

Carlton Hotel Fire – September 9, 1991

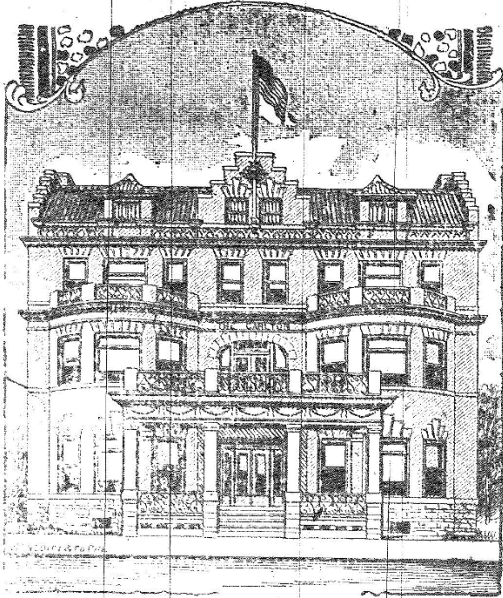
The Carlton Hotel opened in 1898, described as “a new and modern hotel, so elegant in all its appointments”, in the January 7, 1898, issue of the Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter.

A PEACH OF A HOTEL.

The Carlton and Its Appointments

EDGERTON'S NEW \$25,000 HOTEL. ERECTED
BY THE HAUSMANN BREWING CO.
OPENED NEW YEAR'S DAY.

When the Commercial House, Edgerton's principal hotel, passed into other hands in May last and ceased to be used for the purpose it was originally intended, in entertaining the traveling public, many of our citizens supposed our town had suffered an irreparable loss, believing the lack of good hotel accommodations would hamper our tobacco trade. They little suspected that within a year Edgerton would be able to boast of a new and modern hotel, so elegant in all its appointments as to entirely eclipse the older structure they felt so grieved to see perverted into other uses. The accompanying engraving gives some idea of what "The Carlton" is like from an exterior view, indicates what faith is imposed in the future business of the leading tobacco town in the state.



By 1991, the hotel was owned by a couple that were remodeling it and planning to convert it to a Bed-and-Breakfast. The story of the fire is told in the September 11, 1991, issue of the Edgerton Reporter:

The Edgerton Reporter

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Fire Destroys The Carlton Hotel

The Carlton Restaurant and Lounge, an Edgerton landmark at 14 North Henry Street, caught fire early Monday morning and caused an estimated \$500,000 worth of damage. The reason for the blaze, which spread to neighboring buildings, is still under investigation.

The call came in just before 3 a.m., according to Edgerton Fire Chief Jim Neal. Seven additional fire departments were called in to help fight the blaze and the fire was under control at about 6:30, Neal said.

"The fire started in the basement," Neal said. "When we arrived there was nothing but smoke on the first, second and third floors, but there were no flames in the basement."

Neal said that when his men returned with new oxygen tanks the flames were in the walls and were climbing up the building.

The cause of the fire isn't known and may not be for a few days because the rubble will make things hard to spot, he said.

"Saying any cause would be speculation, and I don't care to speculate at this time," Neal said.

Tom and Sue Kinnaird, the owners of the building who live on its third floor, were awakened by the sound of their air conditioner shutting off at about 3 a.m.

"We could smell smoke and when we opened the fire door

smoke came out," Sue Kinnaird said. "We got our four kids and went down the back fire escape."

Tom Kinnaird said he was able to grab some "odds and ends" to take with them as he, his family and their one employee who was staying there escaped from the building. Everything else was destroyed.

The loss of The Carlton is estimated at \$350,000. Insurance may or may not cover that much.

"We don't know what the insurance will cover," Tom said. "Let's just say it won't be enough to cover this by a long way."

The fire did major damage to two buildings nearby and minor

damage to other ones. Mildred's Antiques at 20 North Henry Street suffered major fire damage in the rear of the building.

"I think everything's a total loss in there," Mildred Harrison, owner of the store said. "I think they'll have to tear the building down." Harrison, who had been in business almost 30 years, Harrison estimates that she had \$65,000 worth of merchandise in the store.

Virginia Gilbertson lived in the apartment above Mildred's Antiques and was awakened by the loudspeakers of the fire engines. She left her apartment at about 3:45 a.m. and suffered no injuries.

Mike Londerville, owner of C&M Printing at 102 West Fulton Street, said his building suffered very minor smoke damage and that the tenants of the three apartments in the building got out with no problem.

