

**THE FIREMAN:**  
**THE**  
**Fire Departments of the United States,**  
**WITH A FULL ACCOUNT OF**  
**ALL LARGE FIRES,**  
**STATISTICS OF LOSSES AND EXPENSES,**  
**THEATRES DESTROYED BY FIRE,**  
**AND**  
**Accidents, Anecdotes, and Incidents.**

**BY**  
**DAVID D. DANA,**  
**OF THE BOSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT.**

**ILLUSTRATED WITH NUMEROUS ENGRAVINGS.**

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**BOSTON:**  
**JAMES FRENCH AND COMPANY**  
**1858.**

TO  
**The Firemen of the United States,**

WHO ARE ENGAGED IN

**AN HONORABLE AND ARDUOUS CALLING,**

WITH

**PERPETUAL PERIL TO LIFE AND HEALTH;**

WHO IN THE DARKEST NIGHT AND THE MOST DREARY STORM, IN THE  
BURNING HEAT OF THE SUMMER SOLSTICE AND IN THE MOST  
INTENSE COLD OF WINTER, ARE FAITHFUL AND FEAR-  
LESS IN THE DISCHARGE OF THEIR DUTY,

**This Work**

**IS MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,**

By

**BENJ. F. COOKE.**

BOSTON, OCT. 22, 1857. }  
No. 5 Tremont St. }

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THE BEQUEST OF  
EVERT JANSEN WENDALL  
1918

FOR the dedication of "THE FIREMAN" to me, and the favorable  
expression you use in relation to the interest I have taken in the branch  
of service to which you devote yourself, I thank you, without assum-  
ing to have become entitled to either.

As your work is national, and not local, I would request the favor  
of dedicating it to

**THE FIREMEN OF THE UNITED STATES.**

Very truly yours,

**BENJAMIN F. COOKE,**

*No. 5 Tremont-st., Boston.*

To **DAVID D. DANA,**  
*No. 4 Cornhill Court.*



**THE FIRE DEPARTMENT OF BOSTON.**

There is no city in the Union where this arm of public safety has passed through so many changes as in Boston. From the year 1672, when the first

fire company was organized, up to the present time, there have been continual changes in the laws by which the department has been governed, and in its general management. Wise and liberal laws have been enacted for the regulation of the department; and these laws have been changed to such as were unwise and illiberal. Regulations have been made which were not conducive to the best interests of the firemen. Laws illiberal and severe are not calculated to insure discipline, nor to render the members of the department more efficient in the discharge of their duty, but the reverse. And, although the laws by which the department is governed at the present time are more liberal than any that have been in force since 1837, yet changes could be made which would greatly benefit the firemen, and have a tendency to elevate them to a position to which they are clearly entitled in the minds of the public. Laws which are calculated "to 'keep down' men, as this phrase is understood, and, at the same time, aim to insure discipline and efficiency," very seldom effect those objects; but, on the contrary, while they have a tendency to degrade the firemen in the opinion of every person who has a mind of his own, they also signally fail in their object. The ordinances by which the fire department of Boston has been controlled, have done more to degrade the service, in the opinion of the firemen themselves, and of citizens of other localities, than anything else that ever occurred in the fire department of this city. The fire department of Boston is a paid department. The members receive one hundred dollars each per annum. The department is composed of a chief engineer and nine

assistants, thirteen engine companies which are entitled to forty men each, six hose companies of twenty men each, three hook and ladder companies of twenty-five men each, one steam fire-engine manned by sixteen men. The department is composed of men who follow laborious callings for a livelihood, who are mostly mechanics, as will be seen by reference to a statistical table in another chapter. We would remark here that this table was prepared for the purpose of refuting the charge, which has been so often brought against the department, of its being composed of idle and dissolute persons, and those with whom it is not fit for young men to associate. Boston, when compared with other cities, has been much favored in regard to large fires; and the reason of this is, in part, that she has always had an efficient fire department to protect her citizens from the destroying element. We propose to give a short account of the most memorable fires which have occurred in Boston.

