



MAP OF THE HENRY COLLIERY

WILKESBARRE, PENN'A.

Scale one inch==200 Ft.

REPORTS OF THE INSPECTORS OF MINES OF THE ANTHRACITE COAL REGIONS OF
PENNSYLVANIA FOR THE YEAR 1872.

HENRY SHAFT
FEBRUARY 6, 1872
4 FATALS

VICTIMS - ROBERT HAYES, ROBERT MORRIS, PATRICK
M' CULLOCH, MICHAEL BARRET

Henry shaft.—This colliery is located on the Plank road, Plainsville township. It is a shaft 400 feet in depth, and has been sunk through the Hillman to the top bed of the Baltimore vein, on which the mine was first opened. A tunnel has been driven from foot of shaft south into the under bed, which is very fiery, and a connection has been effected with the second opening by sinking the second opening shaft of the top vein from the top to the lower bed of the Baltimore vein, and an air-way driven from the tunnel under said shaft.

On the sixth day of February, 1872, a serious explosion of fire-damp took place in this mine, which resulted in the death of four persons, as follow:—Robert Hays, Robert Morris and Patrick M'Culloch, also Michael Barret, who ignited the gas, but he lived three or four days after the explosion.

The explosion occurred as near as could be learned about as follows:—The mine had been lying idle for some time except for repairing which was being done at the time. The Luzerne coal and iron company not having had the mine very long, and desirous of making many changes in the manner of working the same, were putting in new roads and a different kind of mine cars. The mine boss, John Nicolls, who had been looking after this place for two or three years, was in charge of the mine, and Mr. F. Mercur, general superintendent. On the morning of the calamity the four men above mentioned descended the shaft as usual, and proceeded on their way into that part of the mine known as the middle lift, where their place of working was, and where they had been at work some days previous, which was on the main road, and on the same level as the foot of the main shaft. Mr. Collins who was in charge of the gang, he being the head track layer, had occasion to remain in the rear of the party as they came near their place of working, and before he had time to catch up to them again, a terrific explosion took place. Immediately some other men that were in another part of the mine, also repairing, on hearing the explosion, ran to the spot where it occurred and found Messrs. Collins, Barrett, M'Colloch and Hays, immediately. Mr. Collins was not much the worse; Mr Barret was fear-fully burnt, and died in a few days; the latter two were dead when found. The fourth, Mr. Morris, was not found for several hours, he having fell at the inside end of a fall of roof on the gangway, where he could not be got at without going around through the cross-cuts of the chambers. This was done when a fresh lot of men came to assist; he was dead when found, and in all probability had not lived long, if any time, after the explosion. At 12 A. M. of the same date, I was informed of the sad calamity, but was too sick to leave my bed until the next day at noon. when in company with Mr. J. W. Miles, I proceeded to the mine. Messrs. Miles, Coryell and Evans accompanied me through that part of the mine where the explosion took place. We descended the shaft at 3 P. M., and after having examined the parts where it was supposed that the gas was ignited, we ascended the shaft at 7.15 P. M.

On the 8th, an inquest was to be held. E. B. Harvey, J. P., acting as coroner, appointed the following persons as jurors, to wit:—R. C. Mitchel, E. O. Baker, Robert Mullighan, John Gray, Michael Walsh and Francis Murphy; after recognising the bodies of the deceased Robert Morris, Robert Hays and Patrick M'Colloch, they adjourned to meet at the office of the acting coroner, after the burial at 5 P. M., at which time another adjournment took place to meet at 9 o'clock on the morning of the 9th, at the house of Mr. Michael Barret.

On the 9th the jury met at the appointed time and place and took the testimony of Mr. Barrett, who stated that he was the person who it was that ignited the fire-damp, and that he was at the main door A and in the act of opening it when the gas ignited, and that after the explosion had passed over he ran back over the rubbish along the gangway for quite a distance. He stated further that there was no fire boss in that part of the mine this day, nor had Mr. Robert Hayes been requested to act as such to his knowledge, and did not see a safety lamp with any person this day, and had not seen any gas at this point while at work there the day previous, they being on the main road did not apprehend any danger from fire-damp.

