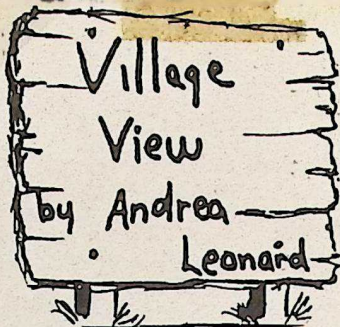




While villages on Cape Cod slumber in the still-warm sun of a golden October, the City of Chelsea bustles about its business just across the Mystic River from Boston.

Let's turn back our clocks, if you please, to mid-October, 1973, and watch the action there.

At the back of a building a thin whisp of smoke rises from a pile of rubbish. The smoke flickers to a tiny flame, paper catches, a wooden stairway starts to burn. Soon the entire rear of the building is in flames and out of control.

The fire spreads, but goes unreported for precious minutes. When firemen are called they face a holocaust. Men and equipment work through the night to contain it.

By noon the next day twenty square blocks of the city lie consumed, blackened, charred. The fire is out.

Miraculously, there's been no loss of life but millions of dollars worth of property is destroyed.

The area is primarily industrial with a scattering of low-income housing units. Five blocks were scheduled for urban renewal; this is no longer a concern.

What is of concern is how to clean up the incredible mess, the aftermath of the fire, for the protection of the health and safety of surrounding neighborhoods.

Many buildings collapsed into their own foundations, shearing off all pipes from street lines.

Massive lagoons of sewage fill many of the excavations.

Some buildings still stand but are in precariously weak structural condition and ready to fall.

In some buildings supplies of potentially explosive substances are stored, including numerous underground tanks of oil, cylinders of oxygen, propane and acetylene, and vats of corrosive chemicals.

Leaking gas lines are a potential danger.

Solid waste is another major problem. In one building more than 10,000 partially-burned automobile tires confront health officials.

A Kosher poultry plant is being picked clean by flocks of sea gulls; nearby a dog food processing plant contains 360,000 pounds of decaying animal and organic matter. The sea gulls are not interested.

Tons of solid waste and scrap metal lie in steaming heaps.

In one building four rounds of live artillery shells will soon be discovered.

Vast quantities of water have been poured on the twenty square blocks. Water still pours from mains, washing silt into the sewers.

All the sewers must be cleaned of silt; unknown at this time is the fact that the sewers also contain thousands of dead rats.

Where do you begin?

The federal government is asked for emergency assistance and, four days after the fire, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers moves in and

begins its work with a survey.

A building-by-building title search starts to obtain demolition releases from owners.

The pools of waste are pumped out, and the water and sanitary sewer connections are sealed off, one by one.

People doing preliminary work, prior to demolition, move with extreme caution to avoid unnecessary vibration that might bring the building tumbling down upon them.

Oil tanks are drained and other hazardous substances removed from the devastated area without incident; demolition proceeds. The cost of purging explosive substances alone climbs over \$20,000.00.

"We're particularly fortunate" a Chelsea fire official notes, "these didn't detonate during or after the fire".

Leaking gas lines provide another potential danger. Equipped with grid maps of the city's gas lines, teams of workers begin sealing the lines. Engineers direct heavy machinery to dig through the rubble, find a line, and seal it off.

They move from building to building; once one is secure, move on to the next. Here, however, they are puzzled. The sensing devices indicate escaping gas after lines have been sealed.

Time after time, investigation reveals a second unmetered and uncharted line. It's a surprise to gas company officials that many Chelsea buildings have been receiving supplies from unmetered lines at no cost.

The 360,000 pounds of decaying matter in the dog food processing plant is eventually divided into smaller units and buried.

Solid waste, tons of it, are carted away. "Proprietors of sanitary landfills don't mind a truckful or two, but when you bring several hundred truckloads, it's a different story," noted an engineer heading that operation.

Scrap metal, where possible, is hauled off for recycling. The four rounds of live artillery shells are defused by experts before they do further damage or hurt someone.

The job of cleaning the sewers begins. Half-choked with silt they are -- and also with the bodies of thousands of dead rats. It's assumed the rats fled into the sewers to escape the fire and heat and were eventually drowned by the great deluge of water.

The discovery of the rats astonishes the experts for few, if any, were found throughout the demolition. If the sewers had been neglected, eventually the whole sewer system of the city would have backed up because sewage from the rest of the city must flow through the destroyed area before reaching the treatment plants.

Finally, all the buildings are leveled. Now the entire area, over 164,000, square yards, must be decontaminated with a chlorine solution which will penetrate one-half inch of the top cover.

Three gallons of the solution is applied to every square yard of surface. This eliminates the stench prevailing the area since the fire.

Chelsea is now ready to start rebuilding. The year 1973 draws to a close. Christmastime is near. With the birth of the new year, the City of Chelsea will experience a rebirth of its own.

A massive clean-up job -- made possible with the help of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers -- is complete.

Villages on Cape Cod stir, turn away, and are unconcerned with problems of the City of Chelsea and its conflagration.