

# Show To Go On In Spite Of Setback

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## Theater Fire Damage Set at \$45,000

### ★ ★ Fire Losses Covered Completely; Origin Of Fire Yet Debated

By FRED FAIR

The spectacular fire of undetermined origin, which destroyed the Whitman College Theater last Thursday, caused damages estimated at \$45,000.

Firemen of all three Walla Walla stations, including both the on-duty and off-duty shifts battled the blaze of the one time hospital building for more than an hour.

Fire Chief Leonard Adams said the building was "gutted and there is little or no salvageable material."

Firemen of the off-duty shift were called to the scene shortly after the first firemen arrived. The blaze was brought under control in about 30 minutes, but only a shell of the framework was left standing.

Most of the blaze was confined to the interior and near the stage but at one time broke through the roof, where firemen had chopped holes in order to battle the fire. Several times firemen had to abandon the roof when it became weakened.

Peter Ongers, school maintenance employee, who was in the theatre shortly after 10 a.m. was the first to report the fire. After making a hasty check to see that no one else was inside he phoned the fire department.

Miss DuMond, assistant theater director, was in the faculty office bldg. when she heard an explosion. Several other people reported to have heard an explosion as well, but it is generally believed to have occurred after the fire had started.

Mr. Alexander, theater director, made a thorough inspection of the whole theater before leaving early Thursday morning and found nothing wrong. The first complete cast rehearsal for "Guys and Dolls" was held Wednesday evening.

Professor Kenneth Schilling, music director for "Guys and Dolls," was in the building half an hour before the fire apparently started and he reported that nothing was unusual.

The insurance value of the building and equipment is around \$65,000. Rough estimates of the damages jumped at first from \$15,000 to over \$60,000 during the day of the fire, but now according to Mr. Pete Reid, building and grounds superintendent, the estimate is between \$40,000 and \$45,000.

Included in the building were costumes, staging equipment, musical instruments and other equipment to be used in the staging of "Guys and Dolls." The play was scheduled to open March 26. Most of the music and other equipment in the play had been moved to the theater only a few days previous to the fire.

All buildings and equipment on the campus were estimated in 1953 at \$3,330,591. The insurance company will pay the cost of replacement for anything damaged and it is a possibility that a completely new theater will be built. In any event, according to President Maxey, Whitman will definitely have a theater again.

Due to the heavy damage inside the theater, the reason for the outbreak of the fire has not been definitely determined. It will be some time before the building will be dry enough to begin the actual investigation to determine how the fire started.

As far as the school is concerned, no one's carelessness attributed to the fire. President Maxey and the fire department said that there is no reason to believe that the fire was anything but accidental and should be considered purely as that.

Several reasons for the fire have been hypothesized. The fire department believes that it may have been caused by either of two things: a short circuit in the original wiring put in by the government when the building was being used as a hospital, or the possibility of one of the stage sets falling and breaking some electrical fixture.

Also the possibilities of a chemical explosion from painting materials or the chance that a cigarette, match, etc., might have started a chain reaction, have been considered.

### ★ ★ Thursday's Destruction Scene...



**BILLIOWING SMOKE** from the Whitman Theater greeted the viewer last Thursday and signaled the advent of a big hammer in the works of the current play production, "Guys and Dolls." In the top photo, firemen from the Walla Walla Fire Department have just arrived on the scene and are shown there and in the photo below trying to quell the blaze . . .

