

# DEATH FLAMES

## Make Human Lives Their Fuel.

### Already Eight Dead Bodies

### Taken From the Smoul- dering Embers,

### Where was Once the Insti- tute Fair Building,

### Lately Used by the Metro- politan Railroad.

### Sheets of Fire bursting Through It.

### Smoke Blinds the Excited Workmen.

### Bravely Meeting Their Fate in Darkness.

### Sixteen of Them Unac- counted For.

### Trying to Rescue the Dying.

### The Injured Cared for in the Hospitals.

### A Morning View of the Aw- ful Devastation.

### The Property Loss \$400,000 —The Insurance.

A terrible conflagration, which in less than ten minutes caused the loss of seven or more lives, and destroyed upwards of \$400,000 worth of property, occurred on the Back Bay district early yesterday afternoon. The New England institute fair building, located on Huntington avenue, was the scene of the horrible disaster. The building has of late been used as a storage and repair shop by the Metropolitan Horse Railway Company, its present owners. At 2.10 o'clock the 100 busy workmen were startled by the cry of "Fire." In an instant they jumped from their work and were horrified to see the right-hand corner of the building a mass of flames. Some believed they had time to gather their tools, but those knowing did not wait a second to get anything, but sought the nearest exit none too soon, for in a few minutes the entire structure was filled with a thick black smoke, while the flames were rapidly spreading to the other parts of the building.

A young man at work about half a mile from the building saw the flames burst through the windows, and immediately ran to Box 248, located on the burning building. On reaching there he found several men trying to open the box, and knowing a minute was great in such an emergency he broke open the box with a stone and pulled in the alarm. During all this time the flames were making quick work of the building. Inside the workmen who were not overcome by the smoke were groping through the dark, crowded space, while around them the flames hissed and threatened every minute to sweep them into eternity. Before the arrival of a single apparatus, the entire building was a mass of flames. A second alarm was then pulled in, after which an effort was made to assist the workmen inside the building. When the fire apparatus arrived the building was a roaring furnace. Within the least warning the roof fell with a crash, thus ending all the chances of escape of those who were not fortunate enough in getting out. The sight at this moment was magnificently appalling, and will long be remembered by the hundreds who filled the space on the front and sides of the burning structure. Although additional help was called by a third alarm, the firemen saw that it was useless to attempt to extinguish the fire, and gave their attention to saving the surrounding property.

#### Inside and Outside.

The fire started in the cupola, and extended towards the main building. An attempt was made by the employes to stop the progress of the flames, but they were driven back by the heat. The flames spread with rapidity, and in a few minutes the whole front of the building was a mass of flames. The employes next turned their attention to running out a lot of cars from the rear portion. About fifty cars were saved in this way. While engaged in getting out a car in the rear in the southern portion a number of the employes were suddenly hemmed in on all sides by the flames. Seeing their danger they made a break for the window and jumped to the ground below. Two of the men were not so fortunate, and one of them seemed blinded and dazed. He climbed to the top of the wall and tried to throw himself over but seemed to lose his strength and fell back, his hands clinging to the top of the wall. A ladder was hastily raised, but the flames prevented the firemen from reaching him, and before the firemen could get to his rescue he fell back into the flames. There were no horses in the building. All of the employes lost from \$25 to \$75 worth of tools. The report that a man had been burned spread rapidly, and in a short time a large number of the wives, sisters, chil-

dren and other relatives of parties who were employed in the building were on the scene, making anxious inquiries for their friends.

One woman accidentally overheard that her husband had been burned, and fainted and had to be taken away. While the fire was in progress cinders and firebrands were carried over to the roof of the neighboring buildings, and the chemical engineers were kept busy in extinguishing such fires and in protecting the roofs.

An inquiry among those who were employed in the building shows that quite a number are missing, and it is thought that at least two, if not three or four, men were burned to death.

**A Roaring Furnace.**  
The scene inside the building during all this time was terrible. An unknown man was driven out of the window of the second story by the flames. He was about to leap, had put one leg over the window sill, when the roof above fell in and pinned him fast where he was. No ladder company had arrived and the crowd outside were powerless to render assistance. The flames followed almost instantly, and the imprisoned man was roasted in agony before the horrified eyes of his friends below. John McNulty and J. F. Ferran, two of his fellow workmen, made an attempt to rescue him, but they were terribly burned about the hands and face, and had to be assisted by their friends.

