

Company Held Blameless in Mine Disaster

Coroner's Jury Finds Eccles Ex-
plosion Was Caused by
Accumulated Gas.

[SPECIAL TELEGRAM TO GAZETTE TIMES.]

ECCLES, W. VA., May 17.—That the explosion in No. 5 mine of the New River Collieries Company April 28, which resulted in the death of 180 men in that mine and in No. 6, adjoining, was caused by an accumulation of gas in No. 5, following a short circuiting of the air, was the verdict of a coroner's jury, which early today concluded the work of inquiring into the cause of the deaths. The verdict exonerates the company from all blame.

The inquest was conducted by Justice Jesse Thomas, acting as coroner, and the state was represented by Attorney General John B. Morrison and Prosecuting Attorney John Q. Hutchinson, while Chief Mine Inspector Earl A. Henry represented the State Department of Mines.

Mine Experts Testify.

A number of mining experts who explored the mine, miners and company officials were examined in an effort to find the cause of the explosion.

From the testimony it was found that the explosion undoubtedly originated in the southern and eastern section of the mine. A small barrier of coal had been left between the entries to protect the air current until an overcast could be constructed to make a split.

It was found that a miner had placed a shot in the barrier, blowing it open and causing the short circuit of air. This left parts of that immediate section unprotected and the gas accumulated, later being ignited by the open lamps.

Fault Laid to Victims.

As not one of the 172 men in No. 5 survived, the only evidence was the condition of the mine following the explosion. Firemen who examined the mine the morning before the explosion testified that the barrier was intact when the men entered the mine.

Seth Combs, one of the victims of the explosion, a contracting miner, probably caused the explosion, according to the testimony. His contract was in the section where the explosion originated and he was arranging to take additional contracts in a section near there.

With an opening through the barrier he could have reached his new work in a few feet, but the distance around was half a mile. Combs' body was found on the other side of the barrier, and it is supposed that to save time he made the fatal mistake.