

14 Summer Street
Kennebunk, Maine
October 24, 1947

Dearest Julia,

You came to Kennebunk in time to see it in its autumn attractiveness. Since you were here the State of Maine has indeed been visited by desolation. I don't know what you have seen in the papers or heard over the radio, but fires have been sweeping through the state, destroying everything in their path. When you and Edward telephoned Monday evening, - and it was sweet of you to do it, - I said that there were fires surrounding us, but, as you made no comment, I suppose you thought it was nothing.

I had Mr. Ellsworth working at the Museum on Monday, taking up the old worn-out celatex covering on the floor in the entrance hall, and in the afternoon we did hear a fire alarm for a woods fire or something. A small leak developed in a radiator and I called up Libby to come and fix it. I was told he had gone to one of several fires and Mrs. Libby didn't know which. The next morning I learned he had been in North Kennebunkport all night and he continued all the next day. Monday night the horizon to the north was red and smoky. Tuesday everything was much worse. I drove to Cape Porpoise around lunch-time to leave some art class paintings at Mr. and Mrs. Freeman's that were done by their granddaughter. It was very smoky and menacing going over, but they did not seem alarmed. Within an hour or two after that the fire had swept over Cape Porpoise and Goose Rocks, almost completely destroying the latter place. That night the Green Leaf was full of people burnt out, with only a bag of belongings with them. They had all been evacuated and many did not know until the next day whether they had lost their homes or not. The road from the Port was full of trucks loaded with furniture and so forth from houses. The next day one couple, who heard that their house had miraculously escaped, went down to Goose Rocks to discover it had been

completely looted of everything and they are now back here again.

Wednesday and yesterday the roads were closed, so I have seen nothing of the burned areas, but it seemed to be getting worse everywhere. Charles and Pat, not going around, thought it all exaggerated and minimized the danger and the destruction, and I have made innumerable trips up to the house telling them about things. Last night there came an alert over the radio that Kennebunk was in the direct path of the fire. Biddeford was said to be doomed, and patients were being evacuated from the two hospitals. People in Kennebunkport were told to leave their homes at once and some came here to the Green Leaf. We didn't go to bed last evening but laid down on our beds with our clothes on. I packed up everything in bags that I could get in, and put the rest in my trunk and locked it up. At about four Mrs. Lafferty went around to say that Kennebunk would probably be alerted. Everyone got up and I put my bags in my car, which was in back of the Inn, and also Marie Peck's, as I said she could go with me if we had to leave. I then went up to our house and got Pat and Charles up to tell them. Late in the evening I had gone to Lucinda's to return a little automobile rug that she had brought down to me some time ago, and found that she and Frank had packed silver, portraits, and so forth, ready to evacuate.

Early this morning, while still dark, everyone was congregated down stairs with bags, ready to leave at a moments' notice. I had brought some emergency food the evening before to keep in my automobile, so passed around apples, sweet chocolate and crackers to everyone, and Mrs. Lafferty made some coffee.

As it turned out, we were not told to get out, so this afternoon I brought my bags back to my room but everything is still packed.

Things look better but the air is thick with smoke like a fog and the half moon is red instead of white. Most of the towns around us have been burnt out or are threatened, and the village looks like war. The Unitarian Church has been kept open night and day, serving meals to fire fighters, the Town Hall is open for them to sleep there if they wish, the Red Cross has people coming and going, truck loads of marines in full battle dress and guns and steel helmets have arrived and have taken over the policemen's traffic work. The hydrants by the IGA at Dane Street and across Main Street by the Library have long hoses permanently lying in the street and a steady stream of great oil trucks, milk trucks, and every other vehicle, that can transport water, stand in lines to be filled, and then stand in readiness by the fire house on Fletcher Street, behind the Bank. Long strings of lights are on either side of the street to light it up, and a fireman stands by the window on the second floor of the Fire House and gives instruction through an amplifier. I stood there this evening and it was most exciting. All sorts of trucks were there to convey men and boys to different fire locations. They were all piled in wearing the hunting costumes that they had expected to use hunting this month, and one after another trucks would pull out with instructions where to go and what to do. A steady stream of men were going in and out of the engine house and standing around outside, and there were tanks and trucks as far as I could see.

The O'Hara Water Color School is completely leveled, and Eliot, Shirley and their daughter June, drove back here to-day. They had only left on Friday and had got as far as New York. Mrs. Cleaves, who ran their Bayberry Tea House, had just bought the Homestead Hotel at Goose Rocks and owned four cottages. She has lost everything except her automobile and what she could put in it. Her brother has driven over from the Berkshires to help her and they are both here at the Green Leaf.

People seem to think we can go to bed to-night but we may be routed out. They all say any shift in the wind may

change the situation. Sanford is threatened, was well as Wells, and I guess there is fire in both places. Kennebunk Pond, Lyman, and Limerick are wiped out and part of Alewife. Bar Harbor and other places in Maine are destitute, too, but fortunately there does not seem to have been much loss of life and I certainly hope it will continue to escape that catastrophe.

Every man and boy is fighting fires now, so business is at a standstill. I have tried to make the Museum as safe as possible.

Well, Sister dear, au revoir, and best love to all.

Devotedly,

Edith