



The Forgotten Fire Disasters, the Origin & Anomalies of Fire Prevention Week

October 8, 1871

Fire Prevention Week takes place annually during the week that includes October 9.

In 2025, Fire Prevention Week was Oct. 5-11.

The announced theme “Charge into Fire Safety : Lithium-Ion Batteries in Your Home”

The “***Great Fire of 1871***”. This “**Singular**” fire” refers to at least three separate fires that all broke out on the same day in the same area. **Chicago, Pestigo** & just across Lake Michigan, the **Great Michigan Fire** burned nearly one million acres.

This presentation was prepared especially for the P-NJ Chapter of ASSP

Things to Know about the Great Chicago Fire

- There had already been **thirty** significant fires in Chicago during the first week of October in 1871.
- The so-called "**Saturday Night Fire**" of **October 7, 1871**, was an omen of the Great Chicago Fire, which would erupt about twenty-four hours later & ten blocks to the south. This fire ignited around 10 p.m. in the boiler room of Lull & Holmes Planking Mill, located at what is now 209 South Canal Street, and burned for **17 hours**.
- The **Great Chicago Fire of Oct. 8–10, 1871**, killed over **250 people** & left **100,000 homeless**. The fire started at about 8:30 p.m. on Sunday, October 8, in or around a small barn belonging to the O'Leary family that bordered the alley behind 137 W. DeKoven Street, when Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicked over a lantern. (**fabricated!**) OR was it inebriated **Peglin Sullivan** who knocked over a lantern while drinking beer in O'Leary's barn?
- The fire's spread was aided by the city's use of wood in a style called balloon frame. More than 2/3^s of the structures in Chicago were made entirely of wood, "**every wretched building within four feet of its neighbor**."
- In 1871, the Fire Department had **185** firefighters with **17** horse-drawn steam pumpers to protect the entire city. After the Saturday fire, **3** fire pumpers were out for repairs — along with **4** hook-and-ladder wagons & **6** fire hose carts. The firemen were also exhausted, suffering from smoke poisoning, swollen eyes, dehydration, & burns.
- A major contributing factor to the fire's spread was a meteorological phenomenon known as a **Fire Whirl**. As hot air rises, it encounters cooler air & begins to spin, creating a **tornado-like effect**. These fire whirls are likely what drove flaming debris across the main branch of the Chicago River to a railroad car carrying kerosene. **Want to learn more? See Slide 3**
- The fire destroyed an area about 4 miles long and averaging 3/4 mile wide, encompassing more than 2,000 acres. More than 73 miles of roads, 120 miles of sidewalk, **17,000** buildings, & **\$222** million in property were destroyed.
- Because of the **telegraph**, word of the Chicago fire spread to newspapers around the world. Peshtigo was a remote area, & its telegraph burned down. The nearest station was in Green Bay, 45 miles away & it took 2 days for them to get the word.
- An incredible video about the fire: <https://youtu.be/DRyKsjxLwek>



• The Great Chicago Fire left 100,000 people homeless, destroyed over 17,000 wooden structures, & killed 300

The intense heat of a firestorm manifests largely as radiated heat (infrared radiation), which may ignite flammable material at a distance ahead of the fire itself

Fire tornado explained

Mini weather system caused by fire.

③ Cooler air gusts into the space left behind the rising air, bringing in oxygen and combustible material.

① Wind moves horizontally over a fire and the turbulence creates vortices.

④ A thermal column is able to reach wind speeds of well over 100 mph, causing damage similar to hurricanes and tornadoes.

② The heated air rises, creating a thermal column.

Fireballs rained & hot air rushed ahead of the main fire, detonating and exploding buildings—and people
Could this cataclysm have ancient precedents? Norse mythology speaks of **Ragnarök**, a fiery end-time battle wherein the heavens burn and the earth is scorched. The metaphor is not lost when considering Peshtigo

The Great Chicago Fire of 1871



What isn't disputed is that a fire began in the O'Leary barn & quickly spread.

