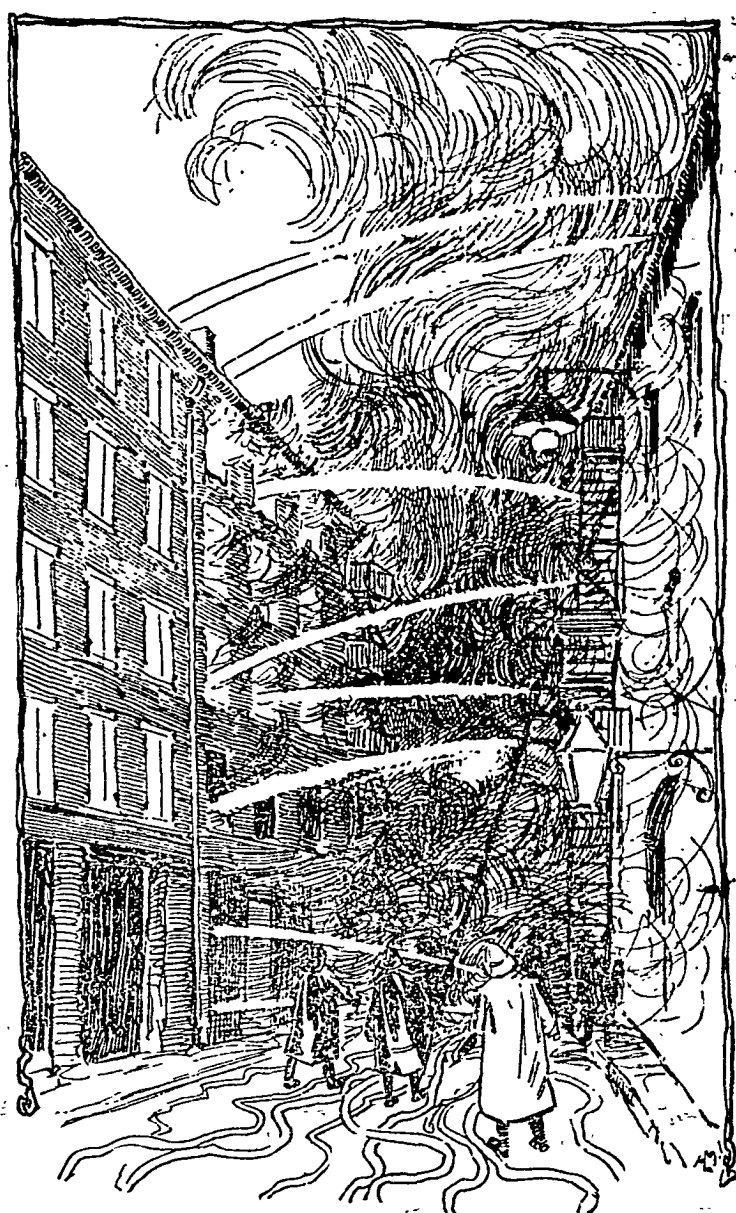


BIG STORE RUINED.

The Pitts-Kimball Company's Place Burned Out.

Fire Started in the Engine Room After Close of Business.



FIGHTING THE FIRE AT CLOSE QUARTERS IN THE REAR ON HAYMARKET PL.

Loss Estimated at \$250,000—Firemen Had Desperate Experience, the Smoke Being of Unusual Density and Overcoming Several of Them—Hot Air Explosions Added to the Danger—Many Sensational Incidents.

The Pitts-Kimball company's big department store was completely ruined by fire, smoke and water last night, immediately after it closed its doors on the completion of the day's business.

The loss to the firm's stock and to the several buildings it occupied, owned by Jason N. Bailey and by the Parker estate, will reach \$250,000. It is estimated by various interested individuals. Several hundred employes will be more or less affected in their employment.

Vice Pres Rufus H. Kimball of the company, who was summoned, would make no statement as to the concern's stock or attempt to estimate the loss. However, it was learned from superintendent A. S. Nye that the firm had a stock valued at between \$250,000 and \$300,000 in the building, and which is insured for slightly over \$200,000.

