

Winnsboro fire of 1888

W.R. Doty

Episcopal church

R.S. DesPortes

Capt. J.A. Gaillard

Jasper Gibson, colored

H.J. Groeschel

Jenkins house

H. Landecker

L. Landecker

T.W. Lauderdale

Jno. P. Matthews'

R.J. McCarley

Rev. J. Obear

John Russell

B. Sugenheimer

Timms' store

SWEPT BY FLAMES!

Winnsboro Visited by a Most Disastrous Conflagration.

A Number of Buildings in the Business Portion of Town Burned Down – Heroic Efforts of the Firemen –
Loss \$25,000

The most destructive conflagration which has visited Winnsboro since Sherman burned the town, occurred on Thursday night about 8:20 o'clock. As Mr. R.J. McCarley was going home, just as he passed the Episcopal church he saw a small blaze in the rear W.R. Doty & Co.'s stable. He immediately gave the alarm, but before he reached the engine house and before the alarm bell had tapped a dozen times the whole building was a mass of flames. Some men who were in the immediate neighborhood rushed to the stable, broke down the doors and drove out what stock they could in the extremely short time they had. The stable was filled with fodder, hay and other combustible matter, and so rapidly did it burn that in five minutes it was doomed. The fire department was out promptly and soon had streams of water upon the buildings. So rapidly did the flames spread, however, that it was soon apparent that nothing could be saved. All the building in the neighborhood of the stable were wooden structures and afforded ready fuel for the flames. The stores occupied by W.R. Doty & Co., and L. Landecker & Co., were soon enveloped, and in an incredible short time were burned. The flames then spread on either side burning the Jenkins house on the north, and several tenement houses in the rear, the engine house of the hand engine company, and Timms' store.

As the fire originated in the rear of the stable which is immediately back of the Episcopal church, this building was soon in flames. The fire raged so fiercely that for a time firemen and citizens were puzzled to know what to do. All the houses on the opposite side of the street are wooden buildings and as the wind was blowing in that direction it seemed almost impossible to save them. The firemen, seeing it useless to attempt to extinguish the burning buildings turned their efforts to saving the buildings on the opposite side. The buildings in immediate danger were the Harden building, the stores occupied by H. Landecker and H.J. Groeschel, the residence of B. Sugenheimer, the Lauderdale building and the store and residence of R.W. Phillips. All of these, at one time or another, were on fire from sparks and the intense heat. Notwithstanding this the firemen fought bravely, and with their faces scorched they nobly stood their ground and played streams of water upon the endangered houses. Companies of men were also stationed upon the houses and notwithstanding there was an abundant supply of water, the roofs caught from sparks and the heat, and, in some instances, burned holes in the roofs. Boag's store and opera house were also in imminent danger, but both were saved.

The wind was blowing almost in an easterly direction, and the sparks from the burning buildings were carried across the town into the county a mile or more out. From these sparks Crawford's stable, the Duval House, Jno. P. Matthews' residence, Mrs. Mobley's residence and probably others caught, but a force of hands on the different roofs prevented their destruction. Mr. Doty saved nothing from his store – except papers and money in his safe, which was found all right on opening the safe the next morning. In addition to the total loss of his merchandise, storehouse, stable and provender, five mules and three hogs were burned, and their piteous moans were heard above the roar of the flames. Mr. Timms succeeded in opening his safe before the total destruction of his store and secured his papers and other valuables. He saved about \$1,000 in goods. Landecker & Co. succeeded in saving a small portion of their stock. The hearse, which was stored in the engine house, was consumed. T.W. Lauderdale had his goods injured by water and lost his plate-glass front, valued at \$60, by the same means. The Jenkins house and the houses in the rear were totally destroyed, as were also most of the contents. The building occupied by John Russell was also in danger, but being new it did not so readily ignite as the old buildings. The losses and insurance are placed at the following, which is entirely within the correct figure:

Doty – store, stock, merchandise and stable	\$15,000
Laudecker – merchandise and building	2,500
Timms – goods and store	3,200
Episcopal Church	2,500
Jenkins – building and outhouses	1,000
Engine house and hearse	1,000
Total loss	\$25,200

Against which there is only \$1,100 insurance - \$600 on building occupied by Laudecker & Co. and \$500 on their stock. This makes the net loss \$24,100.

The only accident was the fall of Jasper Gibson, colored, from the Harden house. The fall was over twenty feet, but in falling he struck another colored man standing on a ladder, which somewhat broke the fall, and he suffered only a contusion of the head.

Two much praise cannot be given the firemen who so nobly did their work, and to Mr. R.J. McCarley, the chief of the department, who so efficiently directed the work.

The origin of the fire is a mystery. Mr. Doty and others are inclined to believe it incendiary, while others contend that it may have caught from smoking in the stable. This is the third or fourth fire in the vicinity, which inclines many to the incendiary theory.

The destruction of the Episcopal church is a heavy blow to that congregation, and leaves them without a place of worship. All the movables in the church were saved except some of the seats. The memorial window to the late Rev. J. Obear was destroyed. The congregation are not dismayed, but have already announced their determination to rebuild. Other places of worship have been offered, but it is not known at present what steps will be taken.

The fire was seen for miles in the country, many coming in with their laborers to assist.

The following telegram was received by Capt. J.A. Gaillard:

“Draw on me for one hundred dollars to help rebuild the Episcopal church.

“R.S. DESPORTES.

“Columbia, S.C.”

[*The News and Herald* (Winnsboro, South Carolina), date illegible, 1888.]