

Eyewitness Accounts of the Cocoanut Grove Nightclub Fire

Last Updated October 7, 2026

Eyewitness accounts of the fire help us understand the scope of the tragedy. Like many eyewitness testimony in legal cases, details may differ, sometimes substantially. Thanks to the hard work of historian David W. Blaney, the accounts below have been gathered and organized into 10 categories. The goal is to offer the best possible sense of "being there," as told directly by those listed without the bias of outside influence.

Most eyewitness quotes here are single source. Some are combined from multiple sources (for example, the concurrent Boston Police Department investigation and City Fire Dept. inquests, or the spring 1943 manslaughter trial testimony and later retrospectives). Regardless of the source(s), text and syntax are NEVER altered under any circumstances, even if in apparent error. The words shown are those chosen by the presented individuals.

Because these are actual unfiltered accounts from survivors and witnesses, some may find certain contents and graphic descriptions to be disturbing. Original source citations appear at the end of each section.

These eyewitness accounts are categorized as follows:

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|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| A) Melody Lounge | F) Main Dining Room |
| B) Kitchen | G) Backstage and Dressing Rooms |
| C) Main Lobby / Foyer | H) New Broadway Lounge Passageway |
| D) Caricature Bar | I) New Broadway Lounge |
| E) Main Dining Room Terrace | J) Selected Rescuers and Witnesses |

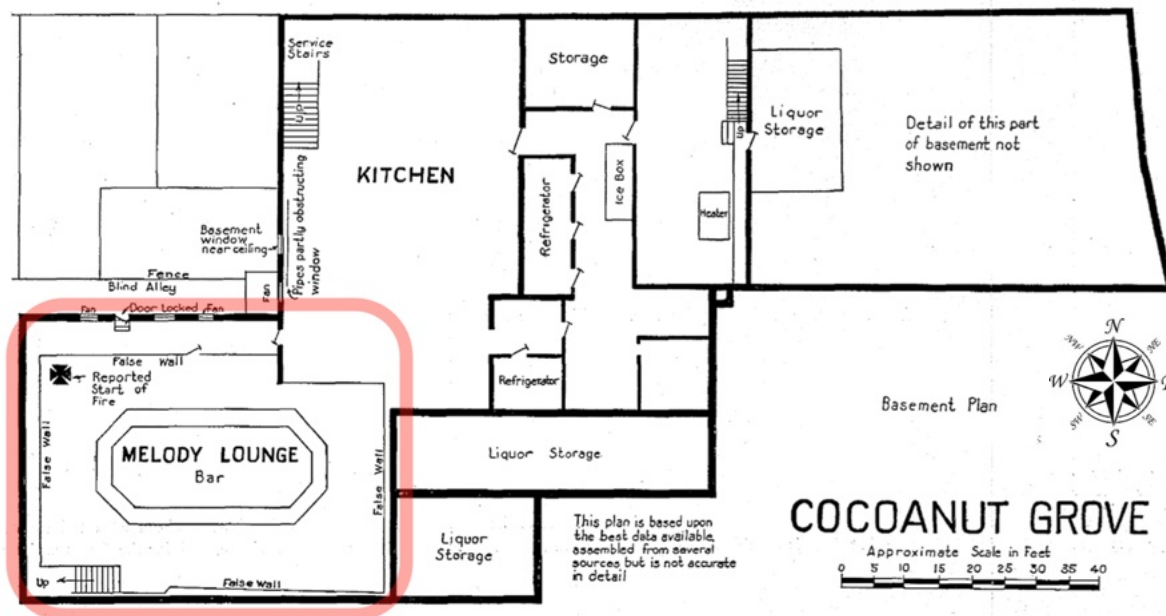


Aerial view of Cocoanut Grove nightclub, looking East, taken after the fire by the US Army Signal Corps. (Boston Public Library)

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A) MELODY LOUNGE (Count 30)



John W. Bradley, West Roxbury, MA (bartender): "The first thing I noticed, someone put out the light in the corner and Stanley came over to the bar and asked what to do. I told him to go over and make them put it on. It was dark down there. I went back about my work serving drinks and I heard someone say 'Fire.' I jumped out from behind the bar and I saw that the palm tree was ablaze, the one in the corner where the light had been out. This palm blazed up and a flash came, and I don't know from where. I ran over and pulled the palm tree down and I tried to beat it out. I tried, but I couldn't. I asked for water and someone gave me water and I threw it on but it only burned harder, higher. The whole ceiling was ablaze after that flash."

William G. Burns, Philadelphia, PA (patron): "We were standing on the far side of the bar from the entrance and were about 20 feet from where the fire broke out. When it started I could see the fire, and saw it hit the ceiling. At the time a waiter was trying to put it out. I guess that was when everybody saw it. At first it started very slowly. It looked like something they could put out and then the crowd became panicky right away."

Robert D. Carson, Pulaski, VA (patron): "I saw this artificial palm tree in the corner start burning. A waiter tried to put it out. Everyone was watching him and weren't very excited. The fire then jumped to the ceiling and I started to get out of there along with everybody else. A door was right behind me leading to the kitchen and I went through there. I asked some of the cooks how to get out. They said there wasn't any way."

William T. Connery, Dubuque, IA (patron): "As I was standing there I observed a little fire up in a corner of the room. It was confined to the limb of a coconut tree. I was ten feet from the fire. First I smelled something burning and then I saw the fire. As the fire flared

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a little bit I saw the ceiling of the room was made of cloth. The palm was tied to the ceiling. And someone in a white suit was trying to tear away the drapings on the ceiling where the fire seemed to reach so quickly. I looked around for a door, and when I saw one and left, the whole room was on fire and women's hair and clothing were on fire. The smoke was terrible."

Gloria C. Deagle, Newton, MA (patron): "We started to leave. We walked around the bar and my girl friend grabbed me by the arm and said, 'Look!' I looked over to the corner and the palm tree went right up. So she said, 'We'd better get out of here quick.' We started right up the stairs and that's the last I saw of her. I ran toward the revolving door."

Anna M. Dee, Somerville, MA (patron): "I heard a crackling, then the flames came. I got as far as the stairs and somebody knocked me down and I crawled up the stairs along the floor and I left by the regular front door. My shoes came off and I was evidently kicked in the head as the mad rush for the exit started. Blood trickled down my face and neck. My fur coat was thrown over my head and finally torn in half."

David D. Frechtling, Hamilton, OH (patron): "I hadn't been there more than five minutes before fire broke out. I saw a flash at the ceiling. I took it for granted - like a bad wire. I said, 'What caused that?' Just a flash and it spread. When I saw it some waiter was trying to put it out. One waiter was trying to stamp it out and another slapped it with a towel. I happened to be walking upstairs, walked right by it and looked at it, and I immediately said, 'Be calm!' Maybe that wasn't the smartest thing to do. Before I got far everybody was shoving right for that stairway, shoved me right out."



Melody Lounge, looking West toward stairs, along Piedmont Street wall. (Boston Public Library)

Nathan C. Greer, Santa Fe, NM (patron): "We were in the corner that was right opposite that where the fire started. We looked up and we saw somebody up there fooling, I thought, with the light. A waiter. He was fixing it, and he was up there, and then I saw this fire start. I couldn't tell, but I thought it was a short because of the fact that it was in the ceiling, and he was trying to put it out by putting his hand up there, and knocking it out. I didn't see the palm catch fire at all. What I saw was the ceiling."

Marguerite A. Hassett, Boston, MA (patron): "I had just lifted my drink to my lips when my eyes caught the glare of a flame which shot like lightning up an imitation plant and raced on to the draped ceiling. I knew the place would be an inferno in a few seconds as all the cellophane decorations were just alive with fire. The first thought I had was to get

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out of there, so I grabbed my girl friend's coat and said, 'Come on, we've got to get out of here.' But she wouldn't come. Instead, she ran the opposite way."

John T. Heyman, Springfield, MA (patron): "The lounge was dark, but when a bulb was pulled from its socket, it became even darker. I watched as a busboy struggled to replace the bulb just ten feet in front of me. He could not see in the dark, so he struck a match, which immediately ignited both the artificial palm tree holding the socket and the palm fronds above the tables. The cloth ceiling caught fire and flames exploded upstairs almost instantaneously, spreading choking smoke and heat everywhere."

Helen P. Hollander, East Boston, MA (patron): "My girl friend, her date and I were just getting settled and I didn't even have my coat off when I saw an employe light a match to replace a light bulb. A fire erupted immediately, and I was able to run up the stairs and across the dance floor. My girl friend and I got out, but her date never made it."



Melody Lounge, looking North, toward point of fire origin.
(Boston Public Library)

Irja M. Jacobson, Gloucester, MA (patron): "We went there about 9:30 and went into the Melody Lounge, and we sat directly under the palm tree where it all started. Within a matter of moments, the whole ceiling was gone. There was a mob scene, everybody heading for the revolving doors. I didn't panic. I remember thinking that if people would just be quiet, everything would work out."

J. Donald Jeffers, Wenham, MA (patron): "I looked over and saw a waiter with a towel trying to beat out the fire. While beating the fire, he was fanning it. No one in the lounge was paying much attention, they were all

laughing and joking. Suddenly the fire caught the false ceiling and before you could take a deep breath, the flames leaped across the room. Burning brands showered from the ceiling, and then there was panic. Everyone ran, shrieking and shouting for the stairway."

Harry M. Kirker, Boston, MA (barboy): "When I came back from the kitchen I saw the whole corner ablaze. It looked to me as though one of the trees was on fire. I went back to the kitchen and I hollered, 'Where is the fire extinguisher?,' and I ran back almost to that door. People had it open and I could see then, it looked as if half the room was going at that time."

James W. Lane, Duluth, MN (patron): "I suddenly saw a flame about the size of a plate. It was a flash near the electric light socket in the ceiling of the Melody Lounge. The fire started in the corner of the ceiling and came across. In less than three seconds, the flames

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were over to the stairway. My companion stood on a chair and tried to cut down some of the topside with a jackknife as the decoration in the Melody Lounge caught fire. I didn't see him after that. I got to the stairway and hung on to a handrail, and that is all I remember till I was outside. I went out the revolving door."

Jeanette Lanzoni, Somerville, MA (cashier): "I was standing there getting ready to give the dupe to the barboy, Stanley Tomaszewski. I heard the bartender yell, 'Put on that light in the left-hand corner.' The bartender was speaking to Stanley. I looked over and saw the corner in darkness. A man had unscrewed the bulb. Stanley stood on a stool or a chair. The next thing I knew there was a flash and the fire started. It seemed to come from the coconut tree. I saw it go across the ceiling. The fire spread rapidly. I was behind the bar and came out onto the lounge part. I saw the smoke was too dense to get up the stairs, so I started for the kitchen."

Ivah M. Leffler, Buffalo, NY (patron): "I noticed the fire before quite a few people did, because I had my face turned toward where the fire had started. And I saw a boy standing at a table there, and I don't know what he was doing. All of a sudden, I saw this flame. Somebody yelled, 'Put water on it,' and nobody did. He was up on the chair when the flames started. I saw him, and when I left he was still there."

Maurice L. Levy, Roxbury, MA (patron): "The waiter served our drinks and went back to the bar, and when he returned, he said something about the bartender asking that the bulb be put back. It was unscrewed halfway out. Someone made a remark to the waiter, something about why he had to screw the bulb back in. He got up, groped around and couldn't find the bulb. It was very dark. He lit a match. Then he put the match behind the tree. That caught fire to the tree and by the time the waiter got down there was a complete fire. The moment the match was struck, the ceiling immediately turned into a bright, white flame. He did not see it get ignited. Someone tried to put it out with his hand, but it didn't seem to do any good. The fire was ten feet behind us when my wife and I started for the nearby stairs. When we reached the stairs it was ten feet in front of us. The match definitely had ignited the tree."

Leroy S. Marks, McClure, PA (patron): "I sat at the bar and talked with the bartender who I know. I saw fire going up through the tree. Johnny, the bartender, went over the bar to try to put it out. By that time it covered the drapes over the ceiling. It started to burn up the corner. I started to go as it caught the ceiling. Two girls went upstairs at the same time with me, and as we went up the stairs, the fire went all over the ceiling and was coming after us. Nobody could get out of the door. It was a revolving door and people tried to get out both ways."

Christian Murray-Allen, Cambridge, MA (patron): "I saw the boy go to the palm tree, strike a match and get on something to reach something. Immediately a large flame started in a palm tree in the corner. No one did anything about it at first. I saw the palm tree and the leaves on fire all at once. It spread across the ceiling. There was no perceptible lapse of time between the lighting of the match by the busboy who went to fix

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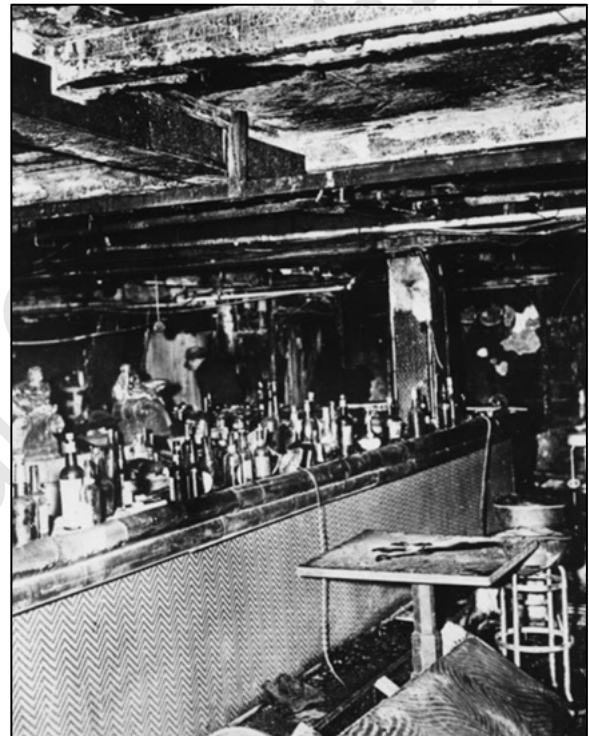
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the light in the corner of the Melody Lounge and the flash of flame and fire in the palm tree when the boy started to fix the light."

Ward M. Palmer, Newport News, VA (patron): "Someone struck a match to see to replace the bulb and the match ignited an imitation palm tree. Flame rushed to the ceiling, where it ignited the coconut matting used for decoration. We were sitting six to eight feet from the stairway, but when we reached it, the stairs were filled with people trying to get out. By that time fire was sweeping the ceiling. In a matter of one to two minutes, the heat became intense and a stampede began. Bartenders stood on the bars urging people to be calm, but their efforts did little good. My date and I finally reached the main door and by then the blaze had burned through and began to sweep the walls and ceilings of that room."

John D. Quinn, Worcester, MA (patron): "We hadn't been there more than two or three minutes when one side of the room suddenly lit up. Looking to my left, I saw a fake palm tree on fire. At that time, the blaze was about 18 inches high. Then there was wall-to-wall flames and the lights went out."

Herbert G. Schein, Ozone Park, NY (waiter): "My back was turned when somebody shouted 'Look,' and I faced about in time to see a terrific gust of flame in the corner. Just one big yellow flame. I started over that way to get a closer look and see what I could do about it when I was caught in a rush of people making for the stairway and was swept along with them. I was only about halfway up the stairs when the flames caught up with me and singed my left hand, hair and ears. That fire sure went fast and it was traveling with equal speed in all directions."



Melody Lounge, looking Northeast along the bar, from the corner with the stairs.
(Boston Public Library)

Emilio A. Soracco, Dorchester, MA (bartender): "I was a bartender there. Somebody put out a light in a corner and I said to John, 'Look at the corner.' Bradley hollers out to the boy, one of the boys, 'Boy, put that light on.' We kept on doing our work. We were busy. I cast my eye up and a fire started in the corner. I thought at first it was an electric light. It started on a tree and just went up to the ceiling. It spread pretty fast. Well, I looked at it for a second and I see that it was pretty dangerous. I just told the lady in the front of the bar, 'Give me room to jump over,' and she did, and I say, 'If you want to save your life, come with me,' and I opened the door that goes in the kitchen. The cashier came with me."

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H. Roland Sousa, Salem, MA (patron): "I was just going to sit down and there is a little palm tree in the corner and it started to get aflame, but I didn't get too excited because I had seen that before and they put it out. I heard them say, 'Put it out, put it out.' It hit the ceiling, started to crawl all around the joint. They didn't stop it. That ceiling is made up of clothly stuff."

Joyce R. Spector, Boston, MA (patron): "So we were sitting there. And someone threw something that hit a bulb in a light on the wall behind us. The light went out, and pretty soon a waiter came with a new bulb. It was very dark. So this waiter scratched a match to see to screw in the new bulb. And right away the dried grass decorations crackled into flame, right over our heads. We got up, so they could get at the fire. It was just a little fire then, you understand." (Note: an additional statement by Joyce Spector is included at the end of this section)

Ruth C. Strogoff, Brighton, MA (patron): "I was in Melody Lounge with my husband, Hyman. I heard a noise in the corner. I noticed it especially because it was annoying Goody Goodelle, who was singing. I saw the boy standing on a stool with a match in his hands at the artificial palm tree. Then the leaves on the tree caught fire. They started to break down the branches. Then the whole ceiling ignited. People even fell off the stools where they were sitting."

Stanley F. Tomaszewski, Dorchester, MA (busboy): "A man in a mixed party, you know, men and women, reached up and turned off a light. A soldier had loosened the electric light in a socket on the outside of a husk of the palm tree, about six inches from the ceiling. I was serving drinks and John says to me to go over to the corner and put on the light. I went over to them and says that you won't be able to put lights out because it's rather dark here as it is. I got up on a chair to put in the light bulb. The soldier told me to leave it alone. I started to screw it back in but it fell out of the socket when I touched it. I didn't know where it was, so I lit a match. I shook the match and then stepped on it. Then I saw that there was a fire in the palm tree and John came over to help put it out. I tried to put it out but the flames came so fast I couldn't do anything. I tried to pull down the curtains on the ceiling. It came so fast. It was worse than any gasoline fire that I ever saw, it spread so rapidly." (Note: an additional statement by Stanley Tomaszewski is included at the end of this section)

Sophie B. Urban, Dorchester, MA (patron): "I was in the Melody Lounge, in the club's lower level, when the fire broke out. A chum and I shared the last chair in the lounge. I saw a small fire in a corner of the room, and suddenly everybody got up and made a rush for the stairs. Our chair was in the way and my chum and I were literally lifted up the stairs to the main floor by the other guests."

Daniel M. Weiss, Dorchester, MA (cashier): "I was facing the opposite end of the room from where the fire started when I heard a commotion, turned around and saw fire in a palm tree. I saw an unusual light, then actual flames coming from the palm tree, between the middle and the top, about three leaves. I saw Johnny Bradley grabbing the palm tree and pulling it down. He was yelling for water. I picked up a mixing glass and threw it at

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the fire and it didn't do any good. Just before he pulled it down I saw a small lick of flame hit the ceiling. The fire in the ceiling spread in an arc towards the stairway. I'm positive it was the palm tree first. It was near the top, from the middle to the top."

Twenty-four hours later, patron Joyce Spector (above) gave Boston Police a revised account (the first account was given to a Boston newspaper reporter):

Joyce R. Spector, Boston, MA (to Boston Police, December 1, 1942): "There were two men and two women and they had had quite a bit to drink. One of the men...he was seated there. He just had to reach up. The bulb was on the palm tree. He just turned it. He said it was too light, he wanted darkness. I told him to put on the light again. He didn't answer. The waiter came over with a match and he said the boss was looking, and he had to put on the light. He came over to the corner and reached over above the man's head and turned the bulb on again, and the light was on and he was still holding the match. I kept watching him very closely because we were amused at the whole situation, and we watched him and the bulb was in already and everybody breathed a sigh of relief. And then we saw it, Justin and I saw the palm tree immediately catch fire. It must have been the match, but even if the match had been held quite a distance away it still could have caught fire from the spark and just the dryness of the air. It immediately started a fire all around the room, up on the ceiling and down on the ground."

Four months later, busboy Stanley Tomaszewski (above) offered an updated account as a witness at the manslaughter trials of Barnett and James Welansky, and Jacob Goldfine:

Stanley F. Tomaszewski, Dorchester, MA (at manslaughter trials, March 29, 1943): "I was told to fix the light above in the corner which was out. I got a small stepladder. I went over there in the corner where there was a group of people. I got on the stool and lit a match from a book of matches. I put the book in my pocket. I held the match up and I screwed tight the electric bulb with my left hand. And the light went on. I got down off the stool and then a woman shouted, 'Fire!' And when I turned around the corner was on fire. The palm tree was ablaze, the ceiling was ablaze. Someone tossed a glass of water up at it. I reached up and tried to pull down the cloth hanging down. Only a small portion came away. Bradley left the bar and came over and pulled down the palm tree, pushing over the cooler next to it. Then the fire spread quickly. I yelled to the people to go to the door the boys use to get to the kitchen."

SOURCES (for A: Melody Lounge)

- 1) **John W. Bradley (1909-1982)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript, also *The Boston Herald* transcript, *The Boston Post* transcript)
- 2) **William G. Burns (1918-2010)**: Source: First Naval District inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript)

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- 3) **Robert D. Carson (1918-1967)**: Source: Letter home to parents, reprinted in *The Southwest Times*, Pulaski, VA, Thursday, December 3, 1942
- 4) **William T. Connery (1914-1987)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Friday, March 26, 1943 (*The Boston Globe transcript*, *The Boston Post transcript*)
- 5) **Gloria C. Deagle (1922-2008)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Wednesday, March 31, 1943 (*The Boston Globe transcript*)
- 6) **Anna M. Dee (1906-1996)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation (from Boston City Hospital), Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript). Retrospective interview (as Miss Alice M. Dee), International News Service wire article, Sunday, March 24, 1957
- 7) **David D. Frechtling (1909-1990)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 8) **Nathan C. Greer (1922-1998)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript, also *The Boston Globe transcript*)
- 9) **Marguerite A. Hassett (1902-1966)**: Source: First-person account, *Boston Traveler*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 10) **John T. Heyman (1919-2019)**: Source: Retrospective interview (at age 93), *The Boston Globe*, Wednesday, November 28, 2012
- 11) **Helen P. Hollander (1910-2004)**: Source: Retrospective interview (as Mrs. Helen Gibson), *Boston Sunday Herald*, Sunday, November 22, 1992
- 12) **Irja M. Jacobson (1921-2001)**: Sources: Retrospective interview (as Mrs. Irja Sheppard), *The Boston Herald*, Monday, April 3, 2000. Retrospective 2001 telephone interview, "Disasters of the Century," 2001 episode. Canadian documentary television series
- 13) **J. Donald Jeffers (1908-1974)**: Sources: First-person account, *The Boston Globe*, Monday, November 30, 1942. First-person account, *Boston Daily Record* Saturday, December 5, 1942
- 14) **Harry M. Kirker (1894-1970)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 10, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 15) **James W. Lane (1918-2007)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Monday, March 22, 1943 (*The Boston Post transcript*)
- 16) **Jeanette Lanzoni (1922-1958)**: Sources: First-person account, *The Boston Herald*, Thursday, December 3, 1942. Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Saturday, March 20, 1943 (*The Boston Evening Globe transcript*)
- 17) **Ivah M. Leffler (1920-1967)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 18) **Maurice L. Levy (1916-1992)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (*The Boston Globe transcript*, Associated Press wire transcript)
- 19) **Leroy S. Marks (1911-2003)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 20) **Christian Murray-Allen (1924-2021)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, March 30, 1943 (*The Boston Post transcript*, *The Boston Globe transcript*)

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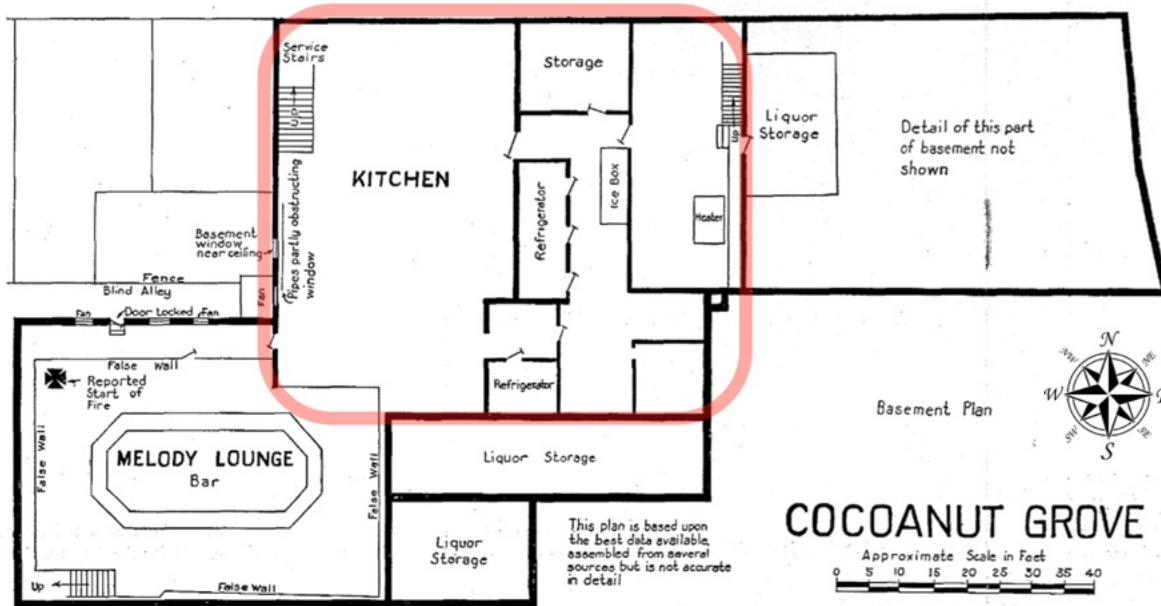
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- 21) **Ward M. Palmer (1904-1985)**: Source: Retrospective interview, *Daily Press*, Newport News, VA, Sunday, November 25, 1962
- 22) **John D. Quinn (1921-2011)**: Sources: Retrospective letter to *Yankee* magazine, November 1998. Retrospective interview, *Boston Sunday Herald*, Sunday, November 22, 1992
- 23) **Herbert G. Schein (1917-2006)**: Sources: First-person account, *Waltham News-Tribune*, Waltham, MA, Monday, November 30, 1942. Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 3, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 24) **Emilio A. Soracco (1886-1967)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Thursday, December 3, 1942 (direct transcript, also *The Boston Herald* transcript)
- 25) **H. Roland Sousa (1897-1982)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 26) **Joyce Spector (1924-2024)**: Source: First-person interview from her bed, *The Boston Globe*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 27) **Ruth C. Strogoff (1902-1982)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, March 30, 1943 (*Boston Traveler* transcript)
- 28) **Stanley F. Tomaszewski (1926-1994)**: Sources: Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Monday, March 29, 1943 (*The Boston Post* transcript)
- 29) **Sophie B. Urban (1919-2012)**: Source: Retrospective interview (school teacher asked her name not be used because of effect on pupils), *The Boston Herald*, Tuesday, November 28, 1967
- 30) **Daniel M. Weiss (1917-1997)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Thursday, December 3, 1942 (*The Boston Evening Globe* transcript, *Boston Daily Record* transcript)

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B) KITCHEN (Count 30)



Frank Accursio, Everett, MA (waiter): "Well, I went downstairs for an order about ten o'clock. I went down there and was just about to pick up my food when I heard a barboy come out. As soon as I went down for the order, the barboy said 'Fire.' He said, 'Frank, there is a fire in there.' In the lounge. I said, 'I better go upstairs and warn everybody and open the side doors.' I went upstairs and opened the exit door leading onto Shawmut Street."

