

HOW THE GREAT BOSTON FIRE WAS FOUGHT

Ninety-Six Fire Companies from Thirty-One Cities Required to Subdue the Eager Flames—Two Members of the Boston Fire Department Now Who Were Members of the Call Department Forty Years Ago—Interesting Incidents Connected With the Fire.

Forty years ago last night, on Saturday, Nov. 9, 1872, what is known as the "great Boston fire" started at the corner of Kingston and Summer sts about 7 p. m. It raged for two days and in the history of the world's greatest conflagrations the Boston fire is fifth in the value of property destroyed. Before it was extinguished an area of 65 acres had been burned over and 776 buildings, valued at \$61,179,300, destroyed.

Although other fires before this had been more destructive and although greater ones have occurred since, the Boston fire taught more lessons in fire protection than any before or since. It was the Boston fire that aroused cities all over the country to reorganize their departments, increase their apparatus and reduce the hazards.

Few cities had permanent paid forces before the Boston fire, for the experience of Chicago the previous year apparently did not impress municipalities with the necessity for more effective organization.

At the time of this fire, Boston had a call department. It consisted of 274 members, and of the men then active members only two are now in the service as Boston firemen. Samuel Abbott, superintendent of the protective department, but in 1872 a call hose man, and John Bickford, then and now attached to Engine 11, East Boston, are the two who may as veterans still on duty celebrate the 40th anniversary of the fire.

To extinguish the great Boston conflagration of Nov. 9-10, 1872, required the services of 96 fire companies from 31 cities and towns of all the New England States, except Vermont; from Biddeford, Me. to New Haven, Conn., 2163 enrolled firemen and hundreds of volunteers, including many firemen who were members of companies and fire departments of different places, who assisted the companies on duty at the fire wherever assistance was required.

Of the 474 members of the Boston Fire Department at that time, about 100 survived.

Boston had 60,000 feet of hose in service during the fire and out-of-town companies had 41,650 a total of 101,650, of which 20,000 feet was destroyed. Boston at that time had a call-force fire department such as most of the smaller cities and towns throughout the country have at the present time.

The chief of department, engineers and stokers of engines and drivers of all apparatus were on duty all the time, all other members including assistant engineers (now district chiefs), company officers, and members were on duty only when there was a fire.

Four cities only possessed full paid or permanent force fire departments at that time, New York, organized in 1865, Brooklyn, N. Y., organized in 1869, Philadelphia, organized in 1871, and Chicago organized immediately after its great conflagration of Oct. 8-9, 1871.

The Boston department then consisted of 42 companies, 21 of them steam fire engines, 11 hose which have since been abolished, seven ladder and three chemical extinguisher companies, also one Underwriters' Protective Company. In the city proper there were six engine, six hose, two ladder and two extinguisher companies. All the engines were second-class, the size now used in the suburban sections.

The first fire boat, which was also the first fire boat on this continent, the "W. M. Flanders" was then in process of construction and went into commission Jan. 1, 1873. The tugboat Louis Osborn of East Boston was provided with a fire pump and was in service along the water front during the fire.

Horse chemical engines had not then come into existence. The three extinguishers carried in portable chemical extinguishers in wagons, as cans are now carried in milk wagons. Aerial ladders, water towers, poles, and many other appliances now used in the fire service were then unknown.

The Boston and Chicago conflagrations revolutionized the fire service and brought about the invention of many improvements in apparatus, equipments and methods of fire department management and fire extinguishment.

The Boston and Chicago fires created a new era in the fire service by ending the customs and methods of the hand engine periods and modernizing its equipments and methods, as automobile apparatus and high pressure water systems are doing at the present time in the cities and the largest towns and villages.

