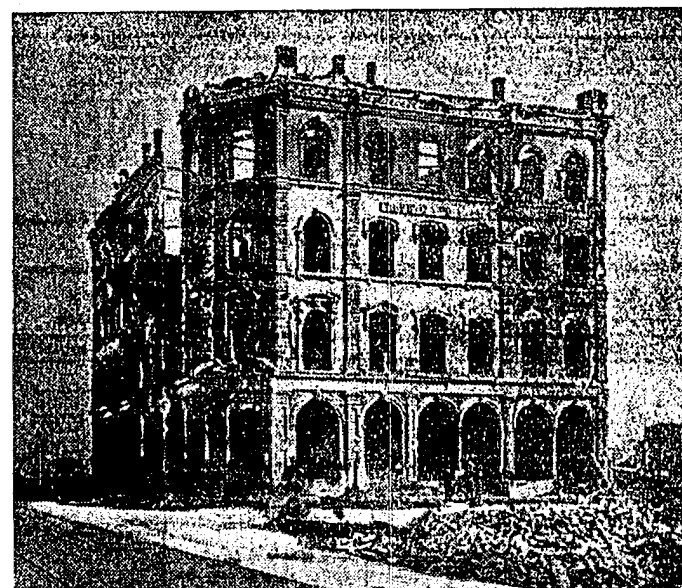


1871 Fire Threatened City; Left Ruins in Wake



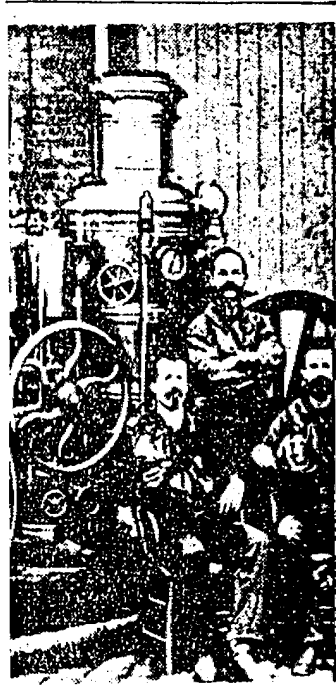
This scene of the great Chicago fire of 1871 appeared in the London Illustrated News for Nov. 11 of that year. It is the Illustrated News artist's conception of the fleeing of the terrified multitudes over the Randolph st. bridge.



The fire scarred building of The Chicago Tribune, only two years old, after the conflagration of 1871 had swept the city. The building then stood at Madison and Dearborn sts.

FIRE ENGULFS CITY, BUT TRIBUNE CALL RALLIES IT TO LIVE AGAIN!

Medill's Classic Account Tells the Terror of 1871 Disaster



Chicago firemen of the 1871 period beside their fire engine.

Oct. 9, 1871! Here is what Horace White, editor of THE TRIBUNE, saw as he trudged toward THE TRIBUNE office thru the darkness early that morning:

"Billows of fire were rolling over the business places of the city and swallowing up their contents. Walls were falling so fast that the quaking of the ground under our feet was scarcely noticed, so continuous was the reverberation. "Sober men and women were hurrying thru the streets, from the burning quarter, some with bundles of clothing on their shoulders, others dragging trunks along the sidewalks by means of strings and ropes fastened to the handles, children trudging by their sides or borne in their arms."

**Mounts His Horse**  
 White lived on Michigan av. south of the loop. William Bross, former lieutenant governor of Illinois and one of THE TRIBUNE proprietors, lived in the same district. He continues the story:

"I mounted my horse and rode south on State st. to see what progress the fire was making, and if it were moving eastward on Dearborn st. To my great surprise and horror, I found that its current had taken an easterly direction, nearly as far as State st., and that it was also advancing in a northerly direction with terrible swiftness and power.

"I knew at a glance that The Tribune building was doomed, and I rode back to the office and told them that nothing more could be done to save the building, McVicker's theater, or anything else in that vicinity."

