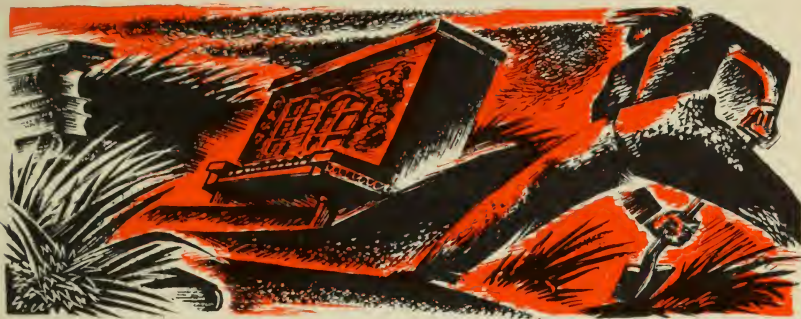


*Letter of MARY FALES (Mrs. David Fales) to her Mother. David Fales was a lawyer with an office in the Portland Block, 135 Dearborn. The Fales residence stood on W. White Street (now Locust Street) near LaSalle.*



*Chicago, Oct. 10, 1871*

DEAR MAMMA,

You have probably heard of our fire and will be glad to know that we are safe and sound after much tribulation.

Sunday night a fire broke out on the West Side about three miles southwest of us. The wind was very high and David said it was a bad night for a fire. About two o'clock we were awakened by a very bright light and a great noise of carts and wagons. Upon examination David found that the fire was not at all on the North Side but was burning so furiously on the South Side that the whole sky was bright. They thought it would stop on the South side when it came to the river, but it proved no obstacle and the North Side was soon on fire and Wells and LaSalle streets were crowded with carts and people going north.

We soon saw that with such a wind it would soon reach our neighborhood and David told me to pack what I most valued. It seemed useless to pack in trunks as every vehicle of any kind was engaged and demanded an enormous price. Several livery

stables were already burned and loose horses were plenty. One of the Wheeler boys had a horse given him for nothing excepting a promise to lead it to a safe place. He brought it home and tied it in their yard. Having no wagon it was of no use to them. So David took it and after a while succeeded in finding a no-top buggy. We felt very lucky as nobody around could get either horse or conveyance. David packed it full of things, set me and himself on top, and started off to the Hutchinsons.<sup>1</sup>

I cannot convey to you the way the streets looked. Everybody was out of their houses without one exception, and the sidewalks were covered with furniture and bundles of every description. The middle of the street was a jam of carts, carriages, wheelbarrows, and every sort of vehicle, and many horses being led along, all excited and prancing, some running away. I scarcely dared look right or left as I kept my seat by holding tightly to the trunk. The horse would not be restrained and I had to use all my powers to keep on. I was glad to go fast, for the fire behind us raged and crackled, and the whole earth, or all we saw of it, was a lurid yellowish red.

David left me at Aunt Eng's and went off for another load of things. This he soon brought back and then he went off again, and I saw him no more for seven hours. People came crowding to Aunt Eng's and the house was full of people they never saw before, and their luggage. One young lady [who] was to have had a fine wedding tomorrow came dragging along some of her wedding presents. One lady came with four servants and one with six blankets full of clothing. One lady came with nurse and baby, and missing her little boy, went off to look for him. This was about daylight and she did not come back at all.

<sup>1</sup>Probably the residence of C. N. A. Hutchinson, just north of Lincoln Park and presumably safe. The "Aunt Eng" of this letter appears to have been Mrs. Hutchinson.



*Randolph Street Ruins,  
with the Courthouse  
in the Foreground*

Now and then somebody's husband would come back for a minute, but there was work for everybody and they only stayed long enough to say the fire advanced, and assure us of safety.

