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MATCH CAUSED BIG FIRE

Investigation Into Loss of Winnipeg Business Building —Smokers are Careless

Manitoba's fire commissioner, Mr. A. Lindback, reporting on the recent large fire in Winnipeg, states: "Fourteen witnesses were called in the investigation into the fire in the Scott building, Winnipeg, March 23, and they have fully established the fact that it began in the office of the Cowan Construction Company, in the rear, on the second floor, during the absence of the man in charge, and with the door locked."

"This office at the time was in charge of a young man who also did the stenographic work—he had returned after lunch about 2 o'clock. His description of the office is, that it was entered by two or three steps with a banister on each side; inside a few feet from the door was a counter running across the width of the front office with a wicket at the north end—inside that was a large standing desk placed against the south partition, a typewriter desk in the centre, and in the north-west corner a filing cabinet about 6 feet high; to the east immediately in front of this, placed on the floor, were a dozen cardboard boxes containing doeskin working gloves, among which was some loose paper and records; the extreme rear of the main office was partitioned off and formed two private offices, the north-east one contained a vault."

"The afternoon of the fire five men are accounted for having been in the office; three of these were only in the part between the door and the counter, and having transacted their errands left."

One Man Smoked

"Some time around 3 p.m. a friend of the man in charge came over on business, too, but stepped inside the counter and sitting down in about the centre of the office, conversed for the greater part of an hour, the friend leaving shortly before four. While both men are smokers, at first they did not remember whether during a leisurely chat of an hour they had smoked, but it finally developed that one man had lighted his pipe. Shortly after the friend had left, or about four or five minutes after four, the other left also in search of an evening paper—the door slammed, locked, and at a brisk walk as he claimed, he did not find a newsboy until reaching the corner of Portage and Main."

"However, shortly after, in Mr. C. H. Black's office, immediately joining, smoke was seen and smelled, and Mr. Black thought it smelled as if rubber was burning. Mr. McGowan, a traveller, was with Mr. Black at the time, and stepping to the Cowan office, found the door locked, but was able to look over the lower frosted glass in the sash partitions and saw a clear flame. In the office on the third floor, immediately above the Cowan office, smoke began to come through the floor, and Mr. A. E. Thomas and one of his men, running to the second floor and vaulting on the banisters outside the Cowan Company's door, saw the fire in the north-west side of the office near the vault, but finding the door locked hurried back to their own office."

Could Have Prevented Fire

"Mr. Thomas avers that had he got in with a couple of pails of water or a reliable chemical extinguisher at that moment, the fire could have been controlled. Immediately following this, three men occupying a room on the farther side of the Black office got busy, and a Mr. Blackman, grabbing a pail of water ran with it and kicked the door open, but was driven back by the pungent and heavy smoke coming out of the door; right after him was the caretaker of the block, who had come down from the fourth floor—realizing the conditions, he ran into Mr. F. Scott's office to 'phone, got central without delay and also the fire hall—told them the Scott block was on fire, received in answer the query, 'Where is the Scott block?' but did not take time to explain—about ten minutes after the department reached the building."

"Considering the evidence of those who first witnessed the development of this fire, the habitual unconsciousness and carelessness with which burning matches are deposited, the interior oil soaked, inflammable material and construction of the Scott building, the accidental failure of rapid protection and the height of the building, we need be thankful that no human lives were sacrificed, and ought to seriously consider the need of abandoning the 'strike everywhere match' as well as the one which will retain the fire from ten to thirteen seconds, as beyond doubt such one was the origin of this heavy loss."

The Royal Bank has opened branches at Fort Fraser and Union Bay, British Columbia.