

Edward T. Toner

(- 4 Dec 1902)

Toner. Suddenly at Chicago on December 4, 1902, Edward T. Toner, beloved husband of Margaret A. Toner of this city. Funeral from his mother's residence, 1119 G street southeast, Thursday, December 9 at 3 p.m. sharp, thence to St. Peter's Church. Interment Congressional cemetery.

The Evening Star, December 4, 1902, p. 1

Death in Hotel Fire

Fourteen Persons Perish in Chicago

Many Suffocated

Hotel Lincoln a Veritable Fire Trap

The Place Was Crowded With Visitors to the Live Stock Show

Chicago. December 4--Fourteen persons, among the scores crowded into the Lincoln Hotel at 116 Madison street, met death shortly before 6 o'clock this morning in a fire which will pass into local history as one of the most horrible Chicago has ever experienced.

Death came suddenly to a few but with awful slowness to others who were penned in the death trap and suffocated or burned to death. Some died in their rooms some chanced all in jumping and lost, while others were found in the hallways, where they had expired with their fingers dug into the cracks of the floor. All of the bodies were recovered, as the hotel was not destroyed.

The Death List

Following are the identified dead: M.M. Handy, Janesville, Wis.; Edward Toner, Milwaukee; H.K Wood, Lebanon, Ind; BF Boswell, Chicago; Samuel L. Yocum, Davenport, Iowa; J.C. Yocum, Davenport, Iowa; F.L. Ewing, Marietta, Ohio; A.B. Coon, Marengo, Ill.; T.V. Slocum, Waconda, Ill.; Ward Lowe, Minneapolis; F. W. Carey, Bucyrus, Ohio.

Three others, including one who died on the way to the hospital, had not been identified up to noon.

The victims were taken to Rollston's morgue, and all day the place was filled with anxious people interested in the dead or seeking to assure themselves of the safety of friends or relatives.

The building was a fire trap of the worst kind according to experts. There were but two exits, a narrow stairway leading down the four floors of the building and an uncompleted fire escape in the rear.

Fire Escape Gives Way

The fire started on the second floor, presumably from a lighted cigar dropped on the carpet. Guests occupying upper rooms at the front part of the hostelry, aroused by the screams of a woman, were able to escape down the stairway, and about thirty people reached safety by means of the fire escape. To add to the horror, however, this gave way while others were attempting to escape, and three men were dashed to death on the pavement of the alley below.

For the people still in the rear rooms, there was now no escape save by jumping. The stairway was in flames and the fire escape gone. Horror-stricken faces appeared at the windows and cried frantically for help. Firemen cried back to them to wait until nets or mattresses could be brought and those who did in most cases escaped with slight injuries. But some crazed with fright, jumped to the pavement and were either killed or badly hurt.

With great difficulty the fire, although comparatively a small one, was subdued, but it was some time before the rescuers could penetrate the dense bank of smoke which filled the place. It was an awful scene which met their gaze. The dead or unconscious were lying stretched on the floors, or in some cases on their beds. Some had attempted to slip on a garment before making for the street, but had been overcome, but most of them were in their night clothes.

Stores Full of Half Clad Guests

Every store and other hotels in the vicinity was filled with men and women who had escaped with only their night gowns. An investigation will be made. A fire wall around the freight elevator and other precautionary alterations had been ordered some time ago, but the matter had been neglected.

Firemen and policemen were not reticent in speaking of what they witnessed at the catastrophe. They condemned the building as a "fire-trap."

Ambulances and patrol wagons from all parts of the city were called to the place and the dead and injured were quickly attended.

All but fourteen of the guests at the hotel were out-of-town patrons. Most of them came to Chicago to attend the international livestock show. Up to 10 o'clock last night persons were taken in at the hotel and in every room or place in which a cot could be erected, it is said, guests were accommodated. A large number of stockmen with their families were turned away after the hotel was filled.

Shortly after the fire broke out the firemen rushed up the stairway into the place and began the work of rescue. Men, women and children were carried down ladders, fire escapes and smoke-filled halls.

Thrilling Rescue of Mother and Son

In one instance a fireman of engine company No. 2 saved a woman from running to the rear of the building to certain death on the fourth floor, only to be forced to drop her from the third floor to the roof of the building at 178 Madison street. The woman held her seven-year-old son in her arms. She was Mrs. J. Sheppard, and her son is named Frederick. She was then carried from the roof of the building to the Brevoort House, where a physician was summoned. It was found that their injuries were slight.

