

MAHANAY CITY'S WORST FIRE

FIREBUG ARRESTED, CONFESSES

Joseph Giblin, 45, Handyman Who Lives In Basement Under Chefs' Restaurant, Tells Local Police He Started The Fire

Joseph Michael Giblin, 45, confessed to authorities early this afternoon that he was the arsonist responsible for the disastrous fire which ravaged Mahanoy City's business district yesterday.

Giblin, who resides in the basement at the Chef Restaurant, 139 East Center street, where he was engaged as a handyman, made his statement voluntarily in the presence of local and state officials including Chief of Police A. P. McLaughlin and Patrolman Joseph Dombrowski, of the Mahanoy City Police Force; Donald K. Unger, Deputy State Fire Marshal, of Hazleton; E. W. McLaughlin, Special Agent, National Board of Fire Underwriters; James Hagarty, of the Reading office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; Cpl. Joseph Louches, of the State Police Barracks at Wyoming, and Pfc. Joseph Davey, of the State Police Barracks at Tamaqua.

In his confession, Giblin stated that he had procured cotton waste from the journal box of a coal gondola, which he had pushed through a crevice in a door in the garage at the rear of the Alshutz Wall Paper Store, 125 West Center street, about a half an hour before discovery of the blaze.

After igniting the cotton waste, he returned to the restaurant where he attended some chores. Later, while the fire was in progress, he said that he helped to remove some of the furnishings from the Recklitis Cafe, 205 West Center street, when it was threatened by the flames from the burning building across the street.

Following the making of his confession, Giblin was taken to the scene of the fire, where he reenacted his actions as he had recounted them to the police. While making his statement, Giblin wept at times, but insisted that he had not been drinking today. He protested that he did not know the reason for his actions and indicated that he was under the influence of intoxicating liquor.

Queried as to whether or not he had made an effort to turn in an alarm, Giblin said "no" but said that he knew how to do so and described the procedure.

Attributed with having made a statement some time ago to the effect that it was a long time since there had been a fire in town and pretty soon he (the person he was engaged in conversation with) would see a good one, Giblin said that he was willing to see the person who attributed to him the statement, or not, as the police might decide.

Taken into custody by Chief McLaughlin, he was removed to the local police station, where he made his confession shortly after the noon hour.

Native of Shenandoah, Giblin, who, it is said, is a native of Shenandoah came here some years ago and for a time had been employed on the local section gang.

Fire In 100 Block, North, West Center Street



Photograph taken from near Locust street, looking west as flames still mount from the burning debris of the city block which was razed by the flames.

TWO ENTIRE BUSINESS BLOCKS AND PARTS OF TWO OTHERS ARE PRACTICALLY LEVELLED BY BLAZE

(By JOSEPH H. DAVIS)

The most disastrous fire in the history of Mahanoy City laid waste, early on the morning of Memorial Day, a large area in the community's business district, entailing a loss that has been variously estimated between one and two million dollars. The section devastated in the holocaust extended along West Center street, beginning at Locust street and continuing through to Linden street. North and south, the fire raged from Railroad street to Market street.

Today, the smouldering ruins, a grim reminder of the worst conflagration ever to occur in the borough, was still being deluged with water by firemen. Thirty business buildings were either totally destroyed, extensively damaged or seriously affected by smoke and water, as were four homes and a row of garages extending along Railroad street from Locust street to below Linden street. Seven business places were also affected by the fire to a lesser degree, the principal damage being occasioned by smoke and water. Thirty-eight families, residing in apartments in the business area were made homeless and twenty-one business firms were either wiped out or suffered almost complete loss. Four others suffered heavy losses and eleven were affected to a lesser degree.

BUILDINGS DESTROYED

Totally destroyed were the buildings housing the following establishments; Baron's ladies wear store; Attorney Calvin J. Friedberg's offices, Anthony F. Adam's insurance office, Souchak beauty shop, Fried furniture store, Krebs drug store, Consolidated Millinery store, Friedberg's department store, L. A. Lutz Lumber Co., Guzinsky Factory Shoe Store, Alshutz Cut Rate Wall Paper Store, Dr. F. K. Wagner's dental office, Helen and Connie Beauty Shop, Galant's Economy Shop, Oberson's Globe Store, McLaren's Auto Supply store, R. Guinan and Co. department store, the Peter O'Brien property, Triangle Shoe Store, Rubens jewelry store, Siddell Dress Shop, William Fried, proprietor.

