

## Great Fire Of 1902 Gave Houlton Heaviest Loss In Its History

### 75 Dwellings, 20 Business Blocks, Three Churches Burned; Loss \$500,000

A fateful date that will always be remembered as long as the Town of Houlton exists, is that of Saturday, May 17, 1902, the day when the most disastrous fire in all the history of Aroostook County dealt the shire town a blow that cost it over half a million dollars in damage.

It has always since been known as "The Great Fire" and well it earned that name. Between the hours of noon one day and the dawn of the next 75 dwellings, three churches and nearly a score of business blocks lay in smoking ruins. More than 80 families found themselves without a home for shelter that night.

#### FROM FOGG BLOCK

There was no warning that the visp of smoke that was seen to curl upward from the rear of the Almon H. Fogg Company block shortly after noon would swell to the size of a devastating conflagration.

It was ironic, too, that this frame building that had, on three occasions around the early eighties, been saved from destruction by re only by heroic efforts, was this time itself the source of the blaze and a complete loss. Company officials added up their damage to the tune of \$36,000, the largest single loss of the day.

It is evident today that, out of this catastrophe there arose a greater and more beautiful town. At such an admission would have been small solace indeed for the destitute families and the ruined merchants. The number of citizens who remember that event and the circumstances that followed it, are growing fewer as the years pass. But history will never be able to dim the story itself nor the courageous and heroic rebirth that followed it.

#### STRONG WIND HASTENS SPREAD

An abnormally high wind was a mischievous circumstance that

early the feverish moving of their furniture and household goods to places of safety. Many were too late and some also had their work in vain, as the onrushing path of fire swept over the doomed area.

The force of the wind and its freakish uncertainty brought about an amazing occurrence almost at the very start of the fire. The first dwelling to burn was one situated on Spring street at least three-quarters of a mile from the Fogg Block. Walter Yetton had no inkling of his danger until his roof burst into flames, having been ignited by large sparks that had been carried over the intervening distance and dropped on the house. The building and its contents burned flat without a drop of water being applied to it.

#### SWEPT EVERYTHING IN PATH

As the path of the flames worked their way up Main street, they swept everything in their path, including the Kennedy block, the Dewey Hotel, Daniel Sheehan's harness shop, the hand laundry of Wong Sing, H. F. Collin's Marble Works, Martin Lawlis' Livery Stable and outbuildings, and Will Foss' stable, all on the south side of the street.

On the north side of Main street

to the ground as well as was Johnson's own home on Military street just a short way east of the intersection of Kelleran.

In its skipping and unpredictable course, the fire jumped across High street, after it had had its own way on Heywood street. It then proceeded to wipe out many structures at the northern end of that thoroughfare, near Military street. Providentially and also unexplainably, Ricker Classical Institute's buildings were undamaged, the fire having practically circled the grounds occupied by the school.

#### CONTINUED THROUGH NIGHT

The ordeal of the fire fighters as well as the scores of volunteers who fought with them continued on through the night as they were obliged to move hither and yon stamping out incipient fires that were springing up spasmodically all over the burned area.

mination to rebuild an even better town, soon became evident. Lumber companies advertised their wares, even to the extent of announcing a new yard that would soon be ready. A furniture store reported it had ordered a new stock of furniture by wire.

The Almon H. Fogg Company promptly found new quarters, set up business and, a few days later, were displaying in their windows the plans for the new building they proposed to erect on their burned over site. Theirs was the first to go up, a brick structure three stories in height, in which the store is still operating today.

A Bangor architect, with unusual enterprise, opened an office here to make his services readily available. The townspeople arose gallantly to the task of rebuilding new homes and caring for those who had been completely ruined with such success that the Aroostook

present Monument Park. The McIntire family rebuilt their burned home. The Free Baptist Church was restored on the same site and the Unitarian Church was rebuilt across the street on the site it occupies today. The Cary Library was added to the quadrangle in 1904.

