

MOUNT LOOKOUT EXPLOSION

The following is a brief description of the Mount Lookout accident where twelve men lost their lives and eleven others were more or less seriously injured by an explosion of gas, in the South Gangway of the Red Ash vein, on the afternoon of May 12, between three and four o'clock. My investigation shortly after the accident shows as follows: Joe Coslick, miner No. 616, working on the night shift in the South Gangway in the Red Ash vein, quit work at eleven o'clock on the night of May 11, and apparently left a feeder of gas burning in his working place. After the night shift the men were all out of the mines, the fan was stopped for twenty minutes for minor repairs. The pump runner, who is stationed near the foot of the Red Ash slope, informed the night fire boss that an explosion had occurred at about three o'clock. The fire boss upon examination found a small fire in the face of the gangway and reported it to the mine foreman, Bernard Holleran, at six-thirty on the morning of the 12th. The mine foreman immediately made an examination of the place, together with the night fire boss, and found a small fire in the face of the South Gangway of the Red Ash vein. The mine foreman immediately organized a corps of workmen and, as he supposed, extinguished the fire. He reported the fact to the district superintendent, George W. Steele, and his assistant, Gilbert Jones, who in company with the mine foreman made an examination of the place. They could not find any fire, but about thirty minutes after the examination a slight explosion occurred, followed by another still slighter explosion about thirty minutes later. Coming to the conclusion that they must have overlooked a small fire in the effected territory, they immediately organized a corps to establish the air current, which had been interfered with by these slight explosions, to remove any accumulated gas in order to enable them to reach the working face and make further investigations. About 12 o'clock the gas had been removed so that the men were enabled to reach the working face, and, while they did not find any fire, they found some ashes and considerable heat where the fire had been.

They organized a bucket brigade to carry water from a slight dip, about eighty feet from the working face, to pour on the coal that was still hot. After continuing this work for about three hours, they felt thoroughly satisfied that no further fire remained, and a large gang of men was put to work in relays building doors, block cross-cuts and opening up the cross-cut close to the face which had merely been holed through.

About three-thirty another explosion occurred that killed seven men, burned fifteen and injured one. Of the seven men killed two were burned, and five were either killed by the concussion or died from the effects of the after-damp. Of the fifteen men five were burned seriously, but the others were only slightly injured.

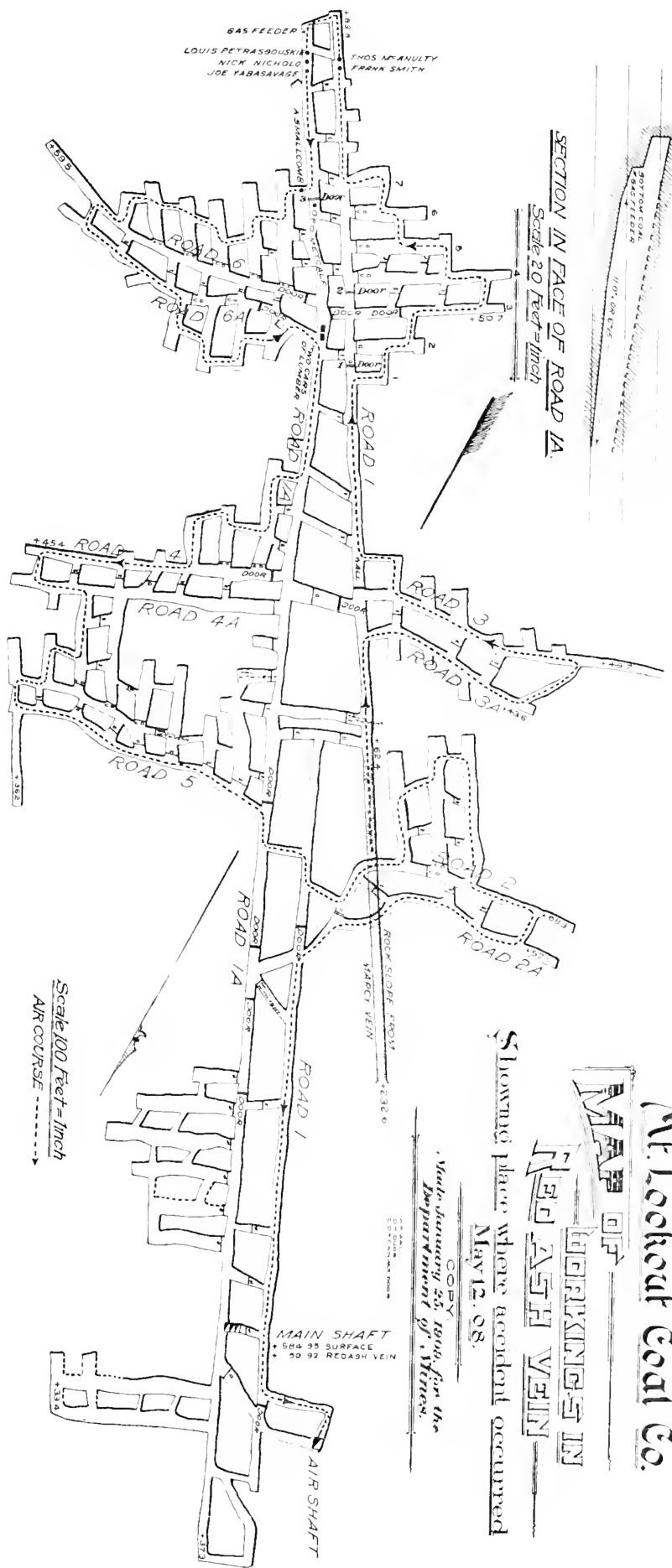
I ordered an inquest to be held to ascertain, if possible, if any person or persons had been negligent in any way. Dr. D. W. Dodson, the Coroner of Luzerne county, conducted the inquest and the first

