



Above: Fire at Dumbrell's (Aurthur Cocks & Co.), Bourke Street, 1927. Photographer unknown.
Below: A wall of water running at about 6 knots down Elizabeth Street, 1972. Photographer Neville Bowler.
Source: The Age Newspaper



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FIRE & FLOOD IN THE HEART OF MELBOURNE

September 5 - November 1, 2003

City Gallery

Fire danger was never far from the early settler's mind. Prior to central Melbourne was without a state fire brigade and entirely dependent upon water punts and punts by the means of a manual punting water carts.

The Melbourne Fire Marine Insurance Company was so concerned about the number of highly flammable timber houses in the settlement that it suggested smoking in public places be banned, surprisingly, early colonists refused.

By the mid-1800s, insurance companies formed their own fire brigades. Rivalry was intense, drawing huge crowds when fire bells rang and dozens of men belonging to different brigades dragged carts hundreds of miles to claim 'first water'. If the burning building belonged to a rival insurance company, the men more often than not turned around and wandered home, hampering the arrival of the next brigade.

The year 1889 proved disastrous, with six firemen losing their lives and several injured in a series of disasters,

including the destruction of the Bijou Theatre in April and George and George's of Collins Street in September.

After several attempts, the Fire Brigade Act was finally passed in 1890 and the first meeting of the newly constituted Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board held in 1891 in the Melbourne Town Hall.

In 1893, a block of land on Eastern Hill with frontages to Gisborne Street and Victoria Parade became the Brigades' present headquarters, featuring a 150-foot watchtower.

Sources: Shaw, E.D. (1939). "The Early History of the Melbourne Fire Brigades". *The Victorian Historical Magazine*. Vol. XVIII. Newnham, W.H. Hill of Melbourne: Biography of a City, Hill of Content, Melbourne.

Four major floods occurred during the 1840s, with boats being rowed along Swanston and Elizabeth Streets. One of Melbourne's prominent citizens

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FLOOD

Michael Cashmore, rowed a fine horse—one of a wagon team—drowned, beyond the possibility of aid, at the crossing in front of the Post-office. . . . the current was so impetuous that it made one giddy to gaze at it as it roared past, empty cases, coffee tins, old hats, sardine boxes, discarded clothes, tattered mats, butchers' offal, and all the varieties of household filth and warehouse abomination hoarded since the previous flood, careering fantastically on its bosom. I saw a gully that became a raging torrent in the rainy season. Shopkeepers in the street kept specially prepared boards that fitted into doorways to fend off floodwaters.

William Kelly described the chaos in 1853: " . . . when the rain ceased, I walked out to witness a scene not to be equalled in any other city in the world. Eniscoe, ran from the junction of William and Flinders Streets.

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1. Workers amongst wreckage after Regent Theatre fire 1945
Photograph
Unknown
Source: City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection

2. Condition of Regent Theatre building after fire 1945
Photograph
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3. Burnt out auditorium, Regent Theatre 1945
Photograph
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4. Great Fire at Messrs Connell, Watson and Hogarth's Bond, Flinders Lane, Melbourne 1873
Wood engraving
Unknown
Source: State Library of Victoria

5. The Great Fire of Melbourne, Fink's Skyscraper building totally destroyed 1897
Photograph
Charles Rudd
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6. The recent floods 1881
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7. Fink's Building, Melbourne, during the Great Fire 1897
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8. Great Fire at Messrs Connell, Watson and Hogarth's Bond, Flinders Lane, Melbourne 1873
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9. Great fire in Collins St. Sketched from the roof of the Bohemian Club 1889
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10. Melbourne street with North Melbourne tram c. 1906-1914
Transparency
Arthur Fox
Source: State Library of Victoria

11. Regent Theatre exterior, Collins St, Melbourne c. 1945
Photograph
Lyle Fowler
Source: State Library of Victoria

12. The effect of storm. Train passing through flood waters, South Yarra. 1907
Postcard
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Source: State Library of Victoria

13. The Floods (Flinders St and the Yarra) 1880
Wood engraving
Julian Ross Ashton
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14. The Floods (St Kilda Rd) 1880
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17. Views of the Great Flood (Cremorne St, Richmond) 1891
Photomechanical print
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18. Views of the Great Flood (Toorak Rd, Toorak) 1891
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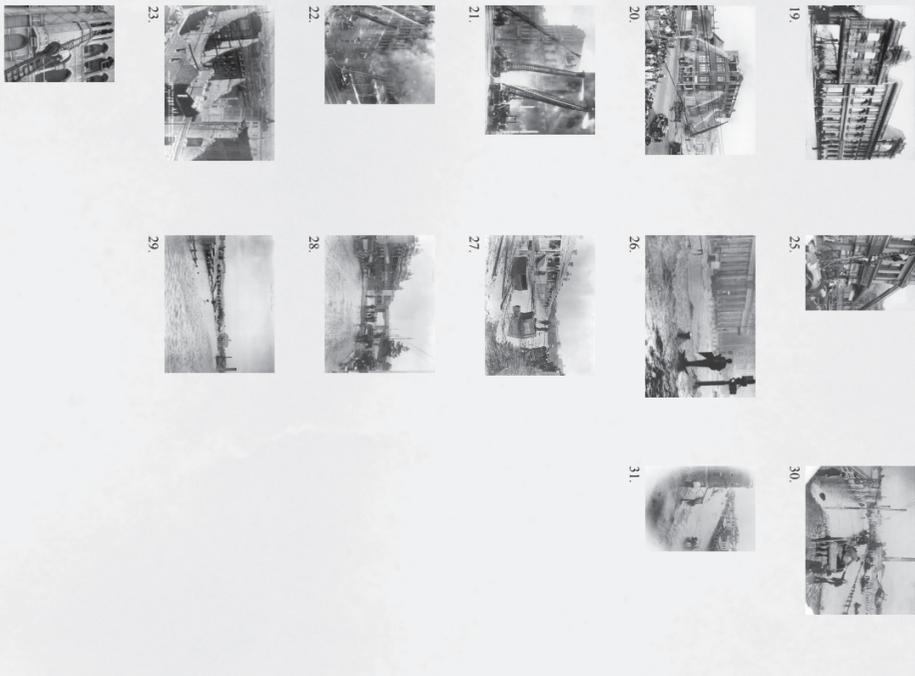
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20. Fire at Fritchman's Building, corner of Swanston St and Queensberry St, Carlton 1927
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21. Fire at Paynes Bon Marche department store 1929
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22. Fire at Stewart Dawson's, corner of Elizabeth St and Bourke St 1927
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23. Flood of Yarra River: Panoramic view of flooded buildings in unidentified street running into the river, Richmond 1891
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Source: Royal Historical Society of Victoria

24. Rescued by MFB during the fire at State Theatre 1957
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25. Rescued by MFB during the fire at Stewart Dawson's, corner of Elizabeth St and Bourke St 1927
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26. Pedestrian stranded on a bench as water started roaring down Elizabeth St during city floods 1972
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28. Flood of Yarra River: Panoramic view of Punt Rd, Richmond looking south to railway bridge 1891
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