

## 1900 Winter Quarters No. 4 Mine Disaster Near Scofield, Utah – May 1, 1900

The Day 200 Miners Died 100 Years Ago

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"As a stone cast into a pool creates a convulsion where it strikes and is followed by ever-widening circles until the shores are reached, so has this awful catastrophe at Scofield sent out over Utah ever-widening waves of sorrow until the borders are reached and passed. Death's winding sheet seems to envelop Scofield this morning."

Readers of Salt Lake City's *Deseret Evening News* raced over those few introductory lines the day after an explosion tore through the workings of Winter Quarters No. 4, near Scofield, Utah, 115 miles southeast of the state's capital. On the day of the explosion, May 1, 1900, the *News* reported that "an army of men" had been killed in an explosion that very morning. When the last body would be recovered, that army would number 200 Utah coal miners. At the time, the United States had never recorded so many lives lost in a single coal mine tragedy; since then the death toll has been exceeded three times in different states, all within 14 years of the Winter Quarters disaster.

Salt Lake City's three daily papers tried to make sense of the chaos and emotional convulsions that wracked the small but growing mining communities of Scofield and Winter Quarters in the northwest corner of coalrich Carbon County. Early estimates of the number of dead ranged from 200 to 350, and articles about the explosion sometimes included conflicting accounts, mistaken identifications, charges and countercharges (some directed at competing papers), and passages dripping with editorial venom for specific ethnic groups among those immigrants who worked the coal mines in eastern Utah. Despite these shortcomings, the papers succeeded in capturing the courage of those who searched for survivors, the pain of the many widows and orphans and the resilience of human nature as hundreds of Utahns and others contributed to a massive relief fund established by Utah Governor Heber M. Wells to assist bereaved families. The



Smoke curls from the chimney of the Edwards boarding house in Winter Quarters Canyon a few days after an underground coal mine explosion 81 years ago claimed the lives of 200 Utah miners. The boarding house briefly served as a makeshift undertaking parlor immediately after the disaster.

(George Edward Anderson photo courtesy of Robert W. Edwards Collection)

melodramatic prose of these papers painted an evocative landscape of Scofield those first weeks in May, but in that landscape of gray clouds that clung to the valleys and canyons, of mourning clothes and of faces streaked with tears and coal dust, the predominant color was black.

When Winter Quarters No. 1 first opened about 1878, the coal was carried out the only possible way- by mule. Before long the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railway laid tracks down Pleasant Valley, about 16 miles southwest of the main line junction in Colton, providing rail transportation for the region's high quality coal to Salt Lake City and other points in the West.



Miners stand among splintered timbers and other debris at the entrance to No. 4 mine shaft, background left, where the explosion is believed to have originated. By the time this photo was taken, much of the debris had been cleared from the portal and engine house by rescue and recovery teams. (George Edward Anderson photo courtesy of Robert W. Edwards Collection)

By 1896, the Pleasant Valley Coal Co., which operated Winter Quarters IN os. 1 and 2, as well as the Castle Gate Mine at nearby Helper, Utah, produced 60 percent of Utah's coal. The company's mines continued to flourish to such a point that in April 1897, Butch Cassidy's band rode in from Robber's Roost to steal \$7,000 in gold from Castle Gate's payroll office. The Pleasant Valley Coal Co. opened new mines in 1899 at Clear Creek, Sunnyside and Winter Quarters No. 4, the next year, despite the work lost following the explosion, the company's mines produced nearly 1.1 million tons of coal, or 88 percent of Utah's production.

During the last quarter of the 19th century, these mines had earned a reputation as being among the safest in the West. Many miners followed that reputation to Carbon County from mines in Wyoming after explosions there in 1881, 1886 and 1895 took more than 100 lives. Despite that reputation, Pleasant Valley Coal Co. mines suffered several fatal accidents.

In 1890, an explosion killed three miners at Castle Gate. As a result, the company adopted a new blasting system that required all shots to be fired electrically from the surface and only after all miners had left the mine at the end of the shift. Ten years later, another explosion ripped through the Castle Gate Mine, wrecking 200 mine cars, blowing out all the stoppings and knocking down doors, timbers and props all along the main entries. More than 200 miners had been working at Castle Gate that day, but when fired shots touched off an explosion of coal dust, most miners were safely at home enjoying their supper, and no one was injured. In the company's other mines, coal dust was not considered as hazardous as it was at Castle Gate, and miners blasted coal loose at any time. Less than six weeks after the destructive explosion at Castle Gate, coal dust would earn new-found respect for its explosive qualities, but at an unexpected cost to eastern Utah.

