

7-4-1966

The Day Portland Burned: July 4, 1866

Earle G. Shettleworth Jr.

Portland Evening Express

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.portlandlibrary.com/news_pph

Recommended Citation

Shettleworth, Earle G. Jr. and Portland Evening Express, "The Day Portland Burned: July 4, 1866" (1966). *Maine News Index – Portland Press Herald*. 15505.

http://digitalcommons.portlandlibrary.com/news_pph/15505

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Maine News Index Online at Portland Public Library Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine News Index – Portland Press Herald by an authorized administrator of Portland Public Library Digital Commons. For more information, please contact campbell@portland.lib.me.us.



The Day Portland Burned

July 4, 1866

OF THE MANY CHANGES which Portland has endured, the Great Fire of 1866 was the most dramatic. In one night the city was transformed from beauty and prosperity into ruins. Yet through the determination of its people, Portland rose again.

The following pages reflect a story of courage. Its message still has meaning today.

An Anniversary Edition Of The Evening Express

35 cents

Portland before the fire

On July 4, 1866, Portland held a high position among the cities of America. In a large part, this was due to action taken on another July 4, twenty years before.

That day in 1846, thousands came to the city to celebrate their independence and to witness the groundbreaking ceremonies for the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad, Portland's future link with Montreal. They knew that an era of great prosperity was dawning, for the railroad would open the way to Canada and the grain-producing regions of the West.

Farmers would ship their grain through Portland because it was nearer to Europe than any other major United States port, Montreal also would depend on the port during the winter when the St. Lawrence River was frozen over.

CANNON THUNDERED, bells pealed and banners waved. At 10 o'clock a large group of dignitaries began the long march from the center of the city to the site of the present Fort Allen Park. They arrived at 12 o'clock and were followed by at least 6,000 others. At 2 o'clock, William Pitt Preble brought the crowd to order. Then in a speech he signaled the start of two of Portland's finest decades when he uttered the words, "... let us begin the work..."

Early in 1853 the 292-mile track to Montreal was completed, and a month later it was leased to the Grand Trunk System of Canada.

Other evidences of progress appeared. The beginning of the Kennebec and Portland Railroad in 1851 and the York and Cumberland Railroad in 1853 contributed

to the growing number of lines which rapidly made Portland the railroad center of Maine.

STEAMSHIPS ALSO began to play an important role. In 1844 the Portland Steam Packet Company inaugurated a regular schedule between Portland and Boston. Lines along the coast and to New York followed. The arrival of the Sara Sands in 1853 started Portland's transatlantic service.

With development of the railroads, large companies began to establish themselves in Portland. The first of these was Greely and Guild of Boston, importers of West Indies molasses. In 1845 they built an experimental plant to produce sugar from molasses. The firm failed, but its manager, John B. Brown, continued the business with Dependence

H. Furbish, an employe, who finally found a steam process which gave the desired result.

In 1855 they, with Philip Brown, were granted a charter for the Portland Sugar Company, which soon became an important factor in Portland's economy as well as the largest molasses importer in New England.

In 1846 the Portland Company was founded to build steam engines and railroad equipment. Other companies came into existence to manufacture iron products, kerosene and furniture.

Fifty of the city's foremost merchants organized the Portland Board of Trade in 1853 and made plans to improve the port. Early steps taken by the group included securing federal funds for dredg-

ing, charting, marking, fortifying and lighting the harbor.

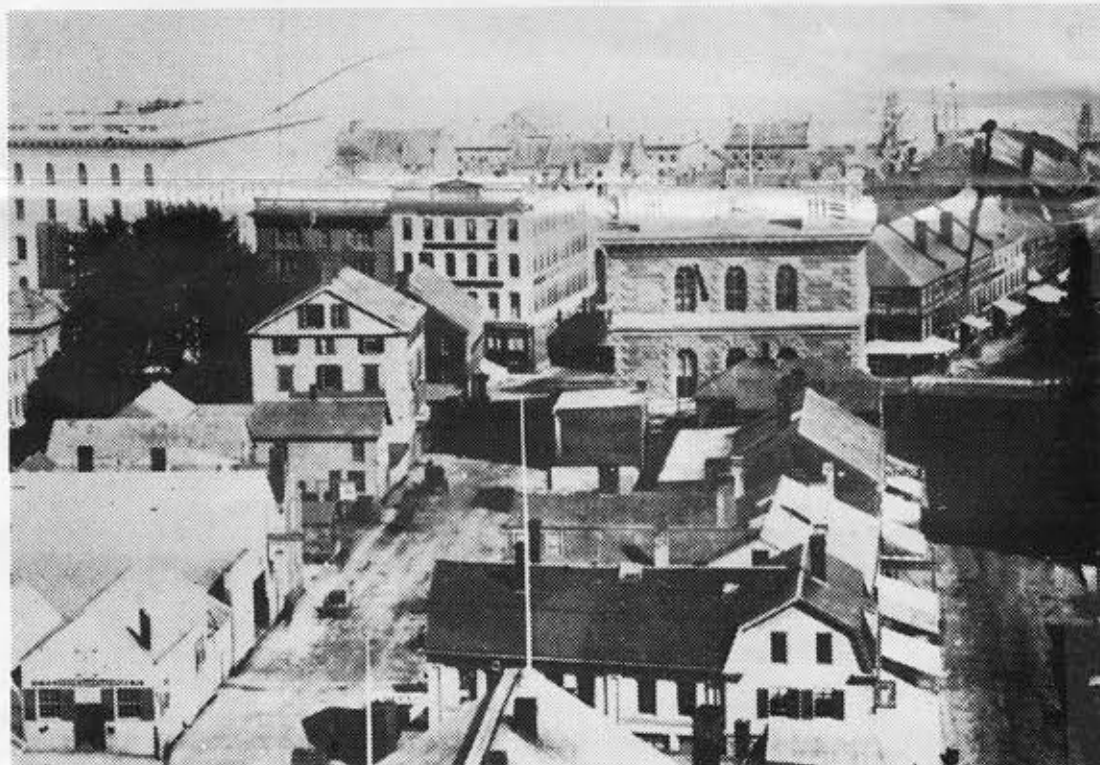
As a result of this great period of expansion and prosperity, important parts of the city changed. In 1852 the waterfront was extended with the creation of Commercial Street at a cost of \$80,000. One hundred feet wide and over a mile long, it was soon lined with new wharves, stores, and massive brick warehouses.

On Middle Street, long the main business thoroughfare, small wooden and brick shops and homes gave way to large buildings. Among these was Wood's Marble Hotel which was built to accommodate passengers of the English steamship Great Eastern. This giant vessel was to have made the city its port-of-call, but did not.

'none can walk our streets...

The By-Line

Research, narrative and pictures were assembled for this fire centennial edition by Earle G. Shettleworth Jr., student of Portland's history and author of articles about its heritage.



DOWN LIME, now Market Street, above, from the City Hall dome, with back of Customs House at right center.

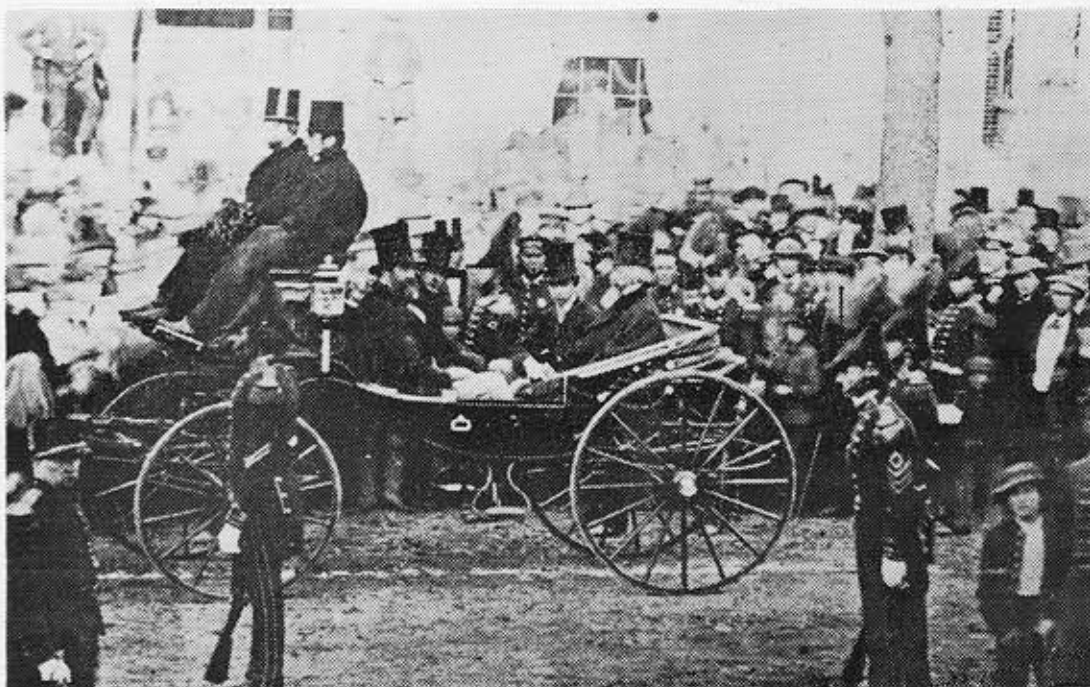


MIDDLE STREET with the Second Parish Church and Wood's Marble Hotel, right center.



