

BOX 52 ASSOCIATION



THE LINE BOX

Vol. 12 No. 3



B.F.D. Doin's

On January 25th, 50 new Boston and 9 Quincy Firefighters graduated from the Training Academy. This brings the total strength of the BFD to about 1,475 members. Boston Engine 21 was honored to be one of the escorts for Hingham native and USMC Cpl Orlando who was killed in a tragic training accident with 11 other Marines. Engine 21 escorted the family from Logan to Hingham. Along the way down Route 3 many police and fire departments staged and rendered salutes.



The face of the Devil on 29 Alpha Road
Photo courtesy of the BFD

Boston is also awaiting delivery of a custom built 'landing craft' for the Marine Division for use on the Islands.



METRO FIRE UPDATES & Other Goodies

Not too much to report from the District. Hanscom AFB has won the Small Fire Department 2015 award for the Air Force Material Command. They will now compete against similar sized Departments from all major commands of the Air Force. The winners in each category will then face off against fire departments from all over the Dept. of Defense.

Brookline new Ladder 2 was placed in service on Thursday Feb 4.

Saugus Fire has taken the Saugus EMA 1997 Freightliner/3D medium duty rescue, for use as a fire rescue. It will be re-painted and lettered for Rescue 1. The rig is the former MASSPORT Rescue 1.

For those interested the Commonwealth will be holding a Firefighters Entry Exam on April 16th. Last day to file is March 1st.

State Fire Marshal Stephen Cohen has retired and good friend of the Box 52 Association, Peter Ostroskey has been named State Fire Marshal. Marshal Ostroskey was the former Fire Chief of Uxbridge. The first class of recruits has graduated from the new DFS Springfield campus. The class of 16 was from various western Massachusetts Fire Departments.



APPARATUS UPDATES

By Michael Boynton, all photos by the author

As we approach press time, apparatus deliveries, although slow over the Holidays, are beginning to pick up. The list of new rigs in Boston, Metro and in the Bay State since our last report is as follows:

BOSTON



Rescue 1 – 2016 KME Severe Service Heavy Rescue



HAMR Unit – 2016 Ford F-550/EVI 4x4 Hazardous Analytical Mobile Response
(companion to Haz Mat Unit)

Metro-Fire



Brookline – Ladder 2 – 2016 KME Severe Service 109' RMA. Their new Engine 5 – 2016 KME Severe Service 1500/500/30F.

OTHER MASSACHUSETTS APPARATUS



Billerica – Engine 1 – 2015 E-One Typhoon 1250/500/30F



Haverhill – 2015 KME Predator 1500/750



Newbury – Engine 10 – 2016 KME Panther 1500/1000/30F



Newburyport – Engine 1 the “**Deluge**” & Engine 2 the “**Mechanic**” 2015 E-One Typhoons 1250/500/30F



Northborough – Squad 4 – 2015 Dodge Ram 5500/Fire-1 4x4 500/300/10 gals Class A foam



Northbridge – Ladder 1 – 2016 KME Severe Service 103' RMA

Box 52 History from the Archives

Christmas Tragedy on Beacon Hill

In the early morning hours of Wednesday 22nd of December 1915, Patrolman O'Hara of the Boston Police Department was working the Night Watch from Division 3, Joy St., on Beacon Hill. As he walked his beat, his attention was attracted to the corner of Cambridge and Charles Streets. It looked like, a fire. Patrolman O'Hara went to the corner, pulled the hook and rang in the fire box in front of the Evans House. It was 2:57 A.M.

Hoseman Charles Willett was on patrol at Engine Co. 10 in the firehouse on River St. He counted the blows and his chalk scratched 1-3-5-6 on the slate. He snapped the switch's which dropped the chains on the horse stalls, turned on the house lights Capt. Cornelius J. O'Brien and the members of Engine 10. Hosemen Willett, George P. Smith, George F. Doyle, Edward F. McCarthy, John V. Ney, William F. McCarthy, and Dennis Walsh boarded the apparatus (*Eng 10's pump was an 1896 steamers with a 3 horse hitch, the wagon was a 1914 ALF type 10 combination hose & chemical with a 40 gal. chem. tank-editor*).

Arriving first due, Ladder 24 under the command of Lieut. Thomas J. Hines, found fire showing from the 5th floor of a 6 story, brick commercial building located at 347-357 Cambridge St. The Glenbrook Wine Co. doing business on the first floor, the Paragon Paint Co., Massachusetts Thread Co., National Rubber Clothing Co. and the Boston Metal Companies on the floors above. Exposed on the left was the Evans House, on the right, a row of two story frame buildings including the adjacent building, an occupied lodging house.

Lt. Hines entered the building intending to make his way to the fifth floor when he encountered fire on floor 3. Engine Co. 10 ran a line to the third floor. A second alarm was sounded at 3:00 and this was followed by a third alarm at 3:22 A.M. Chief McDonough arrived to take command.

The battle was joined. Water shot from the pipes, hooks and axes opened up, the fire was knocked down.

The "Long Rakes" of the downtown truck companies began to open up.

In the street Chief McDonough surveyed the situation. The fire building had been the scene of a fire the previous year in November. Some repairs had been made and changes including a sprinkler system had been recommended. The Boston Fire Department knew this building. Chief McDonough decided, it was time to pull the men out.

On the third floor, Engine Co. 10 was overhauling. Suddenly an ominous creaking was heard from the floors above them. Capt. O'Brien ordered his men to get out fast!

