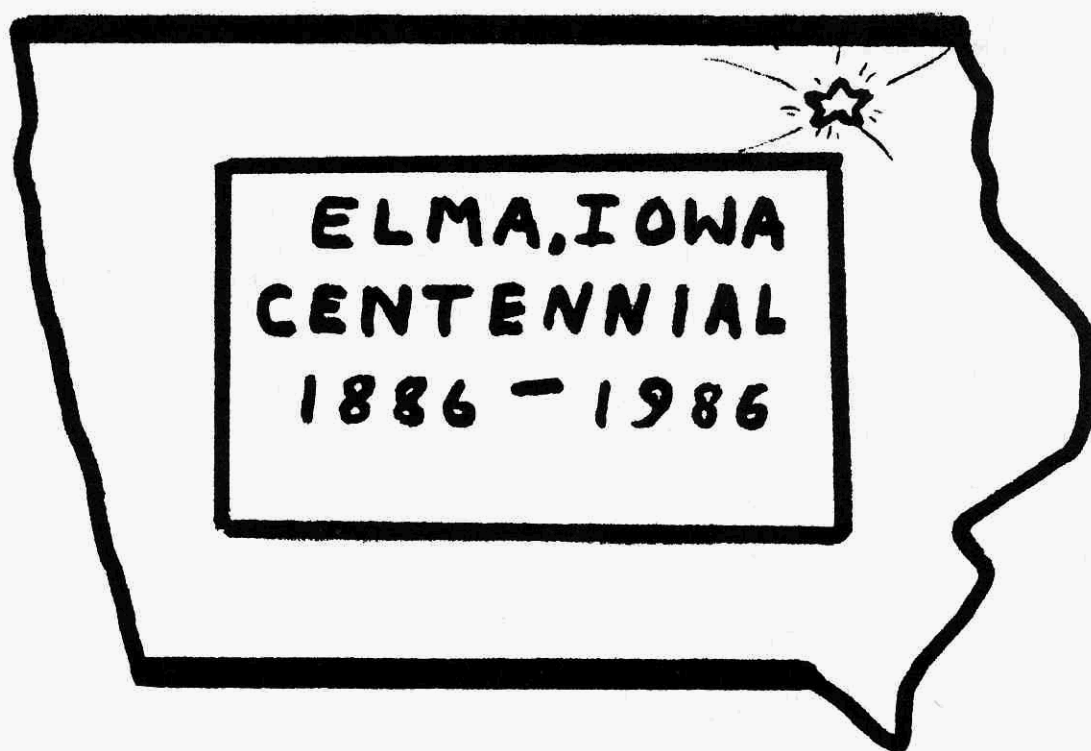


Disasters



Submitted by Marge Gansen

Elma's Big Fire of 1900

The first Busti fire and the "coal sheds" fires occurred in 1900.

The first of these fires occurred on June 23, 1900. It originated in the C. E. Reilly implement warehouse located in the center of a block of frame buildings on the west side of Busti Avenue, and consequently the fire spread both ways with great rapidity, lapping up building after building that stood in its path, and in one hour and ten minutes after the alarm was sounded seven business buildings were destroyed.

The building occupied by Reilly was owned by Frank Smart. Reilly and family lived in part of the building.

A quote from old files: "The progress of the fire was so rapid that by the time the citizens had arrived in sufficient numbers to render assistance in saving property nothing could be saved from the building. Mr. Reilly himself was so bewildered when he awoke and found his sleeping room filled with smoke that he simply took time to slip on his pants and stockings and rushed out into the street and to the assistance of neighbors, when he might have saved several fine carriages and phaetons had his wits not failed him."

Fire next moved south to the Joe Devereaux building, which was occupied by Mrs. Constantine as a restaurant, into which she had moved but a few days before.

Then came the Kate McCormick building occupied by Katie Kelly as a grocery store, the greater part of whose stock was saved.

Next came the building owned by a Waterloo grocery house and occupied by Mrs. E. J. Siddall as a millinery shop and residence, who was fortunate enough to save most of her belongings.

Last to the south was a building recently erected by E. E. Miller and occupied as a saloon, the contents of which were nearly all saved. This building stood where C. Foley's implement office now stands. (This building was later McGrane and Tonn Produce and is no longer standing—the location was Busti and Forest Street.)

On the north corner which was burning simultaneously with the south section, was the building owned and occupied by the Gesell Bros. as a general store, from which practically everything was removed, but considerably damaged. A barn to the rear of the store burned.

The next building to the south of the Gesell building was the building owned by Larry Riley and occupied as a saloon from which little was saved.

The elevator of J. W. Harris (located back of and a little north of where Zeimetz Service Station now stands) was saved by a force of men keeping the roof soaked with water, although the roof was on fire several times.

The Doan hardware store (located where the Weber blacksmith shop later stood—now Mort's) was saved by the tin veneer on the Gesell building which held the north wall erect until the building had been consumed.

The brick block across the street was saved by blankets and carpets being hung over the fronts of the buildings, which were kept saturated thoroughly with water, although almost every front on the east side of the street had more or less cracked windows.

At that time Elma had no fire protection.

The second fire occurred two weeks later. A quote from old files: "Last Saturday afternoon shortly before 5 o'clock foreman Loper of the Great Western coal sheds noticed a cinder fall from the roof of the sheds and cried out 'Fire!' to his assistants. The flames being well up on the tower when first discovered, nothing could be done to stay their progress."

The coal sheds had a high tower and an elevated track where a car of coal could be drawn up to be dumped.

In less than five minutes the entire structure from end to end, from top to bottom, was a solid mass of flame, the black smoke pouring out from the coal and furiously fanned by a brisk northwest wind, hung like a pall over a doomed city. No alarm was sounded and none was needed, as a considerable portion of our businessmen were at the post office awaiting the distribution of the evening mail, and the sound of flying feet and the smell of smoke was enough to warn them of another visitation of fire.

