

11 KILLED IN FIRES IN NEWARK HOTEL AND A TENEMENT

3 Die as Christmas Tree in Hotel Lobby Is Ignited by Faulty Connection

30 PERSONS ARE HURT

6 Victims in Tenement Blaze Are in a Single Family— Arson Is Suspected

Special to The New York Times

NEWARK, Dec. 24 — Eleven persons were killed in two major fires today, eight of them in a tenement early this morning and three more this afternoon when a Christmas tree in a downtown hotel lobby burst into flames. All were asphyxiated.

Six of the eight persons who died in the tenement fire were in one family. All eight were sleeping in their home in a decaying area on the west side of the city when the blaze broke out at 2 A.M.

There have been a number of suspicious fires in the neighborhood recently and Newark's fire director, John Caufield, said of today's blaze: "I do not rule out arson."

300 Evacuated at Hotel

Thirty persons were injured in the Military Park Hotel fire, which was ignited by a faulty connection in the 16-foot Christmas tree. The flames were largely confined to the lobby and second-floor dining room, but thick, choking smoke coursed through most of the 12-story building. The three persons who died were in various parts of the hotel.

All of the 300 persons within were evacuated, about 150 of them by aerial ladders and by the Fire Department's new mobile platform.

As the smoke swelled up through the building some guests on the upper floors rushed to the windows covering their faces with towels.

Sound Truck Warns Victims

Below, a special sound truck bellowed advice and instructions: "Stuff towels under your doors, open windows. Don't jump, don't jump," the loudspeaker kept repeating.

Inside firemen and patrolmen worked their way down the smoke-filled hallways, beating down doors to rooms and banquet halls, in some of which Christmas parties were under way.

While Christmas shoppers streamed up and down Broad Street a block away on last-minute errands, smoke-blackened survivors stumbled through a parking lot, searching and crying for friends and relatives.

The victims of the tenement fire died in a third-floor railroad flat at 197 16th Street. Seventeen occupants of the building escaped, including two members of the family that lost six.

No one was injured in two other fires that broke out with-

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The New York Times (by Barton Silverman)

RESCUE OPERATION IN NEWARK: Fire Department ladder with platform at the end is used to remove guests from the Military Park Hotel, filled with smoke from fire.

The New York Times

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11 DIE IN NEWARK IN 2 MAJOR FIRES

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in two hours of the tenement blaze.

The dead in one family were Mrs. Grace Basile, a 54-year-old widow; her three sons, Thomas, 19, Ralph, 23, and Victor, 21; a daughter, Margaret, 16, and Ralph Basile's son, Ralph Jr., who was 18 months old.

The other victims were Mrs. Maria Melendez, 20, and her brother, Felix Fernandez, 21, who lived in the third-floor flat adjoining the Basiles' Mrs. Melendez was pregnant.

The two members of the Basile family who escaped were Anthony, 25, who jumped from the third-floor bathroom window, and Joseph, 8, who was carried down the front stairs by Warren Jackson, a passing driver who had seen the fire.

The families in the tenement's two second-floor apartments escaped without injury.

Fire Director Caufield said the fire apparently started in the second-floor landing of an enclosed rear porch of the building, which is on a corner and contains a grocery store on the first floor.

Mr. Caufield said the flames spread quickly up the porch stairway into the rear rooms of the two third-floor apartments.

In one, the Basile family was asleep after spending part of last evening wrapping Christmas presents. Mrs. Melendez and her brother were apparently asleep next door.

Anthony Basile told authorities that he awoke in one of the front bedrooms when he heard someone shout: "Fire, get out, get out!"

Headed Toward Fire

According to fire authorities, the victims had unaccountably headed toward the rear of the apartment, where the fire was.

As smoke began to fill the rooms, Anthony led his sister, Margaret, and two others to the bathroom. The others tried to get out the rear and front doors, but were driven back by the smoke.

Somehow, the authorities said, Mr. Jackson was able to race up the front stairs and seize 8-year-old Joseph from someone's arms. The thick smoke repelled others who tried to help.

Director Caufield said the fire moved fast but was quickly brought under control. When firemen finally broke through the doors, they found one member of the family in the kitchen, two in the living room, three in the bathroom and one near the front door.

Mrs. Melendez and her brother, who both were evidently attempting to warn the Basile family, died in the Basile apartment.

