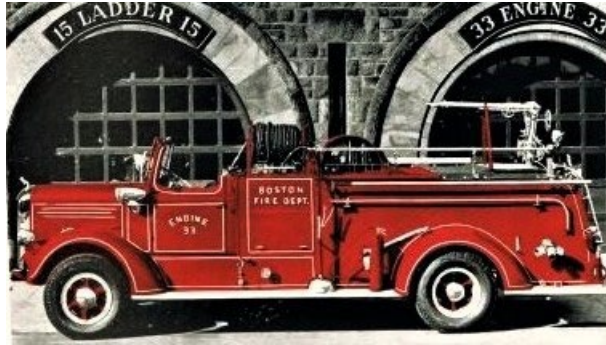


## *Box 52 Association*



## *The Line Box*



*I.F.B.A. Member club since 1955!*

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Vol. 20 No. 4 Part One

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***Chelsea Ladder 1 operating at the American Barrel Co. fire 50 years ago May 22, 1974.  
Our feature story! Photo by member Peter Aloisi***

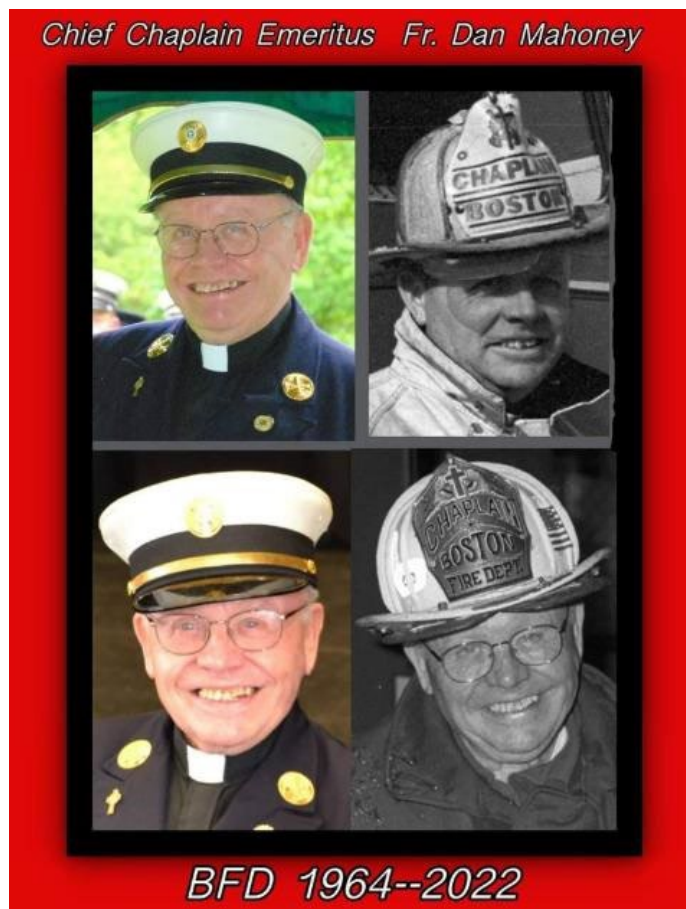
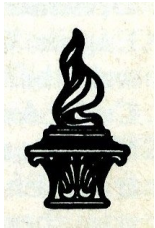
### ***Welcome Faithful Readers!***

This is our fourth and final issue of the Line Box for the 2023-2024 season. You may have noticed on the masthead that this is part 1 of the fourth issue. Part 2 will be sent out a few days later and will contain more great content and is our largest Line Box we have ever produced. Giving you plenty of some great summer reading!

In this issue we will look back fifty years at the American Barrel fire in Chelsea. Past President Rick Conway tells the story of the little known Nashua, New Hampshire conflagration ninety four years ago.

We cover the spat of recent jobs in Boston including the car fire in the Ted Williams Tunnel. We also cover a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm in Woburn where first alarm companies made a rescue from the roof of the dwelling.

Have a great summer, be safe and see you all in September!



It is with deep regret that we announce the passing of Retired Boston Fire Chaplain Father Daniel J. Mahoney. Father Mahoney, well known to all in the fire service, served faithfully for 57 years in the Boston Fire Department. Appointed November 1, 1964 as an assistant chaplain becoming the Senior Assistance Chaplain on July 1, 1972 and Chief Chaplain on October 1, 1991. He retired on June 17, 2022. He was 94 years of age.

Father Mahoney became a Box 52 member on January 21, 1965 and was the 2nd senior most member of Box 52.

May his soul rest in eternal peace.

Collage courtesy of member William Noonan.

***The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the***  
**American Barrel Company Fire**  
**207 Carter Street**  
**Chelsea 5-262**  
**May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1974**  
**Line Box Staff Report**

Since many of us are students of Boston area fire history we remembered that May 22<sup>nd</sup> in 1964 was a banner day for the Boston Fire Department. At 0800 hours at Fort Hill Square the new Rescue was put in service on a 1964 Mack B chassis with a Gerstanslager body looking like a twin to the FDNY's Rescue Co. 1. All was quiet till box 7251 was transmitted for a fire on Bellflower Street in South Boston at 1339 hours and this fire became known as the Bellflower Street Conflagration. A new chapter in the area's fire history was about to be written.



Photo courtesy of the Boston Globe Archives. Photo by J. O'Connor

**Background on the American Barrel Company**

On May 22<sup>nd</sup> American Barrel Company was located at 207 Carter Street and was considered by the entire Chelsea Fire Department as a prime fire hazard. The company had suffered fires over the years with the last being on April 4<sup>th</sup> and caused one thousand dollars in damage.

On April 18<sup>th</sup> Deputy Chief Edward Roche in command of the C.F.D.'s Fire Prevention Bureau had served a cease and desist order for paint spraying and its barrel dipping operation. He had made two follow up inspections after the 18<sup>th</sup>. The first was for an environmental complaint. The second was made 10 days prior to the fire on May 12<sup>th</sup>. This inspection was to see if the order to cease painting and dipping operation had been complied with. The building was equipped with two sprinkler systems. Deputy Roche checked them both and they were found to be in operating condition. On the day of the fire only one system operated and did not activate the master box.

According to owner, Alvin Robbins, the first he knew of the fire was when a worker ran past him and pulled the box. He was quoted in the Evening Globe as saying "we were planning to liquidate the company's remains assets and move to New Hampshire".

**The Fire**  
**From the Box 52 Archives**  
**Special Feature Published June 1974**

Box 262 was sounded for the fire at 8:39 AM. First arriving companies found smoke coming from the American Barrel Company at Carter & Beech Streets. The two story wooden building sprawled the eastern side of Beech Street to the Northeast Expressway. The fire somehow worked its way under the building and quickly spread the entire length of the building. Buffs and firefighters who were on scene reported that it looked like it was sitting atop a gas stove burner as the flames raced along beneath it. Acting Chief of Department William Capistran (Chief of Department Herbert Fothergill was at the NFPA Annual meeting in Miami presenting a program on the October Conflagration) ordered a second alarm at 8:50, a third alarm at 8:55, fourth alarm at 9:02 and the fifth alarm at 9:08. All off duty firefighters were also called at 9:08 as the new horns atop Chelsea City Hall blew the ominous signal signifying that Chelsea was again afire.



Everett Ladder 2 being moved in a hurry. Photo courtesy of the Boston Globe Archives. Photo by J. Denehy

Within twenty minutes the walls of the American Barrel Company started to crumble as the fire totally involved the structure, which was in the process of being closed and was soaked with creosote and other chemicals used in the making and cleaning of barrels. Gases in the building resulted in several tremendous explosions and heavy electrical service wires and transformers exploded and caused a real hazard to firefighters. The heat from the roaring inferno, the large 2 story structure was totally involved in flame, was unbelievable. Arriving fire companies could do no more than join Chelsea companies backing away. Boston Engine 39 arriving on the Northeast Expressway ramp, stopped to get orders from Chelsea Officers. The crew of the engine found it almost impossible to get back in the apparatus and move it, the heat was so great. Several lines were used to cool the apparatus as the fire increased in intensity.

Spreading by radiant heat the fire jumped across Beech Street and ignited the Murdock Corporation at 158 Carter Street, the Ponn Machine Cutting Company at 245 Everett Avenue and Leatheron Inc. building at 217 Everett Ave. Gaining momentum the fire spread to the Chase Parker Company, at 211 Everett Ave, and Gans Tire Company at 148 Beech Street. The Palmer Spring Company at 143 Beech Street was also destroyed.



Lack of water pressure, almost helpless in their attempts to check the spread of the flames, lines were laid from Revere Beach Parkway, Washington Street and Broadway by mutual aid companies responding to the call over Newton Control.

As more and more equipment rolled into the City of Chelsea some very interesting relay pumping evolutions began to be established. Newton Engine 4 on Washington Ave pumped into Lynn Engine 3. Lynnfield Engine 1 at Broadway and Everett Ave. pumped into Brookline Engine 7 at Everett Ave and Walnut St that pumped into Newton Engine 3 at Everett Ave. and 4<sup>th</sup> Street. Saugus E1 pumped to Revere Engine 5 which pumped to Revere Engine 4 which was pumping to Chelsea Engine 1 which was fed by Reading Engine 1 and Chelsea Engine 3.

