

BULK HANDLING DeWitt Buchanan Jr

DeWitt Buchanan Jr, retired president of Old Ben Coal Co, was a leader in automated mining, including conveyor usage underground, and moderniser in the uses of coal as a source of energy. He passed away at the age of 71. DeWitt Buchanan, Jr succeeded his father, DeWitt (Buck) Buchanan, Sr, as President and CEO of Old Ben Coal Co, one of America's largest coal producers. Buck had founded the company by buying up promising land in southern Illinois.



Born in 1917 in Chicago, DeWitt Jr attended Princeton University where he acquired a degree in engineering. After graduation he returned to Chicago in 1940 to manage Old Ben with his father. It was with this return that he went on to carve a career for himself and a future for Old Ben that equalled his father's accomplishments. He joined the firm in 1940, became President in 1950 and Chief Executive Officer in 1964.

Buchanan eliminated entirely the use of black blasting powder in all of Old Ben's mines and thus paved the way for the eventual elimination of this dangerous explosive in all underground coal mines. He promoted the use of permissible explosives and eventually even replaced those when he introduced the first continuous mining machine. He developed this machine with Robbins and Goodman Equipment to perfect the first

type of successful continuous miner, the Goodman boring machine.

He also introduced continuous belt haulage and thus made Old Ben one of the first mining companies in the country to completely eliminate track haulage for coal. In 1960, he opened the first large modern mine totally equipped with belt haulage and continuous miners. This mine used high extraction pillar methods with increased productivity and reduced the waste of leaving coal underground. Though unsuccessful at first, DeWitt pioneered one of the first longwall mining attempts in the country in the late 1960s.

Buchanan accomplished more than just mining mechanisation, however. Through careful negotiation with railroads and power companies, he established the first long-term supply and transport contracts with electric utilities. This brought coal into the modern age as the prime fuel in electric generation.

Buck retired from Old Ben in 1968 and DeWitt went on to manage the company which continued to mine the massive Old Ben reserves of Franklin County, Illinois and parts of West Virginia. In 1968, he set up and executed the sale of Old Ben to Standard Oil of Ohio, thus marking the beginning of big oil's entry into the coal industry. He continued on, however, as President and CEO of Old Ben after the sale.

Like his father, DeWitt continued Old Ben's lead in human relations within the coal industry. Old Ben enjoyed a peaceful and successful partnership with the United Mine Workers of America during his tenure. He made numerous contributions to the development of Franklin County and its people. Though he retired from Old Ben and as a director of Sohio in 1980 he continued to actively participate in coal industry affairs until he passed away in 1988. His life was devoted to his industry and his company, and he truly oversaw much of the modernisation of the US coal industry.

The coal company was a leader under father and son in mechanisation and mine safety. They prohibited the use of black powder in the mines and promoted the rock-dusting procedures that are now required by federal safety laws. His father invented the first electrically driven rock-dusting machine, making the patents available in the interests of safety.

"My father had vision," Kenneth Buchanan said. "He saw coal as part of the total energy picture. He coordinated with railroads and with utility companies to achieve economies and to

help bring coal out of the Stone Age and into an era when it became a major supplier of electric power.

“People have an image of coal mining being underground pits, but under him the mines of Old Ben Coal were very modern and efficient underground operations. He was very concerned with safety there and good labour relations.”

Buchanan was chairman of the National Coal Association in 1964 and 1965. He was also a director of the Bituminous Coal Operators Association.