Box 52 Association

The Line Box

I·F·B·A· Member club since 1955!

Vol. 20 No. 1

WOW!!!!!!

I can't believe that with this season we start the ***TWENTIETH YEAR*** of the Line Box!

And what a way to celebrate this milestone event as we cover the Chelsea Conflagration that occurred fifty years ago this October 14th.

Inside you will find several reports on the fire published by Box 52 members. This includes an in-depth report by late member L. Murray Young that he presented to the July, 1975 Insurance Service Office Annual Conference. We also have late member Dave Proctor, who spent countless hours at Chelsea Fire Alarm building a concise apparatus response timeline. And information gathered from a firsthand account written by the late Dennis Williams, who was on duty that autumn Sunday.

The issue will have plenty of photos for your enjoyment.

These members have left us with the complete picture of one of the most famous fires to ever occur in Greater Boston. Many of our members sparked the fire and more than a few worked the fire.

Please take a moment and remember them and their contributions, not only to Box 52 history but the history of the Chelsea Conflagration. And may they continue to rest in peace.

CHELSEA CONFLAGRATION
Sunday October 14th, 1973
BOX 215 Arlington & Third Streets

Report by member L. Murray Young
Presented at the I.S.O Offices Seminar
July 1975
All photos by L.M. Young collection of member David Parr

Chelsea is a city of 2.4 square miles located adjacent to Boston, separated by the Mystic River and Chelsea Creek that becomes part of Boston Harbor. It is one of several communities that make up what is known as Metropolitan Boston.

Of this 2.4 square miles, only 1.82 square miles, or about 80% is built upon with a population of approximately 31,000 people. The city has industrial and residential occupancies. More than likely, the most common commercial activity is salvage of waste materials.

There are many businesses in recycling useable materials, mostly in what is known as the “rag shop” area or district. This district is located in the northwest section of the city covering about one-fifth of the city.

Conflagrations are not new to Chelsea. Chelsea’s history dates back to the 1600’s. Durning the late 1800’s and early 1900’s structural conditions grew to a point of ‘being ripe for conflagrations” because of mainly a lack of building and fire prevention codes.

These structures were mostly of wood frame and some were brick or ordinary construction, anywhere from one to three stories and some even five stories. Most of these frame structures were the “three decker” type tenement or dwellings only 6 to 10 feet apart in most areas.

With these types of structural conditions in existence, the occupancies also began to be a problem with a wide range of rag shops, scrap metal and waste businesses being operated in many of these three decker dwellings, having moved to Chelsea from Boston after the Great Boston Fire of November 9, 1872. The revision of Boston Codes prohibited the rag districts to rebuild so they easily took the “Winnisimet” Ferry across Boston Harbor to Chelsea. In Chelsea, the dwelling type buildings were not designed to accommodate the contents that flourished during this period.

Then came Palm Sunday, April 12th, 1908 when a fire occurred in this rag shop area. The fire was first seen in the area of Carter and Summer Streets in the northwest section of the city. With the strong winds that prevailed during this dry period, the fire swept over about 275 acres or one fifth of the city and across the Chelsea Creek into a section of East Boston. This fire killed 19 persons and left 17,000 homeless, destroying 3,500 buildings.

Over a period of 65 years with these lessons long forgotten, except that wood shingled roofs had disappeared for the most part, the same conflagration conditions were allowed to rebuild with the same occupancies.

During the 1920’s the Chelsea Fire Department established a Fire Prevention Bureau to try and keep the hazards in check.

Over a period of years, many of these waste occupancies installed sprinkler systems. Some of the frame buildings were metal clad, hoping to afford some protection from the exterior against the spread of fire.
During recent years, some of these shops and residential tenements had fires and many of these never rebuilt. Others became vacant, and frequently the scene of incendiary fires. Fires became too common in Chelsea. It is known that in 1968, Chelsea had more building fires per 1,000 population than any other city, covered by the N.F.P.A’s annual survey.

Then the salvage business began to decline and in 1970, the city adopted the 1970 A.I.A. fire prevention code and the 1970 BOCA building code. One Deputy Chief and one inspector were assigned full time to fire prevention but conditions were too severe for the men to control.

With the waste trades barley existing, an urban renewal plan was developed that would revitalize this blighted area. This took a few years to develop and be approved and funded. Meanwhile, all these hundreds of buildings in the rag shop area, including closely built tenements, some in dilapidated condition and for the most part, vacant, became conflagration potential.

Photos taken during the Sept. 1972 I.S.O Inspections in the “rag district”. Photos by late member LMY

Since the fire of 1908 the present day Chelsea Fire Department operates with five engine companies, 2 ladder companies with a full paid department consisting of approximately 112 firefighters. Automatic aid is provided on some first alarm boxes and all multiple alarm fires. Firefighters work a 42 hour week with an average of 3 men per company of on duty strength.

Chelsea has a Class A fire alarm system with the present equipment installed in a 1935 in a separate 1 story building of fire-resistive construction at the corner of Chestnut Street, City Hall Avenue and Washington Avenue. There are approximately 135 coded fire alarm boxes in the city on seven box circuits. The fire alarm system is operated and maintained by the city Electrical Department with usually one fire alarm operator on duty at all times.