As a **minority—a woman, an immigrant, & a Catholic**—Mrs. O'Leary was the perfect scapegoat.

- The **Great Chicago Fire** was a conflagration that burned the American city of Chicago, Illinois, from October 8 –10, **1871**.
- A 14-week drought had parched the city, & **a major fire the previous night** had exhausted firefighters & damaged equipment. The winds were blowing at **30 mph** that night.
- The fire began on the West Side, in the **De Koven Street** barn of **Patrick & Catherine O'Leary**, though what happened is not known. *Vandals, milk thieves, or a drunken neighbor.*
- Due to an error by a fire watchman, **Matthias Schaffer**, the firefighters were misdirected, thus arriving too late.
- A steady wind from the SW carried the flames & blazing debris from block to block. The water supply was deemed to be insufficient for the increasing population in the early **1860s**.
- On October 10, only rainfall, the lake, & unbuilt lots on the N Side finally halted the wave of destruction!
- 120 bodies found, but the fire killed approximately 300 people, destroyed roughly 3.3 square miles of the city, including over 17,000 structures, & left more than 100,000 residents homeless. The fire caused damage of **\$222 million** (equivalent to **\$4.7 billion today**).
- Mike Ahern was a newspaper writer, & admitted that he started the **O'Leary fable**, & later rectified it in the 1911 **Chicago Tribune** edition, stating the milk theft tale. The story became so ingrained in local lore that Chicago's city council **officially exonerated** the O'Leary's — & the cow—in **1997**
- In a quirk of fate, the O'Leary house survived the fire, as the flames spread outward away from the property

The History of Fire Prevention Week

- **Fire Prevention Week** is an annual weeklong event focused on educating children & adults about how to stay safe in case of a fire.
- **Fire Prevention Week** is observed annually during the week of Oct. 9, commemorating the **Great Chicago Fire**, which began on Oct. 8, 1871.
- On the 40th anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire in 1911, the Fire Marshals Association of North America, the oldest membership section of the NFPA, sponsored the first **National Fire Prevention Day** to keep the public informed about the importance of fire prevention.
- In the US, the first **Fire Prevention Day proclamation** was issued by President Woodrow Wilson in 1920.
- In 1925, **President Calvin Coolidge** proclaimed **Fire Prevention Week** a national observance. As the week has been observed every year since, **Fire Prevention Week** is the nation's longest-running public health observance on record.
- Each **Fire Prevention Week** has a theme – an area of focus for firefighters, advocates, & educators to address in their fire safety messages. **The NFPA selects the annual theme.**
- NFPA offers a wealth of resources & materials for fire departments & other educators working to promote **Fire Prevention Week**, including videos, safety tip sheets, social media cards, & more.
- <https://www.nfpa.org/events/fire-prevention-week> for a tool kit

Climate conditions at the time of the fire

- **Peshtigo** is a small city in *Wisconsin*, about 250 miles from Chicago. The average temperature in October ranges from 56°F to a low of 43°F.
- In 1871, Peshtigo was a bustling logging town, home to the largest factory of wooden products in the world, producing everything from clothespins to buckets.
- The summer of 1871 brought drought conditions that had not been seen in years. With lower-than-average rainfall & higher temperatures, the landscape around Peshtigo became a tinderbox, setting the stage for disaster. This dry spell left forests parched, making them highly susceptible to ignition. In addition to the drought conditions, farmers had increased the size of their crop-producing land by cutting down trees & burning them in big piles. Laborers working to extend the rapidly expanding railroad system were doing the same.
- One large blaze threatened Peshtigo on September 24, *two weeks before the disaster*. That incident required a substantial defense of the town. Ultimately, a shift in the wind pushed that fire in the opposite direction, sparing Peshtigo. During the next two weeks, some more cautious people saw the foreboding & buried important items in their yards, just in case a fire hit the town. The factory relocated much of its combustible materials & placed additional *Hogshead* barrels (55 gal) around the town. But the railroad construction, farmland expansion & camping fires continued without concern, and daily life went on as normal. The smoke caused eye irritation.
- A strong fall *cold front storm* in the area fanned the flames left unchecked in the woods surrounding Peshtigo. By the time the firestorm reached the town, the winds were so strong (**110 MPH**) that people could not hold onto keepsakes, bags, or even babies. Wagons, pieces of buildings, & other debris were all flying.
- Most people headed for the Peshtigo River & the refuge they hoped the water would provide. Many made it to the river, only to be swept downstream (flow was **1,272 CFS**) or *drowned*. Others spent the night in the waterway as the conflagration burned around them, causing severe burns to any exposed flesh. Many were temporarily *blinded*!

