



ST. JOHN'S MILITARY SCHOOL SKIRMISHER



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No Injuries . . .

Fire Finally Gets Vail Hall



As smoke shrouds fireman atop aerial ladder (center), flames eat across roof of round tower at east end of Vail Hall at St. John's Military School during a disastrous fire Monday, Nov. 6. The inferno left Vail Hall--the school's 91-year old administration building-- a near total loss and damaged adjoining Griswold Hall apparently beyond repair. (Photo courtesy of The Salina Journal)

SJ Landmark Rendered Useless; Griswold Hall Badly Damaged . . .

A devastating fire left Vail Hall--the School's 91-year old administration building-- a near total loss and damaged adjoining Griswold Hall apparently beyond repair, Monday, Nov. 6.

At press time, the cause of the fire has not been determined. Fire inspectors, assisted by police detectives, are investigating.

According to Col. Keith G. Duckers, School President, the fire apparently started in a locked room of the top floor of three-story Vail hall in which dramatics department supplies were kept.

"The smoke detectors triggered the alarm" said Col. Duckers.

"Everyone was evacuated safely", said Lt. Col. Paul

Kellogg, Commandant. "The alarm went off, we discovered heavy smoke on the third floor and evacuated the building. Everyone was out of the building and accounted for in 41 seconds".

The alarm sounded about 11:20 a.m. while classes were being held.

Firemen, with two aerial ladder trucks and a squadron of pumpers, fought the blaze for four hours before the inferno was brought under control.

Roof Collapses

Engineers Say

The fire raged through the third floor of Vail, collapsing the roof and that of abutting Griswold Hall. Shortly after 1:30 p.m., there was a collapse of a portion of the roof and a west wall of Griswold. Fifteen minutes later, more of the roof collapsed.

Firemen atop the aerial ladders played streams of water through windows and onto the building's roof. Others worked from ladders to the third story windows. Reaching the flames from inside the building appeared impossible.

(Cont't. on page 2)

President Predicts Bright Future

The towers and third floor of Vail Hall are being removed as a safety precaution. The collapsed roof of Griswold Hall will also be removed.

The Board of Trustees voted to take this action at a meeting Nov. 13. The decision was made after hearing reports from two engineering firms that the free-standing walls were in danger of falling.

Work to determine the full extent of damage cannot continue until this project is complete. No one has been permitted to enter the structures because of the instability of the buildings.

One engineering report concludes that Vail is a total loss. The foundation of the building

is not considered sound.

The Board postponed other action on rebuilding plans until the insurance company announces its settlement and the complete extent of damages is determined. Special meetings of the Board will be held frequently.

Tentative discussions centered around the re-building of a modern, fire-proof office, classroom and dormitory building to replace the damaged aged structures.

Col. Keith G. Duckers, President
(Con't. on page 4)

The Journal's Page of Opinion

Sad news

Old Boys throughout the country will be saddened by the news of the ruinous fire at St. John's Military School.

St. John's has maintained exceptionally close ties with its alumni. Young men who learned academics in its classrooms, discipline on its drill field, and loyalty to school traditions through the daily regimen have left the Salina school to make marks in many fields. They do not forget their alma mater.

In an era when military schools appeared out of favor with some, St. John's successfully maintained its posture of academic excellence and full personality development.

That it will continue to provide for new generations of New Boys a place for growth and a source of pride should not even be a matter for conjecture.

The Corps of Cadets undoubtedly will continue to muster again and again.

SJMS Is More Than Vail Hall

There were a few that thought if you destroyed Vail and Griswold Halls, you would destroy the institution.

The old building took shot after shot! It lost its fourth floor, towers and turrets in 1948. Various small fires occurred during the years. Griswold was the scene of a fire in September of 1975. And again Griswold was damaged by a fire on Sept. 27, 1977 and the bandmaster collapsed and died shortly after making a check to see if the building was cleared of Cadets.

Col. Keith G. Duckers, President, who has devoted 28 years of his life to SJMS, felt that Vail could take one shot after another and sail on like an old battleship - with a little repair.

But a fatal torpedo got the old building this week. But the institution continues. Remember--the School motto is "SJMS forever!"

As an 80-year old man who was a trustee during the fire in 1948 said to me as we both stood in tears in my back yard, "Tell Keith to bulldoze the damn thing down, it's jinxed."

