

**SOUTH SALINA STREET ARSON
BENNETT INSURANCE CASE
F. P. VEDDER
PART III**

The fire occurred December 27, 1869 and by January 5, 1870 the Syracuse NY Daily Standard reported that “F. P. Vedder, in a few days, on the opposite side of the street from where he was burned out” would reopen. We now know by reading the trial transcripts that Vedder had moved a great amount of goods out of his store prior to the fire so restocking the new store was not much of a problem. By February 18, 1870 Vedder had collected from his insurance carrier as reported in the following article:

**SYRACUSE NEW YORK DAILY STANDARD
FEBRUARY 18, 1870**

Fire Insurance – We are informed that the following Companies have paid their share of the loss sustained by F. P. Vedder on the morning of the 27th December last:

Lancaster of PA. paid first – D. P. McCarthy, agent.
North America, Philadelphia; Buffalo City; Common
Wealth; Western of Buffalo – Broughton & Babcock,
agents, Cleveland, Ohio – John reed, agent of Republic
and Merchants of Chicago—Miller & Smith, agents.

We recommend the companies to the public who pay their losses promptly. And all parties who have property they wish to have insured, we trust will duly appreciate such companies.

In April 1870 Vedder moved his store to 18 South Salina Street opposite the Syracuse House. By May 1870 Vedder was not only back in full business but adding staff.

**SYRACUSE NEW YORK DAILY STANDARD
MAY 14, 1870**

Wanted Immediately – At F. P. Vedder’s two First Class Tailors, to do Custom Cutting. None but those who are experts in the business need apply, as the best talent in the country is wanted, and liberal wages will be paid. Store 18 South Salina Street.

By December 1870, one year after the fire, Vedder's business was failing.

**SYRACUSE NY DAILY STANDARD
DECEMBER 14, 1870**

Heavy Loss – F. P. Vedder has marked down one hundred double Paisley shawls from \$30 to \$15 a piece. Also fifty double Paisley's have been marked down from \$40 to \$30 a piece. Our readers will see by Vedder's notice in our local columns that he has determined to go out of the dry goods business, and is closing out his stock regardless of cost or value. Store 18 South Salina Street, Syracuse.

In mid-January 1871 Vedder's luck continued to be bad. The Syracuse Daily Journal reported that a broken water pipe had damaged over \$ 15,000 worth of dry goods and they were being offered at auction by Adam Fralick, auctioneer. At that time, 15 months before Vedder implicated Fralick in the arson, they were still doing business with each other.

The following article published in the Syracuse Daily Standard details the movement of goods prior to the fire, how the fire was set, the intent to defraud the insurance companies, and the arrest of the conspirators.

The article gives a detailed account of the actual questions and answers from the court room. Questions then are the same as you would hear now in an arson or fraud trial.

This testimony opened up two years of both criminal and civil trials over the fire 15 months earlier. Vedder had not travels the route of denial, insanity defense, acting under threat and duress to now being the key witness for the state.

He would still face numerous trials, grand jury hearings, bankruptcy, divorce and finally moving back to Greene County, Illinois broke and ruined from business. Quite a fall from the high life he expected with a young wife pocket full of money upon his arrival in Syracuse.

BENNETT INSURANCE CASE
As reported in the Syracuse Daily Standard April 25, 1871

Who Fired Bennett's Store

VEDDER'S FULL CONFESSION

"Adam Fralick Set the Fire"

Bennett and Briggs Accomplices

WARRANTS ISSUED FOR THEM !

Fralick in custody at 10: o'clock P.M.

Lodged in the Court House Cells !

FRALICK'S FULL STATEMENT

His Wife Goes East with Trunks.

Bennett and Briggs Not To Be Arrested At present.

Case Adjourned Until 9:30 A.M. To-Day.

What is known as the Bennett Insurance case was continued at the Supreme Court room in this city, yesterday, before judges Bacon, Johnson and Holmes of Utica, as referees. Some of the most important testimony bearing on the cause of the fire that burned the Crouse House, Bennett Brothers, Vedder's and other stores in south Salina Street, was brought out. It had been whispered about during the forenoon that evidence of a most startling character would be given. Some had gone so far as to say that F. P. Vedder would make a confession; that he would turn states evidence and reveal facts that would lay the crime of arson at the door of persons hitherto supposed innocent. These rumors resulted in a large crowd of lawyers and substantial citizens being present in Court at the o'clock when the case was called. The evidence which we now print in full below will show the rumors were not unfounded. Mr. F. P. Vedder makes a full confession implicating ADAM FRALICK as the man who set the store on fire by placing burning candles in prepared cotton batting, saturated with kerosene oil, which cotton batting had been twisted for that purpose by ADAM FRALICK, Samuel H. Bennett, of Bennett Brothers, and Mr. Briggs, who was in charge of the Rome store.

