

AMP Building Fire 1885

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The Australian Mutual Provident Society (AMP) was formed on January 1, 1849. Later that month, John Roper, Albury's Clerk of Petty Sessions, was appointed as the Albury agent for the company.

The company expand quickly and in November 1881 "the tender of Mr Hartley has been accepted for the completion of the building in Dean-street recently purchased by the Australian Mutual Provident Society lor the purposes of a district office." The new building was on the corner of what soon became known as AMP Lane and next to the office of the *Albury Banner*.

There were several premises destroyed by fire in the 19th century, many said to be "suspicious." The largest of these fires started in the AMP Building in December 1885. The fire caused total destruction of the building, totally gutted the *Banner* building next door and severely damaged the premises of Patrick Fallon on the other side of the lane. The fire was said to result in an estimated loss of £15,000 (over \$2 million in 2022 terms).



The only known image of the first AMP building in Dean St with the *Albury Banner* building right. An illustration from the *Australian Town & Country Journal* of February 1886, several weeks after the fire. The AMP Lane is left.

The fire started in the downstairs drapery store of Joseph Johnson. In his window he had a 'Father Christmas' figure illuminated at night by gas jets – the jets ignited a lace display in the window and "in a moment the whole place was ablaze."

There were calls for many years for a reticulated water supply for Albury, it was slow in coming, and not turned on until January 1886. To fight the AMP fire, the fire brigade relied on water carts to deliver water from the river. Firemen used a hand operated pump to direct a small stream of water on the fire, supplemented by buckets of water passed along a line from the water carts.

The water carriers sourced their water from the river at the western end of Hume Street. A letter to the *Banner's* editor described the site was "the receptacle of the drainage of the town, the Chinese gardens, the refuse of the breweries and the adjacent pig styes." The owners of the water carts competed to be first to a major fire, with the first and second to arrive receiving cash bonuses from Council.

The shell of the *Banner* building remained intact and the building restored. The AMP building had to be totally rebuilt. The new building was designed by local architects Gordon & Gordon and construction starting in November 1886. This building was knocked down to make way for the current building, which opened in July 1941.