

Long Beach, CA Double Pier Collapses, May 1913

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400 FALL AS PIER CRASHES; 33 DIE.

CALIFORNIA CROWD PLUNGES FORTY FEET TO GROUND AS BEACH STRUCTURE COLLAPSES.

200 PERSONS ARE INJURED.

THRONG OF 25,000 THROWN INTO WILD PANIC AFTER DISASTER NEAR LOS ANGELES.

MOST OF VICTIMS WOMEN.

Tragedy Occurs at Celebration of "Empire Day" In Honor of Queen Victoria's Anniversary.

Special to The New York Times.

Long Beach, Cal., May 24 -- While 10,000 persons were massed on a double-deck pier in front of the City Auditorium to-day, celebrating "British Empire Day," a section of the upper floor gave way and 400 were plunged to the beach, forty feet below. Those on the top deck fell upon the hundreds crowded on the lower deck, and all were dashed down a chute of shattered woodwork to the tide-washed sands.

Thirty-three persons -- mostly women -- were killed by the shivered timbers or crushed to death by the falling bodies of companions and friends. Fifty more were seriously injured, while hysteria and fright caused the disabling of scores of others. The total number of injured may reach 200.

A section of the auditorium which went down in the crash was added to the wreckage that fell of top of the injured and the dead.

Nearly all the dead and injured were residents of Los Angeles or its vicinity, and most of them were subjects or former subjects of Great Britain.

The dead are:

MRS. FRANK MAATTHEWS.

DAVID BLACK, aged 7.

MRS. DAN THOMAS.

MRS. AUGUST BARTZ.

MRS. D. D. McSPARRON.

MRS. JAMES NICOL.

MRS. CHESSHIRE.

MRS. ARTHUR HELPS.

MRS. A. K. HILL.

HAROLD LETTS.

FANNIE McGEE.

MRS. D. S. HOLMES.

MARTHA J. BENNET.

MRS. D. J. LOMAS.
MRS. D. E. WALLACE.
MRS. C. H. LAWRENCE.
MRS. JANE WYVEL.
MRS. WARREN C. LETTYS, and a daughter, DOROTHY.
MRS. E. C. VALENTINE.
MRS. FRANK SHAW.
MRS. EMMA PRIGMORE.
MRS. ELIZABETH HANNAH RICHARDSON.
MRS. PAULINE McGEHEE.
THOMAS BECK.
MRS. LILY M. HOLMES.
Son of H. L. BAYLES.
MRS. ADA E. INGRAHAM.
MRS. ANNA LONGFELLOW.
MRS. WILLIAMSON.
MRS. D. McPHARRON.
MISS ANNA STONE.

25,000 See Disaster.

The calamity brought to a sudden end the celebration of the birthday anniversary of Queen Victoria, which was attended by 25,000 persons. The decayed condition of the timbers supporting the structure, which jutted out over the beach, is blamed for the disaster.

The tide was out at the time and the people were plunged to the hard beach when the floor slipped from under their feet with the suddenness of a trap on a hangman's scaffold.

All the doctors in the city are working to-night, and their efforts are reinforced by surgeons and nurses who came from Los Angeles when appeals for aid were sent to that city shortly after noon to-day.

The accident occurred a few minutes before 12 o'clock. The Empire Day parade, the principal feature of the celebration, had just ended, and the participants, with thousands of other visitors, were crowding up the steps of the pier and surging toward the auditorium when the pier floor sagged. An instant later the supports gave way and the crack and groan of breaking timbers mingled with the shrieks and cries of the victims, as all went down into a mass on the sand.

The entire landing of the pier was wrecked and a part of the auditorium front fell.

Pier Overburdened.

The cause of the accident was the overburdening of the pier. This, according to an official statement tonight, was due to the delay in unlocking the doors of the auditorium. Had the doors been unlocked at the proper time, it was asserted, the crowd would have got into the auditorium, instead of massing at the doors, where the weight overwhelmed the pier supports.

Scottish bagpipers had just entered the portal of the auditorium and were marking time when the crash came. Inside others were singing "America."

When the auditorium front fell those near the door tried to get out of the pier, and went down on top of the scores who already lay hurt or dying on the sand.

