

**November 2, 1879**  
**Mill Slope, Delaware and Hudson Coal Company**  
**Explosion**  
**5 Victims**

Victims

Zachariah Thomas	David Jenkins
William Kinney	George Forsythe
David Rupp	

Zachariah Thomas, David Jenkins, William Kinney, George Forsythe, and David Rupp, were all instantly killed by a terrible explosion of fire-damp, in No. 9 lift in the Mill Slope, on the 2d day of November 1879, being on a Sunday morning. The two first named were very much burned while the other three were not burned at all, but had evidently been killed by the concussion, or blast of wind produced by the explosion of gas, igniting from the lamps of the one or the other of the two men, Thomas and Jenkins, who were so badly burned.

The Mill Creek colliery is operated by the Delaware and Hudson Coal Company Mr. John Cook being mine boss, and Mr. A. H. Vanling superintendent assisted by Mr. C. H. Scharar, mining engineer. The mine has always been a very gassy one, but having good ventilation and careful management, it has been extraordinarily free from accidents from explosion of gas. The above statement will be found true, by examination of the accident list from 1870 to the time of this occurrence. Many years ago, the gangways and air-ways were very small, which I condemned severely. The air-crossings or bridges were also of the same kind, entirely inadequate in size, But all this was soon changed and large and roomy air-ways, gangways, and air bridges were had, and an aggregate of one hundred thirty thousand cubic feet of air was kept in circulation in the various splits, there being from five to six and eight splits. The mine got to be very extensive, the slope being down about three thousand hundred feet. There being a flat part way down, an engine was there, to hoist from the lower one thousand feet. Work was being in the Nos. 3, 6, and 7 on the left, Nos. 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, and 4 on the up to the time of the explosion.

On Saturday, the 1st day of November, there being a crush in some part of the No. 9 lift, work was suspended there, and a number of the men put

to work to timber along certain parts of the gangway and air-way, and Mr. Cook, the mine boss, and a gang of men worked until about midnight, when they quit work, the place being rather unsafe, as they supposed. On Sunday morning early, Mr. Cook, accompanied by a young boy, went down the slope to learn the condition of No. 9 lift, along the gangway where they had been timbering, and while there formed an opinion that the crush was not so bad as it had been, and that his first idea of timbering the gangway to prevent the spread of the crush beyond a certain section, could then be carried out. So he went out, and, on reaching the surface, sent the lad, aforementioned, to the houses of some of his workmen to ask them if they would go to work, (this being Sunday morning,) while he started home to get his breakfast. On his road home, he met two of the men, who had lamps, and he asked them where they were going, and they replied they were going into the mine to get their tools, when he asked them if they would have any objections to work this day, and they assented. He then requested them to go and see some other parties for the same purpose. One of these men had been in the party timbering Saturday night. These two men and three others, five altogether, were not seen again by Mr. Cook nor any other officer, until their corpses were brought out of the mine, after the explosion.

When Mr. Cook returned from his breakfast, he was informed soon, by the engineer, that a gust of wind and dust was seen thrown out of the mouth of the slope. And it being a downcast, Cook knew there was something very wrong, but he stated he thought it probably was a concussion from a cave of roof. He then descended the slope until he came where the walls had been blown down, then he returned, and after getting assistance, explored the No. 9 lift, where they found the bodies of Kinney, Forsyth, and Rupp, but those of Thomas and Jenkins were not found in No. 9, but were found at the entrance from No. 8 to the No. 9 lift, second opening. It appears that the man Jenkins had not been to work on Saturday, but that he worked walling stoppings in the said second opening, or plastering the same, as the air current then passing across said place towards the return was about to be closed off, in order to make the said second opening and traveling-way an intake air-way. More than likely that Jenkins went there to get his tools to go to work at the timbering, on the No. 9 gangway, with the other three men who had gone down there, and probably that Thomas had gone with him for company. It is very evident that the gas was ignited by the lamp of one of them, probably the former, as his body was found inside the entrance to the second opening, while that of Thomas was found in the No. 8 lift gangway, a trifle outside of the said entrance, which might have been carried there by the blast or concussion. The three men killed in the gangway of No. 9, from which the gas came, were killed by the concussion caused by the said explosion, just as they were about going towards the section, where the timber had been put up the night before. The gas had, no doubt, been given off by a caving of the roof of

several chambers in the No. 9 lift, letting off the gas from the upper bed of the Baltimore seam, or top vein, as they call it, to such an extent as to adulterate the whole stream or current of air, which was about thirteen thousand cubic feet per minute. Before this cave, the current was free from the presence of gas. The top seam or bed generates gas very fast, and it has not been worked over the area of the cave.