St. John's Military School has always meant much more than a pile of old bricks to the thousands of students who believe that SJMS was a positive factor in their lives and will continue to be.

... Elizabeth A. Duckers

SJ LANDMARK (Con't. from page 1)

By 1:30 p.m., onlookers were being warned away from the building in the fear of collapsing walls. The area is still cordoned as the engineers who inspected the structure feel the walls may collapse.

Encounter Problems

Firemen encountered several difficulties in fighting the blaze according to Acting Fire Chief Laverne Brockway. Fire fighters were driven back by heavy smoke several times as they tried to enter the building and gain a better vantage point from which to fight the fire.

"A couple of men went inside early with air masks and the fire followed them out into the hallway and then went up into the wide open attic area, spreading quickly," said Brockway.

Around 2:30 p.m., firemen were finally able to enter the building. Brockway said it was about 4 p.m. before the fire was considered "under control".

At this point, staff members were permitted to enter the office area to remove pictures and other historical memorabilia.

Brockway continued that it was late afternoon before the fire crew could pinpoint the fire. He said, "Before that, it seemed as if we were chasing it from window to window."

He added, "We were really concerned about the walls going. We saw spots where the wall had cracked. The structure is weakened."



WATER IS POURED on the main area of a fire which broke out Monday morning Nov. 6 on the third floor of the administration building at St. John's Military School. Despite efforts of firemen, the flames spread to other parts of the building.

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Vail's Walls Succumb To Flames

"I would never have believed that Vail Hall could go up like that. The walls are three feet thick," said Col. Keith G. Duckers, President, in an interview with Barbara Phillips of The Salina Journal.

Col. Duckers shook his head as he viewed the havoc wrought during the four-hour fire Monday, Nov. 6.

"The fire started in the bedroom of the apartment where Liz (Mrs. Duckers and I lived for a year after we were married. Our sons, Kyle and Ed, have called from Lawrence and Washington, D.C. They were born and raised here and they just can't comprehend coming home to a campus without Vail Hall. And Sarah arrived home from high school in tears. It was like home to them."

He continued, "They were keeping all kinds of things up there—scenery props—there may have been some paint, too."

Duckers said that the doors to the storage area apparently were locked when the fire began. The fire spread quickly through the third floor of Vail

(Con't. on page 4)

POLICE OFFICER Walter Seals consoles Col. Keith Duckers (white shirt) as the St. John's President is joined by Robert Kastner (second from right) chairman of the School's executive committee, and Lt. Col. Paul Kellogg Commandant, as Vail Hall burns in the background. To the right in the picture are Lt. Col. Kenneth Faerber, Academic Dean, and Lt. Col. V.B. Loy, Social Science instructor.



SEEKING A CAUSE, Fire Inspector Jerome Schmidt searches the ruins for clues to the cause of the fire.



A CADET ROOM in Griswold Hall, the bed made in the traditional military manner, is littered with charred debris, an aftermath of the Monday fire which ruined Griswold and Vail Halls. (Photos courtesy of The Salina Journal)

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— THE SKIRMISHER —

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SJMS Cadets Pick A Queen

Kathy Strom, 17, Overland Park, was crowned homecoming queen for St. John's Military School Friday night, Nov. 3, before the SJMS-Westmoreland football game on Perkins Field. Her escort was Cam Eklund, a St. John's Cadet. She is a junior at Shawnee Mission West High School.

The homecoming activities were part of Parent's Weekend at the School. More than 300 parents, relatives and alumni joined 165 Cadets for the weekend activities Nov. 3-5.

The weekend began at 4 p.m., Friday with a dinner for members of the football team and their fathers in Nichols Hall. A dinner for the Corps of Cadets and candidates vying for homecoming queen was at 6 p.m. Friday in Nichols Hall.

Homecoming queen candidates were Minday Ashwill, Shawnee; Jonna Everett, Valley Center; Cindy Petersen, Kanopolis; Kim Price, Olathe, and



KATHY STROM

Judy Williams, Belle Plaine, Iowa.

Saturday activities included a Lower School intra-squad football game, parent-teacher conferences, the Foundation luncheon and a parade on Perkins Field by the 91st Corps of Cadets.

