



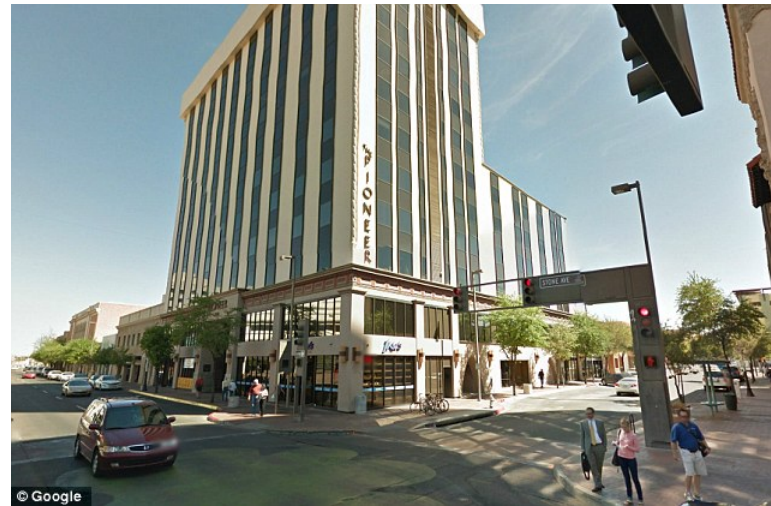
News Coverage of the Pioneer Hotel Fire

By: Justin Sayers



Pioneer Hotel

- Opened in 1929
- Catered to the World's elite
- Housed the largest ballroom in the country when it opened



Pioneer Hotel Fire (12/20/70)



- 28 people killed (deadliest fire in Arizona history)
- 16-year-old Louis Taylor arrested and charged with arson
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKecVbSwKKw>
(1:10-4:40)

Los Angeles Times (12/21/70, Pg. A1)

- Associated Press Story
- No mentions of Louis C. Taylor
- No mention of inadequate fire safety systems

28 Die as Fire Rips Through Upper Floors of Tucson Hotel

TUCSON (AP)—Fire swept through the upper eight floors of a hotel crowded with hundreds of holiday celebrants early Sunday, killing 28 persons who a fire official said might have been saved by adequate sprinkler and alarm systems.

Asst. Fire Chief R. B. Slagel led newsmen on a tour of the 12-story, 41-year-old hotel, then said:

"The Pioneer International Hotel met the minimum fire safety requirements. In my opinion, no one would have died had the building had an adequate sprinkler and alarm detection center."

Flames raced through hallways and stairways so quickly, Slagel said, that many hotel occupants became virtual prisoners in their rooms with no means of escape.

Richard Darling, president of

Pioneer Hotel Co., declined to comment on Slagel's remarks.

More than 30 persons, including 12 firemen, were injured, officials said.

Firemen said the blaze—the cause of which was not immediately determined—covered part of the fourth through 12th floors, catching many of the hotel's 112 residents asleep.

Rescue efforts were hampered by the fact that fire truck ladders reached only to the eighth floor and, firemen said, safety nets are useless for heights above three stories.

Firemen said two persons leaped from upper floors of the hotel in attempts to escape the flames.

One, a middle-aged woman, was killed when she leaped from the seventh floor shortly after screaming to firemen below, "I'm still here. I'm still here."

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Chicago Tribune (12/21/70, Pg. 1)

Tucson Hotel Blaze Kills 28, Injures 44



Father carries child down ladder to escape from flames in Pioneer International Hotel in Tucson, Ariz.

(From Tribune Wire Services)
TUCSON, Ariz., Dec. 20 — Flames ravaged the Pioneer Hotel early today, killing and injuring dozens of persons, including some who jumped from the upper stories.

Twenty-eight persons died, police said. Forty-four persons including 12 firemen, were injured. Four of the dead were children.

Three among the dead were identified as Chicagoans in a list released by police. They were identified as Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Rebbe, of 1405 W. Sherwin Av., a retired couple, and Mrs. Estelle Kaufman, who was listed as a permanent resident of the hotel from Chicago.

The death toll was the greatest of any fire in recent Tucson history. Damage to the \$3 million hotel was estimated at \$300,000.

Report Man Is Held
One man was being held by police for questioning about the fire, it was reported. Police said they were making "more than a routine" investigation into the possibility of arson, but refused to confirm that anyone was being held.

Cause of the fire is still unknown, altho one hotel resident reported smelling acetone, a flammable liquid, in the building shortly before the fire.

One woman was killed when she jumped from the seventh floor of the 12-story stucco hotel. Four children also leaped from the upper stories, firemen said. Some persons clambered down makeshift ropes of blankets and sheets.

- Reported One Man Was Being Held
- “It is my opinion that if there had been adequate sprinkler systems and an alarm system, no one would have lost his life.”