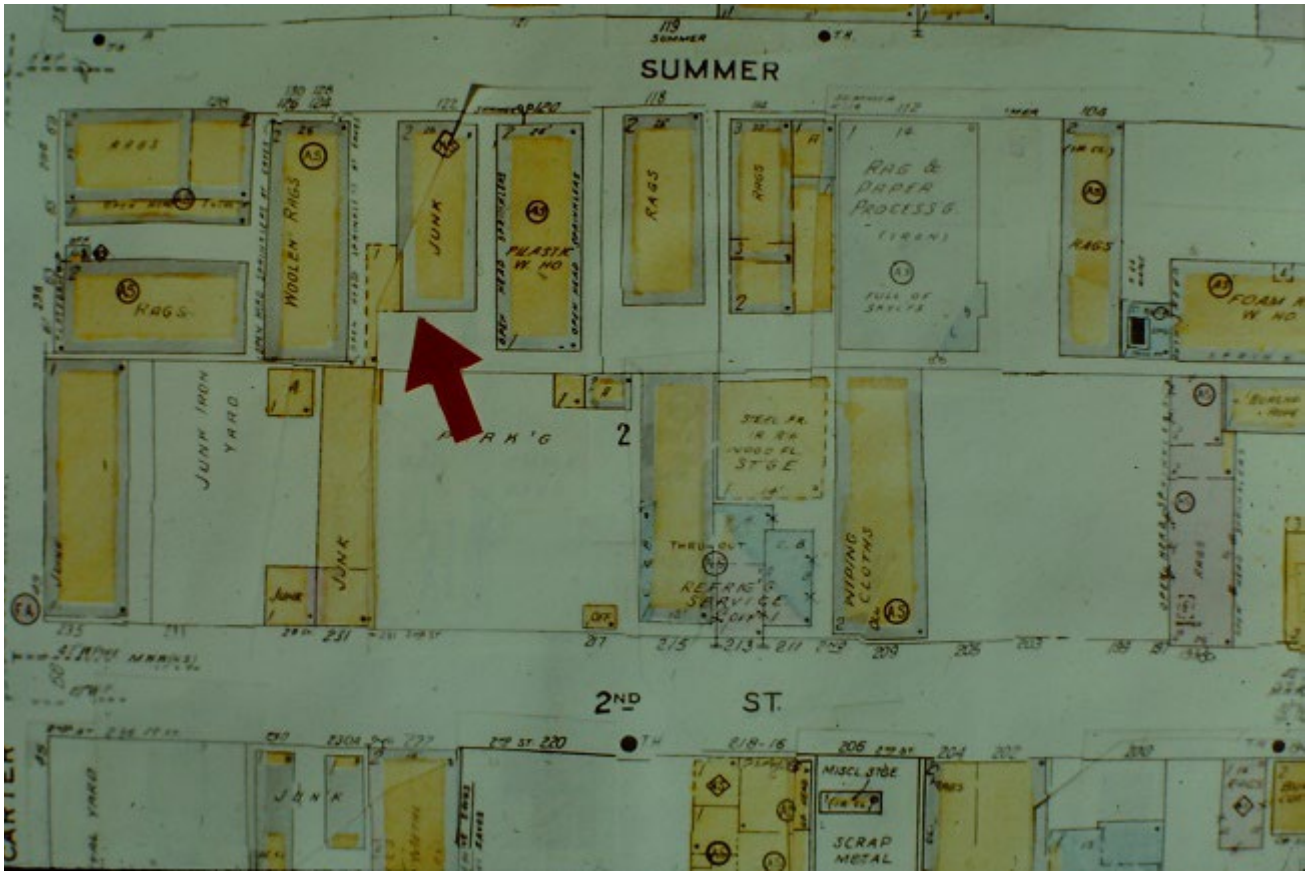
All box and still alarms are announced over the vocal alarm system and radio simultaneously as all apparatus is dispatched by this procedure. All boxes are beeped over the radio – a “beep-tone” with each stroke of the tapper bell. Chelsea has an excellent radio procedure.

The radio communications operates on the Chelsea fire frequency of 154.325 Mhz with all apparatus and fire department vehicles, including portable radios, having dual control for not only the Chelsea frequency, but that of Civil Defense Fire District 13 (the Greater Boston area) frequency of 154.220 Mhz for mutual aid communication. Twenty-five out of twenty -six communities, including Logan International Airport have base stations with some apparatus on this mutual aid frequency with the Central Dispatch Control Center located in the City of Newton Fire Alarm Headquarters.

A report based on the survey conducted by the Municipal Survey Service of Insurance Service Office from the Home office in New York City, during August and September, 1972, contained a dramatic statement that was to become quite true to life. The bold capital letters.

“***SEVERE SWEEEPING FIRES ARE PROBABLE IN THE WASTE TRADE DISTRICT AND IN CLOSELY BUILT WOOD FRAME TENEMENT SECTIONS”***

Will never be forgotten!



THE FIRE

On Sunday, October 14th, 1973, a mild fall day with the temperature around 68 degree mark and the wind blowing from the Northwest in gusts of 40-60 miles per hour, a fire from an unknown cause began at the rear of 122 Summer Street.

With little rain during the past month, the ground was exceptionally dry. With the tremendous gusts of wind and the dilapidated condition of many of the buildings, their close proximity to one another, as well as the thick growth of brush and all the heavy accumulation of trash around almost all buildings, and topped off with a conflagrations best friend, the delayed alarm, it soon became……..”CHELSEA ON FIRE”!

All fire departments in the Boston area were busy with the usual brush fires on such a mild, dry windy day. Chelsea, too, was busy, but nothing like what was to come.

Firefighters from the station of Engine 5 at Everett Avenue and 4th Street, which was also the temporary station of Engine 4 while their new station was under construction, spotted smoke rolling across the roof tops of the brick tenements across Everett Ave.

The crew of Engine 5 “stilled themselves out” to investigate the smoke at about 1555 hours. Two youths playing near the corner of Arlington and 3rd Streets also saw the smoke several blocks north and pulled fire alarm box 215 at Arlington and 3rd Streets at 1556 hours. Many people reported seeing this smoke but no one thought to sound a fire alarm.

Engine 2, out on a still alarm for a wire down in the street, reported “heavy smoke showing, upon receipt if the box alarm over their radio, even though they were some distance from the fire location.

It was difficult at first to determine the exact location, or even where the origin of the fire was, due to the heavy volume of smoke and fire in the area of Sumner, Maple, 3rd and Carter Streets. The usual response of three engine companies and one ladder was sent with Engine 3 being special called in place of Engine 2.

The running card for Box 215 showing the predetermined response of apparatus up through four alarms. This is typical of pre-determined response for all fire alarm box locations in not only Chelsea, but in all communities in Metropolitan Boston, and even throughout New England. Most all of the communities have connections between other communities on the coded fire alarm system.

Deputy Chief William Coyne reported a working fire at 3rd and Maple Streets. At 1557 hours, Fire Alarm received a pulling on box 228 at 2nd & Carter Streets.

At 1558 hours, Deputy Chief Coyne requested a second alarm on Box 228. Since Fire Alarm had not transmitted box 228 as of yet, and in advising Deputy of Coyne of this, Deputy Coyne requested the third alarm, which was transmitted on Box 215 at 1559 hours, skipping the second alarm.

