

THE BEAST

“The popular western image of a dragon as winged, four-legged, and capable of breathing fire is an invention of the High Middle Ages based on a conflation of earlier dragons from different traditions. In western cultures, dragons are portrayed as monsters to be tamed or overcome, usually by saints or culture heroes, as in the popular legend of Saint George and the Dragon. They are often said to have ravenous appetites and to live in caves, where they hoard treasure. These dragons appear frequently in western fantasy literature.” Wikipedia

This Book Is Dedicated To Those Men &
Women Who Have Dedicated Their Own
Lives To Helping Others.

Our Firefighters
&
Emergency Medical Service Personnel

**A HISTORY OF
FIRE
Middletown Is Burning**

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INTRODUCTION

As I was doing the research for this book, I was a little surprised to find discussions about fire from decades back that are very similar to the discussions we are having today.

The question was and is: Can wildland fires do good, or, are all wildland fires bad?

I suppose the answer to that question would be heavily influenced by a person's personal experiences relative to fire, however, the debate, just as the fires, rages on.

Back then, those who thought burning was good pointed to the Native Americans and their habit of burning wildlands to improve animal and plant life, just as people today, who favor burning, reference the Native American's burning as a bolster to their argument. Those who disliked burning argued that everyone needed to preserve our flora and fauna for future generations. Sounds a little bit like today's 'sustainability'.

Nearly 100 years ago, 1922 to be exact, a journalist discussing destructive forest fires expressed his own frustration with the debate. Even the bark beetle was an issue back then and it seems we have solved nothing other than producing more sophisticated means for

fighting the same beast in the same mother-nature controlled environment.

The wind and the weather conditions drive our fires today just as they have done forever.

Removing fuel to starve the beast is still the argument. The question debated is when to do it, how to do it, or, even whether to do it. And yes, in the meantime, we burn.

South Lake County, California
Valley Fire

9/12/2015

76,000+ Acres Burned

1,958 Structures Destroyed

1280 homes

27 multi-family structures

66 commercial properties

585 other minor structures

93 structures damaged including 41 homes and 7
commercial properties

It was estimated 3,600 people were made homeless
4 firefighters injured, 4 civilian fatalities

Does fire have to be a necessary evil that we must accept when it strikes uninvited? I think not. However, I think as long as we refuse to undertake steps to starve the beast, we will continue to burn.

**Middletown
A History Of**

FIRE!

MIDDLETOWN IS BURNING!

It was after church services on Sunday, March 3rd, 1918 and well into the noon-time meal hour when the alarm was raised; FIRE!, Spier's Garage.

March is the month that marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring and is known for being a windy time and this day was no different. The wind was blowing, sometimes fiercely, from the south to the north fanning the flames into a wind driven blaze that was going to have its way with the entire business district of Middletown before it burnt itself out. The only places of commerce reported left untouched were the Post Office and a garage at the south end of town, however, there were conflicting reports about the Post Office.

Bucket brigades were formed and people worked themselves to exhaustion trying to tame this wild beast called 'fire' but without success. It moved back and forth across 80 foot wide Calistoga street at will, burning one business after the other giving those who owned them little or no time to try and salvage anything from their establishments.

The burning buildings fell into heaps of white hot coals, producing showers of sparks and sending burning embers onto their neighbors, thereby, feeding the appetite of the beast. A barber shop here, a butcher

shop there, an empty saloon next, it continued to burn building after building, destroying business after business for two full hours, sometimes taking only minutes to ruin a future.

Those who were fighting the beast experienced the futility of trying to beat back the intense heat and destruction that had been released on them from the gates of hell, but they tried.

Those businesses and individuals who were later reported to have fallen victim to this beast were:

C. S. Piner's general store.

D. F. Reinike's dry goods store

Frank Vallette's bakery

Herrick's General Store

James Rees's barber shop.

John Nelson's barber shop.

Mrs. G. Barker's candy store.

Mrs. G. Warren's home.

Mrs. G. Warren's unoccupied livery stable

Odd Fellow's Hall

Robert Smith's vacant saloon.

Robert Tocher's blacksmith shop and planing mill

Thomas Albert 'Bert' Read's drug store.

The Commercial Hotel

The Lake County House

The Odd Fellow's business block containing C. E.

Lewis realty and the Middletown Independent.

The unoccupied Exchange Saloon

Vacant building owned by F. C. Deering
W. F. Snow's butcher shop
White Transportation Company's garage and
automobiles
William Spier's Garage.

Several of these structures were two story. Most, unfortunately, had little or no insurance. It was estimated that only about 10 percent of the loss was covered by insurance. Devastating as it was though, no one had lost their life, was burned or injured.

Fire was certainly nothing new to anyone who lived in this area and because fire was a reality, Middletown had raised 350 dollars toward the purchase of a hand-drawn combination chemical fire-engine. But its cost was 450 dollars and being 100 dollars shy, no order had been placed for the engine. However, there was no remorse as everyone knew that had the town possessed the fire-engine it would have played a very small part in dealing with the monster that had devoured essentially every business and building on Calistoga and Main streets.

It was reported that one of the greatest losers was Mort Stanley, editor and publisher of the Middletown Independent, who was unable to save anything from his office and who had no insurance. He was quoted as saying: *"The only thing saved from my shop was the front door key and I haven't a front door anymore"*. Unfortunately, the newspaper would soon become a

fatality of the fire. After trying to publish the paper from Lakeport he issued the final paper March 16th, 1918 but not without reporting that certain parties were stealing goods from doomed businesses during the fire and how these people were low enough to kiss the belly of a snake.

After the monster had satisfied its appetite and the business district lay in a smoldering heap, the town's people traumatized and in shock, still vowed to rebuild.

A moment of levity was produced when a vat of pickled pork, minus the vat and the brine, was pulled by W. F. Snow from his devastated butcher shop, fully cooked, and he shared it with all present.

That evening the community pulled together to feed all the firefighters and the ones who were still monitoring the smoldering remains.

The monster was finally dying.

But what had started the fire? Progress started the fire. The automobile, the wonder of transportation at that time, required different services than just those of a blacksmith. So those in the transportation business had to embrace progress or die. Therefore, they had to be prepared to provide the services the automobile required and one of those items an auto needed was

rubber inflatable tires. To repair those tires required a new process called vulcanization which required heat. It was reported that an un-attended vulcanization plant, inside Spier's Garage, caught fire and spread rapidly through the wood structure. The beast fed on other flammable materials within, growing in strength. Then the wind, it did the rest, releasing the beast on Middletown with a deafening roar and wind driven burning embers.

HELP IS COMING

Calistoga responded to Middletown's crisis and called a town meeting the following Tuesday evening. There they all agreed, as a community, they would help Middletown rebuild.

Transportation for those persons traveling to Middletown from Calistoga and then back would be provided free of charge by the Calistoga to Clear Lake Stage Company and the White Transportation Company. And passage over the Lawley Toll Road would be free.

Nearly one hundred men from Calistoga agreed to take their tools and supplies to Middletown to get the community started with its rebuild. Middletown folks were to remove the debris clearing a path for those coming to help.

The clean-up was a big job, however, Middletown's neighbors were up to that task as well. Calistoga,

Lower Lake, Kelseyville and Lakeport all agreed to help. The Middletown ladies said they would feed everyone but the ladies of Calistoga and Lakeport insisted they be allowed to help feed the workers too.

Businessmen from Calistoga and Lower Lake came to Middletown offering their assistance and merchandise. This, as displaced businesses re-opened in vacant buildings or shared space with other tenants, all trying to provide much needed goods and services to the community.

Frank Vallette, the baker, was already rebuilding his oven. It was reported that the butcher opened up in the vacant funeral parlor. The destroyed hotel, the Lake County House, was offering rooms in a large private home while others were ordering lumber or being just as determined to get going forward.

The Press Democrat reported that even Middletown's churches were being pressed into service as stores. *"At the Presbyterian Church the Herrick Company has moved in for the time being with a stock of groceries. At the Baptist church C. S. Piner and Son, and D. F. Reinike are maintaining their stores."*

MAY, 1918

Barely two months after the destruction of the commercial section of Middletown, a freak event took place on the James Quayle property just outside of the town. Lightning struck the barn setting it on fire. Two

men in the barn were able to get all the livestock out but the barn, 30 tons of hay and some equipment were destroyed. In spite of this siege, the community of Middletown would re-build and, in doing so, survive to see more fires and much more devastation.

