

# FLAMES SPREAD THROUGH CHURCH

The Brighton Congregational Church on Washington st, near Dighton st, Brighton, was destroyed last night by fire. The damage is estimated at more than \$75,000. Three alarms were sounded for the fire, one of the smokiest and most spectacular in that section of the city for a number of years.

The main church, a wooden structure built in 1868, was doomed when the flames spread from the chapel more than half an hour after the fire was first discovered. The church building was one of the oldest in Brighton.

The cause of the blaze was not learned. The fire started in the basement underneath the chapel some time after 8 o'clock, and after smoldering there for some time burned through the flooring to the vestry on the floor above. The chapel was closed for the night soon after 8:30, when the last of the young people attending the meeting of the Christian Endeavor Society there left for home. There was no indication of fire or smell of smoke in the building at that time.

## Race to Ring in Alarm

Shortly before 9 o'clock Miss Evelyn Barron, who had been at the meeting

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and was returning to her home on Washington st next to the church, saw what she believed was a fire in the chapel. She ran to her home to tell her father. In the meantime the sexton of the church, who lives on Dighton st, saw from a window the smoke issuing from the chapel building. The sexton ran to the street and down Washington st toward a fire box, with patrolman Joseph J. Cadigan of Station 11, who had also just discovered the fire, running him a close race. A man whose name was not learned had the alarm

ring when the sexton and Cadigan reached box 5127 at Washington and Market sts.

When the first detachment of firemen arrived the fire appeared to be burning briskly in the basement of the chapel. When the firemen broke down a door they found that the flames had worked into the vestry. Before they got a line on it the fire took on a threatening aspect. District Chief James T. McMahon ordered a second alarm sounded.

The church is so situated that the firemen had good opportunity to fight the fire, but the flames had gained great headway. The firemen fought the flames from the Dighton-st side and the lot at the south side of the building, but their efforts were fruitless and the fire spread despite the water thrown into the chapel.

## Smoke Hampers Firemen

For half an hour after the fire was discovered the smoke was so dense that the firemen could not take up a position in the chapel. Although the chapel and the main church are joined, there was an air shaft running the length of the building at the point of intersection. The chapel was built on to the church about 20 years ago. The flames got into the air duct and, fanned by a draft, spread into the main building, where the organ was located, back of the platform.

At this time the fire had burned to the balcony of the chapel and through the roof.

The dry wood of the main building burned briskly and the flames mushroomed through the arches of the church and through the slate roof. Great clouds of black smoke issued, followed a minute later by huge tongues of flame that lighted up the neighborhood.

A third alarm was sounded when it was realized that the flames would spread into the main edifice. The firemen attacked the flames from three sides and poured tons of water on the church, but it was nearly two hours before the blaze was under control.

A large number of handsome memorials were set in on either side of the main auditorium and these were destroyed by the heat and the force of the water turned on the fire.

## Pastor Sees Building Burned

Rev Silas Whitman Anthony, who has been pastor of the church for more than a year, hurried to the scene from his home on Bennett st, nearby. He and other officers of the church witnessed the destruction of the building. Rev Mr Anthony and others feared for the carved bronze and stone memorial tablets in the church, but when they got into the auditorium late last night they found that the members of the Protective Department had these covered with great rubber blankets. The pulpit was saved, but the organ will be a total loss.

The memorial tablet dedicated only a few months to the memory of the 57 young men of their country who died in the service of the side of the walls which were left standing though blackened and fire ridden. The communion service was untouched by the flames. This was carried home by Rev Mr Anthony.

The origin of the fire could not be ascertained. The sexton said he was in the basement under the chapel and the church about 7:30 and there was no evidence of fire at that time. He banked the fire before 8 o'clock and there had been no steam on in the building since soon after 7 o'clock.

Although there was a young people's meeting in the chapel until about 8:30 Rev Mr Anthony said he did not believe any of the members would have had occasion to go to the basement of the chapel, where the fire started.

## Fireman Overcome by Smoke

Ladderman James Burton of Ladder 31 was slightly overcome by the smoke while fighting the flames in the chapel from an areaway on the Dighton-st side of the church, but he remained on duty after a rest on a lawn nearby, during which time he was given first aid treatment by brother firemen.

