



NEWS AND NOTES

from

The Fauquier Historical Society

Vol. 19, No.2

WARRENTON, VIRGINIA

Fall-Winter 1997

The Catastrophe of Nov. 23-24, 1909

Warrenton Rebuilds After the Great Fire

Editor's note: On Nov. 24, 1909, the Baltimore Sun reported extensively on the fire that devastated Warrenton the day before. Following is a slightly modified version of this dramatic story.

Warrenton, Va. - Saved from destruction by fire through the efforts of a corps of dynamiters, one of whom set off a 50-pound box of dynamite with a lighted roll of papers held in his hand, this town today is manifesting a spirit of thanksgiving and pluck that means a new Warrenton in a year.

The situation is sufficiently terrible to depress the spirits of the sternest, but the men of the town grasped the situation before the embers died out, and plans are being made to alleviate the distress by forming a relief committee to collect funds.

There is plenty of work to be done. Twenty-six buildings were burned to the ground, 14 families left homeless, several of them destitute; nine buildings were rent to kindlings to prevent the spread of the blaze, the municipal building is gone, the town library destroyed, some of the finest residences are burned and with them heirlooms of priceless value to the owners, and several townsmen were ruined financially. The entire western part of the town is gone.

The aggregate of the loss to property, stock and personal effects will be \$125,000. The insurance is estimated at about \$80,000.

When the work of relieving the situation is over, Mayor Thornton, Judge C. M. White, Sheriff A. S. Hamilton and other prominent men of the town will plan the future of Warrenton. A bond issue has been suggested by Capt. Fielding L. Poindexter, editor of the *Warrenton Virginian*, which will be used



Much of the west side of Warrenton was destroyed when a fire that started in a livery stable on present-day Ashby Street spread to adjoining buildings.

to repair the broken dam, which was partially to blame for the spread of the conflagration; erect a new municipal building, which will include a public library; repair sidewalks and make other improvements. This will probably be done.

Smoking Ruins

That, however, is of the future. Today Warrenton stands with one smoking blot of smut upon the fairest hill in the city. All the forenoon and afternoon the townspeople and those from all parts of this and surrounding counties have stood about and gazed at the ruins of what was once the fairest part of Warrenton.

In the crowd were the people who had suffered. Men stood with hands deep in empty pockets. Others, worth more than \$50,000 each, had suffered no damage save the loss of their wardrobe and stood in the only pair of trousers they owned. A number of ladies lost valuable and beautiful gowns, jewelry, and keepsakes. It is probable that the romantic value of the heirlooms, rare paintings and antique furniture destroyed would, if placed in the estimate of their owners, amount in losses to several millions of dollars.

Standing in the crowd also were many who rightly deserve the name of heroes.

(Continued on Page 3)

Walking Tour, New Displays Near Completion

The totally new Walking Tour of Historic Warrenton is nearly complete and ready to be submitted for printing bids, according to Fauquier Historical Society President Maxwell Harway.

The new tour guide has undergone several revisions as the committee has worked on it over the past few months. The numerous sites on the tour are coordinated with the Civil War Trails listings, and the format and size has been changed to improve portability and reduce production costs.

In a related matter, board member Linda Anderson has negotiated an extremely reasonable price for metal plaques to be affixed to tour buildings and other historic properties.

Civil War Uniform

Through the efforts of Museum Director Jackie Lee, a 3/4 length uniform jacket of Brigadier General William

ing celebration will be held when it is placed in the museum.

Kiosk Planned

Plans are currently in the works for a wishing-well informational kiosk, part of the Walking Tour but also a good addition to the historic offerings of Old Town Warrenton. The kiosk would be located on Town of Warrenton property on Courthouse Square, and would display information about the history of the county. Director Barbara Wilson has an artist's rendering of the kiosk, and is seeking a contractor to design and build it.

Society Cookbook

Director Bea McDonnell is collecting old recipes for a cookbook to be printed and sold by the Society. Members are urged to bring her period recipes - including dishes cooked in an open fireplace - for inclusion in this unique

Chair Jeanna Worst has asked Dave Bourne, formerly at Sky Meadows State Park and now at Sailor's Creek, to return to Warrenton in March to give a lecture on Warrenton's Gen. Eppa Hunton, CSA. Historian and cartographer Eugene Scheel, of Waterford, may also speak earlier in the year.

