

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

BEFORE: FIRE COMMISSIONER WILLIAM A. REILLY.

January 19, 1943.

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,
Tuesday, January 19, 1943. 11 a.m.

Commissioner REILLY. I will call Mr. Kenneth W.
Blennerhassett.

KENNETH W. BLENNERHASSETT, Sworn.

Q [By Commissioner Reilly] What is your full name? A. Kenneth
W. Blennerhassett.

Q What is your position? A. Photographer, City of Boston, Law
Department.

Q Where do you live? A. 530 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston,
Massachusetts.

Commissioner REILLY. I will now ask Mr. Murray to take over
from here and introduce some exhibits.

Q [By Mr. Murray] As a result of a request from the Fire Commis-
sioner, did you take certain photographs of the premises formerly
occupied by and known as the Coconut Grove? A. I did.

Q And can you tell us the date when you took the photographs?
A. I cannot, truthfully. I think December 17.

Q Well, does New Year's Day refresh your recollection? A. That is
true. Thank you. It was. I took them the 31st of December, 1942,
the first of January and the fourth of January, 1943.

Q Are the dates on the prints at all? A. No, sir, I didn't put

them on.

Q All right. Were you alone when the photographs were taken, or were you accompanied by someone? A. I was accompanied first by Paul Cavicchi, the adjuster for the City of Boston Law Department, automobile work; and secondly, by Mr. Joseph Duffly, investigator of the Law Department.

Q And did you take interior shots and exterior shots of the premises? A. I did.

Q Now you have some photographs in front of you? A. Yes, sir.

Q Prints of the negatives that were taken by you at the premises? A. Yes, sir.

Q All right. Now will you pick them up one by one and identify the photographs so that we can have them marked as an exhibit, please? A. This photograph here shows just a general view of the outside of the entrance of Coconut Grove on Piedmont Street.

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked as an exhibit, please.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 74.]

Q Do you have any other exterior shots? A. No, sir.

Q All right. Now what is the next photograph which you have in your hand? A. The next photograph was taken standing in front of where the revolving door was, on the Piedmont Street entrance, and shows the general view of the lobby looking toward Church Street.

Q All right. Now I call your attention to a date on the back of that photograph. What is that? A. That was the date of the fire.

Q The date of the fire? A. Yes, sir.

Q Not the date the picture was taken? A. No, sir.

Mr. MURRAY. All right. Let that be marked as an exhibit.

[The photograph above described
was marked as Exhibit No. 75.]

Q What is the next photograph that you have in your hand? A. The next photograph is taken from the platform of the entrance to the Caricature Bar, and shows the entrance where the revolving door was. Also the entrance to the corridor leading to the stairway which led to the Melody Lounge.

Q Is it a view of part of the lobby? A. Yes, sir.

Q And as you look at the photograph, in which direction are you looking? A. Church Street.

Q Towards Church Street? A. Yes, sir.

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked as an exhibit.

[The photograph above described
was marked as Exhibit No. 76.]

Q By the way, are all these interior views of the premises taken with flashlight? A. They are taken with artificial light, not all with flashlight. Some were flood light, some with flashlight or flash bulbs.

Q What is the next photograph you have? A. The next photograph was taken from the -- I call it the main lobby of the Coconut

Grove, that is, the Piedmont Street entrance, and is a general view of what is called the Caricature Bar, and shows a portion of the main dining hall and the grand piano on the stage.

Q You were looking in what direction when you took that photograph? A. Looking toward the corner of Broadway and Sawmut.

Mr. MURRAY. All right. Let that be marked as an exhibit.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 77.]

Q What is the next photograph you have there? A. A general view of the interior inside of the Caricature Bar.

Q Taken from what point? A. Taken from the Church Street end of the Caricature Bar.

Q And looking in what direction? A. The direction of Broadway.

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked as an exhibit, please.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 78.]

Q What is the next photograph you have there? A. The next photograph is taken from the Church Street end of the Caricature Bar facing Broadway, and shows what I believe was called the main bar. It is the bar that ran along the Piedmont Street side of the Coconut Grove.

Q The wall bar, along the wall? A. Yes, sir.

Mr. MURRAY. All right. Please mark that as an exhibit.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 79.]

Q What is the next photograph that you have in your hand? A. A general view of the main dining room looking in the direction

of Shawmut Street.

