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MOUNTAINS, MINES AND COMPANY QUARTERS LIFE, LABOR AND THE SLOSS-SHEFFIELD STEEL & IRON CO., 1880-1950

Steven Filoromo

The heart of Central Alabama's evolving landscape, Jones Valley, bore witness to tremendous changes in technology, community development, and industrial entrepreneurship as Birmingham was built. From this, a mobile workforce evolved, partially from the impermanence of mining camps, but generally from the desire to improve income and status and provide financial stability for families. At the height of industrial opportunity, Jones Valley flourished – creating a smog that filled the valley from the many furnaces in the city and beyond. Sloss-Sheffield Steel & Iron Company stands at the heart of industrial growth as their camps and communities extended far beyond the City Furnace. Through the workers at Sloss and residents of neighboring communities, we can further investigate the legacy of the adaptations made to mitigate harsh living conditions. Closed off mine shafts are among the limited remains of the once-bustling communities that fueled the growth of the city, making it difficult to understand how Birmingham came from more humble beginnings. Through an examination of the mining camps and industrial suburbs, a clearer understanding of how the urban, industrial, and inter-connected environment arose from the lives and labor of everyday workers.

The complexity of life and labor in this new industrial age is often sparse in historical documents. The trials and tribulations miners and factory workers adapt to throughout their communities are quite complex. Additionally, mining camps and industrial communities contribute directly to the industrial growth of the urban landscape in the newly formed city of Birmingham in Alabama. It is important to research the history of these communities and their inextricable tie to socio-cultural issues. These communities are not just reflections of the evolution of different mining technologies, they also physically demonstrate the juxtaposition of racial tension and urban planning. In this era, an attitude of post-industrial corporate paternalism develops towards African-Americans, immigrants, and other ethnic working-class communities. Due in part to increasing work opportunities throughout the state of Alabama and these attitudes are directly reflected through community development. These attitudes exist in different extremes. On one hand, corporate paternalism is most obviously demonstrated through domestic science programs put forth in the 1920s. An extension of this attitude exists under the auspices of the convict leasing programs of the late 1800s and early 1900s. The physical relationship between company, worker, and place-making is first apparent through the development of the mining camp.

Sloss City Quarters. The vault, one of the last three remaining buildings located next to the rear of the Commissary. Photo by Steve Filoromo, 2019.

Mining settlements are defined by their impermanence - they develop as single-industry settlements that eventually falter as resources become depleted and are abandoned as workers find opportunities elsewhere.[1] Archaeological surveys on mining camps demonstrate that there are massive variations spanning short-lived temporary camps to sprawling urban settlements.[2] Similarly, the need for workers in industrial facilities lead to the development of the 'company town,' or quarters. Company towns find their historic origins in the development of riverside mills and

factories most notably in the late 18th century, as factory supported communities are generally built adjacent to pre-existing transportation networks.[3] This model is reflected in many industrial facilities in Birmingham, like that of Sloss-Sheffield Steel & Iron Company and their Sloss City Quarters. Of course, instead of being built along a preexisting river network, their company is organized around the newly built railroad network. Mining settlements differ from company towns in various ways, one such way is their development, as mining settlements are designed around their mobility, yet they find similar living conditions. This need for impermanence results in the variations of domestic structures being either a log cabin, canvas tents with wood frames, dugouts, brush shelters, and many other haphazard living quarters.[4] Birmingham's mining communities generally consisted of board and batten single and multi-family residences. Conditions within these communities are often sub-optimal within the architectural legacy of different communities as 20th century industrial quarters are most similar to the two-room homes of antebellum slaves.[5] Understanding the complexities of community development is important. These different variables require much more specific contexts, and for the greater Birmingham area, it is important to note how the landscape changed from Alabama statehood in 1819 to the founding of Birmingham in 1871.

