

16 BUILDINGS IN ASHES. Our City Visited By A Destructive Fire On Saturday Morning.

From the Walnut Bureau, Friday, June 26, 1896

The East Side of Central Street From the Post Office North and the South Side of Highland Street from Central to the Alley entirely Destroyed.

At a few minutes after two Tuesday morning fire was discovered between the buildings occupied by Mrs. Geo. Griffith as a milliner shop and Frank Mick's restaurant.

The alarm was given as soon as possible and in less than half an hour the town was out in force.

The fire spread both north and south and soon the entire row on Central street from the post office to the corner of Highland street was a mass of flames.

Our waterworks system is only about half complete and the only means to fight the fire was by a bucket brigade and what water could be brought from wells and cisterns.

All efforts were directed towards confining the fire within the one block and heavy work was done to keep it from crossing the street to Volstedt's and Comer's buildings on the corner of Central and Highland streets.

Had it reached these buildings the loss would have been many times as large as it would then have had a free range through nearly a half mile of the best residences in the town.

Two other points where heavy fighting was done were at Seiffert & Wiese's lumber yard and at the post office where men worked with might and main to stem the fire fiend and were successful in both.

Seiffert & Wiese's office was entirely consumed but the lumber yards and sheds were saved.

The walls of the post office are still standing but the building is a total wreck and is practically valueless.

The first work was clearing goods out of the stores that could be reached and in an incredible short space of time the goods and fixtures in Blohm & Heilman's saloon, the post office, the Misses Whittie's milliner store, C. W. Merrill's shoe shop, Dr. Hanna's office, Welty's barber shop, Voss' shoe shop, Moritz's meat market, Howard's and Peters' billiard halls, Ehmke's saloon and tailor shop, Grantz & Gloe's ware rooms and office and Seiffert & Wiese's office were removed to a place of safety.

Only in three buildings were the goods all burned, Frank Mick's restaurant, Mrs. Griffith's milliner store and Fraser's butcher shop, these were entirely lost not a thing taken out.

Hans Couse and family, living over Fraser's meat market, barely got out before the stairs fell and Geo. Griffith and wife, who were sleeping in the milliner store had time to secure but little of their clothing.

A large steel tube filled with gas for charging a soda fountain was lying on the floor in Mick's restaurant and when the fire reached it an explosion occurred which shattered the remaining part of the building and sent a shower of burning splinters over the town.

The tube had a tested strength of 3700 pounds, and was made of the best forged boiler steel.

The bursting pressure must have been enormous as the walls of the tube were torn in shreds and twisted in all manner of shapes and was found scattered in all parts of town.

It is almost miraculous that someone did not get hit with some of the flying pieces as the streets were full of people at the time.

The old and much condemned cisterns were the salvation of the town this time as without the water taken from them the march of the flames could not have been checked.

The losses and insurance are about as follows:

John Fraser, building, \$1,200; insurance in German Insurance company \$600.

F. J. Fraser, meat market, stock and fixtures, \$1,000; insured in Continental Insurance company for \$550.

Mrs. M. Hagge, building, \$600; insured in Des Moines Insurance company for \$300.

Grantz & Gloe, building, agricultural implements; fully insured.

Seiffert & Wiese, buildings, lumber and coal; fully insured.

Des Moines Saddlery company, building. . . . [part of paper missing, including at least one additional listing]

William Peters, billiards, \$300; no insurance.

William Voss, shoe maker, \$100; no insurance.

Post office building, \$700; insured for \$400.

A. C. Blohm, post office fixtures, damaged by removal, fully insured.

Mrs. George Griffith, millinery, \$650 insured in Concordia Fire Insurance company for \$300.

K. and A. Whittie, building and millinery, partial loss fully insured.

T. C. Hansen, building, loss about \$900; insured in Connecticut Fire Insurance company for \$700.

Blohm & Heilman, saloon; insured in Connecticut Fire Insurance for \$650.

J. B. Johannsen, building; insured Fire association for \$500.

H. Moritz, buildings and meat market, \$2,500; insured in German Insurance company for \$1000, and Iowa Mutual Insurance for \$450.

F. Mick, restaurant, insured in Iowa Mutual Insurance company for \$900.

C. Ehmke, buildings and merchandise, \$2,000; insured in Iowa Mutual Insurance company. . . . [part of paper missing, including at least one additional listing]

The mayor and council, if properly drilled, would make a good hose team.

