

BIG FIRE CAUSED BY BURGLARS

THEY BLEW OPEN KELLY & CO SAFE

Announcement by Mayor Curley After Visit to Ruins

Loss of \$400,000 in Heart of Retail And Wholesale District

The big Chauncy-st fire this morning was caused by burglars blowing open the safe of Thomas Kelly & Co, the occupants of the building.

Announcement of this was made by Mayor Curley this afternoon, following a visit he made to the ruins.

The fire and police officials, however, cannot tell whether the safe was actually blown open or if robbery was committed, because the safe is buried in the smoking ruins, and until they have been cooled off they will be unable to get at the safe.

During his visit to the ruins, the Mayor was also told that another break by burglars had been made in a building in the same district.

The Mayor was told of the operation of the burglars by the fire and police officials at the fire. Later Fire Chief Peter F. McDonough confirmed the Mayor's announcement.

"There is every indication that at least an attempt was made to blow open the Kelly Company's safe," declared Chief McDonough. "The safe is connected with the A. D. T. burglar alarm system and the alarm from the safe rang in the A. D. T. office at least six or eight minutes before the automatic fire alarm was sounded. I think that nitroglycerin or some other highly explosive material was used to blow the safe, but it was set off in such a bungling fashion that it set fire to the woodwork."

"We will be unable to tell, however, whether the safe was actually blown open until we get at the safe. It is now buried in the ruins, and until they are cooled off we will be unable to confirm or disprove the theory of burglars."

During the fire no mention was made to reporters by either the fire or police officials of the fire being caused by burglars. They did tell the Mayor when he visited the place and happened to mention it while speaking about the fire. He expressed surprise that the officials did not tell

the newspapermen at the fire about the explosion.

He then stated that he had been told by School Committeeman Michael H. Corcoran, who is a member of a firm which occupies a building near that in which the fire occurred, that another burglary had occurred in the night in a building near the Kelly Building.

The Mayor also declared that if the Kelly Building had been equipped with water sprinklers the fire would not have got headway. He also took the occasion to remark that he hoped the Department of Justice would find some means of compelling a reduction in the price of sprinklers, as the result of its present investigation into the subject of sprinklers and an alleged monopoly which has forced up prices on these articles. The Mayor expressed commendation of the Fire Department for keeping the fire from spreading.

At Police Headquarters this afternoon Supt Crowley said that he had not heard the report of burglars in the building before the fire, but the "tip" would surely be investigated.

