

"PULL THE HOOK" IN ALL CASES OF FIRE

Duplication of Street Names, Chance For Confusion on Phone, Cause Sennott to Stress Order

"When you discover a fire go to the nearest fire alarm signal box, open the door, pull down the hook, let it go, and then stand by the box until the arrival of the firemen to direct them to the fire.

"Do not try to send the alarm to the Fire Department by the telephone. Be sure that an alarm is sounded from a box and be sure that the firemen who arrive in answer to the alarm receive directions as to where the fire is burning."

The above is an order that Daniel F. Sennott, chief of the Boston Fire Department, is broadcasting at every opportunity. At formal meetings, social gatherings or any other place where Chief Sennott can gather a few listeners, this message is being preached. The message, in short, is: "Never mind the telephone. Pull the hook."

Daniel F. Sennott became the boss fire-fighter of Boston, Dec 19, 1924, but his message to pull the hook was heard long before that date, as he says that he started to deliver this message nearly 43 years ago, when he first put on the blue uniform and the silver buttons.

Must Avoid Mixups

In his message he says: "With a separate individual number on each fire alarm box, the striking of this number on the tappers and gongs sends the firemen to the spot at which the box is located, but an attempt to notify the department otherwise, through a misunderstanding of the message sent, may send the firemen and engines to a place miles away.

"One of the chief troubles in understanding persons trying to telephone an alarm is failure to explain themselves, through excitement or inability to pronounce correctly the words they wish to use, but the chief trouble is, in telling the operator at the fire alarm office the correct location of the fire.

"This is not entirely due to the person calling, but partly to the fact that the same name is used for identifying different streets in different sections of the city, in some cases two or more streets of the same name are in the same district, but miles from each other.

"The fact that duplicate names exist in the city on streets in different sections is common knowledge, but the operators at headquarters know better than any other persons that highways numbering from two to seven in the same section of the city bear the same name, and whenever the signal on the telephone switchboard flashes for a fire call, they all start praying that the call is from some place that can be located.

Chances for Confusion

As a result of the preaching of Chief Sennott an attempt was made to get from the official street directory of the Street Commission of Boston some of the outstanding cases of which he complains, page after page showing exact duplications, with hundreds of cases of streets pronounced the same but spelled with a difference of one or two letters.

Washington is a name known to everybody, but how many persons know that 23 highways in this city bear this name, and it covers streets, courts, avenue, parks, places, roads and terraces? Can Chief Sennott be blamed for broadcasting the message of "Pull the hook."

For example, a fire is discovered at City Hall. The hook in box 1255, located in the building, is pulled. The signal 1-2-6-5 is sounded at headquarters and transmitted to the engine houses, with the result that every fireman who hears this signal knows that the department is needed at City Hall.

What a difference to the operator when he gets the message, "Send the firemen to 1000 Chestnut." "What Chestnut, and where?" "West Roxbury." "What is your telephone number?" "Parkway 123456." With this the telephone is hung up and the connection broken.

The card on file under the heading "Chestnut" will show the operator that 16 highways in Boston are listed under that heading, seven of them in West Roxbury, all with telephones connected with the Parkway exchange. These highways call for an avenue, street, grove, place, road, square and terrace.

How Firemen Are Balked

With this card before him he attempts to get the person calling back on the phone to ascertain, if possible, which one of the seven was referred to, but is unable to get an answer, and when telephone information is called on for assistance the reply will come back, "They do not answer."

While the operators at headquarters are doing all in their power to locate the fire, somebody in West Roxbury suddenly remembers that a red box is stuck on a pole about 100 feet away from the burning building, rushes down and sounds an alarm, with the result that when the first company reaches the scene the officer in charge takes a quick look, turns to one of the men and says, "Give me a second."

This situation has arisen in Boston a number of times. While "Chestnut, West Roxbury," has never been the scene, it has occurred when the operator has been unable to learn on which one of half a dozen streets of the same name the fire was burning.

If the fire for which a second alarm is sounded can be stopped with two-alarm apparatus, then the danger from mistaken telephone alarms would not be so great, but a mistake by telephone might mean the destruction of an entire district. Were this fully realized, the order, "Pull the hook," would be more generally obeyed.

Again, with the placing of telephones in the city in exchanges located in other municipalities, a person calling over the telephone, "Send the Fire Department," means that they will be connected with a Fire Department in a city or town other than Boston.

The telephone company when installing telephones did not follow the municipal boundary lines, but located lines for the greatest convenience in handling the telephone service, with the result that the line between Brighton and Brookline runs through Commonwealth av, while the municipal lines are a number of blocks back of the avenue.

