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## Fires at St. John's

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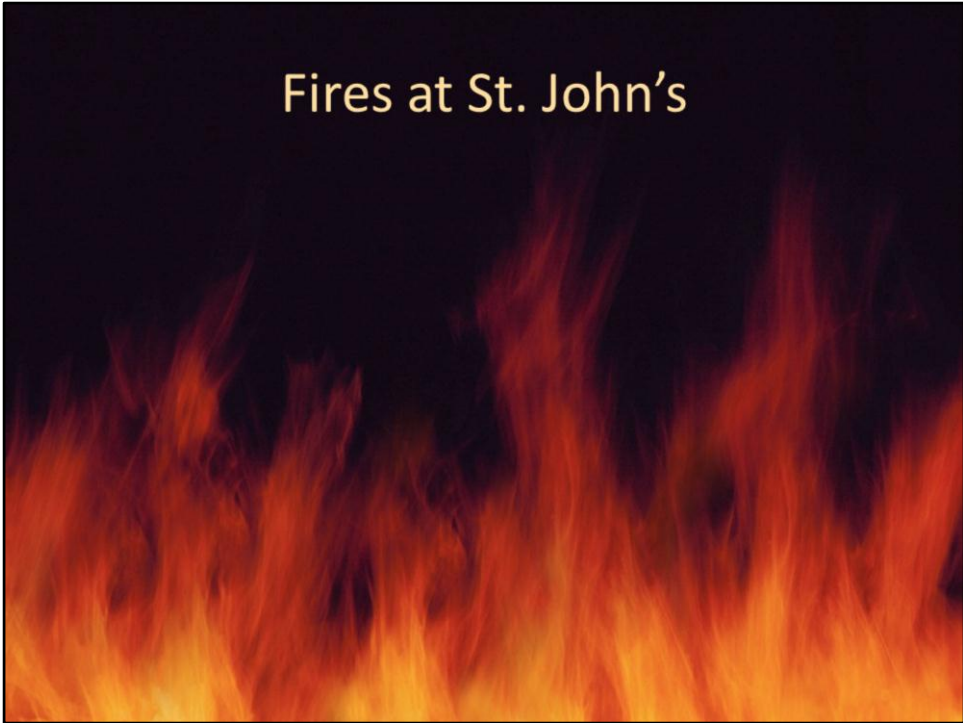
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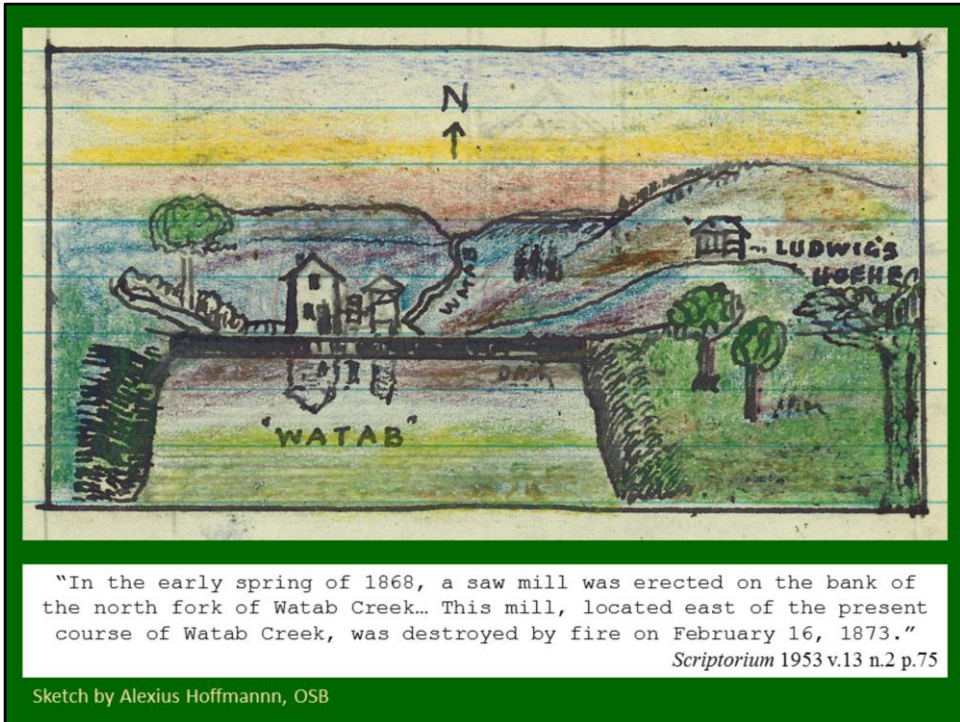
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# Fires at St. John's