The initial attack was made with two 2 ½ inch hose lines and eventually with deluge guns with ladder pipes.

At 1605 hours, Chief of Department, Herbert C. Fothergill, reported heavy fire in a two block area containing congested one-two and three story frame buildings.

At 1606 hours, Chief Fothergill requested a 4th alarm on box 215. This fourth alarm was transmitted at 1607 hours.

At 1609 hours Chief Fothergill requested the calling back of all off-duty members.

At this point, it was attempted to hold the fire at 3rd Street but this was not successful. Hand lines were not effective anymore, not even the master streams, as there was not enough water available to supply master streams.

1610 hours, the Chief of Department requested five additional engine companies and two minutes later indicated a possible conflagration, with the fire out of control at 1613 hours.

At 1615 hours it was requested to open the emergency water mains immediately!

Three minutes later at 1618, five more additional engine companies were requested. By this time, the mutual aid frequency with Newton Fire Alarm Headquarters as the control center was handling most of the requests for the extra companies, plus covering companies. At 1622 four additional engines were requested.

At 1627 hours, Chief Fothergill notified Newton Control that this fire was a CONFLGRATION – and to get any help they could get (*this was the first declaration of a conflagration transmitted via radio in history – Editor)*. At 1628, the Chief asked Newton for five or six more pumpers, they were going to try and make a stand at Everett Avenue. The fire was also spreading down 2nd to Spruce Streets and it was requested that an additional five more engine companies be sent to this area at 1636.

At 1641 hours, the Chief requested all available police from surrounding towns, Massachusetts State Police and the Metropolitan District Commission to evacuate residents and keep spectators out of the area. Also, since the Mystic River Bridge lower ramp was closed due to repairs, it was ordered opened for fire apparatus only.

At 1655, Chief Fothergill again ordered all available apparatus into Chelsea through Newton Control. The fire had now spread to Spruce Street and 5th Street area where there were large four and five story waste warehouses, fully sprinklered.

Command and control problems were developing. The fire had become so large that the Chief could not see all the important areas of it. In walking from point to point, the chief could not keep up with the spread of the fire and as a result could not exercise effective control. At 1652 hours, the Chief was advised that a Massachusetts State Police helicopter was available and arrangements were made for its utilization. With all Chelsea Chief Officers having portable radios, the Chief, through several helicopter observation rides, could maintain contact with his officers and could get command of the fire situation much more readily.

At 1704, more available help was summoned through Newton Control for the areas of Arlington, Spruce and 5th Streets.

Companies coming great distances began arriving into Chelsea and some would go to work on their own while others went to Chelsea's Headquarters fire station. Then they would be dispatched from there to wherever needed – some staying only a few minutes before being sent to a fire location.

During the evening companies were at work in narrow streets in close proximity to the fire. One of these engine companies, Medford Engine 6, was destroyed by the fast-sweeping fire. They were using a reserve 1946 Mack pumper at the time as their 1956 B Mack pumper was out of service for repairs. Other apparatus had to be pulled out hastily because of the progress of the fire.

Photo courtesy of Kevin Boyle

Eventually a stand was held at the north side of the along the railroad tracks. To the west, a line was held on 2nd Street. During the fire, a fire storm *(A fire-storm is a large fire, which achieves such intensity that it creates and supports its own wind system that creates tremendous turbulence and also cause the strong surface inflow winds to change direction erratically.developed in addition – Editor)* developed in addition to the gusting winds that carried heavy burning materials to all areas of the city in the direction of the wind. Walking was extremely difficult. Flaming trash, rags, paper and brush were carried by the wind to adjacent properties where they ignited accumulated trash, stock and structures. The fire spread also by direct radiation.

The heavy body of fire seemed to be contained around 2130 hours but additional companies were still required to relieve tired crews and fuel-short apparatus on the fire ground. Many spot fires were extinguished. One fire caused by flying brands, ignited the attic of Chelsea City Hall where it required five engine companies and ladder trucks from Boston, Cambridge, Southboro, Wakefield along with the Framingham Aerial Tower and the Woburn Snorkle, to extinguish the fire with 2 ½ inch hand lines stretched over the all the aerial ladders and elevating platforms.

The final progress of the fire was halted at Arlington and 5th Streets through the determined efforts of Arlington Ladder 2, the Lynn Tower and a Lynn aerial ladder, and several engine companies from several communities. This stop was the determining factor in the control and containing of the entire fire area shown on the accompanying map. Protection was set up around the Williams School, at one time the largest grade school in the Commonwealth. This brick school with its open yard and the Expressway to the Mystic River Bridge made a gap to assist the fire companies in the area of Arlington and 5th Streets to stop the progress of Chelsea's second conflagration.

It would be an almost impossible task to undertake the responsibility to gather an account of the apparatus that responded to the fire, either to cover the stations or to work at the fire. But fire buff David Proctor of the Box 52 Association completed this lengthy and tiring task with complete cooperation of from the Chelsea Fire Department and the following statistics are now factual: 93 municipal fire departments, as well as Logan International Airports and Chelsea Naval Hospital apparatus, responded for a total of 95 fire departments involved including Chelsea. Of all these fire departments involved there was a total of 145 engine companies, 20 aerial ladders, 1 snorkel, 2 aerial towers, 4 rescue companies and 3 miscellaneous pieces of fire apparatus. Of this total amount, Boston sent the most – 10 engines and 3 ladder companies.

Apparatus came from as far away as 40 miles to the north, 35 miles to the west, and 35 miles to the south. A total of 1,500 firefighters were on the scene.

It should also be noted that Civil Defense Fire District 5 (the northeastern section of Massachusetts beyond the greater Boston area to the New Hampshire line) with the city of Haverhill as the control center, handled the dispatching of apparatus from this area, even though Chelsea is not assigned to this radio mutual aid frequency of 154.070 Mhz.

WATER SUPPLY

The water supply is obtained from the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) Water Division, with an adequate supply but the arterial and distribution system within the Chelsea city limits is generally small and tuberculated to provided adequate strength. This water supply is obtained from the Northern low and Northern High Services of the M.D.C. The Chelsea High and Low Service has a number of emergency connections to the M.D.C.'s High and Low Services An emergency connection to the M.D.C Northern Low Service at 2nd Street and the Everett city line is opened on all second alarms in the western portion of the city.

