



Brown County Journal

September 15, 2013

Events:

Brown County Historical
Society meeting
October 7

Brown County Genealogical
Society meeting
October 8

If you no longer wish to receive this
e-newsletter send an e-mail with the
word "unsubscribe" in the subject
heading to: rhonda@
browncountyhistorycenter.org

The material contained herein is
copyrighted.

Rhonda Dunn

More Fires ~ From Mishap to Mayhem

Fires are a common occurrence in the life of a community. Most are accidental from either unsafe heating materials or unsafe handling by humankind. When a fire actually happens to your home or neighbors you discover that life goes on after a fire. You pull yourself up and rebuild, or help your neighbors rebuild. That is what communities do, they come together in tragedy and help each other. A few of the more infamous fires have been known or suspected to have been set intentionally. Fire is the one thing that can be used to cover up many misdeeds by criminals. With the advent of modern fire investigation, though, most of these arsonists have been caught. The stories of these more memorable fires have been presented in more or less chronological order to get a sense of the history of fires in Brown County. Our first story if you'll remember started in 1873 with the courthouse fire. Following that we jumped forward to 1925 with the story of the fire in Helmsburg that almost wiped out the entire town. We also threw in a little history of Helmsburg and the fire at the train depot in 1942. Of course there is always a tale of fires at schools and churches that most likely resulted from accidental human mishaps. Now we continue on with more interesting stories of Brown County fires.

Nashville Christian Church Fire

The next major fire occurring in Nashville was the loss of the Christian Church on Oct. 29, 1931. The following article from the Democrat highlights the event. "CHRISTIAN CHURCH CONSUMED BY FLAMES. As we go to press the Christian Church is in flames. The Ladies Aid of the church were having an all day meeting and were working to pay the remainder of the debt which remained from the remodeling about five years ago. It is thought



The original Nashville Christian Church

and James Meyers. The Gray family lived on the south side of the Kelp home at that time in a little house which had been moved with an ox team from the site of the Kelp barber shop on Main Street. Ollie Gray did his first carpenter work on this job. The ball on the steeple was made from wood by El Hopper. It was dedicated in the same year by Rev. Z. T. Sweeney of Columbus. . . Another minister who labored faithfully in the Christian church was Elder J. W. Street. . . When the building was remodeled a window, made lovely with stained glass, was dedicated to the memory of each of these men. The building was completely remodeled about five years ago. . . was rededicated in October 1925 by Rev. Fred R. Davies.

The Ladies Aid Society was meeting for an all day session on Thursday of last week and part of the members had assembled when Mrs. Mary Tomlinson, housekeeper and nurse at the home of Mrs. Mary Kelp, saw a white smoke coming from the roof. She said she noticed it because the smoke made by coal is not white. She called Mrs. Moser and the alarm was

that the fires started from a defective flue and dropped down on the ceiling. It had gained great headway before discovered. The local fire truck was out of commission leaving only the bucket brigade to fight the flames until help came from Morgantown and Bloomington. They responded as quickly as they could get here. Much had already been done to save the nearby houses. The wind was a favorable factor as nothing would have saved the R. S. Moser home had not the wind carried the sparks in another direction. There were many heroes who worked until exhausted. The kitchen cabinet, dishes and tables were carried from the basement and saved. The piano and part of the benches were carried to safety.” (Brown County Democrat, Oct. 30, 1931)

The next article about the Christian Church incident tells of the hopes and dreams of the congregation to rebuild their church and relates the story of its history. “CHRISTIAN CHURCH WILL BE REBUILT. The Nashville Christian Church was built in 1888 by James P. Gray, his son, Ollie



Fire of 1931- back side of Church



New Nashville Christian Church

present church on land given by the T. D. Calvin family. In 1960 the lot south of the church was bought after the decline of the old Pittman Inn building and a parking lot was procured for the congregation. In 1988 they celebrated the 100th Anniversary of their church's founding.

A couple of other churches must be mentioned as well. Unfortunately these fires resulted from the misdeeds of youth. The Bear Creek Christian Church and the Grandview Apostolic Church were both lost. Bear Creek was rebuilt, but lost all of their old church records. Fortunately their records had been copied by the Historical Society and we were able to give them back something that they had lost. Unfortunately Grandview lost a 100 year old building and will probably never be rebuilt.

Nashville Fire Epidemic

Fire seems to be a plague of towns and cities with so many people living in close quarters and with shops and homes being built right upon each other. Fire has ravaged the small community of Nashville many times in her past. In the 1930s and 1940s Nashville was hit by a series of fires that has to this day changed the look of our town's profile. In 1939 the

turned in. There were heroes and heroines, several of whom were burned or cut, not seriously. . . On Thursday evening the remains of the basement, parched trees and shrubbery and a tall chimney rising from a pile of ashes, gave mute testimony that tragedy had been in our midst." (Brown County Democrat, Nov. 6, 1931)

The following Sunday the congregation met at the Nashville school with all eager to get started on a new building. Plans were underway and the present church that now sits in the same spot was build a little farther back from the street and was dedicated a year later on Nov. 13, 1932. In June of 1956 a new parsonage was built just north of the



Looking down Main Street - Old Nashville House



E. Main Street Across from Courthouse

east end of Main Street was hit by a fire and Nashville lost several businesses. In 1942 Calvin Lumber on Van Buren Street, just south of the intersection at the courthouse, had a partial loss from a fire. In 1943 the old Nashville House burned to the ground leaving only the foundation stones that would be reused later in the new building. In 1954 there was another major fire on the west end of Main Street and the town lost a few more businesses. There is one block in Nashville that has had fire ravage it several times. It is directly across the street from the Courthouse on the southside of Main Street.