The Boston Fire Department was then governed by a Board of Engineers, consisting of John S. Damrell chief, W. A. Green and John W. Regan, after were chief and deputy chief of the reorganized department; Stover Jacob, Levi W. Shaw, R. B. Farrar, G. W. Clark and Zenas E. Smith, in city proper; Joseph Dunbar and Joseph Barnes, East Boston; George Brown, South Boston; James Munroe, John Collins and P. D. Allen, Roxbury; and S. H. Hebard, Dorchester, assistant engineers; all of whom have passed away. The City Council was represented in the management of the department by a committee consisting of three Aldermen and five Councilmen, only one of whom is now alive, Councilman James F. Marston, a veteran fireman, who at the commencement of that year, resigned his position of foreman of H. & L. Co. 3 to become a member of the Common Council.

Charlestown, Brighton and West Roxbury were not annexed to Boston until Jan. 5, 1874.

Of the 274 members of the Boston Department at that time, only two are now in the service, Supt Samuel Abbott of the Protective Department, who was then a call hoseman and a member of Engine Co 3, and John Bickford, then, as now, driver of Engine 11, East Boston. Several others who served as volunteers or substitutes subsequently became members of the department, a few of whom are still in the service.

B. F. Underhill, chief clerk of the department, was then a member of the Protective Department, which was quartered with Engine 7 in East st; Deputy Chief John Grady was then a volunteer with Truck 1 in Friend st. When the paid or permanent force went into commission in 1874, most of its members were taken from the old call force, many of whom served until recent years, when they were retired on pensions.

Money Loss the Fifth Largest.

The loss by the Boston fire is the fifth largest in history. The loss by the San Francisco fire of April 18-20, 1906, which destroyed 25,000 buildings, covering 3000 acres, is \$200,000,000. By the Chicago fire of Oct. 8-9, 1871, which destroyed 17,450 buildings, covering 2124 acres, \$191,672,000. By the Moscow fire of Sept. 4, 1812, which destroyed 31,000 buildings, about nine-tenths of the city, \$150,000,000. By the Baltimore fire of Feb. 19, 1847, which destroyed 1229 buildings, covering 140 acres, \$70,000,000.

By the Boston fire, which destroyed 776 buildings, covering 65 acres, \$61,179,300. By the London fire of Sept. 2-6, 1666, which destroyed 10,000 buildings, covering 436 acres, \$53,000,000, and by the Chelsea fire of April 12, 1840, which destroyed 282 buildings, covering 287 acres, \$17,600,000.

The Boston fire started about 7 o'clock Saturday evening, Nov. 9, 1872, from an unknown cause in the basement of a six-story granite building on the southeast corner of Summer and Kingston sts and swept over that section bounded by Summer, Washington, Milk, Congress, State, Kilby and Oliver sts to the water.

On its arrival in Boston, Sunday afternoon, it was first used to draw out-of-town engines without horses, which had been ordered home to the railroad stations. It was in service at the Shreve, Crump & Low fire and on the ruins for many days. After the fire it was purchased by the city and for a short period was used as a horseless engine by Engine Co 21, Uphams Corner, and later for some years as a horse machine by Engine 11, East Boston.

Frank E. Judkins, who has been engineer of Engine 1, Newton, Mass., for 28 years, came to the fire from Manchester with this engine as its stoker. The first alarm was sent in from Lamour box 42 at 7 o'clock, about 20 minutes after the fire was first seen at distant points. Policemen at that time sent in a second alarm without an order from a Fire Department official, when ever a fire of considerable magnitude was discovered above the second floor, and officer Page sent in a second alarm at 7:23 o'clock. Assistant Engineer John W. Regan, whose home was in Columbia St., was the first to be ordered to arrive at the fire and he ordered a third alarm at 7:30 o'clock.

Chief Damrell on his arrival from his home in Temple st ordered a fourth alarm at 7:45, a fifth at 8:06, a sixth at 8:07 and a seventh at 8:24 o'clock.

The sixth and seventh alarms were sent in from Box 124, Broadway and Dorchester ave, South Boston, and the eighth from box 48, Summer and Federal sts, which were sent in to bring to the fire the companies which were covering at stations in the suburban sections. The first call for out-of-town assistance was sent about 8:30 o'clock and was continued at intervals until midnight. The first out-of-town apparatus to reach the fire was engine 3 of East Cambridge at 8:12 o'clock, which came without being called, and the last was engine 2 of New Haven, Conn., at 10:30 p. m., Sunday, Nov. 10.

