

WOMAN CUT OFF BY SMOKE AT TOP OF A SKYSCRAPER

Miss Alice H. Grady Prisoner on the 11th Floor of Compton Building, on Fire Seven Stories Below.



COMPTON BUILDING,
ARCH STREET

MISS ALICE H. GRADY
WEARING DRIVER LANIGAN'S COAT.

FIREMEN ON LADDERS NEAR
SEVENTH FLOOR TALKING TO
MISS GRADY FOUR STORIES
ABOVE

Men With Scaling Ladder Making Dangerous Climb Toward Her When Blaze of Suspicious Origin Is Subdued.

All means of exit blocked by flames and smoke from a fire of so mysterious origin as to demand special investigation, Miss Alice H. Grady, secretary of Louis D. Brandels, and said to be the highest salaried woman in Boston, was kept a prisoner on the top floor of the 11-story Compton Building, 161 Devonshire st and 22 Arch st, for a half hour yesterday noon while firemen fought a dangerous blaze on the fourth floor in the rooms of the Common Sense Gum Company, and struggled with scaling ladders to reach and rescue the imprisoned woman.

It is the first fire in the history of the Boston Fire Department at which the firemen have been confronted with the problem of rescuing persons from the upper floors of a skyscraper, and it demonstrated the fact that the science of building construction has progressed more rapidly than that of fire fighting.

The longest ladder the firemen were able to raise reached barely to the seventh story, four stories below that in which Miss Grady was imprisoned.

The interior fire escape, by means of which occupants of the upper stories are supposed to depend for their safety, was so filled with smoke and so hot in some sections that no one could pass through it.

Miss Grady when she first smelled smoke attempted to reach the ground floor by way of the interior escape, but as soon as she opened the door to escape she was almost overcome by the clouds of smoke and at once saw the impossibility of trying to descend by this route.

It is said that an open door was the cause of the interior fire escape being in this condition.

Elevator Man Driven Out.

The first that was known of the fire was when Edward C. Greenwood, treasurer and bookkeeper of the gum company, who had left the main offices, room 412, to go to the stock rooms in another part of the same floor, smelled smoke and saw the reflection of flame in room 412 upon the glass of a door opposite.

He ran to the elevator well, shouting "Fire!" The cry was heard by Michael Doherty, the elevator man, and Supt. Walter Brookins.

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WOMAN CUT OFF AT TOP OF SKY SCRAPER

Continued From the First Page.

Doherty, he said afterward, ran the elevator to the top floor, where Miss Grady was at work in her office, and gave the alarm. He then ran the elevator down to the 10th floor, where William Montgomery, a State actuary, who had heard the shouting, was waiting for the car, and Montgomery and Doherty descended through the suffocating smoke.

Meanwhile Greenwood, after discovering the fire, had made his way down stairs from the fourth floor to the street. Mr Montgomery ran to box 41 at the corner of Washington and Milk sts and turned in the alarm.

Doherty said after the fire that having landed Mr Montgomery on the ground floor he attempted to again run the elevator to the top of the building, but half way up felt himself growing weak from the suffocating smoke, and fearing that he was about to collapse he returned to the ground floor. He said he did not think Miss Grady, seven stories above the fire, was in any immediate danger.

Miss Grady Cut Off by Smoke.

Miss Grady's first intimation of the fire was the strong odor of smoke. She dropped her work and opened the door leading from the office of Dunbar, Brandels & Nutter into the general corridors.

The hallways were filled with dense black smoke. Miss Grady groped her way to the inside fire escape and opened its doors to be almost overwhelmed by the suffocating fumes. She hastily retreated to her office and closed the door.

She said afterward that for a moment she thought of trying to reach the roof, but figured out that it would be harder for firemen to reach her there than in her own office.

She did not know in what part of the building the fire was and had no means of knowing whether or not any one else had discovered it. In order to be on the safe side she telephoned Fire Headquarters and told the operator that there was a fire in the building and that she was alone on the 11th floor, unable to reach the street because of the smoke which poured upward from the fire.