These statements, with the headings above as to Bennett and Briggs, are the allegations of F. P. Vedder.

CONFESSION MADE TO A MASON

We are informed this confession was first made to a prominent Mason of this city, with whom Mr. Vedder has been familiar for some time past. It was told a day or two after the adjournment last Friday, the 14th. Mr. Vedder has been in a habit of making this gentleman a confidant whenever he got into trouble of any kind. He dropped an expression some months since, which led his friend to think his conscience was troubled. The friend said to him; I want you to tell me all about the affair, now, Mr. Vedder. We give the words of the Mason:

“He went on and made a full confession as to how the fire was set, and who were involved in it.”

Mr. Vedder has been in the charge of Sheriff Evans for a day or two. The confession, as it was given very promptly and cheerfully by Mr. Vedder before the court, yesterday, we print below, Mr. Vedder pausing only once or twice, to take a drink of water:

Mr. Mitchell—Mr. Vedder, when did you come to Syracuse?

Vedder—I came to Syracuse in March, '65.

M—Where were you before that?

V—I was formally in this County; but I went to Illinois, Green County, and lived 26 years.

M—What did you do there?

V—I Followed the business of carpenter and joiner six years.

M—“Did you do anything else there?”

V—Yes; I went to the State Legislature in 1844, and was County Clerk also”

M—“Did you hold any other offices?”

V—“Yes; I held minor offices.”

M—“What did you do when you first came to Syracuse, after that?”

V—“I went into the stove and hardware business.”

M—“how much were you worth?”

V—"I was worth about \$28,000; I bought out Mr. Fralick, the 17th of October, 1868."

M—"Have you employed counsel since you were on the stand before, and if so, who?"

V—"Yes sir; I employed Frank Hiscock to advise with me!"

M—"When was that?"

V—"On Thursday last."

M—"Whom did you meet after that?"

V—"I met Mr. Hiscock, the District Attorney, (Mr. Lyman), and you (Mr. Mitchell)."

M—"When?"

V—"Yesterday, at Hiscock's office."

M—"Where were you before that?"

V—"I was at Daniel J. Halsted's before seeing Mr. Hiscock, etc., in the office."

M—"Whom did you come here with?"

V—"I suppose it was the Sheriff."

M—"Where did you stay Sunday night?"

V—"At D. J. Halsted's."

M—"Did you know that that fire was to occur before it did?"

V—"It was so understood."

M—"When did you know of it?"

V—"About three weeks before it occurred."

M—"Who mentioned it to you?"

V—"MR. FRALICK!"

M—"What Fralick?"

V—"ADAM!"

M—"Where were you?"

V—"In my store!"

M—"Who was present?"

V—"No one but him and I."

M—"How long before the fire occurred did you know the time set for it to occur?"

V—"About three days!"

M—"Who was it whom you learned that of?"

V—"I learned that of Fralick in my store?"

M—"Who was present?"

V—"No one but him and me that I recollect!"

M—"Did you ever learn anything of Mr. Bennett and if so how long before the fire?"

V—"He spoke about the culminating point."

M—"Who spoke about it?"

V—"Mr. Bennett!"

M—"How long before the fire?"

V—"A few days."

M—"Did he speak to you about the fire when anyone else was there?"

V—"Yes, I think Mr. Fralick was present, too."

M—"What did Bennett say on the subject?"

V—"I can not say the words."

M—"Give me the substance."

V—"I don't know exactly what it was."

M—"Where were you when he spoke of the culminating point?"

V—"In Bennett's store—Fralick was there with me."

M—"Where in the store?"

V—"We were below. It was at night."

M—"Were you in the basement?"

V—"Yes sir."

M—"What time was it?"

V—"I don't recall."

M—"Was there anything said on the subject as to when it should be set?"

V—"Not to my recollection."

M—"Were you in Bennett's store Sunday night of the fire?"

V—"Yes, about 8 o'clock"

M—"Where?"

V—"In the basement—We were in the office first."

M—"Who was there?"