<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/3659/show/3617>

(Written "by" the Old Stone House)

The night of March 22, 1877, was a night I'll never forget. Cries of "Fire! Fire!" resounded through my halls and through the rest of the buildings. I remember that the fire started in one of the sawdust-filled wooden spittoons in one of the seminarians' rooms.

HOUSE

The fire soon got between the interior and exterior walls, thereby making it harder to extinguish. A disaster was averted because the first water works had been installed the previous autumn.<sup>28</sup>

THE

As usually happens during a fire, some people got panicky. Students started throwing books, furniture, and clothes out of my windows. Some even dragged their trunks and suitcases from the top floor, down the steps, and to a safe place far from the buildings. Father Aloysius Hermanutz, O.S.B., was rather out of place when he arrived on the scene with a rifle yelling, "Where are they?" You see, he thought the abbey was being burglarized.

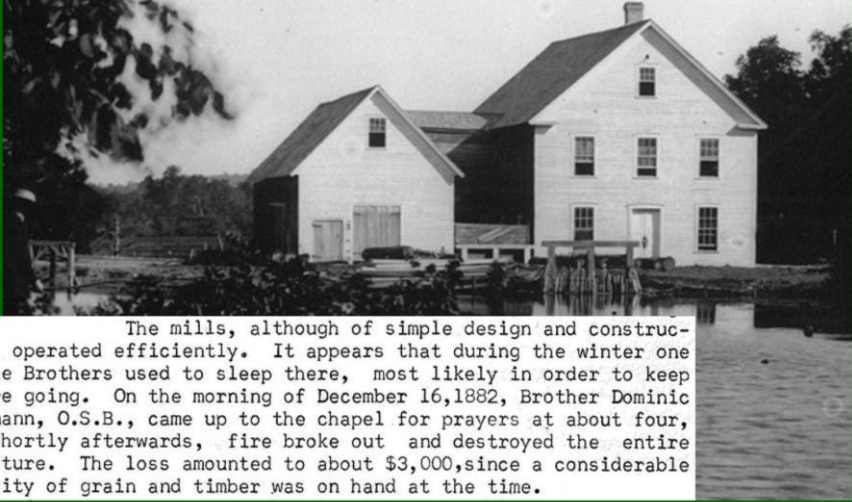
Scriptorium Dec. 1954, p. 31-32

From *Scriptorium* Dec. 1954 v.14 n.1 p. 20

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/3538/show/3429>

Bottom photo LP068.1883.Quad.StoneHouse in Ascherman Sesquicentennial collection

After the first sawmill had burned in 1873, a larger one with a gristmill had been erected closer to the banks of the Watab. One waterwheel did service for both.

