

**All Pompey Hill Mourns Death of “Jerry” Conan; Ran Store for 50 Years
End Comes in St. Joseph’s Hospital in Syracuse at Age of 76**
Sunday, June 28, 1941, Syracuse Herald-American, Syracuse, NY

“Jerry Conan is dead and Pompey Hill never will be the same to those that reside there nor to the many Syracusans who made Jerry Conan’s store a stopping place for half a century.

“Jerry’s store has been there since about 1836, with Jerry Conan in charge of it since 1891. It is just across the green if you draw up the hill past the Jamesville Reservoir.

“For 50 years or more Jerry was on the front porch, or the ‘stoop,’ or platform, as you will, to welcome all to Pompey. Jerry and his general store were symbols of the village life that is passing. The store changed and Jerry Conan grew a bit gray, but the atmosphere was just the same from the bicycle days, yes, even from old horse and buggy days, to these times of streamlined cars that now whiz just beyond the corner along Route 20, or snarl their gears when the light changes to green.

“There were no green lights on the highways nor in Pompey when Jerry Conan bought the store in 1891. It was a long climb to Pompey Hill, picturesque high oasis in the topography of (New) York State.

“Snows are deep in winter on the hill and the temperature is low, but Jerry Conan was always willing to shovel his way out to his thermometer to tell the inquirers from newspaper offices in Syracuse about weather conditions.

“In summer when cars were new the water boiled over in radiators and always folk stopped at Jerry Conan’s, where a sprinkler filled with water awaited. Perhaps in old days Jerry had food for horses, too, when they climbed the hill carrying Syracuse folk for a ride. At least there was water for them.

“Folks Jerry knew - and they were legion - were always asked to have some ice cream soda when they stopped at his store. They could sit by the sugar barrel and the cracker barrel, too, and talk politics or weather or whatever. Time was when the familiar cracker barrel was present, but in later years the store was changed a bit. The long front porch used to be crowded with goods on display, everything from wagon wheels to soap, and Jerry Conan in his bow tie was there to welcome.

“Evenings in the ‘90s and in the new century Jerry Conan’s store was the social center of Pompey Hill. There the men foregathered and felt at home. There women came for their supplies and Jerry waited on them and visited. He asked about them and their families, their troubles and their joys and they knew him as a friend.

“At the right as you enter his store is the post office and at the left the stock of all things needed. In the old days there were months when folks on Pompey Hill couldn’t go down to Syracuse to shop, so Jerry Conan carried a large and varied stock.

“While a young man he ran a store in Lafayette for a while and about 1891 he bought the old stone store which he continued to his death. This was built in 1836 and was unchanged excepting that Jerry added a porch in 1898.

“Jerry Conan conducted this store through all the changes of a half century, from the days of flour and sugar by the barrel and home canned fruit and tins and tins of fruits and vegetables and meats. Kerosene lamps lighted the store for many years after the days of candles, until Jerry Conan installed electricity.

“On Pompey Hill folk were slow to change their ways, but Jerry kept abreast of the changing times and catered to the new wants of the people. Yet at the same time he kept some of the old ways and goods for he found a demand for them until in most recent years.

Fire Razes Old Pompey Church

Four Buildings Damaged After Lightning Strike

Saturday, July 20, 1946, The Post Standard, Syracuse, NY

Other Dwellings Imperiled at Center of Village

“Three buildings of wooden construction, including the historic Presbyterian church, one of Central New York’s oldest landmarks, were razed, another was damaged and several nearby dwellings were endangered in the heart of Pompey after lightning-caused flames broke out shortly after 11 p.m. yesterday.

Gasoline Endangered

“Firemen of several nearby communities fought the blaze more than three hours, wetting down homes nearest the burning edifices and combatting flames on the southernmost corner of a two-story store building to keep one of its walls from topping onto a gas station in which approximately 1,500 gallons of fuel were stored.

“Fire flared up about 10:50 p.m., according to Mrs. James Mullarkey, who said she was on the second floor of her home in cherry Valley turnpike, next to the gas station.

“A bolt of lightning struck a garage at the rear of the Chester Balinski home in sweet rd., flames fanned by a west wind carrying over to the two-story P. J. Brennan house which Balinski and his family occupy.

