

141 MEN AND GIRLS DIE IN WAIST FACTORY FIRE; TRAPPED HIGH UP IN WASHINGTON PLACE BUILDING; STREET STREWN WITH BODIES; PILES OF DEAD INSIDE

The Flames Spread with Deadly Rapidity Through Flimsy Material Used in the Factory.

600 GIRLS ARE HEMMED IN

When Elevators Stop Many Jump to Certain Death and Others Perish in Fire-Filled Lofts.

STUDENTS RESCUE SOME

Help Them to Roof of New York University Building, Keeping the Panic-Stricken in Check.

ONE MAN TAKEN OUT ALIVE

Plunged to Bottom of Elevator Shaft and Lived There Amid Flames for Four Hours.

ONLY ONE FIRE ESCAPE

Coroner Declares Building Laws Were Not Enforced—Building Modern—Classed Fireproof.

JUST READY TO GO HOME

Victims Would Have Ended Day's Work in a Few Minutes—Pay Envelopes Identify Many.

MOB STORMS THE MORGUE

Seeking to Learn Fate of Relatives Employed by the Triangle Waist Company.

Three stories of a ten-floor building at the corner of Greene Street and Washington Place were burned yesterday, and while the fire was going on 141 young men and women—at least 125 of them mere girls—were burned to death or killed by jumping to the pavement below.

The building was fireproof. It shows now hardly any signs of the disaster that overtook it. The walls are as good as ever; so are the floors; nothing is the worse for the fire except the furniture and 141 of the 600 men and girls that were employed in its upper three stories.

Most of the victims were suffocated or burned to death within the building, but some who fought their way to the windows and leaped met death as surely, but perhaps more quickly, on the pavements below.

All Over in Half an Hour.

Nothing like it has been seen in New York since the burning of the General Slocum. The fire was practically all over in half an hour. It was confined to three floors—the eighth, ninth, and tenth of the building. But it was the most murderous fire that New York has seen in many years.

The victims who are now lying at the Morgue waiting for some one to identify them by a tooth or the remains of a burned shoe were mostly girls of from 16 to 23 years of age. They were employed at making shirtwaists by the Triangle Waist Company, the principal owners of which are Isaac Harris and Max Blanck. Most of them could barely speak English. Many of them came from Brooklyn. Almost all were the main support of their hard-working families.

There is just one fire escape in the building. That one is an interior fire escape in Greene Street, where the terrified unfortunates crowded before they began to make their mad leaps to death, the whole big front of the building is guiltless of one. Nor is there a fire escape in the back.

The building was fireproof and the owners had put their trust in that. In fact, after the flames had done their worst last night, the building hardly showed a sign. Only the stock within it and the girl employes were burned.

A heap of corpses lay on the sidewalk for more than an hour. The firemen were too busy dealing with the fire to pay any attention to people whom they supposed



The Burning Building at 23 Washington Place.

beyond their aid. When the excitement had subsided to such an extent that some of the firemen and policemen could pay attention to this mass of the supposedly dead they found, about half way down in the pack, a girl who was still breathing. She died two minutes after she was found. The Triangle Waist Company was the only sufferer by the disaster. There are other concerns in the building, but it was Saturday and the other companies had let their people go home. Messrs. Harris and Blanck, however, were busy and their girls—and some men—stayed.

Leaped Out of the Flames.

At 4:40 o'clock, nearly five hours after the employes in the rest of the building had gone home, the fire broke out. The one little fire escape in the interior was never resorted to by any of the doomed victims. Some of them escaped by running down the stairs, but in a moment or two this avenue was cut off by flame. The girls rushed to the windows and looked down at Greene Street, 100 feet below them. Then one poor, little creature jumped. There was a plate glass protection over part of the sidewalk, but she crashed through it, wrecking it and breaking her body into a thousand pieces. Then they all began to drop. The crowd yelled "Don't jump!" but it was jump or be burned—the proof of which is found in the fact that fifty burned bodies were taken from the ninth floor alone.

They jumped, they crashed through broken glass, they crushed themselves to death on the sidewalk. Of those who stayed behind it is better to say nothing—except what a veteran policeman said as he gazed at a headless and charred trunk on the Greene Street sidewalk hours after the worst cases had been taken out:

"I saw the Slocum disaster, but it was nothing to this."

"Is it a man or a woman?" asked the reporter.

"It's human, that's all you can tell," answered the policeman.

It was just a mass of ashes, with blood congealed on what had probably been the neck.

