

The Cyclone of Fire

or

The Hinckley Fire

A true description of the century's
most gruesome catastrophe. A sea of fire
swallows up in several hours

over 500 people.

**Horrible scenes of death. The fire's
strange caprices**

Published by
Companion Publishing Co.
Minneapolis, Minnesota
-1894-
(Copyrighted, all rights reserved)

TRANSLATOR COMMENTS:

This translation is made from a copy of the original. Both the original and the photocopy are in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society. It is part of a collection of documents, etc. that were given permanent deposit by the Swedish Historical Society of Chicago upon the self-termination of the same.

It is cataloged as *SD 421.A3 in the Society's collections.

An author is attributed to this booklet by the name of Gudmund Emanuel Åkermark. This name is hand written in on the title page. Whether he is the author or not cannot be determined by me.

Where I have changed wording or added words to make this translation more comfortable in the English language, I enclose such in [].

Charles John LaVine, Translator

The translation is as follows:

Introductory overview

Saturday the 1st of September 1984 was an indescribable day of horror for the poor settler families (the most Swedes and Norwegians) who had their homes in the southern part of the might belt of woods which stretches approximately forty miles wide on each side of the border between Minnesota and Wisconsin.

That day namely a fearsome forest fire (One has with right to have called it *the fire cyclone*.) struck over/upon these unfortunate neighborhoods, and within the course of six hours of time, about 600 people perished in the most horrible sufferings in this indescribable sea of fire's roaring and smoke high gyrations. Now a surface area of 400 square miles lies coal black and deserted, at many places burnt down even to the stone foundations, bearing witness in its immense melancholy about this most heart-rendering episode, which at any time has been inscribed in the United States' voluminous annals of misfortunes.

It lies hardly within the grasp of possibility, with pen or word [and with objectivity], to describe this horrible misfortune; in addition to those who were part of it, but who were saved from the horrors, this is difficult, for the heart rendering scenes, the public anxiety and the fear of death not the least, paralyzed, so to say, all power to observation. Yet the reader can make for himself a weak presentation about this visitation's unbelievable, all-ravaging nature when we state that the stone hard steel rails themselves on the rail line by Mission Creek and Hinckley, here and there under the smelter like heat, loosened from the ties before these had yet been able to catch on fire, bowing with the ends upward and curling themselves up like snakes. Over two dozen cities and market towns, saw mill locations and smaller station villages were sucked up completely or in part by the thunder like, rumbling cyclone of fire, which, driven forward by an unbelievable storm of wind, sent millions of flying tongues of fire whole miles before itself, thus terrible foreshadowing its feared progress in the Duluth direction; and even so not all of the fleeing were able to save themselves.

In Duluth, around 70 [miles] from the fire's center point, one, already by 4 o'clock in the afternoon, had become aware of the fateful day's dismal premonitory sign about the horrible catastrophe, which just then began to be played out in communities in the woods doomed to destruction in the southwest The whole head of the lake by Duluth and the city itself lay covered in a voluminous black cloud ---- heavy billowing masses of smoke, which only on the horizon was broken through by blood-red flashings. By five o'clock in the afternoon, the city was enveloped by a completely night-black darkness, and a rain of tight, fire-heated ashes fell the whole afternoon. A terrible consternation/anxiety brooded over the population. On the very nearly, almost unbearable smoke-filled streets, the people groped silently, almost [like] shadows past each other. No one wished to begin a conversation whose seed one completed wished to avoid to taste, and all recognized unmistakably that there outside of the city -- someplace in the immense, tinder dry and brushwood pinewood forests with its many timber camps and numerous industrious cities, there occurred *death*, the one implacable and severe with the fire and the windstorm as allies, its fearful game with mankind's works and mankind's lives. It was like Ragnarök¹ and the Duluth residents themselves trembled for their fate, not know at what moment they should be struck down by devastation's strong arm.

¹ In Norse mythology, "the doom of the Gods" or the end of the Cosmos. The better-known equivalent is the "Gotterdammerung" in the Germanic mythology.

The forebodings are confirmed.

At six o'clock in the evening, the first information arrived, the first confirmation on the dismal forebodings. It was a telegram from Pokegama² by the Eastern Minnesota Railroad line, which read, "The train that left Duluth at 1:55 has had an accident; many people dead, other injured. Send help immediately." A relief train was prepared as soon as it was possible and sent off. It returned on the following morning with 231 passengers, who had been on board the wrecked train. One of the saved from the train, who at noon left Duluth over the Duluth Short Line, has related the following:

: "When we had only a little piece further [to go] to Hinckley, approximately a mile, [as] I can [judge], suddenly we observed, in the darkness of the smoke that completely enveloped us as we hurried past, several groups of people, who with waving and calls, tried to get us to stop. The locomotive engineer, who immediately understood the connection, hurried to stop the train and backed up to those waiting. I shall never forget the view, which now met us. Over one hundred refugees from Hinckley, men, women and children of all ages began to board the train, as if they had been [driven] crazy, and under the most shuddering sounds called forth by the fear of death mixed the with the happy feelings over the unanticipated outlook for saving. They fell on their knees and implored the train personnel not to try to push forward any further to Hinckley, and in their visages could be seen the indescribable mental suffering and torments driven to mania's border of fear. When all of these fleeing had gotten on board, the locomotive engineer/driver backed the train, as fast as he was able to, northward. This was not a second to [late], for from the direction of Hinckley, we heard a constantly growing noise/thunder, which completely out-shouted the locomotive's heavy groaning, and when we had gotten about three miles northward, we suddenly saw that the wave of smoke behind us as well as long, fluttering tongues of fire, split/rendered, cleft and thrown apart, which stretched their forked spears after us. Although we had a good half of a mile jump a head, the thousand-tongued fire dragon gained upon us minute after minute. We understood this by the quickly encompassing heat and the increasing crackling. *It we can get up to Skunk Lake, we are saved*, some one called out. At the same moment,

as if to kill our last hopes,

the train was set on fire. The heat itself seems to have set it on fire, for the fire's flames were a long stretch behind us. It was a dangerous moment. The compartment windows broke into pieces by the heat and the passenger cars were filled more and more by the hot smoke, so that we, with handkerchiefs before the mouth and nose, must lie prostrate on the car's floor. The stuffed seats now began to burn and belch out and one and another, feared to craziness, threw themselves out through the windows. A indescribable panic now gripped all and God knows how it [would have gone] with us, if just at *that moment* the train began to brake and there with awakened us to conciseness, "*Skunk Lake! Fly for your lives!*" was now called out through the cars, and quicker than can be described, we all threw ourselves out of the burning train and jumped down into the marsh/slough found tight to the train embankment. This was the long

² Possibly Pokegamon. In "Minnesota Place Names" there was a village incorporated on May 23, 1857, but no location is given and no trace can be found of it. There was later a post office established called Pokegama Falls. Pokegama Falls itself is a falls on the Mississippi in Itasca County.

desired saving's goal and it *became* also our saving, although it hung by a hair, for the boundless heat and the dangerous masses of smoke, which immediately after our stepping down into the marsh, began to envelop us, was close to killing many. We rooted/buried ourselves in the mud up to the chin and covered the face and head with the wet mass. In any other way, had certainly no saving been possible, and out of this situation, we were retrieved by Track Supervisor Dave William's relief train, which left Duluth on the evening of the day of misfortune"

So ran the first report from the place of misfortune, and it was certainly horrible and nerve-shacking. But yet more horrible bad news should be enumerated. The accounts by the saved fliers from Hinckley should make the listener's blood freeze, and the relaters themselves fell time and again into nervous, compulsive crying and moaning. The memory of the excruciating scenes became for them overpowering, and covering their faces, distorted by pain, with their hands, their tales of sorrow broke out, and they became silent and remote. But the body's restless rocking spoke adequately enough of the consuming and harrowing pains, which raged in the poor ones' interiors. The curious ceased with their questions: the incomprehensible sorrow, the bottomless deep pain within our fellow creatures has this with itself – the due respect and providence towards the unwarranted.

The need relieved:

In the meantime, another train had arrived, carrying about 500 Hinckley residents. Duluth's hospitality and willingness to give was now placed to a hard test, but they passed with honor. One expressly competed to get to help and support the destitute sufferers. As soon as the relief trains loaded with fliers arrived, they took the former hurryingly to the city's hotels and restaurants, there they were amply fed, and on the following day, Sunday, the 2nd of September, the city's mayor called residents together. One arranged quickly and in the usual American practical organizing hand. A public support committee was appointed and a ladies' help association was promptly created. Subscription lists were circulated, already, after the course of three days, one had alone in Duluth collected \$10,00 in cash. Jim Hill³, the well-know railroad magnate, and Sir Donald A. Smith⁴ in Montreal, a partner in the Eastern Minnesota Railroad, gave \$5,000 each, and Mr. Hill gave besides 5,000 acres of good farmland to the suffering in Hinckley. From Two Harbors⁵ flowed in \$900, from West Duluth \$450 and from Carlton, 1,700. From St Cloud, Rush City⁶ and Pine City came as well liberal contributions, but Minneapolis and St Paul exceeded them all: Minneapolis with \$25,000 and St Paul with \$18,000. As from this, the willingness to give was great and beautiful.

Terrible scenes.

³ James Jerome Hill (1838-1916) American railroad magnate who built up an extensive railroad network in the United States Northwest, which ultimately became the Northern Pacific Railroad. Hill was also a founder of the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

⁴ Sir Donald Alexander Smith (1820-1914) Born in Scotland, Smith became an important businessman and politician in Canada heading among other enterprises, the Hudson Bay Company. He was not a founder of but his later participation assured the success of the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

⁵ A city and county seat of Lake County on Lake Superior approximately 30 NE of Duluth.

⁶ A city on the Duluth and St Paul Railroad in Chisago County north of St Paul.

But permit us in imagination to borrow the wings of the eagle in order to be able to take a general overview of the devastated forest area immediately after the cyclone of fire's violent passage. It is a limitless, gloomy, depressing bird's perspective we see under us. Immediately to the north of Miller, that is to say there where the city *had been*, we see the final border of the fire's progress, and the green pine forests stand there still majestic in the distance. But turn the glance towards the southwest and a shudder rushes unconditionally through you with the sight of the disconsolate picture. Mile long extents of soot-black burnt woodland as far as the eye can reach, and here and there a smaller smoky patch, which gives you an indication of where the burned up cities have laid, and whereat, hundreds of despaired mankind fought their hopeless fight with the death in that's most fear-awakening guise. You see the dark, empty areas remaining from the communities of Hinckley, Sandstone, Pokegama, Mission Creek, Sandstone Junction, Partridge, Mansfield and Cromwell, and you tremble with the thought of the fire daemon's limitless power to destroy. But however, you have not seen all. Turn the glance towards the Wisconsin border and there also shall the desolation's abomination meet you, if not in a so terrible form, so however terrible enough. Here lay the former beautiful small cities of Shell Lake, Baronette, Granite Lake, Rib Lake, Marengo, Bradshaw, Cumberland, Pineville and Forest City, to the most part in ruins. They are all the same the unsparing fire's work, which swept forward 15 miles in one direction and 25 miles to the other, that is to say 400 square miles.

The death's harvest.

But the air's winged corpse-plunderers – the ravens scream already over the whole country around. They have smelled of the corruption, bodies of people and animals in masses - dainty cadavers for their black-crooked bills. Under terrible croaking and hoarse calls, they circle around the rail line, where the deceased lie the thickest.

The --- what is it that appears long, long there far away where the railroad rails seem to run together! A little, black dot, but it grows, grows and takes on a definite form. A railroad train – *a relief train!* It come to fetch up the dead in order to show the poor deceased the last service, the one to save their mutilated and distorted bodies from the beast of prey's tooth and from the beast of prey's claw and to bed them in consecrated ground. The predatory [beings] eject shrill warning signals and run away to all the points of the compass, but we take the opportunity to step aboard the train, to take part in its heavy, sorrowful journey through destruction's and death' gloomy surroundings.

Soon we are at the point where the unfortunate, half paralyzed from fear, running, tried their last desperate fight for life. It is between Sandstone Junction and Hinckley [that] the corpses lie the thickest. What nameless pain has not here been tasted! Mankind's tongue cannot describe it, but the terrible stamp [that] death has set upon these poor, spoke its speechless, shudder-worth language about indescribable pain and suffering. Our fantasies see them still living, these death-doomed, there they with blood strained eyes and half choking lungs tried running to avoid the growling pursuer, who all closer and closed spread sparkling strokes of fire after them, stupefying masses of smoke and long, curling tongues of fire. Oh, it is frightful! The one after the other, they are killed, overtaken by smoke and the boundless heat. They fall on the back, on the side or prostrate, and the work of death [marches on]. The

sufferings are hellish. The hands wanted to dig themselves into the breast chamber, for the air streams through the lungs like glowing lead. The eyes retreat into their sockets, spasmodic twitches run through the body, the arms twisted around as if by invisible hands, and the thighbones are pressed, as if in cramps, up against the bowels. It is the end. Some seconds afterwards, the fire burns over the corpses, and when the smoke veil has been able to disappear, they lie there in their horrible body positions, doubled over, fearsome and horrible.

The corpses are loaded onboard the train, which now moves slowly forward to a complete halt. ---- Yes, for the dead lie right against the roadbed, and the one horrible picture of death succeeds the other, mile after mile. There lies a female corpse naked from the feet up to the bowls, charred, surrounded by four small children's bodies, even they partly charred. A stone's throw away on the rail track's other side is found a man's corpse lying prostrate with the face pressed against the railroad rail, which impressed a horrible fire sore/mark from the forehead bone down over the nose and down to the corner of the mouth.

Some car lengths away, we stumbled yet again upon a corpse. It is of a young girl, at the most 17 years old. The fire has, with unusual capriciousness, devoured all of the clothing, so that not one thread of them remains; only the shoes are undisturbed. But not so much as one fire blister can be discovered on the body, and hardly a singed lock of the rich, beautiful hair. How to explain this abnormality?

But the dismal journey goes forward [with] constantly new, horrible finds until we approach Skunk Lake, whereat the [fire] for the time seems to finally have gotten its greediness [filled] of human life, because there among the masses of dead cattle, dogs, horses and the woods' wild animals, with their presence, likewise shows of the frightening fate they, in the marsh-saving refuge by the Skunk Lake, avoided.

A ravaged landscape.

The devastated stretch of land out by the railroad track presented an indescribably disconsolate picture. Black and burnt as far as a man can see – a desert in soot-black expanse. Here and there a fallen down spruce stump belches its blue-white smoke, which hardly stands out against the black background. Besides, it looks like [as if] a mile long giant scythe had traveled, mowing forward through the tight woods, and where the buildings had stood, one can hardly find a handful of ashes, which bear witness of that there something had existed.

The animals' sigh.

But the train goes forward all the same, and side by side of it, on the other side along the barbed wire fencing running along the railroad embankment, trotted some [large], starved oxen. They cast out soft bellows and their wild eyes were directed, as if begging, to the people onboard the train. Poor, leaderless, starving, suffering and thirsty creatures. From where have they come? Possibly from a timber camp now swept away and erased from the earth. In some wonderful manner, they had succeeded to avoid the horrible cyclone of fire, which overcame and sucked up their owners, and now they move around helpless and all around are prey for excruciation hunger's suffering, seeking in vain after some bit of grass and water. Ashes,

charcoal and soot are all that they find. Their backbones appear as if they will gnaw out through their hides; the body is dangerously empty and sunken in under the small of the back; the eyes are weak, staring and standing out, a viscous, while mucus, the tearing sure sign of thirst, dangles in long threads from the gaping mouths.

Not a bit of grass, not a leaf has the pattern of fire left behind itself, and the suffering animals search in vain, scenting with their heads after any nearby puddle of water from which they could quench their burning throats. They are abandoned, as it appears, both by God and mankind. The train personnel have their hands too full with the collecting up of the dead humans in order to pay attention to the soulless animals' prayers for help and succor, and after having finished, set the machine in full speed, and we steam quick as lightning away. The abandoned beasts of course ran a while, puffing and stumbling after, but the distance between them and us grew with each second and soon we could perceive them only as small black dots in the distance behind us.

What will be their fate? They evaded the fire alive, but is then hunger's death's slow consuming fire in the dried up entrails and thirst's indescribable pain in the constricted throats a milder fate?

Chapter I

The fire's origins

It is quite natural that one, everywhere, asks oneself; *how did the fire begin?* As yet however, no [completely] satisfying solution has been able to answer the inquiry's goal, rather one, in this matter, is continually directed towards guessing, and they liberate assumptions' great fields. The fatal spark, which was the cause of this colossal desolation, has perhaps fallen from a railway train rushing forward through the woods, or from a smoker's tobacco pipe or cigar. It can also stem from some hobo's, berry picker's or woodcutter's [cooking] fire, or equally as willingly, from some unwitting schoolboy, who celebrated his summer vacation with firing off some "woods fireworks".

Dark suspicions.

As said, the field of conjecture is great, and the one conjecture can be equally as probable as the other. The impudent timber thieves, who against all law and regulation and without owing a twig of the tracts of the woods they devastate, and who cut thousands of acres of valuable timberland, can neither go free of suspicion of being this sorrowful event's cause. Many believe, and on excellent reason, that the timber thieves, in order to wipe out any trace of their thefts, had set fire to the devastated area and that the fire spread itself beyond reach of their control. If this is the true situation, then the horrible guilt rests on these conscious-less, great thieves and sawmill millionaires, who in their hometowns, go and are recognized as society's supporters and perhaps sit in the legislature as the peoples' trusted representatives and legislators.

For the sake of the goodness, which certainly is found in the mankind, we hope however, we wish in the utmost to believe, that such a dreadful horror is not the basis for this unforgettably horrible scourge, which cost so many human lives and grimly cut apart the band that makes life pleasant and bearable. Husbands and wives separated, of course, through that most painful of all manners of death, parents compelled to powerlessly look upon how their own children, their own flesh and blood, the dearest they owned in life, became pitiless prey for the raging element. Young men and women must witness how their gray-haired and infirm parents, with heart rendering agony painted on their faces, tried in vain to avoid the immeasurable fire dragon, who with an abysmal roar cut off the way to flight, consuming them with its glowing hot greeting or suffocated them with its white-yellow masses of smoke. And these horrors, they must look upon without being able to move a finger for help or assistance. The heart will cease to beat when one hears described all of this misery, all of this groaning. And should it be people, who of evil or to hide engaged in crimes, have given cause hereto, we *cannot*, we *will* not believe that so it is.

The woods' destruction's results.

How was it not previously arranged otherwise with our woods? For two hundred years past, prairie fires were the worst one knew and the most feared. The original residents in the West's near endless woods, did not worry themselves much about limiting the destructive fires they themselves created, but the woods had, at that time in its permanent moist atmosphere, its own natural protection against fire. Such is not the case now. The headless and conscienceless cutting of the woods for sordid gain's reason, has drawn much suffering over our land such as sandstorms, drought years, flooding, insect afflictions and so forth. After the forests, so without discrimination, were cut away, drought years have become more numerous, and when these are of a so intensive nature as last summer's, all of the windfalls and the masses of cutoff branches and twigs, which, after the timber cutters' axes, lie and make trash between the tress, are dry and as easy to light as tinder.

How one underestimated the danger.

When the reader reminds himself that hardly a drop of rain fell from the month of May until the 6th of September over the areas of woods now destroyed by the fire, so is it easy to get for oneself an idea about what an enormous amount of inflammable material was offered there. When a forest fire begins under such circumstances and succeeds to spread out beyond human control, then one has only, to powerless, observe the elements' own more or less capricious and destructive progress. A forest fire in a completely dead wind condition is seldom dangerous – as a rule, “burns itself out” within a limited territory and burns out up against sandbanks, roads and smaller courses of water. This state of affairs, the now destroyed forest village residents all too uncritically have depended upon; one made a so-called “fire ring” around the city's limits and thereby thought that everything was beyond danger. One knew very well that the fire smolders for weeks deep in the woods, but what of course did it mean – forest fires had been seen of course almost every fall? Certainly the smoke had become more than unusually thick and encompassing the last days in August (It at times made the sun as pale as the moon, even for the residents of Minneapolis, that is to say 75 miles from the fire.), but “it was of course

clear” that so should it be; “that it was always so snuff dry in the woods in the summer” one thoughtlessly said or push away the perils with the badly suitable phrase, “Let Jerusalem burn! Rain will soon come.”

But the rain did not come and the calmness of the wind did not help this time. There in the woods, it burned and glowed stronger and stronger by each hour. The fire did not wish “to burn itself out”, as it [had done] for years, one thought. Instead of [to lag behind] in the calm of the wind, the fire so gradually aroused to life an otherwise up to now slumbering power of destruction.

The cyclone of fire.

This was an alliance of the powers of nature’s fearsome attack, about whose possibility the death-doomed residents in the woodland villages knew nothing and therefore neither could take into recognition of, and one continued to sleep [in] the heavy ignorance’s obdurate sleep. During this time, the fire circle widened itself more and more continually developing an intensive heat, which finally at the hour of 3 in the afternoon of the misfortune-filled 1st of September, it took a new decisive turn and gave room for a new and more destructive phenomenon of nature.

The overheated air rose upwards with incomprehensible speed, leaving behind an immense empty air of room, which however, in the next moment began to be filled with new streams of air, which under the unbelievable atmospheric pressure rushed in with unopposed violence, and therewith was the cyclone awakened. Ready and fully feathered, together with Muspelhem’s⁷ released power, he spread his strong, misfortune-boding wings to the trip of destruction.

The outbreak was horrible.

Born by a whiling storm, formal clouds of sparks and sparkling brands of fire were flung in all directions, over obstacles that should have stopped the winged arrows’ course. An eyewitness from Hinckley relates:

“At [about] three o’clock in the afternoon, the fire literally came with giant bursts over us. It did not approach us gradually, cutting itself [into parts] as fires otherwise do, destroying everything in its course. No! – I can see it still – it came [placing itself] in mighty bursts like the top froth on the ocean’s greatest hurricane waves and with a speed, as if it wished to grasp everything fleeing before it, for [then] afterwards to sink back and to lick forward in slow pace like on play. The boundless heat had given birth to a veritable whirlwind of flames, which broke lofty and thick poplar trees like dry reeds and collected a fearsome giant bunch of

⁷ Múspellsheimr was in the Norse mythology the realm of fire. This realm was one of the Nine Worlds and is the home of the Fire Demons or the Sons of Múspell and Surtr, their rulers. The land to the north, Niflhelm, is ice and when the two mixed, they ~~v~~created water from the melting ice of Ginnungagap. According to the Ragnarök prophecies in Snorri Sturelsen’s [Eddas, the sons of](#) Múspell will break the Bifröst Bridge, signaling the end of time.

burning embers high up in the air, throwing them forward from forty to fifty *rods*; there they spread out and fell as a rain of fire in order to in its order continue destruction's work.”

The only avoiding cure against a repetition of similar horrors lies in the prevention of the mass desolation of our forests, which now goes on in its unbridled form. The so-called isolation method, after the European pattern, should show itself to be especially workable. In stead of permitting the sale of large tracts of forest to greedy speculators, who without thought cut down both proper and unsuitable timberland, the owner of forested land should, by the most stringent laws, be required to save the woods as much as possible and permit the planting of new trees following upon the heels of the cutting and to enclose each new *clearing* with a broad belt of fire-suppressing *green-woods*.

Through a strict application of similar regulations and a careful collection together of brush [and woods debris], forest fires in Prussia and Austria' Alpine lands now belong as good to the age of myths, and likewise miles-wide stretches located there are from 60 to 80 percent state forests.

Chapter II

Mission Creek⁸

Approximately 12 miles north of Pine City by the St Paul and Duluth Railroad [was] a little place called Mission Creek. It had an insignificant number of residents, at the highest 150 souls, and its foremost industry or enterprise was a large steam sawmill, which employed a part of the population, among which were counted many Swedes.

Agriculture in the neighborhood of this little village was in the swaddling clothes of an almost newborn, but [on the opposite], the cutting down of the forests was much livelier. Today, even this branch of industrial life is almost totally past, for of the former proud woods, which surrounded Mission Creek, are now found only charred pine stubs. In the meantime in some years time, a paying agriculture might blossom up on this ground, which now lies black with charcoal and ashes, namely so far as the fire did not completely burn away all of the top soil, which unfortunately at many places where this unfortunate fire has [afflicted], [this] has shown itself to be the situation.

Mission Creek was the first of the villages lying to the south of Hinckley, which was eaten up by the fire, and only one house belonging to our countryman, Mr. David Hedman, remained, even the out buildings undisturbed. It lay, "*protected*" by potato field lying to the southwest – the only reason for it saving, one *says*. But those, who have seen the little, gray, insignificant log house [where] it lies equally as near and equally right in the path of the sea of

⁸ Per "Minnesota Place Names", there was a Mission Creek village in Mission Creek Township in Pine County. The village at one time was comprised of a hotel, a sawmill, a general store, a blacksmith and 26 houses and a station on the Northern Pacific Railroad. All were destroyed in the Hinckley Fire except one house and the cemetery.

fire where it billowed forward, must doubtlessly shake the head towards the “protecting potato field”. This horrible cyclone of fire gave proof of the many so-called vagaries that the reflective person is, within himself, compelled to think about: *does one not wonder anyhow [that] the vagaries there were a completely leading Providence’s overlying engagement?*

The eye witnesses to the terrible desolation spoke about that while the fire was still 40 rods from their unfortunate village they could see from their hiding place in the potato field how the houses began to smoke and burn under the driven upon heat, and they saw how the plastering on the basement walls broke and loosened, thick clay jugs, which many had left outside, broke apart with a short detonations and the railroad rails themselves cracked and splintered into railroad spikes as if they had gotten life. Only the little log house, which lay the nearest to the advancing wall of fire, stood undisturbed by the destroyer’s hot breath: not even a roof single was scorched.

Can such be considered as the work of a blind happenstance? The human is quite strange! She believes often and particularly that this impersonal, unreasoning something, which we call *happenstance*, can change the power of nature’s path, wherever she seeks to make herself believable with the probable possibility that all of reason’s and leadership’s original source, the guiding but unknown Providence, is this power of nature’s ruler.

No matter – the Hedman house in Mission Creek stand there as a dumb, unsolvable puzzle for all human astuteness and wisdom.

Who were they?

The information about the people in Mission Creek’s fate is still conflicting. Some opine that nine humans there died, others again hold forth that *no one* residing in Mission Creek died and that the nine dead that are talked about must have been some unfortunates fleeing from the south, who ignorant of the village’s locale circumstances and the places of security it offered to its own, sought saving in vain in the neighborhood. Any identification [of them] was not possible – skull’s and bone joints’ do not tattle about the annihilated integument’s name.

The danger grows.

The Mission Creek people were, in similarity with the other unfortunate villages’ residents, completely unaware of that the fire had raged for several weeks in the woods immediately to the north of Pine City, but an unexplainable indifference or the underestimating of the danger had taken hold of everyone, and not a finger was moved to the warding off of overhanging danger before it was too late, it will in other words be said:

On the day of misfortune itself.

The last part of August had been broken in to a swallowed up, in a half-darkness caused by the thick smoke, which then was more worse than anything before. It was with heavy forebodings [that] one [on] the night of the 1st of September sought rest’s bed in Mission Creek,

but no one should have had a proper foreboding about the impending destruction's full embrace and all too devastating nature. There was not much sleep in any home that night.

In the meantime, the 1st of September the day dawned – as good as it could for the covering of smoke's sake, which then hung in pale gray with thick, white-yellow folds/pleats, which inferred that the fire now fed in the known, nearby pine forests' resinous giants. It was already early in the morning [when] one [appreciated] the now feared fire.

