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INDEXED

*NYC Fire Department*  
*NYC Fire alarm systems*

NEW YORK, December 14th, 1896.

Hon. William L. Strong, Mayor,  
New York City, N.Y.

My Dear Sir:-

Last September while engaged in a Western city, I read of the decease of Austin E. Ford, a gentleman whom you had appointed a member of the Board of Fire Commissioners, of the City of New York.

Some months previous, I had been employed to aid in preparing charges against Superintendent Smith of the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, and subsequently aided in trying the same. I was instructed by a majority of the then existing Board, to critically examine and fairly present all matters relating to the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau.

Very soon after accepting this employment, I learned that Mr. Smith was supported very strongly by influential persons, whose political affiliations were certainly not with those who desired a reform administration. At the conclusion of the evidence for and against Smith, the case was adjourned for three weeks. In the meantime, unfortunately for your administration and the City of New York, Mr. Ford died.

Fearing the evil consequences that might follow the appointment of an unsuitable person to succeed him, in the Board of Fire Commissioners, I wrote you a letter dated at Cincinnati, which read as follows:

"I am here for a few days on important business. I would very earnestly ask you, before appointing a successor to Mr. Ford, to look into the facts developed in the Smith trial. The Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau has been for years a nest of rottenness. There has been more than \$200,000 stolen from the city in the construction of the underground cable system. These are grave assertions, but I can establish

"them to your satisfaction.

"Your administration should have the credit of unearthing these "frauds and cleaning up the rascality. I write you this, simply in "your, and the public's interest. I have no interest of my own in the "premises. I believe it is your intent to give a clean business admin- "istration to New York City. I have ever so declared in public and pri- "vate, and I want to help you to do it."

Sunsequently you appointed Mr. Sturgis as successor to Mr. Ford.

I went abroad; and, upon my return to America, I learn that Mr. Smith, by a vote of two to one of the commissioners, was restored to duty. As one who has been a constant supporter of your administration, I now desire to place before you certain facts, which I think demonstrate that your "commissioners have abused the confidence you reposed in them, and betrayed the public interests in restoring to duty an officer, who was for years grossly negligent and incompetent. That I have been a constant supporter of your administration, the public prints of this city bear evidence. In the clubs, at public dinners, and as a member of the County Republican Committee of this City, I have on every proper occasion, condemned assaults upon your administration, and contended that, as republicans, all we had a right to claim from you, was a vigorous, aggressive, reform administration. That you were elected to some extent irrespective of party, for the purpose of reforming a bad city government, and fault should not be found because of your lack of partisanship; my claim being, that you "served your party best" by serving your city best.

Soon after your inauguration, a number of republicans began to find fault with your administration, claiming that certain influences were successful in retaining in office many men who had been active in maintaining and carrying on a corrupt city government. In spite of all



your friends could do, the great body of the republicans of this city, who had furnished ninety per cent of your votes, were alienated from your administration; and to-day, upon Mr. Croker's return to the Fourteenth Street organization, he finds welcoming him "back to his own", more than half of all his old appointees, including Superintendent Smith, of the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, in position as of yore. If a good, clean administration could be pointed to, this line of criticism could be partially met; but your opponents have lately begun to assert that your administration was not only nondescript in politics, but lacking in every essential element characteristic of a genuinely reform administration, and that the very magnitude of your opportunities to have made a name in history, and to have not only scotched, but absolutely destroyed, the bad elements heretofore banded together for the plunder of this city, seems to have frightened your administration into a degree of inertia, indicative of paralysis which precludes every hope of reform from it.

This form of criticism may not reach you. It certainly will not be brought to your attention by the parasites who surround you, and who are seeking neither the good of the republican party, nor the good of the City of New York, but their own petty aggrandizement, in daily running to you with their mis-information, and surrounding you with their unhealthful effluvia.

Months of constant labor in investigating and preparing the evidence, relating to the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau for the past eight years, has taught me that there is no place too great or too small, too important, or too sacred, to escape the rapacious venality of certain

commorants who have lived by public plunder; and that gross incompetency, aloied to positive dishonesty, characterized the history of the Fire Alarm Teletraph Bureau of this city down to, and including the first few weeks of the appointment of your first Board of Fire Commissioners.

You were asked before making the appointment of Ford's successor, to read the testimony of Mr. Smith himself, and of Mr. Carty, the electrical engineer of the Metropolitan Telephone Co. of this city: and after reading, to satisfy yourself that your appointee, whoever he might be, would be a man of sufficient ability to understand, and courage to perform. You asked me if I had any one to recommend as an appointee? I told you "No I have no one to recommend; my sole anxiety is, that you should make a good appointment."

Hundreds of pages of testimony were taken in Smith's trial, but Mr. Sturgis, in a few days, was prepared it seems, to cast the most important vote that he probably ever has or will cast in his life. Smith was restored, and the incumbency that has characterized the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau for the past fifteen years, is again in, full sway, thereby arming your enemies with ugly material to use against reform and good government.

Permit me to call your attention to a few points in the case, to the end that you may, in so far as you can, repair the evil that has been done this city by your commissioners.

I quote from the opinion of commissioner Sturgis.

"It is not proven that the necessary funds or authority could have been obtained, and I am not justified in speculating affirmatively on that point."

This alludes to the alleged fact that Mr. Smith could not help



having a telegraph system which was recording day by day a great number of failures, because of "lack of funds and authority".

It is queer that Mr. Sturgis finds that the bad system could not be remedied, because of "lack of funds". In Mr. Sheffield's opinion, filed before charges were drawn against Mr. Smith, he boldly asserted "The New York Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau is the best in the world"; and Smith swore in his answer that he "kept and maintained the best fire alarm system in the world", but, at the conclusion of the evidence, both Sturgis and Sheffield are driven to furnishing lame excuses to explain why Smith is not to blame for its being the worst in the world.

Mr. Smith's testimony, now on file in the fire commissioners office, admits that his system overhead and underground was failing daily. It is also in evidence that the failures were owing partly to defective springs, rust, broken terminal screws and like avoidable and petty causes; yet Smith did not take steps to avoid or prevent them. Hundreds of injuries to circuits from magnet wires coming in contact with the iron boxes were recorded. The boxes could have been insulated and failure prevented, at a cost of one dollar per box, yet Mr. Sturgis says, "the necessary funds" could not have been obtained. It cost more to remove troubles of this character, than the radical change would have cost; and the argument of "lack of funds" is of no force.

Mr. Sturgis not only disregards all of the testimony that was offered on the subject of "ways and means", but in addition, he misstates when he says that Mr. Smith "had not the authority". Mr. Smith's authority comes from the law and rules of the Board of Fire Commissioners.

You will find among the Rules of the Board, the following:

"He (the superintendent), shall have the control of all operators, clerks, linemen, battery men and climbers, and all other employees assigned to him; and he is charged with maintaining the Fire Alarm Telegraph in proper repair, and, in addition, under the Rules and Regulations, shall himself prescribe such necessary Rules for the Government of the employees serving under his direction, as are not herein contained."

Such was the responsibility of the Superintendent; but the facilities were equal to the responsibilities. "Extra pay-roll No.1.", ex-president Purroy swore, was provided to meet such "emergencies as the Superintendent might find, arising from time to time"; and this "Extra Pay-roll" ran from \$647.25 per week upwards for the last three months of Mr. Purroy's administration; and ran into tens of thousands of dollars every year, from the time it was devised, until the time that the new Board was appointed.

I do not believe that the many hundreds of thousands of dollars represented by the "Extra Pay-roll No.1.", were properly and honestly expended for the city. I do not see how any man can believe, with daily failures occurring, that any of the money of "Extra pay-roll No.1." was used for the "emergencies of the service". Mr. Sturgis shuts his eyes to the evidence when he states that the Superintendent had not the "necessary funds or authority".

The evidence shows that no other city had such a record of Fire Alarm Telegraph failures as New York. All the other cities of the United States did not have to exceed one-twentieth of one per cent of failures of their boxes of Fire Alarm Telegraphy to work when pulled for fires or tests. New York City had over two per cent of failures of its boxes to work; and its underground system in its record of failures,



greatly exceeded two per cent. Yet Mr. Sturgis disposes of these facts by saying:

"The value of the records of other cities is modified by the uncertainty as to their minuteness and accuracy. The evidence indicates that none will bear comparison with our own, in these respects--a fact which is greatly to the credit of the Superintendent--as from this armory of facts alone can the evidence to prove his incompetency under this charge be drawn."

Suppose this were true--are not the thousands of unnecessary and avoidable failures recorded by Smith's subordinates good evidence against him ?

But Mr. Sturgis' statement is a singular perversion. The records of the other cities were established by the production of the records themselves of those cities before the commissioners and by the sworn testimony of Superintendent Mead of Pittsburgh, Assistant Superintendent Wafer of Brooklyn, Superintendent George of Boston, and others. It is an insult to these witnesses to say that their testimony or their records were "modified by uncertainty."

Again, it is unpardonable trifling with the truth to say that: "it is from this armory of facts (Smith's records) alone can the evidence to prove his incompetency under this charge be drawn."

It is in evidence that Mr. Carty, Electrical Engineer of the Metropolitan Telephone Co. went from box to box, from terminal post to terminal post, of the underground cable system, and found decay and rotteness at every point he examined; none of which were on the records. Smith's incompetency is proved absolutely by the records of the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau; but it is also conclusively proved by the testimony outside the records of the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau.

Mr. Brophy, an electrical engineer of Boston, testified that he inspected many terminal heads and many boxes, and found the entire system in so far as he examined it, "very bad". This was not on the records. Probably the United States could not furnish two men higher in their special fields as electrical engineers than are Mr. Carty and Mr. Brophy, and yet these witnesses, totally disinterested, not connected with the government of the City of New York, nor wanting to be so connected; nor with any Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, nor with any Cable Company, nor with any Box Manufacturing Company, nor with any Supply Company, are totally ignored by Sturgis and Sheffield.

You will find on page 224, in Mr. Carty's testimony, the following:

"From my examination of the cable system, I should say it is in a condition of progressive decay, and is certain to result in numerous and continuous failures. I also say that the construction and condition of the boxes, judging from those I have examined, show that the Fire Alarm System is in a dangerous condition."

To Mr. Brophy, on page 292, I put the following question:

"Q. What is your judgment of the condition of the New York Fire Alarm System; is it good, bad or indifferent?"

"A. I regret to be obliged to say, it is bad. As to the cables, if the same conditions exist throughout the system, as in the portion I have examined, a greater part of the cables that terminate in the boxes are in a bad condition."

Now, Mr. Mayor, not one word was offered in contradiction of the testimony of these and other experts; nor is there any allusion to this testimony in the opinion of Sheffield and Sturgis.

The entire electrical business of this city is done in a slipshod, disjointed manner; as, for instance, the Police Department controls its own electrical appliances, including both cables and overhead wires.



The Fire, and other departments, the same.

In the other leading cities of America and of Europe, this is not the case. In Philadelphia, Boston and elsewhere, a single officer controls the placing of all wires in the city, whether they are of a municipal or private character.