The large mercantile building on the southeast corner of Washington and Summer sts, adjoining the burnt district, occupied by Shreve, Crump & Low, jewelers, was destroyed at midnight Sunday, Nov. 10, by a fire caused by an explosion of gas due to the great fire, for which there were five alarms from box 42, the first at 12:18 and the last at 1:19 o'clock. Out-of-town companies the last to arrive, which were then on covering duty, rendered conspicuous service at this fire.

All the Boston companies, with the exception of Truck 6, Dorchester, were on duty at the fire and on the ruins for many days. The last of the out of town companies were sent home Monday evening.

The 30 cities and towns outside of Boston to send companies with apparatus to the fire, the companies they sent, etc., were as follows: Most of the nearby companies, including those of Boston, were drawn to the fire by hand, the horses then being sick with a distemper which made its appearance in Canada two weeks before. Long distance companies came by train. The places are named in the order they arrived at the fire.

Cambridge, Chief P. H. Raymond, Engines 2, 3 and hand Truck 1. Engine 3 was on duty at the fire and ruins longer than any other out-of-town company. Asst Engineer T. J. Casey, subsequently chief for many years, was in charge of the detail at the fire. R. F. Tobin, for some years a Boston Fire Commissioner, was then a member of Engine 2, Cambridge, and William Frazer, for 10 years a fireman of Bangor, Me., a resident of Cambridge at this time, accompanied Truck 1 to the fire as a volunteer, and was killed by falling walls while endeavoring to save the lives of others at the Weeks & Potter building, on Washington st. His remains were never found. Frank D. Olmstead, 18 years of age, another volunteer with Truck 1, was injured by falling walls at the Walker Carriage Barn, on Federal st while endeavoring to save others, and died the following day.

Charlestown First to Offer Aid.

Charlestown—Chief W. E. Delano was the first chief to personally tender the service of his department to Chief Damrell at the fire, Engine 1 (now 27), Hose 3 and 4 were in service. For a week or more Charlestown companies responded to first alarms in the North and West Ends of Boston. Martin Turnbull, 26 years of age, a member of Hose 3 fell down a flight of stairs with hose pipe in his hands and received injuries from which he died four months later.

Lewis P. and Albert C. Abbott, brothers, former members of Hose 1, lost their lives by this fire which caused their mother to die of grief shortly after. Lewis was buried beneath falling walls of the Weeks & Potter Building in Washington st, and Albert fell from a ladder in rear of Post Office in State st and received injuries from which he died the following month.

Chelsea—Chief Samuel Hutchins, Engine 1 and Hose 3, much of the credit for saving the Marlborough Hotel on Washington st, between Bromfield and Winter sts, belongs to this department.

Somerville—Chief James R. Hopkins who retired two years ago and is one of a few if not the only chief in service at the fire now alive. Engine 1 in service. L. D. Bixby now a member of Engine 1 at that time.

Medford—Chief B. H. Samson, Engine 1, of which Gen J. H. Whitney now chief of the State District Police was foreman.

West Roxbury—Chief C. A. Belford, Engine 1 and 2 and Truck 1, all located in station now occupied by Engine 25 and Truck 10 at Jamaica Plain. John Connelly, a member of Truck 1 lost his life by suffocation in the Weeks & Potter Building and his body cremated by the fire.

Navy Yard, Charlestown, Commander E. G. Parrott, Engines Contingent and Monitor in service.

Brookline—Chief Alfred Kendrick Jr., Hand Engine 1, Hose 1 and Truck 1. This hand engine was one of four in service at the fire.

Malden—Chief T. W. Hough, Engine 1 and Hose 3. Walter F. Trombley, a young member of Hose 2, was killed by a falling wall at Hexon's furniture store on Washington opposite Bromfield st, and his body was recovered several days later.