Mr. Cook claimed that he had not intended the men to have entered the mine before his return from breakfast. His having conversed with two of the men, and giving them instructions to seek other men, and then, again, for these men to have gone on their way to the place where he wanted the work done, would rather indicate an understanding by them of their duties to be performed. He also gave as his reply to the question, why he had allowed the said men to go down into the mine before a fire boss or himself had examined the condition of the place, "that it was a standing rule that no persons were allowed to enter the mine until the same had been done, &c., &c., and that he had no reason to suppose that they would enter in this case, before himself or his fire boss should give them information that such was the case."

The unfortunate men having all been found dead, there was no one left to give their side of the case, and it certainly looks rather a doubtful case; yet there is no proof, that I heard, to warrant the inspector in saying that Mr. Cook had sent those men into the mine, and the reader must draw his own conclusion from what has been stated. When in attendance at the inquest, I gave it as my opinion that there was nothing proven that Mr. Cook had neglected in carrying out the law, yet, in view of the great importance of the case of a cave, it was my opinion, that it being an *extraordinary* circumstance, Mr. Cook should have taken *extra care*, and should have cautioned the men he saw *not* to enter the mine, and informed the boy to request the parties he went to see, that they should *not* enter the mine until they saw Mr. Cook or his fire boss, &c., &c. But instead of that, Mr. Cook, I fear, did not think the danger was so great; in fact, it is doubtful whether he thought about the possibility of large quantities of gas being liberated therefrom. He had been down in the mine early that morning, and went along the main gangway, carrying a naked lamp so far as he went. It is true, he did not go so far as the face of the mine or workings, yet it appears as if Mr. Cook had not the slightest thought of the accumulation of gas, or he would not have gone so far as he did, not knowing anything of its condition, except that there was a pretty strong current of air on the main gangway; and I doubt whether he had any thought of gas, even in the return, and that it was more by luck than real thought, that he did not himself ignite the said gas. On the other hand, if he did at all think of the possibility or probability of gas being met in an explosive state in the said return, then his act of neglect could not have been questioned, for which he should be made to suffer the penalty of the law.

Below will be found a copy of the verdict of the jury, as given to me by Mr. Evan Morgan, (justice of the peace,) acting coroner. The testimony I have not inserted, for the reason of its imperfect condition. Many important questions and replies are omitted in connection with the testimony of Messrs. Cook and Foot, the latter being the outside foreman, and having control of engines and of fans, &c., &c. There are also questions and replies given entirely inaccurate; hence I left out the whole as being inaccurate and deficient in the case, and give the conclusions arrived at by the jury, to wit:

#### Inquest.

An inquisition indented and taken at Plains township, in the county of Luzerne, the 3d day of November, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy-nine, (1879,) before me, Evan T. Morgan, one of the justices of the peace in and for the county of Luzerne, upon the view of bodies of David Jenkins, Zachariah Thomas, Daniel Roop, George Forsyth, and William Kenny, then and there lying dead, upon the oaths of Owen Griffith, William Tasker, Aaron Hilbert, Michael Mayoock, George Ayres, and Winthrop Oplinger, good and lawful men of the county aforesaid, who, being sworn to inquire, on the part of the Commonwealth, when, where, how, and after what manner the said David Jenkins, Zachariah Thomas, Daniel Roop, George Forsyth, and William Kenny came to their death, do say, upon their oaths, that David Jenkins, Zachariah Thomas, on the 2d day of November, A. D. 1879, came to their death in Mill Creek mine, by the explosion of carbureted hydrogen gas, supposed to be ignited, from a light carried by the said David Jenkins, in the traveling road, between Nos. 8 and 9 lifts of said mines, and that by the concussion of the same, Daniel Roop, George Forsyth, and William Kenny came to their death. And the said jurors further say, upon their oaths, that John E. Cook, inside foreman of said Mill Creek mine, is guilty of gross neglect, in not ascertaining whether the condition of the said mines were free from danger previous to the men entering the said mines, Sunday, the 2d day of November, 1879. And further say, that the unfortunate men that came to their death were also neglectful in not inquiring whether the said mines were free from danger previous to entering. And further recommend that a more diligent watch be kept over the fans of the said mines.