Henry W. Bimler, Boston, MA (waiter): "The kitchen is located when you go through from the main dining room and go through the stone stairway. I ran downstairs to the kitchen. I shouted 'Fire,' and went over to the other side with nine girls and two young men and put them in the icebox...and I said, 'Stay there for a few minutes until we get a door broken down.' There was no more lights. I had a flashlight. Then we had the door pried open and they went out and I went out with them. I was going to help the cashier, Katherine Swett, to get out. I said, 'Come on, Katherine, it's getting pretty dangerous.' She said that she wouldn't leave the cash."

John W. Bradley, West Roxbury, MA (bartender): "Katherine Swett was in near her desk when I went back into the Melody Lounge the second time to see if I could get anybody else out. And I hollered, 'Anybody else in here run this way.' And I held the door open, and I didn't hear anybody coming...and the smoke was hitting me in the face. Pretty soon the kitchen filled up with smoke and heat, too. And I went back in the kitchen and we put a lot of people out the window of the service bar, and I went through the window and out on the alleyway. By the time I got to helping some of the people out, my hair was on fire and my hands and ears were burned."

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William G. Burns, Philadelphia, PA (patron): "The fire shot across the ceiling and some people started out a door which led into the kitchen. My brother and I left through the door leading into the kitchen. There was no panic at the time. We started up the stairs and got part way up and couldn't make it...The heat was too intense, the smoke was very heavy and people were passing out and rolling down the stairs. We saw a woman with a bag and a flashlight. She seemed to be an employee. We took her by the arm and went upstairs again, but still the smoke was very heavy and there were people passing out and rolling down the stairs beside us. The woman with us passed out. We were not in such good shape ourselves. We held handkerchiefs over our mouths."

Robert D. Carson, Pulaski, VA (patron): "I saw this artificial palm tree in the corner start burning. A door was right behind me leading to the kitchen and I went through there. I asked some of the cooks how to get out. They said there wasn't any way."

Joseph Cericola, East Boston, MA (waiter): "When the fire started I was downstairs in the kitchen paying a check at the cashier's desk, which is right opposite a door that comes out of the Melody Lounge. I saw a bartender and a waiter with fire extinguishers running along the corridor toward the Melody Lounge. I followed them, opened the door and saw smoke and flames. All you could see was a mass of flames. The extinguishers wouldn't do any good, and...about a dozen people ran out of the room. A girl fainted and I picked her up and carried her for a while and gave her back to her boyfriend."

William T. Connery, Dubuque, IA (patron): "...I was in the kitchen. The smoke was terrible...I went into the icebox. I met Lieutenant John Carr and his wife there. They were from Iowa, too."



Outside view of basement Kitchen window, looking East.
(Boston Public Library)

Dorothy B. Davis, Brookline, MA (patron): "Immediately there was a rush of people...and the four of us were swept down the stairs into the kitchen. Panic seized most of those who were crowded down there and most of them retraced their steps up the stairs only to go to their doom. About 20 more besides us stayed downstairs milling around in the smoke. Suddenly someone found a window leading out into an alley. There was a crash of glass and we felt fresh air blowing on our faces. I lost my valuable fur coat and my new purse with a considerable amount of money..."

Richard W. Davis, Brookline, MA (patron): "The four of us collected ourselves and went down through that kitchen door into the basement section there. We just pushed ourselves down the stairs. We hadn't been there only a short time when someone apparently familiar with the establishment broke a window in the basement. We worked our way over to the window. I was able to crawl on a counter about three feet high and stretch my other foot

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to a ledge that ran beneath the window. By that way I was able to pass several women up to the window, and someone outside was helping them through. Shortly after that the place became filled with smoke and I couldn't see or hear anymore. I managed to drag myself out."

Augusta C. "Peggy" Disbrow, Brookline, MA (patron): "There wasn't much fire at first. But the smoke was blinding. We couldn't see a thing. And everybody was screaming and pushing and hysterical. We followed the draft, until we came to a kind of skylight opening on the street. Charles reached up and broke the glass with his fist. He cut himself, but he didn't even notice it at the time. We had lost our coats and all I had on was a thin evening gown. But we were safe, and the only thing that saved us was finding that window."

Charles W. Disbrow, Jr., Brookline, MA (patron): "There was smoke in the cellar as we entered. There were people in front of us and behind us. There seemed to be a line of people down there, about two abreast, and they were going toward a rather dark corner. We went after them and then someone yelled, 'We can't get out this way.' So we started back toward the stairs and all of a sudden the basement began to fill with very heavy smoke. Then the lights started to go. I went into one or two storerooms with my wife and we had to retreat again. Then I felt a current of fresh air through the smoke. I found that there was a window high above the downstairs bar. It seemed to be half-boarded up. I climbed onto the bar, knocking off a number of liquor bottles to make a place for my feet on the back shelf, and pulled the boards off the window and pushed through the glass. I boosted my wife through. We found ourselves in a sort of open courtyard. There was a ventilator still running on the side of the building and it was hot on my hands."

A. Arthur Ercolini, Somerville, MA (waiter): "I was in the kitchen at the time getting food for my party. One of the boys from the Melody Lounge said there was a fire. He was about 45 years old and with glasses. He ran back looking for a fire extinguisher. I told him it was right here and addressed my remarks to everybody in the kitchen at the time. He took it. There was a puff of black smoke and everybody got excited. Smoke started to fill the kitchen and the first thing I knew I was near the service bar. The lights went out. I had a napkin and wet it and put it over my eyes. I went out through the back passage through the Shawmut Street side."

Rocco Fanuele, Roxbury, MA (waiter): "I went downstairs to get an order. I stopped near the service bar and saw people coming from the Melody Lounge into the kitchen. Ten or 15 all panicky. I saw the waiter and cook run to the Melody Lounge with an extinguisher. I ran up to the head of the stairs in the dining room. I went to the exit and saw another waiter."

Monica C. Files, Allston, MA (patron): "When I saw people turn around and run down toward the kitchen, down some cement steps...I said, 'Maybe it will be better if we run down this way.' It was dark down there. We couldn't see a thing. At first there was no smoke, but after a while the smoke started to pour in like anything. There were no lights on down there. I opened the icebox first and we were going to get in there, but there were people in there already. My husband said to leave them because there wasn't enough

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oxygen in there for them, just to stay out of it, it would be better. We were locked in there for a quarter of an hour - it seemed like a lifetime. People seemed to feel that there was safety in holding onto the hand of somebody else. We formed a sort of human chain. I don't know how I got out except that firemen chopped us out. My husband and I held hands and went out."

Fred L. Guarnieri, Watertown, MA (waiter): "I went down in the kitchen and there was nobody there except guests, no cook. I heard glasses breaking. Somebody said, 'Keep quiet.' I saw this very black smoke. I started to cough. I went back again to my station. Somehow I managed to crawl through a window and don't remember anything more until I found myself walking down the street aimlessly."

Morrill S. Guerin, Brookline, MA (waiter): "I went down to the service bar for two ryes. Someone came dashing out of the Melody Lounge after a fire extinguisher. This fellow Harry came out, one of the barboys who worked in the cocktail lounge. He came out and asked for the fire extinguisher kind of excited. I turned around kind of nonchalantly and pointed it out...He went into the Melody Lounge where the fire had started and came out again. At that time one of the boss' nephews was down in the kitchen and we both tried to shove the crowd back into the dining room. A girl fell and split her head. Three or four others fell - then people stopped because they didn't want to step on those who fell on the stairs. But finally the crowd started walking over them. Others were coming and falling down. I stood there until the lights went out. The only person there was Mrs. Swett. She refused to be budged away from the money. I worked with her and I knew she was a stubborn sort of person. I had no reason to argue with her because I knew it was foolish. I got up the service steps and someone pushed me the rest of the way. The smoke smelled like it came from something that had been there a long time, like an old burned cloth or something."

Marguerite A. Hassett, Boston, MA (patron): "I was squeezed in-between two crowds, so I turned and made my way to a cement wall. There I found a refrigerator. 'Let's not be selfish,' I said to the man who hurried inside with me. So I stuck out my hand and pulled in a boy and a hysterical girl, and...a musician in the club band...I gave my coat to a young kid who had been working at the club only a week. He said the refrigerator was fireproof. But then we got to thinking what would happen if the floor caved in. 'Well, the only thing left to do is pray,' I said. So the kid and I prayed and prayed in the dark all the time we were there. It was only a half-hour, but it seemed like ages. Finally, I heard the swish of water and knew that there must be firemen nearby, so I yelled and they led us to safety."

Karl E. Hemenway, Dorchester, MA (waiter): "I was going downstairs to the kitchen from the main dining room. Halfway down the stairs I heard a barboy shout for a fire extinguisher. He was just hollering as he came through the kitchen. His name is Harry. He grabbed one and another waiter grabbed another one and they went into the Melody Lounge. One was on the stairway going to the pantry and another was near the steam table. Eight or ten people came running out of the Melody room going upstairs, yelling 'Fire.' At that time I thought it was just a little fire and I said, 'Don't make so much noise. If you get up in the dining room it will be a panic.' They turned around and went through

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the kitchen to the back entrance. There is a fire door between the kitchen and the back entrance. So we pushed the door open and then I could feel the air come in. I went down to the corner to the nearest telephone and called my wife."

J. Donald Jeffers, Wenham, MA (patron): "When the nightmare began my wife and I reached the kitchen of the Melody Lounge. It was pitch dark and we lost each other. I crawled into a refrigerator. There were five of us in all - an employee and two girls and some other man. We were in there 25 minutes. We kept calling for help. One of the women with us prayed more fervently than I ever heard from the pulpit. A fireman came to the door, flashed a light and said, 'Come to the light.' He got us out through a chopped part of the wall. For one horrifying hour I searched the crowd looking for my wife."

Harry M. Kirker, Boston, MA (barboy): "I didn't know where the extinguishers were. I asked the checker, and she was too excited. She...said, 'Stop it. Stop your noise.' I was excited, so then one of the boys hollered, 'Here it is,' so I grabbed it and started back in. I saw I had no chance with the fire extinguisher and I ran back and put it in the kitchen, and just then I went back and I hollered, 'Follow me.' I figured we didn't have a chance there and we would have to get out [*through*] the basement."

A. Cecil Mahoney, Somerville, MA (service checker): "The fire must have started a little after 10:15. The barboy Harry Kirker asked for the fire extinguisher and then I saw smoke which came pretty fast. He was looking at me and asked for a fire extinguisher. I pointed and showed him. I just stayed at my desk as he looked for the fire extinguisher. There was a waiter there, too. He took the fire extinguisher and went in, back into the Melody Lounge. Smoke was coming in. Billy Payne was bringing people back past my desk and through the service door. I got to the icebox. Mr. Buston [*sic*] was there. He said it was the safest place. I stepped in the icebox with him and we were joined by the cook who stayed just a couple of minutes and then went out...Giuglielmo Guidette. That icebox saved my life."

Anthony P. "Tony" Marra, Everett, MA (busboy): "I ran downstairs into the kitchen. I was down there for about 20 minutes. There were people down there but they all disappeared. I saw I was the only one in there, and I didn't know what to do. The lights were out. The place was full of smoke. I stood in front of the electric fan in the kitchen and I could breathe better. Then the electricity went down and I couldn't see and I was getting hot. I knew there was an ice cream box in the kitchen, so I went over and took off the covers and stuck my head in to keep cool. There was maple walnut in there, so I rubbed it on my face. Then I thought the building might collapse. So I crawled over some pipes and out a cellar window."

Reno A. Masciocchi, Dorchester, MA (waiter): "I was about to take up a tray to come upstairs in the dining room. A bar waiter or a fellow that I know by sight that worked in the Melody Lounge ran out and yelled for a fire extinguisher. He is a short, stocky chap with red face, about 35 to 40 years old. I dropped the tray and ran up the stairway that leads into the dining room, where the pantry is. I got the fire extinguisher that was there. It is always there. I tried to get into the Melody Lounge and the smoke stopped me halfway

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in. I played the fire extinguisher on some sparks in the hall until it was empty. Somebody played a fire extinguisher behind me and played it on me. I was pretty well soaked. At that time the lights started to blink and they went dead right away after that. Then I went back to the main dining room and stood by the back door."

Leonard T. Mounce (Walsh), Roxbury, MA (bar waiter): "I saw a lot of people run out of the Melody Lounge. I started for the Melody Lounge myself, but the crowd pushed me back. I was going to run upstairs to the dining room."

William C. 'Billy' Payne, Boston, MA (club tenor): "Smoke started to come very quick and thick in the main dining room. I said to some people, 'Follow me downstairs to the kitchen,' a concrete cellar floor. The people followed me past the girl who checks the food in and out at the foot of the stairs. It was three-quarters filled with smoke blowing in from the Melody Lounge. The kitchen was all the hotter because the fire ranges were still going and food was cooking and all that was throwing off a lot of heat. I pulled out a handkerchief and on the left was a dishwashing machine, so I dipped it in and told the others to do the same. Meanwhile somebody is yelling to get keys for the kitchen door. I knew it was locked, so I stayed where I was. Somebody was yelling about the icebox and I told everybody to get in the ice chest. I laid down on the floor with the people and got out onto Shawmut Street. When I heard the door open, I knew the passageway was free so I yelled to everybody to follow me."

Guiseppe N. "Joseph" Perella, Boston, MA (salad chef): "...The door right in front of me...It goes to the Melody Lounge...and a boy come out looking for the fire extinguisher...Harry Kirker. I said, 'There is a fire extinguisher over there. It was on a post, on a pole right inside there, and Harry grabbed it and went back again. I saw flame coming in, and I ask the chef, 'What say, Chef?' And the chef said, 'Well, let's go.' The chef goes ahead, and we follow the chef. I saw the flames coming over the partition and the kitchen began to fill with smoke. I ran to the door which the help used and found it locked. Some fellow came up for the keys, but you couldn't see, it was too dark, and he was too shaky. So I go downstairs again and told the checker to come out. She just said to me, 'Who will take care of the money?' I put a towel over my mouth and ran again to the door. This time it was open. Somebody had opened it while I was looking for the key in the chef's desk."

Daniel J. Rizzo, Lynn, MA (waiter): "I was waiting for my order, and one waiter from the Melody Lounge came in and said there was a fire. He grabbed a fire extinguisher and started for the Melody Lounge. The fire was already there and he turned and yelled, 'Someone go upstairs and get the engines!' I went upstairs and went over to the Venetian-blind doors."

Procopis M. Sperdalīs, Boston, MA (kitchen handyman): "I am a kitchen man, but Saturday I worked with the cooks. The man came in...Harry, and he asked me for that pump, to get the pressure for the water. He asked Miss Swett first, the cashier, and he was so excited, and he took one, and I took another one myself. But somebody was before me, this Italian fellow called Marino [*sic*]...he is a waiter. They couldn't do anything. I took a fire extinguisher and played it. I tried to push it up so the water would come out,

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but I couldn't see anything because there was too much smoke. I dropped it in the sink, and I leave it there in the sink, inside in the sink. I go, but before I go I told Mrs. Swett, I said, 'Get out. Get out.' She said, 'No, I want to protect the money.' I can't help her anymore. I got my own flashlight. I leave by the door. I find it open."

Daniel M. Weiss, Dorchester, MA (cashier): "There was only one light that I remember in the kitchen. That was near Katherine Swett's desk. And I saw some people in white coats, such as kitchen help wear. And I turned to my left, near the stairs leading up...and saw a couple of fellows trying to lift someone up. I picked one woman up off the floor. She was a patron. And then some girls grabbed me and asked me to show them the way out. Well, at first I started to direct these people up the kitchen stairs, and then I went up myself, and saw it was useless, and I came down. I actually went up the stairs about three-quarters of the way, and on the stairs were quite a number of people sitting or lying or something. And I stumbled over them getting up, and then the heat was so intense up there that I couldn't make the top of the stairs, so I practically fell all the way down again. I spoke to Katherine Swett, and tried to get her to come out with me, but she started to put the money in the box, and I argued with her about a minute, and she moved very slowly, so I ran back near the kitchen stairs, and these girls asked me to lead them out again. So I turned to the right past the dishwashers' place, and I was leading these girls by the hand, but it was pitch dark, and I guess they didn't think I knew where I was going. They became panic-stricken and ran back."

Alessandro "Alexander" Zaccardi, Boston, MA (head chef): "A barboy ran in and hollered for a fire extinguisher. He asked one of the checkers there. So I heard him, and I said, 'Harry, there is the fire extinguisher right on the side.' We had two of them in the kitchen, so I got one for him. He ran down to the Melody Lounge and I followed him and saw a flash of flame. Well, the flame spread on the partition between the kitchen and Melody Lounge. Then I hollered, 'Let us go out in a safe place,' and then I ran. I...went to the next door back of the stage. We had to break it down. I used my shoulders and Mickey Alpert, the orchestra leader, was with me also breaking through. In the excitement, when I first fled to the door and found it locked, I forgot about the keys. I had a key which I kept on a key ring with other keys given me by Barnett. I used to leave them on my desk. I didn't think of it at that moment."

SOURCES (for B: Kitchen)

- 1) **Frank Accursio (1917-1978):** Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 2) **Henry W. Bimler (1889-1964):** Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript, also *The Boston Post* transcript)
- 3) **John W. Bradley (1909-1982):** Sources: Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Thursday, April 1, 1943 (*The Boston Post* transcript)
- 4) **William G. Burns (1918-2010):** Sources: First Naval District inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony,

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Saturday, March 27, 1943 (*The Boston Post* transcript, *The Boston Globe* transcript, *Boston Sunday Advertiser* transcript)

- 5) **Robert D. Carson (1918-1967)**: Source: Letter home to parents, reprinted in *The Southwest Times*, Pulaski, VA, Thursday, December 3, 1942
- 6) **Joseph Cericola (1913-1995)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Friday, December 11, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, March 23, 1943 (*The Boston Globe* transcript)
- 7) **William T. Connery (1914-1987)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Friday, March 26, 1943. (*The Boston Globe* transcript, *The Boston Post* transcript)
- 8) **Dorothy B. Davis (1913-1993)**: Source: First-person account, *The Boston Globe*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 9) **Richard W. Davis (1907-1974)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Wednesday, December 2, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 10) **Augusta C. "Peggy" Disbrow (1918-2000)**: Source: First-person account to hometown newspaper by long-distance telephone, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 11) **Charles W. Disbrow, Jr. (1905-1997)**: Source: First-person account, *The Boston Herald*, November 30, 1942
- 12) **Arthur Ercolini (1891-1969)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 10, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 13) **Rocco Fanuele (1911-2007)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 10, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 14) **Monica C. Files (1924-1992)**: Sources: First-person account, *The Boston Globe*, Monday, November 30, 1942. Boston Fire Department inquest, Wednesday, December 2, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 15) **Fred L. Guarnieri (1891-1956)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 10, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 16) **Morrill S. Guerin (1917-1996)**: Sources: Boston Fire Department inquest, Wednesday, December 2, 1942 (direct transcript, also *Boston Daily Record* transcript). Boston Police Department investigation, Saturday, December 12, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Friday, March 19, 1943 (*The Boston Post* transcript)
- 17) **Marguerite A. Hassett (1902-1966)**: Source: First-person account, *The Boston Herald*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 18) **Karl E. Hemenway (1903-1978)**: Sources: Boston Police investigation, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 19) **J. Donald Jeffers (1908-1974)**: Source: First-person account, *Boston Daily Record*, Saturday, December 5, 1942
- 20) **Harry M. Kirker (1894-1970)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript, also *The Boston Globe* transcript)
- 21) **Cecil Mahoney (1891-1968)**: Sources: First-person account, *The Boston Herald*, Wednesday, December 2, 1942. Boston Police investigation, Thursday, December 10, 1942 (direct transcript)

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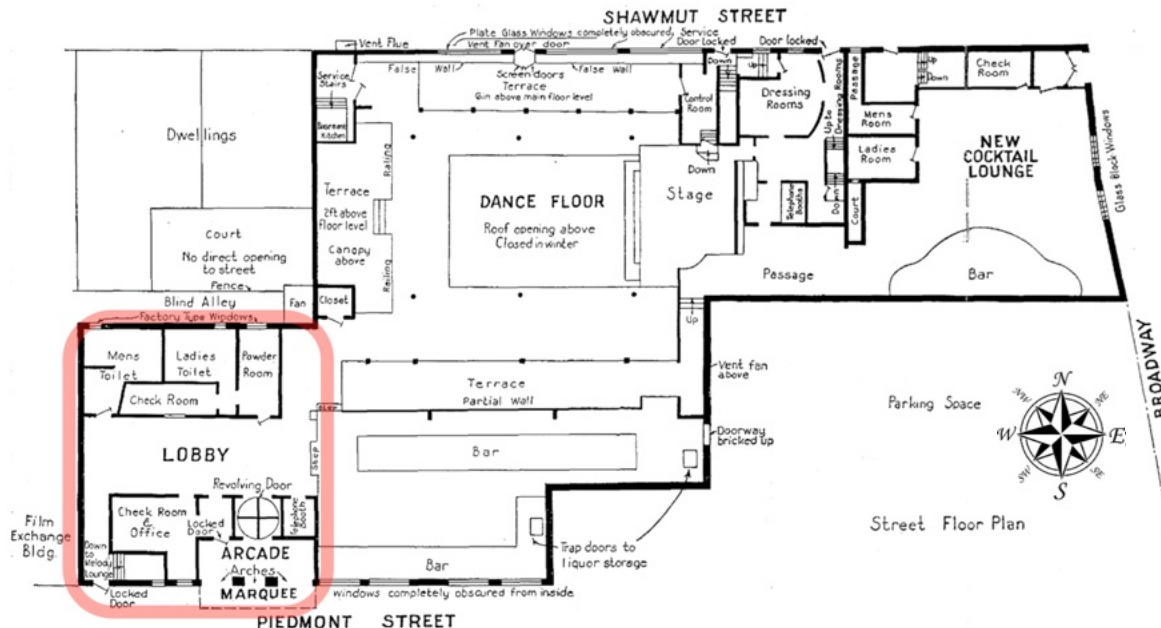
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- 22) **Anthony P. "Tony" Marra (1927-2003)**: Sources: Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Monday, March 29, 1943 (*The Boston Evening American* transcript). Retrospective interview, Associated Press wire service, Sunday, November 29, 1992)
- 23) **Reno A. Masciocchi (1906-1980)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Thursday, December 3, 1942 (direct transcript, also *The Boston Herald* transcript)
- 24) **Leonard T. Mounce (Walsh): (1923-1996)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Monday, March 29, 1943 (*The Boston Evening Globe* transcript)
- 25) **William C. "Billy" Payne (1899-1952)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, April 6, 1943 (*The Boston Post* transcript)
- 26) **Guiseppe N. "Joseph" Perella (1894-1970)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript, also *Boston Daily Record* transcript)
- 27) **Daniel J. Rizzo (1915-1974)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, March 23, 1943 (*The Boston Evening Globe* transcript)
- 28) **Procopis M. Sperdalis (1889-1977)**: Sources: Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Police Department investigation, Friday, December 11, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 29) **Daniel M. Weiss (1917-1997)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Friday, December 11, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 30) **Alessandro "Alexander" Zaccardi (1899-1972)**: Sources: Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript, also *Boston Daily Record* transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Saturday, March 27, 1943 (*The Boston Globe* transcript, *Boston Sunday Advertiser* transcript)

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C) MAIN LOBBY / FOYER (Count 31)



Charles J. Beldotti, Somerville, MA (patron): "I was in the door compartment. The door started around to a point where my compartment was within the framework of the entrance, and then it stopped. I couldn't get into the club and I couldn't get back to the street. I pushed both ways, but the door wouldn't move. I heard a girl yell that there was a fire inside and that she and some others wanted to get out. There was no sign of smoke or fire or anything then. Inside I could see people rushing towards the door and I could hear cries and screams of 'Fire.' Finally a panel or something in the door let go and everybody rushed out, pushing me backward."

Georgia Canelias Brockton, MA (patron): "After I had danced a rumba with my escort...we left the main floor to return to the lounge. And just as I did so a wild rush of patrons from downstairs swept me along with them to the front of the Grove. Many of the persons were screaming, and as I was swept along the dense smoke poured over us. As I was being pushed out the door the people were being trampled upon and being pushed down by the ones in back of them in their haste to reach the door. People were stumbling and falling all around us, and I would have fallen if some unidentified man had not grabbed my arm and steered me out the door to the street."

Raymond N. "Nick" Carter, South Boston, MA (patron): "I went to the mens room and had just come out when I heard the cry of 'Fire.' There was a roar that came up from the staircase from the Melody Lounge. It was like a terrific windstorm, like a lot of blow torches in operation. It was all heat and gas. Well, people were rushing for the revolving door, and it kept getting hotter. I waited to see if the door worked and if people were getting out. All I saw was that they were piling against the door. Well, I knew there was a window behind the Caricature bar. You wouldn't know it was a window, but I had seen it before. I

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looked for something with which to break the window, but I couldn't find anything. Then this great blast of terrific heat hit me, and I dove through the window."

Vera B. Daniels Roxbury, MA (washroom attendant): "Just after 10 p.m. a small fire broke out in an artificial palm tree downstairs in the Melody Lounge. Someone yelled 'Fire!' and there was pandemonium, with people frantically rushing to escape via nearby revolving doors, which appeared to be locked. The fire spread so rapidly that it was almost impossible to escape it, and suddenly a flaming chunk of wood fell on my head, igniting my hair. I put my hands up to my head in an attempt to beat out the fire. By crawling on my hands and knees, I managed to get to an exit door near the coatroom and, in escaping, had to step over and on bodies already piled up on the floor."

James P. Duggan, Waltham, MA (patron): "We didn't know where to turn. There was a jam of people in front and in back of us. We were just stuck."