Pestigo Wisconsin

- The name "*Pestigo*" is a Native American word meaning "*snapping turtle*" or "*wild goose*." *Peshtigo*, originally called Clarksville, was a small frontier town of 1,700 on two sides of the Peshtigo River.
- In 1838, Erastus Bailey & David Jones built the first sawmill at Peshtigo. It had had **97** saws. At that time, **Benzene**, (FP 11°F) was historically used as a lubricant in sawmills due to its properties as an industrial solvent
- That fall, the village's population grew through an influx of railroad laborers, salesmen, & visitors.
- Chicago Millionaire *William G. Ogden* had built the country's largest woodenware factory in Peshtigo. There were **60** saloons & almost as many houses of prostitution.
- At the start of the fire, the air was thick with smoke & ash, & everything was in flames. Described as a ***wall of flame a half-mile high, 5 miles wide, traveling at 100 MPH***, the fire was so intense it jumped the Green Bay & Peshtigo Rivers, burning both sides of town.
- Due to the intense heat estimated to have been **1,500-2,000°F**, followed by tornado-force winds, there was often nothing left to identify. **So, documentation of even death & burial was not possible.**
- <https://youtu.be/CoEjcpvbBel>



The quickly growing village had several new churches but **no** police station, **no** jail, & **No fire station** & the town had

Only **one** hand-drawn "*Black Hawk*" manual fire pump capable of **69 GPM**

River is **94** miles long & empties into **Lake Michigan** →
Estimated depth in 10/1871 is **4 feet & 581 Ft wide**

The fire also burned **16** other towns, but the damage in Peshtigo was the worst. The city was gone in an **hour**.

Forrest had 1 billion trees

REFERENCES:
1 Peshtigo Co. Boarding House
2 Pub. School
3 Peshtigo House
4 Hotel House
5 Court House
6 City Hall
7 Fire Station
8 City Jail
9 City Prison
10 City Cemetery
11 City Church
12 City School
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95 City Church
96 City School
97 City Hall
98 City Jail
99 City Prison
100 City Cemetery

BIRDS EYE VIEW OF
PESHTIGO

WISCONSIN SEPTEMBER 1871

The Deadly forgotten wildfire - Pestigo, Wisconsin

The Contribution of the Railroad to the Available Fire Load

- The other big business of the day was the *Northwest & Chicago Railroad*, which had made its way to the Peshtigo area. Crews were laying a track from Green Bay to Menominee. Wealthy financiers who had already profited from the railroads were obsessed with the prospect of even greater riches to be gained by getting goods to new markets faster.
- A steamer loaded with immigrant families, mostly Italians, arrived in Peshtigo. They had come to work on the expanding railroad. They had said goodbye to family & friends & boarded the boat to Peshtigo, Wisconsin, with a mix of excitement & foreboding. They arrived the day before the fire. They were “*never heard from again*”.
- At the time of the fire, between 1,200 & 2,500 people were working on the railroad expansion.
 - Land was sold for \$1.25 an acre, but homesteaders had to clear 10 acres to claim it
- Railway workers were encouraged with substantial monetary rewards to work at a breakneck pace. They piled logs from cut trees on both sides of the right-of-way & let them burn with little or no supervision.
- The fire is believed to have started in a railroad construction site around 6 PM on October 8th.
- The most important bridge in & out of Peshtigo was made from lumber, & the roads to & from the town were covered in sawdust. As a result, if a fire started, it would be incredibly difficult to flee.

