

FREIGHT HOUSE SWEPT BY FIRE

Men Run for Lives in Boston & Maine Shed

Explosions Start Blaze That Caused Loss of \$150,000

Dozen Cars and Valuable Merchandise Burned

Five hundred feet of Boston & Maine freighthouse No. 11, in Charlestown, which was packed to the doors with valuable merchandise inbound, were consumed in less than an hour yesterday afternoon by a spectacular fire which started from an explosion among barrels of alcoholic spirits in a car drawn up at section 15. Railroad officials say the loss is at least \$150,000.

Thousands of people, attracted by the huge cloud of black smoke and the clanging of fire apparatus in all parts of the city—there were four alarms—watched the fire from the old Warren Bridge alongside the freighthouse, from the Charlestown Bridge above and from the roofs of buildings in the North and West Ends.

That house 10 which parallels the shed that was burned was not also destroyed was due, according to Chief McDonough and General Manager Pollock of the Boston & Maine, to the foresight and prompt action of three officers of the United States Army stationed at Watertown.

These men, Capt James L. Walsh, Lieut J. S. Hatcher and Lieut Franz Donlat, had just arrived at the North Station on a train from Lynn when the fire broke out. They ran to house 10, which had been deserted by the freight-handlers, called them back and with crisp sharp Army orders directed the closing of every fire-door in that freight-house. This shed was filled with combustible merchandise, and had the doors remained open undoubtedly flying sparks would have set the building on fire.

Jump for Their Lives

Michael Sullivan and Cornelius Donovan and a gang of men whom they were superintending at section 15 and in the car where the fire started had barely time to jump for their lives when the explosion occurred and a sheet of flame burst from the car door and swept into the building. These men were unloading from the cars. More than 50 freight handlers, who were at work in that section of house 11, ran for the doors without stopping to get their coats.

At first there was a report that Walter H. Baker of Somerville, fore-

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man in charge of the building, had not come out. Railroad officials found him uninjured 15 minutes after the fire started.

Practically every piece of motor apparatus north of Dudley st was set in motion. Companies 4, 8 and 8 and some Charlestown crews were the first to arrive. They attached lines to hydrants alongside the freighthouses, only to find after the connections had been made that there was no water there. The water is not turned on in these pipes until April 1 because of the danger of freezing during the cold weather.

Immediately the hose was hitched to engines and hose-carts and dragged out to Beverly st where connections were made. Several lines of hose were burned before this was accomplished. Hose had to be stretched through the yards to Beverly st to get water. Fire boats 31, 47 and 44 appeared very early, poked their way up through the draw-bridges and were largely responsible for checking the fire.

Dozen Cars Destroyed

Chief McDonough, who was at his home in Charlestown when the automatic alarm sounded, sped to the fire without his rubber boots, and for more than an hour he stood knee deep in the water between freighthouses 10 and 11, directing the attack.

The first explosion in the freight car was followed by a number of others, dull booms which startled the crowd, but added little to the danger or to the damage. The 500 feet from section 15 to the Boston end of the building were doomed from the time the car was ignited. A dozen cars ranged beside the shed were devoured by the flames. Nearly a dozen more were dragged to safety by a yard engine.

The first bell alarm was rung in from box 1314 on Beverly st at 2:32 p. m. The fourth had been sounded a 2:41, and just before 3:15 the fire was under control, though the smoke continued to roll up.

By this time there were probably 15,000 people congregated outside the ropes and on the bridges. Charlestown bridge was black with spectators. Surface car lines were partially blocked, but the elevated trains continued to run and there was very little delay on that line.

Big details of police from Charlestown and the downtown stations were kept busy handling the crowd, and despite their efforts groups of small boys got in through the yards and appeared on the roofs of nearby freighthouses.