The two boys who escaped were treated at East Orange Hospital and were taken in by relatives tonight.

This afternoon, angry firemen pointed to the open Christmas gifts in the Basile apartment and said that they had been rifled by looters in the neighborhood.

Arson Squad Chief Joseph Starrs said that all the presents were found unopened early this morning in a front bedroom that had been untouched by the flames. He said looters had ransacked both flats, ripping open gifts and scattering the imitation jewelry in the Melendez apartment.

Mrs. Melendez's husband was reported to be in Puerto Rico and was expected home for Christmas tomorrow. A sixth son of the Basile family, Nicholas, is a Marine lance corporal stationed in California.

Investigation Ordered

Fire officials ordered an immediate investigation. Director Caufield said the fire was suspicious, and was similar to a rash of fires that have started either in back yards or on rear porches.

Chief Starrs said there had been a series of seven or eight suspicious fires near the end of last month and early this month, all of them similar.

In a tenement fire that started on a back porch Dec. 5 on West Market Street, Alex Gamble, 3, was killed and several others were injured.

In the two fires later this morning, several families were driven from a building on Camden Street, three blocks away, and four families were evacuated on Rutgers Street, six blocks away.

Tonight, grief-stricken relatives of the Basile family were making funeral arrangements. The victims will be buried from the Gate of Heaven Roman Catholic Church in Hanover, because local cemeteries do not have enough grave sites immediately available.

