

Worst Fire Ever Here Destroys Hotel and Theater Buildings



GOING, GOING, GONE—The fire in the Hotel was at its height when this picture was taken from the west side of Main Street near 6th Thursday night. The picture below was taken from the same spot the next day. —(Journal Photos).

HOT SPOT—Firemen carried the fight to the top of the Cass Theater in an effort to save the theater building. Two water lines were up and a third was being hauled aloft. Heat soon drove the fire fighters down, however and after

the theater roof caught fire the building didn't last long. The front, perhaps pulled by weight of the marquee, collapsed onto Main Street, the rubble falling just short of Plattsmouth's aerial truck.

4-H Visitors To Arrive June 30

Eight Cheyenne County 4-H'ers will arrive June 30 to visit their counterparts in the Cass-Cheyenne County 4-H Exchange.

The Cass-County 4-H'ers who visited the western county last August and who will serve as hosts now are Linda Rehmeier of Weeping Water, Sandra Stapert and Connie Dietl of Nehawka, Rollin Terryberry of Louisville, John Roeber of Murdock, Larry Engenkemeier of Murray and Mary Hendrix and Tom Sullivan of Plattsmouth.

Two tours have been planned, points of interest will include, the Steekly Corn processing plant, Ash Grove Cement plant, State Fish Hatchery, Allied Chemical, Boystown, the Omaha Stock Yards and Equity Union Grain Elevator at Rock Bluff.

Fire Chief, Mavor Commend 'Fighters.' Others Who Helped

Fire Chief Joe Kruntorad and Mavor Grant Roberts Friday commended Plattsmouth's own Volunteer Fire Department, each volunteer, the local police force and three organizations called in to assist.

The Bellevue, Avery and Offutt AFB departments were prompt in setting here and worked shoulder to shoulder with local firefighters. One Bellevue fireman was reported injured.

Kruntorad said he thought the firefighters "did a terrific job." He also thanked all those who helped the firefighters in any way, including providing coffee and lunch—among them Joehim's, the VFW, Falls City Meat Co., Tim's Bar. Others were unidentified.

Mavor Roberts was pleased at the conduct of both the fire and police departments and with the help of the neighboring departments.

The latter are, with Plattsmouth, members of a Mutual Fire Protection Association. Members call on one another for help. For Plattsmouth, the only cost was some gasoline provided to keep the visiting units' booster pumps going.

Fast Moving Job Saves Many Museum Relics

The fastest moving job ever seen here saved much of the Historical Society's display material in the wee hours Friday.

Volunteers from the crowd of fire onlookers, police and fire departments pitched in to rescue relics from the Society's new Museum next to the theater when fire threatened the building and damaged the north end. At a signal, a hundred hands laid-to to clear the building of as much as could be carried out. Huge display cases, hastily packed with smaller moveables were lifted and taken to the Methodist Church. Many pictures were removed from walls.

Mrs. Alice Perry of Plattsmouth, Society president, said she was amazed at the way the volunteer help whisked things away. The display cases went like little tables. The next day strong men had difficulty moving them.

Not all was saved. Among major losses was destruction or heavy damage to a collection of paintings by Mrs. W. G. Brooks of Plattsmouth.

Damage to the building, dedicated the past year, was largely to the rear storage end and attic and also to the ceiling from the water which undoubtedly saved the structure.

The partition between the display and storage-service sections was badly burned, the attic and much of its contents damaged. The building structurally was alright Friday morning, although the unsupported west wall of the theater loomed overhead.

Mrs. Perry, Martin Sporer, Mrs. Clem Woster and three daughters and Sgt. George Waters tackled the job of moving the articles to Mrs. Perry's house and garage a block west on Main Friday.

They got big help from Bernard Whipple, 8, and three friends.

Salvation Army Officers Listed

Josephine Rys has been named chairman and welfare secretary in Plattsmouth for the Salvation Army, headquarters in Omaha has announced.

Other officers are Fred Tesch, treasurer, and Dr. R. F. Brenzel, O. F. Mussman and W. C. Soenichsen, committeemen.

'Accidental,' Marshal Rules

State Fire Marshal Joe Divis of Lincoln Friday ruled Thursday night's fire "accidental" but said that further investigation would be made.

He said the fire started in a room at the rear of Edith's Beauty Shop.

Divis, his chief deputy in charge of electrical investigations and Fire Chief Joe Kruntorad made the inspection. Kruntorad said his findings agreed with the fire marshal's.

Evacuation Was Fast, Orderly

Evacuation of Hotel residents and occupants of nearby apartments was fast and orderly Thursday night.

Police officers reported some difficulty with a few Hotel residents who wanted to go back for this or that of their personal belongings.

