

THE LIFE OF JOHN NUTTALL

Written by his Grandson, John Nuttall

The city of Accrington, in Lancashire County, England, was divided into districts or surrounded by many suburbs, each with its own name. Thomas Nuttall was born in 1788, in one of these suburbs named Cupola Clough; he became a weaver and married Alice Crabtree; they had six children, the fifth child was named John, and the sixth child was named Alice. A year after the birth of Alice, Thomas, the father, died, January 3, 1820, and the widow had a hard time feeding her family and the children had to go to work just as soon as they could. In that era, the age of eight was considered old enough for a child to begin work and, at that tender age, John had to start working. He got a job as a tierboy in a calico printworks, in a suburb named Love Clough and stayed at that three years, until he was eleven; he then went to work in a coal mine in another suburb, Goodshaw Hill, and was there six years, until he was 17. He, next, went back to the printworks as an apprentice and remained there three and one-half years, but he preferred coal mining and went back to that and continued working in the mine for the next 12 years. John was born April 9, 1817, and in April, 1849, he was 32 years old and knew all about coal mining and had saved enough to emigrate to America. He had married Elizabeth Pollard and they had three children, Alice Elizabeth, Suzanna and Thomas.

Elizabeth Pollard had had the same misfortune as John had, in losing her father when she was a small child; John's mother never married again, but his wife's mother did remarry with a man named Crabtree.

After Mrs. Pollard married Mr. Crabtree, they had three children, William and Jonathan and Martha, and Martha married a Mr. Sutcliff. These three children had emigrated to America and had established a silk mill on Staten Island, under the firm name of Crabtree & Wilkinson, and specializing in silk handkerchiefs.

Since I shall have to write my grandfather's name a hundred times, it will save work and space if I refer to him hereafter, by using only his initials.

J. N. was cautious with his money and he did not want to risk burning bridges behind him; so he decided to go to America alone and make sure of a job before taking his family over.

He wrote to the Crabtrees and they replied that they could give him a job in their silk mill since he knew cloth printing; so he went and landed in New York in May, 1849, then sent for his family the next year, after becoming fully satisfied about his job.

April 26, 1851, a fourth child, Martha, was born, and two years later, the mother died and Mrs. Sutcliff took charge of the baby, Martha. Both J. N. and his wife caught some disease which the doctors of that day could not diagnose and they gave it that catchall vague diagnosis of the ague; J. N. slowly recovered, but his wife did not.

At the silk mill, he was able to save a lot more money each year than he had been able to save in England, and he did not spend his entire savings in the emigration; so as, he liked mining better than cloth printing and he knew he could do better at that than in the silk mill, he read the papers and made enquiries, watching for an opportunity to join somebody in opening a mine. Finally in 1856, seven years after his arrival in this country, he heard of a possible opportunity to get into coal mining. He heard, or read, that The Pennsylvania Railroad was building a branch line from Tyrone, near Altoona, Pennsylvania, to climb the mountain and go on to Philipsburg and Clearfield, and that this line would tap large amounts of coal and timber there.

He went up to Philipsburg by stagecoach and hired a horse and rode along the surveyed right-of-way, making enquiries about coal seams and prices.

He rode down to Osceola Mills, about eight miles below Philipsburg, and there he heard of a Mr. Colburn who had a good coal seam on his farm about five miles further on towards Tyrone, and he went on over there.

Mr. Colburn was digging some of this coal for himself and neighbors; he had 200 acres and it lay properly alongside the right-of-way and Mr. Colburn did not put a high price on his place, it being so isolated. The coal was of reasonably good quality and J. N. decided that this would be his place and he went back to Staten Island what he then agreed to with Mr. Colburn is not known; maybe some verbal agreement or option or down payment. When he told the two Crabtree brothers about the huge profits in coal, they readily agreed to join with him; the demand for coal far exceeded the small amount of coal being produced and prices were consequently high. William Crabtree agreed to buy the land and Jonathan agreed to put up as much cash as J. N. lacked for opening the mine and building a village and a store and buying mine cars, rails and mules, and J. N. went right to work on his new mine, even though the branch was only started out of Tyrone.