The roof had failed, stacking up as the impact hit them the 5th and 4th floors let go! Capt. O'Brien and Hosemen George P. Smith, Doyle, Ney, and Edward F. McCarthy went to the front windows. Hosemen Willett, Walsh and William McCarthy made for the rear. The mass and momentum carried the 3rd floor down into the 2nd floor.

When a count was taken the members who had gone to the front windows made it out. The men rushing to the rear were pinned in the rubble.

A rescue effort began. The Laddermen from Ladder Companies 8 & 17 went to work digging for their buried comrades. They were joined in their efforts by others at the fire.

Doctors, who had been called to the scene treated, Capt. O'Brien and Hoseman Edward McCarthy. Also treated was Ladderman William J. Connell of Ladder Co. 8 who sustained a concussion and lacerations to his head when he fell from the apparatus to the street. He was transported to the Haymarket Relief Station for further treatment.

For two hours the rescue effort went on. As members were located in the pile, physicians crawled in and administered oxygen with Pulmotors and treatment for shock. Father Dennis Lynch crawled into the rubble and administered the last rights of the Catholic Church.

First to be located was Hoseman McCarthy. He was conscious and in great pain. He was able to guide rescuers to Willet and Walsh. He was taken to the Haymarket Relief Station for treatment. Next to be removed was Hoseman Willett. He was placed in an ambulance and rushed to Massachusetts General Hospital but was pronounced dead on arrival. For another hour, at some time around 7:20 A.M. Hoseman Walsh was removed. Doctors examined him and pronounced him dead at the scene. They felt he had been dead for some time.

The fire was deemed to be suspicious and an investigation began.

Both Hoseman Walsh and Willett left behind a wife and three children along with other family and the members of their company.

A young organization of fire enthusiasts had planned a Christmas Tree Celebration for that week. In recognition of the sacrifice and to honor the memory of these men, the organization cancelled their celebration. In addition to canceling their meeting, has announced that it would be raising a trust funds for the families of those killed. Members of the Box 52 Association raised over \$4,000.00, below is the copied story from a Boston Globe Article on January 8, 1916.

BOX 52 FUND NOW \$4,018

Large Subscriptions Boost Total for Education of Children of Firemen Killed in West End

The Box 52 Association fund for the care and education of the children of Firemen Walsh and Willet, who were killed at a recent fire in the West End passed the \$4000 mark yesterday afternoon, as the result of three donations of \$100 and many smaller ones, received at the at the office of Tres. Patrick O'Hearn in the Hibernian Bank.

The three large donations were from James R. Storrow, Mrs. Charles D. Weld and the Boston Development and Sanitary Company. Shepard Brooks sent a check for \$50 and the Leopold Morse Company a check for \$25. Supt. of Protection Timothy Toomey of the William Filenes and Sons Company arranged for a window display of pictures of the dead firemen and the funeral services.

George Y. Berry a former president of the Box 52 Association and one of the best known "Bufs" in New England donated the services of two of his big automobile trucks for advertising purposes for the special performance "The Only Girl" which is to be held at the Majestic Theatre next Tuesday afternoon. The entire receipts of which are to be turned over to the fund.

This article was taken from the Box 52 Special Report on the fire, edited by the late David Proctor and his staff in 1976. Thanks to Tres. William Wilderman for digging through the archives to find the original. Thanks also to member William Noonan for sending some photos of the fire that have not seen for a few decades.

February 1, 2016 will be the 40th anniversary of the fire. Many of our members were in attendance at this massive fire.

Enjoy!

PLANT SHOE FIRE 5-2411



This fire was one of the largest burns in recent years, equal only to the fire at the John P. Squire & Sons factory, or the Heywood-Wakefield facility in Wakefield.

The complex was actually a group of 12 congruous buildings with an attached power house:

- Building A, erected in 1890 measured 150x51 feet and was 6 stories in height with a basement.
- Building B, erected in 1896, measured 150x51 feet and was 6 stories in height with a basement.
- Building C, erected in 1900, measured 105-118x51 feet and was 6 stories in height with a basement. In addition it had a seventh story roof house.
- Building D, erected in 1902, measured 100-14x50 feet and was six stories in height with a basement.
- Building E, erected in 1904, measured 114-135x65 feet and was 6 stories in height with a basement.
- Building F, erected in 1905, measured 171-175x50 feet and was 6 stories in height with a basement.
- Building G, erected in 1906, measured 300x70 feet and was one story, mostly 2 stories in height with a basement.
- Building H, erected in 1906, measured 160x50 feet and was 6 stories in height with a basement.
- Building I, erected in 1908, measured 195x53 feet and was 6 stories in height with a basement and a sub-basement.
- Building J, erected in 1910, measured 100x100 feet and was 2 stories in height with a basement.

- Building K, erected in 1914, measured 225x50 feet and was 3 stories in height with a basement.
- Building L erected in 1921, measured 80x40-80 feet irregular shaped, 2 stories in height with a basement.

The buildings were of typical mill construction. Walls were brick, sixteen to twenty inches thick. Floors were heavy plank and timber, and the roofs were tar and gravel over plank and timber. Skylights were either heavy glass, saw tooth thin glass screened, or wire glass in metal sash. Stairwells and elevator shafts extended from basement to the 6th floors in several locations. Originally, these 'flues' had been well enclosed in their own towers partially protected by 1 ¾ inch steel fire doors. Throughout the complex, protective fire walls were weakened by pipe openings, ducts for hot air heating systems and waste removal chutes. The complex was equipped with an extensive wet type sprinkler system throughout the structure. Over 95% of the area was covered by the wet sprinkler system, mostly made up of Grinnell piping and heads. Spacing of the heads was good with few distribution obstructions. The system was capable of being supplied by two sources; the primary was from the public water supply, from two separate six inch mains. The second source was from two 1,000 gpm steam fire pumps, drafting through individual 20 inch suction lines from two cisterns totaling 332,000 gallons of water.



