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THIRTIETH ANNUAL REPORT  
OF THE

# State Fire Marshal

FOR THE YEAR 1940

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JOHN W. STROHM  
State Fire Marshal

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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY  
DIVISION OF FIRE PROTECTION AND INVESTIGATION

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Des Moines, Iowa, January 31, 1941.

HON. GEO. A. WILSON, *Governor of Iowa*,  
Des Moines, Iowa.

SIR: In compliance with the provisions of law, I have the honor to submit the Thirtieth Annual Report of the affairs of this office covering the period beginning January 1, 1940, and ending December 31, 1940, both dates inclusive.

Respectfully submitted,

JOHN W. STROHM, *State Fire Marshal*,  
DIVISION OF FIRE PROTECTION AND INVESTIGATION,  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY.

PROCLAMATION

TO THE PEOPLE OF IOWA, GREETINGS:

Prevention and control of fire is a matter of common interest to us all, in that we are the owners of property which, if caught by a flame, might be destroyed.

The value of fire prevention is effectively testified in terms of lives saved and reduction of property loss. In 1922, the loss in Iowa, in terms of dollars, was more than \$10,000,000. Last year it was less than half that amount.

Therefore, I, Geo. A. Wilson, Governor, do hereby designate the week of

OCTOBER 6 TO 12, 1940

as

IOWA FIRE PREVENTION WEEK

It is my urgent recommendation to all of my fellow citizens that suitable attention be given during this week to the means of prevention of fire, and that exercises be planned by the schools, and I especially propose that a special vote of thanks be given our professional and volunteer fire fighters during the week named, for their untiring efforts in our protection.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the Great Seal of the State of Iowa. Done at Des Moines, this 30th day of September, in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Forty, of the State of Iowa, the Ninety-Fourth, and of the Independence of the United States the One Hundred and Sixty-fifth.

(SEAL)

GEO. A. WILSON, *Governor*.



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY  
DIVISION OF FIRE PROTECTION AND INVESTIGATION

Appointed by the Commissioner, Department of Public Safety  
Term, Four Years. Expires July 1, 1943

Office	Name	Legal Residence	County
Fire Marshal.....	John W. Strohm.....	Clinton .....	Clinton
Assistant .....	A. Lubberden .....	Pella .....	Marion
Assistant .....	J. Leon Leeper.....	Leon .....	Decatur
Assistant .....	C. W. Cornell.....	Bedford .....	Taylor
Secretary .....	Olive R. Sly.....	Boone .....	Boone

## STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S REPORT

There were 4,887 fires reported for 1940, or 522 less than for 1939.

The fire loss for 1939 was \$4,745,909 while the 1940 fire loss was \$4,449,221 or a decrease of \$296,688.

A most interesting fact is the decrease in fires caused by sparks from chimneys—there were 1,222 such fires reported for 1939, while only 955 fires were reported for 1940, and the fire loss on this item was reduced to \$313,659.

There was a decrease in the number of "Unknown" fires from 762 fires for 1939, to 640 fires for 1940, and a reduction in the amount of fire loss from \$1,809,377 for 1939 to \$1,702,240 for 1940, a difference of \$107,137.

Fires from "Defective Flues" increased from 253 for 1939, to 324 for 1940, and the fire loss increased from \$272,049 for 1939, to \$338,726 for 1940, or a difference of \$66,677.

Brooder stoves and lamps were responsible for 51 fires and a property loss of \$13,761, or an increase of \$5,034 over the 1939 fire loss.

Bonfires, grass fires and rubbish fires caused a fire loss of \$66,337 in 308 fires in 1939, and this item was reduced to 130 fires and a loss of \$22,645 for 1940.

These items are of interest inasmuch as they are among our leading cause of fire, and it is gratifying to note the reduction in the amount of fire loss in a few cases.

Credit must be given the Fire Departments of Iowa, Fire Prevention organizations, Chambers of Commerce, social and service clubs, adult education groups, Fire Prevention programs in schools, and all Iowans who have taken an active part in Iowa's Fire Prevention program.

## PROPERTY DESTROYED

The fire loss in chicken brooders and hatcheries was reduced from \$18,784 for 1939 to \$7,996 for 1940.

The principal cause of these fires is carelessness in handling brooder lamps and stoves.

The fire loss in factories was reduced from \$431,658 for 1939 to \$115,014 for 1940—smoker's carelessness, defective electric wiring, spontaneous combustion in rubbish, cause many factory fires.



Town dwelling fires were reduced from \$616,134 for 1939 to \$554,721 for 1940—sparks from chimney, defective flues, defective electric wiring and many of the other 35 common causes of fire in the home were responsible for this loss.

School fire loss was increased from \$117,772 for 1939 to \$214,887 for 1940. Heating plants, defective flues, electric wiring, and spontaneous combustion were responsible for a large portion of this loss.

The loss in store fires was increased from \$604,953 for 1939 to \$705,205 for 1940. Defective flues, heating plants, electric wiring and spontaneous combustion are common causes of store fires.

Storage and warehouse fires increased more than fifty per cent in 1940—most common cause of such fires being defective electric wiring, defective heating plants, smoker's carelessness and spontaneous combustion.

### IOWA'S DEFENSE

America is being geared to maximum production of goods required for national defense. Our resources are the basis of all production. Material wealth must be utilized to best advantage. Wastage of finished products or raw materials under present conditions is a crime against the nation! Destruction of property by fire is waste. FIRE PREVENTION is a patriotic duty.

Fire, beyond control, can be our worst enemy, and it has been known to destroy not only millions of dollars worth of property, but takes the lives of 10,000 men, women and children every year, and slows up defense production.

