

FIVE BOROUGH ALARM SOUNDED

MAELSTROM OF FIRE LAPS UP BIG BUILDING EARLY THIS MORNING

Great Blaze in the Heart of New York's Skyscraper District, When Mammoth Equitable Fire Proof Building Burns Like Shavings

SEVERAL LIVES WERE LOST DURING FIRE

Every Bit of Apparatus Was Called Out for First Time in the History of Metropolis to Fight Gigantic Conflagration

(United Press Leased Wire Service.)

NEW YORK, Jan. 9.—Six men are known to be dead and property variously estimated at from five million to twenty million, has been destroyed by a fire which in three hours today totally destroyed the mammoth building of the Equitable Assurance Society...

It was the most spectacular fire in the history of New York. The real property loss may not be known for weeks, or until the debris has sufficiently cooled to permit an extended examination of the great vaults of the Equitable Life Assurance Society, the Mercantile branch of the Bankers Trust Co., the offices of the Union Pacific and Southern Pacific railroads, and other great financial institutions in the burned area. It is believed that all the valuables were saved from the vaults of the Equitable Trust Co.

The fire was accompanied by wonderful rescues and heroic work on the part of firemen, who worked in a temperature below freezing with shovels of ice forming on their clothing. So dangerous did the blaze become that a "five borough" alarm, moving every piece of fire apparatus in New York City, was sounded at eight o'clock by Fire Chief Kenlon, the first time such an alarm ever was rung in New York. For a time it was feared the fire would extend across the narrow canyons and start a skyscraper conflagration that would have been the worst in history.

The suffering of the firemen, according to Kenlon, was the greatest he had ever seen. Men came from the blazing building literally caked in ice which formed on their clothing as the mist from the streams poured about them. Dozens were overcome, their faces cut by falling ice.

The building, one of the first "skyscrapers" built in America, was eight stories tall in portions and twelve stories in others. It was erected at a total cost of \$14,000,000 and has been a "show place" of the financial district for many years.

Six Known Dead.

The six known dead are four porters, three of whom jumped from the fifth story window within twenty minutes after the fire was discovered, each being crushed to death as he landed on Broadway. Their bodies were recovered and sent to the morgue. A fourth man who prepared to jump fell back into the flames and perished. The body of Conrad Seibert, a special policeman, was found on the first floor, frightfully crushed. Fire Chief Wm. Walsh, of the second battalion, is missing and, according to Fire Chief Kenlon, is dead in the ruins.

According to President Day of the Equitable Life, many of the records of that company had recently been moved to the hazen building, and therefore are saved. Only the executive and financial offices of the company remained in the home office building.

and thousands of spectators for the tons of water that had seeped through cracks in the building were freezing, shaking and throwing down the walls as though by high explosives.

Started in Basement.

The fire was discovered in the basement, near the engine rooms of the building, at the corner of Nassau and Pine streets. Sucked up through huge air shafts, the flames spread like lightning and before the first fireman arrived from six blocks away, the entire building was burning fiercely, every floor being on fire, with flames shooting from hundreds of windows on all four sides of the mammoth structure.

Then began the task of fighting the most spectacular and destructive fire New York has ever witnessed. Three sides of the building were bounded by streets that elsewhere would be called alleys. Rising on all sides were immense skyscrapers, forming great canyons, with walls of granite and marble. Even if they stood with their backs against the buildings on the opposite sides of these streets, the firemen had to approach within thirty feet of the inferno that raged about them. Alarms followed alarms, until three thousand firemen were fighting—and suffering. A sudden drop in the temperature caused the water to freeze as it left the hose. Descending mist and steam fell upon the firemen and froze. Great pieces of marble and granite, dislodged by the heat and the force of the "high pressure" water, fell about them in the narrow streets. Flames rose and billowed hundreds of feet in the air, outlining surrounding skyscrapers in a frame surrounding skyscrapers in a frame of red. It seemed a living inferno—the bursting of a volcano in the depths of some great chasm that was made by man instead of by nature.

Firemen suffered from heat and cold; heat from the blazing structure, and cold from the bitter water that froze about them. But it is to the credit of the "smoke eaters" that they never wavered. They stood to their tasks and suffered, fighting back the maelstrom of flames that, once out of their power, would have swept through the heart of New York like a thing possessed. And though they suffered, they won.

Curiosity Gone Mad.