Prior to the massive industrial growth that influenced Birmingham's development, the regions origins stem from a more bucolic beginning. While the area is well-traversed by indigenous Creek communities, an American fort and log cabin is constructed atop the remaining Mississippian period mounds in what eventually becomes Bessemer.[6] The Jonesboro fort in Bessemer is built to protect only several families from potential hostile interactions with the Creek (despite the lack of any known violence); however, it soon finds itself sharing Jones Valley with the small community of Wood's Station (Woodlawn) just several years after its humble beginnings.[7] However, the most notable settlement prior to Birmingham's existence is found in the 1850s, as Williamson Hawkins purchased and developed 2000 acres surrounding Village Creek at the base of Jones Valley.[8] Hawkins developed a cotton plantation, enslaving 150 African-American slaves to manage the land.[9] This changed following the founding of Birmingham in 1871 and again in the 1880s as industrial leader Samuel Thomas of Pennsylvania purchased the land to develop both the company town of Thomas and the Pioneer Company's blast furnace complex.[10] This pattern of development seen with Thomas becomes all too common as blast furnaces, coke ovens, and other industrial facilities emerge and plant themselves on the growing urban landscape of the Birmingham district.

From simple shacks to well-kept bungalows and plantations to mansions, the landscape of transformation that turned the Birmingham district from farmland to the magic city revolved around one thing, industry. The city served as a playground for the wealthy investors who wanted to take a risk on the industrial potential found in the region. Therefore, acquiring land from the Elyton Land Company and situating industrial facilities along the newly built railroad encouraged a boom like no other. In order to maintain stability in production, facilities required a massive labor force; however, with constant influxes of workers in a newly formed city, they are presented with an issue. Young men such as David Allen sought opportunities as they entered the workforce, and many of those opportunities came from the Birmingham District. In 1929, David Allen of Andalusia, Alabama relocated as his uncle offered him a job at the No. 2 Slope at Lewisburg mine. Due to the lack of money, he eventually moved to Chattanooga, TN just a year later, and made his way to work at Hampton Slope in Pratt City and later Sloss-Sheffield Steel & Iron in the 1930s and 40s.[11] Not just David Allen, but many other African-American men believed that moving to Birmingham will improve their lives, mostly in part because of efforts made by industrial leaders to maintain a large unskilled labor base since unskilled workers would generally take the worst jobs.[12]

Mining camps surrounding the Birmingham district were ubiquitous through the industrial boom between 1876 to the 1950s. The region faced an unstable beginning; nevertheless, in- 1876 new methods for reducing lime in local ore to create stronger iron, partnered with the discovery of extensive coking coal deposits brought

together industrial entrepreneurs like James Withers Sloss, Truman Aldrich, and Henry DeBardeleben ultimately forming Pratt Coal and Coke.[13] Due to the continued increase in labor demand, miners and other unskilled workers joined the ranks of many different companies rather than remaining at any single one. Strategically located facilities like Sloss City Furnace, Republic Iron & Steel, and Tennessee Coal & Iron are built in the heart of Birmingham. With the railroad running right through the center of the city, company sponsored living quarters develop around different facilities and camps spring up around the newly opening mines. Unlike the permanent communities built by the companies in the city, such as Sloss City Quarters and Sloss's North Birmingham Quarters, other quickly assembled camps moved throughout the mountains and fields due to the temporary nature of mining. Companies including Sloss, Tennessee Coal & Iron, and Woodward constructed many satellite communities within thirty miles of Birmingham including Pratt City, Brookside, and Dolomite. [14] However, to understand the extent of these networks established by the companies, one would need to look further at Sloss-Sheffield Steel & Iron Company to help explain much of Birmingham's development.

James Wither Sloss's most ambitious project and lasting legacy are that of Sloss Furnaces, which are a National Historic Landmark in Birmingham. While the site itself is massive, the extent of the company's business expanded far beyond the city's limits. Sloss Mines, one of the first mining communities built by the company, near the former villages of Muscoda (now Bessemer), which is built just several years following the organization of the company.[15] Ore excavated at Sloss Mines required less fluxing stone, proving to be far superior to the ore removed from Ruffner Mountain, where Sloss also maintained extensive mining operations.[16] Sloss Mines 1 and 2 leave a little record of life in the area; however, reports from local newspapers describe a complex, yet dangerous, condition of living.

