

**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**

**April 27, 1887; Tunnel Colliery, Ashland, Pa.;
5 Killed**

*(From the "Mining Herald and Colliery Engineer,"
May 7, 1887, p. 143)*

Wednesday afternoon, April 27th, the whistle of Tunnel colliery, at Ashland, Schuylkill county, Pa., sounded an alarm that quickly brought hundreds of people to the hillside southeast of town, where that operation is located. This colliery has been noted for the great accumulation of gas in its gangways and the many frequent and serious accidents which have there occurred. In the west gangway, adjoining breasts, numbers 85 and 86, there were two pillars which had been closely worked, and for two or three weeks past a fall of coal had been expected. Work, however, was not suspended, the bosses believing that sufficient warning would be given for the men to escape without injury when the fall and consequent rush of gas afterward occurred, but it was assuming a great risk which resulted in the sacrifice of five lives. This gangway runs under the hill on the south side of town for about a mile and in the different breasts there were nearly thirty-five men working on the afternoon of the 27th. Shortly after ten o'clock a strong current of air, the usual warning of the serious consequence which so often result, rushed through the gangway and was a signal for all the men to hurriedly flee in the direction of the bottom of the slope. They nearly all succeeded in reaching a point of safety before the terrific crash was heard, which brought down from the pillars into the gangway hundreds of tons of coal and rock. It was immediately followed by a rush of the deadly gas, which is the horror of all mine workers. It drove the air before it and succeeded in getting within its fatal grasp nine or ten men, who were working so close to where it started that it was impossible for them to escape it. For more than an hour after the rush it was almost impossible to approach nearer than 200 yards of the terrible scene in the dark and gloomy death chamber. Four of the victims were first recovered, and it was feared for a time that their existence on this earth would be very short, but efforts to restore them to consciousness were successful, and it was discovered that they were not seriously injured. However, upon going farther, the rescuing party found five bodies in which life had become extinct, the gas having done its work effectually by smothering them to death.

It was fortunate that the gas was not ignited or a terrific explosion would have resulted with fatal consequences too horrible to imagine.

One of the rescued states that when passing out of the gangway in his effort to escape, he saw the five men who met their deaths, and thought that they too were trying to get out. He supposed they were aware of the coming rush. The point where the victims were smothered is about one and one-fourth miles from the colliery, where the men entered the mines, and is supposed to be midway between Ashland and Locust Dale, underneath the cemetery. The men used safety lamps and fortunately no explosion resulted. This part of the mine had been idle for a week and the employees were anxious to go to work when the order was issued on Monday. The seam of coal at this locality is from 40 to 60 feet thick and these men were engaged in robbing pillars.

**"THE DAILY MINERS JOURNAL,"
POTTSVILLE, SCHUYLKILL COUNTY. PA.
THURSDAY, APRIL 28, 1887.**

**"HORRIBLE MINE ACCIDENT - FIVE MEN SUFFOCATED
AT THE TUNNEL COLLIERY YESTERDAY"**

"A MINE ACCIDENT WITH TERRIBLE RESULTS OCCURRED AT THE TUNNEL COLLIERY, SITUATED WITHIN THE BOROUGH LIMITS OF ASHLAND YESTERDAY AFTERNOON. THE WEST GANGWAY OF THE COLLIERY HAD BEEN IDLE SEVERAL WEEKS, AND ONLY A FEW MEN NECESSARY TO KEEP THE COLLIERY IN CONDITION WERE ALLOWED TO GO IN, AND THESE WERE CAUTIONED AS TO THE DANGER. AS THEY WERE AWARE OF THE EXTREME DANGER TO WHICH THEY WERE SUBJECTING THEMSELVES, IT IS PRESUMED THAT THEY TOOK WHAT THEY DEEMED SUFFICIENT PRECAUTION AGAINST AN ACCIDENT. BUT LIKE MOST MINE ACCIDENTS, THE FATAL CRASH CAME IN A MOMENT. GREAT VOLUME OF GAS SUDDENLY POWERED DOWN UPON THE GANGWAY. FIVE IN NUMBER, WHO WERE AT WORK IN THE GANGWAY, AND EVERY ONE OF THE WORKMEN SUCCUMBED TO THE FATAL ELEMENT.

"JUST HOW THE ACCIDENT OCCURRED HAS NOT YET BEEN ASCERTAINED. THERE WAS A RUNNING OF THE PILLARS, A SUDDEN RUSH OF THE NOXIOUS GAS, AND THE SUFFOCATION OF THE FIVE MEN. THE ACCIDENT HAPPENED ABOUT 2 O'CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON, BUT IT WAS NEARLY 3 O'CLOCK BEFORE THE BODIES OF THE VICTIMS WERE RECOVERED. A CONSIDERABLE TIME ELAPSED BEFORE EVEN THE TERRIBLE OCCURRENCE BECAME KNOWN, AND THEN THE WORKINGS IN WHICH THE FATAL RUSH TOOK PLACE, HAD TO BE VENTILATED.

"THE COLLIERY IS OWNED AND OPERATED BY THE P. & R. C. & I. COMPANY, THE ONLY LOSS THE COMPANY SUSTAINED BY THE ACCIDENT IS THE DEATH OF SIX MULES WHICH WERE SMOTHERED."