Yesterday And Today—

Struck Central Mine Didn’t Reopen

By SHIRLEY DONNELLY

John Cheeslock, Box 82, Thurmond, wrote the Post-Herald religiously and makes scrap books out of the columns.

This old World War I veteran goes in for local news, especially the New River variety. He occasionally sends in suggestions for subjects to be given treatment in this department.

A friend of John Cheeslock lives out in Helena, Mont. He is Edwin Grafton, one of the high-up officials in the Scottish Rite Order of the Masonic lodge.

It seems that Grafton used to live in these parts and often commits to writing his recollections of his days on the banks of New River in Fayette County.

THERE WAS a mine at old Central in Fayette, William Grafton, a cousin of Edwin Grafton, was store and office manager at that operation back through the 1900’s.

Employed at Central were a lot of English, Irish and Welsh miners. The head man of the operation was a strong willed man and Edwin Grafton remembers only as “Colonel,” as his last name has gone from Grafton’s memory.

There at Central the miners were always first to come out on strike and the last to go back to work when differences had been adjusted. One day after the miners came out on strike, the head man of the operation made the statement if the men came out on strike again he would close down the mine. They did come out on another strike and the mine was closed down and never reopened. Edwin Grafton remembers his father telling about going to see the old colonel and begging him to forgive the miners. However, the colonel was adamant in his stand, adding that he had warned the miners.

All the men had to move away. Later, William Grafton, store and office manager at Central, was elected clerk of Fayette County court, serving from 1900 to 1909.

IN EDWARD GRAFTON’S days on New River, Fayette County had a pest house where people with smallpox were sent to recover, or die. It was at Pennbrook and was maintained for something like five years or more.

Railroad authorities put in a short siding just west of where Ephraim’s Creek flows into New River. Next the railroad provided a box car to transport the patients to the pest house.

Whenever a new case of smallpox was discovered the railroaders would send a switch engine to get the car. A male nurse went with it to accompany the patient to the pest house.

The smallpox doctor was Dr. Rappold. He was a coal company doctor from the New River section. One day Dr. Rappold’s mother-in-law went there to visit her daughter, Mrs. Rappold, at the pest house complex. While she visited the mother-in-law contracted smallpox and died very suddenly. Many others died there from the dread disease.

All members of the Grafton family were vaccinated and escaped the malady.

One of the patients at the pest house was the late Ben D. Keller (Sept. 6, 1898-June 5, 1961), the noted news reporter. Ben once wrote for me his recollections of his stay there as a “guest” at the Fayette County pest house at Pennbrook.

THE PEST HOUSE complex was comprised of three buildings. One was on the open plain near the mouth of Ephraim’s Creek. A second was a house for men only a few hundred yards up in the woods from the creek. The third house was the one occupied by the doctor.

Dr. Rappold had a number of hobbies. One was growing grain. It didn’t grow very well for him but it abounded on the hillside near the pest house.

When snow diggers roamed the wooded mountains in that section, they camped under a shelving rock cliff a half-mile or so up Ephraim’s Creek.

The pest house was abandoned nearly forty years, then the buildings were torn down by the Pennbrook Coal Co.

This Pennsylvania concern built a railroad from just east of East Sewell, it was a long haulage from the mine down to the railroad tracks, and caused the company a lot of trouble. Several times the loaded cars got away and tore up the tipples at the bottom.

Today, the coal operation at Ephraim’s Creek and old Pennbrook are but memories in the minds of a few old timers. The Grafton family moved away from their farm family up Ephraim’s Creek in 1906.

Donnelly - Mar 19 1969 - Central Mine, Pest House at Pennbrook

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