The building which houses The Edgerton Store at 106 West Fulton Street wasn't as fortunate. That building caught fire near the back and smoke and water caused further damage. Janet Heilendrung, the daughter of Norma Springer, who owns The Edgerton Store, said she doesn't yet know how much dollar damage the fire did to her mother's store. Heilendrung's store, Jan's Coffee Shop and Stained Glass

Studio is next door to her mother's store and had major smoke damage.

The walls of The Carlton that were still standing were knocked down Monday evening to allow workers to safely get to the power lines and restore power, Neal said.

The Carlton had just been remodeled and some additional remodeling was planned. Tom Kinnaird said they had planned to eventually expand into a Bed and Breakfast on the second and third floors.

The Kinnairds plan to stay in a travel trailer at Rock River Leisure Estates for a few days.



Edgerton firefighter Ben Barbour continues to spray a stream of water on the smoldering remains of The Carlton.

"We could smell smoke and when we opened the fire door smoke came out. We got our four kids and went down the back fire escape."

— Sue Kinnaird



Tom Kinnaird (center) is consoled by Katy Kinnaird, Jim Kinnaird and Becky Kinnaird.



Many different streams of water are aimed from Henry Street at the smoldering remains of The Carlton.

Community is Shocked at Losing Historic Landmark

By Bob Samuelson
Reporter Staff

A solemn Eugene Gruna simply shook his head in disbelief as he watched firefighters continue to spray streams of water on the smoldering and crumbled remains of one of the city's most cherished landmarks.

"I don't know what to say," the Edgerton mayor sighed. "I really don't know what to say." Gruna, and virtually every other passerby, looked on in shock at the aftermath of a fire that had swept through The Carlton early Monday morning, completely destroying the 95-year-old building and damaging three other businesses.

The three-story brick edifice that played such a prominent role in Edgerton's history during the early 1900's was suddenly little more than a heap of charred rubble.

All that remained standing when firefighters from eight departments concluded a six-hour battle was a skeleton of what was once this town's centerpiece.

Edgerton was only 13 years old when the former hotel was built in 1896 at a cost of \$25,000. It provided the grandeur that put Edgerton on the map during the hey day of tobacco.

The grand hotel catered to wealthy tobacco buyers at the turn of the century and continued to attract a steady clientele of tobacco dealers and buyers through the mid-1940's.

Gone are a century worth of memories.

"It was the center of the city," Gruna said. "Everything revolved around it."

"It's such a shame," the mayor continued. "You can't rebuild it."

Damage to The Carlton, 14

N. Henry, is estimated at \$350,000.

The fire also spread to three neighboring businesses.

Mildred's Antiques, 20, N. Henry, sustained major smoke and water damage. There was also heavy fire damage to the rear of the building.

The Edgerton store, 106 W. Fulton, also sustained heavy smoke and water damage.

Firefighters were forced to cut a hole in the roof of the building in order to battle the fire after it had spread to the clothing business.

The Antique & Art Gallery, 104 W. Fulton, is the third business that sustained smoke and water damage resulting from the fire.

"This street was dressed up so nicely," Gruna said of Henry Street with its decorative street lamps, park benches and rose garden. "It had a theme with The Carlton and all these businesses putting a lot into it."

In recent years, Edgerton has tried to boost its economy with the tourism trade and has used The Carlton as one of its main attractions.

The Carlton, which was built by Madison's Housman Brewing Co., was listed in the National Register of Historical places in November 1989.

The building was a Queen Anne Victorian style with a Jacobean influence.

It was purchased for \$75,000 in 1989 by Tom and Sue Kinnaird, who remodeled and opened the former hotel as a restaurant and lounge. The couple had plans of incorporating a bed and breakfast.

Plans called for the 40 rooms on the second and third floors of the hotel to be remodeled into 22 larger suites.

The Kinnairds had made painstaking efforts to restore the

building to its historic nature, including refurbishing 14-foot carved ceilings and a great deal of classic woodwork.

The restoration effort was viewed by the family as a five-year plan, and a lot of the work was based on the original architect's blueprints.

Obviously, it was a huge loss for the city.

"Just two days ago, the music was playing and everyone was going in out of the building," Gruna said, alluding to the Edgerton Jaycee Club's Chili-Mania festival on Saturday.

"Now look at it."

Ted Brown, Edgerton's representative on the Rock County Board of Supervisors, said it was more than the loss of a landmark.

"It's not only an historical loss, it's an economic loss," he said. "People would come to eat and then shop in town."

Alderman Carl Korrite is another who felt the loss.

"A part of your heritage is just when you lose a building like this," he said. "It was a place where presidents stayed and vacationed. You just can't replace it."

