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Views of Chicago: Picturing the Ruins of the Great Fire

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Fig. 1. Lovejoy & Foster, “Bookseller’s Row, N.E. Cor. Madison and State Sts.,” c. 1871. Photographic prints on mount, approx. 3 1/2 x 7 in. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA; photo by Nathan Fiske

All Chicago is on fire. . . everybody is burned out from Twelfth Street north, and from Canal Street on the west side, to the lake. All the city banks are burned, the business part of the city is gone, and the fire is still raging. The water has given out, and the firemen are exhausted.

So read a special dispatch report from Chicago to a Cincinnati newspaper on October 9, 1871, its dismal prose conveying palpable hopelessness and exasperation.¹ A century and a half later, I held in my hands an image of the Great Chicago Fire’s aftermath, presented in duplicate and pasted onto rectangular cardboard. The stereograph I was examining at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, some 950 miles away from Chicago, portrayed the remains of a large neoclassical building. Its façade was still adorned with engaged columns and low-relief, cherubic heads, but its entire interior was obliterated, save for parts of its load-bearing walls (fig. 1). While searching for photographs of nineteenth-century houses, I instead found pictorial evidence of my hometown in ruins. This particular stereograph, one of dozens lying before me, depicted destruction at the very heart of the city: the remnants of what was formerly Booksellers’ Row on the corner of

Madison and State Streets, today the center of Chicago’s grid system. Orienting myself to the coordinates invited reminiscences of other sites familiar to me that are no longer there, such as Marshall Field’s (which fell victim both to the fire in 1871 and, more recently, to the Macy’s department store empire).² In viewing the other stereographs in the collection— noting crumbling archways, fortress-like towers, and fluted columns—I was also reminded of sites in Pompeii, Athens, Rome, and other cities with still-extant or heavily documented ruins, and I wondered how much I was imposing a twenty-first-century view onto this scene. This brief moment of imagined, long-distance time travel made me curious about how these pictures functioned in their own era and if the ruins had significance to Chicago’s legacy beyond their initial shock value. As I discuss below, the stereographs’ pictorial allusions to a romanticized past—evident to viewers then and now—helped construct the city’s future.

The Great Chicago Fire raged for more than twenty-four hours, claiming roughly three hundred lives and causing three-and-a-half square miles of damage.³ Following months of drought, the fire made quick work of the dry city. The once-burgeoning metropolis was reduced to heaps of ash, piles of bricks, and the skeletal façades of formerly grand buildings. Hastily erected wooden structures seemed to evaporate completely. Another reporter began a detailed description of the wreckage: “Never was presented a more mournful scene” as “the desolate ruins of this city.”⁴ This reporter and others sought to bring distant audiences into the spaces of ruination in Chicago. However, no media achieved this better than the stereograph. When viewed through a stereoscope, these photographic images created the illusion of depth and seemingly placed the viewer directly into the environment that they were viewing.

Prior to the fire, Chicago was not exactly a remote outpost. It had developed quickly over the course of the nineteenth century to become an integral hub in the country’s industrial economy, one of the reasons post-fire rebuilding occurred so rapidly. Other cities’ industries had a vested interest in Chicago’s success because their own depended on it. The scorched city not only attracted their fiscal support but also their ideations of what a modern American metropolis could be. Chicago’s once densely packed and shoddily constructed urban landscape became a blank slate for redevelopment. Exhaustive news coverage with illustrations of the city’s trauma circulated the specter of the conflagration internationally. Soon, cities worldwide sent aid, and architectural firms rushed to rebuild and innovate in a city brimming with new possibilities. In addition to the fire’s mass destruction, speculation about its still-unknown cause abounded and contributed to its enduring legacy. Blatant anti-Catholic and anti-Irish sentiments put the blame on Catherine O’Leary and her famous cow, but this rumor has since been debunked. The fire’s massive scale and accompanying sensational accounts likened the event to other historic fires, usually the Great London Fire of 1666 and a more recent fire in New York in 1845. Though largescale urban fires occurred frequently throughout the nineteenth century, Chicago’s has remained at the forefront of cultural consciousness locally and beyond—something I took for granted growing up with a father who was a Chicago firefighter. Indeed, the Great Chicago Fire remains ubiquitous today, inspiring pop culture references that range from children’s songs to the names of sports teams and a long-running TV show.⁵