Four Types of Forest Fires



- **The flash point**, or the temperature at which wood will burst into flame, is **572°F**,
- **Surface Fires**: Surface fires burn through materials like needles, moss, lichen, & small vegetation near the ground. They primarily spread by flame combustion & *largely determine the fire's expansion*.
- **Crown Fires**: Crown fires burn through the forest canopy, consuming live & dead foliage, branches, & tall shrubs. They usually start from surface fires & can be *passive or active*. **Passive** crown fires burn individual trees or small groups, while **active** crown fires spread rapidly through the canopy, creating a continuous wall of flames from one tree crown to the next.
- **Ground Fires**: Ground fires occur primarily in decayed roots below the surface & in the duff layer, which consists of compacted dead plant material like leaves, bark, & twigs. These fires are sustained by glowing combustion without visible flames & often go unnoticed for extended periods due to their minimal smoke output.
- **Slash-and-burn** land management was a common way to clear forest for farming & railroad construction

The Fire in Peshtigo, Wisconsin

The deadliest wildfire in recorded history

“The only light available in the dark of the night was that given off by the fire itself, creating an eerie glow that seemed to taunt the dying & surviving alike like the open mouth of hell.”

From the book: *The Deadly Night of October 8, 1871,*



- The event was largely overshadowed by **the Great Chicago Fire**, which occurred on the same day, leading to its lesser-known status in history. The Peshtigo fire has been largely forgotten, even though **it killed at least five times as many people.**
- The Peshtigo Fire occurred on **October 8, 1871**, in northeastern Wisconsin and is considered the deadliest wildfire in American history. It killed up to 2,500 people & destroyed the town of Peshtigo (population 1,700) & the surrounding areas.
- The fire burned over 280,000 acres in hours, obliterating several towns & causing extensive damage across multiple counties, & destroying **800** Peshtigo buildings.
- Due to the drought conditions during the summer & fall of 1871, the fuels on the surface had become extremely volatile by October.
- The combination of topography, geography, wind conditions, and ignition sources that led to the fire is known as the "**Peshtigo Paradigm**". The American & British militaries studied the fire during World War II to learn how to recreate firestorms during bombing campaigns.
- While the fire itself only lasted from the evening of the 8th into the morning of the 9th, it still caused massive destruction, property loss, damage to the landscape, and a major death toll.
- Archaeologists found evidence that three people who tried to hide in a water tank were **boiled to death** because the fire heated the water so much. Some people committed suicide rather than be burned to death.

Meteor Showers & the Comet Hypothesis

- Meteor showers in Autumn are common in the upper Great Lakes. In recent years, these showers have left burning chunks scattered over the entire region, some large enough to break through the roofs of homes and outbuildings, starting fires in dry fields and wooded areas. With the tinder-dry conditions present throughout the entire region on the night of October 8, 1871, such a meteor shower would easily have started what seemed like spontaneous fires.
- Speculation since 1883 has suggested that the start of the **Peshtigo & Chicago** fires on the same day was not coincidental, but that all the major fires in Illinois, Michigan, & Wisconsin that day were caused by the impact of fragments from **Biela's Comet**. An alternative theory, first suggested in 1882 by Ignatius L. Donnelly in Ragnarök: *The Age of Fire and Gravel*, this hypothesis was revived in a 1985 book, reviewed in a 1997 documentary, & investigated in a 2004 paper published by the American Institute of Aeronautics & Astronautics. Given the low tensile strength of such bodies, if a fragment of an icy comet were to strike the Earth, the most likely outcome would be for it to disintegrate in the upper atmosphere, leading to a meteor air burst.
- Certain behaviors of the Chicago & Peshtigo fires were cited to support the idea of an extraterrestrial cause, such as blue flames (thought to be *methane* gases burning) in the basements of houses. Methane-air mixtures become flammable only when the methane concentration exceeds 5%, at which point the mixtures also become explosive. Methane gas is lighter than air & thus does not accumulate near the ground; any localized pockets of methane in the open air rapidly dissipate.
- However, modern fire theory indicates that the blue color was most likely a product of burning carbon monoxide in the poorly ventilated basements.
- An interesting note regarding the National Weather Service, was established in 1870, only one year before the Peshtigo Fire. The new National Weather Service was born within the *US Army Signal Service's Division of Telegrams & Reports* for the Benefit of Commerce. The data collected by this agency was the basis for recreating the weather pattern for research purposes of this event. However, it would still be another 40 years before they began to issue fire weather forecasts.