On Sunday February 1, 1976 fire destroyed the former shoe manufacturing facility at Centre and Bickford Streets in Jamaica Plain. Before the fire was brought under control, 43 engine companies (40 Boston, 3 Mutual Aid), 9 ladder companies and 3 aerial towers (1 Boston, 2 Mutual Aid) would respond.

At 2128 hours, Senior Fire Alarm Operator Frank Whalen, on duty at the Boston Fire Alarm Headquarters in the Fenway, received a telephone call on the 536-1500 (emergency) line from a male caller who reported a fire in the factory building at Centre and Bickford Streets Jamaica Plain. At the same time, Engine Company 14 returning from box 12-2294, spotted a heavy column of black smoke against the night sky coming from the Bickford Street factory. The initial telephone call to Fire Alarm was followed by several others reporting the same fire. Engine 14 and Ladder 10 were dispatched via radio and box 2411 was transmitted by Fire Alarm, bringing to the scene Engines Company 12 and 28 and Aerial Tower 2 as the balance of the first alarm assignment. At the time of the fire, Aerial Tower 2's Sutphen was out of service and they were operating with a spare. Boston had only one Tower in service at the time of the fire.

Engine 14 responded to the Bickford Street side of the building and attempted to locate the fire, which was not initially visible from the outside of the building. The fire fighters entered through a loading dock door located opposite Parker Street and began looking for the source smoke. Engines 12 and 28 went to the rear of the building on Walden Street and advanced hose lines over ladders into the third floor. The Chief of District 9, Leo McEleaney, arrived and ordered a second alarm at 2136 hours. Companies were directed to operate on the fire from windows overlooking an open courtyard, but were unable to stop the fire's spread

through the structure. Heavy fire was now showing from the first floor windows on the Bickford Street side. A third alarm was transmitted at 2153 hours. The fire, now rapidly advancing, overtook two hose lines crews, who had to be rescued by ladder from third floor windows. All companies were ordered from the building and heavy stream appliances were set up as the fire moved into Building I. From the outside the progress of the fire seemed at first somewhat slow, retarded by the firewalls within the structure. At one time it even appeared that the hard work of the Boston Firefighters were going to stop it. But, eventually it overwhelmed their best efforts and moved rapidly towards Center Street.



After the blaze, Commissioner Paul was quoted as saying the "fire could have been a disaster were it not for the driving rain at the time. I've been a firefighter for twenty-six years and I've never seen such a volume of fire in one building. It's the first time I've seen bright orange flames (indicating an extremely hot fire) burn for such a long time. Tongues of flames shot 200 feet any number of times during the night. If it had been in the cold of last weekend, or even a dry summer's day, with any wind, it would have been terrible. It would appear that the fire was set in at least three or four remote places."

It is not known if anyone died in the fire, At one time at least four artists were reported missing, and feared dead. Due to the nature of the residents, it is unlikely if this question will ever be resolved satisfactorily. The destruction was just so complete that the answer will probably never be known for sure.

The fire was contained at approximately 0304 hours, but the ruins would continue to burn and smoke for almost one week. The all out on box 2411 was recorded at 2304 hours on Tuesday Feb. 3. A large detail of apparatus remained on the scene after the all out was ordered. The box was re-struck at 1734 hours on Wednesday Feb. 4 and remained in effect until 2238 hours on Thursday Feb. 5th. The fire detail was terminated at 1100 hours on Saturday Feb. 7th, 1976.



Time line for box 2411

2128 Still Alarm 301 Centre St E-14, L-10, D-9
2129 Box 2411 E-12, 28, A.T. 2 (using a spare ladder)
2136 2-2411 orders of District 9
E-37, 24, 42, 26 L-30, 4 Rescue 2 L.P. 2
Div. 2 , Special Service Chief (Car 13)
2136 L-15 cover A.T. 2