The fire was so intense that grass along the Northeast Expressway became ignited, the huge Thomas Strahan and American Optical buildings on Heard Street began to smoke and the asphalt siding on a three decker on Everett Ave. melted. Fortunately, at the time of the fire the wind was calm. If a strong wind was blowing from the northwest, the Strahan and A.O buildings would have undoubtedly become involved. If those structures had gone, much of the remaining area of Chelsea east of there could have been destroyed.

Damage was in the millions of dollars. 200 jobs were lost and 14 firefighters were injured, including late Box 52 member and Chelsea Firefighter Dennis Williams.

All photos next three pages by late Box 52 member H. Brenneck



**Chelsea Ladder 1, fully involved and no water pressure.**



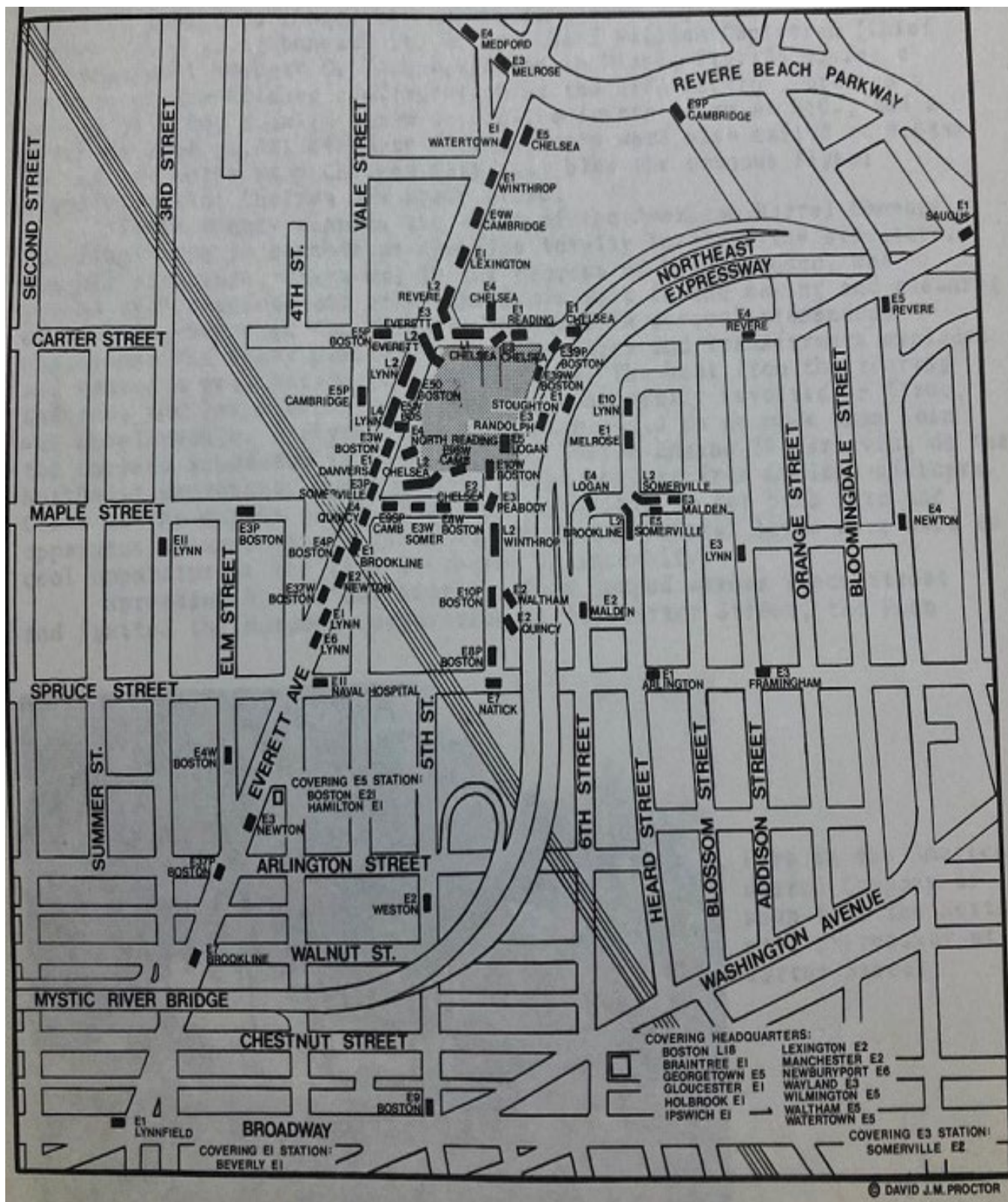
Booster line off Chelsea Engine 4 being used to cool the big Hahn pump.











### **The Aftermath**

Thirty eight communities, including Logan responded to the fire. Destroyed were four industrial buildings and heavily damaging two others:

American Barrel – Destroyed

Gans Tire Company – Destroyed

Unity Fruit Company\* –Destroyed

Ponn Machine Company\* –Destroyed

Charles Parker Industrial Supply Company – Damaged

Leatherton Plastics

*\*Companies renting space in the large Gans Tire warehouse.*

***This is the report which appeared in the NFPA's Fire Journal Magazine September 1975***

### **Conflagration, Chelsea, Mass. May 22**

A conflagration destroyed several buildings in Chelsea. Although a serious fire, it did not reach the size of the three preceding ones (April 1908, September 1908, and October 1973).

The fire started in a barrel-reclaiming plant, which was being vacated. It spread to a machine shop, two tire company buildings, an electronics firm, and several other industrial, commercial, and storage buildings before being contained. Few dwellings were threatened; however, nearby residents were evacuated as a precautionary measure.

The fire was near the area of the October 1973 conflagration. An expressway, railroad tracks, and one relatively wide street served as fire breaks. A light wind also helped the fire fighters, who responded from nearly 50 cities and towns.

Seven Chelsea fire fighters and two from Boston suffered from smoke inhalation and various other injuries. A Chelsea captain was taken to the hospital after a possible coronary attack, Fire fighters were hampered by chemical explosions and low water pressure. The exploding chemicals were responsible for the collapse of one roof and an outside wall. Flames leaped to the roof of seven nearby buildings.

The fire that started at 8:30 am has been attributed to sparks from a workman's torch that ignited flammable materials inside the barrel company. The total damage figure was set at \$3,592,326.91. Approximately 200 vehicles in the north-bound lane of the expressway had to turn around and use southbound lanes to exit to other streets. The billowing smoke forced authorities to close the highway for most of the day. The radiated heat was so fierce that it touched off a fire in an automobile on the expressway and ignited a three-story tenement building 100 yards away.

The area's mutual aid agreement was again called upon through the network control office located in Newton, Massachusetts. Forty-eight departments responded to the call with 116 pieces of equipment and 540 fire fighters and officers. Other area communities responded by filling in at neighboring towns along the way.



Date 5/22/74 (Box 262)Signed O. Neil + Gregorio  
Operator

**Fire Radio Network - Fire District #11**  
**Newton Fire Department - Control Point - 134.22 Hz.**  
**Daily Log**

(THIS WAS THE  
2ND - MAJOR FIRE)

Remarks  
(Use other side for  
additional remarks)

City or Town	Letters	Test	Other than Test
Arlington 1	KCH-311	E1-6:00P	E1 to Chelsea 9:21 AM E3 Covering Somerville 11:11 AM
Baldmont 1	KCD-849		E2 to Chelsea 10:52 AM
Boston 3	KCA-591		E1 & E2 to Chelsea 10:13 AM E5, E8, E10, E11, E12 to Chelsea 9:11
Brookline 4	KCF-364	LA-3:00P E1-6:00P	E2 to Chelsea 10:13 AM - Ret 3:00P E1 to Chelsea 10:30 AM
Cambridge 5	KCB-290	E9-6:15P	E9 to Chelsea 10:40 AM E5 to Chelsea 9:13 AM
Chelsea 6	KCD-985		2nd Box 262 - 8:52 AM 3rd Box 262 - 8:56 AM
Dedham 7	KCH-551		
Everett 8	KCH-424		E1 & E2 to Chelsea 9:00 AM E2 to Chelsea - 11:25 AM
Lexington 9	KCH-476		E1 to Chelsea - 9:53 AM E4 to Chelsea - 9:09 AM
Logan Airport 10	KQX-839		Edam Truck to Chelsea - 9:03 AM E2 to Chelsea 10:45 AM
Malden	KCH-732		E2 & E4 to Chelsea 10:30 AM
Medford	KCI-223		E4 to Chelsea 9:19 AM
Melrose	KDD-961	E2-8:03 E3-4:45	E3 & E5 to Chelsea - 10:30 AM E7 to Chelsea - 9:16 AM
Milton	KCB-747		
Needham	KCH-520		E2 Covering Newton - 10:45 AM E4 to Chelsea 9:18 AM
Newton	KOZ-632		E2 & E3 to Chelsea 10:46 AM E2 to Chelsea 10:38 AM
Quincy	KQM-679		E4 to Chelsea 11:06 AM E5 to Chelsea - 9:00 AM
Revere	KDB-728	LA-4:48A	E4 & E2 to Chelsea - 8:52 AM
Saugus	KDM-542		E1 to Chelsea - 8:56 AM E3 to Chelsea - 9:20 AM
Somerville	KDB-298		E5 & E2 to Chelsea - 9:12 AM
Waltham	KJJ-403	E5-4:23P E2-7:00P	E5 to Chelsea - 10:55 AM E2 to Chelsea - 9:26 AM
Watertown	KGY-613		E1 to Chelsea - 9:26 AM
Wellesley	KCB-403		E3 Covering Newton - 10:45 AM
Winchester	KCH-741		
Winthrop	KBC-205	E2-9:59 E1-9:59	E2 to Chelsea - 9:00 AM E1 to Chelsea - 8:56 AM
Lynn	KCC-886	E10-4:48 E3-4:48	E10 to Chelsea 9:13 AM E3 to Chelsea 9:13 AM

Courtesy of member Mark Roche



All below photos by member Peter Aloisi





### The Law Suit

Shortly after the fire, the five companies involved in the fire, with the exception of American Barrel Company, sued Chelsea over lack of water for sprinkler systems to operate properly and protect the building and property of the plaintiffs.

