

AUTOS AND WAGONS BLOWN TO PIECES



A VIEW ON COMMERCIAL ST.

EXPLOSION THEORY FAVORED BY EXPERT

Full Inquiry Necessary,
Says W. L. Wedger

Walter L. Wedger, Massachusetts District Police expert on explosives, last night, after several hours' study of the circumstances of the disaster, said he was unable to express any final opinion as to the cause.

While strongly inclined to the belief that there was an explosion, he said that an investigation to be made today by Deputy Chief George C. Neal of the State Police, Building Commissioner Herbert A. Wilson of Boston and himself might upset this theory.

If there was only a collapse, Mr Wedger pointed out, fragments of the tank would not, as conditions plainly indicate, have been hurled against the Elevated structure and caused such wreckage there, nor would the vehicles on Commercial st have been blown to atoms.

One of the suppositions of Boston men familiar with the handling of molasses was that the rivets in the tank became loose and the pressure on the aperture became so great as to tear the whole structure apart.

The destruction of a three-story dwelling on Commercial st on the other side of the Elevated structure could be caused, according to those advancing the theory of collapse, by the suction created by the toppling tank.

This, however, is not regarded as likely by Mr Wedger, although he was not willing to say it was impossible.

Experts appear to have established that fermentation of molasses would create a gas or alcoholic vapor, and an expansion of from 5 to 6 percent. Some of them say that if the tank was filled to capacity and this expansion developed there might be enough pressure to cause explosion.

Mr Wedger says that a gas explosion would have essentially different characteristics than dynamite or powder explosion, and the effects might well be just what they were when the Purity Company's tank was demolished.

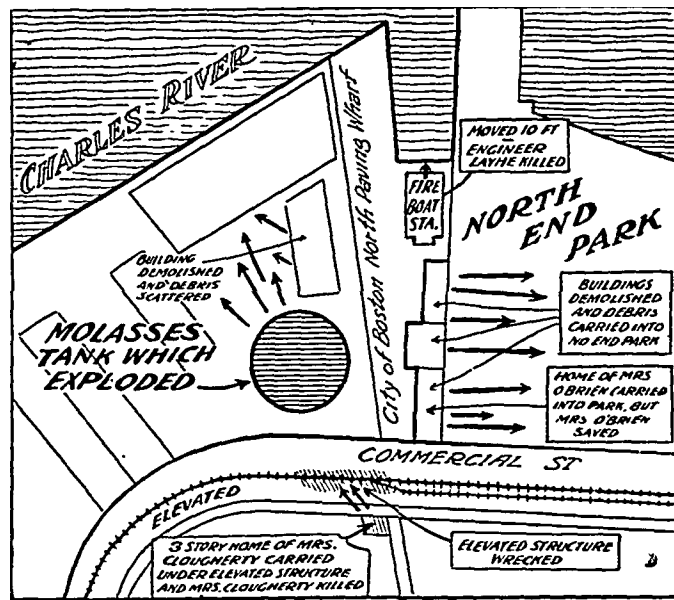
In every explosion, he said, there are freak conditions which nobody can ever explain, and, therefore, he preferred not to discuss without further investigation several of the puzzling phases of the present case.

One Boston enthusiast last night expressed the opinion that the disaster might have been caused by an explosion produced by the ignition of carbon dioxide when the fermentation of the molasses produced a certain temperature.

He also thought it barely possible that a spark from a short-circuited electric wire might have ignited alcoholic vapor through contact with the exterior of the tank.

A Harvard professor, who has been in a position to obtain from persons in touch with the company valuable information upon which to base his conclusions, said last night he believed that a pressure of carbonic acid, or carbon dioxide, emanating from the molasses in the fermentation, was the cause. There was no ignition, and could be none, in his opinion.

DIAGRAM OF EXPLOSION



ALCOHOL COMPANY TO CONDUCT INVESTIGATION

When the State and city officials who are planning to start this morning a joint investigation of the Purity Distilling Company tank disaster begin work they are likely to discover already on the ground a group of experts employed by the United States Industrial Alcohol Company for the same purpose.

Prof Arthur H. Gill of Harvard and Prof Miller of Massachusetts Institute of Technology have been retained by the company as chemical experts, and a detective agency has been engaged to make a separate inquiry.

The president of the United States Industrial Alcohol Company, it is reported, will arrive tomorrow, accompanied by several attorneys, from New York.

A member of the firm of Dolan, Morsan & Stebbins, Boston counsel for the Industrial Alcohol Company, said last night that instructions have been received for a thorough investigation. "We feel sure there was no explosion," was the only statement that could be obtained from this source as to the cause.

The Boston attorney said the capacity of the tank was 2,500,000 gallons, and that it was well filled. It has frequently been tested, he said.

EXPLOSION CAUSED FROM OUTSIDE COUNSEL'S VIEW

Harry F. R. Dolan, attorney for the United States Industrial Alcohol Company, said last night that the company holds the theory that the explosion was caused by some outside force and not from within the tank.

He said further that molasses does not ferment in winter weather and that the tank was bigger and stronger than is required by law. The company has no enemies, as far as he knows.

It has been manufacturing alcohol used in making munitions for the Allies.