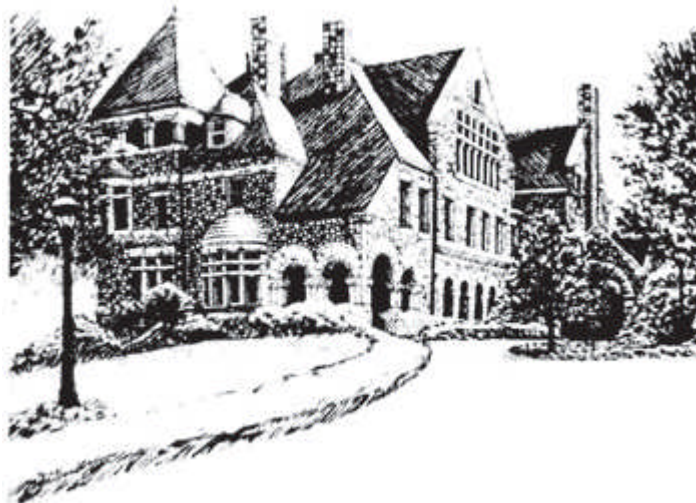


The Fire of 1889



From the *South Bend Tribune* of October 9, 1889:

... "It has been years since South Bend has had so disastrous a fire where mere pecuniary loss is concerned, as the one this morning which destroyed the Clem Studebaker residence, Tippecanoe Place. The building and its furnishing represented a money value to Mr. Studebaker of, perhaps, \$300,000 on which the insurance was so small as to cut scarcely any figure. The building was practically fireproof from the outside, with its stone walls, tile roof and copper facings, while on the inside the only fire, aside from that under the boilers in the sub-basement, was in the kitchen range. So safely were Mr. Studebaker's commands to the builders that the danger from fire on the inside was so small that many people thought it folly for Mr. Studebaker to carry any insurance and he did carry but little. The amount will cover but a fraction of the loss, while no amount of money can replace many keepsakes that were lost in the general ruin.

"The fire was first discovered by Mrs. Studebaker at about two o'clock this morning. She awakened and smelled smoke and immediately arose and began to search for it, at the same time arousing her aunt and the domestics. She came down the grand stairway, and traced the odor to a small closet under the rear stairway, where some oil rags used for rubbing the floors and woodwork had been thrown. When she opened the door the air turned the fire into flames and they shot out so she could not close the door. She hurried up two flights of stairs to the third floor where her grandchild, Mr. and Mrs. George M. Studebaker's little son, was asleep, and grabbing the child hurried down the stairs. From the third floor there is but one stairway, which runs around the elevator. The flames had shot up the elevator shaft, but it was Mrs. Studebaker's only avenue of escape and she came down through the smoke and flames shielding her grandchild's face under her arms, and while terribly burned herself, she saved the child with only slight burns on its hand and leg.

"Before finding the fire, yet knowing there must be one in the house, Mrs. Studebaker, with great presence of mind aroused the male help and called them to bring the garden hose and to go for Mr. L.P. Skerritt, Mr. Studebaker's private secretary, who lived just across the street. Mr. Skerritt was the first outsider to reach there. He found Mrs. Studebaker half sitting and half lying in the

northwest portico, and partly insensible. Dr. Dunning reached there a moment later, and they carried Mrs. Studebaker to Mr. Skerritt's residence where she now is. Her hands, arms, breast and part of her body are terribly burned, as well as a portion of her face and her feet. The smoke she has inhaled has injured her throat and stomach, and she requires the most careful nursing. The relapse after the intense excitement and terrible experience she passed through has naturally left her weak aside from her injuries.

"As soon as Mr. Skerritt had seen that Mrs. Studebaker received proper attention he turned back to the house and began moving books and other valuables with the help of the few who had got there, and kept this up until the flames drove them from the building. The last handful of books that Mr. Skerritt got from the shelves barely escaped a tongue of flame that shot down from the ceiling almost into his face.

"If the fire department could have reached the fire with their usual alacrity the building might have been saved, but everything worked against them. The alarm was late being turned in from the Jefferson and Taylor street box, owing to the key being thrown from a house there and lost in the grass. An alarm was sounded from 14 and the firemen promptly responded. Finally a telephone message told them where the fire was. All this took time and through no fault of any of the firemen. To make matters worse both Jefferson and Washington street were blockaded with sewer and paving improvements, and the hose carts had to make a detour by way of Market [LaSalle] street and then south on Taylor to get to Tippecanoe Place. This consumed more valuable time, so that when they were ready for water it was impossible to go into the building on the south side where the fire started. A cross-fight was then made through the building from east to west through the main hall and the library, which at this time was a mass of flames. This was so successful that the fire traveled no further north on any but the top floor, and this, with the rood, was practically burned at this stage of the fight. All the boys could do was to hold the fire in check at this point. Immense quantities of water were thrown by daylight and more or less had been thrown all day long to protect the men who are working on the debris.

