

**A tragic 1966 fire in Irondequoit led to several new safety protocols for the county wide public safety communications system.**

**The following was copied from Times Union and Democrat & Chronicle articles published in 1966**

# Woman, Youth Killed in Fire

TIMES UNION DEC 23 1966

A Rochester attorney's mother and a grandson of the founder of Hart Food Stores (Star Supermarkets) died early today as fire destroyed a five bedroom ranch house in the exclusive Huntington Hills section of Irondequoit.

The dead are:

Enola Tuthill, 81, mother of Marsden Tuthill, a member of the law firm of Harris Beach, Wilcox and Linowitz.

Peter Beckerman, 19, son of Mr. and Mrs. Murray Beckerman, who left Rochester a year ago to live in New York City.

Peter, a freshman at the University of Denver, graduated from Harley School in June.

Four others—Tuthill, his wife, Katheryn, 53, their son, David, 18, and daughter, Elizabeth, 21—escaped.

Peter was visiting David Tuthill, a friend from his days in the Rochester area.

Irondequoit Police said Tuthill's wife was awakened by potting glass about 2:30 a.m., woke her husband and began yelling to rouse the others.

She then ran out the front door.

Tuthill, making his way to the same door, found David groping his in the smoke and guided him outdoors.

Outside, Tuthill realized his mother and Peter were still inside. He ran in a rear kitchen door but was overcome by smoke.

David found him and dragged his unconscious father outside.

David and Mrs Tuthill dragged the attorney down the driveway. Tuthill was revived by Irondequoit Patrol-

Meanwhile the daughter jumped from her bedroom window, ran next door and tried to summon firefighters.

Irondequoit police said the elderly Mrs Tuthill was found in the dining room within three feet of the front door. Peter was on his bed.

The Monroe County Medical Examiners office reported both suffered massive body burns and carbon dioxide poisoning. The deaths were ruled accidental.

Point Pleasant Fire Chief Paul Mascari said, when his department arrived, half the house "was all hot flames".

Cause of the fire was not determined.

Police Officer Rowland Henderberg said the greatest concentration of heat was near the living room fireplace. However, the family told him the fireplace had not been used for three days.

Police said David was the last to go to bed at about 1 a.m. He told them everything appeared to be all right then.

Peter was the grandson of the late Alfred Hart, the store founder.

Relatives said he moved to New York City in the fall. He graduated from Harley and Indian Landing Grammer School, Brighton.

They said that Peter had been here for about a week and was visiting friends during Christmas vacation.

Surviving are his parents; a sister, Martha; his paternal grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Abe Beckerman; and his maternal grandmother, Mrs Alfred Hart.



**PETER BECKERMAN**



*Without or with offence to friends or foes I sketch your world exactly as it goes.—Byron*

ROCHESTER, N. Y., SATURDAY MORNING, DEC. 24, 1966

## Fire Alarm Delay Investigated

By Jack Tucker

Public Safety Commissioner Mark H. Touhey Jr. yesterday began a hard-look inquiry into delayed emergency calls to Fire Bureau dispatchers—in the wake of a tragic Huntington Hills, Irondequoit, house fire.

There was a time lag of from 10 to 15 minutes before volunteer firemen even knew there was a blaze. The fire broke out about 2:30 a.m.

By the time Point Pleasant firefighters could get to the flaming Marsden Tuthill's home, the fire was beyond control. There was no chance to save Tuthill's aged mother and a visiting collegian, although investigators believe the trapped victims could not have been rescued in any event.

Nearly all Monroe County's towns have contracts with the Rochester Fire Bureaus, whereby emergency calls are answered and the initial information relayed.

Virtually all volunteer firemen have two-way radios in their bedrooms, and this is the primary means of alert.

Point Pleasant Fire Chief Pauyl Mascari said last night his radio "sounded off" at 2:45 a.m. It was about that time the siren on the Point Pleasant firehouse—nearest to the fire scene—began blowing.

But at least 12 minutes earlier, several persons tried to reach city fire dispatchers—who operate in a building at Andrews and University Avenue—without success.

They said they dialed the correct number, 232-2121. Officer Dennis Saeva, night desk man for the Irondequoit Police Department, meanwhile kept trying the same number.

But someone had called the sheriff's office which, Saeva said, contacted him at 2:35 by radio to report "a bad fire in Huntington Hills".

Actually Chief Investigator Joseph J. Nalore of the City's Fire Investigation Division learned, Tuthill himself had managed to get to a phone in his smoke filled, burning home, dial the telephone operator and gasp before escaping:

"Fire! Huntington Hills!" Why all efforts over a span of 10 to 15 minutes went unanswered by city fire dispatchers could not be learned, pending investigation findings.

