

CHIEF IS OUT.

Webber Retires From the Fire Department.

Goes on Pension List at \$1750 Per.

Broken Health Given as the Reason.

His Fire Record of 37 Years a Good One.

William T. Cheswell is in Line for the Position.

Promotion May be Made Formally Today.

Second Assistant John A. Mullen to be Advanced in Rank.

Battered and worn out physically, Lewis P. Webber, chief of the Boston fire department for the past 17 years, retired yesterday from active duty and went on the pension list, from which he will derive an income of \$1750 a year—half pay—during the rest of his life.

The first assistant chief, William T. Cheswell, will be advanced to the position of chief and the second assistant, John A. Mullen, will be advanced to the position of first assistant.

These changes will very probably necessitate a number of others throughout the department in the course of the next few weeks.

The retirement of Chief Webber came as a great surprise to many, but it was not much of a surprise to those who have been intimately associated with him and who have been familiar with his physical condition for the past few years.

The terrible strain of 37 years' service in the department, most of which was in an executive capacity, has broken down the once vigorous health of the chief, until today he finds it difficult to breathe at times, and his nerves, as he says himself, are about all gone.

It has been one continual baptism of fire and smoke and water during these 37 years, nearly every one of which recorded some hairbreadth escape from death or some accident which brought him next door to it. It is a miracle that he has lived to retire, and it is no wonder that he is "broken up."

Only a brave man can be a fireman, and Boston has undoubtedly as brave a set of firemen as there are in the world; but it should be borne in mind that for 17 years at least the entire department has been inspired by a man as its executive head whose bravery was of that unconscious and unostentatious kind which is contagious.

Lewis P. Webber never asked a man to go where he would not go himself, and his physical condition today bears testimony to his daring bravery.

For 37 years he has been at the beck and call of a gong at any hour of the day or night. No fireman can tell what the sound of that gong means to him personally, and few of them ever give the matter a thought—to them it is simply the call to duty. Unlike other people they think of consequences after the trouble is over—then they count the cost. But such is human nature that few of the men who ever belonged to a fire department could be induced to leave it for a less exciting and less uncertain business. The type of man that enters the fire department would

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ordinarily rather go to a fire than eat. They are the real heroes of city life, for they literally "take their lives in their hands" every time they respond to an alarm. They are the men on whom the people rely for the safety of life and property whenever the fire fiend starts up. It takes a big man and a brave man to be the leader of such men. But as chief of the Boston fire department, Mr Webber ever had the respect and confidence of his men, and as one fireman told the writer yesterday: "He hasn't an enemy in the world. The men all loved him."

Led the Strenuous Life.

His has certainly been an exciting life and a perilous one. He has been blown out of buildings and picked up almost unconscious. Last June he received what appeared at the time a fatal injury. He had but just returned from sick leave and was in the thick of a conflagration on Commercial st when a large slate fell from the roof of one of the buildings and struck him on the head, stunning him, and in falling he broke two ribs. The fire that he wore saved his life that time. That hat is kept as a souvenir up in the Mason-st office. It was cut almost in two by the force of the blow. The five-inch scar on the chief's head necessitated considerable sewing up, however.

A couple of years ago he got a terrible shock from a live electric wire, that latest terror of the fireman. In fact, Chief Webber has received about all the injuries that he could stand, and as he said yesterday:

"I feel that if I had a few more years to live I might as well enjoy them in peace and quiet."

Lewis P. Webber was born in New York state, at Hastings-on-the-Hudson, Nov. 18, 1843, but his parents moved to Brighton when he was about a year old, where he was educated in the public schools.

In his early youth he learned the trade of a carriage builder and had nearly completed his apprenticeship when he caught the war fever and enlisted in a regimental band, which was commanded by Mr. Gulner, at the time orchestral leader of the Boston Museum. This band was attached to the 98th N. Y. volunteers, which was detailed as a naval coast guard, its headquarters being near Fortress Monroe. Young Webber played the cymbals and bass drum. He was witness to the stirring scenes which led to the battle between the Merrimac and the Monitor.

