

23 DIE, 40 HURT IN NEWARK FIRE

Many Other Women and Girls,
Caught in a Flame-Swept
Factory, Missing.

BUILDING WAS A FIRE TRAP

Two Fire Escapes on It Useless,
and Victims, Ablaze, Leaped
Out of High Windows.

SOME IMPALED ON PICKETS

Firemen's Nets Smashed to the
Ground with the Weight of
Plunging Women.

FIRE ESCAPES BLOCKED

Scores Fought in Vain to Reach
the Ladders the Firemen
Threw Up to Them.

A TEN-MINUTE-LONG HORROR

Roof and Floors Fell Within Half an
Hour, Carrying Down Dead and Dy-
ing—Defective Law Alone to Blame.

Twenty-three women and girls were killed, at least forty were injured, and an unknown number are missing as the result of a fire which destroyed a factory building at High and Orange Streets, Newark, in a few minutes yesterday morning. The building was fifty years old and was saturated with oil. The flames spread with great rapidity, and in a few seconds after the first alarm flames were bursting from every window.

The two or three hundred women employed on the four floors of the factory were panic stricken. It is likely enough that if they had kept their presence of mind more of them might have been saved. But in any case there must have been a terrible loss of life, as there were only two fire escapes of the ordinary type. That is all the law requires, so the Newark authorities say. Therefore the horror cannot be laid at the door of any one in particular.

The flames burst out just in that part of the building where the fire escapes were. The girls on the fourth floor, among whom all the deaths occurred, seem to have assumed at once that they could not pass the third floor, where the fire began, and found that they were also unable to descend by the iron ladder.

They ran to the windows and hung out, six or seven at each of them, shouting and imploring for help. A station of the Fire Department was actually across the street from the factory, but so rapidly did the building go up that the men there had no time to get their apparatus out. Even as they harnessed their horses and rushed out with ladders the end came. First one then another girl hurled herself from a window. Most of them seemed to have hesitated till their clothes were actually alight, and then with despairing cries they jumped.

Jumped Out All Aflame.

From every window all over the building a stream of women began to fall through the air. A few let themselves down from the window sills and hung for a second or two before they let go. Others sprang out hand in hand with companions. Here and there a woman, all in flame, was seen plunging through the air, and as one went another took her place at the window with her own piteous appeal for rescue.

But as they threw themselves out there was worse to come. The firemen did what they could. They rushed across the street and held their nets beneath the windows, but could not stand the strain put on them. There were not enough nets to put under all the windows, and sometimes three or four would come plunging into a net and smash it to the ground.

At the eastern end of the building, just where most of the girls had run to get as far as possible away from the blaze, was a picket gate, barring a carriage way into the factory. It stood open yesterday and woman after woman, as she came hurtling down, alighted upon its sharp iron spikes. The injuries they inflicted were ghastly to the last degree. Arms, bodies, and faces were ripped up, and it seemed to witnesses who saw those impaled that it had been almost a happier fate to be caught by the flames.

Even those who struck the pavement were scarcely more fortunate. The fall of four stories was too much for the strength of their bodies. Injuries too shocking for description were received and the bodies of those picked up were crushed almost out of all human semblance. For the moment, however, there was no time to attend to these. As a woman struck, if she gave no sign of life, there she lay. Firemen, policemen, and bystanders had other work to do. The dead were left in heaps, while every nerve was strained to help the living.

On the Fire Escapes.

On the fire escapes the women from the lower stories were crowding till they could not move downward. There was imminent danger that they would be pushed off by those who came after them, and the flames were licking at their heels from every window. The firemen ran

into the building as far as they could penetrate, made their way to the second floor, and pushed their way through the struggling women to the fire escapes. There they took their stand and passed down woman after woman as long as any were in danger.

They raised their ladders, too, to the windows, but had no time to clamber up them. The moment they were in position the women made a furious rush at them. Some climbed down the front and others got hold of the rungs from beneath and worked their way down as best they could. Somehow or other the ladders stood the double strain, and in ten minutes from the time the first alarm was sent out every one who escaped had reached the ground.

