

(copied from The Meridian Sunday Star — Sunday, November 2, 1913)

METHODIST CHURCH DESTROYED BY FIRE

One of the most spectacular fires ever visiting this city occurred shortly after 1 o'clock Sunday morning, originating in the First Methodist Church on the corner of eighth Street and Twenty-third Avenue, and for a time endangering the wholesale house of Threefoot Brothers & Co., the Heiss Building and adjacent property. The flames were under control at 1:35. The fire is believed to have been of incendiary origin.

The church building was completely gutted and was a mass of flames when discovered. The loss is estimated at about \$25,000 with an estimated insurance of about \$10,000. The flames spread rapidly and the building was practically destroyed within five minutes after the fire was discovered.

Restaurant keepers across the street from the church said that they had noticed no fire in the building at 1 o'clock, one man standing on the sidewalk with every opportunity to discover a conflagration. Other pedestrians passing the building about 1 A. M. also declared that they saw no sign of fire.

Flames Spread Rapidly

The fire was discovered about 1 o'clock and an alarm turned in. When first discovered, the whole church building was on fire and burned rapidly, the old timbers burning like oil.

The spectacular part of the conflagration was the burning of the immense steeple. The flames crept gradually up this place, eating up the timbers until the whole fell with a crash into twenty-second avenue, one or two persons barely escaping with their lives.

E. C. Walk Injured

E. C. Walk, who was assisting the firemen in handling a line of hose, was struck by a piece of flying timber when the steeple fell, barely escaping the falling ruins. Walk's left arm was injured, but the injury is not believed to be serious.

Firemen Endangered

A general alarm was turned in and every department in the city scampered to the scene. Line after line of hose was rushed to the scene and the firemen working in close to the building were kept constantly on the move by falling bricks and pieces of timber. The cupola on which the steeple rested gave way shortly after the steeple fell, the mass of bricks narrowly missing three firemen who scampered away just in time.

Fine Work Done

Every available piece of equipment was rushed into service, and the fire within twenty-five minutes after the arrival of the department was under control and the danger of other buildings catching had been eliminated. Thousands of dollars worth of property were endangered especially the large wholesale house of Threefoot Brothers and Co. on the side and rear of the church. The top of the Threefoot building caught once, but Chief Powell ran up a line of hose to the top of the building and quickly extinguished the flames.

Flying Sparks

Sparks from the conflagration flew in every direction and added to the danger. Two frame houses across the street from the church were quickly ignited and started into a brisk blaze. They were quickly extinguished before any damage was done.

City in Darkness

The falling steeple of the church fell directly across the trolley and electric wires, which fell into the street with flames of fire. For a time there was considerable danger of electrocution, but all lights were put out and the city was in total darkness in the fire district for several hours.

Dwelling Houses Catch

The home of Louis Meyer, Twenty-fourth Avenue and Seventh Street, caught from flying sparks. A fireman put this blaze out with chemicals.

Church Building Old

The church was one of the landmarks of the city. It was built 28 years ago when W. C. Black was pastor. Rev. Black is still a resident of the city.

Discovery of Fire

The fire in the church was first discovered and reported by a Negro blackman who went to Woodruff's Drug Store and the alarm was turned in from there. Prof. Rudolph Lundberg said that he was sitting in his office in the Suttle Building about 1 o'clock and saw the lights brighten up. Going to his window, directly across from the church, he saw that the church was on fire and endeavored to get in a telephone alarm. He states that he was unable to raise central.

Siamese Connection

For the first time Chief Powell put his Siamese connection into operation Sunday morning. Three connections of hose were run into one, giving the stream the force of three connecting lines. Eight men tried to hold the stream, and it threw them around like babies. The force of the stream swept everything in its path and reached the highest part of the church building.

A Lurid Scene

The flames furnished a beautiful though awful sight to witness, the flames bursting with fury from windows, from roof, from belfry, and from the tall steeple which threatened to fall at any moment. It was the burning steeple that held the gaze of the hundred of onlookers who came to the scene from all directions.

Planes Reach Steeple

As the flames worked their way up this old steeple, inch by inch, lap by lap, each lap kissing the other as it followed in the wake, the crowd began to scatter. They were afraid of the steeple falling and they of course knew not which way its fall might be. After the roof fell in, several portions of the steeple gave a quick lurch and fell in a southwesterly direction.

The Steeple Falls

There was little of it when the fall came, nothing, in fact, but the frame, and that but little more than embers. It was, even at that, a spectacular sight, one that will long linger in the memory of those who witnessed it.