New York Times (1/14/1971, Pg. 19)

- “Youth”
- “Unusual Request”
- “Boy”

YOUTH, 16, CHARGED IN FIRE FATAL TO 28

TUCSON, Ariz., Jan. 13 (Reuters)—A 16-year-old youth was charged today with arson and 28 counts of murder stemming from a fire that destroyed a hotel and killed 28 guests last month.

A petition charging Louis Taylor with the offenses was filed in Juvenile Court, but a county lawyer made an unusual request to transfer the case to adult court. If convicted in adult court, the youth could face the death penalty.

The boy was arrested inside the burning Pioneer Hotel Dec. 20 while firemen fought the blaze. He was unable to explain his presence to the police.

Washington Post (12/22/70, B8)

B8 Tuesday, Dec. 22, 1970 THE WASHINGTON POST

Paul d'Hedouville Dies in Ariz. Fire

Paul E. d'Hedouville, 31, a Washington lawyer, was one of 28 persons killed in a fire Sunday at Tucson's Pioneer Hotel.

Mr. d'Hedouville, who was named a partner in the Washington firm of Howrey, Simon, Baker and Murchison last week, was in Tucson on business.

antitrust division of the Justice Department from July, 1964, until May, 1966, when he joined the firm in which he had just been named a partner. Mr. d'Hedouville belonged to the Massachusetts and District of Columbia bar associations.



PAUL E. D'HEDOUVILLE

- Only mention of fire was an obituary for a Washington D.C.-based lawyer
- Two mentions of Tucson are in the first two paragraphs

Arizona Republic (12/27/1970)

- News analysis about the inadequacies of the hotel's fire sprinkler system

Hotel used for fire drills

Pioneer-type tragedy Tucson firemen feared

By BOB THOMAS
Southern Arizona Bureau

TUCSON — The Pioneer International Hotel fire which claimed 28 lives in Arizona's worst land disaster a week ago today had been feared by the city fire department.

News Analysis

Blazes of this type had been the subject of many repetitive fire drills. In fact, the fire department used the hotel as a classroom to teach rookie firemen how to fight fires in a high-rise building.

When the fire occurred nothing could prevent the huge loss of life or the millions in damage, despite the preparations.

It was a classic example of a big city fire — a wintry blaze in the dead of night, screaming victims trapped in their rooms high above the streets, bodies crashing to the pavement, people clinging to ropes made of bedsheets or trying to scale narrow ledges while tongues of orange flame licked from shattered windows.

fire spread from the fourth floor to the 11th story and above it to the penthouse of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Steinfeld.

From the first alarm, firemen were on the scene in less than two minutes. The main fire station is six blocks away and for years it has been the practice of the department to send out all the big hook and ladder trucks and the pumper engines on every downtown alarm.

According to Franklin, the fire fight went about as planned. While some firemen were racing up the outside fire stairs on the south end to hook up hoses to the existing standpipe hose connections built into the building, others were raising ladders to the people trapped in their rooms.

Other crews took hose lines through the lobby and attacked the fire from below.

But the fire simply had too much of a head start. It spread laterally down the hallways until it reached the second stairwell and it too acted as a chimney.

Louis C. Taylor's Trial

- Forced to stand trial as an adult because of “sociopathic tendencies”
- Convicted by an all-white jury
- Incriminated because he was at the scene of the crime and had matches in his coat pocket
- Actual trial lasted less than two months
- Found guilty and sentenced six days later

Pre-Trial Coverage

Tucson Daily Citizen
(1/28/71)

Louis C. Taylor **Said 'Sociopathic;'** **Adult Trial Asked**

Sixteen-year-old Louis C. Taylor was described today as "a sociopathic personality" who should be tried as an adult for allegedly setting the Dec. 20 Pioneer International Hotel fire that killed 28 persons.

Paul Charters, director of the Pima County Juvenile Court

vate adolescent treatment center here, said Taylor may be sociopathic "but that's just a symptom of any underlying problem."

He said Taylor should be considered a juvenile and receive rehabilitative help.

Arizona Republic
(2/29/72)

White jury **to hear trial** **in hotel fire**

By HOWARD ARMSTRONG

A jury of six men and six women — predominantly craftsmen and housewives, all white and all over 21 — was selected late yesterday to try 17-year-old Louis Taylor for murder.

Also picked by prosecution and defense attorneys were four male alternates who, with the jury, will hear testimony. The trial is expected to last a month.

Pima County Public Defender Howard Kashman, Taylor's attorney, challenged the jury and moved for a mistrial on grounds that none of the jury or alternates are black or between 18 and 20.

The jury, said Kashman, "is not representative of this community and certainly not representative of Mr. Taylor's peers."