How many were left in the building no one can say as yet. It is known that eight were killed by throwing themselves out of windows. One woman was found dead a little way inside the doorway. In one corner of the top floor a heap of eight was found in the northeast corner, by the windows. Another girl was found charred to the bone, seated at her machine, as though nothing had happened. Perhaps she had died of heart disease at the first alarm. But how many more lie buried amid the ruins cannot yet be estimated, and will probably never be definitely settled. The walls were being pulled down yesterday afternoon for the safety of the passers-by, and the ruins were not cool enough for a thorough search.

A Gasoline Explosion.

The fire began on the third floor of the factory building, which was occupied by the Anchor Company and the Aetna Electric Company. On the floor above these was the factory of the Wolff Muslin Undergarment Company, a branch of the Wolff Clothing Company of 119-125 West Twenty-fifth Street, which employed just 100 women and girls.

On the second floor was the Newark Paper Box Company, and on the ground floor were the factories of the Drake-Morrison Paper Box Company and John Bliverson. Together in addition to the 100 girls on the fourth floor between 200 and 300 women worked in the building.

The building was a half century old. Its floors were thoroughly oil saturated. At 9:15 in the morning there was an explosion of gasoline on the third floor in the rooms occupied by the Anchor Lamp Company. One of the hands was filling a lamp with gasoline when somehow it went off. At once there was a wild cry of alarm from the girls, but the forewoman, Mary Geary, kept her head. She called for the sand which is always kept ready for just such an emergency. Louise Fraschlin brought it to her and the two made a brave fight to put out the blaze.

Eugene McOut, foreman of the room, also did his best to extinguish the flames. He shouted to the girls to be quiet and fought the fire until he was painfully burned and saw he could accomplish nothing. Only then did he shout to the women to save themselves as best they might. Unfortunately the very courage which these three employees of the lamp company showed was one of the causes of the great loss of life.

Just across the street were the quarters of Engine Company 4. All they had to do was to run to the window to call for help and the engines would have been out in a minute.

Precious Time Lost.

They lost precious seconds. The floor blazed up and sent forth dense volumes of smoke. The escapees were full of flame and smoke almost as soon as the girls of the Wolff Manufacturing Company on the floor above knew that anything had happened. Lomin G. Paddock, engineer of the building, at the first sound of alarm ran to the top floor. He had just time to reach that and call to the girls to get out, and found it impossible to effect a retreat by the stairs.

As the flames and smoke shot out from all the windows of the building some one ran into the engine house and alarmed the men. Fireman Oscar Brown snatched up a hand extinguisher and ran across the street. He was followed by Lieut. Durgas, but even they were unable to get higher than the second floor. They had to content themselves with running to the offices and factories there and helping the women to the windows.

Meanwhile Miss Haag, the forewoman in charge of the Wolff factory on the top floor, was doing her best to keep her girls calm. She ran to the door and saw at a glance that it was impossible for them to get through the smoke. Then she ran back and called to them to make for the windows. Many dashed for the windows at the northwest corner leading to one of the two fire escapes. Flimsy steps led up to it as the girls were rather high. The rush of girls broke that down and in a second the fire escape was blocked.

Soon a Raging Furnace.

A strong wind blowing from the north down Orange Street seemed to catch just that part of the building where lay the girls' only chance of safety. In a moment it was a raging furnace. On the top floor near the fire escape window no one could live for a moment. The women were driven screaming with terror back into the factory, right across to the other end of the building, 100 feet away. There for a moment the flames had not spread, and there was time for them to rush to the windows and lean out crying for help.

When Engineer Paddock found he could not descend the stairs he turned to the roof. He called to the girls to follow him and a few obeyed. He thought their best chance was to reach a fire escape, and he checked them first from leaping to the ground and guided them toward the iron ladder. He hoped that they would be able to leap down to it and so escape. The few that tried missed and went crashing to the pavement. He at last jumped himself and just managed to catch the top rungs of the ladder.

Across the street Charles R. Devevoise saw from his store, 219 High Street, that the women on the lower floor were crowding the fire escape. From the lowest deck of the escape a long iron ladder was supposed to lead down in emergencies to the street. It stuck, and the crush of women and the panic in which they were made it impossible to move it. A colored man ran out from a factory office with an ordinary stepladder, and at the peril of his life rushed up to the blazing building, set the ladder against the wall, and held it there while the firemen ran up it and got the escape in working order.

