INQUEST BEING HELD TO FIX BLAME OF FATAL GAS EXPLOSION

Witnesses Differ as to Danger Period Following the Cleaning of Gas Sewers.

At the inquest, which is being held to determine as to who is responsible for the accident which happened at the steelworks on Saturday, Steve Sudar and Mile Marich, two of the victims who are at the Minnequa hospital testified that it is dangerous to enter a gas sewer for the purpose of cleaning it for twenty-four hours after water has been turned on for the purpose of flushing the sewer. Edward Gardner, superintendent of the furnaces, testified that the danger is past within two or three hours after the flushing. The two victims claimed that they would not have entered the sewer had they known that the water had been turned on within so short a time as three hours as was true in the terrible disaster of Saturday.

Dane Zigich testified that he had warned Carl Pensinger, foreman of the gang, of the danger from flushing and had ordered him to tell the men which, he supposed that he did. Persinger testified that he had warned one of the men, Nick Uzelac, but had not told the rest of the gang.

The inquest over the remains of Nick Uzelac, Mike Radmanovich, Jandre Uzelac, Elija Zigich and Stanko Marich, who were killed by the explosion, was begun yesterday morning at the undertaking parlors of McMahon & Collier's and will be continued this morning at 9 o'clock at the steelworks where the accident happened. A number of witnesses were examined yesterday, and one of them, Dane Zigich, will be recalled to the witness stand this morning. The jurors will be given an opportunity to see the place where the accident happened before they will be asked to render a verdict.

The case is being handled for the people by Deputy District Attorney E. C. Holt. T. D. Donnelly is acting as clerk to keep a record of the testimony, while Sava Radakovich was chosen as interpreter as several of the witnesses are unable to speak the English language intelligently.

Corner McDonnell and Deputy Coroner Collier have charge of the inquest and chose as the jurors, J. K. Dempsey, Alderman N. Zink, A. C. Daniels, W. H. Tate, Patrick Byrnes and W. G. Frazier.

Edward Gardner Testifies.

Edward Gardner, superintendent of the gas house, was the first witness who was called on to testify in the matter. Mr. Gardner had a number of blue prints with which he was able to acquaint the jurors with the surroundings of the place where the accident happened.

Mr. Gardner testified that the work of cleaning out the sewers is done at regular intervals, Saturday afternoon being the usual time to do the work. He showed the jurors where the water is turned into the sewer. He said that explosions are frequent but of no serious consequence, when the water is turned on and usually occur within two or three hours after the water is turned on. After that time, he said, there is little danger of explosions occurring.

Dane Zigich, who gives orders from Mr. Gardner to Carl Pensinger, who was foreman of the gang that was doing the work, testified that he had instructed Mr. Pensinger as to the work at 9 o'clock, warning him that he was going to turn the water on and to be on guard. He testified that he was sure that Mr. Pensinger had done his duty. Mr. Zigich's testimony was given partly in English and partly through the interpreter, Mr. Ranakovich. After receiving the orders, Mr. Zigich testified, Mr. Pensinger took the men to another part of the plant to clean some boilers and did not return to the gas sewer until 12 o'clock.

E. J. Parks, superintendent of the openhearth furnaces, and T. R. Jackson who had charge of some of the openhearth furnaces, gave testimonies similar to that of Mr. Gardner. Dane Dejinovich, Janko Radmanovich, Mitor Marich and others testified as to seeing the men in the vicinity of the sewer just previous to the accident but otherwise their testimonies were of no importance.

The jury adjourned at noon to meet at 1:30 at the Minnequa hospital where the testimony of Carl Pensinger, Steve Sudar and Mile Marich, the three men who were seriously injured by the explosion will be taken.

Marich testified that he had been working at the steelworks for two years and seven months and had been engaged in cleaning gas sewers ever since he entered the employ of the company. The gas sewers were cleaned at regular intervals, he said, of about three months and that two gangs of men were required to do the cleaning. On every Saturday afternoon both gangs were required to clean one sewer.

Methods Used in Cleaning.

Two methods, he said, are used in cleaning the new sewers. One is to wet the inside of the sewer by means of turning water into it, but when this method is used, the water is turned on at least a day before the men enter for the work. The other method is for the men to carry water into the sewer and pour it onto the ashes as they work, a small quantity at a time, which merely keeps the dust down and makes the ashes more easy to handle. This method, he said, is the one which the men supposed that they were going to use last Saturday.

Marich said that none of the men, so far as he knew, had any knowledge at all that water had been turned into the sewer from the water main, else they would have refused to enter it under twenty-four hours. The gang, he testified, with the exception of Mr. Pensinger and Nick Uzelac, who was instantly killed, were old hands at the business and understood it thoroughly and well knew the danger from explosions within a day's time after water is allowed to flow into the sewer.

That the men had been warned of danger, he said, was true. According to his testimony, they were told at 9 o'clock that they must clean the gas sewer at openhearth furnace No. 7 and to be careful upon entering it on account of gas which might not have passed out as the gas from the furnace had been turned off at that time. Nothing had been said to any of them, so far as he knew, concerning the turning on of water.

Steve Sudar, testified that he had been employed at the Minnequa plant for 2 years and 4 months and that he had been employed in cleaning gas sewers for that period. He corroborated Mr. Marich's testimoney.

Mr. Pensinger testified that he had told the men at 9 o'clock that they were to clean the gas sewer at openhearth furnace No. 7 and for them to be careful on entering the sewer on account of gas which might still be in it. He said that he had been told by Mr. Zigich that the water had been turned on and that he had told Nick Uzelac about it but had not warned the others.