

Mining, Railroads and Industrialization

Essential Questions: What industries were important in Tennessee's industrialization after the Civil War?

Following the Civil War, Tennessee entered into a period of industrialization. This was due in part to the damage the war had done to Tennessee's economy. It was also due to investments from people outside of Tennessee. Many Northerners had been in Tennessee during the Civil War and saw opportunities for investing after the war was over. Northerners who moved South after the war to take advantage of business opportunities were called "carpetbaggers." Many of the investors carried their belongings in satchels made from heavy weight carpet like fabric.

One of the first industries to be developed after the war was railroads. A number of important railroad lines ran through Tennessee before the war. Because of the strategic importance of railroads, many of them had been either deliberately or accidentally damaged during the war. After the war, Tennessee's railroads were repaired and new ones were built. The growth of railroads was a key factor in the growth of other industries, especially coal mining.

Coal had been mined in the Cumberland Plateau region before the Civil War. By the 1850's coal was replacing wood as the fuel of choice in homes and industries. After the war, Tennessee's railroads expanded and so did coal production. Another factor that helped Tennessee's coal mining industry grow was the convict labor system. Though the 13th amendment outlawed slavery, a clause in the amendment allowed people convicted of crimes or convicts to be forced to work during their prison term. Tennessee, like many other states, rented out convicts to mining companies and other industries. The state earned revenue from the rental and the mining company gained a cheap source of labor. Many of the convict laborers were African Americans who were often accused of crimes and unfairly convicted just to add laborers to the system. Convict laborers were treated horribly and many died due to dangerous conditions in the mines. The low cost of labor allowed mining companies to sell their coal more cheaply than coal from the North. The era of convict labor ended in Tennessee in response to the actions of free miners in an event known as the Coal Creek War.

Mining companies set up company towns for their workers. Most miners and their families lived in company owned houses, worshipped in company owned churches and shopped in the overpriced company store. Many companies did not pay their miners using American currency. The company created its own money called script. Script was only accepted in the company store, so miners were forced to pay high prices for goods. These conditions, along with dangerous working conditions in the mines, eventually led to strikes and the introduction of labor unions.

The increase in railroads also helped other industries grow. Coke, a byproduct of coal, was used as fuel in the iron smelting process. The railroads provided easy access to coke which allowed the iron industry to grow as well. Railroads made transportation easier for people as well as products.

Tennessee's cities also began to grow during this time period. As cities grew, people had more money to spend on luxury products.

One product that benefited from increased luxury spending was Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola was invented in 1882 by an Atlanta pharmacist named Dr. John S. Pemberton. Pemberton sold the rights to Coca-Cola to Asa Chandler who expanded the product to soda fountains outside Atlanta. In 1899, three young lawyers from Chattanooga, Benjamin Thomas, Joseph Whitehead and John Lupton bought the rights to bottle Coca-Cola for one dollar. The three men divided up the country into regions and sold bottling rights to local businessmen. By 1909, there were more than 400 Coca-Cola bottling plants around the country.

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Read the text and respond to the following questions.

1. Why was coal essential to industrial growth?

2. How was coal transported across the nation?

3. What was the convict lease system?

4. What was life like for coal miners in Tennessee?

5. How did Coca-Cola become a national product?
