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# The Hartford Courant

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## Three-Alarm, \$5 Million Fire Destroys St. Joseph Cathedral; Seven Are Injured



FLAMES DESTROY CATHOLIC LANDMARK: St. Joseph Cathedral during the height of the blaze which turned largest Connecticut Roman Catholic Church into a raging inferno. Thousands were attracted to the scene which roared uncontrolled until noon. (Courant Photo by Robert B. Ficks).

### Courant Offers \$1,000 For Arson Conviction 7 Quizzed In Probe Of Arson Possibility

The Courant Monday offered a standing reward of \$1,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of any person or persons in connection with the wilful damage by fire of any church building, synagogue or other place of religious worship in Connecticut. If arson is involved in the fires at St. Patrick's Church and St. Joseph Cathedral, this offer applies also in the investigation of those occurrences.

In the event of more than one person claiming the said reward, or to be entitled to a share therein, it will be apportioned as the Chief of Police, Michael J. Godfrey, and a representative of The Hartford Courant deem just.

A \$5 million, three-alarm fire destroyed majestic St. Joseph Cathedral Monday in eight flaming, smoke-filled hours. The Rt. Rev. Msgr. William J. Collins, rector of the historic landmark, placed the loss at \$5 million but said that the replacement cost would probably far exceed that figure. Insurance, he said, is about \$4 million or 80 per cent of the cathedral's value.

The Hartford Fire Marshal's Office and Hartford police immediately launched an investigation into the possibility of arson. During the day seven men were picked up by police. Two were still being questioned late Monday night, as flames still flickered in the ruins.

**Pictures on Pages 10, 11**

By a strange twist of fate, it was the Fire Department chaplain, the Rev. Francis S. O'Neill, and Deputy Fire Chief James McSwegan who found the fire at 7:30 a.m. after Father O'Neill completed the 7 a.m. mass.

Smoke poured from the building continuously for hours. At 10:45 a.m. a large chunk of the ceiling over the main altar collapsed and flames roared the length and breadth of the imposing structure.

**Flames Break Through**

During the early hours only smoke was visible. No flames appeared until the break came in the ceiling. Then, like a roaring cyclone, fire swept the building breaking out great windows on the east, west and front of the cathedral.

**Fire Ruins West Granby Parsonage**

GRANBY, Dec. 31 (Special)—Fire gutted the West Granby Methodist Church parsonage this afternoon despite efforts of firemen who worked more than two hours to check the blaze.

**Minister Away**

The fire was discovered by Raymond Messenger, a resident nearby, at about 2:30 p.m.

At that time, the Rev. and Mrs. Donald W. Sower and their four children were at Old Sturbridge, Mass., with their guests, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Kysar of Evanston, Ill.

**Lowered By Rope**

Only minutes before the blaze broke into the open and roared through the building a squad of firemen under Capt. Raymond Daly had been on the roof of the sacristy area. Two of their number had just been overcome by smoke and had been lowered three stories to the ground by rope.

**6 Firemen Injured**

During the course of the blaze six firemen and a policeman were injured seriously enough to be admitted to hospitals.

They are:

- At St. Francis Hospital: Edward Stelmach, 30, of 32 Arnold St., of Truck Company 13, overcome by smoke on the sacristy roof condition good.
- Fire Marshal George F. Kennedy, 42, of 285 White St., overcome by smoke, condition fair.
- Kenneth Lindley, 22, of 207 Main St., struck in the head by a 90-pound hose, condition good.
- Charles Owen, 32, of 76 Ledgercrest Dr., Newington, overcome by smoke, condition good.
- At Hartford Hospital: William E. Powers, 31, 98 Lenox St., Manchester, back injured, hurt when parts of the cathedral ceiling struck him, condition good.
- Lt. John W. Covey, 52, of 58 Stafford St., back injury, hurt when ceiling fell, condition good.
- Police Sgt. James W. Jordan, 46, of 12 Kenneth St., broken wrist in fall outside cathedral, discharged.
- Lt. Covey and Fireman Powers were injured when a 20 foot section of ceiling in the basement chapel collapsed on them early in the fire. The two men were removed to the hospital by ambulance.

