

Michigan Every Day **By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberly**

Sept. 17, 1929
Mysterious Kalamazoo Fires

For several years, suspicious fires plagued Kalamazoo. The first inferno struck the city in December, 1925, when the First Congressional Church burned. A month later, an entire block burned at Rose and West Michigan Avenue, with losses estimated at \$92,000. In March, the First Methodist Church was destroyed and two firefighters were killed. In April a fire took the Moose Temple on Portage Street. In July, the Presbyterian Church was set ablaze.

There were two more fires that December. The frequency of the fires convinced residents that an arsonist was at work. Despite all of the probable crime scenes, investigators had no luck finding any clues and things quieted down for a few years. Then a spectacular fire broke out on Sept. 17, 1929 at the National Refining Company on Lincoln Avenue.

Fifty families were forced to flee their homes after seven 19,000-gallon gasoline storage tanks exploded. Shortly after, another fire struck, this one at the Regent Theater.

Police arrested a youth after that blaze. He admitted to all the fires, however the boy's mental state cast doubt on the validity of the confession.