



Report

Wellbrum Mine

WEHRUM MINE EXPLOSION.June 23rd, 1909.

LOCATION-

The Wehrum Mine is located in the south-eastern part of Indiana County, Pennsylvania, about 10 miles directly north of Johnstown and on the line of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and is owned and operated by the Lackawanna Coal & Coke Company.

COAL BED-

The Miller Coal Bed is reported to be operated at this mine, which has a thickness of 3'8" to 3'10". The Coal contains about 17% Volatile matter, 6% Ash and 4% Sulphur. The average daily capacity of the mine is 1300 tons. The coal is somewhat irregular, having a number of faults or clay veins.

DEVELOPMENT-

The coal is reached by means of two shafts each 150 ft. deep and a slope of 20°. One shaft serves as an outlet for the air and the other shaft and slope serve as intakes for air as well as means for raising the coal. The mine is developed on the double, triple and quadruple system of entries with room and pillar work. A small part of the mine has been worked on the long wall method. Owing to the lack of height the bottom is taken up so as to maintain a total height of 5 ft. This bottom is a shale and necessitates blasting to remove it. The coal is undercut by means of compressed air punching machines and is shot down by means of black powder and fulmenite; dynamite being used in shooting up the bottom. The mine furnishes about 1100 gallons of water per minute, in consequence large parts of the mine are wet.

However, there were some parts of the mine which were found to be dry and there was evidence of coal dust on the floor, on the ribs and timber. Much coal dust was in evidence on the south main entry extending away from the foot of the slope along the haul-way where the trains of cars were assembled. Along the 1st South Left entry, beyond the 3rd Butt the roadways were quite dry and dusty. The 3rd Butt entry off the 1st South Left was also dry and in the rooms to the left of the 3rd Left Butt the bottom of the mine was dry and dust was in evidence, but not in great abundance. No system of applying water to the dry parts of the mine was practiced.

VENTILATION-

The mine is ventilated by means of a modern Capell fan 16 ft. in diameter, working as an exhaust. The fan is set to one side at the top of the air shaft and a housing forms a conduit from the top of the shaft to the fan. The top over the shaft consists of a large wooden frame. This frame was slightly dislodged by the force of the explosion.

EXPLOSION-

At 7.40 o'clock A.M., on June 23rd, 1909. an explosion took place within this mine which resulted in the loss of 17 persons and the injury of 16 others, of which latter 4 have since died, making the total fatalities 21. One of those killed outright died from physical injuries received. Another was sufficiently burned to have caused death and the 4 who have since died were also badly burned. The other 14 died from the effects of breathing after-gases and were not burned. The explosion was limited to two sections of the mine, the main North and South

entries and the 1st South Left. Beyond the limits of the explosion, along the main North and South entries, the roof, sides and bottom of the mine were damp, the bottom being sufficiently damp to be plastic. The initial point of the explosion appears to have been at the face of the 1st North Left return airway. It would appear that the explosion originating at this point traveled in the direction of the shaft and passed up into the 1st South Left where additional impetus was given by a secondary explosion of greater violence, caused by the inflammation of coal dust, judging from the mechanical effects witnessed after the explosion. There was little evidence of charred coal dust through the affected part of the mine. At the face of the 1st South Left entry two men were at work; one appears to have been drilling a hole in which to put a charge of powder. The hole had been drilled in about 3 ft. and a sulphur ball or some other hard substance interfered with the advance of the auger. The auger had been withdrawn and a hand churn drill had been inserted into the hole, evidently for the purpose of drilling through the obstruction. The other man in this place was found about 30 ft. back from the face of the entry, being very badly burned. At this point a bursted 5 pound powder flask was found, having its top blown off and the inside of the can showing indication of much heat. On the roof immediately over and on two props standing nearby, as well as on some of the gob, was found blisters and charred dust. About 25 ft. out-by this can, at the near corner of the crosscut, was found a piece of newspaper, part of which was charred and on the rib of the coal at this point some charred dust was found within the crevices. Going out from the face of the entry and on the left

side were turned 5 rooms, the gob at the entrance ^{to} some of these rooms was blown in an outward direction. At the junction of the 1st South Left with the 2nd and 3rd Left Butt entries, were found several bodies, part of whom had been suffocated. There were 5 bodies taken from this vicinity who were afterwards revived. It would appear that all of these men were at work in the faces of their respective rooms and escaped any flame that may have been present along the entries. Just inside of the room necks on the 3rd Left Butt there was some charred coal dust, but none at the face of the rooms.

