

May 14, 1893; Red Jacket Copper Mine, Calumet, Mi.; 10 Killed

1893 Houghton County Mining Inspector's Report

This was one of the most appalling disasters that ever occurred in the history of mining in Houghton county. By the oversight of an engineer caused by the supposed disconnection of a number from an indicator band ten men were hurled to instantaneous death at the Red Jacket shaft of the Calumet and Hecla mine on the 14th day of May 1893 viz: John ODGERS, timberman with assistants Allen CAMERON, Andrew EDNIE, John HICKS, James COCKING, Joseph POPE, Con S. SULLIVAN, Robert WUOPIO, James TREANA and Michael SANDRETO.

These men entered the shaft as usual to timber up and secure the shaft that was being sunk during the week. Everything went well during the forenoon. Several buckets of timber had been lowered down the shaft for the men to put in place to secure the sides of the shaft and nothing while the work was in progress happened to create the least suspicion that the machinery in every detail was not in perfect order. It is customary among the men working in the shaft to go to the surface for dinner and when the noon hour arrived the unfortunate fellows got in the bucket and gave the proper signal to hoist men and both the lander and the engineer according to their testimony at the inquest received the signals correctly. Mr. Ernest TULIN was running the engine and James ASHTON was landing. Both are men of experience in their line of duty and had the confidence of the men working in the shaft.

When the signal to hoist was given the bucket containing the men was hoisted up the shaft at the rate of seventy strokes a minute. The speed for hoisting rock is ninety strokes a minute and a standing order was given to the three engineers employed in running the engine at the Red Jacket shaft when men are riding up or down the shaft not to run any more than half speed or forty-five revolutions per minute more than allowed equal to 550 feet faster than the allowed rate but owing to the fact afterwards brought out at the inquest that the fatal number became detached from the indicator band and fell off the engineer lost his reckoning and supposed the bucket was 900 feet down the shaft at the time when it reached the surface consequently the bucket and men were hoisted up against the timbers on top of the shaft house where they struck with a terrific crash snapping asunder the steel bolt connecting the bucket to the wire rope and

precipitating men and bucket down the shaft a distance of 3,000 feet. The indicator is a number attached to a steel band operated by the engine and serves to designate the location of the bucket in the shaft and the number attached with a set-screw. When the bucket is far down the shaft the number disappears from view under the stand or casting in which it is operated. How the number became detached from the band is a mystery that never may be solved. Of the two numbers attached to the band at the time of the accident, one was to govern the landing of the north and the other of the south bucket. The number that fell off was to govern the landing of the north bucket and its loss was not noticed when the south bucket was being hoisted in which the men were riding up the shaft until the top of the frame was reached in which it was operated. See letter C on cut of indicator. The number that governed the landing of the south bucket came in full view at the bottom of slot A. The bucket was then 350 feet down the shaft. Letter B shows the point of landing the south bucket or mouth of shaft.

An inquest was held before Coroner MACDONALD. The jury after due deliberation rendered the following verdict. We find that the deceased men, John ODGERS, John HICKS, Allen CAMERON, Andrew EDNIE, James COCKING, Joseph POPE, Con S. SULLIVAN, Robert WUOPIO, James TREONA and Michael SANDRETO came to their deaths by accident and we exonerate the Calumet and Hecla Mining Company and its engineer from all blame but we suggest that a new system of indicating be adopted. The recommendations of the jury have been complied with.

