

FOUR MEN DIE TRAPPED IN VAULT BY FIRE IN THE FINANCIAL DISTRICT

Painters Suffocated, Many Firemen Overcome by Smoke and Fumes in Basement of New Harris-Forbes Building, 24 Federal St.

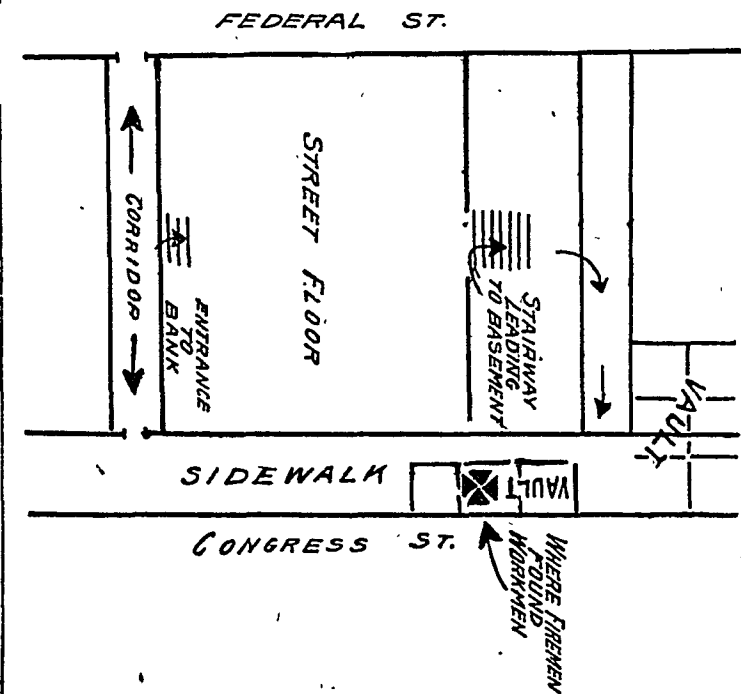
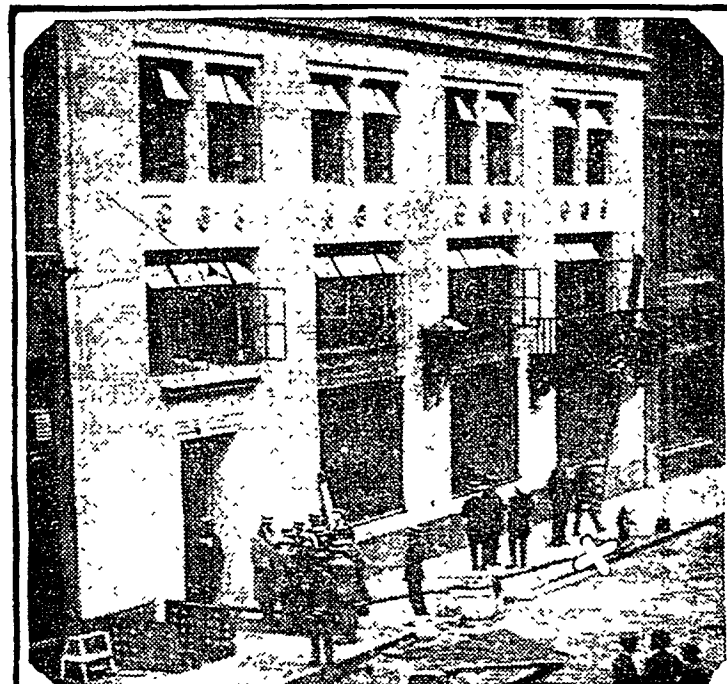


Diagram shows plan of street floor of Harris-Forbes Building and vault in basement, under sidewalk, where four painters lost their lives during fire.



New Harris-Forbes Building, Congress st side, where four workmen met death in fire. The fatalities occurred in a vault beneath the sidewalk at point marked by a cross.

Victims All Painters

Fire in Composition Flooring

Dropping of Match Police Say Cause

Firemen In Gas Masks Have Hard Fight

THE DEAD

(At the Northern Mortuary)

John Kuhn, 2021 Ogden st, Philadelphia.

William B. Dempsey, Philadelphia.

John Francis McCoy, 51, married, 5 Heffernan st, Allston.

John McCauley, 95 Childs st, Jamaica Plain.

OVERCOME BY GAS

(At the Relief Hospital)

Henry J. Powers, 28 Fairmount st, Dorchester; captain of Engine 8, acting district chief, District 4.

Thomas E. Flanagan, 327 Columbia road, Dorchester; lieutenant of Engine 25.

John A. Allen, 253 Boston st, Dorchester; fireman of Engine 25.

Cornelius Toomey, 282 East 9th st, South Boston.

