

(Handwritten date: Saturday, August 2, 1941)

COUNTY INSTITUTION DESTROYED BY FIRE

(handwritten: on Friday, August 1, 1941 at 7 p.m.)

(2 photos)

Pictured (top) are the ruins of the Adams county infirmary, which was completely gutted by fire early Friday evening. The lower photo is one of the infirmary taken shortly after the building was completed in 1901. The infirmary was constructed at a cost of \$35,000 40 years ago. Loss has been estimated at approximately \$50,000.

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COUNTY INFIRMARY WAS BUILT IN 1901 AT COST OF \$35,000

Contract for the construction of the county infirmary building which was destroyed by fire last evening, was awarded by the commissioners to Cal Miller, contractor of this city, on January 23, 1901.

The general contract, exclusive of plumbing, heating, wiring, was \$22,658. Cuno Kibele of Bluffton was the architect for the 80 room house.

The commissioners at that time were Samuel Doak, J. E. Mann and Fred Reppert, the latter the father of Col. Fred Reppert of this city.

The total cost of completing the building is estimated at \$35,000. In the past 40 years many improvement have been added. Last fall the tubular fire escapes were installed at a cost of \$1153. They were ordered by the state welfare board.

In October of last year the building was rewired throughout at a cost of \$411. New cable circuits were run throughout the building and on inspection by the state investigator were approved.

A conservative (cut off)

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44 INMATES ESCAPE FLAMES AS COUNTY INFIRMARY IS RAKED BY FIRE EARLY FRIDAY EVENING

Brick Building, Erected in 1901, Is Completely Destroyed By Fire At 7 O'clock Friday Evening;

Inmates Removed From Building With Only Slight Injuries; Starts on Second Floor
By Bob Shraluka (Staff Reporter)

A barren, gutted shell, yesterday a home for the aged and poor, was all that remained today of the Adams county infirmary - a grim reminder of the roaring holocaust which

swept through the institution early last night, forcing the inmates from their last worldly refuge.

Pathos and tragedy were written into the annals of the county last night as hundreds watched the 40-year-old, two-story brick building being completely destroyed in the con- (cut off) ...the site once occupied by the (cut off) ...of caring for the 44 persons who had been confined to the building.

While no estimate of the damage was officially ventured by county officials, it was estimated that the loss would amount to \$50,000 in actual value with replacement value running still higher.

A check with officials this morning revealed that insurance on the building totaled \$25,800, which, allowing for salvage deductions, would be reduced considerably.

Although the cause of the blaze had not been definitely established late today, the opinion was ventured that defective wiring had created the spark, which later was to spread over the entire structure.

Superintendent Ron Reinhart, members of his family, workmen at the institution and 44 inmates either escaped or were carried to safety before being reached by the flames that enveloped the building.

It was shortly after 7 p.m., when passersby, including Richard and Robert Martin, (cut) smoke issuing from a northeast attic corner.

Superintendent Reinhart and infirmary workers were hardly more than notified when the flames broke through the roof, hungrily spread to other parts of the building and leaped 20 feet in the air.

The gigantic work of speedily yet carefully removing bedfast, ill and feeble-minded inmates and patients was hurriedly conducted with the aid of infirmary workers, they saw the red-hued sky above the blazing inferno.

Only one injury - and that believed a minor one - was reported in a checkup of the inmates, while a fireman was also superficially hurt.

Within a few minutes after the blaze was first noticed, the spacious lawn of the institution was littered with inmates, beds, cots, chairs and hundreds pieces of furniture and equipment that they managed to save from the flames.

Tear-stained eyes of inmates who regarded the institution as their own home were prevalent on all sides as they were carried to ambulances or made comfortable on makeshift beds out of the range of the blistering heat from the burning structure.

Several barely escaped burning to death or serious injury as they repeatedly made attempts to reenter the inferno after items which made up their last possessions.

Today it was made known that the fire actually started sometime earlier in the shoe "cobbler's" room on the second floor of the institution. With the contents of four fire extinguishers, Superintendent Reinhart, it was thought had put out the blaze.

(Cut off)

...basement were all that escaped complete destruction, however.

Fanned by a brisk breeze, the flames ate their way through floor after floor and wall after wall until it was definitely ascertained that the firemen's only work could be concentrated on saving the other buildings in an event of a change in the wind.

Zwick & Son, Gillig & Doan, Black and Lobenstein ambulances made repeated trips to the scene to carry away ill and bedfast patients.

City, county and state police authorities industriously patrolled the area to prevent further plundering of the contents moved onto the lawn and aid in handling the enormous amount of traffic.

TWO ARE HURT

An inmate known as Jim Fren (cut off) ...ed a head injury when struck by a chair thrown from an upstairs window.

Most of the furniture and equipment, excepting that fastened to the building, was believed saved from the flames. The structure was formed into an estimated 80 rooms.

Walls and a porch on the north side were all that still stood today.

Two barn fires have occurred at the county farm since 1924. On May 1, 1924, fire swept through all the barns, granary and hog houses, part of the large loss being covered by insurance.

Replacing these structures, two contracts were let in May and June of that year to F. L. Johnston for barns, one for \$5,410.18 and another for \$6,772.45.

On August 9, 1940, the large bank barn was burned to the ground with loss of about \$5,000, fully covered by insurance.

Although no statement could be obtained from the commissioners about rebuilding the infirmary, an architect called at the auditor's office at 11 o'clock this morning and was informed that the officials were in Fort Wayne.

Adams County Historical Museum
1940-1941a Scrapbook, image 59-60
Transcribed by Karin King