Long term living in the area brought ongoing work opportunities and a more permanent community of workers, standing in stark contrast to the nearby board

Sloss City Furnaces at Sloss Furnace National Historic Landmark. In the foreground are the stock trestles. Photo taken by Steven Filoromo, 2019.

and batten homes for other camps on Red Mountain. Each camp whether on Red Mountain or the Warrior Coal Fields were community resources, domestic residences, different processing facilities, and additional supervised quarters for convicts leased to the company. Within the residential area of the mining camps, streets are intentionally separated by race. Many white workers viewed the "black" areas of a community as inferior, wanting residents to not only face racial oppression through economic and social activities but also within their physical spaces. Often times these same white workers attempted to stay clear of different streets because of an unsubstantiated fear and ongoing racial terrorism within the community. With the inclusion of state-leased convicts, black workers, and white workers, as well as the climate of the Jim Crow South, racial terrorism permeated throughout mining communities such as Brookside. This is demonstrated through the murder of Tom Redmond, who attempted to step in and

lessen the ongoing altercation between a group of whites and blacks only to meet his untimely fate.[17] One other case that stands out for the Sloss Mines at Bessemer is the 1892 murder of Brack Wallace. Reports showcase that community members Phil Thomas and Brack Wallace had a verbally aggressive exchange in town, and later that night during a social gathering Thomas recognized Wallace as he passed by to which Thomas quickly shot the man in the mouth, only to be chased by city officers that happened to be near the mining quarters at that time.[18] Obscure references to activity in the residential area of Sloss Mines make mentions to the murder of Officer John Manning as well.[19] Aside from similar reports of homicides in the community, residents and workers faced trouble when their tenured superintendent committed suicide in his family home. The coroner investigating the death of 55-year-old superintendent C.E. Barrett speculated that due to his ill health, Barrett may have been despondent when committing the act.[20]

Not only did danger lurk within the domestic areas of mining and factory communities, workers face imperious conditions while working, too. As a new cylinder is put in place at Sloss Mine No. 2 in 1900, a white employee was crushed as the equipment was being installed. [21] Additional reports show even during normal operations, the site remained quite dangerous. Later that year, on November 29, three men met their untimely end as empty tram cars "broke loose and carried death in their path."[22] For one man, his end came as he took a nap at the tracks of the L & N railyard, only to be awoken as a freight train caught and crushed his leg.[23] Instead of bringing the man to a nearby clinic, workers brought Was Robinson to the "negro restaurant" neighboring the Robertson's & Petersons Saloon.[24] Occupational safety did little to actually protect workers as the condition in which they worked was constantly declining. At Sloss Mines in Bessemer, the trials and tribulations of life and labor consist of harsh conditions. However, they are distinctively different from other mining camps. Sloss Mines in Bessemer were one of the few more permanent neighborhoods. Impermanence plagued many of the different camps in the broader region; however, Sloss Mines in Bessemer benefited from its proximity to Bessemer, as well as helped change the heavily forested landscape into a complex network of mines and camps.

Shown on a 1908 map of the Birmingham district made by Tennessee Coal & Iron, Sloss Mines existed on the periphery of Bessemer. [25] Bessemer's urban layout provided plenty of space for the workers of Sloss Mines to expand and integrate into the community, unlike many of the other camps lining Red Mountain. This same map also shows many of the mining and industrial communities that have expanded and become modern neighborhoods in the City of Birmingham today. The map illustrates urban plans, road, and rail networks surrounding Red Mountain, and for most mines and their camps, such as Ishkooda, Smythe, and Redding, no urban layout exists. Few urban blocks appear in remote areas near the mine; however, the communities of Smythe and Ishkooda show simply an intersection in the road network as being the center of the communities associated with the mines. Within this 1908 map, small industrial communities are integrated well within the urban sprawl of Jones Valley. Yet many communities, some of which no longer exist, that will go on to become part of the modern Greater Birmingham Metropolitan area are merely in their infancy. Rosedale (formerly Clifton), Irondale, Crestline Heights, all appear within this map, as well as many remote urban blocks not tied to any specific city or industrial community.

Beyond the Birmingham District, Sloss-Sheffield Steel & Iron Company established satellite communities far into the fields and forests of western Alabama.[26] The isolation of these satellite camps and communities only attracted more issues. A series of robbery attempts plagued Sloss at Alden and Flat Top. The robbery attempts at Alden were unsuccessful; however, using nitroglycerine, robbers were able to blow the combination lock and escape with $3,000 early in the day at Flat Top. [27] Another interesting story highlighting social life, specifically in the Sloss Mine No. 9 Russellville community, revolves around illegal whiskey production. On December 1929, Officers discovered a still run by three men in the local camp, and upon its discovery destroyed the facility. [28] While these activities are not atypical in any modern community, they demonstrate a life among the camp. Camps are generally small; however,

they did not remain isolated from the social landscape. The network of interactions exist far and wide throughout the state.