After taking the above testimony the jury proceeded to the office of E. B. Harvey, J. P., acting coroner, where the inquisition was continued to its completion, (the acting coroner having since died I have been able to get a copy of all the testimony,) when the following verdict was rendered by the jury:

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA, } ss:
Luzerne County,

An inquisition indented and taken at Plainsville, in the county of Luzerne, the eighth day of February, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy-two, before me, E. B. Harvey, a justice of the peace in and for said county, acting as coroner, upon the view of the bodies of Robert Hays, Patrick M'Cullough and Richard Norris, then and there lying dead, upon the oath of Robert Mitchell, Michael Welch, E. O. Baker, John Gray, Robert Milligan and Frank Murphy, good and lawful men of the county aforesaid, who being sworn and affirmed to inquire, on the part of the Commonwealth, when, where, how and after what manner the said Robert Hays, Patrick M'Cullough and Richard Norris came to their death, do say, upon their oath and affirmation, that the said Robert Hays, Patrick M'Cullough and Richard Norris were killed and Michael Barrett seriously injured by the explosion of fire-damp or carburetted hydrogen in the Henry colliery on the morning of Tuesday, the sixth day of February, A. D. 1872, and agree:

First.—That the explosion was the result of a want of care in carrying out the requirements of the ventilation law, as by examining the mines before the men went to their work.

Second.—That if there had been that required and careful examination of the mines before the men went to their work, the explosion would not have transpired.

Third.—That John Nichols, mining boss, possessing the right to hire a fire boss, should have had one, or should have performed the duty of examining the mines himself, and thus averted the explosion.

Fourth.—That John Nichols is a competent mining superintendent, and did not neglect having an assistant or fire boss, nor omit performing the requirements of the law, wilfully or from malice, but from an over-devotion to the company's pecuniary interest.

Fifth.—That from the testimony of witnesses the Luzerne coal and iron company, the present owners of the said Henry colliery, under the careful management and supervision of Fred. Marcus, Esq., superintendent, and T. M. Williams, mine inspector, since June 16, 1871, have been and are now making improvements and repairs, which, if completed, will perfect the ventilation of said mines and make it safe for the miners, so long as the appointees perform their duty.

Sixth.—That the owners of said colliery are not careful enough to see and know that their bosses and appointees fully keep and perform all the requirements of the ventilation law.

In witness whereof, the aforesaid acting coroner and the jurors aforesaid have to this inquisition put their hand and seals this ninth day of February, Anno Domini one thousand eight hundred and seventy-two, at Wilkesbarre, county and State aforesaid.

E. B. HARVEY,
Justice of the peace and acting coroner.

R. C. MITCHELL,
E. O. BAKER,
ROBERT MULLIGHAN,
JOHN GRAY,
MICHAEL WELSH,
FRANCIS MURPHY.

In addition to the above I would give the following as my humble opinion of how the sad affair took place, together with my reasons for the same. The most violent part of the explosion must have been at a point a little inside of the door A on plan 2, about the chamber B, where there had been some great force piling, &c., against the rib on the lower side of the gangway, which blew a wooden brattice and a stone wall out of a cross-cut that was between the gangway and the air-way, into the latter as clear as if it had been shoveled therefrom. In the said chamber B many timbers had been blown out and some of the roof had fallen. In chamber A the force of the blast seemed to have entered it from chamber B, blowing the timber, &c., in the same direction through cross-cut No. 2. In chamber C the indications were just the reverse, looking as if the force had been inward just as it had been outward in chamber A. The No. 2 cross-cut in chamber A was near the face, while No. 1 cross-cut was further back. The air (if there were any in circulation) traveling inward would naturally strike some distance ahead of cross-cut No. 2.

The distance from cross-cuts Nos. 1, 2 and 3 can be seen by referring to plan of mine. The breadth of the chamber can also be seen. The thickness of vein is about 7½ feet, and pitching there about 7° or 8°, but there is one other matter to be mentioned in regard to this chamber B, that cross-cut No. 3 was not cut through the top coal bench, hence it would help to dam back the gas down to the level of the cross-cut top before the air would get hold of it. No trace of fire could be seen along the gangway, or at any point inside of chamber C, there being pieces of paper lying along the gangway and loose powder having been blown over and scattered at one place but not ignited.