In 1888 there was begun in this city the laying of underground cables for fire department purposes; the contention being that underground cables would be free from almost all chances of failure to transmit information. The work was continued year by year until 1894, at which time, there were about one hundred miles of cables laid with an average of eight conductors to a cable, at a total cost of about \$500,000. Mr. Smith was the Superintendent under whose direction this cable was supposed to be laid; but almost from the day the first cable was laid until this day, the record of the failures of the underground system to work, considering the relative usual ability of each to interruption, many times exceeds in number that of the overhead system.

One of the charges against Mr. Smith was that he drew his specifications for the benefit of Contractor Wylie; and the result of the conspiracy or incompetency, in the matter of laying the underground cables, was the loss of more than two hundred thousand dollars to the City of New York. But, Mr. Sturgis has the effrontery to say: "Testimony of Wylie shows the specifications gave sufficient information for intelligent bidding." Many disinterested, expert witnesses said the specifications did not, but Wylie says they did. There is a homely saying: "Ask my brother if I am not honest", which surely applies here.

In the brief which I send you with this letter, you will find on pages forty to fifty, evidence set forth which does not leave any room for an honest business man to reach any other conclusion than that the city was defrauded out of this large sum of money. If we had been compelled to pay a quarter of a million too much for a good cable system the citizens might not mind (?). The public do not usually scrutinize closely municipal expenditures if they get good results. Remember that ~~that~~ which we got for our money was the kind of a cable system described by Carty and Brophy. We not only were charged twice the price that the best underground cable system should have cost, but we receive a cable system which is dangerous and nearly worthless. Yet all this in the trial for the removal of Mr. Smith for incompetency is ignored.

Had a court-martial been called to try Benedict Arnold for his treason at West Point, and had the court-martial restored him to his command in the American Army, it would not have been a more flagrant abuse of power than that which has been committed by commissioners Sheffield and Sturgis in restoring Smith.

These gentlemen undertake to justify themselves, by referring to the testimony of the underwriters of this city. It is a false pretense. Read the testimony of the underwriters given at the trial of Smith, and I know you will agree with me in saying that the testimony should not have had one particle of consideration in making up a judgment. These amiable club acquaintances of Mr. Smith neither personally or officially represented the underwriters of the city.

To show you Mr. Mayor, how the insurance people of the city



view the matter, I would ask you to read the Insurance Press of November 4th and 11th, 1896, a paper published at #101 Cedar Street in this city, and which has a high standing in insurance circles.

I would also ask you to read "Fire & Water", the most prominent Fire Department paper in the country, published in the City of New York at #93 William Street. In its issue of November 14th, it says:

The plain duty of the fire commissioners of the City of New York in the case of Superintendent Smith, of the Fire Alarm Bureau, was "to fill his position with a man of more progressive ideas. The commissioners who voted for his acquittal of the charges brought against him have failed to discharge their duty towards the people they represent. The evidence produced at the trial of Superintendent Smith showed that New York's Fire Alarm System was very far behind the age, and that Mr. Smith was responsible for this condition."

This journal asks the legislature to abolish your Board of Fire Commissioners "because of their inefficiency" x x x "without waiting for the adoption of the charter for the greater New York."

Let me quote you another sentence from this insurance journal;

"So long as such men control the fire department of New York, the insurance companies and others, will have to keep a close look-out for blunders similar to those which commissioners Sheffield and Sturgis have made; otherwise some startling catastrophe may be looked for."

Mr. Sheffield in his opinion makes the point that, "No loss of life or property has occurred, by reason of the failures of Smith's Bureau."

How does Mr. Sheffield know? There are more than one thousand entries on the records of the fire alarm telegraph bureau, showing that boxes did not work when pulled for fire, during Smith's incumbency, as Superintendent. When a box does not work when pulled for fire, the party attempting to send the message must go to the next box; therefore every time that a box refused to work when pulled for fire, there was

some delay in notifying the Fire Department. Chief Bonner, Mr. Purroy and Mr. Smith all admit that every second lost in getting to a fire, incalculably increases the difficulty of the Fire Department in putting it out. Who can say how much increased the fire losses have been by reason of the thousands of times Smith's Bureau failed to work when pulled for fire? No wonder the insurance journal says "some startling catastrophe may be looked for."

The Insurance Press, in its issue of the fourth of November says:

"The opinion of the new commissioner, Mr. Sturgis, is a marvel of 'logical' laboriousness. It will be admired no doubt by those who know a good thing when they see it. How oblique Mr. Sturgis' vision is, is suggested by his grandiloquent allusion to the 'testimony of the fire underwriters of this great city'. What kind of a judicial mind is it that sees in the testimony of the three or four modest underwriting gentlemen who appeared before the board 'the testimony of the fire underwriters of this great city', and sweeps aside the testimony of real experts, practical electricians and fire alarm telegraphers as possessing no value whatever? The hiatus in the outcome of the Smith trial is that fire underwriters are put in the position of apparently being perfectly satisfied with a fire alarm system which is antiquated, rusty, dusty, rotten, in its insulations, in a 'condition of progressing decay' (so far as its underground wires are concerned), and which fails to do its work two times in one hundred times."

One of the oldest and most influential journals in the United States, "The Spectator", says:

"The testimony relative to the deficiencies of the Fire Alarm System should not be ignored, and, if necessary, a committee of electrical experts should be appointed to report fully upon it."

Other Insurance Journals say:

"There appears to be no doubt that the Fire Alarm System of New York is far behind that of many other leading cities in point of efficiency.--U.S. Review, Philadelphia."

"Many will question whether the final result was justified by



"the testimony offered, for there were many expert underwriters who entered their remonstrance against the present state of affairs in the department presided over by Superintendent Smith.-The Standard, Boston."

"In the opinion of experts the Fire Alarm System of New York City is wholly inadequate.--Fireman's Herald, New York."

Please permit me to call your attention to the editorial in that most valuable magazine, "City Government", published at #150 Nassau Street this city, in its issue for November, pages 112 and 113.

"By the verdict of the majority of the New York fire commissioners, J. Elliott Smith, Superintendent of the Fire Alarm Bureau, is a competent official and his department is in a satisfactory condition. This verdict comes in the face of the facts that the New York fire alarm system is absolutely the worst in this country. x x x The decision of the two commissioners forms nothing more nor less than another case of 'white-washing', so common with municipal official investigations in this country. x x x As a matter of fact, nearly all of the competent testimony given at the trial showed the fire alarm system of New York to be in a most deplorable condition and a menace to the safety of life and property. Yet Commissioners Sheffield and Sturgis voted to reinstate Superintendent Smith, thereby giving their official approval to New York's inefficient fire alarm service."

Remember Mr. Mayor, it is you and the men who nominated you, and your administration, that will be held responsible before the public; not the unknown Mr. Sturgis and Mr. Sheffield; and, when the insurance and other press of this city and of the country assail, as it is assailing this decision it is Tammany that is benefited, and real reform suffers because of the sins of sham reform.

Mr. Purroy the leader of Tammany, boastingly testified in Smith's case, that during his incumbency of the office of fire commissioner, he was nine-tenths of the Board. He was the star witness that came forward to defend Smith and the methods of the old board of fire commissioners, which LaGrange and Ford had put upon trial, and for which Mr. Sheffield became the special advocate. Ford's death, Sturgis'

appointment, gave Sheffield the power, and the testimony of Purroy is quoted by Sturgis and Sheffield, as a justification for the reinstatement of Smith. That is reform, Mr. Mayor, with a vengeance.

You also have commissioners of accounts. They have been at the fire department headquarters for more than six months, professedly examining accounts. Either Tammany must have been very correct, or your commissioners of accounts are purblind. They must be of the same warp and woof that a majority of your fire commissioners are. I stand prepared to make good the assertion that a bright, honest expert accountant can, in ninety days' time, point out more than one third of a million dollars taken from the city in the accounts of the fire ~~ix~~ alarm telegraph bureau, for which absolutely no value was given to the city in the ten years ending January 1895. Your commissioners of accounts may have labored, but they have not yet so far as the public knows, brought forth even as much as the fabled mountain did.

Remember that in Smith's investigation, there was only one bureau of the city's government investigated; and, notwithstanding the mass of incompetency and dishonesty disclosed, your commissioners restored Mr. Smith. Suppose our enemies ask:

"Tammany's opponents, headed by Mayor Strong, were brought into power as the result of a combination of false pretenses; Mayor Strong has been in office for two years. What has he shown? What dishonesty have his commissioners of accounts demonstrated?"

The fire commissioners caused a most rigid investigation to be made of one of the most important bureaus of the city. Its honesty and competency were demonstrated and Mayor Strong's commissioners, two out of three, give a certificate of efficiency to the bureau, find nothing



wrong in its administration, and restore its Superintendent who for many years had been Mr. Purroy's 'expert adviser' to office. That is the inference that the magazine, "City Government" says must follow. That is the inference that your opponents will claim is correct. You and I, and every man who can read, knows it is false; but that is what your fire commissioners give your opponents an opportunity to say.

Mr. Sheffield wishes it understood that a majority of the then existing Board of commissioners, were the accusers of Mr. Smith, and therefore they should not have the selecting of counsel to prepare charges and try the case. I think the objection is far-fetched. When a court charges a person with contempt, for instance, it does not hesitate to assign counsel to prepare the charges and present them to the Court.

Mr. Sheffield laboriously attempts to acquit Mr. Smith of conspiracy, entered into between Pearce and Smith to defraud the city in the matter of furnishing electrical supplies. The evidence shows that the city paid from fifty to two hundred per cent more than market prices for supplies purchased. Mr. Pearce and Mr. Smith were jointly charged with being co-conspirators. Mr. Pearce was in the trial room, and in the private offices of the fire department, in consultation with Smith's counsel, including Mr. Sheffield, and yet was not called as a witness. The counsel for Mr. Smith admitted "it would be unwise to call him." Mr. Sturgis says: "Pearce is not hereby exonerated from over-charging, but Pearce is not on trial."

No, Pearce the seller is not on trial, but Smith the buyer was

on trial. Pearce the seller, if on trial, before the present Board, would have been acquitted, just as Smith the buyer was.

You know, Mr. Mayor, as a business man, that from fifty to two hundred per cent over market prices is not paid for goods, month in and month out, year after year, without somebody profiting.

Read the testimony of the chief's assistant, Captain Doherty, who had to go to four different boxes before his third alarm of a great fire was properly received. Read the cross examination of the insurance men.

One of the charges against Smith was that he negligently, and I believe purposely, omitted to keep records. On this point, Mr. Sturgis, as on every other, finds him "not guilty"; but very incautiously adds the following:

"Regarding the system of preserving records, the evidence shows that it is deficient and required amendment. While less important than the work itself it is second only to that, and should be of such a character as to afford to future authorities accurate information of all important details."

Exactly! But that is just what it does not do. It was Smith's duty to have seen that this was done. He negligently omitted to do it, and Mr. Sturgis and Mr. Sheffield find him "not guilty", although Sturgis says as above.

