

The Quarterly



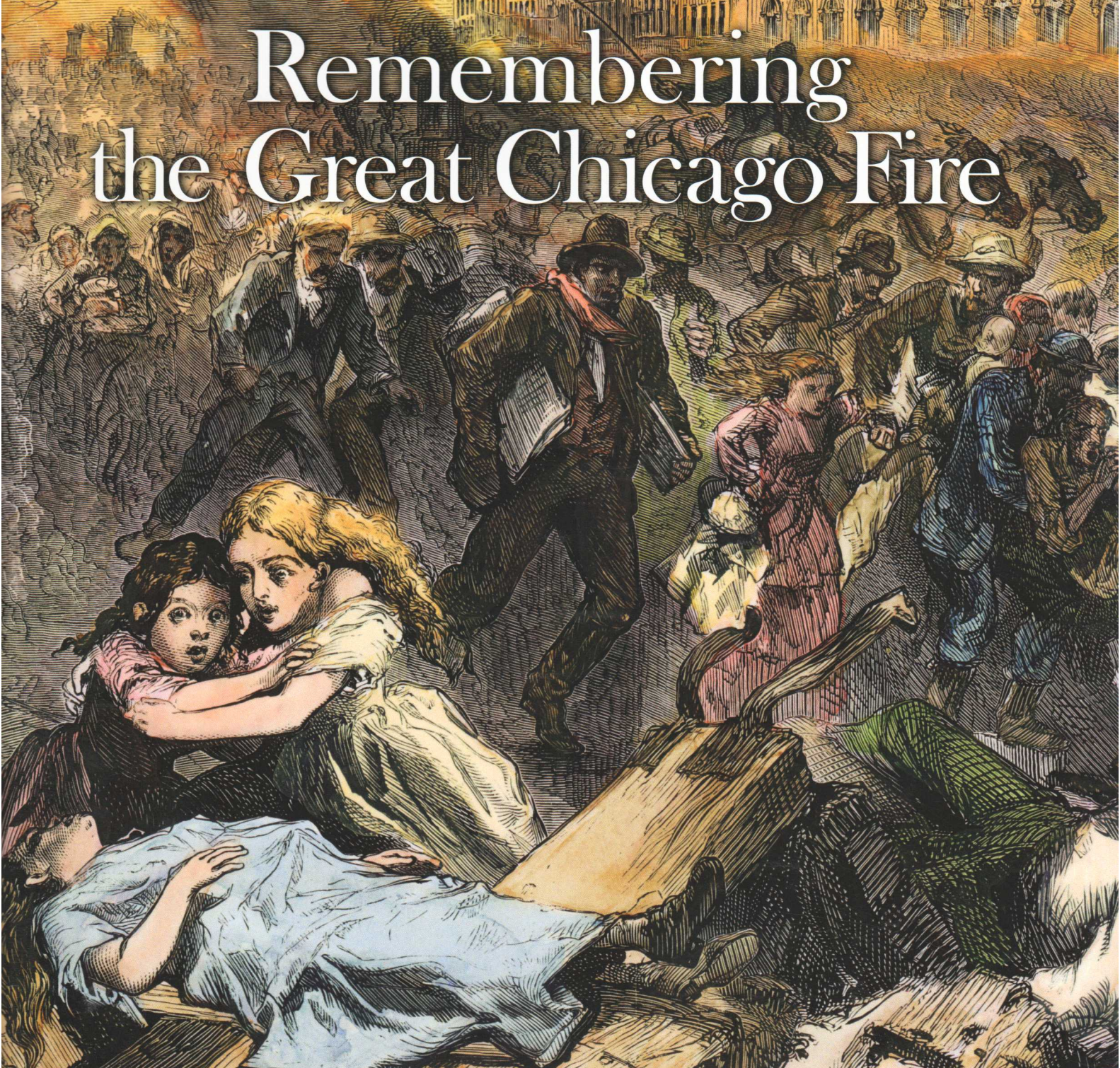
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Remembering the Great Chicago Fire



THE GREAT CHICAGO FIRE



Think All the Records Were Destroyed? Think Again. by Tony Burroughs, FUGA

For years, everyone I have asked, from clerks to genealogists to librarians to archivists, has told me: "We only have records from after 1871 because all the records burned in the fire." After extensive research I learned that wasn't true. There are many records that survived the fire.

There are several reasons that records survived the Great Chicago Fire. One was that all Chicago records were not stored in Chicago at the time of the fire. This is readily evident when thinking about federal records, primarily stored in Washington, DC, and state records, primarily stored in Springfield.

A second reason pre-fire records exist is that after the fire hit, clerks rushed to save them and carried them outside the city. During the fire, title companies rushed their records to safety outside the burned area.

