File

DATA SHEET
PEERLESS TYPE M ODORIZER

Sold to: Ford, Bacon & Davis — INVOICE Odorizer No. 1970

Location: Longhorn Ordnance-Karnack, Texas — Date: 5-15-42

Order No. 1625 — Size Pump M-1 200# — Serial No. 2105

Size Line 10" — Size Orifice 4.50" — Hourly Coef (8 oz-.60 Gr.-Flange Taps) 5305

Average Line Pressure (Gauge) 50 +15 = 65 lbs. Absolute.

Maximum hourly gas flow at working pressure and 100" differential = ____

Hourly Coef 5305 X $\sqrt{65}$ X 100 = 425 000 Cu. ft. or .425 Millions Cu. ft.

Millions cubic feet gas flow per hour (from above)	.425
Gallons Odorant per million (when using pounds Pentalarm divide by 7)	2
Gallons Odorant per hour	.850
Pressure Factor = $\sqrt{(\text{Line Pressure} + 15) \div 65}$ = $\sqrt{65 \div 65}$ =	1
Gallons per 360 revolutions of meter	.850
Sprocket ratio 3 - 1 Multiply by reciprocal	.333
Gallons per 360 revolutions of pump	.283
Liquid Setting (Bulletin 203, Page 2, Fig. 3 for M-1 Pump) (Note: Special curve for liquid setting for M-2 & M-3 Pumps)	14.5

(Precision valve setting is directly proportional to gauge pressure)

Line Pressure	40	45	50	55	60
Precision Valve Setting	.80	.90	1.00	1.10	1.20

Precision Valve - Regular
Sight Feed - Yes
Float Valve Size - #62
Filter - Fisher
Calibration tube - 2"-Scale in Gallons for 48" Tank
Storage tank - 48"
Stand - Yes
Set Misc. Connecting Valves and Fittings

PEERLESS MFG. CO.

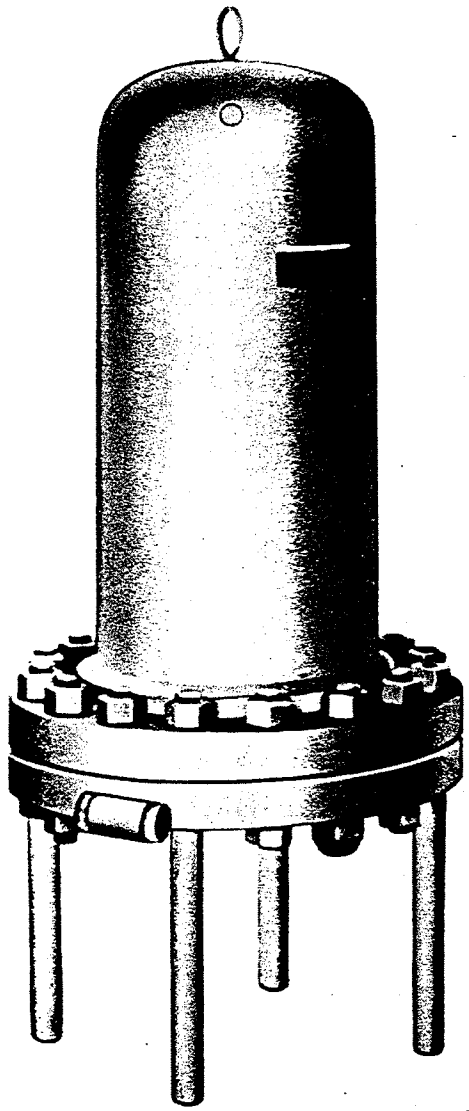
113 MURRAY ST. DALLAS, TEXAS

(If capacity changes require a change in orifice plate, write us giving new data and we will supply new Data Sheet.)

PEERLESS

TYPE "M" ODORIZER

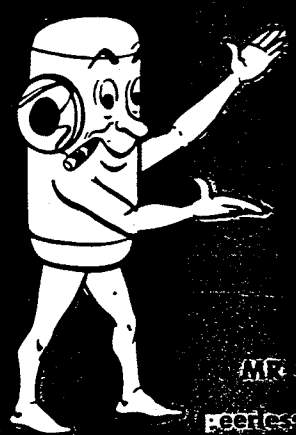
(METER TYPE)



BULLETIN No. 901

The Peerless **ROBOT** that **METERS** the odorant from your storage tank to your gas line...

MORE ACCURATELY
MORE DEPENDABLY
MORE ECONOMICALLY



PEERLESS MFG. CO.
DALLAS TEXAS

Peerless L Sep tor

PRINCIPLE of OPERATION for

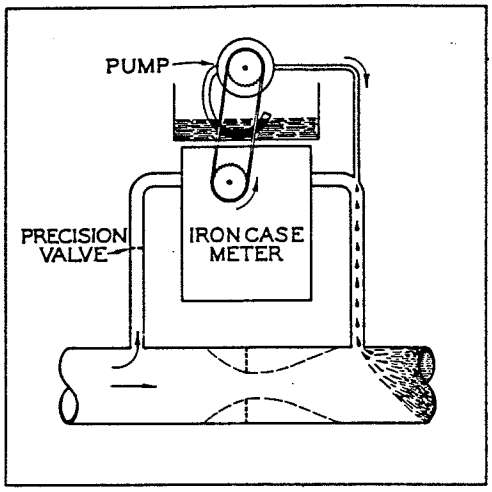


FIG. 1

The differential across the orifice plate and the Precision Valve, always being equal, the flow of gas thru the meter is EXACTLY proportional to the flow of gas thru the orifice plate.

The meter drives a pump which, at each revolution, picks up an accurately MEASURED volume of odorant, and delivers it to the meter OUTLET.

The liquid level is controlled by the Peerless Float Valve, which has given complete satisfaction in Peerless Float Odorizers over a period of years. The meter and odorant pump are enclosed in a pressure tight case which is easily removed, making all working parts readily accessible.

THE PRECISION VALVE used is a ¾" Hancock Flo-control Valve. It is set according to the curve in Fig. 2, to deliver a maximum of 360 cu. ft. per hour, (normal capacity of the meter), thru the meter at 100" differential, and at the specified working pressure. After starting odorizer, small adjustments to obtain the EXACT odorizing rate required may be made by adjusting the Precision Valve.

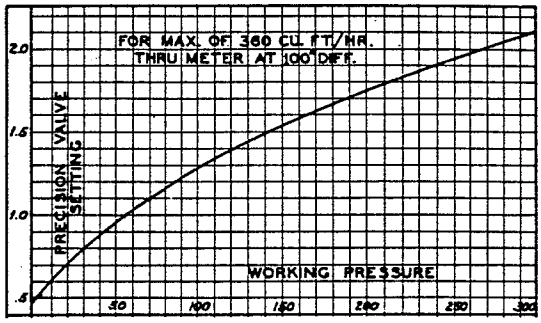


FIG. 2

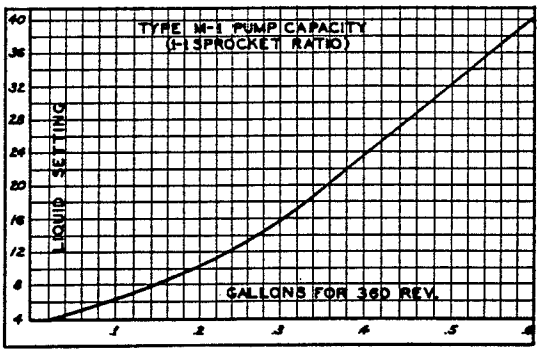


FIG. 3

THE LIQUID LEVEL can be set to deliver from .05 gallons to .60 gallons for each 360 revolutions of the pump. This setting is made to a scale on the float valve, and held with a lock nut. This setting is made at the factory according to data furnished by user, and can readily be changed by user if load conditions require change in the orifice plate size. Complete instructions are furnished with the machine.