The first large fire in Boston occurred in 1653, near State-street; but there is no record of the fire to be found at the present time. On the 8th of August, 1679, a fire broke out in the Town Dock, on Ann-street, destroying eighty houses, and seventy warehouses, valued at a million of dollars. Several vessels were burned by this fire. During the year 1690 a large fire occurred on Hanover-street, by which many buildings were destroyed.

June 19th, 1691. A large conflagration occurred in North Square, destroying a large number of houses.

March 11th, 1702. A terrible conflagration took place in Dock Square, at one time threatening destruc-

tion to one half the town; but it was finally stopped in its progress by blowing up several large warehouses.

Oct. 2d, 1711. A fire broke out in an oakum-picker's tenement in Williams Court; one of the women who was picking oakum allowed it to take fire. The flames spread with great rapidity. All the houses and stores on both sides of Washington-street between School-street and Dock Square were laid in ashes, besides the first meeting-house that was built in Boston. During the fire, four sailors ascended the steeple to save the bell. The stairs burnt away, the roof fell in, and the sailors were crushed to death.

Nov. 14th, 1759. A fire commenced south of Oliver's Bridge, Water-street, and swept off all the buildings east on that street and on Milk-street.

March 20th, 1760. A fire broke out on Washington-street, where several buildings were burned. It then extended to Long Wharf and to Fort Hill, burning one large ship, nine smaller ones, the Quaker Meeting-house on Congress-street, one hundred and thirty-three dwelling-houses, sixty-three stores, sixty-six shops, and thirty-six barns; a total of two hundred and fifty-five buildings, valued, in the currency of that day, at £71,012 7s. 3d.

Jan. 13th, 1791. A fire commenced in a shop in Dock Square, which destroyed *Faneuil Hall* and all the buildings east of it.

April 20th, 1787. A fire broke out in a malt-house on Beach-street, and, the wind blowing a gale from the north-east, the flames communicated to many buildings at the same time. The Hollis-street Church, which was fifty rods from where the fire originated, was soon in a

blaze, and was burnt to its foundation. There were destroyed by this fire one hundred buildings; sixty of them were the most costly mansions to be found in Boston at that time. All the buildings on both sides of Washington-street, from Elliot to Nassau streets, were destroyed.

July 30th, 1794. A fire commenced in some rope-walks on a line with Pearl-street. This fire swept everything in its course to the water's edge on Russia Wharf, burning one hundred houses and stores.

Jan. 15th, 1803. Daniel Bowen's Museum, at the corner of Tremont and Bromfield streets, was destroyed by fire. The flames ascended to such a height as to be seen at Portsmouth, N. H., a distance of sixty miles.

Jan. 16th, 1807. Bowen & Doyle's Museum took fire, and was entirely destroyed. The southern walls were forced out by the flames, and fell into the cemetery grounds, crushing to death several young men.

Nov. 3d, 1818. The Exchange Coffee-house, situated in Devonshire-street, took fire, and was burned to its foundation. This was, at that time, the most extensive establishment of the kind in the United States. The building was seven stories in height, and from the ground to the top of the dome one hundred feet and ten inches. The house contained two hundred and ten rooms, with a dining-room which would seat three hundred persons. This fire presented one of the most grand and sublime spectacles ever witnessed in Boston; occurring in the evening, the light was seen at Portsmouth, N. H., a distance of sixty miles. Loss \$500,000.

July 7th, 1824. A fire commenced in a carpenter's shop, situated on Charles-street. The wind was blowing a gale from the west, which carried the flames to a block of buildings on Chestnut-street. The heat, smoke and flames, rendered the efforts of the firemen for a time ineffectual. Lines of men were formed to the Frog Pond, and also to the Mill-dam Basin, for the purpose of passing water to the engines in fire-buckets. A block of buildings on Beacon-street was soon on fire, and, had it not been for the wisdom shown by covering the roofs of other houses with blankets, and keeping them wet, the whole of Beacon-street would have been laid in ashes. The Common, after the fire, presented the sad spectacle of elegant and costly furniture damaged and broken by impetuous and careless removal from the buildings on fire. Burning flakes were blown to the eastward as far as Bedford-street, firing several buildings in that direction, but they were quickly extinguished. Loss \$150,000.

