

Whodunnit?

By DON MIDDLETON and JOHN ADAMS

College Station, Texas. Sunday, May 27, 1912. 12:15 a.m. A senior cadet is awakened from a deep sleep in his dormitory room by a buddy. Slowly he dresses and makes his way to the depot of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad, a few hundred yards away at the entrance to the College. Arriving at approximately 12:30

a.m., he relieves a fellow cadet who has been on guard duty since 10 p.m. the previous day. 1 a.m. Clyde Threlkel, a worker at the College power plant, takes his usual mid-shift break and strolls to the Main Building, in the geographical center of the campus. He enters the College Post Office, which is never locked, located on the first floor of the building. Retrieving the contents of General Delivery Drawer No. 5, Threlkel pauses

Something went 'thump' in the night

momentarily as the early morning silence is broken by the sounds of chairs being shuffled on an upper floor. Taking little heed of the noise, Threlkel leaves the building and returns to work.

2 a.m. Senior Cadets G.W. Ashford and W.G. Church are studying for an upcoming exam in their room in Ross Hall. Through the window they can see the dark outline of the Main Building. From the darkened building comes the sound of a large can being knocked over and rolled down the supposedly deserted halls. Ashford comments in passing to Church regarding the disturbance. Moments later Ashford gazes out the window and is surprised to see the reflection of a bright glow in the windows of the Chemistry Building, located on the opposite side of the Main Building from Ross Hall. With Church close at his heels, Ashford dashes out the door of the dormitory and hurries toward Old Main.

At the same instant, the cadet on duty at the Railroad depot notices a strange light in the upper windows of the Main Building. Sensing disaster, the cadet sprints down the dirt road

that runs a half mile directly to Old Main, drawing his pistol and firing both rounds into the air.

The cry of "Fire! Fire in the Main Building!" goes up around the sleeping campus. The alert Corps bugler quickly sounds the fire call as cadets, teachers and staff members begin pouring out of houses and dorms and flock to the burning edifice.

R.R. Rosa, believing he had overslept his watch, struggles from his bed. Hearing the shouts of his neighbors, he looks out his window to see Old Main engulfed in flames. He reaches for his trousers but finds that the legs have been tied in knots and it is ten minutes before he can pull them on. By the time he reaches the Main Building there are 500 to 600 people clustered around it.

During the next two hours chaos reigns. Fearless cadets and teachers risk their lives in countless attempts to save valuable documents, records and books from the inferno.

Efforts to fight the fire with extinguishers and hoses prove futile. By 4 a.m. the once-magnificent structure has been reduced to a blackened brick skeleton.

The Main Building, built in 1876, was the nerve center of the growing campus. At the time it burned it housed the offices of the President and the Commandant, the Exchange Store, Library, Post Office, Athletic Department, Student Press, Archives, as well as other vital offices, classrooms and assorted drawing rooms.

The four-story building was erected at a cost of \$100,000 and over the years had served as a dormitory, mess hall and residence for the

teaching staff.

When the first students came to A&MC they found the Main Building standing in the middle of a barren prairie, with Gathright Hall a few yards away.

On the morning of May 27, 1912 it stands in the middle of a bustling college campus, its elaborate architecture obliterated, cherry-red brick walls charred and grey slate roof lying crumbled among the ashes.

Monday, May 28, 1912. Room 25, Civil Engineering Building, later to be named Nagle Hall.

7:30 p.m. Professor D.W. Spence calls to order the committee appointed by President R.T. Milner to investigate the circumstances surrounding the burning of Old Main. Other members of the committee include Professors E.J. Fermier and Wilmon Newell and Capt. C.L. Fenton, Commandant of Cadets.

Also in attendance are President Milner and State Fire Marshall Wallace English.

The committee has been authorized by the president to call any and all witnesses who might shed light on the confounding situation. Their task is to determine, if possible, the cause of the tragic fire and to leave no stone unturned in pursuit of that goal.

The proceedings begin with a question directed to the committee by Fire Marshall English.

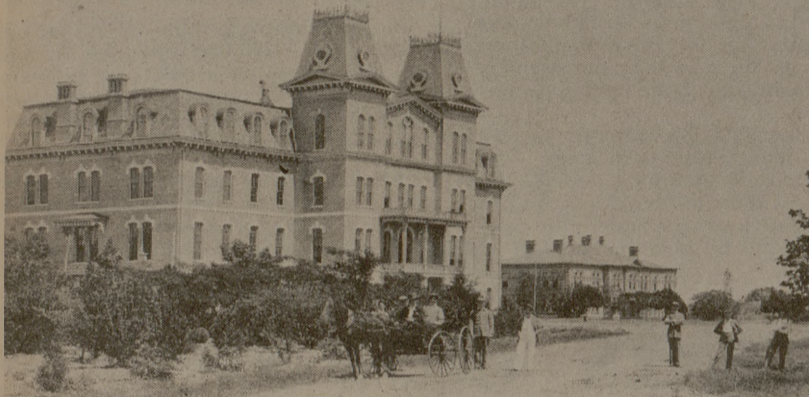
Mr. English: "Where did the fire originate?"

Capt. Fenton: "That's what we're here to find out."

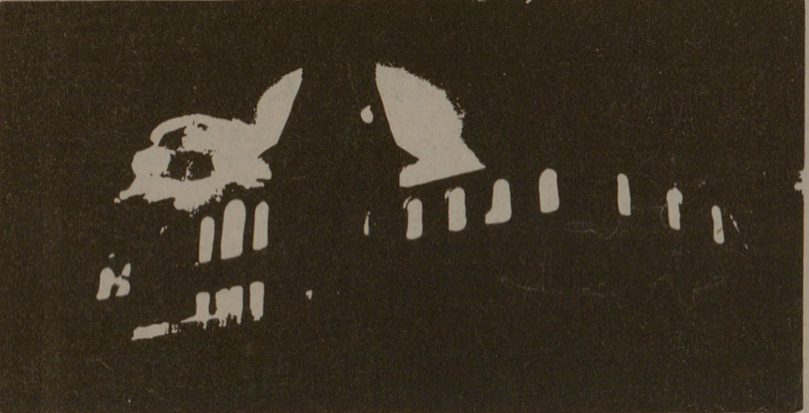
Who, if anyone, burned Old Main? And Why?

To be continued, next week.

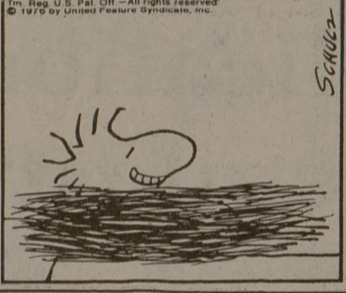
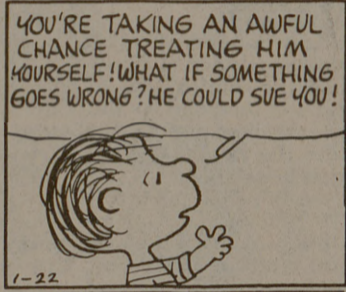
Before . . .



During . . .



. . . and After



The Battalion

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