

FEARLESS BOSTON FIREMEN

Who Take All Kinds of Chances

A SERIES OF PERSONAL STORIES

CAPT MICHAEL NORTON ENGINE 21

"After a service of over 30 years in the department, many events crowd to the front demanding recognition as the most thrilling. There come to my mind scenes at the old Globe Theatre fire, the Brown Branch, and the Roxbury general alarm fire, all of which were indeed thrilling in themselves.

However, it was on April 12, 1908, that I had my most exciting experience. At that time I was captain of Engine 5 of West Boston, which was the first company to arrive in Chelsea when assistance was called from Boston.

On arriving at the fire I received orders from Chief Spencer to take my hose to a point near the place where the fire had started. We had dragged the hose into a narrow passageway to head off the fire from spreading any further in that direction.

Just as we got water Lieut Michael O'Brien, who had gone back to pass the word for water, found that the fire had come in back of us in such a way that we were cut off from escape from the passageway. He shouted to us and encouraging the danger we fought our way back through the flames and smoke.

What saved us was that we had water in our line. Otherwise, there is no telling what would have happened. The heat was so intense that one whole length of the hose was burned and had to be taken out when we reached the street.

For 102 hours we battled with the flames that were consuming the city. From the terrible punishment received



CAPT MICHAEL NORTON

from that fire Lieut O'Brien, a splendid officer and able fireman, went off duty when we returned to quarters. It later resulted in his death.

"At dusk it was appalling to behold the panorama of charred ruins extending in all directions far as the eye could see. It was pathetic, too, to see the homeless men, women and children conveying but a few belongings and wandering about aimlessly without a place to lay their heads."

Capt Norton was appointed to the call service Oct 16, 1885, and made a permanent man Feb 16, 1888, on Ladder 1. He was promoted lieutenant Aug 28, 1896 and captain Jan 24, 1908. He has served on Ladder companies 1, 3, 5 and 29 and Engines 5, 6, 21 and 43.