

### ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY DECEMBER 6



The worst mining disaster in American history occurred on December 6, 1907, when an underground explosion at Monongah in Marion County killed 362 miners.

**CSO: SS.8.9, SS.8.17, ELA.8.1**

**Investigate the Document: (*The Illustrated Monthly West Virginian*, January 1908)**

1. What is significant about the explosion that occurred in the No. 6 and No. 8 mines of the Fairmont Coal Company in Monongah?
2. What had the State mine inspector determined about the condition of the fans in the No. 6 and No. 8 mines shortly before the disaster?
3. Although never proven, the data gathered by the Ohio inspectors concluded that the explosion was likely caused by what two possibilities?
4. Were the gases that existed in the mines at a dangerous level? Was the dust in the mine properly watered down?
5. How many miners lost their lives in the No. 6 and No. 8 mine?

**Think Critically:** Describe the conditions that existed in the coal mines during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Had there been any federal oversight to ensure the safety of coal miners? Has there been legislation that has been passed to make coal mining safer? How has unionization affected the coal industry? After reading about the Monongah Mine Disaster, what is your greatest takeaway?

## Events in West Virginia.

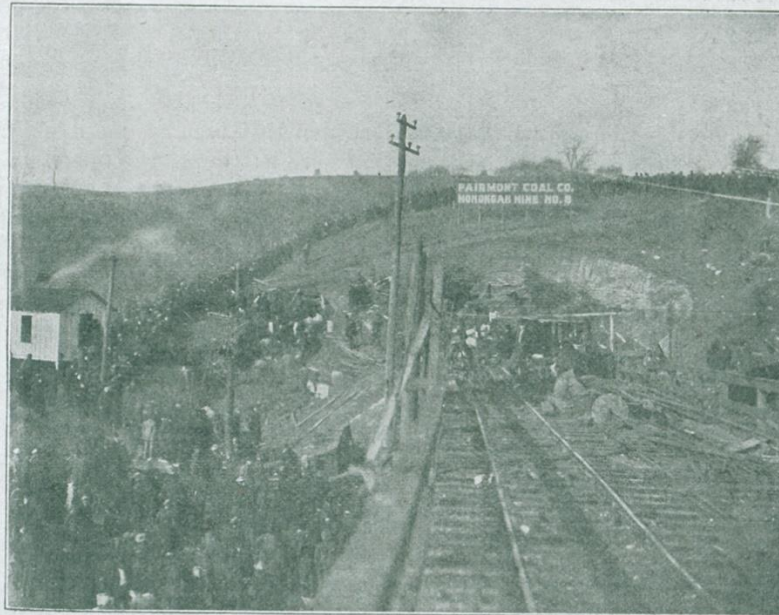
### THE MONONGAH CATASTROPHE.

Most Appalling Disaster in the History of Coal Mining.

On December 6th, at 10:20 in the morning, there occurred at Monongah, six miles from Fairmont, the worst catastrophe in the history of coal mining in West Virginia or in any other section of the world. It was an explosion in mines Nos. 6 and 8 of the Fairmont Coal Company, which completely wrecked the mines and snuffed out the lives of almost four hundred men. The worst of the explosion occurred in the No. 8 mine and so great was its force that the concrete roof of the engine house was torn into fragments and one piece, weighing more than 100 pounds, was blown more than 500 yards. The victims came to their deaths suddenly. Many were found sitting upright in the positions they were in when the explosion came with its spread of deadly gases. The scenes at the mines during the work of rescue were pitiful in the extreme. For several days frantic women grouped about the opening of the mines and their shrieks of agony were enough to move the hardest heart to pity. Grief-stricken mothers, wives, sweethearts and sisters waited and watched and wept. Some prayed, some sung, and some, in their very ecstasy of sorrow, became hysterical and laughed.