When charges were first discussed, in relation to Mr. Smith, Mr. Sheffield scoffed at them, and said Mr. Smith had the "best fire alarm telegraph system in the world." The sworn answer of Mr. Smith set up that he "had and maintained the best fire alarm system in the world"; but the evidence shows conclusively that he kept and maintained



the worst fire alarm telegraph bureau in America. I believe Constantinople is not as well equipped as New York in the matter of a fire alarm telegraph bureau and because of that exception New York loses the distinction of having the worst in the world.

Mr. Sheffield filed an opinion that no cause for charges against Smith existed; Smith's system was "the best in the world"; but the charges were filed, and now he abandons the claim of its being "the best in the world", and becomes an apologist for this bureau, laboring to show that conditions must be considered in exculpation of its defects. In his last opinion, he makes the following point:

"For instance, if the General Superintendent of the New York New Haven & Hartford Railroad was on trial on the charge of incompetency because a certain number of lives were lost on his system in a given period, and a certain number of accidents occurred by which property was destroyed, it would not be competent testimony to offer, as a witness to prove the charges, the Superintendent of the London & North Western Railway Company in England. That road, I believe, in one year, carried ~~xx~~ millions of passengers without a single accident to either life or property. But it does not prove incompetency in the Superintendent of an American Railroad that, on his line, there were accidents during the same period."

What a far-fetched illustration to be sure. Nobody charged Mr. Smith with being responsible for accidents. Mr. Smith was charged with responsibility for continuing failures which were the result of gross negligence. The element of accident was entirely outside; wholly eliminated from anything put in evidence against Mr. Smith. But take Mr. Sheffield's illustration, would it not be suggestive to the Superintendent of the American Railroad, if it was true, which it is not, that the London and Northwestern Railroad carried millions of passengers without a single accident, to either life or property, for him to examine

the methods adopted by the London and Northwestern, and adopt similar methods on the American Railroad ? He might not be able to do it in a day or a month, or a year; but surely it could be done. He could at least begin to try.

But why should Mr. Sheffield go to England to find an illustration ? When I offered testimony for the purpose of comparing the New York Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau, I went to our nearest neighbors--Brooklyn, Newark, Boston, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Chicago, Cincinnati, Baltimore, Washington--in all these cities the percentage of failures was about one to forty in New York.

What arrant nonsense it is for Sheffield to claim different conditions. Conditions all favored Smith; unlimited money, unlimited authority was his--we should have had the "best fire alarm telegraph bureau", but instead we have the worst.

It is in evidence that the railroad companies of Europe, and the better railroad companies of America, ~~xx~~ use the block system of electric signals; and it is in evidence that the block system is electrically worked, and that there are not as many as one failure in each quarter of a million times that the electrical appliances are called into requisition; but, in the New York fire alarm telegraph bureau, there were two failures in every one hundred times that it was pulled for fire or tests.

I have personally no fault to find with Mr. Sheffield. He was courteous to me throughout. I tried to be to him. We understood each other perfectly from the beginning. He knew I was the attorney against



Smith; I knew he was the chief attorney for Smith.

I write you this letter, in the hope that it will cause you to examine and correct. Your office which is much more important than ~~the~~ the Vice-Presidency of the United States, will soon pass to another. Your incumbency of it is drawing to a close; but there yet remains time to do much to make it possible that your successor will be a man devoted to the cause of honest municipal government. The fire commissioners standing at bay say: "Smith is restored, Wylie the contractor remains; what are you going to do about it?"

History repeats itself--Tweed was a fire commissioner once, and once he said, "What are you going to do about it?" The response was the reiteration of the charge of dishonesty. Tweed went out of office. Should not Smith go out of office? Your reputation, the good of your city, requires that he should.

I conclude by quoting what that highly responsible journal, "Fire & Water" said editorially in its issue of November 28, 1896:

"Mayor Strong, in order to save his reputation, should at once look into the evidence in the case of Superintendent Smith, and see that Commissioners Sheffield and Sturgis right the grievous mistake they if, have made--at least, he intends to hold good faith with the people."

Yours very respectfully,



INDEXED

*Wes  
Lyle  
Superintendent  
of  
Forest Service  
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*Headquarters*  
*Fire Department*

*Bureau Chief of Department,*  
*157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

*New York,* Dec. 22nd 1896 *189*

HUGH BONNER,  
Chief of Department.

Hon. Board of Commissioners,

Gentlemen:-

With much regret I announce the death of the entire Goldsmith family, which occurred at their residence, No. 514 East 58th Street, at 7.36 P. M. on the 20th inst, caused by fire in their apartments.

It would seem from what I can ascertain, after a thorough investigation that the alarm was promptly sent out, the first at 7.36 p.m., box 591, followed at 7.38 P. M. from box 568, which was not sent out and at 7.39 P. M. again from box 591 which was not sent out. The Department arrived about on their usual time except that Engine Co. No. 8 instead of passing through 58th St. proceeded to the fire through 59th Street, which may have caused a very slight delay, but Eng. Co's Nos. 39 & 8<sup>both</sup> arrived at the same time, followed immediately afterwards by the H. & L. Co's. Water was immediately applied to the fire which had entire control of the building from the front door, parlor floor to the 3rd floor.

From what we can learn it seems the alarm was sent out promptly on the fire being discovered, but the locality of the building is such that there are very few, if any pedestrians in the street after

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# FIRE DEPARTMENT.

Bureau Chief of Department,

*New York,*.....*189*

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# Headquarters Fire Department

Bureau Chief of Department,  
157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,

HUGH BONNER.  
Chief of Department.

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dark, as the building is situated on the end of the street, built on the embankment of the East River, which naturally makes it <sup>a very</sup> out of the way locality and it is not possible for any fire to be seen by the passers-by except when it breaks out in a flame.

A policeman, it seems, stood on Avenue A. directly near the box, which was about 200 feet distant from 514 E. 58th St.

The cause of the fire is still unknown although it is assumed it was caused by the up-setting or explosion of a kerosene parlor lamp. The fire extended from parlor floor to second by stairway and so to third floor. It would seem that the children were in the upper story and that the parents evidently went to the rescue of the children and all were caught on the second floor, where the bodies were found after the fire was extinguished.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

Sd., HUGH BONNER.

Chief of Department.

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# FIRE DEPARTMENT.

Bureau Chief of Department,

*New York,*.....*189*

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*Headquarters*  
*Fire Department*

*Bureau Chief of Department,*  
*157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

*New York,* Dec. 28th, *1896*

HUGH BONNER,  
Chief of Department.

Hon. Board of Commissioners,  
Gentlemen:-

I have the honor to transmit the following detailed report of the operation of the Department at fire at Nos. 209 to 233 E. 33rd St. and 214 to 218 E. 34th St., on the morning of the 25th inst.

The first alarm was received at 7-20 A. M. and followed by the 3rd, 4th & 5th alarms respectively at 7-25, 7.30 & 7.50 A. M.

The fire was found to be throughout the buildings at Nos. 211 to 229 E. 33rd St. on the arrival of the Department, and immediately communicated with the seven story building at No. 215 to 229 East 33rd St. by means of archways protected by iron doors on each floor. The fire burned fiercely for quite a while from the fact that the building was old and formerly used as a rubber factory, and was at present occupied by various firms as wood workers. There being no cross walls within the building it permitted the fire to extend very rapidly from building to building.

The Department arrived promptly considering the bad condition of the streets and did effective work after they had been assigned to positions.

The walls from the factory on the east and west side toppled over and crushed the flat houses on either side driving the occupants of said

# Headquarters Fire Department

Bureau Chief of Department,

157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,

HUGH BONNER,  
Chief of Department.

New York, (2) 189

buildings into the street.

The fire communicated to the Polyclinic Hospital, No. 218 E. 34th Street, the rear of such building being entirely exposed to the fury of the fire from the buildings on 33rd Street; the fire entered through the roof and partly destroyed the top story, with but slight damage to the floors underneath.

The following accidents occurred to apparatus, hose and implements, as follows:

Number of lengths of hose burst was 30

2 lengths of Eureka, issue 1888 & 1893 and 2 lengths, issue 1895 were destroyed by falling walls and being burned.

## Accidents to Apparatus.

Handle on deck pipe of Water Tower No. 2 slightly injured, and right hind wheels slightly damaged by heat and right side of tower blistered by heat. Pole of hose wagon snapped off while wagon was turning around

## Injuries to men.

Fireman McDermott, H. & L. Co. 21, struck on left foot by piece of wood, slightly injuring him. Engineer Frank Shay, Eng. Co. 2 received slight injury to right shoulder by falling, while assisting line up.

Water Tower No. 3 was delayed somewhat on its arrival at the fire



# Headquarters Fire Department

Bureau Chief of Department,  
157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,

HUGH BONNER,  
Chief of Department.

New York, (3) 189

owing to the fact that the horses assigned to this apparatus were not able to pull the apparatus through the snow and was impeded in its progress for this reason. In the absence of this tower, not reporting on time, W. T. No. 1 was called by special call, but on its arrival, W. T. No. 3 had arrived in the meantime and was placed in service.

The loss to buildings and stock seems to be total, which will probably amount to \$250,000.00

The dangerous walls I have turned over to the Department of Buildings, who are now at work on the walls with view of razing and making safe.

Very respectfully,

(signed) Hugh Bonner

Chief of Department.

Engine Co. No. 21 found hydrant out of order.

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# FIRE DEPARTMENT.

Bureau Chief of Department,

*New York,*.....189

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5-3



JAMES R. SHEFFIELD.  
O. H. LA GRANGE.  
THOMAS STURGIS.

Commissioners.

*Headquarters*  
*Fire Department,*  
*157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

*New York, November 30th 1896*

Hon. William L. Strong,

Mayor-

Dear Sir:

In conformity with your request I have the honor to submit herewith a statement showing, in brief, the operations of this Department for the week ending at noon on Saturday, the 28th instant, together with a record of changes in the personnel of the Department, and a brief reference to unusual events or occurrences of importance, during the same period:

The Fire Extinguishing force of the Department now consists of -

1175 officers and men-

86 companies, of which 64 are engine and 22 hook and ladder companies, organized into-  
14 battalions.

The equipment of the companies is as follows:

3 Fire-boats, "The New Yorker" at Castle Garden, "Zophar Mills," at foot of Bloomfield Street, N. R., and "William F. Havemeyer," at foot of 5th Street, E. R.

42 having 1 steam fire engine and 1 hose wagon or tender each,

8 having 2 steam fire engines and 2 hose wagons or tenders each.  
 1 having 2 steam fire engines and 2 hose wagons or tenders each,  
 and a Water Tower attached.

5 having 1 steam fire engine and 1 hose wagon or tender, and 1  
 hook and ladder truck each.

1 having 1 steam fire engine and 1 <sup>combination</sup> hose wagon and chemical  
 engine.

2 (in the newly annexed territory) having 1 hose tender and 1  
 hook and ladder truck - to have also a light steam fire  
 engine each.

1 (in the newly annexed territory) having 1 hose tender - to  
 have also a light steam fire engine.

1 ( in the newly annexed territory) having a combination hose  
 wagon and chemical engine.

---

64 engine companies in all.

---

18 having 1 hook and ladder truck each

2 having 1 hook and ladder truck and 1 Water Tower each attached.