Hydrant flow test by I.S.O. Sept. 1972

I.S.O. Inspection section of tuberculated pipe section.

All pipe is cast iron. Mains installed since 1945 are cement lined and older mains are tar-covered.

Even though most of the commercial properties were sprinklered. The arterial water system was not sufficient enough to afford proper protection to the properties. The use of many hydrants as the fire progressed, “robbed” the sprinkler systems of their water supply. Also, as these sprinklered buildings were destroyed, the debris broke sprinkler risers and water in large volumes flowed endlessly as there was not any way to shut off the OS & Y valves or the street valves until the fire had been contains and cooled down.

The structural conditions in the fire area had a required fire flow of 6,000 G.P.M. at 20 p.s.i. for the area of Carter and 2nd Streets. Flow tests revealed only 2,100 G.P.M. available at 20 p.s.i. during the September 6th, 1972, flow tests.

AFTERMATH

As far as records can indicate, a total of 301 mercantile and industrial buildings were destroyed including 50 fully sprinklered buildings. There were 59 dwellings destroyed. All this was over an 18 block area, with about 1,100 people being driven from their homes. About 60 firefighters were treated for various injuries but none serious.

The fire at one time threatened to destroy the 2 ½ story brick station of Engine Company 5 on Everett Avenue and 4th Street. When it was felt the station would be lost, firefighters and civilians removed almost all possessions and equipment from the station. One 1 ½ inch hose line was brought into the station and the fire that did get into the station was extinguished with moderate damage done to a second floor room and the apparatus doors and some window casings. Otherwise the fire went completely around the station and continued on.

However, The Chelsea Department of Public Works was not as fortunate as the Engine 5 station. They lost all buildings and vehicles located on 5th Street.

Chief Fothergill suffered a personal loss when his 1973 Lincoln Continental was destroyed by the conflagration as he used his personal car to respond to the fire. He said he “thought he had parked it at a safe distance from the fire”!

It is of interest to note that the 1973 conflagration started only about 300 feet southeast from the origin of the 1908 conflagration and traveled in the same direction with the same weather conditions. Only in the 1973 conflagration did the firefighting effort make a stand and therefore this recent fire only consumed about one-quarters of the area consumed in 1908.

L. Murray Young
I.S.O., NERO, Boston, Mass.

CHELSEA BOX 215
CONFLAGRATION RESPONSE

Timeline Created L.M.Y. Report & Other Sources

Response Compiled by Late Box 52 Member David Proctor

Time	Alarm	Engines	Ladders	Remarks
1555	Still	E5		Stilled themselves out smoke in the area
1556	215	5, 1, 3	1	E3 in place of E2 out on a still for wire down
1557	228			Not transmitted
1558	2-215	2, 4, Bos E50	2	Skipped
1559	3-215	Eve. E2, Bos. E11, Rev. E4, Bos. E8 Wint. E1	Eve L2	
1607	4-215	Eve. E3, Bos. E10 Rev. E5, Mal. E6 Sau. E1	Rev. L2	
1608	Eve. 1691	4, 2, 3	Eve L2	Revere Beach Parkway & Vale St. Box auxilarized to Touraine Paint Company All responded directly to the fire.
1609				Orders of C-1 callback all off duty personnel
1610	Sp. C			5 Extra engines to the fire
1613				C1 rpts possible conflagration, with fire out of control
1615				Open Emergency water valves immediately
1618	Sp. C			5 extra engines to the fire
1622	Sp. C			4 extra engines to the fire
1627				C1 rpts to Newton Control Fire is a conflagration
1628	Sp. C			5 or 6 extra engines to the fire
1636	Sp. C			5 extra engines to the fire
1644				C1 requests via Newton Control "All available apparatus to Chelsea"

1602	Boston E50, E11		Dist. Chief 2
1603	Boston E10, E8		E3 to cover E50
1604	Revere E4, E5 Winthrop E1 Naval Hosp. E11	Revere L2	USN Ship Yard E1 Cover USN Naval Hospital
1605	Somerville E5		E2 cover Everett
1608	Everett E2, 3, 4	Everett L2	
1610	Boston E39		

1614	Weymouth E5		
1618	Malden E6		Malden Emergency Center
1619	Saugus E1, Lynn E1		Lynn E3 cover Revere
1620	Melrose E1		
1621	Logan E1 E5, E7 Fireboat Fitzpatrick		Placed on standby for oil tank fire. Fireboat manned and ready to respond.
1623	Medford E4		
1627			Boston E56 & L21 cover Revere
1629	Brookline E1 Quincy E2, E3		Malden E4 cover Everett
1630	Medford E6 Watertown E3		Malden E4 cover Everett
1632			Boston E7 to E56 Lad. 24 to 21, Lad 15 to 24
1634	Arlington E4	Arlington L2	
1636	Somerville E9 (Aux) Watertown E1		
1637	Melrose E3		
1639	Wellesley E3		
1640	Avon E2 Sharon E1 Reading E2		
1645	Canton E1 Holbrook E1 Medway E1		
1649	Cambridge E1, E5 Waltham E2		
1650	Somerville E7 Lynn E4		
1651	Brookline E3		
1655	Boston E20, E21 Dedham E2		Milton E1 cover Bost E16. Quincy E2 cover Bos. E20
1657	Winchester E1		
1658	Braintree E1 Hingham E1, E2, E3		Hingham E6 to Quincy Hull E1, E2 to Hingham
1704			Medfield E2 cover Westwood
1706	Norwood E6		
1707	Wellesley E6 Lincoln E1		
1710	North Reading E5		
1711	Newton E3		
1712	Belmont E3		Salem E4, L1 cover Revere
1715	Danvers E1		Needham E3 cover Bos. E45
1717	Wrentham E1		
1719	Foxborough E2 Stoughton E1		
1720	Dover E1, E2 Georgetown E5 Randolph E3		Arlington E2 cover Malden
1722	Salem E2		
1725	Bellingham E2		Wakefield L1 cover Revere

