

WAS CAUSED BY FIRE DAMP

Explosion in Slope No. 2, Pratt
Mines, Which Killed Six.

FULL INVESTIGATION HELD

By Mine Inspector James D. Hillhouse and His
Two Assistants—The Official Re-
port in Full.

Yesterday afternoon State Mine Inspector James D. Hillhouse gave out his report of the investigation made by himself and his two assistants, Messrs. Duncan and Culverhouse, of the explosion that occurred in Slope No. 2 at Pratt mines, on Saturday, the 16th inst., which resulted in the death of six negro convicts who were engaged at work in the mine.

The report was made after a careful investigation, and attributes the accident to a fire damp which was generated from a feeder or pocket of gas, liberated by a shot of dynamite in the coal. The gas accumulated in such quantities while the men waited for the dynamite smoke to clear away as to cause the explosion when they returned to work.

According to the report, the mine is one of the best ventilated mines in the state. The following is the report in full.

Investigation made by myself and Assistant Mine Inspectors Culverhouse and Duncan shows the explosion to have been of fire-damp, and not of powder or of dynamite. A careful examination of that portion of the mine where the explosion occurred did not show the presence of any gas on Monday afternoon, a period of sixty hours after the explosion, and in spite of the fact that the ventilation has not been fully restored to its normal condition in that part of the mine. Two small blowers were found in the slope air course, where two of the men worked, but the ventilation in the then impaired condition was sufficient to keep the place free from gas. In the same place it was found that a shot of dynamite, in the coal, had been put off, evidently just prior to the explosion of gas, from the fact that no coal had been removed or disturbed after the shot was fired.

From these conditions we are forced to the conclusions that the shot in the coal liberated a feeder or pocket of gas, which had time to accumulate while the men waited for the dynamite smoke to disappear to such an extent or in such quantity to cause the explosion when the men returned to their working place. None of the six men were bruised or burned except slightly, and it would appear that they were asphyxiated by the after damp.

From the best information obtained I find during the twenty years this mine has been operated and of my own knowledge during my term of office no such pocket or accumulation of gas has been encountered, and the ventilation of the mine is not surpassed in this state at the present time. The accident was very unexpected and could not have been foreseen or prevented. I have always regarded this as being one of the best, if not the best, operated mine in the state. Neither myself nor my assistant inspectors have found gas at any time during any of our visits of inspection to this mine.

It could not be ascertained what quantity of powder or dynamite the men had in their working place at the time of the explosion. The mine is examined regularly every twenty-four hours by a "fire boss" employed for that purpose. This "fire boss" was within 1,200 feet of the scene of the explosion at the time it occurred and found the return air currents all along in their usual good condition. The explosion occurred 12,000 feet, or over two miles from the mouth of the slope, and near this point also the men were found by the relief corps working under the direction of the inspectors.

Respectfully submitted,
J. D. HILLHOUSE,
Chief Mine Inspector.