A high wind, that approximated a gale, came sweeping through from the west. Sucked into the narrow flues caused by the great, towering buildings above the narrow streets, huge fire brands were carried blocks away. Some of them flew nearly to East River. Telephone girls, hastily apprised, notified night watchmen in all the downtown and Brooklyn districts, instructing them to stand by, with fire hose ready, on the roofs of their own buildings, to extinguish any blaze started by a flying spark. As the morning progressed, hundreds of thousands of men and women, employed in the hives of financial district, began disgorging from subway, elevator and surface lines. With curiosity gone mad they tried to force their way through the fire lines, though tumbling walls were falling about them and great masses of granite and marble were crashing onto the street. More than a thousand policemen, with fire lines drawn taut, fought them back, for the danger was great, and once that army broke through and penetrated to the fire zone, the loss of life would have been great.

Scores of buildings in the immediate vicinity of the fire were ordered closed by the policemen and firemen

and thousands of men and women, denied access to their places of business, poured to the fire, trying by every known method to get inside the fire lines. Time and again mounted policemen were compelled to charge through the crowds and drive them back.

The First Reports.

NEW YORK, Jan. 9.—Fire which started at 5:20 this morning, totally destroyed the immense eight and twelve story building of the Equitable Life Assurance Society, Twelfth and Broadway, entailing a loss early reported by fire underwriters to be \$20,000,000. The building itself was valued at \$7,000,000. It is a total wreck. Fire brands, swept by the high winds, are being scattered all over the downtown district and a grave conflagration is feared. The fire is in the heart of the lower Broadway skyscraper district.

Seven or ten men are believed to have been killed, their bodies buried in the debris of the immense "fire proof" structure.

Shortly after the fire got under headway, four porters were seen, in the glare of the blaze, to leap from a fifth story window. Tons of debris fell immediately upon the spot where their bodies landed. Firemen have not been able to approach the scene, but there seemed little doubt that the men were instantly killed.

Roasted or Drowned.

During the frightful heat of the blaze, a fireman emerged from the building and told the fire chiefs that three of his companions, driven by the heat from the sixth floor, had retreated into empty fireproof vaults in the basement of the building and had taken refuge there. The doors were clogged by tons of debris. Although great marble blocks fell about them, a hundred volunteer firemen poured tons of water in the vaults while others with axes and crowbars, dashed in and out among the falling debris, trying to chop out the men.

At 8 o'clock, a fireman emerging from the structure, declared the vaults were half full of water, threatening to drown the imprisoned men, but that it was necessary to keep pouring in water to keep the heat from suffocating them. He expressed little hope that the three men would be saved, but the volunteers kept at their heroic task, facing death every second.

Famous Lawyers' Club.

Buildings in the immediate vicinity and adjoining the Equitable among others are: The two Trinity buildings; the Mutual Life building; the New York Clearing house and the Chase National bank. The famous Lawyers' club occupied a floor of the building and it is feared its wonderful library, of so great and intrinsic value that it is not believed it can be replaced, has been totally destroyed.

All the records of the Equitable Life are believed to have been destroyed, entailing a loss that may be staggering in its greatness. Nothing was known at this hour as to the fate of the vaults of the Equitable Trust company. In the Pine street side of the building, or of the Mercantile Trust company, in the Broadway side, employees in a restaurant on the eighth floor of the building may have lost their lives.

The Equitable building is one of the largest in the world, in point of area, covering the entire block bounded by Broadway, Cedar, Pine and Nassau streets, in the very heart of the great financial and skyscraper district.

Building Cost \$7,000,000.

It was eight stories tall on the Pine street side, while it towered twelve stories on the Nassau street side, housing the entire home offices of the Equitable together with offices of attorneys, insurance brokers, trust companies and brokers.

The building was supposed to be of "fire proof" construction, and was declared to be one of the most massive in the lower Broadway region. It was of steel, granite and marble, and its original cost is said to have exceeded \$7,000,000.

August Belmont, the famous Cafe Saverin, Alexander Green, and Pierce and Greer law firms, the Equitable Trust company, the Mercantile Trust company, William A. Reed and company, the Western Maryland railway and Mercantile Safe Deposit company.

When the Broadway side walls fell in, one of the three firemen, who was imprisoned in the basement vaults, was looking out through a grating, talking with his companions who were trying like mad to saw him out. He declared his two companions were already dead. He, himself, unquestionably was killed by the falling walls.

