

**CODE  
RED**  
OCTOBER 8, 1871

# The Great Chicago Fire

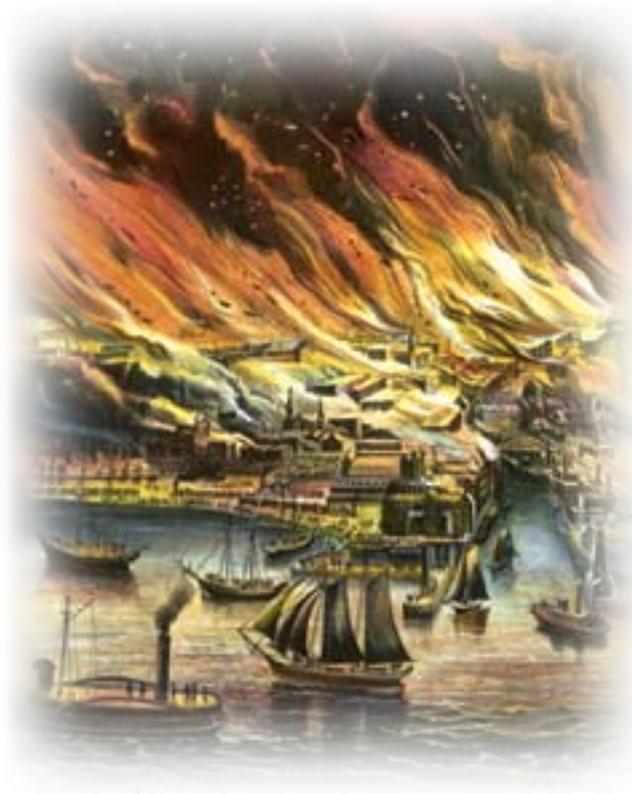


by Janet McHugh



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Historian, Chicago History Museum

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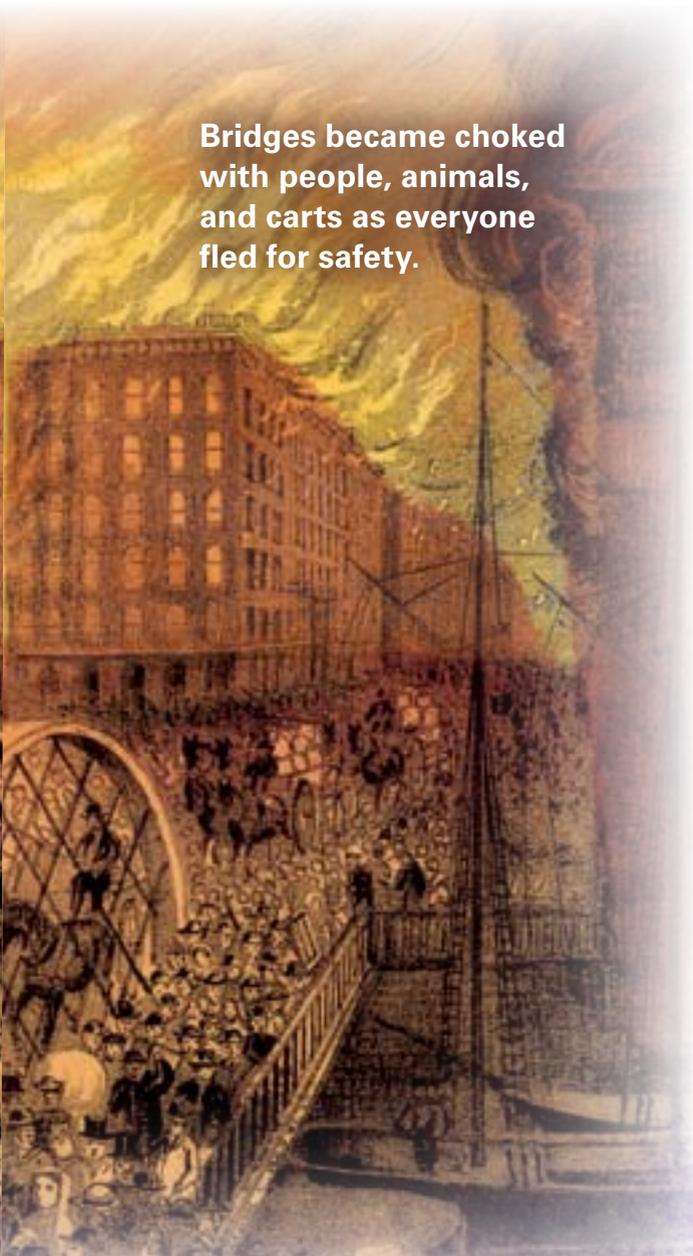
# A Night of Terror

