

AWFUL DEATH

Hundreds Perish in a Theatre Fire

THE DEATH LIST

At 7:45 P. M. Coroner Tieger Reported 736 Dead by Actual Count. Thrilling Stories of the Work of Rescue and the Recovery of the Dead—This is Reckoned as the Second Greatest Calamity That Ever Occurred in Chicago—The Iroquois Theatre, Used for the First Time, Was Packed With a Matinee Audience Watching the Production of "Blue Beard." When in the Second Act of the Play, the Fire Broke Out in the Flies of the Stage, Presumably from a Defect in the Electrical Display—In an Instant the Draperies and Flimsy Stage Settings had Burst Into Flames—The Actors and Actresses Ran Wildly About the Stage as the Audience Fought and Jammed its Way to the Front—In a Short Time the Interior of the Theatre was Apparently a Mass of Flame, and Smoke Was Issuing in Clouds from the Front of the House—A Frightful Panic Ensued—The Loss of Life Was Greatest at the Foot of the Stairways from the Upper Balconies—At that Point the Bodies of the Persons Who Sought to Flee from the Flames Were Piled Fully Twelve Feet Deep—The Bodies Were Taken Out as Rapidly as the Men Could Enter the Smoke-Filled Corridor and Grasp Their Awful Load—At 4:45 P. M. the Fire Was Out.

Chicago, Ill., December 30.—About five hundred and fifty people were killed in ten minutes this afternoon during a fire in Iroquois Theatre, the newest, the largest and as far as human power could make it, the safest theatre in Chicago. Estimates of the dead and injured vary. The police account of the dead is 536. The estimate of the newspapers is 562. Besides this there are fifty-five people missing at midnight, the majority of whom are probably among the dead in the morgue and various undertaking establishments. Eighty-six of the dead have been positively identified and ninety-two others are known to be injured.

A few of these people were burned to death by fire many were suffocated by gas, and scores were trampled to death in the panic that followed the mad plunge of the frightened audience for the exits. It will be many hours before the number of dead is accurately known and many days before all of them will be identified. There are bodies lying by the dozens tonight in the undertaking rooms, in the police stations, and in the hospitals from which nearly everything that could reveal their identity to those who knew them best is gone. Their clothing is torn to rags or burned to cinders and their faces have been crushed into an unrecognizable pulp by the heels of the crowd that trampled them down as they fled for safety.

The fire broke out during the second act of the play "Blue Beard," which was the first dramatic production presented in the theatre since its erection. The company, which was very large, escaped to the street in a panic, and to flee into the snowy streets and clothing but their stage costumes sustained minor injuries but none were seriously hurt.

Origin of the Fire.
Accounts of the origin of the fire are conflicting, and none of them certain, but the best reason given is that an electric wire near the lower part of a piece of drop scenery suddenly broke and was grounded. The fire spread rapidly toward the front of the stage, causing the members of the chorus who were then engaged in the performance to flee to the wings with screams of terror. The fire in itself up to this time was not serious and possibly could have been checked had not the asbestos curtain failed to work.

As soon as the fire was discovered, Eddie Foy, the chief comedian of the company, shouted to lower the curtain, and this was immediately done. It descended about half way and then stuck. The fire thus was given practically a free, through which a strong draft was setting, added by the doors which had been thrown open in the front of the theatre. With a roar and a bound, the flames shot through the opening over the heads of the people on the first floor and reaching clear up to those in the first balcony, caught them and burned them to death where they were. As soon as the flames first appeared beyond the curtain, a man in the rear of the hall shouted "Fire, fire," and the entire audience rose as one person and made for the doors. It is believed that the explosion was caused by the flames coming in contact with the gas reservoirs of the theatre, causing them to burst.

An Explosion.
Immediately after the rush of flames there came an explosion which lifted the entire roof of the theatre from its walls, shattering the great skylight into fragments. Will J. Davis, manager of the theatre, said after the catastrophe that if the people had remained in their seats and had not been excited by the cry of fire, not a single life would have been lost. This is, however, contradicted by the statements of the firemen, which found numbers of people sitting in their seats, their faces directed toward the stage as if the performance was still going on. It was the opinion of the firemen that these people had been suffocated at once by the flow of gas which came from behind the asbestos curtain.