Korrite arrived at the fire scene about 5 a.m.

"It was really going," he said. "You couldn't see the entire block, it was just smoke."

Fire Chief Jim Neal said the fire started in the basement of The Carlton. Edgerton firefighters were notified of the blaze about 3 a.m.

Dane County initially received a 911 call at 2:53 a.m. The Rock County Sheriff's Department was contacted and Edgerton police were dispatched to the scene.

Officer Kyle Spoth responded

Donations Accepted for Kinnairds

The fire at The Carlton not only destroyed a valuable Edgerton landmark, but also all the possessions of the Kinnaird family. If you would like to donate clothing or household supplies to the Kinnaird family you can drop them off at The Edgerton Reporter, 21 North Henry Street.

Following are clothing sizes and household items that the family needs:

- Women's clothes: Pants sizes: 10-12, 14-16 and 18. Blouse sizes: large girls, 36-38 and 40. Shoe sizes: 3-1/2 and 8-1/2.

- Men's clothes: Pants sizes: 34-30 and 44-30. Shirt sizes: large, X-large, XX-large. Shoe sizes: 10-12.

- Household items: Sheets, blankets, pillows, towels, dishes, glasses, pots and pans, silverware and cooking utensils.

The Kinnairds also would like to have pictures of the interior of the Carlton for keepsakes. These can be dropped off at The Reporter as well.

Fund Set Up at Bank One

A "Spirit of the Carlton Fund" has been established at Bank One to accept monetary donations for the Tom and Sue Kinnaird family.

Edgerton's Popular Cat Survives Fire

Oliver is alive and getting well.

That is the message that Mildred Harrison, owner of Mildred's Antiques at 20 North Henry Street, has for all those in Edgerton and throughout the state who have been calling to ask if her cat made it through the fire safely.

Oliver, a yellow cat with a white face, chest and paws was well known because he lived in the window of the store, Harrison said.

Oliver was found in the charred remains of the store after 10 a.m. and was rushed by the fire department to a local veterinarian.

"Oliver was in the store through the fire," Harrison said. "He's stung on his paws but he's getting well."

Harrison said she has been asked many questions about her pet who lived in the store.

"I've had people from all over Wisconsin calling me about the fire and about me but the first words out of their mouths were, 'How's Oliver?'"

Harrison said the cat was very well known. On Monday many townspeople asked Harrison about Oliver.

"More people were concerned about my cat than they were about my merchandise," she said.

The concern for Oliver began as soon as the fire started.

The fire started near 3 a.m. At 3:15 Harrison said people were pounding on her door. They said, "Give us the keys and we'll go down and get the cat out," Harrison said.

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From the September 25, 1991, Edgerton Reporter:



The clean-up of The Carlton continued last week. Currently the site is clear and the hole has been filled in. The investigation into the fire continues. The official cause is still undecided. Investigators are awaiting the outcome of lab tests that are being done on the evidence gathered at the scene.

Other newspaper clippings showing the damage and cleanup:



The breakfast sign and the lamppost stand intact in the remains of The Carlton.



Fire investigators gather at the sight of the fire.



The rear of the building which housed Mildred's Antiques was destroyed by the fire.

Investigation Continues For Carlton Fire Cause

The cause of a fire that destroyed The Carlton and damaged three other businesses is still undetermined.

Police Chief Keith Burdick said the investigation continues into the origin of the blaze that swept through the 95-year-old landmark building on Sept. 9, causing an estimated \$350,000 worth of damage.

"The matter is under investigation at this time," Burdick said Monday afternoon.

Investigators from four agencies spent the better part of four days combing through the remains of the three-story brick building located at 14 N. Henry.

Involved in the investigation were Edgerton police, the Wisconsin Department of Justice's Arson Bureau and Division of Criminal Investigation, and the U.S. Treasury Department Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms.

Burdick said the preliminary investigation could be completed within 30 days of the date of the fire.

The state Fire Marshall's office has completed the on-sight portion of its investigation, but agents must still conduct a

number of interviews.

Investigators are also awaiting the results of tests that were conducted on evidence gathered at the fire scene.

Some of the tests are being conducted at the state crime lab, while others are being done at a laboratory in Texas.

"The cause of the fire is officially undetermined at this time," Burdick said.

Seventy-five firefighters from eight departments spent six hours battling the blaze that also damaged Mildred's Antiques, 20 N. Henry; The Edgerton Store, 106 W. Fulton; and The Antique & Art Gallery, 104 W. Fulton.