Reading—Chief W. H. Temple, Eagle Hand Engine 4. The company was presented by a Kilby-st firm with \$100 for saving its safe.

Hyde Park—Chief E. P. Davis, Engine 1 and Hose 1. These companies saved Paper's coal wharf on what is now Atlantic av, and received a substantial money gift from its owners therefor.

Newton—Chief R. M. Lucas, Engines 1 and 2. For saving the Mudge Building in Bedford st, Engine Co 1 received a gift of \$100 from its owners and \$200 from A. A. Lawrence & Co, one of its occupants. Engine 2 rendered conspicuous service in saving the Marlboro Hotel. Frank A. Barrows, then a member of Engine 1, is now its captain.

Wakefield—Chief C. H. Davis, Hand Engines 1 and 2, drawn by hand came in over the road, 12 miles, and rendered excellent service in the building of Lucia Beben—a resident of Wakefield, in Pearl st.

Lawrence—Chief Levi Ladd, Engine 3 was in service at both the big fire and the Shreve, Crump & Lowe fire, and was on duty longer than any company outside of Boston, Cambridge and Charlestown.

Lynn—Chief W. W. Kimball, Engines 1 and 2, in charge of Asst Engineer C. H. Downing, afterwards chief for many years. Engine 2 was run by Frank Holbrook who died last month, and Engine 1 by his brother, Amos Holbrook.

Salem—Chief D. B. Lord, Engines 1 and 2 and Hose 5. The Salem and Lynn engines came to the fire on the same train.

Worcester—Chief S. E. Combs, Engines 1 and 3 and Hose 3. Thomas Maloney, a member of Truck 2, and Lewis C. Thompson, a volunteer, received injuries by falling walls, which soon after caused their deaths. One of the most heroic acts by firemen was that of Asst Foreman E. L. Vaughn of Engine 1, subsequently chief of the department, who bravely faced death in a successful effort to save comrades in a building on Milk st.

Providence, R I—Chief O. E. Green, Engines 1, 4 and 6, which were in service altogether more than 60 hours. Asst Chief Ira Winsor was in charge.

Watertown—Chief A. D. Drew, walked 6 miles to the fire to tender the service of his department to Chief Damrell and then walked back, secured forces and sent Engine 1, which is still in service, to the fire.

Portsmouth, N H—Chief S. L. Marston, Kearsarge Engine 3. Melrose—Chief J. H. Horton, Hose 2. Watertown Arsenal—Col. T. T. J. Lingley commander. By special order of President U. S. Grant, Engine 1, with a detail crew, was sent to protect the Postoffice on State st, which was beyond saving when they arrived.

Waltham—Chief Marshall Parks, Engine 1, which was in service at both fires. Stoneham—Chief Onston Gilmore, Engine which was in service at both fires.

Manchester, N H—Chief B. C. Kendall, Engine 1 and Hose 1, which were in service at the Shreve, Crump & Low fire. Thomas W. Lane, then a member of Hose 1, has been chief of the department for 33 consecutive years, and is now the oldest chief in years of service in New England and the fourth oldest in the country.

The Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, which at that time constructed steam fire engines, sent the first self-propelling or horseless fire engine made with the other apparatus. This machine, made in 1867, had been used only for exhibition purposes and had been in storage for a long time, until the day before it came to Boston, when it was put in serviceable condition in anticipation of being called into service at home because of the horse distemper.

Fall River—Chief T. J. Bowen, Engines 3 and 4. On their arrival Sunday afternoon, Engine 3 was at once returned home and Engine 4 placed on covering duty in Engine 7 station where it was when the Shreve, Crump & Low fire commenced. W. C. Daval Jr., who was then foreman of this company, has been chief of the department for 30 years.

New Bedford—Chief A. H. Howland Jr., Engine 4 one of two first-class engines with four outlets at the fire. While preparing to leave its location near the Old State House to go to the Shreve, Crump & Low fire, its company discovered a fire in the Massachusetts Bank Building in Devonshire st which, after several hours hard fight, through 1600 feet of hose, was extinguished after the roof and upper story had been destroyed. Its timely discovery and good work saved that and probably other buildings.

