

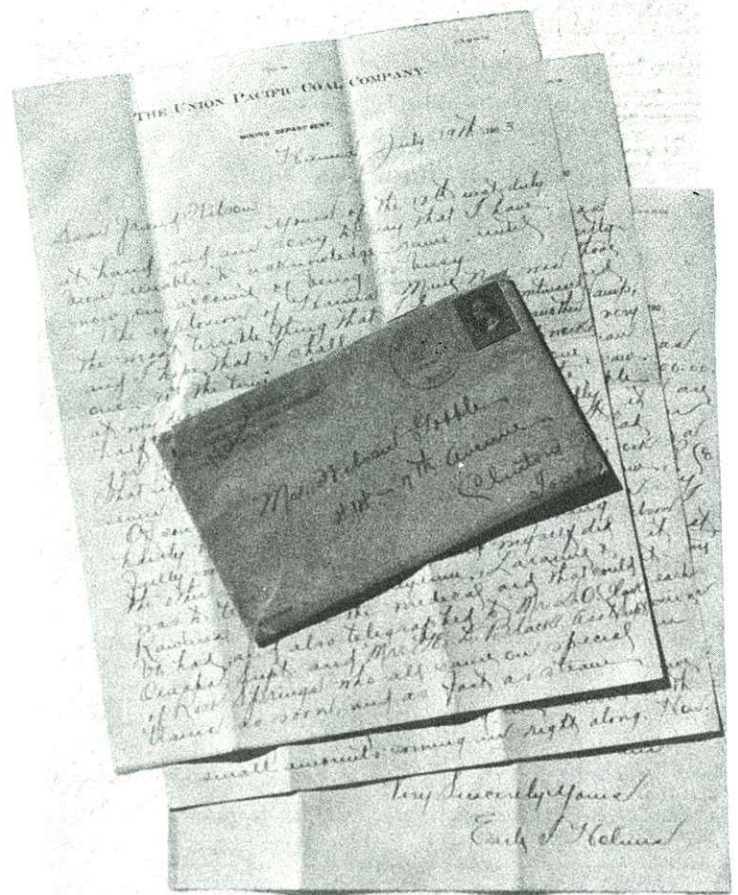
A LETTER FROM HANNA MINE NO. 1

by Deric English
Boron, California

Personal letters concerning various aspects of mining are not only collectible, but they provide insight into the pleasures and hardships associated with mining. The content of these letters may range from the misery experienced by a miner's mourning widow to the details of a mining swindle undertaken by some unscrupulous promoter. Often, these "eyewitness versions" give us a glimpse of the event unlike ones provided by the mine owner, the press, or other chroniclers. No mining story would seem complete without some mention of these obscure, written letters.

The Union Pacific Coal Company's Mine No. 1 in Hanna, Wyoming was the location of a terrible mining disaster on June 30, 1903. At ten o'clock in the morning what sounded like a charge of dynamite catapulted rock, timber, coal, and earth from the portals of the mine. Smoke filled the air as rescue workers tried to mount their rescue. The inner workings of the mine were caved and with cessation of the pumps, the mine began to fill with water. One hundred and sixty-nine men were killed; the last body was removed almost five months after the explosion.

The following letter embodies this awful disaster through the recollections of Earle Holmes, a Union Pacific Coal Company clerk. Earle was working at his desk, a half mile from the mine, when the explosion occurred.



The Union Pacific Coal Company

MINING DEPARTMENT

July 19th, 1903

Dear Friend Wilson:

Yours of the 12th inst. duly at hand, and am sorry to say that I have been unable to acknowledge same until now, on account of being so busy.

The explosion of Hanna Mine No. 1 was the most terrible thing that I have ever witnessed, and I hope that I shall never experience another one. At the time of the explosion I was at work at my desk in the Office which is fully one half mile away from the mine, and the jar was so great, and came so unexpectedly that it almost knocked me off my stool. It even broke windows almost a mile away.

Of course everybody was thunderstruck and hardly knew what to do, although realized fully what had happened. The first thing the other Clerk in the Office and myself did was to telegraph to Cheyene, Laramie, & Rawlins for all the medical aid that could be had, and also telegraphed to Mr. D.O. Clark Omaha, Supt. and Mr. E.L. Black Asst. Supt. of Rock Springs who all came on special trains as soon, and as fast as steam could bring them. I even went so far as to venture into the Mine with others shortly after the explosion, to endeavor rescuing those whom we thought still might be alive, and help carry out the dead, but the Black Damp, and the After Damp were so intense that very little could be done. One place that I can never forget seeing, was our party saw about 27 of the dead, but were unable to get to them on account of the above. As it was, four of our party played out and had to have assistance out of the Mine. The work of getting out the dead bodies is very slow, and up to date only 12 bodies have been recovered out of about 200. I tell you Wilson one cannot realize what a terrible thing it was, unless you are right here to see it.

I know of three fine women here, who each gave birth to a child on the day of the explosion, and their husbands are among the dead in the Mine. Just think of that.

We have a relief committee here who have already received something like \$6000. with small amounts coming in right along. Now, Marcus A. Hanna whom the town was named after even sent a draft for \$100.00.

Well Wilson, just as soon as things are in a fair shape, I am going to resign my position here at Hanna to accept a better one with the Southern Pacific R.R. Co. at San Francisco, and I have not fully made up my mind as yet, whether I shall come home, before going to the coast or not, but shall decide in the near future and will let you know.

Can you tell me where I can address a letter to Cora, that is, if she has started on her trip.

Well old boy, write soon, and please do not show this letter to anyone for I have written it in a hurry, and have paid no attention to mistakes.

With kindest regards to all I am

Very Sincerely Yours

Earle I. Holmes