

CROWN DISSATISFIED WITH FIRE PROBE

Attorney R. H. Greer Says He Will Not Stop Investigation of American Club Tragedy Until He Gets Satisfactory Explanation of Directors' Reference to "Incendiary's Vile Work"

Although the Crown has penetrated deep in an effort to discover the cause of the American Club fire, which has been under investigation for the past two days before Provincial Coroner Joseph E. Rogers, Chief of the Provincial Police, at the City Hall, during which time forty witnesses have been examined, Lieut.-Col. R. H. Greer, County Crown Attorney, who abandoned his military duties temporarily to examine the witnesses, at the close of yesterday's sitting declared that he would not end the inquiry until he had obtained a more definite explanation respecting a letter issued at a meeting of some twenty members of the club following the conflagration.

County Crown Attorney Greer stated that the wording of the first paragraph intimated that an **alien enemy** had been responsible for the conflagration because of the apparent activity of the members of the club in using the premises as a recruiting agency for the 97th Battalion (American Legion) for overseas service.

"There must have been some driving impulse towards passing the resolution," replied Provincial Coroner Rogers. "The purport of the resolution requires explanation."

Wants Further Evidence.

"I do not intend to conclude the inquiry until I have heard further evidence," said the Coroner in adjourning the case until Friday.

Mr. F. L. Riggs, formerly Secretary and Manager of the University Club, who succeeded Captain Minard as Manager of the American Club five days before the fire, stated that he was present at the meeting when the resolution was passed. He was of the opinion that the wording may have been prompted by reason of the numerous conflagrations preceding the American Club fire, with the possibility in the mind of those present that **alien enemies** desired to obtain revenge because of the active interest displayed in the formation of the American Legion for overseas service.

Asked concerning the employment of foreigners by the American Club, Mr. Riggs replied that when he assumed full responsibility he was given to understand that it had been the custom of the former steward to engage the help, under Captain Minard's supervision.

"Did you hear of any threats of violence?" asked Lieut.-Col. Greer.

"Not during the few days I was supervising the operations of the club," replied Mr. Riggs.

The Resolution in Question.

The portion of the letter upon which the Crown wants further enlightenment is as follows:

"Fellow Member,—Before the ruins of the club house were cold your directors in meeting assembled felt that they represented you and every other member in deciding that, while deploring the loss caused by Wednesday morning's fire, the members of the American Club saw in the fire not a reason for lying down but an incentive to better things. The loss of life cannot be repaired, but the other loss will be more than made up in prestige when—as we intend with your help—the club rises again on a new and different footing earned by the sympathy of our fellow-citizens in our loss, and our own pride in the cause which drove the incendiary to his vile work."

Inspected the Ruins.

Provincial Coroner Rogers and County Crown Attorney Greer inspected the ruins yesterday, after which they heard evidence bearing upon the origin of the conflagration, with a view to determining whether it was the work of **alien enemies**. They discovered that the clock in the lounge room was still going and that the glass in several windows on the main and second floors remained intact—facts which convinced them that the explosions must have occurred on the third floor.

"It is just a veritable fire-trap," said Mr. Rogers.

Fire Chief Smith, who did not hear the explosions, said:

"The opening of a door would supply oxygen and cause the explosion. The current of fresh air rushing in when the door was opened would cause an explosion when it came in contact with the hot smoke."

Was All on Fire.

Mr. Greer—Do you think it would have been possible to have an explosion in the roof while another fire was raging below? A.—No; I think it was all on fire. The fire might have been burning half an hour or more.

"Were you impressed with the apparent amount of fire that was in the partitions?" A.—Not from the construction of the building.

Deputy Chief W. J. Russell declared that when the air was saturated with particles of fine dust severe explosions occur; in fact scientific demonstrations had shown that such explosions were much more dangerous than gunpowder explosions.

Testimony touching upon the progress of the fire when the firemen

arrived was given by District Chief George Sinclair, Captain John W. Fox and Captain R. H. Foster.

Four Austrians Employed.

Four Austrians employed in minor positions in the American Club declared that they were so satisfied with their positions that they had no desire to discuss the war.

Did You Start the Fire?

"Did you start the fire?" asked County Crown Attorney Greer of Peter Sawka, a porter, whose work was confined to the basement and main floor.

"We go home at 5.30 p.m., before fire, in bed at 9 o'clock, wake up at 6 o'clock next morning and report for work at 7 o'clock, when I find place spoiled," replied Sawka.

"Did you hear of threats of violence?" A.—No chance.

Mr. James Ingham, a retired building inspector, who examined the building, stated that the explosion was caused by a back draft, and that the fire originated in the ceiling of the lounge room.

Guest Gives Evidence.

Mr. Earl F. Hussey of Montreal, who was a guest at the club on the morning of the fire, and occupied a room next that of Mr. Zoellner of London, said he went to bed at 11.45 o'clock. His room was hot, but he did not smell anything burning. Subsequently he was awakened by smoke. He heard someone in the hall calling "Fire!" Just then he detected a thick cloud of smoke, but he saw no signs of fire. Not sure that the fire was in the building, he put on his trousers and got out of the window.

"You weren't very excited over it, apparently?" asked Mr. Greer.

Witness replied that two weeks ago in Montreal he had an experience with fire in his office. He slid down a rope to the street. The explosion to him appeared like blasting more than anything else.

Zelgler's Room Examined.

The detectives reported to the Provincial Coroner that they had examined the room occupied by Ernest Zelgler, a young German, of Berlin, who was employed at the American Club, but did not find anything but a letter to his sister, which referred to his getting a job in a departmental store here.

"If you have satisfied yourselves that he had no connection with the fire there will be no necessity to detain him," replied the Provincial Coroner. "I rather thought he was somewhat confused while in the witness box."