

BAKED!

SIXTEEN BUILDINGS: \$40,000 WORTH OF PROPERTY

FROM THE WALNUT BUREAU – FEBRUARY 10, 1881

All day long, Saturday, the streets were about as void of life as a grass-grown cemetery; the roads leading to town were as near impassable as can well be imagined; the streets were untrodden by the horse's hoof, and, as a consequence, wore a glassy smoothness that was uninviting to the pedestrian.

Although it was the night which usually keeps a crowd upon the streets until a late hour, people went home early. With everything encased in a coating of ice at least an inch and a half thick, few would have thought of taking any thought or extra precautions against that much dreaded for, fire.

Nevertheless some human fiend, either from malice toward some individual or upon a general principle of deviltry, conceived the idea that it would be a good night for a fire.

About 12 o'clock, Scott Sankey saw a blaze climbing up the side of the store occupied by Lebeck Bros., between it and Dr. Barber's drug store. He immediately gave the alarm, but owing to the slippery condition of the streets, and the difficulty of locomotion, the alarm did not become general for nearly three-quarters of an hour.

As the buildings mentioned were entirely composed of wood a few moments sufficed to make it dangerous to the inmates who occupied the upper floor.

Adolph Lebeck and wife occupied the rear end of the upper floor as a dwelling. He heard the alarm and had barely time to dress and escape, saving a very few of his household effects. He ran down into the store and says that there was no fire in the store at the time. As the personal safety of his family was the first thing to be thought of, and as there as yet, no one on the ground to assist very little of the merchandise was saved.

The front part of the upper floor was occupied by John Hopley, James Turner, W.H. Nogley and ----- Sherwin, as sleeping apartments.

Turner was awakened just as the fire was eating the window sill away. He yelled to Hopley and made a rush for the door. It seemed difficult to make the key fit and Hopley,

seeing there was no time to loose, picked up his clothes and threw them over the balcony.

Returning for some other articles of value, he found the flames bursting through the floor. He was bashful and didn't like to appear before the public dressed in a night shirt, but as it was not a time to stand on points of etiquette he got down stairs, gathered up his clothing and made his way across the street to an empty lumber wagon, standing in front of Linfor & Koli's office, he climbed into it and made his toilet. It was made hastily, and John will blush to the longest day of his life when he thinks of his elevated dressing room.

Dr. Barber had time to get two of the show cases out of his store, and going back the second time got singed and concluded it was time to keep out.

S.R. Baker's clothing store was next, and as he was not alarmed in time, and owing to the fact that there were very few on the ground, his entire stock, upon which there was no insurance, was destroyed.

A. Brown's grocery store was the next building to receive its baptism of fire. E. Preble was sleeping in the building and was awakened in time to dress, and save a part of his private effects; after doing which he went to the money drawer and grabbed the change of large denominations, rolled out a barrel of sugar and a little tobacco, in pails and caddies.

The hotel owned by L.I. Green, of Odell, Ill, and occupied by A.H. Brown was the next structure that was doomed to destruction. It ignited readily and made the work of saving furniture a dangerous one.

Upon the supposition that the most valuable part of the furniture had been taken out two or three of the best rooms were neglected and their contents shared the fate of the building.

While superintending the removal of furniture Mrs. Brown was knocked from the top of a flight of stairs to the bottom, by a piece of furniture in the hands of a reckless individual.

The fall tore loose some of the ligaments in one of her limbs and caused other injuries which confine her to her bed. Though serious they are not fatal.

Jack Casey's saloon was the next building to be destroyed. Casey was out of town, but Frank Nevill succeeded in getting out most of the fixtures and the liquors, and removed them to what he supposed was a place of safety, but some fellows, to whom a fire is a picnic and free whiskey a month's delight, stole several bottles, and drew some in pails.

As Charley Brown was carrying water one of these fellows stuck a pail of Whisky under his nose and told him to take a drink. He replied by knocking it on to the ground.

By this time the streets were literally blockaded with goods, and the opposite sidewalk was barely passable.

Luckily the wind was blowing from a little north of east, which kept the fire from the east side of the street.

It was also fortunate that the buildings were covered with ice, as it in a great measure, prevented the flames from bursting through the roof until the inside was pretty well burned, it also largely aided in keeping the heat in.

About this time an attempt was made to pull down the building occupied by James Mennealey, as a restaurant; it was hoped that if a break could be made that the engine could be worked to some benefit.

The building was being gradually pulled to pieces, by chopping holes in the roof, and hitching to rafters and studding, when a temporary lull in the fire was occasioned by the fact that Casey's saloon was short and the flames neither reached very high or extended very far to the rear of Hector's clothing store, which was the next building.

Hoping to save buildings nearer the fire the men engaged on the restaurant left it and attempted to demolish Casey's saloon, but the smoke and flying cinders prevented getting close enough to do any good.

Work was again resumed on the restaurant, but burning shingles and boards soon made the position untenable, and the work was left for the engine which had been placed on the ground, but owing to the fact that there was no fire company and no facilities for obtaining water, had not been used.

An empty kerosene barrel was obtained to place the suction hose in, and that portion of the crowd not engaged in carrying out goods from the stores north of the flames, provided themselves with pails, coal hods and tin wash boilers, and started for a pond that had been formed by the melted ice, near Dierks Brother's lumber yard.

As it was some distance to carry, through slush ankle deep, and to obtain water one must stand in the pond half way to their knees, the supply failed.

Had this not been the case those handling the hose at the time say the fire could have been held there.

