

THREE ARE HURT IN ACETYLENE BLOWUP

Two Women and One Man Injured
in \$25,000 Explosion at
Prest-O-Lite Plant.

FIREMEN'S WORK PERILOUS

Fight Flames While in Danger
From Debris Hurlled by Ex-
ploding Tanks.

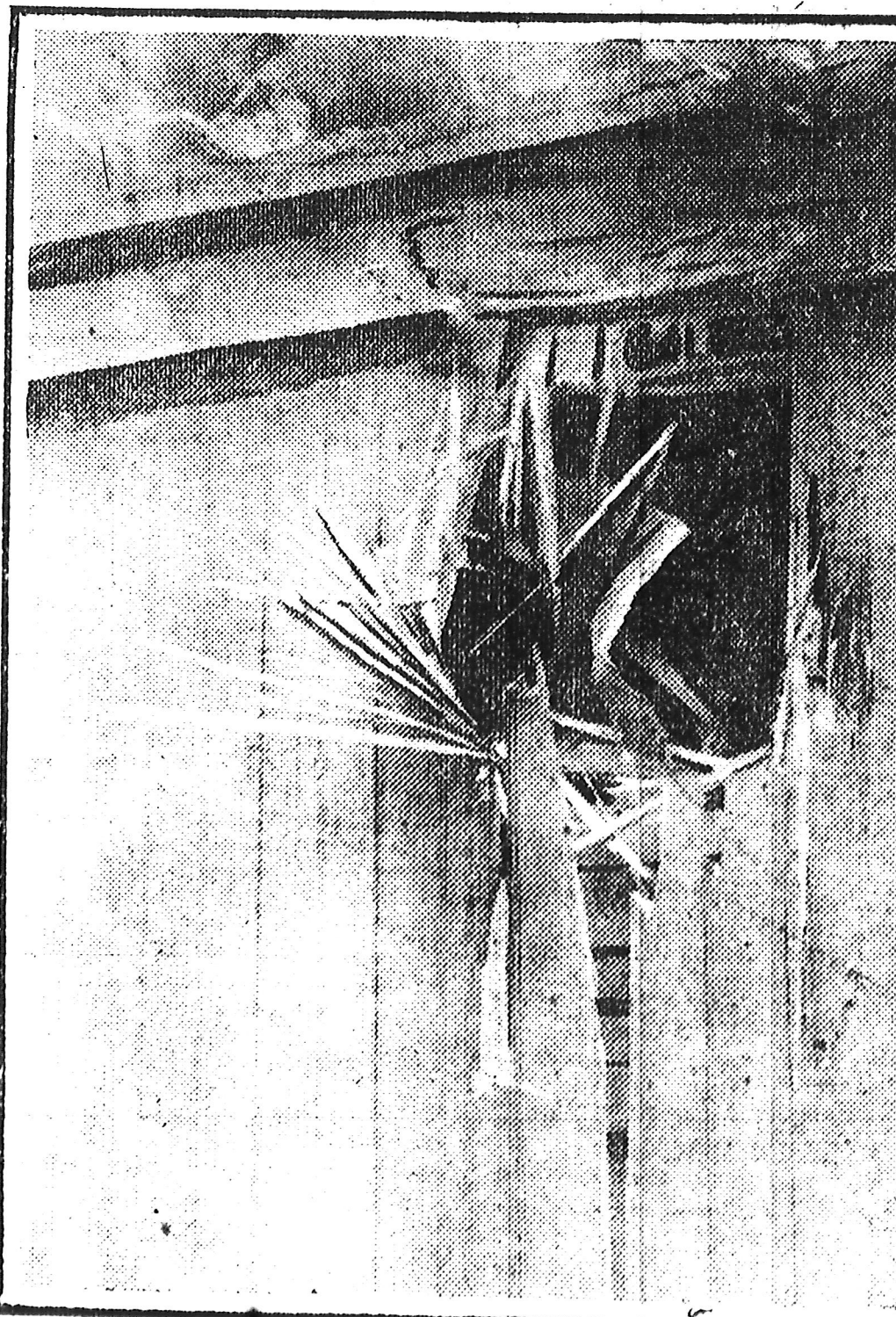
THE INJURED.

Miss Emma Brown, sprained ankle.
Miss Kate Metz, arm bruised and
slightly lacerated.
John Luckey, leg sprained and bruised,
face scorched, hand cut.

Three persons were slightly injured and loss of \$25,000 was entailed at the plant of the Prest-O-Lite Company at Pearl and New Jersey streets yesterday, when a fire or an explosion on the first floor of the plant set off 200 or 300 steel tanks that had been charged with acetylene gas. That no one was killed is a marvel to the police and firemen, who were on the scene a few minutes after the fire broke out, for, by the time the officers arrived, the terrific explosions were following in such quick succession that the reports were like a continuous roar, and jagged pieces of steel were flying in all directions.