Messrs. Harris and Blanck were in the building, but they escaped. They carried with them Mr. Blanck's children and a governess, and they fled over the roofs. Their employes did not know the way, because they had been in the habit of using the two freight elevators, and one of these elevators was not in service when the fire broke out.

Found Alive After the Fire.

The first living victim, Hyman Meshel of 332 East Fifteenth Street, was taken from the ruins four hours after the fire was discovered. He was found paralyzed with fear and whimpering like a wounded animal in the basement, immersed in water to his neck, crouched on the top of a cable drum, and with his head just below the floor of the elevator.

Meantime the remains of the dead—it is hardly possible to call them bodies, because that word suggests something human, and there was nothing human about most of these—were being taken on a steady stream to the Morgue for identification. First Avenue was lined with the usual curious east side crowd, Twenty-

sixth Street was impassable. But in the Morgue they received the charred remnants with no more emotion than they ever display over anything.

Back in Greene Street there was another crowd. At midnight it had not decreased in the least. The police were holding it back to the fire lines, and discussing the tragedy in a tone which those seasoned witnesses of death seldom use.

"It's the worse thing I ever saw," said one old policeman.

Chief Croker said it was an outrage. He spoke bitterly of the way in which the Manufacturers' Association had called a meeting in Wall Street to take measures against his proposal for enforcing better methods of protection for employes in cases of fire.

No Chance to Save Victims.

Four alarms were rung in fifteen minutes. The first five girls who jumped did so before the first engine could respond. That fact may not convey much of a picture to the mind of an unimaginative man, but anybody who has ever seen a fire can get from it some idea of the terrific rapidity with which the flames spread.

It may convey some idea, too, to say that thirty bodies clogged the elevator shafts. These dead were all girls. They had made their rush their blindly when they discovered that there was no chance to get out by the fire escape. Then they found that the elevator was as hopeless as anything else, and they fell there in their tracks and died.

The Triangle Waist Company employed about 600 women and less than 100 men. One of the saddest features of the thing is the fact that they had almost finished for the day. In five minutes more, if the fire had started then, probably not a life would have been lost.

Last night District Attorney Whitman started an investigation—not of this disaster alone but of the whole condition which makes it possible for a firetrap of such a kind to exist. Mr. Whitman's intention is to find out if the present laws cover such cases, and if they do not to frame laws that will.

GIRLS JUMP TO SURE DEATH.

Fire Nets Prove Useless—Firemen Helpless to Save Life.

The fire, which was first discovered at 4:40 o'clock on the eighth floor of the ten-story building at the corner of Washington Place and Greene Street, leaped through the three upper stories occupied by the Triangle Waist Company with a sudden rush that left the Fire Department helpless.

How the fire started no one knows. On the three upper floors of the building were 600 employes of the waist company, 500 of whom were girls. The victims—mostly Italians, Russians, Hungarians, and Germans—were girls and men who had been employed by the firm of Harris & Blanck, owners of the Triangle Waist Company, after the strike in which the Jewish girls, formerly employed, had become unionized and had demanded better working conditions. The building had experienced four recent fires and had been reported by the Fire Department to the Building Department as unsafe, on account of the insufficiency of its exits.

The building itself was of the most modern construction and classed as fireproof. What burned so quickly and disastrously for the victims were shirtwaists, hanging on lines above tiers of workers, sewing

machines placed so closely together that there was hardly aisle room for the girls between them, and shirtwaist trimmings and cuttings which littered the floors above the eighth and ninth stories.

Girls had begun leaping from the eighth story windows before the firemen arrived. The firemen had trouble bringing their apparatus into position because of the bodies which strewed the pavement and sidewalks. While more bodies crashed down among them, they worked with desperation to run their ladders into position and to spread fire-nets.

One fireman, running ahead of a hose wagon, which halted to avoid running over a body, spread a firenet, and two more seized hold of it. A girl's body, coming end over end, struck on the side of it, and there was hope for an instant that she would be the first one of the score who had already jumped to be saved.

Thousands of people, who had crushed in from Broadway and Washington Square and were screaming with horror at what they saw, watched closely the work with the firenet. Three other girls, who had leaped for it a moment after the first one, struck it on top of her, and all four rolled out and lay still upon the pavement.

Five girls who stood together at a window close to the Greene Street corner held their places while a fire ladder was worked toward them, but which stopped at its full length two stories lower down. They leaped together, clinging to each other, with fire streaming back from their hair and dresses. They struck a glass sidewalk cover and crashed through it to the basement. There was no time to aid them. With water pouring in upon them from a dozen hose nozzles the bodies lay for two hours where they struck, as did the many others who leaped to their deaths.

