

PHOTOS

WAYNE COUNTY SCRAPBOOK

by Brooks Tenney

Williamson's July 4, 1910 Fire

(Part 1 of 3)

1910 was a memorable year. A bandstand at the Four Corners was the site for concerts by local bands and orchestras. Spectators could enjoy performances from the porch of the Williamson Hotel located a few paces away. Plays were held in Pound's Hall (the space above today's Williamson Hardware) and in Pultneyville's Gates Hall. The horse was still ascendant but autos were making their presence felt. William Howard Taft was President. It was bulky Taft who began the custom of having the President throw out the first baseball on opening day.

Congress passed the Mann Act in this year; prohibiting the transportation of women across state lines for immoral purposes. Mark Twain died in 1910. Barney Oldfield drove a Benz at Daytona...reaching a top speed of 133 m.p.h. Electricity had reached the village a few years earlier, but only a few homes were wired in 1910.

The Fourth of July, 1910, was celebrated with flags and bunting on Williamson's Main Street. The occasion combined the popular American holiday with the Annual Convention of the Lake Shore Volunteer Fireman's Association, an organization that was initiated in 1904.

The Association was initially composed of firemen from Williamson, Sodus and Wolcott. They began holding an annual convention as soon as they were formed. The group grew steadily. In 1905, Webster joined. In 1907 the ranks were swelled by Red Creek and Hilton. In 1909, Charlotte and Ontario came aboard.

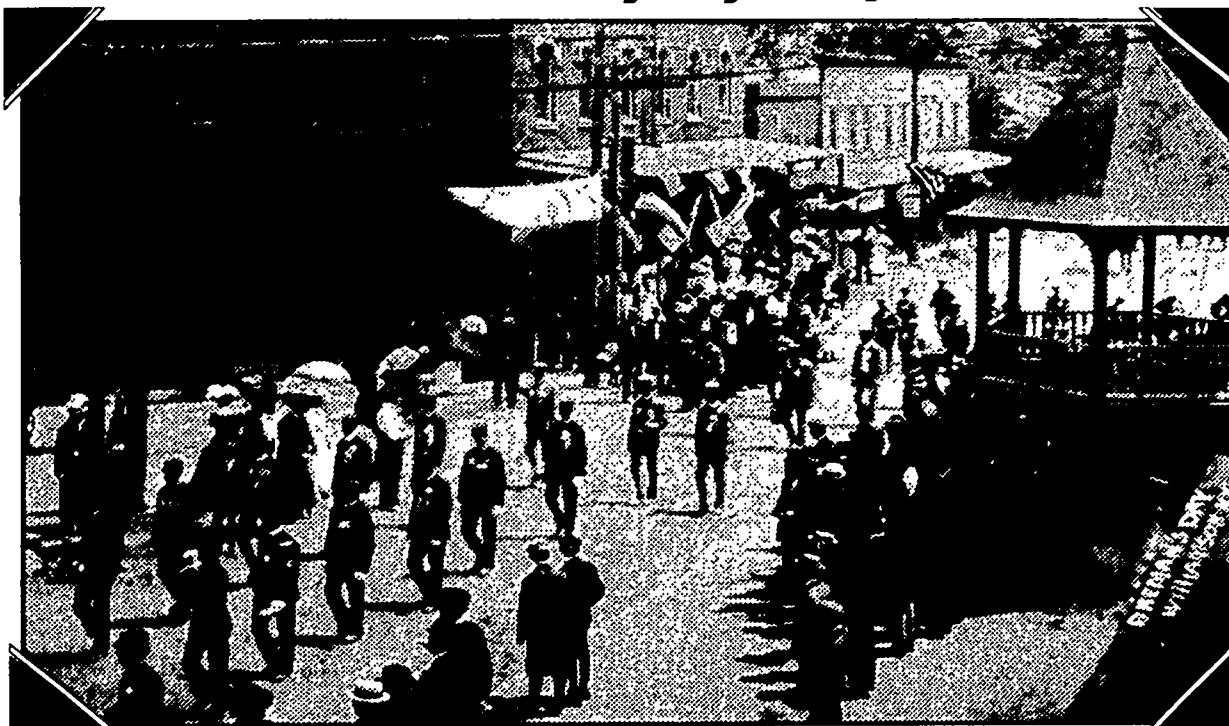
Their practice was to have various communities take turns hosting the Annual convention. In 1910, Williamson played host. Two years earlier, in 1908, local firemen had purchased the "Fireman's Driving Park" on the north side of West Main Street.

