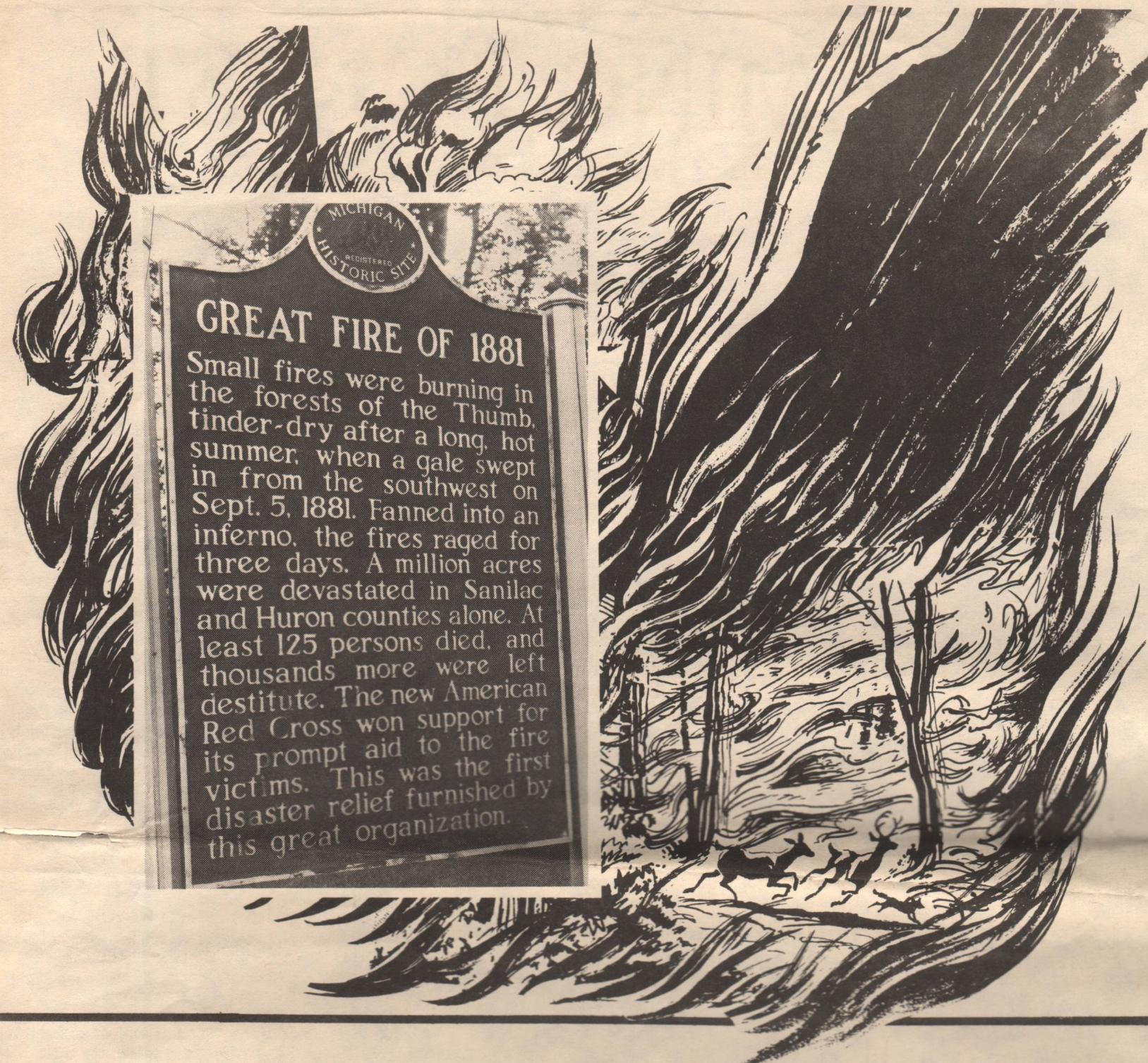


THE FLAMMING FOREST

A Collection Of Stories
The Great Fire of 1881
A Tuscola County Advertiser Historical Publication





Haunting Memory Lingers

Between Sebewaing and Bay Port, in a small roadside park on M-25 — the shoreline highway that circles Michigan's verdant Thumb area — stands a small historic marker, placed there by the Michigan Historical Commission & registered as Site No. 141 in the state's registry of historical markers.

The marker, today sheltered by the cool shade of tall trees and surrounded by the soft green grass that carpets much of the heartland of one of Michigan's principal agricultural areas, recalls a day ... when the grass was not green and when trees — instead of giving cool shade — fueled a fiery inferno.

It was a hundred years ago this month the Great Fire of 1881 brought horror, devastation and fiery death to parts of four Michigan counties, all located in Michigan's Thumb area.

It was this disaster which triggered the first domestic efforts of Clara Barton's fledgling American Red Cross. The Great Fire, therefore, also marks the hundredth anniversary of this great American institution of compassion.

Today, although this event is now more than a century old ... it's haunting memory lingers.

The Advertiser was already 13-years-old when the Great Fire of 1881 occurred — on the heels of a similar, but smaller inferno in 1871. The Advertiser had been founded by Henry G. Chapin, a young printer, who, interestingly enough, had learned the printing trade at the Dansville, New York Advertiser — the newspaper which served as Clara Barton's hometown newspaper. He named The Advertiser after the New York newspaper.

Chapin ran the paper until 1881 — the year of the fire. But several months before the fire, on April 1, 1881, he died returning from Lapeer. He died several months before the Great Fire and never knew what great things a lady from his hometown would mean in the relief which flowed to the Thumb because of her organization's efforts.

Unfortunately, the files of The Advertiser contain no editions from the period of the Great Fire of 1881, because these were all destroyed in a fire which swept thorough The Advertiser newspaper office in 1884 while Fred Slocum was the publisher.

And so, without these newspapers, we have had to go to other newspapers and other authors to provide a nostalgic look at this agonizing and yet historic part of the Thumb's rich history.

The major portion of this special section is a reprint of an account of the Great Fire written many years ago by Miner Chipman, an early Bad Axe resident.

The final pages of the section contain stories which appeared in newspapers and magazines in more recent years, recalling other details of the fire.

Gruesome, horrible and awesome though it is ... The Great Fire of 1881 is a part of the Thumb's heritage ... and through it we more fully appreciate the agony and the suffering by which this great area was tamed and brought into flower.

THE FLAMING FOREST

The Story Of The Great Fire of 1881

By Miner Chipman

News Stories Hint Of The Coming Inferno

The 4 o'clock edition of the Detroit Evening News of Tuesday, September 6, 1881, carried the following news:

Lapeer, Mich., Sept. 6 — Mrs Richard Elliott of Five Lakes, in this county, was burned to death in the woods last night, while fleeing from her house to that of a neighbor, she having been driven out by the forest fires which raged around her home.

Bay City, Mich., Sept. 6 — Terrible fires are raging in all the forests immediately north and west of this city, and cinders, burnt leaves and twigs are flying by us. The people are suffering greatly from the effects of the super-heated air and dense smoke. The village of Kawkawlin is in great danger. The ties of the track of the railway near Vassar have been greatly damaged. A heavy rain is greatly needed.

Flint, Mich., Sept. 6 — In consequence of the extreme drought the vegetation is all drying up and forest fires are devastating the woods in various parts of this county, destroying fences, etc. A barn belonging to Avery Ables, of this city, was burned yesterday.

Charlotte, Mich., Sept. 6 — While a steam thresher was in operation yesterday, on the farm of John Welch, of Sunfield Township, the sparks set fire to the straw and burned the barn and most of its contents. The fire spread to the woods, and the threshers and neighbors turned out and only by the greatest exertion prevented a general conflagration. The barn, and its contents were worth \$1,000. Insured.

East Saginaw, Mich., Sept. 6 — It is intensely warm here and the heat and smoke make it almost suffocating, and there is no sign of rain. East of the city and north of the Deerfield Road the forest fires are raging fiercely. All travel on the Watrousville plank road is cut off, hundreds of acres in that region being afire; but as that section is sparsely settled for several miles the losses thereabouts will not be so great. All night the huge fires to the eastward of this city were plainly visible from here, and reports have come in of barns, wheat and oat stacks, etc., burned. The fires have surrounded the Indian settlement seven miles south of this city, and it will be wiped out as it is surrounded by heavy timber. In Bloomfield and Bridgeport townships heavy fires are reported. No news can yet be obtained of the situation up the St. Louis railroad, but the story of the burning of Porter's station is confirmed. The station and 12 houses were destroyed. People are out all over the valley fighting the fire and the flames are within two blocks of the city at Fifteenth Street.

Millington, Mich., Sept. 6 — William Bates' sawmill, lumber, logs and all the buildings adjacent burned today in spite of the efforts made to save it by the men who went out to fight the fire this morning.

J. G. Smith's lumber yard and all the buildings except his house, burned last night.

Mrs Richard Elliott of Five Lakes, burned to death in the woods while fleeing from her house to that of a neighbor, having been driven out by the forest fires which raged around her home. Avery Ables of Flint loses a barn. A steam thresher starts a fire on the farm of John Welch near Charlotte. It is intensely hot in Saginaw. There has been no rain for seven weeks. The land is dry and parched. The people of Saginaw stand watching the dense clouds of smoke arising from the burning wilderness to the eastward. Men are out fighting the flames at Fifteenth Street. William Bates sees his sawmill, lumber, logs and other buildings go up in flame and smoke at Millington.

You do not get the full significance of the picture. I am sure of it. Mrs Richard Elliott — who was she? We do not know her. Remote, indistinct! We read these items as we read the pages of ancient history. We read them as we read the news of battles in the World War. Five thousand men killed! It means little. It was war! Oh how differently we read the reports when one, just one, of the five thousand was a boy we knew, their son, or yours, or the son of our neighbor — a boy who played on that street corner just a few short years ago.

The people of Caseville, Port Austin, Port Hope, Sand Beach, Bad Axe and Minden did not know that Mrs Richard Elliott of Five Lakes had burned to death. Many of them

never knew it. The Detroit Evening News would go up to Sand Beach and then by stage to Bad Axe. But it did not go. The Evening News of Tuesday, Sept. 6, 1881, never reached Bad Axe. Even though it had — what of it? People would have read of the burning to death of Mrs Richard Elliott and said "too bad", and passed on. It would have been as remote to them as it is to me now.

Within a week from the time that Mrs Richard Elliott was burned to death while fleeing from her home at Five Lakes, the people of five counties knew the meaning of a forest fire. In New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, people stood and talked of the great forest fires in the Thumb of Michigan. The first pages of the New York Times, the New York Herald, and the New York Tribune carried full details of the disaster. A meeting at the Y.M.C.A. in San Francisco raised money for the sufferers.

As a child I heard the stories of the Fire of Eighty-one. In the traditions of Bad Axe everything was "before the fire" or "after the fire". The stories I heard were individual and particular incidents. No one seemed to be able to picture the Fire of Eighty-one in all its tremendous proportions, its meaning to isolated individuals, to communities, to states, to the nation. I wonder if it will be possible to secure such a picture. Can we go back, in our imagination, and see Huron County as it was on the 6th of September, 1881?

Let us, first of all, get the picture as it was flashed over the wires of the Western Union Telegraph Company to a sympathetic world. What did a man in New York or San Francisco know about it? What picture did he receive?

East Saginaw — September 6, 1881. An anxious day has nearly passed. The thermometer has ranged from ninety to

ninety-eight degrees and the atmosphere is like a furnace. There is no rain and no indications of any.

Fires continue in every direction and the scenes of today are but repetitions of yesterday — fires running, buildings burning, people fighting fire and praying for rain. Water has become almost a priceless commodity in the country and has to be hauled, in some instances several miles.

Heavy fires are reported on the Otter Lake branch of the Flint and Pere Marquette railroad. At French's Crossing this afternoon a train was on fire. Between Bridgeport and Birch River fires are bad and the village of Clio was threatened.

This afternoon a fire engine was telegraphed for from Clio and one was sent from Flint, as none could be spared from Saginaw.

In Buena Vista Township is an Indian settlement, containing about forty families, mostly Indians with a few Germans, and a dense forest surrounds them. Two men coming out, narrowly escaped with their lives last night, and as the wind drove the fire in the direction, the entire settlement will be swept away.

On the St. Louis road the woods are on fire, at the cemetery and across the Tittabawassee River.

Christopher Wartenberg, who lives on a farm on the town line road between Saginaw and Kochville, had his house and barn burned last night. His neighbor across the street lost a barn. Another man in the same vicinity had his house and barn burned, and Albert Ringer, who lives near the Mackinaw Road, lost a house and barn.

A house and barn belonging to Mr Hubbard near the Jewett place was burned; also a new barn belonging to John Fisher, who lives on the Mackinaw Road about three miles from the city.

Three dwellings and four barns in Kochville Township burned last night, and whole farms are left without fences.

F. Ritter, a farmer in Blumfield Township, lost 600 bushels of oats, 250 bushels of wheat, 200 bushels of barley, a quantity of hay and all his farm implements.

Second dispatch from East Saginaw.

East Saginaw, Sept. 6 — On some sections east of this city the situation today and tonight is extremely critical. The fires, raging yesterday, fanned by the fresh south wind today, spread rapidly in spite of the utmost endeavors of the inhabitants.

The fire that swept out Porter Station made the last mile and a half of its approach in thirty minutes, and took the people by surprise.

It is hot here tonight and no prospects of rain.

Third dispatch from Saginaw.

East Saginaw, Sept. 6 — The fires are doing considerable damage between this city and Midland, and many miles of fences have been destroyed.

The village of Frelands is threatened, but owing to the excitement and terror of the people it is difficult to obtain definite information.

Since 7 o'clock this evening telegraphic communication has been cut off between this city and Vassar and three miles of fire are reported along the road.

Fourth dispatch from East Saginaw.

East Saginaw, Sept. 6 — Telegraphic communication between this city and Vassar was cut off tonight and three miles of fire is reported near Seidens, burning fences and timber.

It is reported that a large force of men at work on the road bed of the Saginaw, Tuscola & Huron railroad were driven off by the fire.

Another day of horror is anticipated tomorrow.

First News From Port Sanilac

Special dispatch to the Detroit Free Press.

Port Sanilac, Sept. 6 — There are families in this part of the country burned entirely out, leaving the majority of them with only the clothes they had on. Many families had to go to the lake to escape the fire. We cannot get any communication further north.

It is reported that Richmondville is entirely destroyed, and parties have left here to investigate.



CHILDREN WERE MAIMED

President Garfield Shot and Failing

The Detroit Evening News Wednesday, Sept. 7, 1881, 3 o'clock edition, front page:

Elberon, N. J., Sept. 7 — 8:30 a.m. Gen. Swain says the president slept well all night. His pulse this morning is 106 and his temperature and respiration are almost normal. The official bulletin will be issued soon.

President James A. Garfield had been shot by Charles J. Guiteau on the morning of July 2, 1881. The president was at the Baltimore & Ohio railway station on his way to New England, where he intended to deliver the commencement address at Williams College. For weeks he had lingered between life and death, suffering the greatest agony but bearing it with a magnificent fortitude that won the admiration and sympathy of the civilized world. He had been removed to Elberon, N. J., in the hope that the sea air might benefit him. It was of no avail. On the 15th of September blood poisoning set in, and he died on the 19th of September at 10:30 p.m.

No Telegraph Service To Port Austin

The Evening News, Wednesday, September 7, 1881, front page, continues:

"The best efforts of the Western Union telegraph employees to "get a hole through" to Port Austin, etc., have failed today, and up to 3:30 p.m. nothing has been heard from there, the wires being destroyed by fire. There is yet no confirmation of the reported burning of Sand Beach and Port Hope, and there are good grounds for hoping that as yet no such fate has befallen them. There is no danger at Harrisville, or at least such was the case this morning."

A special to The News from Lansing says that the woods north and west of there are all afire, and the city is filled with smoke. Such a drought has not been known for years in that section.

Son Is Burned Fatally By Flames

Port Sanilac, Mich., Sept. 7 — The fire equals in destruction that of 1871, and is not done yet. The wind is in the northeast this morning and the fire is backing up on the farms not touched before. It is raging for miles west of here, and as I write a large gang of men have gone to fight it back from the buildings of a man whose whole family is sick in bed, himself included. Port Sanilac is not in as much danger today as it was last night. The loss of life in Forester Township is very great. I have heard of many families being missing, and as many as 10 are known to be burned to death.

A party has gone to Richmondville with relief. Seven or eight farmers were burned out west of Forester this morning. The smoke is not as dense now as it has been, as a north wind has cleared the atmosphere. There is no news from the north as the telegraph line is burned down above Forester.

Many persons will perish unless they have medical aid soon. The latest reports from Forestville are that the western part of the town was destroyed last night. We must have rain or everything will be swept away.

East Saginaw, Mich., Sept. 7 — The wind shifted to the north during the night, and it is now cooler and blowing fresh, fanning the flames and making the situation in the burning district more horrible. It is reported that the fires are doing a great deal of damage between this city and Coleman on the Flint & Pere Marquette railroad, and fires have also started up near Amber and Custer in Mason County and other points along the line of the road west. The wires are down between here and Vassar, and nothing can be heard from that division. This morning it was said there were three miles of fire on both sides of the road near Leidler's station in Saginaw Township and in Kochville the fires are running bad, and it is expected that a large amount of damage will result.

Trains are running to St. Louis but 20 miles of the telegraph line is down and the damage along the road will be \$50,000 up-to-date, and no telling where it will stop. No reports are at hand today from east of this city, but last night there was plenty of fire and people on a dozen farms were fighting the flames. There are as yet no prospects of rain.

East Saginaw, Mich., Sept. 7 — A man just in from Watrousville Road says everything is burning up between this city and Reese along that road. Trees, fences, stacks of grain and buildings are going, and the wind is blowing a gale from the north which makes it worse than before.

Millington, Mich., Sept. 7 — The fire is now in the village limits and running fast in the open fields, but plenty of men are fighting it. The wind is in the north. The buildings on both



A VICTIM OF THE FIRE

Second dispatch from Port Sanilac.

Port Sanilac, Sept. 6 — The whole country is burning up. The fire is raging terribly two miles west of here, with a strong west and southwest wind blowing. In this township, yesterday, and last night, about a dozen farms were cleaned completely of buildings and as many other barns were destroyed last night.

Fear reigned supreme in all hearts, many people not going to bed. In Forester Township the fires were worse. A belt two miles wide was completely stripped of everything and a number of persons are reported lost, though the only one positively known to have perished is a lady named Birch.

Richmondville, ten miles north of here, is completely destroyed, only one building remaining. Seven lives were lost and one other person badly burned. John Lee, wife and mother, and Abram Thornton, wife and son, are lost; the two latter jumped into a well.

Two girls named Sharkey and Winters and an old man named Winters can't live, they are burned so badly.

Many of the Richmondville people are here being cared for. They came down on the first boats. All they saved was themselves and the clothes on their backs. Men say the fire consumed buildings in ten minutes after it struck them.

Anderson Station, on the Port Huron & Northwestern Road, was completely destroyed. Much livestock was lost and great damage done north of Anderson. I know of fifteen farms completely devastated.

Persons coming from Sandusky yesterday came through solid flames. On the line west of this place nearly every family has its goods packed up ready to move on a moment's notice. Eight buildings south, and six north, of Sandusky, were burned yesterday.

As I write a report comes from Forestville that the whole village is destroyed.

The elevator is burned at Minden, eight homes are burned at Deckerville and between the two places many farms are devastated.

Trains have stopped running on the Port Huron & Northwestern Railway, yesterday's mail train being unable to get above Deckerville.

Third dispatch from Port Sanilac.

Port Sanilac, Sept. 6 — The news is getting worse and worse. We are in no immediate danger of being swept away, but are ready to go into the lake.

Mrs Deebert and four children were burned southwest of Sandusky. The Dennison family is reported missing.

A family of nine in Forester, named Wilson, are all burned.

McClure's schoolhouse, Elk Creek Mill and all the buildings and Elk Creek Bridge, all south of Sandusky, are gone.

I have a letter from a person in White Rock, who says they are all right there. He says:

Port Hope is almost destroyed. Bad Axe is all gone but the courthouse and hotels. Verona Mills is all gone but the church and store. Charleston is all gone. Minden is partly destroyed.

When he wrote the fire was raging in the western part of Forestville village.

Everybody is moving to the lakes.

The fire west of us is coming, but we hope to keep it down and save the town, but God help us if it doesn't rain soon.

Vassar, Sept. 6 — The fires continue to rage. The fires are within two miles. The whole country on the east side of Cass River is in flames and the wind is southwest. A family residing on Houghton Creek were compelled to seek shelter in a well and remain there for six hours. At one time twenty-four women and children were crowded in one well. No one can at present estimate the terrible loss in this county.

Second dispatch from Vassar.

Vassar, Sept. 6 — The fire is still raging within three-fourths of a mile of Vassar. The wind blows strong from the southwest. If the fire can be kept out of the corporation Vassar can be saved. All the mills and foundries have been shut down and the citizens are out in force fighting the fire. Destitute families from the burned district continue to come in.

Carsonville, Mich., Sept. 6 — A general conflagration has swept over this entire county spreading death and desolation in its track. Twenty-five families have been rendered homeless, and have had everything they possessed in the world consumed.

Two entire families have been burned alive, one that of a farmer named Deebert, consisting of wife and four children, was burned to death in Watertown Township and their charred bodies were left upon the bare and blackened ground. Another entire family, named Dennison, is reported burned and still the whole horrible truth is not half told. The mail carrier from Marquette to Bad Axe is also reported to have perished.

Lexington, Mich., Sept. 6 — At present the fire is nearing Croswell and they apprehend great danger unless the wind subsides. Tonight the smoke is very dense here and shifting. The wind has been blowing all day; the woods are very dry and a spark of fire, dropping on a log kindles it instantly.

The intense heat has seared the leaves on the green beech and maple trees and they apparently burn as easily as

And Out West . . .

Jesse James

While the pioneers of Huron County were battling with the flames on Wednesday, Sept. 7th, the good people of Independence and Glendale, Missouri, were excited over one of the many exploits of Jesse James. The Detroit Evening News of September 8, 1881, says:

"The Chicago & Alton westbound express and mail train, No. 48, was stopped by nine masked men two miles west of Glendale at 9:00 o'clock last night. The express messenger was knocked down and terribly beaten, and his safe broken open and robbed of a large amount of money, variously estimated at \$5,000 to \$30,000. The passengers were also robbed. The train was stopped by lantern signals, and the track obstructed by stones and logs. The robbers were heavily armed with guns and revolvers and kept up a continual firing. The robbery occupied 10 minutes. No one was hurt except the express messenger whose injuries are thought to be fatal. He bravely defended his car and refused to open the safe. Several shots were fired at Conductor Hazelbaker, but he escaped. The train ran into Kansas City and the alarm was given. The entire police force of the city were immediately organized into a pursuing posse, and are now on the way by special train to the scene of the robbery. A large posse is also being organized here and will leave immediately. There is no doubt that Jesse James was the leader of the gang. The robbery occurred within two miles of the same spot as the celebrated Glendale robbery of Oct. 8, 1879."

the Murphy farms are burned and the settlers at Hemlock are all burned out.

Ten Bodies Found, Bad Axe Burned Up

Lexington, Mich., Sept. 7 — The wind on Monday spread the fires in an easterly direction, burning houses, barns, stock and crops. Many lives have been lost in this county. The village of Cato, consisting of 20 or 30 houses, a sawmill and a grist-mill, store and several shops, was entirely burned. Richmondville burned. Carson on the Port Huron & Northwestern railway, consisting of about a dozen houses and upwards of 50 families, has been burned out slick and clean, and so far nearly 40 lives are reported lost. In Huron County come confirmatory reports of the burning of Bad Axe, except the courthouse and one hotel, also the destruction of Verona Mills.

Haywood Vale, part of Port Hope, including the mill and dock, and Huron City are all burned.

Ten bodies were brought into Sand Beach, and others are hourly reported, while the dead bodies of men, women and children, horses, cattle, sheep and hogs are found in some sections too numerous, in the general horror, to occasion remarks and probably not less than 100 lives have been lost in all. The weather continues dry, a high wind is prevailing and the fires are still raging terribly.

The Detroit Post and Tribune for Sept. 7, 1881, in a dispatch from Lapeer, says:

"Two miles northeast of Five Lakes, Richard Elliott resided on an 80 acre farm, 10 acres of which were cleared. Here he was trying to lay the foundation of future prosperity; but the wave of destruction rolled that way and leaping 20 rods across a corn field, the blaze gathered in his dwelling, hurrying the inmates, his wife, Christina Elliott, aged 39 years, a little son, and Mrs John Frederick, a neighbor, out into the road for safety. Mrs Elliott got together a quantity of clothing and followed Mrs Frederick and the child in their flight before the fire. Blinded and suffocated with smoke and heat, the women struggled on with the child, her companion urging Mrs Elliott to drop the bundle that impeded her progress, which she neglected to do and was soon left behind the others, who escaped. About this time Mr Elliott started for home on horseback from Five Lakes, fearful that the fire might reach his clearing, but after going about a mile was compelled to abandon the horse on account of the burning logs and timber. He soon found he could not follow the direct road even on foot and so went north, approaching by the rear, and found all his improvements, including house, barn, fences, drops — everything a mass of smoking ruins. Frantic with the disheartening sight he started down the road in the track of destruction and met a neighbor who informed him that his wife and child had gone to Mrs Brown's for safety. He struggled on and soon fell to his knees, overcome with the smoke and heat, but gathering strength, arose and groped onward until he had got about sixty rods from the smoldering ruins of his home, when he came upon the charred and lifeless remains of his wife. She had been caught by the fire, and died alone amidst the wreck and ruin that surrounded her.

Feared Loss Of Life Is Frightening

The Detroit Evening News, of Thursday, September 8, 1881, 2:00 o'clock edition:

"Every telegram, letter and human being coming from the devastated districts in Huron and Sanilac counties shows that the loss of life and property has been fearful, far surpassing that occasioned by the great fires of 1871. Tongue cannot tell the full story of the trouble that has come upon the poor people on whom the wrathful flames have wreaked their fury. It is now very clear that the first dispatches, telling of the terrors of Monday, which were almost hoped to be exaggerations, have in fact fallen short of the state of affair."

When such men as Senator Conger, W. L. Bancroft and L. A. Sherman of Port Huron, Walter Jenks of Sand Beach, R. W. Stafford of Port Hope, John P. Niggeman of Lexington, J. H. Shults of Minden and others bear the dreadful tidings to the press and public, it is safe to say there has been little or no exaggeration.

From Saginaw to Sand Beach and from Port Austin to Port Huron stretched one vast area of partially cleared wilderness. There had been no rain for seven weeks. The ditches were dry, and the weeds and vegetation along the banks and on either side of roads and fences were parched & ready to spring into flames at the touch of a spark. The clearings were surrounded by vast areas of swamp and slashings. The ravages of the fire of 1871 and the litter of the lumbermen; the tinder-dry undergrowth all formed one vast kindling for the burning.



A FAMILY FLEEING FROM THE ADVANCING FLAMES

Farmers were preparing for the fall sowing and clearing a few more additional rods of land for their grain. The air was hot & heavy. The smoke of the burnings gave the landscape a hazy brown cast & the air was heavy with the odor of burning muck. Here and there fires got beyond the control of the farmers and ran its way into the wilderness. As the pall of smoke gathered, peoples in far away villages went on with their work, wishing for rain, and discomfited by the intensity of the heat. That they were living in the flue of a vast furnace did not occur to them. The fire was far, far away. It was dangerous to light fires when everything was so dry. People should be more careful.

The prosecuting attorney of Huron County, Hiram L. Chipman was undisturbed. He had business in Sand Beach and must ride horseback over there; he would return on Wednesday. Robert Philp received a shipment of oil and checked off the barrels as they were unloaded in front of his store in Bad Axe. Carl Heisterman, the county clerk, was at work as usual. Dr Deady made his usual round of calls.

In Detroit, Chicago and New York people were reading of the great fire in southern Michigan. As the printers in the newspaper offices in Detroit worked at their type cases setting up the latest dispatches from Saginaw, Flint, Bay City, Sand Beach — the people of Bad Axe went unconcernedly. Communication was slow. The telegraph lines were down — but what of it. The fires, somewhere far, far away, had felled a pole or two.

On Thursday, September 8, 1881, Rev. Z. Grenell, Jr., pastor of the First Baptist Church of Detroit, arrived in Detroit from Sand Beach. He came down on the narrow gauge and the Grand Trunk and arrived at noon. On his way to Port Huron by the narrow gauge railroad, it was noticed that in some places the track had proved an effectual barrier to the flames, which did not find fuel in the gravel road bed. In other places it burned the ties and twisted & destroyed the rails, which had to be replaced.

As the Rev. Z. Grenell, Jr. looked from the car window he saw "a burned desert of ashes and smoldering embers, without a sign of vegetation or animal life — a country abandoned by God and man, and to which it was impossible to imagine anyone returning."

The telegraph poles had all burned and the wires had been reset upon any stick that could be found, and for long distances were merely laid along the ties beside the rails.

Awful Darkness Preceded The Inferno

According to the minister one of the most appalling phenomena accompanying the calamity was the awesome darkness which preceded it and remained until all was over. The experience of Sand Beach illustrated that of the whole

lake shore. At sunrise Monday the air was as clear as usual. At about 1 p.m. the people began to observe a singular copper-colored appearance of the whole firmament. A little later this deepened to a deep red and by 2 o'clock it was so dark that people were compelled to take lanterns to find their way about outdoors. Mr Jenks, a well-known citizen said that he passed his hand back and forth before his face and could not see it.

The fearful darkness continued all that afternoon, with an occasional rift through which the rays of the sun darted furtively with unnatural brightness to be succeeded immediately by still more blinding blackness. Many thought the end of the world was at hand and were filled with terror. The horrors of the imagination were soon intensified by the approach of the flames, the stories of the universal desolation to the west of them, the dread that they were fated to a frightful death, and then by the arrival of the charred, blackened and shapeless remains of the poor victims. This awful condition continued all along the shore until Wednesday morning at 8 o'clock, when the wind, which had been blowing steadily from the west, turned suddenly from the north, carrying the cool, moist air of the lake to the fevered heads and smoke and ash-begrimed faces of the people. It was sweet as the breath of God, and was accepted as thankfully.

Rev. Grenell continues: The scenes of horror in the woods were too frightful for any pen to portray. The dead were found everywhere, very rarely recognizable, and in most cases undistinguishable human remains.

He then goes into a minute description which in this day of yellow journalism, would be considered unprintable.

Mail Carrier Is Burned To Death

William Humphrey, the mail carrier from Argyle to Elmer, started on his route Monday, September 5, 1881. He was stopped by the flames. He unhitched the horse from the wagon, made a saddle of the mail bags and mounting the beast turned back at a gallop. This is what the people of Argyle thought happened. The horse arrived at Argyle without rider or mail bags. Believing the worst had happened, they tied a mail sack on the horse and turned him back on his route. The poor beast followed the habits of his daily work and dashed over the road into Elmer. Humphrey's burned body was afterwards found in the wilderness in one place, the mail bag, half consumed, in another, and the wagon in another.

Into the newspaper offices the news dispatches poured by the Western Union. By the 8th of September people from the burned districts began to arrive in Port Huron and Detroit, and their personal experiences and observations became a matter of record. As I record these events I wonder how

many are living today who knew the people whose names appear in these pages. We read so lightly. There was Dr. Richards of Port Austin who drove out to look after his property south of the village. His buggy caught fire, from which he cut the horse. The horse disappeared in the smoke. The doctor secured another horse and rode back to town. The reading of this dispatch dimly recalls to my memory a Dr. Richards of Port Austin.

A Call For Help Is Issued

On Thursday, Sept. 8, 1881, Mayor William C. Thompson of the city of Detroit issued this proclamation:

To the Citizens of Detroit:

Reliable information has been received that numerous villages in this state have been totally destroyed by fire and their inhabitants rendered homeless and destitute and that a large number of farmers have been driven from their homes by the flames which have destroyed their houses, barns, stock, leaving them without shelter and in want.

The sufferings of these homeless and destitute people, our own fellow citizens, appeal to the humanity of the country and especially to that of Detroit. It is an imperative duty to afford them liberal and instant relief.

Therefore, believing it to be my duty to invite the people of Detroit to aid these sufferers, I hereby give notice that a meeting of the citizens of Detroit will be held this day at 12:30 o'clock in the afternoon at the Common Council Chamber, to consider what can be done to relieve the destitution of the sufferers from this calamity.

From Port Sanilac came the news that Abel Thornton, son and wife were burned to death. That Sarah Sharkey and John Mohan were burned at Richmondville.

Six were Found Dead In A Well

In Marion Township six were found in one well and seven in another. There were many reports of death in the northern part of Forester Township — but the names of the dead had not, as yet, been ascertained. The village of Bridgehampton was burning — but no details. All the roads leading to the lake were lined with fleeing refugees. An old man named Cole, living northwest of Port Sanilac, was burned to death.

Two men of Port Sanilac returned with news from Richmondville. Stephenson's mills were burned and all the surrounding houses. The people were suffering for want of food.

Dr. E. A. Hoyt of Port Sanilac, braved the flames and with medicines and bandages made his way into the country north and west of the village. He reported many burned fatally. He found seven dead bodies at the Ridge schoolhouse.

