

Scenes at the Norridgewock Fire



RUINS OF BURGESS & HENDERS ON STORE AND ROGERS HOUSE WHERE FIRE WAS STOPPED—
INSERT, FIRE CHIEF SOULE OF NORRIDGEWOCK.

Sat May 17
NORRIDGEWOCK, May 17 (Special).—Whether a dance in one of the upper Somerset county towns saved Norridgewock from a more disastrous blaze than it had on Friday night will probably remain for all time an unanswered problem. This is certain that but for the

operate. This whistle was located on the roof of the engine house. It was sounded by compressed air from a tank in the lower part of the structure. Its operation was accomplished electrically by means of a circuit from the telephone exchange, which is on the same side of the street, as the engine house was, but

short distance below.

When Miss McDonald roused him from his sleep Mr. Stevens at once sounded the alarm. As the fire was in the engine house he caused the whistle to give a long blast and then a few short ones, which was the signal calling the firemen to that place. Before he could sound a sec-

dance, which brought Miss Ruth McDonald back into town at about 3.30 that morning, the fire which cleaned the westerly side of the business section from Mill stream

the opposite side of the Osoola stream, more commonly called "Mill stream," which flows thru the center of the village, having its junction with the Kennebec river a

ond round the fire either burned away the electrical connection or rendered the compressed air plant useless, for the whistle would not work.

bridge to the residence of Mrs. Jesse Rogers would not, in all probability, have been discovered until much later.

But Miss Ruth, who is a petite little blond, with bobbed hair, went to the dance and got home about that time, discovered the engine house was on fire, roused Fred A. Stevens, night man in the telephone exchange, who sounded the alarm which aroused the town.

That this prompt alarm did save a considerable loss is positive, for it enabled the firemen, shop-keepers and their clerks, aided by willing citizens, to save much of the stock of goods and equipment in the stores occupying the buildings which burned.

First stories of the fire were to the effect that the fire gave its own alarm, by sounding the fire whistle. This was due to the fact that but one alarm or set of signals sounded, leading many to think that the fire, in some way, caused the alarm to

As is customary in small towns like Norridgewock, the night operator in the telephone exchange sleeps a good part of the time. There is not enough business to warrant his remaining at the switch board thru-out the night. Inward calls ring a large gong which arouse him and persons who desire to enter the exchange accomplish the same thing by rapping at the door.

Thursday night Mr. Stevens went to bed about 10 o'clock, as is his custom. He says that the town had been exceptionally quiet, with very few on the street. This was due to the absence of the young folks to dances and entertainments in other places.

His first interruption of the night came at 12.10. A man rapped on the door and came in to put thru a telephone call. When the man left Stevens went to bed and to sleep. He was aroused again about 2 o'clock by the hooting of the occupants of some automobiles which had come into the village and stopped on the bridge. They made so much noise that he got up and looked out to see what the trouble was.

At that time there was no sign of fire in the engine house or anywhere else. Again he retired and was not disturbed until Miss McDonald's pounding on the door awakened him. To his inquiry as to what was wanted, the girl cried:

"The Engine house is afire!"
"I jumped off the couch and ran to the window, looked across the stream and saw that the upper part of the building was ablaze; that was all. I jumped to the alarm key and sounded a long and five short blasts on the whistle, but after that it refused to work."

The alarm accomplished its purpose, for in a surprisingly short time firemen and citizens generally were rushing to the fire house.

A Flaming Barrier

Chief Soule of the department, as told in Friday's dispatch to the Lewiston Journal, was the first to reach the fire house. He thru open the doors and started to rush in with an idea of getting out the apparatus to fight the fire, but was met by a wall of flame and heat thru which no living thing could go.

He tried again to go thru, but the flame and the heat forced him back.

Other men had arrived and they too were prevented from reaching either the chemical, the ladder truck or the gas fire pump.

Norridgewock was as helpless in the grasp of the fire as tho it had never owned a piece of fire apparatus or a foot of hose.

Telephone calls were sent to Skowhegan for help and that department immediately dispatched assistance. The chemical engine and crew arrived about 4.30, but the steamer which started got stuck on the road and it was nearly 6.30 when it took up a position on the bridge across the stream and began the real fight to stop the flames.

There was no hope of saving the first five buildings, they being then practically totally destroyed, but the Skowhegan men tackled the fire which was then rapidly consuming the home of Mrs. Rogers. It was a tough battle, but the firemen won in the end. The building was gutted and practically ruined, but the fire was stopped there and many buildings, which otherwise must have gone, saved.

Much Mystery in Origin

As yet no satisfactory explanation of the fire's cause has been offered. It is hoped that an examination of the ruins of the fire house may solve the mystery, tho there is little reason for expecting it to.