**Boilers Shut Off**

Water poured into the cathedral created a threat to the cathedral boilers in a low structure at the northwest corner of the building. The boilers were shut down early in the day.

The shut down cut off heat from the convent, rectory, chancery office, and two houses on

**Masses Set At Armory, Allyn Theater Today**

The Rt. Rev. Msgr. William J. Collins, rector of St. Joseph Cathedral which was destroyed by fire Monday, said masses will be held today at the State Armory.

Gov. Ribicoff offered the use of the State Armory to the church.

Seven Masses will be held at the State Armory from 5 a. m. to 11 a. m. today which is celebrated as the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord.

Originally, three masses had been planned for the Cathedral Hall but lack of heat made church officials decide to hold all seven masses at the Armory.

The parishoners of St. Patrick's Church which burned Sunday will attend mass at the Allyn Theater which has been made available to the church for as long as needed.

**1956 News Roundup In Courant Today**

A roundup of outstanding local and state news events of 1956, in the fields of political and economic affairs, education, health, religion, crime, courts, and top highlights, are featured in your Courant today on pages 24, 25, and 26 inclusive. Also listed on page 26 is a necrology for the past 12 months.

**Today's CHUCKLE**

It isn't what girls know that bothers parents. It's how they found out.

### Stoned Mona-Lisa To Get Warm Cell, Bolivian Says

PARIS, Dec. 31 (UP)—The bearded Bolivian who threw a stone and damaged the Mona Lisa, the world's most famous painting, had what he wanted today—a warm prison cell.

Police sources said Tigo Unzaga Villegas, 42, a native of La Paz, was jobless and broke. They said he had no other motive than getting jailed through the cold winter when he flung a marble-sized stone at the painting in the Louvre Museum.

In La Paz the man was identified as a nephew of the leader of Bolivia's chief opposition political party.

Unzaga is Unzaga de la Vega head of the Bolivian Socialist Falange. He once was imprisoned for alleged subversive activities and sent to the Curubana concentration camp, some 50 miles from La Paz. When released from the camp he was sent into exile abroad.

Art experts worked today to restore a finger-sized patch of paint from the elbow of the Leonardo da Vinci painting and to replace the glass cover which was shattered.

**Life Sentence Not What He Suspected**

HOLLISTER, Calif., Dec. 31 — (UP) Cruz E. Bocanegra, 33, stood before Justice of the Peace Lorena M. Johnson today, accused on a battery charge filed by his common-law wife.

"I am going to sentence you to life," said Justice Johnson.

Bocanegra blanched. Justice Johnson then explained she was directing him to marry the woman. They have five children.

And Justice Johnson added after Bocanegra serves a 60-day jail sentence for battery, she will perform the marriage ceremony—free.

**Enfield Woman Steps Out For Mail, Escapes Blast**

THOMPSONVILLE, Dec. 31 (Special)—An Enfield woman narrowly escaped death when a domestic hot water heater in her home exploded this afternoon.

Mrs. Anna Gudaszewski had just stepped outdoors to her mailbox when an old-fashioned wood-burning kitchen range with a hot water jacket exploded. She had lit the heater only a few minutes before the blast.

Damage to her home on Water Street, Scitico, was estimated at \$1,000.

Enfield police said a pipe in the jacket may have frozen, causing a tremendous pressure build-up in the system.

The force of the blast blew out windows and shattered plaster walls and ceilings in the small, one-story house. Pieces of the iron stove pierced kitchen walls.

New Year holiday traffic deaths Monday were running considerably below the record Christmas weekend toll but the worst of the four-day period—New Year's Eve—was still ahead.

By 10 p.m., EST, 261 persons had died in automobile accidents. There were 36 fire fatalities and 67 deaths in miscellaneous holiday accidents for an over-all toll of 364.