He first went to Philadelphia to see about buying some supplies and equipment and at his boarding house he met a Mrs. Ann Nuttall. She had emigrated from England recently and her husband and two children had died and left her stranded. Her husband was said to have been a distant cousin of John's. J. N. liked Ann and was sorry for her and he saw her again on each of the several trips he had to make to Philadelphia. They each needed the other right badly and they got married in November 1856. J. N. had by then constructed a few houses and had a bit of a commissary and had named his growing village, Nuttallville; he and Ann went to Staten Island and got the children and went up to Nuttallville.

To be more technically correct about the branch, Morgan Hale & Company bought 38,000 acres of coal and timber lands on top of the mountain above and back of Tyrone, and they started the branch to develop their property and the P.R.R. took it over when it was well along.

Nuttallville was the first place that this branch reached and when it got there in 1881, J. N. had his mine well developed and was ready to ship coal and his profits were considerable.

A Mr. Robert Powell of Philadelphia heard of the big profits and he went up to Nuttallville to see if he could get in on this bonanza in some way and the result of that visit was that Mr. Powell bought out the two Crabtrees and bought another 650 acres and put up still more cash for more houses and more equipment. Mr. Powell knew nothing about mining and would take no part in it but to put up the needed money, and he would continue to live in Philadelphia. Whether J. N. retained a full half interest is not clear, but apparently he did. In view of the fact that J. N. would furnish all the knowledge and experience and do all the work and assume all the worries and privation of life in the woods, Mr. Powell generously agreed to pay him a \$.05 a ton royalty for producing the coal. They were both quite pleased with the arrangement and both made good profits and J. N. was so pleased about it that he renamed his town and called it Powelton. This contract was executed in 1862.

With plenty of cash for development, J. N. quickly brought the production up to 4000 tons a month and at \$.05 a ton royalty, that meant \$200 a month, which was a huge salary in that day; and he also got his partnership share of the overall profits. Dayhands at his mine got only \$12 a month, but living costs were in keeping with these wages and a man could raise his family on that \$12 a month in the 1860's.

J. N. used some of his profits to open another mine of his own on Coal Run back of Osceola Mills, about 5 miles west of Powelton, and he named it Decatur, as it was in Decatur township, of Clearfield County. The 12 mile round trip on horseback consumed too much time, and Mr. Powell agreed to buy out J. N.'s interest in Powelton in 1866 and then J. N. moved to Osceola Mills.

The second marriage of J. N. did not turn out happily; they had married without knowing each other scarcely at all and in a few years they discovered that their natures and personalities and beliefs clashed and they could not get along harmoniously, nor happily. In 1861, they agreed, by mutual consent, to separate for five years and signed a paper to that effect; he agreed to pay her \$2.50 a week, which seems a pitiful sum today, but at that time that was all a wage earner got for raising his family. He had invested in a house in Philadelphia and he gave that to her also, and he allowed her to have temporary custody of my father, Lawrence William, who was born to them at Powelton, September 17, 1857. At the end of the five years, J. N. was still sure that he could not be happy with Ann and they got a divorce and he gave her a good cash settlement and she went to England to visit relatives. Upon her return, she bought a home in Philipsburg and lived there until 1900. J. N. had taken custody of my father before the divorce.

George W. McGaffey, a young carpenter from Vermont, had drifted in to Powelton and helped J. N. build his village and he married

the eldest daughter, Alice, in 1864. J. N. had a mine foreman named John Todd at Powelton and he married the next daughter, Suzanna, about a year before Alice got married.

When J. N. moved to Osceola in 1866, to give his whole time to his new mine Decatur, he had my father, Lawrence William, back with him and apparently the McGaffneys kept house for them all.

