



CITY OF BOSTON

FIRE DEPARTMENT

BRISTOL STREET

BOSTON 18, MASS.

November 19, 1943

TELEPHONES

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FIRE PREVENTION DIV. } LIBERTY 1171  
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WILLIAM ARTHUR REILLY  
FIRE COMMISSIONER

WILLIAM D. SLATTERY  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Stephen C. Garrity, Esq.  
State Fire Marshal  
1010 Commonwealth Avenue  
Brookline, Mass.

Dear Sir:

In accordance with Section 3 of Chapter 148 of the General Laws, (Ter. Ed.), of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I submit herewith a report of an investigation into the circumstances of the fire which occurred at the Cocoanut Grove, 17 Piedmont Street, Boston, Mass., on November 28, 1942, which fire resulted in 490 deaths and 166 injuries, as recorded by the Boston Committee on Public Safety.

A report of this fire, upon the form prescribed by the Commissioner of Public Safety, was delivered to the State Fire Marshal within forty-eight hours of the fire, as required by G. L. (Ter. Ed.), c. 148, s. 2.

I commenced the investigation of this fire on Sunday, November 29, 1942. The State Fire Marshal, the Mayor of Boston, military and naval authorities and representatives of the Federal Bureau of Investigation were there present.

Hearings, open to representatives of the press, were held daily thereafter, except Sundays, at Fire Headquarters, 60 Bristol Street, Boston, Mass., until Wednesday, January 20, 1943. Public hearings were suspended at that time to avoid possible interference with criminal proceedings initiated by the Attorney General and the District Attorney for Suffolk County. My investigation, however, was continued, but not in public. A transcript of all testimony given before me was forwarded daily to the District Attorney and to the State Fire Marshal.

I submit herewith various diagrams, descriptions, findings and recommendations as outlined in the following index.

Yours very truly,

*W. A. Reilly*  
Fire Commissioner.

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DESCRIPTION OF PREMISES

The Cocoanut Grove was a night club. It occupied approximately 10,250 square feet and was open only during the evening hours, during which hours food and liquor were served and an entertainment program offered. The restaurant license permitting the sale of food and alcoholic beverages on the premises had been issued by the Boston Licensing Commission. The application for the license for the year 1942 stated that the premises contained 100 tables, 400 chairs and 30 fixed stools.

It had been in operation as a night club since 1927, at the same address, 17 Piedmont Street, Boston. One previous fire was recorded as having occurred at this location, on November 2, 1931, but there was no loss of property or life, or any injuries recorded as having been caused by this fire.

The principal structure occupied by the Cocoanut Grove was a first-class one-story building of reinforced concrete, erected in 1916.

It had a frontage on Piedmont Street of about 75 feet. Approximately half of the building, on the north side, extended back through to the next street, (Shawmut Street), a distance of about 92 feet. Adjoining the Shawmut Street side of the principal first-class structure were two second-class buildings, Nos. 4 and 6 Shawmut Street. Adjoining these second-class buildings, on the north, was still another second-class building facing Broadway. On the first floor of this building facing Broadway, was located the room described as the Broadway Lounge.

This room had been newly built and had been opened only a short time before the night of the fire.

The public had access to the following portions of the above-mentioned group of buildings:-

Street floor of first-class building, (17 Piedmont Street), foyer, Caricature Bar, and main dining room.

Basement floor of first-class building, (Melody Lounge).

Street floor of second-class building, on Broadway, (Broadway Lounge).

Eleven fire extinguishers were found on the premises after the fire, four of which had been obviously partly used or tipped over during the fire. The others were found to be unused and in good operating condition.

PIEDMONT STREET ENTRANCE

The main entrance was at 17 Piedmont Street, a narrow street of about 21 feet in width (from curb to curb).

The entrance door was of a revolving type recessed from the sidewalk in a portico about 18 feet wide and 9 feet in depth. (See photograph attached, taken after the fire).

To the left of the revolving door, (as one enters from the street), was a door leading in to the check room and office. (This door was not used the night of the fire, this section being used as a check room). The window to the left of the portico was also in this coat room and office.

The window to the right of the portico was one of those in the rear of the service bar. The basement window on the right of the portico led into the storage room of the basement.



FOYER

Inside the Piedmont Street entrance was a foyer, leading from which were two coat rooms, (one of which was also used as an office), a men's room, a women's room, and a telephone room. The foyer was about 40 feet long and 12 feet wide from wall to wall.

At the westerly end of the foyer, (to the left upon entering from the outside of the building), there was a corridor leading to the stairway down to the basement Melody Lounge.

At the easterly end of the foyer, (to the right upon entering from the outside of the building), was the Caricature Bar.

The Caricature Bar was raised approximately 1½-feet from the floor level of the foyer and was separated from the foyer by a railing. (See photograph attached, taken after the fire).

The furnishings in the foyer consisted of upholstered settees and chairs arranged in a row on both sides of the room along the walls.

The ceiling was arched and finished in plaster.

The walls were covered with artificial leather stretched over the permanent concrete structural surfaces. A rattan material covered the walls at the entrance, from base board to a height of approximately six feet above the floor.

The flooring was of linoleum on concrete.

A large portable electric fan was located in the corner at the end near the corridor to the Melody Lounge stairway. A heating unit, (blower type), was located in this same corner and

a wall-type covered radiator was nearby.

Exits from the foyer were through the revolving door to the street; through the office-coat room to the street, (this was obstructed by a coat rack and a lock); through the door to the street at the end of the corridor leading to the basement Melody Lounge stairway, (this door was locked); and through the other end of the lobby into the main dining room.

A drawing is attached giving an outline of the structural layout of the foyer.