At twelve David came and said that he got everything out of our house, and buried the piano and books together with the china in Mr. Hubbard's ground.<sup>2</sup> He saw people taking off all the chairs, tables, and light furniture without saying a word for he knew it would burn even in the street, and my nice preserves which Maggie had set out on the piazza he gave freely to anybody that had a mind to take them. The Hubbards thought they were safe in a brick house with so much ground around, but wet their carpets and hung them over the wooden facings for additional safety. All to no purpose. David saw ours burn and fall and then theirs shared the same fate. The McCagg's large house and stables burnt in a few minutes, also the New England church and Mr. Collyer's.<sup>3</sup>

In the afternoon the wind blew more furiously, the dust was blinding, the sky grey and leaden, and the atmosphere dense with smoke. We watched the swarms of wagons and people pass—men, women, and children. All the men and many of the women were dragging trunks by a cord tied in the handle and children were carrying and pulling big bundles.

Soon they said Aunt Eng's house must go too. Then such confusion as there was, everybody trying to get a cart and not one to be had at any price. After a while two of the gentlemen who had had wagons all the time came and carried their wives

<sup>2</sup>Probably the residence of Gurdon S. Hubbard, on N. LaSalle Street near the Fales home.

<sup>3</sup>The residence of Ezra B. McCagg was located on N. Clark Street in what is now the 800 block. The New England Church (Congregational) stood on the corner of Dearborn and White, now Locust, streets. The Collyer house was the residence of the Rev. Robert Collyer, pastor of Unity Church, on Chicago Avenue near the Water Tower.



farther north, and those that were left watched for empty wagons and nobody spoke at all. Mr. Hutchinson, David and some others were taking things out and burying them, and many of the ladies fairly lost their wits. Poor Aunt Eng even talked of sending home a shawl that somebody left there long ago. David started for a cart. Again he was successful and got an old sandcart with no springs, one board out of the bottom, with a horse that had not been out of harness for twenty-four hours. He put in all our things and one trunk of Aunt Eng's, to which Miss M. added a bandbox.

The West Side was safe, but to get there was the question. The bridges were blocked and some burned, but the man who owned the cart thought we could get there. We thought of Judge Porter's and Mr. Dupee's where we thought we should be welcome.<sup>4</sup> Wherever Aunt Eng's family went they must walk, and our prospects seemed so fair that we took May with us. Our ride was an anxious one. The horse had been overused and when urged on would kick till the old cart bid fair to break in pieces, then he would go on, and finally finding kicking no use gave it up, much to my relief. Many times we were blocked and it seemed as if the fire must reach the bridge before we did. But we were much too well off to complain. Some carts had broken down, horses had given out, and many were walking and pulling big things who seemed almost exhausted. Furniture and clothing lay all along the road. Mrs. Hamilton hailed us from a mean little hut two miles from her house and ours and asked us to take a bag of Mr. Hubbard's silver. It must have been some servant's house. Anyway it was burnt soon after and we still have the silver. The fences were broken on all the un-built fields, and furniture and people covering every yard of

<sup>4</sup>Judge William A. Porter of the Superior Court and Charles A. Dupee, lawyer, both of whom lived on Washington Street on the West Side.



*The  
Courthouse Before  
the Fire*

it. After a ride of two hours and a half we reached Judge Porter's at dusk and found a warm welcome.

Every family that I know on the North Side is burnt out. I can't enumerate them. It would be useless: it is sufficient to say every individual one. We were the only ones who took our things from Aunt Eng's. The lady with the six bundles left five behind her, the lady with the four servants left a bundle of French dresses to burn, but worst of all, the baby and nurse. They went with the Hutchinsons. At the last minute a Miss M. insisted on David's taking charge of her watch. She said she could trust it to no one else and it did not occur to her to keep it herself. All of our clothing is saved and much we have with us.

I never felt so grateful in my life as to hear the rain pour down at three o'clock this morning. That stopped the fire.

The gentlemen have come in, and David says the piano burnt under the ground—nothing left but the iron plate. The North Side is level and the burnt part of the South Side so that the streets are not distinguishable. They say people in every class of life are out of doors. The churches are full and food is sent to them, but hardly anybody has any to spare. It burnt far above Aunt Eng's. My watch was at [the] jewelers, and may have been in a safe, but the safes have not yet been uncovered. I shall write soon again, meanwhile direct to 448 West Washington Street.

MARY.