

SOME OF INDIANA'S MAJOR FIRES

FEB 12, 1840 – Regarded as Indiana's first serious fire. This blaze destroyed the Ephraim Carpenter residence at the corner of Philadelphia Street and Carpenter Avenue. It prompted townspeople to demand better fire protection.

DEC 23, 1892 – The Indiana Evening Gazette called it "The Big Conflagration" that had been predicted for years. Fire destroyed the Thomas House and the American Hotel, both three stories tall, in the 700 block of Philadelphia Street. Blairsville firemen came by train to assist the Indiana volunteers.

1898 – Indiana volunteer firemen responded from three locations: First Ward Engine House on North Sixth Street; the Third Ward Hose House on Philadelphia Street between Foundry Avenue and Eleventh Street; and the Fourth Ward Engine House at Philadelphia and Ninth Streets.

DEC 10, 1899 – Fire destroyed the Christ Episcopal Church, which had been remodeled only four years earlier. An editorial in the Indiana County Gazette three days later said the church fire demonstrated that Indiana needed a better fire alarm system and a water system with more pressure. "Repeated efforts to get a stream to the ceiling of the church were without results because the water wasn't there," according to the editorial.

AUG 31, 1900 – Fire destroyed the Indiana Wollen mill along Oakland Avenue, probably the largest wollen mill in the county at the time.

DEC 1, 1905 – Clark Hall, the boy's dormitory at Indiana Normal School, was gutted by flames. This was probably the largest building in Indiana destroyed by fire up to that time. "An unfortunate feature was that the people of the town had been notified that the fire alarm whistle would be tested and regulated at that time and that they should not be uneasy if they heard the alarm," the Indiana County Gazette reported in its Dec 6th edition. "This fact deterred many from going to the fire when the alarm was sounded." As in the Episcopal Church fire, inadequate water pressure doomed the building. Borough council discussed the Clark Hall fire, noting that the weak water pressure "demonstrates that the town is in constant danger of destruction by fire."

MAY 11, 1910 – Fire wrecked the main factory building and blacksmithing shop of Indiana's Bent Rung Ladder Company. Nearby stables were also destroyed and the company's large paint shop and storage building were also ignited and

threatened, "but food work on the part of the fire department saved it," a newspaper reported. "Difficulty was experienced in getting in an alarm because of a scarcity of telephones in that vicinity...In a short time the first hose carriage was on the scene and a connection was made to the water plug at Seventh Street and Wayne Avenue, but the firemen say they had no water for 10–15 minutes after they were ready to begin work." Firemen had to run hoses across several back lots to get the water from the fireplug to the blaze. "Some of the owners entered serious objections to their, claiming that their garden patches would be injured. But little attention was paid to such remonstrances however, the firemen going about their obvious duty, irrespective of onion patches and chicken coops."

NOV 2, 1910 – Though not an exceptionally big fire, the blaze at the Indiana Hardware Company was noteworthy for the response from the Blairsville Volunteer Fire Department. "As soon as the alarm of fire was sounded in Indiana, someone telephoned to Blairsville," an Indiana newspaper reported. "Three box cars full of volunteer firefighters and fire-fighting apparatus arrived here about 40 minutes after the general alarm was sounded. Twenty-six minutes was the remarkably fast time in which the train came from Blairsville. But when the Blairsville firemen arrived - the local firemen had the flames almost under control and their apparatus was not used."

NOV 19, 1910 – The presence of many barns and stable still inside the borough in the early 20th century presented unique fire dangers. The Indiana department received six alarms within as many hours, a record up to that time. "A serious conflagration was narrowly averted when flames broke out among the livery barns on Nixon Alley," a newspaper reported. Three barns in a row and adjoining properties were endangered but the newspaper headline read, "Efficiency of the department is again shown."

JAN 31, 1912 – fire destroyed the Dugan Glass Company, Indiana's largest employer. Lost were the mold shop and a large quantity of expensive patterns. Loss was estimated at \$25,000.

MARCH 20, 1918 – a gas explosion was caused when a customer dropped a match near a five gallon can of gasoline. This destroyed the Anchor Motor Company on East Water Street.

