

THIRD DISTRICT.

JAS. PRITCHARD.

HOCKING, PERRY, MUSKINGUM AND MORGAN COUNTIES.

293.

HON. GEO. HARRISON, *Chief Inspector of Mines*, Columbus, Ohio.

DEAR SIR:—In compliance with the time-honored custom of the Department, I herewith submit my second annual report of the Third Inspection District, composed of the counties of Hocking, Perry, Muskingum and Morgan, with the list of improvements made, cause and number of fatal accidents, new mines opened, mines abandoned, and mines suspended from January 1, 1906, to December 31, 1906, inclusive.

The condition of the coal trade throughout the District during the year improved but slightly over the preceding, so far as the operation of the mines is concerned, and few, if any, of them average more than half time. On April 1, a general strike was declared between the members of the United Mine Workers and the operators for a restoration of the 1903 scale. On the 15th of April, the following companies conceded the demand and resumed operations: New Pittsburg Coal Co., New England Coal Co., Johnson Coal Mining Co., Taylor, Williams & Jenkins, The Wills Creek Company, and a few minor companies. The other large interests involved, however, continued the contest until it finally terminated July 18 by the signing of a two-year contract between John W. Winder, representing the operators, and the officers of District No. 6, representing the miners, conceding the demands of the miners and once more establishing peaceful and harmonious relations between the contestants.

In a former report attention was called to the dangers incident to the reckless manner in which electric wires are strung in the mines of the District. I regret to state that the fears then expressed have been fully realized by the electrocution of three men during the year by the deadly trolley wire, which emphasizes the necessity for some vigorous action in order to reduce to a minimum this constantly increasing danger. This is particularly true of the low coal fields where motor haulage has become not only a convenience, but a necessity.

Investigations made of the fatal accidents other than those due to electricity disclose the fact that two factors are largely responsible for these deplorable results: First, the utter indifference displayed by some of the victims themselves for the rules and orders of the Department, and second, the failure of many mine managers to enforce said rules and regulations, and maintain the proper discipline over employes that will insure the prompt obedience of every order issued looking to their personal safety.

In this connection, it is but just to say that the companies who have carried out the principles for which we have contended in this direction should be commended for the results obtained. The Sunday Creek Company, the largest producers of the District, have conducted their large operations without the loss of a single man during the year. The same is true of the Zanesville Coal Co., The Tropic Mining Co., The Wills Creek

Coal Co., and many of the smaller companies. This method of commending companies for the results obtained may be a new departure from the former custom of submitting reports, but it is only fair to those who have exercised this care and discipline that they should have full credit, and my only regret is that it could not be general.

On November 3, while hoisting the men out of the shaft in the evening at San Toy No. 1 mine, Perry County, O., owned by the New England Coal Co., Columbus, O., the worst disaster in years occurred. Nine men had entered the cage and started upward, when within sixty feet of the top, or 124 feet from the bottom, the gate of the pony rack within which the men were riding suddenly dropped downward and caught under a timber on the side of the shaft with such force as to break the rack near the center and precipitated six of the occupants down the shaft, resulting in the death of five of them. John Wright, the only survivor of those going down, escaped with both legs broken, and whose escape from death was as miraculous as the cause was mysterious. It perhaps may never be known what the true cause in this case really was. The most logical deduction is that either the pins were not properly placed in the gate at the bottom by the cager (although he testified under oath that they were, and which was confirmed by another witness), or were pulled by one of the occupants of the cage while ascending, which, from the statements of reliable men and the top cager, whose duty it was to take out the pins, had been frequently done. Unfortunately, neither the survivor who went down the shaft, nor the three who were left untouched upon the cage, have the remotest idea of how it happened; there are even some persons who claim that the door was so constructed that it could fall even with the pins in. I give the latter statement little credence, as I had the door reconstructed and restored to as near its former condition as possible, and after a thorough test proved conclusively that this could not occur, but the fact that men had frequently pulled those pins out while ascending on the cages with the knowledge of those whose duty it was to punish this offense deserves the severest criticism or censure. I realize, however, the difficulty of enforcing rules at this mine when we take into consideration that of the six men who fell from the cage, they represented six different nationalities. Among such a babel of tongues as this, accidents create but little surprise, and I presume will continue until such time as the Legislature sees fit to establish a standard of experience, without which discipline in the mines of the state will be impossible.

