

Engineer and Stillman Narrowly Escape Death

Top of Huge Tank, Hurl'd Through Air by Explosion at Radio Oil Refineries, Misses Workers by Inches—Spectacular Fire Gives Firemen Stern Battle for Several Hours.

George Gibson and Joe Hechter, engineer and stillman, respectively, employed at the Radio Oil Refineries, Ltd., distilling plant, Munroe avenue, East Kildonan, narrowly escaped death at 6.40 o'clock, Thursday evening, when an explosion, followed by fire, almost wrecked one of three big oil tanks on the premises. Damage by the explosion and fire was tentatively estimated by Ben Hechter, 32 Noble avenue, president of the company, at approximately \$1,000, partially covered by insurance.

The blast, which rattled windows of houses for blocks around, tossed the 500-pound galvanized iron top of the tank for a distance of more than 50 feet. Gibson and Hechter, who were tending the open-air boiler at the time, jumped back when they heard the explosion, although totally unaware that at that exact moment the huge weight was hurtling through the air toward them.

Missed Death by Inches

Had they not leaped back in the direction they did they would have been killed, for the big top, missing them only by inches, landed on the exact spot where they had been standing a second before.

Flames belched forth from the tank immediately following the explosion, casting a spectacular glare which could be seen a considerable distance away, and which attracted a huge crowd to the scene. Making a dull roaring sound, the fuel oil which the tank contained, burned furiously and was still blazing hours after the outbreak. Fortunately, the tank in which the fire occurred was not full at the time. Each of the three containers, which stand in a line and are separated only by a few inches, are of about 16,000-gallons capacity.

Blast Heard for Miles

The explosion, the cause of which is not yet known, was heard within a radius of several miles, and shattered windows of the offices of the plant. Outside of this, the loss of the oil and damage to the tank, was all that resulted. Tanks containing gasoline were not endangered, as they are located some distance away on the grounds.

East Kildonan firemen responded to the alarm and two pumps and a ladder truck from halls 7 and 8 of the Winnipeg fire department were sent out by request of the suburban brigade, but their aid was not required. Acting Chief John Miller, of the city fire department, also personally attended and gave assistance.

While water from several hose was poured on the blazing tank other streams were directed on the two adjoining tanks and at the same time they were emptied of oil, which was piped into other containers in a distant part of the grounds.

Provincial fire commissioner, Edward McGrath, and Robert Stewart

chief boiler inspector of the department, were called to the scene and will continue their investigation today when they will make an examination of the damaged tank and connecting apparatus in an effort to determine the cause of the explosion.

REWARD OFFERED FOR SOLUTION OF TRAGEDY

Parents of Milton Koser,
Found Strangled Saturday,
Appeal for Information

Think Most Likely Cause of
Boy's Death Was Attempt
to Do "Houdini Act"

Reward of \$500 for information that will clear up the mystery of their son's death is offered by the parents of Milton Koser, the 13-year-old boy who was found strangled in his room, at 77 Home street, Saturday afternoon.

Announcement of the offer of the reward was made in a written statement issued to the Free Press, Thursday afternoon, by the boy's father, Leon W. Koser.

In his statement, Mr. Koser says the suicide theory is inconceivable to any one who knew the boy. The murder theory, he states, is equally hard to entertain. No one, in his opinion, except a dope-smared fiend, could conceive of executing such a crime and in any event there would have been signs of a struggle and bodily injuries other than those that were around the boy's neck and head.

The most likely cause of the tragedy, Mr. Koser believes, was that Milton was attempting to do a "Houdini act." He is convinced, however,

(Continued on Page Six)

LOOKING BACKWARD

(From the Free Press Files)

Fifty-five Years Ago—Oct. 15, 1876

The prize-winners at the provincial fair were Jas. Harrower, Robinson & Wilson, Geo. Maxwell, Mrs. Pritchard, R. Egan, Mrs. McIvor, M. McDonald, C. Mellard, E. G. Conklin, W. A. Farmer, the Manitoba Free Press, F. D. K. Geo. Packer, Geo. Lydie and E. H. J. O. Hay.—It was recommended that one of the first duties of the new government of the Northwest Territories should be the enactment of legislation to protect the buffalo.