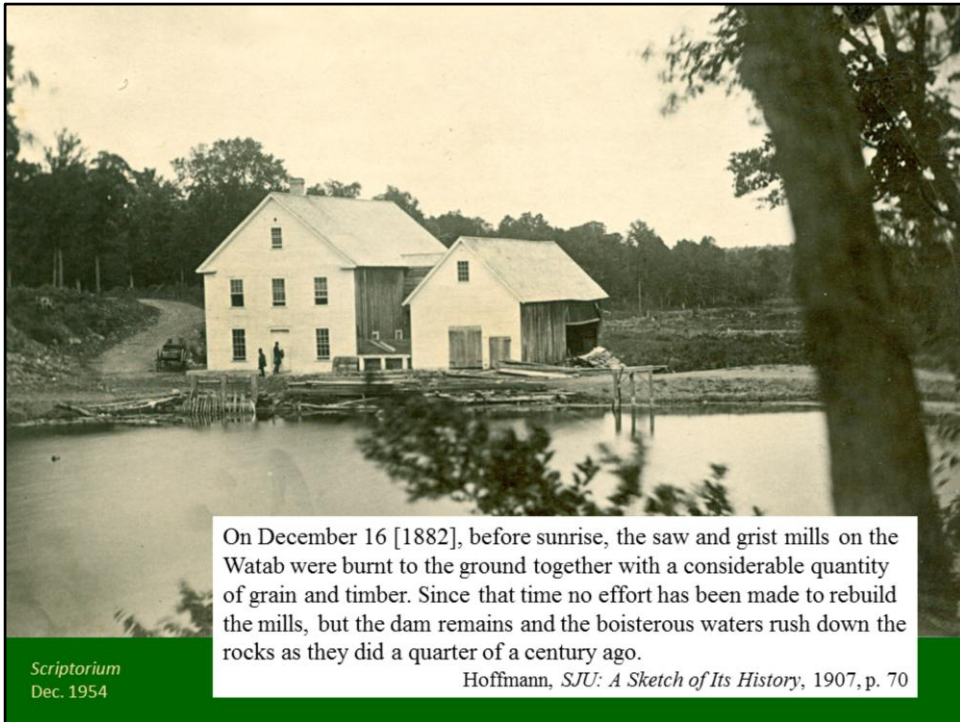


The mills, although of simple design and construction, operated efficiently. It appears that during the winter one of the Brothers used to sleep there, most likely in order to keep a fire going. On the morning of December 16, 1882, Brother Dominic Hoffmann, O.S.B., came up to the chapel for prayers at about four, and shortly afterwards, fire broke out and destroyed the entire structure. The loss amounted to about \$3,000, since a considerable quantity of grain and timber was on hand at the time.

From Father Alexius' notes, it appears that many members of the community put the blame for the fire on Brother Dominic, but Father Alexius attributed it to an over-heated wood stove.

*Scriptorium*  
Dec. 1954

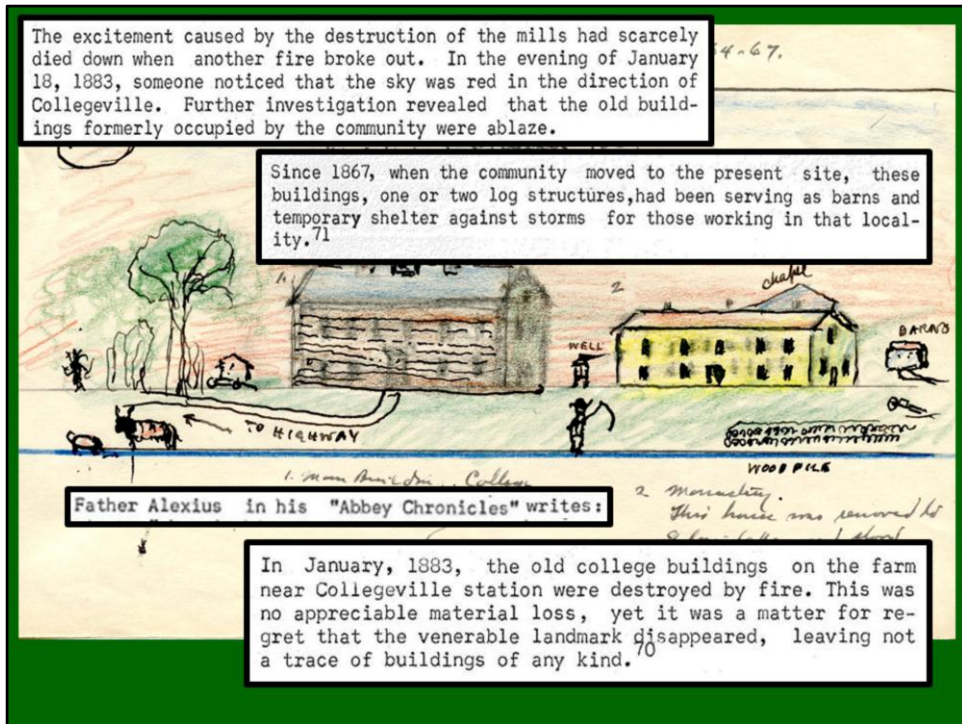
From *Scriptorium* Dec. 1954 v.14 n.1. "The Brothers of Saint John's Abbey, the Building Era, Part II" article by Br. Thomas Whitaker, p. 42  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/3538/show/3451>