It was fought the whole morning tenaciously with despair's courage and habit against the unappeasably advancing element. It was an unrewarding fight and the conclusion of the same was apparent already at the beginning and given beforehand, but likewise one no way gave in. With eyes reddened and tear-filled by the smoke, sooty, sweaty and covered with gray by the ashes, Mission Creek's hardy men fought hour after hour against a superior power. Their hair and beards were scorched, the shoes burnt through and the smoke threatened time after time to suffocate them, but anyhow they continued [to fight the fires] until their strength began to desert them.

It was at 12 o'clock in the afternoon and the misfortune was now clearly perceived; that it was *unavoidably* understood. Mission Creek was already doomed to be laid to dust and ashes; that is to say, their homes, everything that they during long laborious years had put together for themselves and theirs, was now helpless threatened by destruction. An hour or two at the time of its height, the fire monster appeared willing to grant them [respite]. Heavy of mind, the men turned towards their homes, whose door thresholds they should for the last time cross. By the village's edge, they were awaited by their wives and children, as all wished to know [but] however did not wish to ask about how the outlook for saving was. But the questions were superfluous, for their answer stood already unmistakably stamped upon the returning [men] in all of their manners and appearance.

Under general gloom, one ate the noon meal. The men, who had been away there where it burned and smoked as if from a lava spouting crater, forgot the food and lost themselves with glances stirring towards the feared edge of the woods in cheerless, all otherwise stupefying thoughts.

The horrible end.

An hour still awaited the departed under painful, expectant restlessness. Then, what was it? - - There, a dazzling flash forward through the masses of smoke, which now began to race forward over the surroundings like pursuing phantoms, first in heavy, billowing roils in ribbon-like clouds and finally thinning to blue-white flying vapors.

In one blow, the edge of the woods were laid exposed/bare, but far away over these swinging tops were seen mighty, twisting arrows of fire as if jumping forward, continuously nearer and nearer.

It was then one had seen the flashes! A long drawn out whistling sound approached over the observers' heads, and in the same second, a mighty hurricane pushed through the now

the almost smoke-free air, which apparently trembled of heat from the forest's glowing smelter. The cyclone of fire had begun its appalling work.

Where should we flee?

This confused, fearful cry was raised from all sides, and likewise aroused by a common thought, all that had life and breath hurried off to the just noted potato field. Many first thought to take with and save their belongings there, but – the life first and foremost. Who knew for certain if the fire should not even reach them there with its long terrifying flames, with its suffocating smoke or its killing heat. No, the possessions became completely worthless. No one wished to risk, sacrifice the life for their saving. And it was without doubt the smartest [decision]. Only a few of the more strong of nerve and brave lingered yet a moment among the rows of houses, but even they must soon beat a retreat to the potato field.

This became the place of observation for the ones in the death-doomed village's peoples' most shifting outbreaks of feelings. What scenes were not played out there! The most boundless anxiety and fear of death gripped some while other were so completely crushed by thoughts of the situation that they sank together as creatures without soul and will. Here a pair of couples embraced each other in dumb, heart-rending anxiety while their small, crying [young ones], shaking in fear in every limb, clung to them. There raged [one person] as possessed, alternately supplicating, alternately threatening the power he did not recognize but only feared, while his neighbor, with calmness, clasped hands and directed glances to the heavens above in trustful belief, called on *his* God for support. Here lay a whole Catholic family, half prostrate, on their knees, zealously making the sign of the cross on their breasts and with soul-rendering voices mumbled long prayers for grace and help from *their* God in the heavens. Some Seventh Day Adventists stared with pale, fearful but yet with submissiveness witnessing faces towards the flaming woods, during which they with a mutual silent presentiment meaningfully pressed each other's hands. For *them* the shuddering play inferred the same as

The certain demise/end of the world.

And in this, their belief, laid firmly held nothing that could awaken surprise, for now, hardly five minutes after the fleeing had reached the potato field, it appeared as if heaven and earth stood in flaming fire, the heat was almost stupefying. Everything came so completely quickly and overwhelmingly. A blizzard of soot, noise, glowing and sparkling flames washed hissing through the air, and behind strode the boom and the rumble with each minute. The windowpanes broke shattering into pieces, and the paint on the houses chipped and crinkled, so that the walls in a moment seemed to be overlaid by millions of wriggling worms before they began to smoke and burn from [their] stone foundations up to the roof ridges.

The air was so completely hot and almost robbed of all of its oxygen that they, the unfortunate who awaited death in the potato field, began to conduct themselves as the hung. The oxygen-less air worked as a narcotic poison on the brain with many, and a number of them were gripped by a wild dizziness and wished to run straight into the fire. But the powers did not remain; powerless with lost consciousness, they fell helpless to the ground and avoided thereby

the horrible death, which their befuddled brains just had exhorted them to seek. And it was high time that such happened, for now was

The moment of destruct at hand.

Judgment Day's trumpet's sound cannot sound more horrible than the roaring that the sea of fire now, only a stone's throw away, pressed forth with from the burning woods' masses of trees. As if called forth by an explosion, mighty, giant flames shot out of the earth by the railroad embankment. It was John Martin Lumber Co,'s steam sawmill that had caught fire, and in the next moment

the sea of fire rolled in over the village.

There up in the potato field under the most horrible of feelings and soul suffering, one awaited on the fearful moment when the fire should fry them all alive. But this did not occur; not a hair was singed on the poor ones' heads although the sky-high, flaming, thundering, devouring sea of fire only some hundred paces distance from them, drew billowing forward over the village, which now stood completely in flames from one end to the other. The waves of fire, driven on by the raging cyclone of fire, towered up high, pyramid-like points, which now and then were lifted high into the air into a crazy, fluttering, whirling dance in order to immediately there upon be cut into atoms and extinguished by the hurricane

These were the moments of the most indescribable terror, but likewise as quickly as the destruction's fire-tongued werewolf had attacked the little village, likewise as quickly was it gone. The baptism of fire lasted at the most fifteen minutes, but how it [looked] *afterwards*. The whole surroundings laid in black, close, tightly sprinkled with gleaming burning stumps, which sent up millions of light, blue-white smoke rings. Every one of the houses were leveled to the ground --- were as if washed away from the surface of the earth. Yes, all except *one*. There off against the southwest limits of the village, there [where] the fire tumbled in its first great sea of immeasurably hungry flames, there stood out sharp and plain against the black background, David Hedman's insignificant but *completely damaged* gray log house It stood as an eloquent memorial upon a village's decay.

It is barely believable that Mission Creek will again be rebuilt in its former manner, but on the opposite, it is rather probable that a flowing agriculture within a short time shall arise from the forest's ruins, for the fire made there clearing work in some short hours, so thorough and wide spread for the cultivator, that mankind should have needed many years of hard work [accomplish].

Consequently even out of this horrible destruction through this, corpse-shrouded, black veil, a new life can sprout, adorned in hope's green colors when the spring sun and the spring air bring forth the first harvests from the always-productive soils.

Chapter III

Pokegama.

This little station village located on the Great Northern Railroad some miles south of Hinckley, was, when the fire swept over it, not much over 1 ½ years old, and its population hardly exceeded 175 individuals, whereof a half were made up of Russian Jews. Pokegama's founder was the firm Kesley & Markham and the location's foremost economic activity was, like with Mission Creek's, the processing of wood. Agriculture was hardly known in the area; one or another settlers with some insignificant clearings for a barely adequate cultivation of potatoes lay here and there stuck in the forests.

Misfortune's omens.

Tight, white-gray – warning, the smoke cover from the far away to the south burning forests for many days had hanged over Pokegama and its surroundings. Now and then when the wind swung about from another side, the common irritatingly mass of smoke eased for the lungs and eyes and the sun broke through as a smiling savior, shining and desired, forward over the meadows. One “then again breathes”; inhaled in long, refreshing breathes the cleaner air and was glad, although with mistrustful eyes cast to the south, [if only] to finally be finished with “the blessed smell”. But the freedom was only temporary, and no one appears to be able to or wishes to understand that these glimpses of sun light, clean air and blue sky, which changeably dissipated the heavy billows of smoke, were nature's well meant warning sign for an approaching danger, still suitably far away in order to be able to be avoided but impermissibly approached closer in horrible form.

Soon “the wind is down” again from the direction of the fire and thicker, white-yellow, more suffocating smoke clouds rolled through the air. So there one day was a stillness of the wind. It completely lulled and the smoke laid itself, mixed with soot and heavy as a bad conscience over the area.

So it remain, day after day, and one thought oneself transferred out upon the sea in a fog, when as the storytellers say:

The wind sleeps on Aeolius⁹ pillow”

And the thickness for long wrenching days preyed over the dead water, compelling the sailor to lay by, drop the anchor, lie in unrewarding rest and however to always be on watch.

Such was the situation in Pokegama when the misfortune-heavy 1st of September broke upon [the village]; the work barge laid by, the steam was shut down, the machinery was stopped and the anchor (reconnoiterers) were sent out in order to scout the surroundings. The morning train's persevering signals sounded in the distance like the foghorn's emergency call; a moment later, the locomotive's eye gleamed out of the darkness of smoke and approached the little [railway] platform for a few minutes of stop. So the buffer chains wheezed in departure, the engineer's signal bell clanged hesitantly, soul-twisting as a foreshadowing great passing

⁹ [Greek God of the Wind.](#)

bell, and heavy-gray as the legend's ghost ship, the train laid off and pushed itself, like a wandering phantom, out the fog of smoke again and disappeared.

But Pokegama's sent-out reconnoiterers were not heard from. The hours passed and passed, but no information arrived. It leaned towards the afternoon, the same disturbing thick smoke, the same tormenting uncertainty for many – but also the same unbelievable apathy of mind and indifference among the majority. At five o'clock in the afternoon, the smoke became lighter as well. Consequently the wind again and perhaps fresh air! *Wind!* Yes, it was well so, but *how* does it arrive? As the fire and death cyclone's abysmal, horrible fore riders, it drew forward; it came --- as *the beginning of the end*. After a period of breeze, the smoke cover almost completely lightened and permitted the area to enter forth into its old, well-recognized condition. But it was

the last time

that picture should be shown. Pokegama's last morning lay already "behind it", although no one knew it; its last evening had already sailed off, but -- did anyone believe it? Of course *now* when the wind-scattered smoke began to increase in strength and at the same time in a misfortune-boding dryness and heat, one now first began to apprehend, one began to believe the worst. This repressed, almost burning simoom, which raced forward with the unseen fire, appears likewise to foretoken the whole area's [impending] destruction and change from a splendid wood side village to a hopeless, flat wasteland -- an oasis-less desert

An indescribable fear now gripped all of the living. One began to run excitedly around each other, into the houses and out again, without plan, without objective. Household goods of all types were thrown, no, *heaved* in the most haphazard mixture up onto the wagons and transports of all sizes and types. In the next moment, one got information on the dangers. Breathless and winded, the sent out reconnoiterers came running back from the edge of the woods.

The fire is here!

"Flee for your lives!", they call to the people. Now the confusion and the fear reached its high point. Some continued, single mindedly and as if stuck blind from the over-hanging danger, their meaningless attempts to salvage [their possessions], others crept down into the cellars and wells, but the most fled in family groups northward in the hope to reach a rather water-fill marsh or woods pond, which one knew should be found some miles from there. Now it began to glimmer of fire out at the whole edge of the woods to the south. Closer and closer, the tongues of fire pushed forward and soon the whole southern horizon was a single, great, magnificently giant flame. Some moments, it looked unmoving, rather continually growing in height. It came like a mile-wide column of advancing fire giants and, as it first seems, with the snail's unexceptional pace, but it was only the perspective's optical illusion, for in [only] some seconds, the feared had appeared in the eye's proper view and showed itself now in its true and most threatening guise.

Under a continually growing roar, the fire mass approached in the form of a counterpoised, forward driven snow plough, and almost petrified of horror, they, the unfortunate in Pokegama, now understood that in some few moments their village should, from three sides at once, be closed in on and sucked up by the raging element. Now the moments were dear.

"To the marsh.! To the marsh!"

it was called out, and the number fleeing to the north increased. All further attempts to salvage [possessions] were given up, and those, who had not fled to the marsh, sought an uncertain protection in the wells and cellars. There they almost all without exception mournfully and suffering perished. Now the waves of fire rolled forward with unimpeded destruction, setting on fire everything burnable a whole mile before itself. Some rather large haystacks by the village's outskirts were set on fire at 300 *rods* distance from the belt of fire itself, and went up in smoke with a short, hissing sound as if they had been oil-drenched bunches of tow. The flames came steadily near, long, wiggling like snakes, methodically as the pale scythe wielder himself and expressly spitting hissing sparkling bunches of fire before itself. And behind the fearsome, rolling wall of fire, which just before had swept away Mission Creek [and] various out-of-the-way farms and timber camps, the cyclone broke down with a so unbelievable strength, so that the ground by the foot of the line of fire was white as the charcoal in the forge under the bellows pressure of air.

Horrible scenes.

When the call "*The fire is here!*" sounded, a Russian Jewish family consisting of the husband, wife, a 14 year old girl and a half grown boy was in great speed collecting together their lighter possessions, which they hoped to be able to salvage in bundles and sacks. However life was dearer whereby the bundles [were left] to lie, and all four ran to a well located a stone's throw from the house. The girl and the father stepped down first, the son followed thereafter and had just grabbed his mother in his arms in order to lift her down in when she crying out, "*the neighbor's little girl*", slipped loose and rushed back to the house. Now everyone remembered that one had forgotten to take with the neighbor's nine-month-old baby, which for the moment was entrusted to their care and was in the house. One waited and waited down there in the well for the mother's return, but she remained away. Then the son climbed up again, rushed to the house, which he found was already standing in bright flames. A little bit to the side laid two human bodies, unmoving on the ground, a large [form] and a little [one] – the mother and the little child. The child was already dead, and the mother horribly burned over the whole left side, but still alive. In pain broken sentences, she tells how she in vain attempted to save the little [baby], who was already suffocated when she found her, and how the fire, when she ran out again from the burning house, caught onto her clothing and burned her. With a weak voice, she asked her son to let her die where she lay, but he did not listen [to her] rather took her tenderly in his strong arms and hastened to the just name hiding place. Then to his horror, he became aware of how the fire had fenced him in all directions and a broad band of flames billowed for some minutes forward over the well where after it coiled further away, leaving a black, smoking trail after itself. In several moments, he is up to the well and he carefully lifts his dear burden from [his] shoulders to ask them down below to receive her.

Then his glance falls on this mother's eyes and a cry of anguish issues from his lips. Her eyes were shattered – had closed; her suffering but awakened other sufferings to life in the son, which with the horrible discovery's first impression [were] deafening and paralyzing.

But new dangers aroused him soon to consciousness. Now the compact sea of fire reached in on the house. The unfortunate saw with a single self-protecting instinct's sharp glance that the well now, after the band of fire had just passed over it, offered a safer protection than before. The heat increased with each second and compelled him to leave the mother's body and retreat down it. He wondered why he had not heard a sound from down there while he climbed down to the well's bottom, but when he reached half way down [the well], he got thereon the explanation. Strong, benumbing vapors struck against him and there below *laid* the father and the sister. They also were dead. The fire, which had just passed over them, had sucked up all of the air from the depth, and both the unfortunates down there had thereby been suffocated by the arising mefitiska-mephitic gases. The son was now the only survivor in the family. But in what a situation! Up by the earth's surface where the mother's body laid, he could not venture, for the fire there was suitably close with its boundless heat to kill him, and deeper down, by the well's bottom, might he equally be [killed] by the poisonous smell that had already finished off his father's and sister's lives. For several hours, he was compelled to cling fast in the middle to the well's walls on a pair of sharp, out-protruding stones hardly large enough to get a foothold on. During these hours, he led the most horrible spiritual and bodily sufferings, and when he finally ventured out from his hiding place, he shivered/shook in his whole body and [his] legs could hardly carry him. Today, this young man, [still] almost a boy, is gray-haired. The few but fearful hours in the well had so changed him, and certainly must he for the whole remainder of his life in its interior draw on a pricking memory, which for ever has made his mind gloomy and melancholy. Such scenes of terror and the fate's unmerciful blow places deep marks on the human memory.

Those refugees, who sought their saving in the wood's marsh lived through equally horrible suffering, and many of them, who successfully saved themselves, were however compelled to completely witness next to themselves the suffering deaths of acquaintances and family members, and these without being able to lift a finger in help.

A elderly woman, who could not follow the fleeing rapidly enough, came with weak, tottering steps running towards the marsh, where her son with his young wife and his small [ones] had already found a somewhat good safety for themselves. The fire was tight on the heels of the old one, and it was [only] with the greatest difficulty [that] she could breath in the heated-up air. She saw her son encouragingly waving to her and was encouraged thereby, [so that] her frail legs [appeared to get] new power and in some seconds she found herself about a stone's throw's distance from those of hers. But death, the horrible pursuer, did not release the desired booty for such a good price; a tongue of fire, longer, more flexible than the others it seemed, shot lightning fast forward out from the ground and threw a splash of sparks and embers over the poor, old woman, whose clothing caught fire in a moment. Now a horrible play was arranged. The unfortunate with her weak powers could no longer oppose the baptism of fire. With a heart-rending cry, she sank to the ground and twisted [around] like a worm in the nameless pain while the fire lapped off her clothing and burn through the flesh into the bone carcass.

But the marsh, or better said the pond in the woods, did not become a place of saving for all, who had sought refuge [there]. Trees stood on two sides so near the soggy ground that, when the fire began to flare up on their trunks and the crowns became heat-killing and an unbroken rain of sparks and embers fell around the unfortunates, [it] made their location yet more dangerous. The men took off their coats, the women their skirts, and with these coverings (which they first thoroughly drenched in water) twisted around the heads of themselves and their children and standing in the water up to their chins, many succeeded to endure and survive the suffocating smoke and the tight rain of fire. However, as it is said, not all were able to save themselves in this way.

A horrible camp of death.

A man came running towards the pond. His beard was singed off, his clothing were partly on fire. He ran for his life, the hands hard pressed against the breast as if thereby he wished to modify the burning pains, each breath in [of air] in the heated-up air poured into his lungs. Fire inwards, fire outwards, in the clothing, into the body itself, and – a sea of rushing, hissing, and thundering masses of fire behind him! Everywhere! He comes closer to the pond, but before he reaches there, he feels a boundless pain over the back and over the shoulder blades and in one side up under the armpit. He understands that the clothing is burned through to the skin. Rapidly he throws off his coat, and vest and some moments of further efforts, he plunges into the pond. In order to be saved? No, only for still awhile to be able to fight a despairing and hopeless fight for his life, and – to finally drowned.

He had, confused by pain and the fear of death, run out at the location in the pond that offered the worst protection. On the west side, right next to the water's edge, stood woods, thick and tight, in wild flames; on the right a long, bushy and tree-grown tongue of land, this also on fire out into the water, and in front of him he had deep water, too deep for him, the non-swimmer. The heat increased with each moment and the fire's embers fell hissing all tighter and tighter around him. He had fallen into a fearful death trap, which not once gave half a possibility open for saving. He must incessantly, duck his head deep under the water in order to not be totally fried by the heat, which continually increased, but after each dunking, the air, which finally properly glowed, became more difficult to breath in and finally the poor, suffering man sank powerless and disappeared into the water. The death became in the last moment however milder than it first showed itself, for to drowned was however less painful than to burn alive.

While these horrors played out, the fire flew rolling, twisting, unceasingly forward towards Hinckley. Nothing proposed to restrain it. Small lakes, streams and bogs it took in mighty jumps, and it swept over the isolated woods clearing like a driving snowstorm. Everything living, who fled before [it] got there, [were] suffocated and **burned-scorched** to death, and black as the night itself laid the surroundings where the horrible destroyer had passed over.

When the last traces of the far away racing fire died away in masses of smoke, the **the** saved refugees returned one after one to the devastated village. It was a sorrowful journey; here

and there one came upon a half-burned bodies of those poor ones, who had not managed to [get] up to the saving location/place. Of the village itself, there was not so much as a ridgepole left; everything laid in charcoal and ashes. In wells and cellars, one found several bodies of men, women and children, who had suffocated [to death in them].

Pokegama was no more, and [near] 30 people, many of them young, strong men and women became the fire and death's victims.

Chapter IV

Hinckley

This flowering market town with a population (before the fire) of around 1200 is located by the Grindstone River and creates a junction point for the St Paul and Duluth and the Great Northern Railroads. Hinckley was, before the fire, the liveliest and most significant city between Minneapolis and Duluth, and everything implied that it had a bright future to experience. Its central position, 77 miles from St Paul and 87 miles from Duluth, and both of the just named railroads joining there, had to a high degree contributed to this unusual upswing, and Hinckley was also the county's most important city.

The surroundings around Hinckley were completely densely ~~occupied~~ settled by energetic farmers who conducted a quite significant animal husbandry and thereby, in its way, contributed to raise the city's well being.

The city made a good impression on the visitor. The broad streets, the many shops, the hotels, the churches, the lumberyards, the sawmill, the magnificent and large schoolhouse and the pleasant and well-kept residences, all spoke for that here a progressive community was located. Trains came and went all times of the day, and great loads of lumber and livestock in significant amounts were transported northward from there. Briefly said: Hinckley was a through-way city, which laid at the midpoint in the passage way for a lively and wide embracing ~~commercia~~le of transportation. The mail came and went daily and two express companies, Adams and American, had their offices located there. The Brennan Lumber Co. conducted a wide-ranging lumber business and employed a large number of workers in its sawmill, in the lumberyard and the store, which the company owned there.

Of the more noticeable buildings in the city ~~is~~ was noted the *Hinckley Hotel* that was ~~owned~~ by B. C. Bartlett and the *Central Hotel* owned by C. Michael Dean, the beautiful school building and the city's churches. Among these latter were a Catholic church and a Swedish Lutheran. The last named church had a rather considerable and strong congregation, for the Swedes numbers in Hinckley were quite large, and many of them possessed ~~a~~ prominent position in the community. About the countrymen in Hinckley, it can be said that they, in general, ~~sat in~~ possessed good circumstances of wealth. They had saved and

economized, built their small, pleasant homes, and in spite of the year's pressing state of the market, they glanced with hope and anticipated to a confident future.

The Swedes in Hinckley and the territory had here, as overall elsewhere where the y build and reside, placed industriousness' and the solid work's stamp on their surroundings. The well-managed farms in the city's neighborhood bore witnessed on the beautiful manner in which the tough and, persevering Swedish new cultivator's peacefully, glorious outpost fight in an outpost for culture's breaking-entering forth through a wild and often to the outmost barren nature's rugged tracts.

The Swedish odalsmannen-yeoman was accustomed to burning and clearing, and the Swedish farmers around Hinckley did not deny to themselves either in the matter. There, where about for not too many years back all the land laid grown up with brush--filled pine woods or weaved through by bottom-less moors and swamps, there waved, a month before the destroying fire's passage, wide-stretched, [ripening] fields of wheat; there waving in tight, long lines the dark green, juicy corn raised high their plumed crowns, and the cultivator sharpened his scythe, prepared his equipment for a happy and awaited harvest, the harvest – which never was brought in

Hinckley was, as noted, a small, well organized community, equipped with everything of an [onward] progressing community's necessary and useful establishments. In order to, for the above said, attach an as elucidating conclusion as possible, here follows an enumeration of the more prominent citizen's names and activities.

Patrick Lawless, Postmaster; Sven W. Anderson, trading; Anderson & Peterson (John and Charles), butthcher shop; B. C. Bartlett, owner of the *Hinckley Hotel*; X. Bone, jeweler; Mrs. Mary Broth, book and paper shop; Dennis Bernnan, pastry shop; Brennan, Lumber Co., sawmill and trading; Michael C. Dean, owner of the *Central Hotel*; Henry Coffin, owner of a laundry establishment; Isak Cohen, clothing store; Wellington D. Cowan, doctor and surgeon; Albert Craid, barber; Wm. Craig & Son (William and John), building contractors; A. Rechner, owner of the *Eastern House*; Douglas Greeley, hotel owner; Aug. Hay, publisher and editor of the "Hinckley Enterprise"; Henry Nelson, owner of the *Henry House*; Miss Sara Henry, milinermilliner; Ernest A. Hogan, doctor; John A. Hogan, lawyer; D. W. Lawler, Catholic priest; John Lindstrom, restaurantueur; John Luchringer, butcher shop; McLoren & Cox, farriers; Hiram Miller, restaurantueur; O''Brian, lumber dealer; Wm. Rant, pres[ident], Pine County Bank; Miss Fannie Turegeon, ladies seamstress; George Turgeon, Great Northern Railroad' station agent; T. Turgeon, barber; Lee Webster, furniture dealer; John H. Young, St Paul and Duluth Railroad's and the Adams Express' station agent.

All of these people, the core of Hinckley's population, where and what are they now? Some became to flames' prey, and of those who escaped, some have returned in order new [enterprise] and beautiful courage try to build for themselves house and home on the old' ruins. Others again have dispersed in all directions. The misfortune made many of them completely impoverished, but not [to be] enough therewith, it robbed them also of all possibilities for a future existence in the destroyed city. By example, [for] those who depended upon logging, what outlook did they well now have since the state's woods were totally scorched for about 40

miles around? It was of course apparent that for them in their occupation [there] was nothing further to do. It must have been with heavy mind [that] these poor, destitute people went to unknown places and towards an unknown fate in order to seek for themselves a new bread of life.

Many of the saved Hinckley residents would not wish, for all of the world's possessions, return there where their homes once stood, for they could not endure again seeing the scenes of the many horrors, which played out during the few but fateful minutes, as the fire spread death and destruction around itself. A middle-aged woman lives in Duluth, a former Hinckley resident, who in the last moment after [having seen] her husband and three small children become the fire's prizes, was saved for a life, which now is for her a heavy and dismal burden, for the condition of her soul for [her] ever remaining presence on earth is time and again enclosed in darkness and confusion. A fire alarm is sufficient in order to cause in the poor [woman] the wildest paroxysms of the brain, and then she again lives through an aroused imagination to the border of insanity on the painful horrors [caused] by the cyclone of fire; then she plainly continues to see the old, continually returning scenes of terror, which never, never shall feel glad for her sick, agonized soul's peace or rest. She sees herself, with the least bit of smoke and heat, [with] the dying child pressed tight to her breast, fearfully awaiting her brave husband, who forced [his way] into their burning house in order to save the other two small ones. He lingers so long, she thinks; the moments become painful eternity, and during the time, the fire spreads and extends itself in all directions and finally cuts off, with a broad band of fire, the last path out to saving for the distressed loved ones. Then she suddenly sees something moving in the fog of smoke. It is the husband with both children. She recognizes them again and hope arises, but – however in the next second to die. Through the smoke and the fire, her husband fights forward with the one child hanging on the back and the other held fast under one arm, and she believes them to have been saved. Then he falls to the ground, rises up again with his dear burdens, staggers some steps forward and falls again, now in the middle of the fluttering tongues of fire. The children twined around under the piercing cry of their powerless father, who again makes some fruitless attempts to again arise. But the plaintive cry was soon deafened by death.

It is finished: the picture of terror with all of its horrible details has passed by – for the time – the paroxysms leave their suffering victim, who is benumbed in a blessed, unconsciousness condition of stupor, from which she so gradually awakes in order to again, with some insignificant reminder of the horrible catastrophe, be again, helplessly cast into the same agony of the soul.

We, who have had the good fortune to avoid living through such atrocities, are able to with difficulty to comprehend this type of soul-suffering, which limited remembrance is able to call forth, but inquire of eye witnesses to the fire thereon, and many should perhaps say to you that just for these horrible minutes, they should have for all time surrendered horror's city Hinckley.

The day of misfortune.