AUGUST 30, 1922, 4 ½ YEARS LATER

Gene Wilkinson arose early and left the house to go deer hunting. Mrs. Wilkinson, Edith, while straightening up the house, placed the trash in the fire place to burn. Their house was on the east side of Calistoga street and the Wilkinsons were renting it from George Lewis the local realtor.

Mrs. Wilkinson proceeded to light the trash afire and went about her daily chores and before anyone realized what was happening the entire roof of the house was on fire.

Just south of the Lewis house was the George A. Fickes' house, that sat just a few feet away and was only saved due to gallant efforts by those on hand. However, the Lewis house, along with all the Wilkinson's possessions, the barn, outbuildings and fences were unable to be saved.

Embers from the fire were carried by strong winds to the hills near the cemetery setting them ablaze. Fire then spread into Long Valley destroying hay fields and equipment.

It was reported to still be burning two days later.

Edith and daughter Helen escaped without injury. The family relocated to the Berryessa valley after their loss

THE BEAST RETURNS

TWELVE YEARS AFTER THE SPIER'S FIRE

Around 11 o'clock in the morning on July 7th, 1930, at the corner of Stewart and Lake streets, tendrils of smoke wafted into the air. This was because some local boys smoking, had inadvertently started a fire. Would this breathe life back into the monster that had died 12 years prior?

The answer came soon enough as the tendrils of smoke soon turned into a column releasing the beast once more.

Middletown would be little better prepared to fight the monster this time than they were before. With a south wind it was soon apparent this demon would do as it pleased for some hours to come.

The fire start location was near Elbert 'Pinkie' Wilkinson's sister Abbie's home, at the south end of town. She raised the alarm by going to her brother's garage and shouting FIRE!

The first fire fighter on scene, Orval Brennen, Pinkie's mechanic, soon realized a bucket of water and a burlap sack were not going to be adequate.

Middletown did have some equipment by this time, compliments of Lake county, but no organized group to respond as a unit to fight fire. The county had provided them with a Packard truck with hard rubber tires with an 800-gallon water tank, a Star four-cylinder engine and a Viking one-and-a-half-inch high-pressure pump. A hose was inserted into the tank and the Star engine fired the pump.

The county also provided a 50-gallon four-wheel soda and acid trailer. The soda and acid would boil, creating pressure creating a large fire extinguisher.

Brennen returned to the garage to get the Packard but saw it was already leaving the garage headed for the fire.

This time the fire was some distance from the business district but there were plenty of homes for it to feed on, and it did, as it traveled north along the west side of town near Rabbit Hill.

The beast, burning north on Stewart street, consumed 5 homes, several barns and out buildings, jumped Main street and gutted the Presbyterian church before leaving the town limits where it then consumed several acres north and east of Middletown. The new elementary school, situated near the church, was spared as it had fire proof tiles on its roof.

It was reported that a force of fifty men followed the fire northward as it burned a milewide path through brush property on adjoining ranches for a distance of four miles. Plus an additional fire was started three miles from Middletown, near Coyote Valley, by wind carried embers.

By this time apparatus from Calistoga were on scene once again helping their neighbors to their north. Eventually the fledgling State Division of Forestry took over the suppression activity. Reported as being at the fire were District Inspector R. E. Roach and Forest Rangers A. A. Wilkie of Sonoma county and Buck Erickson of the Middletown district along with Taylor Day, Lake county ranger.

Those reported to have suffered a loss from the fire were: Charles Johnson, Dave Lundquist, Dennis Childers, F. J. Crabtree, Henry Knight, James Mason, James Rees, Justin Reed, Max Cavanaugh, Mrs. Abbie (Wilkinson) Cranson, Mrs. Ludwig Pikesch, Mrs. Mary Tripp, Mrs. Ray Young, Ralph Read, Robert Tocher, Sam and Joe Rees and Sam Delany.

Eventually the beast was slain but what arose from the ashes of this latest fire were the future dragon slayers, Middletown's original first responders, the Middletown Volunteer Fire Department was formed.

M. V. F. D.

LANDOWNERS AGREE TO 12 CENT TAX

A few days after the fire the local men determined they would form a volunteer fire department. On July 25th, 1930 a meeting was held to organize a fire company. It was reported that those appointed commissioners were: Sim Chapman, Newton Booth, Charles Kepner, Anton Hartman and Charles McKinley. Bill Abercrombie was elected chief. Those then appointed were: Lorin Hunt, first assistant chief; Ben Delaney, second assistant chief; Elmer Dukes, third assistant chief; Melvin Parriott, Orval Brennen, Arthur Bohn and Les Simonsen, engine men; Byrd Copsey and B. V. Chadduck, nozzle men. On the chemical cart were George Butler, William Brooks, Charles Jackson, and Frank Fordham; the nozzle men were Henry Herman and Hazen Capps; in charge of the 2½ gallon chemicals were E. C. Runyon, Wes Delaney, Max Cavanaugh and J. A. Ratchford; in charge of tank and pump, Les Moore, Elbert 'Pinkie' Wilkinson, Blythe Henderson and Les Whitaker. the police department were Elmer Wisdom, Justin Reed, Sim Chapman and James Rees.

The local landowners agreed to tax themselves an annual 12 cent tax on their property to go toward operating the M.V.F.D.



This is a photo of early volunteers.

Front row L-R: Vic Holmstead, Sim Chapman, Bert Childers, Reed Hardester
Second row L-R: Moss Hunt, Arch McKinley, Jess Ratchford, Bill Abercrombie
Back row L-R: Mel Parriott, Dale Strickler, Orval Brennen, Charles McKinley,
Oscar Wrieden, Bill Nelson & Elmer Dukes.

The first new piece of equipment purchased was a siren that would be used to alert everyone of a fire. The siren was mounted on the roof of Pinkie Wilkinson's Garage.

Before this purchase, the bell at the Presbyterian Church was used as the fire alarm, however, the church had been destroyed in this most recent fire so it was time to move forward.

When the fire siren went off the firemen just left their businesses open and went to the fire counting on friends and neighbors to "take care of business".

The year following the formation of the M.V.F.D. the firemen started an annual fundraising event called the Firemen's Auction and Frolic, which was mainly an auction of donated goods by the community. It was very successful for several years. No professional auctioneers, just friends and neighbors having a great time, raising money for a service that protected all of them..

The departments next big purchase was a 1926 Chevrolet truck that they mounted three old Standard Oil gasoline tanks and a pump on. The tanks would hold a total of 500 gallons of water. This was around 1932.



The Volunteers and their equipment in front of the fire house. The firemen are, back row L-R: Ellis Field, Ray Moody Jr., Orval Brennen, Reed Hardester, Marvin Higgins, Doc Barker, Al Terry & John Irwin. Front row L-R: Moss Hunt, Dick Puser, Al Cook.

The success of the Fireman's Frolic allowed for the purchase of another Chevrolet truck in 1936 and a Ford in 1941.

FIREMAN'S AUCTION



Those Pictured On Stage:

L-R Ken Palmer, John Irwin & Ray Moody Sr.

L-R John Baughman, unk, unk, George Williamson, Orval Brennen
& Ray Moody Jr.

RELATED FIRE STORIES

A lady named Marion McMurtry lived in Middletown as a little girl and her parents, Mr. & Mrs. Philip Ridenhour, worked for the telephone company and operated the switch board connecting the incoming calls to the party they wanted to reach. She related her story in the Sonoma County Museum Newsletter issue of March and April 2001 which is now used with permission.

She said her parents recognized everybody's voice, knew their phone number and where they lived. Her parents also took fire calls, manually activated the siren, near the Post Office and told the responders where the fire was reported as being.

The telephone office was in the building situated on the northeast corner of highway 175 and Bush street.

She writes: "The first call came in to the switchboard about 4 a.m. "Fire! Up on the ridge west of Anderson's!" The caller crashed down his phone, knowing his voice would be recognized and the operator would take it from there.

That's the way it was done in those days. The operator that night was my dad. The year was 1934, and the switchboard was a magneto outfit that occupied the front half of our house in Middletown (Lake County). Telephone operators knew their customers' voices, numbers, and where they lived.

