

[McConnelsville Herald]

VICTIMS PERISH IN THE FLAMES!

Horrible Explosion! Gasoline Lets Loose!

*Lurid Flames Leap Up Into the Sky! Great Clouds of Smoke Shoot
Heavenward!*

*Men, Women and Children are burned until the flesh drops and the victims beg
for death to come to relieve their suffering.*

*The Charred Remains of a Man Burned Beyond Recognition are Found When
the flames abate, among the scraps of a dozen consumed automobiles.*

*And between the walls now crumbling and without roof, of what was a few hours
ago the Morgan County Garage.*

*The worst holocaust that ever visited the Village of McConnelsville comes
Sunday afternoon shortly after four o'clock.*

*Thousands of people fill the streets and stand helpless while the fire rages.
Physicians rush to the side of the victims to bind up and bandage and relieve the
suffering. For nearly two hours the flames refuse to abate.*

Sufferers are being removed on cots and in automobiles to physicians' offices or the hotels or to the home of friends. Suffering death, destruction, agony made an appalling scene never to be forgotten as the Sabbath evening sun was setting in the western sky.

From Monday's Daily [Herald]

Sunday morning and afternoon gave promise of a great day for McConnellsville. The Chautauqua was in session, people were in attendance from all parts of the county and from other counties and a splendid program was supplying the wants of a large crowd, which gathered in the village. Suddenly and at about 4 o'clock the crowd and the village was startled by a loud explosion, followed by the cry of fire and the ringing of the fire alarm. All became excitement and rush and in a moment hundreds – yes thousands of people hurried into the streets to discover what had happened and where the clouds of smoke which were rising over that part of the village surrounding the east end of the river bridge was resting on a pillar of fire underneath. As the crowd gathered the scene told above in the headlines met its view. Flames were pouring out through the roof of the building on the north side of Main Street, occupied by the Walker boys as a garage. In the remarkably short space of time the flames spread to the residence of Chas. L. Johnson, which stood immediately to the west of the garage building, and also to the property of E. W. Beckett, which adjoins the garage building on the east. These three buildings stood in close proximity to each other and it seemed impossible that either should be saved from total destruction.

Hazardous Work.

When the explosion occurred in the garage, there was a large quantity of gasoline and oil and like inflammable material stored there. Ten or a dozen automobiles, each containing a tank partially or wholly filled with gasoline, stood on the floor, while the dangerous condition within and the flames which from start shut off any entrance to the building, made it impossible for any of the cars to be removed and they were left to add their fuel to the flames which already seemed uncontrollable, and added to the hazard of attempting to save the adjoining buildings or their contents. The confusion and excitement which prevailed made it difficult to gain accurate information as to the cause of the disaster as well as to its results. Victims were said to be dying and wild rumors of death and destruction were passed from one to another throughout the great crowd that stood shocked and awestricken at the horrible disaster, just how horrible no one knew nor apparently could ascertain.

Flames Subdued

At last the fire brigade, the volunteers succeeded in subduing by the streams of water, which were kept pouring onto the roofs and walls and through the windows and openings from which the red flames belched forth like demons from the underworld. And then, when the fire had quit the truth – even more awful and more heart rending than the wild rumors had been became known.

The charred remains of a man burned beyond recognition, - in fact, burned until one would hardly know what it was that lay there burned and blacked – was taken out of the charred debris

of the garage building. By the watch and a few other articles found near the body, it was ascertained that it was Ed Sheets, an employee of the Walker boys, who had thus met his death in the flames. The remains were taken to the undertaking establishment of C. E. Fisher & Co.

The Victims

Other persons who were in the building at the time of the explosion and all of whom were seriously injured, were Frank Walker and Chester Walker, owners and managers of the garage, Mr. and Mrs. Will Chappelear, managers of a store at Shinn, O., Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Rardin and child Brooksie of Pennsville, Mr. Herman Hook of Stockport, Willie Lighthizer, son of Robert Lighthizer of the east side, Ernest Ridgley, driver at the garage, Frank Bartlett, nephew of Mr. Ned Bartlett of Malta, Delmar Roberts, son of Mrs. Chas Hughes of Malta.