Clear, calm and beautiful the 1st of September originated over Hinckley whose inhabitants, with usual liveliness and desire, engaged themselves in the daily work and

industry; few suspected that this newly arisen sun would by the evening's sky's western sundown should look over their homes' ruins, hundreds [of people] burned and mutilated human bodies and a countryside as black and dismal as the night itself.

However it did not take long before one began to suspect that that not everything was right. Highly few misadventures fall upon us without a warning indication, and when the mighty natural elements threaten to step over security's damming in a wild, imposable outbreak, then [there] never fail to appear warning signs for those who watch out for them. So as well here. The day was unusually quite, the wind lay dead calm as before a strong lightning storm, but not withstanding this calm, which now and then made the aspen trees easily moved leaves completely rest, a gray-white, steadily thickening fog crept over the surrounding countryside and by the morning settled, thick and impenetrable, over the city. It was the smoke from the fires burning in the woods for several weeks back. One understood finally that this fire, which one for long since had become accustomed to and consider as something commonplace and not dangerous, during the just passed night had won a misfortune-boding expanding out, and now, behind the thick masses of smoke [was cutting forward] through the woods, steadily nearer and nearer to Hinckley. The general anxiety arose with each quarter of the morning's long hours. So the knowledge/information came: a telegram from Pokegama. It read, "*Be on your guard!*"

The fire is over us:

hardly a mile distant, and the wind freshens. Our city is doomed!" The dismal injunction/proclamation was within moments known by all of Hinckley, and in a moment, everyone was on their legs in order to prepare for flight and salvation. A number considered that the fire had about five milers to put behind itself before it reached forward [to the city], and then, in the calmness of the wind, it could not come over them so especially quick, and in good calmness, they began to pack up their household good, which they hoped to carry away in wagons and proceed in with them and themselves without any danger. Other, although the danger looked them in the face, were still without worry; for they thought, the open, treeless stretches of land that laid between the city and the edge of the forest itself, was large enough in order to make the fire powerless, and depending thereupon, the undertook *nothing* to save, be it their homes or their lives. What deceiving hope! What marvelous short sightedness among these humans, who of course however almost all were aware/familiar with the forest fire's fearful powers of destruction in dry years!

But hope's illusions should in moments be cast away. At about the hour of two in the afternoon, the masses of smoke began noticeably to slip over to the north, the air became clearer and a newly awakened breeze drew forth over the city. But this breeze, otherwise do desired because of the suffocating smoke's sake, did not come alone this time. It had two horrible following layers: a tight, drizzling rain of soot and a dry, warm, and at times, burning air. There was now consequently no doubt and longer; the feared monster of fire rushes forward implacably towards its fattest prize/booty. Mission Creek was long since devoured – ack! but a mouthful only! -- and the bellowing, immeasurable abyss of fire now stretched as best its

thousand flickering fire-yellow tongues after Pokegama – the already [sharp-eyed]¹⁰ appetite stimulated for the tasty morsel Hinckley.

A nameless fear

overcame everyone, and a frenzy, indescribable and wild, took hold. All reason, all thought appears in some seconds to have abandoned the unfortunate city residents, who now ran like crazy people around each other without a single clear thought upon *which* means of salvation they should seek for their lives. It was now no longer a question about goods and property, no, it concerned only one thing: *life*.

Then as one, all became as petrified. The groaning calls silenced for a moment, and every face was turned full of fear staring towards the woods. Had one not captured a glance of a strong glow, short but sharp as the heather fire's? Of course, there it gleamed again! High over the tree tops shot a spiral-formed shaft of fire up into the air, releasing from itself a rain of sparks and died down, but was followed after immediately by another, yet another; by several, tight, until the whole southwest horizon was as great flaming sea of fire. Yet there were those who hung firmly to the hope that the clearings lying should protect the city and themselves from the end of the world. It was the drowning man's groping for the straw, for in the next moment the horrors entered that no one had awaited.

A giant flame,

a whole cloud of fire and embers came, as if thrown forward out of the burning forests, right down on the unfortunate city. Bourn on invisible wings, this fearsome snip of fire took an unheard of jump into the air over the clearing, and before the people had properly been able to embrace/comprehend this strange terrible play, the flying fire had settled itself down in the heart of the city and set the houses on fire. Now a proper panic followed, a general flight. Only some few of the more courageous and predominant men tried to oppose [it]. The city water hoses were set up to meet the fire at the market town's edges, but it was [like trying to spit out a fire in] a blast furnace and the men were shortly compelled to quickly pull themselves back and join the crowd of the fleeing. Around 200 people of all ages fled on foot and in wagons in the direction of the Grindstone River, at whose other side a marsh/slough was located. How it went we these one, we shall later relate.

When the heat and the smoke began to be unbearable, when the one house after the other began to catch fire like barrels of tar, briefly said: help and salvation came, at least for many. A Duluth train came steaming in on the Eastern Minnesota's rail line, an on this [train] about 500 people were saved, who otherwise certainly would have died. The train of salvation itself was not sufficient in order to be able to carry all of the refugees, but one knew what to do. A considerable number of freight cars stood coupled together on a side track and a freight locomotive, which was on an adjoining track a little ways in the woods, was coupled on the other end. So thus equipped with two locomotives, the train steamed away in the direction of Duluth again, loaded with as many people as the cars could accommodate. It was a dangerous

¹⁰ At this point the Swedish combination word "skarpstekt" meaning "sharp-fried" is used. It makes no sense in the sentence so I have changed it thus.

trip, which now commenced, but all went successfully, even when the burning and shaking bridge over the Grindstone River was crossed. Hardly was this crossed before the burning pillars gave way and that, which remained of the bridge, fell down into the depths [of the river].

A while after this rescue train had gotten out of sight, another train arrived on the Duluth railroad line, but this train could not get closer than a mile's distance because of the burned down bridge. Here, in the meantime, around 100 refugees had congregated, who were taken on board by the train and under a proper chase with death right behind it, [it] fortunately reach Skunk Lake's march and there they were saved, while the train, which carried them there, went up in smoke and ashes only the throw of a stone away within the course of a few minutes.

But there were many of the worthy commiserate, who could not or were not of enough mind to have recourse to the railroad train. For one or another reason, they had been behind the others and now sought, in almost insane despair, a real or imagined protection. A number hid themselves in cellars and others in wells, but none of them escaped with [their] lives. In the cellars, the burning houses fell in on them, and in the wells, they suffocated for a lack of air. A small number, around 100 persons, hastened, as if by instinct or by chance one knows not, to a place, which became their saving and which could have saved the whole population, if they had sought their refuge there. It was to the, in the introduction, noted sand pit out by the Eastern Minnesota's track where the refugees were covered over [their] heads. Even the animals, with their instinct for self-preservation, sought refuge there, and in several moments, the pit was filled with people, horses, cows, dogs and household goods that one or another had been able to take with.

But permit us to return to those who fled northward out along the railroad track and towards the slough on the other side of the Grindstone River. They, the former, were killed, one after the other on the way, overtaken by the heat and the smoke, and around 30 bodies were collected the day after by the railroad track. Among these was even an Irish woman by the name of Mrs. John McNamara and two of her sons. A little hand purse was found beside the body containing \$525 in cash and \$3,500 in a certificate of deposit, presumably the family's whole together collected wealth, [from] many years of work and denial.

The marsh of death.

This dismal name serves to the fullest measure the marsh by the Grindstone River, there 125 people, under the boundless suffering, died. Naked, prostrate, mutilated by smarting pain and with pain-twisted limbs, the bodied of these poor ones were found, who suffered so indescribably before the hard/terrible fight was over. They, who never reached forward to the marsh but succumbed on the way and were lost, [suffered] without doubt a painful death, but their torments must have been milder than with the others, for in the swamp, death was slower. Only seven of these refugees and a pair of horses were saved, and Mr. F. A. Morison from Pine City, who was one of the first visitors to the marsh, has related the following there on:

"A Hinckley resident, Jake Barden, had, when he saw his house threatened [by fire] driven off after three barrels filled with water in order to therewith save his property. When he finally came back with the water, he perceived in the meantime that it was useless with the

attempt to squelch [the fire], and instead, he turned the horses toward the river and drove [with utmost speed] in the same direction as the other fleers had taken. With him on the wagon were six other persons, a woman and her husband with their two children and the Swedes Josef Lund and John Gustafson. On the way to the marsh, they saw one after the other of the fleeing overtaken and killed from the heat from the fire rolling tight after, and it was [with much difficulty that] the horse, because of the suffocating smoke, could mangle through to the goal. In the marsh/swamp/slough, which lay heavily covered in smoke, a heart-rending moaning prevailed. Mothers called for their children, children for their parents, and this moaning was mixed with the wagon rattle from those, who were in flight driving there, the deafening noise from the approaching fire, the dogs' wails and the cattle's' bellowing. And over the whole, the smoke laid so thick that one could hardly separate/discern anything at an arm's length's distance. It was a desperate fight against an overpowering, invisible enemy, who one knew lay in wait somewhere behind the darkness, prepared to throw itself over its sacrifices. The heat became hotter with every second, and those in danger must dig themselves down into the mud up to their chins in order to not be completely fried up and smeared over their faces with the same substance.”

“Jake Barden and his companions, who were so fortunate as to have water with them, had a hard encounter to fight. When the fire finally was completely enclosed upon the marsh's edges/borders and the sparks and embers began to fall tight as rain around them, they crept, by turns, into the water barrels, and the horses they protected from the fire through covering them with their water-soaked coats. In such a manner, these people saved themselves from a situation, which, if they had not had the little water supply with them, would have ended with a certain death for them all.”

“When the sea of fire finally vaulted over the marsh and rolled further away, all of the cries of moaning had quieted. Death has completed its terrible commission – no one, not a living person except for Jake Barden, his six fellow refugees and the swift horses avoided perishing, and over these freezing, soul-twisted bits of humanity, who had gone through an overhanging death's danger's all changing phases, the night now settled, desolate and quiet. None of the survivors, neither wished to nor ventured to leave their place of hiding, and during the long, desolate night, they sat tightly huddled together, silent and staring out into the darkness on the many gleaming embers.”

Now finally the morning broke, pale gray, clammy, and the still lingering smoke bleakness scatters itself around, the six saved got to see a view, which well never leave their consciousness. Wherever the eyes went, they saw the same, nauseous scene; heaps of human and animal remains, body after body. The marsh was strewn over with scorched and stinking limbs of flesh from all of these unfortunate deceased. Many had disappeared, so to say, completely passed on to the life of the saved, without these [having] known anything thereon. Half suffocated and [stupefied] by the thick, rancid smoke, these retched individual, un-scorched and un-heard, fought with death and were bowed down, and on the bodies lying unnaturally about stiffened in death's pains, one could conclude that the pains [and agonies] must have been hellish. Among the dead horse bodies and the animal remains, among the iron and metal rubble from the burned up wagons and the household goods of every type, which the refugees took with, the deceased lay among them naked, prostrate, burned and in many cases

massacred to unidentifiable ness. The bloodiest battle field could not look so horrible out; bombs and grenades could with great difficulty bring about more horrible mutilations, and the eye witnesses, hard men who had seen many blood-filled scenes of death, assured that they, under hard attacks of nausea, must turn themselves away from the scenes, which directly said, met them with each step.

But [while] the “Marsh of Death” offered uniformly these horror awakening pictures [it offered] as well scenes of a deep, self-gripping nature. Here and there one came upon a female body, a mother, who in her burned up arms, held her deceased small one pressed hard against her breast. Mother’s love, the always great and wonderful, had here in the end wrestled with the cruel death, who of course finally was the winner – *the destroyer*, but still however succeeded not to cut the loved one from the loving ones’ from [that’s] uttermost protecting embrace. Up to and after the last spark of life fled from the tortured and deformed body, mother and child laid almost inseparably pressed to each other, and it was with difficulty the body collectors could separate them from the encircling arms.

Around 135 human bodies alone on this misfortune’s place were collected, so that one could well call this place of dismal perishing *the marsh of death*. But the fire-garbed angel of murder had made a rich bounty as well on the little stretch of road between the city and the marsh. Not less than 60 people of all ages had there been killed like wing-scorched sparrows by the terrible heat, which robbed them of all sense and power, and then immediately there after, the forward billowing smoke and fire had completed the work of death. These deceased as well were found naked and burned up. Only in some single, unexplainable cases had the fire not in the least way mutilated or burned their bodies, and [on these] not so much as a thread of the formers’ clothing remained to be discovered on them. The elements of nature appear to follow strange fancies sometimes.

A tale of sorrow.

An eyewitness relates:

“ When the fire suddenly and unexpectedly, almost as it had been released from the sky, struck its claws onto our unfortunate city, all hurried, who had horse and wagon to their disposal, to get these in order for flight. In a shorter time than I am able to describe, I had my cariole hitched up and was racing out on the road north. The smoke covering was already at the start almost unbearable, and although my horse flew forward, I felt how the heat took a hold on the back with every minute, and I began to be filled with a veritable fear of death, for it spoke plainer than all words that the fire was far faster than my runner, and that it would not be especially long before the last named, [my horse], should be killed by exertion, and I thus cut off from all saving. The horse appears to have recognized the same, to fear the same as I, for he lay out in a yet faster pace. Then I suddenly perceived before me in the fog of smoke a dark object in the middle of the roadway, and when I came up to it, I saw it was a buggy, which remained still. Something in the harness had broken or gotten out of order, and a man was up front by the horses’ brisket with a single shaft while he, with desperate voice, tried to calm those sitting in the carriage. I drove up along side and hauled up my horse and then saw in the buggy a woman with two or three small children clinging to her bosom. The children were

crying loudly and the poor mother rocked them back and forth in her embrace. I called to her to give me some of the small ones. More I could not take because of the cariole's little space did not permit, but she sat as if deaf, and when she finally recognized my presence and heard my renewed call, she shook a no with her head and thrust the children tighter to her. Now I again felt the misfortune boding heat behind me increase and therewith caused a rain of sparks to drop down over our heads. It concerned my *life* as well as the others, so I gave my horse the bridle/reins again. Off [I] went in unbelievable speed, but I was the whole time taken up with only a single thought, and that concerned the poor one left behind on the road. I thought to myself through the fog of smoke, which almost blinded my vision and caused my eyes to smart and run, to have to have recognized again in the woman and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Axel Hanson, and I shivered with the thoughts on their situation. Should he be able to get the harness rein in order and succeed in escaping with his dear ones? Or should the fire reach them and suck up all of them?"

"These painful thoughts burned in my brain while I hunted for the way forward, and my own fear of death gave complete urgency to [this end]. Finally at the end, I could not endure [it any] longer. I knew of course that I could not in my little one-seat vehicle take with more than *one* of the distressed [persons], *one* of the children, and these of course the mother had refused to leave her; but *likewise*, I must, I *will* turn about to them in order to not see myself as a coward. I drew on the reins in order to turn around, but no, here appeared another obstacle, the horse remained motionless and could neither by hook or crook be gotten to turn the head *towards* the smoke and the wind, and during the minutes [that] I vainly tried to get control of the animal, the frightful pursuer came nearer and nearer. Gray-black, tight and heavy, the masses of smoke rolled now forward in mighty, rolling folds, while pressed [by] the hurricane, and the fire now and then clawed itself lightning-quick through the darkness. I had with the glance of an eye seen enough to understand that my left-behind refugees already lay in death's arms, and I was gripped anew by this paralyzing fear for my own life and let the horse run. How long I hurried forward in this manner, I do not know, for I was as [if] unconscious by the fearful tension of the soul, but when I came to myself again, my horse with good instinct had turned into a side path, which laid away from the wind and fire, and I was saved."

"On the following day upon another road, I ventured back towards Hinckley. I became informed of what I already knew, that Axel Hanson with wife and children had perished. The bodies, like all of the other, had been found burned beyond recognition at the place where I had driven up to them, and it was from the remains of the buggy that one guessed who they were."

Unbelievable rescues.

Among those fleeing by horse and wagon were also found a family, a husband, wife and two children. The husband had, as soon as he understood that the danger began to be hanging over/impending, harnessed his two small ponies with the intention to flee to his father-in-law's farm lying to the east where one of his children was, for the moment, visiting. The wife and children had been gripped by the general confusion and panic and refused, in the beginning, to try to flee in the wagon, for it appeared to them to be as certain a death as to stay and await the fire. Their stubbornness, by death's agony generated, is understandable, for at every direction they turned the glance, [it] was met by [scenes] of fire and smoke. The city appeared/seemed in

some seconds to have been transported in the middle by a fearful, flaming circle of fire, which threateningly drew together, closing off, as it looked out, every path of flight. The husband however had not lost his senses; just the opposite, it seems that he managed with sharp consideration and clarity. He saw what the others did not see – that the road still was fire-free in two directions, north and east, and he had decided to steer the course in the last named direction. It could not linger for many minutes [more] before that path should be closed off. Should the fire cast itself over them just as they came up to the still free passageway? The poor man understood that his and his dear ones lives stood [on the play of a card]; that it here concerned

a race for life.

but it must require boldness and speed. Almost with violence, he stuffed his children and wife into the carriage, and with out-of-mind speed, it bore off to the bank of a stream. The small horses strained themselves to the utmost, but the fire was however quicker. When the refugees had gotten about 2 ½ miles from the city, the fire had gained so much on them that only with the greatest effort could they breath in the heated-up air, but anyway, they continued a while until the pursuer was close to overpowering them, then they all jumped out of the wagon and let the animals run their own course, however not before the husband took with the horses' watering bucket. Now the refugees continued by foot, tight by the stream, until they reached a bridge that the fire had just begun to ignite. The husband immediately began to throw water on the bridge pillars thinking, that if the bridge in any way could be saved, they could find protection under it.

But what well could a person do against the horrible cyclone of fire? Equally willingly, he could try to put out the fire in a volcano's seething interior! The bridge was doomed to destruction, and the distressed family father looked around himself in indescribable fear for a way out for saving [themselves]. The situation was heart rendering. Then a thought of salvation came to his brain, and in the next moment, it was [quickly] undertaken. He exhorted his wife and the children to, in a closed-together group, wade out into the almost dried up stream where the water was the deepest, where he himself after joined them. In this location, they poured, by turns, water over each other when the heat threatened to rob them of their remaining powers of body and soul.

But they were not alone in the fight for life. For from all directions, in streamed the animals from the around-lying farms. Horses, cows, sheep, pigs and dogs came in flying flocks down to the bridge. They as well sought the water as a place of refuge but found only death – [in] the horrible end to be burned alive, for the little amount of water, which rippled forth over the stream's muddy bed some few inches deep, was [insufficient] to protect them. Turned wild by fear, flaying about, bellowing and whimpering, the poor, soulless animals trampled together out into the [mucky] stream bottom, there their helplessly sank down and [became mired in] [and] so [became] much surer booty for the fire, which some moments later began to slowly fry them to death. It was a hair-raising performance, and during the indescribable confusion, the distressed family was several time close to being trampled by the animals and share their fate, but an invisible saving hand appears to protect these four human beings.

When the fire finally drew away and the wailings around them had become silent by death, they then entered, with overwhelmed yet thankful hearts, on their return trip to their destroyed home – to Hinckley’s smoking and glimmering mounds of ashes.

The saving shawl.

A woman, together with her elderly mother, succeeded to save herself, related the following:

“We lived a little way from the Grindstone River. The fire came so unbelievably quick that no one got time to think about [anything] other than their own salvation, and it soon was clear to me that we, my weak mother and I, were completely forgotten and left to ourselves. I cannot describe the horrible fear, which gripped both of us. I was for some moments certainly half insane, for *not* a clear and useful thought was able to take form in my brain. But in view of my helpless, old mother’s dumb despair again gave me common sense’s use. I began to think about [how to save ourselves]. My first thought was directed to the marsh/swamp on the other side of the Grindstone. But how should we get there? How should the old, eighty year-old manage to get herself there? Crazy, impossible! Yes, well it was, for had we however gotten there – we would have never left the place alive. I thought about the well, but no, how to get and old one down it. In the cellar? The house should within a short time fall together as a ruins and exterminate us under its burning rubble. Yes, it was death, the most horrible death and destruction at every direction we turned, and I was ready to give up everything as lost.”

“Then suddenly I got, I know not how or where from, an inspiration, which I without hesitation followed. I searched for a large wool shawl, which was in the house, and so equipped, I took my old mother by the hand and hurried with her to the Grindstone River. It was in the meantime, a wretched protection this river had to offer us, for in the almost dried-up waterbed, snaked with effort a little a weak runnel/trickle [of water] through the mud, and nearer, steadily nearer, came the sea of fire’s surging waves with its horrible deafening noise. My poor, old mother shivered with fear and efforts in every limb, and, I, myself, was many time close to breaking down from the terrible tension of the soul, but the feeling of responsibility for the old one kept me up. We sought out the deepest place in the water and there awaited, under the indescribable oppression of death what ever should come.”

“We had not been there long before we were enveloped in a thick, night-black cloud of smoke, full of kicking embers and sparks and unceasing, streaked-through, wiggling tongues of fire raised themselves away over at the place where we knew the great lumberyards with their masses of dry, fire-caught wood were located. The wind laid strong from the lumberyards and down towards our hiding place, and within a short time, the whole surroundings was drowned in a black, impenetrable smoke of soot, which unceasingly, was drenched through with the tight, falling sparks. For a good half hour, we could hardly see [anything] an arm’s length from us, so thick was the smoke, and in order not to be suffocated by it, we must hold the skirts over our mouth and nose and breath through the fabric. Our situation was fearsome, but yet more terrors stood before us. The thick, suffocating smoke eased at long last in order to be followed by something yet more terrible – a killing, strong heat and a double in intensity fire of rain. We noticed now, some stones throw away from us, a group of refugees, a husband, wife and two

small minor-aged boys and a little newborn child, who the mother held in her arms. They had, like us, sought refuge in the river's bed, but found themselves closer to the fire than we, and when the heat insufferably rolled over them, they rolled in the silt of the water. My mother and I must soon follow their example, for the heat almost peeled [the skin off of] the face and forced through the clothing and aching in on the body. During [this] time the sparks fell tighter around us, into the water and upon us, so that we finally [shall] be lost during this baptism of fire."

"Now it was when the shawl came to use and became our savior. I thoroughly wet it in the water where after I wrapped it around and over the both of us, but immediately after it was dry again and was threatened to be burned through by the falling embers, so that we incessantly, with the danger of having the eyes and face burned, must repeat the wetting [of the shawl]. With every baptism, we felt how the wind from the burning lumberyards became hotter, and finally the air was so thoroughly glowing that we, in stead of making the shawl loose and wetting it, rolled in it in the water, thoroughly drenching it and our selves at the same time. I do not know for how long we fought for our lives in this terrible way, when a three
voiced

moaning, [piercing to] the bone and marrow,

reached us from our unfortunate comrades. I looked through the shawl's fold off towards them. May I be spared, to yet once again during my life see such a hair-raising scene! The mother protected her new born with a covering of cloth, a skirt I believe, in a similar manner as we, but the poor husband and the two boys had nothing other to protect themselves with than the silt of the water, and this was not sufficient to save them – no, it served only to extend the boundless death pains. During the heart rendering screams, more like animal/s than human cries, these unfortunates twisted like worms in river mud in order to find relief from the sparks' burning sting and the intensive heat. But no mitigation was given them, yet less any salvation. The fighting movements of the bodies became weaker and fewer and finally quieted completely. All three now lay unmoving and by their twisted and stiff arms and legs, we understood that death had entered."

"It was horrible to see this terrible catastrophe played out right near us and anyway be prevented from moving a finger for help and mitigation. We forgot, both of us during this horrible moment, our own terribly situation, but the continuously shifting dangers quickly awoke us consciousness. The rain of sparks had begun to draw off, but the air became continuously hotter, but the worst was, that the water in which we stood, finally became so hot that it was burning us, and we were compelled to climb up on to the beach/bank. To our great fortune, the worst of the danger was now over; the heat gradually diminished, and we were gripped by a wild feeling of our salvation from this unhappy death, which for a time threatened us from all sides and that had devoured its unfortunate prizes – our fellow humans – so to say, right at our feet. Together with the spared woman and her child, my mother and I spent the intruding night on the river bank: we two with dull pains mixed with joy over our being saved and our poor unfortunate comrade [doing] an incessant outcry over her deceased husband and the two small boys, whose bodied laid only a stone's throw away in the night darkness.

The fire's rampage towards Skunk Lake.

From the horrors in Hinckley, the reader now gets to follow for a while the fire's track for a little bit of the way up to Skunk Lake. Not far from the noted location, a little settler village was found [that] counted around 30 members of whom only some few were saved. One of the location's settlers, a Mr. John H. Anderson, tried to save himself, his wife and his three children in a wagon when the fire approached. They steered a course northward, but had not reached many stone's throw from the house before a suffocating cloud of smoke reached up and swept over them, and in some seconds, the horses were so overcome by it that they were killed and were down. All five family members abandoned the wagon now and attempted to continue the passage by foot, but in the darkness of the smoke, they became separated and the one after the other was overwhelmed by the smoke and the fire and disappeared. The son Charles, the only one of them who had gotten to the security of the marsh/swamp, heard the parents' and the brother's and sister's cries for help and the cries of death but could do nothing to save them.

A bare half-mile from the railroad track was the Westlund family's house. The fire came over it so suddenly and unexpectedly, and in some seconds, it stood in flames from house corner to house corner. Mrs. Westlund, who was for the moment alone at home with her children, must have immediately sought protection together with these in the house's cellar, for there one found the bodies of all three of them. The corpses of two neighbor ladies, who apparently also thought to flee down into the same cellar, were found on the ground very near the burned-up house. The fire had eaten up every thread of clothing from their bodies, which however had not so much as a burn blister. The hair was hardly singed, and the faces, confused/twisted by the pains of death, were also spared by the fire. The one woman laid on her side with clasped hands, the other on her back with drawn up, stiff limbs. The deaths had certainly been indescribably painful for them both.

A Frenchman living in this neighborhood found his salvation in a well that he had dug some days before, and without which, he certainly now would not be counted as among the numbers of the living. He related that suddenly, as he was going to his employment, he saw a large haystack, located approximately a mile away, catch fire and go up in smoke like a dry torch, and quickly thereafter like lightning, the fire spread to a neighbor's house, which in an incomprehensibly short time was devoured by flames. He could not comprehend where the fire had come from, but he understood that something dangerous was occurring and that it was soon his turn. In haste, he provided himself with two pails of water and took them down with him into the well. Hardly before he had climbed down, he saw great, waving tongues of fire likewise drop down from the sky, and almost paralyzed by fright, believing that the uttermost judgment had fallen over him, he heard a far off soft mumble, the forest fire's threatening roar. While he down below under the ground, with the water's help, [he] protected himself from the down-falling fire; very near him passed away/died in the most terrible manner 17 of his neighbors, who had not come to think of or even less to be able to find any protection.

In desolation's track.

These and many similar catastrophes denoted the fire dragon's progress on the path of the road between Hinckley and Skunk Lake, and this stretch of land's appearance immediately after the fire permits itself can hardly to be described in words. At several places, everything was burned up and changed to ashes up to the stone ridges. Smoking tree stumps and half burned up telegraph poles showed themselves in black gloominess that which had been, but where the residences and the farm buildings stood were found hardly more than ashes remaining to tell us the tale of sorrow.

"At one place," related a Swedish newspaperman, who the day after the fire visited this area, "we came upon a sewing machine, which was completely undamaged, but of the house in which it had its place, there was not the most limited trace. Near the burned up Duluth train had stood a house and besides it a large barn, but thereof was not found a trace. On the opposite, on the place where the barn had stood, some agriculture equipment was found almost completely undisturbed by the fire. These were the only remains; otherwise the fire had swept away everything. The few trees that remained standing were robbed of their branches and twisted around, which best shows the horrible strength the cyclone-wise fire storm had been." Several of the survivors told about the different events during the storm that followed the fire, which was indication that the last named had also been of an electrical nature.

