



Photos courtesy of the Douglas County Historical Society
The corner of Broadway and 5th Avenue, as shown in 1985.

Backdrop for many countless memories

Historical Society provides history of Broadway buildings

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Alexandria lost a piece of its historic heart Tuesday, Feb. 25, when a fire broke out on the 500 block of Broadway.

To provide a glimpse into the historical value of the four buildings burned in the tragic fire, the Echo Press turned to the Douglas County Historical Society.

Director Brittany Johnson provided a detailed list of businesses that have occupied those storefronts — some dating back to the early 1800s.

The list is based on information found at the Historical Society. However, Johnson said that anyone who can help provide some fine tuning of the list should call the Historical Society at 320-762-0382, or send an email to histor-ic@dchsmn.org.

In a post on the society's Facebook page, Johnson said, "When something historic is destroyed, the entire community feels its loss, as though a longtime friend or part of the landscape has been suddenly ripped away."

The buildings lost today, her post read, were the backdrop for countless memories for this generation and generations before.

For more than 150 years, the buildings on Broadway housed many different businesses, including drugstores, grocery stores, restaurants, doctors, clothing stores, hairdressers, retail stores and more.

"The 500 block has been a cornerstone of life in Alexandria since the arrival of European settlers. What was lost today has been part of Douglas County's history and always will be a part of Douglas County's history," said Johnson.

"As a Historical Society, the only balm we can offer this pain is the immortality gained through historic

appreciation and preservation. Buildings were lost in the fire today; memories were not. Bricks came tumbling down; history did not."

History of businesses

The following is a list of each building with what year it opened if known. This list is as accurate as the Historical Society can provide. Some locations and addresses have changed or merged over the years.

502 Broadway – RM Tattoo and Body Piercing (2009): Nelson Barber; White Swan Saloon; Morissee, Wegner and Aiton Hardware (1900); Henry Holverson Rexall Drug (1913); Larson and Johnson (1929); Phillips 66 (1929); Dairy Queen (1951); Downtown Floral (1996).

504 Broadway – RM Tattoo and Body Piercing (2009): Vikings Savings and Loan; Bud's Cafe; Tangen, Wegner and White Hardware (1887); Morissee, Wegner and Aiton Hardware (1900); J.A. Carlson Grocery (1900); Cobjornson and Wegner (1914); Lo-Seth Service Station (1929); Montgomery Ward (1951); Glenwear (1955); Edith's Town and Country (1955); Downtown Floral (1996).

504 Broadway (not the main floor): Lundgren Cigar Factory (1900); Hopson Barber Shop (1929); Douglas Hotel (1940); Ernie's Barber Shop (1951); Lois Your Hairdress-

er (1960); Beauty Nook (1974).

506 Broadway – Raapers Eatery and Ale (1996): Christianson Sterett Drug (1800s); Black Front Drug (1800s); LeRoy Hackley City Drug (1800s); Malmquist Saloon (1800s); Baumbach-Morisee Drug (1883); Baumbach-Holverson Drug (1896); Dr. E.A. Hensel (1900); Baumbach-Holverson (1908); John A. Carlson Grocery (1911); Charles Culross Restaurant (1913); Fitzgerald Drug (1935); Holverson Drug (1938); Kalpin's City Grocery (1939); Rosvold Drug (1940); Dahlquist Electric (1951); Baumbach Drug (1953); Sears Roebuck (1965); Williams Drug (1976); Kalpin's Boots and Saddles; R V Graphics (1996).

506 Broadway (not the main floor): Dr. C. A. Lester; Dr. Haskel (1911); Park Region Echo (1913); Dr. Kierland (1938); Dr. Stubig (1938); Dr. Reinhardt (1959); Dr. Kuhlman (1959).

508 Broadway – Charlie's Bazaar (1999): Pots and Plants; Our Place; Christ Oppel Shoes (1869); Oppel Shoes, new building (1884); Rosvold Drug (1940); Olson Shoes (1964); Walt's Shoe Repair (1964); Marquee Too (1975); Special Memories (1996).

510 Broadway – Little Darlings Children's Boutique (2015): Decorating Kitchens; Wilson's New Bakery; Hollobaugh Hardware (1867); Cowing Robards Hardware (1872); Cowing Robards Hardware, new building (1880).



The 500 block of Broadway, as shown in 1999.

FIRE

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The State Fire Marshal is the one who will make the determinations, said Karrow.

