

April 6, 1885
Culyer Colliery
Raven Run, Pennsylvania
10 Killed

(From the "Mining Herald and Colliery Engineer," April 11, 1885, p.178)

About one o'clock on Monday afternoon last, the mining village of Raven Run was thrown into a state of the wildest excitement by the announcement that an extensive cave-in had occurred at Culyer colliery and that ten men then in the mine were probably killed. The concussion caused by the fall was so great that it sent a cloud of dust up from the breaker, and this told the persons outside what had occurred. A few minutes later the whole village seemed to be at the scene of the accident and the cries of the wives and children of the ten men, who were known to be in the fatal mine, could be heard throughout the entire village. There was hope at first that the men in the mine might have escaped the fall, but the concussion was so great that most persons believed them dead even if they had not been killed by the fall. The lapse of a few hours time confirmed the worst fears of those outside, who watched and waited in vain for the return of the ten men in the mine. They not only failed to come out, but exploring parties returned without any tidings of them.

Culyer colliery has been in operation about twenty years. The workings are in the Buck mountain seam and consist of a drift or water level, and two slopes, which are sunk to a depth of about 700 feet below the water level. The slopes are sunk at a distance of perhaps a mile apart, but are connected both by the water level gangway, through which the coal is still taken to the breaker, and other gangways below. The seam at this point is about twelve feet thick, an excellent quality of coal. The workings are divided into four lifts below the water level, the bottom one of which is in the basin, and the total distance from the lower gangway to the surface, as the seam runs, at an average pitch of about 18 degrees, is about 1,000 feet.

The fact that the seam had an excellent roof enabled the operators to take a great deal of coal out of it at little comparative cost. Very little timber was used or required, and the pillars are said to have been very weak. At a point about four or five hundred feet west of the east slope, a crush began several months ago. The pillars were weak and cracked continually under the weight of the great mountain of rock above them, the squeeze extending from the lower lift gangway to the drift level. Three or four days before the accident occurred the squeeze on the pillars and on what little timber there was in the mine became so heavy that the men were afraid to work under it, and on Monday morning work was suspended at the mine owing to the dangerous condition of the workings. The inside boss then selected seven men to go into the lower lift to retimber the gangway point at which it was being crushed. At the same time a worker and his son, aged 18, who were working a breast in the second lift, also went in to work, and a driver went in to take the coal away from them. These were the only persons in the mine on the day of the accident and being directly under the fall were killed instantly. An examination of the mine shows that the fall extends eight hundred feet along the gangway and all the way to the surface. The fall can be approached from either side, and this enables those acquainted with the working to determine accurately the width of the break, but it also dispels hope that the miners might be taken out alive.

THE COAL MINE DISASTER

Efforts to Reach the Imprisoned Miners, Who are Undoubtedly Dead.

SHENANDOAH, Penn., April 7 - The excitement and suspense at the Cuyler Colliery at Raven Run, where the cave-in occurred yesterday afternoon, remains unabated. The attempt to reach the 10 men who are closed in by the caving in of the roof was continued all night but without success. Superintendent Baird of Kelley Run colliery headed a party last night, who descended both the new and old slopes in the hope of reaching the men. Mr. Baird is considered one of the pluckiest and hardiest men who go under the ground, but on his return he said he never saw anything to equal the cave-in in his whole experience of mining, both in this country and Great Britain. The pillars were working, the top was cracking and every few minutes small falls were taking place. The party did not get to within * * yards of where the men are supposed to be. Superintendent Baird said the mine has been entirely robbed out and that no pillars of any consequence have been left standing; even the claim pillar along the new slope was not the required thickness, being much less than in any colliery in the region. The honeycombing was carried on to such an extent and the strain was so great upon the few pillars of coal left standing, that with an ordinary mining pick one man in day could cut as much coal as 10 men in any other mine. The coal is running in loose strips and it is the opinion of the miners that too much of it was taken out of the portion of the mine where the cave-in occurred. A squeeze has been going on for a month and the miners had noticed it daily going to their several chambers to work.

