

This is a 2-part news article by Tamie Dehler about the City Mine Explosion which occurred on February 20, 1925.

PART I

PART II

FATALITIES

Part I

Genealogy: Tragic mining disaster in Wabash Valley

Tamie Dehler

December 22, 2019

On Feb. 20, 1925, the Wabash Valley experienced the most tragic coal mining disaster in its history. This occurred at the City Mine, located one mile east of the town of Sullivan. That Friday morning, 135 miners had gone down into the shaft as usual. At 10:25 a.m., a massive explosion occurred in the northeast section of the mine. Despite its size and intensity, the blast could not be heard aboveground, where check weighman T. O. Thomas was 130 feet up, on top of the tibble with weight boss Bruce Lowry. They heard a “sizzling noise” and then felt a “violent gust of air” coming upward. The force of this air knocked them off their feet, rocked the tibble, and blew off some of its tin siding. The last words from the miners below were heard over a telephone: “My God, save us! Do something!” Then nothing further was heard.

The elevator cage was not functioning. The first men to enter the mine after the explosion were carpenter Glenn Morgan on a ladder, blacksmith William Hartley, lowered on a rope, and fire boss Russell Stewart, who went in without a gas mask and spent four hours underground searching for the location of his men. He had to be hoisted out on a stretcher and revived by a physician. Mine engineer

John Slieder went down and worked all night and into the next day. He stated, "I sent them into the mine; I'm going to hoist every one of them to the top before I quit." Check Weighman T.O. Thomas stood grimly at the top of the shaft to identify every body brought up. He refused to go home the next day for the birthday dinner his wife had prepared for him.

In the next thirty minutes, eighty-four men emerged from the mine relatively uninjured. Most had nosebleeds, as they had stuck their fingers far up inside their noses to keep from breathing the toxic gas. These men had been working in the opposite section of the mine, away from the actual explosion. After their escape, many went right back inside as part of the rescue crews, such as miner Steve Williams. Fifty-one miners were still down there.

Word was immediately put forth calling on all physicians in the area and all mine rescue teams in any nearby Indiana or Illinois community to respond to the accident. The first major rescue team to arrive was from the U. S. Bureau of Mines, located in Vincennes and lead by Jack Ogilvie of Bicknell. It took them an hour to arrive at the mine and then another half hour to get inside the mine and down to the area of the explosion.

The first miner to be brought up alive was Elmer Davidson of Sullivan. His chest had been crushed by falling slate, but he had survived. Others to get out alive were mine president John M. Lowry and Floyd and Marshall Shipman, all uninjured. Lowry had been called down prior to the blast by the miners in run 3 reporting a problem. He entered the mine with pit boss Harry Anderson, who had branched off and was killed in the blast.

By the end of the day, sixteen bodies had been recovered. Thirty-four remained underground. Rescue teams stated that there was no question that the rest were all dead. Time to recover the bodies was of the essence because the rescue teams feared that rooms in runs 3 and 4, where the bodies were located, were sinking and were at risk for an earth slide that would entomb all bodies underground.

Hearing the news of the disaster, thousands of people appeared on the scene—some were relatives of the trapped miners, some had come to help the rescue crews, some to set up on-site ancillary assistance, and some came to gawk. There were so many people on the scene that the crowds threatened to hinder the rescue operations and the authorities struggled to keep the crowd at bay. The American Legion and Boy Scouts assisted with crowd control.

The rescue efforts continued into the following day. Robert Robertson of Sullivan, who had been on an underground team for seventeen hours, was brought to the surface exhausted. They continued to recover bodies, some of which were difficult to identify. Each victim was sent to the morgue where the miner was positively identified and a death certificate prepared. In all, fifty-one had perished.

To be continued next week.

Part II

Genealogy: 51 miners killed in explosion in Valley

Tamie Dehler

December 29, 2019

Last week described the explosion and rescue efforts that took place in the Wabash Valley's most tragic mine disaster, which occurred at Sullivan's City Mine on Feb. 20, 1925. The explosion severely injured one miner and killed fifty-one others who were working in runs 3 and 4 in the northeast section of the mine. They sustained severe burns, crush injuries, and asphyxiation. Eighty-four miners who were working in other sections of the mine were spared.

The cause of the explosion was attributed to an open flame from a miner's headlamp igniting flammable gas that had leaked into the runs in question. The source of this leaked gas was hypothesized to be from the closed-off tunnel of an old mine shaft that the miners had accidentally breached. (This was reported by the Indianapolis Times on Feb. 21, 1925. [This article can be viewed here](#) as a .jpg image).

But breaching an old shaft was not mentioned in the final report filed by the Indiana Bureau of Mines, which stated, "The evidence would all seem to indicate that the explosion had its origins at about Room 13 or 14 at the 4th North entry and was propagated through the northeast section by fine coal dust...accompanied by an inrush of gas from the roof...and that the gas had been ignited by the open light of a miner at about No. 12 or No. 13 Room." The entire original report of the investigation of the disaster can be found at https://usminedisasters.miningquiz.com/saxsewell/city_news_only.htm.

All during the rescue and recovery the community of Sullivan and beyond rallied together. Women prepared meals for on-scene workers, the Red Cross set up accommodations, the American Legion and Boy Scouts assisted with crowd control, physicians and ambulances rallied to the scene, local stores acted as temporary hospitals, fund-raisers were later held. Following the disaster, the Lynch Coal

Operators Reciprocal Association provided \$3,960 to each dependent family of a deceased miner, as well as \$100 towards the funeral.

