

Historic Turner Hall in Alton Engulfed by Massive Fire

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - A devastating fire destroyed the historical Turner Hall Building at Fourth and Ridge Streets in Alton on Wednesday, Feb. 28, 2024. The fire erupted at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Alton Fire Department Chief Jesse Jemison said a box alarm and then a second box alarm were called for the fire and he said his department received assistance from the East Alton Fire Department, Godfrey Fire Protection District and Black Jack Fire Department in the battle of the gigantic blaze.

The Alton Police Department was one of the first at the scene to control the area outside the fire. The Madison County Emergency Management Agency was also called out to assist. The smoke and orange glow of the fire were visible for miles away.

Chief Jemison said the Alton Public Works Department has been contacted to take the building down later tonight once the fire is completely out for safety concerns.

"The building has been vacant for a long time," Jemison said. "I was at an Alton City Council Meeting when I got a call about the fire on Ridge so I left immediately and was at the scene in just a couple minutes."



Chief Jemison said the fire at Fourth and Ridge was under control by about 7:45 p.m. Wednesday.

Turner Hall was located at the northeast corner of Fourth and Ridge Streets in Alton and was completed in 1867 by the German Turnverein Society of Alton. It served German immigrants as a gymnastics, social and literary center and was one of the oldest buildings in the state built by a private organization.

It also once contained a 1,000-volume library and was home to the Maenarchor, a choral society. The Turner Gardens, a small park adjoining the hall, featured brass bands and entertainment.

After World War I, the society changed its name to the East End Improvement Association due to the anti-German sentiment. The East End Improvement Association remains active today as the sponsor of the Alton Halloween Parade and the Alton Memorial Day Parade.

Chief Jemison described the situation as "a massive fire."

"Luckily no one was injured in the fire," he said. "We had two ladder trucks at the scene."

Jemison said a track hoe would be brought in later tonight to take the building down for safety purposes. He also said there was a home about 20-30 feet from the historic building, but there were no issues with exposure.

The cause of the fire has not yet been determined, Chief Jemison said.

