

INVESTIGATION IN THE MATTER OF COCOANUT GROVE
FIRE, PIEDMONT STREET, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS.

BEFORE: FIRE COMMISSIONER WILLIAM A. REILLY.

Friday, December 11, 1942.

ROBERT C. CUNNINGHAM

Stenotype Reporter

1103 BARRISTERS HALL, BOSTON, MASS.

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ELEVENTH DAY

Boston Fire Department Headquarters
60 Bristol Street,
Boston, Massachusetts.

Friday, December 11, 1942. 2.45 p.m.

Commissioner REILLY. I am sorry to keep you waiting so long, but the witness I wanted to talk to today with respect to the location of heaters and fire extinguishers and blowers -- you remember, we looked into those yesterday -- those witnesses have not showed up as yet. They have not been served with processes yet. We are waiting for them to come. However, we have been trying to reach them, and if they do come there will be business. Otherwise, there will be no business.

So I want you to know that you are welcome to have the heat and comfort of this room, and I am waiting, as you are.

[Short recess.]

Commissioner REILLY. Mr. Goldfine is on his way in here, and with him I shall probably go to the Coconut Grove and locate those heaters which he described yesterday, and those which he didn't describe. That is one point which will be done this afternoon.

[Short recess.]

JACOB B. GOLDFINE, Recalled.

Q (By Commissioner Reilly) What is your name?

A. Jacob B. Goldfine.

Q And your address? A. 268 Normandy Street, Roxbury.

Q You have testified before? A. Yes, sir.

Q Mr. Goldfine, yesterday in your testimony you failed to mention, or did not recollect a blower which is or which may be located on the wall, on the Arlington Street side of the lobby near the men's room, and I would like to have you come with me to the premises for the purpose of refreshing your recollection.

A. It skipped my mind yesterday. I remembered after I left here that I didn't tell you about it.

Q You recall there is one there? A. Yes, sir.

Q Well, I think we will go to the Coconut Grove, and in the presence of all the press and photographers, locate these different units, so that we may know where they are. That particular one, anyway. A. Yes, sir.

Commissioner REILLY. The hearing will be in recess until we meet at the Coconut Grove, as soon as we can get there, which will be about 4 o'clock. We will go directly there.

[Whereupon, at 3.35 p.m. the hearing was recessed until 4 o'clock p.m. at the Coconut Grove.]

[The hearing was resumed in the Coccanut Grove.]

JACOB B. GOLDFINE, Resumed.

Commissioner REILLY. The hearing will now be resumed.

Q (By Commissioner Reilly) Mr. Goldfine, I call your attention to a heater which is located at the furthest end of the lobby as you enter the revolving door, in the right-hand corner of the Church Street end of the building. Was that there before the fire? A. Yes, it was.

Q Was it in operation the night of the fire? A. No.

Q Where is the switch that turns that heater on? A. Inside the door. There is a switch in back of that door on the wall.

Q Inside the door? A. Inside the door. There is a sort of a recess right in back of that wall there inside.

Q What door is that, the door immediately in that wall?

A. Yes, this door here. This is the entrance to the men's room.

Q That is on the inside of the door which is an entrance to the men's room? A. Men's room. There is an opening up there to bring the air out through that and throw it into the lobby.

Q Who had charge of operating that heater? A. Well, the head waiter or myself or the man in the men's room.

Q Any one of the three could have turned it on or off?

A. At any time. As a matter of fact, anybody could have turned it on. Just walk in and turn on that switch.

Q Did you turn it on that night? A. No.

* * *

Commissioner REILLY. The hearing is resumed now.

Q Is there any other heater or ventilator in this room?

A. There is a ventilator up there (indicating).

Q In the lobby? A. In the lobby. It is a steam heater, that is, a steam radiator.

Q There is a steam radiator on the wall on the left-hand side of the lobby as you come in the door, the revolving door, at the farthest end of the building from Broadway? A. That is right. And then there was a radiator in there, in the checkroom and office.

Q Then there was a radiator in the check room? A. Yes.

Q But that wasn't in the lobby itself? A. No.

* * *

Q I call to your attention an opening in the ceiling over the entrance into the main dining-room from the lobby. What was that? A. That was sort of a ventilator. It was a vent. There was no fan in there.

Q It is just something to let the air out? A. To let the air out.

Q (By Chief Pope) Do you know of your own knowledge?

A. Yes, I know. I know there was no fan in there.

Q When you say there was no fan in there, you don't know whether or not there was a fan that controlled the air in there?