From *Scriptorium* Dec. 1954 v.14 n.1. "The Brothers of Saint John's Abbey, the Building Era, Part II" article by Br. Thomas Whitaker, p. 42

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/3538/show/3451>

Photo from "A Visual History of Saint Benedict's and Saint John's" sesquicentennial PowerPoint by Alan Reed et al, slide 17

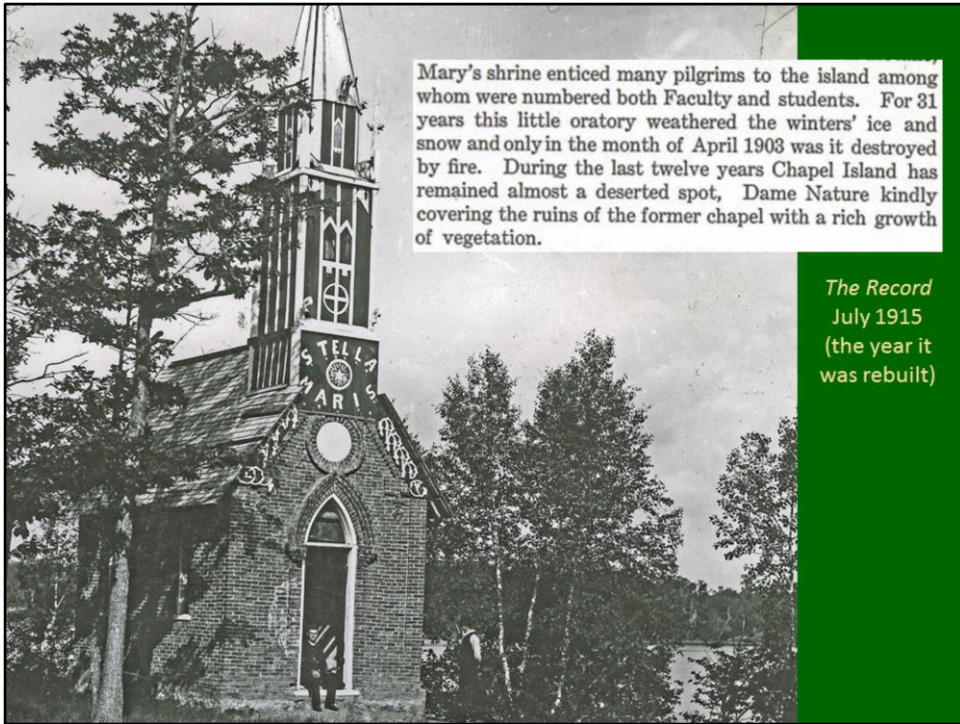


St. John's in the Indian Bush, 1864-1867 – drawing by Alexius Hoffmann in the SJAA

From *Scriptorium* Dec. 1954 v.14 n.1. "The Brothers of Saint John's Abbey, the Building Era, Part II" article by Br. Thomas Whitaker, p. 43

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/3538/show/3452>

p. 44 <http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/3538/show/3453>



Mary's shrine enticed many pilgrims to the island among whom were numbered both Faculty and students. For 31 years this little oratory weathered the winters' ice and snow and only in the month of April 1903 was it destroyed by fire. During the last twelve years Chapel Island has remained almost a deserted spot, Dame Nature kindly covering the ruins of the former chapel with a rich growth of vegetation.

