

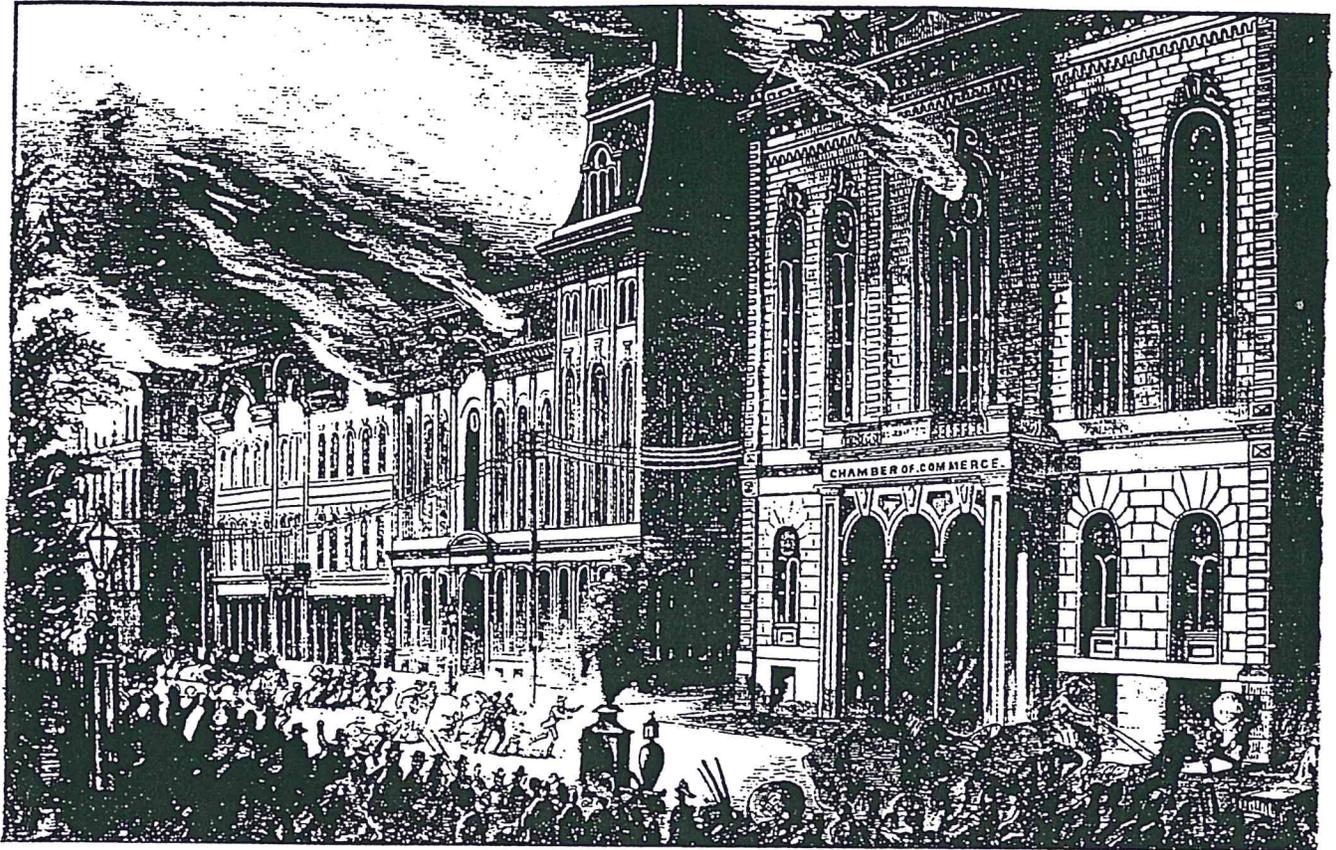
Fire! Fire! Fire!

Dennis Rogan went to bed early. He fell asleep quickly in the warm October air. Then suddenly he awoke. He heard shouting.

“Fire!” someone yelled.

Rogan jumped up and ran outside. The O’Learys’ barn was on fire. Rogan ran next door to the O’Learys’ house. He pounded on the door to warn them. Then he ran for safety. Later, he asked another neighbor how the fire started.

