

THE MINNEAPOLIS DISASTER

MANY LIVES LOST AND MUCH PROPERTY DESTROYED.

THE SHOCK OF THE EXPLOSION FIFT MILES AWAY—SEARCHING THE RUINS FOR THE DEAD—CHARRED REMAINS DISCOVERED BURNED BEYOND RECOGNITION—STATEMENT BY ONE OF THE SURVIVORS—THE LOSSES AND INSURANCE.

Special Dispatch to the New York Times.

St. Paul, May 4.—Late advices from Minneapolis to the *Pioneer-Press* give further details of the effects of the terrible explosion in the Washburn and other flour mills there last night. The burning shingles and tarred paper were borne as far as this city in six minutes after the explosion, which was heard distinctly in two distinct reverberations, although an earthquake had occurred. The disaster occurred just after the day force had left the mills, and the smaller night force was on duty. The most intelligent estimates place the dead at 17, of whom 14 were in the Washburn Mill. Had the explosion occurred earlier in the day the slaughter would have been terrific. To-day has been devoted mainly to a search in the ruins for the dead. Daylight brought a fuller realization of the destructive force of the explosion. The firemen spent all night in pouring streams of water into the burning débris which marks the scene of the disaster. Scarcely one stone stands upon another as it was laid in the big Washburn Mill, and the chaotic pile of huge limestone rocks is interwoven with shivered timbers, shafts, and broken machinery, through which pours streams of water. The destruction of the Humboldt and Diamond Mills is even more complete. The fire-scared walls of the Pettit, Smith, and Galaxy Mills stand stark naked, burned clean of their contents. The north wall of the Pettit Mill is cracked and seared, and leans out from the plumb. It is liable to fall at any moment. The intense heat which prevailed will necessitate the rebuilding of every part of these mills. Besides the six mills enumerated, the destruction extends to the Mill Company's elevator and Pettit & Robinson's lumber-yard, with 1,000,000 feet of lumber.

The total loss is now placed at \$1,000,000, or about \$500,000 less than at first supposed. The insurance on all the property destroyed in home and foreign companies will reach nearly \$550,000.

Late this afternoon seven bodies had been taken out of the ruins, and it was believed the loss would not exceed the number named last night. The first body taken from the ruins was taken out last night. It was blackened and charred beyond recognition. The skull is torn entirely away and only the teeth of the lower jaw remain. All of the head, arms, and legs are gone, and the ghastly trunk has little semblance of man. No remnant of his clothing is left to identify him, and who he was will probably never be known. This morning about 7 o'clock a body was found lying on the top of the ruins of the Washburn Mill. The hands, feet, and head were burned away, but there remained on the charred trunk of the body a cheap calico shirt. Mr. James and other employees of the mill identify the remains as those of Henry Hicks. Other bodies and mutilated fragments were taken out during the day.

It is the theory of Mr. J. A. Christian, the head of the firm operating the big mill, that the fire originated in the stones from flour dust, that a case was created which filled the elevators and every part of the mill, and the explosion followed. The theory is also advanced that the fire originated from a lantern being lowered in the wheat bin where wheat gas had been generated. An incipient fire generated by the flour dust gas occurred in the big mill some months ago and was extinguished without serious injury. The following are extracts from the statements of David Day, an employe in Pettit & Robinson's mill:

"I went down to the mill about 6 o'clock, as usual, and had looked the building over and sat down on a desk in the front office, which faces the Washburn Mill. The first I knew I was lifted out of my chair and hurled violently against the stone wall of the mill, and the desk after me. I had but fairly gained my feet and reached the side window when I was thrown back again by the same kind of leverage, and then the office was full of flying and falling débris. I did not hear any noise at all, not so loud as the snap of a fire-cracker even, and, of course, could not have any idea of what the matter was. Though stunned a little, I did not lose my senses, but scrambled back to the side window, knowing that if the roof and upper floors were coming down I should be safer in the window, as the walls are at least three feet thick. Although they are the best mill walls on the canal, they were looking like a cradle. The sash was gone, and I looked out of the front window and saw that the big mill was gone. The canal was full of stones and stuff, and the place where it stood a mass of flame, and the elevator was on fire from top to bottom. The falling of the walls into the canal flooded the packing-floor of our mill, and the water was several inches deep until it ran off. It seemed as if a sheet of flame had been blown through the mill igniting only light stuff. The flames were roaring overhead, and I looked up to find the whole mill above me was as full of fire as the walls would hold, and as I knew I could not do anything, I left the mill. I don't believe it possible that a soul could have escaped from the big mill, as it was all blown to pieces and all on fire in an instant. I can't give any opinion as to the cause of the explosion, but doubt if it was caused by the dust from the middlings purifier."

All the mills in the place are working to-day as usual and the proprietors report that the burned mills will be promptly rebuilt, many of them in time for the new wheat crop. There will possibly be a question of the payment of insurance, as the mills were destroyed by explosion instead of fire.

The flouring mills involved in the disaster form a group which comprises the heaviest concerns in the State. Chief among them were the two Washburn mills, the property of ex-Gov. C. C. Washburn, of Wisconsin, of which the one in which the explosion occurred was the largest flouring mill in the country, and the largest but one in the world. It was built in 1876, included 12 runs of stone, and was worth \$200,000. The following is a list of the mills destroyed, with the number of runs of stone in each: Washburn 6, 42 runs; Galaxy, 12 runs; Hennepin, or Diamond, 6 Co.'s; Humboldt, 6 runs; Pettit, Robinson & Co.'s, 15 runs; Zenith, 6 runs.

The Washburn Mill was operated by J. A. Christian & Co.; Humboldt, by Ball, Newton & Co.; Hennepin, by Burton, Haywood & Co.; Galaxy, by Cahill, Ankeny & Co.; Zenith, by Day, Rollins & Co., and Pettit, Robinson & Co.'s by themselves. In addition to these mills, there were numerous other buildings destroyed by fire, including a large elevator and planing-mill.