

A Daisy of a Town:
A Pictorial History of Daisytown,
Pennsylvania



by
Mary Elaine Lozosky

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Dedicated to my mother, Helen Lozosky, one of the best oral historians I have
ever known



Helen Timko Lozosky
Third Grade

Preface

This collection was an idea I developed as I was doing my family genealogy. I could not only see Daisytown changing and disappearing as the “patch town” I knew but I was being told on a regular basis of children and grandchildren cleaning out family homes and destroying the things that they found. An entire history was being lost.

So I began to ask and search for Daisytown stories and pictures. I borrowed pictures, scanned them on my computer and returned them unharmed. Many people assisted me. St. Agnes parish was kind enough to run my request in the church bulletin. I took out an ad in the Center in the Woods newsletter. Glenn Tunney ran an article in the *Herald Standard* newspaper. I wrote letters to former residents. I found some gems.

Victoria Billingsley’s help on this project was indispensable. This is certainly not a complete collection of Daisytown photographs. I wish it were. Many photographs are gone forever. Some few are yet to be discovered.

Mary Elaine Lozosky
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West Pike Run Township is comprised of the villages of:

Daisytown
Crescent Heights
Walkertown
Sharrertown
White Hall
Clover Hill

The township was originally part of Pike Run Township, which in turn was formed from a portion of Fallowfield in 1792. It was named for the creek that flows through it. March 9, 1839 marked the creation of East and West Pike Run Townships.

West Pike Run Township was rich in bituminous coal. Although small mines operated in the creek valley in the early 1800s, not until the early 1900s did the Vesta No. 4 Mine become the largest bituminous coal mine in the world. It was owned and operated by the Vesta Coal Company, a subsidiary of the Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation. The entire output of the mine was used by J&L in the manufacture of steel at its Pittsburgh and Aliquippa Works.



Over 15 billion tons of coal has been taken out of Pennsylvania since mining began around 1760. The peak production year was 1917, when 277 million tons were extracted. Pennsylvania was the number one coal mining state in the United States until it was surpassed by West Virginia in 1930. Pennsylvania produced only 65 million tons of coal, but was still the nationwide leader in coke production.

The Vesta Coal Mining Company built Daisytown in 1906 to house the miners of Vesta #4. According to local legend when the surveyor arrived to lay out the town, he and his assistant found the land covered with daisies. The assistant is reported to have said, "This will be a daisy of a town." Hence the name.



Daisytown from Jablonsky Farm circa 1930.

While the story about the daisies is a neat one this one is probably more accurate. It first appeared in the *Southwestern Pennsylvania* magazine series. I was able to confirm the story with Max Avner's grandson.

There was no post office in Daisytown until Max Avner arrived. The people wanted a post office so Max Avner said they could have part of his store for that purpose. Post offices need a name. Political boss Boise Penrose was a friend of Max Avner's. Penrose controlled much of the political patronage in Pennsylvania. Post offices were political plums. (Later Penrose would be involved in a big scandal over building the capital building in Harrisburg.) Penrose asked Avner about a name. Avner suggested the name Daisytown again because of those prevalent fields of daisies in the area. The physical location of Daisytown was named Hood's Hollow on the map. For some reason, Hood's Hollow did not stick – maybe because many of the immigrants had trouble pronouncing it calling it instead “Hootch Hollow.”



Another view of Daisytown from Jablonsky Farm.

The location of the post office in a grocery store was short lived. The Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation, owner of Vesta #4 mine, did not like to get its mail in a grocery store. The company built a post office not far from the store. That building served the community until 1983 when the new facility was open. The original building remains although it has fallen into disrepair.

A coal patch is a town where everything was built and owned by the coal company, including schools, churches, theaters, and residential structures. Coal patches in Western Pennsylvania generally date from the 1870's through the 1920's.

It is common for the mining camp and services to be built near the portal or entrance of the mine. A company town is designed for efficient housing. It is often built one at a time, has identical housing units, and includes services built and operated by the company, such as a company store, an infirmary, and some recreational facilities.

The company may also provide such services as free fuel, a church, schools, and athletic facilities.

Unlike many other industries mining does not typically come into an already established community. The mine entrance and availability of transportation come first; housing for the workers usually follows.

This arrangement made the company not only the miner's employer, but his landlord and storekeeper as well. Whatever the advantages were of the system in its earlier years, eventually the community felt the company had too much power over the worker and by World War II the company system had disappeared in Southwestern Pennsylvania.



Typical Daisytown row house.

Two things made Daisytown life unique. One was its isolation. Due to its location interaction with other communities was limited. Therefore, interaction was mostly within the community. Also making Daisytown unique were the policies of the Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation, which owned the town. People in Daisytown were allowed to raise cows on the pastures that J&L maintained for its mine animals. The inhabitants raised pigs, chickens, and substantial gardens, very much like their relatives in the old country. This agricultural base made it possible for Daisytown families to keep much of their ethnic life and also gave them the means for getting by in hard times when work in the mines was down.



Inside Daisytown row house.

J&L's housing policy was informal. When a home was vacated, any mining family could move in, so people naturally encouraged their relatives and fellow countrymen to move into the vacated homes.

