

Edwards In Ashes

A Sad Ending of the Fourth of July Celebration of 1894 in a Beautiful Village - The Loss Severe - Insurance \$35,000.

The fire fiend came near writing "Finis" to Edwards village Wednesday afternoon. As it was the very heart of the little village was eaten out, and where was the center of beauty and prosperity, a large black scar remains. Although the blow is a severe one for Edwards to bear, it is believed that its citizens are equal to the emergency and that in a very short time the village will be rebuilt. As a matter of fact the work has already begun.



Shows the scene along Main St with corner of Maple Ave. and Dr. Goodnough's house (Robert Archer's now) seen at far right.

The speakers, floats, citizens in carriages and on bicycles paraded the principal streets after which they went immediately to the new Town Hall on Maple Ave. where a program was presented; to be the last in the beautiful little opera house. The line of march then proceeded to the church where they disbanded for dinner.

Little did they know how soon their merrymaking would be changed to sorrow. It takes but a few minutes to raze the work of years and that was soon illustrated.

R. Palmer of Russell had rented Eli Clark's store for the week to sell refreshments, snacks, etc. for the celebration. Shortly after twelve o'clock W. J. McFerran, from his store across the street, discovered

A big celebration had been planned and extensive advertising had been done. The streets were gay with flags and bunting, rows of trees were set along the street and everything was in order for a grand gala day. Shortly after three o'clock in the morning strains of lively music burst on the scene, firecrackers cracked and cannon boomed over hill and dale. The band discoursed its liveliest music until everyone was roused. Before five o'clock the crowd began pouring into town from all directions and by nine o'clock the streets were lined with people throughout their whole length.

At 9:30 A.M. the band, with some others, met the train and escorted the speaker and other guests to the Union Church where the parade formed. In the parade were forty-five young ladies, each wearing a crown and a sash bearing the names of a state, representing the union.



Maple Ave. with a group of people at the corner of Main and Maple. In the background can be seen what were the Davis Block (now Frosty's Wings & Things), Grant's Furniture Store (later the Grange Hall), Raymond's store, and the Union Church. These last three buildings have been razed.

a blaze from Clark's store chimney and notified Palmer. The blaze seemed to die down, but not before it was too late. A spark had done the fearful deed.

The only method of fighting the fire was by bucket brigades, which were quickly formed. The wind blew a veritable gale however, and these feeble efforts to check the flames were unavailing. Some wiser ones saw that unless the fire was at once checked, the entire village was liable to be swept away and telephoned to Gouverneur for a steamer and assistance. These calls were repeated from time to time for fully half an hour, but there was no one in that telephone office at the time, the day being a holiday, so the cry for aid went unheard and unheeded and Edwards was left to perish. Had the message been delivered, the steamer and hose trucks could have been hustled onto a flat car and the run made in a short time, probably resulting in a saving of over half the burnt property.

Since the wind was blowing strongly, and as the Stammer block was high, old and dry, a spark striking the roof caused a mighty flame. In less than five minutes the whole roof was in flames and the adjoining five wood buildings were on fire. The flames spared the remaining buildings on that side of Main Street from Dr. Goodnough's house and beyond, probably because of the open area caused by the empty lot where Dr. Murray's office building had burned the year previous.

Almost simultaneously the flames were blown across the street by the wind, igniting the McFerran block and the Rushton House Hotel. From these the fire rushed with fury across Maple Ave. and licked up the pretty town hall, the pride of the town. It burned along Maple stopping just before Cyrus Watson's house at the corner of Prospect Street. At the same time the fire leaped to the east side of Main Street burning all the business blocks. The second stories of all these wooden buildings were mostly occupied by the owners of the businesses. The last house on Main Street to burn was Dr. Taylor's, with office and barns. He had closed the door, and locked it as he left, saying, " If it burns, it burns, and if it doesn't, I don't want anyone disturbing anything".



Overview of area between Maple Ave. and what was then, Factory St. (now Court St.). Shows Alvin Gardner's house, which was spared. The fire burned Dr. Taylor's just before Gardner's, then changed directions going to Factory St. burning the buildings on one side of the street. In the background can be seen one of the oldest houses in the village, occupied at that time by Mrs. Grieve and someone else. At that time it was a double house. Now it is painted blue and occupied by only one family.



In the foreground is Maple Ave. showing the cellars of the destroyed houses. Looking across the central area to Factory St. can be seen the Grieve house, then the square house where John Stoffel now lives and the house where Greg Brown lives. At far right is the cheese factory. These pictures can be seen as a panoramic view, mounted on a cardboard backing, in the Edwards History Center.

In the meantime, the wind had changed slightly, sparing the Gardner house on the corner of Main and Factory Streets, but raising havoc with Henry Webb's residence on Factory Street, and his four rental houses on the same street were forced to succumb. While fire raged in these buildings, the old Woodcock building beyond the Clark building on Main Street burned. There the fire spent its fury and subsided, leaving over four acres of ruins, over forty buildings in ashes, and twenty-two families homeless.

Had there been a system of water works, the village would have been merely scarred instead of being drained of its very heart's blood. \$3,500 had been voted for such a system and bids were to close next week.

In many towns the people would become discouraged, but in this happy, prosperous little village the people will show their perseverance and ambition by building up at once. The future Edwards will be but typical of resurrection for it will present a more beautiful scene than ever before.

The preceding article is a compilation of articles appearing the Gouverneur newspapers following Edwards 4th of July 1894 fire. It is written in the style of the reporters of the time and not original wording of 1999. The complete

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