

# **BANNER MINE DAILY REPORTS, 1914**

## **Finding aid**

**Collection number: GR-DIR-9**

**Extent: 0.87 cubic ft. (1 oversize box)**

**Alabama Department of Archives and History,  
624 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36130  
[www.archives.alabama.gov](http://www.archives.alabama.gov)**

## **BANNER MINE DAILY REPORTS, 1914 ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY**

The Banner Coal Mine was a Pratt Consolidated Coal Company mine located in northwestern Jefferson County. It was worked to a large extent by convicts leased to the company by state and county governments. With the industrialization of the American South, big corporations in industries such as mining and lumber, along with large plantations, heavily relied on the cheap source of labor from the prison system. Prisoners were placed into three categories based on physical abilities and skills and were priced accordingly. A fourth class, often known as “DH” or “dead hand,” consisted of prisoners priced at a negligible amount or nothing due to a perceived lack of value as a laborer.

On the morning of April 8, 1911, an explosion shook the Banner Coal Mine, killing 128 miners. Of the miners killed, 125 were convicts leased to the mining company from state prisons and 113 were Black men. The explosion was the largest loss of life in an Alabama mine to date and led to a debate on mine safety and convict labor. After the explosion, the Banner Mine was quickly replenished with new convicts, most of whom were Black and had been arrested for trivial misdemeanors, if for any reason at all.

Prior to the Banner Mine explosion, a bill to abolish the lease system had passed the Alabama Senate, but the bill died in the House of Representatives. Although the convict-lease system continued, the legislature passed a mine safety bill thanks in large part to the support of Governor Emmet O’Neal who signed it into law on April 18, 1911. The law increased the number and salary of state mine inspectors, and it set standards for equipment and procedures. Mine inspectors could investigate accidents but were prohibited from publishing their findings, and companies were not liable for loss of life. The convict-lease system continued until Alabama became the last state in the nation to officially end the practice in 1928.

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### **SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

This collection consists of daily reports from Banner Mine in Alabama during 1914 that were sent to the State of Alabama Mining Department. Each day's log is listed on its own sheet of graphed paper and keeps a tally of the number of free laborers and convicts working and the specific jobs assigned to them. The free laborers are tallied by the number of men working the various jobs, along with their rate and amount. The convicts are tallied by their classification (first through fourth) along with their job title. There is another graphed section for convicts listing the number of convicts assigned to the mine, hospital, and prison, which also includes their job description. This section includes tabs for "sick in hospital," "convalescent," and "excused by physician." Most prisoners were assigned to work in the mines with a job description of "loading coal." The total number of new men received, total in prison, and discharged or transferred are included in the tally.

The amount of coal gathered from the mine is also tallied. The report includes the number of railroad cars loaded with coal by listing car initial, number, capacity, net weight, and grade of coal. The tally includes the overall cost per ton and total for that day. A remarks field is included at the bottom of the page. Most of the remarks listed in this field are "Sunday" where the only information logged on that day are the free laborers' listings and totals on coal. Other miscellaneous information is sometimes listed in the remarks section such as accidents, a recaptured convict, or a change in the day's schedule. A specific example of this is from November 2, 1914, where it notes that tasks are down due to sixteen convicts attending court as witnesses. The reports end with a timekeeper and superintendent's signature.

**BANNER MINE DAILY REPORTS, 1914**  
**CONTAINER LISTING**

<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Description</u></b>
SG040669	Banner Mine daily reports, 1914