As demonstrated above, Sloss mine's camps landscape of north Alabama offer often elusive insight into the social sphere of a satellite community. Even as racial tension in the urban landscape created detrimental and unequal living and working conditions for African Americans, these attitudes are reflected and acted upon in the mining community. Racism is inextricably tied to the development and planning of a community, and at Flat Top mine, segregation is readily apparent. White workers at Flat Top lived in an area called 'Silk Stocking Row,' where the streets are lined with yellow homes; contrasted with the red-painted black worker's homes. [29] Similarly, the Sloss-owned Bessie Mines demonstrated this too. Photos from 1912 show further that the smaller board and batten homes in the community were similar in construction but show a difference in how close they are to each other and are racially separated.[30] Bessie mines faced their fair share of issues too. In 1916, where an explosion entombed more than thirty men in the mine.[31]

Returning to David Allen's story, Allen, once purchasing his own property in Cat Mountain, still returned to the closest commissary at Republic since it had good food resources.[32] Allen made good use of six of his acres, while also picking up odd jobs on his days away from Sloss, even when working six days a week.[33] Like Allen, other individuals achieved some stability in their communities, which is remarkable since life is truly defined by mobility in this early industrial age of Birmingham. Gamble Mines blacksmith John Baker remained integral throughout a majority of the communities first several decades. Despite the increasing availability of "better" blacksmiths, Baker remained of service to his community after assisting in prospecting for Gamble Mine in 1887. [34] In 1941, Baker still lived at Gamble, remembering his fifty-four years of service to the community from its inception to its abandonment. [35] Witnessing decades of the constantly changing community, Baker, despite industry disappearing, remained an important part of the community's resources. Alongside Baker's blacksmithing business, the resources available to individual communities vary.

Without detailed archaeological work and/or historical records, there are no true reconstructions of the original mining sites that enabled Birmingham to burst at its seams. Therefore, without these detailed levels of analysis, it is difficult to ascertain an idea about community resources in relation to community development. Several photographs from various sites including Pratt No. 6, Edgewater, and Sloss No. 2 give some indication as to the different features found within the landscape. Presumably, from 1914 (based on the date/trinomial in the bottom right-hand corner of the photograph), it is clear that at the fan & transformer house at Pratt Mine No. 6 is juxtaposed with a thick forest.[36] Within the photographic records at Sloss Furnaces, a clear picture of the inside of a TCI First Aid room at Edgewater demonstrates further the use of medical space at a mining camp.[37] Both photos, as well as others from Pratt No. 8 demonstrated that features are erected not for permanence, but for function.[38] These buildings are not intended to boast any architectural significance but more so to execute the wishes of the company, and unfortunately, miners' homes fall to the same issue.

Unlike their contemporaries in the industrial quarters of the city, the impermanence of a mining camp is clearly expressed further through the 1930s photos of Arthur Rothstein of the Farm Security Administration. Companies intentionally laid out their communities to support corporate paternalism. Rail lines ran within feet of the front doors of miners' homes.[39] The physical landscape of a company town is intentional because it also imposes social control and inequality, whereas, a mining camp reflects the chaos of American urbanization and exploitation. Rothstein's photos demonstrate that living conditions in mine camps, specifically that of the coal mine camps are deteriorating.[40] Pyramidal duplexes line the streets of most communities owned by TCI, and while most were built to offer 'passable' living conditions, Rothstein demonstrates otherwise.[41] Boards were falling off already patchy roofs with front doors being boarded over, all while the front porches bowed. This speaks to not

only the living conditions described throughout various oral histories, archaeological fieldwork, and historical records, but also speaks to the difficulties in adapting to new economic situations that were born out of the Great Depression.

