

CANADA'S GREATEST FIRE

... Illustrated. ...



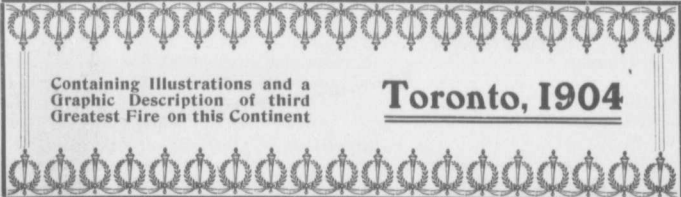
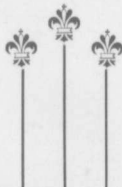
TORONTO, 1904

Price 10 cts.



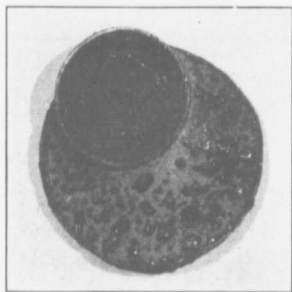
Canada's
Greatest Fire

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**SOUVENIR
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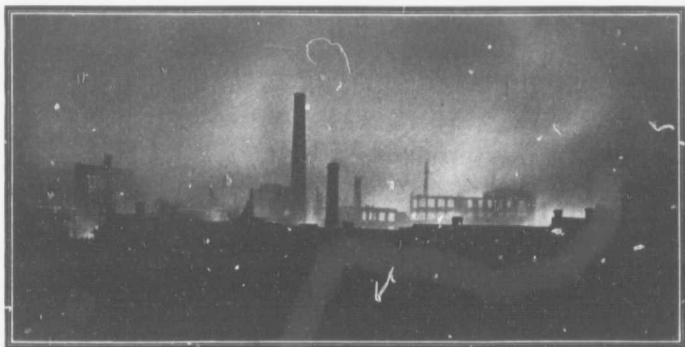


Containing Illustrations and a
Graphic Description of third
Greatest Fire on this Continent

Toronto, 1904



RELICS



THE FIRE AS IT APPEARED AT ONE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING—FROM YORK ST. BRIDGE
LOOKING EAST.—PHOTO BY D. J. HOWELL

CANADA'S GREATEST FIRE

BY CLYDE FORMAN

TORONTO, on the morning of Wednesday, April 20th, 1904, faced a fire loss of from \$12,000,000 to \$15,000,000, and saw its wholesale district an area of awful ruin. From eight o'clock Tuesday night till four on Wednesday morning the fire raged practically unchecked. North, south, east and west the flames spread; the fire department, pitiful in their utter helplessness battled doggedly against the destroying element.

From a blaze which had a beginning seriously looking to be sure, yet not necessarily heralding the commencement of a great conflagration, fanned by a high north-west wind, the flames swept resistless, here and there, devouring everything within reach.

The fire had its beginning in the building occupied by the E. & S. Currie Co. on Wellington Street West, made rapid headway and was soon beyond control. The heat from this building was so great that Suckling & Co.'s premises to the west and Brown Bros' warehouse opposite were soon afire. The fire now spread in an easterly direction

attacking the building belonging to the Digmun & Moneypenny Co., and the warehouse of the Allcock, Laight & Westwood Co. on the corner of Bay and Wellington Streets. These buildings, though of a modern and fire proof design, seemed mere playthings for the flames, and in an incredibly short time Wellington Street from Suckling's building to Bay Street on the north side and Brown Bro's. on the south side, was a mass of flames. The Gale Mfg. Co's. factory, in the rear of the Ansley building, was the next victim, and soon the flames had leaped across to the east side of Bay Street and attacked the warehouse of the Office Specialty Co. The offices of the Telegram adjoining this building were now in great peril, but by dint of much effort, both on the part of the fire brigade and the staff of the Telegram, it was saved after two hours hard fighting. This building proved to be the northern limit of the fire.

