

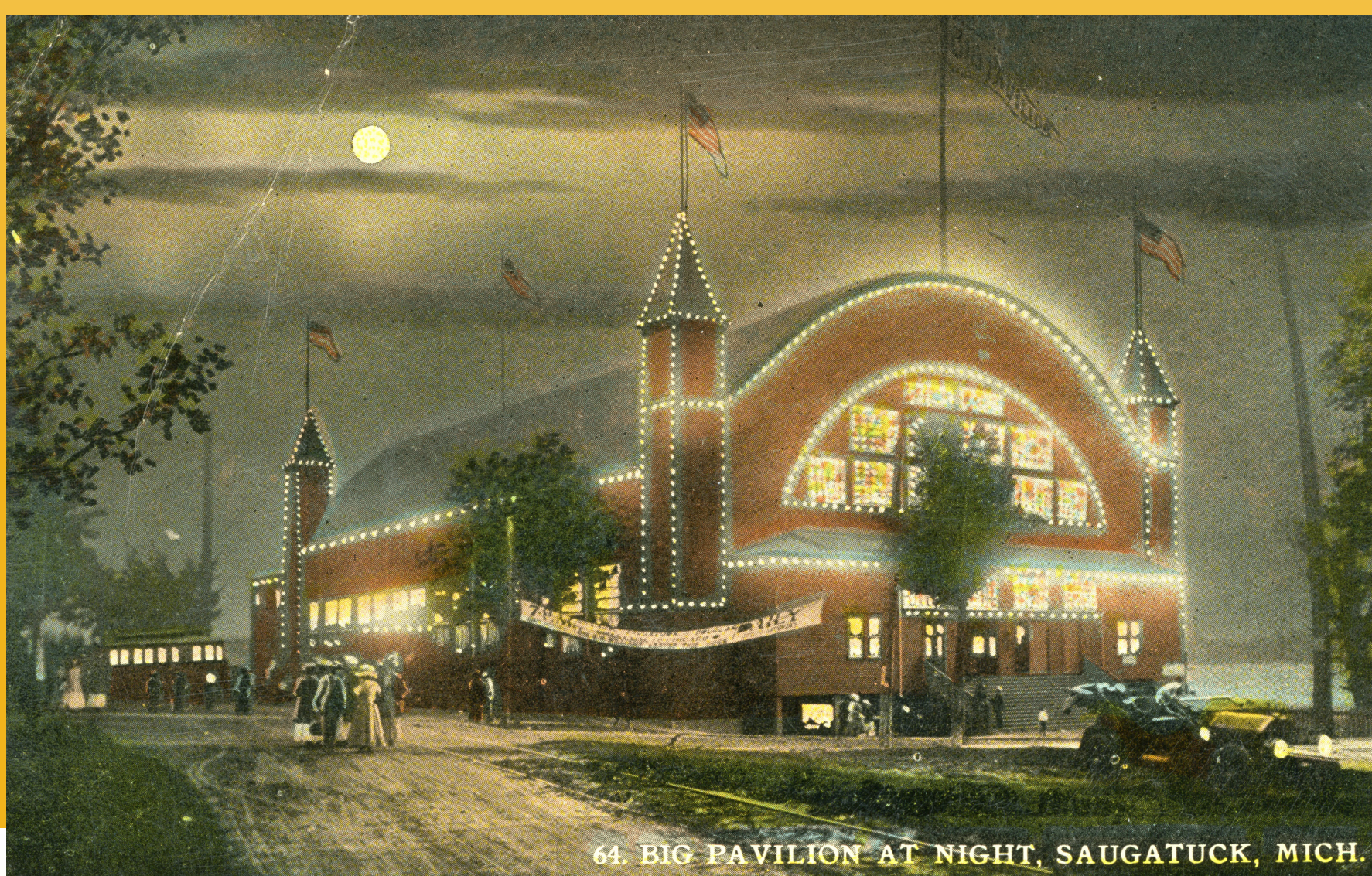


Postcard of the Big Pavilion with sailboats anchored in Lake Kalamazoo

SAUGATUCK'S BIG PAVILION

From 1909 to 1960, one of the most popular entertainment venues on the Great Lakes stood in front of you – The Big Pavilion. The large dance hall was an attractive destination for day trippers, summer cottagers, and locals. Many lakeshore communities had similar pavilions, but Saugatuck's was one of the largest and longest-lasting establishments.

The Big Pavilion stood eight stories tall, built of large semi-circular arches, with a 6,600 square foot dance floor. Sometimes, over 1,000 dancers crowded inside! Multicolored electric light bulbs lined the ceiling, flashing on and off in time with each dance. Over 5,000 electric lights framed the exterior, giving the building its nickname, the "Brightest Spot on the Great Lakes."



The Big Pavilion pre-dated widespread electricity use in Saugatuck by two years – its electric lights were some of the first residents had ever seen!



