

The hospital opened its doors on November 9, 1874. In January 1879 a major fire consumed the building. The following is an account that was published in the January 26, 1879 edition of *the St. Joseph Gazette*.

A Great Calamity

- - -

**State Lunatic Asylum No. 2
Destroyed by Fire**

- - -

**A Fine Structure a Mass
Of Smoldering Ruins**

- - -

**The Inmates Rescued and
Quartered in the Court House**

- - -

**Heroism of the Attendants
In Rescuing the Unfortunates**

- - -

**Thrilling Scenes Witnessed
During the Fire**

- - -

**Intense Excitement Occasioned by
The Rapidly Flying Rumors**

- - -

**Meeting of Managers and
Resolutions Adopted**

- - -

**The Board of Trade Takes Prompt
Action in the Premises**

**History of Institution and
Estimate of the Loss**

- - -

**Interesting Facts Gleaned on the
Ground by *Gazette* Reporters**

At about one o'clock yesterday afternoon a courier on horseback dashed down Frederick Avenue at a terrific speed, and galloping to the hook and ladder house on Francis Street

between Fifth and Sixth, gave notice that State Lunatic Asylum No. 2 was on fire. Word was at once sent by telephone to Chief McNutt, at Hall and Kingsbury's bookbindery on Felix Street between Fourth and Fifth, and he at once ordered the entire department to prepare for immediate service. The hook and ladder truck already equipped was at once manned and started for the scene, drawn by a strong team, and Capt. McNutt hastened to the engine house on Edmond Street between Market Square the River where he met Mayor Piner. It was the chief's intention at first to attach six horses to each of the steamers and make all possible speed to the scene of the conflagration but this idea was abandoned after a consultation, the ad condition of the roads rendering it impossible to draw the engine over them to the institution in time to save the building. The news spread like wildfire throughout the city and in half an hour after the arrival of the courier, the streets were filled with people and

THE WILDEST EXCITEMENT

prevailed in town. Every available vehicle in the city was called into use and in a few minutes Frederick Avenue leading to the institution was almost blockaded with people hurrying to the scene of terror. The dense volumes of smoke ascending could be seen from the city, and all the eminences were occupied by people with field and opera glasses viewing the scene of destruction. A light breeze blew from the northeast and seemed frightened with nothing but rumors concerning the disaster. These rumors only intensified the panic in town and as they floated about the city, they were exaggerated until one might readily have believed that an appalling holocaust would be the result. Then as the firemen dashed over the streets, their horses foaming and panting with blood flowing from their nostrils, those in the vicinity of the avenue who had not heard the rumors were attracted to the thoroughfare, and the sidewalks were lined with excited people, among whom all sorts of stories circulated, and the panic was thereby increased. Women ran to and fro, wringing their hands, weeping and lamenting

THE AWFUL FATE

of the unfortunates who were supposed to be perishing in the flames. Occasionally a wild man, a maniac or one made with excitement was met fleeing, terror-stricken, hatless and shoeless, warning all that he met to turn away from the Sodom and Gomorrah. This convinced all who journeyed in the direction of the burning building that panic must prevail at the institution, for it was then definitely known that some had escaped, and this knowledge gave color to some of the wild statements that were afloat among the people in town and on the road to the institution. On emerging from the city's limits and ascending the knoll beyond,

THE FIRST GOOD VIEW

of the flames was obtained. Then the stately front stood up untarnished, but above and beyond it the red flames leaped high and danced and roared with terrific fury, telling in language plainer than human tongue could speak that the grand and imposing edifice was doomed. Entering the gateway to the grounds and proceeding up the avenue by the building, an immense crowd was greeted and the excitement was intense. The Officers of the institution were besieged on all sides by anxious inquiries seeking information as to

the safety of individual inmates, but there was little to be obtained that was at all satisfactory.

DR. G.C. CATLETT

Superintendent of the institution stated that he could give no information as to the origin of the fire. He and Mr. D.M. McDonald, the steward, had just finished their dinner and entered the steward's office, where they were engaged in making a tabular statement of the cost of keeping the patients in the St. Joseph institution. It is uncertain that Representatives Saudners and Crowther had requested a statement of this kind, to be used in opposition to the efforts of Mr. Campbell of St. Louis to prejudice the Legislature against all state institutions outside of St. Louis. This statement will show that the cost of keeping patients at St. Joseph not been greater than at St. Louis or Fulton.