Flames Race Thru Home

“The flames raced thru the Balinski home, from which he and his family fled to safety, ignited the church, on its north side, and the Jerry Conan store building, to the south.

“The wooden buildings collapsed approximately 45 minutes after Mrs. Mullarkey said she and her husband ran from their home after the lightning hit.

“Altho the church, to which a \$3,500 steeple had been added only recently, was leveled, its records were in safekeeping, having been earlier placed in the hands of Mrs. Dwight Hoffman.

“The church was built in 1818, replacing another structure which had been in the spot previously.

Furnishings Lost

“The Balinskis failed to save any household belongings, but the families of James Mularkey, Roy Clark and Frank Cox, whose homes were nearest to those destroyed, managed to haul most of their belongings into a small parkway in front of the burned buildings.

“Volunteer firemen from Dewitt, Manlius, Cazenovia, Fabius and LaFayette poured water into the inferno from 10 p.m. until midnight, relays bringing the water into the village by bucket brigade method from wells of nearby farms.

“Two of the volunteers, from Fabius and Dewitt, whose names were not disclosed, were treated for minor burns by an emergency unit established at the scene.

Power Shut Off

“Power and telephone lines for a three-mile stretch thru the village were purposely disabled by linemen to cut the possibility of persons being injured by high tension wires.

“Fears that the wind would carry the flames to the rest of the homes in the village caused many of the residents to gather their belongings in the streets in front of their homes.

“The wooden buildings, the barn-garage in which the blaze started, the church and the Brennan house, were leveled nearly an hour before, the brick walls of the unoccupied store building remained solid until about midnight, when the left side of the structure collapsed.

“Firemen concentrated their efforts on keeping flames away from the Cox gasoline station, which is at the intersection of the Jamesville rd. and Cherry Valley turnpike.

Water Lacking

“An emergency call to the Syracuse fire department for help was of no avail, Chief Frank Savage holding the city’s equipment from the scene because of the lack of water at the fire site.

“Early this morning as the inferno still raged within the store edifice, little hope was held that the southern wall would remain intact and firemen were alarmed at the possibility of the gasoline at the Cox station becoming ignited.

“The resulting explosion, they said, would touch off the rest of the town in tinder-box fashion, most of the buildings being constructed of wood.

“Sheriff’s deputies at the scene, who kept traffic moving thru Route 20 during the fire, were Clarence Walker, Art Willis, Leo Beebe, Ed diligent and Criminal Deputy Justin King.

“Only a few hours before the lightning hit and ignited the buildings, the church had been visited by 100 Syracuse university art students who spent the afternoon sketching the 128-year-old edifice. Rev. Richard Eaton is pastor of the church.”

Loss in Pompey Blaze Estimated at \$40,000

Sunday, July 21, 1946, The Post Standard, Syracuse, NY

“Flames which devoured four buildings in the heart of Pompey Friday caused a property loss of approximately \$40,000, owners of the destroyed edifices revealed last night. Completely wrecked by the lightning-caused fire were the historic Presbyterian church, P.J. Brennan two-family house, a barn garage and a brick constructed unoccupied store.

Two Landmarks

“The church, built in 1818, and the store, erected in 1796, were two of the Central New York’s oldest landmarks. All that remained of the church yesterday was a pile of rubble, while only two walls of the store building failed to buckle.