CAPACITY requirements of odorant determine the size of odorizer required. Because this odorizer can be used with any type of odorant, the only determining factor is the amount of odorant per hour to be dispersed at maximum flow.

Use Type M-1 Odorizer for maximum loads up to 3.6 gallons of odorant per hour.

Use Type M-2 Odorizer for all maximum loads above 3.6 gallons odorant per hour.

ACCURACY is a built-in feature of the Peerless odorizer. The basic principle of operation results in an accurate rate of odorization from 100" down to 2" differential. The meter operates on a minimum pressure drop of .1" water pressure. This results in the odorizing rate being 1% slow at 2" diff., and down to 5% slow at ½" diff. Such a low differential is very seldom reached, and no other type of odorizer can anywhere nearly approach such accuracy.

CALIBRATION SCALE for the storage tank is laid off on the right side, in thousanths of gallons for testing. The left side of the scale is laid off in gallons, or pounds in storage. If the storage tank is supplied by the user, the left side of the scale is left blank for strapping the storage tank.

PEERLESS Type "M" ODORIZER

- Easy to install.
- Easy to operate.
- No error due to temperature or to viscosity of the odorant.
- No small orifices to clog.
- Accurate odorization at any rate of flow.
- Readily adjustable to any odorant.
- Shipped ready to operate.
- Finest materials and workmanship.

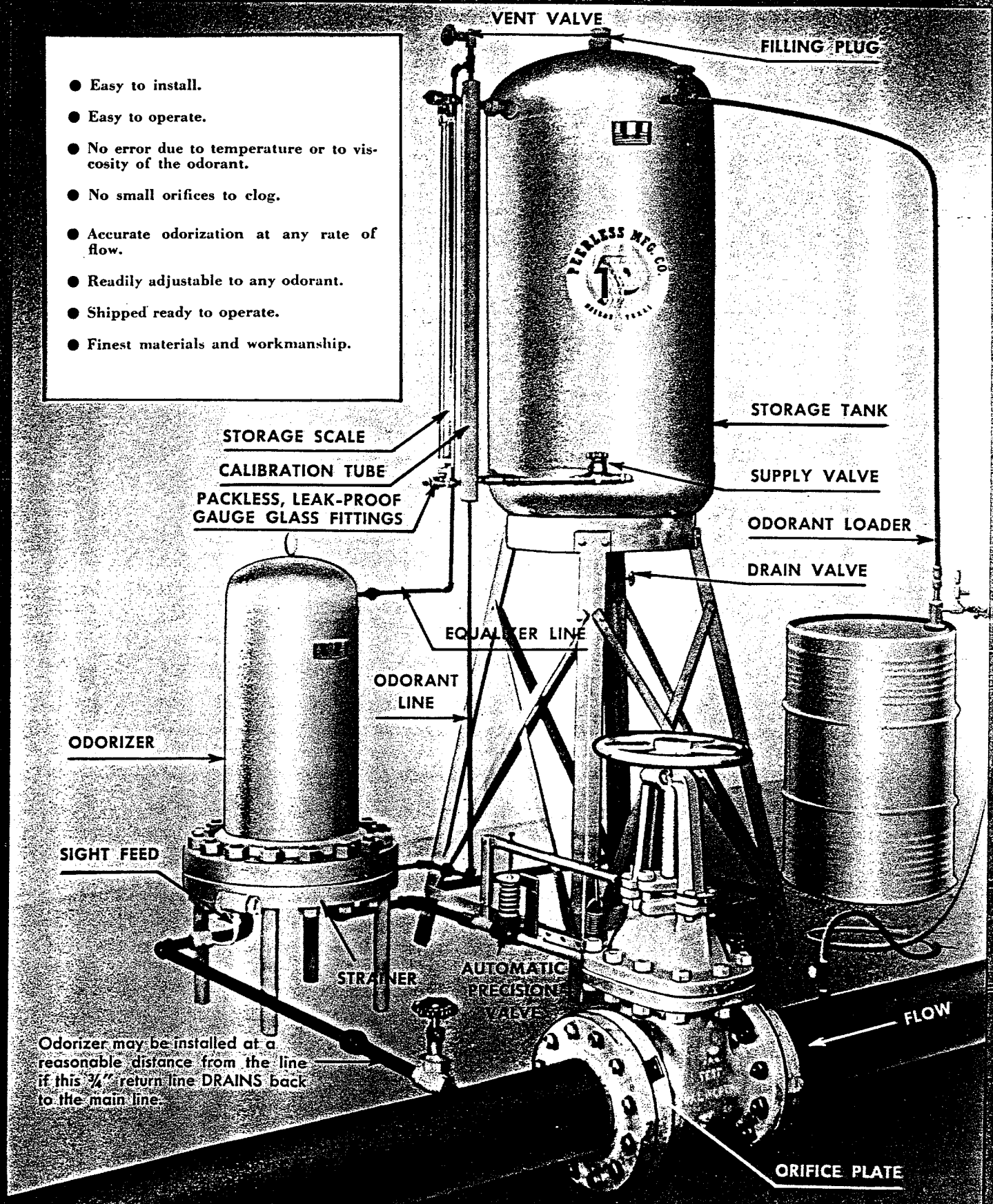


FIG. 4. TYPICAL INSTALLATION OF PEERLESS TYPE "M" ODORIZER CONNECTED TO A 24" STORAGE TANK

ACCESSORIES

PEERLESS ODORANT STORAGE TANKS AND STANDS

These tanks and stands are specifically designed for this odorizer. The tanks are equipped with all necessary connections for the odorizer, Calibration Tube and Peerless Odorant Loader. The stands provide rigid supports for the tank:

Size Tank	Capacity gallons	API-ASME & ASME (1950) Code work. press.*	ASME 1949 (U-69) * work. press.	Approx. weight of tank	Approx. weight of tank and stand
16″ O.D.	26	500	500	290	390
24″ O.D.	60	200	200	400	585
24″ O.D.	60	500	466	625	670
36″ O.D.	135	200	176	975	1,005
36″ O.D.	135	492	386	1,800	1,940
48″ O.D.	250	197	161	1,700	2,025
48″ O.D.	250	472	370	2,300	3,125

* Specify the code construction of the tank when ordering.