1 having 2 hook and ladder trucks.

1 having 1 hook and ladder truck and 1 chemical engine.

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22 hook and ladder companies.

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431 horses are now the property of the Department.



70 fires occurred during the week.

220 companies were called to respond to these fires.

51 telegraphic alarms were received and sent out.

21 verbal alarms were received.

Notable fires - Wednesday, 25th instant, 12:11 P.M. at 1397 and

1399 Second Avenue, S.W. corner 73d Street: 2d alarm, 12:12 1/2

P.M.; 3d alarm, 12:14 1/2 P.M.; special call Water Tower,

12:24 P.M.; under control, 1:36 P.M. Building 6-story brick,

50 x 125 feet; cigar factory; originated on 4th floor; front,

on 2d Avenue, considerably damaged in upper stories and roof;

loss approximating \$50,000.

*Incendiarium, etc*

-----  
Tuesday, 24th instant - Dennis Dwyer, of 2218 Eighth Avenue,

was arrested on charge of setting fire to letter box at 2214

Eighth Avenue, on same date. Declared insane, on 25th inst.,

and committed.

Receipts Bureau of Combustibles for license and permit fees,

etc., for the week-----\$918.00

One trial for delinquency was had and fine of 12 days' pay

imposed.

There were no changes in the personnel of the Department.

## Meritorious Service -

The name of Fireman Martin M. Coleman, of Hook and Ladder 3, placed on Roll of Merit for rescue of a man (without personal risk) from 3d-story window of 134 Third Avenue, during a fire on Wednesday, the 25th instant.

Very respectfully,

*James H. Sheffield*  
President.



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JAMES R. SHEFFIELD,  
O. H. LA GRANGE,  
THOMAS STURGIS.

Commissioners.

*Headquarters*  
*Fire Department,*  
*157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

*New York, December 7th, 1896.*

Hon. William L. Strong,  
Mayor-

Dear Sir:

In conformity with your request I have the honor to submit herewith a statement showing, in brief, the operations of this Department for the week ending at noon on Saturday, the 5th instant, together with a record of changes in the personnel of the Department, and a brief reference to unusual events or occurrences of importance during the same period:

The fire extinguishing force of the Fire Department now consists of-

- 1175 officers and men,

86 companies, of which 64 are engine and 22 hook and ladder companies, in

14 battalions.

431 horses are now in the Department.

73 fires occurred during the week.

283 companies were called to respond to these fires.

63 telegraphic alarms were received.

17 verbal alarms were received.



*Headquarters*

FIRE DEPARTMENT,

*New York,*.....189

DEPT. FIRE

RECEIVED

RECEIVED  
DECEMBER 30 1890

Notable fires - Tuesday, December 1st, 7:05 P.M., at 747

Broadway, a four-story brick building, 25x200, running through to 306 Mercer Street, occupied by bar-fixture concern; fire extended throughout building, damaging it considerably. The fire spread to 743 and 745 Broadway, a five-story brick building, occupied as a clothing manufactory, damaging it slightly. Second alarm, 7:19 P.M.; third alarm, 7:30 P.M.; 4th alarm, 7:38 P.M. Under control, 10:45 P.M. Loss approximately, \$50,000.

Incendiarism, etc.- One, considered of suspicious origin, starting in two places, no one having been in room for about 11 hours prior to alarm. Another fire of suspicious origin, which occurred some time ago, has been under investigation .

Receipts Bureau of Combustibles for licenses, permit fees, etc., for the week-----\$1,212  
Inspections and surveys made for the week----- 162

One trial for violation of rules was had and a fine of 3 days' pay imposed, and one fine of 10 days' pay imposed on a former charge.



Changes in personnel - One mason, who had been previously

discharged, reinstated; one stableman discharged ~~on~~ *after*

trial *on charges of neglect and incompetency.*

Very respectfully,

*James H. Sheffield.*

President.

JAMES R. SHEFFIELD,  
O. H. LA GRANGE,  
THOMAS STURGIS,  
Commissioners.

*Headquarters*  
*Fire Department,*  
*157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

*New York, December 14th, 1896,*

Hon. William L. Strong,  
Mayor-

Dear Sir:

In conformity with your request I have the honor to submit herewith a statement showing, in brief, the operations of this Department for the week ending at noon on Saturday, the 12th instant, together with a record of changes in the personnel of the Department, and a brief reference to unusual events or occurrences of importance during the same period:

The fire extinguishing force of the Fire Department now consists of-

1175 officers and men,

86 companies, of which 64 are engine and 22 hook and ladder companies, in

14 battalions.

429 horses are now in the Department.

67 fires occurred during the week.

232 companies were called to respond to these fires.

55 telegraphic alarms were received.

18 verbal alarms were received.



Incendiarism, etc.- A fire of suspicious origin occurred at 319 East Fifty-third Street, on December 10th. Father & Son, both named Henry Otto Louis Schepp, were arrested, and their examination set down for to-day.

Receipts Bureau of Combustibles for licenses, permits and penalties for the week----- \$925.50

Inspections and surveys made for the week----- 162

2 persons were arrested for violation of law, in refusing to comply with the regulations relating to the storage of explosives, etc., and held in \$100 bail for trial.

Five trials for violations of rules were had and fines, aggregating 14 days' pay, imposed.

Changes in personnel - Appointed, 2 Climbers. Resigned, 1 Stenographer.

The Board of Electrical Control has been requested to assign separate ducts in the subways of this Department, in order to obviate damage to the cables of the fire alarm system and interruptions of its fire alarm service, caused by the drawing ~~in~~ of telegraph cables of other Departments <sup>into</sup> the same ducts.

Very respectfully,

*James H. Schep*  
President.

*Headquarters*  
*Fire Department,*  
*157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

JAMES R. SHEFFIELD,  
O. H. LA GRANGE,  
THOMAS STURGIS,  
Commissioners.

*New York, December 21st 1896*

Hon. William L. Strong,

Mayor-

Dear Sir:

In conformity with your request I have the honor to submit herewith a statement, showing, in brief, the operations of this Department for the week ending at noon on Saturday, the 19th instant, together with a record of changes in the personnel of the Department, and a brief reference to unusual events or occurrences of importance during the same period:

The fire extinguishing force of the Fire Department now consists of -

1175 officers and men,

86 companies, of which 64 are engine and 22 hook and ladder companies, in

14 battalions.

450 horses are now in the Department. The snow-storm necessitated the hiring of 20 extra horses, at \$2 per day, for a number of days.

95 fires occurred during the week.

332 companies were called to respond to these fires.

73 telegraphic alarms were received.

23 verbal alarms were received.



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*Headquarters*

FIRE DEPARTMENT,

*New York,* ..... 189

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Incendiarism, etc.- Henry Otto Louis Schepf, Sr., arrested (as reported last week) in connection with fire of suspicious origin at 319 East Fifty-third Street, on the 10th instant, was taken to Bellevue Hospital for examination as to his sanity.

Floyd L. Danforth, was charged with setting fire to 7 East One hundred and twenty-fifth Street, and was taken to Bellevue Hospital for examination as to his sanity

Receipts Bureau of Combustibles for licenses, permits and penalties for the week-----\$1,082.00  
 Inspections and surveys made for the week----- 125

Four trials for violations of rules were had and fines, aggregating 11 days' pay, imposed.

Changes in personnel - There were no changes in the personnel of the Department.

New apparatus received -  
 2 steam fire engines.  
 2 Hose Wagons.

Very respectfully,

*James H. Sheffield*  
 President.



JAMES R. SHEFFIELD.  
O. H. LA GRANGE.  
THOMAS STURGIS.

Commissioners.

*Headquarters*  
*Fire Department,*  
*157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

*New York, December 28th, 1896*

Hon. William L. Strong,  
Mayor -

Dear Sir:

In conformity with your request I have the honor to submit herewith a statement showing, in brief, the operations of this Department for the week ending at noon on Saturday, the 26th instant, together with a record of changes in the personnel of the Department, and a brief reference to unusual events or occurrences of importance during the same period:

The fire extinguishing force of the Department now consists of -

- 1174 officers and men,

86 companies, of which 64 are engine and 22 hook and ladder companies, in

14 battalions.

450 horses are now in the Department.

129 fires occurred during the week.

431 companies were called to respond to these fires.

96 telegraphic alarms were received.

38 verbal alarms were received.

FIRE DEPARTMENT,

New York, ..... 189

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Incendiarism, etc.- Henry Otto Louis Schepf, Sr. and Jr., father and son, previously reported arrested, etc., in connection with the fire at 319 East 53rd Street, on the 10th instant, after a preliminary examination by a City Magistrate, were required to give bail in \$2,500 each, to await the action of the Grand Jury.

Floyd L. Danforth, for setting fire to No. 7 East 125th Street, whose arrest was previously reported, was also held to await the action of the Grand Jury.

Notable fires.- Copies of the reports of the Chief of Department on the fires which occurred at 514 East 58th Street on the 20th instant, and at 209 and 211 East 33rd Street and 214 and 216 East 34th Street on the 25th instant, are herewith enclosed. The Fire Marshal reports the cause of the last fire not discovered.

Receipts Bureau of Combustibles for licenses, permits and penalties for the week-----\$456.00

Inspections and surveys made for the week----- 57

Two trials for violations of rules were had, and fines aggregating four days' pay imposed.

Changes in personnel.- One fireman was dismissed on charges duly tried.

Very respectfully,

*James H. Sheffield*  
President.

Henry Otto Louis Schopf,

previously reported arrested

at 219 East 53rd St

a preliminary examination

to five balls to \$2,500 each

55

and jury

Constitution for setting the

trial was previously reported



*Office of the  
Commissioners of Accounts.*

ROOMS 114 AND 115.

*Stewart Building,*  
280 Broadway

SETH SPRAGUE TERRY,  
RODNEY S. DENNIS,  
Commissioners.

*New York,* December 31, 1896.

Hon. William L. Strong,  
Mayor.

Sir:-

It is the rule of the Fire Department that the various officials in charge of the engine companies and other branches and the bureaus of the Department shall, on or before the tenth day of each January, make a return to the Commissioners of the property in their possession or under their control on the thirty-first day of the preceding month. An examination made of such returns shows the absolute want of system and accuracy in their preparation. Seldom have any returns been made within the required time. The Superintendent of Buildings of the Department, the Superintendent of Telegraph, the Superintendent of Stables and the Purchasing Agent have never made any returns of the property in their possession December 31, 1895. An incomplete return has been made by the Purchasing Agent, but as the same does not show the amount of property on hand at the commencement of the year or the amount of property received during the year, the same is of little value. Nearly all the returns actually made are full of inaccuracies and erasures; to a large extent they cannot be compared with the returns for the previous year, and as far as they are capable of comparison they show large discrepancies. Accompanying such inaccurate returns are affidavits by the persons verifying them to the effect that they are correct; in some cases the affidavits have not been signed or verified.