The city of Boston at this time seemed doomed to be destroyed by extensive and disastrous conflagrations. Hardly had the rubbish been cleared away from the ruins on Beacon-street, before the city was again visited by one of the most disastrous fires that ever occurred in Boston.

April 7th, 1825. A fire broke out in a wooden building in Doane-street. The fire soon communicated to the adjoining buildings and to the large warehouses on State, Central, Kilby, and Broad streets. Owing to a scarcity of water it had full sway for a long time, and the heat from the fire was such as to penetrate the partition walls that separated the warehouses one from



another, and set the timbers on fire in the different rooms. The wind blew fresh from the south-west, and the communication of the flames from one building to another, on both sides of Central-street, and as far as the Commercial Coffee-house, was extremely rapid. The progress of the flames was not arrested until four o'clock the next morning. After the fire had raged for five hours the utmost efforts of the firemen were necessary to prevent the flames from crossing to the west side of Kilby-street, although the wind was blowing from a westerly direction at the time. Some of the finest buildings in Boston were destroyed by this destructive conflagration. Loss \$2,000,000.

Nov. 10th, 1825. A fire was discovered in a building on Court-street, and before it was extinguished nine buildings were destroyed, reaching from Tudor's corner to Washington-street. Law books valued at \$20,000 were burned by this fire. On the opposite side of the street several wooden buildings were also burned. Loss \$60,000.

Nov. 29th, 1829. A fire commenced in a building on Summer-street, occupied by H. T. Salisbury. The fire soon spread to the adjoining buildings, which were all totally destroyed. Loss at this fire was \$30,000.


Nov. 21st, 1832. A fire broke out under the eaves of the old State House, which still stands as a relic of the Revolution. The building was damaged to the amount of \$4,000.

May 18th, 1835. A fire broke out in the carpenter's shop of Stetson & Smith, on Blackstone-street. The flames extended to several adjoining shops, and a stable occupied by a Mr. Simmons; all of which, with their

contents, were consumed. All the buildings between Blackstone, Cross, and Pond streets were entirely destroyed. On the opposite side of Pond-street the Massachusetts Hotel and several other buildings were badly damaged, and the livery stable of Mr. Davis, was completely burned. All of the buildings on the west side of Salem-street, from Cross to Hanover streets, with but one exception, were entirely destroyed, and many other buildings were damaged by fire. At this fire, Melville Engine, No. 13, drafted, and played on to the fire through eleven hundred and fifty feet of hose. Loss \$70,000.

January 24th, 1839. A fire broke out in the iron foundry of Haskell & Turner, on Haverhill-street. The fire soon spread to the adjoining buildings, and in a short time all the buildings from that in which the fire originated to Market-street were totally destroyed. On Beverly-street all the buildings were destroyed to Charlestown-street. A row of buildings, five in number, on Cooper-street, and a block on Charlestown-street, were consumed, together with a block of houses on Endicott-street. The weather was extremely cold, and many of the firemen were badly frost-bitten. Loss \$80,000.

June 24th, 1844. A fire broke out in Hamilton's Planing-mills, in the rear of Suffolk and Dover streets. The materials about the building were very combustible, and the weather extremely hot. A strong breeze was blowing from the west, which caused the fire to spread with great rapidity. A block of fine buildings on Suffolk-street, and a large block of buildings on Dover-street, were soon on fire, and in a short time were



destroyed. The Franklin school-house, on Washington-street, was next in order for destruction ; and, while the firemen were making great exertions to save it, the fire spread along a block of small brick buildings on Groton-street, five of which were destroyed. Loss \$70,000.

August 18th, 1844. A fire broke out in Samuel Jepson's carpenter's shop, in South Margin street. The fire extended with great rapidity to the adjoining buildings. About twenty buildings with their contents were destroyed. Loss \$60,000.

