

NEW HAVEN THEATRE BURNS; FIND 4 DEAD; MAY BE 30 VICTIMS

Blaze Starts on Stage and Sweeps Through Old Struc- ture With Great Rapidity.

80 BURNED AND INJURED

Many Yale Students Among Those Hurt in the Frenzied Rush to Escape.

SOME DROP FROM BALCONY

Manager in Custody—Fire May Have Started From Incense Burned as Picture Is Shown.

Special to The New York Times.

NEW HAVEN, Conn., Nov. 27.—Fire, believed to have been caused by the burning of incense on the stage, destroyed the Rialto Theatre, a moving picture house, opposite the Hotel Taft, in College Street, and on the edge of the old Yale campus here at 7.30 tonight. Four persons are known to have been killed and at least eighty were injured, many of them seriously.

The suddenness with which the fire started and spread at first led to the belief that fifty or a hundred persons had perished. Timothy J. Hanlon, who had been at the theatre, died immediately after being received at St. Raphael's Hospital.

Another on the death list was reported to be Mabel Moran, of Derby, Conn. An elderly woman and a young man, both as yet unidentified, were found dead on a fire escape.

Late tonight Lawrence W. Carroll, manager of the theatre, was held by Coroner Mix on a charge of manslaughter. The Coroner will conduct an investigation to learn whether or not the fire regulations were violated.

Fire Marshal Perkins late tonight was of the opinion that other bodies might be found in the ruins when a daylight search was made, and it was believed by other officials that the addition to the death list might be as many as thirty. Search with lanterns by the firemen and police up to midnight, however, failed to disclose any further victims.

Physicians Rushed to Scene.

For nearly two hours flames from the burning theatre rose higher than the nine-story Hotel Taft, illuminating the entire city and bringing Yale University students by the hundred and townspeople by the thousand to try to help in the work of rescue and to watch the spectacle.

Practically every physician in the city was called on and the injured were sent to the three leading hospitals, the New Haven General, Grace and St. Raphael's Hospitals. Nearly fifty of the injured were taken to the General Hospital and twelve or fifteen each to Grace Hospital and St. Raphael's. The General Hospital alone sent twenty-five physicians and fifty nurses.

About twenty Yale students were among the injured. Of these the most seriously hurt is Allen Kelen of Southport, Conn., a sophomore, who is in the Yale infirmary, where it was said it was feared he might die. Louis A. Lincoln of Amherst, Mass., star quarterback on the football team, was severely but not dangerously burned.

Fireman Frank Kildea was seriously injured by a fall from an extension ladder while trying to rescue a youth about seventeen years old from a fire escape. The lad, with his clothing afire, made his appearance on the fire escape landing after the crowd had gathered and after many others had escaped by that route. He was told to jump, but failed to do so, and finally fell unconscious on the fire escape landing.

Kildea started up on a ladder which was thrust through intervening flames. He apparently inhaled smoke or flame, for he lost his hold and fell to the ground. He was taken to a hospital with burns and possible internal injuries.

Many persons who fought their way out of the theatre with slight burns or bruises made their way home without hospital attendance. A number of Yale students were on the injured list, but the majority of those injured and, so far as known, all of those killed were New Haven residents.

A panic began with what was apparently the flare-up of burning scenery and the cry of "fire," and it was remarkable that the dead and injured list was not greater.

As it was, few of those who were in the theatre could have escaped without bruises, as those trying to escape the flames which shot over the seats in the orchestra became jammed at the exits and many were trampled underfoot. Two of the patients at St. Raphael's Hospital bore evidence of a severe struggle. James Tierney of 170 Ward Street had a fractured skull and Bernard Dorgan of 280 Lombard Street, a fractured leg.

Others at the hospitals had injuries which came from trampling. Many of those who were not injured had their clothing nearly torn off in the crush.

Theatre Packed to Capacity.

Fire started about 7:30 o'clock when the theatre, which seats about 500, was packed to capacity. Practically every seat was occupied and a few late comers were standing in the rear of the orchestra. There were a few persons in the aisles, looking for seats or returning from an unsuccessful search for them, but the aisles were in general clear and open.

"The Sheik" was the picture being shown, and it had been advertised, not only by the usual methods through newspapers and by billboard posters, but by letters to patrons. The response had caused the "standing room only" sign to be displayed.

The picture was preceded by a prologue, a girl, representing the heroine, and a man impersonating the Sheik.

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both in Arab costume, appearing on the stage and singing a duet.

