MANY DEAD!

Ford's Old Theatre Wrecked.

FLOORS CAVED IN

Cavalry Ordered Out to Clear the Streets.

WHAT THE WITNESSES SAY

Interviews with Some of the Rescued.

CARRYING BODIES OUT

Sixteen Dead Recovered Up to 2 P. M.

WASHINGTON, June 9.—Ford's old Opera House on Tenth street was wrecked this morning. A great many persons were killed. Up to noon it was impossible to state just how many. It was just before 10 o'clock this morning when the accident happened. For several days workmen have been excavating for an electric plant.

This excavating was responsible for the accident. The workmen had undermined the walls of the old opera house. The building itself had been condemned a long time ago, but sentiment had left it untouched. The opera house is known in history as the theatre in which John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Lincoln.

There were over 400 Government and other clerks in the building at the time the catastrophe occurred. Although some escaped with their lives, scores of them were more or less injured. Many who were taken to the hospitals may yet die of their injuries.

The Emergency Hospital was soon filled beyond its capacity with the bodies of the dead and dying. Other hospitals were also pressed into service. The injuries to those who were not killed outright are of the severest character. Fractured arms and legs and crushed heads are among the majority of the hurts.

The news of the accident spread over the city and surrounding country quickly and excitement was intense. The scene of the disaster was soon blockaded with persons. Thousands of excited persons ran about looking for friends and relatives.

Cavalry Ordered Out.

At 10:45 o'clock eight dead bodies were taken out of the ruins. They were removed to the Morgue, but were not identified. Gen. Schofield ordered out two troops of cavalry from Fort Meyer—just across the river—and two companies of infantry from the arsenal to the damaged opera house.

The Secretary of the Navy also ordered out all the naval medical officers stationed in Washington, and also opened the Naval Hospital to receive the injured. The Commandant of the Navy was directed to render all the assistance in his power in caring for the injured.

Perhaps Eighty Dead.

At 10:50 o'clock it was feared that there were eighty bodies under the ruins, and great efforts were making to get them out. The first of these to be extricated from the mass of timber and debris was Howard S. Miller of Ohio and an unknown man who was horribly mangled. He died before reaching the Emergency Hospital. Among others taken there with serious injuries were the following:

Some of the Injured.

FRED CLAVERT.
CHARLES METCALF.
S. D. DEWEY.
WILLIAM LECOLTURE.
F. N. TEST.
—— KUGHLER.
PENNINGTON AMES.
CHARLES R. MILLER.
C. F. HATHAWAY.
R. M. PATRICK.
J. A. STEWART.
B. F. SIMS.
LOUIS DUSAPY.
G. N. MCLAUGHLIN.

Up to 10:50 o'clock ten dead bodies had been removed. Few or none of them could be identified. One of the workmen, a colored man, who was employed in excavating the cellar, dug his way out about 11 o'clock with the assistance of those around him, and was soon able to tell something of his experience.

Said he: "I told them yesterday that the archway would fall, for any time any one walked over the floor it would bend. There were twenty men working with me when the accident happened, and I don't know what has become of them. I think that many of them have been killed, for the heavy timbers and other building material rattled down upon us like hail."

At 11 o'clock the remains of a young man, not identified, were taken to the Morgue. This made the number who had been killed eleven, with the probabilities that every few minutes would add to the list, for those buried under the ruins were being searched for diligently.

The police and firemen made great efforts to reach them, and were assisted by the militia. The blockaded streets added to the great trouble in clearing the scene. The cavalry arrived about 11 o'clock to beat back the excited crowd.

Weakness Caused Collapse.

The top floor collapsed through weakness, caused by excavating the cellar below, and in its fall carried down the other two floors, and with them the clerks employed there. After the floors crashed to the ground the walls were left standing, but they were believed to be in a very insecure condition, and it was feared that they might topple over with still more serious results.

When the floors fell in the terrific report, as though of an explosion, could be heard many blocks away. Dust, smoke and ashes arose from the disordered mass of timbers, while from the broken windows in the walls clerks were trying hard to reach the ground safely.

They gesticulated and shouted to persons below to save them. In many instances, driven frantic by their danger, they leaped headlong from the third story, and in these cases had limbs badly broken. The floors had been heavily loaded with records and documents in the Records and Pensions division of the War Department. The clerks employed were all men.

Clerk James M. Stewart was one of those who jumped, thereby saving his life. He leaped from a rear window of the second floor just as it began giving way.

He said that there must be over 100 clerks under the falling walls, and considered it marvellous that any had been brought out alive.

He was employed with others in the Surgeon-Geeeral's office. He thinks the pension clerks were among those who fared the worst.

