furnaces. As a result, the hundreds of beehive coke ovens at Pocahontas were no longer needed. As of 1939 it was reported, "The coke ovens, long unused, are crumbling into dust."<sup>65</sup> Over the years waste materials from the mines were dumped there, so that today there is an extensive dump at least 100 feet high covering all but a few of the coke ovens. Even the remaining ones are in ruins.

The end of the coal operation at Pocahontas came in 1955, after 73 years of continuous operation. Over that period, 44,000,000 tons of what was considered the best coal in the world came from Pocahontas' three mines.<sup>66</sup> It all started with Pocahontas No. 1 in the spring of 1882.

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<sup>63</sup> Workman, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, Semi-Centennial Edition, 1939, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> "Pocahontas No. 1 'Retires'," *Norfolk and Western Magazine*. n.p.

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The discovery of Pocahontas seam no. 3 coal in northeastern Tazewell County, Virginia, and what that ultimately led to, was best summed up by Jerry B. Thomas in his 1971 study, "Coal Country: The Rise of the Southern Smokeless Coal Industry and Its Effect on Area Development, 1872-1910."

With the opening of the Pocahontas coal field, the Industrial Revolution—and its accompanying chain of consequences—arrived in Central Appalachia. A vast mountain wilderness in southern West Virginia and southwestern Virginia was quickly transformed into a new frontier as companies formed to buy the previously worthless land, and mining camps began to dot the rugged landscape. Negroes left the worn-out farm lands of eastern Virginia to seek work in the mines, and the first immigrants from eastern Europe arrived. Almost overnight, the sleepy village of Big Lick became the booming industrial city of Roanoke, the nerve center of the Norfolk and Western network. By 1885 the facilities at Norfolk were inadequate for the growing flood of coal, and a new port grew up at Lambert's Point, four miles away.<sup>67</sup>

The richest coal fields ever discovered in the United States were now known and ready for exploitation. The coal from these fields would soon fuel the growing industrial might of the United States and forever change not only the history of central Appalachia but also the history of the American people.

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<sup>67</sup> Salmon, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63. Quoted from Thomas, "Coal Country," pp. 76-77.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.  
 Previously Listed in the National Register.  
 Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.  
 Designated a National Historic Landmark.  
 Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #  
 Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

**POCAHONTAS MINE NO. 1**

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## Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State Agency  
 Federal Agency  
 Local Government  
 University  
 Other (Specify Repository):

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: 9.9 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing  
 A 17 810469 3741289

## Verbal Boundary Description:

Beginning on the west berm of Tazewell County Route 659 at a point 30 feet south of the southeast corner of the power house and continuing in a northerly direction along the west berm of Route 659 for approximately 375 feet to a sharp curve in the road, thence continuing in a straight line for 500 feet in a northwesterly direction paralleling the west side of the road, thence up the hillside in a westerly direction for approximately 500 feet, thence in a straight line in a southerly direction for approximately 500 feet, thence 1,000 feet down the hillside in an easterly direction to the point of beginning.

## Boundary Justification:

On August 11, 1993, Historical Consultant John W. Bond visited the site and consulted with Mr. Woody Milliner, principal guide at the Pocahontas Exhibition Mine, and Mr. Walter Moore, a former guide at the Exhibition Mine and a retired coal miner. From the site visit and extensive telephone discussions with Mr. Milliner, it was determined what resources relating to Pocahontas Mine No. 1 exist with sufficient integrity and which are essential for illustrating the national significance of the site. The resources which meet these requirements are the original mine, the fan house, powerhouse/bathhouse and the 13-foot-high outcropping of coal near the beginning of the ramp to the fan house. The ruins of the steam generating plant are considered contributing because enough remains exist to illustrate an important aspect of the mining story.

The circa 1940 storage shed across from the power house and the circa 1920 machine shops located one-quarter mile from the mine are not included in the boundary because they came too late in the mine operation. The 1888 mule barn, located near the machine shops, is so far removed from the prime resources that it is regarded as not sufficiently significant to warrant its inclusion as a non-contiguous resource. The coke oven ruins across from the power house are so deteriorated that they do not qualify.

The surface boundary is drawn in such a manner as to insure that all of the mine features which are part of the Pocahontas Exhibition Mine are included.

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

**POCAHONTAS MINE NO. 1**

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Date: October 22, 1993