

# THE FIRE INVESTIGATION.

## Findings of the Fire Commissioners.

### Nothing New Elicited as to the Origin and Progress of the Conflagration.

The Board of Police and Fire Commissioners has made a report. Of course they have nothing new to disclose, or even to suggest, for this is an age when all valuable information of public affairs is first harvested and conveyed by that enterprising *avant courier*, the press:

The following is the official finding:

#### THE WORK ACHIEVED.

The Board of Police, as required by law, have investigated the origin of the fire of October 8th and 9th. We have heard the sworn testimony of fifty-one witnesses, and had the same taken down by a stenographer and subsequently transcribed. As written out, it fills about 900 pages of foolscap paper. As a large part of this testimony was published in the daily papers as it was taken from day to day, and as the original is on file for reference, we deem it unnecessary to recapitulate the evidence to any great extent, but proceed to give the result of our investigation briefly, and place it on record.

#### WHERE THE FIRE STARTED.

The Board find that the fire originated in a two-story frame barn in the rear of No. 137 DeKoven street, the premises being owned by Patrick Leary. The fire was first discovered by a drayman, by the name of Daniel Sullivan, who saw it while sitting on the sidewalk on the south side of DeKoven street, and nearly opposite Leary's premises. He fixes the time at not more than 20 to 25 minutes past 9 o'clock when he first noticed the flames coming out of the barn.

#### WHO STARTED IT.

There is no proof that anybody had been in the barn after nightfall that evening. Whether it originated from a spark blown from a chimney on that windy night, or was set on fire by human agency, we are unable to determine. Mr. Leary, the owner, and all his family, prove to have been in bed and asleep at the time. There was a small party in the front part of Leary's house, which was occupied by Mr. McLaughlin and wife, but we failed to find any evidence that anybody from McLaughlin's part of the house went near the barn that night.

The first information received by the fire department came from the alarm struck in the fire-alarm office at 9:30. The alarm sounded box 342, at the corner of Canalport avenue and Alsted street, a point in the direction of the fire but a mile beyond it. There was no signal given from any box to the central office, but the box was given by Mathias Shaffer, from the court house cupola, he being the night watchman on duty at the time, and having sighted the fire. There was no signal given from any box by anybody until after the fire department had arrived and turned in the second and third alarms. If any person set the fire, either by accident or design, he was careful not to give any alarm. The nearest engine house was six blocks away from the fire; the next nearest one was about nine blocks away. The nearest hose house was located about eleven blocks from the fire, and at this hose house the watchman had seen the fire before the alarm was given from the Court House, and the company was on their way to the fire before the box was struck. In consequence of this early sighting the fire, the hose company, the America, ran eleven blocks and attached their hose to the fire-plug, and got water on the fire before any engine did, although two engines were located considerably nearer to the fire. It would require five minutes for the nearest engine to go to the fire, a distance of six blocks. From three to five minutes more would be required in which to unreel and lay out the hose, make connections with the fire plug and get to work. Intelligent citizens who lived near the place of the fire testify that it was from 10 to 15 minutes from the time they first saw the fire before any engines came upon the ground. It is proved that the engines repaired to the fire after getting the alarm, with their usual celerity. When they arrived there from three to five buildings were fiercely burning. The fire must then have been burning from ten to fifteen minutes, and with the wind then blowing strongly from the southwest and carrying the fire from building to building in a neighborhood composed wholly of dry wood buildings, with wood shavings piled in every form and under every house, the fire had got under too great headway for the engines called out by the first alarm to be able to subdue it.

#### THE SECOND ALARM.

Marshal Williams and Third Assistant Marshal Benner arrived upon the ground soon after the engines, and at once saw that the fire could not be stopped without more engines, and Marshal Williams at once ordered the second, and soon after the third, alarm to be turned in; but this only caused the distant engines to come. Many valuable minutes must elapse before they could reach the fire and get to work, and before this could be accomplished the strong wind had scattered the fire into many buildings, all as dry as tinder, and spread it over so large an area that the department, though working with their utmost energy, were unable to cut it off, or prevent the wind, which soon became a gale, from carrying burning shingles and boards over their heads, and setting buildings on fire far away from the main fire.

#### THE JOB BECOMES HOPELESS.

After it got into the high church, at the corner of Clinton and Mather streets, and thence into the match factory and Batcham's mills and lumber, it got beyond the control of the fire department. About this time it crossed the river, between Van Buren and Adams streets, by means of flying brands, and set fire to Powell's roofing establishment, adjoining the gas works. Before this time, the watchman in the Court House cupola had twice extinguished the fire which had caught from the brands carried by the wind into the Court House balcony from the West Side,

