

4 ALARMS RUNG IN

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pg. 1

SPECTACULAR FIRE IN THE ABANDONED ELEVATOR BUILDING. 4 ALARMS RUNG IN

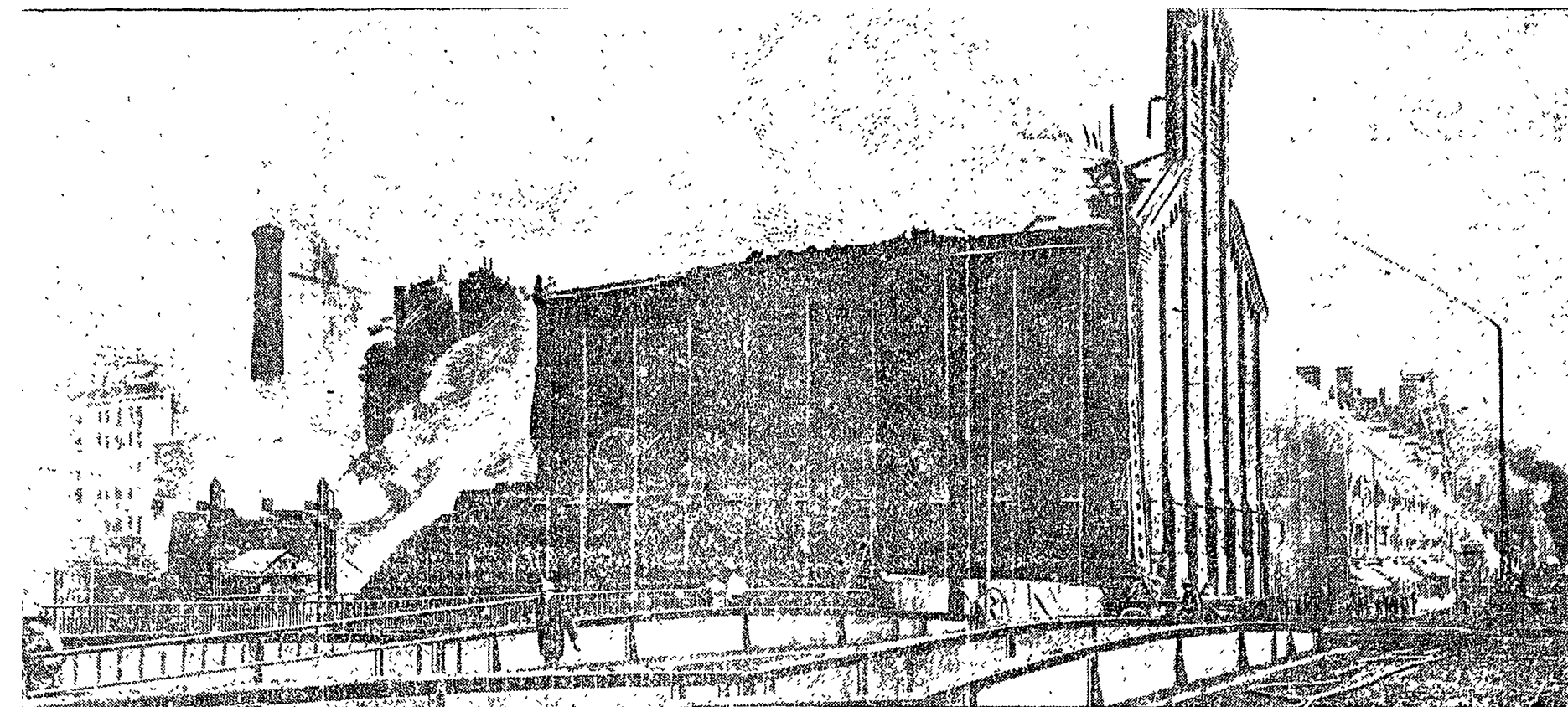
RUNG IN

Big Fire at the South End.

Old Elevator Building Destroyed.

Scores of Small Fires by Flying Embers.

Bucket Brigades Busy— Loss \$60,000.



PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN FROM THE BERKELEY-ST RAILROAD BRIDGE.

A fire which started at noon yesterday in the abandoned eight-story grain elevator of the N Y, N H & H RR company, situated on Chandler and Berkeley sts and running for 400 feet along the southerly side of the railroad tracks, completely destroyed that structure, started more than 20 small fires in buildings in the South End and in the Back Bay, caused unimportant injuries to several firemen and a few citizens, and entailed a property loss of probably about \$60,000. It caused four alarms of fire to be sounded from box 85, which not only called out about 30 steam fire engines, a dozen ladder trucks and three water towers, but a crowd of 40,000 people and the reserves from all the Intown, Roxbury and South Boston police stations.

