

**COUNTY**

# Mobil Foam plant struck by fire twice in nine years

*Great clouds of black smoke billowed from the North Street plant on May 25, 1966.*

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From Mark Marentette: The Mobil Foam plant on North Street, which is now the site of Pactiv Corp., was struck by a massive fire on May 25, 1966, and again on July 21, 1975. The 1975 fire triggered the largest firefighting effort in the 200-year history of the Canandaigua Fire Department as approximately 400 firefighters from departments throughout Ontario County and neighboring counties responded.

**From the Daily Messenger,**

**May 25, 1966**

**“Mobil Foam Plastics Plant Is Guttled By Late Morning Fire”**

A general alarm fire cut its way through the Mobil Foam plastics plant on North Street this morning, billowing up great clouds of black smoke and apparently gutting most, if not all, of the interior.

Plant manager George Acheson said the fire apparently started somewhere in the production line. It might have been caused by static electricity igniting the polystyrene foam sheets used in manufacturing the meat trays and egg cartons which the fir produces, Acheson said.

“However,” he added, “that is only a guess. We will have to wait for detailed investigation after the fire is out.”

When the fire struck, four railroad freight cars were along the east side of the building being loaded with finished products. The fire quickly spread into two of these. Firemen and workmen were able to uncouple the other two and move them out of range.

No attempt was made, however, to move the two burning cars away from the building because they would have had to pass by an area of the plant containing tanks of pentane, said to be a highly volatile chemical used in the manufacturing process.

When the fire broke out shortly before 10:30 a.m., all employees were quickly evacuated from the plant, through which smoke rapidly spread.

From the outside, it appeared that the production and office areas of the plant were almost completely damaged either by fire or smoke. At press time today, firemen were trying to prevent the fire from spreading into the huge warehouse in the rear, although smoke was billowing from it, too.

In the parts of the plant where the fire was the hottest, the steel girders supporting the roof began to buckle a bit.

Mobile Foam, a division of Socony Mobil Corp., began production here in early 1965. The warehouse was added last fall. Presently, construction is underway on an addition to double the plant's production capacity.

Patrolman William Coyne of the Canandaigua Police Department phoned in the first alarm at 10:29 this morning. All three city fire trucks rushed to the scene.

Fire Chief Orin J. Buck, who directed the firefighting force, quickly called for water tankers from East Bloomfield, Hopewell and the McIlveen Water service in an attempt to get water around to the rear of the plant.

Thompson Hospital's ambulance was dispatched to the scene, and the Veteran's Hospital fire truck moved into standby position at the Niagara Street firehouse. Also alerted to stand by were the Manchester, Shortsville and Crystal Beach fire departments.

From the Daily Messenger,

July 22, 1975

“\$1.5 Million Fire Probe Underway”

Investigators today continued to probe the cause of a massive fire, which blanketed the Canandaigua area yesterday afternoon with thick, black smoke and destroyed a large three-story plastics warehouse at Mobil Chemical Co. on North Street.

Some 28 county fire companies assisted Canandaigua firefighters, according to Fire Chief Stanley Kuras. Kuras stated the fire was brought under control before spreading to additional warehouses and the factory, with the assistance of about 400 firemen.

This was the second major fire at the plant in the past nine years. The previous fire occurred in May 1966.

### **About this series**

Canandaigua Fire Chief Mark Marentette is providing a weekly column looking back over 200 years of Canandaigua Fire Department history. Don Ford, Ron Bement, Pat Thorpe, Dave and Nancy Hayden, Greg Russell, Maureen Baker and the Ontario County Historical Society have all been instrumental in providing copies of newspaper articles and information for this series. Submissions from others are welcome. The stories and the collective history of more than 2,200 men and women who have fought fires and responded to so many other emergencies will be celebrated throughout the year. This column covers the week of May 22-28.