

TRYING TO PLACE BLAME FOR DISASTER.

Inquest Into Darr Mine Explosion Begins Near Scene of the Accident.

COMPANY OBEYS THE LAW.

Ventilation System in the Bituminous District May Be Changed—Blame Victims.

BY JOHN R. HALL.

SMITHTON, Pa., Jan. 16.—That the coal operators of Western Pennsylvania are confronted with a serious problem in the ventilation of their mines was brought out strongly in the first day's testimony at the inquest into the Darr mine disaster at Jacobs Creek, about one and one-half miles from here, which began today. It is probable the coroner's jury will recommend a change in the system which has been universally adopted by the bituminous operators.

It is not likely that any specific system will be recommended. There are too many conflicting opinions regarding the proper method of ventilating coal mines for the layman or even the mining engineer to sift out what system would produce the best results in all mines. It was admitted repeatedly by witnesses today that the conditions in each particular mine govern its ventilating system. What must prove effective in one, it was shown conclusively, would be dangerous in another mine. While all bituminous mines as a general proposition are similar, it is seldom that any two of them have the same conditions to meet in ventilation.

Differ as to Ventilation.

The problem was summed up in terse manner by J. P. K. Miller, of Scottdale, chief engineer for the H. C. Frick Coal Company, when he said in reply to the question:

"Do you think the Darr mine had the best system of ventilation?"

"Every engineer has his theories regarding ventilation of mines. The Darr mine used the same system universally adopted by the bituminous mine operators, and it was in good working order. Whether there is anything better, remains to be proved."

Another practical engineer said: "Explosions never occur in what are known as dangerous mines. It is always the unexpected that happens. Darr mine was considered a safe one."

The inquest is being conducted in Higley's nickelodeon by C. A. Wynn, coroner of Westmoreland county. The state mining department case is conducted by Deputy Inspectors I. G. Roby, of Uniontown; C. H. Ross, of Greensburg; and Alexander MacArthur, of Scottdale. For the Pittsburgh Coal Company, owners of the Darr mine, Senator Cyrus S. Woods, chief counsel, and Paul H. Gallier, of Greensburg, have charge.

Good progress was made today and it is believed that the case can be closed tomorrow. The jury is composed of the following citizens of Smithton: N. E. Rhoads, cashier of the First National bank; Thomas T. Frances, retired; A. Z. Linn, merchant; Samuel Hateman, retired; William Saunders, hotel proprietor; and D. H. Smith, miller. The coal company has recovered 20 bodies from the mine, and expects to find one or two more under bits of slate which it has been unable to remove as yet.

Last Records Found.

The coal company officials, with State inspectors and engineers of ability, have arrived at the conclusion that the explosion which wrecked the Darr mine and killed so many men occurred in the second right room on Twenty-nine entry, which is near the extreme end of the pit. Various theories were advanced until a few days ago when the record book of the fire boss was found. In the book is this notation made on the day of the explosion:

"I have examined sections 23, 23 and 23 and found gas in second left on 23-15, 16, 17, 18 on second right on 23 found off falling; and three right on 23 found off. Balance of working places clear and in safe condition." This memorandum is taken as a solution of the explosion. It is signed by Thomas Murphy, fire boss.

The rescuing parties found the bodies of five miners in 23 entry. This entry had been fencd off because of the presence of gas and workmen were forbidden to go in. Notwithstanding this, the opinion is expressed that the five miners disobeyed orders and went into the entry. While working there it is believed they did some blasting. This released a pocket of gas which drifted from an open lamp and went through the mine, gathering intensity as it went. In substantiation of this theory it is pointed out that the bodies of the five men were found huddled together. Not one of them had a chance to move after the explosion. They were killed in their tracks. There were also found in this section the dead body of a mule, a pit wagon partially filled with coal and a miner's cap with an open light.

Company's Able Defense.

This will be the company's defense, and according to the testimony adduced today it is well taken. Everything brought out tends to show that the coal company had done everything to make the Darr mine safe. It was not considered a dangerous one, but improvements were being made constantly. Recommendations of the State inspectors were made without delay and every precaution taken to avoid accidents.

Those to appear on the stand today were: William G. Mase, of West Newton, a mining engineer of 23 years' experience; William M. Kelvington, superintendent of the Darr mine; Benjamin Pereday, inspector of mines for the Pittsburgh Coal Company; J. P. K. Miller.

AS OTHERS THINK

Everyone in Pittsburgh Has a Right to His Own Opinion.

While everyone has a right to his own opinion, yet it is wise to always consider what others think and profit by their experience.

