

INSURANCE MEN SAY \$450,000

Loss by Big Blaze in Wool District.

High Pressure Salt Water Proves a Big Success.

Six Firemen Blown Into Street by Explosion.

Following closely the great lumber district blaze, a spectacular four-alarm fire caused \$450,000 damage in the wool district yesterday morning in a five-story brick and stone building on Congress st. For the first time the high pressure salt water service was used, proving highly successful.

During the progress of the blaze six firemen narrowly escaped death from a back-draft explosion and the collapse of several floors and two others were slightly injured.

The fire gutted the quarters of Crimmins & Pierce, wool merchants, who occupied the building numbered 175 to 181 Congress st; the quarters of Charles E. Perry, dealer in paper goods, at 185 Congress st, and the quarters of the Cook-Vivian paper company at 187 to 189 Congress st.

An automatic alarm was sounded at 2.50 a m from box 516, in the basement of the Crimmins & Pierce building, and the firemen found a brisk blaze in progress on the first floor. Box 44 was sounded at 2.55 and a second alarm was sent in three minutes later. A third alarm became necessary at 3:04 and at 4 o'clock, when the entire roof became a mass of flames, Chief Mullen turned in a fourth alarm.

At the latter hour there was a spectacle seldom seen at a fire in this city. An avalanche of water was poured into the building. It rushed through the building and poured out of the windows like a miniature Niagara, filling the streets a foot deep.

Almost every window of the five stories of the wool storehouse was closed with iron shutters. These became red hot from the furnace within. There was not a fire wall nor a fire door in the whole building, and the flames had full sweep.

The firemen of ladder 18 attempted to pour a stream into the windows, but they were driven down, foot by foot, until Chief Mullen ordered them down altogether. The thick smoke from the smoldering wool drove the firemen out of the first floor. Others were obliged to slide down ladders in search of a whiff of fresh air. There was no vantage point from which the firemen could fight.

High Pressure Service Used.

Soon after the fourth alarm was sounded the water towers and the great Hart bowguns were put to work with determination.

Engine 44, a fire boat, ran up to Central wharf, and putting all its monstrous energy into 12 lines, the salt sea water, for the first time outside of demonstrations, was poured through the high pressure salt water mains and given to the water towers.

The high pressure salt water hydrant at Congress and Franklin sts was opened, and a few minutes later another at Congress and Matthew sts was connected with three lines of hose. The fireboat began to pump the salt water through the lines, and within a minute the pressure reached 140 pounds.

Without the high-pressure salt water system the flames might have been spreading yet, for the wind had changed from the southwest to the east and was blowing fresh and carrying the flames along Congress st and across toward the rear of the Federal-st building.

As day broke the scene was one to marvel at. There were 15 terrific streams of water pouring upon the Congress-st front of the burning building from the three water towers, three Hart bowguns and from engine and hose companies working from the street, from ladders and from the roofs of the buildings on the opposite side of Congress st.

The fire broke out afresh at 7 a m in an L in the rear of the Crimmins & Pierce building, but from the windows of the Cook-Vivian company's plant the firemen succeeded in extinguishing this blaze. The "all-out" signal was sent in at 7:18 a m.

Firemen Blown Into Street.

While fighting the flames on ladders in Leather sq two firemen were severely cut by falling slate. G. B. S. Kewer of ladder 18 and Theodore Gallpeau of ladder 14 were the injured men. Both had tendons of their fingers severed and severe cuts upon their hands. They were removed to the Relief hospital in an ambulance, and after their wounds were dressed they were taken to their homes.

At 6 a m, while Capt Riley, Lieut Howard and hosemen Porter, Boudreau, Locke, Murphy and Doyle were on a landing of the stairway at No. 183 Congress st, the back draft caused a terrific explosion which hurled them out into the street, and the next instant the roof and all the floors crashed down to the basement. The members of engine 4, from Bulfinch st, were uninjured, but the shock was an unpleasant one.

Insurance companies were severely hit by their losses in yesterday morning's fire, as they were in the great lumber district fire last week. All the companies, however, are amply able to pay their losses. The wool stock of Crimmins & Pierce was insured for \$562,500, the building at 169 to 181 Congress st, owned by Frank E. Simpson et al, was insured for \$87,500, while insurance on rents in this building amounted to \$16,000. Insurance men estimated the loss yesterday at about \$450,000.