Edith Finkelstein, Brighton, MA (war bonds salesgirl):

"Well, I was sitting at my desk making out applications for bonds that I had sold. And as I was sitting there making them out, I noticed this terrible stampede coming up from the Melody Lounge. I got up and I had my glasses on, and I got up from my table and went to the



Lobby/Foyer, looking West, with main entrance and revolving door on the left. (Boston Public Library)

door, the revolving door, to see what I could see. And the minute I got over there, flames and smoke just caught me right in the face. And they just singed a little bit of my eyebrows, and part of my hair. And the next thing I know, I hesitated a moment, thinking perhaps I would go back for my coat. But I couldn't even get a chance to do that, because they pushed me and pushed me right outside that revolving door."

Shirley Freedman, West Newton, MA (patron): "Lester and I were in the Melody Lounge downstairs. It was too dark, so we decided to leave. When we got to the top of the stairs, Lester went to get our coats and I waited outside a phone booth. Suddenly, the flame came flashing up from the lounge. The man in the phone booth came out and knocked me down. When I tried to get up another man pushed me down."

Leo S. Givonetti, Medford, MA (captain of waiters): "I was at the door of the main entrance. I was talking to a customer who was asking me to get a table. I told him it was impossible. As I was talking to him, I heard a scream in the lobby. I thought it was going to be a fight. I didn't see any flame to start. The headwaiter was on the phone at the time.

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I told the headwaiter to drop the phone and call the riot squad. He kept on talking and I made a run toward the phone booths located near the lobby. As I started to get into the lobby, I saw flames pouring out of the office and coatroom. Flames were rolling out in clouds. He said, 'Run like hell and open those exit doors.' The last I saw of the actual flames was the bandstand burning up."

Jacob B. "Jack" Goldfine, Roxbury, MA (wine steward): "I was standing in the lobby talking with Abe Levy, a cashier, when a man came running over to me and gasped, 'You've got a fire downstairs.' So I walked towards the Melody Lounge, and flames hit me over my head and I backed up. People were trying to run out. I then rushed over to the revolving door which is the main entrance to the club, figuring I could adjust the door so that there would be a wide passageway. Before I could get there, others had attempted to push their way out, causing a pile-up. The door would have opened if I could have got those cables open. It would have been easy to get out. By this time, the flame that was in the lobby had gone all across the Caricature bar. The smoke was terrific."

Nathan C. Greer, Santa Fe, NM (patron): "We got to the head of the stairs and a headwaiter - he had a tuxedo on - said he wanted to get by and get some water. He was trying to come up to get some water. One of the girls, Ann McArdle, went upstairs to the women's room. Kathy [*Kathleen O'Neil*] had gone in there and told them that there was a small fire downstairs, so the girl was taking her time. I saw fire at the head of the stairs, so I broke into the womens room and yelled, 'Get to hell out of here!' It looked like a ball of fire traveling through the air. Then I saw people on each side of the revolving door, but the pressure seemed to be equal on each side and it wouldn't move. I hit the revolving door and we broke it down. When I got outside my hair and my coat were burning. When they found Kathy's body, she was clasping my watch in her hand."

George J. Hayes, Quincy, MA (patron): "We came upstairs, and I got the hats and coats out of the checkroom. The women had gone outside. And we just got to the door, when the piano player that was playing down in Melody Lounge earlier - he had got through playing, and the girl started to play - and he came running through the lobby. He ran through the lobby and he was hollering, 'Take it easy, keep quiet,' and I thought it was a fight, never thinking of a fire, because there wasn't any signs of it. It roared up the stairs as though it was a blast furnace, and then it started to roll when it got into the lobby. It was gas in the air that was burning. None of the decorations or anything was burning. And we started for the door. They jammed Mr. Beaudry and me in against the door, and his leg got caught in the revolving door."

Howard A. Jones, Jr., Cambridge, MA (patron): "We waited to check our hats and while we were standing near the checkroom, a waiter rushed by. I noticed the headwaiter rushing up the steps from the Melody Lounge and he bumped into me. As he did I turned around and saw flames coming up the steps. Just then, fire shot up from the downstairs lounge and all hell broke loose. When I got outside I saw lots of people rushing out, their clothes in flames and some of them with the clothes burned right off. I think I was the last person to come out that door alive."

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Vita Maria "Anna" Lettini, Boston, MA (checkroom girl): "I heard a commotion down the stairs and thought there was a fight. I saw people coming in and I saw panic in their faces. I saw flames coming up the stairs. I said to Barbara O'Brien, another girl that works there, I said, 'Look.' She said, 'Let's go out.' She grabbed my coat and gave it to me. As I started to take coats and hats off the rack my hair caught fire. I lost my head and went out through the revolving door. Some people had fallen down, and I walked on them. I had a feeling of stepping on bodies as I made my way through those doors."

Abraham Levy, Mattapan, MA (cashier): "Suddenly a customer yelled, 'Fire in the Melody Lounge,' and as I looked around I could see flames shooting across the lobby. Smoke swept into the main club and at that the customers became panicked."

Edward J. Maher, Brooklyn, NY (patron): "I was more or less in the lobby. I didn't get a chance to settle. I looked over and I noticed the flames coming up the stairs. It was sweeping along between six and eight feet. They ran up the stairs, and I heard someone say, 'It's a fire.' I passed out in the building. I was overcome by the smoke."



Exterior view of main entrance, looking North, with post for revolving door in middle archway.
(Boston Public Library)

Nellie M. Malang, Plainfield, NJ (patron): "We stepped into the foyer and asked for tables, but were told we would have to wait a few minutes. Frightened almost stiff, we saw smoke and flames and rushing people coming toward us. We four girls held each

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other tightly and made for the only exit we could see, that revolving door. Three of us got through okay, but the fourth became stuck in the jam that was piling up. Then we heard a crash of glass and our friend came running toward us. The girl who became wedged in the door suffered a broken arm."

Leroy S. Marks, McClure, PA (patron): "The fire came up behind me as I went up the stairs. Nobody could get out of the door. It was a revolving door and people tried to get out both ways. There was another bar upstairs and crowds pushed up ahead. I got up on a chair and kicked a window out. When the window was kicked out the flames burned my hands. I got burns of the right ear and both hands."

V. Alice Maulsby, Wellesley, MA (patron): "I was just coming out of the ladies room and enveloped by smoke. I saw people trying to get out there and they couldn't, and they went towards the back door. My escort was there looking for me and we made our way over different people and somebody reached in and said, 'Come on, sister,' a small door."

Anne S. McArdle, Lawrence, MA (patron): "I left the room before the fire broke out, and went up to the ladies room and I was in the interior portion of the ladies room, and someone yelled, 'Fire.' But I didn't pay much attention to it, and when I got out into where the coats were, while smoke was coming in the door, there was only this woman and myself left in the ladies room. Then we went out the window."

Mary G. McCarthy, Springfield, MA (patron): "We left the Melody Lounge about 9:45 o'clock, and went to the revolving door exit. There Miss O'Sullivan and Mr. Schorling said they would like to have one more dance, so Mr. Lightcap and I were waiting by the door for them. Five minutes later I saw flames coming from the Melody Lounge stairs, and a woman with her hair on fire. Well, my escort pushed me through the revolving door and I landed out in the street."

Dorothy "Dotty Myles" Metzger, Manhattan, NY (entertainer): "Just about five minutes before show time...a funny little drunk came to the door of the lounge. We recognized him as one of the entertainers from downstairs, in the Melody Bar [sic]. Then, just as casually as he might have said, 'Hello,' he spoke just one word: 'Fire.' There was no commotion there, but I did see a strange light on the stairway leading down to the Melody Bar. I noticed the light was glowing brighter, with a flicker behind it."

Charles P. Mikalonis (Mitchell), South Boston, MA (assistant headwaiter): "I was standing right in the lobby talking to some guest. I heard this hissing sound come. It was coming right up, a hissing sound like someone holding a blow torch. The next thing I noticed the flames...coming from the Melody Lounge. It was in the air. I went downstairs and the next thing I saw fire, and I ran upstairs and coming behind me, the flame come up so fast. I was horrified, and I was there for about a second, and then the next thing I know - I don't know how - I got across the other side of the dining room."

Dorothy A. "Anne" Millard, Manchester, NH (patron): "About 10:00 p.m. we went into the Cocoanut Grove and waited in the lobby to be seated. When the hostess appeared,

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she said, 'It's against our policy to seat women in uniform unescorted.' We decided to come back dressed in civilian clothes and turned toward the revolving door just as shouts of 'Fire!' came from the stairs. A mass of people rushed through the lobby toward the door. I found myself crawling on the street outside, my nose dripping blood."

William J. O'Connor, New Bedford, MA (patron): "We had paid our bill and were walking toward the checkroom. Suddenly, from that entrance, a mass of flame came rolling toward us...The flame drove me back as far as the telephone booth. I realized in a second or two that we would never get out by going that way. We backed away and started in the opposite direction. I don't know how I got out but I rolled out of there somewhere. If the fire had started three minutes later, the four of us would have been safely outside."

Adele Penardi, Stoughton, MA (patron): "We went into the ladies room with four ladies, each following the other at about ten o'clock. I heard someone shout, 'Fire.' I went into a private toilet and when I came out, they were all gone. I just stayed in there for a minute. I could now see the flames, and the room was filled with dense smoke. It was very dark. I finally found a window and could not open it. I hurt my fingers, but could not open the window. I got into this alcove and climbed out of the window. I jumped into the arms of people below."

John D. Quinn, Worcester, MA (patron): "A man in a tuxedo - I think he was a bouncer - ran down the stairs past us, holding a fire extinguisher. It must have been only seconds later that the same man rushed up the stairs past us with a look of horror and fear on his blackened face. When I turned around, I saw a sheet of flame that reached from the ceiling to stairs and wall to wall. That's the last time I looked back."

Wilbur L. Sheffield, Newton, MA (patron): "We were hardly inside when I saw the bright flashes of fire. A woman ran toward me. Her clothes were all afire. I turned and started to leave. There was a flash and then it went out. As I was working to get through the door there was another flash. I turned right around and went out the revolving door."

William A. Sivers, Jr., Albany, NY (patron): "I was in the mens room and off the lobby. I heard somebody say, 'Where is the extinguisher?' When I got out in the lobby the flames were coming up from downstairs, the Melody Lounge. It seemed up in the ceiling. It just spread."

Ruth C. Strogoff, Brighton, MA (patron): "I crawled up the stairs on my hands and knees with my fur coat over my face. My hair, hat and fur jacket were all in flames. At the top of the stairway I rolled on the floor to put out the flames. Then I picked myself up. A gentleman had followed me up. I don't know who he was. I was screaming. We went to the revolving door and tried to open it. We pushed it, but it wouldn't move. Then we got a stool from a booth where some ladies had been selling war bonds and stamps. We broke the glass through with the stool and got out. Two marines pulled me out."

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Hilda Sudnovsky, Lynn, MA (patron): "I left the table located close to the entrance and went to the ladies room. I was in there only a minute. As I opened the door the lights went out, and the piercing screams of women resounded through the dining room. There was a lot of flames. People rushed toward the door. I was close to the door and the gathering pushed me along, trampling over other people who had fallen. In some manner I was carried through the doorway and outdoors. I don't know how I ever got out."

Jennie "Jean" Termine, Boston, MA (patron): "We went out through the revolving door immediately after we heard of the fire. At the same time, I saw a club employe stand in front of the door - hold out his arms - and tell the people that all bills must be paid before leaving. 'Nobody goes out of here until he has paid his check! It's only a small fire!'"

SOURCES (for C: Main Lobby / Foyer)

- 1) **Charles J. Beldotti (1907-2003):** Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, March 30, 1943 (*The Boston Globe transcript*, *The Boston Herald transcript*)
- 2) **Georgia Canelias (1922-1973):** Sources: First-person account, *Brockton Daily Enterprise*, Monday, November 30, 1942. First-person account, *The Boston Post*, Tuesday, December 1, 1942
- 3) **Raymond N. "Nick" Carter (1916-1971):** Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Monday, March 22, 1943 (*The Boston Globe transcript*, *The Boston Herald transcript*)
- 4) **Vera B. Daniels (1912-2001):** Source: Retrospective letter to *Yankee* magazine, November 1998
- 5) **James P. Duggan (1918-2009):** Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, March 30, 1943 (*The Boston Globe transcript*)
- 6) **Edith Finkelstein (1898-1991):** Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, December 7, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 7) **Shirley Freedman (1922-2001):** Source: Retrospective interview, *The Boston Globe*, Monday, November 14, 1994
- 8) **Leo S. Givonetti (1910-1997):** Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 9) **Jacob B. "Jack" Goldfine (1895-1968):** Sources: First-person account, *The Boston Globe*, Monday, November 30, 1942. Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Saturday, March 20, 1943 (*The Boston Globe transcript*, *Boston Sunday Herald transcript*)
- 10) **Nathan C. Greer (1922-1998):** Sources: Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript, also *Boston Daily Record transcript*, Associated Press transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Thursday, March 25, 1943 (*The Boston Globe transcript*)
- 11) **George J. Hayes (1898-1958):** Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Wednesday, December 2, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 12) **Howard A. Jones, Jr. (1917-1975):** Source: First-person account, *Boston Sunday Advertiser*, Sunday, November 29, 1942

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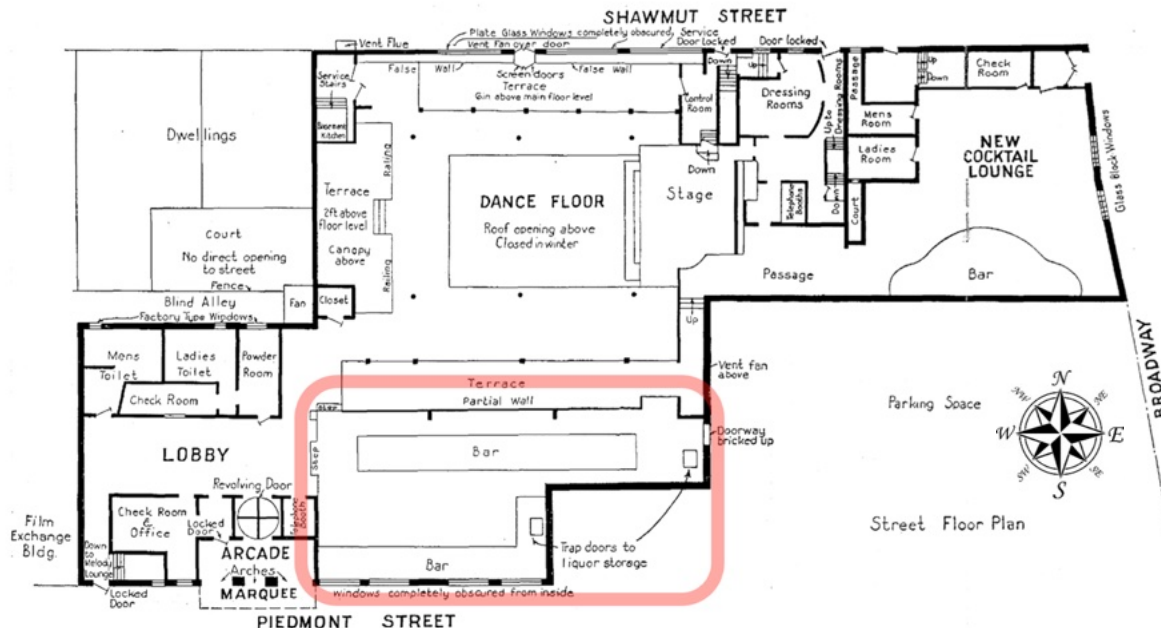
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- 13) **Vita Maria "Anna" Lettini (1916-2005)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 10, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Monday, March 22, 1943 (*The Boston Post transcript*)
- 14) **Abraham Levy (1905-1975)**: Source: First-person account, *The Boston Herald*, Sunday, November 29, 1942
- 15) **Edward J. Maher (1919-1986)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 16) **Nellie M. Malang (1919-1982)**: Source: First-person account to hometown reporter, *Plainfield Courier-News*, Plainfield, NJ, Tuesday, December 1, 1942
- 17) **Leroy S. Marks (1911-2003)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 18) **V. Alice Maulsby (1920-1994)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 19) **Anne S. McArdle (1924-2004)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Wednesday, December 2, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 20) **Mary G. McCarthy (1917-1965)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Monday, March 29, 1943 (*The Boston Globe transcript*)
- 21) **Dorothy "Dotty Myles" Metzger (1925-1967)**: Sources: First-person account (ghost-written), "I Almost Burned to Death," *True Experiences* magazine, October 1948
- 22) **Charles P. Mikalonis (Mitchell) (1909-1985)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, December 7, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 23) **Dorothy A. "Anne" Millard (1915-2012)**: Source: Retrospective letter to *Yankee* magazine, November 1998
- 24) **William J. O'Connor (1896-1980)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript). First-person accounts, *Fall River Herald News*, Fall River, MA, Tuesday, December 1, 1942
- 25) **Adele Penardi (1891-1979)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 26) **John D. Quinn (1921-2011)**: Source: Retrospective letter to *Yankee* magazine, November 1998
- 27) **Wilbur L. Sheffield (1912-1983)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Monday, March 29, 1943 (*The Boston Globe transcript*)
- 28) **William A. Sivers, Jr. (1917-2012)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 29) **Ruth C. Strogoff (1902-1982)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, March 30, 1943 (*Boston Traveler transcript*, *The Boston Herald transcript*)
- 30) **Hilda Sudnovsky (1924-2009)**: Source: First-person account to parents/reporter, *Daily Evening Item*, Lynn, MA, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 31) **Jennie "Jean" Termine (1926-2015)**: Source: First-person account, *Boston Traveler*, Wednesday, December 16, 1942

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D) CARICATURE BAR (Count 14)



John R. Capuana, East Boston, MA (bartender): "Somebody yelled 'Fire,' and I saw flames coming from the Melody Lounge up the stairway. I told people to leave orderly. I was at the main bar and the other bartender and cashier followed me. We notified the other bartenders. Meanwhile people were jamming up the door and the lights went out."

Scott J. Dow, Jr., Wellesley, MA (patron): "I had been to the washroom. A sailor who, I believe, was sitting at the very edge, the very end of the circular Caricature bar, stopped me and made a comment. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the first sight of the fire. The first thing I saw as I turned around and looked was a terrific gale of red hot embers coming from the far end of the foyer. It was a large number of small embers bursting out in the foyer, relatively high up. I might say that smoke appeared. Those embers came first. I instantaneously realized what it was and ran for my table."

Harry M. Engel, Jr., New York, NY (patron): "Someone shouted 'Fire!' The lights went out. Then there was panic."

Francis X. "Red" Fleming, Milton, MA (patron): "I had my drink and paid for it when the sound of merriment was drowned by the shrieks of women. I started walking from what they called the Caricature bar, and - I later learned - that the room downstairs where the first screams came from, was Melody Lounge. In a bat of an eye that whole crowd started running. I had all I could do to reach that revolving door. I had to weave and dodge. But I never saw a trace of flame or smelled smoke until I reached the opposite side of the street. It all happened so swiftly it almost made you dizzy."

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Samuel Goldberg, Boston, MA (bartender): "It must have been about 10:20 or twenty-five, and I was waiting on some customers and I heard a noise. And I looked over and I saw a flame coming out of the Melody Lounge and some smoke. It seemed to come out of the Melody Lounge entrance, see, in the ceiling, in the air. Somebody yelled 'Fire.' I saw the people start running for the front door and all the people left the bar, see, for the front door, and they were running all around. I walked to the end of the bar, climbed under the bar and through the passageway and into the New Lounge. It was smoky in there and I could feel the heat on the back of my neck."

Joseph F. Kelly, Arlington, MA (patron): "I heard this commotion. It came from the Melody Lounge. I thought it was a fight between Boston College and Holy Cross fans. The flames were going up the stairway. It was like an illuminating gas flame, blue with red tinges. The smoke was thick and oily. There was a strata of air under the smoke. You could see ahead where the tables had been all knocked over the stools. I never saw anything get going so sudden. There was so much smoke."

Joseph T. Levine, Roxbury, MA (cashier): "Exactly 10:15, I was waiting for the show to go on. I heard some slight noise. I saw a terrific burst of fire and flames come through the lounge...the Melody Lounge. I saw flames and the flames were immediately followed by a terrific burst of smoke."



Caricature Bar, from Lobby/Foyer looking East.
(Boston Public Library)

James A. Morrissey, Cambridge, MA (patron): "It looked as though it came from the cloakroom. It came at us like a shot out of a cannon. I poured the drink in my handkerchief and held it to my face and started out with a buddy, Frank Ahern, of Arlington. Frank said, 'Let's get out of this place,' and he started toward the new cocktail lounge. I was taking it easy because I didn't figure it was bad. Frank was about ten persons ahead of me. There was no announcement or cry. The smoke got thick pretty quickly."

Florence M. O'Hara, Lynn, MA (patron): "My girl friend, Dorothy Scherer, and I were seated at the bar. We were sitting at the bar when someone screamed 'Fire.' When the fire swept toward us, Dorothy grabbed my hand. The lights went out - and she let go suddenly. Then someone pushed me toward a door. That was all that saved me. I have just identified Dorothy's body."

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Anna Mae Smith, West Roxbury, MA (patron): "I heard a commotion coming down from the left, in the direction of the Melody Lounge. My chum and I got up and started toward the ladies room. When we got to the steps I saw the fire. I then started toward the cocktail lounge. Then the lights went out. I was knocked down twice. People stepped on me. I saw an empty space on the floor and pressed my face down against it. Then I must have passed out. When I came to, I was out of there."

Betty R. Soroko, Malden, MA (patron): "We saw some flames coming from the...area of the Melody Lounge. People were saying, 'Don't panic...take it easy.' Some rushed for the doors and others still sat at their tables in a daze. Someone said they saw a girl run up from downstairs with her hair on fire. I didn't see her, but I think people panicked when they heard about it."

Irving Soroko, Malden, MA (patron): "Well, I was at the bar facing toward the show...and then the rhumba orchestra stopped playing, and he announced, 'Mickey Alpert and his orchestra. Show time, show time.' And I was talking to my wife and waiting for the show to go on, just when he said, 'Show time, show time.' And I heard a sort of commotion, and I thought it was a fight. Then suddenly I saw flames near the mens room. A woman with her long blonde hair on fire ran howling across the room in which we were standing. Someone shouted 'Fire' and in a flash second everyone was pushing, shoving and fighting to get through the main revolving doors. I took one look at those doors and I knew that there wasn't a chance of getting out that way. Within two minutes the whole place was filled with thick black smoke. That thing went through from one end of Piedmont Street to Broadway, it was no time at all."

Benjamin C. Wheaton, Belmont, MA (patron): "We were seated at the extreme east end of the bar. In fact, my wife and I were dancing the last dance that the orchestra played prior to getting ready for the floor show. We hadn't been much more than seated when Mrs. Wheaton said she thought there was an argument and mentioned that she thought it was perhaps some football argument. Then we readily recognized the smoke and flames, coming from the Melody Lounge up the stairs to the ballroom near the foyer just before you enter the ballroom. It rolled on as a wave rolling in from the ocean. We left the bar and went through the entrance leading to the New Lounge bar."

Frances N. Wheaton, Belmont, MA (patron): "I did not see the smoke or the fire. I thought it was an altercation. I would say we were among the first ones out. I recall one person about to come in."

SOURCES (for D: Caricature Bar)

- 1) **John R. Capuana (1907-1982):** Sources: Boston Fire Department inquest, Friday, December 4, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 10, 1942 (direct transcript)

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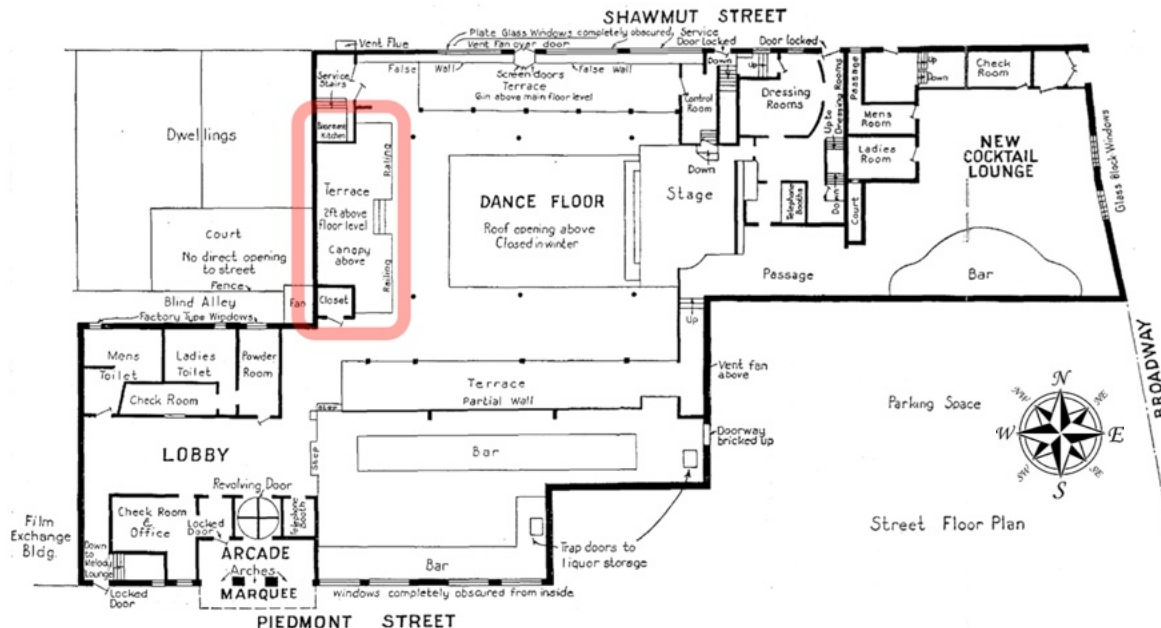
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- 2) **Scott J. Dow, Jr. (1905-1982)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Wednesday, December 2, 1942 (direct transcript, also *The Boston Globe* transcript)
- 3) **Harry M. Engel, Jr. (1916-1983)**: Source: Retrospective interview, *The Honolulu Advertiser*, Honolulu, HI, Friday, April 12, 1974
- 4) **Francis X. "Red" Fleming (1920-2007)**: Source: Full-length first-person account, *The Boston Evening American*, Wednesday, December 16, 1942
- 5) **Samuel Goldberg (1902-1948)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Friday, December 4, 1942 (direct transcript, also *The Boston Globe* transcript)
- 6) **Joseph F. Kelly (1906-1978)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 7) **Joseph T. Levine (1906-1979)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Friday, December 11, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 8) **James A. Morrissey (1917-2006)**: Source: First-person account, *Boston Traveler*, Thursday, December 3, 1942
- 9) **Florence M. O'Hara (1923-1962)**: Sources: First-person account, *The Boston Herald*, Monday, November 30, 1942. First-person account, *The Boston Evening American*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 10) **Anna Mae Smith (1911-1996)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, March 23, 1943 (*The Boston Evening American* transcript, *Boston Traveler* transcript, *The Boston Globe* transcript, *The Boston Herald* transcript)
- 11) **Betty R. Soroko (1915-2002)**: Source: Retrospective interview, *The Boston Herald*, Tuesday, November 28, 1967
- 12) **Irving Soroko (1909-1988)**: Sources: Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript). First-person retrospective, *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, Syracuse, NY, Friday, November 27, 1959
- 13) **Benjamin C. Wheaton (1898-1988)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Wednesday, December 2, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 14) **Frances N. Wheaton (1901-1976)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)

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E) MAIN DINING ROOM TERRACE (Count 10)



Henrietta Davis, Brookline, MA (patron): "We were in the Terrace Room on the first floor. Between quarter past ten and 10:30, I saw some persons that were rushing towards the front of the stage and we thought it was a fight. We hadn't seen the flames as yet. We thought it was probably a fight between the Holy Cross and B.C. boys, and suddenly we saw a burst of flames around the cocktail bar. It looked like the cocktail bar was in flames. The flames were just bursting."