The miners who worked at Winter Quarters Nos. 1 and 4 had much to be thankful for that last weekend in April 1900. Many had wives and families in the company's houses in and around Scofield; the camps had even come to be known as the "married men's camps." Others were working to save enough money to bring their families to the burgeoning West. With a new Navy contract for 2,000 tons of coal per day due to begin the first of May, the miners were getting all the work they could handle, and the company could not fill all its orders. Scofield was growing, and new houses in various stages of completion dotted the hillsides along the valleys and canyons. In an elegant new hall that was only partially finished, the local lodge of the International Order of Odd Fellows held a ball Friday night to celebrate the group's anniversary, and another was scheduled for Tuesday night to celebrate the first of May. The miners were also grateful that the quarantine flag had come down following a period in which no new cases of smallpox had been reported and that an epidemic of measles also was abating. School children eagerly awaited Tuesday's May Day celebrations.

On Tuesday morning, more than 300 miners entered the two interconnected mines; some were accompanied by their sons who worked as couplers and trap boys. Since it was the first of the month, many miners carried new 25-pound kegs of black powder with them to their rooms. There they would make up their charges to shoot down the coal.

Work was well under way in both mines by midmorning, and miner William C. Wilson and his partner were waiting for a boy to return with the car so they could load their coal from a room off the back-main entry in the No. 1 mine, about half a mile from the workings of No. 4. The two men felt a mild shock in the mine's air.

*Around 10:25 that morning, a low rumble had come from the depths of No. 4 and grown like rolling thunder. The portal belched smoke, dust..., splintered timbers and mangled mine cars. Then... stillness.*

"What was that?"

Puzzled, Wilson, who had spent nearly 50 years in English and American coal mines, took his oil lamp from his cap and placed it in the middle of the track to check the air. After watching the flame, he told his partner, "The air is going in the right direction, and everything seems to be all right." As the miners heard the clatter of an arriving coal car, Wilson added, "There can't be anything the matter; the horse is coming in."

When the boy stopped the car, the look on his face told the two men that something was wrong.

"What's the matter?" Wilson asked the boy.

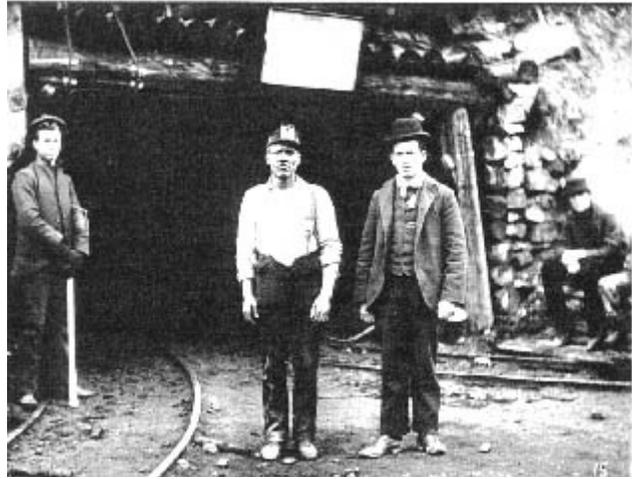
"I don't know. I was nearly blown off the end of the car."

"Did you hear anyone say there was a cave-in anywhere, or did you hear anyone running anywhere?"

"No," the boy replied.

Soon another miner ran up to the three workers and confirmed Wilson's growing fears. "Explosion! You had better get out!" They needed to hear no more. The acrid smell of burning materials was strong as they made their way toward the portal of No. 1, but they were blessed with good air all the way to the surface. Several other groups of miners were not far behind. More than 200 men had been working in Winter Quarters No. 1, deep in the belly of the mountain, when the explosion occurred. Wilson and his partner were among 103 miners who would reach the safety of Winter Quarters Canyon. Once there, they all began to learn the magnitude of the terrible accident.

