

## Progress of the Chicago Fire of 1871



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## Fire Limits in Chicago in the 1870s



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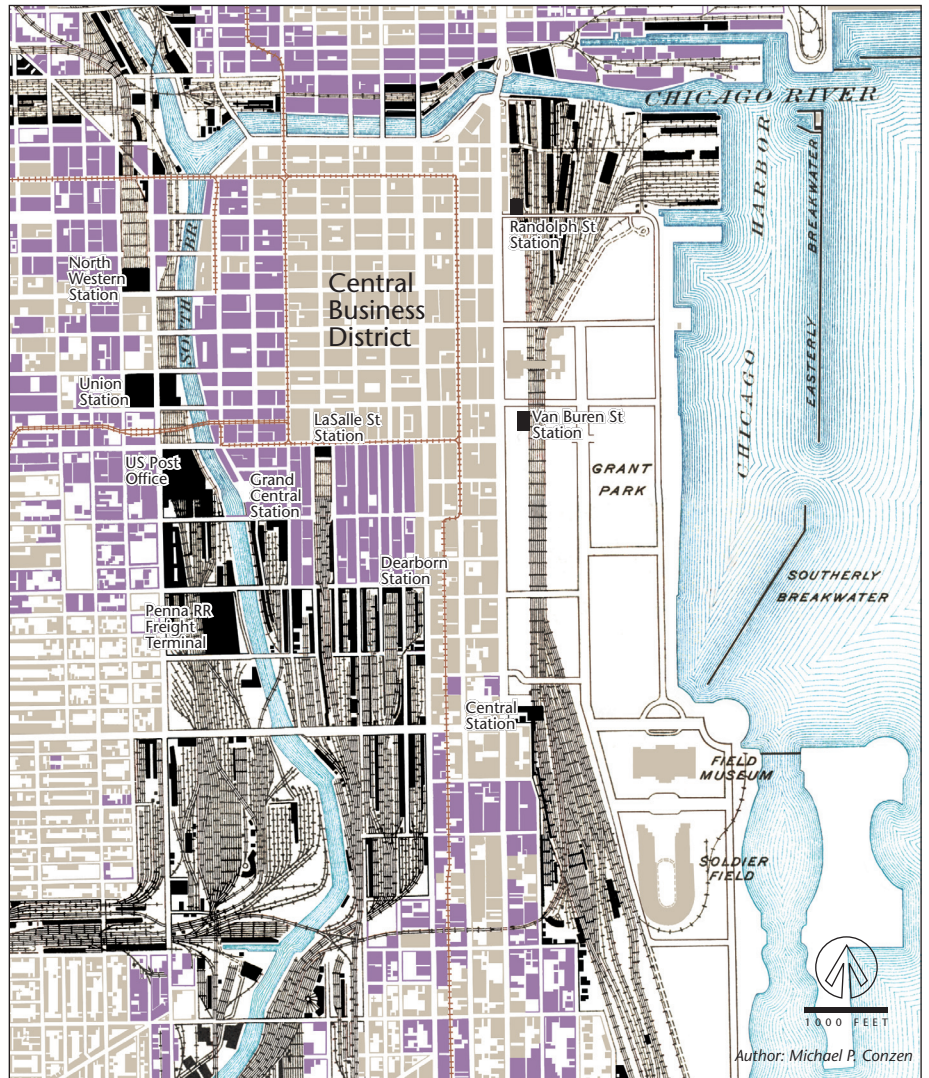
The Great Chicago Fire was not one fire, but a succession of nine separate fires started by flying brands carried from earlier burning sites, which then melded into one relentless inferno. It all started in the O'Leary barn on a rear alley of DeKoven Street on the Near West Side at 8:30 p.m. on October 8, 1871. Amid firefighting difficulties and official confusion, the fire spread north and eastward. Ninety minutes later a burning brand, caught in the updraft, sailed over and landed on Bateham's Mills to the north, starting a second fire. Brands from there started other fires across the river near and in the business district, and by 2:30 a.m. a flying brand started a fire on property north of the river. Given the prevailing winds, the coalescing fires burned most of the western portion of the city center and a swath of the North Side heading north-northeast to the lakefront by 6:00 a.m. the following day. By then it was unstoppable. Over the next 22 hours the fire finished off the business district, the lakefront harbor, and a large wedge of the North Side as far as Fullerton, by which time rain helped the fire burn itself out.



### Fire Limits in Chicago in the 1870s

The Chicago Fire of 1871 burned less than a quarter of the built-up area of the city. It destroyed the business district, residential blocks immediately to the south and southwest, and a good portion of the North Side east of the North Branch of the river, but missed virtually the whole South Side and most of the vast West Side. In 1872, "fire limits" were established within which new construction was to be of brick or stone. The limits were drawn, however, so that much of the North Side could again be built up with wooden structures, a concession to the meager resources of many residents. Notwithstanding the new regulations, many replacement buildings across the city continued to be built of wood, making the fire limits a hollow act of city governance.

### Railroads and Chicago's Loop, circa 1930



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■ Railroad Facilities ■ Warehouses ■ Other Buildings

### Railroads and Chicago's Loop, circa 1930

As the nation's single most important transportation hub, and as the key commercial pivot between the East and the great West, Chicago developed an extraordinary concentration of railroad terminals and related warehousing districts around its central business core. This map captures the pattern in 1930, when a great deal of urban manufacturing shared space with warehouse quarters (purple) adjacent to the railroad stations, yards, and river-front and lakeside docks and elevators (black). The combination of these facilities created a complete collar five to eight blocks deep encircling the business district (dense brown), except on the eastern flank where Grant Park (white) was laid out between the Illinois Central tracks and Chicago Harbor.