

FLAMES DESTROY JOHNSON COUNTY'S LARGEST SCHOOL



FIRE DESTRUCTION—Center Grove High School and gymnasium in Johnson County glow from raging flames.

Times photo by William A. Oates Jr.

\$500,000 Fire Starts After Pupils' Party

Gymnasium Also
Ruined by Blaze

A raging fire destroyed the Center Grove High School and gymnasium—the largest school in Johnson County—early today.

Passing motorists discovered the blaze only a few hours after a Halloween party for its 750 pupils had ended. The school is located south of the Marion County line on Morgantown Rd.

Loss was estimated at upward of \$500,000 by Johnson County School Supt. Custer Baker.

Firemen battled the flames for four hours and were able to save a new eight-room grade school building used this fall for the first time. It was located south of the high school building in a three-building cluster.

Conference Called

Among the student body of the gutted school are children of Indianapolis commuters who built homes in growing White River Twp. in recent years.

Supt. Baker said he would meet with Township Trustee Floyd Doty and his advisory board this morning to discuss rebuilding and plans for transferring classes to other schools Monday.

Cause of the fire was unknown. It apparently started in the two-story high school building and spread rapidly to the brick gymnasium 25 feet to the north.

Hollis McCartney, who lives across from the school, said the fire was discovered raging through the roof of the building about 11 p. m. He said volunteer firemen fought the flames until 3 a. m. before they were brought under control.

Wind Fanned Flames

A brisk wind from the south kept the fire roaring northward, saving a farm shop building east of the destroyed buildings, Mr. McCartney said.

Mr. McCartney said the Halloween party ended about 11 p. m. and Principal Roger Ratliff inspected schoolrooms and the gymnasium twice before leaving.

Supt. Baker said the old buildings were worth \$150,000 and replacement cost would be \$400,000 to \$500,000.