Clerk Stewart, continuing his story, said:

"The first indication we had was a snapping noise, followed by a tremendous crashing sound.

"Then there was a great cloud of dust. Looking around I saw the third floor falling quickly. Immediately a cloud of dust arose so dense that we could not see through it.

"The first intimation I had of the fall of the second floor was when I started forward to render help, when I found myself facing a chasm. Below was a mass of crushed and struggling humanity, and I jumped."

The efforts to save the wounded were heroic, but painfully slow. The cries of the injured clerks were heard above the rush and roar.

Clerks Tell Their Stories.

Cliffe Lowe, the son of Judge Lowe, who was Supreme Justice of Iowa for many years, had a deep cut in the back of his head.

"I was at work on the first floor," said Mr. Lowe, as the blood streamed from his wound. "Suddenly I heard a terrific noise and began to run. I was caught, however, before I reached the door and pinned down for a moment, but with the help of an iron bar I managed to extricate myself."

T. S. Lowry of 609 Third street, bleeding from numerous cuts on his face and head, and his clothes torn to shreds, was painfully creeping down Tenth street. He said:

"I was at work on the second floor near the door of the room in which were about one hundred other clerks. Suddenly I was enveloped in a mass of ruins. I managed to struggle out. I know not how."

C. A. Huper of 2,032 I street was in a badly cut up and bruised condition. He was unconscious and said he was at work on the second floor when there was a crash and he found himself buried in a mass of lime and timbers.

He managed to extricate himself in a few moments. Only about sixty of the 450 clerks were able to escape, he said.

At noon connected accounts as to the cause of the accident were partially obtainable.

The excavations, which were the immediate cause of the collapse, were being made at the instance of the War Department, for the purpose of putting in an electric light plant.

The insecurity of the building had been repeatedly reported.

For a long time past whenever a heavy loaded wagon has gone by the building seemed to sway backward and forward, as the clerks describe the sensation.

When the first rumbling warning of the approaching collapse came, the clerks on the third floor, to the number of eighty or 100, rushed to the windows and jumped for the roof of an adjoining structure. Some of them thus escaped.

George M. Arnold, a colored clerk appointed from Virginia, was seen at a third-story window. He was warned not to jump, but despite the protestations of numbers of people he climbed out, and, lowering himself from the sill, let go. He fell upon a covering at a lower door and slid off into the cobble-stoned alley, striking on his head, and was instantly killed. His head was mashed to a jelly, and the cobbles for a distance of several yards were bespattered with blood.

The Walls Left Intact.

Although the walls of the building are intact, the interior, from the top floor to the basement, is cut out as if with a gigantic knife. Heavy iron rafters and girders are bent and twisted as though they were wire.

Every few minutes a dead body or a wounded man was brought out during the morning, placed in an ambulance and sent to the Morgue or Hospital.

When the noon hour arrived eleven had been taken out dead and the work of removing others was still in progress.

Heroism of a Boy.

One of the bravest and most daring incidents of the calamity was performed by a colored boy, 19 or 20 years of age, by the name of Basil Lockwood. As soon as the floors collapsed and the dust cleared away, realizing the danger of those at the rear windows, who were wildly attempting to climb out, and, calling for aid, he climbed up a large telegraph pole as high as the third story and lashed a ladder to the pole, putting the other end in the window. By this means ten or fifteen were assisted down the ladder in safety.

Gen. Grant Talks of the Disaster.

The question of the responsibility of the accident was of course earnestly discussed, even while the work of rescue was progressing.

Assistant Secretary Grant was one of the first officials to visit the scene of the disaster, and immediately gave orders by telephone and mounnted messengers to the officers of the department to render all possible aid.

Gen. Grant said to a reporter, speaking under pressure of great emotion: "I am appalled at the magnitude of the disaster. It is impossible for me to say anything as to the cause, for I know nothing of the condition of the building."

Chief A. G. Shunt Killed.

The dead body of A. G. Shunt of Gettysburg, Pa., the Chief of the office, was dug out of the ruins at 12:10 o'clock.

Business, public and private, was practically suspended, and the crowd around the demolished building kept increasing. The drug stores and many of the business houses have been transformed into emergency hospitals, and almost every physician and surgeon in the city is in volunteer service. The majority of the clerks were veterans of the war.

At 12:30 o'clock another dead body, that of H. S. Wood, reached the Emergency Hospital.

About the same time the mangled body of a clerk by the name of Jarvis was taken from the debris. He had been crushed to death by a great mass of lumber.

More of Those Injured.