V—"Fralick, Bennett and Briggs of Rome."

M—"Was there any cotton there?"

V—"What in the evening?"

V—"No!"

M—"I mean below, Sunday night?"

V—"I was speaking of being in the office."

M—"What was done when you went below?"

V—"Twisting up cotton batting."

M—"In what shape?"

V—"Why, in a rope like!"

M—"Who was doing it?"

V—"When I went down they were working at it."

M—"Who?"

V—"THERE WAS THREE—MR. FRALICK, MR. BENNETT AND MR. BRIGGS!"

M—"How large would you judge they were twisting it?"

V—"About as large as my wrist."

M—"How large a pile of it did they have when you left?"

V—"Oh I don't know. About a bushel of it."

M—"How long did you stay down there?"

V—"Perhaps half an hour."

M—"What was said by them by Mr. Bennett or Mr. Fralick about what was being done?"

V—"Someone said it wouldn't answer to make a failure!"

M—"Were they all together?"

V—"Yes sir."

M—"What else was said on the subject?"

V—"WELL MR. FRALICK SAID HE NEVER HAD MADE A FAILURE YET!"

M—"What further—anything said as to how it was done?"

V—"He made the remark that IT WAS NECESSARY TO HAVE FIRE ALL OVER THE ROOM AT ONCE!"

M—"Who said that?"

V—"I think it was Mr. Fralick."

M—"What did they take the cotton from to make these ropes?"

V—"Cotton batting or wadding. I am not familiar with the names."

M—"Did you go back to Bennett's store again after you left there?"

V—"No sir!"

M—"Was there anything said when you started to go away about your staying?"

V—"I told them I felt sick and was going to leave."

M—"Anything said to you?"

V—"Mr. Fralick remarked I was very week-kneed."

M—"Did you learn soon after the fire how it was finally set?"

V—"Yes sir, Mr. Fralick told me."

M—"What did he say?"

V—"HE SAID HE PUT THE CANDLES AROUND IN DIFFERENT PLACES IN THAT COTTON AND LIT THEM UP! I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY!"

M—"Was there anything said as to what they had put on the cotton, or soaked it with anything?"

V—"FRALICK TOLD ME THE COTTON WAS SOAKED WITH KEROSENE!"

M—"Did he say anything upon the subject of the length of the candles, as to their taking fire at the same time?"

V—"I understood from him how the candles were all the same length—the pieces of candles."

[All this took place in Bennett's store]

M—"What time did you leave your store that night?"

V—"Between eleven and twelve."

M—"Where were they when you left your store?"

V—"I don't know as I could tell."

M—"Had they come into your store during that time—any of them—after you left?"

V—"Mr. Fralick had. I don't whether he went back or not. I don't know where he was when I left my store. He was not in my store."

M—“Where there goods brought out of Bennett’s store into yours the Saturday night before the fire?”

V—“They were.”

M—“And on Sunday night?”

V—“There were.”

M—“Were your sons in the store on Saturday night?”

V—“Yes sir.”

M—“What doing?”

V—“Helping carry in goods from Bennett’s.”

M—“Were they in your store Sunday night?”

V—“Yes sir.”

M—“What were they doing?”

V—“Well, I don’t think they were doing much of anything.”

M—“any boxes being packed?”

V—“I recollect five boxes being packed in the afternoon—three for Oswego and two for Auburn.”

M—“Were they nailed up?”

V—“they were not nailed up on account of making noise Sunday, the lids were put on and marked.”

M—“Did Fralick say anything to you as to what you could make by the fire three or four weeks before it occurred?”

V—“He didn’t say anything about what I could make by the fire!”

M—“After he spoke to you that there would be a fire so that you knew about it, did he say anything to you about what you could make in any way?”

V—“He said we could make about \$25,000 a piece by buying a large quantity of goods!”

M—“How about the price of the goods being put down?”

