The social legacy of Pennsylvania coal mining is something that has deeply influenced me since I was very young. Having grown up in Schuylkill County in the heart of the Anthracite region, I heard tales of the “Golden Days” of coal and saw the devastation to the land and society it left behind. I was interested in learning how a black rock buried deep in the ground could fuel an industrial revolution, bring growth and power to a region, and diminish so quickly over a span of little more than one hundred years. So, studying the topic in a classroom setting really opened my eyes to things that I would have never learned at home.

From the very beginning of the semester, I showed my interest in the material with my Introductory Essay. Writing of my connections to Pennsylvania coal and the Molly Maguires brought about memories that I have long stored at the back of my mind and made me realize that there had to have been so much that I didn’t know. For instance, although I knew my great-grandfather was a miner, I never really understood what he did in the mines. I guess I had created this glorious image of a man dressed in gray heading into the mine with a pick and lantern. I didn’t understand the danger he put himself in every day, so that his wife and children may eat and have a roof under which to sleep. Researching the Molly Maguires further would have informed me that the man hanged for Officer Ben Yost’s murder was named James Carroll. I never knew his name until taking this course led me to greater interest in the topic. Perhaps, I didn’t realize how much the stories interested me until I was able to hear them in a scholastic setting away from old men sitting on their front porches telling tales.

To me, the legacy of Pennsylvania coal rested in my backyard. Little did I know that there was so much more going on throughout the state at the same time as mining in Schuylkill County. It wasn’t until I needed to co-author a paper with Rebecca Sinski about a town outside my little world that I truly understood the girth of Pennsylvania’s mining heritage. Writing the Archbald essay was a strange undertaking, as I had never known such a town exists. Writing about this town shed light on the idea that coal mining wasn’t strictly limited to the stories and names that I knew. The only thing I would have liked to have done when studying Archbald would’ve been to look more closely at the old lithograph map and realized how differently towns formed. I didn’t realize it until after reflecting upon the completed essay that Archbald was nothing like Tamaqua. The realization that no two coal towns were exactly the same escaped me until after I had finished writing the piece and reread it.

Perhaps, the most informative and enlightening assignment was the team presentation on Coal Mining in Pennsylvania. I knew the stories of home well, but had never known anything about the bituminous coal region, Pittsburgh, or the steel-making industry until we were presented with some extensive research regarding the matter. After learning so much about bituminous coal, I do wish I had broadened my research about coal, politics, and immigration to include more information about the Pittsburgh Coal Seam region. I may have shown partiality to the Anthracite Region in my research because of my roots there.

After reviewing my progress throughout this course over the semester, I think it is safe to say that my eyes have been opened and my horizons expanded. I no longer see coal as my paper weight, but rather a fuel. It is a fuel that sparked an industrial revolution, a social expansion, an economic boom, and a social flourish. It brought great wealth and power to Pennsylvania and took it away when its production declined.

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