

THE BURNING MINE !

Atwater's Sad Fourth of July !

Ten Colliers Consumed !

A FULL ACCOUNT OF THE CATASTROPHE !

The Way it Occurred !

IMPOSSIBLE TO HAVE PREVENTED IT !

**Every Care Taken by the Com-
pany to Secure its Men against
Accident--Diagram of the
Mine--Cowardice of
one of the Men,
&c., &c., &c.**

[Correspondence of THE BEACON.]

MINE OF THE ATWATER COAL CO., }
PORTAGE Co., O., July 8, 1872. }

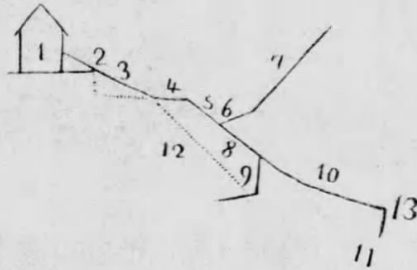
THE BEACON of Saturday gave as full an account as could be obtained at that time of the great disaster in the mines of the Atwater Coal Co. on the afternoon of July 4th. But this was not sufficient for our readers and accordingly I came here Saturday evening to obtain such full and accurate information as is only to be obtained upon the ground. I find no reporters here except one for the Detroit Post who resides near by, so that it is probable that this will be the first complete report that will be furnished to the press :

The sad event by which ten men have been ushered out of existence without a moment's warning has thrown the darkest gloom over the community of Atwater. The terrible manner of their death, and attendant circumstances have all combined to make the occurrence one which will never be forgotten by those who live in the vicinity of the mine or who were in any way connected with its working.

On the morning of July third, eighteen manly, hardy men descended into the mine and by afternoon but eight survived to tell the harrowing story of their comrade's death.

THE MINE.

The mine, work in which was commenced but a few months ago, had not until the first of last week got under full headway. Previous to that there had been only ten tons of coal mined daily but arrangements had at last been perfected by which from fifty to seventy or more tons daily could be taken out. In order that our readers may more fully understand the position of the mine and the place in which the fire commenced, we present the following diagram showing the course and lengths of the different slopes and entries.



- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Engine House. | 7. East Entry. |
| 2. Entrance. | 8. Narrow Passage. |
| 3. Slope. | 9. West Entry. |
| 4. First Level. | 10. Shaft Entry. |
| 5. Entry. | 11. Shaft. |
| 6. Coal Rooms. | 12. Air Course. |

In the original plans three entrances were contemplated and the principal one of these, the one at the shaft, was to have been completed this week, but most unfortunately was delayed one week too long, although the probabilities are that it might not have saved those who died from suffocation. From what is used at present as a main entrance, and marked 1, a slope of 195 feet in length descends until it meets the level marked four, and which is 90 feet in length. From the level an entry 53 feet long branches off and is terminated by two doors, the one leading into the east entry, the other into the shaft entry. The east entry is divided into two parts, the total length of which is 236 feet. The shaft entry is 366 feet long, and the west entry, marked 9, is 161 feet in length. At 11 is the place designed for the shaft. A drill hole was made directly after the fire, which strikes the entry at 13. Several coal rooms had been staked out branching off at 5 from the main entrance, and in these some of the miners were at work at the time the accident occurred.

THE VENTILATION.

Much unjust censure has been laid upon the owners and managers of the mine which was totally undeserved. When the subject of ventilation was brought up at the time the mine was about to be opened, Mr. E. C. Roberts, of Salineville, an experienced miner who has been in the business for over thirty years, was consulted and given charge of the work. He conceived the idea of a manway partitioned off from the slope and made air tight by sawdust, dirt and *débris* and which could be used for a two fold purpose, that of furnishing an entrance and exit for the workman and at the same time an air course for the transmission of the foul air from the entries below. To facilitate this transmission of foul air a furnace was placed near the top of the air course, and everything satisfied the company's expectations until they had reached a depth where it could no longer work effectively. In the mean time Mr. E. C. Roberts left and Mr. Richard Roberts took his place. Finding that the draught was no longer strong enough to carry off the foul air, Mr. Richard Roberts had the furnace removed to the bottom of the slope and a quantity of sheet iron placed about the walls and ceiling of the level to guard against fire. An air course, marked 12, was then cut across to the west entry. Two doors were built at the east and west entries and by shutting one or the other a sufficiently powerful draught was obtained to enable the men to work in either entry. Everything that experience could suggest or skill employ was done to make the ventilation a success, and to guard against any possible accident. Mr. P. M. Wales, the General Superintendent of the mine, saw to it personally that a man who understood his business thoroughly should make this arrangement as perfect as possible. This was considered a safe and reliable plan and was to have been made doubly secure by the sinking of a shaft at the end of the shaft entry. To further decrease the risks the woodwork about the furnace was kept saturated with water from the pump which stood near by and which was operated by the engine in the works above.