The Explosion

When the explosion of gasoline, which was the cause of the terrible conditions following, occurred, Chester Walker, Frank Walker and Edward Sheets were engaged in emptying a drum of gasoline into an underground storage tank, and other work about the automobiles stored in the building or brought there to have their tanks filled with gasoline. Herman Hook was inside the building for some purpose connected with his motor cycle which he had with him. The Rardin family and the Chappelear family, who had come to town together in a car belonging to Mr. Chappelear had just run their car into the garage to get their tank filled. Mr. Rardin was standing near the car, while the women and the child were sitting in the car and Mr. Sheets was working on their car, when Chester Walker drove in with a drum of gasoline, bringing it from Chesterhill. Sheets left the Chappelear car to assist the Walker boys and Ridgley in emptying the drum into a tank kept for storing gasoline. When the plug was removed so as to give vent to aid in emptying the drum, a gas began to make its escape from the drum, pouring forth in an alarming force and violence and which immediately spread through the room. Mr. Sheets and the Walker boys observed the danger and all immediately undertook to correct the dangerous condition by shutting off the escaping gas, and so were engaged [when] the gas which had escaped into the room came in contact with a lighted match or a coal of fire in the forge in the rear end of the building, and then the walls shook, the bodies were hurled through the doors and openings to the outside – their clothing burned, their hands and arms and face and bodies burned and the agony and torture which in many cases was soon to be relieved by death, followed.

Two little boys, Frankie Bartlett and Carl Roberts were passing the building at the time of the explosion, and were near enough to receive serious burns and injuries, the result of which as in many of the other cases cannot be foretold at this writing. It was an awful tragedy. Words cannot describe with sufficient vividness the events which, in so short a time has brought so much agony to our little village. The next few hours may bring more deaths, more details of the horror – more to appall. None can yet measure all the results of this most serious accident. As more of the results are learned the worse it all seems to be.

Two Brothers Die

As we write this article the news is flashed to our office that Frank Walker has passed away. But a few moments later, and again the wire brings the news that Chester Walker is also dead, dead by the side of his brother. These two young men of sterling character, honest, industrious, capable business men, who in a few short years built up a highly successful business, sons of Mr. Harry Walker and Hattie Travis Walker, have their lives snapped out in the twinkling of an eye. The hours of the night are passing. Herman Hook lies at the home of Esther Buton. His father and mother, Henry Hook and wife, of Stockport, are by his bedside. There are burns over the entire face, head, arms and body except one limb. Will he recover? This is the question that friends and relatives are awaiting to have answered.

Mr. Rardin, with his hands burned, but otherwise not seriously injured, and his wife whose burns extend all over the body and who has also received internal injuries, by reason of which, as we write she is vomiting blood, while her physician and attendants anxiously await results, are both lodged at the Sanitarium on Kennebec. Mrs. Chappellear, whose clothing was all burned from her body, her head, face and hair scorched and blackened and the flesh from her body is being held intact by bands and bandages while she suffers intense pain, has been taken to the home of Delaney Sillery, where all is being done that can be to relieve her suffering. Her condition, however, is most serious. There is little evidence of anything to inspire hope, little to give promise of recovery.

At the Kennebec Hotel lies the Lighthizer boy, the seriousness of whose injuries can hardly be told at this time.

Ernest Ridgley is on a bed of suffering at his home in upper Malta. His burns encompass the trunk of his body and his condition would seem almost if not quite hopeless. He was standing near the front door when the explosion occurred. Frankie Bartlett was first taken to the home of Robert Savage the burns over the head, face, chest, arms and limbs were treated, and he was afterwards removed to his home in Malta, and probably has a chance to recover, although he is badly hurt and suffering intensely. He is a nephew of Ned Bartlett and was adopted by him. Mr. Chappellear is also at the home of Mrs. Sillery and his injuries, while very bad indeed, are not thought to be serious as those of his wife. The little Rardin child who was with its parents is practically uninjured. How it escaped no one can account for.

Ralph Walker's Account

Ralph Walker, younger brother of Chester and Frank Walker, who were so badly injured in the explosion, gives an account to the Herald of the accident as follows:

He had just left the garage long enough before the accident occurred to walk across the bridge into Malta with some companions. When the explosion occurred he looked back and saw the great smoke and knew instantly it meant an explosion at the garage. Someone came flying by in an automobile and he jumped on the running board and rode to the scene immediately. He states that his two brothers had been blown from the building, Chester clear across the street to the curbing and Frank nearly across. That Frank immediately jumped to his feet and started to run. Chester Walker was blown almost to the feet of Dr. Ray who was standing out on the street opposite the garage. Help was at hand at once and they were taken into the Franklin hotel. Frank

Walker's wife, who, with her sisters had constituted a little company at dinner guests of Mrs. Ed Dunnington, reached her husband immediately, and helped as they carried him in the hotel.

When Ralph was asked if he knew how the accident occurred he replied –“I think I know almost exactly.”

The Standard Oil Company here had run out of gasoline, and at this Chautauqua season the garage was needing a supply. Chester Walker therefore had gone to Chesterhill and procured a drum of high pressure gasoline. When this was brought in, they were in the act of pouring it into an underground tank, when the explosion occurred. It is Ralph's theory that some one – outsider, must have used a match for otherwise the accident never could have happened, for the garage management strictly forbids matches or cigars in the building, and use only electric lights and flash lights about their work. When asked about who were in the garage when he left it a few minutes before the accident, Ralph replied: “Chester and Frank, Ed Sheets, Ernest Ridgley. Ridgley ran clear across the bridge to the doctors in Malta with his clothing burning.” Ralph did not know about the Chappelars and Rardins being there. As to the various drivers employed there: Howard Price was out driving a car, Byron Whipple had just returned and was backing a car about to enter the building. The top of the car he was driving was set on fire by the explosion. Harry Triplett and Virgil Lochary were out driving.

