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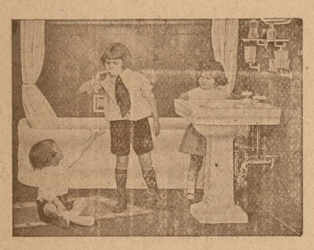

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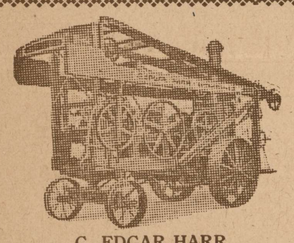

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DAMAGE AMOUNTING TO $506,541,001 CAUSED BY FIRE IN THE UNITED STATES DURING 12-MONTH PERIOD

Matches, Smoking, Defective Chimneys And Flues, Stoves, Furnaces And Boilers Leading Factors In Loss Of Property—Public Carelessness And Ignorance To Blame.

(By Nancy Hanks)

Once again, it is evident, America has succeeded in shattering her own lamentable record of fire loss. Never before 1922, even in the year which saw the threatened effacement of San Francisco, has she suffered so much of her material substance as $506,541,001 to be wasted by flame in the space of twelve months.

The magnitude of such sum as $560,541,001—averaging $964 for every fleeting minute and erecting a per capita of $4.61—is not easy to grasp. It is, for instance, only a trifle less than the country at present is expending on all forms of national defense; the Government received little more in revenue from customs during 1922 than was consumed by fire in the same period; $560,541,001 would have paid the personal income tax in 1922, with millions of dollars left over; at an average cost of $75,000, the money representing America's 1922 fire loss would have sufficed to eliminate 6,754 hazardous railroad grade crossings. Possibly a few comparisons like these will help to supply perspective to minds which find it difficult, as most minds do, to envisage such a gigantic waste.

Still, merely to record even so great a loss as $506,541,001 leaves untold much of the story; it does not take into consideration the real, though incomputable, fire toll involved in diminished production of needed commodities; it overlooks, too, the cost to the people of maintaining large fire-fighting units, and disregards the stoppage of public income derived from property once taxable but since destroyed. And what figures shall be used to calculate the value of the human beings sacrificed to no purpose, or, what is hardly less regrettable, permanently mutilated?

Underlying fully three-fourths of this composite fire loss was, as in previous years, some variety of public carelessness joined to ignorance of an order which, in the United States, is common to rich and poor—ignorance amounting to a popular disinclination to learn, to profit either by reiterated precept or by costly and horrible example. There were, true enough, other agencies sharing responsibility for this unprecedented devastation by fire, but the combined machinations of Carelessness and Ignorance, through the medium of such avoidable causes as matches—Smoking, Defective Chimneys and Flues, and Stoves, Furnaces, Boilers and their pipes—the three leading factors—overshadowed them all.

It may be that the optimistic can extract a slight meed of comfort from the fact that the actual tabulations fell approximately fourteen millions of dollars short of the total for 1922, as estimated last spring, on the basis of preliminary figures. Since, however, the real increase over the exhibit for 1921 exceeded eleven millions, or 2 per cent. this consolation seems at best somewhat frigid.

Here in Baltimore county the fire loss has been large, especially in the rural districts.

The average farm house is not subjected to danger caused by fire in adjoining buildings as in the case with city buildings. On the other hand there is little or no fire protection provided for farm dwellings or outbuildings.

Too many farmers fail to recognize the ever-present danger from fire. Farm buildings should be the most easily safeguarded against loss from various fires.

Chiefly responsible among the known causes of fires on farm properey are lightning, defective chimneys and flues, stoves, furnaces, boilers and their pipes, spontaneous combustion, matches, smoking and petroleum and its products.

Every farmer knows that he can remove the lightning hazard by a very simple and inexpensive method of lightning rod equipment. Defective chimneys and flues are wholly within the control of the owner of the property. Proper repairing of stoves, furnaces, boilers and pipes is a matter of good housekeeping which it is almost criminal to neglect. Sparks on roofs cannot be entirely eliminated, but if the chimneys are tight and run to a proper height danger from this cause is reduced to a minimum. Fires caused by petroleum and its products can be wholly eliminated if proper care is maintained in using these articles and if they are kept in receptacles intended for the purpose. Spontaneous combustion usually results either from oily rags, paint or similar material left carelessly where last used or from explosions in barns due to improper ventilation. It is simple to avoid these hazards by the use of ordinary intelligence.

For every bit of farm property that is destroyed, the profits of some farmer are wiped out and the "problems of agriculture" are increased by just that much, for the farmer must secure new capital with which to replace property destroyed. This must all be charged up against the high cost of production on farms.

As to fatalities and mutilations due to fire on the farm, there are no available statistics but conservative opinion holds that of the 30,000 deaths and injuries by fire in the United States in 1923, a regrettable number occurred in rural districts.

