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## Preface

*A Mile Deep and Black as Pitch* follows my four previous works of oral history, *Bicentennial Voices*, *Stones and Stories: An Oral History of the Old Monroe Schoolhouse*, *Farm Women of Sussex County*, and *The Carousel Keepers: An Oral History of American Carousels*. Colleagues and friends in the historical and academic communities in New Jersey urged that I undertake the compilation of an oral history of the Franklin and Sterling Hill mines, located near the neighboring villages of Franklin and Ogdensburg, respectively, in Sussex County, the northernmost county of New Jersey. These mines are known throughout the world for their magnificent and diverse mineral deposits. More than 340 different minerals have been found in these remarkable mines, and thirty species are found at no other place on Earth. For over three hundred years, these rare deposits attracted geologists, mineralogists, and mining experts from all over the world. When the Smithsonian Institution opened a replica mine in 1997 at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC, the exhibit included six tons of minerals from the Sterling Hill Mine. However, after the ore body of the celebrated Franklin Mine was exhausted in 1954 and operations in the Sterling Hill Mine were stopped in 1986, one of the great mining enterprises of the world came to an end.



The idea of conducting an oral history of the Franklin and Sterling Hill mines was personal to me. I had been raised in the small mining town of Franklin, where I lived with my mother and father and three sisters. After graduating from Franklin High

School in 1944, I left the area and did not return, except for brief visits, for thirty-five years. One of those short returns, in 1951, was for the funeral of my father, Paul Chandler Moore. My father had been a miner and a remarkable person. Although suffering with cancer for more than ten years, Dad never was known to complain. After recuperating from five surgeries, he returned to the physically demanding work of being a miner. With frail health, mining must have been extremely difficult for him, yet he cheerfully went off to work each day. Although highly intelligent, Paul Moore had considered himself fortunate to be employed by the New Jersey Zinc Company as a "mucker," the lowest paying job in the mine. During the Great Depression, with a wife and four little girls to feed, he appreciated having any kind of a job.

An appreciation for life, an ability to be happy, to find good in every circumstance, and to remain optimistic in the most trying conditions were outstanding characteristics of this unusual man. Even though he was only a mucker, Dad knew and liked everyone in the mine and in the town. Because he so enjoyed people, he was always a favorite. My father's enthusiasm and appreciation for life were matched only by his rare sense of humor. Through all of those operations, he often joked that he was getting his money's worth out of the health insurance payments. Dad even made his time in the hospital worthwhile. As soon as he was able to get around, he went from patient to patient in the ward to find out if there was anything he could do for them. Within a short time, Dad knew all of the patients, and with his kind smile and optimistic attitude, the entire ward seemed brighter for having him there.

Dad was an avid reader and loved books of every type. He also was quite a linguist and spoke with his mining friends in several of their Slavic languages. Although there was no one with whom he could speak French in the mine, Dad spent many hours studying that language too. My father really was an inspiring man who showed everyone around him how to accept and live each day to the maximum, whatever it held of joy or sadness.

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When, after his sixth operation, cancer took his life, his obituary noted only that Paul C. Moore, *a miner*, had died after a long illness. To have the totality of this fine man condensed to the one word, *miner*, seemed to me to diminish his life. To abridge his uncomplaining spirit, his example in living, his endurance and strong character to one word that defined a menial occupation appeared to me to be so insufficient. The word *miner* seemed acutely inadequate to signify all that was his life.

Reading that old obituary some forty years later, however, I reflected that maybe the word *miner* signified more than I had realized earlier. Only recently had I been asked to undertake the oral history project on mining, and I subsequently decided that doing so would give me an opportunity to discover as much as possible about what it had meant to have been a miner in Franklin and Ogdensburg when the mines were in operation. I called the research that followed the Mining Oral History Project; *A Mile Deep and Black as Pitch* is one result of my search for a better understanding of what it meant to have worked in and around the Franklin and Sterling Hill mines.

Thirty-four narrators contributed their recollections to my project, and the pictures they portray constitute this book. Through their commentaries, we gain a heightened sense of the people, the feelings, the places, and the events that made up the Franklin and Sterling Hill mining communities during much of the twentieth century. Through the memories of these narrators, we step back in time to discover not only the hard work and long hours demanded by the mining, but also the satisfaction and pride that the miners took in their work. As we share their experiences, their successes and their failures, their joys and their problems, we honor the lives of these miners and pay tribute to the work they once did in the underground mines of America.



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