

Baltimore Morning Herald
May 13, 1901

Thousands of Hungry And Destitute Were Relieved

Supplied From the Morning Herald's Relief Train

***Commissary Officers Surprised and Delighted at the
Quality and Quantity of the Necessaries Sent From Baltimore***

Poverty Stricken People Overcome Their Pride to Come and Ask for Assistance

Pathetic Condition of Men and Women of the Middle Class

Jacksonville, Fla., May 12 – More than 9000 men, women and children were fed today by the citizens' relief committee, and of this number fully one-third were given rations made up of the supplies from the Herald train.

The variety and good quality of the food sent from Baltimore surprised the commissary officers and delighted the luckless and hungry fire sufferers. The canned fruit, crackers and tea have been especially welcome to the ill, the aged and the shelterless.

Many women of gentle birth, whose lives have been passed in ease and comfort, were made paupers by the fire. Pride has kept some of them from asking for help, but today hundreds, driven to desperation by hunger, came to the commissary depots for bread.

It was inconceivably sad to see them wait in line with the pinch of starvation upon their faces and tears in their eyes.

All who have friends in the suburbs are being cared for by the latter. Five thousand have been sent to St. Augustine.

The greatest suffering has been among the middle class whites. Clerks, small storekeepers and working women, who lived up to their incomes, are homeless, penniless and out of work. Many men who have labored all their lives in offices are today pathetically grateful for the opportunity to direct the gangs of negroes working in the ruins. The latter are paid \$1 a day, and tomorrow (Monday) all who refuse to work will be warned to leave town within 12 hours.

The darkies "burned out" by the fire, with characteristic philosophy, are making the best of the situation. Daily they troop to the commissary tents for their rations of food. Today fully 500 crowded about one of the depots supplied by the Herald train. One of the committee opened two barrels of Baltimore crackers and proceeded to dole them out.

"Ef you don' min', boss," said an immense old auntie, "Ah'd ruther hab con'n an' bacon. It sortah sticks to mah ribs better," and the committeeman gave her a big slab of Baltimore bacon and enough Baltimore corn meal to feed her to a standstill.

Excellent order prevails throughout the city and despite their pitiful plight the people are optimistic and hopeful. Last night the newspaper correspondents here held a meeting to fix the responsibility for the sensational stories of anarchy and suicide printed by many Northern papers a day or two after the fire. Capt. C.E. Garner, chairman of the relief committeemen, and other leading citizens were present. The guilty persons, when found, will be ordered to leave town.

“The ‘fake’ stories sent from here,” said Captain Garner today, “have done much harm to Jacksonville. The papers which were imposed upon relied for their dispatches upon irresponsible adventures who happened to be here during the fire. The few journals, like the Herald, that have sent reliable correspondents to Jacksonville have the thanks of our people for the manner in which they have set us right before the country.”

The work of the relief association is still a stupendous one, particularly in the commissary department and the labor department. There is abundant work for everybody who can do manual labor, and difficulty is being experienced in getting the colored men to work.

The commissary department and the labor department are working together to change this order of things, and the man who will not work tomorrow will find himself cut off from rations.

Chairman Parrott of the commissary department today completed his system. Commencing at noon Monday the distribution of supplies only will be made to those who can furnish identification as to their actual need of assistance, and all such persons must apply in person to the official in charge of the subcommissaries.

Each applicant who will receive rations will also receive a ticket and be checked on a list. Only those holding these cards will be assisted.

A general list of the supplies will be served according to army regulations for families and according to the number of the family. The work of the commissary department has been a stupendous one, and it is now thought that a thorough system has been inaugurated.

The military are still in possession of the city, and will remain here so long as the committee of the association thinks best. This is the notice given the committee by Governor Jennings today. The liquor men have approved the action of the Governor in closing the barrooms, and in meeting indorsed it by resolution.

No more dead bodies have been found in the ruins, and the work of cleaning up the streets is progressing rapidly.

Street cars will be running to all parts of the city tomorrow, with the exception of the Main street, and this line will be ready to operate on Wednesday.

The electric light plants are in operation and the main streets of the city all will be lighted again in the next three or four days. There has been no disturbance of any kind, the people having behaved in an admirable manner. Only six cases of drunkenness have been reported since the day of the fire.

***Entry Into the Stricken City of Jacksonville No Criterion
As to the Condition Found in the Interior***

***Militiamen Always in Evidence-Hotels Crowded With Unfortunates and Visitors-All Sorts of
People Throng Thoroughfares. To Put “Phoenix” on the Bum***

Jacksonville, Fla., May 12.-“I don’t see no fiah,” said the Pullman porter disgustedly as he thrust his head out of the car window and twisted his neck dangerously.

“Well, dar wuz a fiah, all right,” answered the chef-waiter of the buffet car. “So I reads in de papahs.”

“Well, den,” observed the porter calmly, “if dar wuz, it must a burned out de insides ob de town ‘en lef’ de outsides standin’.”

And in this deduction the logic of the porter was based upon sound and unassailable premises.

As the train from the North comes in over the Seaboard Air Line, the passengers see rows of cute little cottages nestling in the gaudy green. Not a charred timber is in sight; not an ash heap breaks the green; not a broken wall rises above the pines. Farther on there come factories and saw mills and coal piers, and, still farther, railroad yards and long lines of cars and piles of merchandise and ships at the wharves, and beyond, the gleaming St. Johns river. But nowhere is there sign or symbol of the great fire.