For those working on the surface near the portal of No. 4, there was no doubt about what had happened. Around 10:25 that morning, a low rumble had come from the depths of No. 4 and grown like rolling thunder. The portal belched smoke, dust, hot, foul air, burnt powder, splintered timbers and mangled mine cars with a force that was difficult to imagine. Then came a disquieting stillness. According to reports that those at the scene later swore were true, a coal car driver, working near the mouth of No. 4, had been thrown 200 yards across the gulch at the mine entrance, his horse thrown half that distance. When rescuers found him, he was still alive, although the back of his skull was crushed and a stick had been driven into his abdomen. He and three other injured miners were later taken by special train to St. Mark's Hospital in Salt Lake City. Miraculously, he survived his injuries and returned to Scofield three weeks after the explosion to recuperate.



Ephraim Rowe and Sam Wycherly, left to right in front of the mine portal, were among the 103 men who managed to escape from the Winter Quarters No. 1 mine through the relatively undamaged portal following the explosion. (George Edward Anderson photo courtesy of Robert W. Edwards Collection).

John Beddoes also was working at the surface near the entrance to No. 4. He had just stepped outside the engine house, his normal post, when the blast demolished the small building. Beddoes suffered severe bruises, but he would not soon forget what happened that day.

Within minutes of the explosion, Thomas J. Parmley, superintendent of the Winter Quarters mines, ignored the knot in his stomach and began the work that needed to be done. He notified the company's headquarters in Salt Lake City of the explosion and immediately assembled a rescue party of 20 men to enter the mine. Smoke, debris and dead horses blocked the entrance to No. 4, so Parmley led the rescuers into No. 1 as an alternate route to the workings of No. 4 and with that he might find some survivors.

Will Clark, a young miner who had been working outside at the time of the explosion, entered the mine with the first rescue party. Disregarding warnings of more experienced miners, Clark raced ahead alone to find his father and brother who were in the mine, but ran right into the lingering afterdamp (a mixture of carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, nitrogen and other gases

that forms after a mine fire or explosion and is irrespirable) and died before help could reach him. Bernard Newren, another member of Parmley's party, was also overcome by the deadly afterdamp, and the group was forced to retreat. Later, Newren regained consciousness.

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While rescue work continued at the Winter quarters mines, a special train from Salt Lake City was on its way to Scofield carrying W.G. Sharp, superintendent of the Pleasant Valley Coal Co., other officials of the Denver and Rio Grande Western and several doctors.

News of the explosion quickly spread to the people of Scofield and eastern Utah. At the company's mine office, the beleaguered paymaster was besieged by callers and visitors begging for information about friends or loved ones. His uniform response to each offered little consolation. "Beyond the fact that there has been an explosion, we know absolutely nothing. We

simply know that Mr. Sharp has been summoned to the mine. Further than that we are ignorant of what has transpired."

Superintendent Parmley's crew, making slow progress, found three men, alive but unconscious, near the mine entrance. Badly burned and almost unrecognizable, the first miner to be carried out screamed in pain and begged his deliverers to kill him. His suffering would last for more than a day before death freed him. A second miner died as rescuers carried him to Edwards' boarding house near the mine entrance. The third man, William Boyter, Jr., required hospitalization at St. Mark's. Boyter and Jacob Anderson, a miner who had been working alone off the first rise in a room that was untouched by the explosion's force and intense heat, were the only men to escape with their lives from workings of Winter Quarters No. 4



In a scene repeated in many homes around Scofield and Winter Quarters, the family of Levi Jones keeps a sad vigil by his casket. (George Edward Anderson photo courtesy of Robert W. Edwards Collection).

By noon, Parmley's men had made their way about 200 yards into the No. 4 mine. There they found the bodies of six men, the first of 83 bodies of friends, relatives and fellow workers that ultimately would be removed from this mine by volunteer rescue crews. As the burned and disfigured bodies were carried from the mine, the litter carriers were greeted by the wails of grief-stricken widows and orphans and by saddened faces of others who tried vainly to comfort the victims' families. Among miners yet unaccounted for early that afternoon was Thomas Parmley's brother, William, the mine foreman at Winter Quarters No. 4. Rescuers then returned to the entrance of No. 4 and, finding that air was beginning to circulate there, started clearing away debris and moving dead and fallen horses that blocked the entry.

By 3 p.m. Tuesday, W.G. Sharp arrived from Salt Lake and immediately went to the mine site to supervise the recovery operations. Volunteers from nearby mines and towns poured into Winter Quarters to help out upon hearing news of the explosion. Most of Scofield's townspeople were quick to provide support in a variety of ways, but the town's resources were sorely taxed.

