

3 Alarms - Box 1324  
June 20, 1961  
Old Howard Theatre - 32 Howard St., Boston

A roaring three-alarm fire swept the Old Howard Theatre at noon to-day destroying the world famed Boston landmark in the crowded Scollay Sq. section, causing a massive traffic jam and for over an hour threatened the lives of firefighters.

Only one injury was reported - firefighter Edward Lowney who was struck by a hose and taken to the Massachusetts General Hospital for treatment.

By 1:30 P.M. nothing was left of the building but the four walls. The entire roof collapsed at the height of the blaze with six firemen narrowly escaping a fall into the inferno beneath them.

Heavy thick smoke was seen for miles around. For more than half an hour a geyser of flames shot through the roof with showers of embers and burning chunks of wood falling over the Scollay Sq.-Somerset St. area.

Narrow Howard St. was roped off and all spectators and firemen alike were ordered out of the area as the front wall or facade of the Old Howard leaned threateningly forward.

Several windows in the adjoining Pemberton Sq. Courthouse between the third and seventh floors were cracked from the heat. Most courtrooms had to be abandoned and 20 defendants in cases in municipal court were removed from the detention rooms to the cooler and safer confines of the Charles St. jail.

All families in a five story 63 apartment building at 39 Somerset St. were evacuated. Smoke filled this building and water from hoses leaked down through apartments from roof to basement.

Capitol police from the State House were enlisted by the Boston police and firemen to assist in handling traffic and removing parked cars. On the narrow alley-like Howard St. on which the old theatre fronted, spectators pitched in with police to push parked cars down to Cambridge St. so that firemen could bring hose lines into that section.

Much of the fire fighting was conducted in spectacular fashion from the roof tops of adjacent buildings and aerial ladders and towers.

The old stone structure - about four stories high - was built in 1843 as a tabernacle by the Millerites, a religious group, who believed the world would come to an end at that time.

It wound up its days about seven years ago as a bastion of burlesque - the one place in Boston known to soldiers and sailors around the world. A stained glass window remained in place in the front of the structure.

More than 100 persons from nearby office buildings were evacuated when the fire showed evidence of raging out of control.

Firefighters from the City of Cambridge moved in to assist Boston firemen in the stubborn battle which attracted thousands of spectators to the Scollay Sq. section at midday.

The ancient theatre, whose official name was the Howard Athenaeum was scheduled for demolition to make way for the \$100 million government center.

Ann Corio one of the many famed strippers who appeared on the Old Howard stage in the '30s recently sparked a drive to restore the structure to its pristine grandeur and set it up as the Howard National Museum.

Chief of Department John A. Martin estimated the loss at \$10,000 and listed the cause as undetermined.

Box 1324 - Scollay Sq. opposite Hanover St.

First alarm	12:05 P.M.
Working fire	12:06 P.M.
Second alarm	12:14 P.M.
Third alarm	12:24 P.M.
Allout	2:34 P.M.

First alarm response -  
Engines 4 - 8 - 26  
Ladders 24 - 1      Rescue, District 3

Working fire - Division 1

12:14 P.M. Division 1 ordered 2 more engine companies - Sent Engines 10 and 27

Second alarm response -  
Engines 25 - 50 - 39 - 3      Ladders 8 - 17

Second alarm cover -  
Engines 2 - 39   24 - 3   21 - 25   37 - 4   53 - 37   56 - 8  
Ladders 3 - 1   15 - 24   23 - 17

12:17 P.M. Box 7118 transmitted -  
Response  
Engine 2 on the way to cover Engine 39  
Engine 21 on the way to cover Engine 25 and  
Engine 7 from quarters - Ladders 18 - 19.

12:20 P.M. Chief of Department ordered 2 towers.

12:24 PM Third alarm -  
Normal response  
Engines 37 - 21 - 10 - 24      Ladder 15  
Actual response  
Engines 37 - 24      Ladder 15

Third alarm cover -  
 Engines 34-10 40-4 42-25 55-42  
 Ladders 29-23 30-24

Special cover

- 12:33 P.M. Sent Engine 21 from Box 7118 to Engine 8
- 12:39 P.M. Sent Engine 1 to Ladder 19  
 Sent Ladder 19 to Engine 1  
 Sent Ladder 20 to Ladder 17
- 1:45 P.M. Sent Ladder 23 to Ladder 20
- 2:19 P.M. Box 1332 transmitted  
 Response -  
 Engine 40 from Engine 4 -  
 Engines 8 and 7 from quarters  
 Ladder 30 from Ladder 24 and  
 Ladder 3 from Ladder 1
- 2:28 P.M. Engine 25 in quarters. Sent Engine 42 to Engine 8.
- 3:00 P.M. Ladder 30 returning from Box 1332. Sent in to Box 1324.



1938 Map shows the location of the "Old Howard" Theatre in Scollay Square.