There are towers at either side of the main church and these were lowered several feet a few years ago because the city Building Department believed that they were unsafe. When the fire worked its way into the two towers, soon after 11 o'clock, the firemen fought the flames with great caution. It was thought the towers were weak and the police kept the crowd of sightseers at a distance.

At 10:30, while the flames were raging in the towers and the firemen were directing water into them from high ladders, the bell in the tower in the northwest corner of the church rang out the half hour. Immediately everybody near the fire got the impression that the tow-

ers were about to fall, and there was a scramble by the firemen, many of whom were at work on the ladders against the front of the church. Chief Peter T. Walsh was directing the fight against the flames at this time.

## Police Keep Crowds Back

The fire attracted a crowd of several thousand persons, and a large detail of policemen under the direction of Capt Forrest Hall and Sergt P. J. Mahoney kept them in check. Soon after the fire showed signs of spreading, the police drove the crowds along Washington st in either direction.

Dighton st was also cleared, because for a time it was feared that sparks and heat from the fire might ignite the string of wooden dwellings opposite one side of the church.

A great crowd that took up a position on Mr Vernon st, at the rear of the church and chapel, was driven to other points of vantage so that the firemen might not be hampered in attacking the flames from the rear.

## Memorial Windows Destroyed

The magnificent double window in the front of the church over the main entrance, dedicated to the memory of Mrs Ann M. Barker, was destroyed. The window was the gift of her husband, Hiram Barker.

Among the memorial windows destroyed were: One given in memory of a friend by Ethel Bird; one dedicated to the memory of David Collins and Clarissa Anna (Bourne) Collins, by their grandchildren; one to the memory of Mrs Mary L. Brock; one to the memory of Jacob and Sally Taylor, and one to Granville and Rebecca Fuller.

The handsome baptismal font of limestone at the front of the church near the platform and pulpit was not much damaged. This font is a memorial to Guy Ellsworth Morris, who died in 1855.

## American Flag Survives Flames

A handsome silk American flag, hanging in front of the organ pipes in the auditorium, survived the flames, though it was thoroughly drenched by water. The flag was later rescued and taken home by Henry H. Sullivan, one of the church members.

The valuable silver communion service was found intact in a basement closet and was removed from the church by several of the members.

The church records, historic and modern, are intact, for they are in charge of the church clerk, Mr Brock, who keeps them in a safety deposit vault in a bank.

The church organ was badly burned at the back and heavy water damage was caused to the pipes in front. There was about \$2000 insurance on the organ.

Will S. Fuller of the Prudential committee said last evening that the committee and other officers of the church would meet this evening to decide what course to pursue in regard to a new building, also to arrange for the continuance of the regular services in some public hall in the district.

Mr Fuller said probably the building would not be torn down. He seemed confident that the damaged property could be rebuilt. The side walls of the auditorium are intact, but the roof is destroyed.

George E. Brock, president of the Home Savings Bank and clerk of the church, presided at the annual meeting of the church in the vestry last Wednesday night and the following day, with Mrs Brock, started for Florida. They remained in Boston until Thursday that Mr Brock might attend the meeting.

On Wednesday night the report of the prudential committee, read by Chairman James T. Knowles, showed no indebtedness and a balance in the treasury. Rev Mr Anthony said last night showed the reports read at the meeting condition and that the outlook was a hopeful one.

## Originally Built in 1827

The Brighton Evangelical Congregational Church was originally built in 1827 and panels from the original pulpit were in the present church building.

The present pastor has served a year and a half. He took the place of Rev William Allen Knight, now of Framingham, who was pastor of the Brighton church for 17 years.

Since 1889 the church has been free of debt and 1920 was a particularly successful year, both spiritually and financially.

In 1855 the Allston Congregational Church was founded by parishioners of the Brighton church and 15 years ago another daughter church came into being, the Faneuil Congregational Church, near the Newbury line.

Mr Anthony and the church officers have already held a conference and decided to hold services in some Brighton hall next Sunday, possibly Warren Hall.