The most common causes of fire in homes are careless smoking, sparks on roofs, defective or overheated chimneys and flues, defective electrical equipment, using kerosene or gasoline to start fires, cleaning clothes, floors, rugs and other articles about the home with gasoline, etc.

Iowa's defense must be less fires if we are to conserve our resources to aid in the national defense program.

We can and will do our part by working together to eliminate fire hazards in Iowa through a better understanding of Fire Prevention, and Fire Protection, the need for fire prevention education, adequate fire protection, fire fighting equipment, well manned fire departments and water supply.

### SAVING LIFE AT HOME

Sixty per cent of deaths from fire occur in homes.

Numerous houses and buildings are constructed with hollow spaces in the walls from cellar to attic. This permits flames in the cellar (where many fires start) to spread throughout the entire building with amazing rapidity. Escape for the occupants of such a house is often cut off before they know there is a fire.

Firemen find many persons dead long before the flames reach them. Smoke and terrific heat come billowing up open stairwells to snuff out lives.

If you become aware of fire, don't open an upstairs door and rush out into the hall. One breath of superheated air may knock you out! Feel of the door first. If hot, leave it closed and seek another exit. If cool, place your foot against it so you can open it an inch or two, but keep your face away from this crack! Then, if smoke and heat rush in, you can slam the door shut.

### CLEANING WITH GASOLINE

You wouldn't put dynamite in your kitchen sink, but cleaning with GASOLINE is just as dangerous.

At least 300 women a year lose their lives attempting to clean clothing in gasoline, naphtha or benzine. These fluids are dangerous because they vaporize so quickly, forming an explosive mixture with air. Then a tiny flame or spark readily ignites this mixture, setting off a devastating explosion. A pilot light on a gas stove will do it. Even a spark of static electricity caused by rubbing materials together in the cleaning process will ignite the vapor. Remember, too, that these vapors are heavier than air. They settle to the floor and spread rapidly. An open cellar door permits them to reach a furnace or other source of ignition downstairs. Don't take a chance with liquid dynamite in your home! ANY kind of cleaning with gasoline, naphtha or benzine is dangerous ANY time!

### SMOKING IN BED

Do you know why smoking in bed is so dangerous? Your senses are dulled, you doze, the cigarette drops to the bed—fumes from the smoldering bedding overcome you—the fire gets under way. A life is snuffed out.

Worst of all, you may take others with you, for the smoke and



fumes will spread to asphyxiate other sleeping persons. If undiscovered for some time, the flames will gain headway, cutting off escape for people on other floors.

### CARELESS USE OF SMOKING MATERIALS AND MATCHES

Many fatal fires are caused by careless smokers who thoughtlessly toss away lighted butts and matches. Countless homes and factories alike are destroyed in this way, year in and year out. Probably there will always be careless smokers! But much of the danger of fire can be eliminated if we will see that ash trays are always handy where smokers are apt to discard their potential firebrands. To avoid trouble with matches, receptacles of non-burning material should be put up readily available to receive the burned ends. Another should hold the supply of matches. This must be well out of reach of small children.

### EXPLOSIONS IN HOMES

Take the case of a householder who had his floors refinished with a power sander. When the job was done, he took the wood dust from the machine and threw it into the incinerator, at the bottom of which a flame was burning continuously to consume all refuse. Almost instantly there was a terrific explosion followed by fire! What happened? The waste material from the sander formed a dust cloud in the incinerator. As soon as this reached the flame it was ignited and the dust explosion took place. Many other commonplace materials and foodstuffs are similarly dangerous in the form of a dust cloud.

Don't permit a dust cloud to form. When disposing of these materials, keep them wrapped up securely so they will be in a compact mass.

### OTHER EXPLOSIONS

One act of carelessness that causes many explosions and burnings of buildings is the attempt to quicken fires with kerosene. Ordinarily kerosene does not vaporize quickly enough to be as explosive as gasoline. But the heat from a fire soon causes it to give off vapors rapidly so that an explosive mixture is then formed with air. Quickenings fires with kerosene is a dangerous practice that everyone should discontinue.

### LIVING TORCHES

The nation was shocked by newspaper accounts of over 200 persons burned to death in a dance hall when flames raced through inflammable decorations. Small gatherings are threatened in a similar way. During special celebrations and holidays, an extra danger crops up from flimsy costumes as well as inflammable decorations. Preference should be given to non-inflammable materials or those treated to make them slow-burning. Smokers should be especially careful at such times and stay at a safe distance from burnable materials.

### UNRECOGNIZED DANGERS

Many persons fail to realize that elementary precautions should be observed in connection with the familiar electrical fixtures and appliances handled every day. Sometimes a switch or other part becomes defective, permitting a dangerous leakage of current if you touch it when your body is in contact with a grounded object. The most common form of "ground" is a steam radiator or water faucet. Anyone who touches an electrical fixture while standing in a bathtub containing water is in similar danger, as water is a conductor of electricity and the current would be grounded through the water and drain pipe. To avoid such shocks arrange your fixtures so you cannot touch them and a "ground" at the same time. Have an expert electrician check all wiring and fixtures.

### OTHER COMMON FIRE HAZARDS

*The cellar* is a danger spot where many fires start. Don't put hot ashes in wooden barrels or cartons—use a metal container; and dispose of accumulations of papers and rubbish frequently. Paint cloths and oil-soaked rags or waste cause spontaneous combustion fires. Put them into a metal can with an air-tight cover. When an electric fuse burns out, don't substitute a larger fuse or bridge the burnt one with a coin or piece of metal because this is like tying down the safety valve on a steam boiler and building up the fire. The over-load of electricity continues to flow through the wires and they may be heated until white hot, igniting a fire. All new wiring and extensions should be done by an expert electrician.