It was practically impossible to obtain exact information as to the cause of the fire, the loss or the injuries to the employees. Almost without exception those who had been in charge of the plant either

Striking Scenes at the



HOLE BROKEN IN BOX CAR 150 FEET FROM BURNING BUILDING
METAL CAN HURLED BY FORCE OF EXPLOSION

it seemed certain they must have known. Some of them even declared that they had forgotten their own names, and one mis-stated his name.

Frank Sweet, who was in charge of the plant in the absence of Carl G. Fisher, at the head of the concern, said that the loss to the company would be about \$15,000, as near as he could estimate it. The building, owned by the Frederick Ostermeyer estate, was damaged about \$10,000. Officers of the company said they did not believe there was any insurance; that the unusual hazard made the rates practically prohibitive.

The fire started on the first floor, near a machine, by which the gas was compressed and forced into the small steel tanks, which are used mostly on automobiles for lighting purposes. Claude Hess, one of the employees, stated that the first blaze he saw—and he was near the place where it started—was in the neighborhood of a pipe leading from the compressing machine to the tank that was being filled. It was supposed that this tube or the tank leaked.

John Luckey, who proved to be lucky to get out with his life, stood near the machine when he was injured. He said that after the fire started he crawled to the place where he might turn the electric current off and thus stop the motor that drove the compressing machine. He was injured on this mission.

The two young women who were injured, Miss Kate Metz and Miss Emma Brown, sustained their injuries in their efforts to escape by way of the fire escape, which was no more than a vertical iron ladder. They were on the third floor of the building. Another young woman, Miss Mayme Clemens, was not injured, according to attaches of the plant.

Despite the fact that remaining within 200 feet of the building was dangerous, the police had to work continuously to keep the curious crowd back.

There was never a time during the course of the fire when the firemen were not in imminent danger of sacrificing their lives, but the men faced death with such bravery that Chief Coots was afterward moved to compliment them for their valor. By their heroic persistence the firemen succeeded in getting the fire under control in about half an hour.

EMPLOYEES IN DANGER.

Men and Women In Building Have Close Call for Lives.

Seven or eight of the twenty-five employees were on the first floor, a dozen more were on the second floor and five were on the third floor when the fire started at the Prest-O-Lite Company yesterday. The employees without exception were conversant with the dangerous conditions that surrounded them and this, probably, accounts for the fact that all escaped without serious injury.

The escape of those on the first floor was simple. They merely turned and ran for their lives. Several of the men on the second floor were compelled to resort to the use of a rope hoist, and thus to let themselves down on the Pearl street side of the building.

That all the occupants of the office on the third floor escaped is marvelous, however. In addition to the three young women, all of whom were employed in the office, Frank Sweet, manager of the concern; O. H. Skinner, a chemist; S. M. Paxton, a traveling salesman for the company, and W. H. Bass, a contractor and a customer of the concern, were on

moment in doing what he believed was his duty. In fact, it was necessary for me to warn the men several times that they were running too great risks and to order them away from the more dangerous positions. No, none of my men faltered about facing danger."

There was not a fireman on the job who did not risk his life every minute of the first half an hour of the fire, for during all that time the tanks of gas were exploding and jagged pieces of steel and other missiles were flying. The firemen crowded closer and closer to the doors and windows as they saw that the flames were diminishing. At times the white light from the terrific explosions within the building leaped almost into the very faces of the firemen, but they did not flinch. It was an occasion that called for great valor. The men arose to the occasion.

MAY DRIVE PLANT OUT.

Coots Would Have Prest-O-Lite Company on Edge of City.

Fire Chief Charles E. Coots and Building Inspector Thomas Winterrowd will confer early this week in reference to controlling the re-establishment of the charging plant of the Prest-O-Lite Company.

Fire Chief Coots believes that the nature of the business is too dangerous to life and property to permit a plant to be situated in the very heart of a populous district, as was the plant destroyed yesterday. Some time ago, the chief said, complaints were made against the plant, which then occupied a small frame building on Twenty-fifth street. Later these complaints ceased, but the chief did not know until a short time ago that the plant had been moved to Pearl and East streets.

"I had been afraid of trouble," said the chief, "for acetylene gas is very dangerous. As soon as I saw the general neighborhood in which the fire was raging today, I told my driver that the fire was at that Prest-O-Lite plant."

The chief and the building inspector will probably ask for a city ordinance, if this is necessary, to drive the charging plant to the outskirts of the city. The chief said yesterday that experience in other cities had been that plants of this general character were dangerous fire hazards.

LUCKEY STOPPED GAS FLOW.

Injured Man Shut Off Machinery and Prevented Further Explosion.

John Luckey's injuries at the Prest-O-Lite fire yesterday were due to his efforts to stop the compressing machine and thus to shut off the flow of gas following the instant when the first floor of the plant seemed to be enveloped in flames.

