Oakland, NJ powder mills explosion, Sept 1901

Submitted by Tim Taugher

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EXPLOSION IN POWDER MILLS KILLED FIVE

Three Houses at the Oakland (N. J.) Works Were Blown Up.

Many Were Injured-Badly, and the Families in the Village Were Panic-stricken - Boiler First Exploded.

OAKLAND, N. J., Sept. 12. - Three explosions occurred at tht works of the american E. C. and Schultze Powder Company at this place at 1:30 this afternoon. Five persons were killed, two probably fatally injured, and many others badly hurt.

The first explosion was the blowing up of a boiler, which caused the two others. Smokeless powder is manufactured at the works, which are in charge of Capt. Money, the well-known pigeon shot. The cause of the boiler explosion is not known.

The dead are:

WILLIAM TITUS, forty years old, engineer in charge of the boiler.

ARTHUR CURRY, twenty-two years old, driver, Home, Newburg.

JOHN DUPONT, twenty-five years old, employed at Isaac's Hotel.

RICHARD VAN BLARCAN, twenty years old, mason.

HARRISON WEYBLE, twenty-five years old, driver.

Those fatally injured are:

BARTHOLOMEW BURNS, twenty-two years old, back broken.

ANDREW LASSENGER, twenty-one years old, back broken.

The less seriously injured were William Weatherworks, thirty-five years old, mixer; Abram McMonnies, forty years of age; Frederick Titus, thirty-five years old, brother of the engineer killed; Frederick Titus, Jr., son of the engineer killed; William Titus, son of the engineer killed; John Farrell, thirty-five years of age, roofer.

The dinner hour at the works is from 1 to 2 o'clock. The men killed and injured were eating dinner at the time. Dupont, one of the killed, had brought dinners to the works from the hotel. Among those he served was Engineer Titus. The engineer's brother and sons worked under him. Titus, Dupont, and the engineer's relatives were near the engine house, while Curry and Weyble were seated together not far away. The others were near the mixing house and the storage room. These and the engine house are all brick buildings.

The works had been shut down about a half hour, when the boiler exploded. It blew out the sides of the building, and killed and injured those near it. Within five seconds after the boiler exploded and while the sound was still ringing in the ear, there was a louder and sharper detonation, followed in less than a second by another. These were caused by the magazine and mixing houses going up. Which went up first is uncertain.

There was an instant panic at the village, but at the works there was perfect order. All who had time to do so threw themselves flat on their faces to avoid flying debris and to escape being knocked down by further explosions that were feared. When these did not come, the employescolly took their places to fight fire or to keep back the crowds. The fire fighters ran from building to building, putting out the flaming brands hurled out by the powder explosions. In doing this they took their lives in their hands, for a stray spark might have meant another explosion.

When this danager had been averted the dead and injured were cared for. The two men with broken backs were almost beyond hope. Those less seriously injured were scalded and burned. The Titus family were all scalded. Some others suffering from cuts and lacerations caused by being hit from flying bricks. Doctors were sent for from the village and near-by places.

Outside the grounds men, women, and children formed an excited mob. Those who found their relatives doing guard about the works were happy. Those whose relatives had been killed or were inside fighting the fire or caring for the injured rushed about, screaming and hysterical. It was a long time before news of a definitecharacter come out of the works. Meanwhile bits of information which filtererd out said that seven men were dead and as many more fatally hurt. It was not until the less hurt, bandaged and attended by friends, began to emerge that the true facts became known.

Mrs. Titus was informed early that her husband was dead and that some of her sons were hurt. She and her other five children formed a sad group as they waited to claim the three injured members and the body of the father.

The two men with broken backs were sent to the Paterson Hospital, while the others were taken to their homes. County Physician McBride of Paterson came here late in the afternoon and allowed the removal of the dead. He will order probably an inquest.

Dupont leaves a wife. Engineer Titus leaves a wife and eight children.

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