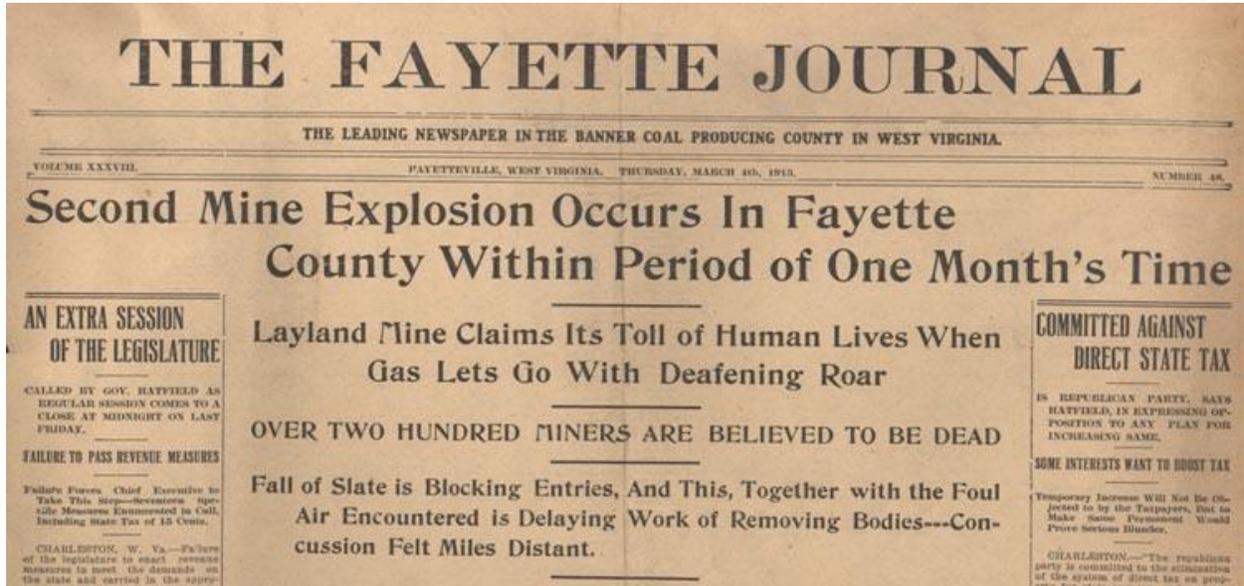


ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY MARCH 2



On March 2, 1915, an explosion at Layland in Fayette County killed 112 coal miners.

CSO: SS.8.9, ELA.8.1, ELA.8.2, ELA.8.3

Investigate the Document: (*Department of Mines Annual Report, 1915*)

1. Read the full text within the report about the explosion at the Fayette County mine and summarize its contents—cause(s), fatalities, significant persons, rescue efforts, noteworthy details (3-5 paragraphs).
2. The fan surviving the explosion was an important detail for rescue efforts because...
3. How was this specific mine generally regarded? Safe? Dangerous?
4. What was cited as the cause of the explosion in the report?

Think Critically: How would you describe the conditions that coal miners worked in during the early twentieth century? Are there any specific conclusions you can draw from this report? How can this specific mine tragedy be combined with others to create a more complete or comprehensive understanding of the evolution of the coal industry in West Virginia?

Oak Fuel Company, operating said mine, and that the said White Oak Fuel Company furnished all necessary supplies of all kinds and gave to the mine foreman and the mine bosses the necessary instructions to keep the mine in a safe condition, and we further find that if there was any negligence that it was due to the failure of the fire bosses in not marking up on the outside of the mine that there was a small amount of gas in room No. 11 on the 5th left although he had marked the said room as dangerous at this entrance.

In testimony whereof, the said Justice of the Peace, and jurors hereto set their hands:

(Signed) S. J. JASPER, J. P.
J. E. GARRETT,
J. W. McVEY,
J. E. GRAY,
W. L. HANGER,
B. E. LYKINS,
M. C. BIBB.

NEW RIVER & POCAHONTAS CONSOLIDATED COAL COMPANY DUST
EXPLOSION.

