

## **Pottsville Fire Department**

### **Looking Back**

#### **85 Years Ago – New Year's Eve**

#### **Minersville & Pottsville**

#### **Mike Glore**

12/31/1933 – STILL – 05:30 – Call for help from Minersville; Economy store, 2 double buildings on fire; Chief sent West End.

Mr. and Mrs. George Bagdanavage lived at 11-13 Sunbury Street above the Economy Store with their two sons. A boarder, John Nickimchas, and his son, Albert, resided with them. Around 5AM that morning, Nickimchas began to smell smoke. Investigating, he made his way to the basement to find the chimney extremely hot. He returned to his room on the third floor and discovered smoke now pushing from the baseboard at the chimney line. As he woke Mr. & Mrs. Bagdanavage, he instructed his son to run to the corner to pull the hook on the fire alarm telegraph box. Bagdanavage also ran next door to the Gobitas Minersville for a fire that gutted the third floor of 11-13 Sunbury Street and heavily damaged the 2nd and 3rd floors of 15-17 Sunbury Street home at 15-17 Sunbury Street and advised them of the fire.

Minersville companies arrived with heavy smoke pushing from under the tin roofs of the home 3-story frame row home. They immediately stretched chemical and booster lines into the homes in an attempt to expose and extinguish the fire. Fire soon had possession of both 2nd and 3rd floors of the Bagdanavage home. Crews withdrew from the home and began to operate heavy exterior streams. As fire extended to the Gobitas home, a call was made to Pottsville for help. West End's 1928 Ahrens-Fox 900 gpm piston pumper was sent.

It was bitterly cold during the fire, which caused \$10,000 in damages. Minersville Asst. Fire Chief George Ulmer was injured in a partial floor collapse as a bed spring fell through the floor above, striking him in the head. The fire was believed to have originated as a result of an overheated chimney. Companies began to return to quarters at 0800 that morning. Total fire loss was estimated at \$10,000. 11-13 Sunbury St still stands today.

12/31/1933 – Box 18 – 22:02 – 109 N. Centre St; City Treasurer’s Office in Brennan building; Cause: Unknown; Loss: \$3000.

That Sunday evening, New Year’s Eve, a Mr. Ebert was walking on Centre St when he spotted smoke coming from the offices of Tax Collector C.P. Hoffman. He ran to Box 18 at Centre & Market. Fire originating in a closet in the Tax Collector’s office spread to the interior void spaces and stairwell. The office was heavily damaged as were the offices of the Schuylkill County Fair Association. Using both booster and chemical lines, firefighters had the fire under control in ½ an hour. Two Humane firefighters suffered minor injuries.



Minersville 11-13 and 15-17 Sunbury Street as the frame buildings looked several years ago and as they generally would have existed at the time of the fire.



Minersville 11-13 Sunbury Street as it generally looks today.



Mountaineer Hose Company of Minersville's 1921 White triple combination pumper that operated on Sunbury Street in 1933.



Rescue H & L of Minersville combination city service hook and ladder truck that was originally a 1915 American LaFrance Type 14 with a 40 gallon chemical tank and 235' of ground ladders.



Scott Mattson photo of West End's 1928 Ahrens-Fox that operated in Minersville and Pottsville in 1933.



Downtown Pottsville aerial map circa 1936 with 109 N. Centre Street marked with a red “x.”  
Note how congested the area was at the time.



A bonus shot... From Pottsville's Christmas parade in 1973 with 109 N. Centre Street marked in the background and Phoenix's 1959 American LaFrance 100' TDA carrying Santa. All the buildings from 109 north (right) were subsequently razed.