Mt. Lookout Coal Co.

MAP OF THE BELKINGS IN THE ASH VEIN

Showing place where accident occurred
May 12, 08.

COPIED
From January 22, 1908 for the
Department of Mines.



Scale 100 Feet = 1 inch
AIR COURSE - - - - -

hearing was held on May 25, at the Town Hall in Exeter borough. After five long drawn-out hearings and the testimony of a great many witnesses, the Coroner's Jury brought in a verdict on June 5 to the effect that the officials of the Mount Lookout Colliery, namely, George W. Steele, Superintendent, Gilbert Jones, Assistant Superintendent, Bernard Holleran, Inside Foreman, and Robert Whitely, Inside Foreman, erred in their judgment in permitting so many men in the mine. The matter stood for some time pending a personal investigation prior to commencing prosecution against these officials. My attorney, the late Hon. George Troutman, was looking up the law and also the testimony in order to make out a case if possible. In the meantime the District Attorney seemed to be very active and wanted to bring the men before the Grand Jury on a charge, I presume, of criminal negligence. He tried very hard to force the Inspector of the District to become the public prosecutor, but, having failed in this, he had warrants sworn out for the arrest of the officials above mentioned, with Mr. Edward Mackin, the County Detective, as prosecutor, but before these warrants could be properly executed, the Mine Inspector through the advice of his attorney had warrants sworn out for their arrest under Article XVII, Section 1, of the Anthracite Mine Law, approved June 2, 1891, he advising that this was the proper course to pursue.

The District Attorney, however, was permitted to conduct the case by order of the Court. The information was issued on September 11, and the trial was commenced before the Hon. Henry A. Fuller, Judge of Luzerne county, October 19. The hearing lasted four days and was ably conducted by the attorneys on both sides. Judge Fuller's opinion in this case was a very able document and very impartial. This ends probably one of the most bitterly fought legal battles over a mine accident case that has ever taken place in the county. The Mount Lookout colliery is in my opinion among the best ventilated mines in my district, and to have such a terrible accident caused by an explosion of gas is something that no one familiar with the condition of the mine would ever expect.

CONDITION OF COLLIERIES

LEHIGH VALLEY COAL COMPANY

- Exeter Colliery.—General condition as to safety good.
- Maltby Colliery.—General condition as to safety good.
- Westmoreland Colliery.—Condition as to safety good.
- Seneca Colliery.—Ventilation much improved, and general condition as to safety good. Roads in poor condition.
- William A. Colliery.—General condition fair.

TEMPLE IRON COMPANY

- Mount Lookout Colliery.—General condition good.
- Forty Fort Colliery.—Ventilation, drainage and condition as to safety good.