The Burning Of Chicago Essay, Research Paper

The legend goes, The cow kicked over a lantern, the lantern set fire to the shed, and the shed set fire to the rest of Chicago. Although, Mrs. Patrick O`Leary swore under oath that she never took a lantern to the shed on the night of Sunday, October 8, 1871, many witnesses verified the ramshackle building on the West Side as the starting point of the fire. In Chicago, it had been a very dry autumn. Furthermore, nearly all the 300,000 people of the city lived in wooden houses. The fire department was aware of the danger as there had been a tremendous three-alarm fire on the West Side one-day prior. A constant wind, blowing from the southwest, fanned the flames roaring through the wooden structures of the city. By the time fire companies arrived the fire was beyond their control. Approximately 18,000 buildings in the heart of the city; burned to cinders. Many people got away unharmed. Only an estimated three hundred perished. Citizens hurried into nearby parks, and out to the edge of the city. Thousands of people fled to the safe haven of the beaches and shores along the edge of Lake Michigan. By Monday newspapers from all over were reporting the caustic disaster. Many artists began illustrating the devastating effect of the fire. Alfred R. Waud and Ralph Keeler, boarded a train for Chicago to cover the story for Every Saturday. They arrived while the flame was still ablaze in some parts of the city. By midnight October 8 most of the city was engulfed in flames causing the sky above the city to dance with burning brands and hot coals stretching for hundreds of yards. The steady wind blew the amber colored coals to buildings still far from the swath devastated by the advancing front of the fire. A fireman’s account examines the condition of the city, “You couldn’t see anything over you by fire No clouds, no stars, nothing else but fire.” As the city grew aware of the circumstances they began fleeing the town, heading toward the outskirts, frantic parents herded their children before them. Anything with wheels was loaded up with possessions and taken out of the city. There were many collisions among carriage drivers. Many abandoned goods were left on the streets of the city to be picked up by the fleeing poor. The prisoners were released and stores began giving items away for free as the city burned. Sunday, a week after the start of the fire, people began to arrive back in the city. Despite the circumstances the people appeared clean. The relief committees finally found places for people to stay, whom had lost their homes in the fire. Even though the churches were burnt and gone, everyone found a place to worship. Waud collected sketches of the city a week after its burning. As Waud and Keeler hurried through the destroyed city to catch a train, a soldier stopped them. After an explanation they were allowed to board the train. General Philip H. Sheridan imposed temporary law, but fell victim to his own law as he was mistaken for a robber. People of Chicago commented that the soldiers caused more harm than good. Waud before returning to St. Louis made a full sketch of the city, which was later turned into an engraving. Keeler stated that there weren’t enough ruins to make an accurate sketch. Many important buildings were lost. Headlines in the Chicago Tribune read; ‘Chicago shall rise again!’. The western mentality of hard work made it possible to rebuild the city. One year later Waud returned to Chicago on an assignment to make new sketches of the city, found pleasure in illustrating pictures with all new buildings. Most of the city was rebuilt.