A correspondent to the Detroit Free Press writes from Port Sanilac: Upwards of three hundred persons perished in the flames. There was no escape for them. In many instances I found men, women and children lying on the ground on their faces, just where they had been overtaken by the fire. I found the bodies of children, burned to a crisp, on top of logs where they had climbed for safety. There was no finding each other when once separated. Many took refuge in wells and root houses, thinking to escape, but in almost every instance they were suffocated. The details of the disaster in Huron County are as bad as here. I believe that when all returns are in one thousand persons will be found to have perished. In Marion Township the family of one Richmond, six in number, were found dead in a well. And another family — name unknown. Rev W. E. Allington of Port Sanilac, found sixteen dead bodies near Deckerville. There are only five buildings left between there and Minden. In Paris Township, the wife of John Flytewager, and his seven children were burned alive. Fifteen others burned to death near Parisville. The Day family — and Morris Clifford and his wife and child. A man and woman were found dead on the road between Donner's mill and Tyre. Mr Paine, of Sibley, was burned to death. Fifteen families were burned in Moore and Argyle. Five hundred families are reported at Minden as having been burned out. A woman burned to death a half mile from Tyre. We need help immediately. Medicine and medical assistance.

(The Richmond family above referred to were near neighbors of the present publisher of the Tribune. The whole family dove into a new 12 foot deep well with about two feet of water in the bottom. They hoped to escape the suffocating smoke and heat and flames which swept over them from their burning buildings. The top of the well was covered with boards and planks. These caught fire and while burning dropped down on the father, mother and five children. The baby, less than a year old, was drowned in the water. The father's head was partly burned off. All were dead when found the next day. The Richmonds, however, lived in Delaware Township instead of Marion. The family consisted

of the father, mother and six children. The oldest boy, 12, was away at a neighbor's and was the only member of the family left alive. — Editor.)

Someone from Forestville wires the Free Press: The whole country around this place is in flames.

Port Huron Group Calls For Help

Port Huron, Sept. 7 — At a citizen's meeting held in Port Huron this evening the undersigned were appointed a committee to appeal to the citizens of Michigan and to charitable people elsewhere for immediate aid to the people of nearly the entire country north of St. Clair from the shores of Lake Huron to Saginaw Bay. We regret to say that even the harrowing reports already given to the public through the newspapers give an inadequate idea of the sweeping ruin and of the necessities of those whose houses and property have been destroyed. The fires have extended over portions of five counties, laying waste large regions in Sanilac and Huron counties. The ruin is far more widely extended and overwhelming than was wrought by the memorable fires of 1871. We believe that between 200 and 300 people have perished, while thousands of our fellow citizens are turned homeless and friendless dependents upon a charitable public. The undersigned will visit the stricken region forthwith and announce the result of their observations. At the meeting here tonight over \$700, besides large donations of food and clothing, were raised and will be sent by boat and rail tomorrow morning. Contributions forwarded to the Hon. E. C. Carlton, mayor of Port Huron and chairman of the relief committee, will be promptly and faithfully sent to the relief of the suffering.

O. D. CONGER,
W. L. BANCROFT

Not until Thursday, September 8, 1881, did any real news of conditions on the interior of the peninsula reach the outside world. Rumors and statements of loss were contained in many dispatches, but not until the 8th were there any authoritative bits of news. The Detroit papers of the 8th began printing "eye witness" reports of those who had come down by boat or rail from the burning area.

The Detroit Post and Tribune, Thursday, Sept. 8, 1881, contained the following dispatches:

One of the most intelligible accounts of the condition of things was related by Mr J. W. Barry, of McClure's Express.

He said:

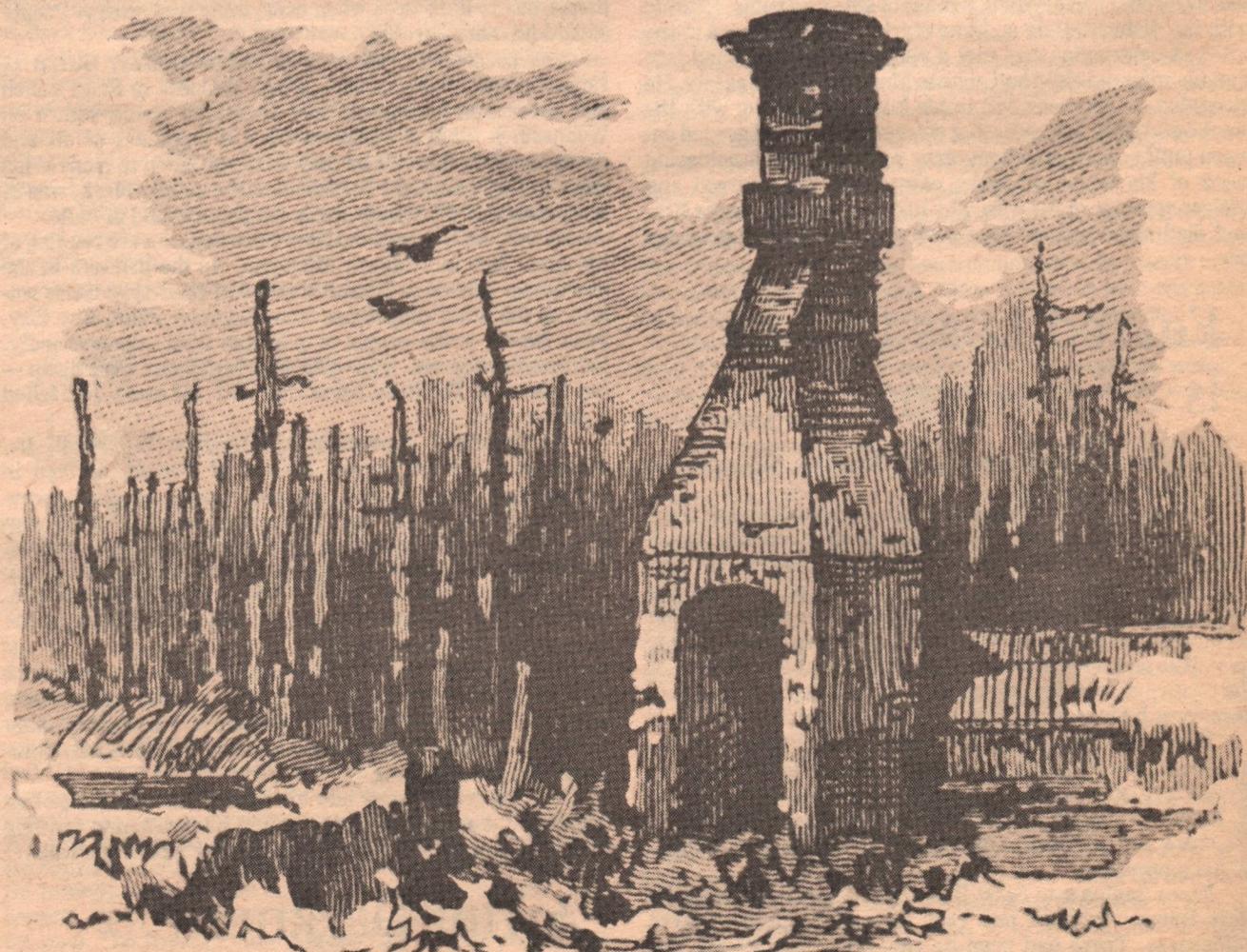
"At Sand Beach when we left they had been fighting fire all day, but did not consider the town in danger, because they have a good system of water works. Verona Mills, the next place below, is gone, clear burned up. We took on some people from there and brought them down to Port Huron. At Bad Axe, the next place, the fire has swept everything except the courthouse and church. White Rock the next port below Sand Beach, is in good shape, or was at 9 o'clock Tuesday evening; but at a place called Paris, a few miles further back, there is a Polish settlement, which was burned out in 1871. It is said to be entirely swept away, not a house remaining. There was a clergyman who came from there who said that on the sides of the road he saw the bodies of sheep, hogs and people. Some of them had been caught by the falling trunks of trees, and some of them had been suffocated by the smoke. No estimate could be made of the number of lives lost, because there were a great many farmers in isolated spots, whose homes have been swept away and no one knows whether they have escaped or not."

"Forestville was the next place we passed. We left there along in the evening, and at that time there was considerable smoke, but they thought they would not be burned out. They were, however, moving their goods out of houses and stores on to the beach, and building board shanties over them."

"How near do the woods come to the settlement over there?" was asked.

"Oh, quite close, just about the same as all along the shore. Below Forestville the fire touched the trees clear down to the shore, and everything carried away. It looks as though every farmhouse on the shore was cleaned out. Richmondville is gone, and we took some of the people on board and brought them down to Port Huron and Port Sanilac. They saved none of their goods, as the fire swept down on them suddenly they had barely time to escape it. At Richmondville, or near there, a family of seven persons named Thornton sought shelter in a well and were suffocated by the smoke. When found they lay in a heap in the water, their hair scalded off and parts of their bodies scorched and apparently cooked. I got these facts from Mr Murray of Richmondville. His own store and all its contents were burned. We could not land at Richmondville because of the smoke."

"Forester is the next port that is touched by the boats. We left there late last night and all was then well, though the fire was back of them in the woods. They were wetting everything they could. Someone cut the mill dam at Forester and let the water out. How it was done no one seemed to know. Back of Sanilac the fire is in the woods the same way."



HUNDREDS OF HOMES WERE LEVELED

The timber near the shore was not burned. They got an idea here that these places were burned, Forestville particularly, no doubt from the fact that the people were firing the roads close by to save their property from the worse fires back in the woods, that were liable to sweep down upon them at any moment. When we passed the wind was blowing fresh toward Forestville. So in all, the towns of Tyre, Cato, Verona Mills and Union City were burned when we left; also part of Port Hope."

"So far as you could learn, what was the estimated loss of life?" was asked Mr Barry.

It is impossible to fix any figure. Mr Jenks at Sand Beach says 100 lives will not begin to cover the loss. The dead are scattered all through the peninsula and those who live are separated by miles of burning trunks and heated ashfields."

A telephonic message from St. Clair to a gentleman in this city says that Mr John Ballentine of Verona Mills, who was owner of a large mill, store, boarding house, etc., was entirely burned out. He and his wife spent 24 hours in a well and he was quite seriously burned.

Special dispatch to the Post and Tribune:

Sand Beach, Sept. 6 — The fires in this county are still raging. Bad Axe, our county seat, is all burned up except the courthouse, one store and a few small buildings. Verona Mills, 12 miles west of here, is all burned, except the hotel and church. Huron City and Forest Bay are entirely destroyed. The dock, mill and many buildings are burned at Port Hope. The fire is now about two miles from here and our firemen are doing their best to save the village. There is no immediate danger. There have been 20 bodies found burned in Rubicon, three in this township and there will undoubtedly be still more. Reports from Paris are that the township is all burned. Wires down, send this by steamer.

Some Eyewitness Tales Of The Disaster

Later: Several men arrived here this evening (Port Huron) from the burned district. Geo. McDonald of Minden, Sanilac County, tells a harrowing tale. Over 200 families are homeless in that section and suffering from want of food and clothing. Mr Haviland from the same place tells of a large number of lives known to have been lost. John Ballentine of Verona Mills says that 53 lives were known to be lost in the neighborhood of Sand Beach. The fire suddenly reached Verona Mills on Monday and the town was soon wiped out. The wind was so strong that Mr Ballentine and wife were picked up and blown 15 or 20 yards. A woman and her husband were found lying against a tree dead, the woman being partly delivered of a child. The devastation caused by the fires of 1871 are nothing in comparison to the fires of the past few days. Mr Ballentine says that: In the vicinity of Richmond and Western Forester and Marion Township, reliable information leads me to say that upwards of 300 persons perished in the flames. There was no escape for them. Persons who have been through the terrible ordeal say that in 10 minutes from the time the fire struck there would be no vestige of a house left.

An unknown informant says: "I have just returned from a trip through the burned district and a description of the sights I saw would make the reader's blood run cold. In many instances men, women and children were found lying on their faces in the road dead just where they had fallen when overtaken by the fire."

Mr Jacob Springer from Minden, Sanilac County, arrived down on the steamer, M. D. Ward this morning. He says that at 11 o'clock Monday dense smoke began to roll over the village, and at noon it was as dark as night, lamps were lighted, and men went about the streets with lanterns.

James Burgess, mail agent on the Sand Beach division of the Port Huron and Northwestern railroad, reached this city Tuesday afternoon. His face showed the effects of a few hours in the burning district. He reports the fires as frightful. North of Croswell the woods were all on fire. At Croswell the people were prepared to leave at any minute. Two and a half miles above Deckerville the rails had been twisted so badly that the train could not run.

Sickening Details Arrive By The Hour

Akron, Sept. 7 — Several families have been burned out and had to flee for their lives. It is reported that two men and a pair of horses were burned to death while attempting to fight the flames south of Akron. The damage to property about Akron is great.

Cass City, Sept. 7 — Seven houses and a copper shop in Cass City were burned and all the inhabitants are fighting the flames. It is believed tonight that there is no further danger of the destruction of the village, unless a fierce gale should spring up. One family living east of the village has been lost track of and it is believed they have perished in the flames.



A STRICKEN FAMILY

People come straggling into Cass City barefooted and bare headed and nearly blind, seeking food and shelter.

The Detroit Evening News of Friday, September 9, 1881, 2 o'clock edition:

Today's news from the fire swept Huron peninsula and adjacent regions indicate that the worst of the work of destruction is done, but the sickening details arriving every hour show that the devastation was even more widespread and awful than previous reports have shown, and at that at least 31 townships and 11 villages in Huron, Sanilac and Tuscola counties have suffered, the villages being utterly destroyed and the townships burned over as close as a summer fallow in many cases. Bridges, fences, barns, houses, stacks, cattle, sheep, horses and human beings went down before the flames like grain before the reaper's stroke. It is yet impossible to give tithe of the losses or correctly enumerate the deaths, but so far the following particulars are known.

Forty-five dead bodies have been found near Paris, and many more persons are missing. The dead are nearly all Polish. North of Richmondville and at that place 3 families are known to be burned out, and at least 60 other farms are believed to have been devastated, while the shore is lined with refugees. Many of them are so panic stricken and hard up that they take the boats for Port Huron or Detroit without a thought of going back to see what is left of their farms. Many of these people are badly burned, and it will be a week yet before the full list of lives lost can be gathered.

At Huron City there isn't enough left to make oath to. Langdon Hubbard is the patron of the place, and his loss is very heavy. Neil's hotel (brand new) the school house, and fine bridge — all gone.

Stafford's dock at Port Hope, the mill, and most of Stafford's property is gone, but the Stafford Brothers have thrown themselves into the breach and are bending every effort to help the sufferers back in Gore & Rubicon townships.

At Bad Axe over 300 refugees are huddled in the courthouse, which with two stores and ten houses, was save. The Irwin house, Armstrong house, school house, Tribune office, Philip's store, Razek's store, Pollock & Deady's drugstore, W. E. Small's jewelry store, Johnston's harness shop, Rappson Brothers' wagon shop, Baptist church, the Methodist and Presbyterian churches, school house and nearly all the residences were destroyed.

The loss of life in Huron County is believed to be over 200. Some of those missing may yet turn up from the swamps, but is feared few will.

Verona Mills is about all destroyed. J. and D. Ludington and John Ballentine, the heaviest merchants, lost everything. Ballentine, who is a brother of Silas L. Ballentine of Port Huron, and Hon. W. H. Ballentine of Brockway, was one of the sufferers of 1871, when he was left with less than a dollar. He has since accumulated about \$60,000 and is today in Detroit thanking God he saved his life.

There are well authenticated stories which show that about 100 farms were devastated in Hume, Meade, Lake, Chandler, Colfax, Verona, Lincoln, Bloomfield, Sigel, Huron, Dwight and Rubicon townships. Worst of all is the fact that there has been a considerable loss of life. John Ripley, a leading man and farmer of Bloomfield is burned to death. A child of Mrs. McPhail of Lincoln, was smothered. Three children of Lorenzo Hazel of Meade were burned to death after being twice rescued.

Port Austin, Sept. 9 — The people of Huron County are in a suffering condition on account of forest fires. The destruction and suffering are terrible beyond description, and we would like to have you, through The News, solicit some aid for us. A large portion of the people are homeless and destitute, and unless some aid can be given them their sufferings will be fearful. Anything consigned to J. Jenks & Co., Sand Beach, C. E. Thompson, Bad Axe, and W. H. Merrick,

Port Austin, will be properly distributed and thankfully received.

Signed,
Mrs. M. Carrington,
Mrs. C. D. Williams'
Com. Ladies Aid Society

The Hurricane Rush And Roar Of Flame

Through the welter of news dispatches pouring into the metropolitan papers; the rumors, the guesses, the panic, the appeals, I begin to realize the magnitude of the "Fire of Eighty One." Contradictions, corrections, personal impressions, fragments, hear-say stories — but back of it all the rush and roar of a hurricane of flame.

I see the interminable stretches of second-growth timber, the miles of torn and broken slashings, the dried swamps, the patches of cleared crop lands. I hear the drone of the sawmills, and see the landscape trembling in the heat of that September day. I see the haze of smoke and breathe the pungent odor of the burning muck. I see the settlements, peaceful and quiet on that Monday morning — September 5, 1881. Vague rumors are afloat of isolated fires which threaten a farmer's crop and barn.

There has been no rain for seven weeks! Everything is as dry as a bone. People should not start fires when everything is so dry. Some people are so careless.

I see the laborers pushing the new railroad into the wilderness. I see the hustle and bustle about the docks at Port Hope. I see the Polish battling the stumps and slashing in Paris Township. I see farmers standing in the dried parched fields, looking into the heavens for the sign of a cloud, silently praying for rain.

I hear the sound of the fire gnawing at the brown wire grass. I see it creep and crawl across the stubble field, flare up at the thick growths along the rail fences. I see the birds as they arise from the marsh lands and disappear into the copper-colored sky. I see the cattle as they graze along the creek bottoms, and hear the voice of a lonely crow from his perch on the charred and shattered stump of a pine.

I see the fire creep into the slashing and kindled with dried weed and bush, and fallen stump burst into fury, and the smoke rise and drift away across the wilderness.

I hear the sound of an awakening wind and the whispering of tiny flames ascend to the battle cry of a thousand titans. I see the pines and the hemlocks unfurl their pendants of flame, and I hear the screech of the wind and the cry of cattle, the falling of the trees and the sound of a sea of fire.

I see the sun hidden, and the twilight of hell — and the darkness. I hear the screams of men and children as they flee along the fiery paths of burning forests. I see the burning muck tossed high into the air and carried like meteors on errands of destruction. Beneath an ocean of smoke I see dimly through the haze the burning home, the blazing barn, the straw stacks, the fences, the world afire. Along the roads leading to the lake I see men, women and children, horses, cattle, in a mad rush for safety.

Husbands dragging wives, mothers dragging children — fire behind them, fire on all sides of them, fire in front of them. I see them stop overwhelmed by heat and smoke gather, huddled in the center of the roadway, and a million voices of death whistling about them. I see love and devotion — a timid wife gazing momentarily into the eyes of a husband — the flare of a flame — I hear the fearful cry of a child in the wild bewilderment of disaster — I hear the fitful gasps of one more breath of life — and I see them sink into a shapeless mass — and consumed in a breath of flame.

I hear the wild laughter of the fires. The ghosts of giant trees, cut for the plunder of the lumbermen, now ride upon the wind of fire and flame. It is the judgment day. The soul of pine and fir awaken and in a hurricane of flaming battle take their revenge. Where are your axes and your saws? Flee along your hand-hewn roads. It is my revenge. Each flame the ghost of a dead loveliness, strikes its blow and flees before the wind.

I see men, women and children seeking safety in the cooling depths of wells, but the fire pursues them, strangling them, throwing them down in tangled masses of humanity at the bottom. I see them seek shelter in root cellars — and die horribly in the darkness. I hear the curses and the prayers, the screams of pain, the awful sound of children battling with a choking death.

I see men coming into Sand Beach, hatless, shoeless, faces blackened with the smoke — bewildered, confused. The end of the world. Husbands fighting a burning road to reach a home somewhere in the wilderness — to reach a home — perhaps already devoured in the wild orgy of death.

I fall and stumble over the body of a mere boy — dead, face down on the road.

What are the stories of the living? What are the stories of the dead? What is this I have unearthed out of the buried archives of the past? I sat down to write of my childhood, my boyhood — my father and my mother — of you — those I



SUPPLIES WERE DISTRIBUTED AT CASS CITY

knew and loved — and here, before me The Fire of Eighty One. Long lists of the dead. Longer lists of the living. Appeals for aid. Benefits. Relief.

Names of men I knew. Long dead. Their children's children living on beneath the blue skies of a Michigan summer. Where are the graves of those others? What monument have we erected in memory of those who fell in that battle of the wilderness? What tribute have we inscribed in memory of their heroic sacrifice?

As the news comes to us from far separated localities — Lapeer, Saginaw, Bay City, Port Huron, Port Sanilac, Port Hope — and only rumors from the interior — we await anxiously for the news from Bad Axe. Already the state is organizing itself in the great task of immediate relief. As the smouldering ruins remain obscured by smoke, communications cut off, boats and trains are being laden with food and clothing.

It is now Friday, September 9, 1881. I hear a newsboy on the street crying the 3 o'clock extra of the Evening News:

A farmer, name unknown, has been burned to death in Arabela Township, and in the Cass City region nine miles square was burned over. Nine lives are known to be lost and there is great destitution.

Charles Montague, of Caro, has received a letter from Cass City which reads as follows: "Within a radius of three miles each way from this place there are not less than 20 families who have been burned out and left entirely destitute of everything except clothing on their persons. They are without provisions or shelter. In Sanilac County the destruction is much more general. I know of from 75 to 100 families in the most destitute condition possible to conceive, with nothing to keep them from starvation. The condition of hundreds of families is appalling in the extreme and much suffering must be the result notwithstanding the assistance which will be extended. In the name of humanity further the securing of aid. Any and everything is needed. Even had they money I do not know how they could get shelter at all. Lumber cannot be had as it is all burned with the mills, so far as I can learn, except in very insignificant quantities. Some plan for a just and equitable distribution of relief should be adopted early to avoid the unequal and often undeserved bestowal of aid which took place in 1871."

Bad Axe Village Pleads For Help

The Detroit Free Press, Friday, September 8, 1881.

Detroit has never been backward when the cry for help came from any quarter. She has again done nobly in respect to relieving the suffering people in our own state, and yesterday contributed over \$7,000 in a very short time. Arrangements were made to provide for the needy with means

of sustenance, clothing, cooking utensils, etc. The first installment of the relief was sent up last night.

To the Honorable Mayor of the City of Port Huron:

We, the undersigned, would respectfully represent to your citizens that the dire calamity that visited Huron County in the year 1871 has been repeated in 1881. On Monday, September 5, 1881, the villages of Bad Axe and Verona were destroyed by forest fires and 200 families are left without clothing or provisions in a destitute and suffering condition, and many must perish unless the general distress is speedily relieved. Some have perished already in the flames, and the fires which no human power can check, are still raging and devouring everything before them. Contributions of clothing, bedding, nails, glass, provisions, etc., will be thankfully and cheerfully accepted.

CHAS. E. THOMPSON,
County Treasurer
JOHN M. CAREY,

County Clerk
CARL HEISTERMAN,

Register
HIRAM L. CHIPMAN,

Prosecuting Attorney

MAYWOOD & MAYWOOD

Huron Tribune

EDWIN WATKINS,

Deputy Sheriff,
SEPTIMUS IRWIN,

W. J. BOOSE

Mr. George W. Jenks of Sand Beach, wrote the following letter to the mayor of Detroit:

Sand Beach, Sept. 7, 1881

Dear Sir: — The fires in this county this week have burned over the east half of this county, destroying almost every house in some townships, with barns, crops and everything. The destruction is greater than in 1871. There are hundreds of families here utterly destitute, with nothing to eat or wear except what is given them.

These people will have to be furnished with clothing, provisions, seed wheat and materials for building. The loss of life here is greater than in 1871. So far as heard from the death list reaches about sixty at present, with others missing. The suffering is terrible and we appeal to you to obtain what aid you can to relieve their immediate necessities. Contributions of clothing and provisions can be used here, but what we want most is money, as provisions, clothing and seed can be bought here as cheap as in Detroit, and thus save the freight. Hoping you will give the matter your earliest attention, we remain.

Respectfully yours,
GEORGE W. JENKS

P.S. — So far there has been no losses in the village of Sand Beach, although there have been a large number burned out in this township.

John Ballentine of Verona Mills, addressed the mayor's meeting today on introduction of Martin Butzel. He described

how he and his family and neighbors fled before the flames on Monday last and lay in a corn field for hours. In his region very few buildings were left and on Tuesday morning fifty pounds of flour was all that seventy-five persons had to eat. The speaker had a sawmill and flouring mill and had a good many in his employ. He reached Sand Beach and sent back provision for his people.

The loss of life is terrible, more than we know of. When he was stepping on the train to come to Detroit he was informed that 53 bodies had been buried in Port Hope and vicinity. He thought the desolation covered an extent of country thirty by fifty miles in his region.

George McDonald, of Minden, Sanilac County, said the smoke and darkness came on about 10 o'clock a.m. and by noon they were obliged to light up for dinner. At 3 p.m., lanterns in the streets were necessary. Minden is on the Port Huron and Northwestern railroad. He described how he found whole families four miles west of Minden burned to cinders, and others shockingly burned but still alive. At Richmondville were found sixteen bodies in one field. In Huron and Sanilac counties, 2,000 families are absolutely destitute. The cool wave has checked the fire to a great extent. Railroad communication was cut off, but on Wednesday a construction train passed over the Port Huron & Northwestern and provisions had been sent from Port Huron for immediate relief.

A correspondent to the Post and Tribune, Detroit, writes:

Bad Axe, September 8 — On Monday the 5th inst., about 10 o'clock, the wind rose and it grew smoky, the same as it has many times before this summer, but when the roar began people were alarmed and began carrying water to save their houses if the fire came. But still most people said there was no danger. Bad Axe was safe as fire had burned around it so much this summer. When the fire came Mrs H. L. Chipman with her two children fled to the courthouse and was the first to reach there. Soon others came, bringing bundles of clothing or bedding and others yet soon followed, glad to get their wives and little children there. Such a scene cannot be described. One building after another began to burn, and men were rushing wildly about in search of their families. Some people jumped into wells and escaped death that way; and in the north and east parts of the town some stayed by their homes and fought the fire through it all, and men calling for their wives; would be told they had run east, and would start and follow, pleading for them to stay. But no, away they would rush. Seven jumped into their wells, and thus were saved; others stayed by their home through it all. The courthouse was full of people. The doors had to be closed, and about 30 men at a time stayed on the outside to fight fire with water drawn from the well on the premises. They could stand it but a short time, when others would take their places. The heat was terrible on the inside and one could not stand near the windows. The row of stores was all ablaze opposite it, and when the gunpowder and about 30 kerosene barrels burned it turned dark and then a bright red. A braver lot of men never were seen. They fought like heroes for their wives, children and friends. One time they thought the courthouse would have to go and they picked out a place for us to run to, but it was as well to stay and perish there for we should certainly have most of us died if we had been driven out. The courthouse stood, but you can conceive of the heat when I tell you that Mr. Heisterman, the register of deeds, can show you books that were in the vault with the leather ruined. The women were brave and quiet. There was no screaming or hysterics there. Twenty-one buildings are left. No hotels are left. Fifty-three buildings burned in town. A great many ran through town or were taken by their teams. Mothers got separated from their children. About 30 persons stopped at W. F. Thompson's farm in a plowed field. The men dug trenches into which all got, putting lumber over themselves and throwing blankets over that and keeping the blankets wet. All came through all right.

The Welcome Rain Comes

The Bay City Tribune, Friday, Sept. 9, 1881:

The propeller Mary Martini which left Robert's wharf at 9:00 o'clock Wednesday morning, proceeded only as far as Caseville that day, the storm on the bay being so heavy that Captain Hutchings deemed it advisable not to go further. The Martini returned to Bay City last evening and a Tribune reporter at once sought an interview with him regarding the fires along the shore as far as he knew. Captain Hutchings said:

"I laid at Caseville all Wednesday night. A light rain storm visited that section about midnight and lasted two or three hours. It served to check the fire, as I noticed from my windows that the illumination in the direction of Bad Axe, Port Austin, Sebewaing and in fact all along the shore had greatly decreased. The smoke rose from the half extinguished fires, and there being a dead calm, it would not rise. When I left Caseville there were fires in the woods about a mile from the outskirts, but it was so deadened there is no danger of it reaching that place unless they should have more dry weather, high winds and no rain. Tuesday morning, Bert

Smalley and Mr Dufty of Caseville volunteered to take provisions to the sufferers at Bad Axe and left that day with two loads. On their way back to Caseville they met with great difficulty, being one day and a half getting there. They said that the sights along the roads were heartrending to behold. By the roadside here and there were carcasses of sows, horses and in numbers of places were sheep with their wool burned to a crisp. Men, women and children had lost the greater portion of their clothing and were dressed in any article of a cloth nature that could be procured. Some were wearing coffee sacks for skirts, and table cloths about their bodies, having lost everything. One party who was questioned about losing her clothes, said that while carrying them in her arms, they caught fire and were destroyed. The people of Bad Axe, when Messrs. Smalley and Dufty reached there, were on their last cracker, and would have famished for want of food in a very short time, were the supplies not received and had the fearful fires continued. They had been running on short rations and the food arrived just in time. Messrs Smalley and Dufty left Caseville again this morning with more supplies, and will meet with no trouble in getting through. The girl, of whom I spoke to you on Tuesday as having been suffocated while going to her father's farm back of Port Crescent, was found by the side of a fence at the place, having reached that far, and then sank to the ground to be burned by the flames.

"George Carpenter, I was told, had to take refuge in his well with his wife and child, for three hours, to escape the flames. Other similar reports were heard on all sides. When I left Caseville this morning the smoke was very thick and objects a few rods ahead could not be seen. All the way into port it was about the same. I had fifteen passengers on my trip in, but none were refugees."

Edward Warren, son of the editor of the Bay City Tribune, had been up to Bad Axe and had returned to Bay City on Sept. 8. He had been in Bad Axe preaching for the Presbyterian society for several months — it being his vacation from the Union Theological Seminary of New York. His time having expired he left Bad Axe last Tuesday for Bay City. His account of the burning of Bad Axe and the frightful scenes of destruction and desolation to be seen on every hand follows:

"The wind commenced blowing from the west at about 11 o'clock Monday morning and rapidly gained in velocity as the smouldering fires were fanned into flames. By one o'clock the wind had increased to a hurricane and accompanied with a horrible roaring, bore the insatiable flames with the speed of a race-horse through the woods toward the doomed village of Bad Axe. An hour after the people, who had been fighting the fires for twenty-four hours, were obliged to abandon everything and flee for their lives. A large part of the inhabitants found refuge in the courthouse. This building was saved with the greatest difficulty. While the fire was raging around it, the interior, which was packed with men, women and children, was as hot as the mouth of a blast furnace, and all were in imminent danger of suffocating.

"The first building in the village to take fire was Charley Brason's stable. His house almost immediately followed and then the work of the fierce destroyer was finished with all possible dispatch and completeness. By 4 o'clock the smoking ruins were all that was to mark the business part of the town. The courthouse and records, five stores and ten houses are all that remain of the county seat of Huron County. J. A. Morgan's family and myself escaped by lying on our backs in a green swale in a low piece of ground to the east of the village. His only salvation was the high wind which blew most of the intense heat and dense smoke over his head and left an undercurrent of comparatively pure but hot air, barely sufficient to escape suffocation. As it was, his hair was singed by the scorching heat and his clothes badly burnt by the falling sparks. No one who has never experienced them can frame any conception of the horrors of a forest fire. The premonitory stillness, the subsequent roaring, a terror in itself, the falling trees, the showers of sparks and the angry tongues of flames, then the dense black clouds, causing the darkness of night, these with the suffocating and blinding smoke form a series of horrors that one never cares to go through a second time.

Mr Warren who passed over the country from Bad Axe to Port Austin and from there to Caseville states that the scenes of desolation he witnessed beggars description. The country looks as though the destroying angel had waved his sword over the land and carried death and destruction on every side.

The Vassar Pioneer gives the following account of the losses in Tuscola County:

Lapp and wife, and brother, W. H. Lapp, with their father Asa Lapp; DeWitt Henderson, wife and five children; William Provost, wife and three children and Samuel Provost and wife. A Mr Wilbur, wife and four children. The homes and all the earthly effects of these five families were swept away and the people barely escaped with their lives. Mr Henderson lost his house and barn with all their contents, which means household goods and all his grain and provisions, also all his farming tools, wagon and harness, two cords of hemlock bark and one cow. Mr Wilbur lost his house, barn and everything he had excepting two beds. Wm. Provost lost his house, barn and everything except his team and wagon. Erastus Goodman, wife and child, who had been living with Wm. Provost, lost everything they had. The house of Samuel Provost was burned with all its contents. The Lapp family lost their house, barn and all the growing crop, two hogs, fowls and everything except a team, which was saved by Mr Provost by great exertion.

The fire in this locality started at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon and so fast did it sweep, all the families mentioned fled, with what things they could snatch, the farm of Messrs. Lapp, who had the largest clearing; but the flames were at their heels and so great was the heat that 18 persons sought refuge in a well, where one man at the top and another at the bottom of the well, kept the others drenched for four hours, and thus saved their lives. The suffering was very great — Mr Henderson and Samuel Lapp being totally blind from the heat and smoke, Mrs Lapp had her clothing nearly burned off, and is suffering from a severe burn on her right side. All the other parties are more or less burned or singed. They stopped at the Central House and secured medical treatment,

and their wants are being supplied by our citizens.

