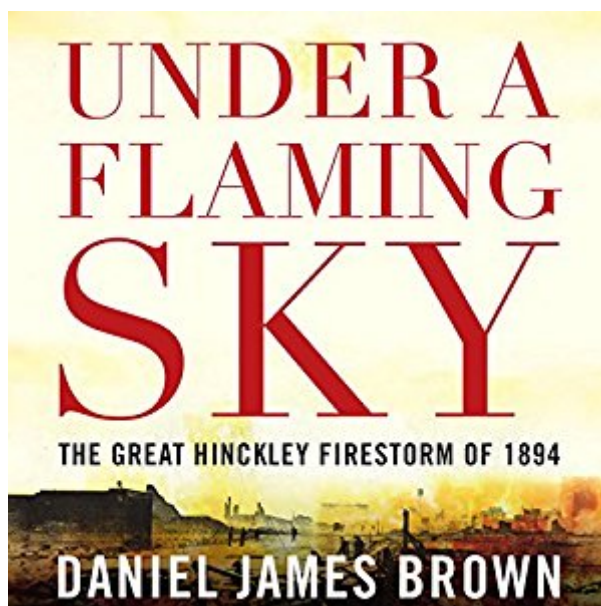


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Under A Flaming Sky: The Great Hinckley Firestorm Of 1894



Synopsis

On September 1, 1894, two forest fires converged on the town of Hinckley, Minnesota, trapping over 2,000 people. Daniel J. Brown recounts the events surrounding the fire in the first and only book to chronicle the dramatic story that unfolded. On September 1, 1894, two forest fires converged on the town of Hinckley, Minnesota, trapping over 2,000 people. Daniel J. Brown recounts the events surrounding the fire in the first and only book to chronicle the dramatic story that unfolded. Whereas Oregon's famous "Biscuit" fire in 2002 burned 350,000 acres in one week, the Hinckley fire did the same damage in five hours. The fire created its own weather, including hurricane-strength winds, bubbles of plasmalike glowing gas, and 200-foot-tall flames. In some instances "fire whirls", or tornadoes of fire, danced out from the main body of the fire to knock down buildings and carry flaming debris into the sky. Temperatures reached 1,600 degrees Fahrenheit - the melting point of steel. As the fire surrounded the town, two railroads became the only means of escape. Two trains ran the gauntlet of fire. One train caught on fire from one end to the other. The heroic young African American porter ran up and down the length of the train, reassuring the passengers even as the flames tore at their clothes. On the other train, the engineer refused to back his locomotive out of town until the last possible minute of escape. In all, more than 400 people died, leading to a revolution in forestry management practices and federal agencies that monitor and fight wildfires today. Author Daniel Brown has woven together numerous survivors' stories, historical sources, and interviews with forest fire experts in a gripping narrative that tells the fascinating story of one of North America's most devastating fires and how it changed the nation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I read this book, lent it to someone, never saw it again and just bought and re read it. It is so astonishing that I followed my husband around all Saturday, reading bits to him while he tried to mow, clean the truck and pay bills. He was even interested after awhile, even though the subject matter is so grim. Just the facts about how people react to disasters that take place during their daily life, leading them to make deadly mistakes because the emergency doesn't fit into their "script", is worth the price of the book right there. These small towns, with no way to communicate with each other, no experience in dealing with a disastrous fire of the size it became, and the heroism shown by a few that risked their lives is heartstopping. I was mostly shocked by the chapter that deals with the train the engineer roared through the fire, attempting to get people out of their burning towns to uncertain safety. Even though he took a risk in stopping the train in each small town, and the entire train was partly on fire, with all the passengers screaming and imploring people to get on and save their own lives, ALL of the townspeople in each place they halted, only stared at them and refused to board!! I found myself almost pulling my hair out!! Every single one of those people that decided not to board the train burned alive in a conflagration too nightmarish to think about. The description of people and how they deal with something that seems completely impossible is so important i think everyone should read it. Even though it happened at the same time as the great Chicago Fire, the subject is still completely relevant today, and the reactions of the average person to a fire is much the same in modern times. During the great Bradford Stadium fire in England, many people died because they would not react to a scorching explosion of flames right under their feet!!!

This wasn't a forest fire as much as an atomic bomb scale of event. I toured the museum in Hinckley the last time I was back in Minnesota. They have a great dvd they show that they put together but sadly won't produce it and offer for sale. There were many survivors and the museum has a 3 ring binder with their stories. Many of course are the same story pretty much with the notable exception of the locomotive engineers. Many books are simply a compilation of those many stories but this book puts them all together in a fascinating and exciting read without disrespecting anyone's experience. I was born in 1951 in MN and raised there. My family is from the Moose Lake area where there was another, larger fire in 1918. The Hinckley fire of 1894 and that fire were the two disasters that finally prompted MN to pass forestry regulations with teeth in them. Sadly, much of the soil in that east central part of the state had been destroyed by that time. To this day the native rocky soil will support shallow root crops like alfalfa but the white pine forests will never come back because the atomic bomb level of heat has sterilized the earth that took thousands of years to

develop. If you can imagine living in that part of the country where they only sounds were nature and steam powered machine sounds. One hot late summer day the first indication you get of danger is a sound like Niagra falls. It's almost impossible to image the scale of this type of heat but the book brings it to life. If you are prone to nightmares you might want to be careful with this book. All true.

I read this book quite a while back so the details have faded, but I found it to be a very enjoyable read. I like to have a variety of books on the shelf to choose from, and I bought this for an entertaining, easy read. I had never heard the story before so it was all new to me and am now surprised it isn't more well known. The story moves fast and gives you insight into the ordinary lives of the people involved. He did a good job of piecing together the accounts into a very fluid story. It really helps you to appreciate the benefits of living in the modern age where we never even consider the threats people back then faced. Having lived most of my life in the Southeast, I've never had much concern over wild fires. But after reading this I went out and did a quick survey of my property to identify any threats that could be removed. I'm a Certified Wildland Firefighter and have experience with controlled burns, but this book gave me a whole new appreciation for how terrifying an out of control fire can be. I recommend this book simply because you'll find yourself thankful at the end and glad to have the protection that they were missing.

I have read this book 3 times now. The first two times were back to back. I've been interested in the Hinckley fire since I read an account as a teenager. After loving Boys in the Boat I noticed that Daniel Brown had also written about Hinckely and put that book on my "to read" list. I loved it! I've visited the area and driven through the towns in the book. I've gone to the museum and walked around Hinckley today using his vivid descriptions as anchors. If you like history, Minnesota history in particular, or if you are interested in wildfires or disasters in general you'll like this book. Since reading it I've gone on to read some of the books the author recommends about other wildfires in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

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