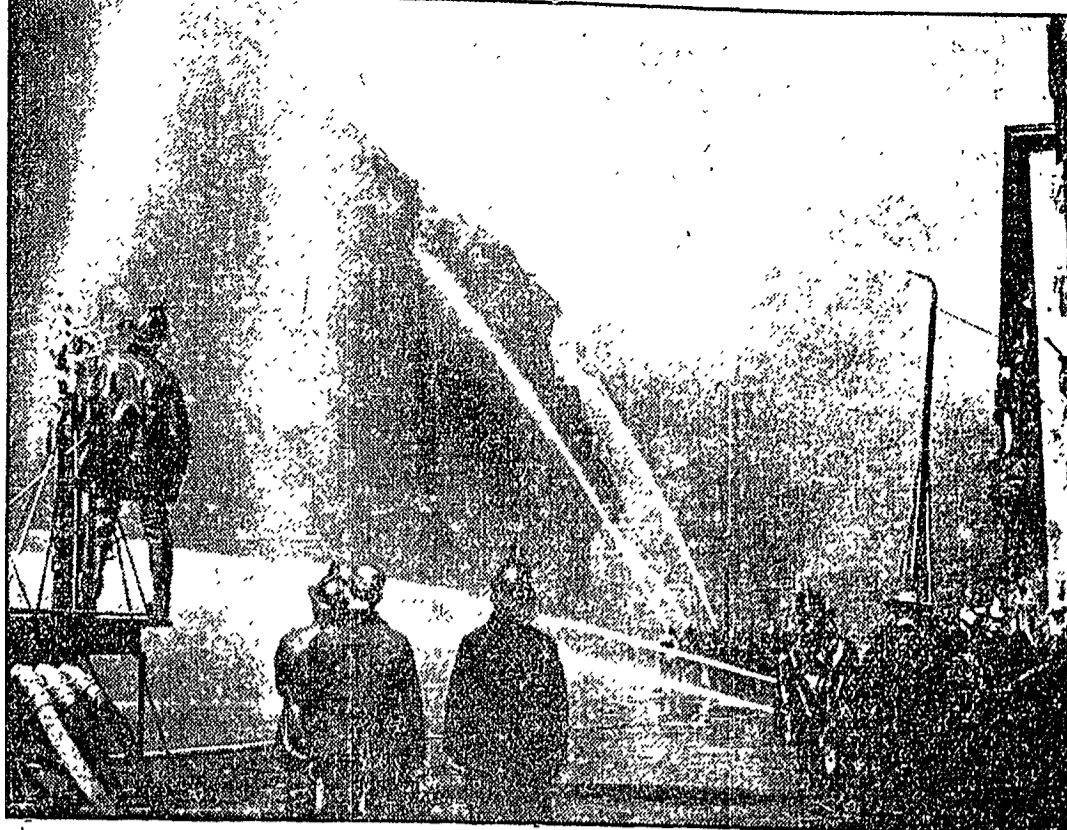
It was the second grain elevator to be burned in Boston this month. Both of them were the property of railroad companies. July 5 lightning struck a freight shed at the Mystic wharves, owned by the Boston & Maine railroad company, and communicated to the Mystic grain elevator, the largest in New England, and entirely destroyed it. There were 100,000 bushels of grain in that elevator. Three sailors of the steamer Austrian, whose entire crew jumped overboard, were drowned. At yesterday's fire there was no loss of life and no permanently disabling injuries inflicted on either firemen or citizens.

The elevator destroyed yesterday afternoon was built 40 years ago by the Boston & Albany railroad, and a few years ago was sold to the N Y, N H & H RR. When it was built it is said to have cost \$250,000, but its machinery was antiquated, it had not been used for the storage of grain for nearly 10 years, and it had long been an elephant on the hands of the railroad and an eyesore to the community. The value of the building had steadily decreased until its present assessed valuation was only \$75,000, and the insurance carried on it was only \$50,000. Real estate men who looked at the ruins in the late afternoon said the insurance fairly represented the actual value of the property.

Cause of the Fire Unknown.

No one knows, apparently, what caused the fire, which started on the second floor in the northwest corner of the building, and was seen simultaneously by citizens crossing the Berkeley-st bridge over the railroad tracks, the engineer of a passing locomotive and

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VIEW FROM THE CORNER OF BERKELEY AND CHANDLER STS.

4 ALARMS RUNG IN.

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by F. G. Robbins, operator of the railroad signals in the tower which stood against the westerly wall of the elevator midway of the building, and between it and the tracks.

The engineer set the whistle of his locomotive to screeching an alarm, the citizens on the bridge raced for fire box 85 and pulled it and signalman Robbins took action. The second floor of the elevator, where the fire started, was about on a level with the roof of the tower in which he was working the signals, and the fire hadn't been known for more than a minute before flames were shooting out of the windows and beginning to lap at the tower.