The progress of rescue and recovery teams was agonizingly slow at the No. 4 mine. Rescuers had to contend with dislodged props, obstructions caused by cave-ins and piles of debris resulting from the violent explosion. Despite those problems, the procession of grim-faced volunteers carrying their lifeless loads seemed endless, and the boarding house that was first to be used to treat injured miners quickly became a makeshift morgue. Relatives and friends identified many victims, but many bodies were burned and mangled beyond recognition. Throughout the day and into the night, the pile of torn and burned clothing removed from the dead miners grew into a small mountain outside Edwards' boarding house.

Soon the boarding house could not accommodate any more victims, and bodies in bags were loaded onto boxcars, carried down the canyon into Scofield, and from there, taken to the schoolhouse to await the work of the undertakers. Meanwhile, gangs of carpenters were put to work to make up the shortage in available coffins.

Outside the mines, newspaper reporters contributed to the clamor for scraps of information about the disaster. Salt Lake City's three daily papers, the *Herald*, the *Tribune* and the *Deseret Evening News*, relied on reports filed by their correspondents at the scene. Scofield school principal and town clerk James W. Dilley, who recognized the historical significance of the disaster, busied himself by gathering names of dead miners as they were identified. At one point, Sarah Walker, one of the many distraught women anxiously awaiting news of their loved ones, approached Dilley.



Winter Quarters Mine Supt. Thomas J. Parmley, Clear Creek Mine Supt. H. B. Williams and Castle Gate Supt. Frank Cameron, left to right, check the list of dead as recovery work continues.

(George Edward Anderson photo courtesy of Robert W. Edwards Collection).

"My brothers are all out and alive, I believe," she said, although her voice belied the conviction of her words.



A view of the Winter Quarters Mine area

(George Edward Anderson photo courtesy of Robert W. Edwards Collection).

Dilley looked at her sadly, but could not speak. He knew that one of her brothers lay in a nearby heap of 30 bodies.

After Utah became the 45th state to join the Union in 1896, the state legislature passed a law providing for a state coal mine inspector, appointed by the governor, who would be responsible for making a "careful and thorough inspection of each coal mine in the State, at least quarterly" and for reporting to the governor yearly on the state's coal mines. That same law

required mine operators to provide mine maps, escapeways, adequate ventilation at specified levels and

other measures to ensure the miners' safety, and it authorized the governor to order a mine closed, at the recommendation of the state inspector, when the operator refused to comply with the provisions of the law. In some situations, a mine operator convicted of violating this law could be fined from \$500 to \$5,000.

Utah Governor Heber M. Wells named Gomer Thomas to be state inspector in 1897, and that year Thomas' annual report had characterized the safety efforts at the Winter Quarters mines this way: "The management has provided good timbers for all purposes .... It has also complied with the law in other respects in providing for the safety of employees." Thomas also noted that Winter Quarters No. 1 was equipped with modern electric hoists and a large exhaust fan that provided artificial ventilation throughout the workings. "There is no gas in this mine," reported Thomas. "It is comparatively safe in regard to gases, and dust is not very dangerous, but management sprinkles traveling roads."

Early Tuesday evening, May 1, 1900, Inspector Thomas arrived at the Winter Quarters mines. By then, 50 bodies had been taken from No. 4. Thomas assembled a rescue party that included W. G. Sharp, Superintendent of the Pleasant Valley Coal Co., and Castle Gate Mine Superintendent Frank Cameron and led the group into the No. 1 mine at about 8 p.m. Among the first bodies they found was that of young William Clark, who had succumbed to the afterdamp while trying to find his father and brother.

Thomas led his men down the main entry of No. 1 and up the eighth rise to the face of what was known as the No. 4 mine's Farrish level, which joined the No. 1 mine's seventh rise and which provided the shortest escape route from the deepest workings of No. 1. Two-thirds of the miners who perished in No. 1 were found at the head of the seventh rise. Not knowing where the explosion had occurred, they had run right into the afterdamp that swept down that rise following the explosion. Thomas, in his report to the governor, would later write, "There is no doubt in my mind that had these men gone down the eighth rise they would have all saved their lives, for had they gone down the eighth rise they would have encountered fresh air."

