

### H I G H L I G H T S   O F   1 9 6 3

The year 1963 saw the beginning of a variety of new endeavors and the improvement and expansion of the other activities in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Mines and Mineral Industries. Several new and expanded functions of the Department were the results of new laws passed by the 1963 Session of the Legislature as part of the legislative program of Governor William W. Scranton. Other innovations were instituted by the Secretary, H. B. Charnbury.

A critical review of the events, challenges, changes and programs of the past year are presented herewith. Basically, there are a variety of separate programs including the development of a new mine rescue technique which has since been used in other parts of the world to save the lives of miners trapped by mine cave-ins. Other programs were involved in the administration and enforcement of the anthracite and bituminous mining laws, the reclamation and restoration of abandoned deep and strip mines, the expansion of an anthracite mine drainage program and a mine subsidence insurance program, the development of a new practical coal research program to help the coal industry in the future and to help the people of the coal-producing areas by curing the ills of the coal mining industry in the past, and finally the conservation and regulation of oil and gas operations within the Commonwealth. In addition, much time was devoted by the Department to assisting the Legislature develop the most effective anthracite and bituminous strip mining laws that we have in this country today. Some time was devoted also to making preparations for the proper administration and enforcement of the strip mining laws which became effective during the close of the current year and the beginning of the new year.

The Department's activities during the last year, together with plans for the future, are presented in the Budget Message for the Joint Senate and House Appropriations Committee which was prepared by Secretary Charnbury, January 29, 1964. The text of that Budget Message, not including appendixes consisting of detailed statistics, is as follows:

For the fiscal year 1963-64, two million one hundred and ninety nine thousand, three hundred and eighty-five dollars (\$2,199,385) was made available to the Department of Mines and Mineral Industries for general government operations from the general fund appropriations. This represents a reduction of five hundred and forty two thousand, six hundred and forty-two dollars (\$542,642) or 19.8% from the amount actually spent the previous fiscal year (1962-63) for general government operations. This reduction was made possible by a decrease in personnel, by increasing work loads, by eliminating multiple duplication of work, and by being able to cover costs of certain functions with State-Federal funds rather than with State funds alone.

During the year, however, there were several unforeseen events which happened that now make it necessary to ask for additional appropriations. First, there was a mine disaster which no one could predict that required the expenditure of certain funds and second, there were certain technological developments which occurred that now make it possible at least to tackle the problem of burning refuse banks in the coal producing areas. For these reasons Governor Scranton has requested additional appropriations for the Department of Mines and Mineral Industries totaling three hundred and eighty six thousand, six hundred and seven dollars (\$386,607). Of this amount sixty-one thousand, six hundred and seven dollars (\$61,607) are requested to pay the state's small share of the Sheppton mine disaster and three hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars (\$325,000) are requested to tackle the vexing problem of burning culm dumps.

#### SHEPPTON MINE DISASTER

The mine disaster occurred on August 13, 1963, when three men were trapped by a cave-in in an anthracite coal mine near Sheppton, Pennsylvania. The mine was owned and operated by the Fellin Coal Company. David Fellin, one of the men trapped in the mine, and Eugene Gibbons are co-owners of the Company. Shortly after arrival on the scene, the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary of the Department were informed by Mr. Gibbons that the Company had no funds to pay for the rescue operation. Consequently, the Department officials had a great moral responsibility but no legal authority for the expenditure of funds. Three men's lives were at stake, important decisions had to be made, and local public sentiment was very strong. Time did not permit a legal investigation before starting operations. A legal investigation of the financial status of the Company was ordered by the Department to proceed concurrently with the rescue operation. The legal investigation confirmed Mr. Gibbons' report.

Fortunately, the rescue operation was a success resulting in the saving of two miner's lives. The method of rescue was completely new. In fact, since then it has been used in other parts of the world. It is quite possible that the method may be used in the future to save other miners' lives.

The method of rescue required action on the part of the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary to obtain equipment and supplies to do the job, and after it was discovered that the men were alive more equipment and supplies had to be ordered. This was done without any hesitation but with full knowledge of the financial status. For this action the Secretary and his Deputy must take full responsibility.

Again, fortunately, the progress of the rescue operation was so highly publicized that it became a demonstration of concern for humanity which resulted in people all over the country setting aside any thought of cost by contributing their time, talents and facilities. Miners, who had worked an eight-hour day, came to the rescue scene and volunteered an additional four to twelve hours to help. Some helpers did not even leave the scene, but ate and slept there to be on hand for all emergencies. Coal companies, drilling companies and other companies sent their highly technically qualified officials free of charge to the scene to provide technical advice and help. Industrial companies from all over the country volunteered their equipment and supplies. Even schoolboys from the area helped to do many a job that had to be done. Government agencies of all types contributed ever so much to the rescue operation. If all labor, professional services, equipment, supplies and other expenditures had to be paid for, it is estimated that the total cost of the rescue operation would be between \$300,000 and \$500,000. The total expenditures amounted to \$61,606.95.

#### BURNING CULM PILES

One of the problems of great concern to the health and safety of the people of the coal producing areas as well as the overall economic development of these areas is that of burning refuse banks. It is estimated that there are at least 200 of these burning banks within the Commonwealth at the present time. Unfortunately, there is no known method which is completely satisfactory to extinguish these banks. However, it is possible, in some cases, when a fire is just starting in one of these banks to dig it out and thus prevent the entire bank from catching fire and burning for years. It is also possible, in some cases, to cut-off a portion of a burning bank to prevent the spreading of the fire.

At the present time, there are no funds in the State that can be legally used to cut a hot spot out of a burning bank or to prevent the spreading of a fire into a new portion of a bank. Consequently, Governor Scranton has recommended an additional appropriation of two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) to the Department of Mines and Mineral Industries to be used immediately for these emergency activities. It is understood that these funds are to be used in special cases to prevent the spreading of fires and not for the general purpose of extinguishing present fires.

#### THE BURNING ASHLEY BANK

One of the most serious of all the burning refuse banks in the Commonwealth today is the one located near Ashley. This is a large bank containing about 6 million tons of burning material. The people in this area are vitally concerned with this bank and are willing to take some action to fight this fire.

During the past two years, research work on the elimination of air pollution from burning culm banks has been in progress at The Pennsylvania State University. This work was made possible by a grant from the Federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Governor Scranton, who was then Congressman Scranton, was most helpful in securing the grant for the University. At that time, the present Secretary of Mines was the recipient of the grant and started the original research work. For the past year this work has been continued at the University under the direction of Mr. James Kindig and Dean David R. Mitchell. It has now progressed to the point where it is believed that a pilot plant should be placed in operation at some burning bank to continue the development of a sound method for extinguishing these fires. A proposal for such a plant has now been submitted to the Health, Education and Welfare Department. Where such a plant, if approved, would be located would be determined by the investigators at the University.