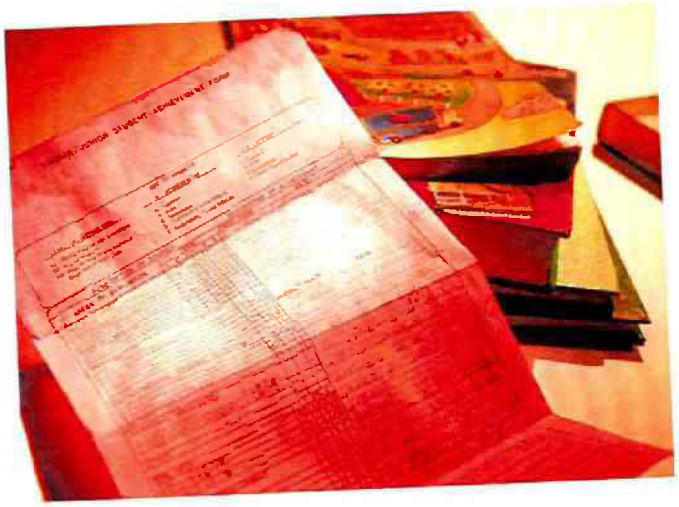

Reports

Hazel Mine

03/22/1911

REPORT OF ~~EXPLOSION~~ AT HAZEL MINE

CANONSBURG, WASHINGTON COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA.

MARCH 22, 1911 - By L. M. JONES

---Oo---

The Hazel Mine, which is in the Pittsburg seam, is one of the largest in Western Pennsylvania, its daily output ranging from 2,500 to 3,000 tons. It is opened by two slopes of _____ feet long with a dip of _____ degrees, which communicate to two main entries, No. 1 and No. 2. The butt entries are driven every 500 feet, from which in turn second area face entries are driven. The coal is taken out by the room and pillar method.

The coal is undercut at the face by Jeffrey chain cutters and shot down by 2F black powder. Permissible explosives have been tried several times but on account of the great amount of fine coal and the general dissatisfaction of the miners black powder always reintroduced. Mr. Adams, the Superintendent, seemed to know very little about the permissible explosives. He had a copy of the last circular issued by the Explosives Department and wanted to know when the tests on the list of powder given were going to be made, not knowing that these tests has been going on for over two years. Judging from his ignorance of the subject it would be a natural assumption that whatever tests had been made with permissible explosives had been half-hearted and not thorough. Pit cars which have a capacity of 2-1/2 tons are gathered by 5-ton electric motors and brought to a central or collecting point. Large trips are then hauled

by 15-ton motors to a point about three-quarters of a mile from the opening, where the cars are delivered to an endless rope; this rope in turn delivers the cars to an endless chain which hauls them up the slope to the tipple. The trips are all handled through No. 1 main, No. 2 main being used as a traveling way by the men. The main haulage entry is lighted by incandescent lights. Open lights are used throughout the mine, except where pillars are being drawn, where Pittsburg safety lamps are used. There is a small rescue station in connection with the lamp room which contains four rescue apparatus and a recharging pump. An elaborate system of fire protection machinery has been installed. This consists of a large two cylinder carbon dioxide oxygen generator on wheels, which has sufficient pressure to shoot 50 to 60 feet; a system of water lines with plugs every 500 feet at the intersection of the face and butt entries; a reel of hose 450 feet long; and two underground stations having ten Babcock hand fire extinguishers each. The main haulage entry has several water supply places at intervals along it. The exhaust steam is turned into the intake near the exhaust shaft, which is about one mile from the slopes. Systematic watering of the entries is carried on, both by hose from the plugs and from hose attached to a steel plate tank car which is hauled along the entries. That part of the mine visited seemed to be well ventilated. Three anemometer readings were taken at the bottom of the exhaust shaft and the average reading gave 230,000 cubic feet of air per minute.

A fire occurred in this mine several weeks ago and a portion of the mine was bratticed off. The brattices, however, were under water when the mine was visited, and so no gas samples of the air beyond the brattices could be obtained.