The fact that the fire, when discovered by Miss McDonald and first seen by Mr. Stevens was in the up-

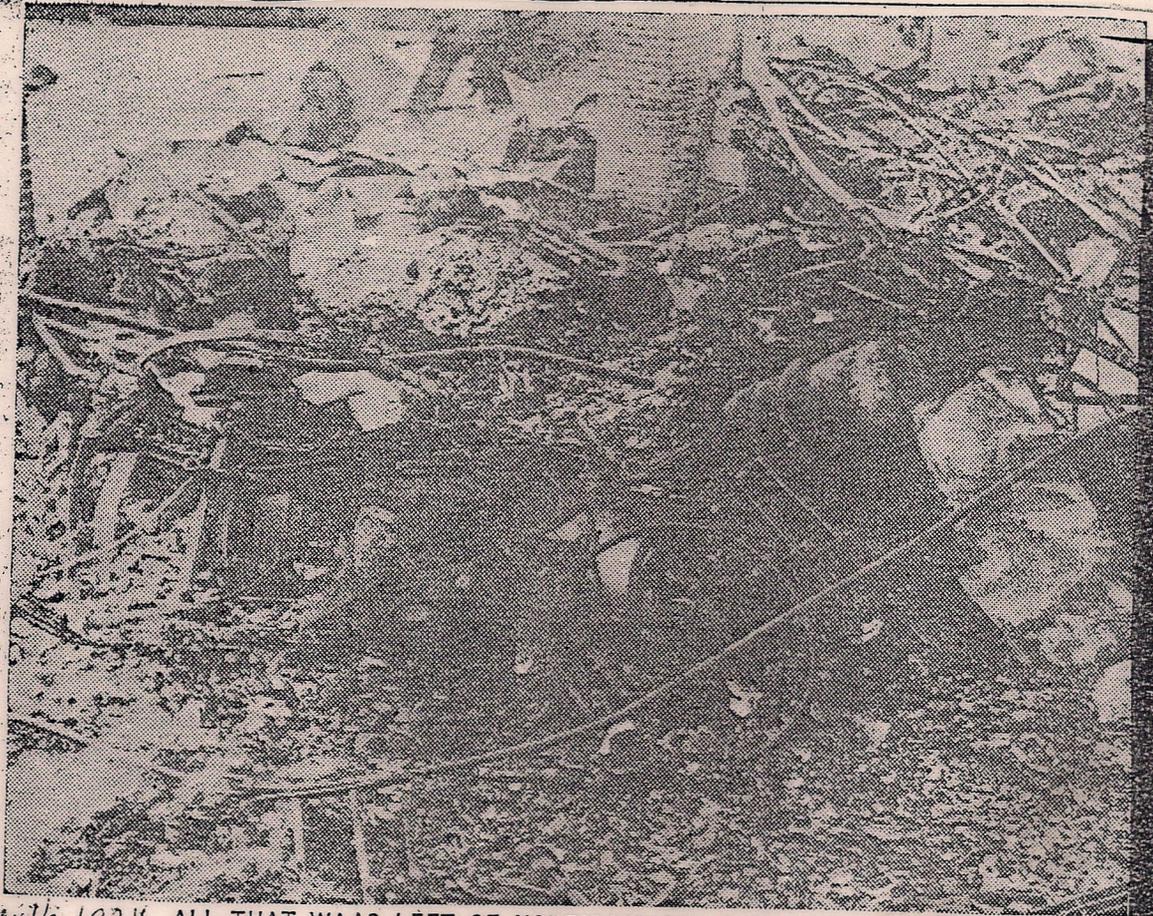
per part of the structure does not make it easy to figure out the cause. This upper floor of the building was used by the firemen as a kind of club room. Ordinarily quite a number of them congregate there nightly, but on Thursday night it is said practically no one was in the rooms. It is said that after eight o'clock that evening not a person is known to have been inside the building up to the time the fire was discovered.

While it might be thought that a carelessly dropped cigaret but might have been responsible it is not thought probable for the reason that had the fire originated in that way it would have developed much earlier than 3.30 in view of the fact that the last person left the hall about eight o'clock.

While there are some who think a tramp might have done it, this is not accepted by the majority of folks. They say that there have been no tramps in the vicinity and that had there been one around some trace would have been had of him before this. So, the cause of the fire still remains a mystery.



Map 16, 1924



May 16 1924 ALL THAT WAAS LEFT OF NORRIDGEWOCK FIRE DEPARTMENT.

Bank Fire May 16, 1924



May 16, 1924 MOVING SOME OF THE GOODS SAVE FROM BURNING BUILDINGS.