The Little Fire Engine that Could – but Did It?[1]

The first fire alarm rang out about 7:15 Saturday evening. Then another and another. The small fire spread rapidly and before it was controlled all of Boston's firemen, and hundreds from surrounding towns, converged at Boston's wharf area to battle the blaze. When it was finally snuffed out Sunday afternoon initial estimates of the damage reached $250 million, rivaling the great Chicago fire of the previous year.[2] Such was the Boston fire of 9 November 1872.

The story

Some of the first automobiles in the United States were "steamers" which were powered by steam produced from a boiler that burned kerosene. Today's internal combustion engine eventually replaced the steamers. George Woodbury, an author, purchased and restored a Stanley Steamer automobile in the 1940s. When Woodbury needed help with the boiler he visited what was once the Amoskeag Machine Shop in Manchester, New Hampshire. This is where he heard the handed-down story of the first New England-built self-propelled steam-powered fire engine that raced from Manchester to Boston to fight the 1872 fire.[3]

Nehemiah Bean worked for the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company in Manchester. The company started as a textile mill in 1831 and later added a machine shop that built locomotives and fire engines. In 1859 Bean built a new version of the steam fire engine which was transported to fires using horses or man power. The engine was a success and orders poured in from across the United States and from around the world. Bean then constructed a five-ton self-propelled version of the fire engine in 1867. Another success and more global orders.[4]

The story as told to Woodbury began the evening of the fire. Homer Maxwell, a fourteen-year-old lad, was cleaning up the Amoskeag Machine Shop after work. Bean and Joel Bemis, a master mechanic, rushed into the shop, said there was a big fire in Boston and they were going down to help. Bean told Homer to find Tim Driscoll and bring him to the shop. When Homer returned with Driscoll, Bean and Beamis had *Vesuvius 1*, the very first self-propelled steam fire engine, fired up and ready to go. Homer and Driscoll jumped on and the engine rumbled out of the shop.

They traveled down the east side of the Merrimack River to Hudson, crossed over (and damaged) the Taylor Falls bridge into Nashua, found the railroad yard and loaded up more coal and water for the journey. They stopped again for fuel at Lowell, Massachusetts. "A church clock was striking midnight" when they reached Boston. Sixty

---

[1] The author thanks Helen Schatvet Ullmann, CG, FASG for reviewing the first draft.
[2] "Devastation," *The Boston Daily Globe*, 11 November 1872, p. 1, col. 4-7; p. 4, col. 2-3; p. 8, col. 5-7.
[3] George Woodbury, *The Story of a Stanley Steamer* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1950), 74-86.
[4] George Waldo Brown, compiler, *The Amoskeag Manufacturing Co. of Manchester, New Hampshire, A History* (Manchester: Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, 1915), 78-80.

miles in five hours – not bad. They drove from street to street fighting the fire wherever they could. Word came that an old wooden church was about to catch fire and if that happened the flames would jump across Washington Street and spread into the residential section. They rushed *Vesuvius I* to the church, focused the engine's four hose lines on the old structure and kept it safe. The entire fire in the wharf area was surrounded and controlled by dawn on Sunday, but the *Vesuvius 1* crew did not stop and rest until noon. Boston was saved.

Is this story accurate? Was such a journey possible two decades before automobiles were on the roads? There are many accurate recordings of amazing events occurring during catastrophic times. Perhaps this is one of those events.

Printed Sources

A history of the city of Manchester notes that the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company built New England's first self-propelled steam fire engine in 1867: engine number 263. During the 1872 fire, "the" horseless engine (a name or engine number is not specified) was sent – via train – to Boston, accompanied by several shop men and citizens. Four of their names are recorded but do not include any of the four individuals from above.[5]

The history of the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company states that one of its self-propellers was sent to the Boston fire and was credited with keeping the fire from crossing Washington Street. This machine's name, engine number, and town of origin are not specified.[6]

In the book *Boston on Fire* is a statement that several self-propelled "Hunneman" steamers arrived in Boston on special trains to help fight the fire. The *Kearsarge 3* from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, is credited with saving the Old South Meeting House, thus stopping the fire at Washington Street.[7] William C. Hunneman manufactured steam fire engines in Boston, but none were self-propelled and none bore the name of *Vesuvius* or *Kearsarge*.[8] The author of *Boston on Fire* may have been more familiar with the Hunneman name and applied it to all the engines that responded to Boston's call for help.