Professional emergency services were generally nonexistent in little mountain communities like ours. The nearest fire crew was over the mountain in Calistoga, 45 minutes away. Small town folks did for themselves.

In case of fire, the drill called for either my mother or father, since they were the live-in agents and

manpower for the telephone company in Middletown, to run the two blocks over to Main Street and manually activate the siren attached to the post office wall.

As the volunteer fire fighters arrived and cranked up the fire truck, my dad would give them the location of the fire.

Out of the night they came, stumbling and pulling on their clothes as they ran: fat George Butler the butcher, my dad's fishing buddy; skinny Les Moore the plumber with tools to repair broken equipment; Roy Simenson, agent for Standard Oil; George Noble, owner of the local saloon (it's still there – watch for it on the right as you enter town); Ray Moody; the Hardester brothers; and even Jesse Ratchford, the attorney. Most of the men in town came out to help, except for the pastor of the community church. He and his wife turned out too, but they had their own agenda. Their little church would be where any evacuees from the fire would find sanctuary.

My mother's job was to man the switchboard for calls coming in from the rugged back country. These calls were vital for tracking the path of the fire. But on this fateful night my mother was not there. There was no one there but me.

My dad swooped me out of bed, perched me up on the high stool in front of the board and jammed the headset down over my ears. It took him two desperate

seconds to tell me, “Answer the calls you can and tell them where I am. And don’t panic!”

Then he was gone. Lights were flashing on the board and I was barely awake, but since I’d been watching my parents use the switchboard since I was a toddler I knew how to do it. I shoved the first orange plug into a lighted jack, and I was in business.

I couldn’t spell the names, but I could write down the caller’s numbers. No one had time to ask questions - the fire was all that mattered.

When my father returned he matched the numbers with names and plotted them on a map for the outside emergency equipment on its way from Napa County. Trucks and men were soon roaring off towards Cobb Mountain and the fire line.

My dad and me? We decided we’d probably better not ever tell the phone company that their emergency operator the night of the big Anderson Ridge fire was 7 years old.”

JULY 4TH, 1938

It was reported that William Hardester, member of the Middletown volunteer fire department, was accidentally run over by the fire truck when the apparatus and firemen were responding to a call to extinguish a roof fire at the Ben Hunt home.

Hardester's leg was fractured in two places when a wheel of the truck passed over his leg.

APRIL 1942

The Wilkinson family was a large family and nearly the entire family is resting in the Middletown Cemetery. It was Eugene's family that suffered the loss of their home in 1922 and Abbie (Wilkinson) Cranson suffered losses in the 1930 fire. Well, fire would strike the family again.

In April of 1942, twenty years later, Frank Wilkinson's widow, Cedora, lost her home to fire too. The fire started around 9 o'clock in the evening inside a closet of the home. The M.V.F.D. responded and they were able to remove some furniture from the home just to have a rain storm ruin what they had salvaged. It was reported that several locals showed up to view the fire and a fire truck had its bumper torn off by one of the 'looky-loos'.

There were several fires the M.V.F.D. responded to over the years; structure fires and wildland fires, but Middletown did not suffer anymore major multi-victim disasters from fire while under their watch.

M.V.F.D. responded to all emergencies; medical calls, vehicle accidents, missing persons, possible drownings, flooding, water rescue, stranded motorist and so on eventually securing an ambulance and training volunteers to operate it.

But just as progress was responsible for the 1918 fire, progress would be the reason for the end of the M.V.F.D.

SOUTH LAKE COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

TRANSITION

The transition from a loosely structured fire department, made up of strictly volunteers, to a structured fire department with paid personnel was a very bumpy ride.

There was anger, frustration, investigations and law suits before the wrinkles were ironed out, however, in 1987 the South Lake County Fire Protection District (SLCFPD) became an officially recognized district across the state. It was the 3rd largest fire district in the state at that time.

The district covers, highway 29 from Hofacker lane to the Napa-Lake county line, Butts Canyon road to the Napa-Lake county line, Middletown, Anderson Springs, Cobb, Hoberg's, Loch Lomond, part of Bottle Rock road, Harbin Springs, Big Canyon to Seigler Canyon road, Hidden Valley Lake & Jerusalem Valley. More than 280 square miles.

Rather than an appointed Board of Directors the district is run by a publicly elected Board of Directors, all directors coming from within the bounds of the district. The district has an annual operating budget of over 2.5 million dollars and its professionalism is apparent and second to none.

The M.V.F.D. served the community of Middletown and the surrounding area successfully for 57 years and it was hard for some folks to see it fade away.

VALLEY FIRE

THE BEAST SEEKS REVENGE!

Had the early volunteer firemen seen this beast, they would not have believed their own eyes. The beast that was released this fateful day had laid dormant for decades, waiting for the opportune time to strike and strike it did.

It struck with such a roar, such vengeance, fury and speed that those who experienced it would have a hard time describing it so others might get an impression of what facing the beast that day was really like. It truly struck fear into the hearts of many as it devoured acre after acre, structure after structure, at a speed never seen before. Never slowing, never giving up an inch to anything man could throw at it. All anyone could do was get out of its way as the beast chewed up tens of thousands of acres and hundreds and hundreds of structures, always roaring, warning those who might try to slay it; that that was not going to happen until its appetite was satisfied.

The wind and weather flattened out the smoke column, pushing it and the heat ahead of the fire, parallel to the ground, effectively preheating soon to be consumed fuel. The roiling of the leading smoke column that was filled with burning embers, heat and wind, allowed those in the path of the fire to see, hear and feel the ominous threat headed toward them that would soon

be where they stood. This struck fear into the hearts of many yet many others were in awe of this fierce force of nature.

Middletown was soon burning, but this time, she was not alone. All of Middletown's neighbors were burning too. When the beast was finally satisfied one would be hard pressed to name a local landmark that was not touched or impacted by the beast.

1280 homes were devoured along with 27 multi-family structures leaving over 3,000 souls homeless, however, this time the business district of Middletown survived. It had been 97 years 6 months and 9 days since the Spier's fire had destroyed downtown Middletown, unfortunately though, Middletown's fire history was not yet complete.

To say people were in shock would be a gross understatement. Frightened, confused and disoriented people fled the beast and once again, our neighbors to the south, Calistoga, opened their arms and welcomed into their community many of those people who were displaced by the fire.

But not just Calistoga opened their arms, other groups and places welcomed in the newly displaced too.

When this nightmare was finally over, 4 people had lost their life and what was left behind was

heartbreaking. It was as hard, or maybe harder, to comprehend than the fire itself.

Most everything was unrecognizable for what it used to be. Here stands a chimney, nearly the only recognizable remains of someone's home. Over there a burnt out hulk of what was once an old pick-up truck. A child's bicycle with only metal parts remaining. Twisted pipes and an exploded propane tank add to the scene. Terracotta flower pots broken spilling their earthen contents without any sign of what had been. Shrubs and trees minus their foliage and charred black, finalizing a color scheme not reflecting anything representing the living. Everything was a mixture of brick red, terracotta, ash grey or charcoal black. On top of that there was the stench of burnt and scorched everything. And this scene played out over and over again everywhere you looked.

Once mountains covered with green vegetation, from majestic 120 foot tall pine and fir trees, stately madrones and mighty oaks, wild grape vines, brush and ground cover, now startlingly, stood nude of all that green. And again, everything left was either charcoal black or ash grey and this was all there was for mile upon mile upon mile.

Today, many of the charred black skeletons of tens of thousands of dead trees, scattered across 76,000 plus acres, still stand. Eventually, each tree will give into its own decomposition and finally, when doing so, will

crash to the ground, thereby littering the hillsides and valleys with the dead, black, grey and broken bodies of those once majestic, stately and mighty trees. This will in turn, constantly remind the living of that fateful, apocalyptic day, Saturday, September 12, 2015 when the world around us changed forever.

MAY 28th, 2018 MEMORIAL DAY

FIRE!

It was 100 years, 2 months and 25 days after the Spier's fire had decimated Middletown's business district when the alarm went out: FIRE! Hardester's Market, Young and Calistoga streets, Middletown. This was again the business district of the community.

