A TOTAL LOSS

Duluth's Beautiful Opera House Destroyed in an Hour.

The Lose Approaches a Quarter of a Million Dollars.

A Number of Occupants Barely Escape With Their Lives.

Rebuilding This House and Various Other Projects Discussed.

A COMPLETE LOSS.

Duluth's Elegant Opera House Brought to the Ground.

A mischievous mouse nibbling matches or some such trifle, a brisk northwesterly wind with the mercury at zero, the usual lack of water at the street, some bungling apparently about laying hose and some confusion when momenta were precious; such were the causes that destroyed the Opera house, Duluth's pride and joy, one of the beautiful buildings of the city, a quasi-public institution in which all felt a personal interest. Such were the causes from which sprung losses of approximately $200,000 to owners and occupants.

About 1 45 Monday morning Thomas Lannigan passing the Opera house saw smoke coming from Gasser's grocery. He ran over to the St. Louis hotel and told Gus Roth, the night clerk, who pulled the alarm from box 47. In five minutes the chemical and one hose cart one was roused and Hanson groped his way out, rolling down two flights of stairs, a bruised and blinded hero. One was left, A. J. Whiteman, in the third corner, Hanson supposing he was in St. Paul. He escaped by the house and confusion and ran to his door, to be met by a suffocating cloud of smoke. He closed the door and threw open a window. Help call was heard, a ladder raised with difficulty past a tangle of wires and the handsome sen ntor crawled down the ladder and was helped across the street, half dead, but beyond quick recovery. Al Gasser was reported missing, but at last relieved his friends by appearing. Maurice Halfey and several others thought they saw a man fall back from a window on the alley side, after frantic efforts to escape, but no one is reported missing. Dr. Pillsbury was reported missing, but sent word in that he was alive and unscorched.

Adjoining Buildings.

Serious as the fire was, it looked several times as if the conflagration would be much worse. When the fire was at its height the St. Louis was in imminent danger. The front wall was smoking and the heat cracked nearly all the windows on Superior street. The firemen did good work here and saved the building. Had the wind held from the northwest as at the start the great hostelry must have gone. It veered to the eastward, however, and before the roof fell had gone down almost entirely. As it was the panels made a bonfire exist with valises and trunks. One man was a bit startled to have a trunk come smashing down from a third story window to the Michigan street sidewalk at his feet. The Superior street exit was at this time impassable and the guests with fear and tremoling were escorted through a dark passage to Michigan street. A memorial wreath came up last evening and largely signed asking the council to order better escapes.

The postoffice too was in danger Postmaster Flynn was one of the first on the ground and the whole postal force was soon at work removing mails. The Opera house will threatened to fall and crush the postoffice out of existence. The boys after getting out the mails with a batch of letters in one hand and their lives in the other, were pulled off. They soon went back and pulled out most of the office fixtures as well. The building was on fire at one time and one mailing case was burned, but the fire was suppressed. At 6 in the morning they set to work moving their traps back and at 7:45 the carriers with the Sunday mails and the large Monday morning budget, started on their rounds, fifteen minutes late In consideration of their gallant services the men were not docked for being late.

The frame buildings on Superior street, unfortunately some will say, were untouched. C. F. Johnson's building, occupied by Alberson & Chamberlain's bookstore, was slightly scorched. The Howard house of course is a salamander. On the avenue above the postoffice, most of the furniture was moved from the two nearest Beneteau cottages, but the wind was not that way and they escaped Over the postoffice John D. Gill in light attire was sowing papers, books and clothing on the sidewalk. He too was rescued.

Several windows in the Ferguson block, diagonally from the Opera block, were broken by the heat, but the building was not in serious danger.

The Losses.

As near as can be ascertained the losses and insurance outside of the building were as follows:

	Insurance.	Loss.
Boyce & Totman	$ 6 000	$14 000
J T Condon (store)	4,000	9,000
J T Condon (rooms)		1 500
W C Sargent		300
Wisconsin Central	250	250
Partridge & Austin	300	300
Osborne & Frazer	2,500	2 500
J K Smith		800
M M Gasser	10,000	14,000
Jewell Bros	8,500	8,500
E W Markell	300	300
R R Webber	100	100
Munger & Markell (office)	3,000	3,000
Weyerhauser		1,000
Baldwin & Willcuts	300	300
H Harrington	300	300
Merrill, Ryder & Co		1,500
Shotwell & Noyes		500
Monroe Nichols		200
Dr Bowman	200	1,500
A J Whiteman	100	1,500
Chamber of Commerce		1,500
Professor Moulitz	1,000	2,500
W Virgil		500
Kitchi Gammi	6,000	9,000
Postoffice building	2,000	2,500
Gill & Myers		300
Dr. Ekman		400
Hotel St Louis	1,000	1,000
Duluth Electric Light and Power company		2 000
Ladies Library association	600	1,000
Messrs Dow and Quilliard (studio)		500

The Insurance.