**16 Mass. App. Ct. 947 July 6, 1983**

*After the plaintiffs in these consolidated actions had completed their opening statements a judge of the Superior Court allowed the defendant city of Chelsea's motion for directed verdicts. This is an appeal from the resulting judgments entered in each action.*

*The facts alleged in the opening statements of the plaintiffs are as follows. On May 22, 1974, a fire broke out at the American Barrel Company, Inc., in Chelsea. As the fire spread through the American Barrel plant radiant heat from the flames caused damage to, or destruction of, the plaintiffs' buildings and personal property. The plaintiffs contended that the city of Chelsea was negligent in maintaining its water supply system; specifically, that the supply of water to the plaintiffs' sprinkler systems was not sufficient, and, as a result, the sprinkler systems were not able to contain or reduce the effects of the fire on the plaintiffs' property.*

*The plaintiffs argue that the water was to be supplied as the result of a commercial relationship; therefore, the consumption would be commercial in nature. We do not agree. The plaintiffs stated no facts in their openings which demonstrated in the instant circumstances a commercial or proprietary function on the part of the city of Chelsea. Regardless of how the plaintiffs try to characterize their sprinkler systems, the city was providing water for use in the sprinklers for fire protection. "A municipality operating waterworks pursues that activity in a dual capacity. So far as it undertakes to sell water for private consumption the city engages in commercial venture, functions as any other business corporation, and is liable for the negligence of its employees. In so far, however, as the municipality undertakes to supply water to extinguish fires, it acts in a governmental capacity and cannot be held liable for negligence on the part of its employees." Nashville Trust Co. v. Nashville, 182 Tenn. 545, 549 (1945), cited with approval in Reynolds Boat Co. v. Haverhill, 357 Mass. 668, 670 (1970). The Nashville Trust Co. case is in accord with the Massachusetts common law rule that there is no municipal liability for injuries arising out of the negligent failure to "furnish water for the extinguishment of fires." Reynolds Boat Co. v. Haverhill, supra at 669. A municipality is not liable for damages "caused by inadequacies in the system of fire protection." Id. at 670.*

*The plaintiffs' reliance on New England Mobile Book Fair, Inc. v. Boston, 2 Mass. App. Ct. 404 (1974), is misplaced, because in that case, the judge's ruling that "the city had been engaged in a proprietary function" was not challenged on appeal. Id. at 409-410 & n.6. Cole Drug Co. v. Boston, 326 Mass. 199 (1950), is likewise unavailing, as there the negligence of the city "arose not out of fire protection [functions] but out of acts related to the [main] water supply system." Id. at 201. Nothing in Sloper v. Quincy, 301 Mass. 20 (1938), is to the contrary. Judgments affirmed.*

Alphabetical List of Communities that responded.

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Engines</b>	<b>Ladders</b>
Arlington	1	
Beverly	1	
Boston	3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 21, 37, 29, 50	18
Braintree	1	
Brookline	1, 7	2
Cambridge	5, 9 (operating a spare)	
Chelsea	1, 3, 4, 5, 6 (Acting E2)	1, 2
Chelsea Naval Hospital	11	
Danvers	1	
Everett	3 (Acting E1)	2
Framingham	3	
Georgetown	5	
Gloucester	1	
Hamilton	1	
Holbrook	1	
Ipswich	1	
Lexington	1, 2	
Logan	4, 5	
Lynn	1, 3, 6, 10, 11	2, 4
Lynnfield	1	
Malden	2, 3	
Manchester	2	
Medford	4	
Melrose	1, 3	
Natick	7	
Newburyport	6	
Newton	2, 3, 4	
North Reading	4	
Peabody	3	
Quincy	2, 4	
Randolph	3	
Reading	1	
Revere	4, 5	2
Saugus	1	
Somerville	2, 3, 5	2
Stoughton	2	
Waltham	2, 5	
Watertown	1, 5	
Wayland	3	
Weston	2	
Wilmington	5	
Winthrop	1	2

**NEWTON CONTROL FIRE DISTRICT 13**  
**Response to American Barrel Chelsea 5-262**  
**May 22, 1974**

Community	Time	Engine	Ladder	Special	Comments
Arlington	0921 1111	1 3			To Chelsea Cover Somerville
Belmont	1052	2			To Chelsea
Boston	0900 1013 1025 1039	5, 8, 10, 39, 50 9, 21 34, 37	L-18	Dist 2	To Chelsea
Brookline	1013 1030	1	L-2		To Chelsea
Cambridge	0913 1040	5 9			To Chelsea To Chelsea
Dedham					
Everett	0900	1	L-2		To Chelsea
Lexington	0953 1125	1 2			To Chelsea To Chelsea
Logan Airport	0903 0909	4		Foam Truck	To Chelsea To Chelsea
Lynn	0915	3, 10			To Chelsea
Malden	1030 1045	4 2		R2 (Malden Emerg, Ctr)	To Chelsea To Chelsea
Medford	0919	4			To Chelsea
Melrose	0916 1030	7 3, 5			To Chelsea To Chelsea
Milton					
Needham	1045	2			Cover Newton
Newton	0918 1046	4 2, 3			To Chelsea To Chelsea
Quincy	1038 1106	2 4			To Chelsea To Chelsea
Revere	0852 0900	4 5	L-2		To Chelsea To Chelsea
Saugus	0856	1			To Chelsea
Somerville	0912 0920	5 3	L-2		To Chelsea To Chelsea
Waltham	0926 1055	2 5			To Chelsea To Chelsea
Watertown	0926	1			To Chelsea
Wellesley	1045	3			Cover Newton
Winchester					
Winthrop	0959	1	L-2		To Chelsea

Special thanks to all that helped to prepare this fifty anniversary report:

NFPA Library, Digital Commonwealth, Boston Globe Archives.

Members Steve Staffier who attempted to locate official CFD records as the E.O.C was being renovated. Bill Wilderman who poured through the records looking for the Special Report done for the fire. Member Peter Aloisi for the use of his photos. To late members Hank Brennick, Dennis Williams and Dave Proctor who left behind photos and lots of information.

The entire staff of the Line Box who never said no to a request for information and always managed to come up with the materials needed.





**Friday May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
Boston 2-9141  
Route Interstate 90 East. Ted Williams Tunnel. Ramp L**

**All photos courtesy of the B.F.D.**

Friday afternoon rush hour has started as everyone is ready to start enjoying a long weekend. A surprise to no one in the Greater Boston area, traffic is bumper to bumper and crawling in both direction on the Expressway. A typical Friday rush hour is in full swing.

The MSP radio starts the afternoon off with a report of a Signal 16 on the ramp to the Ted Williams Tunnel. MSP Unit H-9 acknowledges and starts for the location. Unit H-12 states he is coming from the Zakim Bridge and will stop ramp traffic. As H-12 pulls up he radios in "Part of the Tunnel is on fire! Have BFD step it up! People are running out of the Tunnel leaving their cars"! H-9 arrives and enters the Tunnel and reports he has three cars on fire and he can't see more because of the smoke. He requests that the HOC turn on all the ventilation fans. Other MSP units are arriving and start blocking all the ramps and the tunnel entrances. Troopers on the Ramp are trying to get cars turned around or to reverse off the ramp so the BFD can get to the fire,



Fire Alarm Office gets the call from the MSP at 1608 hours and strikes box 9141. They announce the location and advises to use channel 4. Engine Companies 5, 9 and Ladder 2 start for the Tunnel to stage at the toll booth. Boston side companies get their instructions, Rescue Co. 1 is to stage at Emergency Station 2 100 MassPort Haul Road.

