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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) · Thu, Feb 21, 1884 · Page 1
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NINETEEN DEAD.

Frightful Explosion in a Fayette Coal Mine.

Death-Dealing Fire Damp at West Leisenring Coke Works.

HOW THE MINERS LOST THEIR LIVES.

The Force of the Explosion So Great as to Wreck the Mine.

HEARTRENDING SCENES IN THE BEREAVED HOMES.

Full Particulars of the Worst Catastrophe of the Kind That Ever Occurred in the Coke Regions.

Special to the Commercial Gazette.

UNIONTOWN, Pa., February 20.—The little mining village of West Leisenring, four miles north of here, was this morning the scene of the most terrible explosion ever known in the coke region. The Connellsville Coal & Iron Company, of which Judge Linderman, of Mauch Chunk, is president, have 200 coke ovens there, which have been in operation about a year. The works give employment to about 100 men, and quite a little town has sprung up named after the president of the company. The coal is obtained by means of a shaft, which reaches the mine at a distance of 400 feet from the surface. This morning a part of the force, who had worked all night, left the mines at a little after 3 o'clock and twenty others took their places, making the usual morning shift, at about half past 6 o'clock.

A TERRIFIC EXPLOSION.

While the men were digging, suddenly and without warning, there occurred an explosion that convulsed the mine in every apartment, and threw the men into the utmost consternation. The scene of the explosion was in one of the apartments fully 800 feet distant from the bottom of the shaft, and, therefore, 1,200 feet from the surface opening, yet the report was heard on the outside for a considerable distance and caused such a jar that the top of a derrick, a hundred feet high, was knocked off. Two mules were standing at the bottom of the shaft, 800 feet from the explosion, and the rush of air blew one of them through the wooden cage, shattering it to pieces. The other mule died from suffocation.

The awful scene that ensued among the terror-stricken miners cannot be described. All their lamps were blown out and they were left in darkness and confusion. They did not time to recover from the shock until they found themselves unable to breathe. The explosion of the fire-damp, a term which miners apply to the light carbureted hydrogen, or natural gas that issues from crevices in the roof of the mines, left the mine filled with after-damp, which contains no oxygen, and renders it impossible for life to be sustained for any time. This after-damp is densest in the upper part of the mine, and hence the men hovered near the bottom, but even here they did not long find relief.

AN ONLY SURVIVOR.

Of all the men who were in the heading where the explosion occurred, Dick Bailey alone escaped to tell the awful story. When the explosion came and all the lights were blown out, Baisley was just hanging his clothes. He at once wound part of his clothes tightly around his face and mouth to keep the foul air from choking him and gave the rest of his garments to his companion with instructions to take the same precautions. He then started for the main entrance, bidding his companion follow. They ran over the bodies of men and over shattered wagons. They could see nothing, but could hear the groans of dying men. Presently Baisley's companion protested that they were not going in the right direction, and turned back. Like Lot's wife, he perished. Baisley pushed on until he finally saw the light and was taken out.

His escape is regarded by experienced miners as one of the most marvelous on record. He said some of the men kept their heads under water as long as they could, and would have to change from the water to the after-damp until finally they gave up the unequal struggle. When the news of the explosion was flashed around, the families of the men gathered about the shaft and were wild with suspense. Baisley's story gave them little ground to hope that any of them could be got out alive.

VOLUNTEERS AT WORK.

So dangerous was the after-damp that it was fully two hours before any volunteers could enter the mines. Many were on hand and ready to make the search, but were unable to do so until hope of rescuing the unfortunates alive had quite fled. It was about 8 o'clock when the first body was brought out. It was that of Michael Ripko, a Hungarian, whose wife and two little children were waiting and weeping at the shaft. His face bore no marks of violence and he had evidently died from suffocation.

The work of rescuing the men now went on rapidly by willing volunteers and at nine thirteen bodies had been carried out. The company's books were then examined, the roll called, and it was announced that all the men were accounted for. The rest proceeded with quiet and order amid the sobs and subdued weeping of the stricken families. The bodies were taken to the homes near by and laid out. Coroner Barnes, of this place, with many citizens went from here and the inquest began at half past 8. No testimony was taken except that by which identified the dead, the list of whom is as follows:

LIST OF THE DEAD.

MICHAEL RIPPERN, Irishman, thirty two years old. Burned in face. Leaves a wife and six children.

JOHN BUCKLEY, Irishman, thirty years old, unmarried. No visible injury.

PATRICK KENNEDY, Irishman, twenty years old, burned in face; unmarried and only child of a widow.

JAMES TRACY, Irishman, forty-five years old, badly burned in the face and body; single.

JAMES BAKER, Irishman, thirty-four years old, terribly burned in the face; leaves a wife and two children.

DAVID FLOYD, Welshman, twenty-two years old; unmarried; burned on the head and face.

WILLIAM DAVIS, Welshman, single, twenty-three years old; no marks.

THOMAS MCGARRY, Irish, thirty-five years; badly burned; leaves a wife and three children in Cumberland county, England.

JOHN HART, American, twenty-five years old, single; no marks.

MICHAEL KIPKO, Hungarian, thirty-five years old; leaves a wife and two children.

GEORGE CALLIS, Hungarian, twenty-five years old; leaves a wife in the old country.