CHARLIE WATERS

the baker, was found in the crowd, attired in light-colored pantaloons, covered with flour, a white shirt, opened in from with A.M. Saxton's carriage robe thrown about his shoulders. He was perfectly calm and gave a rational account of the disaster so far as come under his notice. The fire was first discovered, Mr. Waters said, about twelve o'clock. Some of the employees in the east wing of the building smelled smoke, and on investigation found that the framework in the drying room connected with the laundry was on fire. The employees worked energetically for about an hour, endeavoring to extinguish the fire, yet it gained such headway that this work was finally abandoned, and under the direction of Dr. Catlett, the whole force was united in an effort to

RESCUE

the inmates. This proved to be a Herculean task for many of them were afflicted with the most violent type of insanity and stubbornly refused to be moved. They were seized, however tenderly but firmly, and dragged from the burning building. Many became alarmed and fled of their own accord, and some of them escaped and are still at large, but the latest information dispels the belief, current early in the evening that large numbers were at large. Mr. Waters stated further that a number of the Babcock fire extinguishers were brought into use, but were not in good working order and proved to be of little service.

PATIENTS

were confined in an enclosure on the premises and a strong guard was placed over them. They were provided with shawls and blankets by the attendants who did all in their power to make them comfortable.

IN THE CROWD

surrounding the building the excitement was intense. Great volumes of smoke went up from the burning building, dense black smoke that almost obscured the sun from the view of those on the ground. Wild rumors were afloat here, also, and if half the stories in circulation had been credited, the spectators must have believed that terrible things were transpiring inside. As the flames were seething and crackling and licking up the south wing of the building, someone said that a man, wild with terror had appeared at one of

the third story windows just as the flames began to dart into his room. Then the flames were bursting from all the windows and coals of fire and cinders filled the air, falling upon the excited crowd below. One unknown man rushed into the building through the main entrance, but soon came out again almost exhausted saying that he had examined thoroughly but failed to find the object of his search—the man who had appeared at the window. The flames gradually advanced northward, and eating their way through the main building, ascended to imposing cupola and cornice, licked them up as a delicate moreau and then began their work of destruction on the north wing. At this time all hands were hard at work endeavoring to save the furniture, much of which was taken out but in a greatly damaged condition.

ANOTHER SCARE

While this work was going on some excited individual below sang out that another man was seen at a second story window in the north wing. Just then the hook and ladder truck dashed up in front and ladders were hoisted to that window at once. Chief McNutt was the first to ascend and peering into the room failed to discover anything living save the flames, which were darting their hideous forked tongues into the apartment over the transom and through the doorway. Other firemen ascended with axes and an effort was made to break the iron grating but this could not be done and as the demon was advancing rapidly the work was abandoned. The flames were then left to complete their work, undisturbed, which they soon accomplished.

FIRST FLOOR

Below we give a diagram of the first floor of the building. The laundry and drying room were immediately above the engine room, kitchen and dining room.

IT'S HISTORY

On the 19th of March 1872, the Legislature passed a bill appropriating \$200,000 for the purpose of securing a site and erecting a 'Northwestern, or Southwestern Lunatic Asylum,' and a board of commissioners including N.H. McHenry of St. Louis, Hon. Zechariah J. Mitchell of Lafayette County, Joseph K. Rickey of Callaway County, Louis Hax of St. Joseph and William E. Gilmore of Springfield was appointed to carry into effect the provisions of the law.

In this view the commissioners in the month of May visited several localities in the northwestern and southwestern parts of the state; and after a spirited contest with opposing influences, concluded to select this city as the most appropriate location.

On the 15th of June the Commissioners purchased a tract of 120 acres, about one-half or three quarters of a mile from the eastern city limits. The farm on which it was situated contained 120 acres, a fine peach orchard of about 20 acres, an apple orchard of 10 acres and a fine vineyard of about 10 acres. There are many fine springs, a beautiful ravine and grove. The land is undulating and the location a very beautiful one and the scenery fine.

This location is one of the most desirable that could have been selected and was secured for the sum of \$28,800. Thomas Walsh of St. Louis was appointed architect and

superintendent. In September of that year the contract of building was let to W.H. Fitzgibbon of St. Louis and the structure completed in 1874.