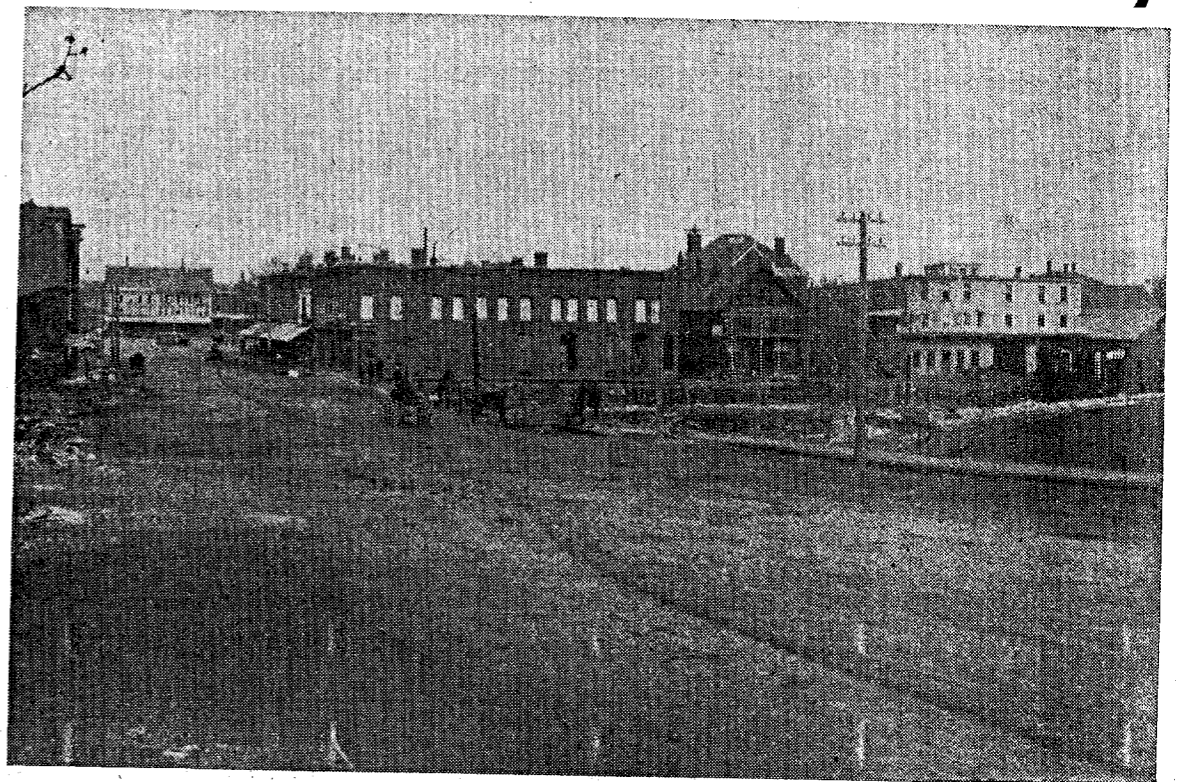
#### SCENES OF INDUSTRY

All of the burned over areas soon became the scene of industry as the sounds of hammer and saw were heard almost around the clock as the building of newer and finer homes went feverishly on. It was providential that there were plenty of warm days to give extra

time to the builders.

In the business section, too, great things were happening as new buildings arose from the ashes of the old. The Town got firm and passed an ordinance requiring that structures in that section must be of brick. And thus did Main street get its new look.

Such disasters as this one probably come at least once in the history of most communities. And each victim, as Houlton did, seems able to rebound with vigor and greater usefulness, although perhaps not all are able to do it as promptly or as well as this town did 55 years ago.



These two pictures present as near to a "before" and "after" description of the Houlton Fire of 1902 as it is possible to show. View at the left was taken at the very start of the flames as the first clouds of heavy smoke were billowing upward from the rear of the Almon H. Fogg Company store at the corner of Main and Water streets. View at the right is from the opposite direction and shows the ruins of the Fogg block and adjoining buildings after the fire had run its course.

### Here Is How It Looked On The Sunday Morning After



## HIGH WIND HASTENS SPREAD

An abnormally high wind was the mischievous circumstance that caused such a swift spread of the blaze that the entire area of Main street between Mechanic street and the residence of J. K. Plummer to the east was in flames before the fire department could get their hose laid to the scene. Given a calm day or even a few minutes of subsiding wind at the right moment, and the fire might well have been contained in a narrow space or even have been stopped before it had gained headway at all.

But this just wasn't Houlton's day.

With the high wind still in command, the fire jumped across Main street, raced through the structures on the south side and then moved rapidly eastward toward what is now Monument Park.

Another wing of flame started to move southward and engulf the buildings on Court street as Capt. Samuel C. Webber and his gallant fire fighters put up a valiant battle to prevent the spread in this direction.

## A MIRACULOUS STOP

In the face of the continuing high wind and with the added handicap of insufficient water pressure, the firemen were still able to save the Exchange Hotel and its livery stable. This miraculous stop undoubtedly saved the county buildings and countless thousands of dollars of property damage which might have been added to the total loss. Saved, too, by this heroic struggle, was the building that housed both the Aroostook Pioneer, and the Aroostook Times on Court street, enabling us to have today a realistic and complete story of the whole sad affair.

