



Correspondence

Dated

05/23/1961 - 06/22/1961

Sonman Coal Company

Mr. Lewis E. Evans, Secretary
 Pennsylvania Department of Mines
 and Mineral Industries
 Capitol Building
 Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Evans:

The Bureau of Mines is preparing to publish a historical summary of major coal-mine disasters, other than explosions, similar to the recently published U. S. Bureau of Mines Bulletin 386, Historical Summary of Coal-Mine Explosions in the United States, 1810-1958. However, we have no detail records of the following early occurrences in your State, which are included in the list of major disasters in Bureau of Mines Bulletin 309.

Date	Mine	Location	Nature	Killed
<u>Anthracite</u>				
1/12/1846	Delaware & Hudson	Carbondale, Pa.	Cave-in	14
9/6/69	Avondale	Plymouth, Pa.	Fire	110
3/22/70	Potts	Locustdale, Pa.	Boiler explosion	5
8/10/70	Heins & Glassaire	Middleport, Pa.	Cage	9
8/29/70	Freston No. 3	Girardville, Pa.	do.	7
5/27/71	West Pittston	West Pittston, Pa.	Breaker fire	10
6/10/73	Henry Clay	Shamokin, Pa.	Fire	10
5/9/77	Wadesville	Wadesville, Pa.	do.	7
8/21/84	Buck Ridge	Shamokin, Pa.	do.	7
4/6/85	Cuyler	Raven Run, Pa.	Roof-fall	10
8/11/85	West End	Mocanaqua, Pa.	Boiler-fire	10
			gas	
12/18/85	Nanticoke No. 1	Nanticoke, Pa.	Inundation	26
9/13/86	Marvine	Scranton, Pa.	Suffocation (?)	8
4/27/87	Tunnel	Ashland, Pa.	do.	(?) 5
10/1/87	East	Girardville, Pa.	do.	(?) 5
5/9/89	Kaska William	Middleport, Pa.	Cage	10
3/3/90	Shaft No. 3 (So. Wilkes-Barre)	Wilkes-Barre, Pa.	Fire	8
2/4/91	Spring Mountain No. 1	Jeanesville, Pa.	Inundation	13

Date	Mine	Location	Nature	Killed
10/23/91	Richardson	Glen Carbon, Pa.	Roof of coal	7
4/20/92	Lytle	Minersville, Pa.	Inundation	10
4/1/93	Neilson	Shamokin, Pa.	Fire	10
2/13/94	Gaylor	Plymouth, Pa.	Roof-fall	13
7/17/94	East Sugar Loaf	Steckton, Pa.	Dynamite	8
10/8/94	Luke Fidler	Shamokin, Pa.	Fire	5
10/11/94	Henry Clay	do.	Boiler explosion	6
6/28/96	Twin Shaft	Pittston, Pa.	Roof fall	58
1/13/97	Wadesville	Wadesville, Pa.	Shaft	5
9/28/97	Jermyn No. 1	Rendham, Pa.	Fire	5
10/30/97	Von Storch	Scranton, Pa.	do.	6
5/26/98	Kaska Williams	Middleport, Pa.	Inundation	6
10/1/98	Midvale	Wilkes-Barre, Pa.	Fire	5
11/5/98	Exeter	West Pittston, Pa.	Cage	9
12/9/1902	So. Wilkes-Barre	Wilkes-Barre, Pa.	Dynamite Explosion	5
1/30/04	Maple Hill	Mahanoy City, Pa.	do.	5
5/5/04	Lance	Plymouth, Pa.	do.	5
5/5/04	Locust Gap	Locust Gap, Pa.	Fire	5
5/25/04	Williamstown	Williamstown, Pa.	Loco. gases	10
11/2/04	Auchincloss	Hanticoke, Pa.	Shaft	10
2/18/05	Lytle	Minersville, Pa.	Roof fall	5
3/9/05	Clear Spring	West Pittston, Pa.	Shaft	7
4/26/05	Conyngham	Wilkes-Barre, Pa.	do.	10
5/15/06	Shenandoah City	Shenandoah, Pa.	Dynamite explosion	7
5/13/08	Prospect	Midvale, Pa.	Roof fall	5
8/28/08	Warrior Run	Wilkes-Barre, Pa.	Mine cars	6
11/9/09	Auchincloss	Hanticoke, Pa.	Fire	9
5/10/11	Plymouth No. 5 (Boston)	Larksville, Pa.	do.	5
9/12/11	Marvine	Scranton, Pa.	Mine cars	5
10/3/11	Drifton No. 2	Fresland, Pa.	Cave-in	5
11/3/22	Eddy Creek	Elephant, Pa.	Premature shot	6
12/8/23	Mount Jassup No. 2	Jassup, Pa.	Roof fall	5

