

July 2012

With the hot temperatures, the burn bans, the fireworks ban over the 4th of July, and the many tragic fires all over the US this summer, the danger of fire is on the minds of many in Bella Vista. Rightly so, as there is definitely a history of fires here.

The biggest fire, in terms of number of structures lost, occurred on March 25, 1951, when 22 cottages were destroyed on the east side of Lake Bella Vista, along the ridge topped by Inspiration Drive. As the story goes, two men were cleaning up their yard around their cottage and decided to burn some of the leaves on the road in front of their cottage. The smoke was visible from some distance, so they were approached by the Linebargers, the owners of the resort, and asked not to burn outside due to the high winds that day. They moved everything inside to the fireplace, and of course the embers went up the chimney, the wind scattered them, and the damage was soon done. Here is what the Benton County Democrat reported on March 26, 1951: *"A fire starting about 12:30 p.m. Sunday caused loss of 22 vacation cottages, located at Bella Vista. A clean up fire is said to have gotten out of control, and is reported to have caused the conflagration. The cottages were located on the east side of Sugar Creek, and in what is known as the east part of Bella Vista. The fire departments of Bentonville, Rogers and Pineville were called. The fire raged over 1,000 acres before being brought under control. The loss is reported to be around fifty thousand dollars."*

There was also an earlier large fire, on March 19, 1939, which caused a lot of damage on the west side of Lake Bella Vista, according to the Benton County Democrat on March 23, 1939: *"Cause of the \$30,000 fire that rode the tail of a high wind to engulf eight cabins and seriously threaten the Sunset Hotel at Bella Vista Sunday was still undetermined today though an investigation is being conducted. The fire was brought under control after a 3-hour battle by the Bentonville Fire Department and approximately 200 volunteer firemen. The Fire Department saved at least one cabin by the use of a booster tank that was refilled several times from the large fish pond at the home of C.A. Linebarger, resident manager. 'The Bella Vista management is very appreciative of the close cooperation of the fire department, neighbors, and Bentonville Fire Department,' said Mr. Linebarger in a statement today. The fire broke out on Cedar Crest Mountain and the strong wind drove it north to Hill Crest, Suits Us and Sunset Mountains. The cabins destroyed were some of the resort's finest."*

That large fish pond, although now empty, is still visible in front of the old log house on the west side of Highway 71 across from Lake Bella Vista.

There are a number of chimneys still standing by themselves in the hills above both sides of Lake Bella Vista, but not all of those cottages were destroyed by fire. Some of the cottages simply fell into disrepair and were eventually knocked down or fell down. However, the two pictures shown here are of chimneys from cottages that were lost in fires.

Future columns will deal with other big single structure fires in Old Bella Vista, including that of the Sunset Hotel and also the former Dance Pavilion on Lake Bella Vista.

The cottage surrounding this chimney was lost in the 1951 fire above the east side of Lake Bella Vista



This chimney belonged to a cottage struck by lightning about 14 years ago, in Old Bella Vista on the west side of Highway 71.

