

Fire followed the explosion so quickly as to seem practically simultaneous with it. The explosion shook the immense structure to its foundations, and was heard several squares from the capitol. It occurred in a small room tightly inclosed by heavy stone walls in the subterranean basement immediately below the main entrance to the old capitol building.

In this room was a 500-light gas meter (which was fed by a four-inch main. Very little was used in that part of the building, but at the time of the explosion the gas had not been turned off at the meter. The meter itself was wrecked, and the gas pouring from the main caught fire.

The flames originated from the explosion darted up the shaft of the elevator, which had been completely destroyed by the force of the explosion, and communicated with the record-room of the supreme court, the office of the marshal of the court and the supreme court library. Before the flames could be subdued the priceless documents in the record room had been almost totally destroyed and serious damage had been done in the marshal's office, and some minor rooms in the immediate vicinity.

The library of the supreme court, located immediately beneath the supreme courtroom, was badly damaged by fire, smoke and water, practically destroying the great collection of law reference books.

The library contains about 20,000 volumes and was used not only by the justices of the supreme court, but by members of Congress and lawyers practicing before the supreme court. Mr. Justice Harlan said tonight that the library was very valuable. Many of the works it contained would, he thought, be difficult to replace.

Librarian Clarke, after a cursory examination necessarily made by the light of lanterns, expressed the opinion that many of the books could be saved, although they had been drenched by water for two hours or more after the explosion occurred.

The most serious damage, in the opinion of the justices of the supreme court, is to the records stored in the sub-basement. These included all of the records of cases and opinions rendered by the fathers of judiciary of the government. Apparently, the documents in this room are either totally destroyed or so badly damaged by fire and water as to be useless. Justice Harlan said that while the loss of the records was irreparable, it was fortunate that the later records of the court, which are kept in the office of the clerk on the main floor, were not injured. As documents for reference at this time and later, Justice Harlan thought these were of far greater value than the records destroyed. Fortunately the clerk's office was not in the least damaged by fire, and the explosion did no damage in it except to blow one window out.

Mr. James McKennay, clerk of the supreme court, expressed the hope after making an examination of the old room, that some, at least, of the documents, priceless from the view point of the historian, could be saved. Tonight, however, owing to the inadequate lighting facilities in that portion of the building where the explosion and fire occurred, it was impossible for him to make an intelligent or thorough investigation of the damage. The supreme courtroom was damaged principally by water and smoke, the fire not reaching that point. Adjoining the courtroom, however, both the marshal's office and the Senate barber shop furnished food for the flames.

While many theories are offered as to the cause of the explosion, it seems beyond doubt to have been due to escaping gas. At seven minutes after 5, Lieut Nelson of the capitol police, de-

tected an odor of gas from the corridor adjoining the supreme courtroom. Not being able to locate it, he proceeded to statutory hall—the old hall of the House of Representatives, thinking the gas might be escaping from a burner in that vicinity. While he was endeavoring to locate the escape of the gas the explosion occurred.

Only a few persons, principally officers of the capitol police, were in the building at the time, but several of them had narrow escapes. Before the fire department, which responded to an alarm sent in by a policeman, three squares from the capitol, had arrived, C. P. Gliem, chief electrician of the capitol, and H. W. Taylor, chief engineer of the House side, had a stream playing into the supreme court record-room, which by that time was a roaring furnace.

Within a few minutes after the arrival of the fire department the flames were under control, although as a precautionary measure streams were poured into the marshal's office, the library and the subterranean basement for two hours. The firemen were unable, however, for a considerable time, to extinguish the flame of gas which shot out of the four-inch main in the meter room. From this main the fire swept through an orifice in the basement floor caused by the explosion and attacked the consultation room of the supreme court justices on the main floor. Some damage was done to the furniture and fittings of this room, but it was inconsiderable as compared with that done elsewhere. The robing room of the justices was practically undamaged.

It was evident that the fire could not be extinguished until the gas from the main was cut off. That this might be accomplished the firemen turned two streams upon the main, choking the flow of gas and at the same time cooling the pipe. Electrician Gliem, braving the intense heat, entered the meter room and cut off the gas at the floor valve of the main.

