

TERRIBLE CALAMITY IN THE KEARSARGE MINE

Superintendent R. B. Turner and Seven Miners Are Overcome by Deadly Mineral Fumes

Originating From Conflagration Accidentally Started in the Boiler House at Mouth of Tunnel

Most Horrible Holocaust Ever Recorded in Madison County Mining Operations

Particulars of Last Friday's Disaster at Summit—Holding of the Inquest and Verdicts of the Jurors—Brief Sketch of the Lives of the Victims—Site Buried in Butte and Two Rescued in Hillsdale Cemetery, Virginia City.

THE DEAD
R. B. TURNER, Superintendent.
GEORGE M. ALLEN.
JOHN TOBIN.
WILLIAM FLEMING.
JAMES POWERS.
ED. LAHERY.
ROBERT O'DONNELL.
MATT ALBIE.

The Kearsarge mine at Summit was the scene Friday morning at 5:30 of one of the worst mining fatalities that ever occurred in the history of Madison county. R. B. Turner and seven other men lost their lives from being suffocated by smoke and gas from a fire that destroyed the tunnel house at the entrance of the main tunnel to the mine. The boiler house and blacksmith shop at the mouth of the tunnel caught fire between 5 and 5:30 in the morning. The fire started from the boiler house and is supposed either to have originated from a spark from the smokestack which fell on the roof or from the overheated stack to the roof direct where the stack passed through it. The roof of this building was very inflammable, as the building had been erected for a number of years, and in consequence was like tinder.

Charles Bradshaw, the blacksmith, was the only man on shift at that hour except the four miners who went on at 11 o'clock. He went from the building for a few minutes, and upon his return saw a small light or fire. He tried to extinguish it, but it spread so rapidly that he could do nothing, and soon the whole building was in flames.

Immediately after the fire alarm was given the whole camp was awakened. The men scarcely took time to properly dress themselves. Robert Turner was among the first to arrive at the burning building. He at once thought of the safety of the men in the mine. Seeing that it was impossible to enter the tunnel through the burning building, he went to the Apex shaft, which had been closely covered. The covering was taken off and the air was found free from smoke and gas. He asked for three volunteers to go with him down the shaft to rescue the four men who were at work in the mine. Lahery, Allen, Auble and Hurter responded and went with Mr. Turner down the shaft, with Lahery in the lead and Auble next to the last. The shaft is 146 feet down to the level which connects it with the workings of the Kearsarge. It is generally supposed that the men were overcome with the gas and fell to the bottom of the shaft. It is thought by some that Auble not being a miner, and who insisted to be allowed to go down, was the first to be overcome by the gas, fell first, and in his descent stripped the ladder. Hurley, realizing that he was being overcome by the gases, retreated up the ladder. Just as he reached the cap rock he became unconscious, and if it had not been for Callen, who grabbed him, he too would have fallen to the bottom.

By this time the gases were coming from that quarter as lowered. All this time the miners working in the mine and on the lower level were unconscious of their danger. It is supposed that they even fired their rounds of holes, as the reports were heard a little after 6 o'clock.

As soon as the burning building had burned itself out it was found that the timbers of the tunnel were on fire and had burned back about 50 feet. The men soon put out this fire. After the workings had partially freed them-

selves from the gases the work of rescue was pushed with all vigor. The body of Tobin was found about 480 feet from the mouth of the tunnel. From the position of the body it is supposed that he tried to escape. The bodies of Powers, Fleming and O'Donnell were found at the bottom of the mine, and were recovered shortly after 3 p. m. As the Apex shaft had over 30 feet of water in it it was a difficult matter to recover the bodies of Turner, Allen, Auble and Lahery. A new hoist had not been made, so a whim was rigged up and about half of the water was taken out. Then grappling hooks were used and the bodies fished out. All of them excepting Turner were badly mangled.