Trapped by a curtain of flames and black, penetrating smoke, four men died of suffocation in a huge vault in the basement of the new building

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FOUR MEN TRAPPED IN VAULT SUFFOCATED

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of Harris, Forbes & Co, investment brokers, 24 Federal st, extending through to Congress st, shortly after 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon.

The men were employed by Remington & Sherman, vault and safe manufacturers, 40 Court st. They were doing fancy painting and enameling in the interior of the vault.



JOHN A. ALLEN.

Overcome by Gas Fumes at Fire

Although the Harris, Forbes Company is occupying the building, the department in which the explosion occurred has not been turned over for its use. None of the employees of the banking house was injured.

Dozen Firemen Overcome

More than a dozen firemen were overcome and the condition of four firemen necessitated their removal to the Haymarket Relief Hospital. All will recover, the doctors say, although the condition of Lieut Thomas Flanagan of Engine 25 is regarded as serious.

The fire started in the hallway outside of the vault, where laborers were engaged in applying a special composition to the newly laid flooring. The whole flooring around the vault became a mass of flames and clouds of penetrating smoke filled the basement.



CORNELIUS J. TOOMEY.

Hoseman, Overcome at Fire.

So dark was this smoke that electric lights that were turned on all over the basement were barely discernible and it was with much difficulty that the laborers made their way to a stairway and up into the offices of Harris, Forbes & Co.

The speed and cries of the laborers, together with the smoke, caused excitement among those working in the brokerage offices.

About 65 Women in the Offices

There were about 125 employes, 65 of them women, in the offices of the firm, on the first and second floors of the building. All rushed for safety. Robert S. Weeks, one of the firm, with several men employes ran through the offices and made sure of the safety of the girls and women.

During the excitement one level-headed employe smashed the glass on an emergency fire alarm box, which sounded an automatic alarm. This brought several pieces of apparatus. Within a minute or so a bell alarm was sent in from box 1282, bringing additional apparatus.

Smoke had filled the first two floors of the building, and for a few moments the firemen were unable to locate the fire. District Chief Cornelius O'Brien and Capt Henry J. Powers of Engine 8, district acting chief, directed the men and groped their way to the basement and found the blaze.

Hose lines were laid through the first floor offices to the basement, which, by this time, was a blazing furnace. The firemen worked on the lines in relays, the dense smoke forcing them to go upstairs to the street for air. Groping his way through the smoke, Chief O'Brien made a survey of the basement and discovered a freight elevator shaft which led to Congress st.

Rushing to the street he had several firemen raise the sidewalk cover of this shaft. Deputy Chief Daniel Sennott, who is acting chief of the department in the absence of Chief John O. Taber, and Deputy Chief Edward J. Shallow had reached the scene by this time and assumed charge of the operations.

Rescuers Groped Way Into Vault

A 35-foot ladder was placed down the shaft and lines of hose were carried to the basement.

After this method of attacking the fire had been instituted, laborers and

painters notified the firemen that several were trapped in the vault. Without hesitation, Deputy Shallow, Chief O'Brien and several firemen rushed downstairs. Groping their way to the vault, they started to search the interior of the vault.

Chief O'Brien stumbled over the body of one man lying at the back of the vault. With the aid of Deputy Shallow and ladderman Foley of Ladder 8, he carried the man upstairs and then to Congress st, where Dr Howard Bouve of the Haymarket Relief Hospital administered first aid. The man was rushed to the relief hospital in the automobile of Chief O'Brien, but he was dead on arrival.

Other firemen, together with members of Rescue Company 1, who wore smoke masks, groped their way to the vault and brought the bodies of the other three men to the street.

When found the men were lying huddled in corners of the vault, with coats thrown over their heads, as if to protect themselves from the suffocating smoke.

Charles Gustafson of Philadelphia, who, while working as a foreman for the firm of Remington & Sherman, painters, is living at 34 Somerset st, West End, together with Arthur C. Setterland, another foreman, assisted the firemen in bringing the bodies to the street. Both were slightly affected by the smoke.

Many Firemen Overcome

Emergency calls for ambulances were sent broadcast from Police Headquarters. Before any arrived, the men were placed in a fire wagon and a commandeered automobile and rushed to the hospital.

During the height of the excitement the Relief Hospital ambulance, operated by Frank Glennon, made three record breaking trips from the scene to the hospital and back with firemen who had been overcome. Many other firemen, including Deputy Shallow and Dist Chief O'Brien, were badly overcome, but after being revived in the fresh air, they refused hospital treatment and remained at their posts.

The fire, which was concentrated around the vault, located partially under the sidewalk on the Congress-st side of the building, became so hot that water escaping from hose lines on the sidewalk evaporated as steam. Deadlights on the sidewalk were smashed by firemen working under the orders of Acting Chief Sennott, in order to give ventilation to the basement so that firemen could successfully fight the blaze.



JOHN F. MCCOY,

Allston Man, Victim in Fire.

