

## THE HARTFORD CIRCUS FIRE



An investigator takes notes near the fallen animal runway in front of the northeast bleachers. Many of the dead were found piled up near these runways, which had prevented a quick escape from the burning big top. *Photo by Acme Photo, from author's collection.*

were turned over to six Hartford undertakers, who provided caskets and prepared them for burial on Monday morning.

Commissioner Hickey, in his capacity as state fire marshal, met with Deputy Fire Marshal Frank Starkel at the fire site early in the evening of July 6 and initiated an investigation to determine the origin and cause of the fire. Interviews and questioning began at 11:00 p.m. and continued through the night. On Friday, July 7, five Ringling men were arrested on charges of manslaughter: vice-president James Haley, general manager George Smith, boss canvas man Leonard Aylesworth, chief electrician Edward Versteeg and superintendent of the Trucks and Tractors Department David Blanchfield. Also accused but not arrested were seat men William Caley and Samuel Clark; Clark was a seat man under the south grandstand and ran out of the big top as soon as he noticed the fire. Charges against Clark were later dropped.

Saturday night after the fire, July 8, Officer Francis Whelan and Lieutenant Henry Mayo from the State Police Department separately went undercover