

Early Morning Blaze Tuesday Destroys The Tavern Building



1951-11-22 NBG 01

New Berlin Gazette

The worst fire to visit the village of New Berlin in over fifty years, occurred early Tuesday morning [November 20, 1951] when the Tavern Building on West street was totally destroyed by fire, together with all of its contents.

Considerable damage was also done to the National Bank & Trust Company building adjoining it on the east and the Chenango & Unadilla Telephone Company building on the west.

The fire was discovered about 5:30 a.m., as flames shot high into the air on the north side of the building, apparently from the dining room. The local firemen responded quickly with all equipment and several lines of hose from hydrants and the village brook were soon pouring water into the building.

The first concern was the occupants

of the apartments on the second floor. Mr. and Mrs. Adolore Balenger and daughter escaped from the building safely but Floyd Brown, Tavern employee, could not at first be awakened and was finally evacuated through a window on a fireman's ladder.

The 3-story building, formerly known as the Cady or McGuire building, one of the oldest business places in New Berlin, burned like tinder and although our fire department fought bravely the structure was quickly enveloped in flames.

One of the first difficulties encountered was the failure of the switchboard in the telephone exchange due to burned cables, making it impossible to summon outside help. Soon cars were dispatched to South New Berlin to phone for help. Fire trucks and men from Edmeston, Norwich, South New Berlin, Sherburne and Morris responded and gave valuable service. Several of the trucks pumped water from the village brook

and at times there were ten lines working on the front and rear of the building.

For awhile it appeared that the fire was under control but suddenly it burst through the third floor and roof and then it looked as if every building on the street would fall prey to the blaze.

It was at this point that the fire got into the cornice and attic of the bank building and seriously threatened the Elliott Brothers building on the south.

Tons of water were poured into the burning building and most of the damage to the bank building resulted from the water. The upper large room, which had been vacated recently by the Masons, was damaged, the new Griswold Studio recently opened on the second floor was damaged together with photographic equipment. The water continued down to the first floor where the bank offices are located and furnishings were moved across the street. The

offices of H. J. Mosher, attorney, on the second floor were not damaged, The outside of the brick bank building, especially on the west side, sustained serious damage and of course many rooms were filled with smoke.

The brick building owned by the Chenango and Unadilla Telephone Corp., had roof damage and also some water damage, besides the severe damage to the company's wires and cables connecting into the switchboard. Telephone service will probably not be fully restored for several days.

The New Berlin Electric Shop on the lower floor of the building was not damaged to any extent. This brick building offered protection to the Gazette block, which was endangered but did not catch fire. The Elliott Bros. building was also spared.

It was a cold and blustery morning with brisk north and northeast winds and the water used on the fire quickly froze on the buildings and streets and added greatly to the discomfort of the firemen.

Fortunately there were no serious casualties at the fire. One fireman from Edmeston, Al Jennings, suffered a heart attack and frosted hands and feet but he revived quickly at the Chase Memorial Hospital. Other firemen had chilled feet and hands.

Too much praise cannot be given to Fire Chief Wesley Aylesworth, assistants Fred Dockstader, Melvin Stephens and Deputy Chief Burr Harrington and all the members of the department. They worked hard and long and only through their valiant efforts was the fire kept confined principally to the Tavern building.

From the start of the fire, the Women's Auxiliary of the fire department went into action and soon were serving hot coffee and doughnuts to the firemen and helpers. The Eagle Hotel, Camp's Restaurant, Tibbitts and many others furnished hot coffee, doughnuts and sandwiches for the firemen.

After the fire was brought under control, some four hours later, telephone and power line crews immediately set to work to tear down the charred walls of the building, eliminating danger from their falling into the street and causing additional hazards and



Deal Photo

damage to poles, cables and wires.

The only salvage in the whole Tavern building consisted of some stock of liquors stored in the cellar and food in the kitchen deep freezer.

The Tavern building was owned by Harry F. and Grace B. Long and their damage will probably exceed \$25,000. They had owned the property about a year and it was fully insured. Mr. Long states that he will rebuild on the present location.

The household and personal belongings of Mr. and Mrs. Balenger, totally destroyed, were partially insured. Personal belongings of Mr. Brown were a total loss.

The entire west brick wall on the Bank building will have to be replaced due to heat damage, and construction and repair costs to the building and interior will exceed \$10,000.

An inspector on the scene Tuesday

was under the impression that the fire was started by a defective coffee maker in the kitchen of the Tavern.

The destroyed building was always considered more or less of a fire hazard. Many of our older people remember Cady hall on the third floor where public entertainments were held. Later Prof. Clarence Mathewson conducted a dancing school there for many years and then it became headquarters for the local Odd Fellows Lodge. It was finally condemned for public use because of a lack of fire escapes.

Several years ago when the building was purchased by Ray Coon of Unadilla, the entire first floor was renovated and new and attractive restaurant and tap room furnishings installed.

Transcribed by Tom DeForest, 06-13-2020, tomdef@stny.rr.com