

COAL and the SOUTHEAST COMMUNITY of NEWPORT NEWS

Without the C&O rail line and the coal it brought to our area for export, the development of what we now call Newport News certainly would have been much different. Collis P. Huntington visited Hampton Roads as a young man and marveled at the many advantages of the harbor. Years later, as a wealthy industrialist and railway magnate, he set his sights on building a railway from the coal mines of Ohio to Hampton Roads. When the C&O rail link was complete, Huntington proceeded to further develop Newport News by creating neighborhoods with the Old Dominion Land Company, building the Hotel Warwick, and launching Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company.

The world for much of the late 19th and early to mid-20th century ran on coal. Coal was king. In my career as a mariner, I sailed on ships that delivered hundred of thousands of tons of coal from Hampton Roads across the sea to the Netherlands, Denmark, and Egypt.

That was then this is now. The reality is that coal is a toxic and polluting 19th century energy source that needed to be phased out around the time World War II ended. Today when you hear proponents of the continued use of coal as a fuel source they invariably are motivated by a financial interest, and will extol the virtues of “clean coal”. Clean coal is a farcical myth, a fantasy. From the time coal leaves the mine on a coal car it spews a blanket of pollution and environmental degradation fouling the railway’s right of ways, the landscape and water ways that it passes. When burned as a power source it spews a noxious miasma of harmful particulate matter and carcinogens that goes where ever the wind goes.

Anyone who lives in the Southeast community of Newport News is familiar with the particulate matter that flies off the huge coal piles next to the 664 interstate flyways: soiling homes, leaving a black coating on window sills and ledges. Citizens should go to the beaches at King – Lincoln Park or Anderson Park and see for themselves the strata of black coal dust on the beaches. Residents of the Southeast community worry about the health effects on themselves, their children and the elderly. Citizens of the Southeast community can’t help but believe that the coal piles are a decisive contributing factor to the high rate of asthma in children, reported to be twice as high as other areas of the city.

Positive action to protect the health of our citizens and the environment needs to be taken today. Although coal played a large part in promoting the prosperity in the early days of our city, its liabilities demand that it be replaced with clean, carbon free energy sources. King Coal must be reined in, and ultimately deposed.

Comments made by:

Captain Patrick Wright
941 Shore Drive
Newport News, Virginia