The strong wind carried the flames and burning embers southward, and with startling rapidity the fire ate its way through from the rear of Brown Bros. building to Front Street, and many fine structures on both sides of this street



BAY STREET BEFORE THE FIRE—THE CITY HALL IN THE DISTANCE

were reduced to tottering walls, and hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of merchandise of every description destroyed. Among the heavier losers here were the Copp Clarke Co., \$175,000; Warwick

Bros. & Rutter, \$200,000; W. J. Gage & Co., \$250,000; Brereton & Manning, \$125,000; Chas. Cockshutt & Co., Wm. Croft & Sons; Ames Holden & Co.; \$35,000, and the Gutta Percha and Rub-



BAY STREET AFTER THE FIRE—PHOTO BY GOOCH



SOME OF THE EIGHTY BUILDINGS DESTROYED—FRONT ST., NORTH SIDE

ber Mfg. Co., \$500,000. These figures can necessarily only be approximate, but they serve to show the tremendous loss of stock in this section. Fortunately

most of the losers were well covered with insurance. A small park separating the Queen's Hotel from the Warwick building proved the salvation of this hostelry,



THE FIRE SWEEPED UP BAY ST. TO SOME LOW BUILDINGS NEXT TO THE TORONTO ENGRAVING CO. THESE LOW BUILDINGS ENABLED THE FIREMEN TO STOP THE NORTHWARD PROGRESS AT THIS POINT

although the western wall of the hotel was subjected to the heat and flames for over an hour. This building on the north side of Front Street, and the A. R. Williams Co's warehouse on the south side marked the western boundary of the fire.

The flames now commenced their work of destruction on Bay Street north from Front, first attacking the large warehouse of the Gordon Mackay & Co.

warehouses were being licked up, the flames, rose literally hundreds of feet into the air.

The shriek and sob of the fire engines, the calls of the firemen, and, above all, the fiery mass and the terrible sound of the flames over head made a combination of sights and noises Dantesque and almost inconceivable. Certainly in the minds of the staring thousands who



CORNER OF BAY AND WELLINGTON STS.—WATER TOWER AT WORK

This building, one of the most substantial in the business district, together with a new addition then being built was soon a mass of flames. The trestle work erected for this addition burned unchecked fifty feet up in the air or came thundering down to the street below.

The trolley and electric wires broken by falling timbers hung in festoons of brilliant blue and purple flames across Front Street.

Away to the south toward the bay, where dozen's of large factories and

drifted about from one view-point to another, and feasted their eyes upon the sights of that wild night in Toronto, no impression, from amongst all that vivid spectacle, will remain deeper than that ever-recurring glimpse of an atom of a man walking about there in the midst of unquenchable fury.

Watching the fire from the side was like standing beside a river in flood, so straight and swift swept the current of flame.

There were wonderful pictures on



BROCK

ROLPH SMITH, & CO.

BROWN BROS.

SOUTH SIDE OF WELLINGTON STREET, WEST OF BAY

every side, inspiring sights unnumbered; but always, as the onlooker crowded in to a new loop-hole of vision, his gaze found the same focus.

From a distance, where the mass of humanity was held in check across the roadway, one looked away through an avenue of brick and stone fronts, one side brilliantly lighted, the other obscure in dull gray; past the poles and sign boards standing out in black silhouette, or glinting from their golden lettering, across the bare wet pavement where the hose ran in serpentine curves from the sputtering hydrant near by; and there, a



THE MINERVA BUILDING WHICH BARRED THE PROGRESS OF THE FIRE
ON THE NORTH SIDE OF FRONT ST., NEAR YONGE

block away, under the furious flash that swept from a hundred yards back, straight over his head, was the man in the rubber clothing whom the people along the rope pay to look after these things for them, doing his regular work in the midst of a huge furnace.

The fire working its way up Bay Street destroyed rows of offices and warehouse buildings, leaving nothing but blackened and twisted walls, and smoking piles of debris of what had been in



FRONT STREET, WEST OF YONGE

The Telephone and Telegraph companies suffered heavily through their wires and poles being destroyed.

the morning imposing buildings filled with valuable stocks.