Such emergency calls are monitored (recorded) by plastic tape in the dispatchers office.

Whether the calls are automatically recorded is answered or not was unclear. City Fire Chief Edward Traugott said he believed calls had to be answered first. Commissioner

Please turn to 3A

# Fire Alarm Delay Probed by Tuohey

Continued from 1A

Touhey said he didn't think so.

When dispatchers receive a call from outside the city, a "tone" alarm is set off and it in turn sets off a siren alarm at the nearest volunteer firemen's headquarters. Each town firehouse has a separate tone alarm code.

The almost trapped Tuthill's gasped alarm to the telephone operator did produce quick results—from her and the sheriff's office.

#### Sheriff Reports

Sheriff Albert W. Skinner said last night that "a fire call for Huntington Hills" was called into his desk deputy at 2:32 a.m.

I was from the telephone operator, saying she had tried to reach the Fire Bureau dispatchers but couldn't get an answer.

"immediately afterward a man called, very excited, and said 'Get a fire company to Huntington Hills, the place is almost burned down'. Our own dispatcher tried to find out where the fire was, and the man said 'it's the eighth house in Huntington Hills off Wisner Road'.

"Our dispatcher used a direct line to Fire Bureau dispatchers" There was no answer. So he called Cobbs Hill (transmitting station) and asked the operator there if he would call the dispatchers. There was no answer."

At 2:34 a.m., the sheriff said, his office contacted the Irondequoit Police Department by radio. It was Officer Saeva who answered, and again, he had no luck in trying to raise city dispatchers.

#### Force of 3

The dispatchers' office calls for three men to be on round the clock duty.

Commissioner Tuohey, after ordering an investigation and issuing a formal statement, made no mention of how many dispatchers were on duty, who they are and why the critical delay occurred.

But under pressure, he said: "Yes there were three on duty...By Tuesday we should have a full report for publication".

It was learned that the three dispatchers were Frank E. Cantabene, Anthony Levecchi, and Ronald Ramsperger. None could be reached for comment, except that Cantabene indicated he was told not to say anything until the Tuohey probe is finished.

#### Supervisor's Reaction

Irondequoit Democratic Supervisor Harold L. Knauf, in expressing deep concern over the tragedy explained:

"the town is not actually involved so far as jurisdiction over the firehouses is concerned. The Volunteer firemen are under the jurisdiction of their own commissioners (there are 5). The volunteer departments, in other words, are separate entities".

Republican Town Councilman Sylvester Zicari said, however, that "the Town Board definitely is interested in seeing that this investigation and report are pushed in order to alleviate repetition.

"This is a very serious matter. WE depend on the Rochester Fire Bureau. There must be some fool proof controls set up. Such a tragedy cannot be allowed to happen again".

"How this lack of communication could happen in view of all the modern electronic equipment today, is hard to figure. A few minutes delay is mighty important."

Commissioner Tuohey, after a closed door session with fire, police and other officials, said he was ordering a police internal inspection of "all aspects" of the case, as it affects the Fire Bureau, that there was a possibility of a breakdown in communication".

**Democrat and Chronicle**

# Local News

ROCHESTER, N. Y., SATURDAY, DEC. 24, 1966

SECTION

B



-D&C Air Photo by Wahl Photographic Service

Air photo shows isolation of home in wooded, fashionable Huntington Hills section where two died in fire.

## *Woman, 81, Youth, 19, Die In Irondequoit Home Fire*

# Woman, 81, Youth, 19, Die In Irondequoit Home Fire

Investigators seek the cause of trouble in the county tone alarm system Page 1A

A local attorney and his son were wrapping Christmas presents until 1 a.m. yesterday in the living room of their home.

Little more than an hour later, fire raged through the house in the Huntington Hills section of Irondequoit claiming the lives of the attorney's elderly mother and a former Brighton youth who was visiting for the holidays.

Mrs. Enola Tuthill, 81, and Peter Hart Beckerman, 19 died in the blaze as the attorney, Marsden Tuthill was overcome by smoke trying to rescue them.

Beckerman, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Murray Beckerman, formerly of 320 Inwood Drive, Brighton and now of New York City was a freshman at the University of Denver. He was a grandson of the founder of Star Markets, Alfred Hart.

#### Started in Library

The fire started in the library, just off the master bedroom, where Tuthill and his son David, 18, had been wrapping presents, and spread up the walls and ceiling.

Cause of the fire is undetermined, according to City Battalian Chief Joseph Nalore, head of the fire investigation unit.