Shockingly, one wondered, could it be that the beast was loose again? Then thinking; not again, please God, not again! Still pondering, would this monster never be satisfied? How much is enough? How much do we give? How much can we take?

Of course, one should never ask God those questions.

The business district of Middletown had survived the conflagration known as the Valley Fire nearly unscathed, for which everyone was grateful. But now, today, this wasn't just another store, another business, it was Middletown's heart, it was Hardester's Market that the beast was consuming.

Hardester's Market, along with the Post Office, constitute the main reason locals come to town. It was where they went to socialize and shop. Everyone felt Hardester's Market was their store. They belonged to it and it belonged to them. After all, the Hardester's had influenced the history of Middletown for decades. They were a huge part of what Middletown was this

present day. People felt they were a part of something successful and they were proud of their market!

THE STRUGGLE

Middletown and its surrounding area was still trying to recover from the devastation of the Valley Fire not quite 3 years prior; and then this.

Unbelievably, the store, housed in a metal building, was completely destroyed, which represented a huge loss to a community struggling to survive.

This time, after a huge fight, professional firefighters from SLCFPD and Cal Fire confined the beast to just one structure. Fortunately, due to protective fire gear, the mark this beast left on one of the firefighters was not serious.

Middletown's total population had taken a drastic downturn after the Valley Fire, due to the loss of so many homes. Some estimates showed the population at around 700 after the fire but 1300 before the fire. So the community, devastated by fire, had its population decimated as well. Now this fire was nearly incomprehensible to those people remaining who were still recovering from their previous losses.

However, on the bright side, there is today a survivor. The magnolia tree at the north east corner of Calistoga and Young streets still stands right where it was

planted decades ago, so the beast did not take everything.

THE STORE

In April of 1943, two young, local men named Reed Hardester and John Irwin bought out Herrick Co. Then, that fall, they bought out Rood Groceries, which had been located in the I.O.O.F. building on Calistoga street.

They closed down the Rood business and then secured a lease on the Odd Fellows building.

The Corner Store was born.

In the spring of 1944 they opened a new grocery store, cut arches between the Odd Fellows building and the Herrick building (stone building on the southeast corner of Calistoga and Main streets) and opened a hardware and appliance business in there.

In 1945 they bought the building between the Odd Fellows building and the old Post Office.

During this time, Irwin owned the Mountain Lumber Company at the south end of town in partnership with Jim Tocher. Hardester bought out Tocher and the Lumber Company became part of the Irwin & Hardester partnership.

In 1949 they bought the Herrick building and opened a clothing department upstairs.

In 1953 they moved the clothing department into their newly remodeled building next to the Odd Fellows building and converted the upstairs of the Herrick building into offices. They were now operating three store fronts plus the lumber yard becoming the largest full time business in Lake county.

The partners then bought the property at the northeast corner of Calistoga and Young streets. Sold the lumber company and in 1960 built their new store of 9,600 square feet.

The partnership ended in 1966. The local paper, the Middletown Times Star said it all:

“THE HARDESTERS BUY OUT THE IRWINS”

The store was rebranded. The Corner Store was no more, it was now, Hardester’s Market, as we know it today.

But, the Corner Store may rise from the ashes at the corner of Calistoga and Young streets, just as did the phoenix.

Time will tell.

EPILOGUE

As a result of the July 7th, 1930 fire, the cut stones from the gutted Presbyterian Church were sold. They were used to build two houses on Bush street and re-face the Brennen house on the same street. The Brennen house and one other are still being lived in this day.

You may have noticed in describing the property losses from the 1918 fire the two saloons listed were both vacant. Well, there was a reason.

“SAN FRANCISCO CALL 11/7/1908

“DRY” VOTES WIN IN LAKE COUNTY

*Prohibitionists Carry Middletown by Thirty-one
Majority After Long Campaign*

SPECIAL DISPATCH TO THE CALL

MIDDLETOWN, Nov. 6. — The greatest election surprise in the history of this town was sprung here Tuesday when Middletown went "dry" with 31 votes majority, and local saloon men and their followers make the statement broadcast that "the town is ruined."

Early in the ballot counting it was seen that Middletown South would go dry by the local option law, as votes against the saloon ran about 2 to 1, and at the finish of the counting the temperance people had gained their victory with a majority of 27 votes.

However, as there are no saloons in this precinct no material gain or loss could be sustained.

In Middletown North until the last six votes were counted the town was wet and the saloonists were preparing to have a banquet in honor of their victory, but each of the remaining six votes were prohibitionist and the saloon league was defeated by four votes.

Owing to the inefficiency of the local telephones all the precincts in the county have not been heard from. The reports received give the anti-saloon league the idea that more dry votes were cast throughout the country than wet. However, this has no effect, except to show the trend of sympathy and opinion.

Lakeport, the county seat of this county, has all but one saloon voted from its midst, while at Kelseyville the north precinct went dry, thus abolishing the bars at Soda Bay summer resort and Grand hotel.

Upper Lake and Lower Lake are the only towns in the county that are not dry or partly dry. These two towns had large wet majorities.

In the precincts heard from, 14 saloons have been voted closed as follows: Lakeport, four; Kelseyville, one; Soda Bay, one; Witter Springs, one; Laurel Dell, one; Batchelor Valley (which includes the bar at Bartlett Springs), one; Middletown, four; Harbin

Springs, one. Probably there will be more when the returns come in.

Whether this movement will be to the advantage of Lake county in general remains to be seen. Middletown will be affected most, as through this town, the summer travel pours from the city to the many resorts in the country. Harbin Springs, also, has heretofore been a favorite retreat of the sporting set and much material loss in custom is expected at that place. Yet Adam Springs has been voluntarily dry for some years and enjoys the largest patronage of any resort in the county.”

The Brennen house, previously mentioned, was the home of Orval and Della Brennen who moved to Middletown in 1928. At first, Orval hired on as a mechanic in Pinkie Wilkinson's Garage. He was the mechanic working the day Pinkie's sister came raising the alarm of the 1930 fire and then he was the lone person who rushed to the fire with a bucket of water and a burlap sack. After the fire, Orval was the driving force behind organizing the M.V.F.D. In April of 1932 Orval leased a building on Calistoga street and opened his own auto repair garage. The building had previously housed the Robert Tocher blacksmith shop. The spot where Brennen's Garage was located is the now empty lot on the east side of Calistoga street between Young and Main streets. Orval was Chief of the M.V.F.D. from 1941 through 1946. He retired from the M.V.F.D. in 1956. Orval and Della lived out

their lives in Middletown, raising two sons; Bill and Bob, during that time.

Pinkie Wilkinson and Les Simonsen together owned the garage where Orval had been a mechanic. After Orval left and opened his own business in 1932, Pinkie and Les sold their garage in September of that same year to Melvin Parriott and Bill Greist.

Melvin Parriott was a cousin of Pinkie's as Pinkie's mother was a Parriott. Pinkie's mother, Lydia, was the daughter of Eugene and Martha (McCall) Parriott and Melvin's father was Lydia's brother.

Elbert Jeremiah 'Pinkie' Wilkinson was born at the Great Western Mine, July 25th, 1891. He was the fifth of nine children born to Leander and Lydia Wilkinson.

Pinkie's father, Leander, was born in Missouri to Jeremiah and Sarah (Warham) Wilkinson on January 25th, 1845. Leander married, Pinkie's mother, Lydia Anne Parriott, in Middletown on June 15th, 1882.

The Wilkinson children were from oldest to youngest; Grace, Eugene, Frank, William, Elbert, Abbie, Mildred, Claude and Marie.

Pinkie Wilkinson lived in a two story house on the east side of Calistoga Street. The house had formally been the Fickes house that stood next to the Lewis house that had burned. He lived downstairs and there was an

apartment upstairs. The house is still standing and its address is 21048 Calistoga Street, commonly known as the “White House”.

There’s a story about the “White house” that goes like this: A relative of the Wilkinson’s came out of the mountains every winter and would stay with Pinkie in the “White House”. Then when the weather got better he would go back into the mountains. One fall he came down from the mountains and he was very ill. He visited the Doctor who told him he was dying, so, he went in the garage and killed himself.

