

"The Carroll County Jail Fire of 1882"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

When Carroll county was founded in 1837, the new county was required to build a court house, alms house and a jail. The latter, an imposing stone structure which also served as the sheriff's residence, was completed in 1837.

Tragedy struck exactly 115 years ago when a fire nearly destroyed the building. A description of the fire appeared in the May 14, 1882 issue of the Westminster American Sentinel newspaper:

A fire, which for some time to come leaves our county without a Jail, occurred in that well known institution on Thursday. Little else aside from the substantial stone walls now remains. The alarm of fire was first publicly made about 9 o'clock, by the new alarm whistle of the Taylor Manufacturing Company nearly opposite, followed by the striking of the fire bell. From the rapid spread of the flames after their first appearance it would seem as though the devouring element had had previously considerable headway. The smoke was first discovered by outsiders, forcing out of the dormer windows of the rear or prisoner's building. In a few moments the whole roof of both front and rear buildings was in flames and the destruction of the building made inevitable. The truck and engine of the Fire Department were promptly on hand and rendered valuable service, but the fire had obtained the mastery in the lower cells of the prisoner's quarters and prevented any interference. The men who were called the second time to the work later in the day, kept it confined here and a threatened renewal of the fire prevented. An iron pipe connected with the hose and attached to the Steam pump of the Taylor Manufacturing company which threw a flood of water into the main building did substantial service and materially contributed in arresting a more serious conflagration, probably involving the destruction of the out-buildings adjacent to the jail. In this work as well as the general assistance from our citizens of town and country, the operatives of the Taylor Company took an active and prominent part. Many of them as well as quite a number of the Fire Department were absent on the Pythian excursion to Chambersburg. It is safe to say that without these two organizations the loss of property would have been much more considerable.

The whole inside of the building except the first floor and part of the upper floor of the main building are in ruins. Some of the division walls in the rear buildings have also been damaged beyond repair. The main walls, however, are intact and saving the western gable perhaps, are as sound and substantial as before the fire. The loss is variously estimated, ranging from \$2000 to \$4000, which latter figure is the amount of Insurance, held by the Carroll County Company, and we learn will be promptly adjusted.

The prisoners, some of whom are suspected with having been the incendiaries, exhibited considerable indifference and only made an alarm when the fire began to penetrate their immediate quarters. Under the charge of Deputy Sheriff Shower and Constable Mackintosh, they, sixteen in number, were marched to the Court House, where they were kept in the jurors' room until later in the day, when they were transferred to the Alms House, where they are closely guarded.

Col. Herr, and Mr. Frank Tyler, of the Fire Department received injuries, the latter a very severe and painful cut in the right wrist, the former a severe bruise of the foot. One of the prisoners, as well as some of the residents of the city and county, are more or less burned. Especial credit is due our ladies who furnished a lunch to the firemen, many of whom were compelled to remain at the building after

serious danger had ceased. The teams of the Taylor Company and of Messrs. E. Lynch, H. E. Morelock and J. Thomson, were generously tendered and did good service. Sheriff Furman's loss is considerable in furniture and valuables.

Immediate steps for the re-building of the burned structure will be made at once.

The County rebuilt the jail and it continued to serve its original function until well into this century.

Photo caption: A group of onlookers gathered at the front of the Carroll County Jail following the fire of May 18, 1882. J. Leland Jordan Collection, Historical Society of Carroll County, gift of the Commissioners of Carroll County, 1955.