

### The \$100,000 Fire in Monroe on January 13, 1914 - Part 3

This column continues the story of the \$100,000 fire that occurred on January 13, 1914.

“Owing to the explosions of gasoline and other dangerous elements, such as heat and falling walls, the hundreds of people who came out in the night to witness the fire were satisfied to watch it from safe distances. The firemen ventured as near as the heat would permit and although the walls kept falling no one was injured by the brick which have been strewn clear across Payne [9th Street] and Jackson [16th Avenue] streets. It will require much work to clear up the ruins.”

One can only imagine the sight and the heat created as described by the editor. “The heavy iron beams were twisted in every conceivable shape and some of the heavy iron floor supports were melted off entirely. The wrecked automobiles are sorry sights in contrast to expense and comfort represented before the fire, each being reduced to a melted mass that could be carried off in a wheelbarrow.”

The editor did not mince words when he talked about the building. “Considering its flimsy construction and the materials in the way of gasoline and oils, it is a matter of congratulation that if the building was doomed to destruction by the fire that the fire could reduce it to ruins with little damage to other valuable property in the immediate locality to say nothing of wider area.”

It always amazes me how much information the newspaper was able to share in such a short amount of time. All of the information I have shared so far in these columns was printed in the Monroe Evening Times less than 20 hours after the fire started. They had no computers to help research information and each word had to be typeset before being printed.



This Trukenbrod photo, from the collection of the late Marv Ruffi, shows the home of D. C. Ryan in flames during the \$100,000 fire on January 13, 1914. The home was located in what is now the city parking lot behind where Stop N Go is now located.

Mr. Kohli announced on Friday that he had contracted for the purchase of a new Intertype (typesetting machine) and a Babcock press for the newspaper plant that would be fitted up for the Herold.

City council held a special meeting on Saturday evening where they passed a resolution where the city clerk was instructed to notify the owners of the ruins of the Monroe Manufacturing building, the D. C. Ryan house, and the Herold printing office that they were to remove any parts of the ruins that might be dangerous to life and property within two days after receiving the notice. The rubbish was to be removed from the street and sidewalk within four days of notice. If it was not done, the city would proceed to do so and charge the cost to the said property owner.

It was announced a week after the fire that the property was to be auctioned off the following Saturday afternoon at 1:00. It was "one of the choicest building lots in the city, being well located and surrounded." A large number of bidders were on hand at the auction of the 85 by 150 foot lot, which included all of the brick and debris on the grounds. Samuel Isley was the successful bidder at \$5,650.

"The conflagration continues to be the topic of street talk and its moral effect is shown in the increase of fire insurance taken out by local property owners." More than \$103,000 in fire insurance had been written here within the week after the big fire. A total of 24 automobiles in the city were also insured within the same week. This fire was one of the biggest automobile losses in the history of the state outside of Milwaukee.

During that week the city council discussed at their meeting whether they should repair the steam fire engine they owned at the time. Some thought it should be fixed while others thought it had "served its usefulness and would be a waste of money to fix it up. That a fire engine would be necessary to fight a conflagration in any of the larger buildings, such as the White Block, Karlen Block, or Fitzgibbons factory, is conceded without argument." The water mains were not able to provide enough pressure to get the water to the upper stories of those buildings.

The editor had a great point when he added. "That the citizens are awakened over the fire hazards of the city is evident and now, while the iron is hot, is the time for the council to take whatever action is necessary to procure better fire protection. Every progressive tax payer would willingly stand his share of expense in improving the fire apparatus now, if never before."

The Universalist Church Society wanted to do something to thank the firemen for all of their work and for keeping their building from being destroyed. "Had it not been for the judicious play of hose on the west side of the church, which was exposed to the blaze, the windows would probably have been broken, in which case there would have been no hope of saving the structure as the flames would have soon spread through the interior. The firemen also kept water on the roof which was ablaze several times."

The firemen and their wives and lady friends were invited for a meal served by the Ladies Aide Society on January 29, the birthday of the late President William McKinley. About 50 firemen attended with their women. The church trustees and their wives also attended and acted as hosts, making over 100 people in all.

"Orchestra music was rendered while a reception committee received the arriving guests in the main body of the church." Rev. N. E. McLaughlin and Dr. F. L. Hodges performed a duet. At about 7:00 the banqueters sat down at the tables in the downstairs where they were served panned chicken, mashed potatoes, cranberry jelly, pickles, olives, hot rolls, coffee, brick ice cream, and cake.

"Rev. McLaughlin acted as toastmaster and following his remarks of the church's appreciation of the firemen's valued services in saving the church, he called upon Chief Joshua Streiff and other firemen who expressed their gratitude to the church people for the banquet. The program was closed with a reading by C. S. Young and a vocal solo by Dr. F. L. Hodges, with guitar accompaniment."

Next week will be the conclusion of the information about this fire.