

TAB 13

ALBERTA MITHS

A Tribute

Photography and text by Lawrence Christmas

Foreword by Thomas H. Patching

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Christmas, Lawrence
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to many of the buildings in Banff Park. No longer visible or active, there were a number of sandstone quarries within the Calgary city limits from about 1886 to 1915. Stone from these quarries went into so many of the fine buildings in Calgary that it was at one time called "The Sandstone City." These quarries also produced stone used in various buildings throughout Alberta.

Many of the quarrymen and stone masons who worked on these buildings were immigrants who had learned their trade in Scotland. In the years of peak activity, several small communities of stone workers grew up near the city quarries.

The massive limestone formations in the mountains provide an ample source of stone for the province's cement and lime products. The quarries in the Crowsnest Pass, Exshaw and Cadomin areas have operated continuously for many years. Quarries at Exshaw, where the mountains meet the foothills, sustain the largest cement-making plant in western Canada, as well as a smaller lime-burning plant. The limestone quarry at Cadomin ships the crushed rock by rail to Edmonton, for processing, in Cadomin itself.

Limestone quarrymen now make use of houses left by the town's former coal miners.

In the early years of Alberta's settlement, most of the major buildings in the province were made of brick, as were the private homes or people of substance, except where stone was available. As the population grew, there was a corresponding need for brick yards and plants, and between 1905 and 1913, 37 plants were established at various places around the province. Many more brick yards or companies show in records, but some never got into production. Plants were located near a supply of good clay or shale, water and fuel, and preferably close to markets. Some of the shales in

distance of the mine shaft or tippie have disappeared. Most miners now live in larger towns, served by good roads, at some distance from their places of work. There they enjoy the same living conditions and pastimes as the other residents of the communities.

While coal mining was Alberta's dominant mining industry in past years, it is now matched in size by the two huge oil sands mines and extraction plants near Fort McMurray. The first of these open-pit mines, the Suncor Mine, was opened in the mid 1960s,

employing large bucketwheel excavators that had never before been used in the country. The second, the Syncrude Mine, was brought into production in the late 1970s and was even larger. It uses very large draglines, bucketwheels, loaders and conveyors. Much of the equipment in these mines is unique in size and nature, and most of the work involves the operation and maintenance of this equipment. Although the employees are mine workers, their jobs do not much resemble what used to be considered traditional mine labour. Employees for both mines and extraction plants reside in the fully modern city of Fort McMurray.

Although it is separated many miles from other major communities, it does not resemble the small one-industry mining towns of former years.

In Alberta, coal and oil sands generally come to mind when mining is mentioned. However, several other mining activities also play important roles in the province's history and economy. These include stone quarrying, the production of limestone, clays and shales, and the operation of numerous sand and gravel pits. We see or use these products almost every day. Only a limited amount of stone quarrying for building purposes is now carried out in the province. Several small quarries within the mountain valleys have produced 'Rundle Rock,' the stone that gives character

were strongly supported. A variety of languages could be heard in the mine dics, on the streets and in the school yards as the new families settled in.

It is to the credit of many mining families that their children got a good education. Young people who grew up in the mining towns have often distinguished themselves in music, science and engineering, medicine and law. (During my tenure at the University of Alberta, it was my good fortune to know quite a few young men from mining communities who had come there to get degrees in mining engineering.)

The character of coal mining in Alberta has changed greatly since the 1939-45 war. Before the war, almost all coal came from underground mines, which employed large numbers of manual workers. Now, with the exception of one underground mine, most Alberta coal is produced by large strip or open pit mines, using mechanical excavators and haulers, and employing far fewer employees to operate and maintain the equipment. The introduction of diesel locomotives on the railways soon after the war forced the closure of most mountain and foothill mines, ending the employment of hundreds of miners. Concurrently, the extension of natural gas pipelines for domestic heating caused the demise of most underground private mines.

On the other hand, the extension of electrical power through the province necessitated the opening of several large strip mines to supply the coal to electrical generating stations. In the 1970s, an expansion of export markets for coaling coal also supported the opening of several large strip and open pit mines in the mountain areas. Consequently, the total tonnage of coal currently mined is now larger than before the war, although far fewer miners are employed and the nature of their work has changed. The small mining communities that were located usually within walking

early years were mined underground, but later all shale and clay was taken from open pits, using conventional excavating equipment. Redcliff and Medicine Hat became the principal sources of brick in the province because of the cheap natural gas and excellent clays in these districts.

Regrets are sometimes expressed about the disappearance of the 'good old days' when life was simpler, and people lived and worked closer together, and knew each other better. Certainly there was a great deal of fellowship between the men who worked together in the mines. Sometimes also there was rivalry and strife, but generally there was a common bond between those who shared work. People living in a mining community were usually considered neighbours. Former residents of places like the Coal Branch or The Pass recall the dances and picnics, and speak fondly of the good life when their families were growing up. Although, at the same time, many would not doubt be reluctant to go back and start it all over again.

Many of those who worked in the mines in former years are now gone and their memories and mining lore are being lost. In this respect, the photographs and stories obtained by Lawrence Christmas help to preserve some memories of a mining life, and to honour those who have worked in Alberta mines.

The focus of this documentation is on the average worker, not on company officials or executives. However, a mining operation requires a full range of workers, from novice to chief executive, to handle its operations. Accordingly, an attempt to show the industry's variety of positions has been made in this book.

The photographer's experience goes back to 1979 when he first photographed Attilio Caffaro, a miner with 50 years at Cammore Mines. As the chief

mechanic at Cammore, Attilio was one of the hard-working and successful people who made Alberta their adopted home. That photograph, the frontpiece of this book, was the beginning of an ongoing passion for photographing and recording the histories of retired miners in Alberta and elsewhere in Canada. Later, the project expanded to include working miners — a perspective that graphically demonstrates the changes that have transformed the industry over the years.

Thomas M. Patching Edmonton, Alberta

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