

## JOHNNY ROSE

Johnny Rose was a young Boston firefighter. He was doing the 9:P.M. to midnight watch which, in Boston Fire Department parlance meant sitting at the Patrol desk on the apparatus floor of the firehouse quarters of Engine 22 and Ladder 13, attending to and recording incoming alarms as they were struck on the department tapper. A few minutes after 10:00P.M, the department telephone rang stridently. Upon answering the young firefighter heard the crisp voice of John Lang, Fire Alarm Dispatcher, issuing action orders in his typical calm and dispassionate voice, "Take Engine 22 and Ladder 13 to a reported automobile fire at Stuart and Broadway. Box to follow." Standard procedure dictated that both fire companies would proceed to the specified location and, additionally, the striking of the street fire alarm Box number closest to the location would bring additional apparatus from other stations in the event their services might be required.

Within thirty seconds the firehouse was emptied. Engine 22 hose wagon assuming the lead followed by Engine 22 pumper trailed closely by Ladder 13. As the apparatus cleared the apron outside their quarters the Fire Alarm tapper could be heard striking 1-5-1-4, Box 1514, location Stuart and Carver Streets, the nearest alarm Box to the reported auto fire at Stuart and Broadway. The men of both responding companies knew that, in other stations, their fellow firefighters were scrambling to their boots, coats and helmets, mounting their vehicles and heading for Box 1514.

The response of Engine 22 and Ladder 13 to their assigned location was rapid and, upon arrival, a smoldering automobile fire was sighted. The Engine company crew uncoiled a booster line and applied water to the burning seat cushions while the Laddermen tore the cushions apart to assure total extinguishment of this minor fire. Other fire companies, summoned by the striking of Box 1514, were arriving and the Chief officer in command was in the process of ordering their return to their respective firehouses since their services were not required. Johnny Rose's task at this fire was nearly complete and he meticulously coiled up the booster hose in its proper place on the hose bed of Engine 22's hose wagon. The time was 10:20 P.M.

Fire Captain John Glynn of Engine 22 watched as Johnny Rose finished coiling the booster line and replacing it on the Engine company hose wagon and, as they prepared to return to their quarters a breathless civilian shouted, "There's smoke coming from a building down there." Glynn stated, "We looked in the direction he was pointing but we couldn't see anything, so I said we'll take a ride over there. And that, of course, was our first awareness of the Coconut Grove fire."

As Engine 22's wagon turned the corner onto Broadway the two firefighters on the back step could see a commotion in front of the door to the Broadway Lounge. "It looks like a couple of sailors having a jam"; Johnny Rose said to Bill Estes. The sailors seemed to be pushing and shoving, but as the fire apparatus neared the curb the sailors broke free from the front of the building

And ran from the doorway. As the apparatus stopped Johnny and Bill looked on in horrors the flames erupted from the doorway roaring with increasing intensity, second by second.

The firefighters reflexively went into action, dropping a hose line back to a nearby post hydrant while Joe McNeil, the pump operator, quickly opened the discharge gate supplying water to the nozzle that Rose and Estes were advancing to the door of the Lounge, now jammed with patrons frantically attempting to break free and escape the unendurable agony of heat and smoke within. With the mass of people in front of them, coupled with the immense amount of fire now roaring out over their heads, the two firefighters were at first unable to make entry into the building proper but tipped their hoseline upward over the doorway to provide both coverage and protection for the screaming mob fighting their way to the street and safety.

“We knew there was a lot of fire in there, but of course, we had no idea how many people were involved”, said Johnny Rose. “Shortly there seemed to be a slackening off of the crows activity as the people inside were being overcome, burned and trampled. We were able to gain entry and started to take some people out of the doorway. We didn’t get too far in because the door in the vestibule swung inward and was blocked by bodies of those who had fallen. After ten or fifteen minutes we were still pulling bodies out, passing them behind us and every once in a while you’d find one that was groaning, but mostly they were burned pretty badly. They were stacked up pretty high, near the top of the vestibule.”

“It took us a good half hour, I would say, to get from the doorway across the Lounge to the bar. There was still a lot of heat and smoke, and the bodies were piled and intertwined one on top of the other. And still there were people in there, at first hollering and screaming, moaning, and then there were no moans at all. When we reached the cocktail bar there was a tremendous pile of bodies, people who had fled through the corridor from the Caricature Bar and the Main Dining Room seeking safety from the flames. Unable to reach the Broadway door before the heat and smoke overcame them, they jammed up, milled around, and that was it. We just continued to remove body after body. I never left the Broadway Lounge until I was carried out.”