

(No handwritten date)

DEMOCRAT REPORTER ONE OF (cut off)

By Simon Schwartz - Staff Correspondent

I was an eye witness last evening to one of Adam's county's largest individual fires. In those two hours or more from the time smoke first started pouring out of the top part of the Adams county infirmary, to the time when the flames had gutted the large structure which was home to forty-four aged, sick and needy persons, I observed many stirring scenes in which were written tragedy, hopelessness, resignation, desperation and grief.

Four of us were on our way to Decatur soon after 7 o'clock last evening, traveling north on highway 27. As we came north of Monroe we noticed a small cloud of smoke in a northeasterly direction. Having plenty of time before the start of the parade at the fair, we decided to investigate the origin of the smoke. As we approached the county farm we could tell it was coming out of the top part of the large infirmary building.

Arriving on the scene, we saw utter confusion. Just a handful of people were there and they had just started to move some of the sick and feeble inhabitants out of the building. Some were carried out, some were taken out in wheel chairs and some walked out. We arrived there several minutes before any flames were visible, even on the inside, but the entire building was filling rapidly with dense, black smoke. The few persons already on the scene had started to throw bed clothes and other articles out of the upstairs windows, while chairs of all descriptions were being carried down. After the upstairs rooms were emptied, work of saving the beds, chairs and other pieces of furniture on the first floor started and by that time there were a large number of volunteers on hand, all willing to help.

Among the first persons on the scene, or already there when we arrived were Roy Price, Arthur Scheiderer, and his wife, who, driving toward the infirmary from Decatur saw the smoke, Richard, Ralph and Robert Martin, Herman Loshe, Chris Eicher, and a few others. All of these worked hard and faithfully and several of us were almost overcome by the smoke as we dragged the contents of the infirmary outside. Another one who was on the scene early was William Linn, local merchant, who did more than his share in helping to save so many of the contents.

The blaze spread with amazing speed, and soon the flames were shooting out through the windows. But the volunteers continued to drag articles out of the burning building until large pieces of the ceiling started to fall down, then a halt was called. But even after burning embers were falling through the ceiling, one elderly occupant of the infirmary, still able to move around quite well, had a bucket of water and was trying his best to extinguish the blaze, throwing the water up to the blazing ceiling. Only consistent coaxing finally persuaded him to leave the burning building which had been his home for many years.

Many tears were shed. Some of the inmates of the institution had no other home and they loved it, and now it was burning away in front of their very eyes. Some of them were clinging pitifully to a prized possession or two. Some were sitting out on the spacious lawn, away from the heat of the blaze, sick and feeble inmates were lying on mattresses or bed which had been hurriedly provided. Soon ambulances from Decatur and Monroe arrived at the scene and took a few of the victims away, some perhaps never to return again to the place which they called home.

I was particularly interested in one of the men inhabitants, Conrad Schlunegger (Jim Frenchy) of Berne and I had seen him every day chair on the north side of the building. The top of his head and the back of his neck were badly singed. A piece of hot tin had fallen on him as he was making his way out of the building. Jim spent most of his life in Berne and I had seen him every day for years. With no relative, he had lived in a humble abode of his own along the railroad tracks in the

south part of Berne until a few years ago when he was finally convinced that he should come to the infirmary. Jim liked it and on his few visits to Berne since coming to the county institution, he highly praised the management of the infirmary. Jim said last evening he did not know what would happen to him now, but I believe I convinced him that he would be provided for one way or another.

As news of the fire spread, conditions around the infirmary and on the roads leading to the institution became congested. Among those who flocked to the scene were a few who had relatives at the infirmary and wanted to take them home with them. One young woman's father was an inmate of the institution and she was almost frantic with worry until she learned that he was safe.

The firemen from Decatur, and later those who arrived from Berne with the rural truck, worked hard and bravely, some even risking their lives in order to save at least a corner of the building. But the building was doomed and the blaze spread so rapidly that it was beyond all control before the firemen were on the scene.

Sam Reinhart, superintendent of the institution and members of his family were broken-hearted. Some of the children had been to Decatur (cut off)

(Handwritten date: Monday, August 4, 1941)

ALLEN COUNTY TAKES INMATES

Most of the Infirmary Inmates Taken There; Commissioners Confer

F. R. Farnam, inspector of county infirmaries for Indiana, was here today conferring with the board of county commissioners and discussing with them the problem of the loss by fire Friday evening of the Adams county infirmary.

Mr. Farnam had no statement for publication, except to say that he was offering the services of the state welfare department to the board and the county as a whole in helping solve the present emergency.

"You've had a very good county infirmary in Adams county. It ranked among the best in the state. What advice I might offer will be given the commissioners and the decision about rebuilding or caring for the 44 inmates in other institutions will rest locally", Mr. Farnam declared.

There were no new developments in the infirmary situation over the weekend. Saturday afternoon, 32 of the inmates were taken to Fort Wayne and entered into the Allen county infirmary. Four were transported in ambulances and entered as patients in the hospital there.

The commissioners planned to visit the infirmary site this afternoon with Cal Yost, contractor, to make a preliminary inspection of the walls. The insurance adjuster, who arrived Saturday, said he could not determine the extent of loss until the condition of the walls was decided.

The Adams and Allen county commissioners entered into a contract for the care of the inmates. Allen county will charge \$5 per week per person for all the inmates, except those confined to the hospital, where the charge will be \$10 a week. Allen county will provide medical aid and a nominal amount of clothing. The contract was signed by Frank Liniger, Philip Strahm and Eli Dubach, Adams county commissioners; Clay F. Spaulding, James T. Johnson and Theodore A. L. Goeglein of Allen county. The contract is revocable on one week's notice from either party.

The Adams county commissioners expressed their appreciation for the consideration given by the Allen county officials. Offers had also been made from Huntington, Whitley and Grant counties to assist in the emergency and take care of a number of the inmates, but since Allen county was able to provide quarters for all of them, it was deemed advisable to accept that offer.

The commissioners said that probably four more inmates would be taken to the Allen county infirmary today. At least four of the inmates will remain on the farm and assist Sam Reinhart, superintendent, in the operation of the farm.

Four of the inmates are being cared for by relatives. It is not known if they will be entered later.

It is the consensus of opinion that fire broke out in the attic in the north wing of the building and spread over the entire structure. Superintendent Reinhart was able to extinguish the flames in the shoe cobbler's shop on the second floor, which evidently started from (cut off)

(Handwritten date: Friday, August 1, 1941)

BIRTHS

Daniel is the name of the baby boy, born this morning to Torres and Rosa Marie Saleno Rodreguez of Jefferson township.

Reuben E. and Mattie Schmucker Schwartz of Wabash township are the parents of a baby girl, Sovilla, born Wednesday.

(Handwritten date: Wednesday, October 8, 1941)

TWO TRAINEES SENT TO WYOMING FOR (cut off)

Virgil Uhrick, of this city, and Gordon J. Fox of Berne, Adams county selective service trainees have been sent to Fort Francis of Warren, Wyoming according to word received here from induction headquarters at Fort Benjamin Harrison.

Adams County Historical Museum
1940-1941a Scrapbook, image 61
Transcribed by Karin King