

1919-0001

# COAL FATAL

REPORT OF A FIRE AT NO. 2 MINE  
AMSTERDAM, OHIO  
OCTOBER 29, 1919 - 20 KILLED

(From the "Pittsburgh Post," Oct. 30, 1919)

With flames spreading back toward the 21 miners trapped in the north passage of the No. 2 mine, mine officials tonight felt no hope for the men. Rescue parties formed from other workmen were able to remain in the mine only a few minutes because of the intense heat and smoke.

Four American-born workmen were reported to be among the miners entombed when an electric generator operating a fan exploded and set fire to the wood braces, according to company officials. The flames started 200 feet from the elevator shaft, it was said.

Partly suffocated and his clothing and hands burned, a trip driver emerged from the burning mine early tonight. He related how he lay on the floor of a mine car and his mule pulled him to the shaft. He said that the other miners had started farther back.

A water tank was emptied into the shaft by a company of the Steubenville fire department, which arrived here tonight to help fight the fire. Rescue parties worked in relays in an effort to reach the entombed men.

James Gray, aged 67, and Stanley Hinoski, aged 41, gave up their lives for 18 fellow miners, whose bodies were found today in No. 2 mine, where last Wednesday fire entombed 20 miners. Their deaths were caused by asphyxiation. The bodies of Gray and Hinoski were found this morning outside of room No. 2 off entry No. 15, and the others, huddled together, and in a sitting posture, were found inside the room.

In their fight with death the men had tried to brattice the room by improvised means. A wall of coal had been built by the men, and this had been braced with planks, mine ties and other timber, available. With their clothing, of which many of the men were stripped almost to the skin, they had stuffed crevices of the unfinished wall - a wall, which to them had they been able to complete it, would have been a wall of life - to prevent the inflow of poisonous gas.

Further details of the disaster were learned today from 20 loaders and three drivers who escaped from the burning mine, which had been set ablaze by an overheated armature in a fan, by cutting their way through an abandoned entry and coming out at a side entrance three miles away, six hours after the fire started. The loaders and drivers were in Entry No. 14, with Gray and Hinoski.

MSHA LIBRARY  
P. O. BOX 25367  
DENVER, CO 80225

When the fire alarm was sounded, the men in Entry 14 which was in front of the fire, started toward Entry 15, which was behind the blaze, to warn 18 miners working there. Seeing that it meant sure death, after they had been driven back several times by gas and the fire which was quickly eating its way toward them, the loaders and drivers sought safety. But Gray and Hinowski refused to leave the other 18 to their fate. By almost superhuman effort the two succeeded in reaching Entry No. 15.

The presence of mind, with which Gray and Hinowski gave encouragement to the 18 others, was apparent from the size of the "life wall."

That Gray must have been the guiding figure on whom all pinned their hopes was also evident, for while the others worked with the hope that they could build the wall and stay death until the rescuers got to the room, the following note, in Gray's writing was found on a board nailed outside the wall: "Help! There are 20 men in this room."

There were only a few more feet of the opening to close when one by one the men were overcome by the gas.

The work of the rescuers was halted by an explosion, which choked several entries.

This afternoon a conference was held between the Ohio State Mine Rescue crew and the Illinois and Pennsylvania crews and a scheme was devised whereby they reached the entry in spite of the fire and gas.

Among the bodies recovered was that of James Gray, Jr., aged 17, son of the aged miner, who fought so valiantly to save his companions.