A doctor, who had participated in some of the Civil War's hottest battles and more than once saw all of the battlefield's horrors and who had also been present at the great forest fires in Michigan in 1871, was one of the very first, who on the day after the Hinckley fire wandered through the burned surroundings. This well-tested man has declared that he has never in his life once seen anything comparable, which in ghastliness could be compared with what he saw. Corpse after corpse of humans and animals. The same scene mile after mile, and between the dismal remains from this mighty destruction's victims, he saw half naked women and men, single-mindedly, crying out in complaint, wandering about in order to separate friends' and relatives' features in the burn-up human remains, which they could dig out from the still glowing piles of coals.

A crazed mother.

Among these unfortunate sorrowing was a Norwegian woman, who attracted the doctor's especial notice. He came across her sitting on the ground, her body waving back and forth. In her skirt laid a burn-up, clammy/sticky object, which was found to be the remains of a little child's corpse. She had found it during her heavy wanderings around these dead and there in recognized, or thought to recognize her child. But the horrible find had been more that her mother's heart could bear and her understanding could endure. She was crazy. When one tried to take the little disfigured child's body from her, she bit and reeled around and issued the most terrible moaning. Not before she had been assured repeated times that one did not intend to steal her child from her, only [that] she follow with, was it possible to get her to leave the place where she apparently had sat the whole night and to go onboard the relief train, which immediately afterwards carried all of the distressed to the neighboring cities where help and care awaited them.

Many scenes of a similar type were witnessed everywhere the fearsome fire had pressed forward over the human communities, and the survivors' sorrow and distress permits itself to be easier thought on than to be described. Many of them allowed themselves to be completely stunned by this fate's heavy blow. With motionless, far away glances and soul-less facial expressions they wander simple-mindedly, without purpose around among the ruins [looking] for their homes. The hunger, shortage of rest and sleep, in brief: doing without of all types, they did not seem to pay attention to; the, to them, recently passed terror had, as it seems, robbed them of their natural demands' manifestations of feeling, and had not the well-wishing people, who the day after the misfortune streamed in from all sides and faraway places, with mild force been able to make these worthies of commiseration think more on their welfare than on those they have helplessly lost, so certainly should many of them been bowed down by the pressing burdens of sorrow and shared the poor Norwegian woman's fate. So gradually, one got these unfortunate ones collected and separated from the places, whose mere sight must have been enough to keep them bound in this soul stricken condition of the mind, and they all have now recovered there from and in different [locations] again have taken up the battle for existence, a number at where their old homes stood, but the most, at distant placed, as if they protected themselves from seeing the places of misfortune where they had so indescribably suffered.

Hinckley, the day after the fire.

We find Hinckley, the day after the fire, like a devastated, burned-over desert, and abandoned like Pokegama and Mission Creek recently [described for] for the reader. There, as we wandered around between the still smoking piles of ashes remaining of the destroyed city, not much could be found that implied that Hinckley had existed. Only some individual objects raised themselves over the desolation – the fallen-down walls from the city's recently elegant schoolhouse, the iron fence, which surrounded the now down-to-the-ground city hall (*the town hall*), the last named building's safe, a completely undamaged outhouse, half of the Duluth Railroad Line's roundhouse, a water tank belonging to the Eastern Minnesota Line and the same line's roundhouse, a tool shelter and a stone's throw away a pig sty made up all of Hinckley, with its 250 houses, which the fire did not manage to consume.

Further away, around 2 ½ miles in an easterly direction from the city appeared, forward by the river bank, likewise a well unconquered work of mankind – farmer Mike Dean's new residence. Dean and his neighbors fought with desperation's efforts and endurance to the outmost against the intruding fire until the heat drove them down into the water. There, with the assistance of wet clothing coverings, they endured the worst of the fire. When the danger was surmounted, they found to their happy surprise that the unbelievable and unexpected had occurred – the house stood completely undamaged.

Hinckley, with the exception of the just noted schoolhouse, which had cost \$10,000, and half of the Duluth Line's roundhouse, had been completely built of wood whereby it is easy to understand [that] the devastation could be so general. So much more unbelievable is presented therefore in the roundhouse's and the Eastern Minnesota Line water tank's escaping from the sea of fire, especially as both of these timber structures laid on the city's southwestern edge, that is to say directly in the path where the fire's surging waves, hissing and destroying, rolled forward.

The city was most compactly built in the fork, which in the north was created thereby by the crossing of each other of the railroad tracks. While one still saw or thought to see a possibility to limit the fire, the fire department crews directed all of their efforts in the attempt to save some small houses located out by the Duluth Line's western side, for the city's business center laid completely nearby on the other side of the tracks, and it was worth [the effort] to stem the fire there. However this was unsuccessful when the fire completely unexpectedly and in a mighty leap fell over the city, the reader already knows from the previous [description]. In a shorter time than it is possible to describe the lapse of time, every house stood in smoke and flames and it did not take long before everything burnable, from one side of the city to the other, lay charred and in ashes. Here as likewise in the previously burned cities, there were many unfortunates, who did not quickly enough flee or who, during the panicky consternation, did not have sense enough to choose safe places of refuge [but] rather vanished miserably. The fallen in houses' cellars and the many wells gave sorrowful proof of the truth thereon, when the corpses collectors the day after the fire examined the place of misfortune and searched forth the one human corpse after the other

The flight on board the burning train.

In the beginning chapter, we intimated most cursorily that two Duluth [Line] trains had arrived in Hinckley just when the fire danger was the most impending for the unfortunate city's residents, and that these trains took on board and saved around 600 human beings of all ages, who otherwise certainly would have been deceased. We wish here in somewhat greater detail to spend some time with the description of the daring and horrible journeys, which both of the railroad trans under took, each one in its own effort. We ought to begin with "the burning train", which, when it after a frenzied race and enveloped by fire on all sides, nice and easily finally reached Skunk Lake, [and] fell [then] into a heap in glowing and smoking small fragments over the wheel axels.

This train came from the north and should arrive in Hinckley at 4:06 P. M. The resolute and compassionate engineer, James Root steered the locomotive with a sure eye and a steady hand, and it seems did not anticipate the danger of death [that] he, for his own part, glided into. And the scenes however [that] were witnessed on board [were] of such a character that the bravest and most cold blooded felt themselves fearful there with. Fire before [them], fire after [them] fire on all sides of them. It rumbled and hissed in the air when the mighty flames, driven on by the tornado, pushed past the forward rushing train. Men, who were present on this terrifying journey, become pale and are gripped as if frozen [in place] when the talk is turned to it. Strong men, who one should believe possessed nerves of steel, have lost [their] senses by the fear and the results of the intense heat and suddenly threw themselves out of the windows of the cupés --- right into the glowing forge [of fire] there outside, their death cries out shouted by the fire's roar. Upon the car's floor laid women and children immersed in burning prayers, begging Him, who directs everything, to be spared [their] life. The small ones clung terrified to their mothers, both with them or summoned by their anxious cries of distress. Back and forth went the brave conductor, Thomas Sullivan, helping and calming the passengers to the best of his ability.

During all of this confusion and testing of the soul however, the engineer, James Root, stood imperturbably calm at his post, a veritable hero in mind and action. The fire threw itself in from all directions, through the windows in his cab, singeing his hair, half peeling off his face and hands, but anyhow he held up. Not [even] when his clothing caught on fire did he show the inclination to give up the unequal fight. With amazing calm and unusual cold bloodedness, he order the fireman, John McGowan, to pour water on him, and with an still firmer grip on the steering pole, he drove the burning train with a speed of 60 miles and hour further, further towards the goal for saving. Three times his clothing caught on fire and three times he was drenched with water by the fireman. Behind them, both of these brave men heard how it bleated and knocked in the cupés/compartments from where the fire flamed up around on all sides, and they knew all to apparently that it could not be long before, in some minutes, each and every car should burn up and collapse together in glowing pieces over the unfortunate passengers. It was soul and nerve spanning, these moments, and it is apparent that if less courageous men be placed in a similar test, it would not be long before they had lost their senses and “let everything go its own way”, as the saying goes. But Root was neither a coward nor self-seeking; it depended on his ability to hold up whether 200 people should be able to avoid a fearsome death. He felt and knew this and he held out until the place of rescue was reached.

Some of the refugees experiences.

The Honorable D. O’Brien from St Paul, who was one of the passengers on the Duluth train which James Root engineered, describes his experience as follows:

“When we at 1:55 o’clock left Duluth, the air was so thick with smoke that we could not perceive West Superior immediately across the bay of the lake. The wind was from the southwest, a fresh breeze, and steadily increased in strength. We observed fire here and there between Duluth and Thompson¹¹, however not heavy, so that it arouse no anxieties among us. The smoke thickness in the meantime became all the heavier and when we reached Barnum¹², the sun was totally darkened although the sky was completely free of clouds. The train continued its trip down to this station, slowly and with great caution and with continuous, long drawn out signals/whistles. [At] 3:46, it became night black, as dark as if in a sack. The cupé/compartment lamps were lit, but not a beam from them gave a reflection from the outside. I was then in the smoking car. Fourteen minutes later when we signaled Hinckley, the treetops in the city’s surroundings could weakly be discerned. The train stopped, and when I looked ahead of us towards the locomotive, I observed that the sun shown quiet strongly through the veil of smoke and hoped therefore that the worst was surmounted. But in the same moment, a mass of people pushed forward from the edge of the woods on our left side. They were fleeing city residents, who cam to seek saving on board the train, and when they came up to the barbed wire fence by the railroad embankment, I saw how the men pulled and pushed the women and children through the same without concerning themselves at all that the clothing thereby was cut into rags and that the fence barbs scraped deep into their bodies. Their awful fear appears to have inured all feeling of violation and pain, and from all the throats was heard a common,

¹¹ Warren Upham’s “Minnesota Place Names” has no reference to a community by this name. There is however a Thompson Hill, the height of land on Duluth’s west side that this might refer to.

¹² The city of Barnum in Carlton County was incorporated in 1967. It has a Northern Pacific Railroad station and a post office from 1872.

complaining sound, a horrible wailing, such as one gets to hear from the insane in an insane asylum. They jumped, staggered or crawled in wild crowding up the track embankment and entered one by one into the train cars. While this proceeded, it became suffocating hot around us, and we suddenly perceived a numbing roar like the aroused the ocean's powerful wave sound. And in reality, it was an ocean's waves that drew near us, but an ocean of fire and spark-crowned wave tops, and when we stuck our heads out through the car's window, we saw a boundless mass of fire come rolling down upon us, capriciously,

whirling like a cyclone.

"I pulled myself quickly back into the car and pulled down the window just at the same moment [when] the flames from the sea of fire reached us and began to lick the outsides of the train, which at the same moment began to back up. We had gotten going nice and easy when the one cupé windowpane after the other fell in with crashing sounds from the heat. The men hurried to pull away the window shutters and roller shades [down], but a half-minute later, even these were eaten up by the fire, and the flames pushed freely in through the openings. Some competent women then cut loose the seat coverings, wetted these in the water containers and held them up before/over the windows. During this time, the train had increased [its] speed to full pressure. It made for a furious lurch, and I thought for a moment that we had gone off the track, but soon it was on the right keel again and continued unimpeded on its unbelievable race. So gradually we succeeded to lay the sea of fire a bit behind us, but a whole length of a car stood in hissing flames. After a further 10 minutes of travel, we came into a region of smoke, which felt significantly cooler, and in the next moment, the train's speed slowed and [it] finally stopped."

"Now a general rushing out of the cars began when someone called, "Stay onboard!" and several women turned [and entered] into the cars. They were immediately afterwards burned up. I observed that the grass was short and wet at the place where we climbed out, so that it was apparent that the fire should not catch fire in it and spread, We all laid ourselves prostrate on the ground with [our] faces pressed tight against the wet swampy ground. The line of fire was advancing but still around 400 feet off. I crawled on all fours forward over the ground to a place that seemed to be a dried out riverbed. There we laid down. The air was filled the whole time with sparks and embers and the women's clothing constantly caught fire. An attendant in our car, a Negro, stood with [his] back towards the fire and took care with a fire extinguisher, which he had the presence of mind to take with him from the train, and with this piece of equipment, he was ready to immediately squelch the fires as soon as they flamed up on the women's and the children's clothing. He was a brave and competent man. When we had for awhile laid in this manner, half dead from fear and the smoke, someone was hear to call while we were still on the train that water had been seen a bit beyond where we laid. I was not tardy to crawl in the noted direction, and after a good period of crawling on hands and knees, I discovered the water, very properly to my great joy, and within a short [timer], we had gotten the women and the children to safety there."

Captain Gorman' rescue.

R. L. Gorman with [his] wife from St Paul were among the train's passengers, and the first named says that he is completely convinced that a great number of those on board perished.

"We were", he relates, "around 80 passengers, as far as I can judge, before we took the refugees on board in the vicinity [near] Hinckley. I surmise that that the last [group's] numbers came up to around 50, so that we were approximately 130 [individuals] when we stopped by Skunk Lake. But when the rescue crew arrived, we were not over fifty or sixty in the swamp/marsh, for we all got room in two so-called double handcars."

"I know that many continued the flight on foot northwards from the track after they had climbed down from the train, for I and my wife started in the same direction, and we saw a whole bunch fleeing before us. The wind threw such masses of embers over us that I decided to turn back in order to reach the little open patch we had glimpsed to the right from the point where the train had stopped. I did not know that there was there a little collection of water but raised the weak hope that the opening should give us protection. The train's porter, John Blair, was the one who first mentioned the water's nearness and pointed out that we should get down in it. My wife was so overcome by the smoke that she [only] with the greatest effort could move herself forward to the water, and when we finally reached it, she lost all consciousness. A night so horrible, which we then experience, is beyond the human's ability to describe."

"It took and especially long time for the train to back up to Skunk Lake, but it still remains for me today an unsolved puzzle how it *could [succeed]*, because of the sea of flames and flying embers and sparks and the masses of suffocating smoke, which we must force our way through, was something indescribably horrible. It was like being thrown [into] a white hot, glowing, sparkling forge/smelter. I am still amazed that the train had not [earlier] turned around, for it had become so pitch dark by smoke that the lamps in the cupés/compartments must be lit. It was as dark as the darkest winter night. I am completely certain, that if we had not met the refugees, the train would have continued on to Hinckley, in which case obviously everyone on board [would] have perished in the flames or been pulled down with the train under the burned down bridge."

"For so much could they not be praised, who selflessly and not paying attention to their own torments and dangers to life, offered up their whole abilities to support and help their unfortunate comrades. One of these danger's heroes was Dr. Harry O'Brien, who himself tormented and sick, time and again almost to the point of unconsciousness likewise was untiring in his care for the other distressed ones. A Mrs. E. N. Saunders and her five children, who all were with onboard on this fire train, could certainly thank Dr. O'Brien that they escaped with [their] lives. Blair, the Negro attendant, earns as well all commendation, and the same can moreover be said about the whole train [crew]."

A hero's achievement.

One of the passengers, a Mr. George E. Sjöqvist, who barely and horribly burned, escaped the horrible fate to be burned alive, has related the following:

“On board the doomed train, I observed among the demoralized passengers a young man, who with an amazing calm, found himself in our horribly hopeless situation. He struck up a conversation with me, and not once [did] a quivering in his voice or a glimpse of fear in his glances supply that he felt any uneasiness – this unease or fear, which in a moment like this must be completely natural and impossible to hide, and as I know certainly thereof, have been reflected fearfully plainly in all of my movements. This young man’s very presence calmed my nerves to a degree that, up to [the] then in life’s dangerous moment, surprised me [so much to cause me] to make some reflections upon his character. “Here”, I thought is one of the few true natural heroes.” My supposition, or more properly said, my undeniable feeling that it so was, was soon confirmed. When the train stopped, a tumultuous rushing/hurrying from the cupés began. One gave oneself no time to wait for free passage through the doors; many scrambled precipitately out through the burning window frames where with they cut their hands and faces on remaining glass splinters and incurred more or less serious burn injuries.”

“Albert W, Speyer - so was the young man’s name – and I came, at approximately the same time, out into the free, and we join immediately with [the other] fleeing and ran in the direction of the marsh. We now heard how the one cupé/compartiment after the other collapsed in a short crash, and we hurried [on] our flight under a hazy feeling of thankfulness that the train had not [disintegrated] long before we reached Skunk Lake. Suddenly Speyer came to a dead stop as if listening, and he grabbed me hard by the arm. “Did you not hear a child cry?” he asked vehemently and listened again. “No”, I answered with my glance fastened sharply on my young companion’s face, which now shined with an impatient desire for action, but in the same moment, a hollow cry prevailed in our ears. It was a child’s voice; there was not doubt thereon any longer. Speyer was, in the next second, running in full speed back to the train, and I hesitantly followed him as if drawn by a magnet in the same direction. I saw my hurrying friend stop two or three times with the hand behind the ear in order to get the direction of the cry of distress, which now could only be perceived very weakly; [finally], he resolutely steered a course to a compartment whose whole long side, opening towards us, fell in. It made me cold when I saw Speyer pull, heave and kick aside the burning [remains of the compartment] and thereafter, with an arm before the mouth so to not suffocate from the smoke, he daringly and recklessly push himself into the compartment. There he disappeared from my sight. A bare minute only, which seemed to me [a period]

as long as eternity,

passed. The crashing and bellowing sea of fire pushed itself nearer, and the compartment, in which I had seen Speyer disappear, melted together and fell apart into pieces. I was gripped by a nameless fear for my brave friend’s fate, and believing him lost, I for the second time should flee towards the marsh/swamp in order to save my own life. Then I at the same [moment] got a glimpse of something white appearing out through the smoke around the luckless cupé/compartiment. Soon I discerned that it was Speyer; he was in his shirtsleeves and before him he carried a dark object, under whose burden he, with great courage, made his way out again. I hurried forward to him. How he looked! Hair singed off, burn blisters on his neck and cheeks, eyes red and half blinded, sooty, torn apart and with patches of fire smoldering on his shirt and pants. And likewise, he was jubilant, holding forth in his coat the wrapped up burden while we for the second time fled towards the marsh/swamp. “I got her out anyway alive!”

It was found to be a little, helpless and abandoned girl that he had saved .The child, without any protector, had been on the train from Duluth on the way to Minneapolis, and when the confused rushing from the train had begun, there was not a soul who took charge or thought about the little lonely one. Everyone thought only about their *own* salvation, and so she was left behind, abandoned in the middle of the flames until the time that Speyer, so determinedly and heroically, hurried to he salvation, whereby he himself so narrowly came to give his life. I shall always remember Speyer as a true hero in connection with the danger filled journey to the Skunk Lake marsh.”

Many perished.

Another passenger on the burning train, Mr. a. Schnabel from St Paul, make the following description:

“While the train backed up towards Skunk Lake, I observed many fleeing men, women and children, who made their ways forward, as long as their strength remained, through bushes and brush and over rugged ground of all kinds. I can still, in the imagination, see their despairing appearances, and I can easily think on the horrible end, when they exhausted by tiredness and overcome by the boundless heat, one after the other sank down to the ground to never more arise. The poor people! The fire was on the heels of the train the whole way, although we steamed forward with a speed of 60 miles an hour. How then should they be able to escape? With what nameless despair must they not have witnessed how the train, which of course could have been their salvation, also rushed past them and left them to their fate.”

“Our trip went with undiminished speed, but the pursuer was almost equally as fast as we, for the whole time, sparks of fire whirled from the outside in through the glass-less window frames. When the train finally stopped, I had no idea that we found ourselves so near water, therefore before I hastened out of the compartment, I drenched my coat in the water container and held it over [my] head and shoulders. Out on the track, I met conductor Sullivan, and we followed it a bit forward. When I saw the flames come nearer and nearer, I stopped and inquired as to what he intended to do. “[Go] after help” he answered and continued on his way, and that was the last I saw of him. I felt certain that he should die, but later got to hear that he was transported to St Paul, still alive but half crazy from [what he] passed through. I remained standing [for] a good period and stared after him, but was finally compelled by the strong heat to retreat to the marsh. There before me, I found all the other refugees congregated.”

The most safe place of rescue.

The couple, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Swanson, were among the few Hinckley residents, who when the fire cut them off from any saving outside of the city, had the presence of mind enough to seek out the only secure place of salvation that was found to go to. We repeat here what they have related:

“After my husband and I despairingly had planed how we, with our three children, should be able to place ourselves in security outside of Hinckley, we came upon the thought

that the Eastern Minnesota Line's sand/gravel pit located on the city's eastern side should be a good place to flee to, and without lingering, we hurried there. Some other groups of refugees had already found [their way there] before we, and the numbers increased unceasingly until we were approximately a hundred people in the pit and a great number of cows, horses, pigs, chickens and other household animals. We heard the fire's threatening roar above our heads and felt how the air began to be hotter and stronger [and] mixed with smoke. This situation worsened with each second, so that finally we must creep down into the three-foot deep water in the pit's bottom. Down here we endured for a rather good period, for counted from the middle, the pit had a depth of about 15 to 25 feet and its circumference at the top was rather significant, and when the sparks began to fall too tight and threatened to ignite our clothing, we saved ourselves by splattering water over each other. We felt ourselves here comparatively safe and wished that all of our friends and acquaintances had followed our example. I do not know how long we stayed down there in the gravel pit, when we heard the Eastern Minnesota train come, and immediately afterwards, we saw it stop completely near our hiding place. Several of our unfortunate comrades in the pit hurried [quickly] on board the train, and my husband stated as well that the children and I should do the same in order to avoid spending the night in the wet sand hole. He accompanied and saw that we got properly on board, where after he returned alone to the hiding place."

How this train was placed in order and coupled with a length of cars on a side track, we have already described, therefore we permit Mrs. Swanson to take up her tale in the following and describe the rest of the course [of the tale].

"A number of the 450 to 500 refugees, who hurried to climb on this train were bare headed, others without coats and many women and children barefooted with disarranged hair and torn apart clothing, carrying their small ones in the arms. Others came letting go of clothing bundles and other loose property, which they, in the excitement, had been able to gather together and thought worth saving. A number of the families' members became separated from each other in the crowding and shoving, and this made the chaos and the general shouting to increase. Children, large and small, who could not find their parents, climbed on board by themselves as best they could. When [after] as many as could get to be well stuffed in, the train got going, which was good while it still had a jump on the hunter. I have heard it spoken about locomotive engineer Root's and fireman McGowan's of the St Paul & Duluth train's competence and bravery and all glory to them, but I do not believe that engineer Best and conductor Powers on our rescue train stood behind them in anything. They showed a calm and faithfulness to duty, which was amazingly worthy. Without paying any attention to the protests by the first onboard refugees to not await those remaining behind, they kept the train standing to couple as well the just noted length of cars [for] the sake of doubly assuring help. The journey itself they likewise conducted cold bloodedly. At one point, the track was completely blocked by criss-crossed, large fallen trees, and in the other direction to Duluth, we must pass over the Kettle River's bridge, 115 feet high and 1,600 feet long. This bridge already stood in light flames when the train reached it, but Locomotive Engineer Best steered his train with its dear load successfully and proper to the other side of the river, and therewith, we had placed behind us the most overhanging danger, and the trip continued afterwards without further adventures to Duluth, which we reached in the afternoon."

Locomotive Engineer Best relates himself.

“We left West Duluth at 1:15 P. M., and some minutes later, I must light the locomotive’s lamps, for the smoke had turned the day to night as we continued forward. The smoke and the heat worsened, of course, the closer we got to Hinckley. I had hoped that we, upon the arrival there, should be finished with the smoke and the insufferable heat, for I felt the area nearest Hinckley to be comparably free and open [from the smoke and heat]. My surprise, and I can willingly say terror, was therefore great when I found the city completely in the fire’s claws. A single glance told me the Hinckley was doomed. The wind drove down with an unheard of strength and ferocity, and the flames properly jumped with giant leaps through the air. The people were completely confused, irresolute and helpless. The fire had come over their city quickly like a bolt of lightning. Powers and I got the train coupled in a flying hurry with a length of [railroad] cars, which stood on a side track in the vicinity of the station, and after we had gotten as many [people] as could be accommodated on board and wished to be stuffed in, we took off again, and let it go for full engine/speed through the burning forests. I believe we flew, for never has my steam engine worked so well. Telegraph poles and railroad ties stood in flame, so that we drove over a stream of fire. The refugees were packed in like sardines, so that they could hardly move. We passed over several bridges that stood on fire. At Partridge¹³, we stopped for a while in order to provide the passengers with water. Behind us, we heard the fire’s rising noise, and 20 minutes later, Partridge was also on fire so to thereby understand how unbelievably quick the fire went. The certainty was that we all drew and easing breathe when we reached the outskirts of Superior.”

How the destitute were received in Duluth.

The reader, who has followed the descriptions of all these human sufferings, shall certainly feel a type of relief when he learns that the population and the city administration in Duluth received, with open arms and noble helpfulness, the wretched refugees. Everything that was in mankind’s ability was ready to be done for these poor ones. Around 800 exhausted and starved human beings took in this manner the Duluth folks’ hospitality, completely unprepared for the demand, but not *one* of them was ignored or neglected. All were accommodated, fed, and where necessary, clothed. One competed in all manners to assist and succor, to consulate and encourage these human beings so hardly punished by the misfortune.

To accommodate the hundreds of homeless, who found in Duluth a temporary refuge; several public buildings were opened up such as the Bethel Home building, the caserne (*armory* in the Howard Building) and the Pilgrim and Congregationalist Churches. Many with the greatest the willingness took in private families, and they, who were injured or sick, were immediately transported to the hospital. *The Ladies Relief Society*, which had its headquarters in the Lyceum Building, created a praiseworthy beyond measure effort to clothe and help the distressed. They preformed many tests of great heartedness and denied neither sacrifice nor difficulty in order to be of assistance to their unfortunate sisters.

¹³ A village in Pine County, Minnesota that was completely destroyed in the forest fire of 1984. Its post office was transferred to the village of Askov in Pine County.

Besides these, many private individuals and firms came, without exception, with rich support in the forms of bed clothing, wearing apparel, foodstuff, and more, and the churches took up liberal subscriptions, and other entertainments were arranged and were launched under great rush and for the benefit of [those] damaged by the fire. But the deservedly thanked and the generous Duluth folk did not stop with this. As soon as the misfortune became known, a number of the city's foremost citizens met and arranged for the rescue trains being dispatched to the location of the misfortune. Several such trains were dispatched, and in an especially compassionate manner, hundreds of the city's residents took part in the devastated district to search out and sooth the needy wherever such could be found. With these few, we ask the reader to return to the place of misfortune in order to there observe

yet another train adventure.

Approximately at the same time as Locomotive Engineers Root and Best guided their trains loaded with refugees, the former towards Skunk Lake, the latter in the direction of Duluth, [there] was a third train, which on the Hinckley and St Cloud Line, started out in a southwesterly direction towards the last named city. This train had approximately 25 passengers onboard, and its course went straight over the stretches that had only some few minutes before been washed over by the cyclone of fire, in other words: the train had to force itself forward straight *against* the still smoking and glimmering track of fire. Already after the first half mile, the situation began to become questionable and a while afterwards purely distressing. The railroad ties stood in flames, the small bridges' supports swayed under the train, and the smoke increased with every second, so that the locomotive engineer was completely helpless. The smoke finally became so intensively strong that he not once could discern the first car behind him. Giant-like burning trees laid criss-cross over the track, so that the train several times was on the verge of going off the track because of them.