UPPER MIDDLE Street looking toward the old City Hall in what is now Monument Square.

S.F.



PRINCE OF WALES (second from right in carriage) in front of the John Neal House on State Street, during a visit to the city Oct. 20, 1860.

“Portland, there can be no doubt, is destined to figure as one of the large cities of the Union. Within a few years, it has taken a new start.”—Beckett’s Tourist Guide, 1853.



BRAMHALL, John B. Brown’s villa on the Western Promenade.

without being proud

MANY SUBSTANTIAL public and private structures were erected, including a City Hall, a Customs House, a Natural History Society, Mechanic’s Hall, the Marine Hospital, the Monroe Street Jail, the State Reform School, Grand Trunk Depot, St. Stephen’s Church, and the Chestnut Street Methodist Church.

Stylish residences adorned the city. On the Western Promenade, John B. Brown built “Bramhall”, an elegant villa with an art gallery and beautiful grounds. Nearby on Danforth Street stood “Oaklands”, the estate of Theophilus C. Hersey. At Park and Danforth Streets, Ruggles Sylvester Morse spent over \$100,000 in creating his home, now preserved as the Victoria Mansion.

One of Portland’s greatest strengths was its people. Neal Dow became mayor

in 1850. The next year he wrote the celebrated Maine Prohibition Law which greatly supplemented his previous temperance measure of 1846. He was re-elected mayor in 1855.

The versatile John Neal was writing and practicing law at this time. In 1849 former congressman and telegraph promoter F. O. J. Smith invested a large sum of money to help build the Portland Gas Works. Attorney William Pitt Fessenden was elected to his first term in the Senate in 1854. Four years later, Portland Democrat Nathan Clifford was appointed to the United States Supreme Court.

During the 1850’s Portland also was favored with artists Charles O. Cole, Harrison B. Brown, John Bradley Hudson Jr., and Charles F. Kimball. Paul

Akers and Franklin Simmons were finding success as sculptors.

Important personages visited Portland. Halls echoed with the oratory of Horace Greeley, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Lloyd Garrison, Charles Sumner, and others in this era of reform. On Oct. 20, 1860, the Prince of Wales toured the city before embarking for England.

The new Fort Gorges in the harbor foreshadowed the coming national crisis. Answering President Lincoln’s call on April 15, 1861, Portland began to send troops to the Civil War. In all, 5,000 men left the city to fight for the Union. Volunteer companies were organized under such names as the Mechanics Blues, the Light Guards, the Rifle Guards, the

Light Infantry, and the Rifle Corps. Military camps were established near Portland, and uniformed men filled the streets.

The city paid \$320,116 in bounties to soldiers and \$105,473 in aid to their families; \$100,000 was donated to various war charities.

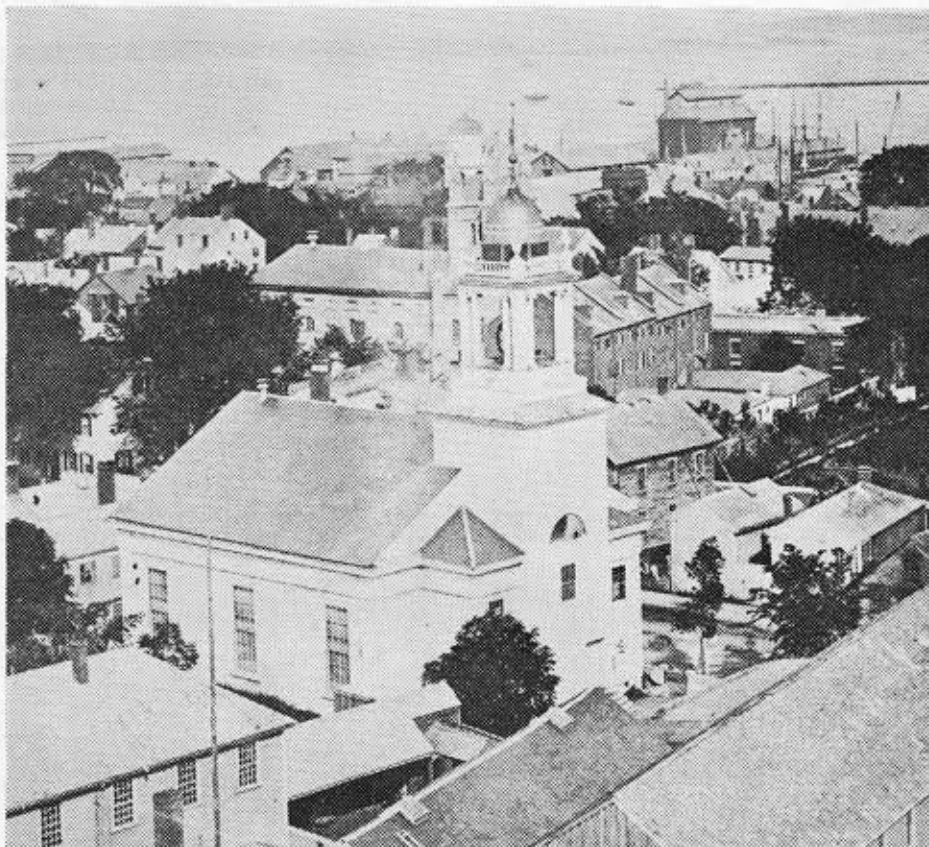
THE REBELLION touched Portland briefly one night in 1863 when members of the Confederate Navy stole the Revenue Cutter Caleb Cushing from its moorings and towed it out to sea. The city realized what was happening, and boats were sent in pursuit. The rebels, mistaking one of the craft for a gunboat, set fire to the Caleb Cushing, which exploded and sank. The enemy was captured and imprisoned at Fort Preble.

As the Civil War came to an end, Portland began to regain its economic strength. Peace had come to the land and with it the promise of flourishing once more. Now there was time for Portland to look upon what it had wrought in the last 20 years and feel that it was only a beginning.

On June 30, 1866, the Portland Transcript declared, “What we wish to call attention to is the beauty of our city, its streets, its gardens, its situations, and surrounding scenery. No Portlander can at this season walk our streets in the twilight hours without being proud. . . .”

A week later the words would be different. . . .

SOUTHEAST from the City Hall with the Baptist Church in the foreground.



A Big, Big City

“The city itself, rising roof above roof, interspersed with its steeples, towers, cupolas and forest trees, as seen on entering the harbor by the ship channel, presents an imposing and beautiful appearance, suggestive of a place of thrice its actual extent.”—William Willis, 1859.

two of the finest decades

R
904.194
f p. 5ev
McCull.

11514166 Pub. 135

363618

The day of the fire

GRAND TRUNK RAILWAY.

GREAT CELEBRATION THE FOURTH OF JULY

CITY OF PORTLAND.

Consisting of the most comical display of FANTASIES ever got up in the State in the forenoon. Also a Military Parade of the old style. At 12 o'clock the BALLOON ASCENSION will take place. In the Afternoon the Grand Menagerie and Circus will be opened. In the Evening there will be the most brilliant display of

FIRE-WORKS

Ever witnessed in this State.

RETURN TICKETS at ONE FARE will be issued at all Stations between Island Pond and Portland, good to return with by the Special Train on Wednesday, to South Paris at 10:30 P. M., or by the regular Passenger Trains on Thursday, the 5th. A Special Train will leave the undermentioned Stations for Portland, as follows:—

A. M.	P. M.	A. M.
South Paris.....7:30	Portland.....9:12	North Yarmouth.....9:35
Oxford.....7:50	Yarmouth Junction.....9:38	Mechanic Falls.....9:45
Empire Road.....8:25	Camden.....9:50	Denville Junction.....9:55
New Gloucester.....9:00	Falmouth.....10:00	Portland.....10:30

J. J. BRIDGES, Managing Director.

Entertainments.



G. F. BAILEY & CO'S GREAT

Quadruple Combination

Will Exhibit in

PORTLAND

ON THE PROMENADE NEAR THE ARSENAL,

Tuesday and Wednesday, July 3d and 4th, 1866.

