

Town of Gordonsville Fire 1916

From the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*¹ of 1916

“Gordonsville Swept by Flames

Two Business Blocks Wiped Out Before Fire Is Checked.

Fire Departments Rushed to Scene From Charlottesville and Orange

Spread of Flames Is Finally Checked

“Gordonsville, VA., January 3,--

Fire, originating in the restaurant and cleaning and pressing shop of G. Mas & Co., located in Faber’s old jewelry store on Main Street, close to the bridge, ignited several other buildings in the immediate vicinity shortly after 12 o’clock, and by 1:30 o’clock this morning had completely destroyed one of the principal business blocks of the town.

“Up to 2 o'clock this morning the following firms had been burned out: Mrs. M. L. Faber, general notions; Warren’s 5 and 10-Cent Store, the Gordon Printing Co., E.D. Michie, grocer; Mayhughes’ Meat Market, a residence occupied by George Wilkins and an unoccupied storeroom beneath; A.K. Clowes, jeweler; W.E. Clowes, photographer; L.M. Acree, general merchandise; J.W. Sullivan, men’s furnishings.

“Calls to Orange and Charlottesville for assistance resulted in engines being rushed here on special trains, and it is hoped that at least one, and perhaps two, of the other blocks directly in the path of the fire, which is spreading east rapidly, may be saved. Members of the Gordonsville Fire Department and several hardware merchants resorted to the use of dynamite in an effort to stop the spread of the conflagration.

“DYNAMITE CAUSES FLAMES TO SPREAD

“The explosion was placed in Mayhugh’s meat market, on Main Street, and the building was demolished. However, it immediately caught fire and flames spread to surrounding buildings. A high wind is taking the fire directly through the heart of the business section and, should the Charlottesville and Orange departments be delayed, it is feared that the entire town, with the exception of the residences to the west, may be lost.

“Battling with a hand-engine and a few feet of hose, members of the Gordonsville Fire Department have striven vainly to gain control of the conflagration, but without result. In

¹ Author Unknown. “Gordonsville Swept by Flames: Two Businesses Wiped Out Before Fire Is Checked.” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, January 3, 1916, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045389/1916-01-03/ed-1/seq-1/>, Accessed February 12, 2023.

desperation, they turned to the use of dynamite; but, probably through unfamiliarity with the use of the explosive, again they failed to be of assistance. The explosion that wrecked the meat market started two other fires and led to the destruction of the last buildings on this block.

“Buildings on both sides of Main Street have been burned on the block next to the bridge, among them being the telephone exchange, the Gordonsville National Bank and many of the principal stores of the town. It is believed that the bank vault will protect a comparatively large sum of money and a number of valuable securities said to be in it.

“The Chesapeake and Ohio Railway received the calls for special trains to bear the fire engines to the stricken town, and at once made up special trains to leave Charlottesville and Orange. Each of these trains bore one engine and a company of firemen. It is thought that they will be able to stay the spread of the conflagration if they arrive before it gains a foothold in the remainder of the business section.

“NO FATALITIES OR INJURIES REPORTED

“Up to an early hour this morning, Gordonsville was cut off from the rest of the country by everything save the wires of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. According to reports there had been no serious injuries or fatalities. A man named Warren, living on Main Street, was found asleep in bed and assisted from his room in his nightclothes. All of his clothing and personal property was destroyed.

“The special trains bearing the fire engines are reported making good time for Gordonsville after leaving Orange and Charlottesville, and it was believed they will arrive in time to save a portion of the business section.

“At 2 o'clock practically all of the business section was burned or blazing.

“Most of the buildings destroyed thus far are substantial brick or concrete two-story buildings, generally owned by the firms occupying them. Captain Wright, a Chesapeake and Ohio Railway conductor, was the owner of the Gordonsville National Bank building. This building was burned to the ground.

“TRAINS MAKE QUICK TIME ON WAY TO TOWN'S RESCUE

“The special trains on which the fire companies from Charlottesville and Orange were brought to Gordonsville made quick time, the Charlottesville company arriving at 1:47 o'clock and the Orange company at 2:07. The Charlottesville company had to be ordered out by the Mayor of that town at 12:05 and left for Gordonsville at 1:15, making the trip of twenty-one miles in thirty-two minutes.

“It was decided not to unload the Charlottesville company, and it took up the fight from the flat-car on which it had been brought to their town. The Orange company, however, was unloaded and taken to the eastern avenue to fight back the blaze there.

“At 2:30 o’clock the fire had crossed into the second business block, and a building there was afire. It was thought, however, that the firemen would be able to gain control of the conflagration and would be able to save the greater part of this block.

“At 2:47 it was believed that the fire had been brought under control.

“SPECTACULAR BLAZE IS SEEN FOR MILES

“The blaze was a spectacular one and could be seen for twenty miles around. The town’s entire population turned out, and people came from miles around.

“Mrs. Belton, wife of Chesapeake and Ohio Dispatcher W.T. Belton of Richmond, was made critically ill from excitement following the loss of all her household effects.

“There is danger of water supply running short. The water is secured from town reservoir and is being pumped through the Chesapeake and Ohio tank into a railroad engine and from thence to fire engine.

“The fire was confined mainly to business section of town.”