One girl, who waved a handkerchief at the crowd, leaped from a window adjoining the New York University Building on the westward. Her dress caught on a wire, and the crowd watched her hang there till her dress burned free and she came toppling down.

Many jumped whom the firemen believe they could have saved. A girl who saw the glass roof of a sidewalk cover at the first-story level of the New York University Building leaped for it, and her body crashed through to the sidewalk.

On Greene Street, running along the eastern face of the building, more people leaped to the pavement than on Washington Place to the south. Fire nets proved just as useless to catch them and the ladders to reach them. None waited for the firemen to attempt to reach them with the scaling ladders.

All Would Soon Have Been Out.

Strewed about as the firemen worked, the bodies indicated clearly the preponderance of women workers. Here and there was a man, but almost always they were women. One wore furs and a muff, and had a purse hanging from her arm. Nearly all were dressed for the street. The fire had flashed through their work-room just as they were expecting the signal to leave the building. In ten minutes more all would have been out, as many had stopped work in advance of the signal and had started to put on their wraps.

What happened inside there were few who could tell with any definiteness. All that those who escaped seemed to remember was that there was a flash of flames, leaping first among the girls in the southeast corner of the eighth floor, and then suddenly over the entire room, spreading through the linens and cottons with which the girls were working. The girls on the ninth floor caught sight of the flames through the windows, up the stairway, and up the elevator shaft.

On the tenth floor they got them a moment later, but most of those on that floor escaped by rushing to the roof and then on to the roof of the New York University Building, with the assistance of 100 university students who had been dismissed from a tenth story classroom.

There were in the building, according to the estimates of Fire Chief Croker, about 600 girls and 100 men. The bodies of those

141 DEAD IN WAIST FACTORY FIRE HERE

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except for the streets immediately surrounding it.

Relatives of the dead were not allowed to come near while the work of the firemen and surgeons was going on, but were taken under police escort to the Mercer Street Station, where a vast crowd congregated throughout the evening. Broadway at 11 o'clock, in the vicinity of Washington Place, was thronged with women, walking up and down and wringing their hands while calling the names of their kinfolks whom they had lost.

SCENES AT THE MORGUE.

Men and Women Gather in a Frantic Throng in Quest of Loved Ones.

A few minutes after the first load of fire victims was received at the Bellevue Hospital Morgue the streets were filled with a clamoring throng, which struggled with the reserves stationed about the building in an effort to gain entrance to view the bodies of the dead in the hope of identifying loved ones.

The frantic mob was reinforced as the hospital wagon brought more of the dead to the institution. The sobbing and shrieking mothers and wives, and frantic fathers and husbands of those who had not been accounted for struggled with the police and tried to stop the wagon that was bearing the dead on its trips to the Morgue. Mothers and wives ran frantically through the street in front of the hospital, pulling their hair from their heads and calling the names of their dear ones.

A few of the surging mob who viewed the situation in a calmer manner attempted to calm the excited ones, but in vain. The police were abused because they would not allow the surging mob in the Morgue, and in many instances they were threatened and had to resort to the use of their nightsticks to keep the struggling mass from breaking in.

Two members of the throng who succeeded in gaining entrance to the Morgue were Mrs. Josephine Pannel of 49 Stanton Street and her son-in-law, who came in search of her daughter, Mrs. Jane Bucalo, 18 years old. She was last seen struggling to get into the elevator on the eighth floor of the building. Mrs. Pannel walked up and down the aisle that was formed between the rows of the unidentified dead and looked in vain for her daughter.

She was filled with hope, however, when an attendant announced that the wagon had just arrived with another load of the fire victims. The newly arriving dead were brought into the Morgue and stretched out, and Mrs. Pannel and her son-in-law ran frantically up and down the lines trying to find the one they sought. When the mother found that her search was in vain, she ran shrieking to her son-in-law and began tearing out her hair. Bucalo stood as a man in a trance, gazing at the rows of blackened bodies. Suddenly he reeled and fell to the floor. He was assisted to his feet by the attendants.

Presently Mrs. Pannel became calmer, and, seeing that there was no body among the dead that would answer the description of her daughter, she grew more composed, and thought it was probable that her daughter had escaped from the burning building alive.

