

VULCAN MINE DISASTER

37 LIVES LOST IN VULCAN DISASTER - Taken from the Garfield County Democrat
and the New Castle Nonpareil, December 19, 1913

Thirty-seven miners, working in the Vulcan coal-mine a little over a mile east of New Castle, were caught in an explosion Tuesday morning at 10:20. The explosion was terrific and every miner in the lower lift was either killed instantly or succumbed a few seconds later to the gases, not one having a fighting chance to save his life.

As a result of the great catastrophe, almost every home in this vicinity is plunged in mourning; wives, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and children are mourning the loss of loved ones. The list of the dead follows:

Married Men

Jerry Crawford
Ralph Wendell,
D. C; Moland,
Addie Norton,
O Reed,
Marion Bonto,
William Meese,
Joe Farren,
Ben E. Davis,
Jas. Manapelli *

Joe La Blanch,
Gale Obester,
Louis Fuschino
Albert Johnson,
H. G. Woods,
Bert Bartle,
William Meese,
John Otten
Tony Manapelli,*
Gabe Manapelli.*

*Wife In Italy

Single Men

George Smith
Roy McLain,
George Smith,
N. Murphy,
A. Cirpka,
Dave Talmadge
Frank McCann
Lee Bonto,
Harry Bonnell,

Lee Bonto,
Clint Crawford,
Wallace Baxter
R. Filso,
S. Kalonsker,
Fred Cook,
Lester Starbuck
Frank Obester,
Lou Walter.

These are the names of the dead, most of whom are Americans, excellent type of physical men, who, care-free and happy at heart had entered the mine Tuesday morning without a thought of the calamity which in an instant was to change their working place into a place of death.

The cause of the explosion is not definitely known, but is thought by many to have been an explosion of coal dust. In fact there is hardly a doubt as to that; but just what took place to ignite the dust is at present a mere conjecture. This could have been effected by

someone having a defective lamp, by a discharged shot or other causes. This cannot be determined until the mine is cleaned up, which will take weeks.

The force of the explosion was so great that it was distinctly heard for 12 miles, and the trembling of the earth even farther. Citizens in the town, hearing the noise, ever apprehensive of the fearful possibilities rushed to the mine fearful the worse had happened. Already employees and officers at the mine were active and the work of rescue was soon under way. Superintendent Meerdink, who had been called over town, arrived at the mine in a few minutes and, without helmet or light, rushed into the main entry in hopes to find the explosion was a local one and not confined to the whole workings. He did not have far to go before he saw how bad the explosion had been and that there was but little hope for the men entombed in the dark chambers.

District Superintendent Cummins soon arrived and at once telephoned for the "first-aid" crews of Sunlight, Spring Gulch and South Canon. These were quickly made up and a special train brought them to the disaster about noon. By this time several hundred people had arrived, and the scene was heartrending. Wives, mothers and sisters were frantically lamenting the loss of some loved one. Men ran about doing what they could; all vainly hoping developments might prove some life had been spared! Vulcan's first aid crew was handicapped because several of their number were on the inside. The work of getting out the bodies had begun by the time the other crews had arrived; the work of finding & bringing out the bodies never faltered. All afternoon and night and all of Wednesday the silent work went on. At 5 o'clock Wednesday 33 had been taken out and identified. Four – Reed, Murphy, Smith and McLain – had not been located, but were thought to be in the main entry covered with debris. That night the bodies of Smith and Reed were brought out from the death chamber and identified.

But not one was found showing a trace of life. Nearly all had met instant death, and a few showed signs of having lived for a short time after the death-dealing blast had run its terrible curse. Gale Obester was driving an air course and had broken through into the upper lift. Instead of trying to come out that way, he went back into the lower lift and traveled a little more than two feet before he succumbed.

The Explosion

When the explosion came the detonation in town resembled the sound accompanying the firing of several cannons at the same time. Nearer to the mine it sounded like a great clap of thunder. The dust and smoke immediately poured out of the air course of the west workings with such force that it went several hundred feet in the air, settling over a large area and making the day seem as night. While slightly intermittent, the volume of pouring smoke made a steady upward stream and kept up for several minutes.