Much has been written on Chicago’s subsequent rise from the ashes and the architectural developments that followed the disaster, but stereographic views of the city’s ruins invite viewers to focus on the moment before that rebuilding was possible. While many have framed the fire as Chicago’s modern beginning, I argue that its pictured ruins provided the

platform for an idealized past. The fire and its ruination served as an event that would not only change the course of the city's history but was, in fact, foundational to that history. In other words, the Great Chicago Fire literally *made* history in the wake of destruction. This notion is articulated through pictures of the city's still and sublime ruins, structures that were materially ephemeral but visually timeless. By pictorially aligning the ruins of Chicago with those of the ancient civilizations, especially of Europe, these representations offered the potential for the recent past to be reframed as storied history, thereby engendering the mythic imaginary of an "Old Chicago" and boosting the city's reputation. Moreover, this association aided the work of nation building and the budding imperialism of a country on the cusp of its centennial but still reeling from civil war.

Following the fire, the city's "[Burnt District](#)" spanned as far south as Cermak Road (2200 South), upward nearly six miles to Fullerton Avenue (2400 North), and from the shores of Lake Michigan westward to Halsted Street (800 West), exactly one mile from the city's center. During the conflagration, even the surrounding areas would have been uninhabitable amid extreme temperatures, dense smoke-filled air, and falling ash. As soon as the fire subsided and the scorched areas cooled down, people rushed to the scene to salvage and document the ruins. Among them were photographers, many of whom made stereoscopic views.

Stereographs, also known as stereoviews, stereograms, or simply "views" during the nineteenth century, consist of a rectangular cardboard mount bearing two nearly identical photographs side by side. A special camera was used to make these photographs: it was equipped with two lenses approximately two-and-a-half inches apart to mimic the pupillary distance between the eyes. When a stereograph is viewed through a stereoscope, the observer's gaze merges the two pictures, resulting in a simulation of three-dimensionality. One of the most commonly employed stereoscope models was developed by physician and writer Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., who also wrote extensively about the medium. Frequently commenting upon the transportive capabilities of stereography, Holmes mused in 1859 that with his stereoscope, he could visit places perceived as distant and exotic without ever leaving home. He recounts exploring rock-hewn Nubian temples, strolling through French vineyards, sitting under Roman arches, and looking "in spirit down upon Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives," all while his body rested in an armchair.⁶ Art historian Melody Davis, in her recent book on stereographs, articulates a blurring of the haptic and the optic in these views.⁷ By inserting a chosen image into the stereoscope, adjusting the device to a comfortable distance, and letting one's vision adapt to its perceived new surroundings, the viewer experiences an immersive simulation of three-dimensional space.

People wanted to see Chicago's ruins, but more than that, they wanted to *experience* them. After the fire, various agencies even offered excursions to the city, with one explicitly advertising "ample time in Chicago for viewing the ruins."⁸ With Chicago's ruins serving as the main attraction in a sort of sublime trauma tourism, stereography offered a way to traverse these spaces virtually. As Jonathan Crary describes, the intended effect of viewing a stereograph was not likeness so much as a heightened sense of tangibility. Developers of the medium "aimed to simulate the actual presence of a physical object or scene."⁹ In addition to viewing destruction through a stereoscope, tangibility of the Great Chicago Fire could be obtained in a more literal sense through relics. Almost immediately, objects bearing traces of the flames were highly sought after, ranging from fragments of grandiose former landmarks to clumps of mundane household items fused together by the heat of the blaze. Some relics were collected and sold by opportunistic entrepreneurs as souvenirs, while

others were cherished possessions reclaimed from the ashes by residents.¹⁰ The immediacy with which a relic recalled the fire is not unlike the immersive tangibility of the stereograph. Indeed, stereographs sometimes [featured these items](#), presenting destruction on a smaller, more intimate scale. Just as the stereographs brought the ruins to those who could not physically visit those sites, they did the same for relics, reproducing visually and almost tactilely the aftermath of this disaster.

The tangible and immersive viewing experience, combined with a low price point, made stereographs exceedingly popular. In the 1860s, one firm recorded sales of two to three thousand stereographs per day, leading Davis to estimate that billions were published, sold, and circulated during the second half of the nineteenth century. A dozen views cost just two dollars, and prices decreased further as they grew in popularity. Stereographs, including those of Chicago’s ruins, were chiefly marketed to women and sited in the middle-class parlor.¹¹ Their use in a gendered space that represented the cultivation of morality, comfort, and refinement during the Victorian era effectively domesticated the ruins, making them simultaneously visible and safely accessible. In the rare instance that people were included in these images among Chicago’s ruins, few women, if any, appear and were likely excluded from many of the unstable sections of the burnt district and its crumbling structures. Alternatively, stereographs offered safe, simulated sightseeing regardless of gender and geography.

