

CITY DESTROYED BY FIRE†
(Friday, May 3, 1901)

Shortly before 12:30 p.m., May 3, 1901, sparks from a nearby negro shanty ignited particles of fibre laid out to dry on the platform of the Cleaveland Fibre Factory, located in LaVilla, at Beaver and Davis Streets. Watchmen soon noticed the jets of flame and poured bucket after bucket of water on the burning mass, but other fragments of this highly inflammable material took up the flame and carried it into the factory building. The immense room was at once a roaring furnace. In the meantime an alarm had been sent in, at 12:35 p.m., but when the firemen arrived with their horse-drawn apparatus, the building was already doomed. A fresh west-northwest wind was blowing, and when the roof of the factory fell in, particles of burning fibre were carried away and fell upon neighboring buildings, whose wooden roofs were as combustible as tinder, owing to the prolonged drought. The fire then spread from house to house, seemingly with the rapidity with which a man could walk.^a

Progress of the Fire

By one o'clock, Hansontown, a suburb of pine shanties, northwest of the city, was all on fire, and not long afterward the flames spread eastward to Bridge (Broad) Street. The wind had gradually increased, and burning shingles were carried into the city proper; the firemen, standing under a canopy of smoke and flame, were even now powerless to cope with the conflagration. About this time telegrams were sent to St. Augustine, Savannah, Fernandina, Brunswick, and Waycross, for assistance. The Fernandina company was the first to arrive, and two hours and thirty minutes after the message was sent to Savannah most of that department was at the union station here. These companies performed valuable services.^a

The following account of the progress of the fire was given in the Florida Times-Union and Citizen, May 4, 1901:

With incredible speed the fire spread, continuing to widen its devastating line of march. By 2:45 o'clock (p.m.) the handsome residences in the vicinity of Julia and Church Streets were blazing, the

†Bibliography: ^aFlorida Times-Union and Citizen, May 4, 5, 6, 7, 1901; ^b"Acres of Ashes," by Benjamin Harrison; ^cFinal Reports of the Jacksonville Relief Association.