Saul P. Davis, Brookline, MA (patron): "We were in the terrace, in the back. It is on the main floor up a few steps. It is part of the dining room. The first thing was a commotion and people running around the place. I saw the bar burning at first, that blue alcohol flame running the length of the bar. There was a little railing around the terrace where we were sitting and we jumped over that railing and down onto the main floor and the door to the kitchen is right handy after we jumped off the railing. We went through that door."

Joseph E. Dreyfus, Brookline, MA (patron): "We were about ready to leave - we were already standing up - when I heard someone shout 'Fire.' My wife went to a little ledge on the terrace near our table to get her coat, then I began to feel very intense heat. My face started blistering. I put my hands up to my eyes to save them and I could feel my hands blistering. Then, through the openings between my fingers, I saw flames. I began to inhale flames, and then I became unconscious. And then I was lying on the floor. I never left the terrace. The whole thing didn't take more than a half-minute and the last thing I knew my wife was near me."

Morris N. Grassgreen, Brookline, MA (patron): "We had hardly been seated - just a short time - when the fire struck. It seemed to me like the flames were right on top of the

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bar. I was able to get up for a second only. I was able to take only three or four steps down the short stairway from the terrace to the floor below when I collapsed. I didn't reach the lower step. All I know is that I started to inhale the fumes. The lights went completely out, and I was overcome by the gas fumes and fell down and everybody seemed to be on top of me. I was rendered unconscious, it seemed, in seconds."

Frederick E. Lieberman, Brookline, MA (patron): "We were all sitting around the table talking and showing pictures of our children. Eddie Ansin said, 'Here's the best baby of them all.' He showed us a picture of his beautiful 16-year-old daughter. All of a sudden, I saw a group of people rush to the bar. My first impression was that there was a fight. I then saw that lots of men and women started to run towards the revolving door, trying to get out. I jumped on the table and shouted, 'Take it easy!' With these words flames appeared behind me. I grabbed my wife and with Mr. and Mrs. Moe Grassgreen we ran towards the left-hand side of the club, away from the revolving doors. As we reached the cellar all the lights went out. There was an awful smell in the club when the fire broke out."



Main dining room, looking West from the stage, with Main Dining Room Terrace visible in the back.
(Boston Public Library)

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Marguerite E. Mahoney, Everett, MA (patron): "I was with an ensign from Harvard. They squeezed a table in for us right next to Buck Jones' party. We danced, had a drink, and were sitting there when we heard them shout 'Fight!' We thought it was some people after the football game. But suddenly there were ghastly flames over the bar. There were chairs and tables falling, and blood-curdling screams. A man in a tux was telling us to be quiet. Everyone was looking for someone else. It was dark. I fell into a slump. I woke up in a hospital bed, and can't figure out how I got out, possibly."

Beatrice A. Rice, Brighton, MA (patron): "We had just paid our check and were waiting for change. We were going to leave and all of a sudden there was sort of a stampede and we thought it was a fight or something. And we saw the smoke and when the fire broke out the lights went out...As you come in where the bar is, that is where the smoke was coming from. Well, all I could see was smoke and flames. We couldn't get out where the stairs were because there were other people sitting there. My husband pushed me over the balcony. I followed him. We followed the crowd. We went down to the basement. I was stampeded."

Martin Sheridan, Allston, MA (patron): "I had just finished my oyster cocktail when I heard voices yell what I at first thought was, 'Fight! Fight!' A moment later, someone at our table screamed, 'Fire!' In the next few seconds, the crackling of flames could be heard and a cloud of black smoke swept into the room. My wife asked about her fur coat which I had checked only a few minutes before. We had taken only a few steps when the lights went out. I never saw my wife alive again. I began to choke from the super-heated noxious fumes. I sank to the floor and into oblivion. From the first cries of 'Fire!' to my falling unconscious had taken only 30 seconds."

Harry H. Thomas, Brooklyn, NY (patron): "As we were sitting there, there appeared to be some commotion coming from the lobby. When the commotion started, I heard somebody yell, 'Be calm - there's a fire!' Pretty soon it took on the momentum of a stampede. There was fighting, hollering, and screaming. The lights went out. I had inhaled some of those strong fumes. I was pushed to the floor. People fell on top of me. It seemed as if I was there ten or 15 minutes. Finally some firemen came in with flashlights and I asked them to pull some of the people off me. They wanted to pull me out, but I was conscious and asked them to get me to my feet. I couldn't move too fast because I have a bad knee. I was dazed, but I got out one of the doors."

Abraham P. Yarchin, Brighton, MA (patron): "I heard a voice cry out, which sounded like 'Fight!' I turned around and saw a huge ball of fire heading for the bar. Apparently, it came from the Piedmont Street side and from the direction of the lobby. I said to my wife, who was at the other end of the table, 'Let's get out of here quick!' I took her hand and walked down three steps...Then people started to push and shove and I fell back. I got one shoe off. I spit on my handkerchief and put it over my face. I called to my wife to get down beside me. After that I don't remember anything until I woke up in the City Hospital."

SOURCES (for E: Main Dining Room Terrace)

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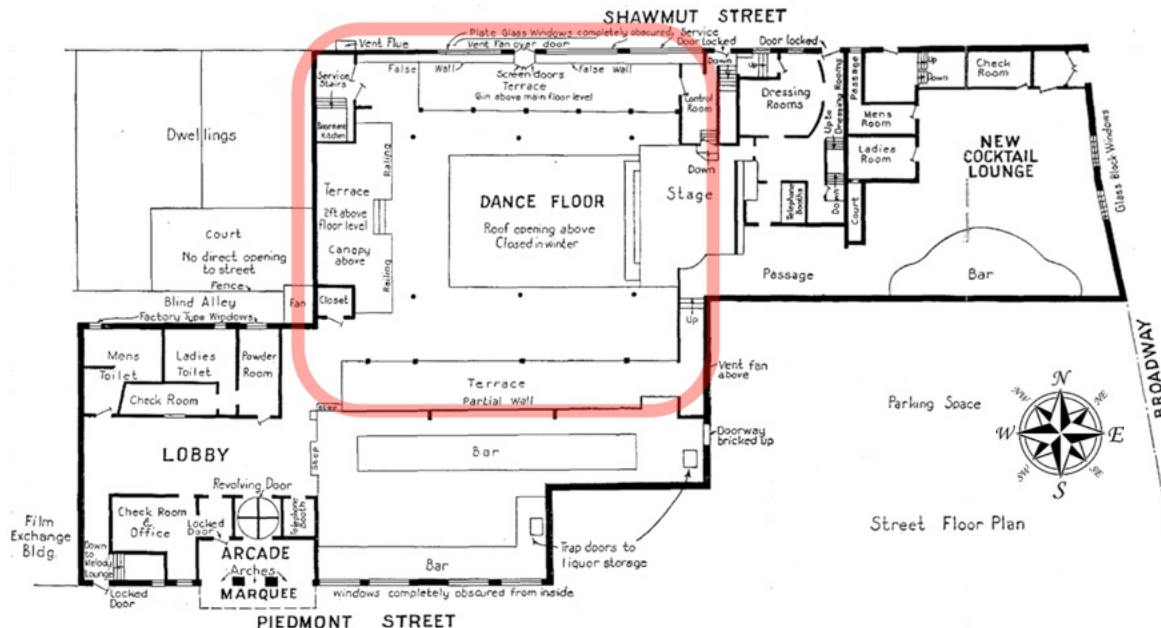
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- 1) **Henrietta Davis (1920-1986)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation (from Mass General Hospital), Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 2) **Saul P. Davis (1918-2008)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation (from Mass General Hospital), Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 3) **Joseph E. Dreyfus (1919-2004)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Monday, March 29, 1943 (*The Boston Evening American* transcript)
- 4) **Morris N. Grassgreen (1898-1973)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation (from Mass General Hospital), Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Wednesday, March 31, 1943 (*The Boston Post* transcript)
- 5) **Frederick E. Lieberman (1901-1981)**: Source: First-person account, *The Boston Globe*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 6) **Marguerite E. Mahoney (1920-1985)**: Source: First-person account, *The Boston Evening American*, Wednesday, December 2, 1942
- 7) **Beatrice A. Rice (1919-2001)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation (from Mass General Hospital), Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 8) **Martin Sheridan (1914-2003)**: Sources: *Sunday Herald Traveler* and *Sunday Advertiser*, Boston, MA, Sunday, November 26, 1972, *Boston Herald American*, Sunday, November 28, 1982
- 9) **Harry H. Thomas (1892-1976)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Monday, April 5, 1943 (*Boston Traveler* transcript, *The Boston Evening American* transcript, *The Boston Globe* transcript)
- 10) **Abraham P. Yarchin (1906-1998)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Friday, April 2, 1943 (*The Boston Evening Globe* transcript)

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F) MAIN DINING ROOM (Count 67)



Frank Accursio, Everett, MA (waiter): "I was the first one up there that knew about the fire. I ran upstairs and I shoved a crowd away from the door. There is no lock on that door. You just push it down and it opens. There is a screen door right before the door...a regular screen like you have in the First National Stores. This door opens two ways. It is a double door. I opened that door and I tried to open the other half. Before I got to the other half the people shoved me out of the way. All the people clogged it up. They tried to get out quicker when they seen the flames."

Milton I. "Mickey" Alpert, Brookline, MA (Master of Ceremonies): "I was sitting at a table with Billy Payne. We sat down because we were tired. Somebody in the Buck Jones party called me up to the back terrace...As I was going up there, I heard a crash and Billy Payne said, 'Mickey, fight.' I saw a flash of smoke and flame in the lobby. It spread like a shot. 'Zing.' I put my arms up and said, 'Wait a minute, folks.' By that time it was upstairs running the length of the room and there was smoke on the other side of the room."

Henry W. Bimler, Boston, MA (waiter): "I was just going to buy a check for a customer. I went over to the headwaiter's desk. There is a minimum of \$3, and those people only had a \$10 check for nine people, so I had to have an O.K. I had to go to the desk for that. Just then I saw a great big flame come from the stairway. It started in the Melody Lounge and came up the stairs and through the coatroom. It didn't last two seconds. Everything happened like a flash."

Marion M. Bizzozero, Quincy, MA (patron): "I remember that I was seated near the stage, and when we noticed the smoke, it did not appear to be serious. I was separated from my husband and knocked to the floor. I don't recall exactly how many persons

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trampled over me. And - although I don't remember how - I found myself on the sidewalk. My legs were bruised. I never saw my husband alive after that."

Louis E. Carballo, Miami, FL (musician): "I hear the people yelling, 'Fire! Fire!' I see a lot of smoke. People running. No lights, and that is all I can remember because I fell down."

Adolph Cecchini, Somerville, MA (waiter): "I had just got an order and I was on my way to the kitchen. A waiter who was my partner happened to be downstairs and came rushing upstairs, and told me to scam because there was a fire in the Melody Lounge. I said, 'I don't see nothing.' I looked at the dining room and saw the fire and smoke. At that time I seen all the people getting up. I ran for the door and it was closed. I looked back, and saw a pall of black smoke with a red glow over it. The crowd stampeded and I went through a window."

Benjamin L. Chiampa, Newton, MA (patron): "There was my wife and I, and my teenage sister, Eleanor, who attended the game with us. Eleanor and I were dancing when someone yelled 'Fire.' All I wanted to do was grab my sister, find my wife and get out. Jennie had left our table and was waiting for us on the rim of the dance floor. The three of us headed for a swinging door near the kitchen. But we never made it through the door. Fire flashed all over the ceiling and the lights went out. There was a huge puff of smoke, and - the next thing I knew - I woke up at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital."

Anna Marie Clark, Keene, NH (patron): "As Fred Jr. and I were dancing, we saw flames everywhere. Fred said, 'Get on your hands and knees and cover your face.' That's the last I remember. Next thing I knew I was in the hospital. I had a couple of tiny burns on my fingers."

Margaret J. "Peggy" Clougherty, South Boston, MA (patron): "We were just sitting there talking about where we'd go next, when someone shouted 'Fight!' We were near the main door of the main dining room. We stood up to see what was going on, when there was a terrible flame over by the door. I can't remember much except the stampede and screaming. The lights were out. We both got to the door and someone sat me down on a chair on the sidewalk. My face and arms were all burned."

Mary E. Cummings, Waltham, MA (patron): "We had a wonderful evening, and were just getting up to dance. All of a sudden someone yelled 'Fire!' Smoke filled the room. Someone knocked into me and that's all I remembered until I woke up here in the hospital."

Dorothy B. Davis, Brookline, MA (patron): "The four of us were lucky enough to have been seated at a table at the back of the room near the stairs leading down to the kitchen. Suddenly there was a cry of 'Fire,' and we saw flames coming up from the Melody Lounge. Immediately there was a rush of people toward the rear, and the four of us were swept down the stairs into the kitchen."

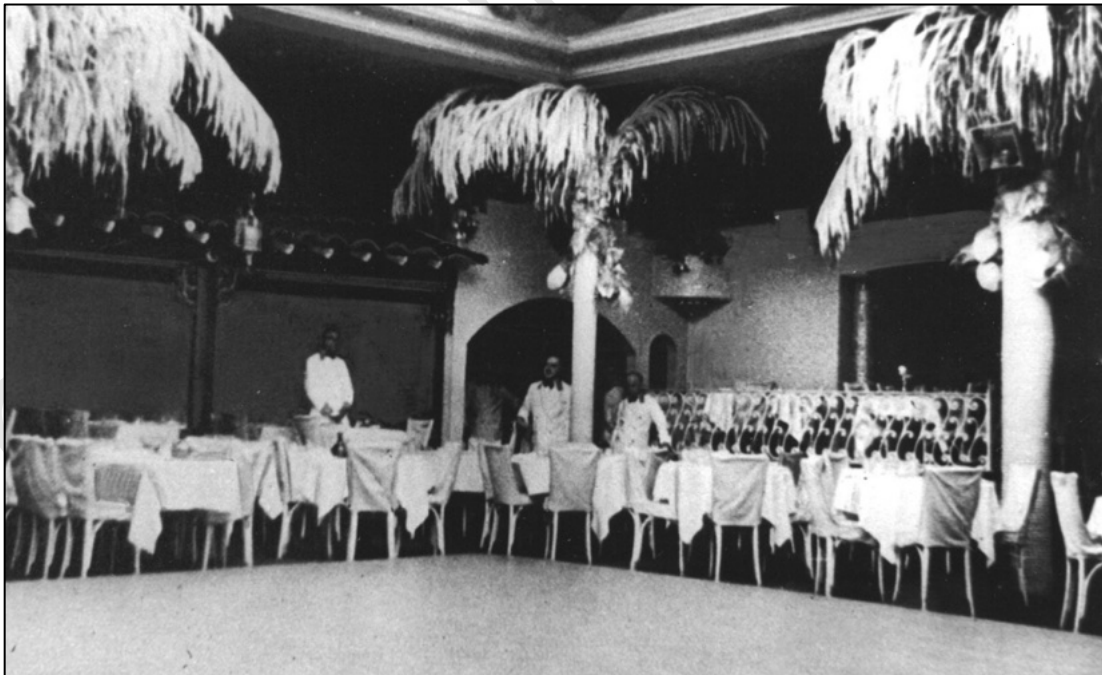
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Harold C. Davis, Jr., Winthrop, MA (patron): "Somebody yelled 'Fire,' and I thought they yelled 'Fight,' and I stood up. I heard somebody say, 'Fire out, don't get panicky.' Somebody yelled 'Fire' again. I saw smoke pouring in from above the bar at the Piedmont Street side. I did not see any flames. All the people in back were pushing. They all started running. My girl and I got separated. I got knocked down and I lost her. I saw a girl on the floor and I picked her up and started for the door. One of the firemen pulled her out by the arms. Then I put my arm out and they did the same for me."

Richard W. Davis, Brookline, MA (patron): "Shortly after quarter past ten I saw this herd of people rushing down upon us, coming from the lobby. They hit us at the tables and we went down. By that time we noticed smoke pouring from the lobby, followed shortly by a glare of flame that seemed to envelope the whole dining room, followed immediately by dense clouds of smoke. I would say we were probably standing there hemmed in by the crowd for a matter of about two minutes. And then a minute later, after the smoke and flame came from the lobby, the place was an inferno. People were fighting to get out of the club. Pandemonium is the only word I can think of, and I must say the scene did no credit to the male sex."

James E. Denault, Adams, MA (patron): "I dove from the elevated floor to the dance hall floor, and started to make my way toward an exit. I dropped to the floor and placed my head in the topcoat I had been carrying, but still the smoke came through. All around me people were pushing and some were falling to the floor. I was stepped on by quite a few. When I was near a door I crawled over a girl who was lying on the floor. I let go of my coat and tried to lift her so as to take her out, but the crowd pushed us apart. I grabbed what I thought was my coat, but what later I found was a woman's coat."



Main Dining Room before the fire, looking Southwest, across the dance floor toward the main entrance, with Terrace to the right. (Boston Public Library)

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Mary A. Devine, Quincy, MA (patron): "We were sitting at the second table up near the platform. I was facing the orchestra. The show had finished and intermission had just started. Nobody was dancing and the place was pretty quiet. Suddenly someone shouted 'Fire.' I looked around and saw a sheet of flame. We didn't see an exit sign anywhere, but went to the entrance used by the chorus girls. The lights on the main floor were on, because I could see them. My husband, Tom, was right behind me. I still can't figure out why my husband didn't get out."

Charles W. Disbrow, Jr., Brookline, MA (patron): "We were sitting in a party of nine persons, just finishing our dinner at a table near the center of the club when I noticed people round us looking toward the front door and bar. There was a commotion there, and at first I thought some celebrators had started a fight. Then I saw a man jump up on a bar. Two belches of flame followed him. I knew there would be a panic, and people had already started running away from the space near the bar. I shot for the servants' door and we went down a flight of steps into the basement."

Scott J. Dow, Jr., Wellesley, MA (patron): "I was returning up the foyer. I saw this blaze of red hot embers. I thought at the time it was coming from an air intake in the building. I ran to my table and quietly, and apparently very firmly, turned and said, 'Come! There is a fire!' The table was located on the far side of the dance floor, one end of it being on the dance floor and going in. At that moment I am speaking the table was on my right, and at that moment I noticed there was a door being opened, which was the Shawmut Street exit door. It was being opened and so, simultaneously with my call to come, I set out for this door."

Cecil E. Dowling, North Quincy, MA (patron): "We were upstairs with the orchestra because the Melody room, where the fire broke out, was too crowded. We were at the table when the waiter came over to tell us that there was a fire downstairs, and showed us an exit by way of a window. We crawled out of the window and into the street. It was very cold so we went around to the front entrance to get my companion's wrap, but the exit was crowded so we took a taxi right home. It was too cold to stick around."

Francis P. Driscoll, Waltham, MA (patron): "There are two different bands that play there. And neither of the bands, I would say, were seated, or if so, possibly two or three of them were still in their seats. They had cleared the floor for the floor show about half past ten, and we were seated. Mickey Alpert was sitting at a table with some friends on the right of us. Well, the next thing I remember, I heard somebody yell, and I thought they yelled, 'Fight.' I thought it was a fight but the next thing I seen was smoke, over by the bar. Everybody rushed for the back door. We all rushed and there were 30 people ahead of us and were knocking one another over."

Dorothy D. Ducharme, North Grosvenordale, CT (patron): "I was upstairs near the street level. Somebody hollered 'Fight' first. Then the flame came. The smoke was terrible. We all ran for the back door. I was taken out."

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Rocco Fanuele, Roxbury, MA (waiter): "I heard people yelling in the lobby and noticed smoke coming from there. In a second things got worse and I started to open an exit. There was a screen there before you open the exit. I could not open it then, even though it is easy to open. I got pushed out and the other half of the door came flying out."

Bernardo Fazioli, Everett, MA (musician): "I lead out Mickey Alpert's orchestra. I just walked out with the boys to start to do the show and somebody said, 'Look, there is fire.' I looked out in the lobby and saw a huge flame come, and everybody started to scream and run. They appeared to be coming from the mens room or further end of the lobby. I started to suffocate."

George B. Fenning, Jr., Brooklyn, NY (patron): "We got a table about ten o'clock, and I would judge the fire started between twenty-three or twenty-seven minutes after. About twenty-five after ten. When we first heard the noise at the bar, I thought it was a riot on behind. I didn't think it was a fire. I didn't observe what was ignited. I told the young lady to get her things and we would leave. We left at the rear door...It was a French window or something."

Romeo J. Ferrara, Somerville, MA (musician): "It was about 10:15. I was just getting on the bandstand to play the show. Down the other end at the lobby I saw some people running from the lobby. I thought it was a fight. The first thing I saw were flames near the main entrance. They were just in the lobby at first, then in no time they were all over the place. When I found out it was a fire I went backstage."

Monica C. Files, Allston, MA (patron): "The floor show was about to start, and all of a sudden everybody got up and there was silence for a while. We thought there was a fight, so my husband was going over to see what had happened. I was going with him, and just as I got a few steps we saw flames. They were coming from the foyer. It looked as if they were coming from the Melody Lounge. The flames were already across the revolving doors when I saw it. It looked as if it were coming up from the floor along the walls. At first there was no panic at all because everybody was so stunned by it that they just stood there. It was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. Then I saw people turn around and run down toward the kitchen, down some cement steps, and so I said, 'Maybe it will be better if we run down this way.'"

Richard A. Garafalo, Watertown, MA (patron): "We were dancing - it was about 20 minutes of eleven - when suddenly there was a cloud of smoke on the dance floor and everyone rushed for the door. There was no explosion and no flames, just smoke and that mad dash for the street."

Margaret L. "Peg" Gill, Arlington, MA (patron): "We were going to leave quietly by the door. They could only open half of it. I don't remember what happened after that."

A. Perry Gordy, Jr., Anniston, AL (patron): "For some unknown reason, I looked up at the ceiling and in the direction of the hat check room on the other side of the main entrance

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- revolving door - and saw flames leaping toward the main entrance and toward the ballroom. I am not sure whether a Negro girl ran from downstairs where the fire started with her hair ablaze, as stated by some, or if the people saw the fire."

Hewson C. Gray, Waltham, MA (patron): "We sat over in the left-hand side, down by that door where the entertainers came out - the stage door, I think they call it. We were sitting down there and we heard somebody hollering, 'Fight, fight.' I heard a commotion behind me, and looked back and towards the bar. Puffs of smoke were coming up over it. Then we saw a flash of flame. It looked to me around five or six feet high. And they all started running away from the revolving door, running back toward the stage, like. I think the people there were running back to that new lounge they built on the end there, running back that way. So then we got up and we started for the door. The place was in a panic even before we got out."

Fred L. Guarnieri, Watertown, MA (waiter): "I was suddenly enveloped in a sheet of flame and smoke. It all happened at once and everyone began screaming and running towards the exits. The rush was terrific, with the screams of those who were being trampled. I pushed my feet against tables and chairs in the dark. I went in the kitchen and into the ice box."

Frederick W. Harrington, Brighton, MA (patron): "We were sitting down and Mrs. Donovan was sitting right across from me. She said, 'Is that a fight?' She was facing the main floor where you come in on Piedmont Street, the revolving door. I got up and turned around, and as I did I seen people along the side running down towards the corner near the door. All of a sudden I saw a flash of flame run up and hit the ceiling. The fire seemed to fan out very swiftly across the ceiling. I turned around and said to my crowd, 'This is no place for us, follow me.' And they all started to follow me. I saw the cluster of fire rolling across the ceiling."

Robert J. Horrigan, Turners Falls (Montague), MA (patron): "We had not been at the Grove long when there was a loud commotion and I thought there was a fight at the bar. In another instant I saw a ball of fire shoot across the room, along the wall near the bar. One of the girls with us jumped up and started to run across the room. I got up from the table, which was near the dance floor and opposite the bar, and started to cross the room. In an instant some man struck me in the face and I...sprawled on the floor. I knew nothing more until later in the night, probably towards morning, when I heard someone say, 'This one's alive,' and then a crackling of glass."

Charles Kalchhauser, Cambridge, MA (waiter): "Well, I was coming up from the bar with some drinks. And I was putting the drinks on the table when I heard the commotion. I was near the front door. And I looked and I saw the flame coming in the lobby. It looked like a furnace coming up, a furnace flame. People were still dancing on the floor. I went right out the Shawmut Street door. Half of the door was open. I heard an explosion on the way out. Then a noise like the roof was cracking. I skidooed out of the Shawmut Street door and watched the fire from across the street."

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Anna M. Kerrigan, Haverhill, MA (patron): "My first impression of the impending disaster was a streak of flame. I don't know what attracted my attention to it first, but I definitely recall and probably will not forget that streak of flame as it started racing across the main hall. It was accompanied by a weird sound. There was no time to be wasted. We all dashed as fast as we could to the door without thinking of our personal belongings, such as coats and purses."

Simon Koges, Boston, MA (patron): "I remember I saw a lot of people running and I said...'There is a fight going on there,' and we happened to stand up. They were running from near the bar. I thought it was a fight, and when I got up with my friend I saw a flame shoot up, right near the checkroom. I stood up and started to make a move, and a party of about ten people started running out. The five fellows got up, pushed the table over on the girls they were with and ran out. Just as we got to a door and I was about to lose consciousness, an Army officer grabbed me by the hand and dragged me out through a little door on Shawmut Street."

Claire J. Krohn, Arlington, MA (patron): "I saw this flare. It just seemed to shoot from the right-hand corner...Just before you get to the bar. And then it seemed to go all over the bar, and then it seemed to go all over the place. We all turned and went for the nearest exit on Shawmut Street."

Edna P. Krohn, Arlington, MA (patron): "The floor show was about to go on when the blaze broke out. I heard someone say - I thought it was 'Fire' - and when I turned I saw fire. Someone yelled 'Fire,' and the place was in bedlam. It seemed to me that the entire wall section was completely in flames. And then Mr. McCarthy grabbed hold of me and rushed me towards the door, which I now know was on Shawmut Street. I could see the people at the door, waiting for someone to open it. Finally a waiter opened the door and the people went out."

