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ECCLES DISASTER BLAMED ON MINER

Mine Horror That Cost 180 Lives Caused by Carelessness, Says Verdict—Company Exonerated.

The Bluefield Telegraph

That the explosion in No. 5 mine of the New River Collieries Company at Eccles, April 28, which resulted in the death of one hundred and eighty men in that mine and in No. 6 adjoining, was caused by an accumulation of gas in No. 5, following a short circuiting of air, was the verdict of a coroner's jury, which on Sunday concluded the work of inquiring into the cause of the deaths. The verdict exonerates the company from all blame, and is as follows:

"We, the jury, find that John Adams and 171 other men who were killed in shaft mine No. 5 at Eccles, Raleigh county, West Virginia, on Tuesday, April 28, 1914, came to their death by an explosion of gas in the said mine and we do further find that the eight men who came to their death in shaft mine No. 6 at Eccles, West Virginia, on the evening of Tuesday, April 28, 1914, came to their death as a result of an explosion of gas and dust in shaft mine No. 5, at Eccles, West Virginia, they having been overcome by afterdamp entering mine No. 6 after the explosion in mine No. 5, the two mines being connected.

"The accumulation of gas in mine No. 5, which was the primary cause of the explosion was due to a short circuit of the air in the southern section of the mine. This gas was ignited by an open lamp and the explosion followed.

"We the jury furthermore find that this short circuit of air was caused without the knowledge of consent of the company or any of its operating staff, and that the company is in no way to blame for the disaster.

(Signed) "M. THOMAS,
HUGH DANIEL,
WARD COOK,
N. S. ALLEN,
C. H. FINK,
J. C. HUTCHINSON,
JESSE THOMAS,
Justice of the Peace and Acting Coroner."

The inquest was conducted by Justice Jesse Thomas, acting as coroner, and the State was represented by Attorney General A. A. Lilly, Assistant Attorney General John B. Morrison and Prosecuting Attorney John Q. Hutchinson, while Chief Mine Inspector Earl A. Henry represented the state department of mines. Counsel for the coal company and for the miners were present.

Many witnesses were examined and the inquest was not completed until Sunday morning, the jury having worked throughout the night. Many mining experts who explored the mine, miners and company officials were examined in an effort to find the exact cause of the explosion.

From the testimony it was found that the explosion undoubtedly originated in the southern and eastern sections 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 some miner had pliced a shot in the barrier, blowing it open and causing the short circuit of air. This left parts of that immediate section unprotected, and as the mine was gaseous, the gas accumulated, later being ignited by the open lamps used. As not one of the 173 men in No. 5 survived, the only evidence was the condition of the mine following the explosion. Fire bosses 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.

It developed in the testimony that one of the fire bosses in No. 5 was T. A. Barrett, an Englishman, without the certificate from the State mine department required by law. Among others were James W. Paul and Geo. S. Rice of the federal bureau of mines, who objected to being summoned on the ground that they had instructions from the head of their department not to give testimony in such cases.

1914 Eccles Mine Explosion NEWS6

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