

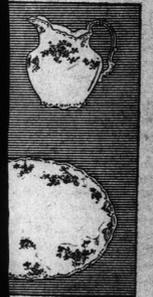
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The Semi-Weekly Colonist.

VOL. L. NO. 400.

VICTORIA, B. C. FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28, 1910.

FIFTIETH YEAR

FLAMES SWEEP CITY'S BUSINESS SECTION

Almost Entire District Bounded by Government, Fort, Broad and Trounce Wiped Out—Damage Will Exceed a Million Dollars— Two Score Firms Rendered Homeless.

Fire which apparently started in the main aisle of the Government street departmental store of David Spencer, Ltd., last night practically wiped out the entire block bounded by Government, Fort, Broad streets and Trounce avenue, the estimated damage being \$1,500,000. The conflagration, which was still in progress when the Colonist went to press, is the greatest in the history of the city.

The chief sufferers and their estimated losses are as follows: David Spencer, Ltd., building, \$200,000; stock \$400,000; H. Young & Co., building, \$100,000; stock \$200,000; Five Sisters block, building and contents, \$150,000; Victoria Book & Stationary Company, building and contents, \$100,000; various stores and offices destroyed or damaged by water, with heavy loss of stock, the damage variously estimated at between \$300,000 and \$400,000.

After four hours desperate fighting the outbreak was brought under control about 2:30 a.m. The actual origin of the fire is a mystery but it apparently started on one of the counters in the main aisle of the store and leaping up the elevator shaft spread rapidly through the top storey and burning downwards soon enveloped the entire Spencer building in a mass of flames. In less than an hour it had eaten its way into the surrounding buildings. At midnight the Five Sisters' block was ablaze. About the same time it became apparent that the premises occupied by H. Young & Co. were doomed.

The damage was not confined to the block in which the fire originated. On several occasions the Driad hotel was ablaze, while stores fronting the eastern side of Government street and the southern side of Fort street suffered some damage. Telephonic communication was dislocated, 1,500 lines being put out of commission. Owing to the flames still burning fiercely at 3 a.m., it is impossible to estimate, except in the broadest way, the actual losses. It is believed that the premises occupied by the Times Printing and Publishing Company are uninjured by the flames, although they have suffered through water. From the outlook at the time of writing, the entire Five Sisters block is gutted, the premises of Henry Young and Company, as well as those of D. Spencer, Limited, where the outbreak originated, being in ruins.

Two accidents marked the progress of the fire while there were hundreds of narrow escapes. Chief Davis of the fire department was slightly injured through shattered glass. His wounds were dressed on the spot and he continued to lead the firefighting. A volunteer named Ferris was cut in the leg by broken glass but his injury is not serious.

While the fire is well under control there is still considerable danger from the ruined walls which may fall at any time. The utmost precautions are being taken to safeguard the public in this respect.

THE SUFFERERS.
The following firms suffered practically a total loss:

- Government Street.
- No. 1207—Office Building (total loss).
- No. 1205—Office Building (total loss).
- No. 1203—Stene Lowe, photographer, John Wilson, architect; H. J. Saunders, broker (total loss).
- 1201—Fit Reform, damaged by water.
- 1123-1127—Henry Young & Co. dry goods (total loss).
- No. 1117—David Spencer, dry goods (total loss).
- No. 1113—Victoria Book & Stationary, Ltd. (total loss).

- No. 1111—Wm. Foxall, photographer; W. H. Langley, barrister; also von Alvensleben, real estate.
- No. 1109—Charlton & Co., 5, 10 and 15c store.
- No. 1107—Finch and Finch, haberdashery (total loss).
- No. 1103—Williams Drug Store (total loss); Shaw, photographer.
- No. 1101—Royal Bank (total loss).

W. R. Bowness, hardware store and office building, tenants: Howard Potts, J. L. Skene, E. C. B. Bagshawe, Plummer & Rideout, F. Coates, Hargreave. Mr. Bowness' loss on stock, \$12,000; partly covered.

D. Spencer and Co. Times newspaper (loss by water). D. Spencer, stove and hardware. Fort Street.

Five Sisters Block—A. W. Jones, real estate office.

C. H. Smith, picture framer and photo goods.

Woodward's florist store.

Western Union Telegraph office.

Five Sisters Block (upper floors).

E. Watkins, architect; Mason and Mann, solicitors; Thomas R. Hooper, architect; H. Dier, dentist.

W. W. Grime, real estate.

Gavin H. Burns, real estate.

T. B. Sedger, architect; W. Woodford, architect; W. J. Woodburn, agent; Vancouver Island Fire Underwriters' Association.

R. H. Marsh.

R. H. McMillan.

Also a number of roomers, who occupied rooms and studios on the upper floor.

