



0. CHICAGO BURNS - Story Preface

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John R. Chapin created this artist's illustration of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Originally published in *Harper's Weekly*, the 1871 drawing depicts a scene facing toward the city's northeast, looking across the Randolph Street Bridge. Its caption is: "Chicago in Flames—The Rush for Lives Over Randolph Street Bridge." Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

People were awakened by the fire. Many left their homes with shawls and blankets around them. One of the few close-up illustrations depicts a family in anguish.

People fleeing death spent the night among the cemetery dead - at Potter's Field, near Lincoln Park - close to the Lake Michigan shore.

The *Chicago Tribune* was burned out of its building. Citizens, in a panic, tried to flee over the Randolph Street Bridge.

There was a heartbreaking loss of life as entire families were unable to escape. A hundred thousand people who had enjoyed an unseasonably warm and beautiful Sunday were homeless by Sunday night.

Fleeing people thought they'd be safe in Lake Michigan. They weren't. Some never came out of the water. James H. Goodsell, an eyewitness, describes the scene (on page 29) in his 1871 book, *History of the Great Chicago Fire*:

The intense heat from the burning buildings, even the flames from them, reached the water, and even stretched out over it, and the flying men, women, and children, rushed into the lake till nothing but their heads appeared above the surface of the waters; but the fiery fiend was not satisfied. The hair was burned off the heads of many, while some never came out of the water alive. Many who stayed on the shore, where the space between the fire and water was a little wider, had the clothes burned from off their backs.

In addition to damaged lives, Chicagoans had to contend with a destroyed city. Many of the wooden buildings were gone or had to be demolished.

Overwhelmed, the people could barely fathom their losses. (Eighty-seven years later, they would endure another disastrous fire—at Our Lady of the Angels School—in which 92 children and three nuns died.)

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/CHICAGO-BURNS-Great-Fire-of-1871>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/CHICAGO-BURNS-Great-Fire-of-1871>

Questions 2 Ponder

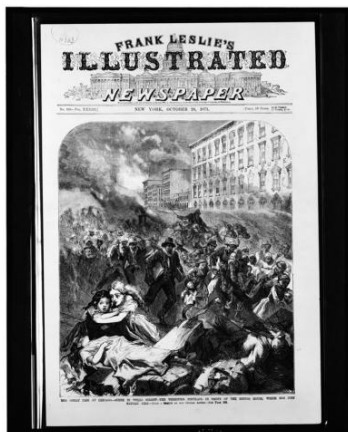
Why Didn't Lake Michigan Provide Chicagoans Safety from the Great Fire?

Pictures, drawings and eyewitness reports regarding the Great Fire, as it occurred in parts of Chicago and Peshtigo, reveal that the waters of Lake Michigan and the Peshtigo River did not provide safety for everyone who was fleeing the flames.

What does the report from eyewitness, James Goodsell, tell us about fire refugees who expected safety when they reached the waters of Lake Michigan?

Were those expectations reasonable? Why, or why not?

Media Stream



Great Chicago Fire - Terrified People

Image from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* - "from a sketch by our special artist," October 28, 1871 issue - online, courtesy U.S. Library of Congress. LOC reproduction number LC-USZ62-109590.

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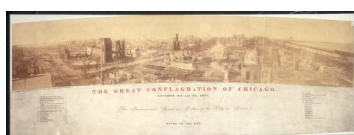


The Chicago Tribune - Before the Great Fire of 1871

Image online, courtesy Chicago Historical Society.

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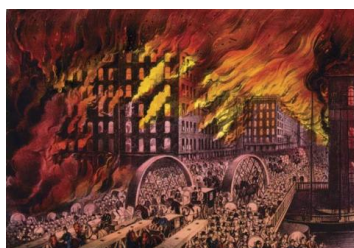


The Great Conflagration of Chicago

Image of Chicago, after the Fire of 1871, online courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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CHICAGO BURNS

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Fire - Our Lady of the Angels School

News clip of the fire at Our Lady of the Angels School, online courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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Impact of Our Lady of the Angels School Fire

Video clip online courtesy the Chicago Tribune's channel at YouTube. Copyright, Chicago Tribune, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

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