May 11th, 1845. A fire commenced in Church-street, which destroyed a large number of buildings in Church and Piedmont streets before it was stopped. There were twenty-five buildings in all, besides the church, burned. Loss \$30,000.

August 15th, 1845. The hotel and stable of a Mr. Doolittle, in Brattle Square, were set on fire. William G. Roulstone and Emerson G. Thompson, members of the Charlestown Fire Department, were killed by the falling of the walls. Several others were injured. Loss \$8,000.

Sept. 14th, 1845. The Suffolk Lead Works, on Gold-street, South Boston, consisting of five buildings, together with six dwelling-houses, were consumed. Loss \$50,000.

Jan. 21st, 1847. A fire commenced in a bowling-alley in Haverhill-street. The wind at the time blew a perfect hurricane, and the cold was intense. In a direct range with the fire was a row of wooden buildings, through which the fire passed with terrible rapidity. Northward and eastward the fire spread steadily and

sadly. The buildings in Beverly and Medford streets were soon swept away by the raging flames. Haymarket Square was filled by the flying inhabitants of the burning district, who had fled from the destruction behind them, many of whom were rendered homeless and houseless. A large amount of property was destroyed, and a great portion of it belonged to those who, in losing their little, lost all. Loss \$75,000.

March 10th, 1847. A block of buildings on Washington-street, near State-street, occupied by Damrell & Moore, printers, and sixteen others, were destroyed by fire. Loss \$75,000.

Sept. 7th, 1849. A fire broke out in an old stable in Sea-street, and soon communicated to the lumber-yard of Whiting & Co., from which it spread to the coal-yard of A. Benson. The wind was blowing strong from the west at the time, which caused the fire to spread to the vessels lying at the wharf, and several of them were slightly damaged. While the firemen were at work in stopping the progress of the fire in Sea-street, a fire broke out in the Catholic Church on Broadway, South Boston, and a portion of the department were sent to South Boston.

The fire in the church had made such headway when the engines arrived, that the firemen directed their attention to the saving of the surrounding buildings, which were in great danger from the heat of the building on fire. In a short time the roof of the church fell in, and all that was left of that large building was the blackened walls. Loss \$100,000.

Nov. 5th, 1850. A large conflagration took place in the building owned and occupied by the Boston and

Maine Railroad Co. on Causeway-street, as a freight dépôt. It was also used, by Harold & Fernald, as a mahogany warehouse. The building was three hundred feet long, one and a half stories high, and, at the time of the fire, there were twenty-three cars inside of the dépôt, loaded with cotton and other merchandise, all of which were destroyed with the building. Loss \$150,000.

**BURNING OF TREMONT TEMPLE AND CHAPMAN HALL.**  
— This fire occurred March 31, 1852. It was discovered in the basement of Tremont Temple, and an attempt was made to stop the progress of the fire without the aid of the department; but it was ineffectual, on account of the combustibility of the material in the building. It was the belief of the firemen that the building could be saved; but their hopes were not to be realized, for in one hour the flames had reached the roof, and in a short time the rafters were so badly burned that they gave way, and the roof fell in. The falling of the roof was terrific, and was soon followed by the falling of the front wall, which was composed of huge granite blocks, into Tremont-street, with a tremendous crash. In the mean time Chapman Hall building, which joined the Temple on the rear, had taken fire, and the falling of the roof and walls of the Temple rendered it dangerous for the firemen to enter the building, and it was soon burned to the ground. A man, by the name of John Hall, was killed, and George Esty, a member of Franklin No. 7, of Charlestown, had his back broken by the falling walls. Esty survived several months after the accident. Loss \$200,000.

