



NORDALE TRAGEDY—Landmark Nordale Hotel is billowing flames at Tuesday night's, Feb. 22, tragic fire. About four persons are presumed missing, among them famed and beloved Eva McGown, Fairbanks' official hostess. Three bodies have so far been recovered.

Gown, Fairbanks' official hostess. Three bodies have so far been recovered.

—Photo by FRANK MURPHY

Great Fire Destroys Nordale-

Famous Eva McGown Believed One of 4 Victims

FAIRBANKS—a blazing holocaust seen throughout the entire Fairbanks area roared through the wooden 3-story Nordale Hotel last week, bringing the

historic landmark to smoldering ruins and bringing injury and death to some hotel residents.

"It is more than likely that four fatalities" were suffered in the blaze, said Robert Sundberg, Fairbanks Chief of Police.

Many residents jumped from windows to escape smoke and flames or were rescued by some of the more than 100 firemen who fought the fire. Nine persons were taken to Fairbanks Community Hospital, Sundberg said, where five were treated and released and four remained in hospital care.

Among those treated and released was William H. Barnes, a 49-year-old unemployed heavy equipment mechanic.

But Barnes has received some notoriety in this area as the occupant of room 107 in the Nordale Hotel the night of the fire.

Room 107, according to Sundberg, "was the most probable place of origin" of the fire.

According to District Court

Judge Robson, who has been assigned the case, Barnes is now completing a five-day sentence on a charge of disorderly conduct. He was found drunk and asleep in another Hotel with a lighted cigar in his mouth.

He will appear before the judge, Robson said, Thursday morning at 10 a.m.

Meanwhile, construction workers and firemen, under the direction of Fire Chief Daniel Coben, continue to clear the remains of the building during the 9-10 hours of daylight, sifting through the smoldering debris to

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NORDALE HOTEL BURNS...

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find bodies of victims and remove property found in the building.

Three bodies have been found—two as late as last Monday—but only one, that of Earl Simpson, a railroad worker out of Anchorage, has been positive-identified.

One of the bodies, said Sundberg, "appears to be a female body."

Fairbanks residents generally concede that at least one woman, Mrs. Eva McGown, 88, official hostess for the city of Fairbanks, was probably killed in the fire. She was known to have been in her room at the hotel at the time the fire started.

Sunday afternoon, in memory of her and others who have lost their lives in the blaze, the university and Fairbanks symphony orchestra opened their concert with a Bach chorale.

For some time, officials have had difficulty establishing the identity of those registered in the hotel at the time of the fire because they could not locate the hotel register. Now it has been found.

"It was carbonized," Sundberg said, it "had been charred quite badly, but it has been very, very useful to us."

Everyone in the hotel has now been accounted for, he said, except for four persons who, presumably, are dead.

Even so, Fire Chief Coben is asking "anyone that has not contacted us and was in the hotel that night" to call the police desk, giving their name and phone number where they can be reached so that "we can interview them."

He has also asked anyone taking pictures before the fire department arrived and during the first five minutes of the fire contact the Fire Marshall's office here.

Some possessions, known to belong to the deceased, have been turned over to the police, the police chief said, but he will soon turn them over to the coroner, Col. Lincoln Ost.

People who had property

stored in the building will be able to contact the Fire Marshall next week, the fire chief said, and will be allowed to search through the stacks of property being put together in the city dump area, to find their possessions.

Also destroyed in the blaze were the Alaska Insurance Agency, the Nordale Barbershop and Martin Victor Furs.

Rep. State Senator John Butrovich, who owns Alaska Insurance Agency, said that his records were not harmed in the fire because they were stored in a vault.

But Martin Victor does not yet know the full extent of the damage to his furs.

"We were able to save at least 98 per cent of the customers' articles," he said, "things that come in and out of the store" for repairs. That is our first concern always. But we don't know about the other things yet, because our records were burned up."

Right now "we're going through the pain of checking it out," he said, "comparing recovered items with past inventories."

His firm is now relocated temporarily in the Lathrop Building, he said, until "we have built our new building on Second Avenue next to the Lathrop Building."

But this is not the first time he has had to face such a disaster.

"We feel like when we lost everything in the earthquake in Anchorage in '64, and the same thing in the flood of '67, and now we got a fire. But we're still going," he said.

With his son in Martin Victor Furs, he said, this makes the fourth generation in his family to be in this business. The company has been in operation in Alaska since 1929.

"We are so appreciative of everybody calling us from all over, offering help and well wishes," he added. "It makes it all worthwhile."