A Tale of the Incredible Destruction

- It was a dark time & US history; itinerant preachers traveling through the area had preached that the end of the world was upon them all, hellfire & damnation. This was a determining factor in keeping many a person & family from seeking refuge in time. When the great fire came, they thought certainly this was the end of the world & would not move.
- The previous day, a fire began in an unknown spot in the Wisconsin forest. The first place to feel the wrath of the fire was the small village of *Sugar Bush*, where every resident died.
- A firestorm "superheated flames of at least **2,000 °F** ... advance on winds of **110 miles per hour** or stronger. The diameter of such a fire ranges from 1,000 to 10,00 feet. In many cases, the fire completely obliterated its victims. Survivors searching for remains of the dead found that very often "even the ashes were gone, blown away by the wind."
- It obliterated the entire town & spread to nearby counties, including **17** other towns, killing roughly **1,700 people**, burning **2,400 square miles of land**, & even jumping across the Bay. Within hours, nothing was left. In *Williamsonville*, a small Door County settlement south of Sturgeon Bay, **59** of the **76** inhabitants were burned.
- Heaps of bodies & body parts were found, most charred beyond recognition. Five people survived by seeking refuge in a nearby well; 2 of them in the well perished. Strange holes in the ground marked the location of trees whose roots were devoured by the fire to their very ends. *Patches of sand were melted into glass*. When heated to 2,600 – 2,900 °F, sand transforms into glass.
- The heat was so intense that many of the bodies showed no traces of scars or burns; they died of asphyxiation, yet in the pockets of the victims, their watches, coins, & other articles of metal were completely melted.
- There was **no** food, **shelter**, or even sunshine —the sun was dark for many days. Survivors reported a fire tornado that threw rail cars & houses into the air. The air was no longer fit to breathe, full as it was of **sand, dust, ashes, cinders, sparks**, smoke, & fire. Some drowned while others succumbed to hypothermia in the *frigid river*, the average temperature is **43.7-54.5 °F**.
- The value of the property & forest that was destroyed in the fire was estimated to be about **\$5** million US (\$131 million in 2024 \$). Additionally, 2,000,000 trees, saplings, & animals perished in the fire.
- The exact number of deaths is debated. Data from graves, both those exhumed & those still being discovered, showed that the death toll was 1,500 - 2,500. More than **350** bodies were buried in a mass grave, *as there was no one left to identify them!*

Unexpected consequence of the fires

- Shipwrecks

- The fires on the shore of the lake caused thick smoke to blow across the lake was responsible for dozens of ships colliding or running aground. Lake **Michigan** is home to an estimated **1,500** shipwrecks, out of a total of **6,000 in the Great Lakes**.
- Many of the **1,167 shipwrecks in 1871** were caused by the heavy smoke.
- During the Peshtigo fire, the smoke was so dense that the *Green Island lighthouse* keeper, *Samuel Drew*, left the light on throughout the daylight hours.
- The **George L. Newman**, a 122-foot, 250-ton ship built in 1855 in Black River, Ohio, was a three-masted barkentine, akin to a schooner. Historical records show that it crashed in 1871 after struggling to navigate through heavy smoke from the Peshtigo Fire.
- The ship ran aground on the southeast end of *Green Island*, which sits in Lake Michigan, & at the time, the ship was carrying lumber from Little Suamico. It wound up so high on the shore, it couldn't get off, so the crew posted on the island for a week, salvaging cargo until they could be rescued.
- It ended up breaking up in storms over the years & ice, then it was swallowed by the shoal, & covered up with sand.
- On Aug. 13, 2023, *Tim & Henley Wollak*, of Peshtigo, discovered the wreck covered by 8 to 10 feet of water, off Lake Michigan's Green Island.
- The wreck serves as a reminder of the maritime history of the Great Lakes & the tragic events of that tragic day in 1871.