No record is kept of the property in the possession of the Department and there is no accurate account of property received or delivered by the Department. The position of Property Clerk has been vacant since 1892. In our opinion a property clerk should be appointed at once and under his direction an inventory taken of



all property belonging to the Department. He should keep a property ledger which should contain an inventory of the property on hand, an accurate and full account of all property bought or otherwise received by the Department and of all property delivered to the various persons in control of the houses or bureaus to which delivery is made; the property so delivered should be charged to the persons receiving the same and they should be held accountable therefor. Transfers of property from one officer to another should be receipted for and the receipts should be sent daily to the property clerk and by him credited and charged to the proper officers.

An inventory should be taken at the end of each year in order to compare the property actually in the possession of the Fire Department and its various branches with the property which, according to the records, should be in its possession. In this way the Department at any time would know what property it possessed and where it was located; at the end of each year it would be in a position to know what, if any, property had been taken improperly or had disappeared.

Respectfully submitted,

*Seth Sprague Terry*  
*Henry S. Dennis*

Commissioners.



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MEMORANDUM OF RESCUES IN 1896, FOR WHICH MEDALS WERE AWARDED.

THE BENNETT MEDAL -

To Fireman 1st grade Martin M. Coleman of Hook & Ladder Co.No.3.

Fireman Martin M. Coleman, and two comrades, of Hook and Ladder Company No. 3, at the fire at No. 77 East 10th Street, February 22d, rescued J. C. Walsh, Mrs. King and Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, under the following circumstances:

The fire originated in the rear hall of first floor and communicated, by the hallway, to the third floor, front room, the door of which had been left open. Means of egress were cut off from occupants of upper floors. One man and two women were hanging out of the middle window of fourth floor and one man from window of the hall bedroom on third floor, when the firemen arrived. Two ladders were raised, and Fireman Coleman ascended one of them followed by Fireman Garcia. Mrs. King, at the fourth story window, before she could be reached, either jumped or fell, but Fireman Coleman, who was then about six feet below the top of the ladder, managed to catch her. Fireman Garcia thence conveyed her safely to the street. Fireman Coleman immediately ascended to the top of the ladder and assisted Mr. Lewis down to those below. Then by an extraordinary effort he lifted Mrs. Lewis (who was a heavy woman) to the ladder, which did not quite reach the window, and, assisted by Fireman Garcia, conveyed her safely to the street. The commanding officer (Chief of Battalion Shaw, since killed at a fire) reported that these rescues were made at personal risk. For this brave action the Bennett Medal was awarded to Fireman Coleman.



On December 11th, 1896, Fireman Martin M. Coleman and John S. Mulster of Hook and Ladder Company No. 3, again distinguished themselves by rescuing Joseph Welsh and Mrs. Rose Welsh from the burning building No. 105 East 15th Street, who had been driven by the heat and smoke to the third story front window, and were at the time cut off from escape. These persons were carried down a ladder while flames and smoke were issuing from the front of the building below, setting fire to and burning up signs and wood work thereon. In this rescue Fireman Coleman led, Mrs. Welsh fainting when he took her from the window to the ladder, while Fireman Mulster, who followed Coleman, to make way for him and his burden, was obliged to swing himself underneath the ladder, afterwards assisting Mr. Welsh down the ladder to the sidewalk.

THE STEPHENSON MEDAL -

To Captain Charles H. Perley of Engine Co. No. 6, who was adjudged the most deserving among the company commanders during the year 1896.



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(2)

JAMES R. SHEFFIELD.  
O. H. LA GRANGE.  
THOMAS STURGIS.

Commissioners.

*Headquarters*  
*Fire Department,*  
*157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

*New York, January 4th, 1897*

Hon. William L. Strong,  
Mayor -

Dear Sir:

In conformity with your request I have the honor to submit herewith a statement showing, in brief, the operations of this Department for the week ending at noon on Saturday, the 2d instant, together with a record of changes in the personnel of the Department, and a brief reference to unusual events or occurrences of importance during the same period:

The fire extinguishing force of the Department now consists of-

1169 officers and men.

86 companies, of which 64 are engine and 22 hook and ladder companies, in

14 battalions.

450 horses are now in the Department.

124 fires occurred during the week.

391 companies were called to respond to these fires.

84 telegraphic alarms were received.

42 verbal alarms were received.



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*Headquarters*

FIRE DEPARTMENT,

*New York,*.....189

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Receipts Bureau of Combustibles for licenses,

permits and penalties for the week-----\$631

Inspections and surveys made for the week----- 62

Four trials for violations of rules were had, and fines aggregating ten days' pay imposed.

Changes in personnel - One Foreman and two Engineers of Steamer retired; one Fireman dismissed on charges duly tried; one Fireman resigned.

There were no unusual events or occurrences of importance during the week covered by this report.

Very respectfully,

*James H. Sheffield*

President.

*By reason of the unusual demands made upon the Uniformed force and the severe injuries sustained by many of them in the discharge of their duties the Board has ordered back to active duty eight firemen detailed to other duties.*

*James H. Sheffield*  
President.



JAMES R. SHEFFIELD.  
O. H. LA GRANGE.  
THOMAS STURGIS.

Commissioners.

*Headquarters*  
*Fire Department,*  
*157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

*New York, January 11th, 1891*

Hon. William L. Strong,

Mayor -

Dear Sir:

In conformity with your request I have the honor to submit herewith a statement showing, in brief, the operations of this Department for the week ending at noon on Saturday, the 9th instant, together with a record of changes in the personnel of the Department, and a brief reference to unusual events or occurrences of importance during the same period:

The fire extinguishing force of the Department now consists of -

1168 officers and men,

86 companies, of which 64 are engine and 22 hook and ladder companies, in

14 battalions.

454 horses are now in the Department.

89 fires occurred during the week.

315 companies were called to respond to these fires.

71 telegraphic alarms were received.

23 verbal alarms were received.

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*Headquarters*

FIRE DEPARTMENT,

*New York,*.....189

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Receipts Bureau of Combustibles for licenses,

permits and penalties for the week-----\$1693

Inspections and surveys made for the week----- 79

Six trials for violations of rules were had, and fines aggregating twenty days' pay imposed.

Changes in personnel - Building Superintendent resigned;

three Stablemen appointed; one Fireman retired; one

Fireman dismissed on charges duly tried.

Donations for the Relief Fund were received from the following named:

The Siegel Cooper Co., 100.

John H. Little & Co., \$50, "in grateful recognition  
"of the prompt and efficient services rendered at the fire in their  
"building, Sixth Avenue, corner Fifteenth Street, on the evening of  
"Dec. 23d last."

Very respectfully,

*James H. Sheffield*  
President.

THE NEW YORK FIRE DEPARTMENT and the TAX ON  
FOREIGN FIRE INSURANCE COMPANIES.

- x -

In the year 1857, the Legislature provided, in an Act known as Chapter 548 of the Laws of that year, that all FOREIGN FIRE INSURANCE COMPANIES doing business in the city of New York, should pay to the New York Fire Department, a tax of TWO PER CENT. upon all premiums for insurance against loss by fire, effected in that city. The proceeds of this tax were to be expended by the Fire Department for the relief of the injured, sick or needy members, and their families.

At the time when this Act was passed the Fire Department of the City of New York was a volunteer organization, and so continued to be until the year 1865. In that year the Volunteer Fire Department of the City of New York was abolished, and a new Department was organized, the members of which were to devote their whole time to the public service, and in return were to receive compensation as public employees. CHAPTER 249, LAWS of 1865.

Down to the time of the organization of the paid Fire Department, the Volunteers had received the proceeds of the two per cent. tax collected in the City of New York; but upon its organization the new Department became entitled, by the Act which created it, to receive the proceeds of this tax. But as the newly organized Department had no immediate demand for a relief fund, the Legislature, in 1866, created a corporation, under the name of the TRUSTEES OF THE EXEMPT FIREMEN'S BENEVOLENT FUND OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, and provided that this corporation should receive the tax on foreign fire insurance companies doing business in the City of New York, for a period of FIVE years, to be used to afford aid and relief to such needy



persons, and their families, as had been lawfully discharged from the Volunteer Fire Department of said City.

See CHAPTER 633, LAWS of 1866.

In 1870, the period during which the Trustees of the Exempt Firemen's Benevolent Fund were to receive, this tax was further extended to the 17th day of April, 1877.

In 1877, an Act was passed, providing for an equal division of the proceeds of the tax between the Exempt Firemen's Benevolent Fund and the New York Fire Department. But, in 1879, the Relief Fund of the latter Department being still in good condition, and the demands upon it comparatively light, by reason of the fact that it had then been in existence for only fourteen years, it was agreed between the representatives of the two organizations that the Exempt Firemen's Benevolent Fund should receive the entire proceeds of the insurance tax until the year 1887, upon the understanding that there should be no further diversion of the fund from its legitimate object and that thereafter the tax should be payable to the New York Fire Department.

Accordingly application was made to the Legislature, and an Act was passed without objection, which gave to the Exempt Association the entire proceeds of the tax to the 17th of January, 1887. When this extension was about to expire, in 1887, the representatives of the Exempt Firemen's Association, in violation of the understanding of 1879, made application to the Legislature to allow them to receive this tax for a further period of ten years. This application was strenuously opposed by the New York Fire Department, but the bill was passed and the right to receive the tax was given to the Exempt Firemen's Association for a period which will expire in January, 1897.

Although thirty-two years have elapsed since the Volunteer Fire Department of the City of New York passed out of existence, and



its members ceased to do duty as firemen, their representatives are applying to the present Legislature for a TEN years' further extension to them of the privilege of receiving this tax.

Since 1865, they have received from the tax, and from interest upon its accumulations, more than ONE MILLION EIGHT HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS (\$1,800,000.00), and the annual income from the tax alone now exceeds ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS. According to the published report of their treasurer the amount received for the year 1894, was \$107,244.62. The accumulated fund at that time amounted to about \$255,000.00.

So long as its own Relief Fund was in a prosperous and healthy condition the Fire Department of the City of New York generously assented to the diversion of this tax to the aid of its predecessors, the volunteer firemen. But the time has come when it must assert its rights and oppose any further legislation designed to deprive it of this income.

During the early years of its existence the number of persons receiving aid from the Relief Fund of the Fire Department was small. But through the increasing age of its members, and the arduous and dangerous nature of its service, the number of dependent pensioners has steadily, and, in the past few years, rapidly increased, until, at the present time, they number about FOUR HUNDRED. The income of the Relief Fund, during its early years, was sufficient to accumulate a considerable surplus. But that condition of things no longer exists. The amount paid out for pensions to the sick and disabled, and to the widows and orphans of deceased, members of the force, during the year 1895, exceeded the entire income of the fund by about \$37,000.00; and from the nature of the case this deficit must grow larger year by year, unless the income of the fund is increased. The only source from which to look for such increase is the proceeds of this two per cent. tax upon foreign fire insurance



companies, and a further diversion of that tax from the Fire Department of the City of New York means the speedy bankruptcy of its Relief Fund.

Indeed, the fund would have been bankrupted before this time, but for the fact that in 1885, An Act was passed by the Legislature, donating a portion of the receipts from Excise licenses in the City of New York to its replenishment. But measures now pending before the present Legislature propose to make other disposition of the Excise funds, which, if carried out, will deprive the Fire Department of New York of the chief present source of income for its Relief Fund.