Fifty Years Ago—Oct. 15, 1881

The building boom continued in

GASOLINE STOCKS MENACED BY FIRE IN EAST KILDONAN

Fire, at times dangerously close to huge steel tanks storing thousands of gallons of gasoline, did damage estimated at about \$2000 to the equipment and control room on the premises of the Radio Oil and Refineries, limited, Munroe avenue and Watt street, East Kildonan, early Monday afternoon.

Origin of the blaze will be investigated today by provincial government fire inspectors.

Good work on the part of East Kil-

donan fire-fighters confined the blaze to the control room, although it appeared at times as if the flames would get sufficiently close to explode the gigantic tanks of gasoline.

The firemen remained on duty for nearly two hours.

The funeral of William Lawton, 62, who died Sunday at the General hospital, will be held this afternoon, at 2 o'clock, from the Clark-Leatherdale funeral home. Burial will be made in Elmwood cemetery.

The Sick, Aged and Helpless
Benefit from Donations to

**THE WINNIPEG
FOUNDATION**

Remember it in your will.

OIL REFINERIES PREMISES AT EAST KILDONAN RAZED

The plant and several other buildings on the premises of the Radio Oil Refineries, Ltd., Monroe avenue and Watt street, East Kildonan, are in ruins today, the result of a fire, followed by a terrific explosion, which swept through the structures early Wednesday afternoon. The cause of the fire has not yet been determined, but inspectors of the provincial fire commissioner's department will resume their investigation this morning.

Ben Hechter, president of the company, declined Wednesday night to give an estimate of the loss, which, he said, was covered by insurance.

Although the fire has resulted in the temporary suspension of operations, Mr. Hechter said no employees would be thrown out of work.

The explosion, occurring in the control room of the plant at the height of the fire, could be heard by persons within a radius of half a mile. No persons were injured, however.

Receiving the alarm shortly after noon, East Kildonan fire-fighters waged a gallant battle in preventing the flames from menacing the 100-foot tanks of oil nearby.

After battling with the fire for about two hours, the fire chief put in an emergency call to the Winnipeg fire department, but upon their arrival at the plant the flames had been placed under control and their assistance was not required.

Chinese Consul For Canada

Vancouver, Feb. 16. — Hsiki Chow, Chinese consul in Vancouver for the past three years, has received instructions from the Chinese National government at Nanking to proceed to Ottawa to assume the post of consul

OIL PLANT HEAD SAYS FIRE DAMAGE IS ONLY SLIGHT

Damage to the plant of the Radio Oil Refineries, limited, Monroe avenue and Watt street, East Kildonan, as a result of a fire and explosion which occurred Wednesday afternoon, was only slight. The plant will be in operation again in a day or so, according to Ben Hechter, president of the company.

The stock was undamaged, while the loss consisted of the recording instruments, valued at about \$1,000, and the damage to the building is estimated at from \$500 to \$600.

It was incorrectly reported in Thursday's Free Press that the plant and several other buildings on the premises were in ruins. The Free Press regrets that this impression was given by its initial report.

Refinery Expansion Protested

A petition presented by A. Reid, 561 Trent ave., with 2,172 signatories, was before the regular meeting of East Kildonan Council Monday night, protesting the proposed closing of Munroe ave. from Watt st. to the C.P.R. tracks for the purpose of industrial expansion.

The petition was worded in the following terms:

"We, the undersigned, do hereby protest the proposed closing of Munroe ave. from Watt st. to the C.P.R. tracks and the sale of land on Munroe ave. to the Radio Oil and Gas Co., or any other oil company for the purpose of expanding the present refinery facilities, as such expansion will be a menace to the present and proposed schools, and the health of the children. It will also tend to lower the value of property and will create an extra fire hazard."

The petition was the outcome of a request by the local oil refinery for purchase of additional land north of their property which had come before a previous Council meeting. At that meeting the petitioners asked that the company's request be "hoisted" for two weeks so that time might be given for a canvass of the district. At that meeting the petitioners' "hoist" request was granted.



Move Out Oil Refinery, Kildonan Delegates Ask

A delegation representing the four wards of East Kildonan asked the municipal council Monday night that an oil refinery at Munroe and Watt streets be removed from the municipality "in the interests of the health of children and residents."

The resolution drafted at a special ratepayers meeting on Jan. 5 objected to the building of the oil refinery near a school, claimed that the refinery constituted a fire hazard, gave off offensive odors at times, and resolved that it find another location outside the municipal boundaries.