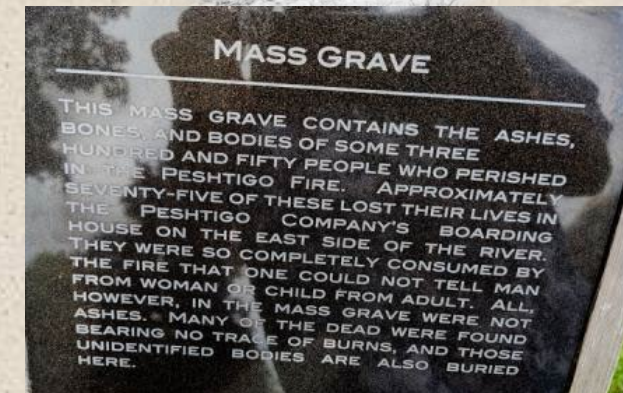


Survivor Stories

- Many individual stories of tragedy & heroism unfolded from these events; it would be difficult to do them justice in this summary. No known list of survivors exists, but scattered notes made by hotel employees, newspaper interviews, letters of volunteers attending the injured, & diaries of survivors give a small amount of information on the dead & those who survived.
- In Robinsonville, dozens of people huddled, praying inside a small Catholic chapel. Although flames surrounded it, the building was somehow spared. Survivors called it a miracle. The church later became the *National Shrine of Our Lady of Good Hope*.
- The only place where people survived, standing in frigid water with their heads in the burning heat & falling hot ash. Many of those who made it to the river were swept downstream & drowned. It was reported that the heat was so strong that people suffered burns to any skin that was exposed above the waterline. Most could not see the destruction & desolation due to *heat-injured eyes*. These courageous people survived the cold, windy winter by living in meager shacks & tents
- Help came from the South. Each family was offered \$50 & free passage to any point in the U.S. Eyewitness accounts by volunteer rescue workers document that after the fire, wagons carrying human remains lined up as far as three miles, awaiting a chance to put the victims to rest.
- For more than 60 years after the fire, *most survivors bore the massive, disfiguring scars that were so prominent on their heads, arms, legs, faces, hands, & feet*. They lived among the population, some trying to hide their inner & outer scars, & others wearing them openly.
- *Peter Pernin* was the Catholic pastor of Peshtigo, Wisconsin. His survivor's memoir, *The Finger of God Is There!*, is a document important to the history of the fire.
- Mrs. *Amelia Dupuis Desrochers*, the last living survivor of the Peshtigo Fire, lived to 100 & died on Aug. 23, 1966.
- Read survivor stories at: <https://peshtigofiremuseum.com/category/stories/>

The Pestigo Cemetery – Bury the Remains

- An old, well-maintained cemetery consisting largely of an elongated mound, well covered with grass, having a few shade trees, and landscaped with a few ornamental evergreen shrubs and trees at a commemorative area near the center of the mound, where an Official Wisconsin Marker stands.
- The original condition of the cemetery is known only to the extent that it was an ordinary small-town cemetery of the mid & latter 1800s. It withstood the full blast of the wind-driven fire, which swept into Peshtigo via Oconto Avenue, the street on which the cemetery is located. At least some of the original markers withstood the fire & remained standing or were reset in their original locations.
- **300 identified victims** were buried in traditionally marked graves
- There is a *mass grave for the 350 victims who could not be identified.*
- The site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- <https://peshtigofiremuseum.com/list-of-dead-in-peshtigo/>