This means that hundreds, if not thousands of telephones are located in buildings in Boston, but are connected with the Regent exchange in Brookline, with the result that when one of these subscribers lifts the receiver and asks for the Fire Department, he is immediately connected with Brookline Fire Headquarters.

Brookline Aids Boston

The Brookline operator, on receiving the message, tells the calling party to call the Boston Fire Department, at the same time sending the call through himself in order to make certain that the alarm is received.

Since Selden R. Allen took command of the Brookline Fire Department a couple of years ago, the policy of "mutual aid" has been followed strictly and when his operator receives a call for a fire in Boston, his orders are to send the nearest company. This policy has been the means of stopping a number of fires in Boston, before the arrival of the Boston department.

The same policy is in effect between Boston and Newton, Chief Randlett having issued orders to his department to respond to all border fires between Boston and Newton, a like order having been issued by Chief Sennott to Engine 51 at Oak sq.

The telephone service in Roxbury in the vicinity of Parker Hill and the Fenway also comes under the Regent or Aspinwall exchanges, with the result that Brookline is called frequently for fires in this section of Boston. Somerville and a part of Cambridge, as well as Milton and Dedham also receive

calls by telephone for fires in Boston. The entire upper section of Dorchester from Ashmont to the Neponset River as well as the Mattapan-section of the district come under the Milton exchange, with the result that a number of fires have got a start on the firemen because the hook being used instead of the hook being pulled.



CHIEF DANIEL F. SENNOTT

Boston has no monopoly on street names such as Washington, School, Pleasant and others, but Brookline, Milton, Dedham and about every other city and town, has streets with the same names and many times when a call is received in one of these towns for a fire on a street with a popular name in Boston, the department in that town responds to its own street only to learn that it is not needed.

East Boston has two Short sts, one at either end of the island, with the result that a telephone call for a fire on Short st, means sending Engine 40 and Ladder 2, to one Short st, and Engine 11 and Ladder 21 to the other, in order to make sure of finding the fire.

Names Often Duplicated

Two streets in Dorchester are named Howe and one Howes. Two Harvest sts and one Harvest terrace are in this district, far apart. The same district has a Columbia road, avenue, park and place and two terraces and a Columbine st.

A glance at West Roxbury shows two Cypress sts, two Brook sts, two High sts and a High road, a Grove road, Grove terrace, Grove st, Grove av and a Grosvenor st, two Clarendon avs, Clarendon ct and Clarendon pk, Deldorf, Delford, Delmore and Delos sts.

If a person in Dorchester calls the department to Kane st, are the firemen to blame if they stop at a house of the same number on Kane st? Dorchester can also boast of a Hillsboro st and Hillsboro road, Hillside st and Hillside road, with West Roxbury throwing in two Hillside avs, Hillcrest st and Hill st.

Roxbury has a Highland av, Highland pk, Highland-pk av, Highland-pk st, Highland pl, Highland terrace and Highland st. Dorchester and Hyde Park can also furnish a Highland st each, in order further to complicate this situation. As for High sts, Dorchester, Charlestown and the city proper can each furnish one, West Roxbury two and a High road. Hyde Park has a High Rock st and Brighton a High Rock way and a Highgate st.

For the hotels and apartment houses in Boston the same system was followed as in naming streets, and that was to take whatever name appealed and hang a sign on the building.

Maze of Similar Names

To begin at the head of the list, one finds an Abacott, three Abbots, an Abbottsford, two Aberdeens, three Adams and one Adams Gables, two Albeinrie and Albeinrie Chambers, with an Alden Court, Alden Hall and Aldine, two Alexanders and an Alexandre, with three under the name of Allen and one Allyn, three Alpines, two American Houses, two Andersons, one Andrew and two Andrews, with one Auburndale and four Audubons, two Avons, two Avondales and one Avonmore.

Under the second letter come five Beacons, two Belledues and three Bellevues.

The next brings four Carltons, five Colonials and five Commonwealths. Three Elizabeths lead the list under this letter, while under Fen of different kinds are listed 12, all in the Back Bay district. Florence leads the names of women.

Franklin is listed nine times with one Franklin Square House. Geneva is listed four times, the same as Gloucester, while one Isabella is lined up with two Isabelles.

Following two parks comes four Parkers, three Parkviews, two Parkways and one Parkhurst. Stuart and Summer are each listed three times, followed by one Sunnybrae, one Sunnymead, four Sunnyside and one Sunset.

Warren comes on the list four times, the same as Wellington, with three listed under the name Washington.

With this situation existing in Boston, is it any wonder that Chief Sennott orders: "On discovering a fire, do not attempt to telephone an alarm, but go to the nearest box, open the door, pull the hook and then stand by and direct the firemen to the scene of the fire."