The Eighteenth St. Sewer Explosion at Detroit

By Robert H. McCormick*

On Jan. 28, an explosion from some unknown cause occurred in the 18th St. sewer. This sewer runs in a northwesterly direction through 18th St., Buchanan St., Calumet and Canfield avenues and Cass Ave. to the boulevard, a distance of five miles. The portion of the sewer from the river to Fort St. is comprised of two 5-ft. cylinders running under the tracks of the Wabash Railroad. From Fort St. north for a ways is an 8-ft. cylinder.

The explosion occurred about 3 p.m. and could be traced from the river to a point about 3½ miles north (see map). Manhole covers along the whole line of sewer were blown off and broken. The greatest damage was done on the shallow portion of the sewer at the Wabash Railroad Yards, where one of the barrels was completely destroyed, and at the Michigan Central Railroad Subway, where the paving of the subway comprised the roof of the sewer, and where the sewer was destroyed for a distance of 100 ft. A portion of the sewer in the subway was a 7-ft. cylinder, composed of three rings of brick. The arch of this portion was blown completely off. Another portion of the sewer at the subway was a special horseshoe section with a concrete slab on top. This slab was lifted bodily and shoved to one side.

At the corner of Calumet and Grand River avenues the fronts of three small stores were blown out. In addition, numerous manholes were shattered and will have to be rebuilt.

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Clearing up after the 18th St. Sewer Explosion at Detroit

The total damage done to the sewer will probably be between $6,000 and $7,000.

The cause of the explosion is, at the present time, unknown, although there is little doubt but what it was caused by the presence of gasoline in the sewer. A thorough canvass of the drainage territory tributary to this

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The large round dots numbered 1 to 10 and lettered, also G, A, M and O, indicate, respectively, garages, automobile factories, motorcycle factories and oil stations, as follows:

- Garages:
  - 1023 Cass Ave. 1 G
  - 124 Milwaukee Ave. West 5 G
  - 14th St. & Gd. Blvd. 7 G
  - 1374 Grand River Ave. 10 G
  - 14th St. & Forest Ave. 8 G

- Auto Factories:
  - Cadillac Motor Co.
  - Amsterdam & Cass Ave.
  - Studebaker
  - Piquette & John R St.
  - 4 A

- Motorcycle Factories:
  - Henderson, 1158 Cass
  - 2 M

- Oil Stations:
  - Sun Oil Co. W. of Brooklyn Ave.
  - S. of M. C. R.R.
  - Auto Station, Linwood & Gd.
  - 5 O
  - 2 O

The sewer has shown that in it there are quite a number of small garages and automobile factories and one oil company which handles immense quantities of gasoline.

The débris and obstructions in the sewer caused by the explosion were removed inside of 24 hours and the normal flow of the sewer was restored. No effort to repair the damage done to the sewer will probably be made until spring, a temporary covering of plank having been placed over it.

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A Cave-in Over a Sewer occurred recently in Baltimore, Md., but the sewer did not collapse, as was reported. We are indebted to Calvin W. Hendrick, chief engineer of the Sewerage Commission of Baltimore, for the following information on the subject:

The cave-in was over the old Harford Run Sewer, which is a 10-ft. sewer built about 25 years ago. The parties who constructed the sewer state that a great deal of fine sand was encountered when the sewer was constructed at this point in tunnel. Appearances indicated that in tunneling ground was lost, leaving voids above the timber work. The seepage of water through the ground finally caused the cavity to work its way to the street surface, and a section of the street bed dropped. The hole has been refilled.