DANIEL BUCKNER, colored; leaves a wife and two children.

JOHN MURRAY, Irish, thirty-four years old; born in America since May last; he leaves a wife, who came to Altoona, and one child.

PETER WATTERS, Irish, thirty-one years old; single, brother of Mrs. Murray.

WILLIAM BEARING, American, aged about thirty-five; leaves a wife and four children.

JOE BAKOS, Hungarian, twenty-eight years old; leaves a wife.

ANDY WARMUS, German, thirty years old; single, and sent his wages to his mother in Germany every month.

ALBAN N. HACKNEY, of this county, thirty-five years old; leaves a wife and one child.

GAREY E. MAY; nothing known about him except that he was from Maryland.

DEATH FROM SUFFOCATION.

Most of the above have no visible marks of violence, but had died from suffocation. Their faces were generally very black, the smoke and dust having been blown into the skin. The last man taken out alive was Henry Wilson, who had managed to subsist on air in the very bottom of the mine until rescued. He was almost gone. Many of those who were in other parts of the mine suffered severely. Dick Baisley reports that the men acted much like horses in a burning stable; they were bewildered, and not knowing which way to go, refused to go in any direction. Some of them were so turned that the flesh dropped off them in places when removed.

SAD SCENES IN THE HOMES.

The scenes in the afflicted homes to night is heart-rending beyond description. In Hackney's house lie two corpses, himself and May. In the house of the Hungarian Ripko is perhaps the saddest sight. This family seem advanced beyond their average countrymen in civilization, and their home is cheerful and attractive. The dead husband and father lies upon the bed, his weeping wife sits at his head kissing and caressing him, while his two little children stand by and call him in vain. The party who went out from here were so affected at this scene as they watched the inquest, that they took up a collection for the widow and children. The neighbors who came in to view the scenes turn away in sorrow.

After identifying the bodies Coroner Barton adjourned the inquest until Saturday morning. The company will pay all expenses of the funerals, which will take place to-morrow and next day. The accumulation of so much gas in this mine as to cause such an explosion is a matter of much surprise. No accident ever before occurred here, and it was regarded as a very safe mine. The fire boss, with his lamp, made his usual examination last night and pronounced everything all right. Men had left other mines that were regarded unsafe and gone to work here because there was no danger felt. The accident has cast a deep gloom over the community.

CYCLONE IN THE SOUTH.

Great Destruction of Property and Many Persons Reported Killed and Wounded.

WILMINGTON, N. C., Feb. 20.—The *Star* specials say a terrible cyclone passed near Rockingham last night, killing from fifteen to thirty people and wounding a great numbers.

MACON, Ga., Feb 20.—This city was visited yesterday afternoon and last night by tremendous storms. Rumors of death and destruction in the surrounding counties. A special from Atlanta reports fifty killed north of that city. Columbus reports several killed and wounded.

BIRMINGHAM, Ala., Feb. 20.—A cyclone swept through the Cohaba valley yesterday noon. It is reported eight people were killed and thirteen injured in one community.

DETAILS OF DESTRUCTION.

AUGUSTA, Ga., Feb. 20.—Yesterday's storm was the severest since the cyclone of 1873. In Hancock county the storm overturned outhouses and uncofed houses. The stables of David Dickson was destroyed by lightning. In Columbia county the barn and stable of Ike V. Ballard was blown down and three horses killed. At Harlem, besides damages in the interior, the plantation of George Granade was ruined, houses demolished and timber carried off. On the plantation of Dr. Reese a negro was killed and Mrs. V. M. Wade, wife of the overseer, seriously wounded. The gin house of Jno. A. Fawcett was demolished. The town of Bradleys, S. C., was nearly blown away. The residence of Dr. Ligon was blown down and his wife badly injured. At Ninety-six, S. C., a house was wrecked and child killed. The residence of W. H. Shatworth, in Edgefield county, S. C., was blown down, and the ruins taking fire a little daughter perished. The dwelling house of J. C. Hankinson and store of J. S. Boyd, at Jackson, S. C., were blown down and three negroes killed. The town of Milton was nearly destroyed, trains impeded, wires down, and mails irregular.

IN ALABAMA.

Another dispatch from Birmingham, Alabama, says: At Leeds the cyclone swept away the station house of the railroad, killing three negroes. An old white couple named Bass were seriously injured. Three miles south of Leeds the house of John Poole was blown away and his son, daughter and a child of a tenant instantly killed. Poole, his wife and four children were very badly injured. The residence and premises of Dr. W. F. Wright, railroad contractor, was demolished. The body of Dr. Wright's mother was found one hundred yards from the house fearfully mangled. Aunt, Jennie, Thomas, James and Edward, children of Dr. Wright, have arms or legs broken. Harriet McCrew, cook, was killed. Of twenty-four cars, two wagons and three horses on the place nothing remained but the carcass of one horse. The home occupied by M. McLaughlin was blown away. McLaughlin was badly hurt. A neighbor, J. F. Leonard, wife and daughter, all had legs broken. The house of a man named Kerr took fire and was blown away. Mrs. Kerr was fatally injured. The railroad for

(Continued on Fourth Page.)

1884 West Leisenring Mine explosion
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Aug 14, 2025

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