

**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**

**July 11, 1877; Brookfield Mine; Brookfield, Ohio;
7 Killed**

*(From "The Chronical," Warren, Ohio, Wednesday,
July 18, 1877)*

The scene of the accident was the Brookfield Mine Tunnel, which was completed last winter. It runs underground a distance of about a mile in three directions, and over ten miles of entry work have been driven. The tunnel is 3,915 feet long. Until recently the coal has been transported on cars drawn by mules. This not proving adequate or satisfactory, a small locomotive was employed in which anthracite coal was used. The tunnel being narrow—8 feet wide at the bottom, six at the top, and six feet high—the smoke and noxious gases generated formed a deadly poison. On the 11th inst., a number of men working in that part of the mine were suffocated by the foul air, seven of whom lost their lives. The men with the engine, after being in the slope but a short time, became affected by the gas, and fell in a senseless condition. The engineer managed to reach the mouth of the tunnel and gave the alarm. A number of persons rushed in to rescue the affected men, but were themselves overcome by the gas. Squads were then organized to go in and bring out the fallen, and in this way 36 were taken out, there being seven fatal cases.

On whom the responsibility immediately rests, if upon any party in person, we have not learned. The popular talk is that the disaster is properly chargeable to defective ventilation, and that the superintendent of the mine, one of the men who perished, had urged the sinking of an additional ventilating shaft, but that his recommendation had not been complied with.

The State Mine Inspector, in his last annual report, says he visited this mine, and found in it "a strong current of air," rarefaction being caused by two 24 foot boilers placed at the bottom of the air shaft to make steam for the water pump.

The air doors of the mine, and all the other ventilating arrangements are well maintained, and the mine is in good condition. This was before the employment of an anthracite coal burning locomotive in the mine, and that may account for the changed condition of the air in the mine.

St. Clairsville, Ohio
June 24, 1961

Memorandum

To: T. C. Higgins, Subdistrict Supervisor, Health and Safety
District B

From: William J. Buswink, Federal Coal Mine Inspector

Subject: Coal Mine Disaster, Brookfield Coal Company's Tunnel,
Brookfield, Ohio, July 11, 1877

The enclosed story of the Brookfield Disaster of July 11, 1877 was copied verbatim from an account column of the disaster from an original weekly newspaper, "The Western Reserve Chronicle" dated July 18, 1877 which is on file at the Public Library, City of Warren, Trumbull County, Ohio.

The employees in charge of this Library were very cooperative and were thanked on behalf of the Bureau.

/s/ William J. Buswink

William J. Buswink

Copy to: James Westfield
W. Dan Walker, Jr.
File

The Western Reserve Chronicle
The Chronicle, Warren, Ohio, Wednesday, July 18, 1877
Terrible Coal Mine Disaster
Seven Men Suffocated

The loss of human life by disaster in coal mines have occurred in late years with fearful frequency. Scarcely a week passes without an accident in some coal district being reported. Fire, flood, explosions, noxious gases, and caving in of shafts or tunnels comprise a list of perils which endanger the lives of these who delve among the black diamonds in the depths of the earth. Another terrible accident, occurring in this county, adds another chapter of horror to the volume of disasters of the character referred to. The scene of the accident was the Brookfield Coal

Company's Tunnel, which was completed last winter. It runs underground a distance of about a mile in three directions, and over ten miles of entry work have been driven. The tunnel is 3,915 feet long. Until recently the coal has been transported on cars drawn by mules. This not proving adequate or satisfactory, a small locomotive was employed, in which antracite coal was used. The tunnel being narrow - 8 feet wide at the bottom, six at the top, and six feet high - the smoke and noxious gases generated formed a deadly poison. On the 11th instance, a number of men working in that part of the mine were suffocated by the foul air, seven of whom lost their lives. The men with the engine, after being in the slope but a short time, became affected by the gas, and felt in a senseless condition. The engineer managed to reach the mouth of the tunnel and gave the alarm. A number of persons rushed in to rescue the affected men, but were themselves overcome by the gas. Squads were then organized to go in and bring out the fallen, and in this way 36 were taken out, there being seven fatal cases. The excitement and anxiety were intense and rapidly spread throughout the neighborhood. Deep sorrow cast its shadow of bereaved families, and gloom and sadness, such as had never been experienced in Brookfield, prevailed. The funerals of two of the unfortunate men took place on Thursday, and five on Friday, and were largely attended. The spectacle was an exceedingly sad one and made impressions that will not be soon effaced in that community.

