

BUTTE CORONER'S JURY PUTS BLAME ON GAS AND SMOKE

INQUEST CONTINUES FOR NEARLY A MONTH INTERVIEWING MANY WITNESSES.

CONCRETE BULKHEADS IN ROAD

Ernest Sulau, One of the Victims Is Said to Have Caused the Fire by an Accident in Putting Light Too Close to Heavy Cable. Total Dead 162.

"Asphyxiating gas and smoke from a fire which started on the 9th of June, 1917, at 11:30 p. m., in the shaft of the Granite Mountain mine," was ascribed as the cause of the holocaust in Butte early last month, according to the verdict of the coroner's jury which was returned Saturday after nearly a month of investigation. Word of the action of the coroner's jury was received here yesterday. The jury placed the total dead in the Speculator mine at 162, the bodies of two of whom, have not been recovered. Of the 160 bodies brought to the surface, 96 have been identified and 64 unidentified.

The final examination in the Speculator mine disaster inquest brought to the stand 12 miners who were in the workings of the Granite Mountain at the time of the fire. The feature of the testimony was the blame that certain of the witnesses placed upon the conditions in the mine, which, they said, prevented scores of men from escaping alive.

Three of the witnesses declared that the concrete bulkheads on the 2,400 and 2,600 foot levels were responsible for a part of the heavy life toll. Men flocked to these levels expecting to get through into the workings of the other mines, they said, because they supposed that the bulkheads were fitted with iron doors that would allow escape.

Another witness, T. J. Hanrahan, testified that some of the manways were blocked by steel "grizzlies," which prevented the men from going from one level to another, and that in one case a manway was blocked by two sets of timbers.

The testimony of another witness was that the helmets first employed for rescue work were found defective, a statement that was contradicted by safety-first experts earlier in the inquest.

The following witnesses were examined: George Felvtovich, George Anastradkus, William Anderson, Arthur Hill, John Camets, T. J. Hanrahan, John Carlson, Ostovich Morum, John Molson, Oley Feltge Murty Shea and Clarence Marthey.

The Verdict.

The verdict returned by the jury is:

"We find the deceased died at the Speculator mine between the 9th and 11th of June, 1917, except Con O'Neill and Ed Lorey, who died at the Diamond mine on June 9, all in Silver Bow county, Mont. The cause of death was asphyxiating from gas and smoke from a fire which started on the 9th of June, 1917, at 11:30 p. m. in the shaft of the Granite Mountain mine.

"We find from the evidence that 1,200 feet of electric cable was lowered from the surface to the 2,600-foot level, said cable being held in place with the chippy steel cable by stoppers of manila rope placed 10 feet apart for about half of the length and the remaining part of the stoppers five feet apart. At the 2,600-foot level, to straighten the cable, about 150 feet of the stoppers were cut off. Then the cable slipped and fell into the shaft. The electric cable, the steel cable and the rope stoppers were in good condition and were lowered in the customary way.

The Fire.

"At about 2,450 feet below the surface a considerable part of the cable hung up in the shaft and the men were engaged in cutting it out when a light, held in the hands of Ernest Sulau, accidentally set it on fire and also the shaft, which was impossible to extinguish. The electric cable, we find, is universally use throughout the mining districts.

"The evidence shows that concrete bulkheads were in the 2,400 and 2,600 foot levels of the High Ore mine, placed there after the fire in the Modoc shaft and placed there to keep out smoke and gas from the workings of the North Butte property. The bulkheads in the 2,400 and 2,600 levels had to be broken down with rock hammers to allow the men to pass through.

Shaft Down.

"The Speculator shaft was unfortunately shut down for repairs during the past three or four months and was not operating lower than the 800-foot level, but was put into operation as soon as possible after the fire started. The Granite Mountain shaft was downcast shaft and supplied the principal part of the mine with air, causing smoke and gas to penetrate the workings in a short time. In order to save the lives of the men the fans of the Rainbow and Gem shafts were reversed to force air into the mines and turn the Granite Mountain shaft upcast and the fan at the Speculator shaft was put into operation to force air into the mines also.

Rescue Work.

"The rescue gang from the various mines were notified and responded with their equipments of helmets and flashlights and a large force was employed exploring the mine and doing whatever work was necessary to locate the men who were alive and to bring out the bodies of the dead.

"The total dead in the Speculator mine numbered 162, two of whom have not been recovered. Of the 160 bodies brought to the surface 96 have been identified and 64 unidentified."