

Fire at Faribault - A.C. Rogers

RETYPE FROM ORIGINAL
Quarterly Conference May 1, 1902

Now, there was one matter I wanted to take up before we separated, and was the suggestion made at the last meeting regarding fire drill. I take it for granted that all of the superintendents have made some progress in it, and I don't know that we wish not to take it up to any great extent. The same reason exists for some very strong work in that direction, and it has been vividly brought to our attention by the narrow escapes at Faribault and Fergus Falls. They had a fire at each of those institutions; the damage was very small; in both cases the fire was put out by the employees, but these two incipient fires show that we may expect a conflagration at any time. If we should have one start in a building at night, it might require some pretty cool-headed work on the part of the employees and officers to get the inmates out. We look upon the question of the care of the inmates as secondary to nothing. It should be the first and most important part of the work, and I understood Dr. Rogers to say in his report of the fire that he emptied the building of inmates, and it had occurred to me it might be well for him to tell us how he accomplished that, and how he got them into the air, and what the condition of clothing, etc., was. If the Doctor will do this, I am sure it will be of interest to us.

Dr. Rogers:-

The fire occurred about half past one, as I remember it, on the morning of March 19th. It started in one of the bath rooms adjacent to the girls' dormitory in the north wing of the Center building between the joists in the wall, and blazed up through the opening that was left for the passage of the steam pipes from the story below to that above. The origin of the fire we are unable to learn. It is presumed that some of the larger girls dropped a match into the hole at the steam pipes, or an oiled rag. There had been no oiling of the floors in that locality for about ten days, so that a rag must have been brought in, if that was the case. Every rag used for that purpose is counted when given out and counted again when returned. Still any child with a tendency to tear cloth could tear off a piece and secret it.

The alarm was given by one of the inmates, who is restless and up much of the night, and one of the attendants heard the girl. She was sleeping on the opposite side from where the fire originated. She unlocked the dormitory at once, went to the fire and started to pour some water on it. It then occurred to her that she must give the alarm. She awakened the employees in that portion of the building, then rushed to the office and called me by telephone. When I reached the place, the flames were spreading up the wall near the pipes. I instructed the matrons who were busy putting water to the fire to get the children out at once. In a very few minutes the children in the adjacent dormitory, with the one above and the below, including about 65 children, were all up and clothing, such as they could carry, and their own clothing, were down in the main building, which could be shut off by iron doors, and then all attention was given to the fire. At this time the

assistant engineer and myself were both found trying to open the valve at the bottom of the stand pipe, which controls the water supply. Before we succeeded in this, the fire had reached up to the next story, and was making fair headway, then the water was applied and the fire was quickly extinguished. The dressing of the children was ordinary; there was almost no confusion.

Dr. Kilbourne:-

What sort of construction?

Dr. Rogers:-

Ordinary lath and plastering, no fire proof construction at all. This tower, where the fire originated, is separated from the rest of the building by a stone wall.

Mr. Dow:-

Do you keep the water on in your stand pipe?

Dr. Rogers:-

No, the objection to leaving the water on is that the children will bend open the valves. We never apply the water or test the cotton hose until a fire occurs. We think the cotton hose we now use, except in an emergency, is the proper thing.

To illustrate how a little thing which is likely to be overlooked will affect the conditions. Unfortunately, the valve which controls the water in the standpipe is located in the basement under a tile floor; a solid manhole has been used, but with hand-hold. When the assistant engineer and myself reached that place, we could not raise the cover. I happened to have a new pocket knife which I broke all to pieces in trying to raise it, and we were delayed five minutes before we succeeded.

Warden Wolfer:-

In the matter of giving alarms and testing the condition of the department, my experience has been that it is very necessary to use the hose, turn on the water and go through all the necessary movements, in order to test the department; but we have a hose for that purpose, and never use it for anything else, and we keep another piece of hose connected but never use it except in case of fire.

Dr. Kilbourne:-

For instance, they don't know when you are going to call them out.

Warden Wolfer:-

They always know when they get there that it is a false alarm. We always have a hose there which we attach. They know when on the ground that it is a false alarm, and are at the water hydrant from which the alarm has been turned in.

Dr. Kilbourne:-

It is my experience that if you use good hose for tests it will ruin it.

Warden Wolfer:-

It will always rot out very quickly; any kind of hose.

Mr. Leavett:-

As I said before, I hope the Superintendents will all keep this matter very carefully in mind, and I believe with Warden Wolfer that there is nothing equal to drilling. Military men attach great importance to it.

Warden Wolfer: -

I will say for the information of the board we are ready for an inspection any time day or night.

Dr. Kilbourne:-

I want to know what expense the board will permit in the way of putting in alarms.

Mr. Leavett:-

That is a bridge we will cross when we come to it; that is to say if we get estimates from our institutions, stating these are necessary for fire protection, I am sure the board will give them very careful consideration, and allow any reasonable expense for that purpose. The discipline of these alarms is something wonderful.

Dr. Rogers:-

I ought to have said in making a report of this fire that I turned in the city alarm as soon as the water was started. Also that the city engineer got into communication with the School for the Deaf where there is a good well, so that we were in position to get help at any moment. The city fire department came there, but the fire was out.

Mr. Leavett:-

Did they send in any bill for that?

Dr. Rogers:-

No, they were very nice. We gave them a cup of coffee and a lunch. They always respond.

Mr. Wolfer:-

I think perhaps in the last three or four years we have had the fire department a half dozen times; have had them outside, but never used them.

Dr. Kilbourne:-

When you do have a fire down in that twine plant, it will be a serious one.

Mr. Wolfer:-

Pretty likely. We are well equipped with automatic sprinklers.

Mr. Leavett:-

There was a matter about which I had talked to Mr. Lee, and to which he had given some thought, as was going to give you his ideas upon the subject, I think Mr. Wright has given the matter some attention, and possible he may be in condition to make some recommendations in that regard, and that is the method of putting the potatoes and things you raise on the farm on the store books. There seems to be no uniformity as to the methods of doing that. It seems quite necessary that they be accounted for in the same manner as any other supplies, and while there are obstacles in the way of holding the steward responsible for them, we think there is a way that they can be accounted for, though allowance must be made for the fact that he does not have the personal custody of these things.

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