

at 24, 1894.

GONE TO GLORY.

WAS

Dynamite and Gun-Powder Carry Death

Judge Vance S for Taking to Feed

AND DESTRUCTION IN THEIR WAKE.

An Awful Explosion Which Wrecks Houses and Kills Two People.

There are some things that happen during the average man's life time the memory of which clings to him till mother earth once more claims him for her own.

Saturday night, August 18, 1894, will probably be remembered for some time to come by the inhabitants of Fort Smith.

A few minutes after 9 o'clock the dynamite and powder magazine of the Speer Hardware Co., situated about a mile from the circuit court house, on the banks of the Poteau in the Choctaw Nation, exploded with a noise that was heard forty miles away. The sky at the time of the explosion was perfectly clear, and the brilliant flash of light which preceded the explosion was a mystery to every one. The deafening noise which followed a few seconds later, tearing out window panes by the thousand, knocking the plastering off of ceilings, and stunning people all over the city, displaced the feelings of curiosity, and in their stead came the awful fright and terror which comes when an unknown danger threatens life and property.

Persons who were on the Avenue witnessed scenes which they will not soon forget. People rushed wildly into the street, vainly inquiring what caused such an unusual noise. The rattling of broken window panes as they fell upon the pavement was not reassuring, and the man who says he was not frightened either left town right after the explosion or has not the nerve to tell the truth.

Parties who reached the scene soon after the explosion were greeted with a horrible spectacle. Not more than fifty feet from where the magazine had stood lay the scattered fragments of a small house which had been inhabited by Mrs. Emily Cook and her blind daughter, "Babe." The house had literally been blown to pieces. Among the debris lay the mutilated bodies of the two women. They had evidently retired for the night, as they had on no clothing except their night dresses. Their death must have been painless and instantaneous. Their remains were brought to the city and placed in Birnie's morgue. The burial took place Sunday afternoon, the Speer Hardware Co. kindly paying all expenses connected therewith.

Where the magazine had stood there only remained a deep hole in the ground to mark the spot. The grass and weeds for quite a distance around were burned as though a fire had withered them.

At the time of the explosion the magazine contained 350 kegs of powder and about 1200 pounds of dynamite. The cause of the explosion will perhaps always remain a mystery. Various theories have been advanced, any and all good, but proving nothing.

Only a few minutes had elapsed when inquiries from various towns along the Frisco and Valley commenced to pour in. The force of the explosion was heard as far away as Poteau, 30 miles down the Frisco. At Van Buren, five miles away, window glass were broken. Immediately after the explosion a luminous cloud formed which was distinctly visible at Muldrow, 15 miles from here. The cloud was formed by the smoke from the powder. The magazine was built of wood and covered with iron. There was no foundation under the building. Had the magazine been built of stone or brick and set on a solid foundation the damage to buildings in the city would have been ten fold greater.

The damage done in Fort Smith will reach thousands of dollars. Hardly a business house on Garrison Avenue, from one end to the other, escaped. Handsome plate windows were smashed into smithereens in a twinkling of an eye, the sash in some instances going with the glass. The county and federal court houses on the side next to the explosion were stripped of nearly every pane of glass, and Belle Point school house fared no better. The Masonic Temple, out on Sixth street, was a heavy sufferer, and on Second street the wholesale houses were not forgotten.

Rufe Templeton, who lives only about 100 yards from where the magazine stood, had a narrow escape. When the explosion came he was lying on the floor on a pallet, the door of his house standing open. He was so badly stunned that he knew nothing for several minutes. When he came to his senses his wife was dragging him out in the yard, exclaiming "the world is coming to an end, Rufe, let's all go over to Uncle Tom's and die together!" Mr. Templeton's house was badly wrecked.

A well known traveling man who rooms on Sixth street was in his room with a gentleman friend when the explosion took place. Grasping his companion by the arm he pushed him behind a wardrobe, dropped down on his knees and commenced to pray. His companion remarked that the danger was all over, and the praying time had passed.

A prominent business man, in company with several others, was standing on the sidewalk in front of his place of business, when the smashing of glass was heard all around him. He rushed up to one of his companions and in a voice which sounded very different from his usual jocular tone, exclaimed, "My God, what's the matter!"

It was reported at Van Buren that six white men and three negroes had been killed by the explosion.

A lady on Second street was sitting on the front porch, and was knocked from her chair by the force of the explosion. She lay where she fell, moaning and crying. One of the neighbors went over and asked her what was the matter. "Oh, I'm shot, I know I am, right in the back of the neck, and I can feel the blood running down my back, booboo!" exclaimed the poor woman.

And it went. Many humorous incidents occurred, but at the time nothing was thought of them, as the explosion was no laughing matter. In fact, it was a very serious matter, and one that will be remembered.

The loss to the Speer Hardware Co. is something over \$1,000.

The unfortunate victims of the explosion—Mrs. Cook and her daughter—were a couple of poor women who have been living in Fort Smith about 10 years, coming here from Mississippi. Mrs. Cook was old and crippled and the daughter was almost entirely blind. It was only by the most desperate exertions that they kept body and soul together. Letters found among the ruins of her house show her to have a daughter or daughter-in-law living at Banner, Miss.

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