Singular

10/13/05	Clyde	Frederickstown, Pa.	Fire	6
8/17/07	Sonnan	Sonnan, Pa.	Shaft	5

If official reports on the afore-mentioned disasters are not available, copies of newspaper articles, pertinent correspondence, or other records or your suggestions as to where such records may be obtained will be appreciated.

Inasmuch as this appears to be a sizeable undertaking, we will be glad to send a representative from this office to assemble available data at your convenience.

If you do not have a copy of Bureau of Mines Bulletin 586, we will be pleased to send one for your reference records.

Sincerely yours,

James Westfield

James Westfield
Assistant Director--
Health and Safety

CMKEENAN:paz

Copy to: C. M. Keenan - 4524
W. Rachunis, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.
W. Dan Walker, Pittsburgh, Pa.
C. J. Dalzell, Johnstown, Pa.
DCMI - 4526
Files

Mr. Rachunis:
Mr. Walker:
Mr. Dalzell:

Any assistance you can
render in assembling this
information will be appreciated.

J.W.



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF MINES
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

June 14, 1961

Memorandum

To: W. Dan Walker, District Supervisor, District B,
Pittsburgh, Pa.

From: H. F. Weaver, Acting Assistant Director--Health
and Safety

Subject: Information on major disasters in Pennsylvania
bituminous-coal mines

In response to our request of May 23, 1961, for information on certain major disasters, a copy of which was sent to your office, Mr. Lewis E. Evans advises that he has no records of the mine fire at the Clyde mine, Fredericktown, Pennsylvania, October 13, 1905, or the shaft accident at the Sonman mine, Sonman, Pennsylvania, August 17, 1907.

It will be appreciated if you will arrange, at your convenience, to have all probable sources of this information, such as local newspaper morgues, coal company records if available, etc., searched and advise this office of your findings.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "H. F. Weaver".

H. F. Weaver

Copy to: C. M. Keenan
DCMI - 4526
Files

June 22, 1961

Memorandum

To: H. F. Weaver, Acting Assistant Director--Health and Safety

**From: W. Dan Walker, Jr., District Supervisor
Health and Safety District B**

**Subject: Information on major disasters in Pennsylvania bituminous-
coal mines**

With reference to your memorandum of June 14:

We are attaching excerpts taken from the Annual Reports of the Pennsylvania Department of Mines for 1905 and 1907 and also photostatic copies of newspaper clippings on the Clyde mine and Sonman mine disasters.

W. Dan Walker, Jr.

W. Dan Walker, Jr.

Attachments

FBagg:vr

We received three photostatic copies of the newspaper clippings from the Carnegie Library in Oakland, which cost \$1.55. Two were on the Clyde mine taken from the Pittsburgh Gazette dated 10/14/05 and Pittsburgh Press dated 10/15/05, and one was on Sonman mine taken from Pittsburgh Press dated 8/18/07.

**Copy to: C. M. Keenan
District B Files**



Newspaper Accounts

Dated

08/17/1907

The Daily Tribune-Johnstown, Saturday Evening, August 17, 1907

FELL 400 FEET DOWN COAL SHAFT.

