

INQUIRY INTO CAUSE OF THE AUCHINCLOSS DISASTER.

Engineer Fine and a Number of Other Witnesses Were Examined Yesterday.

Deputy Coroner F. B. Brown, of Luzerne county, yesterday afternoon began an inquest into the cause of the accident which resulted in the death of ten men in the Auchincloss shaft at Nanticoke, on Wednesday, Nov. 2. The jurors are: John Reagan, Daniel Powell, T. R. Callary, Samuel Powell, W. H. Oldfield, of Nanticoke, and James O'Donnell, of Plymouth. Mine Inspector James Martin, of Plains, assisted in the examination. Attorney D. R. Reese represented the D. L. and W. company. W. H. Carne, a member of the executive board of the United Mine Workers of America, and Attorney T. D. Shea were also present, together with many interested spectators. The inquest was held in Smoulter's hall. The most important witness was Engineer Jacob W. Fine, who was in charge of the engine when the accident occurred. He was calm and his testimony could not be shaken. His face showed plainly the severe strain through which he had passed and it seemed a relief for him to speak. He said:

"I cannot tell what caused this accident. The engines were running slowly in order that the cage might go on to the fans easy. When within about forty feet of the stopping place I reversed the lever and the engines flew like lightning. I cannot tell what it was or what did it. I shut off the steam and applied the brake and stuck to my post until the pieces began falling where I stood, when I jumped through the window. I have been an engineer for nearly ten years and never had any trouble with this machinery before, but believe that for an instant something was wrong. What it was, no man can tell.

"Have never been advised by any one in authority to be more careful. Some men had asked me to be lowered slower while others said too much time was consumed in this respect. I went as nearly in accordance to the mine law as I was capable. Mr. Phillips did not say the engines were out of order. It was my duty to examine appliances on one shift and the other engineer on the other. Never had an accident before. Mr. Snyder said that when he had trouble with the engine the throttle stuck. I did not tell any one that the throttle stuck for me. I heard of an accident at this place a long while ago, but it was before I went to this colliery. I handled the machinery just as when the other carriages were lowered and was not excited and am not a drinking man.

Mr. Phillips, engineer, who worked cross shift to Jacob W. Fine, testified as follows: "I am an engineer at the Auchincloss mine, but was not at the engine house when the accident occurred. Examined the engine after the accident and found steam blowing off, injector broken, reverse lever in center and one brake on. There are four levers—one for the throttle, another for the reverse and two for the brakes. These are about six or eight inches apart. All are in front and cannot say that any one would be likely to take hold of the wrong lever. Never had any complaint about men being hoisted too fast. The machinery, to the best of my knowledge, was in perfect order."

John Mundkowski testified that he had been employed as headman at No.

1 shaft, Auchincloss mine, for about one year. On the morning of the accident he noticed nothing wrong until it was about time for the fourth carriage to reach the bottom, when the empty cage shot up past the landing and did not stop. From all appearances the engine was running at the regular rate of speed, except just at the last it quickened. There were nine men on when I counted, and I afterward allowed another to get on. Never heard any complaints from the men about being hoisted or lowered too fast.

William Morgan testified that he was outside foreman at the Auchincloss colliery but that Mr. Fine was an engineer at that place when he went there. Mr. Fine was thoroughly competent. A sudden shock might throw the reverse lever, but cannot say positively.

P. H. Devers, assistant mine foreman, testified that his knowledge was confined to the finding of the bodies, as his duties were inside the mine. At the time of the accident he was not far away, but cannot say what was the cause.

Never heard any complaints that the men were hoisted too fast. Fans were open at Baltimore vein, where the carriage was broken. Have known Mr. Fine about one year, and believe him to be an honest, sober and competent man.

John Rinehejmer, master mechanic for the Vulcan Iron Works, at Wilkes-Barre, testified that on Monday last he made a careful inspection of the machinery and found everything in perfect order. Different parts of the machinery had been examined, and no trace of anything wrong could be discovered. The placing of levers overhead or underneath was merely a matter of taste and the ones at the Auchincloss, underneath, would be his preference. The machinery at this plant is first-class in every particular and all appliances for safety that can be used are there. In September there was a small leakage of steam and that had been repaired, but that would be no detriment to the working of the machinery.

H. G. Davis, of Kingston, superintendent for the company in that district, stated that he arrived at the Auchincloss colliery on the morning of the accident about forty minutes after it happened. He made no examination of the machinery, but set to work to rescue the men. It was thought best not to make an examination of the machinery, etc., until after the last body was found. Cannot say what was the cause of the accident. A cage forty feet from the fans if not stopped and traveling at a rapid rate would go through them and break the carriage. The engines were used for the first time after the accident that same forenoon. They responded without any repairs, except the signals and rope, which had become detached from the cone. From the fans to the bottom of the mine the distance is about 630 feet. There is an opening at the bottom, but it is not passable.

Joseph Mazarowski, John Nahodia and Joseph Lynch, employees who were waiting to be lowered into the mine, testified that the carriage was running at a rapid rate when it passed the gates. The inquest adjourned to meet at the call of the coroner.