

Dynamite Plot To Blow Up Bulkhead On August 25, 1904

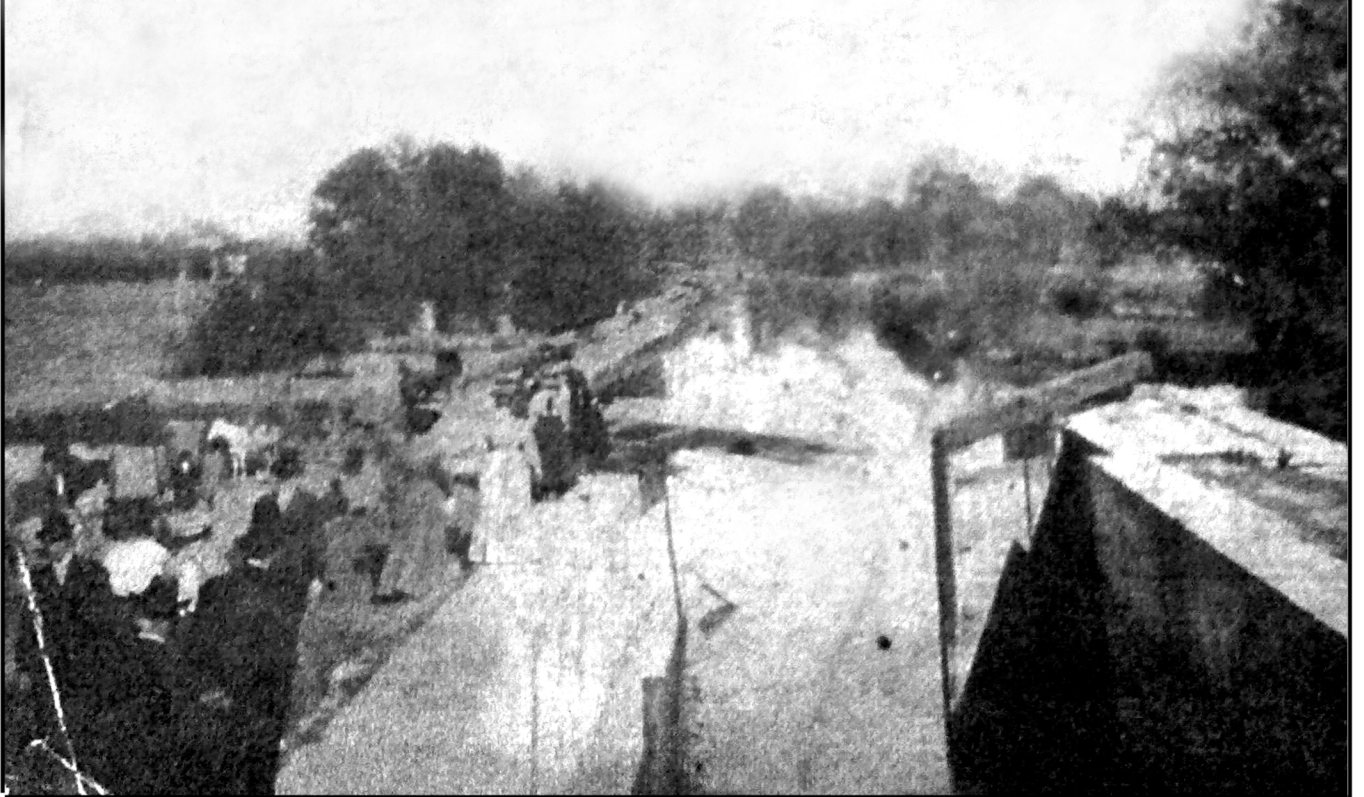


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DYNAMITE PLOT TO BLOW UP BULKHEAD

Aug 25, 1904

Startles Northwestern Ohio. Attempt To
Drain Grand Reservoir Fails. State
Will Hunt Down Offenders.

Dynamiters tried to blow up the bulkhead on the east side of the reservoir Monday night and the force of the explosion was transmitted by the water to Celina so that our people and not St. Marys felt the shock and sprang from their beds thinking some dire calamity was at hand. Celina nine miles away, felt the force but was ignorant of the cause. St. Marys, only a mile away did not awaken until the startled residents in the neighborhood of the bulkhead made their way to the town and told of the explosion.

The dynamiters failed of their purpose. Only the upper part of the south half of the gate through which the waters of the reservoir pass into the canal feeder was demolished and the huge stone abutment on the south side had its top stones crushed and crumbled and sent apart down through the thirteen tiers that are visible above the water's surface.

It was the intention to blow up the bulkhead and let the waters of the grand reservoir, 18,000 acres in extent, pass out through the canal and thus drain the huge inland lake. This part of the plan failed. The one thing that was done to a finish was the wrecking of the two-story frame house 50 yards away, owned by Felix Strolgers, and occupied by the family of William Cordell. It was little short of a miracle that the inmates escaped death. Arthur Cordell told that they heard a dog bark near midnight. They also heard whistles. Then came unconsciousness and they revived to find their beds covered with broken glass and an avalanche of plaster. They were not hurt, but Mrs. Cordell lies critically ill as the result of the terrific shock she sustained. Two other houses had their windows shattered. The State built in charge of Captain F. A. Bennett, his wife and a crew of five men lay east a little ways of the bulkhead. Had the bulkhead been destroyed and the waters come through with a

rush their fate would have been tragical, but men who resort to dynamite care but little for such paltry considerations as a few lives lost.

