

# THREE BIG FIRES IN CHARLESTOWN, TODAY

## Police Suspect All Were Incendiary, Intended to Burn District.



Upper Picture is the Remnant of Freight House No. 10, Burned to the Ground.  
Lower Left-Hand Picture, a Section of House No. 11.  
Lower Right-Hand One, Freight Car Burned to a Skeleton.

## Worst Blaze Was in Railroad Freight Sheds--- John Bryant's Sons Loss the Next.

Between midnight and dawn today there were three big fires in the Charlestown District.

Because of suspicious circumstances the firemen, policemen and citizens expressed a fear that a promaniac was abroad, determined to raze the entire section.

The first two fires were the most disastrous and menacing, and for a time they burned simultaneously. Because seven alarms were sounded from four different boxes, the effect was almost the same as a general alarm, though not technically such. They caused the movement of nearly every fireman and piece of fire apparatus in the city, as well as apparatus and men from Chelsea, Cambridge, Somerville and Milton.

The different fires were scattered over the district, one being at Prison Point, another just out of Thompson sq and the last at Charlestown Neck.

The first fire destroyed the greater part of transfer freight sheds 10 and 11 of the old Fitchburg Railroad in yard 13, many freight cars and a great quantity of general merchandise; the second destroyed the three-story wooden building at 13, 15 and 17 Austin st, just out of Thompson sq, occupied by John Bryant's Sons, undertakers, and the third badly damaged the first floor of the three-story wooden building in the rear of 10 Dorrance st, back of the Sullivan-sq Elevated station, which is occupied by E. R. Whitman as a storehouse for refrigerators and grocers' fixtures.

### Wide Variance in Loss Estimates.

Various estimates of the damage by the freight sheds fire range from \$100,000 to \$500,000. The police report makes the damage the latter figure, but this is regarded as excessive. The damage by the Austin-st fire is broadly estimated at from \$15,000 to \$20,000, and the damage to the E. R. Whitman property is placed at from \$,000 to \$3,000.

A sorry spectacle is presented by the ruins of all three fires today, but the work of clearing away the debris and preparing for rebuilding has already begun.

Had the wind been stronger and blowing toward the south by east during the freight shed fire there is no telling how great the damage might have been, for it was there was a time when it was feared the flames would race through the freight sheds, freight and passenger cars and finally get into the big North Terminal properties, where they would have created havoc.

While this fire raged the air was

filled with lightly flitting snowflakes, on which the flames created a glow which was visible miles away in the distant suburbs and caused thousands of persons to speed to Boston to watch the flames. All the bridges in the vicinity, housetops and tops of long lines of freight cars were crowded with excited spectators who watched the fire with great interest. Many on the tops of freight cars were obliged to flee for

their lives as the flames swept along through the lanes of cars in their direction.

The smoke was dense and heavy and hung in a pall over the scene. Thousands of gallons of gasoline were stored in cars, freight sheds and in two great gasoline storehouses, and there was constant danger of a big ex-

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losion which might bring disaster with it. There were several fairly bad explosions of barrels of oil at the start of the fire, and the spreading oil added new fury to the already racing flames.

## Explosions at Start of Big Fire.

Just before midnight two heavy freights were made up and ready to start for the West and the crews were attending to their final duties before the start. Suddenly a great volume of flames burst from the southeasterly end of shed No. 10 and almost immediately there was a succession of loud and powerful explosions which rent the building. John Stevens, a brakeman, who was in the other end of the yard toward City sq, dashed away at top speed for City sq to send in an alarm.

At almost the same moment Patrick Coadley, a freight conductor, saw the flames, and he raced toward a locomotive standing near. Boarding the cab, he pulled at the whistle and sounded it frantically in a jerky fashion, giving the railroad man's fire alarm. Albert Miner, another railroad brakeman, heard the toot of the whistle, saw the flames and started up through the old yard to the corner of Cambridge and Haverhill sts, where he sent in an alarm from box 403 just at midnight.

This brought Engine Company 8 from Salem st to the front of the old Fitchburg Station, and seeing the location of the fire, the company started for the scene down through the railroad yards. The engine barely escaped racing through an open drawbridge into the Charles River.

