

Rash of fires prompt fire department improvements

"Last Tuesday night Bloomington had another fire. The loss was small, but this was owing to the location. Had the residence been on the square, at the rate the wind was blowing, an entire block might have been burned before the flames could have been checked."

—Bloomington Telephone, Nov. 17, 1883.

The fire was the last straw as far as the Telephone was concerned. On Nov. 17 it warned, "Bloomington must have a first-class fire department — cost what it will. In saying this the *Telephone* does not reflect on the men who are now in charge, for they do their duty; it means that the fire company is by no means sufficiently equipped."

A case in point was the residential fire of Nov. 13. The newspaper explained that it was so cold that water was drawn from the engine boiler to keep it from freezing. That problem wouldn't arise if the city building had been completed.

The *Telephone* had another improvement in mind. "First of all the Council should pay a man to be with the engine through the nights;



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

and second a 'heater' should be attached to the steamer and be in operation at all times. This is necessary, for by the time our citizens can get to the engine house, start a fire and get the steamer to its place, a fire is bound to be beyond control."

Commented the newspaper? "This costs money? But the work at one fire would pay for it all."

The fire that inspired all that editorial rhetoric consumed a stable on the south east end of Ezra Perring's property. A strong wind fanned the flames toward a nearby house occupied by W.W. Durand.

There was fear that the Baptist Church and property belonging to the Orchards would also burn.

Incredibly, the steamer truck was not on the scene because "the night before the water was taken from the boiler to keep it from freezing." Continued the *Telephone*, "One of the hand engines was on the ground but was not in operation until the danger was over."

Spectators resorted to a bucket brigade and they also put salt on the fire.

A week later on Nov. 24 the *Telephone* reported that the "City Council at their last meeting did the wise thing in making all necessary equipments to our fire company and offer to do more if it is found necessary to protect our property from the flames that have been disastrous within the past year." In fact, the newspaper pointed it out that within a period of eight months, Bloomington had lost by fire more than \$300,000 worth of property.

The *Telephone* also passed on to its readers the gist of a resolution which urged Bloomington citizens to go to the engine house as soon as they hear the fire bell. It is not entirely clear what they were supposed to do there.

The firemen came in for their share of praise. "With their opportunities the firemen have fought the flame heroically and saved more than has been burned; and now it is to be hoped future conflagrations may not be so serious."

The *Telephone* gave the City Council a verbal pat on the back for authorizing the changes in the Fire Department. "Bloomington has a sensible, progressive Council. They do what they think to be to the interest of the City, regardless of the howl of a certain class found in every community. The same may be said of the Commissioners of Monroe County."

Meanwhile, Perring, who lost his stable, had had time to think about the fire. "Ezra Perring seems to have no doubt that his stable was fired by an incendiary. Some of these nights the wretches will be caught at this work and it will be the saddest period that they experienced."

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