# CHICAGO NEWSPAPERS ON THEATER HORROR

## Reporters Find Evidence of Gross Negligence of City Officials and Theater Managers.

AS THE greatest disaster which has happened in Chicago since the great fire of 1871, the Iroquois Theater fire has almost monopolized the space of the Chicago newspapers for the last week. They have shown commendable newspaper enterprise in collecting the news of the affair and in arranging it so as to be intelligible to their readers. After the first issue following the fire, they have devoted their energy principally to telling the cause and placing the blame, as well as relating the stringent measures taken by the city authorities for the protection of theater audiences in future. They have illustrated the affair without stinting space, but their photographers have evidently been handicapped by smoke, darkness and snow, for many of the pictures are blurred and indistinct as to detail.

The day after the fire the Tribune gave up eight pages to the story of it, having little besides this except the statement that it was due to the failure of the asbestos curtain to work. A page and a half was given up exclusively to a list of the known dead, the missing and the injured. Other papers handled the subject in equally complete detail.

It was on the following day that the public indignation burst out against the managers and builders of the theater and the city authorities. While much space was occupied with the story of the identification and removal of the dead, attention was turned mainly to placing the responsibility, exposing the cause and telling of the measures for the punishment of the guilty. On that day the investigation by the city authorities began and arrests were made. The discovery was made of the attempt to destroy the evidence that the stage skylights were closed. There are numerous pictures, imaginary, of course, of the horrible scene at the stampede, and halftones of the theater as it appeared after the disaster. There are also many pictures of the victims. The Tribune devoting three pages to them.

### Gloom Marks the New Year.

The New Year's editions are marked with gloom instead of the usual joyous tone. The Tribune begins its story of the affair with the words: "The New Year came to Chicago with muffled drums." The Chronicle said:

Gloom settled over the entire community yesterday. The day usually ushered in by noises and marked by the joyousness of holiday festivities bore the shadow of an awful calamity. No such day was ever seen in Chicago, for it wore the hush of horror.

There were fewer on the streets than the quietest Sunday that the city ever passed. There was practically no business, and resorts that are usually frequented when business is suspended were remarkably free of frequenters. The street-cars, crowded by pleasure-seekers on the ordinary holiday, carried few passengers. Suburban trains might, for the most part, have been abandoned, so light was the traffic to and from the suburbs.

The Inter Ocean of that day tells of the steps taken to make New Year's a day of mourning instead of noisy rejoicing, the sale of all the usual noise-making devices being stopped and the licenses and stocks of peddlers of such articles being taken away until after the New Year. On that day began the burial of the dead and the Chronicle says of it:

Chicago yesterday began to lay away her dead. The silent New Year's morning broke on a city palled and mantled with grief, and night had fallen ere the last cortege had returned from the cemeteries, where victims of the Iroquois Theater catastrophe are now sleeping their last sleep. Christmas greenery had been hastily torn down to make way for the black trappings of woe, and all through the day and night the railroads bore from the city the bodies of out-of-town visitors who had died in the fire.

The Record-Herald begins its account of the funerals:

While a Sabbath stillness brooded over the city, a hundred funerals passed in mournful procession through the streets yesterday. In the snow-covered cemeteries half a thousand graves were being dug. In as many homes lay the dead, who had perished in the hecatomb of fire at the Iroquois Theater, with closed eyes and crossed hands, coffined and garbed for the tomb. In cellars and back rooms of morgues, a score remained unidentified. Over all a leaden sky. Underfoot a frozen, snow-mantled earth. It was Nineteen Hundred and Four in Chicago.

Chicago's darkest New Year's was a day of silence. The riotous, carnival noises of other years were lacking in downtown thoroughfares. There were no explosions of cannon and firecrackers, no tooting of horns and whistles, none of the din and racket characteristic of New Year's thoughtless exuberance. Their absence was the tribute of the street to the city's sorrow.

### Only One Defender of Guilty.

The only paper which seems to have a word to say in palliation of the indignation against the theater managers and city officials is the Chronicle, the Democratic newspaper, Mayor Harrison being also a Democrat. It said on the morning of January 1:

People who believe in a superintending power in the universe must admit that it was an inscrutable Providence. If there had been any obvious lack of care in the construction and management of the theater it would have been different, but the mystery is that the greatest of all American theater disasters should have occurred in spite of the most elaborate and costly preparations for human safety ever devised.

The air is filled with rumors, of course, as it always is at such times, but there is as yet no well-grounded reason to believe that any known precaution was neglected to make the theater safe for human life in case of a fire or a panic.