Adaptation, or the lack thereof, accurately describes in one word the ongoing issue of industrial quarters and mining camps. However, unlike the mining camps, industrial quarters (note the use of the word 'quarters') serve as an analogy to antebellum slave quarters.[42] Not to say that mining camps do not reflect these same conditions, it is just more readily apparent and on display as industrial quarters are merely adopted into the urban footprint as a ward within the city landscape. While once a resident of Sloss Quarters, Will Prather describes that wind blew through the cracks in the walls, that the 1' x 6' boards only stood on the outside of the house with no boards or insulation on the inside.[43] By the time Prather even considered putting in tubs in the 1950s, the quarters were about to be demolished and/or moved elsewhere.[44]

Oral history records offer valuable insight into the generation of Sloss workers who lived in and around the quarters and city furnace through and following the Great Depression. Interviews with Jeffrey Rush go on to further demonstrate that the Sloss Quarters had few resources, especially when it came to maintenance as there was no indoor plumbing in the properties where workers lived.[45] Luckily crime was low (according to Jeffrey's experience), and that the few deaths that did occur here are from two residents touching a naked wired with a wrench, and a stabbing that occurred later.[46] Rush spent his money mostly at the Commissary; however, when he and his family had some extra money they would travel into center city to get groceries from the Dago's such as Buckeyes, one on Morris Ave, and Willie's Curb Store on 2nd Ave.[47] The Sloss Quarters community is tightly knit, most of the people who lived and rented here stayed until they passed away or quit. The community itself is made up of residents from the countryside since the "city boys would save up to buy a new suit" and leave.[48] At the quarters, women created and influenced change within the household. Men worked; however, low wages and the male-dominated industrial facilities limited female work opportunities to various domestic occupations such as laundresses, and house workers for the white Birmingham elite.[49] As the families moved in to company leased quarters, women worked to ameliorate their new homes which lacked window panes, insulation, running water, and other issues by saving money and working to purchase furniture from the commissary, create and decorate the homes, and gardening to provide food.[50] Without their hard work, conditions could have been much worse for those working and living in the community.

Change within the different mining communities relied heavily upon the actions of its residents. Despite the enforcement of domestic science programs and development of different community resources, areas near the city that lacked the supervision of a corporate entity demonstrate that among the changes made, they were made due to the actions of everyday individuals. The town of Clifton offers a good example of this. Clifton (now Rosedale) was organized in 1886 by the Clifton Land Company sitting atop Red Mountain near the present-day city of Homewood and the location of the *Vulcan* Historical Park. Clifton faced issues with attracting residents, mostly because of the lack of consistent transportation from Highland Park, therefore the company subdivided the lots and encouraged African American workers to move into the town, labelling it as an opportunity to become a property owner.[51] The residents relied upon themselves for the construction of churches, stores, and more. Even with a steam dummy line running up and down the mountain, residents knew it was inconsistent and walked up and down the "pig trail" past the Valley View mine (near the present-day *Vulcan* statue). Early within the community's history, they erected the Healing Springs Baptist Church (1887), which when later renamed to Union Missionary Baptist Church, served as a center to offer community welfare and educational programs for the residents of Rosedale.[52] This shows that citizens relied upon themselves to incite change for their communities. Specifically, with the case of Clifton/Rosedale, the community supported these activities by using the church as a social place that allowed them to discuss and later create better conditions for themselves.

Despite the difficulties of everyday life, residents were very active in inciting change for their living conditions. The lack of adaptation shown on a broader scale exacerbates the oversight of corporate-paternalism, and the adaptations a family makes to their own home can only be done at an individual level. Families maintained some sense of stability as the nature of working life changed; whereas, companies often neglected to understand how rapidly their communities evolved. Many companies, in response to the cultural shifts spreading throughout the country in the early years of the 1900s and the negative views whites had towards worker housing, instituted domestic science programs and remodeled many of their communities.[53] As these same shifts are occurring in the neighborhoods surrounding Birmingham, the exact opposite became prevalent in the satellite mining camps and communities. Miners went on strike in 1908 in response to the announced reduction in wages in the larger coal companies and union mines.[54] Despite the strike's short life, violence spread throughout the Birmingham district, with many bombings and murders in the valley.[55] Miners already worried about the lack of positive living conditions in their own communities. Canvas camps continued to go on without proper sanitary facilities and regular camps even faced issues with having proper law enforcement.[56] In response to the strike of 1908, mining camps added a clause on their home leases that allows the company to dictate who can and cannot be permitted on the property.[57] Eventually, as the strike settled, the camps did return to some sense of normalcy. The deputy-sheriffs of each mining camp returned to patrol and keep anyone unfamiliar to the area out.[58] Reporter John Fitch experienced this firsthand, and when he encountered a guard while photographing a mining camp, only to learn that the deputies police the camps to keep labor agents out.[59]

