

## Line of Duty Death of Assistant Fire Chief Michael L. Fallenstein

By Michael Werner



Photo of Michael Fallenstein (Files from Jeff Bengston, Mankato Public Safety)

Assistant Fire Chief Michael L. Fallenstein died as a result of acute dilatation of the heart caused by over-exertion after fighting a fire at the City Hotel on Second and Plum Streets on April 19, 1913.<sup>1</sup>

The fire in the City Hotel broke out at approximately 4:40 am April 19, 1913. The fire began in “the upper story on the south side” with the exact origin and cause unknown.<sup>2</sup> The Weekly Ledger stated that “The fire appeared to have started in or near an elevator shaft at the junction of two halls where the fire was the fiercest.”<sup>3</sup> A general alarm for the fire was reported from alarm box 25 located at the corner of North Front St and Plum St.<sup>4</sup> When the alarm

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<sup>1</sup> “First Assistant Chief of Fire Department M. L. Fallenstein Dies After Working Valiantly At Hotel Blaze This Morning”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>2</sup> “City Hotel Guttred By A Fire That Occurred This Morning”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>3</sup> “City Hotel Burned”, Weekly Ledger, Mankato, MN, April 23, 1913

<sup>4</sup> “City Hotel Burned”, Weekly Ledger, Mankato, MN, April 23, 1913

sounded Fallenstein was in bed at his home at 107 South Fifth Street. Upon hearing the alarm Fallenstein “arose, dressed hurriedly and ran to the fire, a distance of six blocks”.<sup>5</sup>

When firemen, including Fallenstein, who was amongst the first on scene, arrived at the scene “flames were shooting forty feet above the roof.”<sup>6</sup> When Fallenstein arrived he “plunged at once into the work of fighting the flames, putting forth all his energies in that direction.”<sup>7</sup> He “worked valiantly as captain of Superior Hose Company No.2”. Most of the scene he was with Chief Philip Leas. As the fire began to spread further into the building more hose lines needed to be run into the building to try and stop it. Fallenstein “was at the front of his line of hose and remained in the building as long as there was need of him.” Fallenstein had entered the hotel from the Second Street entrance and climbed to the second floor. The building was filled with smoke. “The floor of the second story was double and the fire had worked its way between the planking and the smoke came up through the cracks in such volume no man could stand it for long.” Fallenstein would go to the windows to get fresh air and brief respite from the smoke before returning to the fight. He was “seen to come to the window for air several times but he always went back and stayed inside until the fire was under control.”

While Fallenstein was inside, crews on the Second Street side were ripping off the siding of the hotel and succeeded in their task. This exposed the fire underneath the floorboards but doing so gave the fire fresh air and the fire began burning “more fiercely”. This put the men on the inside in “imminent danger of being suffocated or burned to death, for the floor might have collapsed at any moment.” At about 6:30 am Chief Leas met with Fallenstein on the second

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<sup>5</sup> “Answers His Last Fire Alarm”, The Daily Review, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>6</sup> “City Hotel Guttred By A Fire That Occurred This Morning”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>7</sup> “Answers His Last Fire Alarm”, The Daily Review, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

floor at which point Fallenstein reported “not feeling well”. Chief Leas suggested that Fallenstein better go outside and get some fresh air or return home.

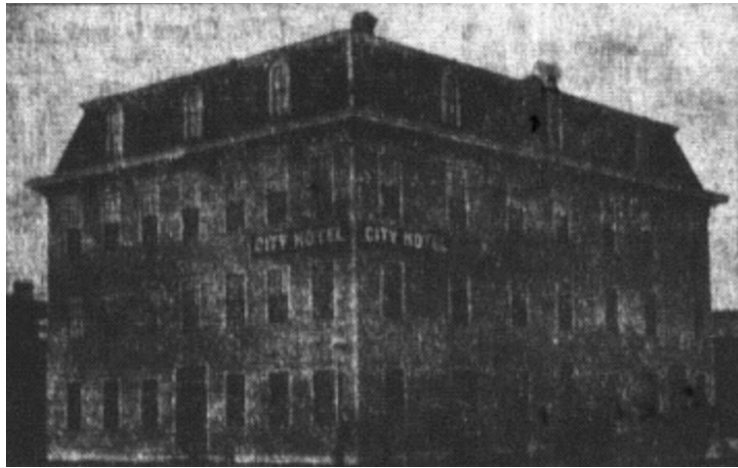


Photo of the City Hotel (Mankato Free Press)