	Norfolk E1 Wakefield E1		
1729			Arlington R1 to Chelsea Soldier's Home for possible evacuation of patients.
1730	Lynn E9 Millis E3		
1738	Burlington E1, E6 Franklin E3		
1750	Southboro E25		
1754	Haverhill E4		
1757			Weston E1 cover Dedham
1758	Arlington E2		To the fire from Malden cover
1759	West Newbury E2		
1800	Weston E2 Woburn E5 Woburn C.D. E8 Wrentham E5	Dedham L1	Cover Chelsea USNSY E-1 Cover USN Hospital
1802	Amesbury E3	Amesbury L1	
1803	Natick E4		
1805		Boston L15	Car 13 (Special Service Chief)
1807	Lexington E1, E3 Quincy E5		Lexington E2 (Reserve) cover Arl. E2 Concord E1 cover Lex. HQ
1809	Braintree E5		
1810	Milton E4		
		Somerville L2	From Everett cover to the fire
1815	Abington E2 Danvers E4 Lynn E10	Lynn Tower 2	Brockton E1 cover Chelsea
1816		Malden L2	
1820	Boxford E2 Cambridge CD E-11		
1829			Dedham E1 to Boston E55
1839	Wilmington E1 Boston E14, E34 from E10 quarters, E48 from E55 quarters		Framingham Twr L1 to cover Chelsea Hanscom AFB E4 cover Lexington
1831	Topsfield E33		
1838	Weymouth E4, E6		
1844	Wayland E2		Maynard E2 cover Revere
1845		Brookline L2	
1846	Marlboro E1		
1849		Cambridge L2	
1850	Belmont E2 Beverly E1, E2		Beverly L.P.

	Ispwich E1 Reading E6		
1856	Hanvover E1, E4 Rockland E4		
1858	Sudbury E1		
1902	Manchester E2 Swampscott E2		Billerica E1 cover Burlington
1910	Acton E6 Marlboro E6		
1912	Newburyport E6		
1914	Hopkinton E4		
1917	Gloucester E1 Newbury E1 Rockport E2 Topsfield E2		N.A.S. So. Weymouth E2 cover Abington
1922	Amesbury E3 Hamilton E1 Wenham E1		
1925	Westborough E3		
1920	Ashland E1 Holliston E3 & Tanker		Ashland E3 cover Chelsea
1934	Southboro E21	Southboro L22	
1940	Stow E1		
1945	Hudson E2		
2040			
2200		Woburn Snorkle	
2230		Boston L8	
2240		Boston L11	Belmont L1 to cover Chelsea
2355			Boston Dist 3 relieve Dist 2 & Car 13
2400	Beverly E8		Relieve Beverly E2

Monday October 15th, 1973

0004			Watertown L2 cover Belmont
0007	Boston E32		Relieve E50
0017	Boston E33, E9		Relieve E39, E11
0100	Boston E45, E4		Relieve E49, 34 Ladder 11 returned to own quarters
0250			Malden L1 cover Chelsea
0400	Boston E29, 5, 25		Relieve E33, E32, E9 returned to own quarters
0500			Boston Dist. 1 to Relieve Dist. 3. Dist. 2 to cover Dist. 1
0700	Boston E3, E40		Relieve E4, E45
0804	Malden E1		
1122	Winthrop E4		

1200	**Boston E56**		

All photos this page by Globe Photographer George Rizer.

The Fight at 122 Summer Street
The First Fifteen Minutes of Operations at Box 215

Sunday October 14th, 1973 started as typical Sunday day tour in all five stations in Chelsea and the greater Boston area. The dry weather conditions had Departments running brush and outside fires all afternoon.

At Chelsea Engine 5's quarter's one member walked out on the ramp and absently watched the cars drive down Everett Ave. In the background the vocal alarm and radio announced a still alarm for a downed wire for Engine 2 on Chestnut St. With the dry windy conditions, Deputy Chief Coyne didn't want an engine babysitting a downed wire and asked Fire Alarm to notify Boston Edison for an ETA. The firefighter on the ramp turned back to watching the traffic continue down Everett Ave. Out of the corner of his eye he spotted a black cloud of smoke rising over the rooftops. He ran into the station yelling "it's a fire, look at the smoke"! Several members walked out on the ramp and looked. Lt. Copello of Engine 5 took one look and ran back into the station yelling for someone to call Fire Alarm and tell them Engine 5 was heading to the fire. The 47 American La France roared to life and headed towards the cloud of smoke.

Pre-arrival rear 122 Summer Street

At the same time two boys playing ball saw the smoke and ran to pull box 215 Arlington and 3rd Streets about 4 blocks from the fire.

What no one knew was that a mother and son had watched the fire taking pictures of the fire in the yard of 122 Summer Street and as she drove away passing box 228 at 2nd and Carter Streets wondering why no fire engines were there yet.

Fire Alarm struck box 215 and special called Engine 3 in place of Engine 2, the time was 1556 hrs. The crew of Engine 2 looked towards the box location and the officer reported the box was a Working Fire. The crew of Engine 5 had no doubt they were rolling into no ordinary fire with the volume of smoke pushing up and the steady wind. Lt. Copello on Engine 5 radioed that there was a Working Fire on 3rd and Maple Streets. Then he realized the fire was further to the left near Summer St.

Engine 5 turned down Summer Street and they were shocked with the blow torch like flames. Lt. Copello grabbed the radio and yelled the fire was on Summer Street in an abandoned building spreading to both sides of the street. Deputy Coyne was shaken by the report Copello was normally unruffled, he must have an out-of-control fire. Deputy Coyne ordered a second alarm on box 228. Fire Alarm advised that box 215 had struck. The next exchange was the order for the 3rd alarm.

At 122 Summer Street the building was fully involved and in danger of collapsing and the fire was extending to the rear of the Clark Barrell Company. Fire Alarm Operator George Brown grabbed the mic of the Newton Control District 13 Mutual Aid radio and he broadcast “Chelsea to Boston, Everett and Revere Chelsea skipping the 2nd and striking a 3rd alarm on box 215 Arlington & 3rd Streets” the time was1559 hrs.

Engine 5 was grabbing the hydrant in front 115 Summer Street. The crew was pulling off 2 lengths of 4 inch supply line and connecting to the pump. The pump operator had climbed up to get the deck gun into action. The gun was opened but the low pressure off the hydrant, it was impossible to get a good stream. The heat was becoming overwhelming, and the order was given for 5 to retreat.