The *History of the Boston Fire Department* states the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company sent a self-propeller to Boston during the 1872 fire. Boston later purchased this engine but "the information regarding this engine is very sketchy and unreliable." Earlier, in 1867, Amoskeag had sent a self-propeller to Boston for a demonstration which was successful.[9]

---

[5] L. Ashton Thorp, *Manchester of Yesterday* (Manchester, N.H.: Granite State Press, 1939), 206-209.
[6] Browne, *The Amoskeag Manufacturing Co*., 80.
[7] Stephanie Schorow, *Boston on Fire, A History of Fires and Firefighting in Boston* (Beverly, Mass.: Commonwealth Editions, 2003), 80, 92.
[8] Edward R. Tufts, *Hunneman's Amazing Fire Engines* (New Albany, Indiana: Fire Buff House Publishers, 1995), 73-131.
[9] William Werner, *History of the Boston Fire Department and Boston Fire Alarm System, January 1, 1859 through December 31, 1973* (Boston: The Boston Sparks Association, Inc., 1974), 10, 4-5.

The Manchester Historic Association published a bulletin about the Amoskeag steamers which stated that a self-propelled unit was sent to Boston during the fire and was instrumental "in keeping the flames from crossing Washington Street."[10] A catalog of the steamers indicates that number 263 was a self-propeller, no name was assigned to it, and it was delivered to Boston in November 1872; how it was delivered to Boston was not stated.[11]

An investigation into the cause of the fire, the sounding of the alarms, and the fire fighting techniques began after the catastrophe. Many witnesses testified and submitted evidence about the events. A search of this 662-page report revealed no mention of the names Tim Driscoll, Joel Bemis, and Homer Maxwell. A transcript of a letter near the end of the report verifies that a self-propeller was sent from Manchester to Boston. The letter is a response from E. A. Shaw (of the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company) to the Hon. Thos. Russell of Boston. Apparently, Russell had sent a letter to Mr. (Nehemiah) Bean inquiring about the self-propeller. Mr. Shaw's response does not state how the fire engine traveled from Manchester to Boston.[12]

Shortly after 8:00 p.m. the night of the fire, Boston Fire Department's Chief Engineer ordered a courier to request help, via telegraph, from every town within fifty miles. The courier dashed off but returned and stated the telegraph offices were closed. The chief engineer then instructed him to go to Worcester (about thirty-five miles east) to request help from Worcester's superintendent.[13] With the telegraph offices closed, appeals for help were slow to reach outlying cities and towns.

The commissioners' report was further examined for all entries of the words New Hampshire, Manchester, Portsmouth, Kearsarge, Washington Street, and self-propeller. None of these entries referred to a self-propeller traveling the roads to Boston. A table in the report shows the names of the towns that responded to the alarm and the equipment each town sent to Boston. Two New Hampshire cities answered the call for help: Portsmouth sent one engine and Manchester sent two engines.[14]

One book, *General Alarm*, actually states a self-propeller named *Vesuvius* was sent by the Amoskeag Company to Boston – on a railroad flatcar. The author cautions the reader to be wary of a story, related by a "lifelong Amoskeag employee," about the *Vesuvius* traveling to Boston over the roads. The author claims to have investigated the story and

---

[10] *Special Bulletin No. 1, The Famous Amoskeag Steamers from Manchester, New Hampshire* (Manchester: The Manchester Historic Association, n.d.).
[11] *Amoskeag Steam Fire Engines and Hose Carriages Manufactured by the Manchester Locomotive Works, Manchester, N.H., U.S.A.* (Manchester: The John B. Clarke Co., 1899), 39.
[12] *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Investigate the Cause and Management of the Great Fire in Boston* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1873), 652; digital images, University of Michigan (http://quad.lib.umich.edu/cgi/text/text-idx?c+moa;idno=AAR8660 : accessed 2 December 2009).
[13] Ibid., 86.
[14] Ibid., 648.

that it has no merit. He does not name any of the *Vesuvius* riders or the storyteller, but attributes the saving of the Old South Church to *Kearsarge 3* from Portsmouth.[15]