Tuthill, a member of Harris, Beach, Wilcox, Dale & Linowitz, his wife, Kathryn, 53, and their children, David and Elizabeth, 21, all escaped.

Tuthill's wife was awakened by smoke about 2:30 a.m. and had awakened her husband. They yelled to rouse the others.

Tuthill then tried to open the door to the library but was knocked back by heavy smoke. He closed the door and followed his wife through the living room toward the front door.

#### Led to Safety

On the way out, he found, David, awakened when his mother pounded on his door, groping in the smoke and guided him outside. Elizabeth had broken the screen on a window in her bedroom and jumped to the ground.

The Tuthills told fire investigators they gathered in front of their five-bedroom house and realized Tuthill's mother and Beckerman, who was visiting David, were not there.

David and Tuthill then tried to get into the back of the house by breaking down the kitchen door, but couldn't and returned to the front, they said.

Then David said, he missed his father thinking he might have gone inside, went to the back of the house again and found him on the kitchen floor.

#### Patrolman Arrives

He pulled him outside and was reviving him when Irondequoit Patrolman Martin Schlegel arrived. The attorney was treated at General Hospital.

Elizabeth in the meantime had run to a neighbors home and tried to call firemen, got no answer, then had driven to the Point Pleasant firehouse to summon aid. No one was there, she told Irondequoit Police.

Two of the neighbor's daughters, Debbie Hall and her sister put a 12 foot ladder against the back of the house a the bedroom where Beckerman was sleeping, firemen said. The girls father, Donald S. Hall, said the two were among several persons who helped in a rescue attempt. Hall refused to give the name of his other daughter.

A policeman who tried to climb into the room was driven back by the heavy smoke.

#### House in Flames

When Point Pleasant firefighters arrived, responding to a delayed call from city fire dispatchers, they found the house almost entirely in flames, Chief Paul Mascari said.

The elder Mrs. Tuthill's body was found in the dining room, within three feet of the front door. Beckerman was lying on his bed.

The Medical Examiner's Office said both died of massive body burns and carbon monoxide poisoning. Their deaths were ruled accidental.

David and Beckerman had been friends for several years, investigators were told. Beckerman was a graduate of the Harley School and of Indian Landing elementary School, Brighton, and had moved to New York City last year. He had been here about a week visiting friends.

Besides his parents, young Beckerman leaves a sister, Martha; his paternal grandparents, Mr and Mrs Abe Beckerman, 24 Penarrow Road, Brighton, and his maternal grandmother, Mrs. Alfred Hart, 28 Cypress St.

# 'House Was Engulfed' When Firemen Arrived

When his two-way radio sounded a Huntington Hills alert at 2:45 a.m. yesterday, Point Pleasant Fire Chief Paul Mascari awoke in a hurry at his home, 201 Lake Breeze Park.

Before I could get my trousers on, I heard on of our men on the radio answering the city dispatcher's voice, saying in what area the fire was, he said.

Mascari, who lives closest to the burned Tuthill residence, hopped into his car and arrived ahead of a stream of volunteer firemen—about 60 of them.

"we all have two-way radios at home," the chief stressed. "our boys were on the scene in four minutes".

\* \* \*

ASKED IF THERE appeared any chance whatever of saving the two trapped victims, Mascari said:

"We determined there was no one we could help. Neighbors had said they thought tow persons might be inside.

"The house was completely engulfed with flames shooting from the roof. We set up lines around the house and did what we could".

Emphasizing that Point Pleasant and other volunteer fire organizations respond to alarms as soon as an alert is sounded. Mascari said that "We can't very well go to a fire unless we first know about it".

Water was no problem. A hydrant is located across the road from the Tuthill home; another is 450 feet away. Three pumbers were used.

\* \* \*

As in most town firehouses, no one is on duty through the night. The two-way radios are key alarms; the firehouse siren sounds automatically.

Point Pleasant maintains an active force of 65 volunteer firemen, and 35 fire-police to control traffic. IT is considered in Mutual Aid circules as on of the most efficient well equipped volunteer organizations.

Sea Breeze firefighters filled in for Point Pleasant.

Monroe County Fire Coordinator Chief Clair E. Stewart said that, of 43 volunteer departments in the county, all but two ( Brighton and Fairport) have emergency-call contracts with the city Fire Bureau.

Chief Investigator Joseph J. Nalore of the city's Fire Investigation Division said there was no indication of arson in the Huntington Hills blaze.