FIREMEN FIGHT SIX HOURS WITH CHAUNCY-ST BLAZE

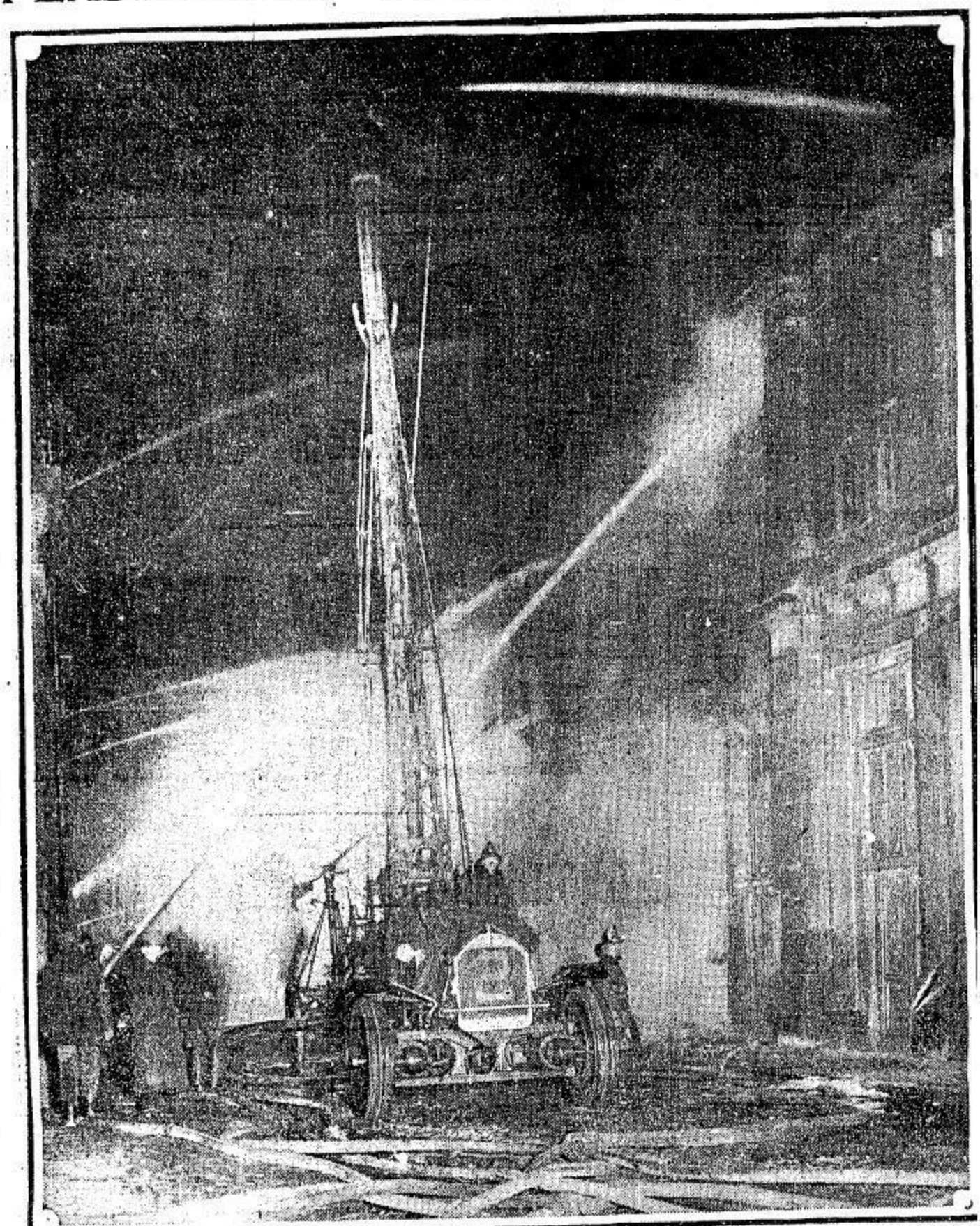
Battling through six hours with a five-alarm fire, in the very heart of the wholesale and retail section, early this morning, the Boston Fire Department gave fresh proof of its prowess and dealt at the same time a body blow to speculative criticism about what might happen if such a fire broke out there.

"A corking good stop!" said Chief Peter F. McDonough, in his laconic way. Everybody who watched the performance agreed. The satisfaction of the firemen who handled the blaze was deep-seated. The damage is estimated at \$400,000, the major part of which is covered by insurance.

The plant of Thomas Kelly & Co, dealers in blankets, quiltings and rugs, occupying the entire five-story brick and stone structure fronting at 89 Chauncy st and backing into Exeter pl, was burned out. The firm's loss in stock and fixtures, estimated at \$250,000 by John J. Hennessey, a firm member, is covered by insurance.

Practically the full strength of the

FLASHLIGHT PHOTO OF THE FIRE



FLASHLIGHT PHOTO SHOWS TOWER 2 AND NINE OTHER LINES AT WORK IN EXETER PLACE.

BIG FIRE CAUSED BY BURGLARS

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partment was brought to bear early upon the job. Except for its valiant, unflagging efforts, the damage must have mounted very high. A brisk westerly breeze was blowing for the first two hours, which made the men redouble their efforts. It was a long, hard struggle, made in the chill hours of the morning, in narrow canyons of streets through which raced brooks of water.

The firemen, the engines, ladders, fire escapes, sidewalks and pavements soon had coatings of ice. Many a weary fireman lost his footing and fell, but no serious injury was reported. One horseman sustained a gash on the wrist by falling glass, but this was bound up and soon he was at his post again.

