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TERRIBLE DISASTER IN ILLINOIS MINE

Nearly Four Hundred Miners Meet Terrible Deaths
in Coal Mine—No Chance of Escape
from the Flames.

Spring Valley, Ill., Nov. 14.—There are over four hundred miners dead in a mine at Cherry, a mining village on the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway, seven miles north of this city. 444 miners were lowered to their work Saturday, and only 24 are known to have escaped. The fire originated in a stable in the second level, or in the mule barns, and was discovered by Miner James Heney, who gave the alarm. But little notice was taken of the warning until 3 p.m. when a general alarm was given. Then it was too late and the biggest mine disaster in the state went on record. A band of twelve rescuers volunteered to go down and they too lost their lives, bringing the sum total of lives lost to 472.

Late tonight government rescue men and state mine inspectors, taking their lives in their hands, unsealed the shaft of the burning mine, and penetrated to the 380 foot or first level of the mine. They found that the fire had been smothered. The smoldering ruins of frame work in the main shaft, the dense pall of smoke, and other havoc wrought by the flames were the only evidences of the fire which raged so fiercely on Saturday and part of today, and which blotted out a greater city than any in the world. No bodies were discovered; no search was made for them. The fire party that descended into the mine was satisfied that the measures taken to check the flames had proved effectual. The men quickly returned to the surface.

Early tomorrow morning the main shaft of the Cherry mine will be opened up to the 500 foot level. Venturists men will go below in these different levels, and into the branch workings that extend like the burrowing of a mole far into the earth in many directions. These parties in all probability, will come upon the bodies of miners who met their death in their living tomb. The work of bringing out the dead will then begin, and the harrowing scenes which have been witnessed at the mouth of the shaft, and all through the little town today will pale into insignificance.

MANY BLUNDERS
The story of the disaster is plain enough now, and with the telling of the story is made patent the fact that someone blundered—someone had blundered not once or twice, but many times, else there might have been a different result. There was a blunder when the hay which caused the fire was sent down the mine. There was a blunder when the burning hay was dumped down the shaft. There was a blunder when the signal was given to reverse the great ventilating fan. There was a blunder when the signal to hoist the cage, the brave heroes who ventured into the burning mine was not obeyed. There was a blunder when the water supply gave out and water had to be transported quite a distance before it could be poured into the burning shaft.

There were other blunders and there are other things that will come out in the investigation that will follow as soon as the bodies have been removed from their tomb.

INQUEST OPENED
Coroner A. G. Mahm, of the Bureau county, held an inquest over the bodies thus far recovered, in the city hall at Cherry.

Engineer Cawley, was the principal witness. He testified that after the cage had arrived at the 380 foot level he received a number of signals in quick succession. The first came a signal to lower, then to stop, then to lower again, then to stop, so that he was at a loss to know what to do, and finally of his own volition realized that something was wrong, and raised the cage. The verdict will be rendered later.

Three hundred and thirty-eight men dead and missing is the terrible toll exacted in the catastrophe which struck the Cherry mines on Saturday last. There seems no doubt as to the manner in which the catastrophe occurred. The mine is built on two levels one opening at the top vein, at 380 feet, the other to the third vein at 500 feet. In the top vein the workings are like the branches of a tree almost. Four drifts are opened north, south, east and west, and from each of the drifts similar drifts are opened, something like the lines of a fork running into each other, so widespread are they.

In the lower level the circular or mining plan is followed. Four drifts are also opened, and then at a distance of about 100 feet from the centre the workings start in a circle, each man working from the end of the drift towards his neighbor, there being two men to a drift originally. Thus the process goes on, gradually widening the circle thus formed. The main and air shafts both descend to the lower level, and a wide gallery runs from one end to the other of the 380 foot level.

A car containing six bales of hay was on this gallery en route to the stables where the mine mules were housed, and Alex. Rosenjack, a young man who works at the cage in the main shaft, got too close to the hay and it ignited from his lamp. Immediately the hay dared up and just as quickly was almost everyone in the vicinity panic stricken. The driver started to run the car towards the air shaft, with the intention of dumping the load into the dump, where there always is water, but in some manner he got so confused that the first thing the others knew the car was being backed towards the main shaft.

Again it was started towards the air shaft and the dump, but all this time the fan at the top of the air shaft had been pouring down into the main shaft a terrific stream of fresh air, which fanned the flames into a furnace head. This same stream of air coming down the shaft constantly keeps the planking in the shaft and at the entrance to the gallery as dry as a bone, notwithstanding that it is regularly sprinkled along with the remainder of the mine, in accordance with state law.

By the time the hay had been burning only a few minutes, the planking caught fire, and then bedlam broke loose. The smoke driven by the powerful fan, swept down to the 500 foot level, terrifying the men at work there, and all made a mad break for the main shaft.

The smoke came quickly up through the main shaft, giving the warning to those on the surface, and signals at the main shaft hoisting apparatus were immediately answered, and from every direction men came running, and for a time it seemed as though most of those in the mine would be saved.