Everyone who has spent any time in the “White House” has experienced unexplainable happenings. In fact there are many, many stories about finding items in other places than where they were left. Appliances turning themselves on. Locked doors being found unlocked and open and even an apparition witnessed by a Deputy Sheriff who found the doors unlocked one evening while on patrol.

During the 1940s Census, a man named James H. Taylor, was living upstairs at Pinkie’s and he was listed as a cousin. He died in 1945. Could this be the relative who killed himself and who may be haunting the old “White House” today?

Pinkie married Henrietta Prichard sometime after 1940. She had been previously married and her maiden

surname was Tewel. She had four grown children from that marriage

Eventually Pinkie and Henrietta moved to Napa where Pinkie passed in 1963. Henrietta lived on until 1976.

Pinkie's sister, Grace Marie Wilkinson, was the first born. She died at age 23. She had married a man named W. Fred Womack and they both died the same year, 1906, in Los Angeles at the Barlow Sanatorium. The Barlow Sanatorium treated people who had tuberculosis. Grace is resting in the Middletown Cemetery with the rest of her family.

Melvin Parriott, Pinkie's cousin, continued to run his Garage in Middletown until into the late 1940s. But by March of 1948 Mel had relocated to St. Helena in Napa county and opened up a Pontiac automobile dealership and garage on Adams street.

Mel was the second son of John Franklin and Minnie Jane Parriott, nee Parker. He married the daughter of Elmer F. and Ida Mae Dukes, nee Radford; Mildred. They had two sons, Melvin and Milton.

Connelly Conn was born in the month of June 1832 in County Kerry, Ireland. He came to America in 1852 at the age of twenty. He moved on to California in 1855 and by 1856 he was settling in the Brown's Valley area of Napa county. Connolly had an uncle, John Conn, who was already settled in Brown's Valley at that

time. Connolly met and married Mary McCall February 10th, 1864. In 1865 Anna Louisa was born and three years later Emma Florence was born. The family was well known in the St. Helena area and the place where they lived was soon known as Conn Valley.

Emma Florence Conn, who had been born in 1868, met and married George Myron Hobson. After giving birth to two daughters, a son, Myron Charles, was born on December 15, 1892. All total, the Hobsons had five children, 2 girls and three boys.

Myron Charles Hobson, grandson of Connelly Conn, met and married one of Pinkie Wilkinson's younger sisters, Mildred Sarah Wilkinson, on July 19th, 1919. Together they had two children. Willis Myron Hobson born November 1920 and Robert Lee Hobson born June 1922. Both sons preceded their parents in death. Robert died in 1956, Willis in 1966.

In the late 1940s Mildred and Myron went their separate ways. Mildred met and married Stanton "Stan" B. Pearson and they made their home in Middletown where the new Mrs. Pearson taught school.

Stan and Mildred's home was at 21037 Calistoga street and today is directly across the street from the Middletown branch of the WestAmerica Bank. The house is today occupied by the local florist.

The next house to the south of the Pearson home was where the Koopmans lived. Abbie Koopman, also a school teacher, was Mildred Pearson's older sister, the former Abbie Wilkinson (Cranson).

Many local children spent hours visiting the Pearson home in the 1950s listening to Stan and Mildred's stories, playing cards, taking nature walks and being amazed at their collection of nature and man-made local artifacts. Such as a paper hornet's nest still attached to a tree branch held up by shed deer antlers. Or an empty pond turtle's shell sitting next to a bird's nest with an assortment of feathers, a snake skin that had been shed, rattlesnake rattles resting in an ashtray along with assorted obsidian arrow points and mortars and pestles scattered about from centuries past. It was like visiting a museum to go visit the Pearsons.

Mrs. Pearson, on occasion, would tell the story about a special Christmas in her childhood when her parents were toll keepers on the Ida Clayton Toll Road that ran past the Great Western Mine to Knight's Valley.

In that remote area getting a doctor to visit, especially Christmas eve, was not much of a possibility. So when her three brothers became very ill with scarlet fever, Mildred's mother exiled she and her little sister Marie to the barn under the care of big sister Abbie, in hopes of keeping them from becoming ill.

The girls were safe and cozy in the barn that was filled with hay, but they were very concerned about Christmas. Their mother, Lydia, had no time to worry about Christmas while all the boys were so sick, so Abbie cut a small fir tree in the surrounding woods, set it in a box of damp sand from the creek and decorated it with apples, red berries from the woods and paper cut outs.

Abbie also cut out pictures from old magazines of things that would make do as a simulated Christmas present. She snuck onto the back porch of the house and secured some old ribbon that was stored there. Then, she tied the ribbon around the pretend presents giving the appearance of Christmas, thereby, stoking excitement in her younger sisters.

Come Christmas morning, before the girls were allowed to open their pretend presents, they first had to sing some Christmas carols and then Abbie had them present each horse and cow, that they were sharing stalls in the barn with, with apples and carrots for their gifts.

Mildred felt that this childhood story was very special and meaningful as she would end the story with: "Remember, the very first Christmas was celebrated in a stable."

Stan passed in October 1961 and Mildred Sarah Pearson, nee Wilkinson, died in 1970. Mildred was survived by a grandson Daniel Max Hobson.

The 1918 Spier's fire not only brought the demise of the Middletown Independent newspaper it sounded the death knell for the famous hotel, the Lake County House.

Charles Marsh Young had built the Lake County House shortly after Middletown was established. He was floating the idea of building a great hotel a few years before he actually built the place. In 1874, the newspaper, the Russian River Flag, reported he was contemplating a three story brick structure. Then on December 25th, 1875, the Sonoma Democrat reported Young had indeed finished his hotel and was open for business. The hotel was described as *“being 34x60 feet, with a large kitchen in the rear. It has on the ground floor a large parlor, reading room, and suite of rooms in the rear of the parlor. On the upper floor, there are fourteen chambers, airy and well ventilated; the whole newly furnished throughout.”*

From the beginning in 1875 through 1918 there were a few different owners of the Lake County House. By 1890 Charles M. Young was no longer the owner as John McGreer had acquired the hotel from Young. Then in 1911 it was reported that the new owner was Bert Levy and he would take control that September. After the 1918 fire, Silas Herrick bought the remnants

and built a new hotel. The Santa Rosa Press Democrat reported in their April 9th, 1920 edition, that a Santa Rosa contractor had just completed the building of the Herrick Hotel *“a fine structure of brick and stucco, finished with 28 rooms, equipped with hot and cold water and all modern conveniences”*.

The Lake County House had been both a famous and infamous landmark during its time, often mentioned in local newspaper reporting. It was in front of the Lake County House where Tom Dye shot and killed Charles Bates. It was where a bartender, working at the hotel, Albert Davis, shot and killed an inebriated client “Skippy” Mathewson. The Lake County House was where John Good sought refuge after being shot by Buck English in 1876. John McGreer, who had acquired the hotel from Young, one evening had a dispute with his son over the leasing of the hotel. Seems the son thought he was acquiring the lease, however, John had decided otherwise. This so upset the son that following the dispute, he shot and killed himself in the parlor of the hotel right in front of his father. And it was where a depressed Chinese chef had committed suicide by jumping off the water tower behind the hotel.

So, after nearly forty three years, the Lake County House was replaced by the Herrick Hotel. The new structure, built in 1920 following the 1918 fire, still stands today but is no longer a hotel.

THE WHITE HOUSE 21048 CALISTOGA ST
c.1891



L - R Jacob and Catherine Fickes, George Adam and Susie Fickes with
George "Archie" in buggy, Teresa, Arlie and Carl, Lawson and Lincoln
"Link"

You have already read about the White House while under Pinkie Wilkinson's care but what about the Fickes family?

Jacob Fickes was born in Bedford County, Pennsylvania January 26, 1822. He became a school teacher. He married his first wife Susannah Imler on July 30th, 1848. They had two sons while in Pennsylvania but moved to Sandusky County, Ohio about 1854 where a third son Francis was born in 1856. Here in Ohio, Jacob and sons lost their wife and

mother, Susannah, when she died in April of 1856 after giving birth to son Francis. Son Benjamin, the second born, died an infant just short of being three months old.

On the 15th of February, 1857 Jacob married his second wife Catherine Moses. Together over the next thirteen years they would have six more children.

