

# FIRES BURN IN WALDRON 1889, 1890 & 1931

## *“BIG WALDRON FIRE” IN “1889”*

**The best portion of the Village was wiped out of existence.  
Twenty-one businesses and nine dwellings destroyed.**

### **Special to the Free Press**

Hudson-May 6, 1889 the Village of Waldron, ten miles south west of this place, on Mackinac Road, was visited by a most destructive fire at about 1:05 p.m. The place was just feeling the impetus of a railroad and numerous buildings; mostly wooden structures had been erected. They were made more ignitable than ordinary by the protracted dry season, and the flames originated in a shed adjoining a livery stable, in the southern part of the town. The fire was carried from one building to another by a strong wind completing the destruction of the entire business part of the place inside of an hour's time. The village was without fire protection and the panic stricken people were powerless to save their property.

Information of the fire was received here and Mayor Howe's, being an ex Mayor, "Wood", dispatched a hand engine, manned on the "Mackinaw Special" to the scene. The run was made to Waldron in less than five minutes; the engine arrived in time to prevent the fire from extending to the rest of the residents. A black track of smoldering ruins running parallel with the railroad indicated the progress of the flames. Not a business establishment was left standing. All the trim looking stores which at four o'clock this afternoon were gone. They were the pride and hope of this little berg. The rate of insurance was quite high and this fact accounts for the small number of risks carried in the village. The loss of Crome Bros., H.T. DuBois and Co., Wilcox and Boyd losses were particularly heavy. While some of the others were smaller it represented their entire possessions. The sum total means a very heavy blow to the community and a serious set back to its prospects.

### **Losses**

Twenty-one places were destroyed; nine dwellings and offices were consumed. The losses as near as can be learned tonight are as follows. E.L. Wilson Livery Barn, \$1,000, no insurance. In a stable adjoining where the fire originated, was a valuable stallion, belonging to Conrad and Gamber near Fayette, was burned to death, value \$700. Spray and Meredith Bakers lost \$300, no insurance. H.T. DuBois and Co. general store recently established in a new building, lost \$12,000 insured for \$7,000. L.A. McFarland general store, loss \$5,000, no insurance on the stock and \$500 on the building. L.A. Wilson grocery loss \$3,000, insurance \$1,800 on stock and building. J. Fogelsong Blacksmith Shop and residence loss \$1,200. Miles Higgins residence occupied by H.T. DuBois loss \$1,500, insured for a \$1,000. Mrs. Persons Millinery Store and dwelling \$2,000. Wilcos and Boyd Jewelry, Boots and Shoes, loss \$5,000, partially insured.

James Forrester Post Office and Notion Store, loss \$5,000. Crow Bros. Hardware, just established, lost \$6,000, no insurance.

W.F. Barnes office and ledger counts loss \$3,000. James Crown over the Art Galleries lost \$500. M.G. Boyd's dwelling lost \$1,000, and is partially insured. William Myers Furniture and Undertaking loss \$3,000, insurance just expired and had not been renewed. Shamberger and Kunkle agriculture implements, loss \$1,000, insured. Milo H. Gunsenhauser publisher of the Waldron Echo Printing Office, insured for \$450. Dr. M.P. Fogelsong, office and barn loss \$1,000, insured for \$700. New block in course of erection by Lickley and Hurch loss \$500, insured by Carpenters Risk. B.F. Pettit shoemaker, loss \$300, no insurance. A.S. Wilson had \$600 in currency in a safe in Wilcox and Boyd building.

Villages helping Waldron, was a purse from Reading and Ransom gave them \$90 in money, twelve bushel of wheat and a load of provisions. Other villages in the county were named and what they gave but I did not get a copy of all of them.

Credits---Reading Telephone News 1889.

Many of the buildings had no insurance and the rest were under insured. In October 1889 some of the owners were able to start over. There were six two story brick stores, five frame stores, and 13 frame dwellings under construction. The Waldron Echo News paper, wrote about the fire and it was published by the Hudson Newspaper, the Waldron paper had been damaged but not burned down.

In 1890 one grocery store, over extended when he rebuilt and the business failed.

