

Historic Inferno – Fire Destroys T H Mate & Co’s Store

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Thomas Mate’s first retail store in Albury opened on the corner of Hume & Townsend streets in 1850. T H Mate & Co moved to the corner of Dean & Kiewa streets in 1899, opening on October 7 on the corner known until then as “Dulley’s corner.”

At about 1 am on Sunday December 12, 1915, fire started in Mates store. By 1.30 am it was reported that the whole building was enveloped in flames.

The *Albury Daily News* told its readers that “in a short time the iron girder supporting the brick work above the windows literally shriveled up and, with a tremendous crash, the whole of the upper storey fell into the seething flames.”



Crews clean up after the fire that destroyed T H Mate & Co’s store.
The Courthouse Hotel is in the background.

The store was rebuilt and reopened to the public in August 1916.

The *Daily News* went on to report that “the fire and the destruction involved are beyond doubt without parallel in the history of Albury.”

The fire brigade, led by Captain Tom Ryan, received much praise for confining most of the damage to Mates building. Albury firemen were assisted by the brigade from Wodonga.

The *Border Morning Mail* reported that the fire caused damages estimated at £62000 (about \$6,000,000 in 2018 terms).

An adjoining jeweller, Abraham Hart, whose stock received some damage, told the *Mail* “that he could not say enough in praise of the firemen, who did their work in a most admirable manner. He recognised that the firemen had made ‘a splendid save,’ and in recognition of this he stated that he would present each fireman with a gold medal.”

The *Mail* told its readers that at the inquest into the cause of the fire “The coroner said there was nothing at all to indicate the origin of the fire. He then returned an open verdict, but how the fire occurred he was from the evidence unable to say.”

The management of Mates thanked firemen in a letter to the editor of the *Mail* “Will you kindly grant us space in your columns to publicly thank the captain and men of the Albury Fire Brigade for their splendid efforts against the fire ... All those who saw the conflagration will agree with us when we say that the pluck and tenacity of the firemen were beyond praise, and thanks to their untiring efforts, portion of our offices with important books of record were saved.”

Mates rebuilt store opened in August 1916.