Whole Block Menaced

For two or three hours the whole block in which the Kelly Building stands was menaced. Only the unmeasured torrent of water spilled on the fire and two stalwart fire walls kept the fire from sweeping through the whole block, bounded by Exeter pl, Harrison-av Extension, Essex and Chauncy sts, including the Essex-st Postoffice. Its most valuable portion is the eight-story building occupied mainly by Bowditch, Clapp & Co, fronting in both Harrison-av Extension and Chauncy sts. The company has a millinery stock estimated in value at \$500,000 in the building, which houses half a dozen other dealers in women's wares.

So fiercely did the flames beat against the northerly wall of this structure that they ate their way beneath the fire shutters of the top floor, occupied by the Butterick Pattern Company, and did considerable damage to the concern's stock. Other occupants suffered smoke and water damage. Skirting the Kelly building on Exeter pl and fronting on the corner of that 100-foot thoroughfare and Harrison-av extension, the five-story brick building occupied by the Marlier Publishing Company, Catholic Church Supply House, proved an effective

barrier to the spread of the flames in that direction.

The separating fire wall between it and the Kelly building was made of true-blue stuff, so the firemen said when it was all over. The upper four stories of this building are devoted to the clothing cutting and storerooms of the Talbot fire wall is attributable the company's escape with negligible loss.

Close to Telephone Birthplace

The house from which Alexander Graham Bell transmitted the first complete and intelligible telephonic message to Thomas Augustus Watson, in March, 1876, stood on the site where now stands the Marlier Company's plant. The first alarm of today's fire, which broke out within 25 feet of the tablet which the Bostonian Society erected last year to mark the fact, was sounded by an automatic instrument for giving warning of fires, which is a supplemental development of Mr Bell's idea.

Perched upon the eaves of this same building throughout the fire were a dozen and more pigeons. In the murk and fog of the early morning they appeared unwilling to trust themselves to seek a less dangerous place. They huddled together in the recesses of the coping until dawn, when they flew off one by one for more comfortable quarters. They were never in danger.

Beside being the worst fire that has confronted the department for several years, this morning's may be said also to have been the most "temperamental." When Engine Companies 26 and 7, first on the scene, drew into Exeter pl, that side of the building was a seething mass of flame and smoke. The men had no sooner coupled their hydrant buckles than a series of violent hot air explosions blew hundreds of panes of glass down upon their heads.

Huge tongues of flame leaped out at the windows and in a trice the firemen made up their minds it was necessary to seek a safer foothold. So they withdrew into Chauncy st and gave excellent account of themselves there.

Five Alarms in Quick Succession

Patrolman George Andrews of the Lagrange-st Station was upon the scene soon after the automatic alarm had sounded; he himself rung a bell alarm at box 140, Chauncy st and Rowe pl, two minutes after the automatic had sounded at 1:58 a m.

District Chief Ryder, acting for Deputy Chief Tabor, at home on his day off, was soon upon the scene and ordered the second, third and fourth alarms sounded from the same box, without intermission. News of the situation was telephoned to Chief McDonough at his Charlestown home, and the chief's son, Edward, chief's aid, hustled him to the spot. The chief saw that he must play his best cards, so to speak, and at once sent in a fifth alarm, which brought practically every piece of available apparatus in the city to the job.

By this time the billows of flame from the Kelly Building had leaped across the 25-foot width of Exeter pl and ignited parts of the roof and upper window frames of the six-story building occupied mainly by the William Skinner Company, dealers in satin, the front entrance to which are at 77 and 79 Chauncy st.

Water Tower 2, with its brace of powerful deck guns and an equally sturdy nozzle at the top of the "big stick," had been placed in Harrison-av extension, and with its streams and those of other engines concentrating on this facade of the Kelly Building, the flames were slowly but surely beaten back within the confines of the side wall. The trooping tower was gradually backed down into Exeter pl and performed perhaps the most valuable service in beating back the flames here, sticking to its post throughout, although many times menaced.

Flames Leap Chauncy St

While this business was in progress the flames had leaped across wider chauncy at and melted into showering sunbeams the big plate glass windows in the shops of the Cunnery, Jones Company and the Seale, Clement Company.

At this point, too, several units took a short stand, notable among them being Companies 1 and 3, and these stayed undisturbed through the tough tangle.