Returning to the point of the Initial explosion, the evidence in the investigation showed that the man who fired the shot causing the explosion survived the effects and gave testimony to the effect that, on the night previous to the explosion, at the face of the entry, he had fired a charge of powder in the bottom coal which blew out. On the morning of the 23rd, he put into this same hole two sticks of gelatin dynamite and fired them without having used any tamping. This miner, with two others, retired to the first cross-cut back from the face of the entry. Immediately upon the dynamite exploding the mine exploded. These three men were slightly burned, two of whom succeeded in escaping but the third succeeded in traveling about 200 ft. and lost his life. On the first entry to the south of the main shaft were four men at the time of the explosion. One of these men was blown through a cross-cut in the direction of the shaft; a brick stopping in this cross-cut being blown out at the same time. Two of the men were blown towards the south and the 4th man was about 40 ft.

from the point at which he stood when the explosion occurred. One of the two men blown to the south was killed. The evidence along this entry indicated that the mechanical force traveled in the opposite direction toward the north as was in evidence by the position of timber blown out, and trolley and electric wires torn from their supports.

On the main south entry, just opposite the diagonal cross-cut, was standing a trip of loaded mine cars. The coal on these cars in the vicinity of the diagonal cross-cut had charred and coked dust, and on the eastern exposure of the cars charred dust was found; also on some upright posts in the cross-cut to the west of this trip of cars there was charred dust on the eastern exposure. This locality was within 250 ft. of the point where the fresh intake current entered the mine. All of the men in this vicinity received burns. One man who was descending the slope at the time of the explosion, carrying a tripod of a transit, was knocked down and slightly injured. In the man-way on the slope there is a stairway and near the bottom of the slope 6 of the steps of the stairway were missing. After the explosion, in the northeastern part of the mine, men continued at work until noon, at which time persons exploring the mine withdrew them. After the explosion, a contractor who was on the outside went to the workings on the 2nd South West and withdrew about 20 men. On his trip into this section he was met by a man with a safety lamp who had gone in after the explosion and who remonstrated with him against taking an open lamp into that part of the mine, but notwithstanding this he continued into the mine and withdrew the men.

Several of the men, whose prostrate bodies were found on the 1st South Left, near the 3rd Left Butt, upon being brought to the surface, quickly revived. Two men carried out from this locality, apparently dead, were revived by the use of oxygen from Oxone generators taken to the mine from Johnstown. All the bodies were recovered and all persons were out of the mine when the District State Inspector arrived on the ground, about 7.30 o'clock P.M., the day of the explosion.

CO-OPERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES-

The noon edition of the Pittsburg Press, of June 23rd, gave an account of the explosion, reporting 100 men in the mine and one taken out dead, and 6 having been recovered badly burned. At 2 P.M. a telegram was sent to the District Mine Inspector, Mr. Jos. Williams, at Wehrum, as follows:- "Advise if Rescue apparatus will be of any service in Lackawanna Mine" signed J. W. Paul. No response having been made to this telegram and the evening Pittsburg papers having an account of the disaster and stating that 60 men were believed to be within the mine, imprisoned by reason of a fire, it was considered advisable that a visit be made to the mine with a view of learning the conditions and whether or not the Rescue Apparatus at Pittsburg Station could be of service. The Pittsburg newspapers had related that Rescue apparatus had been taken by automobile to the mine, so the inference was made that Rescue apparatus would be available upon arriving at the mine. However, this proved to be a mistake in so far that the apparatus sent to the mine consisted only of

oxygen generators, which would be available only in fresh air.

I arrived at the Wehrum Mine at 8.15 A.M. June 24th and at 9.15 A.M. entered the Mine with the following Inspectors; Joseph Williams, in charge of the District; Thomas Williams, Alex. Monteith, Nicholas Evans and D. R. Blower, and an investigation of the mine was made until 5.15 P.M., when the party came out of the mine. The observations taken during this visit are outlined above.

Upon coming out of the mine we found that Inspectors C. B. Ross and I. G. Roby had arrived and were, on the following day, to make further examination of the mine.

GAS IN THE MINE-

A careful examination was made of the affected parts of the mine to determine the presence of explosive gas and none was found by the use of a safety lamp.