The bodies of the eight men were brought to the city and placed in the undertaking parlors of R. R. Herndon, where they were prepared for burial. The bodies of Mr. Turner, Allen, Powers and Fleming were taken to Butte on Saturday. Mrs. Turner and son Wilson accompanied the remains of the husband and father to Butte. With Mrs. Turner were Dr. Donald Campbell and Miss Crane of Butte. She was met at Whitehall by her uncle, General Lester Wilson, and Mrs. Davis Wilson, an aunt, both of Bozeman.

Jack Turner, a brother, and his wife of Denver arrived in Butte Monday evening to attend the funeral. The origin of the fire and the attempt to extinguish it is told by several witnesses at the coroner's inquest on the death of John Tobin, and is given below.

Justice of the Peace N. D. Johnson, acting coroner, and the county attorney, M. M. Duncan, were at once summoned to the scene of the catastrophe by the management.

As Tobin's body was the first recovered, and it was some time before the others could be taken out, the coroner summoned the following men to sit as a coroner's jury: Thomas Duncan, Thos. Ford, S. H. Ribbey, Ed. Hart, Henry Pomeroy, W. A. Stevenson.

After viewing the remains the inquest adjourned to Monday, for the purpose of taking testimony. The inquest was held in the court room and the witnesses were examined by M. M. Duncan, county attorney. The evidence of the principal witnesses is as follows:

Dr. H. A. White, the company physician, was called to Summit, and was one of the first to arrive there from this city. He was the first witness examined at the coroner's inquest, and testified that he had examined the body of John Tobin when it was brought out of the tunnel, to see whether life was extinct or not. He said that the man was dead, and that he did not examine the body to ascertain the cause of death. He was asked by the county attorney if he could say how the deceased came to his death, and he answered he could not.

Dr. J. J. Mahoney, who was also summoned to the scene of the accident, was the next witness examined, and his testimony was corroborative of Dr. White's.

Charles Bradshaw, who was on shift and was the fireman during the night that the fire occurred, was the next witness examined. His story of the origin of the fire is as follows:

Q. Were you at the tunnel house at the Kearsarge mine at the time the fire started?

A. I was out at the water closet at the time the fire started.

Q. Now just tell the jury all the circumstances and facts connected with the starting of this fire and the burning of this building as you know them.

A. It was about a quarter past 5 and we built a fire up at the other boiler there so as to start the hoist on the shaft. I had taken about all the wood I had in, and a quarter past 5 I thought I would throw in what wood I

had left there. I started to put the wood in these two fires at that time. At 6 o'clock we always blow the whistle to wake the day men up. I went out to the water closet, and when I came out of there I saw a light in there that I knew was not coming from the lantern in there. I rushed in. There is a pile of wood between the water closet and the shaft house. As soon as I got around that I saw that the light did not come from the lanterns, and I tried to get a hose on the pump, but the flame ran so swift that I saw I could not make it. There was a bucket there that we had to wash in, and I ran to take the bucket and see if I could not get it out with that. And by the time I got the bucket I saw there was no show then to save it at all. Then I grabbed for the whistle, and I could only hold on to give it one pull. Fire was all around me. It went just as though the whole thing was coal oil. Andy Quilty was sleeping in the office right next to it, and that was the next thought that struck me, that he would be burned in.

A few minutes. I ran and kicked on the door and yelled at him as loud as I could. He jumped out of bed. I told him that the works were on fire there and to get out as quick as he could. Then I ran out again and grabbed the poker I had been firing with, and went up on top of the roof and tried to get hold of the whistle wire to try to blow the whistle with the poker. As soon as Andy Quilty got outside he yelled fire as hard as he could, and I yelled as hard as I could. When I saw I could not get the wire with the poker I had, Andy started up the hill, and I said, "I will cut those horses in there loose," and he said, "I am going up there to let those men out at the air shaft up on top."