One man was forced to leave his dental plates behind. Others fled with just a little clothing.

They were taken to private homes or to St. Luke's Church for the night.

Sgt. and Mrs. George Waters and their three children were evacuated from the Pioneer Apartments and are housed at the home of apartment owner Mrs. Alice Perry. They'll have to stay out until further word from him, Fire Chief Joe Kruntorad said.

Rev. and Mrs. A. L. Embree also have an apartment there but Rev. Embree is in the hospital and Mrs. Embree had gone to Wausa to visit a sister.

There were tortuous hours for Mrs. Sarah Ceil who lives alone west of the Historical Museum. Relatives and friends sat guard with a garden hose on the roof as the fire worked westward from 6th Street. Some sparks had to be doused.

People evacuated from apartments and homes watched anxiously as the fire progressed, debating whether to dash back in for a prize possession in an apartment farther from the blaze.

Work was expected to continue today after a layoff Saturday and Sunday.

Police from Plattsmouth went to Omaha to escort the demolition equipment to town, Friday.

Bloodmobile To Be Here July 14

The Bloodmobile will be at the Methodist Church here July 14 from 12 noon to 6 p.m.

The VFW Auxiliary is recruiting donors. If you can assist or be a donor, call 3902 or 8236.

CITY COUNCIL

The City Council will meet tonight at 8 o'clock at City Hall. It's the regular second meeting of the month.

5 of Fire Victims Would Re-Establish

Five of the business operators burned out in the Hotel-theater fire Thursday night told The Journal they plan to continue operating or get back into business if possible.

STAN'S BAKERY—Stan Prokuek said Friday: "Plattsmouth has been good to us. I don't see why I shouldn't operate a bakery here again." He said he had no definite plans yet, things were in such a muddle. Stan, like others of the business operators burned out, lost most of his records. He and Fire Chief Joe Kruntorad made an attempt to get into the room where records were kept but smoke wouldn't let them past the doorway.

BROWN FLORAL SHOP — Mrs. M. E. Brown said she is continuing to operate, bringing (Continued on Page 4)

Hotel, Theater Were Landmarks

The Hotel and Theater buildings which were destroyed in the fire Thursday night were landmarks in downtown Plattsmouth, though far from being the oldest buildings in town.

The Hotel was built in 1890 around the old Presbyterian Church whose congregation built a new church in 1889.

The Hotel in its day was the height of elegance, with carpeted parlors furnished in the best of fashion where smart wedding parties were held.

Accommodations were the finest. In later years, the building had deteriorated badly and was the object of scrutiny by local and state fire authorities.

The theater building, constructed by Charlie and Tom Parmele and Jim Terryberry about 1903, too was the best in its (Continued on Page 4)

New Museum Damaged, Can Be Restored

Plattsmouth's worst fire in history Thursday night destroyed the Plattsmouth Hotel and Cass Theater buildings here as four firefighting organizations were unable to save them but succeeded in preventing a downtown-leveling holocaust.

The fire: —Gutted the 71-year-old Hotel building, leaving the four walls standing, minus a section of the south wall which collapsed onto the sidewalk on Main Street.

—Burned out the Cass Theater building erected about 1903 leaving most of three walls standing after the front (south) wall collapsed with its marquee onto Main Street.

—Heavily damaged the north (back) end of Plattsmouth's newest downtown building, the Cass County Historical Society Museum next door west of the theater.

—Defied control for nearly four hours despite efforts of Plattsmouth, Bellevue and East Sarpy County (Avery) volunteer departments and the Offutt Air Force Base Dept.

—Attracted large crowds of compassionate watchers, many of whom joined in to lend a hand stringing firehoses, moving unattended vehicles left in the danger area and helping finally with rescue of historical articles, a majority of them loaned, from the Historical Museum.

—Burned out seven businesses, including those of the Hotel and Theater, Edith's Beauty Shop, Hulda's Beauty Shop, the Hotel Restaurant, Brown's Floral and Stan's Bakery.

—Left about 40 persons, many of them senior citizens who had made the Hotel their residence, without a home.

—And threw a major scare into most of the people who live or operate businesses downtown.

Friday and since, besides the principal reaction of shock at the horror of destruction by fire, the consensus has been that the town generally was lucky—the fire could easily have been 10 or 20 times worse and there might have been death or serious injury.

Two Plattsmouth firemen, John Bergmann Jr. and Winford Dasher, were struck and cut by flying glass when a plate glass building front blew out with a tremendous explosion early in the firefighting.

They were the only casualties as far as is known. (Continued on Page Five)



WALLS COME DOWN—Demolition of the Hotel walls for a steel ball was being gently swung from the crane to topple small sections at a time.