ON BUILDING

A W Flupke (Grand Pacific), $1,250; Franklin, $1,250. Mendenhall & Hoopes—Pennsylvania, $1,500, queen, of England, $1,500; British America, $1,500; Northern, England, $1,500 Myers & Whipple—American Central, $2,500, Liberty, $1,000; Phoenix, British & Mercantile, $4,000; Hanover & Children, $3,000; American Fire, $4,000; Insurance Co of N A, H Graves & Co—Connecticut, $2,500, Aetna, $2,500; German American, $2,500; Commercial Union, $4,000; Hartford, $1,250; Niagara, $1,250; Phoenix, $1,500 Marvin & Hawkes—Union, $1,500, St. Paul, $2,500, German, of Pittsburg, $2,500; American, of Philadelphia, $1,000. Sherwood & Co.—Queen (Liv.), United Firemen, $500, Providence & Washington, $1,500, Packers & Producers, $1,000; Mechanics, of Philadelphia, $1,500. Partridge & Austin—Several company panies, $4,500.

INSURANCE ON STOCKS.

Kimberley, Stryker & Manley—Orient, of Hartford, $500 for Boyce & Totman; Insurance, of New York, $2,000, for Boyce & Totman; Sun Fire, of London, $1,000, Buffalo German, $1,000, Liverpool Royal, $500, for M. M. Gasser. Mendenhall & Hoopes—Insurance Company, of North America, $1,000 for W. C. Sargent. Merchants, of Newark, $1,250, Concordia, of Milwaukee, $1,250, for Sig. Levy C. H. Graves & Co—L. L. & G., $2,000, Phoenix, of Hartford, $2,000, for Boyce & Totman, National, $1,000, for J T Condon, North American, $500, Phoenix, $500, for J T Condon; Union, $400, for A. J Whiteman, Springfield, $1,000, for M M. Gasser, Phoenix, of London, $1,500, Firemen's Fund, $1,000, for Sig Levy, Syndicate, $1,000, Springfield, $1,000, Firemen's Fund, $750, for Kitchi Gammi club W C Sherwood & Co—State, of New Haven, $1,250, for W. C. Gasser Partridge & Austin—For Kitchi Gammi club $1,750, W. H. H. Sewell $1,000, J. T. Condon $500, Osborne & Frazer $1,750, N. M. Gasser $1,000 Sig Levy $1,250 H. W. Pimple—Fireman's, of Newark, $500 for Hilldell & Lacey Farmers, of York, Pa., $300, for A. H. Wigdahl. Total insurance—on building, $53,000, on contents, $37 350, grand total, $91,350

There are probably some risks placed out of town that have not been reported, which will bring the insurance to about $100,000.

Book Worms Cheated.

The best public library in town, kept alive by woman's devoted efforts, the Ladies' Library, was burned. They have $600 insurance for a nucleus and they should have public aid in gathering a far better library than the one destroyed. The best private library in Duluth was the Kitchi Gammi's. A collection of reference books and maps, unequalled in the Northwest went to ashes in the Chamber of Commerce rooms. Here were charts of the geological survey, an invaluable collection of directories of all the American cities, maps of which many can scarcely be duplicated, seventy volumes of the Congressional Records, and hundreds of pamphlets and reports, many of small value severally, but the whole inestimable in value and as a collection not to be replaced. Mrs Shoemaker, the stenographer, loses four of five sets of Sheridan awaiting delivery Secretary Phelp's personal loss is about $150.

The Salvage.

