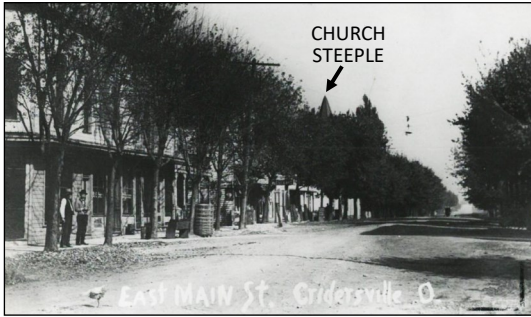




100 Block of East Main Street
Looking at north side of street from the railroad



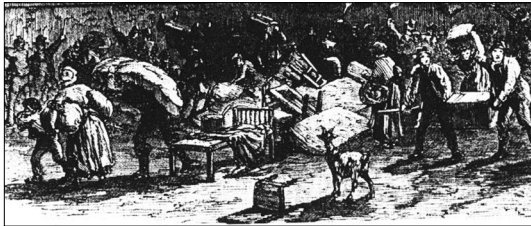
Methodist Church

As the fire moved to the Stepleton store, the high wind blew pieces of burning debris in all directions, landing on the many other wood shingle roofs. The neighboring stores and homes on the south side of Main Street were also soon on fire.

News of the fire spread rapidly. The column of smoke from the fire could be seen from miles away.

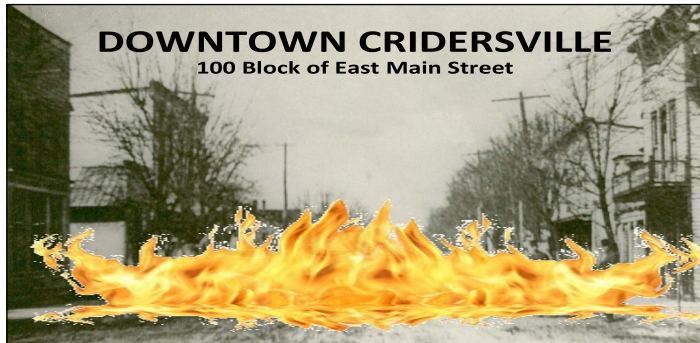
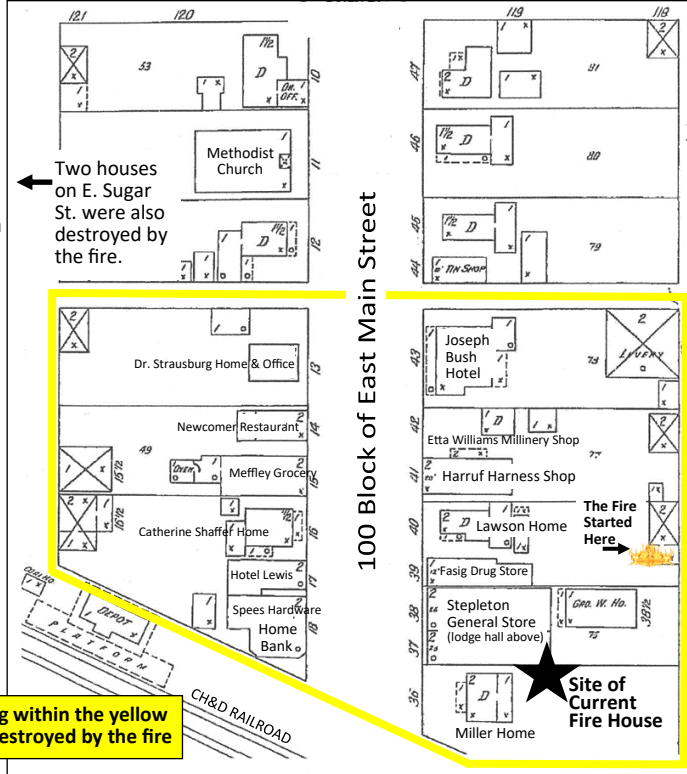
Boy Scouts in Lima heard of the blaze, hired a taxi cab, and rushed to Cridersville to help in the bucket brigade. An unknown Army lieutenant, hearing the news, brought several soldiers from Lima aboard a Liberty Truck to help fight the fire.

An hour after the fire started, the heat was so severe that trains were unable to pass through the village. All efforts soon went from trying to extinguish what was burning to stopping its spread. In fear for the safety of the Methodist Church, the Lima Fire Department sent for dynamite to blow up the house just west of the church in hopes of stopping the fire.



As the fire spread, people brought items from their stores and homes into the street where they thought they would be safe.

Cridersville's WORST DAY



All the buildings on both sides of the street were gone in 3 hours.



HARNESS SHOP
The family lived above the shop



DRUG STORE
and U.S. Post Office



BANK & HARDWARE
Hotel on the second floor



GROCERY STORE
The family lived above the store



STEPLETON GENERAL STORE
Lodge Hall on second floor

When the Stepleton General Store was completely on fire, the front of the store fell into Main Street onto the items people had moved from their stores and homes—spreading the fire to the north side of the street. Soon, both sides were burning.

