

DISASTER INQUEST.

Coroner Investigating the Auchincloss Accident.

Engineer Said He Did Not Know What Happened or What Was the Cause of the Accident—Testimony That the Machinery Was in Good Order, Inquest Not Finished.

At Smoulder Hall in Nanticoke yesterday afternoon the inquest to ascertain the cause of the Auchincloss mine disaster by which ten men met a horrible death, by falling down the shaft on Wednesday, Nov. 2d, was held. Deputy coroner F. B. Brown of Wilkes-Barre presided and the following named were chosen as jurors: 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. Rees represented the D. L. & W. Co. W. H. Carne, a member of the executive board of the U. M. W. of A., and attorney T. D. Shea were also present, together with many interested spectators.

ENGINEER PHILLIPS.

The first witness was Ivor Phillips, engineer who worked cross shift to Jacob W. Fine, and he testified as follows: I am an engineer at the Auchincloss mine but was not at the engine house when the accident occurred. Have been an engineer for some time, was formerly a pump runner and took the place of Mr. Snyder. 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. Did not tell Mr. Fine that the engine was not working properly. I am not acquainted with Mr. Snyder and do not know anything about his accident. I was not there at that time. Abstract of mine laws is posted and with its contents I am familiar. We use about two minutes each trip in hoisting and lowering men. Usually from twelve to fifteen carriages of men are lowered every morning.

THE HEADMAN TESTIFIES.

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. He did not see any one hurt and did not run until the sheave wheel was torn off. Had no knowledge of position of "fans" at the bottom. Men are not hoisted as fast as coal. I am sure there were only ten men on the cage and did not pull any one off. There were nine men on when I counted and I afterward allowed another to get on. Never formed an opinion as to whether the men were hoisted or lowered too fast. Never heard any complaints from the men.

THE OUTSIDE FOREMAN.

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. Cannot give the cause of death of the men. Did not examine the appliances—this was delegated to the engineer, who is a competent man. There was no signature on file in the office that morning that all appliances had been examined.

BELIEVED ENGINEER COMPETENT.

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. I descended No. 2 shaft as soon as possible after the accident to learn if there was any sign of life. Examined the landings carefully and on my way down found coats, shoes and tape lines.

Never heard any complaints that the men were hoisted too fast. Know nothing of the machinery outside. Fans were open at Baltimore vein where the carriage was broken. Have been employed by the D. L. & W. Co for about eighteen years. Have known Mr. Fine about one year and believe him to be an honest, sober and competent man.

THE ENGINEER TESTIFIES.

Much interest naturally attached to the testimony of Jacob W. Fine, the engineer. 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 of 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.

MACHINERY IN GOOD ORDER.

John Rinkeimer, 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.

OTHER TESTIMONY.

H. G. Davis of Kingston, superintendent for this 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. Between 140 and 150 men are employed in this mine. 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.

Adjourned to meet at the call of the coroner.

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