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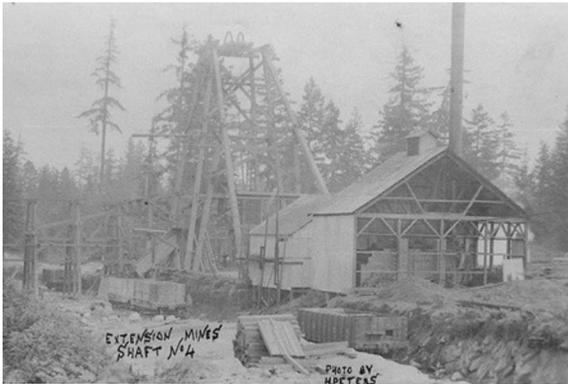
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Extension Mine fire killed 16 in 1901



This photo shows Extension Mine Shaft No. 4 in 1901. On Sept. 30, 1901, 16 miners lost their lives when a fire broke out in the mine.

*Photo Courtesy of Ladysmith and District Historical Society
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By [Contributed - Ladysmith Chronicle](#)
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Much has been written about the Extension Mine explosion of 1909 when 32 lives were lost, but there is little about the fire in the mine on Sept. 30, 1901, when 16 miners lost their lives.

The main reason is that the first newspaper published in Ladysmith was the Ladysmith Leader Wellington Extension News, published in January 1902 in what is now the Eagle's Hall.

The first report was in the Victoria Daily Colonist of Oct. 1, 1901: "At one o'clock this afternoon, a terrible disaster occurred involving the deaths of 16 or 17 men.

The fire broke out at the bottom of the slope on the canvas curtains, then in half an hour, the whole slope was on fire.

John Thomas, a rope-runner, was returning with a half trip of empty coal wagons when George Southcombe and Eugene Griffiths told him the mine was on fire and to run; all three started to run through the heat and smoke, but only Thomas reached the top, being young and active, managed to beat the fire racing up the slope."

Manager Andrew Bryden arrived and directed efforts to find the trapped miners, but they were not successful. The miners who perished ran with the fresh air coming down instead of against it, as was their accustomed way.

Explosions went on all afternoon, and when it was realized that all hope of rescue was gone, they started blocking up the entrance and fan shafts. Dense volumes of black smoke poured out and filled the valley.

Bryden sent a message to James Dunsmuir: "Fire occurred on No. 2 slope at No. 3 level which made such headway that in half an hour, it was halfway up the slope spreading into the airways and workings of Numbers 2 and 3 mines. I was obliged to stop both mines off after two explosions. Have lost some men, cannot say how many."

Dunsmuir left by special train immediately.



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In February 1902, the fire was still burning, so it was decided to flood the mine. Then on Feb. 24, mine officials decided that the fire was out, and draining started.

The bodies of Southcombe and Griffiths were recovered on Feb. 26. Griffiths's funeral took place in Nanaimo under the direction of St. John's Lodge. Southcombe's funeral was to be later.

On March 1, more bodies were recovered, and officials hoped to have the mine clear of water and the mine in full working order by March 31.

On March 15, it was reported that 11 mine victims were buried in Nanaimo last Sunday. (The first burial in the Ladysmith cemetery was in 1904).

The Ladysmith Leader and Wellington Extension News reported on March 5, 1902: "Nanaimo was the scene of a very sad and unusual event on Sunday, when the remains of 11 miners, victims of the Extension No. 2 disaster last October, were interred in the cemetery in the presence of an enormous crowd of spectators. The two trains which arrived from Extension and Ladysmith were crowded with hundreds of the friends of the dead miners. The funeral procession fell in behind the three hearses and, headed by a band playing funeral marches, set out by way of Fitzwilliam and Milton streets for the cemetery. The day was beautifully fine and the route lined with hundreds of sympathetic spectators"

A coroner's jury ruled that George Southcombe (and by extension, his 15 companions) met his death by suffocation. "Cause of the fire we were unable to determine by the evidence. We are of the opinion that the management are free from any blame according to the evidence."

We must remember them.

Submitted by

Kit Willmot

Ladysmith Historical Society

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