Upon returning to Boston he worked for the Spencer rifle company, later at the 2d av. armory in New York city, where he was during the draft riots, when the armory was twice attacked by the mob. The death of his father brought him back to Boston and he went to work for the Metropolitan horse railway company.



ASST. CHIEF JOHN A. MULLEN.

He had a natural leaning toward the fire service, and in 1863 he joined hand engine company Tremont 7 of Roxbury. In 1864 this was merged in Dearborn company No. 1, which had the first steamer introduced in that then independent city. In 1867 he was promoted to be assistant foreman of that company, all this time his service being on a call basis.

In 1870, after annexation, he was promoted to be call foreman of engine company 14 on Center st, and held that position until 1874, when he was persuaded by the commissioners to take the permanent foremanship of that company.

In the big Boston fire, in 1872, he did great service as captain, or foreman, of this company.

He was transferred to the captaincy of engine company 3 on May 13, 1880. In 1884 he was appointed chief of district 8 and a month later was appointed chief of the department by the fire commissioners.

He has had many problems to meet since that time, but he has handled them all successfully.

chiefs were overcome one after another by the fumes of burning cotton and chemicals, and Chief Green detailed Webber to take charge. In the dense smoke he fell from the deck into the first hold. A bar of iron prevented him from falling headlong into the next hold. He was seriously injured at the time.

At the Chipman fire on Court st, April 20, 1891, he was caught under a falling roof with about 20 others, but escaped with slight injuries.

At a fire in Bell's provision store on Commercial st, on June 25, 1887, Lieut. Smith of engine company 8 was caught

as a fire fighter, and he is a hustler today, although he is about the same age as the retiring chief, both having been born in 1843.

He was born in Boston and has been "running" to fires ever since he was a boy. Those are the boys to make firemen.

Back in 1859, when he was but 16 years of age, he did duty with extinguisher 5, a hand engine on East st. On leaving school he learned the trade of a tinsmith.

When the first steam fire engines were introduced in 1861 young Cheswell was appointed as a substitute on Lawrence 7, then located on Purchase st. He was made a permanent member of that company on April 1, 1863, and remained with the company until June, 1864, when he was transferred to Barnicot company No. 4, of which he was appointed driver. He was promoted to assistant engineman in 1870 and engineman in 1874 of the same company. Four days after this latter appointment he was promoted to be captain of engine 4, and he retained that position until July 1, 1880, when he was made chief of the fourth district.

He was made second assistant chief Feb. 8, 1895, and assistant chief Nov. 12, 1897, with headquarters in the Mason-st building.

He, too, has had many narrow escapes during his career as fireman, but he is hale and hearty today, and about as active a man as there is on the force. Chief Cheswell lives on Chambers st, with his wife and three children—two girls and a boy.

For several years, during the absence of Chief Webber, Assistant Chief Cheswell has been the acting chief, so that he will not be entirely new to the duties of the office.

He is a 32d degree Mason, past grand of Franklin lodge 23, I. O. O. F.; he was treasurer of the Charitable association, Boston firemen's cemetery association and Barnicot fire association, a director of the Boston firemen's mutual benefit association and president of the New England states veteran firemen's league.

In all probability he will be notified of his appointment as chief today—so says city hall.

Commissioner Russell is dumb on the subject, and Chief Cheswell has forgotten his own name, apparently. All of which means that there is a little red tape and formality about these matters under Commissioner Russell. But it will be pretty safe to congratulate Chief Cheswell today.

Assistant Chief Mullen.

John A. Mullen, who will take the place of 1st Asst. Chief Cheswell, is a South Boston boy, born and bred, and it is said that he knows every house, alley way, street and hydrant in the peninsular district—knows them from the standpoint of the fireman, and he will undoubtedly feel out of place for a little while at least in the Mason-st building.

He, too, has a splendid record as a fire fighter, and he is a man who has the unbounded respect of all who know him.