Lessons Learned from the Peshtigo Fire

- Although Peshtigo burned **154** years ago, the tragedy can teach us valuable lessons.
- “After thirty years of clearing, burning, & building...man was the architect, not only of cities, farms, & mills, but of **destruction**, & wounded Nature would fight back”!
- The nation had an opportunity to learn from the disaster at Peshtigo. The conflagration gave rise to changes in land use practices, & more attention was given to the debris caused by clearing land. General awareness of the destructive power of wildfires has increased dramatically since 1871.
- Wisconsin began by hiring fire wardens who could then hire firefighters. Forest rangers were later appointed to maintain the forests, & a headquarters for forest protection was established at Trout Lake. As the protection of forests became more sophisticated, **lookout towers** & ranger stations were erected to ensure greater organization of fire protection protocols.
- The tragedy highlighted the need for better communication systems, leading to improvements in telegraph lines & later, telephone networks. Regulations regarding land-clearing fires were tightened, & new fire safety laws were enacted to manage & reduce the risks of large-scale fires in forested & rural areas.
- **The Great Fires of 1871** were not just a disaster; they were a wake-up call for America. The facts uncover the chaos, the myths, & the aftermath of one of the most devastating fires in U.S. history.
- Understanding & remembering the **Peshtigo Fire** is crucial not only for historical knowledge but also for improving current & future disaster preparedness & response strategies.
- <https://youtu.be/CoEjcpvbBel>



The Pestigo Fire Museum

- In 1963, a group of Peshtigo residents made it their mission never to forget this tragic event and founded the *Peshtigo Historical Society* (PHS). The Peshtigo Fire Museum is located on the site of the Catholic church that *Father Pernin* lost in the fire.
- The first church rebuilt in Peshtigo after the fire is the former Congregational church.
- The building was moved to this location after the Catholic church on that corner was destroyed by fire (again) in 1927.
- When St. Mary Parish built a new church a few blocks away, the Congregational church building was acquired by the Peshtigo Historical Society.
- In the museum is a small, charred Bible that survived the nightmare. It's open to **Psalm 107**, "... they drew near to the gates of Death. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distress."
- <https://peshtigofiremuseum.com/museum/>