#### A DISTANCE OF A MILE.

At 11 o'clock the keeper of the crib of the lake tunnel, being located two miles from the shore, found the sky full of sparks and burning brands, and from 11:30 till morning he worked with all his might to prevent the wooden roof of the crib from burning up and destroying himself and wife. From Powell's roofing establishment, the progress of the fire was rapid and terrific, sweeping everything in its course. The engines had all been working on the West Side, and they could not reel 600 feet of hose each, and cross the river and get to work soon enough to prevent its spreading, literally, on the wings of the wind. Blowing up buildings in the face of the wind was tried, and without any benefit. The Court House and Water Works, though a mile apart, were burning at the same time. Gunpowder was used in blowing up buildings, with good effect, the next day, in cutting off the fire at the extreme south end of it, and preventing it backing any further. After the Water Works burned, the firemen could do little good with their engines, except on the banks of the river. They had lost 7,500 feet of hose, and one steam fire engine. Two more engines had been in the repair shop, and were partially destroyed, so that after 11 o'clock Sunday night we had but 14 engines in the service, and after daybreak had but about one-half of our hose remaining. This would not admit of an engine conveying water very far from the ruins. The firemen and their officers were sober and did all that men could do. They worked heroically to save the property of others when their own homes were burning and their families were fleeing from the flames.

A large part of the department had worked at the large fire on Saturday night and Sunday, till 3 o'clock p. m.—eighteen hours steady work—and they were nearly exhausted when this fire commenced, but they responded to this call with alacrity, and worked with all their remaining energy.

#### WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

We believe that had the buildings on the West Side, where the fire commenced, been built of brick or stone, with safe roofing, and the buildings need not have been fire-proof, that the fire could have been stopped without doing great damage, and certainly would not have crossed the river. After it did cross, the wooden cornices, wooden signs of great size, the cupolas, and the tar and felt roofs, which were on most of the buildings, caused their speedy destruction, and aided greatly in spreading the conflagration.

#### THE PUMPS GIVE OUT.

The single set of pumping works upon which the salvation of the city depended, were roofed with wood, had no appliance by which water could be raised to its own roof in case of fire, and was one of the earliest buildings to burn in the North Division. The Board of Police have year by year in Annual Reports to the Mayor and Common Council endeavored to point out the great defects in the manner in which our city was being built up. We advised and entreated to have much greater fire-limits established before an immense amount of combustibles were piled around the heart of the city. We reported Mansard roofs and tar roofs to be unsafe; that the water supply was insufficient; that our fire hydrants were twice too far apart; that we ought to have fire department cisterns at the intersection of the streets, so that we should always have water at fires; that we ought to have floating fire engines with powerful pumps in the river, and thus enable the firemen to wet down 1,500 feet on either side of the river or its branches; that wooden cornices were an abomination; that the Holly system of pumping the water and sending it

through the pipes with a pressure of 40 pounds on ordinary occasions, with power to increase it to 100 pounds in case of a fire, would give us four sets of pumping works in the different parts of the city, and not leave us to the mercy of chance or accident to a single set.

We showed that the four sets of Holly works could be built for less than one year's interest on the cost of the present water works, and when built would admit of the dispensing with every engine in the Fire Department where the water was in the street, allowing us to get rid of most of the horses and all of the engines of the department, and reducing the number of men one-half, saving two-thirds of the expense of the fire department and making it as efficient as it would be now with one hundred steam fire engines.

None of these things were noticed by the Mayor, Common Council, or the newspapers, no heed being paid to our suggestions so far as any change or improvement of our plan of extinguishing fires was concerned; the only thing we could do was to ask for an increase of the engine companies, so that we might be prepared as well as possible to contend with the great fires to which we were and still are liable.

#### THE ENGINES TOO FEW.

Our engines have always been too few in number, and too far apart. The fire department should be very much enlarged, and the system of putting out fires by steam fire engines should be abandoned. If the citizens don't believe this now, they will after the next great fire sweeps out of existence the greater portion of the wooden city which now remains.

If we had had floating steam-pumps of large capacity in the South Branch the fire would not probably have crossed to the South Side. If we could have had cisterns in the streets, we could have saved all of the North division, north of Chicago avenue and west of Clark street, and all of the southeast part now included in the burnt district of the South Division.

#### MONEY WAS PAID.

Evidence was given of money having been paid by citizens to some of our own firemen, but we can find no evidence that any of them worked during the fire with any idea of receiving any pay or consideration for their labor upon any property. The money paid was merely as a testimonial of respect for the firemen, and acknowledgment in a substantial form of services rendered by the firemen, many of whom had periled their lives to save the property of citizens and lost their own homes while doing so. No money was paid them until weeks after the fire, and was a surprise to the firemen who received it. The Fire Department received all the aid from firemen of nearly every city far and near that could be rendered, but they all came and brought their apparatus and worked with a will, and placed us under a load of obligation which we can never repay.

#### THE AREA BURNED.

over by this fire is about 2,050 acres, divided among the three divisions as follows: About 160 acres in the West Division; nearly 500 acres in the South Division, and upward of 1,400 acres in the North Division. The total loss of property burned is estimated at about \$200,000,000. The number of buildings burned is between 17,000 and 18,000. The number of lives lost at the fire is supposed to have been about 200, although the Coroner has as yet found but 117 bodies of persons lost at the fire.