He was born June 2, 1859, and, after leaving school, learned the trade of an iron molder. His experience as a fireman dates back to 1873, when he went on as a substitute on engine 15, on the corner of Broadway and Dorchester av. He became a regular the next year, taking the place of Jimmy Sturks, who was killed at a fire on Hanover st.

He was transferred as a permanent man to engine 23 May 9, 1876. He remained there five years and was promoted to the position of captain of engine 15 Aug. 8, 1881. He was appointed a district chief and assigned to the South Boston district Aug. 20, 1885, having passed the first civil service examination ever held in the state for such a position. He was promoted to the position of second assistant chief Nov. 12, 1897, with headquarters at engine 15 on Dorchester st, and holding the position of district chief at the same time.

He will not be a total stranger to his new duties, either, as he has had to act in that capacity during the absence of Asst. Chief Cheswell, or while the latter was acting chief.

He has a thorough knowledge of fire fighting. He is cool and brave in emergencies, and he has done splendid work at all of the big fires of recent years. He was bulletined as killed at the Hecht fire, where he was struck by a falling wall. He was blown out of a building on Arch st a couple of years ago and had to lay off 31 days.

In 1878 he had a narrow escape at a fire on Wareham st, when the ladder on which he was perched broke about 65 feet from the ground. He swung himself against the wall and held on to

the hot handle of a door until he was rescued. He has had some other narrow escapes.

Asst. Chief Mullen is a member of the Firemen's relief association, Firemen's charitable association, trustee of Firemen's monument association, member of the Ancient Order of United Workmen, Independent Order of Heptasophis and South Boston council, Knights of Columbus. He is married and has five children, two boys and three girls. The oldest boy is 18 years of age and is attending a commercial college.

It is not all unlikely that District Chief Patrick E. Keyes, another brave fire fighter, will become second assistant chief, but he will very likely remain in the district which he knows so well—district 7—which includes the Wareham-st lumber shops and the vast lumber yards in that vicinity. His work at all the large fires has been highly commended.

He was born in Boston in 1850. In 1875 he joined the fire department, and rose quickly from hoseman to captain and district chief.



ACTING CHIEF WILLIAM T. CHESWELL

On Thanksgiving evening, Nov. 25, 1886, Chief Webber came very near losing his life at a fire. It was a three-alarm fire from box 8. The fire was a stubborn one, and while making his observations on the second floor of the building Chief Webber stumbled over the body of a man. The smoke was so thick that the light in his lantern was extinguished and the door by which he entered closed with a snap.

He groped his way to the door with his inert burden, opened it and fell upon the stairway unconscious. He soon revived and returned to duty, but brave ladderman W. H. Flavel could not be restored to consciousness.

At the great Thanksgiving day fire of 1883 Chief Webber was perhaps the coolest man there. He quickly saw what was ahead for the department, and he rang in the second, third and general alarms in quick succession. He then sent for assistance to surrounding cities and towns. The fire commissioners congratulated him on the work of that day. He was badly injured at a fire in a paint shop on Elyot st in 1899, and was obliged to go on leave of absence.

In 1883 he was at a fire, when captain, on the steamer Otranto, which laid at a wharf in South Boston. The district

in the building by the falling of the heavy floors. The situation was one of great peril, not only to the lieutenant, but to any one who should attempt to aid him. The chief did not hesitate a moment, but went at once and unaided to the assistance of the imprisoned man. For a time he was in greater danger than the lieutenant, but he made the rescue in safety.

On Feb. 5, 1897, the chief married Miss Catherine J. Corbett, and they have had four children, three sons and one daughter.

The second son, "Jo," has been the chief's driver and messenger. He was born on the night of the big fire in 1872, and it was two days before the father had a chance to make the baby's acquaintance. The eldest son is in the fire supply business. One of the chief's brothers is captain of a ladder company.

The chief said yesterday he didn't know what the future had in store for him. For the present at least he said he was going to take a good rest and keep as quiet as possible. He has a bronchial trouble, and his nervous system is in bad shape, but he looks hale and hearty and his comrades hope to see him around for many years.

William T. Cheswell, who will succeed Chief Webber, has an enviable record