THE FIRE.

On the morning before the fire occurred the Hon. John Hutchins, of Cleveland, President of the Atwater Coal Company, visited the mine and made a tour of the whole premises, and found everything working smoothly and no indications of anything which would cause the calamity that so soon occurred.

At two o'clock on Wednesday afternoon eighteen men were working in the mine. Mr. Roberts had just ordered a **Mr. Strong** to put two shovelfuls of coal upon the furnace fire, and the command had been

obeyed, when Strong discovered the existence of fire by the smell of burning wood. He first yelled "fire," and then rushed to the top of the slope, where little Georgie Hofferd, a lad 9 years of age, and who was employed in opening and shutting the doors in the mine, was standing. Instead of going down into the mine, like a man, he ordered little Georgie to go down and tell the men that the mine was on fire. He obeyed and Sunday morning, at 1 o'clock his little body, all mangled and charred, was dragged out of the mud and slime, at the bottom of the slope.

THE VICTIMS.

As soon as the men became aware of the existence of fire they rushed frantically for the entrance and tried to make their way through the burning embers which were falling from the timbers above. In their inexperience they must have stood up when they ran and have thus breathed the smoke which suffocated them.

THE SURVIVORS.

Eight men, who had been working in the coal rooms, came out after the others had rushed for the opening and had dropped dead, and getting down on their knees made their way through the fire to the opening above. One alone, of all these, escaped without injury, a Mr. Lang, of Middlebury, whose story THE BEACON has already given. All the rest were so badly burned that the lives of some are despaired of. In four hours after the fire broke out a drill hole was made through the ground to the shaft entry. Soon after a shaft, six feet square, was sunk and yesterday (Sunday) was almost completed.

THE CAUSE.

Several theories, as usual, are advanced as the cause of the fire. Some, and they are mostly those who know very little about the workings of a mine, think that the furnace set fire to the planks over head and that the smoke suffocated the men. The most plausible theory is that by the furnace and mine combined, gases were generated which ignited from the fire in the furnace. That gases had some agency in the matter is confirmed by the fact of its burning about the bottom of the slope and then suddenly burning out at the top of the slope, leaving the intermediate part unharmed. It could not, however, have resulted from fire damp, as its existence has never been discovered in the mine.

THE DEAD MEN.

Thirty-five feet from the top of the slope the first body, that of Richard Roberts, was found. The rest were scattered along down the slope as far as the doors of the main entries.

While the men were digging for the last three bodies, during Saturday night, a loud thug, as of falling earth, was heard by those above ground, and for a moment the greatest consternation prevailed. Men fairly trembled with apprehension lest another accident had happened. Paralyzed with horror they were unable to move for a moment, but the re-appearance of some of the miners, unharmed, served to dispel the terrible thoughts and to reassure them, by the statement that it was due only to the falling of some earth in the mine.

The following are the victim's names and ages:

Richard Roberts, 30 years; Wm. Roberts, 27 years; Robert Roberts, 21 years; John Williams, 33 years; John Jones, 32 years; Thomas Means, 35 years; Jos. Otey, 24 years; Georgie Hofferd, 9 years; Howells, 25 years; Evans, 35 years. Evans was the Welsh miner who had just come over, leaving a wife and seven children in Wales. Of all these men but four were married, Wm. Roberts, John Jones, Thos. Means and Evans. The first seven mentioned were taken out on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning, and buried Friday afternoon. The last three taken out were Howells, Evans and little George, who were in a terribly decomposed state, and who were so mangled and swollen as to be past recognition.

ASSISTANCE.

As soon as the fire was known in Ravenna the fire engines were sent down, and almost extinguished the flames. The water, however, caused the ground to cave in and delayed the work of exhuming the bodies.

Yesterday morning at a quarter before one o'clock, the body of George Hofferd was obtained by two men who crept thro' a hole just large enough for a man to pass through, and dragged the body from the water and mud. Even at as late an hour as that they discovered some fire still burning at the bottom of the slope.