Mildred F. Lane, Newton, MA (patron): "I noticed a commotion over at the extreme end, diagonally opposite me in the ballroom. It looked like a fist fight, the way it impressed me. Some of the people around us said it was a riot. There was a door right near the table, directly behind the table that we were at. Our table had to be moved. We had to get up and move the table. The door was opened by a man a table behind us or by a man in front of us. We went through that door to the dressing room. I didn't see any flame till I got out on the street, but I smelled smoke."

Anthony P. 'Tony' Marra, Everett, MA (busboy): "I had gone up the ladder above the terrace to see if there was someone at the spotlight for the second show. As I was going up the ladder I saw another boy up there. I then saw everybody running towards the Shawmut Street door, from the main dining room towards the exits. Then I saw smoke coming up from the kitchen. And the smoke was getting thick. I saw flames and I heard wives yelling for their husbands and husbands yelling for their wives. I didn't know what to do. I got down from the ladder and went to the kitchen."

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Thomas J. McGreevy, Jr., West Roxbury, MA (patron): "We were in the main dining room of the Cocoanut Grove. All of a sudden, there seemed to be a stampede and somebody shouted, 'Fire.' 'Stay calm,' I said, 'We'll find a way out.' We rushed to where the waiters were bringing trays from the kitchen. There was no flame at that time. It was all smoke. I passed out and woke up here."

Winifred W. McHugh, Bronxville, NY (patron): "We had a couple of drinks. When we were about to leave, we saw a commotion and somebody said there must be a fire, and with that I heard, 'Take it easy, there's a fire.' We went to the left where there was supposed to be a wall. We saw the flames and as we walked down, I saw it come across on the ceiling and the roof. The first thing I knew, there was an exit there. The next thing I knew, the lights were out."

Dorothy "Dotty Myles" Metzger, Manhattan, NY (entertainer): "Two waiters were over at an emergency exit, struggling to get the door open. Just then it seemed as though everyone in the room awoke at once from a sound sleep; seemed as though a thousand voices all started screaming at once. With all this, a few of the diners were still too stunned to move, and I started working my way toward a nearby table to see if I could help a little old lady there. Just as I reached the little old lady, the lights went out. Then bedlam really broke loose."

Eleanor F. O'Neill, West Roxbury, MA (patron): "I didn't see it until it came around the corner. It came from the Melody Lounge. It went right across the ceiling. I fell down. I was carried out."

Peter S. Pantages, Boston, MA (waiter): "I was about to go down to the kitchen and I noticed the people at the bar standing up. I did not go down to the kitchen since there might be a fight. I walked in the door and I noticed smoke coming out of the foyer. Then I saw the smoke pouring towards me and the flames behind it. I turned about and headed to the side entrance. I reached about 12 feet away from that door when I was hit by an overturned table. Then I crawled until I felt the warm air about me. The smoke was getting thick. I couldn't get up, but about three feet away from the door I got up and the onrushing crowd pushed us out."

Robert D. Parks, Barrington, RI (patron): "We were a party of nine seated at tables about 30 feet from the entrance. The fire started like a flash and spread rapidly along the walls. Split seconds after the fire burst in, I saw the door onto Shawmut Street opened. We were able to reach the exit without much trouble, but when we got out we found that my sister was not with us. I went back and heard my sister cry out. I called the attention of two firemen to her plight and they found her wedged under many people. They succeeded in freeing her and carrying her out."

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William C. "Billy" Payne, Boston, MA (club tenor): "Mickey told me he was going to

Main Dining Room, looking East toward the stage from the
Main Dining Room Terrace. (Boston Public Library)

announce the coming of Buck Jones to Boston. Right after he left the table to see Jones and his party, I heard the crashing of glass at the bar and people started yelling. I thought it was a fight. I could see some guy in the lobby with a fire extinguisher, and I started to go to the front of the room. As I started to go there I saw this terrific ball of yellow or white flame come surging past the checkroom, past the revolving door, past the two telephone booths in the lobby. Smoke started to come very quick and thick in the main dining room. A crowd gathered towards the Shawmut Street entrance, pushing me in a corner. They slammed me against the iron grille work in the terrace and kept pushing me back. I said to the people, 'Follow me downstairs to the kitchen,' a concrete cellar floor."

Juan Pineda, Miami, FL (musician): "A young woman came running from the Melody Lounge screaming 'Fire.' Her hair was in flames and her dress was burning. Some people thought for a moment it was part of the show. I was going to make an announcement, and then - phoof - the fire blew around the ceiling, and everything blazed up. Then the flames leaped out and ran around the room. There was a crazy rush for the exits. With my wife, who was sitting at one of the tables, I started for the dressing room exits. Then someone came to the window outside and opened it and dragged us through."

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Florence H. Price, Somerville, MA (patron): "We were seated a few tables in front of the orchestra when suddenly there was a little excitement in the background. Some member in our group asked, 'What's going on over there?' People were rushing to see what was going on when we saw the flames. My husband threw my coat over my shoulders and said, 'Let's get out.' We went to the exit where the chorus girls come out. It was very dark there and the smoke started to roll over the dance floor. It seemed as if it was following us along the way, like a draft was pulling it toward us."

Louis Price, Somerville, MA (patron): "Why, someone at our table said that he thought there was a fire. And I looked out of the corner of my eye toward the main door and saw - not a flame - just a light, an eerie light, sort of a bluish light. I heard shouts of fire, and looked up and saw a sheet of blue flame in the lobby. I just heard someone say, 'There is a fire,' and I said, 'Let's get out.' I shouted, 'Let's follow the waiters,' and we ran after them to a door in the rear of the dining room. We were being pushed by the crowd behind us, but at the beginning it was no more than the ordinary crush you would get in any entrance, such as the crush you would get at a football game."

Anthony B. Puzyn, Cambridge, MA (waiter): "Well, at first I had just finished serving a party of four, and I heard some sort of half-scream, and I looked back and I didn't see any fire at first. So I finished serving my party and laid down a couple of more coffee cups, and I heard another scream, accompanied by a yell of 'Fire.' Then I turned around and saw people running, with a sheet of fire coming out of the lobby. The whole lobby seemed to me like in a burst of flame. I started for the lobby on the Shawmut Street side, and was carried by the crowd in the rush through the door. The people on both sides, finding they couldn't pass through the door like those in the middle, pushed all the harder and became excited."

John D. Quinn, Worcester, MA (patron): "With the light of the fire behind us, I could just barely make out a group of people to my left, all the way across the dining room, approximately 40 to 50 feet away. I saw two men in tuxedos trying to, for lack of a better word, swim out. They had climbed up the backs of people until they reached the heads. Then they would reach forward with one hand, grab some hair, and pull themselves forward, then reach with the other hand and repeat the stroke."

Rita A. Ratte, Fairfax, VT (patron): "We were at one of the first tables at the door of the main dining room. Someone hollered. There was smoke and blackness. My escort told me to be calm. I was out in just a few moments. I didn't have to go through flame, but the heat was terrific and the smoke sickening."

John E. Rembold, Owensboro, KY (patron): "I heard someone scream 'Fire.' I noticed the front entrance was burning fast and people were dashing through the fire. I had to be careful not to get tramped on, for once you fell down you would be tramped to death. I ran upstairs looking for a window. I picked up a large lounging chair and threw it through a large window. I decided I did the silly thing by running upstairs, but it looks like that was the best thing I could have done."

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Daniel J. Rizzo, Lynn, MA (waiter): "I went upstairs and went over to the Venetian-blind doors. The lights went out. It started to get hot. This sailor and I grabbed a table and hit the door. Somehow it came open. I was pushed outside with the surge of the crowd, and then helped pull people through the door. Then I realized my brother was in there. The first thing I knew I was inside again. I got about two feet when I was hit by a table and pinned against a wall. Then the table fell on me and I fell down. The smoke was very black. I tried to crawl out, but a woman grabbed me around the hips. Finally someone clutched me and pulled me out. I was burned on the hands, arms, face and knees."

John J. Rizzo, Jr., Revere, MA (waiter): "Well, I was just starting to collect the check from a customer and I turned around and I saw a big crowd in the lobby, and I heard a lot of screams. I saw a crowd there and I thought it was a fight. And I heard somebody hollering, 'Get the cops, it is a jam.' So I ran up there and I looked, and I saw a red torch of flames coming up from the stairs in the Melody Lounge. I ran across the hall over to the left-hand side of the stage. I was trying to get out that door. The fire was halfway in the dining room at that time, at the time I ran from the place where I saw the fire to that entrance. It was right in the middle of the room just like a forest fire, coming right down along the aisle."

Lawrence B. Russell, Newton, MA (patron): "We had just finished dinner and were waiting for the check when we saw this commotion towards the lobby. We all got up from the chairs. I thought there was a fight. Somebody yelled, 'Fire.' I didn't believe it. The crowd surged back. I was away across the room. Where I was looking and where the fire was, the only part I saw was in the vicinity of the front door of the lobby. I could see a few flames. The fire started like a flash and spread rapidly along the walls. If the lights hadn't gone out, a lot more people would have got out."

Marguerite P. "Mimi" Russell, Newton, MA (patron): "I first became aware that something was wrong when I saw what looked like a fight starting. Within a few seconds I saw the first of the smoke and flames and with my husband started for the exit. I became separated from my husband and our party, and was knocked down in the darkness. I placed my coat over my head to shut out the smoke. About ten minutes later a fireman appeared at the entrance, which I had been unable to find. I feel that I owe my life to the fact that I kept my coat over my head until help arrived."

Katherine K. Scales, Arlington, MA (patron): "I heard my sister say, 'Look,' and it was fire. It seemed to be coming from the entrance door. It seemed as though the flames flared up behind the bar. We all turned, got up and went toward the door, a small side door on Shawmut Street."

Morris "Moe" Solomon, Dorchester, MA (musician): "Well, we had just been called in by the relief band and I was standing on the stand talking with Bernie Fazioli. And Bernie walked away to the center of the stage, and it seems as if he had just got there when somebody in the band yelled, 'There is a fight.' This boy yelled that there was a fight, and one of the boys yelled, 'Come on, let's play.' And as soon as he yelled that, another boy

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yelled, 'God, it is a fire.' And when this boy yelled 'Fire,' we saw this big sheet of flame spring up in the foyer, and all this crowd started to mill. Some of the patrons thought it was a fight and called, 'Quiet.' It just seemed to be one sheet of flame in that foyer."

Barbara C. Stubbs, Bangor, ME (patron): "We were in the main dining room...We were at a table very near the center. The orchestra had stopped playing, and everyone was waiting for the second show. The great room was far from silent, but there was a sort of lull. And then it happened."

George E. Stubbs, Bangor, ME (patron): "My life history flashed before me, and then I made one desperate dive. Don't ask me how I made it. I really have no idea. Smoke and flame were all around, but somehow I got through to the air."

L. Ray Thiry, Kansas City, MO (patron): "The floor show was about to start and we were all ready for enjoying the program. Suddenly, the room filled with smoke. It must have been spread about the room by the ventilating system, as the room filled up very quickly. I looked up and saw flames and then I heard someone shout, 'Fire.' We could hear screams and we could see tables being knocked over. My girlfriend was knocked off her feet, but I was successful in getting her back on her feet again as we forced our way towards an exit off the right side of the club."

Giovanni "John" Turchi, Boston, MA (busboy): "I thought there was a fight, you know, I saw a lot of people running for the door. And then I saw all the flame come all in at once. I went down to the kitchen and got away through the back door. I was near the back door and the smoke was pretty heavy."

Isaac Walles, Wilmington, DE (patron): "I didn't notice the fire at first, but I heard a lot of people hollering and saw people running and pushing. I rushed from the main floor up the steps to the second floor. I noticed a couple of windows open and I guess someone must have jumped out before I did. The room must have been a dressing room."

John J. Walsh, Jamaica Plain, MA (patron): "I was sitting at a table on the Shawmut Street side, about midway in the building. I was sitting at the table with my back to the stage, that is, I was facing the rear. And I saw what appeared to be a puff of smoke and flame over on my left, in the left-hand corner, that is, over where the telephone is, adjoining the entrance on Piedmont Street. I simply saw the flame, the first flame that entered the room, and then saw in a very short period this rapid spread of that flame. The flame appeared to be all up at the ceiling, none low, and it appeared to already have started to run down toward the stage on the Piedmont Street side. I turned to my party and said, 'There appears to be a fire over here. I think, as long as we are ready to leave, we had better leave immediately, and never mind our clothing.' When I turned after having addressed the group and looked at that spot again, it was a roaring mass of flames."

Frederick Wayland, Jr., Brighton, MA (patron): "I first saw what I would call a commotion near the Piedmont Street entrance. Someone yelled 'Fire!,' but I could see nothing. A little later I saw smoke and then flame come towards the dining room. It was a

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heavy red flame that rolled, just as a wave might roll and break up on a beach. I told my wife and her uncle to sit still for a moment. Then I remembered that a boy and a waiter had gone to the couple a few tables from where we sat and asked them to move. Apparently they had to move the table to get at the door. The couple went out that door. We started for the door and were fortunate enough to get out. It seemed to be a door that was only half-open. I saw a man in a club uniform of some kind trying to break down the other half."

Helen D. Wayland, Brighton, MA (patron): "The first thing we knew, someone yelled 'Fire.' So Fred said, 'Don't get excited now. It's only a little bit of smoke.' I fell down outside the Shawmut Street exit. That was because of the extra push my husband gave me as I went through the door. We got out just in the nick of time."

SOURCES (for F: Main Dining Room)

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- 4) **Marion M. Bizzozero (1902-1988):** Source: Retrospective interview, *The Boston Herald*, Tuesday, November 28, 1967
- 5) **Louis E. Carballo (1909-1994):** Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript)
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- 8) **Anna Marie Clark (1926-2017):** Sources: Retrospective letter (as Mrs. Ann Gallagher) to *Yankee* magazine, November 1998. Retrospective interview (as Mrs. Ann Gallagher), *The Keene Sentinel*, Keene, NH, Sunday, August 2, 2009
- 9) **Margaret J. "Peggy" Clougherty (1920-2003):** Source: First-person account (from Boston City Hospital), *The Boston Evening American*, Wednesday, December 2, 1942
- 10) **Mary E. Cummings (1912-1978):** Source: First-person account (from Boston City Hospital), *The Boston Herald*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 11) **Dorothy B. Davis (1913-1993):** Source: First-person account with husband, *The Boston Globe*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 12) **Harold C. Davis, Jr. (1924-1988):** Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, March 23, 1943 (*The Boston Post* transcript, *The Boston Globe* transcript)

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- 14) **James E. Denault (1917-2000)**: Source: First-person account, *North Adams transcript*, North Adams, MA, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 15) **Mary A. Devine (1909-1993)**: First-person accounts. *The Boston Globe*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 16) **Charles W. Disbrow, Jr. (1905-1997)**: Source: First-person account, *The Boston Herald*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 17) **Scott J. Dow, Jr. (1905-1982)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Wednesday, December 2, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 18) **Cecil E. Dowling (1898-1992)**: Source: Retrospective interview, *Quincy Patriot Ledger*, Quincy, MA, Tuesday, June 12, 1945
- 19) **Francis P. Driscoll (1916-1994)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 20) **Dorothy D. Ducharme (1917-1978)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 21) **Rocco Fanuele (1911-2007)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 10, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 22) **Bernardo Fazioli (1897-1942)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation (from Boston City Hospital), Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript),
- 23) **George B. Fenning, Jr. (1917-1987)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 24) **Romeo J. Ferrara (1916-1989)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 25) **Monica C. Files (1924-1992)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Wednesday, December 2, 1942 (direct transcript, also *The Boston Herald* transcript)
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- 28) **Perry Gordy, Jr. (1911-1983)**: Source: Letter to hometown newspaper, reprinted in *The Sunday Ledger-Enquirer*, Columbus, GA, Sunday, December 6, 1942 ("...after obtaining permission from Naval public relations officers, as Ensign Gordy requested")
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- 30) **Fred L. Guarnieri (1891-1956)**: Source: First-person account, *The Boston Sunday Globe*, Sunday, November 29, 1942
- 31) **Frederick W. Harrington (1890-1972)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 3, 1942 (direct transcript)
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- 42) **Dorothy "Dotty Myles" Metzger (1925-1967)**: Sources: First-person account (ghost-written), "I Almost Burned to Death," *True Experiences* magazine, October 1948
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- 44) **Peter S. Pantages (1912-1997)**: Sources: Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 10, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 45) **Robert D. Parks (1906-1982)**: Sources: First-person account, *Waltham News-Tribune*, Waltham, MA, Monday, November 30, 1942. Retrospective interview, *The Boston Herald*, Sunday, November 26, 1967
- 46) **William C. "Billy" Payne (1899-1952)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Fire Department inquest, Thursday, December 3, 1942 (*Boston Daily Record* transcript)
- 47) **Juan Pineda (1904-1998)**: Source: First-person account, *Boston Sunday Post*, Sunday, November 29, 1942
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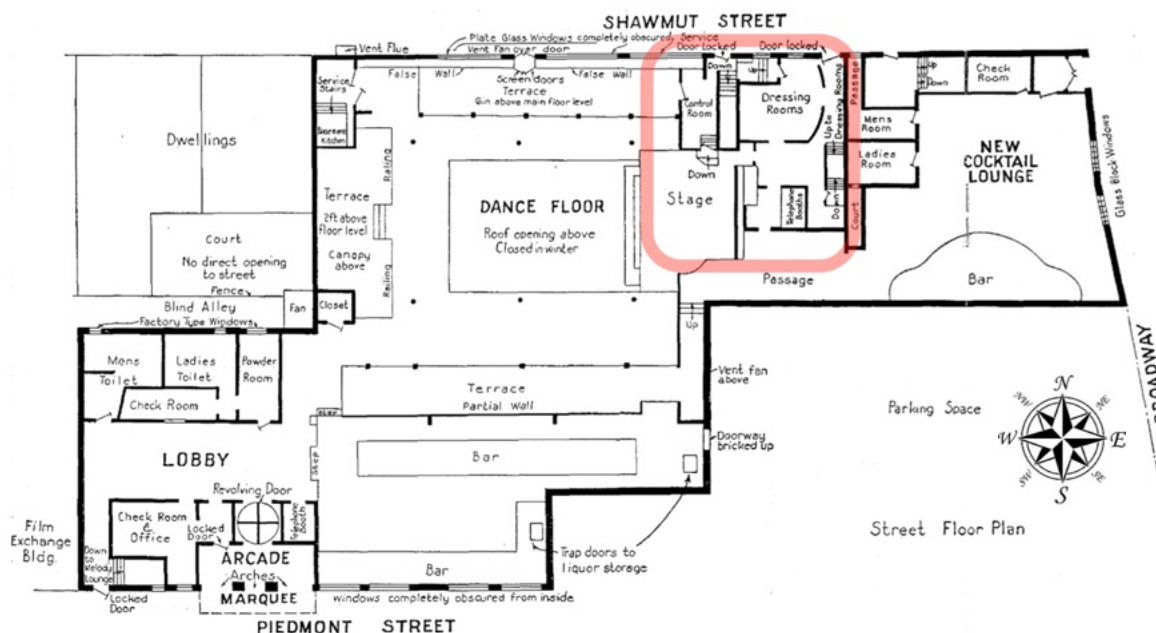
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- 59) **Morris "Moe" Solomon (1914-1988)**: Sources: First-person account, *The Boston Herald*, Sunday, November 29, 1942. Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, December 7, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 60) **Barbara C. Stubbs (1915-2012)**: Source: First-person account, *Bangor Daily News*, Bangor, ME, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 61) **George E. Stubbs (1914-2001)**: Source: First-person account, *Bangor Daily News*, Bangor, ME, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 62) **L. Ray Thiry (1905-1981)**: Source: First-person account, *The Boston Globe*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 63) **Giovanni "John" Turchi (1921-1998)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Thursday, December 3, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 64) **Isaac Walles (1913-1997)**: Source: First-person account to hometown newspaper, *The Sunday Morning Star*, Wilmington, DE, Sunday, December 6, 1942
- 65) **John J. Walsh (1892-1978)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 66) **Frederick Wayland, Jr. (1912-2001)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, March 23, 1943 (*The Boston Evening Globe transcript*)
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G) BACKSTAGE AND DRESSING ROOMS (Count 24)



Milton I. "Mickey" Alpert, Brookline, MA (Master of Ceremonies): "I ran across the kitchen, up the back stairs, and I saw people trying the door. And I had people following. And I ran through, and as I ran through I figured we would go into the new room where the girls in the show dressed, and as I pushed that door, the fire and the flame came out of there. Well, I pushed on the door, and then there is a stairway up to the second floor. As I pushed the door, people pushed the door back at me. So I was trapped in this room between, and then I remembered a window. I smashed a window in the little room with two bars. I pushed people through the bars until I could not see any more people. I put my feet through the bars and got out through the window leading to Shawmut Street."

Peter J. Antonell (Carr), Yonkers, NY (acrobatic dancer): "The minute I got the smell I heard the panic. I walked right out into the panic. I saw a group of musicians to my left frantically trying to open a bolted and locked door. It wouldn't open. The two doors near our dressing rooms were locked and in that short time there were people coming from the inside of the club. I was one of those being pushed up the stairs. We climbed up that flight and another flight. When we got to the top I took the first thing that was nearest to me, I don't remember what it was. I started with my elbow and whatever it was I took it and broke every part of the window and looked down and there was nothing but another roof and nearer to me on my left was a pipe. I got on the roof and jumped onto a car and rolled off it."

Sidney Carr, Manhattan, NY (acrobatic dancer): "When we arrived at the dressing rooms I had just started to take off my coat when someone yelled 'Fire.' I yelled at Pete to grab our coats. At the bolted door were about 15 or 20 people standing back while two men tried to open it. They were kicking it and shoving but not getting anywhere. Pete and

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I reached the other door and he kicked it. Immediately a flame jumped out, practically in our faces. I returned to where the people were trying to break out the bolted door, and there through the dimness of the smoke I could see the two men still working while the others just stood around. They didn't move or say a word. Not a bit panicky. A few men braced their shoulders against the door and the rest got back and pushed. After a few tries, with everybody working together, the door gave and they were out on the street."

Adolph Cecchini, Somerville, MA (waiter): "I went to the service door and tried to open it. But it was locked. The man with the key should have been there but he wasn't. Then I started to smash it down, but I couldn't. Then I thought I'd better wait, because I didn't want to cause too much damage until I found out just how bad the fire was. Then I went to the control room in back of the stage and suddenly a big wind blew in smoke and fire and everything became like a hot furnace, and big balls of smoke started to pour all over the place. I went back again and tried to knock down the service door again, but I couldn't."

Dorothy J. "Dottie Christie" Christensen, Boston, MA (dancer): "We were in our upstairs dressing room waiting for the signal to go out on the stage when we smelled smoke. One of the girls said she thought the fire was in the Animal Rescue League quarters, which are nearby. Then we heard that the fire was in the Cocoanut Grove. Jackie McGregor, our captain, told us to keep calm, cover our heads with our coats and follow her. The smoke became so heavy that Claudia Boyle, Mary Jane Courtney and myself were forced back. We went back upstairs, and I closed the door of our dressing room to keep out the heavy smoke. Claudia Boyle climbed out the window as I held her by one of her wrists. I let go of her wrist and the waiters caught her. Then a fireman came and he placed a ladder against the building. He came up the ladder, and told me to remain calm while he went up to see if anyone was on the top floor. He was soon back and he assisted me from the window and down the ladder. The fireman then rescued Mary Jane Courtney."



Stage in Main Dining Room, looking Southeast, toward passageway to New Broadway Lounge.
(Boston Public Library)

Marshall S. Cole, South Boston, MA (dancer): "I just started down the head of the stairs, and was on my way down, probably three-quarters of the way down, when all of a sudden I heard the crowd, and I thought there was a fight. I heard slapping and pushing. Then all of a sudden somebody yelled, 'Fire,' or 'Help'...and suddenly red-hot smoke hit me in the face. And it seemed as if somebody grabbed me by the chest and pushed me

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up, and I seemed to go up the whole flight of stairs backwards...They said I went through a window. And I was walking on the roof - I had never been on there before - I felt like a Pied Piper, because everybody was following behind me, as if I knew where to go, and I didn't know anything more about the place, and probably even less than they did, because I was in more of a panic."

William Fiorito, Roslindale, MA (waiter): "I had got through with whatever I had to do and I heard somebody scream. In the back there was a door. I went in and I saw the singer Goody Goodelle. She was calling for help. She told me that the Melody Lounge was on fire. At first I thought she was fooling. I saw one of the waiters had broken a window and I got out there, myself. I don't know if he saw the fire but I saw he was climbing out the window and I did the same thing. There was another waiter there. I don't know if he got out before me or after. The musicians knew there was a fire because they were running this way and that way. I didn't see any fire till I was out."

Eleanor V. Giglio (Gayle), Quincy, MA (dancer): "I don't remember much of it. But what I do know is that we were in the dressing room playing cards. A few of the girls were playing cards and they wanted to finish the game, and we did not realize what time it was. We looked out of the window and heard engines. We thought the fire was across the street. One of the girls yelled, 'It's us.' We opened the door and the smoke and gas was coming in. Some of the girls went downstairs. The door was locked downstairs. The musicians broke down the door downstairs and [a/so] got out through the roof. The only way I knew I was out was by feeling the cool air..."

Frederick W. Harrington, Brighton, MA (patron): "I was one of a party of 15 that went to the Cocoanut Grove that night. We ordered our food. Then the fire came. I went through a door and bumped into some of the show girls coming down the stairs from dressing rooms above, I believe. Just as I was going up the stairs to go out the lights went out. Before I got to the door I opened a window and it was barred. I was the only one of the 15 at the party that's now alive."

Mildred F. Lane, Newton, MA (patron): "We went through that door to the dressing room. We stayed in there. We walked as near as we could to the other steel-like-looking door that leads to Shawmut Avenue [sic]. And we stood there, and someone announced that the door was locked and they tried it several times. We stood there for, I would say, between five and ten minutes - I don't know exactly how long - when suddenly the lights went out, and instantaneous with the going out of the lights, smoke - dense smoke - seemed to fill the entire room, and everybody around there was coughing. It made my eyes water and I was shaking. I know there was one woman in particular who was screaming for her baby. Somebody grabbed hold of her by the sweater and she practically tore it off, and the sweater was practically in ribbons. I didn't realize when I was out that I was out."

Andrew J. Louzan, Boston, MA (dancer): "I was there when the fire started. In the dressing room, in the new building. They were all dressed waiting for the different acts, and we heard a noise and we thought it was a fight. I went downstairs halfway and I saw

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smoke. I saw some smoke and I saw men down there all running around. They were all coming in from the dining room. They were screaming, some of them. They were yelling 'Fire,' and the headwaiter [*sic*] came upstairs. I was going down further to get out the door on the Shawmut Street side but I had to go back because there were other actors upstairs, other show people, and we went out the window there. The girls got out downstairs, and the other actors - the other boys - we went through up to the roof."

