

A Gem of a Legacy

Benjamin E. Clement, high school science teacher and entrepreneur, was drawn to western Kentucky by an interest in the wealth of fluorspar (a mineral used primarily in steel-making) in the region. Fluorspar mining was an industry just starting to pick up momentum when Clement organized his first of four fluorspar companies in the mid 1920s. Although mining for Fluorspar began as early as 1818



(President Andrew Jackson owned a mine in 1835), it wasn't until 1890 that the use of fluorite began to grow as a result of greater purification technologies. It was utilized in not only steel, but aluminum and glass production as well as chemical and nuclear processes. At its peak, Kentucky's regional mines provided over 40% of the world's needs for the mineral.

Clement was acutely aware of the historical impact the fluorspar industry would have on industrial history and in 1920 began collecting what became one of the largest assemblages of mineral samples and associated historical records in the world. Clement's expertise with fluorspar and knowledge of its importance in the manufacturing of steel and atomic weapons were evident when he served during World War II as a member of the War Production Board and the President's Tariff Commission. The western Kentucky fluorspar industry began to sharply decline in 1950 with an influx of access to inexpensive foreign fluorspar and overseas industrial production.

Interviews about Benjamin E. Clement and fluorspar miners and can be found at <http://passtheword.ky.gov>. (Image Courtesy of Ben E. Clement Mineral Museum)

"Pass the Word" is a discovery tool for oral histories throughout the state of Kentucky. To learn more about this topic, visit <http://passtheword.ky.gov>.