



Newspaper Accounts

Newburg Mine

Newburg Shaft Explosion Killed 39 in 1886

MINE HORROR!

Explosion of Fire Damp
In the Deep Shaft

AT NEWBURG

On Last Thursday Af-
ternoon, January 21st

Not a Man Escaped to
Tell the Sad, Sad Story

AN AWFUL CALAMITY

Thirty-Nine Men
Instantly Killed

The Sights and Scenes
of the Sad Affair

FULL PARTICULARS

Of the Awful Event and
List of Names of the
Unfortunate Miners

At Newburg, this county, on Thursday afternoon at 2:45 o'clock, January 21, 1886, occurred the most terrible calamity that has happened in the history of the State. It was the explosion of gas in the "Mountain Brook Shaft" of the New-

burg Orrel Coal Company, situated in the west end of the town, and just south of the track of the B. & O. R. R. Co. The explosion was accompanied by a rumbling sound like low, rolling, heavy thunder, followed by a slight shaking of the ground. Then a dense column of smoke rolled out the mouth of the shaft, which was cleared away by a blue flame of fire which filled the whole mouth of the shaft for a moment, but did not rise to a great height. Simultaneous with the report was seen flying through the smoke, boards and timbers of the derrick (or house) over the shaft. Then all was silent.

The people began running toward the shaft, and soon the whole town was there. The alarmed inhabitants who rushed to the shaft, saw only a dark, gloomy pit, silent yet speaking untold horror. A large crowd collected about the mouth of the shaft as the news rapidly spread through the neighborhood, and it soon became evident that nothing could be done by those who knew what to do, with such a mass of horrified, wailing humanity surging about the black-hole eager to gain some idea as to the true state of affairs. Consequently, a sufficient space was fenced off by means of ropes, and several policemen were appointed to keep back the crowds.

Meanwhile the wails of mothers, wives, sisters and children arose on every hand. The dust begrimed eyes of the workmen about the shaft and coke ovens, who had become accustomed to facing danger in its various forms, streamed with tears at the very thought of the awful calamity that in all probability had befallen their fellow-workmen. Men talked in whispers, or in low tones, scarcely daring to make a sound. The scene was one never to be forgotten, and one that it is hoped may never be witnessed here again.

The cage was at the bottom of the shaft, and could not be gotten up. It had been twisted and broken, and debris and timbers held it down, and the

wooden timbers used to guide it had been blown partly off. Hence the weighted boiler used to balance the crib was removed, a large iron bucket placed on the wire rope instead, and this rope in the engine house was transferred to the other drum, so as to operate this bucket. Meanwhile the messenger sent to the Irondale Furnace for the safety-lamps returned, having made the trip in one hour. The messenger was Frank Brain, of Newburg, who was to go to work in the shaft the following Monday as driver.

John Laxton, the Superintendent, of the shaft, and Riley Metz and Charles McCartney descended slowly in the bucket.

Within 20 feet of the bottom of the shaft a piece of ice from the side of the shaft near the top fell and struck Mr. Laxton, hurting him so seriously that the bucket was brought up immediately, Mr. Laxton assisted from it and taken home, where he remained disabled till 7 o'clock. Mr. Richard Edwards joined the other two men in the bucket, and again it descended. They reached the bottom. But their safety lamps showed the presence of so much of the treacherous gas that they had to return without discovering anything in particular.

Night closed upon a scene never to be forgotten. It was damp and cold, but a large crowd stood about the shaft as near as they could get, almost breathless with anxiety. The coke ovens on either side of the engine-house were crowded with sad-faced men, women and children, gone thither for a few moments to warm, and in whose faces as they obviously gazed into the fiercely burning ovens, were visible the veriest pictures of despair. Through all that long, dreary, awful night did the miners who had escaped assisted by volunteers from the eager crowd, labor with untiring energy to reach their unfortunate comrades, but all in vain, for at the bottom of the shaft was found a mass of debris that choked up the main

passage. The air was very bad. This was so because the explosion had torn down all the doors and openings.

