

THE FIRES OF BEDFORD

Although even under normal conditions Trimble County might never have engendered a town even the size of Carrollton, Kentucky or Madison, Indiana, the possibilities did exist. However, there were many events that created barriers to such development.

At the turn of the century, Wise's Landing was a bustling riverport town and Milton a thriving center of river trade and the ferryboat gateway between Trimble County, Kentucky and Jefferson County, Indiana. On several occasions, both of these early settlements were devastated by floods which retarded their growth.

Bedford, situated at the center of the county on high ground, suffered no threat of flood, but this small county seat literally burned down on numerous occasions. These fires swept almost the entire blocks on the north, south and east sides of the square before, finally, consuming the courthouse. In addition, many smaller fires are recorded. In every instance, some businesses that suffered in these fires were never rebuilt.

Every account of the fires of Bedford carries the same statement, or some variation of the same theme: "Lack of water hampered the efforts of firefighters to contain the flames." And following each of these devastating occurrences there would be a flurry of activity to get signers for a water system for Bedford. It took hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost property before a water system finally would become a reality for Bedford residents. This service became effective August 1, 1957. Water meters were scheduled to be read on September 15, and residents were advised to expect their first water bill on October 1.

Although some records are incomplete, the following pages are an effort to document the basic facts about the destructive effects of fire on the town of Bedford over a period of 60 years.

The first fire is thought to have occurred about 1922 when the Terrell Brothers building and garage were reduced to rubble, but no documentation is available on this loss. The others were as follows:

July 19, 1930	North side of the courthouse square.
January 23, 1934	East side of the courthouse square.
March 18, 1941	South side of the courthouse square.
December 34, 1943	Woody's Finer Foods, north side
December 19, 1948	Old Bell Hotel
March 5, 1952	Trimble County Courthouse
January 8, 1982	Bedford Sweet Shop Corner

A fire of undetermined origin--the most destructive fire in the then history of Bedford--consumed the entire block on the north side of the courthouse early on Sunday morning, July 19, 1930. Destroyed in that block were The Trimble Democrat Publishing Company, two store buildings, four residences and the Odd Fellows and Masonic Hall. The Baptist Church, which was directly behind the newspaper building on the west side, was also destroyed.

The alarm was sounded shortly after midnight when a fire was discovered in the northeast corner of the newspaper building. This was a two-story structure which housed the printing office, storage room and garage on the first floor. The front part of the second story was owned by the Odd Fellows and Masonic lodges. In the rear was another storage area which contained store merchandise owned by Harry D. Peak.

The losses in the fire were estimated at \$40,000, very little of which was covered by insurance. The Trimble Democrat Publishing Company carried \$1,400 on equipment and contents and \$800 on the building. The Masonic and Odd Fellows Lodges had \$250 insurance on their hall. This \$2,450 represented the total in insurance coverage.

The other property in the burned-out block included the following:

Adjacent to the newspaper office was a four-room house owned by The Trimble Democrat Publishing Company and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hood. East of this was a cottage owned by D. L. Bell and D. H. Peak and occupied by Mrs. Hallie Vories and her daughter and Mr. and Mrs. Lockett Peak. Next to the cottage was a two-story store and residence owned by C. A. Bell and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Cutshaw and Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Peak. The corner store building was operated as a restaurant by Lockett Peak.

The Trimble Democrat Publishing Company saved its office equipment, records and circulation list, but the presses and most of the other printing equipment were lost. The Linotype, a modern typesetting machine, was saved because of the foresight of one of the owners, D. L. Bell, who caused it to be housed in a fireproof room attached to the frame structure. Stockholders in the publishing company, in addition to Mr. Bell, were D. H. Peak, Charles A. Barclay and Keith H. Hood.

Harry Peak estimated his loss of stored goods at \$300 and Mr. Albert Wood estimated that his loss would also be about that amount. Most of the contents of the other buildings in the block were saved. However, furniture and fixtures were carried from the Baptist Church only to be consumed by the fast-spreading flames which destroyed them before they could be removed from the area.

All of the buildings were of frame construction and the fire burned furiously for about three hours before it finally was brought under control. All of the buildings burned quickly, and the crowd which

had gathered from the surrounding countryside was hard pressed to carry furniture and other possessions to safety. In order to prevent the spread of the flames to other property, the Peak restaurant on the corner was dynamited.