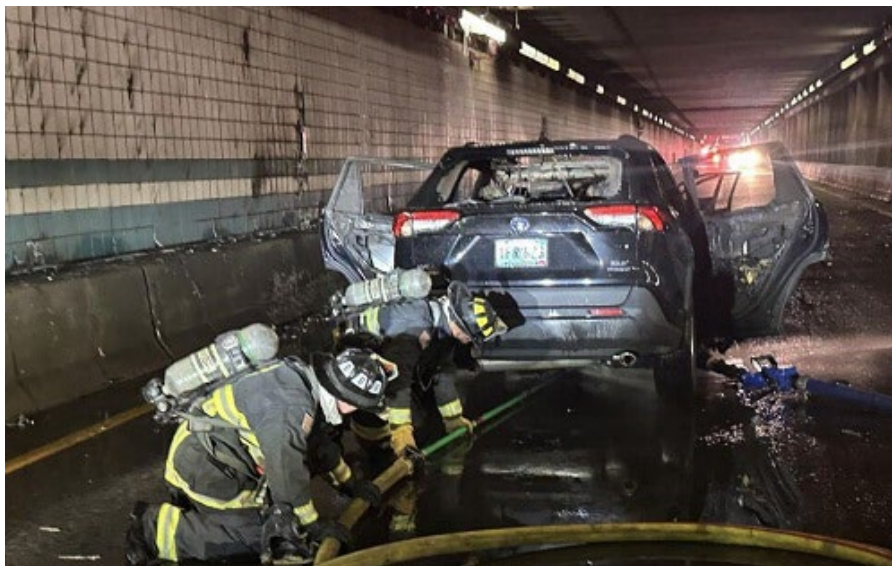
Car 6 reports that they have made it through the Tunnel and have seen nothing coming westbound. Fire Alarm is advised they are going to have to swing around and come east. C6 reports that he is at the MassPort H.O.C Engine 3 locates the fire and reports 3 cars fully involved they have a heavy smoke condition and can't see what is on the other side of the fire. They also report that the ceiling is on fire.

Fire Alarm was busy issuing instructions to the first alarm companies for their various assignments. Engine 39, Ladder 18 were ordered to set up for "contra-flow" (*companies to approach the scene from the wrong direction against traffic –Editor*) at Congress St and East Service road awaiting MSP escort.

Engine 10 was ordered to feed the stand pipe on Congress Street at Building 6. H-1 who was in the tunnel special called an additional engine to the fire. H-1 also reported air quality was good.

At 1626 hours C6 from the Tunnel H.O.C. ordered a second alarm. District 6 was the Operations Chief and he advised that the fire was against the ceiling and Engine was getting their Blitz Gun into action and that a collapse zone was being established, all incoming engine companies were advised to be ready to flow foam.

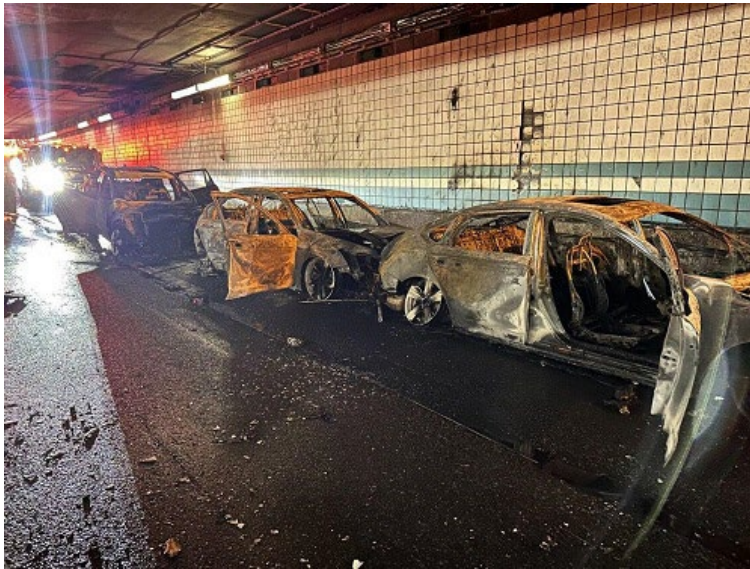
Operations requested an electrical and tunnel inspectors to the scene. Then reported he had 5 lines run flowing foam. Three lines were playing underneath a hybrid vehicle. The gasoline fire had been stopped. The smoke condition was lifting. Companies reported having difficulty using channel 4 and that messages were un-readable. A few minutes later a special call was issued for Engine 22 for their piercing nozzle. Two of the car fires were extinguished and only the Hybrid was still burning.



Engine Co 22 operating their piercing nozzle, note Blitz Gun on right side of photo.

The all out was transmitted at 1823 hours. The Boston Fire Department had responded to what could have become one of the worst disasters in the Cities history. The pre-planning of the entire Big Dig project showed its worth.

Time	Box	Engines	Ladders	Rescue	Special	Chiefs
1608	9141	5, 2, 10, 9, 39, 8	2, 18	1		C6, Dist 6, 7, H1
1626	2-9141	21, 4, 14, 22	4, 19		E42/LG2	



**Saturday May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024**  
**3-3648**  
**706-708 Walk Hill Street**

The quiet of a lazy Saturday afternoon, when the cries of **FIRE** were heard on Blue Hill Avenue and up and down Walk Hill Street. 9-1-1 calls were flooding in reporting a house fire and that people were trapped. Fire Alarm quickly transmitted Box 3648 Blue Hill Ave @ Walk Hill Street. They broadcast the alarm giving information that persons were reported trapped in the three story 6 family wood frame OMD. Fire Alarm broadcast the alarm again advising Car 12, Ladder 29 and Rescue 2 that people were in the building. Engine Company 18 was assigned as the RIT engine.

Engine 52 and Ladder 29 roared out of quarters, turned right on Blue Hill Ave for the short run to Walk Hill Street. Ladder 29 turned into Walk Hill Street and Captain Lynch ordered the second and third alarm together. Engine 52 pulled off a big line and started for the rear where the fire was reported. Ladder 29 and arriving Ladder 16 threw their aerials to the roof and crews hurried inside to start the search for the trapped residents. Rescue 2 would soon arrive and join the search.



Engine 52 advised Car 12 that they had heavy fire conditions in the rear and that the rear porches had burned through and they had extension the rear of the B exposure.

C7 arrived on scene and became Command and District 12 became Operations. Neighbors soon informed the firefighters that everyone was indeed out of the building and accounted for.

Companies hit the fire hard and it was soon knocked down with only slight extension to the exposure. The main fire building suffered heavy damage and the Red Cross was requested to aid those burned out of their apartments. The All Out was at 1726 hours

Time	Box	Engines	Ladders	Rescue	Chiefs
1358	3648	52, 16, 53, 18-RIT	29, 16	2	D-12
1402			TL-10, 6		D-8, H-1
1402	2-3648	24, 48, 28	23, 28		C7, D-10, D-7
1402	3-3648	17, 42	4		C-2 Chief of Ops Calobrisi





**June 12<sup>th</sup>**

**4-1883 5-7-9 Carson St.**

Just about 0505 hours Fire Alarm started to receive calls for a building fire on Carson Street in Dorchester. Box 1883 was transmitted Dorchester Avenue and Crescent Street for 10 Carson St. on District 7. Fire Alarm announced the box followed by 'receiving calls'

Engine Co. 21 pulled into Carson Street and reported fire showing from a 3 decker. Lt. Foley made his size up and ordered a second alarm at 0510 hours. Power lines across the front of the houses made the use of aerial ladders impossible. Orders were quickly given for Ladders 4 and 23 to throw 40 foot ground ladders.



The first progress reported that the main fire building was 7 Carson with extension to the Bravo exposure at 9 Carson and the Delta exposure at number 5.

District 7 then ordered a 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm and two minutes later a fourth alarm. Companies reported that they were making rescues at number 5 Carson. Primary searches were underway in the exposure buildings. Engine 2 was assigned to bring a big line down the alley way between 7 and 9 to try and cut off the fire from extending further on the rear porches of number 9.

Companies had lines run and were able to knock down most of the fire by 0549 hrs with extensive overhaul and Division 2 asked for a 2 and 2 fire detail.

Time	Alarm	Engines	Ladder	Rescue	Chief/Other
0505	1823	21, 17, 39, 24 RIT	7, 18	2	D7
	RIT	24, 7	TL10, 4, 19		D9 RIT, H1
0510	2-1823	14, 3, 2	23, 19		C7, D4, D8
0514	3-1823	22, 18	6		K1
0516	4-1823	20, 33	15		C1

**June 15th  
4-3428 27 & 31 Edson St**

At 1824 hours of a pleasant late spring Saturday evening, Boston Fire Alarm started receiving calls for 27 Edson Street in Dorchester. Box 3428 in District 8 was transmitted. Engine 16 arriving on scene reported smoke showing, seconds later Ladder 6 ordered a second alarm and reported they had two houses going.

Ladder 6 reported heavy fire in the rear of both houses and to stay off the rear porches of both buildings. Second alarm companies were arriving and Engine 53 was ordered to operate in the rear of the buildings. Ladder companies were conducting primary searches. Engine 53 reported to Command that the fire was now coming through the roof and to get the companies off the roof.