#### RESCUE AND RELIEF WORK.

Although the village of Monongah was unprepared for the disaster, relief



No. 8 Mine After Disaster

work was quick and effective. Relief parties were rapidly formed and additional forces were hurried from Fairmont and adjacent cities and towns. But with a few exceptions there was no need for the physician and the rescuer—death to those in the mines came fully and suddenly and without suffering. The mine officials as well as the officials of the B. & O. Railroad Company took an active part in the relief and many acts of bravery were performed by the volunteers who entered the mines in search of the victims. Appeal for funds with which to carry on the relief work among the families of those who perished met with a quick response. Mass meetings were held in a number of towns throughout the State at which generous contributions were made, and many fraternal and benevolent societies and some newspapers also assisted on their account in the work of raising funds. Through the generosity of Mr. Andrew Carnegie, who made a liberal donation, the comfort and care of the survivors was greatly improved.

#### THE CAUSE OF THE DISASTER.

The mines were generally considered the best equipped in the State. The fan at No. 8 would force 240,000 feet of air into the mine every minute and the fan at No. 6 had a capacity of 200,000 feet a minute. A State mine inspector, Mr. Larue, had passed upon them shortly before the disaster and had expressed himself as well pleased with their condition. At the time of his inspection, about October 6, there were no traces of gas or dust in No. 8, and only a slight trace of dust in No. 6. Consequently there was no ground, so far as the inspector's report was concerned, for the theories that the explosion had arisen from gas or dust.

#### THE CAUSES OF THE CALAMITY.

It is very doubtful whether the real or original causes of the explosion will ever be known. Many theories and explanations have been advanced which are more or less sustained by the facts, but none are left to tell the tale or to give any information. The report of the Ohio State inspectors truly states that there is no survivor to give reliably "any information as to the condition of the mines or defects of ventilation in the mine working places, or the dangers that existed on the morning of the explosion resulting from roof falls or other causes during the previous day when all work in the mines was suspended." From the data at hand the Ohio inspectors, however, are of the opinion that the catastrophe was caused by the explosion of a blown out shot, although they state that the explosion could very probably have resulted from an accumulation of coal dust. The West Virginia inspectors in their report state as their conclusion that the explosion was caused by the accumulation of dust and recommend sprinkling as a means of minimizing the chances of similar catastrophes in the future.

On January 16, in the afternoon, the verdict of the coroner's jury was made public.

The verdict was one which had long been anticipated by those who had followed the evidence. The opinion advanced by Chief Mine Inspector James

(Continued on page 87.)

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W. Paul that the explosion was caused by "a blow out shot inflaming the dust" was practically borne out by the verdict of the coroner's jury.

The decision of the jury held out but two closely allied causes as being responsible for the disaster, as follows:

We find from the evidence in our possession that A. H. Morris, Charlie McCane, John M. McGraw and about three hundred and fifty (350) others (whose names are made a part of the record herein), came to their death on the 6th day of December, 1907, by means of an explosion in Monongah mines Nos. 6 and 8, owned or operated by the Fairmont Coal Company, which was caused by either what is commonly known as a blown out shot, or by the igniting and explosion of powder in mine No. 8. As to which caused the initial explosion the evidence and opinions of mine experts and other witnesses were conflicting.

We further find from the evidence that the traces of gas in these mines were slight, and not considered dangerous, and dust which was created was removed or kept watered down as far as was deemed practicable, and that in operating these mines the company complied with the mining laws of the State.

As there are many unsolved problems connected with coal mine explosions in the United States, we recommend that Congress make an appropriation for the establishment of a bureau of investigation and information to aid in the study of the various conditions under which explosions occur, and as to how they may be prevented.

We also recommend the more general use of "safety or flameless powder," which we believe would tend toward greater safety in coal mining, and that the firing and handling of explosives used in coal mines be placed in the hands of experienced and competent persons, and, also, that clay or some non-combustible matter be used in tamping.

Owing to the fact that there are over sixty thousand persons now employed in the mines of West Virginia, we further recommend that four (4) additional district mine inspectors and two (2) inspectors at large be appointed.

In testimony whereof, the said coroner and jurors set their hand, this the 15th day of January, 1908.

(Signed)

E. S. AMOS, Coroner.  
W. E. CORDRAY,  
GEO. H. RICHARDSON,  
A. S. PRICHARD,  
FESTUS DOWNS,  
J. M. JACOBS,  
W. S. HAMILTON.

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### CARE FOR THE SURVIVORS.

