



Lethbridge, Alta.—The Business Section and Public Square.

The Lethbridge Coal Mines

By O. D. AUSTIN

THE pioneer coal mines of the prairie provinces, the Lethbridge mines, hold a unique position in the development of the Canadian West. In 1882, Sir A. T. Galt, showed his faith in Western Canada by interesting himself and some English capitalists in the then almost unknown coal resources of Alberta. A company known as the North-West Coal and Navigation Company was formed with the object of mining coal from the out-cropping seams on the banks of the Belly River and of supplying their product to the Canadian Pacific Railway, which was then wending its way across the prairies.

In order to take the coal to the nearest C.P.R. point, which was Medicine Hat, barges were built. After contending with shallow water, and a shifting river-bed for a season that plan was given up. The company then built a narrow gauge railroad, commonly called the "turkey trail" to Dunmore Junction, near Medicine Hat, a distance of one hundred and five miles. From 1885, when the road was completed, until 1896, when the Canadian Pacific Railway Company bought it and made it a part of the Crow's Nest Line, the Company operated the road. Meanwhile, the output of the mines had increased more rapidly than had the market in the Western Territories and it was necessary to reach other markets. Accordingly, another "turkey-trail" was built, tapping the Great Northern at Great Falls, Montana, about eighty miles south. The company has since built another line extending sixty miles south-west to Cordston. All these lines are now standard-gauge, well operated and profitable.

It was in 1885, when the Dunmore road was finished, that the Lethbridge mines really began to be operated. From being a small plant on the side of a river bank, hoisting a few tons of coal a day up the side of the hill to the railroad in small cars attached to a cable, the

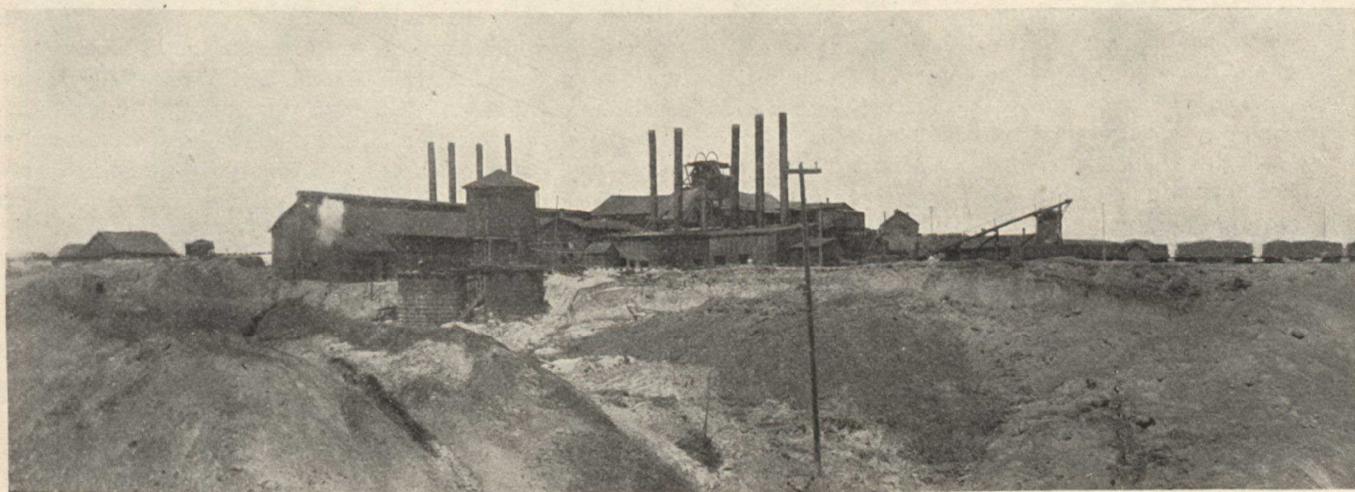
mines have extended to their present large proportions.

The Alberta Railway and Irrigation Company, as it is now called, owns large areas of coal land. The seams have an average thickness of fifty-four inches. The Galt coal is known all over the West as the best domestic coal on the market because of its free burning qualities and hard structure. At Lethbridge there are two other small mines, together producing fifty to sixty tons per day.

When the famous strike was called, on March 8, 1906, five hundred and forty miners refused to work unless their demands for higher wages, a weight-checker, better conditions in the mine and the recognition of the union by the company were granted. The Company considered these demands unfair and impossible. The output from the mines just previous to the strike had been about one thousand tons per day, although it had been at times as high as fifteen hundred tons. During the months that the strike lasted, the management had a few men at work but only enough to keep the mine in repair and to install new machinery. Practically no coal was shipped, although, with the output of the other mines, there was enough to supply the local demand. It is to the credit of these companies that the price of coal was not raised during the strike.

After many months of bitter controversy and several futile attempts at conciliation, the sufferings of the public, especially in Saskatchewan, became so acute that the Dominion Government, through W. L. Mackenzie King, Deputy Minister of Labour, attempted to bring the strike to an end. Finally, after a conference of several days' duration, the operators granted some concessions and the miners generously waived several important contentions, and on Sunday, Dec. 2 the strike was declared off.

The next morning nearly two hundred men returned



The Lethbridge Coal Mines—No. 3 Shaft.