

INFERNO LEAVES CHICAGO IN RUINS

HUNDREDS KILLED—MANY HOMES,
CHURCHES, AND BUSINESSES DESTROYED

By our city correspondent

October 11, 1871

CHICAGOANS TODAY surveyed the ruins of their once great city—and wept. In just over 30 hours, the Great Fire has destroyed 17,500 buildings, killed up to 300 people and left a third of its 300,000 residents homeless as winter approaches.

Investigators are seeking to establish the cause of the blaze, but it is thought to have started in or close to a barn belonging to Mr. Patrick O'Leary on DeKoven Street. It is rumored a cow owned by his wife, Mrs. Catherine O'Leary, accidentally knocked over a lantern setting fire to straw.

Civic leaders admit the fire could have been contained had the city used materials other than wood for many of its buildings. Even the sidewalks were wooden. A drought had made the buildings tinder-dry while strong southwest winds whipped up flames to a conflagration.

Witnesses describe how "waves of fire" engulfed offices, hotels, churches, stores, and factories. One says the blaze devoured buildings as if they had been the "playthings of a child." Others report that many were trapped in the downtown area, and fled to the beaches along

Lake Michigan. Some resorted to burying themselves in the sand to avoid the flames. Fire raged up the rigging of boats turning masts into giant candles before consuming the hulls.

It is no surprise the city's Fire Department was overwhelmed. The courageous efforts of its firefighters were not enough to overcome the tornado-like "fire whirls" that spread flaming debris far and wide.

The blaze began to die down only after rains arrived late on Monday night, leaving a huge area of devastation. An appeal has now gone out across America and overseas to provide assistance to those most in need of help.

U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant, who made his home in northern Illinois before moving to the White House, is understood to be donating \$1,000 of his own money.

Despite the devastation, civic leaders predict the city will rise rapidly from the ashes. It is said fortunes are there to be made by those willing to invest in the new Chicago.

Almost all prominent buildings have been destroyed, the Chicago Water Tower being one of a handful to survive, and is certain to be cherished as a reminder to future generations. Ironically, O'Leary's own cottage was left standing after the blaze.

One Two Three— Up She Goes!

THE RAISING of a Chicago landmark structure in the air has been successfully completed to make way for the city's new sewage system, thanks to an ingenious feat of engineering, writes our technology correspondent, March 15, 1869.

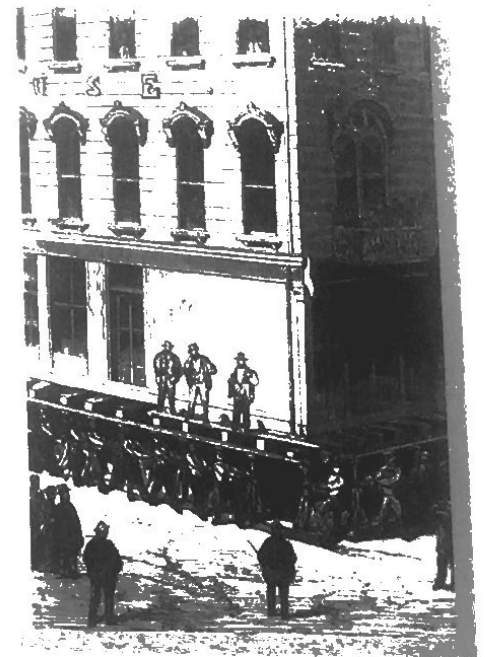
The Tremont House hotel, from the balcony of which both Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas gave speeches, stayed open throughout the operation that lasted several weeks. It is said some guests did not even notice anything was happening.

To hoist the hotel, 5,000 jackscrews were placed beneath the building's foundations. One man was assigned to operate each section of 10 jackscrews. On the signal, each man turned the jackscrews the same amount at the same time, and the six-story building slowly lifted. It is one of many buildings, including the one pictured below, raised to the new street level for sewers to be installed beneath.

The engineering feat follows protests from Chicagoans about the city's poor sanitation after a cholera outbreak seven years ago. Because it stands just above Lake Michigan's shores, the city has little or no natural drainage and thus harbors disease. It has gained the unenviable and accurate nickname "Mud Hole of the Prairies."

City planners decided on an underground sewage system but the low-level ground meant lowering the Chicago River or raising the city. They chose the latter.

The waste water is already draining more efficiently but some engineers predict it will not be long before the Chicago River becomes an open sewer, threatening to pollute drinking water and be a general risk to health.



TOWERING OFFICES RISE FROM ASHES OF OLD CHICAGO

By our city editor

August 24, 1885

A 10-STORY building in Chicago is poised to become the world's first "skyscraper," and change the skyline of one of America's greatest cities for ever. Rising to an amazing height of 138 feet, the Home Insurance Building has an innovative structure that uses a metal skeleton frame from which are hung "curtain walls" of stone and brick.

Thus, the building weighs much less than if built using more traditional construction techniques. These would have required thicker walls at the base to support the weight of the building above.

The innovative design will allow buildings to be taller and slimmer than their predecessors, with more internal space and greater window areas for natural light.

The rebuilding of the new Chicago is now in full swing after the Great Fire destroyed almost all of the downtown area.

One journalist has observed that construction on such a scale is "a miracle of pleasing sensations and fascinating scenes" that makes him feel "ecstatic."

The Home Insurance Building is the work of Mr. William LeBaron Jenney who won a competition for plans for the site, resistance to fire being a key consideration in awarding the contract.

Mr. Jenney was educated in engineering and architecture at the prestigious École Centrale Paris, graduating a year after his fellow student M. Gustave Eiffel, who is planning a gigantic metal tower in the French capital. During the Civil War, Mr. Jenney designed numerous fortifications for the Union side.

The iron-and-steel skeleton of the Home Insurance Building is claimed to offer greater protection against fire, which will reassure workers in a city that is still recovering from the tragic inferno that devastated the downtown area in 1871.