**Tries to Find New Home**  
 Early the next morning, Bross was out trying to find a new home for THE TRIBUNE.

"On reaching Canal st., on my way to purchase the printing office I had heard of, I was informed that while Mr. White and I were saving our families and as much of our furniture as we could on Monday afternoon [Oct. 9], Mr. [Joseph] Medill, seeing that The Tribune office must inevitably be burned, sought for and purchased Edwards' job printing office, 15 Canal st., where he was then busy organizing things."

The banks of Chicago had burned with the rest of the city, and nobody would accept bank drafts, checks, or credit. Cash amounting to \$2,130,000 had burned up in the postoffice building alone. Bross had to borrow \$64 from friends to buy four heating stoves to set THE TRIBUNE up in business again.

**Medill's Notable Account**  
 The most dramatic eyewitness account of the fire was written by Joseph Medill himself. Medill at the time of the fire lived at Washington and Morgan sts., outside the fire belt. He was routed out of bed at 11 p. m. on Sunday night, Oct. 8, by his family, and rushed to THE TRIBUNE.

"I concluded that the danger point was on the roof," he wrote. "The air was like that of a furnace—fearfully hot. With the hot air, the stifling smoke, and a perfect storm of sparks and blazing fragments falling on THE TRIBUNE'S 'fireproof' roof, we had a trying time in our efforts to extinguish the incipient fires all about us. . . ."

"About 7 o'clock a pressman told me they had attempted to go to press, but the basement was so hot that the rollers had melted into a mass and nothing could be done with them; that there was so much smoke that the men could not live in the basement, and there was only water enough in the tank for a short run, the supply having been cut off by the burning of the water works. So the printing of any papers containing an account of the great fire had to be abandoned. . . ."

**Clothes Set Afire**  
 "Our faces were black. Our clothes had been on fire scores of times. Our hair and beards were singed. Our faces and hands were

scorched and blistered. Even our shoes were burned from stamping on the spots of fire on the hot roof. We were a frightful looking set of fellows."

**Leases Temporary Quarters**  
 Medill soon found and leased the temporary quarters on Canal st.

Almost miraculously, Medill got steam engines, presses, used type from Cincinnati and Milwaukee, workmen, and got a newspaper out.

"We missed only one day after the fire," he wrote. "We indeed began printing that day, and if the water hadn't given out would have issued a 14 column account of the fire about 8 o'clock that Monday morning."

**A Prophetic Voice**  
 THE TRIBUNE had been a great, prophetic voice, warning people of Chicago of the holocaust which lay before them. Exactly one month before flames left Chicago in ruins, on Sept. 10, 1871, it had said editorially that Chicago had "miles of firetraps, pleasing to the eye, looking substantial, but all sham and shingles."

"Chicago and the Great Conflagration," a book written by Elias Colbert and Everett Chamberlin and published less than two months after the Chicago fire, tells the story of what THE TRIBUNE accomplished:

"The Tribune building had not ceased to blaze, or rather to melt, for there was not much about it to make a blaze of, before Joseph Medill, one of its chief stockholders, since elected mayor of the city, had sought out a job office on Canal st.—a locality where nobody had dreamed there was anything of the sort—and bought it out, type, presses, and lease of three spacious floors; so that on the morrow the force of THE TRIBUNE was at work producing a broadside sheet for Wednesday morning."

The loss was unparalleled in history. About 300 people perished. A total of 2,100 acres was burned over, destroying 18,000 buildings, of which some 2,400 were the greatest and most valuable stores and factories in the city. More than 100,000 people were made homeless. The property loss amounted to \$300,000,000 or more. Of the 341 fire insurance companies which had to cover more than 88 million dollars worth of losses in the fire, one account says that 57 went bankrupt.

**A Famous Editorial**  
 In the face of this terrible disaster, Joseph Medill's editorial in the historic Oct. 11, 1871, edition of THE TRIBUNE was headed "Cheer Up!" Its first paragraph said:

"In the midst of a calamity without parallel in the world's history, looking upon the ashes of 30 years' accumulations, the people of this once beautiful city have resolved that CHICAGO SHALL RISE AGAIN!"

Exactly a year later, when THE TRIBUNE moved into its new, greater building erected on the foundations of the old, it heralded the fulfillment of that prophecy for all the world in a single word—"Behold!"

Area of Devastation of 1871 Chicago Fire

