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THE FIRE SHOW

A MARVELOUS AND THRILLING SPECTACLE

White City Amusement Park, 63rd Street and South Parkway, Chicago, IL (1905)

The greatest and most elaborate attraction at White City is undoubtedly the Fire Show. This mammoth spectacle of burning buildings and dashing fire departments in action is one which will stir the pulses of even the most sluggish. This great feature is located in the extreme southern part of the grounds, and the entrance is on the southeast corner of the oblong formed by the "Board Walk." This show is given on a scale of grandeur that is marvelous. The grandstand for the audience alone seats more than fifteen hundred persons.



Front of Fire Show Grand Stand



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From the grandstand the audience is given a view of three blocks of business houses such as may be seen in any part of a metropolitan city. There are dry goods stores, department stores and all other kinds of stores in the scene. Many of the spectators will quickly recognize many of the names displayed on the sign boards in front of the various business places.

The scene is one typical of any city on a busy day. Wagons and cabs trot through the streets, automobiles dash in and out among the teams, trolley cars speed along regulation tracks, and hundreds of pedestrians' crowd on the sidewalks in the pursuit of their business. Women stop in at the stores to purchase goods, the men stop at cigar stands and purchase tobacco, and the view is one of life and action. Two boys get into a fight and spectators' crowd about them to witness the conflict, when a patrol wagon dashes up and the offenders are arrested.



Scene in the Fire Show



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Suddenly, without a moment's warning, the cry of "Fire!" comes from the hotel which stands on the corner of the street. The scene quickly changes. The terrified occupants of the hotel crowd to the windows and scream for help. The crowds on the streets run to watch the structure burn, and are driven back by the police just as the engines arrive. Fire lines are stretched, the hose is coupled to the hydrants, and the life-nets are spread barely in time to catch the apparently frenzied men and women as they leap from the topmost stories of the structure. The firemen perform wonderful feats of agility as they scale up the walls with their pompier ladders [a hook ladder] and slide down ropes with fainting women in their arms.

After a hard battle all the occupants of the hotel are rescued, and then the work of fighting the fire is begun. The hose shoots strong streams of water into the blazing building and the long extension ladder creeps slowly into place. The flames seem for a time as if they would defeat the brave efforts of the firemen to extinguish them. But finally, after a furious battle with the flames, the firemen are victorious and the blaze is subdued. And the audience disperses.

That this spectacle is presented on a mammoth scale is readily understood when it is known that it requires three complete fire companies to produce this show, including an extension ladder and chief's wagon; over two hundred and fifty people are used to give the street scene the proper life and bustle; five cabs and two automobiles dash through the streets, and fourteen horses are used. The exhibition is most lifelike and intensely realistic; the audience frequently forgets that it is only a spectacle that they are watching, and not a real conflagration, and are aroused to a high pitch of excitement. This show cost more than \$20,000 to install and complete, and is one of the finest shows of its kind in the world, even exceeding the Hale's Fire Fighters, which attained so much popularity at St. Louis last year. Chief West, who was one of the famous Kansas City firemen who went to Europe and taught the foreigners how to handle engines, is the leader of the Fire Department at White City.