July 4th, 1910 was a perfect day for the festivities and most homes and businesses along Main Street were decorated with flags, bunting or patriotic signs. Photographers of the day recorded the parade in views that were later made into post cards. (Postage: one penny.) Visitors came in from surrounding communities on the trolley which ran through town every hour from 6 a.m. until 2 a.m. In 1910 a few automobiles had made their appearance but they were rare. Most homes were without indoor plumbing, electricity or a steady water supply.

For the convenience of townspeople who lacked a private water source, the town maintained a common well located in the southeast corner of the village's Four Corners. In 1910 it was located underneath the town's bandstand. A dipper hung near the well for use by the public.

In anticipation of an active day along the dirt road that constituted Main Street, firemen connected their hoses and slaked the dust before the crowd arrived. Water was sprinkled liberally from a horse-drawn cart.

At 10:30 an estimated 20-25,000 people filled Williamson's Main Street to watch the parade of uniformed firemen, bands and equipment displays. The parade lasted about an hour and the crowd dispersed to various churches, and the Grange Hall for lunch.



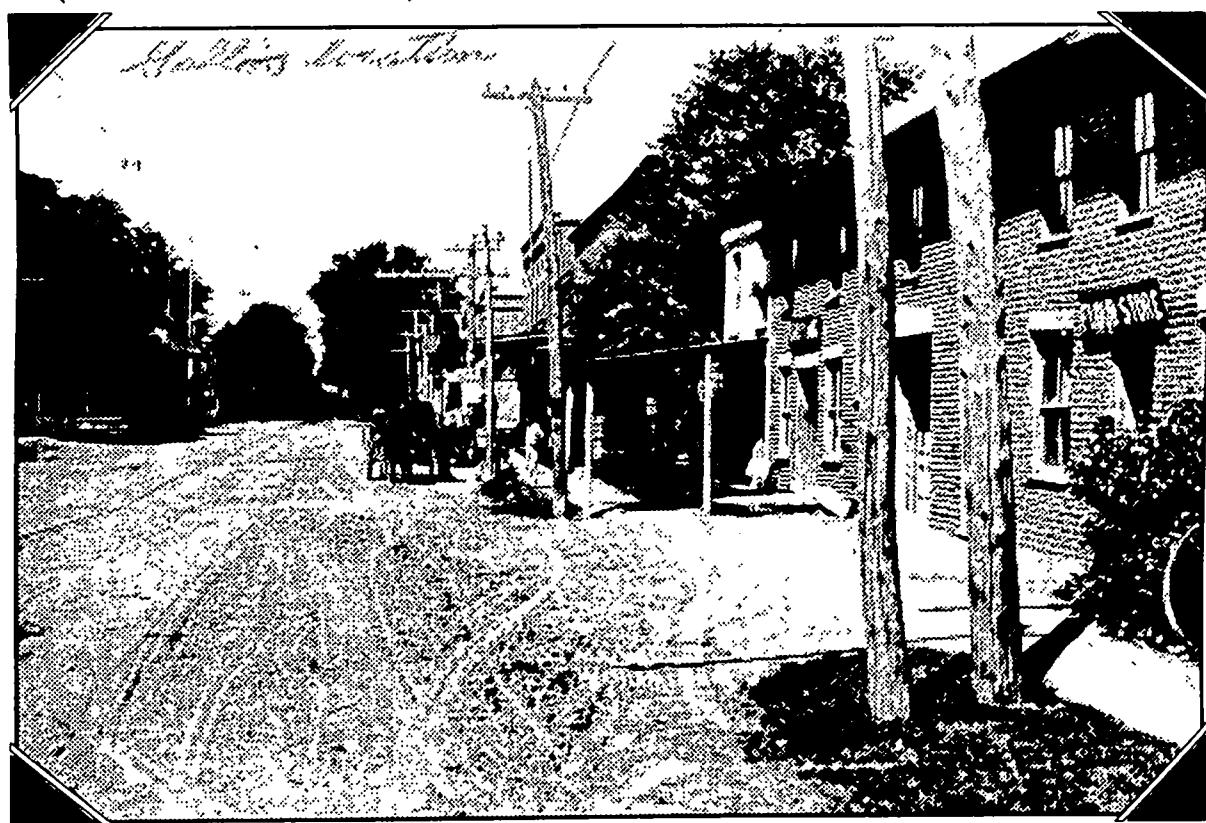
Firemen's Day Parade; Main Street at Four Corners; looking east. Note the outline of the Grist Mill and Flour Store (Beehive) north of the roof of the bandstand. Photo courtesy WC Historical Society, from A Gathering of Memories, A Evangelist.