Practically nothing was saved. John T. Condon trundled out his safe. About twenty more are in the ruins and will be pried open in a few days when they cool off. Sieg Levy had valuables worth about $10,000 which may be destroyed or not. A few of the tenants got their trunks out. Condon rescued the goods in his show windows and some of Boyce & Totman's cases were brought out. A knot of half a dozen was preparing to carry off the goods from the west window when something blew up with no provocation at all, shooting the window frame into the middle of the street and the crowd to the other side. The goods were suffered to burn.

The Cause.

No altogether satisfactory explanation is found. Mice gnawing at matches is suggested as the most plausible. One of Gasser's clerks was in the store about midnight and heard rodents scamper about near where the fire caught. Spontaneous combustion or slow ignition from steam pipes is dismissed altogether. The fire started near the rear of the grocery, either just above or just below the ground floor. It is not supposed that there will be any opposition from insurance companies.

The House That Was.

The foundations for the Duluth Grand Opera house were laid in '82 and in '83 it was opened by Emma Abbott. It cost $100,000 and with fixtures and scenery about $120,000. The auditorium, containing 1,000 seats, was one of the prettiest in America, closely re embling the Bijou of Boston. Munger & Markell, the proprietors, though they are by no means impoverished by the loss, received expressions of sympathy yesterday from the Duluth public and telegrams from every part of the country. Equal sympathy is extended to many occupants whose loss, though smaller, is far heavier than the owners'.

As Emma Abbott was the first, Helen Bowers was the last performer to appear here. Brought to this country to reopen the Union Square, prevented by fire from appearing in St. Paul, she left this house after a brilliant engagement just before its incineration. Is Miss Barry the original fire fiend?

THE PHŒNIX SONG.

Duluth's New Opera House—Perhaps Two of Them.

The Opera house will probably be built on its present site. Neither Mr. Munger nor Mr. Markell were prepared to say much about the plans last evening. It is, however, almost certain that Munger & Markell will have a theater on the Opera house corner. The plan has been discussed of extending the building back to the alley, removing the postoffice building and making the block 140 instead of 100 feet deep. Then a larger house than the old one could be built on the rear of the lots, with ground floor exits, leaving space still for sizable stores in front. A large building usually takes a year and a half to complete, but it is thought with a specially early start the Opera house part could be walled in by late summer and the interior finished before next January. A date has already been made with Modjeska for next December and it is likely probable that the house will be ready for her. The work could be so separated that, while forming a part of the same structure, the office building in front could be finished at leisure. Several other plans are already suggested, but there is a general disposition to give first choice to the men who built a better place of amusement than the town could support five years ago, and carried the elephant uncomplainingly until it began to be profitable. Public spirit is appreciated here.

Of the other plans, the most definite centers upon Masonic temple on the corner of Superior street and Second avenue east. It is pretty well settled that the business center will be west of Lake avenue but that does not prevent the site named from being as good as can be found. While stores there would rent for less than at Fourth avenue west, a theater would be exactly as well located. So that ground rents favor this site. A paper circulated spontaneously yesterday and a number of solid men subscribed for round blocks of stocks. The plan would include a theater on the ground floor and the Masonic hall above. The scheme would possibly include a foyer and other metropolitan wrinkles, but details are unsettled.

It happens also that the Palladio syndicate has recently purchased an additional fifty feet and has thought of an opera house for utilizing the rear space. Large floor room could be had on this site without having the stores or offices too shallow and much otherwise "dead space" could be utilized. The indispensable requisite of ground floor exits would here be present.

Still a third site is the A. M Miller property opposite the Spalding. It is understood Mr Miller would have built before but for his belief that the Spalding, Chamber of Commerce, Jewell and Palladio buildings were enough for awhile on one square. He has not announced any decision under present circumstances but has had a theatre in mind among other things.

The West End people are not to be overlooked. They have several commodious halls but no good theatre. They are quite likely to come forward with a project, though none probably to conflict with those mentioned.