Of the original structure, exclusive of subsequent additions, the main building fronted west with a depth of 58 feet and was 150 feet long. The entire building was four stories high with basement. The basement and first story were 13 feet high in the clear; the fourth story was mansard and presented 48 elegant dormer windows. The top of the roof of the structure had an altitude of 59 feet from the range work. On the front of the main building the clock and bell tower rose to a height of 115 feet from the ground. The smoke tower in the rear of the same section was 110 feet high. The walls were faced with stock brick and rimmed with Milwaukee pressed brick. The arches were trimmed with spring, ring and keystone of Warrensburg sandstone. Over 3,500,000 bricks were contained in the walls of the original building and these were manufactured on the asylum grounds.

About the first of November 1874, the building was opened and the first patients received in charge of the present superintendent Dr. G.C. Catlett. Additions and improvements to the asylum, in the way of outbuildings and other necessary improvements have since been made at an extra expense of about \$20,000.

IN THE ENCLOSURE

A number of female patients huddled together like frightened sheep many of them weeping bitterly and lamenting the destruction of their beautiful home. Others clenched their short-cropped hair and raved while many seemed entirely oblivious to all their exciting surroundings. The men behaved in about the same way. A few of both sexes were in straight jackets and did nothing but curse and rave while others less violent, pityingly sought to pacify them. One man, tall and with features almost classical, but minus the flowing locks that he would doubtless have worn if permitted to make his toilet to suit himself, quoted Shakespeare with dramatic effect. Another, once a lawyer, argued some mighty cause and vainly sought to convince an imaginary court that the prosecution was malicious in that there was neither law nor equity nor precedent for sustaining the demurrer. Here was observed a musical genius, a lady of rare culture (in her own opinion) who sat at an imaginary piano and entertained an imaginary audience with choice selections of Liszt, Mendelssohn and Lecocq. Here strutted a soldier with the pride of a corporal and the dignity of a Marshall in Napoleon's army.

A preacher sought a secluded spot and prayed reverently for the salvation of the whole world. A representative in Congress delivered a speech calculated to electrify all the nation. A little group of spectators were edified with the relation of thrilling adventures at sea by an old tar who had been nine times across the Atlantic, thrice shipwrecked and once cast on a desert island. Isolated and alone was a melancholy, sedate and thoughtful journalist whose sole ambition was to please but soliloquized that the world's wages were dross, and that true genius went unrewarded. The agitator was there demanding that the people rise up in their might and majesty, and wrest the government from the hands of the despots who had ruthlessly torn it from the hands of the patriots who fought, bled and died to save the flag for the flag's own sake. An intelligent looking man declared that

somebody had inveighed against the papists and if there was anything under the heavens that made his blood boil and his hair stand on end it was denunciation of the papists. The wholesale merchant sat in his counting room and planned for the mercantile interests of the South in general and of his Orleans house in particular. An artist sketched the building as it burned and called attention to the fact that the view would be presented in the next Harper's weekly. A pugilist came here in the attitude of a prizefighter and terrified all whom he encountered. "I'm not crazy," shouted an excited individual, "and I'm going home. Hear my gentle racket! Stand off and let me pass! I'll submit no longer to this infamous outrage."

"Just wait," persuaded Dr. Catlett, "and we'll send you home by and by."

"Send me home! You send me home!" exclaimed the indignant gentleman. "I'll have you know sir, that nobody sends me. I'm a free American citizen and go and come at will."

"But you misunderstand me," the doctor said. "I mean that we'll get you a ticket and let you go on the train."

"What train? What ticket?" roared the maniac. "I need no trains or tickets. I scorn your generosity. I can walk faster than any trains on these roads can go. You needn't trouble yourself about me, sir, I'm all right."

But he fell into line after a while and marched out of the enclosure into the city.

THE WOMEN

were provided with conveyances first, and brought into the city where they were provided with comfortable quarters in the County Clerk's office and the courtroom. They were usually dressed in dark calico and many of them had their hair shingled close to the head. Some were very violent and a few were in straight jackets. All the vehicles on the ground were employed and an attendant was sent with each wagon. All possible care was bestowed upon the unfortunates. Some of them were haggard and wore a look of mad frenzy, while others looked and acted as sane people do. One woman became alarmed and leaped from the wagon after it had started. She ran at a terrific speed but was caught, overpowered and placed in another wagon. Finally, after all the wagons had gone there were still some twenty-five or thirty men remaining and they were escorted into town afoot.

