

echoes

from the mine...

Artifacts and remnants from
the city's mining history
by Meg McKinney



Defunct railroad cars sit alongside the Southern Railroad's roundhouse, near Finley Boulevard, where steam-powered locomotives that carried coal from Birmingham mines were serviced. The roundhouse was replaced when the Norris rail yard was built in 1952 in Irondale.

It's everywhere, like kudzu. We pass it by and ignore it. We treat it with both respect and irreverence. We appreciate the efforts of others to preserve it, but only pay attention to it when it's convenient to our busy schedules.

"It" is the history of Birmingham's mines, foundries, railroads, rural communities, cities, towns, and the companies that supported and depended on them for survival. The thousands of people who moved our history forward—miners, engineers, steel workers, business owners, and more—were often uncelebrated.

When my Birmingham friends described their youthful adventures exploring this history, I decided to visit these mysterious sounding places. I put hundreds of miles on my car without leaving Jefferson County.

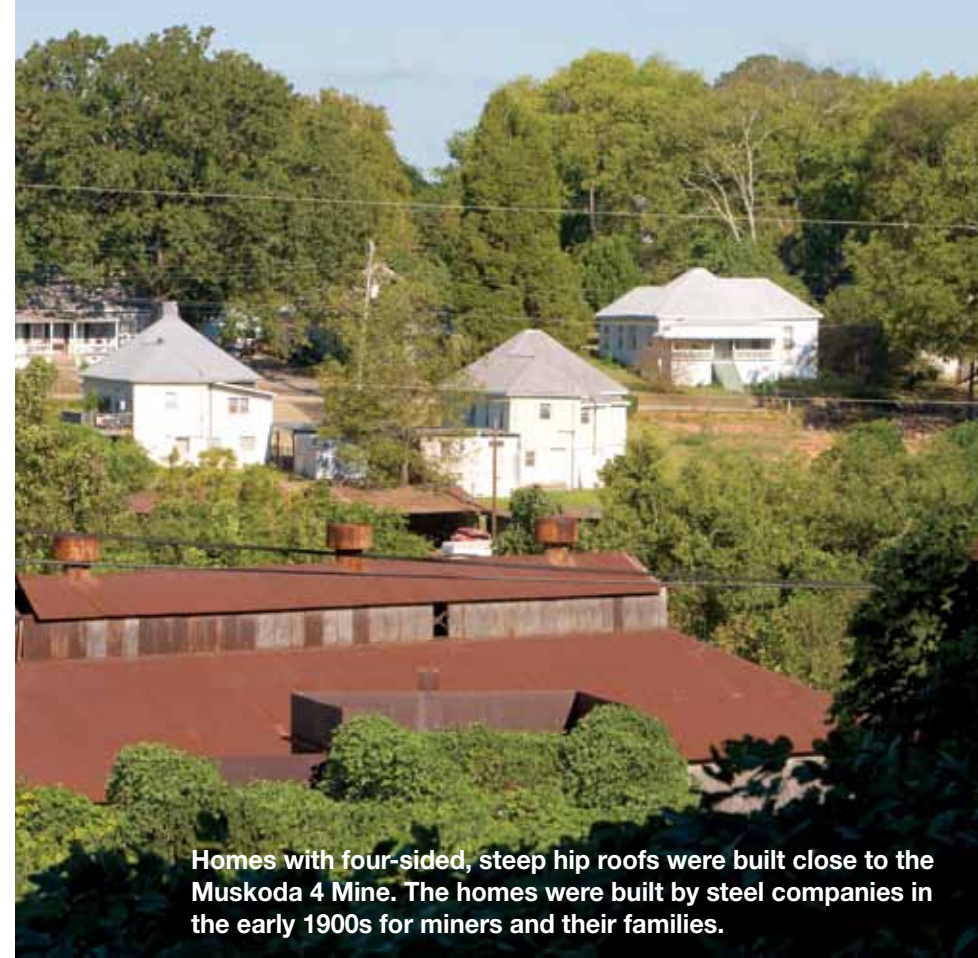
I was fascinated by what I found and attempted to capture it with my camera.

This collection of images represents a portion our history. There are many more parks, buildings, and people, that are worth getting to know, and I hope you will take the time to do so.



On a hillside covered by kudzu above Martin Luther King Jr. Drive in Birmingham, a lone ore crusher is a reminder of past mining activity.