The Tribble Democrat of July 24, 1930 described the efforts:

"It is a wonder that more houses were not destroyed. Hard work and much water was necessary to save the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Cook, which is located across the street west of the printing office site. Attorney E. W. Tandy's residence on main street was saved by heroic effort. But for the metallic roof, it would be gone. The shingle roof on the barn at the (Methodist) parsonage caught fire several times, but the blaze was extinguished with water and wet bedclothes. A ladder was taken to the Christian Church, where the shingle roof was on fire several times. Judge I. T. Stanley, assisted by others, labored strenuously to prevent his barn from burning. Rapid work was also required to save the residences of Messrs. John Gatewood and D. V. Cutshaw, both located west of the Baptist Church site.

"A call was put in to the fire departments at Madison, New Castle and Eminence, but upon inquiry it was revealed that a scarcity of water would render such an undertaking useless.

"Telephone communication to the neighboring towns was cut off when telephone and electric cables were snapped in two by the mounting flames. Telephone men were soon on the scene, however, and did valiant service in the face of imminent danger.

"Bucket brigades worked cool-headedly as water was taken from the wells and cisterns, while large trucks from Little Kentucky brought water in milk cans.

"Great was the work done in saving the rest of the town. All hands turned to and gave their best work. Hundreds came to help from everywhere near. Some Negroes from Caspellsburg came in a truck and brought a load of water from Swingsford, according to reports."

Following the fire, publishers from neighboring towns came to the aid of The Tribble Democrat so that not one issue was missed.

Even during the fire, the president, D. L. Bell, announced that a new printing office would be built, "probably of brick and concrete," as soon as plans could be drawn.

From July until the following April, when a new building was completed and equipment installed, the business office operated from the Florence Theatre* building. Stories were written, the type was set and locked in forms, then taken to Carrollton for printing in the offices of The News-Democrat. The papers were then taken back to Bedford, folded by hand and prepared for mailing on the back porch of the Hood residence.

* The Florence Theatre building was then located on a site behind the old Bedford Garage (in 1991 a Marathon station was opened in this location).

Bedford's second disastrous fire to occur within a decade happened on Sunday, January 23, 1936, when three-fourths of the Main Street block on the east side of the courthouse square was destroyed.

Originating in the W. T. Ware Pool Parlor, the fire spread rapidly to the buildings on either side. (Cause of the fire was not readily determined as it was blamed both on a defective motor and on oil being heated to apply to the floor boiled over and ignited.)

From the pool hall, the flames spread south to the two-story frame structure that housed both the dental office and the residence of Dr. W. P. Bell, as well as the residence and beauty shop of Orville and Jess Swisher. On the north, they caught the one-story frame structure housing the Merchant's Creamery and spread to the one-story barber shop and residence of Omer Miller. From there, they spread to the two-story frame structure of the C. A. Bell & Company Drug Store. The two-story Bedford Loan & Deposit Bank building adjacent was also gutted from roof to cellar before the flames were finally brought under control.

The brick construction of the bank, together with bucket brigades and fire equipment for neighboring towns, were credited with preventing the fire from spreading to the north side to an apartment building and a restaurant, Woody's Inn. Seven business establishments and three residences were consumed during the four-hour battle.

The brisk wind which aided the flames in leaping from one building to another also carried sparks to the roof of the Christian Church in the next block, and it was ignited in a number of places. Before the disastrous fire was brought under control, the church roof was damaged beyond repair. Church pews also were damaged extensively when efforts were made to carry them from the threatened building.

The fire was discovered in the pool hall about 11:00 a.m. and at the time of discovery the smoke was too dense to allow entry to the building.

Therefore, attention was turned immediately to helping those persons whose property was threatened. Bucket brigades were formed and fire equipment arrived from Madison, Indiana and LaGrange, Kentucky, but a lack of water severely hampered all efforts.

Firefighters and rescue crews came from all parts of the county and surrounding areas to help fight the blaze and aid the families in saving such possessions as they could.

The residence of Dr. W. P. Bell caught fire in the wing occupied by the Swisher Beauty Shop and the residence of Orville and Jess Swisher and moved with such speed that little could be saved. Efforts to save Dr. Bell's personal property and valuable dental equipment were severely hampered by heat and smoke, and very little was saved there as well. Dr. Bell estimated his loss at \$10,000.

