

THE GREAT FIRE OF 1843.

Sunday, July 2d, 1843, will always be referred to by the inhabitants of this city, as a day on which occurred one of the most memorable events recorded in the history of Fall River. It furnishes a date from which incidents are often reckoned, and "before the fire" and "after the fire" are terms well understood and in common use among the people. The direct influence and effect of that event are seen and felt at the present time. The fire-bell never strikes without awakening a remembrance of the disastrous results which once followed such an alarm; and whether at mid-day or mid-night, the alarm is scarcely sounded before our firemen are at their posts, our steam and hand engines in working order, and our streets filled with anxious and interested "lookers on." All this gives to our citizens a feeling of security which they could not have felt on that Sabbath afternoon when they were called from their places of worship to arrest a great conflagration with a comparatively inefficient fire department.

During a part of the day on which the fire occurred, the mercury stood at 90°. Every thing was dry and parched, after a long drought; the water was shut off from the stream, that labor might be performed in its channel; and a high wind was blowing from the southwest, tending greatly to facilitate the progress of the flames. The alarm of fire was given at about 4 o'clock P. M. The conflagration commenced near the corner of Main and Borden streets, in an open space in the rear of a large three-story warehouse occupied by Abner L. Westgate. This space was covered with shavings, which were kindled from the firing of a small cannon by two boys. The fire almost instantly communicated with the surrounding buildings, and within five minutes the flames were rising apparently fifty feet high. Showers of sparks and cinders, carried by the heavy wind, kindled many buildings before they were reached by the body of the fire.

The buildings on both sides of Main Street were soon burning, and the wind blowing nearly parallel with the street, all hope of controlling the flames and saving the business part of the village, was abandoned. So sudden were the movements of the flames, unexpectedly rising in different localities, that in many cases all efforts to preserve property were ineffectual.

The whole space between Main, Franklin, Rock and Borden streets was one vast sheet of fire, entirely beyond the control of man; and had not the foe proved the ally, the destruction would have continued until nearly the whole village was in ruins. The change in the direction of the wind was all that checked the flames.

Man was powerless, and could only helplessly and with fear view the terrible scene. Awe as well as terror must have influenced the beholders, when to the crackling flames, the crash of falling timber, and the whistling of the wind, were added the lightning's flash and the thunder's deep roar. They looked upon their village in ruins, and felt that it must long bear the marks of this fearful calamity. They could not foresee that so terrible a catastrophe would warm into new life the industrial activities of the place, and that in eleven years Fall River would be numbered among the cities of the Commonwealth. They did not dream that in ten years its population would be increased two-thirds, and its taxable property doubled; and that in twenty years, instead of running but thirty-two thousand spindles in its representative business, almost two hundred thousand would be employed in manufacturing forty-five millions of yards of cloth.

While Dr. Archer's house, on the southeast corner of Main and Franklin streets, was burning, the wind, which had been blowing from the southwest, suddenly changed to the northward, driving back the flames over the burnt district. The house of H. Battelle, Esq., on Purchase street, was the last building burned, and the only one north of Franklin street. It took fire at about ten o'clock P. M. While it was in flames, a vessel arrived at the wharf with an engine company from Bristol. The company immediately proceeded to Purchase street, and by their timely efforts saved the adjoining buildings and prevented the further progress of the flames.

The conflagration had swept over nearly twenty acres of the central part of the village. After immediate danger was passed, the remaining dwellings were thrown open, and shelter and refreshment

furnished to many houseless and exhausted people ; but a great number passed the night in the open air.

Soon after the fire, a committee was appointed, with instructions to obtain a correct list of those who had suffered, and of the amount of property destroyed. From the report published by this committee, it appears that the

“ No. of persons residing within the burnt district at the time of the fire, was.....	1,324
No. of persons in addition, employed or doing business in the burnt district, but living out, about	600
Buildings burned,.....	291
Hotels,.....	2
Churches,.....	3
Cotton Factory,.....	1
Carriage Factories,.....	2
Banks,.....	2
Cabinet Warehouses,.....	3
Marble Factory,.....	1
Tannery,.....	1
Livery Stables,.....	4
Dry Goods Establishments,.....	17
Clothing “.....	11
Grocery and Provision Establishments, including three or four Crockery Stores connected,.....	24
Boot and Shoe Stores,.....	6
Hat and Cap “.....	3
Book and Periodical Stores,.....	3
Hardware,.....	3
Millinery Shops,.....	11
Mantua Makers,.....	5
Apothecaries,.....	6
Jewelers,.....	3
Harness Makers,.....	3
Stove and Tinware,.....	3
Brass Foundries,.....	2
Blacksmith Shops,.....	3
Machine “.....	2
Carpenters’ “.....	8
Reed Makers’ “.....	1

