

GAS MAIN FIXED, FAMILIES RETURN

Hundreds Back Home After
Blast, Many Without Heat

By WILL LISSNER

Three hundred Lower East Side families forced from their apartments by a gas explosion Friday night returned yesterday to homes that were still without gas and, in many instances, electricity and central heating.

Some of the older apartment houses had heat from coal stoves, but, with the temperature below freezing, many of the families had only portable kerosene or gasoline heaters for warmth.

The blast was of gas that had collected in a tunnel that ran along the north side of Delancey Street from Essex across Ludlow and Orchard to Allen Streets. It lifted up 40- to 100-foot stretches of the street, throwing up three to four feet of dirt cover over the tunnel roof, 18 inches of concrete street base, and four to six inches of asphalt.

Thereafter, until 9 A.M. in some spots along the four-block site and until 6 A.M. in others, blue, orange and green flames spurted from the street debris 30 feet in the air, casting an eerie light over the neighborhood.

Old Tunnel a Mystery

The tunnel that was the site of the blast presented a mystery. It was a disused facility built, according to maps, by the old city Public Service Commission in 1909. It was a pre-cast concrete rectangular tube, eight feet wide and six feet high, with three-foot mine railway tracks running down the center, apparently for moving materials.

Engineers were unable to guess the use it served. Later it was used for electricity and cable conduits, but these were subsequently relocated. Nowadays such tunnels must be filled with said, but such unused tunnels and conduits remain in the street.

Although the explosion occurred in a densely populated and heavily traveled district—the street is part of Schiff Parkway leading away from the Williamsburg Bridge—only one person was injured in the blast.

Mrs. Juanita Pacheco, 20 years old, of 118 Eldridge Street, suffered minor head injuries when the car in which she was riding was rocked by the explosion. She was treated at Bellevue Hospital and released.

Three firemen and two Con-



The New York Times (by Robert Walker)
SCENE OF GAS EXPLOSION: Ruptured concrete and damaged cars on Delancey Street at Essex Street mark the site where blast occurred Friday night. Many residents of the Lower East Side neighborhood were deprived of heat.

solidated Edison emergency workers were treated for smoke inhalation and minor injuries.

The police said the Manhattan-bound side of the Williamsburg Bridge would probably continue to be closed today. Delancey Street, between Essex Street and the Bowery, will also be closed to traffic.

Subway service on the Sixth Avenue IND Line to Brooklyn from the West Fourth Street Station in Manhattan was cut off until 5:44 A.M. The Broadway, Brooklyn-Jamaica Line's tunnel, which runs just underneath the tunnel where the blast occurred, remained out of service until late yesterday afternoon. The line ended its operations at Marcy Avenue in Brooklyn, and the Metropolitan Transit Authority provided bus service to the Lower East Side.

35 Houses Emptied

When the explosion occurred, city and transit policemen and firemen went into neighboring tenements, evacuating the residents of 35 houses. Most found shelter with relatives and friends in the neighborhood.

The director of the American

Red Cross disaster unit, Thomas A. Boyle, responded to the alarm with 15 cars, summoning also available volunteer drivers from five boroughs. They took families to nearby restaurants and the Clinton Street police station.

Finding hotel space short, the Red Cross team took those who had them to relatives or friends living in the city.

Mrs. Rebecca Shapiro, one of the evacuees, said she and some of her neighbors sat in booths in a restaurant until 4 A.M. "Then the restaurant owners had to get ready for business and we had to get out—we couldn't hold up the man's business," she said. "So we went to the University Settlement, 184 Eldridge Street."

One House Burned Out

Residents of 120 Orchard Street were not allowed to return. Their house was burned out in a coincidental fire brought under control at 2:40 A.M.

With fire apparatus blocking the street, the Orchard Street Market, where more business is done on the sidewalk than in the stores, was engaged in business as usual. Adler's

Men's Store at 120, with a shop full of the latest fashions, prepared for a fire sale.

What caused the blast was not established. Nor was the break or breaks in the main found. The utility company rushed in several hundred workers with half a dozen trenchers, earthmovers with a large metal claw. They dug out the mains and capped them by inserting and inflating balloons.

At 5:40 A.M. the master valve was found at Delancey and Orchard Streets and turned off.

The explosion recalled one, also from gas, that occurred in Jamaica, Queens, on Jan. 13, 1967, when nine houses were demolished and eight others badly damaged, along with two fire engines trapped in a blaze that resulted. This led to a re-organization of distribution-main inspections.