T. B. BROWNS,  
MARK SHERIDAN,  
J. E. CHADWICK,  
Commissioners.

## ANOTHER MAMMOTH CAVE.

Thirty Miles Beneath the Earth—A Subterranean River—One Hundred Acres of Lake—Wonderful Waterfalls—Underground Church, Cathedral, Tower Halls and Passages—The Wonder of Southwest Missouri.

From the Kansas City Times.

A week seldom passes by without some new and wonderful discovery being made in the great expanse of country known as the Southwest. Of late most of these discoveries have been made in the southwestern portion of Missouri and the Indian Territory, which has been for many years only partially explored by the white man. During the latter part of the war, a cave was discovered near Pineville, McDonald county, Mo., but the times were so unsettled that beyond a careless superficial examination of the more accessible portion of it no general explorations have as yet been made.

Mr. C. C. Carpenter, a gentleman residing in Pineville, in company with one or two of his friends, gives the following as the result of an expedition made last week in search of the wonderful.

#### THE LOCATION.

of this new subterranean wonder is sixteen miles southeast of Pineville, McDonald county; the entrance is on Sugar creek, in a ravine bearing the suggestive title of "Bar Hollar." You make your entrance into the bowels of the earth through a volcanic fissure seven feet wide by twenty feet in length; you soon lose sight of daylight and find yourself in a long entrance hall one hundred yards in length, which terminates in

#### THE BAT ROOM,

so named by the explorers from the thousands of bats that swarmed within its dark and hidden recesses; they flew about in swarms, making a terrible noise in the arched roof above. This room has three sides, each with an aperture opening into smaller caverns or side rooms. The dimensions of the room were taken by Mr. Carpenter, and found to be 50x130 feet, the ceiling about 20 feet from the floor. Passing from this room, a walk of about four hundred yards, through a spacious hall and we find ourselves in

#### BARNUM'S MUSEUM,

so called from the number of strangely-shaped stalactites found there. This room is in the shape of a horse-shoe. Nature must certainly have intended this room for a church, since the roof is arched in purely Gothic style, with dome and columns, and, to finish off and make it complete, a pulpit near the centre. The walls of this magnificent cavern are one hundred feet high; but one of the most remarkable features about it is a fountain of pure water four feet in diameter. Turning northward we find a room sixty feet wide, and filled almost full of a glistening formation of stalactites, which hang in curiously-formed pendants from the roof. To the south of this is a room which should be named

#### THE BOTTOMLESS PIT.

since it lacks neither bottom, sides, nor roof. The darkness within this place is appalling. Turning to the east, the party walked a distance of about a quarter of a mile, when they came to a flight of natural steps, forty or fifty in number, terminating in a wide platform which formed the entrance to a

#### MAMMOTH HALL.

supported by Corinthian pillars of various thickness, and endless in number, all white as snow, and glistening as though studded with millions of diamonds. This hall is probably two hundred feet in width, and communicates with a number of passages leading off in various directions, none of which have as yet been explored. Proceeding on their way, the explorers found

#### A RIVER OF RUNNING WATER,

coming, no one knows from whence, and going, no one knows where. It is about fifty feet wide and three feet deep. The party followed its course down stream to the falls, where the water goes roaring over a precipice into the darkness below. The party retraced their way to the Mammoth Hall, crossed the river and proceeded on their way. They passed room after room, of endless shapes and full of natural curiosities.

MILES OF CAVERNS WERE PASSED THROUGH, each having outlets in others, and all dark, but all full of beauty when lighted up with torches or lamps. A lake of pure water was soon reached, which was at first supposed to be a river. Here a rude boat or dug-out had been brought by a fugitive during the late war, and went northward until he thought he was coming to a waterfall, when he returned.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS ON THE LAKE developed the fact that the noise was made by a huge waterfall, where the water came pouring in from above. The lake is circular a distance of fifty feet. The water falls in shape, and has no visible outlet for water. It is about one hundred acres in extent. There were eight or ten dark passages found upon the banks of the lake, leading in all directions, but the guide accompanying the exploring party lost his courage and refused to go further. The party were then about eight or ten miles from their starting point. They were in the cave forty-three hours. Mr. Carpenter says there is another entrance to the cave

#### THIRTY MILES

distant, which old trappers and hunters say leads to the lake. Mr. C. C. Carpenter lives at Pineville, McDonald county, and will take pleasure in making further explorations with any party who may call upon and accompany him.

The Milwaukee and Northwestern railway is progressing, though work was abridged by the bridge across the Milwaukee river. This is now completed. The company have struck two subterranean lakes, one in Saukville, and the other in the tamarack swamp crossed by the road in the town of Fredonia. In the latter a portion of the grading suddenly disappeared from view, sinking to a depth of twenty-nine feet. The company propose to complete the road between Milwaukee and Plymouth by the first of January.

Nearly all the telegraph offices in England are in charge of women. Female labor has found this a new and profitable field.