

LETTER OF 1871 GIVES A GRAPHIC PICTURE OF FIRE: M. Hoyne Writes Wife of Conflagration.

TOM

Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922); Oct 6, 1921;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988)

pg. 13

LETTER OF 1871 GIVES A GRAPHIC PICTURE OF FIRE

Thomas M. Hoyne Writes
Wife of Conflagration.

One of the vivid pictures of the Chicago fire, especially interesting this week because of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the fire, is contained in a letter written a few days after the conflagration by Thomas M. Hoyne to his wife, Mrs. Jeannie T. Hoyne, who at that time was visiting her father, Mr. B. Maclay, in New York. The letter is dated Oct. 15,

Mr. Hoyne is still living, but he died a short time ago. Mr. Maclay is the son of Thomas Hoyne, who was elected mayor of Chicago, and was the father of former State's Attorney Maclay Hoyne.

Dear Jean:
This is the first time since the fire that I have really felt as though I had time to sit down and write a letter. I received a letter from you and one from your father yesterday. A week ago, since the fire, I was looking out of the window, but it seems to me that I have been in a terrible week. I have been reading the experience and terrors of the past years. It is a week as if I had never been through



THOMAS M. HOYNE

last Sunday evening at about 10 o'clock the fire alarm sounded, and looking from our back window to the southwest we saw that there was a terrible fire raging. The wind was blowing a gale from the southwest and everything being dry as tinder I knew there would be a large fire, but as we

had the river between us and the fire, I retired without feeling any anxiety.

About half past 2 I was startled from my sleep by hearing father come in excitedly. I sprang from bed and met him at my door. He said he thought our office was in danger and that if I wished to save anything I had better go down and get it out of the safe at once. I dressed and father, Jim, Frank, and I started on the run.

We took the wheelbarrow to bring away the account books. When we reached Washington street we found it impossible to get through that way, as the courthouse was already in flames.

[Mr. Hoyne details other vain efforts to reach the office, from which the books, he learned later, already had been saved, and tells of their return to their periled home.]

Pictures Terrible Scenes.

The scene on Wabash avenue was a terrible one. Men, women, and children thronged the walks and streets dragging trunks and carrying bundles containing all they had been able to save—all pushing south in the hope of finding some place of safety.

We reached home and told them they had better pack up. I found we were safe for the present, as two long depots with a wide space between them had checked the fire and turned it to the north. Lizzie and I then went down Wabash avenue to Van Buren street and there watched the progress of the fire.

It was on Van Buren street west of State and we were in hopes that the strong south wind would prevent its coming further east, but it did not. It reached State street and then commenced working up south against the wind.

Move as Flames Near.

I watched the progress of the fire up State street and determined that when it reached the new clubhouse on the corner of State and Harrison it would be time for us to go. It did reach it in about two hours and we commenced to move. All our clothing went first to Mrs. H. O. Stone's, including your big trunks, the silver and valuables followed, and then our library was sent to the Doctors. Then we picked up such other things as were of most value. But here came upon the field of action a new actor.

Gen. Sheridan took command and blew up the clubhouse. Then he blew up two houses on Harrison street in the rear of the Methodist church on the corner of Wabash avenue. This saved the church. Then he blew up two houses in the middle of the brick block on the corner of Wabash avenue and Congress street.

This made a break and saved the Michigan Avenue hotel. It was on

fire once, but they saved it and when I saw the wall of Scammon's house fall I felt that we were safe. Terrace Row went like tinder.

Monday a Day of Horror.

Monday was a fearful day. All day long the crowd poured by our house, dusty, thirsty, hungry and looking the very picture of despair. Where they all went to I cannot imagine. Every one was hurrying along with what he or she could carry and considered most valuable. Poor Mrs. Hobson, the milliner, went by dragging a cart loaded with her all, her daughter following and pushing behind.

But this is only what I saw. This was upon the south side. The north side was ten, yes a hundred times worse. Here they escaped and left the fire. Then the fire followed and drove them on before it. The rapidity with which the flames traveled cannot be appreciated without hearing the stories of those who went before it. It did not stop to burn one building and take another in order, but it leaped over buildings and sent its fiery messengers ahead, so that men found themselves hemmed in and while they were watching the flames in front of them they burst out behind them.

Experience of Partner's Wife.

Mrs. Horton [wife of the late Judge Oliver H. Horton, a partner of Mr. Hoyne] came over the river about 3 o'clock to see the fire and when she started home she found she was cut off from the north side entirely. We found her on our steps at 5 o'clock. She rested a little while, took some breakfast, and started for home.

She walked over the 12th street bridge, then north on the west side until she had got beyond the fire and reached home just as Mr. Horton was leaving the house for good. He had packed up such of his valuables as he could carry and removed them to Lincoln park, upon the island there which you remember, perhaps.

Thousands had taken refuge there, but the flames swept through the trees and grass and burned up the goods which had been placed here for safety and forced the people to the water's edge and into the water, where many of them stood holding things before their faces to protect them from the heat.

Mrs. Horton lay upon the ground all night with a wet handkerchief over her face to prevent suffocation from the smoke. They managed to preserve their lives and goods from fire

through the night and in the morning got off to the west side. They are now with us.

Common Experience of Thousands.

These incidents are but specimens of the common experience of thousands. Many lost their lives. How many it will be impossible for some time to learn. The papers are filled with advertisements of husbands, wives, and children advertising for the lost ones from whom they have been separated.

In the midst of all this suffering should we not thank God that he has spared us our lives and a house to live in and consider our losses as small compared with others? We have health, energy, and good spirits, and while we

have these we cannot and do not complain. We can work. There is no anarchy here now. All are reduced to one common fellowship. All must rise again together.

But our troubles were not over with the great fire. We had no rain, the winds were still high, and no water. The waterworks were destroyed with the rest, and a spark might set us all off again. We have not, therefore, felt easy, but have every night kept watch on this block, as they have throughout the city.

Organize Against Ghouls.

We have organized a patrol and take turns of three hours apiece and watch the alleys and streets, and yet it would seem this was not enough. The city is full of scoundrels who have poured in on us from every direction for plunder, and they seem bent upon the destruction of what remains of our city.

[Mr. Hoyne describes a battle to save the Hoyne barn, which was found in flames some time after the big fire was over and which he believed was set by one of the ghouls, several of whom he said had been shot when caught setting fires. He continues:]

I am not of a bloodthirsty disposition, but I must say that during the past week I have had a fearful desire to shoot some one and we have all on this block been anxiously looking for the man every night.

And What of the Future?

And now, my dear Jean, for the future. I thank heaven every day that you are not here. Our business is entirely destroyed for the present. We can collect no money here nor get a

cent of what is due us from the bank until they get their vaults open, and then they can pay only a small percent. I have in my pocket a few dollars, but see no prospect of getting any more, so you must depend upon what you have for some time, and if you could spare it I would even like you to send me a \$5 bill. This is reversing the order of things, but the fact is there is no money here and we must work along until the banks can get on their feet again. Every bank in town was destroyed (except some small institution on the west side).

We have opened an office in the basement and propose to work and live like poor people, as we are, until we can get up again. I have no fears that we shall not succeed in time, but we have got to be a little careful at present.

What do you think of this, my dear Jean? Can you deny yourself many of the things which you have been accustomed to and live like the rest of Chicago?

Love to all at home. I am your affectionate husband,
Tom.