

COAL FATAL

REPORT OF A FIRE AT AUCHINCLOSS COLLIERY
NANTICOKE, PENNSYLVANIA
NOVEMBER 9, 1909 - 9 KILLED

(From Reports of the Inspectors of Coal Mines
of the Anthracite Coal Regions of
Pennsylvania, 1909, p. 336)

On November 9, 1909, at 2:50 in the afternoon, an explosion of gas occurred in No. 2 shaft, Auchincloss Colliery, at Nanticoke, fatally burning one man and setting fire to the timber and coal at the face of chamber known as No. 40, which produced smoke and gas that suffocated eight other workmen, and slightly burning another.

The section of the mine in which the explosion occurred is known as No. 1 counter off NO. 1 slope, Ross seam, and is ventilated by a separate and distinct split of air independent from all other parts of the mine and in which about 50 men are employed, but as is the custom; a number of them emerged from the mine earlier in the day, among them being miner No. 40, in whose place the explosion is supposed to have occurred and for whom the injured was laboring. Miner No. 40 testified at the inquest, held for the purpose of inquiring into the cause of the accident, that on entering his chamber on the morning of the explosion and on leaving it at 12:20 p.m., he made an examination of his place and found it free from gas and in good condition. He also testified that he worked in this particular place, chamber No. 40, for one year and during that time he recalls only one occasion on which he found an accumulation of explosive gas. Therefore, the cause of the accumulation of gas between 12:20, the time miner No. 40 left his chamber, and 2:50, the time of the explosion, can only be conjectured.

Chamber No. 40 is driven at about a five per cent dip off NO. 1 counter and is about 400 feet long, and at the face is a very abrupt upthrow or anticlinal, in consequence of which the coal was in a laminated condition and fell away from the working face, allowing the occluded gases to disintegrate (sic).

Three theories were advanced as to the cause of the explosion, all of which were plausible.

The theory accepted by the coroner's jury as having caused the explosion, was that the seam of coal at the face of chamber No. 40, having suddenly changed from a light dip to a pitch that is almost perpendicular and being of a laminated nature, a pocket of gas was liberated and filled the workings with fire damp at the point where the men were at work, which was ignited in some unknown manner, possibly by coming in contact with one of the workmen's lamps, or

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by one of the men striking a light.

The most unfortunate incident in connection with this disaster was the failure to escape of the six men who were suffocated. They were working fully a 1,000 feet from where the fire occurred and were warned to leave the mine as there was something wrong. This was evident by the filling of the workings with smoke and afterdamp, but after they had examined the air current in the workings and expressed the opinion that the trouble that existed in the portion of the mine from where the smoke was coming was but slight and would not endanger their lives, they decided to remain. They had sufficient time to reach a place of safety, had they heeded the wise warning of one of their number. They remained, however, and the working filled with smoke and afterdamp to such an extent that escape was then impossible; the rescuing party being unable to reach them before the deadly vapors overpowered them.