*Furnaces and stoves* require a thorough cleaning and a checkup for worn, broken or rusted parts every year. Repair or replace all



defective parts or pipes. If the smokepipes or other parts that get quite hot are too close to burnable material, either widen the space or protect the material with a sheet of asbestos or metal with an air gap between it and the material to be protected.

The chimney, too, needs a cleaning each year and an inspection to reveal possible cracks or loose bricks.

Never "force" a heating plant in cold weather. If you don't get as much heat as you should, call in a heating expert.

*Leaking gas stoves in kitchens* are an explosion and fire hazard. Have a plumber make the necessary repairs when you smell gas. Never look for a gas leak with a lighted match or candle. Keep oily cleaning cloths or mops, in tight-closing containers.

*Worn and frayed wire cords* on lamps or electrical appliances may cause a short circuit resulting in a fire. It is best to replace them. Outside aerials for radios should be connected to a "ground" deep enough in the earth to reach permanent moisture and be equipped with a lightning arrester.

Underwriters' Laboratories have made tests of numerous electrical appliances to prove how safe they are. Protect your family by purchasing appliances because they are safe rather than because they are "bargains."

Most attics contain broken or discarded furniture, old clothing, cartons overflowing with miscellaneous articles and piles of papers—just waiting for the chance dropping of a lighted match to start a merry blaze. Spontaneous combustion sometimes breeds in such material. The owners readily admit they probably would never use any of it. For safety's sake, why not get rid of it all? Attics and closets should be provided with electric lights. If not, use a flashlight when looking for something in the dark.

It is always best to keep roofs in good condition so a fire would not be readily ignited by hot sparks from the chimney or fire brands blown there. Chimneys should be constructed solidly and joists that support the house should not rest upon the chimney. The fireplace hearth and bricks should be well insulated and of course place a screen in front of the fireplace to prevent hot coals popping out onto the floor.

#### TO FIRE CHIEFS, MAYORS AND TOWNSHIP CLERKS:

Reviewing the fire records for 1940, we find the fire loss was materially reduced during the year.

Credit for a large part of this reduction is given the firemen of Iowa cooperating with Fire Prevention organizations throughout the state.

For the benefit and information of newly appointed fire chiefs and township clerks, we are calling attention to the state law, Chapter 80, Sections 1624, 1625, 1626, and 1627, Code, Iowa, 1939, which provides that fires shall be reported to this office within one week of the occurrence of the fire, giving the value of the building, value of contents, damage to building, damage to contents and insurance carried on building and contents, and cause of fire.

Fire report blanks are furnished by the State Fire Marshal's office upon request.

ALL questions in the report must be answered fully so that our fire records will be complete.

Fire chiefs are requested not to report country or rural fires—these are to be reported by the township clerk for the township in which the fire occurs.

We urge your cooperation in reporting all fires promptly in order that our records may be complete and up to date.

#### VOLUNTEER FIREMEN

A number of our Iowa Volunteer fire departments have become members of the Volunteer Firemen's Section of the National Fire Protection Association, and we do not hesitate to recommend that other departments join this organization as soon as possible, in view of the helpful suggestions that are offered to Volunteer Fire Departments in fire fighting.

For information regarding the Volunteer Firemen, you can write to the National Fire Protection Association, 60 Batterymarch Street, Boston, Massachusetts, or to the office of the State Fire Marshal, Des Moines, Iowa.

#### INSPECTIONS

The State Fire Marshal's office has made 270 inspections in 71 counties during 1940, including inspections of fire escapes, compressed gas installations, and various types of fire hazards.

Orders issued for the correction of conditions found have been complied with in practically every case.

Removal of fire hazards is part of Iowa's Fire Prevention program.



## IOWA STATE FIRE PREVENTION ASSOCIATION

The Iowa State Fire Prevention Association, a non-profit organization working for the reduction of fire loss in Iowa, makes the following report for 1940:

Town	Number of Risks	Number Defective	Recommendations	People Addressed
Belmond .....	90	76	219	366
Garner .....	79	68	219	397
Jefferson .....	121	96	309	1,015
Mount Pleasant .....	143	107	376	650
Storm Lake .....	182	148	475	999
	615	495	1,598	3,427

## FIRE PREVENTION WEEK ADDRESSES

Number of addresses to school children.....	6	
Number of children addressed.....		1,411
Number of addresses to adults.....	4	
Number of adults addressed.....		266
Material furnished for 9 talks by other than members of Fire Prevention Association.		
No record of persons addressed—estimated.....		5,000

## FIRE PREVENTION—STATE FIRE MARSHAL

In addition to the fire prevention work carried on by the Iowa State Fire Prevention Association, approximately 15,000 fire prevention posters and other pieces of fire prevention literature were sent out by this office.

Fire prevention talks were made by this office to 4,350 school children and 3,747 adults in the following cities and towns in Iowa:

Bedford, Carroll, Cedar Falls, Cedar Rapids, Charles City, Council Bluffs, Creston, Des Moines, Fairfield, Hudson, Keokuk, Knoxville, Manning, Mason City, McGregor, Nevada, Newton, Odebolt, Pocahontas, Rock Rapids, Storm Lake, and Waverly.

The Iowa Association of Insurance Agents distributed approximately 50,000 X-ray pictures showing the 35 common causes of fire in the home, in addition to home inspection blanks that were widely distributed throughout the state.

## SCHOOL FIRE DRILLS

In view of complaints that have come to this office that no fire drills are held in some of our Iowa schools, we again call attention to the state law providing for such drills, Section 1651, Code, Iowa, 1939:

**FIRE DRILLS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.** It shall be the duty of the state fire marshal and his designated subordinate to require teachers of public and private schools, in all buildings of more than one story, to have at least one fire drill each month, and to require all teachers of such schools, whether occupying buildings of one or more stories, to keep all doors and exits of their respective rooms and buildings unlocked during school hours.