In some views of the ruins that are otherwise devoid of people, bright afternoon sun pushed the photographer’s long shadow into the frame (fig. 2). Here, the silhouette grounds the viewer and provides an avatar for the scene, even as it simultaneously exposes its own visual deception through the inclusion of the camera apparatus. The stereograph is already a medium that requires effort on behalf of the viewer to hold the stereoscope, adjust it comfortably, and let their eyes focus accordingly.¹² In essence, the viewer contributes to making the stereographic picture every time—an image that includes a photographer in it becomes a metareference to that experience.



Fig. 2. E. B. Ives, “Masonic Temple,” c. 1871. Photographic prints on mount, approx. 3 1/2 x 7 in. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA; photo by Nathan Fiske

Though a photographer’s shadow was one way a viewer might feel pulled into the scene, other compositional decisions could aid in achieving this effect. In order for stereographs to

accomplish the illusion of depth, the images need to feature a variety of objects that punctuate pictorial space at different distances. Stereographers frequently composed their photographs to include visually interesting things in the immediate foreground as well as in the middle- and background in order to emphasize dramatic spatial relationships when viewed through the stereoscope.¹³ One example features a view looking north toward what was the post office in the distance and to the left the façade of the Bigelow House Hotel (fig. 3). A series of angles work to make this image especially dynamic, such as the lamppost that springs forth from stone rubble in the foreground and appears to lean toward the viewer. The charred wooden beam that looks purposefully placed at the base of the lamppost appears to recede more severely. The massive steel beam resting horizontally in the center of the image, textured by scratches and nicks, underscores the distance between the viewer and the seemingly endless ruins that lie beyond. To the right and a few yards behind the lamppost lies its lantern cover, now a mangled pyramid on the ground. Meanwhile, the post office and a lone, intact lamppost appear markedly distant to the viewer. To the far left, a tangle of rebar points to more crumbling brick walls beyond the frame. Holmes narrates the experience of viewing such rich images: “The mind feels its way into the very depths of the picture. The scraggy branches of a tree in the foreground run [toward] us as if they would scratch our eyes out.”¹⁴ Of these rather aggressive visual details, Crary describes the depth of stereographs as disorderly, characterized by planar disjointedness that lend the scenes “disturbing palpability.”¹⁵ The uncanny yet destabilizing realism of stereography makes it especially fitting for representations of ruins.



Fig. 3. G. N. Barnard and Lovejoy & Foster, “Bigelow Building, Looking North to the Post Office,” c. 1871. Photographic prints on mount, approx.. 3 1/2 x 7 in. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA; photo by Nathan Fiske. Click image for [animated GIF](#)

Though shocking, the images of Chicago after the fire were not the first time American viewers consumed images of ruins, and indeed ruin and disaster imagery was fairly common in the postbellum United States.¹⁶ By 1871, photography was still a relatively new medium, but it had already proven to be an effective and accessible one for documenting trauma. It played a significant role in the Civil War, which occurred less than a decade before Chicago’s Great Fire. Photography was instrumentalized to record and report the ravages of this violent conflict, documenting both slain bodies and demolished buildings.¹⁷ Audiences were

primed—and even hungry—for images of Chicago’s ruins not just because of the recent Civil War imagery but also because of decades-long consumption of and appreciation for other renderings of ruin.¹⁸ Moneyed Americans made pilgrimages and embarked on grand tours to Europe, viewing ancient ruins and acquiring printed representations of them as souvenirs. Meanwhile, archeological excavations of ancient sites in Africa and South America, laden with colonialist and imperialist motivations, made headlines and similarly circulated widely in visual and material culture of the time. In turn, leading artists of the day integrated ruin imagery into their paintings, which were frequently reproduced as engravings or lithographs, populating parlors across the country. With all of these visual depictions of historic ruins thrust upon American audiences, it is no surprise that, upon viewing the desolation in Chicago, a man in Stoughton, Massachusetts, remarked to his local paper, “It reminds me of the pictures of old forts and ruins of olden time.”¹⁹ In many of the stereographs, it is clear that photographers embraced the Romantic aesthetic of this established iconography when composing images of their own, a parallel that was not lost on American viewers.



