

## **BLOW IN A VITAL SPOT.**

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# **BLOW IN A VITAL SPOT.**

All the railroads whose Boston terminal are at the North Station were completely paralyzed for more than two hours yesterday forenoon and were badly crippled in their service all the rest of the day and night owing to the destruction by fire of Tower A, on the bridge just outside the station—the tower which controlled the switching of all trains that enter and leave the station.

The entire Boston & Maine System could not have been struck at a more vital point in its mechanism than in this Tower A, which handles or has controlled more trains and shifting lo-

comotives daily than any other railroad tower on the American continent, and which has been considered by railroad men as the most efficient switching tower in the world.

About 2900 switching operations were performed in this tower daily, including regular trains, eight locomotives, empty trains and other shifting operations.

These operations were performed by 60 electro-pneumatic machines that worked 120 levers, all of which have been destroyed by the fire, throwing the entire switching operations of the North Station back to the old hand system of switches until a new tower can be built and equipped.

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# BLOW IN A VITAL SPOT.

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This may slightly affect the train service at the North Station for a time, although the officials hoped last evening to be able to resume regular schedules this morning by opening the old Fitchburg tracks and running the Fitchburg Railroad trains into the extension at the rear of the old Fitchburg Station, and by bringing the Eastern Division trains in through Yards 1 and 20 in Charlestown and Somerville, thence over the old bridge east of Tower A and into tracks 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 in the North Station.

These trains will be operated from the old tower on this bridge. That will leave all the Southern Division and Western Division and other trains to come into the station on the regular tracks—operated for the time being by hand switches.

## Switchmen Hard to Muster.

The worst of it is, it has been found difficult to get switchmen who understand the hand switch system, and the signals, and who can work them efficiently. The only men who know these things well nowadays are the men who operate freight trains. The semaphore signals are out of commission and all signaling must be done by lanterns at night and flags by day, and in addition the signals must be passed along from the station to the drawbridge and then to points beyond up to Tower B near East Somerville.

Where 573 trains were able to leave the North Station daily by means of the tower switching, not more than half that number could be operated by the hand system. There are 23 tracks in the North Station and these converge into the eight tracks just before they reach the drawbridge about 100 yards from the station. Then they begin to diverge again after crossing the bridge, although the great track divergence does not begin until Tower B is reached, which is more than a mile from the station. It is at this tower that the various railroads which constitute the Boston & Maine System meet.

The fire which started in Tower A about 9 o'clock yesterday forenoon was felt in pretty much every part of Western, Northern and Eastern New England, inside of half an hour, and although it is bad enough as it is it would have been much worse had it occurred on the previous day when in addition to the severe cold the wind was blowing a gale. As it is only the tower and the electro-pneumatic switch connections were destroyed, whereas the bridge and tracks might have been seriously injured if the fire had occurred 24 hours earlier.

It was almost impossible for the regular fire apparatus to get at the burning tower owing to its location on the farther side of the drawbridge and the broad network of tracks leading to the bridge, so the blaze once started gained headway that could not be checked until the fireboat came on the scene and brought a half dozen streams to bear on it.

The intense cold of the morning froze the water the moment it touched the building and the surrounding area, clogging up the switches and tracks in all directions, and the firemen from the regular engines were like animated cakes of ice before they had been at work 10 minutes.

The land engines had to string hose lines from their positions on side streets thousands of feet to the burning building, and this required much time, so that the tower was doomed before a drop of water was available. The fireboat simply drowned the building and the fire when it arrived, however. No one seems to know how the fire started. No one was seriously injured.

## Resort to Surface Cars.

The heaviest of the morning suburban passenger traffic had been disposed of before the fire started, but at that every road was choked with incoming trains inside of half an hour after the fire began, and these were stalled at East Somerville, at East Cambridge and at Union sq. The trainshed of the station was about half filled with trains at the time, some ready to depart and others empty after discharging passengers.

The people on the incoming trains were advised to take surface cars to Boston and those in the station who were not going on the express trains

were advised to go to surface cars or other roads. Those for Lynn and stations beyond went by the Narrow Gage, and those for points 10, 20 or 30 miles distant took surface cars or other conveyances.

There was a great deal of confusion in and around the North Station during the fire, which lasted several hours, but it was as nothing compared with the confusion between 4 o'clock and 6 o'clock in the evening, when probably 30,000 people, who work in Boston and live in suburban cities and towns on the Boston & Maine lines, flocked to the station, many of them wholly ignorant there had been a fire, and others in hope that the trouble would have been remedied.

And it was remedied in a way, for trains began to move out of the station about noon and by 4 o'clock about half-service had been resumed. But it had to be done very cautiously at first, for the 50 or more men that had been organized to man the hand switches had to become familiar with their duties. The seven men in the tower under Supt. Palmer each took charge of a squad of these new men and instructed them and got them into pretty fair working order before the congested hours set in when the heaviest service is demanded at the station between 4 and 6:30 p. m.

## Great Crowd in Evening Rush.

Another gang of men had to keep the tracks and switches clear of ice. Seven shanties were quickly constructed on the bridge for the use of the seven squads of switchmen and their shanties were connected by telephone with the train dispatcher's office in the station. Electric lights were also rigged along the bridge over the tracks, for the most serious part of the work began when darkness set in.

It was fortunate that the tracks were in no way injured, and after the hand switches were adjusted and the switches thawed out the work of moving trains went forward with more and more rapidity, but at that it was utterly impossible to keep any kind of a schedule or to tell when a train would arrive or depart. Scheduled trains were from one to two and even three to four hours late in arriving at the station and there was no attempt to send other than express trains off on time and these were all an hour or more late.

