

# FOUR-ALARM BLAZE IN STATE-ST BUILDING

## Firemen Imperiled by Falling Slate And Hot-Air Explosions in Kelley Peanut Co.'s Plant—Two Hurt



SCENE OF FOUR-ALARM FIRE AT 185-187 STATE ST.

### Many Narrow Escapes

### Huge Pall of Smoke Covers District

### Damage Estimated at \$150,000

### Flames Conquered After Fight of 1-1-2 Hours

Clinging to ladders and fire escapes, at times almost overcome by thick, blinding clouds of nauseating smoke, in peril from showers of falling glass and slate from the roof, firemen yesterday afternoon fought a fire in the Kelly Peanut Company's establishment, 185-187 State st.

Four alarms were sounded. The damage due to the fire is estimated at \$150,000.

No cause for the blaze was assigned by the fire officials. It was ordered investigated by the police and the fire marshal's office, especially in view of a statement made to newspapermen by John W. Leavitt, manager of the concern, who said that he had trouble with some of his employees yesterday. He later qualified the statement by saying that per-

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haps a lighted cigarette was responsible for the fire.

Mr Leavitt said he had left the building about an hour before the fire was discovered and that the employees had been out of the building since 1 o'clock.

The fire started just before 4 o'clock and, not until 5:30 after the flames had shot through the roof, was it under control. The interior of the building was gutted and only the work of the firemen and the construction of the adjoining buildings kept the fire from spreading, and causing a serious conflagration in the downtown district.

### Firemen in Peril From Slates

Heroic acts were performed by several fire fighters.

There were times when the thousands gathered in the streets nearby held their breath while large pieces of slate, some weighing 50 pounds, slid from the roof of the five story brick building and smashed into fragments below.

In some instances firemen at work on ladders and the water towers were struck by pieces of slate but none was seriously hurt.

The first warning of the fire came when an automatic alarm was sounded from the third floor of the building at 2:16. Patrolman Dennis Kellner of the City Hall av station saw smoke issuing from the building about the same time and he sounded an alarm from a nearby box. On the arrival of the first district chief, a second alarm was ordered. When Chief John O. Tabor arrived, he ordered the third alarm skipped and the fourth sounded.

The sounding of the fourth alarm resulted in the entire apparatus of the downtown district being massed near the building, 18 engine companies, six ladder companies and three water towers, together with the rescue company, responding.

On the arrival of the first companies, the fire seemed to be raging fiercest on the second and third floors. Ladders were thrown against the building on the State-st side and also on the Central-st side, the building being one of a block which runs from one street to another.

Firemen were ordered to take up positions of vantage on the fire escapes of the building immediately adjoining, occupied by the D. W. Slade Co. and William G. Bell Co. From the fire escapes of this building on the third, fourth and fifth floors, the men poured into the burning building huge quantities of water.

Other fire fighters were sent over the ladders to attack the fire in the rear of the building, which was out of range of those working on the fire escapes. These firemen were the targets for the cascade of pieces of slate, when they started to shoot off the roof, loosened by the heat and the water.

Lieut Fred Young and men attached to water tower 1 remained at work while the slate was falling all around them, directing the powerful stream from the elevated nozzle of the water tower. Pieces of the slate struck the tower, one piece striking the bell and causing it to ring out loudly.

### Fire Commissioner's Narrow Escape

Fire Commissioner Theodore A. Glynn narrowly escaped being struck by one of the flying missiles, being pulled out of the danger zone just a few seconds before a piece came off the roof and struck on the spot where he had been standing.

Several hot-air explosions occurred in the building while the firemen were at work. One explosion resulted in a mass of wooden wreckage being hurled down stairs from the third floor to the second floor, striking members of engine 25 and ladder 8 who were working on the stairway. Lieut Thomas Flahigan and Hoseman Stephen King, John Coleman and Edward Covey of engine 25 were caught in this explosion.

Lieut Flahigan was struck by flying wood, sustained multiple but not serious injury and Hoseman Covey had both his hands burned. He refused hospital assistance, however, and, after being given first aid treatment, returned to the fire.

Laddermen William Farley, John Carr and others of engine 5 were ordered to quit work on the third floor of the building by Dist. Chief O'Brien when the flooring began to show signs of weakening and there was danger of it collapsing. Despite the immense amount of water poured into the building none of the floors collapsed.

One of the features of the fire was the narrow escape of Capt Daniel Hurley, Lieut Joseph W. Shea and E. J. Casey, Jeremiah Cronin, John Coleman and William Farley of Rescue Company 1 when a hot air explosion struck them as they were directing a line of hose into a window on the third floor of the State st side of the building.

### Thrashing Hose Imperils Firemen

The explosion was strong enough to cause the masts to fall back, for a few seconds and in that short period the heavy line of hose they were using got beyond their control. Thrashing and turning like an irate python, the hose thrashed around, almost knocking the hose-thrower from the window ledge to the ground. He managed to grasp the side of a ladder just as he lost his balance and held on. The other members of the company were having difficulty to get the hose under control but finally succeeded and the fire fighters returned to their task, staying at that point over an hour.

While at all times the fire was dangerous, it seemed to give the firemen the hardest battle after it had practically gutted the floors of the building and reached the roof which was loaded to capacity with different products of the peanut industry. Thick clouds of smoke rolled out of holes in the roof from this enclosed fire area and not until 5:15, an hour and a half after the fire was discovered, was there any flame seen coming through the roof.

The firemen were waiting for the flames to show on the roof and lines had been run up over the fronts of the two adjoining buildings for this

emergency. Inside of 15 minutes the water poured from this vantage point had drowned out the fire in the loft and the blaze was conquered.

### Thousands Near Scene of Fire

A crowd numbering several thousands gathered in the streets near the fire, attracted by the rushing of the apparatus to the scene and the thick smoke blown by an easterly wind up State st, covering the banking district with a thick pall like a fog. At times the upper floors of the Custom House building could not be seen.

Lieut James Laffer of the traffic squad, in charge of the police detail, had a cordon of police thrown around the district, giving the firemen ample opportunity to work unhampered. Police Commissioner Wilson, Police Supt Crowley and Deputy Supt Goode were on the scene and they were loud in their praise of the way the police detail was handled.

The inspectors' squad at headquarters was ordered out for duty and a few minutes after they arrived inspectors Conway, Murphy and Crawford of Headquarters found two well known pick-pockets mixing with the crowds at the foot of Central st. They were taken to Headquarters, booked as suspicious persons, and held.

On the way to the fire, a white horse attached to the hose wagon of Engine 27 from Charlestown fell and sustained injuries to the body. Acting Chief Edward McDonough's automobile was in collision with another automobile at Congress and State sts, but none of those in the cars was injured.

The Kelly Peanut Company deals in peanut butter, salted peanuts and other products. The thick black smoke was said to be caused by burning peanut oil.

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