The count of New Year holiday fatalities which commenced at 6 p.m. Friday, will continue until midnight Tuesday.

During a similar 102-hour Christmas period 706 persons lost their lives in traffic mishaps, a record for any holiday. Added to these were 54 who died in fires and 124 in nontraffic accidents for an over-all total of 884, also a record.

The National Safety Council estimated before the New Year holiday began that 490 lives

would be lost in traffic over the long weekend. The record traffic toll for a New Year holiday is 407 during the four-day period of 1952-53.

The council has figured that between 35 and 40 million persons will be moving in vehicles during the New Year holiday compared with an estimated 45 million last weekend.

GREENWICH, Dec. 31 (UP)—Robert J. Erickson, 18, of 6 Blind Brook Lane, Rye, N.Y., was killed early today when his car struck a utility pole after failing to negotiate a curve on Old Field Point Rd., near Oak Ridge, Street here.

Raymond Tutolo, 19, of 16 Elizabeth St., Rye, escaped with minor injuries after being tossed from the car by the impact.

Erickson's body, pinned to the

front seat, had to be extricated by police and firemen.

This was the second holiday weekend traffic death in Connecticut.

The other occurred Sunday when Mrs. Andrew Martin, 47, was killed in West Haven as a car driven by her husband skidded on a snow-swept road and struck a utility pole.

Another violent death Sunday was that of Mrs. Betty Ronning, 44, who apparently fell on her doorstep in New London, hurt her head and lost consciousness. She was found frozen to death.

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### Road Toll Low But Danger Period Lies Ahead

New Year holiday traffic deaths Monday were running considerably below the record Christmas weekend toll but the worst of the four-day period—New Year's Eve—was still ahead.

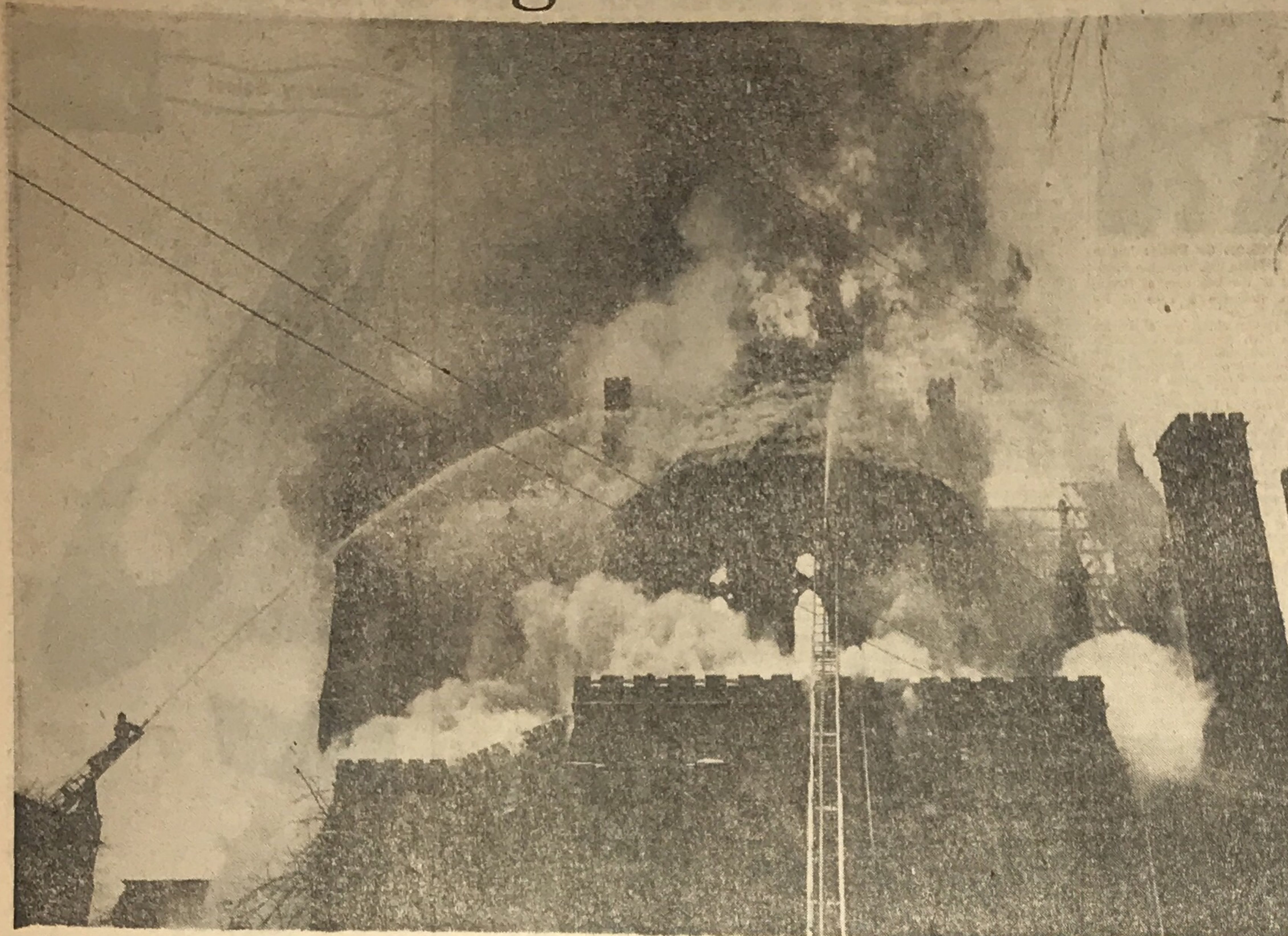
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# As Blaze Rages In Cathedral