This Colossal Establishment, the largest and most complete in its varied features ever presented to the public, combines in

One Gigantic Show

The specialties and attractions of no less than **Four Complete Exhibitions.**

FIRST. That greatest marvel of the Animal Kingdom and Antediluvian wonder, the gigantic

HIPPOTAMUS!



Imported by G. C. QUICK, Esq., at an expense of over

SIXTY THOUSAND DOLLARS,

From the White Nile, 2000 miles above the city of Cairo. This remarkable animal, "The Behemoth of Holy Writ," is accompanied by Ali, his Egyptian trainer and captor, and is the only animal of his species that has ever been exhibited in America. The peculiar characteristics, habits, history, &c., of this strange creature of nature will be described each day and evening in a brief and interesting lecture by Prof. Ellingham.

SECOND.

Sands, Nathans & Co.'s

PERFORMING ELEPHANTS!



Antony and Cleopatra, Victoria and Albert.

These remarkable animals, under the direction of their trainer, Col. Chas. Johnson, have been educated to such a degree of perfection as to border on the marvellous. No lion can be conveyed through the medium of language of their extraordinary and multitudinous performances. They dance, play the organ, stand on their heads, and perform an infinite variety of other feats almost incredible, except to those who have witnessed them.

THIRD.

MELVILLE'S AUSTRALIAN CIRCUS!

In organizing this Circus, the management would respectfully state that they have spared neither time, labor nor money to make their present combination the most brilliant and attractive ever presented to the public, and have congregated from the four quarters of the globe the choicest gems to form the following

Grand Galaxy of Talent!

the most brilliant fireworks ever

AS JULY 4, 1866, DAWNED, Portland readied itself for more than the usual festivities, for this was the first Independence Day since the troops had returned from war. Perhaps the following article which appeared in the July 2 issue of the Portland Daily Press best describes the many events that were planned. Ironically, the account places particular emphasis on the excellent display of fireworks in the evening. True to their billing, they would prove to be "the most brilliant ever exhibited in this state."

Fourth Of July

The arrangements for the celebration of the Fourth of July in the city are of such a character as will prove attractive to our friends from the country, who, generally, on that day desire to visit the city, especially if there are to be any exhibitions worthy of note.

Special trains will be run over the Grand Trunk road as far as Paris, by which visitors can arrive here soon after ten o'clock in the morning, and leave after the exhibition of the fireworks in the evening. On the P. S. & P. road (Portsmouth, Saco and Portland Railroad) a train will go out to Biddeford after the fireworks are over. These trains run at one fare for the round trip. On the Portland and Rochester road trains will run several times during the day, and one will leave in the evening after the exhibition is over.

The Fantastics will appear this year in a stronger body than ever, and will commence their march between eight and nine o'clock in the morning.

During the forenoon there will be an old fashioned military training. This will be a sight well worth seeing.

At twelve o'clock the grand balloon ascension will be made by Messrs. Starkweather & Sever, from the Deering pasture. A grand opportunity will be afforded the tens of thousands to witness the process of inflating the balloon and of seeing the ascension.

In the afternoon there will be a game of baseball; between the Lowell Nine of Boston and the Eon Club of this city. It will take place in the grounds of the Rolling Mills Company, formerly Camp Berry.

A grand trotting match for a purse of \$250 offered by the proprietor of the Forest

City Trotting Park, will come off at three o'clock in the afternoon. For this trot some of the best horses in the State have been entered. There are seven entries, most of which have made their mile in less than 2:40. Among them are "Dashaway," entered and to be driven by Mr. O. M. Shaw of Bangor; a splendid trotting horse named "Walter," from Calais, and other fast nags owned in this vicinity, among which is "Portland Boy," an untried animal but a great favorite. Two of the fast horses owned in distant parts of the State were too late in being entered.

The display of fireworks to come off in the evening will be the most brilliant ever exhibited in this State. It will take place in Deering pasture which is the best place in the city for such a purpose, as the rising grounds afford every one an opportunity to witness the display, and be without the reach of danger.

The great Caravan & Menagerie will give three exhibitions on that day, affording people from the country an opportunity to see the wonderful hippopotamus, elephants and other animals, and to witness some of the best equestrian exercises.

Morris Brothers & Trowbridge's Minstrels will perform one of their celebrated pantomimes at Deering Hall in the evening. The islands will be visited by thousands, as the steamers will run throughout the day.

In short, there is enough to occupy the attention from early morn till late at night, and all can enjoy themselves, except the reporters of the daily papers, who are expected to be everywhere at the same time, and to chronicle all the proceedings.



Portland From Cape Elizabeth

Entertainments.

CELEBRATION

—OF THE—

ANNIVERSARY

—OF—

American Independence.

The Committee of Arrangements for the appropriate Celebration of the approaching Fourth of July, announce the following

PROGRAMME,

AS THE ORDER OF THE DAY.

SALUTES WILL BE FIRED

—AND THE—

Bells Rung

For One Hour each, commencing at Sunrise, 12 M. and at Sunset.

THE FANTASTICS!

(We are assured) will make a Grand Display of Oddities, Caricatures, and Grotesque Groupings, commencing at an early hour in the forenoon, and moving through the principal streets of the city. Great preparations are making to produce the most laughable display (of this nature) which has ever been seen in Portland!

A BALLOON



Will ascend at 10 A. M. from Mr. Deering's grounds, (near Green street) under the direction of Messrs. Sever & Starkweather, of Boston. During the ascension, small balloons and other displays will be despatched by these gentlemen, from the principal Balloon. It will require about 20,000 feet of Gas to inflate it, and will be the largest ever sent up from this city.

THE TWO

Bands of the City

Have been engaged for the day and evening, to perform in different parts of the city, an occasion shall require.

A GRAND DISPLAY

—OF—
FIREWORKS

Furnished by S. W. Cress, of Boston, (Agent of C. E. Mason) will be shown in the evening, on the field at Mr. Deering, near Green street. There will be Seventeen Principal Pieces, such as Date Tree, Kite-balloons, Mexican Sun, Prometheus Altar, Peruvian Cross, Folks Dance and Colored Battery, 1776, Tribute to Ceres, Saturn and his Satellites, Chinese Bower, Our Country, in its Palmetto, Fanes' Frolic, Cascade, American Glory, Grand Finale, in honor of Washington, producing a colossal statue of the Father of his Country, with Corinthian columns, the American Eagle, Mattoes, Devices, and other accompaniments, making it the most extensive and gorgeous display, in a single piece, ever shown in this city.

Between the periods of letting off the set pieces, there will be a continuous display of Rockets, Flower Vases, Illuminations of Silver, Crimson and Emerald Fires, Aerial Bombs, rising to great altitudes and burst with heavy reports, Spiral Courantines, Silver and Colored Torbillion, Mines and Batteries of Colored Stars and Gold Fires.

The Committee believe that for splendor and extent, this display of Fire-Works will eclipse any ever before exhibited east of Boston.

Portland, June 20, 1866. J. J. B.

Vessels Wanted.

To load Lumber and Laths at St. John, N. B. for Philadelphia and Baltimore, and Deals for Europe. Also vessels wanted to freight Coal from Lincoln, Cowbay, and other Nova Scotia ports to New York, and other parts. Also vessels to take lumber at Bangor for Baltimore, Philadelphia, Providence, &c. Apply to

LITTLEJOHN & CHASE,

No. 3 Moulton St., opposite Head of Long Wharf. May 29, 1866—dtd

The Fair Fund.

ALL persons who resided in Portland April 23, 1866, and still reside here, embraced in the following classes, are requested to report to George F. Emery at once on any afternoon after 4 o'clock, in order that the list of beneficiaries of this fund may be perfected at once, namely:—
All widows of persons who died in the Army or Navy during the War—all guardians or orphan children of such persons—and all widowed mothers of such persons who were dependent upon them for support.
PER ORDER,
June 29—1w.

NOTICE.

TO CAPTAINS!

WANTED immediately by a man who has had 12 years sea experience as sailor and officer, a situation as first or second officer. Good testimonials furnished.
Address E. K. C., Post Office, Portland. Jc29Ed

Portland Rifle Club.

MEETING at 21 Union St., on MONDAY, July 2, 5 P. M.
Per Order,
Jc29Ed E. B. DOW, Sec'y.

Peruvian Hair Regenerator

Turns Gray Hair to its original color; promotes its growth, and prevents its falling off.
For sale by Druggists.
May 12—3m

and the fire that was

borne by wind

Between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, an alarm was sounded for a fire in Deguio's Boat Shop on Commercial Street near the foot of High Street. Most contemporary accounts state that this fire was started by a boy throwing a firecracker into a pile of shavings outside the shop. Some believed, however, that it was kindled by sparks from a passing locomotive.