seen in town..."

The largest purse for the day's races was \$100. Fireworks were scheduled for the evening. At 1:00 p.m. the games began at Fireman's Park. The events included a greased pig contest, a greased pole climb (to recover a fifty-cent piece at the top) and a type of jousting event in which horsemen attempted to drive a lance through a five-inch diameter ring. Some accounts indicate that a few contestants attempted this feat from a moving automobile.

Later in the afternoon, a baseball game was in progress pitting Williamson against Eastman Kodak. Many firemen had gone home by this time, but a crowd still remained at the ballfield. Sometime between four and five p.m. the fire bell began to ring.

(Continued Next Week.)



Main Street. Looking west. Buildings between Beehive (right front) and the brick building (today's Williamson Hardware) were destroyed.

In Retrospect From page 3

his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Hart of Pultneyville, after serving three years in the U. S. Armed Forces, twelve months of which he spent overseas serving with the 17th Airborne Division, which was attached at various times to the U. S. Third and Ninth armies, the British Army and later to the British Commandos.

The Fire Companies of Williamson and Pultneyville have accepted the invitation of the Palmyra Fair Association to participate in the parade and competitive events on the opening night of the fair, Sept. 6th. Isaac Colwell, Williamson Fire Chief of 22 years standing, states that the Williamson Fire Company will be represented in the parade by at least 30 firemen in uniform, headed by a community band composed of Williamson musicians augmented by several members of the Williamson Central School band under the direction of Roland Orbaker of Pultneyville.

The Williamson Theatre management has booked for the theatre-going public of Wayne County the Technicolor single reel production "Empire State" to be screened over three days, starting Sunday, September 2nd. This is a pic-

ture story of New York State, from New York City to Buffalo, depicting the cities and beautiful suburban towns. It also includes the Finger Lakes section.

Echoes of the past

From page 2
she has room for.

The drought conditions in the northeast are beginning to affect the Western New York apple crop. Although lack of rain will not affect the overall quality of the apples, it will result in smaller apples. With the apple harvest already underway, the growers are hoping for a good soaking rain throughout the area.



Barberchair

From page 4

DeMosky, Thomas Freeman, Lorraine Wahl, 7th.

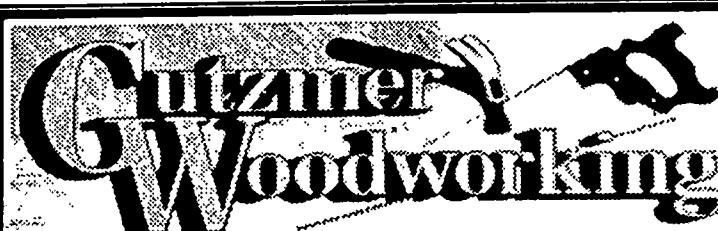
Happy Wedding Anniversaries to: Richard and Lois English (56 years), Sept. 3rd; Robert and Serafina Fillmore, Sept. 4th; Gary and Liz Ekkebus, Bruce and Dolores Federation, Tom and Jean Minkau (13th), Mr. & Mrs. Richard Combes (54th), Sept. 5th; Kyle and Shirley Kephart, Sept. 7th; Dean and Emberly Matthys (20th), Thomas and Dorothy Jean Wagorn (2nd), Sept. 7th; and to all celebrating, have a happy day! Send news, anniversaries and birthdays to me at 12 E. Main St., Apt. #3, Sodus, NY 14551. Phone 483-1566.

