

PANIC IN THEATER

Big Audience at the Bijou Becomes Fear-Stricken Over a Slight Fire.

WILD RUSH IS MADE

Fortunately All Reach the Street Without Sustaining Serious Injury.

LESSEE M'COY GIVES WARNING

Tells the People Diplomatically of Their Peril—Blaze Soon Extinguished and the Performance Is Resumed.

Sixteen hundred people were thrown into a panic in the Bijou theater, Halsted street and Jackson boulevard, last night by a warning that the building was menaced by fire.

There was a wild rush for the exits, and the few policemen who were near at hand were unable to control the leaders of the excited mob. No one was injured, however, although men and women were crowded together and pushed fiercely into the street.

When the curtain went up every seat in the house was occupied. The lessee of the building, E. H. McCoy, had remained long enough to see that everything was in good shape for the performance, and a few minutes after 9 o'clock he started home.

When he reached the front door he noticed three men on the opposite side of Halsted street, who were looking intently at the roof of the building. He, too, looked up. Along the cornice he saw a little blue blaze, and he lost no time in going to the rear of the theater. He entered by the stage door just as a vaudeville team were finishing their turn.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, as he advanced to the front of the stage, "there is a fire a half a block away, but I think it would be best for all to leave the theater. There is no danger. Leave slowly, please."

Exciting Cry Is Raised.

There was no indication of a panic. A number of the persons who filled the seats on the lower floor arose, and there was every appearance of good order.

Suddenly some one shouted 'Fire!' and instantly all was confusion and excitement. There were 600 men and boys in the top gallery, and they set up a shout as they hurried to the exits. Down the narrow stairs they ran, and while several of the house attaches were trying to stop them Police Officers **David Carroll** and John Jackman of the Desplaines street station were endeavoring in vain to control the hurrying mass who were pouring out of the front doors.

The officers were standing in front of the theater when the panic broke out. They ran to the doors, and, with six ushers, tried to restore order. At almost the same instant Chief Swente and Fire Marshal Camplon arrived, and they attempted to enter. They were met by the full force of the crowd and carried to the middle of the street.

T. F. Hanks, manager of the theater, had sent in an alarm, and soon several engines were in front of the house. They added to the excitement.

One woman fainted, but was carried into a drug store and soon revived. So far as the police could ascertain, she was the only person who suffered any during the panic, and they were unable to learn her name, as she returned to the theater after the excitement was over.

Impossible to Stop Them.

E. C. Laird and Edward Baker, ticket-sellers in the gallery, tried to stop the men and boys who were in that part of the house, but their efforts were unavailing. They were pushed aside, and a rush for the street was begun. It did not end until all had gotten out in safety. A number of occupants of the balcony appeared at the second-story windows, and it was feared some of them might attempt to jump out. To prevent them from so doing, a ladder was run to one of the windows, but no one tried to use it.

In five minutes the firemen had the blaze extinguished. It was caused by crossed electric wires, and when the patrons of the house saw the danger was past they hurried back to their seats. They were almost as anxious to get in as they had been to leave. There had been a delay of half an hour, but the play continued after all ticket-holders had been seated.

"I think the cry of 'Fire!' came from the lower part of the house," said Mr. McCoy. "Some of the employes say, however, that it was first raised in the upper gallery. I did all I could to have the people leave quietly, and had not the cry been raised I would have succeeded. I was glad to find no one was injured."