# Fire Delay Terrifies Neighbors

By JAN STURDEVANT

Huntington Hills residents yesterday described themselves as "terrified" and "indignant" about the delay in alerting volunteer fireman Friday morning to the blaze that took two lives,

Point Pleasant firemen weren't alerted until 2:45 a.m., although the owner of the burning house, Marsden Tuthill, had himself turned in the alarm at 2:30.

Tuthill's aged mother, Mrs. Enola Tuthill, and a visiting college student, Perter Hart Beckerman, a former Brighton resident, died in the blaze. Four members of the Tuthill family escaped.

#### Probe Ordered

Rochester Public Safety Commissioner Mark H. Touhey ordered an immediate investigation of the charges that calls to the central fire dispatcher went unanswered. Though Touhey's report isn't due until Tuesday, the communication breakdown has been pinpointed at the dispatchers office.

Monroe County residents reporting a fire are supposed to call 232-2121 to alert the dispatchers, who operate from a building at Andrews Street and University Avenue. When a fire call comes in from outside the city, a "tone" alarm is set off, which in turn sets off a siren alarm at the volunteer firemen's headquarters nearest the blaze.

On Friday morning, however, for more than 15 minutes, no one at the dispatchers' office answered the calls which poured in from a telephone operator alerted by Tuthill, from the Sheriff's Office, from the Irondequoit Police Department and from Tuthill's neighbors in the exclusive Irondequoit section.

Huntington Hills residents were still shocked and angry yesterday.

#### Fear for Future

Mrs. Richard H. Wagner praised Chief Paul Mascari's Point Pleasant volunteers. But she worried aloud about the possibility of a future delay.

"Our department is always on the spot", she said. "This must have been a breakdown at the dispatchers office. We're all afraid now of the same thing happening again".

"It's horrible to turn people away from a firehouse", referring to an attendant at the Ridge-Culver fire hall who told Irondequoit Police that only the dispatchers' office could send out his unit's equipment.

"there isn't much reason to have confidence in this system", said Milo E. Webster.

## Fire Terrifies

### Neighbors

From Page 1B

"If you can't get the dispatcher when you call his number, it's no good."

Mrs. Lee J. Rusling agreed. "The idea of a central dispatcher is great" she said, "but something must have gone terribly wrong. They must have been having a Christmas party or something. Everybody in the neighborhood is very upset."

#### System Should Be Changed

Donald S. Hall, whose daughter tried in vain to alert firemen from Point Pleasant and Ridge-Culver, said bitterly, "The system certainly didn't work the other night. If it doesn't work any better than that, it should be changed. WE used to have an alarm box practically in front of the house. An alarm box still might be better than calling people who aren't on the job, if that's the case. Of course, it could be any number of reason, faulty relays or something like that".

Hall, who would change the systems, had no specific alterations in mind. Neither did Point Pleasant Chief Mascari, who still believes in the central dispatching system.

"Up to this incident," Mascari said, "the present system has been 100 per cent efficient. I don't know what this breakdown was. But everyone who gripes about the system ought to go to the dispatchers office and see for himself how the calls come in and how they're handled".

Mascari said the question of waiting for a dispatcher's signal before sending out equipment is optional for each fire company .

"I can only speak for my company", he said. "If we heard of a fire, we'd get going".

18B  
18B  
18B

Democrat and Chronicle

# Local News

ROCHESTER, N.Y., MONDAY, DEC. 26, 1966

## Fire Call Meeting Slated

A meeting of Irondequoit Town Board and the commissioners of the town's five fire districts will be held tonight or tomorrow night to set "a foolproof system" of fire protection.

Councilman Sylvester J. Zicari said the meeting is being arranged to prevent a recurrence of the delayed fire alarm early Friday morning in Huntington Hills, Irondequoit. Two died in the fire.

The delay apparently occurred in the city's dispatching office. Public Safety Commissioner Mark Tuohey Jr. has promised a report tomorrow.

"Most people are terrified and very upset" Zicari said. "I've received many telephone calls. They are deeply concerned."

"We want to get together to see that the situation is corrected so this will never happen again."

The town's fire districts are St. Paul, Point Pleasant, Laurelton, Ridge Culver and Seabreeze.

ROCHESTER, N.Y., MONDAY, DEC 27 1966

# *Fatal Fire Studied in Irondequoit*

Irondequoit officials huddled briefly yesterday to discuss the house fire in the town's exclusive Huntington Hills section that claimed two lives early Friday morning.

Neither Supervisor Harold J. Knauf nor Councilman Sylvester J. Zicari would elaborate on the meeting, held in Knauf's office, except to say that the Town Board wanted a report Public Safety Commissioner Mark H. Tuohey Jr. is preparing on the early morning tragedy.