Good work by Firemen

The firemen worked like heroes, never, apparently, paying attention to their personal safety. By strenuous efforts the fire was confined to the church, adjoining buildings being saved with but slight damage. Strange to say, in defiance of the intense heat produced by the flames that appeared to

spring from all directions from the interior of the church building, window glass in adjacent buildings on either side of the street remained whole, or, at least, escaped with but few cracks.

Origin a Mystery

The origin of the fire is a mystery. In so far as could be learned, the only fire about the building Saturday night was a small fire in a stove, provided for choir practice which was held in the lower floor of the burned edifice. This, a church member who was seen by a Star reporter, thought could not have been the starting place of the flames. When the alarm was turned in shortly after 1 o'clock, flames were leaping from the windows on the 8th Street side of the building and within a very few minutes ,the fierce shaft of flames was seen bursting from the loft on the east side adjacent to the rear of the Threefoot building.

Heard Loud Explosion

A gentleman who had gone to his home, not far from the church, at a late hour, about 1 o'clock Sunday morning, told a Star reporter that he had just seated himself in his room before a fire, to read a few minutes before retiring. Hardly had he seated himself, he told the reporter, when he heard a loud explosion. Curiosity prompted him to look out the window, thought the noise more than likely to have been produced by a bursting automobile tire. To his intense surprise, the gentleman saw a lurid light and he at once put on his coat and hat to go to the scene, which appeared, as it was, close by.

By the time this gentleman reached the scene of the conflagration, the entire building was a blaze of fire with fierce, shooting, building-eating flames. It was this gentleman's opinion that the fire might have been caused by an explosion, but of what nature he could not even surmise.

Heard No Explosion

On the other hand, the Greeks who operate a restaurant opposite the church on 8th street, stoutly declare that they heard no explosion or unusual noise before they saw the flames leaping from the windows. This information casts considerable doubt upon the explosion theory advanced by the gentleman quoted above.

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Notes of the Fire

Grouped around the several corners, good vantage ground for the spectators, were hundreds of people, all eager, wide-eyed, and more or less appalled by the sight. Someone yelled: "Look out! She's falling!" and within half a minute the places where these groups stood was as empty, except for the firemen and fire apparatus, as would have been the case had there been no fire.

One young lady, evidently interested in Sunday School work, stood in the doorway of one of the buildings opposite the church, tears streaming down her eyes. "Oh, what will we do for our Sunday School today? It's too bad, too bad." she was heard to say, whereupon, another lady, standing near, soothingly replied, "Never mind, dear. Don't you know that we are taught to believe that the Lord will provide.' He will find us a place somewhere."

The progress of the flames up the old steeple was a weird sight. After the flames had reached the belfry, sheets would reach upward, die out or recede, make another start, again fall back, and once more dart, more viciously than ever, upward. This time the apparent desire of the flames was satisfied. A shingle, already hot from the reflection below, was caught and in an instant another and then another until there was a sheet of flame encircling the old sharp-pointed steeple. And thereafter the flames steadily rose like an orderly crowd. When told to encircle to a higher one, until the entire steeple from base to top was one burning, sweeping mass of fiery flames. It was a weird sight, a fascinating sight, one long to be remembered.

No fire was ever handled better than that of early Sunday morning. There was grave danger of the flames less the adjacent buildings filled with merchandise of all kinds should catch. Had the flames succeeded in getting a foothold on any of the adjoining buildings, there is little doubt but that the entire block would have been in ruins ere daylight came Sunday morning. The firemen, from Chief Powell down to the lowest man in the service, deserve the highest praise for their work in handling the situation.

It was almost as astonishing how quickly the crowd of several hundred people so quickly gathered as was the rapid headway the flames made after discovery. People came from all directions and in quite all costumes imaginable. It was a curious though supremely orderly crowd. When told to get back, they moved as though by intuition out of the danger zone to places of more safety.

Telephone, telegraph, trolley, and electric light wires running along 8th Street and Twenty-third Avenue were put out of commission early in the struggle, the leased wire of The Star running into the editorial rooms being among the first to "go out." Word was quickly transmitted to the power-house to cut off the current. This action was well timed and possibly saved accidents for the crowd, at times, disposed to close in around the corners, and it would have been nothing surprising if some unfortunate became tangled with a live wire.

