

# Cliff Mine - Dickson Mine

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

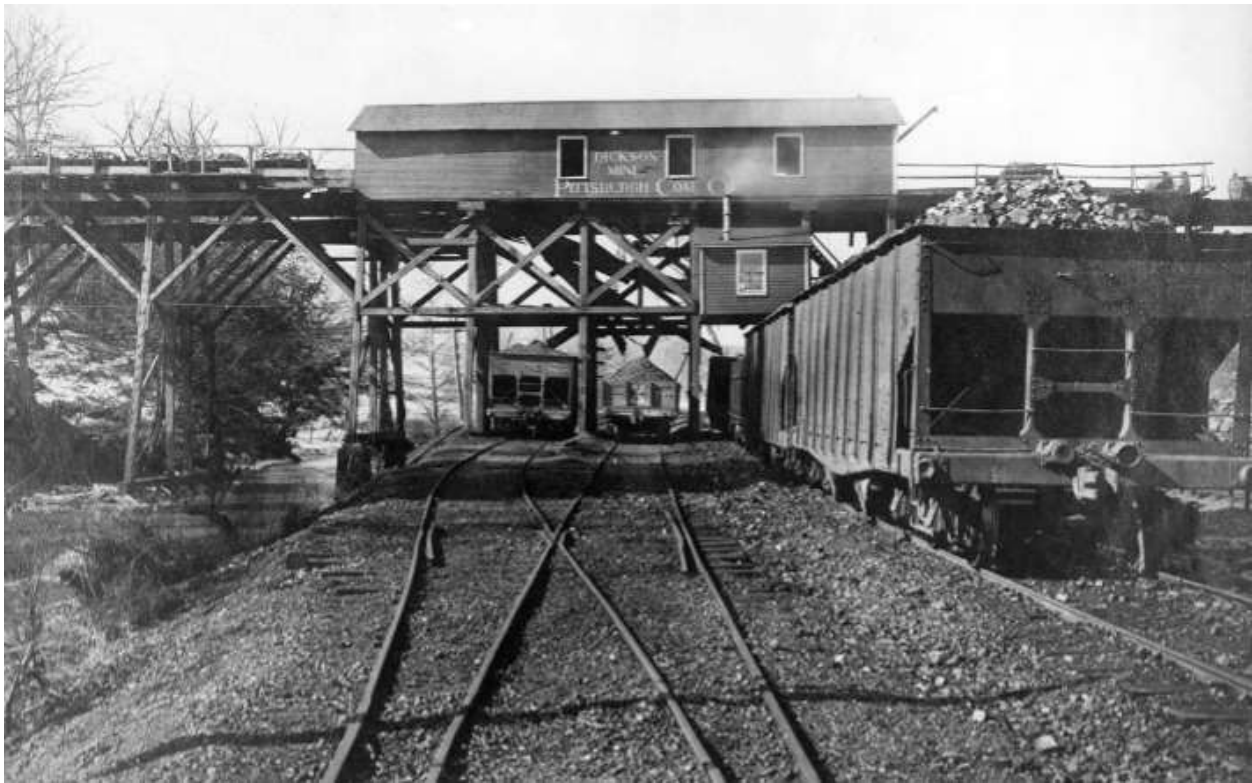
The Imperial Coal Company opened their first coal mine in June, 1879, shipping the coal on its newly built company railroad, the Montour Railroad. The Montour carried the coal to a barge loading facility located seven miles away on the Ohio River in Coraopolis. After a connection was made in Coraopolis with the newly constructed Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad later that year, outbound coal shipments were handled by the P&LE.

The history of that first mine and its various names is a bit confusing. The mine was located near the village of Guy's Mills at Cliff Mine station on the railroad (Trail mile 6). The mine had two entrances, one called Cliff at the village of Beechcliff and the other a short distance to the west was called Dickson. At its start-up in 1878, the mine was called Cliff Mine. By 1881, it was referred to as Beechcliff Mine, after the local village. Around 1890, it was back to Cliff Mine, but by 1898, Beechcliff was again in vogue.

In 1899, the Pittsburgh Coal Company was formed for the purpose of buying and consolidating about 75 coal mining companies located in southwestern Pennsylvania. The Imperial Coal Company was one of the properties acquired, including its subsidiary company, the Montour Railroad. At this time, the mine became known as the Dickson Mine, named after the second entranceway where the coal was sent out of the mine and down an inclined plane to the tipple. This name remained for the final 31 years of operation.