No one appears able to tell a correct tale of what happened, and almost everyone on the surface thought there had been an explosion of dead-end fire. Up came the cage, after a time, with its human freight, and then came the signal suddenly of nine bells at the fan. This is the emergency signal to reverse the fan and this was done at once with the result that matters were made worse. The fan had been driving the smoke and flames toward the main shaft, and to suck the air, cutting off the escape of those who had started to climb the ladder from the 500 foot level to the upper level, and as the air was drawn up the shaft, fresh air rushed in through the main shaft, and once more fanned the flames, so that in short order the gallery was a furnace.

A rescue party was organized and furnished, the cage descended into the mine, and four times returned with a load of men. Then, when it was about to descend for the fifth time, John Bundy, the mine boss, shoved aside Dr. Howe, who had gone on the previous trips, and said: "You stay here, you will be needed to take care of the next load. It is getting very bad down there." This seemed reasonable, for the shaft was already stifling, and Dr. Howe stayed prepared to resuscitate any who might be overcome by the smoke. Down went the cage and those on the surface waited patiently for the signal. Five minutes passed, then ten, and many urged Joe Cowley, the engineer in charge of the hoisting apparatus, to bring up the cage, declaring that something must be wrong. There had been several signals—but at no time did he get the signal to draw them up, and Cowley refused to do so, on the plea that he might cause the death of someone by leaving them at the bottom of the mine.

Just how long they were down in the mine no one can tell. Some say, half an hour, but the chances are that it was much less, when Cowley realized that something terrible must have happened, and drew up the cage. When it reached the surface, there, exposed to the horrible gaze of the waiting crowd, were ten bodies burned almost beyond recognition; each with the arms flung up across the face, as if to keep the flames from the eyes, ears and mouth.

Dr. Howe nearly fainted, and as he was turning away to hide his agitation, he said what he declares the most fervent thanks he ever gave the Almighty. He had escaped death by a hair's breadth. A man screamed out in grief, and he turned to see a brother of Isaac Lewis, the Cherry liveyman, gazing into the blackened and distorted face of one of the victims. Young Lewis had just arrived and before the car came up heard someone remark that like Lewis was down in the cage. The first body he inspected was that of his brother.

If horror had seized the crowds before, it now became redoubled, and like wild fire went the news through the town that the mine was burning, the fan was stopped, and a rush made to go down into the mine in the face of the fate which had overtaken the rescue party, and at once water was poured into the mine.

Lewis and Frumento were in no way connected with the mine, and both gave their lives in futile attempts to save others. Lewis was especially popular, and after it was seen that he was dead, a crowd followed his body as it was carried away, women and men weeping. The engine house at the surface was brought into play, and steam from stream was directed down the shaft, when the crowd was one more horrified to hear that the water was giving out. Telephone messages for help had already been sent to Ladd, and other nearby towns, and quick as word could be gotten to Mendota, the home of the divisional superintendent, flat cars carrying immense filled with water were at once despatched to the mines. By the time the fire had been burning a little more than an hour it had swept up the air shaft so that the house over the fan was burned, putting the fan out of commission. Strange as it may seem, the structural work in the

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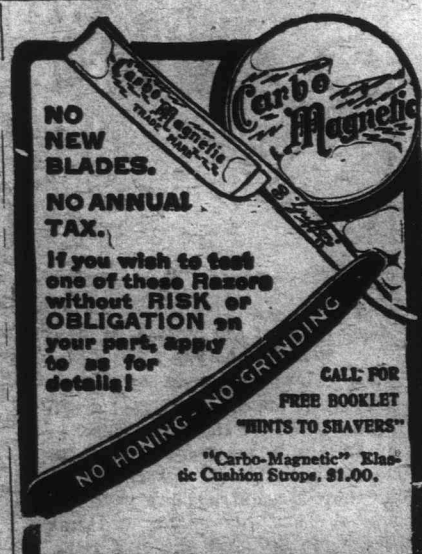
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galleries of the mine, with the exception of the main gallery is steel, out in the galleries and shafts, it is of very heavy wooden beams said to be eight by eight.

Once there were thoroughly afire, it seemed that all the water in the country would not extinguish the flames. Finally, after two tremendous splashes of water had been hurled down the shaft, it was decided that the only way to extinguish the flames was to smother them, and preparations were made to seal up the entrance to the shaft. Once this became apparent to the crowd pandemonium broke loose, and men, women and children rushed to the shafts determined to make one last effort to save those who were down in the mine. To smother the flames seemed to them to mean that the men would be smothered, and time after time, the women especially, had to be hurried back from the shaft to prevent them from hurling themselves into it. Virtually crazed by grief, screaming, cursing and imploring, they gave the rescuers and fire fighters a fierce battle before they were driven back.

Those familiar with the mine knew that here and there through the galleries and drifts were trap doors, which might be closed, and that the men, therefore, might have a fighting chance of escape if the shafts were sealed up and the fire smothered.

Finally this was done and the crowd prepared to wait until morning. Some went home, but the greater number remained at the shaft, notwithstanding that rain was falling and blowing cold and keen. Those who went home furnished one of the most pitiful sights of the whole town, all the more apparent to one who realized the import of the catastrophe. Everyone of them lighted a lamp and placed it close to the front window or in the door way, sheltered in some way from the wind.



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