

BANK CHIEF, SHUT IN FIERY VAULT, SAVED AS CEILING FALLS

STRUCTURE CRUMBLES IN TERRIFIC BLAZE, DEFYING FIREMEN

With Granite Walls Tumbling About Their Heads, Fire Fighters Are Forced Back by Fierce Heat—Interior Like Furnace.

(Continued from First Page.)

apparently holding the flames to the easterly side of the building, when the wind suddenly shifted and drove the blaze back toward the Broadway side.

No fire fighter could stand before that rush of flame and within half an hour the whole building became a roaring furnace. The roof fell in with a terrific roar that sent great clouds of smoke and pyramids of sparks high in the air, and the interior became a huge mass of flames. For hours the flames consumed the partitions and furnishings, while only the thick granite walls withstood them. By eight o'clock only the walls were left standing.

Brave Death in Flames at Worst Blaze in Years

A man who was passing through Pine street saw a flash of flames through the window of the Cafe Savarin, and rushing up to Broadway informed Police Sergeant Casey and Policeman Foley, who were standing there. Hurrying back to the storeroom they found George Davis, chief engineer of the building, with four men fighting the flames with the hose with which the building was supplied.

Davis declared that his men could cope with the flames and told the police, they say, not to sound an alarm. Sergeant Casey, however, sent Policeman Foley to ring in an alarm, which brought Deputy Chief Binns and a small quantity of apparatus. The blaze had then spread to the upper part of the building, and a second, third, fourth and fifth alarms were sounded within twenty minutes, each bringing two ambulances. Fire Chief Kenlon came with the second alarm, and he was soon joined by Joseph Johnson, Fire Commissioner, and the Police Commissioner, Mr. Waldo.

Deputy Chief Binns sent his men into the building to man the stand pipes inside and fight the blaze, which was then confined to the easterly side of the building. The flames burst out through the windows on that side and roared up in huge volume, which threatened the tall buildings in Nassau street, but it seemed for half an hour that the firemen were holding the blaze into the rear side and that its spread might be prevented.

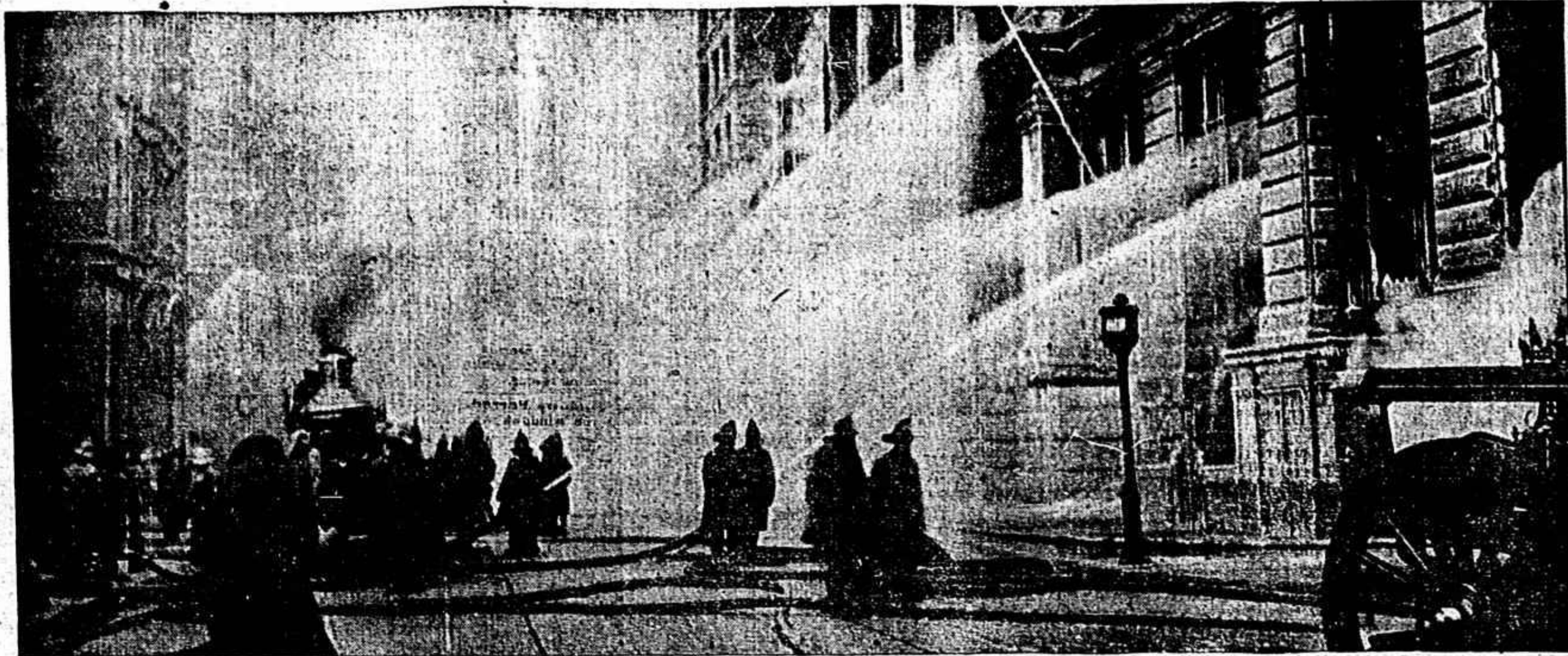
WIND TURNS FLAMES AGAINST FIREMEN.

