

# FIVE-ALARM FIRE IN SOUTH BOSTON

## Many Narrow Escapes at Early Morning \$150,000 Blaze

### Electric Bulbs Explosion Spreads Rumors of Munitions Plant Plot

Three upper stories of a five-story brick building, 381-389 Congress st, corner of B st, South Boston, were gutted by fire early yesterday morning. The flames, discovered at 4:15 by policeman Fallon of division 16, was not under control until 6:30.

Five alarms were sounded, and at one juncture, with the blaze bursting through the roof and walls collapsing, the entire district was menaced. The loss is estimated at \$150,000.

#### Probe Origin of Fire

Federal, State and local officials are probing the origin of the fire, which started in the third floor and went through to the roof so rapidly as to baffle the firemen.

The third and fourth floors were occupied by the Boston Scale and Machine Company, engaged principally in turning out parts of rifles for the United States Government, and the fifth floor by the Westinghouse Electric Company as a storehouse.

Thousands of Westinghouse electric bulbs were smashed by the heat, causing noises like explosions, and the report was widely circulated that a munitions factory had been destroyed. The fact that the building is in the alien enemy zone gave an additional realistic touch to this rumor.

With the temperature around zero and a gale sweeping the waterfront, the firemen were greatly handicapped, especially in the use of ladders, which were soon coated with ice.

Several had narrow escapes. A squad from Engine 39, headed by District Chief Stephen Ryan, were almost trapped on the third floor, when the flames shot across the hall, cutting them off temporarily from a stairway to which they finally found their way and rushed out into the street for resuscitation.

Four times the men of Engines 7, 23 and 39 were driven into the street by smoke and flames while dragging lines of hose over the main staircase. The

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aerial ladder was taken away from a third-story window in flames.

## **Firemen in Great Danger**

When a floor in the rear of the fourth story collapsed, Engines 1 and 43 squads grouped on a fire escape were in great danger.

It is estimated that the damage to the building is \$50,000, and that the other losses are: Boston Scale and Machinery Company, \$45,000; Westinghouse Electric Company, \$25,000; Crucible Steel Company, which occupied the first and second floors, \$30,000.

About 500 persons are thrown out of work by the blaze.