Fig. 4a, b. Top: P. B. Greene and Lovejoy & Foster, “Union Depot, Lake Street,” c. 1871 (from an earlier photograph before the Great Fire). Bottom: P. B. Greene and Lovejoy & Foster, “Union Depot, Lake Street,” c. 1871. Photographic prints on mount, approx. 3 1/2 x 7 in. each American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA; photos by Nathan Fiske. Click either image for [animated GIF](#)

Recognizing an international market for ruin imagery, enterprising Midwestern studios produced photographic series such as *Among the Ruins in Chicago*. One of the most prominent stereographic publishers, Lovejoy & Foster, leveraged the experience of having their studio burned out to bolster their legitimacy and to boost sales. After relocating, they began producing stereographs again as early as October 18, mere days after the fire. Not long after that, Lovejoy & Foster advertised their *Combination Views*, which allowed viewers to see an old building or site as it originally was and then immediately view its post-fire rubble. Viewers consumed portrayals of the before and after without having to witness the catastrophic fire itself. Some combination stereos, if viewed in quick succession, function almost like moving images, crumbling in real time (fig. 4). A prime example of a combination view features the Union Depot, one of the city’s former train stations. With the flip of a card, the depot’s fortress-like structure is reduced to a partial turret and empty archways. Lovejoy & Foster boasted that the views “are finished in the highest style of the art and give a better idea of the great conflagration than even a visit to the city could afford.”²⁰ According to the ad, the publishers sold nearly fifty thousand views of the ruins since the fire, filling orders from countries around the world.

While combination views offered a near simulation of real-time destruction, the standalone depictions of Chicago’s ruins evince a more ambiguous timeline. On one level, viewers knew these ruins represented a recent event, but they could also let themselves imagine a more historical connection, linking the recent ruins to those in the deeper past, in a nondescript “olden time.” Be it the peaks of a neo-Gothic church, Corinthian columns, or a Colosseum-like structure, photographers sought out ruins in Chicago that viewers might visually connect to distant pasts and distant lands (fig. 5).²¹



Fig. 5. J. H. Abbott, “First National Bank”, c. 1871. Photographic prints on mount, approx. 3 1/2 x 7 in. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA; photo by Nathan Fiske

These images, then, served as surrogates for a longer history of civilization—one that Chicago was not believed to possess. However, before Jean-Baptiste Point DuSable, a Haitian trader of African and French descent, became the area’s first non-Native resident, the land that includes Chicago was stewarded by the Council of the Three Fires: the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Nations, with many other tribes such as the Fox, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Miami, and Sack residing, trading, and gathering there for generations.²² These

histories are rendered invisible in the ensuing media about the Great Chicago Fire and its ruins. Instead, architectural allusions to civilizations from other parts of the world—notably, those deemed either culturally legitimate (usually European) or ancient (which included ruins from the Global South) by white artists, authors, and audiences—were continually grafted upon the ruins of Chicago through both image and text.

In “The Phantom City: A Moonlight Stroll Through the Shades of Chicago,” a front-page article published in the *Chicago Tribune* on Halloween 1871, the anonymous author poetically describes the city’s streets three weeks after the Great Fire. The essay typifies the romantic lens through which some people viewed the ruins, a perspective preserved in many of the stereographs. At times, the author’s musings are analogous to the process of photographing the ruined city. They even mention stereographs quite early on, describing the “stereoscopic views of shattered walls and fire-eaten stones.”²³ They bemoan the impending disappearance of Chicago’s ruins, fearing that citizens “will forget that this new city, in this new country, has had its ruins, as well as Italy or the East, though ours were once the homes of merchant princes, and theirs of Emperors and Kings.” Throughout the article, the author deploys references to every kind of historic ruined site they can muster, including the ancient city of Palmyra; fire-ravaged Nineveh, which was excavated and plundered by Europeans in the mid-nineteenth century; pre-Columbian sites on the Yucatan Peninsula, such as Chichen Itza; Pompeii and other Roman sites; crumbling English castles; and Egyptian pyramids.