At the suggestion of Pres. Harway, the Lecture Committee is considering holding lectures on Sunday afternoons, rather than week nights, in order that many more can attend.

Gulf War Monument

The Gulf War Monument placed on the lawn in front of the museum will soon have a plaque attached explaining its significance.

The monument is a four-foot section of the bronze railing designed by world-renowned sculptor Frederick E. Hart for the Fauquier Veterans Memorial on



Looking east on Winchester Street toward Courthouse Square before the fire. Capt. Carter's house (Carter Hall) is at left. Carter Hall was gutted, and everything on the opposite side of the street was destroyed.

Great Fire

(Continued from Page 1)

Perhaps the one to whom greatest credit was given unanimously by the townspeople is C. C. Waugh, a strapping worker in the construction department under Mr. Paul C. Richards, who is constructing a road near Warrenton.

Heroes in Time of Need

When the fire was at its height and the dynamiting of buildings necessary, Waugh entered the house of Mrs. Parker with a 50-pound box of dynamite. If he worked quick enough he knew he could save the eastern and business sections of the city.

He set the pasteboard boxes containing the dynamite inside the cellar and then looked about his pockets for a fuse. He had none. The fire was beginning to creep near the Parker house. He knew if he went for a fuse he would not have time to come back because the house would be off. He knew if he had the fuse at that minute the house would be down before the fire reached there and the flames could not leap the breach.

Unhesitatingly he wrapped a bunch of newspapers tightly in his fingers and set a match to them. Glancing at the open cellar door and gauging the distance, he leaned over cat-like and threw the blazing paper at the dynamite. He figured that it would take several seconds for the flames to eat inside the pasteboard and he took a chance that

those two seconds would give him his life.

As he jumped out of the cellar door and darted across the street the flying debris of the house, following a terrific detonation, fell about him, and he was thrown 20 feet across the road. He scrambled to his feet unhurt.

That was only one instance of the pluck of those who went about to save

the town. It looked from the first, however, that nothing would save it.

Fire Started in Hayloft.

Probably no one knows how it started except that flames were seen shooting out of the hayloft of Bradburn & Clatterbuck. It was 20 minutes to 8

(Continued on Page 4)



Opposite view of Winchester Street, after the fire. Burned remains of Carter Hall and Mrs. Britton's house are at right.

Great Fire

(Continued from Page 3)

o'clock, and the revival services in the Methodist Church were just beginning. At the post office the townspeople were waiting for the evening mail to be opened.

"Fire!" rang out from the lips of a terrified Negro, and a moment later the door of the hayloft crashed out and a tongue of flame shot up to speak its ghastly message to Warrenton. Someone rang the Courthouse bell and the volunteer firemen were on the scene in five minutes. Most of them had been waiting for mail.

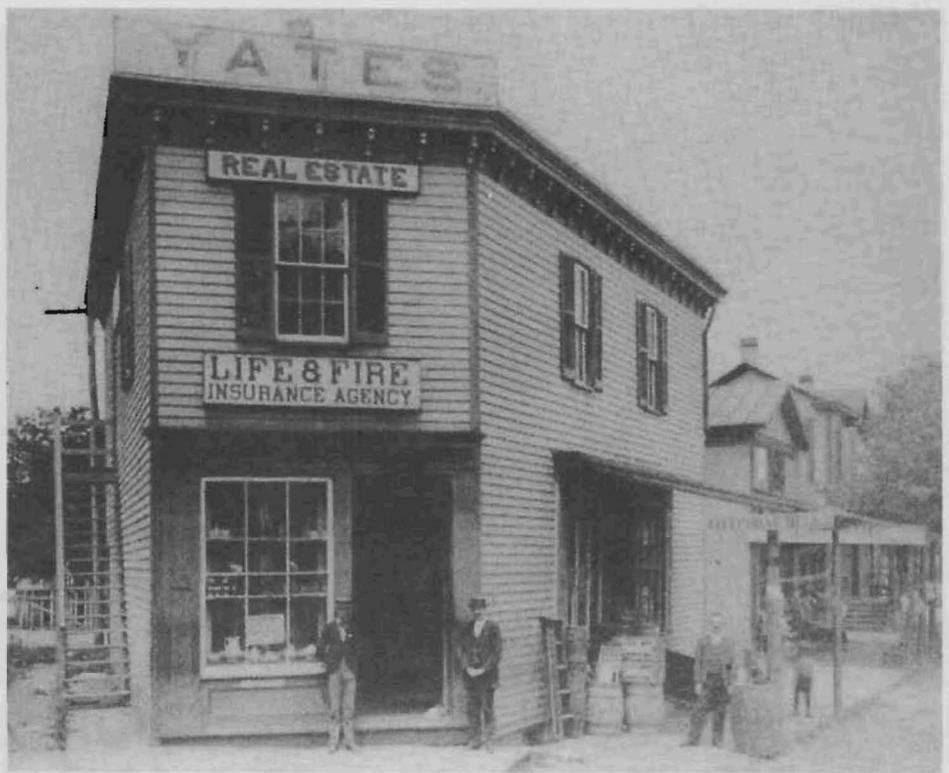
There is no fire engine in Warrenton. The pressure of the mountain water is generally sufficient, but there has been a drouth and the new reservoir of the town leaked at one end of the dam. When the fireman attached the hose there were a few moments of spluttering water and then the stream died away.