*The Record*  
July 1915  
(the year it  
was rebuilt)

Photo in Ascheman Sesquicentennial Collection, LP092.1stChapel

Text from *The Record* July 1915 p. 389

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/18308/show/18258>





1927 Dairy Barn

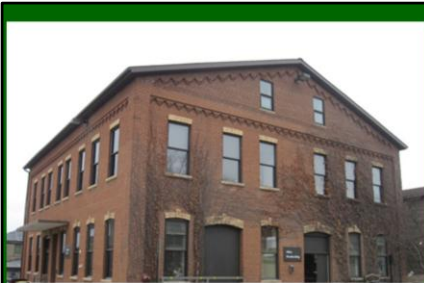
LP020.1927.Barn.Fire



Woodworking Shop  
1903

The Blacksmith-Carpenter Shop Building is a two-storey brick building. When constructed in 1903-04, it had ample room for the following shops: blacksmith facilities, woodworking area, paint room, and bookbindery. It served many useful purposes in providing for the maintenance needs of the institution

*From the National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form, 1978*



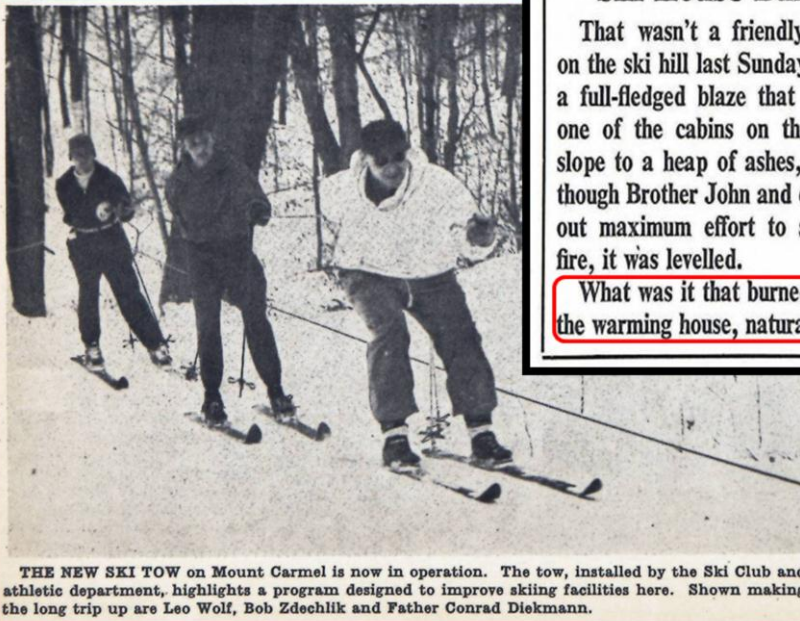
Woodworking Shop Fire –  
January 29, 1939





<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/28946/show/28942>  
 Photos from Abbey Archives  
 The fire started in the bindery on the second floor.

*The Record* January 1951



**THE NEW SKI TOW** on Mount Carmel is now in operation. The tow, installed by the Ski Club and athletic department, highlights a program designed to improve skiing facilities here. Shown making the long trip up are Leo Wolf, Bob Zdechlik and Father Conrad Diekmann.