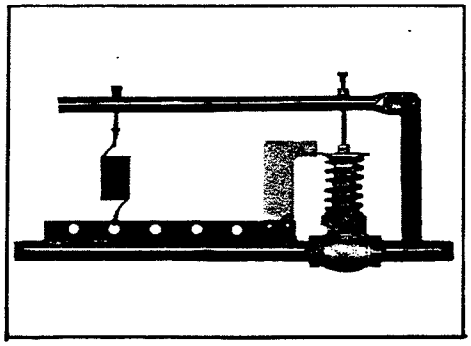


FIG. 5

PEERLESS AUTOMATIC PRECISION VALVE

The Peerless Automatic Precision Valve automatically compensates for varying line pressure, thus increasing the efficiency and lowering the maintenance cost. It will operate accurately over a range of plus or minus 50% from design pressure. The bellows actuated valve, adjusted at the factory for the design pressure, requires little or no attention. Many have been in service for more than ten years without parts replacement or resetting. (Fig. 5)

PEERLESS ODORANT LOADER

The Loader facilitates the transfer of odorant from shipping barrels to the storage tank. It speeds up the filling of the storage tank and reduces spillage and fuming losses during transfer. Operating from the main gas supply the loader is equipped with a small pop valve and a pressure guage to prevent bursting the shipping drum. All necessary hoses and valves are included as standard equipment on the Loader. (Fig. 6)

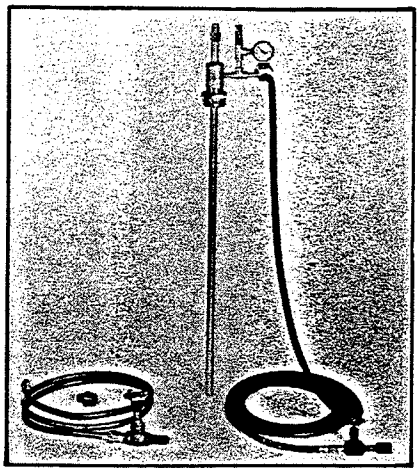


FIG. 6

SET OF VALVES AND FITTINGS

Supplied in this equipment are all valves, couplings, aluminum Tube, and pipe dope necessary for connecting the odorizer and tank into the line. This simplifies the connecting of the odorizer and reduces material procurement to a minimum.

ESSENTIAL DATA REQUIRED FOR FILLING ORDERS

1. Size Line.
2. Actual Working Pressure.
3. Maximum hourly load in WINTER.
4. Maximum hourly load in SUMMER.
5. Odorizing rate per million cu. ft. required.
6. What code stamping if any, is required.

PEERLESS MFG. CO. DALLAS TEXAS

PEERLESS MANUFACTURING COMPANY

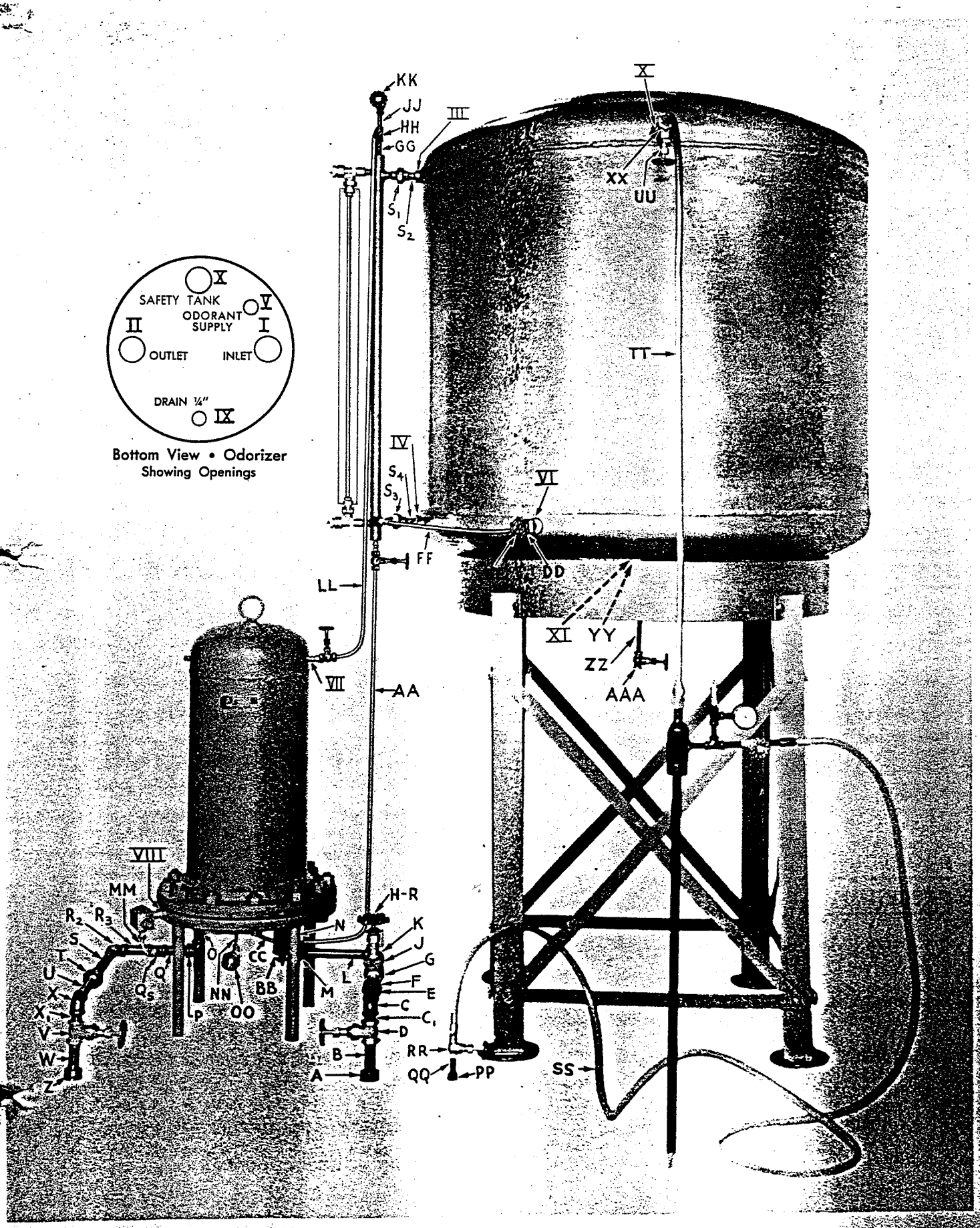
Walnut Hill Lane at Old Denton Road

P. O. Box 7193 DALLAS, TEXAS DIxon 8431

AGENTS IN: Houston, Alice, Odessa, Wichita Falls, and El Paso, Texas. Tulsa, Denver, Phoenix, Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Louisville, New York City, Buffalo, Chicago, Richmond.

INSTALLATION INSTRUCTIONS for PEERLESS Type "M" ODORIZER

PARTS LIST and PARTS PRICES



Bottom View • Odorizer
Showing Openings

INSTALLATION INSTRUCTIONS for

These instructions are provided for connecting the piping for the Type M Odorizer. The fittings referred to are all included in the set of valves and fittings, which is supplied as an extra:

PROCEDURE FROM PIPE LINE TO GAS INLET

Weld ¾" coupling A into the upstream side of the gas line.

Note: Using pipe taps, rather than flange taps, is recommended.

If it is desired to tap the line in the top, a street ell A_1 is provided.

Connect ¾"x5" nipple B into coupling A.

Connect ¾" Valve D to nipple B. (A gate valve is supplied on 200# and a plug valve is supplied on 500#).

Connect in ¾" Ell C and ¾"x5" nipple C_1 if a change in direction is desired. (As shown on the accompanying sketch.)

PROCEDURE WITH REGULAR PRECISION VALVE

Connect ¾"x10" Nipple E to ¾" Valve D.

Connect ¾" Union F to Nipple E.

Connect ¾"x5" Nipple G to Union F.

Connect Regular Precision Valve H-R to Nipple G.

Connect ¾"x8" Nipple J to Precision Valve H-R.

