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January 9, 1948

Honorable Richard Maize
Secretary of Mines
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Maize:

Attached hereto is a copy of our report covering the gas explosion which occurred on December 11, 1947, at the Franklin Colliery of the Lehigh Valley Coal Company.

You will note that reference is made at intervals throughout the report to the violation of different sections of the Anthracite Mining Laws. Those sections which were violated and contributed most directly to the explosion are as follows:

Rules 4 and 5 of Article 12, Sections
4, 10, 11 and 12 of Article 10.

These statutory requirements are imposed upon the Superintendent, Mine Foreman and Assistant Mine Foreman. Therefore, we propose proceeding against such persons as may be involved in accordance with Article 17 of the Act of June 2, 1891, P. L. 176.

Yours very truly,

Daniel H. Connelly, Chairman
Mine Inspector
Eighth District

Andrew Wilson
Mine Inspector
Seventh District

John D. Edwards
Mine Inspector
Thirteenth District

EXPLOSION

FRANKLIN COLLIERY, LEHIGH VALLEY COAL COMPANY
Wilkes-Barre Township, Pennsylvania

At 11:00 A. M., December 11, 1947, an explosion of gas occurred in No. 2 slope, Ross seam of the Franklin Colliery, Lehigh Valley Coal Company, resulting in the death of eight workmen.

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The section of the mine in which the explosion occurred was examined by the assistant foreman on the morning of the accident prior to the workmen entering the mine and was reported to be safe.

The assistant foreman's record book indicated that gas was not found in the affected section for a period of three months prior to the explosion, with one exception, namely, on November 21, 1947.

Following the starting time on the day of the accident, two assistant foremen declared that they had measured and examined all of the working places in the affected section and found such workings free of gas. This inspection was completed shortly before 11:00 A. M. The officials then left for another part of the mine. The explosion occurred about ten minutes later.

An official testified that the faces of some of the chambers had "run" because of the heavy pitch, and that he was unable to examine for gas at the faces of these places. The portions of the chambers left unexamined were approximately thirty feet (30') in length. It is believed that gas accumulated in these unexamined portions and was forced by a rush of coal to the gangway where it joined the ventilating current and was finally ignited.

While the evidence seems to indicate ignition was caused by an electric arc, it could have been caused by a defective safety lamp or by smoking.

The investigation further revealed that the accessible abandoned workings were not examined weekly, main doors were not erected in pairs, nor was the air current conducted and circulated to and along the working faces in sufficient quantities to dilute, render harmless, and sweep away smoke and noxious or dangerous gases, to the extent that all working places and traveling roads were in a safe and fit state to work and travel therein.

All workmen in the section in question used permissible electric cap lamps, and in addition thereto, the miners were furnished with permissible flame safety lamps. A trolley locomotive with reel cable was used in the section.

Jackhammers, driven by compressed air, were used for drilling purposes, and permissible explosives were used for blasting.

The electric motors used for the operation of the shaker chute and conveyor lines, and the switches connected therewith, were of the open type.

Based upon the evidence before us, it appears that two explosions occurred. A laborer, who escaped injury,

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declared that while shoveling coal into a pan line installed in his chamber, he felt a concussion which threw him off balance. He then heard his miner, who was topping a car on the gangway, moan as though in pain, and after walking two or three steps down the chamber to assist his miner, a second explosion occurred. The concussion from this explosion knocked him over and the brattice boards fell upon him. He saw no flame from either explosion. There was, however, considerable dust in suspension. The interval of time between the explosions was, he declares, a few seconds, and the second explosion exerted the greater force. The escape from injury by this laborer may be attributed to the fact that the chamber in which he was engaged was blind, and was driven at right angle to the direction of the force, thus making it impossible for the exertion of any considerable force at the point at which he was working.

The pumpman, who escaped injury, likewise declared that there were two concussions, and that the interval of time between them was but a few seconds.

An examination of the accessible abandoned workings following the explosion and after the ventilation had been restored to an extent comparable to that which existed before the explosion revealed the presence of explosive gas. These abandoned workings are immediately adjacent to, and are on the return side of the live workings. Both sections are ventilated by one continuous air current.

Based upon investigation it appears that the originating source of the gas was at the face of one or two chambers, which chambers, in the course of development, ranged from a moderate pitch to more than sixty degrees (60°) at the face. When this heavy pitch was encountered, the chamber faces "ran," forming voids of possibly more than thirty feet (30') in length. These voids were not ventilated, nor could they be examined.

In the presence of this condition the slope footman, in the performance of his duties, opened a single door erected between the intake and return airways, that he might transport empty cars to a certain branch on the inside of the door and take therefrom loaded cars. To perform this work it was necessary to use the slope rope. This prevented the closing of the door until the transportation work was accomplished.

Based upon our findings, it is evident that the door here described was open for a period of about seven minutes when the explosion occurred. During this period the workings in the affected section were deprived of ventilation.

In our consideration of the cause of the two explosions, which the survivors describe, it seems reasonably possible that following the ignition of the gas on the

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gangway in the live workings, its flame expanded and moved in the direction of the abandoned workings where it encountered and ignited a body of standing gas, to the exploding of which we attribute the second concussion described by the survivors.

In this case the colliery superintendent, the mine foreman, and two assistant mine foremen were charged before the Court of Luzerne County with the violation of several sections of the Anthracite Mining Laws. When arraigned before the Court they pleaded "nole contendere." The superintendent was found guilty and was given a suspended sentence. The foreman and his assistants were fined Five Hundred Dollars (\$500.00) each.

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