

# Tibbie's Restaurant Fire – December 9, 1982

Tibbie's Restaurant, a supper club located in Indianford, Wisconsin, was popular for many years, notably for its fried chicken. It was a family owned and operated business for decades.

The front page of the Edgerton Reporter, December 15, 1982, issue captures the story of Tibbie's Restaurant fire.

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## Fire Razes Landmark Restaurant



**Firefighters watch helplessly as flames and smoke engulf Tibbie's Restaurant.**

The cause of a fire that ripped through historic Tibbie's Restaurant in Indianford Thursday remains undetermined after a team of investigators began probing through the smoldering rubble Friday.

Damage to the 57-year-old restaurant was so extensive that fire officials say it may be impossible to pinpoint the exact cause of the blaze.

Roaring flames, at times towering 30 feet above the building, roared and whirled by chilling December winds, swept through the Indianford landmark leaving the popular supper club in a heap of smoldering rubble.

The fire, which was spotted about 9:30 a.m. by a passerby, is believed to have started in or near the kitchen because of the

direction the flames were shooting when firefighters arrived.

The eight-hour blaze was one of three that kept Edgerton volunteer firefighters on the go. Along with the fire that destroyed the restaurant overlooking the Rock River and the Indianford Dam since 1925, housefires in Dane and Jefferson counties also kept firemen on the go.

A team of investigators from the Rock County Sheriff's Department and the State Department of Criminal Investigation and the State Fire Marshall's office were called in because of the suspicious nature in the way the restaurant burned.

The probable cause of the blaze remains undetermined at this time.

Investigators found no evi-



**Only the sign marking the founding of Tibbie's Restaurant 57 years ago stood undamaged after a spectacular fire razed the landmark Indianford business.**

or told detectives the restaurant was assessed at \$274,000 nearly 10 years ago.

Maurer indicated earlier he would probably not rebuild the business. He said the business was actually underinsured and that replacing the 6,000-square foot restaurant could cost as much as \$400,000.

More than 40 firefighters from Edgerton, Milton and Evansville battled the spectacular blaze, which reportedly could be seen from a distance of 10 miles away for more than eight hours.

There were no injuries reported.

Relatives of Maurer were at the scene and feared that he had been trapped in the fire when he couldn't be located. Maurer's daughter, Diane, was visibly

distraught Thursday when she arrived at the fire, saying she did not know where her father was.

Reports at the scene of the fire had Maurer in Chicago while several people also reported seeing him in Indianford, but fire officials were initially unable to locate him.

At the height of the blaze that burned this Rock County business to the ground, Maurer was in Janesville having a muffler put on his car. Returning to his Edgerton home early Thursday afternoon, Maurer told reporters he saw a column of smoke lowering 250 feet above Indianford. Arriving in Indianford and discovering his restaurant was burning, he said there wasn't much point in standing around and watching it burn and decided to leave.

A man who had lived in an upstairs apartment was also feared to be inside the towering inferno, but Maurer told fire officials the tenant had moved out approximately three months ago.

Firemen from Edgerton, Milton and Evansville used a collection of 11 firefighting vehicles to battle the fire which leveled the



**Firefighters battled the restaurant fire for more than eight hours before finally squelching the blaze.**

sprawling wood-frame structure. Edgerton, alone, dispatched three tankers, two pumpers and 24 firefighters to the scene.

Despite chilling temperatures that dropped the mercury to about 10 degrees above zero, firemen had to continually spray each other with water from the fire hoses as the heat emitted from the restaurant fire became unbearable at times once the blaze burned through the roof.

"It was so hot you couldn't stand it," said Edgerton firefighter Mark Backes. "I had to stick my arms in the tank (used to supply water in rural fires) just to cool off."

In fact, the heat radiating from the fire was so intense that firemen were also forced to hose down the nearby fire trucks to keep the paint from scorching and the window glass from shattering.

However, heat wasn't the only problem plaguing firefighters' efforts. Some local firemen said smoke billowing from the blaze was so thick that it prevented those equipped with oxygen tanks from moving about inside.

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### Three Blazes Keep Firefighters Hopping

Shortly after 9:30 Thursday morning, the wailing sound of the fire alarm pierced through the city of Edgerton, summoning volunteer firefighters to Tibbie's Restaurant in Indianford to combat a blaze that eventually burned the historic supper club to the ground.

But the spectacular blaze, which sent flames and smoke billowing high above the burning restaurant was only the beginning of an incredible day that few local volunteer firemen will soon forget.

The busy day included three fires in three different counties being reported in just over a three hour time span.

While firefighting arsenals from Edgerton, Milton and Evansville desperately tried to control the Tibbie's fire that was so advanced the restaurant was a total loss, despite their efforts, a house fire was reported about 11:40 a.m. on Kumbien Road near

## Tibbie's Restaurant Destroyed In Fire...



Milton firefighters used an aerial truck to spray water on the burning restaurant.



