

*FLAT ROCK, MICHIGAN
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1948*

Blast Wrecks Exchange; Run Dial System in Tent

Telephone service, was completely, restored to Flat Rock 14 hours after an explosion Thursday that utterly destroyed the Michigan Bell Telephone company's community dial office here. Recently placed in service (Dec.-10), the building, was one-story in height, built of brick.

It housed \$54,000 worth of switching equipment. Nobody was in the building at the time.

The equipment was placed in working condition following an all-night repair job under a tent hastily thrown over it to protect it from further damage or exposure. It is expected the community dial office, which originally cost \$11,000 will be replaced for \$15,000 including needed repairs to the telephone equipment.

Believed to have been caused by a leaking gas main, the explosion rocked Flat Rock, shattering windows three blocks away and cutting off telephone service for all subscribers to the village exchange.

As emergency measures, Michigan Bell rushed four switchboards* from Farmington to the scene and began setting up temporary operation for the townspeople.

In addition to the above equipment, the company sent a telecoach to the scene which had facilities for five telephones and an attendant to handle emergency long-distance calls. This telecoach was in addition to the one public telephone made available to subscribers in the long-distance office a block and a half away from the dial office. Long distance service wasn't impaired by the explosion.

Of injuries sustained, none were serious. Three students and one teacher from the Flat Rock High School were cut by flying glass, given emergency first aid treatment, and dismissed from school. All classes were adjourned as children became excited.

The teacher who was injured slightly was J. P. Kohli, who was presiding

over a second floor study hall at the time. John M. Barnes, superintendent of schools, dismissed classes for the day.

Late in the afternoon it was reported that order was being restored and that eight public telephone booths had been set. up throughout the village to further increase, telephone facilities.

In addition to 35 windows being shattered in the high school, it was reported that stained glass windows in a Methodist Church in back of the community dial office and across the street were shattered also.

Robert McFadden, who is employed by the Village of Flat Rock, was working on a fire hydrant at the corner of Church and Erie Streets, where the community dial is located, when the explosion occurred.

He saw the roof of the building soar 50 feet in the air and land on the roof of his own home 60 feet to the west. Besides springing walls in his home, blowing some windows out, and shattering sections of his own roof, the roof of the community dial office eventually, settled on the top of his 1940 Oldsmobile parked alongside the house. The top of the car was badly mashed.

Two of his children, a daughter Betty, 9 years old, and a son, Bobby, 2-1/2 years old, were playing in the backyard of their home when the explosion occurred. Neither was hurt although the girl received a small cut on one finger from flying debris. Mrs. McFadden, working inside the house was not injured, but was thrown to the floor by the force of the blast.

Eye-witnesses to the, accident included Bill: Goudrau who lives block and a half away from the scene of the explosion and who reported it was "like something in the movies, with parts of the building flying as high as two or three hundred feet in the air."

John Vlachos, owner of the Flat Rock Theater, and a friend, James Nash, reported the explosion to the police.

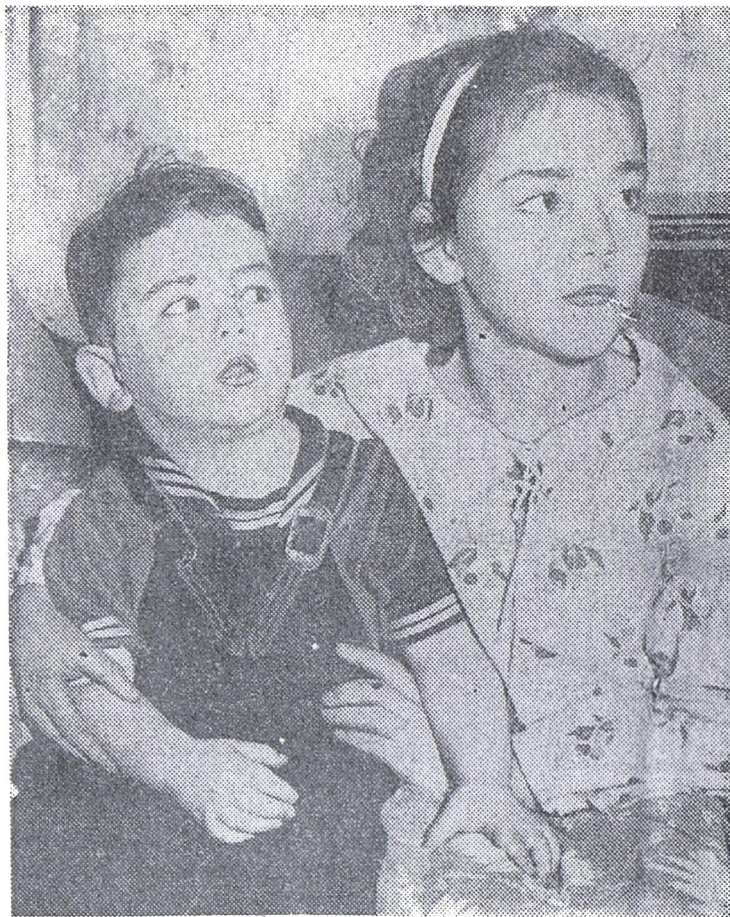
Several townspeople reported the explosion to the police by saying that they thought it was in their own basements — it sounded like it, it felt like it.

The first telephone was restored to service at 5:50 p.m., Feb. 13; 14 essential subscribers had service at 8:00 pm., including local and state police, Village president, "Guardian" office, home and business phones of doctors, fire department, water works, electric and gas companies, D.T. & I. railroad office, etc.; all but 21-lines were in service by 12:30 a.m., Feb. 14; complete service to all

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Mobile-On-wheels-phOne-Switches or **MOOS*

Flat Rock's Blast-Wrecked Phone Building



Photos from Flat Rock by Detroit Times Staff Photographer Roy A. Bash



Flat Rock's telephone building (right) after the explosion that leveled the exchange built at a cost of \$200,000. Two adults and three children were injured. Betty Mae McFadden (pictured above with her brother, Bobbie, 8) suffered a cut hand when the roof of the exchange landed on their home next door. Two blocks away, 33 windows were blown out of a school.



Detroit Times Photo

This car, crushed by bricks and timber from the explosion, was parked next to the Flat Rock exchange. It is owned by Robert McFadden, who lives next door. Probable cause of blast: an underground gas main leak.



