

Workday Wednesday: Broida Bros. Cigar Factory Fire, Oil City, Pennsylvania

Interesting Trade Items.

John Shirk and William Kellogg have formed a partnership which has opened a new cigar factory in Macon, Mo.

Fire of unknown origin recently damaged the cigar factory of Broida, Bros., Oil City, Pa., to the extent of \$100.

Fire at Broida Cigar Factory in the *Untied States Tobacco Journal*, Feb. 28, 1914, Vol. 81, page 89, via GoogleBooks.

[Broida Family](#) (Click for Family Tree)

For millennia, fire has been a terrifying prospect for those living or working in wooden buildings. Even stone or brick buildings are not exempt, since the interior utilizes wood in walls, floors, furniture. Add in the other contents of the building being highly combustible, and there is potential for big losses of property and even life.

A cigar factory definitely fits the category as high risk for fire. Full of tobacco and in the case of the Broida Bros. Cigar factory of Oil City, Pennsylvania, cases of matches too,

and the smallest spark can set off a conflagration.

In 1914, a fire in the factory caused an estimated \$100 worth of damage, which is equivalent to about \$2,500 today. This number probably only includes the physical losses- one needs to add in the cost of lost work time while waiting for repairs to be completed, stock to be replenished, etc. It definitely would have had an impact on the Broida families that owned the factory, and their workers, many probably related.

BLAZE, STARTING IN MATCHES, IS QUICKLY PUT OUT

Oil City Cigar & Candy Co. Building Damaged--Loss by Smoke and Water to be Great.

SMOKE HAMPERS FIREMEN

Fire originating in cartons of matches resulted in considerable damage to the building and contents of the Oil City Cigar & Candy Co., at 349 Seneca street, adjacent to the Drake Theatre building, at 12:30 o'clock this afternoon.

The loss, which was caused mostly from smoke and water, could not be estimated by the owners, Broida Bros., this afternoon. The cause of the ignition of the matches could not be ascertained. Flames from the one carton of matches quickly spread to several others and as a result the entire second floor was filled with fire.

Fire at Oil City Cigar & Candy Co., Jan 29, 1931, via News-Herald (Franklin PA), page 15.

Another fire in 1931 caused significantly more damage. A fire started in cartons of matches, but the cause was unknown at the time this was published. The article goes on to say that the fire quickly spread to merchandise on shelves nearby. If the firefighters had not responded so quickly, the losses would have been even greater. When they arrived, the whole second floor of the building was in flames, and the smoke was so dense that it was challenging for them to get the blaze under control. Two hose companies and a hook and ladder truck had responded, and finally were able to get one hose spraying down the second story, putting out the fire.

Sadly, the large amount of water required to put out the fire seeped through the floorboards and walls down to the first floor, where much merchandise was ruined. Watery cigars in soggy wooden or cardboard cigar boxes (cigars and cigar boxes were not sealed in plastic back in the day) would not be easy to sell, especially once they got moldy, and candy that was a bit smoky would not have been popular back then. (Today, smoked chocolate etc. would command twice the price for sweet-toothed foodies!) So the smoke and then water damage caused by putting out the fire was the reason for their greatest loss in this fire. Since it occurred in January in Pennsylvania, work probably stopped, as the building would need to be aired out and cleaned- not easy to leave the windows open in northern winter weather! As in 1914, employees may have been out of work, new stock would need to be acquired from vendors, etc., so the Broida Bros. would also have had a loss of profit while recovering from the fire. Hopefully they had insurance, which was not the huge industry back then like it is today, but it was available.

Thankfully, no one was hurt in the fire.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. United States Tobacco Journal, Vol. 81– <https://books.google.com/books?id=G5JBAQAAMAAJ&pg=RA8-PA29&lpg=RA8-PA29&dq=broida+brothers+cigar+factory&source=bl&ots=-Q8Vg07Dw7&sig=p-UG9ybtsc62-9RM0hMrIglcsjI&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj0jcuxrzYAhVE7yYKHZ0uDAoQ6AEIQjAE#v=onepage&q&f=false>
2. Inflation calculator– <https://www.dollartimes.com/inflation/inflation.php?amount=100&year=1914>
3. “Fire at Oil City Cigar & Candy Co.,” Jan 29, 1931, via News-Herald (Franklin PA), page 15.

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