The opening scene of the picture proper is a harem scene, and at tonight's showing incense or a colored light, or both, were burned in an attempt to give "local atmosphere" and "local color." This incense or light was seen by persons in the audience to burn close to the ceiling above the stage, being apparently suspended from it.

Panic Follows Spreading of Flames.

Suddenly there came a flash of flame, and immediately afterward, according to some of those present, what appeared to be pieces of burning scenery fell to the floor of the stage. There was almost a unanimous opinion that the fire began above the stage. It did not in the projecting box, which was located in the balcony.

The flash of flame which ignited the inflammable stage accessories caused a rush for the exits. Increasing in volume, the flames spread out over the seats in the orchestra, and a stampede began. Panic stricken, the theatre patrons, who included several hundred Yale undergraduates and a larger number of New Haven residents, men, women and children, struggled to get out of the building, driven by fear of a disaster.

Some of the cooler heads endeavored to check the panic. These cried, "Keep your seats and file out; move out slowly. There's no danger." These warnings had little effect in stopping the rush.

Those who had been sitting in the rear seats reached the street without much difficulty, although they had felt the heat of the fire to such a degree that most of them insisted that an explosion had taken place which had filled the theatre immediately with scorching flames.

Those in the middle of the house and in the balcony had a terrible experience. The panic grew among these, and men, women and children were trampled. Amid it all there seemed to have been a certain restraint, due probably to the comparatively high level of intelligence, which prevented it from being the mad rush which has characterized other theatre fires.

Many of those who escaped, with hands and faces burned, and eyebrows and hair singed, said that they recalled having unwillingly trampled over bodies of persons who had fallen in the aisles. A considerable number must have fallen, but many of these, although injured and with their clothing partly torn off, regained their feet and were able to attain safety.

Patrons Jump From Balcony.

In the balcony, escape was cut off when the stairs caught fire. Many patrons were dropped or jumped to the orchestra floor, and their number added to the crash. One of those in the audience described the scene then as being like a gigantic football scrimmage.

Many of those in the balcony escaped by means of the narrow fire escape, but even there the weaker were knocked down and trampled upon and some of them fainted before being pulled up by the stronger.

Meanwhile the flames having ignited the entire theatre devoured it as though it were kindling wood. The building was a frame structure a century old, and lacked fireproof construction. To add to the confusion and the difficulty of escape the lights were extinguished and the final struggle for egress was made in darkness that was penetrated only by the yellow light of the burning theatre itself.

The entire fire department was summoned instantly and emergency calls were sent to Bridgeport and Meriden.

For some time the firemen were unable to penetrate the theatre because of the rapid spread of the fire. The building had been emptied of all who were able to walk within two minutes after the flames appeared.

Yale Students Aid in Rescues.

The combined efforts of the three fire departments were not sufficient to prevent the flames from spreading to two adjacent business blocks, but in these the blaze was extinguished without serious damage. The historic Hyperion Theatre is situated around the corner from the Rialto, in Chapel Street, and the roofs of the two theatres come close together. The danger to the Hyperion was imminent and the firemen fought to save it from ignition. There was a burlesque show just beginning in the Hyperion, and it was dismissed without panic.

Almost with the alarm of fire hundreds of Yale students started to give what assistance they could in the work of rescue. They came from Connecticut Hall and the Vanderbilt Dormitory, the nearest of the buildings in which students are living. Scores of others came running from the Harkness Memorial Dormitories, a block and a half away. Others rushed across the campus from Durfee, Wright and Far-num Halls and from the cluster of dormitories around Berkeley Oval. A little later the crowd of students was swelled to more than a thousand by the arrival of those living in the fraternity houses in "Shefftown," as that part of the campus near the Sheffield Scientific School is known. The reflection of the fire brought people to the scene by thousands.

Manager Blames Incense.

Morris Kennedy, the operator of the moving picture machine, described his experiences as follows:

"The flames came out into the body of the house from behind the screen and over the stage with a flaring, blazing rush. The theatre lights had been turned off for the beginning of the picture, and before I could turn them on the interior of the theatre had become a raging mass of humanity struggling to escape, as the flames were eating their way out over the body of the house. Men were hanging from the balcony and were dropping down into the squirming mass of human beings who were trying to wriggle into the open."

Three explanations were offered for the cause of the fire. First, that the incense ignited the rafters; second, crossed wires and third, that an explosion was caused by some inflammable substance, possibly a film.

"The fire, as far as I have learned," said Lawrence W. Carroll, manager of the theatre, "was caused by the incense burned in the prologue which apparently ignited the flimsy drapery used in the scene. Royal Marion, the organist, first discovered the flames, and told the stage manager. Together they pulled the flaming drapery down and tried to throw it outside. One of the men tried to use a chemical extinguisher, but it was useless."