While the vast crowd were pressing as near as possible to the burning structure on the front and sides, until forced back by the police, sad events were transpiring at the southeast corner of the building. It was in this portion that the cementers' shop was situated, and it was here that the men burned to death were last seen alive. Directed by workmen who had escaped and who had seen at least one of the men disappear from a window from which he was trying to make his escape, gangs of firemen worked with best endeavor to subdue the flames in the rubbish enough to permit an entrance. This was at last done, and several firemen, braving the intense heat and aided by furious streams thrown upon them by their companions, made their way into the southeast corner, and there, close to the wall, found a human body burned to a crisp and wholly unrecognizable. The remains were borne out tenderly and placed in a shed near by that had escaped the flames.

**Fighting the Fire.**  
Although no means of identification remained on the body, yet the position in which it was found makes it certain that it is that of William Taylor, a man 70 years of age, living on Greeleaf street, and employed in the carpenter shop in the portion of the building where he was found. He returned to the building for his tools, and, cut off from the stairway by the rapid advance of the flames, attempted to get out a second story window, in which effort he was caught by the flames and drawn back to death. Shortly after, another body, charged beyond recognition, was taken from about the same place. This was identified as that of a carpenter named Oliver Frost. He also undertook to go back after his tools.

**The Injured.**  
The following are the injured as far as is known:

- John McDonald, living at 32 Kendall street, had his head and face burned.
- Joseph Whidden, woodworker, living on Milford place, was badly burned about the hands and face.
- William Sturgis, burned.
- Robert Owen, burned.
- Joseph Haveline, burned.
- Eph Ferran, burned.

Queen Ryan, 70 Westminster street, at the City Hospital, face and hands burned.

E. L. Larren, 46 Winslow street at the City Hospital; face and arms burned.

**A Mass of Ruins.**  
In less than half an hour after the first alarm was given the immense structure was a mass of ruins. Search was then made by the firemen for other bodies, and they succeeded in finding five. One was identified as that of Alex Campbell, 35 years old, living at 122 Camden street. He was employed in the wood-working shop and lost his life by going back to get his tools. Another body was identified as that of Patrick Lyons, 26 years old, employed in the blacksmith shop. He escaped from the building but went back to get his tools. The other two-bodies still remain unidentified.

#### Meeting Fire and Death.

One of the blacksmiths who was at work in the shop stated to a reporter last evening that he was busy at his forge when the cry of fire was first sounded. At first he thought that it was his house, which is situated within 100 feet of the southern portion of the building. He dropped his tools and rushed out, but not before some of his companions, who had heard the first cry given, had left the shop before him. He said further: "On leaving the blacksmith shop I saw at once that the fire was in the building. The thick black smoke from the hard pine timbers filled the whole building, and it was impossible to discern an object two feet away. I could hear men running hither and thither, crying out 'fire' at the top of their voice. In my haste to escape, I stumbled and fell headlong, bruising my elbow slightly. It could not have been more than twelve or fifteen minutes from the time the first alarm was cried out in the building before the roof doubled up like a jackknife, and went down, pulling the walls in with it.

Not two minutes had elapsed from the time I escaped from the window when the collapse of the roof and walls occurred. The men kept their tools in the loft, and those who escaped before me and went back to save their tools, were probably caught by the falling timbers as they were coming down the stairs. The fire caught near the Huntington avenue entrance, and as all the men were employed near the other end of the building, I think it must have got well under way before being discovered. There were from seventy to 100 crows inside which we had been working on, and from twenty-six to twenty-eight snow-ploughs. I saw poor Pat Lyons, he was going back into the building to save his tools. He worked near me in the blacksmith shop. I suppose, like myself, he was terror-stricken when the first alarm was given, and after getting over his fright he returned, and I saw his body when they found it this afternoon all blackened and shrunk to almost nothing.

"Another poor fellow appeared at one of the windows. He had climbed up on a ladder, but before anyone could assist him, or he could make an effort to break the glass, he tottered and fell back into the smoke and flame, which the next instant burst from the window with a roar like a mountain torrent. None of us can tell how the fire first started. It was first seen on the lower floor, and just above the place where it was first seen was a large paint shop, the floor of which was thoroughly saturated with oil or benzine. The fire in an instant spread to the carpenter shops, and got extra headway in the dry wood and shavings. Everything was dry as tinder, and the lower story seemed to burn up like so much paper."