Flames Spread

With Fierce Speed

The progress of the fire highly spectacular in its every incident was of an appalling character. The spread of the flames was remarkable for the fact that the wind carrying them along the top stories of the buildings it was apparently impossible for the fire fighters to locate the best point of vantage on which to concentrate the streams of water. By 11 o'clock it was apparent that the building occupied by David Spencer, Ltd., was doomed. The entire structure was a seething mass of flames. Whirling showers of sparks and flaming debris were borne by the wind in a southerly direction, the thousands of spectators dodging these as they fell to the ground littering the streets.

direction on the Broad Street side, the Times building being involved in the doomed area. It was only about now that the firefighters who had been reinforced by the arrival of the Garrison forces turned their attention to this part of the block. Hoses were run to the roof, but all efforts were unavailing, and shortly after midnight it was apparent that the entire block would be gutted.

What looked like proving the most serious part of the disaster occurred a few minutes past twelve o'clock, when the Five Sisters' Block, which although always in the most imminent danger, finally became well ablaze. Within what was apparently only a few seconds the entire top storey was aflame. Fire burst out of every window on Government street, and the wind, at this time rising, carried showers of debris into Fort street, while the cloud of sparks sweeping southwards over the city became denser than ever.

The interior of Spencer's building, which had been collapsing in places, again attracted considerable attention, the heavy crashes and intervals marking the collapse of beams, ceilings, rafters and piles of charred goods. The outer walls held their position well and through the furnace-like interior it was possible at intervals to see Broad street and the men engaged in fighting the flames on that side of the block.

All lost the most of their belongings. The residents of the upper floor were C. F. Hines, wife and child; Ike Culross, C. Kroeger and two sons; Assistant Fire Chief Stewart and wife, who were about to give up their rooms; Robert Myra, machinist of the Colonist, who was engaged in his work while his goods were destroyed; Miss Davis; Messrs. Laker, one the bookkeeper at the Dominion Hotel, the other employed by W. S. Fraser & Son; Caretaker A. McEwen; Miss Miles, teacher of piano; and J. P. Mann, formerly city solicitor.

By 12:30 o'clock the Five Sisters Block, wreathed in flames, was doomed. Despite the fact that the wind was blowing from a northerly direction, the fire continued to spread in the direction of Trounce Ave., and all attempts to cope with the outbreak in this direction seemed hopeless. A cordon of hose, served by the entire fire department staff, the members of the Garrison, numbering 150 in all, and numbers of the public, surrounded the block and were kept continuously employed, but it had become apparent that if the outbreak which had originated, it was the most that could be hoped, such was the hold the flames had gained at this time.

Shortly after 1 p.m. the fire commenced to eat its way into the buildings fronting on Trounce Ave. Again and again it was driven back, but continuing to spread despite the most strenuous efforts it ate its way through the length and breadth of the northerly end of the block.

At the southerly end the Five Sisters block was a mass of fire vividly spouting flashes of curling flame broke at intervals from out of the dense smoke enveloped frontage of the structure. Fort street was littered with debris. The hoses of all the stores on the edge of the fire zone were kept in continual play and the streets surrounding the doomed block ran rivers of water. Spencer's building which had now been burning for upwards of three hours still showed no diminution in its furnace-like effect. While the majority of the hoses were engaged

on other parts of the block, some half dozen were kept playing on either side of the Spencer building, which possibly on account of the large amount of combustible material contained therein was a hotbed of flames.

FIRST ALARM

C. F. Hine, of the Army and Navy Cigar Store, was leaving the shop at 10:45, when he noticed a small blaze on the ground floor, in the centre of the main aisle, seemingly on one of the counters. A moment later one of the two watchmen, rushed from the front door, shouting "Fire! Fire! Call the Firemen." Mr. Hines ran back to his shop and telephoned for the fire department, others seemingly being engaged in telephoning an alarm at the same time. The watchman ran back to try and beat out the flames until driven out.

The flames spread with a rush, the whole inside of the building being aflame when Mr. Hines left his shop, and being alarmed for the safety of his wife and child who were in his room at the Five Sisters' Block, he ran to awake them and save what he could of his belongings. He ran from door to door, waking those residents who had retired, and went to places of safety, that arms laden with as many goods as they could save.

All lost the most of their belongings. The residents of the upper floor were C. F. Hines, wife and child; Ike Culross, C. Kroeger and two sons; Assistant Fire Chief Stewart and wife, who were about to give up their rooms; Robert Myra, machinist of the Colonist, who was engaged in his work while his goods were destroyed; Miss Davis; Messrs. Laker, one the bookkeeper at the Dominion Hotel, the other employed by W. S. Fraser & Son; Caretaker A. McEwen; Miss Miles, teacher of piano; and J. P. Mann, formerly city solicitor.