Another section of the walls on Broadway fell at 8:35. The flames were then sweeping over the entire block bounded by Cedar, Pine, Nassau and Broadway.

President in the Vault.

At 8:50 the firemen learned that the three men entrapped in the basement vaults were not firemen, but were President William Giblin, of the Mercantile Safe Deposit company, and two companions, who had been driven from the building twice by firemen, but who returned the third time in an effort to rescue papers. Giblin has just told the firemen his companions were dead and himself injured seriously. The floor supporting the Broadway walls fell at 8:30, and it was feared the walls would follow. Despite this fact, hundreds of firemen worked desperately to get into the vaults to save Giblin, with great blocks of marble and granite falling about them.

First Time in History.

At 8:56 Fire Chief Kenlon sounded a "borough" alarm, bringing to the fire for the first time in the history of New York every piece of fire apparatus in every borough of New York. It was then feared the flames would spread and that a frightful conflagration would ensue.

The fire was the hardest the New York fire department ever had to battle. It started at 5:20 this morning, and spread with such a rapidity that by the time the first firemen arrived on the scene the great structure was a seething volcano of flames.

With increasing rapidity the flames ate their way up the various air shafts of the great structure, scores of fires starting on each floor simultaneously, so that the firemen could not enter their work on any particular spot.

Full of Flues.

The immense building, erected years ago before space was so valuable was a mass of labyrinths and winding passageways, with a dozen entrances from the various four streets on which it faced. Through these labyrinths the flames made their way, sweeping all before them.

Broadway at this point is not more than sixty feet wide, while Nassau, Cedar and Pine streets are mere alleys, through which two wagons cannot pass each other. It was these canyons, walled in on all sides by mammoth skyscrapers, that the firemen had to fight the fearful blaze that blistered their faces. In the narrow confines in which they had to work, fire towers could hardly be raised and the firemen were compelled to approach within a few feet of the flames if they entered any one of the three streets around the building.

Instances of individual heroism paled into insignificance in comparison with the general conduct of the entire department. Though mammoth blocks of granite and marble fell constantly about them, firemen plunged into the maelstrom of flames without flinching. As the water left the hose, it froze, and firemen soon were encased in ice. Their suffering was frightful.

Beyond Control.

Beginning at 5:20, the fire was beyond control, and at six o'clock Chief Kenlon called out all available apparatus from downtown Manhattan. At 8 o'clock fire apparatus was hastily summoned from Brooklyn, while at nine o'clock Kenlon, for the first time in the history of New York, sounded a "five borough" alarm, calling to the scene every piece of fire apparatus in the five boroughs comprising New York City.

There were more than a billion dollars worth of property endangered by the flames at that hour. A high wind was sweeping from the west, picking up great blocks of burning and charred wood and hurling them in every direction. Firemen were scattered throughout the entire financial district, with the fire hose belonging to each building ready to quell from the start any fire started by a flying fire brand.

More than 500,000 office men were employed in the buildings in the immediate vicinity of the Equitable

building, in the financial district. When in the late morning the subway, surface and elevated lines began disgorging this huge army in the vicinity of the fire, it became necessary to call out the police reserves from all the downtown districts and tighten the police lines to the point of military severity.

Giblin's Folly.

The most thrilling rescue ever seen at a New York fire was that of William Giblin, president of the Mercantile Safe Deposit company, in the Equitable building. Giblin, driven out of the building twice by firemen, returned the third time to rescue some of the priceless papers in his private desk. His escape was cut off by the flames. With two companions, whose names were not learned up to 9:15, he retreated into an empty safe deposit vault, closing the door, but calling to the firemen through a grating.

Though tons of debris were falling about them, a hundred volunteer firemen, answering a call for volunteers for dangerous duty, seized axes and crowbars and fought their way to the vaults, smashing like wild men at the grating to save the three men. Their companions played water into the vaults, submerging the imprisoned men and covering the rescuers with sheets of ice to keep them from burning to death. For hours cheered by a hundred thousand men from a safe distance, these heroes worked. Finally the floors fell and Giblin, a little man physically and badly burned, dragged his unconscious or dead companions onto the main floor where, a few moments later, amid wild cheering, the brave firemen fought their way and dragged Giblin, dying, to the street. At that hour they had been unable to find his companions and Fire Chief Kenlon was considering calling the heroes from the building for the danger was too great.

Giblin was rushed to the Hudson street hospital, where physicians say he would die of shock and exposure.