In a few minutes the flames had crept to the other stable. A horse was burned to death before anyone could open the door. The dry structure burned like celluloid. The wind was strong from the south and it blew up Winchester Street, spraying the embers upon all the buildings in the neighborhood. Soon there were a dozen houses afire. The Municipal Building, alongside of the Courthouse, caught simultaneously with the skating rink, which is next to the stables. Both burned so fiercely that the flames beat back the men who attempted to save documents.

With empty hose in their hands the firemen tore buckets from stores and dwellings. Willing women ran out with anything that would hold water.



The old Methodist Church on Culpeper Street.



The Five Forks Building, at the intersection of Main Street and the Alexandria Turnpike, was one of nine buildings blown up by dynamite to stop the spread of the fire.

Military Cadets to the Rescue

The flames lit the sky until the countryside was alarmed. The Bethel Military Cadets were marshaled on the parade grounds and given instructions to march to the city and give what assistance was possible. They marched at double quick.

Water was thrown on the flames, but there was no stopping the fire. Dr. Carter's house took fire and the family fled. The cadets struggled on the two floors to save what they could, and Mrs. Carter and their two children were given shelter in a nearby house. Trunks were thrown out of windows by cadets, spilling clothing about, but all was quickly snatched up and removed beyond the danger zone. Pictures and books were carried out and dumped in the street.

Across the street at Captain Carter's house the boarders were having a desperate time to escape. Miss Worth, daughter of Gen. William Jenkins Worth, was carried out by some of the men of the house and taken to the home of Mr. Alexander Rose. Miss Worth is 86 years old.

Gen. H. W. Hubbel, U. S. A. (retired), another boarder, had grown gray in the service, but he wrestled a full-sized trunk out of a second-story window like a piano mover. Miss Hubbel, his daughter, moved the trunks of frightened ladies to the bottom floor and then, call-

ing cadets to assist her, dragged them to a place of safety and sat on them for several hours.

Fleeing From the Flames

Capt. Newton Collins had barely time to get out, and his trunk was missing until noon today, when it was found.

Colonel and Mrs. Thomas Smith, the former the son of "Extra Billie" Smith twice Governor of Virginia, were forced down the stairs by the flames.

Mr. Thaddeus Fletcher had climbed to his roof to attempt to extinguish the embers that had set fire to the building. Before he realized it the flames were

(Continued on Page 5)



A lone chimney stands above the ashes.

Great Fire

(Continued from Page 4)

beginning to cut off his escape. One red wave swept out of an aperture in the roof near him; he ducked it and lost his hold on the roof, sliding down to what the spectators thought would be death. But his clothing caught in the rainspout and he clutched a window and was saved.

When Mr. Richards saw the blaze and remembered that the only water was low, he knew that only one thing would save the town - dynamite. With Waugh and N. T. Bartlett, a giant dynamite worker, he loaded 500 pounds of it on a wagon and came to town. One house after another until seven had been leveled were dynamited, but still there was no effect.

The flames spread to the jail, and eight prisoners were taken out without manacles, and were told to wait to see what happened. Not one attempted to escape.