PROCEDURE WITH AUTOMATIC PRECISION VALVE

Connect Automatic Precision Valve H-A to Valve D.

Connect ¾" Union F to Precision Valve H-A.

Connect ¾"x8" Nipple J to Union F.

Connect ¾" Ell K to Nipple J.

Connect ¾"x5" Nipple L to Ell K.

Connect ¾" Ell M to Nipple L.

Connect ¾"x5" Nipple N to Ell M.

Connect Nipple N into opening I on Odorizer.

FROM GAS OUTLET IN ODORIZER TO PIPE LINE

Connect ¾"x5" Nipple O to opening II in bottom of odorizer.

Connect ¾" ell P to nipple O.

Connect ¾"x3" nipple Q to ell P.

Connect ¾"x¾"x¼" Tee Q_S to nipple Q.

Connect ¾" Street Ell R to Q_S

(Alternate) A ¾" ell R_2 and a ¾"x5" Nipple R_3 may be used to replace the street ell (as seen in the installation diagram).

Connect ¾"x16" nipple S to Ell R.

Connect ¾" Union T to Nipple S.

Connect ¾" Valve V to Nipple U. (This is a gate valve for 200# installations and a plug valve for 500# installations).

(An extra ¾" ell X and ¾"x5" Nipple X_1 are provided to change direction, if required. This is indicated on the installation diagram).

Connect ¾"x5" Nipple W to Valve V.

Connect Nipple W to ¾" 6000# Coupling Z_1 which is placed in the line.

A ¾" Street Ell Z_1 is provided if it is desired to tap the line in the top.

PEERLESS Type "M" ODORIZER

CONNECTING CALIBRATION TUBE TO TANK

Screw ½"x2" nipples S_2 into openings III and IV on the tank.

Connect Calibration Tube to these nipples S_2 by ½" Unions S_1

FROM BOTTOM OF CALIBRATION TUBE TO ODORANT INLET ON ODORIZER

Connect aluminum tubing with brass fittings AA into valve on bottom of calibration tube.

Connect ¼"x1½" nipple BB into opening V in the odorizer.

Connect ¼" Fisher Filter CC on to nipple BB.

Connect aluminum tubing AA on to filter CC.

SUPPLY LINE FROM ODORANT TANK TO CALIBRATION TUBE

Connect ¼"x1½" nipple DD into opening VI on the storage tank.

Connect ¼" Angle Pattern Needle Valve EE to Nipple DD.

Connect ⅜"x13" aluminum tubing FF with brass fittings to Needle Valve EE, and into side opening on the bottom of the Calibration Tube.

EQUALIZER LINE FROM TOP OF CALIBRATION TUBE TO ODORIZER DOME

Screw ¼" Needle Valve into opening VII on Odorizer.

Connect ¼"x1½" nipple GG to top of Calibration Tube.

Connect ¼" Tee HH to Nipple GG.

Connect ¼"x1½" Nipple JJ into Tee HH.

Connect ¼" Straight Pattern Needle Valve KK to Nipple JJ.

Attach ¼"x60" aluminum tubing LL with fittings to side of Tee HH and into valve opening VII on the odorizer.

CONNECTING SIGHT FEED

Screw Sight Feed into opening VIII on the Odorizer.

Connect ⅜"x8" aluminum tubing with fittings MM into sight feed.

Connect Tubing MM to Tee Q_S.

ODORIZER DRAIN

Connect ¼"x1½" nipple NN in opening IX on the Odorizer.

Connect ¼" straight pattern valve OO to Nipple NN.

FROM PIPE LINE TO ODORANT LOADER

Put ¼" coupling PP in line upstream.

Connect ¼"x1½" Nipple QQ to coupling PP.

Connect ¼" straight pattern needle valve RR to Nipple QQ.

Connect 15 feet of oxygen hose with fittings SS to valve RR.

FROM ODORANT LOADER TO ODORANT INLET ON TANK

Connect ⅝" Copper Tubing Line with fittings to ½" pipe TT to top of loader.

Connect ½"x2" Nipple XX into opening X on the tank.

Connect ½" gate Valve UU to nipple XX.

Connect line TT to valve UU.

ODORANT TANK DRAIN

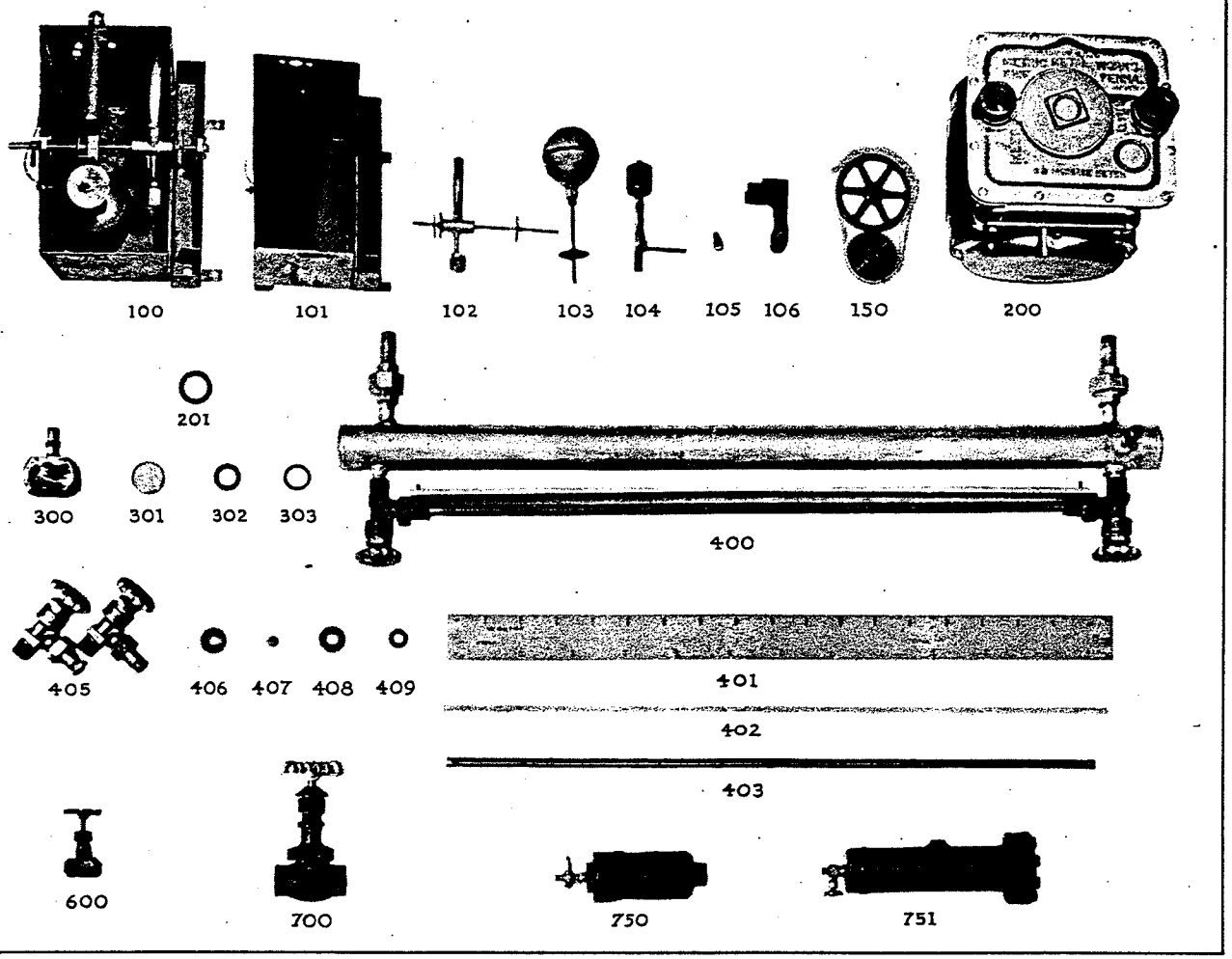
Connect 1"x½" steel bushing YY in opening XI on the tank.

