

## Valmont

COUNTY: *Otero*

LOCATION: *11 mi. south of Alamogordo*

MAP: *page 241*

*P.O. est. as Camp 1908; discount. 1910. Name changed to Shamrock 1910; discount. 1916. Name changed to Valmont 1917; discount. 1922.*

In 1859 a detachment of mounted riflemen of the Eighth Infantry from Fort Bliss, Texas, pursued a band of Apaches into Dog Canyon on the west flank of the Sacramento Mountains. High in a rocky chine an engagement ensued, and three soldiers and nine Indians were killed.

Early in the 1900's a railroad station was named for Dog Canyon five miles to the east. A post office at the Dog Canyon Station was named Camp for the first postmaster. In 1910 the name of the post office was changed to Shamrock, and in 1917 it became Valmont, from the combination of the words vale and mountain. Soon a community of about forty persons developed in the vicinity of the station, established a grade school, and prospered for several years.

Shortly before World War I, drought and other factors caused the families to leave, and Valmont slumped into a state of depression.

Nothing remains to mark the site of the station or the former community.

## Van Houten

COUNTY: *Colfax*

LOCATION: *18 mi. southwest of Raton*

MAP: *page 239*

*P.O. est. as Willow 1902; discount. 1902. Name changed to Van Houten 1902; discount. 1952.*

The St. Louis, Rocky Mountain and Pacific Company revived mining activities at the coal mining camp of Willow late in 1902. The village name was changed to Van Houten for S. Van Houten, the company president, and soon the mines were producing at full capacity. Two hundred and seventy-nine miners and five boys worked underground, with twenty men and five boys working at

the tippie. By 1910 the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad had extended a branch line to Van Houten, and the mine efficiently operated with the latest electrical haulage and ventilation equipment. Some of the bituminous product was shipped to coke ovens at nearby Gardiner, and some was sold to railroad companies such as the Colorado and Southern, Chicago and Rock Island, and the El Paso and Southwestern.

The camp gradually increased in size to a peak of about fifteen hundred residents in 1915, when the town businesses included two hotels, the Blossburg Mercantile Co., a barber, billiard hall, and a stage line. The community, consisting primarily of Germans, Austrians, and Italians, was fond of gala affairs and celebrations. The local twenty-two-member band entertained with concerts and at Saturday night dances. Movies were shown Monday and Wednesday at the amusement hall, and baseball games were a popular pastime. The town sponsored an active Red Cross chapter and during World War I sold \$111,000 worth of Liberty War Bond subscriptions. This was the largest per capita investment in the war effort of any town in the nation.

A favorite picnic spot for young people about a mile and a half from Van Houten was called the Devil's Kitchen. At this spot a slow-glowing fire supplied by natural gas seepage had been burning for several years. When the fire was low and visitors wished to do a bit of cooking they would vigorously scratch the charred ground surface and the flames would burst through. The local old-timers told how early pioneers scared off attacking Indians when a discharging rifle ignited the gases, causing a large explosion and a mass of flame which scattered the frightened savages in every direction.

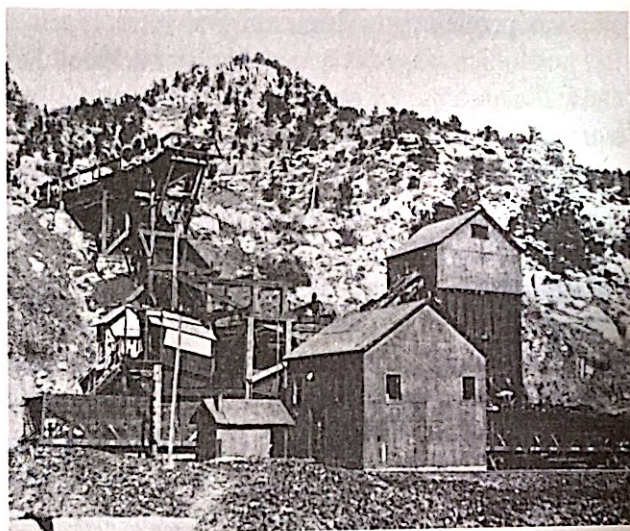
As the years wore on, telltale signs of the declining coal economy brought uncertainty to Van Houten. A series of railroad strikes temporarily slowed coal production, and development of new oil and gas deposits competed strongly with the mines. In 1940 the mine closed, but it was reopened a year later with the crisis of World War II. In 1948 a twenty-four-day strike critically damaged the St. Louis, Rocky Mountain Company, forcing them to increase the employees' pay. The fatal blow was dealt with the loss of contracts from the A.T. & S.F. Railroad and the Colorado Fuel and Iron Corporation. The drastic reduction in



coal demand affected all the coal camps in the region, forcing many mines to discontinue operations. On May 27, 1954, all mining activity ceased at Van Houten, putting about a hundred men out of work. Families moved, buildings were torn down, and the company records closed.

All of the buildings of Van Houten have disappeared. Today the property is privately owned by Kaiser Steel Corporation.

Number 5 mine tipple at Van Houten, circa 1915.—*Courtesy Evelyn Shuler.*



View of upper tipple and a portion of Van Houten, circa 1910.—*Courtesy Evelyn Shuler.*