WHERE BLAZE STARTED

At the time when the alarm went in, the fire raged but small dimensions in the front west corner of the Spencer Building, where it undoubtedly got its start. Two counters, which form the men's furnishing department, seemed to be apparently where the fire started.

This was for barely one minute, for by the time the department arrived the second floor was ablaze, and its spread like lightning to the rear end of the first and second floors taking its course from that upward. The fire started at 10:30 p.m.

The department arrived in less than one minute after the alarm went in, and Chief Davis, who was not at the hall was brought at the rate of 60 miles an hour to the scene of the blaze to the Broad street entrance. When the car made its mad dash along Broad street the massed crowd barely escaped from being cut down.

Arriving at the scene, Chief Davis was among the first to enter the building, and for many minutes later his voice rang the air with his quick, cool-witted orders. In less than five minutes three streams were put into working, which were later added to by more.

March Of Flames On Government Street

The big department store was a cauldron before the firemen laid their hose, and with five streams playing into this they forced their way into the store, while sparks flew all about them, and broken glass and other debris threatened them. Only for a few minutes, though, could the firemen approach

close to the mass of fire which a short time before had been a great emporium of women's wares worth a very large amount. As the flames gushed out they were forced back to the middle of the road from where they played their stream on the upper floors, reaching only to the second floor. The place was quickly gutted and the cornices began to fall, following the masses of broken glass. Then the bricks toppled, masses of the wall fell, the firemen being forced to run back again and again by the falling debris.

Meanwhile the crowd increased and the police had their hands full to keep back the sightseers until the fire department and engineers of the Work Point barracks doubled up from the Esplanade road to assist the police. With the assistance of many of the soldiers—a number went to assist the firemen—the crowd was kept back to the west of Bastion street and east of Fort. Meanwhile sparks showered over them and Government street at times resembled the Brocken scene.

The department store was soon gutted and the spreading flame, fanned by a breeze which sprang up before midnight, was swept on to the back and upper part of the Five Sisters' block, and burned through to the Five, Ten and Fifteen Cent store which was soon demolished despite the efforts of the firemen who bravely forced their way in with a stream, the Victoria Book and Stationary Store took fire from the back and about the same time the fire swept through the rear wall of the Western Union Telegraph office and the adjoining picture store of C. H. Smith & Co., both these places being quickly wiped out. Meanwhile the upper part of the Five Sisters block began to flame. It soon flared up like a work torch, hurling clouds of sparks to the eastward, threatening other buildings. A block away, on Broughton street, the carpenter shop of J. P. Burgess & Co. took fire from the flying sparks, but a hose from a rear window of the Pemberton block was used on this place with good effect.

From the roof of the Victoria Transfer stable another hose was used with good effect.

Although the fire spread with greater rapidity eastward, it also worked its way westward, licking through the wall into the Times newspaper building, which took fire shortly after 11 p.m., but was saved, and Henry Young's department store with its valuable stock fell victim next to the sweep of the fire. The adjoining offices, Skene Lowe's photographic gallery and the offices in the same building were destroyed—in fact the fire swept on along Government street from the Royal Bank to the Great Northern Railway office, destroying the greater portion of the block.

Across the street, the heat was so great that it broke the plate glass windows of nearly all the stores opposite the block. The owners of the premises within some distance of the fire bustled themselves in removing as much of their wares and effects as they could carry, and Bastion, lower Fort street Yates street, Trounce avenue were piled here and there with office furniture and all manner of goods.

Sheets of Flame

On Broad Street

Broad street was the centre from which the department first directed its efforts. While the flames were seething in the Government street front of the Spencer block, they swept up through

the open centre of the block worked along the top floor and burst out through the windows, afterwards working down floor by floor until, within two hours of the alarm, there was nothing but blazing embers encircled between the two side walls, which stood their terrific heat. The flames ate their way south into the two story brick block occupied on the ground floor by the Bowness Hardware Co. In a few minutes the interior was gutted, but the flames were unable to get into the adjoining block of the Melrose Co. the walls barring progress farther south into the corner block occupied by the Dominion Bank and other offices. The Times building which was in the very heart of the raging flames, withstood the assault in a remarkable manner, though encircled by a wall of fire as the blaze ate itself from the main part of the Spencer store around the rear of the Times block and into the northern section of Spencer's, which suffered a like fate with the balance of the big department store.

DRIARD'S NARROW ESCAPE

During the fiercest part of the fire the intense heat licked off the metal cornices of the Driad hotel, igniting the woodwork on the gables and window sills, but streams of water from the fire hose, as well as small streams from within saved the building, though at one time it looked as if it would be utterly impossible to save the big structure. The guests had plenty of time to remove their belongings, and a stream of trunks passed down the stairs and out onto View street.

