

Coal Culture

1924 Shanktown Mine Explosion

By

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At 3:00 pm on Saturday, January 26, 1924, a violent explosion occurred at the Lancashire #18 mine of the Barnes and Tucker Coal Company. The mine was located near Starford, Indiana County, on the Starford-Wandin Road. 36 of the 47 men working in the mine were killed. 32 were killed instantly by the force of the explosion and 4 died from the effects of the afterdamp generated by the explosion. Mine explosions generate a mixture of by-product gases characterized by a lack of oxygen. This mixture is called “afterdamp.” An electric spark caused by the “arcing” of a mining machine in an atmosphere charged with dust and explosive gas (methane) was given as the cause of the explosion.

The *Indiana Evening Gazette* of Tuesday, January 29, 1924, gives the grim details of the accident. By Saturday, midnight, rescue crews had arrived from Pittsburgh. They were equipped with oxygen apparatus and began explorations inside the mine. (The mine was just being developed and workings were not very extensive.) Other rescue teams from local mines at Nanty Glo, Barnesboro, and Spangler as well as Indiana County mines participated. The last body was recovered at 2:15 pm on Monday, January 28th. Indiana Salvation Army workers and Red Cross volunteers from Indiana fed the rescuers. The *Gazette* reports that the volunteers served 80 gallons of coffee and 2,500 sandwiches. Doughnuts and cinnamon rolls were supplied by neighbors and officials in Starford. The total rescue operation took 47 hours. A morgue was set up in Starford and bodies were prepared for burial as they were brought from the mine.

As with all such disasters, the families of the victims suffer their losses. At least 3 families endured a double loss on that January day. Violent

deaths came to John Crandell and his son, Charles. (John and Charles were found together with the father's hand shielding his son's eyes) George Gtsett and his son George Jr. and Edward and Joseph Kelly, brothers, were the second and third pair of victims. The *Gazette* reported that one woman, widowed by the explosion, was widowed once before in the Reilly mine explosion of November 1922. All but one of the men was married and family sizes ranged from one child to eight children.

A coroner's inquest was held at Indiana on February 12, 1924. County Coroner Dr. A.H. Stewart was in charge. Thomas S. Lowther, State Mine Inspector from Indiana, and J.W. Paul of the US Bureau of Mines in Pittsburgh investigated the accident and recommended ways to safeguard the mine's employees in the future.

Complete Casualty List

The following list was published in the *Indiana Evening Gazette*:

Edward Kelly
Joseph Kelly, brother of the above
Walter Brown, Colored
Joe Laska
Joe Gignac
Andy Sherensky
John Crandell
Charles Crandell, son of the above
Max Zaharansky
John Hudak
George Gtsett
George Gtsett, Jr., son of the above
Urias Keith
Frank Novak
John Uhuran
John Burda
Blandino Buretti
Mike Scranko
Pete Krawasky
Joe Neletia
Emilo Bosiet
Joe Snancak
John Shulick
Louis Straffi

John Chapella
Ellsworth Sickenberger
Gust Lesky
Mike Makitko
Don Goodlin
John Yenderell
Albert J. Stocker, Asst.Mine Foreman
Arthur Chaparella
Chester Williams
John Stone, Mine Superintendent
Joseph Parkins
Mike Mihalchak

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