V—“After the 2d of December _____ of goods was to be put to us as _____
The dollar by Bennett! I gave notes to Bennett during the month of December, I have a memorandum of the amounts. (Looking at the memorandum) December 2d a note was given of \$8,000 to Bennett; the 18th a note of \$9,758 was given to Bennett, the 25th of December a note of \$14,107 was given to Bennett; the note put down for the 25th was dated back for a day or two after the fire; that \$14, 107 was made up of two items \$6,000 and \$8,000; when I gave these notes I was up in Fralicks office in the pike block, Fralick and Bennett was the only ones there. Gave Bennett a note of \$1,000 after the fire; I can't remember the time; \$80,000 of those notes were taken up by Mr. Fralick last November; at the time of the fire he had \$43,000 in notes against us; the first note must have been \$18,000 instead of \$8,000; I was in Bennett's office when these were taken up; it was in the larned block; Mr. Bennett gave them to me; Mr. Fralick gave his notes in place of them; I put those notes in the stove in Bennett's office at that time; I executed a paper to Fralick; I never had a copy of that; Fralick got it up and Charley copied it in my store; I signed Charley's copy; I wanted a copy and it was agreed I should have a copy; I never got a copy; I wanted a copy and ask Charles and Adam for it two or three times; the last time I ask was three or four days ago; I did not see it; Adam Fralick said it was burned up; I knew about the substance of it; read it myself; that paper from me to Fralick was agreed to in the presence of Bennett at the time the notes were given up; I can't say whether or not Briggs was there in the cellar when the cotton batting rope was being made; Bennett must have some of my notes still; I paid him some money; he has got some since the fire; can't tell about how much; since I was on the stand the last time Bennett has been to my house; he has been there two or three times while I was sick; Fralick was there also after I left the court; Charley Fralick also; Adam came there perhaps a half a dozen times, perhaps more; Mr. Fralick ask me as to whether I had confessed anything; Charles and the other clerks came a number of times; could not say when Bennett came first; my sons were in town at the former trial; some of the clerks in the store were here also; before my two sons went to Fulton they were clerking in the store; they were Francis N. and Orange T. Vedder; they were subpoenaed to attend the trial; I don't know where they are ; they left the city one week ago yesterday.
(Paper handed to the witness)

That is the paper I signed at the time I settled my insurance; when I talked to Fralick about this fire I understood he had fires before; Sunday night after I left the store, I came to Tasket's and nothing was said there as to who should get the night watchman away; saw Fralick last Saturday night about 7 o'clock; then went to Hiscock's home alone; was there 1 1/2 hours; then to the theatre down Genesse street and saw Fralick standing in Lewis and Leonard's saloon; did not speak; got home about 11 o'clock; no one came there afterwards; Sunday morning when I got up I went over to Mr. Hiscock's home as he called twice after me my wife said; then went to J. D. Halsted's where I remained; my wife and daughter were at home; my boys have not been back since they went away; I have no personal knowledge of the amount of goods that came to my store or went into side stores.

M—“ Did Bennett or Fralick say last Saturday anything to you as to whose hands their lives were in?”

Objected To.

M—"Did Bennett ever say anything to you as to what he would do if anyone went back on him?"

V—"Not on this matter!"

M—"What was the matter you referred to?"

V—"Well, I don't recollect now; it was not about the fire; the notes I gave to him, Bennett were given for goods bought by Fralick of Bennett at 60 cents on the dollar amount; I went to Bennetts office and settled for some of the bills during business hours; paid in cash and check when I paid for goods; will swear I have paid Bennett over \$500 since the fire; should think it was in the neighborhood of \$1,000; may be more and may be less; I went to the theatre Saturday night; met Mr. Hoes; went into Campbell's saloon before I went home; saw Fralick at my store Saturday night; I own the stock of goods in my store; if there be anything left after paying my debts and giving me \$8,000 for my services; Fralick is to have it; Fralick is to have the sale of my goods; I was sick four or five days after I swore here; the first goods previous to the first of December I took some receipts of Bennett; I will swear positively Bennett was there during the whole of the transaction of giving these notes; I did not make inventory when I bought Fralick out; only knew from his invoice what his goods were worth; they were worth fifty cents on the dollar.

Counsel—I don't care.

Mr. Vedder—Neither do I now. Don't remember that I looked over the account after the fire with West; think \$1,000 note was given a month after the fire in the Pike block; my credit I thought was good in August '69; was worth \$60,000; I have no idea what amount of goods Fralick and I bought in New York; I have made an affidavit that I had no connection in business with Bennett; have made an affidavit that was in the usual course of business; to the best of my recollection I think I made affidavit that Bennett's loss was \$75,000; can't say that I heard within thirty days after the fire how much it was.

Harding—"Will you swear that Bennett heard anything as to twisting cotton?"

Vedder—"He was there."

H—"Will you swear he heard it?"

V—"He must have heard it!"

H—"Will you swear he did?"

V—"I can't say he did, but he was there."