Five Men Met Awful Fate at Sonman This Morning Through Engineer's Error

MIRACULOUS ESCAPE OF THREE

All Spilled Out of Cage at Top of Tipple 80 Feet - Above the Mouth of the Shaft

Special to the Tribune

Portage, Aug. 17.--Eight men, five of whom lie dead at the undertaking establishment here of John Tickerhoof & Son figured this morning in an accident which occurred at the Sonman Coal Company's shaft between this town and Benscreek, and which, in its singular character and the number of lives snuffed out, has not had a parallel in mining circles in this part of the country. Supposed negligence on the part of Engineer E. D. B. Holmes sent the five unfortunates from a tipple nearly eighty feet above the ground down a shaft, which measures 320 feet from the landing at the top to the tracks at the bottom. The five men were used up in a horrible manner, almost every bone in their bodies having been broken and their abdomens burst open. The dead, their ages, places of residence, and occupation, as furnished by the undertaker and the employees at the shaft, follow:

The List of Dead.

RUSSELL HOLLERS, son of Edward Hollers. Was eighteen years of age and lived here with his father. The lad was an engineer on the interior of the mine.

JOHN MC CALLISTER, aged forty years. Mr. McCallister was married and his wife and family reside at Coalport, Clearfield County, while he himself boarded at Sonman. He was employed as a roadman and his duties were to keep the tracks in repair.

RALPH RITCHEY, aged thirty-five years. Mr. Ritchey was married and made his home here, where a wife and one child mourn his loss. He was employed as a roadman.

ADAM KUNKO, aged forty years. Mr. Kunko lived at Sonman and leaves a wife and five small children, the oldest one of which is ten years old. Kunko was employed as a rockman.

OSCAR GROKI, aged twenty years. Groki was unmarried and lived here. He was employed in the shaft as a pumpman.

The three men who escaped are all foreigners, and they owe their lives to the fact that they caught hold of some timbers as they were falling. These three are Joseph Monte, Joseph Molata, and Andy Bologna, all of whom are diggers and live at Sonman.

A Most-Remarkable Accident

The accident and its accompanying fatalities is probably the worst in the annals of mining in this part of the State, with the exception of the great disaster at Johnstown in 1902, when over 100 lives were lost in an explosion. The news that a number of men had been killed in the Sonman shaft spread throughout this section very rapidly, and in an incredibly short time after its occurrence people had gathered from the surrounding country, and doctors hurried to the shaft to lend what aid they could. There was nothing to do, however, as the five men lay dead at the bottom of the deep and dark pit, and the three who remained above the hold crawled down to earth in safety, uninjured beyond a few scratches and bruises.

Cage Went Up, Not Down

The terrible accident, it is said, was the result of forgetfulness on the part of Engineer Holmes. The Sonman shaft is one that has been in operation for a number of years, and is the only one in that community. It is double, one cage

being lowered while the other one is being lifted to the top. When the day's work is done, the outside engineer is supposed to reverse his power so that the cage at the top would be lowered and the cage at the bottom would be lifted if the power were turned on. This has been the rule at the shaft ever since operations began there, but when the cage was lifted to the top for the last time last evening, Mr. Holmes, it appears, forgot to reverse the power. The result was that when he applied the power this morning, and at the same moment overlooked the fact that the reverse was not on, the cage continued to the top of the tipples instead of going down, as was intended.

In Happy Mood When Dashed to Doom

What happened in the next few seconds was heartrending. The eight men had reached the mine in a happy mood this morning, and as usual, stepped into the cage to be lowered to their labors down in the bowels of the earth. They were talking and commenting upon the work ahead of them, and the signal to be let down was given Engineer Holmes. The beginning of the descent is generally made rapidly and the cage is slackened on nearing the bottom. Thinking his power was reversed, Mr. Holmes pulled the lever as usual, but the cage shot upward, not downward. At first the men stood still and looked up in amazement. Then realizing the danger to which they were being carried, the eight imperiled miners called at the top of their voices to the engineer to "Stop!" "Reverse!" and other exclamations.

Sitting at the lever in the engine house, Mr. Holmes heard the cries and looked up. Unable to realize at the moment what was wrong and causing the car to go up before he had time to correct his mistake, the cage reached the top and struck with such force that it was turned completely over, instead of turning only partially, as it does when dumping coal, and the load of humanity

was spilled out. Unable to catch hold of any projection, the five above-named unfortunates fell eighty feet to the landing of the shaft, struck some timbers there, and then continued 320 feet farther to the bottom.