The first thing, then, to be done was to put up these doors and stoppings so as to force the current of air to follow the headings, and drive out the foul gas. At this the men worked all of Thursday night, and got back 150 feet in the main heading. All day Friday shifts of men were similarly employed. Friday, 22d

As the day advanced the crowds increased; every train was loaded with people crowding to the scene of the disaster, who stood about the shaft, watching every movement of the men, apparently rooted to the spot, until the cry of "hoist away" would cause the crowd to jam tighter than before.

Toward evening it was announced that one of the mules had been found and the body of Daniel Miller. Later on two others were found, but none were brought up.

Night came again, but the same crowd stood about the glaring coke ovens and pressed so hard upon the rough board fence that had taken the place of the one made of ropes, as to demolish it.

Before the crowd dispersed for the night, it became generally known that the three bodies found would be brought to the surface next morning.

Saturday, 23d

Early Saturday morning the crowd assembled, more anxious and breathless if possible than before, augmented by persons from Fairmont, Terra Alta, Grafton, Piedmont, and from all the surrounding country. The jam at the platform at train times on Friday was surpassed on Saturday. The town was filling with strangers who could neither get away nor get lodging. Many were glad to pass the night in the parlors of the hotels where a good fire could be enjoyed, somewhat regardless of obtaining any sleep.

Saturday morning was bitter cold, but the crowd waxed greater, and it was found neces-

sary to have a strong force of police and exclude everybody from the area enclosed by the plank fence, except jurymen, policemen, coroner, physicians and reporters.

At 9:25 a. m. the first body was brought up and identified as that of Isaiah Timmons, the pit and fire boss. It was brought up in a rough-box, conveyed to the engine room, whence all persons were excluded excepting those before named, viewed by the coroner's jury, identified, placed in a wagon and conveyed up town to Undertaker Barb's, where it was washed, dressed and prepared for burial. All the other bodies were treated in the same manner. As Timmons's body was being brought to the undertaker's wagon passed the house where the widow resided; and while it was passing she was telling her friends that she could not believe that her husband and son had perished.

In a few moments the cage again ascended, freighted with another life-less form, which was identified as that of Daniel Miller, the cageman. It went down again at once, and again, after ten minutes of breathless suspense, brought up the inanimate form of Willie Timmons.

By noon, as it had been announced that no more bodies would be brought up for some time, the great crowd melted away from the shaft.

The work of hunting for bodies had to be suspended, and that of carrying further into

the mine the column of fresh air rebegun.

As it was generally known that the corpses were at Undertaker Barb's shop, about 2 p. m., a great crowd collected around the old and crazy building, the door of which is reached by a platform about 40 feet long and, in some places, 6 to 8 feet above the ground. To prevent the crowd from breaking down this platform and to relieve the shop of the siege, the dead bodies were brought out in coffins and arranged so that the crowd could see them.

Sunday, 24th

Saturday evening dispersed the crowds pretty generally, but Sunday morning brought persons from all points, east and west, to the scene of disaster, suffering and woe.

No more bodies were brought up till 2:30 p. m., Sunday, when nine were brought to the surface, as follows — named in the order in which they were brought up:

Adolph Wein, John Lambert, John Edwards, George Riggins, Joseph Guy, John Conoway, Charles Tunley, Clinton Albright and Harry Guy.

Sunday evening the work of exploring continued, the explor-

ers having reached the farthest rooms of the mine's main heading, and having a good air course established.

Monday, 25th

Sunday night and Monday morning six more bodies were brought to the surface, and identified as Richard Birtley, Nicholas Birtley, Thomas Guy, John Byer, Jr., Joseph Johnson, John Hornby.

Then again the work of clearing the air passages was resumed. About 4 o'clock four or five experts, including State Mine Inspector Tucker, went down and made a tour of inspection. When they came up, about 6 o'clock, they reported that the work was progressing faster than expected. Then a shift of men went down, and all night long the work went ahead, new shifts going down about every two hours.

Tuesday, 26th

The work of ventilation proceeds. Fresh air must be forced in advance of the workers; in order to do this brattices must be put up and stoppings made. Mud, water and falls from the top of the mine, all make it slow work. The bad air, too, because of the foul gas and the dead bodies, hinders the work. In one relief force, yesterday, two men were overcome by foul air. One of the experts believes another explosion is most probable. Other experts think there is no such danger. Relief parties today were in charge of 1. Wm. Brooks, of Moundsville, 2. John Little, of Piedmont, 3. Robert Jack, of Fairmont, 4. State Inspector Tucker, and 5. Robert Jack. The crowd is about one half that of yesterday.

