

# Time of mourning for a Kentucky coal-mining clan

CRAYNOR, Ky. (AP) — Ever since rescuers pulled the bodies from a coal mine, residents of this small town have been making their way up a winding muddy road to mourn with a family that lost seven relatives in a mine blast.

Wednesday's explosion cost Lillie Hamilton three sons, a grandson and three distant cousins.

Killed were her sons Donald Hamilton, 39, Jack Hamilton, 36, and Burnis Hamilton, 31; grandson Wade Hamilton, 23; and cousins Ronnie Hall, 25, Thurman Reynolds, 25, and Palmer McKinney, 26.

The men were killed when an explosion ripped through the Hamilton family's RFH Mining Co. tunnel near this Floyd County community.

Federal and state mine safety officials are to resume their investigation of the accident Monday. Willard Stanley, state mines and minerals commissioner, said the blast apparently was caused by explosives.

**THREE OF THE** seven men died instantly from internal injuries, medical examiners said. Poisonous carbon monoxide gas killed the other four a few seconds after the explosion.

The bodies of the four Hamiltons were taken Friday to the home of Purvis Hamilton, 47, Lillie's oldest son and father of Wade Hamilton.

The seven men will be buried today near the deep tunnel in a remote eastern Kentucky hollow where they lived, worked and died.

Funerals are scheduled Monday for two other men, crushed Friday when a tunnel collapsed at another mine. That mine was near the Phelps Community in Pike County, about 30 miles east of Craynor.

**FELLOW MINERS** described the cave-in as a "freak accident" at the small truck mine, which state officials said had a good safety and maintenance record.

In the past seven weeks, 38 men have died in coal mine accidents in

Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

Throughout Friday night and Saturday, dozens of friends and relatives quietly made their way to Purvis Hamilton's home. They drove slowly up the narrow, muddy road between two mountains, passing by the empty mine and the darkened homes of several of the dead men.

"People have been coming ever since they brought the bodies here," said Glenn Tackett, a cousin. He drove one of three four-wheel drive vehicles which ferried mourners the last half mile from a parking lot to the house.

**"THE ROAD IS** bad and there's no place to park up at the house," Tackett said. "I don't think there's anything we could have done to help the family more than this driving.

"Everybody around here is related and they're doing a lot to help the family," he said. "One man gave us \$100 and said to go buy them whatever groceries they needed. And he couldn't really afford to do that either."

Tackett and other relatives spent the day remodeling Purvis Hamilton's home for the funeral. They knocked out a wall to make a room large enough to hold the four coffins and built a front porch from lumber and sheet plastic.

On the porch, silent mourners sat surrounded by flowers. A relative's singsong chant was all that could be heard from inside the crowded house.

**AT PHELPS,** THE Smith family mourned the deaths of Vernon Wilson Smith, 37, of Phelps and Curtis Adams, 61, of Phyllis, a family friend.

Vernon Smith was a cousin of mine owners Jerry and Kenneth Smith.

Adams was a part-time preacher at the Bible Church in nearby Grapevine.