

# Deadly fire destroys three apartments in Lynn, Massachusetts

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Just after midnight on Friday, a deadly and all-consuming fire destroyed a small apartment building at 24 Bruce Place in Lynn, Massachusetts. The building burned so quickly that firefighters who responded from less than three blocks away were unable to save the lives of four residents.

By the time the flames were extinguished, the roof and the third floor of the building had collapsed. Many residents were awake when the fire broke out, but four were nonetheless unable to escape because of the intensity of the flames.

The four victims were Maritza Cruz, her sister Sonia Cruz, her daughter Yasmin Cruz, a student at North Shore Community College, and Rodolfo Cruz. Sonia, 36, was pregnant. The Cruzes lived on the second floor.

Witnesses told the *Boston Globe* of “desperate screams” and a “ball of fire.” A resident rescued a woman in her eighties from the second floor who was reluctant to leave the burning building because of family members trapped inside.

One survivor of the fire was taken to Salem Hospital and a second to Lynn Union Hospital before being moved to Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. Partners HealthCare, a multi-billion-dollar organization that has been buying and consolidating smaller hospitals in working class communities around Boston, has announced plans to close Lynn Union and merge it with Salem Hospital over the next three years. Lynn Union is only a mile from the scene of the fire, while Salem is more than four miles.

According to firefighters, the building had working smoke detectors and met safety code requirements. Nonetheless, it is an example of the conditions facing workers and immigrants in eastern Massachusetts, where finding an apartment with affordable rent is often difficult. According to the web site [rentrange.com](http://rentrange.com), the

average monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Lynn is more than \$1,600.

The wood-frame buildings on Bruce Place are so close together that the siding on a neighboring house was melted by the blaze. The three apartments in the building comprised slightly less than 2,600 square feet of total living space, including eight bedrooms. An estimated 20 people lived in these cramped conditions.

After the fire Frank Obey, Lynn’s building inspector, told the *Globe* that the city does not limit the number of relatives who can share an apartment, claiming “we can’t separate families.”

Of Lynn’s 35,776 housing units, nearly 63 percent are in multi-unit structures, compared to 41.7 percent statewide, according to US Census data. Of the city’s 33,000 total households, only 46.6 percent own their own homes, compared to 62.7 percent statewide.

Lynn, a city of 90,000 people nine miles north of Boston, was world-renowned for its shoe manufacturing in the 19th century. In the middle of the 20th century the industry sought cheaper labor elsewhere, leaving Lynn economically devastated.

Now less than 4,000 manufacturing jobs remain in Lynn, most of them at a General Electric plant making airplane engines. More than 25 percent of employment is in the category of “educational services, and health care and social assistance,” jobs which do not pay adequate wages and often make it difficult for workers to maintain regular schedules. One of the victims of the Bruce Place fire was a home health aide.

The median household income in Lynn is slightly more than \$44,600, but according to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue web site, the 2012 per capita income was less than \$18,000. From 2009 to 2013, 21 percent of Lynn residents lived below the poverty level. During the same period 26.2 percent of families with

children under five years old were below the poverty level. Over the past year the city's unemployment rate has consistently been above the Massachusetts average.

The Southern Essex County Registry of Deeds lists the owner of the Bruce Place building as Jane Jamgotchian, who bought it in March 2009 for \$111,900. The previous owner of the property had taken out a \$396,000 mortgage from Ameriquest in March 2005, which was foreclosed by Deutsche Bank National Trust Company after Ameriquest collapsed.



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