

SCRIP

How the Coal Companies Impoverished Harlan County

Charles Edward Thomas

In 1910, the L&N pushed its railroad into remote Harlan County, Kentucky, opening access to billions of tons of coal, the fuel that ran everything during the Industrial Revolution. Coal did it all. Streetlights from coal gas, coke for the steel mills, power for the new national electrical grid.

The country's richest men and largest corporation rushed in—Ford Motor Company, US Steel, Chicago Edison, International Harvester, Peabody Energy, the Mellons, the Carnegies, bringing with them a system they had perfected: Scrip.

What if you didn't have to pay your workers? Not really, not in cash? What if you could make your own currency and make it worth whatever you wanted?

Scrip was a system designed to pay miners in pinto beans and corn meal from the company store and make billions in profits for the coal companies.

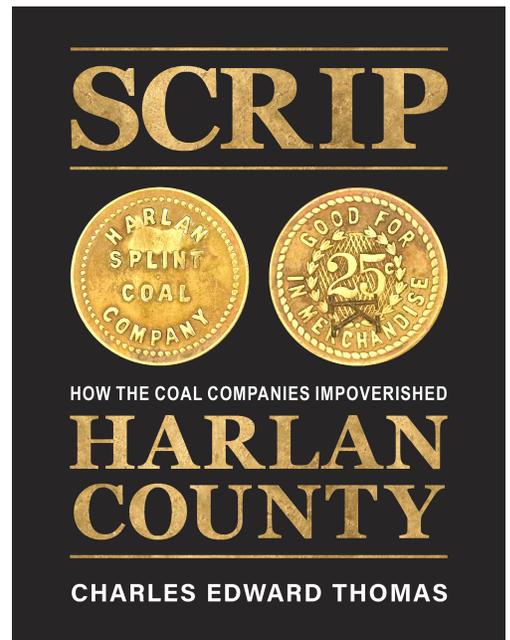
The fragments of history and the sheer volume of scrip documented in these pages from just one small Kentucky county shows how pervasive this system became and how it impoverished the workers left behind.

In this oversized 300-page, full-color, library-quality hardback, readers will find:

- The history of Harlan County, Kentucky during the coal wars, including the Battle of Evarts.
- A map of each coal camp, as well as several county maps.
- Color photographs of over 800 different pieces of Harlan County coal scrip.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles Thomas was born and raised in Harlan County, Kentucky, a coal mining area. He was a SNCC volunteer in Mississippi in 1965–66 and was in federal prison from 1967 to 1969 for refusing induction. He learned to print at the New England Free Press and, except for five years as a union organizer, made a living working in print shops.



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