



Nelson Poirier

A backdraft or smoke explosion can be one of the most dangerous fire events that a firefighter can face. It is hard to predict and can be devastating. It was just such a condition that led to the death of firefighter Nelson Poirier of the Ottawa Fire Department.

On Saturday, January 29, 1921, at a few minutes before seven p.m., a passing citizen activated fire alarm call Box 16 at the corner of Queen Street West and Broad Street after noticing smoke coming from the Sach's Brothers rag and junk warehouse. Firefighters from Station 7 arrived quickly on scene and noticed smoke coming from the second-storey windows of the three-storey building, but there was no sign of flames. Crews stretched a hose line and took ladders down the laneway to the rear of the building, where the attack was to be mounted.

Firefighters Edward Lachance, whose father died on duty in 1898, and Fabien Provost raised a ladder to the second floor to operate a stream into the window. At the same time firefighters Poirier, Landry, Bellefeuille who was at his first fire and Hudson raised a ladder to the third-: Hudson began to climb the ladder with an axe to break the window. Poirier and Landry started back down the lane close to the wall to get another ladder

The instant the window broke oxygen entering the building through the opening caused a backdraft of such explosive force it blew out the entire wall. Poirier and Landry were buried under bricks and debris, while Hudson Lachance and Provost were thrown some distance off their ladders.

Firefighters immediately rushed to their assistance and dug them out in seconds. Poirier was unconscious and had severe injuries was placed on a hose wagon and rushed

Hospital where he died at 10: John Graham, whose father was killed on duty in 1877, was at his bedside

Nelson Poirier was thirty-seven years old he came to Ottawa at the age of 6 from Alexandria Ontario He had been a substitute firefighter for two years and full-time for seven. Poirier children received \$1,000 through Compensation Act, \$1,000 from life insurance and \$560 from the firefighters benevolent fund in a lump sum payment. There was no orphan fund similar to the one Toronto had at the time to provide her with a monthly income

The fifth Ottawa firefighter to die in the line of duty now lies in Notre Dame Cemetery. Nelson's great-grandson, Andre Poirier, carries on the tradition today as an Ottawa firefighter.