Sodus Chamber
Going Back To School

From page 2

children from Sodus Central School. Students spend a day at the school and often dress in the clothing of the late 19th century. They also write on slate boards, sit in authentic period desks, and read lessons from years gone by.

These children from Williamson, Sodus, Newark, Fairport, Victor, Irondequoit and Oswego enjoy the 3 hour program each Fall and Spring with several retired school teachers from Wayne County volunteering for this program.



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PHOTOS

WAYNE COUNTY SCRAPBOOK

Williamson's July 4, 1910 Fire

(Part 2 of 3)

Williamson's Fire Company was located across the street from the Grist Mill, known at the time as "The Beehive"—approximately the location of today's Gallo's. People at the park could see black smoke rising from the town. An immediate rush to the scene took place. A few individuals with cars were the first to arrive at the fire.

One of these early arrivals was John Spavin, owner of a meat market in the affected area. Spavin ran into his building and emptied the till of its contents. It was the only thing he would be able to save.

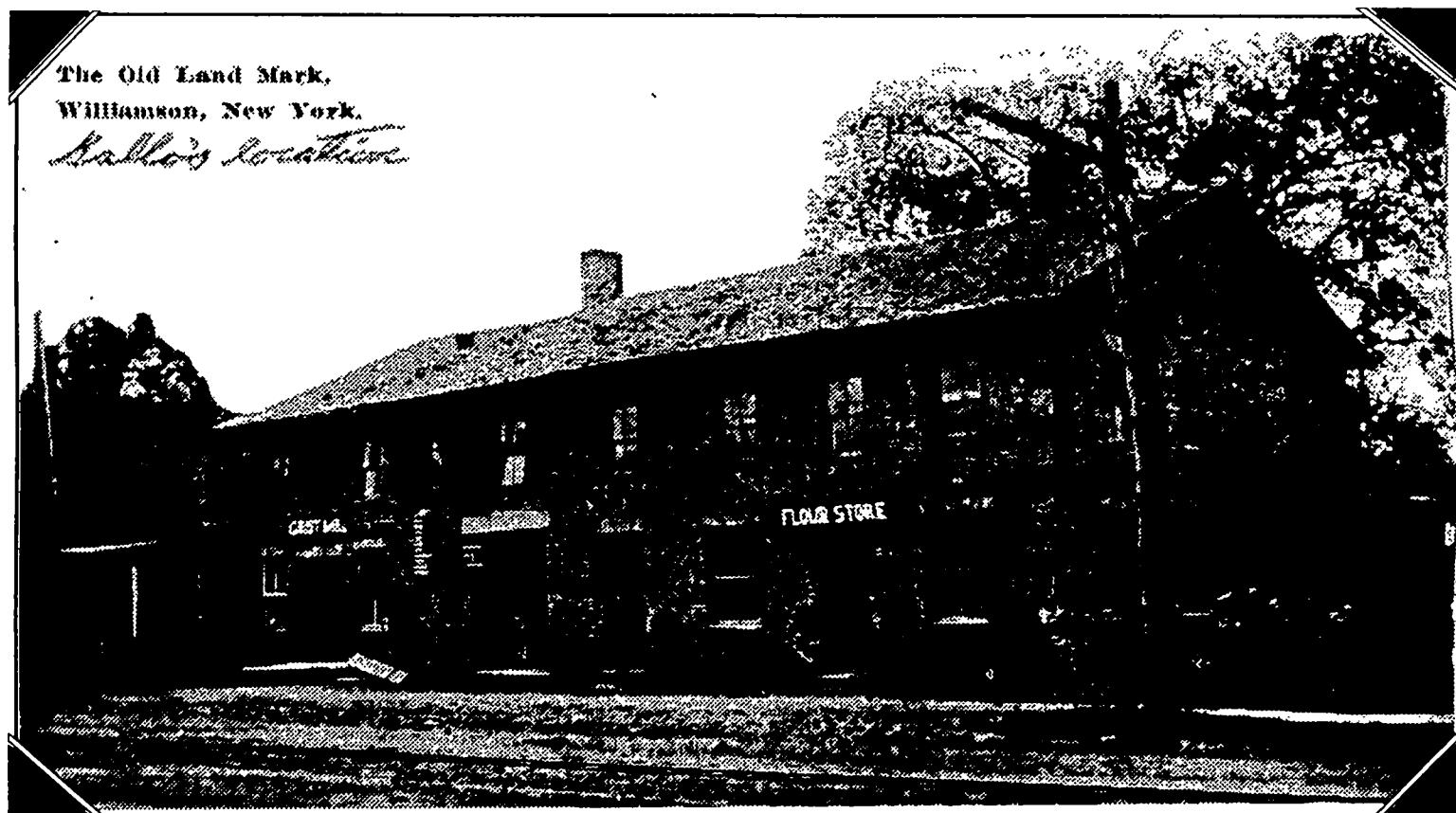
Some said the fire originated in Jacob Martin's Clothing store; possibly from a heated iron left unattended. It quickly spread through all the buildings between The Beehive, a stone structure to the east and the Pound Block, two brick buildings in the northeast corner of the intersection of Main Street and Lake Avenue.

