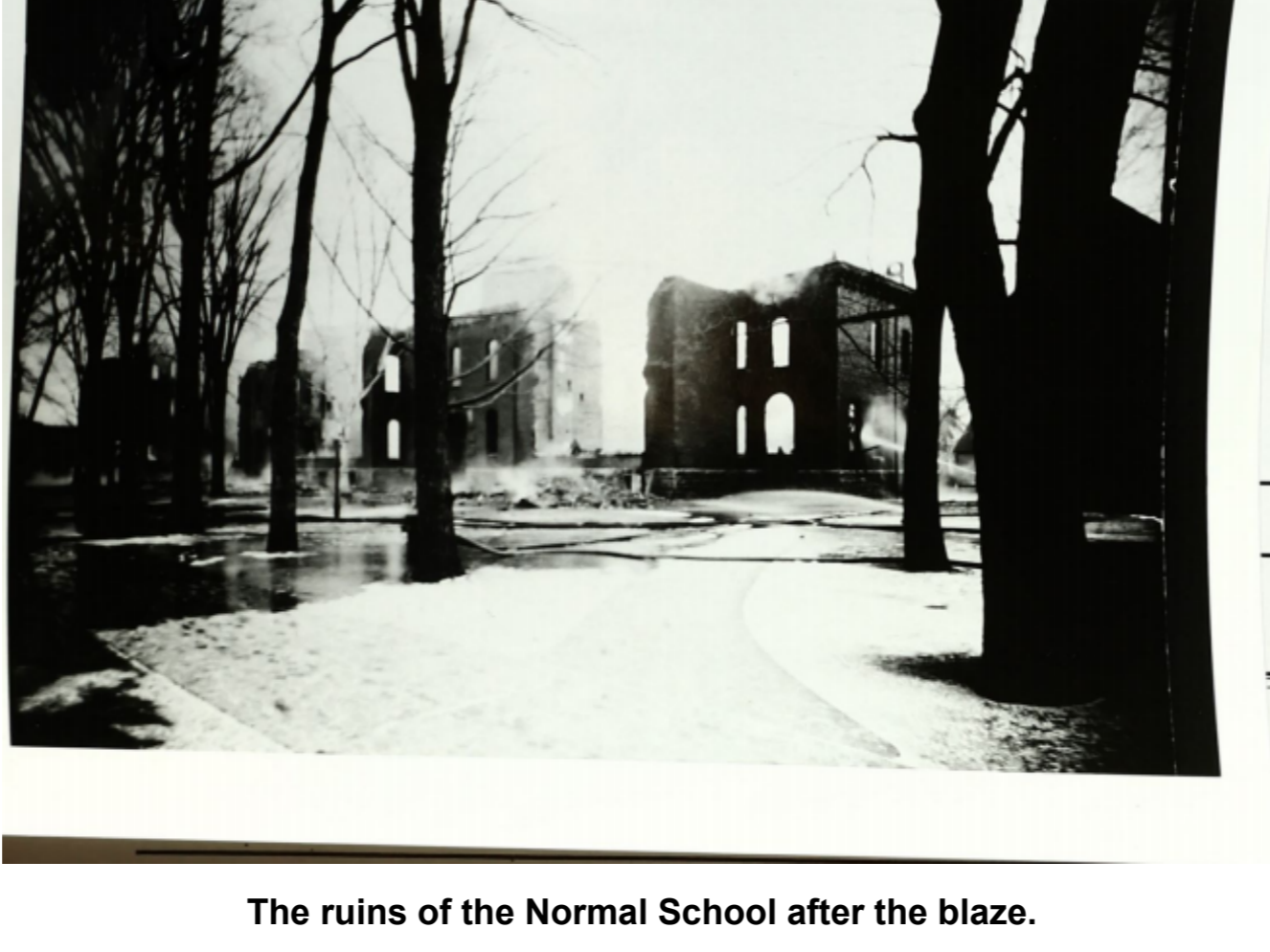


DIGITAL HUMANITIES – SPRING 2018

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The Dreaded Cortland Fire of 1919

by Megan Bender, Sarah DeLena, and Garrett Sweeney



The ruins of the Normal School after the blaze.

Facts About the Fire



The smoking ruins of the Normal School.

The fire occurred in the early hours of Feb. 27th, 1919, at the Cortland Normal School. It's thought that the paper chute caught fire, from the "bottom to the top of the shoot" and moved straight to the 3rd floor (1). No one was injured or killed and over half of the library and records in the school were saved, everything else was lost (4). Classes resumed March 3rd at the YMCA and Church site directly after the fire, so the students' educations weren't greatly affected (2). Offices also opened in the Savings Bank Building (3). Damages to the school ultimately ranked up to be \$150,000 plus (4).

Rumors About the Fire



People gathered at the burning building.

There is currently no official reason as to why the fire began in the Normal School. One rumor said that the "janitor found the back doors of the school open" and that breeze set the fire alight through, possibly, spontaneous combustion (3). However, the actual janitor of the school, Mr. Seiber, refutes this accusation (3). Despite the rumors and mystery of how the fire actually started, many actually saw the fire as a blessing in disguise, since the losses were fully covered by insurance and the school was able to charter a new location; though the debate about where the new Normal School would go was pretty aggressive (3).

