

# Spectacular Grandeur of a Great Conflagration an Inspiring Sight



WRECK OF THE NYE SCHNEIDER FOWLER ELEVATOR

RUINS AT THE MANEY COMPANY'S MILL

BURNING GRAIN AT THE NYE SCHNEIDER FOWLER ELEVATOR RUIN



WORKING AMID THE DEBRIS

WHAT WAS LEFT OF LONG TRAINS OF CARS

**A**FTER all, Mother Nature is unsurpassed and unsurpassable when it comes to arranging great spectacles. Conceive as man may with all the resources of stage craft, he can tender no such sight as the occasional cataclysm which affords the most elaborate scenic efforts known to the history of man, whether in ancient Coliseum or modern Hippodrome, are insignificant compared to the splendor of a first-class fire such as Omaha experienced a few days ago.

Had come modern Nero intent simply on causing a brilliant spectacle, deliberately originated this fire he could not have chosen a scene which would have afforded better results. The burning buildings sat in a deep valley flanked on either side by sheer hillsides, with a viaduct at one end, completing an amphitheater. Deep as the valley is, the height of the doomed buildings was such that the flames mounted much higher than the hillsides on which the thousands of spectators watched the fire.

There is no human being possessed of the sense of sight to whom a great fire is not fascinating, and proof of this, were it needed, could be found both in the numbers which the spectacle drew and the length of time they remained in the neighborhood of the fire. The trouble began at a late hour Sunday night, at a time when most citizens have gone to bed, and the scene of the fire was not the most easily accessible spot in the city. Neither of these conditions deterred many. Men, women and children came by trolley, by motor car and on foot, and most of those who came the first way returned, hours later, the last.

The crowds believed after the customary fashion of crowds and felt the same feelings. There was an occasional expression of regret at the vast losses which everyone knew were occurring, but sentiments of this sort—except in the minds of those particularly interested in a property—have little weight against the pleasure of viewing a scene of genuine brilliance. Practically speaking, most of the thousands who swarmed to the neighborhood experienced an emotion very near to joy. Walking home later to South Omaha or up Florence way, some change in emotional quality undoubtedly occurred.

Many crept too near the brink, for fire lines were an impossibility, even had there been policemen present in numbers sufficient to have established and maintained such boundaries. But though thoughtless people too near to get close to the ridge and risked their necks, no one toppled over and whole skulls were carried home by all.

Yet it was not a night of pleasure for all concerned, for besides the men whose property did burn to the ground, there were hundreds of others who stood expectant, anxious to get close to the ridge and witness the fire in person. The high wind carried the scintilla sparks a long distance. At a conservative estimate 300 or more small fires were started blocks away, all of which were put out as soon as begun. Householders spent a night of vigil on the roof tops, and for those there was anxiety instead of enjoyment of the illuminations. Many bucket brigades formed from Omaha ever before known, for garden hose was well high worthless anywhere in the vicinity of the fire.

No fire Omaha ever had sent sparks flying as far and in so great quantity. Millions of wheat grains, heated to incandescence, were blown in the strong wind which blew to the northwest, and in a shorter radius from the fire the suction out of the canon was powerful enough to carry fiery masses of wood. Residents of streets six and eight blocks from Twenty-eighth avenue were occasionally started to bed in fire dropped in front or back yard or on the roofs of their homes, clumps of wood burning as brightly as logs in a grate.

The grain sparks meantime flew as far as three miles from the fire and initiated hundreds of little blazes which would have developed into real fires but for the watchful care of home owners. Some few men and women, living not many blocks from the fire, slept through it all and next morning wondered that they had not been awakened by fire in their own homes. Some of these had mingled feelings of thankfulness that they had escaped having their homes on fire, and regret that

they had missed seeing a wonderful vision. The men and women who watched all night to protect the roofs, gave an unconventional sight, because many of them did not stop to dress themselves fully. In the early hours of the fire barefooted men could be seen mounted on house tops with buckets in hand.

As was to be expected the sparks fell in greatest quantity in the neighborhood of the fire, but even a mile away, in the direction of the wind, variable showers dropped at intervals and steadily decreasing quantities came down even as far as Cum- ing street.

