

Name: _____

Date: _____

The Company Store

Adapted from explorepahistory.com



Eckley Miners' Village Museum
Eckley, Pennsylvania

Introduction:

Most patch towns had a company store owned and operated by the coal company. This store provided the miners and their families with many items that they might need. These would include clothes, mining supplies, seeds, food, furniture, cloth, thread and even candy for kids. The company store sometimes served as the bank for cashing the miners' paychecks and serving as the town post office.

Each payday the miners would go to the company office to receive their pay; sometimes they would receive "scrip" instead of paper money. Scrip is like paper money, but it can only be redeemed at the company store. Eckley didn't use scrip. Before giving the miners their money, the clerks would subtract rent and store purchases from the miners' paychecks. Then the miner would receive whatever was left over; often this amount was very little. Sometimes the miners would actually have no money left or owe money to the company. This process was often what kept miners in debt to the company.

Some company stores in the area sold quality merchandise and charged only slightly higher prices than other stores. Other company stores helped the miners and their families when times were rough. These stores would allow longer lines of credit before bills were due or even give them food to help them get through until the next session of work began. However, for every good company store there was a bad company store. Bad company stores would sell poor quality items, overcharge costumers, and bully their workers into only buying items from them. Sometimes these stores would go as far as threatening to fire the miner if they didn't shop at the company store.

Questions:

1. Name 3 services the company store provided for miners and their families.
2. How did miners pay at the store?
3. Who owned the company store?
4. Do you think the company store was fair or unfair? Explain.
5. How do you think miners felt about the company store?
6. Look over the previous questions and readings to create a 2-3 sentence summary to explain what the company store was and how it worked.