

## The \$100,000 Fire in Monroe on January 13, 1914 - Part 1

Another large fire occurred in Monroe on Tuesday, January 13, 1914 and became known as the \$100,000 fire. The fire started in the building formerly occupied by the Miller Manufacturing Company, which had been located where Stop N Go now sits. This building is shown on page 76 of the Pictorial History of Monroe; one can also see three other buildings affected by the fire in that photo, the D. C. Ryan home, the Green County Herald and the Universalist Church. Also affected were the United Telephone Company across 16th Avenue [photo on page 77 of the gray Pictorial History], the Ludlow Hotel [shown on page 70 of the same book] across 9th Street, and the home of D. C. Ryan, which sat behind the 4-story building in what is now the city parking lot. Coincidentally, this fire happened exactly 15 years after the Fitzgibbons Bros. Carriage manufacturing plant, which occurred on January 14, 1899.

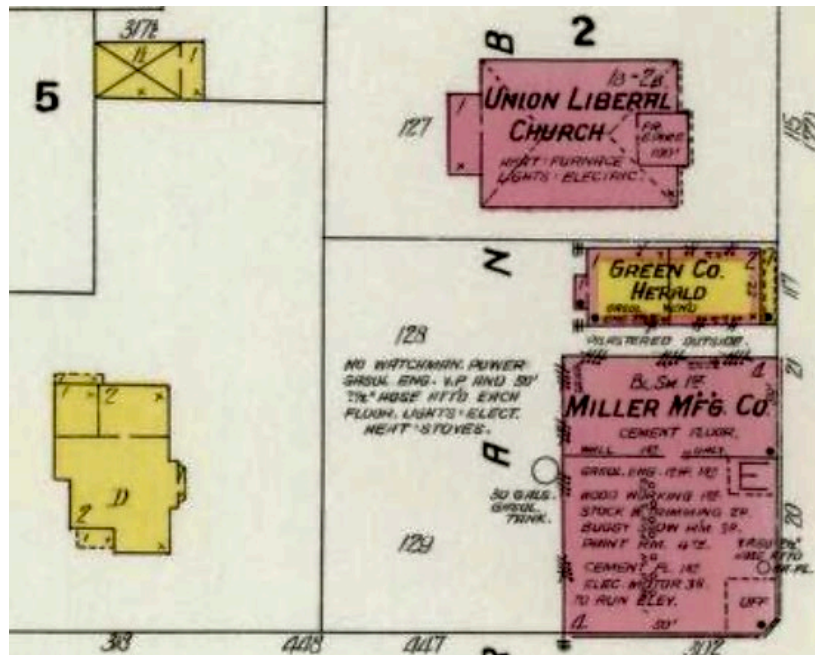
This fire was discovered at 10:20 p.m. when Frank May noticed it from his room in the Ludlow Hotel. When he arrived at the garage door, there were two or three other parties there. The fire had originated in the northeast corner of the garage room on the ground floor. The flames were already breaking through the windows and garage doors at that time. Only the cash register and the typewriter were saved from the office; everything else was consumed.

The wall on the northeast corner fell out about 30 minutes later. After 45 more minutes the west wall went over into the street; soon after that the south wall fell. Just before midnight the east wall caved in on the Herold building. All that was left standing were the corners and part of the center wall; both were torn down the next morning.

It was no surprise that the fire spread so quickly. The automobile tanks in the garage kept exploding and the flames feeding on the combustibles such as gasoline and greasy rags with great fury. "With the numerous windows serving as air flues the flames roared angrily and reached high into the air. The explosions threw great masses of burning particles far above the flames and the lurid glare illuminated the heavens so that the fire was seen many miles away. The inflated tires of the automobiles kept cracking with sharp reports that startled bystanders."

Those who arrived first agreed that the fire "was confined to the northeast corner and a new Buick covered with paper seemed to be the first machine enveloped in flame. No combustible materials were stored in this part of the room and the stove did not stand near there." It was also thought that it might have possibly been defective wiring, but the switch was turned off so there was no current in the wires since nobody was in the building. The Schar boys had been in the garage only ten minutes earlier and there was no sign of fire then. The garage had two large gasoline tanks; fortunately, neither of them exploded.

The firemen realized immediately that it was useless to try to control the fire in the large building; it was necessary to connect to several hydrants in order to protect the adjacent buildings. They had eight



This portion of the 1908 Sanborn map shows the corner where the \$100,000 fire occurred in January 1914. The top of the map is east, so the right side side would be facing what is now 9th Street. The D. C. Ryan home is to the left (north). You might want to save this map until you've read the next three columns about the fire.

leads of hose, but found there wasn't enough pressure for that number. Pressure was 15 pounds less than maximum. With the lack of water, the firemen "labored valiantly and, with splendid results," considering the the proportion of the fire.

"The factory building at the time it was built was equipped with a hydrant and hose outfit on the ground floor but this part of the building was locked and there was no chance to connect with the hydrant."

After the danger of the fire seemed to be over, sometime after midnight, the home of Miss Teresa Gettings was opened to the hard-working firemen where they served coffee and sandwiches.

The fire left the ruins of 30 automobiles owned by Herman J. Karlen that had been housed in that building; many of them were new and expensive machines. The loss included three used cars belonging to the garage and a dozen new Hudsons, Studebakers, and Buicks. Another 15 vehicles, which were insured, were the property of individuals who were listed in the newspaper. Another eight vehicles that were not insured were mentioned along with the owners' names. Rudolph Schiesser was one of those, having left his roadster the last thing in the evening. Ferdinand Schar's sons had taken his Chalmers Six touring car out of the garage only two minutes before the fire was discovered.

Fortunately for Wilson G. Bear and Roy Jaberg, they had moved their line of new automobiles from the south part of that building to their new quarters in the Fitzgibbons Brothers Block just east of the square on the previous Sunday.

The residence of Daniel C. Ryan, which was located immediately to the north of the garage, was totally destroyed that night. The wind was blowing to the north, so it was in early danger. As soon as the fire in the garage building gained headway, the entire south side of the Ryan house was inflamed. "Because of the withering heat the firemen could not get in between the buildings with their line of hose and the stream of water lacked force to throw it to the roof. However, no amount of water could have saved the building since it stood directly in line with the heat and flame."

Most of the Ryan's furniture was removed from the home before the building was burned to the ground. Four large chimneys were left standing. A. W. Goddard had built the residence, which was one of the finest in the city in its day. Mattresses and bedding, which had been carried to a vacant lot in the next block north and across the street, caught fire and burned. The cushions of a buggy were burned after the buggy was pulled down the street from the barn. Mrs. Ryan's clothing caught on fire as she left the house. Mr. and Mrs. Michael J. Knight, who also occupied rooms in the Ryan home, sustained a heavy loss. Ryan, who was in Chicago at the time, carried \$3,500 insurance on the home.

Learn more about the destruction caused by this fire in the next three columns.