Escaped Down a Ladder.

Perhaps twenty or thirty women made their escape down the ladder in this way from the second and third stories, and others were also able to leap from the lower windows without any great injuries, but from the top floor the distance was too great for anybody to leap with safety. Still, the women were forced to do it.

Behind the floor was blazing, and smoke and flames filled the whole factory. The crowd that had collected in the streets below yelled to them to hold back. They could see the firemen raising the ladder and they knew it was only a minute or so before more apparatus would arrive. But the flames had already begun to scorch them. Their clothes were aflame, and one after another they jumped to death.

The firemen spread a net beneath the window. Three girls, hand in hand,

sprang together and broke through. Others fell on the firemen, and still others came down on their companions who had leaped just before them.

An iron gate was standing ajar in front of the building. Woman after woman, as she fell, was pierced by spikes. One had her side ripped open. Another was pierced through her arm and cheek. A third, hitting the sidewalk squarely, had her legs driven clear through her body.

Last Rites Administered.

As fast as the women came down those who showed any life were hurried away to a little wooden house at one side of the factory. The dead were left lying mangled and torn in a ghastly line along the sidewalk. To the dying the rites of the Roman Catholic Church were administered by the Rev. John A. Dillon, Diocesan Superintendent of Parochial Schools; the Rev. John H. Kiernan, and the Rev. William P. Brennan, curate of the cathedral.

Even as the work of rescue was going on, as the firemen were rigging their ladders and running out their lines of hose, and as the women came pouring out of the burning factory they stood amid the flames and the smoke, fifteen feet apart, and solemnly and calmly administered absolution to the dying who lay before them.

On the fourth floor when the alarm was given were employed Sophie Diehn of 130 Norfolk Street, Newark, and her two sisters. Before saving herself she rushed about to see if she could find them. The smoke was too thick, and in despair she had to make her own way to a window. There she sprang into a life net and was fortunate enough to escape with a sprained ankle. Both her sisters also escaped.

Catherine Diehn sprang directly to the ground from the fourth floor, and though her injuries are serious it is hoped she will recover. The third, Sarah, was one of the few who managed to climb down the fire escape of a fourth floor. She was helped part of the way by a fireman, but was not quite sure how she actually reached the street.

Dog Attacked Them.

Every piece of fire apparatus and every ambulance in the city was called out by rapidly succeeding alarms. A great crowd collected, in large part composed of friends and relatives of those employed in the building. It was all the police could do to hold them back in their frenzy, but an unusual obstacle was found to the work of rescue at the beginning of the fire.

A large dog belonging to the little wooden house next to the factory took alarm at the excitement and attacked savagely those who were trying to reach the women on the east side of the building from the open space. He bit one man severely and materially delayed the work of rescue from that quarter.

Within ten minutes of the first alarm all that were rescued were out of the building. The firemen had just time to make sufficient search to find one woman dead near the entrance and a heap of bodies, charred out of all recognition, on the northeast corner of the top floor, close to the window from which so many had jumped.

Even they, hardened as they are to terrible sights, were shocked as they came across, also on the top floor, one body, presumably a woman, still sitting at her machine. She was burned to a crisp. From the attitude it was clear that she had never arisen from her table. Either the fire had killed her in one blast or the alarm had struck her dead in a paroxysm of terror. In any case, the flames had swept over her and left her seated at her regular work table.

Firemen Driven Out.

But the firemen could make no exhaustive search. They were ordered out of the building just in time, as a few minutes later the third floor, on which was much heavy machinery, fell in. It was quickly followed by the other floors, and the building remained a blazing shell. How many injured, dead, and dying were carried down into the cellar no one can say.

Perhaps it never will be known. It was stated last night by the Wolff concern that though they had an approximately correct list of all their employees in Newark, they had been lately taking on extra hands through a rush of business, and it might be that some of them had not been entered in their duplicate books kept in this city.

It was rumored that a boy was seen entering the building just as the fire began and was not seen to come out again. He was not an employe of any firm in the building and who he was and what his business was is not known.

