



0. A DEVASTATED CITY - 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

The Great Fire of 1871 consumed Chicago's business district, including its courthouse. This photograph, by Jex Bardwell, depicts some of the devastation and the courthouse ruins. Online via Chicago History Museum.

The famous Palmer House was instantly ruined. James Goodsell describes the hotel (at page 10 of his book) as it succumbed to the relentless fire:

The Palmer House was the tallest building in the city, eight stories high, three of which were in its mansard roof, and the scene of its demolition, which was more rapid than the account can be transmitted to paper, was inexpressibly grand. The march of the devouring element from this point to the lake was uninterrupted, the intervening buildings, including many of the finest private residences in the city, melting away like the dry stubble of the prairie.

Although the entire city was not destroyed, the business district was annihilated:

The entire business portion of the city was obliterated. Two-thirds of the territorial area of the city was unscathed, but Chicago, as a great business mart, the proud commercial centre of the growing west, was ever devastation more complete! (Goodsell, page 11.)

"All the fire engines being at work on the south side," resulted in unchecked damage once the fire moved north of the river. The north side "perhaps suffered more than both of the other divisions united." (Goodsell, page 12.)

Churches were not spared from devastation. Some, like St. James Episcopal, were partially ruined and partially standing.

The same was true of the Water Works. The famous Water Tower, an important landmark in Chicago today, was spared while the rest of the complex was consumed:

The whole building was soon in flames, and in a few minutes the engineers had to rush out of the building to save their lives. The machinery was very considerably injured. The water tower, however, to the west of the pumping works, was almost entirely uninjured. (Goodsell, page 15.)

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/A-DEVASTATED-CITY-Great-Fire-of-1871>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/A-DEVASTATED-CITY-Great-Fire-of-1871>

Questions 2 Ponder

What Makes People Resilient in the Face of Catastrophe?

Imagine this: It's a warm and beautiful Sunday afternoon in early fall. Life is good. Then ... it's evening of the same day and your city is being consumed by a violent, rapidly spreading fire. People are panicking. Nowhere seems safe.

Your home has burned to the ground, just like the homes of most of your friends. Is life still good? Explain your answer.

Suppose your family had a business but couldn't afford insurance to cover losses in case of a fire. Do you salvage what's left and move forward? Why, or why not?

Media Stream



Chicago Water Works - Before the Fire

Lithograph depicting Chicago's Water Works before the fire (when the pumping station was very close to Lake Michigan), by Louis Kurz for Jevne & Almini. Published by Chicago Lithographing Co (located on Clark Street in Chicago). Image online, courtesy U.S. Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Chicago-Water-Works-Before-the-Fire>



Chicago Water Tower

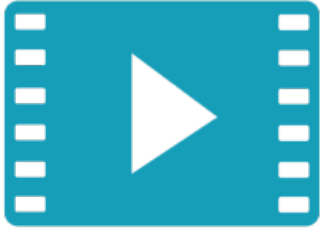
Image of Chicago's Water Tower, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Chicago-Water-Tower>



A DEVASTATED CITY

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/A-DEVASTATED-CITY>

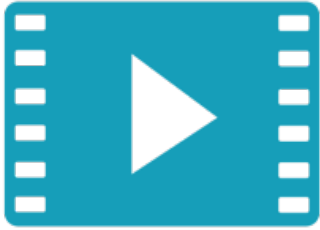


Great Fire of 1871 - Spreading Conflagration in Chicago

Clip from "[Chicago Tonight](#)," presented by Eddie Arruza. Copyright Eddie Arruza and Chicago Tonight, all rights reserved. Clip online via YouTube and presented here as fair use for educational purposes.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Great-Fire-of-1871-Spreading-Conflagration-in-Chicago>



Chicago Water Works - Destroyed in 1871 Fire

Clip from the Weather Channel's story on Chicago's Great Fire of 1871.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Chicago-Water-Works-Destroyed-in-1871-Fire>