In this manner, the wild journey proceeded still a good period in the dark and at random when suddenly the track broke¹⁴ and gave out in both directions and the train turned on its side. A strange outcome of fate was that no one with this event became injured, rather all collected together and began their the journey on foot towards Pokegama located only a few *rods* before them. The unfortunates had however not come further than some feet from the untracked train before they found themselves on the edge of a 60 foot wide and 40-foot deep ravine, whose bridge had been burned by the fire and fallen down. On the way, they had in the meantime successfully gotten up to a clearing around the location where the station house just recently had stood, and there they found a type of saving refuge away from the still dangerous fire's groundswells. Four or five members of this band of refugees however never got up [to this place of refuge]; the day afterwards, they were found dead out by the railroad track, apparently suffocated by the smoke.

Chapter V

Sandstone

¹⁴ The word used at this point in the original was "skräckte" or "terror" if there was no "e" at the end. I believe it is a typographical error and should have been "spräckte" the past tense of "break" or "fracture".

This little, industrious community, which in its bounds, counted a size of 350 to 400 residents, was established and began to be populated in the year 1887 when it was incorporated and got all of the institutions of an American county city. Sandstone before the fire was located by the Kettle River in Pine County, approximately 87 miles north of St Paul and 24 miles north of Pine City. The place was crossed by the Great Northern Railroad, which there in the area was known under the name, the Eastern Minnesota Railroad.

Sandstone had both a bank and churches, a magnificent schoolhouse built of brick and gave the impression to being a little flowering and progressive city. The city is known in wide circles for its superb stone quarry, which offers the population, whose majority is made up of Scandinavians – the most Swedes – good working incomes, [so that] the world of business is flowering. The majority of the Sandstone residents were therefore in rather good circumstances.

Here follows a listing of the more noted citizens of the city, of which many are Swedes and Norwegians.

E. Erickson, Postmaster; P. Collins, doctor; P. G. Erikson, shop/store and sawmill owner; J. P. Flod, butcher shop; J. H. Frisendahl, Justice of the Peace; Johnson & Settergfeld, trading; J. O'Brien, doctor; J. P. Osell, carpenter; Ring & Tobin, trading; Staples & McCoy, hotel owners; G. Sutherland, carpenter; E. A. Swenson, shoemaker; P. W. Thompson, barber; Troolin & Nelson, sawmill.

The great misfortune's forebodings were of the same nature as the phenomenon, which proceeded Hinckley's, Mission Creek's and Pokegama's destruction; smoke for several days before, now and then cast about by a breeze, and, so immediately before the fire's breaking in over the city, a tight, falling rain of soot. Immediately after noon on the misfortunate day itself, the smoke to the nearest became unbearable and one sent out reconnoiterers in the southwest direction in order to be informed about the overhanging danger's true nature. The reconnoiterers in the meantime were gone significantly longer than was expected, and some of Sandstone's residents began to show definite signs of disturbance, while on the opposite, the greatest number completely did not permit themselves to be terrified thereof. The first named began to pack together everything loose and movable; horses were hitched to wagons of all types and sizes - in brief: one began to prepare for flight, and the following shall show that these preparations were not made a second too soon. At about four, some cover-with-soot and sweaty men came running into the city from the south. They were the returned reconnoiterers, and from their eager gestures with arms and hand while they were still far away, the population understood completely that a great danger was advancing. The reconnoiterers had hardly been able to relate what a horrible fate awaited them all before some apparent train signals pierced through the air, warning and likewise confirming the dismal report.

With a mindless speed, [with] all the depth's falling Furies on the heels after it, came in the next moment the Eastern Minnesota's rescue train from Hinckley came scampering in, constantly pushing out hollow signals. The poor destitute in Sandstone, who now with regard to the [considerable] load of humans onboard on the train, as one, got completely clear to themselves of their own horribly hopeless situation [and] thought for a moment that they should

be left without help and mercy as sacrifice to the flames. But such however did not occur, the brakes were applied, and with a clattering sound, the train stopped.

Flee onboard!

“Flee if life is [dear] to you!” sounded it warningly out of a hundred throats of the Hinckley fleers. The train remained still for only some few minutes, and they, who hurriedly paid attention to the warning, were almost all saved, while those, who first tried to save some of their most precious articles, wretchedly perished. The fire namely followed the train tight on its tracks, and so dangerous was the heat that many persons fell down powerless long before the flames themselves reached them. Most of the residents did not pay attention to the exhortation to flee onboard the train, rather in stead took their flight to the river, and so many, who were able to come there, were saved. But it was far from all who were so full of sense and fortunate. Some families hid themselves in the quarry’s excavations and evaded thereby a fearful death. Others sought their rescue in wells and cellars, but in almost all cases, these hiding places conveyed a fateful result.

The fire billowed forward with a speed that can hardly be described. Several times the masses of fire were close to falling down into the river and to destroy all of them, who had sought protection there. Only by [crouching] down, up to the neck and covering the head with wet pieces of clothing, could the destitute save themselves from an overhanging death. We have listened to many of the survivors’ heart rendering tales concerning the misfortune, which had overwhelmed them, but not once anything similarly alike have we heard spoken about. To in words describe the scenes, which occurred when the homeless, during the night, tried to find their relatives’ and friends’ corpses, does not stand in our ability.

The situation in Sandstone immediately after the fire was even more shocking than was the situation was in Hinckley, if one ignores the number of dead in the last noted city. One of Sandstone’s citizens, hotel owner Otto Stafferfelt, who was present during the worst moments during [which] the fire rushed over the city and who with scanty necessity escaped with life, has described this hair-raising catastrophe, and we repeat here, since we have it second hand, his description:

“At the noontime, the first disturbing signs, the fearful misfortune’s dismal forebodings, began to show themselves. The smoke, which before had been almost unexceptional like a normal fog [that] had slipped/glided over the surroundings, now came thick and white-yellow in towards our doomed city, and occasionally by a stronger breeze, carried the rank, resin smell from the burning woods, strong and unendurable, between the houses. Those of us, who previous possessed and knowledge about forest fires in dry years like this one, could no longer blind ones’ eyes to or evade to understand the overhanging danger, which we knew came nearer to us by every moment. The anxiety, which herewith empowered us and which we finally were not capable to hide, infected [all], and soon the wildest panic had gripped all senses. Despair’s outcries from women and children filled the air, and the men ran hurriedly about each other carrying their most prized possessions out of the houses and in other way prepared for flight. The clock could have been approximately five-thirty in the afternoon when the first flames became apparent over the burning forests. They threw themselves several feet

high over the tree tops, appeared first here then there over the wide stretched belt of forest, disappeared and returned [again] with renewed strength and doubled in numbers. It continued so for some minutes, when suddenly, as if by the stroke of a troll/witch, the whole horizon to the southwest was lit up by a mixed glare, and we saw to our indescribable terror how the fire, now billowing like a might sea, rolled forward towards us

from three sides.”

.”The terrible destroyer approached with an unbelievable speed and under a roar and noise, which was similar to a mighty thunderstorm’s rolling rumbles. At the same time, long, circling tongues of fire likewise fell from the skies, setting on fire haystacks, piles of boards and all similar combustible material that came in its way. The fire had not yet found it way to the city itself, but with the strong, cyclone-like hurricane behind it, it was apparent to us all that it could not linger for many minutes before the feared should occur. At this moment, rescue came -- at least for many: for those in any case, who had the wisdom enough to make use of thereof. It was the train with its load of refugees from Hinckley. A good part of the distressed placed themselves in safety onboard, but far from all were so smart. To be best aware thereof is that over a fourth of Sandstone’s population afterwards was found to have perished. The terror and the fear of death might have taken away from some all reason, sense and accounting, for I saw several family corpses, like terrified animals, seek protection in the first, best hovel, cellar or well. Many were the unfortunates, who sought out the last-named places only to in the most horrible manner perish, for those of them, who were not burned in pieces, drowned or were suffocated by smoke. In these death traps were [found] among others Peter Kallen with his wife and three children, Gustaf Anderson with wife and three children, August Anderson’s wife, Alfred Broad with wife and two children, the farmer Emil Peterson, Magnus Englund with wife and seven children, Erik Ellström’s wife and five children, the farmer John Wolf with wife and several children, the farmer Guldahl, Hoffman with his whole family, Henry Lind’s wife and five children, Greenfield with family, Wille Nelson, John Nelson, his wife and two children, Mrs. John Westlund and two children, Aug. Svenson and a son. All of these (countrymen judging by the names) and [too] many others to keep secret were found afterwards dead, and one could by the bodies’ positions see that the fight to death in many cases had been both long and indescribable painful.”

Two men were found in a well, who obviously tried to save themselves from suffocating from the smoke in such a way that they burrowed their faces under each others armpits, for in this position, one found them firmly joined together and their finger nails had, apparently under the self labor of death, dug themselves deep in through the clothing.

The just noted Erik Ellström had, with his family, hurried down into the cellar under his house. They had not been there long before the cellar windows were burst by the heat, and the smoke and the warm air pushed in through the openings. The poor humans suffered horribly; the dry, hot, smoke-mixed air, singed, and burned in their throats and lungs with every breath. When this situation was finally seen to be unendurable, Ellström ran out of the cellar and down to the river to fetch water and therewith to quench his abysmal thirst and of [his others]. He got to the river well and good, but he never got back to the house. When he returned with the water, he saw to his horror namely that the fire had cut off his pathway to the cellar and that the house

already stood completely in flames. He made several attempts to force himself forward and get his family out and with him down to the river, but every time was in vain. The heat increased with every second and drove him back just as he should venture jump through the flames and into the house. Two time he fell over half unconscious, but calling forth all of his strength, he succeeded to get on his legs again, and when he finally perceived the hopelessness in the attempt to save his family, he stumbled half suffocated down to the river in order to seek the rescue he also found. After, when the sea of fire had rolled forward over the city and further on and all danger was over, he found his house in rubble and ashes and in the cellar his [family] dead and burned beyond recognition.

As a strange opposite to this horribly sorrowful play may be presented the wonderful saving of Axel Westin's family members. They also had in the first consternation sought protection in the cellar but soon found that the hiding place offered no secure protection. They therefore made themselves prepared to run out into the free when the house, which already had burned a good while, fell together and blocked the exit. How they avoided to share the Ellström family's sorrowful fate, still stands as an unsolved puzzle, but to escape with life, they all did.

In death's jaws.

When the rush down to the Kettle River went on in its wildest, two people were seen, Aron Anderson and his son, who were a bit after the others, fall down one time after another, raise themselves again and finally disappear in the masses of smoke. It was generally accepted by all that they had perished, but such was not the situation, and Anderson himself has related the following on the race to rescue:

“My son and I did not join quickly enough those who fled down to the river, for we first thought to seek escape in the well. During this period of hesitation, the fire gained so much that the heat and the smoke overtook us, so that we fell down several times, but it seemed that a protecting Providence directed us, for when we almost powerless and certainly thought that we had fallen [down] for the last time and never more should arise, a strong, exhilarating puff of wind came, which entered into our lungs a pure and life-giving air, so that we again could use our legs and continue the flight. When we had come forth so far that we found ourselves only some stone throws [away] from the river, my son's strength became completely exhausted. He sank down like a rag, so that I must, holding him under [my] arms, *carry* him the remaining stretch of way to the river. Here I poured water over his face until he [came back to consciousness], where after we both stepped out into the river and hunched down into the water, so that it came up to our necks. The fire was up to the to the river some moments later, whose other bank it reached with a jump, where after the flames remained over us [for] a good hour as well, hanging in the air, rolling back and forth over the river. We must remain in the river a full four hours, and several times we were compelled, because of the boundless heat, to hold [our] heads *under* the water [for] as long as we ventured to hold back fetching a breath. The smoke was impenetrably thick, so that we could not see or discern anything at over an arm's length's distance, but a ways from us in the water, we heard a strong murmur of clamoring, crying, whimpering and praying human voices from the 200 co-refugees, who, from what we later learned, in likeness with us, sought out the Kettle River as a place of rescue. Had we not had this course of water to go to, certainly should the number of deceased reached to

nearer 300 in stead of the sixty some, who are estimated to have given up life with this occasion.”

Another farmer by the name of Lars Mattis was also near to perishing but was saved as if through a miracle. He saw the fire approach and prepared to fight it if possible, but it did not take him long before he saw the attempt was crazy. He, [along] with so many others, sought rescue in a well, but in contradiction with almost all of the others who did so, he *was* saved. He provided himself first with a bundle of clothing and climbed down with this into the well along with a ladder that he first put down. The well had sever feet of water, but not withstanding this, he suffered without limit the intensive heat, and the sparks together with the heat ignited the bundle of clothing, which he had taken with to save, and totally destroyed it. Only by unceasingly pouring the well’s water over himself and by means of breathing with the nose and mouth tight to his wet coattail, he succeeded to hold out down there in the depths.

One can safely understand that all of the people in Sandstone, who survived the misfortune, had to thank for these circumstances that the Kettle River [was by] and they managed to get forward to it in time.

The Erickson family’s wonderful rescue.

When the fire came rolling in towards Sandstone, it found a Swede, J. Erickson with two sons and a daughter, out by Sandstone Junction where they were engaged in digging up their harvest of potatoes. Right next to the field was a little sawmill belonging to Erickson. A daughter, a schoolteacher, found herself on the day of misfortune in Partridge, where she instructed, and another of Erickson’s daughters was with the mother at the location’s post office, which they managed. Erickson’s sons were the first to get a glimpse of the fire and sounded the alarm. The father, immediately with his sons, took off to the just noted sawmill, which he hoped could be saved. But that the attempt was fruitless, soon became clear to them, therefore they hurried back to the potato field, whose open location they thought should save them. But even from there they had to retreat because of the heat. A bare half-mile from there, they knew that a little lake was located, and they now directed their flight towards it. During this time, the fire, with its colossal masses of smoke, had come nearer to them, and before they knew a word of it, it had become so dark that they could not discern each other ten steps away, and the result was that the father became confused and became separated from the children. They called to each other, but the suffocating smoke, the blowing, the fire’s deafening rumbling increased the confusion, and the father and children remained separated. The last named groped their way in the meantime up to the place where the horses stood hitched, climbed into the wagon and succeeded in it to reach the little lake. The poor old man had completely fallen out of comprehension and knowledge of the locale; he has so gone astray that he lost the path and *distanced* himself from the lake, when he again heard one of his boys call to him; he answered, and led on the path by the sound, he finally found his son, who helped him, [along with himself], to the lake where the other children already were with the horses and the wagon. They all trudged out into the water as far as they could, and it was high time that they did so, for some moments later, the fire swept forward out on both sides of the lake. The horses became scared by the glow and set off but fell within a short time as victims to the fire.

As soon as all the danger was surmounted, they went back to the city, which they found completely leveled to the ground, and after having wandered around for awhile, they steered their course to the river, where they, to their great surprise and joy, found Erickson's wife and the one daughter completely uninjured. The latter related that they had taken the approaching fire's rumbling for a cyclone's special sound, whereby they immediately hurried down into the cellar. Here they saw [it] was a mistake and hurried in the direction of the river, which they also reached before the cyclone of fire in all of its fury broke over them. The daughter succeeded, at the last moment and with danger to her own life, to save the post office's cashbox, but her own money, a right beautifully saved amount, burned up, and when she left the last stair step, the house fell in under a deafening crash. Also the daughter living in Partridge escaped alive and uninjured, so this family in its entirety were saved, although the members were dispersed and separated from each other and found themselves in the most distressed situation.

A marriage with obstacles.

One of the farmers living nearby in the area, Mr. Samuelson has related a little episode from the fateful 1st of September, which we can not avoid to partake with the reader, especially as it can serve to give, in this otherwise dismal description, a glimpse of merriment's lighter color, for the event, which we come to relate has, so serious it be, a half comical side.

In Mr. Samuelson's home, from early on the morning of the unforgettable day of misfortune, everything was joyous, content and in high glee, for the daughter, Minnie Samuelson, should that day, as one had decided it, be married to a young man by the name of John Derosier. The forenoon proceeded with happy preparations up to the time of the moment of the ceremonies, which one impatiently looked forward to, breaking up by the evening time. The guests arrived, the one after the other, and everything proceeded in happy excitement. Games, happy teasing and conversation succeeded each other, and the time went quickly for all the participants of the party.

Finally one had only one hour remaining until high ceremonies when a mighty flame of fire shot down on the house. One did not understand at the first moment of amazement *from where*, and [it] was set on fire. The whole society stormed head over heels out of the house but only to come right into the open mouth of a new, still more fearsome danger. Where ever the eye looked, it was met by fire – only fire, and this recently so happy group of people found themselves, as if through an infernal spirit's trickery, helpless in the middle of a hissing and crackling circle of fire, which unceasingly struck a narrower circle around them.

“The root cellar can save us!”

one of the wedding guests called out at this moment, where upon a general rushing to the noted place followed. All arrived safely into the cellar, whose wooden door was immediately barred from within; it not take many minutes before it showed itself to be a hiding place not as safe as one thought. The fire now drove down with fearful strength right against the root cellar's door and sides. The former began to smoke and burn; great pieces were burned and fell out through the fissures, which thereby appeared; the smoke played and the intensive heat [crept] in. In the dark cellar's black interior, the distressed groped and shoved around each other, many of them

half crazy from the horrible heat, which almost denied them all available air. The situation became all the more doubtful for constantly several pieces of the door threatened to burn out, and many minutes could not linger before the whole of this frail separating wall between them and the fire was laid in ashes, and the waves of fire got free entry.

But even from this horrible situation, there was a way out to rescue, and nearer than anyone in the first moment of fear had seen or thought about. In the cellar were namely stored 20 large buckets of milk. This supply of milk now got, in haste and in the absence of water, to be used as a quenching material. The burning door was splashed therewith, and in such a way, it was succeeded to save the remaining parts of the door, and thereby also all of those, who had sought their escape inside of the same. When the heat likewise became so unbearable that it pushed through the clothing and singed the skin itself, one began to pour the milk over each other. “The kitchen’s gruel, [smelling] eternally to us of singed milk, I have always detested” uttered half jokingly our storyteller and added, “but in this root cellar, we sucked it in as the finest perfume thankfully through our nostrils.”

The 20 buckets of milk were in fact that, which saved these people from being fired alive in the cellar hole.

When the rescue expedition the next day came to the location of this strange adventure, and the expedition’s leader became aware of it, the immediately concern was for the bride to get a suitably wedding trousseau, and a liberal collection of money was taken up for the pair, who there after, in society with the bride’s relatives, entered on their *wedding trip* to Grantsburg, Wis.¹⁵, where friends and acquaintances awaited them. So ended *this* adventurous marriage. – When the end is good, everything is good.

A death trap.

One of Sandstone’s citizen’s had undertaken the digging of a well with the intention of procuring a necessary water supply, but his work appears to be in vain, for although he had dug down [at least] 30 feet into the earth’s interior, he had not found a drop of water, and he saw himself compelled to give up the attempt. For a long time this well hole stood and gaped to no use, when finally, a practical man fell upon the idea to use the excavation as a type of root crop cellar. To this end, a partition was made, a floor 15 feet down in the well’s neck counted from the well’s opening, and upon this were packed in root crops of all types. When the fire on the unfortunate 1st of September fell quickly and unexpectedly like a thief in the night, [it was to it] that a flock of the distressed, 17 in number, the most men, who were cut off from all other ways out to any other place of refuge, hurried to the noted primitive root cellar in the hope to there find a secure refuge. They had in the meantime hardly [gotten] in, than the partition gave way from their combined weight, and all together [they] fell, head first, down the remaining 15 feet to the well hole’s bottom. One should be able to believe that they, at this depth, were in safety from the approaching sea of fire, but so was not the situation. Within short a veritable rain of sparks began to fall down on them, so that they were fully engaged in suffocating the fires in their clothing. But this, however, was not the worst; the boundless heat above their heads namely sucked out all of the available air that there was in well, and the one after the other

¹⁵ A village in Burnett County, NW Wisconsin.

began to expire from the poisonous gases, which entered in the clean air's place, and in this horrible way, they all perished like soulless animals in a trap hole.

One of Sandstone's oldest citizens relates the following:

“My wife and I found ourselves together outside when we suddenly apprehended a rumbling sound, and then we saw from the direction of the sound, we began to notice what we thought was a dark cloud spigot, which came whirling in the direction towards us. We both thought that it was an approaching cyclone cloud, and confused about its limited embrace, we judged that we could run past its apparent course. We ran with all we had determined to search out the first, best cellar, which we could assume laid out of the path of the cyclone, and many of our acquaintances appeared to share our perception, for we saw them hurriedly rush down into the cellars and wells. We had not run long before we saw our mistake; from all directions now came [smoke] resembling clouds, and between them and behind them at times were glimpsed sharp [sounds] similar to the fire from distant cannon mouths. As one, we were gripped by the horrible reality; we were surrounded on three sides by a raging forest fire, and the only way out to rescue, that we now understood, was the Kettle River – if we were fortunate enough to get there *before* the fire. It was a desperate race for more than one, for the fire – *death* was tight on our heels, and its hot, destroying foul breath threatened each moment to throw us powerless to the ground. We also observed, my wife and I while we ran forward, how then one, then the other of our fellow fleers one after the other became overtaken by the heat and became prostrate.

It was in the last moment that we got up to the river, for hardly had we crawled our way out to the middle of it before the first, mighty flames of fire were over us, and a rain of fire, of sparkling embers and blossoming, glowing [coals] began to fall tight around and on us. We must, in order to not [to simply] expire, pour water over each other, but neither did this always help, rather [we] were compelled for long periods to hunch down in the water up to our chins. In this painful situation, we became aware of [that] above us and below us [were] hundreds of other refugees, who in the same manner fought for their lives out in the water, but after awhile, the smoke became thick and impenetrable, so that we only with the greatest effort could see beyond an arm's length. I cannot say with certainty how long we remained in the water, but certainly it was for many hours, for when we finally crawled up onto the bank, the air was smoke free, and we saw some stars twinkle forth from the night heavens. We remained sitting on the edge of the beach [for] the whole night staring at the thousands of glimmering glows on the [earth], which gave sign of the fire's track. [Never], if at anytime, shall this night leave my memory. For myself, I was as if stupefied and benumbed after undergoing this testing of the soul and the pressing physical hardships, and with my wife, the situation was identical. Thoroughly wet as we were, it appears however [that] the night cold did not inconvenience us; at least neither of us can recall that we froze. We remained for a long time, possibly for several hours, sitting on the ground, pressed tight to each other, completely without inner or outer consciousness, for not a thought was thought or a word uttered [that] any of us can call forth from the memory of this gloomy night's first hours. But our trance came suddenly to an end with a heart rendering call of anguish from a distressed human breast broke the night's silence. The cries of anguish came from those who wandered around in the darkness searching for their deceased relatives' bodies, and when they met what they sought or thought they had they had

found it, the groaning and the lamentations became all the louder, so that they went cutting us [through to the bone]. It was a fearful, a horrible night, whose like I might be spared from to experience.”

The morning after the fire.

The picture or better said *the place* where Sandstone *had been* offered for the human eye the day after the terrible misfortune, or more properly *the place* where Sandstone *had been*, was similar in its main characteristics to the desolations’ dismal surroundings as gave recognition to the same fire monster’s destroying passage over Hinckley, Mission Creek and Pokegama. The sun came up over a landscape so depressingly deserted and dismal that words are inadequate to describe it. Soot, ashes, and charcoal everywhere, here and there some still glowing and smoking tree stumps, and over the black ground, human figures wandered around with ghost pale, tearful faces. Such was the picture of sorrow. Near the stationhouse lay a corpse, black and burned, the remains of a woman, and some steps further away in the direction of the river, lay her husband, he also a corpse with the face turned to the ground and completely naked down to the shoes, which the fire had not managed to burn up.

A stone’s throw near the river laid the dead body of the strongly built thirty year old fellow, who certainly fought bravely for his young life, and a little ways from the just noted woman’s corpse, was found another, a new born child’s body.

For only some hours past, these four had lived in a little farmhouse around a half mile south of Sandstone; there they were known by the family name Bred. From the bodies’ positions, it seems that they were in the process of fleeing to the river when the fire and the heat overpowered them, so that they fell to the ground powerless to rise again.

The expedition, which reached the little laid-to-ashes Sandstone immediately after the misfortune, was met there by the same horrors and heart rendering scenes, as it had shortly before witnessed in the other cities. Some [more than] sixty human remains, whereof many were [mutilated] and disfigured in the most horrible [manner], were recovered, but of the buildings and other real property, there were found no other remains than the soot and the ashes that whirled around on the ground, if one excepts the single find, namely an old, worn out safe, which however in all of its decrepitude, was able to snatch aside from the fire a money [to the] amount of \$2,700 in bills, silver and gold.

Somewhat over a hundred of the survivors took off on Sunday morning on the path to a little place called Hell’s Gate¹⁶ located about four miles from Sandstone by the Kettle River. At the noted place, a man by the name of Place, who ran a type of *boarding house*, and who fed and lodged them all. At 1 o’clock on Monday morning, two messengers arrived with the information that a relief train on the St Paul and Duluth railroad line waited at Sandstone Junction 4 miles away and that they must go on foot there, if they wished to follow with on the train to Duluth. Naturally, there was not one of the poor homeless who refused to follow the exhortation; all got in motion and [went off] in the night’s darkness over the burned ground. The travel was tiresome to the utmost, for the whole way was covered with thousands of half-

¹⁶ Upham’s “Minnesota Place Names” lists no such place.

burned tree trunks, tree stumps and the like, but likewise not a complaint was [heard], be it from the adults or the children; all felt their hearts filled with thanks that the hour of help had come.

Sandstone Junction or Miller as the place is also called was a little stopping place on the St Paul & Duluth Railroad Line nine miles north of Hinckley known as a loading place for logs that should be transported further by the railroad. Most of the residents in this section were farmers, who with great difficulty and under much privation had cleared [as] much land that they could thereby take a subsistence existence. The population at this location, who succeeded to escape alive, had fled down into wells or out into the potato fields. There they covered themselves with earth and in this manner protected themselves from the heat. A large part of the location's population were at another village when the misfortune occurred, and of those who were home, approximately fifty percent /[perished]

Partridge

Chapter VII

About this little place, essentially only an insignificant station village by the Eastern Minnesota Railroad, there is not much to say. Partridge is located approximately six mile north of Sandstone. The location's whole population exceeds hardly fifty souls, and of these, there was only one, who became the fire's victim, and his name was Robert Burns. Five families made up the whole population of Partridge The whole of this little village, lock, stock and barrel, was laid in ashes, and not so much as a wood chip avoided the general destruction.

One of Partridge's citizen had made available the following description for us:

“Already by noon, we understood that something crazy was under way in the forest expanses southward, but we were nevertheless more or less confident about forest fires and thought ourselves safe from this one, which, by all usual signs to judge [on] the 1st of September in the morning, was still many miles away. We had in the meantime this time been mistaken; in the afternoon, the smoke in the south became denser and in towards four o'clock, it drove in in mighty, thick and soot-mixed masses in on our little village. We could now and then recognize the smell of resin from the burning woods. Approximately at this time, the Eastern Minnesota train arrived with its refugees from Hinckley and Sandstone. It stopped some moments, and we were encouraged to climb onboard, but strangely enough, we all to a man refused. For what motive, I am still not clear on, and the train went on it way again. Hardly twenty minutes had passed after the train's departure before we bitterly regretted that we had not followed with, for now, in a single moment it seems, death in all of its most horrible guise stood tight before us. The mighty waves of smoke from the south had suddenly come completely [upon] us and was now driven forward in a night-black, compact mass. It came so quickly that we, who had thought that the fire was still fifteen miles distant, were surprised to see, some moments later, that the tree tops approximately 2 mile away were in full flames behind the all in between settling/sinking or breaking apart waves of smoke. Now [escape] must be sought, for it was clear to us all that in some few minutes the fire in all of its terrible

strength should be over us. We had no collection of water or any larger clearings to hurry to, but presence of mind did not desert us for the better. In flying hurry, we got all of the women and children up on some [railroad] hand cars with whose help we, altogether, transported ourselves three miles to a lumber camp, whereat we knew that around a hundred acres of land, which had previously been burned, could serve as protection”

“The fire the whole time was behind us hot on our heels. The smoke had again collected itself and become denser to a thick, gray-black mass, which with unbelievable speed, rolled out forward after us with an ear deafening sound, whining and rumbling. We had barely come to our rescue place when the mighty mass of smoke behind us cleft, or better said, flew in two and a blood-red flame of fire shot like a bolt of lightning forward. In the next moment, every particle of smoke disappeared, burned up, and in [its] place we saw unbelievable seas of fire where shortly before a might green forest proudly waved its crowns.”