Connect ½"x3" nipple ZZ into bushing YY.

Connect ½" straight pattern needle valve AAA to nipple ZZ.

PEERLESS Type "M" ODORIZER

PARTS LIST and PARTS PRICES



PART NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	SELLING PRICE
100	Odorizer Tank, Pump Mechanism & Float, Complete	$107.25
101	Odorant Tank With Clicker	25.10
102	M-I Pump Assembly	42.35
103	Float With Float Rod	13.50
104	Float Arm, Counterweight & Scale	9.00
105	Odorant Valve & Seat	2.55
106	Valve Casting (Machined)	10.75
150	Set of Sprockets & Chain	19.15
200	Meter	30.00
201	Meter Union Gaskets	.20

PART NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	SELLING PRICE
300	Sight Feed	18.15
301	Sight Feed Glass	1.25
302	Sight Feed Fibre Gasket	.20
303	Sight Feed Resistoflex Gasket	.20
400	Calibration Tube	59.75
401	Calibration Scale	6.05
402	Calibration Tube Gage Glass	2.45
403	Calibration Tube Gage Glass Guard	16.00
·	Calibration Tube Exchange	25.15
405	Set of Gage Cocks — Complete	24.95
406	Gage Cock Diaphragm Gasket	.20
407	Gage Cock Aluminum Seat	.20
408	Gage Cock Union Gasket	.20
409	Gage Glass Gasket	.20
600	Drain ¼" Needle Valve	3.05
700	¾" Precision Valve	18.00
750	Fisher LP Filter	7.35
751	Fisher HP Filter	18.15

PEERLESS MFG. CO. DALLAS TEXAS

PEERLESS MANUFACTURING COMPANY

Walnut Hill Lane at Old Denton Road

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AGENTS IN: Houston, Alice, Odessa, Wichita Falls, and El Paso, Texas. Tulsa, Denver, Phoenix, Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Louisville, New York City, Buffalo, Chicago, Richmond.

May 6, 1941. D. A. SILLERS ET AL 2,240,808

MEANS FOR INTRODUCING LIQUID INTO FLOWING FLUIDS

Filed June 28, 1939 2 Sheets-Sheet 1

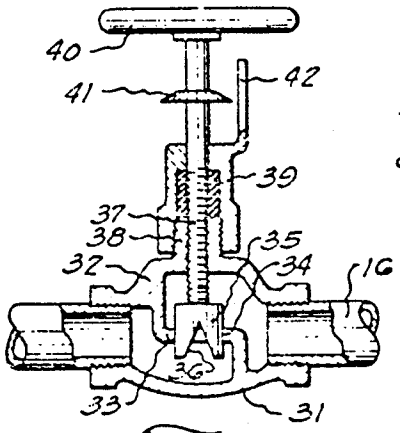

Fig. 8.

Fig. 1.

Fig. 9.

Inventors
Donald A. Sillers
Alexander Clarke

By Jack A. Ashley
Attorney

May 6, 1941. D. A. SILLERS ET AL 2,240,808

MEANS FOR INTRODUCING LIQUID INTO FLOWING FLUIDS

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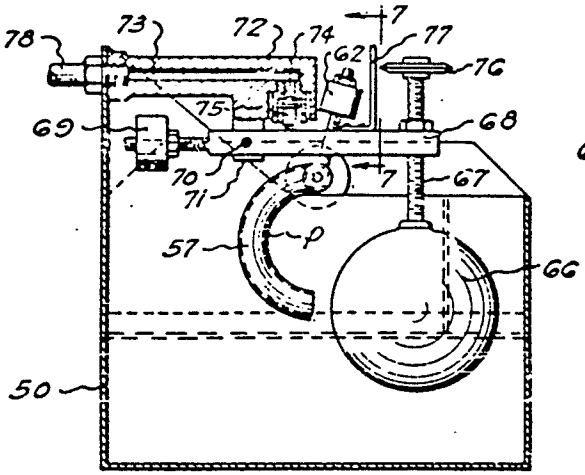
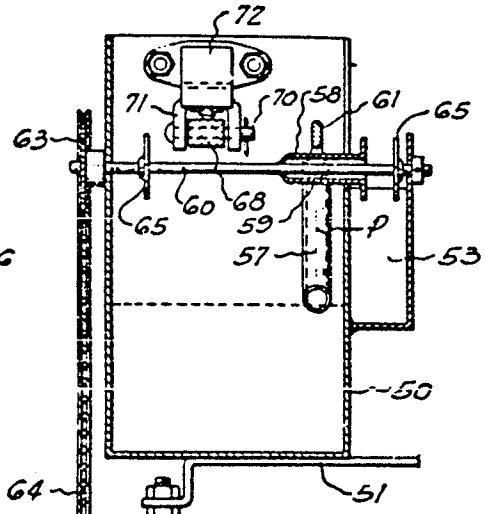


Fig. 4.



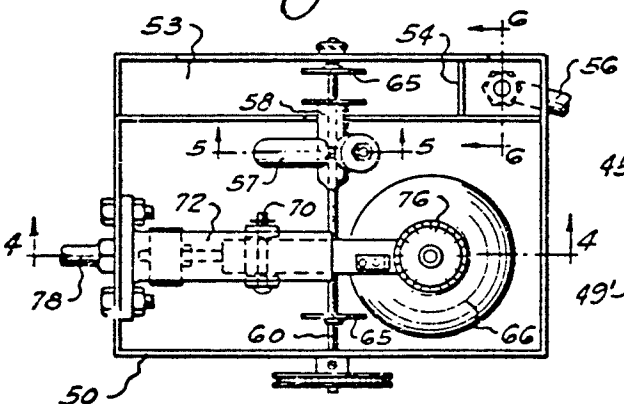


Fig. 3.

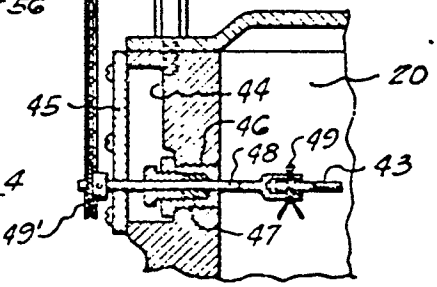


Fig. 2.

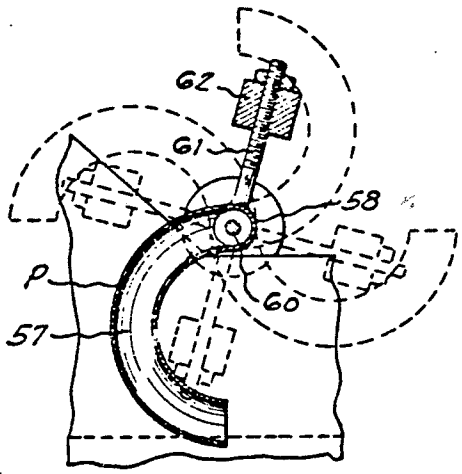


Fig. 5.