Lovely homes with ornate details located along Minnesota Street in Bessemer, were built in the early 1900s for mining company officials, and are still in use today.



Homes with four-sided, steep hip roofs were built close to the Muskoda 4 Mine. The homes were built by steel companies in the early 1900s for miners and their families.



The entrance and walkway at the Muskoda 4 Mine in Bessemer is now covered by kudzu.



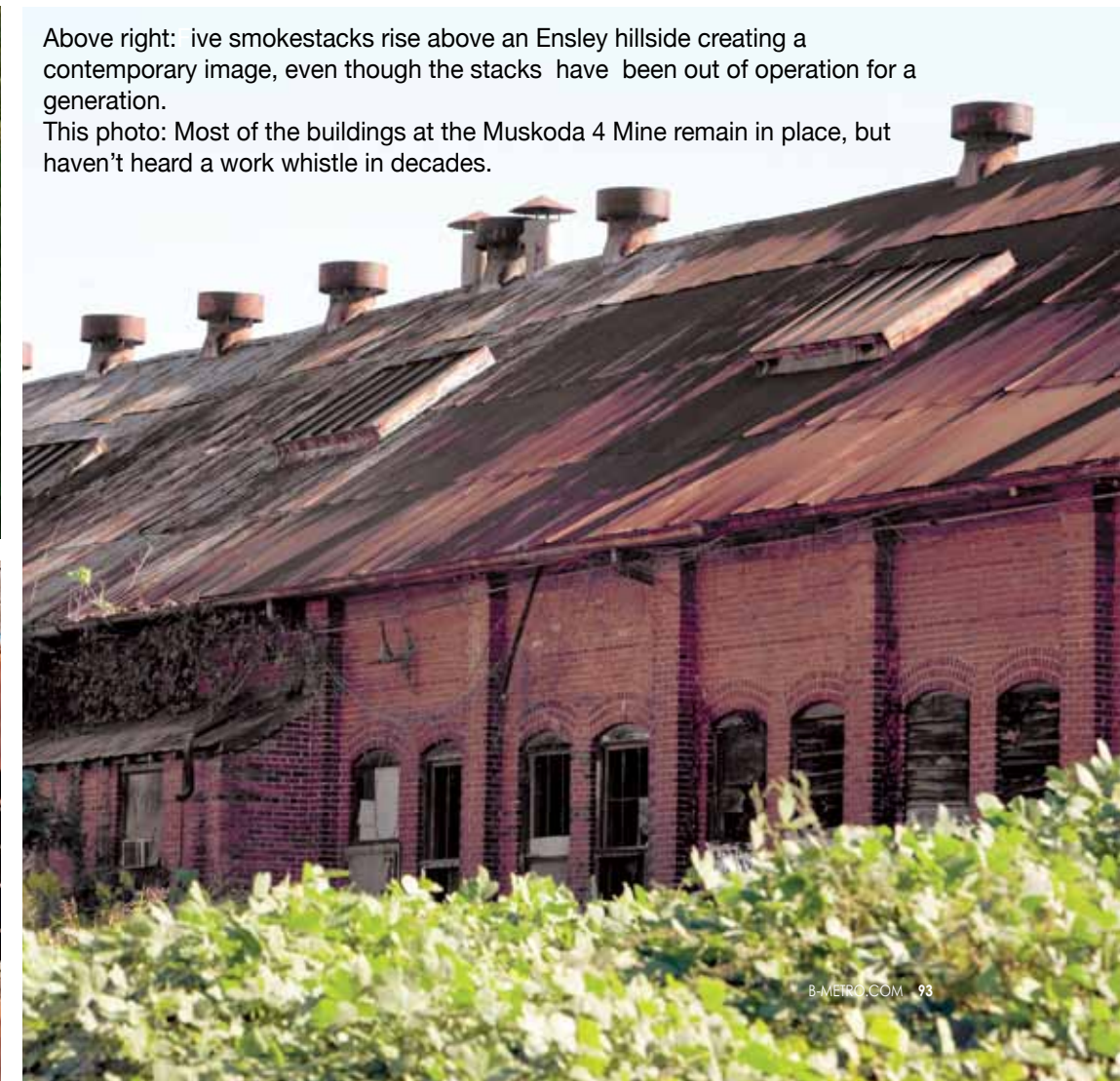
Above right: five smokestacks rise above an Ensley hillside creating a contemporary image, even though the stacks have been out of operation for a generation. This photo: Most of the buildings at the Muskoda 4 Mine remain in place, but haven't heard a work whistle in decades.