The greatest damage to the hotel premises will be from water, great quantities of which were poured through the broken windows and flowed through the rooms and corridors. Time and time again the building ignited, and at first there was no stream which could reach the top but later an engine stream was put to the full height of the building and saved the day.

SPREAD TO FORT ST.

While the flames were bursting out on the Broad street front of the block, the fire ate its way around the rear of the Melrose block and into the Five Sisters' block, which was enveloped by a deluge of sparks which eddied through the entrance at the rear of the block, set fire to the woodwork at the rear, got into the elevator shaft and within an hour had completely gutted the building, cleaning out the stores on Government street.

Every bit of available apparatus belonging to the department was brought into service, and every inch of hose was requisitioned in the fight against the flames. The three engines stationed at the corners of Yates and Broad, Government and Yates, and Fort and Broad streets worked right through the fire without a hitch. Hydrant streams to the number of fifteen also did effective work, though the domestic pressure was not as effective as were the engine streams.

Occupants of nearby office buildings took advantage of the opportunity to remove their belongings, but so rapidly did the flames make their way through the buildings that in many cases little was saved. Willing workers by the score were in evidence, and vans, automobiles and other conveyances were ready to assist in carting off effects.

As the fire was destroying the Five Sisters' Block, constant attention had to be paid to the buildings across Fort street. Streams of water were kept playing on the new Pemberton Block, and on the low frame structures lying to the west between that block and Government street, while streams were also kept playing on the Colonist and McGregor Blocks. A party of soldiers from Work Point Barracks did excellent work in assisting the police and firemen.

The heat made it trying work for the firemen, but they stuck to their work.

LIGHTS TURNED OFF

During the progress of the fire the city electric lighting service was maintained, but that supplied by the B. C. Electric Company was turned off for a considerable length of time, though subsequently restored. The darkness in which

occupants of many of the stores were thus forced to work hampered the work of saving contents, while in other instances owners did not make any serious attempt to save their property.

As soon as the proportions of the blaze were ascertained, Chief of Police Langley called out the entire force, and order was generally well maintained throughout the night. The irrepressible individual who would persist in crowding to the front and interfering with the firemen was generally conspicuous by his absence, and little or no trouble was experienced.

The B. C. Electric Company, soon had a force of men at work cutting out dangerous wires, while City Electrician Hutchinson was ready at the city plant to cut off the current should such a step become necessary. The flare of live wires as masonry and timbers fell gave sufficient warning to spectators to the danger of venturing too close to the blaze.

Watchman Cannot Explain the Cause

Mr. Monteith, one of the auditors of D. Spencer & Co., was at work in the building until 10 p.m., and there was no sign of fire when he left. The firm employ two watchmen, A. Luscombe and J. Gale. They state that they were past the scene of the start of the fire within a few minutes before the outbreak, and all was safe.

Soldiers Summoned By Motor Special

An automobile was sent shortly after the telephone had failed on account of the fire to Work Point Barracks to notify Col. Wadmore, officer commanding, that assistance was required. Orders were at once given despatching the whole garrison to assist. A bugler sounded the fall in and in command of Capt. Macdonald, R.G.A., Capt. W. Lindsay, R.E. and Lieut. Harris, the gunners and engineers of the barracks doubled to the city. They quickly got to work, part of them being told off to assist the police in keeping the fire lines and others to aid the firemen. A number were sent up on the roofs of buildings in the path of the sparks flying from the fire and did good work in stamping out incipient blazes caused by the sparks. Chief Langley called out all members of the police department to join in the policing of the fire area.

SCENES ON BROAD STREET

The hardware store of W. Bowness & Co. on Broad street was destroyed, a two storey building, the lower part given over to the hardware business, the upper part consisting of offices. The hardware stock of Bowness & Co. was valued at \$12,000, partly covered by insurance. The offices upstairs were rented by Howard Potts, real estate; J. L. Skene, contractor; Hargreaves; E. C. B. Bagshawe; Plummer & Rideout, real estate; and Mr. Coates, architect. The offices of Mr. Bagshawe were insured, and some of the other offices were covered.

Fifteen Hundred Phones Are Dead

The greater part of the district south of Yates and east of Government street, will be without telephone service today as a result of the fire. Fifteen hundred subscribers, it was estimated last night, would be unable to communicate with the central office by wire until repairs are effected. Oak Bay and a portion of James Bay section are cut off. The company already has made arrangements to rush the necessary re-stringing of cables. A force which has been employed at Saanich has been ordered to the city, and assistance is being obtained from the Vancouver staff. It is expected that the service will be in operation throughout the city again this evening, or at the latest, on Friday night.

(Continued on Page 2.)