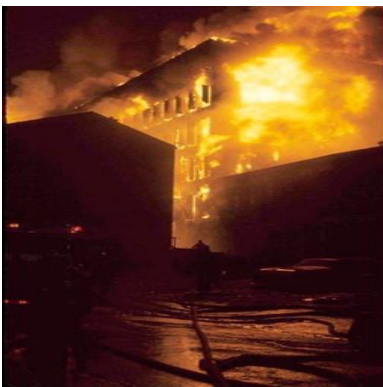


- 2140 E-24 Code A Columbus Ave & Amory Street
- 2140 Special Call E-3 to 2-2411
- 2151 E-55 cover E-28
- 2153 3-2411 orders of Division 2
- E-53, 9, 43, 21
- E-25 from E-33 to E-12, E-20 to E-24, E-8 from E-10 to E-33, L-16 to L-29
- 2153 E-24 available, directed to the fire
- 2156 Sp. Call C7, 1 extra ladder, L-18 from L-4
- 2158 Sp. Call C7, for A.T. 1 to the fire
- 2159 Sp. Call C7, 1 extra ladder, L-23 from L-10
- 2212 Cambridge L-3 cover L-15
- 2229 Sp. Call C7, 1 extra ladder, L-11 from L-30
- L-29 from L-23 to L-30, L-25 to L-6, L-16 to L-29, Brookline L-2 to L-10
- 2240 4-2411 Orders of Division 2
- E-34, 2, 55, 8
- Brookline E-1 to E-37, Cambridge E-2 to E-10, Newton E-8 to E-51,
- Quincy E-2 to E-20, Somerville E-2 to E-32
- 2248 Sp. Call C7, 2 extra engines, 1 extra Dist. Chief to front of the bldg on Centre St to check
- on a fire in the basement. District 7, E-20, 28
- 2249 E-16 to E-24, Newton E-1 to E-16
- 2250 E-25's Wagon Code B Harrison Ave & Dudley St
- E-11 from E-25 to E-43, E-10 to E-42, E-33 to E-37, L-15 to A.T. 2
- 2258 5-2411 orders of C1
- E-51, 32, 10, 25
- E-29 to E-34, E-30 to E-42, E-50 to E-12, Massport E-1 to E-40,
- Brookline E-3 to E-29, Chelsea E-5 to E-9, Dedham E-1 to E-55,
- Everett E-3 to E-50, Milton E-1 to E-16, Needham E-3 to E-39,
- Winthrop E-1 to E-11
- 2306 E-36 to E-50, E-49 to E-52, Everett E-3 from E-50 to E-36
- Dist. 8 to Dist. 7, Dist. 12 to Dist. 8, Dist. 10 to cover Dist 10 & 12
- 2311 Spec. Call C1, 1 extra ladder, L-13 from L-4

2315 Spec. Call D-7, 2 extra engines to fire,
 E-30 from E-42, E-50 from E-12
 2319 E-40 from E-8 to E-12
 2329 Spec. Call C1, 2 extra engines, E-40 from E-12, E-49 from E-42
 Watertown E-2 to E-34, L-8 to L-4, Chelsea L-2 to L-8
 2333 C1 ordered BPD to evacuate Bromley-Heath Housing Project
 2333 Somerville E-2 from E-32 to E-8
 2336 Spec. Call C1, 3 extra engines, E-16 from E-24, E-29 from E-34, E-33 from E-37
 2338 Spec. Call C7, 2 extra engines, E-22, E-52
 2339 E-7 to E-12, E-36 from E-50 to E-33, E-48 to E-24, E-56 to E-22
 Cambridge E-1 to E-7, Chelsea E-5 from E-9 to E-43, Lynn E-1 to E-9
 Malden E-6 to E-45, Medford E-4 to E-50, Melrose E-1 to E-32
 Waltham E-2 to E-17, Wellesley E-3 to E-49, Westwood E-1 to E-49
 2354 Spec. Call C1, 2 extra engines E-7 from E-12, Brookline E-1 from E-21

Monday February 2, 1976

0001 E-11 from E-43 to E-12
 0012 Spec. Call C1, 2 extra engines E-17, E-45
 0018 Spec. Call C1, 1 extra engine, Malden Tower 1 to the fire E-11 from E-12
 E-4 to E-37, Everett E-3 from E-36 to E-4
 0033 Spec. Call C1, Cambridge A.T., 1 to the fire
 0035 Spec. Call C1, 1 extra engine for brand patrol E-5
 0036 E-39 to E-25
 0037 Spec. Call C1, 1 extra engine E-36 from E-33
 0041 Westwood E-1 from E-49 to E-42, Somerville L2 to L-15 (Camb L-3 returned)
 0045 Spec. Call C1, 2 extra engines, E-4 from E-37, E-56 from E-22
 0047 Arlington E-1 to E-33, Belmont E-2 to E-37, Braintree E-4 to E-52,
 Cambridge E-9 to E-22, Chelsea E-4 to E-12, Malden E-4 to E-41, Newton E-3 to E-28,
 Quincy Eng. B to E-1
 0053 Spec. Call C1, 1 extra engine for brand patrol E-48 from E-24
 0101 E-1 to E-14
 0112 E-17's wagon (Squirt) to shops from the fire
 0114 Spec. Call C1, 1 extra engine for brand patrol Chelsea E-4 from E-12
 0117 Spec. Call C1, 1 extra ladder L-29 from L-30 E-17's pump from the fire to E-26,
 E-41 to E-28
 0216 E-30 from the fire to cover E-4
 0300 Somerville L-2 from L-15 to L-13
 0304 E-9 in quarters out of service due to fire damage.



The Saint John's Parochial School Fire

All Photos Courtesy of Ted Quinn Collection Peabody Historical Society

Last October 28th, 1915 was the 100th anniversary of one of the most tragic and deadly fires in Massachusetts history. The fire's tragedy is significant even on a national and international scale. The tragedy is compounded by the fact that no one remembers it!

In the City of Peabody, it was a typical autumn morning, which had started no differently than any other day. At Saint John's Parochial School, the steam boiler fireman had tended the fire for the boilers and left. Classes for the High School students began at half past 8:00 o'clock in the morning. Primary and Grammar school classes began at 8:45. Seventeen Sisters of Notre Dame had charge of nearly 700 students. The younger students were housed on the lower floors.

The school was built in 1892. Set back 300 feet from the street, it was partially hidden by other buildings. Ninety-five feet in length, the building was of second class construction, three stories high with a full basement. A central corridor ran the length of the building on each floor with six classrooms opening off it. In the center of the hallway, a set of swinging doors portioned the corridor. These doors were normally kept open when school was in session. All the doors opened inward. Interior stairways in front and back led from the basement to the top floor. There were no exterior fire escapes.

Around 9:00 o'clock, the pupils had finished their prayers. After checking the basement 30 minutes before, Sister Camelita Maria, the Superior, conducted her daily school inspection. By the time she had reached the top of the stairs, she smelled smoke. Right away she sounded the fire alarm. Just a few days before, a successful fire drill had been held. The students had evacuated quickly without a problem.