Biddeford, Me—Chief J. W. Brooks, Engine 2, only Maine company at fire. Norwich, Conn—Chief D. A. Delaney, Engine 1, and 5 and Hose 1, with 120 men. The men went to the United States Hotel and the apparatus was not taken from the cars until the Shreve, Crump & Low fire, two hours after its arrival.

H. L. Stanton, then a member of Engine 5, is now chief of the department and possesses as a relic of the fire a piece of the outside box of a fire alarm box 52 from which the alarm for the fire was given, which he obtained while at the fire. Engine 1 was a first-class engine.

New Haven, Conn—Chief A. C. Hendrick, Engine 2 with 20 men were the last from out of town to reach the fire. It was in service at the Shreve, Crump & Low fire for several hours. John Richardson a member of the company received injuries by falling from a ladder which caused his death two years later.

List of the Companies at the Fire.

The 96 companies, 41 from Boston and 55 from other places, which responded to the several alarms and calls for assistance and the time of their arrival at the fire, are listed in the first alarm was at 7:24 and the first call for assistance at 8:30 o'clock.

SATURDAY P M

Engine 7, East St, Boston	7:20
Hose 2, Hudson St, Boston	7:27
Protective 1, East St, Boston	7:28
Engine 4, Brattle Sq, Boston	7:30
Truck 1, Friend St, Boston	7:31
Extinguisher 1, North Grove St, Boston	7:31
Hose 1, Salem St, Boston	7:32
Hose 8, Church St, Boston	7:32
Hose 5, Shawmut Av, Boston	7:33
Truck 3, Wareham St, Boston	7:37
Extinguisher 2, Wareham St, Boston	7:37
Engine 8, Salem St, Boston	7:38
Engine 10, River St, Boston	7:38
Engine 6, Wall St, Boston	7:44
Hose 4, North Grove St, Boston	7:44
Engine 2, Wilmington St, Boston	7:45
Hose 7, Fremont St, Roxbury	7:47
Engine 9, Paris St, East Boston	7:47
Truck 4, Lusit St, Roxbury	7:50
Hose 9, B St, South Boston	7:51
Engine 11, Sumner St, East Boston	7:55
Truck 5, 4th St, South Boston	7:56
Engine 1, 4th St, South Boston	7:56
Hose 4, Northampton St, Boston	7:57
Hose 10, Washington Village	7:57
Engine 13, Cabot St, Roxbury	7:58
Engine 14, Center St, Roxbury	7:58
Engine 21, Uphams Corner	8:05
Engine 12, Dudley St, Roxbury	8:05
Engine 15, Dorchester St, South Boston	8:05
Engine 3, East Cambridge	8:12
Hose 3, Charlestown	8:15
Engine 2, 4th and I Sts, South Boston	8:15
Engine 17, Meeting House Hill	8:15
Truck 7, Meeting House Hill	8:15
Engine 1, Charlestown	8:17
Hose 4, Charlestown	8:22
Engine 2, Cambridgeport	8:25
Engine 1, Chelsea	8:40
Engine 18, Harvard St, Dorchester	8:40
Hose 3, Chelsea	8:55
Engine 10, Dorchester Lower Mills	8:55
Blue 20, Newport	8:55
Engine 1, Somerville	9:00
Engine 4, North Cambridge	9:00
Engine 5, Marston St, East Boston	9:12
Engine 10, Mattapan	9:30
Louis Osborn tug boat	9:30
Engine 1, Medford	9:30
Engine 1, Jamaica Plain	9:40
Engine 2, Jamaica Plain	9:40
Truck 1, Jamaica Plain	9:40
Truck 1, Cambridgeport	9:45
Contingent engine, Navy Yard	10:15
Hand engine 1, Brookline	10:30
Hose 1, Brookline	10:30
Truck 1, Brookline	10:30
Engine 1, Malden	10:45
Hose 6, Chelsea St, East Boston	10:45
Truck 2, Sumner St, East Boston	11:00
Hand Engine 4, Reading	11:00
Hose 1, Hyde Park	11:00
Engine 1, Newton	11:20
Hose 3, Edgewood, Malden	11:40
Hand Engine 1, Wakefield	11:45
Hand Engine 2, Wakefield	11:45
Engine 3, Lawrence	11:50
Engine 2, West Newton	11:55
Engine 1, Hyde Park	11:55