Meanwhile Dr Haycock, who was to assume the lease of the Opera house next Friday, is making arrangements to pre sent many of the attractions at Turn hall. So we shall not be altogether without the drama until the new house—or two of them—is built.

pulled up in Superior street and a little later the West End hose cart wheeled into Fourth avenue. But there were costly, perhaps fatal delays. It took several minutes to break open the front door. It took still more time to locate the fire. The chemical was brought into play, but its stream came nowhere near the flames, which at this time were entirely in the rear. The water would not flow through the pipes when first turned on, whether because the hydrant was frozen or for want of pressure is in question. Anyway the hose would not throw the water ten feet. The News reporter too went into the building at this time found no smoke in the corridors and no heat in the walls. It looked like an insignificant smoulder. But a glance at the rear of the building showed anything but a smoulder. By the time the engines arrived the flames were bursting out from the basement door, and in a few minutes the wind had fanned it into a furnace. The hose cart which was to serve this part of the building was partly disabled by the horse's falling, and it took a long time to get a stream to the one place where water could do any good By this time Gasser's store was a mass of flames and the fire had burned through to the wings of the Opera house stage. There was no stopping it then. In a few seconds the fire had leaped to the roof and penetrated to every part of the building. The walls began to bulge. In Levy's liquor store a series of explosions were heard as one barrel after another was licked up by the flames. There was one boom in particular like a dynamite blast which shook the earth and could have come from nothing less than a ton. Half an hour from the time the alarm was given the building was a cauldron of flames and a hundred yards away the heat was scarcely tolerable. A few minutes later the roof fell in, carrying everything with it to the basement. About 3, with a tremendous crash, the Superior street front and the avenue wall fell outward, and the fire was practically over. The debris continued to blaze harmlessly and still sends up a mighty smoke this morning.

People in Peril.

A dozen people were sleeping in the Opera House building when the alarm was sounded. Chas. Hanson, the janitor, was among the first to awake. He got out his family and went back to rouse the others, leaving his household effects and all his savings—about $100—to the fire. S. W. Mountz and his three children, scanty clad, were among the first rescued. Mr. Mountz's furniture and a valuable musical library were left. Don A. Dodge, who roomed on the fourth floor, had just time to snatch a pair of trousers, a sealskin cap, a pair of socks and a spring overcoat and fly. He saved nothing else—not even a collar button—furniture, watch and private papers be consumed—and they were. Frank Lazier had just been awakened by his brother, who was sleeping with him when Hanson came to the door. They tumbled out hastily, with incomplete toilets, and scrambled through the smoke. All but was on fire at one time and one mailing case was burned, but the fire was suppressed. At 6 in the morning they set to work moving their traps back and at 7:45 the carriers with the Sunday mails and the large Monday morning budget, started on their rounds, fifteen minutes late In consideration of their gallant services the men were not docked for being late.

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Where They can be Found.

J. T. Condon will probably go into the Spalding House.

Several of the burned out firms have already taken new quarters.

Duncan & Brewer hold forth in the annex to the Banning block, 12 Second avenue west.

Munger & Markell are with the Lake Superior Elevator company, Board of Trade building.

Baldwin & Willcuts are with the D. J. Sinclair Abstract of Title company, Duluth National bank.

Dr. Boyce, of Boyce & Totman, started for St. Paul on the limited to purchase a new stock of drugs. His firm will occupy a store in the St. Louis.

W. C. Sargent is with the Pioneer Fuel company, in Hotel St. Louis; also Wisconsin Central railroad, Osborne & Frazer, J. C. Ennis and Partridge and Willcuts.

The West Duluth Land company is temporarily at room 508 Duluth National Bank building, but will fit up permanent quarters in the Spalding House at an early day.

The Kitchi Gammi club have one or two places under consideration for headquarters, but will decide upon nothing until tomorrow, when a meeting will be held in Paine & Lindner's bank.

Sparks from the Building.

Col. Stowell lost an elegant piano which was in the Kitchi Gammi rooms.

Messrs. Munger & Markell only a short time ago paid over $215,000 for the Opera house property.

A "fire sale of real estate" is one of the peculiar things that has grown out of yesterday's fire. Mr. Gill announces such a sale. Mr. Gill is nothing, if not unique.

The fine oil painting executed by Mr. Gilbert Munger, brother of R. S Munger, and valued at $1,000, was consumed with the rest of the contents of Munger & Markell's office.

A subscription for the benefit of Charles Hanson, the janitor who lost all his savings while alarming the tenants of the Opera house, is in circulation. B. R. Clarkson has charge of the paper.

At 4 a. m. Superior street was blocked by a mass of debris from the fallen wall. The tracks, however, were cleared by the time street cars began running, and the street was cleared full width before night.

Duluth newspaper men who were anxious to serve their outside papers found Operator James L. Owen, of the Western Union, equal to any task they could impose upon him The manner in which he handled the vast amount of correspondence reflects great credit on him.