A major contributor to the workforce at mining camps comes from the convict leasing system that the state of Alabama perpetuated from 1866 to 1927.[60] A majority of the mines in Alabama employed convict labor as a means to keep up with the demand for different materials at the many different blast furnaces in Jones Valley. Not only was convict leasing an inexpensive labor force, but companies also sought to use convict miners for the jobs no one else would take.[61] Conditions for convict workers were among the worst – it was not until 1901 that the state responded to the concerns of management and took control of providing food, clothing, and housing for convict miners.[62] The state disregarded the concerns many had with convict leasing, and until the Banner Mine explosion of 1911, where 128 convict miners peril, the government rarely acknowledged the failures of this system.[63] Mining companies continued to exploit labor from this system as it also provided a weapon in response to impending miner strikes.

Of the many mining communities mentioned, several of Sloss's benefited from convict labor. While Flat Top maintained an entire non-convict community, at one point in the first decade of the 1900s mining labor is "almost exclusively convict labor," as the company began to open more mines in the region.[64] Another Sloss owned community, the Coalburg Mining Camp, leased several hundred black convicts.[65] The number of workers within each community varied; however, their presence is undeniable within each communities landscape. Convict workers could only travel to their working post and their prison camp. At Coalburg, prison facilities contained a separate female prison and washhouse separated by the main prison with a fence. In the main part of the prison camp, the kitchen was kept separate from the main building. Next to the entire prison camp though lied the northern extension of the coke ovens, with several log cabins to the south.[66]

The Pratt mining village saw something similar. Pratt Mines Shaft Prison for Shaft No. 1 has a much different layout than that of Sloss. Just off the tracks to the coke ovens, a gangway leads to a small complex prison camp containing a bathhouse, hospital, kitchen, dining area, commissary, and guardrooms.[67] But between this 1888 map of the prison camp and an 1891 map of the same camp, major changes occurred. Enclosed in a large square fenced-in area, a plus-shaped prison containing cells and a dining room stand separated from kitchens, a larger hospital, and wash house.[68] These alterations reflect a larger change in how the state manages convict camps.

The employment of Dr. Russell Cunningham resulted in many changes, as his focus on sanitation, diet, and labor ultimately led to a reduced mortality rate at the convict camp.[69] Cunningham called for the creation of a separate convict town that improved the negligent conditions convict workers faced, shown in these two depictions of the facilities.[70] Pratt Mines, owned by TCI, saw an increase of convict labor within their camps, as in 1888 the company signed a new decade-long contract that employed the use of between 500 and 600 convict workers.[71] These prison camps emerged as ancillary structures to most industrial features in, restricting workers to only be able to see a very limited aspect of the operations. It is important to note too that as to whether or not convict prison camps are visible in different records, convict labor is employed in a majority of the mining communities active during this period between 1866-1928.

Many mining communities dotting Red Mountain, Cat Mountain, and the Jones Valley region eventually absorbed into the urban footprint of Birmingham. Companies began to abandon mines and dismantle homes dismantle homes in the 1950s as housing laws changed and the demand for iron production is offset with modernization. Of the few signposts to the history of the Birmingham district, few exist in our modern age. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, interests in the mining and industrial history of Birmingham came to the forefront as the Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark opened and the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) reviewed eligible historic properties in the surrounding region. Among these recorded sites, Sloss Mine No. 2 and Brookside offer unique glimpses into the dynamic and complex nature of these sites so ubiquitous to industrial life and labor in Alabama. Additionally, the interest in Birmingham's industrial age has even influenced the archaeological investigations into sites such as the Sloss City Quarters frequently mentioned above.