Command checking with Engine 24 operating inside number 31 Edson Street asked for a report and was told they needed another line to the second floor and help in opening up walls. Command, District Chief Whalen ordered a third alarm transmitted.

All primary searches were negative and Division 2 (C7) arrived and assumed command with District 8 now operations. The third alarm companies were ordered to respond to the front of the building. District 9 notified command that the rear interior stairs at 31 Edson Street were burned and for companies to stay off.

Companies were making good progress in both buildings and engine companies were asking Command for additional ladder crews with rakes to assist with opening up.

Division 2 Deputy Chief Doherty ordered a fourth alarm with an additional RIT engine and ladder to respond at 1855 hours.

Third alarm engine companies were being ordered to advance additional lines to the top floor of both buildings.

Command reported that the original fire building 27 Edson a 50'x50' 3 story woodframe, extended to exposure D side a 2 ½ wood frame at 31 Edson. Damage to two additional buildings on the exposure C side. All companies working and a special call for two additional ladder companies to respond.

At 1907 hours Command reported that fire in both buildings appears to be knocked down extensive overhauling, all companies working.

Time	Alarm	Engines	Ladder	Rescue	Chief/Other
1824	3428	16, 18, 52,	6, 29	2	D8
	RIT	24, 28	TL10, 23, 28		D7, H1
1827	2-3428	20, 17, 53	7, 6		C7, D4, D9
1835	3-2428	42, 21	4		
1855	4-2428	14, 48			
1907	Sp. Call		18, 26		

As always my thanks to honorary member retired BFD Commissioner Paul Christian for his assistance with both of these articles. And to the Broadcastify Radio Archives.

### Jobs That Don't Make the Six O'Clock News

Arlington, Sunday July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1977. A hazy hot and humid day. A call was received at Fire Alarm from the Police reporting a fire in the basement of Maida's Pharmacy. Box 154 Mass. Avenue & Windsor Street was transmitted at 1536 hours followed by a second alarm at 1540. The fire was at 127 Mass Ave in a one story taxpayer housing a pharmacy and Rocco's Italian Imports. The fire was found to be arson and set in the basement of the grocery store.

On Monday July 25<sup>th</sup> police and the State Fire Marshal arrested the owner of Rocco's after find numerous cartoons of cigarettes and other stock from the store in his apartment. Also on Monday the Board of Selectmen gave permission for the pharmacy to operate from a trailer on Windsor St.









Time	Box	Engines	Ladders	Rescue	Chief	Cover
1536	154	1, 4	1	1	C2	H.Q Park Circle
1540	2-154	2, Som. E6 Camb. E4	2		C1	Med E2 Som. L3 AFD E3



## **Hans Kisse Fire 7-21**

**May 20, 1991**

**21 South Street, Somerville MA**

**By District Chief Frank Lee**

**Hans Kisse:** Started operation in 1984 on South St. Somerville, they are manufacturers of prepared foods and deli salads.

**Building:** One and two story interconnected cinder block and wood, approximately 250 x 300 irregular. Roof was heavy rubber over old tar and gravel, with multiple heavy duty refrigeration units.

**Exposures:** Side A: South Street, Exposure A1: 15 South attached 2 story ordinary construction. Exposure A2; Three Story metal clad mercantile. Side B: Three story mill construction. Side C: 15 Ward St. Two story mill construction. 9 Ward St 2 1/2 story wood frame dwelling. 9A Ward St Two Story brick and wood dwelling with flat roof. 5 & 7 Ward St. Three decker with a flat roof. Side D: Large three story wood, 12 apartments with flat roof over the Hacienda Restaurant. One story cinder block auto body shop.

**Weather:** Warm and sunny, temps in the high 70's to low 80's, wind light.

**Somerville Fire Department:** At the time of the fire, the department consisted of 189 Firefighters in various ranks, up to and including the Civil Service Chief Engineer. There were 10 civilian Civil Service Fire Alarm Operators. A civilian Master mechanic and 1 FF assigned to the shop. The normal on duty shift consisted of 3 engines and 3 trucks. At HQ was the Deputy Chief in C2 (shift commander) in the West End was C-3 the District Chief. Both Chiefs had Aides (ICT's). Company strength was a minimum of an Officer and 2, with some companies riding 1 and 3. Members were still wearing rubberized Nomex coats and 3/4 length boots. The FAO is normally staffed with a Senior Operator and an Operator.

**The Fire:** Employees of the Hans Kisse Company reported seeing fire in a large pile of cardboard boxes. They attempted to fight the fire with extinguishers. The fire spread rapidly, causing Freon gas lines to burst, which forced the employees to evacuate the plant.

*Now we're off to the races!*

(1991 was bad financial times for the Commonwealth. Many FD's were facing huge budget cuts with many FF layoffs and company closures, coming up on July 1. At the time of the Box, many off duty Public Safety personnel from across the state were on Beacon Hill, protesting the upcoming budget cuts. Also in attendance was Somerville C-1, Chief Engineer Emilio Scalesse. When word spread of the big job in the Ville, it was every man for himself to get back. Eventually the off duty guys got to the fire ground and went to work, even the guys getting laid off. Somerville laid off 14 FF's on July 1 (including myself. - *Author*)

In the Somerville Fire Alarm Office, Senior Operator Al Carlino and Operator Paul Warren were on duty. At 1210 hours, Mr. Gamewell started to play his song, with Box 21 hitting, simultaneously the 1500 emergency lines lit up. 911? What's that?

**Box 21 Medford St and South St @ 1210** Engines 3 - 2 - 1, Cambridge Engine 3 Ladder 2, Ladder 3, C2. The normally first due truck is Tower 1, they were at another incident when the box was struck.

Engine 3 called off with smoke showing @ 1213, they laid 400' of 4" into the parking lot. They were met by a foreman stating that there was a fire in the center of the building. Also, there was a possibility of phosgene gas being produced from the burning Freon. The crew consisted of a Lt and 2 FF's, E3 stretched a 1 3/4 inch line to the interior. They encountered a very heavy smoke condition. After a while, not making any headway, they had to back out. This was due to cork insulation and Styrofoam starting to burn. After regrouping they put their Stang Gun and a 2 1/2 inch hand line in operation.



First due Engine 3 preparing the Stang. Engine 3 is x-FDNY Engine 306 a 1972 Mack. Photo by member Peter Aloisi

Ladder 2, the first truck to arrive, went interior with Engine 3. They searched for any remaining occupants and found none. They exited the building and threw a 35 to the roof and assisted Ladder 3 opening up. They went into a Ladder Pipe when they were ordered off the roof.

C2 Deputy Chief Graney arrived assessed the situation and ordered a Working Fire.

**45-21 @ 1218** Engine 4 and C3

**Special call @ 1222** for an extra engine and extra truck Somerville Engine 4 and Cambridge Ladder 4 (they were enroute to a cover assignment at Somerville Ladder 3 in Teele Square)

At this time heavy smoke started pushing from the cockloft. A second alarm was transmitted

**2-21 @ 1227** Somerville Engine 6, Somerville Engine 7, Cambridge Engine 5, Som Auxiliary Engine 9, Everett Ladder 3 (It is unknown what time Somerville Tower 1 cleared their still, but they were at the fire between the second and third alarm.) Interior companies were having great difficulty trying to push in to the seat to the fire.



**Special Call for a Tower Ladder @ 1234 Cambridge Ladder 1**

Conditions continued to deteriorate. Companies were ordered out of the building and a third alarm was transmitted.



Photo by member Peter Aloisi

**3-21 @ 1235 Boston Engine 32, Everett Engine 2, Cambridge Engine 4, and Boston Ladder 9**

At this time the fire started to vent out of the Bravo side, exposing dwellings and commercial buildings along Horace St and Ward St. A fourth Alarm was struck.

**4-21 @ 1243 Arlington Engine 2, Medford Engine 1, Malden Engine 3, and Malden Ladder 1.**

C1 Engineer Scalesse arrived on the fire ground at this time, after battling heavy traffic coming from the State House. He met up with Deputy Graney who gave him a run-down of fire conditions and possibility of Phosgene Gas being released.

C1 ordered all companies to place deck guns and ladder pipes on the fire building that was now heavily involved. Companies that came in Ward and Horace Streets were ordered to place lines on all the exposure buildings that were being impinged upon. If the fire jumped Horace St. it would be the Mystic Foundry and its sister company, the McIntire Brass Works. Buffs should recognize them as makers and worldwide suppliers of Brass fire poles and deck guns.

At this time C1 ordered the fifth alarm, these companies were to bring water in from mains that are not in use. C6 Deputy Kelleher became the water supply officer.



Photo by the Frank Lee

**5-21 @ 1305** Boston Engine 33, Chelsea Engine 1, Lexington Engine 1, and Medford Ladder 1.

**6-21 @ 1406** Revere Engine 4, Winchester Engine 4, Brookline Engine 1, and Revere Ladder 2

**7-21 @ 1459** Boston Engine 3, Winthrop Engine 1, Watertown Engine 1, and Chelsea Ladder 1

**Special Calls** after the 7th: Waltham Engine 2, Reading Engine 3, Boston Engine 10,



Photo by Frank Lee

**1700 hours** shift change. Group 1 relieved Group 2 at the fire. Companies were still heavily engaged and would be for many hours to come. All out of town companies were still operating as of 2200 hours, when the special call engines and the 6th & 7th Alarm companies started to be released.

