

August 24, 1894; Franklin Mine; Franklin, Washington; 37 Killed

(From State of Washington, Department of Labor and Industries report)

One of the most deplorable accidents that has ever occurred in the history of mining, by which 37 persons lost their lives through suffocation by smoke from a mine fire in the above mine, occurred on August 24.

The fire originated in breast 62 of the north sixth level; how it did occur will remain a mystery. Two theories were advanced — incendiarism and spontaneous combustion. I believe in the latter. The gobs or refuse which is kept in the breasts are known to have been heated before and after the fire. Each of the old worked-out levels have had fires from that source. The coroner's jury returned a verdict ascribing the cause to incendiarism without any evidence of that nature. The testimony of those that escaped proved that the men could have all gotten out safely, but it seems that they stopped for the purpose of extinguishing the fire; some of them had come from the south side with buckets so as to throw water on it. They would have been perfectly safe in doing so, had the fan remained in operation; but someone stopped it, thus compelling the men to retreat towards the bottom of the slope, and when they reached the rock tunnel leading to the fanway they encountered the smoke which came into the gangway when the fan stopped, thus their only means of escape was cut off, and they were suffocated in trying to go through it. Had this mine been worked by double entry system, or had two levels been connected at stated distances, this loss of life would not have occurred.

This would have afforded another means of escape. This is a matter that should be provided for by statute. This disaster emphasizes the need of having competent men in charge of the ventilating apparatus, when so many lives are dependent upon them. Fourteen wives were left husbandless and 38 children fatherless by the mistake or ignorance of the person who stopped the fan.