As near as can be estimated at the present time about 1,500 people were in the theatre. Three hundred of these were on the first floor, the balcony being in the two upper balconies and in the hallways back of them. The theatre is modelled after the Opera Comique in Paris and from the rear of each balcony there are three doors leading out to passage ways toward the front of theatre. Two of these doorways are at the end of the balcony and one in the center. The audience in its rush for the outer air seems to have for the greater part, chosen to flee to the left entrance and to attempt to make its way down the eastern stairway leading into the lobby of the theatre. Outside of the people burned and suffocated by gas it was in these two doorways on the first and second balconies that the greatest loss of life occurred.

The Fight for Life.
When the firemen entered the building, the dead were found stretched in a pile at the head of the stairway at least eight feet from the door back to a point about five feet in the rear of the door. This mass of dead bodies in the center of the doorway reached to within two feet of the passage way. All of the corpses at this point were women and children. The fight for life which must have taken place at these two points, is something that is simply beyond human power adequately to describe. Only a faint idea of its horror could be derived from the aspect of the bodies as they lay. Women on top of these masses of dead had been overtaken by death as they were crawling on their hands and knees over the bodies of those who had died before. Others lay with arms stretched out in the direction toward which lay life and safety, holding in their hands fragments of garments not their own. They were evidently overtaken by death as they were whom they had endeavored to hold down and trample under foot as they fought for their own lives.

Brave Men Break Down.
As the police and firemen removed layers after layers in these doorways, the sight became too much even for them, hardened as they are to such scenes, to endure. The bodies were in such an inextricable mass, and so tightly were they jammed between the slides of the door and the walls that it was impossible to lift them one by one and carry them out. The only possible thing to do was to seize a limb or some other portion of the body and pull with main strength. Men worked at the task with tears running down their cheeks and the sobs of the rescuers could be heard even in the hall below where this awful scene was being enacted. A number of the men were compelled to abandon their task and give it over to others whose nerves had not as yet been shaken by the awful experience.

As one by one the bodies were dragged out of the water soaked blackened mass of corpses, the spectacle became more and more heart-rending. There were women whose clothing was torn completely from their bodies above the waist, whose bosoms had been trampled into a pulp and whose faces were marred

beyond all power of identification. Bodies lay in the first and second balconies in great numbers. In some places they were piled up in the aisles three and four deep where one had fallen and others tripped over the prostrate forms, and all had died where they lay, evidently suffocated by the gas. Others were bent over backs of seats where they had been thrown by the rush by people for the doors and killed with hardly a chance to rise from their seats. One man was found with his back bent nearly double, his spinal column having been fractured as he was thrown backward. A woman was found cut nearly in half by the back of the seat, she having been forced over it face downward.

In the aisles nearest to the doors, the scenes were harrowing in the extreme. Bodies lay in every conceivable attitude half naked, the look on their faces revealing some portion of the agony which must have preceded their death. There were scores and scores of people whose entire face had been trampled completely off by the heels of those who rushed over them and in one aisle the body of a man was found with no vestige of anything flesh or bone remaining above his waist line. The entire upper portion of his body had been cut into mince meat and carried away by the feet of those who trampled him; a search was carefully made with a hope of finding his head, but at a late hour tonight it had not been discovered.

The theatre had been constructed but a short time and all its equipment were not yet in place. This was unfortunately the case with a fire escape in the rear of the building. The small iron balconies to which the iron ladder was to be attached were up, but the ladder had not yet been constructed.

Failure of Fire Escape.
When the panic was at its height, a number of women ran for these fire escapes only to find as they emerged from the doorway upon the little iron platform that they were able to step five feet from the ground, a fire behind and no method of escape in front. Those who reached the platform endeavored to hold their footing and to keep back the crowd that passed upon them from the rear. The effort was utterly useless and in a few moments the iron ladders were jammed with a mass of women who screamed, fought and tore at each other like maniacs. This lasted but a brief interval, and the rush from the interior of the building became so violent that many of them were crowded off and fell to the granite pavement below. Others leaped from the platform, fracturing legs and arms with fractured skulls, having been killed instantly.

George Helliott, secretary of the Consolidated Gas Company was in a building directly opposite the theatre across the alley and noticing smoke went down to ascertain its cause. When he reached the street the women were already dropping into the alley and he immediately rushed for a ladder, in the effort to save many of the women who were available and the only method of assistance they were able to devise was to hurriedly lash some planks together and throw them across to the affrighted women of the platforms with instructions to place the end firmly on the iron frame work. Before this could be done, a fearful loss of time had been lost, the women were picked over every instant to the alley and by the time the bridge was constructed but few remained to take advantage of it. However about two dozen, it is believed made their way across this narrow causerway.

The members of the theatrical company being on the first floor had comparatively little difficulty in reaching the street, although their situation was a most highly critical because of the speed with which the flames swept through the mass of scenery in the flies and on the stage.

