



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF MINES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

September 3, 1965

Memorandum

To : Acting District Manager, Health and Safety District E,
Lakewood, Colorado

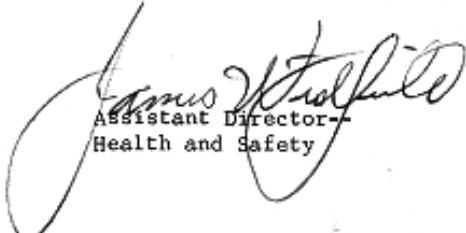
From : Assistant Director--Health and Safety

Subject: Bull Domingo Mine Disaster--November 13, 1885

A fire and explosion on November 13, 1885 at the Bull Domingo Mine, Silver Cliff, Colorado caused the suffocation of 10 miners.

On November 14, 15, and 17 the Pueblo, Colorado Chieftain printed relevant details of the occurrence, stating that a coroner's inquest was held on November 17th and 18th, but the findings were not revealed as far as could be ascertained by a search through later editions of this journal in the Library of Congress.

The enclosed summary draft was composed from available information. It is highly desirable to include the findings and conclusions reached by the coroner's jury. Please have a member of your staff secure this information for transmittal to this office at the earliest convenient time.


Assistant Director--
Health and Safety

Enclosure

cc:
(1) J. Westfield (2) E. P. Shoub
(1) R. G. Stott (2) L. W. Lanier
Files





November 13, 1885: Bull Domingo Mine (Silver-Gold), Silver Cliff,
Colorado; 10 killed

(From the Pueblo Chieftain--November 14-17, 1885)

At 7:00 p.m. portions of a burning roof fell into the boiler room, and the resultant explosion of a quantity of powder stored there rendered the hoisting equipment unserviceable. As the flames swept through the building and down a large section of the hoisting shaft, ten men working on the 550 foot level were trapped and suffocated. The hoistman tried vainly to operate the damaged machinery in order to bring the men to the surface before the flames surrounded him and he had to be carried away by his companions. Two men on the surface were slightly injured by the explosion.

As soon as the fire was brought under control early on the following morning, the debris was cleared away from the mouth of the shaft, and the remainder of the shaft fire extinguished. The foreman was lowered by rope to the 200 foot level where he found the air good but no sign of life from the missing men. Caving near the shaft collar forced him to the surface. However, later in the afternoon, when the caved areas had been cribbed, he was again lowered to the 550 foot level where he found the bodies of the victims. Five had climbed from the bottom of the shaft to the mouth of the drift while the others had died at the face of the drift.

Ropes, pulleys, and manpower were utilized as volunteers braved the depths to accompany each body to the surface in a six hour operation which ended at midnight on November 15.

**November 13, 1885: Bull Domingo Mine (Silver-Gold)
Silver Cliff, Colorado; 10 Killed.**

(From the Rosita Sierra Journal - November 19-26, 1885)

Courtesy of State Historical Society of Colorado

At about 7:00 p.m., a boiler room explosion destroyed the shaft house, much of the hoisting machinery, and entombed 10 men who died later from suffocation as fire swept through the wrecked building and down some 30 feet of shaftway before it was brought under control.

Two divergent views regarding the cause of the disaster received considerable space in local journals. One report indicated that portions of a burning roof caved in, causing the explosion of a quantity of dynamite which was being warmed and stored in the boiler room. However, the coroner's jury charged the mine superintendent with involuntary manslaughter when it was learned that dynamite had been placed on the boiler, also that primers may have been included.

An undisclosed number of miners would have met similar fates had they not reported late for work. The hoistman tried vainly to operate the damaged machinery in order to bring the men to the surface before flames surrounded him and he was carried away by his companions. A bucket line was formed from a well in the gulch below to extinguish the burning timbers around the shaft. Several hours were consumed in the necessary retimbering before a manshift hoister could be improvised.