At the door of the Morgue Mrs. Pannel met a reporter, and told him of her miraculous escape from the burning building, and the cause of her frantic search for the body of her daughter. According to her story, she was in the reading room of the factory when the fire was discovered. She, with others, ran to the elevator shaft, and when the car reached the eighth floor they fought to get into it. She said that she seized her daughter by the skirt before leaving the cutting room, and as she was being carried into the elevator by the frantic mob that was surging behind her her hold on her daughter's dress was torn away, and she remembers seeing the terrorized face of her daughter as the car was started downward. She called to her daughter, and thought that she saw her reel and fall to the floor as the car shot downward.

Mrs. Pannel described graphically the surging throng that clamored in the hall of the eighth floor and the struggle of the employes to gain entrance to the elevator car. She told of the rush of the occupants of the car when the elevator reached the ground floor on its last trip. She said she had a dim recollection of persons being trampled under foot by the excited mob as they dashed from the car to the entrance of the building, and that she believed many who were trampled upon perished in the bottom of the elevator car.

She also said that when the car left the eighth floor, some of the employes made a vain attempt to leap on the top of the car and that a few, being pushed forward by the struggling mass behind them, fell down the shaft through the open doorway of the shaft on the eighth floor and were dashed to death upon the roof of the car.

Police Work Desperately.

A hundred policemen, most of them ashen and with trembling lips, worked at the heart-rending task of keeping back, without undue roughness, the maddened thousands.

"For God's sake," one cried to a reporter, who was wedging his way out of the mob, "get me a drink!"

The poor bluecoat needed it.

Every few minutes a patrol wagon or a hastily improvised morgue wagon that had done duty as an auto truck earlier in the day appeared at the head of the mob at First Avenue and Twenty-sixth Street, and the reserves of six precincts had to force open a narrow path through the crowd for it. As soon as the path was opened in front, however, the crowd surged in behind it. At the sight of the bodies the crowd broke into fresh weeping and screaming, each seeming to see in the charred and often unrecognizable remains a loved one.

Twelve patrol wagons from as many stations, besides dozens of hastily impressed dispensary wagons of the Police Department and the Department of Public Charities and a few auto trucks were used in transporting the dead from the fire to the Morgue. The Morgue itself became too crowded, early in the evening, for further storage of bodies, and the Charities Department decided to throw open the long public dock adjoining it. Here, as night settled over the city, the bodies were taken from the wagons and laid out, side by side, in double rows along either side of the long docks.

Besides the thirty attendants regularly at the pier, twenty derelicts who had applied at the Municipal Lodging House in East Twenty-sixth Street for a night's rest, were pressed into service for the ghastly work.

In the narrow lane left between the double rows of the dead on the dark pier, the patrol wagons and rude dead wagons crept slowly, to where the lines had freshly ended. They deposited their freight, backed slowly out, and returned the scene of the fire for more bodies.

As fast as the dead were brought to the pier the grimy panhandlers and de-

relicts were set to work arranging them in rows, and later putting them in the rough wooden boxes that serve as coffins nightly at the Morgue. But the supply of boxes was soon exhausted, and Commissioner Drummond of the Department of Charities was obliged to send over to the storage warehouse on Blackwell's Island for more. Presently there steamed up to the pier from the island a large double-decked launch, bringing stacked up on its deck 100 more boxes.

"Them boxes wasn't brought here since the Slocum fire," said one old attendant at the Morgue, amid a tense silence. Other attendants nodded reminiscently.

Considerable confusion was caused on the pier in numbering the dead. The police of the various precincts had received from the Charities Department small, colored tags bearing numbers to tag the different boxes as soon as the bodies were laid in them. There turned out to be three separate systems of numbers, and the enumeration had to be done all over again.

At 11:30 o'clock, with the mob still storming more and more outside, the police had counted in the Morgue and on the pier 136 bodies—thirteen men and 122 women. Fifty-six of these were burned beyond all but human semblance and may never be identified. The thousands of clamorers outside could not have identified them, even if the police had let them swarm in on the pier.

As the maddened throng swarmed around the ghastly laden patrol wagons and improvised hearses their misery wrung even the hardened habitual handlers of the dead in the Morgue, making them frequently turn away from their work. There were hundreds scantily clad and shivering, despite their raving, in the cold night air. Many of them had no money. Their week's funds were in the pay envelopes, found in dozens, on the scorched and irrecognizable bodies on the pier. One woman, her head charred to a mere twisted blur of black, carried in her stocking \$600 in tightly crumpled bills. Dozens of the girls whose bodies were laid out on the pier were found to have carried their scant savings in this way.

Clung Together in Death.

Two girls, charred beyond all hope of identification, and found in the smoking ruins with their arms clasped around each other's necks, were conveyed to the pier, still together, and placed in one box.