Ladder 1 was swung into Summer Street and came to stop. The crew ran to Engine 5 and pulled off several lengths of big line, screwed on the pipe and prepared to supplement Engine 5’s deck gun. The line was dropped when Engine 5 was ordered to retreat. They then ran back to the Ladder truck and backed up Summer Street.

Engine 1 pulled into the fire from the 2nd Street side. They grabbed the hydrant at 216 Second St. and the MPO finished the hook up the rest crew pulled 5 lengths of big line off and ran it into the rear yard on Carter St. It was an untenable position. The intense heat forced the crew to back out.

Engine 3 came in towards 3rd Street hoping to come in from the east and north side of the fire. At the same time Chief Fothergill ordered the 4th alarm at 1607 hrs.

At the same time Everett transmitted box 1291 Revere Beach Parkway and Vale Street Everett Car 2, Engines 4, 2, 3 and Ladder 3 were responding. They saw the smoke and thought the fire was at the rear of the Touraine Paint Company. They continued down Vale Ave and into the fire and went to work. Engine 2 was only Everett Company not assigned to respond on the multiple alarms for box 215.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the CFD fleet had arrived, Engine 2 reported they were clear and responding to the fire, no one answered their calls. With their Federal Q siren screaming they swung into the scene and went to work.

Engine 4, with MPO, late Box 52 member Dennis Williams drove the 69 Hahn into 2nd Street and grabbed the hydrant at Maple and 2nd Streets. They dropped 400 feet of supply line. The crew pulled off 200 feet of big line and got the line charged and started to hit the fire. Williams, due to the heat had to pull off the booster line and play it over the crew's heads, the rig and himself.

Chief Fothergill had advised Fire Alarm to "standby for future multiple alarms and he had several blocked of one, two, three stories buildings involved, fire is extending rapidly."

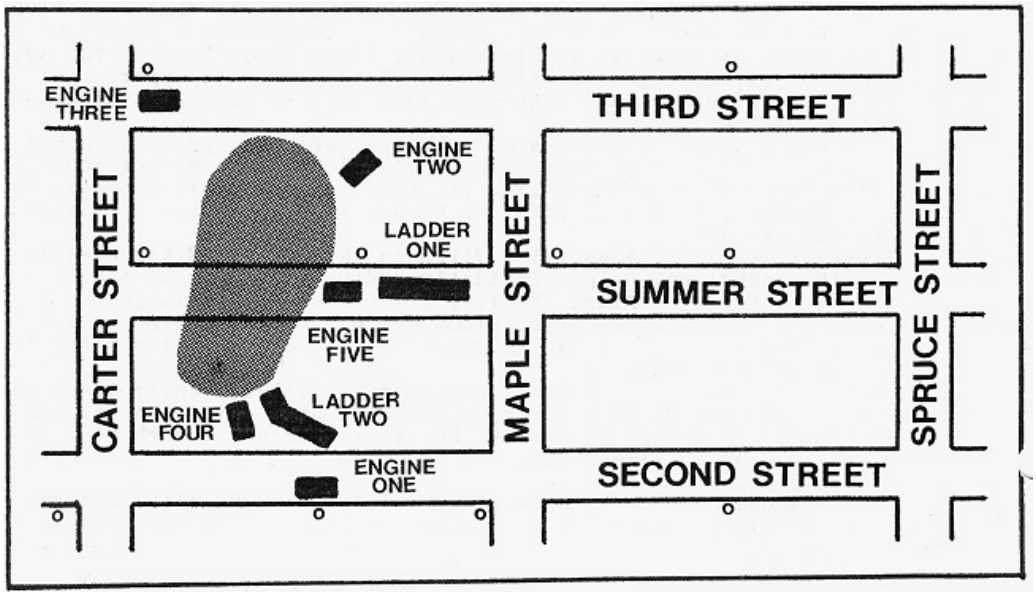
Chief of Department Herbert Fothergill.
Photo collection of member Mark Roche

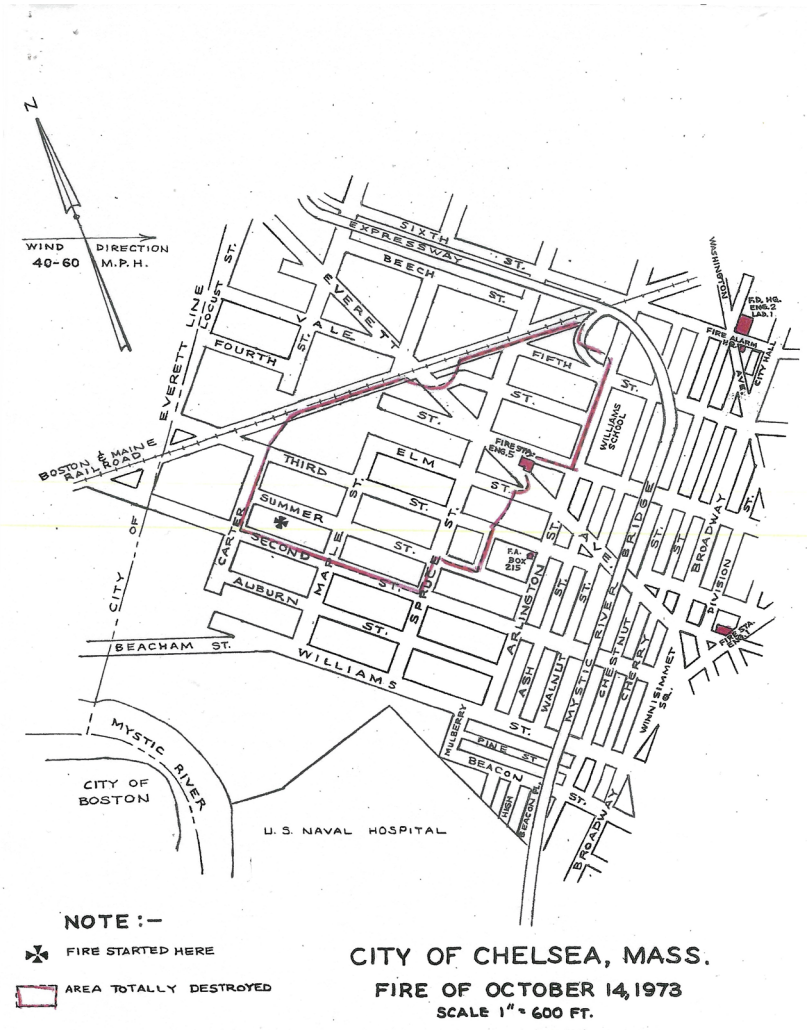
By now all five Chelsea Engines and the three Everett Engines were fighting the rapidly growing fire and the low water pressure with streams barely reaching the fire. Boston Engine 50 and Engine 11 had now arrived on scene under the command of District Chief Gallavin of District 2. 50's pump stopped at the hydrant at 260 Summer Street tied onto the steamer gate and stretched two lines into the wagon and a third line from Chelsea Engine 1 to get their hose wagon's turret gun into action. The hydrant that 50's pump was on had little pressure. Additional supply lines would be needed to get them into action. Engine 11 grabbed the hydrant at Summer and Maple Streets and prepared lines to feed Chelsea Ladder 1's ladder pipe.