One member of Thomas' rescue party, a miner who had come to Winter Quarters from the company's Castle Gate Mine, described the scene to a reporter. "We had some hard experiences today going through the mine. Several times, members of our party were overcome by the damp, but we got them out in time. We found bodies of the men in every conceivable shape, but generally they were lying on their stomachs with their arms about their faces. The men died almost instantly when struck by the damp and did not suffer. They just became unconscious and were asphyxiated. Their faces were all calm and peaceful as though they had just fallen asleep.

"The men in No. 1 might possibly have escaped had they started to run as soon as the explosion in No. 4 . . . occurred," the miner continued, his voice tinged with sadness. "Evidently, they did



Several days after the disastrous explosion at the Winter Quarters mines, the town of Scofield, Utah, seen from the cemetery, awaits funeral services for miners killed in the blast. Barely visible in the foreground, right, workers prepare final resting places for many relatives and friends. The mouth of Winter Quarters Canyon can be seen in the distance, center. (George Edward Anderson photo courtesy of Robert W. Edwards Collection).

not appreciate this fact until too late, as they put on their coats and arranged their tools before starting. They started, however, just in time to meet the damp halfway."

While Thomas and his men worked their way along the Farrish level, he tried vainly to understand how such a tragedy could possibly have happened. As he told a reporter that evening, the Winter Quarters mines were regarded among the most carefully managed in the West, believed to be free from firedamp (methane gas) and from dangerous quantities of coal dust. Thomas had found no dangerous conditions when he had inspected the mines about six weeks earlier. The questions that now tortured him would never be answered for certain; the only miners who knew exactly what had happened were dead. The effort to determine what had happened would consist of painstakingly piecing together telltale signs left on singed roof timbers, on the ribs and other areas, and trying to trace the origin, force and direction of the initial and possibly subsequent explosions through careful examination of displaced and sometimes demolished mine equipment and the location and condition of each victim's body.

In many cases, rescuers were forced to call upon all the inner strength they could muster when they came upon another victim. One miner described the scene this way: "When a man was caught by the full force of the explosion, he was hurled against the wall or floor with the same effect that would follow the throwing of a piece of dough against the wall."

Rescuers worked until 2:30 Wednesday morning when Superintendent Sharp sent them home for a much-needed rest. By one newspaper's account, 137 bodies had been recovered from both mines when that first intensive rescue and recovery effort ended.

Several crews resumed work early Wednesday morning as newspaper readers around the country first learned of the terrible mine accident. The Deseret Evening News reported a perceptible change in the mood surrounding Pleasant Valley and Winter Quarters Canyon, as so many of the houses prepared to receive their dead. "The awful scene of yesterday had passed away when the day dawned this morning, and the awful calm of despair had taken its place," the news account said. "The agonized shrieks of the widows and the moans of the fatherless were no longer heard. The stricken ones were beyond that, and their grief could find no utterance."

In some homes, the burden of grief was especially heavy. Several Scofield families lost all their male members in the explosion. In one family, Robert Hunter, his three sons and four of his nephews were dead. John James, a miner who also served as one of Carbon County's commissioners, was discovered by one of the rescue parties with his son at the spot where both



Boots and clothing of dead miners lie outside the Edwards boarding house while volunteers inside prepare the bodies for identification. (George Edward Anderson photo courtesy of Robert W. Edwards Collection).

were overcome by afterdamp, entwined in each other's arms. Abe Louma and his wife, who had come to Scofield from Finland only three months earlier to enjoy the prosperity of the "new" country with their sons and grandchildren, lost six sons and three grandsons in an instant. The mine camps of Scofield and Winter Quarters that had been known as married men's camps were now widows' camps.

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country with their sons and grandchildren, lost six sons and three grandsons in an instant. The mine camps of Scofield and Winter Quarters that had been known as married men's camps were now widows' camps.

In his formal report to the governor, Thomas later reconstructed what he thought had happened in Winter Quarters No. 4 that Tuesday morning. "It seems, from the evidence available, that some person accidentally ignited a keg of powder, which caused the dust to rise and ignited the same, carrying the flames from a point known as 'Pike's Peak' and immediate vicinity thereof ....