Even after the passenger has been set down at the Union depot and shanghaied by the inky hackmen he wonders if the story of Jacksonville’s destruction might not have been a newspaper hoax. All around him he sees people hurrying to and fro as if engaged in their ordinary occupations, and in the street side gardens the green of the trees is unsullied.

But in a few moments a corporal’s guard of scraggy militiamen march up a side street, and then, of a sudden, he catches a glimpse of a chimney without a house. Then he turns to the left and walks a block or two, and, in a flash, like a great and ghostly panorama the ruins of what was once the heart of Jacksonville are before him. Whereupon, he believes and is silent.

For nearly two miles east and west, and along a path almost a mile wide the fire tore through Jacksonville. Today the ruins stand like Pompeii: tall spires of crumbling brick and hillocks of cracked and powdered stone. Ordinarily a burned house appears as a smoky shell with black and damp interior. But in the ruins of Jacksonville there is no trace of black, for the fire burned everything that was burnable, and when it was gone and its work was done, there remained but white ashes and swirling dust.

In the place of these white ashes and stumps of walls there stood, 10 days ago, about \$15,000,000 worth of houses. Today they are worth 10 cents a cartload, delivered at the dump.

Ten of these 15 millions must come from the pockets of the people of Jacksonville. The other five must come from the coffers of the insurance companies. Already the former have paid their share and apparently have forgotten all about it.

But nobody knows how much more they must pay before Jacksonville is once more Jacksonville.

Bay street is the only main traveled road that remains, and from its western end to the spot where the fire leaped across it and filled it with ashes it is as busy today as Light street during the rush hour. Trolley cars clang up and down, and cyclists speed along and darky teamsters shout and lash their whips, and people crowd each other on the side-walks and swarm in and out of the stores. Along the south side, west and east of Hogan street, are the offices of most of the relief committeemen, and all day and half the night they are immersed in work up to their eyes.

First of all, there are the hungry and homeless to feed and clothe and shelter, and then there are the “crooked” to watch and the relief funds that pour in from all parts of the country to handle, and a thousand and one other things to remember and think of and do. Some of these committeemen lost almost everything they had in the world in the fire. But next morning they were hard at work with their coats off, and it was their neighbors, and not themselves, for whom they labored and worried and sweated and schemed.

It is a great conglomeration of diverse types of humanity-the crowd upon the streets of Jacksonville. First there are the soldiers-guardians of the peace. By the facings upon the collars of those who wear full uniforms it may be learned that they are members of the Florida militia. But not all of them wear more than one article of their official regalia. Some, for instance, have side arms, but not leggings; others have belts, but not blouses; others have campaign hats, but not shirts.

For the most part they are too young to be dangerous, and too redolent of the scrub pine to be fierce; but, nevertheless, the disorderly element holds them in fear, and they have but to say "Halt!" and would-be toughs subside. The majority of them evidently look upon their official duties as parts of a highly agreeable picnic program. On their tents, in the side streets, they have erected signs expressive of their satisfaction and content. One of them reads, "I don't care if I never go back." On other tent flaps are numbers of the bon-mots so dear to the heart of the callow militiaman. One of them reads, "Second-story rooms for rent," another, "Ponce de Leon Hotel."

At the hotels the insurance adjusters reign supreme. There are shoals of them, and they represent companies in all parts of the habitable globe-from Chicago to Glasgow. Their talk is of losses, and reinsurance, and rates, and risks, and at meal time they hold long conference over their buttermilk and corn pone.

"How much is the Faith, Hope and Charity in it for?" you hear one ask his neighbor.

"Two hundred thousand." replies the latter, and then the first on asks if it carried any reinsurance, and the other replies that it didn't and then they both say "Oh, Lord!" and mop their brows and gulp their ice water.

About the distributing depots of the commissary department there are straggling scores of the homeless and hungry from 8 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock at night. During the first few days after the fire rich and poor, and high and low alike, were in need of aid, and among those who waited in line for bread were many whose clothes stamped them as of the well to do. But those who were able were not long in securing help for themselves, and today nine out of ten of the applicants are colored. With the careless good humor of their race they laugh and joke and jostle each other in the line as if starvation were the veriest jest imaginable.

To each is given enough food for three meals and no applicant is supplied more than once a day. The 20 tons of provisions in the Herald train will feed 3000 of them for three days.

As might be expected, the prospect of free board and loot has attracted not a few "bad niggers" from the pine woods turpentine camps. But the men under Colonel Lovell are rapidly corralling them, and all who refuse work at \$1 a day are escorted out of town. Among the bank Jacksonvillians there is also a sprinkling of those to whom the idea of labor is disturbing. These are boldly shanghaied and sent to the ruins, where an unsentimental gang boss sees that they shovel enough debris in a day to pay for their bread and salt.

Those of the people of Jacksonville who are able to help themselves are spending their days and nights in making plans for the city's resurrection. Already houses are rising from the ruins. Frame houses they are, it is true, and very unsubstantial ones at that, but still they are houses. When the insurance adjusters go home and the last company has decided between paying its losses and applying for a receiver, the frame houses will come down and brick dwellings will rise in their places.

And then, as an undaunted Jacksonvillian told me yesterday, "Jacksonville will put the phoenix on the bum."