Adequate fire protection is one essential need in every school building and adequate fire drills must not be neglected.

Given adequate exits, unobstructed doors and good discipline, however, the drill will prevent many a catastrophe, and save thousands of school children by forestalling panic. So, whatever your schools may possess or lack in the way of protection, they should have drills that mean something, drills that empty a building rapidly and without confusion.

Fire drills can strike at two of the common causes of fire and fatality: Carelessness and excitement.

## RURAL FIRE LOSS

Our fire records for 1940 show a total farm fire loss amounting to \$1,582,051. Of this amount, \$494,560 occurred in farm barn fires and \$869,715 in farm dwelling fires, or a total of \$1,364,275. The balance, or \$217,776 covered fire loss in other farm property such as corn cribs, granaries, hog houses, hay and grain stacks, sheds, etc.

Iowa, as an agricultural state, can and must preserve her resources as a part of the defense program. Therefore, there is an urgent need for better and more efficient fire fighting equipment, adequate water supply on the farm, and the elimination of every possible fire hazard from the premises.

This can be done by farm educational groups, 4-H Club groups and others interested in the reduction in farm fire losses, cooperating with fire departments in nearby towns, and fire prevention agencies throughout Iowa.

## FARM FIRE EQUIPMENT

We understand action has been taken by some insurance companies in Iowa toward the purchase of fire fighting equipment for small towns and surrounding territory as a fire prevention and fire protection measure for the benefit of their policyholders. This is indeed a forward step in the right direction looking to a reduction in Iowa's farm fire loss.



### IOWA FIRE SCHOOL

Four hundred and twenty-five firemen attended the State Fire School in Ames, in May, 1940. One hundred thirty-two, or nearly one-third attended their first fire school.

These figures indicate something of the fireman training situation in Iowa. They show that there are still many firemen in the state who have not been reached by any type of program. They also indicate something of the turnover in our Iowa departments with veterans dropping out and new blood coming in.

### TRAINING SCHOOLS

It is estimated there are 17,000 firemen in 627 fire departments in Iowa. Many of these are "training" conscious, and a large number of Iowa firemen are coming to regard training as the necessary and normal thing if they are to keep up-to-date.

No matter how great the courage and how good the intentions of the fire department may be, unless they have mastered every detail having to do with the handling and use of their fire apparatus and equipment, so that every fireman may be free to give his attention to the unusual, the hazardous aspects of his job—it may fail in its major responsibility of protecting life and property against fire in an emergency.

### DISTRICT FIRE SCHOOLS

In addition to the State Fire School held at Ames each year, District Fire Schools are held throughout the state.

Nine hundred and forty-five firemen attended the District Fire Schools held during September and October, 1940, at McGregor, Cedar Rapids, Newton, Creston, Denison, Pocahontas, Mason City, Cedar Falls, and Keokuk.

The ideas and leadership of the host fire departments, together with the general programs for each school, proved interesting and of real benefit to all visiting firemen.

Better make your plans now to attend the Annual Fire School at Ames, and the District Fire Schools in 1941.

Interesting programs with practical, competent instruction is the aim of the State Advisory Committee cooperating with County, Inter-county and Sectional Firemen's Associations and with live-wire fire departments in organizing District Fire Schools, and if

you would like to have a school in your District, get busy in your fire department and send your request to LINDON J. MURPHY, Director, Iowa Fire Schools, Engineering Extension Service, Iowa State College, Ames, Iowa.

Under the leadership and direction of Mr. Lindon J. Murphy, Iowa Fire Schools have become known throughout the United States and the training programs at the schools have been responsible for Iowa being given credit nationally for a high percentage of progressive, up-to-date fire departments.

On behalf of the Firemen of Iowa, Fire Prevention organizations, and this Department, we wish to extend to Mr. Murphy our sincere thanks.

### NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION

Membership in the National Fire Protection Association is open to any individual or organization interested in the protection of life and property against loss by fire. The membership is widely distributed among men and companies of varying interest, namely: Mercantile establishments, factories, hospitals, insurance agencies, dry cleaning establishments and numerous other types of business.

Information relative to membership in the National Fire Protection Association can be obtained by writing direct to the National Fire Protection Association, 60 Batterymarch Street, Boston, Massachusetts, or to this office.

### NATIONAL BOARD OF FIRE UNDERWRITERS

All Iowa owes a vote of thanks and appreciation to the National Board of Fire Underwriters for the assistance and cooperation given through their engineering service and the helpful information published on the subjects of Fire Prevention and Fire Protection.

### IOWA'S PER CAPITA FIRE LOSS

Iowa's fire loss in 1939 amounted to \$4,745,909, or \$1.87 per capita, while the 1940 fire loss amounted to \$4,449,221, or \$1.75 per capita.

### NATIONAL FIRE LOSS

The National fire loss for the United States in 1939 was estimated at \$300,000,000.00, or \$2.29 per capita.

Figures for the 1940 loss are not available at this time.