Ladder 2 had to relocate to the corner of Carter and 2nd Streets, raised the aerial ladder to get its ladder pipe set for action. At this position they were able to get two 3-inch lines into the pipe directly from the pumping station at the corner. They had the best stream on the fire for about 3 minutes then lost all pressure. The heat had become unbearable and they had to retreat from the advancing fire.

Meanwhile, Winthrop Engine 1 came down Summer Street to Maple and took a line off Revere Engine 5 which had put its hard suction on the hydrant. Winthrop ran a big line into the yards off the involved buildings. They were soon pushed back by the heat.

The time was now 1617 hours, a mere 17 minutes since box 215 was transmitted. The fire was out of control! Now involving several blocks and completely rendering the twelve engine companies useless with no water, high wind, dry conditions, overwhelming heat and dilapidated buildings!


ENGINE THREE
THIRD STREET
ENGINE TWO
LADDER ONE
CARTER STREET
MAPLE STREET
SUMMER STREET
SPRUCE STREET
ENGINE FIVE
ENGINE FOUR
LADDER TWO
ENGINE ONE
SECOND STREET


N
WIND DIRECTION
40-60 M.P.H.
SIXTH
EXPRESSWAY
BEECH
ST.
EVERETT
LINE
LOCUST
VALE
FOURTH
FIFTH
WILLIAMS SCHOOL
BOSTON & MAINE RAILROAD
THIRD
ELM
SUMMER
SECOND
AUBURN
CARTER
MAPLE
SPRUCE
ARLINGTON
ASH
WALNUT
CHESTNUT
MYSTIC
RIVER
BRIDGE
BROADWAY
WINNISIMMET SQ.
MULBERRY
PARK
BEACON
HIGH
PEARL
BEACHAM ST.
WILLIAMS
CITY OF
MYSTIC RIVER
CITY OF BOSTON
U. S. NAVAL HOSPITAL
NOTE :-
FIRE STARTED HERE
AREA TOTALLY DESTROYED
CITY OF CHELSEA, MASS.
FIRE OF OCTOBER 14, 1973
SCALE 1" = 600 FT.

BOX 215
Arlington and Third Streets

Municipal fire alarm telegraph box 215 was a Gamewell 3-fold non-interfering type fire alarm box. It was mounted to a telephone pole owned by the New England Telephone and Telegraph Company. The box transmitted its signal via one of the seven Chelsea box alarm circuits.

Running cards for each fire alarm box in the city called for a first alarm assignment of three engines companies, one ladder company and the Deputy Chief. The second alarm called for the remaining two Chelsea pumps and ladder company and one mutual aid engine. The third and fourth alarms each received five mutual aid engines and one mutual aid ladder truck total response was 16 engines and 4 ladder companies.

Fifty years later in 2023, Chelsea would need to transmit 6 alarms to get this amount of engine companies.

Box 215 the day after. Photo by the late Edward Fowler courtesy of Cambridge Fire Dept.

Deputy Chief Fire Alarm Operator - Retired
George Brown

On October 3rd, 2023 at 1800 hours Chelsea Fire Alarm transmitted signal 10-43 for the death of Deputy Chief Fire Alarm Operator. Deputy Chief Brown was the on duty Fire Alarm Operator for the Conflagration. His voice became the voice of calm over the Chelsea and Newton Control radios.

He was appointed on September 7th, 1969 and retired on October 10th, 1996. He was a Marine Corps veteran. Funeral services was private.

The Run Card

Alarm	Engines	**Ladders**	Coverage Engine 2	Engine 3	Engine 4	Engine 5	**Ladder 1**
1st	5, 2, 1	**L1**					
2nd	3, 4, Bos. E-50	**L2**	Bos	Rev	Win	Eve	**Eve**
3rd	Bos. E-11, E-8 Eve. E-2, Rev. E-4, Win. E-1	**Eve. L-3**	Bos	Rev	Mal	Eve	**Rev**
4th	Bos. E-10, Eve. E-3, Mal. E-6, Rev. E-5, Sau. E-1	**Rev. L-2**	Bos	Lynn	Med	Som	**Win**

First Alarm Companies

Engine Co. 5 1948 American La France 1000 gpm

Engine Co. 1 1948 American La France 1000 gpm


Engine 3 1954 Mack LS 1000 gpm

Ladder Co. 1 1969 Pirsch 100 ft tiller

Second Alarm Companies

Engine Co. 4 1969 Hahn 1000 gpm

Engine Co. 2 1966 Pirsch 1250 gpm

Boston Eng. 50 Wagon 1950 Mack/Cardox

Boston Eng. 50 pump 1970 Hahn 1000 gpm

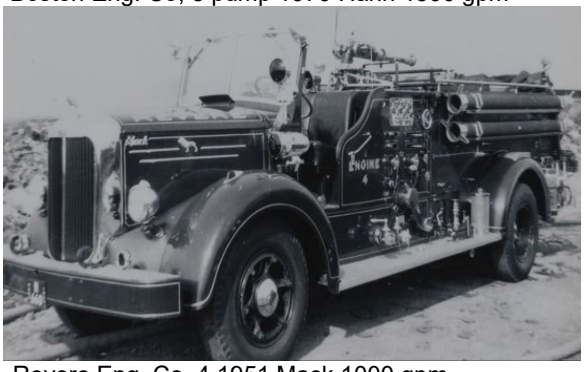
Ladder Co. 2 1949 American La France 85 ft tiller