The timbers were entirely stripped off the two main air courses, stone and large timbers being thrown a quarter of a mile away. That no one outside was hurt was a miracle.

The Rescue

Miners from Sunlight, Gulch and South Canon and New Castle, union and non-union, went to work as soon as they arrived on the scene, each one putting forth every effort to find

the entombed ones and bring them out. Ranchers and business men who had a knowledge of mining willingly lent their services. All worked with a desperation until they were completely exhausted and many had to be forced to give up and allow fresh ones to relieve them. Special deeds of heroism might be mentioned, as there are many cases known, but all are heroes in the strictest sense of the word.

The women of the vicinity and many from a distance were present doing all in their power to relieve the distressed and to furnish food and drink for the workers. Knowing that the occasion demanded strong hearts as well as womanly tenderness, none faltering in doing that which they found to do.

The Saddest Feature

The whole occurrence was filled with sadness, but many of the incidents are particularly so. Mrs. Louis Fuschino is left with eight helpless children. Mrs. LaBlanch, with four little one, the eldest but 7, are mourning the husband and father. The Grant Smith family have lost the only son and two sons-in-law, Bartle and Obester. Mrs. Bartle is soon to become the mother of her first-born and had come from her home in Red Cliff to be with her mother during the event. Mr. Bartle came with her temporarily, taking a place in the mine to help out and had been at work only a week.

A wife and two daughters, with a son, are grieving over the shadow which has fallen upon them. The husband and father, Marion Bonto, & son and brother, Lee Bonto, are among the dead. One of the sisters, Irma, losing her fiance. Two sisters in the Gunn family, Leela and Ella, are deeply mourning, the former, with her year-old-babe, the husband and father, Wm. Sheere; the latter, the loss of a sweetheart, Dave Talmadge, whom she was to marry this Christmas. To mention one, however, is to mention all. One who mourns but one loss feels that as keenly and distressingly as those whose loss was greater.

Little 2-year-old Lee Crawford, the son of Pit Boss Crawford, has for months, every evening, waited near the mouth of the pit for Papa to come from work. The poor little fellow could not see why on that fatal Tuesday he was not allowed to do as was his wont; but insisted that he again be permitted to wait for his loving father to greet him and carry him down the hill to his cottage. Little could the child realize that his papa lay cold in death in that dark chamber and was not to be found until late that night.

Mrs. Herbert Woods, also soon to be a mother, is heartbroken over her husband's death. The happiness which accompanies the presentation of a mother's first-born to a happy father has been denied her by the saddest blow of the worst fate.

Of the nine small cottages which stand below the railroad by the mine, seven today contain widows and fatherless children. One of the remaining two is empty; two sets of brothers – all cousins, the Manapelli's who lived there alone, met the same fate. Each had a wife and children in the old country.

But the three men, Meese, Bonto and Otten, were of middle-age or past. The others were young men, in the prime and full strength of life. All of them were well-to-do, with a good education and of good training. They mostly were men of other pursuits, who for the past years had been accustomed to while away the dull winter months as miners. They could not consciously see why this year they should not do what they had done every winter, and

after giving due consideration to the fact that the foreign born element had instituted a strike, again and for the last time had taken up their pick and shovel. As a class the men measured far above the standard by which the world judges the average miner. A large number were of the best families.

Narrow Escapes

Strange tricks of fate seem to have led some into the mine on that particular morning, but the miraculous escapes of some outnumber those who at another time would not have been in the mine.

Kenneth Lewis and Lester Sparks - motorman and helper respectively - had several minutes before brought a string of cars outside and had ample time to again be back in the vicinity of the explosion. They were ready to return at once when Lewis suggested that they take in some timbers. This was loaded and Sparks suggested that nails were needed, so went below to get them. When all was ready to reenter, Lewis dropped his glove between the motor and the car, and as they were again ready to start the explosion came. It was of sufficient force at the entrance to knock them from the motor and to remove the motor's top.

Will Finlay and Dawson were just finishing lifting rails on the upper level preparatory to going to the lower level when the accident occurred. Immediately they were covered with a black dust and could not see. They were near enough to the entrance to grope their way out.

