

Northern Kentucky Views presents . . .

THE MAYSVILLE EAGLE - EXTRA.

From Our Extra Monday Morning

Maysville Powder Magazine Fired

TERRIBLE EXPLOSION!

800 Kegs Powder Burned

33 Houses Demolished

\$100,000 Worth of Property Destroyed

Narrow Escape of Life

\$1,000 Reward for Perpetrators!

On yesterday morning (Sunday) at 5 minutes before 2 o'clock, our citizens were roused from their slumbers by the most tremendous and awful explosion ever heard in our midst – causing by the firing of the Maysville powder Magazine, containing 800 kegs of blasting and rifle powder – and carrying desolation and destruction into every quarter of our city, of East Maysville, and of Aberdeen Ohio.

The light produce by the explosion was the most brilliant and most intensely vivid imaginable, startling hundreds of our citizens from a sound sleep, and awakening them to the sudden realization of the awful Judgment Day. And then the explosion and the terrible concussion of the atmosphere that followed confirmed many hardened sinners in the conviction that “Gabriel was blowing his horn” and that “the time had come for us all to go.”—Such was the language of some, and scarcely one of the six thousand dwellers in this immediate valley but was greatly agitated and alarmed. Many scenes were witnessed—men of nerve losing their presence of mind, women screaming and children running about in terror—ignorant of the cause of their alarm, and fearful of the death of nearly all their households, of neighbors and friends all around, and of the destruction of all their property. Demolition and imminent danger was everywhere and in every

house—and yet, in the special providence of God, not a life was lost, and but few sustained any bodily injuries.

Some minutes elapsed before the citizens would venture into the streets—so dreadful and universal was the alarm created by the explosion and its incidents, the bursting in of doors, the crashing of windows and glass, the wreck of walls and other materials struck by the flying missiles, the feeling of suffocation produced by the close sulphurous atmosphere—all instantly succeeding the flash of almost unearthly like, the explosion, louder and more devastating than a hundred thunder-storms, and the tremendous heaving of the earth and jarring of houses scarcely less violent than the earthquake motions of Lisbon at New Madrid.

As the citizens sallied forth, they found the side-walks covered with stones and bricks from the foundations of the Magazine, with bricks and fragments of wood from the chimneys and walls and roofs of the houses, with broken glass and sash and doors—and in many places the sills of the doors and windows tops of fences etc., covered with powder or with the grit and sand and plaster scattered by the explosion. These last penetrated into many rooms covering the bedding, mantles, tables, etc.

All realized at once that there had been a general and very serious destruction of property—but the great fear that animated all, was as to the killed and wounded. As many were hurrying to the scene of the explosion, they met a crowd carrying from his residence to the Lee house the body of Wm. P. Conwell. Esq. – one of the ablest and soundest lawyers in Kentucky – who was bleeding profusely, and to the confusion supposed to be greatly mangled and almost lifeless. Such a scene, a distance of two squares from the magazine appalled many – who can even now, thirty hours after the terrible calamity, scarcely realize that in the providence of God, not a single human being lost his life, and that with this one exception no individual was dangerously hurt, and very few were wounded at all.

Mr. Conwell received prompt medical aid and the best attention. He was struck on the left leg, near the hip, by a stone through the window shutter and window and which inflicted a gash some two inches deep and three long, severing one or two blood vessels. From which he lost much blood before its flow could be staunch. The violent bruising of the limb is more to be feared than the gash. Mr. C. received a slight cut in the corner of his left eye. He is doing well, and it is believed will recover soon.

Mrs. Dr. Phister and Miss Belle Poynte, at a distance of three squares, were struck with rocks, inflicting ugly cuts in the head of one and on the foot of the other, producing temporary lameness. Miss Helen Seaton had her right arm cut in several places by a window sash blown in on her. Mr. Dempsey Carrell was badly bruised on the elbow and on the hip, by stones from the Magazine. An old negro woman was considerably injured by the falling of her roof and the side of her house, in the hollow below the Magazine. Another negro woman lying ill at

the time, had her system, so violently shocked by the explosion and preyed upon by fear, that she died yesterday afternoon. A number of persons received slight scratches, among them children, from falling timbers, plastering, et,

The damage to property is immense-variously estimated at from \$50,000 to \$100,000. Every house developed damage of one sort or another, not previously discovered – walls sprung, roofs giving way, cracks in walls, door frames crushed partly in, doors, shutters, sash, and glass demolished, walls and roofs and partitions and flooring pierced as if by cannonading, furniture of all kinds, chinaware, etc. broken into fragments or greatly injured.