A high wind which had been driving the flames eastward, suddenly shifted and caught scores of fire fighters who were manning the hose on the upper floors. Driven backward before the wall of flame, they rushed to the windows and stairs and fled for their lives from the building, while the fire rushed through the inflammable offices and burst out through the Broadway side of the building as though fed by tinder. Showers of flaming embers beat against the brick walls and windows of the Chase National Bank, in Cedar street, of the seventeen story American Exchange Bank Building, at Cedar street and Broadway, against the tall Schermerhorn Building, in Pine street, and drifted over the roofs of the skyscrapers, showering down upon the East River.

Firemen were sent into these buildings to man the stand pipes and check any fire that might burst through the windows, and scores of streams of water were poured against their sides to protect them.

Just as the rush of flame drove the firemen from the Broadway side, the firemen in the street saw three men, believed to be kitchen cleaners employed in the Lawyers' Club on the fourth floor, crawl out on the wide coping which surrounded the building. They carried a light rope, one end of which had been made fast near the side of the window. Two men grasped the rope and started to slide down, when the rope took fire and snapped off close to the window, and the two men, clinging to it, fell to the sidewalk. They were both killed. The

Gale Sweeping Water Streams Aside from the Burning Building



third man toppled off the coping and fell, crushed, in a little areaway. Spectators turned their heads as the three men took the fatal plunge.

WOULD BE RESCUERS THROWN FROM LADDER.

Responding to their cries for help, the firemen had thrown up an eighty foot ladder, which reached to the third story, and several firemen started to rush up the ladder as the three victims fell. A burst of flame through the window shut them off, ignited the ladder and sent the would-be rescuers sliding downward to the street. Several of them fell from the ladder. Lieutenant Humphries, of Truck No. 6, was one of those knocked off the ladder, receiving painful bruises.

At this moment loud cries for help were heard in the offices of the Mercantile Safe Deposit Company, in the lower floor, at Broadway and Cedar street. Men were seen running about in the offices, apparently helpless, and one man, who was afterward found to be William Giblin, president of the company, was seen penned within a wire cage behind barred doors.

Although huge masses of broken granite were raining down on the sidewalk, threatening them with instant death, the firemen rushed to the rescue of the trapped men, and smashing in the windows and doors of the safe deposit company's offices, dragged out Frank Peck, its watchman, and Gus Peterson, an employe. Mr. Giblin had passed through the steel barred door of the guard room leading to the vaults, and had shut the door behind him, locking it, before he discovered that he had no keys.

William Sheehan, a watchman, was trapped there with him. They were vainly trying to unlock the doors or break out of the cage in which they were penned like rats in a trap and alternately praying and crying to the firemen for help. Portions of the ceiling were falling upon them, and Sheehan was soon penned on the floor by one of the big pieces of masonry.

FIFTY FIREMEN FIGHT TO FREE MAN.

Fifty firemen attacked the steel doors in a frantic effort to free the trapped man, but for nearly an hour they struggled in vain to loosen the great "mob" door, so securely was it fastened. Mr. Giblin was behind a pile of desks in the cage and seemed uninjured, but unable to help himself. Despairing of his rescue, Chaplain McGean, of the Fire Department, entered the offices and pronounced the last rites of the Church over the apparently doomed man, while firemen still dug and pried at the steel bars.

Finally Chief Kenlon ordered a two inch rope brought. It was fastened to the door and every fireman within reach manned it, and with a terrific pull they yanked it from its hinges, rushed in and dragged Mr. Giblin out just in time to save his life. Half conscious, Mr. Giblin was carried across the street

to the boiler room of the Trinity Building, where he said: "There is another man in there. I lost him."

BODY SEEN IN BURNED OFFICE.

While firemen kept half a dozen streams of water pouring into the office of the safe deposit company to hold the flames in check, others again entered the cage whence Mr. Giblin had been taken and found William Sheehan, the watchman, lying on the floor with his hand pinned by a huge piece of masonry. He was struggling to free himself and begging the firemen to save him. While the firemen fought to free him Dr. Gowdinsky, an ambulance surgeon from Gouverneur Hospital, donning a fireman's helmet and coat, rushed into the guard room and gave the trapped man medical treatment. It is reported that he was compelled to amputate the man's hand in order to free him. At any rate, he was quickly freed and rushed to a hospital.

