

State Tragedy in 1881 Led To Disaster Relief Program

Eighty years ago the first 10 days of September focused national attention upon Michigan, where one of the most destructive forest fires in recorded history ravaged the Thumb area leaving at least 200 people dead and nearly 15,000 homeless.

The tragedy of 1881, and the horror of its aftermath, also marked the beginning of America's Red Cross disaster operations in North America.

A report from Michigan Senator O. D. Coster which reached America's first Red Cross Chapter at Danville, N. Y., less than three weeks after its Aug. 27 founding, was incomplete but so harrowing that the organization and its first president, Clara Barton, began to collect relief supplies immediately.

EYEWITNESS accounts and local newspaper reports of the time presented evidence of needs as great as that of a nation-wide appeal was made by Gov. David H. Jerome on Sept. 15 for more assistance than the people of Michigan alone were able to provide.

His appeal found the Red Cross already in action, the young society's first disaster agent on the scene, and new Red Cross groups at work in Syracuse and Rochester, N. Y., assembling supplies for the fire victims.

The elements of tragedy had built slowly toward the horror of Sept. 5, when vast areas of Huron, Sanilac, Tuscola, and sections of Lapeer and St. Clair counties exploded into flame.

No rain had fallen for two

months. The "slashing" left by lumbermen in the forests were like kindling.

THE CROPS withered, the wells ran dry, the scrub trees and brush which had grown up on land burned over by the disastrous fire of 1871 became tinder, and even the swampland dried into plains of baked, cracked clay.

Unaware of the danger, the farmers pursued their usual occupation for late August, the clearing of brush and woods and the burning over of fallow fields. By Aug. 31, the fires had begun to spread out of control, consuming farms and endangering towns where citizens fought back with bucket brigades.

Throughout the area, the smell and sight of the smoke which dimmed a blazing sky became familiar to the people.

THEN on the afternoon of Sept. 5, a gale roared out of the west, sending walls and funnels and torrents of flame across the land.

There was no escape from its path.

Charles R. Quay of Carsonville, who was a boy of 15 in Pontiac at the time of the fire, says: "Lurid forked flames shot up across the heavens like great, flaming tongues, roaring, hissing furnaces that consumed everything in its path. Crops were heaped, fences burned, and farm buildings went up in great pillars of fire. Terrified cattle ran bellowing across the fields, were pursued, overtaken, and consumed by the fiery blast that enveloped them and swept

2-A THE BIRMINGHAM (MICH.) ECENTRIC Oct. 12, 1961 B'ham Schools to Hold MEA Confab Meetings

Individual meetings of the annual conference of Region No. 7 of the Michigan Education Association will be held at Seaholm and Groves High Schools Oct. 20 and 21.

The opening Oct. 20 at Cobo Hall in Detroit, the conference will have as its theme "Professionalizing the Individual Educator."

Several members of the professional staff of the Birmingham School System will participate in a variety of group meetings, sessions on the subjects of exceptional children, visiting teachers, and foreign language will be conducted at Groves while others on language arts, library service, social studies and driver education will be in progress at Seaholm.

THE LANGUAGE arts session at 9:30 a.m. under the chairmanship of William S. Corlies, director of elementary curriculum, will be the day-long series of meetings.

Dr. Otis M. Dickey, superintendent of Birmingham Schools, will officially welcome members and guests.

Participating in the language arts discussion will be Mrs. Ruth Murray on "Creative Dramatics"; Mrs. Irene Janke on "Choral Reading"; Miss Cathy Campbell on "Benefits to the Children in Dramatics"; and Mrs. Naomi Erdmann on "Demonstration with Children."

MISS JANE Parker Ward will be chairman of a language arts meeting on "How We Use the Library in the Junior High School." Also sharing in this session will be Mrs. Maragry Frawald on "What Happens after the Child Leaves the Library with a Book"; Miss Katherine Stok on "How Can a Math Class Use the Library"; and Malcolm Tindall on "The Functional Library as a Guidance Facility."

Another language arts session on "Individualized and Personalized Reading" will be held by Mrs. Mary Woodworth. Participating will be Mrs. Marjorie Tate on "Let's Personalize Our Reading"; and Dan Welch on "Diagnosis, the

His topic will be "The Asia-American Does Not Know."

Mayor to Speak

Birmingham Mayor Florence Willett will speak Wednesday at the October meeting of the Detroit Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Mrs. Willett will speak on "The Suburb of Tomorrow." The dinner will be at 6:30 p.m. at Northwood Inn.

PURPOSE OF the conference is to bring together professional educators to discuss methods of improving educational standards for teachers and determining current educational problems.

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This sketch made at the scene of the great Michigan forest fire of September, 1881, shows Red Cross volunteers distributing clothing at Cass City. The spark that kindled the tragedy also sparked a program of organized disaster relief by the Red Cross through the contributions of the American people.

Commission OK's Barton Property Rezoning Request

Birmingham city commissioners Monday night approved a request to rezone part of the Carl O. Barton property at Poppleton and Knox.

They accepted the plan board's recommendation to rezone from R-2 Single Family Residential to P-Parking a portion of Barton's property at the southwest corner of Knox and Poppleton and a vacant lot east of the water tank site between Oakdale and Poppleton.

Commissioners set public hearings for Nov. 6 on a proposal to vacate part of Oakdale and on a proposed rezoning of property at 707 Knox from R-2 to P.

They will consider vacating of Oakdale south of Ridgedale, including the portion immediately east of the City water tank.

COMMISSIONERS instructed Police Chief Ralph Moxley to study and report on traffic and parking on Poppleton from Maple north and on Ridgedale from Hunter east.

Residents of the area, banding together in a home owners association, objected to the proposed rezoning at Monday night's public hearing.

They contended that it would create a traffic hazard for children and would be "an unjust and unnecessary example of spot zoning."

Residents felt that a parking lot would not be suitable to the residential character of the neighborhood.

City officials and the real estate developer involved in the transaction argued that the parking lot, by taking parked cars off the streets, would improve the traffic situation.

THEY FELT that lighting and screening requirements would make the property suitably attractive and thus compatible to the rest of the area.

Mrs. William Redford, 863 Knox, pleads for retention of the residential zoning. "This is one of the loveliest areas in Birmingham," she declared.

Mayor Florence H. Willett replied that the commissioners "constantly strive" to maintain the residential character of Birmingham.

PARKING IS now available on the property, but would not be adequate for a building expansion Barton is planning. He owns the commercial development on Maple between Poppleton and Hunter.

The plan board reported that the property up for rezoning probably would never be utilized under the residential zoning.

Commissioner William E. Roberts' motion to grant the rezoning request passed, 5-0, with Commissioner Carl Ingraham abstaining because of a legal association with Barton.

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