It was Monday, October 9, 1871, in Chicago, Illinois. At 2:00 in the morning, Mary Fales woke suddenly. She heard carts and wagons rolling past her house. From the window, she saw a strange glow lighting up the night sky.

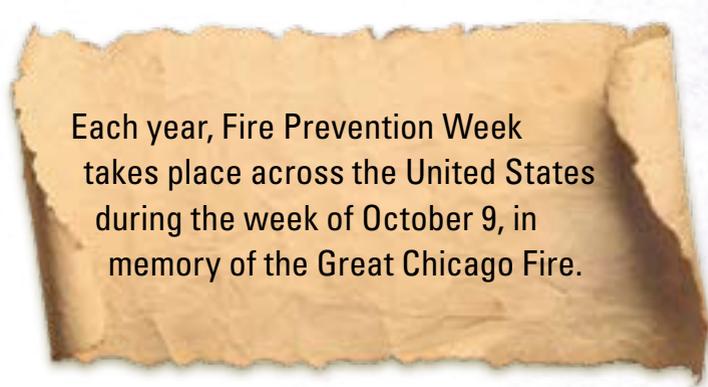


The evening before, Mary heard that a fire had started in another part of the city. She and her husband, David, went to bed thinking they would be safe. Now, however, wind was spreading the flames. Soon the fire would reach their neighborhood!

Terrified, Mary and David packed their belongings in a horse-drawn **buggy**. Climbing aboard, they joined the crowds trying to escape.



Bridges became choked with people, animals, and carts as everyone fled for safety.



Each year, Fire Prevention Week takes place across the United States during the week of October 9, in memory of the Great Chicago Fire.

“I had to use all my powers to keep going on. I was glad to go fast, for the fire behind us raged and the whole earth . . . was . . . yellowish red.”