The only buildings left in this entire neighborhood are those of Martin Kile and Wm. Henry. Mr Henry had burned 825 cedar posts, 250 telegraph poles, 37 cords of cedar bolts and 50 cords of bark. The Lapp brothers also had 50 cords of bark burned.

Bate's Mill Burns At Vassar

Probably the most destructive fire in the township of Vassar was Tuesday afternoon, when William Bate's mill, three miles south, on the railroad was burned. This mill was burned out last spring and had just been rebuilt. It was stocked with about one million feet of logs, which were all burned.

On Tuesday night, Henry Sherman, 3½ miles east of Vassar, on the Mayville Road, lost his house, barn, pigs, chickens and most of his crop on the ground. The same night, Remos Disbrow's sawmill burned and the old lumber camp of John S. Kilborne.

A reporter of the Vassar Pioneer on Tuesday visited Millington and found the fires running to a fearful extent in this township, nearly 20 families having been burned out of house and home.

On Monday the inhabitants of Gagetown were in the greatest danger and everyone was out fighting the flames, and it was only by the most strenuous efforts that the village



ROUGH SHELTERS WERE BUILT AFTER THE FIRE

The Losses In Tuscola County

Tuesday, just after noon, a large load of people, eighteen in number, arrived at the Central House, who had barely escaped with their lives, and who had a terrible story of suffering to tell. The people consisted of five families, all neighbors living in Juniata Township, on the east side of the river, eight miles below Vassar. Their names are: Samuel

MICHIGAN'S

TERRIBLE CALAMITY.

DANSVILLE SOCIETY OF THE

**RED CROSS.****A CRY FOR HELP!**

The Dansville Society of the Red Cross, whose duty it is to accumulate funds and material, to provide nurses and assistants if may be, and hold these for use or service in case of war, or other national calamity—has heard the cry for help from Michigan. Senator O. D. Conger wrote on the 9th of September that he had just returned from the burnt region. Bodies of more than 200 persons had already been buried, and more than 1,500 families had been burned out of everything. That was in only twenty townships in two counties. He invoked the aid of all our people. The character and extent of the calamity cannot be described in words. The manifold horrors of the fire were multiplied by fearful tornadoes, which cut off retreat in every direction. In some places whole families have been found reduced to an indistinguishable heap of wasted and blackened blocks of flesh, where they fell together overwhelmed by the rushing flames. For the dead, alas! there is nothing but burial. For the thousands who survive, without shelter, without clothing, without food, whose every vestige of a once happy home has been swept away, haply much, everything, can be done. The Society of the Red Cross of Dansville proposes to exercise its functions in this emergency, and to see to it that sympathy, money, clothing, bedding, everything wh' c's those entirely destitute can need, shall find its way promptly to them. But the society is in its infancy here. It has in fact barely completed its organization. It has not in possession for immediate use the funds and stores which will in future be accumulated for such emergencies. It calls therefore upon the generous people of Dansville and vicinity to make at once such contributions, money or clothing, as their liberal hearts and the terrible exigency may prompt them to make. Our citizens will be called upon for cash subscriptions, or such subscriptions may be left with James Faulkner, Jr., Treasurer of the Society, at the First National Bank of Dansville. Contributions of Clothing and Bedding may be left at 154 Main street, Maxwell Block, Sewing Machine Agency of Mrs. John Shepard.

A special agent of the Society will be dispatched with the money and goods to see to their proper distribution. Please act promptly.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE RED CROSS.

Dansville, Sept. 13, 1881.

DANSVILLE ADVERTISER HENRY PRIEST.

The First Appeal

The first American Red Cross appeal for help was printed by the Dansville Advertiser at Dansville, New York, on September 13, 1881. The plea was for help for the victims of the Great Fire of 1881 which struck the Thumb of Michigan.

Interestingly, The Dansville Advertiser was the training-ground for Henry G. Chapin, who founded the Tuscola County Advertiser in 1868 and named his new Tuscola County newspaper for the New York newspaper at which he had learned the trade. The Dansville Advertiser was probably the "hometown newspaper" of Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, an interesting tie between Michigan's Advertiser and New York's Advertiser brought about by the Great Fire of 1881.

was saved. Within a radius of 10 to 12 miles south of Gagetown on the road to Caro, 20 families are burned out.

"M. Quad" Tells of Desolation

"M. Quad," special writer for the Detroit Free Press — remembered, I am sure by old timers in Bad Axe and vicinity, writes on September 9, from Port Sanilac:

"I have made a ride of twenty miles along this shore today. No picture you have painted of the desolation comes up to the reality."

"The fires are mostly out now in this vicinity, but are still burning to the westward. The one house left at Richmondville is occupied by seven or eight families and barely a person among them has saved a whole suit of clothes. Some women have only a calico dress to cover their nakedness and men are barefooted and bareheaded."

"The loss of life on this shore is at least 150 persons, with several townships unheard from. Scores of families have lost houses, barns, and crops, and are wanderers on the highways. Scores more have lost houses and saved barns and crops."

"Relief parties have buried all the dead found, but many persons are unheard from and missing. A Canadian family which lately moved in back of Richmondville was burned out, and no trace of the family has yet been found. Reports from further west increase the horror of the situation."

"Relief must come and speedily, to this. Hundreds need clothing, food, tools, furniture and shelter, and cold weather is not far away."

Grindstone City, September 8. — Since Monday afternoon one of the most horrid fires that has ever been recorded in the state of Michigan has been raging; the amount of property destroyed is far beyond anything being estimated, and no one can tell how many people have been lost. We have heard of many. One man reports seeing no less than six bodies lying by the roadside in going as many miles. Whole herds of cattle, sheep, hogs, in fact, every living thing, where the flames went darting along almost as fast as though they were licked up by the flames.

Huron City was burned in about two hours, and but two or three old houses left to mark the spot. Thus it has been going for the past three days and nights, and everybody is out fighting fires for their lives.

Losses Greater Than in '71

The women have packed what little they could of their most valuable things and carried them to some place of safety, and no one knows where. Some have dug holes in the ground and buried what they could and then run for their lives, many running to some supposed place of safety and while fleeing being devoured by the fire or suffocated by the smoke.

Pen fails to describe half of the suffering that has been and must of necessity follow for so many are out of house and home and no clothing except what they have on.

Grindstone City has so far escaped, for everything that mortals could do has been done. Water from the lake has been taken by carryalls and every barrel, pail and tub that would hold water was put into use, and men have been placed as sentinels in every direction.

The great fire of 1871 is not to be compared with this as regards loss of life and property.

The wind has changed and is now blowing briskly from the north, and while we are at present out of danger, it is driving rapidly back into the country. Many have gone from here in search of missing friends, and every kind of conveyance is in use.

Two schooners, the Trojan and the Wilcox, have been lying at the wharf waiting to assist the people in making their escape should it become necessary. Many have remained on the dock for the past two days, blankets and provisions have been given them.

Many were made blind by the smoke and ashes. People have been able to indulge in but little sleep or refreshments for the past three days, and all are entirely overdone. Had the wind remained in the south much longer they would have been forced to let the village burn.

It is reported by reliable parties that thirteen bodies have been brought in at Sand Beach, fourteen at Port Hope and five at Forest Bay. Three of these bodies were so nearly consumed that they were brought in in a ten quart pail.

At Forest Bay, J. Madigan and Robert Wade, wife and three children were burned to death.

The dead in Bloomfield Township as far as now known are John Ripley, Mrs Sibley and Robert Clark and his mother. The last two went into a swamp for safety and were there burned to death.

People Left Helpless, Destitute

Sand Beach, September 10, 1881. — The condition of the people in Huron County and the destruction caused by the fire have not been exaggerated in the reports sent to the Post and Tribune during the past few days. I have just returned from a trip to Bad Axe, 18 miles above here, and the scenes I have witnessed today convince me that the story has only been half told. The entire country has been swept over and left the people in a most helpless and destitute condition.

The settlers were taken unawares, and they describe the fire as a storm of flame. The very air seemed to be fire, and the wind blew a hurricane from the southwest. It was indeed a storm of wind and flame, and it swept over many miles with almost incredible rapidity. The smaller trees that remain standing in the woods are bent nearly to the ground, showing the force of the storm. No language can adequately describe the scenes of Monday.

The fire was peculiar in many respects. It left nearly every oat field, in some instances burning on all sides of grain in shock," and seldom running over the stubbles. In places it went in streaks and the houses located on hilltops have nearly all escaped in the region I have traveled through.

Langdon Hubbard Lost 100 Cattle

The amount of stock that perished cannot be estimated. On the road today I counted 12 head of cattle, sheep and three hogs that had been driven out of the woods by the heat and had perished. One mammoth ox sought shelter under a bridge, but that caught fire and the beast burned to death beneath it. Parties of men have been out burying the animals

for two days past. I met one gang at 4 o'clock this afternoon and was told they had buried over 150 head in Verona Township and were not through yet.

Langdon Hubbard of Huron City lost over 100 head of cattle. The stock that is left had but little to live on.

The tales of suffering and narrow escapes from death that have been related to me today would fill a dozen volumes, but they would be a repetition of what has already been published, as the experiences were all similar.

James Ackles left Wyandotte last May and settled six miles west of Sand Beach. His house, barn and contents were swept away, and he and his family came near perishing. When the fires came upon them they started to flee, but before going attempted to save some harness, and in doing this were badly burned about the face and hands. Mr Ackles is a pitiful sight to look at. His whiskers were burned off and his face and hands are covered with burns. Mrs Ackles is in no better condition and their eldest daughter was severely injured. They managed to get to a neighbors where they are now staying in an almost helpless condition and with nothing to aid them in building a home again. Louis Sees and family of six, formerly of Wyandotte, lost their house, barn and contents and several cattle.

Many families living back from the main roads are suffering for want of provisions, not yet having learned where supplies may be secured. It was reported to me this morning that some of the sufferers were eating the dead cattle, but upon investigation I was only able to find one man who had made use of the carcass of a dead steer. There was a well-to-do Pole, who lives three miles west from here, who lost everything. Back from the state road I found several families who were in need of food and at one place the little ones begged in the most pitiful manner for a morsel to eat. I had filled my traveling bag with crackers and dried beef before leaving Detroit, for myself in case of emergency, and it served a good purpose today by satisfying the hunger of a dozen half-starved children. On the road, I overtook a 16-year-old girl, exhausted and scarcely able to walk. I invited her to ride and when questioned about her condition the tears came to her eyes and she confessed that she was traveling in search of something to eat. When I placed my lunch before her she devoured it with the eagerness of a half-starved lion. "This is the second fire I have gone through," she said, "and may God spare me from another."

List Of Losses AT Verona Told

The village of Verona was swept away 10 years ago and is in ashes again today, there being but nine buildings left. The following is a complete list of losses at Verona Mills: John M. Campbell, house, barn and contents; John Ballentine, store, house, sawmill and gristmill; J. Ludington, house, and two barns; A. Murray, house and blacksmith shop; D. H. Ludington, house and store; A. A. Ludington, machine shop and tools; Joseph Broomfield, house and barn; Geo. Whitelam, house and barn; Albert Ludington, house, barn and carpenter shop; Dr John Gardner, drug store, house and barn; George Martin, house; W. Whitelam, two barns; John Burk, barn. All of the above lost all household goods and the contents of their barns. Mr Ballentine assures me that the total loss in Verona Mills will exceed \$75,000. The following named farmers within three miles of Verona lost all buildings and contents: John Burk, Watson Robinson, John Grates, Thomas Green, John Collings, M. Hanson, S. Hendershot, John Hunt; James Grills, Jr., D. Stanton, E.H. Emery, Alex Snetsinger, C. Greger, Michael Minock, John O'Neil, Thos. Capeling, James Stickney, James Long, John Burns, William Summerville, Wm. Corvin, Joseph Malloy, Joseph Murray, P. L. Hager, William Armstrong, Fred Pethers, Caleb Wilder, Michael Brether, H. F. Pangborn, John Metcalf, A. Fuller, James Pangman, William Smith, C. B. Shire, John Getty, Thomas Blaylock, James Adams, Sr.; John Scott, Jr.; Thomas Scott, Mrs Alex Ross, John Bingham, Harry McDonald, Wm. Smith, C. Galloway, August Morrison, Philip Kappler, George Pangborn, George Miller, Benj. Thurtle, C. Sageman, J. Smith, Daniel Ferguson and John Walker.

The following named persons within the same territory saved their homes but lost barns and contents: W. Whitelam, E. Gardner, John Burk, R. Hugh, George Russell, Robert Midaugh, James Philp, Joseph Martin, John Pethers, John Coats, Thomas Rapson, R. Esterbrook and John G. Collins. Both Mr Ballentine and Supervisor Campbell estimate the loss in Verona Township alone over \$225,000.

The fences are all burned and settlers have lost their crops, tools and in some instances all their stock. They have no shelter and no clothing except what is on their backs. Where there is a house or shanty left there are from a dozen to thirty persons huddled together within. Some families have been sleeping on the bank of a creek without shelter or blankets.

A wagonload of supplies sent from Detroit reached there about midnight and was distributed from the hotel this morning. There were about 100 people there when I arrived all

waiting to get food. Mr Ballentine states that people have come to Verona today from all quarters and many from points that he least expected. Some came a distance of 10 miles from the south and others six miles from the east. He thinks that supplies will have to be distributed at Verona to four or five hundred people living in the townships of Sigel, Bingham, Lincoln, Verona and Bloomfield. A few people came all the way from Tyre today. Six barrels of flour was dealt out in small lots up to 10 o'clock.

Supervisor Campbell is making a list of all losses, and Mr Ballentine keeps a record of the supplies dealt out to each person. The people are very thankful for what was sent from Detroit and are profuse in their expressions of gratitude. Their present wants are supplies in the way of food, but more will be needed Monday.

Supervisor Campbell is making a list of all losses, and Mr Ballentine keeps a record of the supplies dealt out to each person. The people are very thankful for what was sent from Detroit and are profuse in their expressions of gratitude. Their present wants are supplied in the way of food, but more will be needed Monday.

Aside from flour, cornmeal, pork, tea, coffee, sugar, etc., they must have bedding, clothing and boots and shoes. One of the pressing needs of the hour at Verona is medicine. Dr Gardner lost all he had, together with his instruments, and many people are sick. Over a dozen families applied for medical aid and attendance today. He is the only physician within a radius of 10 miles and must have help or he will be compelled to leave, as he has lost every dollar and will not be able to collect anything for two years to come. The presence of a physician here is a necessity and medicine should be forwarded at once.

Only Five In Six Miles Left

On the road between Verona and Bad Axe, a distance of six miles, there are only five houses standing and the out-buildings on two of these were burned. The country on both sides of the road between these points was swept over and there is nothing to be seen but charred timber. At Bad Axe there are two buildings standing. The following is a complete list of the losses in the village:

Rev J. E. Beacher, Oliver Haley, Richard Pangborn, Henry Lawson, John Gould, each a house and barn; Robert Carter, carpenter shop and tools; Elmer Johnson, harness shop; Septimus Irwin, hotel and barns; Maywood Brothers, printing office; George W. Armstrong, Jas. Skinner, Edwin Watkins, Mr Welch and Chas. Brown, each a house and barn; Richard Smith, store and house; Marcus Razek, grocery; Mr Pollack, house and drug store; W. E. Small, jewelry store; R. Philp, store, three houses and barn and 126,000 feet of lumber; Jacob Schad, two houses and barn; William Warren and Charles Thompson, each house and barn; M. E. church and parsonage; Rapson Brothers, two blacksmith shops and wagon shops; Mark Razek, Mrs S. Porter, August Arenburg, Alex Park, Philip Rapson, Mrs Jenkins, Mr Johnson, Mrs Wilder, John Murphy, Abram Durfy, James Catline, J. F. Sweet and Geo. Hilton, each a house; Peter Nobel, Peter Richardson, Reuben Rapson, James Early, Jos. Watson, Jacob Durfy and William Rapson, each a house and barn; Chas. McAvoy, house and blacksmith; Geo. W. Carpenter, house, barn and law office; James Skinner and W. T. Bope, law offices; G. E. Terwilliger, Thomas Donaldson, Thomas Pangborn, each a barn; Baptist church and school house. The total loss in Bad Axe will reach \$70,000.

Justice Durfy states that the hurricane of flame struck Bad Axe about 2 o'clock Monday, and was a complete surprise to all. The people knew that there was a fire in the woods about three miles west, but did not dream of its approach. While the fire came up from the west the first building to catch was located on the east side of the town, and within thirty minutes all the buildings named above were in ashes. The wind blew a regular tornado, carrying women and children off their feet. Everybody was wild with terror and all rushed to the courthouse, a brick structure having a slate roof, for safety, before many of the other buildings were ablaze. Every effort was made to save the courthouse, but the heat was so intense that the paint on the woodwork was blistered. Had this building caught fire the loss of life would have been great as the town was surrounded by fire and there was no escape. As the hurricane approached the town Septimus Irwin and family started down the road east, and about two miles from town they dug a pit in a plowed field, in which 30 persons sought refuge and were saved. Jos. Watson and wife, an aged couple, made every effort to save their house, and when they saw that there was no help for them, they laid down in their garden and resigned themselves to meet their fate. After their house was burned they were found in an exhausted state by Hugh Ross, who dragged them to the courthouse. They were nearly suffocated and their escape was a narrow one.

The people at Bad Axe are in a decidedly cheerful mood under the circumstances. A number are quartered in the

courthouse, sleeping on the floor and eating off pine benches. They have not wanted for food, as supplies were sent in from the towns on the Saginaw Bay as soon as their condition was known. Supplies from Detroit reached them this morning, and another lot went there tonight. This will relieve them for two or three days, but they are compelled to depend on the continuous generosity of the public for their support. What these people want now as much as anything is a place to shelter themselves. There is no lumber to be had and nothing can be done until some is sent from other localities. What little lumber there was about here has already been secured and several parties were at work today building shanties. Stoves and bedding are needed by every family. Axes and tools of all kinds should be sent. An old man at Verona said to me: "Tell them to send us plenty of axes if nothing else." It must be remembered that these people are left with nothing and they are unable to help themselves until the necessary tools are placed at their disposal.

The steamer Ward arrived at 6:30 this evening with another supply of provisions from Detroit for Bad Axe and Verona. A rainstorm passed over the county this evening and tonight it has grown quite cold. This will increase the suffering of the people and their condition will grow worse from day to day as winter approaches unless they are able to erect shanties to live in.

Many Thought It Was Judgement Day

On Sunday, September 4, 1881, George Anderson was attending the camp meeting in Thrtle's Woods, a mile east and two miles south of Verona Mills. It was the last day of the revival, and the excessive heat accompanied by a heavy smoky atmosphere was depressing even upon the spirits of the contending exhorters. For a week the campaign for lost souls had been interrupted by prayers for rain; the practical hard-headed farmers being more concerned with their crops than the saving of wayward souls.

When not engaged in exhorting, singing, praying or pleading George would join in the rounds of conversation; on every hand the sole subject of concern being that of rain and the fear of fire. The long drought and the menace of fire, provoked in George Anderson's mind a new significance to the book of Revelation, he saw the yellow sky, the infinite stretches of slashings, and the whole world, to him, was typified by the country immediately adjacent to the camp-ground. Taking his Bible with him he withdrew from the crowd and turning to the Book of Revelation he read:

"These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the day of their prophesy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth."

He read on until he came to the eighth verse of the sixteenth chapter:

"And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues; and they repented not to give Him glory."

He closed the book; it was all clear to him now, the babel of tongues in the wilderness, the confusion of His Word in the mouths of foreigners; he could see it all clearly. It was the

end. Not without meaning had been the summer-long drought, the mile upon mile of dried, parched forest; it all bore a significant portent; the day was at hand. He was it all.

It is said that George Anderson was possessed of the power that night at the camp meeting.

Martha and the children seemed to sense a strange foreboding silence in the world. Was it George Anderson's brooding upon the day of prophesy? The smoke hung like a shroud over a dead earth, only the rattle of the wagon, as it bumped over the rutted-road, awakened the stillness of the wilderness. The sun, like a rising moon, flamed a dull reddish glow in the sky; the children covered by a blanket were dozing on a pile of canvas in the back of the wagon.

"Martha," George said, "I have been reading."

"Yes, my dear," she replied.

"It is written that it shall rain not in the days of the prophesy," he continued. "We live in a land like unto Sodom and Egypt, and this darkness is the hand of the Almighty darkening the heavens of the last day."

"Yes, my dear," Martha said. She had heard these things many times before.

"It is the darkness of the bottomless pit," he said. "The hands of the judgement is upon us."

"See the smoke in the west," she said. "It grows darker; there must be a bad fire over Ugly way."

George looked into the west, over a wide sector of the horizon he saw irregular, rolling, tumbling waves of dense black smoke, rising like gigantic tarpaulins, bellied and inflated by the wind. High in heaven the smoke rose in waving columns, fanned out at the top like giant plumes. The clouds of rolling smoke cast a strange shadow over the landscape, he urged the horse onward, the children slept, and Martha was visibly frightened.

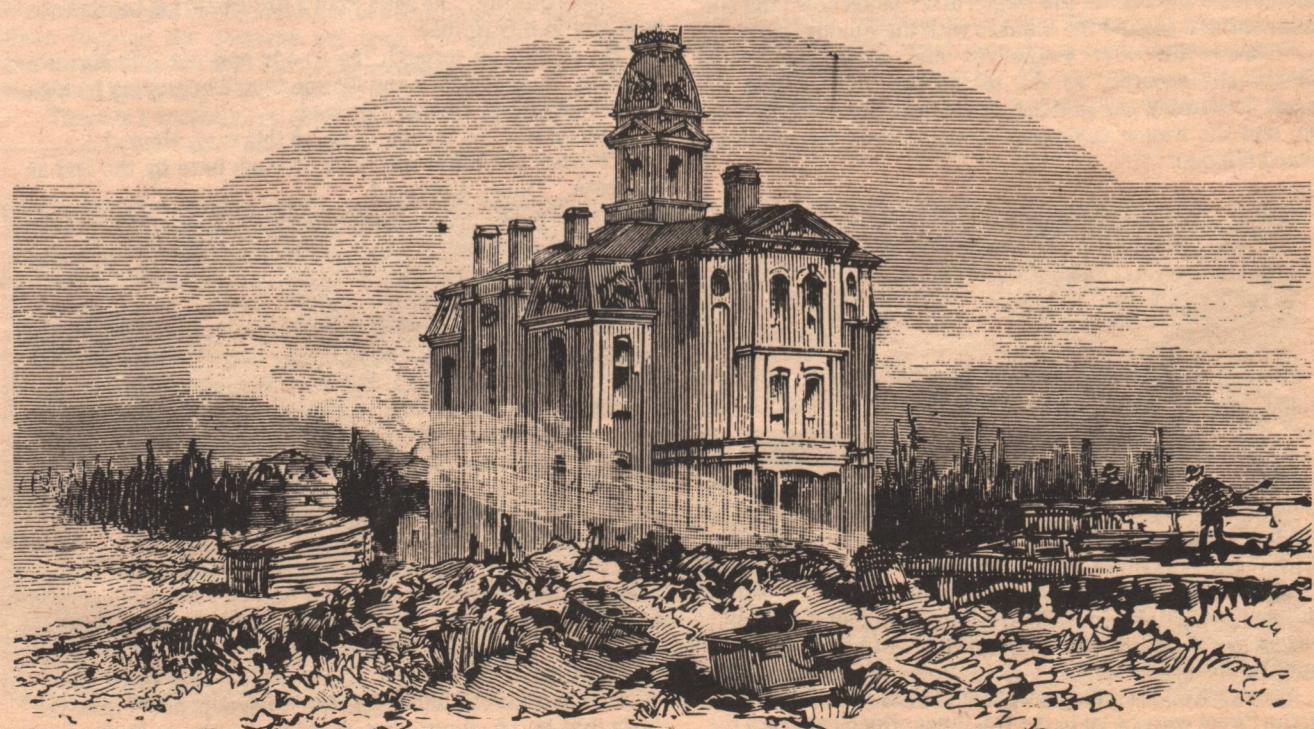
"It is growing terribly dark," she said.

He did not answer her; he was possessed of an inner sense of ecstasy; nothing mattered now the day was at hand. A hot breath of air suddenly came out of the west; the silence was broken by a rushing of wind in the forest, the yellow twilight deepened into the gloom of a purgatorial night. They came out upon the windswept road through the slashing. The horse stopped, and the wind, laden with sticks, leaves and particles of dried muck, pounded them with the ferocity of a hail storm. The hurricane caught the blanket which covered the children and hurled it into the darkness, and they awakened with a scream. Martha sat rigid shielding her face from the fierce blasts of smoke. Through the roar and tumult of the wind, the terrified clamor of the children, she heard her husband shouting: "Glory be to God! Hallelujah! It is the Day."

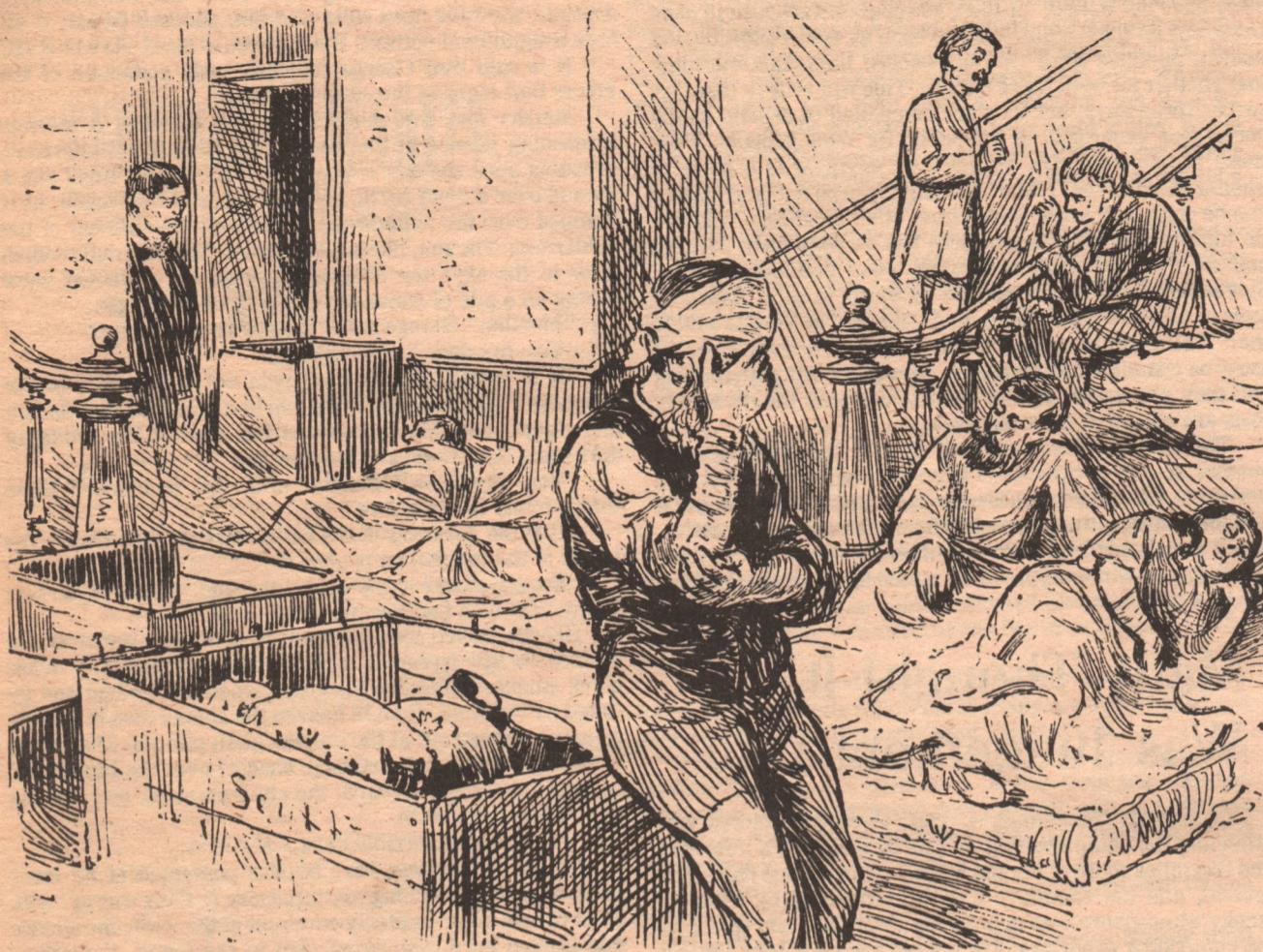
There was a momentary quieting of the wind, the roar of the forest subsided, as along the western horizon a great serpent of blood-red flame stretched itself, and then recoiled in a blinding flash of fire, as the sky was serrated by waves of ghostly red.

The hurricane came again, blinding, flaming, scorching and Martha managed to climb over the back of the seat and crouched with the children in the bottom of the wagon. She saw her husband rise and lift his arms heavenward, and over the roar of the wind, the screams of the children and the howling of the wilderness, she heard him praying.

As she crouched in the back of the democrat wagon and heard her husband glory shouting in the teeth of the hurricane, and the roar and tumult of the forest fire bearing down upon her, something snapped within her. Beneath her



THE COURTHOUSE WAS ONE OF A FEW BUILDINGS REMAINING IN BAD AXE



THE HEAT WAS TERRIBLE INSIDE THE COURTHOUSE AT BAD AXE

calm acceptance of all things she felt a sudden revulsion against this glory shouting in the moment of impending destruction.

"George," she shouted, "drive on out of this slashing!" He paid no attention to her command but remained kneeling at the seat of the wagon crying: "It is the Day! It is the Day!"

"George Anderson," she cried again, "drive on out of this slashing — or I will!"

Martha looked about her. The children, frightened into silence, their faces white with terror, stared hopelessly at their mother; in the west the flames were leaping into the blackness of the sky. The fire was not more than a mile away. Something had to be done and done quickly. She climbed over the back of the seat, took the reins, and whipped the horse into action. The wagon started up with a jerk but George Anderson remained upon his knees and continued his shoutings. Martha leaned far over the dashboard, using the whip and urging the horse forward. The wagon bumped and lurched along over the corduroy, the children bouncing around atop the camping equipment in the back of the wagon.

She halted the horse beside a low bridge beneath which she saw a pool of muddy stagnant water. She pulled out a bed blanket from the rear of the wagon and rushed down the embankment and soaked the blanket with the muddy water.

"Throw this over yourselves and keep your heads under!" she shouted, as she tossed the blanket into the wagon. Resuming her seat she again beat the horse into action, and the wagon continued bouncing over the corduroy toward Minden.

The Story Behind The Story

"In Argyle Township, Sanilac County, the wife and five children of Paul Wirtzell were burned to death, also George Krentch." (Detroit News and Tribune, Sept. 10, 1881).

George Krentch owned a farm a mile south of the White Schoolhouse in Argyle Township, forty acres cleared, and one-hundred and twenty acres of timber. His house was of hand-hewn logs with a frame addition; the barn was a good frame structure on a stone foundation. He was a good farmer, a quiet hard-working, sincere man. His only sister, Lulu, had married Paul Wirtzell, and she and her five children were living with him while Paul was in Caro employed in the stave-mill.

Krentch had built his house on the south side of his clearing, the forest coming up to the rail fence which ran from the road to the back of his farm. The clearing was irregular, following the creek bed and running back for nearly a half mile into the woods. Each year George cut wood for the

winter's fire and a few logs which he hauled to the mill at Argyle. Approximately ten acres were cleared of stumps, the remainder a battleground between crop and brush. The road in front of the Krentch place was almost impassable in the spring, the corduroy floating away with the floods and whole stretches of it disappearing into the bog-holes.

How One Fire Started

On Sunday, September 4, 1881, George Krentch walked down the creek bed to Henry Bauer's clearing. For the first time in his 12 years experience in Michigan, the creekbed was dry. He saw the dead minnows lying in the hollows like smoked herring, and the land baked hard by the summer drought and criss-crossed with deep crevices, like a piece of old Chinese pottery.

He made his way along a narrow path through the brush to the rail fence separating his farm from that of Henry Bauer. Taking a plug of tobacco from his hip pocket, he opened his jackknife and shaved off a filling for his pipe. He then split a sulphur match from the packet and struck it on the end of a rail. The head of the match snapped off into the grass and the flame spread as though the ground were covered with black powder. He hastened to stamp out the fire with his boots.

"Holy Jimmy!" he said, "but a fire would get beyond one in a jiffy in this timber."

He passed on through the woods and out into Bauer's clearing. He saw Henry and his son Charlie carrying turnips to the root-cellars. George inquired:

"When will the threshers be up this way, Henry?"

"Forbes promised me to be through here by the end of the week," Bauer answered.

When George Krentch returned to his house he found his sister reading aloud to the children. She was reading "The Ugly Duckling" out of the book George had bought for them at the store in Elmer.

Martha, a girl of twelve, with her head upon her mother's shoulder, sits with eyes closed, living in that magic world of Hans Christian Anderson; her bare legs are tanned by the summer sun and her little hands hardened by the soil.

Marie is ten, frail and affectionate like her mother. George is nine, named for his uncle, a round faced wondering boy filled with a thousand unanswered questions. Stephen is seven, solemn and subdued, and little Jamie, the baby of the family, is three.

In that little narrow world, surrounded by forest, slashing and swamp, life is simple and joys are few, but in a land where Nature is an unwilling mother the family is secured by a love which represents the perfection of social organization. When the aspirations of the people to not reach for the unattainable, and happiness is not dependent upon the artificialities of sham and pretense, love and life are crystalline and pure.