The entrance to the Muskoda 4 Mine doesn't welcome visitors, although the top of the property is now used for paintball games.



The top of one of the buildings at the Muskoda 4 Mine, once a large and busy place, has long since lost windows and paint.





This photo: Women and children wear traditional head-scarves during Sunday services at St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, as they have since the church was formed in 1894 in Brookside. The church was founded by Slovakian immigrants who came here to work in the mines. Until the 1960s, services were held in Slovak. Bottom Left: Nataliya Winters scoops up chili in the kitchen at St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, Brookside. The Sunday meal, called Agape, is free to all who attend. Winters and her family live in Columbus, MS, and make the two-hour-a-half-hour drive every few weeks to attend services. Other families drive from Corinth, MS, and Huntsville. Bottom Right: Seated beneath religious images, Father Benedict Tallant and Mattuska Davis chat after the Sunday meal.



Top Left: Two miner's homes reside side-by-side in English Village. The homes with a tin, four-sided, steep hip roof, were built by steel and mining companies throughout Jefferson County in the early 1900s. According to steel workers' lore, the steep roof design kept cinders from collecting. The homes usually had four rooms. These homes are owned by Margie Ingram, and have the original hardwood floors and fire places. Top Right: The 400-square foot historic office building is home to Liz Hand Woods Associates, an interior design firm. Karla Pitts, designer, works in the sunny one-room building. Bottom: With the original hardwood floor and brick fireplace still in place, Kate Clark, a law student at Samford University, decorated this miner's home in a colorful and eclectic style.



"I like the light and having eight windows in one giant room," Clark says about the living room and kitchen combination. Of the out-of-the-way location of the miner's homes in English Village, she says, "I like unique addresses and that UPS can't find me. I can walk everywhere in the Village. I like small spaces, which are more of a challenge to decorate." She considered each object before displaying the folk art she has collected from around the world.



Left: Vulcan Park, is now a walking trail and a scenic place to practice one's music. Nikki Thomas, a student, says "It's so relaxing here, especially at sunset. I can get away from everything." Right: Remnants from 1864 at the Irondale Furnace, Mountain Brook, have been preserved in a park. Paul Hinson, and Skip, take a Sunday jog past the structures.