The goods from Green's hardware, Bosley's general store, Moershell Bros. store, Mennealey's restaurant, Bruce & Co.'s stock of drugs, Rowley & Dunlap's stock, Boot's stock, the contents of Flickinger Bros. law and A.B. Slater's real estate office, Johannsen & Ronna's general stock, Stowe's jewelry store, the mail and fixtures of the post office, and Palmer's fancy stock had all been removed, and the buildings abandoned as a prey to the flames.

A lively popping of cartridges showed that a part of Green's stock was "going off" on its own hook.

There seemed to be but little chance of stopping it inside the row, now; and buildings could have been bought cheap.

Finally, Mr. E.R. Hinckley suggested that if Stowe's jewelry store, which was a small building, was torn down that the engine could stop the fire there and save the post office.

Acting upon the suggestion W.H. Coats, Charley Hinckley, Tom Broughton and two or three others commenced cutting holes and fastening ropes.

A sufficient number to give the thing a twist had now collected around this new point of defense, but this portion of the street was as yet so slippery that a man could not pull more than the weight of twenty pounds.

But after a good deal of yelling and a little pulling the man chopping knocked off a couple of shingles with his axe, the men at the ropes, hearing the shingles rip, were encouraged by this and gave a vigorous yank and pulled off a lath.

By this time the force of yank – ees at the rope had considerably augmented, the next time a hitch was made a portion of the roof was brought down, knocking Tom Broughton down and injuring him pretty badly; J.B. Case also had his hand torn at the same time.

After some deliberation as to whether it was best to set the engine near the post office or try and save Carstensen's shop, it was decided that the shops were probably safe, anyway that a few men with pails could put out sparks there, and the engine was set in the street, near the post office.

It was with considerable difficulty that the barrel was kept full enough to prevent the hose from sucking in air, and whenever a solid stream could be had its effect was at once noticed.

It was doubtful for some time whether the fire could be stopped here; especially as the thirty-five or forty men carrying water were getting tired and sprained running over the slippery ground, and of the 200 or more others engaged in watching the fire none or few volunteered to act as a relief, they were enjoying the sight of a big fire under the awnings on the opposite side of the street.

Quite a number thought it was wasting water to throw it on the Johannsen building until the flames burst through the north wall, but they will upon reflection that the water kept the wall soaked and also kept the heat in so that when the roof and the east and west end walls fell in it was an easy matter to push the north wall in, which had not been the case had it been a sheet of flame.

As the north wall was pushed and went down with a crash, a shout of victory went up and the flames were conquered.

It was 5:30 when the last building was consumed and the flames had unfalteringly kept their course for nearly six hours, part of the time through a slight storm of sleet and hail.

Had not every thing been covered with an inch of ice none of the residence west of Central Street could have been saved, sparks sifted through the unbattered cracks in Carstensen Bro's. barn and set fire to the hay, several times, thereby endangering the machine shops and adjacent buildings, but the timely administration of water by watchers inside prevented any damage in this direction.

Peter Carstensen loaded his house hold effects onto a wagon and let the wagon loose on top of the hill thinking it would run down somewhere to a place of safety, but having nothing to guide it, it started off at a lively gait, then turned and ran into the corner of Jack Hamilton's house, making him think an earthquake had taken place.

Much of the merchandise in Green's hardware store was not saved as the piles of nails, butts, bolts, etc., attest.

Four or five hundred bushels of potatoes in Bosley's cellar were roasted in good shape and a large quantity of heavy goods.

Moershell Bro's. saved the larger portion of their goods, though the bulkie articles were left.

Rowley & Dunlap saved there stock in splendid shape, losing only a few barrels of salt and some other bulk goods.

Boots stock was all carried out.

Johannsen & Ronna's was carried out, all but some bulky goods in the cellar.

The losses are about as follows:

Lebeck Bros. \$6,500, insurance \$4,000.

Adolph Lebeck probably \$500, insurance \$200.

Lodge Bros., three buildings \$3,000, insurance \$1,400.

Dr. G.M. Barber \$2,200, insurance \$1,400.

S.R. Baker \$2,500, no insurance.

A.H. Brown, furniture in hotel \$100.

L.L. Green, Odell, IL hotel building \$2,500, no insurance.

Jack Casey, building and stock \$600, insurance \$300.

J. Hector, stock \$1,000, insurance \$1,000.

Leah Spangler, building \$1,200, insurance \$600.

G.W. Bosley, stock \$1,000, insurance \$2,500; building \$1,500, insurance \$500.

Frank Green, stock \$2,500, building \$1,200, insurance \$500 on building.

Jas. Mennealey, \$100.

Moershell Bros. building occupied by Mennealey \$400.

Moershell Bros. building \$2,000, insurance \$1,000; stock damaged \$1,400, insurance \$2,600.

Bruce & Co., building \$1,500, insurance \$500; stock damaged \$500.

Mrs. Drake's building \$1,500, insured, household goods \$600, probably insured.

Rowley & Dunlap stock, damage nominal, no insurance.

A.B. Slater, building \$1,000, insurance \$600.

Boot, stock \$225, insured.

Frank Stowe, damage to household goods \$50.

Johannsen & Ronna building \$2,000, insurance \$1,000; stock damaged \$1,500, insurance \$4,000.

Stowe's jewelry stock damage nominal.

Bowman's building, torn down, \$200, insured -----.

Dr. Hanna lost office furniture, medical books, etc.

Palmer's stock was badly damaged, also Bowman's household goods.

This list does not contain any estimate of the damage to Mr. Motter's feelings because the boys wouldn't turn the hose on his building, at his earnest and repeated requests.