Sloss Mine No. 2 is one of the most important mines for the extraction of iron ore on Red Mountain. But after its abandonment in the mid-20th century, the site became heavily deteriorated. During the period in which archaeologists and historians began examining eligible properties for listing on the Historic American Engineering Record, it is found that Sloss Mine No. 2 provides not only traces of the mine but several other important features.[72] Within the site, features include the 1890 No. 2 mine opening, a cemetery, the 1894 hoist house, and several implements associated with the site remodel in 1900.[73] The Sloss Mine cemetery is found to have grave markers ranging the mid-19th century through the closing of the site in the 1950s – indicating that there is an occupation of the area preceding Sloss's purchase of the site.[74]

Adjacent to the Mine No. 2 features, foundational remnants are leading towards the opening for Mine No. 1; however much of the area seems to be overgrown and in poor condition.[75]

Further north from the Sloss Mines on Red Mountain, the Brookside community offers not just a glimpse into the legacy of industrial activity, but social activity. Brookside's cultural identity differed from many of the other satellite communities. It existed in near isolation with access to several different coal mines, and a majority of its residents are from Czechoslovakia, resulting in a close-knit community who found comfort in the cultural similarity.[76] Records from the HAER survey indicate that much of the landscape changes that are made in Brookside remain – beehive coke ovens in two batteries (or rows) hide under overgrown flora in the woods of the community.[77] It is clear from the drawn maps of the beehive coke ovens features that they are built around the topography and in a manner that minimizes the need for lifts that transport materials throughout the site. Coke ovens are among the more common features that remain present in modern post-industrial communities in the region. Aside from Brookside, beehive coke ovens still exist in both Blocton and the Pratt City communities as well as the Sloss City Furnaces. [78]

Among the many different features present on the grounds of the Sloss City Furnaces, the Coke Ovens are of least known. Located near the front entrance of the grounds, several open archaeological units by the road covered with an awning shield the only remaining features from the base of the coke ovens. Only the foundational

remains exist from the coke ovens, where a small portion of the beehive coke ovens foundation is visible at the entrance of the site; however, they are part of a larger system that grew from 120 to 288 coke ovens, until they were ultimately dismantled in the 1920s.[79] Residents of Birmingham complained about how the coke ovens posed detrimental health problems those who live in the valley, forcing Sloss-Sheffield Steel & Iron Company to open a by-products plant in North Birmingham in the 1920s.[80]

Additional archaeological work at the Sloss City Furnaces yields valuable information about the material living conditions of the residents at Sloss Quarters. The lots where the quarters once stood are generally cleared or built over with new commercial buildings; however, the commissary, vault, and doctors office still stand. Preliminary excavations conducted in 2012 unearthed a variety of materials including faunal remains, glass bottles, bricks, two dog tags, and other miscellaneous fragments.[81] Many artifacts unearthed indicate that the remaining shotgun houses removed by the company in the 1950s, worker relocated and dismantled the homes rather than demolishing them with wrecking equipment as structural remains were minimal, including on few foundational bricks and no erratic debris that would indicate the presence of a wrecking crew.[82] Since the commissary served as the main supplied for goods in the quarters, in the later years of the Quarters there is likely access to a wide variety of goods, including a diverse array of medicine. Faunal remains from the excavations demonstrate that residents had a highly variable diet that included a lot of wild game and domestic animals.[83]

While the communal garden at Sloss Quarters no longer remains, the Birmingham Historical Society maintains a plot near the furnaces that includes a variety of herbs and snake gourds, while using slag and other soils that the garden of the bygone quarters would have adapted to.[84]

Impermanence and exploitation are common themes throughout the history of the Sloss mining camps and quarters. Although, this is by no means exclusive to Sloss, as every single company that benefited from convict leasing, industrial growth, and the mineral wealth of the Birmingham district has similar stories. The legacy of these mining settlements ties to many of the modern communities that exist throughout Alabama, and through an examination of their history, the Sloss Sheffield Steel & Iron Company's legacy extends far beyond the city furnaces. Cultural values and racial tension directly influenced social life and urban planning even in rural, isolated, mining settlements. Far beyond that, it is clear that with issues such as convict leasing, mine abandonment, and corporate paternalism created a far more complex social system that provided difficult situations that workers found various ways to adapt to. Conditions of living were terrible in many cases, but workers were active agents for inciting change even when it seemed hopeless. The lasting remnants of this bygone era may not fully represent these issues; however, by understanding what the few traces of the past represent, we can have a more holistic understanding about the nature of living in Birmingham in its industrial age.

ENDNOTES

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