## IOWA'S FIRE LOSS

(Compiled by Months)

Month	1939	1940
January .....	\$ 361,463	\$ 612,782
February .....	700,392	512,382
March .....	388,877	516,999
April .....	450,411	438,048
May .....	298,258	211,230
June .....	313,588	230,681
July .....	343,695	392,640
August .....	214,636	389,593
September .....	384,744	228,768
October .....	429,750	356,922
November .....	470,149	168,620
December .....	389,946	390,556
	<hr/> \$ 4,745,909	<hr/> \$ 4,449,221

## FIRE LOSS IN LARGER CITIES

City	1939	1940
Ames .....	\$ 25,440	\$ 18,623
Boone .....	27,163	13,078
Burlington .....	62,425	53,801
Cedar Rapids .....	101,812	65,552
Clinton .....	22,678	18,175
Council Bluffs .....	42,072	66,454
Davenport .....	54,095	212,950
Des Moines .....	666,965	285,327
Dubuque .....	13,063	22,293
Fort Dodge .....	30,665	31,372
Fort Madison .....	13,551	18,900
Iowa City .....	10,630	48,306
Keokuk .....	15,787	17,451
Marshalltown .....	10,048	73,967
Mason City .....	19,310	* 43,405
Muscatine .....	17,487	204,182
Oskaloosa .....	17,182	4,850
Ottumwa .....	115,897	130,738
Sioux City .....	73,347	152,176
Waterloo .....	67,853	121,622

\*The fire loss for Mason City, Iowa, was incomplete at the time books were closed for 1940.

## ARSON INVESTIGATIONS

The State Fire Marshal's office has made 98 investigations of fires in 54 counties during 1940.

Some of these are set out here for your information relative to the investigation work carried on by this office.

**APPANOOSE COUNTY:** An investigation was made of a tire shop and service station in Centerville, Iowa. The evidence was submitted to the Appanoose County Grand Jury and the owner

was indicted. The case was tried in the District Court and the defendant was found guilty and sentenced to the state penitentiary for a term of ten years. An appeal was taken by the defendant and the case is now pending in the Supreme Court of Iowa.

**BUTLER COUNTY:** We made an investigation of a barn fire and during the investigation learned that the suspect had had several fires in the last few years. After questioning the suspect, occupant of the property, he admitted setting fire to the barn, but was unable to give us any reason for setting the fire. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to a term of 10 years in the State penitentiary in Fort Madison.

**CHICKASAW COUNTY:** An investigation was made by this Department of a lumber yard fire in Alta Vista, Iowa. This case is pending.

**CLARKE COUNTY:** On June 10, 1940, a barn burned on an unoccupied farm in Clarke County. On July 2, 1940, two suspects were apprehended. On July 6, 1940, both men pleaded guilty and were sentenced to the Men's Reformatory at Anamosa, for a term not to exceed 10 years. Both were paroled, however, providing they pay for all damages incurred plus all court costs.

**DALLAS COUNTY:** An investigation was made of a dwelling fire in Perry, Iowa, and the case is pending.

**DECATUR COUNTY:** In 1939 an investigation was made by this Department of a dwelling house fire occurring in Decatur County. At that time a lady pleaded guilty in connection with this fire and was sentenced to the Women's Reformatory at Rockwell City, Iowa, for a term of five years.

In 1940, after a continued investigation, her husband also pleaded guilty and was sentenced to the State Penitentiary at Fort Madison for a term of 20 years.

**DECATUR COUNTY:** An investigation was made of a barn fire in Decatur County. A local hitch-hiker made a sworn statement that he burned the barn maliciously to square a grudge.

In view of our opinion that this young man was mentally incompetent, he was examined and adjudged sane. He was then tried in District Court on a charge of arson and acquitted.

**DECATUR COUNTY:** On November 30, 1939, a farm dwelling burned in Decatur County. After a continued investigation the



occupant was arrested on March 26, 1940, at which time he made a sworn statement admitting that he burned this dwelling and that he made a fraudulent claim for loss to household goods to the insurance company. A charge of arson with attempt to defraud the insurance company was filed against the defendant. In October, 1940, he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to five years in the State Penitentiary at Fort Madison.

**HANCOCK COUNTY:** A building occupied as a tavern and dwelling burned in Hancock County. This fire was investigated, the occupant arrested and charged with arson.

He was later indicted by the Grand Jury and acquitted in the District Court.

**HENRY COUNTY:** This office made an investigation of a dwelling house fire in Mount Union. The suspect, and owner of the property, was arrested, tried in Justice Court and bound over to the Henry County grand jury which convenes in February, 1941.

**KEOKUK COUNTY:** An investigation was made of a farm dwelling fire near Sigourney, Iowa. The person responsible for this fire was mentally ill and was committed to the State Hospital at Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, for treatment.

**LINN COUNTY:** An investigation was made of two barn fires that occurred in Center Point, Iowa. This case is pending.

**MILLS COUNTY:** An investigation was made of a barn fire near Hastings, Iowa.

There was a quantity of Government sealed corn stored in the barn and the suspect was questioned regarding the fire and admitted stealing corn from the barn and selling it to the grain elevator in Glenwood, Iowa, under an assumed name.

In our investigation we found he had broken into and entered another corn crib, hauling some of the corn away.

Charges of breaking and entering were filed against him, after which he was tried and convicted in District Court and sentenced to ten years in Fort Madison penitentiary.

Our investigation relative to the fire is pending.

**PAGE COUNTY:** On August 18, 1940, an attempt was made to burn a dwelling house in Coin, Iowa. This dwelling was owned by a lady in Chicago and was occupied by her father. On August 21, 1940, the owner's husband and an accomplice pleaded guilty

to a charge of attempted arson and were sentenced for a term of two years each in the Penitentiary at Fort Madison. The accomplice, however, was granted a parole.

**POCAHONTAS COUNTY:** An investigation was made of a farm dwelling house fire that occurred in Pocahontas County, and the case is pending.

**POLK COUNTY:** An investigation was made of a series of fires occurring in Beaverville Addition in Des Moines. We found these fires were started by two juveniles about 10 years of age. These boys, accompanied by their fathers, appeared before Judge Meyer, who reprimanded them and placed them in custody of their parents.

