

## Major Fires in New Berlin

by

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New Berlin experienced various major fires before the 1932 founding of the New Berlin Fire Company. Photos exist for two of them, the Union Hotel fire in 1912, and the stocking factory fire in 1898.

The Union Hotel was photographed before and after a devastating fire on December 8, 1912. The hotel had been constructed by Christopher Seebold in 1818 and was later enlarged by owner Michael Kleckner (b. 1807-d. 1887). Five arched doorways were focal points in its handsome façade.



The blaze at the Union Hotel began at 11:45 p.m. on December 8, 1912, and was out of control before outside help could arrive. Having rained earlier that night and with no wind, the fire did not spread as it might have done. Thus the fire did not damage the adjacent brick home, partially seen on the far right,

and an auxiliary building, both owned later by Robert W. and Grace Miller. The Union Hotel was never rebuilt. Eventually a single family dwelling was built on the very corner of the lot leaving a very large side yard between it and the unaffected brick dwelling. In the 1970s, Grace Miller used the auxiliary building, formerly the office of the *New Berlin Reporter*, as a restaurant called The Towne House. Today, both buildings belong to David and Sally Farmer. (NBHA and UCHS 86.3.8)



A year and a half after the Union Hotel burned to the ground, so did New Berlin's Central Hotel. In the wintery picture (next page) the sign of the Central Hotel is barely visible on the left side of Front Street. It was located on Front Street, New Berlin. Labeled a "suspicious fire," its owner, A. M. Herman, was charged with arson. (NBHA.)



Some 14 years before the Union Hotel fire New Berlin experienced a factory fire. The first stocking factory in Union County was located in New Berlin on the 300 block of Front Street. Textile production in earlier times had been in homes and by itinerant weavers who made coverlets and woven yard goods. Below is real photo postcard of workers at the first stocking factory in New Berlin (UCHS #85.23.2)



The following photo is of umbrella-holding spectators on April 14, 1898, viewing the smoldering remains of the stocking factory's fire. (NBHA.)



Other clothing firms that were later established in town included two hosiery mills, a silk mill, a shirt factory, the New Berlin Garment Factory, Middleburg Sportswear, Sew-Comp, and most recently, starting in 1978—Tara Lee Sportswear.

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