CORONORS' VERDICT-

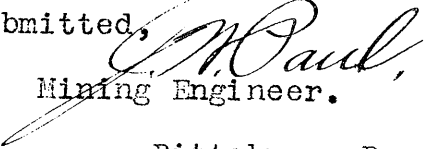
The Coronors' Jury empaneled to investigate the cause of the death of the victims of the Wehrum Mine Disaster, on July 16th, returned a verdict to the effect that the men came to their death as a result from a charge of dynamite igniting mine dust and that the Jurors were of the opinion that the explosion would have penetrated every part of the mine had not the dust been wet in some places.

COAL DUST TESTS.

On July 24th, at the Government Station at Pittsburg, a test was made in the explosive gallery No. 1, with coal dust from the Wehrum Mine. This dust when shot into with black powder

and with gelatine dynamite caused the dust to explode with great violence. There were present at this test: Mine Inspectors Jos. Williams, Alex. Monteith, Jos. Knapper and T. S. Lowther. Also Mr. W. N. Johnson, Superintendent, W. A. James, Chief Engineer, S. N. Hewlett, Mining Engineer, and others of the Lackawanna Coal & Coke Company.

Respectfully submitted,


Mining Engineer.

Pittsburg, Pa., Aug. 17th, 1909.



Newspaper Accounts

Stop This Slaughter

JUST at a time when the country is carrying out the most extensive program in history in an effort to prevent mine disasters, explosions seem more frequent than ever before. With such frequency have these explosions occurred that the sight of miners carrying the burned and charred bodies of their comrades from mines is no longer a novelty.

After each explosion it is announced that the miners met their death in a model mine. Inspectors are ready to testify that they made examinations immediately before the explosions. On May 20 the mine at Wehrum was examined and the inspector reported that ventilation and drainage were in excellent condition. Yet there was an explosion a few days later which snuffed out many lives.

There has been a series of disasters in what are called the model mines of Western Pennsylvania. During this period experiments have been made at the government's experimental station in Pittsburg. Practical miners, superintendents and inspectors have been sent there to witness experiments and learn the cause of explosions. Still the disasters continue.

Announcement that a mine was a model will not stop the tears of the widows and orphans nor will it provide them with food, clothing and shelter. Nor will the public be willing to accept the opinion that it was a model mine when there are explosions and disasters.

It is time to stop this slaughter of men.

July 2, 1909

21 WEHRUM VICTIMS

Two More Miners Injured in Disaster Are Dead.

JOHNSTOWN, Pa., July 2.—[Special.]—Calvin Huey, injured in the Wehrum mine disaster, died today at the Miners' Hospital in Spangler. Patrick Burns, another victim, died yesterday. The two fatalities bring the total death list to 21. Huey is survived by a widow and two children. Burns leaves a widow and three children. The mine where the disaster occurred was put into operation again this morning. The officials there have not received word as to the date of the inquest.

17 MEN DIED IN MINE; 16 ARE HURT

Bodies of All Victims in Wehrum, Pa., Disaster Recovered

Wehrum, Pa., June 24.—Seventeen lives were snuffed out and 16 miners were terribly burned by the explosion yesterday morning in Mine No. 4 of the Lackawanna Coal and Coke Co. at this place. All the bodies have been recovered and are in the improvised morgue, made out of an abandoned stable.

The injured were sent to the Spangler Hospital at Spangler, Pa. excepting A. L. Johnston, the mine foreman and son of the superintendent, and two foreigners, who are at their homes in Wehrum. Johnston is expected to die. The others will probably recover. The total death list will not exceed 18.

THE DEAD:

A. D. RAYMER, aged 31, American, married.
JOSEPH MERRIOTT, 25, Italian, single.
MIKE LITTON, 23, Italian, single.
ALEXANDER SHAFTOCK, 46, Hungarian.
CHARLES GEOVDA, 22, Italian, married.
LEVEY LOUIS, 22, Italian, married.
ERNEST BARROCCI, 41, Italian, married.
DOMINICK LITTON, 21, Italian, single.
ANTONIO BATEST, 20, Italian, single.
ANTONIO TOTURA, 22, Italian, single.
GEORGE KOWASH, 23, Hungarian, married.
CHARLES FOLDY, 32, Hungarian, married.
SIMON RAMINSKI, 35, Hungarian, single.
STEVE BASE, 35, Polish, single.
KOSTI LEVICK, 31, Russian, single.
CHARLES LORRY, 26, Italian, single.
GEORGE LENN, 34, Russian, married.

