

Footprints Through the Sands of Time

Arsonist on the Loose at Moclips in 1928

Byline: Kelly Calhoun, Executive Director/Curator of Museum of the North Beach

The original McCammon Hotel and General Store owned by James M. McCammon was located on the west side of Pacific Avenue, one block south of the Moclips Beach Hotel. It burned in March 1912 along with several other businesses. Around 1915 or 1916, the McCammon Hotel was rebuilt on the bluff where the Tradewinds Lodge once stood, next to today's Moclips Grocery Store.

Listed in the 1928 Businesses, Manufactures, Merchants & Tradesman Financial Condition, Grays Harbor County, Washington, James M. McCammon, hotel and general store owner possessed a high credit rating.

On July 6, 1928, the second McCammon Hotel and General Store was completely destroyed by fire resulting in a loss of over \$50,000. Although the Hoquiam Fire Department rushed a pumper to the scene in record time, the building was a raging mass of flames. Volunteer firefighters stretched a fire hose from the M.R. Smith Shingle Mill across the Moclips River in an attempt to keep the fire from spreading to nearby houses and other structures. If the wind had been blowing from the west, the entire area on top of the hill would have been destroyed.

Two eyewitnesses, Roy Tottie, a long-time Moclips resident at Smithtown, and Doris Norstad, who also lived at Smithtown during the years 1927 and 1928, shared their personal accounts with the Museum:

"The night before, I had been through the hotel selling papers. The next morning, she was all done. It was a nice building, a big nice building," said Tottie. At the time of the fire, Roy Tottie was eleven years old.

Doris Norstad recalled, "I saw the water tower engulfed in flames and collapse. I heard the owner frantically went and knocked on doors so everyone could get out."

By the next morning all that remained was the chimney and a pile of debris. All the stock from the store, valued at \$15,000, and garage operating in conjunction with the hotel was destroyed. However, most of the furniture from the hotel was saved. According to Hoquiam Fire Chief, William Crawford, the blaze began in the kitchen of the hotel but at the time the cause was unknown. The building was partially covered by insurance.

On Sunday, July 15, 1928, Eldee Herman Goodman, age 17, was arrested for arson in the case of the McCammon Hotel fire, based on his signed confession. He also admitted to setting several other fires in Moclips, including his attempt to destroy the M.R. Smith Shingle Mill, but was worried he would be caught. According to his confession, Goodman tossed a lit cigarette through a broken window in the McCammon store portion of the building. Goodman tried on several occasions to set fire to the building by throwing lit cigarettes and matches through the window knowing there was a pile of papers and an old mattress directly below the window.

After starting the fire, Goodman entered the hotel and stole a dress and coat belonging to Mrs. McCammon and threw them out of a window but they fell onto the fire. He also took her purse and watch but returned the purse after finding no cash.

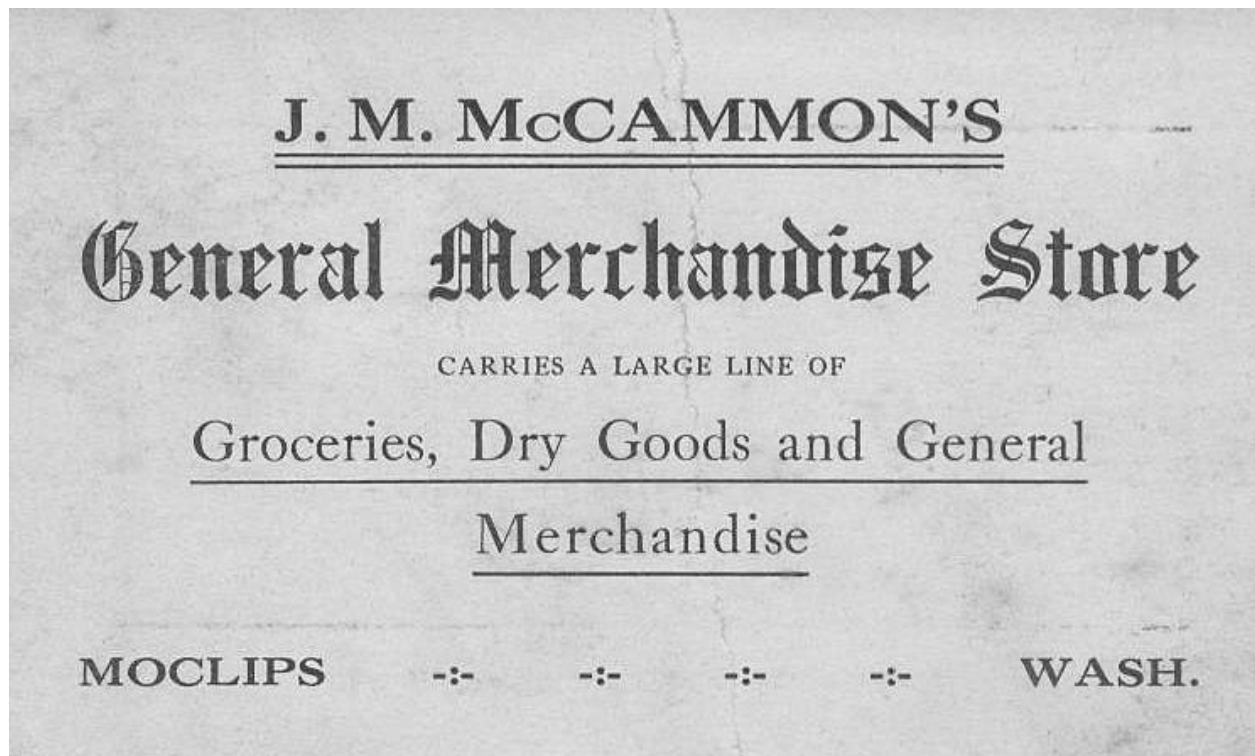
On July 8, 1928, Eldee Goodman hitched a ride to Seattle and returned to Moclips a few days later. On the night of July 14th, he attempted setting fires at the Moclips home of G. Gertz. The next day he tried setting fire to the Gertz Grocery Store and Prinz Meat Market on the flats. Both fires were discovered and extinguished and resulted in his eventual arrest.

Goodman was found guilty on several counts of arson and was committed to Monroe State Penitentiary. Incredibly, he was released two years later and was instructed never to return to Moclips. Then another fire broke out on October 20, 1930, completely destroying the Prinz Meat Market, the Prinz home, Gertz Grocery and Gertz Theater. Within days of the fire, a letter sent by Goodman to his parole officer was postmarked from Moclips. It wasn't long after this that he was arrested again and confined to the same penitentiary. These incidents are just a few of the several times that a fire's destruction has been recorded in Moclips history. As a local reporter put it in 1975, "The heyday of Moclips was surprisingly short. High seas and fires continually nipped at the resort, making the life of the businessman perilous, as he could wake up on any morning to find his business establishment no longer standing."

(two photos ahead)



The McCammon Hotel on the bluff prior to the fire



Business card from the McCammon General Store on Pacific Avenue