

THE MILL EXPLOSION

Not many of the young people of Burnet know that Burnet was built around a mill called Hamilton Valley Mill, which was located at the end of present Hamilton Creek Drive at the old Llano road crossing. There were four stone houses besides the mill, one being the stage coach station.

Mr. C. L. Alexander of Burnet gave the following clipping of the time the "Mill Blew Up" to the Historical Society.

We have heard many interesting stories concerning the Old Mill and would like to hear from any one who knows about the Mill. Write to Mrs. J. D. Mallory, Star Route, Burnet.

(The account published below of the terrible mill explosion, which took place in Burnet almost 50 years ago, is taken from a copy of the Burnet Bulletin published on January 8th, 1880. The paper has been preserved by the Blackburn family, and was kindly loaned us for reproduction. Old-timers in Burnet County will recall the incident with startling distinctness, and will read the article with great interest, as will also many of our younger readers, who have heard their parents speak of the terrible tragedy. The writer can remember distinctly when many of the heavy pieces of iron thrown by the explosion were still scattered about near the mill.—L. C. Chamberlain, Ed. Bulletin.)

As stated in our last issue, we stopped the press to give a bare mention of the terrible calamity that befell the "Burnet Meal and Flouring Mills" on last Thursday. It now becomes our painful duty to furnish the horrid details as far as may be, to account, if possible, for the accident, and to allude more specially to the three unfortunate souls that were hurled into eternity without a moment's warning:

It appears that Mr. John Smart, senior proprietor and manager of the Mills, was sick in bed the morning of the explosion, and his duties were divided between his aged father and his younger brother—the

father acting outside as fireman, the brother engaged inside the house at the hoppers and smutter, and up-stairs at the bolting chest. Mr. Bryce Smart, Sr., fired up very early, in order to get through a large job of grinding by noon—100 bushels of wheat, we understand, and an order for 1,000 lbs. of flour from Messrs. Westfall, Watson & Co. Under the hurry of the unusual strain, it is supposed he neglected to observe the steam-gauge, or placed too much confidence in the strength of the boiler. And having, besides, little or no

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More Mill Explosion

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knowledge of the dangers of steam, in connection with a boiler to which he was unaccustomed. (It was a "Locomotive") it is reasonably surmised that the boiler must have taken three or four hundred pounds of steam, and produced the disaster. What added to the risk, too, the safety valve allowed only about half an inch vent, and steam was generated on the fatal morning with cedar wood, which, it is known, makes an intense heat and very rapidly.

The explosion occurred about 9 o'clock, and the boiler was torn literally into shreds—showing, according to the opinion of experts, that it must have been a first class specimen. Pieces of sheet-iron, steam-pipes, bolts, fractured castings flew in every direction, and almost littered the ground towards the north.—About 5,000 pounds of the boiler flew in that direction, ricocheted twice, plowing the ground ten or twelve feet in two places, like a shell, and finally stopped at least 150 yards from the Mills. The steam-gauge was found across Hamilton creek. The bolts of pieces of the boiler appear wrenched out like tacks from a shoe, and the general color of every part a dead, grayish hue—showing the action of intense heat.

Six men and a boy were in and about the scene at the time of the explosion—four inside the house and up-stairs. Had it been fair weather that invited visitors, the casualties might have been trebled.

Mr. Bryce Smart, Sr., was

standing close to the boiler, and was driven into a stack of wood, his body horribly mangled. It had to be uncovered. All the head was gone except the venerable beard. The chest appeared torn open, and the writer saw his grief-stricken son pick up his bleeding heart lying yet warm upon the ground. It was a pitiful, dreadful sight, and brought tears to many eyes unused to weeping. The good o'd man's tongue and a part of his skull were found in the adjoining field fifty yards away. His remains were taken to his home in Williamson county for burial. He was some 62 years old, and universally esteemed as an honorable man, a good citizen and an humble member of the Christian Church.

Mr. H. H. Hall was standing at the engine, replacing a belt upon one of the wheels—the machinery not running at the time. A hundred-pound fragment of the boiler cut both legs off, and broke several large wheels before it stopped. One leg of the unfortunate man was found driven under the hopper, the other lay by the smutter. When assistance came he was lying on the ground, an awful sight, bleeding copiously, and suffering untold agony. And yet when asked what could be done for him, this hero in a rough garb managed to mutter: "Never mind me — look after the rest."

Coming from one known to fame, such sublime self-denial would immortalize the author of it as worthy Sidney Smith himself. All that was possible was done by the physicians and citizens, but he was too far gone from loss of blood, and breathed his last about dark. Before death came, however, he spoke of his wife and children, asked if Mr. Smart was hurt much, requested prayer of some one, and

him in a fervent, solemn petition to God, the dying man breathed a deep "Amen," and passed gradually into a comatose state. Mr. Hall was about 45 years of age and left a wife and four or five children, who, we are glad to learn, have some property left them.

Johnny Blackburn, about 13 years old, was on an errand of charity at the request of his heart-broken mother, and passing on his way by the mills, lingered at the engine a moment, when death came upon him. Some part of the boiler cut his skull open on the right side, from which he remained unconscious until 3 o'clock next morning when his young spirit passed away. It is said the little fellow showed a great fondness for machinery and it was this taste that indirectly caused his untimely death.

The explosion was heard from six to eight miles away. Messrs Smart, Avery, Lamberston, and Clapp were up-stairs at the time but escaped uninjured. The steam filled the room and hurled a window sash to the ground. Mr. Avery is of the opinion that the boiler must have been at white heat with several hundred pounds of steam; it was warranted for 150 Mr. Smith the wheelright, is of the same opinion.

The remains of Mr. Hall and Johnny Blackburn were followed to the cemetery last Friday afternoon, by a large concourse of citizens, Rev. M. Aaron officiating.

God grant that our little community may be spared another such misfortune for all time and that He may help us, when the grim messenger of Death does come, to be prepared to meet him, and thus rob him of his terrors!

Received from E. H. Hall & Markan Corbin of Lempasser, 17 April 200, Joe Cop