When Dist Chief Tabor arrived at the building smoke was pouring from two windows on the top floor and flames were belching forth seven stories below.

Unaware that Miss Grady was cut off on the top floor and that the chief problem of the fire was her rescue, Dist Chief Tabor realizing that he was confronted with a desperate battle, rang in a second alarm, and when, shortly afterward, it was learned that Miss Grady was imprisoned, Dist Chief Sennott ordered a third alarm in order to bring men to the scene to handle the longest ladders in equipment.

Scaling Ladder Brought Into Use.

To the firemen first at the burning building nothing of Miss Grady or her danger was known until the true state of affairs was communicated to Chief Mullen by a driver who had been in communication with headquarters.

With the assistance of four volunteers the largest ladder, then on the scene, was raised on the Arch st side of the building. This, however, was no short that it wasn't of a great deal of use. The only solution of the problem appeared to be in the use of scaling ladders, which have been seldom resorted to.

Joseph H. Andreoli and John Buckley of Ladder 1 took a scaling ladder and, ascending to the top of the extension ladder, which reached only to the fifth floor, began a slow and dangerous climb upward, which after 15 minutes landed them on the eighth floor, three floors below the prisoner.

In the meantime crowds in the street below, fearful lest Miss Grady lose her head and leap to the street, shouted advice to her when she appeared at the window of her office. She smiled and waved her hand to the anxious gathering below by way of answer.

As a precautionary measure life nets were, however, spread in the street, where patrolman Kenner of City Hall Police station hastened up to the top of the building opposite on Arch st and told her she was in no danger from the fire below. Miss Grady nodded her head to show the policeman that she understood.

Crowd Fears Woman Will Leap.

Several times the imprisoned woman left the open window and disappeared in the smoke, which by this time filled the office. Each time the hearts of those far below sank with fear that she might be trying to struggle through the smoke in an effort to reach the street by one of the inside passages. Each time, however, Miss Grady returned to the window to watch the progress of the two ladder men who were trying to reach her.

Although the two firemen with their single scaling ladder worked as swiftly as firemen ever worked, to the crowd below their progress seemed most slow. Every move they made was watched, and every inch they gained up the perpendicular wall called forth enthusiasm from below. As they reached the eighth floor an aerial ladder which reached to the seventh floor was raised.

Two men from Ladder 17 running up this disappeared in the building while orders were shouted to the scaling ladder men to discontinue their laborious climb.

The fire had been almost conquered, and the smoke was rapidly being driven from the building.

Scaling off the ladder to the seventh floor, the two men from Ladder 17 were able to pick their way up four stories to the room where Miss Grady had for half an hour been a prisoner.

She greeted them calmly and seemed anything but nervous. She admitted, however, that she was thankful that they had arrived. They reassured her that there was no longer any danger and asked if she cared to go through the smoke-filled upper and wet lower corridors to the street.

Cheered as She Reaches Street.

She in turn assured them that she had felt all the time that she was safe enough and the efforts of the crowd in urging her not to jump had amused her.

After donning a rubber coat and

chief's hat with which the ladder men supplied her, she announced that she was ready to accompany them downstairs. Her own hat and coat had been mislaid somewhere in the room and could not be found just then because of the smoke which hid from view everything in the room. Later the same two ladder men who had "rescued" Miss Grady rescued her hat and coat.

Unable to see, choked by the stifling fumes, the trio cautiously picked their way step by step down from the top of the skyscraper to the street.

As the two firemen and their charge appeared in the doorway there was a joyous cheer from the much-relieved crowd and firemen and newspapermen clustered around Miss Grady and congratulated her upon her courage.

Although she had passed through a half-hour which would have brought most women to a state of nervous exhaustion, Miss Grady appeared wholly cool and collected.

"Not Afraid at Any Time."