Throughout the lower central portion of the old capitol building doors, windows and fittings in committee rooms, and other apartments are badly damaged. Just north of the crypt an archway almost over the meter room was completely blown out and great masses of masonry torn from the floor were hurled to the ceiling with such force as to burst the stone and plaster of the walls above. Ponderous flagstones were wrenched from their resting places and throughout the corridors the frescoing on the ceilings and walls of the corridors were utterly ruined. No damage was done to the main foundations of the building as these are of solid masonry deeply embedded and twenty-five feet four inches thick.

The electric lighting apparatus, including dynamos, boilers and wirings was not damaged. In order to enable the firemen to work without peril from live wires, Electrician Gliem cut off the current from all wires except one circuit, which lighted the lower western part of the building. Within thirty feet of the scene of the explosion a solitary incandescent lamp marking the exact center of the capitol structure and hanging directly over the bier in which it was proposed to lay the remains of George Washington, burned brightly.

Among the losses which will be most sincerely regretted are those of busts of Chief Justice Marshall and other distinguished members of the Supreme court, which were arranged on small pedestals about the Supreme court chamber. In the smoke and ruin which followed the explosion these valuable works of art were either badly damaged or wholly destroyed, and with their destruction the country has suffered an irreparable loss. Many of them have been treasured as exhibits in the

Supreme court chamber for half a century.

The capitol building has been damaged a number of times before by fire, but it is believed that tonight's fire will prove to be the most disastrous in the history of the building. On two occasions prior to this, fires have been

caused by explosions of gas. Seventeen years ago a large amount of damage was done to the same part of the building by an explosion of this kind, and in 1876 there was an explosion of gas that killed two men and came near killing others.

No intelligent estimate of the money lost by the explosion and fire yet can be made. In the opinion of Capitol officials and mechanics who examined the structure tonight, the loss will reach probably \$200,000 to the building. The loss on the library and records as stated above, can scarcely be estimated in dollars and cents. A million dollars could not replace them because of many of them, no duplicates are in existence.

Arrangements were completed tonight by Librarian Clark of the Supreme court and Col. Richard Bright, sergeant-at-arms of the Senate, by which the sittings of the Supreme court will not be interrupted. The court will convene tomorrow in the room of the Senate committee on District of Columbia, one of the most spacious rooms in the capitol. How long the sessions of the court will be held there will be determined by the justices themselves.

THE GEM OF THE ROCKIES.

Paris, Bear Lake Co., Ida.,

October 29, 1898.

A trip through this part of the country at this season of the year is not only interesting but very instructive to one who reads as he runs, or, rather, rides. There is not much to be seen though in a midnight ride from Cache Valley from 11 p. m. till one nears Soda Springs at 7 a. m. the following morning. Between this place and Montpeller a large force of men are making good the railroad track where the great wreck took place a short time ago, and soon nothing will be seen or known of this unfortunate affair, but in the families of the dead engineers, firemen, the brakeman and the runaway conductor, who, I am told, when he saw what was the result of criminally disobeying orders gathered up his grip and fled. No one at present knows where.

The Oregon Short Line is doing a heavier freight business than ever before, train after train all day long with thirty or forty heavily loaded cars show that this company has all the work it can possibly do.

Soda Springs has a grand money chance for some man who will erect a flour mill. Just think of it! At this tail end of the nineteenth century the farmers and in fact everybody have to go to mill thirty miles to Montpeller before they can yet a grist ground into flour. Besides Soda Springs there is also the people of Gentile Valley, Nounan Valley and Portneuf have all to go thus far before they can convert their wheat into flour, taking two days for man and team and sixty miles travel to get bread. There is a chance to make money and lots of it. A roller mill at Soda Springs would be central for all and would find work nearly all the year.

On arriving at Montpeller at 8:30 a. m. Jack Frost had the town under his grasp. The sidewalks were an inch deep with frost. It was just after a storm, but all is very pleasant now.

In traveling through the towns of Paris, Montpeller, Ovid, Bennington and Georgetown, in Northern Bear Lake county, one sees that the farmers have been prospered more the past year than in any since this valley has been settled. Grain has been raised in