

## **Florence Fire**

### **27 November 1870**

Notes: The word *inst.*, which occurs in the second paragraph, is an abbreviation for "instant" which means the same month in which the writer is writing. In this case it is obviously November, though the paper was not published until December. The phrase "his usual sermon" makes it sound like the preacher only had one sermon, but that may not be what the writer meant. The admonition at the end seems a bit moralistic; it would be interesting to know if anyone insured because of it, but I doubt it consoled anyone affected by the fire.

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[Correspondence Covington Journal.]

FLORENCE, BOONE COUNTY, KY.

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Great Conflagration.

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FULL PARTICULARS BY A SPECTATOR.

Florence is a prosperous little country town of perhaps twelve hundred inhabitants, situated on the Lexington Pike, nine miles south of Covington. There are some fine buildings in Florence, including the Odd Fellow's Hall, which is a very handsome and substantial structure. The Southern Hotel is quite a spacious building. There are some fine private dwellings also. Florence and vicinity support five churches and a debating society, &c.

On Sunday the 27th inst. there was service at two of the churches, and the people were collected at those two places for devotional purposes. The pastor of the Christian church was delivering his usual sermon, when about half-past 11 o'clock, the cry came to the ears of all, like a thunderbolt.

## FIRE! FIRE!

and this word, which has carried distress to many a home, was caught up by the congregation, and repeated time after time. In a single moment what a change came over that tranquil assembly, where, a moment before, everything was quiet and still, save the voice of the preacher. It became a scene of the wildest confusion and excitement. The church was vacated by every person almost instantly. The old, the young, alike seemed to have but one object--that was to get out of there as soon as they possibly could.

The alarm proved too true. It required but a single glance down the street to substantiate the alarm. Within a square of the church there leaped up towards the sky a great devouring flame. Scarcely had it subsided a little when another much larger burst into the air, and then it became one continuous sheet of fire.

The scene now became one of terrible confusion, especially when compared with the serene one of the morning, women running to and fro, some of them weeping, others asking every body if there is danger of their houses catching fire; children crying, strange men using rough and profane language, and a few looking on tranquilly as much as to say, we are glad it is not our houses. The scene was all together one not soon forgotten.

## ORIGIN OF THE FIRE.

The fire originated in a large frame stable, formerly used as a livery stable, standing in the south-west corner of the Lexington and Burlington Pikes. Contiguous to the stable on the west side was the carriage manufactory of Messrs. Coffman & Wagstaff; on the east of it, was situated J. McNeal's grocery and in the rear of these buildings were several small frame buildings.

It is ascertained beyond a doubt that the fire was caused by cigar smoking in the stable. It is generally believed that a colored man thoughtlessly threw his cigar in the stable, and this opinion is strengthened by the fact that the fire originated on the ground floor.

It was plainly evident from the moment of discovery of fire, that it would be useless to attempt to quench the flames. Therefore every one turned his attention to the removing of all portable things and the preventing of the spreading of the great grasping flames. Unfortunately the proprietors of the carriage factory were absent, but though there was no one to attend to their property but their friends and strangers, yet they made noble efforts in their behalf. I believe they saved most all of their work, both finished and unfinished. Their tools, material, &c., were unavoidably lost. Their loss is considerable. Most of Mr. McNeal's groceries, &c., were saved; but in the hurry and excitement of the moment, they were considerably damaged. For example, men would rush in and seize jars, &c., and carry them out to the pavement, and dash them down, and consequently such articles were destroyed.

Right opposite McNeal's grocery is an old frame building, as dry as an ash bank. When

McNeal's store began burning, it was only by the most vigorous and determined efforts, that the fire was prevented from crossing the pike. At times it would seem that all mortal endeavors would prove futile, but the unceasing labor of bold men won the day. It was of paramount importance to prevent it from crossing, for close by was Grant's large stable and many other wooden buildings. The destruction would indeed have been great, had this terrible demon crossed the pike.

It was now that a report spread that there were

#### HORSES IN THE BURNING STABLE!

It appears that the fire had gained such headway at its discovery, that the horses, with that singular instinct which characterizes them in such cases, would not leave their stalls, and thus they were necessarily left to perish. The trampling and kicking of horses in the terrible agonies of burning to death, confirmed the report. Four horses fell victims to the flames. They were the property of Mr. John Huston, who follows teaming for a living, and thus the means of livelihood is suddenly snatched from him. He has a family, which he provided for through this source. Undoubtedly the blow falls heavier on him than on any one.

#### A FINE DWELLING ON FIRE!

The stable had not been burning long before the flames leaped across to Wm. Glassford's dwelling, situated on the north corner of the Lexington and Burlington pikes, directly across the street from the stable. From the proximity of the buildings it was impossible to extinguish the flames on Mr. Glassford's house. The next building to the north of Mr. Glassford's was fortunately some distance from it, and it was the most difficult thing imaginable to keep the flames from leaping across to it; but here again the men worked faithfully and unceasingly. There was a sharp south-western wind at times, which made it extremely difficult at these critical periods to successfully contend with the fire, yet each and every man seemed to be inspired with renewed energy, at these awful moments. The roof of the Odd Fellows' Hall caught fire, at one time, but the prompt service of a young gentleman soon extinguished it without its becoming materially damaged.

The wind at times would be so severe as to blow pieces of burning shingles to different parts of the town. A great many roofs were consequently burned to some extent. Most of them however were discovered before much damage had been done.

#### LOSS BETWEEN \$20,000 AND \$30,000 !

It is generally estimated that the destruction of property by the fire will exceed \$20,000. But of course it is impossible to ascertain the exact figures. I am reliably informed that there was

## NO INSURANCE

Whatever upon any of the property destroyed. It seems strange that persons will become so careless as to neglect having their buildings insured in some reliable company--especially frame buildings in town.

OAKWOOD.