Q. This building was entirely destroyed by fire, was it?

A. Yes, it was entirely destroyed; there was nothing left of it at all.

Q. State whether or not this building was over the mouth of the tunnel of the Kearsarge mine?

A. There were outlets to it all the way around. It was over the mouth of the tunnel, but there were outlets all the way around.

Q. What do you mean by these outlets?

A. You might say it was not a permanent building; it was a sort of a patched up shed.

Q. Was it a fireproof building?

A. No, it was not a fireproof building at all.

Q. How many men were working in the mine through this tunnel at the time this fire occurred?

A. I think there was only three in the mine at the time. The other fellows went in voluntarily.

Q. That is from the top?

A. Yes, Mr. Quilty went up there and opened the doors in the first place, and Mr. Turner came over. I saw that he was excited and wanted to go through the fire into the tunnel. Mr. Quilty came down from the top of the hill and said if the men would stay in the bottom they would be all right.

Q. Which Quilty was it?

A. Andy Quilty.

Q. For what purpose was this building used—the building that burned?

A. It was used for a small engine that did the sawing, the blacksmith shop and engine house; that is about all you would call it.

Q. Can you tell us where the fire started?

A. The fire started in the roof of the building, right around the smokestack.

Q. Had you been doing any blacksmithing that morning before the fire?

A. No.

Q. Was there any oil of any kind kept in the building?

A. No; no more than the oil for the engine.

Andrew Quilty, the foreman of the mine, testified as follows:

Q. State the circumstances and the facts concerning this fire as far as you know them, Mr. Quilty.

A. I do know that Mr. Bradshaw kicked in my door and saw the fire and said the building is on fire. I got out

of bed in my night clothes and stepped into the shaft house, a space of about three feet, and I saw the fire and saw how much of it was on fire, the building stepped back into my bed room, got my clothes and oversalls, put them on and came right back. I tried to get into the face or mouth of the tunnel. The fire was so strong and so far from the mouth of the tunnel that I could not approach it. Then I thought about the Apex shaft on top of the hill and the doors being closed down. I went right up and opened the doors. I thought it was the only way to save the men by any possibility at that time, by leaving that smoke go right through.

Q. You did that?

A. Yes sir.

Q. Then what happened, what did you do?

A. After opening the doors I came down to the yard where the fire was and met about a dozen men there. I asked them if we could not get the fire out in any way at all possibly, and I sent them after all the buckets we could possibly get in the camp. We fought the fire then as well as we could until we got them out of the tunnel.

Q. You say, we fought the fire then as well as we could until we got them out of the tunnel. What else happened?

A. My next orders were for to fight the fire in the tunnel and to follow it up until they got to the end and we did so. I judge that was about 70 feet, long before we got the fire out.

Q. It was burning in the timbers there, was it?

A. Yes sir.

Q. Who is the owner of the Kearsarge mine, if you know, Mr. Quilty?

A. I do not know.

Q. For whom were you working?

A. Mr. Millard.

Q. Just Mr. Millard individually?

A. I cannot say, he is the man who hired me.

Q. How long have you been working in there?

A. Since the 6th of last November, 1902.

Q. How many men did you ordinarily work in the mine at the time of this accident, about that time?

A. At the time of the accident we worked four men.

Q. How many were working in there the day before?

A. There were eight men in the mine.

Q. How many is the fewest you have ever worked when working at all?

A. The fewest we have ever worked in the last 90 days has been two.

Q. The most or greatest number, about how many, in one shift?

A. The greatest number in one shift, including the men under ground, carpenter and engineer, in all 10 men.

Q. How long has this building burned been erected, Mr. Quilty?

A. It has been erected. I could not say, it was there when I came there.

Q. For what purpose was the building used?

A. The building as far as I could judge, was for covering the boilers and for saw mill. That is what we have used it for, and for sorting ore.

Q. Did you use it for a blacksmith shop?

A. Yes, there was a blacksmith shop there.

Q. State whether or not the building is constructed over the mouth of the tunnel of the Kearsarge mine.

A. Yes, part of it.

Q. It enclosed the tunnel, did it not, the mouth of the tunnel?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. How long has it been used for a blacksmith shop?