**RINGGOLD COUNTY:** An investigation was made of a dwelling house fire in Mt. Ayr, Iowa. A young man was arrested in connection with this fire, and admitted in a sworn statement that he started the fire to collect the insurance. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to three years in the Men's Reformatory at Anamosa, Iowa.

**RINGGOLD COUNTY:** At the time of the investigation of the above case, an elderly man walked into the sheriff's office and stated that he had set fire to his house located on a farm near Mt. Ayr, and after hearing of the above case his conscience hurt him and he wanted to plead guilty. He returned his insurance check on his loss and was taken before the insane commission.

**WAPELLO COUNTY:** An investigation was made of a fire in a gasoline service station in Ottumwa. A young man who had owned the station only a few days made a statement wherein he admitted setting the station on fire to collect the insurance on the contents. This man was taken before the Judge of the District Court and sentenced to one year in the County jail.

**WOODBURY COUNTY:** An investigation was made by this Department of an attempt to burn a dwelling house in Sioux City, Iowa.

A man and his wife who owned and occupied this dwelling were arrested in connection with this crime. The husband pleaded guilty and was sentenced to a term not to exceed two years in the State Penitentiary at Fort Madison. His wife was held to the Woodbury County Grand Jury but was not indicted.



## KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE FROM FIRE

**S**MOKING materials carelessly used are among the most frequent causes of fires. Be careful in disposing of used matches and cigarette butts. Keep matches out of the reach of small children. Never smoke in bed.

**T**AKE no chances in leaving children alone in the house. They might be trapped should a fire occur. Fires often spread very rapidly.\* Save life first. Let the fire department save your property.

**O**ILY rags or waste should be kept in closed metal waste cans outside the house. Never hang oily mops in a closet. The spontaneous ignition of oily rags has been responsible for many serious fires.

**P**REPARE for fire safety by using fire-resistive materials wherever possible. Eliminate the hazard of sparks on wooden shingle roofs by using fire-retardant roofing. Construct chimneys safely.

**T**EACH everyone in the family to be careful of fire, to watch stoves, fireplaces, electric irons and all other possible fire causes, and every day to remove old rags, papers and other rubbish.

**H**OT ashes should never be placed in wooden barrels or near wooden partitions. Use metal barrels for ashes and for rubbish. Covers on the barrels adds to cleanliness and fire safety.

**I**NQUIRE of your fire chief, when buying a fire extinguisher, to be certain of getting the right type. Know what to do should a fire start. Never run with your clothing ignited; smother the fire with a blanket or rug.

**S**END your cleaning work to the dry cleaner or use fire safe cleaning fluid. Never use gasoline or kerosene to start or quicken a fire. Flammable liquids cause the greatest number of fatal home fires.

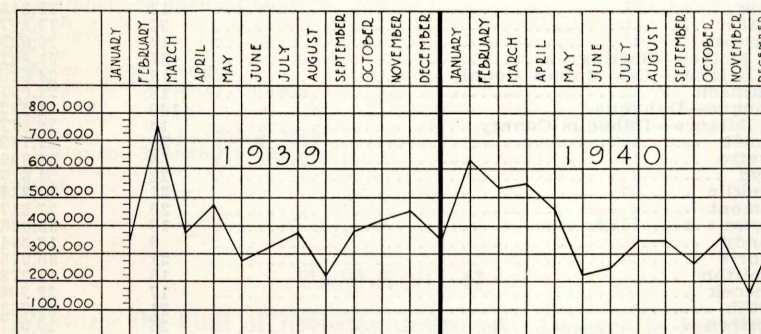
**W**IRING should be kept in safe condition. Replace frayed cords. Have an electrician make needed repairs. Always disconnect the electric iron when leaving the room. Use only standard fuse plugs.

**A**LARMS should be given promptly when fire is discovered. Do not attempt to fight a fire unaided as it is likely to spread beyond control. Know the location of the nearest fire alarm box and understand how to sound an alarm.

**S**AFETY may depend upon repairing a defective flue or stove-pipe before starting the fire for the winter. Have the chimney cleaned. Keep the principles of fire prevention always in mind and never take a chance with fire.

**T**HAWING frozen water pipes with blow torches or open flames is dangerous. Sparks may lodge out of sight and cause fire to spread through concealed spaces. Use hot water for thawing, or call a plumber.

**E**NCOURAGE others to save life and property from destruction by fire. Support fire prevention programs. Demand adequate public fire protection facilities including fire department equipment, water supplies and fire alarms.



IOWA'S FIRE LOSS  
John W. Strohm, State Fire Marshal

This graph, compiled by the State Fire Marshal's office, shows the monthly fire loss in Iowa for 1939 and 1940.

We call your special attention to the lowest monthly fire loss for the two-year period in November, 1940.

We believe the extensive fire prevention activities during Fire Prevention Week and the entire month of October, 1940, may have been responsible for this low figure, proving that Fire Prevention DOES PAY.



TABLE NO. I

Showing the total number of fires reported by counties. Cities of more than 10,000 are set out separately. Damage to buildings and contents is combined.