On the other side of the jail was the annex to the Warren Green Hotel. If it caught, the whole eastern section of the town would go.

"Set it off," said the proprietors with a nod, and Waugh and Richards were in there for a moment. Another instant and the two-story structure was in splinters. The flames were stayed. Many times the other part of the hotel took fire, but by this time the fire extinguishers had arrived and good work was done with them.

From all parts of the surrounding country men came to the rescue.

"Charlie" Guards the Post Office

Richard Wallach, famous horseman, came in on his fleetest mount and plunged into the work of saving furniture and valuables until he was unrecognizable by the soot that covered his face. P. R. Labouisse, capitalist, drove to the scene with eight fire extinguishers in his buggy. He set a Negro, Charles Marshall, on the dome of the post office with a fire extinguisher. Every time the Government building caught fire Charlie got busy.

A storeroom had been fired on Winchester street. The fire had been stayed from the business section, but the wind was still blowing the embers. W. F. Wilbur, son of the millionaire chocolate man, came posthaste to town and joined in the rescue work.

Captain Poindexter, with a squad of 20 Negroes, fought the fire back from the Main Street line. Mr. F. D. Gaskins,



Looking north from Main Street down a row of burned buildings.

secretary of the Warren Horse Show Association, with his corps of white and colored men, all looking alike from the soot and working for one end, fought on the Winchester Turnpike.

Mother and Babe Saved

At the home of Mr. Henry Garrett, Mrs. Garrett, his wife, was in bed, with a 2-day old infant beside her. The fire started to eat its way up the back porch.

The cry rang out around the burnt district until it was heard way above the roar of the flames, "A woman is in danger!" A dozen men rushed into the house, emerging a moment later carrying Mrs. Garrett in their arms. A giant

Warrentonian bore the babe with careful tread behind.

Outside the burning area, but threatened every moment with destruction, was the house of Mr. J. A. C. Keith, Commonwealth's Attorney. Mrs. Keith was confined to her room with an infant a week old.

Mr. Keith fought the blaze, and Mrs. Keith was carried out by Mr. John D. Hall and Mr. Richards. Later they were able to return.

Mr. J. D. Kirby and his wife and 12 children could not go back. Their home was destroyed. Mr. O. B. Callohan, who

(Continued on Page 8)



The entire area bounded by Winchester, Lee and Diagonal streets was burned. Rebuilding started soon after the fire was out.

Living in a Piece of Warrenton History

By **MAXWELL HARWAY**
President, Fauquier
Historical Society

When my wife and I brought our "dream house" on one acre overlooking Old Orchard Lane several years ago, we soon realized that we had bought a piece of Warrenton history.

Many people said to us, "So, you bought the Mary Colket house?"

We began to hear stories about Mary Forbes King Colket, of the fabulous parties she used to give in the ballroom size living room, of her four dogs, of her interest in horse racing, and of the extent of the large King Estate in the center of Warrenton.

Recently, a new piece of her history has surfaced, with the discovery of some old documents in the attic of a house on Winchester Street (*see related story*).

One of our neighbors found a cache of 1926 papers while having some electrical work done. Included was a letter from Mary Forbes King from boarding school to a Warrenton acquaintance, bills from local merchants and traces of some old Warrenton parties.

In 1926, "Silent Cal" Coolidge was in the White House and the Jazz Age was in full bloom. America was three years from the Great Depression that would forever change our country.

Mary Forbes King was away at boarding school, "far from her family, her lifestyle and her horse," and she wrote Mrs. Lucy Young at the Stuyvesant school in Warrenton.

The note is on monogrammed paper, simply headed "Thursday," and from the text, was probably written in March, 1926. It carries a two cent stamp, and was mailed from Oldfields Academy, near Baltimore.

It reads:

Dear Lucy,

I wonder if it has been as bad a day at home as it was here. It has snowed all day long. I think though that the weather is worse here than anywhere else in the world. How is everything at home. Every Friday afternoon I think about the good food and time that everyone has at Public Speaking.

If you ever get time I wish you would send to a poor hungry little girl off at boarding school anything that you have time or want to make for her to eat. Those oatmeal cookies, and sugar cakes, and fudge and everything is so good that I don't



The "Mary Colket House," overlooking Old Orchard Lane in Warrenton.

care what it is. Get Frank to get a tag from my mother and tie it up, if you ever get a chance to.