Bodies Burst Open in Fall.

In their descent, the bodies of the five struck against the timbers in the shaft, and it is thought that death came to some before the bottom was reached. When removed about thirty minutes after the accident, the bodies presented a terrible sight. The bones in the legs and arms of almost every man were broken as though they were so many pieces of chalk. In some cases the bones protruded from the flesh and the skulls were crushed as so many egg shells. Ribs, collar bones, and other bones were also broken. A peculiar fact in connection with the mutilation of the bodies is that in every case, the flesh in the region of the abdomen was burst open almost the entire width of the body, the entrails protruding. The remains of the five were loaded into the cages and lifted to the surface, where Undertaker Tickerhoof took charge of them. Nothing can be told of the funerals as yet.

Trio's Wonderful Escape

The escape of the three foreigners was little short of miraculous. They were almost carried down and their holds torn loose when the bodies of their companions struck them in their descent. They held on, however, with the grip of death, and soon afterward crawled down the framework of the tippie, reaching the earth to safety.

Coroner W. B. Frothers, of this city, was notified of the accident and fatality, and stated this afternoon that he did not believe it necessary to hold any inquest. Dr. Frothers spent some time inquiring into the facts and has reached the conclusion that the five men met death purely through an accident. He

stated that he could not find anything on which could be based an action against any one.

Engineer Forgets: Fire
Dashed 400 feet to death

Johnstown Pa Aug 17 1907

Appears in

The Pittsburgh Sunday Post

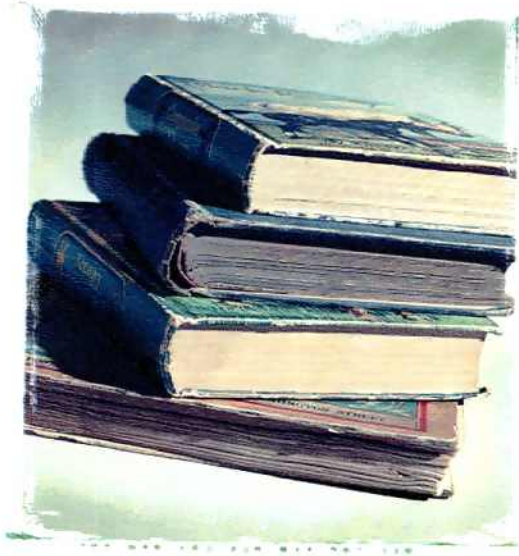
dated Aug 18, 1907

front page, ^{editorial section} cols 4 and 5

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Book Excerpts

**Annual Report of Pennsylvania
Department of Mines 1907**

Falling Down Shaft

August 17, Sonman Shaft, Adam Kunkle, Polish, Ralph Richie, American, Russel Hollern, American, Oscar Groki, American, and John McAllister, Scotch, all company men, together with three others, got on the cage to descend to their work. The engineer, in-

stead of lowering the cage, hoisted it to the automatic dump in the head frame with such force as to displace the angle guides, upsetting the cage straight down the shaft. Five men fell to the bottom, a distance of 350 feet, the other three escaping by clinging to the cage and shaft timbers. At the inquest, the engineer stated that he had left the engine after hoisting a man up the shaft to see if there was water in the boilers. Upon receiving a signal to let the men down, he unintentionally sent the cage the wrong way, hoisting it to the automatic dump instead of lowering it into the shaft. The evidence shows that he hoisted the cage slowly at first, but when an alarm was given by the men around the top of the shaft, he became excited and shot the cage up. The following is a copy of the verdict:

"We, the jurors, find from the evidence presented that the death of Adam Kunkle and four others at the Sonman mine, August 17th, 1907 was due to an unintentional mistake of E. D. B. Holmes, operating the engine that raised the cage instead of lowering it, causing the fatalities."

J. B. Prothero, Coroner,
Cambria County.