



The New York Times

**BATTLING QUEENS SCHOOL BLAZE:** Firemen aim water at P.S. 5 at 30-11 29th Street in the Astoria section

## 700 Pupils Flee Burning Queens School in 3 Minutes

By **ALFRED E. CLARK**

More than 700 children were safely evacuated yesterday in three minutes from an Astoria, Queens, public school that was destroyed in a four-alarm fire.

The youngsters, who ranged in age from 4 (prekindergarten) to 11 (fifth grade), marched in orderly files to the street under the guidance of their teachers and other adult overseers.

Fire Marshal Vincent M.

Canty said that an 8-year-old pupil at the school admitted that he had been in an empty classroom at lunchtime and had set the fire in a clothes closet while playing with matches. The child's name was withheld because of his age.

Miss E. Patricia Burns, the school's principal for the last 10 years, said after checking to see that all her charges were safe:

"Thank God for fire drills.

It's a miracle that no one was burned to death."

Only two injuries were reported. Fireman John Sullivan, 33, of Tower Ladder 1 was struck on his left hand by flying glass and cut severely. He was admitted for treatment at Elmhurst General Hospital. Raymond Taylor, 30, a custodian's helper at the school, was treated at Astoria General Hospital for smoke inhalation and released.

Outside, the youngsters

stood patiently behind police lines as their anxious parents and relatives hurried to the fire at Public School 5 at 30-11 29th Street. The 63-year-old school was to be closed at the end of the year and be replaced by a new building across the street. It is situated in a quiet middle-class neighborhood of homes and apartment houses.

Hundreds of spectators

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# 700 Pupils March Out Safely as Fire Destroys Queens School

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joined the children and watched shooting flames and belching smoke engulf the block-long building. Buildings Commissioner Charles G. Moerdler, who drove to the fire scene, declared that the school had been cited as recently as last February for defective doors and holes in walls and ceilings.

Both parents and children had praise for Mrs. Lorraine Tompkins, who discovered the fire in her third-grade classroom on the second floor of the four-story red-brick building.

The pupils had just returned from their luncheon recess to the 21 classrooms in the school. Mrs. Tompkins noticed smoke seeping beneath the door of the coat closet. She directed the children to line up at their desks and dispatched a monitor to Miss Burns's office.

## Alarm Is Sounded

The principal immediately called a fire alarm by sounding the internal bell system in her office three times. Teachers throughout the building ordered the children to get their coats and to form double lines.

The pupils were promptly led downstairs and out of the school while someone pulled the lever on a wall fire-alarm report box that sent a signal to Fire Headquarters at 1:04 P.M.

Among the first of more than 150 firemen who responded to the alarms with 29 pieces of equipment was Harold J. Maloney of Engine Company 263. Mr. Maloney knew that two of his grandchildren, Kim Maloney, 10, and Kathy Maloney, 6, were pupils in the school.

The fireman's wife, Mary, saw him as he was hurrying toward the burning building. She cried:



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**Pupils evacuated from P.S. 5 in Astoria watch firemen battle school blaze. Vantage point is a nearby laundrette.**

"Harry, the children. They're all right!"

Mr. Maloney went on with his duties and—he said later—"With a lot of worry off my mind."

One fifth-grade youngster caused moments of anguish. He was reported missing after a head count of youngsters who waited with their teachers for

parents, relatives and family friends to take them to their homes.

A police radio car raced to his home. They found the boy there and brought him back to the school. He told Miss Burns that he had a stomach ache and had decided not to return to afternoon class. Miss Burns ran her hand through his tousled hair and exclaimed: "Thank heavens, you're safe."

Some of the children and their parents were taken home in police squad cars, after a loud-speaker on a Fire Department truck announced:

"All the kindergarten and grade-school children in P.S. 5 and their teachers have been evacuated without harm."

The fire grew to four alarms in 47 minutes. The equipment used to fight it included two 75-foot ladder towers that had been sent from Manhattan. Firemen standing on the tower platforms were able to send streams of water from high-power pressure hoses directly on the fire.

Soon after the fourth alarm was sounded at 1:51 P.M., about 15 firemen were directed to leave the central portion of the building where the school auditorium was situated. In a few minutes the ceiling and roof of the auditorium collapsed. No firemen were injured.

Firemen said the stairs and walls were quickly consumed by the flames and intense heat. Acting Fire Chief Charles J. Stressler expressed doubt that anything could be salvaged once the flames died. The fire was declared under control at 4:36 P.M.

A four-block section around the school was cordoned off. Store owners and residents of

buildings nearby were ordered to leave the area because of the danger of collapsing walls.

George Lent, a public relations representative of the Board of Education, said that as far as damage to a school building was concerned, "This is the worst one that anybody on the board can recall."

Assistant Superintendent of Schools Jerome G. Kovalcik, spokesman for the Board of Education, said that as far as he knew, "there was never a worse fire in terms of damage to school property." He said the school system in this century had been "unusually lucky" in not having had any major fires.

The modern school that is to replace P.S. 5 was described as 95 per cent complete. The school, designated as P.S. 17, was scheduled for opening early next year.

However, Arthur G. Paletta, acting director of the office of School Buildings, said that he would inspect the new building today and see if it could be rushed to completion by next month.

The Board of Education issued the following instructions for reporting to classes this morning for pupils of P.S. 5:

¶Prekindergarten, kindergarten and first-grade pupils are to report to P.S. 7, 26-13 21st Street.

¶Second-graders, P.S. 6, 31-36 Steinway Street.

¶Third-graders, P.S. 70, 30-45 42d Street.

¶Fourth-graders, P.S. 166, 33-09 35th Avenue.

¶Fifth-graders, P.S. 171, 14-14 29th Avenue.

All of the schools are situated in Astoria and Long Island City, Queens.