

## Buehler Fire 1930 Part 1

Before the Monroe Evening Times printed a small hard-covered book in 1994, I didn't know that Monroe ever had an indoor golf course. The book included a wonderful photo of the course with a minimal caption that stated that it had been "lost in a fire." There are three photos on the following page in Looking Back that appear to show some of the remains after the fire, one of which shows the old high school in the background. There was really no other clue about when the fire took place nor where the building was located. After many years of reading old newspapers and handling many items of historic interest, I finally found out when the fire took place and, consequently, where the building was located.

The Monday, February 17, 1930 article started, "A fire that glowed and smoked brilliantly above Monroe last midnight swept to destruction the Charles H. Buehler Company garage building, 1720-22 12th Street, with total damage estimated by Mr. Buehler at \$100,000." That meant that it was just to the east of the location of the 1912 William Becker fire, which I wrote about in three columns in April. "It was the most serious and spectacular conflagration in Monroe in years, only the fact that there was no wind minimizing danger to other nearby residence property." The loss included about 30 automobiles, and a large stock of tires and automobile batteries, accessories, the Pine Gardens indoor golf course, and the newly equipped John Fischbacher drink parlor.



This photo shows an indoor golf course called Pine Gardens, which was operated by a young Charles H. Buehler, Jr. It was located on 12th Street and destroyed by fire on February 17, 1930. This photo was copied from a book called Looking Back, A Pictorial History of Green County, Wisconsin, which was printed by the Monroe Evening Times in 1994.

At the time of the paper, it appeared that the fire had originated in the west end of the long, single-story structure, possibly from a hard coal heater. Dense smoke curled from every crack in the building at first and broke through the roof at the southwest corner after firemen arrived on the scene. Some spectators thought the firefighters were getting the upper hand since the flames were reduced, but the streams of water weren't reaching the seat of the fire under the tin and paper roof. As the heat spread

through the building, oil and gasoline ignited, causing the entire long roof to burst forth into “a fiercely seething inferno.”

A more detailed list of the losses included: a new Janesville-Monroe bus owned by Wisconsin Power and Light, valued at \$7,500; two motor hearses and a small sedan owned by Shriner Brothers, about \$6,700; two tractors and a trailer owned by Allis Chalmers Company in Milwaukee; a large coupe owned by Dr. L. E. Creasy; two cars owned by Frank Buehler; a coupe owned by Sam Magdal; a coach owned by G. L. Morey with a new washing machine inside; a coupe owned by P. F. Steuri; a delivery truck of the Voegeli furniture store; about 20 used cars belonging to the Buehler company; tools owned by the employees: Charles A. Jorgenson, Herman Dieckhoff, operator of the tire and battery shop in the garage, and Charles King; oil supplies; large stock of tires in the Monroe tire shop operated in connection with the garage; a stock of batteries and accessories; garage office equipment; Pine Gardens indoor golf course and equipment; and the new drink parlor fixtures moved into the space of John Fischbacher only a month earlier.

Officer Sam Jones, who was patrolling his beat, noticed the smoke on 12th Street about 11:30. He inspected the garage premises and found it coming from the west end. He ran to the alarm box and pulled the lever. Within a few minutes firemen had made the two-block run from spring square and were laying the hose.

The smoke was so dense that they were not able to do much inside the building. Only two trucks near the northwest door were removed. It was not immediately evident whether the flames would break out, but they finally appeared in the southwest corner. The firemen were able to turn water on the flames from the ground on the south, which was about level with the garage roof.

Four leads of hose were stretched, only one from a truck pumper since higher pressure was not a necessity. The hook and ladder pumper operated at the southeast corner of the courthouse square. Another lead ran directly from a hydrant at 17th Avenue and 14th Street, one from 17th Avenue and 12th Street, and one directly in front of the garage.

“Small explosions in the hot mass were heard frequently and great showers of sparks were shot upward with leaping flames and dense clouds of light and black smoke. Lack of wind permitted a straight rise.” When the entire roof ignited it became a matter of simply spraying streams over the flames to reduce the danger of flying embers and sparks. The glow was lessening by 1:00 a.m. so the crowds dispersed, but some of the firemen remained at work with a hose until daylight.

Direct attack on the seat of the flames was impossible since the building could not be entered effectively and streams could only be shot through here and there as breaks in the roof appeared. The tin and paper roof held the fire and heat in and permitted it to spread the length of the building.

After opening of the doors on the east, the smoke cleared. Some of the men thought about removing some of the cars, but the entire roof ignited. That sent them scurrying and the entire place was ablaze. “The intense heat and water let nothing in the building escape damage.”

When mechanic Charles A. Jorgensen left the garage about 9:30 all had looked normal to him. The walls of the building were concrete block with a metal covered frame.

I'll share more information about this fire next week.