LOOKING DOWN BAY STREET INTO THE HEART OF THE FIRE AREA

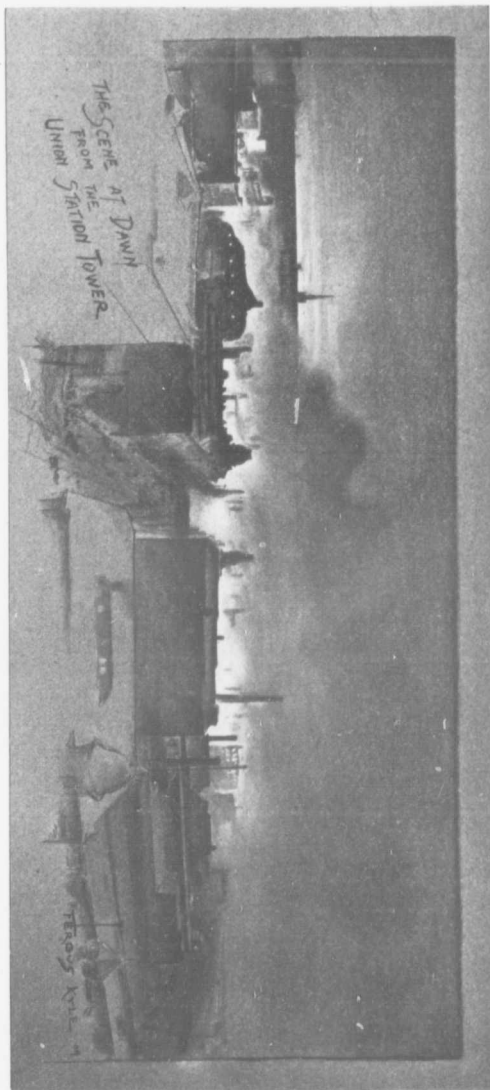
1. The Brock Building.
2. The Wyld-Darling Building.
3. The fire limit on Front Street close to the Custom House

It was here that one of the peculiar vagaries of the great destroyer was exhibited when sheets of flames burst from the W. R. Brock Co's warehouse on the corner of Bay and Wellington Streets. This building was at first thought to have escaped, but it was soon manifest that the interior had been on fire for some time.

Before all these buildings on Bay Street had caught, the blaze was eating up magnificent warehouses on both sides of Front Street, directly south of where the fire started.

Here despite the efforts of the firemen working in the face of a terrible heat and blinding smoke, the fire had attacked both sides of the street. On the south side it licked up a score of closely built warehouses, the intensity of the fire being increased by the inflammable nature of their contents. Some idea may be had of the devastation when it is mentioned that the loss here was about \$3,000,000. In the meantime the retreat of the fire northward had been checked at the Telegram and Toronto Engraving Co. building's on Bay Street. Its progress westward was never serious because a favor-

able wind and open spaces saved the buildings on Wellington Street and the Queen's Hotel on Front Street.

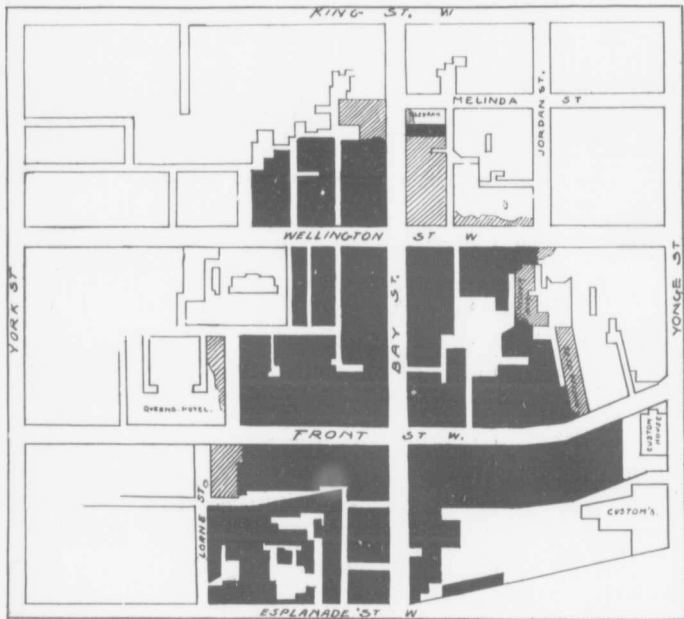


It had gone south as far as it could go—to the railway tracks and the Bay.

