

CHESTER TIMES – January 11, 1912

DESTRUCTIVE FIRE DESTROYS OLD HALL – Ancient Monastery at Villanova Razed by Flames Entailing Loss of \$100,000 – Students Overcome

Three students and a fireman, were overcome and property to the value of \$100,000 was destroyed by a fire which started on the third floor of St. Rita's Hall, the old monastery of St. Thomas College, Villanova, yesterday afternoon, and for a time threatened the destruction of several of the other buildings.

The four who were overcome were treated in one of the college buildings. They were Michael Hopkins, Sylvester Martin, Charles Songster, all of whom were in the building where the fire started and Joseph Lang, a volunteer fireman from Bryn Mawr. None were injured seriously.

The fire was discovered by Hopkins, who while in his room saw puffs of smoke coming from the ceiling. He leaned out of the window shouting that the building was on fire. At the time the fire was discovered, most of the 55 students who live in the building were on the lower floor at dinner.

TELEPHONE FOR HELP – As soon as the alarm was sounded Philip Colgan, a prefect, telephone for help, and the fire apparatus of the surrounding towns responded. Under the leadership of Rev. Joseph A. Hickey, O.S.A., Rector of the chapel in St. Rita's, the 55 students marched out of the building, and while waiting for the fire apparatus to arrive started to fight the flames with the buckets and hose that were brought from the various college buildings.

While several of the students ran to get the buckets someone shouted that Hopkins was in his room in the burning building. Immediately Martin and Songster rushed into the building and made their way through smoke to the third floor, where they found Hopkins lying unconscious. Both men brought Hopkins to the ground, and then collapsed.

Following the collapse of the three students, the roof, burning away, fell the fiery embers burying Lang, who with others had been standing directly where the roof fell. For a time it was thought that the fireman had been killed, but Lang staggered out of the debris and after being treated by a physician, was sent to his home.

KEITH LOCKHART COLLECTION