The Star office was in total darkness for more than an hour, power and lights being out of commission. Candles were found, mostly in pieces, and stuck about tables, embedded in their own grease, gave light to the reporters who were preparing copy against the time when power to operate the machines should again be turned on.

(copied from The Meridian Star - Monday, November 3. 1913)

RUINS OF CHURCH OBJECT OF INTEREST; OFFICERS TO MEET

The ruins of the Central Methodist Church, which was destroyed by fire early Sunday morning, was the center of attraction Sunday, and many people during the day visited the scene of the fire.

Part of the steeple of the church is still standing and is a menace to human life. Several portions of the wall are just hanging to the top of the ruined structure by a thread, and it would take a very slight jar to send them crashing to the pavement. The rear walls of the building are in the same condition. The sidewalk around the church is roped off.

The city forces were employed Monday in cleaning up the rubbish on the sidewalk, while the telephone and electric light linemen were replacing the wires broken by the falling steeple.

Church Officials Meet

Dr. J. B. Jones, pastor of the church, has called a meeting of all officials of the Central Methodist Church at his home, 1302 Twenty-third Avenue, at 7:30 Monday night. At this meeting the situation will be discussed and the officials determine what can be done temporarily for the holding of services and carrying forward church business. All church officers are requested to be present.

Origin a Mystery

The origin of the fire is a complete mystery. Two or three theories have been advanced, but none seem to exactly fit the case. Some hold the belief that the fire originated from a stove in the lower floor of the church which is known to have contained a fire Saturday night during choir practice. On the other hand, it is pointed out that the lower floor is the least damaged of the whole building, and that the main fire was in the top of the building when discovered and burned so rapidly that the efforts of the firemen were of little use.

Others express the opinion that the fire originated from an explosion. This theory is based in the rapid consumption of the building, it apparently catching on fire in every part at one time. Another fact that adds to this theory is that the tin shingles with which the church was covered were scattered all over the street and must have been forced off by an explosion and thrown in every direction.

One gentleman who passed the church just before the alarm was turned in said that he had seen no fire in the building when he passed and that he distinctly heard an explosion and the rattling of glass. The exact origin of the fire may never be known.

Church Had Insurance

The church building was insured for \$10,000 and the pipe organ for \$1,000. The organ is a complete loss, as is the building. The flames gutted the woodwork, and the walls are in such dangerous condition that they will have to be torn down.

Threefoot Building

The Threefoot Building on the south side of the church caught fire on the roof, causing an estimated damage of \$400 or \$500. A line of hose on top of this structure is all that prevented its destruction.

Fire Shutters Unclosed

The fire shutters on the rear of the Threefoot Building were not closed, and a line of hose was also placed there to prevent the flames reaching across to the building. The heat was so intense that one of the shutters caught fire but was quickly extinguished. The Threefoot Building was not damaged in this vicinity.

Building Burned Fast

The rapidity with which the building was consumed has been a cause of much comment. Three or four men passed the building near 1 o' clock while restaurant keepers directly across the street from the church did not see any fire until the whole building was a mass of flames. Within twenty minutes after the alarm was turned in, the building was a complete loss and the fire under control,

Residences Endangered

Four or five frame dwelling houses caught fire from sparks which flew in a southwesterly direction. Those who occupied the houses, however, were out with buckets and lawn hose and prevented any damage.

Pigeons Burned

The steeple of the church was literally alive with pigeons and sparrows. A few of the birds were seen flying around during the fire, but it is supposed that most of them burned to death.

(Copied from The Meridian Star — Thursday, November 6, 1913)

CENTRAL METHODIST CHURCH IS SEEKING TEMPORARY QUARTERS

A meeting of officers of the Central Methodist Church which was destroyed by fire early Sunday morning was held at the home of Rev. J. R. Jones Monday night, and a committee, Rev. J. R. Jones, J. A. Gully, and D. G. Brown, were appointed to secure a temporary place of worship.

Several offers of temporary quarters have been made the congregation, but as yet no selection has been made. A majority of the officers, it is understood, are disposed to accept the offer of the city hall auditorium, Make repairs, and use it until permanent arrangements can be made. The committee will reach a decision and report at a later meeting.

The congregation has for some time had under consideration the building of a new church, and the building committee will immediately begin preparations to carry out the plans.

The loss to the church will be heavy, the building only being insured for \$10,000 with an additional \$1,000 on the pipe organ. This amount will not by half cover the loss, although the sale of the lot where the building stood will add considerably to a fund for the erection of a new edifice.