

I Remember Old Tuscaloosa

By Fred Maxwell

THERE HAVE been many steam boiler explosions, most of them with serious consequences. Almost invariably the cause is due to allowing the boiler water level to get too low and then injecting cold water on the too hot boiler plates, generating a quick flash of steam that can and usually does cause the boiler to burst but

remain in the same location.

Tuscaloosa had a unique case in 1900 (circa). The Tuscaloosa Ice Co. was located in the center of the east part of the city block just north of the old Post Office (and now the City Hall) at the corner of 5th St. and 22nd Ave.

On this occasion it seems that the

fireman allowed the boiler water to give out completely. The entire boiler apparently got red hot. The fireman injected water and with a terrific explosion the boiler was projected out of the roof of the boiler room, thence over intervening buildings, over the three-story First National Bank building (now Adrians Department Store), and to the Atlanta Store (now the First National Bank building) where it crashed through the roof and came to rest on the second floor. This was an aerial trip of nearly two city blocks. The Maxwell Brothers warehouse in close proximity to the boiler explosion was not struck by the boiler (it cleared it) but there were over 150 holes in the warehouse roof from bricks, pipe and other debris.

An inspector from the Hartford

Insurance Co. (veteran boiler insurance underwriters) walked around the boiler on the second floor of the Atlanta Store and then remarked, in substance, "I take my hat off to this one. In my many years of boiler explosions I have never seen anything like this.."

The best explanation I've ever heard of the cause of the aerial trip of the boiler is that when water was injected on the superheated red hot boiler that it was converted directly into its atomic elements—oxygen and hydrogen (H₂O) instead of steam. The enormous increase in pressure volume content gave it the power to "take off" and follow the trajectory that ensued.

In a way the trip by this boiler antedated the present day of rockets by about 40 years.