WHATEVER THE CAUSE, flames soon engulfed the building and spread to an adjoining one. Firemen easily extinguished the blaze and left.

Then a strong wind carried cinders to the roofs of the Portland Sugar House and the Staples Foundry nearby. While these burned, the fire spread to the Richardson Foundry.

From then on, nothing could stop the conflagration. It swept up York Street to the foot of Center Street, and continued on from Center to Cross, from Cross to Union, and from Union to Plum, reaching higher and higher on each street.

FROM ITS START, it took a direct diagonal course across the peninsula, widening on each side as it went. Arriving at Plum Street, it hit the back of brick buildings on the southern side of Middle Street. Some hoped that these would stop the fire, but it quickly consumed them.

ON IT WENT to encompass the business district of Middle and Exchange Streets and destroy the new City Hall on Congress Street. Then, slowly, it narrowed until it stopped at the foot of Munjoy Hill at dawn.



RUINS of John B. Brown's Sugar House at Maple and Commercial Streets, near where the fire started.

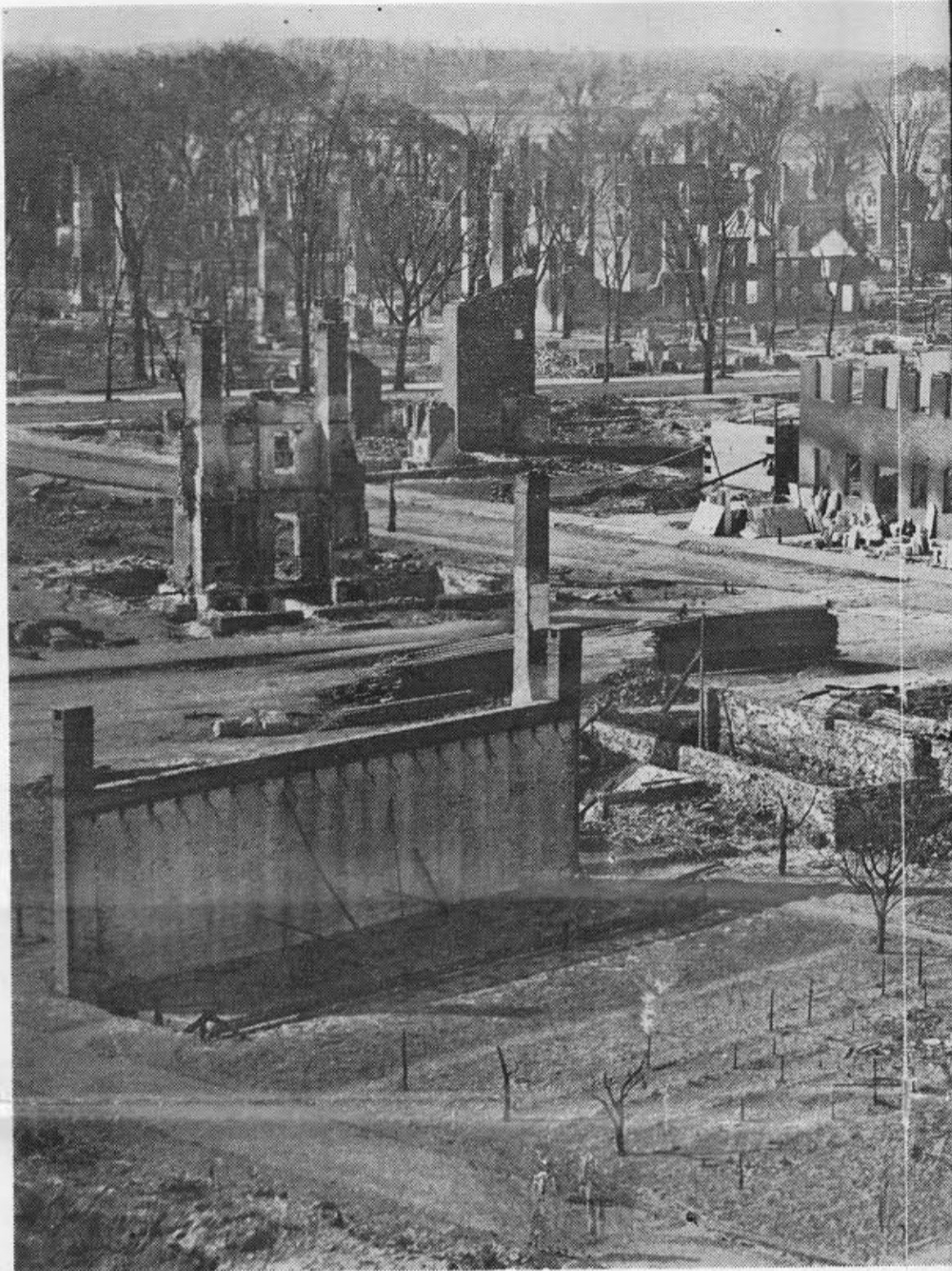


SOUTHEAST from the Customs House at Middle and Exchange Streets. Jagged brick walls stand before the unburned section of the city. The cluster of church steeples marks Congress Square.

Homeless: 10,000 people. In ruins: nine hotels, eight churches, three libraries, every bank, every lawyer's office and countless other buildings.



THE CUSTOMS HOUSE at Middle and Exchange Streets was one of the few major buildings to survive. The fire weakened it structurally, however, and it had to be taken down.



the NIGHT OF DESTROY

'dismay appalling to the stoutest hearts'

The terrible night of destruction left 10,000 people homeless and caused the loss of \$12 million worth of property. Major buildings such as the City Hall and the Customs House were severely damaged. In ruins lay nine hotels, eight churches, three libraries, the Natural History Society, every bank, newspaper office, and lawyer's office. Countless other buildings and homes also were destroyed. Many beautiful trees stood as charred reminders of what they had been.

The fire was not without drama. In the 1869 report of the Portland Society of Natural History appeared the following account of the horror of that night:

"THE ROAR OF THE FLAMES like the deep-toned voice of many Niagaras — the shrieking of the gale that fanned them to an intensity of heat vying with that of the molten furnace, and rolled them forward far in advance of the burning buildings, crumbling into speedy ruin the structures of stone and iron

upon the opposite sides of broad streets — the lamentations of the multitudes driven from their burning homes — the shouts of the firemen — the rattling of the engines — the confused hurrying to and fro and clatter of innumerable horses and vehicles — the uproar deepened at frequent intervals by the falling of walls and the explosion of mines — the clangor of bells ringing out anew at this late hour and for the last time the wild alarm and mournful dirges for the destruction that so soon awaited them — the whole region overhung with a dark and weird canopy of smoke lurid and rolling... were all united in creating a night of terror and dismay that was appalling to the stoutest hearts."

John Neal also gave vivid descriptions of the fire in his Account of the Great Conflagration in Portland:

"ONE BRAVE WOMAN told me, that after spending whole hours in getting ready to move, when it should become