Martha had mothered Marie; Marie had mothered Georgie, and the two of them were responsible for Stephen

and Jamie. In the winter Martha had broken the path through the snow to the schoolhouse, and in the spring, when the floods came, she had carried little Georgie over the sink holes. During the summer vacation they played at keeping house and hide-and-go-seek about the barn and stables.

Mr Humphrey, the mail carrier from Elmer, had stopped on Friday on his way from Bad Axe. He said the farmers were crying for rain, that fires were everywhere, and that if rain did not come mighty soon, the devil would be to pay. He said that the smoke was so thick between Elmer and Argyle that he had a hard time of it, getting the mail through at all. The smoke, he said, hung like a cloud over the whole country, some said, from Bay City to Port Huron.

At Caro Paul Wirtzell was fighting a brush fire near the stave-mill.

A mile north of George Krentch's farm, opposite the White Schoolhouse, the widow Richmond and her seven children were eating dinner on an improvised table out of doors, it was intolerably hot, and close in the kitchen.

A half mile west of the widow Richmond's, Stephen Pawloski was quarreling with his wife, and Fedor, his son of six, had hidden in a cave hollowed out by the calves in the strawstack.

At sunset Lulu Wirtzell attends to the milking; Martha does the dishes and cleans up the kitchen; Marie sees that the children are in bed at eight; George Krentch feeds the horses and carries the swill to the hog pen. At nine o'clock the house is dark and still.

George Krentch is up with the dawn and Lulu Wirtzell prepares breakfast as the children hustle about in preparation for school. Everything is the same about the farm, the same fields, the same trees, the same smoky yellow sky. The cattle are huddled in the barnyard waiting to be driven to the pasture; the horses are restless in the stable; the pigs are rooting and grunting in the pen — everything is the same.

At seven thirty, Martha, Marie and George strike off down the Elmer Road toward the schoolhouse, George Krentch is in the field cutting the corn and Lulu Wirtzell has a washing to do, and there is bread to bake. At Caro Paul Wirtzell is at work in the heat and noise of the stave mill.

In everything, except life itself, we see the inexorable law of cause and effect; we do not believe in fate; it cannot be, there is always the doctrine of free-will. The carelessness of the lumbermen, the optimism of the pioneer, eight months of drought, the dry swamps, the brush, the slashings — are meaningless. There is no portent in the air, no sign of impending disaster, everything is the same. The smoke hanging like a pall over the land means nothing, it is always like that in the fall. Yet there are a thousand voices crying in the wilderness. The worm of disaster stirs within the vast cooon.

Far away in the wood skirting the Cass River a herd of frightened deer are racing into the north. Above Richmondville, in the dry bed of the great ditch, a brown bear and her inquisitive cub are working their way toward the lake.

It is ten by the clock, Monday, September 5, 1881: Lulu Wirtzell has prepared the bread for the baking, there it is, in the tins on the kitchen table covered with a cloth. She is busy at the tub on the back porch; Stephen and little Amie are playing in the yard; George Krentch is cutting the corn in the field; not a breath of air is stirring in an amber world of smoke.

She carries a basket of wash to the line. Reflected in the white of the washing she sees a wavering glow of yellow. It deepens rapidly and turning she sees in the west a cloud of tumbling smoke rising high into the air, and caught by the wind, spread out into a stream of yellow light. She calls her brother in the cornfield. He pauses and looks at the nebulous clouds. The world seems to be wrapped in a strange and unusual silence, foreboding, tremulous. The western horizon becomes black as a thunderstorm. Long streamers of rolling smoke, like serpents with yellow heads and crimson tails, scud across the sky.

The amber-yellow deepens, an enshrouding darkness closes like the night. A dim, distant, rumbling roar comes out of the west and steals stealthily through the forest, over the clearings and into the slashings.

The darkness is cut with a sword thrust of flame. A gust of wind sweeps across the clearing, the blackness stirs and flutters as though a million giant birds were taking wing. A whirlwind of smoke tears at the dry earth and swirls across the barnyard, sheets of straw are torn from the stack and sent hurtling through the air. The forest creaks and groans beneath the onslaught of the wind as the sky grows red above the rising tide of flame.

Lulu Wirtzell has but one thought: the children at school. "George!" she cries, "the children, Martha and Marie."

Before he can restrain her she has disappeared in the storm of smoke and dust. Stephen and Jamie are screaming at the kitchen door. Across the barnyard a whirling mass of burning straw is blown. George Krentch sees his barn afame.

He rushes into the house, catches up the children in his arms, runs through to the front door and opens it. The grass along the fence is in flames, the dry grass between the house and leaping the fire he carries the children to the Elmer

Road. Through rifts in the driven blasts of smoke he can see his sister running toward the school. He follows, running, stifling, suffocating; gasping for breath he runs as best he can with his burden. Suddenly before him he sees the corduroy ablaze. He stops — he cannot go further, there is no use. Far up the road he sees a livid flare; it is the slashing! The fire is leaping across the Elmer Road. Through the seething smoky screen he sees his sister falter and then stop. She is enveloped in a swirl of smoke and fire. George Krentch turns back; there is no use trying to go further; at the right is Stephen Pawloski's wheat field; he must seek safety in the stubble. He leaps the ditch, lets the children down and helps them over the fence; he follows and then running, drags them into the field.

"Lie down flat," he cries, "put your faces to the ground." He tears off his coat and puts it over the heads of the children. Overhead the smoke and cinders are flying on the wind, and along the ground and through the stubble, the lethal gases prowl like jackals in search of prey.

The fire leaps across the Elmer Road; the brush and weeds along Pawloski's fence are afire. The wind whips long tongues of flame far out into the stubble, wisps of straw ignite and flare, and burning tumbleweeds speed across the field; into the unthreshed grain and into the wood beyond. The field of Stephen Pawloski is a blackened waste, and it was said he lost a hundred bushels of wheat.

The Opening, Terrifying Ending

The white schoolhouse at the corner one mile north of the George Krentch farm sat on a barren acre of ground, the forest on two sides, Pawloski's clearing to the south, and the widow Richmond across the road to the west. A three-board fence surrounded the schoolyard with a gateway of staggered posts to keep the cattle out. School opened on Monday, September 5, 1881, with Mr Wilbur Jenkens, the new teacher in charge.

The Polish children came in Philip Bowleski's old canopy-top, and George Becker, horseback, with halter and blanket. The rest of them trudged along the roads and across the clearings, carrying their books, slates and dinner baskets.

The widow Richmond came, bringing her flock, to make quite sure that Bessie, who had been ailing some, got a seat well out of the draft.

Mr Jenkens would the clock and set it by his watch. The children milled about the room, casting grave and appraising glances at the new teacher. Martha Wirtzell, wetting her slate-rag at the pump, proceeded to clean the cracked and faded blackboard. Sarah Gunning, finding an empty ink bottle, filled it with water, and placed it with three dusty dandelions on the teacher's desk. John Sparleski produced a Baldwin apple, polished as a mirror, and shouting, "Catch," tossed it into the teacher's lap.

At nine o'clock Mr Jenkens proceeded with the task of organizing the school. Taking the brass bell from the shelf by the blackboard, he walked briskly to the door, ringing the bell with methodical measures.

The children take their places with some confusion and then settle down with solemn expectancy. Mr Jenkens assigns the lessons, and in a moment the room takes on that drowsy, hum of industry characteristic of the schoolroom. The little ones are busy examining their new books; Harper's First and Second Readers with "Little Bell" and "The King of the Golden River." Albert Clifford, as is his habit, draws funny pictures on his slate, and stolid Anna Sparleski looks on disapprovingly.

The windows of the schoolroom are open, the sash held up by rulers and bits of lath, white with chalk dust. The door is open and one looks out across the hard-packed schoolyard, spotted with grass; to the Elmer Road, where the Widow Richmond's house, half hidden by the shrubbery along the fence, stares blankly through the amber colored atmosphere.

Mr Jenkens calls the class in elementary arithmetic and proceeds to explain the mysteries of simple proportion:

"If one barrel," he said, "will hold two and one-half bushels of potatoes, how many barrels will be required to hold twenty-five bushels?"

"I know," shouts Stephen Gunnings, "ten barrels."

If one man can split three cords of wood in two hours and a half," continued Mr Jenkens, "how many men will be required to split seventeen cords in four and one-half hours?"

There is an industrious scratching of slates.

Mr Jenkens sees little Anna Sparleski staring out of the window toward the west, she half rises from her desk. The western sky is blackened by clouds of rolling smoke like an approaching thunderstorm, as the pale amber light deepens into vibrant yellow low. The children look up from their work, out of the window toward the west, and then questioningly at the teacher. There is silence in the schoolroom, a silence which seems to be universal, reaching out of doors, into the forest, across the slashing. The sky, the wood, the road, the schoolroom are illuminated by the iridescent yellow light.

Mr Jenkens lowers the windows and closes the door & the children watch him with foreboding apprehension. The yellow light flickers and fades into a nocturnal gloom, flaring into a brilliant topaz as the sun streaks through a rift in the smoky sky.

The silence is broken by a dull, distant roar. As though loosened from a leash, the wind whips through the slashing and breasts upon the schoolhouse in a mad clamor of confusion. The windows are pelted with flying twigs and loose bits of earth, the room darkens and apprehension deepens into terror as fear comes scudding across the darkening sky.

"It is nothing," cries Mr Jenkens, it is only a storm blowing up, it will soon be over."

The schoolhouse shakes and trembles with each blast of the hurricane.

Mr Jenkens is confused — what shall he do? What can he do? He shouts to George Becker: "Take your seat. You are frightening the children." He is answered by a screech of diabolic laughter. A child screams. The room is suddenly enveloped in a blackness of night. The roar of the wind dies with a terrifying suddenness; the sound of George Becker's horse is heard stamping and pulling at its halter. The half-wit fumbles and stumbles along the wall toward the door. In the darkness, the children, suddenly possessed of an overwhelming fear, are screaming and milling about the room. In the pitch blackness of the schoolhouse they seek some avenue of escape.

They were screaming, crying, stumbling, falling, in wild confusion, crashing against desks, and falling upon the floor to be trampled in the black confusion.

The room is suddenly illumined by a crimson flare. The tall poplars across the road at the widow Richmond's place are silhouetted against a flaming incandescent sky, and above it a boiling, tumbling, rushing sea of blood-red smoke.

George Becker is shouting: "The end of the world! The end of the world!" Rushing to the door he opens it, his figure in the doorway, with arms upraised, strikes a long spectral shadow across the room and up the wall. He leaps from the steps and runs across the yard where his horse is tied with the halter and rope.

The wind leaps from the forest, and the trees bend and shriek before the blast. The white walls of the schoolroom appear as a waving tapestry of color, crimson and red, and yellow, and black. The whole room, the faces of the children, the figure of the teacher vibrate with the flickering of the cinema.

George Becker unties the halter rope, and leaping on the back of the horse, plunges out upon the Elmer Road and disappears in the clouds of smoke and driven dust. Over the roar of the wind the children can hear him shouting: "The end of the world!"

The widow Richmond appears in the doorway:

"Richard, Emily, Tom" she cries into the tumult of the room. "Richard, Emily, Robert!"

Martha Wirtzell is seeking Marie and little Georgie. She finds them crouching back of the sheet iron stove in the corner. Seizing them by the hands she shouts: "Come, we must go home, we shall die here — come, we must go home."

The wind bursts with renewed fury through the open door, there is a smashing of glass, the windows are broken by an explosion. The wind fills the room with a suffocating whirl of smoke and dust; books, papers, coats, hats, are given wings and hurled about the room adding to the terror and confusion. Amid the screaming of children, the cries of the widow Richmond, Martha is trying to drag Marie and Georgie toward the door. Through the blinding, driving hurricane of smoke; through the awful crimson glare, she drags them through the doorway out upon the steps. The wind throws them down in a fluttering confusion, she holds them tightly in her grasp. "We must go home — we must go on!"

There is a momentary quieting of the wind. Martha runs

ning, and half dragging her brother and sister across the yard, reaches the road and turns toward the farm.

The widow Richmond has gathered her children together and is driving them before her out of doors. The hurricane leaps from the forest and the air is filled with flying earth, twigs and wisps of whirling straw. The children clinging to the mother fight their way against the wind toward the gate. A horse gallops past, the shrill piercing cry of George Becker is heard above the uproar of the tempest: "It is the end of the world — the end of the world."

The widow and her children reach the road, crouching, gasping for breath, they run along the brush by the rail fence to the farmyard gate. The wind assumes a new sound, a definite, distinguishable tone of nearness. The crackle of flame in the brush, the boom of the fire in the slashing, the falling of trees, the seething of wind and flame in the cat-tails along the ditch.

As they pass through the gate, a whirling, incandescent ball of fire comes hurling across the barnyard. The strawstack is afire, the wind is tearing it apart, sending flaming brands high in the air, and scudding along the ground. In an instant, the barn is afire, the house is afire. The tall grass and dried weeds by the barnyard fence burn with leaping, frenzied gusts as the wind rips one way and then the other tossing the flame to the right and to the left.

The widow Richmond turns. "Back to the schoolhouse," she shouts. The children follow her, the wind helping them, driving them pell mell through the opening and out into the road.

Martha is struggling to drag Marie and Georgie down the Elmer Road. They have passed the widow Richmond's clearing; they are on the edge of the slashing, the roar and confusion is terrifying. There is a crash, she sees a tree falling across the roadway. Leaping back, dragging the children with her, she is enveloped in a cloud of blinding, choking dust. Their screams are drowned in the roar of the slashing.

"On, we must go on." Martha pleads — pulling them up and over the fallen splintered timber. "We must go home."

The air is thick with smoke and flying dust. The wind, like the breath of a furnace, stifling, suffocating. Marie falters.

"Come, come on — we must go on." Martha shouts to her, and struggles on against the blinding storm. Little Georgie stumbles. He cannot rise. Martha lifts him into her arms. "Hang onto me," she cries to Marie, "hang on or you will lose your way."

For a few rods they struggle on fighting the wind. Marie stops and sinks to the roadway. Martha lets little Georgie down. "Marie, Marie," she shouts, "you must not stop now, we must go on — we must go home." Marie does not answer; Martha shakes her violently: "Marie — do not stop now — you mustn't."

Little Georgie, gasping for breath, falls face downward upon the curdury, he does not scream now, he does not cry.

"Marie, come, oh, please, pull yourself together, you must help me."

Marie does not answer, she does not hear her sister calling. The little face is blackened with smoke and streaked with tears; her eyes shot with tiny rivulets of blood are staring into the crimson ocean of the sky.

Martha bends low over her sister. "Marie," she screams, "Marie." She tries to rise but the smoke and scorching blast hold her fast and crush her down into the roadway. She sees the slashing afire beside her, the brush is burning with a maddening roar, swirls of fire and playing in the dry grass at the roadside; she dimly sees that the corduroy is afire, a river of flame bearing upon her. Nearer if comes, and nearer, but it cannot reach her, she is carried away from it, softly, swiftly — it is very far off now, only a thin line of serpentine light which dies into a single wavering flare, then all is dark.



DESOLATION IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE INFERO

The Tragedy And Ache Of Pioneering

Jessie had \$365 which she added to Peter's capital, and a stout box containing the homespuns, bed blankets, and linens. These with an old hog's back trunk her mother had used on her journey to Michigan, constituted her wealth of worldly goods as she turned her back upon Detroit, and bid farewell to a world she would never know again.

At Port Hope, John Alder, a friend of Peter's, met them with a team and wagon to drive them to the farm. She would never forget that drive from Port Hope to her new home in the wilderness. The forest fire of 1871 had left a stark and naked land. She had pictured forests of pine and hemlock, tall ferns, and pathways carpeted with pine needles. She visioned lovely vistas of green through which the sun filtered in long fan-like shafts of golden light. She expected to catch glimpses of woodland glades and splashing waterfalls ablaze with tiny rainbows.

The landscape presented a panorama of charred stumps, broken scarred trees and a tangle and jungle of infinite slashings. The road wound a devious path through the stumps, around the bogs and across long stretches of corduroy over which the wagon bumped and thundered.

In the center of a ten acre clearing, dotted with black stumps about which clustered a dusty growth of pigweed and goldenrod, she saw her new home. A box-like house with a roof of ugly pitch, and two windows so crowded to the center door that it gave the face of the house the appearance of being cross-eyed. Behind the house she saw the barn and out-buildings.

"Well, Jessie, here we are," Peter exclaimed, "home at last."

She climbed down from the wagon and walked into the house. Peter and Alder followed carrying the hog's back trunk. She stood in the middle of the room staring about her. Jessie was only a girl of nineteen — she must be forgiven. She broke down and cried like a child. Peter put his arm about her and drew her tenderly to him.

"You are tired, Jessie," he said.

"I still feel myself on that boat," she replied, "everything seems to be moving."

We will scratch out of our narrative the sentimental, heartbreaking story of those first days of Jessie Morrell in the wilderness. There was no room for sympathy and understanding in the world of stumps. In the midst of battle sentiment is crushed with the enemy. Her new world was an unconquered monster and every ounce of human energy was mustered to fight back the desperate attack of the undefeated forest.

I shall not write of the hours of consuming loneliness, the disappointments, the disillusionments. We shall not enumerate the thousands of little things she wanted and was denied. We shall not exert ourselves to discover the causes underlying the changes wrought in Jessie Stirling in those pioneer days in Huron County. She slaved for three weeks to transform Peter's dirty, vermin ridden house into a home. She did not open her treasure box of homespuns. Within a month after she had arrived at the clearing, her face underwent that change frequently observed in the face of one sent to the prison at Jackson.

When neighbor women came to visit, if she saw them coming, she would quickly draw the burlap curtains, lock the door, and ignore the knocking. Late in May of 1876 she told Peter they were to have a baby. She would have to make a trip to Detroit, she said, to buy the necessary things. Peter told her that she could get everything required at the big store in Port Hope.

She bought unbleached cotton and washed it and hung it on the fence by the barn to bleach in the summer sun. Again and again she washed it and bleached it. It remained coarse and hard. She had no dainty lace, no fine materials, no filmy delicate things, which in her mind were the inherent property of a baby. She finally gave up in despair and resigned herself to the crude and homely togs fashioned out of the harsh cotton. She made one really fine long dress out of an old linen table cloth from her hopechest.

That summer as Peter was clearing the land at the back of the house, Jessie would sit with her paint-box trying to conjure up something worth sketching. But she found no beauty in the things around her. Stumps, stumps, nothing but stumps. Everything in her little world seemed to be charred, stunted, and twisted. She bought two cheap chromos at the store in Port Hope, and an imitation "handpainted" vase from the old Jewish peddler, Abram Friedman. She picked wildflowers and great bunches of goldenrod and tried to give her home a touch of color.

Her baby was born on December 11, 1876. It was terribly cold and the snow was drifted to the upper sash of the windows. The doctor from Port Hope had great difficulty in reaching Peter's clearing. It was a boy and they named him Thomas Morrell Stirling. They always called him "Tod" for short.

It is Sunday, September 4, 1881. Little Tod is nearly five



HOMELESS RESIDENTS AWAIT HELP AND SUPPLIES

years old. Five years have wrought a tremendous transformation in Jessie Stirling. To all outward appearances she has become a woman of the land. She has driven the plow and walked behind the harrow. She has pulled and tugged at stubborn fragments of roots and carried them to the piles ready for the burning. She has dug the potatoes and carried them to the root cellar. She has milked the cows and shoveled the dung from the stables.

One thing and one alone has tied her to the dream-life of her girlhood, and that her inner secret adoration of the boy Tod. His little growing body has been the one beautiful thing in her life. No one knew, and if they had they could not understand, the inner thrill she experienced as she bathed him. The other women in the neighborhood did not make a fuss over their children. When alone with her baby she had hours of gladness and ecstasy. She tried to paint a picture of Tod — but it was a daub and she destroyed it.

Peter is down at Richard's farm fighting a brush fire. Everything is excessively dry, and everyone has been warned not to get any fires started in the slashings. It is very hot and the air is laden with smoke. Jessie is sitting on the back porch reading for the third time a romance of Maria Edgeworth. It is one of the fourteen books in the neighborhood. Little Tod is playing about on the hard packed earth between the house and the barn.

On this Sunday, September 4, 1881, at the well by the house there was a little puddle of water. In this puddle little Tod placed a stick, pretending it was one of the schooners he had seen at Port Hope. He picked up tiny bits of wood and grass and carefully placed them on the imaginary deck. He had played like this many, many times, but today he slipped and fell headlong into the puddle. With a yell he lifted himself up out of the mud. He was a sight. Jessie closed her book and laid it on the windowsill and automatically went to fetch the big large pail.

"Stand right where you are, Tod," she said. "I will have to scrub you from top to bottom. You are an awful mess."

She filled the tub with water from the well and put it on the ground at the foot of the steps. Little Tod was undressed and given an unusually good scrubbing. When finished she told him to sit on the porch in the sun until he was dry. She carried the tub out into the yard to empty it. Returning to the house she stopped.

Tod was bending over gazing intently at a black and yellow butterfly softly fanning its wings on the hot plank of the porch. Jessie stood breathless. The child, her child, there on that sun drenched porch, was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. For the first time in her life in the wilderness the world seemed ineffably beautiful. Even the dingy house made a wonderful background to the exquisite loveliness of the baby figure before her.

Jessie did not understand the strange emotion which throbbed within her. It was symbolic of something buried deeply within her. She knew there were a few things in life which had given her a strange and unexplainable ecstasy.

At that moment Peter came tramping around the corner of the house. Seeing Tod, nude, stark naked on the porch — out of doors, he stopped and with that fantastic gesture of an outraged modesty, said to Jessie:

"You should not let Tod about like that. Suppose someone should come!"

"I am sorry, Peter," she said, "he fell in the puddle and I had him drying in the sun."

She hurried the boy into the house and dressed him.

Tod was tucked away in bed at seven. Peter was sound asleep at nine. Jessie Stirling sat on the back porch looking out over the slashing. The sun had gone down like a great copper kettle, leaving the sky a hazy sheet of tarnished brass. From the dark earth the naked trees lifted their spear-like forms. As the darkness descended, the sky to the south and west took on a dull reddish glow — the fires over toward Richard's farm. I have no record of Jessie Stirling's thoughts that night. Perhaps she was looking on down through the years with a lingering hope. Perhaps she saw the eventual victory over the wilderness — the infinite stretches of wheat and corn. Perhaps she felt the presence of the dead past — and saw the charred skeletons of the forest marshalled in battle order for the last charge. Who knows?

At last she went to bed and slept. Peter awakened her.

"Jessie, you are having dreams," he said.

"I saw them coming toward me, surrounding me; I saw them reach for me with long arms of red fire; I tried to run away from them and they followed me."

Then she was silent and Peter fell asleep. He did not hear the sound of her weeping. He did not hear the voices in the slashing, nor did he see the dull glow of the signal fires which were extinguished by the dawn.

Through a haze of smoke the sun arose from its bed in the coppery lake. The gods had played their part — the kindling was laid — the sacrificial altar was prepared.

It is Monday morning, September 5, 1881 — the day is born.

On The Road To Port Hope

On Monday morning, September 5, 1881, Peter Stirling drove to Port Hope for a barrel of flour and seed-wheat for the fall planting. Jessie prepared breakfast as he harnessed the horses. She went out upon the back porch to call him. A pall of smoke hung over the forest; it was to be another hot, close, suffocating day. The lard bucket was in the yard where she had left it after Tod's Sunday afternoon bath. She remembered how he looked as he knelt on the hot porch gazing intently at the yellow and black butterfly; how Peter had come around the corner of the house and shamed her. She remembered how she sat on the porch after nightfall and

looked out over the slashing. She remembered her dream and how Peter had awakened her.

The horses were harnessed and Peter drove up from the barn to the water trough at the pump.

"I wish you were going to Port Hope," he said.

"It would be nice," Jessie replied, "but it is going to be too hot, and then I have washing to do."

"I shall get the flour and the seed-wheat; is there anything else you will be wanting?" Peter inquired.

"No, nothing I can think of," she replied.

They sat down to breakfast and Peter said to her, "You had a bad dream last night, Jessie."

"It was nothing, I have had dreams often," she said.

"You are not angry with me," he said patting her hand, "I should not have said what I did, I am sorry."

"Of course not, Peter. Why should I be angry? I guess I am funny that way; people think I am queer."

"You are not queer, Jessie," Peter said, "the rest of us are queer. You are just different, better perhaps, than the rest of us. You see pictures in everything and all I can see is the work to be done, the stumps, the smoke and the slashing."

As Peter arose from the table he saw the paint box on the shelf by the stove; he took it and handed it to Jessie: "Jessie," he said, "I would like to have you paint a picture for me."

She was surprised, he had never said such a thing before.

"Paint a picture for you!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I would like to have a picture; a picture of the slashing."

She shuddered: "A picture of the slashing!" she cried in amazement.

"Yes," he said, "I would like a picture of that slashing out there; it will not be there long; in a few years it will all be gone and I would like to have a picture of it, as it is now, and then I can look at it and see just what I have accomplished."

Jessie stood on the back porch as Peter kissed her and said "Good-bye," and climbed into the wagon, turned the horses, and drove out of the clearing upon the road to Port Hope.

"Paint that!" she said aloud. "That!"

What was this slashing anyway? She certainly had never thought of painting it; it was something which had been beautiful, yes, it had been beautiful — once. It had been, once upon a time, exactly what she had expected to find at the end of her wedding journey, lovely vistas of green through which the sun filtered in long fanlike shafts of golden light; glimpses of woodland glades and splashing waterfalls ablaze with rainbows. Yes, it had been like that — once. The beautiful had given way under the pressure of progress; she saw in the slashing the bitter hope of transition, the change which means death to the old and birth to the new. She saw the leafless trees standing nude, dead and frozen in the path of progress; each stump, like Lot's wife, had lingered too long in the retreat of the forest.

"One should not look backward," she thought. The slashing was a tangled, confused mass of things living and dead; the scrub tamarack and the pale poplars struggling to lift their heads above the drab confusion.

"They will never amount to much," she said aloud, "those tamaracks and poplars; the fire and the ax will get them."

He had asked her to paint a picture of the slashing; she felt an urge within her to do so; there must be some beauty in its ugliness after all, particularly when one remembered what it had been — once. But there was the difference; it had lived, and she — never. She was like the scrub tamarack in the slashing, a symbol of something fine in life, a touch of green in a world of desolation. It would not be long before all would be gone; the forests would be a memory, the slashing would be forgotten, men would be plowing out yonder, and there would be fields of wheat and long rows of whispering corn. She was a pioneer woman, she should be brave and silent; she should stand in her place and be stripped of leaf and flower, become one with the slashing — a naked, broken, shattered thing, she should let herself be burned out and make way for a field of wheat and a row of corn.

An inner sense of rebellion raged within her; why had she been chosen? The world was full of women who were content to be just "that"; women who felt within them a heroic ecstasy in sacrifice. Why had Peter called her into the wilderness? If she had remained in Detroit everything would have been different. But then, she had never lived her own life — really. She had been dragged about from one place to another always. It had always been a vague promise of the future, and now meant nothing in her life. And, what was this tomorrow? What was the substance of this promise? More land, a new house, a bigger barn, more acres of wheat, a few more rows of corn. And then! The slashing all over again — broken down fences, worn out machinery, the barn falling to pieces, and she, an old woman; the slashing all over again. That was life; the forest, the slashing, the wheat, and death.

"Building for Little Tod," Peter would say to her.

Would Little Tod want any of it? That was the question. He, too, perhaps, would look beyond the horizon even though it might be across fields of wheat just as she was looking across the slashing. The blood of the pioneer is forever

restless, his eyes are always looking beyond the horizon. The here and now, always incomplete, awaken the restless soul to search for some complete perfection.

Yet Peter had asked her to paint a picture of the slashing; she might be able to do it — at least she could try. If she could put into the picture all she felt and saw in that slashing; what a picture it would be! How much of herself? How much of life? The dead stark things out there were symbolic of some woman struck down in the battle of progress. The saplings! What were they? Like the little children battling for life against the smothering choking remnants of the past.

She sketched in the surrounding trees and gave the saplings a tint of viridian green. She stepped back to view her work; the yellow in her sky was too dark, it would have to be brightened up. The great pine stump was not the dead slate color she had, at first, imagined. It possessed an iridescence which at first escaped her; a yellow and blue and green. She began to see something in the slashing beyond the somber gray of its seeming substance. She went back to the canvas and brightened the picture with the cadmium yellow and touched the horizon with a vibrant orange. A splash of color down the trunk of the old stump gave it life and meaning. There was, after all, a something of life and meaning in the slashing. For an hour or more she mixed her paints placing the color on the canvas in bold free strokes.

Absorbed in her work, her eyes constantly playing between the palette, the canvas, and the slashing; her mind intent upon catching the new world of color arising and ever changing before her; she worked herself into emotional fantasy wherein reality was lost in the hallucination of the ideal.

She was awakened from her reverie by the voice of Little Tod calling to her from the kitchen porch:

"Mama," he cried, "Mama!"

She waved her hand that he might see her and went on with the painting. He came running across the barnyard dressed only in his nightgown, and stood for a moment silently looking at the picture.

"Mama," he said, "are you painting the fire in the forest?"

"A picture for daddy," she replied, and went on with her painting.

"I am hungry," he said, "I want my breakfast."

Little Tod returned to the house and standing on the kitchen porch he looked backward to where his mother sat on the broken stump absorbed in the painting of the picture. Over the slashing he saw a giant cloud of slate black smoke, beneath it flared a crimson plume of flame. He saw the silver leaves of the poplar stir and tremble as an awakening wind crept through the slashing. He heard a dim, distant roar like the sound of the surf on the sand at Port Hope. The cloud of smoke swept across the sky toward him, darkening the sun and throwing twilight gloom over the landscape.

Tod was frightened: "Mama," he cried, "The fire! The fire!"

His voice was drowned by the rush and roar of the wind as it came ripping out of the slashing and across the clearing. It caught her canvas and hurled it high into the air; her dress was blown about her, and the world seemed suddenly to be possessed of a mad confusion. Picking up her paint box and palette she turned and faced the slashing; it seemed to be a thing alive, and like her dream, it shouted and screeched into her ears, and was rushing upon her like a devouring beast. Over the roar of the wind she heard Little Tod screaming: "The fire! The fire." Clinging to her paint box and palette she ran toward the house. The fire was in the brush at the back of the barn. The strawstack was aflame; the world seemed to burst into a bedlam of fire and confusion. Her paint box and palette in one hand she picked little Tod up in her other arm and fled toward the road. The grass along the roadway was afire, and long streamers of flame reached out of the slashing and raced across her pathway.

She reached the road to Port Hope and hesitated. The fire was everywhere! Which way should she go? To Port Hope — there was Peter, the lake, and safety. With the wind at her back she was pushed along through the swirling smoke up the road to Port Hope. She ran a few rods and then she heard a fearful noise behind her. She paused and turned and saw coming toward her a whirlwind of flame and burning brands. Out of the slashing it came, crashing, blinding, overwhelming.

It was all over in a few moments, leaving in the roadway a pile of scorched calico, a broken paint box, and a palette with some spots of vivid color still fresh and vibrant upon it.

Peter Stirling drove to Port Hope for a barrel of flour and seed-wheat for the fall planting. At the big store he purchased the flour and rolled it up on the wagon. At the mill he got his seed-wheat, and drove down the street toward Stafford's dock, and tied his horses at the post in front of the doctor's office.

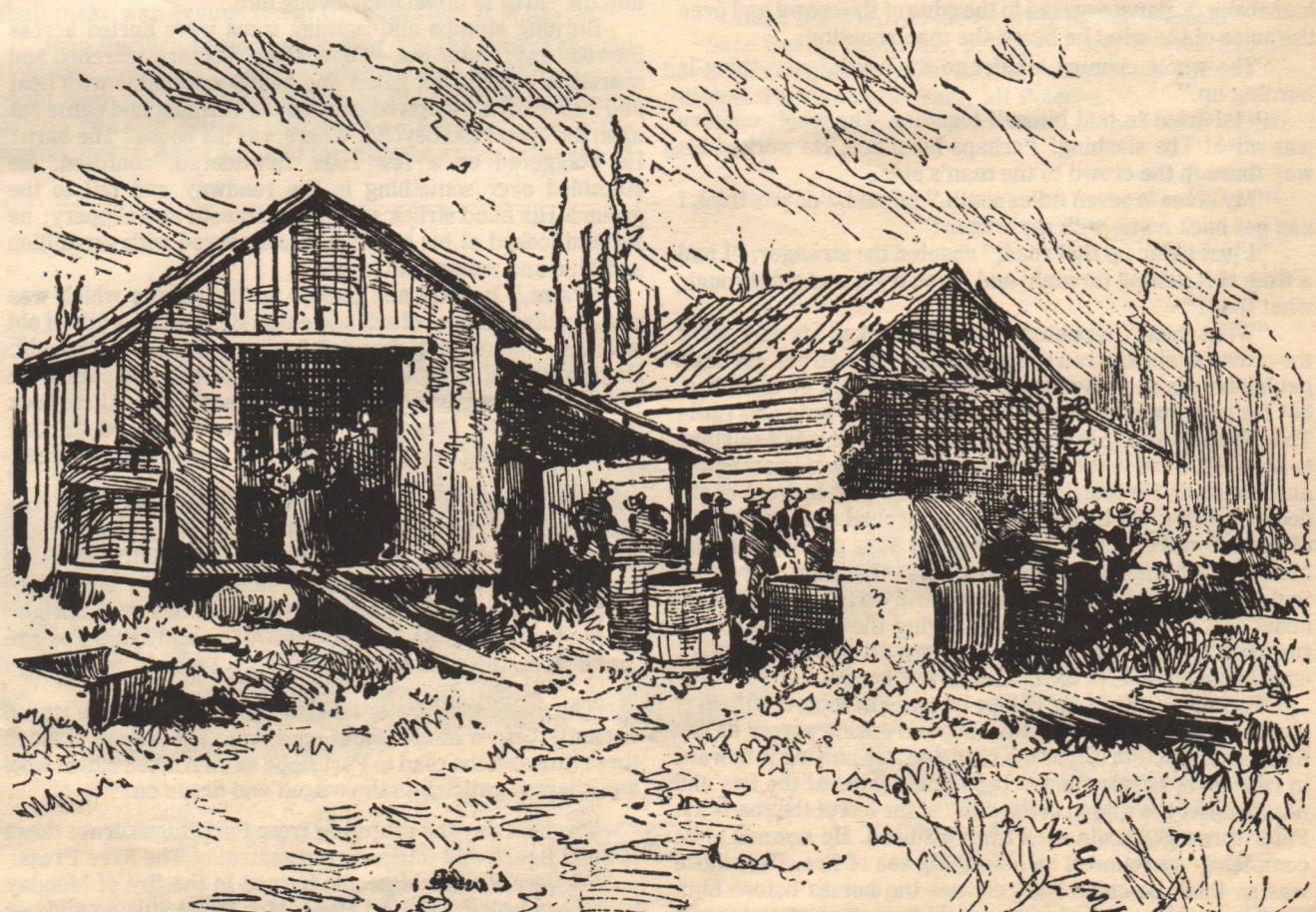
Through the heat and smoke of that September day the fresh fragrance of the sawmill, the pungent odor of the sawdust, awakened within him a realization of life and industry. At the dock a schooner was being loaded with lumber, the village was alive with activity, and Peter Stirling felt far removed from the life in the little clearing in the wilderness. He sauntered down to the dock and met a drummer from Port Huron and a Government Agent from Cleveland.