On October 1st, 1861 Jacob enlisted in the Army serving with the Union Forces. He promoted to full Captain on January 10th, 1862 and joined with Company I, Ohio 72nd Infantry Regiment on February 18th, 1862. He mustered out on February 4th, 1863. This Regiment fought in many battles during the course of the war. These included battles at Shiloh and Memphis Tennessee; and Corinth and Vicksburg Mississippi. The Ohio 72nd fought in 36 named battles from its inception through the end of the war.

By 1870 Jacob and family were living in Missouri where their last child Carl Shurz Fickes was born.

On September 3rd, 1877 Jacob Fickes, now 55 years old, registered to vote in the village of Guenoc, in Coyote Valley, California. Then on December 2nd, 1879 Jacob was appointed Postmaster for the village of Guenoc. There is no record of just when the family relocated to Middletown, however, other family related documents show it must have taken place in the late 1880s.

First born child of Jacob and his first wife Susannah, George Adam Fickes, was a carpenter and builder in Middletown. He met and then married Susan 'Susie' Lincoln Read who was also a resident of Middletown. This event took place November 27th, 1887.

Susie was the oldest child of Joseph L. and Margaret Read. J. L. Read and family settled in Middletown in 1874, his Middletown resume lists; farmer, Justice of the Peace, Postmaster and founder of the Middletown Independent.

George and Susie had two children, both boys. Archie, the oldest, followed in his grandfather's footsteps and became a school teacher. In June of 1916 Archie became vice principal of the Vallejo elementary school.

George suffered a heart attack in 1933 and passed the following year on January 16th. His wife Susie died two years later on March 29th, 1936. Archie died a young man of 47 years on January 31st, 1937.

Jacob and Catherine Fickes, their sons; Francis and George Adam; and their daughter-in-law, Susie are all resting in the Middletown Cemetery.

THE VALLEY FIRE TIME-LINE

The following time-line of the Valley Fire came from posts on the fire-fighters blog, Facebook and from the scanner.

Identity of post - * These posts are from the fire-fighter blog, # These are my posts to FB, ## These are my daughter's post to FB.

Abbreviation meanings: FB Facebook - PIO Public Information Officer - MOD Moderator - RROS Rapid rate of spread - AA Air attack - STL Strike team leader - CLD Cloverdale - GEY Geyserville - WND Windsor - RIN Rincon - BVF _ Volunteer fire - WT Water tender - IC Incident commander - MROS Moderate rate of spread – Batt. Battalion Chief – DIV Division Chief – freqs. frequencies

TIME - LINE

9/12/2015 Saturday 13:24

*13:54	High Valley Rd. Cobb mtn. That is the east side of the geysers, nasty country up there. 2 acres MROS was the size up. Unknown size now. But it has crossed Bottle Rock Rd burning to the east
*13:56	Mods this is the Valley Fire and is off of Cobb Mtn and the back side of St Helena. Structure threats, 3 type 1s on order and immediate need strike teams being toned out.
*14:04	IC requested 2 prevention officers, 1 command & 3 tac. freqs. Possible closure of Hwy. 175.
*14:09	DIV 1409 requesting entire community of Cobb be evacuated.

1 HOUR	
*14:23	Just requested 40 engines, any type, 20 crews, 10 dozers.
*14:29	Just asked for 10 WT, 3 OPBD and 8 DIVS.
*14:31	50 acres , per Cal Fire.
#14:45	Major fire on Cobb Mt. Evacuations, injuries, major resource order, west wind, road closures, bad.
*14:49	Sonoma County putting together two Type 3 Strike Teams, First team: Batt 6 STL, CLD 6570, GEY 6171, WND 7266, RIN 7572, BVF 7861
*14:49	Local media reports "strong west wind" pushing fire to the east.
1 HOUR 33 MIN	
*14:57	Update: Per AA Fire is growing at an incredible rate pulling crews back, long range spotting & erratic Fire Behavior occurring
*14:58	200 acres now and growing fast.
#14:58	Ordering 3 more air ambulances for the Cobb fire - 200 acres headed for Hobergs loop and Bluess crt.
*14:59	Trying to divert and dispatch resources to 2 new fires along Hwy 175. AA confirms at least one new fire.
*15:01	Local media reports spot fire on Gifford Springs Rd. in Cobb.
1 HOUR 40 MIN	
*15:03	400 acres , heavy timber RR0S per AA
#15:03	New fire Whispering Pines burning down hill toward Middletown
#15:07	Fire jumped at Hobergs entered Boggs State forest rapid rate of spread 400 acres
*15:07	Fire is in Boggs Mtn. State Forest per AA.
#15:08	Fire at Gifford Springs power lines down
*15:10	Update: #Structure Protection group says it's starting to hit houses hard in the #Whispering Pines neighborhood

#15:11	The fire that started near Whispering Pines is burning downhill towards Middletown .
2 HOURS	
#15:24	Mandatory evacuations of Harbin Hot Springs and Big Cyn Rd .
*15:31	Safety alert issued due to an evacuated home having several thousand rounds of ammo in the garage - per local media.
*15:35	Reports of mandatory evacuation zone being extended all the way to Harbin Hot Springs Rd. and Big Canyon Rd.
2 HOURS 13 MIN	
#15:37	Evacuating Harbin and Big Cyn Rd .
#15:43	Just ordered 4 additional air tankers
*15:46	Requesting mandatory evacs Loch Lomond to Cobb .
*15:46	Local media says fire reached Boggs Mountain helitack base over 20 minutes ago.
*15:48	Fire at Gifford Springs road will be combined with the Valley inc. as "Valley 2".
*15:57	There have been two additional fires, doesn't sound like spots, in the south and north extremes of the Cobb area.
*15:57	There was a separate start at Gifford Springs, the Valley 2 fire and they are being managed as one incident.
#16:00	PG&E to shut off all power to COBB.
*16:02	AA140 states Valley2 is spotting all the way through Boggs State Forest and will impact Harbin Hot Springs in 2 to 3 hours
2 HOURS 28 MIN	
#16:03	Request for 10 additional water tenders.
#16:05	Fire will impact Harbin and Big Cyn Rd within 2-3 hours.
#16:07	When PG&E shuts down the power any water system needing electricity will be inoperable.

#16:09	Fire will impact Harbin and Big Cyn Rd within 2-3 hours.
*16:19	Flames now visible from Middletown .
3 HOURS 17 MIN	
*16:41	AA states Valley 2 fire has made it to Harbin Hot Springs and will impact downtown Middletown by nightfall.
*16:50	SHELTER LOCATION CHANGE*** New location K-ville Presbyterian Church 5340 3rd Street in Kelseyville. Is Middletown being evacuated?
#16:52	This from a firefighter blog Mod Note: "Feel free to start a well wishes thread for Copter 104 crew, It may sidetrack the Q and D, so it may need it's own thread, but we encourage the positive thoughts. Thank You: MOD-FLINT" We knew there were injuries now we know who.
*16:53	Extending evacuations down Hwy. 175 including all roads off of 175 to the Dry Creek Cutoff.
*17:01	Have them go south. Evacs are advisory along 175 south to Dry Creek . Going north would put them into the fire danger.
*17:07	If they quickly, what BZ said may be true. However, I did hear AA state that fire was almost to the east side of Boggs State Forest. If so, am wondering how long 29 will be viable back toward Hidden Valley Lake. Have not heard any traffic about evacuations on that Hidden Valley side though either.
*17:09	Air Attack said fire could be hitting 29 in an hour.
*17:11	OK, so now IC stating fire to hit hwy 29 in an hour . Hustle it up! Advisory for Hidden Valley Lake. Also winds have really picked up in south Sonoma Co. Konocti RAWs is gradually going up, now 24 gust to 34.
*17:12	From the online scanner traffic, it sounds like it is making a "hard run at Hidden Valley". Lots of homes in there. Probably more since I worked at

	that station years ago. Evacuations could be a major issue in there as well.
#17:16	Please stay alert!! Many pieces of large burnt materials falling anyone of these could be an ember rather than ash. Thanks to Marsha Huff for the alert.
*17:22	Advisory Evacuation notice for all of Hidden Valley Lake.
4 HOURS	
*17:24	Air Attack says the fire is bumping SR 29.
*17:41	Big... Very big. Air Ops being shut down because of turbulence
#17:41	At this point you know what I know. <i>(my last post – shut off computer and started packing)</i>
*17:46	IC requesting mandatory evacuation for Hidden Valley due to spot fires.
*17:52	AA estimating 10K acres.
*17:56	Asking for "immediate, immediate evacuations of everything north of the casino."
*18:11	Prevention 1410 requesting more engines for hidden valley
*18:13	Mandatory evacuation of Middletown per PIO Berlant
6 HOURS 1 MIN	
*19:25	Fire being reported on both sides of Butts Canyon Road by Branch 2; didn't catch all of it but sounds like a civilian may have tried to start a backfire?
*19:47	J W Chesnut, I think you can expand that perimeter significantly into the Hidden Valley Lake area. Lots of radio traffic indicating that the fire's well-established east of 29 and burning in the subdivisions there. Also social media reports from residents who have seen homes burning.
*20:01	#Update #Hidden Valley Branch says he needs as much help as he can get req-10 Strike Teams Fire impacting 100+ Homes right now