The new mine proved a total failure; the coal seam would disappear and they had the expense of driving entries to find it again, then lose it and, after two years of this, J. N. had to abandon it entirely. But he still had plenty of money left over from his Powelton mine and he bought 1200 acres on the edge of Philipsburg, Pennsylvania. Philipsburg is in Center County, but this 1200 acres was on the other side of the Moshannon creek, in Clearfield County, the location being a suburb known as Pt. Lookout. . He named his new mine Decatur #1 and spoke of the failure as Old Decatur; he built a village and a school and a store and was able to salvage some equipment by hauling it or shipping it from Old Decatur. For some unexplained reason, his new town was locally referred to as The Nuttall Blocks, but officially it was Decatur.

John Todd was mine foreman of this new mine and had by now learned everything about mining coal the way J. N. wanted it done and J. N. had no worry about the production of the coal. George McGaffey had proved to be a young man of sterling qualities and with a level head and J. N. had taken him into the office and he was rapidly learning all details of the outside manager which meant keeping the books, selling the coal, making up the payrolls, attending to the rentals and repairs of the houses, managing the store and handling the finances and also purchasing agent for the mine. This new seam of coal proved a good one and J. N. opened a second mine and called it Decatur #2, and as soon as money began coming in from this place, he opened another mine, named Laurel Run #1, and then he opened Laurel Run #2, and it would seem that those two mines were on land leased from the owners, #1 leased from Richard Hughes and #2 leased from John Shaw.

In 1868, his son, Thomas, finished his schooling. He had a longing to take a trip out west and see Indians and buffaloes before he settled down to coal mining, and J. N. agreed to the trip and helped him get a freelance agency to sell Fairbanks scales wherever there was no present agency west of the Ohio. Thomas must have sold a good many scales, inasmuch as he took quite an extensive journey far out west, and on his return he bought an Indian pony, saddle and bridle for his sister, Martha. When he reached the Ohio he saw a paddlewheel ready to continue its journey upriver to Pittsburgh and he took passage on it, for a rest and to speed his return home. At bedtime he remarked that he was going down to the lower deck to see if his pony was alright and that was the last seen of him; this was 1868, about August.

In the early spring of 1870, J. N. read in his paper about the construction of the C & O Railroad in West Virginia; it had started at Old Pt Comfort at the mouth of the James river and followed the

river to its source and was now over the crest of the Allegheny; it would go down through the New River gorge and down the Kanawha river and end at Portsmouth on the Ohio, and construction was being started from Portsmouth to work back east and meet the other crew.

The article stated that there were many seams of coal on the Kanawha and a couple in the New River gorge. J. N. had profited well by coming to Powelton and buying land before the railroad got there and he thought it might pay him to go down and make enquiries in West Virginia on the Kanawha. He was 53 years old and had worked hard for 45 years and now had a very nice income and he was entitled to ease off and undertake no more privations. Hard work seldom hurts anybody if they live right and J. N. was always most abstemious and moderate in everything and used no tobacco and no alcohol, and at 53 he was just in his prime. He was about to embark upon a second life of 27 more years of considerable accomplishments.

The McGaffneys had no children and they were giving J. N. and my father a good home; they also had a home for Martha, but she was going away to school nine months and in summer visited many weeks at Staten Island and was at Decatur very little at this period. The two sons-in-law were competent, able and willing to look after the Pennsylvania mines and J. N. was footloose. He went down into Virginia by train and there boarded a stagecoach of the James River and Kanawha Turnpike and in two days arrived at the tavern of Dr. Cooper at Locust Lane in Fayette County, West Virginia, on the headwaters of Keeneys Creek. He was surprised to see them burning coal and it looked like a fine grade of coal and he made enquiry about it, and was told that it was mined from a seam on the bank of Keeneys Creek nearby. A local surveyor, J. L. Blume, was at the tavern, probably to get his mail, and J. N. got into conversation with him and could have found no better informed man to talk with, as Mr. Blume knew the corners and owners and prices of all the lands around there. Mr. Blume stated that this coal seam on the bank of Keeneys creek was $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet thick clean coal; that it was 5 miles down the creek to the top of the New River gorge and the C & O was to come on this north side of the river; that two years ago when climbing down to New River he had seen a fine four foot seam of coal exposed by a slide on the side of the gorge and land was \$1.00 an acre. J. N. decided to lay over here a few days and investigate.

In an effort to keep this account as brief as possible, I am omitting a great many details and side issues, especially from here on.

