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# The Great Fire of Tottenham - June 18, 1895

On June 18, 1895, fire swept through Tottenham, leaving much destruction. The following is an excerpt from the *Cardwell Sentinel*, which was printed at the corner of Queen and George streets, on July 24, 1884:

## Fire Protection Warning - July 24, 1884

In view of last week's serious fire in Alliston, we have been requested to announce a meeting at Granger's Hall, 1 Queen St North, to consider the advisability of securing a fire engine for Tottenham. What was Alliston's fate last week might be ours next, and a small expenditure in time might save large losses in the future.

The village is rapidly growing and good, substantial houses going up, yet in older portions frameworks are standing. Let us do our part in guarding against such a calamity.

There are dozens of places in the village littered with dry chips and rubbish that a spark or match might result in a burnt hamlet.

How ironic that, several years before the great fire, the above warning was made! The following account of the fire is taken from a newspaper

article dated June 19, 1895. Eighty buildings were lost altogether.

'The village of Tottenham was swept by a terrible fire. About three o'clock flames broke out in McKinney's foundry, in the south-western part of the village (at the corner of Queen and Albert streets, where Urbanski's Garage now stands). As a strong south-westerly wind was blowing at this time, the flames spread rapidly towards the east and north.

Everything being so dry fires started simultaneously in several places, so that while the fire engine was doing good work in one direction, scores of places elsewhere were in flames, which spread so rapidly that the people could do little more than helplessly look on.

Albert, Richmond, Victoria and Mill Streets were swept on both sides, together with a considerable portion of Queen Street South.

About eighty buildings were burned, including the foundry, Mercer's store, Potter's block, Lyons shop, Methodist Church. The loss is estimated at \$125,000.00. Allandale sent down a fire engine, which did good work. A large number of Beeton and Alliston citizens came over with a quantity of hose, which was badly needed. Some three hundred volunteers from the camp at Beeton also came on a special train, and all the citizens and soldiers worked like Trojans, and to their unsparing efforts may be attributed the fact that even so much of the town was saved.

The business places burned were those of D. McKinly, foundry; D.C. Fraser, shoemaker; W. & C. Brown, woollen store; T.G. Wolfe, two implement shops; H. Garrity, campmaker; J.A. Mercer, flour and feed; J.V. Childs, woodworker; J.C. Anderson, blacksmith; D. Martin, baker shop; J. Henderson, shoemaker; W. Dillane, barber; J. Riddell, shoemaker; Verney & Co., furniture; F. Brawley, blacksmith; W.H. Sanford, druggist; H. Stone, insurance agent; J. Anderson, butcher; S. Windsor, shoemaker; T.J. Turner, tailor; T. Moffatt, factory.

List of dwellings: Potter block, J.A. Mercer, Mrs Phillips, two houses;

John Hay, Mrs Lorey, T.G. Wolfe, P. Garrity, J. McDermott, Mrs Logan, Mrs McDermott, T. Moffatt, P. Doyle, J. Austin, Walter Potter, B. Fanning, H. Williams, J. Preston, Miss Mitchell, W. Henry, W. Line, J. Gregory; Lyons block, T. Bruce, D.C. Fraser, A. Gunn, John Long, A. Totten, H. Stone, W.H. Sanford, F. Brawley, Methodist Church, W.J. Verney, John Anderson, Mrs Austin, John C. Anderson, Mrs Woods, Misses Heenan, H. Ledgerwood, T.E. Williams, G.M. Robinson, H. Hutt, Newbury property, Mrs A. Wilson, F. Wright, J. Aikens, J.M. Lyons, barn Y.T.M. Greenaway, barns and 1,000 bushels grain; T.J. Turner, G.P. Hughes' livery stable and other vacant stores and buildings.'

## THE GREAT TOTTENHAM FIRE

June 18th, 1895

**A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT OF THE FIRE** Fortunately, though she was only a small child at the time, Jean Gordon Gilchrist, daughter of Tottenham merchant, George Gordon, vividly remembers the Great Fire of 1895. Here is her eye-witness account:

The terrible Tottenham fire of 1895; it was a very hot windy day and my mother chanced to say, 'This would be a terrible day for a fire.' It was very shortly after that when the fire alarm went and word got around very quickly that the foundry towards the south end of the village had been throwing out sparks and a fire was travelling from the south toward the north of the village. The southern part, especially toward the east, was simply devoured. It reached along Queen Street (the main street) as far as the store that belonged to my father, George Gordon. They had got it, they thought, under control, two buildings south of there. But I can remember very distinctly the wet blankets being put on the roof of the building and the furniture and dishes and so on being carried out. They were able to control and contain the fire two doors away. There was terrible confusion, but most fortunately for the safety of the village, Colonel Tyrerwhitt of the militia was having a summer camp over by Beeton. By horseback or some way or other, Colonel Tyrerwhitt and his men got word of this great disaster and they came en masse and they really saved the village. The devastation was terrible - people in the north and the west just opened their homes. My grandmother was paralyzed from a stroke and I remember, with great worry and anxiety, seeing her being carried out and placed in a carriage drawn by men being taken to safety in the northwest part of town. The reason that the men were hauling the buggy was that there was no time to even locate horses, much less hitch them to a vehicle. We were like wild little children, running around. Nobody had any time for us and I remember having rescued a kitten, partially burned, and wrapped it in a scarf of my father's. I went around holding this kitten in this woollen scarf; the poor thing was partly singed and pretty close to death but I didn't realize this, just that it was a comfort for me to have this kitten. As soon as I was discovered with the dying kitten, it was taken from me and I was taken charge of. I was only four, and I can remember the sheets of flame, yellow and red, sweeping along, and the smoke, but I can't say that I was really frightened. There was a great spirit of sorrow and sympathy and unity among the people. It didn't matter what sect or religion or anything else - it was one solid body of people out to help each other, and all neighbours' homes were opened and I remember father opening the store for people just to come in and get materials and food and so on to tide them over the terrible situation for a few days. This was the most devastating fire, to my knowledge, that Tottenham has ever had.