

Document 1:

Article excerpt from the New York Times the day after.

Three stories of a ten-floor building at the corner of Greene Street and Washington Place were burned yesterday, and while the fire was going on 141 young men and women at least 125 of them mere girls were burned to death or killed by jumping to the pavement below. The building was fireproof. It shows now hardly any signs of the disaster that overtook it. The walls are as good as ever so are the floors, nothing is the worse for the fire except the furniture and 141 of the 600 men and girls that were employed in its upper three stories. Most of the victims were suffocated or burned to death within the building, but some who fought their way to the windows and leaped met death as surely, but perhaps more quickly, on the pavements below. *New York Times March 26, 1911 Page 1*

Document 2:

Article excerpt from the New York Times the day after.

Vocabulary:

Waist Company: shirt manufacturing company.

Unionized: Became members of an association that works together for better conditions

Insufficiency: not enough

Strewed: spread out

Apparatus: Fire Trucks/machines

Document Note: This is a New York Times article the day after the disaster describing the scene of the fire and the chaos that ensued.

How the fire started no one knows. On the three upper floors of the building were 600 employees of the waist company, 500 of whom were girls. The victims mostly Italians, Russians, Hungarians, and Germans were girls and men who had been employed by the firm of Harris & Blanck, owners of the Triangle Waist Company, after the strike in which the Jewish girls, formerly employed, had been become unionized and had demanded better working conditions. The building had experienced four recent fires and had been reported by the Fire Department to the Building Department as unsafe in account of the insufficiency of its exits.

The building itself was of the most modern construction and classed as fireproof. What burned so quickly and disastrously for the victims were shirtwaists, hanging on lines above tiers of workers, sewing machines placed so closely together that there was hardly aisle room for the girls between them, and shirtwaist trimmings and cuttings which littered the floors above the eighth and ninth stories.

Girls had begun leaping from the eighth story windows before firemen arrived. The firemen had trouble bringing their apparatus into position because of the bodies which strewed the pavement and sidewalks. While more bodies crashed down among them, they worked with desperation to run their ladders into position and to spread fire nets.

Source: 141 Men and Girls Die in Waist Factory Fire; Trapped High Up in Washington Place Building; Street Strewn with Bodies; Piles of Dead Inside
New York Times, March 26, 1911, p. 1.

Document 3:

Article excerpt from New York Times, March 26, 1911,

Document Note: Stories of Survivors. And Witnesses and Rescuers Outside Tell What They Saw

According to several eye witnesses, the flames were pouring from the windows and the girls jumping to the sidewalk for several minutes before the first fire truck with ladders arrived. Benjamin Levy of 995 Freeman Street, the Bronx, one of the first men to arrive at the burning building, says that it was all of ten minutes after the fire started before the first fire engine arrived. Mr. Levy is the junior member of the firm of I. Levy & Son wholesale clothing manufactures just around the corner, at 3 and 5 Waverley Place.

"I was upstairs in our work-room," said he, "when one of the employees who happened to be looking out of the window cried that there was a fire around the corner. I rushed downstairs, and when I reached the sidewalk the girls were already jumping from the windows. None of them moved after they struck the sidewalk. Several men ran up with a net which they got somewhere, and I seized one side of it to help them hold it.

"It was about ten feet square and we managed to catch about fifteen girls. I don't believe we saved over one or two however. The fall was so great that they bounced to the sidewalk after striking the net. Bodies were falling all around us, and two or three of the men with me were knocked down. The girls just leaped wildly out of the windows and turned over and over before reaching the sidewalk.

"I only saw one man jump. All the rest were girls. They stood on the windowsills tearing their hair out in the handfuls and then they jumped.

"One girl held back after all the rest and clung to the window casing until the flames from the window below crept up to her and set her clothing on fire. Then she jumped far over the net and was killed instantly, like all the rest."

One for the policemen who were checking up the bodies as they were being shipped to the Morgue told of one heap in which a girl was found still alive when the others were taken off her. She died before an ambulance doctor could reach her.