A chapel service at 11 a.m. Sunday in Armstrong Chapel concluded the weekend activities.

SJMS Rallies After Fire

Classes for the Lower School Cadets continued Monday and the morning after the fire. Upper School classes began at 1 p.m., Wednesday, Nov. 8.

The older Cadets spent Tuesday and Wednesday assisting members of the faculty and staff in clean-up activities. Many Cadet hours were spent carrying furniture, pictures, records, etc. from Vail and Griswold Halls. Col. Keith Duckers, President, had high praise for Cadet assistance.

Col. Duckers said that classes are being held in various areas of the campus. For example, the typing department has been moved to the mechanical arts drawing room of the Ferris Shop Building.

"We're using the Cadet Center and the Clem Library. We've just doubled up in places to make enough classroom space to get by for the rest of the year."

"We felt the quicker we could get organized and stabilized,

the better it will be. We may have lost the battle, but we're not going to lose the war."

Administrative offices have been moved into the north half of the brick duplex formerly occupied by Maj. and Mrs. Harold Fraizer. The Academic offices have been moved into the Library.

Housed at KW

About 100 Cadets are currently being housed at Wilson Hall, the conference center at Kansas Wesleyan. Griswold Hall is beyond repair. Sage Hall is temporarily uninhabitable.

Sage was served by the same central heating and hot water system. As soon as the heater and water system is repaired and re-organized, approximately 60 Cadets will be housed there.

"That means we need hous-

ing for only 20 or 30 boys and we'll try to work that out with Kansas Wesleyan. Dr. Daniel Bratton, KW President, is on our Board of Trustees and has assured me that Wesleyan will cooperate with us," said Col. Duckers.

Shared Food Service

The Cadets were served meals in the cafeteria at KW for two days while Nichols Hall was being fumigated and cleared of smoke. The same food service serves both SJMS and KW; so there wasn't any problem.

Col. Duckers said, "There has been a tremendous pulling together of faculty and trustees. And we greatly appreciated the expressions of concern from all over town and the country. The local offers to house the Cadets have been greatly appreciated, but we feel that a military unit should stay together."

PRESIDENT PREDICTS

(Cont. from page 1)

dent, said, "I think the future appears bright for SJMS. It will take two to three years to replace what was destroyed in a four-hour blaze but we will be back stronger than ever."

Sage Hall has been cleaned, fumigated and minor water damage to floor tile is being repaired. Cadets living in that dorm were to move their possessions back into the hall before leaving for Thanksgiving furlough.

Work is progressing on installing a heating and water system for Sage, independent of the system that was housed in the basement of Vail Hall. The utility work should be finished before the Cadets return from furlough, Nov. 26.

VAIL'S WALLS

(Cont. from page 3)

Hall and into the upper floor of Griswold.

Fire doors were installed between the two buildings about 18 months ago, but the fire spread through the ceiling.

But now roofs are gone and the ancient administration building, with a cornerstone laid in 1887, is apparently a total loss. The three-foot thick stone walls were still standing, although they apparently were severely weakened by the blaze and water damage.

Color Guard Selected

The official school Color Guard has been formed. Members are John F. Louisot, commander; Truls Rinkjob, Jon Skinner and Ken Decker.

The Guard has posted the colors at all the home football games at Kansas Wesleyan, Salina, this fall. The group also appeared in the Ft. Hays State college Homecoming parade in Hays, Kans., Oct. 14.

SJMS B-team Beats Bennington

The Cadets got two touchdowns in the first quarter from John Powell and made them stand up for a 12-6 B-team football win over Bennington, Oct. 9.

Powell tallied on runs of four yards and one yard. The second TD came after Tom Johnson blocked a Bennington punt and returned it to the Bulldog one-yard line. Bennington scored in the fourth quarter.

The SJMS B-team is 2-2 for the season.



St. John's Military John Louisot grimaces as he throws a block into Westmoreland's number 44, which allows Cadet running back John Weatherman (81) to cut upfield in an Eisenhower League playoff game, Nov. 3. Westmoreland won, 22-14. The Cadets got a quick break when they recovered a fumble on the opening kickoff and six plays later Stan Smith plunged over from the two-yard line. Late in the game Robin South connected with Eric Pederson on a 38-yard TD pass. Smith ran the two-point conversion with only 38 seconds left on the clock.

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