Much Water and Smoke Damage

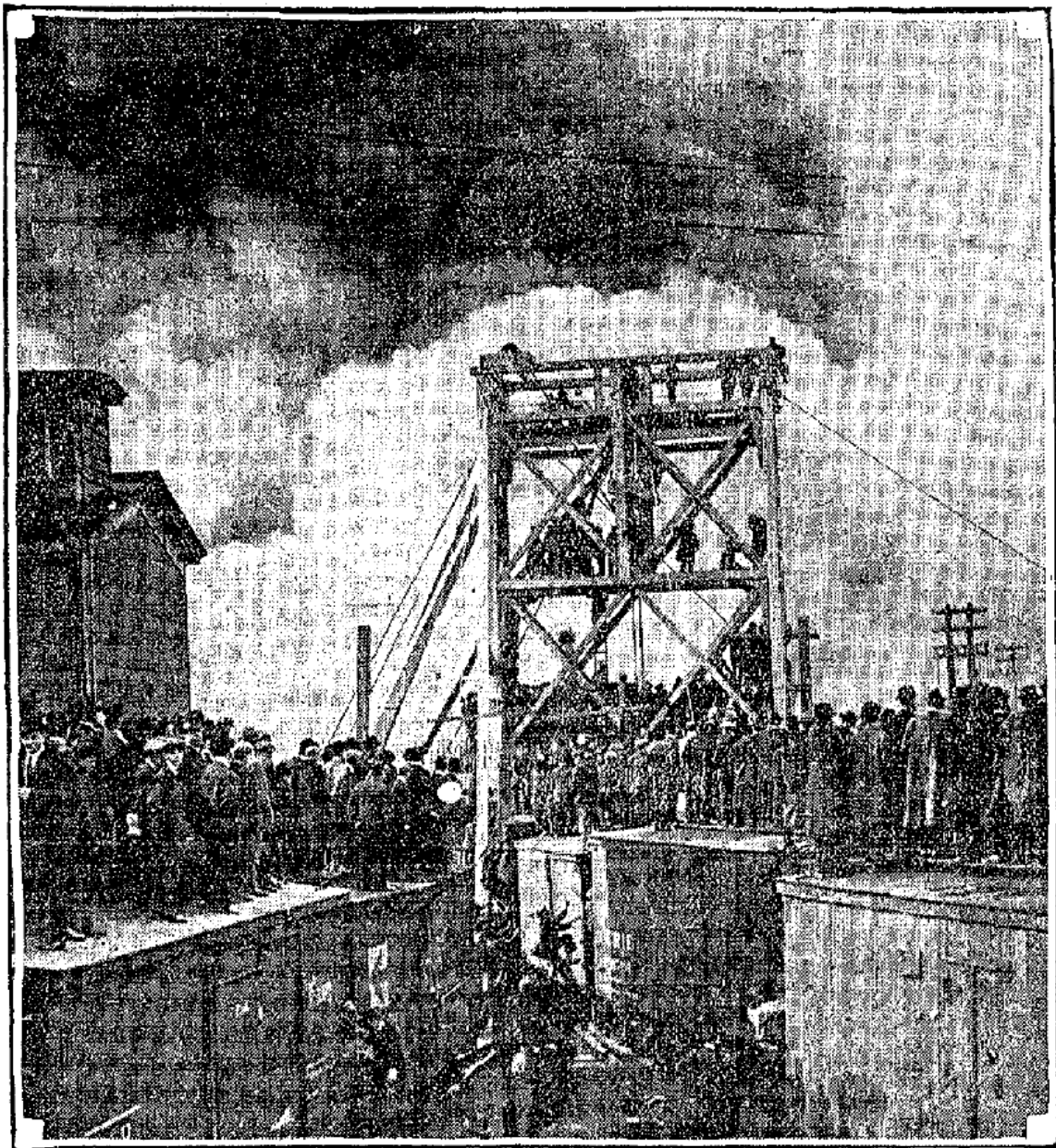
Freighthouse 11 was 1050 feet long. Every burned section was loaded with merchandise of various kinds. Although the flames were checked before they reached section 1, the goods there were ruined by water and smoke.

In this shed the freight handlers were receiving merchandise shipped in less than carload lots. There were stores of whisky, wines, paper stock, dry goods, woollens and flour.

Gen Mgr Benjamin R. Pollock, Gen Supt John D. Tyter, Supt George H. Folger of the Terminal division, Gen Freight Agent Frank W. Beckman and Gen Foreman W. W. Gordon directed gangs of their own men in protecting railroad property menaced by the fire. Nothing could be saved from the burning freighthouse.

Railroad officials thought it remarkable that all the men in the shed and in the car where the fire started escaped. The fire swept through the building rapidly. Reports that men were smoking while about their work and thus caused the explosion could not be verified.

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SPECTATORS ON TOPS OF CARS AND DRAWBRIDGES WATCHING THE BOSTON & MAINE FREIGHT HOUSE FIRE.

CLOSED HYDRANTS AT B. & M. FIRE SCORED
Boston Daily Globe (1872-1922); Mar 31, 1916;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers Boston Globe (1872 - 1927)
 pg. 11

CLOSED HYDRANTS AT B. & M. FIRE SCORED

Large Loss Attributed to
 Delay in Getting Water

Commissioner Grady Computes 54
 Minutes Wasted at the Start

Fire Commissioner Grady, in a report to Mayor Curley last night on the fire which recently destroyed freight house No. 11 of the Boston & Maine Railroad, asserted that the insufficient flow of water, because of the shutting off of the flow except in one hydrant, resulted in a very serious delay to the department in getting streams upon the burning building and consequent great financial loss.

In 1913, after a conference on fire protection, the railroad established hydrants at freight houses Nos. 10 and 11. The pipes to which these hydrants are attached are under ground, but above the frost line. As a precaution against freezing, the officials shut the water off each Winter in all but one hydrant, the understanding being that the watchman at the gate of a small shanty at the end of freight house No. 10 was to turn the water on in case of fire.

"When several engine companies arrived at the fire and located at these hydrants, it was impossible to get water," Commissioner Grady writes. "This of course, resulted in a very serious delay at a critical moment, as the companies were obliged to move back to other hydrants, after having run lines, etc. But one of the hydrants gave water, and this one was located at the end of freight house No. 10

"The alarm was received at 2:31 p. m. March 27, and water did not flow from the post hydrant between Nos. 3 and 4 doors of freight house No. 11 until 2:51 p. m. and then only slightly. It was 3:25 p. m. before enough water came from the hydrant to supply one engine.

"Our investigation shows that the water was not turned on until 10 minutes after the discovery of the fire and then by a foreman named William Gordon. When the water finally did come the hydrant was of little value because the fire had been brought under control by the fireboats and streams from available hydrants in Warren av and Beverly st.

"The fire increased so intensely at the beginning that this department lost approximately 300 feet of hose. The first few minutes of a fire is a critical time and water, and plenty of it, should be ready, for all the apparatus and men of the department are of little avail unless they are provided with the means of extinguishment.

"It is very evident that this lack of water resulted in such a large loss and it is my opinion that if the water was there when wanted the fire would have been checked at a very early stage and the loss would have been represented by a much smaller figure.

"The above main and hydrants belong to and are on the property of the Boston & Maine Railroad. The conditions at the fire on March 27, 1916, prevailed at a fire at the same location on Feb 27, 1913. At 12:05 a. m. on the latter date there was a fire in freight houses Nos. 10 and 11 which necessitated three alarms, and resulted in a loss of \$131,000, lack of water being directly responsible for this large loss."