Locations Of The Properties Swept By Fire

- 101-103: First floor, Baron's store. Second floor; Offices of A. F. Adam, insurance representative, and Calvin J. Friedberg, Esq.; the beauty salon of Mrs. Peter Souchak and the Souchak apartment. Third floor: The apartment of Mrs. Paul Georges. Michael Dearcot is the proprietor.
105-107: First floor, Fried's Furniture Store, Ben Fried, proprietor. Mr. Fried and his family occupied the upper floors of the building.
109-111: First floor, the Krebs Drugstore. Mrs. George Hensly, owner, Mrs. Hensly, her son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Harrison James, and Mrs. Vivian Krebs, occupied the apartments in the building.
113: First floor, the Consolidated Millinery Store, Mrs. A. F. Adam, proprietor. Mr. and Mrs. Adam occupied the apartment above the store.
115: First floor, the Elmer Friedberg drygoods store, with the Friedberg family occupying the upper floors.
117-119: First floor, the L. A. Lutz Lumber Co. Second and third floors, apartments of Mr. and Mrs. Lutz, Mr. and Mrs. T. B. Van Buren and Mr. and Mrs. William Parfitt.
121-123: First floor, the Factory Shoe Store, with Mrs. George Guzinsky, the proprietor, residing on the premises.
125-127: First floor, Alshutz Cut Rate Wall Paper Store, David Alshutz, operator. Second floor: Dental offices of Dr. Frederick R. (Continued on Page Seven)

Fire Apparatus

Pumpers placed by the various fire companies were in action at the following points during the fire:
Humane company, first attached to the hydrant at Center and Linden streets, moved to Locust and Centre streets. Second truck was placed at Main and Vine Sts. Citizens pumper was at Locust and Pine Sts.
Good-American pumper at Main and Centre Sts.; Auxiliary defense pumping unit at Main and Market Sts.
West End company pumper at Pine and Linden Sts.; defense auxiliary at Catawissa and Market Sts.
Shenandoah, Polish-American pumper, on creek between Linden and Catawissa Sts.
Tamaqua, Citizens, pumper at Main and Birch Sts.
Frackville, Altamont, at Pine and A Sts.
Ashland company, at Main and Mahanoy Sts.
Gordon company pumper on creek, Locust and Linden.
Centralla company pumper, at Linden and Mahanoy. Bearing burned after half-hour or so in action.
Gilberton, Continental pumper at Catawissa and Pine Sts.
Shenandoah, Columbia and Park Crest firemen were assigned to patrol the fire area.

Extensively damaged were the Refowich building, in which is located the office of dentist, Dr. John F. Bonavich, Tulin's men's clothing store, Galant's Fur Shop, the Kapo properties, in the western half of which is located the former offices of Lt. Col. Peter J. Kapo, local X-ray specialist.

Homes destroyed beyond habitation were the apartment properties of Miss Ruth Snyder and Mrs. Anthony Wilsbach, the Kapo home, the residence of Mrs. Mary Kern, and the apartments of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Karazusky.

Thirty-eight families who resided in apartments in the area, who have been made homeless by the total destruction of the buildings in which they resided, include those of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Souchak, Mrs. Paul Georges, Ben Fried, Mrs. George Hensly, Mr. and Mrs. Harrison James, Mrs. Vivian Krebs, Mr. and Mrs. A. F. Adam, Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Fried, Mr. and Mrs. L. A. Lutz, Mr. and Mrs. T. B. Van Buren, Mr. and Mrs. William Parfitt, Mrs. George Guzinsky, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Golin, Jacob Fried, Sr., Mr. and Mrs. William Gabilin, Mr. and Mrs. A. Galant, Mrs. Irving Liner, Mr. and Mrs. I. Oberson, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Edwards, Mrs. Leah Shanfield, Mr. and Mrs. John McCormick, Mr. and Mrs. Morris Nitchun, Mr. and Mrs. George Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Karazusky, Miss Marge Flaherty, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Dixon, Mrs. R. Guinan, the Kapo family, Mr. and Mrs. Ceylon Richelderfer and family, Mrs. John Tulin, the Walter Blackwell family, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Coombes, Mr. and Mrs. Chas. Leisey, Mr. and Mrs. P. J. O'Brien, Mr. and Mrs. Philip Rubens, Mr. and Mrs. William Fried, Miss Snyder and Mrs. Wilsbach, the Misses Mary and Florence Ford, Mrs. Mary Kern.

PROPERTIES DAMAGED

Among the properties damaged by the fire were the Kotis cafe, the A. & P. Supermarket, the J. V. O'Connor property, the Gorman property, the Morris Burkett home, the Lafayette Market, the Recklitis cafe, the Dunlap cigar store, the Joseph Cook barber shop, the Patrick (Silver) O'Brien dwelling and the City Cafe, Frank Chmielowski, proprietor.