Big Pavilion interior decorated for a harvest dance



The Big Pavilion under construction, 1909, looking north towards Coral Gables restaurant

Over half a century of cultural change swept through Saugatuck in the Big Pavilion's lifetime. Local prohibition laws prevented alcohol sales in the Big Pavilion until its first bar, "The Dock," opened in 1938. Moving picture shows rose to popularity in the 1920s, and the Big Pavilion constructed its own theater. Popular music from large orchestras, to big bands, and later jazz played in its hall. Saugatuck's first Jazz Festival was held at the Big Pavilion in 1959, with Dizzy Gillespie and his quintet as one of the acts.

On May 6, 1960, the Big Pavilion burned to the ground within an hour. Winds blowing from the east saved the village from further damage. Plans to rebuild were started, but soon abandoned. Today, the Big Pavilion's footprint remains as the parking lot for the Singapore Yacht Club.

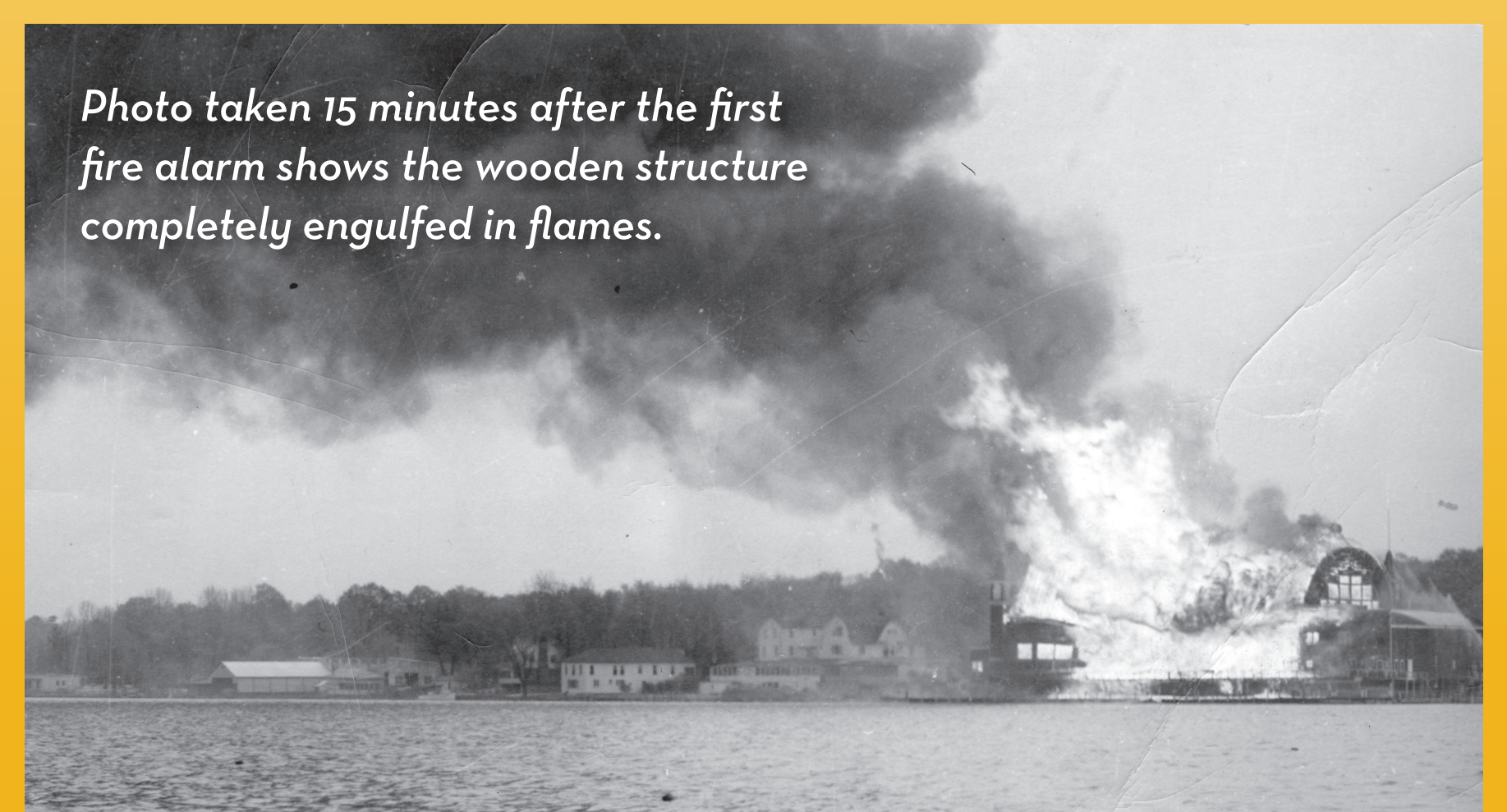


Photo taken 15 minutes after the first fire alarm shows the wooden structure completely engulfed in flames.