

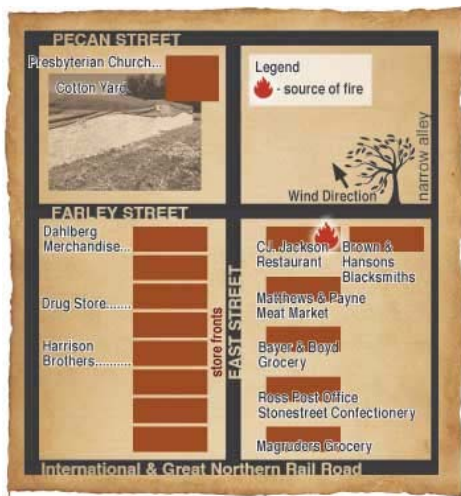


1902 Hutto fire

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Written by Suzanne Haberman Friday, 12 June 2009



Map of 1902 Hutto

A fire alarm rang out over Hutto at about 10 p.m. on a late summer Saturday in 1902. Wind from the southwest lifted embers from the burning frame of C.J. Jackson Restaurant where a gas stove had exploded, sending fiery debris over East Street toward the yard filled with cotton for sale. The exact date of the fire has been lost over time, but the amount of cotton in the yard suggests it occurred after the harvest, between July and September.

In the absence of an organized fire department, Hutto's residents fought the fire. They filled buckets, pots and tubs — anything capable of holding water. They hand-pumped water from



A fire destroyed most of the buildings on East Street in 1902. Courtesy The Williamson Museum

15-foot wells and poured from cisterns. The women reportedly saved the cotton yard by assembling a bucket brigade and delivering water to

the men. A horse team pulling water tanks on wagons made laps from the business district to get water from the Round Bale Gin, three blocks away and on the south side of the International & Great Northern Railroad.

Records show that at the turn of the century, Hutto's population totaled 563. Access to the I. & G.N. rail and east Williamson County's fertile soil attracted cotton farmers. By the time of the fire, businesses bordered both sides of East Street, once Hutto's main thoroughfare.

"In 1902, Hutto was a hustling, bustling place," said Mike Fowler, Hutto resident, former mayor and author of books covering the city's history. "The farmers from the area, the townspeople, all took great advantage of having the business and services that were here at the time."

The era's businesses included churches, mercantile, markets, cotton gins, drug stores, a post office, school, restaurant and newspaper, according to Hugh S. Davenport's 1984 compilation, "History of Hutto."

The blaze consumed the C.J. Jackson Restaurant and immediate neighbors, the Brown & Hansen blacksmith that faced Farley Street and the Matthews & Payne meat market on East Street, as described by a Taylor newspaper article from 1902.



The Taylor paper reported that Bayer & Boyd's grocery burned slowly, but intensely and the structure melted into the ground. The ironclad building that the post office and confectionery shared passed the spark to Magruder grocery, but the brick on the building better repelled the flames and survived.

The southwest wind kept the flames away from the lumber shed that was behind the burning sector, so townspeople focused efforts on preventing damage to the west side. The heat blared against the business districts' storefronts, shattering windows and searing the exposed wood. A spark landed on the roof of a Presbyterian church at the corner of East and Pecan streets and set the shingles on fire, but the citizens put out the flames before any serious damage occurred. Embers rained down on the cotton and threatened to destroy the town's most lucrative crop.

By 1 a.m., the flames had subsided, but had caused a lot of damage. The 1902 newspaper reports a loss of \$9,725 to business on the northeast side of East Street, an amount that would be equal to more than \$200,000 today. Despite the fire's proximity to the cotton yard, Hutto did not lose a single bale.



East Street in 1890 was the main thoroughfare through town and was also known as Main Street. Courtesy The Williamson Museum

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