Tuohey's report, to be released today, is expected to pinpoint reasons why neighbors had trouble contacting firemen to turn in an alarm.

#### **To Study Report**

Tuohey's report will be studied by Irondequoit town and fire district officials tonight or tomorrow night, Zicari said.

Zicari said the meeting lasted "only five or 10 minutes. We're going to meet with the fire district commissioners after we see Tuohey's report." Zicari said the meeting would be held in the Town Hall.

The delayed alarm, Zicari said, was "a downtown problem. We don't know if it was caused by faulty equipment or human error. We are interested in finding a solution so that this doesn't happen again. The town board doesn't have anything to do with this. The fire districts are separate but we want to meet with them".

#### **Time Lapse**

A 10 to 15 minute time lapse in the alarm for the fatal fire caused much comment and led to Tuohey's investigation. Irondequoit, like most towns in Monroe County, has a contract, with the Rochester Fire Bureau for relay of emergency calls. Paul Mascari, chief for Point Pleasant Fire District, said his two way radio sounded the alarm at 2:45 a.m. Friday. However, several persons reported that they had tried to call the city fire dispatchers at least 12 minutes earlier but no one answered.

Point Pleasant is one of five fire districts in Irondequoit. The others are St. Paul, Laurelton, Ridge-Culver and Sea Breeze.

The fire claimed the lives of Mrs. Enola Tuthill, 81, mother of Marsden Tuthill, a Rochester attorney, and Peter Hart Beckerman, 19, a house guest in the Tuthill home. Tuthill was overcome by smoke and dragged unconscious from the house by his son, David, 18.

Cause of the fire has not yet been determined, City Battalion Chief Joseph J. Naolare said last night. Chief Naolare is head of the fire investigation unit. "We haven't gone back to talk to the family," he said. Naolare talked to members of the Tuthill family at the scene that night.

**Democrat**

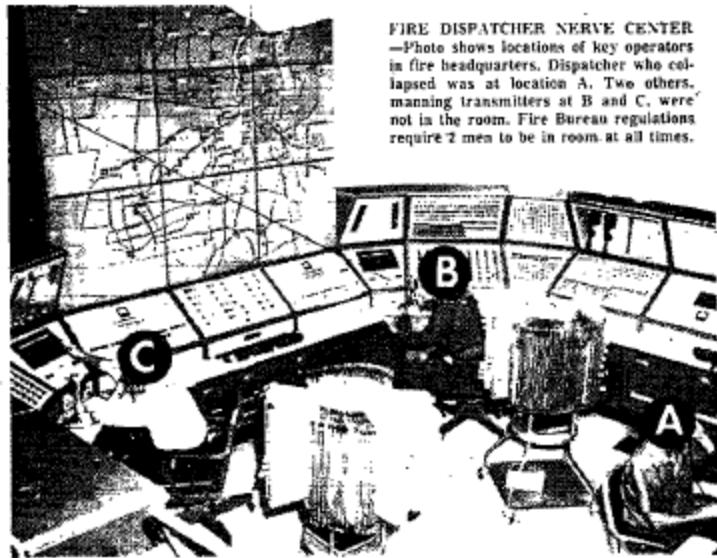


**Chris**

*Without or with offence to friends or foes I sketch your world exactly as it goes.—Byr*

ROCHESTER, N. Y., WEDNESDAY MORNING, DEC. 28, 1955.

## 9 Awful Minutes:



FIRE DISPATCHER NERVE CENTER  
—Photo shows locations of key operators in fire headquarters. Dispatcher who collapsed was at location A. Two others, manning transmitters at B and C, were not in the room. Fire Bureau regulations require 2 men to be in room at all times.



# Chronicle

Metro  
Edition

*'sketch your world exactly as it goes. — Byron'*

TUESDAY MORNING, DEC. 28, 1966

10 CENTS

## 9 Awful Minutes: Buzz, Buzz...

### Huntington Fire Alarm Tape

#### A Drama of Suspense

"Hunting.....Hunting.....Hunting....Huntington Hills...just give me....where is this...what town?"

It was fire dispatcher Anthony LeVecchi's first reaction to calls reporting a fire in Huntington Hills that took the lives of an elderly woman and an 18-year old youth last Friday morning.

Before that, LeVecchi was alone in a diabetic coma, according to a report by Public Safety Commissioner Mark H. Tuohy Jr.

Tuohy played a tape of fire calls received by the fire dispatcher's office from 2:10 a.m.

It began with LeVecchi's voice:

"Fire department"

"Man pinned in a car at 831 Carter. Send an ambulance."

