

# 1897 Jermyn Mine Fire Description

Taken from the list of fatalities of 1897 in the Annual Report

## **Jermyn No. 1 Mine Fire**

**Rendham, Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania**

September 28, 1897

No. Killed - 5

Fire Boss Isaac Watkins, while making his morning examination of the workings of the middle vein, Jermyn No. 1 mine, discovered a tire in a chamber known as Apple's, off Davies' old airway on the morning of September 21.

Mining was suspended in that section of the colliery and every energy directed towards extinguishing the fire. The fire originated from an ignited blower having been left burning at quitting time the previous day, and this in a short time communicated fire to the gob.

A line of water pipes was immediately laid and properly connected to a pump, and work was commenced with the air current flowing in its usual direction, shown by black arrows on tracing. As the work progressed from cross-cut A towards cross-cut B, it was discovered that the location of the fire was nearer to cross-cut B than to cross-cut A.

The fire had caused the roof to fall in considerable quantities, and as this had to be loaded out and the place securely timbered, it was decided by the mine officials after a consultation, to change the direction of the current and reach the location of the fire with the view of quenching it, and to reduce the heat and smoke, so that the work of loading the debris would be facilitated. The current was consequently changed on 25th September, about two o'clock, Mine Foreman Johns being in charge of the work. The direction of the currents after the change is shown by red arrows on tracing.

Sometime later Mine Foreman Johns and Fire Boss Watkins having found that the current was working successfully in the new direction, decided to go in with the new intake to the location of the tire. This they did and found the vicinity of the fire clear of gases and concluded that it would be safe for the shift to go in and commence work from that end. Isaac Watkins, the fire boss,

had charge of this shift, consisting of John Gallagher, Wm. Frankland, Wm. Tompkins and Joseph Smith.

About 3:30 P. M., they went in, after making arrangements with the other men to bring T iron rails later. At 5.10 P. M., Geo. Shrives. Al. Whyte, Thos. Curley and John Conway were back at the door marked D on the plan, with the rails on a truck.

This door they found closed when they arrived. They discovered the body of Tompkins at the point shown on the plan, and the bodies of Frankland, Smith and Gallagher some distance inside, as shown on the plan also. Later in the day Fire Boss Watkins' body was recovered from a point near the location of the fire. During the investigation and inquest which followed, it was shown that the air current from D around the location of the fire was intact beyond a doubt, with no possible way by which it could reach the return, except by way of the fire.

All doors, brattices, and walls were undisturbed and the fan running at its usual speed. The Coroner of the county assisted by the mine inspector held an inquest over the remains Isaac Watkins and the others October 4, 1897 Rendham, at which all the available evidence was submitted.

The jury returned the following verdict: "We, the undersigned jurors, find after hearing the evidence submitted, that the said Isaac Watkins and others, for some causes unknown, retreated to the bad air current and met death as the result of breathing sulphurous gases. "We further find that no blame can be attached to Isaac Watkins nor the other officials, R. Willis Reese, E. D. Owen, T. P. Cosgrove, J. Nicholis and Wm. Monroe.