Peter had a noon-day dinner at the hotel in Port Hope and then joined the drummer and the agent in the barroom.

"The smoke is a fright," said the drummer, "it smarts my eyes, gets into my throat; where are the fires anyway?"

"Away south," said the government agent. "The farmers are clearing their land and starting fires; I have warned them, but it doesn't do any good — they will do it."

"What is one going to do?" asked Peter. "Most of us would starve to death with the land we have. There hasn't been a drop of rain in two months and I should be clearing up another ten or twenty acres right now. It is too dry and I am afraid of fire. If it doesn't rain soon I will not be able to do my



FARMERS AT THE SUPPLY DEPOT

fall plowing."

"The smoke is getting thicker," said the drummer, "I wish the wind would change and come off the lake, it would be cooler and clearer anyway."

The drummer was a first-rate whiskey drinker, but Peter and the agent remained true to the good old Port Huron brew. After the fifth drink the party forgot about the smoke and the gathering darkness. The drummer told his favorite stories, exposed his adoration for women, and related his adventure in a certain dive in Detroit where a wanton woman had tried to rob him of \$350 of his company's money. Above the bar was a large framed picture put out by a Kentucky whiskey house, portraying a woman and two young girls disporting in a pool. It was fly-specked and yellow with smoke and dust. Peter had never noticed it before. Today it stood out with a new and strange significance. The drummer saw him staring at the picture: "Swell picture, that! Pretty good picture, what do you think?"

"See that picture up there," said Peter, "my wife can paint pictures like that, you bet she can, just like that."

"Your wife is an artist?" asked the drummer.

"My wife paints all right. She could paint a picture better than that. You bet she could all right. My wife is smart, she's painting a picture for me right now up there in the clearing."

"Bet there ain't any women and girls like that up there in the slashing where you live," said the drummer.

"She ain't painting no barroom picture my wife ain't," replied Peter. "She's — she's painting a picture — I told her to paint me a picture of the slashing."

"That'll be a swell picture all right — a picture of the slashing! That's a hell of a thing to paint; she ought to paint something like that up there."

The hotel creaked with a sudden gust of wind. The coal-oil lamp which the bartender had lighted, flamed up smoking the chimney. Peter staggered over to the window and looked out toward the south. In a befuddled way he saw the sky was overcast with dense flying clouds of yellow smoke. Clinging to the frame of the window he pressed his face against the pane and stared into the gloom.

"Come on, come on," shouted the drummer, "let's have another."

"Bad fire off there," said Peter, "way off south of us — a bad fire all right; terrible black smoke coming up."

"Your place off down that way isn't it?" inquired the agent.

"Yes, seven miles south," said Peter, "but the fire is further'n that. The wind is coming up terrible."

The drummer arose unsteadily from his chair and lifting his glass shouted:

"Here's to the wind and the smoke: may they all blow over like our troubles."

"That's a great toast," said Peter. "May our troubles all blow over like the smoke — that's a swell toast all right."

There was a sound of horses hoofs in the village street followed by shouts and confusion. Peter and his friends lunged out of the barroom into the street. Peter was drunk, but drunk as he was he felt some apprehension in the darkness and confusion of the village. Men were rushing about with lanterns, a crowd had gathered about a man on horseback. Peter staggered to the edge of the crowd and over the noise of the wind he heard the man shouting:

"The whole country is afire to the south, everything is burning up."

Peter tried to pull himself together. The whole country was afire! The slashing! Perhaps his place. He worked his way through the crowd to the man's side:

"My place is seven miles south," he said, "do you think I can get back home with my wagon?"

"I just came up that road," shouted the stranger, "I had a time of it getting through, and if you try it and get through, what then?"

"What then?" repeated Peter. He worked his way out of the crowd again and ran unsteadily down the street. He must get his horses and drive home. The man might be mistaken, but his place was in danger, and there was Jessie and Little Tod. He should have brought them with him, it was a mistake to have left them in the path of the fire. He would know better another time. He found his horses at the post in front of the doctor's office. He turned the wagon around and started out of town toward the south. The wind was suffocating and blinding with smoke and dust. The horses knowing by instinct that they had been turned homeward, sensing the danger about them, burst into a run dragging the wagon lurching furiously from side to side. Peter threw an empty grain sack over his head and let the horses have the rein.

Six miles south of Port Hope he came in contact with fire, it came tearing out of the slashing and racing across an oat field, seizing the brush at the roadside and hurling it upward in ribbons of purple flame. The horses shied at the fire and nearly upset the wagon in the ditch at the left of the roadway. Peter threw the grain sack from his head. He seemed to be completely surrounded by a seething sea of fire. The smoke was so thick he could scarcely see the horses before him. They lunged forward a few steps and then stopped. Peter saw that he could not drive them through the burning slashing. He climbed down from the wagon and hastily unharnessed the horses, and the moment they were free they rushed forward



A RELIEF PARTY SEARCHING FOR SUFFERERS OF THE FIRE

into the depth of the burning slashing. Peter felt himself being overwhelmed by the hurricane of flame — he must do something quickly — he would burn to death right where he stood. A flaming brand caught in his sleeve, he struck it out with his hand. He turned suddenly and ran backward up the road to Port Hope. The fire had already swept the oat field clean. He paused and looked backward. He thought of his clearing, of Jessie and Little Tod. He must get through. He might make a detour, but that was impossible — he must go straight through. He ran down the road shielding his face with his arms, he passed his wagon, it was afire — "I shall lose my flour and my seed-wheat," he said, "but it doesn't matter."

The roar of the wind and fire in the slashing, the tumult of falling trees, the fierce voice of the burning tamarack, the fearful rush and crackle of burning underbrush, all seemed to be pounding upon his brain, endeavoring to drive him down into the earth to crush and devour him.

Burning stumps and flaming trees were hurled across the roadway; Peter leaped over them, his face scorched and seared, breathing hot gases and nearly overcome with heat and suffocation. At last he cleared the slashing and came out upon the open road beyond. Where was his house? The barn? He staggered on a few rods, bewildered, confused. He stumbled over something in the roadway and fell to the ground. His hand struck something smooth and slippery; he sat and looked at his hand; it was smeared with vermillion and blue and yellow and green.

"Paint," he said and picked up the palette which was now a confused mass of ash and color. Beside him a pile of old clothing: "Something dropped from a wagon," he thought. He took hold of a piece of it — a piece of charred calico; he wiped his hands clean of the paint. A piece of the calico stuck to his fingers — something about it awakened and startled him; he had seen that pattern before — it was Jessie's dress.

That evening a wagon from Port Hope stopped a few rods from Peter Stirling's clearing. They found him crouching in the roadway beside a pile of charred calico, clutching an old paint box and muttering strange incoherencies. They lifted him into the wagon and a man in the seat held him upright. On the floor of the wagon they laid Jessie and Little Tod and drove on up the road to Port Hope.

The man beside Peter tried to comfort him but he stared vacantly before him without speaking. The wagon stopped three times on the road to Port Hope as men lifted bits of wool and charred calico into the wagon and drove on.

The next day the drummer from Port Huron drove down to Sand Beach and told a correspondent of The Free Press:

"Several bodies of people burned in the fire of Monday have been brought to Port Hope. Mrs Peter Stirling and her five year old son were burned to death in the fire a few rods from their home from which they had tried to escape."

And that was all the papers had to say about it.

Story Of The Black Snake Whip

John Bachich made an excellent cherry brandy which when mixed with a concoction of crushed nuts and herbs made a most delicious and aromatic cordial. He had learned how to make it at the hands of the fisherman Zaro at Icici in Dalmatia. After a day of hard labor in the field, John loved to fill a glass with his cherry cordial and sit watching Catherine and Martha prepare his dinner. Catherine was the dead image of her mother. What a beautiful girl she had been! How clearly he remembered that day when he saw her first. It was on the steps of the cathedral in Flume. If it hadn't been for his friend Zaro he would never have been able to meet her. Married at seventeen — dead at thirty-two. That was the story; he did not like to think of it.

He often wondered how his brothers were doing in California. He should write them. They were at a town named Sonora, working in the mines — he would like to see them. Someday, perhaps, he would go there. He would have been happier, he was sure of it, among his own people. These Poles were a vicious lot, no mistake about that. Yet, this was America, there was equality here, and there shouldn't be any Poles, Slavonians, Italians, or Germans, they should all be Americans. That was right. Well, why weren't they? That was a tough question. Each one left his native land because he hated it, and yet when they came over to the land of liberty and equality they talked of the good old days in Dalmatia, Poland, or where not. Every last one of them brought along the traditions of the past; the hatreds and jealousies. Why couldn't they forget it? They had cried for liberty and when they found it cried louder for the green hills of their native land. Such foolishness.

On Monday morning, September 5, 1881, John Bachich was plowing up the new clearing at the back of his farm. With a strange mixture of Slavonian and Anglo-Saxon profanity he urged the oxen across the rugged field.

"On Zena, up Zaro," he would shout followed by a volley of gutteral expletives.

The field was filled with hidden roots and every few rods John would be lifted off the ground as the plow would suddenly strike a snag. It was hard plowing, but Zena and Zara knew their business; the moment the plow brought up against a root they came to a dead stop. There was only one fault with John's oxen, when they stopped they stayed stopped. No amount of profane coaxing would cause them to buckle down into the yoke and follow the furrow. John would throw the plow on its side and walk around in front of them and summon up his most profane cajolery. When he got them in motion he would rush back to the plow and continue the furrow. The hot smoky atmosphere and the frequency of the hidden roots caused him to be worked up into a sweaty rage. In long

blasts of eloquent Slavonian he would cuss the land, the stumps, and the roots which caused continuous annoyance. When the oxen came to a dead stop he would rush out in front of them, and snapping his long black snake whip over their heads, he would shout: "Hey, Zena, Ho, Zara, Oopa! Oopa!" and bending into the yoke they would carry on until the next root caused a repetition of the process.

John Kurdrawczk bought his nails and shingles in Minden and started northward toward Parisville. Anna Stirbowski sat on the front porch of her father's house and visited with Tillie Schwoutack. Tillie's beau, a Polander in Argyle, had sent her a wonderful diamond ring he had bought of J. Lynn and Company, by mail. Although the diamond was exceedingly small, it was a diamond, and diamonds in Parisville in the year 1881, irrespective of size, were a symbol of love and affluence.

The big dinner bell of Lorenzo Pernecki could be heard ringing the noon day hour. It was the signal for the Polanders within three miles of the neighborhood to have dinner ready and waiting. Joseph and Adam went into the house for dinner.

John Bachich freed the oxen from the plow and went to the house for dinner. Paul Klebba, Anthony Slavoc, the Spitzas, John Waytelowaz, Thomas Schwoutrak, and the rest of the colony answered the call of Lorenzo Pernecki's dinner bell.

It is twelve o'clock noon, Monday, September 5, 1881.

Out Of The West On Hurricane Wings

It came out of the west on the wings of a hurricane, its black shadow overwhelming the land in a darkness of night. Then came the blinding storm of smoke and dust, the flare of flame, the crimson death of the forest fire. The tranquility of the Polish settlement was suddenly transformed into the awful confusion of an exodus. To the east — the Lake — safety. There was no time to think — to save anything but life — to the east — the lake and — safety.

The horses were harnessed to the wagons, women and children were bundled in, with a confusion of hastily gathered clothing, bedding, cats, dogs, and keepsakes. The cattle were turned loose from the barnyard and belched forth into the roadway. The shouts of men, the cries of women, the screams of children, the bellowing of cattle, the roar of wind, the crash of falling timber; the sudden realization that nothing counts but life itself; moments when land, and wheat, corn, and money are cast aside for the hope of another hour, another day of living.

Wielding the black snake whip in long zooming lashes John Bachich urged his ox team with the rattling hay rack over the corduroy: "Hey Zena, Ho, Zara — Oopa! Oopa!"

The three daughters of the Slavonian, covered with a blanket, lay in the straw at the bottom of the wagon. Three miles east of Parisville there was a long stretch of swamp and slashing, the fire had already reached it and the flames were leaping upward on both sides of the roadway. Into the seething furnace the oxen lunged, and then in a sudden swirl of smoke and dust they stopped.

"Hey, Zena, Ho, Zara — Oopa! Oopa!"

The flames swooping out of the slashing threatened the team and wagon. John turned and looked backward through the driving smoke he saw Adam Stirbowski's team racing madly toward him. Adam was standing in the wagon urging the horses. Beside him old Joseph slouched in the seat, and a confused pile of baggage and human faces behind him. There was no room to pass; the ditches either side, with burning grass and cattails were impassable. Stirbowski's team came suddenly upon them, the tongue of the Polander's wagon barely missing the Slavonian girls in the hay rack. Along the road from the west, driving, hurrying, racing, came the refugees; horses urged forward with the lash and the shouts of men; men on foot driving cattle and sheep and swine; men burdened with baggage, mothers with babes in arm, and children laden with dolls and household treasures. The side roads belched their quota of flying humanity, each bent upon reaching the lake and safety.

An hour before John Kurdrawczk had abandoned the wagon with its load of nails and shingles and astride one of the team, was lashing them through the storm of fire toward Parisville and Anna.

Through a sea of flame Martha Anderson had driven pell mell, her husband shouting his prayers and repeating the declaration "It is the day." Reaching the road leading from Parisville to the lake she encountered the rushing horde of refugees. She turned the horse to the left and joined the mad rush toward the water and safety.

"Who is that ahead with the oxen?" shouted old Joseph Stirbowski.

"It is Bachich," replied Adam.

"The Bohunk blocking the way with his damned oxen. Tell him to get on and out of the way of us."

John Bachich made the black snake whip whistle over the unyielding oxen.

"Oopa! Zena! Oopa! Zara!" he cried and again and



SUPPLY TRAINS ARRIVE

again. They would not go on.

The long line of wagons, buggies, cattle, and humanity piled up behind the stubborn ox team like a log jam.

The Anderson wagon came to a stop and over the roar of the fire and wind George Anderson heard the gutteral curse of the Polanders, the bellowing of cattle, cries of women and children. Hurrying along the road, through the confusion of people, wagons, cattle, and baggage, the Parisville priest called upon the men for calmness and patience. George Anderson recognized his old antagonist in religious controversy, and leaping from the wagon called after him:

"The beast shall ascend out of the bottomless pit and shall make war against them. Glory to God! It is the Day!"

John Bachich turned and looked into the eyes of the old Polander, Joseph Stirbowski. Above the roar of the flames he could hear the cries of the men in the crush of humanity behind him. He climbed calmly down from his seat in the wagon, looked down the road through the swirls of smoke at

the confusion of wagons, cattle and people. Old Joseph shouted in a wild jargon of Polish, but John Bachich did not seem to hear him. He walked over to the wagon and taking hold of the blanket which protected his daughter, tore it away and threw it into the ditch at the roadside.

"Get out of the wagon," he shouted.

The girls obeyed. Old Joseph was joined by a growing crowd of frantic and enraged Polanders. Bachich appeared to be oblivious of their presence.

"Into Stirbowski's wagon," he ordered, and one by one he helped them up and on to the pile of baggage in the back of the Polander's wagon.

"I'll get my oxen out of your way," he said to Stirbowski. "Get into your wagon and drive on."

He walked out in front of his ox team, unfurling his great black snake whip he sent it singing over their heads:

"Up Zara, up Zena! Oopa!" he shouted.

The oxen bent into their yoke and followed him. John Bachich kept his black snake whip zooming over the heads of the oxen as he slowly backed off the road, and down into the ditch. The oxen followed, the front right wheel slid off the embankment; surrounded by the burning brush, Bachich continued to back away still shouting "Oopa, Zena! Oopa Zara," and disappeared into the jungle of flame as the hay rack toppled over on its side into the burning brush.

Adam Stirbowski saw the oxen make one lunge to free themselves from the wagon for one swift moment he looked for the Bohunk, the Dalmatian — Bachich, and then lashing his horses into a run, raced onward toward the lake.

Martha Anderson paused a moment as the jam of teams and cattle began to move; where was her husband? The people in the wagon behind her shouted for her to go on. A little further on she came upon him, standing at the roadside, shouting and exhorting as each wagon passed.

"It is the day! The judgment is at hand!"

"Come, George," she cried, "get into the wagon, we must go on, we will block the way."

"It is the day!" he shouted. His bloodshot eyes staring before him, his arms uplifted, his hair blown and tossed by the wind, he answered all of her entreaties with voice of a madman, shouting:

"The judgment, it is the day. Glory be to God!"

"George! the children — come."

"Drive on," he shouted, "drive on into hell; it is the day — the chariot shall come to deliver me out of the fiery furnace."

She looked at him for a few indecisive moments, and then bringing the whip down upon the flanks of the horse, she drove on, pell mell toward the lake.

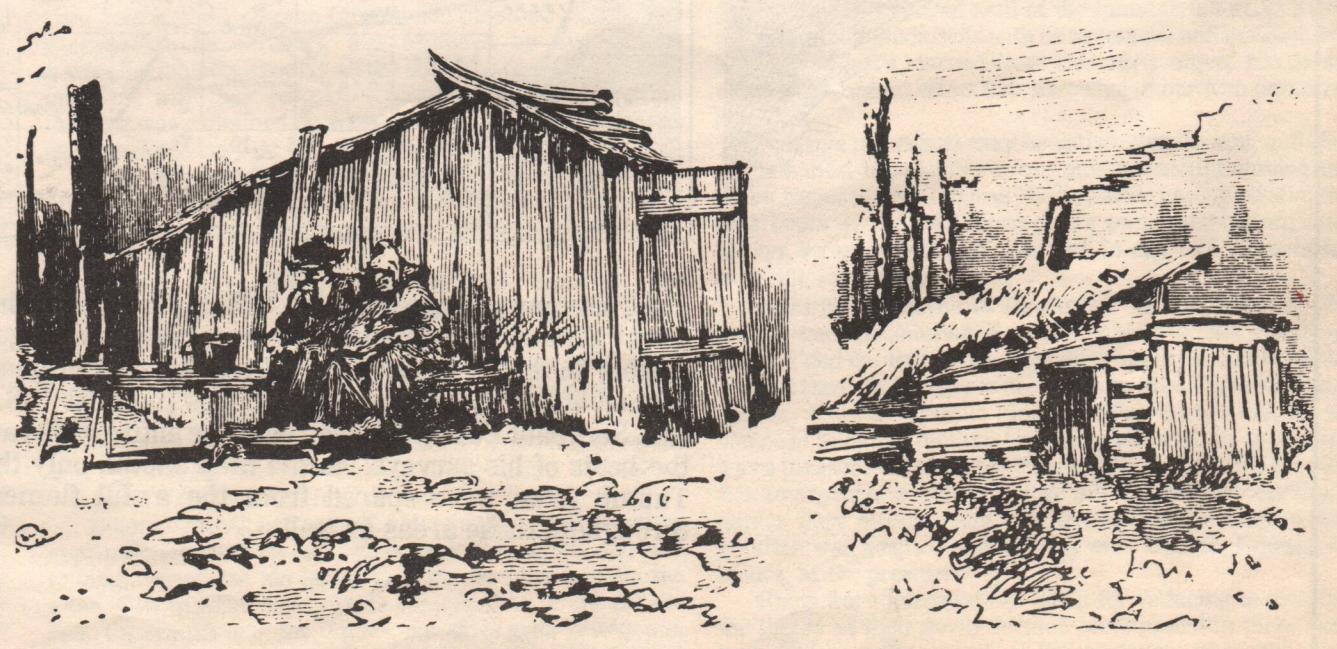
To the day of old Joseph's death he would tell of that great man John Bachich — a wonderful man that Dalmatian; of how he had led his oxen out of the road and into the flaming brush to save the lives of his daughters, and send the Polanders on their way to safety. That is the way it was in America; even a Russian would do the right thing in the crisis.

Anna Stirbowski died in the asylum at Pontiac. For fifteen years she sat and waited for the coming of John, for fifteen years she mumbled to those that were near:

"I must meet him at the clearing at four o'clock."

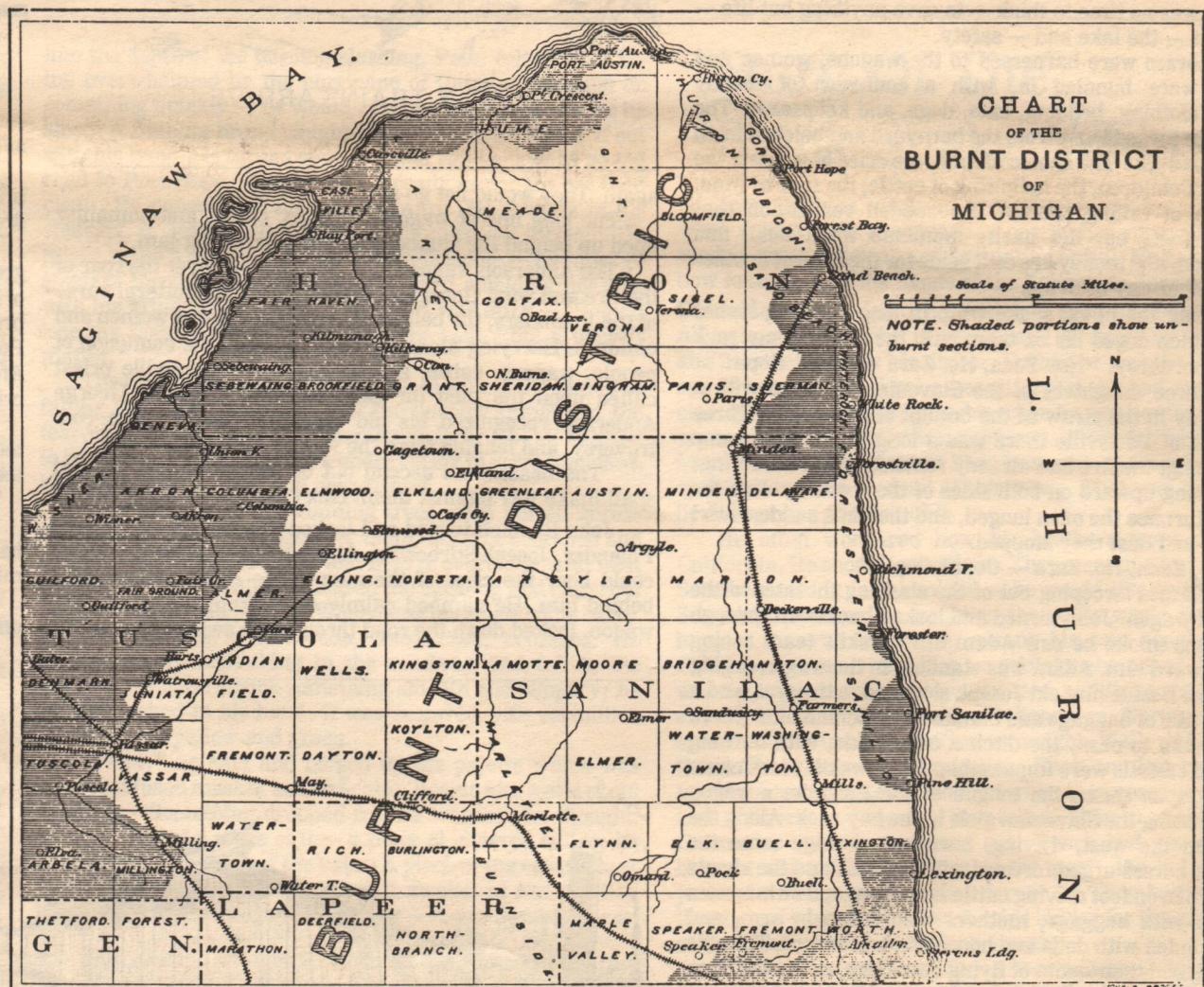
Sand Beach, September 9, 1881 — Forty-five dead bodies have been found near Paris, and many more persons are missing. The dead are nearly all Polacks.

And so I bring to a close my story of the Fire of Eighty-one.



EXAMPLES OF HUTS BUILT BY SURVIVORS

Sergeant's Map Shows Extent Of The Disaster



This map prepared by the U.S. Signal Corps shows the extent of the burned areas in the Great Fire of 1881. The map was prepared by Sergeant William O. Bailey and appears in his Report on the Michigan Forest Fires of 1881. Sergeant Bailey was in charge of the Port Huron Station of the U.S. Army Signal Corps (now the U.S. Weather Bureau.) Immediately after the fire, Sergeant Bailey traveled over the entire area ravaged by the fire and prepared this map on the basis of his surveys. As the map shows, only the extreme western portions of the Upper Thumb Area were spared from the awful flames, although smaller fires were reported throughout these areas as well.

GREAT FIRE OF 1881

Stories And Newspaper Accounts



CLARA BARTON

From Clara Barton

Michigan Forest Fires

by CLARA BARTON

From "The Red Cross" — Published 1898

It may be necessary to recall to the mind of the person reading these pages hastily, the fact that the National Red Cross of America was formed nearly a year before the accession to the treaty. This was done by the advice of President Garfield, in order to aid as far as possible the accession. "Accordingly a meeting was held in Washington, D.C., May 21, 1881, which resulted in the formation of an association to be known as the American National Association of the Red Cross."

Several years of previous illness on the part of its president had resulted in fixing her country home at Dansville, N.Y., the seat of the great Jackson and Austin Sanitarium and the acknowledged foundation of the hundreds of health institutions of that kind which bless the country today. The establishment of the National Red Cross in Washington had attracted the attention of persons outside, who, of course, knew very little of it; but among others, the people of Dansville, the home of the president, felt that if she were engaged in some public movement, they too might at least offer to aid. Accordingly, on her return to them in midsummer, they waited upon her with a request to that effect, which resulted in the formation of a society of the Red Cross, this being the first body in aid of the National Association formed in the United States. It is possible I cannot make that more clear than by giving an extract from their report of that date, which was as follows:

In reply to your request, given through the secretary of your association, that we make report to you concerning the inauguration of our society, its subsequent proceedings and present condition, the committee has the honor to submit the following statement:

Dansville, Livingston County, N.Y., being the country residence of Miss Clara Barton, president of the American Association of the Red Cross, its citizens, desirous of paying a compliment to her, and at the same time of doing an honor to themselves, conceived the idea of organizing in their town the first local society of the Red Cross in the United States. To this end, a general preliminary meeting was held in the Presbyterian Church, when the principles of the Treaty of Geneva and the nature of its societies were defined in a clear and practical manner by Miss Barton, who had been invited to address the meeting. Shortly after, on the twenty-second of August, 1881, a second meeting, for the purpose of organization, held in the Lutheran Church and presided over by the pastor, Rev Dr Stroebel, was attended by the citizens generally, including nearly all the religious denominations of the town, with their respective pastors. The purpose of the meeting was explained by your president, a constitution was presented and very largely signed, and officers were elected.

Thus we are able to announce that on the eighteenth anniversary of the Treaty of Geneva, in Switzerland, August 22, 1864, was formed the first local society of the Red Cross in the United States of America.

Almost immediately following this occurred the memorable forest fires of Michigan, which raged for days, sweeping everything before them — man, beast, forests, farms — every living thing, until in one report made of it we find this sentence: "So sweeping has been the destruction that there is not food left in its track for a rabbit to eat, and, indeed, no rabbit to eat it, if there were." Here occurred the first opportunity for work that the young society had found, and again I give without further note their report:

Before a month had passed, before a thought of practical application to business had arisen, we were forcibly and sadly taught again the old lesson that we need but to build the altar, God will Himself provide the sacrifice. If we did not hear the crackling of the flames, our skies grew murky and dark and our atmosphere bitter with the drifting smoke that rolled over from the blazing fields of our neighbors of

Michigan, whose living thousands fled in terror, whose dying hundreds writhed in the embers, and whose dead blackened in the ashes of their hard-earned homes. Instantly we felt the help and strength of our organization, young and untried as it was. We were grateful that in this first ordeal your sympathetic president was with us. We were deeply grateful for your prompt call to action, given through her, which rallied us to our work. Our relief rooms were instantly secured and our white banner, with its bright scarlet cross, which has never been furled since that hour, was thrown to the breeze, telling to every looker-on what we were there to do, and pointing to every generous heart an outlet for its sympathy. We had not mistaken the spirit of our people; our scarce-opened doorway was filled with men, women and children bearing their gifts of pity and love. Tables and shelves were piled, our working committee of ladies took every article under inspection, their faithful hands made all garments whole and strong; lastly, each article received the stamp of the society and of the Red Cross, and all were carefully and quickly consigned to the firm packing cases awaiting them. Eight large boxes were shipped at first, others followed directly, and so continued until notified by the Relief Committee of Michigan that no more were needed. Meanwhile the hands of our treasurer were not left empty, some hundreds of dollars were deposited with him. A most competent agent, our esteemed townsman and county clerk of Livingston County, Major Mark J. Bunnell, was dispatched with the first invoice of funds and charged with the duty of the reception of the supplies, their proper distribution and of making direct report of the condition and needs of the sufferers.

The good practical judgment of the people and society led them to consider the near approach of winter and the unsheltered condition of the victims, bereft of every earthly possession, and warm clothing and bedding were sent in great abundance. Our cases were all marked with the Red Cross and consigned to Senator Omar D. Conger of Port Huron, who led the call of the Michigan committee and to whom, as well as to his kindhearted and practical wife, we are indebted for many timely suggestions and words of grateful appreciation.

In a spirit of gratitude and hope we submit this partial report of our first work under the Red Cross, which can be but partial, as our rooms are still open and our work is in progress awaiting such further calls as may come to us. We are grateful that we are called, grateful that your honored President, with the acquired skill of the humane labors of many years in many lands, was with us to counsel and instruct. We are glad to have learned from this early object lesson the value of organized effort and the value of our own organization.

We hope our report may be satisfactory to you, and that our beautiful little valley town, quietly nestling among the green slopes of the Genesee Valley, after having offered the first fruits of the Red Cross to its own countrymen, may always be as prompt and generous in any call of yours for suffering humanity.

Influential citizens of Rochester, Monroe County, NY, having become interested in the subject of the Treaty of Geneva and the Red Cross work going on in Dansville, sent a request through the mayor of the city to Miss Clara Barton to address them in a public meeting. Miss Barton met an audience of thinking, philanthropic men and women, to whom it was a pleasure to unfold her theme. The result was a proposition to organize a society before adjournment. Accordingly names were pledged, and, the second evening after, a constitution was adopted and officers were elected, Edward M. Moore, M.D., president.

Steps were immediately taken for reducing to practice the theory of their newly formed society, and in three days from the commencement of its existence, its agent, Professor J. B. Hubbell, was on the burnt fields of Michigan with

The Dansville Advertiser.



A SPECIAL NOTE

It is interesting to note that the founder of The Tuscola County Advertiser, Henry Chapin, lived in Dansville, home of Clara Barton. The Tuscola County Advertiser name was given this newspaper by Chapin, naming it after The Dansville Advertiser, headquartered in Clara Barton's home community and the newspaper where Chapin served his apprenticeship ... an interesting link between Clara Barton and the Thumb.

instructions to examine into the condition of the people and report their necessities to the society from actual observation. These duties were faithfully and judiciously performed, and on the day following his report of the special need of money the sum of \$2500 in cash was forwarded as a first installment. At last reports the sum raised amounted to \$3,807.28 and the society numbered 250 members. It is evident that no full report can be made concerning a movement of which only the first steps are taken, and which is still in active operation, but it is believed that the instances are rare when, with no distress of its own as an incentive, but from the

simple motive of benevolence, a people has accomplished so much, both in organization and practical results, in so brief a space of time.

Following close on the organization in Rochester, the citizens of the sister city of Syracuse and vicinity, in Onondaga County, NY, met at the Board of Trade rooms and perfected their organization under the above name. Rev Dr Richmond Fiske, a widely known philanthropist, prominent connected with the principal charities of the city, assisted by Professor G. F. Comfort, of the Syracuse University, led

the movement. The constitution, embracing in admirable form the principles of the Geneva Convention, was signed by a large number present and officers were appointed representing the names of the leading people of the city.