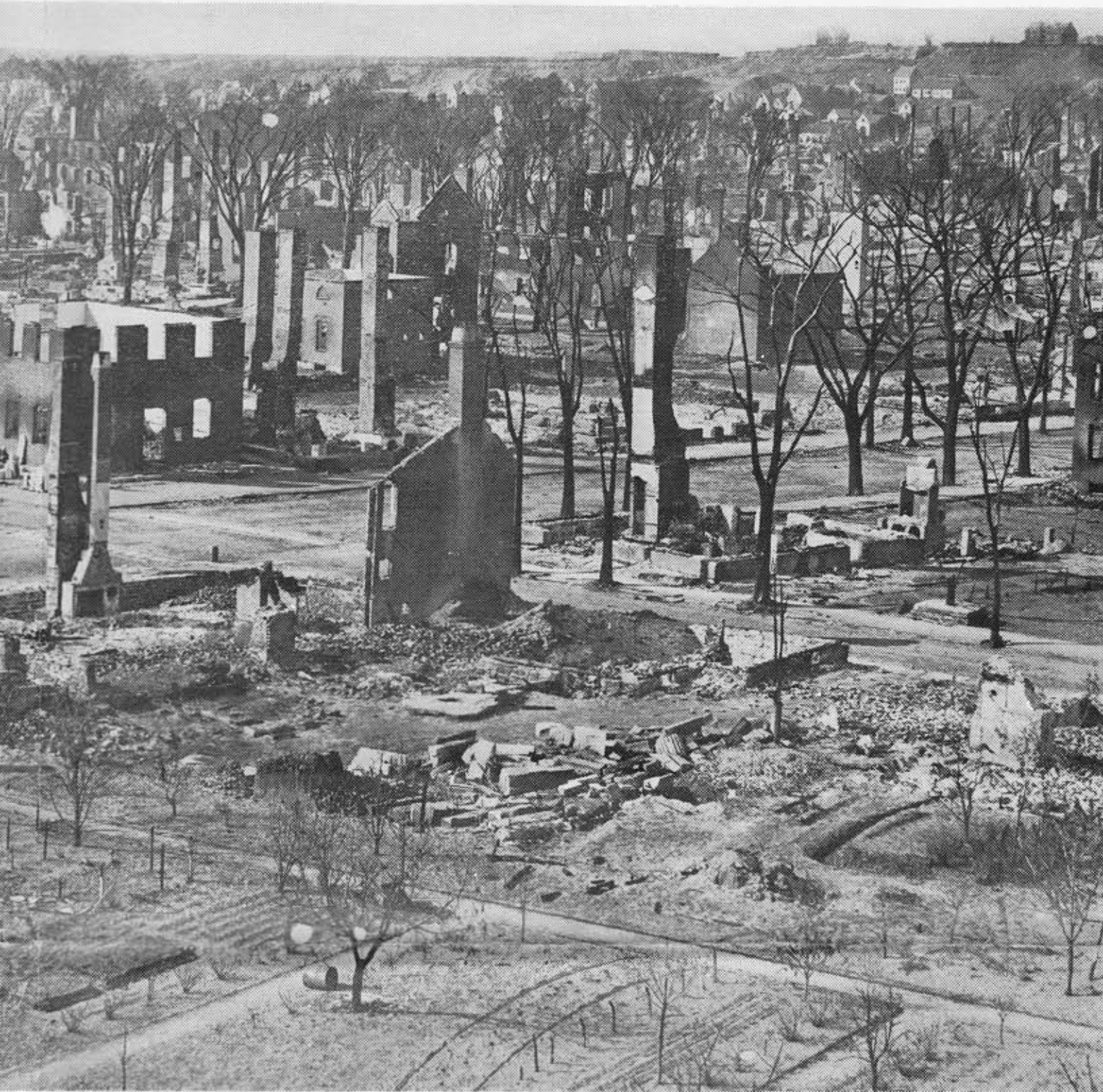
necessary, while her husband with one or two friends were carrying up water and pouring it on the roof, she was suddenly called upon to flee for her life, while yet the roaring seemed afar off. She had just time to escape with her two children, followed by her sister leading one little child... when the air was already so hot, it scorched her throat, and she had to clap her handkerchief to her mouth, and run for her life, leaving house and furniture, and clothing..."

"An Irish woman was seen carrying off a large pig from the midst of the flames, leaving her baby to take care of itself, till her 'darlint' was safe. Another was seen chasing a pig at full speed, with her clothes flying loosely, and hair streaming 'like a meteor,' down Center Street.

The pig made a dash at a heap of furniture, followed by the woman, with loud outcries. A few moments later, while she was poking around after him, he reappeared, with a washstand upon

his back, through the legs of which he had thrust himself, and not being able to get rid of it, he was now seen hurrying away, like a miniature elephant, with a tower on his back, at full speed, followed by his poor mistress, in a transport of terror.

"IT SEEMS, TOO, that another poor fellow, half seas over — and perhaps, more, for the worst of liquor was plentiful as water, and might be had anywhere in certain neighborhoods, for the asking — was lodged in one of the cells, and left there, for safe keeping, and then wholly forgotten. But the next morning he was thought of; and though the whole City Building had been burned to ashes over his head, he was found in a refreshing sleep, wholly unconscious of the danger he had run of being roasted alive — or baked to a crisp — and utterly heedless of the tumult and uproar still raging about him."



NORTH FROM the Customs House across the residential area which was the last stand of the Great Fire. After destroying these streets of houses, it came to an end on the slopes of Munjoy Hill.

The Cover

Fire-blackened chimneys at Congress and Franklin Streets dramatically symbolize in the cover picture the destruction wrought by Portland's Great Fire of July 4, 1866.

The Photos

Pictures appearing in this edition are from the collection of the Maine Historical Society, the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, William B. Jordan Jr., and Francis M. O'Brien.

A CLEAN SWEEP, below, across Exchange Street and Lime, now Market Street, with City Hall ruins in the background.

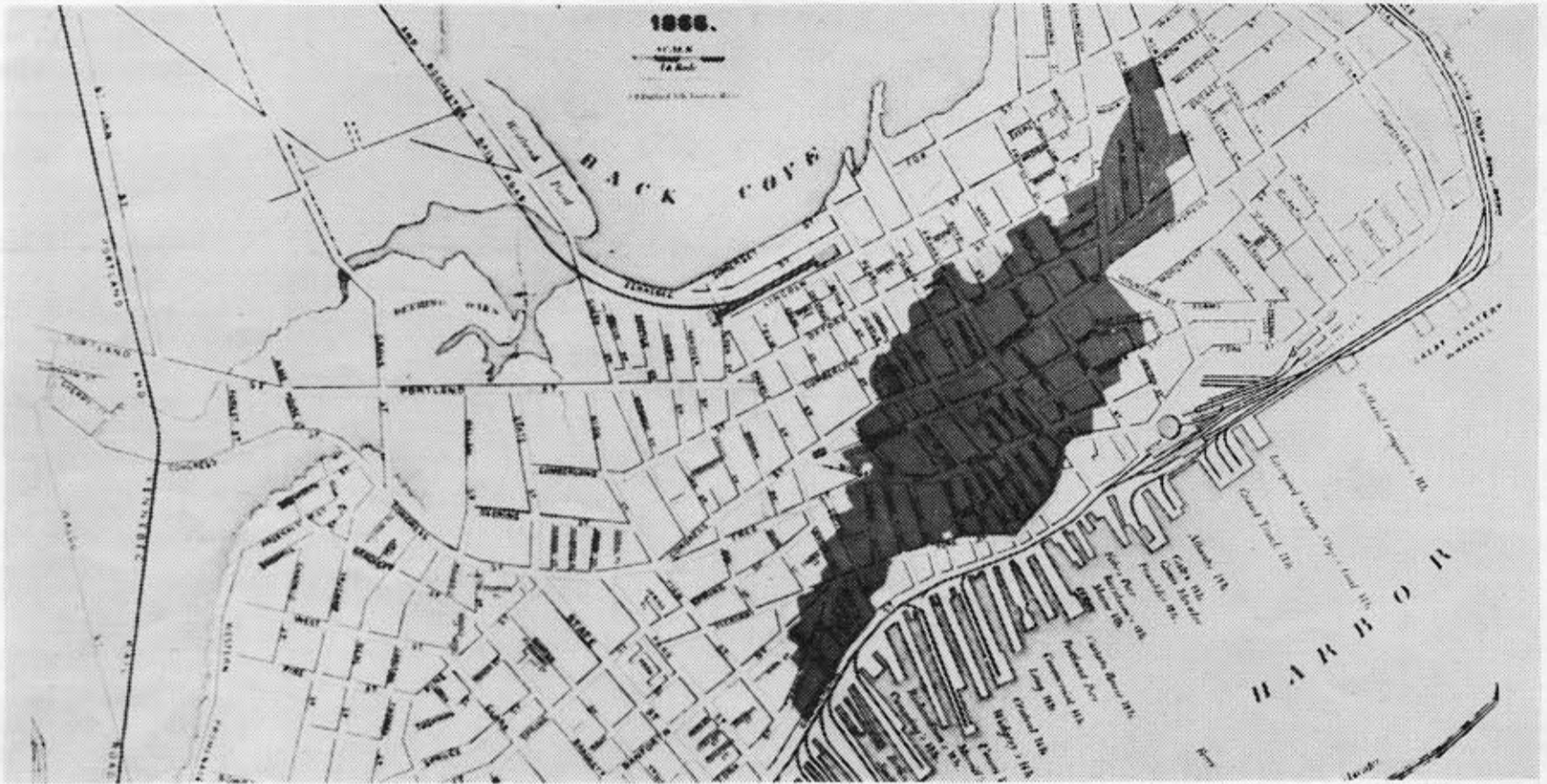
STRUCTION



Keeping Her 'Darlint' Safe



After the fire



THE FIRE BEGAN near High and Commercial Streets and extended to North Street on Munjoy Hill.

It blackened its greatest width between Fore Street and Cumberland Avenue at Franklin Street.

a shadow settles on a stricken city



DOWN MIDDLE STREET, into Temple and Exchange Streets area with the Customs House in the background.



CONGRESS STREET from Pearl Street looking toward Munjoy Hill.

LOOK TO THE FIRE!

