

Disastrous Local Fires

Burnley Brothers

Early on the morning of February 26, 1897 the Burnley Brothers' Brantford Steam Laundry at 78 Colborne Street was destroyed by fire (**Brantford Expositor**, February 26, 1897, p. 1). The fire caused approximately \$18,000 damage and the two stores adjacent to the laundry, Caudwell's Dry Goods and Clifford's Furniture Store, also suffered some damage. After the fire Samuel and Arthur Burnley relocated their business to 80 Dalhousie Street. It was last listed in the Brantford City Directory in 1906.

Verity Plow Company

The Verity Plow Company factory at Clarence and Wellington streets was destroyed by fire on October 26, 1897. For more information about this company go to **Industries: Massey-Harris Company**.

British America Starch Works

This company's factory was destroyed by fire on several occasions. For more information about this company go to **Industries: British America Starch Works**.

Slingsby Manufacturing Company

The factory burned down on December 24, 1876 when it was known as the Holmedale Woolen Mills. The Slingsby Manufacturing Company was destroyed by fire again in December 1902. For more information about this company go to **Industries: Slingsby Manufacturing Company**.

Snowdrift Baking Powder Company

This business, as well as the factory and warehouse of George Watt & Sons, was destroyed by fire on September 18, 1902. For more information about this company go to **Industries: Snowdrift Baking Powder Company**.

Canadian Folding Box Company

This company at 27-37 Jarvis Street was destroyed by fire on December 10, 1906. For more information about this company go to **Industries: Box Manufacturers**.

Stratford Opera House

This building was destroyed by fire on January 1, 1908. For more information about this building go to **Theatres: Stratford Opera House**.

Hampel Box Factory

The fire at the Hampel Box Factory happened on January 14, 1909. For more information about this company go to **Industries: Box Manufacturers**.



Waterloo Street Rink

The fire on September 21, 1911 destroyed the rink and several nearby homes while other houses in the neighbourhood were also damaged (**Brantford Expositor**, September 21, 1911, p. 1). The rink was located in the middle of the block surrounded by Waterloo, Duke, West, and Fleet streets. The loss was estimated to be \$15,000. Brothers Samuel and Arthur Burnley owned the rink.

Brewster Five-and-Ten Store

The fire at 146-148 Colborne Street occurred on the morning of February 1, 1913 while the store was open and many employees and customers were inside (**Brantford Expositor**, February 1, 1913, p. 1). The store was last listed in the city directory in 1915.



E. B. Crompton and Company Store

A fire destroyed this store at 90-96 Colborne Street on March 3, 1915 and caused extensive damage to the adjoining stores, John Bishop and Son, hardware merchants and James Young, jeweler (**Brantford Expositor**, March 4, 1915, p. 1). E. B. Crompton and Company sold household goods of all kinds, dry goods, hats, furs, and ready-to-wear apparel. Several firefighters were injured while battling the blaze which took nine hours to put out with the loss estimated to be \$200,000. Constructed in 1859, the building was originally occupied by H. W. Brethour and Company, a dry goods business. Edwin B. Crompton took over the business several years before the fire. After the fire the store temporarily relocated to the old YMCA building until a new four-storey building was erected on the original site. Cromptons was purchased by the Arcade Limited in 1920 when E. B. Crompton retired.

For more information:

- [Expositor October 1909 \(p. 86 and 92 of PDF\)](#)

Gem Theatre

The Gem Theatre, located at 87 Colborne Street, was destroyed by fire on March 4, 1915 only one day after the fire at the E. B. Crompton and Company Store across the street. Damage was estimated to be in the neighbourhood of \$50,000 and stock was damaged in several of the adjacent stores. For more information about this theatre go to **Theatres: Gem Theatre**.

Brandon Shoe Company

Located at 125 Pearl Street, the building, machinery, and stock were destroyed by fire in the early morning hours of March 25, 1923. For more information about this company go to **Industries: Shoe Companies**.

