

Preserving Forest Grove

Newsletter of the Historic Landmarks Board

Historic buildings are especially vulnerable to destruction by fire, and past newsletter articles provide some examples. We are reprinting them here because they are still relevant and interesting. Fires are caused by a number of factors, especially during winter holidays when people are burning fires in wood stoves and fireplaces, using space heaters, and burning candles. So please be mindful of old electrical wiring, chimney cleaning and maintenance, unattended candles and Christmas trees, and smoking. Pay attention to fire detectors and extinguishers, set up escape routes, and remember to train your children. The Historic Landmarks Board wishes you and yours a safe holiday, and we hope these articles give food for thought.

The Great Fire of 1919 original by Edwin Dey, excerpted from Summer, 1998

Most towns in the American West began life with a downtown district largely built of wood, and most also suffered disastrous fires.

Forest Grove was no exception. Forest Grove had a verdant, tree-dotted "village green" in its

center, surrounding the white Congregational Church between College Way and Main Street. The open churchyard, where the farmers tied their teams on market days, gave the town a sort of uncrowded New England flavor.

The Thursday, July 24, 1919, Washington County News-Times (now the Forest Grove News-Times) carried a front page headline: "Holocaust of Flame Sweeps City Sunday."

On Sunday afternoon, July 19, 1919, at about one o'clock, occurred the most disastrous fire in the history of Forest Grove. On a Sunday afternoon when the streets of the city were more nearly deserted than at any other time, the fire demon chose an opportune time to spread his deadly ravages over a goodly portion of the city's business district...

...How the fire started or just where is not



Looking diagonally across College Way towards 21st Avenue. Left, the ruins of the Congregational Church, and right, burnt-out buildings on 21st. July 20, 1919, Courtesy of Friends of Historic Forest Grove.

definitely known... Mrs. Ernest Brown, who lives across the street from the Sanford secondhand store, on North Main Street, had just returned from church, observed some smoke coming from the vicinity of the rear of Mr. Sanford's business. At that moment she gave it little thought, merely thinking that someone had previously built a bonfire and that it was only the smoldering embers from it that she had seen...

A neighbor sounded the alarm, and firemen were on the spot in a remarkably short time and lines of fire hose were deftly and quickly laid to nearby hydrants and the fight was on for the control of the devastating element. Quickly the maddening flames leaped to adjoining structures, and it soon appeared hopeless to attempt to stop the flames from destroying the building they had entered. After vainly striving to quell the fire by pouring two streams of water on the seething inferno, the plucky firemen were compelled to withdraw their forces and pull the hose with them. They were then directed toward saving adjoining property.

Had the fire succeeded in gaining headway, it would have been next to impossible to have saved the business portion of the town from utter ruin, as the wind was blowing from the northwest and carried burning embers all over the town.

A swath had been cut through two blocks of the center of town. Sixteen buildings were destroyed or heavily damaged. The First Congre-

gational Church—replacing the original pioneer structure, which had burned down a few years before—was destroyed, along with the Public Library. Destroyed or heavily damaged were an unoccupied building north of the library, the Washington County Poultry Association building, a three-story residence on College Way, Staehrl's residential property; the Palace Garage, a frame building occupied by the Valley Realty Co., a building occupied by C.H. Adams Millinery, the new Odd Fellows building, occupied by M.S. Allen and Co. Hardware, an unoccupied building owned by M. Peterson, the Sanford secondhand building, the vacant building of the Marble and Granite Works, the Leabo Livery Stable building, the Caples & Co. building and the Hoffman building housing Miss Darling's photo gallery.

The loss of their near-new church was devastating to the Congregationalists. Although they had long preserved the village green surrounding their church, the expense of rebuilding required a sacrifice. Portions of the block were sold.

While the present incarnation of the First Congregational Church still occupies the original site, numerous other buildings—all built of brick or concrete, mostly in the 1920s—have covered what was once the village green.

The great fire of 1919 had changed the downtown face of Forest Grove.