NOV 10, 1918 – the W.S. Daugherty Planning Mill on the south side of Philadelphia Street at

Foundry Avenue burned. The alarm was phoned in, but because of a lack of steam the siren didn't sound. The firemen's response was hampered by a broken universal joint on their fire truck.

DEC 2, 1920 – A “frightening conflagration” and “Indiana Boroughs potentially most dangerous fire” were descriptions of the blaze at the American Independent Oil Company near Eleventh Street. One explosion of an 8,000 gallon tank of gasoline threw fragments as far as the Normal School. Low water pressure would only force the water 37 feet. Damage was placed at \$30,000. Eighteen days later borough council passed an ordinance removing gas storage plants from the borough.

FEB 13, 1921 – Twenty-eight new automobiles were destroyed when the Hileman Garage on Nixon Avenue near the jail burned, causing \$40,000 damage.

JUNE 27, 1929 – The J.M. Stewart & Company hardware, also known as “The Big Warehouse,” a landmark business in Indiana for more than 75 years, was nearly gutted by a fire that caused \$150,000 damage. A newspaper reported that, “The fire alarm siren, which rests atop the building, was quickly out of commission after the first short blow, it being thought that the fire had eaten through the connecting wires.” Explosions of flammable liquids in the basement added to the dangers for the volunteers and Indiana fireman Matthew Bruce was burned when one of the explosions sent flames shooting out, catching him in the face. The Clymer Water Service Company estimated that 1.3 million gallons of water were used fighting the fire.

CHRISTMAS EVE, 1930 – King Leather Goods Company was destroyed in a \$100,000 fire, putting 100 people out of work.

JUNE 27, 1931 – The Diamond Glassware Company (where the IUP athletic field is now located) Indiana's leading industry for the previous 40 years, was destroyed by a fire possibly started by a spark from a passing locomotive. Damage was estimated at \$100,000. One hundred people lost their jobs and four firemen were injured.

JULY 3, 1931 - The Greiner Baking Company plant on Foundry Avenue was destroyed by flames and 52 more people lost their jobs. Damage was estimated at \$20,000.

JAN 9, 1939 – “Roaring through the Hetrick Block, historic Indiana landmark across Philadelphia Street from the Courthouse, fire last night caused

damage estimated at \$100,000 and for more than an hour threatened the heart of the business district,” a newspaper the next day reported. The frontage was considered among the most valuable in Indiana. The fire destroyed the Waxler Clothing Store, Dean Phipps Auto Supplies, the Kane Koffee House, and apartments on the second and third floors. An unseasonably warm, still night aided the firemen in localizing the blaze. “Spectators stood for hours behind fire lines in Philadelphia Street and on the courthouse lawn and steps,” the newspaper reported. The paper also attributed heavy firewalls between the Hetrick Block and adjoining bank buildings in preventing the spread of the flames.

MAY 31, 1949 – Two spectators – Elma Jean McJunkin 72, of Chestnut Street and Annie Thompson of Oak Street were injured while Indiana volunteers battled a \$30,000 blaze at Best Feeds and Farm Supplies Store at the rear of 818 Oak Street. The Indiana Evening Gazette reported that the women attempted to get a closer view of the fire, crossed the street and “were tripped by a fire hose that was being laid by a fire truck in operation.” The two women were thrown to the pavement and were taken to Indiana Hospital for treatment. This was the first fire where the IFA's aerial ladder truck was used. “Indiana's recent purchase of an aerial ladder truck proved to spectator's yesterday afternoon that such equipment was necessary for A-1 fire protection in the community” the newspaper added. “The fire was boxed in by the iron sheeting and by using the ladder truck firemen were able to get above the building and shoot water down into the raging flames...Firemen were seriously hampered yesterday by curious public...People crowded up too close to the firefighters, making it difficult sometimes for them to move quickly. Children were constantly threatened with possible injury in their mad dashes in dangerous places.”

FEB 3, 1956 – A newspaper called the fire department's battle against flames at the Indiana Elks “one of the most excellent stops in fire department history,” preventing the spread of flames to adjoining structures.

