

BUILDING A TRAP FOR THE HUNDREDS

**Only Two Fire Escapes and They
Were Utterly Inadequate in
Any Emergency.**

LAW MAY BE TO BLAME

**Authorities to Make an Investigation
and Prosecutions Are Not
Unlikely.**

Considerable criticism was made yesterday at having a building in which so many women were employed so badly supplied with fire escapes. The building was 150 feet long, and it had only two, one in front and one in the rear. An inquiry is likely to be made into this phase by Prosecutor Mott. Fire Chief Ashles declared that the building was a veritable fire trap.

"Look at those little fire escapes!" he exclaimed. "Look at that narrow doorway! What chance had the poor girls!"

Supt. William T. O'Rourke of the Department of Buildings was one of the first on the scene of the fire. Speaking of it later he said:

"I have instructed Inspector McKenney, who is in charge of this district, to report to me at once. He was at the fire and will have made notes of the exits and the fire escapes. He already has informed me that the two fire escapes, one on the High Street side and the other in the rear, were both used to their fullest capacity, and many of the employes owed their lives to them.

"But the building was very old. It was in use as a factory at the time of my birth. Its floors had become thoroughly saturated with oil, and everything was favorable to the quick spread of the fire.

"This department acts, so far as the equipment of factory buildings with safeguards against fire is concerned, merely as an assistant to the State Labor Department, which regulates the matter under the law. We have been careful always to compel owners to provide for the safeguard as far as our power extended.

"We refuse to approve plans for new buildings or for alterations in old factories until provision is made for proper natural exit and other ample means of escape from the building in an emergency."

As far as could be ascertained yesterday the lack of proper fire protection was due to the conflict of authority between the State and municipal administration. George J. Jaegers, who was recently appointed a State Factory Inspector by Gov. Fort, said that the State law required one fire escape to be provided for every twenty-five persons employed as high as the third floor. An additional escape for a smaller number on each upper floor.

As the destroyed building was 150 feet long at least a dozen fire escapes should have been installed instead of two. But it appears that the municipal authorities have not at the present full power to enforce this.

Capt. C. Albert Gasser, Superintendent of the Bureau of Combustibles of the Fire Department, said that he had for a long time been trying to get the law amended so as to give the municipal authorities more power in this matter.

However, he had found many difficulties thrown in his way and a curious apathy. He has nevertheless succeeded so far as to have the amendment to the law which he wishes set down for the next sitting of the Common Council. If it is passed it will then be possible for the city authorities to exert more thorough supervision over factory buildings.

There was also some remarks on the length of time which elapsed before the apparatus of the Fire Department arrived on the second alarm. It was estimated that six or seven minutes elapsed before they were on the scene, although witnesses admitted that in the horror of the spectacle and the general confusion it was impossible to make accurate statements. It was noted, however, that the additional assistance would have arrived a good deal more speedily if the recommendations made last year by the Board of Trade's Committee on Fire Hazards had been carried out.

Redmond P. Conlon, Chairman of that committee, was present at the fire, and stated that the establishment of five battalions had been recommended to the Board of Fire Commissioners. In these battalions all the men not actually needed for the care of fire houses would be assigned and they would be equipped with auto cars carrying such life-saving devices as nets and short ladders. It was proposed that they should be stationed in the neighborhood of Broad and Market Streets, so that they might be within quick reach of the most crowded sections of the city.

"We presented our recommendation," said Mr. Conlon, "to the Board of Fire Commissioners, but that body was seemingly intent on the establishment of more fire companies along the old lines and gave no heed to us. I am sure that such flying battalions as we suggested would have been of incalculable service to-day."

The question of the thorough efficiency of the Fire Department in such an emergency was also raised by some who watched it at the fire. Newark has not at present a regular training school for firemen, and there seemed to be a certain lack of organization and teamwork visible when the crisis came. The city, it was pointed out, has grown rapidly in the last few years, and it is imperative that its fire fighters should be placed on a first-class footing.

The loss is estimated at \$150,000.