Soon Daisytown became a series of ethnic villages. For these and other reasons, Daisytown maintained its pockets of Polish, Slovak, Hungarian, and Italian culture until World War II.



Lozosky and Dobozinsky families.

Life in Daisytown was hard. The homes were poorly built and were hot in the summer and cold in the winter. One family had two rooms, half of a coal shanty, and an outhouse. Most houses had a pump outside for water. “City water” was not installed until the 1940’s. Indoor bathrooms were an event of the 1950’s. The town was often called “tub town” because everyone had washtubs hanging from the house.



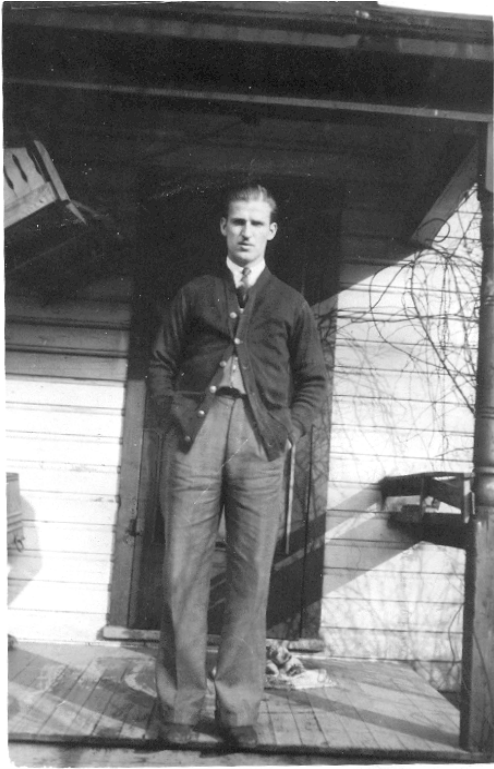
Young Edward Lozosky. Note
board sidewalk and coal "shanty".



Edward Lozosky, kneeling
on board sidewalk.



Walter Lozosky & Boleslaw Dobozinsky
Note outhouse in the background.



John Louis Lozosky, the author's father,
in 1941



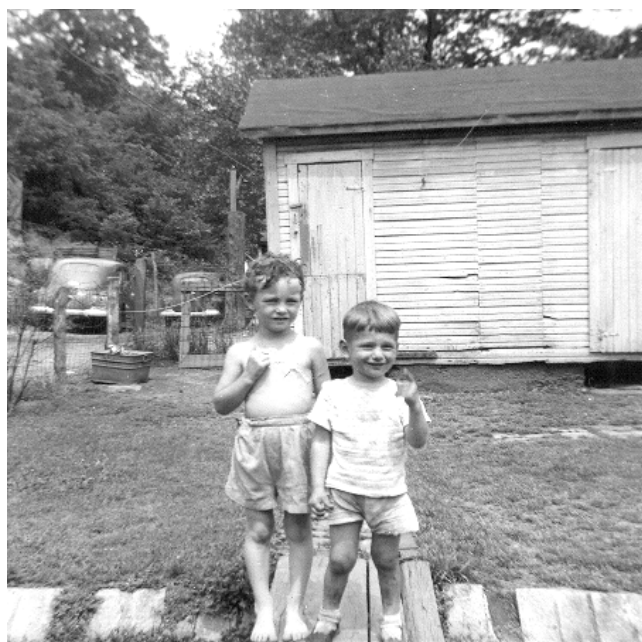
Fern Fisher relaxing with the local
newspaper



Helen Solak giving her dog a bath in front of coal stove.



Mary Zatrock and Joe Gruhulla next to trellis.
Note wash tubs hanging on house.



Two boys of the Fisher family on a summer day.



Helen Lozosky and Clara Dobozinsky
mugging for photographer.

The kind of housing the company provided in Daisytown was not nearly as attractive as that in Richeyville, built by the Vesta Coal Company for the same workers at the same Vesta #4 mine. But Daisytown had a community spirit and vitality lacking in many other coal towns that were physically more attractive.



Men gathering
near old post
office.



Family picnic.



Daisytown Slovak Band members
Martin and Joe Gruhulla.



Mary Sungali, Winnie Solak, Helen Lozosky
sitting on the porch.



St. Mary's Boy Scouts, circa 1965.

Daisytown miners worked in the Vesta #4 mine, one of seven mines owned by the Vesta Coal Corporation, a subsidiary of Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation. Vesta #4 opened in 1904 and soon became the world's largest bituminous coal mine. By 1905, it employed more than a thousand men and produced about one and a half million tons of coal per year. Vesta #4 was a hand-loading mine until the 1940's. The mine closed in 1978.



George Sepic.



Andy Micjan May 1943.

Shipments of coal from Vesta #4 started in 1904. The first year's operation produced 828,00 tons from 96 acres. This acreage represents a solid block of coal the size of 60% of the acreage of California Borough.



Vesta #4 Miners circa 1929.

In 1904, the second year of operation of the Vesta #4 mine, 1,390,573 tons of coal was mined from 154 acres. This is approximately the size of California Borough in acres.