Fire boss Lou Walter and Joseph Davis had just changed shifts last Sunday night; Lou working days and Jose nights.

Perry Coryell Jr. and Herbert Townsend, brothers-in-law, had been working regularly for several weeks. Tuesday morning, neither feeling quite well, slept late and so decided not to go to work until the noon hour. Needless to say that Mrs. Coryell and others feel there is a higher power than mere fate.

Finds Body of Father

Among the first to reach the mine after the disaster was Harry Meese, a young man who has lived most of his life in New Castle. His father, William Meese, was on the inside, and Harry unhesitatingly entered and began the search. At the close of an hour of fruitless search by himself, he joined the others and made himself active in bringing other bodies to the surface. Not until the late afternoon was the body of the elder Meese found. Harry Meese and James E. Smith of the Sunlight rescue crew entered the room of Meese and his partner. A body was found and a few feet farther Smith found a body which he recognized as the elder Meese. He tried to get the son to take the first body out, but Harry refused to go until he had seen whom the other body was. He advanced and turned the head over and gazed into the face of his father. For a while he sat motionless, then went to the outside. After a brief rest, he again joined the rescue in the search for other bodies.

Few Badly Mangled

Few of the bodies were badly mangled but for the most part the only markings were badly burned faces. Three bodies hardly showed a scratch. The falling coal covered many of the bodies that had been knocked down by the force of the explosion. After the bodies had

been washed identification was easy in most cases in fact many were identified when first found. The body of McCann was so bruised about the head that identification was impossible. He was recognized later by a ring he wore.

Company Bearing Expenses

In an interview with President Shumway of the Rocky Mtn. Fuel Co., who arrived from Denver yesterday, that gentleman stated to the representative of the Democrat that the company had agreed to give to the family of each victim \$75 for funeral expenses. This was considered the best plan inasmuch as many of the families had friends who were willing to help them out; that many of the victims were members of lodges which would meet the expense of the funerals, was considered and thus it was thought better to give the money personally to the families instead of the company directly taking charge of the burials and meeting all expenses. The three undertakers, Schwarz and Farnum of Glenwood Springs, and Crawford of New Castle, have each agreed to do their work for \$60.

Superintendent Cummins, also in the interview, said that none of the officials knew what caused the explosion of coal dust and that not until the cleaning up of the mine had properly been done. This will take several days.

Doctors Do Good Work

Mine doctors, W.W. Crook and R.H. Paxton, were soon on the ground, and deserve due credit for the way they stuck to their post of duty. The serious condition of the wives claimed most of their efforts. Drs. Stewart, Clarke and Plave, all of Glenwood Springs, were at the mine; the latter offering the use of his sanitarium and its appliances if needed Other professional and business men of the county seat came to the scene of the disaster, and all were willing to and did help in any way they could.

County Helps

With practically every available man busy, either at the mine or assisting with the arrangements in town, there was not enough help at Highland Cemetery for digging the graves. The county commissioners were appealed to, and every man, 40 in all at the convict road camp between New Castle and Glenwood Springs, were sent to the cemetery and kept busy, yesterday and today, preparing the last resting places for those whom it was desired should be buried there.

Second Mine Explosion

The Vulcan is owned by the Rocky Mountain Fuel Co., and is practically a new mine as the vein which is now being worked has been opened up within the past year. However, Tuesday's explosion is considered as the second one as on Feb. 18, 1896, the Santa Fe Fuel Co. experienced an explosion within a few hundred yards of the place where the Vulcan now operates. There are many points of similarity between the two. Then 48 men lost their lives. Both took place on Tuesday shortly after 10 AM. At that time it was almost a month before the last victim was taken out. The Santa Fe Mine was closed and never operated afterward. The interior is still on fire.

Officials Present

Since Wednesday morning State Coal Mine Inspector Dalrymple has been here and is thoroughly going into the cause of the disaster. He has three assistants of his office aiding him in the work. President Shumway, Chief Counsel Sickman and Master Mechanic Simms are representing the company. Yesterday morning, State Coal Mine Inspectors Petis and Forester of Utah, with several others, came in from Salt Lake. Chief Roberts of the rescue work came Wednesday night from Victor. Coroner Hopkins came down from Glenwood Springs Wednesday and, after holding inquests, turned the bodies over for burial. At the mine, President Shumway is always on the ground directing all branches of the work, with the aid of the others named above.