Money was literally lavished on it. There were 25 exits of unusual width. Fire-extinguishing chemicals were hung everywhere and instantly used. A representative of the fire department was on the spot. There was an asbestos fire curtain. The managers were two of the most liberal and experienced men in the profession. But, after all, the loss of life was the largest and most heart-sickening ever known in such a place on this continent.

This is no time for a discussion as to the responsibility for the catastrophe or for the expression of hasty opinions on the subject of safeguarding the people against further disasters of the kind. No doubt there will be a searching inquiry, and probably useful lessons will be drawn from the tragedy which has brought sorrow to many homes.

But it changed its tune the next day. In commenting on the sad contrast between the brightness of the faces seen in the reproduced pictures of the dead and the horrible shapes into which they were crushed in the stampede, it said:

What is the lesson? Wherever these sweet faces look up from the printed page into the suffused eyes of grief-stricken humanity let a resolution be made that with redoubled diligence ways and means shall be sought and discovered that will prevent forever in the future such scenes of horror as we have witnessed during the last week.

This was a symptom of the wave of indignation which had burst out against the guilty as the facts became known, and which found its echo in even the Chronicle's news columns. The Inter Ocean runs the following head over the whole of its front page:

### Theater Called a Firetrap.

"Asbestos curtain in theater death-trap annihilated by blast of air during fire. 'Fireproof' guard, flimsily made of but one thickness, totally collapses at first strain put upon it. Small fragments now litter the floor of the fatal playhouse. Terrible tragedy would have been lessened, if not averted, if curtain had been properly made." The Tribune heads its cartoon on the same day: "Death-trap where unlocked door might have saved hundreds." In telling of the worthless curtain, it gives this heading: "Curtain bought because cheap. Asbestos drop in Iroquois made of second grade of 'fireproof' goods. Expense is $56 lower. Boston dealer admits he sold poorer quality of required safety device."

The story following this head states that analysis showed that, while there was some asbestos in it, the curtain was made largely of wood pulp, which is highly inflammable. Below this article is an interview with William Clendenin, editor of the Fireproof Magazine, denouncing the Iroquois as a fire-trap, and adding:

The whole thing was a rush construction. It was beautiful, but it was cheap. Everything but the structural members was of wood; the roller on the asbestos curtain, the pulleys, all a cheap compromise.

The blame for the existence of the death trap is divided between the builders and mangers of the theater in not complying with the building ordinance, and the city officials in not compelling them to do so. The campaign on this subject was fairly opened on the morning of January 1. The Record-Herald and Tribune state that on November 2 Building Commissioner Williams made a report detailing the violations of the building ordinances at the various theaters. This report gives details as to each of 34 theaters. It shows that only one had fireproof paint; one had automatic sprinklers and that one not on the stage; only three had water tanks on the roof; none had the exits indicated on the programme; 13 had asbestos curtains, four burlap curtains, 11 linen curtains, two canvas curtains and the others claim fireproof curtains without specifying material or make no report; 15 have exits marked, 11 have them not marked at all, and the others have the marks not plain enough or not according to law; 20 have fire extinguishers, 6 have none at all, and the others are insufficiently provided or have fire hose or other devices; 11 have fire alarms, 22 have none and one has a fire alarm half a block distant; 10 have firemen on the stage, one has a private watchman, and 23 have no such protection. All the precautions named are required by the building ordinance.

### Guilt of City Officials.

This report, which was printed in full in the Record-Herald, occupied six columns. It was transmitted on November 2 to Mayor Harrison, who sent it to the Council with the recommendation that it be referred to the judiciary committee, remarking: "The violations are so numerous and so complete that it would be impossible for the city administration to compel observance of the ordinances without closing practically all the theaters of the city." It was referred to the committee mentioned, which was at the time revising the building ordinances, and has slept there ever since. The excuse for the delay was that it was being printed and that the printer was slow. The Record-Herald lays the blame for inaction in enforcing the ordinances on the Mayor, saying he was slow to act. The Mayor says the Council ordered a stay of proceedings under the ordinances, but the Record-Herald says there is no record of any such action. The Chronicle, however, blames the Council, saying:

It is because of the ineffectiveness of the building ordinances that Mayor Harrison said yesterday afternoon he did not direct the building department to close the theaters until they are placed in a safe condition. The Mayor took the position that the commissioner because of the action of the Council had no power to force a compliance with the city code.