A call for help issued by Capt. Webber met with a prompt response. Woodstock, being nearer, was the first to reach the scene with a steamer, 20 men and 900 feet of hose. Fort Fairfield, Caribou and Presque Isle likewise responded with men and equipment, although all of this assistance did not reach the scene until six that afternoon, after the fire had been raging for more than five hours.

## SPECIAL TRAIN

A special train was also organized by the Bangor and Aroostook railroad in Bangor and kept in readiness to set out for Houlton until seven that night when it became apparent that no further aid could be needed.

The residents of Kelloran, Military and High streets as well as those on upper Main street, began

to die and outbuildings, and Will Foss' stable, all on the south side of the street.

On the north side of Main street, after the two Fogg buildings had been laid waste, the fire successfully worked on the Fairweather boarding house, Campbell's Bakery and the Plummer residence.

One of the more serious losses, not replaceable by dollars and cents, was that suffered by the engineering department of the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad, located on the second floor of the Fogg Block. With the employees gone for lunch, there was no opportunity to save any of the valuable maps and records of all kinds that had to do with the railroad. All were destroyed.

Others to be burned out of business in the same block were Mrs. Orr's millinery store, the grocery store and market of L. W. Dyer, Charles F. Thorne's stove store, the millinery store of Gillen and Sincock, S. L. Somerville's grocery store and the furniture store of Keaton and Betts. A three story storehouse in the rear also perished.

## THREE CHURCHES RAZED

The residence of J. C. McIntyre, almost directly across Main street from the Plummer home, and on the corner of Main and Kelloran street, was one of the first of several residences along Kelloran street, to burn. Others were those of Eben Woodbury and W. G. Somerville.

Three churches lay directly in the path of the relentless march of flame. At the corner of Military and Kelloran streets stood the high spired Free Baptist Church that became the first church edifice to go. Just below it, on the same side of the street, was the Unitarian Church which caught and burned almost simultaneously. Almost directly across the street from the Unitarian Church stood the equally defenseless Methodist structure. It, too, burned level with the ground soon after the Unitarian edifice was laid waste.

## SPARKS SPREAD

In the meantime, sparks from the towering spire of the Free Baptist Church had been blown southward along Kelloran street with the result that nine residences on Heywood street, several hundred yards away, were ignited and destroyed.

The area of what is now Monument Park, in the rear of the Unitarian Church, housed nearly a dozen buildings, owned by Lewis B. Johnson. Seven of them were razed

to move miter and you stamping out incipient fires that were springing up spasmodically all over the burned area.

The next day was Sunday. And what a dismal and dreary day it was! Never in almost a century of history had the townspeople been forced to gaze at a more sorrowful sight. The heart of the business section and great areas of the residential part of the town, laid waste — buildings level with the ground.

With amazing restraint and a complete understatement, the local papers, both of which had escaped the blaze, commented that the burned over area presented "a sorry sight".

This was the kind of crisis that would demonstrate of what stuff the people of Houlton were made. The easy way would be to give up, to turn away from the challenge.

Not this town!