Some of the young ladies rendered valuable services in carrying water and getting empty buckets back to the wells.

The business men of the town, with few exceptions, have signed an agreement not to build anything but brick buildings in the future.

Several of the broken glass fronts will be replaced with plate glass.

One of the big plate glass windows in Lebeck's store was broken by the heat.

Grantz & Gloe and the post office found shelter in the room north of the German bank.

Claus Ehmke was the first to erect a new building.

New buildings will be erected by [part of paper missing]

A cigar case was taken from Frank Mick's restaurant and locked up in Hardesty's shop. Some one knowing the fact broke the shop open and took several boxes of cigars.

The meat markets were both doing business within a few hours after the fire. Herman Moritz opened up in the little building north of Volstedt's, and Fraser has temporary quarters in the back part of Koll's store.

New buildings were erected over the piles of ice left exposed, during the afternoon and evening Saturday.

Jerry Volstedt slipped while at work on the roof of their building and broke several bones in his hand.

The liquid refreshments that floated around the back alleys were no benefit to any one.

The best workers were those who could see something to do without being told.

The millinery goods of the Misses Whittie were removed and replaced with little or no damage.

Large pieces of the exploded steel tube is on exhibition at Lodge & Kincaid's store and at Fraser's restaurant.

The men who would make good members of the fire department were easily recognized by what they were doing.

The small chemicals done good service.

A piece of the exploded gas tube was found in the road over a mile west of town.

Fraser's safe was opened Monday afternoon and the contents found in good condition.

The systematic pilfering carried on by a crowd of young boys would bear investigation.

Two streams of water from the water mains would have quenched the fire inside of a half hour.

Also in this paper:

Frank Mick will erect a tent just north of the German bank building and use it for temporary quarters.

Among the ten or twelve insurance companies that held risks on buildings and goods in the burned district the first to get their adjusters on the ground and settle their claims were those represented by J. B. Johannsen.

Fred Gloe came down from Manning Saturday morning. He heard of the fire at eight o'clock and took the train for Irwin, driving across from there and was here by noon.

At the special meeting of the council Tuesday night Herman Moritz was granted privilege to erect a temporary building on the street to use until his new building can be erected.

The city council met in special session Tuesday night and passed an ordinance defining the fire limits of the town of Walnut, and prohibiting the erection of any but fireproof buildings within that limit.

[Editor's note: The property owners who had petitioned for this ordinance were recorded in the City Council minutes of June 20, 1896.

They were Exchange State Bank, W. S. Packard, Citizens Bank, Dr. F. Hanna, J. B. Johannsen, K. & A. Whittie, Des Moines Saddlery Co. by J. B. Johannsen, Agent, John Fraser, W. F. Burke, N. Carey, Claus Ehmke, S. R. Comer, Ronna & Hector, E. H. Ott, Jno. Mallicoat, Chas. Robinson, C. L. Lebeck, G. E. Sellers, A. F. Lodge, L. C. Pederson, and W. E. Fraser.

Ordinance No. 31 was published in the Walnut Bureau, June 26, 1896.

It made it unlawful to build any building in the east half of block 16 and the west half of block 15 (Walnut's downtown block) unless the outer walls be made of brick and mortar or stone and mortar. All roofs had to be covered with metal or other fireproof material and chimneys had to be built of good hard burned brick and mortar or stone and mortar, well plastered inside.

Every person violating the ordinance was subject to a fine of not more than \$100.

Every wooden building that was erected contrary to the provisions of the ordinance was to be taken down within 10 days of notice from the Mayor or marshal.

A person who did not remove such a building was liable to a fine of \$5 to \$10 per day after the order to remove the building.

This ordinance was still in effect in the Revised Ordinances of the Town of Walnut, Iowa, 1904.

On October 5, 1926, Ordinance No. 13 was passed establishing fire limits, regulating the erection and removal of buildings therein and prescribing penalties for violation.

It detailed the fireproof materials that could be used for the buildings.

The fire limits included all of blocks 15, 16, 21, and 22; lots 6, 7, and 8 of block 9 and lots 9, 10, and 11 of block 10 (All of the downtown business district).

{A similar ordinance was still in effect in 1967, but is not currently in Walnut's ordinances, according to our City Clerk.}