

---

COMMITTEE ON POLICE AND FIRE.

---

EXONERATION OF MRS. O'LEARY AND HER COW FROM  
ALL BLAME IN REGARD TO GREAT CHICAGO  
FIRE OF 1871.

The Committee on Police and Fire submitted the following report:

CHICAGO, October 6, 1997.

*To the President and Members of the City Council:*

Your Committee on Police and Fire held a meeting on Monday, October 6, 1997 and having had under consideration a resolution introduced by Alderman Edward M. Burke (14th Ward) to forever exonerate Mrs. O'Leary

and her cow from all blame in regard to the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, begs leave to report and recommend that Your Honorable Body *Adopt* the proposed substitute resolution transmitted herewith.

This recommendation was concurred in by all members of the committee present, with no dissenting votes.

Respectfully submitted,

(Signed) WILLIAM M. BEAVERS,  
*Chairman.*

On motion of Alderman Beavers, the said proposed substitute resolution transmitted with the foregoing committee report was *Adopted* by yeas and nays as follows:

*Yeas* -- Aldermen Granato, Haithcock, Tillman, Preckwinkle, Holt, Steele, Beavers, Dixon, Shaw, Buchanan, Frias, Olivo, Burke, Jones, Coleman, Peterson, Murphy, Rugai, Troutman, Munoz, Zalewski, Chandler, Solis, Ocasio, Burnett, E. Smith, Burrell, Wojcik, Suarez, Gabinski, Mell, Colom, Banks, Giles, Allen, Laurino, O'Connor, Doherty, Natarus, Bernardini, Hansen, Levar, Shiller, Schulter, M. Smith, Moore, Stone -- 47.

*Nays* -- None.

Alderman Natarus moved to reconsider the foregoing vote. The motion was lost.

The following is said resolution as adopted:

WHEREAS, A fire broke out on the evening of Sunday, October 8, 1871, in the barn of Patrick and Catherine O'Leary on the west side of the City of Chicago; and

WHEREAS, While it ironically spared the O'Leary's house, located at 137 DeKoven Street, the blaze tragically spread out of control and burned a huge swath, approximately three and one-third miles in size through Chicago; and

WHEREAS, Before the Great Chicago Fire died out in the early morning hours of Tuesday, October 10, it had killed three hundred (300) people and destroyed property valued at One Hundred Ninety-two Million Dollars (\$192,000,000); and

WHEREAS, Even as the conflagration raged, Mrs. O'Leary and her cow were being blamed as the source of the biggest catastrophe ever to occur in the Windy City; and

WHEREAS, The *Chicago Evening Journal* first spun the yarn that the Great Chicago Fire was sparked when Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicked over a lantern while Mrs. O'Leary was milking the bovine animal; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. O'Leary claimed she had a solid alibi and was asleep in bed with her husband, Patrick, at the time when the fire first broke out; and

WHEREAS, A neighbor, Daniel "Peg Leg" Sullivan, was a man who some historians now suspect may have been the true culprit behind the fire; and

WHEREAS, Although contemporary research appears to vindicate Mrs. O'Leary, she has unfairly remained vilified and maligned by history; now, therefore,

*Be It Resolved*, That we, the Mayor and members of the Chicago City Council, assembled this twenty-eighth day of October, 1997, do hereby forever exonerate Mrs. O'Leary and her cow from all blame in regard to the Great Chicago Fire of 1871; and

*Be It Further Resolved*, That a suitable copy of this resolution be presented to Dr. Douglas Greenberg, President and Director of the Chicago Historical Society.

---