

Hotel Winecoff ...“*Absolutely Fireproof*”

“For many years, the Winecoff Hotel stood as a landmark in downtown Atlanta. Built in 1914, the imposing 15-story brick, concrete and steel structure faced Atlanta’s famed Peachtree Street just about half a block away from the theatre where the world premiere for “Gone With The Wind” was staged.”

The Winecoff was considered one of the city’s leading hostelries and a major establishment, a first-rate hotel. It was also considered “fire resistant,” and had met all safety codes from the day it had first opened its doors for business.”

...“On the night of December 7, 1946, the Winecoff Hotel was packed to capacity with 285 guests filling its 194 rooms. Among the visitors were some 50 boys and girls from all over Georgia who were in Atlanta for a youth conference.

Sometime between 3:15 A.M. and 3:30 A.M., a bellman delivered ice water to a guest’s room on the fifth floor. When he left the room a few minutes later, he found himself trapped in the corridor by a wall of smoke and flame.

A fire, at first believed started by a carelessly tossed cigarette in a hallway on the third floor, had already started racing through the “fire resistant” Winecoff Hotel with frightful speed. The blaze roared out of control within minutes after it was discovered and before fire fighting equipment could be summoned. By the time it was over, Atlanta would be the site of the worst hotel fire in American history—a conflagration which claimed 119 lives and injured at least 100 more persons.

Horrified onlookers would see men, women and children plunge screaming to their deaths on the pavements below their windows as they sought to escape the searing flames, while scores of others were trapped and burned or suffocated in upstairs rooms.

The sides of the tall, chimney-like structure became draped with torn bed sheets and blankets, marking the rooms where victims tried to escape. Eyewitnesses told how panic-stricken guests swung from 10th and 12th story windows on flimsy makeshift ropes. A few were rescued, but most fell headlong as flames burned away their supports or they lost their grip.”

...“Newsman E. J. (Chick) Hosch said he saw many persons leap to their deaths, including one woman who threw her young son and daughter from a seventh-floor window, then followed them to her death too.

“I never expected to hear anything so terrible as the screams of those people from the time they would jump until they struck the pavement,” he said.” [*Dan Perkes, Eye Witness To Disaster, Gallery Books*]

[Ed. A gruesome story, but part of history. Thanks to Stuart Bergman, TX, who sent this information in]