W. T. Bare placed the loss of equipment and stock of goods in the pool hall at \$8,000.

All of the property of the Merchant's Creamery Company was saved.

Most of Omer Miller's barber shop equipment and household furnishings were also saved.

The buildings housing the barber shop and drug store were the property of Miss Carrie L. Bell. Her loss was estimated at \$7,500.

The loss at the C. A. Bell & Company drug store exceeded \$10,000.

(This was the second \$10,000 loss by fire without insurance that Dr. C. A. Bell has suffered within a six-year period. The first loss was in the July 19, 1930 fire which destroyed the building and equipment of The Trimble Democrat Publishing Company.)

Initial estimates of the losses suffered totaled \$74,500, but the final figure was expected to exceed \$86,800 when personal property losses were complete.

With the exception of \$5,000 carried by the bank, no insurance was carried on the property destroyed. This lack of insurance coverage was due to the high rates charged on frame buildings.

On Monday afternoon following the fire, the bank vault was opened and it was found that no records were damaged and the interior of the vault showed no evidence of smoke.

Following the fire, W. D. Archibald, cashier of the bank, established temporary quarters in the court house. A number of offers of assistance were received from various banks, but Mr. Archibald declined these offers with appreciation. He explained, "the bank is in a position to take care of itself, being in very strong financial condition."

In the week following the fire, plans were already being discussed to build a new banking institution on the same site as the old one.

Immediately following the fire, representatives of the telephone company and Kentucky Power & Light Company (later to become Kentucky Utilities) were on hand to restore telephone and electrical service.

1941--SOUTH SIDE OF THE SQUARE

Bedford's third disastrous fire within the span of a decade struck the night of Tuesday, March 18, 1941, wiping out the entire south side of the town square and destroying a business establishment and apartments on the opposite side of U. S. Highway 42.

Destroyed were the A. B. Clem Heirs' general merchandise store, where the fire originated, the Clem electrical appliance store, the A. G. Spillman Funeral Parlor, Trimble County Health Department,

and the Graves Furniture Store, as well as the residences of Mrs. A. B. (Letitia) Clem, Finnell Jackson, Raymond Chandler, Arthur Cutshaw, and A. G. Spillman.

Discovery of the fire at about 10:45 p.m. in the A. B. Clem Heirs' store followed the sounding of the burglar alarm in the store. Flames were found to be licking up the elevator shaft from the basement and already out of control.



A. B. Clem Heirs store, northwest corner, south side, Bedford courthouse square. To the left is a corner of the W. S. Pierce property which also burned.



Clem Store employees are (left to right) Maurice Clem, Ruby Clem, Allie Gatewood, Edward McMannis and Earnest (Shep) Shepherd.

The two-story frame structure was soon enveloped in flames, making it impossible to remove any merchandise. Fanned by a light breeze, the flames rapidly spread to the adjoining Clem residence and then to a residence directly behind the store occupied by the Finnell Jackson and Raymond Chandler families.

Miss Zula Doyle (later to become Mrs. J. C. Cantrell), Trible County health nurse, was alone in the Clem residence at the time and managed to escape in her night clothes with only an armload of clothing. Mrs. Clem and her daughter Mrs. Ethel C. Spillman were out of town.

The Trible Democrat of March 20, 1941 carried a vivid description of the fire as follows:

"Raging like a thing gone mad with hunger, the searing tongues of flame leaped the intervening space bisected by U. S. Highway 42 and enveloped the two-story, half-block-long frame-constructed Pierce property, housing the Graves Furniture Store and a number of apartments. Here more loss was suffered as the inhabitants were not fearful of the blaze spreading until it was too late to salvage the contents of either the store room or apartments. Only the belongings of Arthur Cutshaw, who occupied the lower floor apartment, were removed to safety. Other families in the building saved only a small amount of clothing and furniture.

"Continuing on its hazardous way in the block of its origin, the angry red giant began methodically to devour the Terrell Bros. store property and apartments. By the time this building was ignited, the flames had met with sufficient delay in the consumption of the Clem electrical appliance store and offices of the health department, formerly occupied by the Bell Telephone Company, to permit the removal of the stock of goods to the A. G. Spillman Funeral Parlour. Household furnishing of Mr. Spillman also were removed to safety."