On Tuesday, March 2, 1915, at 8:30 A. M. an explosion occurred in the No. 3 mine located at Layland, Fayette County, operated by the New River & Pocahontas Consolidated Coal Company, resulting in the death of one hundred and twelve persons, one hundred and eleven on the inside and one on the outside. At the time of the explosion there was one hundred and sixty-four persons at work in the mine, seven of whom were working on the fourth left off of third main entry and were rescued shortly after the explosion. Fortunately the fan was not damaged to any extent and in a very short time Mr. Kneer, Mine Superintendent, and Mr. Nahodil, Mine Foreman, entered the mine finding the overcast partly destroyed and stoppings blown out. They returned to the outside reporting the conditions found to Mr. H. M. Bertolet, the General Superintendent, Mr. Holliday and Mr. Absalom, District Mine Inspectors, who had arrived at the mine, and under the direction of Mr. H. M. Bertolet rescue crews were organized who immediately entered the mine for the purpose of restoring ventilation, removing the dead and rescuing the living should any be found. The rescue work was carried on successfully without any interruption and rapid progress was made under the existing conditions, as the force of the explosion had displaced the timbers at the main entrance of the mine, causing the same to be greatly obstructed by a large quantity of earth and stone, which required several days to move. For this reason supplies were taken into the mine through a narrow space by the side of the fan, as there was no track in the air course and all material had to be carried into the mine, the farthest point being at least one mile from the entrance, but this work was carried on day and night, with no complaint, as there were several hundred miners and mine officials on the scene ready and willing to aid in the rescue work. The working force was divided into several crews,

working six hour shifts until twelve o'clock Friday night, at which time all the bodies found on the tunnel and main fourth headings had been removed to the outside. Having completed the work in this part of the mine the men on duty were called to the outside and the fan stopped, for the purpose of making the necessary changes to reverse the air current. While this work was being done a large force of men were removing the obstructions from the main entrance of the mine, as this work could be completed on the following morning, at which time the haulage ways could be used in handling material and bodies.

About 8:00 o'clock A. M. Saturday morning the entrance to the mine was cleared and a number of men were waiting for the fan to be started when they were greatly surprised to see five miners walk out of the mine, reporting that they were working on the ninth left entry off of third main at the time of the explosion and that they had made several attempts each day to come to the outside but were unable to do so owing to the large quantity of afterdamp which was being forced from the tunnel and fourth main headings through the sixth left to the main No. 3, which at this time was the main return through which they would have to travel to get to the outside. Upon investigation, a few hours after the fan had been stopped, they found that the natural ventilation had improved the condition sufficient for them to make their way to the outside, having in their possession a note which was picked up by one of them in their travel, giving the information that there was forty-one miners in the tenth left heading. When this fact was made known a number of men hurriedly entered the mine, travelling to the tenth left heading, where they found a slate stopping constructed on the entry. Hastily removing part of this stopping and going a distance of about one hundred feet, another slate stopping was found, which was also hastily removed, behind which was found a number of men. Upon investigation, several more men were found in a room, all of whom were brought on the main entry, many of them being in an exhausted condition, having had nothing to eat for four days and nights except the strings in their shoes and bark from the mine props. As soon as possible these men were assisted to the outside, where they received proper care and attention under the direction of the physicians and quickly revived from their fearful experience. The scenes on the outside upon the arrival of the forty-six men alive, who had been given up as dead, were beyond description. Among the persons rescued there were several nationalities and of different ages. One of them a Mr. Whalen, who had passed his seventy-fourth year, and who was working with his son, John, in room No. 24 on ninth left heading, at the time of the explosion, and his statement was to the effect that there was practically no disturbance in that part of the mine, just a feeling that a man could not describe, but from his experience he realized that an explosion had occurred. His son called to him and they made their way to the main entry, where they found a wrecked trip of cars, but the afterdamp was so strong that they were unable to get any further. By this time a large number of men who worked on the ninth and tenth lefts came to them and they decided among themselves to make no attempt to make their way out, but would return to the tenth left, as

this part of the mine had not been affected. By some means these men became separated, five going into the ninth left and forty-one into the tenth left, where they immediately proceeded to construct slate stoppings to protect themselves from the afterdamp, remaining within the enclosed chamber for four days and nights, during which time many prayers were made that they would be rescued or be relieved from their suffering by death, which would, undoubtedly, have been their doom had not one of the five men making their way out, found the note stating that they were behind the barricade on the tenth left.