The flames swept down across the tracks into the warehouse row and soon the Inter-State Grain Co.'s elevator was on fire, next the Hunting Elevator Co.'s warehouse, soon followed by the Sidman Grain Co.'s elevator and here the fire was checked from consuming the other two warehouses by tearing down of a small coal shed, which enabled the train crew which came down on an engine from Riceville to keep the north end and roof of the building soaked sufficiently to prevent it igniting and which undoubtedly saved the lower half of east Elma from going up in smoke.

The sparks from the warehouses had fired the sheds and outbuildings in the rear of Doan's hardware store and soon communicated with the store, consuming most of the stock and the household goods in the upper rooms. Here again in spite of a withering heat and suffocating smoke men saved the wooden row across the street by manning posts on the roofs and fronts of the buildings, keeping them thoroughly drenched and thus saved the north half of the street. (The block referred to here was given as the buildings from the Weiland building south to the residence of Frank Streich. This is where Mort's station now stands and the home of Kenneth Peterson.)

(The depot was then located farther north than at present, almost on a line with the Memorial Hall.)

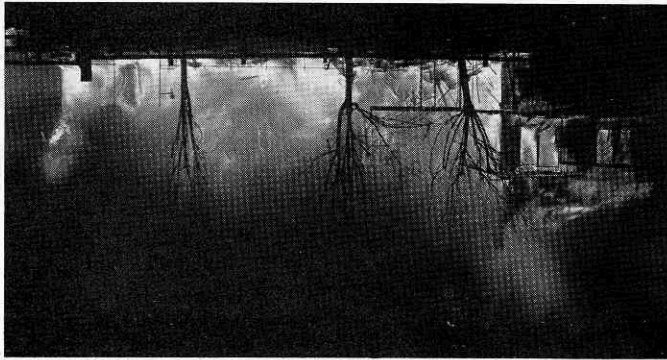
Agent Galehouse had the company's books removed to a place of safety and had things inside so arranged that everything moveable about the depot could be saved. Telegraphic communication was cut for a short time by the burning of the poles and the breaking of the wires, but the night and day operators were dispatched in different directions with sets of in-

The west side of Elma suffered a fire loss on August 31, 1901. The West Hotel occupied several lots on the corner of Main and 4th Street. It was previously the Ayers Hotel. A barber shop in the basement was also lost. Roche and Soris had a furniture store on this same block and it, too, was destroyed. This was on the fourth lot.

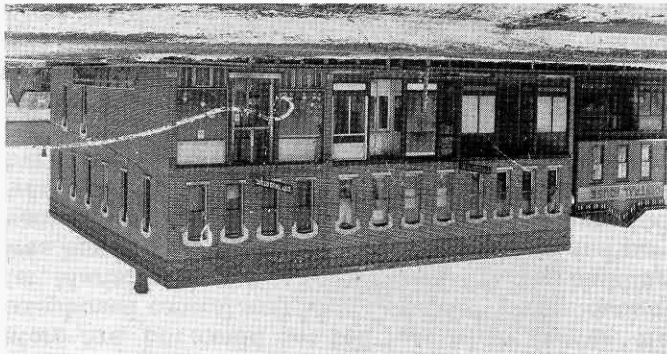
Insurance losses were suffered by the following: West Hotel; Frank Kelly; J. T. Ayers; Riley & Clear;

**Fire of Saturday, August 31, 1901
Which Consumed Six Business Buildings**

The Chicago Great Western Club House blazes the night of August 21.



The buildings on this photo are from left to right: Central House, which stood where the Bluebird Tavern is now. It was a hotel and restaurant. The next building bears a sign that reads "The Elma News." Next was a barber shop, and a post office, and the last building—the City Drug Store—stood where the K.C. Hall is now located. All of these burned in the fire of August 21, 1901.



People who filed insurance claims for losses in the blaze were: Richmond Drug Co., James Devereaux; A. A. Carter; Mrs. J. F. Hess; J. W. Cannon; H. H. Maiman; Joe Cannon; Walter Doan; D. L. Dufrey, clothes; A. W. Swinton; Chicago Great Western Club House; Weer Block, damage; Mrs. D. C. Speed; F. McLaughlin; Mrs. Constantine; Long Estate; Leo C. Wachtel; and Dr. J. W. Mulick. It has been impossible to trace where all of these people and their businesses were situated.

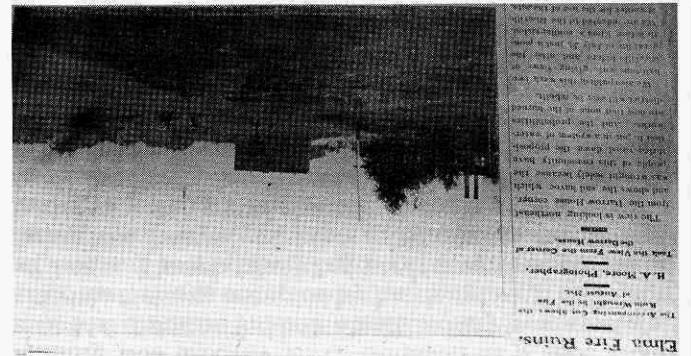
In 1901, Elma was again the victim of two fires. These occurred in the space of ten days. The first fire on August 21, 1901, destroyed businesses on the east side of town.

Bustl Avenue from Plum to Forest was completely destroyed. Lost in this blaze were: City Drug Co., owned by Richmond and which also housed a jewelry store; the post office; a dry goods store; the Central House, a hotel and restaurant; a cobbler shop; a board-ing house, run by Mrs. Constantine; a building housing

**Fire of Wednesday, August 21, 1901
Which Consumed Eight Business Buildings**

The picture is more accurately stated as being from where the depot now stands. The large building in the center is the Weers Building. To the right is the Methodist church. The tall chimneys to the left are unidentified. The block which was burned was from Plum to Forest streets or where the K.C. Hall stands to the north for a full block. The quote about the probabilities of not rebuilding are interesting in that this is now the sight of the majority of the businesses on the east side of Elma. The picture was reproduced from an old newspaper clipping.

"The view is looking northeast from the Darrow House corner and shows the sad havoc which was wrought solely because the people of this community have thrice voted down the proposition to put in a system of waterworks. And the probabilities are now that none of the burned district will ever be rebuilt."