Because of the speed with which the fire spread, Dr. Philip Nodier and his family, whose residence and office were across the street from the burning block, removed their furniture and the doctor's office equipment. Julian Pecar, whose grocery store abutted the affected block, also removed his stock of goods to safety.

Although the Carrollton fire pumper was on the scene in "nine minutes following the issuance of the permit authorizing the engine to leave the city," the firemen's efforts were hampered by a lack of water to fight the flames. Water from one large cistern was used to save the residence of W. S. Pierce on the east side of Highway 42.

This most devastating of the fires yet to strike Bedford raged for over two hours and resulted in losses estimated at \$100,000. The amount covered by insurance totaled \$14,000--\$5,000 on the Clem store; \$1,500 on the Clem residence; \$1,500 on the residence at the

rear of the store; \$2,500 on the Terrill property; \$500 on the equipment of the health department, and \$3,000 on the Pierce property, which housed the Graves Furniture Store and the adjoining apartments.

* * * * *

The November 13, 1941 edition of The Trible Democrat reported that steel had arrived for the construction of the new general store and office building to be erected on the corner of Main and Court Streets. Construction, which was under the supervision of Joe Frost, had been held up prior to that date by the delay in steel delivery.

The same article also reported that the home of Mrs. A. B. Cies, being constructed on the opposite end of the block, was under roof and being plastered. It further stated: "When completed this will be the most modern home in the town."

1943--WOODY'S FINER FOODS, AGRICULTURAL OFFICES

The next fire to assault Bedford happened on Christmas Eve--Friday, December 24, 1943--when Woody's Finer Foods and the offices of the county extension agent and AAA (later changed to ASCS) were destroyed in a mid-morning blaze. The cause of this latest disaster to strike the Trible county seat was not determined, but it started in the basement, according to store clerk, Bell McAlister, who was the first person to observe the smoke.

The fire spread very rapidly and the contents of the entire building were lost. Woody's grocery, operated by Leonard (Bud) Wood and his brother, occupied the first floor and basement of the structure. The county agricultural offices were on the second floor of the two-story building. The first signs of fire were sighted about 10:30 a.m. and the building caved in about noon, leaving only the four brick walls standing.

The Carrollton Fire Department arrived in time to prevent the spread of these flames to the Trible Democrat building on the corner and the Frank C. Bell residence next door.

Lyle Wood, owner of the burned building, estimated the loss at approximately \$25,000.

This latest victim of fire in Bedford was located in the middle of the block on the north side of the courthouse square and was the second such disaster to strike this area in a period of 13 years. During this same period of time, four devastating fires had assaulted Bedford and caused property losses of over \$245,000.

The grocery site was later rebuilt and Raymond Wood and his brother, Chester Wood, operated a grocery there for several years. Later, Hartman Wood replaced his father as co-owner.

Following the fire, the county extension office was relocated to a small, two-room, frame building in the courthouse yard near the jail. The AAA offices were moved to the second floor of the Clam Building and both agencies remained in these quarters for some time.

At the time of the fire, J. D. Tolbert was the county agent and Mildred Pardo (Pruitt) was his secretary. Hubert Stark was chief clerk in the AAA office, with Mrs. Banzil Peak and Willanna Martinis (Moore) making up the rest of the office staff.

1948--OLD BELL HOTEL

The next fire to strike Bedford also chose the holiday season to attack. On Sunday, December 19, 1948, a 100-year-old, two-story, frame landmark, the old Bell Hotel, on the northwest corner of Church and Main Streets, was reduced to rubble, a furniture store was destroyed, and four families were left homeless in an early evening blaze.

The first alarm was sounded at about 5:00 p.m. and within minutes the whole building was ablaze and completely out of control. Flames were first noticed in the ceiling of the Graves Furniture Store by Earl (Dusty) Graves who was visiting his brother, John, operator of the store.

Even though the fire was detected at an early stage, workers had time to remove only one truckload of furniture from the first-floor store before heat and smoke defeated their efforts. The four families occupying the second floor apartments barely had time to escape ahead of the flames.

James Tingle, father of three children, escaped from the burning building with a child under each arm, a radio and a tool chest. His wife escaped with their older daughter. Willis Law succeeded in getting out ahead of the flames but was unable to save any clothing or other possessions. The Dell McAllister family were able to save some articles of clothing and some small items of furniture.

