

# SEEK FIREBUGS AFTER STRATFORD HIGH SCHOOL BURNS; LOSS \$200,000

## 5 FIREMEN INJURED IN HARD FIGHT

Fire which may have been of incendiary origin broke out at 3 o'clock this morning in the Stratford High school, and despite the efforts of Stratford and Bridgeport firemen laid the building in ruins. The exact amount of damage, which is only partially covered by insurance has not been determined as yet, but it is estimated at approximately \$200,000. A hasty meeting of the Stratford Board of Education was called this noon, and it was decided to house as many students as possible in the churches and other available buildings, until the school is repaired.

Cold weather handicapped the fire fighters considerably, the water freezing solidly on the walls and fire escapes of the building. Five Stratford firemen were injured while fighting the blaze, and were given medical attention by Dr. E. H. J. Hennessey and Dr. DeRuyter Howland. While the fire was at its height, about 4 o'clock, a large number of women appeared on the scene with hot coffee and sandwiches which they parsed out to the cold and hungry men.

### Seen by Policeman.

The blaze was first discovered shortly before 3 o'clock by Patrolman David Dinan, who saw flames shooting from a basement window in the front of the school. The policeman turned in a general alarm.

When the firemen arrived, the fire appeared to be confined in a small lunch room next to the boiler room near the front of the building. A stream of water was poured on this blaze and the fire seemed to be under control. A few minutes later, however, flames burst through the roof. A door was broken down and the fire was seen roaring up the main stairway in the center of the building.

A call for aid was sent to the Bridgeport Fire department at this time, and engine company No. 8 responded. A big pumping engine supplied by the Bridgeport department rendered valuable assistance to the firemen, and eight streams of water were directed on the flames.

When the roof caved in, Oscar Swanson, a Stratford fireman who was standing on a fire escape landing on the second floor, slipped and fell down the entire length of ice-coated steps. He was rendered unconscious by a blow on the back of the head. William Hanford and Harry Flood, also of the Stratford department were overcome by smoke while inside the blazing structure, and had to be carried out by their companions [sic]. Hanford was nearly frozen in addition to suffering from suffocation. Albert Anderson and Herbert Smith both sustained cuts on the knees. All five of the injured men required medical attention.

The flames were gotten under control about 5:30 o'clock, but water was poured into the building for a number of hours later, in order that, smouldering [sic] embers might be extinguished.

### Probe Shows Matches.

An investigation started this morning showed that the blaze started in the basement in either the boiler room or lunchroom. In the hallway on the second floor was found a quantity of matches strewn over the floor, and in an adjoining room lay a box of matches. Chief A. D. Judson would not say that the fire was incendiary, but admitted that the matches looked suspicious. Other firemen who arrived early on the scene, said that the flames appeared to start in several places at once. It is believed that the blaze had its origin in the basement and swept up to the second and third floors through ventilators and the stairway.

The high school as it stands today is a complete wreck. All of the 15 rooms in the building were damaged by fire or water, and many valuable books and records were lost. C. C. Thompson superintendent of schools said today that he hopes some of the records could be salvaged.

Every room on the second and third floors was gutted by the flames. Two pianos were destroyed on these floors, and all records, papers and books were lost. The first floor was not seriously damaged by fire, but was completely flooded by water. Holes were chopped in the floors to release the water which measured over six feet deep in the basement. Above the first floor nothing was standing except the walls. When the flagpole fell from the top of the building it pierced a heavy slate roof over the front porch and narrowly [sic] missed several firemen.

The building and surrounding trees and grounds were covered with a thick coating of ice this morning. Fire escapes were also covered and passage over these was almost impossible. Fire lines were established to keep back the crowd which gathered to inspect the ruins.

A meeting of the Board of Education was called this noon, and plans were aimed [sic] for holding school sessions in the Stratford churches. Chief Judson started a rigid examination to determine the cause of the fire, and will pay particular attention to the finding of the matches on the second. It is said that no one was in the building last night

### Phone Line Heroine.

Miss Marie Blucher, a Stratford telephone operator, was the heroine of the blaze. The young lady summoneed [sic] many firemen by telephone, and stuck to her post although the telephone building was in danger of being fired by sparks which flew from the burning High school. Firemen were posted at nearby buildings to prevent a spread of the flames.

The High school building was a three-story structure and was erected in 1884. At the present time it was being used for both high and grammar school students. The High school classes were being operated on half time, due to the overcrowded conditions of the schools.

At the Stratford school board meeting this noon it was decided to resume regular school sessions on Wednesday. All of the assembly and parish halls in the town, the Masonic temple and the town hall have been donated for use, and it is expected that these will provide ample room for the 600 pupils who were attending the high school.

All of the students who attended sessions in the high school building will report in the Stratford theatre at 9 o'clock Monday morning, when they will receive instructions as to where they will be placed on Wednesday.