Eddie Foy, principal comedian in the play was one of the last to escape, by getting out through a rear door after assisting the women members of the company to safety. He went into the Sherman House in his stage costume and with his face covered with grease and paint, in order to secure surgical attendance for some burns he had sustained. In describing the commencement of the fire, Foy attributed the extent of the catastrophe to the failure of the fire proof curtain to work properly. Because of this, he said, the flames readily obtained access to the main part of the theatre and were forced by the draft, carrying with it gas as well as fire, swept up to the two balconies where the loss of life was greatest.

"The fire began in the middle of the second act," said Mr. Foy. "An electric wire broke, was grounded, and from this the flames were started in the rear of the stage. The stage is unusually wide and there was so great a draft the flames spread rapidly. They soon had attacked all the scenery in the rear of the house. I never believed it possible for fire to spread so quickly. When it first started I went to the foot lights, and to prevent alarming the audience said that there was a slight blaze, and that it would be better for all to leave quietly. Then I stepped back and called for the asbestos curtain to be lowered. This, when about half way down, refused to go farther, and thus an additional draft was created. This swept the flames out into the auditorium and I knew that the theatre was doomed. I hurried back to the stage and added in getting the women members of the company into the alley. Some of them were in their dressing rooms and were almost overcome by smoke before they could get down to the stage and to the

doors. The simple fact that the curtain did not descend entirely was what saved the lives of the company, although it caused such a horrible catastrophe in the front of the house. After the curtain had refused to descend, then came the explosion of the gas tanks and with the curtain down, all the fire and gas would have been confined between the rear wall of the theatre and the fire proof front. Under these circumstances it would not have been possible for a single member of the company to escape alive, unless he or she had been standing immediately in front of the door leading into the alley. As it was, the draft carried all the gas and fire out beneath the curtains and the company was saved, although their salvation was the death of so many poor people in front."

Rarely in the history of Chicago has its people been so stirred as by the calamity of today. It is next to the Chicago fire, the greatest catastrophe that has ever occurred here, and the speed with which it came and went seemed for a brief period to appall the business section of the city. The news spread with great rapidity and in a short time, hundreds of men, women and children were rushing toward the theatre. The building in which the calamity occurred stands midway between State and Randolph streets, on the north-south side of Randolph street.

Although every available policeman within call of the department was immediately hurried to the spot and the men placed in lines at the end of the block allowing nobody to enter Randolph street from either Dearborn or State, it was found for a time almost impossible to hold back the frenzied crowd that pressed forward, many of them having friends or relatives in the theatre and tried to learn something of them. The conduct of the police was beyond all praise. The officers held their ground firmly and gently pushed back all those who sought to gain an entrance to the theatre, although in some instances frantic men, anxious to look after the loved ones, actually beat the officers with their fists in their rage at being prevented.

In spite of the efforts of the police, however, a large number of people succeeded in breaking through their lines and entering the theatre, and in many cases did heroic work in rescuing the injured and carrying out the entire room of women. Alderman William H. Thompson, who, unaided, carried to the street the bodies of eight women. The first newspaper men upon the ground also carried out many of the dead and injured. The building was so full of smoke when the firemen first arrived that it was not immediately grasped until a fireman and a newspaper man crawled up the stairway leading to the balcony, holding handkerchiefs over their mouths to avoid suffocation. As they reached the doorway the firemen, whose vision was better trained in such emergencies, seized his companions by the arms and urged "Good God, man, don't walk on those faces." The two men tried valiantly to get through the door which was jammed with dead women piled higher than either of their heads. All the lights in the theatre were necessarily out and the only illumination came through the cloud of smoke that hung between the interior of the theatre and the street. The two immediately hurried to the floor below and informed Chief Musham of the fire department that the dead bodies were piled high in the balcony and prompt assistance must be rendered if any of them were to be saved.

The chief at once called upon all of his men in the vicinity to abandon their work and to come to the aid of the rescue. The building was so dark and the smoke so thick that it was found impossible to accomplish anything until lights had been secured. Word was at once sent to the Orr and Lockett Hardware Company, two doors east of the theatre and that firm at once placed its entire stock of lanterns at the service of the department. Over 200 lights were quickly carried into the building and the work of rescue commenced. So rapidly were the bodies brought down that for over an hour there were two streams of men passing in and out of the doorway, the one carrying the bodies, the other composed of men returning to get more.