### **Ski House Burns**

That wasn't a friendly bonfire on the ski hill last Sunday. It was a full-fledged blaze that reduced one of the cabins on the snowy slope to a heap of ashes, and although Brother John and crew put out maximum effort to stop the fire, it was levelled.

What was it that burned? Why, the warming house, naturally.

*The Record* 1951 Jan. 18 p.2 Diekmann, Conrad

Notice of fire in *The Record* Jan. 17, 1964, p. 1

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/33383/show/33379>

## Saint John's Sugar Bush: Still Full of Sap, Still Green

Any hometown newspaper worth the wood that made the paper, runs a feature this time of year on the springtime cliché, "The sap is running." Read your hometown newspaper for the facts: such as, bore a hole in a maple tree, insert a spigot, and hang a tin pan below the spigot.

After a three-year rest, the maples at Saint John's again spilled sap from some 1900 spigots, and the woods again filled with candidates, novices, and other ambitious monks. Smoke flowed from the concrete-block shack that borders the extreme edge of the Prep baseball field. Touched by spring nostalgia I browsed through the record of the operations, a task made easy by a monk who knows every page of print which our forefathers gave out—Br. Kevin Ludowese.

### EARLY YEARS

In the Saint John's Record, 16 April 1942, Robert Mertz tells the first recorded story of some 150 gallons of sap from spigots in 1440 maple trees. Men like Fr. Wendelin Luetmer brought his biological expertise; Fr. Matthew Kiess analyzed and tested; and Br. Charles Kirchner did most of the work. The candle shop (tucked away in a nook behind the plumbing shop—where the latter still makes

candles from the wax of the bees he cares for) became the boiling set for Br. Michael Hurth. Not in the Record story is the fact that it was a popular novelty in the abbey dining room; most used it on the occasional ice cream that appeared, though men like Br. Ambrose Mader put it on his potatoes and Fr. Joachim Watrin put it on everything.

In September 1942 a Record reporter discovered that a new building appeared in the woods. Supervisor Father Wendelin told the reporter that the building, not far from Mt. Carmel, would house the equipment for the evaporation of sap into syrup. Fact: it takes about 32-40 gallons of sap to evaporate down to one gallon of syrup. A 1945 reporter discovered that "there was an immense number of trees; that it was raining; and that a bucket of sap is remarkably heavy." Another fact: when the nights are frosty and the day temperature rises above freezing the sap runs faster.

### UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

In 1948 Br. Julius Terfehr was running the operation. In 1949 there was another attack on the trees, but no record was kept. In the 26 April 1951 Record, reporter Ed Mason writes that "twelve gallons of maple syrup will

lubricate many pancakes. . . . This is

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time (Brother Michael now rides, as his job, in the security vehicle). A new process developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture produced a new

The Record failed to report that a fire of mysterious origin, some suspect arson, destroyed the 1942 building. In 1970 a shack of concrete blocks was erected by Fr. Sebastian Schramel in a remote area, where maple trees were even more abundant.

the bubbling liquid will boil over on to the floor, and it's not fun walking around in two inches of maple syrup."

Abbey Quarterly vol. 3 n.2

"Saint John's Sugar Bush: Still Full of Sap, Still Green" *Abbey Quarterly* vol. 3 n.2, April 1985, p. 6-7  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/19443/show/19437>

October 18, 1984      Volume 57      Number 10

## Fire damages Tommy Hall

**By John Benavise**

A fire in the basement of Tommy Hall October 16 caused between \$100 and \$2000 worth of damage and will cost another \$300 to \$500 in cleanup and repairs, according to an administrative report.

The fire began about 6:00 P.M. in a basement storage room.

The basement fire department extinguished the flames before the fire spread to other areas of the dormitory, the report says.

The storage room was damaged along with most of the contents. Vice President of Student Affairs P. Roman Pace, OGB and the room to store office supplies, videotapes, film projectors, record, videotape materials and other miscellaneous items. There was "some damage to the neighborhood of \$10,000 in contents damaged." Page said. "I would say between \$700 and \$800."