The following houses were entirely demolished, or so damaged as almost to require rebuilding:

Jno. Smith's frame dwellings and brick sausage-meat house; Jos. Frank's dwelling, occupied by Ben Logan; the lower city school house, brick; the frame dwellings oh Jno. B. Gibson and J. A. Bierbower; the frame African Baptist Church; the brick dwellings of Father Spaulding, James G. Spaulding, Dr. Ambrose Seaton, Thos. Y. Payne, Alex. Maddox, and Jacob W. Rand, together with Rand & Rich[illeg]'s Maysville Seminary Building.

The Presbyterian, Methodist, Methodist South, Baptist, Christian and African Christian Churches were damaged from \$200 to \$1,000 each, and the Court House probably \$400.

The Mayor, in the name of the City Council and the citizens, has offered \$1,000 Reward for the apprehension and conviction of the scoundrels who fired the Magazine. Hon. Judge Duvall has ordered a special term of the Mason Criminal Court, for an investigation before the Grand Jury.

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From the Eagle of Tuesday, August 15, 1854

Additional Particulars

Those at a distance not acquainted with the localities about Maysville will understand the reason why – although the damage is immense, so great that \$80,000 cannot replace everything in the same good order the explosion found them – the destruction was not much greater, when we tall them that the Powder Magazine was blown up, together with three other magazines, is situated in the narrow hollow or gorge along which the Maysville and Lexington Turnpike ascends the hill back and south of the City, at a distance of less than a third of a mile from the Court House and the heart of the city. More than 4,000 people were quietly slumbering, at the dead hour of 2 o'clock, within one mile of this powerful mine that was suddenly sprung upon them by the villainy and heartlessness of a few men – five, it is believed – and but for the elevation of the

Magazine a hundred feet over their heads, at least a thousand human beings must have been killed or horribly mangled and crippled for life. Indeed, as it is, many who are not wont to offer thanks have expressed great thankfulness for the wonderful and miraculous interposition of Providence in saving them and theirs from an awful death.

We learn from the *Express* of yesterday that the quantity of powder which blew up was considerably more than we stated in our *Extra* above – amounting in all, when the barrels were reduced to kegs, to an aggregate of about 27,500 pounds. Theoretical gunners in the Navy can calculate approximately the force of the explosion, when they learn that the foundation of the Magazine was of tolerably heavy limestone, and the walls of three brick or 12 inches thickness, arched over with brick, and with a solid iron door. A stone weighing 102 lbs. was found by J. P. Lawell, where it was thrown by the explosion, in Aberdeen, entirely across the River and at least a mile from the place of its starting. Another stone weighing 43 lbs. struck a locust post of a grape arbor in James Helm's garden, in Aberdeen, and completely shattered the post.

The steamer *Huron*, The Cincinnati packet lying at her landing place at the lower grade, was pierced by a number of stones – of which one passed into the hull an inch above the edge of the water, one or more passed through the roof and cabin floor and then out into the river, and one passed entirely through the state room where the clerk, Rolla Cooper and his wife were sleeping, only four inches from Mrs. Cooper's head. The rattling of the stones and bricks on the roof and side of the boat, on the grade, and all around the river was quite appalling.

We shall not attempt any systematic detail of damage done, and narrow escapes, but give at random such as occur to our mind.

The Parker House, on Second street, was struck by several large stones and numbers of small ones. One, weighing some fifty pounds, perforated the wall of the second story, and rebounding fifteen feet, was broken into a dozen fragments. It forced a mass of brick and mortar over the room and specially the bed of Mr. McKee, book-keeper at Pearce, Tolle & Co., who was to have returned from the country with his wife that evening, and was providentially detained. Both would have been seriously hurt. Several of the boarders narrowly escaped injury by the blowing in of sash and broken glass upon them.

The residence of Wm. H. Wadsworth, Esq., on second Street, near the Cotton Factory, was struck by six or eight stones, several very large. One of them pierced the shutter and window, and shattered the bedstead on which reposed Mr. J. J. Carson and wife and infant, who had reached here only four hours previously from New Orleans. They received no injuries.

The residency of Mr. Ramsey, in the Brick Row, a few doors east of Mr. Wadsworth's with a number of smaller ones, was pierced by two stones, weighing about 40 and 70 pounds, respectively. The smallest shattered to pieces the cradle

from which she had removed her baby, and broke a part of the bedstead on which she was sleeping, while the largest lodged by her side in the bed, but so quietly that she did not discover it until daylight.

