

GOMER THOMAS EXPLAINS THE SCOFFIELD DISASTER

Tells How the Mine Was Blown Up, But Fails to Place the Responsibility.

State Inspector Says Black Powder Caused the Explosion— Recommendations Made.

Without attaching blame to anyone specially, and, in fact, without fixing the responsibility in any manner for the terrible disaster at the Winter Quarters mine on May 1, when 19 coal miners lost their lives and seven others were injured, State Coal Mine Inspector Gomer Thomas yesterday reported to Governor Wells what he terms the nearest ascertainable cause of the explosion, the results and the warnings to be heeded in the future.

The inspector's official report contains a list of the names of the dead victims and of the injured ones, reported to him by Assistant Mine Superintendent H. O. Williams, together with an opinion from the assistant superintendent as to the cause of the explosion which brought such great sorrow to hundreds of families in Utah.

Inspector Thomas ascribes the cause of the disaster to the accidental exploding of a keg of powder, the flame from which ignited the bags of powder and the explosive coal dust. While he believes that the dust is not explosive under ordinary conditions, he has recommended that the coal company keep the dust wet. Since the reopening of the mine the company has followed the inspector's advice. In the inspector's report his declaration is cited that no explosive coal gas exists in the Winter Quarters mine.

Text of Inspector's Report.

The official report of the state inspector is as follows:

"At about 10:25 on the morning of May 1, 1900, an explosion occurred at the Winter Quarters coal mine, apparently originating in No. 4 mine, by which, according to the latest count after the most careful checking, 19 men lost their lives and seven were injured. One man came out of No. 4 mine uninjured, and 165 came out of No. 1 uninjured. Most of the men in No. 4 mine were killed by force and heat of the explosion. All the men in the first rise were suffocated by after-damp, and more than 100 men in No. 1 mine were suffocated by the after-damp which swept down from No. 4 mine.

No. 1 mine and No. 4 mine are connected, and by reason of such connection high mines suffered a loss by the one explosion.

"It seems from all the evidence available, that some person (Charles Clark) accidentally ignited a keg of powder which caused the dust to rise, thus igniting the dust and carrying the flames from room to room from a point known as Pike's Peak, and the mine-dust vicinity thereof. I find that nine kegs of powder were exploded near this place. Fourteen kegs of black powder exploded in other parts of the mine making a total of twenty-four kegs of black powder exploded, thus adding great force to the explosion.

How the Miners Died.

"Along the line where the powder exploded all the bodies were badly burned, more so than in any other part of the mine. From this place the blast swept along the main and main back entries, and through all the rooms and entries of No. 4 mine, scattering all the combustibles, such as dust, powder, etc., within reach. Part of the blast shot out to the surface, through No. 4 mine tunnel and air shaft and part went through No. 1 mine. The part of the blast that went into No. 1 mine soon lost its force, the heat only reaching as far down as room No. 11, fourth rise, and room No. 7 on the sixth rise, but did not reach the eighth rise.

"There were sixty men smothered by after-damp. These men were found between the seventh and eighth rises. They were not burned and were only a short distance from fresh air.

Many Could Have Saved Themselves.

"All the men working below the fourth level of the eighth rise entries escaped and scarcely left the shock. Only two men, working above this point, came out alive. They were David Uro and one other, and were rescued three and one-half hours after the explosion occurred. Uro was working in room No. 11 of the eighth rise. He remained in his room, not knowing an explosion had occurred, and there being sufficient air in his place his life was saved. All the other men on this level hearing the explosion ran, trying to make their escape, and encountered the after-damp, to which they succumbed. I am of the opinion that had they remained in their working places, or if they had gone down the eighth rise entry, many of them would have been saved.

"The mine foreman having been killed and all those who were acquainted with the location of the places where the men in No. 4 mine were working, having been killed, made it difficult to rescue the men, as many places had caved and buried them up, and also made it difficult to gain information as to the cause of the explosion.

No Explosive Gas in Mine.

"At no time has there been known to exist in any of the Winter Quarters mines, any explosive gases, before or since the explosion, were the same as have been in existence for the past twenty years in the Winter Quarters mines Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4. These mines are all on the same vein of coal.

"In the year 1899 1,400 kegs of black powder were used in mining coal in the Winter Quarters mines. It has always been a practice for each miner to take his powder into the mine by the keg. Not alone in these mines has this been the practice, but in nearly all of the mines of the different states, and this has been done regardless of dust or other surrounding dangers.

"It is my opinion that the dust in the Winter Quarters mine is not of a very explosive nature, as we find that there have been hundreds of windy or blown-out shots in the mines, with no serious results therefrom. In one case John D. Jones accidentally exploded three-quarters of a keg of black powder, and the dust did not ignite. This was in mine No. 2, which mine developed as much dust as the one that exploded. It is connected with No. 4, being a continuation of the same vein of coal.

"For the safety of the miners in the future, I have recommended that not more than six and a quarter pounds of powder be allowed to be taken into the mine by any one miner.

"I have also suggested in the com-

pany that they put a watering system in all the Winter Quarters mines, so that every place can be sprinkled. This the company has done, and No. 1 mine has started to work under the new rules which I have recommended. This will make the work safer, as the sprinkling says the dust, and there will be a great deal less quantity of powder in the mine.

"I have submitted samples of coal and dust taken from these mines for analysis, but have not received the return yet.

Supposition of Probabilities.

Inspector Thomas' recent reference is made to the statements of Assistant Mine Superintendent Williams, under date of May 15, as follows:

"The time and origin of the explosion are not yet definitely known. The fact that the mine foreman and most of the men who were killed, making it difficult to ascertain evidence. No explosive gas is known to have been seen in any of the Winter Quarters mines, either before or since the explosion. The methods of mining at the time of the explosion were the same as have been in practice for the past twenty years in Winter Quarters Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4, which are all on the same vein of coal.

"Investigation that has made to the supposition that the explosion probably originated by an accidental discharge of black powder, and was augmented by coal dust. The explosion seems to have spread from the upper part of No. 4 mine, the after-damp extending some distance beyond the force of the explosion. Many of the deaths in No. 1 resulted from this after-damp. From the lower levels in No. 1 mine about 165 workmen escaped unhurt.

Results of Examinations.

Supplemental to the state inspector's report is a lengthy type-writing report of the technical and scientific examination of the mine by inspector Thomas, Mine Superintendent Williams and Robert Percey and George V. Snow, expert mining engineers. The supplemental report of the examination made of the mine details the condition in which the mine was found after the explosion. Every room and opening was explored in order to ascertain the facts of explosion and the notes.

At the time of the examination it was found that the flame produced by the burning of the dust, ignited by the explosion of powder in the first instance, had spread in the form of a fan, covering long distances from the originating point of the explosion. The flame, along the path of the fatal flame and heat, accompanied by force and violence, but as a mass of black powder dust in the rooms not connected directly with the main entry, which exploded, although they had been touched by the heat and flame.

Giant Powder Found.

All along it was believed that fifty-six sticks of giant powder had also exploded, but inspector Thomas yesterday received a telegram from Bonfield, stating the dynamite sticks had been found, thus settling the theory that the giant had contributed to the awful force of the explosion.

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