The participants

i) Nehemiah Bean's existence is well documented. The Manchester and Amoskeag history books, the commissioners' report, and Bean's 1896 obituary (which describes his life in some detail)[16] all relate that he worked for the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company. All except the commissioners' report state he invented New England's first self-propelled steam fire engine. But none of these sources refer to a road trip from Manchester to Boston in a self-propeller.

ii) Joel Bemis does not appear in the 1871 or 1873 Manchester city directories,[17] or in the 1870 and 1880 New Hampshire censuses.[18] New Hampshire vital records do not contain a death record for him.[19] It is possible he was living with someone and, therefore, not recorded in the directories; and he could have died out of state. His absence from the two enumerations is puzzling, unless he worked at Amoskeag only between 1870 and 1880.

iii) Tim Driscoll is absent from the 1871 Manchester directory but present in the 1873 edition.[20] He does not appear in the 1870 Manchester census,[21] but a Timothy Driscoll, age 35, laborer, turns up in Manchester in 1880.[22] A 1904 death record shows a Timothy Driscoll, 57, mill operative, born in Ireland in 1847, died in Manchester on January 6.[23] In the story, Homer refers to Tim as an Irishman. Tim's obituary also indicates he was born in Ireland but does not mention his profession.[24] This 1904 decedent could be the person in Homer's story.

---

[15] Charles F. Haywood, *General Alarm, A Dramatic Account of Fires and Fire-fighting in America* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1967), 90-93.
[16] "Died of Apoplexy," obituary, *The Manchester (New Hampshire) Union*, 21 July 1896, p. 5, col. 3.
[17] *The Manchester Directory for 1871* (Manchester: William H. Fisk, 1871), 26; also subsequent year by the same title: (1873) 36.
[18] 1870 U.S. census, New Hampshire, population schedule; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (http://www.ancestry.com : accessed 11 December 2009); citing NARA microfilm publication M593. 1880 U.S. census, New Hampshire, population schedule; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (http://www.ancestry.com : accessed 11 December 2009); citing NARA microfilm publication T9.
[19] Deaths before 1901, box 931; deaths, 1910-1937, box 1095; New Hampshire Division of Vital Records, Concord.
[20] *The Manchester Directory for 1871* (Manchester: William H. Fisk, 1871), 64; also subsequent year by the same title: (1873) 79.
[21] 1870 U.S. census, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire, population schedule, Manchester; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (http://www.ancestry.com : accessed 11 December 2009); citing NARA microfilm publication M593, roll 843.
[22] 1880 U.S. census, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire, population schedule, Manchester, Enumeration District [ED] 133, p. 24 (penned), dwelling 93, family 224, Timothy Driscoll; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (http://www.ancestry.com : accessed 11 December 2009); citing NARA microfilm publication T9, roll 763.
[23] Deaths, 1901-1937, box 1125, Timothy Driscoll death, 1904; N.H. Div. of Vital Records.
[24] "Timothy Driscoll," obituary, *The Manchester (New Hampshire) Union*, 7 January 1904, p. 4, col. 7.

iv) Homer Maxwell (since he was a child) does not appear in the 1871 and 1873 Manchester directories;[25] nor does he appear in the New Hampshire vital records.[26] Homer could be a middle name or a nickname. He claims to have been fourteen when the fire occurred, which yields a birth year of about 1858. Birth records show an unnamed male Maxwell born on 27 January 1857 at Nelson, N.H., to Joseph and Emily Maxwell.[27] This family does not appear in the 1870 and 1880 New Hampshire enumerations.[28] A Homer Maxwell does not show up in the 1880-1930 New Hampshire censuses.[29] Death records show a William H. Maxwell, born 1864 at New Brunswick, Canada; occupation: tire business; died at Manchester in 1934.[30] William's obituary does not indicate he ever worked at the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company.[31] His 1864 birth year indicates he was eight when the fire occurred. Could this be Homer?