As in every fire to hit this Trimble county seat in recent years, the first distress call went out to the Carrollton Fire Department which promptly answered the call. The fire department from Madison, Indiana also was called and arrived soon after that of Carrollton. Although their arrival could do nothing to save the burning building, the efforts of these firemen were instrumental in preventing the spread of the fire to the adjoining Bedford Loan & Deposit Bank and to the Bedford Sweet Shop, across Church Street on the southwest corner.

The Sweet Shop and the adjoining Community Store did suffer considerable damage from the intense heat of the fire. Those townspeople who witnessed the struggle to prevent such a spread marveled that the flames were confined to the burning structure. Several families occupying upstairs apartments in these buildings experienced considerable damage to furniture that was hastily moved out of the danger area.

Even though the fire departments arrived just in time to help prevent the advancement of the blaze, The Trimble Democrat of December 23 reported: "Those in the 'know' give the credit for saving (the Sweet Shop) to R. E. Lee, who had presence of mind enough to break holes in the walls along the second floor ceilings and keep them wet from water poured down the walls and water tossed on the exterior walls of the building from the second floor windows."

It was thought that the fire, which started between the first floor ceiling and the second floor of the Graves Furniture Store, was caused by defective wiring. It was reported that on the previous evening a short circuit in the building had blown the fuse at the main transformer and had thrown that section of town into darkness.

Early estimates of loss by the A. B. Clem heirs, owners of this corner property, were placed at \$20,000 with only a minimal amount of insurance coverage.

Within hours of the fire, members of the Trimble County Chapter of the American Red Cross were already actively involved in caring for the immediate needs of those families made homeless by this latest disaster. By Tuesday evening, all families had been supplied with clothes, food and the basic necessities. It was reported that later that same week a representative from the national office of the American Red Cross, in Virginia, came to Bedford to help arrange for temporary housing for the four families.

1952--TRIMBLE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

In the early morning hours of Wednesday, March 5, 1952, the Trimble County courthouse, a two-story brick structure, was destroyed by fire. Reports varied as to who actually discovered the fire and sounded the alarm about 5:30 a.m.

Both jailer Wilmer Moore and John Gammons were credited with the discovery and with summoning local officials and townspeople. All records of importance were saved and were moved temporarily to the home of Mrs. Eugene Mosley, directly across the street from the courthouse. County officials estimated the loss to be in excess of \$100,000. Insurance coverage totaled \$37,000.

Cause of the fire was not readily determined but it started in the records-storage room in the attic.

Lack of local fire equipment hampered early efforts to control the flames, and the building was a raging inferno by the time the Carrollton Fire Department arrived on the scene. Firemen were able to prevent the spread of flames to nearby buildings housing the county extension office, county superintendent's office and the jail (which was unoccupied), all of which were located in the courthouse yard. Several lengths of hose were laid and water was pumped from two cisterns on residential premises to contain the fire.

Destroyed in the blaze were the offices occupied by the county judge, county attorney, sheriff, county clerk, tax commissioner, and circuit clerk. Also believed to be lost was a famed metal rooster weathervane which for several years had been perched atop the red dome of the courthouse.

(A brief article in the February 5, 1953 Tribble Democrat noted that the rooster, which was retrieved from the rubble when the debris was removed in preparations to rebuild the courthouse, was once more back in place. The article also mentioned that the rooster had been placed on the courthouse in 1948 as a symbol of Tribble County's then solid Democratic majority.)

The burned courthouse had been erected in 1884 as a replacement for a frame one which had been razed. The frame structure previously on the site had been erected to replace an earlier court building which also had been destroyed by fire.

In the week following the disastrous event, county officials were kept busy finding space and settling into temporary quarters. The county judge, attorney and sheriff moved into the county extension building, and the county clerk and circuit clerk shared residency in the offices of the county superintendent. (The departments displaced by these moves transferred their operations to the Cies Building.)

After much discussion and consultation and many suggestions and plans changes, a contract to rebuild was issued to the Barnett Lumber Company of Campbellsburg in August. Barnett's contract price was listed as \$89,386.29. Construction was started immediately.

