

# Heritage Gazette of the Trent Valley

ISSN 1206-4394

The Official Publication of Trent Valley Archives and Trent Valley Ancestral Research  
Fairview Heritage Centre 567 Carnegie Avenue Peterborough ON K9L 1N1

© 2000 - 2001 - 2002 - 2003 Trent Valley Archives  
From Volume 6, number 4

*Peterborough Evening Examiner, 26 January 1918*

*BIG FIRE IN BUSINESS SECTION*

*HALF OF GEORGE ST. BLOCK IS RUINED*

*FIRE DESTROYS HALF A BLOCK IN HEART OF CITY'S BUSINESS SECTION*

Blaze which started in Neill's Shoe Store at 5:30 o'clock This Morning Completely Destroyed That Building and Guttered Top Stories of Dominion Bank and Royal Theatre Buildings — Loss is Conservatively Estimated at \$500,000 — Firemen Make Heroic Fight in Zero Weather Against Worst Fire that Business Section of the City Has Experienced.

ASSISTANCE FROM LINDSAY BRIGADE

Half the block on the east side of George Street, between Charlotte and Simcoe Street, was practically destroyed today by a fire which broke out about 5.30 o'clock this morning, at the rear of the big Robert Neill Shoe Store. Before the blaze was finally gotten under control after a heroic fight in zero weather by the Peterboro firemen assisted by a contingent from the Lindsay Fire Brigade, the Neill store with its huge stock had been completely wiped out, and the fire had spread both north and south, gutting the top floors of the Dominion Bank Building, the Royal Theatre Building and practically ruining the Dominion Bank quarters, and the Matthews-Blackwell Company's retail store, and badly damaging with smoke and water the Union Bank offices. The property owners who suffered the chief loss were: Mr Robert Neil, owner of the building occupied by his shoe business, the Bradburn Estate annex of the Dominion Bank Building, and Mr M. Pappas, to whom the Royal Theatre Building belongs. The tenants affected are the Dominion Bank, the local Masonic Lodges, whose quarters were completely destroyed; Dr Preston, dentist; Mr Harry Rush, whose offices were ruined; Matthews-Blackwell Company and the Union Bank.

The fire was probably the worst that the business section of Peterboro has ever experienced. It is thought to have originated from an explosion in the heating apparatus of the Neill Store and certainly the big start that the conflagration got before the alarm was sent in justifies this theory. Mr George Sturmer, employed at Shortly's Store was the first to see the fire. He was busy clearing the snow off the side walk when his attention was attracted by a crackling noise and looking down the street saw dense clouds of smoke pouring from the Neill Store. He at once sent in the alarm and the brigade responded promptly.

When they arrived the blaze had made rapid headway. The interior of the Neill Store was already a mass of flames and it could be seen at a glance that there was little or no chance of saving the building.

The big store which is the distributing centre for the chain of Neill Stores throughout the province was heavily stocked, the second and third floors being jammed with shoes. The contents burned fiercely and belched out dense clouds of heavy black smoke which hindered the efforts of the fire fighters. Chief Grange soon had all his available hose in action with streams playing on the blaze front and back. Engineer Pammett got the engine working quickly and the difference in the pressure was noticeable.

However, in spite of the utmost efforts of Chief Grange and his men to localize the blaze it was a losing fight. Until 7:30 o'clock it looked as if they might be successful in holding the flames to the Neill Store but then the fire ate its way under the mansard roof of the Dominion Bank and once inside the blaze made terrific headway. In a few minutes the top floor was a furnace and when the flames broke through the roof the situation was very serious. Only a narrow lane separates the Dominion Bank Building and the City Buildings and there was grave danger that the fire would spread in that direction. However, the brigade managed to hold the blaze in the bank building. Meanwhile, however, it had spread southward into the rooms over the Royal Theatre and the fire fighters had a terrible battle on their hands to keep the flames from breaking through into the Victoria Hall Building in which case the whole block would have gone. By 11 o'clock Chief Grange expressed the belief that the blaze was under control, but it required tons of water to hold the fire in the Royal Building and this afternoon the fire fighters were still flooding the blaze.

Edward Parks, an elderly employee of the Royal, who sleeps over the theatre, had a narrow escape from losing his life. He was awakened by the smoke, and escaped in his night clothes, half suffocated.

A telephone message was sent to Lindsay, asking for assistance, and a squad of fire fighters arrived on a special train shortly after 9 o'clock. The visiting firemen did valiant work, and their assistance was of the greatest value.

The power was shut off in the early stage of the fire, and was still off at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, with the result that street cars were out of commission. Many business places were without lights, and the newspaper offices were without power to operate their typesetting machines or presses. This explains the strange appearance of The Examiner to-day.

---