These were the first steps of the American National Association of the Red Cross in relief work and in the organization of auxiliary societies. The completion of this work, which may have seemed premature and preliminary, left the association free to continue its efforts with the Government of the United States on behalf of its accession to the treaty.

From The Sanilac Jeffersonian

The Big Fire Of 1871 Was Prelude To An Even Worse Disaster A Decade Later

When Mr W. L. Jenks of Port Huron addressed the Commercial club a few weeks ago he spoke very earnestly about the value of preserving the historical history of this community and asked all who could do so to take an interest in getting matters of history in form to hold for future generations. The Jeffersonian takes pleasure in republishing the account of the fire of '71, taken from the files of this paper of October 14 of that year. The account of the fire of '81 will also be given and any of our readers who have any other historical event in mind that would be of general interest can secure the publication of what the Jeff had to say of them by signifying their wishes. We have complete files from the first issue of the paper in 1858, when it was the only paper in this part of Michigan:

The long drouth has at last resulted in a fire that has been

more widespread and caused more destruction than ever before heard of on this continent. The terrible fires that have been raging in Minnesota and Wisconsin are now finding their counterpart in our own midst.

During the entire season fires have raged in all this new country, causing greater or less damage, but it was left for last Sunday night for the fire fiend to show its awful power by a blow so sudden and crushing that human beings can only stand aghast in awe and wonder.

For a week or two, the smoke has been thickening and growing more distressing each day, and on Sunday last the wind that had been rising and blowing with great freshness several days, increased to little short of a gale from the west, and the smoke rolled toward the lake, foretelling the death and destruction that was to follow.

In some places little alarm was felt, and people went to bed at night as usual to be aroused at midnight by the fearful cry of fire that called some to see their earthly treasures vanish into smoke and ashes, and themselves saved almost by miracle, while others, choked with flame and smoke, left their charred bones alone to tell their friends where and how they died.

The fearful tale needs no elaboration to make it more horrible than the bare recital of the ghastly facts themselves. We are just beginning to learn something of the extent of the fires and the immense amount of damage it has done. It can never be accurately known and can be estimated by millions.

At Forestville

On Sunday night, the people were engaged in fighting the fire on one side of the village, when it rushed in like a tornado from the other and almost 'in a twinkling of an eye,' the village was in flames and the citizens seeking shelter on the beach, or in the water, or any place which furnished the least danger. The storm of fire swept over the bank, grasping everything it could reach to feed itself upon. In a half an hour the place was in ruins, every building but one small saloon and both docks crowded with valuable goods, lumber and shingles, being in ashes. Everybody is a sufferer. Most of the citizens having lost their all. The following is a partial list of the sufferers, with the estimated loss of each so far as we have been able to learn: Isaac Green, \$20,000; Jacob Buel, \$15,000; William Canham, \$5,000; Joseph Parkinson, \$3,000; Dr Johnson, \$2,000; J. Law, \$1,000; H. L. Adams, \$1,000; P. Riecrath, \$1,000; and others probably to the amount of \$75,000 and perhaps much more.

Capt. Bridenbach, living two miles below, lost his barn and sheds, and the family saw the flames around the house so close and threatening that they fled to the lake to save their lives, and came back to their home the next morning to find the house uninjured! It had taken fire at one corner but the flames went out and the house stood. We believe all the buildings four miles south on the shore are burned and how many in the woods west we do not know.

The people sought a refuge in boats or anything else they could reach, and managed to save their lives by covering themselves with wet blankets.

At White Rock

The people had apprehended some danger to their schoolhouse and watched it part of the night. About midnight the storm came. The wind blew a perfect hurricane, unroofing buildings and enveloping the whole village in a sheet of flame. Men, women and children jumped from their beds, snatched what few valuables they could gather, and rushed over the bank, pell mell down into the lake and out on the dock, while the flame and smoke poured over their heads, scorching them so horribly that the cold water of the lake was regarded as a welcome relief. The lake was so rough that women and children were thrown back upon the beach and obliged to risk death by drowning to be saved from death by fire. Part crowded on the dock and tore up planks and fought the fire from there and thus saved part of the dock and provisions in the warehouse.

Loss of Life

Many lives have doubtless been lost that never will be reported. Thus far we learn of only four. Mr Corbett, Mrs Richards and Mr McPherson and wife. We believe these parties lived near White Rock. Mr Corbett and his wife rushed out to save themselves and became separated from each other. She going one way, was saved, and he the other to meet his fiery doom. She came down on the Huron Thursday, nearly distracted and sick with exertion and sorrow.

Loss of Property

Messrs. Thompson and Bros. lost their store, stock, salt works and saw mill valued at upwards of \$20,000. R. Munford's store, stock and house valued at \$8,000. Dr

Red Cross Beginnings Michigan Fires Recalled

by SHARON BYRD

Along state highway M-25 between Sebewaing and Bay Port in the Thumb of Michigan, you'll find nestled among the trees in a roadside park a monument to the great Michigan forest fires of 1881 and the first disaster relief operation undertaken by the American Red Cross.

The marker, designated as Michigan Historical Commission Registered Site No. 141, gives just a clue to the devastation of the fires that swept through four counties in the Thumb during three days, killing 280 people, destroying 3,400 buildings and leaving an estimated 15,000 people homeless and destitute.

September of 1881 was hot and dry after a summer that produced little rain. Crops in the area had withered during the dry season, and streams and wells turned into empty, dusty holes.

Farmers had been taking advantage of the dry soil and setting small fires to clear their land of brush and trees and burn the idle fields.

The scattered fires had become a familiar site when shortly before noon on September 5, a gale roared in from the southwest and united the fires into an enormous inferno that seemed to explode the country side into flames.

The force of the winds carried the walls of the flames like a tornado, uprooting trees and carrying buildings through the air like toys. The best recourse for the frightened people was to flee, although for some it was too late.

Many took refuge in the Huron County Courthouse in Bad Axe, the only brick building in town. When the fire had passed, the courthouse was one of the few buildings left in the devastated community.

After three days, the fire had burned its way to the Lake Huron shoreline, and the horror was over. Scores of people were dead or homeless, and the once-rich lumbering territory was reduced to a blackened prairie, never to be reforested. Large swamplands in the low-lying area had been dried up, and the settlers were left with the task of rebuilding from nothing.

Newspapers in Saginaw, Detroit and Port Huron carried daily accounts of the fire. As readers learned of the destruction, committees organized in Port Huron and Detroit to gather and send relief supplies. Soon food, clothing and rebuilding materials began pouring in from around the coun-

try.

One of those committees was that of the newly-formed American Red Cross, headed by Clara Barton out of her home in Dansville, New York. The small group quickly rallied to send supplies in boxes and crates bearing the organization's symbol — a red cross on a white background.

The chapter in Dansville, formed just a month before the Michigan fires occurred, quickly recognized the opportunity to prove the society's worth.

A report of the local society, published in "The Red Cross" by Barton, describes the committee's initial thoughts following news of the fires' devastation:

"Before a month had passed, before a thought of practical application to business had arisen, we were forcibly and sadly taught again the old lesson that we need but to build the altar, God will Himself provide the sacrifice. If we did not hear the crackling of the flames, our skies grew murky and dark and our atmosphere bitter with the drifting smoke that rolled over from the blazing fields of our neighbors of Michigan, whose living thousands fled in terror ..."

"Instantly we felt the help and strength of our organization, young and untried as it was."

The neighboring towns of Rochester and Syracuse, hearing of the activity of its smaller neighbor in providing relief for the Michigan victims, also organized committees under the name of Red Cross.

Clara Barton writes: "(They) desired also to unite in the world and knowing much less even than Dansville of what the Red Cross might mean, still desired to act with it, if possible ..."

Although the Red Cross was only one of many committees around the country involved with the relief effort, the new organization won public support for its prompt and visible aid to the fire victims. The groups in New York were committed to the Red Cross aim, and this small center of strength began the young organization on a journey that is now well-known.

The U.S. Congress, for many years reluctant to ratify the 1863 Geneva (or Red Cross) Conventions, finally signed the humanitarian treaties in 1882, making the U.S. a part of the international Red Cross movement. Many, including Clara Barton, believed this breakthrough with Congress came as a result of the Red Cross effort in Michigan.

Johnson's store, valued at \$3,000. L. Ferguson's hotel and store, and numerous others roughly estimated altogether at upwards of \$100,000.

Elm Creek

Mill and every house in the place with the dock and all it contained. Loss \$20,000 and falls on Pack, Jenks and Co. Everything on the shore, too.

Rock Falls

Was gone and Whitcomb's mill at this place. Everything here was saved with this exception. Loss \$10,000.

Sand Beach

Here Carrington, Pack & Co's boarding house and store, Grice's shingle mill and dwelling house were saved, while the dock and Irwin's store and house, and every other building in the place shared the fate of Centre Harbor. Loss \$30,000.

Port Hope

Suffered dreadfully, but most of the town was saved. The mill, dock, tannery and a number of other houses burned. Loss \$50,000.

Huron City

Is a city today with one house. Everything belonging to the company being destroyed. In addition to the mill, store, dock, etc., lost, quite a number of Mr Hubbard's celebrated blood horses were shot to save them from a more dreadful death. Loss \$75,000.

We have not as yet got any reliable intelligence from further up the shore or back in the country, though it is reported that New River was entirely burned. Buschowski's and Du蒙d's shingle mills in Paris, Gunning's mill and store in Austin, Ludington's mill at Verona, and hundreds of settlers scattered through the northern part of this county and over the whole of Huron. The loss is incalculable.

Marion

In Marion the fire was not so dreadful, owing to the large clearings and cultivated fields, but we learn from Mr Wright that some families in his neighborhood were entirely cleaned out, while all have suffered more or less from the loss of barns and crops. Mr Wright himself lost everything but his house. At Deckerville only three houses were burned but all the lumber sleighs and much valuable loose property. How anything was saved there is indeed miraculous.

Minden

To the Jeffersonian:

One town has been saved from the devouring element — Fire! which has raged on every side. The whole country round about is burned, houses, horses and human lives have not been spared, two women were burned in Paris, Huron County, and one family of five persons are missing at present, there is no hope of their being alive, there is not a provision left in the whole country to feed the people any length of time, and, unless succor is sent numbers must suffer for the necessities of life.

S.M.T.

Buel and Elk

The fires have traveled over a goodly portion of both these towns, burning the buildings and crops of the settlers. The lumber shanties of Mr B. Mills with all their contents of hay, grain, horses and sleighs were totally destroyed. Numerous instances of poor families losing all their crops are reported. One poor woman, Mrs Perkins, living a distance from other settlers in the northwest part of Elk, was alone with her children for nearly two days, fighting the fire that attacked her premises, and had not a drop of water within a mile. When visited by her neighbors after the fire, she was found blind and exhausted, her house saved but her outbuildings which contained her hay for her stock, and the little store of potatoes in ashes. The bridges and crossings in swamps are burned out so that teams cannot pass with loads west of Buel.

Great Suffering

Has already been endured by the victims, and much more is unavoidable. The coming winter presents a bleak and cheerless prospect to them. With their houses, clothing, barns, feed and grain gone, lumber and timber all burned, no employment and cold weather coming on, the outlook is indeed gloomy.

Liberality of the Public

On learning the extent of the disaster the Steamer Huron and Kate Moffat and Revenue Cutter Fessenden were sent to the scene of suffering, and the liberal and generous citizens of Detroit and Port Huron forwarded supplies by those boats. Mr Smith of Forrester, though he is a heavy loser (as indeed are all our businessmen), started two loads of supplies for the country back of Forestville that was not so readily accessible and the suffering could not be so quickly reached as on the shore. The conduct of all has been such as we had reason to expect from an enlightened and generous people.

Incidents

At Forestville, Mrs Green, who is an invalid, had to be carried out of the burning house and provided with shelter in a hole in the bank.

Henry L. Adams, who kept the Forest House, got his family into a boat on the beach and covered them over with wet blankets, but even in this situation Mrs Adams' shawl was burned through until it looks as though it had been laid on a bed of coals.

Mr Frank Buschowski, who owned a shingle mill west of White Rock only saved himself and wife and baby by lying

down in a ditch and covering them with wet blankets and keeping them wet.

Dr Johnson and his family at White Rock were driven into the water with the rest where they remained for hours battling with the flames and water, Mrs Johnson's shawl being burned off her head.

One family consisting of an old father and mother and two sons, started for the shore which was some distance. It became apparent that the old couple could never get through. So the sons dug a hole in the ground and placed the father and mother carefully in, giving them a chance to breathe and left them. It has since been ascertained that they are all right.

The gale was so fierce that before the fire reached the salt block at White Rock the roof was lifted bodily and carried some distance.

One man ran his wagon into the lake, covered his family with wet blankets and shawls, and the fire burned the spokes of the wheels to the water's edge.

One woman with a child only two days old, was obliged to stand in the water for hours to save herself and babe from the flames.

Mr Martin Drumond, whose mill was destroyed, was rescued from the flames by his workmen, having endeavored to save something from the fire until he sank down suffocated by the fire and smoke. He is in a dangerous condition.

At Gunning's mill the people huddled together in a hole in a sand bank which had been excavated to obtain sand for building purposes. From this place we learn that two women whose names are unknown were burned, and that a family of five persons named McDonald are supposed to have perished, as nothing has been seen or heard of them since the fire.

In the township of Paris the people are crowded together in the Catholic church, without food except meat and no bedding and scantily clothed.

It is estimated that the dwellings, household goods, clothing, winter's provisions, and supplies for stock of from four or five thousand people have been destroyed, and with the mills the means to supply their families by their labor.

The Aid Required

Thank God that the people of Port Huron, Detroit and other places are quick to respond to the call for help. The aid proposed should however have judicious supervision. The immediate necessity is bread, clothing and bedding, blankets especially. Meat, we are told, there is plenty, as the stock will have to be killed to keep them from starving. The surplus of aid, if any, after supplying these wants, should be devoted to

supplying axes and other tools, and nails to help provide shelter, and cooking utensils. Without the inducement these last items would offer to the houseless to rebuild, many settlers will abandon their places and the lake shore, and we cannot afford to lose them.

Summary of mills, stores, etc., destroyed:

Gunnings mill and store at Tyre

Buels mill and dock at Forestville

Green's dock and store at Forestville

F. Buchkowski's mill

Ludington's mill and store at Verona

Pack, Jenk & Co's. mill, dock and store at Elm Creek

R. W. Hubbard & Co's. mill, store and dock, Huron City.

Mill, dock store, New River

Canham's store, Forestville

Thompson mill (flouring and shingle), salt block, store &

dock, White Rock

Munford's store, White Rock

Thompson's store, White Rock

Whitcomb's mill, Rock Falls

Durant's store and dock, Centre Harbor

Stafford Haywood & Co., mill, dock and tannery, Port Hope

Irwin's store, Sand Beach

Carrington's, Pack & Co's. mill and dock, Sand Beach

Joiner's mill, Tyre

Susalla's shingle mill, Paris

Grobell's mill and several other shingle mills proprietors names unknown.

This is merely a list of mills and stores. Around each were numerous dwellings which shared the same fate.

Many of the helpless and homeless are discouraged and well they may be, as they stand beside the ruins in which are burned the result of years of toil and privation such as is only known to the settlers in the back woods, their scantily clothed children shivering and hungering in their presence. Food may be supplied for the present, but the chilling blasts of the coming winter, always cheerless enough in this new country will overtake many unprovided with shelter or the necessities of life.

While we in this village have occasion up to this time for thankfulness for preservation, is the duty of charity imposed upon us, these sufferers. Are our neighbors bound to by many ties, their prosperity or calamity is ours. God in his mercy has left us so far in a situation to help. We do not think there is among us anyone with a soul so small that these tales of suffering has not moved us.

From The Sanilac Jeffersonian

The Big Fire of 1881 Eclipsed Earlier Fire In Destruction

The dry weather that has been prevailing the past few weeks has finally culminated in one of the most disastrous fires on record and involving a loss of life absolutely frightful. We are yet in the midst of it, and unless we have rain soon we may be called upon to record even more appalling scenes. We have only partial reports as yet from the districts visited by the fires, and we hope they are greatly exaggerated, but we know of enough already to make a sickening record. Whole families have been burned; horses, cattle, hogs, sheep, houses, barns, crops and fences have been swept away, and hundreds of people left homeless and penniless. The scenes of '71 have been reenacted, with the additional horror of a much greater loss of life.

On Wednesday of last week, August 31, the fire swept over much territory and destroyed many buildings, fences and crops: but Monday, Sept. 5, the wind blew all day a perfect gale, fanning every ember into a flame that spread over the country with a rapidity that was every moment increased by what it fed upon, and only stayed when there was nothing else to burn.

The train of the P. H. & N. W. railroad, that came down from Sand Beach Monday morning, found nothing to embarrass it in the least, but the train north at noon found a red sea of fire just above Deckerville, through which nothing could live. Returning to Deckerville it was obliged to pass through one nearly as bad which had closed in behind them, but they fortunately passed before the culverts were burned or rails warped, otherwise the whole train would have been destroyed. This train worked all night in smoke and darkness so dense that objects a yard distant could not be seen, and Tuesday afternoon succeeded in reaching Croswell.

Minden

The elevator at Minden and one report says the station is gone.

Charleston

Asahel Moore informs us that no danger had been apprehended at Charleston until the cloud of smoke and fire was seen approaching. The people rushed for the lake, and in almost the twinkling of an eye every house in the place was in flames, including the mill, store and shops. Before they arrived at Forestville it was so hot that hogs were dying by the roadside. We hear of the loss of several lives, but have not learned the names of any except Henry Cole, whose dead body was found the next day.

Moore threw his tool chest in the pond, but when he returned the top and contents were burned.

One woman named Swick was sick, having been recently confined, and in the hurry she was forgotten, but she managed to get out, and with four children, made her way to Minden and escaped.

One woman south of the village buried her three children, all but their faces, and their heads were badly burned. She also buried herself, but her foot and ankle were burned.

Austin

Mr Harrison, of Austin, came to town Wednesday evening, and added his story to the tales of horror already told. The fire seems to have swept over the whole northern part of this county and Huron with ever more destructiveness than further south. At Cumber everything is burned, and indeed the answer to every inquiry put to him in regard to parties known here was "Everything burned!" "All gone!" "Not a rag left!" with the exception of here and there. The story of the loss of property is the same, and it is safe to say that in the burnt districts nobody escaped some loss, and hundreds are thankful to have escaped with their lives. Pagett's new store, French's mill, Smith's mill, Donner's mill, Volz, Alfred Gunning, Thomas Brown, Wm. Thomas, Chas. Weimer,

Chas. Snider, the Deans, Gibbard, Grummett, D. McPahil, Christopher Murphy, the Nevilles, Geo. Bond, the Hartwicks, Wm. Jordan, Alex McKenzie, and hosts of others were stripped.

Thomas Barnes' wife crept into the river, but she was badly burned. Her sister and mother and two children were lost.

Morris Welch, wife and two children were also burned to death.

A family named Day, living in William's lumber camp, are missing. The woman was a sister of Alfred Gunning.

Fremont

Wm. McIntyre lost his barn, stables and all his crops.

Thomas Aitken, barn and contents.

Nathan McClure, house, barn and crops.

Joseph Neuham, house, barn and crops.

Buel

Julius Kline, house, barn and crops.

Reinhardt Leins, barn, shed and crops.

E. R. McCredie, barn, shed and forty acres of wheat.

G. W. Smyth, barn and crops.

Lexington

T. Moss, barn and contents.

Mrs Ernest Baker, barn and contents.

Cephas Arnot, house and crops.

M. Musselman, household furniture.

Widow Dart, everything.

H. K. Beach, barn and crops.

John Odlum, three barns, shed, house, crops and all tools.

Wildman Mills, threshing machine.

Sandusky

C. J. French writes, under the date of September 6, to his father-in-law, B. Miller, as follows:

Last night was a terrible night after a terrible day yesterday. One family burned up in their house three miles out. I carried two small children a mile through burning wood, on my back, to save their lives. Our team was on the go all night, and are now bringing in people who lost everything. The village is safe, but everybody outside is being burned out. The McLure neighborhood is all burned out. All our town records were burned last night. You don't know anything about fire. Two families are with us. A little boy came in crying a few minutes ago, asking for help for his father and mother. Will and the team have gone and they will have a half mile of fire to go through. The village will be overrun before night with people burned out. All well and keep a stiff upper lip.

LATER — Report comes in of more people burned up. Team just gone out for a family of five lying dead in road. It takes lots of grit to keep up, I tell you.

The next day he also sent the following:

John Ash just came in from Argyle Township. Says roads are lined with dead animals. Fourteen dead bodies found in Moore and Argyle Townships. Not half a dozen farm houses in this town. Dreadful reports from the north part of Custer. Village all right yet.

Mr O'Keefe sends us the following under date of the 7th: The following persons are known to have been burned:

Watertown — Mrs Drebert and four children, 3 to 11 years old. Mr Drebert not expected to recover.

Moore — Mrs Strong and two children, Humphrey (stage driver from Marlette to Bad Axe,) Mrs Frank Dennison, child and sister.

Argyle — Paul Weitzel, wife and five children, Geo. Kroetch, who went to rescue.

Hundreds of families homeless. Cattle, horses, hogs, birds, etc. lying dead all over the country.

Twenty persons reported burned to death on the Forester Road in Custer.

ANDERSON STATION

They found the station at Anderson and every house in the place all new and put up this season, all burned to the ground. The track was warped and twisted by the heat, ties and culverts burned out as well as telegraph poles and posts. The country around Anderson was also burned over, and we are able to give only a partial list of the sufferers:

Hiram Cudney, barns and crops.

G. L. Demert, barn and crops.

Two Osbornes, house and all.

Tubs, buildings and crops.

Boynton, buildings and crops.

Wm. Maskell, buildings and crops.

D. Corsaut, store, stock and everything.

George Ennest, buildings and crops.

Pierson, buildings and crops.

John Armstrong, building and crops.

Whitcomb, hay, grain, house, two barns and stable, lumber, threshing machine, implements.

Wm. Benedict, barn and stacks, hay and grain.

Wm. Hobson, house and contents.

Richard Hobson, house, stable and grain.

Turnbull, house and stable.

Hugh McLean, stacks.

Hiram Patterson, everything.

Charles Kennedy, hay press.

Henry Rogers, all his buildings and crops.

Two Maxwells, houses and barns.

Theodore Ennest, hotel just finished.

James Campbell, everything.

O. A. Munn, postmaster and station agent, stock of goods.

Aldred, house, barn and crops.

MARION

Joshua Madill of Marion reports that nearly everybody in the northeastern part of the town are cleaned out, and some persons are missing, and eighteen lives are supposed to be lost.

George Ayrhart, his wife, two children, grandmother and a grandchild were burned. Also a family named Richmond, consisting of five persons.

Dr Vincent lost his house.

Joshua Madill, barn, crops and furniture.

M. W. Stevenson, six barns and contents, mill, store and several buildings.

RICHMONDVILLE

The fire seems to have been very severe and destructive at this place, and the loss of life is considerable. The whole country, consisting of a strip two miles wide and running four or five miles, was burned over to quickly as to allow the inhabitants scarcely time to escape with their lives. The fire made a clean sweep of everything. There was scarcely time to get away from the houses before the buildings were enveloped in flames.

The family of Abel Thornton, consisting of a son and daughter, were lost, as also a young man named John Mohan and a girl named Sharkey.

The list of losses as far as we have been able to learn is as follows:

John A. Mey, barn and entire crops.

Martin O'Meara, same.

Solomon Yakes, house and contents.

Joel Savage, house and contents and crops.

Abram Tate, all building and contents.

Charles Bunyan, house and contents.

Samuel Nichols, same.

John Lee, all buildings and contents.

Charles McCormick, same.

Speaker

Our Speaker correspondent, under date of Sept. 7th, says: The forest fires are still raging, and we hear of great losses everywhere.

Donald Bruce lost his house, grain and fences.

Reuben Gilbert merely escaped with his family; everything burned.

David Glendenning lost all his grain.

Thomas Robson lost his stable, straw, hay and even his pigs.

Andrew Faulds lost his house and pigs, but saved the most of his furniture.

John Udell lost stable and feed.

James Stevenson, same.

Simon Demray, same.

Geo. Bartle lost everything on his place; merely got out with his family.

Further west in Maple Valley, John Tobin had a large crop, and was cleaned out of everything on his farm; even his geese were burned on the road.

Mrs Groat was moving her goods in a wagon when they took fire and everything was burned, even the wagon; but her house escaped.

Mr Mixture was harrowing, and while at dinner the harrows were burned.

A. Donaldson lost about four hundred rods of fencing and had a very narrow escape with his buildings and after unhitching from the plow the whiffletrees were burned.

Edward Hilborn had just nicely got done threshing when the fire came through and cleaned him out of everything around the barn, but his grain was saved.

We hear of even worse reports from the north. This is all within three or four miles.

Wm. Demray had a narrow escape with his house and barn. He had about forty cords of stove wood in his door yard, which was burned together with the gate between his house

and barn and straw pen. The buildings are safe yet.

This has been a worse fire to contend with than that of ten years ago, as the wind was higher.

Peck

Fire! Fire! Fire everywhere.

The people in this vicinity have suffered terribly from the fires the last few days. The fires in '71 were nothing in comparison. There is no less than fifteen buildings burned between Robert Coffron's and Jas. McClure's, a distance of about two miles. Mr Alexander English lost his barn and all his grain. Peter McDonald, about four miles north of Elk, lost his saw mill and all his lumber, dwelling and out buildings. Earl Smith lost a fine house and about all the contents. The buildings on the old place of John Ash were swept clean, not a bridge or a culvert left.

In the northwestern part of Elk, D. McCollum, R. Bartlet, Joseph Gerig, J. Hillman and some others have been made homeless, and we learn that in Flynn the damage is fully as great. Our merchants sent provisions to some of the sufferers. Nothing but the most heroic exertions on the part of the citizens save our village from total destruction, every available person was fighting fire and many from Brockway Centre were here and did noble work. Mr John Hall lost his barn with all of his grain. But the saddest of the whole affair is the death by fire of the family of Mr Wm. Dibert of Watertown. The charred remains of Mrs Dibert and four children were all found near each other in the road between Sections 10 and 29, burned to a crisp. It is said Mr Dibert is nearly distracted with grief.

The proprietors of the stores and mill freely opened their places of business and gave provisions to the sufferers until their supplies were exhausted.

Fremont

Wm. McIntyre lost his barn, stables and all his crops.

Thomas Aitken, barn and contents.

Nathan McClure, house, barn and crops.

Joseph Neuham, house, barn and crops.

Custer

Peter Martin, John Basset and Anderson, living on the Forester Road, lost houses, barns and crops.

John Jackson and some others lost crops.

Scenes and Incidents

Four persons are reported burned at Index — a man, woman and two children. Besides, two German families are missing.

In Washington Township, Mr Whittaker relates that his boys having camped down beside a stack which escaped, a bear and a deer sought the same refuge and remained most of the night.

John Herrick was caught with his rig near Bad Axe and remained overnight in a field. Next morning, between Bad Axe and Sand Beach he overtook two women, each with a child, with not a single stitch of clothing upon them. He had a couple of grain bags in his buggy which he tore up and gave to them.

Hugh McKenzie, who visited Austin Wednesday, reports that every house that is left standing is a hospital of people burned and blinded with the fire and smoke. All who have anything left are dividing with their less fortunate neighbors.

A man named Reynolds, from Marlette, went into Moore last Monday and nothing has been heard of him since. His horse returned. It is almost certain that his life is lost. Parties are now hunting for his body.

Martin DuMond, of Paris, was engaged Tuesday in picking up dead bodies. When our informant left he had already carried seven to the Catholic burying ground.

Mr Wagner, of Sand Beach, who started on the noon train Monday for Sand Beach, spent that night with the train, and succeeded Tuesday afternoon, with Route Agent Burgess, in getting through to Croswell by crawling in ditches and fighting almost constantly for their lives. He describes the scenes on that train as fearful in the extreme, and their escape from destruction as almost miraculous. He had no desire for further experience of the kind and took the Pearl Wednesday for home.

From Port Huron Times-Herald

Great Thumb Fire Assured Red Cross Future

As long as there are old timers in Michigan to tell stories and a younger generation to listen, tales will be told about the great forest fires which swept the Thumb district in 1871 and again in 1881.

In October, 1871, at the same time Mrs O'Leary's cow kicked over the lantern and set Chicago ablaze, fires in Huron and Sanilac counties left two-thirds of the population homeless.

An unusually dry summer and autumn had set the stage for the conflagration which started in the east side of Tuscola County and swept across Sanilac and the southern part of Huron County to Lake Huron. Fires broke out Sunday night, Oct. 8. Villagers and farmers in the eastern part of the Thumb district were awakened about midnight to find themselves helpless in the face of flames which spread rapidly eastward.

Forests of charred stumps were left in the wake of the blaze. The toll of the fire on Michigan's first growth pine and hemlock was inestimable. Losses to private property reached hundreds of thousands of dollars. Few lives were lost because the district was not thickly settled except around the lake shore.

The fire of 1871 was destructive enough, but the fire of 1881 remains the now almost legendary "great fire". The fire fifty years ago is memorable on another count. It was the first national disaster in which the Red Cross in America was called upon to serve. The organization's work in Michigan did much to swing public opinion in favor of Clara Barton and her work which was only beginning to become known in this country.

Nearly 300 Thumb residents were burned to death in the blazes which licked across Sanilac, Huron, and part of Lapeer, St. Clair, and Tuscola counties. Whole families perished as communities were wiped out. Survivors described how fleeing families sought refuge in Lake Huron, others in improvised cellars, over which planks and wet blankets were thrown, and others in horses and buggies.

The Port Huron Daily Times, Sept. 7, 1881, described the outbreak of fire: "In the whole of this section there has been but little rain during the past two months and everything was parched and dry, when, on Monday, Sept. 5, a hurricane swept over it, carrying with it a sheet of flame that hardly anything could withstand."

The extent of the fire is estimated in a message to the state legislature which Gov. David H. Jerome convened in special session in February, 1882, to vote relief for the sufferers. "The property of 3,231 families was destroyed and 14,438 persons were made dependent on public aid. In this calamity 1,531 dwellings were consumed, and 1,480 barns ... the destruction covered a territory of 1,800 miles."

Another extract from the Port Huron Daily Times of Sept. 7, 1881, gives a graphic idea of the destruction: "Bad Axe is all consumed but the courthouse. Verona Hills

together with Ubly and the country are all swept clear, hardly a building left. Owners had no chance to escape. Tyre is completely destroyed and also Deckerville."

Plans for relief were underway everywhere. The state legislature voted \$250,000 for the relief of the fire sufferers. Contributions of food, clothing, and cash from a state relief commission, commissions in Port Huron, Detroit, and other large cities and personal contributions brought the total to about \$1,000,000.

The work of the Red Cross in the relief of suffering is pictured in an account sent to Washington. The first local society in this country at Dansville, New York, summer home of Clara Barton, president of the American Association of the Red Cross, was instrumental in Michigan relief work.

The account follows:

"Our relief rooms were instantly secured and our white banner, with its bright scarlet cross, which has never been furled since that hour, was thrown to the breeze ... We had not mistaken the spirit of our people; our scarce-opened doorway was filled with men, women, and children bearing their gifts of pity and love. Tables and shelves were piled, our working committee of ladies took every article under inspection, their faithful hands made all garments whole and strong; lastly, each article received the stamp of the society and of the Red Cross, and all were carefully and quickly consigned to the firm packing cases awaiting them ..."

The Red Cross so distinguished itself in "disaster relief" work in the Thumb district that shortly after the United States subscribed fully and without qualification to the Treaty of Geneva, international Red Cross covenant drawn up in 1864. Out of the destruction of the "great fire" of 1881 one constructive result had come. The future of the American Red Cross was assured.

MICHIGAN FOREST FIRE, 1881

The Red Cross made its first excursion into disaster relief before the United States government had given its official adherence to the Geneva Treaty. This was in the Michigan forest fire in September 1881. All of the preceding summer Miss Barton had labored in the hope that her years of effort to secure official recognition for the Red Cross would materialize. President Garfield had indicated that he would give his support to the international treaty. However, Garfield's death, after a lingering illness from the bullet of his assassin, came on September 18, 1881. For a time at least, Miss Barton lost all hope of reaching her goal. While Garfield lay battling for his life, the Michigan fires broke out following a hot, dry summer. Julian B. Hubbell, who was then studying at the University of Michigan, reported to Miss Barton on the needs there.

Miss Barton had met Mr Hubbell in Dansville, New York, while he was teaching chemistry there. He had been a member of the Dansville Chapter of the Red Cross which had been organized to support Miss Barton in her efforts to

secure American adherence to the international treaty. This was the initiation of Julian B. Hubbell, (soon to become an M.D.) into lifelong service with Clara Barton and the American Red Cross. Hubbell's reports on the devastation and suffering in Michigan led Miss Barton to make an appeal to the people in Dansville and the surrounding communities of Rochester and Syracuse. Money was raised and sent to the clerk of Livingston County, New York, and its distribution was made through the Port Huron Committee and a stateside committee appointed by the Governor. Soon boxes and barrels of food, clothing, and medicine, as well as stores of lumber for rebuilding homes, poured in. All told, approximately \$80,000 was given out among the families made destitute by the fire.

