



0. 19TH CENTURY FIREFIGHTING - Story Preface

1. FIRE!

2. 19TH CENTURY FIREFIGHTING

3. WAS IT REALLY THE COW?

4. FIRE IN PESHTIGO: A COINCIDENCE?

5. DEATH IN PESHTIGO

6. PESHTIGO SURVIVORS

7. CHICAGO IN 1871

8. CAUSE AND ORIGIN

9. CHICAGO BURNS

10. A DEVASTATED CITY

11. SHOCKED CITIZENS

12. CIVIL RESTRICTIONS

13. HOLLAND BURNS

Currier & Ives published this hand-colored lithograph—"The American Fireman. Always Ready"—in 1858. It was created by Louis Maurer (1832-1932), a German-born printmaker who later emigrated to America. [Online via the Library of Congress.](#)

The Great Fire took place 6½ years after Abraham Lincoln's assassination. Equipment then was not close to the equipment we have today. Cars were not yet invented. Racing to the scene of a fire wasn't like it is today.

By 1870, a French-invented chemical fire engine was imported to the U.S. It could have been helpful, in Chicago, but it went to Derry (a town in New Hampshire).

Firefighters throughout the Midwest would have to rely on their steam engines, and water, to fight the massive conflagration that became "the Great Fire." It would not be an easy job.

How sophisticated was 1871 fire-fighting equipment? A few months before the Great Fires, in its June issue, *Manufacturer and Builder* boasts of the great steam engine advancements over equipment from "ye olden time."

Of all the numerous improvements which forcibly impress the stranger in a large city, nothing is more likely to challenge his imagination or excite his wonderment than the rapidity and certainty with which the largest and fiercest conflagrations are extinguished by the use of the great steam agent and its only superior, electricity.

One hundred and fifty years ago, the cry of "fire," even in the staid burgh of New-York, was the signal for all employments to cease, and for the whole population, from the grave burgomaster to the equally stolid youngsters who played in the gutters, to make a tumultuous rush to the scene of the conflagration. Buckets and swabs came into requisition, and the portly burgers busied themselves in endeavoring to combat the devouring element until the arrival of the engines.

(*Manufacturer and Builder*, June 1871, page 130.)

The boast was premature. When "the largest and fiercest conflagrations" actually developed a few months after this article was published, men and their "modern" equipment were powerless to stop the ravenous inferno.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/19TH-CENTURY-FIREFIGHTING-Great-Fire-of-1871>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/19TH-CENTURY-FIREFIGHTING-Great-Fire-of-1871>

What Happens When Technological Glitches Hinder Problem-Solving?

It is difficult to imagine how Chicago’s firefighters, in 1871, actually fought the fast-moving fire. Suppose, therefore, that your town has a gas shortage, rendering all fire engines incapable of traveling to the scene of a massive fire.

Does that scenario help to compare fire-fighting today with fire-fighting in 1871? If not, do you have a better comparison? What is it?

What would fire fighters do, today, if a gas shortage actually happened?

How would they get to the scene of the fire?

How would they transport their equipment?

How much time would they lose? How would lost time impact their fire-fighting abilities?

Media Stream



Fire Engines - New York, 1730s

Page 140 from *The Manufacturer and Builder*, Volume 0003, Issue 6 (June 1871).

Title of Article: *Fire-Engines of "Ye Olden Time."* Online, courtesy Library of Congress and MOA (Making of America) at Cornell University.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Fire-Engines-New-York-1730s->



19TH CENTURY FIREFIGHTING

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/19TH-CENTURY-FIREFIGHTING>