10/27/2025

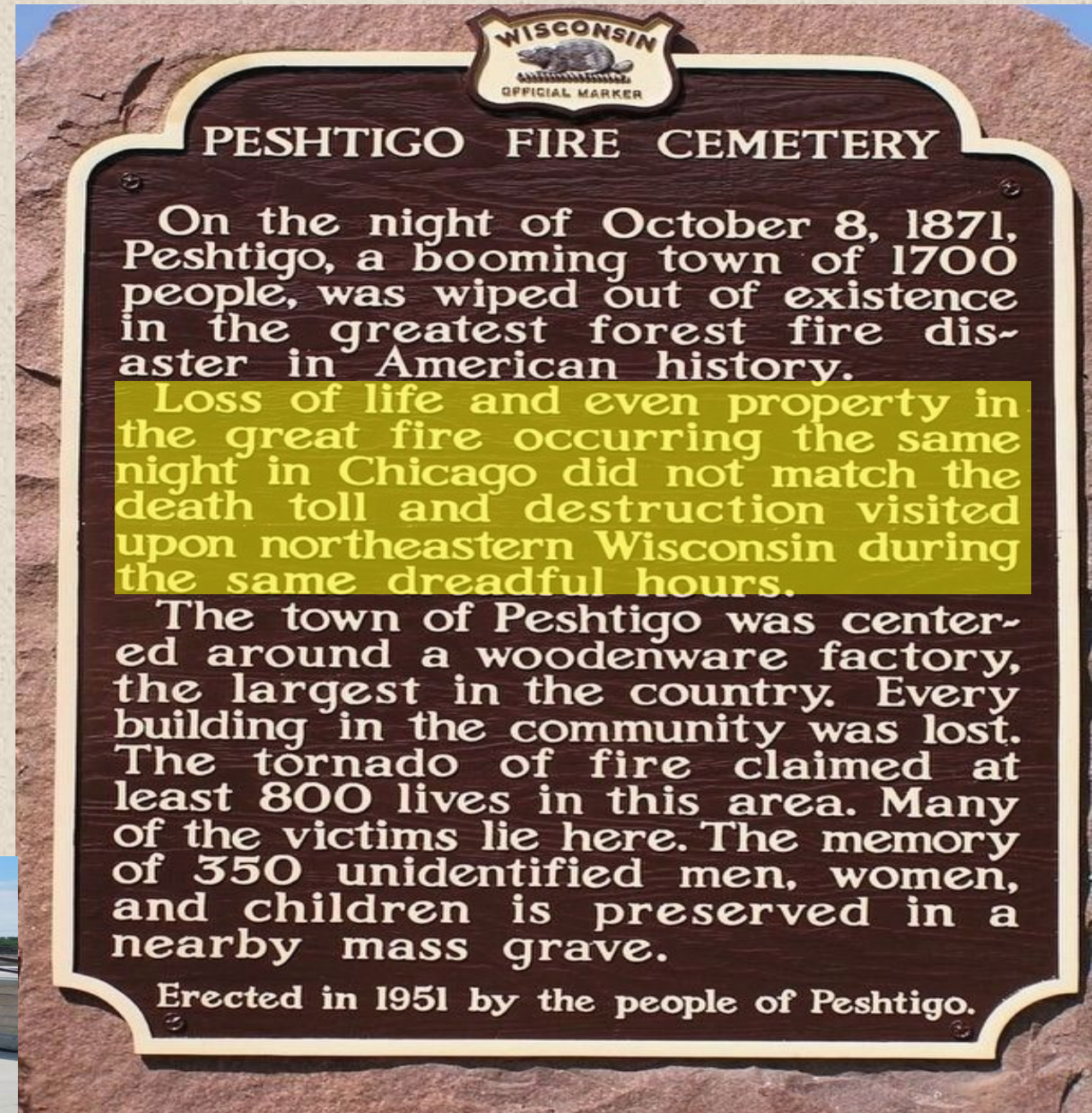


The Deadly forgotten wildfire – Pestigo, Wisconsin

Memorial

- The Peshtigo Fire is the story of immigration & homesteading. It is the story of clear-cutting & lumber mills & railroads. It is the story of abundant natural resources, of greed & power, & westward expansion.
- Tornado Memorial County Park is located on the site of the former community of Williamsonville, a small village in Door County, & is named for the fire whirl which occurred there. Out of 76 residents, only 19 survived, & *Williamsonville* was never rebuilt
- The memorial marker for fire victims located in the *Peshtigo Fire Cemetery* is the first official Wisconsin state historical marker. It was erected by the citizens of Peshtigo in **1951**.
- A second memorial commemorating the fire was dedicated on **October 8, 2012**, & called *The Peshtigo*

Fire & Veterans Memorial Bridge.



Legacy of the Pestigo Fire

- The Great Fires of 1871 were a series of conflagrations that took place throughout the final days of September and the first weeks of October 1871.
- Some people genuinely thought it was the beginning of the end of the world. Certainly, the sheer terror experienced by the residents of the many towns engulfed in flames is difficult to quantify; one can only imagine seeing a wall of flames coming towards you at lightning speed.
- The Peshtigo Fire's history teaches us about the unpredictability of natural disasters & the profound effects they can have on human settlements. It also reminds us of the resilience of communities that rebuild & reform in the wake of such events.
- The Peshtigo Fire holds a unique place in American history as a powerful example of natural disaster & human vulnerability. Its occurrence during the same night as the *Great Chicago Fire* offers a stark lesson in the dynamics of media coverage and public attention.
- Despite its immense impact, the Peshtigo Fire remains lesser-known, overshadowing important discussions about rural America's environmental & historical landscape. The Peshtigo Fire was not an isolated anomaly; it was "hitched" to many events & practices of the day, John Muir.
- "Emmy® Award-winning filmmakers Kelly & Tammy Rundle of Fourth Wall Films received a \$10,000 Wisconsin Humanities grant award for their historical documentary. Completion of the documentary is planned for the fall of 2026.
<http://peshtigofiremovie.com>



Memorial brick at
Lambeau Field