A. I am pretty sure there wasn't.

Q Well, do you know? A. No, not from my own knowledge.

* * *

Q (By Commissioner Reilly) Now, we have gone up two steps onto what is described as the caricature bar, the room containing the caricature bar, is that correct? A. That's right.

Q Immediately over the stairs on the left-hand side at the ceiling is a heater, is that correct? A. That is a blower heater.

Q You described that in your testimony yesterday? A. Yes.

* * *

Q Are there any others in this room? A. We had a fan in this corner, a fan there, that is, the right-hand corner.

Q In the right-hand corner of the room? A. On the Piedmont Street side.

Q As you go up the stairs, on the Piedmont Street side --
A. That's right.

Q --was a fan? A. A fan.

Q What kind of a fan? A. Just a regular, oh --

Q An electric fan on a standard? A. An electric fan on a standard.

Q Was that described by you yesterday? A. Yes.

Q (By Chief Pope) Can you see it now? A. I can see it now, yes.

Q (By Commissioner Reilly) Was it in the same position as it is now?
A. It was standing up facing out that way, but it wasn't on.

Q That is, it was facing across the room, but it wasn't in operation? A. It wasn't in operation.

Q Are you sure it wasn't in operation? A. Yes.

Q I call your attention to two openings covered by grille-work on the right-hand side of the stairway, in the wall farthest from Broadway? A. Yes.

Q What are those openings? A. That is a steam radiator which is controlled from the telephone booth there. It is on the floor.

Q Did you describe those yesterday? A. No, I didn't.

Q Were there any blowers behind it? A. No.

Q Any other heaters in this room? A. There is one over here. That is the right-hand end underneath the bar.

Q One underneath the face of the bar? A. The face of the bar.

Q About the fifth stool? A. Yes, about that.

Q From the wall? A. From the wall.

Q Furthest from Broadway? A. That's right.

Q Or, in other words, on your right as you come into the caricature bar from the lobby? A. From the lobby.

Q On the back bar which is against the Piedmont Street wall? A. That is correct. There is another radiator right here (indicating).

Q And there is another radiator in the center of the same bar? A. Yes.

Q Another radiator in the approximate center of the same bar which backs up to the Piedmont Street wall? A. Yes. Then there is another radiator right here (indicating).

Q And then there is another radiator at the end of the bar on

- the Broadway end. What kind of a radiator is that?
- A. Steam. That is a steam radiator.
- Q It is a steam radiator? A. Controlled by the rheostat; that is, the whole thing was controlled by a rheostat -- or a thermostat, I guess.
- Q All the radiators were controlled from the same thermostat, were they? A. Yes.
- Q And was that described yesterday? . Yes.
- Q Were there four windows? A. That is all windows here. That is all glass in here (indicating).
- Q The Piedmont Street wall had four openings covered by glass? A. Covered by glass and mirrors. Some parts were mirrors.
- Q What were the wall coverings in this room? A. That was the same, I believe, as the lobby.
- Q Are you sure? A. Oh, no, no. That was just, I think, cement or some kind of fibreboard; I am not sure. It was fibreboard.
- Q (By Chief Pope) Do you know? A. Yes, I know now. I remember that.
- Q (By Commissioner Reilly) It was sort of a fibreboard? A. Fibreboard, yes.
- Q Was it leatherette? . No.
- Q Are you sure? A. Positive.
- Q How about the other wall, which is farthest away from Broadway immediately on your right as you come up the stairs? A. You mean over here (indicating)?
- Q Yes.

A. About three or four feet up was covered with leatherette, and then the rest was the same as this side here. The same as the ceiling. Plasterboard.

Q What was the covering of the bar stools? A. The bar stools had leatherette.

Q And the face of the bar? A. Leatherette.

Q And on the caricature bar what was the covering of the stools? A. Leatherette.

Q On the face of the bar, what was that? A. Leatherette.

Q Entirely around the caricature bar? A. All the way around.

Q Was there any heater or blower in the right-hand corner behind the back bar which is nearest Broadway at the Piedmont Street side? Was there any heater or ventilator or instrument there?

A. There was a fan which operated the intake, that is, blow the air in and take out the air. You can operate it either way.

Q Where was that located? A. Right up in the corner. There is the thing.

Q Up by the ceiling? A. Right up in the corner by the ceiling.

Q Was there a motor on that? A. Yes. That is the grille right there (indicating).

Q Was it at the top or the bottom of the window? A. At the top, way at the top there. It fitted right in.

Q Fitted into the window-frame? A. Yes.

Q Was it operating? A. Yes, it was.