They found the second seam of coal about 200 feet below the cliffs that rimmed the gorge and J. N. decided to open a mine here on Short Creek, which was one mile west downriver from Keeneys creek. He pointed out to Mr. Blume what he wanted and Mr. Blume took him to see the owners of those tracts; the price had heretofore been \$1.00 an acre, but the owners naturally, and not unwisely, asked more when they saw that J. N. had decided to locate here. The first owner asked \$4.00 an acre and got it without dispute and the next man hearing of that, asked \$6.00 and still no argument and so the next owner asked \$8.00 and got it, and J. N. signed up for 657 acres. He took a lump

of his new coal back to Philadelphia with him and had it analyzed and found it a better coal than his Pennsylvania seams, so he raised as much cash as he could and arranged for his two sons-in-law to manage his Pennsylvania mines and he went back to Locust Lane in the fall. He bought another 1500 acres, and the prices varied according to how close they were to his mine and how badly he needed that tract; you could perhaps say that in general they were \$8.00, if anywhere within reach of a mine on the side of the gorge above the Railroad. George Alderson had a tavern on the turnpike, four miles west of Locust Lane, and he owned 547 acres of wild land west of his farm; it was far back from the gorge and J. N. had no need for it, but Mr. Alderson wanted to sell it at \$1.00 an acre and J. N. bought it. This was the only \$1.00 land that J. N. got. A poorly informed school teacher who lost his job undertook the writing of what he claimed was a history of Fayette County; he stated that J. N. got his lands at \$.50 an acre and this was definitely untrue.

When J. N. came back to Fayette County, in the fall of 1870, he brought along Mr. W. H. Holland to be his mine boss and to help with the many jobs that had to be done. They worked 18 months getting everything done that they could do until the railroad should arrive and bring them their heavy goods and rails, and the railroad not yet in sight, J. N. took his crews a mile upriver and opened a second mine on Keeneys creek.

His first mine was planned to have a maximum production of 500 tons a day and it was named Nuttallburg and postoffice granted under that name. The C & C had listed the place as Nuttall on their tariffs and could not change them and the place became known as Nuttall and the Burg was used only when addressing a letter. The second mine was on half the scale of Nuttall and to produce a maximum of 250 tons a day, and was named Keeneys Creek. The railroad was built from both ends and two crews met at the bridge over New River, 7 miles below Short creek, and the road completed February 1873, two years and a couple of months after J. N. started to work on his mine. Coal prices were still high and as soon as J. N. got all his houses built and his store stocked and had paid for all his equipment, he built coke ovens. When all was done, he had 17 double two-family houses, 80 one family houses, 220 bankcars, 30 bank mules and 80 coke ovens at the two mines. The word mine was used only collectively in those days and each mine was called a bank; the men put on their bank clothes and bankcap and banklamp and worked in the bank and had a bankboss.

Almost all the settlers living on top of the gorge worked in the mines and other settlers bought a few acres and built homes, so that half the men lived in their own homes on top, and this settlement was called Nuttall Mountain, until they finally got their own postoffice and named it Edmund, named for Eddie, the son of John Ryan who applied for and got the first postoffice. Short creek is one mile downriver from Keeneys creek and two miles further on downriver is Fern Creek; when J. N. got his mines going he began buying more lands and he bought everything along New River from Fern Creek up to

a half mile above Keeney's Creek for a river frontage of $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles. He bought everything on back to the turnpike, fanning out a bit as he went back and the turnpike ran from four to five miles parallel to and back from the gorge. He had in this boundary about 12,000 acres and was satisfied with this, but men were continually coming to see him, wanting him to buy their land. Some men would die and an administrator appointed to sell the place and nobody wanted it and the administrator would appeal to J. N. to please buy it so they could get the estate settled.

J. N. bought many of these offerings, partly as a favor and partly because he believed all land would increase in value and he couldn't lose by buying it. In this manner he bought another 12,000 acres without plan and it was badly scattered and jagged and poorly connected, often isolated. In almost all of his purchases, the seller reserved the surface whereon was his home and cleared fields, but J. N. got all the mineral solidly.