Council pointed out that the industry in question, the Radio Oil Refineries, limited, own their land and it was hardly possible to order any person or private company to pack up and leave their own location.

Acting Mayor F. W. Dryden pointed out that no consideration had been given the refinery since council had received a petition from the ratepayers, and advised the delegation to re-word their resolution and present it to council again.

Control Of Pumping Stations

Council authorized entrance into an agreement with the greater Winnipeg sanitary district regarding effective control of operation and maintenance of sewage pumping stations. Cost and personnel is to be

paid by the municipality and the district will assume responsibility for direction and control.

The proposal was made in a letter from the Winnipeg Diking board, containing recommendations by the chairman of the Municipal Engineers committee.

Council also passed bylaws providing for assessment of costs of paving and widening certain East Kildonan streets, including parts of Henderson highway, and also along the course of Broder Drive and Roosevelt Place.

VETERANS' AUXILIARY MEETS

The ladies' auxiliary of Rockwood unit, Army, Navy and Airforce Veterans in Canada will hold a meeting at 8 p.m. Thursday in Harrow United church.

Visiting Doctor Canadian Surgeon

"Canada can be proud of her surgeons," Dr. A. E. Coates, of Melbourne, Australia, said Monday.

He passed through Winnipeg Monday over Canadian Pacific lines on his way home after a tour of medical schools in Canada, the United States and Great Britain.

A past president of the Victoria branch of the British Medical Association...