They were carried into Thompson's restaurant which adjoins the theatre on the east, where all the available space was given by the proprietor. The dead and wounded were placed upon chairs, tables and counters, one woman even being placed for lack of a better spot on top of a cigar case. Because of the tremendous throng which surrounded the block in which the theatre building stood, it was not possible for the police to carry the dead and wounded any distance, and they were compelled to await for ambulances at the theatre. Although all the patrol wagons and every ambulance owned by the city was pressed into service, they were utterly inadequate to carry away the dead and in a short time there was a line of corpses fifty feet long, piled two and three high on the sidewalks in front of the theatre. It was found necessary in order to convey the bodies rapidly to the morgue, and to the various undertaking establishments, to impress trucks into service and in these, upon costly blankets furnished by the dry goods stores in the vicinity, and covered with the same material, the dead were hauled away, practically like so much cord wood.

The merchants in the vicinity of the theatre sent wagon loads of packages of cotton to be used in binding up the wounds of the injured and to cover the dead. The drug stores furnished their stock to anybody that asked for it in the name of people hurt in the fire. Doctors and trained nurses were on the ground by the score within half an hour after the extent of the calamity was known and every wounded person who was carried from the building received prompt medical aid. A number of doctors waited at the entrance to the theatre with stethoscopes in hand and as soon as a body which looked as though it might possess life was carried out, it was

at once examined and if dead placed on the pile lying on the sidewalk. The others were at once placed in ambulances and whirled away to hospitals or to the offices of physicians in the immediate neighborhood. While the police and firemen were carrying out the dead and injured, Will J. Davis, one of the proprietors of the theatre, was indefatigable in his efforts to alleviate all suffering and to assist in caring for the dead. He said: "There was no need, so far as I know, of a single life being lost. There were over forty exits to the theatre. The building is fire proof and if somebody had not screamed "Fire" I think that as far as those killed in the panic are concerned, all could have reached the street in safety. And of those who were suffocated by the gas, nearly all would have been out by the time the explosion occurred if order had been preserved in making their exits. As far as we have learned, everybody on the first floor except three, escaped, although some sustained bruises and other minor injuries. The great loss of life was in the first and second balconies."

It was declared tonight by the management of the theatre that the fire was not caused by the grounding of an electric wire or to any defect in the equipment of the theatre. It started, they claim, by the bursting of a calcium light apparatus. The conclusion was so great that it blew out the skylights over the stage and auditorium. This statement of the theatre management is a direct contradiction of the statements of many who were in the theatre and who declared that before the explosion occurred they saw flames in the narrow streak crossing along the fall near the upper part of the drop curtain.

William Zellers, the house fireman who was severely burned in trying to lower the asbestos curtain, describes the scene upon the stage and the cause of the fire as follows: "I was standing in the wings when I heard the explosion and then immediately afterward a cry of fire from the stage and all over the theatre. Looking up I saw that the curtain was ablaze and at once I ran for the fire curtain. We got it half way down when the wind rushed in from the broken skylight, bellied it out so that it caught and we could not budge it. With the stage hands, I climbed to where it was suspended and together we tried to push it down. Our cries were futile and seeing that no human power could move that pre-curtain and that the stage was a mass of flames, turned my attention to warning the actors and trying to save those who introduced the trouble."

Eddie Foy hurried to the front of the stage and commanded the people to remain calm, saying that if they would keep their seats the danger would be averted. The curtain, however, still burned, pieces of the smouldering cloth falling into the orchestra pit. An effort was made by the stage hands to arrange the curtain so that the blazing fragments would not drop into the pit. I looked over the faces of the audience and remarked how many children were present. I could see their faces filled with interest and their eyes wide open, as they watched the burning curtain. Just then the people in the balcony rose to their feet and crowded to obtain a better view of the fire. Eddie Foy rushed to the center of the stage again and waved his arms in a gesture meaning for the people to be seated. At that instant a woman in the rear of the place screamed "Fire!" and the entire audience of women and children rose to their feet filled with uncontrollable terror. In another instant there was a confused roar made by a thousand people as they rushed madly from the impending danger.

"On the stage the chorus girls who had aroused my admiration because of their exhibition of presence of mind, turned to flee, but many of them were overcome before they could take a step. Several of them fell to the floor and I saw the men in the cast, and the stage hands carry them off the stage. Miss Elsie Elmore was the first to leave our box. The upholstering on the railing was then on fire, and we were compelled to brush fragments of the burning curtain from our clothing in order to prevent them catching fire. Then there came a great roar and a great draft of air and the flames shot out over the parquette of the theatre until it seemed to me as though they must reach the very front walls of the building. There were but few men in the audience, but I saw several of them pulling and pushing women and children aside as they fought like maniacs to reach the exits. I saw a number of little children trampled under foot and none of them arose again. In the balcony the scene was beyond my power to describe. There was a big black crowd of human beings, each one apparently fighting everybody else. The balcony was so steep that many fell before they had left the first four rows of seats. The exits to the fire escapes were choked and those in the rear rushed with all the strength they possessed upon those who were nearer to the doorway."

