

HOONAH FIRE-JUNE 14, 1944

The fire started when the men brought Sockeye fish from the outside coast. After they brought it in, the ladies wanted to smoke it and dry it because the fish was real rich and could not be kept through the winter.

Instead of regular smoke houses, they used underneath their houses on the beach side. They had canvas fastened all around like a room. But one woman didn't fasten one of the pieces of canvas too well. After she had the fish hanging, she built a fire.

Behind the canvas there were some gasoline drums. The fall before the fire started some gas drums were lost from the military base in Excursion Inlet. These drums were floating all around Icy Straits, and therefore were picked up by Hoonah people and put under their houses.

The weather was clear and the wind was coming from Glacier Bay. A piece of loose canvas blew into the fire and started burning. The fire was not immediately detected. The woman who was smoking her fish was sitting inside her house alone when someone walking by saw the house on fire. The passerby went in and told her to get out because her house was burning on all four sides. She had over a thousand dollars upstairs but was unable to save anything.

They couldn't control the fire after that. They tried the water but the pressure was too weak. With gas drums exploding everywhere the fire spread very fast. The fire destroyed everything from Frank Shotter's house to the present site of the A.N.B. Hall. It burned the Presbyterian Church down.

Only one man burned in the fire. His name was John C. Smith, the brother of John K. Smith. He burned in the Snail House. They weren't able to get him out. He wanted to stay just like the lady in Glacier Bay. He didn't want to leave. This man was on the Raven side.

All of the old custom stuff was burnt in the fire. Most of the community houses were burnt and never rebuilt except for the Shark House, Wolf House, and Iceberg House.