And yet the men who did the work had evidently calculated that the wall of water would find its way through the canal and through the waste weir at St. Marys into the river and that St. Marys would thus escape destruction. It would have been no Johnstown horror and yet had the work been successfully done the destruction might have been far greater than contemplated.

Work Poorly Done.

Several sticks of dynamite were evidently used but its users had but little knowledge of the force exerted by explosives. Had they tarried for a moment by the water's edge and inserted the charge down between the huge wooden posts at the corner of the gate and then touched the fuse, away would have gone the big wooden gates and the stone abutments on either side. As it was they dropped the dynamite on the top ledge of stone, lighted the fuse and hastened out of harm's way. The explosion was terrific but the force was outward and not downward and the gate was not broken sufficiently to let the water through.

All along the east bank the high waters have done great damage. Had the bank been tunneled and the charge inserted there instead of at the bulkhead, then St. Marys would have been at the mercy of the waters and the town obliterated from the map. The dynamiters waited to spare St. Mary. The reservoir and its improvement and preservation had evidently aroused their ire. They wanted to impress the State that the reservoir must be drained and not improved but they resorted to sorry means to emphasize their desires.

Soon after the discovery of the outrage a crowd of people was on the spot and there were heard dire threats of vengeance against

the dastards who would so wantonly imperil human life and possessions. Rumors of arrests to be made were heard and there was another mysterious rumor of a secret organization leagued together to force the drainage of the reservoir. One remembered that a mysterious trio of men had been seen at the bulkhead Monday and after giving several widely varying versions of what they had seen and heard of the explosion quickly disappeared on Tuesday. But these were only suspicions, and circumstantial evidence and not positive proof would have to be depended upon were arrests to be made.

Repairs Evidently Not Wanted.

Last spring's heavy rain-fall did great damage to the east bank of the reservoir. There was great fear that the bank would give way and St. Marys felt no slight qualms of uneasiness as to what would be her fate should the water force its way through. The country south and west of Celina was flooded by high waters but Celina felt no fears from the breaking of the bank in this vicinity. People had suffered in convenience from high waters before but never to the extent of the past spring when they had to leave their homes and their farms were made unhabitable for the year. People have talked drainage in connection with the reservoir for some years but, possibly never so much as during the past spring. Legislative enactment in the matter took the form of an appropriation to improve and strengthen the banks, and the STANDARD is now advertising the bids for this contract which will be let at Columbus September 13th. The state has recently completed its survey of the banks. L. F. Handshagen, of Celina, accompanying the surveying party in its rounds. The dynamite demonstration of Monday night was no doubt made by some person or persons either desiring to express their own objections or acting as a hindrance to others who object to the State improving the banks. It has been known that the farmers near by the reservoir were ardent adherents of the drainage side of the question but among that law abiding class of men it is difficult to suppose that any one of them would resort to desperate measures to express objections to the flooded conditions he was forced to endure this year. And that a legion of dynamiters could exist on the east or south side of a reservoir whose sole purpose is to force the abandonment of the reservoir is another matter that demands credence. Now that an attempt has been made to destroy it the State of Ohio will not be lax in its vigil-

ance of ferreting out the dynamiters, while it will keep such watch and ward over its property hereafter that it will be a vigilant dynamiter who can get in his work.

Where The Outrage Occurred.

The bulkhead is nine miles distant from Celina. The embankments that surround the reservoir open at the east end to let the waters pass through big wooden gates, twenty-five feet in height and hung between solid stone abutments, into the feeder of the Miami and Erie canal, which extends from Toledo to Cincinnati. There are a double set of gates and the east gates have been removed to put in new ones. The dynamiters undoubtedly took this time when there was only one set of gates to demolish to do their work as one barrier could have been more easily removed than two.

It is a pretty scene at the bulkhead. The reservoir in all its magnificence of high waters lies to the west and here where it terminates there are the solid stone abutments towering up above the waters and just beyond the wooden gates the narrow channel connecting the reservoir and the canal stretches in the sunlight like a line of silver between the green banks on either side. The east bank over which the sightseers from Celina trod their weary way of a mile and more is high and ragged at the water's edge and not pretty and picturesque like the wooded west bank that extends south from Celina. The wrecked house is close to the bulkhead and there are others not far away and the placid landscape round about is suggestive of anything but dynamite outrages and yet the preperators picked their place with care that here the work could be most satisfactorily accomplished.

Second Attempt At Draining.

Monday night's effort was the second attempt made to let out the water of the reservoir. As our readers have been told times without number in the STANDARD the first attempt was made May 15, 1843, and then it was successful. No dynamite was used at that time for dynamite was unknown. The banks were cut below Celina in the old Beaver channel and the water was all let out. Then the work was done in daytime and every county officer and every prominent citizen hereabouts engaged in the work so that no convictions could ever be made against the offenders. The water had been turned into the reservoir that spring and the people were indignant that their farms had not been paid for as promised. There was another grievance. It had been agreed that the timber should be deadened before the water was turned in and this work had not been completed. The submerged forests of living trees, it was thought, would create sickness. There had been money appropriated to compensate the people for flooded corn and wheat fields and to deaden the timber but the money had gone to officials and to land sharks and not to the farmers. It was a valiant little company of one hundred men who armed with picks and spades and wheel barrows marched out of Celina sixty-one years ago last May to right their wrongs and they never faltered before the fear of arrest, or at the threat the Piqua guards would be there to rout them if they attempted to cut the banks. It cost the State \$17,000 to repair the damage and it taught the State a lesson that the pioneer residents of Mercer county were men who resented unjust treatment and unfair measures to defraud them of their rights.