Source: Stories of Survivors. And Witnesses and Rescuers Outside Tell What They Saw New York Times, March 26, 1911, P. 4

Document 4:

Photograph of funeral procession for unidentified fire victims.

Document Note: In the April 5th funeral procession for the seven unidentified fire victims, members of the United Hebrew Trades of New York and the Ladies Waist and Dressmakers Union Local 25, the local that organized Triangle Waist Company workers, carry banners proclaiming "We Mourn Our Loss."



Source: Photographer: unknown, April 5, 1911

Kheel Center image identifier: 5780pb39f17d

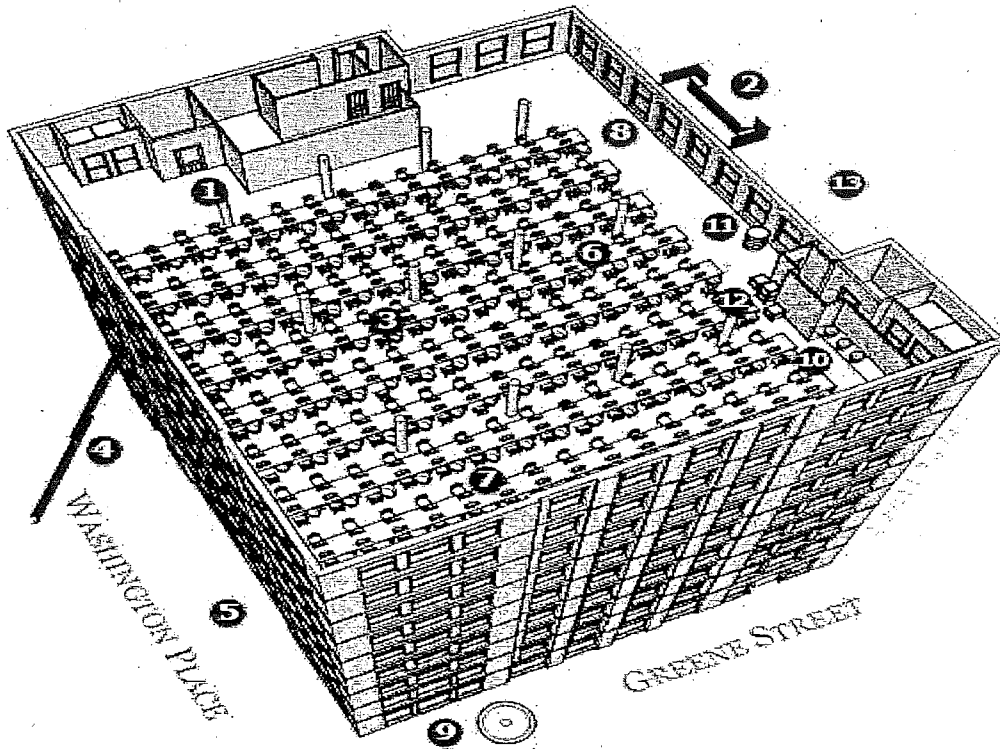
Document 5:

Model recreation of the Triangle Shirtwaist Building.

Document Note: This model represents problems that existed before and during the fire that caused so many people to lose their lives on the 9th floor.

Source: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/supplemental/3Dmodel.html>

What Went Wrong?



FIRE HAZARDS:

1. Locked door to the stair well
2. Rusty fire escape that collapsed
3. Cluttered work spaces
4. Short ladders only reached 6th floor
5. Not enough water pressure
6. Long wooden tables became obstacles
7. Wicker baskets full of scraps
- ✗ 8. Oily floors spread the fire quickly
9. Fire nets failed to catch jumpers
10. No sprinkler system, only pails of water
- ✗ 11. Flammable barrel of oil
- ✗ 12. Boxes crowding the exit
13. Lack of a required third staircase

INSPECTOR OF BUILDINGS!



Document 7:

Document Note: In an editorial cartoon, a skeleton surrounded by smoke and flames rises from the burning Asch Building and considers the horrifying events below.