Mutual aid needed

Within a short period of time that morning, Karrow knew the Alexandria Fire Department would need assistance and more resources. Through mutual aid agreements and lists of resources of area fire departments, Karrow called in five other departments — Carlos, Osakis, Forada, Garfield and Long Prairie.

For Douglas County, Alexandria Fire Department is the only department with an aerial (ladder) truck. Long Prairie was called due to that department having an aerial truck, he said.

More than 100 firefighters battled the blaze for nearly 12 hours on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Broadway. And there were Alexandria police officers and city workers, Douglas County Sheriff's deputy and posse members, and numerous first responders and medical personnel on scene, as well.

No injuries were reported.

However, while fighting the blaze, Alexandria's ladder truck lost all controls from inside the bucket. Karrow said control was gained through an override on the truck itself. When that happened, he immediately called the mechanics. They were on scene within no time and got the bucket controls up and running again.

"We didn't miss a beat," said Karrow. "We just had to use plan B, the override controls."

Although it was hard for him to explain, Karrow said it was amazing to watch everyone come together.

"There was such a connection with all the departments," he said. "There were good conversations. It was these guys doing this while those guys were doing that. It was a team effort and just unexplainable to watch."

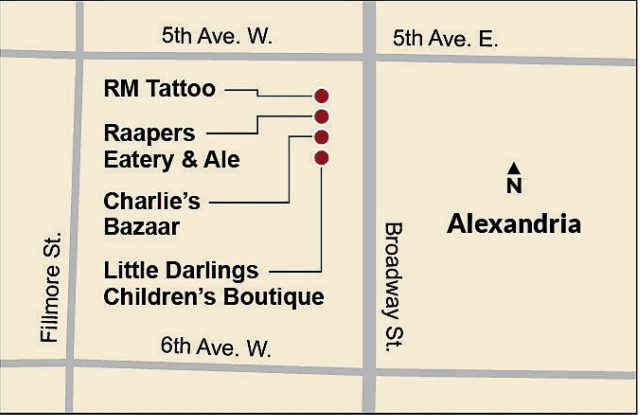
Help was bountiful

The impact of the devastating tragedy was widespread, although the aftermath is yet to be exactly known. The news of the fire flew through media outlets and social media and the community was there to help.

Roers Family Bakery, Traveler's Inn and Common Ground were supplying firefighters with food and beverages early in the day, and others joined the effort, including Garden Bar, Qdoba Mexican Grill, Domino's Pizza and others.

Emergency personnel were not the only ones being taken care of.

The apartment buildings above the burning businesses had been evacuated, displacing residents who lived there. They were



Forum Design Center

taken to the Alexandria Fire Station where the Red Cross and several volunteers assisted them.

Although the city of Alexandria is grateful for the community support for the displaced residents and the business owners, at this time their immediate needs are being met, according to Sara Stadtherr, the city's communications coordinator.

Many individuals have asked what they can do to help the displaced residents but at the moment there is no system set up to collect items, Stadtherr said. The Red Cross, however, is accepting cash donations.

The aftermath

More than 32 hours after the fire broke out, a three-block portion of Broadway (Highway 29) was reopened to traffic in both directions.

However, motorists traveling southbound will encounter lane closures from Fourth Avenue to Sixth Avenue, as cleanup from the fire continues, according to the Minnesota Department of Transportation. Delays and congestion are expected, MnDOT added.

"The city of Alexandria is still reeling in the aftermath of the fire," Stadtherr said Wednesday. "Crews have maintained an overnight watch on the scene and assessment is being done now concerning all public safety elements."

While the structures are being examined, the city asks the public to use only the sidewalks that are open and stay clear from the area unless visiting a business in the vicinity.

The west parking lot between Fillmore and Broadway is also open from Cowing Robards and to the north.

Backhoes were used to demolish parts of buildings that were too fire damaged to save and to keep the fire from spreading to other businesses. Materials from the burned buildings are being hauled to the Douglas County Demolition and Landfill near Carlos. Once they are cleared to be disposed of, the materials will be transferred to a lined landfill.

Legislators

give thanks

On Wednesday, Sen. Torrey Westrom, R-Elbow Lake, commented that news of the fire spread throughout the Capitol and was on the minds of many.

"Thanks to the tireless efforts of our firefighters

and first responders, no one was injured, and we're all so thankful for that," Westrom said in a statement.