Q Which way? A. I believe it was -- I am pretty sure it was

- Q Where did you turn it on? A. It was turned on a regular switch like you put on a light.
- Q Chain attachment? A. String attachment.
- Q Who turned it on? A. I turned it on that night.
- Q About what time? A. About 9.30.
- Q Is that grille which is on the back bar on the Piedmont Street side to the best of your recollection the grille which was on the face of this exhaust? A. To me it looks like the grille.
- Q It is about the same size? A. Yes.
- Q Are you sure there was a motor? A. Yes.
- Q Was there another fan in this corner also? A. Yes.
- Q Where was that located? A. It was located just about standing there opposite the other one; they were just about facing out this way (indicating).
- Q What type of fan was that? A. The same type as the other fan.
- Q What kind of a fan? A. Electric fan.
- Q Electric fan on a standard? A. Yes.
- Q Does this appear to be it which is lying down behind the bar at the present time? A. Yes.
- Q Was it in operation? A. No.
- Q It is the same as the other standing electric fan which is at the other end of the bar? A. Yes.
- Q Chromium post? A. Yes.

* * *

- Q We are now down at the farthest end of the caricature bar from the lobby, is that right? A. That's right.
- Q And we are facing an opening in the wall which is at the farthest end of the bar, backing up to a parking space outside, is that correct? A. Right.
- Q What was the purpose of that opening? A. That was an exhaust fan that took the smoke out of the caricature bar --took most of the smoke out.
- Q You testified about this yesterday? A. Yes, sir.
- Q Was it in operation that night? A. Yes.
- Q Was there any other heater or blower or fan at this end of the bar? A. No, not outside of this radiator (indicating).
- Q But there is no blower connected with that radiator?
A. No.
- Q What was the covering on the wall at this end? A. This end here was -- Let's see -- if I remember right -- I can't seem to remember what it was. I can't say for sure what was on the wall there.

Commissioner REILLY. All right, sir.

* * *

- Q (By Commissioner Reilly) I call your attention to a duct which is on the wall at the ceiling, on the wall separating the caricature bar from the main Coconut Grove at the parking space end of the building. A. I see it.
- Q Do you remember what that was? A. No, I couldn't say what that

was there for. I don't know what that was.

Q I call your attention to another duct which is in the center of the same wall about 15 feet nearer the lobby backing up to the caricature bar. Do you recall that? A. I never saw that. I have never seen any of them.

Q I call your attention to another one immediately beyond which is still fixed in what may have been its original position in the center of the wall which separates the caricature bar from the main room. Can you see it? A. I can see it, but I don't know what they are there for. I never saw them. They are in the walls.

* * *

Q We will go over to the entrance door which is the entrance into the main dining-room from the lobby, and we face the main dining-room with the mezzanine immediately on the left and the caricature bar on the right. A. That was the terrace.

Q When I said mezzanine I meant the same location as what is known as the terrace? A. That is correct.

Q Can you locate for me now the blowers that were in this room? A. There was one up in this corner (indicating).

Q Directly over the entrance? A. It is up there now.

Q Directly over the entrance into the main room from the lobby. A. That was a heater with a fan.

Q Behind it, is that correct? A. That is a blower heater.

- Q Where was the head waiter's desk? A. Just where that brown circle is (indicating).
- Q The head waiter's desk was located immediately on your left as you turned into the main dining-room from the lobby?
- A. That's right.
- Q About eight feet from the door? A. That's right.
- Q Or the opening? A. That's right.
- Q That is one blower. A. There was another one over this end (indicating).
- Q From our present position we go to the extreme left-hand side of the room, which is on the Shawmut Street side, and in the extreme left-hand corner against the wall adjoining the Shawmut Street side of the building and the terrace there is another heater-blower? A. That's right.
- Q Was that there before the fire? A. Yes.
- Q The instrument which appears to be below the heater, was that a loud speaker? A. That is a speaker controlled from the mike on the platform.
- Q And then where are the others? A. There was one over in this corner here (indicating).
- Q There was another on the Piedmont Street end of the stage, the extreme right-hand side as you enter the main dining-room from the lobby? A. That's right.
- Q And that isn't now standing within our view? A. I don't see

it there.

Q Was it in the same comparative position as far as height?

A. Exactly the same as these are.

Q Did it face out toward the center of the dance floor?

A. The same as these others, facing in.

Q Where was the other one? A. I am not sure about the other one.

I think there may have been one up there, but I never noticed it.

I am not sure.

Commissioner REILLY. All right.

