

"Taneytown Fire"

Carroll County Times article for 30 November 1997

By Jay A. Graybeal

On October 18, 1897 Taneytown residents organized the Taneytown Volunteer Fire Company and elected Dr. Clotworthy Birnie as its first president. Unfortunately the new company was barely organized when fire broke out on November 27, 1897. The story was published in the December 4 issue of the Westminster American Sentinel newspaper, under the headline of "Destructive Fire in Taneytown":

Taneytown, this county, narrowly escaped destruction, on Friday night of last week, by a fire which started about 7 o'clock, in the hay and straw packing establishment connected with the large warehouse of Mr. Tobias H. Eckenrode, and it is believed that well nigh the entire town would have been swept by the flames if its total dependence for water had been, as formerly, upon the wells of the place. Fortunately the new water works were so far advanced as to furnish an abundant supply. Difficulty was experienced in making use of it, however, as the town is, to a great extent, without the necessary fixtures for that purpose. The flames had therefore spread to buildings adjacent to the warehouse before arrangements could be made to apply the water which was at hand in abundance. Finally, however, a small hose was attached to a fire plug, and then the fight to save the town from destruction began in good earnest. Eckenrode's warehouse and hay packer had nearly gone up in smoke and flame by that time, and the fire had extended to the large building owned and used as a storage warehouse, by Mr. Edward E. Reindollar, and also occupied by the Carroll Record as a printing office, which was burning fiercely. The building occupied by Stanley Reaver as a saddler-shop and by F. S. Staley as a cigar factory, also owned by Mr. Reindollar, was also in flames, as well as a dwelling house owned by Mr. Eckenrode and occupied by Mr. Josiah Snyder. The large double dwelling of Mr. John Davidson was finally reached by the devouring element, and, with all the other buildings mentioned, was burned to the ground. Most of the contents of the structures destroyed were also consumed. The surrounding property was in great peril and several houses were badly scorched, but by covering them with cloths, which were saturated with water, the danger was at last averted and the fire stayed in its destructive progress.

Appeals for aid were wired to Frederick, Littlestown and Hanover and the Littlestown Hose Company arrived on the scene in time to assist in the final suppression of the conflagration, but that result would have been accomplished without outside help. The gallant and prompt response of their neighbors, however, is thoroughly appreciated by the people of Taneytown.

It is somewhat difficult to estimate losses, that of Mr. Eckenrode being variously stated at from \$8,000 to \$15,000. Mr. Reindollar's loss is put down at the modest sum of \$5,000, which is certainly not excessive, considering the extent of the property destroyed. Mr. Reaver's loss on stock amounts to \$150, and Mr. Staley's loss is \$775. The loss of the Carroll Record publishing company will hardly fall below \$2,000 and Mr. Davidson's will reach \$4,000. The aggregate, as estimated by the parties themselves, is \$23,775, including a loss of \$200 sustained by Mr. Franklin Bowersox, of which mention was not a first made. The aggregate insurance on the property destroyed is \$13,700.

The newly organized firemen moved quickly to acquire proper fire fighting equipment. On December 27th a committee was instructed to purchase ladders, hooks, axes, buckets, lanterns, six coats and hats, and one two wheel truck for the ladders. The men were also authorized to purchase 36 badges, at a

price not to exceed twenty-five cents each, however, each member was required to buy his own badge. The fire company acquired its own fire hall, dedicated on the Fourth of July 1903.

Photo caption: "Baltimore Street, west from Railroad, Taneytown, Md." The northwestern Carroll town suffered a devastating fire on November 27, 1897. Historical Society of Carroll County post card collection.