Admin. Assistant R. Ann Tangelhoff, OGB, said the fire would cost an additional several thousand dollars to remove the damaged area. "The cleaning, structural damage, repair and cleanup will run another several thousand— somewhere between \$300 and \$1000," Tangelhoff said.

"The cost in damage of this fire is the biggest in history," Fire Chief Dr. Ronald Smith, OGB, said. Firemen Tom Swanson and Bob Benavise reported seeing smoke coming from the roof of Tommy Hall as they were phoned back to the dormitory. They took their report to Life Safety Services, located in the basement of Tommy Hall about 10 feet above the hall. "We did not report it until 10:00," he said.

Life Safety attended the scene and called the fire department. Firefighters began clearing out of the building and within minutes the fire was out.

The fire department had some difficulty clearing the fire as smoke could not be seen coming from the roof. Apparently, as when the fire started, the smoke rose to the roof.

**Fire continued on page 4**

1984

May 5, 1988      Volume 101      Number 7      Collegeville, MN

## Roof of Old Gym sustains damage in blaze

### Fireworks cause night fire

**By Robert Speltz**

A fireworks fire in the upper portion of a fire which broke out suddenly on the roof of the SJU Old Gym Thursday, April 23. The blaze ignited before a crowd of several hundred SJU/CSB students enjoying a JEC sponsored outdoor evening concert on the SJU Mall. No one was injured in the brief fire which officials say caused \$15,000 in damage.

According to Roman Pace, OGB, vice president for student affairs, one of those reported in connection with the fire was sponsored by Michael Lane, OGB, 575, director of Life Safety Services, who conducted a fire drill then the fire broke out.

1988

## Pinestock to be held

**By Robert Speltz**

Despite widespread rumors to the contrary, the John Brown Council (JBC) 1988 Pinestock event will take place as scheduled on May 14. Rumors began circulating campus-wide this week that Roman Pace, OGB, SJU vice president for student affairs, had suspended the event until those responsible for the April 22 fire on the roof of the Old Gym were identified. The fire occurred during an outdoor concert on the SJU Mall sponsored by the JBC.

Last yesterday, one of those reported in connection with the incident was confirmed and identified to Michael Lane, OGB, SJU director of Life Safety. At that time, the vice president admitted involvement in the fireworks incident as he reported a loss of approximately \$15,000 in property.

Other SJU students likewise gave accounts which led to the fire. In particular students have yet come

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Page 4

## Two fires plague SJU during J-Term

**By Sean Murray and Tom Dudley**  
Editorial Staff Writers

Two fires occurred on St. John's campus during this past January Term. One of the fires was in the South Tower of the Sexton Commons and the other was in 102 Bernard Hall. The Sexton Commons fire happened late on the night of Jan. 8, and the Bernard fire was on Jan. 15.

The Sexton Commons fire was reported at approximately 11:00 p.m. Flames from the fire extended approximately 18 feet from the top of an extended tower of the structure. Sparks from the fire were going in a southwesterly direction over Tommy Hall toward the Butcher Shoppe. Students gathered around the walkway between Engel and Tansing Hall waiting for firefighters to put the fire out.

Senior James Elmquist, a student manager of the SJU Information Center, was among the first students to observe the Sexton Commons fire. "I was walking out from the information desk, and I heard this boom! I looked over [towards the new student center] and there were flames all over the place."

1993

February 18, 1993

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1993

Triplett estimated the cost of the Sexton Commons fire to be between \$20,000 and \$30,000, all of it to be paid by the insurance company of the Kesteven Construction Company. This price may rise pending the completion of the investigation.

The fire in Bernard Hall started at approximately 9:25 p.m., and it was extinguished at 9:45 p.m. The fire started when an SJU student left a candle burning on top of the VCR in his room which he went to the Butcher Shoppe. The smoke alarm in Bernard Hall went off, and security alerted the fire department.

