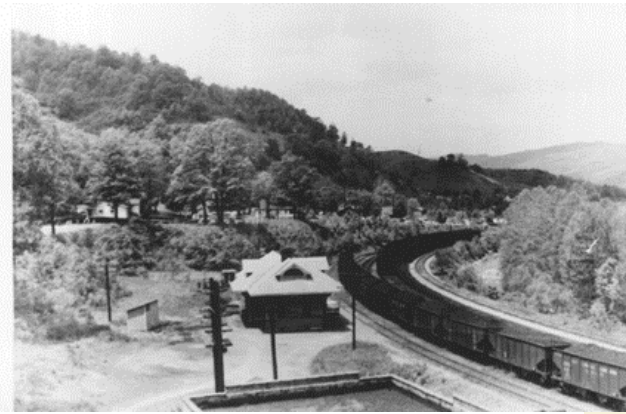
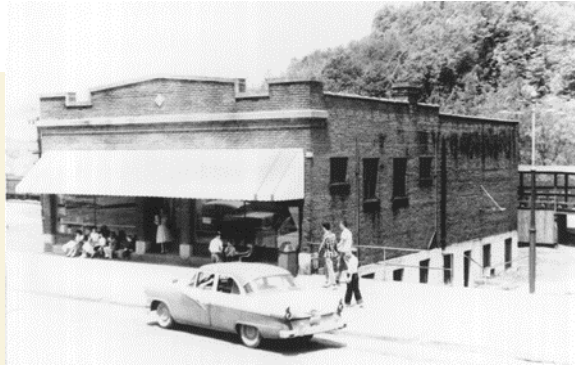


Historic Downtown Benham Walking Tour Map



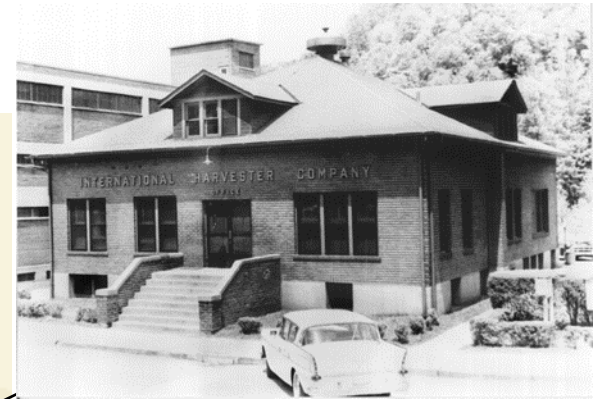
Historic location of the Benham Depot and current location of the Miner's Memorial Park.



