

1897 Von Storch Mine Fire Description

Taken from the 1897 list of fatalities in the Annual Report

Von Storch Mine Fire

Scranton, Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania

October 30, 1897

No. Killed - 6

A fire was discovered in the Von Storch Slope about midnight, October 29. This slope crosses the measures and intersects the Diamond, Rock and Fourteen "Foot" veins. At the Diamond vein the empty cars are run off on what is known as the light bridge. Some distance below this on the slope there are two pump rooms. One is known as the Diamond pump and the other the Fourteen Foot vein pump.

On the night in question Edward Simpson, 26 years of age, was engaged in looking after these pumps. At 12:40 he smelled smoke. After ascertaining the pump rooms to be safe, he started up the slope to locate the fire. He found the light bridge enveloped in smoke; he could also hear the roof rock falling.

He made an attempt to reach the section of the mine known as the New Diamond workings by way of the rock vein heading but was prevented from doing so by smoke. He knew the water boilers were in that part of the mine. He then went out of the mine through the second opening shaft, to give the alarm and to notify the company's officials. The fire companies were soon on the ground but were unable to do effective work for some time, as the dense smoke prevented them from reaching the location of the fire. The mine officials made brave attempts to reach the men by all available avenues from the second shaft but were cut off by smoke.

Finding it was impossible to reach the men they manipulated doors so as to carry the bulk of the smoke away from the imprisoned men, and after doing so directed their attention to the slope which, on account of the heat from the fire, together with the contraction of the air passage owing to falls, was upcasting and thus keeping the fire companies from working.

At about 7 o'clock on the morning of October 30, the smoke abated and in a few hours the fire was well under control. At 9 P. M. a rescuing party reached the New Diamond workings and there found Joseph Yankoskie alive. He informed them that all the other men were dead. Yankoskle, together with notes left by other members of the party, testify that they were all alive at 11:30 A. M., October 30.

They had become discouraged and determined to make one final attempt to reach the Four "Foot" vein along a rock plane connecting the two veins. At about 11:30 they all started through the thick smoke up the plane.

Yankoskle, who was leading the way up the plane, heard his companions saying "good-bye," decided to beat a hasty retreat. In the course of some time he reached the dip chambers and there, with two mules, he remained until rescued. The bodies of Hill, Farrell, McDonnell, Padden, Walsh and Moran were found by the rescuers as told by Yankoskle, at or near the foot of the plane.

Had the men, or even one of the number been acquainted with the current in that section of the mine, or had they known the use of the several doors, they could have done more to save themselves by the manipulation of the same than it was possible for the mine officials and others to do in that direction at the time and under the circumstances. Had any one of them possessed that knowledge he failed to turn it to good account at the critical time. It is further demonstrated had they remained in the dip chambers they would have survived.

At the inquest, which was held in the Lackawanna county courthouse, Scranton. November 5th and 6th, voluminous evidence was submitted by men and boys who had passed up the slope at various times on the night of October 29 up to 12:30, all stating under oath that no smoke was noticeable at the location of the light bridge when they passed that spot.

Evidence was also submitted to show that no stove was in use at that point, neither did any steam pipes come in contact or in close proximity to the bridge.

The following verdict was rendered: We, the undersigned, find that Thomas Hill and others came to their death by suffocation due to a fire in the Von Storch Slope. The origin of which is to us unknown, but after listening to testimony introduced we believe it to be of Incendiary origin. We further believe that the Delaware and Hudson Company did everything in its power to save the men and subdue the flames after they were discovered. John D. Keator, Robert Courtwright, Ed. Barrett, Wm. J. Jones, Joseph F. Bausch, Patrick Cusick.