

Hot Time In The "Ole" Town In 1883

Town Had Its Big Fires And Fairly Often Years Ago

Ninety Percent of Business District Burned Down In Late 1883

Coming here in the early eighties, Mr. Chas. Smallwood apparently thought he had picked out a hot spot on earth. He had been here only a short time before the big fire of 1883 swept 90 per cent of the business district between midnight and dawn of December 8th. Starting in a store room near the Buck Slade store about where the Guaranty Bank is now located, the fire burned all the way down to Smithwick Street, burning the Slade store, a brick-wood store operated by Groves and Peel, and buildings belonging to N. Staton Godard, Roberson's bar, Alf Rogers' and the big store of Biggs and Simmons on the north side of the main street. The fire jumped the street and started burning Church Hardison's beef market almost in front of the Slade store, or about where Rose's dime store is now located. Two or three small shacks, one operated by George Williams, a small wooden drug store operated by the late S. R. Biggs and Elder C. B. Hassell's store on the corner of Main and Smithwick Streets were burned on the north side of the main thoroughfare.

While the town's main business district was burning, fire broke out at the old river wharf, destroying a railroad warehouse and

PROPRIETORS PLANTERS AND CAROLINA WAREHOUSES



The big quartet, Messrs. Sylvester Lilley, John A. Manning, Carlyle Langley and John Gurkin, are all set for a big season at the Planters and New Carolina Warehouses in Williamston. Combining rare ingenuity, ability, knowledge, determination and the means, these four men have what it takes to run tobacco sales and operate warehouses, and they can be expected to cut a big figure as co-operators of the Williamston Market this 1942 season. They are inviting all farmers everywhere to start with them on their first sale at the Planters Warehouse on opening day, Tuesday, August 25th, with the assurance that once a customer, always a customer.

the river steamer, "Commerce." It was a hectic time in the ole town all right, but as the embers died down so has the history of the fire dimmed in the memories of those who now vaguely remember the fire as the biggest in the history of the town.

The old railroad train, standing at the foot of Smithwick Street, blew its whistle and volunteers were called to fight the fire at the river. But property owners up town begged the volunteers not to leave and go to the river.

No records are available, but it is believed that the loss that night was in the neighborhood of \$200,000. Elder Hassell's store, well stocked, covered the lots where the Welcome Inn and the shoe shop now stand. The fire was checked there, leaving a few buildings further down Main Street and one or two on West Main about where Eagle's store now stands.

About two years later, or in 1885, fire destroyed the old wooden courthouse and jail on the brink of the river hill. Many old

records were lost to posterity with the exception of one book which a county officer happened to have at his home at the time. According to stories handed down during the years, a defendant, facing a charge in the courts, burned the old hall of justice to destroy the evidence. No one was ever prosecuted, but the person who was said to have fired the structure left soon thereafter for another state where he made good.

About a year later, Sam Newberry's big livery stable on the

corner of Main and Watts Streets burned. Mrs. Clement's office building, nearby, was also destroyed.

On December 16, 1891, the fire, retracing its path of eight years before, burned the S. R. Biggs' two-story brick drug store. An old wooden structure on the site where Margolis Brothers' store is now located, caught fire and fired the drug store and one or two other buildings.

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