

JUSTICE TO DEAD—CHARITY FOR LIVING

CORONER'S JURY HEARS STORIES OF WITNESSES

Explosion of Cafe Is Reviewed

Depositions of Injured Will Be Taken Today and Inquest Resumed Monday—Benefit Planned for Sufferers

- CORONER'S JURY**
- W. F. Ball, proprietor pool room.
 - M. A. Hamburger, Hamburger store.
 - E. S. Butterworth.
 - Harry Dean, druggist.
 - Martin Neuner, Out West Publishing company.
 - J. M. McClellan, druggist.
 - L. Christopher, candy manufacturer.
 - S. Nordlinger, jeweler.
 - H. Jevne, merchant.

Nine men, bound by the most sacred oath the state has to offer, the oath of duty toward the dead, are discussing the evidence in the inquest over the bodies of the victims of the explosion and disaster at the Cressaty restaurant last Wednesday morning, and the entire city is awaiting the report of that jury which will determine the responsibility of the disaster.

The jury, selected by Deputy Coroner Jack Adams, is composed of some of the best known business men of Los Angeles, Moses Hamburger of the People's Store, H. Jevne, the wholesale and retail grocer, S. Nordlinger, jeweler; Harry G. Dean, druggist; L. J. Christopher, and others of like standing who are known throughout the state as men of honesty and business integrity.

These men met yesterday in the parlors of the Bresee undertaking establishment to investigate the cause of the disaster. All through a weary, gloomy day, neglecting their business and calls of duty, they listened as witness after witness told the details of the tragedy. In the next room were the bodies of the victims of the explosion. Poor little Lavonne Meyers, the youngest victim of the tragedy, rested side by side with Mrs. Annie Crawford, the eldest; while next to them were the bodies of John Mains and Jack Fuentes, whose lives had been crushed out.

Many Witnesses Examined

The jurors saw those bodies yesterday and their attention to the detailed evidence was painfully severe at times. At the close of the session nearly two score witnesses had been examined, while ten others remained in the witness room and a dozen more subpoenaed for the occasion were moaning in agony in various hospitals. Between today and tomorrow afternoon, when the investigation will be resumed, each one of those stricken witnesses will be examined and their depositions taken to assist in the investigation. The others will also be compelled to undergo the searching inquiry, and it may be Tuesday before a verdict fixing the responsibility of the accident is returned.

In the meantime little Lavonne Meyers will have been placed in her grave, the funerals of Mrs. Crawford, John Mains and J. M. C. Fuentes will have been held, and new names may have been added to that list of dead.

Among the chief witnesses of the inquisition yesterday were Max E. Rotman, an employe of the gas company who had served with them for less than three weeks, and who was standing within three feet of Foreman Blumenthal when the explosion occurred, Patrolman Billy Matuskawiz of the Spring street squad, Miss Rae Callish, cashier of the Cressaty restaurant, and Fire Chief Lips.

Rotman Tells Story

Rotman was the only man who could testify accurately as to what had been done by the gas men, and even he could not tell of the cause of the explosion.

Here is his story, the first account to be published from the viewpoint of the employes of the gas company, from the man who alone knew in what condition the gas pipes were.

"I was hired by the Los Angeles Gas company on January 26," testified Rotman. "Before that time I had been employed with the gas companies of Brooklyn for three years or more and was thoroughly acquainted with the gas business."

"On the morning of the 13th, the day of the explosion, I was about to leave the gas company's office at 10:45 o'clock when I met Foreman Charlie Blumenthal on the steps of the office building. I was mounting my wheel when he called to me and told me to hurry down to the Cressaty restaurant, that there was trouble there with the pipes and that I must hurry to assist Holderman who had already been sent there to investigate."

"I jumped on my wheel and was riding away when Blumenthal called me back and told me that I must take my soap along in order to putty the leaks immediately, and so I went back and got the soap and some tools. I then hurried to the place and asked for Holderman. They couldn't tell me where he was, so I walked on through the restaurant to the kitchen and found him examining the pipes. I asked him if he had looked at the meter and he told me that he had taken the meter out and that he wanted to look for the gas man in order to draw out the gas and shut off the flow into the restaurant pipes while he fixed the leaks."

"About that time we walked outside and there we found Foreman Blumenthal, who had come down to the restaurant to make a personal investigation. He was talking to Police Commissioner Lewis, who was the agent of the building. Holderman asked Blumenthal if there was a manhole in the vicinity so that he could get at the gas man, and Blumenthal said he didn't know of any."

Thought Head Was Torn Off
"Blumenthal then ordered me to hurry back to the office and get his electric flash and I returned in a very short time with the light and gave it to Blumenthal. He walked ahead with Holderman and the two entered the restaurant through the kitchen door, while I stopped to stand my bicycle

up against the wall on the outside, I walked after them then and I had hardly gone inside the kitchen door when the explosion came. I was thrown down and stunned, but I fought my way to safety and helped drag several of the men and women from the debris. I did not know anything about the explosion other than I thought my head had been torn off."

Patrolman Billy Matuskawiz, who walks Spring street, was another important witness. Matuskawiz was one of the first men at the wreck immediately following the explosion. While there he became engaged in an altercation with Sergeant Craig and has preferred charges against his superior officer, whom he alleges struck him with his club during the excitement.

