

McLean County Historical Society

McLean County Coal Company

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Table of Contents

Collection Information
Historical Sketch
Scope and Content Note
Box and Folder Inventory

COLLECTION INFORMATION

Volume of Collection:	One Box.
Collection Dates:	1869-1929, 1945, 1966, 2007.
Restrictions:	Ledger and many brittle documents. Use photocopies unless authorized by Librarian / Archivist.
Reproduction Rights:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History.
Location:	Archives
Notes:	For additional information, see: Museum Map collection for 1908 map of 3 rd vein; 1917 survey map; 1923 map of 2 nd vein; and others.

Historical Sketch

The largest and most successful coal mine in McLean County was the McLean County Coal Co., located on Bloomington's west side, north of Washington St. and just west of the Chicago & Alton Railroad mainline (today these tracks are shared by Union Pacific and Amtrak). It operated from 1867 until the late 1920s. In 1904, to cite one measure, this mine accounted for 150,000 of 218,000 tons—or 69 percent—of all coal hauled out of Mclean County. Financial backers of the McLean County Coal Co. included the Stevenson brothers, James B., William, and Adlai Ewing, the latter serving as U.S. vice president during Grover Cleveland's second administration.

In the post-Civil War era, most communities the size of Bloomington relied to some extent on local coal. In Bloomington, coal was needed to operate boilers at the city's waterworks and electric light plant. Most homes were heated with coal, and most machinery could not run without it.

In May 1899, the McLean County Coal Co. offered a rare glimpse of its operations to "Madame Annette," a pseudonym for a local female newspaper reporter. Annette, who wrote for *The Daily Bulletin*, a long-defunct Bloomington paper, described in vivid detail life 500 feet below Bloomington's far west side. At the time, mine production averaged 700 tons of coal per day, with a workforce numbering some 350 men. Annette noted the "cosmopolitan crowd down under" by identifying African-American, English, French, Irish, Italian, Polish, Russian, and Swedish miners.

The mine was the setting for periodic struggles between capital and labor common to the Industrial Age. In the national strike of 1894, Mclean County Coal Company miners joined the United Mine Workers (UMW) of America. The impact of this strike—which targeted industrial monopolies, primarily the railroads—was felt throughout the Midwest. Longer strikes, such as this one, produced coal shortages, or "coal famines." In Bloomington, the electric light plant was shut down at night so most of the city's coal could be directed to the waterworks.

The McLean County Coal Mine halted production in 1929. The shafts were sealed and the buildings dismantled over time. Today, there is no visible evidence of coal mining in Bloomington.

Scope and Content Notes

The McLean County Coal Company collection consists of 1 box, which holds 1 ledger and 6 folders containing material from 1869-1929, 1945, 1966, and 2007. Items in the collection include newspaper clippings, the company ledger from 1923 to 1929, stock certificates, and correspondence, real estate and tax bills.

Box and Folder Inventory

Ledger: 1923-1929

The ledger covers the period from January 1, 1923 to April 30, 1929. The latter date is when the coal company ceased doing business. It includes such information as names and shareholders, names of employees, their sales, and the surplus account. The account declined from \$113,000 in 1923 to \$4,000 on April 30, 1929. The ledger shows the amount each year that the surplus account was reduced because of operating losses.

