

CCHA Program: Chatham County Coal Mining History

June 18, 2017

Chatham County Courthouse

Chatham County Coal Mining was the topic of CCHA's June 2017 program, which was presented by Forest Hazel, an ardent local historian. An enthusiastic audience interested in learning more about this aspect of Chatham County's history populated the historic Chatham County Courthouse on Father's Day afternoon.

The only significant source of coal in North Carolina lies along the Deep River in Chatham and Lee Counties. Attempts to mine the Deep River coalfields commercially began in the early 1850s and the last mine closed about 100 years later. The focus of Mr. Hazel's talk was the May 27, 1925 explosions in the Carolina Mine which shook the Chatham County village of Coal Glen and took the lives of 53 men. This accident is still counted as the largest industrial disaster in North Carolina's history.



Barbara Pugh, past president; Forest Hazel, speaker; Grimsley Hobbs, CCHA president



Mining artifacts

Mr. Hazel's talk was illustrated with photographs of the mine disaster and several Chatham County mines. He talked about the history of the mining industry in Chatham County, the numerous accidents that plagued it, and what life was like for the miners and their families. Mining artifacts were displayed.

A resident of Mebane, NC, Forest Hazel has a BA in Anthropology and a MPH degree, both from UNC-Chapel Hill. Most of his work for the past 35 years concerns the history of American Indian communities in the Carolinas, but recently he has been working on the Deep River coalfields project. His interest in the coalfields was initiated by a visit to the Cumnock cemetery to photograph the headstone of Duncan Goins, a CSA vet of Indian descent. Hazel noticed markers in the cemetery indicating that men had died in various mining accidents. His grandfather's family were coal miners in Wales and his curiosity was aroused. Hazel found that few people knew much about the NC coal mines, and felt that the story should be promoted and remembered. Mr. Hazel was the



Mine entrance

impetus for the recent installation of a [historical highway marker commemorating the Coal Glen disaster of 1925](#).

Mr. Hazel maintains a Facebook page on North Carolina Coal Mining History, which promotes the history of the coal mining industry in Central North Carolina from roughly 1853 to 1953, when the last mine closed for good, and the contributions of the mines and the miners who worked and died in them.



Miner's houses--"Red Town"

Additional information about Chatham County's coal mining history can be found in Fred Vatter's article, "Deep River Coal: Source of Dreams and Disasters," which is included in *Tales Beyond Fried Rabbit: Chatham's Historical Heritage*,* and in Wade Hadley's article "Chatham County's Coal," in volume 6, number 2 of the *Chatham Historical Journal*.* Paul Wilson's [Coal Glen Mining Disaster website](#) links to a variety of original sources about the disaster.

[*Can be purchased at the CCHA gift shop, [online or by mail](#).]



Tracks leading to mine entrance



Script used in Cumnock Mine Store

Family,	80¢	Eggs,	15
Molasses,	25¢	Chickens,	12 1/2 @ 25
Sugar,	60¢	hogging,	7 1/2 @ 9
Coffee,	21¢	Ties,	\$1.20 @ 1.50

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