

Burlington Department Store Destroyed by Blast - July 3, 1962

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From the cover of *Hose & Nozzle* magazine for July-August 1962. Uncredited photograph of a demolished suburban department store in Burlington. The explosion at Shopper's World occurred on July 3, 1962. Address of 209 Baldwin Road, from the 1962 [city directory](#).

Reported the *St. Petersburg Times* on July 5, "the blast was heard for several miles. It broke windows in nearby stores and residences and hurled debris for several boxes." The owner of the store, a forty-five year-old male, "suffered pain burns but otherwise was not injured." However, "he was unable to give a coherent story and placed under heavy sedation."

Officials had no immediate explanation for the blast. The owner purportedly parked his car in the front of the store and unlocked the door at about 9:14 a.m. Seconds later, the one-story building (that "stood alone") exploded. "Nothing was left standing. Only a crater remained where the basement had been."

The *Hose & Nozzle* story offered a more detailed narrative. Owner Ben R. Lilien, identified as "part owner," detected a "different type of odor" when he entered. He couldn't identify the smell as natural gas. He headed immediately to the basement, suspecting on "possible water infiltration from heavy rains the previous night."

He opened the door to the stock room and took two steps inside. He heard a "massive 'swish'" and was "blown back eight or ten feet." He reported that he didn't know what had happened, but was aware that "fire was threatening his feet." He was able to find his way out of the building.

Said a neighbor, "I heard the explosion and I thought an airplane had crashed." She came out of her house and saw an overturned car and "a lot of smoke, but no building."

The owner's car was turned over and its engine "blown out." (The late-model Cadillac was reportedly thrown several feet into the air.) Three-hundred yards away at a bowling alley, every window was blown out. Another window was broken at a "state owned liquor store." The valuable possessions inside (my phrasing) were not damaging.

Burlington firefighters responded. They found no fire, just smoldering rubble. They also searched the wreckage for victims and were assisted by the Graham rescue squad, reported *Hose & Nozzle*. Based on other photos showing a crane at the scene, the search took a number of hours or perhaps days.

Loss was estimated at \$500,000. Reported the *Spokane Daily Chronicle* on July 3, the building had a "frontage of about 150 feet and was about 75 feet deep. It sat alone in a residential area."

The Burlington Fire Chief Roman C. Fortune commented "not in all my years of experience have I seen a building so completely demolished."

Click to enlarge:



Hose & Nozzle photograph

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