Debate Over New Location



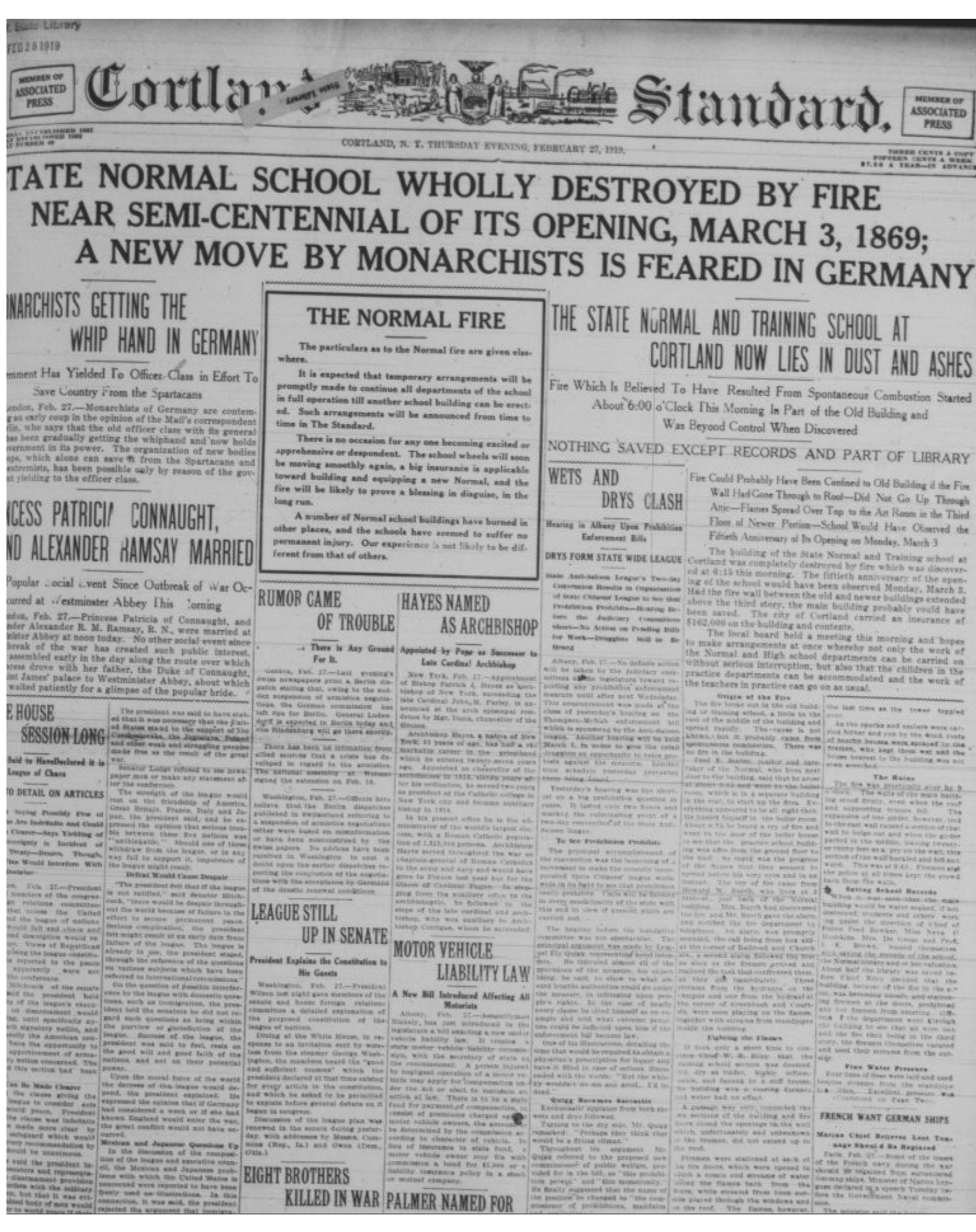
After the fire was put out at the Normal School.

There was a plethora of arguments surrounding the new location of the Normal School. Many wanted the Randall Flats location, but others favored the Hill, where the school eventually ended up (3). Another potential mystery or suspicious fact surrounding the fire is that there was already debate about moving its location before the fire ever occurred; "Plans have been underway for some time for the erection of a new school at Cortland and controversy over the site has existed in the city" (3, 4).

Newspaper Records of the Time – The Cortland Standard



The fire at the Normal School was covered wholly by the insurance.



The breaking news article that recorded the fire.

All Research Sources/Images Courtesy of the SUNY Cortland College Archive.

- 1 – Title: "Today Marks 50th Anniversary of Normal School Fire;" Creator: The Cortland Standard; Date: Feb. 27, 1919; Source: SUNY Cortland College Archives; Original Format: Newspaper.
- 2- Title: "Normal School Starts Upon It's Second Half Century;" Creator: The Cortland Standard; Date: Feb. 27, 1919; Source: SUNY Cortland College Archives; Original Format: Newspaper.
- 3- Title: "Sentiment Favors Rebuilding Normal On Site of Big Blaze;" Creator: The Cortland Standard; Date: Feb. 27, 1919; Source: SUNY Cortland College Archives; Original Format: Newspaper.
- 4- Title: "Fire Wipes Out Cortland State Normal School"; Creator: The Cortland Standard; Date: Feb. 27, 1919; Source: SUNY Cortland College Archives; Original Format: Newspaper.

