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THE WASHINGTON THEATRE TRAGEDY

(Continued from first page.)

to the huge chunks of concrete and tractors or gangs of men would drag them into the street. Part of the balcony remained attached to the wall—it was there that an effort was being made to reach several bodies.

Detachments of soldiers macrhed in from nearby posts.

The relief work was not allowed to lag even though it was feared that the walls might collapse in the pit where the work was going on.

One of these walls was shaky and building inspectors watched it.

Many pinned beneath the wreckage were fully visible, agony, terror and grief written deep on their faces. I saw a marine officer, fatally injured, coolly directing the rescue of his wife and daughter, imprisoned beside him. He died shortly after he was freed.

In another section of the ruins Dr. Clyde Gearhard lay pinned under a fallen steel girder, one of his legs crushed. Beside him was his wife, dead, and, though in partial view of the rescuers from the first, it was 5 o'clock Sunday morning before he was released. In the endless hours of his wait he felt the pulse of his wife, tried desperately in his cramped position to revive her. Conscious throughout, he kept repeating, "She can't be dead." After being taken to the hospital it was necessary to amputate his crushed limb.

Everywhere I turned, it seemed, I saw faces, the death mask just developing, or the stare of near insane horror, which gave them the appearance of the dead.

Maddening screams accentuated the confusion which marked the first entrance of rescuers. It was a charnel house.

Noise of panic followed. Those nearest the doors stampeded for safety. Charles Whitcomb of New York, who had purchased the last ticket sold at the theatre, had just opened the door to enter when the roof crashed. The force of the impact hurled him across the lobby, through the outside door into the street. Only slightly bruised he muttered thanks to God for his escape.

Not more than half a dozen persons, seated on the outermost aisle of the orchestra, were as fortunate at Whitcomb in escaping.

Meantime, from the great snow drifts, blocking all traffic without, thousands of people appeared as if by magic. From nearby fire stations companies summoned by the general alarm, fought desperately with their heavy equipment to make their way to the scene.

Those who reached the disaster first saw a hill, three stories high, gray and ghastly. Now and then moans of women and children and shouts of imprisoned men pierced the air above the clang and roar of fire engines and ambulances. These cries guided the rescuers.

The huge mound of ruin was made more ghastly by the shadows cast upon it from the standing walls and the few electric lights that had not been broken by the collapse. Snow, driven by a high wind, swept down on the wreckage.

Probably the wind and cold and driven snow silenced the early comers. They expressed their anxiety in faint moans and followed the rescuers through a side door near the stage, where flood lights still burned and cast their soft reflection on the silver screen. That was the only note of color during the first moments following the cave-in.

The weird light, rendered more so by the fact that I had just come in from the bright lights and glistening snow without, the figures of human beings could be seen, frantically struggling to get out, terror-stricken. The straining and cries of those pinned gave me the impression that the huge mass of debris was alive, but could not move.

Under the wreckage I could see men, women, girls and boys seeking to crawl along small openings between the seats. Shouted directions from friend to friend filled the air. Mingled with these came the shouts for help.

A closer survey revealed high up on the jagged mass, the overturned projector house, a great bulk of plaster-stained metal, resembling a giant distorted head. The movie machines and thousands of feet of film were all inside there, black and tangled. The operators, too, were in there in the wreckage near by. Sunday two babies were taken from the pile, unhurt, save for slight frostbite on their tiny doubled fists.

Above a jagged horizon were four walls ripped clean of their burden—the roof. All the painted decorations of the theatre, the gilded moulding and ornaments, were hidden in the ghastly pile. Great chunks of the hardened lime formed an almost solid cover to the horror. The balcony, jutting far into the orchestra, had collapsed with the roof, so that most of those occupying the higher-priced downstairs seats lay in a sepulchre.

Mrs. F. W. Richardson had just taken her seat in the front row of the balcony when the roof fell in.

"I heard a sound that I thought was a heavy wind sweeping over the roof," she said. "The whole place trembled and then suddenly I found myself sweeping headlong with the balcony into the orchtra pit."

Mrs. Richardson suffered a fractured leg and wrenched back.

"Those of us who were in the balcony got off comparatively easy," said C. F. Alexander, another to be seated upstairs. "I was partially pinned in by a section of the roof and a little boy was thrown on top of me. Both of us, however, escaped without serious injury."

