

# Winona Republican

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30, 1872.

## CITY AND VICINITY.

### SHOCKING CALAMITY.

**EXPLOSION OF GASOLINE WORKS—E. D. WILLIAMS, OF THE HUFF HOUSE, KILLED—PARTICULARS OF THE TERRIBLE AFFAIR.**

The city was shocked by an appalling calamity that occurred about fifteen minutes after eight o'clock, this morning, resulting in the death of E. D. Williams, one of the well known proprietors of the Huff House, by the explosion of the gasoline works attached to the hotel. The gas house took fire, but the Fire Department responded to the alarm with great alacrity, and soon had a stream playing upon the building and got the flames under control in a very short time. An immense number of people flocked to the Huff House from all parts of the city.

#### A SAD THROG.

In the office, in the reading room, and in the billiard hall of the hotel thronged a sad crowd of the business men and citizens of Winona, each countenance betokening the general sorrow which was occasioned by the awful and sudden catastrophe. Col. Cockrell, the old time partner of Mr. Williams, was weeping as though a brother had been taken from him. Miss Lena, the faithful housekeeper, walked the floor in anguish, and the clerks, the watchmen, the cooks, waiters and all connected with the house were stricken with unspeakable grief. It was indeed a sad sight.

The sickening odor of the gasoline pervaded the office and other rooms nearest to the scene of the accident and intensified the depression felt by every one. The body of Mr. Williams had been carried into the first reception room, or gentleman's parlor, across the hall, where it was viewed by a number of citizens. He was very much disfigured and blackened, the head arms and shoulders being terribly bruised and broken.

#### PARTICULARS OF THE ACCIDENT.

Our reporter talked with a number of employes of the hotel and obtained all the particulars to be had in the general confusion which prevailed.

#### STATEMENT OF W. W. DOTY.

Mr. Doty attends the billiard room. He says that Mr. Williams came through the saloon about five or ten minutes before the explosion and asked if he had a monkey wrench. Not procuring it he went over to the stable of Mr. Nevius and borrowed one of him. Soon after that Mr. Doty heard the explosion and ran to the door; saw fire and smoke coming out of the cracks and corners of the building; hurried back and gave the alarm in the office.

#### STATEMENT OF MARK COMFORT.

Mr. Comfort is the night watchman. He was in the office at the time settling the bills of passengers who were going out on the morning train. Comfort heard Doty's alarm and ran out. He heard Mr. Williams had gone into the gas house; thinks he heard him groan two or three times after he reached there; thought at first he must be in the building, but another man from a shed said there was some one lying on the roof; Comfort ran up a ladder and could see the body with the feet hanging partly over the scuttle. Through the fire and smoke he succeeded in drawing the body to the edge of the roof, but then his strength gave out and he was nearly fainting when Mr. P. B. Palmer, the Street Commissioner, ran up the ladder and helped Comfort down with the body. The clothes were burnt to a crisp and fairly peeled off as they got the mangled remains down. The head, arms and shoulders appeared to be mashed to a jelly in the explosion, which had evidently blown Mr. Williams up through the scuttle, a distance of ten or twelve feet, and when he came down he struck on the roof, which was flat and covered with gravel.

#### STATEMENT OF THE COOK.

Martin Fitzpatrick, the cook, was in the gas-house a few minutes before the explosion, with Mr. Williams. Martin went in there to follow a little dog, Frank, that had been kicked by a cow and had his leg put out of joint. Mr. Williams was then on top of the holder, working with a wrench to take out the bolts of a small plate, about eighteen inches in diameter. Martin had no conversation with him. The distance from where he was working to the scuttle was ten or twelve feet. Martin does not remember whether the scuttle was open or shut. He went back to the kitchen, and in a few minutes heard the explosion and ran out. He was among the first on the spot. They supposed Mr. Williams to be in the building, and burst in the door, but the smoke, flames and gas drove them back, and the body was soon found on the roof, as above stated. Martin found the hat that Mr. Williams had on blown a distance of six or eight rods and lodged in a wood pile.