All the stock not destroyed by fire, and which is scarcely more than 30 percent, is damaged by water and smoke.

Hardly a counter could be covered by the protective department force, so dense was the smoke throughout the buildings, and so rapid was the spread of the blaze. Probably at no fire of recent years has the smoke been so dense, obscuring everything in the vicinity and interfering even with the working of the fire apparatus massed in the streets.

Two score of firemen, including District Chief Mullen, were overcome at various times, none very seriously, however, and all returned later to their work.

The Park theater and Gould's hotel, adjacent on Washington st, the Hawthorne, on Avery st, and McCarthy's billiard and bowling alley, on the opposite corner of Fayette pl, all suffered a water damage, while smoke permeated every portion of the buildings, but not to the extent that will occasion any permanent damage.

At the Tremont theater, directly in the rear, the fire and smoke delayed the performance and caused some inconvenience, but after it was assured that the fire was under control the audience was admitted and the show began at 8.30.

Store Closed for the Day.

It was very fortunate that the store had closed for business the day before the fire broke out. As it was the blaze was discovered almost instantly. Fully three-quarters of Boston's fire force, summoned by four alarms in quick succession, was massed on the spot in the battle with the flames, but for two hours the combat for supremacy being waged with but slight advantage being gained by the department. Then the deluge of water poured upon the flames began to tell, and an hour later the last vestige had been completely drowned out, and the salvage brigades

were at work freeing the various floors of water and of smoke in the endeavor to save as much as possible.

Four streams from the Tremont theater, manned from the fire escapes in the rear of the theater, and directly opposite where the flames were fiercest; three streams from the roof of the Park theater by that fire brigade, and a couple each from the roofs of Gould's hotel and from Jacot's restaurant on Boylston st, rendered effective assistance to the fire department; in fact, some of these streams were pouring water on the flames before the arrival of the department in any force, and did much in preventing a more rapid sweep of the blaze at the outset.

The burning establishment furnished an opportunity for streams to be directed upon it from every side. It is located in three different buildings. The original building is Bumstead block, 61 1/2 Washington st, and next door to the Park theater. This is a five-story granite block, extending back to Head and Haymarket pls, a depth of several hun-

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BIG STORE RUINED.

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dred feet. What is called the addition to the original store, is the six-story brown-stone front building corner of Washington st and Fayette pl, owned by the Parker estate. In the rear of this and backing the corner of Fayette pl, and extending back to Haymarket pl, which runs from Boylston to Avery st, just in the rear of the Masonic temple, the Edison electric station and the Tremont theater, is a five-story brick building, recently occupied in part by the municipal printing plant, but better known to the public mind as the home for years of the old Boston Cribb club.

Handicapped by Smoke.

All these pieces proved of immense value to the department in its flight, as streams could be directed from all sides, as well as from the roofs of the surrounding buildings.

But in these narrow confines, too, the flames were the fiercest, the heat the most severe and the smoke pall so dense that firemen knew only by feeling their hose lines just where they were at. Falling glass from the intense heat in the building and frequent hot air explosions made the situation most hazardous, but the brave firemen stuck to their posts, and valiantly led in lines of hose through the doors from Washington st through smoke so dense that men could scarcely live in it, and amid a labyrinth of counters in which some, indeed, got lost and almost succumbed to the effects of the smoke before they managed to reach the outer fresh air again.

It was a case, too, of every man for himself, as none could see even his own hands, and the roar of the fire, the falling glass and the splash of water from every direction made calls for assistance absolutely useless.

Ladders were practically useless in the positions in which they could be erected, so direct contact with the blaze from windows and by steady advance along the different floors from either side was the only means with which to engage the flames with any degree of success.

It was moving to see fireman after fireman stagger from the store to the alley on every side, feebly grasp the railings and windows for support and writhe in pain from the smoke. Emetics and aromatic spirits of ammonia were in great demand, and onlookers who assisted the suffering men to Gould's hotel and other places did good service.