**FIRE RAGES THROUGH CATHEDRAL:** Roaring flames and black clouds of smoke soar from the upper levels of St. Joseph's Cathedral in this picture made from the rear yard. A fireman atop an aerial ladder was one of many braving heat and falling debris to get water

into structure. ALL COURANT PHOTOS BY PHILIP J. ACQUAVIVA, ROBERT B. FICKS, HARRY BATZ, HERMAN F. MARSHALL, ARMAN J. HATSLAN, ARTHUR J. WARMSLEY, AND THOMAS J. SWEENEY.



**PRIEST SAVES CRUCIFIXES:** Priests, firemen, and policemen cooperated in carrying altar appointments and vestments from the burning church as fire became more threatening. Here, Rev. Mr. Edmund M. O'Brien carries out crucifixes.



**NUNS LEAVE CONVENT:** As a precautionary measure in the face of threat from the blazing church next to their convent nuns of

the Sisters of Mercy leave with some of their belongings for safer quarters.

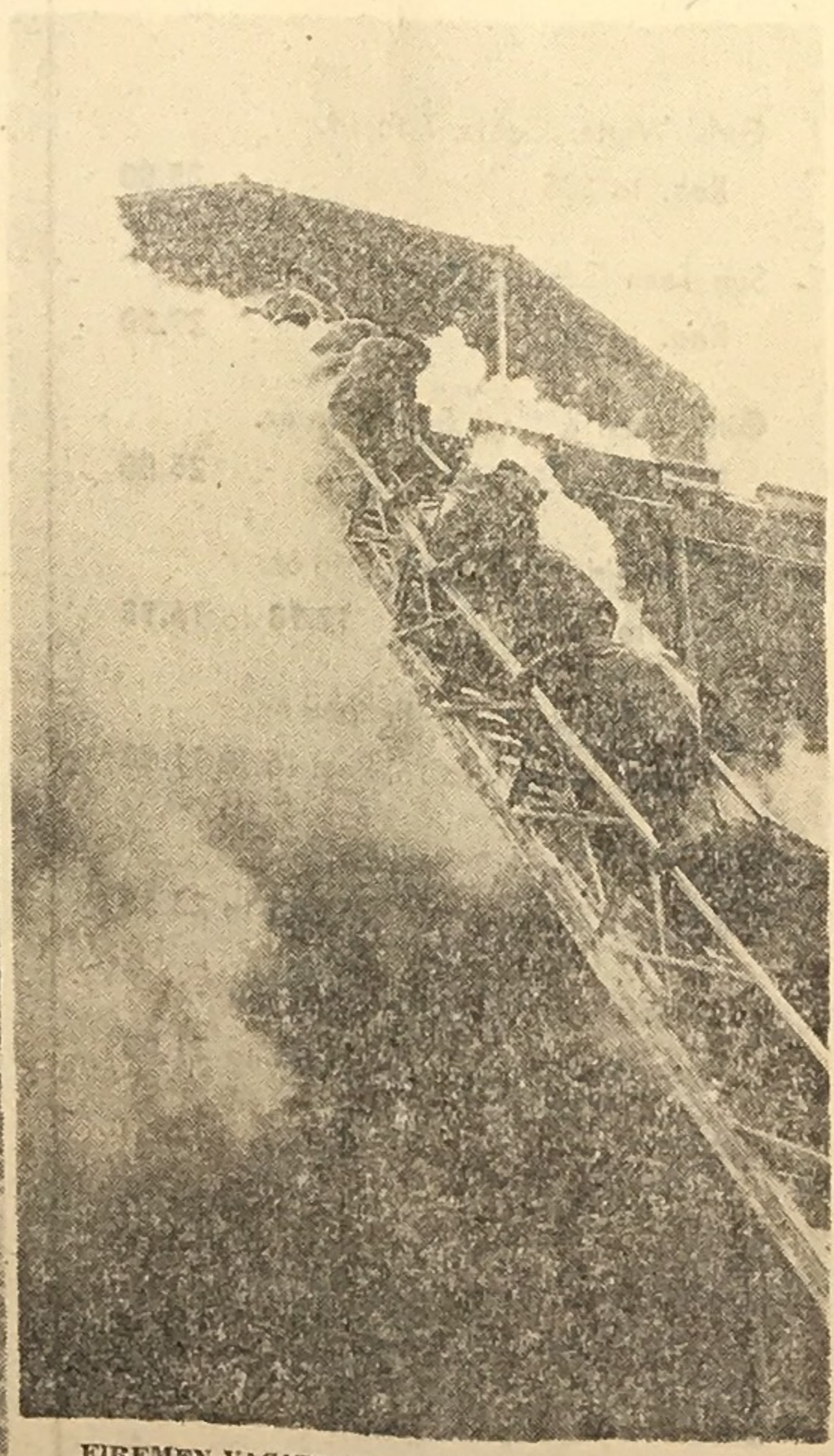


**CROWDS THROG TO FIRE SCENE:** A portion of the crowds of sightseers, many armed with still and movie cameras, who appeared at the scene of the spectacular fire. As word of the blaze spread police had a fulltime job in barricading surrounding streets and breaking up traffic stalls.



**FIREMEN FELLED:** A grimace of pain flashes across the face of Fire Captain Thomas McGuire, a victim of smoke inhalation. He was one of nearly a score of firefighters who

succumbed in varying degrees during their long fight. Shoulder in foreground is that of a doctor rushing to aid.



**FIREMEN VACATE ROOF:** After striving for several hours to bring the fire under control, firemen were forced to leave the burning room of the sacristy where the fire started in the basement. Soon after this picture was taken flames burst through the roof of the apse which encloses the main altar in the north of the cathedral.



**EMOTION PULLS AT ARCHBISHOP:** The impact of the second disastrous fire as St. Joseph's Cathedral burned is reflected in the face of Archbishop Henry J. O'Brien as he real-

izes church is doomed. At this point he was watching from within adjacent St. Joseph's School which he and other priests had to evacuate as fire grew worse.





