

FATAL COLLIERY ACCIDENT

A TERRIBLE FALL OF ROCK IN A PENNSYLVANIA SHAFT.

THE TOP OF THE CAGE CRUSHED IN—FOUR MEN KILLED AND THREE OTHERS PERHAPS FATALLY INJURED.

WILKESBARRE, Penn., Sept. 2.—An accident, resulting in the death of four men and the serious and perhaps fatal injury of three others, occurred this morning at the Oakwood shaft of the Prospect Colliery, belonging to the Lehigh Valley Coal Company, in the northern part of the city. About 7 o'clock Patrick Smith, John J. Martin, John Gallagher, Patrick McGroarty, William Harrington, Patrick Kearney, James Kearney, Patrick Purcel, James Peterson, and Thomas Jenkins took their places on the "cage" to make the descent of the shaft for the purpose of going to work. The shaft is 700 feet deep, and 10 men are let down at a time. When the men had almost reached the bottom of the shaft a loud, rumbling noise was heard overhead, and immediately there was a great crash, a shower of heavy rocks, some weighing as much as 300 pounds each, crushing in the top of the cage and breaking through sills and floor, killing three of the men outright, and injuring the fourth so bad that he died shortly after being taken to the hospital.

The names of the killed are John J. Martin, a miner, aged 35 years, unmarried, and living with his widowed mother; James Kearney, a laborer, aged 25, unmarried; John Peterson, miner, aged 26, married and living at Parsons, and Thomas Jenkins, laborer, 28 years, single, and residing at Miners' Mills. Peterson, when dragged out, was still breathing, and struggled a little, but it was evident that death was certain. He was, however, removed in the ambulance to the hospital, where he died. He was bruised about the head beyond recognition. The 4-inch steam pipe had been broken, and he was scalded with the steam and water. He was a Swede, and leaves a widow, to whom he had been married less than three months.

Martin had a large cut in the right side of his head, his hand was cut, and there were bruises on other parts of the body. Kearney had a gash in the side of his head just back of his ear, and his back was crushed. He had been employed in the colliery a long time. Jenkins was horribly mangled. His head was split open, and his brains fell to the ground and had to be gathered up by the men.

Those injured are Patrick Smith, bruised in the side, back, and head; Patrick Purcel, badly cut in the back, probably fatal injuries, and Patrick Kearney, bruised in the hip and on the right leg. When the news of the accident became known there was great excitement, men, women, and children flocking to the scene. The relations and friends of the dead men gave vent to their feelings by expressions of deep grief and sorrow. After the accident a force of men was put to work clearing away the shattered wreck of the carriage, which had been drawn to the top. Many of the iron bars and castings belonging to it were shattered and one of the sills, a stick of oak timber about 8 by 12 inches in size, was broken, as was also an iron rail of the track laid upon the cage for the accommodation of the cars when run on it to be raised or lowered from or into the mine. A piece of the rock lay upon the ground near by which had been drawn up on the cage. This piece weighed upward of 200 pounds. Several pieces of stone must have fallen, and the fall must have been 100 feet or more.

One of the exposed men on the shaft relates the following story: "Going down the shaft I was standing almost precisely upon the place where the hole was broken through the floor of the cage by the piece of rock, but when I heard the noise of the rock coming down against the side of the shaft above, and the smaller pieces striking the roof, I somehow stepped to the centre of and under the crossbeam, which supports the roof. Others were running back and forth to find a place of safety, as all knew what the sound meant. The position saved me, as pieces of the rock struck the roof and crashed down through on either side. My lamp was put out, and as the carriage struck I made a step and fell into the hole that had been broken in the floor, one of the smaller pieces of stone hitting my hip. I got out of the place and half fell off into the gangway. My presence of mind had not deserted me, and my first thought was for my brother Jim. I called to him, but there came no answer. Then we searched the wreck and found the bodies of the others, all mangled and bleeding, and finally Jim, his feet on the edge of the carriage and his body and head lying over the edge and in the water, dead."

For the past three months a gang of men has been employed timbering the shaft at places where it was thought necessary, and in trimming from it any fragments of stone that might have become disintegrated by air or water. Many of the miners think that the company has neglected to take the necessary precautions in regard to this danger, and censure it accordingly.