Business houses in the first block west of Main street suffered considerable smoke damage, while smoke cracked a window of the Miles and Timm store. At the Regal and Blum store at the west end of the block, on the north side, considerable smoke damage resulted as well as to the apartments above occupied by James P. Noonan, superintendent of the Mahanoy Township Public Schools, and Joseph Janowitch. In the latter apartment embers ignited window drapes through an open window. Fortunately it was discovered in time which factor, together with the fact that the business was of brick construction, prevented the spread of the fire into the remainder of the block.

THE INJURED

A number of local and regional firemen were injured during the fighting of the fire. Nine of the injuries were reported as serious. A majority received the ministrations of local physicians.

Dr. Mark Holland treated the following eleven of the injured firefighters. Those whom he treated included: Adam Balkiewicz, Shenandoah, sprain of the left shoulder and back; Earl Berger, of the local Washington Hook and Ladder Co., burns; Arthur Williams, Gilberton, burns of the hand; Joseph Shukaitis, local Merchant Marine presently home on furlough, burns of the mouth and face and lacerations of the hand; (Continued on page seven)

John Gallagher, Aged 87, Dies Here Last Night

John Gallagher, in his 87th year, a resident of Mahanoy City for 59 years, retired contractor and father of Attorneys James J. and Frank A. Gallagher, died at his home at 101 East Mahanoy street last night at 11:00 o'clock.

In ill health since last March, his condition was not considered serious and his death last night was unexpected coming as a shock to his family and friends.

The departed was born at Lock Haven and was a son of the late James and Margaret Gallagher. He was reared at Patriotic Hill and after his marriage to the late Mary Reing, located in Mahanoy City in 1892 spending the remainder of his life in this community.

First employed about the mines in the region he later engaged in the contracting business and after retiring from business accepted a position as stripping foreman for the P. & R. C. & I. Company. For the past 25 years he had lived retired.

A man of fine character, Mr. Gallagher was highly esteemed in this community and news of his passing was received with much sorrow.

Religiously he was a member of St. Canisius Church and was also a member of the Holy Name Society. His wife preceded him in death in December, 1929 and he is survived by the following children: C. M. Gallagher, New York City; Attorney James J. Gallagher, town; Mae, wife of Edmund Brennan, Poetsville; and Attorney Frank A. Gallagher, town. Two grandchildren also survive.

He was the last member of his family. The funeral will be held on Monday morning. Thomas Noonan, funeral director.

Killed In Action



William H. Lutz, Petty Officer Son of Mr. and Mrs. L. A. Lutz, who was reported killed in action while in the service of his country and who was buried at sea with full military honors.

Set Other Fires

Joseph Giblin, arrested for arson and who confesses to having been responsible for the disastrous Memorial Day fire, later admitted to the authorities that he also set fire to various buildings in town and vicinity within recent months, including the fire at the Polish hall here. All in all he is said to have admitted to seven attempts at arson. He is still being grilled by the authorities.

Denies Rumors Of Contract Rejection

Rumors circulating the region that the War Labor Board has rejected the contract negotiated between the U. M. W. of A. officials and the anthracite operators were denied by Joseph T. Kersheisky, of town, president of District 9, when contacted by phone today in Washington, D. C., where he is presently serving as a member of the negotiating committee, selected to present the contract to the WLB.

President Kersheisky stated that the committee had met at 10:30 o'clock this morning with the War Labor Board, which has not as yet made their decision. However, he emphasized, there is no foundation for the rumor that the contract has been rejected and the board's decision is still pending.

A special meeting of the Shenandoah Central Labor Union has been called for this evening, at 8 o'clock, at Shenandoah, to act upon important matters, of which this is believed to be one.

GOVERNOR VEToes BILL

Harrisburg, May 31. (U.P.)—A bill to permit school districts to rent vocational education facilities to public or private agencies was vetoed today by Gov. Edward Martin.

Martin objected to a specification in the measure that total income from such contracts should not exceed tuition charges.

"There is no reason why the taxpayer or real estate should be burdened with the expense of paying the difference between the tuition charges and the full cost of the program," he said.

VISITED AT READING

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Phillips and children and Mrs. Minnie Berger, of Frackville, spent yesterday visiting in Reading.

FIRE PICTURES ON PAGE 12

Additional pictures of the Memorial Day fire disaster will be found on page 12 of today's issue.