"It was almost incredible, the speed with which the flames ran through the scenery, and although I was but a second after Miss Elmore in jumping over the railing of our box to the aisle in front, the stage was a mass of flames. As I started upon the aisle a man rushed into me and knocked me down. I was so terrified that I grew weak and sank into one of the orchestra chairs, and after that I hardly remember anything. In some way I reached the main entrance where men were kicking against the doors and shattering the glass and panels in their attempt to afford a larger space for the exit of the people. Many fell as they reached the doors where a few steps more would have carried them to fresh air and safety. As I look at it now I must have been walking on prostrate bodies as I struggled through the opening. All of our party escaped in about the same manner as I did, but all of them suffered so terribly in the matter of clothing that the first thing they did

(Continued on Fifth Page.)

RUMORS TR

J. Skelton Williams Resigns as President

of S. A. L. BARR ELECTED

The Resignation Was Touched at a Meeting of the Directors Held in New York—Mr. Williams Was Made Chairman of the Board of Directors—Vice President Barr, Whose Election Was Urged by the New Investors, Becomes the Head of the Seaboard System.

New York, December 30.—At the meeting of the directors of the Seaboard Air Line today J. Skelton Williams resigned the office of President of the company and Vice President Barr was elected President and General Manager. Mr. Williams was elected chairman of the board of directors.

Mr. Williams expressed a desire to be relieved of the active management in order to give more of his time to his banking interest and personal affairs. It was therefore decided to amend the by-laws and to establish the office of chairman of the board, to which he was then elected.

J. M. Middendorf was nominated, but declined re-election as second vice president and the office was therefore not filled.

The following members of the board were elected to be members of the executive committee: T. F. Ryan, T. J. Colridge, Jr., T. J. Blair, J. S. Williams, J. B. Dennis, B. F. Yoakum and S. D. Wardell.

Other officers were elected as follows: N. S. Meldrum, Vice President and Treasurer; D. C. Porteous, Secretary and T. W. Roby, controller.

Mr. Barr's succession to the presidency was expected some months ago in spite of repeated denials from official quarters. His selection was urged by the interests which more recently became dominant in the Seaboard system.

ON THE COTTON MARKET

Speculation Very Active and Fluctuations Were Erratic

New York, December 30.—Speculation in cotton was resumed on an exceedingly active scale today and trade sentiment seemed no less nervous and unsettled than on yesterday. From the very clang of the gong fluctuations were wildly erratic. Cables were perhaps a shade better than looked for just before the local opening, but afterwards weakened and the outlook was for heavy receipts.

First prices were seven points higher to 8 points lower and following the call ruled very erratic. May, for instance, opened at 13.75, a net loss of five points, sold up to 13.80 on the call, then broke to 13.60, recovered slightly but within the hour half hour sold back to 13.50, a net loss of 24 points, while the other months showed equally wide changes with the general tendency downward as a result of heavy liquidation and rumors that the bulls were unloading.

At the lowest level of the morning, March sold at 13.29; May at 13.40 and July at 13.44, this being a net loss of 25 to 40 points and a decline of about \$4.85 a bale from the best prices of yesterday. Just about midday the bulls quickly renewed their tactics and began bidding aggressively, while the room crowd that had been helping to sell the market down turned to cover and a perfect torrent of buying came in, with prices rallying to about the best point of the morning or just about even with last night's close. This was succeeded by another down turn of several points and early afternoon showed losses of 9 to 11 on all points on the active months.

During the late trading, fluctuations were less violent, but the market showed a distinct downward tendency under liquidation that accompanied unsettling rumors regarding the far eastern situation. The market closed weak at a net decline of 33 to 49 points. Sales were estimated at 1,500,000 bales.

General Woodruff to Do Duty in North Carolina

Washington, December 30.—At the request of the Governor of North Carolina, Brigadier General Carl A. Woodruff, U. S. A., retired, has been ordered to report to the Governor at Raleigh for duty with the organized militia of the State of North Carolina for a period of four years unless sooner relieved. This detail is made under the provisions of the Dick militia bill and while serving under it General Woodruff will receive the full pay and allowances of his grade.