

DEADLY DAMP.

Terrible Explosion in the Conyngham Coal Shaft at Wilkesbarre, Pa.

Fifty Men Terribly and Fatally Burned—Work of Recovering the Bodies.

Distressing Scenes—The Explosion Caused by the Foolishness of a Miner With a Naked Light.

WILKESBARRE, Pa., Nov. 26.—Shortly after the miners and laborers entered the Conyngham shaft this morning an explosion of gas took place. Between twenty and thirty miners are said to be killed, badly burned or seriously injured. This shaft is known to contain considerable gas and is owned and operated by the Delaware & Hudson Coal Company. The explosion occurred in a shanty at the foot of the shaft, which was occupied by the fire boss. No work was done yesterday, consequently there was a larger quantity of gas than usual in the shaft. The men are now being removed from the pit and taken to their homes or to the hospital in ambulances and wagons.

LATER DISPATCH.

The accident in the Conyngham shaft occurred at ten minutes past seven this morning, while the men were getting ready to go to work. About fifty men, miners and laborers, were sitting at the foot of the shaft awaiting for the inside boss when a terrible explosion took place. Only three or four, as far as can be ascertained, escaped without injury. Most of the men were sent to their homes at once and as they are scattered far and near, long distances from the shaft, no account of the result of the injuries at this writing can be obtained. It is known, however, that several, possibly twelve or fifteen, will die, others will be scarred and maimed for life. The disaster was caused by Cornelius Boyle, a mine laborer, who stepped into a worked-out chamber which was filled with gas with a lighted lamp in his hat. Boyle will die. Many mules were killed and wounded. The damage to the inside workings of the shaft is great. Fire Bosses William Williams and William Evans are reported fatally burned. There is great excitement in and about the shaft.

TERRIBLE SCENES.

WILKESBARRE, Pa., Nov. 27.—The scene at the Conyngham colliery while the injured men were being taken from the shaft was terrible. A crowd of several hundred persons had gathered at the mouth of the shaft, among them the wives, mothers and daughters of the injured men. As they were taken out of the pit they were brought to the engine house, and the women made desperate efforts to gain entrance. Their entreaties and frantic demonstrations of grief were terrible, but they were kept outside the building while the blackened, scorched and bleeding victims were wrapped in blankets soaked in oil. The floor of the engine house was covered with writhing human forms so disfigured by the fire as to be unrecognizable. As fast as possible they were taken to the hospital or to their homes, and so rapidly was the work done that by nine o'clock every one had been taken out and carried away.

The recovery of the following is believed to be hopeless: Hugh Sweeny, aged 27, laborer, unmarried; Edward Kerns, aged 29, laborer, unmarried; Richard Coulter, aged 26, miner, wife and family; Condy Shannon, aged 31, miner, wife and large family; Thomas O'Brien, aged 30, miner, wife and large family; Cornelius Boyle, aged 38, miner, wife and family, reported dead; John Cannon, aged 40, miner, wife and family; Christopher Brundage, aged 35, laborer, unmarried; Michael O'Brien, aged 30, laborer, unmarried; Daniel Ferry, aged 32, miner, wife and large family; John Dougherty, aged 31, laborer, unmarried; Denis McCabe, aged 40, miner, unmarried.

HOW IT OCCURRED.

While the miners were engaged in genial chats the thundering report of an explosion rang through the dark corridors and in a second the frantic men hurried to the foot of the shaft, all anxiously peering upward. In less time than it takes to tell it the deadly gas flame circled around their heads and agonizing screams rent the air. Many fell at once in a heap, while others, less injured, dropped on their knees and put their blistered heads into the stream of water that ran along the gangway. The fact that the men were in such close proximity to the shaft rendered their removal to the surface an expeditious matter. In two hours all were safely taken up. As they came up to the surface, two or three at a time, the horrorstricken crowds at the mouth of the shaft peered anxiously at the faces of the men. It was impossible to recognize any of them at that time. In some instances the skin had been ripped off in masses, leaving the purple flesh exposed, which in turn was begrimed with coal dirt to an extent that made the facial disfigurement horrible to look at. As each man was lifted from the cage a thick blanket was thrown completely over him and he was hurried away to one of the neighboring offices. Some were taken to their homes. All sorts of conveyances were sent to the scene. It was a cruel sight to see many of the sufferers passed into common coal carts and jolted over rickety roads and pavements.

Mike Clinton, one of the men who escaped injury, said: "We were all at the foot of the shaft, waiting orders to go to work. It was about 7:10. The inside boss had not arrived. Most of the men were seated in groups. Suddenly a terrific explosion was heard, and in an instant we were all thrown down on the bottom of the gangway. Some of the men dove their faces into the running water. The water was up to the rail, and we didn't know whether we could work until it was removed." A laborer named Cornelius A. Boyle walked to the chamber across which a little board was stuck with the word "Gas" on it. He either didn't see this or was careless. Anyway he went in with his open lamp, and thus set fire to the gas and caused the explosion. Fire Bosses William Evans and William Williams, both Welshmen, were taken out terribly burned. Inside Foreman McDonald went down after the explosion and was overcome by fire damp, but will recover. Some forty-five men were burned, many of whom will die.

1886 Conyngham Colliery explosion
NEWS1

Clipped By:
usmra_rob
Oct 12, 2025