

# 8 KILLED, MANY HURT IN ONE OF REGION'S MOST SERIOUS MINE MISHAPS

**Buckling of Timbers on Slope at Gilberton Colliery Sends  
Hundreds of Tons of Debris Upon Large Force  
of Men Engaged in Laying Tracks**

## Scenes About Slope Are Pitiful

Eight men were killed, seven others injured and eight were more or less bruised and suffered from shock in one of the most serious accidents in the history of this end of the anthracite region when the main slope of the Gilberton colliery, a Reading Coal and Iron company colliery, collapsed at 6:00 last evening and sent thousands of tons of broken timber, rock, coal and silt down upon the 23 men working 1,000 feet below the surface on the heavy-pitching slope.

## Operators Look For Continued Mining

**Belief Prevails That New  
Wage Pact Will Keep  
Many Mines Going on Full  
Time Basis**

General expectations in the coal company offices these days are that August will bring in plenty of orders for fall and winter deliveries and that

1930 Gilberton Colliery cavein NEWS

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William Burke, 44, of Maizeville, formerly of Mt. Carmel.

Michael Malick, Frackville, married.

Charles Yourasas, 43, of Gilberton.

Matthew Kucher, 29, of Gilberton.

Patrick Birmingham, 46, of Gilberton.

Anthony Strucka, 49, of Shenandoah.

William Comorosky, 20, of Turkey Run.

George Melinavage, 35, of Frackville.

According to reports from the colliery one of the victims was beheaded, another had both legs torn off, a third had an arm and a leg pulled out at the sockets while others of the dead were frightfully crushed. Some of them were so badly mangled about the head that identification was difficult for a time.

Three other men are in the Ashland Hospital, as follows:

Edward Phillips, of Gilberton.

George Davis, of Gilberton.

Philip Berwick, of Gilberton.

#### **Slope Timbers Buckle**

The Gilberton colliery was closed down early in May to permit of rebuilding of the heavy-pitching slope in order to speed up production at the mine. Since that time large forces of timbermen had been engaged in rebuilding the timbers the full length of the deep slope.

Shortly before 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon, 23 timbermen and laborers, under the direction of John Gallagher, formerly of Mt. Carmel, an assistant foreman at the Gilberton colliery, located at Gilberton, entered the mine to expedite the laying of track at the third level in a hope that the colliery might be ready to resume operations on Monday.

A few minutes before 3 o'clock last evening the heavy timbers near the

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head of the slope suddenly buckled with a terrific roar, releasing thousands of tons of rock, coal and silt from above and along the sides of the slope-way and sending this debris, along with the ponderous timbers, rushing down the slope.

Working on a 45-degree pitch at the third level, 1,000 feet below the mouth of the slope, the 23 men heard the roar from above, realized the impending danger and endeavored to leap to safety. Several succeeded in reaching the third level after having been struck by flying timbers and rock. Others were able to protect themselves by leaping behind timbers, against which some of them were held prisoners.

However, eleven of the men were caught in the midst of the rush and carried down the slope to the dish at the bottom, where they were buried under vast quantities of debris.

Workmen on the surface were attracted to the mouth of the slope by the deafening roar as the timbers buckled and sent the vast quantities of debris down the steep incline at terrific speed. They realized the seriousness of the situation and rushed about to summon assistance. Officials were notified and within a short time an improvised cage was placed on the water shaft and rescue forces started into the mine to effect the rescue of the injured and to recover the dead. From the foot of the water hoist the men were able to make their way to the slope bottom to begin rescue work.

At the bottom of the slope a scene of carnage awaited the rescuers. Men, accustomed to minor mishaps about collieries, shuddered and quaked as they beheld the vast piles of debris, beneath and from out of which men were struggling, some calling for help and others seeking to extricate themselves.

As rapidly as they could, the rescuers aided the living out of the pile of rock, timber and silt. First aid men gave temporary aid while others aided in taking the men to the surface.

News of the catastrophe spread quickly thru the villages of Gilberton and Maizeville and thence to Frackville, Mahanoy City and throughout the Schuylkill Valley. Within fifteen minutes after the mishap vast armies, including the families of many of the men caught in the rush, were speeding to the head of the slope and it was with difficulty that workmen there prevented women and children from endeavoring to enter the treacherous slope. Several of the wives of men trapped in the mine had to be subdued by powerful men and later were taken by force from the mouth of the slope and to their homes.

Thousands were gathered for blocks about the colliery as the dead and injured were hoisted to the surface on the improvised cage on the colliery water shaft. The bodies of the dead were taken as quickly as possible to morticians to be prepared for burial while a fleet of ambulances, sent from all nearby Reading collieries, rushed the injured to the Locust Mountain and Fountain Springs state hospitals. A corps of physicians and surgeons from thruout the region administered to the injured.

Survivors of the accident, recovering from the shock resultant from thrilling experiences, told and retold the story of their experiences to relatives, friends, colliery officials and strangers.

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According to John Gallagher, the foreman in charge of the work, all 23 men were at work just above the third level of the slope. He was directing their activities in laying new rails on the heavy pitching outlet of the mine.

With a roar that was deafening, the men were startled by a crash from overhead. Shouting a warning to the men to flee, Gallagher succeeded in reaching the third level, although he was struck and hurled forward by rock and timbers and suffered painful injuries. Other men also followed the foreman into the level, while those at work higher on the slope sought the protection of timbers or tried to wend their way in leaps and bounds to the third level opening.

According to members of the surviving party the rock and timbers reached the third level in less than five seconds after the initial roar had been heard. Men who were hiding back of ponderous slope timbers saw their fellow workers below engulfed in the great mass of debris

and swept to their deaths in the pile-up. The rush of dirt and timber served to extinguish the lights used by the men and all were trapped for some time in the darkness before the less seriously injured were able to light their lamps to assist as far as possible in the rescue work.

The men were all engaged in laying new ties and rails on the slope which was to be used to convey coal from the Gilberton and an adjoining mine to the surface. Many weeks of endeavor had been spent by large forces in completely re-timbering the slope, which was designed to be utilized as a highspeed medium of removing coal from the mine.

Mine Inspector Quickley, formerly of Mt. Carmel, reached the scene shortly after the accident occurred and directed the rescue work and started an investigation. The inspector had visited the new slope yesterday and found everything in apparently good shape.

High officials of the Reading Coal and Iron Company hastened from Pottsville to the colliery and assisted in providing all possible aid for the relief of the injured and in comforting the widows, orphans, parents and other relatives of the dead.

William Burke, one of the eight killed, was a former resident of Centralia and was widely known throughout this region. He had been a fireboss under the Lehigh Valley Company at the Continental Colliery at Centralia until that operation was abandoned when he accepted employment at Gilberton as an expert timberman and trackman and removed his family to Maizeville.

The accident of last evening was the most serious in the recent history of the anthracite region and served to attract thousands of persons to the vicinity of the colliery. Until long after the midnight hour several thousand persons loitered about the operation awaiting further news from the rescue parties beneath.

The body of William Mallick, of Frackville, was not recovered until early this morning. Members of his family awaited news of his fate and at one time the report emanated from the mine to indicate the man had escaped and in his fright had fled deep into the mines. Later in the night came the news that his mangled body had been found at the bottom of the heap of debris on the third level.

According to advices today from Mahanoy City many months will be required to rebuilding the damaged slope, the upper portion of which carried down with it a vast area of surface and thousands of tons of rock and silt that had been used to make the slope solid for speedy transportation of coal.