Occasionally a spectator could be found who meditated reflectively on the utter waste caused by the flames. Here was property worth in the neighborhood of \$1,000,000 vanished completely, going into nothingness from the practical standpoint. Insurance would cover the losses in a way, but only in a way. Besides the uninsured and unmeasurable losses to the owners of the destroyed property with respect to interruption of business and future profits, there was a loss to the exact amount of everything the flames licked up. That which had been, so long as it was in existence, Human energies, beginning way

back when the seed of the burned up what was planted—or even before—had been completely nullified. There had been a cash return to the farmer, the railroad company which brought the grain hither had been reimbursed, but they, like all the crowd on the hillsides, were losers by the fire. Immediately, a considerable part of the burden devolved upon the insurance companies and on their stockholders. A step farther back and the loss in this fire, as in others, was common to society.

The gale of wind which fanned the flames blew financial profit to a few. Drivers of fly-by-night motor cars picked up many an extra dollar, and at midnight there was not one of these conveyances which had not been chartered. At Twenty-fourth and Vinton streets are two small restaurants which exist to serve street car men coming off runs. Hundreds of patrons were on hand for these restaurants that night and during the morning who have never before eaten in there and who may never again.

The street car company picked up a few extra nickels, or, more strictly speaking, dimes, for a number of extra cars were put on after regular hours to haul home latecomers. Human energies, beginning way

throughout the entire union. Greeley was made friends with in New York and Boston during her first visit to America. What she herself calls "one of the most important events of my stay" was the meeting with Longfellow on her first visit to Boston: "Although I was forwarder of his visit," she says, "I was quite overcome with emotion when his card was brought to my room. One look of his kind, deep-set eyes, and a warm handshake soon restored my mental equanimity, and put me at my ease. The presence of this trust great poet, this man, endowed with the finest qualities a man can possess, was a spiritual feast for me."

"He spoke to me of Boston and its celebrities, and acquainted me with the names of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, James T. Fields, Oelia Thaxter and others, chatted me about going up Bunker Hill monument and asked me how I compared the California weather with the beautiful climate of Massachusetts. He went on speaking in the manner of a perfect man of the world, and simply charmed me. Then, my son came in and we were both invited to luncheon at the poet's house in Cambridge.

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among much less known writers. A celebrity without conceit is a rare thing to behold; he did not seem to care much for "When I attempted to speak about his compliments, he interrupted me, and pointing to a handsome armchair standing in his study, drew my attention to it by remarking jokingly that the children liked his verses, because he had received that present from a school on the—here he paused, and added with a laugh—"centennial" anniversary of my literary activity."

"Then, as if regretting that he had spoken lightly of the gift, he grew suddenly serious, and stroking the back of the chair with his hand, he said almost tenderly: "I prize it highly."

**Judge Belford's Courage.**

Judge James P. Belford, formerly of the supreme court of Colorado, whose death occurred January 7, is mourned as the last of the "old guard" which has survived that state's earlier days. As a campaign orator, a judge and a statesman he was a remarkably brilliant and well informed man. That he was not wanting in courage is illustrated by the following anecdote told by Judge E. T. Welch, his colleague on the territorial supreme bench:

"He was a man of nerve, who would take a chance with his life in following out a course he believed to be right.

"I saw him sitting on the bench in a lawsuit at Georgetown with a double barrel shotgun across his knees. I forgot the title of the case now, but it was one involving large interests in a wealthy mine of the district. Both sides had engaged the services of noted gun men to make a demonstration in the town and later in his courtroom. Judge Belford had given a great deal of study and deliberation to the issues raised and he was satisfied of the soundness of his decision.

"It had got noised around that on that particular day he would read his decision, and the little courtroom was packed with partisans of the litigants. Belford took his place on the bench, adjusted the shotgun on his knees, unfolded his manuscript and began to read. His judgment was entered on the record, court adjourned and there was no bloodshed, but before he entered the room he did not know but that they would carry him out feet first."