Martha, the fourth child of J. N., married Jackson Taylor, a Bookkeeper, and they came to Nuttall as soon as it got going and he kept the books the whole way through. His good friend, Fred Rothwell, a relative of the Taylors who had come from England with his brother, Herbert, to help, was given the job of store manager, and Dr. L. B. Rupert was appointed physician. In 1878, my father was 21 and finished his schooling and he came down and was put at various jobs, then was taken into the office and handled the finances, kept some of the books, attended business meetings for J. N., sold the coal and handled much of the correspondence. J. N. had had to go to work when he was 8 years old, but his mother had taught him his three R's and he could write a very creditable letter; his only weakness was in having to dodge around using such words as possession.

In 1882, J. N. decided to divide up a little with his children; he designated certain tracts as being in a leasehold, to be known as the Nuttallburg Coal & Coke Company, and he gave Jackson Taylor, my father and Mr. Holland equal partnership in this leasehold with himself as the fourth. The lessees had to pay J. N. individually, \$.10 a ton royalty on all coal mined and an additional \$.02 a ton for twenty years, to repay him for the houses and equipment. They shipped so much coal that in 12 years J. N. figured he had received enough return from the extra \$.02 royalty to have repaid him and he canceled it out in 1894. J. N. also divided up with his two sons-in-law in Pennsylvania, but I do not know the details; my father said they each got \$50,000.00, but I do not know if it were cash or if they got partnership in the Pennsylvania mines and realized the \$50,000.00 apiece when the mines were sold upon the death of J. N. The new leasehold included both of the New River mines and the partners apparently made good profits in spite of the \$.12 a ton royalty payments.

Money was piling up from the two New River mines and the four Pennsylvania mines and by 1887, J. N. felt he must do something about investing it. He owned practically everything within a mile of

either side of Keeneys Creek back to the turnpike and well beyond it. What they had thought was two seams of coal turned out to be one and the same seam; the upthrust of the strata was deceptive and they later found that this one seam, the Sewell seam, cropped on both sides of the Keeneys Creek hollow all along it. There was room up that hollow back from the gorge for seven good mines, if only there were some way to get it down to the C & O. J. N. climbed up and down the length of Keeneys creek and along the side of the gorge, figuring on it and finally decided that a branch railroad could be blasted out of the hillside. It would start at the mouth of Keeneys creek and climb up to run above the village of Nuttall and go a half mile beyond, then switch back and climb on up and enter the Keeneys Creek hollow, high enough for an engine to be able to chug on up the hollow to the turnpike. He told the C & O that they could get the revenue from seven new mines if they would build this branch; since they got \$8,000.00 freight revenue for hauling one acre of coal to the nearest market, they wanted the new mines, but they said it would be impossible to build any railroad up that steep mountainside. J. N. employed their own engineers to make a survey and they reported it could be done, but that it would cost a third more than normal for such a road and more than the output up there would warrant. J. N. countered by offering to contribute \$100,000.00 and thereby dispose of the adverse argument. The C & O thought that fair enough and it was almost agreed upon, but not definitely so. Mr. Low, of the Lowmoor Iron Company in Virginia, had bought land on the southside of New River, opposite the mouth of Fern creek, and he was very anxious to mine his coal over there. When he heard of the negotiations of J. N., he talked to other landholders over there on the southside and they agreed to put up the cost of a bridge across New River at Fern creek, if the C & O would build some trackage on the southside for them to mine their coal over there. This focused the attention of the C & O upon the fact that they needed a second track through this worst part of the gorge.

