

Michael Landon watched with tears in his eyes Friday as the make-believe town of Walnut Grove, which grew up around 'The Little House on the Prairie,' was dynamited into television history.

'We blew up the town,' Landon, who directed and starred in the long-running series, said after the final blasts. 'Everything came off without a hitch.'

'A lot of people cried today. You can't spend a decade of your life in a town and not feel bad about losing it. But at least now no one else can use our town for some other show.'

Only the church and the little house were spared the destruction - and they will have to be dismantled as the land where the series was filmed, in the Simi Valley north of Los Angeles, is returned to its original condition.

Landon decided to blow up the rest of the town 'in a blaze of glory on the screen' that will be seen in the last of three 'Little House' specials to air this season.

The show's plot evolves out of the news that some eastern financiers have purchased the property and plan to make the townspeople work for them.

The series' stars decide to destroy their homes and businesses and move on.

Luke Tillman, who has supervised the show's special effects since the pilot, arranged for the blasts by lacing the structures with 9,000 feet of explosive cord.

'He just plugged it in and sent a current running through at 36,000 feet per second,' NBC spokesman Mike Casey said.

'The buildings all went. The mill, the bank, the feed and seed store, the mercantile, Nellie's Restaurant and the Post Office.'

'The biggest blow was the last one, the mansion owned by Almanzo and Laura Wilder (played by Dean Butler and Melissa Sue Gilbert). It was a three-story 1890s Victorian, all wood, with two spires and a peaked roof. It cost \$70,000 to put up.'

Besides Landon, the only cast member to witness the blasts was Dabbs Greer, who plays the Rev. Alden on the series, which premiered Sept. 11, 1974. Greer was there because of a scene in which he walks down the rubble-filled street toward the still-standing church.

Although the church will be torn down for good, a spokesman said the the 'little house' that gave the series its title would be reconstructed later at another location.

Landon, meanwhile, recently indicated that the end of the town might not mean the end of the 'Little House' TV shows.

'If there is a reunion later,' he explained, 'we can do it elsewhere.'