As the practice drills had taught them, the children began to file out of the school via the front and back stairs and doors. Smoke and fire swooshed up from the basement. Children in the front began to rush the doors, someone tripped and fell. The bodies piled up against the inward opening door.

The nuns acted quickly by redirecting some children out the back doors. For a time the rear doors became blocked too. Somehow, the choke at the rear doors was cleared but the delay caused the nuns to start redirecting children to leave by the windows. On the second floor, Sister Aldregan, her habit on fire, began dropping children from a window. Seven children were rescued from the inferno by her heroic actions. Sister Aldregan suffered serious burns about the head and shoulders.



The local fire alarm and the commotion attracted the attention of off duty Peabody Fire Department Fireman John Ellis. He called the alarm into Fire HQ and then rushed to the scene. Within a mere two minutes of the call, Box Alarm apparatus, two steam engines, a hook & ladder, an auto hose and chemical car were thundering towards Chestnut street. As they rounded the corner and headed for the school driveway, they were greeted by horrific images of children fleeing, some burned and some with hair and clothing on fire.

Half of the men ran towards the school, while the others ran hose lines to beat back the flames. Firemen, police officers and civilians came together and tried to help. Ladders were thrown. Life nets were fashioned out of blankets and coats. Firemen and police with axes attacked the front door, hacking the doors to pieces as they began pulling children from the doorway.

Boston Fireman Francis Keough of Ladder Company 27 enjoying a day off hunting on the marshes nearby, rushed to help. He entered the school and removed 7 children from the first floor before the fire and injuries from fallen timbers stopped him. Another off duty Boston Fire Captain was in the area and also ran to help.

The first steamer grabbed a hydrant on Chestnut St. and connected, but it was dead. The other steamer had tied into a hydrant at the corner of Franklin and School streets. They had water and the streams started to hit the raging flames. It was no use, a mere 15 minutes after the alarm was sounded the interior had become an inferno. Peabody Fire Chief Jesse Barrett transmitted a general alarm on his arrival and summoned aid from Salem and Danvers. Firemen manning hose lines tried in vain to push the flames back so their comrades could try and enter the school. It was an impossible task.



By 10:00 o'clock in the morning the flames had been pushed back enough for firemen to enter the holocaust in the first floor hallway and begin the grim task of removing the small bodies, many burned beyond recognition. The Peabody Chief had put 75 firemen to work. Fourteen streams, 4 from pumping engines and 10 from hydrants were played on the fire. Two engine companies, three auto combination hose & chemical cars, two hose companies and two hook & ladder companies were in attendance at the fire. Some of the companies were of the new motorized style, while others were still horse drawn.

Both Boston Firemen, Ladderman Keough and Captain Lorenzo Merrill of Ladder Company 29 were commended for their actions in General Order 82 of the Boston Fire Department dated November 11, 1915.



In the end twenty two students died in the fire. Four others were badly burned. A single mass was celebrated for the majority of the victims, ironically just before All Hallows Day.

The fire was found to have originated in a closet in the basement, which contained a box of sweepings, some storage and the gas meter. The fire led to a national review of school fire safety.



A memorial statue sits on the site of the fire to inspire us to remember that lives were lost, that mistakes were made and the dedication to humanity of those who tried to help.



Photo courtesy of Salem News

Once again our thanks to Tres. Wilderman for digging out the Box 52 report on this job, and to member Bill Noonan for many photos from his collection!

PARAMOUNT & PLYMOUTH HOTEL EXPLOSION
Friday Jan. 28, 1966



It was the end of another work week in Boston, people were headed out of the City bundled up against the bone chilling 15 degree temps. On the edge of the Combat Zone on Boylston Street between Washington and Tremont the basement bar of the Plymouth Hotel at 19 Boylston Street the regulars had gathered in Leonardi's Café to toast the good fortune of bar tender Louis Baker, who had become a grandfather earlier that day. In other bars and cocktail lounges in the area happy hour was in full swing. By the time 7:00 P.M. arrived eleven customers would be dead and over 50 injured!

The block was made up of complex of several connected buildings:

13 Boylston St was a café called the Gilded Cage

15 Boylston St. The lobby of the Plymouth hotel an eight story hotel with smaller buildings connected

17 Boylston St, Was the lobby of the Paramount hotel, an 11 story first class building

19 Boylston St. Leonardi's Café

21 Boylston St. Chartells Coffee Shop

Both the hotels were rated by the City Hotel Association as '3rd rate hotels at best'. The hotels were home to an assortment of residents, many of whom added, shall we say a certain color to the local area.

Paramount Hotel handyman and a third floor resident, Herb McBride smelled gas in the stairwell when going down to the first floor. McBride advised the desk clerk Mr. Ronald Coyne. Coyne advise McBride to notify the manager of Leonardi's bar. Coyne then went to the stairwell and found a very strong odor of gas. He retreated to contact Boston Gas. Before he even reached the desk an explosion occurred and he found himself in the basement. McBride was on the sidewalk in front of Leonardi's.

At 1838 hours Boston Police Officers George Ruck and William Crosby patrolling the area in the '200 Wagon' heard a loud explosion. They called in to the Turret and reported an explosion had just occurred at the Paramount Hotel on Boylston St. All available police personnel were dispatched and BPD notified the Fire Alarm Office.