—Mary Fales, in a letter she wrote to her mother

# Where Is the Fire Department?

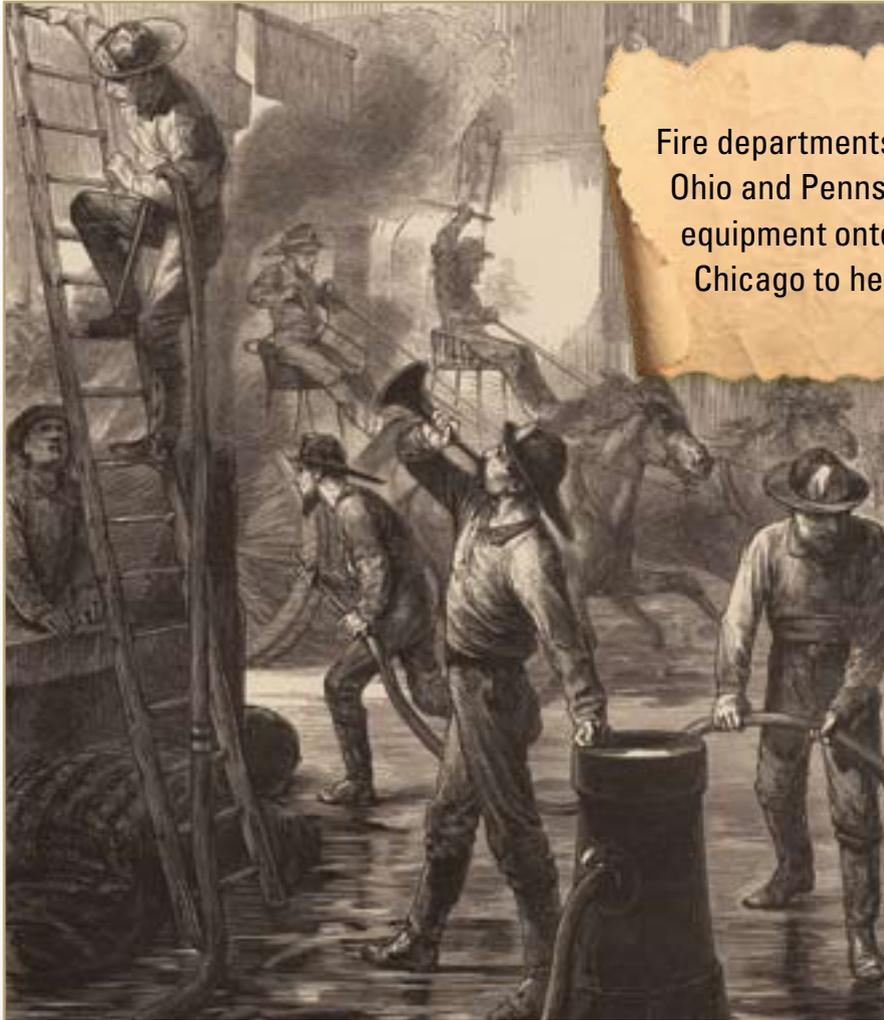
The Great Chicago Fire started around 9:00 on Sunday evening, October 8. It began in or near a barn on Chicago's southwest side.

A fire watchman tried to identify the fire's location. Unfortunately, he made a mistake. He sent firefighters to the wrong place. By the time they finally arrived at the barn, the flames had spread to many buildings.



**Pulled by its four horses, the *Little Giant* was one of the first fire engines to reach the fire. It soon lost its battle trying to put out the flames.**

The Chicago Fire Department had only 185 firefighters to protect the city. Many of the firefighters were exhausted. Half of them had just spent Saturday night through Sunday afternoon battling another big fire. Despite their efforts, they could not stop the new flames from spreading.



Fire departments from as far away as Ohio and Pennsylvania loaded their equipment onto trains and raced for Chicago to help battle the blaze.

**Firefighters bravely tried to stop the flames as the night wore on.**

**“CHICAGO IS IN FLAMES. SEND YOUR WHOLE DEPARTMENT TO HELP US.”**

—Roswell B. Mason, mayor of Chicago, in a telegram sent to the mayor of Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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## About the Author

Janet McHugh is a writer and editor who grew up in Chicago. Her grandfather was a captain in the Chicago Fire Department. Her granduncle was killed fighting a railroad fire on the site of what today is Chicago’s famed Millennium Park.





# The Great Chicago Fire

Mary Fales woke suddenly at 2:00 in the morning. A strange glow was lighting up the sky. The evening before, Mary heard that a fire had started in another part of Chicago. She went to bed, thinking she would be safe. Now the wind was spreading the flames.

For more than 24 hours the fire raged, destroying thousands of homes and businesses—and even leaping across the Chicago River. Everyone had to flee. Although 100,000 people were left homeless, the citizens of Chicago did not lose hope. They would return to take part in the amazing rebirth of their city. Chicago would rise again!

The *Challenger* Space Shuttle Explosion

Emergency at Three Mile Island

The *Exxon Valdez's* Deadly Oil Spill

**The Great Chicago Fire**

The *Hindenburg* Disaster

Nightmare on the *Titanic*

The Texas City Disaster

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

The 2001 World Trade Center Attack

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