Photographer: Artist unknown, 1911

Kheel Center image identifier: 5780pb39f18i

Image 6 of 14



Source: Photographer: Artist unknown, 1911

Kheel Center image identifier: 5780pb39f18i

Image 6 of 14

Document 8:

Document Note: Vol. 3, sec. 7 (pp. 1803-1901). Testimony by workers; and by Isaac Harris, co-defendant/owner, who describes earlier fires, petty thefts by workers, inspection of pocket books, layout of premises

THE COURT: Now, Mr. Harris, if you will kindly answer questions so all the Jury can hear you.

THE WITNESS: Yes, sir.

Q. You are a partner of Blanck's, aren't you?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. And you have been in partnership with Blanck about how many years?

A. About twelve.

Q. Now we can't hear you over here.

A. Twelve years.

Q. Mr. Harris, did you ever carry a key to any of the lofts?

A. No, sir.

Q. At no time?

A. Never.

Q. No key to any of the lofts?

A. No, sir.

Q. In getting from one floor to the other, Mr. Harris, did you ever use a key?

A. No, sir.

Q. Did you have anything to do with the locking of the doors Mr. Harris, yourself?

A. No, sir.

Q. Or the locking of the doors at any time?

A. No, sir.

Q. When you had one loft only, Mr. Harris, when you were on the ninth loft, which used to have charge of locking the doors up then?

A. Well, the old man, Mr. Alter, the one that has been here.

Q. The gentleman who was a witness?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. I think there was one witness testified here, Mr. Harris that you and Mr. Blanck used to stand by the door on the Greene Street side on the ninth floor and watch the girls as they went out, and sometimes that you would look into their books. Did you do that?

A. I never done that.

Q. You knew it was done?

A. It was done yes, sir, of course that was done.

Q. That was done by your direction and by Mr. Blanck's direction?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. But you personally did not do that? A. No, sir; I never done that.

Q. Now where were you Mr. Harris when you first knew that there was any trouble?

A. I was in that time in my office; just had selected some goods from the representative of Krauer and Tynburg.

Q. How did you first know that there was any trouble Mr. Harris?

A. Well, I really could not remember how I find out this, but is that time when I heard all the noise outside, I opened the door from my office and seen four girls running to the Washington elevator place.

Q. The Washington elevator doors?

A. Running to the Washington elevator doors, yes, sir. I came out, I heard the sound of bells and all the noise of course; and I noticed in the back of the room some flames towards the fire escapes, but I could not see the fire —

Q. You say the back of the room. Do you call the place where the fire escape was the back of the room?

A. Yes, sir; I call the front the Washington Place side where was the offices and the back of the room Waverly Place side.

Q. If you can remember, just what you did to tell us, tell us anything that you can remember Mr. Harris.

A. When I came out I have seen the girls and everyone hollered fire, and I have seen there is fire through the windows at that time. The elevator just case up and they went into the elevator; I started to rush all the girls into the elevator. I told them go as quick as you can and come back up as quick as you can. He came up once more and took down another load, and then he took about a minute or a half minute and I waited and I didn't see him coming up anymore. Somebody started in hollering, somebody in the back, fire, they were hollering in the back, and I heard fire hollered and I ran back to see, they said the fire was in the packing room and so I went back and looked in the packing room and I see that there was fire in the packing room. So I didn't think of the elevator, I didn't think it would come up any more but which it did afterwards I learned, but I didn't know there that it was coming again.

Q. Now when the operators went out at night as I understood you to say, the examination of the employees was done under your direction and Mr. Blanck's direction?

A. Yes.

Q. And you said that you personally had nothing to do with it, never stood there and examined the employee that is their books and bundles as they passed out?

A. No, sir.

Q. Now Mr. Alter performed that duty on the tenth floor didn't he?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Now the object of having those watchmen there was to prevent the employees from taking things which did not belong to them was not that so?

A. Of course.

Q. You didn't want them to take any of your shirtwaists?

A. No, sir, surely not.

Q. And you didn't want them to take any of your laces, is that not so?

A. Certainly.

Q. Now you had had some experience in having things taken from your factory had you not?

A. Well, enough.

Q. Well, as you say enough, you had had it several times?

A. Yes, we once locked up about six girls and we found in their room, the room of one girl two dozen waists; one girl about three dozen waists; and one girl had in every — in every girl's house we found so many waists, and we had detectives that went around there and we searched in every house and found from two dozen to three dozen waists that these girls had taken, and there was six girls that we locked up in one night.