SUNDAY A M

Engine 1, Lynn	12:00
Engine 2, Lynn	12:00
Engine 1, Salem	12:00
Engine 2, Salem	12:00
Hose 5, Salem	12:00
Monitor Engine, Navy Yard	12:00
Engine 1, Worcester	12:15
Engine 3, Worcester	12:25
Engine 1, Providence, R I	12:40
Engine 4, Providence, R I	12:40
Hose 3, Worcester	3:30
Engine 1, Watertown	4:30
Engine 3, Portsmouth, N H	5:15
Hose 2, Melrose	6:00
Engine, Watertown Arsenal	9:30
Engine 1, Stoneham	10:30

SUNDAY P M

Engine 6, Providence, R I	3:00
Engine 1, Manchester, N H	4:43
Hose 1, Manchester, N H	4:43
Horseless engine, Manchester, N H	4:43
Engine 4, Fall River	5:00
Engine 4, New Bedford	6:00
Hose 2, Biddeford, Me	6:00
Engine 1, Norwich, Conn	10:15
Engine 5, Norwich, Conn	10:15
Hose 1, Norwich, Conn	10:15
Engine 2, New Haven, Conn	10:30

Many other companies throughout New England started for the fire but did not reach it. The light of the fire was so great that it was supposed to be only a short distance away, and many alarms were given for it.

Engine 1 of Portland, Me., reached Portsmouth, N H, Sunday afternoon, where the train was stopped by a dispatch from Boston and the company returned home.

Most of the telegraph offices outside of Boston closed early and some of the messages for assistance did not reach their destination until Monday, including Lowell.

Several companies claimed to have saved the Old South Church. The fire did not reach the church and it was never in great danger. Its slated roof and spire saved it from sparks. Several times burning embers lodged on top of its spire during the night, which were extinguished by engines from Chelsea, West Roxbury, Watertown and Portsmouth, N H, in the order named.

Fourteen lives were lost by the fire. Seven of that number were enrolled firemen, three ex-firemen, three volunteers and one citizen. The firemen were Foreman William Farrar and Assistant Foreman Daniel Cochrane of Truck 4, Boston; John Connelly of Truck 1, West Roxbury; W. S. Trombley, Hose 2, Malden; Thomas Maloney, Truck 2, Worcester; Martin Turnbull, Hose 3, Charlestown, and John Richardson, Engine 2, New Haven. Ex-firemen, L. P. and A. C. Abbott, Charlestown, and W. S. Frazer, Bangor, Me (Cambridge). Volunteers, Henry Rogers, Engine 6, Boston; F. D. Olmstead, Cambridge, and Lewis C. Thompson, Worcester. Citizen, Michael Fitzgerald, Boston.

Hose 2 located in the Quincy School yard in Hudson st, was the first company to start for the fire. It started before the alarm was given. Engine 7, in East st, the nearest company to the fire, had just cleared the door when the alarm came in and was the first to reach the fire, but owing to some delay in getting to work, Hose 2 was the first to pass water.

The commissioners who investigated the fire, in their report said of the firemen:

"The most important part of a fire department is its men. Boston has the best material. Words fail to describe the courage and devotion of our firemen. No battlefield ever witnessed nobler heroism than was seen in our streets. The story of the fire is a story of hardships endured and dangers braved in obedience to duty. More than one of the firemen has literally proved 'faithful unto death.' We know the whole community joins in the praise recently bestowed by our Mayor on the members of the department and in thanks which he renders to the firemen of other places far and near who so promptly furnished aid in our time of need."