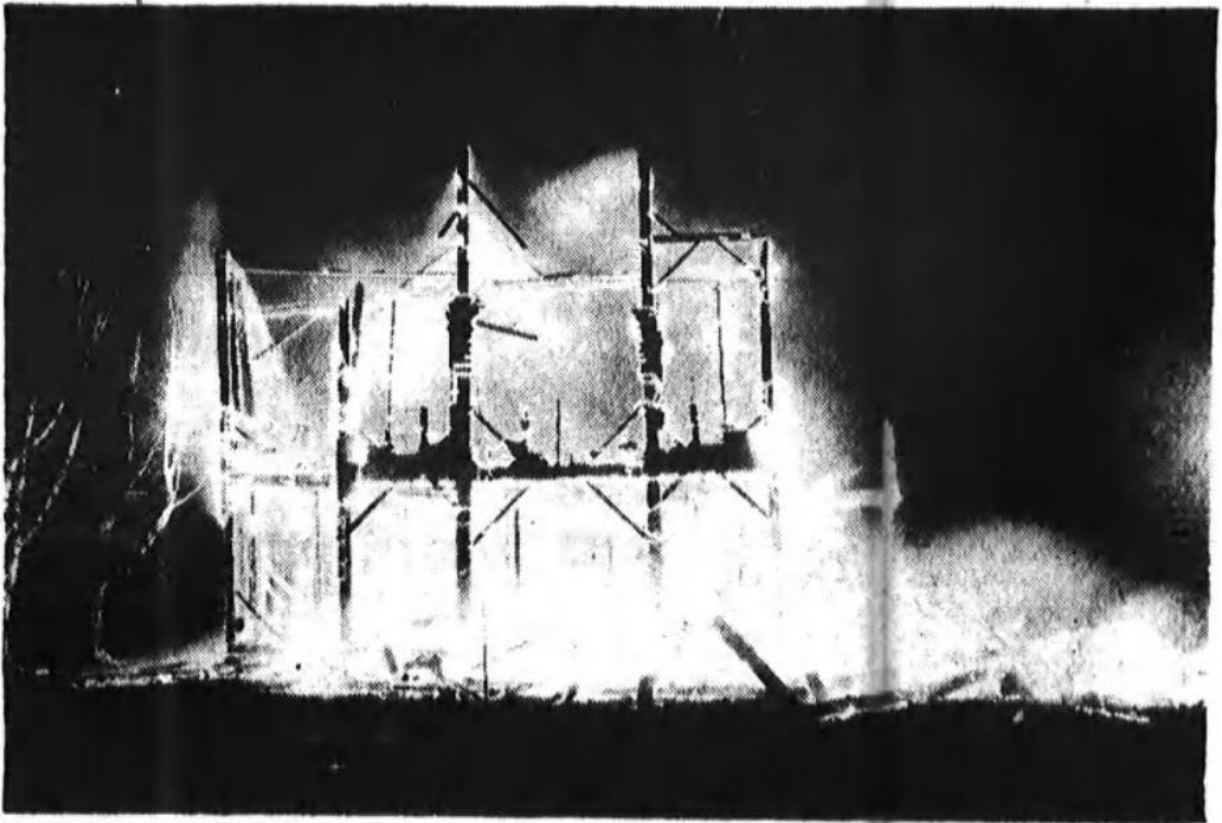
“One of the walls which remained intact was on the southern side of the building near the Frank Cox gasoline station. Firemen early yesterday, after the flames were brought under control, propped the wall with huge timbers. It had been feared that 1,500 gallons of gasoline in the station would be ignited if the wall collapsed.

“Rev. Richard Eaton, Presbyterian pastor, said last night he was unable to give an exact estimate on the worth of the church but placed \$25,000 as a conservative loss, basing his opinion on the fact that it cost \$3,800 recently to repair the church steeple.

“Richard Long, owner of the barn and store building, figured his loss as near the \$10,000 mark. He said that insurance covered only a small part of that amount.

“Owner of the two-family house, P.J. Brennan, said that it was also insured in part. Loss was about \$5,000, Brennan revealed.

“The family of Chester Balinski, routed when flames swept their home, which was between the church and store, is reported to be sheltered temporarily on the farm of Mrs. Balinski’s parents.



HISTORIC CHURCH DESTROYED—Flames outline the skeleton of historic Pompey Presbyterian church, a few minutes before it fell in ruin Friday night in a lightning-caused fire which destroyed three wooden buildings and damaged a fourth in the center of Pompey village. The church was more than 125 years old.

“Mr. Eaton disclosed that Sunday church services of his congregation would be conducted at Disciples’ church. He said that the edifice consumed by the blaze is used only three months a year, the Presbyterian congregation attending Disciples’ services the other nine months.

“The 128-year-old church had been attended at various times by the Jerome family, Onondaga county kin of Winston Churchill. Charter members of the first Congregational church of Pompey, which later became a member of the Presbytery, were Levi, John, Molly, Amarilla and Lucy Jerome.”