A dozen stones, from 2 to 20 lbs. each, penetrated the roof and windows of Mr. Dempsey Carrell, also in the Brick Row, doing much damage, and two of them bruising Mr. C. badly upon the elbow and hip. His family were saved from suffocation by his promptness in creating a ventilation through the house, which the concussion had failed to effect.

Just in this vicinity and in this direction was evidently the thickest discharge of stones, bricks, and other missiles. On both sides of second Street, beginning at Short, and coming up to the Parker House, every building with perhaps four exceptions, is perforated either through the walls, roofs, windows, or doors by stones, which did in some cases very serious and in others trifling damage. Several were perfectly riddled, and have the appearance of being bombarded by cannon.

The following houses suffered most severely:

The frame dwellings now owned by Abram Carr, in the hollow, have only the front walls standing. The negro woman mentioned in our *Extra* as among the wounded, was dug out of the ruins of one of these houses. Loss say \$200.

The sausage-meat factory of John Smith was crushed in almost to the foundation. Loss about \$100.

The double-frame dwelling, one of them occupied by John Smith, situated in the hollow on the "old road" were nearly demolished - \$200 will hardly repair them.

The brick "scotch castle" of the venerable Father Daniel Spaulding was damaged probably \$200.

The next brick building, of his son, James G. Spaulding, had the front wall and part of the roof so damaged that they will have to be taken down. \$200 will make it whole.

The brick dwelling of Dr. Ambrose Seaton, next on 4th Street or the "Pike," had the entire roof crushed in, and was otherwise heavily damaged. Loss say \$400.

The "Maysville Seminary" building was damaged, probably \$200.

The brick residence of Jacob W. Rand, adjoining the seminary, had the roof badly injured, the walls sprung, the partitions moved, and was otherwise damaged. It will require at least \$1500 to repair it properly.

The brick residence of Wm. Corwine's estate, occupied by Sam'l L. Blaine was damaged some \$100.

The brick dwelling of Mrs. A. M. Cox, occupied by Thos. Y. Payne, Esq., had one end of the roof crushed, a partition moved, and two walls sprung. Loss and damage say \$250.

On the opposite side of 4th Street, Jonathan A. Bierbower's residence, frame with a brick ell, was pierced by and battered by many stones – the former so much injured as scarcely to be worth repairing. Damage and loss some \$300. Much of the fine shrubbery, etc., in his beautiful garden was sadly injured.

The residence of John B. Gibson, frame and brick, had one side of the frame torn in and was otherwise damaged to say \$100.

The large brick residence of Alex. Haddax in the square back of the Christian Church, was almost entirely raised—will scarcely justify re-building. Loss and damage say \$1000.

The brick residence of Wm. B. Broadwell, on the Pike, had some frames crashed in and one wall gave way—rendering the house untenable for the present. Loss and damage say \$100.

The frame residence of Joseph Frank, occupied by Ben. Logan (colored), was almost demolished. Loss say \$50.

These are the most serious losses to dwellings and buildings other than the public. To these later the damage was very heavy.

The African Baptist Church (frame) on the Pike—the building owned by Father Spalding, and the furniture, etc. by the blacks—had one end torn to pieces, the pews thrown about, and was otherwise damaged to say \$100.

The African Methodist Church, in the hollow, (frame) we have not seen—but learn from others that it is damaged some \$50.

The Christian Church or Reformed Baptist Church, on Third street had a portion of the roof lifted from its place, the chandeliers, window blinds, and sash all broken, the walls sprung, etc.—damage at least \$300.

The Methodist E. Church, on Third street, had nearly all the sash and glass and the fine chandeliers broken and considerable other damage done. Loss at least \$200.

The Presbyterian Church, on Third street, the finest in the State out of Lexington and Louisville, had nearly all the sash inside shutters, etc. broken, and was much

damaged otherwise. Loss say \$300—several hundred dollars less than was at first supposed.

The Methodist Church South, on Second street, was seriously damaged by the springing of walls, breaking of doors, fine chandeliers, sash, blinds, carpet spoiled, etc.—in amount not less than \$500.

The German Methodist Church on Third st., loss say \$50 in sash and glass broken, etc.

The Episcopal and Roman Catholic Churches at the opposite end of the City from the Magazine, received comparatively little damage we believe.

The Episcopal and Methodist E. were the only Churches in which services were held on Sabbath morning.

The lower City School House, built mainly by the legacy from John Armstrong's estate, was demolished above the first story. \$500 will probably restore it.