Robbins telegraphed to the superintendent of the road at the South station that the tower was in danger and the tracks were, he considered, unsafe for the passage of trains. Then he telegraphed to the operators in the towers on either side of his station to stop all passenger trains and hold them until further orders. Having tied up the traffic of the road so far as passenger business to or from the South station was concerned, Mr Robbins made a dash for the open, with the smell of frying paint, which the flames were striking up in the tower, in his nostrils. From then, and the time when he left the tower was 12:18 o'clock, until after 1, not a train on the N Y, N H & H road passed the scene of the fire.

Boston & Albany trains were stopped for nearly an hour, but as the tracks of that road ate farther away from the elevator, traffic was resumed, and the engineers whisked the passenger trains by the blaze about as fast as they could go, as for a long time there was great fear of hot air explosions which might have blown one side of the building onto the tracks or trains.

All the passengers on the trains crowded to the side where the fire was to catch a passing glimpse of it, but observing persons who watched the engineers noticed and commented on the fact that not one of them turned his eyes toward the fire, but kept them straight ahead on the rails, as provided for in the rules and regulations of the road.

Sounded Fourth Alarm.

The first of the men to arrive at the scene saw they had a great battle before them and the first district chief to get there promptly jumped in a third alarm, which brought apparatus on the jump from every direction. When Chief Cheswell arrived he sent in a fourth alarm, which brought more engines, more policemen and more people.

Before the fourth alarm had finished ringing, the fire had spread to all parts of the elevator and a pillar of dense, black smoke was pouring from the ventilators under the apex of the sharply pitched roof, which was six stories up from Chandler and Berkeley sts and eight high, counting it from the railroad side. On the railroad side the first two stories were of brick the entire length of the building, and above those two stories the building was of frame with slate sides. On the Berkeley-st end the building was all of brick, and on Chandler st for 200 feet toward Tremont st the building was of brick, with frame and slate covering above it, and about 200 feet of the building on the end nearest Tremont st was all frame and slate.

There were windows in the two brick stories on the railroad side, and there were a couple of doors each on the Berkeley-st end and Chandler-st side, but there were no windows there, and no chance for the firemen to get streams onto the fire direct, so the flames had things pretty much their own way. About all the firemen could do was to array all the apparatus they could on each side and the Berkeley-st end of the building and form water curtains in the hope of preventing the fire from communicating to the Castle-st hotel, the block of four-story tenement houses on the opposite side of Berkeley st, and to the building on Berkeley st across the bridge, and to the rows of houses on Cortes st, the rear of which back up on the railroad.

One of the water towers was stationed in Chandler st and the deluge it poured, supplemented by the streams from half a dozen fire engines and the house hose of the Castle-st hotel, which was operated from the roof by employees, prevented that building from taking fire. Two other water towers bombarded the front of the building with the streams from eight engines, and succeeded in saving the block of tenement houses on the other side of the street, although the wind, such as there was, was blowing toward them the first hour and a half of the fire.

Residents Form Bucket Brigades.

The streams of a dozen engines were kept on the burning building from the railroad tracks, and two or three chemical engines went up and down Berkeley st, across the bridge, along Columbus av for two blocks on either side of Berkeley st and through Cortes and Ferdinand sts, putting out the little fires that flying cinders, some of them nearly a foot long, kept setting in the awnings and woodwork of the houses. The people who live in the houses formed bucket brigades and succeeded pretty well in quenching the firebrands which fell upon the roofs.

The Youth's Companion building on Columbus av was guarded by a large force of the employees there, who fought the firebrands with hand extinguishers and buckets of water. A large number of employees of the Hoffman house, which extends from the corner of Columbus av along the southerly side of Berkeley st nearly to the bridge, fought the fire there and prevented any serious damage being done aside from the destruction of a few awnings. The apartment house on Berkeley st, next to the Hoffman house, and between it and the railroad tracks on which it abuts, lost about every awning it had, and some of the window sills were scorched.

The firemen ordered the blinds on the houses on Cortes st removed, and the folks told them to take them off themselves if they wanted them off. When the firemen started to remove the blinds

as an element of danger of the spread of the fire, they found them so hot that they had to drop them, and they went crashing down on the railroad's right of way. Some of the windows were broken in the Cortes-st houses by the heat, and a couple of the houses caught fire, but the regular firemen and volunteers put them out in a hurry.

In Berkeley st, Cortes st, Columbus av for a distance of three blocks beyond Berkeley st and in all the little streets which intersect Columbus for several blocks in either direction, householders got their valuables together and prepared to move. Some of them actually did get out of the neighborhood, convinced that the fire was going to develop into a conflagration.

Fire Started in Hotel Brunswick.

