

ISCHUA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MEMORIES OF THE DISASTROUS FRANKLINVILLE FIRE OF 1880

Charles A. Perley, a young boy aged 11, was an eyewitness to the devastating fire of September 1880 that destroyed the South block of Park Square. At 10:00 PM a cry of "FIRE!" echoed through the streets of the Village and children and adults tumbled from their beds and hastily dressed. Crowds rushed to the site and observed flames shooting through the roof of Chandler Brothers Store, lighting the night sky. Bucket brigades were quickly formed and pails of water were passed along lines from nearby wells and handed to men standing on the ladder propped against the building.

At that time Franklinville had neither firefighting equipment nor an organized fire department. There were several wells within the village but the water supply was not plentiful. There was a well in front of the Globe Hotel and a deep well created when the old Campbell Hotel, located near the site of the Chronicle Building, burned several years before. There was also a well on the lot where Morgan Hall now stands. Hardware stores donated their supply of buckets to the bucket brigades.

The volunteers realized the fire could not be controlled and moved on to save the contents of the store and the adjoining buildings. Flames spread rapidly through the neighboring wooden structures, while the outside was littered with furniture, showcases, groceries, tin ware, stoves, tableware and glassware.

Charles' father had started a newspaper in 1875 located over the Green and Mixer Grocery Store on the corner of South Main. He realized that his father was out of town and rushed up the stairs to the newspaper office. He was just in time to rescue the subscription lists and other office records to the gratitude of his father. Unfortunately, his father had just purchased a large Campbell printing press several weeks before. Charles stood helplessly by as the printing press crashed into the cellar of the building. The thousand dollar acquisition was a worthless tangle of iron and steel, as yet unpaid for.

The Green & Mixer Grocery Store was on the corner lot and the ARGUS newspaper office was upstairs. On the east side was a hardware store owned by Lorentius Salisbury and the headquarters of the Masonic Lodge were located above the store. There was a barn at the rear.

Next was the village Post Office in the tailor shop building of John Little Sr., who also served as postmaster. His son John Jr., who later became the Sheriff of Cattaraugus County, had a tin shop in the rear.

The general merchandise and grocery store of George and Andrew Chandler is where the fire originated. The store was downstairs and the barbershop of Tom Sanders, a former slave, was upstairs, together with apartments where the fire started. A vacant house, where Morgan Hall now stands, also burned.

Two smaller buildings, one the meat market of Wilbur Huyck, also went up in smoke. The old McMillan home, a beautiful colonial structure was also destroyed.

This tragic fire led to the trustees of the village purchasing a barrel like chemical contraption on three wheels and turning it over to an organized company called Eagle Engine Company. Although not very effective, it served the village for many years.

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Eventually a number of businessmen pooled their money and had about ten wells drilled with eight or ten four men force pumps installed capable of throwing streams of water over most of the buildings in the Square. They also used these pumps for sprinkling streets and window washing in addition to fighting fires. A hook and ladder truck came next.

The R.S. Litchfield Hose Company was later succeeded by the M.J. Waring H & L Company. All the companies served Franklinville well and were in great demand as parade units. They brought home many prizes for speed, appearance and drilling at Western New York firemen conventions at the turn of the 20th century.

This information came from the memoir written by Charles A.

Submitted by: Maggie Fredrickson, Village of Franklinville Historian