View from the corner of the Darrow House.

**ELMA FIRE RUINS FROM
BLAZE OF AUGUST 21, 1901**

struments and after attaching the broken ends were jerking lightning again as though nothing had happened.

Besides the coal sheds, which contained several hundred tons of coal and a stationary engine for hoisting the buckets and running the pump, the company lost ten boxcars, three of coal, four of shingles and three empties and considerable side track, causing a loss of about \$20,000. Had not a freight engine been dispatched here from Riceville to remove about 50 loads that had been setting in the yards here for several weeks their loss would have been even more.

Elma Fire Ruins.

The accompanying picture shows the ruins of the burned district. The view is from the corner of the Darrow House. The picture was reproduced from an old newspaper clipping.

G. Meverden; Ferguson & Despres; Roche & Sons, loss furniture stock; Frank Kelly, loss restaurant stock; and Dr. J. W. Mulick, office fixtures and drug stock.

There is no record of where these businesses were for certain, except the hotel and furniture store.

Cashman Store Burned January 30, 1928

A fire of unknown origin destroyed the M. Cashman Clothing Store and contents. A large crowd was at a dance on Thursday night and as late as 2:00 a.m. noticed no signs of fire. Clem Cashman and his wife had been at the dance and on returning to their home, in the southwest part of town, found their fire gone out. Stepping outdoors, Clem noticed the reflection of the store fire, but could not tell just where it was. He telephoned central and Mrs. O'Brien sent her daughter, Marie, up the street to locate the fire. The building was beyond help. The firemen held it down and prevented its spread to nearby buildings. A strong wind was blowing from the northwest and big sparks and burning cinders were flying over the buildings to the south and east as far down as the Lammers place a half a mile away. The Cashman building, being of light frame construction, soon burned down and attention was directed to saving the adjoining buildings. The old Elma State Savings Bank building on the north caught on fire, but little damage was done. The roof of the Dunton building to the south caught fire and a small blaze appeared in the northwest corner just over the window, but these were soon extinguished. The Dunton building, erected some years ago by J. J. Stritzel, had stone walls nearly two feet thick. This fact alone saved the remaining south portion of that block and in fact, the whole southeast part of town from destruction. Mr. Cashman did not decide to rebuild. Mr. Cashman entered the clothing business in 1914 by purchase from Jacob Zeiner. The business was then located in the Gesell block where it remained until May or June of 1927 when he moved into his own building.

Fire Destroys Elma Theatre Building January 4, 1932

A fire of unknown origin completely destroyed the Diekmann building, in which was housed the Elma Theatre. In addition, the building on the north occupied by the Gross Hardware Store was considerably damaged and a great deal of the stock was ruined by water and smoke. The building to the south occupied by the Elma Grocery was also damaged, but its stocks were practically untouched. Paul Kelly, son of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Kelly, operated the projection machine. The manager was Niles Meltesen. Fixtures of the Diekmann Clothing Store which were stored in the second story of the building, were also lost. Stock of the Conway Furniture Store just north of the Gross Hardware Store, was damaged by smoke.

Elma Landmarks Burn to Ground Early Tuesday, May 8, 1934

A spectacular blaze razed two of the earliest buildings in Elma. Both buildings were located on Main Street, a block west of the hospital. One was occupied by Miss Hulda Johnson until she moved to the County Home. The other was occupied by Ben Zeiner for living quarters and storage room for potatoes and other articles. The origin of the fire was unknown. The fire siren brought several hundred Elma residents, who gathered at the scene. The fire had made too much headway, the buildings being of frame construction and old and the continued dry weather making conditions ideal for a fire. All attention was placed on the E. C. Sayers and the H. J. Trunkey residences to the north. Both buildings were constructed in 1886, the same year the town of Elma was started. The west building was used by E. G. Johnson as a shoe store until Mr. Johnson's death about twenty years before. After that, it was occupied by his daughter, Hulda, for her home. The east building served various purposes during the forty-eight years of its existence. It was used as a jewelry store by Mr. Doan, a photographers shop, a rooming house and as a home. Two years ago Mr. Zeiner moved in with his collection of rags and other miscellaneous articles. The burning of these two buildings left only the home of Mrs. Augustus Pierce in the two-block stretch between the Hastings Hospital and the house then occupied by Mr. and Mrs. George Doubek. These two blocks were at one time completely filled with business places. Gradually, they were weeded out by fires at different times in the history of Elma.

Althof Blacksmith Shop and Equipment Completely Destroyed February, 1942

Fire of undetermined origin completely destroyed the Althof Blacksmith Shop. The building was perhaps as old as any in Elma at that time. It was built before 1892. The building was of frame construction with a coating of galvanized sheet metal around it. The sheet metal was a great help in keeping the fire confined to the building and the inside of the building was completely destroyed before the metal coating gave way and the building collapsed. The wind at the time of the fire was blowing almost from the direct south and this was to great advantage as no buildings were in the path of the fire. The heat was terrific at the height of the blaze. The three windows in the New Era office were cracked by the heat and a lean-to on the Haberman Creamery building was partially destroyed. A car belonging to Pidg Eiffler suffered considerable paint damage from the blaze. Mr. Althof carried no insurance.

March 16, 1948, Fire Destroys I.C. Church Building

Fire of undetermined origin discovered about 6:30 Tuesday morning completely destroyed the two-story brick building belonging to the I.C. church and housing the Elma Theater and the offices and warehouse of

the Interstate Power Company. The fire loss has been estimated at \$30,000 to \$60,000.

The fire apparently started in the basement of the theater side of the building and when the firemen arrived the building was engulfed in smoke and firemen were unable to enter the building.

Elma firemen sent for Alta Vista firemen to help battle the blaze. Both companies battled the blaze for five hours to keep the flames from spreading to the adjoining buildings on the west and east.