The accident of March 22 occurred at the beginning or at the outbye end of No. 8 double parting on No. 2 main about a mile from the foot of the slope. A trip consisting of five cars filled with miners was going into the mine. When they reached this parting the first car jumped the track and was dragged about 40 feet when it crashed into the left rib knocking off chunks of coal. A little beyond this point it struck the left post of the second set of a stretch of timbered entry. The forward corner of the car was splintered and the end of the brake rod bent in, which caused the middle of it near the brake to bend outward. The resistance of the post to the cars advance caused the second car to be shunted off to the opposite side of the track. This car struck the center post of the same set, knocking it forward and allowing the two 40 pound rails, which acted as the collar of the set, to fall across the car. The withdrawal of the support of the roof precipitated a large fall of rock, which also fell on this car. One huge piece became caught between the outbye end of the car and the roof near the next set, and this brought the whole trip to an abrupt stop. There were ten men in the second car and nine of them were dead when the men from the other cars were able to get them out from under the rock. The tenth man was sitting very low in the car and a huge piece of rock arched from the man next to him to the corner of the car and so saved him from being injured. There are three causes contributing to the accident: The primary one was the high speed at which the trip was moving. Under the State law a motor trip should not run at a higher speed than 8 an hour, but it was admitted by all that this trip was running much faster than that; in fact, it has been the general practice to take the trips in beyond the limit

allowed by law. If the miners kicked on the speed at which the trip was moving, they were told by the motorman that they had the privilege of getting off and walking. Another common violation of the law is the permitting of men to ride on the motor. One man was riding on the motor when this accident occurred. It is uncertain just what caused the first car to leave the track; two possible causes have been advanced. First, that the point of the switch may have offered some obstruction to the passage of the wheel, causing it to rise off the rail. Second, that the braking of the trip by the motorman, in order to slow it down while passing over the switch caused the rear cars to close up on the first one and the opposing forces acting on the first car caused it to rise from the track. The first of these causes seems the more likely, but the second seemed to find greater favor among the mine officials because the first point at which the tread of the flange of the wheel was found was about 8 feet beyond the point of the switch. However, I do not think that this point makes the first theory any the less likely, inasmuch as the car could easily have covered this distance before the wheel would hit the ground outside the rail. The final cause, and the one on account of which the great loss of life was due, was the system of timbering. The timbering of the entry at this point consisted of sets independent of each other made up of two posts, one at either rib and a central post with a collar of two 40 pound rails extending from rib to rib. The rib posts were partly set into the rib but not wholly so. The tee iron was not fastened to the posts in any way but simply wedged against the top. When the car hit the outside post it knocked it forward but may not have caused the rails to fall. However, the withdrawal of the center post by the second car let down the rails, which fell across the end of the second

car and the death of some of the miners was in all probability due to the rails.

In regard to precautions to be taken to prevent similar accidents, the first one is without doubt to run the trips at less speed, for while it might have been possible that this trip would have left the track at a lower speed, it might have been stopped by the motorman in the 58 feet between the point at which it left the track and where the accident occurred. Also, had the trip been running at a lower speed, the force with which the car hit the post would have been so decreased by the car hitting the rib and the efforts of the motorman that it might not have knocked out the posts. Again, a slower speed would decrease the liability of a sudden braking of the motor, c causing the car to leave the track, or of a small obstruction causing a similar effect.

The failure of the timbering was due primarily to the fact that the rib post of this set was not wholly set into the rib, for had it been so set the car could not have knocked it forward. In that case the knocking out of the center post would probably not have caused the rails to fall, particularly as the ends of the rails extended into the recesses in either rib.

Again, had the sets been tied together by some means, the likelihood of the failure of one set would have been greatly decreased. A guard rail along the posts set in the rib would prevent a wild car from knocking out the posts. Similarly, a guard rail on the side of the center posts would greatly decrease the likelihood of a single post being knocked, while it might prevent it altogether. The same effect could probably be obtained even better by a concrete wall between the posts. This latter method

would, of course, be rather costly, but where the roof is as weak as it was at this point, so that the failure of a single set would cause a great fall of roof, the expense of such an arrangement would be warranted.

3/28/11

Newspaper Accounts

NINE LIVES IN EAST C

Derailed Car Wrecks Supporting Posts and Roof Reduces Men to Unrecognizable Mass--Wives and Children of Victims Create Scene at Pit Mouth

Canonsburg, Pa., March 22.—The lives of nine miners were blotted out this forenoon by a fall of slate in the Hazel mine of the Pittsburg and Buffalo Coal company at East Canonsburg.