Yesterday twenty-six miners from Salineville came over and humanely went to work and relieved the other miners, some of whom had not rested since the fire broke out. Under the efficient management of Mr. Sharp, the "boss," they succeed much better than they anticipated. As soon as the neighboring country became aware of the calamity they commenced sending in vast quantities of provisions for the sustenance of those engaged in seeking for the dead bodies. Never were their sympathies aroused more quickly, nor were responses ever more generous and plentiful.

FUNERAL SERVICES.

Yesterday afternoon, funeral services, conducted by pastors in the neighborhood, and which were largely attended, were held. The sad calamity and tearful remembrances of departed friends touched the hearts of all and the occasion was made one of deep and solemn thought.

THANKS.

In conclusion, I wish to return thanks to the Hon. John Hutchins, President of the Company, and Mr. P. M. Wales, the efficient Superintendent for courtesies during my stay at the scene of the disaster. Often, upon such occasions, there is an unwillingness to furnish the public with the facts, but not so in this case. All necessary information was freely given and I am thus enabled to furnish THE BEACON with the first complete account of the sad event, since neither the Cleveland nor the Pittsburg papers have had reporters here. C. C. R.

In yesterday's BEACON we gave such meagre information as could be obtained about the terrible disaster in the coal mines at Atwater, Portage county, on the Fourth. Notwithstanding that the accident had happened twenty-four hours before, our telegraphing to the scene of the calamity got no answer and no particulars were obtainable.

But James Long, one of the survivors of the men in the mine at the time of the accident, came to the residence of friends in the Sixth Ward, last evening, and through him we learn some of the particulars of the event. The fire is believed to have caught in the pine timbers supporting the roof at the foot of the slope, and surrounding the furnace. When the danger was perceived Long dropped upon his hands and knees and told his comrades to do the same. An old Scotch miner, himself, cautious and self-collected, he had the sagacity to do this and as he crawled out in this way, with his mouth as close as possible to the ground, he passed over the dead bodies of those that had been his living companions but a few minutes before. They had rashly or thoughtlessly attempted to save themselves by running, but carrying their heads in the upper air got the full force of the burning air and were suffocated.

When Mr. Long finally got out of the mine he was well nigh exhausted, but he was yet able to tell the horror-struck crowd above that their efforts to dig out the men were fruitless, all were dead.

Among the saddest incidents of the

tragedy was the death of a Welsh miner, who had just come from the "old country," and had gone into the mine for the first time. It had been his intention to send immediately for the wife and six or seven little ones, who are now left without a protector in a distant land.

THE BURNING MINE.

The Coroner's Inquest—No Opinion Expressed.

[Correspondence of THE BEACON]

RAVENNA, O., July 8, 1872.

I send at your request the verdict of the coroner's jury in the Atwater mine disaster. The verdict, as you will see, covers seven men. There were ten killed in the mine and the three had not been recovered at the time of the inquest and it was impossible to keep the bodies until all were removed. The other three bodies were recovered at 2 A. M. Sunday morning, July 7th, and were found at the foot of the slope in the main entry.

R.

CORONER'S VERDICT.

The State of Ohio,)
Portage County.)

We, the undersigned, jurors, empaneled and sworn on the 5th day of July, in the year 1872, at the township of Atwater, in the county of Portage, by Lyman Bryant, Coroner of said county, to inquire and true presentment make in what manner and by whom the death was caused of Richard Roberts, William Roberts, Robert Roberts, John Williams, Thomas Means, John Howells and Joseph Evans, whose bodies were found in the slope leading to the coal mine operated by the Atwater Coal Company, at Atwater, Portage county, Ohio, on the 4th and 5th days of July, in the year 1872, after having heard the evidence and seen the bodies, we do find that the deceased came to their death by suffocation from fire and smoke in the slope of said mine, communicated to the timbers of the slope from a fire arch or furnace located near the foot of the slope, for the purpose of ventilating the mine. The furnace was constructed by Richard Roberts, one of the deceased, who was "Pit Boss" of the mine. From the evidence we are unable to say whether the fire was communicated to the wood work by gas or by the furnace being in too close proximity to the timbers of the slope.

Given under our hand at the time and place of said inquisition, above mentioned.

Signed

JOSEPH R. CONRAD,
JOHN WHEELOCK,
F. WHITTLESY,
H. E. BRUSH,
AMOS BARTH,
JOHN B. WHITTLESY.