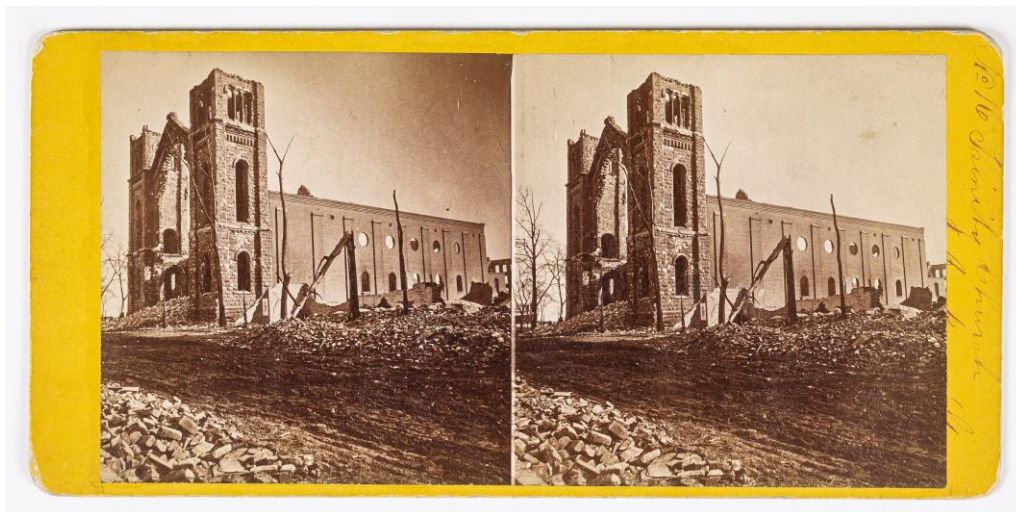


Fig. 6. J. Carbutt, “Trinity Church,” c. 1871. Photographic prints on mount, approx. 3 1/2 x 7 in. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA; photo by Nathan Fiske

Looking upon the ruins in harsh daylight, among the hustle and bustle of clean-up efforts, the author writes, “It is material destruction, and nothing more, that one views.” They continue, “But when serene night comes, all this is changed. These crudities and discrepancies disappear. . . . Ruined wall and shattered masonry are softened and refined by the clear mild light. . . . In this indefinite light, all things are old, and all things are strange. It is no longer Chicago wherein we walk, and the sky above us is clear and starry enough to look upon the Rhine and Arno instead of the Chicago River.” In other words, the author is saying that if one squinted hard enough at night, Chicago’s ruins would become ancient ones. Daylight provides a clear picture, but out of darkness emerges the picturesque, the poetic rendering of the ruin fully developed. The manipulation of light makes this

transformation possible. The manipulation of light is, of course, also the essence of photography, and like the author’s stroll through the city at night, the stereographs of Chicago’s ruins harness an eerie stillness and quietude. The writer continues, “Yonder, burnt and bruised and blackened, stands the church, its peeling organ stilled forever.” Applied to the pictured ruins of Trinity Church, this description becomes quite literal—calling to mind the process of burning and dodging, *burning* being a technique that darkens isolated areas of the photograph (fig. 6). Above the structure, the photographically burned sky casts an especially ominous pall over the physically burned church and its surroundings. If the *Chicago Tribune* author feared losing the ruins and everything they represented, then stereographs seem to be the perfect solution. These photographs that record the ruins in a flattering, historicizing light allowed viewers to traverse these sites and accord to them the awe and wonder that the author felt they deserved, even as the very structures depicted began to disappear.

Utilizing poetic and visual metaphor to apprehend the city’s ruins gave way to the creation of an “Old Chicago,” as if to say that these buildings have always been here or that Chicago and the rest of the United States’ burgeoning metropolises were a natural, self-evident occurrence. The stereographs reveal that a fire consumed not just Chicago’s buildings but the full picture of its history and origins. In essence, they helped construct a narrative of civilization by instrumentalizing destruction and its ruinous remains. Two World’s Fairs (the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 and A Century of Progress, held from 1933 to 1934) paid homage to the Great Chicago Fire, and celebrations on significant anniversaries since the 1871 conflagration used the event to illustrate the city’s phoenixlike resilience. Serving as a springboard for the future, commemorations of the fire helped cement Chicago as the picture of progress. On the occasion of the fire’s 150th anniversary, however, we may choose to return to ruined sites now only inhabitable through the stereoscope. In doing so, we may better understand how these views of destruction aided in the physical and cultural construction of a modern American metropolis.

Notes

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¹ “Special Dispatch to the Times and Chronicle,” *Cincinnati Daily Times*, October 9, 1871.

