



FIRE INQUIRY REPORT SCORES CITY COUNCIL

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and protective measures, and have assumed the attitude that the government of Klamath Falls is competent to take care of its interests without outside interference.

To substantiate the above, we quote a paragraph from a type written communication dated January 23, 1920 to the state fire marshal written on the official stationery of the city attorney of Klamath Falls and signed I. R. Struble, mayor:

"Personally I fail to understand how the fire marshal's office can assume jurisdiction over a matter of this sort, as this city is a self governing community and the people elect its officers to use their judgment in the government of the city. They should be more competent to know who are qualified to act as officials of the city, than someone who probably has never seen the city in his life, or who does not live here."

Facilities Grossly Deficient
When the Houston hotel fire broke out there were only three persons on duty at the fire department, to-wit: Fire Chief Keith Ambrose and two volunteer firemen. Assistant Fire Chief Mark Howard, the only other paid fireman, was away on his vacation. The sole fire fighting equipment available for combatting the blaze was a triple combination, motor driven fire truck the capacity of which is 350 gallons per minute and about 3000 feet of hose, 1500 feet of which was of comparatively recent purchase. The fire chief is also driver of the truck. He drove the engine to the nearest hydrant from the fire where the two volunteers alighted and strung the first line of hose and then drove on and strung the second and third lines alone. About this time Sheriff Humphrey and one or two other citizens arrived to render assistance.

Competent witnesses, including the man who drives the street cleaning apparatus and the night patrolman who were among the first to have been apprised of the fire, testified at the inquest and at our inquiry that it required from 15 to 17 minutes to get the alarm through central to the department. The night telephone operator says that the call was received and put through with dispatch. The fire was discovered at 3:17 and the alarm was not received at the department until 3:35 according to testimony. Certain it is that the department was late in arriving upon the scene and the fire had gained much headway.

Water Pressure Falls
The water pressure during the early stages of the fire was very low. Had it been adequate or up to standard Fire Chief Ambrose is confident that he could have confined the blaze to the hotel at least and saved all of the other buildings destroyed and possibly could have saved the lives of some of the innocent victims. During the first few minutes of the play of the first line of hose there was fair pressure, all agree, but the pressure went off some say for a period of from ten to fifteen minutes during which interval the heat became so intense that the fire fighters were forced to give ground. Several residents in the same block could get no water from their garden hose. One man could not get enough water in his house to cleanse his false teeth.

Water system officials account for this serious deficiency in the face of such an emergency when the first few minutes means the winning or losing of a battle against the fire fiend as being due to the crossing of wires and shutting off of the current to the auxiliary pumper which supplies water directly into the mains. It was also admitted that one of the three reservoirs which

supplies the city was shut while undergoing repairs. The water mains throughout the city are small not at all in proportion to the growth of the community hence the pressure, at best, was not equal to the demand.

Conclusions and Recommendations
In view of the foregoing facts, deduced from the evidence submitted at the hearings, interviews with prominent citizens and other information gathered during our investigation, we are led to the following conclusions and to the correction of the errors and evils as pointed out in these conclusions we most respectfully submit as our recommendations:

The fire started from some unknown cause in rubbish at the rear of the Houston hotel.

The fire department is utterly lacking and sorely deficient in mechanical and other fire-fighting apparatus and equipment and the man power is far too low for a community of the size. (As a result of the fire some extra men have been put on the fire fighting force—at least temporarily.)

The water system, especially the mains in the business section, is wholly inadequate as was evidenced by the failure of the pressure when put to the crucial test. The mains are those originally installed for the small town of a few hundred people and their capacity is not at all in keeping with the industrial and population growth of the city.

The fire alarm system is not in keeping with the community of Klamath Falls and its rapidly developing proportions and responsibilities.

The city is deplorably lacking in fire prevention and protective ordinances and sadly in need of legislation to cure the evils which exist at present and have been permitted to exist for more than a year past, and to clothe the fire chief with ample inspection and curative authority without being handicapped and hindered by petty political and factional strife and jealousies.

"Somebody is Responsible"

The officials who shape the political destiny of Klamath Falls from the mayor down are men of sterling worth and unimpeachable character, so far as the results of our investigation disclosed. The great trouble seems to be that they are too easy-going of the "it never has happened and, therefore, it never will happen" sort. They feel and appreciate their duties and responsibilities keenly; their motives are unquestioned and their openly avowed ambition to clean up and rid their proud city of its deadly menaces may be sincere, but they seem to lack the courage of their convictions. They shrink from hurting anyone's business or feelings and their courage crumbles and falls before the least criticism or opposition until they have come, by force of habit, to choose the course of least resistance.

The citizenship of Klamath Falls, too, is of the highest order of God-fearing and God-loving people. There is not a man or woman endowed with ordinary powers or observation and reasoning but is and had been aware of the dangerous conditions that have threatened their community and home-life for many months. They, like the peoples of other communities, are so thoroughly imbued with the love of peace, harmony and prosperity that they dread the discordant agitation for betterment of civic conditions. Most everyone is "too busy making money" and having a good time to lend ear to the calamitous harpings for civic reforms. "Retrenchment in governmental affairs" along the line of cutting down budgets and lowering taxes is far more musical and harmonious.

Chief of fire department Ambrose is particularly qualified for the position of chief and is greatly interested in fire prevention and inspection work, and if given the 100% co-operation of the city officials it is only reasonable to presume that the fire waste in Klamath Falls could be reduced at least 50% and possibly more.

Too Much "Passing The Buck"
The mayor "passes the buck" to the council and the council passes it on to the people. Klamath Falls, however, has learned her lesson in the hard school of experience, heart-rending and regrettable though it has been, of frightful cost of lethargic indifference and dallying with serious problem of civic improvement along

preventive and protective lines, and we feel sure—at least we sincerely hope—that those precious lives have not been sacrificed in vain.

We do not feel competent or called upon to place the blame for this terrible calamity. Nobody is willing to assume the blame or responsibility for the disaster personally nor to point the finger of accusation toward any individual or group of persons yet, in the language of one of the leading members of the Klamath Falls clergy who delivered an eloquent sermon upon the occasion of the public and joint memorial services, held in respect to the victims whose innocent lives were sacrificed upon the altar of carelessness said:

"Someone is responsible for this tragedy. Responsible to God, to the nation, for the loss of its citizens, to the state and

to the city, and, most of all to the relatives of these victims. We are disgraced in the eyes of the whole state. We are branded as a community where the law is not enforced and we are sunk low in our neighbor's esteem. Let us admit our humiliation frankly and correct it by sincere reform."

We submit herewith the transcripts of testimony produced at the coroner's inquest, prior to our arrival upon the scene, and that elicited at our own hearing (112 pages-transcript of testimony) in support of the foregoing findings and in justification of the conclusions.

Respectfully yours,
H. H. POMEROY,
Chief Deputy Fire Marshal.
GILBERT W. ALLEN,
Asst. Deputy Fire Marshal

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