

Burning buildings made for local heroes in 1914

Fires made headlines in the *Bloomington Telephone* during the first part of 1914. One of the more spectacular ones produced a genuine hero for the community.

It was Feb. 12, and John Morrison, a Monon Railroad employee, was on North College Avenue when fire broke out at the Stimpson boarding house. The *Telephone* of Feb. 13 described it: "Morrison groped through the flames of the burning building and fought his way to the second story where he rescued the infant child of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Stucky, who had apartments directly over the room where the fire originated."

The occupant of the room where the fire started was a 77-year-old blind woman, Polly Cruse. She, too, was rescued, but not by Morrison. The newspaper explained. "Since she could not see, she was afraid to try to escape for fear she would run directly in the flames and sat in her helpless condition until her niece, Mrs. Parmella Stimpson could reach her and lead her to safety."

Many onlookers at the fire were unaware that Morrison had dashed into the burning house until he emerged with the child. The



LOOKING BACK
By Rose McIlveen

Telephone put it this way. "Morrison descended as the flames were licking across the hallway, but he carried the sleeping babe in such a protecting way that it was uninjured. The brave act was carried out so quickly that few realized what had happened, and it was not known Morrison had been in the fire until his injuries had been dressed."

How did he know there was a child in the burning house? The article does not make that clear. Perhaps the mother was calling for someone to rescue the 1½-year-old.

Morrison's injuries were not slight. The *Telephone* reported that his hair was singed, and there were burns and blisters on his face and neck. Also injured but less seriously was the Stucky's 4-year-old son. His mother had grabbed him when the fire started.

The *Telephone* made it clear to the readers, in case they were taking Morrison's heroism too lightly, that the situation was critical. "The smoke was so intense that the child could not have lived but a few moments longer after Morrison reached him."

In the front page article there was praise for the firefighters, as well. Commented the newspaper, "The fire department laid two lines of hose and good work prevented a bad fire. There was great danger of the large Metropolitan livery barn owned by W.S. Wood catching fire as it is separated from the burned building by only a few feet ...It was a cold, stubborn contest for the fire laddies, but they gave a good account for themselves."

In those days, the readers of newspapers seemed to be interested in whether damaged buildings were insured, by which firm and for how much. The *Telephone* did not disappoint them in the instance of the Stimpson boarding house. "The fire loss to the building is about \$1,000, which is fully insured in the Wooley & Barnhill for \$2,000 and the Walter Hottle agencies for \$1,000. The household goods for Mrs. Stimpson are insured for \$800

in the Wooley & Barnhill agency."

Another fire that got press attention about the same time was at 10th and Grant. It was the barn of Amos Simonel and contained a horse, phaeton, harness, hay, and chickens.

According to the newspaper, there was not enough time to get anything out of the barn. That fire had its hero, too, but the outcome was different.

"James Turner made a valiant effort to save the horse. He ran into the burning barn, and with the blaze waving around him, attempted to untie the halter of the doomed beast, but he could not stand the heat and was driven out of the building."

For the benefit of any interested readers, the *Telephone* stated that the value of the horse was \$175.

As a postscript, the newspaper mentioned that two other fires occurred the same night. "Two other buildings were damaged by fire Saturday night. The barn of W.V. Mathews, on Cottage Grove Avenue, caught fire and the roof was burned, and Mr. Mathews' residence was also slightly damaged. The department prevented a costly fire by their good fighting."

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