"The walls are left standing, but the roof is gone except a small patch on the east side. The suite of rooms of Miss Studebaker, on the floor below, are badly damaged, while those of Mr. and Mrs. Clem Studebaker are nearly destroyed together with the hall on that floor. The grand stairway, leading down to the main hall, is nearly all destroyed, with its handsome carvings, winged lion and massive balustrade. On the main floor the reception room and parlor are untouched by fire, owing to the efforts of the fire department, but they will be badly damaged by water. The library is entirely burned, and it was one of the costliest rooms in the house. The sitting room south of it is damaged by water and smoke and the doors are burned out. The main hall, with its handsome oak walls and ceiling is a wreck. The rear stairway, elevator shaft and telephone room [south bathroom] are entirely burned. Mr. Studebaker's "den" just across from these is a sad sight. It was his favorite room. . .

"The floor below the main one has not suffered so badly and most of the damage is from water. The magnificent dining rooms, breakfast room and hall were ankle deep in water this morning. The glass in the windows is broken and the leather hangings on the dining room walls are destroyed. The other rooms on this floor are injured but slightly. In the basement the water is from a foot to two feet deep in the bowling alley and other rooms.

"All in all the ruin is a sad and sickening sight. Mr. Skerritt has a large force of men at work

hauling away the debris and getting it in as good shape as possible by the time Mr. Studebaker returns. It will be some days before the loss can be fully established, but it will take at the very lowest \$75,000 to place the house in its former condition, exclusive of the furniture and works of art.

"The ground for Tippecanoe Place, as Mr. Studebaker called his home, was broken during the last week of September 1886, and the house was not completed until February of this year. (1889) It was slowly and carefully built by the best workmen Mr. Studebaker could secure in this city, for he intended it to be his masterpiece of the many buildings he had constructed in this city. The site it occupied on the bluff, which runs diagonally through his grounds, was the very spot where the council fires of Tippecanoe once burned. The building, for the walls still stand, is of Indiana field stone, with sand stone and granite trimmings. The field stone is apparently unharmed by this fire, but much of the granite and sand stone is badly damaged and may necessitate the removal of a portion of the walls. The structure has a frontage of 67 feet on Washington street and 102 feet on Taylor street and is divided up as follows, beginning at the bottom: There is a sub-basement for heating purposes solely. In it is located the boilers for supplying the hot water with which the building is indirectly heated, and the multitude of pipes necessary for its distribution. The boiler room is 28 by 16 by 18 feet high, the coal room is 18 x 16, the wood room is 16 x 12, and the cellar, which extends outside the building underground, 12 x 12. In the basement, which has an outlook on the terrace, is dining room, 86 x 20; the breakfast room, 18 x 24; the cellar, 22 x 12; the main hall, 26 x 45; the back hall, 17 x 20; in which is located the hydraulic elevator; the kitchen, 18 x 15; bathrooms, closets, vaults, etc.

"The main entrance to the first floor above the basement is at the northwest corner of the building, surrounded by stoned columns and is 15 x 13 feet in dimensions. The vestibule is 6 x 10; the main hall 45 x 27; the reception room in the front center. 16 x 13; the statuary room adjoining, 11 x 13; the parlor at the northeast corner, 36 x 20; the octagon library at the east front, 22 x 24; and the sitting room on the same front, 22 x 20. From the library and sitting room there are exits to the loggis [verandas] on the east front. Mr. Studebaker's office room is located in the southwest corner and is 15 x 19 in dimensions. The remainder of the space is occupied by the lavatory, 9 x 15; various closets, three flights of stairs, the grand staircase, a spiral flight around the elevator and one in the rear for the servants, and the back hall, 21 x 18. The western entrance from the porte-cochere is 7 x 9 and the vestibule is 8 x 8. On the east front there are two rotundas for flowers.

"On the second floor the sitting room, 21 x 21, occupies the southeast corner with an adjoining bedroom 14 x 21. There is another bedroom 24 x 18 on the east front, and a third in the round tower at the southeast corner, 21 x 20. On the west side are bedrooms 21 x 14, 16 x 18, and 19 x 15, and dressing rooms, etc. occupy the remainder of the space.

"On the third floor there is a balcony 16 x 16 at the northeast corner, and on the east front bedrooms 21 x 16, 24 x 16, and the tower room 16 x 26. On the west side is the art gallery, 32 x 28, and three bedrooms each 12 x 16, with linen closets, bathrooms, etc.

"The plaza [veranda] at the rear is 40 feet long on the south side with 80 feet on the east side, with which the sitting room communicates.

"The house stands on an elevation which gives its north front and the greater portion of the east

front a full story below the "bluff" as it is called. The south and west side of the house reach upon the bluff, and all the entrances on this level. . . "

So the fire was extinguished. Workmen shoveled up the debris of charred wood, cinders, burned carpets and roof tiling and other workmen hauled it away. Hot water was run through the pipes to aid the drying process and a large canvas was stretched over the top floor in lieu of the burned-out roof. Ten days later the Studebaker's entertained one hundred fifty members of the Pan-American Congress for luncheon, following their tour of South Bend's industries. With the determination that he had always shown, Mr. Studebaker started with the plans for the rebuilding process.