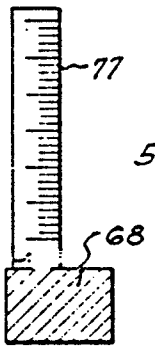


Fig. 7.

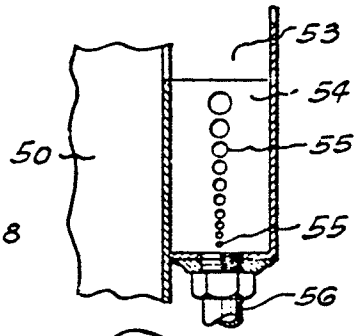


Fig. 6.

Inventors
Donald A. Sillers
Alexander Clarke

By

Attorney

The Dallas Morning News

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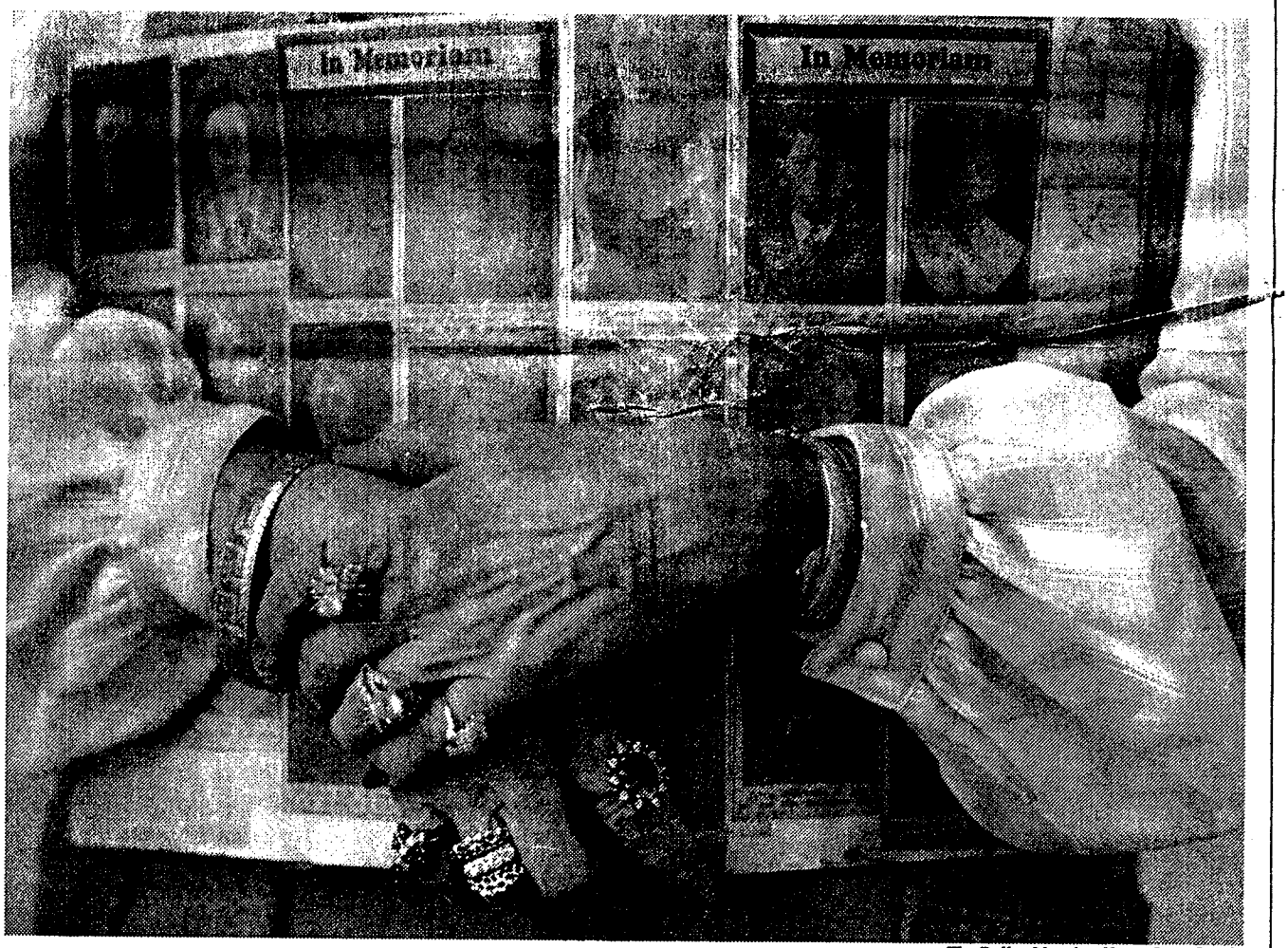
A LOST GENERATION



The Dallas Morning News: Juan Garcia

Helen Sillick clutches a scrapbook with photos of her schoolmates who died in the New London explosion on March 18, 1937. Only since a 1977 reunion, have she and other survivors "felt free to discuss it."

'37 New London school blast survivors recall deaths of 300

By Steve Blow
Staff Writer of The News

NEW LONDON, Texas — In a thunderous instant 50 years ago this month, a little oil town in East Texas became the object of worldwide pity.

Even Adolf Hitler sent his condolences.

"On the occasion of the terrible explosion at New London, Texas, which took so many young lives, I want to assure your excellency of my and the German people's sincere sympathy," said the cable to President Roosevelt.

> "It was something that will scar your mind. The cries. The screams. It wasn't long before you saw mothers on the streets crying, stopping cars, saying 'Have you seen my child? Have you seen my child?' "
> — Mollie Ward

But not even a world of sympathy could soothe the grief that descended that Thursday afternoon.

A pocket of natural gas and a school destroyed. Almost 300 children dead. Many mangled beyond recognition. Scores more injured. Frantic parents searching among the living and the dead.

Who can fathom it yet?

■

With the geometry teacher out of the room, Arthur Shaw was teasing Virginia Rose Blanton, undeniably one of the prettiest girls at London High School.

Over in the fifth-grade English class, Bill Thompson was feeling equally frisky. While students gave current events reports, he quietly traded seats with a classmate to flirt with Bil-

Please see NEW on Page 26A.

New London survivors recall 300 who died

Continued from Page 1A.

lie Sue Hall.

It was just after 3 p.m. on March 18, 1937, and a moment of giddy excitement. Spring was rich in the air, and school would be dismissed in minutes for a school holiday. The "county meet" was set the next day in Henderson, a highly anticipated event featuring scholastic and athletic competition with rival schools.

Oration teacher Johnnie Marie Nelson was in the school auditorium, offering some last-minute coaching to students who would compete in the declamation competition at the county meet.

Joe King sat in the school library, looking over a newspaper. The headline said Amelia Earhart had departed on a round-the-world flight, but King mostly daydreamed about attending the track meet the next day.

New London, Texas, was a fortunate place to be in the spring of 1937, and most there knew it. The Depression was dragging on elsewhere, but New London sat in a pocket of prosperity — the booming East Texas oil field.

Newspaper stories had recently proclaimed the school district the richest in the nation. A dozen oil wells pumped away on the school grounds. Large oil companies all had field offices and residential camps scattered around. The Tidewater Oil Co. camp adjoined the school grounds.