Fallenstein thought he would return to his residence. On his way out of the building he met with Second Assistant Chief A. D. Beach where he also mentioned not feeling well. About ten minutes later Beach took Fallenstein to his residence in the chief’s buggy.<sup>8</sup> Fallenstein walked to the house and complained of chest pain. Sources conflict on whether it was a pain in his lungs or his heart. The Free Press stated “He complained that his lungs were hurting him terribly and he went in the house and was put to bed.”<sup>9</sup> The Daily Review said Fallenstein “complained to Mr. Beach of a pain in the chest in the region of his heart” when Fallenstein arrived at the house the Review went on “Mr. Beach noticed that he rather tottered in walking up the steps. As soon as he entered the house he became unconscious at once.”<sup>10</sup> Whichever is

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<sup>8</sup> “First Assistant Chief of Fire Department M. L. Fallenstein Dies After Working Valiantly At Hotel Blaze This Morning”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>9</sup> “M. L. Fallenstein Dies”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>10</sup> “Answers His Last Fire Alarm”, The Daily Review, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

true it is clear Fallenstein was experiencing some form of chest pain and wasn't doing well by the time he arrived at his residence.

A local doctor, Dr. J. A. Hielscher was summoned immediately and examined Fallenstein. The doctor advised Fallenstein to be admitted to St. Joseph's Hospital and a bed there was being prepped when he passed away at 10:20 am in his residence before he was able to be moved. <sup>11</sup>

Michael Fallenstein had been a member of the fire department since 1879. He was a charter member of Superior Hose Company No. 2 which was organized in 1879. With the exception of a few months "Fallenstein was an active member of his company, filling most of the offices in the organization. He filled the office of assistant chief one or two terms and a few days previous to his death had been elected to the office of First Assistant to Chief Leas."<sup>12</sup> The Daily Review described Fallenstein as "one of the most active members of the department, serving in various official capacities at different times."<sup>13</sup> He was also the president of the Mankato Fire Department Relief association which he held for a term or two to "the satisfaction of the association."<sup>14</sup> Fallenstein was also a member of the State's Firemen's Relief association.<sup>15</sup>

The Daily Review expressed great praise for Fallenstein and his conduct in the fire service. "Whether as a fireman or official Mr. Fallenstein was always at the front when the call for duty sounded, and if there was a place around a burning building where danger was greatest, there he was always to be found. He was daring almost to recklessness and ready to

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<sup>11</sup> "M. L. Fallenstein Dies", Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>12</sup> "Death From Dilation of Heart", Weekly Herald, Mankato, MN, April 22, 1913

<sup>13</sup> "Answers His Last Fire Alarm", The Daily Review, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>14</sup> "Death From Dilation of Heart", Weekly Herald, Mankato, MN, April 22, 1913

<sup>15</sup> "Answers His Last Fire Alarm", The Daily Review, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

take chances that others might wish to avoid. No man was more active than Mr. Fallenstein and in his death the department loses one of its most valiant and courageous workers. His family will have the sincere sympathy of the entire community in their great sorrow.”<sup>16</sup>

Several members of the department and a city councilman expressed the following as a testament to Fallenstein’s character:

**Chief Leas**: “Assistant Chief Fallenstein was one of the best firemen on the force. He was always ready and willing to do all in his power. A more faithful man never served the city in the capacity of a fireman. I am indeed very sorry to lose Mr. Fallenstein as my first assistant. His place will be hard to fill.”

**Captain William Funk**: “Mike, as he was known to his friends, was one of the most faithful and untiring workers we ever had, and I am very much grieved at his untimely death.”

**B. Bangerter, Jr.**: “Mike was one of the best firemen in the city, always in the front of the battle, and as a friend. I want to say that he was one of the best fire fighters I have ever known.”