It has seen fire at least four times and that is only counting the times it had been photographed by Frank Hohenberger. Thanks to Frank Hohenberger his photos have saved a moment in time.

East Main Street Fire

The local newspaper relates the story of the fire that destroyed the businesses across the street from the Courthouse. "\$25,000 FIRE HERE YESTERDAY IS LARGEST IN MORE THAN 25 YEARS. Joshua Bond and Grover C. David Buildings, also Vacant House Owned by Mrs. Clayton George on East Main Street, Destroyed - Fire Discovered at 7:30 a.m. Quickly Consumes Buildings Aided by a Strong Wintry, North-west Wind.

The fire of undetermined origin originated in the second story of the three-story frame David building just across the Main Street from the Sinclair Service Station and the Post Office. . . The second floor was occupied by the Grover David family and four boys - Lee, Preston, and Quentin Crabtree and Herman Powell, who had rooms there. . . One of the stores was owned by Joshua Bond in which he operated a variety store and was also used as his office for his undertaking business.



Bond-David Building fire 1939



Aftermath of the Bond-David Fire

was constructed of brick and roofed with metal offered a splendid protection for the Nashville House and the fire was brought under control there.

Valiant fire fighting with buckets of water, fire extinguishers, and a hose from a tank mounted on a truck saved the rest of the building. Nick Roberts and Dale Bessire also responded with their trucks and water tanks. While Nashville has no water works, the 12,000 gallon cistern at the Nashville House proved very effective in furnishing an ample water supply. Other buildings that were slightly damaged were the Leila David home and tourist cabins and the Dr. Genolin property now owned by Mrs. Maud Calvin.”

Two of the oldest landmarks of the town were lost in the blaze - the David building and the Bond building both being between 75 and 100 years old. The Bond building had weathered many a storm. The David building had originally been built on the bank of Salt Creek, south of town, and was used as a mill house. It had also been used as a Masonic Hall for a time. [Joshua Bond often

The street level store was occupied by the Shamrock Inn, a bar and restaurant, owned and operated by Charles Murphy in the west portion and by Ray Skinner Garage and Repair Shop in the east portion. Between these two business places Mr. David operated a small sandwich and ice cream business. . . A heavy explosion caused by the cooling unit in this place leveled the building and in so doing probably saved the Nashville House. . . The flames spread quickly to the unoccupied residence property just east of the David building. This property known as the Bitters property was vacated only a few days ago. . . the building owned by Joshua Bond, one of the old landmarks of the town,



**The Old Nashville House -
location of the first Pittman Inn**



Corner of Main & Van Buren Street - the old Nashville House

wondered if his troubles from the Helmsburg fire had followed him to Nashville.]

(Research by Jeanette Richart 2011)

The Old Nashville House Fire

The original Nashville House was built in 1867 by John Watkins. The foundation for the structure was constructed by Charles C. Hanna and was a huge two story Inn. It had changed names a few times by whoever ran it at the time. It had been known as the Pittman Inn, Hampton Inn, Browning Hotel, Hobbs House, and the King's Hotel. While Bill Pittman ran it as the Pittman Inn in the

early part of the 1900s it was a popular draw for the artists of the new Art Colony. It was sold in 1926 for \$6000 by James Tilton who was the current owner at that time. It was completely renovated in 1927 by new owners, Jack Rogers and Fred Bates Johnson, who had an idea to make it a modern hotel.

On September 24, 1943 the old Nashville House burned to the ground. From a newspaper article from the Democrat the following history of the building and the event was related. "NASHVILLE HOUSE DESTROYED BY FIRE - WILL BE REBUILT.

Another of the famous old landmarks of Brown County was destroyed last Friday evening when it was burned to the ground. The 23 room hotel had been the chief hostelry of the town since Civil War days, at which time it was built . . . Volunteer workers carried out many of the antiques which had been added during the last quarter century from other places. . . The contents of the gift shop, which occupied the northeast corner of the lower floor facing the court house were practically all saved. It was known as the Brown County Folks Shop that had been owned and managed by Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Sperry." (Brown County Democrat Sept. 30, 1943)



The Nashville House fire 1943



The stones in the footer was all that was left and would be used in the current building. The structure might have had a chance to be saved had there been a sufficient water source. Nashville's only fire engine was a hand-operated pumping unit that was not properly functioning at the time. Also a bucket brigade would not have helped either because Salt Creek was dry at the time. It was rebuilt in 1947 as the current structure, the Nashville House Restaurant, currently owned by Jack Rogers' son, Andy Rogers.

The current Nashville House Restaurant

West Main Street Fire

The last fire that we will report on was that which occurred on Jan. 13, 1954 that destroyed 3 buildings on West Main Street. The local newspaper reported, "fire was discovered in the poolroom in the center of town. The flames spread so rapidly that before daybreak the poolroom and the Loren Moore grocery on one side and the Abe Martin Barber Shop owned by Ralph Arnold on the other were completely destroyed. The local fire department with its only equipment of two hoses attached to a trailer were unable to cope with the fire. . . Veva Cope, the telephone operator started arousing the fire department, the sheriff, and local residents. Sheriff Roberts called on the towns of Columbus, Bloomington, Franklin, and the State Park. Outside help was the only thing that saved the entire block from burning. One witness stated that the fire was so intense that the store windows across the street cracked yet the night was so cold that the water froze on the street the minute it hit the ground. . . Thanks also go out to the brilliant efforts of Fire Chief Keith Taggart and his assistant, Harold King." Harold King was the owner of the Star Store that was also threatened by the fire. To paraphrase the article 'the 'Nashville folks took it [the tragedy] in their stride and worked side by side.' (Brown County Democrat Jan. 14, 1954)



West Main Street Fire Aftermath