The large and handsome Court House was damaged some \$300 to doors, shutters, sash, etc. Fortunately the windows of the large hall were open, or the damage must have been much greater.

The City Hall, on Second street received similar damage besides the destruction of the elegant chandelier loss some \$300.

Of the business houses Michael Ryan's large hemp magazine, corner Third and Sutton sts., Thos. J. Pickett's grain warehouse, corner Second and Wall sts., Dr. John Shackelford's two storage warehouses, on Second street, and Jos. Frank's Tinware store adjoining, received probably the greatest injury. Every store on Second and Market street had all or nearly all the glass in their large show windows broken.

There are probably fifty houses which have not a single pane of glass left unbroken; as many more with not a dozen sound ones; and some twenty with every sash broken or thrown out on the floor and wrecked.

The elegant dwelling house lately occupied by John Armstrong, dec'd, and willed to his young son Frank, was damaged some \$500 including the injury to the furniture.

Many houses occupied by others than the owners suffered very greatly by the falling in of the doors, windows, plastering, etc.—doing immense damage to their fine carpets and furniture of all kinds.

The purlines, or heavy timbers at the ridge of roofs that support the rafters, were snapped in two in several instances.

The strong wooden bars that fastened the warehouse doors, in nearly every instance, were snapped in one, two, or three pieces.

Sixteen hundred (1600) lights of glass were broken in the Maysville cotton mills. Several stones pierced the roof, and broke the firewalls in two or three places.

From the best information we can gather, it will require some \$25,000 outlay to make immediate and pressing repairs. An immense amount of damage was done that will not be repaired for years. Several houses will hardly justify rebuilding. Many walls are sprung that will be keyed up with an S, or in some way strengthened for present purposes. Every hour develops damage in some shape or form not before observed—much of which can never be remedied.

The effect in Aberdeen and East Maysville was in proportion to that experienced here. The same scenes of terror were witnessed, similar agonizing screams of mothers for their children heard, and piercing cries of children for their parents. Windows were broken, walls sprung, door-bells rung, rocks and gravel hurled about, damage every where and on all sides.

The report of the explosion was heard for many miles in every direction—at Poplar Plains, 23 miles distant, on a steamboat 42 miles up the river, etc.

At Orangeburg, 7 miles off, china ware was shaken off the table. At John S. Wells,' 1 mile this side of Orangeburg, windows were broken. At Geo. L. Forman's 3 1/2 miles south from this, windows were broken and a boy thrown out of bed. Near Helena 12 miles distant, negroes were thrown out of bed. On the farm of Henry Walker, 1 3/4 miles over the hill back of the Magazine, windows were broken and shingles torn from the roof of his gardener's house. A stone was thrown through the roof of Wm. M. Hedrick's house, half a mile over the high hill. A stable door was burst in, and the stile splintered at Geo. Cox's, 1 1/2 miles below the Magazine.

A gentleman who was up at the time, and gives one of the most practical descriptions of the scene that we have heard, distinctly saw a large three-story warehouse vibrate about a foot, near thereof, during the general quaking produced by the explosion. This quaking must have lasted nearly half a minute.



Tuesday morning, 10 o'clock

We have just returned from a short walk around two or three squares. The click of the hammer may be heard in every house, and our city is a perfect bee-hive. Citizens have turned carpenters and doers-of-all-work, and are cheerfully trying to rise above their misfortunes and outgrow the immense damage done to all.

It is a curious sight, to observe windows filled with boards of all hues and colors, with signs, box-tops, fragments of awnings, new cotton, etc., etc.—to keep out the sun and rain. All the sash and glass in the city was taken up promptly, and the supply is very far short of the demand. Orders have been sent off for large supplies. The best feeling prevails among all classes, those who are least damaged patiently waiting for the most urgent damages to be first repaired. The ladies of the different Churches have turned out to assist in cleaning them up.

Ben Logan—an honest and very industrious negro man—lost nearly every thing, and yet we have not heard a more cheerful voice or seen more willing hands. He had 10 Hogs in pens about 200 feet from the magazine, 4 of which were killed, and the balance it was supposed had been blown up into the air and carried to “the place where all good hogs go.” Two of them were found this morning, and seemed to have had their natures changed while absent in parts unknown. When corn was offered them, they did not seem to know what it was or why it was given them.

We regret to observe a general disposition on the part of citizens to *over-estimate* the damage done. It is certainly bad enough as it is, without an effort to produce an impression that it is very much greater than is really true. Some of our citizens most experienced in building say the damage cannot exceed \$40,000; while others vary from that up to \$75,000 and \$100,000. The latter figure, we are now satisfied, is *too high* entirely.