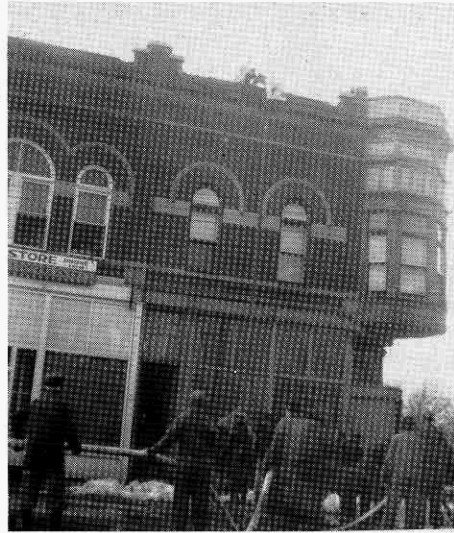
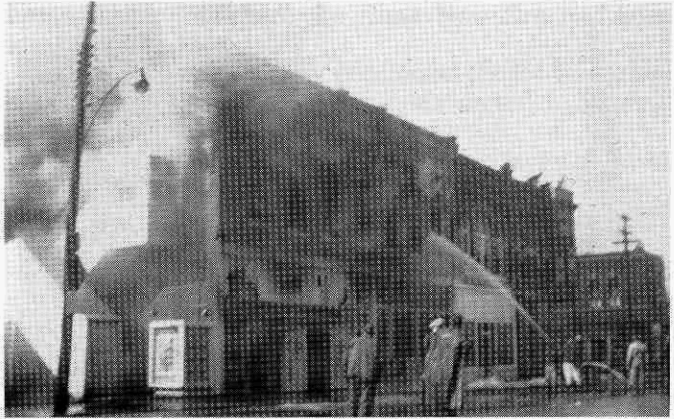
The second story of the building was used as a community hall and for church and school entertainment and all contents in the hall were destroyed.

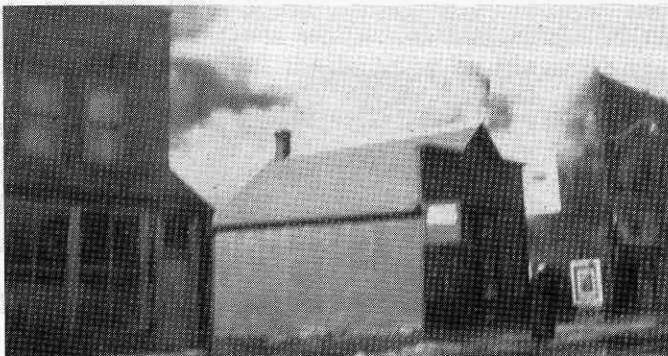
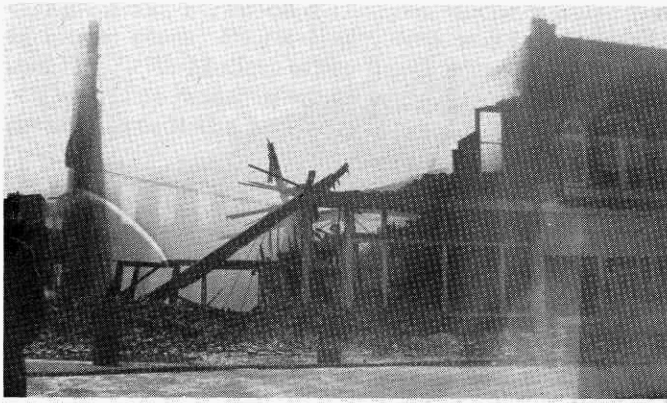
Considerable smoke and water damage was caused to the Grosser store and the building owned by E. B. Richmond and housing the Iowa State Liquor Store on the first floor and three apartments on the second floor.

The walls of the building stood until about 10 o'clock when the front wall crumbled to the ground and this helped firemen considerably to hold down flames. The department dynamited a hole in the roof to release some of the smoke and flames. Mr. Grosser repaired and redecorated the interior of the store and reopened and the apartment occupants moved in again after some cleaning and repair work was done.

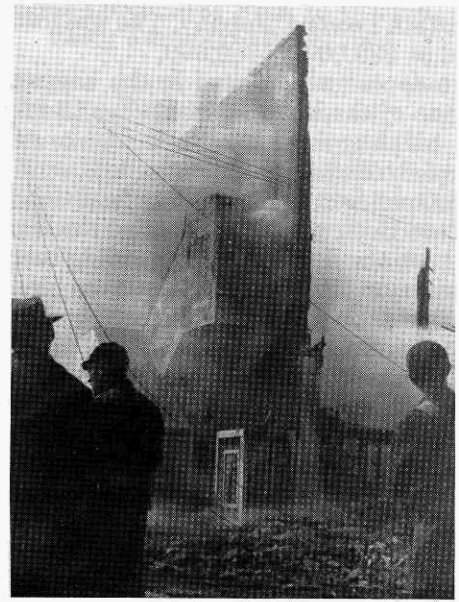
Elma New Era

The fire of 1948





South side of the block held the shoe store, the Hopkins Hatchery, and the burning section of the block.



Furniture salvaged from the apartments of residents was set beside Klobassa's Store.

Elma Fire of 1954

In less than four hours a most destructive fire on Friday, March 4, 1954, reduced eight business places to ashes, smoldering timber and brick, on the Main Street of the west section of Elma. Nine families were left homeless and without personal possessions.

Robert Jacoby, publisher of the *Elma New Era*, detected the smoke, and reported the fire about 1:00 a.m. The fire appeared to spread instantaneously following a terrific explosion. The fire was believed to have started in the Tip Top Tavern, owned by Leo Tonn.

Following the explosion, the wind-whipped flames wiped out the entire row of buildings on the north side of the street with the exception of the Elma Co-operative, a brick building apart from the others. The heat was so intense that firemen were hampered in

their persistent attempts to fight the blaze and get the fire under control. Windows in the buildings on the south side of the street exploded from the heat, and wind-carried flames quickly enveloped these buildings.

There was sufficient water supply to fight the blaze, but the near zero temperature froze the water almost as soon as it left the hoses. Firemen fought the leaping flames and stifling smoke courageously without serious injuries.