Within a few minutes box 421, at the corner of Main st and City sq, was sent in by brakeman Stevens, and this brought the Charlestown apparatus to that side of the fire. District Chief Pope sent in a second alarm from box 421 at 12:15, and then the alarms came in the following order: From box 481 in Warren av, opposite the B & M Railroad yard, at 12:30, followed by a third from this box at 12:50 a. m. The alarm second at 1:22 a. m. for the Austin-st fire.

## Firemen Unable to Get Water.

Engine 35c company was first in at the fire down in Yard 13, and Lieut Tague had the first stream on the flames, but this means that the first water touched the flames fully 20 minutes after the start of the fire, owing to the fact that the firemen were unable to get water. Engine 32's company was next in, and then Engine 27's company under Lieut Hebron, came in.

Within a few minutes all street car traffic along Warren Bridge was stopped, and the streets were filled with apparatus racing around and wildly searching for a place to get in and at the burning freight sheds and freight cars, and to find locations where water could be obtained. It was almost half an hour before the Fire Department got down to business in combating the flames which had raced along the freight shed No. 10 from the Boston end along almost to the extreme end at Prison Point, and also had reached out across the paved roadway and caught shed 11 in the blaze.

But for the invaluable fireboats, there is no telling where the fire would have been stopped, for they poured such a deluge of water upon the fire from the moment of their arrival that it was soon under control.

## Sheds Filled With Merchandise.

Within a few minutes the flames raced northwesterly and southeasterly toward both ends of the shed, which was 1300 feet long and about 50 feet

wide, one story high and covered with iron sheathing. It was filled with highly inflammable general merchandise, which burned like tinder.

A 50-foot paved roadway, known as yard 13, separates sheds 10 and 11, but the flames reached out across this, and soon shed 11 was burning. This shed was 1050 feet long.

The firemen found it almost impossible to reach the burning buildings, but the fireboats, which were telephoned for at the start of the fire, made slow progress up through the bridge, and finally reached the scene to the southwest of the burning buildings.

## Burning Train Pulled Out.

A train of 25 heavily loaded freight cars having general merchandise in them was standing to the southwest of the burning shed No. 10, and five of the cars were burning briskly when Engineer Walter Hodgkins and Fireman H. C. Smith of the big mogul locomotive took in the situation. They ran their locomotive down through the flames beside the burning freight shed and coupled on to the burning train and ran with it out to Somerville, where the crew extinguished the fire and saved the 25 cars and their freight from more than a nominal damage.

Another train of cars which were at the northeast side of shed No. 11 caught fire and the engineer of a shifting locomotive attempted to haul them out to safety, but discovered when he was coupled on to them that the firemen had stretched their lines of hose across the tracks and he could not run over them, so the cars were abandoned to the flames. It was impossible to ascertain just how many cars were destroyed by the fire, but it was believed that fully a dozen or 18 were badly damaged, and as many more slightly burned.

The greatest mishap of the fire was the lack of water. The firemen got in to the scene in good time and placed their apparatus and stretched their lines of hose, but when they called for water they called in vain for fully a half hour, and all the while the flames were gaining headway.

## Railroad Had Shut Off the Water.

It is said that the Boston & Maine Railroad officials had the water supply, which is their own system, shut off all winter to prevent its freezing. A watchman was supposed to be kept there at all times prepared to turn the water on when it was needed, but District Chief Pope said that the man could not be found last night, and that this was the cause of the delay.

Lieut Tim Hebron of Engine 27 took his crew down into Ward 13, nearly opposite door 24, where the fire was hottest in shed 10, and made ready to fight the flames. The horses were unhitched and sent back to safety. When they were ready to start their engine, they couldn't get water. For 20 minutes they waited, while the flames were threatening the fire engine, which cost \$2900.

Finally the flames became so hot that Lieut Hebron was obliged to send his men back, but he remained by the side of his engine. At a fortunate moment he called the crew, and they came, and they were able by main strength to pull the engine by hand out of danger. A moment after they had done so, the flames reached across the driveway and in another minute shed 11 was burning briskly.

The fireboats directed streams from all of their big guns across several trains of freight cars and upon the burning sheds. These streams began almost immediately to check the progress of the fire.

