

## History

# Jordan Block explosion leaves one dead, many injured



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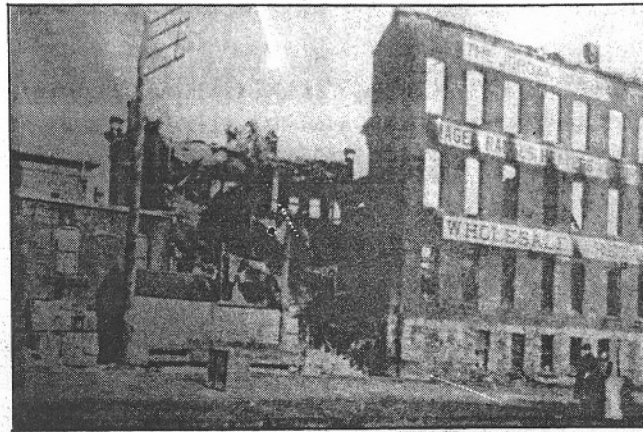
### Part Three

It was decided to demolish the rear, southern wall of the Jordan Block by dynamite. There was concern that it could crash onto a passing steam locomotive.

The fuses were set, and the dynamite was ignited at 4:40 p.m. from a battery-operated set located on Railroad Street. There was a tremendous explosion. Rubble and debris were peppered like shrapnel across a wide area, injuring many people.

Warren Worth, a 28-year-old chauffeur and William Webber, a 41-year-old foreman at American Thread, suffered broken legs. Mayor Danny Dunn had grazes on his chin and scratches on his legs. In all 14 people were badly injured. Giles Alford, a 36-year-old bookkeeper who worked for the Windham National Bank, was struck in the chest by a large boulder as he observed the explosion from the tracks of the Vermont Central railroad near the railroad depot, and he died in hospital 14 hours later from internal injuries. Six people

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The rear, southern wall of the Jordan Block is pictured shortly before it was dynamited on the afternoon of Nov. 23, 1916. The explosion killed one and injured more than 100 people.

were rushed to St. Joseph's Hospital, and hundreds of people received slight cuts and bruises.

It was estimated that 1,000 people were in the vicinity of the blast. Most of those who received the worst injuries were stood on Railroad Street and in the New Haven and Central Vermont yards. Two cameramen from the Western Feature Film Co., who were filming the explosion, were also slightly injured. In the immediate aftermath of the blast, there was a stunned silence followed by much confusion, as it could be seen that many people were injured.

The scene took on the appearance of a battlefield. In-

jured people were being carried away or supported by others, and people were calling for medical attention. Dr. Laura Hills, and Drs. C.A. Jenkins, F.M. Smith, F.E. Wilcox and Owen O'Neill rushed to the scene. Giles Alford did not seem too badly hurt. He walked into Dunn's cigar store on Railroad Street and asked the clerk to ring for a taxi. He sat in a chair, collapsed and was taken to the hospital. He died fourteen hours later. Many of the worst injuries were suffered by those standing on box cars about 100 yards directly across from the blast.

The railroad yards were covered with pieces of granite ranging in size from marbles to

footballs. Harry Kelley, of 733 Main St., the son of Corporation Counsel Thomas J. Kelley, had a lucky escape. A piece of stone flew straight through his hat without touching his head. One piece of granite pierced a railroad box car, going straight through it like a bullet. The explosion was heard in South Coventry, Mansfield and South Windham, windows were shattered on Main Street, and panes were broken in Dawson's greenhouse on Pleasant Street.

Windham County Coroner Arthur G. Bill was called from Danielson to determine whether there was any criminal negligence. He held a hearing in the town hall, and witnesses gave accounts of the explosion. Thomas Foley, the chief of the fire department, was called and he believed that the amount of dynamite used was not excessive. Samuel Pocarro who set the dynamite, testified that he had worked with dynamite for twenty years, on railroad and highway work. He had blown up four stone houses in his career, to clear the way for railroad construction, and thought that the Jordan Block wall would need a full case, some 50 pounds of dynamite, to demolish it. He said he was following Dunn's instructions, and purchased the dynamite from the Hurley-Grant Co.

It took the coroner more than a month to come to a conclusion. It was announced on Jan.

5, 1917, that the death of Giles Alford was caused by the criminal carelessness of Samuel Pocarro, who was in charge of placing the dynamite in the wall. The quantity of dynamite was excessive and dangerous, and endangered the lives of many people.

The Jordan Block was rebuilt in reinforced concrete, of brick exterior and with a basement. It had a frontage of 100 feet and a depth of 115 feet. Construction of the four-story building began on the site of the old Jordan Block in the spring of 1918. It was completed by the summer of 1919. The ground floor housed the Willimantic Trust Co. and the Jordan Hardware Co. The second floor was used for offices, and the third and fourth floor and basement were occupied by the hardware store.

Fred D. Jordan died in 1925, and in 1951 the Jordan Associates, William P. Jordan, Marion Harrington, Roland B. and Walter S. Jordan and Myrtle V. Jordan, sold the building to the Willimantic Trust Co.

The fine architectural features of the new Jordan Block were hidden from view in 1974 by the application of a bland, featureless, stone cladding. Its isolated location, and its current dull, drab appearance deflects the historic importance of the building, and the fact that here was the scene of one of the greatest fires and disasters in Willimantic's history.