

(Wausaukee Centennial Issue 1989)

February 3, 1913 ----

The 12 year-old Wausaukee high school building, the pride of the community, was reduced to a pile of smoldering ashes in the early morning hours of February 3, 1913. The fire alarm was sounded at 4:15 a.m., but it was already too late when the fire crew arrived on the scene. Only an hour later, the brick work and the chimney were all that remained.

The fire, which had apparently been burning for quite some time, was not discovered until the flames broke through the roof. Like a huge torch, the fire illuminated the whole village, according to accounts of the fire found in the Wausaukee Independent. The building, along with all of its furniture and equipment, was a total loss. One of the greatest tragedies was the loss of the library, which boasted over 2,000 volumes. About 1,500 of the books had been donated to the school by Senator H.P. Bird shortly before his death.

Other losses included about \$25 worth of books and personal property belonging to George J. Ritter and personal property of the teachers.

The Wausaukee high school was completed in the spring of 1903 at a cost of \$8,000. Furniture and equipment cost \$2,000. Insurance on the building and contents totaled \$7,500.

The board of education met immediately to make plans for the continuation of classes during the emergency. It was decided that books and other equipment be ordered at once. Meantime, Rev. Fr. Reul of St. Augustine Catholic Church offered the temporary use of the rooms in the parochial school for public school use. The 5th and 6th graders met there, while 7th and 8th graders were quartered in the Knights of Pythias hall, and high school students met in the old Bird & Wells store building.

The board of education called a special meeting a little over a week after the disaster to discuss plans for building a new school. Ninety percent of the electors attending the mass meeting voted in favor of constructing a \$24,000 building to accommodate all departments of the public schools. In a special election, 221 Wausaukee electors voted to bond the town in the sum of \$20,000. Only 25 ballots were cast in opposition to the project.

The new building completed in 1915, proved to be more durable than Wausaukee's first high school. The architects were instructed to incorporate the latest in fireproof design. Today the old brick building is still the heart of Wausaukee high school, even though there have been many additions and changes over the years.