Earlier that day, the well had been pumped dry—in an effort to slake dust. Some was used for what firemen described as "a hose event on South Avenue." Williamson's Fire Company still relied on hand drawn "chemical wagons," but a new (1906) pumper was powered by a one-cylinder gas engine... on a horse-drawn cart. Despite the almost immediate availability of fifty firemen, the town well was dry. Frantic firemen dammed the creek behind The Beehive and quickly emptied that source.

They began seeking water from wells along Lake Avenue; from Main Street to Sanford Street. Each well was quickly emptied. Finally a well belonging to Nate Brizee proved to be equal to the demand; but by then the fire had done its work.



Pumper No. 1, Williamson gas powered pumper of 1906. The buildings directly behind the pumper, from the (current) Williamson Hardware building recognizable on the left, to the cobblestone Grist Mill on the right, all burned during the fire of 1910. (From History of the Williamson Fire Company #1.)



The Beehive, also known as The Old Land Mark, or the Grist Mill. The fire was contained by the western wall of this building. The structure with the shed roof in front was destroyed.

Ira Horton's Dentist Office. Several apartments were located above these businesses and the occupants lost virtually all of their belongings.

After the fire, land occupied by the stores was sold to Williamson realtor Charles DeZutter and rebuilding began almost immediately. Some tenants began anew; others folded their tent. The inventory of new tenants is contained in a 1973 Hoffman Essay by Darlene Follette who heard stories of the fire from her grandfather.

(Next Week: Conclusion)

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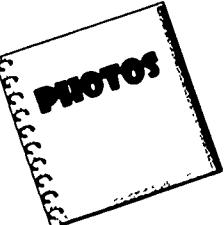
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Williamson's July 4, 1910 Fire

(Part 3; Conclusion)

In 1910, The Beehive—which survived the blaze intact—still housed a gristmill that was a source of flour for the community. Water for this mill, at one time, ran under Main Street; the stream bed can still be seen from the parking lot behind the Williamson Hardware Store.