Nothing makes life so miserable, or interferes so widely with the usefulness of the average American, as indignation, and it is well for us to give fair consideration to what others think about this remarkable affliction.

—Max Knifer from their own pen.

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\$8 and \$6.....	\$3.85
\$2.50, \$4 and \$5.....	\$2.85

Women's Shoes.

\$7 and \$5.....	\$4.85
\$5 and \$6.....	\$3.85
\$3.50, \$4 and \$5.....	\$2.85
\$4 and \$5.....	\$2.50

Women's Slippers.

\$4, \$5, \$6 and \$7.....	\$2.85
\$4, \$5 and \$6.....	\$2.00
\$4 and \$5.....	\$1.50

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\$2.50 and \$4.....	\$2.75
\$3 and \$3.50.....	\$2.50
\$2.50 Shoes.....	\$2.50
\$2.50 Shoes.....	\$1.50

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\$2.50 and \$3.00.....	\$2.00
\$2.50 Shoes.....	\$1.50

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ler, of Scottdale, chief engineer for the Frick Coal Company; W. W. Keifer, of Pittsburgh, manager of the Monongahela River Consolidated Coal and Coke Company; John Ross, a superintendent of the Youghiogheny and Ohio Coal Company; Benjamin Howard, of West Newton, division engineer for the Pittsburgh Coal Company; Frank Shrapenberg, a miner; Max Spucht, a miner, and Edward Muldowney, a fire boss at the Darr mine.

The unanimous testimony of these men was that the ventilation system of the Darr mine is the same as used in every bituminous mine in the district and was as good as any. They described, in detail, the condition of the mine before the explosion and what improvements had been made. A large exhibit given showing in detail every section of the mine, occupies a greater portion of the front wall of the building where the inquest is being held and each witness, as he proceeds, points out to the jury just how the mine was operated.

Chief Inspector Attends.

Great care has been exercised by the coal company in preparing their defense. They have a blue print, showing the location of each body removed from the mine. This is expected to play a very important part in proving that the explosion occurred in 23 entry. James J. Boudrich, chief of the State department quest is closed. He has a stenographer making copies of the testimony. He is accompanied by six deputy mine inspectors who will probably go on the stand tomorrow.

In his testimony today, Superintendent Kelvington said the fan had a capacity of 1,000 cubic feet per minute and that the gauge on the morning of the disaster showed that it was working perfectly. Kelvington said he made one visit a week through the mine. The entries, he declared, were fed by 2,000 feet of air, giving each miner 50 cubic feet, just double that required by law.

Laws Are Obeys.

The mine, he said, was sprinkled each night and on Sundays to prevent an accident from dust. A complaint made by the State inspector concerning the air in the swamp entries, he declared, had been remedied as soon as possible. This testimony was corroborated by other witnesses.

Inspector Pereday, who has had 12 years experience as a miner, 16 of which were spent in England, inspected the Darr mine four times in 1907. The last inspection was made on October 23, 14 and 25, at which time his report showed the ventilation had in a few places. It was testified, however, that this defect had been remedied. Cheap oil, he said, had been used by the miners for some time, which made considerable smoke and made the air bad. He did not consider the Darr mine gaseous.

"The system of ventilation in the Darr mine was good in general and excellent in some sections. The distribution was good. The quantity furnished each miner was twice that required by the State. Ninety-five per cent of the mines have the same system." This testimony was given by Chief Engineer Miller, of the Frick Coal Company.

Mr. Keifer said he did not know of a better ventilating system in use in Western Pennsylvania.

Engineer John Ross, of the Youghiogheny and Ohio Coal Company, who installed the fan at the Darr mine, said it was ample to supply air to every section of the pit.

"Go Just Like Mules."

Miner Frank Shrapenberg proved an interesting witness. He left the mine just shortly before the explosion occurred. When asked if the miners did not regard the chalk marks of danger placed on the entries by the fire bosses, he said: "No, we're just like a set of mules. If the entries do not have a danger board across them we go ahead. Chalk would do no good. If there was gas there, we would never see the chalk mark." He said there was nothing wrong with the ventilation and that the air was good. He never heard of a blow-out shot in the Darr mine. This statement was corroborated by Max Spucht.

The following officials of the Pittsburgh Coal Company were present and may be called as witnesses tomorrow: E. I. Taylor, chief engineer; George W. Scholtenberg, general manager; J. N. Armstrong, superintendent of mines; H. V. Boudrich, assistant superintendent of mines.

1907 Darr Mine Explosion NEWS

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