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THE TALLAHASSEE FIRE OF 1843

[An account of this conflagration, which destroyed the greater part of the town as first built, appeared in the Quarterly in the issue for July, 1924. These additional documents and notes are taken from contemporaneous issues of the *Floridian* and the *Sentinel*, Tallahassee newspapers.]

An Address to the People of the United States of America.

It has pleased an inscrutable Providence to afflict, by an awful calamity, the inhabitants of a city on the frontier of the Union. At five o'clock in the afternoon of the 25th of May, 1843, the city of Tallahassee numbered, with a population not exceeding two thousand souls, eighty-nine stores and houses, the theatre of activity mercantile and manufacturing industry. In three hours of a devastating fire which no exertion could stay not a solitary store, shop or theatre of business remained. A property in buildings which many estimate at not much less than half a million had fallen a prey to the flames and with it goods, furniture and movable effects of a value of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars more.

The extent of this overwhelming calamity may be measured by the fact that from the ports of Tallahassee at the mouth of the River St. Marks, there has been exported in the current year, or collected for exportation, chiefly on account of the Merchants and Traders of Tallahassee, 32,000 bales of cotton, the only staple export of the Territory of Florida, a quantity worth, in ordinary years, \$1,200,000, and at its present reduced price, a moiety of that sum.

In return for this exportation, a full equivalent has hitherto been imported comprehending not merely nor chiefly the comforts nor luxuries but the necessities of life, its staple commodity having, until lately, employed

the productive industry of the country, to the exclusion of every other pursuit. The Merchants and Agents of a commerce that has exceeded two and a half millions in a year, are, by a sudden blow, deprived of their stores, warehouses, and their stock of goods; the artizans of their shops, and of their very tools of trade. And, of the property so lost, less than twenty thousand dollars is covered by insurance.

Having just escaped from the ravages of an Indian war, they had begun to cherish the hope of returning prosperity, though struggling with embarrassments of currency and commerce. It is at such a period, and under such circumstances, that they are reluctantly induced to look beyond the limits of their own Territory for consolation and aid. The far greater part of those who have most heavily suffered by the late destructive fire will seek through a different channel to repair their heavy loss. That portion of its victims to whom relief may come need that it should be promptly administered.

F. EPPES, Mayor of Tallahassee.

Committees appointed by Mayor Eppes

on Losses	on Relief
D. P. Hogue	Gen. C. F. Mercer
J. W. Argyle	L. A. Thompson
Thomas Baltzell	W. H. Brockenbrough
M. Starr	T. H. Hagner
H. Bond	H. L. Rutgers
J. Kirksey	T. Brown
W. W. Waddell	G. W. Call
J. B. Bull	John Parkhill
R. A. Shine	Jas. B. Gamble
L. W. Levinus	Jas. E. Broome

Editorial, *The Florida Sentinel* (June 6, 1843).

As gold is tested by the fire, so are the moral qualities of man tried by adversity. . . .

There is none of that stagnation, idle stupor, hopeless despair, or brooding, listless melancholy which might be expected after the overwhelming blow which has fallen upon our previously embarrassed community. All our Merchants, with the remnants of their stock in trade, have taken temporary stands and are busy again. . . .

. . . . One might indeed be facetious over the ruins of our office and the expedients to which we have been compelled to resort to compass the poor object of issuing even a half sheet. The sheet was issued from the south basement room of the Capitol. A plasterer's horse serves to support a case, out of which we are extemporaneously composing the present article, since we have neither pen, ink nor paper. A few broken grave-stones serve to support our battered and squabbled forms-in one corner of the room lies a promiscuous heap of pi, type metal and sand, while scattered about the floor are cases, sticks, furniture, chases. . . .

* * *

AN ORDINANCE.

Whereas, the owners of lots situate within the district which has been recently burnt commencing at Augustine st., on the east side of the Capitol-square and extending north to McCarty street, commonly known as the two hundred foot street, including the blocks on the east side of Monroe street and the blocks between Monroe and Adams streets from the Capitol-square to McCarty street have petitioned the Intendant and Council for the passage of an ordinance prohibiting the erection of any other than fire proof buildings on that part of the town

Be it ordained That it shall be unlawful for any person to build any house situate within said burnt district which shall be composed of

wood That all houses shall have the walls of brick, stone and the roof of slate, tyle, zinc. . . .

That until such fire proof houses can be built, the merchants who are burned out are authorised to put up temporary buildings on the public open squares of the city and the two hundred foot street.

F. EPPES, Intendant. JAMES BARRY, Clerk.

June 5, 1843.

* * *

A very laborious investigation has been had in regard to the origin of the late destructive fire in Tallahassee. From an unhappy misunderstanding which had existed between the owners of the property, and the occupant of the Washington Hall Buildings, where the fire originated, the latter became subject to the suspicion of having intentionally fired them, or caused them to be fired, in the spirit of vindictive revenge. He, together with a white person employed in the house as cook, were arrested. After examining a great number of witnesses the Court came to the unanimous conclusion, that although it appeared highly probable that the fire was the work of an incendiary, yet there was no evidence indicating the individual who had been guilty of this enormous offence.

* * *

Our merchants have generally accepted the tender of the City Council of public squares and are fast establishing themselves in shanties near their old stamping-ground. We doubt if any could have endured a long series of buffetings of fortune with braver hearts than they. First there were heavy losses in the decline of Cotton; then still greater in bad debts and the explosion of credit; and finally to cap the climax a sweeping conflagration.