That part at door A being as low, if not lower than from there to face of gangway, I am of opinion that if the gas had filled to this point, it would have been through the inside chambers, and the gangway, down to and level with the place where it was ignited, as it would pass inward through the cross-cuts before it could fill down to the gangway, we did not see any indications of there having been such a body ignited. And further, had there been such a body of gas ignited by any person opening the door A, it would have been impossible for him to have lived any longer than the blast would have been in reaching him, as this door was at the junction of the air-way and gangway, and all the workings inside it, except one chamber; hence the whole force would concentrate in this direction, being an air channel. Again, it is very difficult to think that any person could have lived to come from the door A, under the circumstances which Mr. Barret escaped immediate death, as every thing were swept away for a long distance, and dashed to pieces against the curved side or rib, even the heavy door frame, 12 inch square timber, was blown and carried 25 or 30 feet along the gangway.

In conclusion, I would give it as my decided opinion, that the gas was ignited in chamber A, from which it spread to chamber B, where there might have been a sufficient quantity of gas above, and from cross-cuts 2 and 3 to face of chamber, to have produced the results above described. This being the reservoir, as the effect was shown in blowing the timber outward into chamber A, and inward into chamber C, and a person igniting it in chamber A, might have been saved much better there than at any other point near the scene of the accident. Thus, in my opinion, accounts how Mr. Barret, who ignited the gas, fared at the time better than the other three men who were on the gangway, and who were instantly killed.

Now the next question naturally asked is, how came the gas to accumulate in any such quantities? By referring to the plan of the mine, it will be seen that the air current at that time traversed inward through the chambers, from the down-cast air shaft X (or second opening shaft) to the face of the gangway; it was then conveyed along a new air-way as a return to the point where the said new air-way formed a junction with the main gangway near the door A, from whence it was to travel the main gangway as a return until it came to the cross-cut or air-way No. 4, which connected the upper with the lower workings, *i. e.*, when the current would be going in its usual course. It seemed from what some of the witnesses stated, that door B, just outside the connecting air-way No. 4 had not been very carefully closed the evening previous, when these men quit work; the reason they gave for it was that the road having been newly put down, and not yet filled up between the sills, there was quite a space left under the door, and the road being a little higher than in the past, the door would not close tight, they knowing that no persons were working, did not take extra care to close it, and thus it was left. This door being a single one, and not one of a pair, it let

part, at least, of the current to take the short and most natural road through door B into air-way No. 4 instead of around the face of the mine, which reduced the quantity travelling in that direction, how much no one is supposed to know. The reason Mr. Nicholls gave for having but a single door on the gangway at B to protect the current at this point was, "that the mine or gangway at this point had been driven, most part of it, through a rock fault, in some places no coal at all, other parts had thin coal as shown on plan, but that they were then endeavoring to connect chamber E with workings on top of plane F, in order to correct this matter, and had been doing all they could to improve the condition of the place ever since the L. C. and I. Co. got possession, and that they had also opened the new air-way from door A inward, so as to avoid the necessity of having the return air on the main gangway, which they thought to have connected to a chamber marked II, which was being driven parallel with the gangway from air-way No. 4 inward, so as to make it a complete return."

Up to the time of the explosion this mine had been very badly arranged. It is true that the faults, &c., made it difficult, nevertheless, the general plan of the mine and the manner in which it was being worked were wrong in principle.

I entered my protest against the manner of ventilation each time I visited the mine, although I did not find standing gas therein but once. I condemned it to Mr. Jas. Thomas, superintendent in charge, and to Mr. John Nichols, the mine boss, for I have always opposed the idea of coursing the air-current first through the chambers, even when there are parallel air-ways with the gangways, but still more so when a mine has no such air-ways, and where the main gangway is made the return for the smoke and foul of the mine. If an explosion or fire takes place, the after-damp and gases are met in the main gangway, the very place where the pure air is required the most, to keep the fresh men in good condition and to reconvert those that may be effected by said gases.

This had in contemplation a new fan, 18 feet in diameter, to be placed at the new shaft at X on plan, but it was not quite ready. There was a small propulsion fan at the hoisting shaft that had been in use, but had been abandoned, leaving the whole hoisting shaft to be an up-cast and the new shaft to be the down-cast.

