

DISASTROUS FIRES IN RECENT YEARS

ENTIRE SOUTH SIDE OF SQUARE THREATENED BY DAYTIME BLAZE

Holmes Garage And Four Buildings Are Destroyed

(May 8, 1952)

A fire siren that stuck and refused to sound the alarm, teamed up with a strong south wind on Monday noon, to aid a small blaze that started in the extreme southwest rear corner of the Fred Holmes Garage, in bringing Mount Pulaski its most disastrous business section fire, wiping out five business houses as well as threatening to keep up a steady march on down the block. But for the fine work that the local fire department and the wonderful aid sent here by many of our neighboring towns and cities, there is no telling where it would have ended. The loss was estimated at between \$75,000 and \$100,000.

The Holmes Garage was completely destroyed, including its wrecker, which was run around from the east side and left directly in front of the building. The loss included a large stock of tires, as well as all equipment which was a heavy source of loss, as much new lathe equipment had been installed recently.

Fire Marches West

After the flames had devoured the garage, they began eating into the office of the Central Illinois Electric and Gas Co., one of four more frame structures in the fire's path. As fire trucks began arriving from various communities, some in response to calls and other coming voluntarily, the firemen and scores of volunteers centered their fight against its spreading any further than the big brick building which houses the Doud Store. A brick wall half way back on the east side of the utility office broke the flames up and did much to aid the firemen bring the fire under control. After sweeping the front and roof off this building it ate into Don Leonard's new radio and television store from which most of the merchandise was saved by volunteers who braved the heat to carry it out. Next in line was the Liesman barber shop, from which most of the equipment was removed, although heavy glass mirrors were left on the walls. The old buggy shop which in recent years had been remodelled into a dental office by Dr. R. N. Hamm, was the last stand for the devastating fire for with seven or eight fire hoses pouring thousands of gallons of water on the building, the danger was over.

Eight Trucks Respond

The response for help was instantaneous and Latham was soon pumping water from the southwest corner of the square along with almost their entire personnel. One of the Lincoln City pumpers and a pumper from the Lincoln Rural Fire Station, were also on the job in a very short time. Clinton, Blue Mound, Illiopolis and the DeKalb Plant also sent fire fighting equipment and men.

80 years ago, when the frame building, two-rooms wide, was put up for the general merchandise firm of Zeiss & Bekemeyer, the owners being Capt. George P. Zeiss and Herman S. Bekemeyer, who became well known to all people of this area.

Capt. Zeiss was born in Marburg, Germany, and came to the United States in 1866. After traveling over the nation for a time, he settled in Decatur, and operated a dry goods store there for eight years. He came to Mt. Pulaski in 1878 and opened a boot and shoe store.

Herman S. Bekemeyer, a native of Springfield, located in Mount Pulaski in 1875 and clerked for two years in the store of George S. Sawyer, and then went into

the grocery business for himself.

In 1880 the mercantile firm of Zeiss & Bekemeyer was formed, and the building was erected for their large establishment. After a number of years Capt. Zeiss retired from the firm and moved to Tyler, Texas. It was then that Wm. H. Clear, also of Springfield, entered into partnership with Mr. Bekemeyer. When he decided to quit business, Mr. Clear took over his interests and operated the store for a number of years. Later J. C. Swinney was in business there.

Garage Opened in 1925

About 1925 William E. Holmes & Sons bought the property and operated a garage thru the years, the present owner being Fred Holmes. Mr. Holmes announced Tuesday morning that he had rented the Unland garage building on South Washington street, just north of the I.C. station, and will be ready for business there in a few days.

The frame building adjoining the garage was occupied by the Central Illinois Electric and Gas Co. office. The next business room west had just been rented by Don Leonard, who opened a radio and TV repair shop. It had been used at various times as a Gamble Store, restaurant, shoe repair shop, etc.

Moving still on west was the room occupied by the Liesman barber shop. In years gone by jewelry stores were operated in this location by Walter Mayer, Ben Overstreet, John Reeves, and Kelsey M. Anderson. In 1907 this room was rented by James H. Shrader for a barber shop. He rented the place for 30 years and then purchased the building and the two on the east, which were described above.

The last of the frame structures was the two-story building where Dr. R. N. Hamm formerly had his dental office. This building was put up in the early days, before the Civil War by John Capps, a brother of Jabez Capps, founder of Mount Pulaski. He conducted a general store several years, and then moved to Illiopolis, where that branch of the Capps family grew up. We are unable to give a complete history of the building, but for a long period of time it was owned by John W. and Jacob Mayer, who conducted a harness shop. They were followed in succession by John W. Mayer and son Oscar, and then Ben Potter. It had various uses for over 90 years and in recent years it became the property of Dr. R. N. Hamm.