The following persons, all seriously, but not fatally injured, were taken to a neighboring drug store:

J. H. Thomas.

F. B. Smith.

A. N. Gerault and —— Esterling of Fort Scott, Kan.

—— Shadbolt of Missouri, a colored man.

Officer Pody of the police force was badly hurt after the accident while assisting others out.

When the Crash Came.

The building stood on Tenth street, northwest, between E and F streets, and not far from Pennsylvania avenue. There were 475 persons, mostly Government clerks, employed in the building, and nearly all of these were at work when the building fell.

An excavation for an electric light plant was being made in the cellar of the structure —a three-story affair, and, according to the best information obtainable, the workmen this morning had dug beneath the foundation supports in the front of the building, weakening them to such an extent that the walls gave way before they could be jacked.

This explanation of the cause of the accident is the one advanced, but it seems somewhat strange in view of the fact that the top floor gave way first.

Men who were in the building say the crash came without warning. Those on the top floor were suddenly precipitated to the floor below, and the weight of falling timber and furniture carried the second and first floors with it.

Fortunately, only the forward half of the floors gave way. The outer ends of the floors and the rear part of the structure remained. The walls did not fall.

Within an hour the news was known all over Washington, and hundreds of anxious relatives and friends swarmed to the vicinity of the old theatre. Women appealed anxiously to every bystander for information about some particular person, while men came with tears in their eyes and imploringly besought the policemen to let them through the police lines that they might obtain some knowledge of their friends and relatives.

A general fire alarm was turned a few minutes after the crash and then all the ambulances in the city were summoned. As quickly as possible the police and firemen formed a reserve brigade and ready hands assisted them to take out the killed and wounded. Police and army ambulances, cabs, carriages and vehicles of every description were pressed into service for carrying away the dead and injured.

Found Near an Historical Spot.

Those who were early on the scene found the body of a colored man in the alley in the rear of the building, where John Wilkes Booth had his horse tethered the night he killed Lincoln. This was George M. Arnold, a well known colored clerk. He had been last seen at a third-story window.

To the occupants of each floor there seemed but one crash, and each thought that his floor fell first. Instantly the whole building was filled with blinding lime dust. Running directly through all of the floors and in the middle of the building was a light well, ten feet or more long and nearly as many wide. The fatal area was in front of this, leaving a space of six or seven feet in width undisturbed on both sides.

Many Narrow Escapes.

There were many very narrow escapes from death. A number of clerks whose desks rested directly upon the line where the floors broke away saved themselves, while the desks at which they sat were precipitated down the awful chasm.

Others who were walking across the room heard an ominous sound and stopped just at the very threshold of death. When the crash came, those who survived heard a mighty scream of anguish from their comrades as they sank out of sight, and then groping in the darkness they found their way to safety, trembling in every joint with the pallor of the dead on their faces.

No women were employed in the building, but in a few minutes after the crash came the wives, mothers and daughters of the victims began to arrive. Within a very few moments 100 or more men stripped for hot work, jumped into the building and began throwing out the wreckage in front and under the floors which remained standing in the rear.

Wreckage by Wholesale.

It was apparent at 1 o'clock that it would be two or three hours before the mass of debris can all be cleared away and the exact number of those who went down in the crash known.

Near the front wall of the building still remains a great mass of wreckage which has not yet been explored, and its position is such as to leave no doubt that several bodies will yet be found beneath it.

When the crash came there were supposed to be in the building, besides the clerks, eighteen messengers and twenty laborers, making a total of over 500 persons.

Those who were most seriously injured were attended to immediately, while the others, groaning and crying from the pain of broken limbs, lay beseeching the doctors to dress their wounds.

The crowds at the main hospital greatly interfered with the work of the physicians, and Dr. Kerr determined to put them out.

Load after load of the wounded, blind from the debris, and with limbs broken and maimed, were dumped at the door.

They had to remain outside for some time, as the force and facilities of the hospital were unequal to the emergency.

As quickly as the surgeons, who were reinforced by the young men graduates of the city, could do so, they examined and dressed the wounds, and patients were then sent upstairs to more comfortable quarters.

It was with great difficulty that the policemen could keep the relatives of the injured out of the building, while outside their agonizing cries could be distinctly heard by the poor unfortunates who lay helpless.

Priests and ministers were soon on the spot, and when admitted repaired to the cots of the injured, where they administered spiritual consolation.

Sixteen Dead up to 2 P. M.

Sixteen dead bodies had reached the Morgue up to 2 o'clock. More victims of the accident were momentarily expected.

The Hospital Lists.

A tour of the city hospitals resulted in obtaining the following additional details respecting the arrivals of dead and injured:

Emergency Hospital, twenty-two injured; four dead; names not taken.