A. For the last 8 or 9 months.

Q. Were you acquainted with the deceased, in his life time, John Tobin?

A. Yes sir.

Q. Was he, at the time of the fire, in the employment of you or the people for whom you were working?

A. Yes sir.

Q. What was the nature of his work?

A. Miner.

Q. Was he mining in the Kearsarge mine in the night or morning of the fire?

A. Yes.

Q. Is he now dead?

A. Yes sir.

Q. You have seen his dead body have you?

A. Yes.

Q. Can you state how he came by his death?

A. No, I cannot exactly state.

Q. Where was his body found, if you know?

A. It was found on what we call the tunnel level.

Q. When?

A. On the morning of the 6th of November, 1903.

Q. Who found his body?

A. I believe John Quilty and a gentleman called Bicknell. I think they were the first two men who came to him.

Q. He died or was killed on this morning, did he not?

A. Yes sir.

Q. You say he was found in the tunnel, you mean the tunnel of the Kearsarge mine, do you?

A. Yes, the tunnel of the Kearsarge mine.

Q. Taking everything into consideration, what in your opinion caused his death?

A. My opinion is that it must have been caused through this gas or smoke, gas I think.

Q. Do you know how far from the mouth of the tunnel his body was found?

A. Yes sir, I think about 480 feet.

Q. Were there any other outlets than through the Apex shaft and through the tunnel entrance?

A. There are three outlets from the 150 to the tunnel level, two on the south side and one on the north.

Q. Outlets to the surface, what outlets to the surface have you?

A. One Apex shaft and the mouth of the tunnel.

Q. They are the only two outlets to the surface?

A. Yes sir.

Q. The four men that were in the mine on the morning of the fire, were working in the breast of the 150-foot level?

A. That is right sir.

Q. Where was the engineer at the time of the fire, do you know?

A. I don't know, he was after coming off shift.

Q. Do you know anything about the family relations of John Tobin, deceased?

A. Yes, he has a family, I don't know, three or four children. I know his wife is dead. That is all I know, I think his children are in Helena at the orphan's home.

Q. Do you know about what the age of John Tobin was?

A. I would judge about 40 years.

Joseph T. Bicknell was the next witness examined. He testified to the effect that he was one of the men who found the body of Tobin and helped to carry it out. His first indication of the fire was the blowing of the whistle. He testified further that the fire had gained such headway when the men arrived that it was impossible to put it out, but were directed to put water on the fire at the mouth of the tunnel. His evidence was corroborative of the testimony already given as to the use of the building and the finding of the body of Tobin.

John Quilty, a contractor, was the next witness, and his evidence was practically the same as that of Bicknell.

W. B. Millard was then called as a witness and examined as to the ownership of the Kearsarge mine. He testified that it was owned by the Alder company, of which he was treasurer.

John Byrne, the mining inspector, was the next witness called, and testified to the effect that Friday morning he had been notified of the accident by Mr. Millard, and that he had hastened to the scene as soon as possible. He arrived in this city Saturday evening and went to the mine Sunday, and had made an examination of the workings of the mine. He found that the property was in reasonably good condition, and that he found the means of exit good. He testified that the Apex shaft was a reasonably good one besides the tunnel. He further found that a building had been maintained at the mouth of the tunnel which did not comply with the law. He said that he had first been notified of this about the 28th of September last, and that he had written Mr. Millard regarding it. Mr. Millard wrote him a letter asking him (Byrne) to visit the property at once and make the necessary recommendations, as he wished to comply with the letter of the law. Mr. Byrne wrote a letter in reply, in which he stated that he expected to visit the mine within 30 days, and that in the meantime to be careful and to use every precaution. This letter

(Continued on Page Four)

TERRIBLE CALAMITY

(Continued from Page One.)