² The company was known as Field, Leiter & Company in 1871 and lost its six-story building on the northeast corner of State and Washington Streets. In 2005, Macy’s acquired Marshall Field & Company and took over the landmark State Street building designed by Daniel Burnham and built in the early 1900s.

³ Definitive work on the Great Chicago Fire includes Ross Miller, *American Apocalypse: The Great Fire and the Myth of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Karen Sawislak, *Smoldering City: Chicagoans and the Great Fire, 1871–1874* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Carl Smith, *Chicago’s Great Fire* (New York: Grove Atlantic Press, 2021). See also Smith’s website, *The Chicago Fire and the Web of Memory*, a collaboration between the Chicago History Museum and Northwestern University: <https://greatchicagofire.org>.

⁴ “Special Correspondent,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1871.

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- ⁵ References include “Mrs. O’Leary’s Cow,” a children’s song derived from a minstrel song; the title of a Beach Boys instrumental track on the unfinished album *Smile*; the Chicago Fire Football Club; the University of Illinois at Chicago’s athletic team (the Flames); and NBC’s *Chicago Fire*, which began airing in 2012. Additionally, the second of the four red stars on Chicago’s flag represents the Great Fire of 1871.
- ⁶ Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,” *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1859, 746.
- ⁷ Melody Davis, *Women’s Views: The Narrative Stereograph in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2015): 23.
- ⁸ Advertisement (“Excursion to Chicago”), *Jackson (Michigan) Citizen Patriot* (published as *Jackson Daily Citizen*), October 21, 1871.
- ⁹ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 116–36.
- ¹⁰ Smith, *Chicago’s Great Fire*, 205–8.
- ¹¹ Davis, *Women’s Views*, 1–23.
- ¹² Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 116–36.
- ¹³ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 124–25.
- ¹⁴ Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,” 744.
- ¹⁵ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 125.
- ¹⁶ For more on the emergence of “disaster imagery” as a cornerstone of an emerging mass visual culture in the mid-nineteenth century, see Michael Leja, “News Pictures in the Early Years of Mass Visual Culture in New York: Lithographs and the Penny Press,” in *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of the News*, ed. Vanessa Schwartz and Jason Hill (New York: Routledge, 2015), 146–53.
- ¹⁷ Megan Kate Nelson, *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).
- ¹⁸ Miles Orvell, *Empire of Ruins: American Culture, Photography, and the Spectacle of Destruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021): 1–42; Susan Stewart, *The Ruins Lesson: Meaning and Material in Western Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).
- ¹⁹ *Stoughton Sentinel* (Stoughton, Massachusetts), October 21, 1871. Stoughton is less than twenty miles south of Boston—a city that would experience its own major fire in November 1872, almost exactly a year after Chicago. The Great Boston Fire resulted in a corpus of ruin photography similar to that of the Great Chicago Fire, ranging from stereographs to multiplate panoramas by notable photographers such as John Adams Whipple and James Wallace Black.
- ²⁰ Advertisement for Lovejoy & Foster, *Farmer’s Cabinet*, February 7, 1872.
- ²¹ It is worth noting that as this imagery was being produced and as journalists and others were writing about Chicago as if it were an old European city, countries in Europe were in the midst of unifying into larger nations, with Italy, for example, completing its unification the very same year as the Chicago Fire. In some ways, the modern unification movement was at odds with the preservation of an “olden time” ethos as visualized by ruins.
- ²² In popular accounts of the fire, the only hints of an Indigenous presence in Chicago’s history generally emerge alongside mention of Fort Dearborn, which coincidentally had burned twice before. During the Battle of Fort Dearborn in 1812, Potawatomi striving to preserve their land from European-American encroachment set it ablaze. The fort was rebuilt, but most of it burned again in another fire in 1857, and the Great Fire of 1871 consumed its remnants. For more, see Ann Durkin Keating, *Rising Up from Indian Country: The Battle of Fort Dearborn and the Birth of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); and John N. Low, *Imprints: The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians and the City of Chicago* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016).

²³ "The Phantom City: A Moonlight Stroll Through the Shades of Chicago," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 31, 1871. The author remains unknown, but it could have been written by Horace White, editor of the newspaper at the time, or possibly James T. Sheahan or George T. Upton, who reprinted the second half of the essay in their 1872 book *The Great Conflagration* as "Chicago by Moonlight." The same excerpt was also featured in an issue of *Every Saturday*, an illustrated weekly printed in Boston, about a month after it appeared in the *Tribune*. My thanks to Carl Smith for his insights on this article's authorship.