H—"Was you sitting or standing?"

V—“Standing.”

H—“Were they all standing?”

V—“Yes sir; did not remain stationary but walked about in a small circle.”

H—“”Where was it?”

V—“Near the centre of the store.”

H—“Which store?”

V—“The south store.”

H—“think so?”

V—“I know it; it was in the basement of the south store!”

H—“Do you know who said it about not making a failure?”

V—“”I can’t tell!”

H—“Were they talking about failure in business?”

V—“Not that I heard!”

H—“Are you clear about that?”

V—“Yes, I am!”

H—“Do you swear the three had a hold of the same piece of cotton twisting?”

V—“No sir!”

H—“Do you swear any two had hold of the same piece?”

V—“No sir.”

H—“How much apple jack did you drink?”

V—“Less than a quart!”

H—“How much did you drink?”

V—“Two small horns!”

H—"Were you in the habit of taking it?"

V—"Yes!"

H—"And since?"

V—"Yes!"

The examination was then postponed till 9:30 this A.M.

THE WARRANT OF ARREST

Last evening Justice Corbett at the instance of District Attorney Lyman, issued warrants for the arrest of Mr. Fralick, Mr. Bennett and Mr. Briggs. The arrest of Mr. Fralick occurred about ten o'clock, the officers looking in all directions, and finally finding Mr. Fralick walking down South Salina Street, in front of the Globe, and complacently smoking his cigar.

Mr. Fralick's Statement

Our reporter visited Mr. Fralick in his cell at the Court House last night. Below will be found Mr. F's statement of some facts, which will show that he did not avoid arrest as was supposed last evening.

R—Mr. Fralick, we will publish any statement you may wish to make concerning the affair.

Fralick—I haven't much to say; but will say this, I shall clear it all up perfectly satisfactory as far as this prosecution is concerned. I haven't any doubt about it. I shall endeavor _____ hearing in the morning.

The report was that you attempted to avoid arrest.

Fralick—That was not true. I was out with a party about four or five o'clock, and got pretty full.

R—What about the evidence that was given against you?

Fralick—Well, it is not strange that a man who has been preparing as Vedder has lately should be able to swear as he did. You see our house has been hard up for a little time. I wished to write to our creditors for a general extension of from thirty to sixty days to close up. We were good beyond every probability. All we desired was a little time. He (Vedder) declined doing anything of the kind. I then said to Mr. Vedder, make an assignment. We can pay up all our indebtedness. (Mr. Fralick's idea was that Mr. Vedder was in straightened circumstances as regards his business and that he received money for swearing as he did yesterday.) Our stock is more than double our indebtedness. He has

also declined to do any of that kind, but put it off by saying he thought he would have the thing all fixed in a day or two. In what way he designed to fix it I did not know, nor did I know how much he was to get for his services in swearing. "It is a put up job and there is no question about it!" "the evidence Vedder gave is false from top to bottom!"

"I regard him an imbecile and insane!" "I think he has been consulted and inducements offered, and that the job was a little too heavy at first."

R—What do you mean by this?

Fralick—Why at the last adjournment, the 14th of April, I think he wanted to tell his story then and he found the job a little heavy and he wanted time to think of it. The books I never saw. I never knew Vedder sent them up to Auburn. I was not trying to keep out of his way. I told Davis if they wanted me at court to send to my store and they would call me. They did not send and about four or five o'clock I went to my room and lay down. I got up again about seven or eight and came up and went into Billy O'Conner's and from there I went to Tasker's. Then, as I was walking in front of the Globe and on South Salina street, I met an officer. I said "Good Evening" to him.

Officer—"You are just the man I want."

Fralick—"Ah; is that so?" and then I ask him to go to the store with me to get my coat. He did so, and then I invited him to go to Tasker's but he didn't; and they then brought me over here. I feel perfectly easy, and I know I can clear this thing all up. "No such swearing disheartens me in the least!"

And we left Mr. Fralick in the full enjoyment of serene conscience and a good cigar.

Fralick's Wife Goes East With three Large Trunks

Not only Mr. Fralick but his family have been under surveillance. Yesterday morning Mrs. Fralick took the eastern train with three large and apparently well filled trunks. How far she went our informant does not care to state. She returned to this city last night again.

Part IV will include the arrival and testimony of Vedder's sons, statewide coverage of the trial, testimony of Vedder's wife and the grand jury's decision on criminal charges.