Again more talk of another school on top of the big fire. In 1893 they built what was called {The Little School} it was a primary school for grades 1 through 8. It was built in the south end of Waldron this time. They built a brick school on Mill street. It stood in the middle of the first block off each side of the building. It is of the bright red brick. The building was used quit a while after the High School and the main town was built. After 1973 the building was sold and made into a dwelling. The building was added on to.

NOTE: The brick schoolhouse on Mill St. is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Roy Hall

## ***“FIRE OF 1890”***

Another article from the newspaper dated 11-21-1890. The Village of Waldron had another fire but escaped great damage. Defective flue in the store of Southard and Bates caused \$200 damage. Prompt work by watchful citizens prevented the fire from growing very far. 8-6-1890, a reward of \$100 was offered by the Nation Board of Underwriters for the arrest and conviction of the party or parties who set fire at Waldron upon which a number of stores were burned. 8-6-1890, by which a number of stores were burned, two men were arrested. L.D. Bailey and George Smith of Waldron were arrested for setting fire to one of the stores that Bailey dealt with. The store was heavily insured. Smith had been in Jackson Prison previous to this. It was thought it was set for insurance money. The town was rebuilt and by 1897 several new stores were built.

## ***“FIRE DESTROYS TWO BUSINESS PLACES OCTOBER 19, 1931”***

October 19, 1931, a very disastrous fire of unknown origin occurred on Monday morning at two o'clock in the business center of Waldron, in which the loss is estimated at about \$15,000 partially covered by insurance.

The fire started in the rear of a building in the alley along side the properties of the Red Front Store and W.F. Barnes. The blaze was discovered by Otis Hills and his sons, who on account of sickness in the home were up at that time, Mr. Hills stepping outside, noticed the flames. He called to his sons and they ran to the firehouse and rang the bell. I.N. Corser was also aroused and assisted in spreading the alarm, but before the equipment could be gotten at the blaze, the rear ends of the Barnes property and the Red Front Grocer, were a roaring furnace. The blaze had gained such headway; it was imperative that outside would have to be procured at once in order to save the block of business buildings.

Word was sent to Morenci, Hudson and Addison for assistance and with in a short space of time these towns gallantly responded and their men and apparatus was soon at work. In a very few minutes, the flames were confined to the properties of Mr. Barnes and the Red Front Store. However, by heroic work of the Waldron firefighters and the help from farmers who drove in, plenty of help was on hand to save the adjoining buildings.

At least ten chemical machines and two water hoses were playing on the conflagration before the roaring furnace could be brought under control.

The fire crew from Addison brought their high-powered hose pump and this did effective work. The inflammable material in the buildings helped to feed the blaze, but when tons of water under high pressure, together with the chemical apparatus, the fire after three hours hard work was considered practically confined to the burnt embers of the two buildings.

The burned buildings were occupied by W.F. Barnes, as a furniture store and funeral parlors, while the store occupied by A.E. Stevens and known as the Red Front Grocery. Both properties were heavily stocked with merchandise, however some the furniture in Mr. Barnes store was saved, before the fire became to hot. But in the grocery store it was impossible to save anything for in a very few minutes after the discovery of the fire, the entire interior was a mass of flames.

The flat over the grocery was occupied by Postmaster Volney Reynolds and wife, and they barely had time to snatch a few articles of clothing and get out of the building. A few pieces of household effects were saved, but everything else was destroyed.

One incident to be remembered is the barking of a German Police Dog who was in the rear of the room of the grocery, aroused the postmaster, and he lost no time getting Mrs. Reynolds and himself out of the building. However it is to be regretted that the poor dog lost his life in the fire.

The water tank and pump hose in back of the city building was also completely destroyed.

The B.A. Laser building, occupied by V.H. Seashols as a meat market was damaged in the rear end, but by the heroic efforts the building was saved. The rear end of the Post

Office building, which is owned by the Gorsach family, was damaged considerably by smoke and water. The damages were such, that the post office equipment was moved across the street to the Clark building as temporary quarters.

With all the excitement and the hundreds of people in town, no one was injured, and the quick response of help was always given, no matter what was asked, for all this the officials and businessmen are indeed very thankful.

It is too early to determine as yet, what disposition will be made about the buildings, but we understand Mr. Barnes will re-build a funeral home on the site. The property of the Red Front Store is owned by parties in Pioneer, and just what will be done is not known at this time.

**“Information furnished by the Waldron District Library”  
Articles put together by John A. Tanner**