#### Watching the Awful Flames.

A woman who lives in the private passageway leading from Huntington avenue to Ruggles street, and who was hanging out clothes in the yard when the fire first started, said: "I first saw smoke coming from the windows on the Huntington avenue. At one time, when the smoke cleared away I thought I saw the leg or arm of a man hanging from one of the windows, but I was so terrified by the awful sight that I may have been mistaken. But once or twice I am quite sure that I heard cries of agony coming from the building. I shall never forget the awful sight. The brave firemen saved my house, which at one time was in great danger. The heat was so intense that my clothes on the line was scorched, and the firemen who attempted to enter the building by the entrance at the southeast corner were kept from burning by the deluge of water poured upon them by their companions. They at last effected an entrance, and soon reappeared with a body. Before the roof gave way I saw a man appear at a second-story window for a moment and suddenly disappear. He appeared to be an old man, for his hair was white, and the place where I saw him was at the window nearest the southeast corner."

#### The Weird Scene of Death.

All the evening up to about 11 o'clock, Huntington avenue in the vicinity of the ruins was literally packed with men, women and children, and the police were kept busy preventing the curious ones from dodging under the ropes. Members of the Board of Aldermen who were at Moon Island showing the mayor of Philadelphia about the pumping station connected with the city sewer, saw the blaze and started on once for the scene of the fire. They arrived early in the evening, and when attempting to go under the safety ropes, were told by the guards furnished by the Metropolitan Railroad Company that they could not enter. Their identity was soon made known, however, and they were allowed inside the forbidden ground. Up to midnight the fire was still burning in fitful flashes, lighting up the scene of

death with a weird, spectral light, and then dying out as suddenly as it came, leaving all in darkness. The windowless, half-crumbled walls loomed up in the night like an old Roman ruin. The chirp of the crickets and the ceaseless, monotonous noise of the frogs in the neighboring marshes served to make the dead hush of midnight more impressive. The streets at this hour were clear of spectators; the blankets of the houses were nodding peacefully, and the puffing of half a dozen steamers was the only thing that served to break the monotony of the death-like stillness.

Up to a late hour the blackened remains of eight workmen had been taken from the ruins, and it is expected that as soon as the fire shall have exhausted itself many more bodies will be found. There are fifteen or sixteen missing persons, and as the force of workmen amounted to ninety or one hundred it is very likely that many more bodies may yet be discovered. Later sixteen were reported missing. The wall facing Huntington avenue, through which the main entrance to the building was pierced, has a crack two inches wide extending its entire width, and is likely to fall at any moment.

#### Amid Ruined Grandeur.

There has seldom been a more beautiful, and at the same time more saddening picture presented to the curious and interested than the broken walls standing majestic in their ominous isolation. Those who have seen can alone comprehend the magnificent picture which was witnessed as the dying flames shot upward with a convulsive dying force, and as the sparks were shot upward, flashing like meteors into the quiet night.

The entire area which the immense structure covered at early morning was still alive with burning debris. Here and there, as though with mechanical precision, patches of brilliant fire illuminated the ruins. Heavy volumes of thick black smoke curled lazily heavenward from the scorching and burning mass beneath. To add to the grandeur of the ruins the moon, radiant in all its glory, shed its soft light, illuminating the dark nooks and corners, and revealing every moment fresh sights. In the very gloom which in places surrounded the edifice the silently moving figures of the firemen could be seen slowly yet certainly finishing the work that had so nobly begun. At 2 o'clock the flames were still in places brilliant, yet in no position to further endanger life or property, though without doubt the ruins will smoulder for many days.