"A big thanks also to all the people, organizations, churches and others that have stepped up to help out a friend or neighbor! No doubt the fire has caused a great loss for the small businesses, tenants, and so many in the city. It has impacted personal lives, families, and employment. In the spirit of selflessness, the community has once again rallied together, providing support for the firefighters, displaced citizens, and others affected. I'm proud to represent part of a city that has such resolve and kindness in the face of a disaster like this.

Please continue to keep everyone affected in your thoughts and prayers that their needs will be met in the days ahead!"

Rep. Mary Franson, R-Alexandria, released the following statement regarding the fire:

"I thank God that there were no injuries, but as a community we are devastated by the loss of these businesses, these homes, and these pieces of our history," said Franson. "I want to thank our first responders and the many volunteer firefighters that have been fighting this fire all day. They are truly heroes. Our community is strong, and we will come together to help those who have been impacted."

State Sen. Bill Ingebriksen, R-Alexandria, also issued a statement:

"Today, the community of Alexandria experienced a devastating fire that has resulted in the loss of businesses, homes, and parts of our city's cherished history," he said. "While we mourn these losses, I thank god knowing that nobody was killed in this tragedy. I want to extend a thank you to the first responders for their quick and tireless work and will keep them in my thoughts as they continue to bring the fire under control."

Ingebriksen added, "This is a difficult time for everyone in Alexandria but more so for families and businesses impacted by this fire. I want to thank everyone in the community for already rallying around these folks, and offering their support. While we grieve for this loss, it is without a doubt that Alexandria will rise above this."

The Echo Press will have updates on its website, echopress.com, and in next week's papers.

STORIES

From Page A1

Woodard said he lost "thousands" of dollars worth of belongings, including a coin collection and a collection of concert shirts from all the concerts he'd been to, like Alice Cooper, Judas Priest and The Eagles.

"Now all I have left is memories," he said.

Narrow rescue

One of their neighbors, Carlos Lopez, who lived above Raaper's in No. 4 for three years, described a harrowing escape from the fire.

A light sleeper, he awoke to the sound of someone running in the hallway and smelled something burning. He woke up his girlfriend and they threw on some clothes.

By the time he tried to open the front door of his apartment, the doorknob was already hot. He opened it anyway but couldn't see a path out of the building.

"It was hot going to the left, hot going to the right," he said. "The smoke was very dark."

Back in their apartment, they opened a window for fresh air

and saw flashlights shining outside in the dark.

"We yelled for help," he said, but it seemed that whoever held the flashlights was having trouble locating their voices. Lopez and his girlfriend then grabbed their cellphones and turned on the flashlight function, guiding rescuers to their window. Firefighters ran a ladder to their window and the pair were able to climb down the ladder unassisted.

"We lost everything," he said. "Just what we have on, that's it."

“

My friends all came running to help. We're a tight community. They were all hugging on me."

TAMI JOHNSON

Not so fast

Johnson, the other person who was awake when the fire started, had put her McDonald's uniform on and was ready to go to work when she noticed haze in her apartment and her 9-month-old cat, Cargo, acting a little goofy.

It was about 4:45 a.m., she said.

She thought maybe an outlet by the bed was smoking. When she realized it was much more serious, she ran next door and said, "I pounded and pounded" until her neighbor groggily came to the door.

"Then I went to the others, above Little Darlings," she said, but nobody answered there.

Johnson went back to her apartment to grab Cargo, then struggled to see in the dark, smoky stairwell (there were 24 steps, she said), as she went to open the door for firefighters.

They were already there by the time she got downstairs. She told them what she knew about who lived upstairs and then stayed outside, as the firefighters didn't want her going back to her apartment.

A firefighter loaned her his phone so she could call McDonald's to tell them what had happened.

"My friends all came running to help," she said. "We're a tight community. They were all hugging on me."

Johnson couldn't recall a smoke alarm going off, which she thought was odd, since her



Karen Tolkinen / Echo Press

Tami Johnson weeps while telling her son, Caleb Oberg, about the early-morning fire that destroyed her apartment in downtown Alexandria on Tuesday, Feb. 25.

smoke alarm was so touchy that even a burned piece of toast would set it off.

There were no reported injuries, and the Red Cross was providing temporary lodging for those who lost their homes as well as blankets and toiletries, said Cyrese Kragenbringer, region-

al duty officer for the disaster response organization.

Several displaced residents said they didn't know where they were going to live long term. One voiced a desire for a shower. But then, he remembered, he had no clean clothes to change into.