Arizona Republic (3/14/72)

- “Conceded”
- Language starts suggesting that there is no evidence
- Another story provides testimony that contradicts prior information

Taylor witness concedes fire cause possibilities

PHOENIX (UPI) — Arson investigator Marshall Smyth of Tucson conceded today that ignition of the “accelerant” which he believes touched off initial fire in the Pioneer International Hotel could have occurred at any of several locations.

Smyth, testifying in the murder trial of Louis Taylor, 17, had said earlier he believed the fire was touched off by an accelerant thrown or placed on the carpeting in the north end of the fourth floor hallway.

Today, he said that there could have been a number of

ways the accelerant was ignited. This ignition could have occurred by a “trail” further down the hall, on an upper floor, or on the stairwell between the third and fourth floors, he said.

Taylor’s trial on 23 counts of murder has proceeded at a snail’s pace the last three days as Smyth was subjected to detailed cross-examination by prosecutor Horton Weiss.

Today, Weiss completed his cross-examination of the witness, but in re-direct examination by defense attorney Howard Kashman, Weiss objected to virtually every ques-

tion asked.

One question was asked five times, with Weiss objecting each time. After being overruled by Judge Charles Hardy, Weiss then objected again when the question was re-stated with slightly different phrasing.

At one point, Weiss had been overruled and Kashman was asked by the judge to continue.

“I’m afraid to ask the question again,” Kashman said.

In the absence of the jury, the two attorneys got into a lengthy exchange over whether Smyth would be allowed to

draw a diagram indicating what would happen to the burning patterns along the hallway if two fires were set simultaneously at different locations. It was the contention of the state’s arson expert, Cyrilus Holmes, that the fire originated in two locations in that hall, not in the single north end spot as Smyth contends.

Kashman said he planned to call several more witnesses before resting his case. Court observers said there was a chance the case could be in the hands of the jury by week-end.

Arizona Republic (3/21/72)

Jury debates youth's fate in Pioneer Hotel deaths

By HOWARD ARMSTRONG

A Superior Court jury yesterday afternoon assumed the task of deciding whether Louis C. Taylor is guilty or innocent of starting the Pioneer Hotel fire in Tucson that killed 28 persons.

The arson - murder case went to the jury of eight men and four women at 2:55 p.m. and the jury was still deliberating last night. Jurors took with them to the jury room voluminous exhibits that have been introduced as evidence in the six - week trial.

Judge Charles L. Hardy told the jury it could return one of three verdicts: (1) guilty, with death as punishment; (2) guilty, with life imprisonment, or (3) not guilty.

"You must determine whether arson was committed and whether the defendant perpetrated the arson," Hardy said. He also urged jurors not to state an opinion early in the deliberations that pride would prevent them from changing later.

He appointed Mrs. Ethel Dee Miller, 5526 N. 62nd Ave., Glendale, jury foreman. Before the jury retired, Hardy also dismissed the one remaining alternate juror, Mark Elzey of Gilbert, who had sat in the jury box throughout the trial.

Deputy Pima County Attorney Horton Weiss, in a 1-hour, 20-minute final argument, accused Taylor of lying to police when arrested to divert attention from his guilt. Weiss charged that Kashman had "tried to distort the evidence."

Weiss dwelled on the testimony of Robert Jackson, 17, Tucson, who last week testified that Taylor told him he had set the hotel fire by squirting lighter fluid on walls and lighting it.

Weiss asked the jury to view the evidence and "put it all together" to return a guilty verdict and to "have the courage to make your verdict ring true."

Weiss, however, did not ask the jury to order the death penalty.

Kashman told the jury that the three state theories of how Taylor started the fire were (1) Bruce Wallmark's testimony that Taylor told him the fire was started with a lighted book of paper matches dropped on carpet, (2) Jackson's testimony of Taylor's admission to him, and (3) the opinion of Cyrilis Holmes, a California fire expert, that the fire started simultaneously in three separate floor areas.

Holmes, Jackson and Wallmark appeared as state's witnesses.

- Story mentions three reasons why state believes Taylor is guilty, but doesn't mention that one of three was proven false
- Note: The other two were proven false later

Tucson Citizen (3/22/72)

- Judge: “The evidence supports a conviction, but I would not have convicted him myself.”
- Prosecutor: The verdict “restores my faith in the jury system. I think the case was fairly tried.” (Note: He was kicked off a different case for berating a suspect less than a month later.)

Life sentence will be set for Taylor

Special to the Citizen

PHOENIX — Louis C. Taylor, 17, of Tucson, will be sentenced Tuesday to life in Arizona State Prison for setting a fire Dec. 20, 1970, which killed 28 persons in the Pioneer International Hotel.