The battle ground lay to the east. From one o'clock until four the surging crowds of spectators speculated as to where the eastern limit would be. Would it be Yonge Street or the Market? Good buildings, water curtains and brave firemen checked it on Wellington Street before it had got half way from Bay to Yonge. On Front Street they were less successful.

tile establishments, both on Front Street east and Yonge Street, must perish. A small strip of ground on the west side of the Custom House aided greatly the efforts of the firemen, while the thickness of the western walls of the Minerva Building, unpierced by windows, and the general substantial nature of that structure also proved of great aid in this final fight for mastery.

The fear was that with the high and erratic wind prevailing the fire might

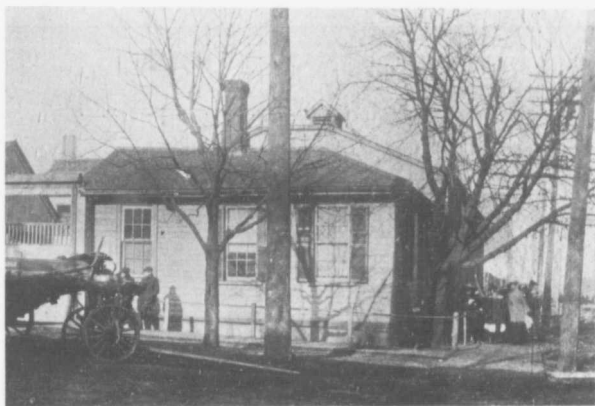


Map of the burned District—Esplanade St. is practically the waterfront—York Bay and Yonge Sts. run north. The white spot in centre black block above Wellington St. shows where the fire started.

On the north side of this street it swept from building to building until the huge Minerva Building was reached. Here the great fight was made. The Custom House on one side of the street and the Minerva Building on the other, being taken by the fire brigade as vantage points from which to direct their efforts. It was thought at this time that nothing would save either building, and with their fall many more blocks of mercan-

continue on its course eastward, and east northward up Yonge Street into the heart of the retail section.

With this contingency facing them the brigade reinforced by a gallant squad of fire-fighters from Hamilton, and Buffalo, approached the supreme battle. Streams were kept playing on both sides of the street, but it was in the rear of the McMahon and Broadfield building that the decisive fight was made. The flames,



A wooden cottage in the heart of fire swept district which escaped injury.

fanned by the high breezes, poured out of the rear of the building in volumes, at times completely enveloping the receiving

or express building in the rear of the Customs house proper. The roar of the conflagration could be heard for blocks,



Dynamiting the dangerous walls after the fire—Photo taken at instant of the explosion.



The onetime doorway of business.

and as volume after volume of fire and smoke came pouring out, it was at once evident that the building was jammed to the ceiling with goods of a most inflammable and combustible character.

Here within eight feet of this raging conflagration fifteen men from the Bay Street fire-hall pluckily kept two streams of water playing upon the flames. At times the water would be played directly against the roaring, seething volume of red, which surged over towards the fifteen feet of space intervening between the two buildings, licking with its forked tongues the water-soaked masonry. The high wind and the draught from the fire drove the water scalding hot back into the very faces of the firemen. The streams would be alternately turned on either building. For about two hours this great fight continued, and to thousands watching the struggle it seemed that the destroying element must conquer, as it was felt that no human being could live in the heat which the flames threw out. A section of five men desisted long enough to carry a length of hose

into the receiving house, and from a window a stream was soon playing on the fire. The other section however held to their posts.

