



Above: Fire at Dumbrell's (Arthur Cocks & Co.), Bourke Street, 1927. Photographer unknown.
Source: Fire Services Museum

Below: A wall of water running at about 6 knots down Elizabeth Street, 1972. Photographer Neville Bowler.
Source: The Age Newspaper





Fire at Stewart Dawson's, Elizabeth St, opposite the GPO, 1927. Photographer unknown. Source: Fire Services Museum

19. Facades of Crawford's and Sargood's after the Great Fire 1897
Photograph Unknown
Source: Fire Services Museum
20. Fire at Friedman's Building, corner of Swanston St and Queensberry St, Carlton 1927
Photograph Unknown
Source: Fire Services Museum
21. Fire at Paynes Bon Marche department store 1929
Photograph Unknown
Source: Fire Services Museum
22. Fire at Stewart Dawson's, corner of Elizabeth St and Bourke St 1927
Photograph Unknown
Source: Fire Services Museum
23. Great Fire of Melbourne 1897
Photograph Unknown
Source: Fire Services Museum
24. Rescued by MFB during the fire at State Theatre 1957
Photograph Unknown
Source: Fire Services Museum
25. Rescued by MFB during the fire at Stewart Dawson's, corner of Elizabeth St and Bourke St 1927
Photograph Unknown
Source: Fire Services Museum
26. Pedestrian stranded on a bench as water started roaring down Elizabeth St during city floods 1972
Photograph Neville Bowler
Source: The Age Newspaper
27. Flood of Yarra River: Panoramic view of flooded buildings in unidentified street running into the river, Richmond 1891
Photograph Webb & Webb
Source: Royal Historical Society of Victoria
28. Flood of Yarra River: Panoramic view of Punt Rd, Richmond looking south to railway bridge 1891
Photograph Webb & Webb
Source: Royal Historical Society of Victoria
29. Flood of Yarra River: Panoramic view of River St, South Yarra 1891
Photograph Webb & Webb
Source: Royal Historical Society of Victoria
30. Great Flood of River Yarra at Hawthorn Bridge 1891
Photograph Unknown
Source: Royal Historical Society of Victoria
31. The 'Flood', Elizabeth St (corner of Collins St) 1862
Photograph Unknown
Source: Royal Historical Society of Victoria

FIRE & FLOOD IN THE HEART OF MELBOURNE

City Gallery

September 5 - November 1, 2003



Brought to you by  City of Melbourne

FIRE & FLOOD

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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 Unknown
Source: City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection
3. Burnt out auditorium, Regent Theatre 1945
Photograph Unknown
Source: City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection
4. Burning of the Bijou Theatre 1889
Wood engraving Unknown
Source: State Library of Victoria
5. Destruction by fire of the Duke of Edinburgh Theatre, Bourke St 1871
Engraving Oswald Rose Campbell
Source: State Library of Victoria
6. Destructive fire at Moore's Timber Yard, City Rd, Melbourne 1893
Wood engraving Unknown
Source: State Library of Victoria
7. Fink's Building, Melbourne, during the Great Fire 1897
Photograph Unknown
Source: State Library of Victoria
8. Great Fire at Messrs Connell, Watson and Hogarth's Bond, Flinders Lane, Melbourne 1873
Wood engraving Unknown
Source: State Library of Victoria
9. Great fire in Collins St: Sketched from the roof of the Bohemian Club 1889
Wood engraving Unknown
Source: State Library of Victoria
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 Unknown
Source: State Library of Victoria
13. The Floods (Flinders St and the Yarra) 1880
Wood engraving Julian Rossi Ashton
Source: State Library of Victoria
14. The Floods (St Kilda Rd) 1880
Wood engraving Julian Rossi Ashton
Source: State Library of Victoria
15. The Great Fire of Melbourne, Fink's Skyscraper building totally destroyed 1897
Photograph Charles Rudd
Source: State Library of Victoria
16. The recent floods 1881
Wood engraving Unknown
Source: State Library of Victoria
17. Views of the Great Flood (Cremorne St, Richmond) 1891
Photomechanical print Paul and Gerald Turner and Webb & Webb
Source: State Library of Victoria
18. Views of the Great Flood (Toorak Rd, Toorak) 1891
Photomechanical print Paul and Gerald Turner and Webb & Webb
Source: State Library of Victoria

Fire danger was never far from the early settler's mind. Prior to 1891, central Melbourne was without a state fire brigade and entirely dependent upon water to be carried from the Yarra by means of a manual pump and water carts.

The Melbourne Fire and 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. Not 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 at the Melbourne Town Hall.

