

# LAX LAWS AND LOCKED DOORS BLAMED FOR NEW YORK'S HORROR

Death of One Hundred and Fifty in Shirtwaist  
Factory Fire is Believed By District Attorney  
to Be Due to Criminal Neglect By Inspectors  
and Individuals and Sweeping Grand  
Jury Investigation is Under Way.

NEW YORK, March 27.—Facing the fact that there are not less than 150 loft buildings in Manhattan alone which are veritable fire traps and that of horror exceeding that of Saturday afternoon which cost 142 lives when the plant of the Triangle Waist Company was destroyed, is possible at any time, immediate plans to remedy this situation were set on foot today. At the same time the district attorney's and coroner's office started an inquiry to place the blame for Saturday's holocaust. It seemed certain, however, that the fault was not alone negligence of individuals, but laxity in the laws, and that it will be necessary to appeal to the Legislature for action.

District Attorney Whitman said that he intended to have the Grand Jury make a sweeping investigation which will be entirely independent of that of the coroner. He intends that the blame shall be squarely placed and if criminal negligence is proven, the persons responsible will be punished. He today assigned Assistant District Attorneys Bostwick, Manley and Ruben to conduct the various sections of the inquiry. He intimated that he is already in possession of information that indicated the inspection of the office and factory buildings of the city has been criminally lax. The provisions of the law demanding standpipes, three separate stairways sprinklers, auto-

matic fire alarms, etc., have not been complied in more than one-third of the big buildings in the city.

Whitman is already convinced that had there been an automatic fire alarm in the building, in which the Triangle Company's plant is located, fifteen minutes would have been saved by the firemen in reaching the scene and that time would have enabled them to get into the upper floors and led many of those who later lost their lives to safety by means of the roof and adjoining structures.

Whitman said that Fire Commissioner Waldo and Chief Croker had cited to him many instances of where the City Building Department had hampered the work of the Fire Department and he said that he was in favor of asking the legislature to give the fire department the same control over factory and office buildings that is now held over theatres.

## CRIMINAL NEGLIGENCE.

Whitman's inspection of the building has shown criminal negligence on somebody's part. The big doors leading to the stairways were reinforced with iron and opened inward so that those who tried to open them were penned against them. Chief Croker and Deputy Chief Binns reported to the District Attorney that they found charred bodies piled in front of the

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# LAX LAWS BLAMED FOR N. Y. FIRE

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doors on the ninth floor showing that dozens of girls had rushed straight for the doors but the first comers failed to get the doors back and immediately the pressure from behind made it an impossibility to get the exits open. The law specifically states that such doors shall open outwardly, wherever practicable and the fire department officials unite in saying that these doors could as easily have been arranged to open that way as inwardly.

The law also states that factory doors and exits must be left unlocked during hours, but the survivors of the horror unite in asserting that it was the rule of the proprietors of the Triangle factory to have all of the doors securely locked. As an excuse they say this was necessary as employes would report for work and then leave without letting any one know, only returning to report off duty.

The single "inside" fire escape in the building has been photographed for use in the grand jury investigation. It is so narrow that only one person could descend at a time and of the kind characterized by the firemen as utterly useless. So-called fire proof buildings, in which category the Asch building was, are required to install fire escapes in the "discretion" of the City Building Department. The officials never compelled the installation of any on this structure.

The District Attorney and his assistants are today examining fifty persons who had knowledge of conditions in the burned building. These include proprietors of the factories on the lower floors; Joseph G. Asch, owner of the structure who arrived from Florida late yesterday and a number of the survivors of the horror.

That it was the habit of many of the workers to smoke cigarettes and pipes despite the inflammable material has already been established by the fire marshal. The rule against smoking, while conspicuously displayed, according to Fire Marshal Beers, was a dead letter in the Triangle factory and he says that the cause of the fire may have been a lighted match or cigarette carelessly thrown aside by a smoker. It is unlikely, however, that the real cause will ever be positively known. The proprietors of the factory say they think it came from a heated jammed pulley while other survivors say an explosion took place just as the fire broke out.