At 8:30 it was discovered that Fire Chief Wm. Walsh, in command of the second battalion, who was last seen on the fourth floor of the burning building was missing. Chief Kenlon ordered an immediate search for him, but no trace of Walsh had been found up to 9:30 and it was feared he was killed.

Money Melted Up.

Conrad Seibert, a special officer in the Equitable building, was killed. His body was recovered at 9:45. At 9:30 fire underwriters in the vicinity of the building declared the loss would range from \$5,000,000 to \$20,000,000, or more depending on the damage done the vaults of the banks and trust companies and insurance companies in the building. It was not known how many million dollars in actual money was stored in the vaults of the two big trust companies, but the intense heat to which they had been subjected made insurance men fear that their contents might have been affected.

At 9:30 the New York Clearing house association, with offices in Pine street, near the Equitable, was menaced, though the firemen declared it would not be reached. Owing to the proximity of the flames, the clearing house management announced that bank exchanges today would be made in the Chamber of Commerce building.

Captain Sydney Johnson, of fire patrol No. 1, the last man to see Captain Walsh alive, declared there could not be any doubt as to his death. A roll call of the firemen fighting the flames was ordered, but owing to the confusion incident to the vast number of men engaged, it was unsatisfactory.

William Sheehan, a special patrolman, attached to the building, the last man to see Conrad Seibert alive, was himself seriously injured.

Eyebrows Frozen.

Timothy Manning, a fireman attached to truck No. 6, one of the heroes who dragged Giblin from his inferno retreat, was rendered insane by the heat and smoke and ice which froze on him, but attending physicians believed he would recover his reason shortly.

When a portion of the walls fell into Broadway and Cedar streets, the streets had been cleared and no one was injured.

At that hour coffee in buckets was being served the freezing firemen. Their eyebrows had frozen, while not a man in the squad had failed to show cut faces from falling ice as the water froze when it left the hose pipes.

Was Magnificent Building.

NEW YORK, Jan. 9.—The Equitable building was only eight stories high on the Broadway side and twelve on the Nassau street side, but it covered

an entire block and cost \$14,000,000, first planned by Henry Baldwin Hyde when he organized the company, into the great financial palace first occupied in 1870. The structure sheltered business representing \$2,000,000,000.

There was not another building like the Equitable Society's in the world. There was a lawyers' "club" on one floor and insurance men's on another, a free library and a dining room. The famous Lawyers Club grew into a membership of 2,000 shortly after the building was occupied.

For years it was one of the show places of New York and was the scene of splendid dinners and other social events.

The building was deliberately planned by Hyde for the purpose of advertising his insurance concern. It was widely copied, after its success was assured.

The entrance from Broadway was through a wonderful arched portal set with ornamental grill of solid bronze. Colored marbles in columns and arches gave a magnificent effect of richness. The corridor that continued through the block to Nassau street was lined with other costly marbles and hundreds of incandescent lights turned the otherwise darkened interior into brilliancy as they flashed on the glittering marble and bronze.

The first floor and a portion of the basement was occupied by the Mercantile Safe Deposit company, which was controlled by the Equitable. The famous Cafe Saverin, which was the scene of many gay parties, occupied the remainder of the basement. The main office of the Equitable on the second floor consisted of a lofty hall, in which stood two rows of colored pillars, the working offices and the cashier's department.

In the rear was a magnificent stained glass window to which a marble lined and marble floored corridor led. Another passage led down to a huge vault where at least \$200,000,000 in securities were kept.

On the same floor were the offices of August Belmont and company, the Mercantile Trust company, and the Equitable Trust company.

The public quarters of the Equitable Society contained an insurance library of more than 8,500 volumes. In this library was the entire history of the science of life insurance.

The greater portion of the library was in a large room with a gilt fretted vault overhead and wonderful allegorical painting on the wall, which was also used for banquet purposes.

The president of the society and other high officers had rooms on the third floor of the Broadway side. Lawyers were the chief tenants of the remainder of the structure, although the Southern and Union Pacific Railroad companies, where Harrison once held sway, and the banking firm of Kountz Bros, also had their general offices there. The Western Maryland Railroad also had executive headquarters in the structure.

The Lawyers Club took up the fifth and sixth floors. The law library was on the seventh. The upper floors of the building were most magnificent. A corridor lined with black stained marble led into a smoking room that dazzled the eyes with the lustre of its great squared columns. The suite included a main dining room and a dozen more which were used for private parties. All of them were decorated in white and pink or hung with splendid brocades that produced a bewildering effect.