One of the party of rescuers who went into the mine this morning compared the scene to a volcano. The cracking coal and rock struck terror into his heart. This morning, the Superintendent of the colliery put 80 men to work. They will be dividing into three sets, each working eight hours, and one relieving the other at the end of that time. They are engaged in timbering, and are starting from the bottom of level No. 4. The timbers to be put in are not supposed to hold up the pressing roof but to give the rescuing party warning when they are on dangerous ground. The timbers will splinter and crack when the squeeze becomes too great for them, and thus the rescuers will be given a warning to retreat. All day today, thousands of people visited the colliery, all solicitous to know the extent of the damages and how soon the enclosed miners are to be reached. Several mining engineers of the region who have maps of the interior workings of the mine arrived at the colliery and made a descent under charge of the Superintendent and a body of miners. According to their estimation the cave-in extends over an area of 200 square yards. Today the surface for a space of 160 yards has fallen a depth of four feet and it expected to go through before morning. The wives and sisters of the ill-fated men are the bravest persons around the colliery. They determined in a body today, through their frenzy and at the peril of their lives, to descend the mine in search of the bodies of those who are near and dear to them. It was found necessary to place a guard of police around the opening of the mine to keep them from carrying out their mad purpose. The Cuyler colliery is worked on what is known as the Buck Mountain vein, which has a thickness through Locust Mountain, upon which range the mine has been opened of 12 or 15 feet. The coal has always been free and the top not extra good. There is no doubt whatever in the mines of those in a position to know that the men in the mine have all perished. The concussion was so great that loose material in the engine house was blown in every direction. As affairs look at 9 o'clock this evening there is no telling when the unfortunate men may be reached. Despair has taken the place of the hope of last evening and though there are many willing and ready hands to work, life is not considered safe to venture even near the point where the cave-in occurred.

Fort Wayne Daily
April 7, 1885

BURIED IN A MINE
Ten Men Meet With a Terrible Accident in a Coal Mine

By Telegraph to the Gazette

SHEANDOAH, Pa. - April 6, - This afternoon one of the gangways of the Cuyler Colliery at Raven Run, Operated by S. M. Heaton, & Co., caved in without warning, entombing ten miners. The cave was caused by a sudden crushing of the timbers. The names of the ten men entombed are: F. McLaughlin, Wm. Anderson, Henry M. Eaves, Benjamin Maurer, Nicholas Pu**ell, Barney Smith, Nicholas Herrity, Daniel Kenny, and John Cavanaugh. The entombed men all have families. The cries of their wives and children fill the air. Exploring parties report that the mine is a complete wreck and all hope of rescuing the imprisoned miners alive has been abandoned.

Syracuse Daily
April 7, 1885

BURIED ALIVE IN A MINE
Ten Men Imprisoned Seven Hundred Feet Under Ground With no Hope of Rescue
A COLLIERY ALL IN RUINS
Doubtful Friends Standing at the Opening of the Mine Afraid to Investigate Its Dangers -
Many Lives Saved by a Holiday

SHENANDOAH, Pa., April 6 - The gangway of the Cuyler Colliery at Raven Run caved in this afternoon, entombing ten miners working inside. The cave-in occurred 400 feet from the bottom of the slope and was caused by a sudden crushing of timbers. The names of the men entombed are Frank McDonald, William Anderson, John Anderson, Henry Mervine, Benjamin Maurer, Nicholas Purcell, Barney Smith, Michael Herrity, Daniel Kenny and John Cavanaugh. There is no means of ascertaining whether the imprisoned prisoners are dead or alive. Everything possible is being done to rescue but the danger of approaching the break prevents hundreds of men gathered at the scene from attempting their rescue. The miners have little hope that the imprisoned men will be rescued alive. The scene at the mouth of the slope is heart-rending in the extreme. The unfortunate men are all men of families and the appealing cries of their wives and children fill the air in the vicinity.

LATER - The cave-in is even more serious than was at first reported. Exploring parties, who have attempted to enter the mine, report that it is completely wrecked and all hopes of rescuing the imprisoned miners alive has been abandoned. The slope is 700 feet deep and is divided into the four lifts. The men now in the mine were in the lower lift, 400 feet above. There were three openings to the mine, an air hole and two slopes, and all three are closed below the first lift. The dangerous condition of the place not only prevents rescuing parties from doing any work, but forbids a thorough examination of the workings. The concussion caused by the fall was so great that nine cars at the foot of the first lift were forced up the slope fifty feet. Miners who are acquainted with the workings declare it not only impossible to rescue the men alive but doubt whether the bodies can be recovered. It is their judgment also that the colliery is a complete wreck. The colliery employed from 150 to 200 men, but fortunately was not in operation today. Had it been working all the men would undoubtedly have shared the same fate.

