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SEVENTY SIX CHILDREN PERISH IN A STAMPEDE WHEN THEATRE IS DESTROYED AT MONTREAL

Montreal, Jan. 9.—Seventy-six and possibly more smoke-stained, blood-blotched boys and girls lie lifeless on the floors of the Montreal morgue. A score of other children, and a few adults, crazed and burned, repose at four city hospitals. All are victims of a stampede that followed a minor outbreak of fire this afternoon during a moving picture show at the Laurier Palace, 1683 St. Catherine street East, in the east end of the city.

All evening the toll mounted and may continue to mount, hour after hour, as ambulances make still more journeys to the old gray building near the harbor, where mortuary chambers held scores of bodies ghastly in death. Long after the last wisp of steam had disseminated over the gaunt east end of the building which had been a tomb for so many, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, tramped wearily from hospital to hospital. Some cried hysterically as they found their little ones in safe care. Others left the last hospital with one more call to make. And the morgue, enveloped in the deathly stillness of a business district hushed on the Sabbath day, saw ever-filling lines of taut-strung men, women and children even, still searching and awaiting the worst.

The mute and mutilated were taken in mid-afternoon from a stairway barely 30 feet long, leading from the eastern end of the theatre gallery to the street. Ten minutes encompassed the whole tragedy. Out of the bright January sunshine, which threw alluring blue shadows under the trees of the snow-covered park opposite the theatre, troops of adults and children, but above all children, had filed, rosy-cheeked and laughing, into the ground floor and the gallery of the show house.

Lured by Glaring Bills

Glaring bills, rich in startling colors, had filled them with anticipation of the fun they would get from the comedy "Get 'Em Young," of the excitement that would come from the serious films. Chattering and gay they filled the greater part of the theatre.

Then from the balcony, the cry of "fire!" It was an usher who sounded the alarm. There was a startled gasp from the audience; a stir and the ominous mutterings of a panic. Trained employees hushed the anxiety, for only a little smoke was coming, from beneath the front of the gallery. It grew in volume. The audience on the ground floor was advised to take the exits, and that was done without semblance of a scramble. Upstairs the children were piling towards the way that led down to the sidewalk.

They Pile up in Heap

The western stairway was clear, and the youngsters were descending rapidly. Things were equally good on the eastern stairway, then five steps from the sidewalk, five steps from safety, the tragedy was born. Boys and girls in the van of the stampeding mob and pressed suddenly from the rear, stumbled and fell. Behind them in serried ranks were the others. In an instant, panic had seized those at the rear. There was shoving and scrambling. Then boys and girls piled in a heap, and a minute or two was sufficient for the stairway to be a solid, suffocating, groaning, shrieking and dying mass.

Many Saved From Jam

Firemen and policemen were on the spot instantly. The blaze became secondary. Many of the children were rescued from the jam, though 20 men pulling on a constable's sturdy leather belt could not snatch one little fellow from death. Practised eyes saw the need for heroic measures. Holes were chopped through the wooden stairs, directly under the jam of bodies; another hole was made in a wall. Firemen formed a human chain, and gradually undermined the mass.

Nearly All Dead

Nearly all pulled out of the stairway were dead. Two or three boys gave their names and died, crushed and mangled. Outside the police worked feverishly. While motor firepumps roared in ear-splitting cacophony, as the interior blaze was attacked with tons of water, doctors were summoned. Frail little bodies were laid in rows on the sidewalk, and injured were quickly separated. Priests were on the scene and the last rites were given to a few gasping little ones who revived a little in the open air, then died.

Nearby fire and police stations became temporary morgues. Mortuary wagons started their trips. Ambulances rushed the injured to the various hospitals. The news spread, and soon hatless, anxious parents were on the run toward the theatre. Reinforced police were merciless to the curious,

kindly and sympathetic to the people who feared their little ones were inside the building. They got little news. The safety forces of the city and the hospital squads worked so quickly that either hospitals or the morgue alone could answer the queries.

Trek to Hospitals.

Then the trek of tragedy from hospital to hospital, and then to the morgue, began. Admitting officers at the four big hospitals were besieged for the names of the patients they had. The best was done for the questioners.

But there was need for tact, for more were dying and the rustle of the soutane was heard in more than one corridor.

At the end of the journey was the morgue. Line after line of police repelled the insistent near-crazed people, who wanted to decide once for all if the loved ones were dead or missing.

Most Suffocated.

In each mortuary chamber the crucifix topped an unforgettable scene. Under the brilliant lights, stretched on the shining, gray-tinted floors, were the boys and girls. There they lay, some with blood stained faces, other smoke-blackened most of them just pale and suffocated. Bright red muffers, green sweaters, round-toed little shoes, mingled with tousled hair, upraised first, chubby faces, wrinkled and distorted into grimaces of agony of which they died. The morgue officers had done their best. For the time being, the relatives, admitted two or three at a time, must look upon the bodies just as they had been pulled from the choked stairway. Sobbing, some near crazed, went into the mortuary chambers and came away with nothing learned. Others caught their breath. "There" and a finger pointed at the victim. Constables moved reverently about the chambers, trying to find some little clue to identity. And all the time the mothers and fathers, the brothers and sisters poured in.

Coroner's Court.