Mourning the Loss, original by Margie Waltz-Actor, excerpted from Winter, 2007

In the Fall of 2006, Forest Grove lost one of its oldest homes to a devastating fire, believed to be caused by an electrical issue in the kitchen. Known as the Latourette / Atwell / McGilvra house at 2314 "A" Street, the entire home was engulfed in flames within moments of the fire starting. Several fire engines and tens of firefighters responded to the fire call, but they could not save the home. Thankfully, no one was hurt in the blaze.

Twenty foot flames could be seen shooting up from the roof line. Forest Grove residents who

live up and down "A" Street witnessed firefighters setting up hoses and watering down neighboring homes to keep the blaze from spreading. Sadly, the entire home was a complete loss and was later demolished, leaving only the front porch steps.

It is believed the home was built in 1873 by an Oregon City businessman and Clackamas County Commissioner, L.D.C. Latourette. He reportedly purchased the lot for the house in 1871 from Elkanah Walker, a minister, who partitioned his Donation Land Claim to create

Walker's Addition where many fine old homes were built and still remain today.

It was a simple one-story building with Classical Revival characteristics, which usually had low-pitched gabled roofs, boxed eaves and a wide frieze board. The house had double-hung sash windows with head molding, and it had original doors in its oldest doorways. Over the years, a vestibule was in-filled and made into a cottage; a rental house was built on the north-west end of the property and a three-car garage was added in 1950.

As Forest Grove citizens, we mourn the loss of one of our oldest residences, but we will con-

tinue to preserve and enjoy those that still remain.



2314 "A" Street fire, Fall 2007.

Photo courtesy of Forest Grove Fire and Rescue.

Herrick Hall Burns (1906) - Totally Destroyed by Fire

excerpted from Winter, 2006 newsletter

One of the greatest disasters in the history of Forest Grove occurred March, 1906 when Herrick Hall, the ladies' dormitory of Pacific University succumbed to the ravages of a fierce fire fanned by a raging wind from the east. With the mercury hovering around 25 degrees and the wind blowing thirty-five miles an hour the firemen worked in vain to allay the calamity while the whole town wrapped in all available materials from rugs and carpets to stray pieces of curtains stood by trying as fruitlessly to keep warm.

The cause is attributed to a spark from a chimney which fell on the roof although it is also stated that a defective chimney was the cause and the fire started from the inside. Both explanations are plausible.

Three hours after the alarm was sounded Herrick Hall was reduced to ashes. At 11 o'clock the first alarm was given while most of the occupants were at church. The students and townspeople were able to carry out almost all of the furniture of the building including four pianos and other valuable pieces.

The raging gale carried the sparks and burning embers westward toward the main Marsh Memorial Hall only 100 yards away which was seriously threatened. The dry leaves all over the campus were

continually catching afire - as many as seven blazes starting within a radius of 20 feet at one time - which kept the big crowd busy. The large oak trees, the pride of the school and town were several times smoking and blazing.

The business section of the town only 200 yards away was catching afire at regular intervals and it is due to the Hillsboro firemen that something more serious did not happen.

A second Herrick Hall was built, but it also burned, on January 2, 1973.



Herrick Hall was built in 1884 and named after Pacific's second president, Rev. John R. Herrick. Photo courtesy Washington County Museum.

Community Enhancement Grant (CEP) Funds

The Historic Landmarks Board (HLB) now has CEP grant funding available for the 2014-15 year. If your house is on our local historic register, or is a contributing building in one of the three historic districts, your house may be eligible for restoration / rehabilitation grant funding. The HLB may have funds to help you with your projects. If you are planning any exterior restoration work, have structural work to do such as foundation or porch repairs, even exterior painting or re-roofing, we'd love to help. We fund projects up to 50% of the cost of the job per grant, up to \$1,000 for many projects and up to \$500 for painting and roofing. We can also help you find historically appropriate solutions to challenges you may have. Contact James Reitz at **503-992-3233** or jreitz@forestgrove-or.gov.

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Preserving Forest Grove is a quarterly newsletter published by the Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board to help fulfill its duty of public education regarding the preservation of cultural resources. If you would like to be on the mailing list, please call James Reitz at 503-992-3233 or jreitz@forestgrove-or.gov.

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The activity that is the subject of this publication has been financed in part with federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, as provided through the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. However, the contents and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of any trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the U.S. Department of the Interior.