The April 1953 meeting of the fiscal court was held in the new Tribble County courthouse with Judge Coleman Wright presiding. The building was formally accepted and turned over to the county in early June, and a dedication ceremony was scheduled for July 18. The high point of the dedication was that the keynote speaker was Governor Lawrence Wetherby.

1982--BEDFORD SWEET SHOP CORNER

It was early morning on Friday, January 8, 1982 when yet another fire claimed yet another familiar landmark in Bedford. Fire of undetermined origin destroyed property on the east side of U. S.

Highway 42, located on the southwest corner of Main and Church Streets. Through the years, the burned structure had housed numerous restaurants and at one time even a bank. At the time of the fire it was being operated as Kitchen Korner by Ted and Wynn Bachman.

At about 1:00 a.m. that morning, Doug Ginn and Donald Ward were passing through town and saw flames inside the building. They immediately sounded the alarm. Their quick action was credited with preventing a major disaster.

In addition to the local fire department, units were called from Milton and Campbellsburg to help fight the blaze. The flames were brought under control about 2:15 a.m., but Bedford firemen remained on the scene throughout the night.

Destroyed in the fire was a 9,000 square foot frame structure which dated back to the 1920's when John Stanley had built it adjacent to his home. (His former residence housed the Ransdell Funeral Home which suffered some fire damage. This building was reported to have been saved from greater damage and, perhaps, total destruction by special equipment brought to the scene by the Campbellsburg Fire Department.) Property east of the burned building also received some fire damage. No estimate of loss was available.

For many years the Sweet Shop Restaurant had occupied the southwest corner of the structure. Even though ownership might change from Gilbert Wood to Carroll Miles to Raymond Wood to Scotty Newman to Alvin Brodbach, the name remained the same. In more recent years, Buddy Chappel and Doug Carter had operated restaurants in this space under the name of The Colonial.

In other parts of the burned-out structure, a barber shop owned by Alvin "Preach" Hunter long had occupied the northwest corner. In later years, Hayward Tingle's barber shop had been established in the same space. Elsewhere, Irene Long, attorney, had her office in the building and Mary Lee's Beauty Shop was there.

The property east of the area that contained the restaurant had been the home of several retail stores through the years. In its very early days, Harry Peak had opened a furniture store in the space, and later Darnell Sly and Ed Shepherd had run a grocery business there. But even before that, it was reported that Albert Woods had maintained an "elegant hotel" within those walls.

In the 1930's Otha Watts opened the Community Store, a general merchandise emporium where many young Bedford men launched their careers as "clerks." When the Wattses retired to Versailles, Ora Tyra Ecker bought the business and continued to operate it as the Community Store for several years. Pauline Ogden was its last manager.

Later, this same space housed King Auto Supply for a brief period, and more recently it was a notions and dry goods store run by Vonnie Isel.

One surprising aspect of the fire was the discovery of a sizeable brick vault in the restaurant area. This was all that remained of the People's Bank which once flourished there. According to unsubstantiated reports, the bank had 40 stockholders and bank stock sold for \$200 a share. This bank was later sold and moved to Sulphur where it subsequently folded.

Legend has it that when Carroll Miles was operating the Sweet Shop--in those days before air conditioning-- he kept a rocking chair in the vault area and on hot summer days sought refuge there in the cool interior.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 1936

Twenty-Eight Pages

Flames Ravage Kentucky Town



BEDFORD, Ky., February 24—(P)—Panic-struck citizens fled their homes Sunday when a wind-whipped blase wiped out a business block and threatened to take the whole town. Lack of water hampered firemen. Photo shows household goods piled in public square and (at left) the Bedford Bank which was gutted but whose brick walls stopped the advancing flames.—Associated Press Photo.

BEDFORD, Ky., February 24—(P)—Brick walls and smoldering ruins today reminded citizens of a \$40,000 fire that gutted a block in the business district here yesterday.

Hampered by a lack of water, fire

companies from Carrilton and La Grange and Madison, Ind., fought the wind-swept flames from 11 a. m. until after 3 p. m. before bringing the blaze under control.

The blaze destroyed six buildings in the business area.

Fearing the flames would spread

to the residential section, citizens carried their belongings to the public square as sparks soared into the sky. The roof of the Christian church several blocks from the fire caught, but the flame was quickly extinguished before any damage was done.