

In My Home Town

Ashland Museum Members Bulletin
Fall 2013



The Museum's new exhibit, "Ashland Reborn: 1865 - 1900", builds on our inaugural exhibit by documenting the growth and change in Ashland's schools, churches, businesses and homes during the post-Civil War period. The exhibit includes information about the Great Fire of 1893. We thought you might enjoy reading more about this pivotal event in Ashland's history.

Visit the Ashland Museum in person or via our website to learn more about how Ashland grew from a resort along the tracks called Slash Cottage to the town we know today.

Ashes over Ashland! The Great Fire of 1893

Although Ashland is named for the Kentucky plantation of Henry Clay, one of Hanover County's most famous native sons, there was one night when Ashland was truly "*Ash Land*."

At four a.m. on the morning of July 26, 1893, a "fire started in a stable behind Mrs. Sinclair's millinery and jewelry shop," located in the row of business buildings on the west side of the town's railroad tracks and south of Hanover Avenue.

Desperately, the small local fire department struggled to contain the fire, but the flames quickly spread to other buildings in the block. According to one account, the fire was finally prevented from spreading to the residences located further south when, "Nat Lancaster's one-story store was shoved off its foundations to create an open space."

An article published in the Richmond newspaper, *The Times*, described the fire and its result:

It spread with great rapidity, and within a few minutes it had gotten into [Mrs. Sinclair's shop] dwelling and other outhouses. As soon as the cry of "fire" was made, which was very



This is the first issue of *In My Home Town*, a Bulletin for Members of the Ashland Museum. We hope to publish quarterly. Future issues will bring articles on interesting or notable people, places, events or things, and memories related to Ashland, Virginia.

We hope you will enjoy receiving this Bulletin, but if not, please call, write or send us an email to unsubscribe.

shortly after it started, the neighbors turned out and worked as best they could with buckets of water and saturated blankets, but the devouring flames had gained such headway that soon the whole triangle, bounded by Railroad Avenue, Hanover Avenue and an alley-way on the south side, was a mass of fire.

The Ashland Fire Department were early on the grounds, but owing to the fierceness of the fire, little could be done, as they only have a truck and buckets. The block [is] a mass of smoldering ruins.[1]

The effect of the fire on the business district was substantial. According to local historian Rosanne Shalf's book, "Ashland, Ashland," the source of the quoted material and historic information in this article, by 1894 the number of licensed business-holders in Ashland had been reduced from 50 to 32.

Today we can still see one result of the fire: the somewhat uniform architecture of the buildings in that formerly fire-ravaged area: Numbers 100 (The Iron Horse Restaurant) to 108 (The Caboose Wine and Cheese) S. Railroad Avenue. Shalf's book reports, "In place of the one-story frame shops that had characterized the area before 1893, the new ones were mostly two-story brick, Italianate-commercial style. They also had metal roofs, and the windows in the rear had metal shutters, fire deterrents that insurance companies liked to see."



Yes, Ashland had its Great Fire. But the years that followed demonstrated one of our town's most remarkable characteristics: its ability to adapt, survive and continue to thrive.

1. "Big Blaze in Ashland." The times [Richmond: VA] 27 July 1893: 4. Library of Congress: Chronicling America Website at chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85034438/1893-07-27/ed-1/seq-4/

For more information, see: Rosanne Groat Shalf, *Ashland, Ashland: the story of a turn-of-the-century railroad town*, (Lawrenceville: Brunswick Publishing, 1994), p. 104-109. This book is available for purchase at the Ashland Museum.

Editors: Nancy Kackley and Susan Tucker. This issue's article was written by Elizabeth Mathes.

Your continued support keeps the doors open and the lights on at the Ashland Museum and the Red Caboose. Please donate at our website or by US mail.

We always need volunteers to staff the Museum and for special projects. Contact us if you are interested in getting involved.

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Museum Hours:
Saturdays: 10:00 am to 2:00 pm
Sundays: 12:30 to 2:30 pm