The New London campus was a showplace, with a dozen structures of varying size. The centerpiece of the campus was the high school — an impressive brick, tile-roofed building with 25 classrooms, an auditorium and school offices. It housed about 600 students in grades five through 11.

About 3:15 p.m., sixth-grader Helen Sillick left Laura Bell's art class a few minutes early to meet her waiting mother. She and her younger sister, Marie, walked hand-in-hand down the long front hall of the school and into the foyer.

At that moment, in the basement-level shop class at the rear of the building, teacher Lemmie Butler reached for the electrical switch on a sander. He flipped the switch.

It sparked.

People up to 12 miles away described it as a tremendous, earth-shaking explosion. But for those at its center, it was strangely quiet.

"I heard nothing. I felt nothing. But suddenly I was up in the air looking across at that Tidewater office with its great big porch," Mrs. Sillick said.

"I could see these men jumping off that porch. I'm up in the air. I know I'm up there. I'm watching, looking at everything, and I can tell I'm falling.

"Then, all of a sudden, my head goes down and my feet up, my head down, feet up. I just keep turning. I felt nothing and I knew nothing."

Shaw said, "The last thing I remember was picking on Virginia Rose. The next thing I remember after that was moving around underneath all that plaster and the wire that holds the plaster. These two boys, Thomas Helms and Carl Hedges, carried me out and placed me somewhere near the cafeteria."

King said, "There was a rumble and then it got dark. We were only a few doors from the chemistry lab, and my first thought was that something there had blown up. That's just what flashed through my mind."

In his English class, Thompson was hearing current events reports about the war brewing in Europe, when the world suddenly turned a somersault. "I didn't hear a rumble or a noise. It was just that everything instantly went up and around and down. When I came to, I was in total darkness.

"They estimate that it was around 45 minutes to an hour before they got me out. Apparently I was unconscious most of that time, because the first thing I remember was hearing the commotion up above me — men hollering and digging. I could hear a lot of screams.

"I was trapped. A beam was across me and had my legs pinned. I was in a real squeezed position. I could move only one hand. I can remember pinching myself. I thought I was dreaming. My first thought after realizing it was not a dream was that we had been bombed because of the events over in Europe."

Ralph Carr, a Tidewater Oil employee, had stopped by the company office to arrange for a few days off. "I just came out of the office and was outside looking toward the school. It was like my eyes were fooling me. The school just raised up and hung in the air, but then after a split second it just fell flat."

He knew his daughter, 16-year-old Chloe Ann, was in the school.

"I went running down there as hard as I could go. I got to the room where my daughter was. For a little bit the dust was so thick from the explosion that you could barely see, but I crawled on in there."

He found Chloe Ann and her class, crushed in the rubble. "I could see the children sitting in their seats. I could see my girl slumped at her seat. They never did get up."

Mollie Ward, a fourth-grader, was sitting in a school bus in front of the school, waiting for the high school classes to dismiss.

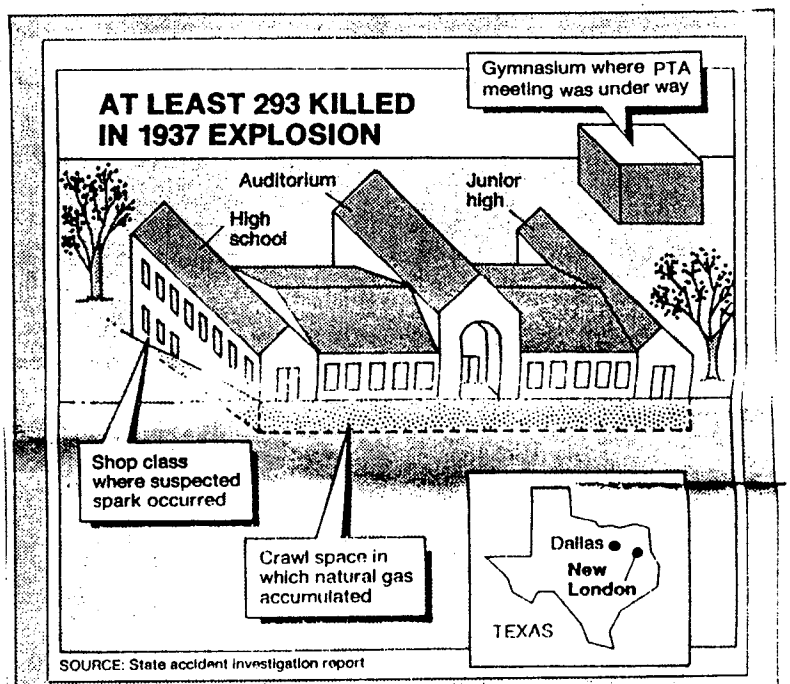
"We were just sitting there waiting, and then it went up. It was just a gray cloud that went up and up and up. In my child's mind, I just never thought it was going to come down. Then the building collapsed. Big chunks of concrete went flying, some of them across the highway," she said.

Even more indelible in her memory is the scene that followed. "It was something that will scar your mind. The cries. The screams. It wasn't long before you saw mothers on the streets crying, stopping cars, saying 'Have you seen my child? Have you seen my child?' "

King joined hands with four or five others in the rubble of the library and they made their way out of the cloud of plaster and mortar dust. Once outside, King looked up. "The body of our neighbor's little girl was hanging up in the wires next to the telephone pole. I recognized her by the coat she was wearing.

"Everybody was saying 'What happened? What happened?' You could hear people hollering and crying. You could see some who were injured, but most were dead."

"Everybody was just walking around like zombies," said Dorothy Box, who had been working as a student assistant in the library. "We all had a thick coat of mortar and plaster on us. I was bloody, but it was



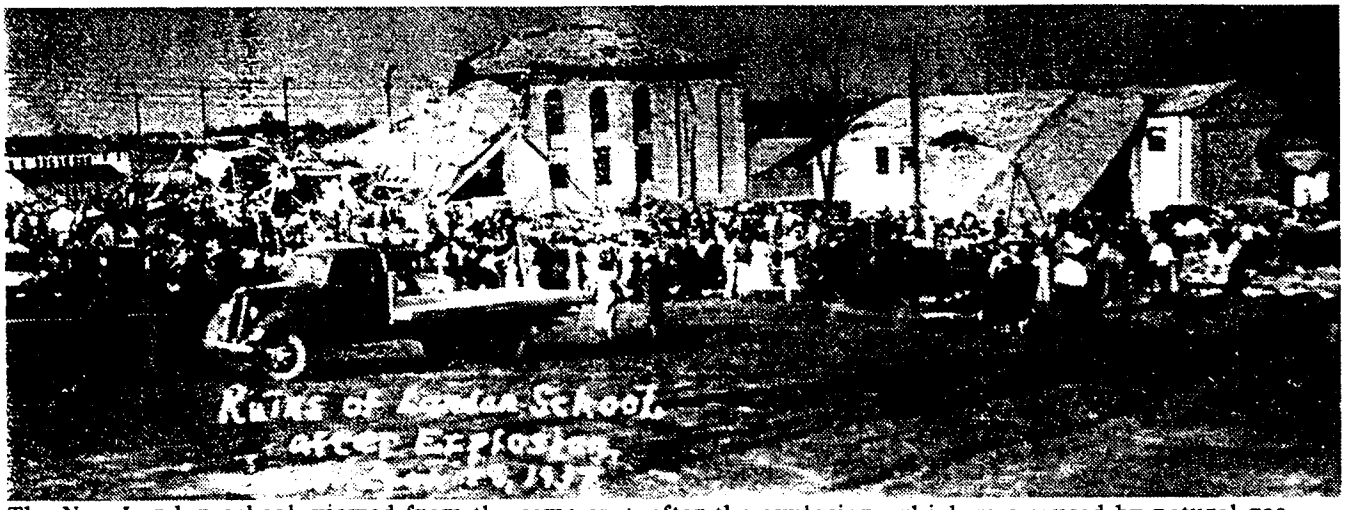
Arthur Shaw, who was injured in the blast, stands near the rebuilt school and a 30-foot granite monument.