In witness whereof, as well the aforesaid justice, as the jurors aforesaid, have to this inquisition put their hands and seals, this 6th day of November, A. D. 1879.

EVAN T. MORGAN, [L. S.]

*Justice of the Peace.*

OWEN GRIFFITHS, [L. S.]

WILLIAM TASKER, [L. S.]

AARON HILBERT, [L. S.]

MICHAEL MAYOOCK, [L. S.]

GEORGE AYRES, JR., [L. S.]

WINTHIROP OPLINGER, [L. S.]

**Augusta Journal**  
**Monday, November 3, 1879**

**PENNSYLVANIA**  
**Explosion**

**SCRANTON, November 1.** A tremendous explosion of fire damp occurred in the Delaware and Hudson mines at Mill Creek, Pa. at 9:30 A.M. Five men were killed. The dead bodies of Geo. Forsie, Dan Rupp and J. Kinney have been taken out of the mine. Two men are yet in the mine and a large force are at work endeavoring to get them out.

**Fort Wayne Sentinel**  
**Monday, November 3,**

A tremendous explosion of fire damp occurred in the Delaware and Hudson mine at Mill Creek, Pa. Sunday morning. George Fassil, Daniel Rupp, G. Kinney, Zach Thomas and D. Jenkins have been taken out dead. Their bodies were fearfully mangled. The remains were hoisted to the surface amidst weeping and lamentations of friends and relatives of the unfortunate men. It is thought flames from the mine came in contact with the gas.

**Galveston Daily**  
**Galveston, Texas**  
**November 4, 1879**

**Five Men Killed and Fearfully Mangled.**

**SCRANTON, November 2 -** A tremendous explosion of air damp occurred in the Delaware and Hudson mine, Mill Creek, at 9:30 o'clock this morning. At 12 o'clock George Fosse, Daniel Dupen and J. Kenney were taken out dead; two men yet remain in the mine. A large force is working to get them out. There were five men in the mine at the time the explosion occurred - Thomas, Jenkins, Forcey, Kinney, and Rupp - who had been sent down a short time before to prop up a crumbling pillar. All were dead when found; the bodies of the three last-named were fearfully mangled and partly covered by a mass of splintered timbers and broken coal. As the men were all killed, it cannot be ascertained how the catastrophe occurred. Three of the victims leave large families.

**Evening Gazette**  
**Port Jervis, N. Y.**  
**Tuesday, November 4, 1879**

*A TERRIBLE EXPLOSION.*

FIVE MEN INSTANTLY KILLED IN A COAL  
MINE NEAR SCRANTON.

SCRANTON, November 2.—At six o'clock this morning the mine boss in charge of Mill Creek colliery of the Delaware and Hudson Canal company, 15 miles from this city, entered the mine and found one of the pillars of coal, which are always left to support the roof in mines, giving way.

He sent for a force of men to prop up the crumbling pillar, and at 10 o'clock George Forcey, Daniel Rupp, William Kinney, Zach Thomas and D. Jennings entered the mine.

About 11 o'clock an explosion was heard by people in the vicinity of the mine. News that an accident had occurred spread like wildfire. A large, excited crowd speedily gathered at the colliery.

When it was deemed safe the mine boss, with two companions descended into the mine. Proceeding to number eight lift they came across the charred bodies of Thomas and Jenkins. Further on in number nine lift they found the remains of Forcey, Kinney and Rupp.

The bodies of the latter three were fearfully mangled and partly covered by a mass of splinters, timbers and broken coal. Forcey's leg was blown off and Kinney's head smashed. The men were all dead when found. The clothing was burned almost entirely off the bodies of Jenkins and Thomas.

The bodies were hoisted to the surface amidst weeping and lamentations of friends and relatives of the unfortunate miners.

As the firemen who first entered the mine were all killed, it cannot be definitely ascertained how the catastrophe occurred. It is thought, however, that the flame from one of the miner's lamps came in contact with some gas and caused an explosion.

No charge of carelessness can attach to the employees of the colliery, as everything was in good condition when the mine boss visited the mine this morning. Three of the men leave large families.

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