* * *

Q As far as you know, that completes all the blowers that were in the main dining-room? A. Yes.

Q Do you know what that grating was that was over the arch?

A. I have seen it there but I never knew what it was for.

I just thought it was an ornament.

Q There appears to be one of those in each corner.

A. I see them. I always noticed them.

Q At least, still standing in three corners, but you don't know what they were for? A. I understood they were just for an ornament. That's what I understood.

Q Now, describing the corners of the main dining-room, is that right? A. That's right.

* * *

Q At the extreme left-hand corner of the room near the door to the dressing-room and on the left-hand side of the orchestra

stage, as you face it from the entrance to the room, is an opening into the ceiling under the tile roof. Do you know what that is? A. There was a light there. That's all I ever noticed there. A light with a glass cover on it. There is the frame of it now.

Q That was a light, as you remember? A. That was a light.

Q Do you know whether there was a radiator in this corner?

A. There was a radiator in this corner.

Q Did it have a grille over it? A. Yes.

Q Is it the one which is now covered by a piece of board?

A. That's right.

Q Was it covered by a board previously? A. It was.

Q It was always covered by a board? A. That's right.

Q Was the radiator on? A. I don't know.

Q Anyone ever complain about this wall being hot? A. No.

Q Was there another radiator there? A. There was two or three.

I am not sure how many, but I know there was two or three radiators on this side of the room.

Q Two or three radiators on this side of the room? A. Yes.

Q Were they covered over? A. They were all covered over.

* * *

Q Mr. Goldfine, you testified yesterday that there was a fan over the exhaust on the Shawmut Street side?

A. That's right.

Q Of the main dining-room? A. That's right. It is right above --

- Over the tile roof. You could see it from the other side.
- Q Was that an exhaust fan? A. That was an exhaust fan.
- * * *
- Q How would you describe this part of the building? A. This is the entrance to the kitchen.
- Q From where? A. From the main dining-room.
- Q At which end of the building? A. The Shawmut Street side.
- Q The extreme left as you enter the main dining-room from the lobby? A. That's right.
- Q Farthest from Broadway? A. Yes.
- Q Or farthest from Piedmont Street? A. That's right.
- Q Was there a fan in the wall at the ceiling of this pantry which is at the head of the stairs going down to the kitchen?
- A. Yes.
- Q What kind of a fan was that? A. An exhaust fan.
- Q That was an exhaust fan that let the air out from where?
- A. That let any air from the kitchen and took it out into the --
- Q Shawmut Street? A. Shawmut Street.
- Q Was it operating that night? A. Yes.
- Q Who turned it on? A. That is usually turned on from the kitchen. Somebody in the kitchen would turn it on when they got -- the work in the kitchen started.
- Q Did you notice it was operating? A. I did notice it was operating the last time I went through here.

Q The night of the fire? A. Yes.

Commissioner REILLY. We will now go down to the Melody Lounge.

* * *

Q Are there any heaters, ventilators or blowers that you know of in this main dining-room? A. No, I think I have got them all.

Q (By Chief Pope) Were there any cooling units? A. We never had any cooling units in the main dining-room.

* * *

Q (By Commissioner Reilly) We are now at the foot of the stairs coming down into the Melody Lounge from the lobby. Can you tell us where the heating or ventilating or cooling units were located in this room? A. There is one in this corner, that is, the left-hand.

Q Immediately on the sharp left-hand corner? A. There is a cooling unit.

Q At the wall between the stairs and the Melody Lounge, there is a cooling unit? . Yes.

Q Was that in operation? A. No.

Q What is next? A. We had another cooling unit in the opposite corner, right over there.

Q That is at the Church Street end? A. Going towards Church Street, that's right.

Q No, wait a minute.

(Discussion off the record.)

- Q It is the farthest extreme left-hand corner as you face the Melody Lounge from the bottom step of the stairway into the lounge? A. That's right.
- Q On the Shawmut Street side of the building? A. That's right. There was another cooling system right over there in that corner.
- Q About the center of the Shawmut Street wall? A. You see where that kitchen door is. Right to the right of the kitchen is another cooling unit.
- Q That was a floor, portable cooling unit? A. That's right.
- Q Of the same description as the others? A. No, that wasn't. That was controlled separately. And then we had another cooling unit on the right-hand side.
- Q In the extreme right-hand side as you come down the stairs facing the Melody Lounge was another cooling unit?
- A. Yes.
- Q Any others? A. Those three units were controlled on one switch. That is, we had a compressor.
- Q Where was the switch? A. Right behind that partition there (indicating).
- Q Is that a closet? A. No, it isn't a closet. It is a sort of an alleyway.
- Q At the alleyway behind the partition which walled off the Melody Lounge on the Shawmut Street side? A. That's right.