*20:16	Harbin Hot Springs being reported as burned to the ground via social media.
7 HOURS 2 MIN	
*20:26	# Valley Fire : Per CHP, fire has jumped to the south of Hwy175 at Santa Barbara Ave in Middletown ; road closures being moved.
*20:39	Weather around the fire area as of 8:40pm - via Wundermap Middletown - temp 89.3 ° wind ENE Gusts 6.9 mph Humidity: 5 % Loch Lomond - temp 75° F wind West Gusts 4.0 mph Humidity: 21 % Clearlake - temp 78 ° wind W Gusts 25 mph Humidity: 21 %
*20:45	Station in hills above Geyserville (~2000 feet MSL) currently reporting 84F, humidity 15%, winds 28, gust 43. Seems that a compressional/adiabatic heating event is ongoing across the region combined with strengthening winds at higher elevations. Lower winds but even hotter/drier and lower elevations. Very strange and very dangerous fire weather situation in the immediate vicinity of the fire.
*20:51	North Ops trying to string together any single resources they can to go to the #Valley Fire but next to nothing left South ops drying out to
*21:04	Report from the Press-Democrat was that 50+ structures were lost in the northern parts of Cobb , but that the downtown area, school, fire station, etc. were not damaged.
8 HOURS 14 MIN	
*21:38	Santa Rosa Press Democrat news report states: "Firefighters made a stand at the town's high school , knocking down a fire that started to burn the main building."

*22:23	<p>Cal Fire PIO Daniel Berlant posts Just In - The #Valley Fire in Lake County has grown to 25,000 acres. Hundreds of firefighters working throughout the night protecting homes. Lots of propane popping off. Structure protection working in Berryessa Estates area. Numerous structure loss. Hidden Valley Lake lower valley area looks mostly ok. Upper not sure. Never thought I would see this in my own neighborhood. Winds have receded significantly.</p>
9/13/2015 00:00	
*01:30	<p>Just did a firing op to save Middletown Cal-Fire Station 31. A lot of people weren't so lucky. Wind (south) has picked up again.</p>
*02:45	<p>Unconfirmed report by a journalist that infrared mapping of the fire now puts it at 40,000 acres.</p>
*03:15	<p>"Send it all..." When a fire goes that big that fast, the ordering system is quickly behind the curve. It <i>*will*</i> take time to fill.</p>
##03:53	<p>we are all together with more friends. Safe. Evacuated to KV. Red Cross</p>
*05:42	<p>The <i>entire</i> ICS system is overwhelmed. This fire is moving far too fast for any human mind to keep up with the system. It will simply take time to process and catch up. For those who are saying "plenty of resources here", I would be asking your duty chief, Department Chief, or OP Area Coordinator if they have received requests or declined requests, or told others up the chain they are available, or at drawdown. If resources have not been dispatched from your agency, it is probably because your Chief or OP Area Coordinator has stated your area is at drawdown.</p>

*07:30	Not surprising to me anymore, as this type of fire growth seems to be the norm now. I was on one of the first type three strike teams IA on the Rocky Incident when it burned over our location, forcing us back to Morgan Valley rd. It went from a relatively quiet backing fire, to burning 7k acres over night. Then a few days later we took refuge in a safety zone as it burned 20k acres in around 4-5 hours. The one most important thing I can stress from all of this is LCES. They are not just boxes to check, use them. They will ensure your safety and the safety of your crews. I know because it did for me.
27 HOURS 32 MIN	
*15:56	As of 13:15, CalFire reporting 50,000 acres burned . KCRA Breaking News at about 1400 has Daniel Berlant stating "100's of homes destroyed"

I'm a person with a survivalist mentality so I was prepared, but not really. Never in my life did I ever imagine a fire of such magnitude. Such a destructive, unstoppable force. It could have been a movie that I was living through, like the "Towering Inferno" or any other fictional movie of a similar story line. In fact, I believe it would have taken a mind that gives us those types of movies to imagine what we experienced that day in September. Unbelievable is what it was. I never knew that that reality existed.

Many people who lived through the Valley Fire to this day suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. They can experience anxiety, nightmares, flashbacks,

avoidance, pre-occupation, negativity and other emotional distress. These can be random events or triggered. Triggers can be as minor as the weather conditions to once again witnessing a fire.

M.V.F.D.

Officers c. 1942



Back Row L-R: Ray Moody Sr., Orval Brennen, Reed Hardester and Bob Groves
Front Row L-R: Orin Higgins, Bill Nelson and Marvin Higgins

FINAL THOUGHTS

This book, FIRE, is the fifth book that I have published about Middletown and some of its history. All the books are a gift to the community from the entire Wink family. Any money raised in the sale of the books went 100% to the organization selling the book because the books were all donated to them free of any charge.

The first book, MURDER IN THE MAYACAMAS, came as the result of an invitation by Sandra Hoberg Fox. She had received startling new evidence that she shared with my wife regarding the 50 year old murder mystery, who then shared it with me and I was on it. It seemed, as if once I started researching the new evidence, I became like a hunting dog on a hot scent and the formula for writing more historical books was born.

I followed that book, MURDER IN THE MAYACAMAS, with a historical regard about GUENOC RANCH and my forty year relationship with her.

Helen Rocca Goss had written a book about the murders that happened 3 miles south of Middletown in October of 1890 but it was out of print and I had acquired new information regarding the event, so, CINNABAR came next.

CINNABAR was followed by ENGLISH

The Benjamin Franklin English family represented the “wild, wild west” and their connection to Middletown could not be over looked.

And George Coburn, I couldn’t leave that story not retold, as my family and I had lived on land that once was part of the Coburn ranch. In fact we lived right at Maker’s Corner where W. R. Coburn was murdered.

And in this book, FIRE, I took a personal liberty to add extra information about the “White House” as we personally had a business located in there for several years, SYLVIE’S ladies apparel. Plus, my wife Sylvia’s grandmother, Ethel (Read) Strickler, was the great grandniece of J. L. Read who was the father of Susie (Read) Fickes.

I hope you enjoy all the books and if so, you will share them with your family and friends, as they are all limited editions.

God Bless America.

Thank you for supporting Middletown.

Bill Wink

PS: There may be one more book. Time will tell.

ADDENDUM

It seems the Middletown fire of 1918 was not the first fire to visit Middletown's business district.

It was reported by the Napa Register on December 20th, 1895; that prior to that date, fire struck the business section of Middletown destroying a block of buildings. Those buildings housed C. M. Young's general merchandise store, the Post Office, J. B. Lynn's notions and grocery store, G. W. Warren's bakery, C. H. Teller's jewelry establishment and Mathews and Lampel's saloon.

Then following the great fire of 1918 on October 17th, 1928, a block in the main part of town was destroyed again by fire.

Although the two firefighting apparatus were used, it was reported that a shortage of water for fighting the fire was the issue. The 500 gallon tank on the Packard truck was soon exhausted and a nearby well pumped dry trying to extinguish the flames.

The fire started on the second floor of a building owned by Sydney H. McKinley that was being occupied by the Arthur Bohn family. The building, its accompanying out buildings and all their contents were lost in the blaze. The McKinley building had been the Callayomi Hotel some years prior.