The following was the air report for December, 1871, (the mine was not working in January:) Amount at face of mine, 12,500 cubic feet of air per minute; amount at outlet, 18,000 cubic feet of air per minute. I must say that this company were endeavoring to improve matters from the time they took possession.

In regard to the matter of fire-boss, had there been one, as the law especially provides for, it is more than likely that the sad catastrophe would not have occurred. That it was one of many serious accidents that have occurred in our coal mines from the effect of bad management, including loose discipline and a want of proper respect for the ventilation law, few will deny.

Since the accident the new fan has been put up, and was built by Mr. Snyder, Pottsville, and gives the following result: Fan dimensions, 18 feet in diameter, 6 feet wide, centre opening 9 feet in diameter. Upright engine, first motion, cylinder, 18 inches diameter; stroke, 2 feet. When fan is running 56 revolutions it gives about 56,000 cubic feet per minute. Number of persons employed at present, 72.

F. Mercier, general superintendent; Jenkin B. Jones, mining boss at present.

The Philadelphia Inquirer.

PHILADELPHIA, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 1872.

COLLIERY ACCIDENT.

Explosion of Gas in the Mines—Three Men Burned to Death and Others Injured.

SCRANTON, Feb. 6.—[*Special Despatch to The Inquirer.*].—A terrible gas explosion took place at the Henry mines, four miles below Pittston, at seven o'clock this morning. The collieries belong to the Luzerne Coal and Iron Company. Three men were burned to death and several others were injured. At the time of the explosion the men were engaged in laying a car track.

The explosion was caused by opening a door to a chamber where it was known the gas was escaping, and which had been closed to temporarily confine it.

Robert Hays was blown a distance of one hundred and fifty feet; his head was crushed to a jelly and his body was fearfully mangled.

Richard Morris was burned to a crisp and was found lying on his back near the place at which he had been working.

John Collins was standing two hundred yards from where the gas was ignited, and was blown to one side of the gangway, where he fell in the gutter. He was not injured, and succeeded in making his way to the foot of the shaft.

Larry Barrett was badly burned about the face and breast. It is thought that he cannot recover.

About one hour after the explosion and before the body of Morris could be got out, a large quantity of rock fell, shutting off the air to that part in which Morris was, and brattices had to be put up in order to change the current of air. This occupied so much time that it was three o'clock before Morris was taken out.

Mick Barrett, a driver, and who was a short distance in advance of the rest of the men, opened a door in the main gangway, which is about seven hundred feet from the foot of the shaft, and the gas escaping, was ignited by his lamp and immediately there was an explosion, which blew the timber in all directions, and Patrick McCullough was blown the distance of two hundred feet. His head was completely severed from his body.

All the men killed leave families almost entirely destitute. The mine stopped work for repairs on the 23d of December, but owing to a disagreement between the miners and the company about wages the repairs did not then take place. The difficulty was settled on the 24th of January, when the work of repairing the mines began and was in progress at the time of the accident.

The Recent Explosion in the Henry Mine.

NEW YORK, Feb. 12.

A *Tribune's* Scranton special says that over twenty witnesses have been examined by the coroner's jury on the death of the men killed by the recent explosion in the Henry mine. The jury have rendered their verdict, which declares, first, that the explosion was the result of want of care in carrying out the requirements of the ventilation law as to examining the mines before the men went on to their work; second—if this care had been exercised, the explosion would not have occurred; third—John Nichols, mining boss, possessing the right to hire a fire boss, should have had one, or should have performed the duty of examining the mines himself, and thus averted the explosion; fourth—that John Nichols is a competent mining superintendent, and did omit performing the requirements of the law, not freely or from malice, but from over-devotion to the company's pecuniary interest; fifth—that from the testimony of the witnesses, the Luzerne Coal and Iron Company, the present owners of the said Henry colliery, have been and are now making improvements and repairs which, if completed, will perfect the ventilation of said mine and make it safe for miners so long as the appointees perform their duty; sixth—that the owners of said colliery are not careful enough to see and know that their bosses and appointees fully keep and perform all the requirements of the ventilation law.