Finally, after much difficult work, the blaze was extinguished, with an estimated loss of about \$3000.

After the four painters had been pronounced dead at the hospital, their bodies were removed to the Northern Mortuary. Dr William J. Brickley, associate medical examiner of the Northern District of Suffolk County, conducted an examination. Later in the evening he stated that the men died from suffocation.

Through an investigation conducted by the fire and police officials it was learned that the composition which was being spread over the floor by the laborers, who were employed by a contractor, was of an inflammable nature. The police report states that a lighted match carelessly dropped on the composition was the cause of the fire.

Charles Gustafson, foreman of the painters, stated that the four men who died, together with Arthur McDonald of Philadelphia and John Gallagher, were working inside the vault doing some fancy painting at the time the fire started. Gustafson, who was outside the vault, made three attempts to reach his men and bring them to safety, but on two occasions he was forced to give up, because of the smoke and fumes.

Tried to Reach Emergency Door

He says the smoke and flames formed a barrier outside the door of the vault and only Gallagher and McDonald were successful in dashing through this and around the corner to the stairs and safety.

The other men apparently knew that there was an emergency door, which is round and about three feet in diameter, in the rear of the vault and made their way toward it.

Not knowing the combination of this door, which was locked, they were blocked and threw their coats over their heads to protect themselves from the fumes and smoke.

A survey of that portion of the basement in which the fire was confined showed that several mahogany partitioned offices, which were located across the hallway from the vault, were badly damaged.

When the fire broke out several employes of the brokerage firm, including girls, were at work in a filing room in another part of the basement, but all made their way to safety without assistance.

Thousands of persons gathered on Congress, Milk and Federal sts and for a time blocked traffic. Fire lines were established by details of patrolmen from Division 2 under the command of Sergeant William A. Flynn.

The building is a 12-story concrete, fireproof structure. Harris, Forbes Company occupy the basement and first two floors, while offices in the rest of the building are occupied by various concerns. It is a new building and was recently dedicated. Hundreds of persons are employed in the other offices in the building and for a time all were in the greatest state of excitement. The majority remained in their offices, although many made their way to the street in an orderly manner.

McCoy's First Day on Job

John F. McCoy, one of the painters suffocated, was 51 years old. He resided with his wife and daughter, Rose, at 5 Heffernan st, Allston. He had been out of work for some-time and yesterday morning he left his home in search of work.

He secured the job and returned to his home about 9 o'clock yesterday morning to get his instruments for the fancy painting. When notified of his death last night, Mrs McCoy collapsed and was in a serious condition. He was president of the Somerville Aerie of Eagles, and a member of the Orioles of Boston, Painters' Union and Bartenders' Union.

Mr McCoy was born in Fitchburg. His daughter, Miss Rose McCoy, is employed at the Manhattan Market in Cambridge. Mr McCoy also leaves four

brothers, Peter, William, Charles and Edward.

John McCauley, 29, of 95 Childs st, Jamaica Plain, one of the victims, had been at work for the Remington & Sherman Company only two days.

Mr McCauley was a native of Boston and was a veteran of the World War. He is survived by his father and mother Mr and Mrs Hugh McCauley, with whom he lived, and a brother, Hugh Jr, also a veteran of the World War, who recently was appointed to duty with the city of Boston life guards. The father has been employed by the city for 39 years. John McCauley was unmarried.

Gas Caused Men to Collapse

Acting Chief Daniel F. Sennott, Deputy Chief Edward J. Shallow and District Chief Cornelius O'Brien said, within a very few seconds after gasoline fumes exploded at the fire in the new Harris-Forbes Building, the air in the vaults became heavily charged with carbon-monoxide gas.

The chemical action of this gas is such that men working in a building do not know it is generating, and no effects from it are felt while they remain in it, but as soon as they get out and fresh oxygen enters their lungs they drop as if snort.

This was the reason given by the Fire Department leaders for the dropping of their officers and men to the marble floor of the banking rooms as soon as they walked up from the basement. Practically every fireman in the first companies to reach the building was overcome by this gas.

The steel and concrete ceilings, floors and walls retained the heat from the fire after it was extinguished.

The uncomfortable sensation experienced by the firemen in the basement was ascribed to the heat and fumes of gasoline.

Capt Henry J. Powers of Engine 8, acting district chief for the Fourth District, made his way through the thick smoke to the basement. Being the second district chief in, he was the first relieved and he no sooner started to return to quarters than he collapsed. He was rushed to the Relief Hospital.

Lieut Thomas E. (Bucky) Flanagan of Engine 25, Fort Hill sq, was the first officer to enter the basement after Chief Shallow.

Police Surgeon William Dunn and doctors from the hospitals treated more than a score of officers and men in the banking rooms. They were kept in the building until all the gas was out of their systems before they were allowed out of doors.