The Fentress Chapter

A Strip Mine permit fight and Blasting Damage dominate the year

1986 kept SOCM members in Fentress County busy throughout the entire year. An application to strip mine outside the community of Allardt moved residents to action. The proposed mine included about 30 acres in the middle of a residential area. The Jim York Mining Company had filed the application to mine near the end of 1985. Residents learned that Mr. York owed thousands of dollars in fines for past mining violations — fines that must be paid before new permits to mine are granted. Despite the unpaid fines, the permitting agency proceeded with technical review and a public hearing was held in September, 1986. Over 50 people showed up at the hearing, all opposed the proposed mine. Twenty residents spoke citing the dangers of blasting, roads unfit for loaded trucks, and acid drainage to the nearby creek that feeds into the county's reservoir. York withdrew his application soon after the public hearing.

> *"My house has a full basement which is foot in, not above, the sandstone rock formations that are to be blasted. I am not willing for my house to be torn apart so that someone else can profit."*
>
> — BILL DELK —
>
> * * * * * *
>
> *"My house is three years old and I'd like it to still be standing when I finally own it."*
>
> — RAINES —
>
> *Excerpts from Testimony at York Permit Hearing*

The withdrawal gave only a shortlived victory. Soon after, the

mineral owners decided to refile the same permit in their own names. The year ends with SOCM members ready to fight this "new" permit as well.

Other SOCM members in Fentress County suffered blasting damage from an operating mine operated by Three K Coal Company. Only after resident complaints did the federal Office of Surface Mining officials begin to serve notice on violations. Among these violations were the absence of a company operating seismograph and eight citations in one week for blasting above the legal limits. By mid-fall, financial problems forced the sale of the mine to Targa Energies, and mining ceased. Residents are now filing suits for damages against the mine.

The Hamilton Chapter

SOCM veterans work successfully on Road Issues, Surface Rights

Hamilton County SOCM members worked quietly and successfully on a couple important issues during 1986. First, due to members' collective efforts, the State agreed to redesign a planned new highway near their homes to give them access. Also, years of complaints about an especially dangerous and unsightly abandoned mine — Board Camp Creek — resulted in designation as a priority site with the new federal and state funds recently released. (See AML article).

But Hamilton County SOCM's most successful efforts were centered on playing their part in the organization's efforts to pass a Surface Rights Bill. Despite many efforts during the 1986 Legislative session to meet with their representative, Bill McAfee, who sits on a key House Committee, McAfee failed to return calls and remained cool to the Surface Rights Bill in Nashville. This fall, before the election, members met with Mr. McAfee and told him of the history of their problems as surface owners. In front of over 25 SOCM members and friends, Mr. McAfee not only agreed to support this legislation during the 1987 session, but also agreed to co-sponsor the bill.