

FEARLESS BOSTON FIREMEN

Who Take All Kinds of Chances

A SERIES OF PERSONAL STORIES

CAPT FRED W. BATTIS ENGINE 48



CAPT FRED W BATTIS

"Of course men long in service in the Boston Fire Department meet with similar thrilling experiences. Perhaps the one of many I have had that made the deepest impression on me was in the Winter of 1886

"Imagine, if possible, your feelings in going over an aerial ladder with flames playing tag around your legs, only to find when you get to a supposed place of safety that you must do an acrobatic stunt and swing out three feet in mid-air to gain the roof—a round roof made of copper. Such was my experience at the Nickelodeon fire.

"I was a member of Ladder 8, but detailed to drive Aerial Truck 14. Box 21 sounded for a fire at the Nickelodeon Theatre on Court st. After setting the truck in front of the building and raising the same I was ordered by the late District Chief Griffin, then captain of Ladder 8, to go over the aerial and ventilate the roof.

"The flames were pouring out of the third story at the time. I found it impossible to get by the third story. Waiting until the wind blew the flames back into the building for an instant, I rushed up the ladder with the flames encircling my legs.

"The smoke was something terrific and I was expecting the ladder to take fire at any moment. When I got to the end of the ladder I found it went only to the eaves. I had to do something and do it quickly. I swung from the ladder to the edge and pulled myself up to the eaves, having the ax in my hands all the time.

"The smoke and heat were blinding and the roof I had now gained I found to be round and of copper, so I could not crawl up. I managed to get along to a

small window and from there to the top of the roof

"The fire and smoke were gaining and I was puzzled which way to go, as the roof of the next building was 40 feet below. I groped around until I found a skylight. Upon opening it I found no way of getting down there. Everything was black and smoky. At that moment the flames burst through the Nickelodeon roof, and I knew I had got to drop through the skylight.

"Upon looking down four stories below I saw a lantern. Shouting down I was heard by the late Commissioner Tobin. He sent a ladder to the roof and I descended in safety.

"I found that the skylight into which I was about to drop was over a wellway, and had I made the attempt my comrades might have been able to pick up the pieces. There certainly would have been a long procession with honors and me riding at the head."

Capt F. W. Battis joined the department in 1886, was made lieutenant March 12, 1897, and captain March 12, 1915.