

Carlinville High School Burned 35 Years Ago

by Tom Emery
September 13 2022 1:13 PM



CARLINVILLE - Dick Spohr still remembers the events of the early morning of Sunday, Sept. 13, 1987.

“The police department called my home before midnight,” said Spohr, the former Carlinville High School principal. “I pulled on some clothes and drove out to the school. I ended up wearing those clothes for a day and a half.”

Tuesday marks the 35th anniversary of the fire that swept through the high school building in Carlinville, ravaging the third story. The first and second stories suffered massive smoke and water damage.

The origin of the fire was traced to the attic between the third story and the roof of the structure, built in 1921.

“Today’s students don’t always know much about the fire, and some haven’t even heard of it,” said Pat Drew, the current Carlinville High School principal who was a sophomore in 1987. “But all of us who were there remember it very well.”

Many recall the community response to the fire, as hordes of students and volunteers helped salvage and move furniture, books, and equipment over the next three days. Remarkably, only two days of school were missed.

“We lost a building, not the school,” recalled Judy Bates, then-school board president. “The students and people of the town were unbelievable, as were the principals and administrators. I still can’t believe we only missed two days of class.”

The fire created temporary classroom arrangements, mostly in undamaged parts of the campus, for two years. During that time, the old building was completely gutted and reconstructed inside the outer walls, which were structurally intact. The building was reopened in August 1989.

A commemorative booklet was created in 2012 to honor the 25th anniversary of the fire, and a ceremony was held in the high school cafeteria that was well attended by former faculty, students, and friends of the school.

Those booklets are still available and cost \$10 each. All proceeds benefit the Carlinville Public Schools Foundation. For more information, contact the high school office at (217) 854-3104.