By 6:00 p.m., the fire began to subside. It had not been necessary to dynamite the house next to the Methodist Church. The large iron safe at the Home Bank was the only thing left among the smoldering ruins of downtown Cridersville. Furniture still blocked the entrances to nearby streets. The village was without telephone service. Many of the poles and lines had been destroyed by the fire.

A disaster of this size was a true test of Cridersville's stamina. The loss of a majority of the businesses could have been a fatal blow, but the local citizens remained positive. Plans were soon underway to begin rebuilding.

32 structures destroyed—50 people left homeless—no serious injuries

OTHER EXAMPLES OF MAJOR FIRES IN THE UNITED STATES

- 1845** Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
1,200 buildings destroyed by fire
- 1871** Great Chicago Fire
17,500 buildings were destroyed by fire
- 1872** Boston, Massachusetts
775 buildings destroyed by fire
- 1906** San Francisco Earthquake & Fire
25,000 buildings destroyed by fire
- 1914** Salem, Massachusetts
1,375 buildings destroyed by fire
- 1917** Atlanta, Georgia
1,900 buildings destroyed by fire

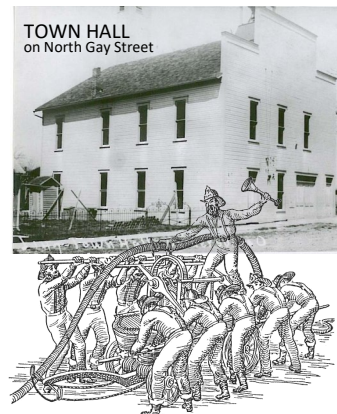
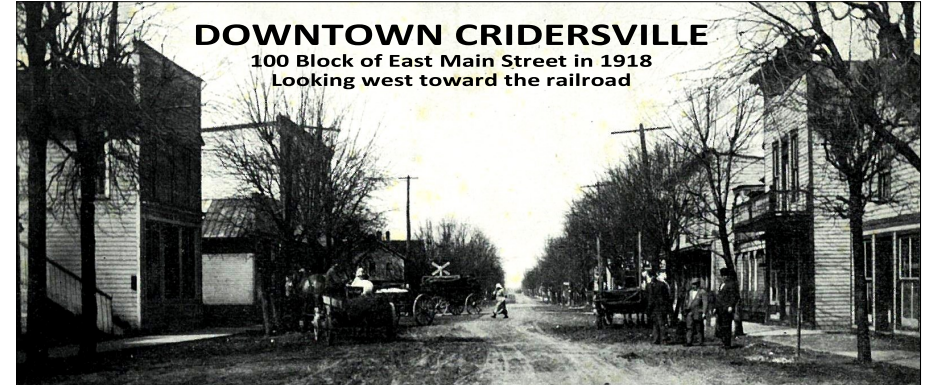


WHY DID THESE MAJOR FIRES SPREAD SO QUICKLY AND DO SO MUCH DAMAGE?

- Wooden building construction—especially wooden shingles
- Flying embers of the fire would often spread the fire to adjacent roof tops
- No fireproof building materials
- Buildings were built very close to one another—there were no regulations requiring spaces between buildings
- Often no city water system—or very low water pressure
- Few, if any fire hydrants in the community
- Cities often depended on underground cisterns filled with rain water—and mud in the bottom
- Fire fighting equipment was primitive—not able to pump enough water to fight major fires

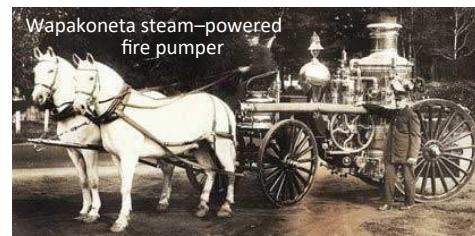
Over the years, communities have invested in modern fire fighting equipment and training, required fireproof building materials and better spacing between buildings, and built adequate water systems with fire hydrants—all to prevent the major fire catastrophes of the past.

CRIDERSVILLE'S GREAT FIRE OF 1918



Hand-operated fire pumper was stored in the Town Hall

Within minutes, the flames spread to the Stepleton General Store. The Wapakoneta and Lima fire departments were notified at once. Within 17 minutes Lima arrived with two new motorized fire trucks. They began pumping from the brick water cistern under Main Street. Soon, their pumps were clogged with mud from the cistern and rendered useless.



On May 2, 1918 the wind was gusting through Cridersville at 40 miles per hour. A young clerk at Stepleton's General Store went behind the store to burn trash. The wind blew pieces of burning trash into the barn behind the Lawson house. Soon a fire was raging in the barn. The village's hand pumper was pulled from the Town Hall to fight the fire. The wind then spread the fire to the Lawson home on E. Main Street.

This fire was too big for the hand pumper.



INTERIOR OF STEPLETON GENERAL STORE

Wapakoneta's firemen put their steam powered pumper on a flatbed car of the Western Ohio Electric Railway and left for Cridersville. To be ready to start pumping at their arrival, they started a fire in the pumper's boiler. Embers fell onto the flatbed on the way. When they arrived they had to put out this fire and then put their hoses in the Town Pond on E. High Street to begin fighting the fire.