Mayor HATCH of Long Beach, who was to have been one of the speakers at the celebration, was in the throng on the pier, and at first was reported to be among the dead or injured. He escaped unhurt, however, and, aided by Mayor GEORGE ALEXANDER of Los Angeles, who came down at the head of that city's public hospital corps and

several platoons of police, helped direct the work of rescue.

Throng Beyond Control.

In addition to the thousands gathered on the pier and its approaches the strand was thronged. There was no warning. A resounding crash alarmed them and panic spread from end to end of the beach, while women began to shriek. Then occurred a desperate rush for the stairways as the flooring gave way, and the victims slid into the gaping hole as into a huge funnel.

Soon the huge pile of wreckage marking the spot where the dead and wounded were was surrounded by a dense throng, which overwhelmed the comparatively few policemen on the strand, and for some time rendered futile every effort at rescue.

The police could not get through the crowds, even when Chief of Police AUSTIN gathered his entire force on the scene. An appeal was sent to Los Angeles, twenty-four miles away, for reinforcements. These came in automobiles and, after helping to drive back the overwrought crowd, they assisted in succoring the injured and removing the dead.

The first body taken out of the wreckage was that of MRS. ARTHUR C. HELPS, one of the most prominent society women in Long Beach, and the body of MRS. WALLACE, whose daughter is proprietor of the Bently Grand Theatre, was next. The bodies of twenty-six women were placed in a row on the sands west of the Auditorium. Near them were placed the injured, as they were brought out.

One hundred automobiles, many of which had carried British notables in the parade, were pressed into service to carry the injured to the hospitals.

If the accident had occurred at high tide, hundreds of persons would have been drowned.

The crowd massed about the Auditorium doors was largely composed of women and children, who were there before the parade ended in order to get seats inside the hall. When the section about the doors collapsed they went in with it, and a half dozen policemen, who had been vainly striving to held the throng in check, went with them. Only a comparatively small number of men were caught in the trap, because most of them were taking part in the parade. Many who were not standing on the section which collapsed were drawn or pushed into the vortex, and those who escaped crowded panic-stricken toward the outer rail of the pier. These fought for safety, and many were trampled under foot.

Those who fell into the hole last were able to climb over the entangled bodies to the broken ends of the floor.

Fallen timbers and flooring were jammed into the struggling mass, and it was necessary to use ropes to pull back the jagged edges of the sunken flooring and broken joists before the dead and injured could be taken out. It was fully an hour before the yawning hole in the floor of the pier could be emptied of its mass of humanity, the dead separated from the injured and the dying extricated from among broken timbers.

The dead and seriously injured were laid in rows on the beach, while scores who had sustained less serious injuries wandered about in a daze, seeking relatives and friends. Several of those who were taken to hospitals were not even scratched, but were suffering from nervous shock.

The work of removing the bodies to Long Beach morgues did not begin until well into the afternoon. Long rows of saddened spectators, most of them still wearing the tiny Union Jack, emblematic of the day, watched in silence as the dead were taken from the temporary morgues to the undertakers' wagons.

Although most of the victims were from Los Angeles and Long Beach, nearly every town in California was represented among the dead and injured.

The Long Beach City Council held a secret session late to-day, and Mayor HATCH announced that the Municipal Government was assuming all expense, paying the funeral costs, and supplying funds for the relief of the injured.

The auditorium, like the pier upon which it was built ten years ago, was owned by the city.

Councilman JOHN TOPHAM of Los Angeles, who narrowly escaped death when the pier fell, denounced the arrangements for the handling of the enormous crowd.

"I was just coming in from the end of the pier and was only five feet from the bridge connecting the pier and the Auditorium when the floor in front of me gave way," said he.

"The four hundred persons crowded together at the entrance of the Auditorium went down in the awful crash. It was a frightful sight to see men, women and children struggling helplessly in the debris."

"In my judgement it was a death-trap. The pier was absolutely rotten and the door to the auditorium from the pier was closed and locked. An enormous crowd of people stood on the bridge in front of that door waiting for it to open when the pier fell. How anybody escaped death will always be a marvel to me."

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Researched and Transcribed by Stu Beitler. Thank you, Stu!