

# FIGHT FIRES BEFORE THEY START

## New Fire Chief Has Taught Prevention Methods in Houses and Hotels as Well as Lumber Yards and Garages



PETER E. WALSH,  
New Leader of Boston Firemen.

"An ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure," is the rule under which the fire hazard of Boston will be handled in the future.

While no official statement to this effect could be obtained from acting Chief of Department Peter E. Walsh, who now leads the firemen in their battles with the flames, it is known that it is the system under which the department will work, having proved successful in District 7, Boston Fire Department, of which the chief was the commander for more than five years past.

The success of this rule is proven by the low fire loss in what is considered the worst fire district of the entire city, composed of all kinds of manufacturing plants and residences ranging all the way from the tenements of the foreign settlements, to the homes on the water side of Beacon st.

### His First Opportunity

Peter Walsh, who became a student as well as a fire-fighter on July 29, 1892, the day he entered the Fire Department and reported at Engine 11, Saratoga st. East Boston, for duty, not only studied the scientific methods of fighting fires, but also the proposition of preventing fires.

This study was not only a practical study, as he tucked away in his head all the knowledge that was obtained from experience and observation, but also a scientific study from text-books on hydraulics, explosives, chemicals and everything else that a fireman is compelled to face in saving life and property.

The first real chance he had to make use of his studies was in 1913; he was promoted to district chief, and sent to the so-called "Lumber District." He soon showed that his duties were of value and up to the time that he left the command of this district to take charge of the department last week, the district was not visited by a "lumber yard" fire, although previous to his taking charge of the district, fires of this nature were common.

This is attributed to the fire prevention methods which he taught to the bosses of the lumber yards and by frequent inspections made sure were being enforced.

### Landlords Taught to Respect Him

The same way with the garages, the most important in the city being located in his district when he took charge. Rules and regulations for the conduct of the garages were drawn up by him, and with the sanction of Gen Charles H. Cole, who was then Fire Commissioner, he placed them in all garages and ordered the owners to obey them.

When he was placed in a position of authority, not only the heads of the lumber business, the garages and other manufacturing and business plants learned that a new system had been inaugurated, but the landlords and tenants of the residences and even the big hotels in the district also felt his power when he inspected their establishments and found a fire menace existing.

The lack of laws to properly enforce his orders did not stop him from keeping at this work, and it is said by officers and men who served in his district that the "midnight electric light" was always burning, with the chief at his typewriter making out reports on conditions he did not like.

Report after report was made about the same establishment when the owner refused to obey his orders and clean the place up. Chief Walsh had the courage of his convictions at all times, and if a fire menace existed, openly said so and advised tenants to move if he believed they were in danger.

### Appealing to the Court

The district that Chief Walsh just left, outside of Brighton and the Fenway, is regarded as one of the worst in the entire city for an alarm to be sounded from at night or in the early hours of the morning.

The construction of the residential apartment blocks is such, in the opinion of the firemen, that a fire, once getting a start, will sweep through them as through a packing box of light wood, but the work done in keeping after the people responsible for keeping them clean resulted in no fires having an opportunity of starting in them.

Up to the time that Chief Walsh

started his crusade of cleaning up these places, it was nothing strange to find in a house containing 50 or more apartments and perhaps 500 occupants, the cellar used as a storehouse by a builder, with gallons of paints and oils scattered about, as well as lumber and all other kinds of inflammable materials.

He never hesitated after a repeated warning was ignored to appeal to the courts for criminal action against the offender.

Being an attorney at law, the study of which was made by Chief Walsh while a member of the department—he was admitted to the bar Feb. 4, 1908—he was able to handle all the legal questions in relation to fire prevention that came up and soon showed the lawyers of the property owners of his district that he was more than a match for them.

### Studying Up-to-Date Methods

It was while a lieutenant on Engine 7, East st. in 1902, that he began the study of law. After a number of years of reading he started to attend lectures and his past work stood him in such good stead that he outdistanced all others and passed his examinations far ahead of them.

For the past 11 years, since being admitted to the bar, Chief Walsh has made a specialty of studying fire prevention and scientific fire-fighting. The way to put out a fire is to put water on it, but according to Chief Walsh there is a right way to use this water and a wrong way to use it.

For this reason, Fire Commissioner John R. Murphy sent Capt Charles Donoghue of Ladder 15, Boylston and Hereford sts, Back Bay, to New York to attend the "Fire College" maintained by the department of that city. Every up-to-date method of fighting fires, from the sub-sub-sub-cellars to the roofs of skyscrapers, is taught at this college.

At the same time Chief Walsh was sent to New York by Commissioner Murphy to make a study of the fire prevention laws of that city and the work of the Fire Prevention Bureau of the Fire Department. It is believed that he is now at work drawing up a new set of ordinances for Boston.

### Would Rather Talk of Children

Chief Walsh, who will become head of the re-fighting force when the pension of Chief Peter F. McDonough takes effect on July 29, is one of the hardest men in Boston to interview.

As a fireman he says nothing, but when the conversation is turned to the question of being a father, he can talk all day about those four children of his who are now spending their vacation at Green Harbor, with the "finest mother that ever lived."

The four of them are his idols, but he does more talking about Peter E. Jr., who is 17 years old and who has done more in his young life to cause talk than Marie, his 15-year-old sister, who is a pupil at Roxbury High School, of the younger brothers, William T., 9 years old, and baby Paul, who has just turned 7.

"Pete" at Dorchester High School is the idol of the pupils, as a result of his work as a member of the school track team. "Pete" takes after his father in making a study of anything that he is up against, both practical and technical, and the number of prizes that he has won for the school as a runner proves that this practice is a good one.

### Holds Medal of Honor

The appointment of Chief Walsh to the command of the fire-fighting forces of the city establishes a precedent, as he is the first man to be promoted from the rank of district chief to that of chief of department since the position of assistant chief or deputy chief has been created.

The late Louis P. Webber was promoted from the rank of district chief to the command of the department, but he did not jump over any senior officers, as at that time all assistants held the rank of district chief.

Other than Chief Webber, Chief Walsh is the youngest man to hold the position of chief of department.

Chief Walsh is a medal-of-honor man, being awarded this honor for saving the life of a woman trapped in a burning building at the corner of State and Devonshire sts in 1901. He has figured in many other rescues, but it is a worse job than trying to pull teeth to get any of the details out of him.

Chief Walsh gave up the trade of stonemasonry in 1892 to become a fireman. He first did duty in East Boston, and after a number of months was sent to the city proper and became one of the "iron men" of Engine 1, as the crew of this company has been known for years.

He went back to East Boston and was promoted to lieutenant in 1896, and captain in 1904.

He was promoted to the rank of district chief in 1913, and 27 years from the day he entered the department will put on the gold badge, the gold button and the five crossed trumpets as chief of department.