

A Tinge of Arson

After surviving innovation, public service and numerous renovations for 57 years, the mill is faced with disaster

The "Arcade Mill" was running smoothly for Clarence Waterhouse, owner of the mill, until the morning of December 4, 1899, when an employee arrived at the mill just in time to extinguish a moderate blaze in a floor. It had burned a fairly large hole and those inspecting the damage detected an obvious odor of kerosene. Since the mill had been closed over the weekend, the blaze was attributed to an arsonist. Suspicions arose and many assumed the fire was set by a disgruntled employee.

Exactly as the century turned, disaster struck. The local newspaper, *Mazomanie Sickle*, described the turmoil: "Those of our citizens who were watching the incoming of the new century, at 12 o'clock, hearing the fire bell ring and were not surprised or alarmed. The bell continued to ring, having changed from tolling to the sharp clang of the fire alarm. Still those who hear it were in doubt as to whether it was a greeting to the new year or an alarm of fire. Perhaps 10 or 15 minutes elapsed when the persistent tone of the bell made sufficient impression upon our citizens to cause them to look out, and then it was discovered that the Arcade Mill was in full blaze."

The firemen got to work in the shortest time possible, but when the water was turned on everything went wrong for a time. Two lengths of hose burst (upon examination they were pronounced cut), and had to be uncoupled and taken out. Two of the nozzles would not work, in the narrow end of one was found a piece of thick leather, which, with the ice formed back of the leather effectively plugged it and rendered it temporarily useless. The other nozzle was full of ice. Finally, a stream was turned on the fire, but it was woefully inadequate. A dozen streams of water could not then have subdued the flames in time to save the property.

"In the meantime the men who had gathered around commenced carrying out supplies and were assisted by one or two of the gentler sex. In this way, two or three hundred dollars worth of stuff was saved, but everything else, building and all, was totally destroyed. The main part of the building was three stories and basement, all constructed of stone, and was connected with the old part, also of stone, by frame walls. The fire started in the main building and spread rapidly. All of the flour, feed and supplies were contained in the old part, thus rendering it possible to save part of it, as this part burned last. The mill had a capacity of 225 barrels with splendid equipment, and had a feed mill that was a trade winner."

A month later the mill was for sale and Waterhouse ordered his attorney to offer the ruins to the highest bidder, Henry Kirch.