



Timelines of
Point
Pleasant
History

The Great Fire of 1906

Did you know...

Firefighters had to use a bucket brigade because fire hydrants had not yet been installed. The damage estimate was a staggering \$82,000.



Heart of Business District Destroyed

Point Pleasant Beach Devastated

Right: After The Great Fire, looking north. The intersection of Arnold and Bay Avenues is to the left center. The large building is John Arnold Hall, formerly McLaughlin's and Lynne's.

Point Pleasant Beach has had its share of fires over the years, many of large proportions. When talking about large fire in town, most residents think back to the boardwalk fires of 1975, Vannotte Lumber in 1968, the OB Diner and Jenkinson's Pavilion fires in 1989, Southern House in 2003, or even the Hotel Arnold fire in 1956. But most likely the largest fire to strike the town as far as size, the number of people left homeless and the effect on the local economy, occurred way back in 1906.

During the first twenty years of Point Pleasant Beach's existence, Bay Avenue was considered the "main street" in town, containing a majority of businesses, with the corner of Bay and Arnold the prime intersection.

At this intersection in 1906 stood a large wooden building on the southeast corner containing a rooming house, three stores and the post office. Originally named the Eureka Building it was built by Captain John Arnold in 1879 and also contained several apartments above the stores.

On the southwest corner of Arnold and Bay was open land with groves of trees, part of the Allen Homestead. Across the street where Point Interior's Furniture now stands were the Fred Makin Bakery and O.B. Van Camp Grocery.

Tuesday evening, March 20, 1906 was as any other night. The weather windy and chilly, but spring was here and another summer season was eagerly awaited. Stoves in the occupied apartments above the stores and in the Central Rooming House were well supplied, fending off the nighttime chill.

The Polhemus family, occupying the apartment above the post office, experienced trouble starting their stove. After lighting the fire, the stove refused to draw. Planning to restart the fire in the morning, the occupants retired for the night. However, the stove did finally take fire and with the flue wide open and loaded with wood, it became overheated and ignited the adjacent wall and ceiling.

At 12:15 a.m. the fire alarm was turned in to Ocean Fire Company #1, located in John Arnold Hall across from Arnold Avenue. Ten minutes later the chemical engine and fire apparatus were set up in front of the burning building.

The first men at the scene immediately evacuated the boarding house and ran up the rear stairway to the Polhemus and Gottlieb apartments. The Polhemus family was unaware of the fire and was awakened and carried out, including two children. Michael Gottlieb, his wife and three children found their route of escape cut off by the flames and went to one of the front windows where they attracted attention from the street. They were brought down a ladder clad only in their nightclothes.



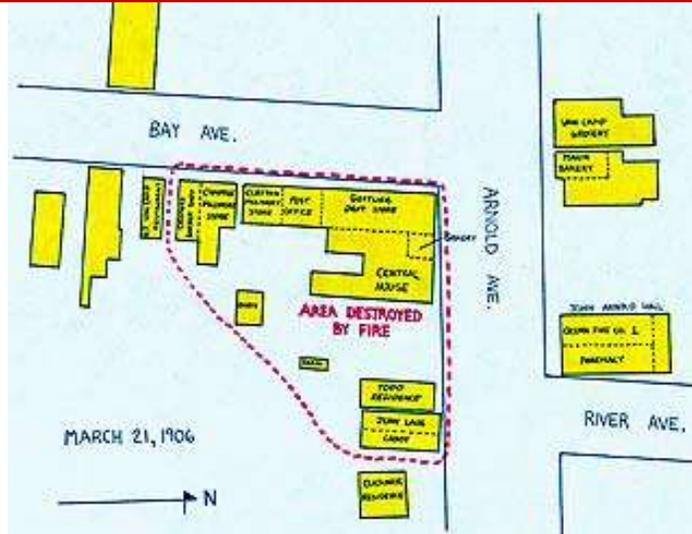
Point Pleasant Historical Society & Museum

416 New Jersey Avenue
PO Box 1273
Pt .Pleasant Beach, NJ 08742
(732) 892-3091

Web: www.pphsm.org
Facebook: @PPHSMNJ
Twitter: @PointMuseum
Email:

ppbhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Many other large fires plagued Point Pleasant Beach during the first dozen years of the century, but the benefit of hydrants, better equipment, experience, and an additional fire company emerged from the ashes of the Great Fire.



One of the main factors in hampering firefighters was the lack of available water to fight the fire. Fire hydrants were not yet installed in town, while the chemical engines were useless against a large fire.

While these rescues were taking place, mail and equipment were removed from the post office and brought to Makin's bakery where the post office resumed operation the next day.

With evacuations completed, firefighters turned their full attention to the growing blaze. The fire was spreading rapidly through the entire Eureka building and ignited a barn in the rear. The firemen realized at this point they were unable to cope with the blaze and summoned help from Manasquan and Spring Lake, the two nearest companies.

A fifty foot open space was between the Central House and the Todd residence on Arnold Avenue and firemen attempted to keep the fire at bay with no luck. Flames leaping 75 feet into the night skies soon ignited the Todd building along with a second barn to the rear.

Councilman John Laug's candy factory was next to the burning Todd House and it too caught fire.

The battle was not only against a growing conflagration, but the strong winds carried burning embers and shingles over a large area of the town to the east, which had to be watched closely.

On Bay Avenue, the south end of the blazing Eureka building was separated by a narrow alley from a three story building containing two stores and apartments. This building soon joined the mass of flames.

By this time, help from Manasquan and Spring Lake arrived and total attention was turned to the surrounding buildings. Bucket brigades were set up in addition to the three chemical trucks at the restaurant of E.T. VanCamp on Bay Avenue and at the recently built George Clickner house on

Arnold Avenue. It was at these two spots that the fire finally checked.

On the opposite side of Arnold Avenue, firefighters frantically worked to save their own building as well as the bakery. Arnold Hall was damaged by the intense heat which cracked the plate glass windows but was kept from catching fire. Makin's bakers and Van Camp's grocery were scorched but were also saved.

By dawn the next day, all of the involved buildings were reduced to the foundations. A total of four buildings and two barns were completely lost, but no serious injuries were sustained. the Gottlieb department store had just been stocked the week before and took a loss of \$12,000. The remaining businesses totaled over \$70,000 in losses, a staggering figure in 1906.

— *By Jerry Woolley*

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