A tenth man in the ill-fated group was so badly injured that his recovery is doubtful.

David Donley was the only American who met death, the others being foreigners. The accident occurred at 7 o'clock just as the day shift was going to work.

The supports knocked out by the derailment of a rapidly moving motor car on which the men were riding, many tons of coal and slate crashed down on them.

No opportunity for an attempted escape was given. The mass fell with a roar heard at the pit's mouth. The victims died without a moan.

There were 800 miners at work at the mine and it was shut down at once.

The Dead

DAVID DONLEY, aged 32, East Pike street, Canonsburg.
JOSEPH SANDONISKI, aged 36, New Philadelphia, Pa.; married.
JOHN SAGER, aged 28, New Philadelphia.
MICHAEL LOBOSKI, aged 23, New Philadelphia.
GEORGE LOBOSKI, brother of Michael; aged 30, New Philadelphia; married.
WILLIAM MIGISH, aged 31, Midland.
HARRY SAPE, aged 27, South Canonsburg.
TONY JERBISH, aged 28, Buffalo Hill.
WILLIAM STANDON, aged 29, New Philadelphia.

Injured:

GEORGE ROSKI, aged 28, Buffalo Hill; left hand cut off.

As the car in which the men were riding left the tracks it turned on its side, some of the miners being pinioned between the car and the wall. With the support removed the roof caved in, crushing the men into an almost unrecognizable mass.

Four of the men remained in the car, but the wooden sides of the vehicle were splintered and the tons of earth and slate buried them.

As a result of a later investigation it was ascertained that it was a weak section of the track that caused the accident. There were nine cars, with 40 miners aboard, attached to the motor car, which was operated by Edward Sherrow. The train was moving at about eight miles an hour.

The second car from the motor, in which there were 10 miners, jumped the track at the weak section. This caused the next car to jump the track. Both of these struck posts, supporting the roof of the mine, and the momentum of the cars in the rear forced these posts down. The falling of the roof supports and the jarring of the derailed cars dislodged 15 tons of slate from the roof, which fell on the car containing the 10 miners.

Only two men escaped death—the motorman and George Roski.

The motorman was beyond the falling debris and Roski was in the rear. The latter ran to the mouth of the mine and sounded the alarm. Quickly a little rescuing party was formed and the men hurried back to the scene of the wreck.

A pile of debris, which blocked the passage, was encountered. The band of rescuers quickly went to work removing the debris and soon the bodies of the unfortunate miners were uncovered.

While this work was going on word of the disaster had been spread through the little hamlet adjoining the mine. Wives, mothers and children of the miners hurried to the mouth of the pit and anxiously inquired for tidings of their loved ones. It was with difficulty that the women and relatives could be restrained from rushing into the black hole.

As fast as a body was recovered it was taken to the entrance and the crowd of relatives would swarm around in an endeavor to catch a glimpse of the victim, but the bodies were covered. As soon as the rescuers could carry the corpses to the waiting ambulances, of which there were four, the bodies were taken to McNary's undertaking rooms, where they were quickly prepared for burial.

The undertakers worked rapidly and the local corps of funeral directors was augmented by a force of embalmers from Washington.

The mine had resumed operation last Monday, after a shutdown of ten days, during which time repairs were made.

Immediately after the accident operations were suspended and the work of getting the big army of men out of the mine was commenced. There were various ways in which the miners working in other sections of the mine could be notified and leave the pit.

The mine extends back under the hills two and a half or three miles.

The news of the accident soon spread among the residents of the nearby village and in a short time there were nearly 1,000 men, women and children at the entrance of the mine. When the bodies were taken to the undertaking rooms part of this crowd went there. There they were told that the dead could not be recognized, and later the names of the victims were announced. Six of the dead men were unmarried.

In addition to having his hand cut off Roski received a fracture of the skull.

At the local office of the Pittsburg and Buffalo Coal company it was reported that the miners were being taken in the mine to work and that a "nigger-head," or large piece of slate, fell from the roof into the car, containing 10 men, killing nine and injuring one.