



# JOHNSTON *Historical* SOCIETY

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Pres Bob Otto  
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## NEWSLETTER

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**TIME &** 4:00 P.M. December 28, 1994  
**PLACE** Johnston Middle School Room 213

**PROGRAM** Don Duvick will tell us about native prairies along with describing the prairies in Iowa.

We've had a death in one of the Charter members. Dr. John Wakefield passed away on November 26, 1994 and is buried in Glendale Cemetary. We extend to Delores our Sympathy.

**COME AND BRING A FRIEND TO THE NEXT MEETING**

### NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to the following new members since our last newsletter. Maribel Matherly, Randy & Kathleen Lehman, Susanne & Darrell Hartle, Don & Marilyn Zarley and Karen (Dewey) & William Miltenberger.

### NOTICE

If you have a silver sticker on this newsletter you will not receive further newsletters unless you join the Society. Dues are \$5.00 for Individuals and \$6.00 family.

**COAL MINES** The program of Ernie Beck was extremely interesting and we will try to hit the highlights. At Herrold, IA there was a coal mine known as Norwood White #8. Many local residents cut props for the nearby coal mines. Beck mentioned Archie Kinsey, John Temple and others. The Norwood-White #8 went Southwesterly from the shaft at Herrold. A map that was brought showed it to extend almost to NW 70th near what is now Rene's Greenhouse.

Beck informed us that it was a myth that the mules went blind when they stayed in the mines. There were 13 mules in the Beck mine on Merle Hay where the present Arby's is located. The mules only came out in the summer.

The first mine in Polk County was located at the site of the present Mercy Hospital. The first mine in Johnston was an open-face mine, on what is now 72nd Ave. just north of the present interstate.

Farmers in the area made money by selling props to the Coal mines. The props were made in one-half foot lengths and the base had to be as many inches as the length i.e. 4.5" for a 4½ foot prop. Theodore Rittgers who is now 89 going on, 90 February 13, 1995, said his dad A. J. (by-gum) Rittgers cut props for coal mines.

The Beck mine (near Merle Hay and Meredith Dr.) holed thru to Des Moines Ice mine (near 73rd and Douglas) and as Beck understands it the Des Moines Ice mine later (Central Service) was holed thru to the Urbandale Coal Company mine on the North side of Hickman west of the present K-Mart.

Hoisting engine had a 35 hp motor. Tail rope winch had a 75 hp engine. After steam were out, electricity was used. The Beck mine coal mine on Merle Hay road acquired its hoist motor from a mine at 30th and Park Ave. It acquired its tail rope system from the coal mine in Buxton, Iowa.

The Beck's had a mine near McRae Park and the road that ran by it was named after Ernie's grandfather Thomas Beck.

The rope on the tail drum could be as long as three miles. Ernie tells me that he could talk another 6 hrs on coal mines. His presentation so captivated the audience that time got away from us and the meeting lasted 2 hrs.

#### DEFINITIONS

**Holed thru**--the connections of two coal companies tunnels at the lease line. Once the connection was made it had to be plugged

**String team**--three mules harnessed together in a row

**Tail Rope**--is a continuous rope which pulled trip(cars) in and out of the mine by the winch at the main entry.

#### >>>AT THE NEXT MEETING<<<

Action on Committees and a permanent repository will be on the agenda for the meeting on the 28th. We are told we must be out of the school building by 5:00 P.M. because of school vacation.

#### ABSTRACT DAY

In the near future we are going to have an abstract day. Sp get out your abstract if you live in Johnston so we can share the history as revealed by abstracts. We will be prepared to copy, so you will be able to take your abstract back home.