

# The Mount Airy News

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## Fires of Undetermined Origin Destroy Vener Plant and Four Store Buildings

### Midnight Explosion Starts Fire That Totally Destroyed Four Store Buildings

Two fires that visited this city last week—on Thursday night and Saturday night—have brought home to our people a fuller realization of the destruction that can be wrought by fire in so short a space of time. At the same time those who are entrusted with the protection of property worked in perfect harmony in the emergency and saved much.

The plant of the Mount Airy Veneer Co., located on South street, was reduced to a heap of ashes Friday night by a fire which was beyond the control of the firemen from the very first. One end of the plant was under full blaze when discovered at about two o'clock in the morning, and the large wooden structure was soon consumed by the flames. The boiler room and steaming vats were saved as they were located some distance from the main building. Besides the machinery and other materials that were in the building there were also three car loads of finished veneering packed up ready for shipment. The loss to the owners Wm. Hadley and E. B. Short, is estimated to be about \$35,000, with very little insurance. This business was started just last summer and its owners say it has only recently reached the point of its highest production and they were well pleased with the bright prospects. Already they are making plans to rebuild. Some of the heavy timbers are now being saved in the mills out in the country and as soon as they can be hauled in the plant will be reconstructed. For the time being about 35 men are through out of employment on account of the fire and will have to seek jobs elsewhere until the plant can be rebuilt, which will be completed at the earliest possible date.

The fire Saturday night made a disastrous and wicked looking hole in the business section of Main street, destroying the hardware store of Midkiff and Brannock, the grocery store of Robt. Belton and L. I. Martin and the restaurant of Ben Belton. It originated in the building occupied by the hardware firm and the first knowledge any one had of it was a violent explosion which wrecked the entire four store rooms, throwing the roof and second story of the buildings high into the air and then dropping them back into a burning mass of wreckage. The force of the explosion was such that plate glass from all nearby stores were shattered, and even glass from the hotel windows was broken out by the concussion. The fronts of the stores across from the scene of the explosion were reduced to a scene of wreckage as timbers, brick and stones were hurled like shrapnel across the street and through the glass into the store rooms, Fuller's Meat Market, W. W. Thomas' Grocery store, Stewart's meat market, Peore's Grocery store, and the wholesale house of the West-Hill Co. suffered badly from the flying debris. Mr. Stewart was in his market when the explosion occurred and as the glass began to fly around him his first thought was that an automobile had run through his front and blown up. He left the scene as hurriedly as possible via the back door, receiving several cut places on his hands from the flying glass. Display counters in his place and the other stores were torn up badly by the flying glass and other materials. Ora Roberts was in the rear of the Thomas store getting ready to close up for the week when the explosion sent a veritable shower of deadly missiles right at him. When the dust cleared away he saw stones about him that weighed 15 and 20 pounds, and several pieces of the middle front of the hardware building were found in the rear of the Thomas store. The concussion from the explosion stunned Mr. Roberts for a short time, but he soon recovered.

The proprietors of the hardware store where the fire is said to have originated, Jim Midkiff and Carl Brannock, had been gone about 15 minutes when the explosion was heard. Mr. Belton was alone in his

grocery store adjoining the hardware building and narrowly escaped death from the flying timbers. The only reason he escaped was that he happened to be on the opposite side of the store room from the hardware building. A frame wall separates his store from the hardware store and when the explosion took place he says the entire partition caved into his room, the ceiling, second story and roof seemed to rise and then tumbled back on him. Darkness immediately enveloped him and by the light of the fast burning wreckage he was able to find his way through the wreckage to the street. He was so stunned and shocked from the violent explosion that it was with difficulty that he made his exit through the wreckage.

John Carpenter and wife were looting in the building over the restaurant and were badly stunned from the explosion which wrecked their rooms and painfully injured both of them. By aid of the firemen they were rescued from the second story through the front windows, as the stairway was wrecked.

When the explosion occurred all the lights in the city went out simultaneously. At first many people thought a transformer had exploded and as the fire alarm did not sound this belief was held for some time following the sound but the blaze continued to grow and envelope a larger area until residents of the city soon began pouring into the burning area by the thousands.