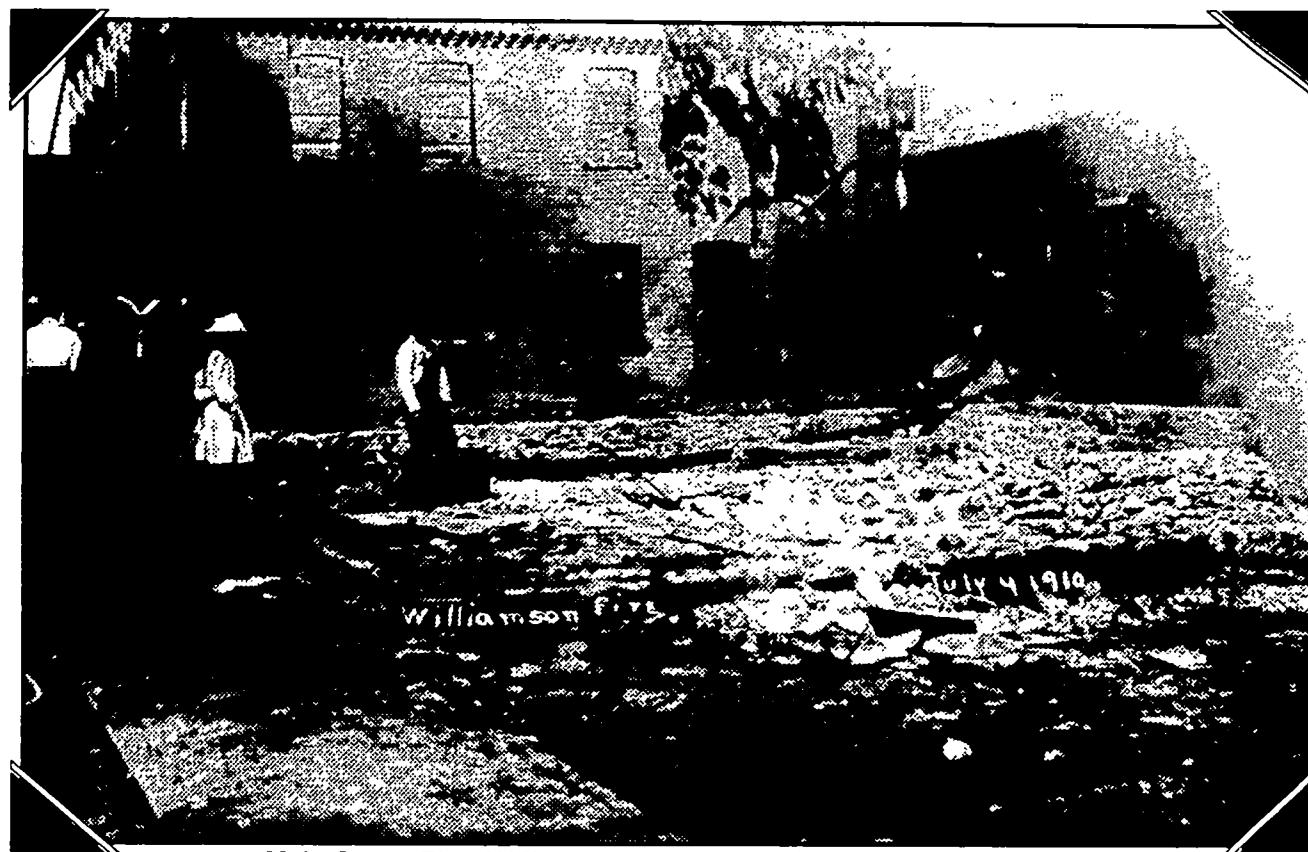
According to "The History of The Williamson Fire Company #1, 1889-2001": "This fire was believed to have been started by an arsonist, or a hot iron at a clothes press shop." There were rumors that the fire had been started by the owner of the clothing store who was reported to have been seen boarding a westbound trolley just before the fire was discovered. No cause was ever found and no charges were ever made.

This "History" notes, "The well on the four corners had already been pumped dry that day and no water was available to fight this fire. This was before the municipal water system was installed and was one of the big reasons for the water system, when it was installed just several years later."

Firemen managed to lay hoses to a cistern at the Lockley residence on Lake Avenue where the "were able to get enough water to fill the hoses and extinguish the ashes."

A detailed account of the fire was carried in the Sodus Record for July 8, 1910.

"Serious Conflagration. On the evening of July 4th, Williamson was visited by the most disastrous fire which ever occurred in this village. Nearly all the residents and practically all of the firemen were at Fireman's Park at the west end of town when smoke was discovered coming from the clothing store of Jacob Martine, Jr. (sic)."