After Sheehan had been taken out the body of another man, with charred hands, apparently raised in supplication, could be seen lying on the floor of the office, where he had been crushed by a falling stone.

Battalion Chief Walsh was missed while the firemen were engaged in the rescue work. In company with Captain Sidney Johnson, of Patrol No. 1, and four firemen, Walsh had gone to the Lawyers' Club, on the fourth floor, and was directing the fighting there when the shift of wind sent the blaze back into the building and filled the offices and stairways with smoke. Choking and gasping for breath, Walsh and his men had rushed for the stairs, and Walsh told Johnson to make his escape, saying, "You go ahead; I'll find my way out."

That was the last time that Walsh was seen alive by any of the firemen. It was rumored that he had jumped from a second story window when the roof fell in and that he had been taken to a hospital, but Chief Kenlon and Deputy Chief Lally, who immediately started a search for him, eventually gave up and declared that he must be dead and possibly several of his men had perished with him. They had no means of knowing how many.

From that time on it was apparent that the fire would be kept within the Equitable Building, and it was only a question of how long it would take the firemen to drown it out. The strange capolas which decorated the cornice had fallen in with the roof and were devoured by flames. Great portions of the cornice and granite ledges surrounding the building had fallen into the street, injuring the firemen, damaging the apparatus and making the narrow surfaces of Pine and Cedar streets a dangerous fighting ground, but the great granite walls still stood, while the interior of the building burned for hours.

Outside High Pressure System.

Maiden lane is the southernmost border of the high pressure water system, and the fire was a block or more south of it. Had it been within the high pressure territory, the firemen say, a part at least of the building and many lives might have been saved. As it was, they ran two lines of hose from a high pressure hydrant in Maiden lane and obtained a little help from that system.

For hours all traffic in Broadway and for three blocks each side of the fire was suspended. Broadway street car traffic was halted, as nothing could pass the fiery building for many hours.

The suffering from the cold and ice by firemen and policemen was intense. "Human icicles," was the only way to describe the appearance of the fire fighters and bluecoats. As a spectacle, the fire has had no rival in many years. The ruins of the Equitable Building looked more like polar glaciers than the skeleton of a modern office building that held the records of life insurance of thousands.

"I have been a fireman for twenty years, but I never saw anything so tough as this," said an ice-coated man at Nassau and Liberty streets. Alongside of him stood a fireman in charge of a pumping engine who was also covered with ice and who was so numbed by the cold wind that he could hardly stand. A banker offered to get a drink of brandy for the fireman, who seemed on the verge of collapse, but it was declined with a "thank you, but I never drink anything but hot coffee at a fire." A man from a restaurant soon appeared with hot coffee.

Business Suspended for Blocks.

Business was practically suspended for five blocks on all sides of the Equitable Building. No one was allowed to pass the fire lines without a fire badge or some very good excuse, and because of the cold hundreds of clerks preferred to return to their homes instead of watching the fire.

Because of the ice several fire engines went out of business and others were called to take their places. The streets were like frozen lakes and that retarded the movement of the supplemental fire apparatus.

Gustave Peterson, the day watchman, who was rescued from the basement of the burning building, told a story that led the firemen to believe there were a number of other watchmen trapped in the place.

Peterson was saved when a negro, Lee Delt, was taken out through a hole in the sidewalk. Peterson said that the building was on fire when he reached the structure for work. He said he supposed that the firemen would get control of the flames and on that supposition went to the basement to change his clothes. The ceiling of the basement suddenly collapsed while he and the negro were there.

Peterson said they were forced to take refuge in the extension that reached under the sidewalk. There they found a pole and commenced to break the little glass disks in the sidewalk over their heads. Firemen above saw the tip of the pole and discovering their presence under the sidewalk, smashed it in and drew Peterson and Delt out. Both men were on the verge of collapse, but recovered under treatment of a physician in the Trinity Building.

Says Eight Watchmen Were Killed.

Peterson said that fully eight watchmen had been trapped and probably burned to death in the structure. He said they must have been in the building, as they had not been relieved by the day watchmen going on duty.

Joseph Brown, a fireman, of Truck No. 61, who carried Captain Bass to the street, said regarding the fate of Battalion Chief Walsh: "Our company was the first to arrive at the fire. Battalion Chief Walsh, Captain Bass and myself entered the building and made our way to the third floor. We entered a room on that floor in the front. The Chief was quite a distance in advance of us. Suddenly the floor gave way, and I, who was partly in the hall, managed to grab Captain Bass, who was badly hurt by a stone arch falling on him. After getting the Captain to the street I went back for the Chief, but though I yelled out loud I got no response. I believe the Chief is buried among the debris."