THE INJURED:

A. L. Johnston, son of Superintendent W. N. Johnston, burned and left arm lacerated, taken to his home; John Tobin and John Kessler, taken to their homes; P. F. Burns, William Burns, C. E. Huey, Chris Frazier, Sam Koncha, Louis Koncha, Frank Dilegram, Tony Martin, Fred Thomas, Nick Spelli, Thomas Battisti, Joseph Onvort, Patrick Battisti, all badly burned, sent to hospital.

A conference of mine inspectors and experts was held this morning in the office of Superintendent A. M. Johnson. At this conference were W. A. James, chief engineer of the Lackawanna Steel Co., of Buffalo, N. Y., who arrived this morning, and B. Holliday, of the Ellsworth collieries, and J. A. Paul, of the United States Experimental station at the Pittsburgh arsenal.

The probable cause of the explosion was discussed and the most general opinion prevailing, although no official announcement of the cause was given out, was that a pocket of gas had been released and ignited by an open lamp used by one of the miners.

The conference lasted until 9:30 o'clock and the inspectors then entered the mine for a more complete exploration and inspection of the mine. This examination will last all day and may not be completed until late tomorrow afternoon.

Scores of Workers May Be Victims of Explosion in Mine at Wehrum, Pa.

*Copy Press
6/23/09*

Wehrum, Pa., June 23.—As the result of an explosion, shortly before 8 o'clock this morning, at the mine of the Lackawanna Coal and Coke Co. here, several men were killed and many were injured.

At the time of the accident, over 100 men were at work in the mine, including foremen and other officials and heads of departments. At 9:45 o'clock this morning, but few of these had come out or been brought out of the mine. At the mine, at 9:45 o'clock this morning, it was stated that there would probably be a large death list, as well as a heavy list of the injured.

As soon as it was known that an accident had occurred in the mine, the greatest excitement prevailed both at the mine and in the hamlet, a short distance from the mine. Forsaking their homes, wives, or mothers, sisters, or brothers, or other relatives, all rushed to the mine to ascertain, if possible, the extent of the accident, and also to make sure, if possible, if their loved ones were among the rescued.

At the mine, however, they were unable to get the satisfaction for which they craved, as owing to the nature of the accident, almost all communication with the outside world had been stopped. The first report that came to the anxious crowd was that two or three had been injured and that the accident might not turn out so badly as such accidents generally do.

This buoyed up the crowd for a short time, but, as the minutes sped by and no one was known to have come from the mine, despair began to settle on the watchers and they began to separate into related groups and tried to comfort each other as much as possible.

WORST FEARS REALIZED.
At 9:30 o'clock this morning, the worst fears of the crowd began to be realized, when it was reported that already several were dead and that the death list was likely to be an extended one. It was also reported that it had been ascertained that many of those who had been in the mine at the time of the explosion had been injured and that this list, too, would likely also be large.

Shortly after this report reached the crowd, several of those in the mine at the time of the accident succeeded in reaching the outside and they confirmed the worst reports. They stated that the explosion, as it appeared to them, had taken place throughout the whole mine at the same time and that every one at work in the mine for a second or two seemed to be paralyzed. Following the explosion there seemed to be a flash and then all was in darkness. From the part of the mine where most of the miners and others had been at work, were heard groans and calls for assistance, after which everything became silent.

Those who reached the outside were unable to give the list of dead or injured, but shortly after they had been taken to the office of the company, a little band of rescuers began to bring out several of the injured and several of the dead.

Superintendent W. N. Johnson, of the mine, when spoken to at the mine, about 10 o'clock this morning, said:

"I do not want any exaggerated report published, as the facts themselves will be bad enough. This explosion, from some unknown cause, occurred a little before 8 o'clock this morning, and seems to have worked its worst in a portion of the mine that we recently opened up.

"We do not yet know the extent of the accident, but we think the death list will be a long one and the list of those injured much larger. Owing to the excitement prevailing, we have been unable to get details, as yet, but we are doing our best.

"Several injured have been brought out, and two or three bodies, but no attempt has been made at identification. In a little time, we will have matters in good shape, however, to handle the accident."

FIRST DEAD BODY FOUND.

At 10:30 o'clock, the body of a foreigner which had been brought from the mine, was placed in one of the sheds at the mine, but had not been identified.

