

### A Terrible Explosion at Pocohontas, Virginia.

POCOHONTAS, Va., March 13.

A terrible gas explosion occurred at one o'clock this morning in the Laurel Creek Mine, operated by the Southwest Improvement Company, at this place. The Laurel Creek Mine is the only one in this section and has been operated for about two years. It consists of a tunnel, running three-quarters of a mile into the mountain side and a railroad runs the entire length of the mine. There are latent galleries at intervals. The mine is situated above the water level, and for this reason it has until now been worked with little trouble and singularly free from accidents, not a single fatal casualty having been reported since operations were begun. W. A. Lathrop, the superintendent, is an expert mining engineer and has had many years experience in working coal. The mines have been worked by relief every six hours.

One hundred and fifty-five men were at work there at the time, and such was the force of the explosion that every one was killed and the fanning machine and engine were blown three hundred feet from the entrance. A train of cars drawn by a small engine was near the entrance, moving in the mine at the time. Four cars and the engine were blown out, and a car axle was propelled by the force of the explosion into the side of a small frame house, several hundred feet distant, occupied by two miners, William Maloney and Jake Sexton. Both were asleep, having left the mine at 6 o'clock. The flying plank awoke them. Their escape was wonderful, the iron wheels of the car falling by the side of their bunks. They struck a light and, so far as can be learned, were the first to realize the situation and to give the alarm.

The fanning machine was insufficient for the mines and before its deficiency was discovered and remedied by those in the mines the gas accumulated to the explosive point. This place is made up entirely

of the houses of the miners and was built by the Southwestern Improvement Company. A good many of the miners are Northerners and Pennsylvanians. The engineer at work near the mouth of the mine, as well as his assistant and a colored boy, were blown a hundred feet away and their mangled bodies found scattered in every direction. The engineer's head was found in a ravine and his legs and arms were found near the mine. Of those at work in or about the mine not one was left to tell the story. The people of the little hamlet, whose population numbers about five hundred, were asleep when the explosion took place. But the whole place was quickly roused and the scene which followed beggars description.

The few living beings who saw a puff of smoke shoot from the mine and the sudden upheaval of the engine and cars rushed into the town with loud cries for help. Men, women and children were roused, and as they took in the intelligence there was a wild rush for the scene of the disaster. Despite the cold night, women as well as men rushed off scantily clad. Experienced miners upon reaching the scene were satisfied that no man in the mines was alive. The horror of the situation has been intensified by the discovery that the mines are on fire.

Everything possible is being done to reach the victims. A party of experienced miners, under charge of Colonel George Dodds, from the coal field mines of Chesterfield county, passed through Lynchburg this afternoon and will arrive at Pocahontas at twelve o'clock to-night. The men employed in the mines were mostly Hungarians without families. A number of negroes from this city and surrounding section were also employed there, and the excitement here is consequently very great. What effect the disaster will have on the operations of the mines can only be conjectured until the full extent of the damage transpires. The mines have not been long opened, but the company had gotten well under way and was supplying a large section of the country with coal and the prospect was most encouraging, a large coaling station for the supply of ocean steamers being in course of construction at Norfolk. While the accident will have the effect of retarding work at the mines it is not believed it will cause a permanent discontinuance, as a great deal of money has been expended there by Northern capitalists, composing the Southwest Improvement Company.

## 1884 Laurel Mine Explosion NEWS1

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The mine is really under the control of the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company, who have a branch road, known as the New River Division, running from New River to Pocohontas, about sixty miles. John C. Ilsey, of Pennsylvania, is President of the Improvement Company, and William A. Lathrop is superintendent of the mine.

POCAHONTAS, Va., March 15. — No efforts have yet been made to recover the bodies of the 154 miners who met a fiery death on Thursday morning in the mine of the South-West Virginia Improvement Company, near this place. Symptoms of the fire are still cropping out. All the entrances from the outside are being closely sealed up with a view to subsequent inundation of the mine for the purpose of quenching the fire.

The theory grows strong that the explosion was caused by the outburst of a large body of gas contained in a cavity which must have been tapped by a powder blast. Some miners believe that, with proper precautions and with gas men to test for gas, the calamity might have been avoided; but more thoroughly informed engineers and experts incline to the opinion that it was one of the disasters that no human skill or foresight could have averted.

The superintendent stated to-day that the East mine, which was not materially affected by the recent explosion, will be worked again in a few days, or as soon as arrangements can be perfected and miners employed. The resumption of work in the West mine, where the explosion occurred, will not take place for two months or more.