“To our indescribable joy we saw that our place of refuge gave a sure protection, for the fire billowed on both sides of us without being able to reach or hurt us, and towards the clearing’s edges immediately towards the south, the waves of fire broke powerlessly. We all remained at this place [until the time] the relief train fetched us, which later carried us to West Superior.”

Chapter VII

In the deep woods.

Out by the river some miles in the woods, a little farming district was found, which was rather densely populated. The people there stood, when the fire dragon so unexpected spread its wings over them, yet more helpless than the villages’ residents, who of course had the opportunity to put themselves in safety onboard the railroad train. We allow here one of the fire-devastated wood village’s new cultivator’s/waste land reclaimer’s to describe the fire’s ravaging and desolation there, and some episodes connected thereto. The tale is simple but true to life and reads so:

“It was in the morning, the first of September. We had just, the whole family, finished our breakfast, when my husband got up from the table, said to our son to follow him down to the dam [in the river that] we had down by the potato field in order to help him with some sort of work. They went, and my little daughter and I took on our usual Saturday work in the house. The forenoon passed, and it became noontime. Both of my smallest boys began to give signs that they were hungry and wondered why papa and big brother had not come home. I now began to become a little bit upset; we had, the whole morning, observed that the smoke to the southeast had gradually increased in denseness and that the wind at the same time had become stronger, and I had unconditionally come to think of the danger of the fire spreading in such a wind. “It can be that they have gone to help the others to meet the fire.” I said to myself calmly. “The smoke appears to be worse in that direction.” At the same timer, my little girl said, “I am certain that something is in danger; the wind is so strong and the smoke is now dangerously dense.”

“Hurry out over the hay field and see if they are not coming from that direction then.” I answered.”

“My little daughter hurried out but was soon back again, declaring that she could not get a glimpse of papa and [her] brother. We sat dispirited at the table; the small ones ate to the heart’s desire while we barely tasted the food. My concerns increased with each minute, and I got up in order to go out and get a sense of the situation. My girl followed me, and we both ran as fast as the legs permitted along the winding steps between the brush and the small trees down towards the open meadowlands. When we got there, we saw mighty masses of smoke roll from the north long, long towards the southeast. I understood that the fire was much farther away than it looked to judge by the smoke. “But it must be dangerously strong.” said my girl complementing my own thoughts. We search anxiously but in vain for the both awaited, and finally we must turn home again in order to see to the two small ones, who we had left behind alone in the house.”

“A good period of time further passed during anxious waiting for the absent ones, but finally we got to see them coming with slow and tired steps. The time now was approximately two, and my husband said that it had taken so long because he, before her turned home, necessarily wished to put a part of [some] newly felled logs in safety in the [dam’s water].”

“The fire had therefore not reached up to you when you left the place?” I inquired.”

“No, but the danger is great; the wind blows dreadfully strong.”

“I heard and saw by my husband that he had the same, dismal forebodings of a great misfortune as I. Both he and the boy hardly stirred their food, although they must have been very hungry after the taxing work. Even my daughter began to show great anxiety, as she, in an absent way, went in and out of the room. I considered now that it was high time that we thought upon saving our lives, therefore I told her to pack up the small boys’ clothing and a pair of her own clothes, so that we could have them in reserve in case the worst should occur. Thereafter, I got myself in order in order to go out and see if there was any way out for us to flee through the woods and over the hay meadow in the event the fire should come straight down on the house. My husband exhorted me to stay, but I hurried off, promising to return at the first sign of danger. The path along our woods’ edge lay almost smoke-free, but when I came a piece further away, where the trees stood denser, I saw thick smoke, which began to fill the air between the trunks, and I thought it best to immediately turn around. By the same fringe of woods, I met my son, who had been sent to get me to come home.”

“When we had gotten further along, I observed that my husband was pouring water over a lumber pile and that he had stripped loose some boards from the house’s roof. In the next moment he ran down to the hay meadow in order to apprise himself about how far the fire had advanced. I myself hurried into the house and told my daughter to collect together some bedcovers and blankets and take them down with her to the well. Such was done. At the well’s opening stood, besides an empty box, a tub filled with water, and we drenched the blankets in it, where after I poured water over the well cover. When this was done, we [all] helped to carry

up our large ladder, whose one end we stuck down into the well bottom, where after I climbed down into the depth with my children. At the same moment, my husband came running, grabbed the empty box and the tub and followed, carrying these after us, down into the well. The tub he placed upside down on the well's bottom and upon it the empty box, which thereafter served my children and me as a foot hold. My husband took his place on the ladder's upper rungs, so that he, with [his] head above the well opening, could look out around him."

"Soon a veritable fire and ash rain began to fall over us, so that my husband was compelled to stretch one of the wet blankets over the well's opening on the ladder's top rung. Notwithstanding this, the atmosphere shortly became almost unbearable for us down there, and my daughter began to grope with the hands and wobble on the legs as if she should faint. In the meantime, I drenched her and the small children's heads with cold water, which stimulated up them every time they appeared ready to succumb."

"Calm and selfless, my husband stood above us and protected us with the wet blanket and at the same time described the fire's progress. How he, who had the worst of it, could endure where he stood, is still indescribable to me. As we stood in this distressing situation, every second expecting that something yet more dangerous should afflict us, our ears were filled by a deafening roar and noise. It was the sea of fire, which in a blink of an eye with some giant leaps had now come into our immediate vicinity."

"Oh! Now the house burns!"

my husband's voice [called] down to us, and immediately afterwards, his body began to sway back and forth and he could only with the greatest effort hold himself upright. I comprehended that the fire [was on the way] to overwhelm him, and I hurried to drench the well's water over his back and head, where with he came to again, so that he ventured to climb down the ladder to us. The fire's horrible roar continued above, and before we knew it, the blanket, which laid stretched out over the well's opening, had dried and caught fire from the falling rain of fire, so that embers and sparks [of fire] now began unimpeded to fall down on us. We wetted the other blanket again, and all crept, as good as we could together, under it. This protected us from being directly burned by the host of sparks [and embers] that now fell hissing on and around us. The heat increased with every second and threatened for a moment to drive us crazy. My head glowed and the temples drubbed like sledgehammers, and I, at the same time, felt as if an icy cold drew [itself] through my back and marrow. Thereafter, I lost all consciousness, until the time I jumped to with something cold hitting me over the face and neck. It was my husband, who poured water over me, in order to get me back to my senses. "The worst is survived; let us go up now." he said while lifting me up."

"Exhausted, half bewildered after all [that we] had gone through, we [climbed] one after another up out of the well. What a picture of destruction met us! A black desert overdrawn by smoke as far as the eye could see. Not a shaving of wood remained of the house, our simple but dear home. Only a gapping, smoking cellar opening! All of the beautiful trees, where are they now? Changed to ashes or still [glowing] and smoking stumps. Not so much as a green leaf was to be found where we stood, bareheaded, wet, sooty and wretched, and we stared around us while the wind, still painfully hot, drove thick ash whirlwinds into our faces. Homeless,

impoverished and robbed of everything, where should we turn to? Driven by instinct, we steered our steps in the direction where our nearest neighbor was or had been. First, when we had gone a piece, it became properly clear to us how tired out we were. My head felt as heavy as lead, and it pricked and pained with every step. My poor husband must get down on his knees in order to recover his strength. Finally we arrived at the nearest neighboring farm, that is to say, where it *had* been. We went past the ruins of the residence but could not discover a living movement before we came up to the edge of a nearby deep lying pit or marl grave. Tight next to the water's edge, we discover a larger group of people congregated, and when we came closer, we recognized again the neighbors from all of the directions in our area, who had rushed there in order to find the refuge they also found.

T. J. Henderson's story.

In Pine City¹⁷ lives a man by the name of Thomas J. Henderson, who during the cyclone of fire, experienced [the most] horrible things. With his two sons, respectively 14 and 16 years old, Henderson found himself circa four miles north of Hinckley. There, all three were employed with opening a new path through the woods for the Duluth & St Paul Railroad's account. We permit Mr. Henderson himself to [tell the story]:

“ We had for several days, during which we worked in the woods, noticed smoke from distance forest fires, so that we were completely accustomed therewith, and placed no special attention from the situation that the smoke upon the forenoon of the 1st of September was somewhat thicker than before, and therefore the fire completely surprised us. My boys and I found ourselves at our work, a bare mile west of the track, when completely unexpectedly and suddenly, a blinding glare flamed up to the southwest completely in upon us. And when we looked towards the direction from where the glare came, our eyes were met by a fear-striking spectacle. The whole forest was drenched in fire, and mighty flames of fire likewise jumped and hopped forward over the treetops. It took only the blink of an eye to completely see our fearsome situation, and we all three took to flight to the nearest human habitat. It was approximately a ¼ of a mile there, and when we came up to the house's owner, a Mr. M. E. Grönfelt, [he] together with his family had already fled down into the cellar. We also jumped down there, but we had not remained there long before it became apparent to us that we all should be burned to death if we remained, for the fire raged completely out of mind in the whole house above us. We hastened out therefore and ran to a nearby potato field. The fire fluttered in our clothing while we ran, and it was with the greatest effort that I was able to quench them on my sons and myself. [The field] was hardly accomplished, when while we stood in the potato field

the horrible happened.”

“Both of my sons, the one after the other, were overcome by the heat [and] fell to the ground and lay in the next moment in a fight against death. The death came quickly but namelessly painfully upon them and completely next to me without my being able to move a finger for their rescue; I must look upon how their dear, young lives were extinguished under horrible pains. My poor, gallant boys!”

¹⁷ The county seat of Pine County, Minnesota. Incorporated in 1881.

“My right hand was horribly mangled by the fire, and I believe that the pain was the reason that enabled me to keep my consciousness and sense, for it came besides to me to hide myself from the danger. When the fire had rolled further, and danger was surmounted, I immediately directed my feet homeward, towards Pine City, there my wife came towards me. Already before I had said a word, she had a foreboding of the [situation] and broke out in an unbelievable moaning over our sons’ horrible end.“

Such is this poor man’s dismal tale of sorrow from the horrible, never-to-forgotten 1st of September 1894. Mr. Grönfelt, in whose cellar Henderson and his two sons first took refuge, has also his horrible memories from the day of misfortune, and his recounting reads in brief so:

“I am well acquainted with forest fires and their nature, and no one may believe that I had not undertaken all the preventive measures around my house and fields, which are useful in forest districts with special regard to forest fires. This fire was [however] no usual forest fire; it did not come, as such fires are used to, skirting the ground, burning the trunks upward, rather it came tumbling in all at once, skirting the ground in the tree tops and, the most horrible of all, from the sky itself – as it seems – and all of this without the usual warning signs. A proper rain of fire began suddenly to pour down over the area, igniting everything in its path. We were as if paralyzed by amazement and surprise and hurried in the first confusion down into the house’s cellar. I had here around me my wife, our six children and my farmhand, John Parrish, and after awhile Henderson and his two sons also came fleeing to our hiding place. We had not remained there long, before we [saw] that the house above us stood completely on fire, but we remained never the less a while, in each moment expecting that the strong rumbling, which we heard and took to be thunder’s booming and rolling, should be followed by a strong rain of hail. The rumbling in the meantime became all the stronger, and when the floor above us began to fall in and the dining table finally came dancing down upon us, we understood that to remain any longer [in the cellar] was the same as certain death, and so we began to climb out onto the ground. *How* we all came out, I still do not know to this moment, for we must, at the same time, exert ourselves to the utmost in order to quench the fires in our clothes. Having come out, we altogether ran to the potato field. Here the smoke lay so thick that we for long periods could not discern each other, and about the Henderson boys’ sorrowful end, I knew nothing before the fire had drawn past and the smoke disappeared. At the beginning, I had all of my nearest around me in the potato field except for my farmhand, who I thought had sought out some other place of rescue. To my horror and before I was able to stop it, my oldest girl ran back down into the cellar. She never returned, but I found afterwards in the ashes of our destroyed house

her burned up skull and bones.”

“What it was that drove her back to the cellar, I can never explain. Perhaps she thought that one of us had remained there and needed her help. I know not, but she was and remains gone. Through the dense, suffocating smoke, an unbroken rain of sparks fell, and I must cut all of the clothing off of them, so that the children were not burned alive. All of this occurred in a darkness so thick that I and my wife must grope forward between our small children, guided by their moaning [and crying]. So all at once they became quiet, and I thought for certain that they all were dead, and with this unpleasant thought [in my mind], I laid down on the ground in

order to await a similar end. I do not know [for] how long I, in this way, found myself completely indifferent to that which was occurring around me, when I was aroused to being by a cry of help from my ten year old son Karl. He cried and called that I must come and help him to put out the fire in my wife's clothing, and I hurried to grope my way to them. When I had done this, I felt [myself coming] *out* of the hot air and out into a cooler atmosphere and understood then immediately that we now found ourselves in the middle of a passageway of wind that drove the heat from the burning house down upon us. I could again breath normally and hurried to get everyone out into the purer air. I found my wife still with life but horribly, badly burned. How I myself escaped completely unhurt, I shall never understand, for I did not think for a second on my own rescue. After all of the danger from the fire was past, and we wandered around over the burned areas, we came upon the burned remains of all types of house animals, and among these was even a pair of horses with the remains of a cart wagon [right] behind them (see the picture). But it was not before around two months after the fearful day that we got full proof of the fate that had afflicted my farmhand. Approximately a mile from my farm, we namely found his dead body besides the burned remains of one of our oxen, and his hand attached with a hard grip to the dead animal's tail. Apparently the poor man had thought that if he could follow the oxen on their flight, so should he be saved through the animal's instinct, and it became instead his certain death."

"The whole territory after the fire showed after the fire that the fire was followed by an unheard of strong hurricane or whiling cyclone, for mighty trees had been pulled up by the roots and carried hundreds of feet through the air."

The Redskins' fate.

One of the fire's ravaged territories was here and there occupied by scattered around Indians, who primarily lived by hunting and fishing. That many of these poor, helpless people of nature got to share the same fate as their unfortunate whites appears in the following newspaper article [reprinted] from one of the Duluth's daily newspapers:

"Pokegama, Minn. Sept. 7 –Information has come here about the bodies of a twenty-three Chippewa Indians, young and old, men and women and children found out on the dried out swamp lands between here and Opstead¹⁸, a little settlement on the east bank of Mille Lacs Lake. They lie spread out here and there in an area of ten miles and should, without doubt, become food for the wolves and other animals of prey, because the area where they have been found is all too far distant from civilization in order for burial ceremonies even to come into question."

"These Indians left the reservation for two months past and erected a hunting cabin by one of The Shadridge River's branches.¹⁹ Wacouta was the name of this hunting party's chief, and he perished along with all of his camp followers. The first Indian corpse found was that of a hardly one-year-old child. Thereafter, one found two squaws and five children. They had, as it appeared out, fled in a westerly direction when the fire came sweeping in on them. A mile

¹⁸ Opstead was a Swedish settlement and Post Office from 1889-1933 in East side Township, Mille Lacs County, Minnesota.

¹⁹ Upham's "Minnesota Place Names" does not list a river or watercourse by this name.

further in over the devastated territory, one came upon a heap of ashes, all that was found remaining of the hunters' cabin. Afterwards, the fleeing Indians path, a stretch of five miles, was identified by their half-burned, dead bodies."

The fire observed from a height.

Right next to the little village of Finlayson²⁰ laid a farm belonging to a man by the name of J. Garnäs. The farmhouse was erected on the crown of a high hillock from which one had a wonderful view [out] over Hinckley, Sandstone, Sandstone Junction and their surroundings. From this viewpoint, the husband and wife Garnäs observed the horribly destroying scene of the fire's approach. At the hour of noon at midday, the air up there on the hillock was already so thoroughly heated up that it properly burned the hands when they were stretched to the arm's full length up over the head. It was, said Mrs. Garnäs, as if one stuck ones hands in an over-heated baking oven. Soon the heat became troublesome even near the ground, so that it was finally difficult to breath in the air. Suddenly as they stood up there and looked over the area in the direction of Hinckley, they observed the mighty flames of fire, as if jumping out of the sky, and in the next blink of an eye Sandstone lies swept in by a raging, whirlwind of fire while Hinckley was literally drenched in smoke. The belt of fire unceasingly extended itself, and the mass of smoke over Hinckley was splintered as if under the pressure of an explosion, scattering and baring an equally fearful picture, as it had a short time before brought forth in Sandstone. There up on Granäs's farm, the people still thought themselves safe, enveloping themselves in the hope that the fire could not reach *so quickly* up there. But they had misjudged, for only some minutes later, the fire billowed rising upwards, and the danger was imminent. A clump of fire came first, dropping down by the garden fence, however without setting [anything] on fire, but was followed immediately thereupon by a proper rain of similar balls of fire, and the air itself seemed to burn.

Now it was reckoned to be decisive, and all of the family's members hurried quickly away to a piece of plowed-up ground located at the back of the house, carrying with them large milk buckets filled with water, and coverlets and blankets. This must occur in the greatest of hurry, for the heat had become completely unbearable, and the flaming air seemed to wish to suck them up, while the smoke layered itself thick and suffocating over all and everything. They all crept together under the blankets, which them time and again, one of wetted with water from the pails. Here they remained for several hours, during which [they] observed/witnessed how their house, stalls, barn and everything else burnable, which they had, went up in smoke and fire. They spent the whole night out in the field longing for the morning's dawning. Here, like in many other places, which were visited by the fire, the fire showed a strange capriciousness in its fearsome progress. A harrow and a reaper stood out in the field not far from each other. The harrow was hardly scorched although made of wood, while on the opposite, the other piece of equipment was so completely burned up that even its iron and steel parts were melted to a formless mass by the boundless heat.

Finlayson's heroine.

²⁰ A Post Office established in 1887, a village incorporated in 1905. Was a station on the Northern Pacific Railroad,

Finlayson, located a piece from Miller,²¹ became, so to say, singed in the passage by of the sea of fire, which had then reached it there as well, struck a bend²² and took a turn in another direction, which offered it less food [for destruction] than before. It had been smoky and dark the whole Saturday morning, but by the time of two, the rain of soot began to fall thick and the air properly shacking by the heat. The peoples' fear was indescribable; one felt himself help less and defenseless. The panic gripped each brain with such power that it was as if a crippled hand laid itself over them all. Nothing was done to warn against, nothing for escaping – one only waited, half screamed out of mind for the dangerous unavoidable.

Such was the situation in Finlayson when at the period of five in the afternoon, a cry of joy sounded through the little community,

“Hear the thunder, we get rain!”

But the joy was of short duration and was followed by a still stronger terror than before, for when all glances immediately afterwards were turned towards the south from where the “sound of thunder” seemed to come, the *real* situation at once was fearfully clear for each and everyone. There [far] away, the thick waves of smoke had suddenly been thrown apart and laid bare a glowing, hissing and rumbling background. There was the fire's surging waves, which now came rumbling with its deafening, horrible roar. If Dante's described flaming background itself had opened to the terror-struck mankind's amazed glances, it could not have appeared more worthy of fear than the colossal mass of fire, which now, threaded through by thick, white-yellow columns of smoke, waltzed itself forward towards them with a roar as from a thousand wild animals throats.

The urge for self-protection took its [rightful place] in the meantime finally by the glimpse of the scene of terror, and a general rushing to a little pool of water or pond began. This was not a moment too soon, for the air was now filled with large, flying tongues of fire, which, as if by the blow of a witch, set every house on fire. The refugees in the pond could only defend themselves with the greatest of effort from the fire by baptizing themselves in the water and pouring [it over] each other. Mothers, who had their small children with them, covered these in their clothing, which they first cut off of themselves and drenched in water. All remained in this situation in the pond until towards midnight. By that time, all of the houses at the location had gone up in smoke and ashes or burned as best in full flames. All except one belonging to a Mrs. A. G. Crocker, but even it began to burn in the roof eaves. Mrs. Crocker then requested all of grownups and the half grown, men, women, girls and boys who were congregated in the pond, to help her to put out the fire in this the village's last remaining [house], and in the end until the breaking of day, she led and continued on with this work of quenching, although the heat, time and again, compelled them to retreat to the pond again. Thanks be to this competent and brave woman, the house was saved, and thereby the many homeless got, as well, a place of lodging to crawl into, until other help was able to arrive. But Mrs. Crocker did not stop with half done work; she searched out every bit of food, which was

²¹ Also known as Miller Station. Later as Belknap and finally as Groningen with a post office this latter name from 18896-1913 and 1917-1954.

²² I believe here was another typographical error. The word was “bugt”, which does not exist. I believe it should have been “buket” = “a bend”.

to be found in her house, properly cooked [it], and divided it among her unfortunate comrades, thereby forgetting completely herself, and towards Sunday afternoon, she went alone a long stretch up the rail tracks, until she met and could signal the relief train, which was on its way to Hinckley. When it finally came and took onboard the distressed; they were all to the utmost tired exhausted and badly knocked about by the exertions and hunger, not the least Mrs. Crocker, but likewise, she offered her strength up to the end in order to assist and help the children and the aged properly on the train.

Chapter IX.

The fire's strange caprices.

We have in the foregoing made note that the fire, at many places, traveled forward in such a curious manners that one should be able to believe it to be [something] with a comprehension or a capriciously gifted spirit instead of being only a blind element of nature. However, [believing] that it can be of interest the reader, we have collected a share of information on this fire's peculiarities, as we in the following shall show.

A newspaper has related: "A short distance from the St Paul & Duluth rail line lived a countryman, who when the fire broke over his property, first succumbed and remained laying, half-suffocated by the smoke, but calling forth all of his strength, succeeded to get to the side of the rail track, which he followed, running *inside of* the fence as far as he was able to. In the meantime, the smoke and the heat become completely unbearable for him, and he fell over several times, raised himself and again sank to the ground. Finally all powers left him; the lungs felt as if they had inhaled fire, and he fell helpless down, completely certain that his last moments were present. So he totally lost his consciousness; did not know *where* he was, or *what* was happening around him, but when he finally, after an indeterminate period of time he again awakened to sense, he found that he laid in the middle of a patch of ground, hardly fifteen feet in circumference, which the fire *had gone around* as well. Everything around this little patch, large and small, had been totally destroyed by the fire, but as for himself, he had not even gotten a hair singed. About this, his wondrous escape, he gradually came to clearness [on] where he laid and gradually recovered his strength, [as] the extent of veils of smoke, which surrounded him, eased and gave room for cleaner air. One of the relief expedition's handcars finally picked him up, and great was everyone's amazement when they saw how miraculously he had escaped the horrible fate of burning alive."

o

A German farmer, who owned a piece of land a little stretch of way south of Mission Creek, fled head over heels with the fire's outbreak from his residence, a simple/frugal cabin, built of course, edge-standing boards with a tarpaper roof. He succeeded to save himself by life and limb, [but] naturally enough thought with great concern on his frugal house, which of course contained al that he owned. The forest stood thick and dense, so good as completely in on the house, therefore his concerns were well grounded. Great therefore was his pleasant surprise when he found the cabin there after the fire completely undisturbed by the fire, while

the just noted previous green trees around her laid spread around “like dropped matches”, as he himself expressed it.

_____o_____

Another yet more remarkable episode from the memorable misfortune is read in the following description in a newspaper: “When the relief expedition followed the [railroad] line up through the devastated areas, [it] came upon, among others, the corpse of a fully grown man. It was impossible to identify the dead [person], for the flesh was burnt off the cheekbones and the neck vertebrae. Not a trace of clothing was found on the twisted body, but when the corpse was lifted up, [there] was found in the corner point of the two-thirds burnt-up pants pocket three silver dollars and some smaller coins, altogether in a clump. And likewise a part of the pocket corner in which the coinage lay was not even singed. Some few feet from the dead person, laid a powder horn, well filled with its explosive contents. A part of the horn’s brass neck had melted together, but this nevertheless, the powder had kept “calm as a cucumber” and absolutely did not catch on fire.”

_____o_____

A farmer in the vicinity of Sandstone tried driving [in his wagon] to save himself and his family, but the fire was too fast for them, so that they saw themselves compelled to change course down to the river. The husband tried in vain to get the horses and the wagon out into the water; the animals refused to obey. Neither goading nor cajoling helped, and he must leave them on the bank. When the fire, immediately afterwards, approached, the horses were terrified thereby and set off in the wildest jumps away from the riverbank. The owner saw them disappear into darkness of the smoke and completely assumed that it was the last time he saw his swift foals alive. But the fates wished otherwise. After having spent the evening’s and the night’s torment-full hours in the river, with his own, the man took off at the morning’s dawning on the following day in order to see if he could at least find the remains of the wagon and animals. He directed his steps in the direction he had seen them disappear. The path everywhere was strewn with dead animals, and here and there laid some burned human bodies, naked and with twisted limbs. But of the horses, not the shadow of a trace, and he stood ready to turn about, when he, on a little patch where the ground was a little marshy, perceived relatively fresh impressions of a wagon’s wheel tracks. He followed the tracks further and stood after some minutes of wandering before a half dried out woods pond, and here he was met by his two horses, alive, with the harnesses complete and undamaged, hitched to the wagon, which in the meantime had one of the back wheels partly burnt and almost separated from the axle. The man’s joy can be better imagined than described, and he first hardly believed his eyes. Only a stone’s throw from the place where the horses stood laid some dark remains, half sunken in the pond’s mud. Upon closer examination, it was found to be the remains of two humans, a man and a woman, who had perished there. Here also the fire had again conducted its strange game with life and property. One should have thought that both humans ought have been better able to take care of themselves than animals. The former had of course the water and the wet mud as a sort of protection, certainly poor but anyway something, while on the opposite, the horses were completely helpless and besides firmly coupled to the wagon, which situation naturally further aggravated this situation.

A hayfield showed a strange sight a bit north of Hinckley. The whole field lay black and scorched, but by its one edge, completely near where the edge of the woods had shortly before drawn its green girdle around the open place, stood a mighty haystack in its pale-green garb and looking out over the surrounding's black funeral cloth. How had it escaped the rain of sparks and the raging fire's billowing waves, which apparently had rushed tight past it? Of course, what was the reason that the just named powder horn had not exploded? The one is equally as wonderful as the other, and to seek the right explanation is in vain.

_____o_____

Those, who the day after the fire traveled through the devastated tracts, could observe many strange results from the fire's progress. Large trees had been completely hollowed out and their grotesque forms reminded of the variety of animal guises from the world of the sagas. Here one saw a telegraph pole, which was burned off at the middle. The burned stumps, the one dangling in threads, the other poking up from the ground [that] the fire had licked the marrow upwards and downwards on, so that only barrel-like remains of the wood remained. There, one saw some *fence* posts, which were scorched in the same playful manner while many others again were left undisturbed. But the fire in its immeasurable desire had not enjoyed itself only with that, which it found above the ground. At many places, it had dug itself a number of feet *down* into the ground besides the mighty spruce trees' deep going roots, so that the ground there seemed like the central point for all of the area's *gophers* and their underground passageways.

