

# OUR TOWN REMEMBERED



*Caption: The miner's lunch bucket*

## **The Lunch Bucket**

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Mount Pleasant is a community surrounded by former coal mines and coal patches. They worked twelve hours a day, six to seven days a week. The miner's lives were far different from ours. Take lunch, for example. There were no fast food chains where one could stop to pick up something to take on the job. The miner had to take his lunch and his drinking water with him. The lunch pail was not only a place to hold his food for the day, but a life line in case something went wrong down in the pits. The pail was typically made of tin and later aluminum. Round or oblong, it had two to three compartments; one (or two) to hold food and one to hold water.

The various pieces of the bucket had to be held together tightly so the bucket

would not fall apart. Some miners would double line the bottom of the pail with an old lid to keep it from getting dings in it. Dings created holes and holes made the bucket leak. More important, if the seams were loose when a pony kicked it over to eat what was inside, which they sometimes did, the bucket would fall open and he would have a feast. There were also rats. Can you just see a rat trying to open the lunch pail not only to eat but to drink?

Most buckets looked the same so each miner had to find a way to make his unique so he would know which was his when it was time to eat. Some put decals on their buckets. Others painted pictures. Some merely added their name somewhere on the outside.

But it is what was on the inside that was unique too. If the food contained too much salt they would be thirsty all day. If there wasn't enough food they would be hungry all day. If an accident happened they needed extra food in case they had to remain in the mine for several days.

Miners said things tasted different underground and foods they enjoyed very much when sitting at the kitchen table they never took with them into the mine. Bananas seem to have had a funny taste underground. One internet site maintained that tomatoes had the opposite effect. They tasted better. It went on to say, "My dad carried the same lunch every day for as long as I can remember: 2 pork chops cooked well done, a slice of bread, a cinnamon roll from Nickel's Bakery, a pint of milk in a fruit jar and a candy bar. He also carried a roll of Tums

for the frequent heartburn he got from eating underground.”

My guess is that if the miner was an Italian there was bound to be some form of pasta in his lunch most of the time. A Hungarian or a Pole’s lunch bucket most certainly housed a halupki or two. Probably the best lunch was on Monday when the leftovers from the Sunday meal were included. Meat, meaning protein was a must.

Today these miner’s lunch pails are collector’s items. When they were used by the miner’s they were a life line.



Coal miner’s hat and light

More photos of miner’s gear



Another type of lunch pail with many compartments.