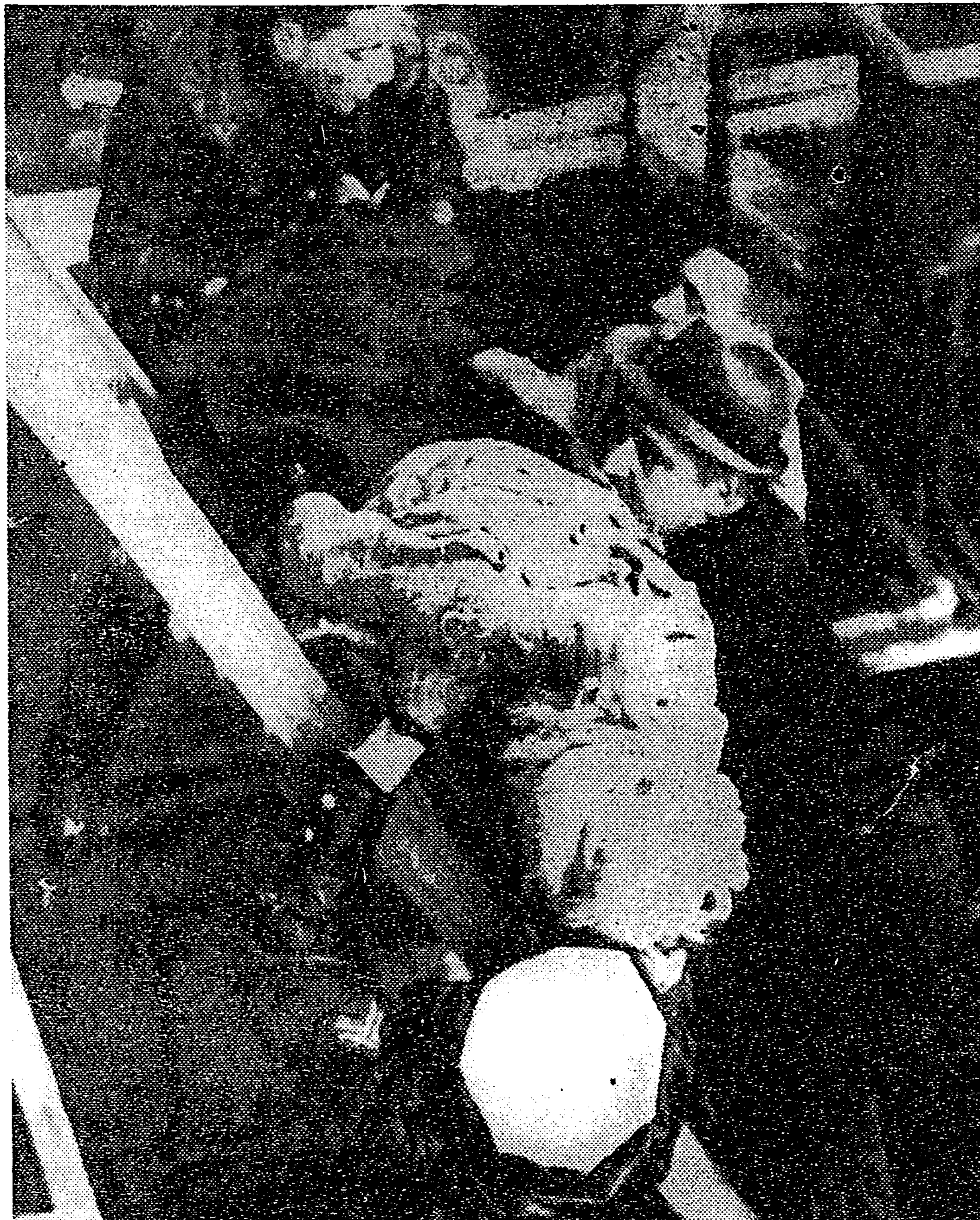
Wedding Was Planned

Margaret Basile will be buried in a white dress that she had picked out for her wedding, which was planned for next spring.

Late this afternoon the entire neighborhood went into mourning. One woman looked up at the charred imitation wreath hanging from one of the Basile bedroom windows and remarked: "They were the best family in the neighborhood—they were the best family in the neighborhood."

The Military Park Hotel is one of the city's largest. It is at the intersection of Park Place and Saybrook Place, across the street from Military Park. The park, a broad expanse of trees and grass, glittered last night with thousands of Christmas trees.

The fire apparently began about 3:30 P.M. in the lobby. Raymond Ruiz, 26, a bellhop, said that he noticed sparks coming from the lights of the Christ-



Associated Press
PULLED FROM HOTEL FIRE: A semiconscious woman, trapped in smoky fire in the Military Park Hotel in Newark, is carried down a ladder by policemen and detectives.

mas tree about that time. He pulled the plug from its socket and went for water, he said.

When he returned half a minute later, he said, he found the tree, and the curtains, which rug around it, in flames, which raced quickly up the broad stairs to the dining room.

More than 30 pieces of fire equipment, 120 firemen and 100 policemen responded to the alarm.

The blaze went no farther than the dining room, but tremendous billows of smoke began seeping through the building.

The department's four-month-old "Snorkel," is a hinged, crane-like apparatus with a platform at the end and a reach of eight stories. It moved up and began to evacuate people, while others on the top floors made their way down interior stairways to get within its reach.

Woman Identified

One woman, who was trapped in a second-floor ladies' room and asphyxiated, was identified from a card in her purse as G. Pressman, 40 years old, of 40 Grove Road, Verona, N. J.

One of the two others who died in the hotel fire was Floyd Edmund, 46, of 131 Butler Parkway, Summit, N. J. He was found on the sixth floor.

The third victim, also a man, was discovered on the roof. He was not immediately identified.

The fire was declared under control at 4:44 P.M.

All the available ambulances in Newark helped carry the injured to City, Beth Israel, St. James, St. Michaels, Columbus and Children's Hospitals. The

city used its emergency supply of 60 containers of oxygen, which is reserved for major disasters, to treat those who were overcome by smoke.

Four motorcycle patrolmen who ran into the hotel at the start of the fire were treated for smoke inhalation. One fireman fell from a roof and broke his leg. A number of others suffered minor injuries or smoke poisoning.

In the parking lot at the side of the hotel, where the police and firemen set up emergency headquarters, survivors of the fire moved among the stretchers, looking for friends and relatives. Others huddled under blankets and cried.

2 Hurt in Manhattan

Two persons were injured last night in a small fire that broke out in a clothes closet in a hotel in Manhattan's theater district.

John Betts, a handyman who tried to extinguish the fire, and Rosemarie Moore, a guest at the hotel, were treated for smoke inhalation at Roosevelt Hospital.

Battalion Chief George Durr, of the seventh battalion, said the fire broke out shortly before 6 P.M. in a second-floor room of the Stacey Hotel, 114 West 47th Street. He said it was brought under control about 10 minutes after firemen arrived.

Smoke damage resulted in Room 207, where the fire was discovered, and water damage in the Jet-O-Restaurant, directly under the room.