## Fight to Save Gasoline.

At the northeast end of shed 11 there is a two-story house, and beyond that, connected with it by a bridge, is another two-story house in which are

stored hundreds of gallons of gasoline. The firemen directed their efforts to protecting these from the flames. There were times when it looked as if it would be impossible for them to prevent the flames from reaching the gasoline and causing a great explosion.

Benjamin Curtis, the watchman in house 10, was at the Prison Point end of the building, making his rounds, when the fire broke out. When he passed door 24, just before midnight, there was no evidence of fire.

Paul Winstone and John Hawkins, the watchmen in shed 11, did not discover the fire until they heard the locomotive whistle, and went out to see.

When the fires were at their height, Engine Company 1 of Chelsea came to Engine 35's house in Charlestown and covered its boxes. Engine Company 2 of Somerville worked on the Charlestown side, while Engine Company 3 of Cambridge came and worked on the Cambridge side of the fire. A ladder company from Somerville also worked on the scene. An engine company from Milton moved in to Engine 10's house in Dorchester Lower Mills ready for duty. All the available apparatus in the city, excepting one company in East Boston, one in Brighton and one in Hyde Park, which would not leave their stations under any excuse on a situation like that of this morning, were moved by the unusual series of alarms.

## Second Fire Starts.

While all the Charlestown fire apparatus was engaged in the blaze in the railroad yards, fire broke out shortly after 1 o'clock this morning in the rear of the three-story wooden building at 13, 15 and 17 Austin st, Charlestown, occupied by John Bryant's Sons as an undertaking establishment and stable.

The building is in the middle of a wooden tenement district, and, although two alarms were sounded in quick succession and apparatus was sent from Cambridge and Somerville, at 2 this morning it still looked as if the fire might spread.

The building in which the fire started was burned to the ground, and the two-story wheelwright shop of J. T. Emery, which is in the rear of the stable and extends back to Lynde av, was also burned.

The adjoining wooden tenement building at 11 Austin st also caught fire and appeared to be doomed. The occupants, Mr and Mrs John D. McGrath and their son, John Crowley, escaped from the house just in time, Mr and Mrs McGrath in their night clothes. They took refuge in a bakeshop nearby.

The fire had made considerable headway when it was discovered by Mrs Catherine Connelly of 27 Lawrence st, Charlestown, who was passing by. She ran to tell Frank Downey and Joseph Langone, and they gave the alarm from box 484 and ran to the stable.

With the aid of the night watchmen and of other neighbors, they were able to get out the horses from the stable and also saved several hearses, the undertaker's wagon, coffins and office furniture.

## Two Alarms Given for This.

The first alarm at 1:15 was followed by a second at 1:22, but comparatively few lines could be got on the fire at first because nearly all the available apparatus was engaged in the railroad yards.

The police detail, also, was insufficient, and the firemen were much impeded in their work by the crowds that packed the streets. Great excitement prevailed through the neighborhood, and occupants of buildings in all directions packed up their effects and made ready to move in a hurry.

The fire started in the rear of the building of John Bryant's Sons on the second floor, where there is a small paint shop, and the combustibles here caused its rapid spread. The origin of

the fire is unknown, but the first belief that it was set by a spark from the blaze in the freight sheds appears to be wrong.

T. Weston Bryant, manager for John Bryant's Sons, estimates his loss at \$15,000, and it appears that damage to other property will add several thousand dollars more.

Austin st is so narrow that there was fear the flames might spread across it, but Hose Wagon 43 took up position directly in front of the building and, using its hose gun like a water tower, played two strong streams straight into the front of the fire, holding it back on that side.

An automobile gasoline engine which was on exhibition in Boston was driven over to the fire. It coupled onto a hydrant at the corner of Adams and Lawrence sts, and had one line on the fire, but hose was so scarce that it did not accomplish much.

## Fire Near Elevated Terminal.

The third fire, shortly before 5 this morning, was discovered in the first floor of the big three-story wooden factory and warehouses of E. R. Whitman, a refrigerator and grocers fixtures manufacturer, in the rear of 10 Dorchester st, just behind the Sullivan-sq Elevated Terminal.

