

LATEST

Fire Breaks Out at Tewksbury State Hospital

Several Towns Send Aid as Flames Threaten
Bancroft Hall—Patients Not Endangered

TEWKSBURY—Fire broke out shortly before 10 o'clock this morning in Bancroft hall, the former tuberculosis ward building of the Massachusetts State Hospital and Infirmary. Alarms were sounded in rapid succession calling Tewksbury and Billerica fire apparatus to the scene, and fire trucks in other nearby towns were ordered held in readiness to respond if additional help should be necessary.

Officials at the hospital reported that no patients were being housed in Bancroft hall and that the fire apparently had made considerable headway before being discovered.

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Unused TB Building Suffers Heavy Loss

Tewksbury, Billerica and Lowell Firemen Save Bancroft Hall From Destruction

TEWKSBURY—Speedy work on the part of firemen saved Bancroft hall, former tuberculosis sanitarium at the Tewksbury State Hospital and Infirmary, from destruction this forenoon when fire broke out in the central section of the rambling two-story structure and spread rapidly, endangering the entire building.

Because of its location far from the main hospital buildings, few of the patients realized that a fire was in progress and there was not the slightest sign of panic.

The building had not housed any patients for nearly 18 months, and only a week ago all electrical circuits entering the building had been cut off as a protective measure. The sprinkler system also had been shut off because of the danger of freeze-ups but it was turned on again while the fire was in progress by Bernard Greene, and aided materially in checking the flames.

May Have Been Set

The cause of the fire could not be determined, but Dr. C. Winthrop Houghton, superintendent, expressed the belief that an inmate might have wandered away from the main building and started the fire. The state fire marshal's office was notified while the fire still was in progress and Inspector James Winn was ordered here to conduct an official investigation.

Two boys, one of them Winthrop Houghton, Jr., son of the superintendent, discovered the lower floor of the office section of the building ablaze at about 9:30. Dr. Houghton ordered the fire-fighting crew of the hospital to the scene and immediately called on Tewksbury, Billerica and Lowell firemen to assist. The entire Tewksbury department, in charge of Chief Alden C. Haines, responded, while Lowell sent Engine 3 in charge of Chief Charles F. Stackpole, and Billerica sent Engine 1, Engine 5 and Ladder 1 from the Center with Chief Harry Waite in charge.

Quick Stop

When firemen arrived, the lower floor of the central section of the building was a mass

of flames and several hose lines were brought quickly into action, pouring hundreds of gallons of water into the building. The sprinklers also were put into service at about the same time and aided in knocking down the exposed flames, but the fire had eaten into the partitions and mushroomed through walls and flooring.

Holes had to be chopped into the plaster walls and ceilings at various points throughout the central section of the building as firemen traced the spread of the flames, but within 90 minutes of the first alarm, the last trace of fire had been drowned out.

Dr. Houghton was unable to estimate the loss, but it is believed that the section in which the fire started was heavily damaged.

Infirmary officials praised the firemen highly for the quick stop they made of the fire which had given every evidence at the outset of sweeping the entire structure.

Bronislaw Kanski, a member of Tewksbury's Ladder 4, was the only casualty, suffering lacerations of the hand when he came into contact with some heavy wire while fighting the fire.

Present at the scene of the fire was Tewksbury Police Chief Cyril L. Barker who took charge of traffic.

City Manager John J. Flannery and City Councilor Joseph J. Sweeney accompanied the Lowell fire chief to the fire.