

FIRE OFFICIALS DECLARE BIG EAST BOSTON BLAZE INCENDIARY

Four Alarms Sounded When Flames Break Out in Two Places at Hobbs Box Factory—Jeffries Point Tenement Section Menaced—Mayor Watches Fire Fighters and Congratulates Them



FIGHTING THE FIRE AT CLOSE RANGE.

The entire Jeffries Point section of East Boston was yesterday threatened with extinction by fire, which officials of the department are satisfied was of incendiary origin, and more than 50 families were forced to take to the streets while the flames raged about their homes.

The fire was in the largest box manufacturing and kindling wood establishment in the United States, that of George R. Hobbs, which is located at 293 Maverick st. Four alarms were sounded and more than 20 fire engines fought the flames for more than two hours before the fire was under control.

That most of the buildings and dwelling houses in the vicinity of the box factory were not badly burned or completely destroyed is due only to the remarkable work of the firemen, and after this "all-out" was sounded it was stated by fire officials that the work of the firemen in confining the flames to the building in which they started constitutes one of the best fire-fighting jobs in recent years.

The damage, it is estimated, will amount to about \$65,000, and in addition to this amount some of the owners of nearby dwelling houses may have suffered damages.

The fire started in two places simultaneously. The first alarm was sounded for a blaze in a pile of wooden cases and boxes about 250 feet away from the factory. The alarm was from box 621, at Everett and Cottage sts, and it was sounded a few minutes after 10 o'clock. Capt Thomas J. Flynn of Engine 9, acting district chief, was in charge of the men, who for about five minutes confined their efforts to the flames in the pile of boxes, of which it was estimated there were about 6000. He was then informed that the factory was also on fire, and, turning, was surprised to see the flames already mounting above the roof of the factory.

Immediately he sounded the second, third and fourth alarms, which summoned much of the latest apparatus from the city proper, and, leaving a handful of men to control the fire in the boxes, took all the rest of his crew and went to work on the factory, seeking to hold the flames until help arrived.

Great tongues of flame were leaping 50 and 60 feet into the air, and though it seemed a hopeless task for the little group of firemen to tackle, they went doggedly to it, and Capt Flynn commanded about 100 citizens who were glad to be of any assistance they could.

It was at this point that the destruction of the whole district appeared almost inevitable, and families living nearby began to collect a few of their effects and leave their homes. The

police encouraged them in this, in some cases ordering families out, and in one or two cases carrying them to the street.

Ferry Brings Apparatus

With the apparatus from Boston, which had come via the ferry across the harbor, came Acting Chief Henry Power of District 4, Bullfinch st, and later Chief Peter Walsh and Fire Commissioner Murphy. Chief Walsh took personal charge of the situation as soon as he arrived. By noon the fire was well under control and not a single dwelling house had been damaged so that people could not live in it.

When the flames were at their height Mayor Peters and William C. S. Healey arrived and watched the work of the firemen, along with a crowd of about 50,000 other persons. The whole section was enveloped in great clouds of smoke, which drifted off across the harbor and created much excitement.

The Mayor paid Chief Walsh and his men a high compliment after the flames were under control. "It was a corking good stop," said His Honor.

One fireman was injured. He is hospital man Bernard McLaughlin of Engine 5, Salem st. He was taken to the East Boston Relief Hospital. He was suffering with scalp wounds, contusions and lacerations of the neck and back, and an injured arm.

GEORGE R. HOBBS CHARGED WITH ARSON

Police Say He Set Fire to His Box Factory

Charged with arson with intent to defraud an insurance company, George R. Hobbs, aged 49, of 147 Elm st. Everett, who is well-known in East Boston as a business man and the owner of one of the largest box factories of its kind in the United States, was yesterday arrested by State Police Officer James J. Grady, who made the arson complaint against him.

Hobbs is charged with setting fire to his box factory, which was located at 257-259 Maverick st, East Boston, on May 6. Special Officers James J. Driscoll and Bartholomew W. Winn of East Boston were with State Officer Grady when the arrest was made.

Three days ago Everett W. Shumway of the State fire marshal's office visited the East Boston Court and was granted a complaint against Hobbs for failure to obey a lawful order of the State fire marshal. He was ordered to remove a big pile of boxes from land adjoining his factory. This he failed to do.

The summons granted Mr Shumway in this issue was made returnable this morning, so that when he is arraigned Mr Hobbs will face three distinct complaints, one for arson, another for setting a fire to defraud an insurance company and the third for failure to obey the order of the fire marshal's office.

