

Eleanor Block: In 1930s, After Fire

By FRANCES B. MURPHEY
NORTHFIELD CENTER —
The Eleanor Block, boarded up since a spectacular fire, is a lonesome-looking building these days.

On March 27 three fire departments fought a blaze centered in a decorating store. "Paint cans popped like artillery" recalled one onlooker.

The first floor of the Marvin Sommer Decorators Inc. fell into the basement. The second floors held but the stairway that once led to the late Dr. R. M. McCulloch's office was burned.

FIREMEN from Northfield Center, Macedonia and Northfield kept the fire contained mainly to Sommer's quarters.

Smoke and water damaged the second-floor offices of a dentist, the YMCA, Catholic Service League, Camp Fire Girls and two apartments.

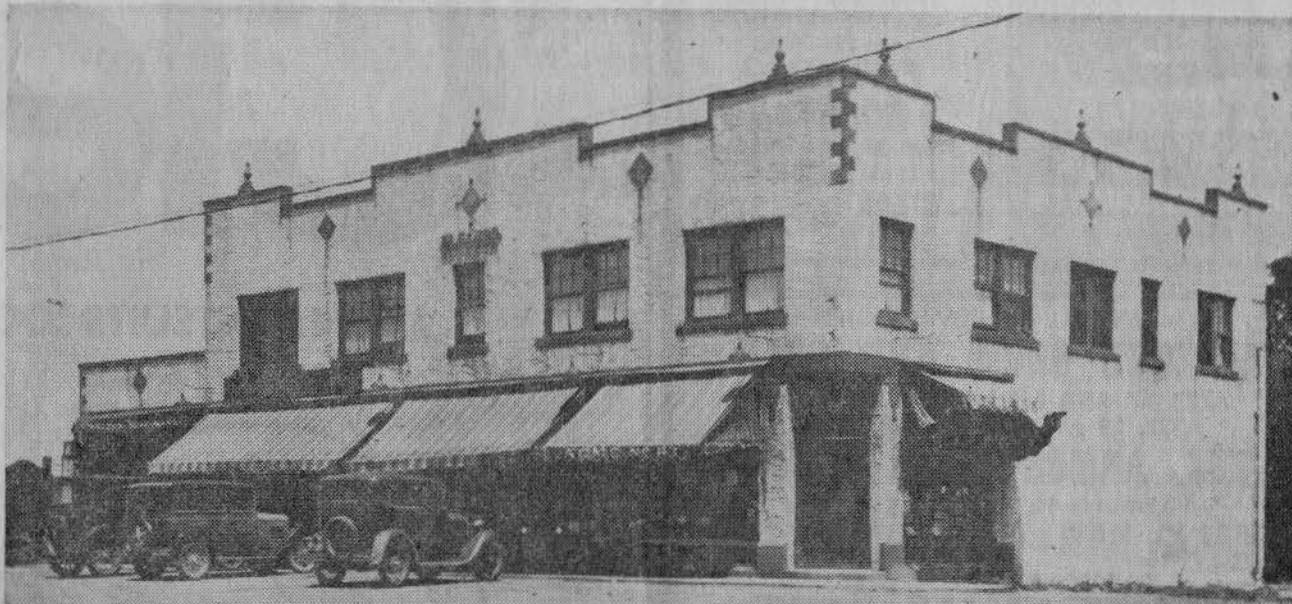
Northfield Florists in a shop next to the main block and its neighbor, the Richland Department Store, had smoke damage.

The fire halted plans of a pizza shop to locate in a room once occupied by a drug store.

IT LEFT Marvin Sommer in the greatest mess he had seen since starting an interior and exterior decorating business here 18 years ago.

Among the things destroyed in the blaze were prized mementos of his artist-grandfather, William Sommer. A palette and a pencil drawing dated 1886 were apparently lost.

One of "Bill" Sommer's



HOW ELEANOR BLOCK LOOKED IN THE EARLY 1930s



SAME BUILDING BOARDED UP AFTER FIRE

One of "Bill" Sommer's originals was among the pictures salvaged from the wreckage.

YOUNG SOMMER has not found an oil painting which he commissioned Linda Kucharik, a Macedonia artist, to do a couple of years ago because "People will forget what they looked like." The painting portrayed an outhouse Sommer's carpenter-father, William, had built years ago.

Singed but saved was the original of Mrs. Kucharik's pencil sketch of the Northfield Center Town Hall used on a 1971 community calendar.

In the last four weeks businessman Sommer has found that the hardest thing "is trying to stay in business."

"The firemen did a fine job of saving records. Though they were wet and smoky, they were not burned," said the grateful Sommer.

SOMMER HAS been utilizing his Hudson office at 201½

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N. Main st. since the fire. He is renovating an old chicken coop behind his home at 9255 Olde 8 rd. as business headquarters.

The street was formerly known as Akron-Cleveland rd. Many residents referred to it as "old 8" after State Rt. 8 moved further East. As a Northfield Center Twp. trustee and past president of the Northfield Center Business Association, Sommer helped motivate the name change.

SOMMER WAS in Maryland when the fire hit the block at 9377 Olde 8 rd. at the corner of Leonard av. one block north of Ohio 82.

Max Landy of Beachwood, owner of the Eleanor Block, and his wife drove through Northfield Center early on March 27 to see if the pizzeria had opened. That night they saw television films of the building burning.

Currently Landy is involved with insurance investigations and hopeful of starting reconstruction soon.

THE BLOCK was built in 1927 by William Lockhart, a year after he moved to Northfield Center. For years Al Hansen owned the building and operated a hardware store until a dozen years ago when he retired and sold out to Landy.

Originally large letters spelled out "E-l-e-a-n-o-r" on the front of the stucco-fronted masonry building. They have been gone for a long time.

Few people today realize that the block was named for Mrs. Leonard Stepro, 10632 Valley View rd. A kindergarten teacher at Ledgeview School, Mrs. Stepro is the former Eleanor Lockhart, daughter of the block's builder.

The block's disastrous fire, its first, started in the basement of Sommer's store. The exact cause is still listed as undetermined. Fire Chief Ed Chamlis' damage estimate was \$100,000.

No one can put a price tag on the inconvenience to people and the irreplaceability of things involved in such a blaze.