In the beginning, the Red Cross gave what might be termed supplementary assistance: Providing clothing and household equipment, along with certain suitable foods for the people who had already received subsistence rations. In a few instances, homes were repaired or rebuilt. More often, temporary buildings were constructed so that the people might have a habitable place to live. These instances in no sense compared with the present-day scale of rehabilitation. Even so, the people dislodged from their homes were assisted to get back to a normal life as soon as possible. In so far as she was able, she made plans for helping them. This might be through providing household equipment, making repairs, replacing furniture, and finding essential clothing. Frequently, there were plans for planting garden seeds so that a food supply would be available later. The Michigan fire served in a sense as the proving ground for demonstrating the function that the American Red Cross might serve in time of disaster. If Congress needed any evidence that the Red Cross could render aid to civilians in distress, here was an example.



DANSVILLE, NEW YORK IN 1881

WHERE RED CROSS DISASTER RELIEF WAS LAUNCHED

From The Times—Record, Valley City, North Dakota

Valley City Woman Recalls Michigan Fires

Fire disasters which swept the state of Michigan back in the early 70's and the founding of the Red Cross at that time are recalled by Mrs James McCully, 103 Beeman Block, known to her many friends in Valley City as "Grandma McCully," 83-years-old.

Though an invalid, caused by an accident three years ago when she slipped and fell on a downtown walk fracturing her hip, she enjoys her radio and all the news it gives, and keeps up with the times. Her daughter, Mrs. C.A. Fritch, lives with her.

Mr and Mrs James McCully came from Deckerville, Mich., in 1905, and while on their farm near Deckerville, in 1881, the second big fire swept Michigan and Mr and Mrs McCully took refuge in their potato field and saved their lives by lying down and burying in the sand. Though they kept throwing sand upon themselves, Mrs McCully was severely burned and for months had lost her voice.

One of her saddest memories is that her neighbor's daughter, Sarah Sharkey, 16-years-old, had run from her own home to McCully's home and during her flight had inhaled so much smoke and was so frightened that it caused her death. She died in Mr McCully's arms and the irony of it was that the Sharkey home was not burned. Mr McCully had the experience of living through the two big fires of 1871 and 1881 without a burn. He died at his home in Valley City in February 1930, and was 77-years-old.

They were given aid in 1881 through Clara Barton as outlined by a clipping from the Mt. Clemens Daily Leader:

Floods Revive Memories

The recent floods in the southern states and the Red Cross relief there bring to her mind the fires in her home state in the early days; disasters which brought about the forming of the Red Cross by Clara Barton.

The following article on these two great fires is taken from the Mt. Clemens, Mich. Daily Leader:

Michigan was the first state in the Union to receive the services of the American Red Cross. Here, for the first time, the banner of the Red Cross was displayed above the supply tent of Clara Barton, who personally handled the distribution of food and clothing in the disastrous forest fire which occurred in 1881 in a strip of land between Saginaw Bay and Lake Huron, known as the Thumb district. Vivid recollections of the havoc wrought and enlistment of relief parties, and of Clara Barton, are preserved by John S. Paganetti, a lumber dealer of Mt. Clemens.

"She was praised for her unusually fine organizing ability and interest in human needs, and she earned the respect and admiration of every one," said Mr Paganetti recently in recalling this calamity of more than half a century ago. "I can remember it as distinctly as if it were only yesterday. Miss Barton attended personally to all details of gathering food, clothing, seed and farm implements, and raising money to rehabilitate the helpless Thumb district."

There remains little doubt of the completeness of destruction. Clara Barton herself briefly summarized the stricken area as follows: "So sweeping has been the destruction that there is not food enough left in its wake for a rabbit to eat, and indeed there is no rabbit if there were food."

As soon as this disaster was made known to Clara Barton she issued an appeal for help. Already there had been organized a single unit of the Red Cross at Dansville, New York. Clara Barton called this unit into action. Rochester and Syracuse were the first two cities to respond. Contributions of \$3,000 were placed immediately at her disposal. Miss Barton's home became a center of activity and a depot for the packing and shipping of supplies.

Recalls Fires

Mrs McCully vividly recalls the fires of 1871 and 1881, from which she so narrowly escaped.

The summer of 1871 had been unusually hot and dry. There had been only scattered showers, and in some places not a drop of rain had fallen for several months. Michigan then was enjoying its most prosperous era of pine lumbering. Forests were being felled, and cleared ground was strewn with huge piles of lumber awaiting transport to market. Due to the drought, frequent brush fires raged in the clearings. Ordinarily, the damage was small.

While Michigan residents were reading the first startling news of the disastrous fire which swept Chicago in October 1871, and were planning to send relief to the sufferers, word of forest fires in their own state reached them. Fanned by a hot wind which at times reached cyclone proportions, the blaze swept across the state overnight, wiping out everything in its wide path. While the forest fire stretched its tongue across the state, it seemed to work its greatest havoc as it approached Lake Huron. In a tract at least forty miles square, scarcely a vestige of life was left.

In the fall of 1881, almost exactly ten years later, a second fire swept through four counties, covering a considerable

part of the region which suffered so severely before. Weather conditions were strikingly similar. The summer of 1881 was excessively dry; all vegetation was parched and withered, streams and swamps were dried up, and in the pine lumbering district the brush piles, windfalls, and slashings were powder-dry. The great fires heaped up windfalls to which the settlers added the slashings of cut timber. In the early days of the hot, dry August, forest fires were burning in almost every township of the four counties of Tuscola, Lapeer, Huron, and Sanilac. This was not unusual. Farmers had been accustomed to burning brush and rubbish in this way, and under ordinary conditions it was not unsafe. However, on Monday, September 5, a fierce gale from the southwest sprang up and caught a thousand of these small fires at their height.

Rages for Three Days

For three days the conflagration raged with the violence of that ten years before, and with even more disastrous results, because by then there was a greatly increased population and more valuable improvements than formerly. The wind blew with such force as to uproot large forest trees and lift the roofs from buildings. At the same time the

temperature outside the fire-swept district was 100 degrees and upward in the shade. Under these conditions the suffering of those exposed to the fires was appalling. Men, women, and children were blocked without escape and burned while they were in flight along the public roads. The air was so thick with blinding smoke that day turned into night. Flaming balls of punk fell in the villages and fields, and new fires would burst forth on every side.

Shore Littered

Some of the refugees were lifted from the ground by the strong wind and were caught by the flames as they fell. Some saved their lives by scooping holes in the ground and burying their faces to escape inhaling the stifling air; others found refuge in wells, where they clung to the walls with their fingers and toes. Some hid themselves in cisterns while the clothing was burning from their backs and the flesh was blistered. Many of those who escaped with their lives were permanently crippled or disfigured. Some took refuge in the lake waters, wading out until only their heads were above water, but even here some were suffocated by the intense heat, the smoke and flying debris. Domestic animals and wildlife, herded together by instinct, died by the thousands.

From Port Huron Times-Herald

Disastrous Fire Swept Thumb Half Century Ago, 300 Burned

Older residents of the Thumb district, especially those of Sanilac and Huron counties, today recall the great conflagration which, half a century ago, devastated the countryside, burning to death nearly 300 Thumb residents, a large number of cattle, all flour mills of the district and millions of dollars worth of other property.

Residents of the burned area, young men and women in those days, who escaped the horrors of those fast sweeping miles of flames which ravished Sanilac, Huron and parts of Lapeer, St. Clair and Tuscola counties say the suffering was indescribable.

The fires of 1881, which laid waste whole communities in their paths, are believed by them to have been even greater, and worked greater hardships on the district, than the catastrophic fires which leveled the forests of the Thumb in 1871, which also laid waste thousands of acres of virgin timberland.

Whole families perished while attempting to escape the flames. Some sought refuge in the waters of Lake Huron, others in improvised cellars, over which planks and wet blankets were thrown, and others made futile attempts to flee the scorching flames with horses and buggies.

The year of the "great fire" was also the year of the great Thumb drought, when lack of rain for months made timberlands and underbrush as dry as tinder, permitting the flames to sweep unhindered mile after mile on the wings of strong winds.

The suffering of the survivors, the horrors of dying men, women and children and the need for aid attracted the state government at Lansing and the entire nation, which quickly answered the appeals for money, food and clothing.

Witness Describes Fire

The first news from a witness of the catastrophe to reach Port Huron, was brought by Jacob Springer, who was engaged in the clothing business at Minden, Sanilac County. He arrived in Port Huron on the steamer Ward, Sept. 7, two days after the worst of the fires had taken place. In an interview in the Port Huron Daily Times of Sept. 7, 1881, Mr Springer states: "At 11 a.m. Monday dense volumes of smoke began to roll over the village (Minden) and at noon it was as dark as night, lamps were lighted and men went about the streets with lanterns.

"From that time until Tuesday morning, the light of the sun was entirely obscured. The citizens of Minden fought the fire to the best of their ability.

"Some buildings in Minden were destroyed but the P. H. & N. W. railroad station was saved. West of Minden, for some miles, nearly everything was destroyed. The roof of a Mrs Stitcher's house was blown off by a gale before the fire struck it.

"The village of Charleston, formerly called Cato, in

Delaware Township, consisting of 21 buildings, was entirely consumed within 20 minutes after the fire reached it, not even a fence post being left. At this place an old man named Henry Cole, refused to leave his place and was burned in it."

Port Huron responded quickly to the calls for relief, and in the evening of the same day the first news was received, Sept. 7, Mayor Carleton called a meeting that night of civic-minded and charitably inclined citizens in Harder's hall.

Fund Raised Here

After a formal written appeal from citizens of Minden had been presented by George McDonald and endorsed by the meeting, a resolution instructing the mayor to appoint a relief committee with himself as chairman, was unanimously adopted. A subscription list was started and within a few minutes \$700 was collected. The list containing such prominent names as O. D. Conger, J. P. Sanborn, Casler and Co., William Hartuff and many others.

This "central relief committee" sent an appeal to the "people of the United States," telling of the "appalling disaster that has fallen upon a large portion of the counties of Huron and Sanilac, with some adjacent territory, a section of country recently covered with forests and occupied by nearly 50,000 people, largely recent settlers, and either poor or in very moderate circumstances."

The distress immediately following the fire is pictured in the following paragraphs of the appeal, published in The Port Huron Daily Times Sept. 7: "In the whole of this section there has been but little rain during the past two months and everything was parched and dry, when, on Monday, Sept. 5, a hurricane swept over it, carrying with it a sheet of flame that hardly anything could withstand."

We have reports already of over 200 persons burned to death, many of them by the roadside or in the fields, while seeking places of safety, and it is probable that twice this number have perished. We also have reports from 20 or more townships in which scarcely a house, barn or supplies of any kind are left, and thousands of people are destitute and helpless."

The catastrophe was the greatest of its kind in Michigan annals, in the toll it took of human lives and property.

Governor Tells of Destruction

Its magnitude is depicted in the message to the state legislature which Gov. David H. Jerome convened in special session in February, 1882, to vote relief for the fire sufferers.

His story follows:

"A district covering portions of Huron, Sanilac, Tuscola, Lapeer and St. Clair counties was widely devastated September last by forest fires, the property of 3,231 families was destroyed and 14,438 persons made dependent on public aid. In this calamity 1,531 dwellings were consumed, together

with 1,480 barns, hundreds of miles of fences, domestic animals in great numbers and vast quantities of household furniture, clothing, and agricultural implements with accumulated stores of food. The losses of those who have asked and received aid, as shown by sworn appraisals, amounted to \$2,346,962, an average of \$726 for each family.

Families Destitute

"To add to the terrible aspects of these dreadful misfortunes nearly 300 human beings perished by suffocation and burning. No reference is made in this estimate to the losses of those who have neither asked nor required assistance, which is known to have been of great magnitudes, nor to those of a public nature, among which were 51 schoolhouses and large numbers of churches and highway bridges.

"The destruction thus wrought left men, women and children destitute of food, clothing and shelter. It covered a territory of more than 1,800 square miles and in the progress of its ravages swept the entire district from within two or four hours after it began. No time was given to save even household treasures. With a furious wind came smoke and darkness followed quickly by intense heat which nothing could withstand. The wonder is not that so many perished as that so many escaped."

\$600,000 Contributed

The legislature voted \$250,000 for the relief of the fire sufferers. This sum, however, was much less than was raised by voluntary contributions. A state relief commission, commissions in Port Huron, Detroit and other large cities and aid from other states brought the total cash contributions to \$623,386.89. Contributions of food, clothing and other necessities made the grand total about \$1,000,000. Gov. Jerome estimated. Josiah W. Begole, Flint lumberman, was prominent in raising funds for the sufferers, and wrote a letter early in the drive, authorizing the relief committee to draw on him for money, no limit named.

While hurried plans for relief were in progress everywhere, new stories of the disaster continued to come from many points in the Thumb as refugees struggled into Port Huron. A correspondent of the old Detroit Post & Tribune, writing from Sandusky, gave the following graphic account:

"I have just returned from a trip through the burned area and a description of the sights I saw would make the reader's blood turn cold. In many instances men, women and children were found lying on their faces in the road just where they had fallen when overtaken by the fire, the children lying on logs where they had clambered for safety.

"There was no finding each other when once separated. Many took refuge in wells and root houses, thinking to escape, but in almost every instance they were suffocated.

16 Die Near Deckerville

"The details of the disaster in Huron County are as bad as here. I believe that when all returns are in, 1,000 persons will be found to have perished in the flames.

"Forester Township will turn out Thursday to bury dead cattle, sheep and horses, the stench from which is unbearable. Rev W. F. Allington found 16 dead bodies near Deckerville. There are only five buildings left between that place and Minden. John Flytewager's family, seven children and wife, were all burned together in Paris Township, with Morris Clifford, wife and child. A man and woman are lying dead in the road between Donner's mill and Tyre. Two of the Wieenpack's family are not expected to live. Paine, of Ubly, was burned to death. Fifteen families were burned in Moore and Argyle. Five hundred families are reported at Minden to have been burned out."

Another extract from the Port Huron Daily Times of Sept. 7, 1881, gives an idea of the magnitude of the fire. "Bad Axe is all consumed but the courthouse, Verona Hills together with Ubly, and the country are all swept clear, hardly a building left. Downton's has no chance to escape. Tyre is completely destroyed and also Deckerville —."

An example of the manner in which Port Huron responded is seen in other extracts from the Daily Times: "In Port Huron's \$2,000 more has been already subscribed, and additional contributions are constantly pouring in."

"The following is a list of supplies shipped from Port Huron this morning: 17 barrels of flour, 350 loaves of bread, 592 shoulders, 127 hams, three barrels of pork, 42 boxes of clothing and general merchandise."

Bad Fire in 1871

Fire also swept the Thumb district in the fall of 1871. It started in the east side of Tuscola County and swept across Sanilac and the southern part of Huron County to Lake Huron, leaving behind smoldering villages, farm buildings and choice timber.

The fire started Sunday night, Oct. 8, under perfect conditions. The autumn of 1871 was unusually parched from the drought, forming a perfect setting for the conflagration.

Farmers of the district, harvest past, turned their attention to ridding their farms of unsightly brush and weeds. Bonfires were set to obliterate the brush piles.

Blaze Spreads

Chips and fragments of burning stumps and brush piles carried on the wind, started new fires until large areas were ignited. The fire began its eastward course and gained momentum as it progressed. Residents were wholly un-

prepared for its arrival, as it traveled more rapidly than the news of its movement.

Villagers went to bed as usual, to be awakened at midnight by the cry of fire. Mad scrambles ensued as hundreds of panic-stricken dwellers began their flight before the flames or took to the wells. Aghast, they watched thousands of dollars worth of property vanish in smoke. Savings of many years were wiped out in a few hours.

Stand In Lake

Persons living near the lake hastened to the water, in which they stood for hours waiting for the fire to abate. Many heroic rescues were enacted. Many who sought to save the lives of others sacrificed their own when surrounded by the fire.

Losses to private property reached hundreds of thousands of dollars. Entire villages were wiped out and practically every farmer of the district suffered from the fire. Sanilac, Tuscola and Huron counties suffered most. The district was not thickly settled, excepting along the lakeshore, or the loss of life would have been greater.

Highways were left in terrible condition by falling trees and burned bridges which made passage after the fire almost impossible. Relief workers had to cut their way through to the distressed inhabitants.

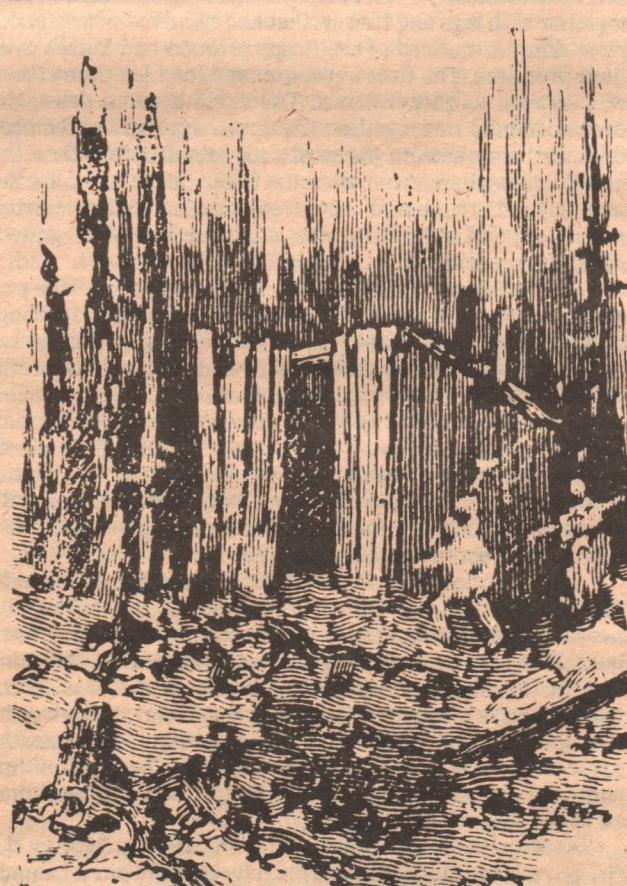
"The roads were terrible, we had ax-men to cut our way through," a relief worker says in a historical article: "As near as I could find out, not one house in 10 was standing. The people were huddled into the houses that remained, some with as many as 17 families in them. Many were sick or burned, with little children lying around on the floors.

Suffering Indescribable

"I looked into one house myself. On the floor was a woman with both feet burned to a crisp. She had a nursing baby by her. Her complaint was she was sorry her child was so dirty, but she had no change of clothing for it and no soap to wash it. She was on a pile of pea straw with an old bed-tick over her. Her clothing was burned, as was her baby's. We found a man and his seven children living in a cellar, nibbling new turnips."

Suffering during the days of the fire was dreadful. Children were buried in the ground or put in wells. One family lived on a dock several days without water or food. Some were blinded by the smoke and lost their way while attempting to escape. Communication was cut-off and sufferers were obliged to wait until relief reached them, perhaps several days after the fire.

Hugh McKenzie, member of the board of supervisors of Sanilac County, said: "On Saturday before I left my home in Austin to attend a regular session of the board of supervisors in Lexington. I was somewhat uneasy as the probability that running fires would do some damage was fixed if the wind should continue to blow. On Monday we organized the board and did some work, but on Tuesday, soon after the roll call, we adjourned.



IMPROVISING A HOME

We were soon on our journey homeward. After 28 miles of fairly decent travel, we reached the burned area. We had to climb over logs and around burning bridges and culverts.

"We could gain no information from the survivors about the country ahead. They said that everything was burned out. Roads were so blocked with falling timbers that the sufferers could get out and relief workers could not penetrate in to them. We worked hours cutting our way through the mess. We had traveled 48 miles and had 10 more to go and our wives and children were constantly on our minds.

"I found my family safe, although very much over-worked. 'Who told you about us?' they questioned, not realizing that the fire was so wide-spread.

At Forestville, the people were engaged fighting fire on one side of the village when it rushed in like a tornado on the other side and almost in the twinkling of an eye the village was in flames, driving the inhabitants to the beach for shelter. The fire swept down to the shore, driving persons into the lake in boats. The water was rough and it was a case of risking their lives by drowning on one side or returning to the land that was burning like a furnace."

Few houses were left in Forestville and the damage was roughly placed at \$125,000.

Jacob Buel, who lived in Delaware Township, told the following story of that district:

Escape In Wagon

"After fighting the fire for two hours, we saw it was useless. We loaded the family into a lumberwagon and, wrapped in blankets we started for the mill race about half a mile away. We drove rapidly over the rough roads and succeeded in reaching the race before the wagon caught fire. The family was placed in the race and blankets thrown over them. By keeping the blankets wet, we escaped with minor burns. A short distance from where we were, I found an old lady who had plunged into the race headlong, blinded by the fire. Her feet were burned off. There had been but little clearing here and the fire swept along without any obstruction."

At White Rock the loss was appalling. The fire struck the village about midnight. Residents expected the danger and were somewhat prepared. They ran down to the beach to the water.

It enveloped the entire village in flames within a short time. Provisions and other goods had been moved to the water-edge by persons preparing for the fire. One man drove his wagon, containing his family, into the lake. The fire burned the spokes of the wagon wheels. A mother was forced to stand in the water several hours with a small baby to save herself and child from the flames.

At Gunning's mill, people huddled together in a hole in a sandbank which had been excavated to obtain sand for building purposes. In Paris Township, Huron County, a group of persons were crowded into the Catholic church without food or bedding and scantily clothed. Only three houses were burned in Deckerville. Its escape was described as "miraculous."

Minden Spared

In Marion Township the fire was not so destructive because of the large areas of clearings. Minden was spared, although surrounded by flames for two days. The fire swept over Buel and Elk Townships, burning the buildings and crops of the settlers. Lamotte Township suffered serious timber losses.

The fire was slow in reaching Lexington. Tuesday morning, Oct. 10, a strong south wind started the fire moving from a patch of stumps and old trees, south of the village. The alarm was sounded and the whole village turned out to fight the flames. It seemed for a time that their efforts would be in vain but a heavy rain helped them to get the fire under control.

A citizens' meeting was called and the president of the village took immediate action to aid the suffering and a committee was appointed to receive subscriptions. The awful truth of the extent of the fire began to spread and immediately relief was necessary. The fair scheduled for Oct. 10-11 was postponed.

Lexington escaped the forest fire but building after building was fired by incendiaries. The damage totaled \$40,000 or \$50,000. The first fire was set Oct. 17 at supper time. Fires each night followed until the person or persons responsible either left town or thought it best to cease operations.

District Recovers Quickly

The aid furnished from Port Huron, Detroit, the state of Michigan and the nation as a whole, helped the Thumb to recover quickly from the effects of the great disaster.

Stripped of practically all their earthly goods, excepting lands, hundreds of discouraged settlers faced the winter months without provisions or shelter. Some gathered their stock and other belongings and moved out. Those who chose to stay, faced virtual starvation.

While the return to normal conditions required years in some cases, farmers and businessmen worked ceaselessly to rebuild their lost fortunes and place themselves and their families in conditions similar to the time before the fires devastated the countryside.

The Thumb has fully recovered. The fires of 1871 and 1881 are but dim memories and the district is a thriving dairy and farming area.

Flames Swept County Just Fifty Years Ago

(On the occasion of her 45th wedding anniversary Mrs Winnie Chipman Walker, editor of the Unionville Crescent and former resident of Bad Axe, had her attention called to the terrible fire of '81, the anniversary of which is the same as that of her marriage.

When these events were recalled she was reminded of the old days in the town of her birth, Bad Axe. She writes below in an entertaining fashion some of the incidents of the great fire. — Ed.)

by WINNIE CHIPMAN-WALKER

Saturday, September 5, 1931, marked the 50th anniversary of the fire which laid Bad Axe in ashes, Monday afternoon, Sept. 5, 1881, but 21 buildings, large and small, remained standing after the dreadful afternoon of flame and smoke.

My mother, Mrs Chipman, and myself and sister, Gale, were saved with more than a hundred others in the dear old courthouse. My father was in Harbor Beach, then Sand Beach, to try a suit. At 1:30 the case was dismissed because of the darkness. People lighted lanterns with which to light the way along the street. My father and Rev Vertican, pastor of the Bad Axe Presbyterian Church, went to the harbor and sat on a stone pier that was under construction for the breakwater and there consoled one another.

Miss Mary Morgan, accompanied by her brother, Will, had gone to Sand Beach that morning where she was to teach. The school was dismissed a few moments after calling to order after dinner, because of darkness.

Saved Law Books

Attorney Wm. T. Bope had gone to Paris to attend a suit. Using a small cart I saved my father's law books, which were in an office used also by Lawyer James Skinner, that stood on the Skinner block. After father's books had been safely stored in the vault of the register of deeds (my mother had secured the consent of Mr Carl Heisterman, the county register of deeds, to put them there). I immediately went to Mr Bope's office to save his books. Those I placed in the judge of probate's office. For two nights they served as my bed.

How well do I remember all the events of that memorable day. How the men tried to quiet the fears of the women and although having barrels placed on the roofs of the two hotels, and on the platforms in front of their stores and filled with water, the owners would say "We are just doing this to be on the safe side, I don't think there is any danger."

Hay Spread Flames

At one o'clock a sudden gust of wind quickened the blaze west of town which had been quietly eating its way from the McDowell neighborhood, along through the underbrush and dry grass on the south side of the road. The fire ignited a haystack at Mrs Elvin's at the extreme west end of town. In a moment the great fire of 1881 was on for Bad Axe. Armsful of blazing hay were carried by the breeze, each moment growing stronger, across the town. One lodged in the belfry of the Baptist church, another was drawn into the haymow of the Cole barn, on our street, Hanselman. In a half dozen places simultaneously, buildings burst into flames.

At 11:30 mother had gone to Mr Cary's home to see Mr Heisterman about putting the law library in the vault. The family was seated at the dinner table. Mr Cary laughed at my mother's fears that a 36 cord of hardwood would be apt to burn her home. Jokingly, Mr Cary remarked, "I have always envied 'Chip' his woodpile, I'll send a dray over after dinner to get the wood." With tears streaming down her face, mother said, "Mr Cary, I wish you had every stick of that wood." Mrs Cary never cleared the dinner table, the fire was on, the old courthouse standing on the same block, was on fire.

Ran to Courthouse

People grabbed valises, boilers, tubs, anything they could fill with clothing, precious belongings, etc. The cry, "Run to the courthouse" rang out. Terror stricken women and children ran for their lives.

The courthouse yard was fenced. Many a woman and man dropped their trunks, feather bed or bundle of clothing inside of the gate, that they might help their children hustle into the courthouse, the haven of safety. The belongings burned, the families were safe.

During that afternoon of terrible experience, men pumped water from the courthouse pump, fortunately on the east side of the building, until they would drop exhausted and men who were carrying water throwing it onto the sanded wooded surfaces of the building to cool it, would pause long enough to carry in the fainting or smoke blinded men.

The many colors of the fire caused by explosions of chemicals in the drug store, gun powder in the hardware, 36 barrels of Robert Philps' kerosene, were terrifying in the extreme: Red, green, copper, blue, black and purples would follow one another in the colors flashing across from the courthouse.

Watched House Burn

I remember Mrs. C. E. Thompson watching her house burn while standing in the clerk's office. Mr Thompson was one of the county officers.

I recall hearing Mrs William Rapson tell how near her child came to burning. The Rapson brothers owned the "old courthouse." When the children were told to "run to the courthouse" they, of course, thought of their courthouse, and ran into the one across the street. It wasn't easy to find them, as they ran from room to room in their fright.

I remember Mr Sep Irwin coming in at the front door of the courthouse carrying some small grips. In a loud voice he cried, "Is my wife here?" "No," came an answer. "She went east with Dr Deady."

Doctor Deady had a gig. He started east sharing the gig with his landlady. Farther down the street, Mrs Irwin relieved Mrs Erehenberg of her infant child, a few months old, and took it with her.

Flames Leaped 100 Feet

Through flames leaping nearly a hundred feet in the air, the Doctor drove towards Verona. Thirty-six of the refugees reached "Billy" Thompson's place east of town, I think a mile and a half or two miles. There the men dug a trench, put the women and children into it, threw wet strips of rag carpet

over all. Mr Irwin and Nettie (Mrs Morgan) reached the Thompson farm.

On our street was the Baptist and Methodist Protestant churches; Rev Bettes, the M.E. pastor's home (later the location of my mother's late home), George Hilton's residence and Cole's barn. Mr Strudwick's and my father's houses were left standing with our chicken coop in that part of town.

I remember several thought it was the end of the world, and that when the smoke would clear away the star of Bethlehem would appear.

Father walked nearly all the way home from Sand Beach. He carried a ham and a 25 pound sack of crackers, expecting many to be hungry, but McLean's, Odell and Collins' and the Morgan stores were still standing.

I hope to attend the Pioneer Picnic at Caseville, Labor Day. I wish that the survivors of the 1881 fire in Bad Axe might have a reunion. I know there are not many. Mr Walker and myself are celebrating the 45th anniversary of our wedding in Bad Axe, Sept. 1, 1886, today.

With best regards and wishes to old friends, I am yours truly,

Winnie Chipman-Walker

From The Minden City Herald

The Big Fire Of 1871 That Hit The Thumb

We have been requested by a number of our readers to print the story of the fire of 1871, as taken from the files of the Herald. A lot of our readers will recall this big fire, and also the fire of 1882 which will be published later.

A sky of flame, of smoke a heavenly, the earth a mass of burning coals, the mighty trees, all works of man between, and living things trembling as a child before a demon in the gale! Such is a forest fire. To those who have seen the picture needs no painting. A simple record of the great ordeal is all that can be given here. Beneath the trees a cloak, formed by the dropping twigs and leaves, had been gathering for years, but had not yet returned to its natural dust. The autumn of 1871 was unusually favorable for ridding the ground of this, together with logs and stumps that had stood in the way of the plow. The farmers fired the heaps of wood and leaves over their premises. The fires burned on and for a long time there was no rain to quench them. The earth became drier, the fires gradually ran together, the upward current of the heat drew the dry air from the westward inland rather than the heavy atmosphere from over the lakes, and thus the wind was formed. Chips and fragments carried thither started new fires, and ultimately, the whole surface was ignited, ready for one general conflagration.

On Sunday night, Oct. 8, 1871, the hurricane was ripe and started on its wild career across the land, blowing, burning, killing, devouring. When aroused to the danger, human beings could only stand aghast in awe and wonder, until compelled to flee for refuge. In some places little alarm was felt and people went to bed at night as usual, to be aroused at midnight by the fearful cry of fire, that called some to see their earthly treasures vanish into smoke and ashes, saving themselves almost by a miracle while others choked with flame and smoke, left their charred bones alone to tell their friends where and how they died!

The counties that suffered most from the fires were Sanilac, Tuscola and Huron. The extent of the losses can never be known. Thousands of acres of valuable pine were burned or rendered worthless. It was fortunate at this time that the county over which the tornado passed was not so thickly settled, except along the lake shore; otherwise the loss of human life would have been appalling. As it was, the greater loss was that of property and pine. The extent of this can never be accurately known, and the record at best must be incomplete.

At Forestville the people were engaged in fighting the fire on one side of the village, when it rushed in like a tornado from the other side, and almost "in the twinkling of an eye" the village was in flames and the citizens were compelled to seek shelter on the beach or in the water, or in any place

which offered safety. The storm of fires swept over the bank, grasping everything it could reach, to feed itself upon. Mrs Green, who was an invalid, had to be carried out of the burning house and provided with shelter in a hole in the bank. Henry L. Adams, who kept the Forest House, got his family into a boat on the beach and covered them over with wet blankets; but, even in this situation, Mrs Adams' shawl was burned through until it looked as though it had been laid on a bed of ashes. The people sought a refuge in boats or anything else they could reach, and managed to save their lives by covering themselves with wet blankets.

Mrs Jacob Buel, who at that time lived in Delaware, relates the following:

"Mrs F. Buschkowski, my daughter was at that time in Paris Township. They were living over store, and were burned out, losing all their property. Mrs Buschkowski's clothes were burned completely off. After the fire had raged some hours, Buschkowski saw the uselessness of attempting further resistance, and loading a number of woolen blankets into the wagon, he started a mill race which had been begun about a half mile from the store, and by rapid driving succeeded in gaining the race before the wagon took fire. The family was snugly placed in the race and blankets thrown over them, and by keeping these wet profusely they succeeded in escaping by the loss of only the clothes they wore. A little further up an old lady was found who had plunged headlong into the race, blinded by the fire. When she was found her feet were burned off! There had been but little clearing done as yet, and the fire swept along over that portion of the county without any obstruction.

Captain Bridenbach, living two miles below Forestville, lost his barn and sheds, and the family saw the flames around the house so close and threatening that they fled to the lake to save their lives, coming back to their home the next morning to find the house uninjured. It had taken fire at one corner, but the flames went out and the house stood. Nearly all the buildings four miles south on the shore were burned, and how many in the woods west has never been known. In half an hour Forestville was in ruins — every building but one small saloon; and both docks crowded with valuable goods, lumber and shingles being in ashes. Most of the citizens lost everything they had. The following is a partial list of the sufferers, with the estimated loss of each so far as could be learned: Issac Green, \$20,000; Jacob Buel, \$15,000; William Canham, \$5,000; Jos. Parkinson, \$3,000; Dr Johnson, \$2,000; J. Law, \$1,000; H. L. Adams, \$1,000; P. Riecrath, \$1,000; and others probably to the amount of \$75,000 and perhaps much more.

The people of White Rock had apprehended some danger to their schoolhouse and watched it part of the night. About midnight the storm came. The wind blew a perfect hurricane, unroofing buildings and enveloping the whole village in a sheet of flame. Men, women and children jumped from their beds, snatched what few valuables they could gather and rushed over the bank, pell-mell down into the lake and out on the dock while the flames and smoke poured over their heads, scorching them so horribly that the cold water of the lake was regarded as a welcome relief. The lake was so rough that women and children were thrown back upon the beach and obliged to risk death by drowning to be saved from death by fire. Some crowded on the dock and tore up planks and fought the fire from there and thus saved part of the dock and provisions in the warehouse. Mr Corbett and wife rushed out to save themselves, but became separated. She went one way and was saved, but he went another way and was never heard from again!

