

# 4-ALARM FIRE AT NORTH STATION

## Old Fitchburg Depot Is Swept by Flames



FLASHLIGHT PHOTOGRAPH OF OLD FITCHBURG DEPOT AT  
HEIGHT OF THE FIRE.

## Four Firemen Injured, Three Not Seriously—Damage \$50,000

The old Fitchburg Depot, adjacent to the Boston & Maine Railroad station and one of the landmarks of Boston, was seriously damaged by a fire which started a few minutes before 10 o'clock last night. Before it was brought under control the fire burned out most of the upper story of the structure and honeycombed the roof for a distance of about 200 feet.

Four alarms were sounded for the fire, the first at 9:55 and the fourth being ordered within 10 minutes from that time. This brought apparatus from the entire downtown section to the scene, and because of the wonderful opportunity the firemen had to bring into play their apparatus and get their heavy lines to

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work, the fire was soon under control.

## Fireman Injured

Frank Benford of 24 Monument sq. Charlestown, attached to Engine 50, Charlestown, was injured during the fire when he was struck by a piece of ceiling when it fell. He was treated at the Haymarket Relief Hospital for multiple bruises of the body.

During the fire, Chief Sennott ordered the greatest care taken by the fire fighters to prevent injury. The aerial ladders were swung out from the building instead of resting against the roof as usual, to prevent the firemen being carried into the ruins in case the roof collapsed.

At 11 o'clock the blaze was practically extinguished. Only the gutted condition of the roof, where embers still smoldered, and the ruins of a portion of the top floor of the building indicated that a serious fire had been in progress.

During the fire the operation of the trains in and out of the North Station was not affected in the least. The Fitchburg Depot has not been used for years for active service and has been utilized in late years as a locker building and rest room for trainmen in the Boston & Maine service and also for offices of the auditing department of the road and storage purposes.

The building was erected in 1847 and is of a construction that is not seen in latter day construction. It is more than 300 feet long crowned with four immense stone towers. The roof is of slate.

## Discovered by Expressman

When the fire was first discovered by Walter Bailey, an employe of the American Express Company, it was burning on the second, top-floor, of the building near the end which is close to the yards of the road. It could be seen through the windows, and an alarm was immediately sounded. A second alarm was sounded within five minutes, as soon as the first fire chief reached the scene, and this was followed closely by the other two alarms.

Despite the efforts of the firemen at the start the flames gained headway and, borne along by a wind which was blowing toward the city, the fire raced toward the front of the building. It had gone about 200 feet when the heavy lines of hose began to get in their work and the progress of the fire was stopped.

Pieces of apparatus were stationed on three sides of the building and with the high pressure water service in full operation tons of water was soon being poured into the building.

## Reflection Seen for Miles

When the fire was at its height and a considerable part of the roof was burning the reflection of the blaze could be seen for miles and from places as far away as Chelsea, Everett, Cambridge and Somerville. This brought thousands of persons to the scene and police reserves were called out to keep the crowd in check and to prevent them interfering with the work of the firemen.

Some difficulty was experienced by the police in affording this protection because of the large area around the burning building. Scores of officers were pressed into service from downtown stations.

During the fire the lights in the outward baggage room of the North Station were extinguished. This plunged the baggage room into darkness. The quarters of the American Railway Express, which are adjacent to this room, were not in darkness, but extra express police and railroad officers were called upon to do duty and protect the express and baggage material.

At the time the fire started, two

freight cars were on a spur track close to the depot. The flames did not communicate with these cars and although clouds of large burning sparks were carried away from the building by the wind no other fires were started.

## Losses by Trainmen

It was said by a trainman in the employ of the Boston & Maine that many of his fellow-employes would suffer personal losses from the fire, as it has been customary for them to leave their clothing and other personal belongings in their lockers when they go off duty. At the time of the fire there were no persons in the building, as far as could be ascertained, as it is patronized mostly during the day.

Traffic in the Subway and on the Charlestown line and the Eastern Massachusetts lines were tied up for several minutes by the fire, until plans were completed for rerouting the cars over lines which were not affected by the massing of the apparatus near the building.

Although the fire was only a block away, no difficulty was experienced by persons entering and leaving the North Station.

## Built in 1847

The old Fitchburg Station has served in many capacities since its erection in 1847.

For many years this fort-like building was the architectural wonder of America, "the black bastille," as one Southern lady described it. Excursion parties used to go especially to see it.

When Jenny Lind, the famous "Swedish Nightingale," visited Boston and the general public complained that it cost too much to hear her sing, she gave a free concert on the huge floor of the depot. During the Civil War recruits for the Union Army drilled in the station. The first commuter's theatre train left the station one night in 1864.

The North Station was built and by 1901 the Fitchburg Station was completely rebuilt.

The granite for its thick walls came from 10 miles above Fitchburg. It cost a half million dollars, a vast sum for the period. The depot was 310 feet long and 75 feet wide. The clock in its facade has counted the hours and minutes for more than three-quarters of a century.

Originally there was a clock at each end of the building, and the dials were illuminated. Above the clock on the front of the building was the copper miniature of a locomotive. In its day it was regarded as a very fine piece of work, and many were the praises showered on the genius who constructed the ornament, which is modeled after the early patterns of locomotives. Its clumsy smokestack recalls the days when engines burned wood.

Until 1875 the towers in the front of the building were open, and stairs wound around inside to the huge hall which covered the entire length of the second floor for many years.

The offices of the road were in the second story at this time. One day a man named Stover, cashier of the road, was going up the winding stairs with a large sum of money when he met two men, ostensibly Army recruits, who struck Stover several staggering blows with a bludgeon. Stover managed to remain standing and call for help; the robbers escaped without the money. Later Stover went to an asylum, insane, it was believed, from blows on the head.

## Four Firemen Injured

According to Chief Daniel F. Sennott, the damage was about \$50,000.

Beside fireman Benford, there were others who suffered injuries, though these were slight. Charles Myers of Engine 23 went to the Haymarket Relief Hospital for treatment of a right thumb nail which had been ripped off. Lieut. Berringer and Hoseman Walter Cook of Engine 50 suffered slight bruises from a falling ceiling. All three returned to fight the fire.

As the flames gave way before the firemen, it became obvious what a remarkable job the department had done. The top story of the station, where most of the fire was, is a clean sweep, has no partitions, and under circumstances flames are almost impossible to stop. Yet the firemen checked it by several lines of hose. Engine 8, at the northern part of the building, did effective work with a high-pressure gun.

When the flames were under control, Fire Commissioner Theodore A. Glynn went to the Relief Hospital to ascertain the condition of the injured firemen.