Q. About when was that?

A. Well, about three years to my memory, if my memory is good.

Q. After you had these six girls arrested about three years ago you didn't have any more arrested, you simply discharged them when you found there had been stealing?

A. Yes, we arrested a few of them, and had them fined, a few of the girls and after that they sued us for damages and the only way we could find — we found the best way is to discharge them and not be bothered with them anymore. That is the best way to get quick rid of them.

Q. Do you think there was a great deal of stealing in your factory?

MR. STEUER: I object to that as immaterial.

A. Well as to that I can't tell.

MR. STEUER: The newspapers will come out with headlines tomorrow that will put us out of business, we won't get any more employees --

MR. BOSTWICK: I object to that remark.

THE COURT: I didn't hear the remark but I sustain the objection.

MR. STEUER: It was not a remark, a reflection upon anybody.

THE COURT: I think that question calls for a conclusion, not for evidence.

Q. During the year 1911, that is from January 1st to March 1, 1911, how much worth of goods was stolen from your factory so far as you know?

MR. STRUER: I object to that as immaterial

THE COURT: I will allow it.

A. That we can't -

MR. STEUER: I except to Your Honor's ruling.

A. (Continuing) That is pretty hard to find out.

Q. How many times in March -- during the year prior to March 25th, that is from December 25th -- from March 25th, 1910 to March 25th, 1911 --

A. Yes, sir.

Q. -- the year immediately preceding the fire, how many times did you find people stealing goods from your factory?

MR. STEUER. I object to that as immaterial.

THE COURT: I will allow it.

MR. STEUER: I except.

A. I could not answer it.

Q. Well would you say it was ten times?

A. What do you mean, before the fire?

Q. Yes.

MR. STEUER: He said in the year before the fire.

Q. The year before the fire, the year immediately preceding the fire?

A. Oh, we had a couple of them, the girl with the waists in her rat and about a couple more perhaps, I don't know.

Q. Now all the instances when you found goods taken from your factory by the employees, how much in all would you say was the value of the goods that you found had been taken by these employees?

MR. STEUER: I object to that as incompetent, irrelevant and immaterial.

THE COURT: I will allow it.

MR. STUEUR: I except.

A. You mean goods that were found.

Q. That you found.

A. We find perhaps -- in one year you mean?

Q. In one year.

A Prior to the fire?

Q. Yes.

A. Well, ten dollars or fifteen dollars or twelve dollars or eight dollars, something like that.

Q. You would say it was not over \$25, wouldn't you?

(The jury, which retired to deliberate at about 2:55 P.M., returned to the courtroom at 4:45 P. M., and rendered a verdict of not guilty.)

Document 9:

**Document Note: New York (State) Laws, statutes, etc, Labor laws of New York State, 1913
Excerpted from Cornell University Digital collection.**

§ 83-a. Fire alarm signal systems and fire drills.— 1. Every factory building over two stories in height in which more than twenty-five persons are employed above the ground floor shall be equipped with a fire alarm signal system with a sufficient number of signals clearly audible to all occupants thereof.

2. In every factory building over two stories in height in which more than twenty-five persons are employed above the ground floor, a fire drill which will conduct all the occupants of such building to a place of safety and in which all the occupants of such building shall participate simultaneously shall be conducted at least once a month.

3. In the city of New York the fire commissioner of such city, and elsewhere, the state fire marshal is charged with the duty of enforcing this section. [Added by h. 1912, Ch. 330 and am'd by L. 1913, oh. 203.]

§ 83-b. Automatic sprinklers.—In every factory building over seven stories or over ninety feet in height in which wooden flooring or wooden trim is used and more than two hundred people are regularly employed above the seventh floor or more than ninety feet above the ground level of such building, the owner of the building shall install an automatic sprinkler system approved as to form and manner in the city of New York by the fire commissioner of such city, and elsewhere, by the state fire marshal.