July 10th, 1852. **GREAT FIRE ON FORT HILL.** — This fire commenced in an old stable, in an alley-way leading from Belmont-street. It caught from the cinders which fell from a chimney that was on fire. The wind was blowing a gale from the south-east at the time, and the fire spread with great rapidity. The roof of the Sailor's Home was soon discovered to be on fire, and, in a short time, there was nothing left of this great building but the bare walls. The alarm was given at three o'clock in the afternoon, and the scene in the neighborhood of this destructive conflagration baffles description. The streets were blockaded with household goods; men, women and children, were without shelter for their heads. Among them were crowded thousands of spectators, gazing upon the burning buildings and the operations of the firemen. At this time the Boylston school-house was discovered to be on fire, and all the energies of the firemen were brought to bear upon this building to save it, but in vain. By this time the excitement was at its height. Washington Square and the adjoining streets were in the wildest confusion. Women were shrieking; firemen were crying out to the spectators, who were an obstruction to everybody and everything, except the raging flames, which threatened to destroy entirely that portion of the city. After five hours of incessant toil the fire was got under, and the firemen were relieved from their arduous duty. Between fifty and sixty buildings were destroyed. Loss \$400,000.

Dec. 1st, 1852. **BURNING OF CHICKERING'S PIANO-FORTE FACTORY.** — The fire broke out in the back part of the building situated on Washington-street, and, owing to

the combustible nature of the material, it was soon wrapped in flames, and in a short time the building was completely destroyed. Benjamin Foster was killed by the falling walls, and a large number of firemen injured. Loss \$250,000.

April 27th, 1855. A fire broke out in a wooden building, filled with cotton, on Battery Wharf. The wind was blowing from the north-west, and in a short time a block of wooden warehouses and a hundred bales of cotton were on fire. The fire soon extended south, across the dock, to a range of buildings on Ferry Avenue. The smoke was stupefying, and the heat so intense that the firemen were driven from their engines. The fire now raged with terrible fury. The ship Pharsalia was soon on fire, and was entirely destroyed. A large building on Constitution Wharf was burned. All the buildings owned by the People's Ferry Company were destroyed. The fire crossed to Lincoln's Wharf, where several buildings, which were used for storing cotton and other merchandise, were burned. A wood and coal yard on the wharf was on fire, and a large quantity of coal and wood destroyed.

The ship Diana took fire, and Perkins No. 2 was put on board to save the vessel; but the heat was so intense that they were obliged to abandon the vessel and their engine though they afterwards rallied and saved them. The schooner Oregon was burned. A large number of vessels were injured by fire.

Engines, Melville No. 6, Dispatch No. 11, of Boston, and Washington No. 2, of Chelsea, were burned, and several others were injured. The area of ground burned over by this fire was about ten acres. Loss \$500,000.

April 12th, 1856. A fire broke out, a few minutes before one o'clock, in the attic of the large six-story brick building at the intersection of Sudbury, Portland, and Friend streets, known as the Gerrish Market. A high wind prevailed at the time, and the height of the building prevented the firemen from throwing any water into the upper stories. For nearly an hour the flames were unchecked in their progress from room to room, and when the fire had penetrated down into the fourth story the scene was truly terrific. The upper portion of the walls was entirely hid from view by the immense body of flame which filled up the market building and the buildings on the other streets. By the aid of ladders the firemen were now able to throw a few streams of water into the third story, but no hindrance was given to the gathering force of the devouring element, which now had undisputed sway, and all the efforts of the firemen were directed to saving the buildings in the neighborhood, which were in the most imminent danger of destruction.

At two o'clock the walls of the market building commenced falling, and, as piece after piece came thundering to the ground, the forked flames burst forth anew. The noise of the falling walls was tremendous, and the danger to the firemen and spectators was great. That part of Haymarket Square nearest to Sudbury-street seemed to be literally a bed of cinders and coals.

The heat of the fire caused a gas cesspool at the corner of Friend and Market streets to explode, by which three men were somewhat hurt, though not seriously. Loss \$250,000.

July 29th, 1856. A fire broke out in a large block



of buildings in North-street, and the flames spread with such rapidity that the tenants were obliged to jump from the windows. In doing this, Margaret Sweenny and Mary Collins were killed. The following were burnt to death: Ellen Kallen, Mary Kallen, Catharine Kallen, Ellen Wright, Emily Wright, John Wright, Charles W. Warren. A member of Hook and Ladder Company No. 1, was killed by the falling of a chimney. Several members of the department were slightly injured by the falling of bricks from the houses on fire. Loss \$100,000.

