

ACCIDENT AT THE VON STORCH MINE

Coroner and a Jury Are Inquiring Into
the Cause of It.

TESTIMONY HEARD LAST NIGHT

It Was to the Effect That Thomas Hill Was Not a Fire Boss but a Watchman--A Theory That the Men Could Have Saved Their Lives If They Closed Tulley's Gate--Witnesses Who Testified--Inquest Will Be Resumed Tonight.

The coroner's jury impanelled to investigate the Von Storch mine disaster, by which six men lost their lives last Saturday, met in the arbitration room of the court house last night. Eight of the twenty-four witnesses who are to be examined gave their testimony and the sum and substance of their stories were almost identical to previous reports in The Tribune.

Evidence that Thomas Hill, who was known as a fire boss, was merely a watchman, and that if Tulley's door in the New Diamond vein had been opened by the men they could have saved their lives, were the features of the inquest.

Another matter hinted at very strongly last night in the questions to witnesses was the belief that some one deliberately set the mine afire. Here is a sample question:

"Do you think a miner's lamp could have set it afire?"

"No, sir."

"Now, understand me, I don't mean the spark from a lamp, but if the flame itself was applied could the mine be fired?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

That was the way outside Foreman Charles Zeigler presented his idea through Mine Inspector Henry Owen Prytherch, the questioner. The jurors were: John D. Keator, Edward Barrett, James Barrett, Robert Courtright, William Jones and Patrick Cusick. The arbitration room contained possibly fifty men, most of whom were fellow-workmen of the dead miners.

- MAPS OF THE MINE.

Maps showing the workings of the mine were displayed. Promptly at 8 o'clock Coroner S. P. Longstreet called the first witness, Edward Simpkins, the young man who was in charge of a pump and was stationed at a point nearest the fire. He discovered smoke shortly after 1.30 o'clock a. m. Saturday morning and at once started down toward the lower pump house. He went back and found the smoke increasing as he proceeded. Simpkins then went outside and gave the alarm. He afterward went in and rescued two men, sending them out, and then went within 500 feet of the "Light Bridge," where the fire is supposed to have started, but he could see no blaze.

At this point in Simpkin's recitation a man sitting in the front row of seats, broke in with:

"As an interested party, Coroner, can I ask this man a question?"

He was told that he could not. He pressed his point, but was finally silenced.

Simpkins, in continuing his story, said that at one time he was within 150 feet of the place where the men were working. He shouted to them but received no answer. When questioned by Inspector Prytherch, Simpkins said that to his certain knowledge no one had passed up or down the shaft during the night.

He admitted that he went up the slope and returned again at 9.50 o'clock Friday night. "Could any one pass up or down without you seeing him?"

"No."

"What, then, is your idea as to how the fire started?"

"I haven't any," was the answer.

"If a fire was smouldering at the heel of the light bridge could you have detected it?"

"I was positive there was no fire at 9.30 o'clock."

WAS NO OIL THERE.

Coroner Longstreet asked Simpkins whether there was any oil at the light bridge and was told there was not, save what dropped from the oil boxes of the cars.

Thomas Morgan, surveyor for the Delaware and Hudson company, explained the workings of the mine from the maps which he had made. Surveyor Morgan could see conditions under which a fire could smoulder at the light bridge without Simpkins detecting it. He was not asked to mention the conditions.

The other witnesses last night were: Division Superintendent Finlay Ross, Patrick Campbell, fire boss; Outside Foreman Charles Zeigler, Inside Foreman Harry Birbeck and Joseph Yankowski. Superintendent Ross believed that if Tulleys' door, in the Diamond vein, had been closed the smoke and gas would have pursued a channel which would have left free that part of the mine where the men were. He could not explain the fire.