

### **The Path of the Great Chicago Fire**

On the day of the fire the wind was blowing a perfect gale from the south-southwest. The city had been experiencing unusually dry conditions and several weeks of little heavy rains.

1. The Chicago fire started at 9:45 p.m. on Sunday, October 8, 1871 at De Koven and Jefferson streets.
2. The flames crossed over to Clinton Street, between Taylor and Cabrini streets.
3. The fire then started up the eastern side of Jefferson Street, which was shortly enveloped in the furnace. Clinton Street, Canal Street, Beach Street, and then the railroads which run along the western shore of the south branch of the Chicago River were in the fires grasp.
4. At 12:00 a.m. the fire swept thickly over the river, drifting upon house-tops and drying the wooden buildings along the southern terminus of Van Buren, Franklin, Adams, Monroe and Madison Streets. The gas works catches fire and explodes igniting the debris and oil in the Chicago River.

The course of the fire then separated into two branches.

#### ***The first branch:***

1. The fire started to spread to just south of Adams Street.
2. Faster than a man could walk, the flames leaped from house to house until fifth avenue (Wells Street) was reached.
3. Hardly twenty minutes had elapsed from the burning of the Pacific hotel before the fire had cut its hot swath through every one of the magnificent buildings intervening, upon La Salle Street. The "fireproof" courthouse (bounded by Clark, Randolph, Washington, and LaSalle) begins to burn.
4. The course of the fire was now directed almost due east for a few minutes; the whole of Washington Street to Dearborn was consumed. Crosby's Opera House, located on Washington between State and Dearborn, burns.
5. The St. James hotel was next fired, at the corner of State and Madison streets.
6. The fire continues to move up Franklin, Wells and La Salle streets to the main banks of the river, swallowing elevators, banks, trade palaces, the Briggs, Sherman, Tremont and other large hotels, Wood's museum, the beautiful structures of Lake and Randolph streets, and the entire surface comprised between Adams, Lake South Water, Washington and State streets.

#### ***The second branch:***

1. The fire moved east on Harrison Street
2. "Terrace Row," a palatial block of private residences on Michigan Avenue (south of Van Buren), extending northward from Harrison Street is threatened and eventually falls. Its destruction required two or three hours.
3. The fire then includes the two blocks bounded by Monroe, State, Jackson and Dearborn streets.
4. The Palmer house on Monroe and State Streets is the tallest building in the city, eight stories high, and it is consumed. The march of the fire from this point to the lake is uninterrupted.

***The two branches of the fire come together.***

1. About eighteen hours from the first discovery of the fire on De Koven Street, the last wall of "Terrace row" falls.
2. The fire is spreading to the North side of the city at the Galena elevator (Kinzie St. just north of the Chicago River), and from here the fire will spread North, East, and West rapidly.
3. The main branch of the fire is moving between State Street and Rush Street; the time when it first crossed over being about 20 minutes to 6 o'clock in the morning.
4. The corner of Rush and Illinois streets were now covered in flames. On the Northwest side, Old St. James Church is destroyed (its bell tower survives).
5. About this time, other portions of the north side adjoining the river catch fire, and soon all North Water street, which was occupied by wholesale stores and large wholesale markets, was in flames. The Galena depot, the Hough house on Wells street, and the Wheeler elevator, west of Wells street, will all burn down.
6. The north side bridges are rapidly burned. No bridges connecting the North to the South side of the city are left; bridges at Wells, Clark, State, and Rush streets are gone.
7. Between Kinzie Street and the river, all is burned. The Northwestern Company at Wells and Kinzie is burned.
8. The fire next burns the Revere house on the northeast corner of Kinzie and Clark Street. The fire advances North on Kinzie to Illinois Street.
9. The fire rapidly approaches Ohio and Clark streets.
10. The densely populated district to the west of La Salle Street, and between Chicago Avenue is burning and is wasted (the fire will completely destroy this neighborhood and will eventually continue as far as North Avenue, destroying all in its path). At about 2 or 3 a.m. the Water Works is burning. Only the stone water pump will survive the flames; the Church of Holy Name and Cathedral of St. Mary on Superior Street also burn. There was no stay to the rapid progress of the fire.
11. By 10 a.m. the devastation reaches Division Street, it's bounded by Larabee Street to the west.
12. It's reported that Chicagoans are using Lincoln Avenue to escape west as many of the other roads to that side of the city, and presumed safety, have been burned in the fire.
13. At about 6 p.m. on October 10<sup>th</sup> the fire is extinguished having stopped at Fullerton Avenue and Clark Street, a little over two-and-a-half miles north of the start of the fire.

Sources used: History of the great Chicago fire, October 8, 9, and 10, 1871 ...

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<http://greatchicagofire.org/great-chicago-fire>

<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/3710.html>