The house phone rang in the Big House at 194 Broadway. Man on patrol quickly took the information and hit the lights and bell and announced "7 and 17, 17 Boylston St. the Paramount Hotel for an explosion!" A moment later the warning blow hit and 1471 Washington & Essex Streets started to bang in on the bells. Ladder 17's 1956 Seagrave 100 foot tiller swung out of quarters, with the officer's foot pushing hard on the siren. Right behind came Engine 7's hose wagon, followed by the pump. As the pump headed out the door, the chauffer looked over and could see Engine 26's Mack wagon starting and the crew getting on board.

Engine 7 turned into Boylston Street and all they could see was smoke and dust. The officer called into Fire Alarm "we have something, but I don't know what!" The rest of the first alarm assignment of Engines 26 and 10, the Rescue and Ladder 8. Division 1 Chief O'Mara, District 4 Chief Galvin and District 3 with Acting Chief Feeney were all on the way. Both Engines 7 and 26 dropped big lines and went to work hitting the fire in the front of the building. Ladder 17's crew was throwing a 35 foot ground ladder to the right side near the Paramount Hotel sign. Ten people were rescued using this ladder alone. Meantime the chauffer was throwing the stick up, as people were waiting in windows for rescue. The police who had arrived on scene were also busy removing victims.



The explosion had blown out part of the first floor and sidewalk were now in the basement. Heavy fire and smoke was now showing. Deputy O'Mara transmitted the second alarm at 1844 hours and requested additional ambulances to the scene. Engines 25, 3, 39 and 8 along with Ladder Companies 3 and 18 were all responding into a frantic scene!

Chief O'Mara, was quick on the hook with the third and fourth alarms at 1845 and 1846 hours, with in five minutes of the still alarm, 15 engines, 5 ladder companies and the Rescue were either heavily engaged, or responding in!

As multiple alarm companies arrived, burning gas shot from manholes along the street with tremendous force. Portions of pavement steamed from the heat. Tongues of flames fueled by gas was shooting 11 stories high! The fire was extending to all floors via the elevator shafts.

Deputy O'Mara was quoted in the Globe "I was several blocks away and I could see smoke and flames so heavy that I ordered third and fourth alarms. As soon as I got there and saw the street, I ordered the fifth alarm!"

Boston Police officers on foot patrol and traffic duties in the area, ran toward Boylston Street, they encountered a scene of carnage. Bystanders were screaming and pointing into the hole where Leonardi's had been a few minutes before. They reached down and pulled several victims from the debris. One of the most heroic rescues of the night was made from this hole by Firefighter William Shea of the Rescue Company. A woman was seen in the basement area. Firefighter Shea jumped down into the basement the woman was pinned under a beam and was unconscious. Not only was she in danger of been burned, but drowned as well. Shea, with the help of other firefighters managed to get the woman up a ladder and to safety. Shea was burned about the ears and hands and was transported to a hospital and would remain off duty for weeks. He was awarded the prestigious "John Fitzgerald Medal" for the most meritorious act of 1966.



Shea was not alone in rescuing and assisting the numerous injured. Police and firefighters were being aided by many civilians who stepped in the help. Some of the civilians helped firefighters move hose lines, other rendered aid to the injured. Many of the injured who had escaped the explosion and fire were cut by flying glass and other debris. Over 150 persons had escaped and were now bleeding and dazed. Ambulances from the Cities hospitals, along with Boston Police, MDC Police, Civil Defense and the US Navy all responded to the scene. As the crews were tending to the injured, the Boston Police were arresting three men for looting. The ambulances took the injured to Mass. General, Boston City and the Beth Israel hospitals.

Chief of Department William Terrenzi arrived on scene at 1900 hours. He directed Fire Alarm to notify Ass't Chiefs Clougherty and Howard, along with Deputy Chief Flanagan all to respond from their homes. At the same time Deputy O'Mara was making an urgent request for both Boston Gas and Boston Edison to respond to the scene.

Firefighting operations were starting to knock down some of the fire. Companies working on the upper floors were using lines off the buildings standpipe. Company Officers had the additional worry of heavy concentrations of natural gas. Lines to the upper floors were advanced over ladders. Once the fire was darkened down, members started to search for trapped victims. The temps made everything turn to ice. As the night wore on, additional companies were special called to the scene (see timeline for full company response-editor). Ladder 14 was one of the special called ladder companies. They came up from Avery Street and turned into the alley known as Bumstead Court. The crew was able to maneuver the 1962 Seagrave 100 foot tiller into the rear of the Paramount. Once in place the crew raised the aerial to the upper floors of the building. Control and extinguishment did not occur until Boston Gas shut down the mains.

While firefighting operations were under way, Boston Police wagons, along with the few hospital ambulances were dashing off to the hospital with injured, turning around and heading back to the disaster. The BCH received 19 of the injured and Mass General took in 21. A total of 57 people were injured. Meantime BPD cruisers were driving through the downtown area using their loudspeakers to detour traffic and no allow spectators into the area. In addition, the BPD dispatched forty members of the Tactical Police Squad to keep order and prevent further looting from stores with no windows.



Medical teams at both hospitals worked to save the lives of the injured. According to BCH Doctors quoted in the Saturday Globe "Victims were so badly charred by flames that identification would takes hours, or in some cases days".

All of the responders were reminded of Dante's Inferno, for a while it looked like the sidewalk was on fire, as the concrete steamed from the heat of the gas feed fire at what fire officials estimated to be burning at 10,000 degrees! Automobiles parked on the street were crushed by steel beams, and damaged by flying chunks of concrete and granite as fifty feet of sidewalk was blown into the area during the blast. One car was in the hole and its left blinker was still blinking. Broken glass littered the streets in the area.