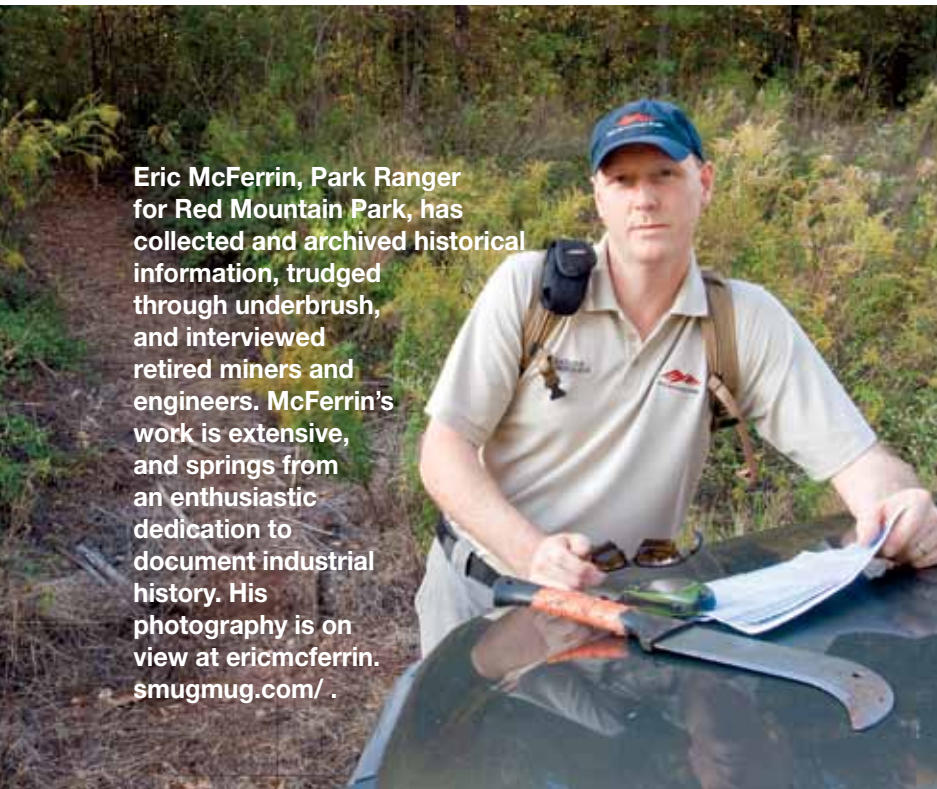


Trash and litter decorate the interior of the Southern Railroad's round house near Finley Boulevard in Birmingham.

On the front porch of The Commissary a new piece of art is put into place in an exhibit. The company store was built in the early 1900s and sold goods only to miners and their families. Located on Overton Road, the store is now home to artists' and designers' wares.

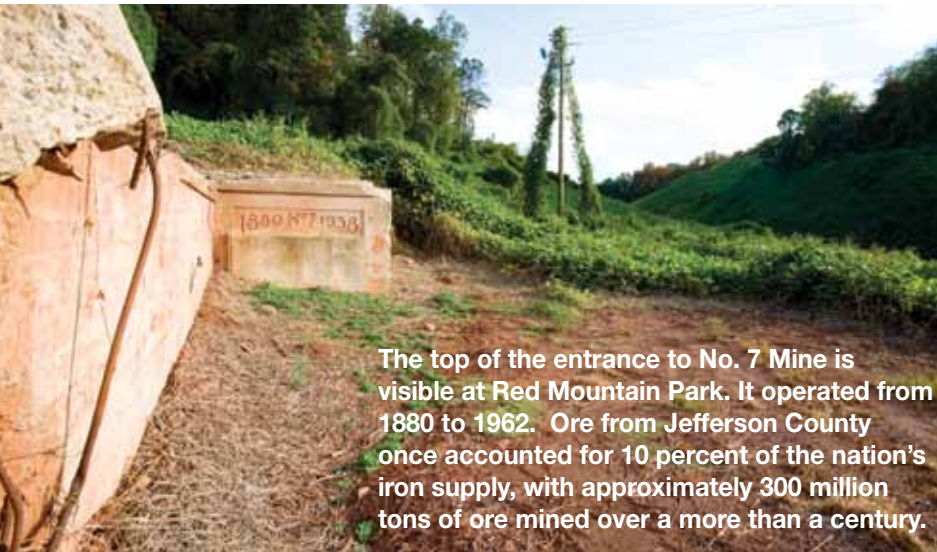


Eric McFerrin, Park Ranger for Red Mountain Park, has collected and archived historical information, trudged through underbrush, and interviewed retired miners and engineers. McFerrin's work is extensive, and springs from an enthusiastic dedication to document industrial history. His photography is on view at ericmcferrin.smugmug.com/.



Chiseled graffiti from the railroad and mining era remain in the rocks along the walking trail in Vulcan Park. Jack Coleman and Raegan Coleman, brother and sister, climb over a boulder with an arrow etched at the lower half.

The top of the entrance to No. 7 Mine is visible at Red Mountain Park. It operated from 1880 to 1962. Ore from Jefferson County once accounted for 10 percent of the nation's iron supply, with approximately 300 million tons of ore mined over a more than a century.



Surrounded by tools and artifacts, Robert Mitchell, owner of the former commissary building, or company store, in Bayview, discusses his interest in mines and railroads. Mitchell's refrigeration and heating company is located in the building built in 1912, and a copy of the blue prints are framed at right. Tools, lunch buckets, crocks, meat scales, lanterns, and more, are among Robert Mitchell's many antique items.



A young visitor at the Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve meets Winston the opossum at the center during a holiday event. Ruffner Mountain was the site of large iron ore mines and stone quarries until the 1950s. Today, hiking trails in the 1,100-acre preserve lead to historical sites. See www.ruffnermountain.org/.



Pay Day! The last pay envelope for Walton Lingo before he retired, is dated April 8, 1955. Neither Lingo nor his family ever spent the original cash payment of \$67.44. The cash and envelope are seen here among the remains of the commissary, or company store, in Mulga, where the Lingo family lived at the time. The metal tag numbered '136' was the number of tons that Lingo and his crew had to load onto a railroad cars during their shift.