_____o_____

An other strange matter of fact, which should be hard to explain and which was observed by a number of people, is that the houses in Hinckley that faced to the south side and also were those the fire first reached, caught fire *last*. The situation was the same with the house in Mission Creel mentioned in the story's beginning, but with the difference only that although it laid in the middle of the passageway of the fire's first approach [*it*] was *quite unburned*. One has guessed here and there, one has in hundreds of manners tried to explain these phenomena, but they still remain as unsolved puzzles, inviting to many speculations and new conjectures.

_____o_____

All of those who survived the misfortune say that they themselves have observed the same peculiarities with the fire immediately before it threw itself over their respective home villages. They all are in agreement with the information that the wind was boundlessly violent, and that the smoke was so dense and black that it was impossible to distinguish objects as a three foot distance. They further talked about that the air was so replete with charcoal dust and so loaded with fumes that proper explosions with strong detonations occurred, where after the whole mass of smoke was changed to a billowing sea of fire, which with a thunder-like roaring rolled further [on].

That dangerous fires of a similar nature had previously ravaged these mighty tracts of forest is apparent, among others, from the following excerpt in a letter by a prominent citizen of West Superior to a friend:

“It was in the month of June for now 22 years past. The spring had been to the utmost dry and rain poor, and forest fires fretted at several places in northern Wisconsin, gradually making their way towards Lake Superior. One day, shortly after sundown, the mighty waves of smoke, which long had been glimpsed in the forests south of our glances, began to glide down upon us, driven on by an unheard of strong hurricane [of wind]. So quick was this movement that we, who had estimated that the fire was still at least 15 miles distant, saw tree tops on the other side of the fjord/bay only some few moments later – a distance of three miles – in full flame. No smoke was then found. It began however soon to again roll up in mighty masses and was bourn by the strong wind, like a strong, black monster, over the river (here around a half mile broad), where after it as well seems to devour the whole of Grassy Point, with its immense spruce forests immediately west of the little country village of Oneota. We were fortunate enough not to find ourselves in the path of the fire m, and if anyone had been so, hardly anyone should to have lived, who could talk about the tale of sorrow.”

“The masses of smoke had reached forward to the valley’s depression and begun to climb to the heights quicker than words are able to describe it. While we stood in clear sunlight glancing at the living walls of smoke in front of us, a mighty clump of fire shot, quick as a flash if lightning, from the Wisconsin shores through the ghost of smoke’s darkest backbone, setting on fire whole masses [of woods] in the blink of an eye. A deafening noise, a crackling, whining sound, a moment [later], a wall of the densest, blackest smoke, the next [moment] a blood-red flame – afterwards we could see through the woods and along the whole length of Grassy Point, smoke-free now but drenched in a sea of fire with a roaring, which seemed to shake the earth, forced its way to the heights.”

“Like before, the smoke began to draw itself together and hide the fire’s unbelievable rampage, and we again saw the same phenomenon repeated in all of its gripping and dismal majesty. It was a scene that can never be removed from my memory.”

“That the fire, even with its victims, conducted its capricious game is apparent by many of the deceased’s body positions when one found them. Numerous apparently had long and agonizing death fights, while others again equally appear to have died a quick death that it in the nearest must be considered as pain free. Of the last named, a young girl can be mentioned, who one found dead in a bowing position on [her] knees with clasped hands raised, lifted to above and the face turned upwards, showing that her last gasp of breath passed over [her] lips in prayer. Many other of the deceased’s body positions also showed that death reached them just as they stretched the foot for a step, or raised the hand to the mouth in order to not be burned [in the lungs] by the hot air, for so precisely one found them.”

_____o_____

Of all the ravaged districts, Pine County is the part that was scourged the hardest. This county possesses an especially favorable location, situated as it is almost in the middle between St Paul and Duluth. It occupies a surface area of 1,400 square miles and has 26 lakes within its borderlines. A considerable number of watercourses empty into the St Croix and the Kettle Rivers, and these running waters, so to say, drain all the countryside’s parts. The area is not, as the name implies, principally grown up in pine woods, for two thirds of its surface is covered or better said *was* covered with a mixed deciduous forest consisting of maple, oak, elm, aspen,

birch and many other harder types of wood. The cutting of timber has, up to now, been the community's principle industry, but now, since the [county'] agricultural resources have become known, one can, with reason, expect a quicker development. An exceptionally fine quality of sandstone lies, in great richness, deposited in the earth out by the Kettle River, and the pursuit in the quarry [there], which there for a number of years has gone on, gives work to a significant number of people.

In most of the county's parts, good, black loam is found to a depth of a foot over a red-gray clay bottom. Wheat, oats, potatoes, garden vegetables, small fruits and the like flourish excellently and give good harvests. There is no less than 122,340 acres of free government land, which awaits the settler's plow, and there are great extents of comparatively cheap, still unoccupied railroad land. Two railroads cut/cross through the [county], and this region's advantageous location to market places makes that it is especially inviting for the enterprising new cultivator.

The county's present population comes to 6,000 and its most important cities are Pine City, Hinckley, Sandstone, Willow River²³, Finlayson, Rutledge²⁴, Sturgeon Lake²⁵, Partridge and Kerrick.

The loss in dollars and cents (sic), which fell upon this county, [will] probably never be known, because it is a rather difficult thing to be able to properly determine, but it is estimated that \$12,000,000 should fully cover the total loss that afflicted the area's population, and those, who conducted sawmill trade and timber cutting are included therein. This is around \$2,000,000 more than what the renowned Johnstown Flood misfortune in the year 1889 cost, and there to comes that this horrible fire misfortune's consequences are of a far more widespread gripping nature. Here became devoured, in some few terrible moments, the products of many years persevering and tiresome labor, and in the most cases, the poor, fire-ravaged countrymen became completely wiped out and without so much as an axe to begin the new fight for existence with.

Chapter X.

The tragedy's heroes.

This terrible visitation, which the 1st of September, demanded so many lives, put more than one human conscience to truly hard test, and many were they, who permitted themselves to completely be overcome by fear, so that they could neither help themselves nor others, but there were not few either, who showed a courage, a contempt for death, and a self sacrifice that cannot otherwise than place them in the ranks of the true hero. We wish in the following to present some examples on these great-minded men's conducts during danger's most critical moments.

²³ A village in Pine County, Minnesota located on the east branch of the Kettle River.

²⁴ A village in Pine County, Minnesota. Is also located on the Kettle River and was first known by that name.

²⁵ A village in Pine County, Minnesota organized by the Duluth & St Paul Railroad in 1889.

Rev. P. Knudson, the Presbyterian minister in Hinckley, showed himself in the moment of danger to be worth the title of Shepard, for no Shepard could be more careful about his flock's welfare than as he then showed himself to be for his humans' lives. From the moment when the city's destruction seemed to be assured, this noble man refused to think about himself, and in stead, devoted all of his powers of soul and body to protect and save others.

He ran from house to house warning the people about the impending danger, exhorted them to take protection in the previously mentioned sand pit. While men half crazed by fear harnessed their horses and senselessly tried to save themselves through the burning woods, he was calm and competent and escorted the one flock after the other, safe and sound, to the place of rescue. The forest stood in smoke and flames on all sides, and the poor refugees felt how the skin on the face wanted to flake as well under the strong heat. The good priest had in the meantime good encouraging and trustful words for them all. He held, calmly, the children in his arms, he supported women, who from fear or exertion were near to losing conscience, and through this, his resolute appearance, he presented a good example to the faint-hearted, which injected courage and the power of action even in them. With his hat, he poured water on the women's and the children's heads when they were near to succumbing from the heat. He took his coat, cut it in two pieces. The one piece he dipped into the water, formed it into a bandage and twisted it around a senseless woman's forehead. The other piece got to serve as protection for two small, poor children, whose faces were almost baked by the overheated air.

One could see this great hearted and noble priest, bare headed and in shirtsleeves, hurrying from place to place, wherever the moaning and danger was the greatest, and as long as his strength stood by, he lingered among the injured and the dying, consoling and helping to the best of his ability. He appears to be the incarnate of self-sacrifice. The railway train's adventurous and ventured²⁶ journey through the burning woods gave witness to a beautiful heroic courage by the train personnel, but what could be more noble or heroically courageous than this priest's conduct in the danger's hottest moment.

Mr. Knudson himself has stated, in talking about the terrible misfortune, that over two hundred of the deceased could have been saved, if they only had taken warning and kept themselves away from the river, which only gave bare protection. "But the situation was" he said, "that they lost all senses and ran around like a herd of terrified animals, head first in to death's jaws. Some tried to avoid [the fire] by driving [through it], and were found afterwards in a heap. I have never viewed anything more distressful. A battlefield's horrors are nothing [compared to] these horrors. None of us believed in being saved when the fire's flames struck together over us, and those, who escaped, found themselves alone and abandoned in the black desert without anything to eat or drink. Few of them had clothing enough to cover themselves with. I found six singed watermelons, and they were eaten/consumed in a minute. My wife milked one of the cows that had sought its refuge in the sand pit, and the milk that she thereby got, helped us to hold the small children's bodies and souls together. Afterwards, we discovered the Eastern Minnesota's water tank, and that find became our saving from thirsting [to death]."

o

²⁶ Again a probable typographical error. The printed word is "vågade" = "weighed". I believed it should be "vågade" = "ventured".

Root related himself.

We have in the preceding briefly described Locomotive Engineer James Root's wonderful and heroic conduct when he piloted the burning train, with the many refugees onboard, through fire and smoke from Hinckley forward to Skunk Lake. This adventure [presents] naturally, when it is described by him, a long and interesting impression, and we wish therefore to relate in the following what Mr. Root himself talked about to a newspaper reporter about the episode in view.

“When we left Duluth, we were on time, and when we reached Carlton²⁷, we were ten minutes late at its height, but when we had reached the ascent by Hinckley, we had quite certainly “made up” the time again. The journey had gone through smoke so thick and dense that the conductors [found it necessary] to light the cupé/compartiment lamps, and I myself lit my cab light, but when we came up on the just named ascent, the smoke separated, and we had again fully clear daylight, so that we blew out our lamps again. At the same time, I saw a mass of people come running [down] both sides of the track, over the bridge, and I said to my fireman, “There must be something crazy going on in Hinckley.” where after I put on the air brakes and stopped the train, plainly perceiving that we could not cross over the bridge and that the fleeing people needed our help. Just at the same moment, an older woman and her two daughters came running past the locomotive and I inquired of them what was going on down there in the village. They were [however] so afraid that they could not give any clear explanation, rather only called out, “Have mercy! Save us!” and that was all I could get out of them. At the same time, a number of fleers came running and climbed into the cupés/compartments from both sides, but still I did not properly understand what the matter concerned before an acquaintance of mine in Hinckley came running, and I questioned him and got as an answer, “We are all burned out in Hinckley, and the village stands in fire and smoke from one end to the other.” I then inquired if the station house also was burned and got as an answer that it [was so] and that the water tank and the bridge were also burning. I now understood the whole horrible situation in Hinckley. I cried to all [those running by] that they should hurry to put themselves in safety onboard, as I intended to back the train at full speed back to Skunk Lake. I called out to the conductor [about] what I intended to do.”

“Some minutes afterward, all had been able to crawl onboard, and just as I released the steam and got the train in motion, [it] seems the flaming abyss itself clattered with its mouth of fire after us. The wind arose with a terrible strength. An explosion or something similar was apparent, and in the blink of an eye the whole train and even the railroad ties stood in flames at the same moment. I had barely taken my place by the steering pole when the pane of glass in my cab, a really thick piece of glass, bent and burst into pieces. A pair of large slivers struck first up to the roof and afterwards fell with such power on my face and head that I received several serious and deep cuts, although I did not pay any attention [to them]. I noticed that I bled a little, but I had no idea about the injury in the neck, which caused such great a loss of blood and exhaustion of strength in me. McGowan, the fireman, said later that he had noticed it, but thought it too insignificant to make me aware of it.”

²⁷ A city and the county seat for Carlton County, Minnesota. Was the junction point of the transcontinental Northern Pacific Railroad and the older Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad.

“When the train reached the cut on the top of Hinckley Hill, I heard someone cry that there appeared to be three men coming running towards us. I put on the air brakes with the intention of taking the men onboard, but in the next moment’s reconsideration, I found it most advisable to not stop, whereas I in the opposite case risked getting the pipe connections burned up, so that the brake brackets became spiked/fused²⁸, and we in this situation could not get to move ourselves out of the spot. Two of the men never-the-less succeeded to clinch fast to the locomotive’s outside and over-hangs, but one of them fell off immediately afterwards and became presumably the fire’s victim, while on the contrary, the other succeeded to hold fast and was saved.

This is the last I remember until we were able to get forward to Little Hinckley Hill. I laid then completely alone in my cab above the machinery deck. The machinery groaned and worked very slowly. I looked at the boiler’s pressure gauge and discovered that we had gone to only ninety pounds of pressure. With great effort, I got up, opened the valve and took my place by the steering pole again. At the same moment, I got a view of the fireman, who had just emerged from the water compartment. I saw him as if through a fog, for it began to blacken in my eyes, and I was near to collapse. Then the fireman grabbed a hold of me and thereby happened to rub his wet shirtsleeve over my face, which gave me as if new life. I asked him to *pour* water over me. He did so and therewith placed a pail of water besides me. We both stuck our hands in the water; they were as red as crayfish and almost half fried, so that the smarting in them was almost unbearable. The water in the mean time stopped the smarting. I told Jack to shovel in more coal, which he also did. This was barely done when I saw water gleaming forward through the masses of smoke and consequently knew that we were close to Skunk Lake, and with a turn of the hand, I set on the brakes, so that the train stopped. I found that I had stopped the train in the middle of the bridge, therefore I must take it back a piece, so that it came to stand/rest on firm ground. Hardly had this been done before all [my] strength completely left me, and I fell straight out head over heels. Jack wanted to help me, but I said to him that he first should help the passengers; later he could come back to me. He went but some minutes later [came] back in company with another man, and they carried me from the locomotive down into the marsh, where I immediately rolled myself [around] in the water and mud.”

“Here I laid for three hours surrounded by men, women and children, who had sought refuge in the marsh/swamp. While I laid in the water, the feelings in the lower part of the body completely deserted [me]. From the hips to my feet, I had no ability to feel, therefore I, with the help of my arms, dragged myself up on dry ground and remained lying so for an hour when a cold, [piercing] to the bone and marrow, entered, overpowering all of my being. I asked Jack to carry me onboard the locomotive again where it was warm. He refused saying that the whole supply of coal and the “cabin” itself stood in fire and smoke. I persisted however and insisted on being carried there. Such was done, and while I laid there on the machinery deck, the feeling began to gradually return in [my] whole body; I felt a beneficial warmth fill all of [my] limbs, but the strength was still as if quenched. I now asked Jack to uncouple the locomotive and drive it forward as suitably far, so that it come out of reach of the of the fire in the burning coal car.

²⁸ The word used at this point was “förnaglade” = “spiked” as in spiking a gun.

He did so, and the locomotive was thereby saved. The whole length of cars, the water tank [car] and everything that was left behind went up in smoke.”

“After all of the danger was past, I got from several directions/sources and from people, who thought they understood the matter better, to hear harsh condemnations thrown out about the railroad’s officials, who permitted us to go out straight into the mouth of a such a death trap. These connoisseurs namely thought that we, by way of the telegraph, ought to have been warned in good time of the waiting danger. This is easy to say, but under the circumstances, which were associated with the catastrophe, no living being could have foreseen what awaited us, and as far as the telegraph is concerned, the lines were so quickly burned off at several places, so that all communication on the road was closed before one knew a word about it. The whole way from Carlton to Hinckley, there was nothing, which could alarm us except the smoke, which as I have already said, was thick, but there was absolutely no fire to be seen before that there explosion of smoke, or what ever it was occurred and, which in the blink of an eye, enveloped us with fire. The first proper intimation I got that there was danger on the journey was when I saw the people from Hinckley come running. Almost every summer, we must travel through masses of smoke from the burning forests. There have always been larger or smaller forest fires, and when I came out of the smoke on the previously mentioned height, I thought that we had past all dangers. I wish again to state that the railroad officials in no way have made themselves deserving of censure. That, which occurred, could not be avoided, and it makes one mad to hear people censured for nothing for, which they not in the least manner, bear fault for.”

“The first rescue group to reach us was Dave William’s, and he came with his fellows from the north on handcars. My first thought was to follow them back to Duluth, but when I saw that I could not sit up, and that I, lying, should take up room for two or three others, I stood aside [and] therefore remained r onboard the locomotive. An hour later, several so-called *handcars* arrived from the south under Conductor Buckley’s direction. All of the weakest, among them myself, were placed onboard these cars, which carried us to Hinckley. Our stronger comrades in misfortune went there by foot, and in Hinckley, a train awaited us, which took us further southward, and I was transported to my home in White Bear²⁹. There I fell into a heavy, beneficial sleep and was, on the following Monday, completely frisk and healthy, and two days later, I was again at work.”

He died at his post.

The telegrapher with the St Paul & Duluth Railroad’s station in Hinckley, the young, courageous and devoted to duty Thomas G. Dunn, went to a horrible bur heroic death during the performance of his duty in the company’s service. He is called by many “the Hinckley catastrophe’s greatest hero”, and perhaps he also was. When everything was smoke and fire around him, and everyone else fled in order to place their lives in safety and called to him to follow with, he remained nevertheless at his operation table awaiting orders about the next train coming down, which should arrive in five minutes. But no orders came, no train came, the bridge out by Hinckley Hill was, of course, burned down and could not carry Root’s train over [to Hinckley}. It *began* to burn in the stationhouse’s roof and walls, and the station platform

²⁹ A city in Ramsey County, Minnesota immediately north of St Paul and on the main rail line to Duluth.

was soon empty of people. In the last [moment], several of his friends tried to induce the young telegrapher to think on his safety and follow with them, but he was and remained unmoved. "Who shall receive telegrams?" he asked them in answer; no one else than he *could* do it, and consequently it was his *duty* to do it, irregardless of what will happen, he let his friends understand, and these finally left him to his horrible fate.

This unafraid and self-sacrificing, young man did not know that he completely, uselessly offered his life. The other telegraph stations' lines along [the railroad line] were closed or abandoned because of the fire; no one could give orders; no train could depart. How he in the end fought with death, how he went under, no human eye saw, but in the stationhouse's ashes, one found his burned skeleton. All of Hinckley's population sorrows over young Dunn's tragic end, but the sorrow mixes itself with respect and amazement for the dead one, and it is talked about erecting a monument on the spot, which hides the hero's bones.

A resolute newspaperman.

The editor of the newspaper, "Hinckley Enterprise", Mr. A. Hay, showed himself, both in the period of danger and after the same, to be a brave and compassionate man. Together with his companions, he traveled on a handcar immediately after the fire down to Pine City in order to from there give the outer world knowledge about the misfortune and all of its details [as] witnessed by himself and his comrade in the misfortune. His descriptions, such as they already the day after the fire were appearing in all of the county's newspapers, acquired and reproduced through the telegraph and printer's ink, reads in summary so:

"At noontime through the city's streets sounded the cry that the row of houses west of the St Paul and Duluth line's tracks were strongly threatened by the forest fire. Branch Chief Craig permitted, without delay, the crew to go off, and a number voluntarily joined the firefighters. A courageous but uneven fight now began against the raging element. The whole western side of the city and the Brennan Lumber Company's (sic) sawmill were in great danger. The fire hoses were found to be completely too short to reach the point where the fire was the strongest. The [Fire] Chief telegraphed to Rush City for more hoses. Confusion continuously took hold, [but] many men and boys, who could leave their homes, passed water from hand to hand in order to fight the fire. At times, the heat was so intense that the skin on the face almost peeled off. The work of extinguishing [the fire] continued without interruption and with undiminished [effort], and each and everyone felt certain of victory, but then came, sneaking like a tiger, the wave of fire from Mission Creek, and therewith was the city's demise a given. An unappeasable hurricane drove on this dragon of fire, and the men were compelled to retreat, every one of them. The south-going train on the Duluth Railroad arrived at 2 o'clock – two hours delayed – and many women and children followed south with this train to safer locations. From and with this, moment, the fire was the victor. The women became, as if brutalized by fear, but they were calmed by those, who were equally in great danger themselves but had succeeded to retain their presence of mind. The southern most house on the main street was Nels Anderson's, and one thought that the whole village's fate depended the saving of the same. One exerted oneself to the utmost in order to deny the fire this first mouthful of Hinckley. In the middle of this hottest fight, the fire chief came on a gallop on his horse crying, "We are unable to save the city! It is doomed! Flee for your lives to the sand pit and don't lose

a moment!” Now a running and screeching began that was indescribable. I found myself around four “blocks” from my office when Anderson’s house caught on fire. I ran as fast as I could to my office, and when I came in to the cloakroom, I saw through the window large embers were falling like hail through the air. I tried to save some valuables in the print shop but soon gave up the idea when I saw helpless women and children running around searching for a place of refuge.”

“Out on the sidewalk, I saw a women, unknown to me, fleeing with three small children. I took the smallest in my arms and carried it, until I got a man, who was driving by, to take it with him to the East Railway Station, which was his place of destination. Then I helped the woman and her two small children forward to the station, but when we got there, the train had already gone, so that I must accompany them to the sand pit. When this was done, I hurried again down the street but could not endure the hot stream of air that met my by the corner of the Morrison Hotel. It compelled me to retreat, and for the second time, I directed my steps towards the sand pit. At the same [time], I saw a woman run over the Duluth line’s track towards the roundhouse. A dead woman’s body was later found there.”

“Two women lay on their knees before the city hall’s facade immersed in prayer, the one in the roadway itself and the other on the grass besides [it]. I interrupted the devotions, got the ladies on their legs and was able to get them to follow with me to the sand pit. Water was better than prayers at *that* moment, and I am in good conscience about [the fact] that both women still number among the living. Seventy souls – men, women and children were crowded with each other in the sand pit’s mud puddle, whose water was barely three feet deep. The houses to the right and left and the stationhouse -- all stood in bright flames. The wind came straight from the south, driving an unceasing rain of sparks and embers down upon us, and I did not understand at this moment how we could live through it. For near three hours we stood crowded together in this pit. After that passage of time, all danger was over, and we went up to the open ground. After some hours of resting in the city’s only remaining building, the Eastern Minnesota’s roundhouse, we organized seven of us for a trip to Pine City for help. We took a handcar and “started out”. It was a bumpy trip over a track, which at many places had separated out at the sides and given out. At Mission Creek, we met the repair train, which already was engaged in putting in place the disabled line, putting in new ties, etc. After various deliberations, we were able, the whole bunch, to [continue on] to Pine City.”

So reads this resolute newspaperman’s unpretentious description about the misfortune, a description, which in the meantime, obviously allows the reader to appreciate that the reported himself put himself in greater dangers than he openly admits.

The heroes were many.

Much more could be written about the heroes from the fearsome catastrophe, for they were many, but this little book’s expanse is all too limited in order for us to be able to go into closer details thereon. Our readers have besides perhaps already, through the newspapers, heard them described. By example, the little Freda Johnson in Sandstone, who saved her father’s, mother’s and little brother’s lives through getting them to go down to the river instead of the cellar, which they intended [to go]? – Or the young man, who carried his betrothed several

miles to a place of refuge while the heat was so intense that others, without a burden, hastening the same way as him, fell over and died? Or the little boy from Duluth, who carried two smaller children several miles to a place where older folk met and saved them?

As said, heroes in this tale of sorrow are all too many in order that they here should be able to be given a complete and proper biography, where for it is said may be enough.

Chapter XI

Among the dead and their graves

As soon as the fire's course was past, and the "red rooster" had fluttered further and away to other tracts, the poor, hopeless survivors ventured from their hiding places in order, if possible, to find their friends and relatives, or at least a trail after them. A scene of desolation met them wherever they directed their steps; a scene easier envisioned than described. Many of the refugees did not venture to leave their hiding places before the morning's dawn, then they came creeping forth, more dead than alive, with painful burn injuries, half blind from the smoke and exhausted from hunger and the exertions. Everywhere they must gaze upon the same gripping picture of sorrow; nothing other than ashes and coals, animal and human fragments, wherever they then directed their steps. Not before it was days, did the loss of life, which the fire had brought about, become known to its fullest extent, and the poor survivors first then properly comprehended clearly how near their lives had been to death's and eternity's harbor/port. They were unable to talk; half stupefied they wandered around, many of them hardly within their minds understanding the horrors in the surroundings, which under normal circumstances must press forth tears and make soft the heart, hard as stone.

The surviving Hinckley residents had, as was said, no proper comprehension of the fire's terrible consequences. When they came out of the sand pit and up from the river, they thought that only a few humans had perished. They knew of course that a great number of the city's population had been saved onboard the Eastern Minnesota's train, and when the first bearers of news from "the marsh of death" described what had happened, they hardly could believe their ears. And yet this first report was not half as grim as the reality later showed itself to be. It was said, namely, that around 40 people laid burned up in the marsh/swamp in question, but it soon became apparent that the number came up to a hundred and twenty-six.

Immediately after this became known, a relief [expedition] arrived at the location, and a compassionate man, Mr. F. G. Webber, placed himself at the head for the most repulsive and the most demanding part of the work, namely the collecting, identifying and burying of the dead. Body collectors were sent out in all directions and from all sides dead, more and less mangled bodies were transported in. This disgusting work went on for three days, and inasmuch as the weather was pressingly warm, one must, for sanitary reasons, hurry on [with it] as [fast] as possible.

The volunteer body [finders] worked with, as it seems, inhuman powers and endurance, and the leader, Mr. Webber, allowed for himself, during three days and nights, not a wink of

sleep. One exerted oneself to the utmost to identify the corpses, but in many cases, it showed itself to be fruitless attempts, for which cause, one of course had in the end only burned skeleton bodies. And many such were found. The horrible remains of these poor deceased were placed in a pile, and not less than

ninety-six charred corpses

were laid in this manner in a stack in order to await their common burial ceremony and their common grave.

After the dead in the devastated cities immediate neighborhoods were given, in this manner, the last recognition of honor and placed in consecrated ground, the corpse collectors were sent out into the farm districts. The corpses that they there came upon were buried at the locations whereat one found them, and a simple piece of board with the deceased's name on it was placed into the ground to indicate the place where the bones found their last rest.

Many and heart rendering were the behaviors, which occurred at the identification places, and during the burial, survivors burst out in unbridled moaning and lamentation every time they recognized or thought they recognized a relative or a friend in any of the dead bodies, which were carried forth or dug out from the piles of ashes. It was many, who to the end, clasped fast with the single hope that their lost relatives had put themselves in safety on the rescue train and were [still] alive, and cruel became therefore their disappointment when they were compelled to recognize them among the dead. On the other side, were found also those, whose sorrow and anxiety were suddenly and unexpectedly turned to joy when their supposed dead [ones] unexpectedly [were found] among the living.

One poor man, with deep emotion and moving sorrow, took part in a mass burial. His beloved wife was one of them, who was placed down into the earth's quiet bosom; he had seen the black remains of the dear dead one, and to the end, his tearful glance followed the simple coffin, which contained what [was dearest in his life.] The three shovels full of earth fell heavy on the boards, the pastor finished the ceremony and everything was surmounted. But here – comes the unexpected – when the man, immediately afterwards, climbed on the train in order to travel to Duluth, he meets, as good as on the compartment stair tread, – his own wife, alive. *She* had come back in order to attend *his* burial, for she had, with certainty, believed him to have perished. That the joy [of again seeing each other] was great and moving, does not need to be said, and the wrongly cried upon dead rests surely, equally calm in its grave, notwithstanding the man's tears. And so do they, all, all of those who were suddenly pulled from this life to the “great unknown” *there beyond*.

