

Death in the Pit.

A TERRIBLE HOLOCAUST!

Atwater Coal Mine on Fire!

Eighteen Persons in the Mine.

Eight Escaped.

Ten are Smothered to Death!

One of the most terrible disasters that has ever occurred in Northern Ohio, happened at the mine of the Atwater Coal Company, on the afternoon of Wednesday last week. The mine is comparatively a new one, having been in operation less than a year, and is owned and operated mostly by gentlemen residing in Cleveland, all of the officers being residents of that city. It is situated near the C. & P. Railroad in the South-east corner of Atwater township, about three miles from Atwater Station and two and a half miles from Lima Station, from which latter point the Company have constructed a railroad to the bank for the purpose of transporting their coal. The road and all the buildings and fixtures of the company are of a permanent and substantial character, notwithstanding the works are new. The bank is worked by a "slope" 100 feet in length, having a descent of eleven inches to the yard, the perpendicular distance from the bottom of the "slope" to the surface of the earth above being fifty-six feet. The roof of this entrance is plank laid over to prevent the caving in of the earth, and the roadway is supported by timber. At the foot of the "slope" is a furnace designed to promote the ventilation of the mine and from the bottom to the top, of this entrance is a timber and plank partition to allow the heated atmosphere and gas to pass off on that side next to the furnace.

At about two o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, one of the men came out of the mine, and discovered that there was fire at the bottom of the slope, and he went a small boy, named George Hafford, Jr., and nine years, to notify the men at work in the mine—seventeen in number—of the fact of the fire. No sooner did they receive the notice than all hands rushed for the slope, as the signs clearly indicate, which was their only means of escape. Eight of the men succeeded in effecting their escape from the perilous position, some of them being somewhat injured, though none very seriously. The rest of the men were unable to get out and were lost to perish below. The news of the terrible disaster spread very rapidly and hundreds of people rushed to the scene, and the excitement was very intense. But every one manifested great anxiety to contribute whatever aid was in their power to rescue the unfortunate victims. A firm of men was immediately organized and went to work putting down a drift-hole for the purpose of ventilation into one of the leads of the mine, some fifty of slaty rock from the entrance, and in the short space of eight and a half hours, working by hand, the drift was sunk through a distance of forty-two feet into one of the passage ways below. Another force of men mostly citizens of the vicinity went earnestly to work in making a short cut near this passage, hoping thus to be able to reach and relieve the unfortunate men, but after getting down some thirty feet the work was abandoned for the time being.

On Thursday morning a telegraph dispatch was received in this village requesting assistance to extinguish the flames. The alarm bell was sounded and in a few minutes the members of Plank's Fire Company were on hand with their fine steamer and equipments and at once as the construction trials of the C. & P. R. R. could be got in readiness, they were on their way to the scene of the terrible disaster. Upon their arrival they were immediately to work to extinguish the flames, and rendered the most efficient service. Everybody present spoke loudly in praise of the manner in which they discharged their arduous duties, and the courage and interest manifested by them in their efforts to effect relief. About noon they had to be gained upon the fire that one of the bodies was reached and taken out, and during the afternoon the remains of five more of the victims were recovered. The horror of the scene when these bodies were brought to view was indescribable. By eleven o'clock on Thursday night the fire was completely extinguished, and the steamer having most nobly performed their duty landed their steamer and hose carts upon the bank and prepared to return home, where they arrived at midnight after a dangerous day's labor. The ladies of this vicinity, as an evidence of the appreciation of their services, prepared a supper for them, but the "boys" being anxious to return home, declined to accept the proffered treatment.

On Friday morning the body of another victim was recovered—and a little after four o'clock another one was reached, but owing to the caving in of the roof the workmen were unable to remove it, and it was not until about two o'clock on Sunday morning after constant and earnest labor that the debris was removed and the three remaining bodies recovered. The first of the three was found near the foot of the slope, that of the boy, George Hafford, Jr., about 30 feet further out in the entrance, and that of the third man about ten feet beyond. The body of the wife, used to haul the coal up to the bank to the slope was found dead, still thirty feet beyond.

The following is a list of the victims who lost their lives in this terrible calamity: Robert Roberts, William Roberts, Richard Roberts, (three brothers), Thomas Roberts, James, John Williams, James G. Williams, Joseph Howell, John Evans, and George Hafford, Jr., the boy sent into the mine to give the alarm.

The following are the names of those who succeeded in making their escape: John Hughes, Benjamin Jones, James Long, Thomas Hughes, David Thomas, Henry Thomas, Richard Brown, George Hafford, Sen.

As to the cause of this sad calamity,

though we visited the scene of the disaster, we do not feel competent to give an opinion, and it seems to be a matter of speculation among even those who have had the best opportunities for informing themselves on the subject. Nor are we prepared to say where the blame rests, if any one is at fault in the matter. But this sad occurrence furnishes another evidence, if any were needed, of the necessity of throwing every possible security around this most perilous occupation.

On Thursday evening Coroner Bryant was notified of the occurrence, and the next morning proceeded to empanel a jury and hold an inquest upon the bodies that had been recovered up to that time. After a full investigation the jury returned the following verdict:

The undersigned jury empaneled, and sworn to the duty of duty in the year 1872, at the township of Atwater, in the County of Portage, by Lyman Bryant, Coroner of said county, to inquire and give judgment in what manner and by whom Robert Roberts, William Roberts, Richard Roberts, John Williams, Thomas 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 day and date of July, in the year 1872, came to their death. 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 "in breach" of the mine. From the evidence we are unable to say whether 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 hands at the time and place of said inquisition above mentioned.

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