To avoid the larger part of America's fire loss, whether it be in town or country, does not require any specialized knowledge but only the quality of ordinary carefulness and the exercise of common sense.

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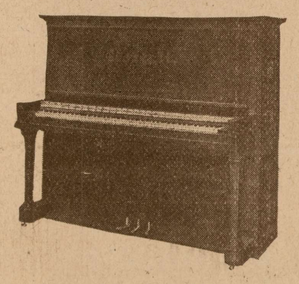

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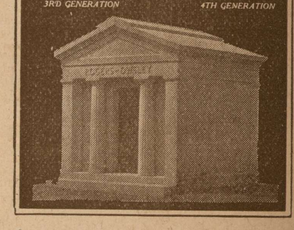

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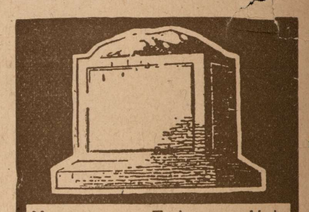

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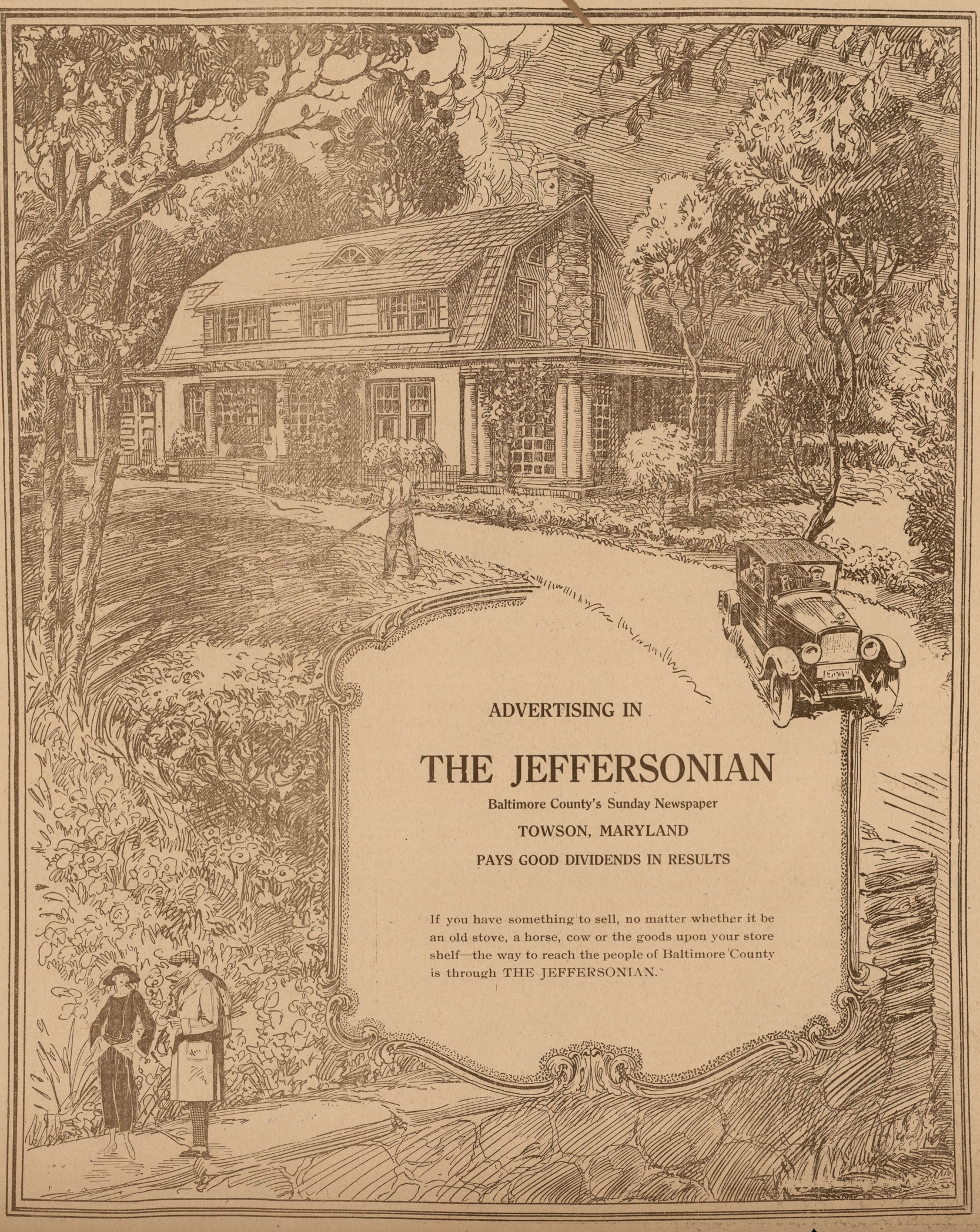

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