

OLD BINFORD RESIDENT IS BELFIELD FIRE HERO

Frank Davis Did Valiant Services In Rescuing Victims of Prairie Fire Holocast.

The news of the prairie fire which raged in the Belfield district in western North Dakota last Friday, and which claimed a terrible toll of life and property, was particularly interesting to residents of Binford and surrounding community, as several of those concerned are former residents and have relatives here.

Frank Davis is well known to Times readers. He is a brother of Mrs. Frank Grigsby, who lives a short distance west of town, and is owner of the farm.

The Geary's are also former residents of this community. One of their sons, Ernest, was a victim of the flames,

Alfred, Walter and Henry Schwartz are the children of Mr. and Mrs. Joe Schwartz, and are numbered among the survivors. They have visited in Binford several times. Mrs. Schwartz is a sister of Henry and Carl Asmus.

The fire was the worst in the history of the country. A teacher in a country school and six pupils were burned to death. The fire was started some 17 miles southwest of Belfield about noon by a threshing outfit which was moving to another setting, and was fanned into a devastating flame by a 80-mile gale, it swept on to claim a terrible toll of life and property.

About 4 o'clock Miss Gladys Hollister and her little flock of 12 school children in the Davis school, 12 miles southwest of Belfield, saw the fire about 5 miles away, coming up the valley towards them. Frantic with fright, they left the building, which stands uninjured, and which would have kept them safe, while the fire demon swept by, and made superhuman efforts to reach a plowed field, which they thought their only hope.

Seven children escaped. They said when they saw the flames swooping down they all ran panic stricken. The Parish girl, Gladys, and Johnnie Olsen were caught on a tongue of land between two fires but made a dash through the flames and escaped unharmed, save for singed hair. Alfred, Walter and Henry Schwartz and Dollie Smith succeeded in reaching some flax stubble and were safe. Horror and fear had so changed the faces of all the survivors that their parents scarcely recognized them. Their teacher and six little comrades struggled on, now falling, overcome

by fear and smoke, then up and stumbling again. But the dense smoke enveloped them and they were huddled together only four rods from the ploughed ground and safety.

Three children were dead when found and three terribly burned. Their clothes were completely burned off. Miss Hollister, who was in a most pitiable condition when found, with 95 per cent of the skin burned off her body, was unconscious but regained consciousness long enough to say that she realized her mistake in leaving the schoolhouse, but did what she thought best.

Frank Davis is the hero of the day. He is a director of the ill fated school, and living only a half mile away, was the first to arrive on the holocaust.

Words cannot describe the horror, he said, the blackened and smoking prairie; the little deserted schoolhouse; the two groups of awestruck children, safely beyond the path of fire and scattered over the burned area the bodies of the victims; here a hand moved, there a head, then again another was past all movement. All seven were totally blinded by the fire. Some were within 80 rods of the schoolhouse—one a half mile away and all save one were lying on their backs, their limbs drawn up.

Nearest the school he found the teacher and little Rexie Smith, only a portion of their shoes remained, but both were alive. Miss Hollister recognized Davis' voice and asked that she might see her sister before she died. Davis took off his outer shirt and put around her and wiped the ashes and dirt from her mouth. She said, "That feels better." She was taken to the schoolhouse where she died a few hours later with her sister, Mrs. Grey, by her side. Rexie died earlier at the Davis home.

Continuing the rescue work Davis picked up another victim who died in his arms. With no coat and with nothing but his undershirt on, Davis took two of the terribly burned, but still living children wrapped in cotton, in his car and drove in a biting wind, 16 miles to Belfield. No less heroic was the conduct of Ethel Smith, who without a hat and in a shirtwaist went with him and held one of the boys in her arms.

A team of horses for sale.—See First State Bank.