

MINE FIRE AT THE BOSTON MINE

The fire at the Boston mine, Plymouth No. 5 Colliery, of the Delaware and Hudson Company, May 10, was the third one to occur within a month. The first was at the Pancoast, April 7, and the second at the Gipsy Grove breaker, April 27.

The number of lives lost in the Boston mine was five. Fortunately the fire occurred on the night shift or the loss of life would probably have been much greater.

In the verdict of the coroner's jury it is said that "the fire was started by some person or persons unknown to the jury and that it was of incendiary origin." If the evidence submitted warranted this verdict the authorities of Luzerne county, through the district attorney and county detective, should spare no effort or expense to find the guilty person and see that proper punishment is inflicted, as a fire of this kind may be started in almost any mine and may endanger the lives of hundreds of employes. I am not aware that any effort has been made or is being made by the authorities of Luzerne county or by the coal company to apprehend the guilty person or persons, but I hope that some effort of that kind is being made.

To my personal knowledge this is the first fire of incendiary origin inside of a coal mine, but several such fires have occurred on the surface.

According to the report of Inspector D. T. Davis, the fire occurred at the mouth of man-way on Red Ash Vein Crop. "About half a dozen sets of hard wood timber, especially selected and suitably prepared, bark peeled, with lagging composed of three inch plank on top and sides over-lying the timber were used in order to prevent the clay from rushing in and obstructing the passage-way. Beyond and in close proximity to this a portion of the man-way was driven through the rock on an angle of approximately twenty degrees, which penetrated the vein. The volume of air entering through this opening, which was the in-take, was from 40,000 to 50,000 cubic feet per minute. The velocity of the current was so great that sparks were conveyed to the coal and the ignition was almost instantaneous. The products of combustion, both complete and incomplete, producing carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide gases, were conveyed with the air and circulated to all portions of 13 Vein workings. This portion of the mine is non-gaseous, but, in order to further safeguard the lives of the persons employed therein, a fire boss was on duty constantly. The east and west side of this plane was ventilated by two separate currents. Those employed on the east side escaped with much difficulty as the smoke entered the workings in such a dense volume as to make it utterly impossible for them to see in what direction they were going. They were compelled to grope and feel their way until No. 8 tunnel, Top split of Red Ash Vein, had been reached and an independent current of air from a portion of the Upper Split was encountered. The persons employed on the west side of 13 plane were less fortunate, as their bodies were found in the face of Two West airway, at which

place they were engaged at work. It seems that according to the condition of the bodies, for their dinner pails were found by their sides, they must have made a great effort to reach a place of safety, but not being able to do so on account of the density of the smoke, retreated to the face of their working place, at which place their bodies were discovered.

The bodies of the driver and door boy were found on the plane, at the entrance to a lift on the east side. The officials of the mine did all in their power to rescue the victims. Several persons were engaged in making an effort to smother the fire and others were inside the mine changing the course of the current so as to send fresh air to the section of the mine to where the victims were employed.

The workings of 13 plane are so arranged that the ventilating fan, located at the main hoist shaft, about a mile from the surface entrance to the man-way, controls the currents circulating through the mine.

Doors had been erected and thrown back, so that in case of emergency they could be immediately closed with the desired effect of reversing the current in the interior of the mine. The officials and miners were greatly surprised that the fire should do so much damage in a place that was least expected, and at such a peculiar time, but the smoke, instead of gradually becoming more dense, entered the mine in great volumes, overcoming the employes who had perfect knowledge of the means of ingress and egress of this portion of the mine. In order to ascertain in what manner the fire originated, I instructed D. W. Dodson, Coroner of Luzerne County, to hold an inquest."

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The following verdict was rendered by the jury:

"That the said William Anglanicz came to his death on the 10th day of May, 1911, at the Boston Colliery, D. & H. Coal Company, from being suffocated by smoke in said colliery. John Russbuski, Jacob Kurrilla, John Malast and George Fender all lost their lives at the same time and place, and from the same cause. William Anglanicz was a laborer. The evidence shows that all these deceased men were working on the night shift, and that about ten o'clock in the evening a fire broke out at the opening of the man-way, and the smoke from this fire in great quantities penetrated the part of the mine in which they were working and suffocated them almost immediately. Six men working in another part of the mine were able to work their way out through one of the other openings. The evidence shows that the said mine had three avenues of escape. The manway, through which the men made their way into the mine, has several sets of timber at the opening, and it was at this point that the fire originated. This manway also served as an intake for air. Fifty thousand cubic feet of air passed in per minute. The jury visited the mine in order to inspect it, and from this inspection, as well as from the evidence, we find that the fire was started by some person or persons unknown to the jury, and that it was of incendiary

origin. We believe that all inflammable material whatsoever should be eliminated from the mines wherever and whenever it is possible to do so.

(Signed)

Thomas J. Hatton,
John J. Boney,
James Williams,
Thomas D. Lloyd,
Wm. I. Williams,
David Phillips."

The mine fire at the Pancoast mine created such an excitement among the mining population that the legislature passed an act which I have no doubt will prevent the recurrence of such catastrophes. The act reads as follows:

"No. 788

AN ACT

To safeguard life in the coal mines of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and to protect and preserve the property connected therewith, by providing that all inside buildings shall be constructed of incombustible material; and providing penalties for failure to comply with the terms of this act, and making a violation thereof by mine superintendents a misdemeanor.

Section 1. Be it enacted, &c., That within six months after the approval of this act, all buildings inside of any coal mine in Pennsylvania, including engine houses, pump houses, stables, et cetera, shall be constructed of incombustible material, approved in writing by the Chief of the Department of Mines: Provided, however, That the time may be extended by the Chief of the Department of Mines, for a period not exceeding six months, upon sufficient cause shown by any person, firm or corporation, of inability to comply with the provisions of section one as to the time therein specified.

Section 2. Any company failing to comply with section one of this act shall be subject to a penalty of five hundred dollars, to be recoverable by the Commonwealth as debts of like amount are now by law recoverable. Any superintendent of a coal mine failing to comply with section one of this act shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction shall be sentenced to pay a fine of one hundred dollars, or undergo imprisonment in the county jail for a period of ten days, or both, at the discretion of the court.

Section 3. The fines collected for violation of this act shall be paid to the Department of Mines, and the Department of Mines shall pay the same into the Treasury of the Commonwealth.

Section 4. All acts or parts of acts inconsistent with the provisions of this act be and the same are hereby repealed.

Approved—The 15th day of June, A. D., 1911.

JOHN K. TENER."

It is the hope of the Department that on the 15th day of June, 1912, when the period of one year from the date of approval of the act shall have expired, the stables, pump-houses, engine-houses and all other buildings in the coal mines of this Commonwealth will be made of incombustible material.