



Beneath the Surface: Mining Ancestors

Sue Lisk looks at websites to help you understand the lives of your ancestors who worked the mines

MY OLD FRIEND TOLD ME HE NEEDED SOME HELP. HE ASKED me to translate the death record of one of his ancestors. Much to my surprise, this blond, blue-eyed six-footer informed me that his grandfather had worked for a mining company in Mexico. But it turned out that his ancestor wasn't a miner. And he wasn't Mexican either. He was a Welsh physician that the administrators of a mining company had hired to care for men working in a Mexican mine. And because he died while working as a doctor on-site, my friend had a copy of the death record in Spanish.



Cabins in a mining camp in Atlantic City, WY. It was founded as a mining camp following the 1867 gold rush in the area, Carol M. Highsmith. (Library of Congress)

Although you're unlikely to discover a similar case, you may have ancestors of your own who worked as miners. Many websites related to mines are available to help you discover more about these individuals and their experiences while working for the mining industry. Let's take a look at a few of them.

Mining in Illinois and Indiana

Wayne Hinton has created an invaluable website devoted to Coal and Coal Mining in Illinois and Indiana, and related history and genealogy. Instead of focusing on well-known figures in this field, he has chosen to dedicate his website to the hard-working miners who struggled, suffered and sometimes gave their lives while pursuing their chosen occupation. You'll find the home page at www.hinton-gen.com/index.html.

Here you'll encounter statistics concerning the relative safety of mining in Indiana and Illinois at different periods. But of greater interest is a list of safety awards granted to both individuals and companies, under the aegis of the Joseph A. Holmes Safety Association, founded in 1916. Its namesake, Dr. Joseph Austin Holmes, served as the first director of the United States Bureau of Mines. He was recognized for his efforts to reduce the likelihood of accidents and ill health and promote greater safety in mining, metallurgical, and related industries.

In the 1930s, you'll see that individuals won awards for having resuscitated and rescued workman located deep in wells. Some of the victims had lost consciousness due to a lack of oxygen, and others had been overcome by gas. In 1932, the Association awarded individuals for having rescued blasting foremen caught under falling roof material. In the same period, the Association also granted awards to a number of workers for not having lost any work time on account of injuries. This certainly implies that many others suffered injuries severe enough to have required time off from their jobs in order to recover.

In the upper portion of the home page, there are two links: one labelled "Illinois" and the other