

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin • County Historian

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THE BURNING OF ALBION HIGH SCHOOL

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"Many times it seemed hopeless to try stopping the lower progress of the fire, but did these men give up hope? No, they stuck right to their volunteer duty and determined to control the flames which rose up as if from a blast furnace.....and we, the people of old Albion High are heartily grateful to these brave men for saving our beautiful building."

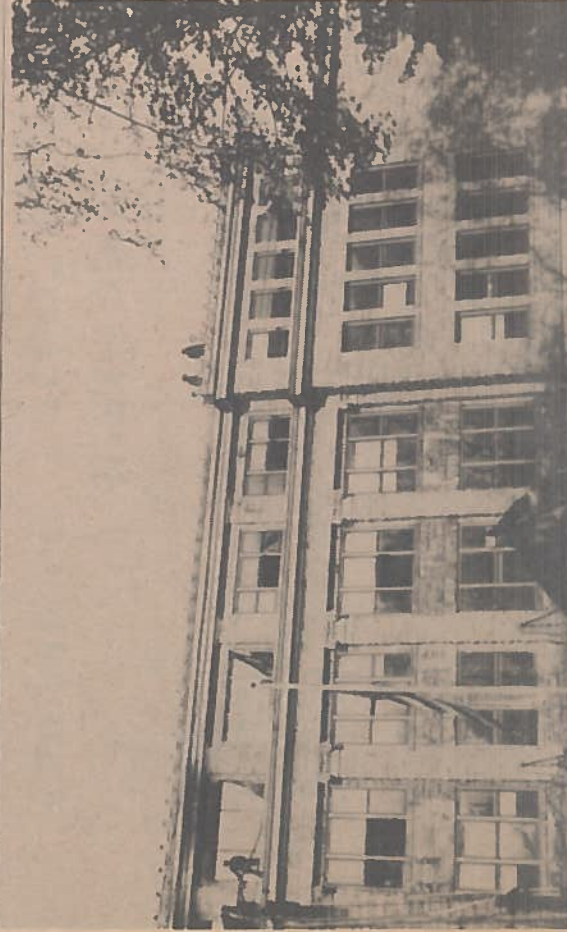
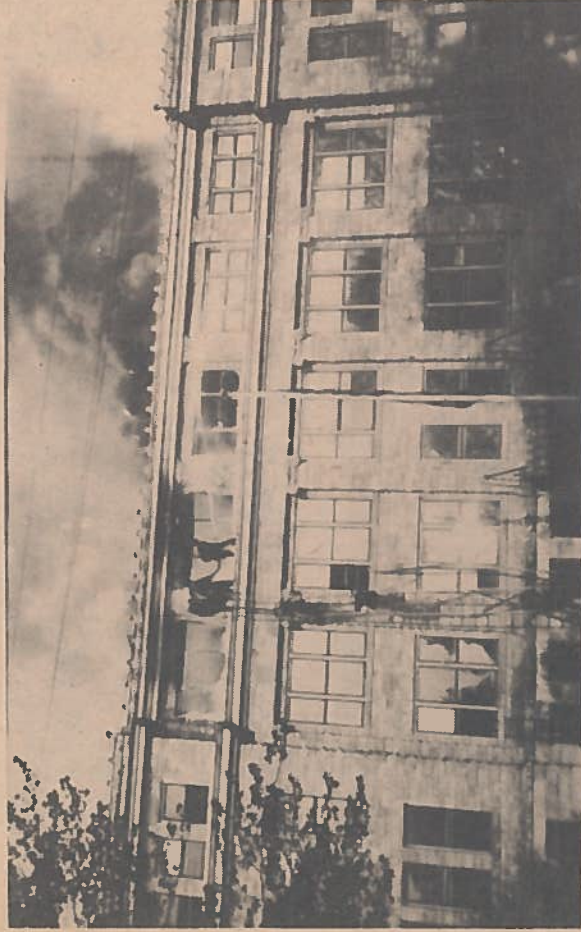
--Sidney Eddy from The Chevron June 1913

On Thursday morning, May 8 prior to the opening of school a fire was discovered pouring from the windows and roof of what was then the Albion High School on East Academy Street. Thanks to the efficiency and alertness of the Albion firemen the blaze was brought under control in a little over an hour. Upon the discovery of the fire, a telephone call was made and the alarm was sounded. Within five minutes the whole system of volunteer fire companies was in action and began to appear at the scene. The first to arrive was the Dye Hose chemical truck, followed by the hose carts, steamer, and the hook and ladder. At first their hose was not long enough to reach from the hydrants to the flames but within a few minutes an extension ladder was put up the side of the building and soon the firemen were amidst the smoke and fire with five streams of water. The top photo shows their bravery at fighting the flames at close range with only a narrow ledge to stand upon. Students and teachers began arriving shortly for school only to find their building on fire. However, under the supervision of the teachers the boys carried books, desks and equipment to safety. During this excitement however, they tossed a great many books from the third floor windows to the ground. Most of these landed in the mud with their leaves being scattered in every direction.

The fire was confined mostly to three science rooms on the fourth floor. It was believed that a gas burner had been left on in one of those rooms which had ignited the interior. Afterward when an inventory was taken, it was discovered that a great deal of damage had occurred from both flames and water. The bottom photo shows to what extent the roof was burned (note sky through the two upper left-hand windows). Fire chief C. Royce Sawyer and others may also be observed on the roof evaluating the damage. Water had run down in the rooms below staining the plaster, woodwork and floors badly.

During the summer of 1913 the Albion School District spent close to \$20,000 repairing the building and replacing the destroyed contents. New steel ceilings were placed in a number of rooms and walls were repainted once the roof was reconstructed. The science laboratories were then equipped with new apparatus as well as chairs and tables.

Later this building became the Albion Grammar School and is now the district office. Although the exterior appears to look much like a fortress made of grey Medina Sandstone, the interior is entirely composed of wood construction. Steel construction was available in 1906 when the school was built. But it is said the district had only so much money to spend and decided to put in into showy, expensive sandstone instead of a fire-proof interior. Had it not been for the quick action of the Albion Fire Department, greater losses might have occurred.



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