

# Mid-Lothian Mines and Rail Roads

## LOCAL COAL MINING IN THE 18<sup>TH</sup> AND 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

Outcroppings of coal along the south bank of the James River in what is now Powhatan County were discovered circa 1700. A hunter from the nearby Huguenot settlement, Manakintown, dislodged lumps of coal as he slid down the riverbank to retrieve his quarry. Soon, nearby landowners began searching the area for coal outcroppings and deposits.

The earliest record of coal mined in the United States was that of a coal pit operated on the headwaters of Falling Creek near present Midlothian in 1737. Among local collieries working in the coal basin in the 18th and 19th centuries were Black Heath, Mills', Trabue's, Cunliffe's, Railey's, Brummall's Blunt's, Aetna, Gowrie, Stonehenge and Mid-Lothian.

## THE MID-LOTHIAN COAL MINING COMPANY

The Mid-Lothian Coal Mining Company was chartered in 1835 on a 404 acre tract by the heirs of William Wooldridge. The coal seam here was approximately 36 feet thick and 700 feet deep. Wooldridge issued stock to raise funds for machinery, construction and the sinking of shafts. There were four shafts, 11 by 11 feet square producing about 1 million bushels of coal yearly. The Mid-Lothian shaft (later known as the Pump Shaft), one of the most productive, was flooded following a disastrous explosion in 1855 that killed 55 miners. After several unsuccessful attempts to pump out and rework this once preeminent shaft, it was abandoned.



Iron ladle and crucible that were used in the coal mining process. Images courtesy of Chesterfield Historical Society of Virginia.



Mid-Lothian Coal Mining Company Stock 1866. Courtesy of Virginia Historical Society.