Shortly after James Naylor, left, and Evan Williams escaped through the No. 1 portal, Williams re-entered the mine with a rescue party and found two friends who had succumbed to smoke and hot, toxic gases resulting from the explosion. Barely alive when Williams reached them, they died in his arms soon afterward. (George Edward Anderson photo courtesy of Robert W. Edwards Collection).

"Along the line where the powder exploded, all the bodies were badly burned, more so than in any other part of the mine. From this point, the blast shot down along the main and main-back entries of No. 4 mine, gathering combustibles, such as dust, powder, etc., within reach. Part of the blast shot out to the surface through No. 4 tunnel and air shaft, and part went through No. 1 mine. The part of the blast that went into No. 1 mine soon lost its force . . . ."

Thomas' first opportunity to explain his findings publicly came at the coroner's inquest held in Scofield on Thursday, at which a number of witnesses expressed anger and

bitterness. Thomas defended the mine owners, noting that the Pleasant Valley Coal Co. had recently hired its own inspector who had inspected the No. 4 mine just a few days before the explosion. Thomas described for the coroner's jury what he had seen at "Pike's Peak," and related the story in language described by the *Salt Lake Tribune* as "stronger than words."

Many miners said they would never work underground again.

"No, I do not want any coal mining here or anywhere else, in fact, for some time to come," one man told a reporter. "I have just shipped my partner, Peter Sutherland, whom I came West with, to his home in Canyon City, Colo., and when that last act was completed, I threw up the hunt for the victims for fear that I would become mentally unbalanced. It was an experience that I would not care to go through again, even if death was the penalty for a refusal to do so."

In almost all the homes along Winter Quarters Canyon and on the streets of Scofield, families kept vigil over the bodies of their loved ones. Tumbledown shacks, box houses and log cabins held one or more coffins surrounded by now fatherless families. A reporter, noticing the many unfinished houses under construction, wrote, "The awful calamity has stopped all work, and it will be months before they are completed, if ever they are."

Passengers on the northbound Rio Grande Western that morning were murmuring among

themselves about the state's dreadful news when the train slowed for its scheduled stop in Colton. Many craned their necks to watch the five coffins that were loaded on the train and the grieving woman who also boarded the train at the station. She seemed to be no more than 18 years old. A nervous quiet settled over the passengers as they rode to Thistle, but when the train stopped and the coffins were taken from the train for the last leg of their journey homeward, the woman became hysterical. She had sufficient reason. Four of those five coffins carried the bodies of her father, John Muir, her two brothers, George and Dan Muir, and her husband of three months, Gunner Bjornson. On Friday morning, Utahns were startled to read a statement in the *Salt Lake Herald* attributed to Gomer Thomas in which he allegedly accused the Pleasant Valley Coal Co. of negligence that contributed to the explosion.



When the boarding house could no longer accommodate the growing number of dead, the washed and wrapped bodies of victims were taken by boxcar down the canyon to Scofield and held there in several public buildings where undertakers prepared them for burial.  
(George Edward Anderson photo courtesy of Robert W. Edwards Collection).

Later that day, Inspector Thomas gave the competing *Tribune* a signed statement, carried in Saturday's paper, charging that the statement printed by the *Herald* was false. "I am not prepared to make any statement as to where the blame should lay and will not, until further investigation is made."

Three more bodies were recovered from rooms off the Farrish level in the No. 4 mine by the continuing shifts of recovery work. Funeral trains carried the remains of 55 victims to nearly a dozen towns and cities in Utah and Colorado. The others awaited services planned for Saturday in Scofield.



Some of the 62 explosion victims carried into Scofield lie under sheets in a schoolroom in which children had taken part in a May Day celebration only the day before.  
(George Edward Anderson photo courtesy of Robert W. Edwards Collection).

The company had provided each of the dead miners with a casket and a suit of burial clothes. It also absolved families of the victims of debts accumulated at the company store during April. In addition to the \$20,000 the company contributed to the relief fund shortly after the explosion, the company offered \$500 to the heirs of each man killed, and most readily accepted the company's offer, in lieu of all claims for further damages. The relief fund would amass more than \$200,000 from sources that included the company, communities, individuals and benefit events.

On Saturday, two funeral services were held. The first service was conducted by Rev. Granholm, a Finnish Lutheran minister who had come from Rock Springs, Wyo., for 61 Finnish miners, and a second was held by several Mormon apostles for the remaining victims who were to be buried at Scofield. Graves were adorned with flowers sent from Salt Lake City, since spring flowers were in short supply near Scofield. Mourners who lingered at the gravesites after the services were driven from the cemetery in the early evening by strong winds and torrents of rain.