The fifty-one victims, their ages, jobs at the mine, and places of residence were reported in the Sullivan Union on Feb. 25, 1925, and are listed on the [Indiana Genealogical Society's website](#).

A search on Ancestry for their death certificates reveals records for fifty of the fifty-one miners. Some of the names are slightly different from the names reported in the newspaper. Here are their exact names as listed on the death records (which can also contain errors). All death certificates were issued as a result of a coroner's inquest, all causes of death were listed as "coal mine explosion-173a." The code 173 indicates death by crushing. This list is the order in which the death records were issued, perhaps indicating the order in which they were found or identified.

See table below

John George Solman, John Row, Russel Dowdy, Robert Freeman, Everett Keller, Ross E. Boothe, Clinton Higginbotham, Emil Lecocq, John A. Ward, Pearl Hawhee, Frank Eugene Hawhee, Dan Washington Purcell, Arthur Chester Sullivan, James Joseph Boyle, David Hammet Smith, Evertt Metcalf, Charles Sheedy, Charles Roscoe McCammon, Harry Lee Anderson, Harold Cecil Carty, John Carrl Thomas, George Baird, Claude Trader, Silas Wagner, Artha Frank Smith, John Brown, Harry Eugene Gorby, Earl D. Robertson, James Miller, Blaine Gibson, Dwight McClanahan, Elmer Earl Eaton, James Burris, Filorant Lecocq, Wayne Walters, Philip Walters, George Neal, Michiel Cusack, Mr. John Collins, Frank Mason, James Eller, Gilbert Taylor, William H. Maberly, R. L. Jackson, Oliver Keagy, Lexie T. Robertson, Frank Cottingham, Claude Sanders, Patrick Joseph Dunning, Elmer Earl Laughlin. No death record

could be found for Perry Oliver Maxwell who was listed as Harry Maxwell in the Sullivan newspaper. All men except Claude Sanders have a memorial on Find a Grave. Sanders was buried in Vigo County, but the exact cemetery was not indicated.

City Mine Fatalities

| No. | Last Name | First Name | Middle Name | Age | Occupation | Residence |
|-----|--------------|------------|-------------|-----|--------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Anderson | Harry | | | Mine Foreman | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 2 | Baird | George | | 23 | Motorman | West Terre Haute, Indiana |
| 3 | Boothe | Ross | E. | 37 | Pick Miner | West Terre Haute, Indiana |
| 4 | Boyle | James | | 52 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 5 | Brown | John | | 56 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 6 | Burris | James | | 30 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 7 | Carty | Cecil | | 24 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 8 | Collins | John | | 33 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 9 | Cottingham | Frank | | 31 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 10 | Cusack | Mike | | 39 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 11 | Dowdy | Russell | | 22 | Motorman | West Terre Haute, Indiana |
| 12 | Dunning | Pat | J. | 42 | Loader | Terre Haute, Indiana |
| 13 | Eaton | Ellis | | 54 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 14 | Eller | James | | 36 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 15 | Freeman | Robert | | | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 16 | Gibson | Blaine | | 33 | Machine Man | Jasonville, Indiana |
| 17 | Gorby | Harry | | 23 | Loader | Dugger, Indiana |
| 18 | Hawhee | Frank | | 21 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 19 | Hawhee | Pearl | | 48 | Machine Man | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 20 | Higginbotham | Clinton | | | Pick Miner | West Terre Haute, Indiana |
| 21 | Jackson | R. | L. | | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 22 | Keagy | Oliver | | 40 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 23 | Keller | Everett | | 23 | Loader | West Terre Haute, Indiana |
| 24 | Laughlin | Earl | | 24 | Loader | West Terre Haute, Indiana |
| 25 | Lecocq | Emil | | 34 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |

| | | | | | | |
|----|------------|---------|----|----|-------------|----------------------|
| 26 | Lecocq | Florenz | | 62 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 27 | Mason | Frank | | 57 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 28 | Maxwell | Harry | | | Pick Miner | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 29 | McCammon | Charles | | 38 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 30 | McClanahan | De Witt | | 24 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 31 | Metcalf | Everett | | 28 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 32 | Miller | James | | 43 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 33 | Moberly | W. | H. | 26 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 34 | Neal | John | | 34 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 35 | Purcell | Dan | | 46 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 36 | Robertson | Earl | | 34 | Machine Man | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 37 | Robertson | Lex | | | Trip Rider | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 38 | Row | John | | | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 39 | Sanders | Claude | | 27 | Day Man | Terre Haute, Indiana |
| 40 | Sheedy | Charles | | | Pick Miner | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 41 | Smith | Dave | | | Day Man | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 42 | Smith | Frank | | 40 | Pick Miner | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 43 | Soloman | John | | 24 | Machine Man | Clinton, Indiana |
| 44 | Sullivan | Arthur | C. | | Trip Rider | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 45 | Taylor | Gilbert | | 26 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 46 | Thomas | John | | 27 | Pick Miner | Clinton, Indiana |
| 47 | Trader | Claude | E. | 40 | Loader | Clinton, Indiana |
| 48 | Wagner | Silas | | 38 | Track Layer | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 49 | Walters | Phillip | | 57 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 50 | Walters | Wayne | | 19 | Loader | Sullivan, Indiana |
| 51 | Ward | John | A. | | Track Layer | Sullivan, Indiana |

Source: Indiana Genealogical Society