When it was reported that an explosion had occurred at this mine it was a great surprise, as this was considered one of the safest mines in the field, being at an altitude of two thousand and five hundred feet, operating the Fire Creek seam, varying in thickness from three and a half to five feet, developed on the double and triple entry plan and ventilated by an eighteen foot Capell fan at a speed of eighty revolutions, producing eighty-five thousand cubic feet of air per minute, divided into four splits and so regulated that an adequate amount of air would be furnished and properly distributed to each split as required by law. The mine was generally damp, with the exception of the live workings, where there was a slight accumulation of dust, but not to the extent of it being considered dangerous. At no time had any dangerous quantity of explosive gas been detected.

John I. Absalom, State District Mine Inspector, made a thorough examination of the mine January 19, 1915, and his report showed the mine to be in first class condition. Mr. R. Y. Muir, Inspector for the Operating Company, examined the mine February 25th and he found the mine in good condition. No gas was reported by either of the above named Inspectors. Both of these men are well known by all of the mining people in this section of the state and considered expert mining men.

On the 15th and 16th following the explosion, officials of the Company, State Mine Inspectors and a number of mining men examined the mine for the purpose of ascertaining the cause of the explosion and, if possible, the point of origin. In making this examination all conditions were carefully noted and it was unanimously agreed that the explosion was due to dust and the point of origin at the face of air course to the third left heading, at which place a hole was found four and a half feet in depth, angling toward the entry and lacking only eight inches of being bored through, as the pillar was very thin at this point. The conditions showed that this hole had been heavily charged with a high explosive, as one of the bodies found nearby was headless and judging from the position in which it was found it is an evident fact that the hole had been charged with dynamite, had not been properly tamped, and the small barrier of coal at the back of the hole giving but little resistance caused the shot to blow through into the entry and ignite the dust, which caused an explosion at this point and was propagated throughout a greater part of the mine by fine dust which finds lodgement on ribs, roof and pavement, and which is readily put in suspension, which added fuel increased the force of the explosion and violence, destroying stopping, doors and overcasts, cutting off the ventilation from the affected

part of the mine, resulting in the death of a large number of persons from suffocation, as only a few of the bodies were found to be mutilated.

"STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA,
COUNTY OF FAYETTE, to-wit:

An inquisition at Layland, West Virginia, in the County of Fayette, beginning on the 7th day of March, 1915, and ending on the 17th day of March, 1915. Before B. S. Hastings of the said County of Fayette, upon the view of the bodies of Virgil Lacy, John Saul, Wilson Kessel, Dennis P. Hurley and John Spularic and others, there lying dead.

The jurors sworn to inquire when, how and by what means the said Virgil Lacy, John Saul, Wilson Kessel, Dennis P. Hurley and John Spolaric and others came to their death, upon their oaths do say that they came to their death by a dust explosion caused by a blow through shot in the 3rd left of main tunnel heading in the No. 3 mines of the New River and Pocahontas Consolidated Coal Company, located at Layland, said County of Fayette, State of West Virginia, on Tuesday March 2nd, 1915.

In testimony whereof, the said Justice and Jurors hereto set their hands.

This the 17th day of March 1915.

(Signed) B. S. HASTING, *Justice.*

JOHN A. HIGGINBOTHAM,

J. E. LOWE.

W. D. LEWIS.

A. ABSALOM.

H. W. CLAYPOOL.

O. D. AMICK.

Members of Juror."

LIST OF PERSONS KILLED IN LAYLAND MINE EXPLOSION ON MARCH 2, 1915.

