HISTORIC TOWN HALL BURNED

Pelham Loses a Building That Was Built 120 Years Ago.

Citizens Tried in Vain to Check Flames, But Saved Other Property.

Postmaster Atwood Ran Barefoot Through Snow to Ring the Alarm—Small Insurance.

Little did the citizens of the quaint town of Pelham think last Wednesday evening, that before the sun should rise on Thanksgiving day, the old historic building, which had served the town first as a church and later as a town hall, for the space of 120 years, would be nothing but a heap of smoking ruins.

Such, however, was the fact. The common place where the fathers met for religious worship for once half a century in which for almost another three-quarters of a century their children and grandchildren met for the transacting of business; it was the measures which dealt with the town's welfare, which between 4 and 5 o'clock on Thanksgiving morning, totally destroyed by fire.

The first intimation of the conflagration was given by Mr. and Mrs. Fergus Bannister.

Mrs. Bannister, soon after 4 o'clock in the morning, happened to look out across the common, thought she detected a light in the south-east corner of the building, but thinking that the janitor had forgotten to extinguish a lamp, she took little notice of the fact. However, on looking again a minute or two later, she saw that something was wrong and that the building was ablaze.

She and her husband, at once gave the alarm. The church bell was violently rung, the citizens on the telephone lines were notified, and in a very brief time many people appeared on the scene to render what assistance lay within their power.

It was seen at once, however, that little or nothing could be done to save the building and its contents. A very high wind was blowing at the time and in a very few minutes the structure was a mass of burning timbers.

On account of the high wind which was prevailing at the time the people who had gathered, finding it impossible to save the town hall turned their attention in the direction of preventing the destruction of other property in the vicinity, which was threatened by the fire.

The wind carried the sparks and flaming shingles a distance of from 300 to 400 feet. In fact, a tree close to the residence of Charles W. Hobbs, at least 300 feet away, was actually found to be ablaze, while a fire was likewise found burning on the porch of his house. Prompt effort extinguished the flames here and saved the premises.

During the progress of the fire, many anxious moments were spent by property owners in the vicinity of the blaze for had the wind changed, it would have been well-nigh impossible to have avoided further catastrophe.

Indeed it was fortunate that the wind was blowing from the north-west. Had it blown from any other direction, other buildings would certainly have been doomed.

It happened also that the roofs of the nearby buildings were wet with the rain and snow which had fallen during the previous 24 hours, and this fact, in the estimation of some who were present, all that saved much other property from destruction.

Just how the fire started will probably never be known. A party from Collinsville had the use of the hall the night before, but the janitor claims that all fires were extinguished before he locked up the hall for the night, after the departure of the party.

Besides the loss of the buildings, on which there was an insurance of $1500, there was also a loss of about $200 sustained by F. M. Woodbury and Mrs. Daniel Atwood, who owned a stage and scenery valued at that sum.

Credit is due to Postmaster H. H. Atwood who, on first learning of the fire, hurried barefoot through the snow to the church, entered the building by a basement window, and gave a general alarm by ringing the church bell.

Division Supt. E. E. Overlock also promptly got out a line of hose and in addition to protecting his company's property rendered valuable assistance to others.

A fact over which much regret is expressed is the loss of two oil paintings of Gen. Samuel M. Richardson and Gen. Joshua Atwood which hung in the hall, but saving them was a simple impossibility.

Aside from the loss of the town hall as a public building, there is also much regret that in its loss one of the town's oldest and most noted landmarks has passed away.

It is 120 years since the structure was erected as a meeting house, it having been built in 1785 and occupied, presumably the following year.

It is a tradition in the town, and it seems to be well authenticated, that on April 17, 1775, the heavy timbers, hauled a distance of about ten miles to the place where the building was being erected, there was at that late date so much snow on the ground that the four ox teams hauled the timbers over stone walls and other kinds of fence.

The building was used as a church until 1842. For many years the people worshipped there in winter's severe weather with no stoves to add warmth to the chilly air.

Since that time, although in a somewhat remodelled condition, the building has been used as a town hall.

What action the citizens of the town will take to replace the loss is of course unknown as yet. The town is not rich, yet its people are both patriotic and progressive. It boasts a library which would do credit to a town of greater size and large resources.

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