

This column has in the past told the story of the periodic devastation of Rock Hill's downtown business by fire. The first major fire was in 1878 when 20 Main Street buildings burned. Five years later the west side of Main burned to the ground.

Four years later, in 1887, half the town's businesses were lost. Then in 1898 some drunken loafers in a barber shop were blamed for an early Sunday morning fire that took down the north end of Main Street.

Yorkville (in 1915 the "-ville" was dropped) had a very destructive fire in 1870 and again in June 1888.

The 1888 fire began in a building that was a combination store and residence. The building was originally built by John Blair in 1820 as a two-story residence. T.M. Dobson had bought the house and added a one-story storeroom. The extension was described as "100 feet west from Main street and parallel with an alley leading to Parish's livery stables."

The blaze was well under way about 4 a.m. before it was discovered. The firefighters broke the front window, and immediately the flames and smoke engulfed the front.

In the house were Dobson, his wife and three children, along with three other adults. All narrowly escaped. Mrs. Dobson was forced by the flames to flee to the balcony and descend a nearby tree.

The firefighters could not save the Dobson house so turned to the task of saving nearby buildings. Across the alley was "a brick house of two store rooms" owned by Capt. J. R. Lindsay. This had a wooden addition in the rear, occupied by J.W. Dobson. "The other part of the house was two stories high, the first floor occupied as a store by W.B. Moore & Co., and the second floor as bedrooms, and the office of the resident engineer of the C.C. & C. Railroad." The mixed use of stores, apartments and offices was typical of most downtowns of the time.

On the south side of the building was "a small wooden room occupied as an office of Dr. Lindsay and Dr. White." This

was torn down in an effort to stop the flames.

While this was going on, the fire turned in a new direction to a two-story brick house built in 1832 and now owned by John M. Hope. It had a 50-foot frontage on Main Street. Beyond the Hope home was the Parish Hotel, part brick, part wood, but the wood part closest to the Hope home.

But when the Hope home was built by Col. William Wright in 1832, he had stated that he feared the Blair house (where the fire began) would catch on fire. Wright had "fireproofed" his house with no windows on the side facing the Blair house and had installed a metal roof.

This stopped the path of the fire and saved the Parish Hotel with its wooden roof. This was fortunate because the water supply was exhausted.

The remainder of downtown Yorkville was saved, and the fire confined to the west side of Main Street.

One week later, on Sunday night, downtown Fort Mill was in flames. The fire began burning at the rear of Dr. J.E. Massey's drugstore. The fire spread rapidly to the stores of S.M. Mills, L.J. Massey, J.W. Ardrey and to the homes of L.J. Massey and P.K. Mull. Only Mills had insurance.

Also lost in the Fort Mill fire were the town records and 10 years of Unity Presbyterian church's financial records (in Dr. Massey's store).

The first to arrive on the Fort Mill scene had found "a goods box filled with inflammable matter" burning under the corner of Dr. Massey's store.

The Fort Mill correspondent to the Yorkville Enquirer observed: "While there is no doubt but the fire was of incendiary origin, there is no clew as to the perpetrator of the deed."

Incendiaries (they did not use the word arsonist in those days) were not new to the area. The Reconstruction Era (1868-1876) had seen numerous barn fires in the rural areas. Our question is, was there a connection between the Fort Mill fire-setting and the Yorkville fire?

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## Were Yorkville and Fort Mill fires tied?

*1888 blazes were week apart and destroyed much of the towns*

NEARBY HISTORY

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