"I always walk through the alley known as Center place," testified the officer. "On the morning of the 13th as I walked by the rear entrance of



EVAN BALDWIN OF THE MISSION THEATER, WHO WILL APPEAR AT BENEFIT



PHILADELPHIA JACK O'BRIEN, WHO WILL AID VICTIMS



OFFICER BILLY MATUSKIWIZ, AN IMPORTANT WITNESS



HENRY STOCKBRIDGE OF THE BURSBANK, WHO WILL ACT FOR CHARITY



H. G. DEAN, INQUEST JUROR



MISS FLORENCE STONE OF THE AUDITORIUM, TO APPEAR AT BENEFIT



FIRE CHIEF LIPS, CALLED TO TESTIFY AS AN EXPERT



M. A. HAMBURGER, JUROR

shock of amputation of one of his legs and from his terrible injuries. The two men are the only ones who can explain and it is doubtful whether they know any more about the catastrophe than those on the outside.

Both went into the building not fifteen steps ahead of Rotman, who followed so closely that if either had lit a match he would have seen it. The explosion struck them with its full force, dazing them. They were the experts and it is to them that the jurymen of the inquest are looking for an explanation. Their depositions will be taken today and read at the investigation tomorrow afternoon and then for the first time the public will know what happened in that awful instant back in the pantry of the restaurant where the force of gas was turned loose.

Deputy Coroner Jack Adams, besides conducting most of the inquest in arranging witnesses and securing evidence, was one of the chief witnesses at yesterday's investigation.

Adams' Version of Affair
"I was standing near Second and Main streets when the explosion occurred," said Adams. "I ran to the place and assisted in taking the bodies out. The back wall of the place had fallen and I found the bodies of Holderman and Blumenthal close together near the wall of the pantry. Both were alive, but badly injured. Holderman, from his position, had evidently been walking in front of Blumenthal



POLICE COMMISSIONER H. S. LEWIS

when the explosion occurred. I saw where he had lain after he was taken out and he was standing in the middle of the pantry when thrown against the wall by the shock. Blumenthal was unconscious when we took him out and he made no statement. From his position one would have judged that he had been under the floor at the time of the explosion, for the flooring was



H. JEVNE, JUROR

plled on top of him. He will be able to make a statement later."

Deputy Adams then gave a list of the injured and stated the condition of each. Chief Walter Lips of the fire department testified that he had taken charge of the disaster and had sent his men to work. He stated that there was no odor of gas about the place and that fire did not follow a gas explosion in many cases. He put a crimp in the theory of explosion from escaping ammonia by stating that the ammonia pipes had been broken by his men when they were pulling down the walls.

A thorough examination of police officers who were at the scene of accident failed to develop any evidence regarding the disappearance of the gas meter. Blumenthal or Holderman, however, can give that information and questions along that line were dropped.

One of the sensational developments of the investigation was the discovery of the fact that from the testimony of both building and plumbing commissioners neither had ever been in the building where the explosion took place.

Oil Not Affected
Fay Smith and Harry Benson, the chefs in Cressaty's restaurant, told of the explosion, described the sensation as coming from the direction of the pantry. Both were thrown under the table in the kitchen and both testified that their first action after the

explosion was to examine the oil tank which fed the range. They stated that the oil had not in any way been affected.

Catharine Dearing and Sophie Cole, young women who were dining in the restaurant at the time of the disaster, testified about the odor of gas before the explosion and of the details of the panic.

Berner Cressaty, proprietor of the restaurant, was present with Attorney R. H. Horton, who will represent him in his suit for \$100,000 damages which he states he will file against the gas company. Senator Del Valle appeared for the family of one of the victims and Attorney Walter Trask held the fort for the gas works.

Cressaty testified in detail as to how he had detected the odor of gas, had made an investigation, had telephoned several times for men to repair the leak and had instructed his cashier to telephone. He was not in the building at the time of the explosion and could give but a brief description.

His cashier, Miss Rae Callish, gave a graphic account of the explosion. She stated that she had telephoned for the gas men several times, telling them, "For God's sake hurry to prevent an explosion," and how she was becoming ill from the effects of the gas when the explosion occurred.

Many other witnesses gave details of minor importance during the day, and thus far no conclusion of blame has been made by any of the officers.

Victim's Funerals Today
The funerals of the victims will be held today from the Bresee undertaking establishment.

GENEROUS LOS ANGELES QUICKLY RESPONDS TO CALL FOR ASSISTANCE

Prompted by the spirit of charity that has made Los Angeles famous in every corner of the civilized world, hundreds of men, women and children are flocking to the aid of the poor unfortunates who have been robbed of nearly everything that makes life worth living by the explosion and disaster at the Higgins block on West Second street last Wednesday.

Subscriptions to the relief fund are coming in daily to The Herald, Times and Examiner stations to help out the victims. That the fund will add happiness and some ray of hope to those whose lives have been blasted is certain. To it, however, the theatrical talent of Los Angeles have come forward as they ever do.

A benefit has been arranged for the victims of the explosion and it will be presented at the new Auditorium Thursday afternoon. Manager Sparks Berry was one of the first to volunteer his magnificent theater as the place for the benefit. Its capacity is about 5000, and from the statements of local benevolent orders and fraternities many of them will buy up the boxes at fancy prices. The body of the house from pit to gallery will be let out at the same price, and prominent business and society people who have tendered their patronage to the affair have also announced their intentions of viewing the show from the gallery, probably the first and last time such a treat will be afforded them.

The preliminary committee representative of the city officers, short acts pointed by apportioning to them bars, of the Florence S. company performance sketch. Henry J. stock company program for the benefit of Berrietta" his appeal Charles Charles this week in Shakespearer monolo Professor (C)