

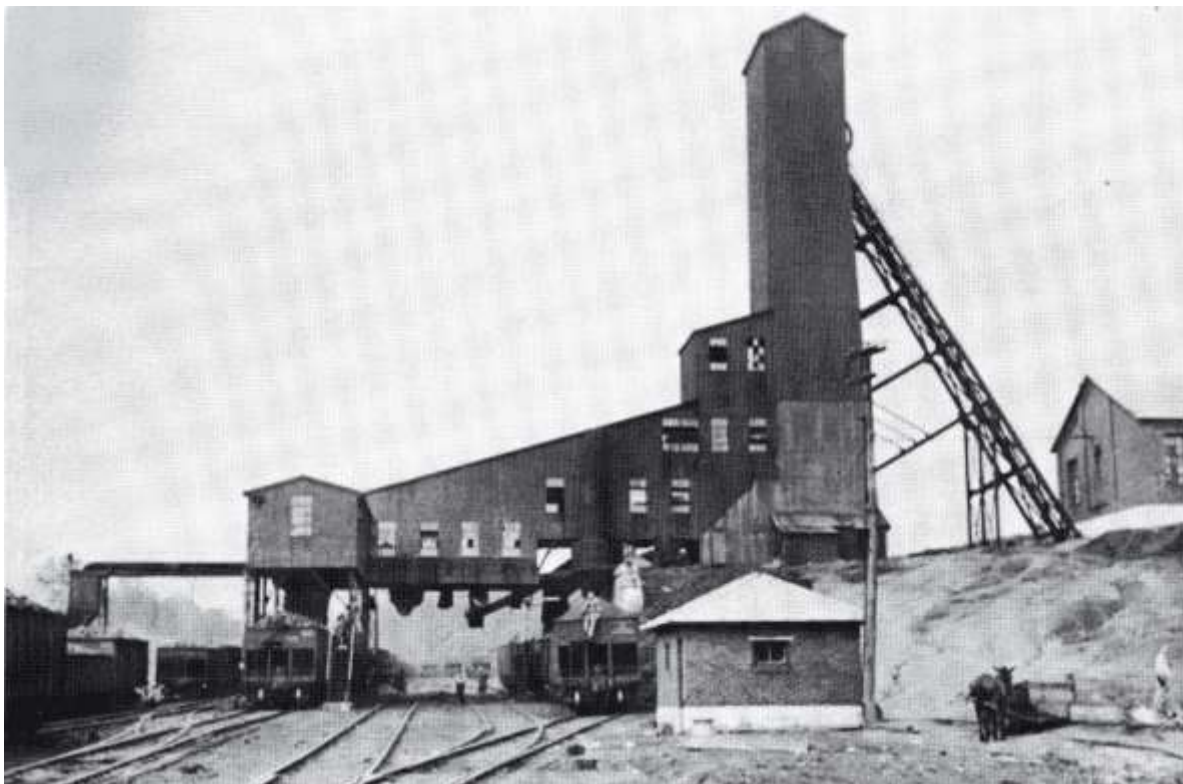
# The Muse Branch

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

Travelling along the Montour Trail in Cecil Township at Mile 24.2, at the end of the curve east of the yellow bridge over the Muse-Bishop Road, you can see an old right-of-way which diverges from the main trail and curves up behind the houses along the road. This was Muse Junction, the start of a branch line which ran 1.6 miles toward the town of Muse to service the coal mine located there.

The Muse Branch was constructed in 1921, to reach the loading tippie of the National Mining Company's Mine #3. National Mining was owned by U. S. Steel and Mine #3 would tap 2,199 acres of coal plus added an additional 1,500 acres of coal reserves belonging to near-by National #2 when that mine closed in 1928.

Typical of deep coal mines in the area, National #3 dug two shafts into the coal seam, which was about 230 feet below ground level. One shaft was located on top of the hill to the north of Muse, along with a bath house for the miners, storerooms and the mine offices. This shaft took men and supplies into and out of the mine as well as moving slate and rock waste out of the mine, which was spread over the surrounding hillsides. The other shaft was located several hundred yards to the east and was used to bring coal out of the mine and up into the loading tippie.



**National Coal Company Mine #3 in Muse loaded coal for over 30 years.  
Photo courtesy of U. S. Steel Co.**

The Montour Railroad came into the mine complex and rails went under the tippie and beyond, with the loaded car yard running down the hill along the east side of the town, toward the school. There were no other rail served businesses along the branch at the time.

Miners and mine employees were the only people allowed to live in the company houses in Muse. It was a planned community. The H. C. Frick Coke Company, a U. S. Steel subsidiary, owned all the houses and took care of their maintenance. The company charged a modest rent for the homes and withheld the payment from the miners pay. The town featured several modern (in the 1920's) amenities. Muse was the first coal mining town in Western Pennsylvania with indoor plumbing and treated drinking water piped into every home. Concrete sidewalks, street lights, fire hydrants and backyard service alleyways completed the scene. A company store with a gas station, a post office, school, several boarding houses and businesses were built in Muse to serve the community. A ballfield in the center of town was one of the main social gathering points. Many coal towns supported community baseball teams and if you were a good ball player, you usually had no problem finding a job in the mines.

Each day at five o'clock, the miners would listen for the fire whistle at the mine to sound. This was the signal that there would be work at the mine the following day. If there was no whistle, no work and thus no pay.

In 1942, the H. C. Frick Coke Company took over operation of the mine and ran it until at least 1947. Operations later were transferred to U. S. Steel, who ran the mine until it was closed in 1954. The loading tippie and its yard tracks were then demolished and the mine shafts were filled and sealed.

After the mine closed, Chemicals & Solvents Company, an industrial waste reclamation operation, leased some of the mine buildings and operated on the site until railroad service in this area ended in 1982. Box cars of supplies and tank cars of chemicals were brought to and from this business, one of several non-coal customers on the Montour. As there was no place on the branch for a locomotive to run around its train, cars were shoved the length of the branch from the junction with the main line.

In April, 1982, the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad, which owned the Montour at that time, had a surplus of box cars and a train of 82 cars was backed onto the Muse Branch for storage. The cars were removed in September, 1983 as abandonment proceedings were completed for the ten miles of track from Gilmore Junction in Cecil Township to Thompsonville Siding in Peters Township, including the Muse Branch. The tracks and ties were then removed, ending the railroad life of the Muse Branch.



**A train departs the Chemicals & Solvents Company in 1980.  
Gene P. Schaeffer photo**

Thanks go to Jim McCauslin and John Soma, both of whom grew up in Muse during the mine's operation in the depression years. They each published remembrances of life in Muse and supplied some of the notes used in this column. Mr. McCauslin published a booklet titled "My Hometown Muse", excerpts of which can be found on-line at [coalcampusa.com](http://coalcampusa.com) and Mr. Soma's memories can be found at [museslatedump.org](http://museslatedump.org)

**This column appeared in the March-April, 2017 Montour Trail Newsletter.  
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