Well, Lucy, Easter is not so very far off and I will be home about the 6th. Remember me to everyone, and tell Whelan to take good care of my little horse for me.

With love,

Mary Forbes King

Across the years, one can feel the loneliness of a little girl far from home. Oldfields was the school attended by Wallis Warfield, future Duchess of Windsor, ten years earlier.

The Stuyvesant School on Winchester Street was owned by Edwin B. King, Mary's father, who was headmaster.

Mr. King was originally from Wilmington, N.C. and was a graduate of Yale with an MA in English and Latin. Lucy Young was her mother's cook.

Frank Young was the family butler and Whelan Clark was a groom in the King stables.

At that time the King Estate was outside the town limits of Warrenton. It stretched all the way down to what is now the bypass, and over to Waterloo Street.

Mr. King founded the Stuyvesant School in 1912. It was modeled after St. Mark's School in Southboro, Mass., that he had attended as a boy. After graduating from Yale, Mr. King served for 10 years as a Master at St. Marks and then became headmaster of the Gilman

School for Boys in Baltimore.

When he founded the school in Warrenton, he named it after Peter Stuyvesant, the last Dutch Governor of New Amsterdam before the British took it over in 1664 and renamed it New York. Mr. King was a lineal descendant of Peter Stuyvesant.

Stuyvesant School was a boys' boarding school for about 30-45 students, and was organized in six forms, after the British fashion. The boys dressed for dinner in coats and stiff collars.

Mr. King converted his mother's residence into the main building. After

(Continued on Page 7)



After the main classroom building at Stuyvesant School burned, a cinder block building was erected on its foundation. It is now St. John's Parish offices and pre-school.

Details of Life in the Old Days Revealed

We can learn much about the past by studying the small details of life – letters, receipts, old snapshots and papers that have been left behind.

Some of the other papers found in the attic of a house on Winchester Street seem to have belonged to Luther Young.

Colket House

(Continued from Page 6)

he had a heart attack in 1945, he sold the school to Donald A. Williamson and Clark C. Copp.

On Feb. 16, 1946, the main school building burned down. The fire was discovered by the same Frank Young mentioned in Mary's letter of 1926.

Although the school building was rebuilt and a gym added in 1949, Stuyvesant School eventually closed in 1954. The Catholic Diocese of Richmond bought the property with the remaining buildings in 1958, and built St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church.

Edwin King died of a heart attack on Christmas Day, 1950 at the age of 74.

Among other things, he was chairman of the Warrenton Hunt, president of the Fauquier Fish and Game Association and a vstryman in the St. James Episcopal Church.

Mary Forbes King went from Oldfields to Paris, France to attend a finishing school. She returned to Warrenton and in 1929 married Harrison C. Colket, a graduate of Stuyvesant School who came from Bryn Mawr in the Main Line Philadelphia region.

Mr. Colket was president of the North American Smelting Co. The couple resided for several years in Hawley, Pa.

In March, 1950 they purchased Bear's Den Farm, 400 acres at the junction of Thumb Run and the Rappahannock River, near Orlean.

They announced their intention of making it their home after a few years, but the property became a game farm and hunting club. The marriage subsequently ended in divorce.

Mary Colket returned to Warrenton in 1968 and built her home on Old Orchard Lane in 1972-1973.

She died on March 8, 1988, and is buried in the Warrenton Cemetery.

Luther was Lucy's husband and the brother of Frank Young. He was a deacon in the First Springs Baptist Church on the Springs Road.

Some time in July 1926 Luther Young apparently gave a party.

There is a bill dated July 17, 1926 from H.B. Carter & Bro., Two Stores, Main Street, Warrenton for 200 ice cream saucers for 70 cents, and 200 ice cream spoons for 70 cents, for a total of \$1.40.

There is a receipt to Mr. Luther Young on July 15 from John McClellan and Sons for \$18.40 for ice cream. At 1926 prices, this must have been a large quantity!

There is a lengthy bill dated July 19 for merchandise delivered on July 17 to the First Springs Baptist Church from J.M. Caton in Turnbull, Va., "Dealer in General Merchandise, Boots, Shoes, Hats, Furnishings, Etc. (country produce bought and sold)."