"Right. National to 831 Carter 2:10"

Then there is a silence until 2:24 a.m. At that time, or anytime after 2:10, LeVecchi fell into a coma. His arm apparently nudged the switch that turns on the tape recorder.

For nine awful minutes there is nothing but the sound of a buzzing telephone on that tape.

It is during this period that Marsden Tuthill kept dialing the fire dispatcher number while his house in Huntington Hills was burning around him. The sheriff's department and residents of the area also were calling.

Then LeVecchi came to. HE picked up the telephone. Benny. Benny, where've you been? They've been trying to get you." the voice said, apparently thinking acting supervisor Frank Cantabene was answering.

"Fire department, uh, had a lot of calls".

"Another call: "Have you got 'em? Hello, hello, this is Point Pleasant."

"Fire department, what you got?"

"Bad house fire....got a kid trapped in Huntington Hills."

"Where? Where?"

"Huntington Hills."

"Hunting.....Hunting

Hunting.....Huntington Hills

.....just give me....where is

Please turn page

From 1A

### Fire Bureau Tape Tells 9 Awful Minutes

This.....what....tell me where."

"Irondequoit, Irondequoit, Point Pleasant."

"Fire department, Got a house fire, a kid is trapped..."

..."Okay, right away."

"Hurry that Huntington Hills, it's a bad one."

"Fire department."

"Irondequoit police. Get an ambulance out to Huntington Hills."

"Is this an accident."

"No, it's a house fire."

Another dispatcher, identified as Cantabene, answers the next call at 2:42 a.m.

"What's the trouble down there?" a voice apparently from the sheriff's office asks.

"I don't know, I just walked in" Cantabene said.

"There's got to be some answer; is your phone out of order or what?"

"Don't know, I'll check it out."

What the tape didn't record was the number of shouts into the other end of the telephone; "Fire, Huntington Hills!"

Point Pleasant's volunteer system wasn't alerted until 2:45 a.m.

By that time it was too late.



# Chronicle

Metro  
Edition

*sketch your world exactly as it goes.—Byron*

TUESDAY MORNING, DEC. 28, 1966

10 CENTS

## III Aide's Blackout Blamed for Lapse In Fire Protection

By BILL O'BRIEN

The city and most of the county was left unprotected by as many as 32 minutes the morning of Dec. 23.

The fire dispatcher was slumped over his switchboard in a diabetic coma as countless telephone calls came in for help on a fire that killed two persons in Huntington Hills, Irondequoit, early last Friday morning.

He was alone at the switchboard while two other dispatchers were "dozing and reading".

That same crew of three dispatchers—including the diabetic—are scheduled to be on duty today at 6 p.m. in the fire dispatcher's station.

### Light Duty Job

Disciplinary action is planned against at least one man—acting supervisor Frank E. Cantabene—for dereliction of duty.

These disclosures were made yesterday in a report by Public Safety Commissioner Mark H. Tuohey Jr.

The diabetic dispatcher is Firefighter Anthony LeVecchi. He has been assigned a dispatcher since April because of his condition. Dispatching is considered "Light Duty".

"Everybody was aware of LeVecchi's condition. That is why he was assigned there", said Battalion Chief Bernard Spillman, in charge of Fire Bureau communications.

### Blank Period

Tuohey had a tape played during a press conference that contained an incessant ringing of the dispatcher's telephone without answer for nine minutes.

LeVecchi's last recollection, Tuohey said, was answering a call for an ambulance at 831 Carter St. at 2:10 a.m. Dec 23.

Then, there is a blank period,



FIRE PROBE—Fire Chief Edward Traugott, left, with Public Safety Commissioner Mark Tuohey at hearing.

*Please turn page*



# Chronicle

Metro  
Edition

*'sketch your world exactly as it goes.—Byron'*

DAY MORNING, DEC. 28, 1966

10 CENTS

*From 1 A*

## Fire Alarm Lapse Aired

"that we just don't know about," he said.

At 2:24a.m. the tape recorder was turned on, presumably when LeVecchi fell forward or moved while in his diabetic coma. The tape must be turned on manually; it is not activated by a telephone call.

The dispatcher's telephone wasn't answered until 2:42 a.m. LeVecchi was left alone because, as Tuohey put it, Cantabene and Fire Fighter Ronald Ramsperger were "attending to personal needs".

Tuohey said Cantabene said he went to the kitchen off the dispatcher's office sometime between midnight and 1 a.m.

"He said he was dozing and reading and remembers LeVecchi coming out once in a while to fix himself coffee or cocoa," Tuohey said.