Artemis Sweets and Metropolitan Store

On the evening of December 25, 1930 these two stores on Colborne Street were destroyed by fire (**Brantford Expositor**, December 26, 1930, p. 1). Artemis Sweets, a popular restaurant and candy store owned by Nick Poullos, had been in business for fifteen years. The store was originally located at 135 Colborne Street before moving to 148 Colborne Street. Damage was estimated to be \$150,000. Artemis Sweets was not rebuilt but the Metropolitan Store, 146 Colborne Street, was.

For more information:

- **Expositor Semi-Centennial (p. 96 of PDF) (Artemis Sweets)**

Marks Transport

The garage and warehouse of Marks Transport at 157 Wellington Street were destroyed by a fire which started around midnight on February 2, 1940 (**Brantford Expositor**, February 3, 1940, p. 1). Seven truck-tractors, two cars, and five trailers and semi-trailers were also lost in the fire. Damage was estimated at almost \$100,000 and flying embers set nearby homes on fire.

National Canned Foods

The canning factory, located on Highway 53 west of Brantford, was destroyed by fire on August 20, 1940 (**Brantford Expositor**, August 20, 1940, p. 1). The building and all of its contents were lost with damage estimated to be \$200,000. The building was originally used by the Farmers' Cooperative Company as a pork factory starting in 1900. Different companies had used the building through the years before it was sold to Canada Packers Limited who operated the National Canned Foods factory. This site was later occupied by York Farms, a division of Canada Packers Limited.



Elliott-Wedlake Hardware Store

The store at 193 Colborne Street was destroyed by a fire which started in the early morning hours of June 22, 1948 (**Brantford Expositor**, June 22, 1948, p. 1). The paint and turpentine in the store made the fire worse and it burned for more than four hours, threatening the whole block. The store and its contents were a total loss with some smoke and water damage to adjacent properties. Total damage was estimated to be more than \$100,000. The hardware store was rebuilt. It suffered smoke and water damage in the January 1961 fire at Wycliffe Hall.

Spruceleigh Farms

The fire at Spruceleigh Farms on Highway 2 on April 18, 1949 caused an estimated \$200,000 damage, destroying a large building which housed offices, a hatchery, and a two-storey section of laying pens. Almost 24,000 laying hens were killed and 100,000 eggs in various stages of incubation were lost. As a result of the fire, the company's chick-raising business was forced to close down for the season. John Schultz and his sons, Harold, Norman, and Howard, had started the company in 1919. They sold the business to Canada Packers in 1964.

George Street Fire

The fire in a George Street apartment block over the stores between Colborne and Dalhousie streets early in the morning of November 19, 1949 sent two people to hospital with severe burns and left thirty people homeless (**Brantford Expositor**, November 19, 1949, p. 1). Loss was estimated at over \$100,000 with heavy smoke and water damage to the stores on the ground floor.

Gazer Mill Stock Company

Located at 112 Grey Street, this company was destroyed by fire on May 4, 1951. Neither the building nor the contents could be saved, destroying thousands of dollars of scarce wools and yarns. William Gazer had started this company in 1903, collecting bags of old material, separating the cotton rags from the wool ones and sending them to mills to be used in the making of felt. In 1989 the company moved to a new building on Copernicus Boulevard. In recent years the company spent most of its time processing high-quality yarn for the carpet industry. The Grey Street plant was sold to Bell City Brands Ltd.

"No. 20" Drill Hall

The fire occurred on November 9, 1951 in the building which had been used as a Department of National Defence drill hall at No. 20 Canadian Army Basic Training Centre during World War II on part of the Glebe lands adjoining Mohawk Park (**Brantford Expositor**, November 9, 1951, p. 17). At the time of the fire the building was being used by the Massey-Harris Company to store finished farm equipment. Over \$100,000 in farm machinery was lost.

Sayle Transport

On the evening of November 24, 1951 a fire destroyed the Thomas W. Sayle Transport garage and warehouse at 206 Sheridan Street (**Brantford Expositor**, November 26, 1951, p. 1). There was extensive damage to 10 trucks and a trailer as well as damage to the interior of the building. The loss was estimated at \$60,000.