MAY THEY REST IN PEACE

Chapter XII

**The devastated Minnesota-district
and its surroundings**

When one, before the Hinckley Fire, traveled by railway between Duluth and St Paul or the reverse, one could not avoid noticing the great timber harvesting/cutting that went on, simply said, along the whole line immediately north of Pine City. Timber on all sides; almost every station had its sawmill, and almost every farmyard could produce mighty piles of cut so-call *cord wood*, railroad ties, shingle blocks or the like, which the energetic settler fetched from out of his woods. Mighty pine, often 100 to 150 feet tall, stood dense in among each other, [in] mile long stretches along both sides of the railroad tracks – a majestic knightly watch in dark green attire. As far as the eye saw, it was met by dense forests or new cultivations with the farmer's cottage in the foreground. These farms showed off not proud residences and stables, but about them it could be generally said that they displayed themselves well in their management, and by the occasional extra earnings they could procure for themselves in the neighborhood. Sawmills had been established here and there, railroads had come in, labor's wages were good, and year round work was found for almost all. Lumber was the principal product, and here was found an almost immeasurable supply of the finest timber, which only awaited the axe.

Thousands of men came every winter from the North West's larger cities in order to seek and find work and income as lumberjacks in this district, and millions of feet of logs were laid up, ready for floating [down the rivers and streams] the following spring. A not insignificant number of people found a paying summer labor in the area's sawmills, so that the Pine County's farmer had a good home market for his products.

The area's creamery industry was, in relationship to the community's population, rather large. The forest's undergrowth made a rather good fodder for horned cattle and a large percent of West Superior's and Duluth's butter and milk needs were supplied from this area's farmers. A special so-call milk train trafficked the Duluth Line every morning.

Here like the most of the other parts of the country of the United States, the population was to the utmost diverse, coming together from the earth's all corners. Scandinavians however made up the overwhelming element, and not a few Germans and Russian Jews had set their residence roots there.

These industrious people had little presentiment that a so terrible misfortune awaited them. They had seen many and serious forest fires, but they had always been mild in comparison, and no one had reason to believe that the "'94 year's" should be more dangerous than the previous summers. Everyone expected such fires, for they never survived [beyond] the fall, but about a similar dreadful bugbear, it no one dreamed of. The usual protective measures against the spreading of forest fires had been adopted, one had been especially careful with the arrangements for the prevention of a new fire outbreak, for the population in its entirety was fully conscious about the situation, that the summer's enduring dryness had made the forest to the utmost flammable. That the list of dead became so great depended perhaps most thereon that whole communities were immersed in the belief that the fire should not be any worse then than before. Many, who should have been able to save themselves if they had tried to do so when the first alarm was given, thought to the extreme that their city at least was safe, until it was too late for them to correct their mistake.

Chapter XIII

The fire's ravages in the sister state.

The same time as the fire dragon raged in Hinckley and its surroundings, spreading death and devastation in all directions, similar scenes of terror played out in Minnesota's sister state to the east, the forest-rich Wisconsin out by the Omaha Railroad's tracks. It is superfluous to go into detail about the same fire phenomenon in the ravaged district that lies between Cumberland³⁰ and Ashland³¹. The same horrible hurricane or cyclone also accompanied this fire, and the terrible monster fell over the [un-anticipating] small city citizens with the same rapidity as the one, which identified the Hinckley fire.

A difference showed up however in the Wisconsin fire from the one that struck forward in Minnesota. In the former, the woods were scorched in long ribbons, leaving long, mile-wide bands of land and woods undisturbed. The tracts ravaged by the fire were sparsely populated, and the few settlements, which were found there, were hardly over 10 years old.

Timber cutting was here, as in Pine County, the principal source of livelihood, and the sawmill companies' interests were that which had drawn the railroad up there. Unbelievable masses of lumber were transported annually from these communities, and in later years grain and hay yields there had taken on rather respectable dimensions. The soil was certainly sandy but however no poorer than that, with the proper management/care, yield right good harvests.

The loss of humans caused by the fire was the greatest and most appalling in Minnesota, but in the question of burned over surface area, so is this many times doubled in Wisconsin. How this easterly forest fire came about is not generally known, but one knows that it began immediately northwest of Rice Lake and northeast from Cumberland. Neither of these two places suffered any large damage from the fire, but they were close enough in order to feel its smelter-like heat and to be seriously disturbed over its fearsome power.

*Barronett*³².

This little city with a population of around 550 souls was situated around 7 miles from Cumberland by the Vermillion River and was called on by the Chicago, St Paul & Omaha Railroad. The whole town, residences, stores, etc., was as good as owned by a powerful timber company, which operated a large sawmill located there. At two o'clock in the afternoon of the memorable 1st of September, two passenger trains stood (*which fortunately were* somewhat delayed) outside of Barronett's stationhouse. The heat and the smoke had increased without interruption, and when both the trains arrived, they found the population in the wildest panic and consequently thankful to be able to find safety onboard. As soon as it became clear the village was doomed, the company's store director opened up the doors, [climbed up onto] the gable [of the roof] and invited the people to provided themselves with what they needed. A few

³⁰ A city in Barron County, northwest Wisconsin settled in 1874.

³¹ The county seat of Ashland County, northernmost Wisconsin on the Chequamegon Bay of Lake Superior.

³² A village in Washburn County, NW Wisconsin near Shell Lake.

in number made use of this permission, but the most had enough to do to save themselves and to see to that their [families] were placed beyond all danger. All, with a pair of or three exception, succeeded to get well onboard and were saved with the possessions they were able to carry in their hands.

The majority of Barronett's manly individuals were sawmill workers, as a rule poor or in very limited circumstances. The refugees steered [their] courses, a number to Cumberland, some few to Shell Lake³³ and some few others to Spooner³⁴. Only one person [gave up his] life in Barronett. His name was Alexander Erickson; he was determined to remain. After the fire had spread out past the village, one found him lying dead with [his] face turned to the ground, apparently overcome by the heat, hardly twenty steps from his own house.

Shell Lake.

This city, located approximately 18 miles from Cumberland by the Omaha rail line, stood completely on the verge [of being] washed away by the fire. The smoke had been thick and suffocating the whole morning, and towards noon, [it] was noticed that the fire [was probable]. The population collected [together] then immediately in order to cut short/impede the fire, and it succeeded to keep it within certain limits around a half mile south of the village until about 5 o'clock, when in spite of all [efforts] the feared fiend succeeded to coil itself forward to a large hay meadow, where after it did not take long before the roadway was crossed. Here it was met again by a hard-pressed opposition from the residents' side, and after a highly exerting effort at quenching, one succeeded to close off the fire from the village's southern side, thereby the whole business quarter was saved from a certain demise. Not one person in Shell Lake perished in this fire, but around 55 houses and other property to a total value [of approximately] \$100,000 went up in smoke.

From this Shell Lake scourge, an episode is talked about, which showed that heroic courage and self sacrifice even there was invited [by] the danger point. A fifty-three year old widow lived in a part of the town most threatened by the fire. She had a nineteen-year-old son, who, with the fire's advance, laid bound to the sick bed in a critical typhus fever. The mother, who, during the whole time of the son's illness, had faithfully watched by his side and given him the tenderest care, would not in the least surrender the helpless one now with this new danger's approach. When she saw that the house was doomed to be swallowed up by the fire, she swept her sick child in a sheet and carried the heavy but dear burden in her arms out to the garden. There she prevented the fire from eating at her own and her son's clothing with water she had fetched in a little tin pail. During the time, the stable building caught fire, but even here, she succeeded, with the little tin pail's help, to become the master of the garden patch. Anyway until long towards midnight, she fought in this manner alone against the fire, and when she was convinced that the stable was out of all danger, she carried the sick one into it and remained there with him until [the time] succor arrived.

*Comstock*³⁵

³³ A village in Washburn County, NW Wisconsin.

³⁴ A city in Washburn County, NW Wisconsin 60 miles south of Superior, Wisconsin. Settled in 1883.

³⁵ A village in Barron County, NW Wisconsin.

was the name of a little station community south of Cumberland. Here the fire swallowed everything there was; chattel and real [property], and the property loss caused thereby is estimated to be around \$80,000.

*Cable*³⁶

is another little city or village by the Omaha Railroad in Bayfield County. This little community laid straight in the thoroughfare of the forward rushing sea of fire and became as well as wiped out from the world. Around 38 residences and a building belonging to the railroad became a morsel for the fire here. The population came to something over 200 souls and the city was located 148 miles from St Paul.

The cities of Hayward³⁷ and Drummond³⁸ avoided in a miraculous manner to share a similar fate. The fire seems to have completely turned aside from both of these places, and it is, as far as Drummond is concerned, so much more remarkable, because it laid bedded in the middle of a thick belt of woods, which also in the same indescribable manner, was gone around and left undisturbed by the fire, while everything around was scorched and burned. Both of these cities now lie as types [of] oases in the devastated tracts.

*Mason*³⁹

This city, populated by around 800 people, was a little, pleasant and progressive community located just where the Omaha Railroad runs or comes together with the Duluth, South Shore [and] Atlantic Railroad. Next to Barronett, there was not a city upon this line that was ravaged as badly by the fire as just Mason. Almost the whole city went up in smoke; a sawmill and enormous masses of sawed lumber were swallowed up. The stationhouse and one or two residences were the only objects that, immediately after the fire, showed where Mason had been. Another smaller placed called Peck or Benoit Station, located between Mason and Ashland, became almost totally destroyed.

Ashland itself was rather badly beset by the fire, which grubbed its way forward into the city's borders, and the fire department had a long and sharp fight against the immeasurable element, before one could breather easier and consider oneself outside of all fire danger.

Even Washburn⁴⁰, located on the other side of the fjord/bay directly opposite Ashland, had a rather cheeky greeting by the fire. Smoke had lain heavy and dense over the city for many days, and when the fire finally cut claws in the city's outskirts, all that body and soul had must [be engaged] in the work of putting it out. From the direction of the fire, a genuine hurricane came, but none the less, one held back the red enemy's lances, until suddenly, flames were seen appearing from Cook Co.'s dock No. 3, or the one that laid furthest north. A flying

³⁶ A village in Bayfield County, N Wisconsin.

³⁷ A city in Sawyer County, N Wisconsin 55 miles SE of Superior, Wisconsin.

³⁸ A village in Bayfield County, Wisconsin 25 miles SW of Ashland, Wisconsin.

³⁹ A village in Bayfield County, N Wisconsin 13 miles SW of Ashland, Wisconsin.

⁴⁰ The county seat of Bayfield County, N Wisconsin on Chequamegon Bay of Lake Superior.

ember had plausibly lit it. A part of the fire department was immediately sent there, but the boundless wind however cut the fire through the wooden piles, and it became completely impossible to prevent the fire's spreading to the Bigelow Co.'s docks, four in number, and in a shorter time than can here be described, all of these docks stood in brilliant flames. Fifteen million feet of lumber gave the fire fearsome nourishment in a few moments. When the fire stood at its high point, a fire engine arrived from Ashland, and if it had not been for this assistance, the whole of Washburn plausibly have been laid in ashes by the over-hanging danger.

In Parisville, 500,000 feet of lumber and the Kennedy's sawmill went up in smoke. Dynamite was used as a means of limiting the fire with the best of results.

It is completely impossible to exactly be able to determine the extent of the damage, which was brought about in this district. Hardly a little country village avoided completely the fire's ravages, and the devastating element forced its way forward up to and over the Michigan border and into Gogebic and Ontonaga⁴¹ Counties. The losses brought upon the railroad company in the form of burned up bridges, telegraph pole, ties, fences, etc. are unbelievable.

Iron River⁴², a pleasant city with around 700 residents located on the Northern Pacific Railroad midway between Duluth and Ashland, was near to being wiped out but slipped aside with the loss of twenty residences and a sawmill. The population had expected the worst and was therefore prepared to fight the fire when it put them at risk, but nonetheless, it looked to be completely hopeless out for some hours. Brule⁴³ and the surrounding villages were ravaged severely by the fire, and a large number of homesteader cabins and lumber camps were swept away from the earth.

Granite Lake⁴⁴ is a station on the Omaha Line between Barronett and Cumberland, got to suffer a similar fate as that, which afflicted Barronett.

The seventh of September, five days after the first bad fire outbreak, the [long] desired rains fell in the devastated tracts, and therefore, whereat the fire had not already consumed everything burnable, was place a border for further devastations.

A horrible end.

Several days after the fire, the newspapers had the following horrible catastrophe to relate from High Bridge⁴⁵, which place was also ravaged by the fire daemon.

"The I. Towers family, consisting of himself, his wife and five children, lived in a little house only a stone's throw away from [their] son-in-law Bargan's new house. In the morning, Towers and the son-in-law and a neighbor, went together to fight the fire with the intent to save

⁴¹ Both Michigan counties in its Upper Peninsula opposite Wisconsin.

⁴² A city in Iron County, Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

⁴³ A village in Douglas County, NW Wisconsin.

⁴⁴ No such place name currently is noted.

⁴⁵ A village in Ashland County, N Wisconsin.

the first name's hay and a large bunch of cedar posts, which laid ready to be sent away. When the fire finally compelled the men to seek their rescue, each one for himself the best he could, the neighbor found himself a bit away from the others and tried, running, to get to his own house, but the heat and the smoke overtook him, however not so bad as he managed to carry himself to the railroad tracks' one ditch, whereat he, while lying with his face pressed against the ground, avoided suffocating [to death]. The Towers family was in the meantime not so fortunate. Around fifty feet from their house a 25 foot deep well was located holding for the moment around 2 feet of water. Into this well, the poor, confused human beings threw down first all of their bed clothing, where after they stepped down into the deep believing that there they should find refuge. But the opposite occurred. The well showed itself to be a veritable oven from which it gave no escape, and all passed pitifully away there. When the dead bodies were taken out, arms and legs were found completely burnt off, and the whitened skulls spoke their silent but horrible, unmistakable language about the intensive heat that [occurred] down there. However it is presumable that the poor unfortunates were already suffocated to death when the fire itself struck its claws into their bodies."

Even here in the Wisconsin meadows, the fire displayed at many locations the same indescribable caprices, which it showed on its rampage in Minnesota, in that it likewise went around certain objects without in the least [damaging] them. We just mentioned that both of the small communities of Hayward and Drummond, which laid right in the passageway where the fire drew forward, were, in this wonderful manner, left undisturbed by the fearful destroyer. In the same manner, [it] occurred with several isolated houses, and it is rather strange to see, by example, a country storeowner's simple store building out in a sparsely populated forest village left completely undamaged. (See the following picture.) The woods stand blackened tight in upon the house, but that, itself, however blackened with soot by the dreadful smoke and the rain of ashes that swept around it, has not gotten so much as a roof shingle burnt and not a bit of the sparse grass on the house yard in the shelter of the house burned up.

_____o_____

These devastated, burned black meadows make an indescribable, dismal impression upon the traveler, who journeys through them. One thinks, when one gazes over these black deserts, that nature itself has prepared its own grave, and all life and all renewed birth is ground down for ever under the [dark mantle]. But hope, belief in the future lies deeply rooted in the human breast. Already, the new cultivator has raised his unpretentious residence upon the previous one's ruins, and out of the corruption's ash piles themselves, he awaits to [draw forth] new harvest and a fine, new livelihood.

Fire has gone over the place,
Where the woods mighty giants stood.
On watch around the settler's roof
Stands only dark, black stumps.

But up from the burned ruins,
Where the trees have died trunk after trunk,
Soon strawberry flowers in the light
Push small, greening runners forth.

You the wood's sister of mercy,
Little flower with a head of white!
On ground as a graveyard dismal,
Prepares a flower meadow [with] your diligence.

There the woods have gotten the torn jacket,
You cling yourself firmly and are not late,
To spread your green veil
Protecting over the gravel and stone.

Your fruit, little birds consume –
And under your blanket arise quickly
The woods charred giants,
Up out of their graves as new born shoots.

Chapter XIV

A glance back

Before we close this little book, it ought not seem to be out of the way to with regard to the recent occurring catastrophe, which had been described, to move us somewhat back in time with a short glance back for a similar horrible natural catastrophe's outbreak.

Forest fires ravage in the United States' boundaries every year and always lead to greater or lesser losses of property, but never before has the devastation been so great and so horrible, as the one described here. Not even in the fearsome forest fire in Michigan [in] 1881 was the devastation such as this one, thank goodness, for life or property. It shall presumably never be fully know how many humans perished in 1881. One has placed the number as 1,000, but many hold forth that 300 comes closer to the reality. Nevertheless, they, who lived through this misfortune, still have a fresh memory of all of those hair raising and heart stopping horrors and the property losses, which thereby afflicted "the beautiful Badger State" [and] laid a heavy drag on its otherwise so blooming commercial life and [upon] it for a long time.

[The] 1881 forest fire broke out around the middle of August. Parts of five counties, all located north of Port Huron⁴⁶ and covering a territory of 75 miles in length, were completely flayed by fire, but Huron and Sanilac⁴⁷ were the communities hardest afflicted by the devastation. All of America had for many weeks before laid under a persevering drought, but Michigan had gotten to suffer it to an especially high degree. Here and there, small forest fires broke out during the last weeks of August, but inasmuch as the woods were not completely dried out, these first outbreaks were soon checked without apparent difficulty, and no one recognized/felt anything especially disturbing before around the 4th of September. At this point of time, the fire from the burning woods had spread itself over almost every part of the southern Michigan Peninsula and nearby tracts and into Canada. That day, the first reports came in that

⁴⁶ A city and port on Lake Huron, St Clair County, E Michigan.

⁴⁷ Huron and Sanilac are counties in eastern Michigan.

humans had perished. Precisely where this had happened was not known, but the information was not doubted, for the smoke quickly became so thick that at many places, located many miles from the point where the fire raged, all activity must cease. A Mr. Dexter, who was an eyewitness to this forest fire, speaks among others the following:

“I very well remember that I approximately at the time of the fire’s outbreak had decided to travel the lake route from Cleveland to Buffalo but was compelled to travel by the train instead, because all of the steamboats as a group were “laid up” [from] the thick smoke, which hung like a heavy lid over Lake Erie. Through this smoke, the sun forced itself with effort as far towards the east as to Rochester and Pittsburgh, and increased the general feeling of despondency that naturally enough followed this dismal natural phenomenon, [and] the heat, which for days had been to the highest troubling, became almost unbearable. In a number of localities, the quicksilver had reached over 100 degrees and above, and it was generally accepted that if rain did not soon follow, the situation shortly should be dangerous. And [if] before the rain came, it was so divined, should the wind freshen, the results would be horrible, and the whole nation seemed to be in endless strain [awaiting] what should come. Should it be the long desired rain or the fearsome hurricane?”

“The question was answered on the 7th of September when the furious hurricane awoke, driving flames before it with an express train’s speed. Nothing could oppose this sea of fire in its wild attack; nothing more sluggish than steam could be able to avoid it, and many were the railway trains, which with necessity avoided to be destroyed in the wild hunt. [Many] families were placed in the most deplorable of situations.”

Other years memorable for large forest fires are 1848, 1854, 1884, 1887 [and] 1889. None of these earlier fires gave rise to so great a loss of human life as those of newer date and that by the just noted reason: a less dense population.

_____o_____

Chapter XIV⁴⁸

General succor

It is the first days after the heaven-rendering catastrophe. The reaction has come. We visit the first of the uninjured refugees in Pine City. They are several hundreds, and we find them standing in small groups, here and there by the street corners, conversing about the boundless misfortune’s hair-raising details. The acceptance that one or another family has perished, or the news that one or another, first believed to be dead, had succeeded to escape, was spoken about with the same feeling-less voice, expressing neither sorrow nor despair, neither joy nor satisfaction.

At the hospital, the admitted [patients] demanded unceasing care by the doctors and nurses, and Pine City’s only druggist had his hands [overwhelmed] preparing ligaments and salves to long rows. On the morning of the 3rd of September, all of the patients found themselves, comparison-wise, well and free from bodily pains.

⁴⁸ This is the second chapter so designated.

The good people of Pine City, who had opened their hearts, their homes and their public buildings for the suffering of need, were placed in pure hurry and movement. The city hall was kept open day and night, and coffee and good, strengthening meals were given out in liberal and nourishing proportions. The courthouse and the schoolhouse [were opened] as well up to the roof for who ever wished to go there to rest oneself. Women and children were given the best quarters, and for the men, [they] were bedded in long rows on the floors of the just noted houses.

Before the dawning of day after the day of misfortune, the whole city's population was in motion: The preparations for succor for the distressed further up in the burned tracts, which one had ceased at the two hour in the night, was taken up anew and with doubled ardor. The appointed committees met and soon had the plan of work well staked out. Before 7 o'clock in the morning, a construction crew arrived from Rush City, loaded with building material for the burned bridge over the Grindstone River by Hinckley.

Around 400 loaves of bread and other lighter provisions were taken onboard at Pine City. A group of workers were appointed to follow with to dig graves and collect the bodies, where after the train continued the journey into the burned district. At Hinckley, all of the provisions were off-loaded unto a handcar manned by the Distress Assistance Committee's representative, Judge J. C. Nethaway from Stillwater, and a half dozen sturdy fellows, and the departure was taken over the swaying bridge in the direction towards Miller located nine miles northerly. There a dozen or more dead were collected and three or four times as many hungry and homeless were fed. From Miller the relief work continued towards Sandstone from there located five miles away to the east whereat 40-50 corpses were taken charge of. At the hour of eleven in the forenoon, the bridge over the Kettle River was placed in satisfactory order, so that a train consisting of a locomotive, a freight car and a *caboose* and loaded with provisions and coffins could pass over it northward.

Above Skunk Lake, the relief expedition reported twelve corpses found upon the railway embankment's right side, obviously deceased settlers.

Under Captain Hale's and Lieutenant McCoy's command, a troop of soldiers arrived from Ft Snelling bringing with a mass of tents intended for the distressed needy, but when they found that Adjutant General Muehlberg had already sent 180 tents there out of the state's supplies, they employed themselves to set up 50 each of these. A military doctor also came to the location in order to assist the hospital's serving doctors, and this help was of need, for the hospital's doctors were by that time completely exhausted by [long hours] and exertions.

To closer or in detail describe all of the efforts that were made everywhere in the Northwest to the need's speedy assistance should take this little description's limited space in all too large a claim. It is enough to say that the helpfulness and willingness and generosity, which appeared, showed itself to be far greater and more beautiful than what one had ventured to hope for under the ruling, general financial distress.

The contributions in the form of clothing, food stuffs and the like, which passed through St Paul's storehouses only for the further dispatch to the need suffering, is estimated to a value of \$22,00. The collect cash contributions and their use, was accounted for by the Relief Commission's Secretary, Mr. Hart, in the following report:

Monies Received

From foreign countries, England and Canada	\$11,600.00
From the United States outside of Minnesota Historical Society	14,711.19
From Minnesota Historical Society	<u>70,147.50</u>
Total cash donations	\$94,458.69
From the sale of lumber and materials to the fire injured	2,018.15
Cash loaned through the Commission	<u>15,000.00</u>
Total cash contributions	\$113,478.84

The Commission's Treasurer's expenditures

Cash payments among the need suffering	\$23,204.61
For building material and building labor	35,322.38
The families' clothing, purchase of furniture, hardware, etc.	22,238.61
Temporary help, groceries, medicines and medical help	14,848.42
Diverse demolishing, plowing, transportations costs, etc.	4,073.20
Administration: salaries to agents, bookkeepers, and store owners	<u>5,156.73</u>
Total expenditures	\$104,843.85
Cash on Hand Dec. 31, 1894	\$8,632.89

Besides the cash contributions and expenses, which the State Commission managed, the local committees in the state's various parts received and paid out the following means for the suffers in need's accounting:

Minneapolis, temporary help from the local committee	\$3,382.46
St Paul, temporary help from the local committee	1,500.01
Pine City, temporary help, burials, etc. through the local committee	1,372.72
St Cloud's local committee: help for the suffering in need in Milaca and Pokegama	1,254.48
Stillwater, through the local committee direct to the suffering in need in Hinckley and surroundings	2,800.00

Cloquet, through the local committee to the suffering in need in Carlton County	898.85
Duluth's local committee, temporary help, food, clothing, etc.	11,850.00
White Bear's local committee	<u>146.24</u>
 Total	 \$23, 565.74

Cash expenditures

The total cash expenditures to the fire damaged, as far as the report extends up to the 1st of January 1895 were \$128,409. The collected cash value that had gone through the respective committees is divided in the following way:

Cash expended through the State Assistance Committee	\$104,844
Building lumber, flour, etc. given out by the State Committee	10,700
Used clothing, etc. sent direct to Hinckley and Pine City	<u>3,000</u>

The total value of the cash and contributions In goods, which have gone through The State Committee's hands	\$140.544
---	-----------

Cash given out by the local committees in Minneapolis, St Paul, Duluth, Pine City, St Cloud ⁴⁹ , Stillwater ⁵⁰ And Mora ⁵¹	23,568
Used clothing, etc. given out through these committees	<u>7,434</u>

Total value of the cash and goods contributions Through the local committees	\$31,000
Free transportation	13,200

Total value of the contributions to the suffering in need Including money and goods contributions	\$184.744
--	-----------

It ought to be observed that the State Commission's administrative expenses for the expenditures of \$140,544 was \$5,157, which is the same as 3.7 percent.

The State Commission placed on its administrative representative and agents that priority be given to the fire injured the opportunity to work on the constructions, which through the Committee's instrumentality were erected. The total sum given out for wages for such work came to \$17,814.69, and of that \$7,970.20 went to those of the fire injured, who helped with the construction.

⁴⁹ A major city on the Mississippi north of St Paul and Minneapolis in Stearns and Benton Counties

⁵⁰ A city and county seat of Washington County on the St Croix River. At this time it was a major sawmill center.

⁵¹ Mora is the county seat of Kanabec County, Minnesota

The Commission's report presents as well the number of persons, who made requests for assistance, and it is divided up as follows:

Number of requests – 1,001 (embracing 3,046 person); resident persons in the burned district at the time of the fire misadventure – 2,772; non resident – 304; the number of those who received assistance – 2,631; of those who will get assistance – 445.

The foregoing listing includes 344 unmarried men; 33 unmarried women; 49 widows whose family members came up to a total number of 155 persons; 59 widowers with a total of family members of 143; father and motherless – 4. The number through the misfortune made widows - 21; widowers – 22. The number of fire-damaged farmers is: in the Hinckley district – 151, in the around-lying tracts – 163.

The State Commission's Secretary Mr. Hart concludes the report with the following:

The Legislature has granted \$20,000 to the State Commission to make good this advancement of 15,000 and in order, if such is demanded, to be able to give temporary assistance to those placed in need who are in need of further support. We support now around 600 persons, counting in farm families, widows and their children and city residents without work and income. As soon as the circumstances permit, the Commission intends to limit this support, but it truthfully is that it is necessary to support around 600 persons until the 1st of May and around 400 until the 1st of August at a cost of around \$6,800. The Commission permitted the foddering out of around 50 cows and the cost here for during three months from the 1st of February is estimated to approximately 600. Around 15 pair of horses are now supported in the same manner, and the cost for them should for six month reach \$600, so that the total cost for temporary assistance comes certainly to amount to \$8,000.

A listing over the known dead.

TRANSLATOR COMMENT: At this point – pages 157 through 159 – are listed the known dead It includes those who died in the Wisconsin fire.

A note at the end of this listing: The numbers in this listing indicated the deceased's age.