Benham Meat Market



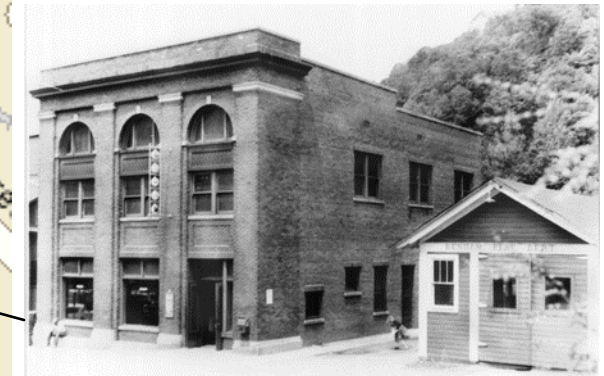
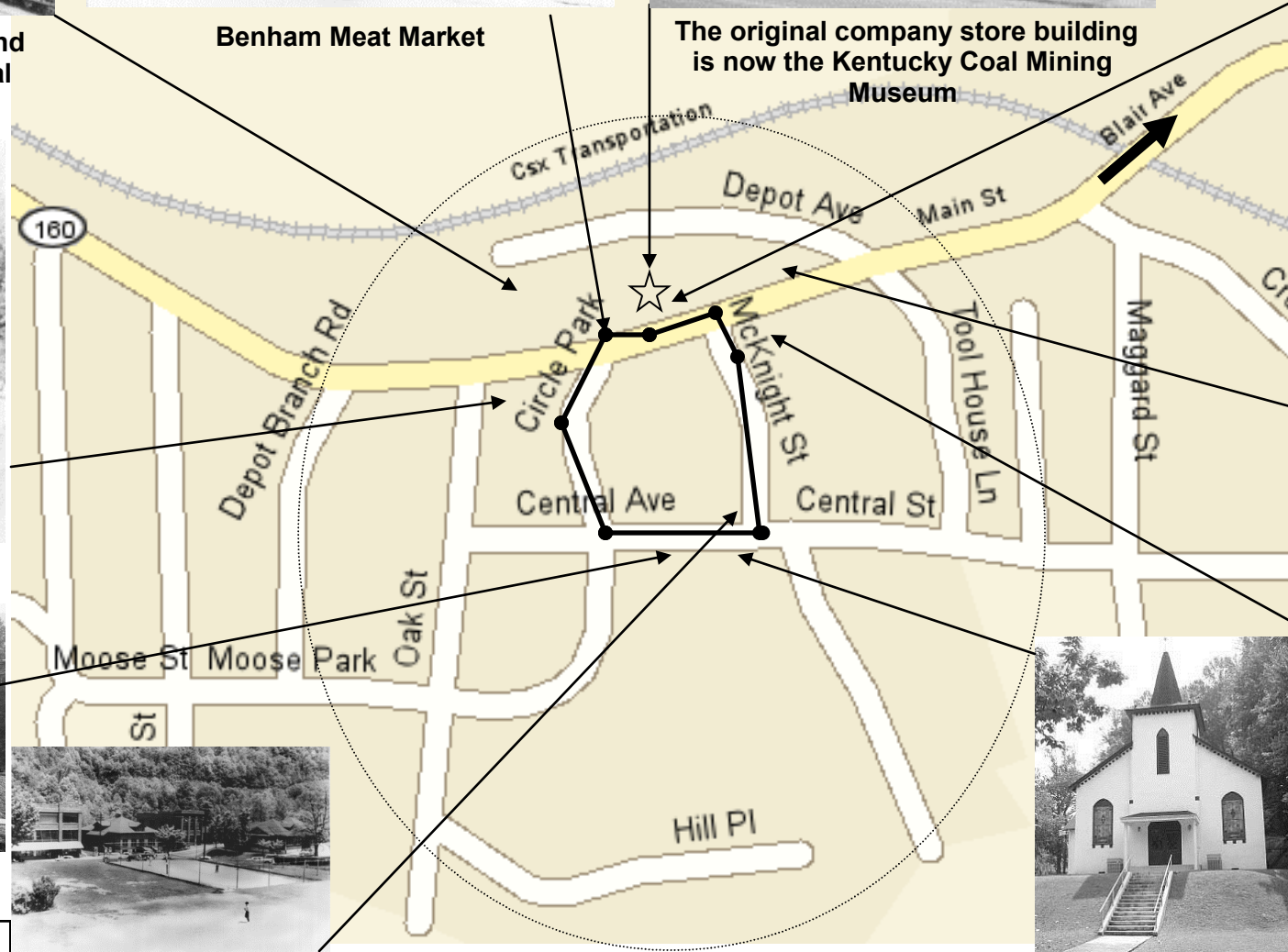
The original company store building is now the Kentucky Coal Mining Museum



Historic location of IH Company offices



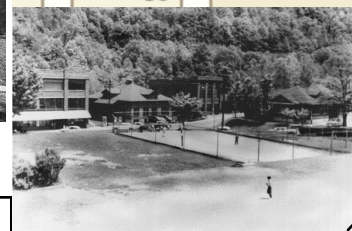
Benham Theater



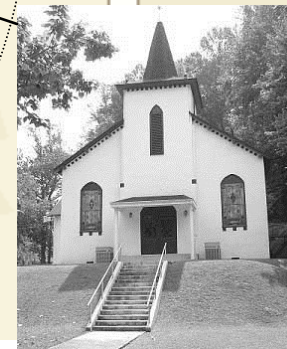
Benham Historic Post Office (left) and Fire House



Benham School



Circle Park



Benham Community Church



Benham Doctor's office and Hospital

****Continue on Main Street to the historic marker for East Benham School and Bernie Bickerstaff Drive.

Benham, Kentucky

Historic Walking Tour

In 1909, Wisconsin Steel Corporation/International Harvester Company began building the coal town of Benham. The town included buildings for businesses, healthcare, education, entertainment, churches and homes for the residents who were the coal company's employees and their families. The policy of recruiting across ethnic, racial and cultural lines created a rich, diverse workforce. The African-American community made especially significant contributions to community life. The East Benham School and its principal, Joseph Matthews is memorialized on a Kentucky Historic Highway Marker on KY Hwy 160.

At its peak operation, there were 1200 employees and their families residing in Benham. Due to economic and technological changes in the coal industry in the early 1960s, Harvester began selling the buildings and homes. The churches were deeded to their local congregations, the school to the county school system, and the hospital to a non-profit group. In 1961, the company incorporated Benham with a mayor and city council. In 1984 most of Benham was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. This brochure and map highlights the historic sites located in the central circle of downtown Benham.

Miners' Memorial Park

Benham Miners' Park is located on the former site of the Benham Depot. During the early part of the 1900s, Harvester shipped coal by rail from this busy train yard. Trains ran to Benham from 1911-1994. In the 1960s, the yard tracks were removed and the yard was used to dump scrap metal.

In the 1990s, the Benham Garden Club began clean up of the Depot and yard area in order to develop a community walking trail and picnic area. The Miners' Memorial Park was dedicated in September 1993.