**Councilman Lamm**: “Mike has been true blue, and always ready to work for the betterment of the fire department of Mankato.”<sup>17</sup>

The funeral for Fallenstein took place on April 22, 1913. The last rites were held over Fallenstein’s remains at 9 am at St. Peter and St. Pauls Catholic Church. The casket was taken from his residence to the church on the wagon of Superior Hose Company No. 2 which was

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<sup>16</sup> “Answers His Last Fire Alarm”, The Daily Review, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>17</sup> “Answers His Last Fire Alarm”, The Daily Review, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

draped in black. “Accompanying the remains to the church were all of the firemen in the city in uniform, the members of the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic Order of Foresters and the members of the Men’s Sodality of the church.” Both Father Hartmann and Father Hughes eulogized at the ceremony upon his life and “as to his attributes as a good Christian man and a citizen. He not alone proved to be a valuable and hard working man in the affairs of the city, proved to be a fearless and unselfish worker for the good of others at which work he died. Such men, the speakers said, were a great loss to any community.” Fallenstein was laid to rest in Calvary Cemetery, Mankato, MN.<sup>18</sup>



Drawing of Fallenstein (Mankato Free Press)

Michael Fallenstein was born near Pittsburg, PA on November 21, 1856. Fallenstein lived near Pittsburg until after the Civil War. During the Civil War his father, Ernest Henry Fallenstein, served in the war but was killed in the Battle of Antietam. After Ernest was killed the family moved to New York City where they lived for several years. He came to Wasbsha, WI with his mother, brothers, and a sister when he was about 15 years old where he worked for a short time as a cook on a Mississippi river barge. Later on in Wabasha Michael Fallenstein

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<sup>18</sup> “Funeral of the Late M. L. Fallenstein”, The Daily Review, Mankato, MN, April 22, 1913

worked in a barber shop where he learned his trade.<sup>19</sup> In 1874, at eighteen years of age<sup>20</sup> he moved to Mankato and worked for two years in Tom's Barber Shop before starting his own barber shop which he ran until the time of his death.<sup>21</sup> Fallenstein opened his first shop at 207 South Front Street; a year or two later he moved his business next door to the Clifton House where he conducted business for twenty-seven years. The final location for Fallensteins shop was underneath the National Citizens Bank.<sup>22</sup>

Fallenstein married Emma Dauber in 1877 with whom he had three children; Miss A. Van Prague of Minneapolis, Ernest who worked in his father's shop in Mankato, and Miss Joseph Bruels of McPherson. Emma passed away in 1886 shortly after the birth of the third child. Fallenstein got married a second time to Lizzie Schmaltz. Together they had three children; Martha, Joseph, and Leo who all still lived together with Fallenstein at the time of his death. He left behind his wife and all six children.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "M. L. Fallenstein Dies", Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>20</sup> "Answers His Last Fire Alarm", The Daily Review, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>21</sup> "M. L. Fallenstein Dies", Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>22</sup> "M. L. Fallenstein Dies", Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>23</sup> "M. L. Fallenstein Dies", Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

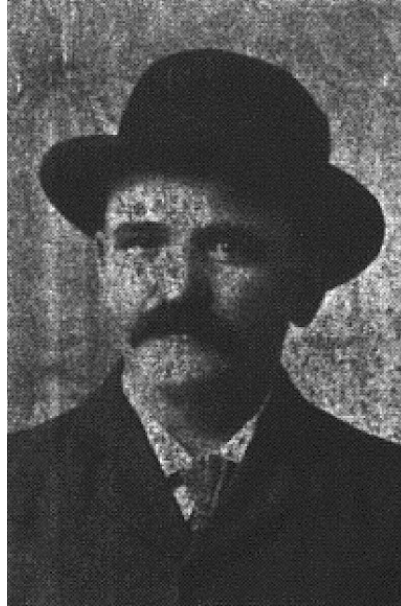


Photo of Michael Fallenstein (The Daily Review)

Fallenstein faithfully served the Mankato fire department for 34 years from 1879 to his death in 1913 always leading from the front. Was a founding member of Superior Hose Company No. 2. He took on numerous leadership roles throughout his career. He successfully ran his own barber business for 37 years. He was also heavily involved in several religious organizations in the community. He certainly was someone who was admired by those around him and his untimely death was a great loss to the fire department and the wider Mankato community.