I urge upon the citizens of Portland, who still have Dwellings or Stores standing, the importance of keeping a strict

WATCH TO-NIGHT!

And also of having BUCKETS and TUBS of WATER at hand to keep their roofs well wet, as a change of the wind would re-ignite the fire and destroy the Western portion of the City.

A. E. STEVENS, Mayor.
Portland, July 5th, 1863.

\$50,000 from Congress... 1,500 Army tents

On the morning after the fire, the most pressing need in Portland was to find food and housing for the homeless thousands. A relief committee was immediately organized in the old City Hall. In front of the building, they set up huge cauldrons for making soup and coffee. More substantial food was furnished as well.

Many cities and individuals answered Portland's appeal for aid with generous contributions of money and supplies.

Congress appropriated \$50,000 for the city and suspended tax collection. The

army sent 1,500 tents for temporary shelter, and troops came to guard against looting.

The writers and artists of large newspapers and magazines descended on Portland to report the calamity to the nation. Photographers and print makers arrived to photograph and draw the ruins.

Thousands also were attracted to the city by a curiosity to see the devastation. John Neal wrote in his Account of the Great Conflagration in Portland, "Two or three days after the fire, while

our city was thronged with strangers, come to see what there was left of us, to hunt for mementos, or keep-sakes, among the masses of molten jewelry in our cellars, two persons — a man and wife, probably — who had taken lodgings at the Preble House, and had just come out to see the ruins, were found near the top of High Street, having turned the wrong way, as they came out of the hotel.

"As they were looking about, in all directions, the woman was heard to

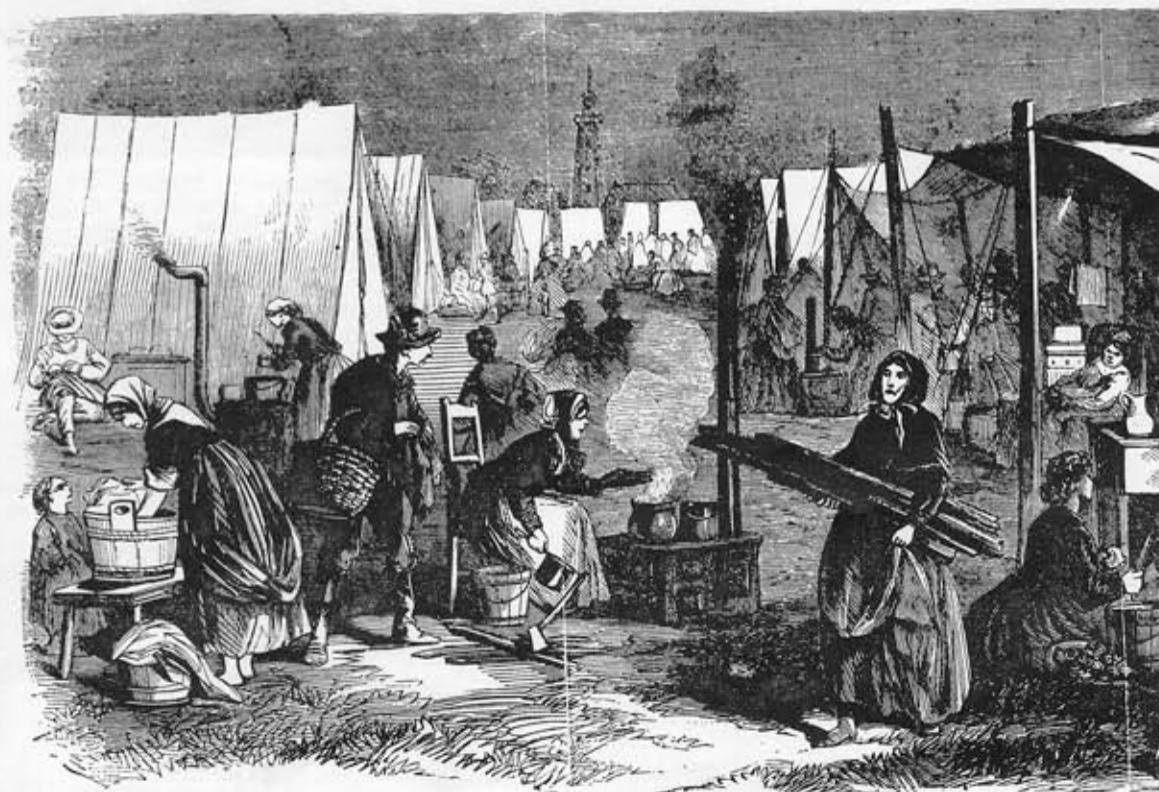
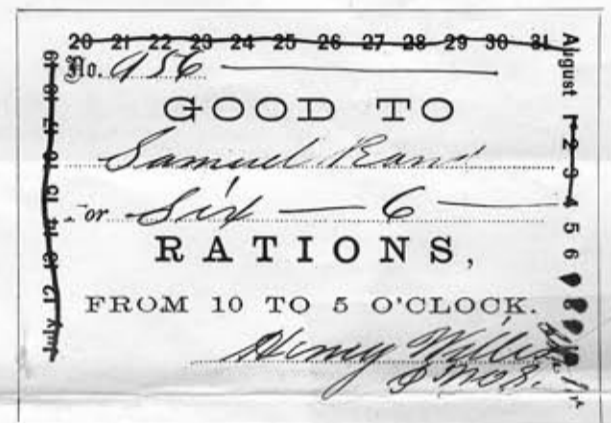
say, 'Well, if this is not the greatest humbug I ever heard of! nearly half the city laid in ashes, according to the newspapers, and not a burned house to be seen, nor a tree scorched!' A passing stranger stopped, on hearing this, and advised them to go down Free Street a few rods, toward the burnt district, assuring them that they would probably find it no humbug — if they went far enough."

Neal's "passing stranger" certainly spoke the truth.

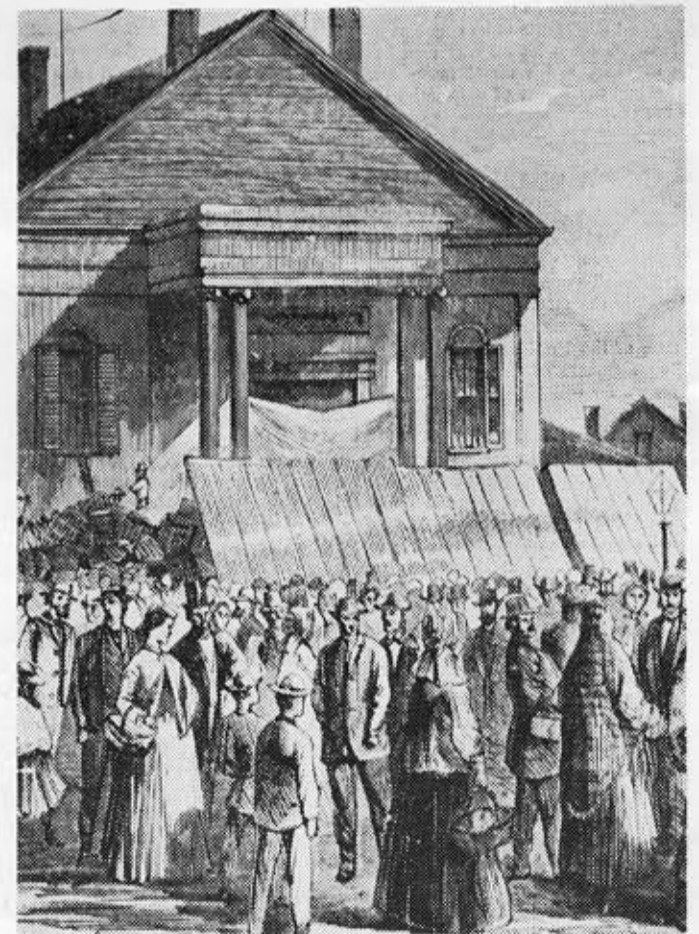


MUNJOY HILL, in the background, seen from the Customs House at Middle and Exchange Streets. Ruins of the old St. Stephens Church in the foreground.

'A city thronged with strangers, come to see what there was left of us . . . to hunt for mementos in our cellars.'



In the city of tents on Munjoy Hill



DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD at the old City Hall in the present Monument Square continued for almost a year after the fire.

the greatest humbug?

The rebuilding

"A NEW CITY WILL ARISE from the ruins of the old. . ." proclaimed the Portland Transcript 10 days after the Great Fire. Its determined statement reflected the spirit of the thousands struck by the disaster. As soon as the rubble cooled, the work of clearing land and recovering bricks began.

