

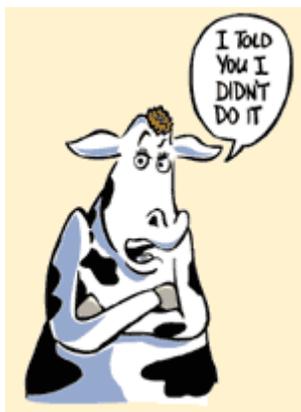
Fire Prevention History

Fire Prevention Week marks the anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire of October 8-9, 1871. The blaze killed more than 300 people, left 100,000 homeless, destroyed more than 17,400 structures and burned more than 2,000 acres. The fire began on October 8, but continued into and did most of its damage on October 9, 1871.

Intending to observe the fire's anniversary with a more serious commemoration, the Fire Marshals Association of North America (FMANA), the oldest membership section of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), decided that the 40th anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire should be observed not with festivities, but in a way that would keep the public informed about the importance of fire prevention. In 1925 President Calvin Coolidge proclaimed the first National Fire Prevention Week. Fire Prevention Week is always the Sunday to Saturday period containing the October 9th anniversary of the Chicago Fire.

The first records of a Fire Prevention event being held by the Excelsior Fire Department dates back to October of 1935. The firefighters have held a fire prevention event every year since. An interesting tid bit of history from the 1940 Fire Prevention Conference held by the Excelsior Volunteer Fire Department is that Lake Minnetonka resident and Minneapolis firefighter, R. H. McLaughlin exhibited a house hold fire alarm that he developed. Though it was called a fire alarm at the time, we now know is as home fire detector.

The **Excelsior Fire District** has maintained the fire prevention tradition by expanding and improving their Fire Prevention Education Program and their Fire Prevention Open House. Every year more schools, businesses, and civic groups make request for fire prevention education from the **Excelsior Fire District**. The Excelsior Firefighters are in the eighth decade of providing preventative education and hosting safety events. The Fire Prevention Open House has expanded significantly in the last decade and has recently been changed to the **Excelsior Fire District Fire Prevention Open House and Safety Fair**. Though the focus is still on fire prevention the importance of life safety in general has become the theme of the open house.



So did Mrs. O'Leary and her cow cause the fire, or is this merely a nineteenth-century urban legend? The origin of the fire has generated speculation since its occurrence, with fact and fiction becoming blurred over the years. One popular legend has it that Mrs. O'Leary was milking her cow when the animal kicked over a lantern, setting the O'Leary barn on fire and starting the spectacular blaze. People have been blaming the Great Chicago Fire on the cow and Mrs. O'Leary, for more than 130 years.

Through police and fire commissioner's inquiries and historical research it has been concluded that the great fire almost certainly started near the barn where Mrs. O'Leary kept her five milking cows. Many people and organized investigative teams have agreed on the origin of the great fire. The conflict lies in the cause of the blaze. Other than

the alleged jumpy cow there are other theories. One popular theory is that two guests of the O'Leary's, one of them known as Daniel "Peg Leg" Sullivan were visiting the couple on the night of October 8th. The speculation surrounding Daniel Sullivan and the cause of the fire ranges from him being a witness to the fire to him causing the fire. Even though he testified before the inquiry board in November of 1871 and there are witness accounts of his whereabouts he still has earned urban legend status almost as popular as the 'Moo myth'.

Other theories have been that sparks carried on the wind from a chimney started the blaze; careless smokers flicking their cigarettes or pipe tobacco are to blame. Some people have speculated that a fiery meteorite may have fallen to earth on October 8, starting several fires that day - in Michigan and Wisconsin, as well as in Chicago.

While the Great Chicago Fire was the best-known blaze to start during this fiery two-day stretch, it wasn't the biggest. That distinction goes to the Peshtigo Fire, the most devastating forest fire in American history. The fire, which also occurred on October 8th, 1871, and roared through Northeast Wisconsin, burning down 16 towns, killing 1,152 people, and scorching 1.2 million acres before it ended.