

# THE WAY IT WAS

The publication of

THE CASS CITY AREA HISTORICAL & GENEALOGY SOCIETY

VOLUME 26 April 2020



The Cass City Historical Society in their regular public meeting received a talk from Debbie Powell, the Village Manager, on the activities of the village. She gave an optimistic report including the prospects for growth, especially in the area of employment opportunities. Detroit Edison is setting up a new Telephone Call Center in their facilities here, and Ben's Grocery Store will also be hiring personnel in the near future. One problem is going to be is the need for affordable housing.



## A-R-A-H-A-R-A-H-A-R-A



**Whenever the fire siren blares our Volunteer Fire Department men and women heed the call!** It may happen in the middle of the night, during the dinner hour or when they are at work, but they stop everything, and come to the rescue. Our community has been blessed with this brave, heroic service for many years.

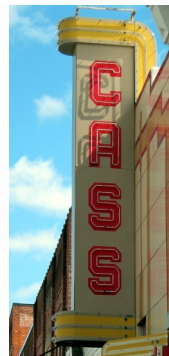
Fires have a persistent way of accelerating quickly, and often much damage may have already occurred before any help could arrive. In many cases containing the fire to prevent its spreading to other nearby homes and structures is the critical objective.

Over the years there have been several such fires, where our fire department has saved the day from a greater disaster.

### The Passtime Theater Fire

In December of 1939 the siren sounded for a fire at the Pastime Theater in town. It was considered to be the finest theater in the Upper Thumb at that time, and owned by the Schuckert family. The films were black and white movies and talkies at that time.

Our fire department was assisted by the Caro Fire Department, and together they were able to contain the fire from damaging other buildings including Fort's Confectionery Store on the east side and the A&P Grocery on the west side. One man recalls when yet a boy seeing the marquee come crashing down on the sidewalk



The Schuckerts rebuilt the theater and gave it its current name, The Cass Theater.

### The Donahue Barn Fire

In June of 1964, at 2 o'clock in the morning, Dr. Donahue's dairy barn on the north side of town where the High school

now stands burst into fire. The sky lit up and it was reported that it was seen from as far away as Sebawaing.

It was reported that 49 registered Holstein milking cows, eleven calves, 350 ton of hay, and a quantity of corn and other feeds were all lost, as well as a large amount of equipment. Sparks were raining down everywhere causing a fearful concern for the nearby homes that were in danger. Again the Caro Fire Department came to help contain the fire.

The fire was determined to have been caused by faulty electrical equipment and spontaneous combustion. It took over three days to extinguish the smoldering remains, but the surrounding damage was minimal.

### Frutchey Bean Elevator Fire

At 9:00 in the evening on September 28th of 1965 after all the workers had gone home fire broke out in the Frutchey Bean Elevator on West Main Street where the concrete grain silos are still standing. The business was formerly owned by the

Farm Produce Company, and known as The Farmer's Elevator. It was the harvest season and grain dust was everywhere. There had been fires here before, but none like this one. Flames were towering high in the sky and the fire was first reported by a group of high school students who were working on a home coming float on the other side of town.

It was estimated that there were 50 firemen on hand that night to fight the fire. They were called from Gagetown, Unionville and Caro. Their assistance brings out another point that our fire warriors are not only on call for the needs of our town, but they may at any time be called to serve in other towns if the need should arise.

The old building (65 years old) was a total loss along with large quantities of navy beans and rye. Bean sorters, scales, gravity separators, and bagging machines were also destroyed. There was a great concern for the grain in the concrete silos, but it seemed to have survived with little damage.



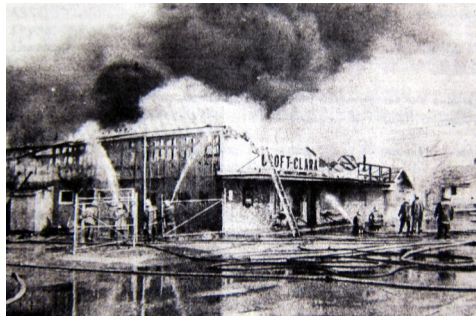
Again the fire department in the heat of the inferno were able to keep the fire from spreading to nearby homes and businesses.

### **The Croft-Clara Lumber Yard Fire**

All the previous fires mentioned happened after dark, but the Croft-Clara Lumber Yard fire happened during the noon hour on Super Bowl Sunday in February of 1993.

The business had a long history in town from being The Brinker Lumber Company, located on East Main Street just east of the current Sunoco Gas Station. When Cliff Croft and George Clara bought it they changed the name and they built a new, larger facility on the west end of town

where the new Frankenmuth Credit Union building now stands. Not long before the fire the business had



been purchased by Siding World, a Detroit based company. Being that it happened on Sunday the business was closed, and there was no one working in the yard at the time the fire broke out.

It was estimated that there were 70 fire fighters from Cass City, Caro, Gagetown, Kingston, Unionville, Akron, Fairgrove and Owendale fighting the blaze, and it took them eight hours to put it out. The fire was so hot that even the steel trusses melted, but because of the work of the firemen the fire was contained and prevented from expanding to nearby homes.

### **The Former Sommer's Bakery and Restaurant Fire**

At a little after 2:00 in the afternoon on March 26, 1997 fire broke out in an electrical fuse box in an upstairs apartment of the former Sommer's Bakery and Restaurant.

It took seven fire departments and a pair of bucket trucks that the Detroit Edison Company loaned to the effort to enable the fire to be fought from above.

The Bakery was noted for many years for its "Irish Bread". The business had been expanded a few years previously to add the restaurant to the business by incorporating the next door former Western Auto Store. That business was moved to larger quarters across from the Cass Theater. Charles and Debbie Wilt had just purchased the business the previous fall.

The fire also engulfed the former Gross and Maier Meat Market building to the west which was occupied at the time by the Tri County Medical Company.

There were three apartments on the second floors of these buildings which were completely destroyed along with all the possessions of the three families living in them. The Paint Store to the east, and the Ben Franklin Store to the west, were saved through the efforts of the fire fighters.

The loss of these buildings left an empty hole in our downtown business district. The former



owners, Charles and Debbie Wilt, owned another bakery in Sandusky, and decided not to rebuild. The space was purchased by the Rotary Club and converted into a park.

These five fires were some of the most significant tragedies that have stricken our community unexpectedly over the years. There have been many, many, more that were maybe not as extensive, but yet some were very tragic.

It is a great comfort to know that we have such a dedicated team of fire fighters ready to serve whenever, and wherever needed.

Whenever you knowingly meet one of the brave citizens be sure to thank them, and let them know how much their dedicated service is appreciated.

\* Most of this information was taken from the Cass City Chronicle archives.