#### A Talk with Engineer Sawyer.

Seen from the front, on Huntington avenue, the remains of the enormous fair building looked in the dusk of the early morning like the ruins of some old world castle. Tall and gaunt, portions of the wall stood spectre-like, marking the corners and sides of what was once the spacious entrance. Within the crumbled walls all was a smoking mass of iron, brick and smouldering wood. Tons upon tons of hollow iron girders that had supported the walls and roof were twisted and knotted like stings in fantastic network. Columns of smoke rose steadily at intervals, while here and there glowing sparks and at times ambitious flames lit up the broad expanse of the shattered basement denoting that much of life still remained of the conflagration. In what was once a basement, now only a black and shapeless hole, crouched, at 3 o'clock this morning, District Engineer E. H. Sawyer, within whose precinct the fire occurred. He was busily engaged in directing a powerful hydrant stream held by two firemen standing in the dark and rubbish a few feet inside the walls. He said: "I've been on duty here all night, and I shall leave until the last spark is extinguished. I myself pulled out of the building from the ruins, and their position indicated that they had run for dear life, but had been overtaken by the flames."

"Do you think there are any more bodies buried in there?"  
"Undoubtedly. Down there, about half way on the left, I smelt burning flesh, and again at about the rear corner; but it was too dark to make a search. No, if there are fire departments, like that of Boston, had been here they couldn't have put out the blaze. No little delay was caused by the men in the building fighting the fire alone for a while before calling an alarm, and by the ringing of so many different alarms from as many directions at once; when once they did set in, I can't help thinking how horrible it would have been if this had happened when the fair was in progress. The fire would have gone still more rapidly when the walls were disaped with rages and not one-half the crowd would have escaped."

"Do you think it will all be out by morning?"  
"That's hard to say. There's a good deal of fire there yet. What we can't get at must burn itself out, that's all. The iron is so hot that it is impossible to work in there yet awhile. The bodies so far removed were probably those at work on the second floor. Those on the first and in the basement must be way underneath the debris."

"Are there any other streams being used tonight?"  
"No. We've got about six pounds of pressure on this one from the hydrant, and that will be enough to reach pretty well towards the centre. There, a little more to the right, boys!"

And as he said the words a shower of sparks showed that the aim of the firemen had been true.

"Yes," continued Engineer Sawyer, "it was a hard fire, and the poor wretches inside had a poor chance indeed. Do you notice that peculiar smell that seems stronger than simple smoke? Most likely that's another victim buried underneath this mass of wood and iron here. Well find him in the morning."

#### The Building Before the Fire.

The building burned yesterday afternoon was erected in 1881 by the New England Manufacturers and Mechanics' Institute, a corporation formed for the purpose of advancing the interests of the mechanic arts in New England, mainly by giving annual exhibitions. Four exhibitions were held, namely, in 1881, 1882, 1883 and 1884. The enterprise proving unprofitable the exhibition feature was given up, and the building was used for some time, as it had been at intervals before, for skating rink and other purposes. The building had been erected upon leased land, and that circumstance, taken in connection with the unprofitable exhibitions, forced the corporation into insolvency about a year ago. Last winter the property was purchased by the Metropolitan Railroad Company, and it has since been used, though the plans had not been fully developed, as a place for the storage and repair of cars. The building was of iron and brick, and had 35,834 square feet, or about eight acres available for exhibition purposes. The main building was 540 feet long by 384 feet wide, and the whole cost of the property when ready for exhibitions, exclusive of the land, was about \$500,000.

It was purchased by the railroad company last December for \$150,000. Within its walls were about 400 box cars belonging on the different lines operated by the company. Of these only one was saved. The company has added \$60,000 worth of stock, intended not only to repair but build their cars. This company has suffered considerably from fire during the past six months. First their Tremont street stables were partly destroyed and this was followed a few months later by the burning of their Eggleston square stables. These fires following closely after each other lead many to believe that an incendiary is at work.

#### Schedule of Policies.

The insurance on the building as far as can be learned very nearly covers the original value. The insurance on the cars is only \$15,000. When the old policies expired, but a short time ago, it is stated that the Metropolitan Railroad Company had made arrangements to book all stock in a new form on or about the first of July, and for this reason the old policies were not renewed, and to this day in a measure be attributed the nominal risks. The companies who carry policies on the stock are: Germania, \$2500; New York Bower, \$2500; Continental, \$2500; American Central, \$2000; St. Paul, \$1500; Citizens, \$1500; Hamburg of Bremen, \$2500; total, \$15,000.

It is impossible at the present time to estimate the insurance on the machinery in the building. President Richardson could make an approximate list, but he could there be any authenticity attached to the random stories afloat in relation thereto.