To the great velocity of the wind which swept around the building is due the devastating progress of the fire. At five o'clock in the morning the wind blew at a velocity of sixty-four miles an hour. At eight o'clock it had diminished to sixty miles an hour.

WILL SOON HUNT AFTER VICTIMS

At three o'clock Fire Chief Kenlon said the fire was under control and that the men were washing down the ruins to cool them off in order that search for the victims might be instituted. At that hour the walls, or what remained of them, were hoisted in by some two feet in thickness. At present the ruins are low but for the ignominious nature in Superintendent Miller of the Building Department, said the walls would be razed soon. Assistant Superintendent Ludwig appeared with a couple of workmen ready to begin the work of pulling down the masonry.

Chief Kenlon showed much grief over the death of Battalion Chief Walsh. He said that in view of the zero weather and the narrowness of the streets that the firemen did wonderful work in containing the flames to the Equitable. He said it was only the good work of the men that prevented a spread of the fire. He had believed that the Equitable was a fire proof structure, and was surprised, he said, when he found that it was not. He was asked to make an estimate of the damage, but said he couldn't very well at that minute.

ICE-SHEATHED FIREMEN REVIVED BY HOT COFFEE

Scores of Men, Exhausted, Freezing and Hungry, Are Hastily Provided For.

WAITERS CARRY NEW LEASE ON LIFE TO FIGHTERS

Suffering of Men at Terrific Blaze Is Intense Until Relief Comes.

Shivering, suffering firemen lay in doorways and vestibules along Broadway and Transverse streets to-day wherever there was a doorway to admit them, with bodies six inches long hanging from their heads and coats covered with ice. They were both cold and hungry. They needed medical assistance when Superintendent McGonigle, of the Equitable Building, arrived and managed to get in touch with an official of the Stock Exchange.

"Find some restaurant man who will supply all those men with coffee and sandwiches," said the Stock Exchange man, and immediately, as soon as a thousand sandwiches could be made and big cans of coffee could be prepared, the firemen, out of commission because of the cold, were regaling themselves with the things they needed most. Waiters in restaurants bearing big cases of coffee and big trays of sandwiches came up Broadway and new life seemed to have been diffused along the whole line.

One fireman, Edward Milligan, of Engine Company No. 29, whose neck had been broken by a falling piece of stone in front of the Equitable building, a man who had been on duty since seven o'clock, grappled with a can of coffee, boiled a sandwich and while his jaws were still working plunged back through the frozen crowd, jostled another fireman out of the line, shouted "Bill, go and get a warmer," and took his associate's place.

FIND TOO LATE THAT VICTIM STILL LIVED

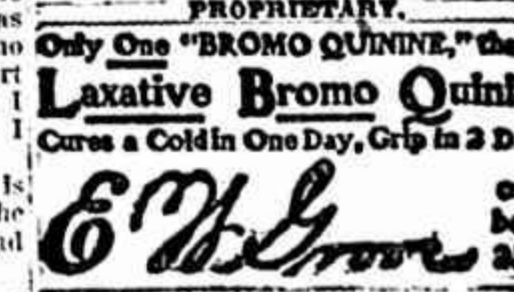
Believed to be dead, a man, supposed from a card in his pocket, to have been Massimo Fratini, of No. 25 East Fifty-sixth street, lay two hours in the street amid the confusion of the Equitable Building fire to-day before Dr. Savage, of St. Gregory's Volunteer Hospital, discovered signs of life and hurried him into an ambulance. He died on the way to the hospital.

Hundreds of firemen, policemen and others ran to and fro past the man, who had been knocked off a ladder by falling debris and left where he fell, because every one believed him dead. Both legs were broken and he had suffered internal injuries.

The dead man's trousers lay had a stripe down one side, and the police believe he was an employe in the burned building.

Saratoga Attorney Found Dead in Bed SARATOGA, N. Y., Tuesday.—James L. Scott, one of the most prominent attorneys of northern New York, and formerly referee in bankruptcy for Saratoga, Schenectady and Warren counties, was found dead in bed to-day at his residence, in Union avenue. Mr. Scott was graduated from Williams College in 1856 and from the Columbia University Law School in 1878. He is survived by a widow and one son.

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To the Policyholders of the Equitable Life Assurance Society

The burning of the Home Office Building at 120 Broadway will cause but temporary inconvenience in the transaction of our business.

The securities and important records are protected by fire-proof vaults, which are intact. Most of the office force, and records, were removed some time ago to the Society's new building, No. 2 Albany Street.

The Executive Offices of the Society and the Cashier's Department have been established in the City Investing Building, No. 165 Broadway. The Society will occupy the second, third and fourth floors of that Building. This will, for the time being, be the Home Office of the Society, where all business with the public will be transacted, including the receipt of premium payments.

W. A. DAY, President.