AT THE COURTHOUSE

thousands of citizens hearing of the removal of the patients to the courthouse, gathered there to see them as they were brought in. The men were placed in Justice Fitton's office and all were made as comfortable as possible. Citizens sent in clothing and provisions and before nine o'clock every patient was cozily stowed away and most of them were asleep.

MEETING OF THE MANAGERS

the Board of Managers of the Asylum held a meeting at the courthouse last night in the office of B.R. Vineyard. The object of the meeting was to take some action in relation to providing the necessary means for taking care of the patients.

In the absence of Mr. A.H. Vortes, President of the Board, on motion of Col. J.H.R. Cundiff was called to the chair. The Secretary, Dr. Malin was at the desk. There were present the following members of the Board: Governor Silas Woodson, R.L. McDonald, Col. J.C. Roberts, Col. J.H.R. Cundiff, Dr. Malin, Dr. E.A. Donelan, and Dr. Catlett.

GOVERNOR WOODSON

offered the following resolutions which were unanimously adopted:

Resolved. That a committee of three members of the Board of Managers be appointed by the President to examine into the cause of the fire resulting in the destruction of the Asylum on this day, and report all the facts as far as possible to an adjourned meeting of the Board next Monday at 3 o'clock.

Resolved. That a committee of three members to the Board be appointed by the President to act in conjunction with a committee to be appointed by the Board of Trade of St. Joseph and the City authorities of St. Joseph, to ascertain immediately if suitable buildings for the accommodation of the patients can be provided in St. Joseph, and if so, what building and upon what terms, and that said committee be constructed to report tomorrow evening, if possible, to an adjourned meeting of the Board to be held at the Courthouse at 3 o'clock.

Resolved. That the President of this Board shall immediately report to the General Assembly, now in session, the destruction of the Asylum Building No. 2 by fire, in the number and condition of patients unprovided for and request the General Assembly, demanded by the circumstances, in which we have 200 insane citizens, placed by the destruction of the building provided by the State for their accommodation, confinement and treatment.

The President appointed for the committee mentioned in the first resolution the following members of the Board: Governor Silas Woodson, Col. J.C. Roberts, and Dr. E.A. Donelan.

The committee contemplated by the second resolution appointed by the President, are as follows: R.L. McDonald and Dr. Malin.

On motion, Col. J.H.R. Cundiff was made one of the second committee.

Col. J.C. Roberts offered the following resolution which was adopted without a dissenting voice:

Resolved. That the superintendent and steward of Asylum No. 2 be empowered by this Board to purchase all supplies and to make all necessary arrangements for the comfort of the patients lately confined in said Asylum until such time as this Board shall determine what final disposition of the patients now thrown upon their charge shall be made.

On motion, Dr. Catlett, Sheriff Spencer and Mayor Piner were appointed as a committee to provide a necessary police force and watchmen to secure the protection of the patients and the court house building.

THE BOARD OF TRADE

A committee from the Board of Trade consisting of George Olds, Samuel L. Smith, Judson Lyon and Winslow Judson called upon the Board of Managers while in session and tendered the assistance of the Board of Trade in providing the necessary supplies and conveniences for taking care of the patients.

THE MANAGEMENT

The Board of Managers consists of ex-Governor Silas Woodson, Dr. Jos. Matin, Dr. E.A. Donelan, R.L. McDonald, Alien H. Vories, Hon. James C. Roberts, and col. J.H.R. Cundiff. Mr. Vories is President and Dr. Malin is Secretary of the Board. The officers of the Asylum were Dr. G.C. Catlett, Superintendent, Dr. Busey, Assistant Superintendent, D.M McDonald, Steward, Mrs. Laura Calhoun, Matron and thirty-five or forty subordinate employees were engaged.

THE PATIENTS

The whole number of patients who have been admitted to the institution during the last four years is 580.

Number in the Asylum—January 1.....	226
Number under treatment during the last two years.....	418
Number recovered during the last two years.....	103
Number improved during the last two years.....	49
Number unimproved during the last two years.....	21
Number escaped during the last two years.....	1

THE LOSS

It is difficult to estimate the loss with any degree of accuracy. The above figures will give a fair idea as to its cost but the walls of the main building remaining intact, and the cost of the building materials having so decreased, it is asserted that the structure could be replaced for half the original cost.