Gorizia A. "Goody Goodelle" MacLone, Dorchester, MA (entertainer): "We ran up behind the stage as the floor show was going on. The bartender was in front of us. I saw them pulling blackout curtains, tearing at them. A door was in-between the windows. They tried to open the door but it was locked. They tried with a huge 2x4 to no avail. Then, after the blackout curtains were down, I noticed iron bars going across. I kept saying, 'I'll never fit, I'll never fit through those bars.' Then I saw these people holding onto the bars feet-first and sliding out. Jeanette the cashier went out ahead of me, then I was outside, falling on a pile of sand as they were using it for cement for a new lounge in front."

Charles P. Mikalonis (Mitchell), South Boston, MA (assistant headwaiter): "I was standing right in the lobby talking to some guest. I heard a hissing sound from the Melody Lounge. I went across the dance hall floor...I tried to get out the service entrance, and it was locked...and the acrobatic team were trying to open it, too. There is a stairway where you can go up to the dressing room. I ran upstairs, where the girls were dressing. Three were there, one with nothing on. Somebody said to get out of there. I told him that there was a fire. I jumped out the window from the third floor into the parking space."

Edward B. Pierce, Queens Village, NY (entertainer): "We were in our dressing room on the second floor, waiting for the show to start, when the headwaiter [*sic*] came to our room, and shouted 'Fire.' We broke a window and left the building by the roof."

Florence H. Price, Somerville, MA (patron): "We went to the exit where the chorus girls come out. In front of us there was a steel door which we couldn't open. The kitchen help came up from below and one of them started hollering, 'We're trapped here like rats.' Some of the men then broke the transom and started to force the door. They broke one hinge off and then they broke the other hinge off. As soon as I came out, I looked around and there were flames belching out of the exit we had just come out of."

Louis Price, Somerville, MA (patron): "We got up and I headed across the dance floor to the door on the left of the stage where the chorus enters and goes back. I just heard someone say, 'There is a fire,' and I headed for that door. I didn't know what I was coming in to, and I found on entering the door that to the right was a steep flight of stairs going down into the basement, and to the left there was a little four-foot vestibule with a door going out. I found about three or four men trying to get out that door to the left, which was evidently an outside door. We were kicking against the door and the bottom hinge gave and the top hinge held. Whatever it was locked by, it seemed to be a padlock, because when the door went the bottom went out and the door was cornerwise. The bottom of the door, when it swung open - the outside light came in. We were doubled up and coughing while we came out."

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David Pullman, Boston, MA (dancer): "I saw a commotion downstairs. I was on the second step from the top. It looked like there was a fight more than anything else. Somebody came up very fast and shouted 'Fire.' Of course, I didn't realize at the time that it was a fire until - whoever it was, I don't know - shouted 'Fire.' We have a dressing room in the back. As far as I remember, I walked in the room and said, 'There is a fire,' and it wasn't very long after that, the smoke started to come in. With that we started to break windows, that is, to lift them up and climb into the enclosure and climb up on the roof. There were about three girls, principals, and four fellows. We found a ladder over the other side of the roof and it reached halfway down, and someone held the ladder and we climbed down the ladder."

Henrietta I. "Pepper" Russell, Mattapan, MA (dancer): "We heard the fire engines and we all sat on the table not bothering to get up. One of the girls lifted up the window to see where the fire engines were going. We heard the breaking of glass and one of the girls yelled, 'It's here.' We opened the door and saw smoke coming up the stairs. We ran back into the dressing room and looked out of the window, yelling. One of the chorus boys opened the door and told us to hold our hands over our mouths and follow him. Some of the girls stayed up there and were calling to the firemen to get them. One girl jumped out the window...Claudia Boyle."

Sumner S. Simons, Brighton, MA (musician): "I was on stage, ready to begin the show, when I saw flames, ceiling-high. I grabbed my three instruments and ran across the stage which brought me to the Shawmut Street side and it was locked. I ran into a back room and found a broken window, but it was barred. I managed to squeeze through. If I wasn't so thin I probably wouldn't have been able to escape."

Morris "Moe" Solomon, Dorchester, MA (musician): "I went through the middle of the bandstand. And these people were starting to mill through this little door...that leads to the rear. And I was yelling these calming phrases until I got hit by that smoke, I felt as if I was ready to just give up and pass out, it was that bad. And then I started to get into the middle of that throng, and it so happened I had been against the wall, and I was able to sort of execute a maneuver like an end run. I slid right through."

Emilio A. Soracco, Dorchester, MA (bartender): "The bar door was open going to the kitchen. Then I went upstairs and upstairs I knew there was two doors. I went up there and saw the first door, the service door we call it, and it was locked and I had no chance to break it because it was too strong. So I went to the next one and started to break down the glass. That I know was a door that I could either break the glass or break the door, so I started to kick the door and somebody outside heard me and they kicked the door. That was the last I see of the Cocoanut Grove. To save myself from the cold I went in the car and went home."

James Leslie Tracey, Sr., Boston, MA (resident maintenance man): "Well, I looked across the street at Broadway and Stuart Street and while we were watching there I heard someone break a pane of glass. I went downstairs to see what it was and somebody said

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it was a fire, and I opened up the back service door. I ran down the stairs and went to the service entrance and assisted some men in ramming down that door with a plank. When we got it opened, some people started coming out. A few people rushed out and three or four firemen took over and the smoke was getting heavy. Then I ran to the middle door in Shawmut Street and saw that both doors were open and people were coming out."

Margaret Irene Tracey, Boston, MA (wife of resident maintenance man): "Daddy was at home having a cheese sandwich and a cup of tea when the fire started. He ran to the foot of the stairs on Shawmut Street and I shouted down to him, 'Daddy, is it bad enough to get the babies out?' He answered, 'Yes, you'd better get them out,' and left to unlock a side door of the club that led to the second-floor dressing room. I grabbed Leslie - he's 3 - and started to go to the stairs when a fireman shouted, 'Is there anyone else up there?' By that time their father had returned and the fireman handed Dickie to him. Daddy held Dickie up high so he'd be out of harm's way, and that's the child that one girl reported seeing."

Alessandro "Alexander" Zaccardi, Boston, MA (head chef): "We broke the door, it was broken. We had to break it. The second door. I used my shoulder. One fellow in back of me was the leader of the band, Mickey Alpert. I didn't see no more of Mickey Alpert after I went out, because he was with me trying to break down the door in the meantime, but then he disappeared and I didn't see him any more."

SOURCES (for G: Backstage and Dressing Rooms)

- 1) **Milton I. "Mickey" Alpert (1904-1965):** Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 10, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Fire Department inquest, Thursday, December 3, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 2) **Peter J. Antonell (Carr): (1904-1971):** Sources: First-person account, *The Boston Sunday Globe*, Sunday, November 29, 1942. Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Wednesday, April 7, 1943 (*The Boston Post* transcript)
- 3) **Sidney Carr (1903-1957):** Source: First-person account, *Dayton Daily News*, Dayton, OH, Friday, December 4, 1942
- 4) **Adolph Cecchini (1897-1993):** Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, April 6, 1943 (*The Boston Post* transcript)
- 5) **Dorothy J. "Dottie Christie" Christensen, Boston, MA (1921-2010):** Source: First-person account, *Boston Sunday Advertiser*, Sunday, November 29, 1942
- 6) **Marshall S. Cole (1925-2020):** Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 7) **William Fiorito (1912-2002):** Sources: Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript). 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Wednesday, March 24, 1943 (*The Boston Globe* transcript)
- 8) **Eleanor V. Giglio (Gayle): (1923-2017):** Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Tuesday, December 8, 1942 (direct transcript)

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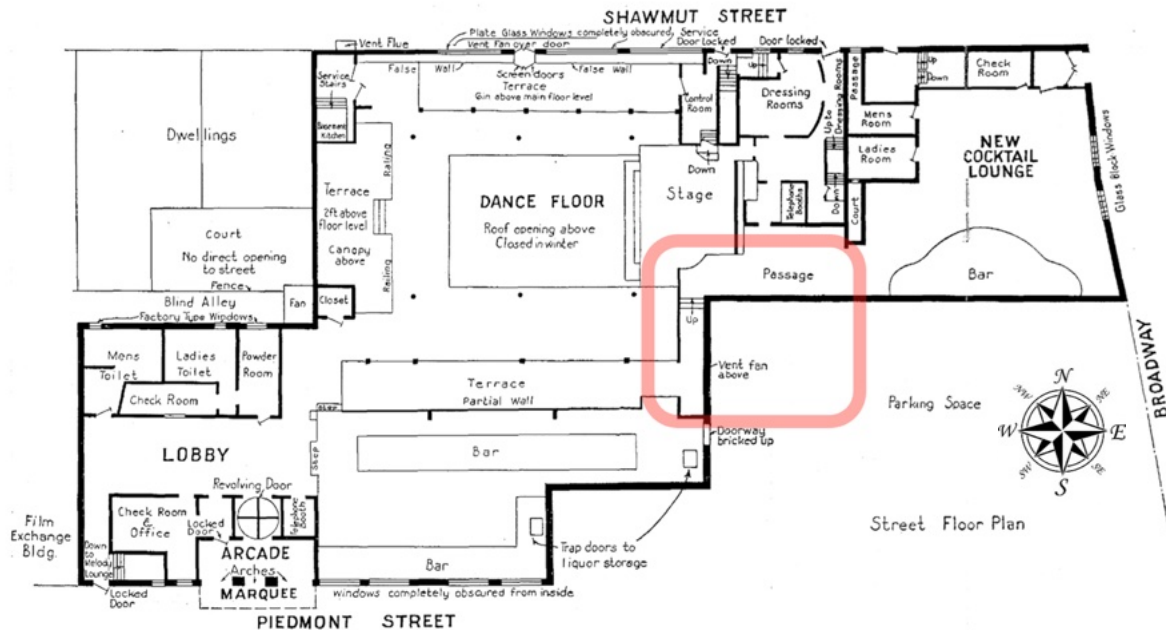
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- 9) **Frederick W. Harrington (1890-1972)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 3, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 10) **Mildred F. Lane (1911-1981)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Wednesday, December 2, 1942 (direct transcript, also *The Boston Globe* transcript)
- 11) **Andrew J. Louzan (1925-1992)**: Sources: Boston Fire Department inquest, Wednesday, December 2, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Police Department investigation, Friday, December 11, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 12) **Gorizia A. "Goody Goodelle" MacLone (1917-1998)**: Source: Undated handwritten notes, supplied by offspring (contrafactual.com)
- 13) **Charles P. Mikalonis (Mitchell) (1909-1985)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, December 7, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Saturday, March 20, 1943 (*The Boston Post* transcript)
- 14) **Edward B. Pierce (1915-1993)**: Sources: Boston Fire Department Arson Division investigation at scene, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Fire Department inquest, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 15) **Florence H. Price (1910-2004)**: Source: First-hand account, *The Boston Globe*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 16) **Louis Price (1907-1966)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Thursday, December 3, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 17) **David Pullman (unknown)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Thursday, December 3, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 18) **Henrietta I. "Pepper" Russell (1921-1992)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 10, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 19) **Sumner S. Simons (1918-2002)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Friday, December 11, 1942 (direct transcript). State Police Investigation, Saturday, December 5, 1942 (*Boston Sunday Advertiser* transcript)
- 20) **Morris "Moe" Solomon (1914-1988)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, December 7, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 21) **Emilio A. Soracco (1886-1967)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 22) **James Leslie Tracey, Sr. (1915-1993)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Friday, December 11, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Saturday, March 27, 1943 (*The Boston Evening American* transcript)
- 23) **Margaret Irene Tracey (1914-1986)**: Source: First-person account, *The Boston Herald*, Saturday, December 5, 1942
- 24) **Alessandro "Alexander" Zaccardi (1899-1972)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript)

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H) NEW BROADWAY LOUNGE PASSAGEWAY (Count 2)



William Stephen Collins, Jr., Medford, MA (patron): "Well, people started coming up the stairs from the main dining room, and I heard the word, 'Fire.' A couple of minutes later many more people were coming up the stairs, going towards the Broadway exit. I turned to Bill Langhammer and said, 'This place is on fire.' He said, 'I think so, too.' I told the girls not to bother with their coats. I told my girl, 'Hang on to my coattails and we'll walk out of this joint.' She was in back of me and we walked to the center of the room."

Frederick W. "Fritz" Friedli, West Solvay, NY (patron): "When we first arrived there I stood at the bar for a drink. It was in the lounge. I was just leaving the mens room and I was walking down this little passageway to look in the dance hall, and I stood in the door and I saw some flames at the back of the bar. After I saw the flames I saw the people starting to get panicky and some starting to run. At the very end I was



Passageway to New Broadway Lounge, looking North from Caricature bar, where fire door was required but not installed.
(Boston Public Library)

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assisted out. People were out on the floor there."

SOURCES (for H: New Broadway Lounge) Passageway

William Stephen Collins, Jr. (1914-1992): Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Friday, March 26, 1943 (*The Boston Evening Globe* transcript)

Frederick W. "Fritz" Friedli (1913-1996): Source: Boston Police Department investigation (from Mass General Hospital), Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript)

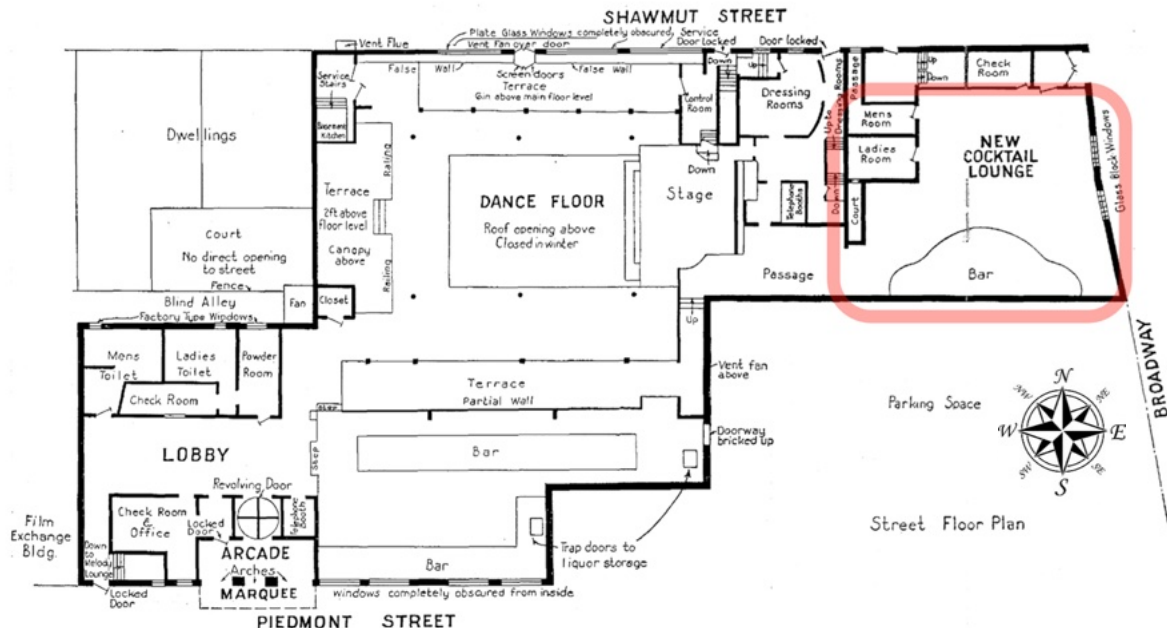


Main Dining Room, looking East toward Passageway to New Broadway Lounge, where fire damage was most intense and caused portion of roof to collapse. (Boston Public Library)

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I) NEW BROADWAY LOUNGE (Count 26)



Salvatore R. Accursio, Everett, MA (captain of waiters): "At the time I heard the cry of 'Fire,' I was talking with four people who insisted on having a seat. I didn't notice any flames. I just heard someone yell, 'Fire, open the door.' I opened the door by the hook on one of the doors and the crowd in back of me pushed me out. Just before I was pushed into the street I saw a table being overturned and people falling over it. After I got out, a couple of waiters and myself got a board and we tried to knock in the side door. Firemen came and knocked it down."

Doris E. Amrhein, Quincy, MA (patron): "We were sitting about ten feet from the door on the Broadway side when the fire broke out. We had just paid our checks and were standing up ready to leave. After the blaze had been discovered the people at first started to walk out, more or less orderly. Then the lights went out and darkness brought panic. In the scramble for the door, I was knocked down and someone stepped on me, I guess. I think I was at the bottom of a pile, for a fireman pulled me out. My three companions also got out, with nothing too serious."

Kathleen C. Andrews, Lawrence, MA (patron): "We went upstairs in the New Lounge deciding on whether to go or stay when the fire started. It must have started almost immediately after we left the Melody Lounge. A girl and two men ran like mad from the passageway leading to the main dining room, brushed past me and almost knocked me over. The girl seemed to say something to one of the club managers or waiters, and he said to the crowd, 'Pay your checks and leave quietly. There is a fire downstairs in the Melody Lounge.'"

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Joseph A. Buccigross, Roslindale, MA (police captain): "I was in the New Lounge. Mr. Welansky - Jimmy Welansky - came over to the table...and a waitress [*sic*] came out of what I think is the main dining room, and she said, 'Mr. Welansky, there is a fire in the main dining room.' At this time there was just a faint smell of smoke. It was only a few seconds after that faint odor of smoke before a big black cloud of smoke came out. The smoke was not ordinary fire smoke. It had a peculiar odor, a pungent smell. I couldn't describe it. I was knocked off my feet to the floor by the rushing crowd, receiving an injury to my left knee."

Garrett H. Byrne, Roxbury, MA (patron): "It must have been around 10:20 or something like that. We couldn't have been seated for more than a minute, when I saw some employee - I don't know whether it was a waitress or a cigarette girl or who it was, and I heard her whisper - not whisper, but I heard her say, but not in a loud voice...that there was a fire inside. As she did that, I turned to my right and I saw some smoke trickling out from what I thought was the roof. At that time there was no panic because the smoke wasn't of any great quantity. Then I thought I would take a look at it, so I started back and I had only got probably about four feet. By that time some of the people were trickling out from the main dining room. By the time I had taken three or four feet to get a look at it, the panic was on. They were just pouring out, and I got myself caught in-between the crowd that was coming out and the crowd that couldn't quite get out, but with no great difficulty found myself out in the street."

Eleanor M. Casella, Medford, MA (checkroom girl): "Some fellow yelled, 'Get your hat and coat and run,' three times. I got my coat. I thought it was a holdup. I was afraid to run. Then the flames started to shoot towards the room. People became excited. Fellows started yelling for their coats to me. I saw smoke coming and saw the singer singing and flames reached her and she went on fire...Maxine. I was knocked down by the rush and my leg and hip were injured. I had to crawl out with an injured leg and hip to reach safety. I was just swept out in the crowd, and staggered over to the Mayfair."

William Stephen Collins, Jr., Medford, MA (patron): "We started walking towards the Broadway exit. By the time we got there people had collected around the door, chairs were overturned, and the lights went out. There was a heavy black smoke. It seemed to get very hot and people were shouting and screaming and milling about. The first thing I knew I was in front of the door. I got pushed out. I thought it was my girl, but it turned out it was another woman."

Maybelle P. Cotten, Cambridge, MA (washroom attendant): "I heard the commotion outside, and opened the door of the ladies room. At first I thought it was a fight. Glasses were all over the floor and people were scrambling and tearing at each other. Then I saw the wisp of smoke and knew the place was on fire. So I got close to the wall and worked my way out. If only someone had held open the swinging doors, or if the entertainers had continued, it might never have happened. My brother, Shadrack Plenty, was killed."

Edward DiMaggio, address unknown (patron): "The smoke apparently came from the hallway that leads directly into the lounge. The people stampeded."

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John K. "Jack" Edwards, Jr., Boston, MA (patron): "I sat there for about 20 minutes, had my drink and was about to order a second when some people came through the corridor...saying, 'There is a little fire going on in the big room.' Four or five people came running through where I was, saying, 'Keep your heads, there is a slight fire.' Right on their heels was a crowd. Directly in back of them there was a good size pall of black smoke. Upon seeing this I decided it was time for me to get out. The window in the door had been smashed, the door was not opened. It seemed that the minute the lights went out the people went crazy."

Edmund J. Flynn, Needham, MA (patron): "Well, the first thing I noticed, people started leaving the lounge and my wife told me to 'come on.' I was up at the end of the bar nearest the door. I followed her and then I heard people saying 'Fire.' I could see some running from the dining room to the door that opened on Broadway. So then all of a sudden the smoke came up and there was a lot of panic. It seemed to come from the entrance of the dining room. It was just about 10:15, I should say, when we started to leave the lounge. Everyone was shouting 'Keep calm.' As I was going out the door I was pushed down. The lights went out and I finally got out. I had my hair singed."



New Broadway Lounge, looking East toward Broadway Street door. (Boston Public Library)

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Donald F. Gribbons, Worcester, MA (patron): "We met the group from Worcester and we tried to get into where they were seated, the Melody Lounge, and we heard there was no room there. And the singer was taking a request for a song and we asked her to play the Holy Cross victory song. And it wasn't very shortly after that that we heard this tipping over of tables and screaming and hollering. And all of a sudden the place is in pitch darkness. So I proceeded along the floor till I got to a point where I could see where the door was because the bodies were piled up there, probably five or six deep."

John R. Griffin, Haverhill, MA (patron): "We were sitting there waiting, when I saw a crowd of men and women come charging through the door from the main room and the Melody Lounge. Then someone hollered 'Fire,' and the crowd began to pour into the lounge from the bars and the dining room. There was no panic at first. But in a snap of your fingers the situation changed and there was a jam for the door. Everyone at first seemed to think everyone would be all right if everybody used his head. We all joined hands, formed a single file and moved toward the exit. But near the door I was hit by a flame in my face and I was knocked down. Our hands had parted and the chain was broken. People were yelling and pushing, the flames caught up with me, and the lights went out. Somebody pulled me out."

J. Louis Hern, Jr., Dorchester, MA (patron): "After dancing on the main floor, my wife and I came back into the New Lounge...and we were just about to go...to get our coats when a man ran up the ramp from the main room crying, 'Fire.' A fellow came in and yelled 'Fire'...and 'Take it easy'...I think an employee. A gust of smoke came up very suddenly and it had an odd odor to it. The smoke came in and filled the room. Until the lights went out people were marching out, but when the lights went out there was a stampede. I was twisted around once so I was facing in instead of out. My back was to the door. I was yanked off the pile by a fireman. The fire was the fastest thing I ever saw in my life."

Merlin R. "Bud" Jensen, Minneapolis, MN (patron): "We arrived there about 10:05 and the fire started shortly afterward. The fellow ahead of me fell and somebody hit me on the head with his fist."

Robert T. Jones, White Plains, NY (patron): "Everything seemed to be quiet. I heard nothing. Then suddenly there seemed to be a commotion in that archway that leads through to the other section and I then noticed a fire. I picked up my cap and started to walk out in the general direction of the door, and looked around and smoke was belching out. You could see the reflection of the flames and by then the crowd was in a panic."

Ivan E. LaFrance, Queens, NY (patron): "We arrived there about 9:30 p.m. We went into the cocktail lounge, which was jammed. At that time I heard someone yell 'Fire' and I said...'Let's get out of here quick. It will be quite a mess if there really is a fire in here.' We were not far from the entrance and we walked out with many people. They were very orderly. Some said, 'Take it easy and we will get out all right.' I think a lot of people lost their lives because they went for their coats. It was the women in particular who tried to get their coats."

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William B. Laird, Dorchester, MA (patron): "Every seat at the bar was taken, so we had to take a small table to the side of it. Well, it all started about 10:25, when this young singer just finished her number...a young blonde girl. I think her name was McDermott. I know she walked back to the main room, and then came running back and told the manager or someone who was seated next to us that there was a terrible fire in the main room. Anyway, before the man could do anything, a terrific cloud of smoke came bursting through from the rear of the place. Immediately there was a panic. The other fellow says, 'This is no place for us. Let's get out.' We got up and walked to the door."

James A. Morrissey, Cambridge, MA (patron): "When I finally got into the New Lounge a girl who kept yelling 'Betty' grabbed my sleeve. I took her hand, told her to take it easy, and pulled her behind me. I crawled over the backs of people in a doorway. I had the girl near the door, and I yelled to a man in the street to reach in and grab her. He gave a yank, and she landed on her back in the street - alive. There was an ensign in the doorway trying to keep the crowd calm. Draperies fell on him, and he was burned alive in front of me. I couldn't believe how people were dropping. I took an axe from a fire truck and chopped a window. A fellow plunged half out the window, but burning draperies fell on him and he was burned alive."

Nick Pagonis, Oakland, CA (patron): "We were seated in the lounge bar on the first floor down near the south end. All I know is that about 10:10 I saw the smoke coming towards the bar up from the Melody Lounge. Someone yelled 'Fire' and we three tried to hold the people back, but I don't know how the fire started. The people went wild. We were just battling to keep them back when the smoke got me and someone pulled me out."

Donald E. Peterson, Chicago, IL (patron): "All I know is the fire started and people started to rush out, and a cloud of smoke came up behind them."

Walter H. Reddick, Boston, MA (bartender): "Jim Welansky came out and yelled to the patrons to take it easy as there was a fire in the other room. He said, 'It's in the other room.' No sooner did he say that when the flames came out from behind him. I was behind the bar at the time. They all rushed for the door at once and the door was jammed."

John H. Senft, Chicago, IL (patron): "There was entertainment going on at the time and the piano player grabbed the mike. I immediately saw the piano player grab the mike and I knew there was some type of emergency. He said, 'Everybody keep quiet.' That was his last remark and flames shot up so terrifically fast he became panic stricken. I was on the Broadway side and they started in the passageway leading to the main part of the Cocoanut Grove. They started at the floor and shot right up [to] the ceiling immediately. The flame kept coming up when all of a sudden I heard a hiss of pressure and it swished all over. We were enveloped in smoke. Everybody jumped up and some people ran to the exit and got out very well. Other people tried to be very orderly. The thing that obstructed them, tables fell."

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Thomas F. Sheehan, Jr., Worcester, MA (patron): "We had a table in the far corner and thought it was a swell crowd and swell to be there until the fire started. All of a sudden we could smell smoke. The next thing we knew on the right-hand side of the bar a big blast of flames came out through the walls. It started to get black. Everybody stood screaming. You could hear the women screaming all over and the men yelling, 'Get to the door! Get to the door!' Then the lights went out. Or it may have been the smoke hiding them. It didn't stay dark long. The walls were burning. I was so far from the door that I was on the edge of the crowd that was fighting to get out. There was no use trying to push through them so I stood in the middle of the room as far from the walls as possible, but the heat was terrible. There was a pile of people four or five deep at the door, wriggling and shouting on the floor. There was a tangle of tables. I pushed some aside to make room. Then I ran and dove right over the pile and landed on my head. I wasn't in the room more than a minute or a minute-and-a-half at the most after the first shout and got burned all over my face and hands."