It was Ralph Walker who found the remains of poor Sheets. Sheets was lying with his head against the counter and the head bruised or crushed so, that Walker thinks the force of the explosion killed or stunned him before the body was burned as it was, beyond recognition. Ralph was able to identify Sheets by his watch, a bunch of keys, and a little wrench which he found just lying under the body. The parents of the Walker brothers, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Walker, had just left the garage in their car and were up the street as far as Boxell's Grocery when the accident occurred.

In reply to what cars were lost in the blaze Ralph replied: A new Studebaker Six, \$1400; a new Studebaker Four, \$1000; an old model Overland, \$450; James Connor's Peerless, \$2000; three new Ford cars, \$400 each; a Ford belonging to Mr. Crooks of Marietta, \$400; one and perhaps two Harley-Davidson motor cycles, valued at \$250 each. Probably there were one or two more Fords in the garage, but not sure. There was hundreds of dollars worth of tires, three tanks of oil and most complete equipment of furniture, machinery, tools and supplies.

The above is Ralph Walker's account. His theory as to the cause of the explosion being the igniting of a match would seem corroborated by Frankie Bartlett's account: That the little boys had stopped in when they were about to empty the drum of gasoline, and that Sheets called out: “Look out! Be careful about matches there!”

Death of Frankie Bartlett

LATER-10:30 p.m. Sunday.

Frankie Bartlett has just breathed his last. He suffered a relapse about 9 o'clock and before attending physician could reach his bedside this little ten year old boy was no more.

Notes.

Chas. Fisher was the first to reach Chester Walker after the accident. Mr. Fisher was standing near the curb in front of his undertaking establishment when, the explosion took place and in the midst of a burst of flames he saw two men running and staggering across the street. Mr. Fisher's first thought was to get a blanket. He and Chas. Havener seized laprobes and rushed across the street, covering each of the Walker boys with a robe in their endeavors to put out the fire.

Dr. Stull and James Rothrock were seated in front of Hotel Franklin, and in tearing the burning clothing from Frank Walker, Dr. Stull had both hands badly burned.

Commissioner McInturf was in the hotel office when the explosion took place and hurried to the aid of the injured men. Others who witnessed the explosion were Geo. Pastesius, Elmer Taylor, Fos Patterson and Court Savage, John Baker, Hal Bell, Mr. and Mrs. Chas. Devitt of Pennsville, Chas. Bebb and his guest F. A. Speicher.

Delmar Roberts and Herbert Ross had run from the building at the first menacing sound of the escaping and escaped unhurt. They heard Sheets last cry of warning.

Mrs. Chappellear lost a purse containing \$50.

Ernest Ridgley ran clear across the bridge and to Dr. Humphrey's office with his clothing blazing.

Some who saw the victims blown from or running from the building described them as living torches, others as fire brands of living flesh. Both descriptions were all too true.

Chester Travis Walker, born Dec. 1, 1885, died Aug. 16, 1914, aged 28 years.

Frank Bruce Walker, born March 21, 1887, died August 16, 1914, aged 26 years. Married Miss Helen Dunnington in February 1912.

The brothers went into business in 1910.

The Attending Physicians.

The cases were under the care of the following physicians respectively: - Chester Walker and Frank Walker, by Dr. J. F. Leeper and Dr. G. E. Northrup.

Frankie Bartlett by Dr. J. E. Brown.

Ernest Ridgley by Dr. Lee Humphrey.

Mr. and Mrs. Chappellear by Dr. W. D. Mercer.

Mr. and Mrs. Rardin by Dr. Clyde Leeper.

Herman Hook by Dr. James Ball Naylor.

Willie Lighthizer by Dr. Day of Waynesville and Dr. F. W. Jewett.

The Latest

3 o'clock a.m. Monday-

The Herald reporter has made a personal visit to learn the condition of the victims of the accident and were met at the door by the nurses and attendants with the following reports:

Ernest Ridgley, resting fairly comfortable.

Mr. and Mrs. Chappellear were resting quietly, the physician leaving at 2 o'clock.

Willie Lighthizer resting very quietly.

At Mrs. Buton's Mr. V. A. Van Horn reported that young Hook will not live an hour. We met Dr. Naylor who confirmed the report concerning Hook.

From Rocky Glen Sanitarium the report concerning Mrs. Rardin is that she is getting along as well as could be expected.

3:15 a.m. – Herman Hook is dead.