



FIREMEN MOP UP LAST OF EARLY MORNING RAILROAD SHOP BLAZE ON MEETING STREET Wall At Upper Left (Arrow) Collapsed Soon After This Picture Was Taken. (Aerial Photo By Jordan Flown By Carolina Skyways)

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## Fire Hits Southern Railway Shops Here

By WILLIAM CHAPMAN  
News and Courier Staff Writer  
A spectacular pre-dawn fire raged through the century-old Southern Railway Co. shops at the corner of Meeting and Columbus Streets yesterday.

The rambling two-story brick structure, completely vacant for the last 11 years, was almost totally destroyed. Origin of the blaze was unknown but firemen believe vagrants started it accidentally.

Steady northwest winds sent sparks from the blaze flying out over adjacent buildings and started a small blaze on the roof of the Wesley Methodist Church. It was quickly extinguished.

The fire, first reported at 4:20 a.m., apparently started on the second floor near the center of the old building and quickly spread into almost every corner. Only the

extreme northeast corner was untouched.

At the peak of the fire, flames soared high into the air and dark clouds of smoke rose skyward. Nearly 100 firemen poured streams of water into the building from every direction but the heavy timber beams blazed on for almost three hours. Not until 1:30 p.m. yesterday afternoon—nine hours after the first alarm—did firemen roll away the last of their equipment.

The building's tin roof broke away in large strips, then curled up and crashed to the ground. A foot-thick brick wall in the westernmost wing collapsed shortly after noon.

City fire inspectors had sought since last December to have the vacant building demolished or fenced off to prevent vagrants

from using it as a camping ground. Several small blazes have been extinguished there in past months.

City Fire Inspector Marion L. Patterson said yesterday he appealed to Southern Railway officials in Washington, D. C., last Thursday either to seal up the building or tear it down. He said conferences with local officials had been carried on since the first of the year.

The railroad yesterday was making immediate plans to raze the hollow shell which remained standing. D. N. Shrum, Southern district engineer, said the company already is seeking bids from wreckers who will knock down the thick walls and clear away the debris. He said the company wants

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### Flames Sweep Old Southern Railway Shops

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to get them down "as soon as possible."

Inspector Patterson said the railroad has cooperated with the city recently by arresting vagrants discovered using the building.

Patterson asked what caused the fire, said, "The only thing I can attribute it to is transients building a fire in there to keep warm." He said the building is almost a total loss but no estimate of the damage has been made. Further inspections will be made tomorrow and Tuesday, he added.

Two city firemen were slightly injured fighting the blaze. Leon Myers suffered a minor back injury when struck by a ladder, but was treated at a hospital and released. J. P. Kennedy was stunned by a falling beam, but returned to his fire-fighting post.

About 70 regular and 30 auxiliary firemen battled the blaze. Two trucks and six pumpers were dispatched to the scene. Red Cross

volunteer workers served coffee to the tired firefighters.

Chief Fred C. Shokes' first step was to douse the adjacent buildings with water in an attempt to prevent the fire from spreading and firemen took up posts on nearby roofs. Plate glass windows of a Meeting Street auto parts supply house were shattered by the heat. Workmen repaired them yesterday afternoon.

The second alarm, given at 4:29 a.m. after an assistant chief arrived on the scene, sent off the loud sirens which awakened many a slumbering Charlestonian. Chief Shokes said the siren alarm is the quickest method of rounding up the off duty crew considered necessary for a blaze of that scope.

"We needed to get them there in a hurry," the fire chief said. He approved the decision of his assistant in sounding the siren alarm after discovering the extent of the blaze, the flying sparks and the brisk wind.

The railroad shop was built in 1838. It was used until 1947 as a warehouse and machine shop, but had been vacant since that time.

Local Southern Railway officials said they could not estimate the

damage yesterday and railroad executives in Charlotte said no estimate could be obtained before tomorrow.

The smoldering embers flared up again briefly late last night but the small blaze was quickly extinguished. A piece of the roof collapsed, stirring up the latent fire. Firemen from Company 7 doused it and remained to investigate other sections of the flooring.

Yesterday's major blaze, plus a number of other calls, kept Charleston's firemen busy over a 24-hour period. Several false alarms were reported and small fires were extinguished on Queen Street and on C Street.

One tired Company 7 fireman stared wearily at the last minute flare-up around midnight and remarked that he hadn't been to bed in many hours.

"I'm going to be a hard man to find tomorrow," he vowed.