While preparations for fixing the responsibility for the horror went on apace today, the various charitable organizations and civil bodies started out to care for the destitute dependents of the victims and to bury the dead. Mayor William J. Gaynor headed a subscription list to be distributed through the Red Cross Committee of the New York Charity Organization Society. The various newspapers also prepared to raise funds, as did the Ladies' Waist and Dress Makers' Union, with which a number of the dead were affiliated. This latter organization also prepared to bury the unidentified dead.

A large lot has been secured in the plot of the Workman's Circle, a Jewish sick and death benefit organization, in Mount Sinai has promised to bury those unidentified and others whose friends are unable to pay the undertaker. The union has ordered that all members refrain from working tomorrow, when it is planned to hold most of the funerals and to participate in a monster funeral procession. Other labor organizations are expected to join, and the whole is to be made a united protest against the lax laws which made the horror possible.

Of the 142 bodies that had been taken to the morgue up to noon yesterday, when it was decided all of the dead had been recovered, all but forty-two had been identified today. All through the night the old covered chariety pier had been besieged by persons whose loved ones were missing, but most of the remaining bodies are so terribly charred that identification seems impossible. A heavy rain that began to fall soon after dark last night drove the mere curiosity-seekers away, but those who were honestly seeking relatives or friends stood in line, although in many instances wet to the skin, until they were permitted to enter.

With daylight the line began to grow again, and before 9 o'clock there were more than a thousand people waiting to get inside. The police and nurses on duty permitted the people to enter a few at a time in order that the usual confusion might be prevented.

All of the bodies had been placed in roughly-painted pine boxes, and, where it was possible, the head had been elevated so that recognition might be facilitated. As quickly as identification was made the lids were clamped on the coffins and they were placed at the rear of the pier to await transfer by undertakers to the sorrowing homes.

Over at the Mercer Street Police Station the police have half a hundred women's hats and furs, as well as other articles of wearing apparel and valuables, arranged around the floor of the reserve squad room. These belonged to the dead and were being held for the relatives to identify and claim. There are also in the captain's safe a number of pay envelopes and pieces of jewelry picked up in the street after the victims jumped.

There were fourteen injured victims of the fire still in St. Vincent's, the New York and Bellevue Hospitals today. Of these it was said five at least are so terribly hurt that they cannot recover.

Nettie Rosenthal, 41, of 104 Monroe Street, was identified by Minnie Blonstein who was working with her at the time the fire broke out. Miss Rosenthal was trampled under foot by the mad rush of other frightened girls. The body was bodily charred but was identified by the rings on the fingers.

Other identifications today:  
Vincenzo Zellotta, 16, of 625 Washington Street, Hoboken, N. J. Her clothing had all been burned off and recognition was possible only by a peculiar iron plate which she had attached to the sole of her shoe.

Rebecca Raynes, 19, of 216 Madison Street. This identification was made by her younger sister, Nettie, and is not yet complete as Nettie Raynes collapsed on seeing the body and was taken to a hospital in a hysterical condition.

Mary Herman, 40, of 511 East Fifth Street. This body was charred beyond all human semblance and all of the clothing was burned off. Identification was made by a garter buckle of a peculiar design.

Nettie Liebowitz, 22, of 27 East Third Street.

Frances Maile, 21, of 135 Sullivan Street.

Rose Friedman, 18, of 77 Eighth Street.

Rosie Bassius, 31, of 97 West Houston Street.

Ida Brodsky, 15, of 308 East Tenth Street.

Sarah Sabassowitz, 17, of 212 Avenue B.

Irene Granetazio, 24, of 6 Bedford Street.

At 11:30 the line of those seeking admission to the temporary morgue extended over five blocks. The police would only permit half a dozen in the building at a time.