The Somerville Auxiliary Fire was operating at the fire since the second alarm. They had responded with their Engine 9 and Two Lighting Plants. It was determined that they could not properly light up the entire fire ground with their equipment. (For the young buffs, apparatus didn't have the lighting capabilities of today. You were lucky if you had a couple 110V spot lights on the cab).



Malden Engine 3 feeds Everett Ladder 3. Chelsea EMA Command Post in front. Photo by Frank Lee

**1800 hours Special Call:** Cambridge Lighting Plant, Arlington Lighting Plant and Medford Lighting Plant

Around midnight a crane arrived to remove the collapsed roof and breach the walls to get at the deep seated fire.

Most Somerville Companies stayed at the fire scene overnight and some even relieving at the fire at 0800 on May 21st.

Thirteen Somerville FF's and Four out of town FF's were sent area hospitals, including Somerville Hospital, Cambridge Hospital, Mt Auburn Hospital and Mass General. Most for smoke inhalation.

The fire was investigated by the Somerville FIU and the MA State Fire Marshalls office.

Cause was accidental.

28 engines & 10 trucks operated at the fire on South St., 6 engines and 2 trucks covered the city and they were busy. The company never rebuilt in Somerville and is still in business at 9 Creek Brook Drive in Haverhill.

**All Out Box 21 @ 0848, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1991**



Photo by Frank Lee



**But fire gods were not done with their work in the Ville, this night:**

In the Somerville Fire Alarm Office the overnight shift was almost two hours old with Senior Operator Wayne Kennedy and Operator Bill Sloane manning the room. The normal amount of stills were coming in with the covering companies and pilots taking them in. At 0046 Mr. Gamewell woke up and started to bang out Box 37, Magoun Square, Broadway @ Medford St.

**Box 37 @ 0046** Quincy Engine 2, Arlington Engine 2, Medford Engine 5 Boston Ladder 18, Arlington Ladder 2 (all from cover) and C4, the covering Chief Officer, who was District Chief Bill Hurley.



Photo by Frank Lee

C-4 called off @ 0048 with smoke from a 2 story taxpayer, ordinary construction, 75 x 75 pie shaped building that fronted on two streets, 490 Broadway and 531 through 545 Medford St. With Mike's Hardware on the ground floor and multiple small businesses on floor 2. At this time C-4 transmitted a Working Fire. C-3 the on duty District Chief, Mike Regan (who was also on duty during the day shift) was just clearing the 7th alarm and responded.

**45-37 @ 0049** Newton Engine 3, Somerville C 3.

On the transmission of the Working Fire, Somerville asked Boston for a covering Engine to Engine 3, which is a normal assignment. It just happened that Engine 32 had backed into their quarters in Sullivan Square less than an hour before and now they were heading down Washington St to the Union Square Station for the second time in 12 hours.

Quincy Engine 2 ran a 1 3/4 line to floor 2 and played on the seat of the fire. Medford Engine 5 came in and stretched to floor 2 in the adjacent business. Arlington Engine 2 stretched a line to floor 2 also. Arlington Ladder 2 put the stick to the roof, they opened 3 skylights and then went to work opening the roof. Boston Ladder 18 threw

ground ladders to floor 2 and went in to open up. Newton Engine 3 took a line over a ground ladder to floor 2.

At this time a few Somerville companies were being released from the 7th alarm, most heading to Somerville HQ to refill bottles.

At this point, the fire in Magoun Square was extending into the roof, a second alarm was transmitted.



Photo by Frank Lee

**2-37 @ 0054** Boston Engine 32, Somerville Engine 1, Somerville Engine 2, Somerville Ladder 2 and responding from the 7th Alarm C-1, Chief Engineer Scalesse.



Photo by Frank Lee

**All Out Box 37 @ 0146**

Fire was investigated by Somerville FIU and the Marshalls office. Probably electrical in origin.

Or rats and matches!

**Nashua, New Hampshire Conflagration  
General Alarm Box 9  
May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1930  
By Member Richard Conway  
All photos Digital Commonwealth Leslie Jones Collection**

The 1930s were known as the Decade of Disasters in the city of Nashua, NH. There was the springtime flood of 1936 that saw the Merrimack River rise 18 feet out of its banks and flood the east side of the city. There was also the Hurricane of 1938 that caused considerable wind and rain damage to the area, toppling trees and flooding city streets. By far, the most devastating disaster was the Crown Hill Fire, which occurred on May 4, 1930.

Nashua, NH is a city located at the confluence of the Merrimack and Nashua Rivers. The city is on the Massachusetts/New Hampshire border, about 40 miles north of Boston, 14 miles north of Lowell, and 18 miles south of Manchester. At the time of the fire, the city was a large manufacturing center, with several large mill complexes along both banks of the Nashua River and also had a large number of lumber yards. The area of the city is about 33 square miles. The population was about 30,000 (today, 95,000), with most development being west of where the F. E. Everett Turnpike runs today.

The fire department was staffed by 43 full time and 15 call firefighters and operated out of 4 firehouses. The fleet consisted of 4 1,000 gpm piston pumpers, 4 hose and booster wagons, 1 75-foot aerial ladder, and 2 city service ladder trucks. All were manufactured by Ahrens-Fox. There was also a Seagrave hose and chemical wagon and a Maxim city service ladder truck in reserve. The city was covered by a Gamewell telegraph fire box system. Water distribution in the area was provided by the privately owned Pennichuck Water Works. Water south of the Nashua River, in the fire area, was distributed by only 2 10-inch and several 8-inch mains. Most of the water on the side streets was supplied by 6-inch or 4-inch mains. At the time of the fire, the operating pressure was at 67 psi. The pressure dropped initially, but by activating the pumping system on the sounding of the General Alarm, the pressure in the system was raised to 75 psi. This pressure could not be maintained, though, throughout the fire. There was a tapper in the water works office and it was normal procedure to up the pressure when a fire was in progress.

Conditions for a major fire were favorable. Little rain had fallen in the weeks before May 4. There had been very low humidity, and a warm wind of 25-30 mph was blowing out of the northwest. The area immediately south of the fire's origin was a densely packed mercantile and tenement area and the area south of East Hollis Street had many one- and two-family dwellings with wooden shingles on the roofs.

The quiet of a Sunday afternoon was broken when pedestrians noticed smoke curling from under the railroad bridge that spans the Nashua River from Temple St. to Canal St., behind the Jackson Mills. The bridge was a 200 foot long, double track, wooden bridge. Each track was a separate enclosed wooden bridge. There was a wooden enclosure surrounding both bridges. In essence, it was 2 wooden tunnels, inside of another wooden tunnel. At about 1400 hrs, Box 9 at Temple and East Pearl was pulled for the fire and the apparatus from Central Fire Station responded. The fire seemed insignificant at first and a line was run out onto the bridge. The construction of the bridge, with all of its concealed spaces, did not allow the stream to get to the seat of the fire and the wind began to intensify the fire. At 1417 hrs, Chief Smith ordered Box 35 on Canal Street pulled to bring

in fire companies from the north. The apparatus from the Amherst Street station responded to this. They were joined by the fire brigade from the Jackson Mills, and soon had 5 streams in operation. The sheathing on the bridge still prevented the streams from reaching their target and the fire intensified. Soon flames were shooting 75 feet above the bridge and the wind was blowing sparks across the neighborhoods to the south.



By 14:25 the General Alarm had been sounded and a call put out to surrounding communities for “all available help.” The desk man at Central had by this time become overwhelmed with bell and phone alarms and was concentrating on just getting outside aid into the city. All times from this point forward are estimates. The wind driven brands at this point were beginning to start roof fires on South St. and Temple St. The fire then jumped Temple St. and set fire to the Nashua Building Company. This company consisted of several large wood framed buildings. It spread from here to dwellings on Williams Ct., Worcester St., and Spruce St. Most of these dwellings had wood shingles for roofs. The large J. S. McElwain Shoe complex was greatly exposed. This complex consisted of several one- and two-story brick buildings that had a sprinkler system. Several windows were cracked, and two wooden doors were ignited, but six sprinkler heads activated and held the fire in check. The fire then swept further south, sparing the complex.

The fire in the Nashua Building Company complex joined up with the fires on Worcester and South Streets and roared down Spruce St. At Spruce and east Hollis Sts., the fire burned several large sheds. They had fire-resistive roofs, and this slowed the progress of the fire a bit. Mutual aid was starting to arrive and go to work. Hudson, NH had arrived with 2 engines and 10 men and Merrimack, NH would soon arrive with an engine and 20 men.