Six weeks after the explosion, a Carbon County grand jury heard testimony on the Winter Quarters disaster, and on June 13, they issued their terse report: "We fail to find any criminal neglect or

carelessness on the part of the owner of the mine in which said disaster occurred or on the part of anyone else."



Workers at the Wasatch company store distribute some of the 100 coffins ordered from Denver. Only 125 coffins were available after the explosion, and local carpenters worked quickly to provide more. Part of the Denver shipment was later returned.

(George Edward Anderson photo courtesy of Robert W. Edwards Collection).

For some residents of the communities in northwest Carbon County, the psychological wounds would fester for their lifetimes. Some families of victims later had to be forcibly removed from company houses they had occupied until the time of the explosion, and some miners who stayed on continued to grumble about conditions and staged an unsuccessful strike in January 1901.



Mrs. John T. Jones and her now fatherless children wait for a wagon to take them to the Mormon burial service held four days after the explosion. Earlier that day, another service was held for 61 Finnish miners who had perished underground.

(George Edward Anderson photo courtesy of Robert W. Edwards Collection).

Despite the scars that would last for years, life slowly returned to normal in the affected communities, and many miners who had sworn that they would give up mining forever returned to the Winter Quarters mines. "That is a peculiarity of coal miners the world over," said one miner who had survived an explosion five years earlier in Almy, Wyo. "Every man who survived that explosion vowed he would never go into that mine again. I was one of the loudest, and yet,

after the shock had worn off, I was about the first to accept work and return to the mine."

One of the men hired to fill vacancies created by the explosion was Daniel Harrington, a young engineer who had just earned his degree from the Colorado School of Mines in Golden.

Harrington worked in the company's mines for many years before joining the Federal Bureau of Mines in 1914. While with the Bureau, he authored or co-authored more than 300 bulletins, circulars, reports and articles. At the time of his retirement in 1948, he had served for more than 15 years as chief of the Bureau's health and safety branch.

When the Bureau received a query in 1936 concerning the Scofield disaster, Harrington responded in a letter that drew upon his earliest experiences as a mining engineer. "What actually happened insofar as could be learned," he wrote, "was that two men, wearing the oldtime oil lamps, were making up some cartridges of black blasting powder at a point in their workroom where they had at least three, and probably more, 25-pound kegs of black blasting powder available. Presumably on making up the charge, the flame of their open light in some way or other came in contact with the granular black blasting powder and the explosion was precipitated with the resultant loss of 200 lives and the wrecking of the mine in which the explosion occurred. This mine was not reopened for nearly 10 years after the explosion."

Harrington concurred with other published accounts that these mines were absolutely not gassy. "The Scofield explosion was unquestionably one started by black blasting powder," he continued, "and the only ingredient entering into it was coal dust."

At the time of the explosion, the potentially explosive nature of coal dust was not fully understood. Gomer Thomas, however, made clear in his report that he was now convinced of the devastating potential of concentrations of airborne dust.

"This explosion," he wrote, "was either due to carelessness in handling of explosives or to a windy or blownout shot, thus igniting the dust, in air free from firedamp (methane) .... Here we have proof that an explosion can take place without the presence of firedamp under these conditions." As one miner told a reporter almost two weeks after the blast, "The explosion has taught Utah a lesson, but the cost of it has been terrible." As the years passed, there were other mining disasters that exacted terrible human tolls elsewhere in the United States. One woman who had lost her husband in the Winter Quarters tragedy would be widowed yet again when an explosion and mine fire killed 172 miners at the nearby Castle Gate Mine on March 8, 1924. This second major Utah mine disaster stunned the townspeople of Helper and sharply revived painful memories among Scofield residents.

Those who survived those days at Winter Quarters would never forget. Folklorist LaVerne Stallings reported in 1954 that her search for a ballad about the Scofield disaster had led her to John Beddoes, then 93, who barely escaped serious injury outside the portal of No. 4. She remarked about his memory for history and mining songs. "He spoke freely of the event," she wrote, "which was still so vivid in his mind that his voice shook and tears rolled down his cheeks as he told how the tragedy had struck almost every family in Scofield."

The wound had been freshly opened.