First floor plans of the Lakeview School of Collinwood Ohio. The plan shows the open hallway and the one fire escape which saved the lives of most of the pupils on the second floor. The loss of life was caused by a jam in one of the vestibules shown.

Ruins of the Collinwood, Ohio, School after the fire in which one hundred and seventy-three pupils and two teachers were burned to death on March 4, 1908.
A telephone alarm was sent in by a fireman who happened to be off duty. He then assisted many of the children to escape through windows.

The cause of this fire is unknown. The corridor that extended through the basement had a sheathed partition on each side extending only part way to the ceiling. In this corridor there were two or three wooden barrels in which to keep the sweepings from the schoolrooms. The contents of these barrels were removed once a week. Under the rear stairs was a closet or bin some five feet wide and ten feet long.

The fire evidently started in the closet or in the rubbish barrels, as indicated by the burning at these particular points. Once the fire gained headway, with both exits from the basement to the outer air open, it spread very rapidly.

The building was a large and roomy structure, having exits thought to be ample for the number of children housed. Many times at fire drills it had been vacated in a minute and a half. The children were well disciplined, but they had only been trained to leave the building by the way of the two usual exits. Unfortunately this line of march led directly into the corridor where the smoke and fire were pouring up from the basement. While the exits provided were all the law required, these were not adequate to provide proper safety.

Lakeview School, Collinwood, Ohio, March 4, 1908.

175 Killed.

The Lakeview School, Collinwood, a suburb of Cleveland, was destroyed by fire between the hours of ten and eleven o'clock on the morning of March 4, 1908, while school was in session, resulting in a loss of life of two teachers and 173 children.

Smoke was first seen coming through the crevices in the stairway at the front of the building. Flames spread with great rapidity up the stairway to the upper floors. At the discovery of the fire the janitor sounded the school fire alarm gong, and the teachers immediately gave fire drill signals. Reports indicate that the children in the rooms on the first floor were safely ushered out of the building.

In some manner, however, the children on the upper floors became panic-stricken, and made a mad rush for the rear stairway, which with the front stairway exit branched from the main corridor in the center of the building. At the bottom of the rear stairway on first floor was a frame partition, which created a vestibule between the partition and outer doors of the building.

In the mad rush the children became jammed in a heap against the inside of this partition and were found there by rescuers. So tightly were the children wedged that the rescuers could do little to free them, and consequently they perished at that location. Because all attention was directed toward saving the occupants, and due to the total inadequacy of the fire department,
Fighting this $150,000 fire in the Tuley High School, Chicago, one fireman was killed and another seriously injured. It occurred on Sunday, February 6, 1938, when students were not in the building.

The building was totally destroyed.

At the time, the Collinwood schoolhouse was considered a modern building, of average school construction. The lighting and heating devices apparently were well installed. The building was provided with two separate exits and an outside fire escape. The children were familiar with the fire drill. All in all, there was nothing unusual in connection with the school to indicate that such a horrible catastrophe could happen. There remain hundreds of schools by no means as well constructed or secure against such a loss as was the Collinwood School.

The direct cause of the fire is not positively known, although the conclusion reached by a thorough joint investigation and inquiry made by the Deputy State Fire Marshal, local coroner, chief of Cleveland Fire Department, and members of the Collinwood Board of Education is that the fire originated from a steam main which rested on wooden joists.

Investigation also revealed that under the front stairway was a storage closet. The fact that smoke and fire were seen coming from the stairs directly over this closet, and that the closet was used for miscellaneous storage, leads to the theory that the fire may have originated there.