Ramsperger told Fire Chief Edward Traugott and Tuohey he went out about the same time, but to another section of the floor—where the dispatcher's office is located.

Ramsperger also testified he was "reading and dozing" in an office chair the same period. Tuohey said.

"This is absolutely not normal procedure to be away from the desk. They should have known our procedure is to have two men on that board and one away." Battalion Chief Spillman said.

Tuohey was asked if any of the dispatchers had been drinking.

"They said no alcohol was involved. The tapes indicate after they came on the air again, their voices were normal," Tuohey said.

In a statement, Tuohey said:

"The acting supervisor (Cantabene) was derelict in his duties in failing to provide an operation procedure for his assistants which would have avoided one man being totally responsible for all operating procedures.

"I have discussed the matter with Chief Traugott and disciplinary charges are being considered, a decision to rest upon completion of this investigation."

Later, Tuohey said he will "definitely bring charges" against Cantabene and possibly against others.

Disciplinary action can result in demotion, complete dismissal, a \$100 fine, suspension for two months of a written reprimand, Tuohey said.

"The men assigned to night duty at the communications center presently work a 14-hour shift (6 p.m.—8 a.m.) and I am recommending that their tour of duty be reduced to a shorter period of time.

"I will also recommend that a backup procedure be initiated through the Cobbs Hill police-fire operating center whereby in case of emergency, a dispatching unit can be activated", Tuohey said.

The public safety commissioner said he will initiate conferences with towns and villages that are a part of the fire dispatching system, "on ways of improving our fire dispatching system which has proved so reliable over the past 10 years."

Tuohey met nearly an hour with City Manager Seymour Scher before issuing his report yesterday afternoon.

"The report was made in my office, typed by my secretary, and changes were made by the city manager," Tuohey said.

December 29, 1966

4B

ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE  
Thursday, Dec. 29, 1966

For Lack of Backup Phone Systems

## Fire Alarm Mixup Could Happen in Other Towns

By RICK THOMAS

For lack of backup telephone answering systems, alarm calls to at least three suburban fire departments would go unheeded, if a dispatcher became incapacitated.

Officials of Gates-Chili, Laurelton (Irondequoit) and Barnard (Greece) departments last night conceded this to be the case with their telephone alarm systems.

Each department has checks, the officials said; which make the odds against an alarm not being answered "astronomical".

Still, they agreed, the alarm foul-up last Friday morning that contributed to the death of two persons in an Irondequoit house fire, could conceivably happen at their departments.

Laurelton Chief William Bailey, referring to the Friday telephone call that went unanswered for several minutes because a city dispatcher was stricken apparently by diabetic coma, said, "it's a possibility that could happen here. We've been contemplating an additional backup system for some time".

Laurelton, Gates-Chili and Barnard are three of six suburban departments, according to the Monroe County Volunteer Fireman's Association, that do their own dispatching. Fire alarm calls for the other 37 departments in the suburbs are processed through the city Fire Bureau, the association said.

The difference is that to reach Laurelton, Barnard or Gates-Chili you dial their respective numbers. To reach the rest you dial the city bureau, as did those who attempted to report Friday morning's life taking blaze.

The other three suburban districts with their own phone numbers—Fairport, Brighton and St. Paul—have elaborate backup systems which insure that a call will be answered if the dispatcher is unavailable.

At Laurelton, Bailey said, the telephone is manned by two men during the day and by one man at night. The phone rings only at the firehouse, and thus would go unheeded if the dispatcher failed to answer it.

Calls for Gates-Chili fireman, too, ring only at the department. The phone is in an apartment in the firehouse, where a fireman and his wife live.

Although at least one of the couple is always home. Chief George Forsythe said. "There's a one-in-a-million possibility something could go wrong."

"We have intentions of discussing this at our next meeting", Forsythe said.

Barnard has a minimum of two men on duty throughout the day and night, commissioner Martin Reichenberger said.

If there is a major fire, he said, the dispatchers who are full time firemen, go out on the call, leaving dispatching duties to volunteers.

"It's never happened before, and it may never happen, but it's conceivable there could be a time lapse of a minute or two between the time the fulltime man leaves and a volunteer replaces him," Reichenberger said.

Reichenberger is president of the New York State Fire Commissioners Association.

The three departments, like others in the county, once a year distribute stickers to each house, listing the department's phone number.

One backup measure that he may institute, Forsythe said, is to add the city Fire Bureau's number to the sticker, thus giving the caller an alternative number.

Reichenberger, Bailey and Forsythe agreed that common sense would dictate calling either the operator or police department if the fire number didn't answer, but noted that common sense does not always guide someone reporting a fire.

