

MINE EXPLOSION CARRIES SIX SABBATH TOILERS INTO ETERNITY

Frightful Disaster at Grapevine Works of United
States Coal and Coke Co., at Wilcoe.

SIX, POSSIBLY
SEVEN, KILLED

Not One Left to Tell the
Cause of the Catastrophe.

THOUSANDS THROU SHAFT'S
MOUTH ENTIRE AFTERNOON

Work of Rescue Slow and Laborious
Scenes About the Mine While
Wives and Children Waited
to Identify Their
Loved Ones

The Dead:
LAWRENCE HYDEN, white.
MIKE PETERSHETE, white.
UNKNOWN HUNGARIAN.
THOS. MINNIS, colored.
TOM JEFFERSON, colored.
JOHN WOODFORD, colored.

The quiet of Sunday was broken by
a fearful explosion, that jarred the
mountains, and sent six, probably
seven, men to their long home.

Three Hungarians, Lawrence
Hyden, Mike Petershete, and one

whose name was not learned, and
three colored men, Tom Minnis, Tom
Jefferson and John Woodford, were
killed by an explosion of gas in the
Grape Vine shaft of the United States
Coal and Coke Company, at Wilcoe,
Sunday afternoon between twelve and
one o'clock.

The men were employed in laying
track and removing slate at the lower
seam of this operation, known as the
Pocahontas seam, 153 feet within the
earth. A number of men who were
engaged in the same work eighty feet
above the victims of this terrible
catastrophe, were shocked by the con-
cussion, but none was injured.

The dead men were horribly mutil-
ated, their bodies being badly torn,
and one had his entire clothing blown
from his body, and was as nude as
when he was ushered into the world.

During the week days there are
nearly one hundred men employed in
mining the coal from this seam, and
while it is unfortunate that the men
were engaged in this work on the

Sabbath, whether they were laboring
of their own free will, or were re-
quested to by the company, it is for-
tunate that the explosion occurred on
that day, for had it happened while
the full force were engaged the loss of
life would have been appalling, as not
one of the unfortunate men who were
in the shaft were left to tell the
story. As a consequence of all their
lives being instantly snuffed out, it is
a matter of conjecture as to how the
gas was ignited, whether by a lamp
or from a shot of slate.

Great excitement prevailed around
the mouth of the shaft and it was
with difficulty that the children and
wives of the victims were kept from
falling into the earth, while they
anxiously awaited the raising of each
body, and hoped against hope that
possibly their loved ones might have
escaped the terrible fate. Though a
large force of rescuers volunteered
their services immediately after the
disaster, it was not until late in the
afternoon that the bodies were re-
moved from the mines. The news
of the explosion was quickly circu-
lated and soon spread to the various
operations of this company, and
thousands visited the scene, almost
choking the entrance to the location
of the shaft, which is situated be-
tween several small mountains. Some
went because they feared friends or
relatives were entombed, some to
proffer their services in the rescue
work, and some through morbid
curiosity.

As is almost always the case, the
number of victims and extent of the
damage was greatly exaggerated, and
the farther the reports were circulated
of the explosion the greater the
growth.

Our reporter was at Welch when
the first intelligence was received
concerning the affair. It was stated
there that fifteen were dead, and in

Bluefield that fourteen had been kill-
ed, and these stories were given
credence. Our reporter visited the
scene as soon as it was possible to get
there. A number of the rescuers
who first went to the bottom of the
shaft were overcome by the foul
fumes, and it was with difficulty that
the work progressed.

There is a probability that when
the debris of the mine is cleared
away, and each room and entrance
searched, that the remains of still
another victim will be found, as it is
reported that seven men entered the
mine, though it is not known whether
the missing man was white or col-
ored, nor even who he was.

The force of the explosion com-
pletely unroofed the frame structure
which sheltered the mouth of the
shaft.

Many are the various remarks that
can be heard among the miners of
this operation. Some condemn the
company, saying that proper ventila-
tion was not furnished, as there is
only one entrance to the mines, the
shaft for the raising and lowering of
cars, and for the air, while there
should be two distinct openings for
this purpose, located several hundred
feet apart, so that the air could be
forced in at one section, and after cir-
culating through the various entries
and rooms, escape at another point;
some claim that the fan did not have
sufficient capacity for the work re-
quired of it, and that it was operated
by steam instead of electricity as was
originally intended. On the other
hand, many say it was a natural con-
sequence, and no matter what pre-
cautions were taken, could be expected
in a shaft of this depth. We do not
render an opinion, as to what the
disaster was due, whether to neg-
ligence of some of the victims or to
lack of proper facilities on the part
of the company.

The remains of the six dead men
were prepared for interment by the
company and shipped away on No. 2
yesterday for burial. The interment
of the three Hungarians took place
at Pocahontas and the remains of
Tom Minnis and Tom Jefferson were
taken to their old home at Bedford,
Va. Those of John Woodford were
taken to Graham, Va., where he had
a wife and two children residing.

J. F. Dillon and Thomas Bush,
who were among those who did such
manly work in rescuing the dead, had
a narrow escape from death them-
selves. They were at the bottom of
the shaft, trying to line the cage,
when ice, which had been loosened at
the mouth of the shaft, gave way and
fell upon them. Mr. Dillon sus-
tained a badly injured knee and ankle
and Mr. Bush was injured in the
back. However, these gentlemen
will be able to resume their duties in
a few days.

The mine where the explosion oc-
curred is among the larger operation,
owned by the United States Coal and
Coke Company, and is located on a
branch line of the Norfolk and West-
ern railway between Welch and Gary,
and is about thirty-seven miles west
of this city.

The headquarters of the United
States Coal and Coke Company are
located in Pittsburgh, Pa., and a full
report of the disaster has been for-
warded to that place.

The men in charge of the operation
at Wilcoe were among the first to re-
spond to the rescue work, Sunday
afternoon and several of these worked
hard during the day and did not
leave the scene of the explosion until
yesterday morning, when they were
forced to seek rest.

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