#### STATEMENT OF THE SECOND PORTER.

Edward Miller, the bell boy and second porter, was in the second story of the hotel. He ran to the back window when he heard the noise, and saw a man lying on the roof; couldn't see who it was; went down stairs as quickly as he could and got a ladder with Billy Schriber, a waiter, and both tried to ascend to the roof of the gas house, but were driven back by the smoke. Mark Comfort then ran up and drew the body out.

Even the waiter boys and porters, recalled, sorrowfully, the last acts they had done for their employer. Said Miller, in a sad way, "It was last night that I blacked his boots for the last time." "And did you see Jack," he said, turning to the cook. (Jack is a little black terrier that has been around the hotel for years.) "When they were taking Mr. Williams from the fire through the house Jack ran around him and whined all the time, and then I drove him off." "And what did you do that for?" asked Martin, sympathizing in the mute but expressive sorrow of Jack. "Because," said Miller, "they took Mr. Williams in the room and shut the door, and I had to drive Jack away." Poor little Jack will miss his kind master.

#### THE GASOLINE.

Three years ago last Spring a man came along here with a patent gas, made from gasoline, which he induced Messrs. Cockrell & Williams and a few other citizens to adopt. The firm named built a stone gas house twenty by twenty-four feet high and covered with a fire proof gravel roof. This building stood about thirty feet back of the hotel. They tried the gas for a few weeks, but it proved to be a failure, and they gave up using it. Still some of it remained in the holder, because it had never been all used up.

Good boiler iron securely riveted together. It was about twelve feet in diameter.

But the building was of no further use for that purpose, and Mr. Williams had employed Mr. C. D. Smith to take out the gasometer and other apparatus and reconstruct the building for a store room. They were working at it on Tuesday, and had set jack screws under the tank and drawn the water nearly all off.

#### THEORY OF THE EXPLOSION.

It is not believed that the explosion was caused by the gas coming in contact with fire. Mr. Williams was very particular never to permit any fire about the building. On Tuesday, Mr. Smith wanted to light a match in order to see under the tank but Mr. Williams positively refused to let him do it.

There was a plate on top of the holder—as heretofore stated—which it was thought necessary

to remove in order to let out the gas if there was any in there, and it is thought that the moment Mr. Williams removed the first bolt, the air communicated with the gas, and the explosion took place. The plate was not blown off, but the heavy iron holder, weighing hundreds of pounds, was lifted out of its resting place, and now lies careened upon one side. This appears to be the only reasonable explanation of the explosion.

#### A SECOND EXPLOSION.

While the firemen were at work on the burning building a second explosion occurred, but no damage was done beyond a shower of ashes and cinders, and another discharge of the suffocating gas. Some of the firemen, who were directing the hose, inhaled this, and were quite sick from its effect.

#### OBITUARY REMARKS.

E. D. Williams was born at Tomlinson, Maine, and was sixty-three years of age at the time of his death. He came to Winona, from Cincinnati in 1856, in company with Colonel Cockrell. They had been employed in a hotel there together—Mr. Williams as steward, and Colonel Cockrell as clerk—and they resolved to try their fortunes in Minnesota.

The success that has attended their efforts in this city, sufficiently attests their ability and enterprise. Mr. Williams had charge of all the outside work of the hotel—purchasing supplies, managing their fine farm near Eyota, and attending to nearly everything pertaining to the exterior business. He was a very public-spirited man, and lent his aid freely in behalf of public enterprises. He was one of the first to organize the Woodlawn Cemetery Association, and has been its President ever since. He purchased a fine lot in the cemetery, and it was his request, made known some time ago, that he should be buried there.

He was also President of the Winona Gaslight Company, and took an active interest in furthering that enterprise. An old settler of Winona, he had identified himself thoroughly with its interests and welfare, and held the high regard and esteem of his many friends. His sudden and shocking death has cast a gloom over the whole city, and there is hardly a home here that has not a mourner for the loss of a generous and public minded citizen. The sad news was sent by telegraph to his relatives—a brother in Illinois and one in Maine—this morning, and it is probable that they will come on to attend the funeral, of which notice will be given hereafter.