Purchased were 20 pounds of ham for \$4.92, bread for \$1.17, three melons \$2.40, nine pounds of franks \$2.07, then eight cases of ale at \$8 plus deposit of \$3.84 for the bottles.

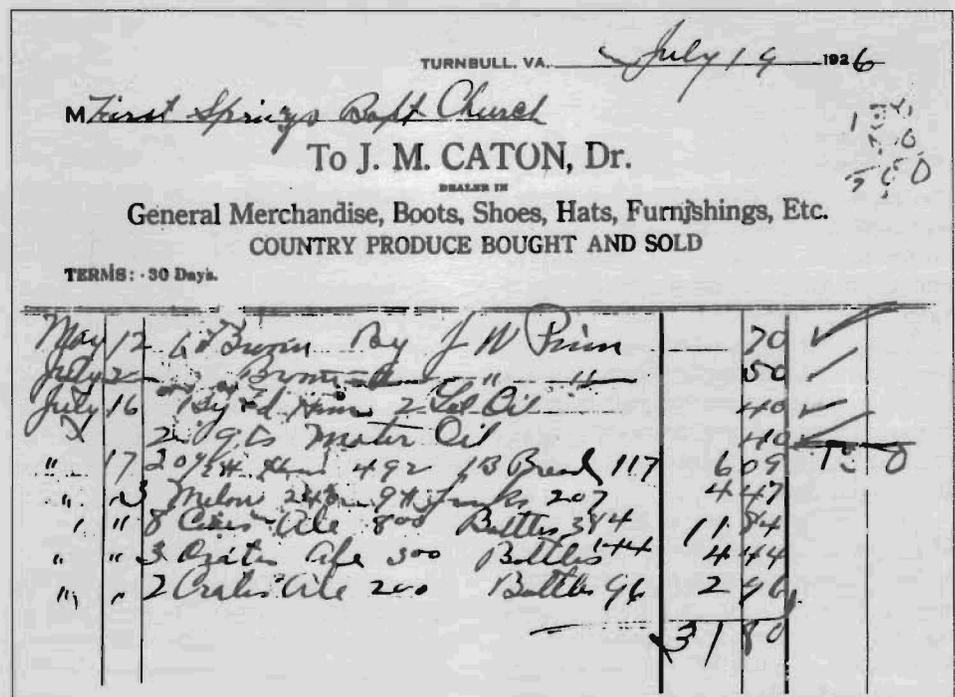
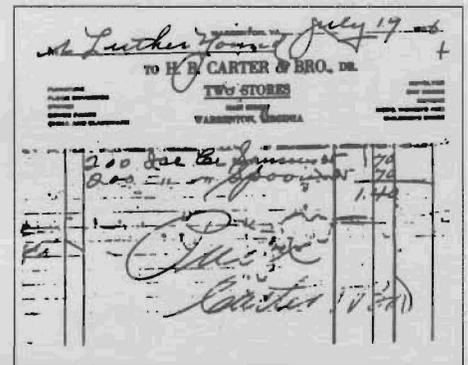
It was 1926, deep in the Prohibition era, so we must assume it was ginger ale.

The house where the papers were

found was originally located on the King property near Broadview Avenue.

After World War I there were a number of New Yorkers who came to live in the area (they founded the Orange County Hunt, named after Orange County, N.Y.).

Among these New Yorkers were Senator James Wadsworth and a Mr. Harper. They helped a number of Russian refugees to settle in the area. Two of these were a captain in the Imperial Czarist army named Alexis Alesheoff and his wife, who were settled in this house after it was moved to its present location on Winchester Street and used as part of the Stuyvesant School.



As the billheads from H. B. Carter's store on Main St., Warrenton (upper right) and J. M. Caton's at Turnbull show, true "general stores" served the people of Fauquier.

The Sun Listed Warrenton's Fire Losses

Summing up the damage

Loss-\$125,000.

Insurance-\$80,000.

Buildings Burned-26.

Buildings Dynamited-9.

Families Homeless-14.

Livery stable owned by C. Ullman and occupied by Bradburn & Clatterbuck, horse burned, harness and feed; loss, \$2,500. Insured.