Business places destroyed on the north side of the street included the West Side Tavern owned and operated by Reuben and Vi Tucheck; Tonn's Clothing Store and Tip Top Tavern, owned by Leo Tonn, and operated by Gloria and Marvin (Louie) Tonn; the Elma New Era Printing Shop owned by Virgil Tobin and leased by Robert Jacoby; and the Barber Shop owned and operated by Clifford Stratton.

Those business places on the south side of the street were: the State Liquor Store building owned by E. B. Richmond and operated by Joe Rohde; the West Side Grocery operated by Dan and Marge Conway; and the Dawn Theater operated by Charles Jones.

Fleeing from their beds in apartments above the north side fire-swept buildings were Robert and Jeanette Jacoby, Leo and Elnora Tonn and daughter Shirley, Marvin (Louie) and Gloria Tonn and daughter Sandy, and Reuben and Vi Tucheck. Clifford and Lucinda Stratton fled from their home at the rear of the barber shop, a building constructed separately from the other buildings. Vacating their apartments on the south side were Ed and Donna Vick, Mrs. Louisa Bartels, Charles and Anna Pospichal, and Myrtle Galligan and son, George.

Supporting Elma residents in the town and surrounding area soon cleaned up the charred rubble in preparation for reconstruction.

Reuben Tucheck rebuilt a one-story brick building on the site of his former building with living quarters in the rear.

To the east of the Tucheck building Ralph and Amanda Biwer constructed a brick building which housed a four-lane bowling alley of which they were the operators, and above which was a clothing store operated by Al and Mary Weber.

Clifford Stratton constructed his barbershop and

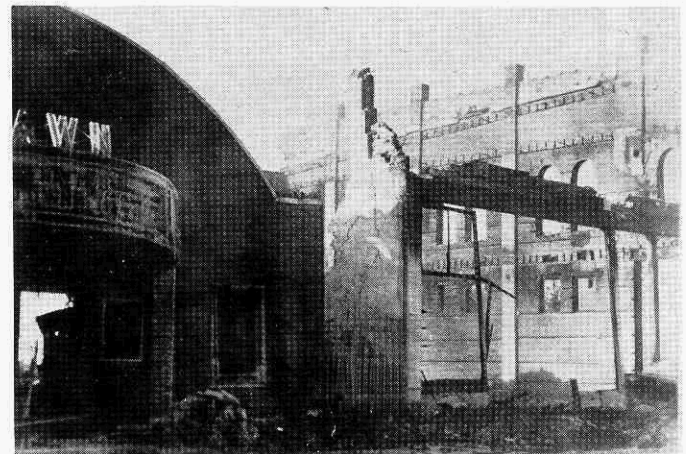
home on the lot where the Elma New Era had been located.

Dan and Marge Conway purchased the lot where the liquor store had stood. They constructed a quonset type building for their grocery store.

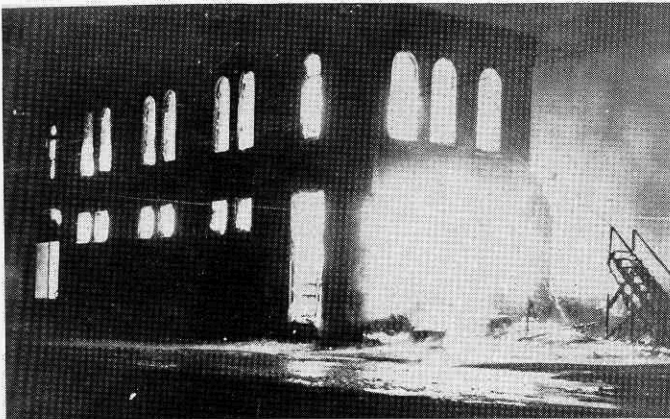
The Elma Theater Corporation built a large quonset type building to house the Flame Theater which was leased and operated by Neal and Mildred Mullinex.



People's Savings Bank can be seen in the background, while in the foreground is the rubble left from West Side Tavern and Tonn's Clothing Store.



The Dawn Theater is to the left and the remains of the grocery store and liquor store to the right.



The south side of the Iowa State Liquor Store.



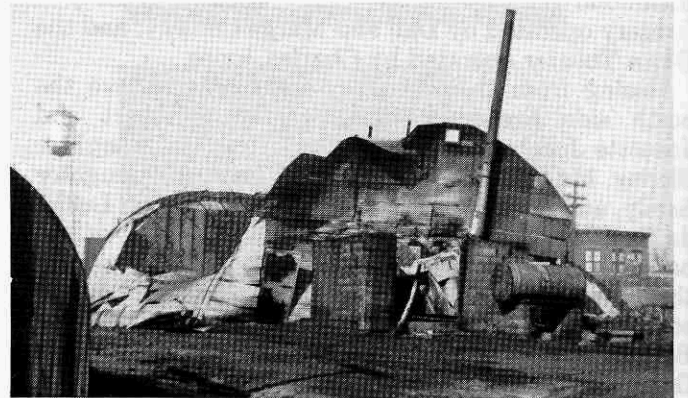
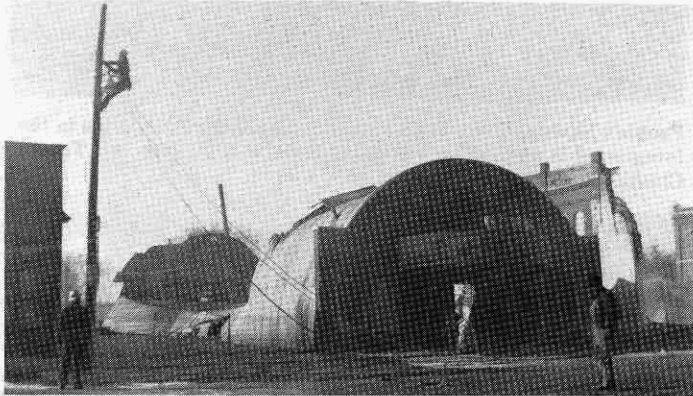
The Dawn Theater



A pile of rubble from the liquor store and Conway's Grocery.



This large hole is all that remains of the five businesses that were located on the north side of Main Street. The Elma Co-operative Creamery is in the background.



