

Neighbors Say House Activity Was Ordinary

By Robert Hoig

Neighbors around 2867 Ohio Street say they noticed nothing suspicious up to the time a bomb went off early Monday.

"We have been trying for a year to get the city to either have that house fixed up or tear it down," said Mrs. Roscoe Vaughn, 60, who lives next door at 2875 Ohio Street.

Olive Whidby, 2882 Ohio Street, said she saw an elderly man mowing the lawn at 2867 Ohio last Monday.

Alvin M. Goodwin Jr., whose parents, Alvin and Fannie Lou Goodwin, own the property, said the man was there on the instructions of his parents.

Goodwin, who has served as federal liaison officer for Mayor Leahy since December, said his father and mother had rented the home until "finally it became so much of a problem that they decided to discontinue the renting."

Mrs. Vaughn, who with her 65-year-old husband is retired, said she is home most of the time and would have noticed anything unusual in the daytime.

Reports Were Made

Mrs. Vaughn said she saw children playing around 2867 Ohio about a year ago.

At that time, she said, she called City Hall to report that 2867 and the house next door to the east, 2865 Ohio, were both "run down and dilapidated."

The Goodwin house has been vacant for just over a year, the one at 2865 for about three years, according to Mrs. Vaughn and other neighbors.

Called Again April 1

Mrs. Vaughn said she was told by "someone at City Hall" a year ago that the problem of the two ramshackle houses "would be taken care of." She said she called again on April 1. This time, she said, City Hall told her to call the Omaha-Douglas County Health Department and gave her a telephone number, 348-7481, the department's Environmental Health Section.

Mrs. Vaughn said the Health Department told her to call 453-9443, the telephone number of the Legal Aid Society's north branch office at 3022 North Twenty-fourth Street.

"At that number, they told me to call a lawyer, that there was nothing they could do for me. I've got no money to get a lawyer. My husband and I are retired. We don't have any money to get a lawyer to make someone else take care of his property," Mrs. Vaughn said.

E. C. Willoughby, chief of the Health Department's Environmental Health Section, said he had a record of an April 1 complaint about the Goodwin home.

Referred to Legal Aid

"Evidently we referred the matter on to the Legal Aid Society," he added.

He said he was checking to determine if any other action was taken by his men.

A Legal Aid spokesman said no records were kept to verify the call.

Mrs. Vaughn said she was certain of the details since, she said, she kept notes of the incident.

Joseph Rogers, head of the City Permits and Inspection Division, said Monday his office "has never had a complaint" about the house at 2867 Ohio Street.

Rogers added that his division therefore has "taken no action" to have the house condemned and torn down. He said he did not know when the house became vacant.

Rogers said he will act to have the house torn down as soon as the police complete their investigation.

Mrs. Vaughn said she and her husband were sleeping in a first-floor bedroom on the west side of their house when the explosion occurred.

"I thought the Russians were here. I said to my husband that they are bombing Omaha," Mrs. Vaughn said.

'Still Shaking'

She said she was "still shaking" some seven hours later. The blast broke all the windows on the east side of her house and some on the north and south and knocked pictures and mirrors off the walls.

Brady Young, 31, a manufacturing plant supervisor, lives alone on the second floor of the Vaughn home.

Young, who went to bed about 8 p.m. Sunday, said he set his alarm for 2:30 a.m.

"I woke up early and was lying in bed. About 2:15 I heard this explosion. At first, I thought it was an accident out in the front," Young said.

Mrs. Whidby said she was caring for two dogs owned by the O. C. Butler family of 2884 Ohio Street while the Butlers were on vacation.

The dogs, a German shepherd and Collie, always bark at strangers but made no noise prior to the bomb explosion early Monday, she said.

The Butler yard is across the street and three houses west of the Goodwin house, Mrs. Whidby noted, and there is a good chance the dogs would not have heard a noise that far away.

"I went out to see the dogs right after the bombing and they were laying there shivering," Mrs. Whidby said.

Mrs. Whidby's nephew, Leslie Craig, 15, a Tech High sophomore, said he was listening to records in the front room until 11:15 p.m. Sunday.

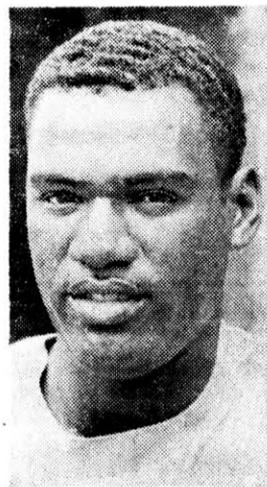
"I didn't hear anything at all from the (Goodwin) house and I think I would have because our windows were open," young Craig said.

Siding, Boards Off

The Whidby home is about 150 feet northwest across Ohio Street from the Goodwin-owned house. The blast broke four windows at Miss Whidby's, blew down some siding and roof boards, and knocked down mirrors.

Mrs. Pearle Starks said the explosion knocked a clock down and a picture off the wall at her home at 2890 Ohio Street, about a block away.

Albert E. Patterson, a Post Office employe and part-time student who lives at 2863 Ohio, said he has lived in the neighborhood for more than a year and noticed no suspicious activity. He was gone Sunday night and early Monday until after the explosion.



Mr. and Mrs. Vaughn, above, saw "nothing suspicious" . . . Young, right, heard explosion.

—World-Herald Photos.