At first it was thought the wires on Main Street had become short circuited by the explosion thus cutting off the electricity at the sub-station, but when Supt. Whitlock arrived at the switches a half mile from the business section he found that the force of the explosion had caused the switches to be thrown open. Mr. Whitlock happened to be standing in front of the postoffice, having just gotten his mail when he heard the explosion and could see the debris from the building being thrown into the air as he looked from where he was standing over the Holcomb & Midkiff building. He estimates that the entire upper structure of the buildings was blown at least 100 feet into the air, and then settled back into the burning wreckage. Others placed the distance at 200 feet. On seeing the flames and flying timbers Mr. Whitlock at once made for the sub-station on Galloway street, and he says that as he passed up Main street the four stores then seemed to be entirely enveloped in flames. He made his way to the sub-station and pulled all the switches until his linesmen could cut loose from the burning district. In the meantime the firemen at once hurried to the scene and the fire engine was soon throwing three streams of water into the seething furnace. Other hose connected direct to the hydrants were also trained upon the fire. And right then every one wished and prayed for another fire engine—the 12 year old one was laboring under a terrible strain as it was being pushed to its last ounce of strength and all realized that under such a terrible strain some vital part of it was liable to give way any second. The salvation of the remaining parts of the entire block rested upon the labors of the old fire engine, for the firemen were leaving the danger of falling walls and pouring the streams of water into the middle of the roaring furnace.

The city's new fire engine was then in the depot but it had not been unloaded and could not then be put into operation, but a call message to Winston-Salem brought Fire Chief Nissen and a truck with a company of firemen to the city's aid, the Winston-Salem boys making a record run here in a little more than an hour.

The fire was practically under control when the aid from Winston-Salem arrived, but the knowledge that they were depending on the assistance of the city made our firemen fight desperately to stem back the attack of the flames until the assistance could arrive. A great shout of

welcome went into the air from every mouth on the streets and sidewalks as the streams of the stream on the Winston-Salem truck could be heard as it speeded on its way through Bannertown and up South Main street.

Little did our people who were viewing the burning of the buildings realize the almost hopeless struggle that was going on at the city well in an effort to furnish water for the firemen. It took more than an hour to connect up the electric wires so the electric pumps could be put into operation, but in the meantime the gasoline pump had been heavily laboring away at its job. When the current was finally turned on Supt. Whitlock phoned to the pumping station if the electric motors would now run. The answer came back, "yes, but we've pumped all our water and there's nothing more to pump." The way our city filtration plant is constructed only a small portion of the water that is available can be immediately pumped for it is a slow process for the water to trickle through the filter beds and with several hoses in use the reserve supply is soon exhausted. And while the crowd stood on Main street and saw the property go up in flames they did not realize that for two hours during that period not a drop of water could be pumped into the tanks for the use of the firemen and they were drawing on the small reserve that was left. During those two hours the city water works force and a force of expert workmen supplied by the Southern Public Utilities Co., with Supt. Whitlock of the power company and Supt. Absher of the water works, supervising the work, a new pipe connection was made which perhaps saved the business district from further destruction. It was through the installation of a new pipe line across the lot at the city well that raw water from the pond on the water shed was allowed to flow directly into the pumps and then from there to the tanks on Lebanon Hill. The men allotted to this task worked feverishly until the valve was opened that permitted the pumps to start their work again, for they realized that failure on their part to provide water for the firemen would mean untold destruction to property. When pumping was resumed the tanks on Lebanon Hill were practically empty but the timely connection at the pumping station gave the firemen the needed supply. While the raw water could not be filtered yet it was heavily chlorinated in order to sterilize it and make it safe for consumption. Nearly one million gallons of water was poured on the blaze in the

(Continued to back page.)

## News of Interest To Tobacco Co-ops

Members of the old Co-op Tobacco Association in Surry and adjoining counties will be interested in the statement given out by Judge Meekins, of the Federal court, who is quoted as saying that the co-op receivers are doing all in their power to preserve the assets for the farmers and that he is satisfied that he appointed the best possible men to wind up the affairs of the association.

"The receivers told me that they have 22,000,000 pounds of dark tobacco on hand and that the average price of it on the open market is only eight cents as compared with 18 cents a year ago," said Judge Meekins.

"The receivers also told me that much of this tobacco has been found to be mouldy," declared Judge Meekins, "and that after E. R. Patterson and T. C. Watkins and other officials began to re-dry tobacco the life of the bonds given by them was reduced to one year so that the bonds had expired before the tobacco was opened and its mouldy condition discovered."

Judge Meekins also stated that these and other matters throwing great light upon the operations of the association would be fully set out in reports to be filed with him by the receivers.

The last audit of the association showed an equity to the farmers of about \$8,000,000 but this amount was not borne out by the audit of the receivers and further shrinkage to dangerously near the vanishing point is now indicated.

### Raleigh Rum Runner Made Too Much Smoke; Is Caught

Raleigh, Dec. 17.—When Durham policemen came here last night to take part in the policemen's benefit dance at the city auditorium, Rufus Bell, alleged rum runner, of Raleigh, took chances with the peace and dignity of the state and got too far on the way to Durham with 45 gallons of liquor as officers say.

