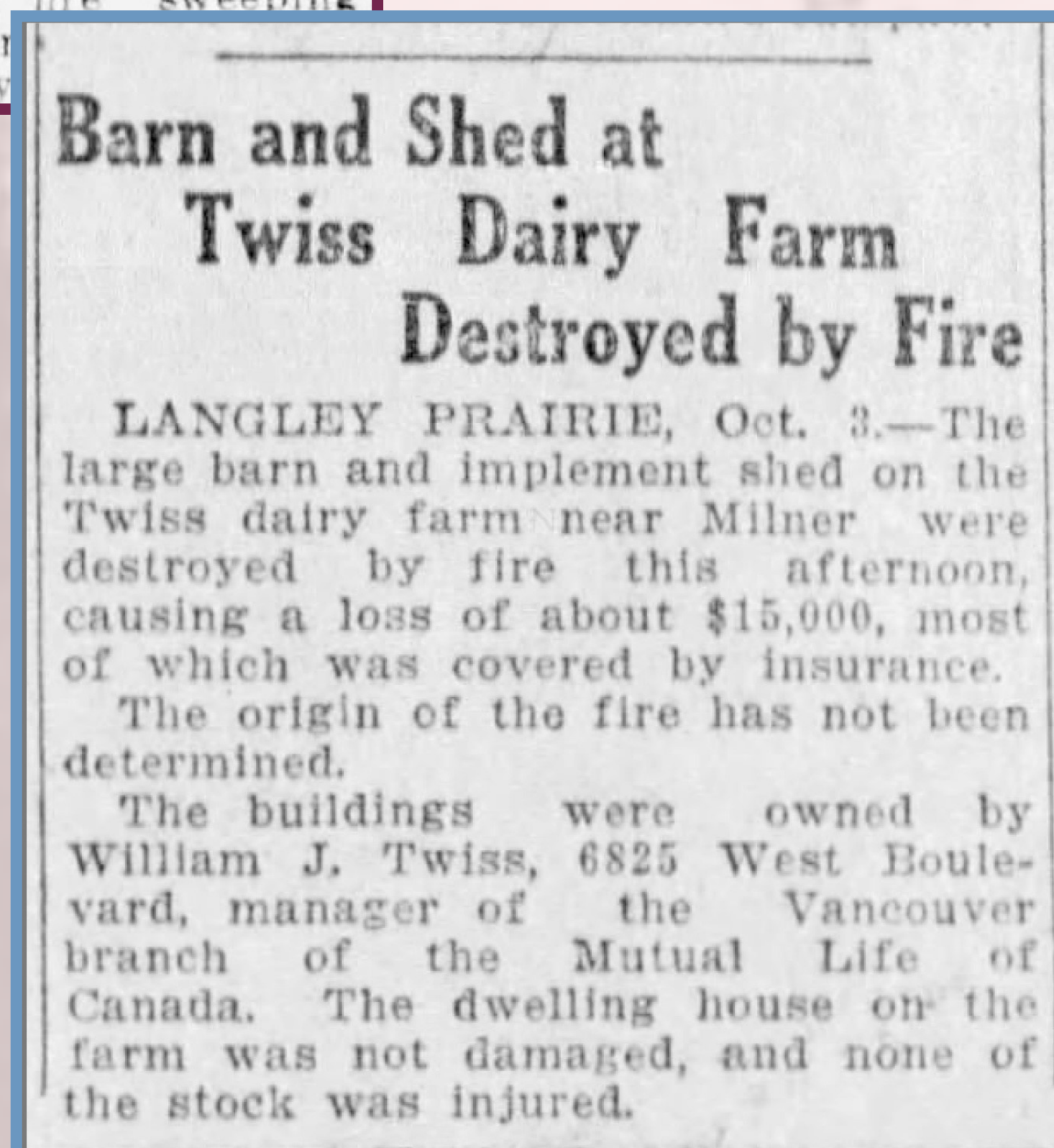


FIRE!

Langley's residents were as worried as we are today about fire prevention, and possibly even more so.



(Above) *The Ottawa Citizen*, August 10, 1925. According to a 1925 police report, there were 12 Langley fires that year, with losses totaling \$36,110.



(Above) *The Province*, October 4, 1925.

In the 1920s, Langley had no organized fire department and a bucket brigade was often the only line of defense— if there was an adequate water source. One relied on neighbours for help in an emergency. The store of Willoughby Singer, for instance, for whom Willoughby is named, burned to the ground in 1921 when Mrs. Singer stumbled and fell while trying to hang a lamp from the ceiling. She suffered from shock and smoke inhalation but was rescued by neighbours. Some parts of Langley were prone to forest and bush fires during hot, dry months. In the summer of 1922, over 100 south Langley homes in Fernridge and Glenwood were at risk. Women and children were sent to stay with friends and over a hundred men and boys stayed and volunteered to fight the flames. At least one house was lost, and Huggard's sawmill lost bunkhouses, stables, and thousands of dollars worth of shingle bolts, as well as their plank road.

A spark might easily be the cause of the destruction of the new town of Langley Prairie at the present moment, and realizing the danger, the residents will meet on Tuesday for the purpose of forming a local volunteer fire brigade...There will be some difficulty experienced in connection with an adequate supply of water, but the meeting will discuss ways and means including the sinking of wells and the installation of pumps.

-The Vancouver Sun, 10 May 1920

With Langley Prairie's close wooden buildings, there was even more reason to worry. The Langley Prairie Improvement Society discussed possible solutions as early as 1920, but it is unclear if anything was ever carried out. Alfred Warman's Langley Electric Bakery suffered from exceptionally bad luck. It opened in 1922 on the north side of the Yale Road, burned down in the beginning of 1923, and was rebuilt soon after. It was destroyed again in Langley Prairie's great fire of 1928.

On the morning of May 21, 1928, fire broke out in the Langley Hotel's kitchen, on the south side of the Yale Road. The fire spread west with the breeze to Sam Brown's Barbershop, Mclean's Dry Goods, the Interurban Station, the Langley Electric Bakery, Hilton Brothers Garage, Des Rochers' Vulcanizing, Pollard's Tinsmith Shop, Morris's Grocery Store, Prytherch's Shoe Repair Shop, and several residences. Live wires and falling poles made moving around the area dangerous, and the heat damaged the paved Yale Road. The residents' bucket brigade could do very little. Thankfully there was only one injury, but approximately one-third of Langley Prairie's businesses were destroyed.

By midday, a carload of flour at the bakery was still burning. Oil barrels at Hilton's garage burned for hours after the buildings were destroyed. The BC Electrical Company was soon out to replace poles and burned railway track. Only half of the losses were insured, and some chose not to rebuild. Despite the complete loss of the bakery, Warman re-opened the very next day in a temporary location and eventually rebuilt, closing after a third fire in 1941.

Several years after the 1928 fire, a local fire department was created, and with community donations, the first fire truck was purchased and a single bay fire hall was built.



(Above) The Langley Hotel before the fire, ca. 1927. Previously called the Half-Way Hotel, it was located a block east of what was more recently also known as the Langley Hotel. Note the Interurban station and tracks on the left.



(Left and below) Where businesses once stood: surveying and assessing the damage, May 22, 1928.

