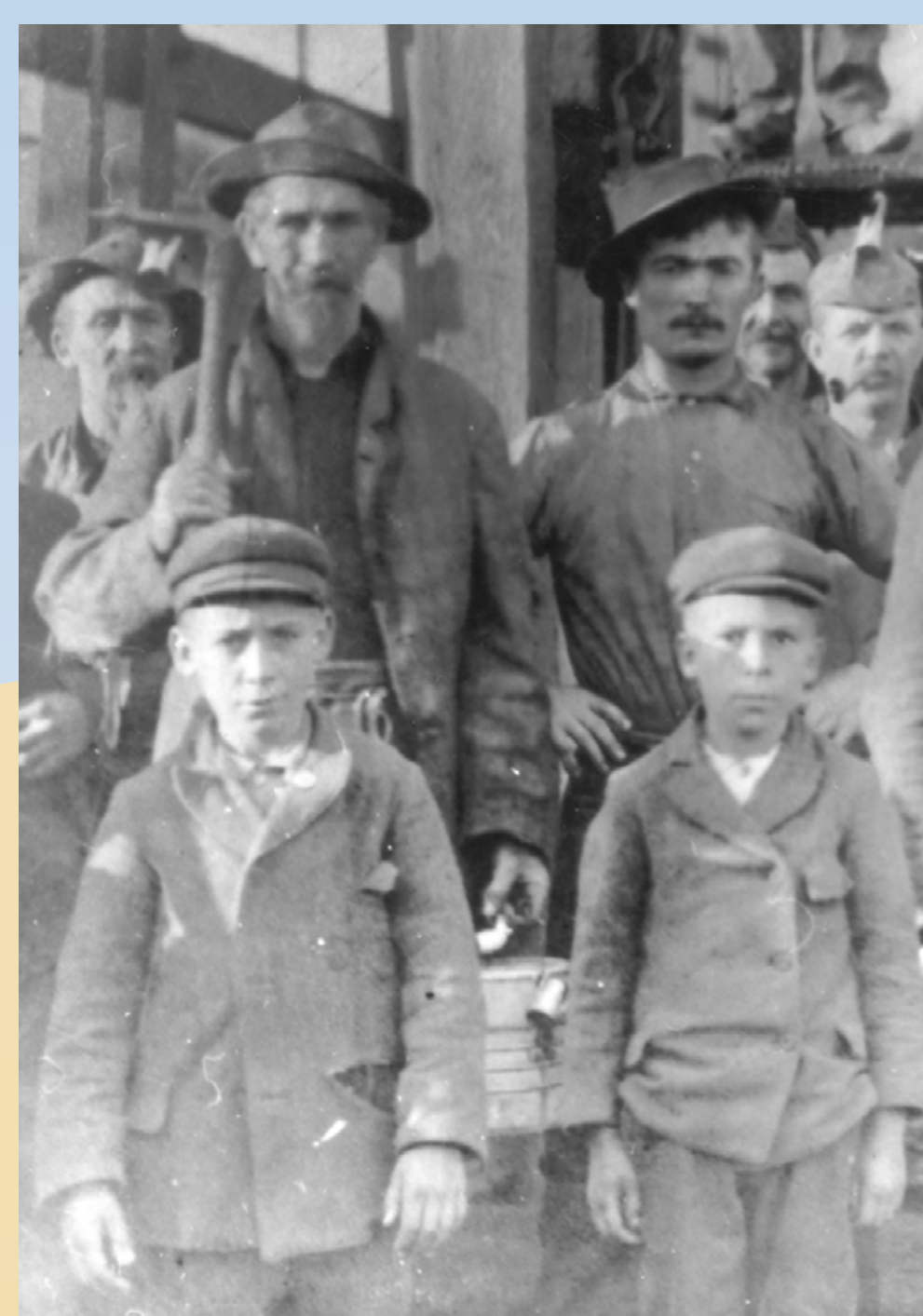


A Dangerous Job

The sound of picks clattering off the coal face rings out across the three foot tall work space. An eight year old boy, called a knobber, struggles to push coal down from where it was cut to the coal car waiting on the tracks 300 feet downslope. In the distance, a muffled “thwump” signals a possible cave-in in the depths below.