Q From what points? A. From a point about half way in the main dining room on the Piedmont Street side.

Q Does it show a portion of the Terrace, so-called, on the left side of the photograph? A. Yes, sir. It also shows where the wall on the Shawmut Street side has been broken through [pointing to photograph].

2

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked as an exhibit.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 30.]

Q Now what is the next photograph that you have in your hand?

A. A general view of the main dining room taken from the orchestra or stage.

Q Looking in what direction? A. The direction of Church Street.

Q Does it show the Terrace at the end of the room? A. Yes, sir.

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked as an exhibit.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 31.]

Q Now what is the next photograph that you have in your hand?

A. This photograph was taken on the Piedmont Street side, in the main dining room, looking in the direction of Broadway, and it shows on the right-hand side of the photograph the entrance to the new Broadway lounge.

Q Does the photograph also show the glass wall between the main dining room and the corridor into the new Broadway lounge?

A. Yes, sir.

Q And on the right of the photograph does it show the tile roof which was over some of the chairs and tables on the Piedmont Street side of the dining room? A. Yes, sir.

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked as an exhibit, please.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 32.]

Q And what does the next photograph that you have in your hand show? A. A general view of the stage taken from the Piedmont Street side of the main dining room.

Q Looking in what direction? A. In the direction of Broadway, from the corner of Shawmut Street.

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked as an exhibit, please.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 33.]

Q What does the next photograph that you have in your hand show? A. A close-up of the stage and the debris, grand piano, instruments, silverware.

Q And that was taken from where? A. Taken in the main dining room on the Piedmont Street side looking in the direction of Broadway and Shawmut Street.

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked as an exhibit.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 34.]

Q Now I show you this other photograph and ask you if you will explain what was shown in the picture? A. This is the corridor leading from the Piedmont Street side of the bandstand, looking in the direction of Broadway, and shows a portion of the new

Broadway Lounge.

Q From what point was the picture taken? A. Well, on the stage there were two steps which the entertainers, I believe, could descend and go into the dressing room.

Q On what side of the stage was that? A. The right-hand side of the stage as you face it from the main dining room.

Q With reference to what street, what side of the stage?
A. Piedmont Street side.

Q And the picture was taken from that point? A. Yes, sir.

Q Looking toward Broadway? A. Yes, sir.

Q And showing the corridor entrance from the main dining room into the new Broadway Lounge, is that right? A. Yes, sir, directly in back of me is that glass wall which shows in the previous exhibit.

Q Which shows in Exhibit No. 32? A. Yes, sir, in Exhibit No. 32.

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked, please.

[The photograph above described
was marked as Exhibit No. 35.]

Q What does the next photograph which you have in front of you show?

A. It shows a general view of the new Broadway Lounge, taken just inside of the corridor shown in Exhibit No. 35, facing Broadway.

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked as an exhibit.

[The photograph above described
was marked as Exhibit No. 36.]

Q What does the next photograph that you have in front of you show? A. The next photograph shows the Piedmont Street side

of the so-called Melody Lounge. The photograph was taken at the foot of the stairs leading from the main floor, also on the Piedmont Street side, facing Broadway, and looking in the direction of the kitchen entrance.

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked as an exhibit, please.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 87.]

Now let there be marked as an exhibit a plan entitled "Plan of Part of Basement Floor, Coconut Grove Buildings, December 16, 1942, Scale 4 feet to an inch," with the signature "William J. Sullivan, Chief Engineer, Street Laying Out Department."

[The plan above described was marked as Exhibit No. 88.]

Let there also be marked as an exhibit a plan entitled "Plan of First Floor, Coconut Grove Buildings, December 16, 1942, Scale 4 feet to an inch." Signed "William J. Sullivan, Chief Engineer, Street Laying Out Department."

[The plan above described was marked as Exhibit No. 89.]

Q Now what does the next photograph which you have in front of you show? A. The next photograph is taken close to the bar itself.

Q Which bar? A. Melody Bar.

Q That is in the basement, is that right? A. In the basement, on the Piedmont Street side, and shows the charred wood on both sides of the entrance to the kitchen.

Q And in what direction are you looking? A. Looking in the direction of Broadway and Shawmut.

Q Now when you say the entrance to the kitchen, will you indicate on the plan marked Exhibit No. 88 what you have reference to? A. Right here [pointing].