A third reason was that individuals who held Chicago records in their possession fled the city and those records were later re-filed in the Cook County courthouse. After the fire, the Burned Records Act was passed, allowing landowners to bring in all types of evidence to prove they owned land and property before the fire. These property owners re-recorded their land deeds after the fire.

Tony Burroughs, author of "Black Roots," has appeared on several national and international television programs. He is a former vice-president of ISGS and a Lowell Volkel Medal recipient.

Another reason records exist is that libraries around the country that had Chicago newspapers shipped copies to Chicago.

One of the reasons most researchers did not know pre-fire records existed is because the huge volume of records created due to the large population of Chicago required many records to be stored in offsite warehouses. These records were not catalogued until the Illinois Regional Archives Depository opened at Northeastern Illinois University in 1991.

Following is a guide to pre-fire genealogical resources.

BIOGRAPHIES

Andreas, A.T. *History of Chicago from the earliest period to the present time*, (Chicago: A.T. Andreas Pub. Co., 1884–1886); three volumes. Volume 1: Earliest to 1857, bit.ly/3BHL2FY; Volume 2: 1857–1871, bit.ly/3i81Uhk; Volume 3: 1871–1885, bit.ly/3l1x2kE

Poles of Chicago, 1837–1937: A history of one century of Polish contribution to the city of Chicago, Illinois, (Chicago: Polish Pageant, 1937); archive.org/details/polesofchicago1800zgle

Biographical sketches of the leading men of Chicago, Wilson & St. Clair, 1868, (Tucson, Arizona: W.C. Cox, 1974). bit.ly/3y83VzL

Biographical sketches of some of the early settlers of the city of Chicago, (Chicago: Fergus Printing Co., 1876); two volumes. bit.ly/3y7GjLA

The Bench and bar of Chicago: biographical sketches,

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(Tucson, Arizona: W.C. Cox, 1974). bit.ly/3j7AUht

BUSINESS RECORDS

Blietz, Ruth Gilke, *Ledger book of Dr. Theodore Hoffman, 1864–1868*. Hoffman was an obstetrician. The book includes names, addresses, nationalities, occupations, relationships to others, and dates of obstetrical consultations. Chicago History Museum and FHL 1307594 on FamilySearch.org

Warner, Edward S., *Crew members who served aboard commercial sailing vessels on the Great Lakes, 1838 through 1925: the names of masters, first and second mates, cooks and stewards, seamen and cabin boys appearing in available first and near-first records*. (Lansing, Michigan: Great Lakes Visual/Research, Inc., 1992).

CEMETERY RECORDS

Chicago City Cemetery. The cemetery was on Green Bay Road (now Clark Street) at North Avenue; much of where it stood is now the southern part of Lincoln Park. City Cemetery was founded in 1843. In 1850, twelve acres of the adjacent estate of Jacob Milleman were purchased and added to the cemetery. Helen Sclair, "The Cemetery Lady," discovered and transcribed the records.

- Original records
- Sexton certificates
- Sexton reports of interments.
- Transcriptions

These records are in the Chicago City Council Proceedings collection in the Illinois Regional Archives Depository at Northeastern Illinois University.

Chicago Genealogical Society. *Chicago cemetery records, 1847–1863: sexton's reports and certificates, treasurer receipts, deeds, and undertakers' reports*, (Evansville, Indiana: Evansville Bindery, Inc., 2008).

CENSUS RECORDS

US Census Records: 1840, 1850, 1860, and 1870, Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, and the National Archives and Records Administration

Mortality Schedules: 1850, 1860, and 1870, Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, and NARA

Illinois State Census (head of household only):

Cook County 1865 and Cook County 1855, Ancestry.com

CHICAGO CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

These are at the Illinois Regional Archives Depository System, Ronald Williams Library, Northeastern Illinois University, 5500 N. Saint Louis Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60625; phone 773-442-4506. Many of the original files in the collection remain un-indexed. Guides to the collection follow:

Bailey, Robert E. and Elaine Shemoney Evans. *Early Chicago, 1833–1871: A Selection of City Council Proceedings Files From the Illinois State Archives*, (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Archives, Office of the Secretary of State, 1999).

Chicago City Council Proceedings Files, 1866–1871: An Index, (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Archives, Office of the Secretary of State, 1987). Ninety-three microfiche cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/databases/chicago_proceedings/home.html

Bailey, Robert E.; Elaine Shemoney Evans, associate editor; Ruth Hutchcraft, assistant editor; Daniel Cantrall, compiler; Martha Woods, compiler. *Chicago City Council Proceedings Files, 1866–1871: An Inventory*, (Springfield: Illinois State Archives, 1987).