SEPT 20, 1959 – Five people aboard a twin-engine plane died when the aircraft crashed at the end of the dedication ceremonies for the Jimmy Stewart Airport. The fire department was on the scene to control the resulting fire, but five people were injured by burning fuel.

FEB 7, 1962 – Strong winds and near zero temperatures challenged firefighters from seven communities they battled one of the biggest fires

in the history of downtown Indiana. About 8:12 a.m. a fire started in the basement of the Indiana Hotel, a 100-year-old landmark at the corner of Philadelphia Streets and Sixth Streets. The flames and heat shot up an elevator shaft and ignited the top floors and roof of the five-story brick building. Firemen from Blairsville, Homer City, Clymer, Marion Center, Plumville, and Greensburg rushed to the scene to assist Indiana volunteers. Eleven firemen were injured. At least two fire hydrants, including one directly across the street from the burning building, were frozen and useless. Before the fire was brought under control in mid-afternoon, the firemen; their equipment; and nearby streets were coated with layers of ice. The flames destroyed the Penn Furniture Company on the ground floor and much of the hotel that occupied the top four floors. The firefighters kept the flames from spreading to an adjacent building, also occupied by Penn Furniture. Damage from the all day fire was estimated at \$250,000. The newspaper the next day reported that the structure was left a "mausoleum of ice and ruin"

DEC 5, 1963 – Pre-fire planning was credited with preventing deaths and injuries from a fire in the attic of the States Rest home on North Seventh Street.

FEB 4, 1965 – Indiana firemen saved buildings on both sides of the Steiner market along Philadelphia Street. The blaze started about 7:15 a.m. and caused \$100,000 damage.

MARCH 8, 1965 – In a major residential fire for the IFA, the 12 room home of Robert Ensley in Shadowood sustained \$100,000.

OCT 22, 1966 – An early morning fire swept through the Moore Hotel, killing 79 year old James Bollman and trapping several others in their rooms until firefighters could rescue them with ladders. Two of the 40 people registered at the hotel were injured. The Moore hotel was located at the corner of Philadelphia Street and Eighth Street, across from the old Pennsylvania Railroad passenger station. A hotel had operated at the site for more than 100 years.

JAN 26, 1968 – The lack of an immediate water supply hampered firemen as they fought a blaze that swept through the Joseph Frye Gulf Service Station at the Routes 119 and 210 intersections north of Indiana. Volunteers stretched 1,700 feet of hose to bring water from a creek. Dozens of snowmobiles, ATVs, garden tractors, and lawnmowers burned. Damage was set at \$100,000.

JUNE 18, 1971 – A suspicious fire wrecked the Selective Service office at 944 Philadelphia Street. Thousands of local military draft records were damaged but others were protected when firemen covered filing cabinets with tarps. The FBI investigated. The flames ate their way through the ceiling and into Dorinda's Beauty School.

JULY 24, 1972 – Damage was estimated at a quarter of a million dollars from a fire that started just before 1 a.m. in the sanctuary of the First Baptist Church at Oakland Avenue and Ninth Street. "The building was glowing inside when we got there," stated the fire chief. "All of a sudden the flames blew out the windows and fire was shooting the flames blew out the windows and fire was shooting up through the roof." At the height of the blaze an orange glow could be seen in the sky from several parts of the borough.

SEPT 1, 1972 – Flames soared 40 feet into the air when the barn at the Windy Ridge Farm along Route 286 burned. Firemen drew water from a nearby farm pond and despite the heat, saved nearby and adjoining buildings. Damage was estimated at more than \$100,000.

AUG 7, 1974 – Volunteers used their aerial ladder to pour water onto the Grace united Methodist Church during a fire that was labeled suspicious. Damage was estimated at \$100,000.

FEB 26, 1975 – Seventeen dogs died, 20 were saved when fire wrecked the Indiana County Animal Shelter along Route 286.

MAY 5, 1975 – A fire that started in the back of Beatty's Restaurant and Bakery at 726 Philadelphia Street caused \$700,000 damage to stores and businesses in the Pealer Building. 45 IUP students were left without a home after the blaze destroyed their apartments on the second and third floors. Adjacent businesses sustained smoke and water damage, especially the Western Auto Store.