That Department, therefore, strenuously opposes any legislation which will take from it the right which it will enjoy, under existing laws, to receive the proceeds of the two per cent. insurance tax, on and after the 17th of January, 1897.

Fire Deph  
2% Tax

48

59



Fire Dept  
2% Tax

42

59

JAMES R. SHEFFIELD,  
O. H. LA GRANGE,  
THOMAS STURGIS,

Commissioners.

*Headquarters*  
*Fire Department,*  
*157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

*New York, January 18th, 1897*

Hon. William L. Strong,

Mayor -

Dear Sir:

In conformity with your request I have the honor to submit herewith a statement showing, in brief, the operations of this Department for the week ending at noon on Saturday, the 16th instant, together with a record of changes in the personnel of the Department, and a brief reference to unusual events or occurrences of importance during the same period:

The fire extinguishing force of the Department now consists of -

1166 officers and men,

86 companies, of which 64 are engine and 22 hook and ladder companies, in

14 battalions.

456 horses are now in the Department.

84 fires occurred during the week.

292 companies were called to respond to these fires.

58 telegraphic alarms were received.

26 verbal alarms were received.



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*Headquarters*

FIRE DEPARTMENT,

*New York,*.....189

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Incendiarism - Henry Levy arrested on suspicion of having set fire to the premises No. 36 West Third Street, on the 13th day of January. His preliminary examination on the charge before a City Magistrate now in progress.

Receipts Bureau of Combustibles for licenses, permits and penalties for the week-----\$1,316.  
Inspections and surveys made for the week----- 133.

One trial for violation of rules was had and a fine of three days' pay imposed.

Changes in personnel - Ten firemen appointed, one fireman retired, two stablemen discharged.

Very respectfully,

*James H. Sheffield*  
President.



*(Copy)*

JAMES R. SHEFFIELD.  
O. H. LA GRANGE  
THOMAS STURGIS.

Commissioners.

*Headquarters*  
*Fire Department,*  
*157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

*New York, Jan. 19, 1897. 189*

Hon. William L. Strong,  
Mayor, City Hall, New York-

Dear Sir:

In response to a request from your office for a statement of the operations of this department during the year 1896, together with any plans the Department may have for enlarging its sphere of usefulness in the future, I have the honor to submit the following:

The entire personnel of the Department on the first day of January numbered 1370; the active fire extinguishing force numbered 1169, divided into 86 companies, to wit:

Fire Boats-----	3
So-called Single Engine Companies-----	52
do Double Engine Companies-----	<u>9</u>
No. of Engine Companies-----	64
So-called Single Hook & Ladder Truck Companies--	21
do Double Hook & Ladder Truck Companies--	<u>1</u>
No. of H. & L. Companies-----	<u>22</u>
Total number of companies-----	86

*Headquarters*  
**FIRE DEPARTMENT.**  
*New York,* ..... 189

JAMES R. SHELLFIELD  
 O. H. GRAYSON  
 ALBION ST. 12  
 20 W. 10th St.

HOUTWILSON J. ST. 10th

1340th, City Hall, New York

*The Department*  
*Headquarters*  
 107 & 109 East 47th Street

New York Jan. 10, 1891. 189



The double companies are each equipped with two sets of apparatus and horses and have a sufficient complement of officers and men; the usual complement for a single company being one Foreman, one Assistant Foreman and ten firemen. Three companies (one Engine and two Hook and Ladder Companies) have each a Water Tower attached. This tower is under the command of an officer, having from three to five men. One of the Engine companies and one of the Hook and Ladder companies have also each a chemical fire extinguishing apparatus connected therewith.

Since January 1st, 1896, five new Engine companies have been added to the force - four of them in the new territory beyond the Bronx River. There has been added to the apparatus of the Department - in some instances to replace old apparatus condemned and sold because unfit for service, and, in other cases, to add to the efficiency of the Department - four steam fire engines, three hook and ladder trucks, five hose wagons and three chemical extinguishing engines. The introduction of the chemical engine is a new departure and the results attained from its use are very encouraging, showing, in many instances, that small fires were entirely extinguished without other assistance.

There are 450 horses in the service of the Department. Each horse when bought is first placed at the Hospital and Training Stables, situated on West Ninety-ninth Street, where it goes through a course of training for fire duty to test its qualities



and to develop any weaknesses, or faults of temper, which otherwise would not be known until the horse had been accepted and put in service. No horse is bought until trial has assured the Superintendent of Stables of its entire fitness for fire service, and until after the horse has also been tried in actual service with a company.

On the whole it is believed that the equipment of the fire extinguishing force is to-day in better condition than ever before, and therefore the Department is better prepared to cope with large fires, under the most difficult circumstances. Several new, powerful steam fire engines will shortly be contracted for, the necessity for which, in view of the continued erection of very high buildings, is becoming more apparent each year.

#### NEW FIRE-BOAT.

The Board of Estimate and Apportionment having allowed \$50,000 for a new fire-boat arrangements have already been made for plans and specifications therefor, the intention being to have the boat in service before the beginning of next winter. The boat will be of lighter draught than any of the present fire-boats, but of somewhat less pumping capacity than "The New Yorker," which is the most powerful fire-boat in the world. The hull is to be of steel and all present known improvements in the construction of boiler, machinery and pumps will be taken advantage of; and the



additional protection afforded by this boat to the water front, as well as the great charitable and penal institutions situated on Blackwell's, Ward's and Randall's Islands is not only greatly needed, but will supply the only adequate means of quickly extinguishing serious fires, if any occur, in those places.

#### REPAIR SHOPS.

For the first time in many years the entire force of the Repair Shops has been kept at work throughout the year without a single day's suspension to keep within the limits of the appropriation. A vast amount of very necessary work is done at these shops, and by means of thus having a repair plant within the Department a great deal of money is annually saved to the city. During the year 1896 there were 153 extensive jobs of repairing completed, besides a large number of minor ones outside of working hours, being what are called break-downs, and which generally occur during the runs to fires; but by sending a force of men down to the quarters of the company or to the place where the break-down occurred, the apparatus is immediately put in service again, and not only is serious delay thereby prevented, but oftentimes serious expense is saved.

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ed to try, in another way, to add to the efficiency of the shops, by applying for the lot in the rear and connecting with the present site at 130 West Third Street; and, in the meantime, to increase the facilities in the present building, by providing a more powerful boiler and a freight elevator. These improvements have been ordered and will soon be commenced.

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Under condemnation proceedings a new site has been obtained for another Engine Company on Twelfth Street, just west of University Place, and as soon as the funds are available therefor a house will be erected. A company has been very much needed in this locality, and the site selected is at a point almost equally distant from the two or three companies which respond to an alarm from that place, so that the new company will add to the effectiveness of the Department in an overcrowded and important section of the city. Condemnation proceedings have also been begun for the acquisition of sites, as follows:

Seventy-fourth Street near Amsterdam Avenue, for a new truck company.

Mott Street, near Grand Street, and

Great Jones Street, between La Fayette Place and the

Bowery (these last two being for Engine Companies



Nos. 55 and 33, respectively, whose houses will be taken by the Elm Street widening and extension), and on

City Island, for a new Engine Company.

Plans have already been selected and specifications are under way, for a new Engine Company on Forty-third Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, upon a lot acquired last year. Arrangements are also being made for new houses upon the following sites now owned by this Department:

One hundred and fortieth Street near Amsterdam Avenue, new Engine Company.

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Upon the lot No. 160 Chambers Street, assigned to this Department by the Sinking Fund Commission, a house is in process of alteration for Engine Company No. 29, which is now located in the same quarters with Hook and Ladder Company No. 10, on Fulton Street, near Church Street. This will place this company more satisfactorily than it is in its present location, giving both

companies better and much needed accommodation. An appropriation has also recently been made for a new site and building for Engine Company No. 61, in Westchester, and for a building for a new company on City Island. In selecting these sites great care has been exercised to place the companies at the most important points for fire duty, and at the same time to regard the general scheme of summoning many companies to any important section in case there occurs a serious conflagration. The proper disposition of the companies is a matter which has received attention in the past and which is of great moment in guarding the tremendous property interests of the city; and the present Board believes that in the sites selected, it has used judgment and care.

#### HIGH BUILDINGS.

The continued erection of high buildings, particularly in the lower portions of the city, is a matter to which the Department has given considerable attention. The opinion of both the Board of Commissioners and the Chief of Department is that these buildings are a menace to life and property. The height to which our engines can throw water through hose is stated by the Chief to be about 125 feet, so that all stories above this point must be dependent for protection from fire on the means adopted in the building for that purpose. In order to cope with fires in these



buildings the Department feels it is necessary to have the most powerful fire engines and the best of equipment at hand in those localities, and it is very unfortunate that two of the most important companies in the city are so badly housed at the present time as not to permit placing within their company quarters the most powerful steam engines. I refer to Engine Company No. 6, situated on Cedar Street, near Broadway, and Engine Company No. 4, formerly located on Liberty Street; but when that site was taken away by the city it was compelled to be quartered with Hook and Ladder Company No. 15, in Old Slip, thus placing two companies in a building only intended for one, and never intended for an Engine Company. I would strongly urge that the quarters of Engine Company 6 be enlarged by the purchase of the lot in the rear, which would give the Department a lot running from Cedar to Thomas Street, and as the present lot is only fifty feet in depth this would give a lot of 100 feet in depth, and permit of placing the largest and most approved apparatus in those quarters. As this company is within 200 feet of Broadway the importance of its situation can be readily seen. I would also advise the purchase of a new site for Engine Company No. 4, now quartered with Hook and Ladder Company No. 15, as above stated, which site should be in the vicinity of Maiden Lane and Pearl Street.



During the year 1896 more or less extensive repairs were required to 56 buildings of this Department. For making these repairs the sum of \$48,000 was appropriated and spent. The buildings of the Department on the coming in of this <sup>Board</sup> ~~Department~~ were found to be very much in need of repairs, and as many of them were legacies to the Department and city from the old Volunteer Fire Department, they are in a condition which requires constant attention. This work has been pushed with great vigor and it is believed that during 1897 less money will be needed for this purpose than during the year 1896. The Department has under its care about 100 buildings, in most of which both men and horses are compelled to spend the entire twenty-hours of each day, and the buildings must therefore be kept in such a state of preservation as to protect the health of both.

#### PURCHASE OF SUPPLIES.

Under a more rigid superintendence of the system of purchases an average of about ten per cent. has been effected in the prices paid for articles of supply and materials. The refurnishing of the company quarters, previously begun, has been continued, and, with the means now at hand, will soon be completed. This adds to the comfort and well-being of the firemen, who are compelled to spend almost their entire time in quarters. Heretofore the men were required to furnish their own bed linen, but the saving lately effected has enabled the Board to provide this amount, and about three-fourths of the companies have now been furnished with bed linen, blankets and new iron bedsteads.



