

Bureau of Mines Bulletin 616:
Historical Documentation of
Major Coal Mine Disasters in
The United States
Not Classified As
Explosions of Gas or Dust,
1846-1962

Report of a Roof Fall September 13, 1886; Marvine Colliery,
Scranton, Pennsylvania; 8 Killed
(From Reports of the Inspectors of Coal Mines of the Anthracite
Coal Regions of Pennsylvania, 1886, pp.20-22)

Marvine mine, which had previously been in successful operation, employing about 250 men and boys, on September 13, 1886, was the scene of a serious disaster, caused by an extensive fall.

The fall was caused by the settling of eight (8) acres in a basin of the mine north-west of the shaft, in which locality the coal of that part of the mine, the vein being about sixteen (16) feet thick, had been mined out. Pillars of the usual dimensions, which had been left for supporting the roof, were crushed by the superincumbent pressure. There were about 100 men and boys working in the portion of the mine that caved in. All except eight escaped. These could have gotten out safely if they had persevered as the others did. They were within ninety (90) feet of the foot of the slope. At this point, it seems they had a consultation and turned back into the mine. They were met going back by William --- ---, son of John -----, who implored his son with tears in his eyes to return with them, but he went right toward the shaft; he got to a point where he was caught by a fall of roof and held fast until relieved by a propman, who was coming out after him. Both of them came to the foot of the shaft in safety. They were also met going back by the fire boss, who tried to persuade them to return and go out with them, but without avail. One of the party that lost his life, was out at the foot of the slope, when he heard his uncle imploring for assistance. He returned to his relief, but never came out alive. The heroic action of John Howells deserves special mention. As he was coming out, creeping over the fall with the roof falling around him, he heard the cry for help of a boy who was held fast by a slab of rock. He returned, turned the rock off his foot, but the boy lost some of his toes and could not walk. Howells hoisted him on his back and carried him to the foot of the shaft, a distance of about 2,000 feet.

The first indication of a creep or squeeze was on Monday morning, September 6th. A slight squeeze was noticed in Thomas --- --- chamber. He was compelled to quit and would not be allowed to work any longer. Next morning the squeeze extended to the chamber inside. He had to quit work also. Next morning the squeeze extended two chambers further in. When it got this far, all the men were removed from this section of the workings to another portion of the mine. The squeeze seemed to stop at this point, and did not extend any further at that time.

On September 13th, the men went in as usual in the morning to their work, and, from the testimony of the witnesses who appeared before the coroner's jury, everything was quiet and no sign of a squeeze. About eight o'clock, the coal began to chop off the pillars from the pressure of the overlying strata, and at about fifteen minutes after eight o'clock the mine foreman thought he had better stop the work in that part of the mine. He then sent messengers through and notified everybody to come out. They all

came out except the eight men who have been mentioned as going back and being lost. Every effort was made to rescue them, but the roof kept falling and it was dangerous to risk going over the fall. On the afternoon of the 13th, every place was blocked tight with falls from the roof. Air bridges and doors were all destroyed, which caused the stoppage of the circulation of air. About noon, on the 14th, gangs of men were started to cut through to rescue the men at two places. The distance to be driven was 154 feet. It took nearly six days to go through to the lower heading. Six bodies were found at the face of the heading on September 21st, and two bodies were found on the 23rd.