

Devastating fires

Most of the time, the fires that devastated Winkler's business community destroyed only buildings and their contents, and sometimes the dreams of the owners, as they burned themselves out at the end of the street. Most of the time. But not always.

Buildings can be rebuilt, and goods can be replaced. However, the cost is incalculable when lives are lost. Several such fires have also occurred in Winkler.

On Saturday, March 18, 1962, a fire at Dave's Service Station at the corner of First St. and Stanley Ave. took one life and injured six others. While a Shell Oil tanker truck was filling the pumps, gasoline overflowed and ran into the garage. As the gas was being mopped up, it exploded, turning the garage into an inferno.

Clifford Derksen died as a result of this fire. His father Dave Derksen and brother La Vern, Jake Enns, and brothers Corny, Pete and Henry Peters were injured.

On September 2, 1965, Peter Wall was injured in a fire at Schmidt Manufacturing. He succumbed to his injuries on September 22. The cause of the fire was uncertain, it appears, but likely due to a defect on an acetylene welder.

An especially tragic fire on Friday, January 24, 1969 claimed the lives of two children when their home at 1275 Mountain Ave. in Winkler went up in smoke. The children, Bernice and Robert Reimer, the children of John and Helen Reimer, had been asleep upstairs in their home when the fire broke out. Their caregivers, as well as their younger sister and another child escaped, but no one was able to get to Robert and Bernice in time. They died of smoke inhalation.

A fire on March 29, 1972 destroyed Triple E Manufacturing Inc. Ltd. and Triple E Motor Homes Ltd. and put 70 people out of work, but its most tragic result was the death of Triple E Motor Homes General Manager Henry Schellenberg. Schellenberg, who was also a shareholder of the company, appears to have gone into the burning building to retrieve some valuable papers and records from the office and was overcome by smoke. His body was searched for, and found, in the office part of the complex when he could not be located anywhere on the premises.

Many fires have devastated Winkler over the years, but these took the greatest toll of all... the lives of its people.