The fire continued to burn all the morning and was not finally extinguished until 1 o'clock. The high wind blowing made the firemen apprehensive that sparks would be carried to some of the factories or small wooden dwelling houses which are near the destroyed building. This, however, was fortunately avoided. As it was the girls from the neighboring factories were terrified lest they, too, would be caught in a burning building and insisted in many cases on leaving their work.

All the afternoon streams of water were poured on the ruins from a water tower. This was done mainly to throw down the tottering top stories. It was directed against the brickwork, and piece by piece this was forced down on the wreckage beneath. A crowd stood and watched the slow destruction of the walls, and at 4 o'clock in the afternoon saw a serious accident happen to Deputy Fire Chief Joseph E. Sloan.

Fire Chief Buried Under Bricks.

He was walking under the ruin at the northeast corner of the building just as a stream was turned on a tottering facade. Without any warning some of the bricks came crashing down on his helmet. He turned and started to run. He had gone but a few steps when his feet caught in some of the debris which was lying in the street and he was thrown heavily to the ground.

As he fell a lot of other bricks came crashing down all around him, and he was almost completely buried. John Comstock of Engine Company 7 had run to warn him as the wall above tottered, and was hit by some of the bricks, but he was not seriously hurt.

The Chief was extricated by the firemen and helped across to No. 4 Engine house. One arm was hanging helpless by his side and he complained of pains in his side and abdomen. He became unconscious, and was hurried to the City Hospital, where it was discovered that he had two ribs broken and was severely bruised. It is believed that he will recover.

At the Hospitals and Morgues.

Within two hundred yards of the factory on High Street is St. Michael's Hospital, a Roman Catholic institution of no great size. Thither the injured were carried in batches as fast as they could be extricated. With them went the swarm of relatives and friends of the employes. Many of these were foreigners and it was impossible to restrain them.

The doctors, busy with giving first aid to the injured, had no time at first to attempt to establish their identity. They were overwhelmed by the weeping women and agonized men who kept begging them

for information. For an hour or two the hospital was mobbed.

The visitors insisted on rushing into the wards, and some of them actually succeeded in making their way upstairs. They had to be fought away almost by main force, and the hospital authorities were obliged to appeal to the police to de-

tall a patrolman to keep their corridors clear.

Only one aged woman bordering almost on hysteria was permitted to enter the ward. She was a Pole, and in broken English, with tears streaming down her face, she begged for information as to her daughter. The attendants were trying to

pacify her when Bessie Sackmeister and Annie Diehn, two of the girls who had worked on the top floor and had been going through the wards to identify sufferers, came along.

Found Her Daughter Dying.

In the old woman's hearing they said that they had identified everybody but a Polish girl. The woman rushed up to them, and they told her that the girl was called "Frances," but they did not know her other name. It was the old woman's daughter, and she was taken to her. She found her already almost gone, and in ten minutes the old mother was led weeping from the building asking what she could do now with her dying daughter's three small children, for the victim was a widow.

St. Michael's, however, could not accommodate half those needing relief, but as soon as the wards were full the rest of the wounded were hurried to the City and other hospitals. So many were there of them that their very removal was a work of difficulty. One ambulance carried six, the driver supporting one of them on his feet, as it passed through the streets and the passersby saw the horrible condition of the injured, which could not be hidden from them. Women were seen to turn faint with horror.

Similar scenes were enacted at the City Hospital as had been at St. Michael's, but still sadder were those that were witnessed at the Morgue. It is a small building behind Mullin's undertaking establishment in Washington Street. As fast as the bodies were taken out of the building all were picked up from the sidewalk, placed in large wicker coffins, taken down to the Morgue, and placed in rows in small outhouses.

Relatives Kept Out.

As the bodies were received they were in no fit state to be seen by the relatives of the missing. Dr. McKenzie, the County Physician, gave orders that for a time everybody was to be excluded until the bodies had been prepared to some extent for inspection. A crowd of women, sobbing and half fainting with terror, and men, strained and anxious, gathered outside the building.

They were held back by the police until all was ready and then in little groups of two or three they were allowed to file through the undertaker's yard and pass before the silent row of bodies. Everything that was possible was done to make their identification as little shocking as could be. The bodies were covered with sheets, and where there was anything about them, such as a stickpin, a locket, or an ornament that might be used for identification, this was noted so that the relatives might tell their own through them.