Counties and Cities of 10,000 and Over	No. Fires	Fire Loss
Adair .....	10	\$ 12,801
Adams .....	10	13,765
Allamakee .....	15	22,555
Appanoose .....	49	47,908
Audubon .....	11	4,193
Benton .....	29	27,280
Black Hawk—Waterloo .....	203	121,622
Balance—Black Hawk County .....	31	38,361
Boone—Boone .....	26	13,078
Balance—Boone County .....	21	68,796
Bremer .....	5	11,519
Buchanan .....	29	38,906
Buena Vista .....	22	48,317
Butler .....	25	30,363
Calhoun .....	4	26,930
Carroll .....	31	83,615
Cass .....	47	30,284
Cedar .....	18	13,467
Cerro Gordo—Mason City .....	93	43,405
Balance—Cerro Gordo County .....	9	42,143
Cherokee .....	22	31,888
Chickasaw .....	12	15,056
Clarke .....	16	13,803
Clay .....	31	25,688
Clayton .....	26	27,586
Clinton—Clinton .....	100	18,175
Balance—Clinton County .....	29	37,928
Crawford .....	13	19,462
Dallas .....	21	20,640
Davis .....	12	32,245
Decatur .....	23	17,897
Delaware .....	19	26,029
Des Moines—Burlington .....	87	53,801
Balance—Des Moines County .....	10	24,525
Dickinson .....	18	23,057
Dubuque—Dubuque .....	130	22,293
Balance—Dubuque County .....	14	72,477
Emmet .....	30	27,745
Fayette .....	54	33,990
Floyd .....	22	4,625
Franklin .....	21	13,234
Fremont .....	20	27,217
Greene .....	16	33,006
Grundy .....	9	18,394
Guthrie .....	21	30,315
Hamilton .....	15	14,278
Hancock .....	17	22,706
Hardin .....	21	39,763
Harrison .....	27	20,047
Henry .....	10	26,045
Howard .....	7	15,790
Humboldt .....	21	12,230
Ida .....	7	8,015
Iowa .....	12	12,000
Jackson .....	18	36,860
Jasper .....	74	141,032
Jefferson .....	47	27,921
Johnson—Iowa City .....	66	48,306
Balance—Johnson County .....	15	77,243
Jones .....	9	34,689
Keokuk .....	30	26,574
Kossuth .....	18	26,992
Lee—Fort Madison .....	30	18,900
Keokuk .....	51	17,451
Balance—Lee County .....	13	16,548
Linn—Cedar Rapids .....	182	65,552
Balance—Linn County .....	33	35,662
Louisa .....	16	31,989
Lucas .....	44	13,901
Lyon .....	14	30,754

TABLE NO. I—Continued

Counties and Cities of 10,000 and Over	No. Fires	Fire Loss
Madison .....	21	25,843
Mahaska—Oskaloosa .....	11	4,850
Balance—Mahaska County .....	20	21,008
Marion .....	39	109,478
Marshall—Marshalltown .....	68	73,967
Balance—Marshall County .....	2	8,380
Mills .....	10	17,040
Mitchell .....	13	20,671
Monona .....	7	7,057
Monroe .....	30	37,967
Montgomery .....	23	16,423
Muscatine—Muscatine .....	82	204,182
Balance—Muscatine County .....	14	28,796
O'Brien .....	12	62,074
Osceola .....	13	13,761
Page .....	22	21,561
Palo Alto .....	16	32,772
Plymouth .....	17	15,620
Pocahontas .....	8	10,040
Polk—Des Moines .....	949	285,327
Balance—Polk County .....	34	62,410
Pottawattamie County—Council Bluffs .....	148	66,454
Balance—Pottawattamie County .....	15	27,619
Poweshiek County .....	21	31,260
Ringgold .....	16	12,126
Sac .....	19	14,866
Scott—Davenport .....	211	212,950
Balance—Scott County .....	24	48,019
Shelby .....	23	18,023
Sioux .....	15	26,728
Story—Ames .....	30	18,623
Balance—Story County .....	37	17,398
Tama .....	30	25,546
Taylor .....	11	54,069
Union .....	18	20,094
Van Buren .....	16	22,029
Wapello—Ottumwa .....	61	130,738
Balance—Wapello County .....	12	13,308
Warren .....	16	25,449
Washington .....	19	18,700
Wayne .....	25	17,144
Webster—Fort Dodge .....	55	31,372
Balance—Webster County .....	23	33,255
Winnebago .....	12	40,310
Winneshiek .....	12	14,508
Woodbury County—Sioux City .....	298	152,176
Balance—Woodbury County .....	15	14,900
Worth .....	8	9,025
Wright .....	25	21,673
	4,887	\$ 4,449,221

TABLE NO. II

Showing the kind of property destroyed. Damage to buildings and contents set out separately.

Kind of Property	No. Fires	Damage Buildings	Damage Contents
Automobiles .....	460	\$ 23,794	\$ 192
Trucks .....	71	3,292	972
Auto accessories .....	1	0	35
Repair shops .....	4	1,885	2,380
Tire shops .....	1	106	0
Awnings .....	50	1,175	151
Bakeries .....	5	385	440
Banks .....	4	21,008	3,780
Barns—Farm .....	213	349,188	145,372
Town .....	56	26,284	13,101
Stock and sales .....	2	15,025	800
Beer taverns .....	43	24,649	13,893
Bridges .....	2	50	0
Cars—box cars and coal cars .....	7	15,433	4,383
Passenger and street cars .....	0	0	0
Car repair shops and roundhouses ..	1	150	125