The pronounced curve in Middle Street was partially straightened. Exchange and Temple Streets were widened, while Pearl, Franklin and Anderson Streets were lengthened. By setting aside land for Lincoln Park, the city created a fire break in a once thickly populated area.

A RIGID BUILDING CODE was established for the burned district. Small wooden houses and stores first appeared there, but they were soon replaced or overshadowed by more substantial structures. On Aug. 1, a brick building was started on Temple Street, only to be followed by dozens of others in the ensuing months. Blessed with extraordinary weather, Portland was able to carry on its reconstruction well into the winter of 1866-67.

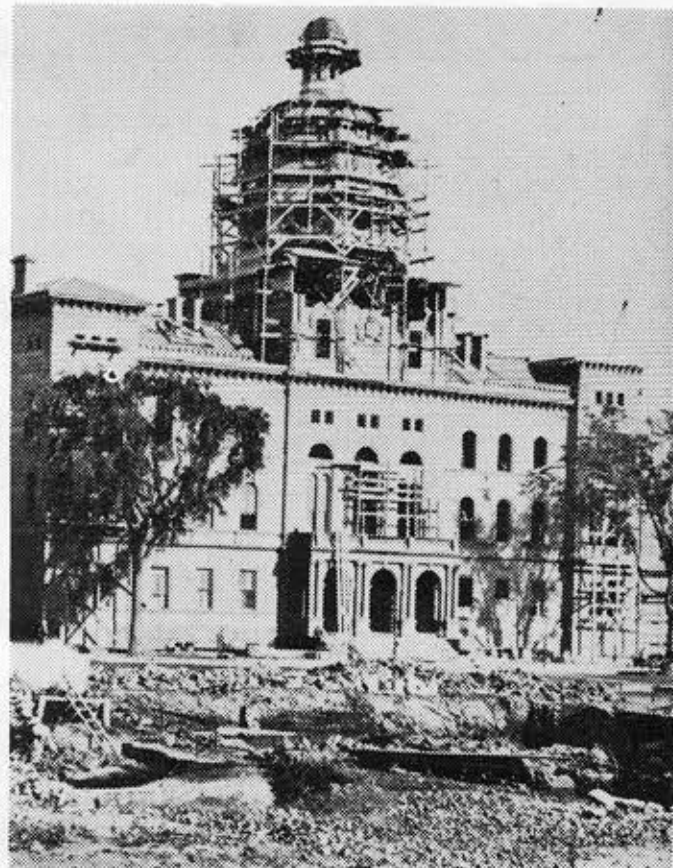
Business blocks and warehouses were not the only buildings erected. A new City Hall rose from the blackened shell of the old one. The government constructed a Post Office and a Customs House. New churches included the Cathedral of the Im-

maculate Conception, the First Baptist, the Second Parish, and the India Street Universalist. Substantial residences began to fill the western section of the city, while plainer homes covered the Munjoy Hill area.

Before the fire, Portland's only water supply had been reservoirs, cisterns, wells and springs. However, the lack of an actual water system had resulted in disaster. Therefore, the Portland Water Company was organized in 1867 to bring water from Sebago Lake. On July 4, 1870, the completion of the pipe line was joyously celebrated.

Gazing upon their new city, perhaps some remembered other July 4ths — the one in 1846 when prosperity was born with the railroad, and the one in 1866 when street after street was laid in ruins.

NOW PORTLAND HAD REGAINED its strength and position. Many felt that it had advanced at least fifty years, because of the opportunity for rebuilding on a larger scale and in a better style. Having met the challenge of the Great Fire, the city faced the future with the confidence of old John Neal, who asked in 1874, ". . . What is there to stay our progress, hereafter. . .?"



CITY HALL at Congress and Myrtle Streets during the period of rebuilding.

'what's to stay our progress?'



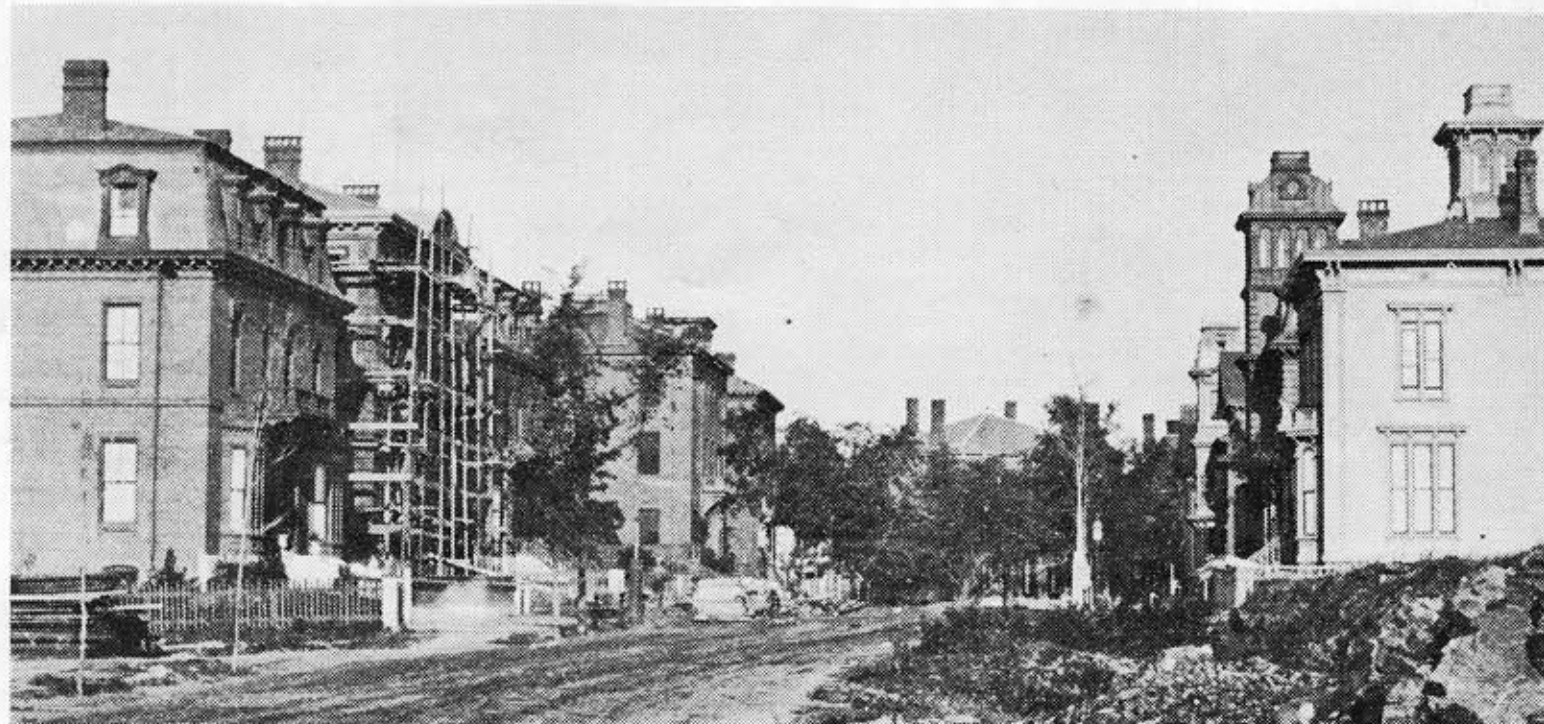
STYLISH NEW business blocks arose at Pearl and Middle Streets. Woodman Building at left is now Cook, Everett and Pennell.



THE FALMOUTH Hotel took a prominent place on Middle Street in the new city.

'With the occasional magnificence that we should look for in a material resurrection.'

SECTIONS untouched by the fire shared the spirit of development. These were new homes on Deering Street.





Many felt Portland advanced at least fifty years in four.

THE RESURGING business district as viewed from the City Hall dome.

City goes up

THE PASSAGES BELOW from John Neal's autobiography capture the feeling of the times. They span the period from 1866 to 1868, the peak of rebuilding.

Dec. 8, 1866 — Our fine weather still continues, the finest I ever knew for the season, and the most favorable for building. We have rain almost every night, beginning after the day's work is over, and clearing off before laborers begin anew in the morning; and then we have it almost always clear and pleasant. Portland is going up, not as on the last Fourth of July, in a chariot of fire, but with the calm, stately movement, and occasional magnificence, that we should look for in a material resurrection.

Dec. 18, 1866 — Today, the weather is clear and bright, and all our new hives are swarming.

Dec. 26, 1866 — Our fine weather still continues. The earth is bare of snow, and today we are getting our roofs on by the score.

Jan. 27, 1867 — Within the last month. . . we have had two of the toughest and heaviest snowstorms I ever saw; and are now up to the waist in another. . .