An example of how dense was the smoke can be appreciated from the fact that the two horses of the hose wagon of engine 3 came near being asphyxiated in Head pl, and it required nearly an hour's work before they were got to a position of safety in a much exhausted condition. When the horses were sent in with the hose wagon to lead out its lines of hose in the rear. The smoke was then not so dense, and they were unhitched. A ladder and several lines prevented their immediate removal to Boylston or Tremont st. Almost immediately afterward the smoke pall descended. The firemen stuck to their posts, as all depended on not letting the fire sweep across the narrow alleyway to the Tremont theater or the Edison electric works or into Avery st.

Hot Air Explosions.

For a time horses and everything else were forgotten in the desperate battle that was being waged. Frequent hot air explosions threw the firemen back time and time again, only for them to immediately return and with greater determination to conquer.

Then driver Fitzgerald heard horses stamping and neighing. At great danger he managed to reach them, although while he had them by the bridles he could not see them. Then he endeavored to lead them out. The horses snorted and resisted assistance. Finally he got the animals into a clearer atmosphere, but not before they had been almost suffocated.

In Fayette pl the members of engine company 7 were so used up while working in the basement that the line was abandoned and the men fled from their positions. They all required assistance when they reached the outer air.

Here, too on a ladder which had been erected, the men of ladder company 17 were overcome. Ladderman Hatton was directing a stream from the top. A hot air explosion almost blew him from his post. The flames swept around him, and aware that he was on fire, he calmly secured the line so the stream continued to play on the blaze and then slid down to the ground. His jacket was ablaze. Driver Bailey and ladderman Tehan sprang to him and tore off the burning garment, Bailey's eyes being quite badly burned by the blaze, while Tehan's face and hands were scorched.

These were but examples of the heroism displayed on all sides.

The cause of the fire is a mystery. The store closed at 6, and everything then was all right. Superintendent Nye, as was his custom, made a round of the various departments, and he had left all in charge of the watchmen.

A few minutes later all was ablaze. The fire was discovered, it would seem, from nearly a dozen points at the same time. As J. W. Vokes was returning from work, he passed down Washington st and noticed smoke coming from the basement windows of the store well up in Fayette pl. He ran across the street and pulled in an alarm from box 53 at 6.35. In the interval some one else had rushed into the house of engine 26, on Mason st, and given an alarm to which that company responded before the box sounded. From the Tremont theater also the Park theater came automatic alarms within a few seconds, and in the interval, when the box was pulled and the alarm sounded, several others had rushed to call the apparatus.

Lightning-Like Spread.

The fire spread with lightning rapidity. A third alarm call was instantly sent in for additional apparatus, calling those who would respond on a second and a third later on. When the flames seemed to have made a still further spread into the main buildings fronting on Washington st, a fourth call was sounded, calling nearly three-quarters of the effective force of the entire department.

Watchman Henry Henica of the Pitts-Kimball company discovered the fire inside the store, and rushed to sound the Park theater box, but this had already been sounded. He states that he had started his first round of the building. About the junction of the front and rear buildings on the Fayette pl side the engine room is located in the basement. Approach from the front building to the rear is by means of a short flight of three or four stairs. He smelt smoke here as if coming from the engine room, and upon opening the door to the office of G. A. Ware, an officer of the corporation and in charge of the boot and shoe department, he was confronted with the flames.

He then ran to sound the alarm. Upon his return the flames had run along,

evidently from the engine room where they started, up a light well and elevator shaft to the upper floors of the rear building, as these were soon a raging mass of flame.

A series of hot air explosions scattered the flames in every direction, while the dense smoke, which was later such a handicap to the firemen's work, began to fill the entire establishment.

Swept Through Open Spaces.

The fire found good fuel in the rear building, where it first gained a foothold. Here on the lower floor adjoining the engine room were the ladies' and gentlemen's dining rooms, the first floor was the new boot and shoe department, on the second boys' and children's clothing, the third and fourth floor were unoccupied, while the top floor carried a stock of over \$40,000 worth of boots and shoes. The four upper floors were destroyed.