The Barnard department, with seven paid firemen and 80 volunteers, serves a four square mile portion of Greece, lying approximately between the city line, Mt. Read Boulevard, Denise Road, and North Ridge Road.

Laurelton serves an area of Irondequoit bounded on the west by Culver Road, on the east by the Float Bridge on Irondequoit Bay, on the south by Brett Road and Densmore Creek on the north. It has four paid firemen and 52 volunteers.

The Gates-Chili department, with no paid firemen and about 130 volunteers, serves all of Gates and the northeast corner of Chili.

According to Joseph Kuhns, president of the county firemen's association, outside of the city there are about 43 fire departments in the county.

They are operated by the town and village, by a fire district, or operate independently. The independent departments contract their services to municipalities.

Most departments, however, are under the jurisdiction of fire districts, where residents vote annually on commissioners and budgets, he said.



*Without or with offence to friends or foes I sketch your world exactly as it goes. —Byron*

ROCHESTER, N. Y., SATURDAY MORNING, DEC. 31, 1966

## 3 Dispatchers Charged in Alarm Delay

By BILL O'BRIEN

The three fire dispatchers on duty when calls for help on an Irondequoit fire Dec 23 that killed two persons went unanswered face charges of inefficiency and neglect of duty.

All three were suspended from the Rochester Fire Bureau as of today by Public Safety Commissioner Mark H. Tuohy jr.

They are Anthony LeVecchi, who was at the switchboard and blacked out for as long as 32 minutes; Ronald Ramsperger, who told police officials he was "dozing and reading" in another section of the dispatch station; and Frank E. Cantabene, the acting shift supervisor, who said he was in the station's kitchen.

Tuohy will conduct a hearing on the charges Jan 16.

Tuohy strongly denied speculation that any of the three may have been drinking.

"Due to the speculation on the part of certain individuals let me say categorically, once and for all, that there is no indication that any of the three men involved were in any way incapacitated by the use of an intoxication beverage," he said.

He said investigators checked activities and movements of the three men for a period of 24 hours before their tour of duty began.

The cause of LeVecchi's blackout has been pinpointed as a hypoglycemia attack by Dr. Louis Specter, the fireman's personal physician. Tuohy said this is similar to a fainting spell.

It is different from a diabetic coma—as the blackout was defined earlier this week—in that it was brought on by a deficiency of sugar in the bloodstream.

"With this type of condition there may often be some sort of

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## 3 Dispatchers Suspended, Face Inefficiency Charges

From 1 A

warning to the individual, but in the case of LeCecchi, who never suffered an attack previously, any symptoms might have been disguised by normal weariness and tiredness," Tuohy said.

LeVecchi takes prescription medication daily for his diabetic condition.

But on the morning before his tour of duty began, he failed to take the medication and "this may have precipitated the attack," Tuohy said.

It was during this attack, which started sometime after 2:10 a.m., the last tape recorded time LeVecchi answered the fire telephone, and 2:42 a.m., that calls from the Huntington Hills fire poured into the switchboard.

At 2:24 a.m. the tape recorder was turned on when LeVecchi nudged it during or after his collapse. Nine minutes of unanswered telephones buzzing is recorded.

Tuohy quoted from an anonymous letter he received from a Rochester firefighter to describe what happened:

"It was man who goofed, not the system."

He said the system has been in use 10 years and is "so good that it took a catastrophe to point out a weak spot—human failure."

### 'Fail-Safe' System

Tuohy said he has taken steps to help make the fire dispatching system "fail-safe".

—He has directed Fire Chief Edward Traugott to cut the 14 hour shift for men assigned to the communications center to eight hours. This becomes effective Monday.

—A "large and loud-sounding bell" has been installed in the communications center. The bell can be activated by radio tones from another dispatch center on Cobbs Hill. The man on duty at Cobbs Hill will be able to ring that loud bell and alert the men in the downtown center regardless of where they are in the building.

### **Cross-Check Plan**

—A cross-checking system between the Cobbs Hill and downtown stations has been put into use. On the quarter and half hours, a direct telephone contact must be made between the two stations. On the hour and half hour, radio checks and station identification must be made with the Federal Communications Commission.

—The Cobbs Hill center has been equipped as a complete backup station to the regular fire dispatcher. Cobbs Hill will be able to duplicate all duties of the fire dispatcher in an emergency.

—Tuohey and Rochester Telephone Corp. are setting up a system under which any call to the Fire Bureau that is unanswered for 30 seconds will automatically be relayed to another point.