AUG 31, 1976 – Visitors to the second day of the Indiana County Fair could see the smoke from a fire that damaged the Willard Home on the Indiana County home grounds. The fire started in the basement of the two-story frame building. Six non-profit agencies operated from the 60 year old building that once was a county orphanage.

OCT 16, 1976 – Fireman covered computers and other expensive equipment with tarps, helping to limit damage, while fighting a fire on the second floor of the Season-all plant along Route 119.

NOV 24, 1976 – Students were on vacation when a faulty wire in a television set apparently ignited a blaze in the School of Nursing building at Indiana Hospital. The Thanksgiving Eve fire started in the basement and spread up through three floors. It took firemen an hour to extinguish the blaze.

DEC 12, 1976 – The Greiner Building, located near Oak and 11th Streets, was the target of a number of suspicious fires in the few months before it was destroyed by an arsonist. Several tenants in the five-story brick building, owned by Kovalchick Salvage Company, lost their quarters and properties in the fire. Damage was about \$250,000. The fire Chief stated that firemen might have been able to extinguish the fire more quickly by taking hoses inside the building. But, the chief decided not to send volunteers inside because of the deteriorated condition of the 70 year old building.

JUNE 27, 1980 – Damage approached \$1 million in a blaze that started in the Record Shop at 718 Philadelphia Street and spread into the Pet Gallery, The Paper Poppie, and The Swing Set. Thirteen apartments on the top floors were also destroyed, leaving 44 people homeless. Firemen from six departments fought the blaze for six hours before bringing it under control. Four volunteers were injured.

JAN 14, 1981 – A potential explosion was averted by Indiana firemen when propane gas tanks caught on fire at the Pyrofax Gas Corp, along Route 119 near the Omni Civic and Convention Center. Firemen sprayed water on 25 burning tanks and several others nearby that hadn't caught on fire.

APRIL 7, 1981 – Indiana fireman Daniel Gromely was treated for smoke inhalation after fighting a wind swept blaze that destroyed the building housing the Hitching Post and two other businesses along Wayne Avenue South. "We tried to keep it out of the insurance and optometrist's office but that didn't work," stated the Fire Chief. "The wind definitely was a factor." Damage totaled \$300,000

MAY 5, 1985 – The T-N-R Department Store on the first floor of the Rend Brothers building in the 600 block of Philadelphia Street was destroyed and offices in upper floors were damaged in a \$100,000 fire. (This blaze was the third of three major fires to hit downtown Indiana at five year intervals starting on May 5, 1975. The first was the \$700,000 blaze in the Pealer Building in the 700 block of Philadelphia Street on May 5, 1975. On June 27, 1980 fire again gutted the Saul

Waxler owed Pealer building and neighboring structures causing \$1 million in losses. And on the 10th anniversary of the first Pealer Building fire, the Rend Brothers Building was badly damaged. The three fires caused about \$2 million damage to Indiana's downtown business district).

APRIL 23, 1986 – Four business buildings and several apartments were destroyed and several other buildings nearby were damaged in a blaze that gutted the Olive Branch craft store, formerly Graft's Market, at the corner of North Sixth Street and Nixon Avenue. Also, destroyed were two Kuzneski Agency buildings and Tom's Pizza Palace. Twenty-seven people were left homeless. Damage was estimated at nearly \$1 million. The fire chief stated that he called "every fire company in Indiana County" for help and about 250 firemen with 27 pieces of apparatus fought the blaze.

NOV 11, 1986 – Damage was estimated at \$332,000 in a blaze that destroyed the building at 1055 Philadelphia Street housing Allied Electric Supply Company and Millar Appliance. In the rear of Nixon Avenue, an attached warehouse for Smiley's Furniture Galley was also leveled.

JAN 22, 1987 – Two men died in the flames that wrecked 12 apartments above Caleco's College Pub and the closed Poor Carl's Lounge and Restaurant at 547 Philadelphia Street. Damage was estimated at \$70,000. It was one of four fires in the borough within 90 minutes that day. All were investigated as arsons. (Two years later, Walter Beatty of Indiana, then 25 years old, was convicted of two counts of second degree murder and arson in the fatal fire at Calecao's. He appealed the conviction and later pleaded guilty to two counts of third degree murder and arson).