It all happened so quickly that Luckey, who was running the engine, hardly knew afterward what had transpired. He said that his first thought was to check the escape of gas by shutting down the motor which drove the machinery. He made a rush for the switch and fell over a can of gas. His leg was bruised, his hand was cut and his knee was sprained by the fall, but he managed to crawl to the switch and stop the electricity. Then, scrambling to his feet, the man escaped before the exploding of the highly charged tanks began.

Claude Hess, who believed that the fire might have started from a leak in a gas line, was working under Luckey



FIREMEN

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Watch Dog Overlooked

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As soon as he heard the commotion that followed the bursting forth of the flames Sweet rushed to the stairway, but was driven back by the flames. By the time he returned to the office Paxton had ripped a wire screening from the window that opened to the fire escape and assisted the young women to the ladder. How they succeeded in gaining the ladder was a marvel, and those who looked the situation over afterward pronounced them plucky girls indeed, for stepping from the window to the ladder would be a difficult task under ordinary circumstances even for a man accustomed to climbing about at dizzy heights.

COOTS COMMENDS HIS MEN.

Fire Chief Praises Subordinates for Valor In Face of Danger.

Instead of being compelled to force his men into "the bright face of danger" at the Prest-O-Lite fire yesterday, Fire Chief Charles E. Coots exercised himself most in keeping the men from venturing too far toward the blazing building while the acetylene tanks were bursting.

"If you were a fireman you would merely regard risking your life as a part of the business—as something that goes along with the job," said the chief yesterday evening. "But the men who fought that fire today were unusually brave. I was on the scene all the time. I did not see a single man falter for a

moment. For acetylene gas is very dangerous. As soon as I saw the general neighborhood in which the fire was raging today, I told my driver that the fire was at that Prest-O-Lite plant."

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Claude Hess, who believed that the fire might have started from a leak in a gas pipe, was working under Luckey learning the business for the purpose of taking a similar place at one of the company's branch plants at New York.

FIRE PROTECTION LACKING.

Prest-O-Lite Building Not Fitted for Such Industry, Officials Assert.

The whole interior of the building at 20 and 24 South East street, the home until yesterday of the tank-filling department of the Prest-O-Lite Company, was ruined.

The building was in no measure fire-proof, and the wooden interior, which was dry as tinder, was in no way protected against such a fire as occurred yesterday.

For a long time the building was occupied by a veterinary surgeon, who also conducted a college, where veterinary surgery was taught, and when it ceased to be used for this purpose there were few changes made for the accommodation of the dangerous business that was to occupy it.

City officials at the scene of the fire yesterday expressed themselves as surprised that the management of the company had established the office—the only department where women were employed—on the third floor of such a building.

RISKS LIFE FOR HORSE.

Drayman, Faithful to Animal in His Charge, Takes Long Chance.

A drayman named Young, employed by the Fry Transfer Company on Virginia avenue, risked his life at the Prest-O-Lite Company fire yesterday to save the horse he had been entrusted with—and finally succeeded.

Young's dray stood in the entrance to the building when the fire started. He

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OLD "JACK" GIVE

Watch Dog Overlooked and Perish

Old "Jack," a mongr formed an attachment watchman at the Prest plant, gave up his life in yesterday.

"Jack" was a strong f plant, but in their rush lives the men and wom overlooked the danger old dog. They never so of him until S. C. Ham at the concern, venture after the fire. He fo on his back with his feet up in the air. He was

DEBRIS STOPS

Before the city fire long on the Prest-O-Lite terday water stood kr corner of Pearl and East Hogue, city street comm the scene. He said th at this corner had been It was some time befo opened and the water w

COMPANY'S FUTURE

Manager to Do Noth Comes From C

Frank E. Sweet, man fated charging plant of Company, could make ment last night as to business here. The de plant came at the buste year. He immediately b in communication with with James Allison, pri the plant.

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FIREMEN WADED THROUGH A VERITABLE

tom of the iron ladder that served as a fire escape on the building. Tamm caught her, and in doing so he was thrown against the wall of the building and his hand was bruised and sprained. The drop from the bottom of the ladder injured neither of the other two young women.

BIG TANK KEPT COOL.

Firemen Protect Great Receptacle and Prevent Serious Explosion.

A stream of water that played for an hour on a great retaining tank of acetylene gas at the Prest-O-Lite fire yesterday was all that prevented the entire building from being blown into smithereens, and the fact that this stream was started on the big tank

gas and had been so floor for repairs, the assembling department

Acetylene gas, known one of the most volatile dangerous of all the handle, is generated and poured upon calcium the gas.

In front of the Prest plant on South East st a dozen big tanks filled elum carbide, but for who were fighting the proved to be waterpro the flames that would breaking of these tank practically impossible, water would only ha