The building is constructed of brick, with but one stairway leading to the upper floors and a fire escape in the front of the building.

E.C. Weber, the night clerk, was one of the first persons to discover smoke on the second floor. It is believed that the fire began in this section of the building. Weber refused to make any statement, and after he had secured possession of the hotel register he was taken to the central station, where he is being detained.

A short time after the fire was discovered consternation reigned in the upper floors. Mrs. Sheppard's son was one of the first to be awakened by the presence of smoke. He awakened his mother, and both began screaming. Many persons were thus warned of the danger and made their escape.

J.E. Herbert's Jump

J.E. Herbert of Salineville, Ohio, jumped from the fourth floor, where he had been sleeping. He struck on the roof of 178 Madison street, where Mrs. Sheppard fell. His right leg was broken and he suffered internal injuries. He was taken to the county hospital.

W.J. Thomas, a mail clerk of Cedar Rapids, jumped through a window on the fourth floor, and in his blind haste narrowly escaped falling to the street. He managed to make his way to the fire escape and climbed to the ground. Previous to Thomas' escape twenty-five to thirty persons had climbed down the fire escape to the street. All were in their night clothing.

Allen Oldorf of Milwaukee made a perilous descent from the fourth floor by scaling the wall by means of the iron shutters. Oldorf stated that he had seen at least a dozen persons on the top floor, vainly endeavoring to make their way from the building by means of the front stairway.

Many of the bodies were found in the beds in positions of slumber. Others were found in the hallways, lying face downward, in positions that mutely portrayed how they had vainly endeavored to save their lives. Some were half-clad and others wore nothing but night clothing. It was by means of articles and letters in the pockets of what little clothing some of the dead persons wore that many identifications were made.

Proprietor's Statement

P.A. Smith, proprietor of the hotel, says: "I am certainly not to blame for this awful catastrophe. Three weeks ago the agents of this building were notified to place a stairway in the rear of the building, and also to build a fire wall around the freight elevator shaft in the rear. The contractors came and looked the building over, but nothing was done. Last night our seventy rooms were all filled, and I should judge that we had about 125 or 150 guests. From what I can learn, the fire started in the rear of the building on the second floor. This probably accounts for the escape of guests who occupied front rooms on the upper floors. They had an opportunity to reach the stairway before the flames reached that part of the building, but the occupants of the rear rooms were cut off by the flames. Most of our guests last night were persons who came to Chicago to visit the stock show and knew little of the building."

Chief Musham of the fire department said that in some ways it was the worst fire he had attended during his career as a fireman, and that so dense was the smoke that it was impossible to reach the imprisoned guests, who died like rats in a cage. When the firemen finally managed to make their way into the room the sight that met their gaze was appalling. Men and boys lay about the floors of the rooms and hallways where they had fallen in their eagerness to escape.

Veritable Fire Trap

"The building," said the chief, "was one of the worst fire traps I have ever seen. The floors in places had cracks in them large enough to drop a penny through and the smoke just sifted through and suffocated the inmates of the rooms before they had time to make their way into the hallways."

From what could be learned from persons who escaped from the building, it appeared that the fire was accidentally started, probably by dropping a lighted cigar on the carpet in the hallway on the second floor. The smoldering fire filled the building with heavy smoke and several were suffocated.

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Resident of Washington

Edward T. Toner Once Member of Columbia Typographical Union

Edward T. Toner, the compositor who lost his life in the Lincoln Hotel fire in Chicago Thursday morning, as stated in *The Star*, was a native of this city and a member of the local typographical union. He served as secretary of the union several years ago. The deceased was forty years old. His wife and three children survive him. They are living at 228 A street southeast, in this city. Thomas W. Toner, father of the deceased lives at 1119 G street southeast.

About five years ago Edward Toner went to Denver, Col., where he was employed on the Rocky Mountain News. Later he moved to Milwaukee, where he worked on the Free Press and Milwaukee Sentinel. Two months ago he went to Chicago and obtained a position on the Chicago Inter-Ocean. His wife received a letter from him last week, in which he spoke of coming home to spend the Christmas holidays.

Mrs. Toner first learned of the fatality last night when she read in *The Star* an account of the fire. Later she received a dispatch from a Chicago undertaker telling of her husband's death. The undertaker was instructed to prepare the body for burial and express it to this city. It is expected it will reach here tomorrow. Arrangements for the funeral have not yet been made.