## NO TEARS OF REGRET

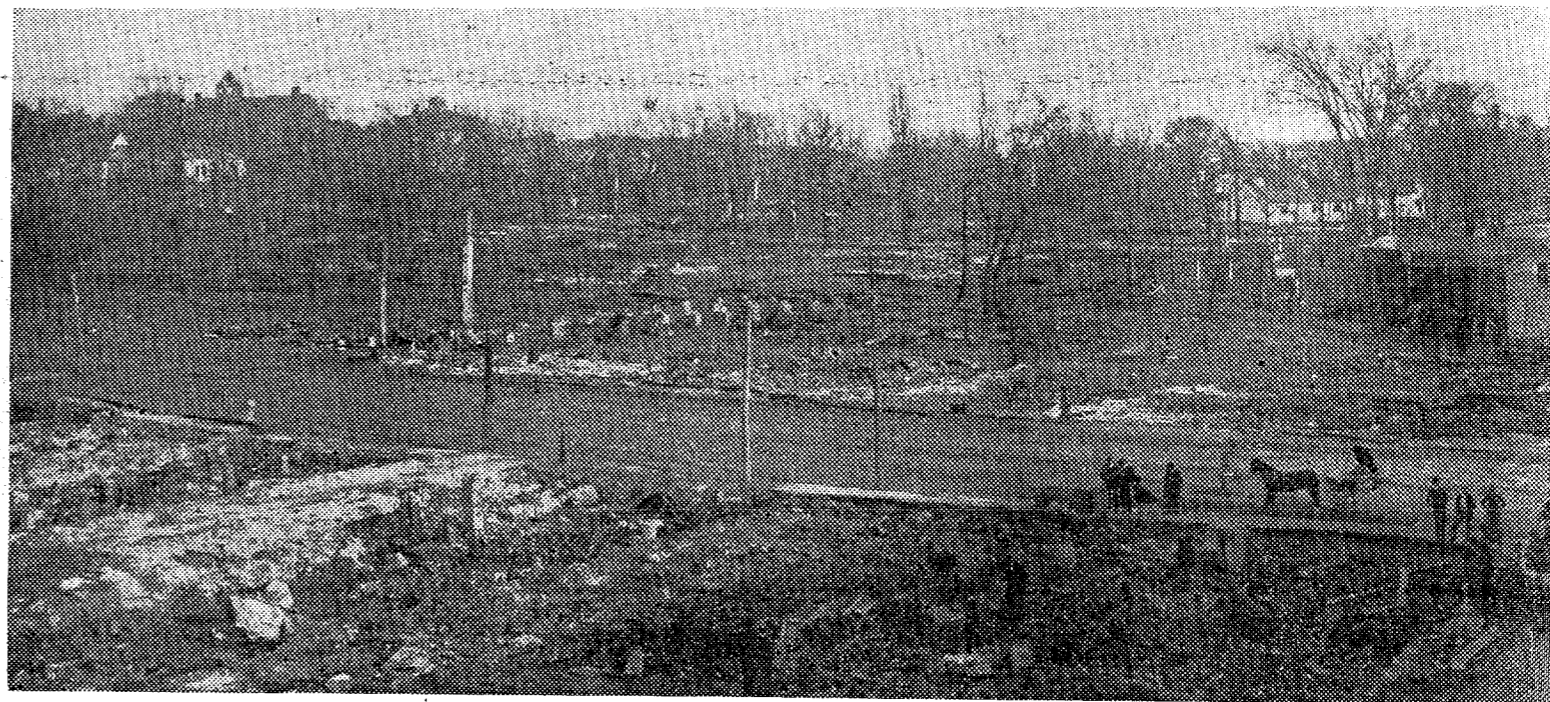
No tears of regret were evident on the printed pages of the newspapers nor in the attitude and courage of the people. A deter-

mined to move miter and you stamping out incipient fires that were springing up spasmodically all over the burned area.

The National Guard was called out, on orders of the Governor, after Capt. Frank M. Hume had requested permission to mobilize "L" Company, Second Maine Regiment to stand guard against possible pilfering of the ruins.

Notwithstanding the costly base upon which it was built, out of this disaster there arose a more beautiful town than the one that had been destroyed. There was presented an opportunity, previously talked about, of extending School street to connect with Main street. This was done in the rebuilding plan and the short street became known as Broadway.

The remaining district, bounded by Main, Kelloran and Military street, was made over into our



This is a partial view of the scene of desolation which met the eyes of those Houlton people who were fortunate enough to have beds in which to sleep, as they awakened on that bleak and dreary dawn of Sunday morning, May 3, 1902 after the worst fire in the town's history had laid waste to more than half of its homes, churches and business blocks.

# Canadian Pacific First Reached Houlton In 1871; Now Vast Travel System

The year was 1836 when the preliminary work on the network of railway lines which connects Houlton with the neighboring province of New Brunswick was started. The lines are, now part of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway, but in those days the Canadian Pacific Railway, since symbolized as Canada's wedding ring, hadn't even reached the dream stage. It was 50 years later when the CPR's first transcontinental passenger train reached the Pacific.

## PRELIMINARY WORK IN 1836

The preliminary work in 1836 consisted of incorporating the St. Andrews and Quebec Railroad Company and sending a delegation to London, England, to see King William IV who granted 10,000 pounds towards the survey work for the railway which was to link the Bay of Fundy port of St. Andrews with Quebec City on the St. Lawrence river. The money was put to good use in making the survey, but more than 10 years later there were still no trains operating.

In 1847 the startling proposal to build a wooden railway was put forward. Fortunately, it was never built, at least not out of wood. Some 10 years later, just 100 years ago now, work was

completed on the first stretch of the line, which was of a more conventional character and stretched almost 28 miles north from St. Andrews to Watt. During the next four years another 56 miles were built, completing the line to Debec.