4:50 p. m.—Five bodies are at the bottom of the shaft, and were afterwards brought up, as follows: Wm. and Frank Laymire, Joseph Ross Kelly, E. Fortney and Arthur Ogden. These bodies were much decomposed.

8 p. m.—Two more bodies have been brought up—Michael J. Kenny and John Carroll, badly burnt and decomposed. The bodies smell very bad as they are hauled through the streets.

The greatest excitement now prevails. The whole vicinity about is carrying torches and lamps of every description, making it look like day. Every time "holst away" is heard we watch for another body.

8:30 p. m. — The bodies of Jacob H. Weaver, Michael Clark and Andrew Scott have been brought up, badly burnt and decomposed.

10:15 p. m. — The body of Newton Moore has been brought up, making the 29th.

11:45 — Three more bodies were just now brought up: John Alvis Weaver, 30th, Wm. Sandsbury, 31st and Peter Hanley,

32d. These last bodies were taken out of two feet of gas.

Wednesday, 27th

Five more bodies have been found during the night and this morning, namely Henry Lambert, Morgan Freeman, C. W. Spencer, James McGowan and Frank Moon, leaving two more bodies to find, those of Bird Miller and Albert McWilliams.

The above five bodies were not quite so badly burnt as the ones first brought out, but they are all very badly decomposed, most of them being badly swollen and black.

The town is wrapt in a most sickening vapor. At 8 o'clock this morning there are sixteen graves open in one graveyard. The scenes now are more pitiful than at any time yet. 9:30 o'clock a. m., January 27—At this writing the town is literally crowded, and any direction you look a funeral procession can be seen slowly wending its way toward some one of the grave yards.

The rescuers are vigorously pushing the work and hope to have the remaining two bodies before noon. The relief association is doing a grand work; over \$2,000 subscribed. The destitute are being cared for.

Several of the widows and mothers are almost distracted. It is feared that several will entirely lose their mind. 11:30 a. m.—The fall under which Bird Miller was supposed to be buried has been removed and he not found. The rescuers are now searching the dip heading which extends about 150 feet northeast from the shaft.

The body of Albert McWilliams has just been brought up. He was found about fifty feet from where he was supposed to have been working, very badly burnt. He was not under a fall, as was supposed. 4:30 p. m.—The body of J. Bird Miller, the last one, has been brought up and identified. He was 15 years of age and son of Daniel Miller, the first one found.

Thursday, 28th

A party of men are down in the shaft this morning making preparation to begin work as soon as possible. The party is under the charge of David Evans, of this county, who led the shift that brought up 22 bodies.

Also many of the miners and experts who are summoned before the jury are now down in the shaft examining the work in general. There is a long list of witnesses. The jury meets at 10 o'clock.

The Victims

At the time of the explosion there were in the mine at the bottom of the shaft, besides four mules, thirty-nine human beings, whose names, etc., given in the order in which their bodies were brought out of the

pit, are as follows:

Isaiah Timmons, married Newburg, fire and pit boss; leaves wife and 4 children; widow is soon to give birth to the sixth. His age was 47. Buried in Newburg cemetery.

Daniel Miller, married. Newburg; leaves a wife and four children. He was the cageman at the bottom of the shaft Buried in Newbury cemetery.

Wm. Timmons, son of Isaiah aged 14. He was door keeper in the shaft, his business being to open and close the doors for the driver of the mules. Buried at Newburg.

Adolph Wein Newburg aged 24, was married the day before Christmas, as was also Clinton Albright, and both set up house keeping under the same roof. They both leave a wife or a bride.

John Lambert, Newburg, leaves a wife and one child. Brother of Henry Lambert following. Buried at Newburg.

John Edwards, Newburg, single. Buried at Newburg. Son of Thomas Edwards, of Newburg, and brother of the Edwards who was drowned in the shaft (see "historical")

George Riggins, Scotch Hill, leaves a wife and two children Buried on Scotch Hill.