From the entrance to the top of the entire building, nothing was left undone that might add to the gorgeousness of the decorations.

The Rescue of Giblin.

The rescue of William Giblin, president of the Mercantile Safe Deposit Co., with offices in the semi-basement at the northwest corner of the building was spectacular. Notified at his home of the fire Giblin rushed to the scene to superintend the removal of valuable securities, worth many million dollars. Three times he was driven back from the building by firemen, but each time he returned to save the papers of his customers. The fourth time he failed to reappear, and for an hour was given up for dead.

Then firemen, digging through the fallen debris along Broadway, saw Giblin's face pressed against the barred window of the vault, which rises two feet above the level of the sidewalk. William Sheehan, a special policeman, was with him, as was John Campeon, "captain" of the night watchmen, who had entered with Giblin to assist in salvaging the securities. Falling floors had cut off their egress from the rear and they were penned in the vault, steel bars between them and the sidewalk.

There was only one way the men might be saved—through the great steel bars that kept burglars away

from the basement windows which lighted the vaults.

The building was a pyramid of flames. Fire Commissioner Joseph Johnson jumped forward. Regardless of personal danger, he bent over the grated window and saw the agonized face of Giblin between the bars.

The Plucky Little Priest.

"We'll get you out," he shouted, and then turned to order a steel cutting saw. Fireman James Dunn rushed up with the implement. Before he could begin work in the inferno, Father McGean, chaplain of the department, went to the window. Over his head a dozen streams of icy water played against the seething walls. Showers of stone fell about the young priest; chips struck and cut him. Drenched to the skin, as the ice formed about him, Father McGean stood calmly in the face of that death until he had administered the last rites to the dying. Then he was dragged away, and Dunn set to his work of sawing through massive steel bars, while the heat scorched his face and the water froze on his back.

A hand saw was never made to saw through two inch steel bars under such stress. As Dunn froze and baked and cursed and worked, the saw bit through the steel. For half an hour the man worked like a hero—and a madman. Then his comrades dragged him away and sent him to a hospital, while Fireman Brown, of truck 1, took his place with the little saw at the bars. As he worked and froze, Brown shouted words of encouragement to Giblin. Then Brown, after a half hour, gave up the task. Fireman Young took his place, and then William Lark took up the task, and in 20 minutes the bars gave way. Lark didn't relinquish his place. He simply dove into the basement, through the flames, and smoke, and passed Giblin, a small man, apparently dying, through the grating. Then, groping through the smoke he found Campeon, dead. He sent his body up, and followed it with the unconscious form of William Sheehan.

At 2:45 this afternoon, Fire Chief Kenlon ordered firemen into the wavering walls to search for probable victims. At that hour Kenlon said eighteen persons, including firemen and employes of the building were missing. He said that fragmentary and unconfirmed reports make the probable dead list twenty-five.

The reported dead:

BATTALION FIRE CHIEF WILLIAM K. WALSH.

CONRAD SEIBERT, special policeman.

GUISEPPI CONTI, porter.

JOHN SAVZI, porter.

JOHN CAMPEON, captain of vaults.

UNIDENTIFIED porter.

UNIDENTIFIED citizen.

THE CLANG OF THE FIRE BELLS

Some of Today's Blazes in Other Cities of the Country.

[United Press Leased Wire Service.]

BOSTON, Jan. 9.—A four alarm fire is raging in the building occupied by the Globe Wernicke Co., dealers in desks and filing devices, at 93 Federal street. A high southeast wind is blowing. Firemen say the loss will be about \$200,000.

Flint is Ablaze.

FLINT, Mich., Jan. 9.—With the wind blowing a terrific gale, a fire which has already destroyed the big wholesale grocery warehouse of Moffatt & Son, is threatening the business district of this city today. The wind is sweeping the flames over the roofs of adjoining buildings. Volunteers are aiding the fire department. Zero weather is making the work of the firemen extremely difficult. Two have been overcome by the cold.

Five Children Burned.

MOTLEY, Minn., Jan. 9.—Five children of Irving Carlisle were burned to death when the Motley home, here, was burned early today. The children were from two to fourteen years old. A sixth child was saved. Carlisle was severely burned trying to save his children. Mrs. Carlisle is crazed over the death of her children and her condition is critical.