Main Street Fire, Williamson July 1910, (Phil Dean collection)

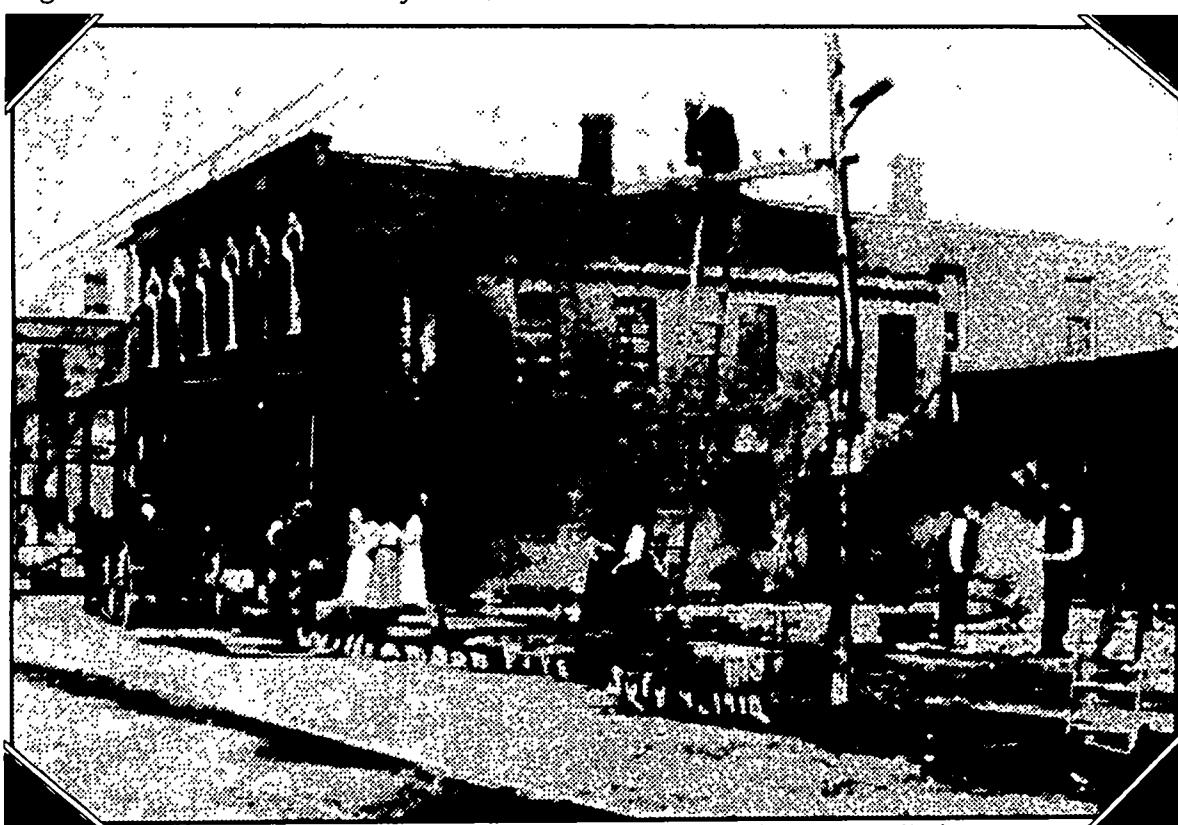
stone construction of the Grist Mill (The Beehive) prevented the fire from spreading. Everything in between was reduced to ashes...because "only one stream could be thrown and the hose had to be changed from one wall to another."

Some sources disagree about ownership of the burned properties. According to the Record, the fire started in a two-story building owned by F.W. Tassell which was totally consumed by the blaze.

The account in the Sodus Record (7/8/10) identified all families who were burned out, together with a list of business and owners who were impacted.

"The same thought seems to occur to all, that Williamson must have a better water supply. Monday night's loss would almost or quite pay for a water system." There can be no doubt that the 1910 fire was instrumental in making needed changes.

Material for this piece was taken from the Williamson Sun, Sodus Record, Hoffman Essay "The Williamson Fire of 1910" by Darlene Follette (1973), and the History of the Williamson Fire Company No. 1—1889-2001 by John Manahan and Bob Sponable. Darlene Follette's essay contains information based on first person interviews with folks who remembered seeing the fire. Photographs and old postcards were provided by Phil Dean and Perry Howland.



Main Street Fire, Williamson July 1910, (A. Evengalist)



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