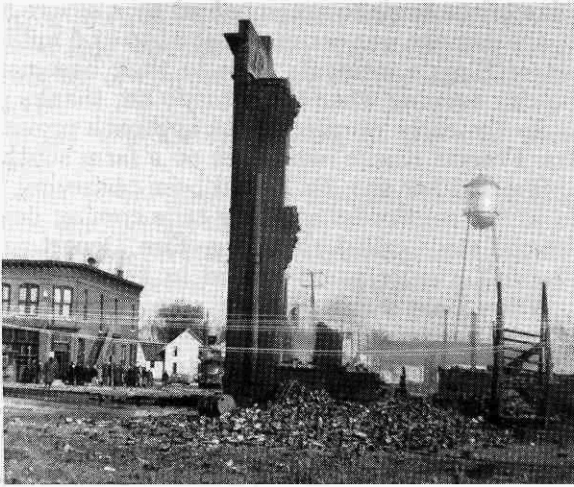
South side of Main Street.



The remains of Tonn Clothing Store.

The west wall of the liquor store remains standing, a lonely reminder of what used to be.

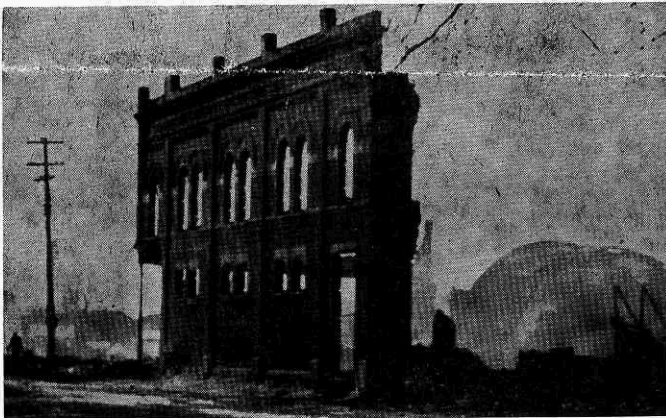




Dan Conway surveys his loss.



The terrific heat in the Elma fire not only burned paper money, but melted supplies of coins that merchants kept in cash registers and boxes. Marvin Tonn, who operated the tavern, is inspecting molten metal that once was money. This, and some ashes, are all that is left of between \$1,000 and \$1,200.



The west wall of the state liquor store in Elma was one of the few objects still standing in the town's west business district following the \$300,000 fire Thursday morning. Liquor stock valued at \$10,000 was destroyed in the fire. This Associated Press wirephoto was loaned to The Times-Plain Dealer by the Des Moines Register.



Temporary home of Mr. and Mrs. Ed Vick after the fire is this trailer owned by their son-in-law. The Vicks lost about everything they had, including their eye-glasses. (The Red Cross bought new ones for them.) The Vicks were burned out six years ago when they lived above the old Elma Theater.



Visiting the scene of their losses are seven men who lost property and businesses when a \$250,000 fire destroyed a considerable area of the west side business district in Elma March 4. From left are E. B. Richmond, Charles Jones, Leo Tonn, Bob Jacoby, C. G. Stratton, Dan Conway and Reuben Tuchek. There is little hope the buildings will be replaced.



Don Ultang, Des Moines Register-Tribune pilot-photographer, snapped this photograph over Elma late Thursday morning after firemen had brought the destructive blaze under control. The fire burned out a two-block area on both sides of Elma's main street. Visible in this photograph are Klobassa's grocery, the Peoples' State Bank, the Elma Cooperative Creamery and the Hopkins Hatchery, creating a boundary of undamaged buildings surrounding the devastated area.

Storm Losses At Elma Included Several Homes, Cars, Trees and Church

The date of Wednesday, May 15, 1968, remains a vivid memory in the minds of many Elma residents. It was this day that Elma was hit and badly damaged by a tornado which struck at approximately 5:25 p.m. In

the wake of the tornado accompanied by a severe hail storm, the damage was estimated at \$1 to \$1.5 million.

Most of Elma's residents were in their basements Wednesday evening when the tornado hit, thanks primarily to the early warning of its approach provided by Mrs. Francis Kucko, who lives on a farm south of Elma. She and her son, Dale, had been observing the clouds in the southwest and saw tails coming down. She immediately called the Elma Fire Department, and the fire whistle was sounded in a long wailing blast. When Dale saw it heading straight for Elma, Mrs. Kucko again called the fire department and once more the whistle sounded. Fortunately, no lives were lost and many attribute this to the warning that was received in time to seek shelter.

The tornado touched down first on the Dale Hart farm home on the west edge of Elma. The storm passed on to hit the trees, homes and anything in its path on the west end of Main Street. Two new homes, one owned by Mrs. Aura Conroy and the other by the James Gansen family, were completely destroyed. Both families rebuilt. Some of the old landmark houses on the west part of Elma were so badly damaged that they were torn down and replaced. Two of them were the old John Condon place owned by Joe Biwers at the time, and the Spaulding house occupied by the LeRoy Mohrfelds.

The Tom Smith home, located near the water tower was a complete loss and miraculously, Mrs. Smith and the three children escaped with only cuts and bruises and minor injuries.

Practically all the homes in west Elma suffered either minor or major damage. The landmark home of Elma Brandmill, for whom our town was named, received major damage. After extensive repair and remodeling, it continues to be occupied by the Dinsmore Brandmills.

The cluster of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church buildings, including church, school and parsonage, was extensively damaged. The entire church roof was moved some two blocks down the street by the winds. The school and parsonage were repaired and the church was eventually demolished and a new church built. School resumed the following Monday. Mass was held in the I.C. gymnasium until the new church was built.

Other buildings severely damaged included the Howard County garage and a corn drying plant.

The tornado continued north and northeast of Elma wreaking havoc on both Elma cemeteries and damaging or completely destroying a number of farmsteads. The Walter Fair farm was destroyed; at old Busti, the Zeimetz home and the Charlie Sullivan place were leveled. Charlie McGee's place was flattened. Much damage was done to the following farmsteads: Jerry Fitzgeralds, the Charlie, Charles and Pat Boyle farms, Tom Burkes, Ivan Schroeders, Henry Biwers, Clarence Bartels, Arnold Rimrodts, Gerald McGees, Victor Larsons and George Franas.

