

## **Australian Mercantile Land & Finance Co Fire 1992**

*Canberra Times*, 8 July 1992

Squatters are suspected of starting the fire that engulfed an 83-year-old mercantile woolstore on Monday, creating the biggest fire in the city in almost 25 years, fire investigators said yesterday. The fire stopped traffic and attracted huge crowds.

The upper floors of the north-east and south-east corners of the severely damaged building were being demolished yesterday: pulling down that part of the woolstore would stabilise it and allow firefighters to get inside to extinguish fires still burning.

"It's coming down to a level which makes it safer for everybody," regional commander Noel Newson said.

"The hotel on the corner and this building have been subjected to small fires from time to time."

Police said yesterday that the AML & F building had been used by homeless men for shelter until they were moved out three weeks ago.

The brick and timber building was quickly consumed by the fire, fuelled by wool grease embedded in the floors. Within half an hour of firefighters arriving, the roof had fallen in and flames were leaping 50m into the air through the thick yellow and white smoke. Soon a large section of the eastern wall fell to the road below, crushing cars and crashing close to the monorail. Another three sections of the wall fell on to Pymont Road in the next two hours.

Up to 100 fire fighters from 20 stations attended and officers expected to remain at the site for another day or two.