Joseph Guy — see Richard Birtley following.

John Conoway, Jr., Newburg, aged 21; support of his father's family, John Conoway, Sr. Morgan Freeman following, was the son-in-law of Conoway, Sr. Buried at Barracksville, Marion County.

Charles Tunley, Newburg, wife and an infant child. His age was 20 years, and he was a driver in the mine. Son of James Tunley, an old citizen of Lyon District. Buried at Newburg.

Clinton Albright, Newburg, aged 23, son of David Albright and grandson of John Albright, of near Kingwood; he was married Dec. 24th last. Buried at Newburg.

Harry Guy — see Richard Birtley below.

Richard Birtley, married, Newburg, father of Nicholas Birtley, stepfather of Joseph, Harry and Thomas Guy and stepfather-in-law of John Byer, Jr. These six were all killed in the shaft and were out of one family. The family came from the County Durham, England some five years since and resided at Fairmont until about two months ago, when they moved to Newburg. The sudden and violent death of these six stalwart men, leaving a family of women and children without a male member old enough to contribute to their support, is one of the saddest and most distressing incidents of the appalling catastrophe. Richard Birtley was 52 years of age, and

leaves a wife and three small children; Nicholas Birtley, his son, was 15 years of age in November last; Harry Guy, step-son, was in his 29th year, and leaves a wife and child in England; Joseph Guy, a brother of Harry, leaves a wife and was 25 years of age in October last; Thomas Guy, another brother, was in his 19th year and unmarried; John Byer was 24 on the 29th of last October, and leaves a widow, a sister of the Guy brothers and daughter

of Mrs. Birtley. They were all buried at one time at Fairmont on the 25th. At the funeral services in the Fairmont M. E. Church there was a great crowd and the scene was most affecting.

Nicholas Birtley—see above

Thomas Guy—see above.

John Byer, Jr., Newburg, leaves a wife; son of John Byer, Sr., of Scotch Hill. He was stable boss in the shaft. See account under Richard Birtley above

Joseph Johnson, Newburg, married. Besides his own family he supported his mother and two small brothers. Buried at Union

John Hornby, Newburg, single. Has no relatives in this country. Buried at Newburg.

William and Frank Laymire, near Independence, twin brothers, went to work in the mine on Monday before the day of the explosion. Their brother lately cut his throat in the asylum at Weston, the particulars of which were published in this paper.

Joseph Ross Kelly, Newburg, leaves a wife and three children in Cambria County, Pa., whence he came to Newburg. Buried at Newburg.

E. Portney, Newburg, single. Brother of the wife of Arthur Ogden below, and of Mrs. Fred Moon, of Palatine. Buried at Union Church, the 27th. His parents reside near Shinnston.

Arthur Ogden, Newburg, leaves a wife and two children. Buried at Union Church, the 27th. His parents reside near Shinnston also.

Michael J. Kenny, Newburg, single was the support of a widowed mother and his sister. He was a brother of Timothy Kenny proprietor of the Kenny house Piedmont, and of Thomas F. Kenny, bookseller and stationer at Piedmont. Buried at Griffon on the 27th, in the Catholic cemetery.

John Carroll, Newburg, married. Buried at Newburg.

Jacob H. Weaver, aged 36, Independence, leaves a wife and five children. He lately joined the church and was leading a religious life. His pastor was to take supper with him the eve-

ning of the explosion, and Mr. Weaver was to come home a little earlier than usual. When he came home the evening before he told his wife that he had suffered that day from heat and gas in the shaft. He and his brother John Alvis following were buried at Independence; funeral by the Rev. B. B. Evans.

Michael Clark, Newburg, single. Had been in this country two or three years, and was the only support of an aged father and six children yet in Ireland. Buried at Newburg.

Andrew Scott, Scotch Hill, single. Buried on Scotch Hill.

Newton Moore, Newburg, leaves a wife, a sister of Frank Moon following. Buried near Evansville.

John Alvis Weaver, Independence, was unmarried, aged 30, brother of Jacob H. Weaver above.