The neighbor said, “Mrs. O’Leary’s cow kicked over a **lantern**. It landed in the hay, and now everything is on fire!”



Bad Luck

No one knows if the cow really did knock over a lantern. But one thing is certain. At about 8:45 P.M. on October 8, 1871, fire broke out on the West Side of Chicago. The fire started in the O'Learys' barn. A nearby store owner spotted the fire. He rang a fire alarm. But the message never reached the fire station.

A lookout on the **courthouse** tower also spotted the flames. His alarm did reach the station. But he made a mistake. He thought the fire was coming from a different place. His alarm sent firefighters rushing in the wrong direction.

The bad luck didn't end there. When a fire truck finally arrived at the barn, it broke down. Firefighters could not fight the fire until they repaired the truck.

Lack of rain added to the problem. The summer of 1871 had been very dry. A **drought** had spread over the midwestern part of the U.S. Everything was dry and dusty and ready to burn. To make matters worse, the wind kicked up. A 25 mile-per-hour wind sent sparks flying from house to house.

The fire spread quickly. It ate through the wooden barn and leaped to other buildings. Homes and businesses went up in flames. Almost all of the buildings were made of wood. Sidewalks and fences were wooden, too. So there was nothing to slow the fire down. Thousands of people from the West Side had to leave their homes. They took what they could and ran for their lives.

A City Under Fire

By 9:30 P.M., several city blocks glowed red. The fire grew bigger and bigger with each passing minute. The blaze roared up the West Side. At 11:30 P.M., it leaped across the Chicago River. People on the North Side and South Side had thought they were safe. Suddenly, they too had to run for their lives.

Smoke filled the air. Huge tongues of flames dashed across the sky.

“There were moments I could see buildings melt,” one witness said.

Another said, “It was a sea of fire. The air was filled with burning **embers**. The wind blew **fiercely**. Thousands upon thousands of people rushed about, burned out of shelter and without food.”

Mrs. Aurelia King told how she ran from the fire. She said, “It was two o’clock in the morning when I **fled**. My little children were clinging to me. The air



was full of burning boards and shingles flying in every direction and falling everywhere around us. It seemed as if the whole world was running like ourselves.”

Fire in East

Finally, it began to rain. After 26 long hours, the firefighters were able to put out the fires. By that time, the city lay in ruins. Over 2,000 acres were destroyed. Property damage was \$196 million. Over 100,000 people lost their homes. And about 300 people lost their lives.

Those who lived began to rebuild the city. They brought in famous builders to put up beautiful new buildings. This time they learned from their past experience. The buildings were made with stone and brick. Soon Chicago was once again a busy, lively city.

Exploring Words

- Use the words in the box to complete the paragraphs. Reread the paragraphs to be sure they make sense.

lantern	courthouse	lack	drought	embers
fiercely	fled	shingles	ruins	acres

In 1871, a summer (1) _____ left Chicago dry and dusty. The (2) _____ of rain caused problems. On October 8, a fire began to burn (3) _____ on the West Side. No one knew how it started. Some people said a cow kicked a (4) _____ into the hay. A lookout on top of the (5) _____ reported the fire to firefighters. But firefighters couldn't stop the blaze.

As the fire spread, people (6) _____ from their homes. They saw (7) _____ from the fire flying through the air. They saw (8) _____ torn from rooftops flying in the wind. By the time the fire died, the city was in (9) _____. Over two thousand (10) _____ had been destroyed.

Do You Remember?

■ In the blank, write the letter of the best ending for each sentence.

- _____ 1. The fire leaped across
a. Lake Michigan. b. the Chicago River. c. Hudson Bay
- _____ 2. The summer of 1871 was very
a. dry. b. wet. c. short.
- _____ 3. The first fire truck to get to the fire
a. caught fire. b. broke down. c. had no water.
- _____ 4. The fire was spread by the
a. wind. b. river. c. horses.
- _____ 5. Most sidewalks, fences, and buildings were made of
a. wood. b. steel. c. bricks.

Critical Thinking – Drawing Conclusions

■ Finish each sentence by writing the best answer.

1. Dennis Rogan knocked on the O'Learys' door because _____

2. Firefighters rushed off in the wrong direction because _____

3. People ran out of their homes because _____