Stedman's Book Store

The book store at 154 Colborne Street was destroyed by fire on the night of January 20, 1955 (**Brantford Expositor**, January 21, 1955, p. 1). The fire department had to pump water from the canal when their supply was cut off after a water main burst. The book store was destroyed with heavy water and smoke damage to nearby businesses. The overall damage estimate was over \$100,000. Brothers Sam, Edward, and George Stedman had opened their first store in 1905 selling office supplies, books, magazines, stationery, and newspapers. After operating their business at several other locations they moved to 154 Colborne Street. The store was replaced by a new one on the same site. In 1962 Gamble-Skogmo Inc. of Minneapolis acquired the business. The store was last listed in the **Brantford City Directory** in 1988.

For more information:

- [Expositor October 1909 \(p. 84 of PDF\)](#)
- [Reville's History Volume 2 \(p. 154 of PDF\)](#)

Agnew-Surpass Shoe Store

An explosion during the noon hour which blew out all of the windows at the store at 166 Colborne Street resulted in a fire (**Brantford Expositor**, November 4, 1958). For more information about this company go to **Industries: Shoe Companies**.

Hooper's Restaurant

The fire started in the restaurant at 39-41 Market Street on the afternoon of May 8, 1959 while there were approximately 20 customers inside (**Brantford Expositor**, May 9, 1959, p. 1). Damage was estimated to be more than \$60,000 and only a heavy fire wall prevented the fire from spreading to Lockington Brothers' Sports Store and Strong's Shoe Store both of which suffered heavy smoke and water damage.

Wycliffe Hall

This fire on January 14, 1961 destroyed the 100-year old building on Colborne Street (**Brantford Expositor**, January 16, 1961, p. 1). Originally Brantford's first YMCA, it was built in 1860. At one time the building was used as a dance hall. Seven families were left homeless and three stores, George's Electric, Buehler's Meat Market, and Black's Shoe Store, were destroyed. Damage was estimated at more than \$250,000. The owner of the building was Ben Schachar who had bought the property in 1941.

For more information:

- Warner's 1883 History (p. 163-164 of PDF)
- Reville's History Volume 2 (p. 140-141 of PDF)



Brant Hotel

This hotel on Dalhousie Street burned down on January 31, 1962. For more information about this hotel go to **Hotels: Brant Hotel**.

Bodega Hotel

This hotel burned down on March 4, 1962. For more information about this hotel go to [Hotels: Bodega Hotel](#).

Brant Avenue Church

The church at 137 Brant Avenue burned down on April 20, 1963 (**Brantford Expositor**, April 22, 1963, p. 11). There was over \$100,000 damage and the organ valued at \$40,000 was destroyed. The school room of the church dated from December 1870 while the main part of the church was completed in 1871. Originally a Methodist church it became the Brant Avenue United Church in 1925 when the Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Methodist churches joined the United Church of Canada. The first service was held in the church on May 3, 1964 while it was still being rebuilt and by October 1964 the restored sanctuary was open for worship. The church was renovated into apartments after the Brant Avenue congregation joined the St. Andrews United Church congregation at their church. "Centennial, Brant Avenue United Church: a collection of historical notes and pictures marking the 100th anniversary of the Church" provides more information.

For more information:

- [Expositor Semi-Centennial \(p. 112 of PDF\)](#)

UAW Local 458

The building at 55 Darling Street used by Local 458, United Auto Workers (CLC) burned down on March 4, 1965. The loss was estimated to be more than \$60,000 with extensive smoke and water damage to other buildings. This building had been erected by the Union Realty Company circa 1908 and was owned by John T. Ham, Joseph Ham, and Ed Minshall. Various businesses occupied the different floors through the years. For example, the first occupant of the ground floor was Charles J. Mitchell, Brantford's first automobile dealer. The UAW bought the building in 1948. After the fire the building was torn down.

Aragon Restaurant and Belinda Shoe Store

Fire destroyed the restaurant at 130 Colborne Street and the adjoining shoe store at 128 Colborne Street on July 11, 1965 (**Brantford Expositor**, July 12, 1965, p. 1). Two nearby stores, Zellers Ltd. and Reitman's Ltd. were heavily damaged. Damage was estimated to be \$275,000.

