



Robert Mayer and Charles Lockwood

FIRE FOLLOWS EXPLOSIONS: Smoke pouring from the four-story building at 18 West 11th Street, near Fifth Avenue. Explosions in the basement shattered glass in the area.

Townhouse Razed By Blast and Fire; Man's Body Found

By DOUGLAS ROBINSON

Three explosions and a raging fire killed an unidentified man and destroyed a four-story brick townhouse at noon yesterday in a Greenwich Village area noted for the architectural style of its houses.

Two women said to have been in the building at the time of the explosion, which fire officials said was probably caused by leaking gas, were cared for by a neighbor. They had disappeared by the time the fire was brought under control.

The first blast—powerful enough to tear a hole in the front wall of the building—apparently occurred in the basement of the townhouse, at 18 West 11th Street, just off Fifth Avenue.

The explosion also shattered window panes throughout the immediate neighborhood, including some as high as the sixth floor of an apartment building directly across the street.

As firemen arrived at the scene, two lighter blasts shook the building as gas lines burst. Flames quickly engulfed the townhouse and, a few minutes later, the entire front wall collapsed.

The body of the man was found in the early evening as firemen searched through the smoldering rubble. They continued to comb the debris, however, because of reports that a small boy had also been in the house.

As the night wore on, the scene was illuminated by flood-

Continued on Page 16, Column 1

Explosions and Fire Destroy Townhouse in 11th St. Off Fifth Ave.; Man Killed

Continued From Page 1, Col. 3

lights in the back and front of the house. Fire officials ordered a large crane to the scene to tear down the side and rear walls because of the danger of collapse.

Witnesses said that the two women, both nude, were found on the first floor of the house by the first rescue workers to enter the building.

The women, dazed and bleeding from cuts, were led from the burning building and were taken to the apartment of Mrs. Susan Wager at 50 West 11th Street. One of the women was said to have cried "Where is Adam?" several times as she left the burning building.

Mrs. Wager said later that she had let the women take showers and had given them clothing. She said she had left the women with her maid and had gone back to the scene of the fire. When she returned, she continued, the women were gone.

Man's Body Under Rubble

The body of the man was found under rubble in the front part of the house. The police said the man had red hair and appeared to be about 35 years old. He was wearing a blue shirt, blue denim trousers and shoes.

Similar brick townhouses on both sides of No. 18 were severely damaged by the explosions and fire. The home at No. 16 is owned and occupied by Dustin Hoffman, the actor, and his wife, Ann. There are also several tenants.

Mr. Hoffman carried several paintings and a Tiffany lampshade from his home before the police prevented him from re-entering the building.

Fire Chief John T. O'Hagen said the Hoffman home had sustained heavy damage in the basement and on the upper floor. A hole was blown in the basement wall, and part of the ceiling on the top floor collapsed.

During the early afternoon, firemen searched the lower floors of the burned-out townhouse, ducking falling beams and bricks that occasionally showered down on them.

In mid-afternoon, Chief O'Hagen ordered his men from the building because of the danger. A power shovel was then used to remove the rubble after a tree in front of the house had been cut down.

Rescue Workers Overcome

At least two rescue workers, Patrolman Ronald Waite, who ran to the scene from his post at 11th Street and Fifth Avenue, and Vincent Calderone, an off-duty Housing Authority patrolman, were treated at St. Vincent's Hospital for smoke inhalation. Both men had helped get the women out of the burning building.

Another rescuer was Sy Blut, a retired fire marshal, who jumped from a taxi on Fifth Avenue when he heard the first explosion. Mr. Blut also ran into the house. It was his report of a child that led firemen to continue their search.

Mr. Blut said that when he and the other men broke down the front door "we heard screaming coming from the basement."

"We saw a woman screaming in the nude with lacerations over her body," he continued. "Another woman who was caught in the debris managed to get out. We heard a child cry . . . then a floor collapsed and flames drove us back."

The demolished townhouse is owned by James P. Wilkerson, president of the Star Stations of Indiana, Inc., a chain of five radio stations in the Middle West. He and his wife were said to be on vacation in the Caribbean. Mr. Wilkerson was executive vice president of Young & Rubicam, the advertising agency, until two years ago.

The Wilkerson Home stands in a row of townhouses originally built in the Greek Revival style that were constructed by Henry Brevoort Jr., a member of a distinguished New York family, in 1844 and 1845.

The house at No. 18 was modified in the Federal style later in the 19th century with



Firemen using an aerial ladder and other apparatus yesterday against the blaze that followed explosions in the townhouse at 18 West 11th Street

Photographs for The New York Times by NEAL BOENZI



Dustin Hoffman, the actor, whose Greenwich Village home is at left of the one where the explosions and fire occurred.

the addition of stone panels day's market, however, they above the first-floor door and bring prices of \$90,000 to windows and an arched brick \$100,000.

doorway substituted for one with Greek pilasters.

Mr. Brevoort Jr., who owned the land as part of a large farm, gave five of the row of seven houses to his five daughters.

Fifty years ago the houses sold for about \$10,000. On to-

The two-alarm fire caused an enormous traffic jam in the area around the scene. The Red Cross set up an emergency center in the parish house of the Ascension Episcopal Church at Fifth Avenue and 11th Street to find lodging for those left homeless.