Shoe Makers' Shops,.....	7
Plane Makers' Shop,.....	1
Roll Covers ".....	1
Turners,.....	1
Paint Shops,.....	8
Butchers' Shops,.....	4
Soap Boiler Shop,.....	1
Cigar Factory,.....	1
Restaurateurs,.....	7
Bake Houses,.....	2
School House,.....	1
School Rooms, beside,.....	3
Athenæum,.....	1
Custom House,.....	1
Post Office,.....	1
Auction Room,.....	1
Counting Rooms,.....	7
Dentists' Offices,.....	2
Stage Office,.....	1
Printing Offices,.....	3
Lawyers' ".....	5
Physicians' ".....	5
Barbers' Shops,.....	3
" Whole Amount of Loss on Buildings,.....	\$264,470
" " " Other Property,....	262,015
	\$526,485
Total Loss on both,.....	\$526,485
Total Insurance on Buildings,.....	\$102,955
" " Other Property,.....	74,020
	\$176,975
Whole Amount of Insurance,.....	\$176,975
Excess of Loss over Insurance,.....	\$349,510

The day after the fire, a committee was appointed by the citizens to afford relief to those who had suffered. This committee entered immediately upon their duties, and presented a circular which called forth so much sympathy and was so liberally responded to, that we quote it entire.

NOTE.—All the merchandize shops in the place were destroyed, except some six or eight, (principally groceries) situated in the extreme parts of the village."

C I R C U L A R .

“To their fellow-citizens, near and remote, both in town and country, the undersigned, a Committee in behalf of the people of Fall River, Mass., make this their brief appeal for help, amid the appalling calamity which, under the wise and righteous Providence of God, has overtaken us.

Our population, from 8,000 to 9,000 souls, and chiefly devoted to manufacturing and mechanic pursuits, is in deep distress—a portion of it in pressing want.

At 4 o'clock P. M., last Sabbath, the 2d inst., a fire broke out in a central part of this village, (the wind blowing a gale) which in its ravages was of the most desolating character.

The burnt district comprises some fifteen or twenty acres of the centre of business operations.

Nearly 200 buildings (not including many small ones) are consumed; among which are three newly built houses of public worship, and all our public offices. Our post office and custom house are gone, and we have not a printing office, nor hotel, nor bank building, nor book store, nor market, nor bakery left. Nearly all our grocery and provision stores, including one wholesale establishment, with most of their contents; and all our dry goods, druggist, tailor, milliner, tin ware, and paint shops, with one cotton factory, running 3,000 spindles, are gone.

Nearly 200 families are turned houseless, and many of them penniless into the street.

Besides, this appalling fire raged with such fury, and spread with such velocity, that many of the sufferers gladly escaped with their lives, without a pillow for their heads, or a change of raiment for their backs. The amount of property consumed it is impossible to estimate, even by anything like a probable approximation.

The assessors of the town, in the discharge of their official duties, within the last two months, have rated the property of the place at three and a half millions of dollars—and the heart of the village is in ashes.

We cannot, we need not enlarge.

We tell you in few words the simple, sad story of our calamity; and with the scene of desolation before us, and the cries of distress around us, we ask your aid:—In behalf of our suffering neighbors, and in the name of humanity, and of our Heavenly Father, we ap-

peal to your kindness and your love, and solicit your assistance ; not to repair our losses and rebuild our village, but to relieve our present distress, and enable us to give bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and shelter to the houseless ; until, with due effort on the part of all among us, a merciful and righteous God, who has justly afflicted us, shall command the hum of business, the smile of contentment and the song of joy to return to our now desolate borders. Send us what you can send—food, clothing, money—send it addressed to either of us, and it shall be carefully distributed to the needy.

N. B.—Provisions or other articles by the way of Providence, Rhode Island, may be sent to the care of Capt. Thomas Borden, of the steamboat King Philip, which plies daily between that port and ours.

JERVIS SHOVE,	DAVID ANTHONY,
ORIN FOWLER,	ASA BRONSON,
JOHN EDDY,	RICHARD BORDEN,
JEFFERSON BORDEN,	WILLIAM BROWN,
ENOCH FRENCH,	JOSEPH F. LINDSEY,
	<i>Committee.</i>

Fall River, Mass., July 4th, 1843.

Prompt and generous donations of money, clothing and food were received in quantities sufficient to prevent immediate suffering.

From Boston, were received	\$13,165 00
“ Providence,	1,700 00
“ New Bedford,	1,700 00
“ Cambridge,	1,000 00
“ One church in Charlestown,	650 00
“ Pawtucket and vicinity,	637 00
“ The churches in Newburyport,	600 00
“ David S. Brown & Co., Philadelphia	250 00
“ Bristol,	208 00
“ Dorchester,	106 00
“ Tiffany Ward & Co., Baltimore,	100 00

The whole amount of money received by the committee was \$50.934 00.