Dalhousie and George Streets

The fire on January 11, 1970 caused \$500,000 damage at six businesses in the block surrounded by Colborne, Charlotte, Dalhousie and George streets - Miller and Miller law offices, Varga and Frank realtors, Ideal Cleaners and Dyers, and three stores occupied by OK Shoe Store, Rainbow Fabrics, and Karek's Food Specialities. Several other nearby businesses suffered smoke and water damage, including the Kerby Hotel. All available fire trucks were needed and off duty firefighters were called in to battle the blaze.

Brantford Clinic

The fire at 54 Brant Avenue on September 27, 1972 destroyed the three-storey portion of the building while the new addition at the front suffered a lot of smoke and water damage (**Brantford Expositor**, September 28, 1972, p. 1). Damage was estimated to be \$200,000 with a lot of medical equipment destroyed.

Formpac Canada Ltd.

The plant and warehouse at 36 Morton Avenue East were destroyed by a fire which started early in the morning on November 6, 1973 (*Brantford Expositor*, November 6, 1973, p. 1). It was the most costly fire in Brantford's history with damages estimated to be between \$4 and \$5 million. Over 200 employees were left without jobs. Initially there were plans to rebuild the factory but the company later decided against it. This company, originally known as Grace Containers Limited, part of Cryovac Ltd, opened in 1964. The name was changed to Formpac Canada Limited on April 1, 1971. They manufactured plastic containers such as foam meat trays and egg cartons for the food industry.



Belmont Hotel

Fire destroyed the hotel at 155-159 Colborne Street on May 24, 1974. For more information about this hotel go to **Hotels: Belmont Hotel**.

Squires' Court Hotel

The fire occurred on October 15, 1975 at the hotel located on Dalhousie Street. For more information about this hotel go to **Hotels: Squires' Court Hotel**.

Dalhousie Street Fire

A fire and explosion in the early morning hours of December 29, 1975 destroyed B. B. Submarine and Pizza, Beauty of India, and Brunswick Billiards with damage estimated at \$110,000 (*Brantford Expositor*, December 29, 1975, p. 1). The Brass Monkey and Pauwels Travel Bureau were also damaged. Those two businesses had also suffered damage two months previously when fire destroyed the Squires' Court Hotel.

Dalhousie and King

A building at this corner was destroyed by fire on February 14, 1976 (*Brantford Expositor*, February 15, 1976, p. 1). Five businesses were ruined - Mike's Camera Shop, Mr. Tony's Hair Stylist for Men, Tuxedo Corner Limited, Brant Art Shoes, and the Sub Tub - and the people living in the apartments above were left homeless. The damage was estimated at over \$500,000. The walls left standing after the fire were torn down.

Kerby Hotel

This well known hotel on Colborne Street, in business for more than 120 years, was destroyed by fire on July 29, 1976. For more information go to **Hotels: Kerby Hotel**.

H. E. Mott Building

A fire was discovered in the four-storey building located on the east side of Clarence Street between Wellington and Darling streets on August 31, 1976 (**Brantford Expositor**, August 31, 1976, p. 1). The building, which was vacant at the time of the fire, was completely destroyed in less than an hour and the walls left standing were torn down before they collapsed. Damage was estimated at \$200,000. The building had originally been occupied by the **Verity Plow Company** and then the **Goold, Shapley and Muir Company** who made windmills, lookout towers, pumps, and tanks. Harold E. Mott started the H. E. Mott Company Ltd. in 1934 when he bought the assets of the Goold, Shapley and Muir Company who had gone bankrupt. The Mott company manufactured wood tanks and textile machinery and also made radar housings, cabinets, and support frames during World War II. Mott Manufacturing Ltd. moved to a new factory at 70 Wadsworth Street in 1958. By that time they were making steel laboratory furniture. L. A. Crews bought the company in 1963 when H. E. Mott retired. The company later moved to a new plant at 452 Hardy Road.

Brant Screen Craft

The fire on December 14, 1978 at 1 Alfred Street caused between \$200,000 and \$250,000 damage (**Brantford Expositor**, December 15, 1978, p. 1). Turvey Electric in the same building was also damaged. Harry Sanders and John DeBoer had started the company in 1963. The company's name was later changed to C2 Media and the business moved to 555 Greenwich Street.