The Burials

Yesterday afternoon at 2:00 the first funerals were held. Don Walter and Clint Crawford, after services at the church, were laid away in Highland Cemetery. Later in the afternoon, the burials of Geo. Smith, Marion Bonto, Lee Bonto and Harry Bonnell were made. Further burials were prevented by darkness. This morning the silent line of march to the cemetery was again resumed. By night the remains of Ben Davis, L.C. Crawford, Gale Obester, Bert Bartel, Wm. Shearer and probably others will have been interred.

Those being shipped are Wendell to Rifle, Reed to Denver, Farren and Nolan to Buena Vista, and Johnson to Pueblo. As far as possible obituaries will be given in the next issue of the **Democrat**.

Relief Going On

The United Mine Workers Tuesday telegraphed \$300 for the relief of the destitute. This has since been augmented by private subscriptions from citizens. Yet there is need of more and Mayor McMahan has appealed to outsiders. The first of the latter to respond was the News of Grand Junction. That paper telephoned the **Democrat** last night stating that the people there had raised a purse and same would be sent. Others willing to help may make their donations to Mayor McMahan or the New Castle State Bank.

Reports Exaggerated

Several reports have reached the outside press which have been greatly exaggerated. The truth, of itself, is certainly bad enough and this paper wishes to decry such tactics on the part of such press correspondents. As far as reports of mutilation, they have been greatly magnified. Identity in all cases except one was easy and in no case so far has any dismemberment been found.

OBITUARY of Edgar Edmund Shumway

15 Jan, 1914; Lyons [NE] "Star"

E. E. SHUMWAY DEAD - Poisonous Gases of Wrecked Mine are Fatal

A message was received here last week by J Shumway telling of the critical illness of his son Edmund E. at his home in Denver and for several days his life hung in the balance, death coming on Sunday night. A dispatch to the **Daily Bee** gives the following account of his last illness:

"E. E. Shumway, 51, president and general manager of the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company, died tonight from the effects of poisonous gases inhaled in rescue work which resulted from the explosion in the Vulcan mine at New Castle. Colo., December 17, last. The Vulcan mine is a property of the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company and immediately upon news of the explosion in which twenty-seven lives were lost, Mr. Shumway personally took charge of the rescue work. Upon his return to Denver from the mine two weeks ago he was confined to his bed and the slow poisoning of the system continued in spite of the medical aid.

"Mr. Shumway came to Colorado from a Nebraska farm twenty years ago and engaged in a small retail business from which grew the Rocky Mountain Fuel company, one of the three large mining corporations in the west. Worry because of the industrial strife due to the present strike of the United Mine Workers in Colorado was said by Mr. Shumway's physicians to have so undermined his system that he could not throw off the after-damp which he inhaled in the mine.

"A coroner's jury report into the cause of the Vulcan disaster placed the blame for the explosion upon the company, and physicians stated that the publication of this verdict caused their patient to sink rapidly until three days ago, when his life seemingly hung in the balance."

Edmund E. Shumway was born in southern Minnesota on January 27th, 1862, where he resided with the family until they came to Lyons in 1881. Mr. Shumway was in the Minnesota State University at that time but joined his father here the next year and entered

the hardware business with L. B. Smith. He disposed of this business the same year and removed to Coleridge where he engaged in the lumber and coal business, remaining there for eight years when he disposed of his interests and located in Denver where he later organized the Rocky Mountain Fuel company, of which concern he was president at the time of his death.

Besides his wife he leaves, to mourn his death a son, two daughters, father, four brothers, Herbert, of Wakefield, Lorin and Roy, of this place, and Chas. of Sheridan, Oregon: and two sisters, Mrs. Fremont Everett, of Portland, Oregon and Mrs. Wm. Cass of this city. The sorrowing relatives have the sincere sympathy of friends in this community.

Mr. and Mrs. L.G. Shumway and M.L. Shumway left Tuesday afternoon to be present at the funeral which was held at 10 o'clock this morning.