## ORGANIZATION.

There are now four bureaus in the Department, known, respectively as the "Bureau of Chief of Department", "Bureau of Fire Marshal", "Bureau of Combustibles" and "Bureau of Fire Alarm Telegraph and Electrical Appliances". The "Bureau of Fire Marshal" deals with the questions relating to the origin of fires and the detection of incendiaries. During the past year it secured four sentences for the same crime - that of Louis Gordon being for six years and ten months and that of Isaac Zuker for thirty-six years. The punishment of these prominent offenders, having been given wide publicity, will doubtless have a deterrent effect upon those who otherwise might be tempted to commit this detestable crime, and it is firmly believed that there is now no organized gang of incendiaries at work in this city.

The "Bureau of Combustibles" issues the permits and licenses for the sale of kerosene, gunpowder and other combustible and explosive materials. The receipts from these sources, collected by this Bureau for the year 1896, amounted to \$52,638.55, which sum goes into the firemen's Relief Fund. This is considerably more than the amounts received for the last two preceding years, exceeding the collections for 1894 by \$5,426.55. In addition there has been a more thorough enforcement of the law with regard to compelling drug and paint stores to secure permits.

In the "Bureau of Fire Alarm Telegraph and Electrical Appliances" there are 1083 street fire alarm boxes, of which number 584 are connected underground; 65 apparatus houses, including one fire-boat, are likewise so connected, as well as 6 other Department buildings, 77 school houses and 3 hospitals. These connections are thorough 108 miles of cable, con-



taining about 965 miles of conductors. There still remain 585 miles of overhead conductors, carried upon 4250 poles. More than one-half of the system is now underground, and, with the means available, it is thought that all connections below One hundred and thirtieth Street can be changed to the underground system during the year 1897. The importance of this improvement will be the more readily appreciated when it is learned that within that section of the city now occur nearly ninety-five per cent. of all the fires, and that the danger by sleet storms, the crossing of telephone or telegraph wires, and all the other dangers to which an overhead system is liable, will be practically over when this improvement is completed. The employees of this branch of the Department are both hard-worked and underpaid. Holidays, with the exception of very brief vacations in the summer, are unknown to them, for the nature of their duties requires their presence every day, including Sundays, and their salaries, from the head of the bureau down through all the grades, are less than those paid in the other great cities of the country.

There were 4360 alarms for fire during 1896 and 3890 actual fires, resulting in an estimated loss of \$3,492,604, an average loss per fire of \$975. With the exception of the year 1895, this is the smallest average loss in the history of the Department.

There is an urgent demand from all sections of the recently annexed territory for better fire alarm service and more Engine and Hook and Ladder Companies. The Department has endeavored to meet this demand to the fullest extent that its appropriation would allow, but it feels itself hampered by lack of means to properly equip this territory. For the entire section of the city lying north of the Harlem River, in an area of about 28,000 acres, the Department has but fourteen companies



in service. A request was made upon the Board of Estimate and Apportionment a year ago to increase this number by four, but the request was denied. But the distances are so great and the means of getting from one portion of the territory to another so much hampered by reason of unpaved streets and steep grades that the Department feels there is an urgent need for increasing the number of companies and for an appropriation to meet this demand, and there should also be provided sufficient funds to properly equip that entire district with the fire alarm telegraph service, in order that the small towns and country places where the houses are built of combustible material should have the means at hand to quickly communicate an alarm of fire, and the Department companies sufficient to meet the responsibility.

#### UNIFORMED FORCE.

My review of the condition of the Department would seem to me to fall far short of what it ought to be if I failed to mention the meritorious services performed by the officers and members of the uniformed force and to add a word concerning the lives of those connected with this branch of the city government, which is never called on for duty without reflecting honor upon itself and the city. During the year 1896 thirty-nine officers and men were specially commended by their superiors for bravery in the performance of duty, and their names inscribed upon the Roll of Merit. Of that number sixteen were particularly commended because of the "personal risk" incurred in this service. The latter showed in great degree the cool judgment, courage, agility, strength and devotion to the safety of the citizen at the hazard of their own, for



which New York firemen are justly renowned. The records show that at least thirty-six lives were saved by our firemen in this manner. So frequent indeed are these instances of heroism that the public has come to regard it as almost a matter of course that the firemen will risk their lives in the attempt to save the life of a citizen, and it is only now and then when some specially heroic action arrests their attention that they give it thought, such as that which occurred not long ago where a fireman made a ladder of his body to rescue people imprisoned by fire in their homes, and, held only by the leg by a comrade, sustained the weight of another man, three stories above the sidewalk, directly over an iron picket fence, until his company could raise a ladder and allow him to descend with the living burden in his arms. And the firemen's statement when commended for his act, that he thought the others would have done the same thing if they had had the chance, while modest as to statement, was almost literally true. It is not, however, upon these acts alone that the firemen's claim to popular favor rests. No other class of public servants render such continuous service. With the exception of an allowance of a little over an hour for each meal each day, and three days' rest in a month, the firemen are on duty every hour, day and night. There are no relays or shifts every few hours or every other day, as in other Departments. During each of these twenty-four hours, whether engaged in the care of the horses or on house watch, the fireman is ready for fire duty on the first stroke of the gong, and whether asleep or awake he must respond at once. If it is a signal to which his company responds, he is often on the apparatus and on the way to the fire before he is fairly awake or has had the opportunity to properly clothe himself.



Every company in the city, whether it is assigned to respond to that particular fire or not, is required to be on the apparatus floor and to assist in hitching the horses, on the receipt of all second, third, fourth, fifth and general alarms. At the first stroke of the gong indicating one of these signals, every company from the battery to City Island must "stand to horse", and with every man at his post, await the remaining portion of the signal, which will indicate either to which section of the city they are to go, or that, for the time being, they may return to their quarters. An unbroken night's rest is almost unheard of in many of the busier sections of the city. Nor is the fireman's hardest or most dangerous work always performed in view of spectators at fires, nor indeed is it generally performed at what are known as large fires, the more complete details of which are made known to the citizens by the public press. Most fires are stopped at their very beginning by the skill, coolness and courage of the officers and men in getting at once, through smoke and flame, at the very seat of the fire. In sub-cellar and basement, behind stairways and in unused lofts, fires break out which can only be quickly subdued by getting at the very point where they began. To do this it is necessary to feel or to crawl their way through blinding and suffocating smoke, and, of course, intense and almost unendurable heat. Such fires are generally, and quite naturally, reported as "damage trifling", or "quickly extinguished"; but, in reality, service under such circumstances may be, and often is, far more hazardous than the more conspicuous acts performed at large fires in the full view of spectators. That the fire men's devotion and faithfulness are not, however, unappreciated, is evidenced by the many commendatory letters received from citizens, sometimes accompanied by contributions to the Department Relief Fund. These



amounted for the past year to \$1223. As the payments from this fund for the years 1895 and 1896 exceeded the income, it was with great relief and satisfaction that the firemen received news last year of your approval of the bill giving to the Pension Fund of this Department ten per cent. of the excise moneys belonging to the city of New York. But just as the fear that the demands on the fund were greater than the fund could stand, had been removed by the passage of this act, the Department is again made to feel uncertain of the future by the fact that the proposed Charter for the greater New York provides that the amount derivable from this fund shall not be more than \$75,000 in any one year. This sum would be utterly inadequate to meet the requirements of this fund, and, in my opinion, the enactment into law of such a provision in the new Charter would do more to breed discontent and thereby diminish the efficiency of the Fire Department than any other single act could do. It is earnestly hoped that no such calamity will befall the fire men and the Department, and I think it is not unreasonable to state that it would be a calamity which would also fall, eventually, upon the citizens of this great city. While the Pension Fund does not make heroes of firemen, it may often be that the thought that those a fireman loves best will be cared for in case anything happens to him, is the deciding factor that makes him rush into danger, when otherwise it would have been so easy to have seemingly done his full duty without the risk.

In closing I desire to add that the growth of the city each year makes larger and larger demands upon the Department and calls for larger appropriations to meet these demands; but it is worthy of notice that, for the coming year, the increase in appropriations is almost



entirely applied to bettering the apparatus of the Department and not to salaries. The total increase in the appropriations over last year, including the appropriation for the new fire-boat and new boilers for one of the other fire-boats is \$90,571, of which sum only \$5,571 is for salaries.

It is believed that the discipline of the Department is excellent and that both officers and men are working in hearty accord for the best interests of the service.

Very respectfully,

*Ex*

*James R. Sheffield*  
President.

*Headquarters*  
*Fire Department,*  
*157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

JAMES R. SHEFFIELD,  
O. H. LA GRANGE,  
THOMAS STURGIS.  
Commissioners.

*New York,* Jan. 19, 1897/89

Hon. William L. Strong,

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*Headquarters*

FIRE DEPARTMENT,

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the men were required to furnish their own bed linen, but the saving lately effected has enabled the Board to provide this amount, and about three-fourths of the companies have now been furnished with bed linen, blankets and new iron bedsteads.

#### ORGANIZATION.

There are now four bureaus in the Department, known, respectively, as the "Bureau of Chief of Department," "Bureau of Fire Marshal," "Bureau of Combustibles" and "Bureau of Fire Alarm Telegraph and Electrical Appliances." The "Bureau of Fire Marshal" deals with the questions relating to the origin of fires and the detection of incendiaries. During the past year it secured four sentences for the same crime - that of Louis Gordon being for six years and ten months and that of Isaac Zuker for thirty-six years. The punishment of these prominent offenders, having been given wide publicity, will doubtless have a deterrent effect upon those who otherwise might be tempted to commit this detestable crime, and it is firmly believed that there is now no organized gang of incendiaries at work in this city.

The "Bureau of Combustibles" issues the permits and licenses for the sale of kerosene, gunpowder and other combustible and explosive materials. The receipts from these sources, collected by this Bureau for the year 1896, amounted to \$52,638.55, which



sum goes into the firemen's Relief Fund. This is considerably more than the amounts received for the last two preceding years, exceeding the collections for 1894 by \$5,426.55. In addition there has been a more thorough enforcement of the law with regard to compelling drug and paint stores to secure permits.

In the "Bureau of Fire Alarm Telegraph and Electrical Appliances" there are 1083 street fire alarm boxes, of which number 584 are connected underground; 65 apparatus houses, including one fire-boat, are likewise so connected, as well as 6 other Department buildings, 77 school houses and 3 hospitals. These connections are through 108 miles of cable, containing about 965 miles of conductors. There still remain 585 miles of overhead conductors, carried upon 4250 poles. More than one-half of the system is now underground, and, with the means available, it is thought that all connections below One hundred and thirtieth Street can be changed to the underground system during the present year. The importance of this improvement will be the more readily appreciated when it is learned that within that section of the city now occurs nearly ninety-five per cent. of all the fires, and that the danger by sleet storms, the crossing of telephone or telegraph wires, and all the other dangers to which an overhead system is liable, will be practically over when this additional improvement is completed. The employees of this branch of the Department are both hard-worked and underpaid. Holidays, with

the exception of very brief vacations in the summer, are unknown to them, for the nature of their duties requires their presence every day, including Sundays, and their salaries, from the head of the bureau down through all the grades, are less than those paid in the other great cities of the country.