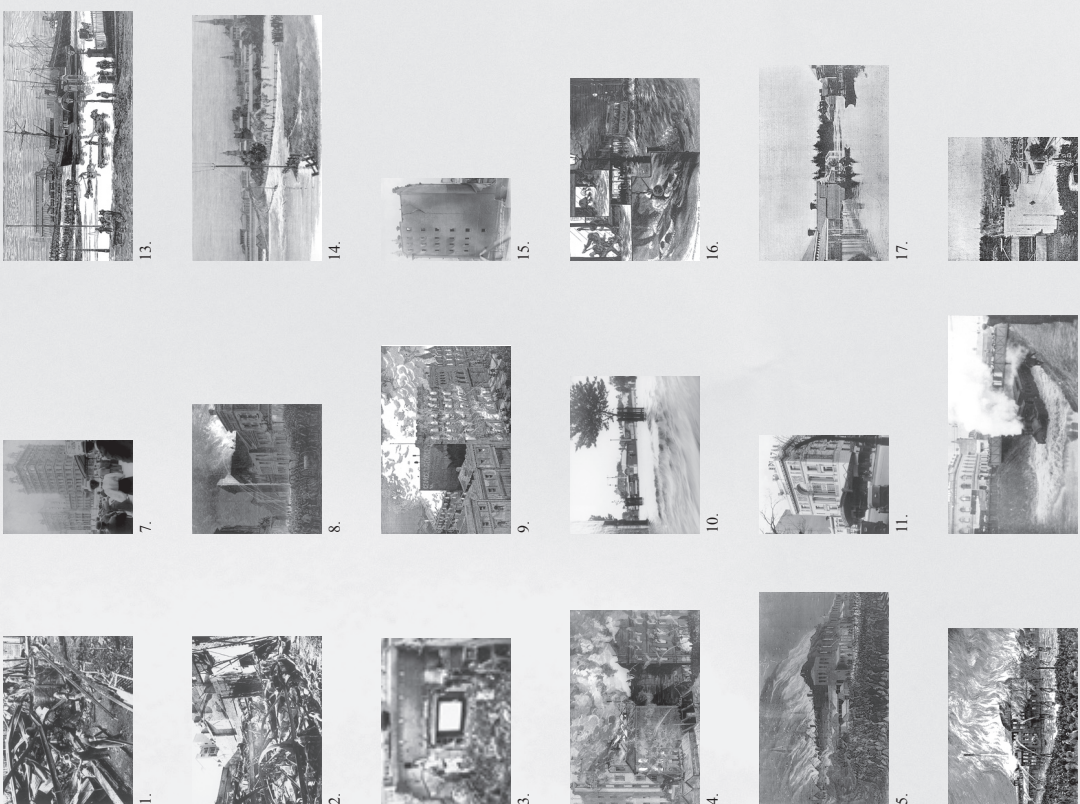
In 1893, a block of land on Eastern Hill with frontages to Gisborne Street and Victoria Parade became the Brigade's present headquarters, featuring a 150-foot watchtower.

Sources: Shaw, ED (1939). "The Early History of the Melbourne Fire Brigade". *The Victorian Historical Magazine*. Vol. XVIII. Newman, W.H. (1889). *Melbourne: Biography of a City*. Hill of Content, Melbourne.

FLOOD

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The lack of early land-use planning meant that, for half a century, Melbourne was menaced by disastrous floods. In the 1830s, right up until a sewerage system was built more than 60 years later, most establishments relied upon cesspits into which bedpans and other household refuse were emptied.

Enough waste escaped from pits in these early years to make Williams Creek, which flowed along Elizabeth Street, a filthy watercourse that discharged into the Yarra, affecting the town's drinking water and causing frequent epidemics of dysentery and typhoid. A similar stream, the Ensoec, ran from the junction of William and Flinders Streets.

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

Michael Cashmore, rowed 'overland' in 1842 for four miles between Footscray and the Royal Highlander hotel in Flinders Street, where he tied up at the bar for refreshments.

The Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers flooded periodically, inundating the low-land houses and factories. Elizabeth Street was 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. Swanston Street on the one hand, and Elizabeth Street on the other, were complete rivers running in volumes, and with a velocity that was starting to look at, and perfectly impossible to cross with safety on foot.

...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 frantically on its bosom. I saw a fine horse—one of a wagon team—drowned beyond the possibility of aid, at the crossing in front of the Post-office...

Sources: Newman, W.H. (1885). *Melbourne: Biography of a City*. Hill of Content, Melbourne. Kelly, W. (1859). *Life in Victoria*, vol 1.