

# The Fire That Destroyed Half Of Hutto's Downtown Businesses

by Harvey Olander

When my grandfather, P.A. Olander, saw the flames in Hutto, he did not take time to saddle his horse. He ran the three miles across the fields to town to help fight the fire. My Aunt Amelia told me she was sure he broke the world's record of the 4-minute mile.

The fire started about closing time on Saturday night when a gasoline stove exploded in J.C. Jackson's Restaurant, located on the corner of East and Farley Streets. The ringing of the fire bell brought men, women, and children to fight the fire. A shortage of water made them realize that the fire was going to spread. The men and boys then concentrated on removing porches and other wooden

parts from the adjacent buildings. The breeze from the southeast kept the burning cinders flying away from the adjoining buildings, but the intense heat soon ignited the Matthews and Payne Meat Market, a wooden frame building next door on the south side. The next building in line was the Bayer and Boyd Grocery Store. Since it was an ironclad building, it was hoped that the fire would be stopped there, but radiated heat spread the fire to the inside.

Next was the post office. J.B. Ross, postmaster, removed all the mail, money and other important perishables from his building. Miss Violet Stonestreet, with the help of others, carried all merchandise from her confectionery. Wa-

ter was being hauled in from the Round Bale Gin reservoir while bucket brigades threw water on the flames, but nothing helped. The fire kept moving south against the wind. Soon R.F. Magruder's Grocery was burning. Next to Magruder's was a narrow alley with a brick building on the other side. That stopped the southward progress of the fire. But the inferno of heat was breaking windows and scorching wood on buildings across the street. Broken windows were shielded and water was thrown on the wood to prevent the spread of the fire across the street.

Meanwhile, back at the Farley Street intersection, flying cinders crossed Farley Street, set the blacksmith shop of Brown and

Hansen on fire and burned it down. A block to the north the Presbyterian Church's shingle roof caught fire, but men on the roof kept putting out the flames as they started. The ladies of the town gathered in the cotton yard diagonally across Farley and East Street, and with wet rags stopped cinders from burning hundreds of cotton bales. This was the month of October and all the cotton ginned that year was stored there. Of all the buildings and merchandise destroyed, only one store had fire insurance. The year was 1902 and this conflagration occurred almost ten years after construction first started on East Street.

This is a part of Hugh Davenport's HISTORY OF HUTTO.



*Cleaning up East Street after the 1902 fire  
(Photo courtesy of the Hutto Chamber of Commerce - Hutto Museum)*