BUSINESS & INDUSTRY JANUARY 30, 2018 9B Lyons Salt; a century of mining in Rice County



A photo of some of the original investors in the Lyons Salt plant. George Kelley, on the right, established the company.

Salt is one of the most basic needs of civilization. It has many uses from the feeding of livestock to providing a means of safe transportation on otherwise ice covered roads and sidewalks, to food preservation and human consumption. Since the late 1800's salt has been mined from several



The top of the Lyons Salt shaft which was sunk in 1917 at a reported cost of \$200,000. The shaft is so substantial that it has a life expectancy of 200 years.

different locations in central Kansas.

An oral history recorded from a "witness" to much of the activity said, "From the very start of rock salt business in 1890 in Kansas it appears to have been a struggle for existence. At one time there were 5 miners operating." Ten mine shafts were reported to have been sunk over

Fire 1945 looking east



number of years. The mine shaft was sunk in Ellsworth but down 250 ft. when water broke in above, the project was abandoned." The third shaft at Lyons, which was 2 miles west of the present Lyons shaft, was abandoned many years ago. The two other shafts in Lyons were sunk in 1890 and the other started in 1916. "The American was started by a George Kelley in 1916, under the name of the American Salt & Coal Co." This later became Lyons Salt Company.

The Lyons Salt Company complex

Cutting a Face



Early mining by pick, axe and hand drilling.

on East American Road has been a fixture in the Lyons community for more than 100 years, the history going back to those early days in 1917 when the shaft was finished.

American Salt Mine



The mine shaft showing a mule pulling a cart.

In those days, horses, mules and wagons and the backs of men were used to move salt out of the mine. Innovation began in the early 1940s when the first mechanical rails were installed. An article appeared in the Lyons News in January 29, 1947 marking the date when the last mules were moved out of the mine. One of them had worked in the mine for more than 12 years, and the mules had lived in the mine since the age of four years old. The article states, "The banish-ing of the mules is only a minor sign of progress at the American plant." In 1960 Lyons Salt Company

installed a conveyer belt and shut down the old rail cars. How salt is acquired has vastly changed over the past 100 years. In the early 20th century traditional mining using a pickaxe as well as blasting. These were the preferred methods. When blasting, charges were placed in drilled holes and fired off. Today although traditional mining has long gone away, blasting is still in use with more sophisticated preparation.

In the modern age there are several preliminary steps prior to blasting. The first step is commonly known as undercutting. The second

American Salt and Coal



Artists conception of American Salt plant complex in Lyons in the 1930s.

is drilling a hole two inches wide and 16 feet deep. The tool used for undercutting is like a big chain saw. It cuts a 6 inch high kerf 16 feet deep across the width of the mining area. After both of the two cuts are complete charges are placed in the area and miners collect the resultant debris. The salt that is collected is used for two main purposes. The first is for roads to keep hazardous

American Salt and Coal



More hand labor in the early mining years.

ice off of America's highways.

The second is for livestock feed. Salt is vital to their survival and health.

One of the great success stories in the modern age of mining at the Lyons Salt Company is their safety record. In the old days mining was a very dangerous job. There are various stories from the

first years of the

Salt Company celebrated 1,000,000 man hours without a single timeloss injury, a monumental feat in the industry. This single undertaking took seven years to achieve. The milestone equates to one



An early photo of the Lyons Salt Mine Plant.

single individual working more than 114 years. To celebrate the achievement Lyons Salt Company held a banquet at Celebration Centre last year. They invited current and retired employees to celebrate the achievement. As they continue striving to improve safety, the company has set the bar even higher. Their next goal is for a million man hours worked without a single reportable injury.

The history of salt mining in Kansas and Rice County marks an enduring spirit of the people that have worked there and fought for something that is basic for human survival. It is an inspirational story of success, tragedy and heroics. In the early days men gave up their lives and some men braved fire and severe injury to rescue and save their fellow workers. Today we celebrate their achievements with a safe working environment and profitable production that the mine should supply for decades to come.

Carey Salt - Lyons



This photo shows salt being moved by rail with an electric locomotive. Salt is now moved by a system of conveyor belts.

Kansas Salt Trivia

A Fire destroyed the plant in 1945.

the time period through the 1930's. "Kanopolis-3, Lyons - 3, Ellsworth -1, Kingman - 1, Little River -1, and Hutchinson -1. The 3 mines at Kanopolis were operated for a number of years, Little River operated for a

Cutting & Drilling

20th century and earlier of cave-ins and other related accidents. However, as the mining technology progressed so has the safety of the profession. In 2017 Lyons

- Salt is a mineral called Halite, NaCl • Deposited 275 MM years ago during the Permian
- Source:AncientOcean
- Evaporation of 80 ft of seawater to make 1 ft of salt
- 300 feet thick (700 to 1000 ft. salt layer starts)
- Discovered in 1887 when drilling for Oil & Gas
- 1888 13 Salt Operations Began, 10 in Hutchinson
- By 1890 There were as many as 30 Operations in KS
- Today there are 6

Blasting & Mucking







• Loading & Shipping