The fire was burning briskly when it was discovered by a street car man going to his work. He ran to box 455 at the corner of Arlington av and Dorchester st and sent in an alarm at 5:15 a. m. The building is owned by Mr Whitman and he occupies the whole of it in his business. How the fire started could not be determined unless it was the work of a firebug, suspected of setting the other two fires early in the morning.

The firemen, almost completely exhausted from their trying work at the previous two fires, were just able to drag themselves to the scene and to drag their heavy lines of hose toward the fire. Engines 22, 36 and 27 soon had their lines stretched and were playing streams upon the flames, which were rapidly eating their way up through the ceiling to the second floor and along the entire first floor. By persistent work the firemen soon gained control of the situation, and they finally extinguished the flames with a damage of upward of \$2000, maybe \$3000. Most of the firemen were sent back to quarters at 7 this morning, but early this forenoon some were still working at the freight sheds and in Austin st.

The police immediately began an investigation into the cause of the three fires. Lieut John O'Rourke, who was out all through the early part of the morning with every available sergeant and man of the division, with help from the intown stations, was relieved by Lieut Hayden Ringer and other men from Station 15, and the work of keeping the curious people away from the ruins and seeking the cause was pushed with earnestness.

## Bills of Lading Were Lost.

William Doherty, freight agent of the Boston & Maine, stated that it would be considerable time before the Boston & Maine officials could determine the loss caused by the fire in the freight sheds at Charlestown early this morning.

In the quantity of general merchandise lost, he said, there were shoes, underwear, woollens, blankets, pianos and rubber boots. The bills of lading were lost, he said, and clerks will start at once to examine the ruins to determine the ownership of the merchandise.

An arrangement for receiving freight intended for the destroyed sheds has been made. It will be received at the Rutherford-av sheds for the present.

## Rescue of the Bryant Horses.

Words of praise were heard today for the splendid work of the first half

dozen people who arrived at the scene of the early morning fire in John Bryant & Sons' undertaking establishment at 13, 15 and 17 Austin st, Charlestown.

The one to whom the greatest praise was given by Lieut James D. Coady for valiant and courageous service was Kate Welch of 27 Lawrence st, Charlestown, who discovered the fire, and who ran across Thompson sq and gave the alarm to several men in a group, including Lieut Coady. Miss Welch, thoroughly aroused to a high state of excitement, called loudly to the men, "For God's sake, come down and save the horses! Bryant's stable is on fire."

Lieut Coady and the other members of the party, including Frank Downey, a Thompson sq business man, Charles H. D. Murphy, organist of St Catherine's Church, Charlestown, Joseph Langone and Charles Lodge ran toward the burning building. On the way Lieut Coady saw a young man whom he directed to the nearest fire alarm box and who sounded the alarm from box 484.

The door of the stable was broken open and Joseph Langone unhitched the halters of five horses, and he and the other men in the rescue party led the horses out to safety. "Old Jim," about 25 or 30 years old, the oldest horse owned by John Bryant & Sons, was rescued with the others, as was the pet dog "Pinkie."

Miss Welch was one of the first to render valuable assistance in removing office paraphernalia, and was of much service in carrying out articles of value in the stable. She even aided in pushing some of the vehicles, which included undertaker's wagon and hearses, the light wagon and automobile.

Early this morning T. Weston Bryant spoke appreciatively of the splendid work of those who first reached the fire and removed the horses and articles of value. The damage amounted to nearly \$15,000. The property is insured.

## INCENDIARISM SUSPECTED.

Building in East Somerville, Used as a Carriage Paint Shop, Burned, With Loss of \$3500.

A fire of supposedly incendiary origin early this morning practically destroyed a two-story wooden building at 89 Mystic av, East Somerville, occupied as a carriage paint shop by Welch, Dwyer & Grady. Alarms were sounded from boxes 116 and 156.

When Asst Chief Ring arrived at the fire he found the sliding front doors leading into the building partially open. The fire started at a paint bench on the first floor and quickly spread through out the building.

The loss amounted to \$3500 on the buildings and contents. A hearse was burned and several automobiles were blistered by heat before they were removed. The fire was first seen by Patrolman Phillips, who was standing at the corner of Broadway and Cross sts. He sounded Box 116.

Three pieces of the Somerville apparatus was at the Charlestown fire at the time, but they were notified and returned to Somerville.