

INTERVIEW WITH HAZEL RILEY

Fr: Beth Nogay

Nogay: Can you tell me what the coal camp looked like in Ramage.

Riley: Well the houses were real close together and they had them on the hill at Ramage and then they were in the bottoms below the bridge and above the bridge they had different kinds of house built .

Nogay: What did the houses look like?

Riley: Well they were weather boarded and they were painted white and green they were kept up nice but people had their own fenced in yards and they was nice coal camp. I think it was because I had always lived there. I was borned at Ramage and I'm still there.

Nogay: What was it like living there? Living in a coal company town?

Riley: Well it was ... if you had it anywhere else you couldnt compare it with something else and alot of us lived there. And of course I lived at Forton after I married for about a year and a half.

Nogay: What was it like living in the coal town? Did the company control much of the town?

Riley: Oh yes, quite a bit. Of course they didn't control where we lived because we were on private property. My grandad had divided the farm up.

Nogay: What would the company store be like?

Riley: It was down at Ramage.

Nogay: How was it different from a private store?

Riley: Quite a bit higher. It cost more for each item than it did in a private owned store. We had more private owned stores at Ramage than we did... I don't remember too much about a company store there at first.

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Nogay: Why were the prices higher at the company store?

Riley: Well they, they most of them made the miners buy at the company store and you could...when you worked a day you could go and draw script on that days work. The most of the miners would draw script to live on so they could eat from day to day. Of course there was no refrigeration then like today. They would go in every day to get their groceries only the staples.

Nogay: What do you remember about the mine troubles around here.

Riley: Well I remember the miners were going up on a train, they were on flat cars going up and there were some miners stopped at the Ramage school that I was at and said they were guarding us and that scared us more than anything because they had red bandana handkerchiefs around their necks and I never did like being called a redneck and thats where they got it from and so they didn't stay there but a little while and of course everything was shut down and nobody could work... no mines were working they all come from Cabin Creek up through there and there wasn't to many of the miners at Ramage the didn't go to Blair Mountain or anything like that.

Nogay: When the men came through can you tell me what they looked like. Did they carry guns and how would they have been traveling on the flatbed?

Riley: Just setting on it some were standing. The train didn't go that fast back then and of course they were in overalls and caps and had their guns..you could see plenty of guns back then.

Nogay: Could you tell me that story again about being in the school yard.

Riley: Well I was at school and they stopped the train at the trussel there was a bridge across the river to the school there at Ramage and there was about six men came over and they had guns, had shotguns and said they was going to guard us well I think that was more scary than anything A cousin of mine was teacher and he kept us in the school house that day he didn't let us out, we had to stay in and the train went on and another one came along that picked them up afternoon. They were there about half a day.

Nogay: How did the people around here feel about the miners fighting with the operators?

Riley: Well we were union and we were always scared to go to Logan County Don Chafin over there had control of it. I know I went over one time and my dad's cousin husband was jailer there and I don't think I hardly drew a breath while I was there in Logan town. It was just frightful to think that they were under..they couldn't unionize or do what they wanted to do. They had thugs, I think is what they called them and people were just afraid to go.

Nogay: When you said that Don Chafin owned the county-What does that mean?

Riley: He was the ring leader of Logan County. He was the boss.

Nogay: What does the boss mean?

Riley: He told people what to do, when to do and how they could do it. Just like they do in Russia.

Nogay: Can you remember any particular instance about Don Chafin-Did he tell people how to vote?

Riley: No I was in Boone County it was just heresay that I would get.

Nogay: But you were afraid of Don Chafin even though you didn't live in Logan County.

Riley: Yes I was afraid of him. For he was against the union and we were fo the union.

Nogay: Can you tell me more about the people leaving on the train.

Riley: Well my dad's two sisters lived at Blair and one of them had a nine week old baby and the last train that would come out of Blair so her husband put her on a train and sent her to Ramage and they stayed with us until it was over with. I think that was probably a week altogether when it happened and I saw the soldiers go up on the train.

Nogay: What did the soldiers look like.

Riley: They were in coach cars not on flatcars and you couldn't tell too much about them.

We didn't see any guns or anything like that when I was there. But they got work out that they were coming down Hewitt Creek and coming on in to Ramage and of course some of them got out at night and would take maybe four hours and they would get out and hide to guard and watch to see if anyone would come and some were invited. My mother's nephew invited my dad and they said what did he have he said did you see a gun he said no I didn't but he had something wrapped up in a sheet that looked like a gun.

Nogay: Was there a lot of division in families over this fighting that was happening with the miners?

Riley: Well Don Chatin had already dug trenches up on Blair Mountain before it started and he was set ready for them when they come and they all come in from Cabin Creek most all of them there wasn't anyone around Ramage that I know of that went to Blair Mountain.

Nogay: Did it cause a lot of tension between families?

Riley: Yes it did. Quite a bit. It was kind of like the Civil War.

Nogay: In what way?

Riley: The next door neighbor, you didn't know if he was for the union or the company. And that's the way it was. A nephew lived about 5 or 6 houses above us and he didn't have a union job in the mines at Ramage and of course he went with the company to break the union.

Nogay: Do people talk much about what happened back then now?

Riley: Well quite a few of them are gone now. Once in a while someone will bring up something about it but....

Nogay: When you think back about those times what do you remember the most?

Riley: Being scared that my dad might have to go and fight and of course he was my pride and joy. You just didn't want to be away from your parents you just wanted to stay where they was for security. I was about 11 when this happened and I know when we heard that the soldiers were coming in we all went down to Ramage to where the trussel is

on the railroad on Six Mile and still live there. We were happy to see them come for we tought they would stop it and if not the ones from Logan, Don Chafin and his crew would maybe come on over and really cause some trouble.