However, these were no real express trains, for all such trains were ordered to stop at nearly all the stations along the lines.

The officials of the road did the best they could to accommodate the public under the circumstances, and the marvel is that they were able to accomplish so much. The one thing that aided them was the rise in temperature and the fact that there was no snow.

The average number of passengers leaving the North Station each day is 90,000—more passengers than go out of the South Station or even the New York Central and slightly more than go out of the Pennsylvania Terminal in New York. So the condition of the North Station between 4:30 and 6 o'clock yesterday afternoon may better be imagined than described.

People poured into the station from every direction, many of them eager to get to their homes, or to keep engagements, or to go to far distant points. They were confronted with signs at every conspicuous point in the station, which read:

"Train service interrupted. All who can reach their destinations by electric cars are advised to take them."

## Half-Schedule Restored.

The trainshed was jammed by 4:20 and the big waiting room was crowded. Occasionally a man with a megaphone walked through the crowd and into the waiting room announcing that a train for Lynn or Fitchburg or Concord and way stations would be sent out from a certain track—usually a different one from the one on which such trains usually run. Then there would be a rush and sometimes even a cheer from the crowd, and that particular train was jammed to the doors in a few minutes.

One track was opened on the Eastern Division to Lynn and Salem, by reason of the fact that track one connected with the storage track on the old Fitchburg bridge, but even these trains were run irregularly. However, most people who wanted to go to Lynn and stations beyond rushed to the elevated and took cars for the Lynn narrow gage station, which did an enormous business yesterday afternoon and evening.

After hearing one train announced and then another, people would become encouraged to wait, and many did wait an hour or more, but most persons who live in the suburbs took electric cars

they were advised by the signs in the station. Taxicabs also did a rushing business and the telephone booths and the automatic telephones in the station were crowded for hours with people telephoning to their homes. The telegraph station was also kept unusually busy.

Besides those people who lived in the immediate suburbs or within 10 or 15 miles of Boston were others who put up at Boston hotels for the night, with the result that about every hotel in the northern and western parts of the city was filled.

All those on incoming trains during the afternoon and evening were advised to leave the trains at East Somerville and make their way to Boston by the Sullivan sq. Elevated Terminal nearby, or the surface cars running through Charlestown, and most of the passengers did as they were advised, for it was necessary to hold back most of the incoming trains during the afternoon rush hours so as to accommodate the suburban service, for which trains were made up in the Somerville and Charlestown yards.

Between 4 and 7 o'clock yesterday afternoon 11 trains were sent out over the Western Portland Division, as against 29 under normal conditions, and 11 were sent over the Eastern Division, as against 25. Fifteen were sent over the Southern Division, as against 25 normally, and eight over the Fitchburg, as against 16 normally.

Under normal conditions a train leaves the station every two minutes from 4 to 7 p. m.

## EXTRA CARS ON ALL TRAINS.

### Revere Beach Road Successfully Cope With Increased Traffic Burden Thrust Upon It.

LYNN, Jan 14—Traffic on the Boston, Revere Beach & Lynn Railroad was so heavy today that the riding between Lynn and Boston was almost equal to the business handled on a Summer holiday after the tieup on the Boston & Maine forced travelers to find another method of reaching Boston. Despite the unexpected demand upon the road, all trains were sent out of the Market-st Terminal on time and the same was true of inward trains.

As soon as the extent of the trouble became known extra cars were added to trains and nearly every train was loaded to capacity on leaving its terminal.

During the rush hours this evening the travel from Boston was far greater than the inward-bound traffic, and until 8 o'clock trains were crowded. In addition to Lynn passengers, the Narrow Gage transported hundreds of people of cities and towns east of Lynn as far as this city, where connections were made with street cars.

The shutting off of all trains on the Fagus branch forced people of that town and the extreme western section of Lynn to rely upon the street cars wholly.

Provision has been made to maintain regular service on the Marblehead branch of the Boston & Maine as far as this city by a train which was placed in operation today.

## SIX ALARMS IN LYNN.

### Automatic Calls Also Contribute to Keeping Fire Department Busy on Cold Day.

LYNN, Jan 14—Six bell alarms and many automatic calls kept the fire department busy today. All of the fires could be traced to the cold weather or the efforts to keep dwellings heated.

The heaviest loss was caused by a fire which started from a defective chimney, tonight, in the two-family house at 11A Neptune st. The roof was partly destroyed and the damage done to the house and to the furniture of Abram Margolis and Samuel Rosenthal, the occupants, was estimated at \$1000.

Others who sustained minor losses were: Washington Melzard of 18 Tilton ter, \$25; Vincent Carbone of 9 Kimball av, \$100; Mrs Margaret Hart of 13 Winneperkut av, \$20; George Vinres of 112 Flint st, \$25; Arthur Churchill of 5 Haddington pl, \$10.

### Fire Chief Leaves Sick Bed.

BRAINTREE, Jan 14—Two alarms were rung in tonight for a lively blaze in the general market of T. B. Cooper, Railroad av, in a building owned by Charles Cavanagh. District Chief Whitmarsh of East Braintree got out of a sick bed and came with the East Braintree apparatus. The loss on the building was \$1500 and on the stock \$1200. Both were insured. The cause is not known.

### Bond Mansion Burned.

CLIFTONDALE, Jan 14—Damage of \$15,000 was done by an early morning fire which destroyed the Charles H. Bond mansion at the corner of Jackson st and Cliftondale sq, and until the arrival of an engine company from Lynn threatened to spread to adjoining dwellings. The house was occupied by the family of F. H. Stearns, son-in-law of Mrs Charles H. Bond of Boston.