And yet, our people are swarming to their work, early and late; the city is going up silently through the deep snow, block after block, and street after street.

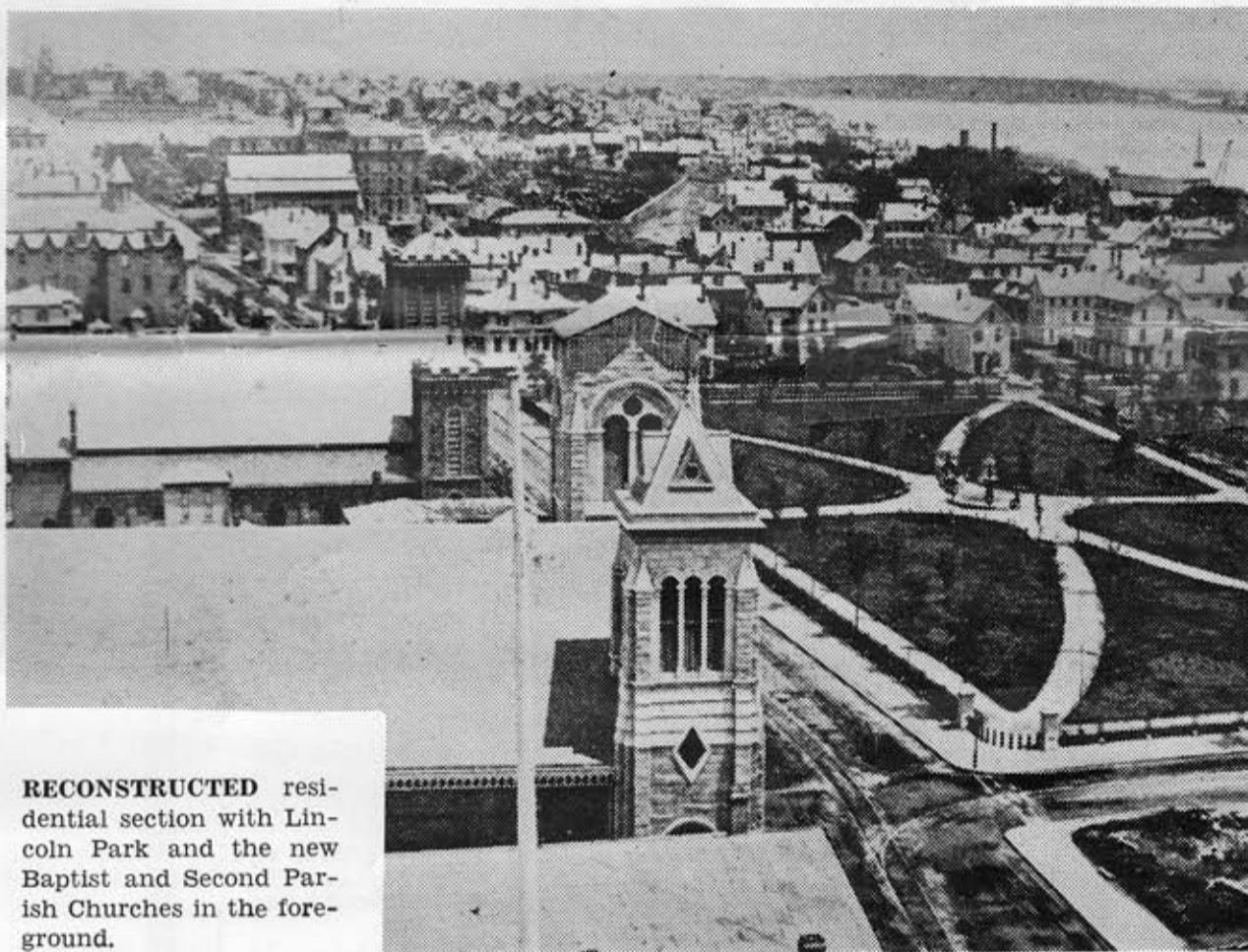
Feb. 19, 1867 — Weather, all we could wish for — cold, clear, and bracing; and everywhere the work goes bravely on.

May 23, 1867 — Portland is going up; and all the buildings that were got under way, soon after the fire, and up to midwinter, have been finished, with improvements a hundred years in advance of what they were before the fire; and most of them are already occupied, and all the rest will be, within a month; while others are going up, stores and mansions and large public buildings, in every part of the town.

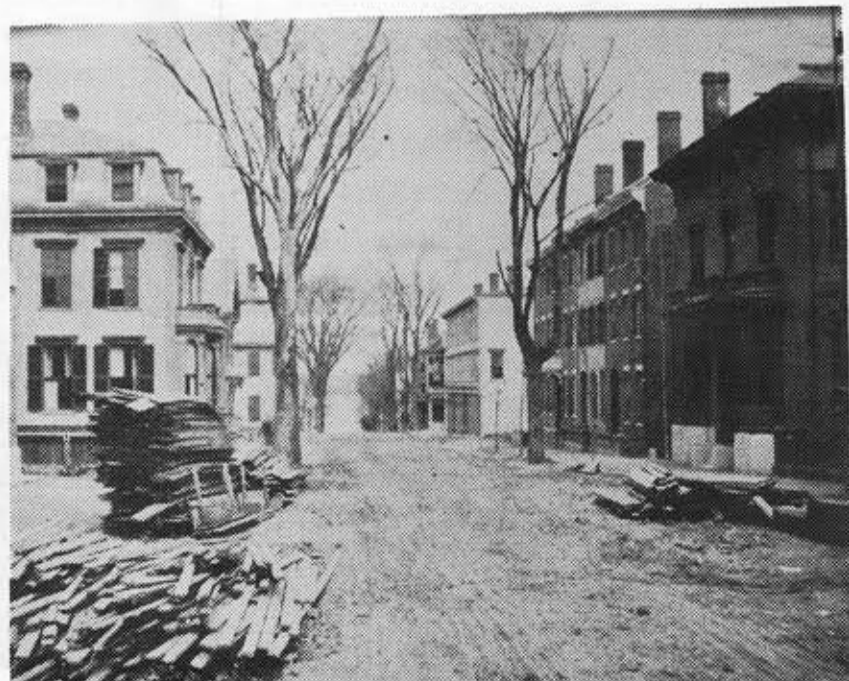
Sept. 22, 1867 — There is probably more "building" now under way, that makes little show, than there has been at any time since the fire. At first, every store, every shed or shanty, could be seen from every part of the city, as it went up; but now that whole streets have been rebuilt, and high buildings are interposed by the acre, we have to turn off into cross-streets and byways to see what is going on.

All the stores and houses are occupied, as fast as they are finished, and sometimes when barely inhabitable; though the number is much greater than before the fire, in all our leading thoroughfares and business quarters; and all this, in less than 14 months, since a third of the city was laid in ashes.

Jan. 1, 1868 — Another year! Portland is now rebuilt, and greatly enlarged and beautified. . .



RECONSTRUCTED residential section with Lincoln Park and the new Baptist and Second Parish Churches in the foreground.



SIGNS of rebuilding on Pearl Street between Congress and Cumberland Avenue.

'And all this in less than 14 months since a third of the city was laid in ashes.'

R
974.194
f P85ev
Mc. coll.

Portland Evening Express.
Day Portland burned.

Cupboard #10, top drawer.

The Legacy Of The Fire

After reading of Portland's Great Fire, one might feel that little is left of historical or architectural merit. Many structures we now would prize were lost in the fire. Yet those which survived it combined with those which were built after it still provide a rich heritage.

The Park and Pleasant Street area escaped destruction as did Commercial Street. The former was Portland's finest residential district for the first 70 years of the 19th century. It remains intact for the most part and can boast of such homes as the Sweet Mansion, the Park Street Block and the Victoria Mansion. Commercial Street was developed in the 1850's with massive brick and granite warehouses.

The Victorian business district on Middle and Exchange Streets rose in splendor from ruins of the Great Fire. Blocks of ornate, mansard-roofed buildings recall the period when the area served as the commercial heart of Portland. Contemporary with it are Deering Street's red brick Victorian homes.

Scattered throughout the city are other landmarks. Eastern Cemetery lies at the foot of Munjoy Hill with stones dating back to 1720. Nearby stands the Observatory, built in 1807 as a signal tower for Portland's merchants and shipowners. In the center of the modern city are Longfellow's boyhood home and the First Parish Church. The list could go on.

Yet Portland recently has lost important parts of its tangible past. The destruction in this decade of such major buildings as Union Station or the old Post Office bears solemn witness to this fact. Now is the time for decision. We can watch the slow undoing of what we still have, or we can fulfill our responsibility to preserve it for ourselves today, and for others tomorrow.