Horrible cries had burst from the misery stricken mob outside when these two were carried through the narrow one in the street, and a few of the clamorous throng had forced their way to the wagon and lifted the dark tarpaulin. Everywhere burst anguished cries for sister, mother, and wife, a dozen pet names in Italian and Yiddish rising in shrill agony above the deeper moan of the throng.

Now and then a reporter, the way cleared before him by a broad, white-faced policeman, forced his way to the nearest telephone, to send to his office a report of what was happening there. Each time a hundred faces were turned up to him imploringly, and a hundred anguished voices begged of him tidings of those within. Had he seen a little girl with black hair and dark-brown cheeks? Had he seen a tall, thin man, with stooped shoulders? Could he describe any one of the many he had seen in there? The poor wretches were hunting for a "story," too.

Piteously they pleaded with the policemen to let them—only them—past, so that they might see whether their loved ones were on the pier. They would only look around, one short glance, and come straight out. The policemen, struggling with their own emotions more roughly than with the crowd, could only put them off. Presently, they said, in a very little while now, they would let them all in.

When finally the pleadings and struggles of the anguish-wracked multitude bade fair to drive them through all lines in a hungry swarm over the pier and into the Morgue, Inspector Walsh, Capt. Cray of the East Thirty-fifth Street Station, Commissioner Drummond, his Deputy, Frank J. Goodwin, and Coroners' Physicians Weston and O'Hanlon held a hurried consultation behind the barred doors of the Morgue. They decided to number each body anew, to make sure of the count; to turn over the valuables or money found with the bodies to Lieut. Sullivan for safekeeping, and then to let the throng, in small parties, into the place. As soon as a body was identified they would place the lid on the coffin and remove it to one side.

The mere announcement, spreading through the crowd outside, that the police would let them through and open the doors at midnight threw the mob into a wild hysteria of almost joy. Several women had to be taken to Bellevue for treatment, laughing and crying and struggling all the way.

Inside, as they heard the savage cries of the mob, they sickened and paled at the thought of what would follow when the doors were opened.

"Fifty-six!" muttered Inspector Walsh, turning his face away. They call him "Smiling Dick" Walsh, but his averted face was not smiling. He meant the fifty-six bodies that were burnt or crushed beyond recognition; fifty-six that would certainly be buried in unnamed graves. Dozens of them had every stitch of clothing burned off them. One body—that of a young girl—was headless and burned to a crisp.

Commissioner Drummond realized that when the mad throng was let into the Morgue and on the pier, many of them, already crazed by uncertainty concerning their loved ones, might at the sight of the dead throw themselves into the river. He therefore ordered that every opening in the Morgue building and on the covered pier be boarded up at once, and that no space should be left which would permit of the passage of a body.

At midnight, by order of Capt. Gray, the door of the Morgue was opened for a brief moment, and the foremost of the surging mob outside, to the number of fifteen, was allowed to enter. The police squad at the doors could hardly keep the rest back, with promises of letting them, too, presently enter in groups of fifteen.

Each group, shivering and clamoring and weeping, was lined up at the door and allowed slowly to file between the rows of boxes. Two policemen accompanied each of them, ready to support them if they should faint. And more than half of them did. They looked around with an air of frightened bewilderment at the ghastly array of dead, and then, one by one, looking down at the nearest box at their feet, where the mangled bodies lay, with heads propped up on boards for the light of the attendant beside the box, they collapsed with cries of terror. Such were carried to one side and revived by physicians from Bellevue, and later warmed with coffee handed to them by attendants and panhandlers at the pier.

Scores of men and women thought they saw in the ghastly bodies propped up in the boxes the relatives they were looking for, but could not identify them positively.

Around several bodies gathered men and women in small knots, each insisting pitifully that what was propped up there belonged to them, and calling the unrecognizable mass with tender pet names. One man, William Mantes of 35 Second Avenue, came there seeking for his sister Sarah, aged 15; his sister Lucy, 19 years, and his mother, all of whom had worked in the same shop. He couldn't find any of them and broke down completely. Another, Dominick Leone, of 444 East Thirteenth Street, came to find three cousins and a niece, who hadn't returned home. He did not find them.

At 1 A. M. eight bodies had been identified by relatives and set aside in sealed boxes. The relatives filed into the improvised Coroner's office in the morgue and tearfully stood in line for their slips, permitting them to have the bodies removed. There was a competitive mob of undertakers with their wagons at the outskirts of the crowd ready to do that