William Sansbury, aged 30, Independence, leaves a wife and three children. Buried at Grafton on the 27th, in Bluemont Cemetery. The scene at the grave was most affecting. His widow seemed to have lost all reason, so overcome was she by grief, and it required the strength of two men to hold her and keep her from throwing herself upon the casket and in the grave containing the blackened and distorted remains of her husband.

Peter Hanley, Newburg, single. Brother of Miss Ella Hanley, a teacher in the Newburg public schools, and the support of a widowed mother. Buried in the Catholic Cemetery, Grafton, the 27th.

Henry Lambert, Newburg, brother of John above, leaves a wife and one child. The two Lamberts were the only support of their widowed mother. Buried at Newburg.

Morgan Freeman, Irontown, leaves a wife and one child. Buried at Newburg.

C. Wilbur Spencer, Newburg, single, Buried near Evansville.

James McGowan, Newburg, single, Buried at Newburg.

Frank Moon, Newburg, single, brother of Mrs. Newton Moore, and the only support of his old widowed mother. Buried at

Newburg.

Albert McWilliams, Newburg leaving a wife and four children. He was a laborer in the mine. Buried at Newburg.

J. B. Miller, single, Newburg, son of Daniel Miller above. Aged 15. He was a driver of the mules. Buried at Newburg.

Historical

Lawrence Henry prospected and found coal at Newburg after the B. & O. was built. Hiscock and Resley opened the coal mines in 1855. In 1856 the Orrel

Coal Company bought them out; Lawrence Henry was appointed general superintendent. He is a native of Scotland, and came to America in 1845, and in 1853 sent the first carload of coal to General Columbus O'Donnell, Baltimore. The coal on the hill being all nearly mined out, the Company, in 1881, sunk a test hole where the shaft is, down 500 feet. In January, 1882, the shaft was begun by Hugh Murray, and a depth of 175 feet was reached by July, 1883, when John Laxton took charge as superintendent. The

work was rapidly pushed, and the coal sought was reached. Its depth is 355 feet, and it is the deepest of the six coal shafts in the State. The main heading extends nearly south a distance of 1200 feet, and the cross heading at the south east is about 600 feet long. This heading has a great many small rooms running out into every direction.

In sinking the shaft there was only one serious accident, that was drowning of Edward Edwards in February, 1884.

The Newburg Orrel Coal Co. is a Baltimore concern. Its officers are Charles Morton Stewart, president; Charles Mackall, secretary; and directors, Messrs. Stewart, Mackall, Robert T. Baldwin, Otho H. Williams and John Stewart. For a number of years it was under the presidency of the late C. Olliver O'Donnell. The company has a mine at Fairmont (the Palatine) and another at Flemington (the Tyrconnell) besides this "Mountain Brook Shaft" at Newburg.

SEARCHING FOR THE DEAD.

Dangers Threatening the Rescue Party in the Newburg Mine.

WHEELING, W. Va., Jan. 23. —The bodies of three of the victims of the explosion in the Oriel shaft at Newburg, W. Va., which were found yesterday, were brought to the surface to-day and after they had been viewed by the coroner's jury were taken in charge by an undertaker, to be prepared for burial. The funerals will take place to-morrow afternoon. The recovery of bodies proceeds very slowly on account of the many difficulties that are encountered. So far the exploring party has been able to enter the main heading only three or four hundred feet. The work is pushed as rapidly as possible and they expect to reach the point in the mine where the men are supposed to have been working at the time of the explosion and recover more bodies by morning. Fears were felt to-day that another explosion might take place on account of the rapid accumulation of gas, but the repairs now making to the ventilating shaft will lessen this danger. This morning an exploring party of experts descended the shaft and remained down for two hours. They report that the place is full of gas and in a very dangerous condition. There is also great danger that the pump, which has thus far been keeping the mine clear of water, will break down, owing to the debris at the bottom of the suction pipe. Should this happen, it will greatly complicate matters. The experts have decided that in order to recover the bodies without causing further explosions, it will be necessary to rebuild the broken bulkheads and clear away the debris as fast as it is encountered. This will probably make the recovery of the bodies a work of several days, if not of weeks. As far as known the miners were working in four parties at the extreme limits. Large crowds have been at the mine all day, excursions trains having been run from near-by points.