But nothing could relieve the horror of the scene. Some one or other had to claim bodies which had lost almost all semblance of human form. Many who came to the morgue were destined to go away in the end to find their loved ones had escaped and were really in the hospitals, but in their anxiety to learn what was before them they had hastened to the morgue before they had thoroughly searched the places where the injured lay.

Identifying the Dead.

One girl was identified only by the gold filling in her teeth. Another can only be identified by her relatives if they can recognize a locket. A third is beyond all hope, and sought her sister. Her brother, she said, had thought he knew the locket. A little scrap of gold tarnished with the smoke was drawn from beneath the sheet, and shown her.

"It looks like hers," said the woman, turning ghastly white.

"Don't be so sure of that," said the Morgue keeper; "It's got a picture inside."

The girl fumbled the locket, but was too nervous to open it. One of the men undid the catch for her and she exclaimed:

"Thank God, I don't know that portrait! Still, I haven't seen my sister. I don't know where she is." The men gave her what rough consolation they could. She went away thankful not yet to know the worst, but certain that, after all, her sister lies dead beneath the debris of the building.

Two women came, and after seeing one particular body one of them said she was looking for her mother, and was sure that this body must be hers. To her the reporters who were standing by simply lied. From her description they were sure that the body was that of her mother, but they also knew that it was so horribly disfigured that it would be cruel to let her see it.

Found His Mother's Mangled Body.

They put her off and kept urging her to get someone else to come and make the search. At last her brother got there and it was he who was informed that his mother had been terribly mangled in her fall. An elderly man with gray mustache and military bearing, begged admittance to the morgue. Two of his nieces were gone. They worked in the factory, he knew, and they had not returned. The morgue keeper advised him first to try the hospitals, and he said he had applied at all of them.

"Baker was their name—Mary and Grace. I've searched everywhere and I can't find them. Can't you let me in?"

At this time only one body had not been claimed and that was shown to him. He declared it was not either of his nieces, and went away to haunt the ruins and the hospitals until he had found his own.

So all the afternoon the terrible work went on. Men, women, and children came to the Morgue and found their dead, or went away unsatisfied. They kept their composure wonderfully under the strain, but swollen eyes and gaunt cheeks told eloquently of their agony. The officials and the police treated them as kindly as they could, but nothing could alleviate the horror of the little backyard and the bare sheds with its line of shrouded, silent figures.

Night Scenes at the Ruins.

As night closed around the scene of the fire a strange quiet fell about the neighborhood that earlier in the day had been filled with the jangling of bells, the shouts of rescuers, and the cries of fear and sympathy. By 9 o'clock the streams from the hose ceased to play on the blackened shell, faintly outlined in the darkness.

Until far into the night a silent throng stood beyond the lines maintained by the police, something of the horror of the day's tragedy keeping the voices all hushed. Men whispered among themselves what they had seen of the fire. Suddenly an old man stepped into the street and shook his first at what had been the big building. Every one could hear his voice.

"I knew you since I was a boy," he cried in shrill tones, "and you were soaked with oil."

Some one whispered that his granddaughter was one of those carried into the hospital. They led him away.

One of the policemen in the line told of an old woman who had come up to him early in the afternoon, and caught his arm.

"Where is my Annie?" she whispered. "She was all I had. Her money was all we had to feed us. She was a good girl."

The woman kept muttering that sentence over and over to herself as they led her down the street.

More than one spoke of the age of the

ruined building, and many remembered playing about its doors in their childhood. With some that was civil war days. Desk Sergt. Astley, at Police Headquarters, white-haired now, shook his head, and said:

"I worked there myself fifty years ago. That was when it was a machine shop and there was oil everywhere."

Making List of Employes.

The proprietors of the shop where most of the injured girls worked, made the rounds last night trying to make a list of their employes for the pitiful roll call to-morrow morning. They found the task difficult, for many of the girls were new and unfamiliar, having been taken on just for the rush season before the holidays.

The Morgue, where most of the bodies lay, was surrounded until late in the night by a crowd of nerveless watchers. Inside the sight was grim enough, with sharp contrasts at times. As one woman who had identified her daughter gave way to shrill hysteria, an old attendant was heard mumbling:

"I must make my coat to the tailor before church."

