

ROBBER GANG ATTEMPTS TO BURN UP TOWN

Four Fires Break Out Simultaneously at Virginia and as Many Buildings Are Burglarized—Lives of Dozen Persons Endangered—Band Is at Large.

Wanted to Loot Town Under the Cover of Excitement—Kit of Tools and Nitroglycerin Is Found in Front of Bank Vault. Special Police Guard the City.

(Range Bureau of the News Tribune.)

VIRGINIA, Aug. 3.—Four fires breaking out simultaneously and as many burglaries here early this morning in which the lives of a dozen persons were endangered give rise to the belief that an organized gang of robbers and incendiaries attempted to start a general conflagration in the hope of looting the city under cover of the excitement.

The loot secured was small, but the damage from fire is estimated at more than \$12,000. No trace has been found of the gang.

The first blaze discovered was at the Mesberg & Lavick furniture store. The second floor was occupied as living apartments, and Mrs. Mary H. James, Virginia postmistress; John Moberg and family and Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Mackey. All had narrow escapes. The Mackeys were cut off from the main hall by the flames. They gained an outside porch by way of a window, but finding egress by the stairs also cut off by fire, made their way to safety over the roofs of the adjoining buildings.

Reports were made while the furniture store was burning of fires at the State bank building, the Duluth, Missabe and Northern station and Andrew Crane's warehouse.

The first floor of the furniture store building was gutted, but at the others the damage was slight.

Burglars' Kit Found.

When the blaze at the bank, which is a fire-proof structure, was extinguished, it was learned that an attempt was made to wreck the money vault. This failed, however, and all the robbers got was some small change and postage stamps left in the counter drawers. A kit of burglar tools, a bottle of nitroglycerin and a cake of soap were found in front of the vault. Entrance was gained through a rear window.

The Missabe station was not damaged. The waste paper basket was fired, but the flames did not spread. The money drawers were rifled but only small change was secured.

Shortly after came the report that Crane's warehouse was burning. A

ORGANIZED GANG WOULD BURN TOWN

Fire Four Buildings at Virginia.
Attempt to Loot the Bank
Is a Failure.

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suitcase filled with rags saturated with kerosene had been placed alongside the building and ignited. The flames were seen from the window of a nearby house, and extinguished before any damage was done.

The Mesberg safe had only a small amount of money in it. It was always left unlocked but when it was possible to go to the safe it was found that after rifling its contents, the robbers locked it.

False Message to Police.

Soon after the outbreak of the first fire, the streets were thronged with people and the excitement grew more intense as fire after fire was announced. It is believed the fires which were started with the purpose of distracting attention so that some big job could be pulled off. As part of the plan, the night patrolman was given a false message, purporting to come from the Iron Range station, to the effect that Oliver police had arrested two men who were caught running from the direction of downtown and were holding them for the police. Officers were sent there and learned from the Oliver officers that no message had been sent in. In the meantime the attempts to burn and rob buildings were made. The patrolmen do not know who gave the message.

Chief of Police Rice has asked for assistance from the state fire marshal's office to run down the gang. Chief Rice has given his men orders to arrest every suspicious person in the city.

Chief Deputy Sheriff Witte and his deputies have offered their assistance to the police.

Special guards were placed at all banks and the postoffice tonight.