The Amoskeag Manufacturing Company (AMC) gave many of its records to the Manchester Historic Association. The AMC Employee Register does not contain the names of Joel Bemis, Tim Driscoll, or Homer Maxwell between 1854 and 1873.[32]

Newspapers

A Manchester to Boston trip in the first self-propelled steam fire engine, especially during a calamity, is definitely a newsworthy event. A Portsmouth, New Hampshire, paper talks about their steamer, *Kearsarge #3*, arriving in Boston Sunday morning on a special train and credit it with saving the Old South Church.[33]

Since the *Vesuvius 1* is said to have passed through Nashua and damaged the Taylor Falls Bridge, the local paper should recount the adventure. The paper had but one short paragraph about the Manchester firemen: They arrived in Boston at five o'clock [a.m.?] on Sunday with two steamers, one a self-propeller which "worked handy."[34] A Concord, N.H., newspaper did not carry any data about the journey.[35]

---

[25] *The Manchester Directory for 1871* (Manchester: William H. Fisk, 1871), 124; also subsequent year by the same title: (1873) 147.
[26] Births before 1901, box 184; marriages before 1901, box 693; deaths before 1901, box 1027; deaths 1901-1937, box 1199; deaths 1938-1947, box 1299; deaths 1948-1957, database; N.H. Div. of Vital Records.
[27] Births before 1901, box 184, male Maxwell birth, 1857; N.H. Div. of Vital Records.
[28] 1870 and 1880 censuses [note 18].
[29] 1880-1930 U.S. census, New Hampshire, population schedule; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (http://www.ancestry.com : accessed 11 December 2009).
[30] Deaths, 1901-1937, box 1188, William H. Maxwell death, 1934; N.H. Div. of Vital Records.
[31] "W. H. Maxwell, 69, taken by death," obituary, *The Manchester (New Hampshire) Union*, 25 May 1934, p. 8, col. 6.
[32] Amoskeag Manufacturing Company Employee Register, 1854-1878, Amoskeag book 201; Manchester Historic Association, Manchester, N.H.
[33] "The Great Conflagration," *The Portsmouth (New Hampshire) Journal*, 16 November 1872, p. 2, col. 5 and 6; also, p. 2, col. 8.
[34] "Manchester Firemen in Boston," *Nashua (New Hampshire) Gazette*, 21 November 1872, p. 4, col. 2.
[35] *The Daily Patriot*, Concord, New Hampshire, 11-18 November 1872 editions.

The Boston papers naturally chronicled the fire in great detail. A Portsmouth steamer, which had arrived Sunday at five a.m., was stationed at the corner of Washington and Milk Streets – the location of the Old South Church. Damages to each street were described. But not a word about a self-propeller dashing into the city at the stroke of midnight and battling the blaze throughout the night.[36] On the one-hundredth anniversary of the fire, the *Boston Sunday Globe* included an insert that recounted the blaze. It tells of Manchester sending a special train with two self-propellers, and of Portsmouth dispatching the self-propeller *Kearsarge #3* on a 3:00 a.m. Sunday train. The insert gave a full page treatment to the saving of the "Old South" by the *Kearsarge #3*.[37]

The Manchester papers should be replete with the story. The *Manchester Daily Union* states help was requested at one o'clock (a.m.?) on Sunday and by two o'clock men and machines were on the way. All of the men returned Monday morning, except for those who remained with the two fire engines that were sent.[38] Two other papers, the *Daily Mirror and American* and the *Mirror and Farmer*, give a different timeline of Manchester's assistance. Both state the city received word of the fire at 9:30 Sunday morning; a hose carriage and two steamers, one a self-propeller, were loaded on a train; the train left about two o'clock and arrived in Boston at five o'clock in the afternoon. This timeline is twelve hours later than all other reports. Manchester's self-propeller was stationed in front of Jordan, Marsh & Co.'s large store near Washington Street. It remained there and kept the establishment safe.[39] The *Mirror and Farmer* reports that Portsmouth's *Kearsarge* arrived in Boston about 5:00 a.m. on Sunday and was instrumental in saving the Old South Church.[40]

Revisiting the story

When Homer told the *Vesuvius* story he claimed the wheels were six feet tall. None of the available pictures or photos of the steam engines show wheels larger than about four or five feet. When wheel size was recorded in AMC's specification book, the forward wheels measured four to four-and-one-half feet, and the rear wheels were five to five-and-one-half feet tall.[41] To a fourteen-year-old the wheels may have looked six feet tall.

On that Saturday night when Bean burst into the shop, he told Homer word of the fire had "just come over the wire down at the depot." According to the story, the *Vesuvius* left the shop about 7:00 p.m. Boston's Chief Engineer did not send a messenger to telegraph for help until after 8:00 p.m., and due to telegraph problems word did not reach outlying towns until hours later.