CHURCH RECORDS

To find names and locations of churches:

O'Hara, Margaret. *Finding Your Chicago Ancestor*, (Chicago: M. O'Hara, 1982). Includes a map of Catholic parishes in 1872 and lists foreign language churches, several from before the fire.

Also, search names of churches at FamilySearch.org Most give names of child and parents, sponsors, minister or priest, and date of birth

CHICAGO CITY DIRECTORIES & BUSINESS DIRECTORIES

Chicago City Directories are one of the best sources for pre-fire names of everyday people. Five sources:

1839–1871 Internet Archive, bit.ly/3i9n2nA

1839–1871 *Fold3*, fold3.com

1839–1871 The Newberry Library, Chicago History Museum, Harold Washington Library, and the Library of Congress.

1866 and 1870 ChicagoAncestors.org (a project of the Newberry Library), chicagoancestors.org/#tab-tools Ancestry.com

COURT RECORDS

Finkelman, Paul. *Fugitive Slaves and American Courts: The Pamphlet Literature*, (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1988).

Federal Court records: These are at the National Archives at Chicago, 7358 South Pulaski Road, Chicago, Illinois 60629, phone 773-948-9001.

US Circuit Court:

Law Records, 1869–1911

Law and Equity Records, 1837–1911.

US District Court:

Bankruptcy Records—Act of 1867, 1867–1889

Appearance and Judgment Dockets, 1819–1880.

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POLICE RECORDS

Chicago Police records, 1857–1861: Newberry Library General Collection—Microforms—2nd floor Microfiche 2076 (includes arrests, charges, magistrates, complainants, etc.)

Chicago Police Department Homicide Record Index, 1870–1930: apps.ilsos.gov/isairad/chicagohomicidesrch.jsp

Bridewell reports (city jail): These include name of convict, offense, (most are for being drunk or disorderly), days committed, days served, number of times committed, date committed, date discharged, fine assessed and remarks.

These reports are in the Chicago City Council Proceedings records in the IRAD at Northeastern Illinois University.

FAMILY PAPERS

Chicago Old Settlers Club Record Books (1904–1918). This African-American organization started in 1904, but founding members came to Chicago in the 1830s and 1840s. The records list years in Chicago, when the settlers came to Chicago, when they joined the club, and addresses; some include member's dates and places of birth and death. The books are held by the Chicago History Museum

"Explore Chicago Collections" includes eighty-five archival family collections that mention the Chicago Fire. bit.ly/3iQyZxv

Chicago Genealogical Society Pioneers: these records document ancestors who settled in Chicago or Cook County from 1833 to 1871. ChicagoAncestors.org at the Newberry Library, bit.ly/3rHkIXR

FUNERAL HOME RECORDS

C.H. Jordan & Company funeral home records [manuscript], 1866–1924, Chicago History Museum.

NEWSPAPERS

Chicago Tribune, founded in 1847. Online at the Chicago Public Library, Newspapers.com, and Proquest.

Chicago History Museum: Thirty-two Chicago newspapers before the fire 1833–1896.

MAPS

Land ownership maps—1853

Newberry Library map catalog and Chicago History Museum

Ten land ownership maps at the Newberry, three with names in the city.

The Newberry Library. *Checklist of Chicago Regional Maps at the Newberry Library: Including Maps of the City,*

Cook County, and the Collar Counties of DuPage, Kane, Lake, Mc Henry and Will, (Chicago, March 2005).

MILITARY RECORDS

Andreas, A.T., *History of Chicago, from the earliest period to the present time, Volume 1.* Histories and lists of soldiers, pp. 264–286, including:

- Fort Dearborn Winnebago War
- Cook County Militia—Black Hawk War;
- Independent Military Companies before 1847
- Chicago in the Mexican War
- Local Military Companies 1848–1860

Illinois State Archives collections:

Black Hawk War in 1832
Illinois Black Hawk War Veterans
cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/databases/blkhawk.html

Mexican-American War 1846–48
Illinois Mexican War Veterans
cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/databases/mexwar.html

Civil War 1861–1865
Illinois Civil War Rosters from the Adjutant General's Report
civilwar.illinoisgenweb.org/reg_html/index.html

Illinois Military Census, 1861–1862
Arranged by county, of able-bodied male citizens between the ages of 18 and 45. Includes Adams, Cook, Jo Daviess, and Lake counties. Illinois State Archives and FamilySearch.org

Kimball, Charles B. *History of Battery A, First Illinois Light Artillery Volunteers*, (Chicago: Cushing Printing Co., 1899). archive.org/details/historyofbatt00kimball

Company B, 29th United States Colored Troops from Chicago. civilwar.illinoisgenweb.org/r155/29usc-b-in.html

Compiled Military Service Records, Fold3.com

Civil War Navy
Illinois Civil War Veterans Serving in the US Navy.
cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/databases/ilnavy.html