On every hand could be heard "Isn't it a plucky fight?" So intense was the heat that the great walls of the doomed building fairly surged and swayed. Just at a juncture when it seemed that all hope of retarding the spread of the fire must be abandoned, an ominous crackling sound was heard, and a moment later the whole west side of the McMahon, Broadfield building fell outward with a resounding crash.

To the thousands of spectators it was a most awe-inspiring and dramatic incident. Just a moment before the whole neighborhood was illuminated by the most brilliant of lights, then there was a great crash, and as if by magic all was in darkness.

With the fall of this wall the great draught which was driving the fire towards the Customs building was withdrawn, and the flames, unimprisoned, wasted their energies in the air. This

was the turning point, as although in many buildings fires were fiercely raging, it was announced that the conflagration was under control.

Apparently satisfied with its playful frolic, the fire-fiend sat down upon the great area he had conquered, and silently, sullenly, yet all unyieldingly, lulled himself to sleep.

As the early morning broke, the weary firemen and the threatened merchants breathed sighs of relief—while a few heart-broken, discouraged men went home to talk over their losses.



The Fire Summarized



Loss on Buildings, — \$2,500,000 to \$5,000,000.

Loss on Stock, — \$7,500,000 to \$10,000,000.

Business Establishments completely destroyed, —150.

Employes out of work—5,000.

Where the fire started,—Premises of E. & S. Currie, neckware manufacturers, 58 & 60 Wellington Street, West.

Origin,—Supposed defects in electric wiring.

Time it started,—7.45 p.m.

Time it was brought under control,—4 a.m.

Stationery and Printing business paralyzed by the destruction of six of the largest Canadian firms.

Some of the largest losses,—Gordon, Mackay & Co, W. R. Brock, Wyld Darling & Co., Brown Bros, W. J. Gage.

Number of firemen at work,—200 from Toronto, 15 from Hamilton, 50 from Buffalo, 9 from London, 5 from Toronto Junction, and 12 from Peterborough.

Most important wholesale houses of the city destroyed.

Insurance,—between \$8,000,000 and \$10,000,000.



A valuable library saved



The scene along the Esplanade.

Incidents at the Fire.

BY FERGUS KYLE

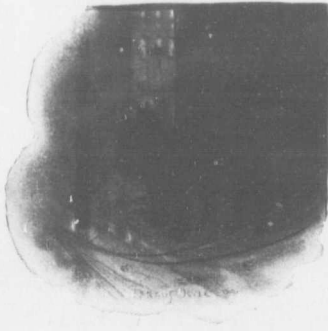
(Canadian Magazine)

Half way down Bay street, below Wellington, when the fire was raging through the block behind them, sending showers of sparks and ashes down into the street, stood a couple of old cronies that had been through many a like experience—the team of horses belonging to the old “Boustead” fire engine. It was an off moment for them, and until their driver would come running to get them to move the engine from under some dangerous wall, or to hustle it around into a more advantageous position in front of the fire, they stood there alone in the smoky half-light, without the slightest nervousness. Nothing of the fiery steed about them, barring their occupation; just two heavy, sensible old customers with only an occasional intelligent turn of the head, the distinguishing look of the fire horse, to tell that they understood or cared any thing at all about it. Had there been an animal study man among the two or three individuals who picked their way past there among

the puddles and dangling wires, he would have heard the off horse mutter, after a scrutiny of the surroundings over his mate's shoulder, “Billy, me boy, this is going to be an all-night job. What do you say if we take a nap while we have the chance?”

There were other equines engaged in tiresome work that night; old general-purpose day labourers that could ill afford the loss of a night's rest. Some of the bank clerks, who at one stage of the fire were looking for a waggon to move some valuables, tell of a couple of boys, the son of an expressman and a “pardner” who had “swiped out” the horse unbeknownst to the “old man,” and at three-thirty in the morning had gathered together the sum of thirty-six dollars, most of it at the expense of the four-footed breadwinner, whom they urged to the limit of his public-spirited endurance.

