

Educational materials developed through the Baltimore County History Labs Program, a partnership between Baltimore County Public Schools and the UMBC Center for History Education.

RS#06: Blame Shifted On All Sides for Fire Horror

The New York Times, March 28, 1911. The *Times* was known for being less sensational in its reporting than its competitors, such as the *New York World*.

Blame Shifted On All Sides for Fire Horror

Responsibility for the inadequate fire escape facilities was charged directly to the Building Department. In its defense Borough President McAneny issued a statement last night. He held that the Department was in no way to blame for the disaster and there was not the slightest grounds for accusing Supt. Miller. The efforts to hold him responsible he characterized as "outrageously unfair." Mr. McAneny said the plans for the Washington Place building were filed eleven years ago and were accepted as complying with the law. This fact urged, contended that its Inspectors never had time to look at buildings except those in process of construction, and that several of its small force of Inspectors were grossly incompetent. District Attorney Whitman engaged two engineers yesterday to examine the building with a special view of determining official culpability, and their report will be ready when the April Grand Jury begins the investigation. Certain paragraphs in the State labor law were quoted by District Attorney Whitman to show that responsibility for proper fire protection in factories, especially in the matter of fire escapes, devolved upon the State Labor Commission. But State Labor Commissioner's Williams refused to accept this interpretation pointing to the fact that a decision of the Appellate Division in 1903 settled the fact that the Building Department has complete control over fire escapes in New York City.

At Albany plans are being made for legislation that will settle this issue. One proposed bill provides that the State Labor Commissioner have control of fire escapes in New York City as in other parts of the State, and the other would vest full control in the Fire Department, as recommended by Chief Croker.

The Legislature is also to be asked to name a committee to investigate the fire. The last report of the State Labor Department on the Asch Building was to the effect that the stairway conditions made it impracticable to change the doors so that they would open outward in that such a change would really increase instead of lessen the fire danger. The same report held that the Triangle Waist Company's plant was not overcrowded. The total of employees then at work, however, was only 400, while on Saturday it had grown to over 600.

Investigations continued yesterday under the auspices of four different city departments. Fire Marshal Beers had the waist company's owners, the building's owner, and thirteen others before him in an investigation to determine the exact cause of the fire's origin. His conclusion was that there was no explosion; that a lighted match thrown into waste near oil cans, or into clippings under cutting table No. 2, on the Greene Street side of the eighth floor, started the conflagration. In answer to evidence that no smoking was permitted, he declared he had many cigarette cases, picked up near the spot of the fire's origin, and could prove that smoking was constantly indulged in.

Fire Chief Croker, dissenting from evidence furnished the Fire Marshal that the doors within the factory were not locked, declared his men to chop their way through them to gain entrance, and if not locked they were at least closed so firmly that only an axe could affect a passage through them.

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<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/triangle/trianglenyt4.html> (accessed June 28, 2010).