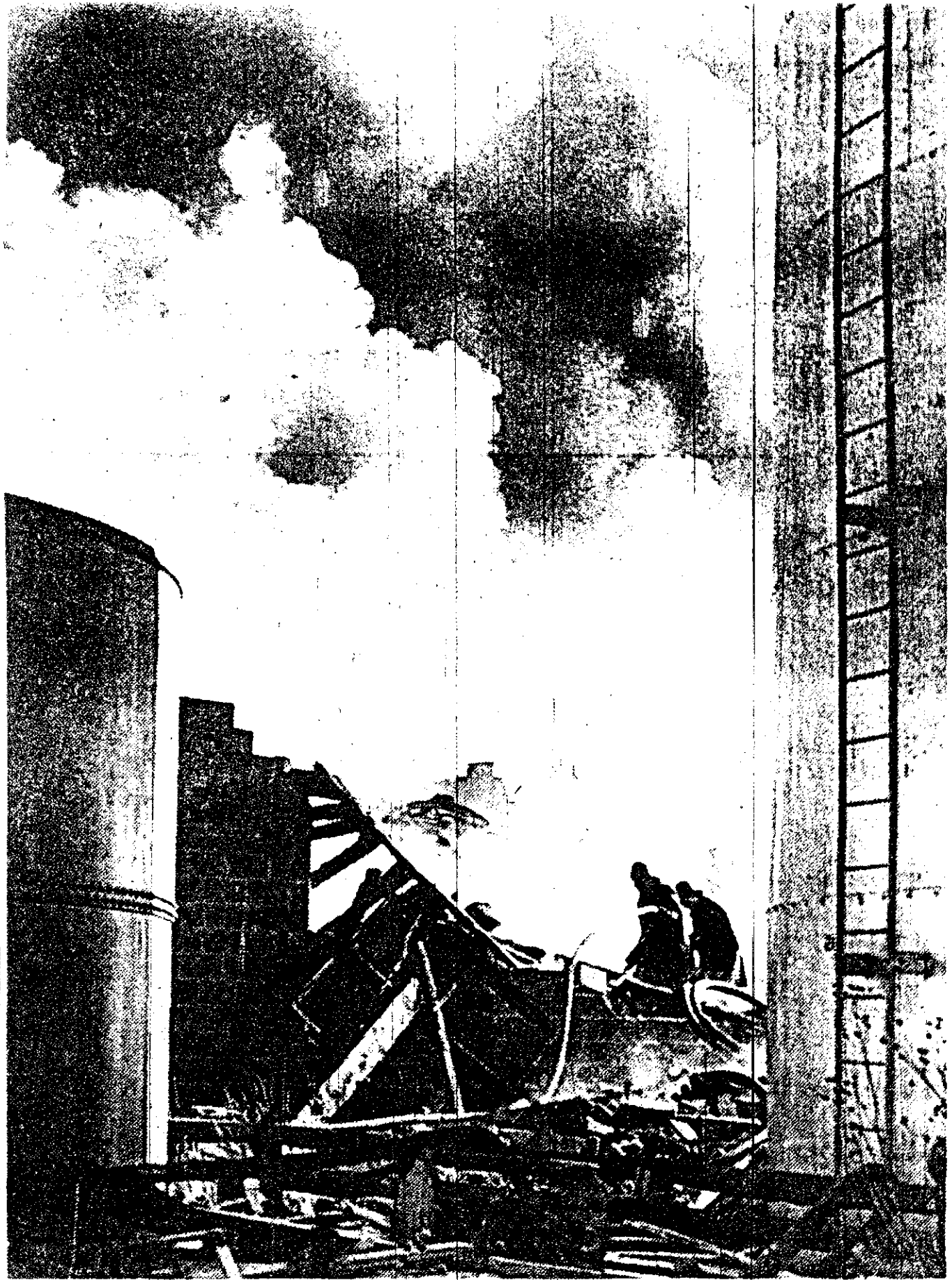


Photo by Jack Abbott

Firemen from East Kildonan and Winnipeg battled a fire that followed an explosion at the Radio Oil Company, Watt Street and Munroe Avenue shortly after noon Monday. Reservoir tank, at right, containing nearly 100,000 gallons of high-octane gasoline was threatened by the blaze which caused an estimated \$500,000 damage. Two men were injured as several explosions ripped through the burning garage building which was razed. (See story on Page 8.)

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COLOR



Husky Oil, a leading Canadian Independent Oil Company, is proud to welcome your neighbourhood ROCO service station to Husky's expanding system of Car/Truck Stops and marketing outlets which extend from Ontario to the west coast.

ROCO (Radio Oil Ltd.) was started in 1921 by Ben Hechter with one gasoline pump in front of a small family grocery store in East Kildonan. In 1925 Max Hechter provided additional capital and joined his brother Ben in the expansion of the business. In 1930 business had expanded to the point where the brothers seriously considered erecting their own refinery and at this stage were joined by another brother Frank, and brother-in-law Fred Sures and the refinery was built.

Gerald M. Hechter joined the company in 1939 and by the early fifties had become the sole owner of the business.

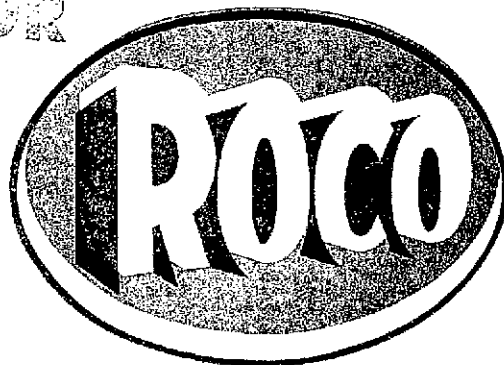
Under Gerald Hechter's vigorous entrepreneurship, Radio Oil expanded its refining activities to about 2000 barrels per day and the company embarked on a program of sustained growth.

During the fifties and sixties Radio Oil's expansion continued, generally as a result of Gerald Hechter's foresight in the selection and acquisition of service stations and viable sites. Today, beginning a well earned retirement, Gerald Hechter says of those earlier days: "As often as not, I was working five and ten years into the future".

But life for Gerald Hechter was not without its setbacks. In 1963 an extreme high blood pressure condition led to complete loss of vision and he was rushed to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. where treatment over a period of months restored his sight.

"When I returned to Winnipeg", Hechter says, "I felt I should ease up a little and I sold most of the properties of Radio Oil to Tobanne Enterprises Limited with a lease-back arrangement to Radio Oil Ltd."

*Left to right:
James M. Halliday, Tobanne Enterprises Limited
M. J. (Jack) Tallon, Husky Oil
Gerald M. Hechter, President, Radio Oil Ltd.*



By 1975, Radio Oil had grown to include many more locations in Manitoba when, once again, Gerald Hechter was struck by illness. That year he suffered a heart attack and, following hospitalization and recovery, he decided to sell. His decision was also influenced by the fact that he has no children and would not have a successor in the family to carry on the business.

Husky, after a long period of negotiations, acquired most of Radio Oil's remaining petroleum marketing assets as of August 31, 1978.