## NEARS DEBEC IN 1871

The Houlton Branch Railway Co., incorporated in 1867, had built almost five miles, from Debec to the International Boundary near Green Road, by 1871. The 3.16 miles from the border to Houlton was laid down in 1871 by the Houlton Branch Railroad of Maine. Both of these lines were acquired by the New Brunswick and Canada Railroad, which was a network of lines that now compose the CPR's Woodstock division. The CPR took over the entire trackage in 1890.

Through this CPR connection, acquired before the turn of the century, Houlton had a direct connection with what is known as the world's greatest travel system. From the infant company which moved into Houlton in 1890, with its main asset being a transcontinental line on which very few people worked and lived, the Canadian Pacific Railway has expanded until today the facets of its organization serve

five continents.

## 22,000 MILES OF TRACK

Almost 22,000 miles of track connect the cities and towns of Canada and the northern United States. More than 4,700 miles of track are in the United States. More than 1,800 locomotives are used to haul the passengers and produce in 80,000 freight train cars and 2600 passenger train cars.

Included in the passenger train equipment is the stainless steel, "Scenic Dome" equipment used on the transcontinental trains "The Canadian" and "The Dominion". These trains, which operate between Montreal and Toronto and Vancouver offer the longest dome ride in the world, 2,881 miles.

## FLEET OF SHIPS

A fleet of ships provides transportation links on Canadian coastal waters and across the Great Lakes. In addition the Canadian Pacific house flag flutters from the masthead of four Empress liners, the new Empresses of Britain and England, the luxurious Empress of Scotland, and the Empress of France. Seven cargo liners carry Canada's produce overseas and bring imports to Canada to be speeded to their destination by train. Total ton-

nage of the coastal fleet is almost 55,000, while the tonnage of the ocean ships approximates 167,000.

A coast-to-coast chain of 15 year-round hotels and summer resorts is also operated by the railway company stretching from Nova Scotia to British Columbia.

The transportation empire includes a communications network providing telegraph service across the nation, and an express company. Canadian Pacific Transport operates a fleet of trucks for highway traffic.

## HAS AN AIRLINE

Youngest of the Canadian Pacific's travel services is the Canadian Pacific Air Lines, wings of the world's greatest travel system. Formed in 1942, the airline has grown from a small domestic operation serving Canada's northern outposts to one of the largest international airlines of the day.

From headquarters in Vancouver, Canadian Pacific Air Lines planes fly to Hawaii, New Zealand and Australia; to Tokyo and Hong Kong; to Mexico City and Lima, Peru; and across the North Pole to Amsterdam, in Holland. A line from Toronto also connects with Mexico City, and from Toronto and Montreal, there are flights to Lisbon, Portugal, gateway to southern Europe.

## First Interest In Christian Science Here In 1894

As near as can be determined, the first interest in Christian Science among Houlton people came in the year of 1894. Guy S. Perkins, C.S.B. (now of Springfield, Mass.) having experienced a remarkable healing through the application of Christian Science, sent his mother, Etta L. Putnam (Mrs. Sam) a copy of the textbook, "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" by Mary Baker Eddy.

Mrs. Putnam and her brother, Addison P. Smith, became interested through reading this book. Later Mr. Smith purchased a copy in order that he and his wife, Emma S. Smith, could read it together.

Just when Mr. and Mrs. Smith started holding Christian Science services in their home is not known but it is believed that it was quite soon after that.

It is interesting to note here, at the time of the big fire of May 1902, when a large portion of the town burned, that comment was made to the effect that the Addi-

son Smith residence was in the path of the flames, — and the Smiths being Christian Scientists, would their home burn? The fact remains, that, although homes all around theirs were destroyed, theirs was untouched.

## SOCIETY FORMED

On March 2, 1916 the following individuals met at the home of Addison P. Smith for the purpose of organizing a Christian Science Society: Addison P. Smith; Emma S. Smith, Elizabeth M. Purinton, Harriette Ebbett Hume, Clara J. Orcutt, Allan M. Wade, Maryetta Haggerty, Eugene A. Smith, Hazel Nasón Smith, Eda Bradbury, Guy Smith, and Inez M. Carpenter. Officers were elected and by-laws adopted.

The Society was not incorporated until September 18, 1920. In the same year (October 22, 1920) the property known as the Presbyterian Church, on the corner of High and Military Streets, was purchased from the First Congregational Church of Houlton.

October 19, 1951 a change of title was made, from Christian Science Society, Houlton, to First Church of Christ, Scientist, Houlton. It is a branch of The Mother Church, The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, Massachusetts.