"I was standing in the rear of the theatre at the time. Everything was going along nicely until I suddenly saw a sheet of flame cover the entire screen from behind. In a moment's time there was a puff of smoke and the screen was ablaze. Before I could move, every-

thing in front had flared up, and the flames were leaping right toward me. They went half-way up the auditorium. It was the most horrible sight I ever saw."

"There must have been a lot of people burned up in front where they were tumbling over each other. The place was packed to the back wall. The cashier had stopped selling tickets a half hour before. There were about 200 in the lobby waiting for the second show to begin. With the shooting out of the flames, the lights went out and the only light that was furnished was by the flames. It was enough, however, to allow everyone to see about."

Stories of Survivors.

A thrilling story was related by a Yale student who refused to give his name.

"I was sitting in the balcony when I saw some smoke coming from the stage," he said. "Next moment I saw a sheet of flame from behind the curtain on the stage and heard a noise as if a fire extinguisher were being used. Some people down in front on the orchestra floor rose to their feet and started to run toward the rear. In a moment all the people on the orchestra floor arose simultaneously. Masculine voices roared above the furor of the rising panic, 'Sit down, sit down!'"

"A cloud of smoke that rapidly grew thicker and thicker as it poured out over the theatre threw the audience into an indescribable state of hysteria. Everybody yelled, 'Take your time!' and 'Take it easy!' and at the same time rapidly pushed forward."

"Suddenly a door in the balcony that had been closed was opened. A heavy draft was created and seemed to intensify the flames. They shot out in long streaks from behind the screen and the curtain collapsed. There was a tremendous flash of fire that spread like an umbrella over the heads of the audience below and leaped up toward the balcony. The hysterical madness of the audience then reached its height. Everybody lost his head. Women shrieked like lunatics and I felt myself doing down beneath the surging mass. Men dived from the balcony and from the windows. I got away with my hair singed and minus a hat and a shoe."

C. A. Myer, a local insurance agent, was seated in the tenth row. He said the orchestra played up to the moment the curtain collapsed and fell into the pit. He didn't see how the musicians escaped being burned to death. His description of the panic was similar to that of others—a sudden puff of smoke and the flash of flames that crept toward the front of the building. He saw bodies lying on the floor trampled on and saw several dive from the balcony to the ground floor.

Louis Rogoien, of 122 Asylum Street, whose arms were burned, said he was sitting with his cousin, Morris Rabinowitz, an attorney, in the first row of the balcony when they heard a disturbance below.

"I remarked," he continued, "that it must be a student fight, because every one was getting to his feet. The flames burst through the screen like a flash of lightning and a mad rush followed. Morris and I yelled 'Keep your seats' and 'Take your time,' but it didn't do much good apparently. I got badly mauled about and lost Morris but we finally met together on the outside."

A group of Odd Fellows, who were sitting near the front of the theatre, took the situation coolly and shouted to the orchestra to continue playing. They restrained some hysterical men from crowding down the aisle and helped to push the women first. All of them were slightly burned by falling drapery, but they stated that before they left the region of the first four or five rows all had been gotten further down the aisle toward the front of the theatre.

While the theatre is believed to have conformed to the State laws in moving picture construction, the antique and inflammable character of the building enabled the flames to envelop it in a short time. There were four exits; the front door, one at each side and the balcony fire escape, but only the front door and the balcony were resorted to in the frantic rush to escape.

The theatre stands on College Street, exactly opposite the Hotel Taft, and hotel patrons viewed the scene with distress. The escaping theatregoers were taken into the hotel in some cases instead of to hospitals and received emergency treatment in the corridors, bedrooms and parlors.

The Rialto Theatre was formerly the College Street Church. It was formerly owned by Yale University, which used it for lecture purposes and for departmental graduation exercises. The exercises of the Medical School were held there until it was purchased by private interests which remodeled it into a theatre.

The theatre was leased by Black's New England Syndicate Circuit from former Senator Harry Leonard.

Just north of the Rialto Theatre is the old New Haven House Annex on the same side of College Street. Osborne Hall and the Vanderbilt Dormitory are on the other side of Chapel Street, directly across from the old New Haven House Annex, and the other dormitories bordering the Yale campus are not far away.

The Shubert Theatre is just south of the Hotel Taft on the other side of College Street. The Y. M. C. A., with dormitories, is south of the Shubert Theatre and about three hundred feet from the Rialto Theatre.

The loss will be about \$100,000, including the furnishings supplied by the Rialto Company for its productions.