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Mining

The first mine openings were in the White Oaks area of the Borough. The Number 1 and Number 2 mines were made in 1845 as the Gravity Railroad was being extended down into the valley. No coal was taken from them until 1846, when the railroad was completed. These openings, found by James Archbald along the White Oaks creek, were made by the Owens and Evans Brothers, who lived on the ridge.

In 1846, the Number 3, 4 & 5 mines were opened in the Hill Street area, while Number 3 1/2 mine was opened in the same area four years later. All of these openings were made by the Delaware & Hudson Canal Company.

The first mine foreman was John Hosie, who later became a successful coal operator on his own account. He was succeeded by James Liddle, then by William Law. In 1854, Edward Jones took over as foreman and had charge of the works until 1858. Patrick Gilmartin was the weigh master and was succeeded by James Hosie a Civil War Marshal and also the nephew of John Hosie. James was shot by a Noah Smith of Waverly, a deserter who was resisting Hosie's effort to arrest him.

In the early days, the coal from the Delaware & Hudson mines was loaded into mine cars of somewhat novel construction - flat bottomed trucks on which two large boxes were placed. These boxes were shaped like inverted pyramids and were equipped with hand tools on the sides, in order that the dumpers might easily tip them enough to permit the coal to empty out. At the No. 1 Mine, these loaded cars were drawn from the mines and dumped at a platform located near the mouth of the mine into gravity cars, which came down from Carbondale to White Oaks on the "light track."

For many years, a cable which drew the mine car from the mine was wrapped around a large tree stump located at the mouth of No. 1 mine. This stump acted as a sheaf, helping to pull the car from the mine. The gravity cars were then drawn by horse to the foot of No. 1 plane. It was there they ran by their own momentum to the foot of No. 2 plans, where they were again hoisted to the top. From this point, at the summit of No. 5 Hill, the cars would run themselves to Carbondale. The Number 3, 3 1/2, 4 & 5 Mines were located along the Gravity Railroad bed and the coal was dumped directly into the cars along the main track.

In 1856, Delaware & Hudson opened another mine on the top of the Northeast Mountain near the headwaters of the White Oak Creek. This mine was known as the "Tunnel". A railroad was constructed between the high rocks on No 5 Hill and the back of Goer's Hill. It ran from the head of the old No 2 Gravity plane to the Tunnel, and was to be used to convey the tunnel coal to market. The mine was abandoned until 1877 when Pierce Coal Co. began operations there. The railroad was never used.

In 1859, a strange and unexpected move was made by the Delaware & Hudson Company. The entire tract of land upon which mining had been conducted was sold to two speculators from New York. Judge Birdseye and Mr. Woodman then operated the mines under a lease, only to be succeeded by H. Jenkins, William Nichols, Robert Sutton and then by Patrick Kearney. After Mr. Kearney secured the lease late in 1859, he abolished a long established monetary allowance provided to the miners for crosscutting. These cuttings, or openings, were made at regular intervals between the mine chambers, and were designed to allow for the free passage of air through the working mines in order to properly ventilate them.

This move on the part of Mr. Kearney enticed many bitter feelings and brought on a strike which lasted for six months. This was the first of many coal strikes in Archbald. Many attempts were made to resolve the matter during the summer months of 1860, all of which failed.

At last, the miners were compelled to accept the pay reduction, as the mining season drew to a close, and the winter was closing in. The next mining season, the men refused to work for Mr. Kearney at any price which resulted in his contract being annulled. In 1861 Hosie and Jadwin leased the property and worked the mines until 1863. John Jermyn became the operator for two years followed by the Boston & Lackawanna Coal Company who worked the mine until 1870. It was only when they went bankrupt that the Delaware & Hudson repurchase the land.

In 1859, the Delaware & Hudson Coal Co. began constructing a breaker in Archbald, the only one between Scranton and Carbondale. They did not begin operations until 1860. This breaker, the original White Oak Breaker, was located just south of the Hill Street crossing on the East side of the Delaware & Hudson tracks.

The Breaker had a capacity of 650 tons daily, and by 1880 employed 230 boys and men. There were 38 mules in use at the colliery. Originally the White Oak Creek passed through this area, but the creek bed was moved to make room for the platform and tracks at the No. 1 mine. The original breaker operated until July 14, 1899, when it suddenly burst into flames. By the 5th of August on that same year, 50 men were hired to clear away the debris of the old breaker and on August 21, 1899, work resumed at all Delaware & Hudson mines. On October 13, 1900, the new White Oak Breaker was ready but did not begin operations until November 3, when the coal strike of 1900 was over.

By 1910, new mines were being opened at the southern end of town and production increased at the White Oak mines. The amount of coal to be processed soon became too much for the White Oak Breaker to handle and plans were made to construct a larger, more efficient breaker. It was decided to construct this new breaker in the Dark Valley section of town where new mines were being opened. This breaker was called Gravity Slope Colliery and when it was opened in 1913 the White Oak Breaker was shut down.

At one time there were 1700 men employed at the Gravity Slope Colliery and three full shifts worked day and night. There were 120 mules in use and it used to be a sight every morning, when the boys would drive the mules from the old White Oak Mule Barn down the tracks to the mines. The main mine, which was a slope and was appropriately named Gravity Slope after the colliery, was open in 1911.

The Gravity Slope Colliery was the center of activity in town for many years. In 1942, the conveyor line to the top of the breaker collapsed and the breaker was permanently shut down. The coal from the still working colliery was shipped to the Powerly Breaker in Carbondale and the Marvin Breaker in Scranton. Soon afterwards the breaker was dismantled. The mines at the colliery were worked until 1955 when water began seeping through the coal seams into the Delaware & Hudson mines from the shutdown Riverside mines. This became too much for the mine pumps to handle. On October 4, 1955, the Gravity Slope Colliery shut down for good, ending the Delaware & Hudson mining in the Borough, one hundred and ten years after their first mine opened in 1845.