New Buildings Erected

From the ruins of the fire there arose a modern basement garage and a fine modern store building erected by Ben Holmes in which Kennedy's Supermarket is located.

MIDNIGHT FIRE DESTROYS SMITH IMPLEMENT CO.



THESE FIREMEN AND VOLUNTEERS shown here may not be "fire-eaters", but they were eating a lot of smoke as they moved in on the front of the Smith Implement Store on the north

side of the square, trying to find a blaze to play their hose on. The Latham fire department was fighting the blaze from the back of the building. —Times-News Photo.

SIX FIRE DEPARTMENTS FIGHT SMITH IMPLEMENT CO. FIRE

Firemen Deserve Much Credit For Confining Fire

(Dec. 13, 1956)

A midnight fire Monday, totally destroyed the Smith Implement Co. store building, hardware and parts contents on the north side of the square, with a loss of approximately \$75,000. It was shortly after 2 a.m. that the fire was brought under control. The fire was discovered by Dean Foster, who lives a block north. Seeing a heavy smoke rolling from the south, he thought that the Christian Church was afire when he called for the fire department.

Pulaski's firemen were on the scene in short order and soon had several leads of hose playing water on the blaze, from their two pumpers, or rather trying to find the flames as a dense smoke and the fact that the flames were confined at first between the ceiling and roof. They also rushed their water supply tank to the rear of the building where it helped to confine the flames until they ran out of water. In the meantime a call had been made for the Latham fire department in charge of Chief Floyd Buckley, and as soon as they arrived they hooked up at the Schahl funeral home corner and took over the rear wall assignment with their big pumper. The

fact that the flames did not get out of hand and spread to the church property just across the alley, can be credited to their fine work.

Pour Thousands of Gallons

The local department continued to pour water into the building from the front and from atop Romer's Feed Store on the east, and it's almost unbelievable that the intense fire, whipped by a strong southwest wind, was kept within the one building. The storeroom to the west which is in the Odd Fellows building, filled with large appliances and parts, and is connected by an ordinary wooden door, was not reached by the flames, although the smoke damage was heavy. The Odd Fellows two-story building with the exception of smoke damage and a few broken windows, was not damaged. Firemen had run a lead of hose up to the second floor to be ready for any outbreak of fire there.

Water Supply Short

A dwindling water supply caused a lot of concern as the stubborn blaze wouldn't be conquered. It was then that a call was sent to Buffalo, Maroa, Warrensburg and Lincoln Rural, for their water supply tank trucks, and they were standing by to be used if the city's water supply did give out. Fortunately, the water held out.

Lumber Yard Destroyed By Fire

(Aug. 24, 1944)

Mount Pulaski experienced its most disastrous fire in 33 years about 3 o'clock Saturday afternoon, Aug. 9, when the John M. Rothwell Lumber Co. plant on South Spring Street was totally destroyed by fire, entailing a loss of about \$30,000 in critical building materials and about \$10,000 in buildings and other equipment.

The two fire engines from the local department were quickly on the scene and a fire truck from Lincoln arrived 12 minutes after a call for help was sent there.

The home of Attorney Leland Simkins located across the switch track and narrow street north of the lumber yard, was right in the path of the most dangerous part of the fire, and it looked as though all efforts to save the two-story structure would be in vain.

J. M. Rothwell To Erect Modern Lumber Yard

(Sept. 7, 1944)

A modern and complete lumber yard is to be erected by J. M. Rothwell on the site of the disastrous fire which wiped out his entire yard with the exception of the office building, on the afternoon of Saturday, Aug. 19.

This was the decision reached last week following a conference between Mr. Rothwell and his son, Chief Gunner's Mate Keith Rothwell, who flew back from his station at San Diego, Calif. Keith was in charge of the yard before entering the service.

The new yard will be modern and convenient in every respect, and will be erected just as fast as materials can be secured. Although priorities have been granted to purchase the needed supplies, it is a problem now of being able to find them. The main office will be built right into the center of the main building with a fireproof vault in it, and show rooms immediately behind, while the lumber piles will be along each side running back a distance of 120 feet with a loading approach on the sides. There will be no center driveway as before.

The building will be 112 feet in width.

Plan to see the Sil-Tennial Pageant one night next week. You'll see Mount Pulaski's past portrayed.

HOLMES GARAGE FIRE THREATENED SOUTH SIDE OF SQUARE

