

SUMMARY DRAFT--LWL--9/7/65

JANUARY 26, 1904: STRATTON'S INDEPENDENCE (GOLD) VICTOR,
COLORADO; 14 KILLED

(From Colorado Springs Gazette--January 28 to February 2, 1904
and the Engineering and Mining Journal)

Mechanical failure precipitating confusion on the part of the hoisting engineer resulted in the death of 14 men as the cage in which they were riding was drawn into the sheave wheel at 3 a.m. The men were being carried to the surface from the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth levels.

A seriously injured lone survivor indicated that twice just before the crushing accident occurred, the cage descended unexplainably for a considerable distance. On two other occasions during the previous months, hoisting difficulties caused a great deal of property damage but no loss of life. Once operations had to be suspended for several days.

In this instance, when the engineer discovered the automatic air brakes were out of order, he immediately tried the steam breaks, but found that they were frozen. He lost consciousness when the men were torn to pieces with parts of their bodies falling hundreds of feet to the sump below.

During recovery operations, a storeroom was turned into a temporary morgue where the coroner, assisted by undertakers, made an effort to assemble the bodies for identification. The entire mining operation was closed for several days.

A coroner's jury found the following safety precautions lacking; (1) No one presiding at the shaft collar when men were hoisted; (2) Safety device to prevent overwinding of the cable not in use; (3) Men loaded and unloaded without placing the cage on chairs; and (4) The disc brakes on the hoisting engine detached from usual position, this making them ineffectual.

From: The Engineering and Mining Journal--February 18, 1904, p.
291

Officers of the Colorado National Guard have [been] acquitted at Cripple Creek of falsely imprisoning, in the military guard house, the leaders of the local miners' unions.

Judge Lewis held that the case was not one for the jury and verdict for the defendants, in as much as the National Guard

officers executed orders received from the Governor of the State. As a result the Western Federation of Miners has dropped similar cases against military officers, but suite against Peabody will be carried to the State Supreme Court to test his power in declaring martial law and in authoring the detention and deportation of strikers.

The Attorney General of Colorado, has handed down an opinion that the Recent disaster at the Stratton's Independence mine might have been averted had certain provisions of the law been enforced and practically laid the blame for the neglect upon the State Commissioner of Mines. The opinion states that the three recommendations made by the committee appointed by the commissioner, the use of some suitable over-winding device; the use of chairs, placed high in the [gallows] frame to catch the cage; if the cable breaks, and the testing of the safety clutches on cages, by some competent person at regular intervals, are reasonable and can be enforced under the existing law, Governor Peabody instructed the commissioner to enforce the recommendations, and the commissioner had issued the necessary orders, affecting about 150 mines in the State.

The Colorado smelters have again raised the price of

From: The Engineering and Mining Journal--February 11, 1904 p. 228
Editorial

On another page we publish a letter from a colliery engineer drawing attention to the unnecessary character of the fatal accident which recently occurred at Cripple Creek.

On January 26, fourteen men were killed by the overwinding of the engine at the main shaft of the Independence mine. Four days later a coroner's jury brought in a verdict blaming the management for neglecting to take proper precautions; before this jury had handed in the decision, the State Commissioner of Mines announced his intention of calling a board to inquire into the matter, the reason for this unusual action being stated to be "the [bias] and prejudice existing, among the jurors and the law officers having charge of the investigations. "This he subsequently withdrew; further proceedings are anticipated. In the evidence before the coroner's jury it came out that the deputy inspector of mines had reported two absence of safety detaching hooks, but no action was taken to insure the addition of such a device until after the accident. It was also shown that the machinery was not working satisfactorily, and that several precautions had been omitted, among these, the placing of the chairs in position is mentioned, but no chairs would have prevented such an accident, on the other hand, the disk brakes appear not to have been in place for action, so that the engineer was unable to use them at the critical moment.

Two lessons are to be derived from this unfortunate

occurrence, one relates to safety detachable hooks and the other to mine inspectors. In many mining regions, in Europe especially, the employment of safety detachable hooks to prevent overwinding is made compulsory by law; in the United States this is not usual, for even in Pennsylvania no such ordinance is in existence. Safety clutches, chairs, etc., are useless in the case of overwinding, because the violent impact against the shieve usually smashes the mechanism of the clutch, and the weight of the cage falling fifty feet or more is too much for the chairs to withstand. Therefore, the ordinary precautions are usually insufficient to prevent such a disaster as the one in question, but that a safety detachable hook would have done so is extremely probable. Apart from this lesson, the incident points to the wretched manner in which mine inspection is conducted in Colorado, and points again to the great injury done to the public service by appointing men to responsible positions mainly on political grounds, and for a short term of office, instead of their being chosen on their merits and kept in office so long as they do their work efficiently.

From: The Engineering and Mining Journal--February 11, 1904 p. 251

Denver-Governor Peabody, by proclamation, has suspended martial law in Cripple Creek and the prisoners held by the military have been turned over to the civil authorities.

It is estimated that the output of the Cripple Creek district for January amounted to over 50,000 tons of a bulletin value of \$1,753,000.

The coroner's jury that investigated the recent fatal accident at the Stratton's Independence mine returned a verdict that the accident was caused by the engineer losing control of the engine and that the management had neglected these precautions: (1) No man was required to preside at the collar of the shaft while hoisting men; (2) no safety device was in use to prevent overwinding; (3) men were loaded and unloaded without placing the cage on chairs; (4) the disc brakes on the hoisting engine were detached from their usual position and therefore useless. The jury recommended that the safety appliances and precautions above specified be adopted by all mines in the district not already using the same. The board of inquiry, convened by State Commissioner of Mines E. Lyman White, reported these suggestions: (1) To restrict use of cages in counter-balances when hoisting men; (2) the use of some suitable overwinding device; (3) the use of chairs in the gallows frame at a point that will insure the catching of the cage if the cable is released; (4) the testing, by some competent person, of the safety clutches in cages at regular intervals. In his report to Governor Peabody, Mr. White stated that he thought the disaster was due to causes purely accidental and beyond control. Governor Peabody says that the Colorado laws relating to

safety appliances are so conflicting that he has referred the report of the board of inquiry to the State attorney general to determine whether local authorities or State authorities can compel companies to provide proper safeguards. Judge Theron Stevens, at Telluride, has refused to grant the injunction against the military, sought by members of the Western Federation of Miners, who have been deported from San Miguel county by the military. Judge Stevens based his opinion upon the law which Governor Peabody has cited as authority for enforcing military rule. Half the remaining soldiers who have been on duty in the county have been relieved, leaving only a provost guard of about 70 picked men.