The hotel where the fire took place was built in 1869 by Henry Himmelman, Sr., who was one of the pioneer settlers coming to Mankato in 1855, and was a popular hotel for decades. It was particularly popular with farmers who brought their goods to market in Mankato from many miles around and “enjoyed a large patronage.” Later on the original structure was enlarged “from two and a half stories to a much larger and more imposing structure.” The hotel managed



to keep pace with the demands in room accommodations and cuisine, the latter which enjoyed “especial popularity.” For years the hotel “did the largest volume of business of any hotel in the city. Trade was attracted from all parts of the country by the good reputation the house had for the comforts it afforded and its range of accommodations.”<sup>24</sup>

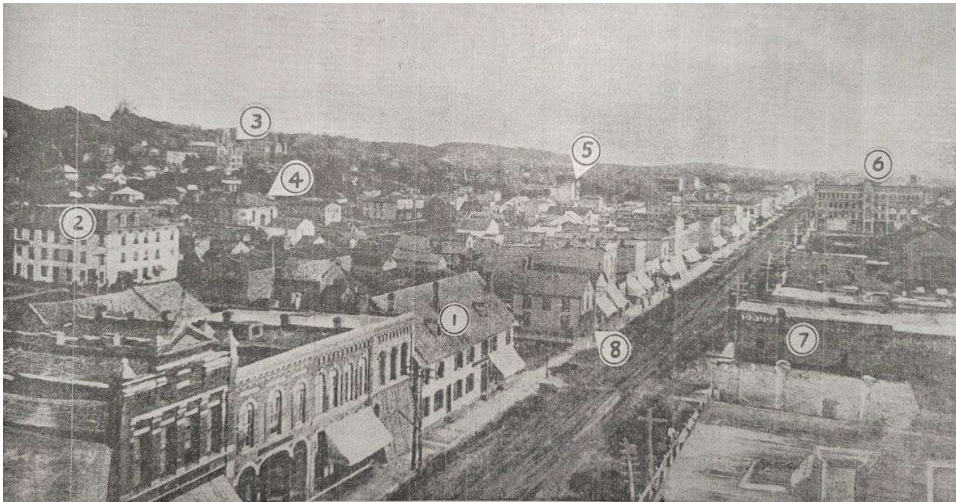


Photo of Mankato in 1890 taken from the high point on the Hubbard Mill on North Front Street. The labeled areas are as follows. (1) the Minnesota House, (2) the City Hotel, (3) the Blue Earth County Courthouse, (4) Union Hall, (5) the Mankato Opera House, (6) the Saulpaugh Hotel which was about a year old at the time, (7) the Wendell Hodapp drug store, (8) Schirrchmidt's grocery at the corner of Front and Plum Streets. The photo really gives a sense of the scale of the City Hotel and why it was considered such a landmark building during its day and age. (Mankato Free Press)

After Henry Himmelman Sr. retired to engage in other business, his son Henry Himmelman Jr. took over as the owner who ran it for many years before passing it on to E. J. Himmelman who was the owner by the time of the fire. E. J. Himmelman also became owner of the Heinrich Hotel after the opening of which the City Hotel was closed for several years and was only used in connection with the Heinrich by supplying sleeping accommodations for the help.<sup>25</sup> “

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<sup>24</sup> “City Hotel Burned”, Weekly Herald, Mankato, MN, April 23, 1913

<sup>25</sup> “Fire Destroys The City Hotel”, The Daily Review, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

When the fire occurred it took over three hours to get under control.<sup>26</sup> “One line of hose was carried up on a bridge from the second story of the hotel on the south side to the building next door and the stream was played for this point of vantage directly into the seething mass of flames. Three more lines of hose were distributed about the sides of the building. All the entrances were broken in, and the water applied from the inside.” As for the damage it was total. “The fire spread all through the building and the interior is completely gutted. The most of the damage however is in the west end of the building for there a large portion of the roof is gone. All the furniture in the place is damaged beyond redemption.”<sup>27</sup>

The firefighters were praised for their efforts in battling the blaze. The Daily Review said “The work done by the fire department this morning is among the very best accomplishments of Mankato’s very efficient fire fighting force. The flames had evidently been at work for some time before the fire boys reached the scene, and from the second story up the entire structure was on fire. Being a frame structure, old and dry, it burned rapidly, the flames shooting through the roof and out the window openings. The energetic work of the department, however, kept the flames within the four walls of the building and from spreading to other surrounding property. The boys of the department cannot be too highly commended for the splendid work accomplished this morning.”<sup>28</sup> After the fire the City Hotel was deemed a total loss and was unceremoniously torn down “to prevent danger of collapse.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “City Hotel Gutted By A Fire That Occurred This Morning”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>27</sup> “City Hotel Fire”, Mankato Free Press, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>28</sup> “Fire Destroys the City Hotel”, The Daily Review, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913

<sup>29</sup> “Fire Destroys the City Hotel”, The Daily Review, Mankato, MN, April 19, 1913