**Work of salvage went on, beginning Monday.** Of the approximately 25,000 bushels of grain which were in the two elevators 15 per cent can be ultimately put on the market. No leaves of bread will ever be baked from it because its grade has been lowered far beyond the flour point. It will be subjected to cleaning process and after being ground up and sifted will be sold as stock feed. Ultimately this grain may again find its way to this vicinity in the form of beef steaks. Machinery is, of course, utterly ruined. Some of the twisted steel may be sold for junk, but that is all. Fans and conveyors must be replaced and all the other expensive apparatus used in the elevators.

With prospect of both elevators being replaced the fire means to some extent Omaha as a grain market. Plans for reconstruction were started even before the ruins ceased smoking and the pen of the draughtsman was busy tracing plans, while foremen yet worked on the destroyed buildings. These are not the only men for whom the fire has meant extra work. Section hands have been busy pulling ruined steel rails from the ties and telephone and telegraphic lines have been active putting into order a badly tangled mass of wires and conductors. For several days after the fire there was work day and night for the men who use climbers.

Instead of extra hours for the elevator hands the fire means to some extent jobs for a time. However the fire started, whether by crossed wires or by unknown and undetectable carelessness or by that rather meaningless phrase, "spontaneous combustion," the fire means for these separation for days and, perhaps months from the weekly payroll. Temporary work in a salvage way has been found for some of the mill and elevator employes, but this cannot last long at least. Some are already at work in other grain plants, but not all can thus relocate themselves.

Had as the fire was—it is the biggest Omaha had ever known—it does not even approach in extent of damage what conflagrations have done in sister cities in recent years. Not to refer to the awful havoc in 1906 at San Francisco, there is the great Baltimore fire of a year previous to that, and there have been lumber yard fires in Mississippi river towns, the total loss of which is considerably in advance of the amount here. Locally the fire of April 1 has not been surpassed in a spectacular, not even by the burning of the Carter Lead Works some years ago. There were highly inflammable chemicals in that and these burned wildly enough. Nevertheless, the quantity of flame visible was less in amount than when the grain was consumed.

Guesses at the size of the crowd which gathered at the scene run from 10,000 to 20,000. Nothing but guesses are possible, for the people were spread over too great a territory for any estimator to see them all at once, and the spectators were rarely still, but constantly on the move.

How many thousands more saw the light in the heavens would be even more difficult to guess. The brilliantly lighted sky was visible for miles and miles from the city of South Omaha. Far out in the country, people gazed at the brilliant skies and wondered whether it was a fire or if the comet had come ahead of time.

## Sunny Episodes in the Lives of Prominent Men

**Henry Waterson.**

**T**HE last of the great editors, ranking with Bryant and Greeley, Raymond and Dana, Prentice and Medill, Forsythe and Ritchie, was three score years and ten last month, relates the Wisconsin Post. His genius was precocious, and in his middle teens his contributions to the press commanded universal attention and extorted universal admiration. When he had scarce fulfilled his third lustrium he was capable of instructing grave senators upon the philosophies of the Whit provisos and other political issues.

A Douglas democrat in 1860, the following year Henry Waterson was a southern soldier, with printers' ink on his fingers, which he employed to make the charmingest and brilliantest military gazette ever issued—the Chattanooga Rebel, each number of which was a treatise on the art of war that would have astonished Jomini and did amaze Bragg. The plans were perfect; unfortunately home but a Hannibal of a Napoleon, perhaps none but a Joshua could have carried them to successful execution.

He was 31. Waterson was the most brilliant political writer connected with the American press, and since 1863 his name has been a household word, not only in Kentucky and at the south, but

throughout the entire union. Greeley was made friends with in New York and Boston during her first visit to America. What she herself calls "one of the most important events of my stay" was the meeting with Longfellow on her first visit to Boston: "Although I was forwarder of his visit," she says, "I was quite overcome with emotion when his card was brought to my room. One look of his kind, deep-set eyes, and a warm handshake soon restored my mental equanimity, and put me at my ease. The presence of this trust great poet, this man, endowed with the finest qualities a man can possess, was a spiritual feast for me."

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ELLIS LEWIS GARRETSON. ILLUSTRIOUS POTENTATE OF AZIFI



AZIFI'S ALL SHRINERS BAND OF TACOMA