At 14:45 the fire reached the Proctor Brothers and Company complex at the corner of East Hollis and Marshall Sts. This complex consisted of several large wood frame factory buildings, including the 3 story 150 X 40 cooper shop and the 3 story 120 X 50 woodworking shop. Although these buildings had sprinkler systems, they were severely exposed and burned to the ground. The fire continued south down Marshall in a wedge shape. It got into several lumber yards where wood was openly stacked 8 to 10 feet high. Soon lumber piles along Marshall from East Hollis to Bowers Sts. were all on fire. It continued the length of Marshall St., burning every dwelling on the street. Then fire also continued to the east. It burned in the stave yards and burned across the railroad tracks. It was heading up the hill towards the residential areas. By 15:30 more mutual aid began to arrive and go to work.





Westford, MA sent one pump with 8 men, Milford, NH sent 2 pumps with 20 men, Lowell, MA sent 4 pumps with 50 men, Manchester, NH sent 2 pumps with 20 men.

By 15:35, the buildings of the White Mountain Freezer Company were on fire at Allds St. The fire continued up the hill and into the Crown Hill Baptist Church and the Infant Jesus Church. There were 600 people at Infant Jesus for a play that was being put on by children. Everybody was lead to safety in an organized evacuation.

The fire continued south into the residential area of Crown Hill. Here, the fire was slower moving, as the houses were further apart. It was described as many individual fires as the wood shingled roofs spread the fires house to house. There was no wall of flame exposing buildings, as it had been in the commercial areas. Apparatus was placed in a flanking position and a plan was developed to try to pinch the fire into something slow moving and manageable, as opposed to actually cutting it off. The wind driven brands were starting individual roof fires in a checkerboard pattern and there was no longer a flame front. The fires in the one- and two-family dwellings were burning from the roof down. Residents had time to try to save their property. There were large piles of belongings stacked in the street or in side yards. Many times, these piles would ignite, other times the fire would pass right over them. Mutual aid continued to arrive at the fire. Chelmsford, MA sent 1 engine with 35 men, Lawrence, MA sent 1 engine with 10 men, Pepperell, MA sent 1 engine with 14 men.

By 19:00 hours the fire had burned to American Box Company and its lumber piles on Burke St. in the Edgewood section of the city. Drafting operations were set up in the mill canal of American Box. Even more mutual aid had arrived. Hollis, NH sent 1 engine and 15 men, Dunstable, MA sent 1 engine and 10 men, Raymond, NH sent 1 engine and 8 men, Belmont, MA sent 1 engine and 8 men, Arlington, MA sent 1 engine and 10 men, and Lexington, MA sent 1 engine and 10 men.

By nightfall the wind had diminished considerably, although flying brands did start a small fire across the Merrimack River in Hudson, NH. The fire jumped Salmon Brook, igniting several lumber piles on that side of the river. The fire also burned several acres of brush and a few cottages between Salmon Brook and the state line, eventually burning itself out.

Total losses estimated for the fire were \$3,000,000, with insurance coverage for about \$1,500,000. Overall the fire burned 201 dwellings, 124 outbuildings, 2 churches, 30 small mercantile buildings, 3 coal and wood sheds, 1 building supply complex, 1 cooperage plant complex and lumber, 1 lumber yard, 1 ice cream freezer factory, and 1 railroad bridge. The cause of the fire has never been determined. The fire is estimated to have burned a swath of one half mile wide by two and one half miles long. Some have placed the cause on small boys, while others have placed the cause on vagrants who congregated beneath the bridge. A locomotive had not crossed the bridge for many hours. The greatest cause of fire spread, in addition to the wind, was the wooden shingled roofs of the many dwellings in the area.



Water pressure in the fire area was estimated to have dropped from 53 psi to 32 psi in the first 2 hours of the fire. Once the pumps at the reservoir were started, pressure was raised to 43 psi. Water consumption was estimated to be 7,500 gpm at the height of the fire, in addition to the engines drafting from the canal. Several pump operators also reported that they went into vacuum at several times during the fire. This was most likely caused by additional hydrants being used (this problem still happens in that area today). Total water used to extinguish the fire is estimated to be 5,250,000 gallons. All of the fire departments operating at the fires used the same threads on their hose, so there were no issues with out of town engines connecting to hydrants. The towns of Pelham, NH; Dracut, MA; Woburn, MA; and Winchester, MA provided station coverage for the city.



In all, 32 firefighters were treated for injuries at Central Fire Station. An additional 24 were treated at the local hospitals. Many were treated for smoke inhalation or eye injuries. One was treated for a laceration and another for a dislocated shoulder. Capt. George McDermott of the Lowell, MA fire department fell down a flight of stairs, but continued to work with his crew. After returning to Lowell, he complained of pains in his back. His injuries required surgery and he succumbed to his injuries on June 23<sup>rd</sup>.

The area of the Great Fire has been rebuilt. Again, it consists of densely packed tenement areas along Temple, South, and Worcester Street. The Spruce, East Hollis, and Marshall Streets area has many commercial buildings and up until recently there were several lumber yards still in the area. The water mains are still small and hydrants are around 600 gpm throughout the area. What could go wrong? Oh, and there are still vagrants who congregate beneath the Temple Street bridge.

### Outside Help Sent to Nashua.

(Factory Mutual Inspection Bureau.)

City or Town	Approximate Time of Arrival	Motor Pumpers	Men	Number of Streams Used	Miles	Approximate Time Run	Approximate Time Operation
Hudson, N. H.....	2:35 P.M.	2	10	3	1	5 min.	9 hrs.
Merrimack, N. H....	2:55 P.M.	1	20	2	8	15 "	16 "
Westford, Mass.....	3:15 P.M.	1	8	1	12	24 "	14 "
Milford, N. H.....	3:20 P.M.	2	30	5	11	20 "	9 "
Lowell, Mass.....	3:25 P.M.	4	50	4	14	22 "	8 "
Manchester, N. H....	3:30 P.M.	2	20	5	18	35 "	16 "
Dracut, Mass.....	3:50 P.M.	1	8	Reserve	12	20 "	—
Chelmsford, Mass....	4:20 P.M.	2	35	2	13	18 "	9 hrs.
Pelham, N. H.....	4:20 P.M.	1	9	Reserve	10	20 "	—
Lawrence, Mass....	4:50 P.M.	1	10	2	26	40 "	5½ hrs.
Pepperell, Mass.....	6:00 P.M.	1	14	2	10	45 "	9 "
Hollis, N. H. ....	7:00 P.M.	1	15	1	8	20 "	10 "
Dunstable, Mass....	7:00 P.M.	1	12	2	10	35 "	6½ "
Woburn, Mass.....	7:10 P.M.	1	11	Reserve	32	47 "	—
Raymond, N. H....	7:10 P.M.	1	8	1	28	40 "	8 hrs.
Winchester, Mass....	7:15 P.M.	1	10	Reserve	32	60 "	11 "
Belmont, Mass.....	8:10 P.M.	1	6	2	32	60 "	11 "
Arlington, Mass.....	8:20 P.M.	1	10	2	30	55 "	8 "
Lexington, Mass....	9:45 P.M.	1	10	1	28	45 "	8½ "
		26	296	35			

### Random thoughts on the Nashua, NH Crown Hill Fire, May 4, 1930

By Member Richard Harrington

Fire buffing was always practiced in our household while I was growing up. As one of the dwindling number of Nashua native's I have seen my share of fires in the area. My parents would often get up in the middle of the night when the compressed air driven Nashua fire whistle (Colloquially known as the "BOO DANG" due to its odd, echo sound) would resonate around the city. Typically, we knew it was a big one when we heard the old Ahrens Fox leaving the Arlington Street Station and thundering down Bowers Street to a fire location. Buffing in Nashua was a kind of 'social thing' to do in the City. You would be sure to see many of your friends, neighbors and co-workers at the scene.

My parents were both natives of Manchester, a mill city about 15 miles north of Nashua. I believe that they moved to Nashua in that 1930 time-frame. Although not born until 1941, the Crown Hill Fire was always a topic of discussion both at home as well as at other City fires. The Crown Hill fire was the bar to which any other blaze was compared.