Mr. Bell made the mistake of raising too much smoke. He convinced the officers that there was firewater where so much smoke was to be seen. As the officers came towards him he backed and hoisted his smoke screen. He crawled for a mile, but finally ran into a garage and there was soon nailed. Bell's engine did him dirty. It choked just when he needed it most.

There was no explanation of the liquor. It was right there and the boy had a bad name, too. He is under sentence now in the city court.

## Happenings Twenty-one Years Ago

Interesting Items Gleaned From the Files of The Mount Airy News 21 Years Ago This Week

A horse dealer from down south will be in this city the last part of the week with the money to buy horses and mules.

Capt. D. D. Parks has resigned his position as dynamo attendant at Buck Shoals power plant and will be carrier on R. F. D. No. 5 after Jan. 1st. C. M. Gentry of this city will take position he vacates. Mr. Gentry has been machinist and engineer at the factory of the Mount Airy Furniture Co. for some years and is a good man for the position.

Wednesday, Dec. 20, at the home of J. W. Greenwood, Miss Anna Robinson and Mr. Ashby Schaub were united in marriage, Rev. J. E. Abernethy officiating.

E. H. Kochitinsky will spend Christmas in Greensboro with his wife who has been there for several weeks visiting her father.

C. H. Haynes and E. C. Freeman, of Debon, spent Wednesday night in the city.

Mr. Wilcher Dunner of near this city died Monday morning of this week and was buried at Salem Church Tuesday. At the time of his death he was 62 years old and had spent his entire life near this city. The day of his burial was cold and rainy but a large crowd followed the remains to the last resting place.

Of all the nights we have seen one to be remembered was a drive of

200 turkeys coming down Main Street one day this week. W. W. Bowman, as agent for the Piedmont Produce Co., went to Carroll County and in about five days he had bought 200 turkeys from the farmers who live within a short distance of Laurel Fork post office. Mr. Bowman says nearly every well to do farmer in Carroll County has a large drove of turkeys and that he was often able to buy as many as 25 from a single farmer. The fowls are being dressed here and shipped to the northern markets.

Last Friday night the graded school children gave an entertainment at the Opera House that was highly enjoyed by those who attended. It was a Santa Claus minstrel and songs and recitations made up the program. Ed Wynn and Babay Payne acted the negro and kept the audience amused by their comic actions and songs. Santa Claus was master of the occasion and directed the entertainment. Gertrude Smith recited in a most pleasant manner a selection, "He Wouldn't Tell His Ma." Peter Penn and Blair Hines sang in a way that caused much favorable comment. Misses Conrad and Kelly treated the children for the occasion.

Bound trip railroad tickets at reduced rates during the holidays. See Service Bill, ticket agent, for particulars.

## Mecklenburg Officers Held Liable For Illegal Arrest

### SUPREME COURT AFFIRMS JUDGMENT OF \$2,000 AWARD FOR DAMAGES

Four Rural Policemen Suspected Automobile of Having Liquor, But Search Revealed None; Attempted Arrest Without Having Warrants.

Raleigh, Dec. 17.—Four Mecklenburg rural policemen and their husbands must pay him \$2,000 in damages for illegally attempting to arrest E. M. Houston, Mecklenburg farmer, whom they suspected of having liquor in milk cans that he brought to Charlotte.

For the second time within as many weeks, the Supreme Court wrote down the principle that officers of the law cannot violate the law in their zeal to enforce it. Associate Justice George W. Connor wrote both opinions of the court. The first one came down last week in which the sentence imposed on two Surry county deputy sheriffs was affirmed. The opinion handed down yesterday was on the civil side in which the same principle was affirmed.

The case of the four Mecklenburg rural policemen, G. C. De Herrodora, J. N. Dodgen, S. S. Rogers and E. R. Hatlewood involved also the New Amsterdam Casualty Company, which was on bond of the first named for \$1,000, and of the Massachusetts Bonding and Insurance Company, which was on the bond of each of the three remaining officers for \$1,000 each.

Houston was a farmer who lived 12 miles in the country, and had been in the habit of bringing milk to Charlotte, and also worked at the Ford assembling plant according to his testimony, and had started home at 3 o'clock in the morning after working eight hours. In the suburbs of Charlotte he came upon the four officers, who had been informed that the milk cans contained liquor. He turned his automobile toward Charlotte, knocking down De Herrodora as he did so, and made haste to get away.