James Welansky, Brookline, MA (unofficial acting manager): "I was covering my brother for a couple of weeks. I was sitting in the New Lounge on the Broadway side of the club when someone shouted 'Fire,' and I started for the direction of the sound. I started for it and I was met by a rush of people, and I think I saw an image of a fire on the left-hand side and I started to holler, 'Please walk, walk please.' I don't know whether I was pulled or pushed or shoved. When I got out I tried to pull a fellow out through a broken window. We couldn't get near him, the fire. I went up Broadway."

Priscilla E. White, Brookline, MA (patron): "I was in the New Lounge room and the flames came in from the Grove."

SOURCES (for I: New Broadway Lounge)

- 1) **Salvatore R. Accursio (1922-2003):** Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 10, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, March 23, 1943 (*The Boston Globe* transcript, Boston Daily Record transcript)
- 2) **Doris E. Amrhein (1908-1990):** Source: First-person account, *Quincy Patriot Ledger*, Wednesday, December 2, 1942
- 3) **Kathleen C. Andrews (1913-2003):** Source: Newspaper interview. *Evening Tribune*, Lawrence, MA, Tuesday, December 1, 1942
- 4) **Joseph A. Buccigross (1893-1964):** Sources: Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (*Boston Daily Record* transcript). Injury retirement news article, *The Boston Herald*, Friday, December 23, 1949
- 5) **Garrett H. Byrne (1897-1989):** Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Friday, December 4, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 6) **Eleanor M. Casella (1916-1999):** Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Monday, December 7, 1942 (direct transcript). Interview with news reporters, *Boston Traveler*, Wednesday, December 9, 1942. Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, April 6, 1943 (*The Boston Post* transcript)

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- 7) **William Stephen Collins, Jr. (1914-1992)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Friday, March 26, 1943 (*The Boston Evening Globe* transcript)
- 8) **Maybelle P. Cotten (1885-1959)**: Sources: First-person account, *The Boston Post*, Monday, November 30, 1942. First-person account, *The Boston Evening American*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 9) **Edward DiMaggio (unknown)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 10) **John K. "Jack" Edwards, Jr. (1909-2005)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (from Chelsea Naval Hospital, direct transcript). First Naval District inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 11) **Edmund J. Flynn (1917-1989)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 12) **Donald F. Gribbons (1919-2014)**: Source: Retrospective filmed interview, "Disasters of the Century," 2001 episode. Canadian documentary television series
- 13) **John R. Griffin (1907-1996)**: Sources: First-person account (at Boston City Hospital), *Haverhill Evening Gazette*, Monday, November 30, 1942). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Tuesday, March 30, 1943 (*The Boston Post* transcript, *The Boston Globe* transcript, *The Boston Herald* transcript)
- 14) **J. Louis Hern, Jr. (1907-1967)**: Sources: First-person account, *The Boston Globe*, Monday, November 30, 1942. Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript, also *The Boston Herald* transcript, *Boston Daily Record* transcript)
- 15) **Merlin R. "Bud" Jensen (1912-1999)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 16) **Robert T. Jones (1917-1981)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 17) **Ivan E. LaFrance (1904-1974)**: Source: First-person account, *Cape Cod Standard-Times*, Hyannis, MA, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 18) **William B. Laird (1915-2001)**: Sources: First-person account at scene, *Boston Sunday Post*, Sunday, November 29, 1942. Boston Fire Department inquest, Tuesday, December 1, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 19) **James A. Morrissey (1917-2006)**: Source: First-person account, *Boston Traveler*, Thursday, December 3, 1942
- 20) **Nick Pagonis (1921-2016)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 21) **Donald E. Peterson (1921-2018)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 22) **Walter H. Reddick (1893-1964)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation, Thursday, December 10, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 23) **John H. Senft (1912-1975)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript). Boston Police Department investigation, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 24) **Thomas F. Sheehan, Jr. (1917-2004)**: Sources: First-person account from Boston City Hospital), *Worcester Telegram*, Worcester, MA, Monday, November

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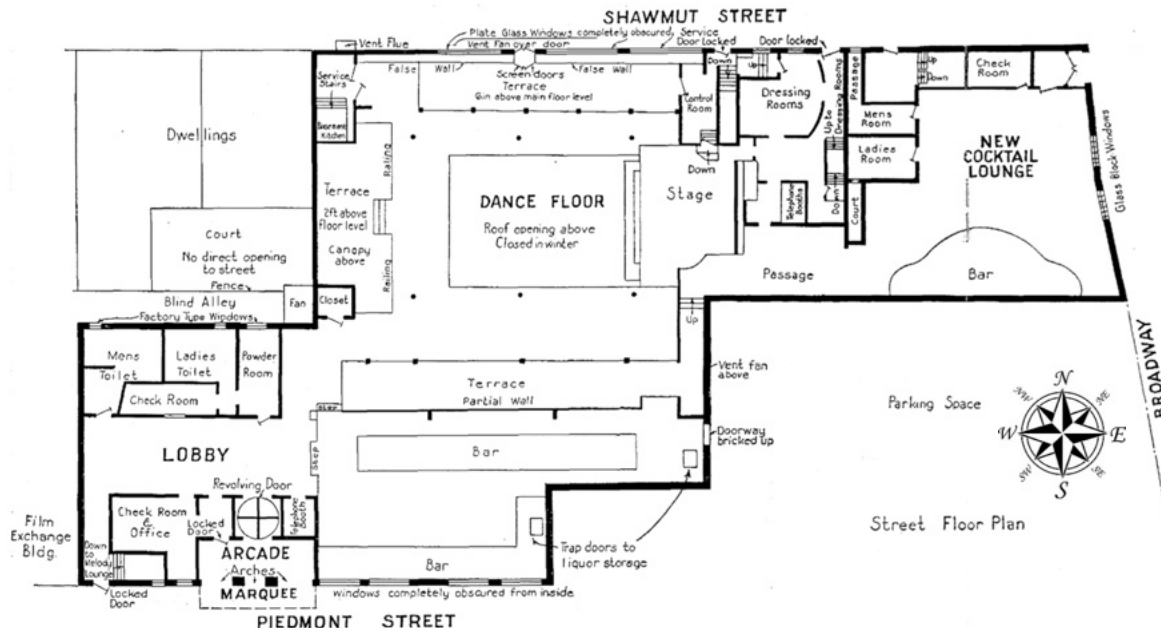
30, 1942. Retrospective filmed interview, "Disasters of the Century," 2001 episode. Canadian documentary television series

- 25) **James Welansky (1896-1962)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript, also *The Boston Post transcript*). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Wednesday, March 31, 1943 (*The Boston Globe transcript*)
- 26) **Priscilla E. White (1915-1942)**: Source: Boston Police Department investigation (from Boston City Hospital), Sunday, November 29, 1942 (direct transcript. Note: entire statement shown),

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J) SELECTED RESCUERS AND WITNESSES (Count 69)



John I. Albach, University City, MO (rescuer): "I was foolish enough to go into the awful smoking place and carry out a poor victim. And after bringing him outside and finding he was still alive, I dragged him to a cab with the help of a swell enlisted sailor whom I worked with the remainder of the night. Over to the hospital we went, giving him artificial respiration on the way. This sailor and I figured out we handled more than 50 bodies during the three-and-one-half hours we worked at the hospital. Some were dead, and some were dying. Their clothes were gone and their flesh burnt. I almost became nauseated three times."

Kathleen C. Andrews, Lawrence, MA (patron): "I saw people jump out of windows, their hair flaming like a torch. A young man ran past me holding his girl in his arms. She was horribly burned. 'Never mind, you're all right now, honey,' he kept saying to her over and over. I know she must have been dead. He just ran up the street carrying her in his arms."

William J. Brickley, Boston, MA (medical examiner): "Many of the victims had the appearance of soldiers who were gassed in the first World War. There are three degrees of burns: first-degree, which is reddening; second-degree, which is blistering; and third-degree, which is roasting and cooking. Death was due to flame burns, both inside and outside the bodies, and that includes all that goes with a conflagration of the sort in which they suffered their burns - carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, smoke, hot air, steam and gases."

Francis J. Burke, Brookline, MA (rescuer): "As soon as I dropped inside the building, a woman whose hair was ablaze rushed toward me, shouting wildly. She was followed by

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others, who piled up on the floor before me. They rushed for the opening in the window. We pulled out 20 or 25 persons. Only the first few were alive. We assisted some of the women to the sidewalk. I made my way back into the club lounge, and I saw a middle-aged woman leaning against the bar. I grabbed her to assist her out, but she seemed to fall apart. She had been cremated."



Exterior view of Shawmut Street exit from Main Dining Room, looking West. (Boston Public Library)

John Henry Butts, East Lansing, MI (rescuer):

"I helped work on three different people to give them artificial respiration. We brought all three back to breathing but learned that one died in the hospital today. It's one of the thrills of a lifetime to work over a seemingly dead man for 20 to 25 minutes and have him start to breathe again and become conscious."

William I. "Bill" Cain, Shamrock, TX (rescuer):

"When we arrived, people were running out of the door with their clothing on fire and women were crying and screaming. We

dragged out a number of sailors, some of whom I knew and had worked with, and several soldiers. I never saw such a horrible sight in all my life - beautiful women and girls burned to a crisp. I had burned flesh all over my hands and clothing and was soaking wet. Wednesday we had to go back to see if we could identify some of the sailors, and the only way we could identify them was by their teeth."

John O. "Rusty" Campbell, Minneapolis, MN (rescuer): "We couldn't see much that was going on inside, but we didn't have to. What we saw coming out through the revolving door, which finally was broken down, was enough. Women and men, screaming, their clothes on fire and their hair burned off. Although the swinging door finally was smashed down, the opening became clogged with struggling bodies and by a big fellow who was screaming that he was going back in to get his wife. My buddy got in close to that big guy and knocked him cold. I kept hearing people screaming names of those they wanted to get to inside."

William J. Carvill, Albany, NY (rescuer): "Bodies were stacked five or six deep in front of a revolving door. On the other side of the room, people were still running around screaming, but most of the people we took out were dead. We were tired and dirty, and although we did manage to get some sleep, we couldn't eat anything the next morning. It was terrible."

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Dorothy J. "Dottie Christie" Christensen, Boston, MA (dancer): "I stood around for a while and some man let me take his coat. All the time they kept bringing out stretchers with bodies on them and people were screaming. I left after about an hour - I just couldn't take any more."

Thomas H. Coleman, Madison, WI (hospital apprentice): "When we arrived at the Mass General, the emergency entrance was clogged with trucks and taxis unloading bodies, some on stretchers, some just carried in by drivers. Stretchers bearing victims arrived two or three at a time and were lowered to the floor. On one stretcher a portly man, well-dressed in a dark suit and flowered tie, was carried in and set gently down. The skin of his fingers was blistered and curled up in thick gray rolls, exposing his knuckles. His face was bloated into one huge blister with only slits for his eyes and mouth. A resident knelt beside him for a deft examination, motioned his bearers to take him to the left, to the Brick Corridor."

John J. Collins, Jr., Milton, MA (firefighter): "It was very, very strange. Some bodies were very badly burned, but some were not. Of all the vivid impressions made upon me that evening, perhaps the most unforgettable was when we first went down into the Melody Lounge. There, sitting at a table was a very pretty girl. She was sitting with her eyes open and her hand on a cocktail glass, as if waiting for someone. As I first looked at her I wondered why she was just sitting there, thinking she was okay. But, of course, she was dead. It seemed very strange."

William Stephen Collins, Jr., Medford, MA (patron): "There was a sailor in the doorway and he and I started pulling people out. When we got down to where the pile was only about three feet deep, I recognized my friend Bill. I grabbed him out into the street, opened his shirt and he made some sign of life. I yelled to some men with white coats and stretchers nearby to take him away."

James E. Connolly, Jr., Dorchester, MA (fire witness): "We heard screams coming from the revolving door of the night club, and we both rushed over to see what was wrong. We saw persons in flames, shrieking, calling, 'Help, help. Try to get us out.' They were falling one upon the other, it appeared, and after four or five minutes, their cries stopped. It's something I will never forget, the looks on their faces. They were a desperate crowd, screaming and very angry. People died before my eyes and I was helpless to do anything."

Thomas F. Costello, Lowell, MA (fire witness): "I watched the proceedings from Broadway, which only recently opened a new entrance to the ill-fated nightclub. During the first ten minutes of my observation I saw no flames, but the smoke was extremely dense and seemed almost weighted down. The firemen were having great difficulty with this smoke, despite the open door and the two smashed windows of heavy glass blocks. Just as we were about to leave, we were shocked to see a fireman carry a man through

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Exterior view of exit door from Lobby/Foyer, at top of stairs from Melody Lounge, looking Northwest, with Main Entrance to the right just out of picture. (Boston Public Library)

the door. A hushed silence fell over the crowd, but one man, apparently overcome by smoke, hardly seemed to justify what then rapidly developed. A Catholic priest paced nervously back and forth in front of the door and the two large broken windows. Then began the horrible parade of the dead. I think I saw about 25 bodies passed through those two windows at the rate of about one a minute. I saw only one body that was badly burned, all others must have been the victims of the extremely dense smoke."

Clayton D. Cressy, Beverly, MA (fire witness): "As we reached Broadway a man made the remark, 'There must be at least 100 dead in there. The bodies are stretched out and piled up like cordwood.' Everywhere bodies were resting on stretchers awaiting removal. Some of those removed groaned and cursed, others were unconscious, most of them were dead. It is still difficult to believe that it actually happened."

Daniel J. Crowley, West Roxbury, MA (district fire chief): "When we arrived they were breaking windows on Broadway. A number of people were rushing out of the building.

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Some of the victims inside were alive and spoke to us. They were all tangled up with others, some dead. We got them out as best we could."

John F. Crowley, South Boston, MA (firefighter): "When temporary lighting was restored the inside of the building was a gruesome sight. There were people dead at tables who had died without moving. There were people behind the bar who tried to get out the windows but they died trying because there were bars on the windows. On the way out I seen so much money of all denominations on the floor. It hit me of how insignificant money was."

Julian W. "Jules" Deshaies, Lewiston, ME (fire witness): "When I first got there a lot of American Express trucks were being used for ambulances. I heard no screams from the inside and the place seemed to be filled with smoke. Firemen, sailors, soldiers and civilians were carrying bodies out of the building. Everyone who was carried past me was dead. I'll never forget those people I saw carried out on the stretchers. It was the most horrible sight imaginable, their clothing in shreds or completely burned off their blackened bodies."

Donald V. Dimmick, Smithfield, PA (rescuer): "When we arrived we started removing the bodies at the front door. I have no idea how many people were jammed there, but I do recall that we had to separate them before we could move them to trucks and ambulances there. They were burned so badly that they stuck together...The beams from the ceiling had fallen and were resting on the heads of the corpses trapped at the door. People died standing up trying to get out of the one revolving door."

John F. Doyle, Lewiston, ME (patron): "I saw people on the inside of the glass brick walls. Clawing, pounding at the brick, seeing the outside, but unable to reach safety. I shall never forget the smell that came from that place. It was like roast beef. And it was on my clothes. You couldn't get rid of it."

Fred John Eggleston, Angola, IN (hospital apprentice): "I can still see the bodies as they brought them in. The first nine were dead. I had to help remove the clothes from a marine sergeant, but he died before we could start treatment. I helped carry out the dead, their faces, hands and legs burned off in many cases. We stacked the dead in our morgue like cordwood. There were over 60 dead and 19 injured at the hospital here, besides those in all the other hospitals in Boston. Six of the dead could not be identified because the bodies were so badly burned. One body brought in had no clothing left on but his shorts. The rest of his clothing was all torn off in the rush, even his shoes and stockings."

Benjamin M. Ellis, Boston, MA (fire witness): "In the front doorway on Broadway I saw probably 12 or 15 people struggling to get out. They were bunched at the entrance...blinded and stifled by dense smoke that became blacker as the heat became more intense. I pulled them by the hands and in several cases by the feet...I left there and went around on to Piedmont Street. I saw some people and they seemed to fade away. Suddenly a huge sheet of flame burst out through the entrance, setting fire to clothing, hair, hats, evening dresses and searing human flesh. Those flames belched 15 feet out

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into the street. Their faces were quickly blackened. The screams were dreadful. Those people didn't have a chance."

George Ferre, Manchester, NH (rescuer): "When I arrived, the entire building was in flames, which burned brightly under a cold drizzle of rain. Bodies carried from the club were laid on the sidewalks or in the gutters, and in some places were piled in heaps of 40 or 50. The interior of the club was a flaming inferno, with all avenues of exit blocked by torches of fire. The first task was to determine if the hundreds of persons lying in the streets and sidewalks were dead or alive. If they were found to be dead, we moved on until we found someone who was alive, whose removal to a hospital was immediately undertaken."

Frederick J. Finnegan, Lowell, MA (policeman): "We went into the building and it looked like a flash fire to us. The walls were blackened, tables were upset and clothing was lying on the floor everywhere. We helped to guard against looters. Everywhere we looked, we saw fur coats, purses and other personal items. As the bodies were taken out, they were covered with blankets and we saw horrible scenes. Once, we saw a woman's bare legs sticking out from beneath a blanket. She still had her shoes on. One of us said, 'There's another dead one.' Then, suddenly, her legs moved up into the air. I had a strange feeling."

Richard P. Fleming, West Lebanon, PA (rescuer): "The inside of the hall was just a skeleton and bodies were propped up against the walls, but the worst were the ones which were trampled and smashed on the floor and covered with water. I ruined a pair of trousers, gloves and shoes from the smell of burned flesh, water and blood. I shall never forget the sight of those bare, burned bodies, and I hope no one else ever has the same experience."

Harry C. Glasheen, Lowell, MA (rescuer): "It was impossible to get through the entrance immediately, because firemen and volunteers were coming out of the building in a staggering stream with the dead and dying. I half-leaned over into the building to grasp bodies dragged to the window by firemen. Of the 20 or more which I helped take out at this point, I saw signs of life in only two, one a man and one a woman. We covered one, a man who looked to be dead, and as the blanket was pulled up over his face he shouted, 'Don't smother me.' The body of a woman appeared to move slightly and then she moaned as we placed her on the stretcher. I counted 32 bodies, some frightfully burned, which were piled in rows against the wall. Some of these were nearly nude and all had suffered burns of lesser or greater degree."

Charles T. Hale, Dorchester, MA (rescuer): "I could see no flames outside the building, but the area was thick with smoke. I could hear people screaming wildly inside and only imagine what was taking place. I saw a chorus girl leap from the third-story ell and land on a car in the street. Streams of bodies came out on stretchers wrapped in blankets. I helped take about 25 of them to conveyances lined up to take off for hospitals and morgues. The bodies coming out of the building in sheets were like gauze-covered cattle carcasses being loaded into a truck for market - stiff and motionless. Many of the bodies

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were seared of clothing and flesh. Occasionally the fresh air would revive one and the form under the sheet would move unexpectedly, often in agonized spasms. It's all like a horrible dream, yet very real."

Henry T. "Harry" Holbrook, Brookline, MA (rescuer): "I went in through the smoke and asked the firemen if I could be of any assistance. They passed me a body of a woman that was terribly charred. I did not know whether she was dead or alive, but I carried it to an ambulance and went back to see what more I could do. They gave me another body, and I brought that out to an ambulance."

James Hudson, Bethany, IL (hospital volunteer): "I was assigned to a 28-year-old fellow with both hands bandaged half way up the arm, one entire leg, and the only visible feature of his face was the tip of his nose and lips. His lips were so swollen they were as large as my wrists. His throat and lungs were seared by the flames and hot air and he was slowly filling up with fluid and he was rapidly suffocating. The doctors came in and decided they would have to slit his throat wide open and cut his wind pipe so he could get air. There wasn't time to use any anesthesia, so the doctor cut away, while by brute force



Exterior view of Main Entrance, looking West,
with one of few pictures with smoke. (Boston Public Library)

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we held him in bed and the poor chap screamed and cursed with the acute pain. After the wind pipe was cut a silver tube was inserted and sewed in and it was then my job to see that that tube was kept free of blood and fluid."

Paul N. Johnson, Worcester, MA (fire witness): "Flames were starting to lick through the roof of the night club. The smoke was terrific. A nearby garage was turned into a temporary mortuary and Red Cross station. Men and women littered the floor. I went to the Boston City Hospital, where ambulances streamed in and out of the driveway to the accident ward bearing many dead. Nurses and volunteer workers helped carry the casualties into the hospital where scores of dead lay covered, many charred and burned beyond recognition, in long rows. Husbands and wives, sweethearts, and other party groups, separated in the mad rush, began to find their way to the hospital, seeking lost companions."

Richard B. Joslyn, Pasadena, CA (rescuer): "I'm still a little shaky from the experience. I found a first-class seaman and station wagon - which we borrowed - and between us we dragged about 30 horribly burned people out of the club and took them to the hospital. We had to carry injured and charred bodies for blocks to ambulances. Hospitals were filled to overflowing and they had to lay bodies in the hallways."

John J. Kenney, Roxbury, MA (deputy fire chief): "I went in on the Broadway side of the building and directed operations. The first victim I saw was when I fell over a chair and my hand hit a body. There were more bodies underneath a table. The heaviest part of the fire seemed to be just beyond the bar on the Broadway side. We discovered many bodies there. Twelve or 14 were buried in the passageway opposite the stage, on the left. They were buried in debris and very badly burned. I found one body in a telephone booth, badly burned."

Edward J. Knight, River Plaza (Middletown Twsp.), NJ (rescuer): "I worked all night removing bodies from that dripping black hell. Many were burned beyond identification. Some had their faces and hair burned off. When we attempted to lift the bodies, sometimes the flesh came loose and exposed the bones. Blood was oozing out of open wounds and some were entirely naked, the clothes having been either pulled off in the panic or burned off. Many had their limbs pulled from them in the fighting and pushing of the frenzy. I thought we would never cease finding bodies."

John J. Landers, Milton, MA (fire witness): "I saw one couple, a sailor and a girl, lying side-by-side, clasped in each other's arms. They were not burned but apparently were overcome by smoke and grabbed one another."

Charles J. Leveroni, Quincy, MA (fire witness and rescuer): "The fire was out except for a burst of smoke now and again as a chemical extinguisher flushed a smoldering ember. It was then 11:30 p.m. The bodies were stacked in the express vans like so much cordwood. A civilian, seeing a fresh face, ordered me to grab a stretcher, and we went into the Cocoanut Grove through the charred, broken remains of the revolving door. On the right was a long bar with people seated on the stools still, or so it seemed in the flicker

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of the fire department lights, enjoying their drinks. It was a horrible mirage. The patrons were dead, literally fused to the stools."

Charles W. Mapes, Jr., Reno, NV (rescuer): "I arrived on the scene just as the fire started. Being one of the first to get to the scene, I was able to pull a man and woman out of the windows. The smoke had just cleared enough so you could see inside, and bodies were lying in heaps all over the place. All of them were overcome by smoke. For two-and-a-half hours, we did nothing but haul wounded and dead out of the building. Many of the women were burned beyond recognition. A very strange feeling passed over me as we were carrying away the wounded. Fathers and priests were there as we loaded them in the ambulances."

Santo J. Marino, Boston, MA (fire witness): "The bodies were burned so badly I can't imagine a sight more horrible. You should have seen the pile of clothing, shoes and pocketbooks piled outside the club. Men's coats and vests were taken off for identification and to see how badly the burns were [*sic*], and women's shoes fell off and pocketbooks were scattered about. I hope I never again see such a fire."

Francis J. Marr, Dorchester, MA (firefighter): "The bartender in the New Lounge was dead...We found him stuffed in a bottle closet. I guess he went the wrong way. [*Hoseman*] Jackie Martin and I were wading through water in the kitchen. We bumped into things we thought were bodies. They were fire extinguishers people had tried to use."

Anthony P. "Tony" Marra, Everett, MA (busboy): "I found a cellar window and I went out between the pipes. There was a waiter who went out the window, too. I was in the courtyard. There was a woman in the powder room window, screaming. So I climbed the fence and handed her down to the waiter. Then I got out of the courtyard."

Jessie K. "Jackie MacGregor" Maver, Cambridge, MA (dance captain): "Scorched bodies lined the sidewalks along Broadway and the smell of burning flesh was overwhelming. I remember seeing skin falling right off people's hands."

John F. McDonough, Roslindale, MA (deputy fire chief): "When I got to the Piedmont Street side of the club, I saw smoke and fire and saw a body in the vestibule. I crawled in and touched the body and it was nude with the clothes burned off completely...At first I thought it might be a dummy, but it was a nude body. I walked through the foyer, bodies were spread around. Ten feet in front of the panic-lock door there were bodies. They were huddled together. There was a pile at the stairs. We had a job to disengage them."

Louise G. "Lucy" McGonagle, Nashua, NH (fire witness): "I was operating a transient rooming house about two blocks away from the Cocoanut Grove at the time. All of a sudden, or so it seemed, all hell had broken loose. A dense cloud of black smoke completely covered the sky in the area, and the wind blew nauseating smells of burning flesh around the area. Police cars were used to move people into the neighborhood and also to bring them out. The latter were the lucky ones who managed to escape from the club. Some were badly burned, others were just dazed and confused. I allowed some of

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them to wait in my lobby for ambulances. Some of them had the clothing burned off their backs, and I furnished sheets and blankets to wrap around them."



Boston City Hospital Triage. (Boston Public Library)

V. Leon Megerdichian, Cambridge, MA (fire witness): "It had to be one of the most gruesome things I had ever seen in my entire life. All these bodies, piled on top of each other in the street, hundreds of them, and the fire department was hosing them down to put out the flames. The stench was unbelievable."

Melvin L. Milligan II, Massillon, OH (rescuer): "Hundreds of people were standing around and we pushed our way on through the onlookers. We saw many victims lying in the cold wet street where the firemen had dragged them. People shouted for help to carry them to taxis to

be rushed to hospitals. There was no screaming from the victims - most of them were dead. Soon the firemen were bringing out bodies at the rate of three a minute. Most of them were badly burned and rigor mortis had set in. I arrived at 10:30, left at 12:30, and they still were carrying bodies out in a steady stream. Even as early as I got there, I saw no conscious victims."

Samuel J. Myers, Mattapan, MA (rescuer): "When I reached the vestibule, a big man was barring the main door. He was facing the crowd which was stampeding to get out of the door. But he was hysterical - he had gone mad - he wouldn't let them out. He was shouting, 'Edith, Edith.' A sailor with a girl on his arm socked the man in the jaw, knocking him through the glass. I managed then to open the door and drag him out. The crowd swept over him to safety. I saw him running around after that, shouting, 'Edith, Edith, where are you? She just left the table when the fire started and now I can't find her!'"