My parents had responded to the "Great Fire" on May 4, 1930. They would speak of the large flying brands as the intense wind and very warm weather interacted to create a mini-firestorms as the fire marched through the Crown Hill residential section of the City with great ferocity. Many homes at the time were constructed with wooden shingle roofs so that provided for this insatiable monster. There also was mention of apparatus choosing hydrants, beginning to go to work, and then being suddenly by-passed by the big red devil. Burning hose lines, abandoned at times, were not infrequent as the fire easily overwhelmed the efforts of many. All of this, occurring



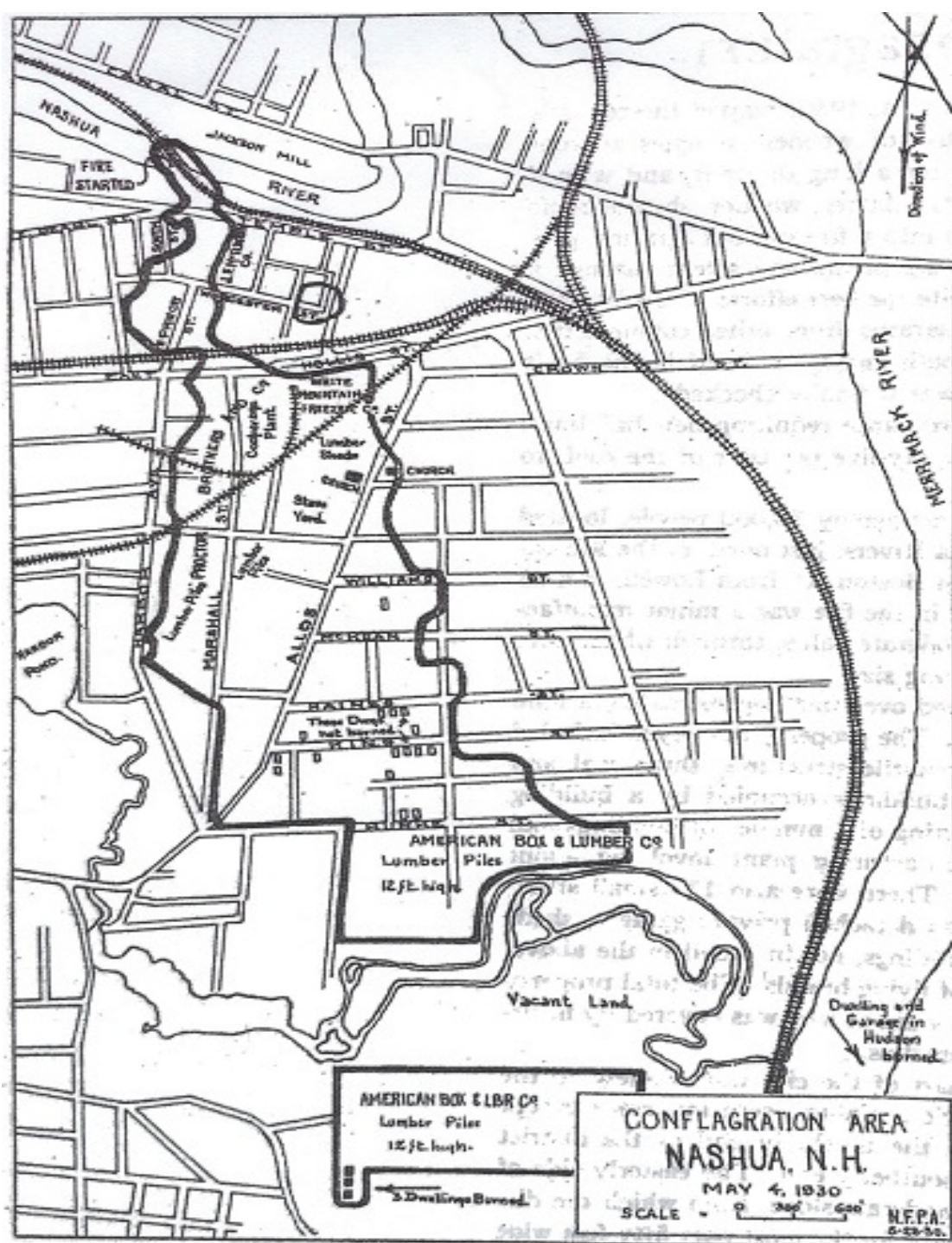
in a times when there were no large diameter hose lines. Also, the water mains, especially in residential neighborhoods, were not very large either, so water volumes of needed capacity were not available.

Pictures taken from a few publications show residents pulling belongings from their homes and placing them in the streets, with the how that the fire would take the building but not their favorite chairs, tables, beds, etc. Quite a site indeed!

Eventually, the fire had run out of fuel as it made its way to the banks of the Merrimack River, southeast of the Crown Hill area, although there are reports that small brush fires were reported across the river in Hudson, NH.

Nashua is made up of many resilient people. Not too many years after the fire that reeked its havoc, new homes began to arise in Crown Hill. My parents moved to one of these “new” two-tenement homes by the mid-thirties where we lived until I was 17 or so. Growing up in the 1940s there, I recall playing in the numerous remaining cellar holes. Most of these foundations were made of large granite stones. The new homes mostly had poured concrete foundations as an example of the changes that happened after the fire. Climbing down into one of those cellar holes was fairly easy, getting out was a challenge. You had to choose individual stones to step on. The new homes all had asbestos or other type of fire proof shingles. The NFPA had mandated new building codes as a result of the flammability of the original wooden shake-style shingles. In today’s world the opportunity for fire spread due to wooden shingles is much reduced, of course. A study of the Crown Hill Fire demonstrates to us the need for constant re-evaluation of codes in view of the development of new building materials and methods (ie Lightweight wood construction). And finally, to consistently make the public aware of the option for sprinklered buildings.

Interestingly, no formal cause of the “Great Crown Hill Fire” was ever determined. Several aspects have been speculated on over the many years including careless smoking, poor housekeeping under the railroad bridge (site of the origin) in terms of brush piles etc. To this day, however, this large, impactful fire has never had a cause published.



**Woburn  
1 Richmond Park  
3-131  
Saturday May 25<sup>th</sup>**

In Woburn a city that is no stranger to major fires, had been quiet of late. After a hectic 24 hour shift with only a few more hours left till the reliefs arrived a fire would break out in an occupied dwelling that would test the WFD and their mutual aid partners.

At 0346 hours Woburn Police started to receive 9-1-1 calls reporting a house fire at 1 Richmond Park with people reported trapped. The call(s) were quickly transferred to the Fire Alarm Office and at 0346 hours box 131 was transmitted. The entire on duty platoon responded with three engines, 2 ambulances, a Tower and the Shift Commander.



Companies from Headquarters were on scene in under three minutes. Tower 1 reported fire showing and moments later the chilling report of a child trapped on the roof and they were throwing a ground ladder to make the rescue. Engine 2 reported via radio they would cover them from inside and try and knock down some of the fire. The crew pulled off two inch and three quarters attack lines. One firefighter pulled the line to rear and try to protect the Charlie exposure, and old wood frame carriage house. The other line with the company officer and the other firefighter push the line in the front door and fought their way to the second floor.

By now the rest of the first alarm had arrived and were going to work. The Tower turned the rescued female over to Rescue 2 and companies commenced an aggressive primary search of the building for trapped occupants. During the search a second resident was located and was removed uninjured.



C3 ordered a second alarm and requested additional EMS assets for standby. The fire was now in the walls and racing towards the roof in a typical balloon frame dwelling. The fire was also starting to gain hold in the Charlie exposure and the third alarm was ordered two minutes later.

With the arrival of two alarms worth of apparatus almost simultaneously, an aggressive attack was made on the fire. Companies were now busy chasing the fire in the walls and into the attic where it burst through the roof and the attack switched to defensive to knock it down and then companies went back to finish the knock down and start the extensive overhauling.

Time	Alarm	Engine	Ladder	Special	Other
0346	131	2, 5, 4	Twr. 1	R1, R2	C3
0350	2-131	Win. E4, Burl. E1, Read. E3, Stone. E3*			C1
0352	3-131	Lex. E4, Wake. E5	Med. L-2		
0522	Spc. Call			Special Hazards 6	C2, FIU, Motor Sq.

\*Stoneham Ladder 1 was out-of-service for mechanical and they responded to the fire using Engine 3.

Thanks to WFD Lt. Kenneth Robishaw for his assistance in preparing this fire report. All photos by Stan Foreman courtesy of the W.F.D.





**FDNY  
875 Jewett Ave @ Cromwell Ave  
Quarters of Engine Company 163 & Ladder Company 83  
10-75-1391**

Ladder Company 83 returning to quarters from a wire down call found a working fire in the basement. They found smoke from the housewatch area and the basement doors. They orders the box to be struck and then ran a line off a hydrant at the front of the station. FDNY officials reported that there was a heavy fire condition in the basement.



Initial investigation lead them to believe a power surge caused a ballast to blow in the basement and ignite combustibles. He added that at the time of the fire there were on going power issues in the area and that a transformer on a pole beside the station blew and wires dropped to the ground.

Con Edison crews were on the scene at the fire coincided with a power outage that affected 800 homes in the Westerleigh and Castleton Corners neighborhoods. Two firefighters suffered minor injuries.

**1731** Ladder 83 reports "We have basement fore in quarters due to power lines down next to the firehouse. Transmit the box

**1733** Transmit the 10-75

**1739** Batt. 22 reports all hands working 2 L/S/O. 1 line operating

**1742** Div. 8 Special call TSU-2

**1800** Div. 8 Special call one additional ladder. Ladder 81 acting 79

**1809** Div. 8 reports main body of fire knocked down, probable will hold.

Time	Alarm	Engines	Ladders	Rescue	Special	Chiefs
1731	1391	156, 157, 163, 158, 166	83, 79 89 (FAST)	5	Sq-8 RAC-5	Div. 8 Bat 22, 21
1733	10-75	159/Sat. 5	80			
1742	Sp. C				TSU-2	
1800	Sp. C		81/79			

Information gathered from Staten Island Live, FDNY, NYC Fire Wire, NYC Firenet.



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AERIAL LADDER TRUCKS—AIRPORT  
RESCUE TRUCKS



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FIRE ENGINEERING