



*In 1880, the waterworks were completed on Main near First. The electric light plant was built in 1895.*

commerce, it attracted extensive shipping from all coastal as well as foreign ports. As the twentieth century dawned, Jacksonville was on the threshold of becoming a thriving city. And then disaster . . .

## Fire!

Friday, May 3rd, 1901 dawned clear, hot and windless. There had been no rain for a month. There was none in sight. At the Cleveland Fibre Factory at Beaver and Davis Streets, moss was spread and drying. About noon a little glow from the moss caught the eye of a workman. He grabbed a bucket of water and ran for it. He was too late. With explosive violence the fire spread to the moss packed factory and at the same time, out of the calm, a wind rose, steadily higher and steadily stronger.

## An awful visitation . . . A city in ruins

Wisps of flaming moss flew far and wide; a shanty caught fire here and a house there. Pandemonium broke loose as men fought a losing battle to control the flames. The wind rose, heat and smoke puffed over the city; fierce flames ate their way eastward towards the heart of the town and as the populace realized that the city was to become a holocaust, fear filled all hearts.

The City was now an inferno of flames and heat. Sound and fury filled its streets . . . the roaring crackle of flames, the shrill neighing of panicked horses, the crying of terrified children, the quiet sobbing of women losing their possessions; unbearable heat and suffocating smoke . . . as men and women tried to load their worldly goods into any available vehicles . . . to save what they could; and failing this, just to save their lives. Smoke darkened the skies over a radius of 160 miles and fire companies came from as far as Savannah. To no avail . . . the City of Jacksonville was lost.

In eight searing hours the fire had spread over a two square mile area, consumed 466 acres in the heart and core of the City. The business and fine residential areas were a sea of glowing ashes. Totally destroyed were 2,368 buildings and homes, 23 churches, 10 beautiful hotels. At eight-thirty that night the fire was brought under control.