The scene in the little room of the Coroner's Court was unparalleled. A long line of weeping parents led to the bench where Coroner McMahon, investigator of crime and accident cases in Montreal for more than 40 years, asked each one particulars concerning the deceased. The coroner had opened the inquest in order to permit relatives to claim the bodies. The regular opening of the inquiry will be tomorrow.

Two Questions Asked.

To each person Mr. McMahon put two questions. He asked the bereaved person whether or not the child who perished was accompanied to the theatre by an adult. In nearly every case the answer was "No." The coroner then asked if the child had permission of the parent to go to the show. Seventy-five percent of the answers to this question were in the negative. The "death" line twisted from the bench to the door of the courtroom. Down stairs in the lobby of the building a crowd of persons seeking to identify their dead were held back by provincial policemen. At intervals a father, a mother or brother was escorted to the mortuary chamber where recognition of a loved one brought a flood of tears or collapse. After persons had established identification they were brought to the courtroom up stairs to replace those in the line who had passed before the Coroner.

Seats About 1,000.

The Laurier Palace Theatre bears the civic number 1683 St. Catherine street east, two streets east of Moreau street, a main artery and six streets east of Pie ix Boulevard. It has been in operation several years. It is a 2 story building with a stone and brick front. The seating capacity is about one thousand. The orchestra seats about 800 persons, while there is a large gallery which fills the back of the house and runs on either side. The place has four exits, two at the front of the house into which lead the stairs from the balcony and two at the side leading into a lane, with a Sortie or Desery street.

After the fire today the orchestra ceiling beneath the balcony was badly damaged while the floor of the balcony was burned through in spots. The ceiling at the back of the balcony was also damaged by the flames and the glass in the windows fronting on St. Catherine street were broken. The lower floor suffered severe damage by water.

The owner of the Laurier Palace moving picture theatre is A. Lawand, who resides at 92 Sherbrooke street east.

Denies Explosion.

Denying the rumor which had prevailed among the crowd that the fire started from a film-roll exploding, Max Reid, manager of the Laurier Palace, said that he first discovered the flames under the floor of the balcony close to the operator's room. He said that there was every indication of a short circuit from wires which would be under there. The location of this place in the floor is just in front here the film projector is installed in the gallery. The audience rushed for both exits.

The exits, the manager said, were in good order and there was no obstruction due to their construction. Those on the floor, he said, had little difficulty with the exits there. On the east side of the gallery the exit is a stairway similar to that on the right, both opening into the front foyer. The children had not stopped to think of the west stairway, but piled down the east, where their progress was barred by the crowd which pushed its way out from the main floor of the theatre. A few had descended the west stairway.

MEMORIAL IS SUGGESTED TO GREAT LEADERS

(Toronto Globe.)

The Dominion Government should give consideration to the suggestion of Allan Ross Davis that the jubilee year of Confederation be made the occasion of marking sites connected with the lives of Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Macdonald was the leading Conservative statesman of his country, and the leading Father of Confederation, while Laurier was the most distinguished Liberal premier, the statesman who did most to develop the Dominion into the advanced position it holds today.

Mr. Davis suggests that the original Macdonald house by the shores of the Bay of Quinte, near Adolphustown, be reconstructed and made into a Macdonald museum. At present the site is marked merely by a signboard. That suggestion may be worth considering, but a more practical idea would be the acquisition and preservation of the limestone house on Rideau street, Kingston, where Macdonald also lived in boyhood while studying law. This house is in good condition, and could easily be converted into a museum. Besides, the Kingston house would be seen and visited by many more people than could possibly journey to the other more remote site. The latter could be marked by a cairn, or in some other manner be given the recognition it deserves.

The brick house in Arthabasca in which Sir Wilfrid lived for a quarter of a century or more while he practiced law in that pretty town by the Nicolet is in fair condition. Nearby is the white wooden law office used by him. The preservation and marking of these buildings should be simple and inexpensive.

Canadians have been backward in sentimental matters of this kind, but public interest in them is increasing. Each year the birthdays of Washington and Lincoln are extensively observed by our neighbors, while buildings associated with these men long ago became national shrines. This country could well afford to take some action in the same direction.

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SPOONING IN FRONT SEAT IS PROHIBITED

Detroit, Jan. 10.—It may be the weather or it may be the law. Whatever it is, there have been few arrests for violating the clause in Detroit's new traffic ordinance that prohibits driving an automobile with more than two persons in the same seat with the driver or "spooning" in the front seat.

The law specifies that a motorist "cannot drive with one arm around another person or while the other person has his or her arm around the driver."

The shop-girl regaro, a fussy woman as as counter-irritant who is not all to the mustard.

INTERNATIONAL PAPER COMPANY

New York, December 29, 1926.

The Board of Directors have declared a quarterly dividend of Fifty Cents (50c) a share on the Common Stock of this Company, payable February 15th, 1927, to Common stockholders of record at the close of business February 1st, 1927.

Cheques will be mailed. Transfer books will not close.

OWEN SHEPHERD,
Treasurer.

Fredericton Vocational Committee

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The office of Mr. R. D. Hanson, secretary Fredericton School Board in the New High School building will be open on Thursday and Friday evenings, January 6th and 7th from 7.30 to 9.30 for those who wish to register. For further information apply to Mr. B. B. Barnes or Mr. R. D. Hanson. A fee of two dollars is required, but this will be refunded if attendance is satisfactory. Every one must register before Monday night.

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