

Grinnell Herald - Register

Grinnell, Poweshiek County, Iowa, Thursday, April 22, 1971

No. 7



The havoc wrought by Grinnell's big fire is shown in this photo taken looking northeast from the corner of Commercial and Main streets.

The "old stone church," which occupied the site now occupied by the United Church of Christ-Congregational, can be seen in the background.

Fire Ravaged Grinnell In 1889

It will be 82 years ago this June 12 that fire destroyed the best part of Grinnell's business section, but as can be seen today, the town bounced back from the tragedy.

The blaze started at noon on June 12, 1889, in the cupola of the F. G. Treat & Co. elevator on the Rock Island tracks between Main and Broad Streets and, driven by the wind, was soon beyond control.

Solid Block Destroyed

In less than three hours, a solid block of the business section, bounded on the south by Commercial Street, on the east by Broad Street, on the west by Main Street, and on the north by 4th Avenue was in ruins. Every building was

destroyed.

The estimated dollar loss was \$130,000. The losses were insured for \$70,000.

Driven by the southeast wind, flames swept from the railroad tracks east along Commercial Street destroying the buildings in its path including the Grinnell Herald office, the Post Office, and the Andy McIntosh store.

Then, just as rapidly, it spread through the entire block. Efforts to keep it from jumping 4th Avenue were successful, or it might have spread all the way north to 6th Avenue.

Move Goods

The merchants on Broad Street had time to move their goods, and a variegated assortment of

merchandise was assembled in Central Park, located across the street.

A shift in the wind to westerly blew the flames over toward the unoccupied stretches of the park, and the fire was finally controlled.

Reaction on the part of the businessmen, whose businesses were destroyed, was instant -- no one was quitting. Stores opened up in every sort of a temporary structure that could be devised.

54 Businesses Burn

Fifty-four business houses were destroyed in the fire, but the buildings were quickly erected to replace those destroyed, and in many cases, the new buildings were far better than those which had been destroyed.