NO INSURANCE

The Managers formerly had the building insured for its full value but the appropriation and the insurance was cancelled. Hon. Waller Young, who was in the Senate at the time, fought heroically against the “penny wise and pound foolish” system of economy as he termed it but to no avail. The Senate was immoveable and so was the House. Perhaps in the abstract they were both right, although in this particular instance it is clearly unfortunate that the policies were cancelled.

Incidents of the fire:

- The roads were very muddy.
- The firemen did all that was possible for them to do.
- May Piner and Marshal Rogers were there.

- Governor Woodson was on the ground early and remained as long as there was work to do.
- The matron, Mrs. Calhoun, lost all her clothing and valuables and six hundred dollars in money.
- There were forty-four patients belonging to this county in the asylum.
- Another of the employees lost all he had, consisting of six fifty-dollar bills and all his clothing.
- Superintendent Dr. Catlett lost nearly all of his own household goods in the burning building including a very fine piano.
- Mr. Speaker, the engineer, suffered the loss of a fine gold watch, three hundred and fifty dollars in money besides all his clothing and other valuables.
- The head laundress, Miss McCord, lost all her earnings for years, amounting to seven hundred dollars in cash besides all her clothing and other valuables.
- A large, grand-square piano was carried out of the room of one of the lady attendants to the head of the stairway in the second story and through the excitement of those removing it, it was jammed tightly in the stairway and consumed.
- James Maloney, one of the employees at the institution, lost his trunk, containing one hundred and fifty dollars worth of goods and six hundred dollars in money.
- Mrs. Gov. Woodson, as soon as it became evident that the building was lost, sent word to Dr. Catlett that her house was open for the reception of any patients that could be permitted to remain there.
- During the burning of the building, when the pipes leading to the gasoline tanks burned off, the fluid streamed out into the midst of the fire with a loud hissing, sizzling noise like steam escaping from an over charged boiler, but without any explosion.
- Some of the patients seemed reluctant to accept the accommodations tendered them at the courthouse but when they were met by their kind matron and assured by her that all was well they at once became docile and did as she desired them.
- At the time the fire broke out, Dr. Catlett and the Steward D.M. McDonald, were in their offices making an estimate of the cost of each patient per day. The estimate shows that the cost has been five-three cents per day for each patient for the past twenty-six months.
- Senator Waller Young was on the ground rendering all the assistance he possibly could. He was heard to frequently lament the action of the Legislature in refusing to vote suitable appropriations, which he advocated to provide an effective fire department for the protection of the Asylum.
- One of the inmates by the name of Will Boyer, whose home is a short distance north of Easton, started for home immediately after he was turned out of the burning building, barefooted and hatless. When last seen he was about seven miles in the country, running wildly and said that he was bound for home.
- Mrs. Laurence, of Holt County, another one of the inmates started for home immediately after being turned out. She has not been seen since and is still missing. She escaped once before and walked home. When she was brought back she laughingly said that the first man she met at the depot just as she arrived in town was Dr. Busey who went up on the train. Some fears are entertained as to whether she will get through safely.
- Great wonder was expressed by some of the citizens of the city on account of the fact that the fire engines were not taken out to the fire. It would have been almost an

impossibility to have taken them out there and they would have been useless after they got there on account of the lack of water facilities.

--Among the first patients brought to the city was an old lady. On being taken to the Courthouse where she was expected to remain, she persistently refused to enter, declaring that she would go in the jail. Deputy Sheriff Finch, perceiving that the attendant was likely not to succeed and understanding how to handle such person, took hold of her and proposed to take her down the street. She looked at him for a moment and then went quietly in without any further trouble.

--A rather amusing scene occurred at the corner of Fifth and Jules Streets at the southeast corner of the Courthouse block. Parties were notified to look out for the patients wondering about the city. Mr. William DeVorse was on the lookout and seeing a lady pass the corner, seized her and made strenuous efforts to take her to the room in the Courthouse occupied by the female patients. It was some time before she could convince him that she was not insane. When Will found out his mistake he felt that he ought to be in the apartment with the male patients.

