

FIRE DESTROYS ONE OF OLDEST HOMES; LOSS OVER \$12,000

One of Original 40 Residences in Riverside Demolished

FIRE ORIGIN UNKNOWN

Frame Structure Thwarts Heroic Efforts of Fire Fighters

Fire of unknown origin completely destroyed one of the oldest residences in Riverside Sunday evening. Firemen responding to alarms sent in by several neighbors found the residence of Mrs. Alma Gray at 133 Scottswood road crowned with a mass of flames, and after an hour of heroic work had to admit that the home was doomed.

Despite the efforts of the local department and a unit of the Berwyn department, the home was almost entirely consumed by flames. The damage it is estimated will be between \$12,000 and \$15,000. The house itself cannot be reconstructed and much of the contents not saved by willing neighbors was damaged by smoke and flames.

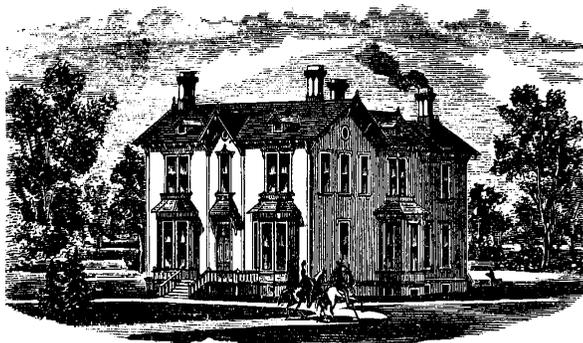
The fire, which it is thought started in the attic of the home, occurred during the absence of Mrs. Alma Gray, the owner, and her daughter and husband, Mr. and Mrs. F.W. Caldwell. Sterling Pratt, who had a room in the house, was in one of the front rooms when the fire started but was not aware of it until warned by neighbors. Miss Gladys Shearer and Miss E. Davis, who also had rooms in the home, were also absent. Miss Shearer said that she left the house about 4:20 o'clock. The fire was discovered a few minutes later.

Gordon Lipsy of South Longcommon road and Rev. Alfred F. Waldo of the Presbyterian church were the first to discover the blaze. Both of them saw flames licking above the edge of the ridge adjacent to the chimney in the rear of the house. Mr. Lipsy said that when he first saw the flames he thought a few buckets of water would put it out but that by the time he called the fire department and got to the Gray home the flames were covering a good portion of the roof.

Fire Had Good Start

Although the fire department was at the fire within three or four minutes after the alarm was sounded, the blaze had gained considerable headway when Assistant Fire Marshal Fred Crowe and a squad of men tried to gain entrance to the attic.

"When we arrived at the fire I knew from



Residence of E. F. Nexsen, on Scott's Wood Road, Riverside.
W. L. B. Jenney, Architect.

the location of the blaze just where to go" said Crowe. "Twenty years ago last December we responded to a fire call at that house and the blaze was located just where it was Sunday evening. At that time a defective flue had set fire to the floor and roof of the attic and considerable damage was done to the house.

"Accompanied by several members of the department I entered through the back door of the house and started up the rear stairs for the attic door the location of which was familiar to me" said Mr. Crowe. "When we opened the door to the attic we found the eight or more steps leading from the second floor to the attic had been consumed by the flames and it was impossible to gain entrance to the attic where the blaze was raging furiously at that time.

"Orders were given to have a hose stretched and we broke a hole through the ceiling into the attic and attached a ladder so that we might pour water onto the fire, we had just started to turn the water onto the fire when the roof collapsed and sent rafts through the ceiling into the second story of the house. The danger was so great that orders were given to the men to get out of the second story and fight the fire from the outside.

While the firemen were busy trying to curb the blaze, scores of neighbors volunteered their services and considerable furniture on the first floor and some from the second floor was removed to garages and barns in the neighborhood.

Call Berwyn Unit

The Berwyn fire department was called for assistance when it was discovered that it would be impossible to reach the attic from the inside of the house and the local department lacked ladders long enough to reach the roof from the outside. A.D. King put in the call for Berwyn under instructions from Assistant Marshal Crowe, but when the call was made Berwyn replied that someone else had previously called and that the fire truck was on the way.

Joe Kapsa, a member of the Riverside fire department, had his back badly wrenched when he fell down the outside stairs of the house as he was leaving it. It is thought that

he fainted with pain caused by stepping on a nail. While fighting the fire he had run the nail into his foot and started outdoors when he fell. He was taken to Hinsdale sanitarium and later returned to his home in the village.

The close to zero temperature made the fire fighting anything but pleasurable for the volunteers, most of whom worked in water drenched clothes for close to six hours. Their suffering was relieved somewhat when Mrs. Fred Crowe brought over a supply of steaming hot coffee and some sandwiches.

Most of the stuff removed from the burning house has been found stored in neighboring barns but a few of the articles are missed. Miss Gladys Shearer has been unsuccessful in a search for a secretary and a small table that she had in her room and of which now there is no trace.

Assistant Marshal Crowe was sitting in the offices of Brundage & Sampson, just across the street from the town hall, when the fire siren sounded. Harry L. Brundage said that he took his watch out of his pocket when Mr. Crowe jumped up to respond to the siren's call, and that but two minutes elapsed from the time Mr. Crowe left the office until the fire engine started down the street toward the fire.

The Gray home was one of the first 40 houses to be erected in Riverside after its development as a home community. It was erected by the Riverside Improvement company, and was a massive residence the reconstruction value of which would total well over \$25,000 at present material and labor prices.

For many years the home was known as the L. M. Jordan homestead and the fire mentioned above occurred while that family lived there.

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