Dr Johnson and his family at White Rock were driven into the water with the rest, where they remained for hours battling with the flames and water, Mrs Johnson's shawl being burned off from her head! One family, consisting of an old father and mother and two sons, started for the shore, which was some distance. It became apparent that the old couple could never get through. So the sons dug a hole in the ground and placed the father and mother carefully in, giving them a chance to breathe and left them. They were saved. The gale was so fierce that before the fire reached the salt block at White Rock the roof was lifted bodily and carried some distance. One man ran his wagon into the lake, covered his family with wet blankets and shawls, and the fire burned the spokes of the wheels to the water's edge! One woman with a child only two days old was obliged to stand in the water for hours to save herself and her babe from the flames!

In the township of Paris the people were crowded together at the Catholic church, without food except meat, and no bedding, and scantily clothed.

In Marion Township the fire was not so dreadful, owing to the large clearings and cultivated fields, but some families were entirely cleaned out, while all suffered more or less from the loss of barns and crops. Mr Wright lost everything but his house. At Deckerville, only three houses were burned, but all the lumber sleighs and much loose valuable property was destroyed.

Minden City was spared from the devouring element which raged on every side. The whole country round about was burned: houses, horses and human lives were not spared. There were not provisions left in the whole country to feed the people any length of time, and numbers suffered for the necessities of life.

The fires had travelled over a goodly portion of Buel and Elk, burning the buildings and crops of the settlers. The lumber shanties of Mr B. Mills with all their contents of hay, grain, horses and sleighs, were totally destroyed. Numerous instances of poor families of losing all their crops were reported. One woman, Mrs Perkins, living a distance from other settlers in the northwest part of Elk, was alone with her children for nearly two days, fighting the fire that attacked her premises, and had not a drop of water within a mile. When visited by neighbors after the fire, she was found blind and exhausted, her home saved, but her outbuildings, which contained her hay for her stock and the little store of potatoes, in ashes. The bridges and crossings in swamps were burned out, so that teams could not pass with loads west of Buel.

In a report to the Detroit Relief Commission Oct. 15, 1871, Mr J. W. Bartlett, states the following:

"I am on my way down, and will try to give an account of my stewardship. At White Rock we loaded two teams and started inland, stopped overnight at Mr Campbell's shingle mill, eight and one-half miles from the shore, and in the morning pushed through to Joseph Buschowski's mill 18 miles from the lake. The roads were terrible. We had three ax-men to cut the way through. The bridge was burned and we had to take the fields, going more than 25 miles to make 18. We got a large box, six bundles of clothing, six barrels of flour, two barrels of pork, and a box of bread into the burnt districts; and it was needed. As near as I could find out, not one house in ten is standing. In some thickly settled parts every house was burned for five miles. The people are huddled in the houses that remain — sick and burned, with little children lying around on the floors. I looked into one house myself. On the floor was a poor woman with both feet burned to a crisp. She had a nursing baby by her. Her complaint was that she was sorry her child was so dirty, as she had no change of clothes for it, and no soap to wash it. She lay on a pile of pea-straw, with an old bed tick on her. Her clothing was burned, as also was her baby's. There were a dozen or more children there and several women."

"The suffering during the days of the fire was terrible. Children were buried in the ground or put into wells. One family of my acquaintance, men, women and children, got onto a dock and lay without a drink of water for days. Many are blind for life. We found a committee, consisting of Joseph Buschowski and a Polish man with an unpronounceable name. They were to see to a proper disposition of whatever was sent. The best place to land was White Rock as it was

nearer, but the dock was bad. Things had to be taken off in boats. Mr Thompson, sent up to take charge of the dock, and the teamster, J. Stoner, worked like a buck, driving the team out for me over the worst road I ever seen. The people seem to try their best to help each other, and one of the strangest cases of honesty I ever saw happened here. An ox team followed us with 50 blankets, six beds, clothing, flour, etc. Not a thing was pilfered or begged on the road, but all was brought to me, though the blankets were worth more than gold.

One team, from Smith, at Forester, reached Paris before ours. We went ten miles further inland. When we got out to the road, we met four teams from Sand Beach who had been three days with about 20 men cutting through, under the charge of Richard Criedson of Port Austin, Chairman of the County Relief Committee. I then went through to Minden, where the fire had been very serious, but not to the extent further north. I found there a representative of a Detroit house relieving the poor suffering people by buying up their stock at \$3 to \$4 per head, to drive out. He was relieving want and making money at the same time. He gave his card and that of the firm.

"I then went to Cato, to Jacob Buel's, whose people had fought fire successfully, and saved the mill and building. From there Mr Buel took me to Richmondville, where I found T. Luce, fighting fire, relieving the suffering, and fighting sharks, who make a pretense of suffereing to get money. He had been imposed upon a little but he says, when he gets his place safe for a day, those who imposed upon him will pay back, or be prosecuted for obtaining goods under false pretense. I took the boat there and came up to White Rock, where we took on board one man dreadfully burned and one or two sick people with destitute families. At Rock Falls we received another consignment of unfortunates.

"Telegraphed to send no more meat, as there is more than enough. They have plenty of cattle and hogs, and if they can get salt and barrels before the cattle starve, they will save meat enough. Axes with helvles are wanted and working utensils, needles, thread, soap and combs; for they are the dirtiest people I ever saw, no one having a change of clothing or soap to wash with. I have been treated with the utmost kindness by everyone. No one would take pay. Teams were at my disposal everywhere, though I walked most of the way, the roads being bad."

The Board of Supervisors were in session at Lexington, but hastily adjourned, and the members hastened away to their respective homes, expecting to find nothing but ashes of their firesides, and the charred bodies of their loved ones. The experience of Mr Hugh McKenzie in the following paragraphs, may well represent the trials of these men:

"On Saturday, before I left my home in Austin to attend a regular session of the Board of Supervisors, to be held at Lexington, Oct. 9, 1871, I was somewhat uneasy, as to the probability that running fires would do some damage if the wind continued blow. On Monday we organized the Board and did some work; but on Tuesday, soon after the roll call, I said to Alison Goodrick, one of the oldest members, that I was so uneasy about home that I could not content myself to stay and work. He replied that he himself was also afraid to stay any longer; and soon afterward he offered a resolution to adjourn, which was carried about half past ten a.m.

"As we were walking toward the hotel, to prepare for our return home, our attention was called to a crowd of people coming up from the dock, which did not fail to arouse still more feeling of anxiety for friends at home. They were a portion of the homeless people taken by a steamboat from White Rock, and many of the number were very destitute of clothing. I remember of only one expression that was made by John S. Thompson. In answer to some inquirer, he said that "it looked as if hell had poured its flames upon them!"

"We were soon on our way homeward, a distance of 58 miles to drive as best we could. I had my horses and lumber wagon. In company with me was Robt. Cleland of Greenleaf, Frank Pacha of Minden, and Robert Wilson of Evergreen. Mr Wilson rode his mule until we reached the burnt district. Here he found it necessary, owing to the mulishness of the animal, to fall back and tie it with a strong rope behind the wagon. The first 28 miles of the roads were clear except one bridge. There we were forced to climb over logs and around burning bridges and culverts the best we could. The night seemed to me the darkest that could be, except when we were lighted by the burning timber.

"Through the kindness of Mr Decker at Deckerville, I obtained an ax, which we freely used on many occasions before daylight. We arrived at Minden soon after midnight and called at John Donlan's Hotel. He and Andrew W. O'Keefe were up. Mr O'Keefe said to me that all he had left was on his back, and many others of his Forestville friends barely saved their lives.

"We could not gain any information about the people further west, only the report that they were all burned out. We continued onward to Tyre, and when we got there we found numbers of the people of that neighborhood occupying the floor of one log house that was saved. At this point Frank Pasha left us and did not stop to say good-bye, boys. When he got to his family he had no home left. The only information that we could get was the people were all burnt out, and that

the roads were so blocked with fallen timber that the people could not come out. The truth of the last statement was soon verified to us, as within the next hundred rods south from there we had to begin cutting our way through. At this point our nerves were fully put to the test, such as cannot be forgotten as long as we are allowed to reflect upon it. It was about three o'clock in the morning and so dark that we could scarcely see our way. The logs and treetops seemed to the piled up in the road to such an extent that any further advance with team seemed impossible.

"We then had to consult as to what could be done with the team. We had driven them about 48 miles, and had still ten miles to go. If we succeeded in bringing them through we could not find a place to leave them. I said to Robert Cleland that I would begin cutting a hole through and see about the extent of the jam, to which he agreed; so I began to cut as best I could, and must say that the prospects were not in any way flattering. Soon Cleland returned with brighter hopes. He said if we could get through the first jam of timber, that the others, so far as he had seen, would not be so bad, and thought that we could reach Patton's clearing. There we could possibly find someplace free from fire, where we could leave the team.

"So we continued on our way through for about two hours, when we succeeded in reaching the Patton clearing. Here we found our way clear through the fields, but could not find any buildings or people left; consequently we concluded to take the team as far as we could. This clearing enabled us to avoid the heaviest jams in the way, although at the west end we were compelled to cut through another jam. About that time daylight relieved us to a certain extent, and our way was made easier. Soon after we arrived at the old home of the Clelands, which was safe and out of danger. I alighted from the wagon, told Robert to take the horses and keep them until called for. Then I made the other four and a half miles as fast as I could. Wilson mounted his mule and the race began. He led me some distance while the road was clear — for the first mile and a half; then there was another mile of timber to make, in which I passed him. There we parted for the morning.

"On arriving at Mr Jordon's, (now Cumber), I found that they had saved their home. Mr Bradshaw's barn was burnt, and also John Welton's house and the schoolhouse. From there I had a mile and a half of bush road to travel to get home, and the nearer I got the more anxious and uneasy I became to find my wife and two children, they being constantly on my mind. As I approached the clearing I took the shortest way for the house, which I could not see on account of the smoke until I was so near that I could have called to my family.

The fire was somewhat slow in reaching Lexington, owing to the clearings and its removal from the interior; but on Tuesday morning, Oct. 10th, the fierce southwest wind blew the fire into the field of Mr Pack, where there were many stumps and old trees, and it kept on toward the village with resistless fury. The alarm was soon sounded, and the whole population was at once on the spot, fighting the demon with all the energy they possessed, but all to no avail. No power seemed adequate to stay its progress. The homes of the people were at its mercy, and in a few hours would soon be in ashes. The village lay helpless, with her citizens in suspense, when it seemed that Providence interposed and a bountiful rain came down in time to place the fire under control, causing all hearts to swell with gratitude.

In the afternoon the steamer, "Huron", arrived laden with helpless and ruined fugitives, and a sadder sight is not often seen. The whole was one mass of scorched and burned humanity. Hands were burned, feet blistered, faces inflamed with swollen eyes reddened and half out from smoke, and the whole frame of those who were fortunate enough to escape was in utter exhaustion.

This confirmed all rumors that had previously reached the village, and set at naught all surmises that it was "only a little smoke." Business was suspended and everything was thrown into anxious suspense. The awful truth that nearly the whole county has been swept over in a few hours, destroying everything before it, and burning people alive, began to be realized.

A citizens' meeting was called by the President of the village to take immediate action to aid the sufferers, and a committee appointed to receive subscriptions of money and clothing to relieve immediate necessities. The fair, which was to have been held on Tuesday and Wednesday, was adjourned, as everyone who was able was needed at their homes to fight the fire, and could not come forward and make the entries in the books of the fair.

Lexington escaped the first sweep of the fire, but her time of the calamity was soon to come — not from the forest fire, but from the most despicable of all sources, incendiarism. It seems that the heroic and successful efforts of her citizens the previous week had not only been unappreciated, but had actually created an envy somewhere, as men had been overheard to say that "Lexington would get a scorching soon." It was hard to believe this; but all doubt was dissipated when on Tuesday, Oct. 17, 1871, while the people were generally at tea, the alarm was sounded and all rushed into the streets to find the warehouse of Messrs. Potter &

Wixson, in the rear of their store, was on fire, and before anything could be done the combustible material within the building was so ignited as to make vain all hope of saving the building or anything in it. The engine was quickly on the spot, playing on the rear of the store, not more than 20 feet distant, checking the progress of the fire in that direction, and giving rise to the hope that it might be confined to the warehouse, when the water in the old well gave out, and by the time the engine could be shifted to a cistern nearby, the flames had made such progress that the store could not be saved.

The light wind that was blowing carried the flames and sparks directly against Wood's store and the stables a few rods east of the warehouse. For some time the smoke and heat were intense, yet citizens and firemen stood bravely at their posts, feeling that the entire town would be in ashes before morning if the flames were not stopped. Those in the heat of the fire were covered with cloths and drenched with water by others while they fought the fire. Notwithstanding the gigantic efforts of everyone, the fire seemed to go beyond all control. The strength of the men was almost gone, and soon they must stop from exhaustion. Hope was abandoning all hearts, when the heavens opened and a bountiful shower of rain helped to quench the flames. With fresh courage the half-roasted and worn-out people bent their energies anew to their work, and soon had the satisfaction of feeling that the great danger was past. The loss, including buildings and goods, was about \$20,000, partially covered by insurance.

There was but little doubt as to the incendiary character of the fire, and the supply of water being short, teams were put on to fill up the tanks and watchmen stationed to prevent another attempt.

Next evening, the excitement from the fire had somewhat abated, except perhaps the discussion of it when neighbors met, and people were wondering if that were the end, when the dread cries again rang through the streets, and the livery barns attached to the Cadillac House were seen in flames. The fire spread rapidly to a stable west, and from there to the Cadillac barn, thence to Meyer's large wagon shop, and a little dwelling in the rear. Meyer's blacksmith shop next took fire, but was pulled to pieces, and by keeping the adjacent building well watered the fire was stayed. Thus, by working the engineer vigorously, the Cadillac was saved. The buildings burned with fearful rapidity, but the unyielding determination and invincible pluck of the citizens and firemen again prevented the spread. The loss by this fire was about \$10,000, principally falling upon Mr Meyers whose hard-earned savings had come by the hammer and anvil.

As soon as the fire was put out a meeting of the citizens was held, and, though late in the evening was attended by nearly everybody. A strong watch was organized and posted. Thursday morning the streets were filled with teams drawing water and with preparing for the prevention of fire. The excitement began to abate toward noon, but the village was canvassed to ascertain the presence of any suspicious parties.

About noon people had resumed their business again, when another alarm was sounded. The building this time was Nicholas Wolfel's barn and this and Jesse Howey's barn were the only buildings destroyed. The excitement was now intense, and a general suspension of business took place. The wind was blowing strongly from the west, and a fire in the western part of the town could not be controlled. Everybody made a careful search of their premises, and kept a strict watch day and night. Finally a vicious looking boy about 17 years of age was found, who could not give a proper account of himself, and he, with a man similarly conditioned, was arrested, as they were seen in the vicinity of the three fires just previous to the discoveries. The alarm then abated.

Thousands of people were homeless and stripped of every description of personal property. Many were entirely discouraged, and every day many families could be seen passing out of the country with their cattle and what other things they had left from the fire. In the burned districts the former resources of the settler for making a little money while improving his farm were gone. The pine was burned, hemlock bark almost entirely destroyed and the wood gone, in many cases not enough being left for fencing. The food for the stock had been destroyed by the fire, and the mills giving employment to hundreds of men were in ashes. Winter coming on, and the country was destitute.

These were some of the difficulties that stared the burned-out settler in the face. In order to go on with the work of placing his fences and buildings, and prepare for the next year crop, it was necessary for the farmer to have a team; but it was hardly possible to obtain sufficient feed. Many sold portions of their stock at ruinous prices in order to obtain feed for the rest. It is indeed difficult to comprehend the terrible reality in which these people were placed. Their feelings and sufferings can best be set forth by some of the incidents related by those who lost their all.

One illustration is the experience of W. B. Thompson, living west of Forestville. He was an Englishman of energetic character, and had been in the settlement seven years. Said he, "I had my farm in good shape with 100 acres cleared. Having served some time as gardener and also as farmer, I took great pride in having everything neat about me, and raised the best crops in the township. My crop at that time

was fully as good as any I had ever raised, and I had made arrangements for the sale of \$750 worth from my farm, which would have paid off a mortgage I gave to get me a team and have left me with money to spare. I had finished a barn 36x60 and had it in the best of shape for the accommodation of my stock and my garden was the best.

Wm. B. Thompson, living west of Forestville, stated his garden was the best in the township. Trees were beginning to bear. When the gale sprung up there was no fire within a mile of me. I thought I could save the buildings, but the storm was soon upon us. The barn caught, and after fighting the fire for some time, I abandoned it to save the house; but this, too, caught, and in a few minutes the smoke and flames were so thick that I began to look only for my family, when, alas! the next to the youngest was missing. I rushed into the house through the smoke which was suffocating, and groping around found him on the floor by the crib, where he had sunk down too frightened to cry or moan. We then went out into the meadow, but the smoke and fire were so bad that we could find no safe place; so we wandered around through the fields to find the creek, which we finally did. I placed the seven children in a heap and fought the fire from them for several hours, until the wind went down. I could have courage to go ahead, though this is the third time I have been cleaned out in this way. If I were the only one! But my neighbors are all in the same condition."

When a man's entire premises were not burned, the wind was so strong that all his loose possessions were carried off, and many of them blown into the woods and burned. To show the force of the wind Captain Breidenbach, whose house was spared, tells this of his wife: "She was most grieved over the supposed loss of the old clock, which we had since we commenced keeping house. She attempted to carry it away, but the fierce wind snatched it out of her grasp. Next day, when we could get to our house, she found parts of it here and there, and kept putting them together until everything was there but a pendulum. Finally she hit upon a doorknob as a substitute and the clock tolled off its minutes with the old regularity, to the satisfaction of the household. Next day a

neighbor girl came in to show what a pretty thing she had found — it was the missing pendulum.

The losses from this fire can never be known. When the smoke had cleared away, and the people had recovered sufficiently to estimate their losses, an attempt was made to arrive at an approximate value of the destruction. It was found that the property destroyed would amount to \$4,000,000, in very round numbers; but the various itemized records were so misplaced, and in many cases consumed by the fire, that it was calculation of the extent of the calamity. There were also many of the township records destroyed or lost on account of these fires.

The following is a summary of mills and stores burned by this fire in Sanilac and southern part of Huron County:

Gunning's mill and store at Tyre.

Buel's mill and dock at Forestville.

Green's dock and store at Forestville.

F. Buschkowski's mill.

Dumound's mill.

Ludington's mill and store at Verona.

Peck, Jenk & Co., mill, store and dock, Elm Creek.

R. B. Hubbard & Co.'s mill, store and dock, Huron City.

Mill and store, New River.

Canhan's store, Forestville.

Thompson mill (flouring, shingles) salt block, store and dock, White Rock.

Munford's store, White Rock.

Whitcomb's mill, Rock Falls.

Durant's store and dock, Center Harbor.

Stafford, Haywood & Co., mill, dock and tannery, Port Hope.

Joiner's mill, Tyre.

Susalla's shingle mill, Paris.

This is merely a list of mills and stores. Around each were numerous dwellings which shared the same fate.

It is estimated that the dwellings, household goods, clothing, winter's provisions and supplies for stock of were destroyed and with the mills the means to supply food for these.

From The Cass City Chronicle

Fire Works Devastation Fifty-Six Years Ago In Thumb

"We write amid smoke and cinders of the most terribly ruinous fire that ever visited the Huron peninsula of Michigan," said Editor Berry in the first number of the Cass City Enterprise printed 56 years ago, on Sept. 8, 1881. In the article describing the conflagration, he said:

"Ten years ago a conflagration swept through this region leaving in its wake a charred and blackened country, but with all its hideous terrors it was not so terrible in its destruction of property and life as the fire of this week, for the very good reason that there was not so much to destroy.

"At this writing it is utterly impossible to form any intelligent estimate of the amount of damage done. In the sacrifice of human life it is simply overwhelming. From all directions reports of the finding of the blistered and charred remains of men, women and little children have continued to come in, until it is thought that within the burned district of the three counties no less than 300 human lives have been destroyed.

"The thought of the untold sufferings accompanying these deaths from burning, suffocation and starvation is too awful to think of. No mind can conceive and no pen portray one-tenth of the sickening sights presented to our eyes as we have made our way through the desert of destruction and looked upon the realm of the dead. Mothers were found cold in the embrace of death with their little children clasped in their blistered and blackened arms, bearing eloquent testimony to the genuineness of their parental fidelity and the almost superhuman efforts which they made to save from the jaws of death those who were dearer to them than life. Well authenticated stories are excited of the devoted heroism of the husband in his utter abandonment of self and the sacrifice of his own life to save that of his wife, who may truthfully write over his grave, 'he died for me.'

"For two weeks past the fires have been burning with more or less fury but not until last Sunday was the real danger apprehended. It was then that the wind began to fan the smouldering embers into hot and hissing flames and by daylight Monday morning thirty townships were enveloped in fire. All day Monday and Tuesday the fiend was bravely fought by both men and women who labored without food or sleep to save their little homes from ruin. But it was a struggle against fearful odds, and utterly in vain, one by one they were driven off, many falling exhausted by the way, or over-

taken by the rapidly advancing monster, were consumed with hardly a moment's warning.

"During Sunday and the two following days the excitement in Cass City was terrible. During every moment of that time we were in imminent danger. It is only because of our abundant water supply and the most heroic and persistent efforts on the part of our citizens that our name is not added to the long list of the consumed. The fire approached with unaccountable rapidity from the south and west, and it seemed again and again that no human power could beat back the great roaring, hissing mountains of flame. But undaunted the brave men fought on hour after hour without food or sleep and to look back over the three days of struggle it indeed seems more like a dream than a reality. Finally, however, hard work won the day, and Wednesday morning the danger was past.

"Mr Richard Meredith, was brought in Tuesday night horribly burned, having been found by the side of the road near Mrs Laplee's on the state road where he lay for twenty-four hours. He is now at the Cass City hotel and is somewhat improved.

"Over 40 persons are reported burned in the single town of Paris, Huron County. In Argyle 12 or 15 were burned. In the vicinity of Port Hope 24 lives were lost, principally from the township of Bloomfield. In Austin the wife of Morris Welch and three children were lost.

"Ira Humphrey, mail carrier between Marlette and Bad Axe, perished 16 miles this side of Marlette, the buggy and mail being consumed, and only the horse escaped.

"A pathetic story is told of a poor man in Sanilac, who fought fire until one of his arms was nearly burned off, returned to his home where his two little children were nearly suffocated, and realizing that he could not save both, had to choose which one to carry off with the arm he had left. He hesitated in bewilderment for a moment, and then as the hot flames were already blistering him, picked up the older child and escaped, while the younger was burned to a crisp.

"A representative of the Enterprise drove through the townships of Greenleaf, Austin, Argyle, Paris and Bingham and witnessed sights upon which he hopes never to gaze again."

Fred White told the Chronicle Friday that he was celebrating his 61st birthday and that he was now residing on

the same spot where he was born in Greenleaf Township, three miles east and $\frac{1}{2}$ mile south of Cass City. Nearly all of that period he has spent on the same farm. The house where he first saw the light of day was burned with the other buildings on the place during the fire of 1881. He was then a lad of seven years of age, but he remembers distinctly the

great conflagration that swept this district and how he with 25 others spent the night after their buildings burned in an open field. His father had finished threshing Saturday and the following Monday the fire wiped out the farm buildings and grain. He described the district as a doleful sight and cannot speak too highly of the prompt and generous

assistance given to fire sufferers by relief agencies. A. T. Hiser of Elmwood resided in Vassar at that time, and when he heard Mr White's story, Mr Hiser said that he brought all the bedding and other material that two horses could pull on a wagon from that railroad station to the fire swept district here.

From The Detroit News

Crucible Of Fire Puts Red Cross To The Test

BY ART O'SHEA
Detroit News

Good sometimes does come from evil, though it certainly didn't look that way in the fall of 1881 when forest fires were burning the entire Thumb area of Michigan to the ground.

What good from that sort of evil, you ask?

Well, the fires in the Thumb were a testing ground for a newly formed organization called the American Red Cross, which celebrates its 100th birthday today.

The fires of 1881 originated in the Sanilac Valley in Lapeer County, where new immigrants from Europe were using fire to turn what had been lumber land into farmland.

It hadn't rained for two months. Everything east of Lapeer was as dry as tinder on the last day of August. High winds began to fan the smouldering fields and swept flames up the valley into Sanilac County.

By early September, the entire Thumb area was aflame.

The toll of dead probably never will be known. But at least 169 names of victims were recorded. By the time the fires died out, a million acres of farm and forest land, 44

townships and numerous villages had been devastated.

Here's how eyewitnesses described the disaster of 1881 in the Thumb:

- The heat was so intense, sailors said it made them "uncomfortable" in ships seven miles offshore on Lake Huron.

- Two miles from the path of the flames, leaves of trees were withered and crops of corn and potatoes roasted in the fields.

- Winds pushing the fire were so strong they rolled big boulders along the ground "as though they were pebbles," uprooted trees, blew down buildings, lifted men and women off their feet and "threw them back violently on the ground."

- Four days after the fires were out, peach and apple trees far enough away to survive burst into unnatural bloom.

- Many of the immigrants died because they made the mistake of trying to hide in wells, not realizing smoke would settle there and smother them.

What good could come from such a tragedy?

Clara Barton, who fought her way into the slaughterhouse hospitals of the Civil War to improve conditions for the wounded and dying, had founded the American Red Cross on May 18 of that same year.

The new organization looked for a way to prove itself to the public and the devastation in Michigan's Thumb area provided its first chance.

The infant Red Cross rushed volunteers to the Thumb, collected money, purchased food, clothing and shelter and distributed all these things. It was hailed for saving lives and lessening the suffering of thousands of destitute survivors of Michigan's great fire of 1881.

That was the first rescue effort but far from the last great errand of mercy of the American Red Cross.

Naturally, the Red Cross was there again in 1908 when the next great Michigan forest fire, the so-called "Metz Fire," swept the Alpena area, taking 44 lives.

But, by that time, all Americans knew about the good works of the disaster organization, as they do today.

From Muskegon Writer

Fire Swept Through Thumb Area

by MILLICENT MEESKE
Muskegon

On the fifth of September, 1881, fire swept through Huron, Sanilac, Tuscola and Lapeer counties of the Thumb district of Michigan, destroying 3,437 buildings with a total property loss of \$2,003,390. The greatest damage and the only loss of life occurred in Huron and Sanilac counties, where 125 people lost their lives.

The summer of 1881 had been excessively dry, all vegetation was parched and withered, streams and swamps were dried up, and in the pine lumbering districts the brush piles, windfalls, and slashings were dry as tinder. No rain had fallen for two months. In August forest fires were burning in almost every township of the four counties. This was not unusual. Farmers had been accustomed to burn brush and rubbish in this way, and under ordinary conditions it was safe enough. On Monday, September 5, a fierce gale from the southwest sprang up and the thousand fires burning in as many separate localities were fanned into uncontrollable flames which became a tornado of fire.

For three days the conflagration raged. The wind blew with such violence as to uproot large forest trees and lift roofs from buildings. At the same time the temperature soared to 100° and above. The suffering of those in the fire areas was appalling. The air was so thick with blinding smoke that darkness became almost total. Men, women and children were burned trying to escape along the highways. Flames were seen to leap many feet higher than the tallest pines. Some of the fugitives were lifted from the ground by the strong wind and were seized by the flames as they fell. Some saved their lives by scooping holes in the ground and burying their faces to escape inhaling the stifling air; others found refuge in wells and cisterns where they clung to the walls with their fingers and toes. The flying sand and smoke blinded people who walked in the dense darkness into fire traps. Many of those who escaped were permanently crippled or blinded or disfigured. Some took refuge in the waters of Lake Huron, wading out until only their heads were above water.

When the fire had burned itself out, devastation was everywhere. Animals, wild and tame, had been destroyed in vast numbers. The courthouse was the only building left standing in Bad Axe, the county seat of Huron County. Huron City, with a population of 75, lost 21 buildings. Verona Mills, with a population of 150, lost 32 buildings.

My father recalls the fire vividly. In a recent letter he states, "Your grandparents lived on a farm two and one-half

miles north of Melvin in Sanilac County. About ten of the neighbors were helping your grandfather thresh grain on September 5, 1881, and the neighbor women were helping your grandmother prepare the noon meal. Smoke had been dense all morning and the women had lighted kerosene lamps in the house. Toward noon, the wind suddenly became strong. I climbed up a ladder to the barn roof and saw fire rolling across the fields nearly a mile away. Fences were burning. I called out. Men rushed the threshing machine out of the barn, began tearing down fences, and putting pails of water on roofs of buildings. The neighbors could not go home to their own farms as we were entirely surrounded by fire. Although fire brands fell on the roofs many times, all our buildings were saved and were the only ones left standing for miles around. Your grandmother sent the children into the orchard. Fruit and leaves were burned off the trees and fire brands fell on us. Smoke was so dense that we could not see. We buried our faces in the dirt in order to breathe. People were sick for days afterward from the smoke. Many had sore eyes. Those who were saved did so by staying in plowed fields and near wells."

At Verona Mills, in Huron County, my mother, then a little girl three years old, was put under blankets in a plowed field with her brothers and sisters. The blankets were kept wet with pails of water from the well. Her family lost everything in the fire: home, barns, grain, livestock, supplies, clothing. The only thing my grandmother saved was a walnut bed which she threw into the well. The family was left without any means of transportation, and there were no stores left where they could buy supplies and clothing. I remember my grandmother telling about the barrels of clothing and food which the Red Cross immediately sent into Michigan. These were distributed through whatever churches were left standing and also at the courthouse in Bad Axe.

It was at that time that Clara Barton had succeeded in interesting a few people in the Red Cross, an organization already known abroad for its work among the wounded in the battlefields. She had raised some money in this country, and with this, sent aid to the people in Michigan who needed assistance so desperately. From this first activity of the Red Cross in the United States has grown the present Red Cross disaster program. Committees of local citizens have been organized and trained by the Red Cross to meet emergencies caused by fire, flood and serious accidents.

As a granddaughter of two of the first families in Michigan to receive Red Cross help in time of disaster, I

marvel at the difference in operation now compared with what it must have been in 1881. On the night of February 22, 1946, fire broke out in the business district of Muskegon, and raged through a city block before it was brought under control. More than twenty families living in this area lost everything in the fire. I was called out as a disaster worker to give assistance to these families, as the local chapter Disaster Committee mobilized its workers immediately at the scene of the fire. The Red Cross was "at their side" equipped to provide shelter, medical aid, transportation, and all possible assistance needed. Fire has always been the enemy of mankind. World War II has often been termed a "conflagration of the world." To know that, should disaster strike your family, there is an organization standing by composed of your own neighbors and friends, prepared to be of help, is a wonderful expression of the spirit of America.



GRAVES OF 22 VICTIMS



A Whole Nation Responded To The Tragedy

Thousands of people from Maine to California responded to appeals for help for the victims of the Great Michigan Fire of 1881 which ravaged Michigan's Thumb area. They contributed more than \$882,000 in cash and goods — an awesome amount when considered in dollars of the 1880's. This response was symbolized by the above drawing which appeared widely at the time. This drawing is courtesy of the American National Red Cross, Washington, D.C.

For Further Study . . .

Several newspapers of Michigan's Thumb area are reproducing differing views and historical sections on the Great Fire of 1881, each viewing the event from the vantage point of their own geographical locale.

The Sebewaing Blade and the Pigeon Progress have issued an attractive and especially interesting, picture-filled centennial edition. Copies of this publication are available from the respective newspapers at a modest cost.

Here is a listing of other books with information on the Great Fire of 1881, which appeared in the Sebewaing-Pigeon historical edition.

Portrait and Biographical Album of Huron County, published by Chapman Brothers of Chicago in 1884, reprinted by Red Flannel Underwear Press, Sebewaing, MI, in 1976.

Thumb's Up — A collection of historical essays on Huron County and the Thumb, published by Field Services, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI, in 1956.

Walls of Flame — Written and published by Gerard Schultz of Elkton, 1968.

The Thumb Fire of 1881 — Written by Roderick Park, privately printed about 1953.

The Michigan Forest Fires — Written by William O. Bailey, Sergeant, Signal Corps, U.S. Army, under the direction of Brig. & Bvt. Maj. Gen'l. W.B. Hazen, U.S. Signal Service, Chief Signal Office of the Army. 1892.

Michigan in Four Centuries — F. Clever Bald, published by Harper & Row, New York, 1954.

A History of Michigan's Thumb — Gerard Schultz, 1964.

The New History of Michigan's Thumb — Gerard Schultz, 1964, 1969.

The Long Ships Passing — Walter Havighurst, published by The MacMillan Company, 1944.

Huron County Centennial History, 1859-1959 — Chet Hey and Norman Eckstein, published in 1959. Pages 15-16.

Pictorial History of Michigan — William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Pages 175-176.

- This special historical edition was designed and edited by Rudy Petzold, Publisher, Tuscola County Advertiser, Caro.
- Sketches are by Charles Graham as they appeared in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper in editions printed in September 1881.
- Other materials from sources as indicated.
- A limited number of additional copies are available from The Advertiser at a cost of \$2.



Published By

THE TUSCOLA COUNTY ADVERTISER
344 North State Street, Caro, MI 48723

August 26, 1981