The people of West Virginia have responded liberally to the call for funds for clothing and care of the families of those who met death through the

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explosion. The country as a whole has also been generous in its sympathy and in substantial assistance. Certain individuals gave a large measure from their private fortunes. There is still much to be done. The call of the relief committees and of the mayor of Monongah are still out. The citizens of the State and the public must contribute further to the penniless and needy families, many of whom are facing hunger and destitution.

PREVIOUS DISASTERS IN WEST VIRGINIA MINES.

A comparison of the Monongah catastrophe with previous mining disasters will serve to show the extent and unprecedented nature of the recent horror.

Bluefield, Coaldale mine, January 4, 1906—22 killed.

Paint Creek, Detroit mine, January 18, 1906—18 killed.

Fayetteville, Paral mine, February 8, 1906—22 killed.

Philippi, Century mine, March 25, 1906—28 killed.

Pocahontas, West Mine Pocahontas Collieries Co., October 3, 1906—70 killed.

Buckhannon, Lorentz mine of the Pennsylvania Coal Co., January 20, 1907—12 killed.

Fayetteville, tSewart mine, January 29, 1907—80 killed.

Monongah, Nos. 6 and 8 mines, December 6, 1907—357 killed.

SPECIAL SESSION OF THE LEGISLATURE.

On November 27th, Governor Dawson issued a call for a special meeting of the Legislature to open on January 28th. The matters which are expected to come up for consideration are: (1) Remedial legislation for the limitation of county levies. This point grows out of the opinion of the tax commissioner that unless the limitation is reinforced, the tax-payers of the State will be called upon to pay from \$1,000,000 to \$1,500,000 in additional taxes through the extravagance of local tax-levying bodies; (2) a county salary bill abolishing the fee system for county officers, including county clerks, Circuit clerks and sheriffs; (3) amendments to the ballot law with the intention of simplifying the State ballot, and preventing fraud and the illegal use of money in elections; (4) needed amendments to the registration law and (5) consideration of a general and uniform system of accounting for cities and municipalities. The Republican leaders consider the call necessary while the Democratic leaders condemn it as an unnecessary expense and a dangerous tampering with business conditions.

CONSULAR AGENCY IN CHARLESTON.

Owing to the large number of Huns in West Virginia, and to the commercial interests of Hungary in the State also, the Hungarian government has determined to have a diplomatic representative in the form of a vice consul at the Capitol. The new office is expected to be established by February 1st.

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A SIGNIFICANT SIGN.

It is significant that the first failure which has occurred in West Virginia since the beginning of the recent money flurry occurred on January 14, and was of slight moment, involving as it did much less than \$1,000. Pretty good indication of West Virginia's stability, isn't it?

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT.

It is not usual to run an announcement of any kind in the body of our magazine. But the need for further funds by the sufferers of the Monongah disaster urges us to adopt this policy.

We wish here to reiterate that if you will send your subscription (\$1.00) to the Red Cross Society of America at 500 Fifth avenue, New York, you will receive The Monthly West Virginian for one year.

The proceeds will continue to go to the relief of the Monongah sufferers. Merely state in remitting your dollar to the Society that you wish them to record your name as a subscriber to The Monthly West Virginian, instructing them to notify our circulation office, Keyser, W. Va., to that effect.

In answering to our offer as we submitted it to the mayor of Monongah, we received the following reply. If we receive no other thanks from any quarter this letter is in itself ample reward.

TOWN OF MONONGAH.

W. H. Moore, Mayor.

Relief Committee:

*W. H. Moore, Chairman.*

*Frank Morris, Secretary.*

*T. G. Price.*

*Wm. Hagarty.*

*Wm. Gaskin.*

*Phil. Pelligrino.*

Monongah, W. Va.

December 18, 1907.

Monthly West Virginian:

Dear Sir: Owing to the awful rush and excitement here, we are sorry to say that your communication was mislaid. Your proposition appeals to me to be a most liberal and excellent one, and on behalf of the poor unfortunate people of our town, wish to express my many thanks for the interest you have shown us in time of great need. Would suggest you have all subscriptions sent to the Red Cross Society of America.

I feel confident that the newspapers will readily respond to your appeal to them on behalf of the distressed people of Monongah.

May God bless and reward you.

Very respectfully,

W. H. MOORE, Mayor.