The fire in the Hobbs factory caused a big scare in East Boston and it was only the remarkable work of the firemen, led by Capt Flynn and Capt Power, that prevented serious consequences throughout the neighborhood.

From the beginning of the investigation of the fire Mr Hobbs has maintained that he knew nothing about the cause of the fire.

Dist Atty Pelletier was communicated with yesterday afternoon and he set the bail in the cases against Mr Hobbs at \$10,000. Mr Hobbs was admitted to bail at 2 o'clock yesterday afternoon and bonds of \$10,000 were furnished by Fred Hodgkins.

WAS OFFERED \$100 TO SET FIRE, HE SAYS

Hancock Tells New Story in Hobbs Arson Case

Government Rests and Factory Owner Takes the Stand

Reversing his testimony of a week ago, James Hancock of 131 Brooks st, East Boston, an employe at the George R. Hobbs Box Factory on Maverick st, East Boston, which was destroyed by fire on May 5 last, testified yesterday, when recalled to the stand in the East Boston District Court, that William H. Finney, foreman of the factory, offered him \$100 some time ago to set fire to the factory.

Hancock was the first witness called by the Government yesterday. Hobbs, the owner of the factory, is charged with burning the building with intent to defraud an insurance company and with failure to obey an order of the State fire marshal's office. Finney, the foreman, is charged jointly with Hobbs with burning the building and with intent to defraud the insurance company.

Continuing, Hancock testified that some time ago, he didn't remember the day or the month, he met Finney outside the Hobbs factory and Finney said to him. "Do you want to make 100 bucks pretty easy, Hank?" Hancock testified that he asked Finney how he could make the \$100 and that Finney answered "by setting a fire in the Hobbs yard." Hancock said that he answered, "No, you can't buy me for \$100! Nothing doing."

Cross-examined by attorney Thomas W. Proctor, Hancock said that when he testified last Friday he was lying, but that today he was telling the truth.

The Government completed its case about 11 a. m. and then the defense opened with Mr Hobbs as the first witness. He was still on the stand, being put through a cross-examination by attorney Walsh, when the case was continued until Friday of next week.

HOBBS AND FINNEY UNDER HEAVY BAIL

Charged With Arson at Fire in Former's Factory

George R. Hobbs, box manufacturer, and William H. Finney, his foreman, both of East Boston, were yesterday held by Judge Murley in East Boston respectively in \$10,000 and \$5000 bonds on charges of arson at Hobbs' factory on May 5. Thomas W. Proctor appeared as counsel for Hobbs and Finney, while Joseph Walsh appeared for the Government.

Hobbs denied assertions by E. R. Searles, that he had stopped Searles from ringing in an alarm when the fire was discovered and that he had made suggestions to Searles as to what he should testify.

Finney denied that he had offered \$100 to James Hancock to set a fire in the box factory yard, as Hancock had testified. He claimed that a Government witness had tried to extort \$200 from him "to keep his mouth shut." Finney denied he had anything to do with starting the fire.

John Hamilton, machinist, said that Searles told him that if Hobbs did not pay him for going to court he would "frame him."

Boston Daily Globe (1872-1922); Aug 7, 1921;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers *Boston Globe* (1872 - 1927)

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GRAND JURY FREES HOBBS AND PHINNEY IN FIRE CASE

George R. Hobbs and William H. Phinney, both charged with complicity in the fire which destroyed the box factory of Hobbs at 257-259 Maverick st, East Boston, May 26, were freed yesterday by the Suffolk County Grand Jury, which returned no bill against them. Hobbs was charged with arson, burning a building to defraud an insurance company and failing to obey an order of the fire marshal. Phinney, foreman of the factory, was charged with burning insured property to injure the insurer.

COURT CLEARS HOBBS OF FIRE MENACE CHARGE

Boston Daily Globe (1872-1922); Sep 3, 1921;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers Boston Globe (1872 - 1927)

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COURT CLEARS HOBBS OF FIRE MENACE CHARGE

George R. Hobbs, East Boston box manufacturer, of 35 Elm st, Everett, was found not guilty of refusing to obey the order of Fire Marshal Neal and was discharged by Judge Joseph H. Barnes in the East Boston District Court yesterday.

The court held the property in question was of money value and could not be considered refuse or rubbish, as would have to be shown to prove the complaint by the Government.

Inspector Everett Shumway of the fire marshal's office, in prosecuting the case, claimed that Hobbs' boxyard on Geneva st, East Boston, where a serious fire occurred last May, was a menace and that the hundreds of wooden boxes stored there were coverless and broken.