The buildings that burned occupied the block between Armstrong and Douglas streets on the east side of Calistoga Street. Those consumed along with McKinley's

were Supervisor Thomas A. “Bert” Read’s residence, the Justice Court building, the jail and several other storage buildings totaling seven buildings in all. The estimated value of all the losses combined was set at \$12,000.

Middletown's Business District Destroyed by Fire

MIDDLETOWN (Lake Co.), March 4.—All of Middletown's business district was erased from the map by fire which started at 12:30 o'clock yesterday in Spiers' Garage, when a vulcanizing plant exploded. Fanned by a stiff south breeze, at times a gale, the flames spread northward, leaping the main street several times and within two hours every business house and several dwellings here were smouldering ruins.

The loss is estimated at from \$75,000 to \$100,000, and the insurance carried will not exceed \$10,000. Many of the persons who lost buildings and contents carried no insurance.

Calistoga to Help Rebuild

CALISTOGA, March 6.—At a mass meeting of citizens it was decided that the community as a body, shall assist the Town of Middletown, recently destroyed by fire, to rebuild immediately.

Stages have been donated by the Spiers stage line and the White Transportation Company to carry all workers free of charge to and from Middletown. Free toll also is given by the Lawley Toll Road Company.

About 200 Calistoga men have signed up for the work and will go to Middletown about March 10th with tools and other equipment to give a big start in reconstruction.

The Calistoga Civic Club will furnish the lunches and every man has promised a full 10-hour day.

Middletown people will clear the grounds and be ready for the Calistoga workers on the day set.

Middletown Fire Burns Church and 5 Dwellings

Flames Sweep Northward; Are Being Fought In Brushland 4 Miles North of Town

MIDDLETOWN, Lake Co. July 15.—Fanned by a high wind, fire swept across the western part of this town today, destroying the Presbyterian Church and five dwellings.

The loss was placed at \$25,000.

The entire population turned out to lend assistance in combatting the fire. Fire fighting equipment was rushed here from Galistoga.

STILL BURNING

Late this afternoon, 50 men led by Fire Warden "Buck" Erickson

were battling to control the blaze in brush land on a dairy ranch on the Lower Lake road four miles north of here.

The five homes were burned within 25 minutes. Sparks ignited the roof of the church and soon it was entirely ablaze. The new grammar school was endangered, but saved.

STARTS AT 11 A. M.

Children playing with matches in dry grass were reported to have been responsible for the fire. Spread of the flames was discovered at 11 a. m. At 12:30 the fire had burned its way out into the brush land outside of the town limits.

The houses destroyed were reported as three occupied by the Crabtree, Tosher and Tripp families, and two others owned by Jim Reese and a Mrs. Young.

No one was reported injured in fighting the fire.

1930

Middletown, September 20.—George Fickes, who was most seriously injured on Tuesday last, when he sustained a fall while shingling the roof of Mrs. Sallee's house, is much better, to the joy of relatives and friends, but is by no means out of danger. Ice packs and the best of care on the part of his family have kept him fairly comfortable and have avoided possible complications. His son, Archie, from Vallejo, has been in constant attendance as has Mrs. Fickas. His many friends hope for his complete recovery within a few weeks.

1	Name in full 158 George Archie Fickes (Given name) (Family name)	Age, in yrs 27
2	Home address 745 Georgia St Valley Cal (No.) (Street) (City) (State)	
3	Date of birth Aug 25 - 1889 (Month) (Day) (Year)	
4	Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? natural born	
5	Where were you born? Middletown Cal. USA (Town) (State) (Nation)	
6	If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject? citizen	
7	What is your present trade, occupation, or office? teaching	
8	By whom employed? 28 City Valley Where employed? Valley Cal	
9	Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? no	
10	Married or single (which)? single Race (specify which)? Cauc	
11	What military service have you had? Rank private; branch Nat Guard years 5 mo; Nation or State Cal.	
12	Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)? no	

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

G. A. Fickes
 (Signature or mark)

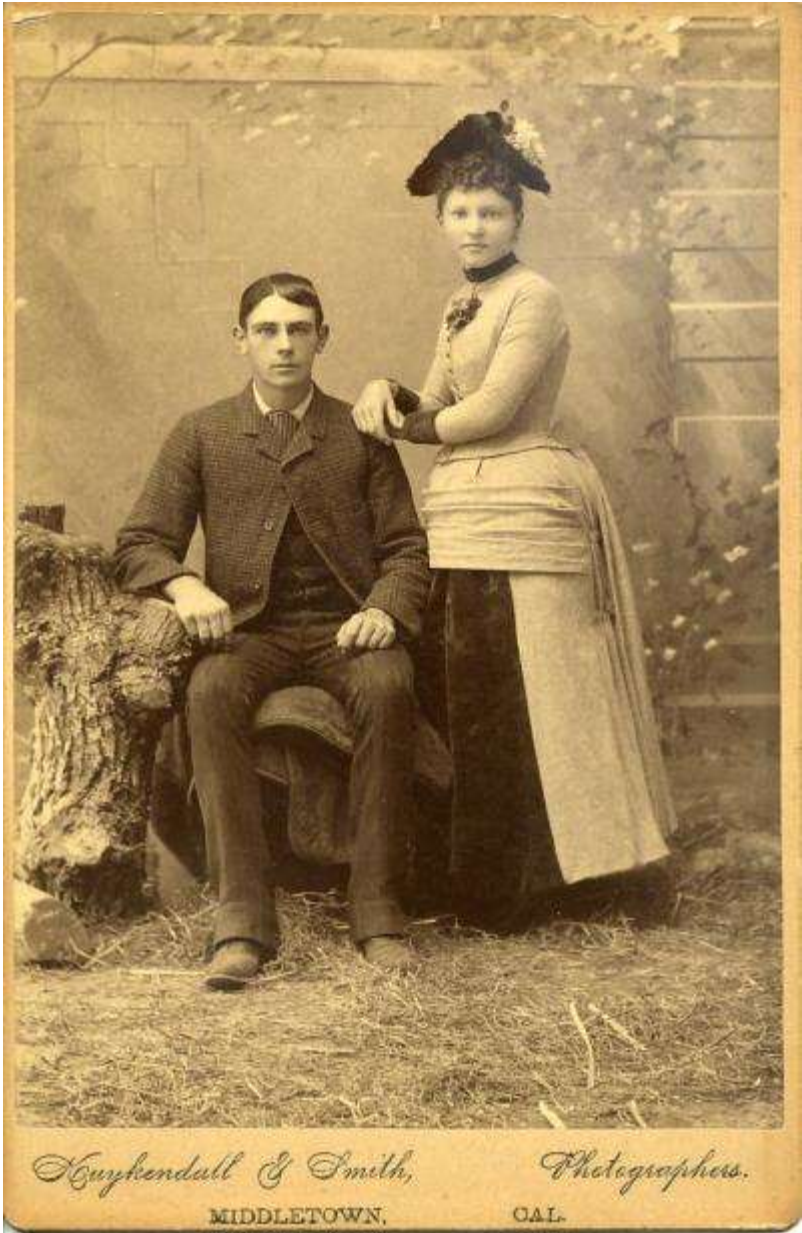


Susie Fickes

Cramer,

402 Kearny Street, S. F.

Susan (Read) Fickes



Sylvia's Great Grandparents
Frank and Mildred Read

SOURCES

INDIVIDUAL SOURCES

- SYLVIA (IRWIN) WINK
- JUDY WINK
- CAL FIRE BATTALION CHIEF, MICHAEL WINK
- ORVAL BRENNEN
- BOB BRENNEN
- GREG HARDESTER
- WALTER HARDESTER
- 'SKEE' HAMANN
- MARION MCMURTRY

PRINT MEDIA

- MIDDLETOWN INDEPENDENT
- WEEKLY CALISTOGIAN
- SAINT HELENA STAR
- NAPA REGISTER
- GEYSERVILLE GAZETTE
- HEALDSBURG TRIBUNE
- RUSSINA RIVER FLAG
- SONOMA DEMOCRAT
- SANTA ROSA PRESS DEMOCRAT

INTERNET

- ANCESTRY.COM
- FINDAGRAVE.COM
- NEWSPAPERS.COM
- FIRE FIGHTERS BLOG.COM

AGENCIES & ORGANIZATIONS

- CAL FIRE
- LAKE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
- SONOMA COUNTY MUSEUM

