

The Day The Arena

Burned

Walkerton has had some near-disasters in its short history. Some spring seasons, the flood waters could have done much worse damage if the weather hadn't turned cold and the rain stopped at the last moment. Some fires almost went completely out of control, the fire-

fighters having last-minute help from nature in the way of wind shift, or rain.

Walkerton's worst fire was in 1877, when a good portion of the business section burned to the ground. It was a good fortune and good fire-fighting that saved a similar incident in 1920.

Walkerton was proud of its arena, which was situated where the Canadian Legion hall now stands. It was a busy centre of activity each winter, until the spring of 1920, when the wooden structure caught fire.

The fire raged with such intensity, aided by gusty winds, that burning sparks were carried across much of the eastern part of town. Truax and Company had stables on their property, just northeast of the burning arena. Despite the efforts of firemen these stables caught fire. Volunteers managed to get the fine horses out, and they were moved to stables behind the Royal Hotel across from the mill. (The high red brick apartment house on the

corner of Durham and Mill streets.) The Truax stables were burned to the ground, but the horses were saved. The irony of this story is that a short time later, the stables of the Royal Hotel caught fire and some of the horses were lost anyway.

Men were placed on the rooftops of most buildings in the

area when the arena burned, to put sparks out. One of the volunteers on the mill roof had his clothes ignited by burning debris and narrowly escaped being burned himself.

Sparks set fire to the lumber piled at the Truax Factory and various rooftops north of the arena caught fire. The roof of the old C.P.R. roundhouse like-

wise became ignited even though this building was across the river and several blocks from the arena fire scene.

In 1920, Walkerton still had comparatively inadequate fire-fighting equipment. It is remarkable that the firemen of that day, with the help of local citizens, were able to save our town from another major fire.