

Parliament Buildings Destroyed by Fire

Historic Buildings Guttled with Loss of Seven Lives

The parliament buildings at Ottawa, in which Canadian parliaments have sat since confederation, were destroyed by fire on Thursday night, February 3. The blaze broke out in the reading room, in which large numbers of newspapers are kept, and spread with such amazing rapidity that within a few minutes it was impossible to live anywhere in the building. Seven lives are known to have been lost, and it is possible that others may be buried in the ruins. The known dead are: B. B. Law, M.P. for Yarmouth, N.S.; J. B. Laplant, assistant clerk of the House of Commons; Madame Bray, of Quebec; Madame Morin, of St. Joseph de Beauce, Que.; Robert Fanning, a waiter; A. Des Jardins, a messenger, and A. Des Jardins, a Dominion policeman. The women who lost their lives in the fire were the guests of Speaker and Madame Seigney, and when Madame Seigney and other members of the household escaped thru a window they insisted on going for their furs and were imprisoned by smoke and fire. Exactly where or how B. B. Law, M.P., met his death is not known. He left the chamber a few minutes before the fire broke out and went to his room upstairs to get his coat and hat before going to his hotel. He was not seen again. J. B. Laplant, who had been a faithful servant of the house for twenty years, was trapped in an upper room, and when a younger man who was with him dropped from a window he refused to make the jump. The other man was seriously injured by the fall and became unconscious, and was therefore unable to direct rescuers who might have saved Mr. Laplant with ladders. The other three men were cut off by falling debris, and another man, whose name is unknown, is said to have perished with them.

Could Have Put It Out

A number of persons were in or near the reading room when the fire started. Frank Glass, M.P. for London, Ont., stated to the press that he was reading a paper when he felt an unpleasant heat behind him, and, turning round, found that smoke was coming from a pile of newspapers under a desk. He was not alarmed, but walked to the door and called the attention of a policeman to the fire. The policeman ran for a fire extinguisher, but when he turned the chemical on to the flames, fire and smoke burst out in a great volume and the blaze was immediately beyond control. Mr. Glass states that when he first saw it the fire could have been smothered with a coat, and he would have put it out himself if he had not thought the policeman would do so.

Was it a German Plot?

Whether the fire was started by a smouldering match or tobacco ash accidentally dropped by a smoker, or whether it was deliberately set by means of a time fuse by an enemy is a matter of much discussion. Officially the fire is spoken of as an accident, but those who believe in the incendiary theory claim that the effect of the fire extinguisher indicates that the apparatus had been tampered with.

Mr. Glass and others who were in the vicinity ran to the chamber where the Commons was in session and gave the alarm. There were only about fifty members in the house, but there were a large number of visitors in the gallery. Order was maintained, however, and these all got out safely, tho it took the flames but a few seconds to reach the chamber.

Some Narrow Escapes

Hon. Martin Burrell, whose office is close to the reading room, had a narrow escape, and his face and hands were severely burned when he dashed thru the fire to safety. Dr. Michael Clark, M.P. for Red Deer, Alta., was knocked down by the hose stream and slightly injured, and a number of other members were slightly burned or hurt. Dr. Cash, M.P. for Mackenzie, and Thos. McNutt, M.P. for Saltcoats, were in the wash room when the fire broke out and

were cut off by fire and smoke. Dr. Cash was unwell, and probably owes his life to Mr. McNutt, who made a rope from the roller towels and lowered his friend from the window into a light well. Dr. Cash had to drop a few feet but was not much hurt, and found a ladder to help Mr. McNutt and an attendant to the ground. Other members had equally narrow escapes, the layout of the building and the amount of wood used in its interior structure making it a veritable fire trap. The employees in the restaurant on the top floor were unable to get down the stairs, but they were able to get some distance from the point where the fire started, and those who did not jump were rescued by ladders.

Fire Spread Rapidly

The dreadful suddenness of the conflagration was almost past belief. Three minutes after the fire call was rung in the corridors were belching a sea of smoke. Five minutes after no man could live where several score had breathed free air five minutes before. Twenty minutes later flames commenced to tinge the clouds of smoke which rolled over the hill. An hour after the fire commenced the tower clock tolled 10 across a seething caldron where once had been the House of Commons. At 11 the clock again struck the hour, with the flames curling round its stately length, while from the senate side the flames joined those from the tower chamber. At midnight the whole structure was burning from east to west, and up the hollow of the tower flames were creeping to stop the hands of the faithful clock.

At 1 o'clock the top of the tower fell, a flaming mass, into the heart of the pyre. A national calamity had occurred, and a national tragedy had been enacted.

The building, whose corner stone was laid by the late King Edward VII when he was Prince of Wales in 1867, and which had been the scene of many an historic debate, and the source of much of the Dominion's legislation, was a gutted, dreadful mass of flaming rubbish, tho its outer walls still stand undaunted and unharmed by the force of the flames.

Library Saved

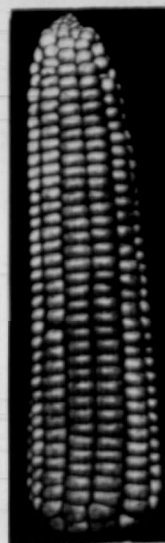
At one time it was feared that the library, which is practically a separate building, connected with the main buildings by only a covered passage, would also be destroyed, but this happily was saved, tho a large number of books were damaged by fire and water. The fire was finally brought under control between 3 and 4 o'clock on Friday morning.

It is estimated that to replace the buildings will cost \$4,000,000. Beside the loss in life and property many valuable records which cannot be replaced were destroyed, and great inconvenience in the transaction of business will undoubtedly result.

LICENSING AND BONDING PRODUCE DEALERS

At the annual convention of the Manitoba Livestock Associations, Hon. V. Winkler mentioned the need in Manitoba of an act providing for the licensing and bonding of produce dealers, and promised that if it was within the powers of the province to pass such an act, he would introduce it at this session of the Manitoba legislature. There is abundance of evidence that such legislation is required, but subsequent investigation has shown that jurisdiction in this matter lies with the Dominion department of trade and commerce, and that the provinces are not competent to deal with it. In the absence of power to deal with it provincially, representation as to the need for such a reform is being made by Hon. Mr. Winkler to the proper authorities at Ottawa.

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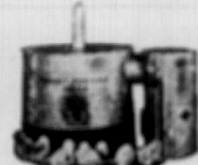
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