# The Big Fire of 1914

Over 100 years ago, the Town of Ross experienced a tragic fire. It was a disaster for many, but also a testament to the young community of Ross. As The Marin Journal reported on July 23, 1914, “One block was completely destroyed and a half a dozen lives endangered at 4:30 Wednesday morning when fire broke out in the Fred Croker store building at Ross station, spreading rapidly to the adjourning buildings.

Despite the efforts of the fire company and about three hundred citizens of that place the flames destroyed valuable property and stock, most of which was uninsured. Ross lost the Fred Croker Store, the Harry Meagor residence, the Vitari shoe shop, Meagor's garage, and Edgar Dale's livery stable.

The fire was discovered by Ed Joseph, a street sprinkler who saw the fire in the store building owned by Fred Croker. Running to the fire house, he awakened Engineer Joseph Green who sounded an alarm, calling out the fire members and the Town of Ross. When the Ross fire department arrived on the scene both Croker's store and the Harry Meagor residence were wrapped in flames, spreading to the shoe shop, Meagor's Garage and Dale's Livery stable. Chief Sam Murray and Engineer Green ordered five lines of hose thrown out, but more were called for. The Meagors had to pass through the flames in their night clothes. As they reached the street, sixty-five gallons of gasoline in the garage exploded, blowing the side of the building out.

Even more dramatic was the situation in the livery stable of Edgar Dale. Seventeen year old Lucy Dale was in bed in the rear, disabled and unable to help herself. Dale rushed back, wrapped her in blankets and carried her through the stable out into the streets. Twenty two year old Walter Dale was severely burned on the face and hands while rescuing twenty-two horses from the stable. He was taken to Dr. Hund's sanitarium on Laurel Grove for treatment, site of today’s Priory Tennis and Swim Club.

Two buildings were saved, the home belonging to Harry Field (still standing today at 29 Poplar Avenue) and the post office next door. Along with the valiant firefighters, the

people of Ross did their part, with about three hundred residents helping to fight the flames, including Allen Kittle and E. G. Schmiedell, both original Town Trustees. Citizens served hot coffee and sandwiches after the fire, but more importantly, they saved lives while risking their own.

## Resources

For the **originally published story** and more, visit the **California Digital Newspaper Collection**, Center for Bibliographic Studies and Research, University of California, Riverside.

The web site **Marin Fire History** is an excellent resource for Marin Fire Departments, past and present:

- Learn about the history of the **Ross Fire Department**
- Read about **Louie and the Siren Factory**.

Learn about the Ross Fire Station in the **Town of Ross Buildings and the mysterious Mr. White**.