City Officials speaking to reporters stated "There may be as many as 30 persons trapped in the debris. They could be buried under 8 feet of water and 13 feet of debris. All through Saturday crews combed the wreckage looking for more victims. 24 hours after the blast the death toll stood at 10 with 57 injured. An eleventh victim would succumb to wounds later in the week.

Chief Terrenzi requested that City Building Commissioner. Robert York to have a crane come in and start to demolish the weakened structures. The services of Duane Demolition Company were secured and they responded with a 90 foot crane to start the work.

Meantime State Fire Marshall Ralph Garrett quickly assembled a team to find the cause of the explosion. The group was made up of the Boston Fire, and Police Departments, Boston Edison, Boston Gas, MDC Police, New England Telephone & Telegraph, The Public Utilities Commission, Metallurgists, and members of the State Police Bomb Squad. It was noted that no visible defects were found in any of the gas mains in the area, with the exception of a small crack found in an 8 inch gas main.

A couple of facts to consider about this explosion. 1.) Numerous BPD undercover police officers had been conducting surveillance of several suspects that had been in the area for an extended period of time. (2.) A known arsonist was in the area with his girlfriend at the time, and was spotted at the scene. He was questioned at length, but was never charged.

So, what did happen to cause the explosion? The crack in the 8 inch main was located in very close proximity to two electric service conduits that supplied the Paramount Hotel via the front wall under the front sidewalk. Investigators believed that gas vapors entered the elevator shaft and that the main explosion occurred in the middle of the basement. It was found that the cross members were blown upwards on the underside of the street level and downwards on the floor of the basement level. Some of the beams were sheared off and this allowed the first floor to drop into the basement. It was believed that the elevator motors may have been the ignition source.

Fire Commissioner Thomas J. Griffin issued a special commendation to all members who responded and worked at Box 1471. The commendation on part stated "The adverse conditions that confronted the department at this explosion and fire required a devotion to duty and stamina, courage and perseverance of

a high power. Sincere gratitude is extended to those who once more have lived up to the highest traditions of the Boston Fire Department”.



Box 1471 Jan. 28 1966

- 1838 Explosion occurs. BPD 200 Wagon transmits report to the Turret.
1840 **Still Alarm** Engine 7, Ladder 17
1841 **Box 1471** transmitted Eng. 26, 10, Ladder 8, Rescue, Division 1, District 4 and 3
1844 **2-1471** Engines 25, 3, 39, 8, Ladders 3, 18
Cover: E-2 to 39, E-24 to 26, E-37 to 10, E-56 to 8, E-53 to E37, L-15 to 17, L-23 to 18
1845 **3-1471** Engines 24, 37, 22 (for E-21), 50, Ladder 15
Cover: E-34 to 10, E-40 to 25, E-42 to 26, E-55 to 42, L-29 to 23, L-30 to 17
1846 **4-1471** Engines 42, 34, 2, 32
Cover: E-20 to 43, E-51 to 3, E-53 to 26, Cambridge E-2 to 10,
Brookline E-1 to 37, Newton E-8 to 51, Quincy E-4 to 20, Somerville E-2 to 32, Winthrop E-2 to 56
1848 **5-1471** Engines 53, 40, 56, 20
Cover: E-5 to 8, E-16 to 43, E-55 to 26, Brookline E-7 to 42, Chelsea E-1 to 5, Dedham E-4 to 55,
Everett E-3 to 50, Milton E-1 to 16
1858 **Special Call:** Two additional Ladder Companies L-30 from L17, L- 23 from L18
Cover: E-5 from 8 to 25
1900 Cover: L-14 to 17, Cambridge L-2 to 8
1902 Cover: E-43 to 22, Newton L-3 to 14
1906 **Special Signal 10-41** transmitted – Reduced assignments in effect
1907 **Special Call:** Two extra Engines E-55 from 26, E-51 from 3
1912 Cover: Cambridge E-1 to 26
1923 **Special Call:** One extra Ladder. L-14 from 17
1923 Cover: L-1 to 8
1934 **Special Call:** Two extra Engines E-43 from 22, E-21
1946 Cover: L-1 to 17
1958 **Special Signal** Raise High Pressure to 175 lbs.
2115 **Special Call:** One extra engine to Tremont & Boylston St. E-5 from 25
2118 Cover: E-12 to 25, Brookline E-7 from E-42 to 12
2140 Cover: E-16 from E-43 to 3
2202 **Special Call:** Two extra engines E-16 from 3, E-17
Cover: E-18 to 17

2231 **Special Call:** One extra District Chief, Car 12

Saturday Jan 29, 1966

- 0034 Cover: E-14 to 33
0134 **Special Signal 10-42** transmitted Reduced assignments terminated



The aftermath, photo courtesy of ArchBoston.org



Looking down Boylston towards Wash. Troy Street Pub.

0200 **Fire Detail:** Engines 4, 11, 18, 29, Ladders 7, 19
Cover: L-18 to 19
0500 **Fire Detail:** Engines 36, 1, 28, 48, Ladders 24, 27
Cover: E-39 to 1, E-53 to 48, L-29 to 27
0750 **Fire Detail:** Engines 10, 40, 20, 34, Ladder 3
1100 **Fire Detail:** E-21, 55, Division 2
Cover: E-53 to 55
1200 **Fire Detail:** E-56, 50, Ladder 8, Division 1
1255 **Cover:** E-9 to 56
1400 **Fire Detail:** E-16, 51
1427 **Special Call:** Lighting Plant
1500 **Fire Detail:** E-39, 11, Ladder 1, Division 1
1800 **Fire Detail:** E-5, 32, 17, 53, Ladder 18
1849 **22-22-1471** All Out transmitted



Photo courtesy of Boston Fire Historical Society

Quincy 2nd Alarm Box 1747 Nut Island 125 Sea Avenue
Photos by Member Michael Worley Q.F.D.