Soon after 7 the flames reached the rear of the original building, which is owned by Jonas N. Bailey. Mr Bailey, after a careful examination, later in the evening told the newspaper men that he believed his loss on the building would exceed \$40,000.

The fire also reached the front building of the Parker estate about the same time. The immense floor spaces and the inflammable contents furnished rare opportunity for the flames to have unrestricted play.

Particularly heavy stocks of men's and boys' clothing, shoes, bicycles and sporting articles were being carried at this time, much having been received within the past few days, and on this property the heaviest loss resulted.

The grocery department on the fourth floor is a total loss, while manager Tilton of the drug department, which is on a balcony of the street floor and well toward the Washington st front, announced that the \$5000 stock of drugs and toilet articles was practically a total loss.

And so it was in other departments—what was not burned or injured by the flames was so thoroughly soaked with water or damaged by smoke as to make the loss almost total.

The Firemen Injured.

Deputy Supt Pierce and Capt Cain had charge of the police, who had their hands full in keeping back the thousands of spectators. Police Commissioners Clark, Curtis and Adams and Fire Commissioner Russell were on the scene and exercised a general oversight over their men.

The police ambulance of division 4 was located on Boylston st, and the emergency hospital ambulances were at hand on Essex st. Fortunately, despite the fact that fully 40 firemen were overcome by smoke, cut by falling glass, or suffered slight burns, but two required hospital treatment. Dr A. A. Wheeler, the volunteer physician who responds to all big fires, attended the other men.

Among the firemen overcome by smoke or injured were Chief Mulen, Lieut H. A. Adams of engine 21, Driscoll and Kennealy of engine 7, Shea of 26, Bailey, Tehan and Hatton of ladder 17, Lieut Joy of engine 6, McGarr and Doule of engine 26, William Field of engine 26 and Jacob Hyman of engine 10. The last two were treated at the emergency hospital. Field had badly cut hands from falling glass, while Hyman received contusions and sprains by the tipping over of the hose wagon of engine 10 on Washington st, just in front of the blaze, and in trying to straighten out his hose lines.

An aged woman named McGowan of Newton was knocked down by the crowd on Boylston st, near the corner of Tamworth st, but was not much hurt.

There were nine employes at work in the rear building at the time the blaze was discovered, three cleaning carpets and six others engaged in work in connection with the shipping. All got out in safety.

INSURANCE WELL SCATTERED.

About All the Companies Admitted to Do Business in This State Are Interested—Rating of the Buildings.

The insurance involved in the Pitts-Kimball company's fire is well scattered among nearly all the companies admitted to do business in this state. The building, owned by the Bailey estate, is fully covered by insurance. It is rated at 77 cents per \$100, with the application of the 80 percent reduced rate clause. The stock of the Pitts-Kimball company, which is also stated to be fully covered, was rated by the Boston board of fire underwriters at \$1.20 per \$100, also with the 80 percent reduced rate clause and at 10 percent allowance for a watchman and a watch clock guarantee.

In the building 605-611 Washington st, also occupied by the Pitts-Kimball company, the contents were rated at \$1.24 per \$100, with the reduced rate clause.

None of the insurance companies were able to give any list of the companies interested, with their amounts, last night. Col E. C. Benton said over the telephone that his agency, the John C.

Paige & Co, had about \$200,000 placed, both on blanket and specific policies, but no details could be ascertained.

Good Work by Tremont Theater Men.

To the men of the Tremont theater fire brigade belongs the credit of being the first to get a stream of water on the Pitts-Kimball fire. Under the direction of W. G. Vinal, the advertising agent of the theater, the men quickly got to work, and in less than two minutes had four streams of water on the blaze. Stands were taken on the fire escapes on the orchestra, balcony and gallery floors and from a window in the fly gallery. Finding that they could do but little to check the fire the men turned their attention to saving their own and surrounding buildings, despite the great heat, until the fire apparatus arrived on the scene. The fire brigade is composed of the entire working force of the theater, and numbers over two dozen men. Their prompt and efficient work was commended on all sides.