Large stable owned and occupied by Bradburn & Clatterbuck, one story, with loft; loss, \$3,000 Insured.

Blacksmith shop in rear of stable owned by Bradburn & Clatterbuck; loss, \$100.

Skating rink, owned and occupied by Garner & Co., fixtures saved, rink and

bowling alleys destroyed; loss, \$4,500. Insured.

Farmers' Hotel, owned by W. A. Garner and occupied by W. H. Kays as a restaurant and dwelling; loss, \$2,000. Insured.

Town library, in Farmers' Hotel; loss, \$1,000. Insured.

Residence of W. A. Garner, stable and several tenant outhouses; loss, \$10,000. Partially covered by insurance.

Residence of T. M. Houchens; loss, \$2,000. Insured.

Small tenant house occupied by Henry Garrett; loss, \$1,500. No insurance.

Small tenant house owned by F. C. Brook, occupied by Mrs. J. D. Wall; loss, \$1,000. No insurance.

Studio of Richard M. Brooke and valuable paintings; loss to building, \$2,000; pictures, \$25,000. Partially insured.

Residence of F. C. Brooke; loss, \$2,500. Insured.

Municipal buildings, two stories, new building, occupied by fire engine company, Mayor's office, Town Council rooms; loss, \$2,500. Partly insured.

Store occupied by William Moore, colored; loss, \$500. No insurance.

Residence and general merchandise store of T. E. Pattie; loss on building and contents, \$12,000. Insurance, \$8,000.

House owned by Mrs. H. A. Parker, occupied by Mrs. M. A. Luce; loss, \$3,000. Insurance only on building; furniture uninsured.

Residence owned by W. C. Marshall and occupied by Mrs. Moore; loss, \$3,500. Insurance only on house.

Residence and stable of Dr. C. S. Carter; loss, \$4,000. Insured.

House owned by Mrs. Kirby, occupied by her son, J. D. Kirby, and two smaller tenement houses; loss, \$2,000. Insured.

House owned by Mrs. J. D. Blackwell and occupied by Mr. Ritnauer; loss, \$2,000. Insured.

Three two-story buildings used as a store, occupied by Jennings Furniture Company and owned by James S. Dorum, colored; loss on buildings, \$8,000; loss on stock, \$3,000. Both insured.

Small residence occupied by Mrs. Helen Wilson; loss, \$1,500. No insurance.

Residence owned and occupied by Capt. Edward Carter, one of the best old Colonial residences in the town; loss, \$10,000. Insured.

Residence of Mrs. Fannie Britton, one of the oldest in this section; loss, \$5,000. Insured.

Annex to Warren Green Hotel, three stories, 12 rooms, pool parlor, heating plant afterward burned; loss \$3,000. Insured.

Store room unoccupied, owned by Fletcher & Bro., at head of Main Street, opposite courthouse; loss, \$2,000.

The *Baltimore Sun* went on to report that "Most of the people on the list will be able to rebuild at once. Others cannot ... the uninsured furniture or house representing the total of their possessions, the savings of years is gone. One family paid the last installment on a piano last week. It is ashes today."

Great Fire

(Continued from Page 5)

two years ago rescued the body of the little Crosby child from the bottom of the reservoir, saved some of the furniture.

Militia On Guard

Judge White, at a conference with the Mayor, suggested that the militia had better be called out. A little later the rally call of the bugle sounded, and the Warrenton Volunteers went home to get their rifles, and returned in marching file. A cordon was put about the fire, and the cadets from Bethel assisted. There was no disorder.

At 11:30 a.m. the flames, balked by the gaps of the dynamited buildings, were dying out. Captain Collins served coffee to the soldiers and firefighters, and soon most of the residents were sleeping exhaustedly.

Today there was a disposition on the part of some to blame the Town Council for the leak in the reservoir, but its members said they had been working to have the leak repaired and could not possibly have had it done.

"We will have a newer and a better Warrenton," said Captain Poindexter today. "I think the spirit of our town will assert itself as it did in Baltimore and we will build upon the ashes. With a bond issue of \$100,000 I think we can rebuild the Municipal Building, with provisions for the library, establish quarters also for the firemen, repair the dam leak and make other improvements."

The Fauquier Historical Society

P.O. Box 675, Warrenton, VA 20188

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