Roads into Elma were officially blocked Thursday to keep out sightseers.

Within town in an area about four by six blocks on the west side, virtually every tree was either stripped of branches or downed. Many streets were blocked by the trees.

Scarcely a home or building in the area escaped damage.

Downed power lines in the streets created additional hazards throughout the town.

No telephone service into Elma existed the following day, but some service within town had been restored by 10:00 p.m. Wednesday evening.

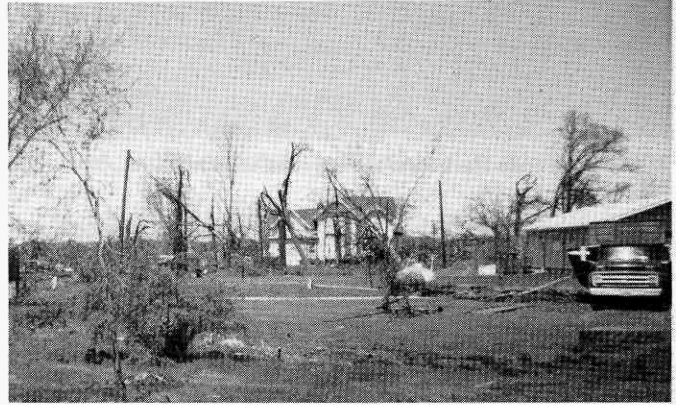
It has been said that a catastrophe such as this unites a community and this was certainly evident. Women from all three churches in Elma prepared the food donated by the people of Elma. Church groups from neighboring towns supplied food for the many workers and victims for several days.

The Memorial Hall was the headquarters for the Red Cross and Salvation Army, serving the community. Clothes, bedding, furniture and other supplies were brought by neighboring communities with additional boxes of food and clothes from the state.

The National Guard troops from Charles City, Mason City and Waterloo were present late Thursday and all day Friday. Ralph Stevenson, a "ham" operator, put out a call after the tornado hit and was answered by L. Bruce Ejerstedt of La Crosse, Wisconsin, and a portable generator was offered at no cost and was delivered yet Wednesday night. Chatfield, Minnesota, and Waterloo also sent generators. Telephone crews from several areas were dispatched to restore lines and service.

There were at least 500 people helping out in Elma at various times after the tornado. Two busloads of high-school youths from Belmond came on Saturday to help clean up; busloads of adults and teenagers from Lime Springs, Cresco and other towns met at Davis Corners on Sunday and came to help with cleanup.

Men with chain saws, bulldozers, heavy equipment and tractors worked long hours and into the night restoring order to our town. The hard work, financial assistance and good-will were in evidence everywhere. The people of Elma felt a deep feeling of gratitude and thanksgiving to all who helped to restore our town to normalcy.



The Lemuel Potter house was occupied at the time of the tornado, and still is, by Dinsmore Brandmill and has been restored.



This house was known as the O'Niel house. It was owned by Marguerite McAvoy when the tornado hit the west end of Main Street.



The twister of 1968 is shown approaching Charles City. It continued to raise havoc on its way to Elma, and further destruction there.

This description gives the feeling of the force dealt by Mother Nature.

"As the funnel churned and twisted, it dug up black dirt from the earth, twisted trees and power and telephone lines, crumpled buildings and hurled machinery through the air."

"Thousands of acres of corn, oats, and soybeans were levelled, many of them matted together like huge green and brown woven rugs by the force of the twisting winds."



The Dale Hart farm on the west edge of Elma.



The house on the left belonged to James Gansen; on the right, Francis Enright. The Enright house was restored.



The trees north of the I.C. Church were twisted reminders of their once stately beauty.



This house was known as the H. L. Spaulding house. At the time of the tornado it was owned by the LeRoy Mohrfeld family.



The remains of the Tom Smith home in the northwest part of town.



This house was known as the John Condon house and was owned by the Joe Biwer family when the tornado hit May 15, 1968.



West end of Main Street. The house on the right side—Francis Enright; on the left side—Joe Biwer.



Immaculate Conception Church



The Decker building across from the Hart farm is being rebuilt and the new structure is larger than the original.

Mrs. Marguerite McAvoy is having her house torn down and plans to build a one-story home with three bedrooms, utilizing three sides of the old foundation which was not damaged.

Mrs. Aure Conroy is having her home rebuilt on the same foundation and will be identical to the original structure which was a new house.

The James Gansen family also was living in a new house and they plan to rebuild a structure similar to the first, with extensions to the kitchen and living room.

The Joe Biwer family lived in a large square house with porches on three sides. It was not demolished, but too extensively damaged to repair. They had the damaged structure torn down, dug a new basement and purchased a house previously built, which they moved to the site.

The LeRoy Mohrfeld two-story home received extensive damage to the upper story and the entire building has been torn down and a new one-story house is being built.

The Francis Enright and Ron Hoffman homes were damaged and are being repaired and new garages are under construction at both sites.

The Dinsmore Brandmill home is being repaired and a new garage is under construction.