Sixty-five (65) permanent improvements were made during the year, being: Furnaces, 11; fans, 19; air shafts, 14; escapement ways, 14; fire baskets, 3; stairways, 1; and 3 sets safety catches. Fourteen (14) new mines were opened, 9 coal and 5 clay, divided as follows: Hocking, 5; Perry, 6; Muskingum, 3. Mines abandoned were as follows: Hocking, 2; Perry, 2; Muskingum, 2; and mines suspended, Hocking, 1; Perry, 3; and Muskingum, 4.

In the matter of ventilation, a noticeable improvement is observed throughout the District except in the old and almost exhausted mines where miles of old works act as breeding chambers for damp and noxious gases, which threaten the health of the workers. This is particularly true of the mines on Brush Fork Valley in Hocking County, where mines have been in operation on a large scale for almost twenty years, and at Shawnee, Perry County, where the same conditions obtain. The tendency of many operators to favor and resort to the use of high speed electric fans is a matter of much regret, as experience has taught us that this method of ventilation is entirely inadequate to maintain a pure and healthy circulation in many of the larger mines of the District. Since the present law was enacted requiring 100 cubic feet per minute per man, the methods of mining have been revolutionized; by the old method men shot once a day, seldom oftener than twice; now they shoot whenever they see fit, which results in the air being constantly charged with a large volume of powder smoke which the high speed fan is unable to disperse as speedily or as effectively as the large and more powerful steam-propelled fans. It thus becomes apparent, in the absence of legislation, to remove this evil, which resolves itself in one of two courses: To insist on either an increase in the volume of air to meet the new conditions, or restrict the practice of shooting as it was formerly done under the old methods of mining. I am pleased to note, however, that even high speed fans, with all their defects, are to be preferred to furnaces as a method of ventilation which many of them have replaced.

Another evil difficult to control, and for which no legal safeguards have been created, is the practice of solid shooting which prevails in several sections of the District. Taking it for granted that the coal cannot be mined successfully in any other way, or at least men cannot be secured who will mine by any other method, it resolves itself as to what remedy shall be applied.

To reduce the dangers incident to such method of mining to a minimum, many suggestions have been offered, which, if carried out, would avert or eliminate much of the danger from "windy" or "blow-out" shots, but as the remedies suggested, such as restriction on the length of the hole drilled and on the length or size of cartridge placed therein, depends largely on the men themselves, and as experience teaches that familiarity breeds contempt for danger, the remedy would lay largely in the hands of those who had less concern for their dangerous surroundings than those who seek to safeguard their health and lives.

I am impressed with the fact that there is but one safe policy to pursue in this matter where such dangers exist, which will reduce it to the lowest possible minimum of danger, and that is the employment of shot firers whose duty it should be to examine the shots before being tamped and be assured of their safety before firing them. The argument will be advanced that this policy, if adopted, will increase the cost of production—

which may be true—but in dealing with a matter of this nature the question of whether it is better to reckon on the saving of lives, or dollars and cents, is easily answered, and I believe the operators affected would hesitate to inject such an objection into the argument when the danger was revealed. There are other reasons why this policy should be recommended as all other states that have taken the matter up have adopted this method by legislative enactment after an exhaustive study of the situation, and there is no reason why the great state of Ohio should be a laggard in this forward movement which seeks greater security for the lives and health of the men employed in the mines of the state.

There have been few changes in the ownership of the coal lands of the District since my last report, most of the available coal having been taken up by those who expect to develop it in future; Morgan county being about the only exception in this respect, which, while possessing large and valuable tracts of undeveloped coal lands, lacks in transportation facilities.

The principal seams of coal worked in the District are the No. 5, No. 6, No. 7 and No. 8-a. Nos. 5 and 7 are found in Perry and Muskingum, and No. 6 in all the counties of the District, the No. 8-a being found in Muskingum only. Large tracts of the No. 7 are found in Morgan county also, but are not worked for the reason given above.

In conclusion, I desire to state that my relations with both operators and miners of the District have been of the most pleasant character, and the co-operation of both in our efforts to secure better conditions is highly appreciated. I desire also to thank you for the many courtesies shown and the kind and timely advice given at all times during the year.

Very respectfully,

JAMES PRITCHARD, Hemlock, Ohio,
Inspector Third District.

December 31, 1906.