Some of the bodies at the Morgue were so charred that it seemed to the keepers as though absolute identification would never be possible. One girl, and her brother said later that she was very pretty, was nothing more than a cinder, but they knew her by the locket around her neck. It was her brother's birthday gift. He drew his breath sharply when he saw it, but did not cry aloud.

Mayor Jacob Haussling, who is in New Orleans with his wife, resting after a hard campaign, heard the news of the disaster over the wire and lost no time in telegraphing Mayor Pennington instructions to issue a proclamation expressing public grief at the disaster. He also wired his private secretary to raise a fund for the relief of the sufferers, with the Mayor's own check for \$100.

One old resident of Newark, who remembers many of its fires, said he had never seen one so horrible as the flames which swept the crowded factory. "I have never before seen a fire," he said, "I have seen so orderly a fire, and one so awed by the tragedy before them. There was reverence, too. I saw three Italian girls down on their knees on the street when the panic was at its height praying with all their hearts for the rescue of their friends in the building. It was a big crowd, too, for the workers free because of Saturday afternoon."

A Good Samaritan.

Late in the evening a motherly looking woman, a spinster by her own confession, stepped into the Second Precinct Station and reported to the Sergeant at the desk that if any one was looking for missing children they might try a visit to her house, near the factory.

"When the fire began," she explained, "I went into the street to see if I could help. Every one seemed better cared for than I could hope to do for them except some little ones who were in the street, cuffed, tired out. They had cried themselves sick because their mothers were some where in the factory and just took them into my home to protect them."

Other women had done the same sort of service. The boarding house district near High Street was a scene of horror. Its closest approach being the tall tenement blaze in Fourteenth Avenue twelve years ago, when sixteen persons lost their lives in a midnight fire which people said there was an incendiary's work.

It was close to midnight before a certain peace seemed to settle over the houses near the fire. During the day there had been ceaseless turmoil there with the means of the wounded carried in and the cries of the bereft. Housewives whose families shared in no degree the disaster had turned their energies into making a bit to eat and drink for the police, firemen, and more details of the army.

One woman came out on to her doorstep long after dark for a little fresh air. She had given over her own beds to the injured, the hysterical, and the dead.

"I've made more coffee to-day than I ever did before in my life. It was good coffee, too," she said, as she opened her doors to spend the night on the lounge in her front room.

Telephones Kept Busy.

All night came the ceaseless inquiry at the hospitals, and every effort was made to give the word simply and with nothing to raise false hope. The telephone centrals of the fire districts were exhausted in mid-afternoon, for every wire in the neighborhood was pressed into constant service.

The operators caught strange side notes of the general distress. One girl heard a man's telephone had been broken in through his message, which was broken off short with a strange little sob. It was never resumed. At the Morgue the girls' telephone had been broken as well as night fell. A quiet crowd stood in the street outside, discouraged when the police lowered the shades. Every now and again there would come a wail of desolation, to be followed by the sound of broken sobbing. Long after the bodies were identified and the friends of the dead would learn it first in the little office of the Morgue.

Reporters coming out with a new identification were repeating the name to each other. It was "Robrecht." At the sound of the name, overheard in the crowd, the news was carried to its outskirts as though by telegraph. A woman heard it, uttered one broken cry, and fell all of a heap in the street. One of the last to visit the ruins of the factory was an old man named Feally, who had a badge to get him by the lines. He picked his way over the wet pavement and looked at the ugly shell of a building.

"I went to work there in 1859," he said, "and then it was four years old. They started it as a gunshop. That was before the civil war."

The family of Terresina Tortorella learned in the afternoon that her brother had identified a body as that of his sister at the Morgue. The family undertaker took the body to her home, at 507 Market Street. There were rings in the ears and a plain gold band on the wedding finger. The girl was unmarried.

"This is not our dead," they said, and their unhappy search began again. Charles Otto of 39 William Street, Belleville, called at the Morgue and identified one body as that of his sister, Margaret. He would arrange to have it taken away, he said, and when to his home, heart sick at the news he must deliver to the anxious ones there. At a window as he approached he saw the face of his sister. It seemed as though her spirit were there to greet him, but it was his sister in the flesh who met him at the door. In the first rejoicing they forgot to notify the authorities that a correction must be made in the list of the dead.