#### THE DOINGS OF DR. WASHBURNE.

A PROFESSIONAL OPERATOR IN MEANNESS—HE GETS INTO THE POLICE COURTS AND LEAVES TOWN.

Notice was made in THE REPUBLICAN, yesterday, of the arrest of Dr. George P. Washburne, for feloniously taking a package of clothing, etc., from the cloak room of the Huff House. After he left there, a week or so ago, he went to the Central House, and then to the boarding house of Mr. Cheeseman, on Third street. He had taken a piece of cloth to a pant-maker's room over J. M. Smith's store and had created suspicion by his frequent changes from a hat to a cap and vice versa. He had met at a neighbor's of this pant-maker a lady whom he had known in Minneapolis, and as luck would have it, sat in her room on Monday evening, when THE REPUBLICAN was thrown in containing a brief account of his operations at the Huff House. He read it, and cut his visit short, went to Mr. Cheeseman's, and was seen to carry out a package. Soon after that Marshal Chappell had him.

The Doctor put on a bold front; claimed to be a "nephew of the Washburnes," of Minneapolis; had been trying to buy Siemers's Hotel for \$10,000, and was doing his best to make an impression that Dr. George P. Washburne was an important and desirable personage for any community. Marshal Chappell thought so, too. He considered Dr. Washburne just the man he wanted. The "Doctor" had a certificate signed by some physician in the western part of the State attesting his "regularity" as a member of the medical profession. It now turns out that the signature was a forgery.

When Washburne was brought before Justice Story, the charge of stealing goods from the Huff House was withdrawn, and he was tried for taking a blanket. He confessed to this, and the attorneys allowed the Doctor to settle the matter by paying \$16 and leaving town. He was glad enough to do it, and has gone hence.

#### ACCIDENTS TO FIREMEN.

Two firemen were ran over by hose carriages this morning, and more or less injured. August Fuhrman, of Turner Hose Company, fell beneath the cart and received some injury on the leg. He will be able to be out in a day or two.

A member of the Hook and Ladder company, named Oyer, had his hand run over by a truck and the fingers considerably bruised.

#### LOCAL BREVITIES.

ONE section of hose burst at the fire this morning.

THE first rain that has visited this section for weeks descended last night. To be free from the clouds of dust seems a luxury.

IN the test of the hose of the Fire Department on Monday, two lengths burst under a water pressure of 125 pounds to the square inch. The hose is supposed to stand a test of 200 pounds.

A VERY pleasing song entitled, "Some day, some sweet day," music by S. H. Dyer, is hereby acknowledged. It is a selection that will prove very acceptable to all lovers of a sweet song.

A BRAKEMAN named J. A. Purcell had the fingers of his right hand badly smashed while coupling cars at Winona Junction, on Saturday last. All four of his fingers were amputated.

SHERIFF MARTIN took Henry L. Kuter to St. Paul, on Monday, as all of the prisoners committed for offenses against the United States are kept there.

THE clerical force in the post-office has been increased by the addition of two new delivery clerks, one of whom takes Henry Kuter's place. The new clerks are Miss Maggie Robb, a young lady of this city, and Henry Posz, a German boy from Lewiston.

WE regret to learn that the father of A. H. Bissell, Esq., of this city, met with a serious accident in New York city, on Friday last. While passing from one car to another his foot was caught between the bumpers, and so badly crushed as to render amputation necessary.

HARRY GORDEN, a young harness maker who was in J. S. Wilson's shop in this city a few weeks ago, attempted suicide with a pistol at St. Paul, the other day, on account of some love affair. It is thought the young man was desirous of creating a sensation, or he would have made more certain work of it.

#### PERSONAL INTELLIGENCE.

Major Blake, of the new town of Marshall, was in the city yesterday.

Col. Paulding, of the St. Paul Pioneer, arrived in the city last evening.

Mr. H. B. Plumer, of Franklin, Pennsylvania, is in the city on a short visit among his friends here.

#### CITY ITEMS.

A CARD.—Among the departures, on the half-past two train, Monday afternoon, was Mr. J. A. Wells, on a visit to his friends in Montreal. He will be absent a few weeks. 3961dct\*