"I wasn't really afraid at any time," said Miss Grady. "I knew the fire was somewhere below me, and felt that the construction of the building was such that the flames would never reach me. The only trouble was the smoke, and I managed to overcome this by keeping my head out of the window. This is the first fire I have been in and I hope it will be the last. At no time did I think of jumping, which would have been foolhardy. I did at one time think of going to the roof to avoid the smoke, but this would have meant that it would be harder for the firemen to reach me than if I had remained where I was."

"I frequently come to the office on Sunday mornings. I cannot understand why Doherty, the elevator man, did not give me warning. I understand he says he tried to notify me of the fire by shouting. I heard some kind of a noise, but it was not enough to attract my attention. He must have known that I was in the building because when I entered he told me that the elevator was to stop running at noon and I asked him to tell me when the elevator was to make its last trip."

Miss Grady went to her home, 2 Walnut st, in a taxicab, but later in the day returned to her office and completed the work the fire had interrupted.

Damage Set at \$5000.

The Common Sense Gum Company occupies six rooms on the fourth floor as offices. Room 412 is used as the general offices. It is thought that the fire started in this room or the one adjoining. When Teas Greenwood first saw the flames it seemed to him that all six rooms were ablaze. Supt Brookins and Doherty, the elevator man, manned a line of hose, with which every floor of the building is well supplied. They had no difficulty in getting a stream of water through the hose, but were unable to keep up the battle more than a short time because of the smoke which, it was said later, seemed to permeate the entire building inside of a few minutes.

After one attempt they were forced to drop their line at the door of the gum concern and stagger downstairs to the open air. As soon as the firemen arrived water and chemical lines were run into the building from both Devonshire and Arch sts. Other lines were carried in by means of ladders, and nearly a score of streams were directed into the offices of the gum company, which was a seething mass of flames. The fire was under control in a short time, but was not extinguished until nearly an hour of work.

The offices of the gum company were a complete wreck. Besides the office furniture and what stock happened to be there, considerable personal property was destroyed, including a valuable fur coat and other clothing belonging to Mr Tarr, one of the heads of the company.

The fire was confined to the offices of the gum company, although other occupants in the building suffered from smoke and to a lesser extent from water. The damage is estimated at about \$5000.

Rumor of Safe-Blowing.

During the fire there was a persistent rumor that the safe of the gum company had been blown and Inspectors Rooney, McCauley, Linton and Waite, who were sent from Police Headquarters to investigate this story, found that one of the steel doors of the safe had been broken from its hinges. Upon investigation, however, the Headquarters men learned that the door, which stood open, was broken off by firemen. Teas Greenwood said he had left the safe door open.

Discussing the origin of the fire late yesterday afternoon Mr Tarr, who has charge of the Boston office of the Common Sense Gum Company, characterized it as of a particularly suspicious nature.

A short time ago, he said, he had received an anonymous letter, mailed at Newport, R. I. It was written in pencil upon a small piece of note paper. It referred to the business of the gum company and in it was the threat: "Kerosene will damn you," which in the light of after events Mr Tarr agreed may have meant yesterday's fire. The letter has been turned over to the United States postal authorities, Mr Tarr said.

Warning in Anonymous Letter.

Until the fire yesterday, Mr Tarr went on, he had not paid much attention to the letter. A short time ago the Worcester office of the concerned were damaged by fire, and for some time it has experienced a lot of difficulty with its slot machines, these being broken as fast as they are put out, he said.

Teas Greenwood, Mr Tarr said, had left the offices of the company but a few minutes when the fire broke out. Mr Greenwood went to the washroom and to the stockroom on the same floor. He did not see anyone else about, Mr Greenwood said.

The Compton Building is owned by the Compton Associates, for whom Judge James R. Dunbar and Henry S. Rowe are trustees.

Hundreds of men and women are employed in the building, and had the fire happened on a working day, firemen say that there would have been grave results. Although the blaze was confined to the six rooms occupied by the gum concern, the entire upper part of the structure was filled with smoke, which made it impossible to run the elevators above the fourth floor or for any one to descend the staircases.

