

## **May 19, 1902; Fraterville Mine, Coal Creek, Tenn.; 184 Killed**

*(From report of Commissioner of Labor, 1902 (Bureau of Mines files) )*

The mine opened in 1870 was one of the oldest in the State and had been in almost continuous operation; 200 men and boys were employed. The furnace was not fired from Saturday night until Monday morning, and ventilation was stagnated. The mine was considered to be nongassy although gas was known to be present in that section of the old and abandoned Knoxville Iron Company mine into which openings had recently been made.

The miners had not been in the mine more than an hour when at 7:20 a.m. thick smoke and dust were seen coming from the ventilating shaft and from the mouth of the mine. Rescuing parties were organized and penetrated about 200 feet where they came upon the body of a victim of the afterdamp. They could go no farther and returned to await dispersal of the deadly gas.

At 4 o'clock a rescue corps again entered. Brattices had been destroyed, and along the main entry the force of the explosion was terrific, timbers and cogs placed to hold a squeeze were blown out, mine cars, wheels, and doors were shattered, and bodies were dismembered. In other parts of the mine no heat or violence was shown, and suffocation had brought death to those whose bodies were found there.

A barricade had been placed across 15 right entry near the heading to protect the miners there from the deadly afterdamp. The 26 men found there must have lived for several hours, as notes were written as late as 2 p.m.

At first it was thought that the gas had come from the old mine, but later inspectors indicated that the gas was liberated from overhanging strata by the "creep" that had begun with unusual violence shortly before the explosion. The gas accumulated because of inadequate ventilation and was ignited by the open lights. Dust was thick in the mine and was blown up and burned in the explosion. No sprinkling was done.

Recommendations by the mine inspector that had not been carried out were for cleaning and enlarging airways, rebuilding brattices and doors, increasing the furnace capacity, tests for gas, and removing dust.

Testimony given before the commissioner on June 6, 1902, was emphatic in condemning the laxity of the officials, as:

The mine foreman was not competent, and the company had not installed a fan as the State inspector had recommended.