Third Alarm Companies

Boston Eng. Co 11 1968 Ward La France 1250 gpm

Boston Eng. Co, 8 pump 1970 Hahn 1500 gpm

Boston Eng. Co. 8 wagon 1947 Mack



Revere Eng. Co. 4 1951 Mack 1000 gpm

Winthrop Eng. Co. 1 1955 Pirsch 1000 gpm

Fourth Alarm Companies

Boston Eng. Co. 10 pump 1971 Hahn 1500

Boston Eng. Co. 10 Wagon 1948 Mack/Cardox

Saugus Eng. Co. 1 1969 Mack CF 1250 gpm

Malden Eng. Co. 6 1955 Mack B 750 gpm

Revere Eng. Co. 5 1964 Seagrave 1000 gpm

Revere Lad. Co. 2 1965 Seagrave 100 ft tiller

Everett Box 1291
Revere Beach Parkway & Vale Street

Engine Co. 4 1963 Seagrave 1000 gpm

Engine Co. 2 1969 American La France 1000 gpm

Ladder Co. 3 1974 American La France 100 ft

Engine Co. 3 1957 Mack B 1000 gpm

Photos contributed by:
Boston apparatus by J. Woods, collection of William Noonan
Chelsea Engs. 1, 3,4,5 L1,2 Revere L2, Saugus E1, Everett E2, L3, Mal E6 member Frank San Severino
Chelsea E2, Medford E7, Everett E3, E4, Revere E4, E5 courtesy of Kevin Boyle

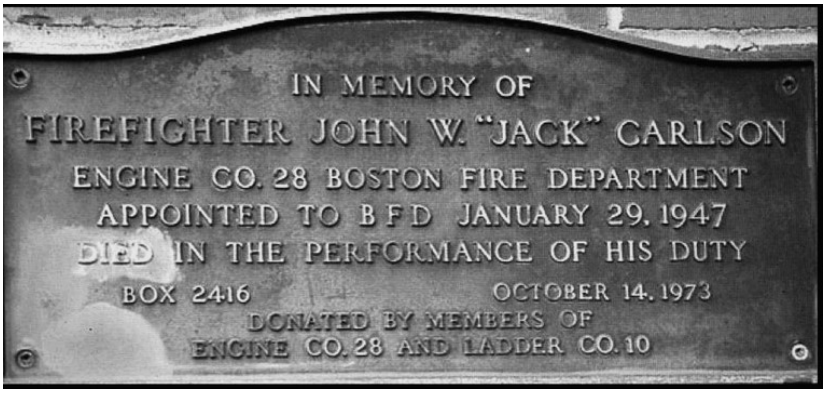
Photo by late member L.M. Young, collection of member David Parr

Boston Line of Duty Death
Sunday October 14th, 1973

As companies responded into Chelsea, companies in Jamaica Plain were making up from an inside fire at 28 Cranston Steet which box 2416 at Sunnyside & Creighton Streets had been transmitted. The fire had been knocked down when Aide to District 9 Firefighter John W. Carlson collapsed with a fatal heart attack. He was rushed to the hospital, where he was pronounced deceased.

He was the aide to District Chief James Donovan of District 9. He was 55 years of age and had 27 years of service and had formerly been assigned to Ladder 20 for many years and still wore a Ladder 20 helmet device.

Funeral services were held on October 18th.



Thanks to member William Noonan for information and photos for this article.

Chelsea Fire Department Today
50 Years Later

All photos courtesy of member Michael Boynton

Today the CFD has 106 firefighters responding from three stations. They operate with three engine companies, one tower and one rear mount aerial ladder manned by four shifts working 24-hour tours. Unmanned is a heavy rescue, squad engine and a multi-use squad. There is one spare engine and ladder. In 2022 a new tower was ordered.

Headquarters
AKA 'Central' 307 Chestnut Street

Engine 2 2021 Pierce Enforcer 1500/750/75 foam

Tower 1 2010 Pierce Arrow 95 ft tower

Prattville
32 Sagamore Street

Engine 1 2015 Pierce Arrow 1500/675

Mill Hill
885 Broadway

Engine 3 2018 Pierce Enforcer 1500/750/80 class B foam

Ladder 2 2017 Pierce Arrow 105 foot rear mount

Special Operations Units

Squad 1 2016 Ford F-250 4x4 quartered at Central

Squad 5 1996 Pierce Saber 1250/500 former Cambridge Engines 1 & 8. Quartered at Prattville

Rescue 1 2017 Pierce Saber Heavy Rescue quartered with Engine 1 in Prattville

Spare Apparatus

Engine 4 2010 Pierce Saber 1500/750/30 former Engine 2

Ladder 3 1999 Pierce 105 foot rear-mount former Ladder 2

Engine Company 50 Pump Mystery

As with any fire we feature in the Line Box, we always find a mystery. Let's dive into this one.

In August of 1973 Engine Company 14 was assigned a new Maxim pumper. Their 1970 Hahn was then transferred to Engine Company 50 as the pump of the two-piece company. At this time 50 was operating with a 1957 B Mack 1250 gpm pump that was formerly Engine 2 and 4. According to records there is some conflict as to the exact time that the Hahn arrived at Engine 50. After much research and back and forth we have found evidence that on Sunday October 14th, 1973, Engine Company 50 responded with the 1950 Mack/Cardox hose wagon and the 1970 Hahn 1500 gpm pump.

Engine 50 1957 B Mack S/N 100 1250/400. Photo by J. Woods collection of member William Noonan.

Appreciation

This issue would not have been possible without the assistance of the following members:
David Parr, William Noonan, Mark Roche, John Pozark, William Noonan, John Galla, Michael Boynton, honorary member Paul Christian.

Thanks also to the staff at the NFPA Library, Boston Fire Historical Society and Mr. Kevin Boyle for his numerous apparatus photos.