B 5 p.m. on November 20, rescue workers completed clearing away all debris. Five of the victims were found on one end of the 550 foot level and the others, lying face down, were located at the opposite end of the drift.

The absence of a ladder in the manway compartment prevented the use of the shaft as an escape-way.

PUEBLO CHIEFRAIN
PUEBLO, COLORADO, TUESDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 17, 1885
THE CLIFF DISASTER
SAD SCENES AT THE FUNERALS OF EIGHT OF THE VICTIMS
(SPECIAL TO THE DENVER NEWS)

Silver Creek, Co., Nov. 15—The results of Friday night's disaster are of the most appalling description. The men were found dead last evening at about 5 o'clock, after the most heroic endeavors of miners and citizens. The removal of the bodies began about 6 p.m., the last being brought up to the surface about midnight, Robert McGregor and Thomas Armstrong alternating the going down the 500-foot shaft. The rope was attached to pulleys to let the brave men down. A corpse was bound to the rope and then the guide stood with his foot in the loop of the rope, with both arms encircling the body. Thus it was brought to the surface by the steady pull of scores of men.

The victims were probably suffocated within an hour at most, being stiff and cold when found with their hats and coats pulled over their faces in the vain struggle for life.

Westfall and Lambe left short letters, the former to his sister, assigning his insurance in the A.O.U.W. to his sister and two orphan nieces. The latter wrote his parents and wife.

The caving in of the shaft necessitated the removal of more than fifty feet of debris, hence the delay of some thirty hours in the recovery of the bodies.

Determined threats of lynching H. W. Foss, the superintendent, were indulged in and no doubt would have been put in effect had not prominent citizens gone to the mine and induced the infuriated relatives and friends of the dead to stay their rash intentions.

Coroner Burke called the inquest today, swore the jury, identified the bodies, and adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow.

Silver Cliff, November 16 – The mayor today issued a proclamation requesting all business houses to close from 12 to 4 this afternoon, during the funeral services of the victims of the Bull Domingo disaster. The funerals of eight of them took place today. Degresslier was buried from the Catholic Church at 11 this morning. Nourse, Heister, Patton, LaPointe, Lanbe, Strong and Westfall, Baptists were buried from the Bull-Domingo at 1 o'clock.

The funeral cortege contained upward of 100 vehicles, and was a mile and a half long. Some most heart-rending scenes were enacted at the funeral – wives of the dead men fainting, children weeping, bringing tears to the eyes of men unused to such portrayal of emotion. Tomorrow Westfall will be buried by the A.O.U.W. and George Smith's remains will be sent to Wisconsin.

The inquest that began yesterday, and adjourned until 10 today was necessarily postponed, owing to the desire of everybody to attend the funeral. The coroner will call the court at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning, when a thorough investigation will be had.

TO: JAMES WESTFIELD, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR—HEALTH AND SAFETY
FROM: ACTING DISTRICT MANAGER, DISTRICT E
SUBJECT: BULL DOMINGO MINE DISASTER—NOVEMBER 13, 1885

The findings of the coroner's jury which you requested in your memorandum dated September 3, 1965, on the subject disaster as reported in the Rosita Sierra Journal, November 26, 1885, page 2, column 2, are: "The Coroner's verdict of the inquiry on the Bull Domingo disaster was, in effect, that the Superintendent of the mine, H. W. Foss had been criminally negligent in his management of the mine affairs and was responsible for the death of ten miners."

We are sending you copies of page 2, November 26, 1885, which gives the verdict as well as page 2, November 19, 1885, giving the story on the disaster. If this material is used, the State Historical Society of Colorado should be credited as requested on the reverse side of each copy.

In your summary it is stated that the burning roof fell and that resulted in the explosion of the stored powder. You will note that according to the Journal, this was the management's version. Another version is that the powder and made-up primers placed on the top of the boiler to warm exploded and started the fire. This second story according to the Journal article appeared more probably from the information which they obtained.