
The Fire.

"Fire! Fire! on the top hall of the new barracks." These were words which, not shouted, but whispered in the ears of the Senior officers on the night of November 29th, set everything astir.

Oh! What a beautiful night it was. Nearly everybody had gone home to enjoy the Thanksgiving vacation, and all around the barracks everything was quiet and still. The surrounding landscape was flooded far and wide by the silvery light of the moon, as through a cloudless sky she calmly soared to her zenith. It was an ideal night for a nice little dance.

"All was quiet and still?"

"No, not quite."

The orchestra was quiet; all were at refreshments. Occasional bursts of merriment, issuing from the mess hall in the old barracks arose above the whispering of the old pines on the campus.

It was in the midst of such merriment that misfortune found the students of the M. A. C. For some time a faithful band of fighters had been working hard and with apparent success, both in fighting the flames and in avoiding the panic which news of the fire might cause among the guests. But now the southwest wind seemed to add new hunger to the flames, and slowly, but surely, they were mounting to the attic. In as quiet a way as possible, the dancers were notified that a blaze had started up in the new barracks, and perhaps it would be better for them to withdraw. Then it was that the true manhood of each M. A. Caesar came to the front. Quietly and orderly all went out, and then each man in his evening clothes turned to the burning building, but all was too late. Already the flames were issuing from the eaves and gable window of the southwestern portion of the building. The attic was full of smoke and too hot to allow anyone to enter. All the streams that could be played upon the fire were turned on and everybody was working hard, but all to no avail.

The halls filled rapidly with smoke, and fanned by a light southwestern breeze, what, but a short time before had been a small blaze, was rapidly assuming threatening proportions. The flames now rose high and started to their work of destruction with a roar. It now became quite clear to all that our own fire-fighting apparatus was totally inadequate to the demands of the case, so all who were not already engaged in removing property from the burning building turned their efforts in that direction. Who can relate even a few of the things he said or tell what he did? Who will ever forget the hurrying to and fro, the bursting of doors, the crashing of trunks, suit cases, etc., on the hard cement walk as they were thrown from the windows?

Some, becoming nervous and excited, threw things indiscriminately; but through it all a remarkable coolness of head was exhibited by the majority of the Cadets. First attention was given to the records and other valuables in the offices on the first floor, a large proportion of their most valuable contents being saved. But there was barely time for this, and little time for anything else. The roof of the doomed building was now all ablaze, and portions of it had fallen in, so that it was dangerous to attempt to save much on the top halls. Later, portions of the walls began to fall so that the building had to be abandoned to its fate. The flames swept through it very rapidly, and in a surprisingly short time it was one blazing furnace.

By this time quite a crowd had gathered from the surrounding towns. Professors and sympathetic friends, together with a fire-fighting brigade from Hyattsville, all set to the task with self-sacrificing ardor. Of course, it was useless to attempt to save anything from the new barracks. Portions of its walls had already fallen and others were in a tottering condition.

Attention was now turned to saving the remaining buildings. The old barracks, although the wind was carrying the heat and flames away from it, was likely to burst into flames at any moment.

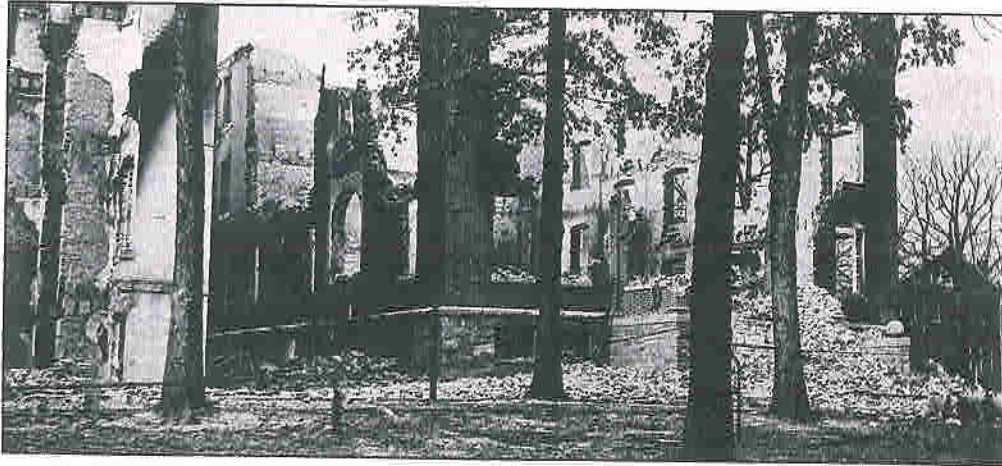
Science Hall also stood in a very threatening and strategic position. If the flames should claim it, who could tell how much more would be lost? The woodwork on the corner next to the Administration Building was so hot that the hand could not be borne upon it. Streams of water were kept playing over the woodwork by a number of men, prominent among them being the janitor, who kept his post despite the intense heat, until the building was out of danger. Our efforts to save the old barracks were fruitless. The door to the attic was battered in, the skylights knocked out or kicked out in order to carry a line of hose on the roof. This was done, but the pressure had now become so low that not enough water could be obtained to be of much value. The fight was continued, however, until an adverse puff of wind filled the building with smoke from the new barracks. The position then became so hazardous that it was necessary to leave. Later the wind blew more strongly from the southwest, and as many of the windows were open much of the smoke disappeared and a chance was given to save more of the students' property. The fire spread rather slowly. It had to work against the wind, and from the top of the building to the bottom, in addition, the construction was entirely different from the other barracks. Though by no means a fireproof building, it having been built in 1856, the brick structure stood the ravages of the flames remarkably well. The top floor fell in first; then the fourth, and so on down, until the whole building presented the spectacle of a huge blazing furnace lighting up the midnight sky



