

**Remarks By Stanley Dempsey
White Ash Mine Memorial Site Dedication
Saturday, October 29, 2016
Colorado School of Mines Campus
Golden, Colorado**

Good Morning, and thank you for being here.

Most of us are surprised that coal mining was once a significant industry in Golden.

Coal was important, particularly for the developers of the gold and silver mines that were being worked on at an increasingly industrial scale west of here, in places like Central City, Georgetown, and Leadville.

Golden's mines produced thousands of tons of coal, and employed hundreds of miners.

The White Ash Mine, where we are standing, was a major mine, run by capable owners, managers, and miners.

Different than most coal mines, the White Ash mined a bed of coal that had been upturned along the Hogback, so that it was vertical, like a vein in a gold mine. Development began in 1877, by way of a vertical, timbered shaft. The coal was 10 feet thick and was between walls of solid sandstone.

By 1888 the shaft had been sunk to an 8th level at a depth of 730 feet. Workings extend along several levels, with the 280 level advanced northward toward its neighbor, the Loveland Mine.

The Loveland had been abandoned in 1881, due to the presence of a coal fire and its accompanying carbon monoxide. This left the mine unattended with its 2 1/2 miles of workings filling with water seeping into its workings underneath Clear Creek.

In 1883 the State Mine Inspector saw a coal fire on White Ash 280 level, and ordered closure of the level to snuff out the fire. This level corresponded to the 250 level of the Loveland. The White Ash miners had driven as far north towards the now flooded Loveland as the company deemed safe, leaving a 90 foot pillar between the two mines.

No one realized that the fire in the Loveland could burn downward. But it did, making the pillar between the two mines thinner and thinner. Finally, on September 9, 1889, water burst through to the 280 level, on down to the 440 foot level, and then on down the shaft to the lowest levels. The force of it, and mine debris taken down with it drowned the miners within minutes.

At about 3:45 pm on that fateful day the Hoist Man noticed that something was keeping the cage from going to the bottom of the shaft. Foreman, Evan Jones, immediately climbed down the ladders in the shaft, but realized at the 280 Level he could hear a great roaring sound of water flooding into the mine. Back on the surface, he checked and found that the water had gone out of the Loveland, and had broken into The White Ash.

Jones quickly organized his remaining miners and top men. He made many attempts to go back into the mine at the risk of his own life. Between 9 pm and 10 pm he made another attempt, making it down to 300 feet before bad air again stopped him.

Other mines were quick to help. The Ralston Springs Coal Mine lent a heavy wire, rope, and an experienced machinist to transfer it to the White Ash hoist. At 7:30 am on the next day, Jones and the State Mine Inspector went down in a heavy iron bucket, and made an inspection. They found nothing could be done to save the men. They covered the shaft to stop the draft between the two mines, and all further rescue attempts were abandoned.

Putting the rescue effort into perspective, Jones' first attempt to enter the mine took him to the 280 level, a descent and return climb of 280 feet, roughly the height of a 28 story building. Twice more he would descend into the inferno, the last time in an iron bucket tied to the newly installed wire rope.

And think about the mechanic attaching a new wire rope to the hoist, as the crowd of one thousand anxious and grief stricken relatives and friends of the lost miners watched. More will be said about the miners who lost their lives, but those who tried their best to save them also need to be held in our thoughts and prayers.

Likewise, state mine inspector, John McNeil who rode the last bucket down the shaft, and who in a straightforward manner spoke to a reporter for the Golden Transcript, outlining the cause of the tragedy, and the decision to leave the miners in their watery tomb.

In the aftermath the Golden community, including its fraternal organizations gave aid and comfort to relatives of the victims. Mine Inspector, John McNeil absolved all from blame.

Participants in coal mining all across the country redoubled efforts to prevent catastrophes such as White Ash, including the organization of a U. S. Bureau of Mines, developing repositories for maps and models of underground workings, and training rescue teams.

Tomorrow is national mine rescue day, as a time to recognize the dedication and sacrifice of volunteers who risk their own lives to save other miners.

Today the goal of everyone involved in coal mining is making sure that every miner returns home safe and healthy at the end of every shift.

Today we can take comfort in knowing that the Colorado School of Mines is a leader in all of the elements of mine safety, including the engineering skills to avoid inundation events, and the training of mine rescue teams.

So ends my history of the White Ash Mine disaster. Nothing can erase the horror and sadness of the event, but we can take comfort that Golden remembers, and that many here are making mining safer.

Thank you.