At the same hour, 10 of the injured men had been brought out, among them the following:

A. L. JOHNSON, son of Superintendent W. N. Johnson, badly burned about the face and body.

PATRICK BURNS, burned about the body.

WILLIAM BURNS, burned about the head and limbs.

CALVIN HUEY, burned about the body.

JOHN THOMAS, burned about the body and head.

GAS CAUSED EXPLOSION.

It was ascertained that the explosion was due to an ignition of gas that had, in some way, accumulated in the mine. The mine employs between 200 and 300 miners, both American and foreign work-

ers. It has been operating only three days a week, and today was to have been an off-day.

On the off-days, however, there are generally 100 or more men in the mine, either working on their own account, or attending to necessary work at the mine. Had the full force of men been at work, it is generally believed that the list of dead or injured would have been greatly increased.

As soon as the report of the accident became known, bands of men from the various mines along the branch hurried to offer their assistance. It was from these that the rescue bands were organized. Those from Vintondale and Nantyglo were specially marked for their effective work. Dr. Conerer, of Vintondale, headed one of the rescue parties from that place. It was ascertained by these rescuers that the worst damage sustained in the mine was in the part that had only recently been operated and it is thought that one of the foreign miners, at work there, opened a pocket of gas, and that this gas, in some manner, became ignited and caused the explosion.

COAL DUST TESTS

Explosions Result When Federal Investigator Shoot to Discover.

A number of tests were made yesterday morning at the Government testing station in Arsenal Park at the instance of the operators of the Lackawanna Coal and Coke Company of Wehrum, at whose mine on June 23 an explosion that cost the lives of 20 men occurred. The tests were made to ascertain whether gelatine dynamite and black powder in the absence of gas would cause an explosion if fired into coal dust from the mine. The dust was placed in the explosives testing gallery, the dynamite and powder were fired into the gallery and a violent explosion of the coal dust was the result. Other demonstrations were made at the station with safety lamps and moving currents of air charged with an explosive percentage of gas.

Superintendent Johnson of the Lackawanna mines, Chief Engineer Jones and Assistant Chief Engineer Hewlett witnessed the tests. Representatives of the Lehigh Valley Coal Company were also present to see the tests upon anthracite coal dust when fired into by the explosion of black powder and certain grades of dynamite.

10 INSPECTORS AT FATED MINE

Explosion of Coal Dust Be-
lieved to Have Caused
Accident

NONE OF THE INJURED
HAVE DIED

SPECIAL TO JOHNSTOWN DEMOCRAT.

WEHRUM, June 24.—Ten mine in-
spectors are still at work investiga-
ting the cause of the explosion in the
mine of the Lackawanna Coal and Coke
company Wednesday morning. They
will return into the mine early tomor-
row morning and do not expect to
complete their work until afternoon.
Not until then will there be an official
statement concerning the cause of the
explosion.

While the inspectors will say noth-
ing, it is the belief of men experienced
in mine work that an explosion of
coal dust following the letgo of an
overcharge of dynamite and not a
pocket of gas and a naked lamp was
the cause of the accident. Coroner
J. S. Hammers of Indiana has held an
inquest into the death of the men, the
verdict being that they were killed by
a mine explosion and from suffocation
by afterdamp. The inquest into the
cause of the explosion will be held
during the first part of next week,
probably at this place. The exact date
has not been set.

The mine inspectors now at work
are Joseph Williams of Altoona,
Thomas Williams of Connellsville,
Nicholas Evans of Tyrone, A. L. Mon-
teith of Patton, F. W. Cunningham, of
Wilkesburg, I. G. Roby of Uniontown,
C. B. Ross of Greensburg, P. J. Walsh
of McClellandstown, D. E. Phillips of
DuBois, D. R. Blower of Johnstown
and T. S. Lowther of Somerset.

Many coal men have visited Wehrum
since the explosion to give what as-
sistance they could in any way. W.
A. James of Buffalo, chief engineer of
the Lackawanna Steel company, is
here at the special request of Supt.
Johnson. Plans are being made to
reopen the mine next week.

All the injured men in Wehrum are
getting along nicely.

Spangler, June 24.—All the men
brought to the hospital here from
Wehrum were living at a late hour
tonight and there was a slight im-
provement in the condition of some,
especially the four who were overcome
by the fumes following the explosion.
It is believed all the men will recover.