### Sins of Theater Managers.

While the newspapers were discovering the delinquencies of the city officials the latter were investigating the Iroquois to discover those of the theater managers. The Aldermen paid a visit to the theater with B. H. Marshall, the architect. The Tribune tells of what passed in detail. One alderman was sarcastic about the fireproof curtain and pronounced the exits awful, as the doors, when opened, block the fire-escape. There were no signs over the exits, the employes never had a fire drill, the ushers were boys of 15 years, the stairs are winding, the exit doors are double and fastened by a device which would puzzle the uninitiated, are covered with heavy curtains, and most of them were locked at the time of the fire. The law requires separate entrances to each balcony, but there is one marble stairway to both balconies in order that the people who buy cheap seats might not be distinguished from the others. This provokes the Chronicle to say: "Vanity Caused Horror."

This investigation and the exposure of the condition of the other theaters caused the order to close 17 of them last Friday and the ultimate order to close all of them until the ordinance had been complied with. That this action was stimulated by the newspaper exposures is evident. The Tribune named a commission of architects, contractors and engineers to investigate all theaters in the city. The Record-Herald said on January 1:

First, the responsibility for the tragedy must be fixed, if it can be fixed. With that object in view the investigation of causes must be as thorough as possible. And, second, regard should be had for the broad general subject of remedies and prevention, as it concerns all playhouses and other places of public assemblage. There are lessons to be learned from the visitation, which should govern the conduct of the authorities in the future, and lead to the enactment of any legislation that may be needed for the protection of the people.

The next day the same paper said:

The absence of automatic sprinklers is not only charged, but admitted, and it is reported also that there was no fire-alarm box on the premises, that the seats were crowded, that the ventilator above the stage was not in proper order, that the exits were not marked, that aisles which appeared on the plans did not appear in the theater, and that the asbestos curtain was of poor quality.

This is a formidable list of accusations, which affects owners, builders, architect and the city inspection department, and it is clear that the slightest infraction of law and the slightest evidence of carelessness must not be overlooked.

It also said:

The slowness of the City Hall officials and the Council in regard to regulating theaters has been proverbial. Occasionally there has been a spasm of energy on the part of the building department to stop overcrowding, but there has been no consistent effort to keep the aisles clear.

That the newspapers of Chicago have awakened the authorities to a full sense of their responsibility is apparent. The great sacrifice of life in the Iroquois may thus be the means of securing the safety of Chicago theater audiences for many years to come.

VIEW OF THE PARQUET CIRCLE FROM THE STAGE.

### A NEW YEAR'S PRAYER.

G. T. P. in Chicago Inter Ocean.

For homes that now lie desolate,
For hearts that mourn in vain,
For those who, stricken sore by Fate,
Writhe in the grasp of pain;
For these we pray, with one accord,
Thy pity and thy mercy, Lord.

The Old Year in a mist of Death
Fades slowly from our saddened view,
A wail upon his parting breath
That hails the advent of the New;
Humbly we pray, with one accord,
Thy pity and Thy mercy, Lord.

Though from the clouds of Sorrow's night
The thunderbolt of wrath was hurled,
We bow before the Word of Might,
The awful Will that rules the world;
Humbly we pray, with one accord,
Thy pity and Thy mercy, Lord.

In weeds of woe Thy servants weep,
The darkness gathers fast around,
To Thy great throne the mourners creep,
No comfort save in Thee is found;
Humbly we pray, with one accord,
Thy pity and Thy mercy, Lord.

### "I BURY MY DEAD"

W. D. N. in Chicago Tribune.

The Rachel of the cities
Looked neither right nor left;
She crooned the croon of pities—
The song of the bereft.
One side was laughter swelling;
One side were light and cheer—
The play and pleasure telling
The coming of the year.
"I bury my dead,"
She said.

Some called: "Take heart of sorrow,
Forgetting yesterday;
Look onward to the morrow
That dances down the way!"
Above her sons and daughters
She bowed her head, and wept,
She sat beside the waters
That, Marah-bitter, crept.
"I bury my dead,"
She said.

Some came all slowly, seeking
Their sympathy to show,
Words fitly chosen, speaking.
She breathed: "Alone I go—
Alone with all my grieving;
Alone beside my lost,
My hodden sackcloth weaving,
For I must pay the cost.
I bury the dead—
My dead!"

She changed her wreaths of holly,
Her wreaths of joyous hue,
Her marks of fun and folly,
For cypress and for rue.
This Rachel of the cities
Crooned low the requiem
Blent of a thousand pities,
Above her dead—for them.
"I bury my dead,"
She said.