with a million glaring sparks. No more awe-inspiring sight could have been wished by those who are thrilled by roaring, crackling flames and billowing clouds of smoke. It was a scene long to be remembered, and not many Cadets will forget the emotions which filled their hearts as, standing in the fire's red glow, they watched the burning of the "Old Barracks," around which so many pleasant memories clustered.

When the fire broke out a call was sent to Washington for aid, and had the firemen been able to get their engine off the car at College Park, the "Old Barracks" would probably have been saved.

More than one thread of good fortune was woven through the whole unhappy disaster. We shudder to think what might have been the result had it occurred with the barracks full of Cadets at 2 A. M., instead of 10.30 P. M. With a few exceptions, no lives were endangered. One Cadet had retired, and when awakened, had to leave his room by the window; another was cut off from retreat while fighting the fire from the chapel roof, and was obliged to lower himself by looping his fire hose around a ventilator and lowering himself on it; several were overcome by smoke, and one or two had very sore shoulders as a result of breaking open doors.

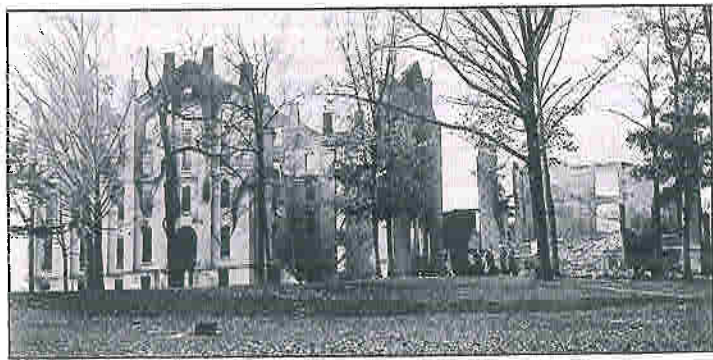


Many instances of personal self-sacrifice and praise-worthy action could doubtless be recounted, but we pass them all by in our enthusiasm occasioned by the noble work and indefatigable efforts of all.

But it would be rude, indeed, to conclude this short description without at least a passing tribute to our fair guests. Never was there a more nery bunch of girls. The cool manner in which they received the intelligence of the fire, the heroic way in which they helped to save our belongings will go down in the history of old M. A. C., and in the memory of us all never to be forgotten. No praise can be too high, no tribute can be too great for them.

It was now necessary to gather the scattered trunks, furniture, clothing, etc., together so that it could be guarded until morning and then stored away until identified by the absent owners, since in all only about 35 or 40 Cadets were present. The rest of the night was spent in this work.

Day dawned, and blackened ruins were all that was left of what had so lately been the scene of merriment and pleasure. The walls of the Administration Building had crumbled and fallen; but those of the old building still pointed skyward, a proud monument of the skill and workmanship of an earlier day. The barracks were gone. That stern reality now forced itself upon us all; but many sweet memories still linger of the happy days spent there.



To the Barracks.

BEFORE.

Believe me, if all those entrancing old scenes,
Which my mind so intensely recalls,
Were to change by tomorrow and fade into dreams,
Like the glories of far distant Halls;
Thou would'st still be adored, as this moment thou art,
Let thy majesty fade as it may,—
Around thy dear ruins each wish of my heart
Would always lovingly stay.

AFTER.

Oh, the heart-rending moments of fear and suspense—
The fire as it raged all around—
The thoughts and excitement of students intense—
Seemed a year to the crowd on the ground.
At last it was over, and thought all in that mart,
As sadly we wandered away,
“And around thy dear ruins, each wish of my heart
Shall always lovingly stay.”

B. A. F.