MWRA crews prepare to lift the concrete planks, allowing firefighters to hit the fire.



Crews attacking the fire from above

From the 1915 Commonwealth's Red Book

WATER TOWER

A water tower is a portable standpipe used to send water from an elevation and horizontally into buildings. - A water tower may be horse-drawn or motor-propelled. A water tower consists of a body to which the traction gear, wheels, brakes, etc., are attached, and upon which rests, with its attachments, the tower containing the extension pipe, hose, nozzle, etc. Height to which tower may be raised, 55 or 65 feet. Power. — A tower may be raised by: — (a) Pressure generated in a chemical tank, or by water pressure furnished by engines. (b) Water pressure. (c) Springs.

Pressure- A pressure of about 125 pounds per square inch is required to raise a tower and about 45 pounds to lower it. The pressure is applied to pistons working in cylinders. By suitable mechanism the power is brought to bear upon the teeth of a quadrant at the base of the tower, the motion of the pistons one way raising the tower, and the contrary motion bringing it down. Four valves control the pressure. Upper right and lower left to raise. Upper left and lower right to lower. The hands must not be taken from the valves when operating, and the tower must be raised and lowered slowly and brought to a stop gently. In cold weather, after the tower is raised, water should be circulated through cylinders to prevent freezing. **Spring-raised Tower.** — One type of tower is raised by heavy springs compressed in cylinders, and when released acting through levers on the base of the tower. By means of an arrangement of gears at the base the tower is raised to the full vertical position when the springs finish lifting. By means of the same gears the tower is wound down and the springs are again compressed and ready for action. The springs are released by stepping upon a lever on the platform at the base of the tower. The lever is held in position by a pin, which must be taken out before the lever can be moved.

Placing Tower- Until a tower is called into action it must be kept at such distance from the fire that it may be turned to take any position desired. When orders are received to put the tower into action, unless orders to the contrary are received, the tower should be placed so that when erect it will be equally distant from both ends of the building, and at such distance as to insure that the stream can be sent through any window within reach.

To operate Tower- Pin sweep to prevent from turning. Chock forward wheels. Take off horses. Set jacks on front axles to prevent vibration. Set braces to steady tower. If brace-bars have chains, fasten them around rim of front wheel. Clear hose out. Cast off guy-lines and see that they are clear. See that water gate is closed. (On spring-raised towers, release latch on rear end of platform that prevents tower from rising.)

To raise Tower- Watch the stops on quadrant. When vertical, set dog in quadrant rack. On spring-raised towers a screw-dog is set in about middle of platform. These dogs prevent the tower from coming down again. Release pawl on drum on which wire is wound that controls pipe. Raise tip by cranks and have pawl in place on ratchet. Keep hose clear while raising. Set pawl on drum that controls nozzle. Fasten guy-lines in direction in which tower is to play to prevent back pressure from tipping it backward. If tower does tip, reduce pressure by closing gate in waterway. Open water gate. Control vertical direction of nozzle by wire rope on drum, and horizontal direction by hand wheel at base. Location of tower can be changed without lowering it, but axle-jacks must be set. Location of tower can be changed without lowering it, but axle-jacks must be set.

To make up Tower- Close water gate. Open valve to drain hose in tower. Release pawl on ratchet and wind tip down. Wind up slack of nozzle-control wire. See that hose does not foul. Release dog. Cast off guy-lines. Lower tower by pressure, or, if spring-raised, by winding on cranks and compressing springs. On spring-raised towers, set latch to prevent tower rising. Disconnect hose from engines. Open all valves to drain. Make up hose; return brace-bars; take jacks off axles; coil up guy-lines; take pin out of sweep and chocks from under forward wheels; hitch horses.

Equipment of Tower- Two 60-foot lengths of 3 ½ -inch hose; one in service; one in reserve.
One 4-way Siamese connection. Different-sized nozzles, two-inch is that most commonly used.
One hose cap and line used to change hose in tower.
Two Morse gates for use on outlets in case they leak.
One set of Porter wire cutters and pair of rubber gloves for use when cutting wires.
Two lanterns — one white, one red — to hang from nozzle.
Spanners for 3 ½ -inch hose. Belts and spanners for 2 ½ -inch hose.
Small tools, wrenches, hammer, etc. Axe for emergencies.
Rubber mallet if tower has chemical tank.
Some towers have deck guns which may be used while tower is playing. A valve on the pipe from the main supply admits or shuts off their supply. There are three inlets for water on each side of a tower, and on some towers three inlets on the rear end. These inlets have female connections for 2 ½ -inch hose, and clapper valves are placed on these and all similar connections (such as monitor turret nozzle connections, and Siamese connections for deluge sets) to prevent water from being forced back through hose on which there is less pressure than other lines are supplying, or being forced out through a connection to which no hose has been attached.



Boston Water Tower 2, Collection of member F. San Severino

STOP THE PRESSES!



Stoneham L-1 2015 E-One LTH-100 Quint, 1250/450/100 foot RMA. Photo by J. Galla

INFORMATION NEEDED FOR LINE BOX

We are in need of **photos** and other information on the 5th alarm box 4187 36 Roland St. in Charlestown on July 1, 1966. First alarm was at 1337 hrs and the all out was sent some 96 hours later. If you can help out please send the info/photos to thelinebox@hotmail.com