was accepted by Mr. Millard as permission to maintain the buildings until the visit of the state mine inspector. The testimony of Mr. Byrne held the company responsible, but the coroner's jury, taking into consideration the correspondence between the manager of the company and Mr. Byrne, did not so consider the company, and rendered the following verdict Monday night, and it was signed by all the jurors:

"That the said John Tobin came to his death on the 7th day of November, 1903, in the tunnel of the Kearsarge mine, about 400 feet from the mouth thereof, said mine being situated about eight miles south of Virginia City; that his death was accidental, being caused by inhaling smoke and gas from the burning building at the mouth of the tunnel, and the said fire originated around the smoke stack of one of the boilers. We further find that the Alder company, the owners of the said Kearsarge mine, had taken all reasonable precaution for the prevention of fire in the building at the mouth of the tunnel of said mine, and in so doing had complied with the recommendations of the state inspector of mines as shown by the correspondence placed in evidence. We also find that the said Alder company technically violated section 3 of an act entitled "An Act to Further Protect Underground Miners," session laws of 1903, by maintaining a blacksmith shop in said building, but that said blacksmith shop in no wise contributed to the death of said Tobin."

Another inquest was held Tuesday on the remains of William Fleming, James Powers and Robert O'Donnell, the remaining three men who were on shift when the fire occurred. The reason that a second inquest was held was purely accidental as a number of the jurors who were summoned on the first did not see the bodies of the latter three. The evidence at this inquest was practically the same as that already given. The verdict reached is as follows:

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"We, the jury, find that James Fleming, aged 56 years, James Powers, aged 28 years, and Robert O'Donnell, aged about 25 years, came to their death at the bottom of the winze, on the 150-foot level of the Kearsarge mine, situated about eight miles south of Virginia City, Madison county, Montana, on the morning of the sixth day of November, 1903, from suffocation by gas caused by the burning of the tunnel house at the entrance to the Kearsarge tunnel.

"We further find, from the evidence, that the fire started on the roof of the boiler house, immediately around the smokestack.

"R. A. VICKERS, Foreman.

"LEWIS T. KISER.

"JOHN S. ALLEN.

"ED D. HART.

"FRANK B. JACKSON.

"SOLOMON WILES."

A third inquest was held Tuesday afternoon on the bodies of Robert B. Turner, Ed. Laherty, Matt Aubel, and George M. Allen. These are the men who went down the Apex shaft to rescue the miners who were in the mine. The jury was composed of John S. Allen, Ed. D. Hart, Solomon Wiles, F. B. Jackson, Lewis T. Kiser and Thomas H. Teal. The verdict reached is as follows:

"That the said Robert B. Turner, Matt Aobe, Ed Laherty and George M. Allen came to their death in the shaft of the Apex mine, on the morning of the 6th day of November, 1903, at Summit, about eight miles south of Virginia City, Madison county, Montana; that the cause of their death was being overcome by gas and smoke and their falling from the ladder to the bottom of the shaft; that the deaths were accidental, due to their own voluntary acts."

The untimely death of Robert B. Turner in the heroic effort to save the miners in his employ is deeply deplored in this city and wherever he was known. Mr. Turner was yet a young man just in the prime of life, not being more than 35 years of age. He stood at the head of his profession and was recognized as authority on cyaniding.

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Mr. Turner was a native of Chicago, but removed to Colorado with his parents, when a child. His father, who has been dead several years, was state auditor of Colorado for a number of years. In the schools of Denver Robert obtained his education which he supplemented by a course in the Golden school of mines. He made a specialty of cyaniding. He started out early for himself in business. He superintended the erection and construction of several cyanide plants in Colorado. Especially notable in this regard was his work at Cripple Creek. In 1888 he came to Montana and located in Butte. His first business venture in this state was the erection of the Bozeman Hotel at Bozeman. The hotel business not being to his liking, he re-entered the mining business. He secured control of the Revenue mine, which he developed and erected thereon a cyanide mill to treat the ores. It proved to be a success. He soon afterwards sold the mine to Kansas City capitalists and purchased the Madisonian mine, which he developed and sold to L. Z. Leiter of

1903 Kearsarge Mine fire NEWS

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Chicago, After the sale of this property he went to Georgia and spent some time mining there, but believing that Montana was the best state, after all, he returned here and soon thereafter became associated with W. B. Millard. His work here, while extending over a period of nearly two years, was just beginning to show the ability and worth of the man. Success was in sight.