We had another one over on the extreme left -- the extreme right.

Q On the extreme left as you face out from the stairs?

A. The extreme right as you come down.

Q Then that is the extreme left, over near the kitchen door?

A. I mean on the right. On the right here, as you face the wall.

Q It is over near the kitchen door? A. That's right. Those were separate units, controlled separately.

Q Which are those? A. Those two. This one here and this one over here (indicating).

Q The unit near the kitchen door and the unit in the center of the Shawmut Street wall were controlled separately?

A. That's correct.

Q Those were in series? A. That's right.

Q How many units all together? A. Five.

Q How many controlled in series? A. Three on one switch and the other two on separate switches.

Q How about the heating arrangements? A. There is a heater up here. That is the blower.

Q That is, the corner of the room which is on the Shawmut Street side of the Church Street end? A. That is right. And then there is another blower on the Piedmont Street; that is, the right, facing the stairway as you come down the stairway.

Q That is, the Piedmont Street side at the Broadway end?

A. That's right, but towards Broadway.

- Q Those two heaters faced each other and were suspended from the ceiling? A. That's right.
- Q Did they have fans behind them, or motors? A. They had fans.
- Q Any others? A. Those were the only two heaters we had here.
- Q Were there any ventilators or ventilating outlets to the street or to ducts that you know of here? A. Yes.
- Q Where were they located? A. There was two right up here on this side (indicating).
- Q Two on the farthest wall away from Broadway? A. That's right.
- Q And they were recessed in the wall? A. That's right.
- Q And about what size were the openings? A. I think about as you see it there; the openings are just about as you see. I should say about three feet.
- Q Three feet square? A. Three feet long and about six inches wide.
- Q Did they supply or exhaust air? A. They supplied.
- Q Were there any others? A. Then we had an exhaust.
- Q Where was the exhaust located? A. Just over there next to the kitchen. See the grille there.
- Q In the middle of the wall on the Shawmut Street side at the ceiling? A. That's right.
- Q That was an exhaust? A. That's right.
- Q How many doors were there into the kitchen? A. There was one door.
- Q Was there a door up in that farthest corner on the left-hand side at the Broadway end? A. Not that I know of. I never

saw any. There was an opening there where we kept silverware from the kitchen, but there was no door there.

Q In locating one of the heating units or one of the coolers, I was in error in describing the location as up near the kitchen door at the farthest left-hand side because apparently there was no kitchen door there. The location of that cooler, then, for the record was at the Broadway end of the building on the Shawmut Street side? A. That's right.

Q Have you any knowledge as to whether these units were operating?

A. Well, I know that these -- the supply was operating, and I know that the exhaust was operating fifteen minutes before this thing happened. I had been down there and I know they were on.

Q You are referring now to the ventilation system? A. Yes.

Q Were the heaters operating? A. No, not at that time.

Q On the night of the fire were these two heaters operating?

A. Not -- the air supply, yes, they were operating when I came down. I don't know what happened after that.

Q That was about fifteen minutes before the fire? A. That's right.

Q (By Chief Pope) There was a shelf in the corner; was there a loud speaker in each corner? A. Yes, four of them.

Q (By Commissioner Reilly) Do you happen to know where the palm trees were located down here in the Melody Lounge?

A. Yes.

Q Where were they? A. There was one palm tree in this corner there, and a palm tree in that corner. There was a palm tree

over there, and a palm tree over there, and a palm tree in this corner. There was five of them.

Q So there was a palm tree in each corner of the room and one on the Shawmut Street side? A. No.

Q No? There was one in each corner of the room? A. Yes.

Q Where was the other one? A. In that wall over there, in that corner. That is the Shawmut Street side.

Q In the center of the wall on the Shawmut Street side?

A. That's right.

Q Were they located near the five coolers? A. Yes.

Q Each tree was near a cooler? A. Right.

Commissioner REILLY. Any questions, Chief?

Chief POPE. No.

Commissioner REILLY. The hearing is recessed.

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Commissioner REILLY. The hearing is now recessed until I notify you, for the purpose of the convenience of the Medical Examiners, the doctors who have dealt with cases in connection with this disaster, and Professor Hottel, who is to make a report. As soon as these men are ready, we will resume our hearings. That may be the first of the week, possibly Monday morning, but I can't say definitely.

[Adjourned.]