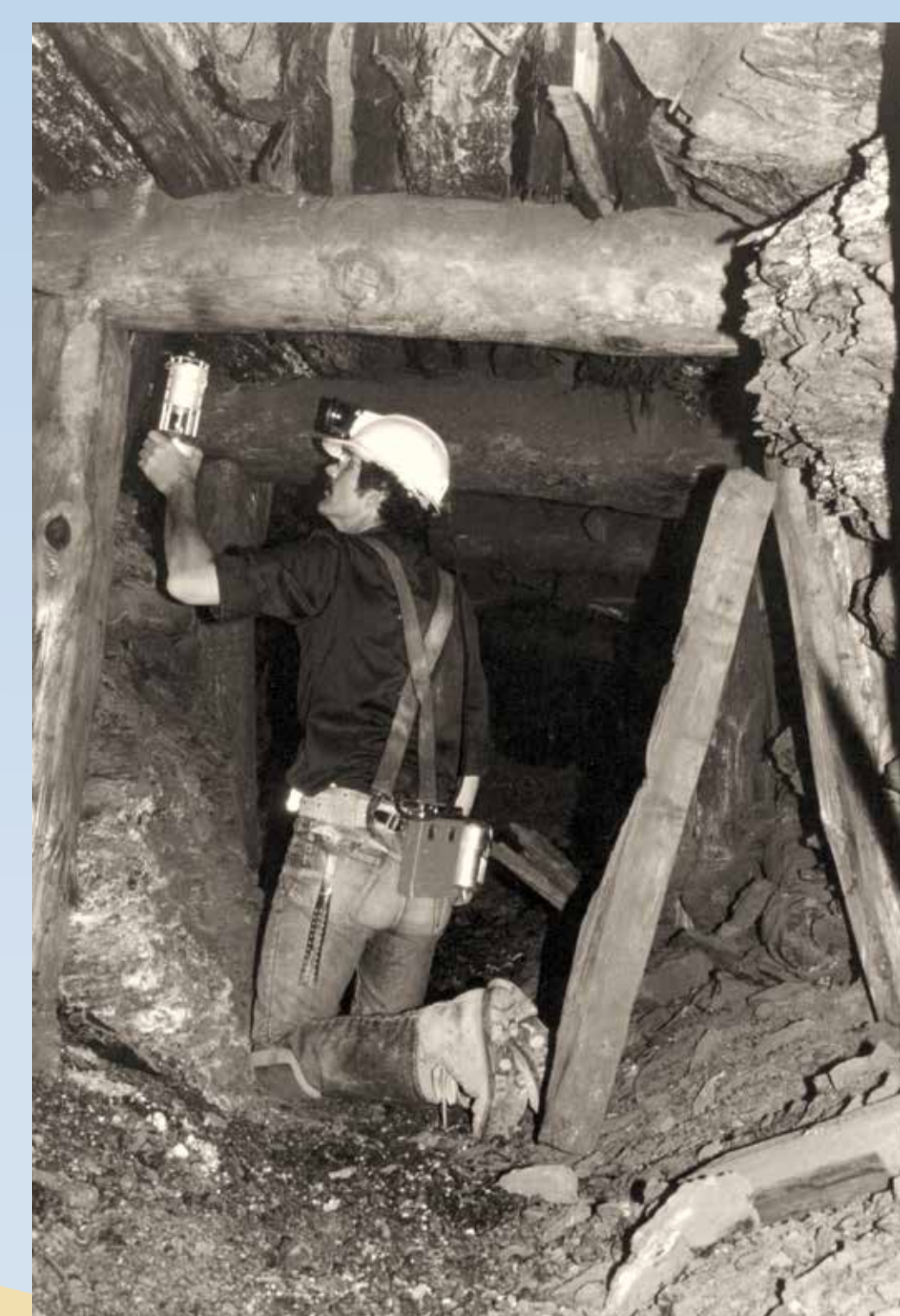
Men and boys, like the ones shown above, worked long shifts in these coal mines excavating hundreds of miles of workings.

Courtesy of the Contra Costa County Historical Society

Coal from the Black Diamond Mine in Nortonville (pictured right) and the other mines in the coal field, was pulled from these hills and then sent by trains and ships to the markets in San Francisco, Sacramento, and Stockton.

George Vivian Collection, EBRPD

Cave-ins occurred when miners hit weak layers of rock. Explosions caused from firedamp (methane gas) and coal dust created additional hazards. Though these nineteenth-century coal mines presented many dangers, supportive communities gave the men the strength to return to mine another day.



After the coal mines were abandoned, some of the underground workings began to collapse or fill with gas. Here former Mine Manager John Waters tests for methane gas in the upper Black Diamond gangway located in the Nortonville townsite.

Photograph by Don Wilson, EBRPD



Coal miners in the Mount Diablo Coal Field toiled in low light and cramped conditions to provide fuel that powered California in the late 19th Century.



Illustration by Bob Kumpkin, EBRPD