There were 4360 telegraphic alarms for fire during 1896 and 3890 actual fires, resulting in an estimated loss of \$3,492,604, an average loss per fire of ~~\$895~~ <sup>\$897.84</sup>. With the exception of the year 1895 this is the smallest average loss in the history of the Department.

There is an urgent demand from all sections of the recently annexed territory for better fire alarm service and more Engine and Hook and Ladder Companies. The Department has endeavored to meet this demand to the fullest extent that its appropriation would allow, but it feels itself hampered by lack of means to properly equip this territory. For the entire section of the city lying north of the Harlem River, in an area of about 28,000 acres, the Department has but fourteen companies in service. A request was made upon the Board of Estimate and Apportionment a year ago to increase this number by four, but the request was denied. But the distances are so great and the means of getting from one portion of the territory to another so much hampered by reason of unpaved streets and steep grades that the Department feels there is an urgent need for increasing the number of companies and for



an appropriation to meet this demand, and there should also be provided sufficient funds to properly equip that entire district with the fire alarm telegraph service, in order that the small towns and country places where the houses are built of combustible material should have the means at hand to quickly communicate an alarm of fire, and the Department companies sufficient to meet the responsibility.

#### UNIFORMED FORCE.

My review of the condition of the Department would seem to me to fall <sup>far</sup> short of what it ought to be if I failed to mention the meritorious services performed by the officers and members of the uniformed force and to add a word concerning the lives of those connected with this branch of the city government, which is never called on for duty without reflecting honor upon itself and the city. During the year 1896 thirty-nine officers and men were specially commended by their superiors for bravery in the performance of duty, and their names inscribed upon the Roll of Merit. Of that number sixteen were particularly commended because of the "personal risk" incurred in this service. The latter showed in great degree the cool judgment, courage, agility, strength and devotion to the safety of the citizen at the hazard of their own, for which New York firemen are justly renowned. The records show that at least thirty-six lives were saved by our firemen in this

manner. So frequent indeed are these instances of heroism that the public has come to regard it as almost a matter of course that the firemen will risk their lives in the attempt to save the life of a citizen, and it is only now and then when some specially heroic action arrests their attention that they give it thought - such as that which occurred not long ago where a fireman made a ladder of his body to rescue people imprisoned by fire in their homes, and held only by the leg by a comrade, sustained the weight of another man, three stories above the sidewalk, directly over an iron picket fence, until his company could raise a ladder and allow him to descend with the living burden in his arms. And the firemen's statement, when commended for his act, that he thought the others would have done the same thing if they had had the chance, while modest as to statement, was almost literally true. It is not, however, upon these acts alone that the firemen's claim to popular favor rests. No other class of public servants render such continuous service. With the exception of an allowance of a little over an hour for each meal each day, and three days' rest in a month, the firemen are on duty every hour, day and night. There are no relays or shifts every few hours or every other day, as in other Departments. During each of these twenty-four hours, whether engaged in the care of the horses or on house watch, the fireman is ready for fire duty on the first stroke of the gong, and whether asleep or awake he must respond at once.



If it is a signal to which his company responds, he is often on the apparatus and on the way to the fire before he is fairly awake or has had the opportunity to properly clothe himself. Every company in the city, whether it is assigned to respond to that particular fire or not, is required to be on the apparatus floor and to assist in hitching the horses, on the receipt of all second, third, fourth, fifth and general alarms. At the first stroke of the gong indicating one of these signals, every company from the Battery to City Island must "stand to horse," and with every man at his post, await the remaining portion of the signal, which will indicate either to which section of the city they are to go, or that, for the time being, they may return to their quarters. An unbroken night's rest is almost unheard of in many of the busier sections of the city. Nor is the fireman's hardest or most dangerous work always performed in view of spectators at fires, nor indeed is it generally performed at what are known as large fires, the more complete details of which are made known to the citizens by the public press. Most fires are stopped at their very beginning by the skill, coolness and courage of the officers and men in getting at once, through smoke and flame, at the very seat of the fire. In sub-cellar and basement, behind stairways and in unused lofts, fires break out which can only be quickly subdued by getting at the very seat of the fire.

very point where they began. To do this it is necessary to feel or to crawl their way through blinding and suffocating smoke, and, of course, intense and almost unendurable heat. Such fires are generally, and quite naturally, reported as "damage trifling," or "quickly extinguished"; but, in reality, service under such circumstances may be, and often is, far more hazardous than the more conspicuous acts performed at large fires in the full view of spectators. That the firemen's devotion and faithfulness are not, however, unappreciated, is evidenced by the many commendatory letters received from citizens, sometimes accompanied by contributions to the Department Relief Fund. These amounted for the past year to \$1223. As the payments from this fund for the years 1895 and 1896 exceeded the income, it was with great relief and satisfaction that the firemen received news last year of your approval of the bill giving to the Pension Fund of this Department ten per cent. of the excise moneys belonging to the city of New York. But just as the fear that the demands on the fund were greater than the fund could stand, had been removed by the passage of this act, the Department is again made to feel uncertain of the future by the fact that the proposed Charter for the greater New York provides that the amount derivable from this fund shall not be more than \$75,000 in any one year. This sum would be utterly inadequate to meet the requirements of this fund, and, in my opinion, the enactment into law of such a provision in the new Charter would do more



to breed discontent and thereby diminish the efficiency of the Fire Department than any other single act could do. It is earnestly hoped that no such calamity will befall the fireman and the Department, and I think it is not unreasonable to state that it would be a calamity which would also fall, eventually, upon the citizens of this great city. While the Pension Fund does not make heroes of firemen, it may often be that the thought that those a fireman loves best will be cared for in case anything happens to him, is the deciding factor that makes him rush into danger, when otherwise it would have been so easy to have seemingly done his full duty without the risk.

In closing I desire to add that the growth of the city each year makes larger and larger demands upon the Department and calls for larger appropriations to meet these demands; but it is worthy of notice that, for the coming year, the increase in appropriations is almost entirely applied to bettering the apparatus of the Department and not to salaries. The total increase in the appropriations over last year, including the appropriation for the new fire-boat and new boilers for one of the other fire-boats is \$90,571, of which sum only \$6,571 is for salaries.

It is believed that the discipline of the Department is excellent and that both officers and men are working in hearty accord for the best interests of the service.

Very respectfully,

*James R. Sheffield*  
President.

Department

Reports

for  
1896

09

Last

Message



JAMES R. SHEFFIELD,  
O. H. LA GRANGE,  
THOMAS STURGIS,  
Commissioners.

*Headquarters*  
*Fire Department,*  
*157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

*New York, January 25th, 1897*

Hon. William L. Strong,

Mayor -

Dear Sir:

In conformity with your request I have the honor to submit herewith a statement showing, in brief, the operations of this department for the week ending at noon on Saturday, the 25th instant, together with a record of changes in the personnel of the Department, and a brief reference to unusual events or occurrences of importance during the same period:

The fire extinguishing force of the Department now consists of -

1166 officers and men,

86 companies, of which 64 are engine and 22 hook and ladder companies, in

14 battalions.

459 horses are now in the Department.

79 fires occurred during the week.

293 companies were called to respond to these fires.

59 telegraphic alarms were received.

23 verbal alarms were received.

FIRE DEPARTMENT,

New York, ..... 189

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Incendiarism - Henry Levy, whose arrest on suspicion of having set fire to the premises No. 36 West Third Street, on the 13th instant, was mentioned in last week's report, has been indicted by the Grand Jury. Adolph Meyers, for setting fire to the premises No. 108 East 113th Street, on the 16th instant, was caught in the act, and has also been indicted by the Grand Jury.

Receipts Bureau of Combustibles for licenses, permits and penalties for the week-----	\$917.50
Inspections and surveys made for the week -----	84

One trial for violation of rules on the part of a fireman was had, but the accused was found not guilty.

During the past week there have been no changes in the personnel of the Department.

Very respectfully,

*James R. Sheffield*  
President.

RECEIVED

JAMES R. SHEFFIELD,  
O. H. LA GRANGE,  
THOMAS STURGIS.

Commissioners.

Headquarters  
Fire Department,  
157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,

New York, 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 1897

To The Mayor:

In view of the Newspaper accounts of the public hearing yesterday before the Commissioners of Accounts on yesterday, I respectfully ask that the Commissioners be requested to make their report as complete as possible and to state what loss if any was shown by the evidence to have been sustained by the City through any act or omission of the Weighmaster



of this Department.

I further respectfully  
ask that a copy of the evidence  
taken before the Commissioners  
of Accounts be sent with  
their report to this Board,  
to guide its action towards  
the Weighmaster and Contractor  
Winant.

Very Respectfully

O. H. Albright

Hon William L Strong

Com<sup>r</sup>

Mayor of New York

Robert King Carpenter

Robert King Carpenter  
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New York

Jun. 29/97

Sir:

Please investigate the trouble between the men of Eugene Co<sup>th</sup> 21. They are always having a row their every night between the house hours of 9-11 PM.

Hoping you will stop this as it annoys the tenants in our house.

I remain.

Yours etc.

"A. Tenent"

East 40 St.

29.

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*Headquarters*  
*Fire Department,*  
*157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

JAMES R. SHEFFIELD,  
O. H. LA GRANGE,  
THOMAS STURGIS,  
Commissioners.

*New York, February 1st 1897*

Hon. William L. Strong,

Mayor -

Dear Sir:

In conformity with your request I have the honor to submit herewith a statement showing, in brief, the operations of this Department for the week ending at noon on Saturday, the 30th ultimo, together with a record of changes in the personnel of the Department during the same week:

The fire extinguishing force of the Department now consists of

1166 officers and men,

86 companies, of which 64 are engine and 22 hook and ladder companies, in

14 battalions.

458 horses are now in the Department.

122 fires occurred during the week.

426 companies were called to respond to these fires.

85 telegraphic alarms were received.

51 verbal alarms were received.

Receipts Bureau of Combustibles for licenses, permits and  
penalties for the week-----\$836.  
Inspections and surveys made for the week----- 72.

Two trials for violations of rules on the part of firemen  
were had, and fines amounting to 11 days' pay imposed.

Changes in personnel - One Stableman appointed; one  
Stableman restored.

A report of the Commissioners of Accounts, made to the  
Mayor and referred by you to this Department, reflecting on Weigh-  
master La Grange, was acted upon at once, and, after a hearing, the  
resignation of the Weighmaster was demanded. It was immediately  
offered and accepted.

Very respectfully,

*James H. Sheffield*  
President.



*Headquarters*

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*New York,* ..... 189



*Headquarters*

*The Department*

*New York, April 1st 1893*

*Headquarters  
Fire Department,  
157 & 159 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street,*

JAMES R. SHEFFIELD,  
O. H. LA GRANGE,  
THOMAS STURGIS.

Commissioners.

*New York, February 1st, 1897*

Hon. William L. Strong,  
Mayor, City Hall -

Dear Sir:

I am in receipt of a communication from you enclosing an anonymous letter, complaining of the actions of men in Engine Company No. 21, between the hours of nine and eleven in the evening. I have this morning referred the communication to the Chief of Department, with directions to carefully investigate at once.

Very respectfully yours,

*James R. Sheffield*



*Headquarters*

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*New York,*.....189

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