

COAL FATAL

REPORT OF A MINE FIRE FEBRUARY 23, 1921; KATHLEEN MINE; DOWELL,
ILLINOIS; 7 KILLED
(FROM BUREAU OF MINES REPORT BY C. A. HERBERT)

Fire of unknown origin was discovered on the Main West Entries just outby the 3rd and 4th North Entries of the Kathleen Mine, Dowell, Illinois, at about noon Wednesday, February 23, 1921. The seat of the fire was approximately 2000 feet from the air shaft and 2600 feet from the main shaft bottom. About 300 men were in the mine when the fire was discovered and all but seven of these men escaped.

Under the leadership of the mine Foreman (sic) efforts were made to fight the fire without calling for outside assistance but the flame spread rapidly and the fire was soon beyond control. Calls for assistance were then sent to the State Mine Rescue Station, at DuQuoin, Illinois, and efforts were made to call U.S. Bureau of Mines Car #6 but in the meantime the Mine Foreman had been overcome by fumes from the fire, considerable confusion appears to have prevailed, and the call for assistance from U.S. Bureau of Mines was sent to the University of Illinois rather than to the Bureau of Mines.

The Mining Engineers of the U.S. Bureau of Mines had been called to Champaign, Illinois, on February 23rd for a conference. Shortly after their arrival in Champaign they were advised that a mine explosion had occurred some hours previously in the #5 mine, Centralia, Illinois, killing three men and that a fire in the Kathleen Mine, at Dowell, Illinois, had trapped seven men. The Urbana Station had received indirect calls for assistance but could give no further information regarding the accidents. It was endeavored to confirm the calls by long distance telephones but the information gained was very indefinite. The engineers left Champaign enroute to Dowell on the Illinois Central at 11:20 p.m. Car #6, which was at Rosiclare, Illinois, at the time was not called immediately because there was no telegraph or telephone service during the night at Rosiclare. At Effingham, Illinois, a message was delivered on the train advising them to go to the No. 5 Mine at Centralia. Acting on this advice the Bureau of Mines Representatives did not go to Dowell until the bodies had been recovered from the mine at Centralia. After their arrival at Centralia they learned that the Kathleen Mine at Dowell had been put under seal at about midnight.

Before the mine was sealed rescue teams from the State Mine Rescue Station at DuQuoin and Benton, Illinois, were on the scene. The sealing of the mine was sanctioned by the Superintendents of the station and by the State District Mine Inspector, the County Mine Inspector and a member of the State Mine Examining Board. These men had been in the mine and they reported that the fire was at the mouth of the third and fourth North Entries in which Entries the seven miners were trapped. They reported that explosive mixtures of gas were present near the fire and they recommended that further efforts to rescue the men in the 3rd and 4th North Entries would be useless and might result in further loss of life.

On March 17th the seal over the air shaft was open and men equipped with oxygen breathing apparatus entered the mine. By the

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construction of seals and a series of air locks the advance was made into the 3rd and 4th North Entries.

During the recovery work it was found that the fire area did not extend across the mouth of the 3rd and 4th North Entries. Heavy falls were found in the Main West Entries. These falls extended from points about 175 ft. inby the 2nd North Entry to points about 100 ft. outby the 3rd North Entry and concealed the actual fire area. Seals were erected in the 3 entries at both ends of these falls and normal ventilation was established in all other sections of the mine.

The seven bodies were recovered from the mine shortly after noon Tuesday, April 5th. The bodies were found in a parting which was being driven off the 3rd North entry. This parting was the place into which it was believed the men would retreat. The men had erected a barricade at a point about 40 ft. from the face of the parting. Brattice boards were used for constructing the barricade. They had started to erect a 2nd barricade inby the 1st one but did not have enough lumber to complete the 2nd one and had used parts of their clothing to complete it. It appeared that a gas explosion had occurred within the barricaded area; part of the barricade was blown down and the men probably were suffocated by the fumes which rushed in upon them following the explosion. Open flame lamps of the carbide type are used in the Kathleen and, doubtless, gas which accumulated in the sealed area was ignited by the flame of the lamp worn by one of the unfortunate men.