

1. Point of Origin: Commercial & 11th

Flames were first seen in the basement of Thiel Bros. Restaurant and Billiard Parlor as smoke began to billow from Bee Hive department store on the North side of Commercial St. It then spread in all directions. To this day, the cause of the fire remains unknown. Upon the sound of the alarm at 2:12 a.m., some began banging on doors to awaken slumbering people and get them out of burning buildings, others attempted to save uninsured merchandise from various shops by throwing stuff out the windows and into the streets.

2. Young Building: Commercial & 14th

Due to its exterior brick walls and reinforced concrete frame, this was one of two buildings on Commercial St. that survived the fire. This street was once much more narrow and used mainly by foot traffic, horse pulled vehicles, and trolley tracks. Downtown reconstruction involved widening the streets, to make room for autos, the newer and more popular means of transportation. In order to keep the structure and accommodate the project, the first floor of this 1916 building was recessed to make room for the sidewalk below. The second floor was then supported by steel columns.

3. St. Mary's Hospital: 15th & Exchange

Built in 1905, St. Mary's Hospital was once a grand four story building. On the night of the fire, St. Mary's and the old City Hall (present day CCHS Heritage Museum) were spared from destruction by the tireless efforts of citizens on the roof spraying water at the flames as nearby buildings were purposely blown up with dynamite to slow the crawl of conflagration. Patients of the hospital were moved to the high school (present day Clatsop Community College Towler Hall) at the top of the hill. The wooden building was eventually disassembled. The 1931 brick addition (present day Owens Adair Apts.) and remnants of the old building's foundation walls remain.

4. YMCA: Exchange & 12th

This 1914 building was saved from destruction due to young people throwing buckets of pool water at the flames. After the fire, the YMCA became headquarters for the General Relief Committee. Here, food and shelter were provided to displaced

citizens, the gym housed 100 cots, the basement held gatherings for free lunches, the handball court was used as a restaurant, and the reading room opened temporary office space to businesses and the local newspaper, *The Evening Budget*, who began reporting about the fire the next day.

5. Fire Reach Monument: Exchange & 9th

The southern point of the great fire ended here where it reached solid ground. The business district was comprised of wooden structures and wooden streets supported by wooden pilings which provided an air supply beneath the fire. A recipe for disaster. Downtown Astoria was rebuilt in 1923-25. The streets were filled in with dredged river sediment and the new buildings were constructed out of concrete and brick. Only three individuals died that night: Norris Staples, president of the Bank of Commerce and Lovell Auto business partner, suffered a heart attack while moving an inventory of new autos out of the way; a boatman out on the river pumping water toward the flames fell from his vessel due to smoke and drowned; and a perhaps unrelated suicide had occurred beneath the docks.

6. Spexarth Building: Commercial & 8th

Constructed of reinforced concrete with a composition roof, this 1910 building acted as a firewall and was able to slow the spread of the fire. To its west, the courthouse and post office (rebuilt in 1933) were saved. Since the structure, itself, did not require reconstruction, this block of Commercial St. was not widened during the rebuild and the street is more narrow than the rest of Commercial St. heading east toward downtown.



Consider membership to the Lower Columbia Preservation Society and learn more about preserved and historic sites all around Astoria! Membership supports the vision of LCPS to make preservation accessible to all by inspiring curiosity, advancing knowledge, creating a "sense of place," and delivering economic benefit for our communities. For more information, visit our website: www.lcpsociety.org

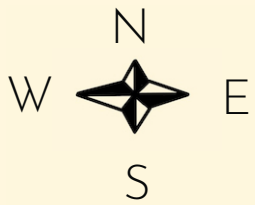
LOWER COLUMBIA
PRESERVATION
S.O.C.I.E.T.Y

WALKING TOUR of ASTORIA The 1922 Fire



In the wee early hours of December 8, 1922, at about 2 a.m., a fire broke out burning down most of downtown Astoria, Oregon. Astoria was originally built atop wood pilings over the tide flats of the Columbia River which, at that time, reached as far as Duane St. and Franklin Ave. The combination of wood framed buildings, wooden streets, and good airflow beneath the town made the entire area vulnerable to fire-related disasters.

Lower Columbia Preservation Society
389 12th Street Astoria, Oregon
www.lcpsociety.org



This tour takes you along and within the fire's perimeter starting at the point from which it began. On the map, you will see six numbered sites, arrows pointing the direction of your path, and a thick line marking the perimeter of the burned area.

Scan the QR code for a guided version of this tour, including turn-by-turn directions with more stories and historical photographs of these sites, or visit: www.lcpsociety.org/1922fire



Widening Commercial St.
at 9th, 1923



Commercial St. between
12th and 14th before the fire



Looking south from 14th and
Marine Dr., December 8, 1922



View of the downtown fire from
the neighborhood south of
Franklin Ave., December 8, 1922



Astoria rebuild at 12th
and Duane St., 1923



Looking west at St. Mary's
Hospital across the street
and facing Astoria City
Hall (present day CCHS
Heritage Museum). It stood
from 1905 - 1975.

Columbia River

