

# BIG CROWD SEES

## EMPRESS BURN;

### DAMAGE \$15,000

Theater Was to Have Re-opened Sunday—Insurance \$21,000.

## ALL FIRE EQUIPMENT FIGHTS THREE HOURS

To Probe Cause—Blaze Believed to Have Started in Basement.

Fire which started in the basement of the New Empress theater shortly after 9 o'clock last night destroyed the front part of the building. Damage is estimated at \$15,000.

The theater was to have been re-opened Sunday with the "New York Cabaret." It was closed Monday when W. M. Abrahamson terminated the contract of the Manhattan Opera company. Improvements to the playhouse costing several thousand dollars were completed only recently. Abrahamson canceled \$10,000 insurance on the house Jan. 1, leaving \$21,000.

#### All Equipment Out.

All Duluth fire fighting crews and equipment, except those in Lakeside and New Duluth, were kept busy until after midnight and traffic on East Superior street suffered a delay of more than an hour. A crowd of 5,000 packed the street.

The blaze had gained much headway when the alarm was turned in at 9:27 o'clock, and firemen were handicapped by dense smoke which defied efforts to reach the fire in the front central portion of the theater. It is supposed that the blaze originated in a paint room, where highly inflammable material was stored.

#### Cause Uncertain.

The theater was deserted when the fire started. Abrahamson had left the box office for the Zelda theater at 8:30 o'clock. William Madigan, janitor, left the theater 5 minutes before smoke was seen bursting from the windows and could not account for the blaze.

Members of the opera company, whose trunks were stored in the theater after their engagement was terminated, had removed their belongings in the afternoon. It was said. According to Abrahamson, the paint room was locked and the only keys were in the hands of the theater management.

#### Will Investigate.

Investigation will be made today to determine more accurately the source of the blaze and estimate the damage.

Abrahamson does not believe the fire had any connection with his controversy with the opera troupe over salaries. Late yesterday afternoon he conferred with Ray M. Hughes, attorney for the players, and agreed to stand the expense of returning the stranded players to New

# EMPRESS IS BURNED; LOSS ABOUT \$15,000

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York. It was stated that the dispute had been closed amicably and nobody had any grievance.

"I don't know if I will rebuild," said Abrahamson. "I am in too much of a muddle right now to say what I am going to do."

## Woman Spreads Alarm.

Detective Donald H. Irvine turned in the alarm after Mrs. G. J. Docken, who conducts the Empress hotel a few doors from the theater, detected smoke and ran to the street to spread the alarm. John Pendergast, stage manager, was with the detective and unlocked the theater doors immediately.

Important papers were recovered from the box office by firemen. Ten baseball scoreboards, worth \$1,000, stored in the front end of the building, were destroyed. More serious damage was averted when firemen kept the blaze from the stage, saving scenery and other valuable equipment.

## Building Flooded.

Much of the damage was done by water and smoke. For three hours the new triple combination gasoline pumpers and several fire engines fed a dozen lines of hose which played steady streams into the building from all sides.

At 11 o'clock the flames burst through the roof and Commissioner Hicken's new \$12,000 aerial truck was used for the first time in fire conditions. The 75-foot aerial ladder was sprung and mounted automatically part of the way. Hand power pulled it to proper position and the ladder was converted into a water tower, from which a stream was thrown down into the interior of the theater.

Chief Randall, alarmed by the glare of a furnace in the interior of the theater, called for help from West Duluth shortly after 11 o'clock. A triple combination was sent.

By midnight clouds of steam instead of smoke told that the blaze was under control and the crowd dispersed. It was found that the flooring was burned away for a distance of 60 feet back from the entrance, that the balcony had fallen on one side and the roof was partially burned away. The entire theater was drenched.

Norman Johnson, drummer in the Empress orchestra, discovered the only freak of the fire. After the smoke had cleared sufficiently to admit him to the orchestra pit he found his drum unharmed, but the sticks, laying on top of it, burned in two.

The Empress was opened in the fall of 1905. It was first known as the Bijou theater. The Sullivan-Considine circuit absorbed it and conducted the house for six years. Abrahamson took over the playhouse two years ago. The building is valued at \$48,000.

James Allen, assistant at the theater, was to have left tonight for Chicago to witness a production of the "New York Cabaret" preparatory to the opening here Sunday. This piece, a seven tabloid offering, was to be followed with the "Henpecked Husband."