

May 31st at 25 minutes past 10 o'clock in the morning 3 wagons blew up in 14th street Wilmington by which 5 men lost their lives namely John Keys, Thomas Tally & James Chambers drivers W[illia]m Thalcon (a citizen) and Robert Henry (James Price's driver) a negro[.] This was the first accident that we have ever had away from home. Uncle Alexis was in Trinity Church, Uncle Henry at the Office, Ireneè at Packing house Hagley and I was in the Machine Shop. My first impression was the Lower Yard for which I was thinking it was the press room and Graining mill as there was but 2 shocks[.] [W]hen I got to H[enry] Clay factory they called from the other side it was at Garesche's[.] [O]n returning I met Uncle Henry at the Lower Graining Mill at Hagley where I told him the impression but at the same time asked where are the wagons! [A]t this he turned pale[;] the truth flashed across my mind. I ran to the barn[,] jumped on horse back and arrived at the scene in 22 minutes after where Geo[rge] Gordon was haranguing the populace saying the Duponts ought to be linched [sic] & etc. But as soon as he saw me he stopped[.] I supposed he thought that it was too late[,] that the men were coming on behind me[.] [E]ven Uncle Alexis began to think there was some danger on account of mob[?] law[.] [H]is expression was of satisfaction when I got my hand on his shoulder and turning he saw me[.] I shall never forget—but to return to the probable causes.

1st The middle wagon blew first, as being about 50ft apart the force of the explosion excavated 3 holes in the ground[.] The middle one about 3ft deep and the others 2ft, but the hind one not quite as deep as the other, the middle hole was like the section in margin about 15ft long where as the other 2 were full 40ft long[,] deep at the end and shallow at the other, nothing was found of the wagons except the irons and hubs of the wheels[.] [O]f these 4 were found on one side of the road and 8 on the other. John Keys who drove the front wagon was thrown about 82yds forward and lit on the steps of McCamby's house without any clothes on him. Tho[ma]s Tally was never found except his arm & hand from the elbow down. Robert Chambers was thrown down near the race bank at right angles to the middle wagon[,] also stripped. The House of Bishop Lee which stood about 40yds to the left of the hindmost wagon had its front pulled out while the smaller buildings nearer were completely demolished. The horses[,] 14 in number[,] were all instantaneously killed except the leader mare of Key's team which as it had its leg broken & etc. they knocked in the head[.] [A]ll the tongue horses were cut in two[.] [T]he heads or for[e] quarters were not much injured while in no instance could there be found any one of the 6 hind horses[.] [T]hese were completely ground to shreds although over 50lbs of horse meat in fragments were thrown into Bishop Lee's house after the front fell. For some of the effects of the explosion see the accounts published (in the scrap book). Being on the ground 20 mins after the accident[,] the men not being recovered and having superintended the recovery of the horses & etc[,] I have had as good an opportunity of judging from the effects as perhaps any one who merely [sic] came for a few minutes and then returned. The newspapers to the contrary notwithstanding[,] there was not a piece of the wagon let alone a size of a piece of head[,] hoop[,] or stave left but the ground was strewed with fragments about ¼ the size of matches.

The evidence of but 2 persons can be brought to bear. 1st is the nurse in Bishop Lee's House. She said that she had a child in her arms and was carrying it up and down the room to keep it quiet when she heard someone shout "Go a head" in a tone which attracted her attention as by a person who was much excited[.] [S]he turned and glanced out of the window when she saw 3

powder wagons in front of the window[.] [T]he middle one she said she saw “a reak[?] of Smoke” coming out of the hind end from under the bows[.] [S]he had not time to speak before it went off. The 2nd is a Negro woman who said that about 10 minutes before she saw the man who drove the hind wagon (this was Tally for Chambers had not arrived) after watering his horses at the pump throw a bucket full on each of the hind wheels (to keep them from shrinking)[.] [A] minute or 2 after this a man walking along 14th street jumped up and looked in the tail of the same wagon and then came up the street running—this man from her description was a cooper. The explosion occurred at 25 min past 10 o’clock[.] [A]t 3 minutes after 10 oclock James Chambers left the Lower Yard[.] that is Peter Bussou was at the Glazing mill bridge when Chambers passed[;] it was 3 min after.

It had been raining the night before the explosion and the ground was very wet.

14th [S]treet is not paved being a clay road except at the crossing gutters which are paved.

The following are the principle [sic] causes assigned for this accident[:]

1st The Wagoners Smoking

2nd Leaky powder Kegs

3rd Fire from the Hughes Brimstone establishment

4th Incendiary

1st As to the wagoners smoking this I acknowledge to be true under certain circumstances, but when ever any one sees a powder wagon and the driver smoking they think of course it must be full of powder[.] [N]ow as the Wilmingtonians seldom see the wagons with powder and 6 times a day going for saltpetre supply and full at which times there can be no objection to smoking[.] [T]hey [word unintelligible] make allowances—yet be this as it may there can be no proof that they were smoking this morning.

2nd Leaky powder kegs. The vents of the lot of 2000 of which these wagons had 400 kegs were loaded the next day and all the kegs carefully examined and not a single leaky one was found. The track of the wagons was examined carefully from the turnpike to the spot where the accident occurred and not a grain of powder was found. The only reason for leaky kegs was the accident of Sept. last but under very different circumstances. If the kegs had leaked and ran on the ground[.] for Chambers horses to blow up they would not have done so 10 to 1 for the ground was as already said very wettened[.] [T]he road not stoned in fact excepting what little the Bishop used the [word unintelligible] it was of no use except as pasturage[.] [F]or road courses it was covered with a pretty good sod[.] [M]ore over how could the girl at Bishop Lee’s have seen the seak[?] of smoke[.]

3rd By some it was supposed that as they had been hooping some burr stones at Tho[ma]s Hughes’ establishment that a spark flew from the fire and fell into the straw on the powder.