Ralph F. Oswald, Allentown, PA (rescuer): "As I arrived on the scene they had just cleared the doorways and were starting to bring out the bodies from within. A young girl with her hair practically burned off her head was blindly dragging her badly burned legs along the gutter. Her legs were burned to the bone and her feet entirely gone. As we entered the hall on our first trip a sailor in front of me blindly stepped on something. He looked down and said, 'It's a foot.' We uncovered a sailor whose body was twisted like that of a weird black statue. As we picked up the 'black statue' and placed him on the stretcher, he just fell apart at the joints. Once we went downstairs into Melody Lounge. We came upon a group of women who had huddled together in fear and were caught there. They had thrown their arms around each other and were burned together."

Cecil O. Patterson, Kansas City, MO (rescuer): "Our group entered the building through a broken window and searched for the living. All these were carried to safety.

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Then we found about 20 men and women, all dead, piled up like cordwood, showing that evidently they were all trying to escape through the same opening. Some were without arms, others headless, and some with the body in two parts. Each time a body was removed I was afraid to look, for fear that it was one of my friends which would have made the task even worse, if possible. It had all the appearances of a real coconut grove except this 'Grove' proved to be easier to enter than to escape."

Mose P. Quinn, Ithaca, NY (rescuer): "The interior was so full of smoke it was hard to see. They couldn't get the windows open at first to let out the smoke. Many of the dead were not even burned. They appeared to have been asphyxiated by inhaling the fumes. A lot of soldiers and sailors helped in removing the dead and injured. The fire didn't last very long. We heard there was just a sudden burst of flames that consumed the decorations."

John E. Rembold, Owensboro, KY (patron): "I noticed the front entrance was burning fast and people were dashing through the fire. I jumped out on top of a parked automobile, and caved the top in but didn't hurt me at all [*sic*]. Then I started dragging people who had been trampled on over to the side. We took clothes off the dead people and made cushions for them to jump on. But several jumped out of the window on fire and started the pile of clothes to burn. I worked until the flesh started to burn and the odor was so bad I vomited several times. Everyone was screaming. About half fainted. Some ran right back into the fire. While loading the bodies in army trucks their flesh would fall off. I was bloody and wringing wet from head to foot."

John J. Rizzo, Jr., Revere, MA (waiter): "When I got to the streets I looked up and a woman screamed. She yelled something about fur coats. She jumped the minute she saw me and I managed to catch and break her fall. The only clothing she had on was a fur coat. I remember thinking, there are people screaming and dying, and she's complaining about fur coats. I ran over to the Statler and got blankets after that."

Winthrop S. Robbins, Dorchester, MA (firefighter): "When we first pulled in there was a woman in a red dress, evidently dead, lying in the gutter. There were a lot of dead people, tongues split open. I thought it was a lot of black people, but they were charred. We went in through the revolving door with masks on. After it cleared up we took them off, but we worked in and went off to the right up two or three stairs that went up into the Caricature bar, and they were all jammed up in there in panic. And some of the people's heads were right through the first section of the wall, like through the plaster, and the people were sitting on the stools at the bar as if they were still drinking there, but they were suffocated."

Charles D. Robertson, West Roxbury, MA (district fire chief): "The people were in various stages of consciousness. Some were able to help themselves but others were semi-conscious and still others were unconscious. Some were inert, some were moving an arm or a leg. Some got to their feet when we helped them. The legs of some only were showing. Most of them were congregated within possibly 12 or 15 feet of that door. And after we got all those people out we were able to walk through that particular part of the

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building, into where it joins the other building, without encountering any more people. We found one more person at the end of the bar, up against the wall, and another one in the telephone booths that were in that particular section...covered with debris and all that was showing was the knee and shin bones, devoid of flesh."

Burton R. Rought, Conklin Forks, NY (rescuer): "After I got through carrying out bodies, I went and helped the boys keep the crowd back. Later, I went scouting around in the firetrap and found a phone booth. I opened the door and a girl was hanging on the receiver. As I opened the door she fell all to pieces. We all got back to our quarters at 2:30, except one sailor of our outfit. He was down in the basement frozen to death. A lot of servicemen in there got killed."

Reno J. Sandri, Roxbury, MA (fire witness): "I saw a crowd at the revolving door. There were flames right behind them, from the top of the ceiling. The door wouldn't move because the crowd was trying to push it in opposite directions. It appeared the flames were coming from the direction of the Melody Lounge. I kicked open the door to the nearby checkroom but nobody was in there. Then the people started coming out. They ran out with their clothes on fire. Some of them had their hair on fire and others had their bodies on fire. I saw a lady run out of the building with her hair on fire. She fell in front of the door and died. I saw people with no skin on them at all. And I saw a priest standing near the door and blessing people as they came out."

Damian J. Sanò, Boston, MA (assistant pastor): "The whole building was in flames. I stepped inside the doors and as the bodies were carried out I gave the last rites. Some of the bodies were still burning, and my thumb is blackened and sore. The smoke was thick and choking. The fire had burned off the clothes of many men and women and the sight of the burned, naked bodies was shocking. I went across the street to the garage which was full of bodies. I saw one of the bodies, that of a woman, accidentally kicked by one of the workers at the fire. The body jumped. She was still alive, and I told two Coast Guardsmen to take the body out and put it with the victims still alive, so she could be taken to a hospital."

Harold J. Scheetz, Easton, PA (rescuer): "It certainly impressed me as being far more gruesome than anything that happened to me before. Bodies were moved away in truckloads and in such a continuous stream that eventually the sympathy you felt for the dead was overcome by a feeling of nausea."

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James Murphy Sechrest, Charlotte, NC (rescuer): "I don't know how many people we carried out, but on the last trip that I was able to make inside, I was carrying a girl when another girl, whose body was nothing but a solid mass of flames, ran up to me screaming. I ripped off her blouse and put out the flames and started out with both of them. There were bodies lying all over the sidewalk and everything that would run was being used to help carry them away. After the ruins had cooled down, the hunt for the bodies started and believe me, they were not hard to find. The ones on top were burned beyond recognition, but it was plain to see that the ones on the bottom had died from suffocation."



Delivery of caskets to Suffolk County Northern Mortuary, with crowds waiting outside. (Boston Public Library)

John O. Silvey, Elwood, IN (patron): "I heard the commotion and thought a fight had broken out. I and several of my buddies departed hurriedly through the front entrance. Once outside, we glanced back to see the entire interior a raging furnace. We went to a side door and tried to break it down to get to the trapped people. We were unsuccessful. We saw uncounted numbers of bodies, burned and charred beyond recognition. The rescuers tried to remove one woman, whose arm protruded from a mass of victims. They pulled the arm out but the body remained. I think she was still afire. It was the worst thing I ever saw."

Ramon E. Skillingstad, St. Cloud, MN (rescuer): "Because we were in uniform the mob let us through to the front. All the servicemen in the crowd got together and helped the rescue workers. They kept bringing out the burned bodies, some dead, some still alive. We put them on stretchers and carried them to waiting trucks, ambulances, and taxicabs used to haul them to hospitals and morgues. We kept it up all night and got pretty sick of the tangles and badly burned bodies. When dawn came and it was time to return to ship we were glad to leave the smell of the place."

Martin H. Spellman, Brighton, MA (medical examiner): "Three lines of hose were already inside the building when I arrived, and about 20 women were coming out. There were no bodies close to the door. There was a woman in the telephone booth, charred and covered with ashes. In the middle of the main room, tables and chairs were piled high. The paint there was not even blistered. I went from there to the northern side, and near a stairway 20 dead bodies were massed in a corner."

Samuel W. Spina, Arlington, MA (rescuer): "The empty stretchers were passed through a hole the firemen had cut in the wall. Inside, firemen and a few volunteers placed the people on them, and they were passed out the main door. As soon as the stretcher

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reached the outside, a couple of blankets were thrown over the occupant. Few of them were burned. Most of the people who died were either overcome by smoke or gas or crushed in the panic. Inside, you couldn't see anything but debris piled all over the floor. That's what took so long - many of the people had to be dug out from under wrecked chairs, tables, and decorations. The smell of burning flesh was the worst thing I ever want to go through."

Louis C. Stickel, Roslindale, MA (deputy fire chief): "The first victim I saw was lying on the sidewalk on the Shawmut Street side. Another was in the middle of the street. I saw one man on the Broadway side of the club hanging over the window, inside, and then the flame took him up."

George H. Stube, Waterloo, WI (rescuer): "I was a block from the fire, and when I got there people were coming out of the night club with their clothes on fire, and screaming like mad. Then suddenly they stopped coming and the firemen rushed in. The firemen went in to the flaming, smoke-filled building and dragged the people out to the corridor and piled them on the floor. We placed them on stretchers and rushed them out to police cars, cabs, ambulances, trucks, and every sort of vehicle available. The worst mess was in the basement. Two of us, a sailor and I, using a litter, carried 25 people out of there. Most of the people we brought were dead, or raving mad, and a mad man is no fun to look at, or to handle."

John W. Stutsman, Plainfield, NJ (rescuer): "There were five or six trucks making steady trips to morgues and hospitals. I loaded about 25 bodies in a railway express truck. There were heaps of bodies piled up awaiting transportation to the morgue, most of them horribly burned. They all tried to get to the one exit at once and were jammed there and burned alive. Some died from breathing smoke, others were trampled to death and some died from breathing hot air. I was taking a woman out with another sailor, when her foot came off in my hand. She had been cremated alive. The place smelled almost like roast beef, and it was almost impossible to tell the sex of the victims, let alone who they were."

Patrick J. Tozzi, Plainfield, NJ (rescuer): "It was a horrible night. You could even smell the burned flesh. I couldn't eat very much Sunday because my stomach was a little upset."

Andrew F. Tully, Jr., Southbridge, MA (fire witness): "Smoke was billowing from the building in great, suffocating clouds, seemingly coming even through solid walls. Firemen were trying desperately to free a revolving door which seemed to be stuck. Some firemen staggered out of the building with women in their arms, others led bewildered figures able to walk but dazed and near collapse. Newspaper photographers' bulbs were flashing everywhere, police were bellowing at the crowd to stay back and the stretchers were still coming out of the building. A woman who had just been taken alive out of the building took one look at a stretcher lying in the street next to hers, gave a heart-rending scream and fainted dead away. A policeman told me what she had seen was her husband's body. I saw one body on a stretcher hoisted into a truck which carried the name of a well-known Boston department store. I saw bodies on stretchers with charred black masks where faces had been."

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Nina J. Underwood, Winchester, MA (rescuer): "I had to knock down two survivors with jiu jitsu because they got out of hand. One was a woman who had been drinking. I questioned another girl who was feeling pretty high with liquor and she said she didn't know there was any trouble until the smoke grew. Another incident that stays uppermost in my mind was a stir in a big bunch of bodies. Three hours after the fire started, a sailor lying on the floor suddenly rose and walked out unaided. It was a dreadful experience to lift an arm that was dangling from the side of a Marine truck, and find that rigor mortis had already set in. Unless the people were covered up when they got into the air their skin fell off."

Henry L. Watson, Brookline, MA (rescuer): "There was a garage across the street. The police had kicked the door in and we carried the victims in there. If they were alive we put them on one side of the room. If they were dead, we put them on the other. All those alive were unconscious. The majority of those we carried over were dead and were women. Most had no clothes left on them, though a few had just a girdle or a bra or a pair of panties or shoes. Their faces were charred beyond recognition. Later, when I went inside the place, I saw three bodies - of two men and a woman. When I tried to pick them up they simply fell apart in my hands."

Irving Arthur Wickes, Dorchester, MA (fire witness): "Smoke and belching flames were pouring from the Piedmont Street side. Just then I saw an incredible sight. A man and a woman walked out of that inferno. They walked woodenly - like puppets. And then I saw that the woman's hair was blazing. Next I saw them slump to the street - dead! A woman ran out, screaming, her hair and clothing afire. Another girl staggered out, all ablaze, to collapse and lie quietly in the street before help could reach her. I saw two corpses literally fused together in death. Excitement and terror were everywhere."

Fred T. Willett, Dorchester, MA (firefighter): "As I reached the Broadway side I saw the body of a man hanging out of the glass block window on the side of the club wall. His shoulders, head and arms were outside the glass blocks and the rest of his body was inside. I tried to pull him free. He was wedged in some way and I couldn't pull him down. After I tried to get him down and I found it was impossible, I went around through the Broadway street door to reach him. I couldn't get to that window. I couldn't get past the bodies that were piled high and in the way. I pushed my way in and there were a number of bodies piled up near the door."

SOURCES (for J: Selected Rescuers and Witnesses)

- 1) **John I. Albach (1917-1944):** Source: Letter home to parents, reprinted in *St. Louis Star-Times*, St. Louis, MO, Wednesday, December 2, 1942
- 2) **Kathleen C. Andrews (1913-2003):** Source: First-person account, *Evening Tribune*, Lawrence, MA, Tuesday, December 1, 1942
- 3) **William J. Brickley (1873-1965):** Sources: News conference, Thursday, December 3, 1942 (United Press wire article, *The Boston Herald*). Spring 1943

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Manslaughter trial testimony, Wednesday, March 31, 1943 (*The Boston Post* transcript)

- 4) **Francis J. Burke (1919-1976)**: Sources: First-person account, *Daily News*, New York, NY, Monday, November 30, 1942. First-person account, *Brookline Citizen*, Brookline, MA, Thursday, December 3, 1942
- 5) **William I. "Bill" Cain (1918-2009)**: Source: Letter home to parents, reprinted in *The Pampa News*, Pampa, TX, Monday, December 14, 1942
- 6) **John O. "Rusty" Campbell (1923-2006)**: Source: First-person account during brief furlough home. *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Minneapolis, MN, Wednesday, December 2, 1942
- 7) **William J. Carvill (1918-1989)**: Source: First-person account during leave to visit parents in upstate New York. *The Times Record*, Troy, NY, Monday, December 7, 1942
- 8) **Dorothy J. "Dottie Christie" Christensen (1921-2010)**: Source: To wire reporter at scene, Associated Press, Sunday, November 29, 1942
- 9) **Thomas H. Coleman (1919-2002)**: Source: Thomas H. Coleman: Source: Written retrospective to the *Harvard Medical Alumni Bulletin*, Winter 1991/92
- 10) **John J. Collins, Jr. (1917-1998)**: Source: Retrospective interview with fire safety expert Casey C. Grant, National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) journal, 1991. Also article by Casey C. Grant, National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) journal, November 1997
- 11) **William Stephen Collins, Jr. (1914-1992)**: Source: William S. Collins: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Friday, March 26, 1943 (*The Boston Evening Globe* transcript)
- 12) **James E. Connolly, Jr. (1896-1949)**: Source: Boston Fire Department inquest, Saturday, December 5, 1942 (*The Boston Sunday Globe* transcript)
- 13) **Thomas F. Costello (1912-1956)**: Source: Witness account written by newspaper editor, *Lowell Sun*, Lowell, MA, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 14) **Clayton D. Cressy (1909-1982)**: Source: Written account by newspaper editor, *Beverly Evening Times*, Beverly, MA. *Beverly Evening Times*, Monday, November 30, 1942)
- 15) **Daniel J. Crowley (1884-1949)**: Source: Boston Fire Department pre-inquest, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (*The Boston Globe* transcript, *The Boston Post* transcript)
- 16) **John F. Crowley (1915-1997)**: Source: Undated 1990s retrospective interview with fire historian Charles Kenney, Jr. (bostonfirehistory.org)
- 17) **Julian W. "Jules" Deshaies (1912-1985)**: Source: First-person account, *Lewiston Evening Journal*, Lewiston, ME, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 18) **Donald V. Dimmick (1921-1992)**: Dimmick: Source: Retrospective interview, *The Daily Record*, The Stroudsburg, PA, Tuesday, November 27, 1962
- 19) **John F. Doyle (1902-1952)**: Source: First-person account, *Lewiston Evening Journal*, Lewiston, ME, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 20) **Fred John Eggleston (1924-2015)**: Source: Letter home to parents, reprinted in *The Angola Herald*, Angola, IN, Friday, December 18, 1942
- 21) **Benjamin M. Ellis (1893-1988)**: Sources: First-person account at scene, *The Boston Sunday Globe*, Sunday, November 29, 1942. First-person account at

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scene, *Boston Sunday Post*, Sunday, November 29, 1942. Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript, also *The Boston Herald* transcript)

- 22) **George Ferre (1904-1983)**: Source: First-person account, *Miami Daily News*, Miami, FL, Friday, December 4, 1942
- 23) **Frederick J. Finnegan (1895-1990)**: Source: First-person account, *Lowell Sun*, Lowell, MA, November 30, 1942
- 24) **Richard P. Fleming (1924-2009)**: Source: First-person account during short leave home, *Indiana Evening Gazette*, Indiana, PA, Friday, December 4, 1942
- 25) **Harry C. Glasheen (1894-1958)**: Source: First-hand account by Associate Press sports reporter (Associated Press wire article, Sunday, November 29, 1942)
- 26) **Charles T. Hale (1901-1981)**: Source: First-person account to *Berkshire Evening Eagle*, Pittsfield, MA, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 27) **Henry T. "Harry" Holbrook (1917-1998)**: Source: *The Boston Globe*, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (as reprinted in his obituary, *The Boston Globe*, Friday, February 6, 1998)
- 28) **James L. Hudson, Bethany, IL (1919-2016)**: Source: Letter home to parents, reprinted in *The Bethany Echo*, Bethany, IL, Friday, December 4, 1942
- 29) **Paul N. Johnson (1916-1975)**: Source: First-person news account in *Worcester Telegram*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 30) **Richard B. Joslyn (1920-date)**: Source: Letter to home to parents, reprinted in *The Pasadena Post*, Pasadena, CA, Thursday, December 3, 1942
- 31) **John J. Kenney (1885-1946)**: Source: Boston Fire Department pre-inquest, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (*Boston Daily Record* transcript, *The Boston Globe* transcript)
- 32) **Edward J. Knight (1912-1948)**: Source: Letter home to an acquaintance, reprinted in *The Bank Register*, Red Bank, NJ, Thursday, December 10, 1942
- 33) **John J. Landers (1908-1967)**: Source: First-person account to Associated Press reporter at the scene (Associated Press, Sunday, November 29, 1942)
- 34) **Charles J. Leveroni (1902-1985)**: Source: Written retrospective, *Sunday Herald Traveler*, Boston, Sunday, November 26, 1967
- 35) **Charles W. Mapes, Jr. (1920-1999)**: Source: Letter home to his mother, reprinted in *Nevada State Journal*, Reno, NV, Tuesday, December 8, 1942
- 36) **Santo J. Marino (1908-1999)**: Source: First-person account, *Miami Daily News*, Miami, FL, Sunday, December 6, 1942
- 37) **Francis J. Marr (1896-1975)**: Source: Retrospective interview (at age 71), *The Boston Globe*, Sunday, November 26, 1967
- 38) **Anthony P. "Tony" Marra (1927-2003)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Monday, March 29, 1943 (*The Boston Evening Globe* transcript, *The Boston Evening American* transcript)
- 39) **Jessie K. "Jackie MacGregor" Maver (1917-1999)**: Source: Retrospective interview, *The Boston Sunday Herald*, Sunday, November 22, 1992
- 40) **John F. McDonough (1881-1956)**: Source: Boston Fire Department pre-inquest, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (*The Boston Herald* transcript)
- 41) **Louise G. "Lucy" McGonagle (1912-2000)**: Source: Retrospective letter to *Nashua Telegraph*, Nashua, NH, Monday, September 20, 1965

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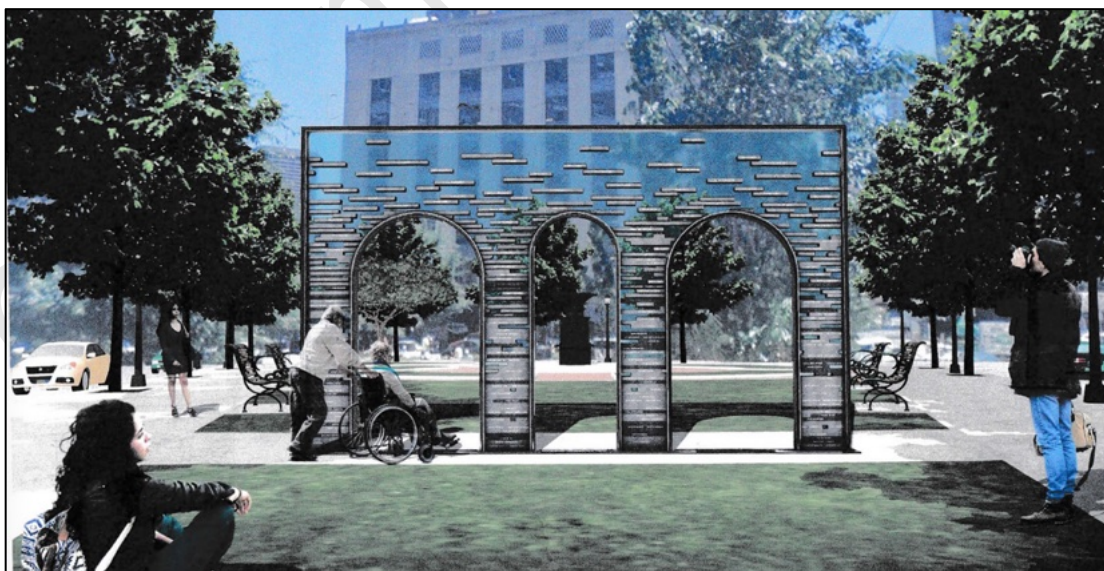
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- 42) **V. Leon Megerdichian (1923-2007)**: Source: Retrospective interview (as Leon Merian, a later name), *Bradenton Herald*, Bradenton, FL, Saturday, February 22, 2003
- 43) **Melvin L. Milligan II (1923-1994)**: Source: Letter home to parents, reprinted in *The Evening Independent*, Massillon, OH, Saturday, December 5, 1942
- 44) **Samuel J. Myers (1891-1960)**: Sources: First-person interview, *The Boston Evening American*, Monday, November 30, 1942. First-person written account, International News Service, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 45) **Ralph F. Oswald (1918-2011)**: Source: Letter home to parents, reprinted in *The Morning Call*, Allentown, PA, Friday, December 4, 1942 (same source and date as letter from Watertender Harold J. Scheetz, U.S. Navy, see below)
- 46) **Cecil O. Patterson (1906-1989)**: Source: Letter to hometown newspaper, *Marshall Daily Democrat News*, Marshall, MO (as reprinted in the *Macon Chronicle-Herald*, Macon, MO, Thursday, December 17, 1942)
- 47) **Mose P. Quinn (1904-1968)**: Source: First-person account by long-distance telephone to *The Ithaca Journal*, Ithaca, NY, Tuesday, December 1, 1942
- 48) **John E. Rembold (1911-1952)**: Source: Letter home to ex-wife, reprinted in *The Owensboro Messenger*, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, December 6, 1942
- 49) **John J. Rizzo, Jr. (1920-2016)**: Sources: Boston Police Department investigation (direct transcript). Retrospective interview, *The Boston Sunday Globe*, Sunday, November 22, 1992
- 50) **Winthrop S. Robbins (1909-1998)**: Source: Retrospective interview with fire historian Charles Kenney, Jr. Monday, July 15, 1991 (bostonfirehistory.org)
- 51) **Charles D. Robertson (1890-1974)**: Sources: Boston Fire Department inquest, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript). Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Thursday, April 1, 1943 (*The Boston Globe* transcript)
- 52) **Burton R. Rought (1924-1986)**: Source: Letter home to parents, reprinted in *The Binghamton Press*, Wednesday, December 2, 1942
- 53) **Reno J. Sandri (1917-1995)**: Sources: United Press interview, Sunday, November 29, 1942. Boston Police Department investigation, Monday, November 30, 1942 (direct transcript)
- 54) **Damian J. Sanò (1913-1979)**: Source: First-person account, *The Boston Globe*, Tuesday, December 1, 1942
- 55) **Harold J. Scheetz (1921-2001)**: Source: First-person account during brief furlough home, *The Morning Call*, Allentown, PA, Friday, December 4, 1942 (same source and date as letter from Pvt. Ralph F. Oswald, U.S. Marine Corps, see above)
- 56) **James Murphy Sechrest (1915-2000)**: Source: Letter home to parents, reprinted in *The Charlotte Observer*, Charlotte, NC, Tuesday, December 8, 1942
- 57) **John O. Silvey (1904-1965)**: Source: "Exclusive interview" with hometown newspaper during brief visit home to parents, printed in *The Elwood Call-Ledger*, Elwood, IN, Monday, December 7, 1942
- 58) **Ramon E. Skillingstad (1925-2012)**: Source: First-person account to parents during one-day visit home, *The St. Cloud Daily Times*, St. Cloud, MN, Thursday, December 3, 1942

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- 59) **Martin H. Spellman (1890-1983)**: Source: First-person account, *Boston Sunday Advertiser*, Sunday, December 6, 1942
- 60) **Samuel W. Spina (1919-1998)**: Source: Interview with hometown newspaper, *The Greenville News*, Greenville, SC, Wednesday, December 9, 1942
- 61) **Louis C. Stickel (1880-1947)**: Source: Boston Fire Department pre-inquest, Sunday, November 29, 1942 (*The Boston Globe transcript*, *The Boston Post transcript*)
- 62) **George H. Stube (1916-1990)**: Source: Letter home to parents, reprinted in *Wisconsin State Journal*, Madison, WI, Thursday, December 10, 1942
- 63) **John W. Stutsman (1914-1975)**: Source: Letter home to parents, reprinted in *Plainfield Courier-News*, Plainfield, NJ, Thursday, December 3, 1942 (same source and date as letter from Seaman Patrick J. Tozzi, U.S. Navy, below)
- 64) **Patrick J. Tozzi (1922-1999)**: Source: Letter home to parents, reprinted in *Plainfield Courier-News*, Plainfield, NJ, Thursday, December 3, 1942 (same source and date as letter from Coxswain John W. Stutsman, U.S. Navy, above)
- 65) **Andrew F. Tully, Jr. (1914-1993)**: Source: Written account by associate editor, *Southbridge Evening News*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 66) **Nina J. Underwood (1924-1997)**: Sources: First-person account, *The Boston Globe*, Monday, November 30, 1942. First-person account, *The Boston Herald*, Monday, November 30, 1942
- 67) **Henry L. Watson (1908-1963)**: Source: First-person account at scene, *The Boston Sunday Globe*, Sunday, November 29, 1942
- 68) **Irving Arthur Wickes (1907-1969)**: Source: Retrospective letter to *Boston Sunday Advertiser*, Sunday, November 27, 1960
- 69) **Fred T. Willett (1892-1980)**: Source: Spring 1943 Manslaughter trial testimony, Wednesday, March 31, 1943 (*The Boston Post transcript*)



Artist Rendition of Cocoanut Grove Memorial, in Boston's Statler Park, replicating the Cocoanut Grove Main Entrance and with the names of all 490 victims.