Index to Civil War Pension application files. Ancestry.com

Regular Army—(these are career soldiers, not volunteers)
United States Registers of Enlistments in the US Army, 1798–1914.
familysearch.org/search/collection/1880762

Register of Confederate soldiers who died in Camp Douglas, 1862–65 and lie buried in Oakwoods Cemetery.
archive.org/details/registerofconfed00unit/page/n5/mode/2up?view=theater

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LAND RECORDS

After the fire, the Burned Records Act was passed, allowing land owners to bring in all types of evidence to prove they owned land before the fire. During the fire, three title insurance companies rushed their records to safety. The companies combined and merged to eventually form Chicago Title and Trust Company, which therefore has the best land records from before the fire. These records have been microfilmed and are available at *FamilySearch.org* Cook County Circuit Court, *Burned record series books, 1871–1932*.

Public domain sales land tract record listing Cook County computer printout. Illinois State Archives/South Suburban Genealogical and Historical Society, 1982.

Computer printout of title abstracts for the first land purchases in Cook County, 1805–1885. Includes name of first owner, residence at time of purchase, date, price, legal description, and volume/page for the original recorded deed at the Illinois State Archives. Computer printout at the South Suburban Genealogical and Historical Society and in the Chicago City-Wide Collection at Harold Washington Library, Special Collections.

Boyd, Gregory A., *Family Maps of Cook County*, (Norman, Oklahoma: Arphax Publishing Co., 2010).

Lists more than 6,880 parcels of land from 1810–1870 with owner's names.

PROBATE RECORDS

McClure, Diane Kotil and Loretto Dennis Szucs, *Probate Court Records: Cook County, Illinois Docket Book A, 1871–1872*, (105 4th Avenue, St. Petersburg, Florida: Diane McClure, 1994). Several records from before the fire, from reconstructed records

SCHOOL RECORDS

Teacher's Reports 1837–1877 lists of pupils, grade levels and ages

Chicago City Council Proceedings, IRAD, Northeastern Illinois University

SHIP RECORDS

Many seamen in Chicago worked on the Great Lakes before 1871. Scores of vessels left Chicago and delivered cargo at ports around the lakes.

Records in newspapers, Milwaukee Public Library; Bowling Green State University, Tennessee; and US Navy.

TAX RECORDS

Tax Collectors Report, 1843; lists people and amount collected. Also records for people asking for tax refund or reductions. Chicago City Council Proceedings, IRAD, Northeastern Illinois University.

Daughters of the American Revolution. *Illinois Family*

Records. Salt Lake, 1972 "Taxpayers in Townships 37, 38, 39 North range 12 East and Bridgeport, Cook County, Illinois, 1848, taken from the assessor field note book." pp. 295–305. FHL 907988

VITAL RECORDS

Deaths

Lists of Missing, Lost, Found & Dead from Chicago Fire in *Chicago Tribune*: Oct 11–20, 1871. web.archive.org/web/20030209195700/http://users.anet.com/~flannery/fire.html

Sam Fink Death Index; same reel as his marriage index *Sam Fink's Index to Marriages Mentioned in Chicago Newspapers, 1833–1871*; FHL Film 1321939 and IRAD at Northeastern Illinois University

Births

Chicago births October 1–8, days before the fire; fewer than thirty records; no names of babies but parent's names; also father's occupation, and physician or midwife. *FamilySearch.org* FHL 1287720; index. familysearch.org/search/collection/1463129

Delayed Birth Records

Title says 1871 but some people who were born before the fire applied for delayed birth certificates

Chicago delayed birth indexes, 1871–1948 bit.ly/3fbXP9X

Marriages

Sam Fink's Index to Marriages Mentioned in Chicago Newspapers, 1833–1871

Abstracted from ten different newspapers; FHL 1321939 and IRAD at Northeastern Illinois University.

Alguire, Joan L. *Some Cook County Marriages Prior to Fire*, (South Holland, Illinois: South Suburban Genealogical and Historical Society, 1984).

Daughters of the American Revolution. *Illinois Family Records. Salt Lake, 197*. "Marriage records, recorded in Marriage record book I, Pike County, Illinois, 17 June 1827– 30 May 1832/copied by Ella R. Dean": pp. 209–214.

Births, Deaths, and Marriages

Index by Chicago Genealogical Society to births; deaths, and marriages from Chicago newspapers, 1833–1848; Index A-K bit.ly/3BCv7IW; Index L-Z bit.ly/3x4VluU

Index by Chicago Genealogical Society to births, deaths and marriages in the *Chicago Republican* and *Watchman of the Prairies* newspapers 1849 and later. Newspaper articles available at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois. bit.ly/2VewWLk