

FEARLESS BOSTON FIREMEN

Who Take All Kinds of Chances

A SERIES OF PERSONAL STORIES

LIEUT HAMILTON A. McCLAY LADDER 12

"During my 20 years' experience in the Fire Department I have had my share of so-called thrills, but strange to say, most of the dangers through which I safely passed on occasions left no lasting memories behind, for the reason that they came so unexpectedly and went so quickly the mind failed to realize the perils from which I had escaped, until all was over, and then they were looked upon as episodes that go with the position.

"There is, however, one incident in my career as a fireman that has left behind it a lasting impression. While I was in no danger myself, the horror of the affair filled me with unspeakable awe.

"It occurred at a fire on Fleet st, North End, where 13 persons lost their lives. I was attached to Ladder 1 then, and upon our arrival ladders were quickly raised to the different windows, over one of which I went.

"In groping around through the dense smoke I stumbled over the bodies of two of the victims who had fought their way together until within a few feet of safety, where they perished, retaining even in death their embrace of mutual protection.

"It is scenes such as this (to my way of thinking) that give the real and lasting thrills. When you come in contact



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with and realize the futility of human endeavors in the presence of the great reaper, personal dangers, wherein severe injuries are sustained, are dwarfed into insignificance by the immensity of one such catastrophe.

"The memory of that fire I have never been able to efface; and whenever the tapper strikes my mind pictures a scene taking place like unto that that occurred among those poor people in their humble home in the North End, a struggle for self-preservation."

Lieut McClay was appointed to the department April 17, 1896, and served with Chemical 8, Ladder 1, Engine 26 and Ladder 12.