

AMERICAN CLUB FIRE DUE TO BAD WIRING

Alien Enemies Not Responsible for Toronto Tragedy

INVESTIGATION FINISHED

Electrical Equipment of the Building
Was Defective, Wires Being Over-
fused, in Opinion of Experts--Nasty
Insinuations Removed by Coroner.

That alien enemies were not responsible for the destruction by fire of the American Club was practically established yesterday at the concluding session of the inquiry into the cause of the tragedy. Additional evidence of an important character, introduced by the Provincial Coroner, placed an entirely different complexion upon the evidence taken by the former sittings, at which the Crown had failed after an exhaustive examination of the different witnesses to obtain direct information upon the theory that explosives had been used in the destruction of the building, in which two lives were lost and several others were injured.

Defective Electric Wiring.

While Provincial Coroner J. E. Rogers declined to give advance information as to the probable cause of the fire, which he will furnish the Attorney-General next week, there is every reason to believe from the character of the evidence introduced yesterday that it will be laid down to defective electric wiring. Both Provincial Coroner Rogers and Lieut.-Col. R. H. Greer, County Crown Attorney, who acted for the Crown, have fully satisfied themselves that, apart from the possibility of the explosions having been caused by air compressure, there is no evidence that alien enemies had gained access to the building, or that the four Austrians employed in the club had any connection with the fire.

An Antiquated Building.

After hearing the evidence disclosing the fact that the electric wiring in some portions of the building was decidedly antiquated and defective the representatives of the Board of Governors, who had previously advanced the theory that it had been the vile work of an alien enemy, concluded that the defective wiring was unquestionably the cause of the fire. It was brought out that Mr. W. J. Bate, an assistant inspector of the Provincial Hydro-electric Commission, who had examined the wiring, had found striking evidences of the wires having been overfused, a situation which always leads to probable danger of fire.

Overfused Wires.

The contention of Inspector Bate as to the possibility of overfused wires starting the fire was endorsed by Assistant City Architect Price, who declared that he had witnessed a practical demonstration along such lines at a recent convention of architects in Chicago. He stated that the overfusing caused an insulation of the wire, which at the weak points would subsequently melt and flame up, with the result that it would ignite the joists, if the wires were not encased in conduits. Mr. James Ingham, a retired builder and building inspector, declared that after a third examination of the ruins he was still satisfied that the fire started in the ceiling above the dome in the lounge-room on the main floor and worked its way through the joists to the dining-room.

Mr. Ingham showed that the greatest destruction was done by the fire in this part of the building in which the electric wires were not encased in conduits. Inspector Bate produced a 30-ampere fuse, which he found in a room on the top floor, where a fuse of ten amperes only was necessary. He also produced a 50-ampere fuse, which had been bridged with a piece of lead on a connection in the basement with the operating of the elevators.

Had Only Slight Knowledge.

With respect to the presence of the latter in the basement, Albert Hoyle, the day engineer, who admitted having only a slight knowledge of electrical work which he gleaned from the Inspector of the Fire Underwriters' Association, said that a thirty-five-ampere fuse had been used, but every time the two elevators started together a blow-out occurred. Subsequently he called in an elevator expert, who inserted the 50-ampere

fuse and bridged it for experimental reasons. At the same time Hoyle expressed the view that he was still satisfied the 35-ampere fuse would answer the purpose. Gordon Moss who had made some electrical repairs in the lounge room, testified that the electric wiring was exceptionally poor, so much so that he was obliged to insert some new wire in making connections with the dome.

Incendiary's Vile Work.

In explanation of the wording "incendiary's vile work," contained in a letter sent out to the members by the Board of Governors after the fire, Mr. F. H. Littlefield, a charter member of the club, and a member of the Board of Governors, stated that he had formed the impression that it had been the work of alien enemies from the newspaper accounts, which elaborated upon the fact that there had been several explosions before and after the firemen had reached the fire. Consequently he was inclined to think that it had been done by some one prejudiced against the club, which had extended the courtesies of the place to the officers engaged in recruiting the American Legion for overseas service.

"Were you aware that there were several alien enemies in the employ of the club?" asked Col. Greer.

Captain Minard Had Charge.

"I did not know such a condition existed," replied Mr. Littlefield. "As Governor of the institution I knew just the handling of the affairs of the club directly came under the supervision of Captain Minard prior to the time he assumed his military duties. I think you will find that there are hotels in the city where Germans and Austrians are employed. I was entirely ignorant of the fact that there were four Austrians in the club's employ."

Messrs. H. E. Tremain and Daniel Baker, members of the Board of Governors, declared that they had no ground for suspicion or belief that the club was in immediate danger of being blown up. They knew of no one who had a grudge against the club or had expressed anything derogatory to it.

Refers to Insinuations.

At the close of the inquiry Provincial Coroner Rogers made the following statement: "Insinuations have been made that the management of the American Club was in some way responsible on account of their financial position, and I feel it is due to the management of the American Club that these insinuations should be removed. There has been no evidence whatever to warrant any such impression, and I feel I am justified in saying that the American Club knew nothing whatever as to the origin of the fire, other than what has been brought out in evidence before this inquest."

Mr. E. P. Heaton, the Provincial Fire Marshal, who attended all the

sittings, said that he concurred in the statement issued by the Provincial Coroner.

The Provincial Coroner also complimented County Crown Attorney H. H. Greer for the able manner in which he examined the forty-eight witnesses, and referred to the good work of Detective William Archibald and Acting Detective Nursey, who worked on the case and gathered the evidence.