Folder 1: Newspaper Clippings

- 1.1 Advertisement, June 28, 1869, p. 3.
- 1.2 "On a Strike," March 3, 1870, p. 4.
- 1.3 "McLean County Coal Company The Third Vein Reached" *weekly Pantagraph*, August 3, 1870. P.3 c.1
- 1.4 Advertisement (original clipping), December 6, 1870.
- 1.5 Advertisement, December 31, 1872, p. 3.
- 1.6 McLean County Coal Company now employing one hundred and seventy-six miners... *Daily Leader* January 11, 1873, p.3.
- 1.7 "Fire Damp. The Investigation into the Cause of the Death of Miner Ogan Continued," *Daily Leader*, February 22, 1878
- 1.8 "Pulpit Points. Among Which are a Few Sharp Ones for the President of the McLean County Coal Co.," March 14, 1881, p. 4.
- 1.9 Advertisement, *Daily Bulletin*, July 21, 1881 p. 7.
- 1.10 Advertisement, October 6, 1881, p. 4.
- 1.11 "The Coal Strike" *Pantagraph* May 5, 1889 p.7
- 1.12 "The Fuel Famine" *Pantagraph* May 7, 1889 p. 7
- 1.13 "The Coal Strike" *Pantagraph* May 8, 1889 p. 6
- 1.14 "Coal Mine Contention" *Pantagraph*, May 10, 1889 p. 5
- 1.15 "Plenty of Coal" *Pantagraph*, May 22, 1889 p. 5
- 1.16 "The Miners Call," July 12, 1892, p. 7.
- 1.17 "A Little Strike" November 29, 1893, p.7.
- 1.18 "Miners' Strike," *Bulletin*, May 4, 1894, p. 1.
- 1.19 "Union Formed. Two Hundred Join the Organization of Miners," *Bulletin*, May 7, 1894, p. 1.
- 1.20 "Local Miners Organize," *Pantagraph* May 16, 1898, p. 1.
- 1.21 "Down in a Coal Mine," *Bulletin*, 1899, p. 1.
- 1.22 "Local Mine Reaches Total Production of 175 Tons Production In Day," December 18, 1919 p. 3.
- 1.23 Advertisement, February 24, 1924.
- 1.24 "Coal Mine Shale Pile Vanishing," April 1, 1945, p. 3.
- 1.25 "Industrial Age's lifeblood was mined on west side" ("A Page from Our Past" column), December 9, 2007, p. B5.

Also see: “Down in a Coal Mine, Underneath the Ground,” *Bloomington Weekly Democrat*, October 17, 1872.

Lengthy article, *Daily Bulletin*, December 8, 1883.

Folder 2: Miscellaneous Papers

- 2.1 “The First Man To Suggest Coal Shaft at the WYE,” 2 p. typed manuscript, no author, no date (newspaper transcription?).
- 2.2 Worker’s compensation contract? Ca. 1890.
- 2.3 Delivery receipts (2), July 11 and October 31, 1891.
- 2.4 Stock certificate, 60 shares at \$100 per share, 1909.
- 2.5 Goodman Manufacturing Company, contract proposal (4 pgs.) and letter (2 pgs.), the latter dated June 3, 1913.
- 2.6 Envelope addressed to McLean County Coal Co. from Funk’s Grove Grain Co., dated June 15, 1920.
- 2.7 Letter, DeMange law office to M. B. Stewart, general manager, McLean County Coal Company, August 29, 1925.
- 2.8 List of materials and labor for employee washhouse, October 1, 1926.
- 2.9 Letter, Illinois Department of Mines and Minerals, to McLean County Historical Society, March 25, 1966, incl. statistics and overview of coal mining in McLean County.
- 2.10 Three maps, 8x10 (reduced from original size—originals in Map Collection).

Folder 3: Abstract / Fairgrounds Subdivision

Fair Grounds Subdivision bounded by Washington Street, Brown Street, Market Street and Stillwell Street. Contains 44.61 acres.

- 3.1 Abstract of Title for McLean County Co. Fair Grounds Subdivision. Booklet, 11 pages, details ownership of title from 22 deed transactions dating from 1859 through 1888.

Folder 4: Bituminous Casualty

- 4.1 Contract Agreement and Power of Attorney, 1921
- 4.2 Power of Attorney at Bituminous Casualty Exchange, 1920
- 4.3 Universal Standard Workmen’s Compensation policy, contract No. 7535, 1920
- 4.4 Bituminous Casualty Exchange, policy contract No. 7729, 1923
- 4.5 Bituminous Casualty Exchange letter regarding Teamsters and the Illinois Industrial Commission, 1922
- 4.6 Bituminous Casualty Exchange letter regarding Advisory Committee, 1921
- 4.7 Bituminous Casualty Exchange letter regarding Advisory Committee, 1926
- 4.8 Bituminous Casualty Exchange letter Industrial Commission, 1925
- 4.9 McLean County Coal Company letter regarding Compensation Insurance, 1926
- 4.10 Illinois Industrial Commission letter regarding McLean County Coal Company insurance, 1922
- 4.11 McLean County Coal Company letter regarding rate on clerical office force, 1925
- 4.12 Seventh Annual Report to Policyholders of Bituminous Casualty Exchange, 1923

4.13 Ninth Annual Report to Policyholders of Bituminous Casualty Exchange, 1925

Folder 5: Real Estate and Tax Bills I

53 items from Illinois county and city treasurers' and collectors' offices, 1870 to 1906

Folder 6: Real Estate and Tax Bills II

57 items from Illinois county and city treasurers' and collectors' offices, 1869-1926