#### Conley Knocked Senseless.

New York, June 21.—There was a large crowd at the Germania Assembly rooms tonight to witness the fight between the two heavy-weights, Frank Hearld of Philadelphia, and Mike Conley of Illuca. The men faced each other at 10 o'clock, and fought 1 minute 20 seconds, Hearld winning the fight by knocking Conley senseless by a right-hand blow on the nose. Hearld did all the fighting.

#### Marries an Indicted Bebout.

TOLEDO, O., June 21.—A wedding ceremony was performed in this city today that was noticeably out of the ordinary. The bride was Zella Van Vleet, a pretty young miss of about 18 years, and the groom was Andre J. Bebout, one of the notorious Bebout's, under several State and United

States indictments for running the obscene Sunday Democrat. Bebout is confined in the city workhouse awaiting trial, and the ceremony was performed in the office. The bride is a sister of Bebout's first wife, and was his housekeeper for some time after her death. There are indictments enough hanging over the groom to keep him behind the bars the rest of his days.

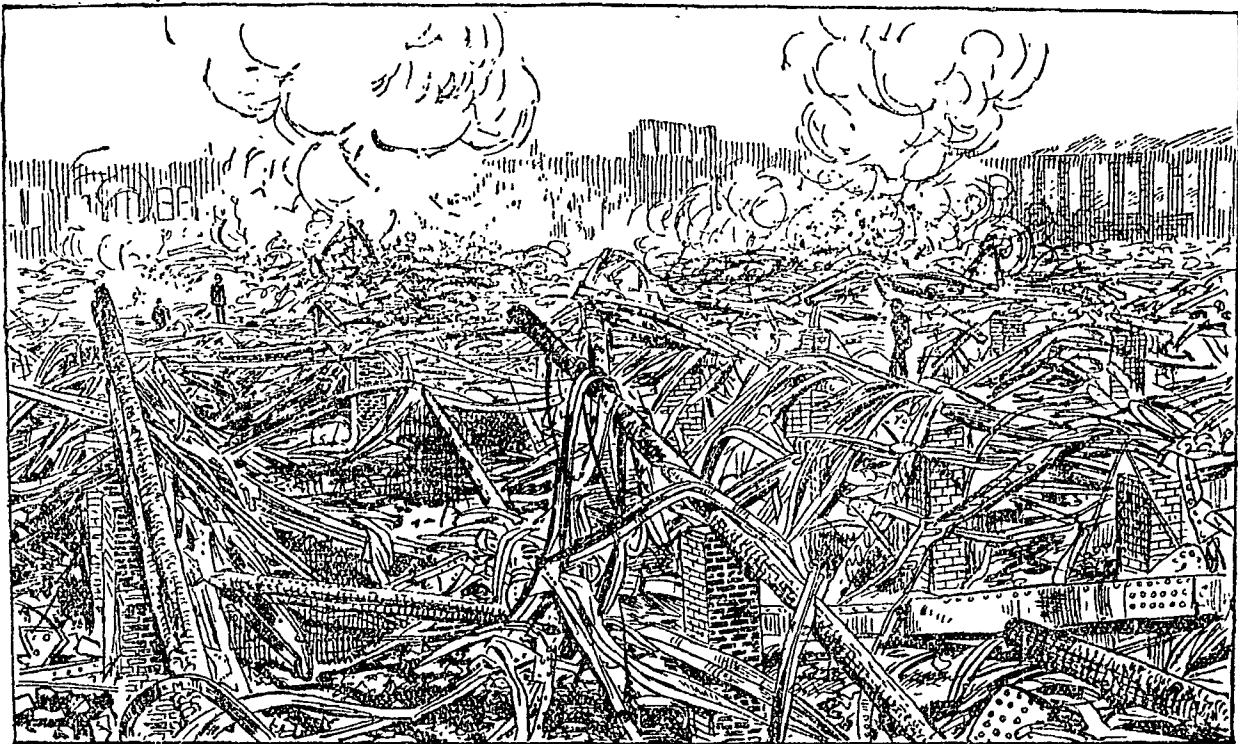
# AFTER THE GREAT FIRE.

*Boston Daily Globe (1872-1922); Jun 23, 1886;*

*ProQuest Historical Newspapers Boston Globe (1872 - 1927)*

pg. 1

## AFTER THE GREAT FIRE.



Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.