JAN 9, 1987 – A propane leak in a tank truck triggered a fire and explosion at Beatty's Gas along Route 119 south of Home. Firemen tried to dissipate the cloud of vapor with water, but the gas apparently reached an open pilot light and exploded. Nearby residents were evacuated and the highway was closed. The explosion and resulting fire caused \$300,000 damage.

FEB 15, 1987 – The top two floors of the wood three-story building at 34 South Sixth Street collapsed onto the ground floor in a blaze that destroyed the IDS-American Express office and a warehouse for the Sherwin Williams Company. Also destroyed were four apartments and 47 people in three buildings were evacuated.

MARCH 6, 1987 – Gas and electricity service had been shut off for years to the 53 year old Indiana Roller Rink along Wayne Avenue when it burned to the ground. A state police fire marshal said the cause was arson. This was the 57th fire of suspicious origin in the Indiana area since the mid 1985. Damage was set at \$45,000.

APRIL 19, 1988 – Indiana volunteers just needed to go around the corner to fight the fire that gutted the former R.H. Fleming Buick building on North Eight Street. The two-story, 34,000 square foot structure was slated for demolition in two weeks. “The firemen battling the blaze in the alley (Nixon Avenue) took a lot of heart and smoke” saving nearby businesses.

OCT 2, 1991 – Firefighters were dispatched to a mobile home fire which claimed one life on Hammersmith Dr. in White Twp.

FEB 14, 1993 – Valentine’s Day diners were forced from the Brown Hotel after fire was discovered in the 120 year old landmark building at the corner of Sixth and Water Streets. Twenty-one residents lost their housing in the fire.

JAN 29, 1994 – Sparks from a tractor may have ignited paper being shredded for cow bedding, starting a fire that destroyed the barn on the Donald Simpson dairy farm along Simpson Road, southwest of Indiana. Damage was estimated at \$150,000. Firemen were on the scene for nearly 8 hours and save nearby silos and other buildings.

DEC 4, 1996 – Indiana firemen assisted volunteers from other communities in battling a \$1 million fire that wrecked the milk house, milk parlor, office, and processing equipment at Brookside Dairy along Route 56 west of Homer City.

JAN 21, 1997 – An Indiana County Airport maintenance hanger, three airplanes, and a car was destroyed in a fire believed started by a heating unit. Damage was estimated at \$258,000. “The fire companies did an excellent job of protecting the other buildings including an adjacent hanger with seven planes”, said the airport manager Todd Heming.

OCT 17, 1999 – Indiana Fireman Brent Marshall was injured when a heavy plaster ceiling collapsed on him while fighting a major blaze that destroyed the Mountain Greenery and damaged three other businesses and several second-floor apartments in the 700 block of Philadelphia Street. Seventy firemen fought the Sunday afternoon blaze that caused \$750,000 damage.

FEB 7, 2004 – A general alarm fire was sounded at approximately 10pm that destroyed an apartment complex in the 600 block of Fairview Ave. in the Chevy Chase neighborhood. Upon arriving on scene firefighters found an fully involved fire which claimed one life.

AUG 23, 2005 – It is believed that dogs are what caused a fire in the 200 block of Washington St. at 8:49am. Crews rescued two pit bulls from the fire and were able to keep the fire contained to the dining room.

OCT 22, 2006 – Indiana firefighters were dispatched at 8:02pm for a commercial structure fire that destroyed a building being occupied by Young Brothers Tea Kwon-Do and the Indiana County Blind Association which was located at 402 N.4th St.

MARCH 23, 2007 – Firefighters were dispatched at 11:55am to the 500 block of Church St. for a structure fire involving two structures, one with entrapment. The first arriving units found that the individual that was trapped in the house had been rescued, although severely burned, also one house was fully involved and a second house catching fire. Crews quickly worked to extinguish both fires. Assistance was called from several neighboring departments.