The officers gave chase and fired three times, according to their testimony, the three shots bursting the rear tires. The car ran into a curb and was wrecked. The officers searched the automobile and the milk cans, but found no liquor in either. The evidence as to the shooting was conflicting, but there was no dispute as to the fact that Houston's car was parked on the wrong side of the street.

Acted Without Authority.

"The conduct of the defendants, as shown by evidence for the plaintiff, which was accepted by the jury as true, was clearly wrongful and unlawful," says Justice Connor, who points out that the officers were without authority to search the car as they had no warrant, or to make arrest upon a charge of violating the prohibition law, as they had no information of a "freshly committed crime."

The rural policemen were presuming to act under a local statute, which was passed in 1917, which would give them authority to arrest upon evidence of a "freshly committed crime" without having a warrant issued, but the jury did not take this view of the facts in the case.

The rural policemen did not contend that they arrested Houston on a charge of violating the prohibition law, but said they arrested him for violating the traffic ordinance by parking on the wrong side of the street, with his car lights out. The jury did not find that there was any arrest, and Justice Connor points out that to point a pistol at Houston, or to search the car, without an arrest, would constitute an assault, and if they pursued Houston without making an arrest they were without authority to shoot at him.

Standard For Officers.

Justice Connor again quotes Justice Feinberg's admission in his Cross Law, which was once before quoted with approval by the late Justice Walker (Houston vs. Cross, 128 N. C. 476): "It behooves the officers of the law to be very careful that they do not misbehave themselves in the discharge of their duty, for if they do they must furnish the usual pro-

tection."

"It is well for officers of the law, especially for those whose duty it is to patrol the streets and highways of the State to be mindful, always that their first duty is to protect the honest, law-abiding citizen in the enjoyment of all his rights under the law," continues Justice Connor.

"It is sometimes difficult for an officer, under circumstances confronting him suddenly and without warning, to distinguish between the criminal who is using the streets and highways for evil purposes, and the good citizen who is using them for lawful purposes, officers must necessarily sometimes make mistakes. They should recognize this fact and be prudent in the performance of what appears under the circumstances to be their duty and thus avoid or at least lessen injury to one who may appear to be violating the law but who in fact is innocent of wrongdoing. It is the duty of a good citizen, and a law-abiding man to submit to arrest. The law is amply sufficient to protect one who has been erroneously arrested, and thus temporarily deprived of his liberty.

"An officer, who is mindful of his duty and prudent in the performance of it, if he makes a mistake in good faith, is entitled to and will receive the protection of the law. It is only when an officer is negligent of his duty, or disregards of the rights of others, that he will or should be held responsible for the consequences of his acts."

### VIOLENT DEATHS TAKE BIG TOLL

Nov. Report Shows That 153 Lost Lives, While 1,313 Die in 11 Months.

Violent deaths took a toll of 153 lives in North Carolina during November according to the monthly violent deaths report, which was released yesterday by the Bureau of Vital Statistics of the State Board of Health. For the first eleven months of the year, violent deaths have taken a toll of 1,313 lives.

As usual, automobile accidents top the heap, 49 persons losing their lives during November from various types of mishaps with their cars. Four of the 49 met their death when they disputed the right of way with locomotives at grade crossings. During the first 11 months, 396 persons have lost their lives in various types of automobile accidents.

With the advent of colder weather, which causes more fires and carelessness in many respects in starting them, 35 persons were burned to death, this number being added to the first ten months of the year bringing the total number burned to death to date to 245.

Homicides and suicides caused the death of 24, there being 21 of the former and 13 of the latter. For the first eleven months of the year, homicides have caused the deaths of 194 and suicides, 124.

Twelve persons met death from accidental gunshot wounds, bringing the total for 11 months to 65. Ten were killed last month from gunshot wounds of "a doubtful nature." Eighty-four have died to date from this particular kind of violent deaths.

Four were drowned during the month, boosting the total for the 11 months to 105. Six were killed in railroad accidents, making the total to date of 85.

Fifteen have met death from lightning. This kind of violent death was not increased during November.

### Ten Men Indicted For Wake Flogging.

Raleigh, Dec. 17.—Ten Wake County citizens among them two county officials, were indicted by the grand jury this evening in connection with the double beating reported by Dolly Jones and Sam Gross, and the hot soaked tonight.

Dr. J. E. Hunter, of Kaleigh; F. E. Holston, of rural Wake, and Deputy Clyde Wooten are the big names against whom the indictments were returned. They and seven others are in the grand jury list of indicted, according to an official tonight. The others are Sheriff Wooten, Edward Robertson, H. Hall, Wiley O'Neal, John, Thomas, Leland Rogers, T. Ramsey and Paul Robertson, all of Wake.