Providence Hospital, E. Leger (Miss.) head cut and injured internally:

W. S. Gustin (Ohio), left arm broken.

National Homœopathic Hospital—Clifton Lowe (Iowa), scalp injured.

Freedmen's Hospital—Dr. James H. Howard (colored, Maryland), scalp cut and internal injuries. He is a graduate of Howard University and married.

Garfield Memorial Hospital—John H. Thomas (Sedalia, Mo.), arm broken.

The Government Blamed.

The destruction of the old theatre this morning, involving a frightful loss of life among the clerks of the Surgeon-General's office of the army, calls attention to the fact that the Government, itself, is chiefly responsible for the disaster. It is in the opinion of many, guilty of murder, just as much as if it had fired a gatling gun into the ranks of the clerks.

For years it has been the policy of the Government to rent the worst tumbledown rattraps in the city of Washington for the housing of its surplus employes of the various departments, while the War Department proper is located in one of the most magnificent office buildings owned by any Government in the world.

These 475 clerks of the Surgeon-General's office have been packed away in an old dilapidated building that had outlived its usefulness. Since the time when John Wilkes Booth jumped out of one of its back windows after having assassinated President Lincoln, time and again the building has been condemned and numberless letters and personal appeals have been made to the authorities to remove the clerks from their dangerous situation. Not only was the building unsafe, but scores of affidavits have been made that the sanitary condition of the building was dangerous.

Another Disaster Feared.

It has been the common talk among the War Department clerks for the past two or three years that there would be a disaster some day, and relatives of several clerks who have died of fevers and like complaints have openly charged that death was caused by the filthy and unhealthy condition of the building.

The Government hears, but heeds not. Another fatal calamity is impending that bids fair to be a thousand fold worse than that of this morning. The Government printing office is on the point of falling down, and has been in that condition for years.

This is not a wild statement or guess work, but the cold truth, and it is to be found on record officially in the shape of several reports of Congressional committees testifying to the fact that the many hundreds of employes in the big printing shop are in daily and hourly peril of instant death, because the old frame structure in which they work will some day surely collapse under the weight of the great presses and the thousands of tons of paper and books.

Warnings from Congressmen.

Senators and Representatives in Congress have several times brought these startling facts to public attention in impassioned speeches, but the warnings have not been heeded.

The money for a new printing office has been appropriated, but owing to the wrangling among the real estate speculators regarding the selection of a site the money remains in the Treasury and the printers remain in the tinder box at the risk of their lives.

The Government seems strangely obtuse on this subject, and a dozen instances of reckless disregard of life could be cited. A few years ago a building that had been a dozen times officially condemned was rented for the use of the city Post Office and was occupied until the walls could be heard to crack above the noise of the office, and another temporary home was furnished until the new municipal building shall be finished.

The relatives of the clerks killed to-day are loud in their denunciation of the reckless disregard of human life shown by the Government authorities who are themselves located in fine new buildings.

HISTORY OF THE THEATRE.

It Was Originally the Old Tenth Street Baptist Church.

The building which was wrecked to-daywas now the Army Medical Museum. It was originally the old Tenth Street Baptist Church. It was a medium-sized structure, and was painted white. About forty years ago the Ford brothers of Baltimore purchased the property and transformed it into a theatre.

The interior was entirely removed, but the old walls were left standing. It was used as a playhouse until several years later, when it was destroyed by fire.

The Ford's then built a spacious brick theatre on the site of the old building. It was in this theatre that President Lincoln was assassinated on the Good Friday night of 1865 by John Wilkes Booth.

After this event the Government closed the theatre and finally bought the property for about $150,000. Again the interior of the structure was remodelled and adapted to the use of the Surgeon-General.

The museum proper occupied the three floors of the building. While it was originally established for the purpose of investigating the wounds and diseases incidental to war, its scope has broadened so rapidly that it lately included all interesting objects of medical and surgical study.

It was said to be the only museum of its kind in the world. Labor and money had been expended on it to an almost unlimited extent. There were no less than 22,000 specimens arranged with great care and system within the walls of the museum.

A large collection of human crania were exhibited in the anatomical section for the purpose of the study of ethnology.

In the miscellaneous sections were, among other exhibits, the latest appliances for the treatment of diseases.

The second floor of the building contained the medical library of the Goverment, a library which was said to contain more medical literature than the British Museum or the National Library of France.

The entire building was usually filled with a force of clerks and officers employed in examining and compiling the records pertaining to the Medical and Hospital department of the army.

A strange coincidence is that the old theatre is wrecked on the day of the funeral of Edwin Booth, brother of John Wilkes Booth.