### MINEOWNERS TAKE REVENGE.

#### Operator Who Hired Union Men Is Caused to Be Put in Bullpen.

CRIPPLE CREEK, Colo., Jan. 6.—C. H. Reimer, a business associate of James F. Burns, president of the Portland Mining Company, was arrested by a military squad today and lodged in the bullpen. K. C. Sterling, chief detective of the mineowners association, at whose instigation the arrest was made, said that after being detained for a time Reimer would be banished from the district. Sterling also declared that if Burns should come here and interfere in behalf of Reimer, he, too, would be placed in the bullpen.

Reimer and Burns, it is said, incurred the enmity of the Mineowners' Association by giving employment to union miners in the Portland mine and by waging a successful campaign for the election of a union man as County Assessor.

In an interview Mr. Reimer said:

"I represent the Ryan-Whitney interests in the Portland Gold Mining Company. I have been in favor, with Mr. Burns, of union labor and the demands made by the Western Federation of Miners for decent wages. I know no other cause why I should be taken to Camp Goldfield and to the bullpen."

Reimer, it is reported, has professed to have evidence that will clear away all suspicion directed against members of the Western Federation of Miners in connection with the Vindicator mine explosion, and the alleged attempt to wreck a train on the Florence & Cripple Creek Railroad.

### Military Deports Strikers.

TELLURIDE, Colo., Jan. 6.—Fourteen more strikers were deported from Telluride today by order of Major Zeph T. Hill, commander of the military in this district. A squad of soldiers is scouring the city for firearms and houses suspected of containing weapons are forcibly entered and searched.

### Parent-Guardian Spends Fortune.

CHICAGO, Jan. 6.—Robbed of nearly $150,000, as it is alleged, Clara Irene Laign, of Chicago, has been induced to go to Toledo, O., and to sign a document releasing her father from all responsibility for his acts while her guardian. Ex-Governor John M. Hamilton has produced evidence to this effect in the Probate Court, where as Miss Laign's attorney he had begun suit to secure an accounting from her father. The guardian is alleged to have kept his daughter in ignorance of the fact that she was heir to $150,000. She accidentally discovered the facts a few weeks ago, when 27 years of age, but the fortune is declared to have disappeared.

Attorney Hamilton declared in court that he had just received a letter from a Toledo law firm informing him that he was no longer Miss Laign's counsel. The woman since has repudiated the document given her father, according to Attorney Hamilton. The case was continued until next Friday.

### General Young Will Visit Cuba.

WASHINGTON, Jan. 6.—Following his retirement next Saturday, Lieutenant-General Young, Chief of Staff, will make a short visit to his sister in Pittsburg and then will go to Cuba to spend the remainder of the Winter in the hope of recovering from an attack of rheumatism.

### Chicago Bandits Placed on Trial.

CHICAGO, Jan. 6.—The trial of the Carbarn bandits, Marx, Neidermeier, Vandine and Roeski, began before Judge Korster today. Among those present was the mother of Neidermeier, who has been familiarizing herself with court methods in attending a murder trial conducted by another Judge during the past few days.


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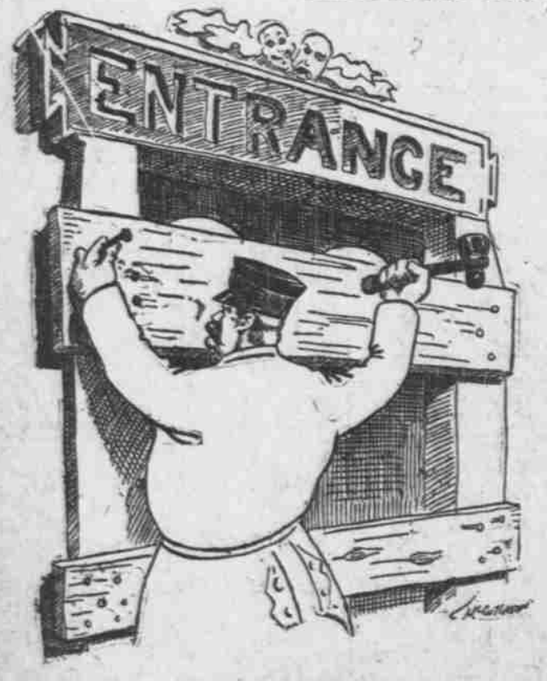


—Chicago Record-Herald.

—Chicago Tribune.

—Chicago Tribune.

CAUGHT IN THEIR OWN TRAP.

To the Citizens of Chicago—Announcement is hereby made that the City Hall will be closed on Saturday, January 2, 1904, on account of the calamity occurring at the Iroquois Theater. All business houses throughout the city are respectfully requested to shut down on that day. CARTER H. HARRISON, Mayor.