---

[36] *The Boston Daily Globe*, 11-17 November 1872 editions. Also, *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 11-17 November 1872 editions. The Portsmouth steamer article: "Washington Street," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 11 November 1872, p. 1, col. 7.
[37] "The Great Boston Fire · 1872. A Disaster with a Villain: Old-Style Politics," insert, *Boston Sunday Globe*, 12 November 1972, p. 20, col. 2; p. 35.
[38] "The Manchester Boys," *Manchester (New Hampshire) Daily Union*, 11 November 1872, p. 3, col. 1.
[39] *Mirror and Farmer*, Manchester, New Hampshire, 16 November 1872, p. 5, col. 4. Also, *Daily Mirror and American*, Manchester, New Hampshire, 11 November 1872, p. 4, col. 1 and 2.
[40] *Mirror and Farmer*, Manchester, New Hampshire, 16 November 1872, p. 5, col. 1.
[41] Amoskeag Steam Fire Engine Specifications, 1857-1877, box 64; Manchester Hist. Assoc.

Bean told Homer to look for Tim Driscoll at "Hogan's on Central Street." Homer found Tim there "with his belly to the bar." This suggests Hogan's was an establishment rather than a private residence. The 1871 and 1873 Manchester city directories do not show a drinking/dining establishment containing the name "Hogan."[42] There were only two residents named Hogan: William in 1871 was a cigar maker working on Elm Street, boarding at 117 Amoskeag Corporation;[43] Michael in 1873 was a laborer with no residence listed.[44] Neither appears to have had a drinking/dining establishment.

When *Vesuvius* crossed Taylor Falls Bridge, connecting Hudson and Nashua, the eight-ton steamer "busted up more than half" of the loose planking. The 1872 and 1873 annual reports for the two towns show only routine maintenance on the bridge.[45] The Manchester annual reports do not show any payments to repair the bridge.[46] Available town record books do not show the selectmen/aldermen requesting additional funds to repair the bridge. Nashua citizens made claims to their aldermen for property damages due to road grading and due to Nashua firemen responding to Nashua fires. Since these small claims were recorded, it seems likely that a large claim for bridge damage would have been noted.[47]

Between Lowell and Boston there was a stretch of road that ran near the railroad tracks. At this point, so the story goes, the steamer caught up to and passed a "freight train loaded with men and fire engines" headed for Boston. The locomotive was the *General Slocum* which they (AMC) "had built the year before." Two sources state the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company sold its locomotive business in 1859 to Manchester Locomotive Works.[48] Available records do not contain any data about the *General Slocum*.[49] Other AMC records do not contain data about *Vesuvius*' trip.[50]

---

[42] *The Manchester Directory for 1871* (Manchester: William H. Fisk, 1871), business section under the headings of Ale & Porter, Eating Houses, Hotels, Liquors, Restaurants, and Wines; also subsequent year by the same title: (1873).
[43] *The Manchester Directory for 1871* (Manchester: William H. Fisk, 1871), 99.
[44] *The Manchester Directory for 1873* (Manchester: William H. Fisk, 1873), 119.
[45] *Reports of the Selectmen, Treasurer, and School Committee of the Town of Hudson for the year ending March 1, 1873* (Nashua: M. V. B. Greene, 1873); also subsequent year by the same title: (1874). Also, *Twentieth Annual report of the Municipal Government of the City of Nashua for the Municipal Year 1872-73* (Nashua: Moore & Langley, 1873); also subsequent year by the same title: (1874).
[46] *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Receipts and Expenditures of the City of Manchester, for the Fiscal Year ending December 31, 1872* (Manchester: John B. Clarke, 1873); also subsequent year by the same title: (1873).
[47] Board of Mayor & Alderman Journal, v. 4, 1872-1877, p. 23-162; City Clerk's Office, Nashua, N.H. Examined all entries from 8 November 1872 to 9 January 1874. Town record books and selectmen books for Hudson, N.H., were not at the Hudson Town Hall. The town clerk did not know the books' disposition.
[48] *The Famous Amoskeag Steamers*, 2. Also, Browne, *The Amoskeag Manufacturing Co.*, 78.
[49] Amoskeag Manufacturing Company Register of Locomotives, 1849-1858, Amoskeag book 311; Manchester Locomotive Works, Business papers, stack 2, unit 7, shelf B; Manchester Hist. Assoc.
[50] Amoskeag Manufacturing Company Clippings Scrapbook, 1871-1901, box 32; Amoskeag Manufacturing Company General Notices, 1870-1908, box 39; Amoskeag Manufacturing Company Analysis of Stock Account, 1869-1897, Amoskeag book 161; Manchester Hist. Assoc.