At the height of the fire the southeast wind of moderate velocity which blew for two hours after the fire started, carried bits of burning wood and air across the Back Bay and as far as the Charles river and the Fenway.

Herbert Barnes, manager of hotel Brunswick, in Boylston st, a good half-mile away from the fire, observed the falling firebrands and called all his employees to go through the big hotel and close every window on the side toward the fire. The work was superintended by Mr Barnes, and was about half done when he discovered that a firebrand which had come by the aerial course, had set fire to an awning on the fourth floor, and sparks from the awning blew into the room which was blazing merrily when the manager came upon it. Mr Barnes grabbed a hand extinguisher and tackled the blaze, shouting as he did so for a porter to send an alarm of fire. The porter rang in box 89, and by the time the firemen got to the hotel Mr Barnes had succeeded in extinguishing the fire, which caused a damage of only \$200 or so.

A burning brand fell on a load of plush-covered furniture which was being driven through Columbus av near the Youth's Companion building, and despite the efforts of a volunteer fire brigade and that of a regular fireman who aimed a stream of water at the load, the furniture was about all ruined.

Early in the fire Lieut Michael Boyle of engine 12 was overcome by heat while fighting the blaze at close range, and was carried into a drug store, where a surgeon of the fire department revived him and advised him to go to quarters. Boyle refused, and pluckily returned to work. In a little while a nozzle which he was helping hold went on the rampage, and, flying up, struck Boyle a heavy blow under the heart, knocking him out. He was carried back to the drug store, but as soon as he regained his consciousness and his mind he again went back to work.

District Chief Engineer Hiram D. Smith of district 8, Roxbury, slipped in coming out of the first floor of the burning building and badly sprained one of his ankles, but he insisted on continuing at work, after he had been attended by a surgeon.

Lieut Fitzgerald of protective company 1, who was injured internally by being kicked by a horse at a fire a week or so ago, was lying helpless in bed across the way from the fire, and as there was doubt of saving the house, he was carried out to an ambulance and sent to a hospital.

Scores of people got hot cinders in their eyes, and more scores had their straw hats or summer picture hats burned beyond all usefulness in the future by the falling cinders.

Wall Falls, Hosemen Stunned.

At 4:30 about 40 feet of the brick wall on the Berkeley-st end of the building fell into the street with a crash that was heard for blocks away, and had it not been for the activity of Sergt John E. Driscoll of division 5, who was in charge of the big police detail, and the assistance of patrolman Underhill of division 5, several persons who had disregarded the orders of Chief Cheswell against passing through Berkeley st, would have been crushed to death.

Lieut William F. Field of engine 3, Harrison av, and five hosemen were on the ground floor of the building on the Berkeley-st end when the wall fell. The part of the wall which went down was crowned with granite blocks and the shock of the tumble caused a lot of beams and scantling to fall inside the building. The concussion blew all of the hosemen out through the door and stunned them, but some of the scantlings fell on Lieut Field, and beside bumps and bruises of the head and thigh he was badly cut in the right hand, and that wound was made worse by the cinders and grime which were carried into it. Dr S. K. Patten of 210 Warren av dressed the lieutenant's wounds and then he was taken to his home in South Boston in a carriage.

Falling from the light it did, the granite cornice on the wrecked wall was broken into countless pieces that shot away from the mass like bullets, bombarding the houses across the street and making clean-cut holes in the windows of 89 and 81 Berkeley st, and a hole was torn through the heavy front door of No. 82.

Supt of Police Pierce was a spectator at the fire, but Sergt Driscoll of division 5 had charge of the police detail, which consisted of about 100 men.

While the large crowd watched the fire several of Chief Inspector Watts' men were on the lookout for pickpockets. About 1:30 inspectors Sheldon, McGarr and Burr arrested James Munroe, Harry Cole and Thomas F. Brown, three young alleged New York pickpockets. They were taken to headquarters and after being warned by Chief Watts they were shipped to New York on the boat train.

INSURANCE LOSS \$50,000.

Estimate of Amount Involved—
Brokers More Interested in Buildings Which Were Endangered.

The news of the fire in the old grain elevator building in Berkeley st was more disturbing to the fire insurance fraternity on account of the buildings in proximity to it, than for any serious losses they might sustain on the building itself. It had long since been discarded for more modern structures in the storing of grain by the railroad owning it, and the place had been looked upon as an eyesore for years.

Recently application was made to use the building as a place to sift the ashes of the road, but for some reason or other the project was abandoned.

The building is insured by G. W. Stickney of Springfield, who is in charge of all the Boston & Albany insurance, and placed the risk when that road owned the elevator. It is estimated that the total amount involved on it will not exceed \$50,000.

It was not regarded as a particularly choice risk, owing to the general antiquity of insurance companies to abandoned buildings of any description, and the line carried by any one concern is likely to be small.