Edgerton Fire Chief Jim Neal initially said the fire started in the basement of The Carlton. Edgerton firefighters were notified of the blaze about 3 a.m.

Dane County initially received a 911 call at 2:55 a.m. The Rock County Sheriff's Department was contacted and Edgerton police officer Kyle Speth was dispatched to the scene.

Speth detected smoke at the rear of the

building and immediately summoned firefighters.

When firefighters arrived, they initially encountered smoke on all three floors of the historic hotel, but were unable to locate flames at that time.

The fire was eventually found in the basement.

Although firemen were successful in quickly extinguishing that blaze, the fire had apparently spread into the walls and up to the attic area.

Once the fire vented through the roof, the Edgerton firefighters sent out a call for mutual aid.

Those departments which responded to the call included Janesville, Milton, Stoughton, Fort Atkinson, Evansville, Oregon and Cambridge.

The Carlton was built in 1896 for \$25,000 by Madison's Housmann Brewing Co. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in November 1989 and purchased later that same year by Tom and Sue Kinnaird for \$75,000.

The cause of the fire was never determined, although many locals believed it was suspicious.

The owners moved to Tennessee shortly after the fire.

Fire Cause Undetermined

The cause of the Sept. 9 fire that destroyed The Carlton and damaged three other businesses is still a mystery.

Despite a lengthy investigation, authorities know little more today about the origin of the fire than they did two months ago when the blaze swept through the 95-year-old landmark building, causing an estimated \$350,000 worth of damage.

"The official cause of the fire will be listed as undetermined," said Edgerton Police Chief Keith Burdick. "Until new evidence is discovered in the case, that will remain as the final conclusion."

Burdick issued an update on the status of the fire investigation after conferring with Gene Brink of the Wisconsin Department of Criminal Investigation.

"Based upon the totality of evidence discovered through the investigation of the fire, it is inconclusive," Burdick said.

Investigators from four agencies spent four days combing through the remains of the three-story brick building located at 14 N. Henry and owned by Tom and Sue Kinnaird.

Physical evidence gathered at the fire scene was analyzed at the state crime lab and at another laboratory in Texas.

Lengthy interviews were also conducted immediately following the fire that also damaged Mildred's Antiques, 20 N. Henry; The Edgerton Store, 106 W. Fulton and The Antique & Art Gallery, 104 W. Fulton.

Involved in the investigation were Edgerton police, the state Department of Justice's Arson Bureau and Division of Criminal Investigation and the U.S. Treasury Department Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms.

Investigators earlier ruled out electrical as the cause of the fire.

More than 100 firefighters from eight departments spent six hours battling the blaze, which was detected about 3 a.m.

Dane County initially received a 911 call at 2:55 a.m. The Rock County Sheriff's Department was contacted and Edgerton police officer Kyle Speth was dispatched to the scene.

Speth detected smoke in the rear of The Carlton and advised Edgerton firefighters.

Nearly one million gallons of water were used in extinguishing the blaze, which was ultimately discovered in the basement.

When firefighters arrived, they initially encountered smoke on all three floors of the historic hotel, but were unable to locate flames at the time.

Although firemen were successful in quickly extinguishing the blaze once the flames were found, the fire had apparently spread into the walls and up to the attic area.

The Kinnaird family lived on the third floor of The Carlton and escaped without injury.

The official cause of the fire will be listed as undetermined. Until new evidence is discovered in the case, that will remain as the final conclusion.

Police Chief Keith Burdick

Tom Kinnaird told authorities he was awakened about 2:30 and discovered that the air conditioner was not working.

He soon began to smell smoke and investigated. When he opened the fire door leading to the stair case, he discovered the hallway filled with smoke.

The family then fled via the third-floor fire escape.

Because no cause has yet been pinpointed, Burdick said the investigation will continue.

"An investigation always remains open until a determination is made as to the exact cause of the fire," he added. "But sometimes you get to the point where you can't go further."

The Carlton was built in 1896 for \$25,000 by Madison's Hausmann Brewing Co. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in November 1989.

The Kinnairds purchased the building from Joyce Breitenstein in November 1988 for \$75,000 on a five-year land contract.

The Kinnairds paid \$10,000 down with the remaining \$65,000 due at the end of the land contract.

A provision in the contract required the Kinnairds to pay 10 percent interest on the unpaid balance in the form of \$541.67 monthly payments.

The building was insured with Owners Insurance Co. of Ohio for \$400,000. The policy also included \$100,000 for personal property and \$60,000 for loss of business.

The policy was written through Buchholz Insurance Agency of Edgerton.

The Kinnairds have moved to Tennessee.