



The sad ending of the First Schoolhouse on Long Point. June 4, 1949. Fire was set by small boy. Picture Taken May 30, 1949.

Thursday, June 9, 1949

## Defective Wiring Is Cause Given For \$100,000 Arnold, Inc., Disaster

### Worst Fire Since High School Destruction Gives Firemen Four-and-a-half Hour Fight—Remains Will Be Razed

A short circuit which resulted from defective wiring is given as the cause of the disastrous fire which gutted most of the Arnold's Inc., furniture building Saturday afternoon with damage not yet accurately estimated but thought to be at least \$100,000 and probably more.

Provincetown's Fire Chief Joseph E. Matta said this morning that he and State Police Lieut. Harold J. Pelouin of the State Fire Marshal's office had each conducted separate investigations and that both had arrived at the same conclusion as to the cause of the fire which called out every fire fighter in town, apparatus from Truro, assistance from a powerful pump on Town Wharf which was being used for sinking piles, and which, at times, was on the verge of threatening nearby buildings.

Chief Matta said that the fire started in a small basement room of the main building and the arrangement there of wires indicated that the costly blaze must have been the result of a short in defective wiring. He added that aluminum tubing had been used to pipe bottled gas to fixtures and that this had melted in places so that blazing

gas under the floor was added to the other highly inflammable fuel of what was one of the oldest buildings in town,—the old school house which formerly stood on Long Point and was floated over to Provincetown when the settlement there was abandoned.

#### Long Fight

From the time the first alarm was rung in at 2:30 until 7 o'clock the firemen fought a battle against raging flames, dense smoke and fumes. A great arena of townspeople, visitors and residents of the Lower Cape attracted by the heavy clouds of yellow smoke which obscured part of the water front, crowded around the beach and on nearby wharves to watch Provincetown's fire department and firemen at work. When it was over and only steam came up from the ruins, they were enthusiastic in their praise of the efficiency, courage and determination of the Cape End outfit.

The ruined structure housed Arnold's store with its large stock of furniture, kitchen equipment, radios, television sets, floor coverings, bedding, and furnishings. It also contained the home of Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Dwyer and, in addition,

twelve completely furnished apartments. All tenants were away at the time of the fire but their belongings were destroyed. Occupying one corner of the building was the barber shop of Joseph Borges who also lived in the rear. He was able to escape the flames which suddenly seemed to fill the entire building with only the clothing he had on and a pair of clippers. Three patrons almost got jammed in the doorway making their escape. Manuel Steel who was being shaved at the time ran out with his face half covered with lather. In another section, formerly a separate building but subsequently made a part of the main structure, a large shop had been completely remodeled but was empty.

Chief Matta said today that had the fire occurred at night there would have been no escape for at least some of those in the building. At it was, a registered collie dog belonging to Miss Florine Peters, Waldick, N. J., and who had one of the apartments, was suffocated and Joe Borges lost his canary and goldfish. Mrs. William Perry, bookkeeper of Arnold's was the first to detect the smoke and after warning Mrs. Dwyer and turning in the alarm, fled from the store. Mrs. Dwyer made certain that none of the tenants were in their apartments and then took her 7-year old daughter, Beverly, to safety.

When Chief Matta saw that the fire, which was quickly followed by an explosion, was out of hand, he sent in a second alarm and called on Truro for help. He later assigned the heavier pumpers to the wharves nearby, realizing that the water tower would soon be pumped dry, and water from the harbor began pouring into the doomed building. He said that, with the powerful auxiliary pump used for sinking piles helping, a total of 3,500 gallons battled the flames, and a total of some million and a half gallons was hosed in the fight which lasted almost five hours.

The fire was under control at 7 o'clock but firemen remained on duty all night. From time to time flames would break out again and it was not until daylight Sunday morning that no trace of smoke could be detected.

#### Praise For Men

Chief Matta joined with the townspeople in his praise of the work of the firemen and also asked that the thanks of the department be extended to the Lobster Pot, Turner's Log Cabin, the Sandwich Shop, Mrs. Domingo Godinho, Mrs. Daniel H. Hiebert, Mrs. Sadie Crawford, Miss Alice Fratus and Mrs. Matta for their work for the

firemen in providing coffee and refreshments. He said he is grateful, too, for the assistance given by Dan W. Clark of Osterville, wharf contractor, for his most prompt cooperation in turning over his pumping equipment for fire fighting. Those who assisted at this end were Frank Souza and Neil Snow of Provincetown, Mr. Clark, Frank Boyne of Hyannisport and Lionel Pierce and William Eton of Osterville. Chief Matta said that special thanks goes to the excellent work of the Truro firefighters under their Chief, Arthur S. Joseph.

Fortunately only minor injuries were suffered by any of the firemen. Most seriously hurt was Herman J. Rivard of Pumper 2 who sustained a gash in his right hand and arm that required six stitches. Lawrence Cabral, No. 2, suffered from smoke inhalation. Deputy Chief Manuel G. White cut his

hand, James Sants, No. 5, was a bit wrenched by a fall and Captain Edward Noons of No. 1 sustained a nail cut in the foot.

Yesterday work of tearing down the historic building, erected in 1846, was started, first by removing what was left of the cupola in which once hung a bell which summoned the youngsters to school on week days and worshippers to church on Sunday, but which last Saturday afternoon was a funnel for billowing smoke.

#### Fire Sidelights

Fire Chief Matta was amazed to find, while investigating after the fire, that in some of the refrigerators which had to take the hottest part of the flames, there were ice cubes still frozen solid.

Fireman Johnny O'Donnell, employed at Perry's Market, who was out of that shop at the first sound of the siren, white apron and all carried his pencil over his ear through most of the fire and only lost it as he struggled getting a hose up a ladder to the second floor.

"Get there fastest with the mostest" is the slogan of the Provincetown Fire Department. So fast did the flames spread Saturday that most of the men didn't even bother to get into rubber coats and hats. They worked drenched to the skin, again and again. Tony Dutra was like that when he came over to the roof to ask, "Who the devil is that squirting the hose on me?"

A second explosion which seemed to be under the unoccupied store raised the whole structure up several inches, and then it dropped. But not before a large plate glass window came out into the street.

Only a few inches separated the Old Colony Tap building from the burning structure and firemen kept pouring tons of water on its roof and sides as it steamed in the heat.