Edgerton's assistant fire chief Jim Neal continues to spray water on the smoldering rubble that was once one of the most popular eating spots in the area.



Firefighters from Edgerton and Fort Atkinson cut a hole in the roof of The Graydon Scholl residence on Kumlein Road to get at a fire that was trapped in an attic space.

cause of a lack of visibility. "You could stick your hand on the (oxygen) mask and that's the only way you could see it," Backus added. "Smoke was coming out all over; you couldn't pinpoint anything."

Jim Neal, Edgerton's first assistant fire chief, who was orchestrating the firefighting efforts in the absence of Fire Chief Charles Edwardson, who was recovering from knee surgery indicated supplying firefighters with water was a keen problem because of the restaurant's rural setting.

"We had to keep trucks shuttling back and forth from town," he said.

Even with a Milton truck drawing water directly from the nearby Rock River and several portable water tanks on hand to pump from, firemen had a difficult time keeping an adequate supply of water on hand.

As late as 3 p.m., one truck and a handful of Edgerton firemen were still on hand trying to douse the smoldering remains as clouds of white smoke still poured from the leveled structure.

Neal said the blaze appeared

concentrated in the southeast corner of the restaurant, but quickly spread throughout the building.

"When something is destroyed that bad, it is very difficult to pinpoint a cause," he said. "All you can do is speculate."

Wayne Thompson, a salesman for Jerry Morse Real Estate Agency of Janesville, confirmed that the business was listed for sale.

Tibbies had a 1,000 square foot kitchen with ceramic tiles on the walls and stainless steel fixtures that were lost in the fire. Other irreplaceable items included a Tiffany lamp in the entryway and five panes of stained glass windows that were preserved when Edgerton's old Catholic Church was torn down in the mid-1970s.

Maurer purchased the restaurant 22 years ago which was founded by Nellie and Fred "Tibbie" Teubert.

It was initially operated as a corner service station that primarily catered to the needs of area fishermen and the restaurant was a favorite hangout for area

Photos from the Tibbie's Restaurant Fire:





Tibbie's Restaurant, December 9, 1982



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Tibbie's was only one of three fires that day. From the Edgerton Reporter, December 9, 1982, issue:

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And if that wasn't enough, the department also responded to a minor fire at 811 Hillside Road shortly after the Kumlein Road blaze was reported.

"It's been a hell of a day," Fire Chief Charles Edwardson sighed, while draped in a padded chair inside the fire station. Many of the other 24 firefighters who spent the day combating fires relaxed and refreshed themselves temporarily with coffee and sandwiches prepared by the Edgerton Ladies Auxiliary.

Edwardson, who is recuperating from knee surgery and walked with a cane for much of Thursday, has been fighting fires in and around Edgerton for some 25 years and said he couldn't recall another day when his volunteer firemen were called out three times as they were that day.

"I've never seen three fires like that in one day," he said. "Sometimes you go a month and you don't have a fire."

"I don't think we ever experienced three structure fires going on at the same time," fireman Eddie Hartzell responded.

Edgerton, Milton and Evansville firemen worked for more than

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## Busy Day For Firemen.....

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eight hours to douse the flames at the Tibbie's fire. The day's activities brought all nine of the fire department's trucks into action and 24 of its roster of 35 volunteer firemen.

While battling the blaze there, firefighters were alerted at 11:44 a.m. that the Graydon Scholl residence was on fire. Crews rushed to the Kumlein Road location in Jefferson County where an overheated woodstove reportedly ignited the blaze in the kitchen area.

Firefighters from Edgerton, Milton and Fort Atkinson fought the blaze for over two hours but could not prevent the kitchen and much of the downstairs area from being damaged extensively.

Then at 12:22 p.m., firefighters were dispatched to the Russell Beechler residence on Hillside Road in Dane County where 21-year-old Beechler and 22-year-old Steve Helgestad had used a propane torch to thaw out a drain pipe and accidentally set fire to a bail of hay windbreak.

Fire officials said the outside of the home was damaged slightly by the fire.

Both Edwardson and Jim Neal, Edgerton's first assistant chief, said mutual aid from the nearby communities, which included Cambridge at the Beechler fire, made it possible for firefighters to respond to the three fires Thursday.

"Thank God for mutual aid," Edwardson said. "With three fires, nobody's got enough equipment to fight that many."

"Mutual aid is probably the greatest thing to happen to a volunteer fire department," Neal added. "If it wasn't for mutual aid, we would have been in trouble. We had four departments helping us."

In fact, it probably was the assistance from the nearby departments that afforded Edwardson the time to joke about hiring a press secretary to field the countless questions about the fires that had been fired at him, in person and over the telephone, by reporters.

The cause of the Tibbie's fire was listed as "undetermined". Arson was not suspected, there was no sign of a break-in and the money was still in the vending machines and the safe. Because the fire had completely destroyed the building it was pretty much impossible to determine the cause.