

## LIGNITE IN THE ROCKDALE AREA

(Researched by Mrs. Ida Jo Marshall)



Lignite is the most important mineral resource in the Rockdale area. It occurs in great quantities within Milam County. This resource of coal attracted the attention of the early settlers.

Seven years before the founding of Rockdale, in 1867, the coal deposits of Milam County were surveyed by Samuel B. Buckley, Assistant State Geologist. This survey showed extensive deposits of coal beds in the county.

In 1890 the first mine in Milam County was put into operation three miles east of Rockdale by Herman Vogel. The slope type of mining was used, and the coal was hoisted by windlass and mule until the installation of boilers and

Two years later, 1892, the Rockdale Mining and Manufacturing Company began operating a mine just five hundred yards from the Vogel mine site. Since both mines were situated near the track of the International and Great Northern Railway, the transporting of lignite to other localities was greatly facilitated. The total

By 1895 there were six coal mines in operation in Milam County. production of the mines amounted to about 29 cars of coal a day. In 1903 the following mines were in operation in the county:

| Name of Mine Superintendent               | Number of Employees |
|---|---------------------|
| Worley Mine A. J. Worley                  | 25                  |
| Big Lump Coal Company S. J. Taylor        | 50                  |
| Lignite Eggette and Coal Co. S. J. Taylor | 140                 |
| J. J. Olden Mine John Eggwart             | 35                  |
| Black Diamond Coal Co. Gus Lorenz         | 65                  |
| Aransas Pass Coal Co. P. H. Perry         | —                   |

In 1910, the following mines were operating in Milam County; the American / Lignite and Briquette Company, Charles Bergstrom, superintendent; the Bigt | Square Mine, E. Rowlett, superintendent; the Milano Coal Company, A. B./ Hamil, superintendent; the International Mine, E. Rowlett, superintendent; the Santa Fe Mine, George Taylor, superintendent; the Sessions Mine, William Wells, superintendent; the Texas Coal Company, John Tolbert, superintendent, the Vogel and Lorenz Mine, formerly known as Black Diamond Mine, Gus Lorenz, superintendent; the Standard Lignite Company, J. P. Sughrue, superintendent; the Witcher Mine, William Wells, superintendent; and the Worley Mine, William Wells, superintendent.



Frequent cave-ins happened in the tunnel mines of that period, the most serious of which occurred at the Vogel Mining Company in 1913. A cave-in in a creek near the mine shaft caused the mine to flood. This cut off and entombed seven miners within the mine. At once, a hole was dug from the

**surface into the mine, through which fresh air could reach the trapped miners. After five and one-half days of digging, six of the seven miners were rescued through another hole dug into the flooded mine.**

**Lignite mining continued to grow each year. By 1915 Milam County was producing and shipping more than seven thousand cars annually. A decrease in the number of mines began to decrease. By 1924, there were only six mines left in production. These were: Big Lump Coal Company, Calvert Coal Company, Sparks Lignite Company, Consolidated Coal Company, Texas Coal Company, and the Sandow Lignite Company.**

**The peak in production of lignite in Milam County was reached in 1931. At that time Milam County produced 1,000 tons of coal each day. Since 1931, the lignite industry in the county continued to decline. By 1949, the only mine in operation was the McAlester Fuel Company, nine miles southwest of Rockdale.**

**With the coming of The Aluminum Company of America to Rockdale in 1951, the revival of this brown coal has had a profound effect on the city of Rockdale.**