The youth's attorney, Pima County Public Defender Howard Kashman, shocked by the Superior Court jury conviction yesterday, said he would ask Judge Charles C. Hardy to throw out the verdict and grant a new trial.

The judge said after the verdict, “The evidence supports a conviction, but I would not have convicted him myself.”

Sobbing, “I'm not guilty, I'm not guilty,” Taylor was led from the courtroom, his hands cuffed behind his back, to the Maricopa County Jail. He will be formally sentenced by Hardy at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday.

The verdict by the eight-man, four-woman jury came at 3:10

p.m., after nearly 14 hours of deliberation over two days.

The jury did not return the death sentence urged by prosecutor Horton Weiss, but the attorney said the guilty verdict “restores my faith in the jury system. I think the case was fairly tried.”

Weiss, who plans to run for the Pima County Superior Court bench this fall, said the testimony of four key witnesses helped seal the state's case against Taylor.

He named Bruce Wallmark and Robert Jackson, who testified about statements Taylor made to them about the fire while they were in the Pima County Juvenile Court Center; former juvenile officer Herbert E. Bay, now a Tucson policeman, and a hotel clerk, Freda Lampton.

Those four probably filled in the blank spots and completed

Continued page 6

Los Angeles Times (3/23/72, Pg. B2)

A 17-year-old youth has been convicted of 28 counts of first-degree murder for setting afire the Pioneer Hotel in Tucson on Dec. 20, 1970. The youth, Louis Taylor, was sentenced to life imprisonment. The public defender said he would appeal. Most of the victims, many of them Christmas shoppers from northern Mexico, were asphyxiated by smoke and fumes from burning hallway carpets.

- Part of “The Nation” section, which included briefs from news around the country
- Only mention in “Big 5” newspapers

Longer Write-Ups

Kingston (Jamaica) Gleaner (3/29/72)

17 year-old guilty of murder

PHOENIX, Arizona, March 22
(Reuters):

A 17-year-old high school dropout has been found guilty of the murder of 28 people who died in a hotel fire on December 20, 1970. He will be sentenced next week.

Louis C. Taylor of Tucson covered his face with a white handkerchief after the verdict was delivered yesterday and sobbed: "I'm not guilty....I'm not guilty."

Evidence was heard during the six-week trial that Taylor told a witness he started the blaze at Tucson's 11-story pioneer hotel by squirting lighter fluid on the walls and lighting it.

But Taylor proclaimed his innocence throughout the trial. The mandatory sentence is life imprisonment.

Public Defender Howard Kashman said he would appeal.

Pacific Stars and Stripes (Japan) (3/31/72)

Arson Killer of 28 Given Life Term

PHOENIX, Ariz. (AP) — Louie C. Taylor, a Tucson teenager convicted last week on 28 counts of first-degree murder, was sentenced Tuesday to life in prison.

Taylor, 17, was arrested soon after flames raced through the upper portion of the Pioneer International Hotel on Dec. 20, 1970, killing 28 persons and injuring dozens more.

Louis Taylor's "Re-Trial"

- Originally his convictions were overturned, but it went all the way to the Supreme Court and was overturned again
- 60 Minutes reopened an investigation into Taylor's conviction in 2003 and cast serious doubts about Taylor's guilt
- Taylor was allowed to plead no contest to the contested charges and be released from prison
- Was released from jail in 2013 and has maintained his innocence

60 Minutes (3/29/2013)

New testimony on Pioneer hotel fire source heard

PHOENIX — A California arson investigator today offered new evidence to support his opinion that a Tucson hotel fire which claimed 28 lives was “man-made.”

Cyrrillis Holmes of Sacramento resumed his testimony in the murder trial of Louis C. Taylor, 17, who is charged with 28 counts of murder in the fire that ravaged the Pioneer International Hotel Dec. 20, 1970.

Holmes, on the stand for the

third day, maintains that the fire started in at least two areas, and possibly a third. The third area, a stairway between the third and fourth floors, might have been ignited by flaming debris falling in the stairwell, he told the six-man, six-woman jury.

He traced the course of the fire on a room-by-room, floor-by-floor basis. He began with the third floor and continued to the top of the 11-story building.

Holmes' testimony to date backs up prosecutor Horton Weiss' opening statement that the fire started in several locations, and was not caused by accident.

Holmes, in his first day of testimony, stated that the fire resulted from a deliberate act.

The witness testified that his examination of the burned out areas did not reveal any electrical connections that showed evidence of having caused the fire.



- Deposition of Fire Investigator Cy Holmes in 2013 (Previous video; (7:14-9:40))

Louis Taylor After Being Released

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehqLB20vcGk>

Discussion

- From what you've seen, how do you feel about the reporting of the Pioneer Hotel fire and the trial of Louis C. Taylor?