The mine was a drift mine, meaning that the coal seam came directly to the surface of the hillside and thus the entries into the mine went directly into the coal seam without the need of a vertical shaft entry. The mine entrances were part way up the hillside above Montour Run, while the tipple and railroad sidings were located along the creek at the base of the hill. The tipple was built just to the west of the current parking lot on Cliff Mine Road at trail mile 6. It included picking tables and screening and cleaning equipment to process the coal before being loaded into the railroad hoppers for shipment. Coal shipments averaged 800 to 1,000 tons daily.

The coal was brought down the hillside from the mine entrance to the tipple on an inclined plane several hundred feet long. There was no bony dump near the tipple or railroad site because the slate and rock were dumped up on the hillside beside the mine entrances, near where subdivisions and apartments now stand.



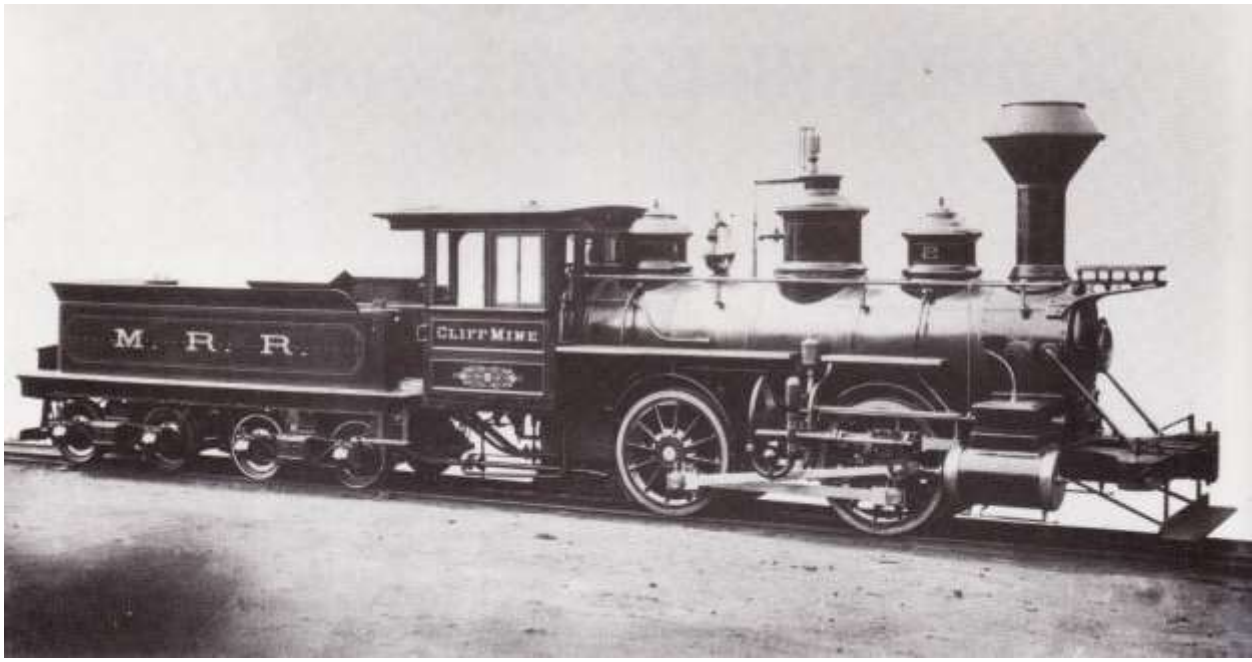
**Dickson Mine tippie looking west toward Imperial, circa 1915. Montour Run flows along the left side of the tracks.**

**Photo from Pennsylvania State Archives, courtesy Gene P. Schaeffer.**

Dickson was a large mine and extended underneath Steubenville Pike to the southwest and southeast of the entrances until it reached the boundary line where it abutted the Carnegie Coal Company's Oakdale Mine.

The Pittsburgh Seam averaged 68 inches of coal where the mine was located, so miners could actually work standing upright instead of being stooped over or on their knees as happened in thinner coal seams. When the workings were begun in the late 1800's, the coal was being mined "up dip" and water naturally drained to the north out of the mine and into Montour Run. After passing beneath Steubenville Pike, the coal seam dipped to the southwest and water collected in the back of the mine, creating what the miners called "swamps" as they had to work with their feet in wet ground. Eventually, a drain was dug at the southern end of the mine to allow the water to run into one of the streams on the south side of the hill.

The Dickson Mine was the first to ship coal on the Montour Railroad, doing so for about 50 years until the mine was closed around 1930.



**The first locomotive on the Montour Railroad was number 2, built in 1879 and lettered “Cliff Mine”. The railroad hauled coal from the mine to Coraopolis. Alco Historic Photos, courtesy Gene P. Schaeffer.**

Thanks to Bob Ciminel and Gene Schaeffer, who provided much of the information on this subject.

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