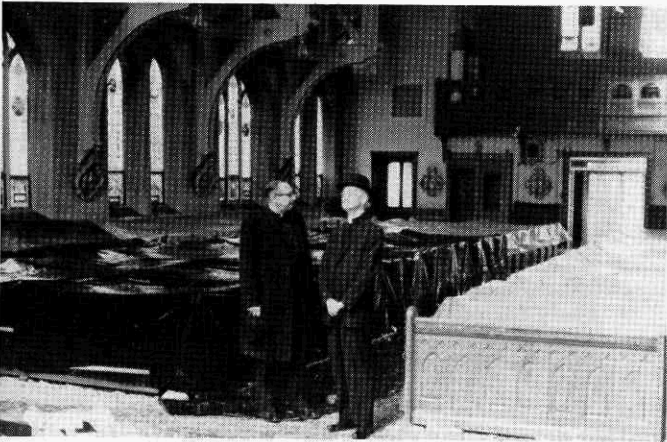
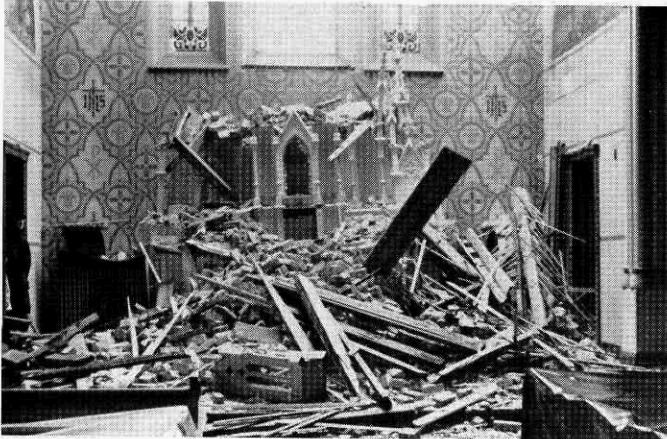
The Tom Smith home which was completely demolished is being built on a much larger scale with three bedrooms and attached garage. They hope to be ready to move into the structure by fall. The family is living in Alta Vista.

Work on the Immaculate Conception Church has not been started.

A mile north of town, Mrs. Ludwina Zeimetz is building a split level home. Her house and buildings were destroyed in the storm. At present she and her family are living on a farm south of Elma.

The Walter Fairs have moved into a home they purchased near the Catholic church from Mrs. Emma Buckley. Because of ill health, Mrs. Buckley is making her home with her son, Mr. and Mrs. Chester Buckley.

The Charles McGees farm also was demolished.



July 18, 1968 . . .

A New Face for the Town of Elma

Residents here have a good start on clearing and rebuilding projects just two months after the May 15 tornado which slashed through this small southwest Howard County community.

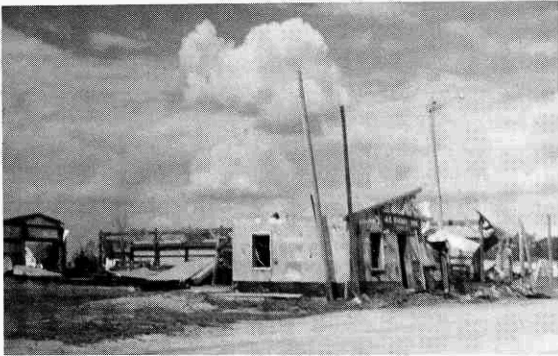
The Dale Hart farm at the edge of Elma is being torn down along with other buildings. Damage to trees and fences on the farm was extensive and it took some time for the rubble to be cleared and new fences erected.



Howard County Highway Building

They have moved into the Gerald McGee home and the latter family has moved into the farm home of the late Dudack brothers north of Elma.

Tom Burkes are living in a trailer home on their farm property while they rebuild.



Decker Hog Buying Station on the west edge of Elma



Tornado of 1968 storm damage at the Ivan Schroeder farm.



1971 Tornado

On Saturday, June 19, 1971, Elma was again in the path of a dipping tornado and violent windstorm, causing considerable damage to buildings and crops.

In just five days, on Thursday, June 24, 1971,



Clean-up on Oak Street; the Merle Schroeder home is in the background.



another devastating storm with winds up to 100 miles-an-hour, driving wind and hail, followed an almost identical path, at about the same time of the day, between six and seven p.m., with damages much heavier than those of Saturday night's storm. Hawkeye Tri-County R.E.C. reported the most outstanding line damage in its history, from twisted lines and broken poles. Hail cut crops to ribbons. Many of the same farms were touched by both storms.

It is impossible to list all the losses suffered by victims of the tornado. Extensive damage was done on the farm of Mrs. Myrtle Schroeder and on the Leo Sullivan farm. The house on the Charles Garmen farm

was damaged as was the house on the Mike Ungs farm, where the windmill was also blown down and other buildings damaged. A machine shed on the Francis Klobassa farm was flattened and Kenneth Fangman, Dale Hoffman and Francis Kucko had damaged buildings. Other farmers who lost buildings included: Melvin Zubrod, J. P. Klassen, Herb Bartels, Gerald Gansen, Matt Palmersheim, Phil Biwer, Kenny Schmidt, Ward Cook and Elmer Gansen.

In the town of Elma, garages belonging to Mrs. Rose Fogarty, Mrs. Alice Fogarty, Jack McDonald, and the garage attached to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Lynn Stevenson were damaged. Ed Diekmann lost his car when a tree fell on it. The roof of the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harley Dykema was badly damaged and water damage followed. Major damage was done to the Elma Locker where they lost part of the roof and wide cracks were apparent in the front of the building.

The third and worst storm to hit the area in three weeks, occurred at the same time, 6:30 p.m. on July 12, 1971. Following the path of the two earlier tornados, it followed a corridor about two miles wide, slipping just to the south of Elma and to the north of Alta Vista, finally dissipating just to the west of Lawler. Elma and Alta Vista escaped with minor damage but the area scene was one of desolation.

All the buildings on the Francis Klobassa farm, except the house, were levelled. The Henry Hoffman farm, tenanted by the Kenneth Fangman family, was completely wiped out, as was the Joe Roethler farm across the road.

West of Elma, the Clarence Price farm, occupied by Joe Dunn lost all the buildings except the house. All the buildings were demolished on the farms of Forest Blough and Homo DeVries. On the Henry Rosonke farm the barn was destroyed and his house and other buildings damaged. Barns on the Dan Halpin, Matt Kinney, Ralph Ries, Wyron Buchholz, and Harold Ries farms were flattened.

Several steel power-line towers were ripped from their concrete bases and toppled. Miraculously, no lives were lost, although there were several persons injured. Among those hospitalized were Mrs. Francis Klobassa, Mrs. Paul Younker, and Kay Klobassa, 10-year-old daughter of the Lee Klobassas.

Farmers in the Alta Vista-Elma area were beginning to wonder if their part of the county was going to become known as "Tornado Alley."



Henry Hoffman farm 2½ miles S.E. of Elma where the Kenneth Fangman family lived.