--William Fowler, who is owner of the Occidental Hotel, which is now vacant, was called upon to know on what terms the building could be obtained for the use of patients. He refused to let the Board of Managers have it unless they would pay him \$150 per month and give R.L McDonald and A.M. Saxton as securities that the rent as well as all damages would be paid. The proposition was discussed in the meeting of the Board last night and was characterized by the members of the Board of Trade who were present, as well as others, as an outrage, and an effort to take advantage of the situation to enforce payment of at least two prices for the rent of the building.

--One of the inmates, by the name of John Teagarten, was standing amid the throng of people during the excitement and stir the attending fire, and appeared to be very anxious about what would become of him. A GAZETTE newsagent approached him and inquired, "What is the trouble?" "Oh," said he, "I belong here. This place is all burning down and I have no place to stay. My folks live at Stewartsville and if my mother and father knew of this, they would have me home in an hour. I have an uncle living up north of town and if I thought Dr. Catlett wouldn't care, I'd go up there and stay all night." The newsagent suggested, "You do not look like you were very crazy and if I were you I would go." Said he, "I am not crazy, but have fits every two or three weeks. He started off and was not seen afterward.

BURNING OF THE ASYLUM

The readers of the GAZETTE will share in the profound regret that all citizens will feel over the destruction by fire of the splendid edifice near this city known as Lunatic Asylum, No. 2. We can add nothing to the very full and accurate report given elsewhere, except to say that never was more true charity exhibited by any people than by our citizens in supplying every want of the unfortunate patients. Every man and woman was comfortably cared for and tenderly put to rest long before midnight—thanks to the unremitting care of Dr. Catlett the Superintendent, nobly aided by a delegation from our Board of Trade and the Workingmen's organization and citizens generally. On all sides and from everybody we hear praises of R.L. McDonald for the constant and heroic work done by him at the fire and among the patients who were removed to the city.

We warn our citizens that they must now be vigilant and attend immediately to the matter of replacing that Asylum.

Not an hour is to be lost.

History of the Superintendent's House

Rev. Moses E. Lard moved to St. Joseph from Kentucky in 1859 and purchased a piece of property about 1.5 miles east of the city. This property was later presented to his son-in-law, Silas Woodson on Sept. 5, 1865.

Silas Woodson married Virginia Juliet Lard (Moses' daughter) on December 27, 1866 in Lexington, KY.

Woodson would become the 21st Governor of Missouri—and the first Democratic Governor elected after the Civil War. He served from January 8, 1873 to January 12, 1875.

Woodson was born May 18, 1819 in Knox County, KY to Wade Netherland and Alice Chick Woodson. His father had been previously married to Mary Harris, granddaughter of Mary Jefferson who was the sister of President Thomas Jefferson.

From Woodson's marriage to Mary Harris, two sons were born. They were Judge Archelaus Woodson and Dr. Charles Ransom Woodson. Dr. Woodson served as the third Superintendent of the St. Joseph State Hospital (1890-1907). (The Woodson Children's Psychiatric Hospital is named in honor of Dr. Woodson.)

Governor Woodson was married three times. His first bride was Mary Jane Roberts of Knox County, KY, who he married Sept 14, 1842. They had one son. She died March 22, 1845.

His second wife was Olivia Adams whom he married on July 27th, 1846. She died February 1856. His third wife was Virginia Juliet Lard who bore him three children. She died Jan 25, 1907 and is also buried in Mount Mora Cemetery in St. Joseph.

The St. Joseph home of Governor Silas Woodson included approximately 10 acres of land. The house changed owners numerous times during its history. It appears that following his death, the home was assumed by the Saxton National Bank. On April 20, 1898, it was purchased or deeded to Annie P. Berry. On February 10, 1937, it was deeded to Emeline P. Hedges. On October 12, 1937, the property apparently became the joint property of Floyd M. Sprague and Annie P. Berry. It was sold March 15, 1944 to the Board of Managers of State Eleemosynary Institutions of the State of Missouri for the use and benefit of State Hospital No. 2 in St. Joseph, Missouri.

The last superintendent to live in the building was Dr. Ron Dittmore who moved out shortly before the new hospital was occupied in 1997.

That Woodson home was used most recently to house a special treatment program until May 2002. It is currently part of the NW Missouri Psychiatric Rehabilitation Center.