

The Daily Journal
Freeport, Illinois
September 24, 1885

Four Miners Drowned in the Pit

HOUTZDALE, Pa., Sept. 24 - A frightful disaster occurred at the Waterloo heading of the Franklin Colliery Tuesday evening by which four miners lost their lives. In some manner, the miners tapped the old workings, when a large body of water burst in and completely flooded the mine, drowning the four men in spite of their desperate efforts to escape. Up to noon Wednesday their bodies had not been recovered.

Daily Gazette
Williamsport, Pa.
September 24, 1885

FOUR MEN DROWNED IN MINE

DISPATCH TO THE GAZETTE AND BULLETIN

HOUTZDALE, SEPT 24. - About seven o'clock this morning, six men John Mehan, John Fosyth, Joe Zamber, Peter Foulk, and to brothers named Aielle were working in the Franklin colliery and having worked up too close to an old opening filled with water the partition gave way, flooded the dip in which the men were working and drowned the four * * * the two brothers made their escape. Five mules were also drowned. The men all have families. Over one hundred men were put to work with pumps to draw off the water so as to recover the bodies.

September 26, 1885
Jackson Sentinel

On the 23d, John Mehan, Peter Folk, Joseph Heamper and John Forsysthe, miners were drowned in the Franklin Mine at Houtzdate, Pa. by water running in from an old mine on a lower level.

Tyrone Daily Herald
September 24, 1885

MINE ACCIDENT

Tuesday morning, a flood in Franklin mine, Houtzdale, drowned four miners and was the cause of injury to several others. In a low part of the old workings, where the coal had been taken out several years ago, a large body of water was known to have collected. The present opening and rooms, going in from another direction, penetrated this body of water, causing an immense flood in the mine. Many of the miners were just going to work,. Had they all been in at the face, none would have escaped.

The law requires operators to prepare and keep in their offices, correct maps of all the headings, cross-headings, rooms, drains, and shafts connected with their mines. The object of the law is to protect the lives of miners, and if its provisions had been strictly complied with, this accident could not have occurred; consequently somebody blundered.

The writer of this was frequently in the Franklin mine with the late James R. Cameron, while that gentleman was superintendent, and also with the district mine inspector. Mr. Cameron's large map, shown to the writer many time each year during the progress of the mine work in Franklin was supposed to be correct to a quarter of an inch or less. Previous to the great suit with the Houtz heirs, some of the most eminent engineers in the county re-measured and thoroughly investigated Mr. Cameron's work. Don St. George Fraser also prepared a large map of the mine for Houtz heirs and his work was critically examined and re-measured by the ablest experts that could be obtained in the country. All this engineers testified to the facts in the Huntindon Court, among them Mr. Finely, present superintendent of the mine wherein the men lost their lives.

The only excuse we have heard offered, is a statement to the effect that Mr. Cameron had made a mistake in his map, and that the present engineer supposed he had thirty feet of solid coal between the face of the rooms and the old workings. If the map was incorrect, how could the fact has escaped detection?

The result of this blunder is a loss of four valuable lives, four wives made widows, and the children of as many families made orphans. Chance or accident prevented an increased number of victims. Men, who are appointed to responsible positions and splurge around on high salaries, ought to be held accountable for their negligence. A careful examination of the situation will show which of the maps was incorrect - that of the old works or the new.