Thus squelched on three sides, the

fire backed up against the massive, unbroken wall of the Bowditch, Clapp & Co home. Scooting skyward, the flames shot out through the upper windows of the Kelly Building and besieged the topmost fire shutters on the neighboring building, finally gaining admission beneath their crevices and working some havoc to the Butterick Pattern Company's stock.

Serious Blaze at Grove Hall

At the height of the fire the alarm for a serious-looking blaze in Roxbury was sounded, and when this news was noised about concern among the department executives deepened. Fire Commissioner John Grady had arrived at the fire at 3 a m, or pretty nearly the time when the Grove Hall fire broke out, and Chief McDonough at once sought and consulted him.

The chief had a few minutes before sent a telephone order to headquarters requesting Engine 14 to come in from its Center-st Station, Jamaica Plain, and Engine 5, from East Boston. This method was adopted to avoid sounding a sixth or general alarm, which would have brought the half dozen remaining pieces of apparatus to the spot which were then engaged in the "covering up" process. The two engines named were soon upon the scene, and the wisdom of the chief's tactics was soon proved when the Roxbury alarm was sounded.

The engine company and ladder truck which the chief had chosen to keep in Roxbury helped wonderfully in winning the day there, for that fire was under control in a comparatively short time.

Many Firemen Fell

Many of the firemen were lamed by stumbles or falls in the dark, icy streets and not a few of them were pretty well doused by bullet-like streams or spray. They continued to work like beavers. The hosemen had powerful nozzles leveled at the flaming windows on all sides of the Kelly Building. From the Skinner Building alone, across narrow Exeter pl, 15 separate lines poured their contents through the windows opposite. The roof of the Bowditch, Clapp & Co Building had its quota of lines, too, as did the roofs of the buildings on the easterly side of Chauncy st.

Ladder Company 17, speeding up from its Harrison-av quarters, made the S curve into Essex st and shot into Chauncy st with a giddy career. The fall of its ladders swung over against a police box on the westerly side of the latter thoroughfare, snapping the box post clean off at its base and laying it low. Near the box at the moment was policeman Andrews, who had sounded the first box alarm, but he escaped injury.

He had just given the officer at the station a general outline of the situation, and within a few minutes two-score policemen, half the number reserve men "sleeping in," and the remainder hastily summoned from other precincts, were there or on their way. Sergt John McDonald was in charge of the squad.

It Was Hard to Keep Warm

From the police point of view, however, it was a soft job, the most onerous task being that of keeping warm. Three representatives of the Box 52 Association were upon the scene with welcome celerity, and their mugs of hot coffee, doled out from big cans, hit the right spot always.

Perhaps 1000 spectators remained to see the fire extinguished, and these gave the police little trouble. It was a raw, cold morning, and the most "comfy" place was as near as one could get to a firebox without interfering with the engine men.

Engine 14 with its capacity of 900 gallons per minute and a resounding thrum, audible above the roar and wheeze of a half dozen engines of lesser power, was the cynosure of a throng of enthusiastic electrical "experts," who discussed in a knowing way the merits of this latest addition to Boston's splendid fire-fighting equipment.

Engines Worked in Groups

Engine Companies 23, 15 and 12, working in a group got in some all-powersful blows against the spread of the fire southward. Fearing it might encompass the Essex-st Postoffice Building, these companies kept a strait and two on this structure. So grave was the fear for that building, at the outset, that half a dozen wagons were sent there from the central office and stood ready to hustle out the most important cases in the Essex-st Building, should the necessity arise.

suffered no appreciable damage, save a little water in the basement.

Engines 25, 7 and 4 bunched themselves together at a hydrant in Bedford st at the head of Chauncy st, and fed long lines of hose 3000 gallons of water a minute. Engines 43, 33, 17 and 13 combined a block up Bedford st, facing on Harrison-av extension, and "did their bit" in smart firemanly style. Engines 35, 39 and 32 were stationed in Chauncy st, opposite Rowe pl, and likewise performed admirable service. Engineers fighting the fire said that, were the high-pressure service ready for their use, they could have accomplished even a better showing with this biggest job they have tackled in years. Each had a twinkle in his eye, too, when "the buffer boys" referred to recent criticisms to the effect that Boston has an inadequate and antiquated fire-fighting organization. An expert in such matters estimated that 400 men and 50 pieces of apparatus fought the fire.

