

June 20,
2025

DFM DISPATCH

Denver
Firefighters
Museum

THE MOST ANTICIPATED ARTICLE EACH MONTH

COLLECTIONS SPOTLIGHT!

DENVER'S MASONIC LODGE FIRE

The Masonic Lodge building, located at 1614 Welton, on the corner of Welton St. and 16th St. Mall, is a historic building constructed in 1890. The Masonic Lodge had red rock face sandstone with heavy timber serving as the building's super structure. It stood 5 stories tall and consumed a quarter of a city block housing commercial occupancies on the first level while the remainder of the floors along with the basement served Lodge purposes.

On March 3, 1984, a large fire occurred within the building. The first alarm for the fire was called in at 7:02 pm. When Denver Fire Department companies arrived, Lodge members in the middle of having a meeting on the second floor reported smelling smoke. Fire crews found the building to be secure except for the stairway door which the Lodge members used to exit the building. Fire companies stretched a fire hose to the second floor using the stairwell on Welton St. next to the Colorado Athletic Club (CAC). The firefighters found the center core wall hot to the touch. They removed the base from the wall only to have smoke and heat pour out into the room. They punched holes into the plaster wall to expose the fire to their fire hoses. The firefighters were quickly overwhelmed when the second floor flashed (everything burst into flames) and the fire crews were forced to dive out the window that had a ladder for a second means of egress. A second alarm sounded at

7:30 pm to bring more support from DFD. The third alarm sounded at 8:30 pm. The fourth, or general, alarm sounded at 10:08 pm.

All firefighters know that fire burns up and out. That means this fire was far below the firefighters inside the Lodge building. Fire crews regrouped and attacked the fire from the basement. When they went into the basement, they found the fire had already consumed a large amount of timber and embers were falling from the ceiling. This could only mean that the fire had been burning for a long period of time and the fire had now spread throughout the entire structure. Fire crews went to the roof to try to vent the fire from the building. As fire crews opened the roof and skylights, smoke poured out and they knew all floors below were involved.

At this point, fire crews were fighting the fire from protected positions. This became a defensive fire, meaning to protect exposures. The stairwell on the Welton St. side between the CAC and Masonic Lodge was the only safe haven. Even though the building was constructed nearly a century before this fire, this stairway was built like a "protect in place" stairwell you see in buildings today. The crews ventilating the roof used this stairwell to protect themselves. Hose line crews along with the ventilation crew were still in this stairway attempting to exit the building when the entire structure failed at approximately 10:30 pm. The

Lodge building and its contents endured heavy damage from the fire. The roof and all floors pancaked in on the basement.

Scene investigation by Denver's Fire Investigators determined that three separate fires were set in the Lodge. The fire setter(s) used gasoline to accelerate the fires. Two of the fires burned themselves out, but a third fire in the Lodge basement burned undetected for hours. This gave fire investigators a timeline of when the fire setter(s) was in the building. They also knew the fire setter(s) had keys to the building and flower shop on the ground floor since the building was secured when DFD arrived. One week prior to the fire, the Masonic Lodge and the building developer announced a \$6 million renovation was underway. All tenants were informed that they would be forced to leave. The owner of the flower shop was arrested for first degree arson, found guilty by a jury, and sentenced to sixteen years in prison.

Win the Contest!

Be the first to correctly answer the question below and you will win a free t-shirt from the museum of your choosing (dependent on sizing availability). Email museum staff at director@denverfirefightersmuseum.org or call us at (303) 892-1436 to give us your answer!

Question: Who was the Denver Fire Department Chief in 1984 when the Masonic Lodge Fire occurred?