His Majesty's Royal Mails are put to such curious uses at times, and the loyal servants of



OLD CRONIES



His Majesty and the people, the letter handlers, are so accustomed to straightening out tangles and seeing that everything posted goes, that it is not astonishing, perhaps, or even amusing, to find the postman whose route lay in the burned district, conscientiously peering into the box at the corner of Bay and Front streets, on the second morning after the wreck, hoping like a patriot that no one had been absent-minded beggar enough (that was not exactly the expression he used) to put anything in there.



OPENING THE VAULTS

The activities of the picturesque telegraph linemen were the subject of much admiring comment on the two days following the big event. While the ruins were still smoking, these fellows were heaving the newly-shaved poles up with their long pikes, dropping them into the holes from which the old roots of ruined timber had been expeditiously extracted.

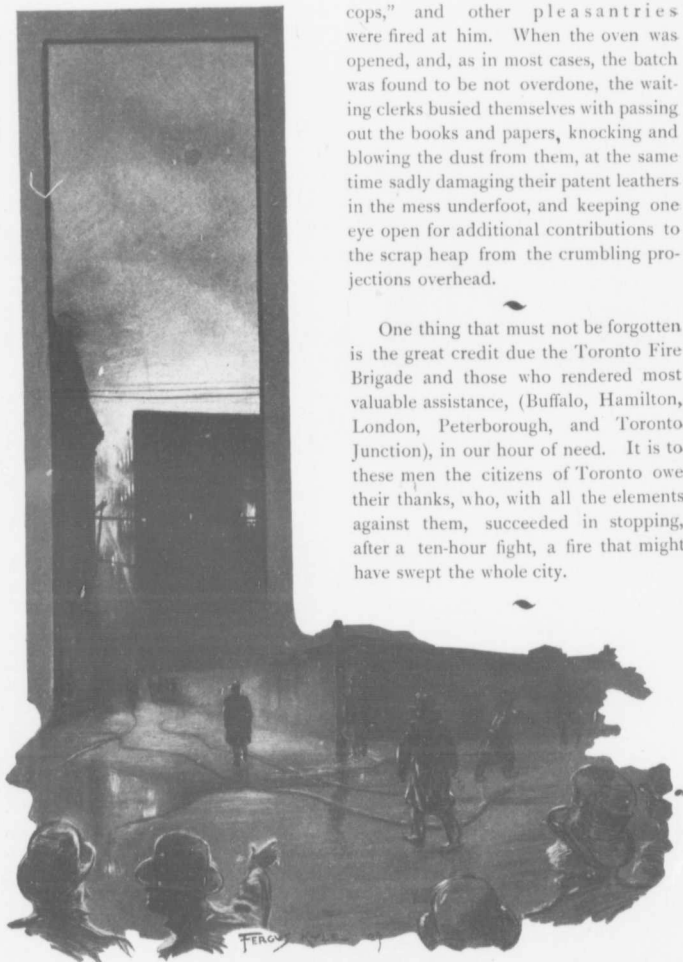


THE LINEMEN AT WORK

There was an urgent call for experts to open the safes and vaults, and the local company, as well as those from elsewhere, had men at work as soon as the temperature of the bricks would permit. These "safe-crackers," as the irreverent workmen called them, were from among the most skilful of those engaged in lock-making, and where one of them was engaged he was always sure of an audience. "Let us know when you get to the stuff, old man; we'll keep an eye on the

cops," and other pleasantries were fired at him. When the oven was opened, and, as in most cases, the batch was found to be not overdone, the waiting clerks busied themselves with passing out the books and papers, knocking and blowing the dust from them, at the same time sadly damaging their patent leathers in the mess underfoot, and keeping one eye open for additional contributions to the scrap heap from the crumbling projections overhead.

One thing that must not be forgotten is the great credit due the Toronto Fire Brigade and those who rendered most valuable assistance, (Buffalo, Hamilton, London, Peterborough, and Toronto Junction), in our hour of need. It is to these men the citizens of Toronto owe their thanks, who, with all the elements against them, succeeded in stopping, after a ten-hour fight, a fire that might have swept the whole city.



THE FIGHT FOR THE CUSTOMS RECEIVING HOUSE