Marion Daily Star
April 8, 1885

ENTOMBED MINERS
A Coal Mine Caves in at Ravin Run, Pa.
Ten Men Buried with no Hope of Saving Them

SHENANDOAH - April 6 - This afternoon one of the gangways of the Cuyler Colliery at Raven Run, operated by S. M. Heaton & Co., caved in without warning, entombing ten miners. The cave was caused by a sudden crushing of the timbers. The names of the ten men entombed are: Frank McLaughlin, William Anderson, John Anderson, Henry Mervine, Benjamin Maurer, Nicholas Purcell, Barney Smith, Michael Herity, Daniel Kenny, and John Cavanaugh. The entombed men all have families and the cries of the wives and children fill the air. Exploring parties report the mine a complete wreck and all hope of rescuing the imprisoned miners alive has been abandoned. The slope is seven hundred feet deep, and is divided into four lifts. The ten men now in the mine were in the lower lift and the place is closed to the bottom.

New York Times
April 26, 1885

AFTER THREE WEEKS' BURIAL

Three Bodies Found in a Mine That Caved In.

SHENANDOAH, Penn., - April 25 - This is the most exciting day at Cuyler colliery since the 10 miners were imprisoned there three weeks ago. Rescuing parties one after another have been at work night and day, braving the greatest dangers ever since. A rumor was circulated last night that three men in the No. 2 level would in all probability be reached some time this morning. A large number of people consequently went to the mine this morning to await their discovery. At 10 o'clock a wagon was hoisted from which jumped Richard Edwards, the foreman of the shift, who said the men had been reached. A rough box was hastily constructed by the excited people and sent inside. Twenty minutes later the box brought to the surface, the remains of John Anderson, frightfully disfigured and in a bad state of decomposition. Some difficulty was experienced in identifying the body, this being finally done by means of the boots. When found he lay on his right side, between two pillars in No. 16 breast, crushed by a heavy piece of coal. It took over an hour to dig the body from under the coal. Young Anderson's death was, of course, instantaneous. He was found 100 yards from the point where the party first commenced the search nearly three weeks ago. The men who found the body were so overcome that they were unable to again enter the mine to finish their work. The bodies of Frank McLaughlin and William Anderson were found soon after covered by hundreds of tons of coal and rock. These, it is expected will be removed by morning.

Anderson's body was taken to Girardville, where it was interred, his mother, whose husband is another victim, not being permitted to see it. She is so deeply affected over the loss of both husband and son that her mind may be permanently impaired.

The Daily Democrat
Lima, Ohio
May 5, 1885

Cuyler Colliery

POTTSVILLE, Pa., May 5 - The body of the elder Anderson has been discovered at the Cuyler Colliery. The work for the recovery of the bodies of the remaining seven men buried in the lower parts of the mine is still being prosecuted. It is doubtful, however, that they will ever be reached. Suits have been entered by the widows and children of the victims aggregating \$200,000.

New York Times
May 26, 1885

CUYLER COLLIERY DISASTER

THE CORONER'S JURY CENSURE THE MINING INSPECTOR

POTTSVILLE, Penn., May 26 - The Coroner's Jury in the case of Henry Mervine, the last recovered of the victims of the Cuyler Colliery disaster after deliberating for 10 hours, returned a verdict early in the morning as follows:

"That death ensued from the fall of the dividing stone and the top coal while the men were in the act of attempting to stop a squeeze by timbering No. 4 gangway under the instruction of the boss miner. The fall was caused by excessive robbing of the pillars. The removing of the pillars was in accordance with the terms of the lease of the land owner, and with the knowledge and consent of their agent, and that the inspector was derelict in his duty, in permitting this undue robbing to be done, without protesting against the same."

The jury was composed of two ex-coal operators, two miners and two merchants. Thomas Eagar, the inside foreman was the last witness called but nothing new was elicited. He says he ordered the men out of the mine on the morning of the accident, but could give no satisfactory reason to the jury for his action. The Heaton Brothers have worked very successfully this colliery for over a period of 20 years with very few accidents until the late disaster occurred. Work will not be resumed at the Cuyler Colliery until some time in June when the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company will assume control. In the meantime, the Heaton Brothers' time is occupied in preparing their defense in the suit instituted against them by the families of the 10 victims for \$20,000 damages. Robert Mauchin, the censured Mine Inspector is 60 years of age and is considered an expert miner and has had charge of the district for over five years. His duties are almost beyond the power of one individual to perform, having 12 collieries to examine, divided in three counties, each of which requires one week's time to thoroughly inspect. The verdict, however appears to be what was anticipated.