The Dallas Morning News: Jan Brunson

New London survivors recall 300 who died

THE NEW LONDON SCHOOL EXPLOSION

The New London school as it looked before the 1937 blast that killed nearly 300 children and teen-agers.



The New London school, viewed from the same spot, after the explosion, which was caused by natural gas.

The Dallas Morning News: Jan Brunson

from someone up above me who had bled down on me. Parents kept coming up saying, 'Have you seen my child?' "

Rosalee Richardson was among those parents.

"We rushed over there and found our oldest girl, Earline. She was OK. Then we began looking for Dorothy.

"There were dead children all around — dead boys and girls everywhere. They had two little girls laid out on slabs of concrete there and a winch truck was about to back over them. I ran around and stopped him in time.

"Two boys had been blown out of the building. Their mother ran back and forth between them, blowing in their mouths and saying, 'You're not dead, You're not dead,' hugging them up close. She would do that to one, then run back and do it to the other one.

"We didn't find our daughter until late that evening. My husband and a Mr. Apple brought her body out and laid her under some trees. They came and got me. I was trying to console Mrs. Apple. Our daughters were just inseparable. And when they found them, their hands were reaching out to each other near the door to the classroom."

The scene around the school grew increasingly chaotic as parents raced to the site. Many were already on the school grounds attending a grammar school PTA meeting in the gymnasium building. Oil field workers began arriving with heavy equipment for digging into the rubble.

The sound of sirens pierced the air, unabated for hours, as ambulances arrived from every neighboring city. Still there weren't enough, and many of the dead and injured were transported in work trucks and private cars to makeshift morgues and hospitals throughout the area.

"Somebody picked me up and put me in an automobile and carried me to the basement of the Baptist church in Overton," Shaw said. "While I was there a dentist and a beauty parlor operator took a few stitches in my head. And then they loaded us up in a bread wagon and carried us to Mother Frances Hospital in Tyler."

Esterlene Gauthreaux found her gravely injured son, 9-year-old Eddie Herman, in the church basement in Overton. His skull was fractured. "A car salesman in town volunteered to drive us to the hospital in Tyler. All the way out of Overton, people were out along the street offering blankets," she said.

"We sat at his bedside for 24 hours, holding his hand, but he never regained consciousness," said his father, E.J. Gauthreaux. "I was holding his hand when he died."

Many parents traveled from town to town for more than 24 hours, searching for their children. "You just can't imagine what it was like. You didn't know whether to look at the school, at the hospitals or at morgues. They had morgues set up in so many places," said Joe Nelson, whose mother, two brothers and two sisters were in the school at the time of the explosion.

He soon found that his brothers and sisters were safe, but they could not find his mother — the oration teacher who had been coaching the students in the school auditorium.

"We just started looking everywhere for her, looking at bodies on the ground. Dad knew Mom had on a brand new pair of shoes, gunmetal in color, and that's what he was looking for. But he didn't realize that the explosion had blown the shoes off everybody. My brother was looking for her rings. You couldn't recognize anybody. They were just mashed to pieces."

New London survivors recall 300 who died

Mrs. Nelson's body was ultimately found in a makeshift morgue at the American Legion Hall in Overton. "Dad had already passed her up, but my brother recognized her Baylor University ring," Nelson said.

Virginia Rose Blanton died in the blast, as did shop teacher Lemmie Butler. In the chaos that followed the explosion, an accurate death toll was virtually impossible to obtain, and it remains elusive to this day. The figures range from 293 to 297 — about 280 of those children.

One of the first wire service reporters to arrive on the scene was a 20-year-old United Press International reporter assigned to the Dallas office. Walter Cronkite would cover many more stories in the years to follow, but none like New London.

"It still stands out in my memory. It's exceedingly vivid," he said last week. "It was the biggest civilian tragedy I covered in my life. Wars, of course, are another thing. But nothing else equaled it.

"We got down there and it was one of the most ghastly scenes I ever saw," Cronkite said. "Those oil field workers whose children were buried there were sobbing as they tore away at the rubble with their bloodied hands, uncovering body after body."

■

New London dealt with the tragedy by never looking back.

By Sunday, three days after the accident, virtually every child had been buried. Lawsuits were few. Discussion of the tragedy became taboo.

With contributions from around the world, an austere, 30-foot granite monument was constructed in front of the school site. But it became the community's totem to an unspoken past.

"I just tried to put it out of my mind," King said. "I lost some of the best friends I ever had, but I couldn't bring them back."

A state-appointed board of inquiry issued a preliminary report 11 days after the accident concluding that natural gas had leaked into a crawl space beneath the school and was apparently ignited by an electrical spark in the shop class.

To save money, the school had tapped into an oil field pipeline carrying raw natural gas, which is odorless. Two months after the accident, the state passed a gas odorization law requiring that a pungent odorant be added to natural gas so that it can be detected. Odorization had been voluntary until then.

School resumed in temporary quarters less than two weeks after the explosion. A new, larger school building was completed on the site of the old one the following year.

Reluctantly, the school held a memorial service on the first anniversary of the explosion, but the tragedy was otherwise never mentioned. As the first anniversary approached, school Superintendent R.L. Bunting said, "We have mapped our school program expressly to keep the minds of our students in normal channels and away from the depressing thoughts of a year ago."

As the years passed, many of those who didn't talk about the tragedy found that they couldn't talk about it.

"When anybody brought it up, I would leave the room. It was something I could not face," said Mrs. Ward, who still lives in New London.

Evident of their reluctance to face the tragedy, the students of that era never held a school reunion. Nor did any following class.

But 10 years ago, Wayne Shaffer and a handful of other former students decided it was time. "That reunion in 1977 was highly criticized and not very well attended. People didn't want it brought back up," said Shaffer, a grammar school student at the time of the explosion.

The reunion proved a turning point for many, however.

"I couldn't even talk to my children about it until we had our reunion in 1977," said Mrs. Sillick, now the county clerk for Rusk County. "Everybody was nervous, but we began to talk a little bit about it. Since then we've felt free to discuss it with each other."

Additional reunions have been held every two years, and attendance has been growing. "You see a lot of hugging and a lot of crying," said J.R. Garner, a history teacher at the time of the explosion. "You'd be surprised. Tears will come to your eyes."

For some, the reunions have become part of a long-postponed healing.

"I would wake up nights, having nightmares and hearing the same thing that I heard that day — women screaming and crying for their babies," said Thompson, the fifth-grader who had traded seats with a classmate.

For more than four decades, an insidious memory had gnawed at him. The reunions helped him confront it. "The student who I traded seats with was killed. I thought about that a long, long time. I felt a lot of guilt," he said.

"After 45 years, I had some counseling with a professional who helped me deal with it," he said.

Now, he looks forward to the reunions with special emotion. "It's real, real touching to all of us to reunite again. Because we have something in common that most people don't have.

"We're survivors."