Q Now what are you pointing to on Exhibit No. 88? A. "Remains of partition."

Q Are you pointing to the words "Remains of partition"? A. Yes, sir.

Q You are not pointing to a doorway marked "3" on the plan, Exhibit No. 88, are you? A. No, sir.

Mr. MURRAY. All right. Let that be marked as an exhibit, please.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 90.]

3 Q What does the next photograph that you have in front of you show? A. A general view of the Melody Bar taken from the Piedmont Street side at the Broadway end, and facing in the direction of Shawmut and Church Streets. Also showing the right-hand wall or Shawmut Street side wall of the Melody Lounge.

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked as an exhibit, please.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 91.]

Q What does the next photograph show which you have in front of you? A. It shows the northwest corner of the Melody Lounge. It shows in the upper portion of the photograph the triangular

piece of board or plywood, and two what I would call beams.

Also either a radiator or air conditioning machine.

Q What are you referring to now? A. The upper right-hand corner.

Q Attached to the ceiling? A. Yes.

Q And does it show some other instrument resting on the floor?

A. Yes, sir. It also shows ---

Q In the corner? A. Yes, sir. It also shows what I believe was a radiator, but I am not sure of that.

Q What are you now referring to? A. This black object in the center bottom of the photograph.

Q Which rests on the floor? A. Yes, sir.

Q How does the photograph also show a portion of the ceiling in the corner? A. Yes, sir. Also a portion of the back brick wall or side brick wall on the Shawmut Street side with two openings therein.

Mr. MURRAY. Let this be marked as an exhibit, please.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 92.]

Q Now I hold another photograph in my hand and ask you what does that show? A. It shows the side of the previously mentioned triangular piece of Board.

Q Mentioned in connection with what? A. In connection with Exhibit No. 92.

Q Where is that located? A. That is located in the northwest corner of the Melody Lounge.

Q Where with reference to the floor is that board located?

A. Approximately eight feet, I would say, perhaps a foot from the ceiling, as I recall it.

Q And it is above head height from the floor, is that right?

A. That is right. It shows the top portion charred and burned.

Q The top portion of the triangular shelf? A. Yes, sir.

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked as an exhibit, please.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 93.]

Q Now I hold another photograph in my hand and I ask you to tell us what does that show? A. That shows the two beams which are shown in Exhibit No. 92. The photograph was taken from inside of what appeared to me to be a storage space for glasses in the extreme northwest corner of the Melody Lounge.

Q Looking in which direction? A. Looking directly at the ceiling, and shows the inner beam in a charred condition, with the outside beam as shown. Also a portion of ceiling.

Q In what direction were you facing when the photograph was taken? A. Well, if my camera had been level it would have faced Piedmont Street at the corner of Broadway. I was in this northwest corner [pointing to Exhibit No. 88], and I shot up to the ceiling. If I had shot the camera across, I would have come across here [pointing].

Q To the southeasterly corner of the Melody Lounge? A. Yes, sir.

Q All right. Now what aspects of these beams are shown, the top, bottom, sides, or what? A. Looking at the photograph, the top

beam in the photograph ---

Q You mean the beam near the top of the photograph? A. Yes, sir.
--- is actually the inner beam.

Q Is that a side, bottom or top beam? A. That is a side and
bottom photograph of the beam.

Q All right. The photograph shows the side and bottom of the
beam shown nearest the top of the photograph, is that correct?

A. Yes, sir.

Q Now with respect to the beam shown in the middle or approximately
the middle of the photograph, what aspect of that beam is shown?

A. It shows the same thing, that is, the inside and bottom. In
both cases this is the inside, that is, the northwesterly side
of the beams.

Mr. MURRAY. All right. Let that be marked as an exhibit.

[The photograph above described
was marked as Exhibit No. 94.]

Q Now I hold another photograph in my hand and ask you what that
shows, Mr. Ellennessett? A. That shows the ventilating system,
or a portion of it.

Q Where? A. Which is on the Church Street end of the Melody
Lounge Bar, and that photograph was taken from the northwest
corner.

Q Looking in what direction? A. Looking in the direction of
Piedmont Street.

Q Is it a view of the bar or a view of the wall on the Church Street

side? A. It is a view of the Church Street end of the Melody Lounge.

Q Not a view of the bar? A. No, sir. It is the end wall of the building itself, I believe.