Great efforts are making to discover the perpetrators, but so far without success.

P. S. Since the above was in type, M. D. W. Loomis, the owner of the powder destroyed, has offered \$500 Reward – in addition to the \$500 by the City and \$500 by the citizens, or \$1,500 in all – for the apprehension and conviction of the parties who fired the Magazine.



From the Eagle of Thursday, August 17

More about the Explosion

The powder contained in the exploded magazine – something over \$4,000 worth – belonged to M. D. W. Loomis of Cincinnati; and was manufactured by the Hazard Company. Mr. L offers \$500 reward for the arrest and conviction of those who fired the Magazine, in addition to the \$1000 previously offered by the City and citizens. As yet all efforts to ascertain the perpetrators of the outrage have failed. Some individuals, against whom suspicions were indulged, were proved to have been in no way connected with the horrible affair. Many circumstances are known which may aid greatly in the detection of the guilty persons.

An officer of the U.S. Army, visiting in our neighborhood, says this is doubtless the heaviest discharge of gunpowder that has ever taken place upon this continent. No similar disaster is remembered, in the world's history, where so little injury to life resulted amidst such immense and general danger.

Nearly every door in the city, and in Aberdeen and East Maysville, that fronted towards the Magazine, was burst open – the locks breaking, or the hinges and screws giving way – and in many cases large and tolerably strong doors of stores and dwellings, were shivered and splintered to pieces. Many doors were forced off and blown entirely across the rooms with considerable violence,

We have heard of only three persons who were upon the street at the instant of the explosion. Two gentlemen, who were standing at the north-west corner of Front and Market streets, were blown by the force of the concussion entirely across to the opposite corner, one of them rebounding into the middle of the street. The third referred to, who was blown from opposite the gate of Dr. Kemper's residence on Fourth street around to and down Market as far as the Baptist Church.

The family of Johnson Jackson, occupying the frame dwelling about 100 yards above the magazine, were so stunned by the explosion, that they had just recovered consciousness, 25 minutes afterwards, when persons reached the house to inquire as to any personal injuries – some forty stones, from ½ to 10 pounds weight, piercing the front of the house, but none of the family were harmed.

The whole body of water in the River was urged towards the Ohio shore, suddenly rising on the on that shore several feet. The steam ferryboat was lifted up so violently, that the switchman was afraid of an explosion.

We saw, in the ceiling of J. A. Bierbower's home, a stone, weighing some 20 lbs., which had fallen through the roof, and broken off the plastering and part of the lathing – immediately over the head of a little child sleeping in the bed beneath.

The door of Maj. Wm. B. Broadwell's house was thrown open with such violence as to break to pieces the cradle in which his infant was sleeping – forcing the little one through the bottom of the cradle, and yet without injury.

The plastering was forced off the ceiling immediately over the cradle in which one of the interesting infant-twins of Robert A. Cochran, at the residence of A. M. January, was lying. The mosquito bar saved the life of the child.

We could relate a hundred similar hair-breadth escapes. Indeed, we doubt if the history of the world furnishes a stronger instance of the special providence of God.

The City clock struck 2, and stopped in 5 minutes – the effect of the jar. More than 20 other pendulum-clocks were also stopped. There was, therefore, no difficulty in ascertaining the exact time of the explosion.

We understand that the damage to the Methodist E. Church South was ascertained, by an examination of the roof yesterday, to be much more serious than was supposed. It is thought that \$1,000 to \$1,200 will be required to repair it.

The roof of the Presbyterian Church was carefully examined this morning, and found to be but slightly damaged.

We regret to see so general a disposition to place a high estimate upon the loss our city has sustained. Actual repairs made, show that the outlay in many cases will be less than supposed – while in other cases, damage has been discovered to an increased extent. The glass will have to be bought elsewhere, and for that the money must be sent off. The balance of the outlay will be among our own citizens – giving employment to some who need it, and exchanging the values of labor and materials here at home. This somewhat relieves the serious ness of the situation.

The above text is all from a single page of the *Maysville Eagle*, published at the time. This *Extra* edition collected stores from several earlier editions of the *Eagle* that reported on the explosion. I should note that the editor of the *Eagle* in these days was noted Kentucky historian Lewis Collins. A big thanks to Jennifer Duplaga, Special Collections Administrator at the Kentucky Historical Society for finding me a copy of the this edition of the *Eagle* that I could read.

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