Equally forunate were Dr. and Mrs. J. Canin, who occupied seats in the last row of the balcony when the crash came. Although the doctor suffered a broken left arm he returned to the wreck and aided in the treatment of the injured, as soon as his arm had been set. Mrs. Canin suffered a fractured rib. Both she and her husband retained their presence of mind sufficiently to burrow their way out of a mass of plaster with the aid of matches which the physician carried in his coat pocket, and climbed down a fire escape to safety.

Under the balcony cave-in the orchestra seats formed a subterranean cave with row upon row of narrow passageways. Those with presence of mind to drop to the floor at the first warning of the crash were saved by crawling through this labyrinth to safety. Among these was W. L. Peters, who with Willfred Brosseau, a student in Georgetown university, had attended the theatre with two young ladies.

"We were seated well up toward the front of the theatre," Peters explained. "Suddenly half the picture on the screen was cut off. I glanced up and saw a mass—which proved to be the balcony—within a few feet of our heads. I called to my companion to drop to the floor. We all did, and the two girls and I were able to crawl out before the backs of the seats were crushed in.

"Brosseau, however, was struck down by a chunk of concrete and fatally injured."

In this section there were some miraculous escapes along with the tragedy toll.

Mrs. Ida Clarke, organist in the theatre had just finished playing her first number and had reached an exit a few second before the crash came. She was unhurt. As she went out, however, the orchestra filed to their places, Ernesto Natiello, the director, was struck down as he took his place. At the hospital he cried in his delirium:

"Don't hurt my arm, don't hurt my arm. I need it in my work. I need it to conduct with."

But the arm was gone, torn off at the shoulder.

The first violinist, Walter Uhl, struck down and fatally injured, moaned as he was lifted from the ruins:

"Never mind me; go back to the rest."

He was taken across the street to a toy shop, where he died a few minutes later.

Through the night and the day following, the hill of devastation presented its hard, rugged surface to and tired and desperate men who tried to pierce it with picks, sledges, hacksaws, crowbars and acetylene torches. Now and then there was a cry for water piercing the subdued murmurings throughout the ghastly place. Captains of marines, of infantry and of the navy joined with privates to rush buckets to the needed spot. Leaning over crevices made in the resisting surface were doctors, hypodermic syringes in hand, waiting to inject the soothing fluid into the arm of a suffering victim.

Followng the doctors came nurses, who made their way over the rugged deathly piles with bandages, hot water bottles and adhesives.

One could see a hand, then a head, gray with dust, resembling the blue-gray head of a drowned man. Then the cry of the rescue crew—"Stretcher, stretcher."

Gently as the jagged surface would permit, firemen and soldiers would lift a helpless form to the litter and slowly across the deathly pyramid a small band would make its way to the doorway, half clogged with debris.

Once outside, the lights in the theatre lobby transformed the ghost-like group.

"Ambulance, gangway, gangway."

A clang of bells, a roar of motors and the crowds moved back to make way for the vehicle of mercy. Through the horrible night and Sunday few women grew hysterical as one by one—with a slowness that was maddening—the prostrate forms of victims were carried to the morgue.

Says She Can Use Either

A Coquille woman asked last week the following question of the Oregonian:

"Is it not proper for a woman whose husband is dead to use his given name or initials socially on her calling cards or invitations. Would it not also be proper to register at a hotel the same way?"

The Oregonian answers:

"In signing her name a widow is governed by the same rules as when her husband is living.

"It is far better form to use the given name (or initials) of the husband. It is correct also to register at a hotel the same way. In signing letters or documents, however, the widow's given name should be signed. If a widow is well known as a writer or artist or if she wishes to carry her own family name, she may use, for instance, Clara Armitage Green. This is done sometimes when the widow's family name is prominent and widely known and when there are several Mrs. John Greens in the community."

Don't forget that children under 12 attending the Liberty for the week, Feb. 5 to Feb. 9, will be admitted free if they are with their parents. See the program on page three.

The Sentinel and the Oregon Farmer can still be obtained for $2.15 for one year.

A Self Starter

On your automobile may be all right and again it may be all wrong. That all depends on the condition of your battery. When it is run down it is worse than useless—it is exasperating. A cold engine 25 miles from home, no lights, a run down battery, all on account of NEGLECT.

Your SOUL is your main battery. It may not have shown signs of neglect, but some day when it is badly needed IT is very apt to FAIL you. The self accusing finger will not help matters then. Better bring your soul to the Service Station,

The Methodist Episcopal Church

at regualr intervals. Take a little time to have your SOUL cared for now and it will be ready for any and all tests. But a little water of life into your soul battery not less than once a week, oftener if possible. "I am the Way," said Jesus.

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