Q All right. And where is the ventilating system shown? What portion of the photograph shows that? A. Approximately in the center of the photograph.

Q Running across the photograph? A. Running across the photograph.

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked as an exhibit.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 95.]

Q I show you another photograph and ask you what that purports to show? A. It shows the charred wall of the -- what I would call the left-hand entrance to the kitchen.

Q Well, now, what do you mean by the left-hand entrance? With reference to Exhibit 88, I mean? A. With reference to Exhibit No. 88, "Remains of partition", which I previously pointed out, it represents a portion of the wall in which the word "Remains" is shown on the plan, Exhibit No. 88. It is taken on the Shawmut Street side of the Melody Lounge Bar, looking in the direction of Broadway.

Mr. MURRAY. Let that be marked, please.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 96.]

Q Now I hold another photograph in my hand and ask you what that shows? A. A general view of the kitchen.

- Q And can you say where you were standing when this was taken, and what direction the camera was facing? A. I was standing on the Shawmut Street side on the Broadway end of the Melody Lounge, with the camera facing approximately north.
- Q Toward Shawmut Street? A. Yes, sir.
- Q Then with reference to Exhibit No. 38, were you standing in the northeasterly section of the Melody Lounge? A. Yes, sir.
- Q And the camera was facing approximately in a northerly direction toward Shawmut Street? A. Yes, sir.

Mr. MURRAY. Let this be marked as an exhibit, please.

[The photograph above described
was marked as Exhibit No. 97.]

- Q Now what does the next photograph which you have in your hand show? A. It shows the upright piano which was located on the revolving platform, the platform being in the center of the working space of the Melody Lounge Bar.
- Q And in what direction was the camera facing when this photograph was taken? A. Northeasterly.

Mr. MURRAY. Let this be marked as an exhibit, please.

[The photograph above described
was marked as Exhibit No. 98.]

- Q I show you another photograph and ask you what that shows? A. Just a general view of the debris in and around the grand piano which is located on the stage.
- Q Of what? A. The main dining room.
- Q And in what direction was the camera facing when that picture

was taken? A. Northwest.

Q Are you sure of the direction on that now? A. Yes, sir.

Q I call your attention to the words "Orchestra stand" in Exhibit No. 89 [showing to witness]? A. Yes, sir.

Q And with that in mind can you say in what direction the camera was facing? A. Yes, northwest.

Mr. MURRAY. May that be marked as an exhibit?

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 99.]

Q I hold in my hand another photograph and I ask you what that shows? A. That is practically the same as the previous exhibit, showing the debris, the wooden charred beams resting on the grand piano, and a portion of the main dining room looking in the direction of Shawmut Street, with the camera facing in a northwesterly direction again.

Mr. MURRAY. Let this be marked as an exhibit, please.

[The photograph above described was marked as Exhibit No. 100.]

Q And those are all the photographs that you have? A. Yes, sir.

Mr. MURRAY. The witness may be excused, Mr. Commissioner.

Commissioner REILLY. The witness is excused.

[Witness excused.]

Mr. MURRAY. Let there be marked as an exhibit a list entitled "City of Boston, Committee on Public Safety, 9 Park Street, Coconut Grove Casualties from fire November 23, 1942. Master list as of December 10, 1942," which is a list forwarded to the Fire

Commissioner by John J. Walsh, Executive Director of the City of Boston Committee on Public Safety, purporting to contain the list of names of the known dead of the Coconut Grove Fire. That will be marked as an exhibit.

[The list above described was marked as Exhibit No. 101.]

Let there be marked as an exhibit the accompanying letter from Mr. John J. Walsh, Executive Director, City of Boston Committee on Public Safety, dated January 6, 1943, addressed to Fire Commissioner William A. Reilly.

[The letter above described was marked as Exhibit No. 101-A.]

Let there be marked as an exhibit a list containing the names, addresses and Registry number of the City of Boston of those concerning whom photostatic copies of the death certificates of Coconut Grove casualties filed with the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths of the City of Boston have been delivered to the Fire Commissioner by Francis J. Fay, City Registrar for the City of Boston.

[The list above described was marked as Exhibit No. 102.]

Commissioner REILLY. That is all for today. The hearing will be adjourned until 10.30 a.m. Wednesday, January 20, 1943.

[Adjourned until Wednesday, January 20, 1943, at 10.30 a.m.]
