

Report of an Inundation February 4, 1891; Spring Mountain
Colliery; Jeansville, Pennsylvania; 9 Killed
(From Report of the Inspectors of Coal Mines of the
Anthracite Coal Regions of Pennsylvania, 1891, pp. 150-152)

On the 4th day of February, 1891, there occurred one of the greatest disasters that ever happened in this district. No. 10 slope in the Wharton vein is opened by a tunnel from No. 1 slope. No. 1 slope is sunk on the Mammoth vein from near the top of which another tunnel is driven into the Mammoth vein to a point from whence the gangway passes the second opening of the Mammoth vein near the large barn of the company.

The No. 10 slope is about 600 feet long and has a vertical depth of 158 feet where it reaches the basin, which rises westward very rapidly. On this basin gangway, breasts were driven on both pitches, and in breast No. 11, is where the water from No. 8 slope gangway was tapped by a miner, who had no idea of his danger. No. 8 gangway had been abandoned since the 1st of June, 1886, and the slope was allowed to fill up with water to the level of No. 7 slope gangway, where it ran to the pumps in that slope and was pumped out. Relying on the map, which showed a strong pillar for a vein four to five feet thick, the superintendent and mine foreman laid out No. 11 breast in No. 10 gangway, and let two miners drive it. On the 4th day of February the No. 8 gangway was broken into, and, while the two miners made their escape, three miners, five laborers, and a bottom man drowned by the flooding waters, and their bodies were recovered between February 18 and 23 inclusive.

As soon as I received notice of this disaster I went to Jeansville, and went into the mines and on reaching the No. 10 slope, found the water within 18 feet vertical of the top of the slope or 140 feet vertical over the foot of the slope, and more than 80 feet higher than the tops of any of breasts in the southeast gangway, and over 40 feet above the top of No. 5 breast on the northeast gangway where living men were found. Finding that everything possible was being done, and that two pumps had already begun to work on the flood, we came away and examined the maps, and after a careful look over them it was decided to place a pump in No. 7 slope and follow down on that side with the pump until it was ascertained that the water from No. 8 workings was no longer discharging into No. 10 workings, and so faithfully was the work prosecuted that two weeks from the day of the accident, one body was recovered, and on Monday afternoon, February 23, by one o'clock, all the missing persons but four had been accounted for. As on Sunday the 22nd, the bodies of two miners and two laborers were discovered in breast No. 1 of the southeast gangway, and on examination of the breast, it was found that they had been closed in at the top of the breast, and for 18 feet from the high water mark in the breast their footprints were found in the mud, showing how they had followed and noted the receding of the waters. For some reason they had built a fire, and placing it in an iron powder keg, had put coal on it and by this act had consumed the life sustaining oxygen from their compressed air, in which they were

hermetically sealed as it were by the water, and then their lives went out with the fire and they were asphyxiated by carbonic oxide gas, as were even the rats which were found with them dead.

Finding that all the bodies that were supposed to be on the lower levels were recovered, and that the last four missing would be likely to be found in the pitch in one of the breasts we were in that afternoon, and finding black damp in the manway of No. 5 breast, a brattice was carried along the gangway from the pillar on the south side of the gangway before it branches into the two gangways, and the brattice was run to the pillar between breasts 5 and 6, and it being after five o'clock it was determined to go out and have supper and let the air work on the damp while we were gone. About seven o'clock an exploring party started up the inside manway of No. 5 breast, and after going to the first heading the foreman rapped on the manway and halloed, and then in silence that followed what was his surprise and that of those with him to hear a weak faint voice halloo back, then indeed there was excitement in that mine, for word was passed out for a doctor, that one man had been found alive and it seemed as if everybody was endowed with new strength and while the Superintendent went to the top of the breast, some tried to get more air to the upper heading and some were dispatched to the slope for bed quilts and blankets and to hurry the doctor in so as to give the men, who all four by this time were discovered to be alive, some proper nourishment and to advise about their removal from the mine.

A doctor who was visiting Jeanesville came right into the mines where the men were and advised getting them down as soon as possible and into better air, and this was the hardest part of all the rescue, for here were four men helpless as babes to be taken down a narrow space of less than three feet wide in many places and not more than two feet high in some places, but the human toboggan was formed to carry this precious freight down this 45 degree pitch and they landed them all one at a time safely at the foot of the breast, and thence willing hands carried them to the slope where they were placed on a truck and hauled to the top of the slope and placed in improvised beds in the engine room where the doctor thought best to keep them till the next day, and very early in the morning they were removed from the mines to the Sons of Temperance Hall. In a few days three nurses were brought up who stayed and nursed them until they were out of danger.