The story was told in the 1940s to George Woodbury, the author, by a boilermaker at the former Amoskeag Machine Shop who had heard Homer "tell the story dozens of times."[51] This suggests Homer worked at the shop for many years, perhaps decades. This work history does not appear in the above obituary of William H. Maxwell. So, William may not be Homer.

Summary

Despite all the sources consulted, no record of the epic Manchester to Boston journey surfaced. The following points summarize the findings:

• Multiple sources do state a self-propeller was sent from Manchester to Boston. But it was transported on a train and the name of this engine was not mentioned; except in the book *General Alarm*. The author calls this engine *Vesuvius*, but he may be relating the name used by the original storyteller.

• The author of *General Alarm* claims he investigated the *Vesuvius* story and found no support for it.

• Multiple sources state a self-propeller saved the Old South Church. Some of the sources, including one Manchester newspaper, credit the *Kearsarge 3* from Portsmouth; the other sources do not name the responsible engine.

• The commissioners' report of the fire contains a letter from E. A. Shaw of the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company. He verifies that Manchester sent a self-propeller to Boston but does not state how it traveled. The tone of the letter implies he is trying to sell self-propellers to Boston. If *Vesuvius 1* had indeed driven the roads to Boston, this would have been a huge success and tremendous selling point. But Shaw is mute on this road trip.

• A suitable Homer Maxwell and Joel Bemis do not appear in New Hampshire records that were examined.

• A "Hogan's" drinking establishment, where Homer found Tim Driscoll the night of the fire, does not appear in Manchester city directories.

• Homer declares the weight of *Vesuvius* (the very first self-propeller) to be eight tons. Amoskeag's literature claims a self-propeller weight of five tons for the first self-propeller – engine number 263.[52] The 1899 catalog shows a self-propeller weight of eight-and-a-half tons.[53] Later models may have had a greater weight than early models. Perhaps Homer, in telling his story, mixed up the different engine weights.

[51] Woodbury, *The Story of a Stanley Steamer*, 77.
[52] Browne, *The Amoskeag Manufacturing Co.*, 80.
[53] *Amoskeag Steam Fire Engines*, 10.

• Homer claims they (AMC) built the *General Slocum* locomotive in 1871. Amoskeag sold their locomotive business in 1859, when Homer was only one year old.

• Hudson, Nashua, and Manchester town reports, as well as Nashua aldermen records, do not report any abnormal expenditures to repair the Taylor Falls Bridge damaged by *Vesuvius 1*.

• The name *Vesuvius 1* does not appear in any of the sources, including those of AMC, that were consulted (except in the book *General Alarm*).

• None of the newspapers, including those of Manchester, relate the adventurous road trip of *Vesuvius 1*.

• The first fire alarm rang out in Boston about 7:15 p.m. Boston's chief engineer did not send a messenger to telegraph for help until after 8:00 p.m. Due to telegraph problems, the alarm did not reach surrounding towns until some hours later. Yet Homer claims to have entered Boston, after a five-hour drive, as "a church clock was striking midnight." This means he would have left Manchester at 7:00 p.m. – before the fire was detected in Boston and before the call for help was telegraphed.

Conclusion

Without a doubt the 1872 Boston fire was a major disaster which caused the loss of thirteen lives and about seventy-five million dollars in damages,[54] made merchants penniless, and threw thousands of employees out of work because their factories and shops burned to the ground. Firemen and citizens from towns across Massachusetts as well as New Hampshire, Maine, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, responded to the call for help. Manchester sent a hose carriage, a steamer, and a self-propeller to Boston's aid. But all accounts, other than Homer's, claim these machines and their men traveled by train. The same accounts declare Portsmouth's *Kearsarge #3* saved the Old South Church, not *Vesuvius 1*. Perhaps Homer tied together several different events in his life into one good story. Or maybe he just liked to spin a good yarn. However, none of the current evidence supports the assertion of a self-propelled steam fire engine navigating the roads from Manchester to Boston during the 1872 fire.

[54] Werner, *History of the Boston Fire Department*, 10.