Coal Mining in Southern Illinois

The Special Collections Research Center (SCRC) in Morris Library holds the work of photographer C. William "Doc" Horrell. Horrell operated a photographic studio in Anna, Illinois and worked a key figure in the establishment of both Photographic Services and the Department of Cinema and Photography at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC). Horrell's images of "the land between the rivers" helped strengthen and preserve the regional identity of Southern Illinois. As a freelance photographer, he recorded the life and work of coal miners and provided important documentation of the coal industry in Southern Illinois. These images provide insight into a vital aspect of Southern Illinois history, inform the work of researchers documenting the history of American mines and of the men and women who worked in them, and comprise an exemplary collection for students and aficionados of the photographic arts.

In 2005, Morris Library considered the aesthetic and research value of Horrell’s photographic legacy and dedicated the resources necessary to make this significant record available to the public. The result was a dual project to present a selection of outstanding images in the form of a small electronic exhibition while simultaneously providing comprehensive access to the entire collection through the creation of a searchable digital archive. For this project SCRC partnered with SIUC's Coal Research Center [2] (CRC), Cooperative Wildlife Research Laboratory [3] (CWRL), Dr. John Richardson, emeritus professor of photography, and Instructional Support Services [4] (ISS). Morris Library staff members converted the entire collection of 8 x 10" monochromatic images into digital form and developed standards to describe them. Experts from the CRC and CWRL provided invaluable assistance in identifying specific mines and mining procedures, and imparted historical context and supplementary documentation that allowed the project to succeed. The CWRL has extensively documented efforts to reclaim abandoned minelands across the region as a key contributor to the Illinois State Reclamation Plan for Abandoned Mined Lands. Dr. Richardson, a protégé and personal friend of Horrell's, contributed not just his intimate knowledge of his mentor’s personal relationship with the mines and miners that he photographed, but his expertise regarding Horrell’s technical methods and work habits.

This website that you see before you represents the exhibition component of the Doc Horrell photograph digitization project. Some images found in this exhibition were previously published in Land Between the Rivers (Carbondale and Edwardsville: SIU Press, 1973) and in the posthumous work Southern Illinois Coal: A Portfolio (Carbondale and Edwardsville: SIU Press, 1995), while others are shown here for the first time.
The comprehensive database, meanwhile, is hosted by the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI) as a service for the people of Illinois and as a resource for interested researchers and scholars around the world. To access the entire collection of images that Horrell made of Southern Illinois coal mines and miners, please see the Doc Horrell Photo Collection [5].

SCRC hopes that all visitors to this collection enjoy the time they spend with this array of images, and welcomes comments and opportunities to publicize this resource. Access to the original photographic prints, other images created by Horrell, and additional images of coal mines and supporting materials, is provided by SCRC.

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