Wilson Arlow (Mike Olis), Stanton Arthur, John Atkinson, Rosario Attena, Frank Baird, Andy Beneie, George Beneie, Peter Beneie, Fred Bennett, Wells Borsuk, Mike Bozach, Dick Bryant, Andrew Butina, Arthur Caldwell, Tory Carolla, Tony Cappano, Andy Clobuchar, Abner Cooper, M. L. Day (Emanuel Lopez), Tony Delatz, Antonio DiTubio, Ed. Donally, Wilton Dorsey, Martin Fadden, Dave Fadlowitz, Mike Fedder, M. Ferris, Vallie Fitzpatrick, Wm. Fitzpatrick, Joe Fleger, John Fleger, Lucupro Fonkolo, Guiseppi Garritano, Lige Gibson, Walter Gill, Edward Gilker-son, Aolio Gioncinto, Homer Goddard, Andre Graguvie, Mahood Hassen, John Havard, James Hornsby, Ighats Hostonof, Dennis Hurley, John Joswa, Welsen Kessel, Amos Kincaid, Zahor Kiselon, Paul Klobuchar, Kostanti Kostukervitz, John Knopich, John Kopico, Amtro Korchi, John Kueic, Virgil Lacy, David Laird, Mike Legevi, Henry Lowen, Martin Lynch, Joe Mavanuchi, Charles Mavcidno, Michele Maviano, Ben McDaniel, Charles McDaniel, George McDaniel, John McMillen, John Miller, John Moody, Paul Morrison, John Mosik, Abe Myers, Walson Navinsky, Hobert Osborn, Alex Otaka, Bunagkr Pagueve, Flory Perry, Sebastiana Pakani (Potani), Roberto Perry, Joe Petvowitz, Steve Plesha, Louis Palatch, A. P. Ponton, Daniel Potapor, Frank Porchilo, Louis Prodonitz,

Alex Propolic, Clarence Quick, John Ricci, Henry Richards, Salvatore Rotolo, Poru Ruziski, Tony Sandy, John Saul, Thomas Saul, John Salosky, Alfred Salvatore, L. L. Shaffer, J. E. Simmons, J. H. Smith, Frank Sowich, John Spolaric, Jim Spariaco, Tom Spolaric, Mike Suckes, Wilson Susky, Mike Supanski, G. O. Weeks, Tony Weber, Nick Widmer, John L. Wimmer, Charles Zofinelli, Pete Zupanski.

LIST OF MEN TAKEN OUT OF LAYLAND No. 3 MINE ON DAY EXPLOSION OCCURRED—TUESDAY, MARCH 2ND, 1915.

Jack Vasilefsky, Ben McDaniel, Jr., Charles Kornosky, Kozytof Fannsy, Stanley Malaga, Jake Solok, Mike Solok.

LIST OF MEN WHO WALKED OUT OF MINE ON MORNING OF MARCH SIXTH.

Sam Morrison, Geatano Maurello, Frank Rudoni, Peter Zanisky, Jack Foreman.

LIST OF MEN WHO WERE RESCUED ALIVE LATER IN THE DAY—MARCH SIXTH.

Guiseppe Baird, Andrew Bozzarello, George Parker, Lorence Noe, Joe Provenzanc, Joe Jumbo, Joe Caldwell, Barolo Perry, Dom Jumbo, John Perry, Sam Huggard, Charles Caldwell, John Whalen, Groce Marco, Earl Aurentz, John Fitzpatrick, Toney Jenony, Frank Jenony, Angelo Aliprandi, Phillip Paganini, Victoria Perry, Toney Abbatia, Gaetano Rodoni, William Derange, Astradi Agostino, Frank Paccinini, G. H. Henson, Luigi Perry, Thomas Whalen, Carlo Marciano, Dominick Crucchi, Mike Bosco, Bal. Clendenin, Caro Tullio, Prov. Merinvio, Jim Pino, Griffanti Carlo, Howard Huggard, John Plesha, Hugh McMillan, Lester Fitzpatrick.

DAVY-POCAHONTAS COAL COMPANY EXPLOSION.

Drift Mine No. 1 operated by the Davy-Pocahontas Coal Company and is located on Spice Creek in McDowell County on a Branch Line of the N. & W. Ry. The War Creek seam is operated at this mine which has a thickness of 5 ft., developed on the double entry system; ventilation produced by a fan. The mine is generally damp and at times small quantities of explosive gas were liberated. On Saturday morning April 17, 1915 at 8:15 A. M. an explosion occurred in which three men lost their lives. When this mine was in operation thirty to forty persons were employed, but as the mine had not been running for two days, there was only six persons in the mine at the time of the explosion. The three that lost their lives were contractors, working in what was known as the rock heading. The three persons who were not injured were day laborers working in another part of the mine. When these six men reported for work on the morning of the explosion, the Mine Foreman instructed them not to enter the mine, as the fan belt had broken sometime during the night, putting the fan out of commission, and for this reason they had better remain on the outside until the belt could be repaired, and the fan put in operation. While this repair work was being done by the electrician and Mine Foreman the six men entered the mine. Shortly after an explosion occurred, and upon investigation it was found that the three men working in the