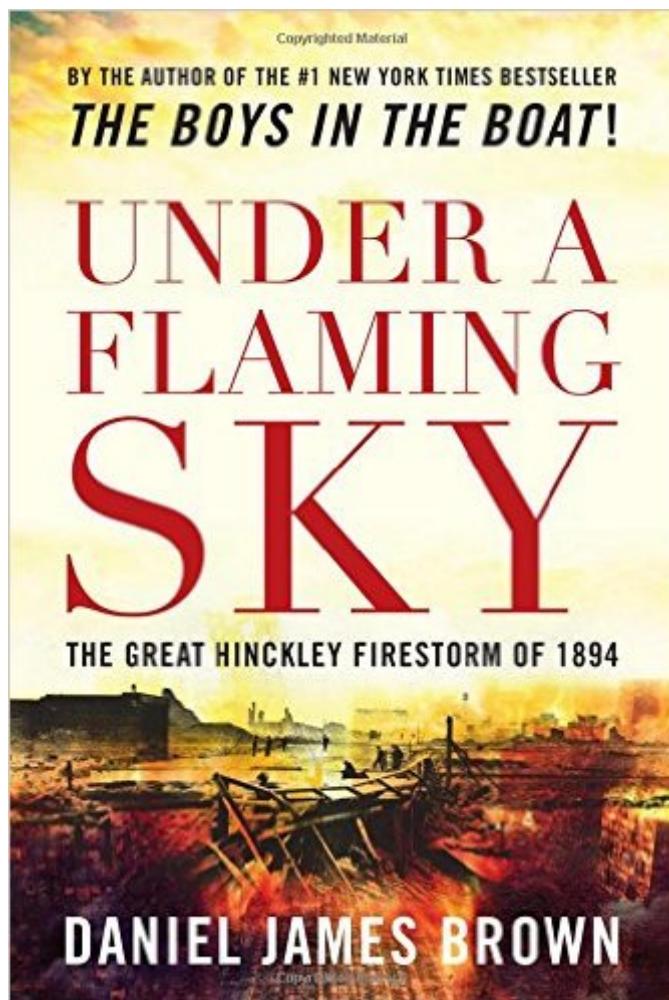


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# Under A Flaming Sky: The Great Hinckley Firestorm Of 1894



## 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 on 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 plasma-like 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

When the citizens of Hinckley, Minnesota arose on Saturday, September 1, 1894 it looked for all the

world to be just another ordinary Saturday. Some folks had to work at the Brennan Lumber Mill. For others there was washing to do and provisions to be picked up in town. The children might well spend part of the day fishing or maybe picking cranberries in the nearby bogs. And as for the engineers on the St Paul and Duluth and Eastern Minnesota railroads, they simply had no idea of the calamity there were about to encounter in the towns of Pokegama, Sandstone and Hinckley later that day. "Under A Flaming Sky" is the gripping true story of the mammoth firestorm that engulfed these towns on that fateful Saturday. Author Daniel James Brown, a direct descendant of two of the Hinckley survivors, offers up an incredible book that captures all of the trauma, all of the heartbreak and the unspeakable pain and heroism that emerged on that day. It is a book you will find hard to put down. Imagine suddenly being caught in a firestorm where temperatures reached 1600 degrees Fahrenheit. Now small brush and forest fires were quite common in these parts in those days so most folks had absolutely no warning about the debacle they were about to face. In "Under A Flaming Sky" Daniel James Brown focuses on a number of families and how they attempted to cope with an impending disaster. Some would manage to escape but many others were not so lucky. You will meet many ordinary people who did extraordinary things. Twenty five year old Tommy Dunn was a telegrapher working at the St. Paul and Duluth depot in Hinckley. Despite the impending disaster Dunn stayed on the job just trying to keep the lines of communication open for as long as he possibly could. Tragically, he would lose his life in the process.

Most readers will not have heard of the little Minnesota town of Hinckley or of the horrific inferno that destroyed it on September 1, 1894, with a higher death toll than that of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Historically, the event was significant as perhaps the worst forest fire in American history, a "perfect fire" orchestrated by an unfortunate convergence of terrain, wind, atmospheric conditions, and a white pine forest. The result was a true "conflagration" (a moving fire storm) that in five hours overran most of a county and reached temperatures high enough to melt steel, leaving behind terrain that never again would sustain a real forest (the fire burned so hot that it consumed organic material in the soil down to a depth of ten or twelve feet, leaving a nearly sterile surface of sand and gravel). The natural question to ask is why someone not a Minnesotan or a disaster junkie would want to read this book. There are several pressing reasons, from the lively storytelling to the especial pertinence of the Hinckley fire to modern readers who-thanks to events like United Flight 93 and Hurricane Katrina-are confronting the very real possibility of disaster striking their own lives. "Under a Flaming Sky" has been meticulously researched to familiarize us with many of the people involved, then to give a minute-by-minute account of the disaster that enveloped them. We learn

enough about the victims to care for them, then wait to see who will survive and who not, hoping for a reprieve or at least a postponement of the inevitable. In fact, wait until you find the identify of Brown's great-grandfather, who perished in the fire. If that doesn't leave a lump in your throat, you are the kind of person who is mean to puppies.

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