The C & O did not have enough expansion money to do both things, and they accepted the offer of Mr. Low which, of course, was their wisest choice. They agreed to build the bridge five miles up-river near Sewell and build their second track all the way down the south side to the Hawksnest bridge; this steepest portion of the gorge so often had slides that blocked the whole line for many hours or all day, and the second track would be very valuable. It was a bitter disappointment to J. N., when the C & O told him with regret that they could not build his branch; he kept on talking to them and they listened to him because they wanted the revenue of any new mines they could get. Finally, it was agreed that J. N. would pay the whole cost if the C & O would build it for him, or cooperate with him to every extent possible in getting it built. And the C & O agreed that they would take it over and keep it in good condition and operate it forever after with no further cost to him and bring all products of his lands down to the mainline with no cost to J. N. As an inducement to get him to build the branch, the C & O said they would charge all lessees a toll for bringing their coal down to the mainline and refund all these tolls to J. N. and he could thereby get his money back, and a toll of \$.05 a ton was verbally agreed upon, to be later raised or lowered according to prices and conditions.

It would take all of the savings of J. N. to build this branch and he could open none of the mines himself and would have to lease them; both J. N. and my father prided themselves upon having never borrowed a dollar. The branch cost \$290,000.00 including the preliminary and grade surveys.

Mr. Holland got first choice of a lease and Fred Rothwell second choice and there being no other associates wanting a lease, the others were given to friends who did not have quite enough funds to fully develop their leases. The branch was started in 1892 and completed in January 1896, seven miles long; it reached the first lease, taken out by the Boone brothers, in 1894. J. N. had many noble and fine qualities, but every man has some weak spots and the weakness of J. N. was in not looking after details and the smaller things and he had very few dealings with surveyors or lawyers.

In describing the Nuttallburg lease, he merely named some tracts and a creek and nobody knew the acreage nor the boundary lines; and in specifying the Boone lease, he used only creeks and the county road and its acreage was unknown and it included a portion of what had been assigned to the Nuttallburg lease. He thought he owned everything up the Keeneys creek hollow and then discovered that he didn't; he had no map of his property and had seldom gone to look at any tract he had bought after the first five or six thousand acres that he needed for his two mines. He was a great and good man and, if he became careless during the latter part of his second life's work, he must be readily and understandingly forgiven for any small errors or the lack of the energy to attend to all details.

In giving the leases to his friends, he told them that the royalty would be \$.10 a ton and that the C & O would charge them \$.05 a ton for hauling their coal down to the mainline. They accepted this, but asked for a guarantee that he would never levy any toll of his own for use of his branch and he readily agreed to put such a guarantee in the leases. When the leases were drawn up, something went wrong and it is difficult today to understand why nobody saw the error; there is every indication that nobody at all ever read a lease after it was written.

The Boones were able to start shipping coal in 1894 and the Hollands early in 1895; the C & O charged them the \$.05 a ton toll and nobody thought anything about it because that was according to the agreements. In April 1895, the Boones finally took a look at their lease and discovered that in the lease J. N. guaranteed them free delivery of all of their coal to the main line and said not a word about any toll. They went to see their lawyer and he said there was no question about it at all; so the Boones notified J. N. of the wording of the lease and J. N. saw that it guaranteed free delivery and he could do nothing but tell the C & O to levy no more tolls, quite a loss. Many things went wrong up the hollow, but nevertheless the building of the branch and the opening of the seven mines was the crowning achievement of J. N. and he revelled in all of the bustling and hammering and sawing and he built a house at the Rothwell lease

and moved up there to be in the midst of it.

Fayette County had been divided into six magisterial districts and when the branch was completed, the County Court carved out a new seventh district to include most of the holdings of J. N. and named it Nuttall district.

I failed to mention at the proper place, that Mr. Blume had a spinster daughter named Martha who was maybe 12 years younger than J. N.; J. N. had endless dealings with Mr. Blume and saw much of Martha and they liked each other and about seven years after they had met they got married, and it was a congenial and happy companionship and she, of course, was with him in his new home at Rothwell.

When J. N. finally sat down at Rothwell with no more planning, he began to slowly slip and by August of 1897 he was bedfast. Fred Rothwell had jumped his horse over a fence and the horse caught his foot and fell on him and he was badly injured. Fred died September 13, 1897 and this hurt J. N., because the two of them had been such warm and close friends for so long, and J. N. died four days later.

They were each buried on the cliffs above the old Nuttall mine.

J. N. left everything, share and share alike, to his four children and gave his widow, Martha, use of the home for her life and an annual allowance of \$5,000.00 a year.