TABLE NO. II—Continued

Kind of Property	No. Fires	Damage Buildings	Damage Contents
Chicken brooders and hatcheries.....	56	4,341	3,655
Chicken houses—poultry houses.....	18	6,220	5,988
Churches.....	19	60,570	5,535
Cleaning and dyeing.....	10	7,409	12,248
Corn cribs and granaries.....	37	19,535	24,933
Creameries—Cream stations and dairies.....	22	2,196	1,766
Dance halls.....	3	6,613	1,000
Depots—freight.....	1	150	0
Passenger.....	2	45	0
Elevators and seed houses.....	10	83,415	47,860
Engine and boiler rooms.....	2	2,516	2,500
Factories.....	36	30,092	84,922
Filling stations.....	38	11,858	5,466
Oil storage.....	1	150	700
Foundries.....	7	5,388	5,657
Funeral homes.....	2	15	35
Garages—private.....	204	26,144	21,861
Public.....	52	42,880	42,573
Hay, grain and straw stacks, grain fields and meadows.....	31	3,107	0
Hog houses.....	7	1,830	251
Hospitals and nurses' homes.....	4	407	183
Hotels.....	35	31,856	14,996
Houses—apartments.....	133	41,060	19,392
Fraternity.....	1	8,000	4,300
Farm.....	394	653,736	215,979
Town.....	2,051	401,604	153,117
Old Peoples' Homes.....	1	418	122
Rooming houses.....	26	5,497	895
Summer kitchens and wash houses.....	13	2,213	1,611
Ice houses.....	3	2,650	553
Laundries.....	6	2,481	12,032
Lodge halls.....	4	2,512	2,700
Lumber yards.....	9	31,009	59,859
Meat markets.....	4	950	787
Mills—feed mills and feed stores.....	5	4,412	4,325
Planing and saw mills.....	2	100	175
Office and office buildings.....	29	6,356	4,061
Packing plants and stock yards.....	3	1,123	3,837
Pool halls.....	7	13,935	6,951
Printing plants.....	10	24,442	63,253
Produce houses.....	6	1,356	958
Pump and engine houses.....	9	1,655	3,322
Restaurants, cafes and lunch rooms.....	40	14,953	21,663
Schools.....	28	183,044	31,843
Sheds—coal and wood.....	79	10,382	1,992
Machine sheds.....	15	4,355	9,938
Shops—Barber.....	8	5,151	1,623
Blacksmith.....	4	1,290	1,875
Carpenter and work shops.....	15	2,965	2,344
Hair dressing.....	8	1,175	368
Plumbing and heating.....	7	7,205	2,731
Shoe repair.....	5	1,742	2,152
Tailor shop.....	2	25	400
Smoke houses.....	5	250	460
Stores.....	233	290,196	415,009
Theatres.....	16	34,481	11,700
Trailer houses.....	18	1,441	832
Warehouses and storage.....	72	63,954	205,168
Miscellaneous.....	99	33,445	22,417
	4,887	\$ 2,690,724	\$ 1,758,497
			2,690,724
			\$4,449,221

TABLE NO. III

Cause	No. Fires	Loss
Adjoining.....	228	\$ 268,941
Ashes and coal against wood.....	49	8,566
Auto backfire.....	53	5,065
Auto wreck.....	8	725
Broken gas line—alcohol on motor.....	93	3,408
Blow and oil torches.....	56	31,508
Bonfires, grass fires.....	130	22,645
Brooder lamps and stoves.....	54	13,761
Candle, lamp and lantern carelessness.....	27	13,606
Children with matches.....	65	7,952
Cleaning clothing, rugs and floors with gasoline.....	12	1,821
Clothing and bedding too near stoves and stovepipes.....	25	3,420
Compressed gas.....	1	2,250
Curtains blowing into flames.....	12	309
Defective auto wiring.....	195	18,675
Defective electric wiring.....	208	325,755
Defective electric appliances.....	15	4,481
Defective fireplace.....	25	2,154
Defective flues.....	324	338,726
Defective and overheated stoves and furnaces.....	159	129,982
Defective oil burners.....	21	9,404
Defective oil and gasoline stoves.....	164	70,023
Defective and overheated pipes to stoves and furnaces.....	123	40,146
Dust in hot air registers.....	6	1,202
Electric iron—current left on.....	24	7,570
Films.....	4	4,842
Fireworks.....	0	0
Friction.....	4	630
Fumigation.....	5	2,478
Gas leak.....	4	4,177
Gasoline and kerosene carelessness.....	63	38,352
Gasoline and volatile oil explosion.....	9	60,685
Grease, paint, tar, wax and food boiling over.....	41	35,783
Incendiary.....	24	63,097
Lightning—not rodged.....	107	153,019
Rodged.....	5	12,013
Lightning running in on radio wires.....	5	2,301
Match carelessness.....	64	12,910
Rubbish piled against furnace and flues.....	32	9,969
Short circuit—electric motors, refrigerators, etc.....	83	93,233
Smoker's carelessness.....	411	100,490
Smoking meat.....	6	477
Sparks from engines and locomotives.....	29	38,665
Sparks from chimney.....	955	313,659
Sparks from stoves and furnaces.....	32	28,164
Spontaneous combustion—coal dust.....	21	40,323
Hay, straw and grain.....	65	180,920
Rags and rubbish.....	121	194,785
Shavings and sawdust.....	3	445
Static electricity.....	1	70
Thawing water pipes.....	31	4,783
Unknown.....	640	1,702,240
Using gasoline and kerosene to start fires.....	2	911
Miscellaneous.....	43	17,705
	4,887	\$ 4,449,221



## CONCLUSION

We have tried to give you interesting facts and figures with reference to Iowa's fire loss during 1940, and take this opportunity to extend our thanks to each and everyone of you for your cooperation in Iowa's Fire Prevention program, and all other phases of our work.

Now let us help in the National Defense program by defending Iowa in the War Against Fire—unfriendly fires that rob us of our homes, and loved ones, of our factories, schools, churches, business establishments and other property in which we have invested our earnings.

Conservation of our resources can be accomplished to a great extent through Fire Prevention, and we are counting on your continued support through 1941.

Respectfully submitted,

JOHN W. STROHM, *State Fire Marshal*,  
DIVISION OF FIRE PROTECTION AND INVESTIGATION,  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY.



