

MINE EXPLOSION CARRIES SIX SABBATH TOILERS INTO ETERNITY

Frightful Disaster at Grapevine Works of United States Coal and Coke Co., at Wilcoe.

SIX, POSSIBLY SEVEN, KILLED

Not One Left to Tell the Cause of the Catastrophe.

THOUSANDS THROU SHAFT'S MOUTH ENTIRE AFTERNOON

Work of Rescue Slow and Laborious Scenes About the Mine While Wives and Children Waited to Identify Their Loved Ones

The Dead:
LAWRENCE HYDEN, white.
MIKE PETERSHETE, white.
UNKNOWN HUNGARIAN.
THOS. MINNIS, colored.
TOM JEFFERSON, colored.
JOHN WOODFORD, colored.

The quiet of Sunday was broken by a fearful explosion, that jarred the mountains, and sent six, probably seven, men to their long home. Three Hungarians, Lawrence Hyden, Mike Petershete, and one

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BOWLING BILLIARD POOL
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whose name was not learned, and three colored men, Tom Minnis, Tom Jefferson and John Woodford, were killed by an explosion of gas in the Grape Vine shaft of the United States Coal and Coke Company, at Wilcoe, Sunday afternoon between twelve and one o'clock.

The men were employed in laying track and removing slate at the lower seam of this operation, known as the Pocahontas seam, 153 feet within the earth. A number of men who were engaged in the same work eighty feet above the victims of this terrible catastrophe, were shocked by the concussion, but none was injured.

The dead men were horribly mutilated, their bodies being badly torn, and one had his entire clothing blown from his body, and was as nude as when he was ushered into the world.

During the week days there are nearly one hundred men employed in mining the coal from this seam, and while it is unfortunate that the men were engaged in this work on the Sabbath, whether they were laboring of their own free will, or were requested to by the company, it is fortunate that the explosion occurred on that day, for had it happened while the full force were engaged the loss of life would have been appalling, as not one of the unfortunate men who were in the shaft were left to tell the story. As a consequence of all their lives being instantly snuffed out, it is a matter of conjecture as to how the gas was ignited, whether by a lamp or from a shot of slate.

Great excitement prevailed around the mouth of the shaft and it was with difficulty that the children and wives of the victims were kept from falling into the earth, while they anxiously awaited the raising of each body, and hoped against hope that possibly their loved ones might have escaped the terrible fate. Though a large force of rescuers volunteered their services immediately after the disaster, it was not until late in the afternoon that the bodies were removed from the mines. The news of the explosion was quickly circulated and soon spread to the various operations of this company, and thousands visited the scene, almost choking the entrance to the location of the shaft, which is situated between several small mountains. Some went because they feared friends or relatives were entombed, some to proffer their services in the rescue work, and some through morbid curiosity.

As is almost always the case, the number of victims and extent of the damage was greatly exaggerated, and the farther the reports were circulated of the explosion the greater the growth.

Our reporter was at Welch when the first intelligence was received concerning the affair. It was stated there that fifteen were dead, and in

Bluefield that fourteen had been killed, and these stories were given credence. Our reporter visited the scene as soon as it was possible to get there. A number of the rescuers who first went to the bottom of the shaft were overcome by the foul fumes, and it was with difficulty that the work progressed.

There is a probability that when the debris of the mine is cleared away, and each room and entrance searched, that the remains of still another victim will be found, as it is reported that seven men entered the mine, though it is not known whether the missing man was white or colored, nor even who he was.

The force of the explosion completely unroofed the frame structure which sheltered the mouth of the shaft.

Many are the various remarks that can be heard among the miners of this operation. Some condemn the company, saying that proper ventilation was not furnished, as there is only one entrance to the mines, the shaft for the raising and lowering of cars, and for the air, while there should be two distinct openings for this purpose, located several hundred feet apart, so that the air could be forced in at one section, and after circulating through the various entries and rooms, escape at another point; some claim that the fan did not have sufficient capacity for the work required of it, and that it was operated by steam instead of electricity as was originally intended. On the other hand, many say it was a natural consequence, and no matter what precautions were taken, could be expected in a shaft of this depth. We do not render an opinion, as to what the disaster was due, whether to negligence of some of the victims or to lack of proper facilities on the part of the company.

The remains of the six dead men were prepared for interment by the company and shipped away on No. 2 yesterday for burial. The interment of the three Hungarians took place at Pocahontas and the remains of Tom Minnis and Tom Jefferson were taken to their old home at Bedford, Va. Those of John Woodford were taken to Graham, Va., where he had a wife and two children residing.

J. F. Dillon and Thomas Bush, who were among those who did such manly work in rescuing the dead, had a narrow escape from death themselves. They were at the bottom of the shaft, trying to line the cage, when ice, which had been loosened at the mouth of the shaft, gave way and fell upon them. Mr. Dillon sustained a badly injured knee and ankle and Mr. Bush was injured in the back. However, these gentlemen will be able to resume their duties in a few days.

The mine where the explosion occurred is among the larger operation, owned by the United States Coal and Coke Company, and is located on a branch line of the Norfolk and Western railway between Welch and Gary, and is about thirty-seven miles west of this city.

The headquarters of the United States Coal and Coke Company are located in Pittsburgh, Pa., and a full report of the disaster has been forwarded to that place.

The men in charge of the operation at Wilcoe were among the first to respond to the rescue work, Sunday afternoon and several of these worked hard during the day and did not leave the scene of the explosion until yesterday morning, when they were forced to seek rest.

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