He was small in stature and weighed only 112 pounds at the time of his death, but he was a bundle of nerve and energy. He had a premonition that he would not live to be 37 years of age. Just recently he mentioned this to a friend. He was a kindly natured man; he enjoyed society but had little time for its pleasures. His home life was ideal. He and his wife and son Willson, now 11 years of age, were good fellows together. They were companions. He met and wooed his wife, whose maiden name was Miss Sella Hatch, while he was engaged in putting up the Bozeman hotel. Mrs. Turner is a niece of General Lester Willson of Bozeman. Mr. Turner, besides his life insurance, which amounts to several thousand dollars, leaves quite an interest in various mining enterprises.

The remains were taken to Butte where the funeral was held Tuesday forenoon from St. John's Episcopal church, Rev. S. C. Blackiston, officiating. The pall bearers were: George Casey, Thomas M. Hodgins, F. C. McBride of Butte, Roger C. Knox of Revenue, Carl Hand of Rochester, and A. J. Huneke of Butte. The floral offerings were beautiful and profuse.

George M. Allan, one of the men who lost his life in the Kearsarge mine fire, was very well known in Butte, where he had lived for 12 or 14 years. During 1897 and 1898 he was assessor of Silver Bow county, having been elected to that office on a populist nomination. Prior to that time he was an engineer at the Pennsylvania mine for a number of years. He was a candidate for re-election to the office of assessor, but was defeated by E. J. Laurandeau, the democratic nominee. After his term of office Mr. Allan engaged in mining, but was not successful. About a year ago he went to the coast and remained there for some months, returning to Butte about six months ago. He was a native of Grass Valley, Cal., where relatives reside. He was married in Butte, but his wife died there about a year ago. About Oct. 19 he left Butte and came to Madison county at the solicitation of a friend, and last Thursday his sister, Mrs. R. B. McLaggan of 428 Garden avenue, Butte, received a letter from him, in which he stated that he had accepted a position as engineer at the Kearsarge mine.

John Tobin, another of those who lost their lives in the Kearsarge mine, was formerly a Butte miner, living at Centerville. His brother, William, lives in Butte, and was shift boss at the Parrot up to the time of the shutdown.

James Powers was a brother of John Powers, who conducts the Rafferty house on West Quartz street. He also formerly lived in Butte.

William Fleming leaves a family in Walkerville. He was 50 years old and for many years was a miner in Butte.

Edward Lafferty left Butte about two months ago, and had worked in the Butte mines for three or four years. He was only about 28 years of age. His parents live at Helmville.

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The funeral of Mr. Allen was held from the residence of his sister, Mrs. R. B. McLaggin, at 2 p. m. on Tuesday, the Rev. T. E. Burrough of the Presbyterian church officiating.

The remains of John Tobin, James Powers and William Flemming were laid to rest in Butte Monday. The funeral of John Tobin was particularly sad to those who attended, on account of the presence of his five orphan children, who came from the St. Joseph orphan asylum at Helena in charge of a Sister, to see their only surviving supporter consigned to earth.

The remains of Matt Aubie and Robert O'Donnell were buried in Hillside cemetery, this city. The funeral was a double one, and was from the undertaking rooms of R. R. Herndon. It was in charge of the local lodge of the Miners' union. Dr. J. J. Mahoney read the Catholic burial service at the graves. Some very pretty floral offerings were given by some of our kind and thoughtful people.