A vintage 1949 L&N Caboose and life-size bronze statue of a miner decorate the Park. Nearby is a historic spring that is reported to be Benham's first water source. The Coal Miners' Wall displays the names of miners from the coal region, and a second memorial salutes the miners killed in accidents at Harvester's mines. Today Miners' Memorial Park is used for community and family gatherings.

IH Company Office Building & Benham City Hall

Benham City Hall, originally used as offices for Harvester's local coal operation, was built in 1919. The building was presented to the city and became city hall in 1961 when Benham incorporated.

During the coal camp years, the building's offices were used by company engineers, managers, and superintendents, and the top floor housed the police department. The large windows on the west façade served as the company's pay windows.



Benham Meat Market

Community residents bought meat, dairy products and produce at Benham Meat Market. Customers shopped in the store or sent an order to be delivered by truck. Formerly, the building had a green awning on the front, double glass doors, and benches in front of the plate glass windows.

The Meat Market basement was used as Benham's ice house. Ice was brought in by train or truck and stored on beds of straw. A delivery truck took blocks of ice to the homes. To order ice, a resident placed a paste board sign in their window to request 25, 50, 100, or 150 lbs of ice. Ice boxes or cellars and straw were used to store the ice used to cool the family's milk, butter, eggs, and meat.

The market closed in the late 1950s and the building was then used for various businesses.

Kentucky Coal Mining Museum

The Commissary, or company store, building was built in 1923. With three shopping levels, the store offered everything a resident might need for their home or personal needs. After some 50 years of operation, the company closed the Commissary and sold the building. It was used as a lumber store, hardware store, antique store, and variety store.

The Tri-City Chamber of Commerce and the Fiscal Court purchased the building in the late 1980s to house a museum dedicated to the preservation of the history of the coal industry, coal miners and their families. Today, the Kentucky Coal Mining Museum continues to display exhibits on coal mines, miners, miners' families, and coal communities since 1900.

Benham Fire House

The Benham Fire House was built in 1922. Employees of the coal company were assigned fire-fighting duties as part of their regular job. These men fought fires both at the mines and in the community. Although the building is too small for today's fire trucks, it houses a 1936 International Harvester Fire Truck that was retired from the city.

Benham Hospital

The Benham Hospital, located near the center of the community, was built in 1922. At the hospital employee applicants were given physicals and miners and their families received medical care. The hospital eventually included doctors' offices, sixteen patient rooms, a delivery room and an operating room. A lab, x-ray facility and pharmacy were added later.

Harvester staffed the Benham Hospital with excellent doctors, many from the Chicago area. The doctors made house calls, delivered babies, treated mine injuries, and performed surgical procedures. Doctors Milo Schosser and James Mullen became a true part of community life.

In 1962, the Harvester Company deeded the hospital building to the community and it became Valley View Hospital. The building now belongs to the City and is occupied by Cumberland Valley Comprehensive Care.

Benham Community Church

The coal company provided three churches to Benham, one of these was the Community Protestant Church. Its construction was completed in May 1912, and has a Gothic style frame and stucco structure with arched Tudor stained glass windows. The main elevation has a square bell tower with lancet windows and a conical roof and a finial. The church's main

entryway has double doors and a rounded arch transom. The interior church walls are wood and plaster and the original seating and choir area are still in place. Since 1961, the building has served the community as a Methodist Church.

Benham School

The Benham School, built in 1926, was one of two schools provided by the Harvester Company. Teacher's salaries at Benham School were supplemented by the coal company enabling the school to provide highly qualified teachers to the children of Cumberland and Benham. The high school at Benham closed in 1961. At that time the school became Benham Elementary School, a part of the Harlan County School System. It was later closed in 1992.

The Benham School House Bed and Breakfast is now located in the building that housed the Benham School.

Benham Theater

The Theater is a two-story brick structure and was built in 1922. This is where miners and their families came to watch silent films or "talkies," and to meet such Hollywood Stars as Lash Laroo, and Hoot Gibson.

The Benham Theater closed in the late 1950s and was later donated to the city for a Youth Center. Eventually, the city restored the theater through grants and donations. The original interior featured decorative molding on the balcony, main floor and stage area. The decorative molding was replaced or repaired and the stage was restored. The Theater is used for city functions and group meetings. The Benham Theater was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

Circle Park

Located in the center of town, Circle Park, was designated as a play area for children in 1915. The park served as a playground for the Benham Elementary School, a practice field for the school marching band, and a gathering spot for adults in the community. The park remains an important part of community life with its tennis courts and recreation equipment.

Walking Tour information was compiled by the staff of the Kentucky Coal Mining Museum.

Layout and Design by Theresa Osborne, Folklorist.

Archival Images provided by Southeast Kentucky Community & Technical College Appalachian Archive, Benham/ Lynch Collection

Our Appreciation to Danny Ford of Ford Brothers, Inc., Southeast Education Foundation, Wilma Adams and Alice Hern

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