The Relief Hospital ambulance corps was early stationed at the scene, although its help was needed in only a few slight cases. Medical Examiner Magrath and Dr William J. Dunn, police surgeon, hastened to the scene at the second alarm and stayed there until the end, although their services were not needed.

Women Carried Across Streets

Thousands of salesmen and women, early Monday bargain-hunters and downtown workers, gazed upon the sorry spectacle of the Kelly Building in the forenoon, while the firemen were putting the last finishing touches upon their work. This and all other structures within its range were ice-coated, as were sidewalks and pavements. Stenographers were, in some cases, carried across very wet and muddy streets by gallant coworkers.

My and Mrs John J. Hennessey and other firm members who responded to the police notification in the wee sma' hours remained about the scene until 9 a m, when they went home in their waiting motor cars.

Apprehension was expressed concerning the walls of the Kelly Building, which bulged noticeably in some places and sagged in others, and Exeter pl was roped off later. The building is owned by the P. W. Hunnewell estate and is assessed for \$65,500. Evidently it will have to be reconstructed thoroughly.

LOSS OF ABOUT \$3000

Blaze in Regent Building, Roxbury, Handled by One Engine Company and One Ladder Company

A fire which was dangerous principally because most of the apparatus in the city was at the Chauncy-st fire, broke out at 3:30 a m in the Regent Building, 442-448 Warren st, Roxbury, at the junction of Blue Hill av. It was finally extinguished by one engine company and one ladder company, which had nearly a mile run to reach it, with a loss of about \$3000.

The fire is supposed to have started in the basement of the building, from a cause unknown. It burst up into the second floor, which is occupied by the J. J. McHugh Liquor Company, and 6th, the J. T. Connor Grocery Company, both of which were damaged.

The flames never got above the first floor of the three-story brick building, the damage in the second and third floors being caused by water and thick smoke. Nor did it get into the savings bank, which occupies the ground floor at 448.

The second floor over the stores which was burned is occupied by the Catholic Apostolic Church, and the third floor by Regent Hall.

THOMAS KELLY & CO LOSS IS TOTAL ON \$200,000 STOCK

The fire on Chauncy st this morning, in the heart of the dreaded "congested" district, will cost the fire insurance companies involved about \$300,000.

Local fire insurance men have nothing but praise for the manner in which the fire was handled. William A. Miller, president of the corporation which handles the insurance on the stock of Thomas Kelly & Co, upon which the heaviest losses were sustained, said that the Kelly loss alone would be at least \$200,000, while the building, valued around \$100,000, was completely ruined. He declared that there will be heavy smoke and water damage in adjoining buildings.

Mr Miller said that the fire was perhaps the most powerful object lesson that the city could receive of the need for expediting the completion of the new fire-fighting machine section. By threatening the entire section with the

pipes from a powerful pumping station, he believes that the fire could have been handled even more effectively than it was, with the bread of its spreading into a conflagration eliminated altogether.

The following is the list of insurance on the wooden stock of Thomas Kelly & Co, 89 Chauncy st, placed by the William A. Mueller & Co, Corporation:

Company	Amount
Atlas, England	\$5,000
London Assurance, England	5,000
North British, England	5,000
Queen, New York	10,000
Edinburgh, Scotland	10,000
Continental, New York	20,000
Royal, England	10,000
Scottish, Scotland	5,000
Mercantile, New Jersey	5,000
Liverpool and London and Globe, Eng.	12,000
London and Lancashire, England	15,000
Glen Falls, Glen Falls, N. Y.	10,000
Fidelity Phenix, New York	10,000
Phoenix, Connecticut	5,000
Boston	5,000
Northern, England	10,000
Atlas, England	5,000
Rich Term Ltd	10,000
Union, France	5,000
Hartford, Connecticut	7,500
Palatine, England	5,000
Yorkshire, England	5,000

Total \$200,000