A Hubbard special in Saturday's header gives an account of the funerals on Friday afternoon, as follows: This afternoon at the Cemetery at Brookfield Center was performed the last sad funeral rites of five victims of the disaster at the Brookfield mine; Jones, Williams, Davis, Young and Barter. Fully two thousand people were present. The procession was in the following order; Barter's remains, under charge of Hubbard Lodge I.O.O.F. with A. Randall as Marshal, followed by the Knight of Pythians of Sharon, Pennsylvania; second, funeral procession of Young. The services were held in the N.E. Church at Brookfield. Scarcely had the remains of Barter and Young been lowered in the grave another mournful cortege came in sight in the following order; Brookfield Ironites leading, followed by a hearse bearing the remains of Davis, followed by his relatives; second hearse, bearing the remains of Williams, followed by his relatives; third hearse, bearing the remains of Jones, followed by relatives and citizens.

On whom the responsibility immediately rests, if upon any party in person, we have not learned. The popular talk is that the disaster is properly chargeable to defective ventilation, and that Mr. Jones, superintendent of the mine, one of the men who perished, had urged the sinking of an additional ventilating shaft, but that his recommendation had not been complied with.

The State Mine Inspector, Andrew Roy, Esq., in his last annual report, says he visited this mine, and found it "a strong current of air" rarefaction being caused by 24 feet boilers placed at the bottom of the air shaft to make steam for the water pump."

"The air doors of the mine, and all the other ventilating arrangements are well maintained, and the mine is in good

condition." This was before the employment of an anthracite coal burning locomotive in the mine, and that may account for the changed condition of the air in the mine.

Z. T. Ewalt, Esq., coroner, sends us the following communication, note from the coroner - verdict of the jury.

Editor's Chronicle: - I thought a word from me would be acceptable to the readers of the Chronicle, on the Brookfield disaster. Being notified, I immediately repaired to the scene of the disaster, and found the community in a wild state of excitement. On inquiry, I found that there had been seven deaths; and that there were several more that, it was feared, would not recover, but when I left it was thought that all were out of danger. The verdict of the jury will give you the best statement of the matter of the disaster. The following are the names of the unfortunate:

John Jones, 2d, foreman of the bank; Miles Davis, Robert R. Williams, Richard Jones, David Jenkins, John Barter, and John Young. Their bodies were found in the tunnel leading into the Brookfield Coal Co.'s mine.

After hearing the evidence and examining the bodies, we do find that the deceased came to their deaths by noxious and poisonous gases generated by burning anthracite coal in the shifter engine, used to haul coal from the inside of the said Brookfield Coal Co.'s mine.

Signed,
George Storefiled
David R. Davis
Thomas Roderick
E. S. Davis
James Dunkerly
Henry Hamilton
E.T. Ewalt, Coroner

Bucks County Gazette
Bristol, PA
Thursday, July 19, 1877

—A terrible disaster occurred July 11, at Wheatland, Pa., in the Brookfield coal mine. The coal from the Brookfield mine is hauled out by a locomotive engine. The managers of the mine ordered anthracite coal to be burned in the engine furnace instead of soft coal, which had been heretofore used. About 11 o'clock the engine passed into the mine slope. After being in a short time the men in charge of the engine became suddenly affected by the gas from the hard coal, causing them to fall to the ground in a senseless condition. The engineer managed to make his way back to the mouth of the bank, and gave an alarm. A large number of men rushed into the bank to rescue their comrades. One after another they passed in, but were almost immediately overcome by the gas, and they, too, fell insensible. After several had thus fallen a gang was organized to rescue those who went in last, and squads of four or five passed in until they came to a fallen comrade, when they would take him in their arms and carry him out to the open air. In this way 36 men were brought out, six of whom were either dead before reaching the mouth of the bank or died immediately after. Wheatland is a small town on the Erie and Pittsburg Railroad, two miles east of Sharon.

Edwardsville Intelligencer
Edwardsville IL
May 12, 1877

At the Brookfield coal-mine near Wheatland, Pa. on the 11th, a locomotive, burning anthracite coal for the first time, entered the tunnel into the mine and after being in a short time, the men in charge of the engine became suddenly affected by the gas from the hard coal, causing them to fall to the ground in a senseless condition. The engineer managed to make his way back to the mouth of the bank and gave the alarm, at which a large number of men rushed into the bank to rescue their comrades. One after another they passed in but were almost immediately overcome by gas and they too fell insensible. After several had thus fallen, a gang was organized to rescue those who went in last, and squads of four or five passed in until they came to a fallen comrade, when they would take him in their arms and carry him out to the open air. In this way, thirty-six men were brought out, six of whom were either dead before reaching the mouth of the bank or died immediately after.

Ohio Democrat
New Philadelphia, Ohio
September 27, 1877

The Columbus Dispatch says that State Mine Inspector Roy has half a dozen mines in the Mahoning Valley in court, charged with having violated the mining law. A number of suits are held in abeyance to give operators four weeks to comply with the law. Others insist that they are complying with the law now. The Brookfield slope, where the locomotive caused the death of seven men, insist upon putting another locomotive in without having provided the shafts recommended by the Inspector.