"When we got there, we could not see a thing in the hall, not even our hands in front of our faces. The door to the room with the fire had been left wide open, so that is why there was so much smoke in the room," Ambrose said. Ambrose also said that when their air tanks became empty, they had to follow the water hose to get outside.

Due to the toxic air after the fire, all of the residents of Bernard Hall were evacuated for two nights. Dennis Lutz, Resident Assistant, said the fire was the insurance company of Peetney's parents.

construction company. The fire truck had to take extra precautions in avoiding the various obstacles on the construction site. This particular students have yet come

Tommie: 1984 Oct. 18 p.1

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/36375/show/36355>

Rat Hall: 1988-05-05 p.01 Old Gym (roof)

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/37404/show/37384>

Sexton/Bernie: 1993 Feb. 18 p. 4

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/38245/show/38228>



Upper left photo from Abbey Archives; 2014 photos by Nick Moe, OSB



# The Record

The College of St. Benedict/St. John's University Student Newspaper

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## Paint shop burns to ground



The SJU Paint Shop was destroyed by a fire on Jan. 14. The cause is not yet known and the rubble will be removed following an insurance investigation.

## Fire destroys most of SJU Paint Shop

### Cause of blaze still unknown, under investigation

By Caitlin Swanson

cbjsurerecord.com

On Tuesday, Jan. 14, several students of the paint shop at St. John's University learned about a fire that destroyed most of the building.

The building, located on the southeast part of the SJU campus, was built in 1911 and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

A cause for the fire has not yet been determined and is still under investigation by the insurance company and the Saint

Joseph Fire Department Fire Chief Stephen Barlow.

Just steps from the site located on the edge of the SJU campus by the Power Plant have not yet been determined in light of the insurance investigation.

"We are working with our insurance provider as we plan for the removal of the building rubble. The definite date has been set to remove the debris at this time," Physical Plant Director Bill Brown said.

An estimate of damages also unknown, said Saint John's University Director of Media Relations Michael Hennemoch in an email.

"The call (that there was a fire) came out at 1:28 p.m. and I was on the scene three minutes later along with the first engine," Barlow said.

The Saint Joe Fire Department and the St. Joseph Fire Department also responded to the fire through a mutual aid agreement among the fire departments. The Saint

Joseph Fire Department provided roughly 15 people, the majority of whom were students, Barlow estimated that together, Saint and St. Joseph provided another 15 fire fighters.

One firefighter from the Saint Joseph Fire Department was treated for possible smoke inhalation.

"He had been transported to the hospital to check him out," Barlow said.

"It would have been the smoke or just the adrenaline taking its toll when the engine, but he was fine and released that evening."

Although the building is considered a historic place, the fire fighters handled the incident like any other.

"We would love that building but any other and try to mitigate the fire as quickly as possible," Barlow said.

"We do the what we need to do."

With the cold winter challenges for fire fighters, they must ensure that the trucks and hoses do not freeze.

"Keeping your people warm is always important, and luckily

we were close enough to the fire department that we could do that," Barlow said.

"We really fell back on our training."

This is the first fire on campus that Barlow has experienced in his 20 years at Saint John's as the fire chief.

Pt. Raphael Kwoy, CEO of designed the building, which is used to house the paint and finishing department of Saint

John's, said Hennemoch. It was originally designed to be used as the laundry building.



The rubble of the paint shop after the fire. It took approximately 28 firefighters to put the fire out on Jan. 14. One firefighter was treated for smoke inhalation.

## Fires at St. John's

1873: First Mill

1939: Woodshop

1877: Old Stone House

1964: Ski Hill Shelter

1882: Second Mill

1969? Maple Sugar Shack

1883: Indianbush

1984: Tommie basement

1903: First Chapel

1988: Old Gym roof

1927: Cow Barn

1993: Sexton

2014: Paint Shop



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