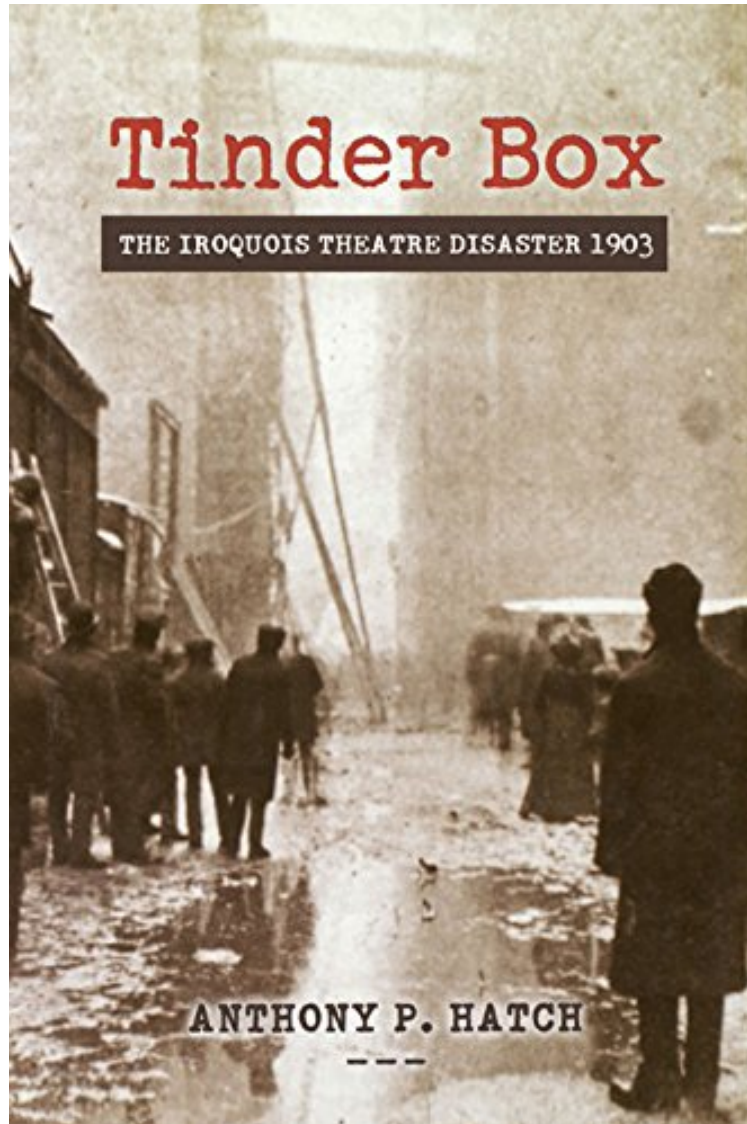


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## Tinder Box: The Iroquois Theatre Disaster 1903

*Anthony P. Hatch*

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**Anthony P. Hatch : Tinder Box: The Iroquois Theatre Disaster 1903** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised **Tinder Box: The Iroquois Theatre Disaster 1903**:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Amazingly Well Researched Book By T-Rex 5 The author did an incredible amount of research, starting in the 1950's/1960's when he was able to interview several first-hand witnesses. The book details a sadly forgotten part of history, the largest theater fire disaster in the US (indeed of any fire in the US, until 9/11.) Around 600 people died in the span of 15 minutes. The author gives individual stories on several of the people who were in the theater at the time of the fire (some who survived, some who didn't.) He gives a history on

firefighting in 1903 and the firefighter's response to the fire. He talks about the societal happenings that caused the opening of the theater to be delayed, which led to the owners opening it before it was actually finished. He gives information on how the theater claimed to be "absolutely fireproof", even though many of the fire-proofing mechanisms which had been planned were never actually implemented or finished. Sadly, he talks about the several people who realized the danger of the Iroquois Theatre before it was opened, but it was opened anyway. The book is very well written, especially for a first time book author. Anyone interested in history, firefighting, government corruption, safety, architecture or theatre should find this tragic story both fascinating and a cautionary tale. Most sadly, the author has an Epilogue at the end of the book written in November 2002, detailing the reasons why he doesn't believe theater's today are any safer than the Iroquois Theatre was, and that such a tragedy could happen again (which it did in February 2003.)

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. with some great photos. This is one of those nonfiction accounts ...By R. J RidleyWell written and researched, with some great photos. This is one of those nonfiction accounts that has you uneasily eyeing the exits in buildings, wondering if you would make it out alive were a fire to burst into flames. Roughly about 600 people died in the inferno, and that number could have been reduced so significantly if only:(1) The asbestos curtain had not snagged halfway down on a small scenery protrusion.(2) Chicago city officials had done their job properly, and not looked the other way while still holding out their hands for freebies and money.(3) The architectural design had focused less on a grand stairway where everyone from box seats to the cheap seats would mingle in luxurious surroundings and exit doors were concealed with velvet curtains. Instead, plenty of exits and clearly marked signs would have prevented piles of dead bodies at doorways. We may have come a long way in fire safety, but after reading this, I wonder if the danger of large scale disastrous fires such as this will ever go away.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Exciting and I love to go back and read about a different time ...By Donald P. Exciting and I love to go back and read about a different time in history. An amazing story compared to the Titanic with man's arrogance and the "fireproof theater". Some of the descriptions of the theatre could get tedious but all in all, it was a good book.

The Iroquois Theater in Chicago, boasting every modern convenience, advertised itself proudly as absolutely fireproof when it opened in November, 1903. Mr. Bluebeard, a fairy tale musical imported from the Drury Lane Theatre in London was the opening production. And leading the troupe of nearly 400 was one of the most popular comedians of the time, Eddie Foy. None of the many socialites and journalists who flocked to the shows were aware that city building inspectors and others had been bribed to certify that the theater was in good shape. In fact, the building was without a sprinkler system or even basic fire fighting equipment; there was no backstage telephone, fire alarm box, exit signs, a real asbestos curtain or ushers trained for emergencies. A month later, at a Christmas week matinee, the theater was illegally overcrowded with a standing room only crowd of mostly women and children. During the second act, a short circuit exploded a back stage spotlight touching off a small fire which spread in minutes throughout the theater. Panic set in as people clawed at each other to get out, but they could not find the exits, which were draped. The doorways, locked against gate-crashers, were designed to open in instead of out, creating almost impossible egress. The tragedy, which claimed more than 600 lives, became a massive scandal and it remains the worst theater fire in the history of the country.

From Booklist It is often said that history repeats itself as farce; events of this year have proven that it can also repeat itself as tragedy. One hundred years after fire in Chicago's Iroquois Theatre killed 602 people in a matter of minutes, we have seen massive loss of life at nightspots in Chicago and West Warwick, Rhode Island. The Iroquois, of course, remains the worst theater fire in American history. Hatch grew up in Chicago, and his father, a fire-insurance executive, owned a book published in 1904 to raise money for families of the victims. The pictures and testimonies in that book began Hatch's deep interest in the fire. His riveting and often infuriating narrative is an indictment of the hubris and negligence of the owners and city officials. Hatch, a former writer and reporter for CBS News, utilizes interviews and correspondence with survivors of the fire, which lends a special poignancy to the story. This is a painful but superbly written work about a wholly unnecessary tragedy. Jay Freeman Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "[Hatch]...utilizes interviews and correspondence with survivors of the fire, which lends a special poignancy to the story. This is a painful, but superbly written work about wholly unnecessary tragedy." --Booklist