

ADELINE ROSSITER JUDD (*Mrs. Norman B. Judd*) also writes to Mrs. Mark Skinner. Since the Judds lived in Kenwood, a suburb on the lake in the vicinity of what is now 42nd Street, they escaped the fire.



*Kenwood, Nov. 23, 1871*

MY DEAR MRS. SKINNER,

During the summer I often said to Mr. Judd: "As soon as the children leave for school I shall write to Mrs. Skinner and give her all the Chicago news." There were many pleasant things to tell you of—the pretty half-rural wedding of Mary Arnold with the tables spread on the lawn—a delightful trip made with the Wadsworths & Williams from Waukegan to Geneva, and a week of boating & picnicing—a trip to Kansas with a large party including the President and his family,<sup>1</sup> & other incidents which we thought you would be interested in, and which it seems strange I should ever remember after all the whirl and excitement & interest of the last few weeks.

As I said, I intended writing as soon as the children left, as

<sup>1</sup>Judd, a staunch Republican who was minister to Prussia from 1861 to 1865 and a member of Congress 1867 to 1871, was on good terms with President Grant.



*The Second Presbyterian Church,  
Northeast Corner of Wabash  
and Washington Streets*

I wished to devote myself entirely to them whilst they remained, but the day before Minnie left the fire came, and since then my time has been so occupied that I could not get time. Those of us who still have houses & clothing are busy caring for the sufferers every spare moment. I can realize with what intense solicitude you have watched & waited for news; as we were abroad during the War & watched and waited in the same way for news from battlefields and sieges, only the enemy was of another kind, but scarcely less to be feared.

I suppose you get the news as reported in the newspapers but you will be glad to hear something of your personal friends. Mrs. Wadsworth left her house when the buildings on the rear were on fire, in a carriage attached to an express wagon, taking some clothing, dishes, pictures and a few relics from his writing desk, & drove to Lincoln Park where they remained for hours. She sat by the margin of the pond with her dress drawn closely around her, ready, should a burning brand light her dress, to step into the pond. Sometime before she left the house she sent the little boys with Mrs. Yoe to Peter L. Yoe's.<sup>2</sup> Soon after they crossed Rush Street bridge it fell, and the carriage could not return. She found her children Monday evening at Mr. Cobb's after a long search for them. Of Tommy she could hear nothing before Tuesday evening and his escape between long lines of burning houses with a wagon drawn by himself, containing clothing etc. was one which called into action all the heroism & judgment & character the boy possessed.

*November 29th.* The very cold weather & over-exertion in our Relief work has made me so miserable of late that my letter to you has remained untouched in my portfolio.

<sup>2</sup>The *Chicago Directory, 1870-1871* locates P. L. Yoe at 200 Michigan Avenue. So many Wadsworths and Cobbs are listed that those mentioned here cannot be identified with certainty.



*St. James Church,  
Cass and Huron  
Streets*



Before this you have probably heard from other friends of the adventures and escapes of your many friends—of the night on the prairie by Mr. & Mrs. Magie drenched by the rain, and smarting with burns—of Mr. & Mrs. Tree who with a host of others stood 14 hours knee deep in the water—of Mr. Arnold & three children who escaped on a tug—of Mrs. McCagg who begged Carrie to leave her to her fate, and try to save her own life, when weary and exhausted she felt she could not go another step in that fearful race in which the fire in many places outstripped the fastest walker.

Mrs. Arnold left her home to look after Mary. She found Mr. Scudder was burying trunks, silver, etc. in Mr. Magie's garden. A few minutes after she entered, he came in and informed them they must hasten for their lives.

Mr. Magie's house was in flames, their own kitchen was taking fire, and when they reached the sidewalk, the fire was one long line of blaze along the outer edge of the sidewalk. They turned northward but before they reached the corner north of them the fire had out-travelled them, and the block beyond was on fire. They turned westward as the only way of escape, and after great fatigue—once passing in the middle of the street between two long lines of burning houses, the air so full of fire that they had to cover their mouths—at last reached a German house where the inmates gave them coffee and a place to rest. It was not long however before a new line of fire was seen travelling directly towards them, and they started on a new race for life, crossed to the West Side & in the afternoon took the cars for Judge Drummond's.

Mrs. Arnold did not know of the safety of her husband, Kitty, Florence & Arthur until Tuesday afternoon & she had left them with Alice Sunday night about 3 o'clock.

It was well for your family that you were away & escaped all

the horrors of that memorable night and day. Sad as it is to know that all your house contained, with the associations of thirty years clustering around your books, your pictures, your vases and relics of your past lives, yet that is better than to have been here, and seen it swept away before your own eyes.<sup>3</sup> It is not the brick walls that made home so dear, but the many articles around which the passing years have woven a chain of associations inseparably connected with the early life, the birth, the childhood, the lives, & alas, the departure of those we love. A new home can never be all that the dear old home has been, & I never think of you with all these treasures swept away, without a feeling of pain and tender sympathy.

I met Mrs. Phillips on the cars recently. She told me she had not thought of their house being in danger until 10 minutes before their barn was in flames—that she said to her daughter: "We will put some of our clothing into a sheet & try to save it for I fear the fire is coming this way." A moment later the daughter exclaimed: "The barn is on fire." They hurriedly gathered a few articles of clothing which they carried in their hands and rushed out of the house. The sidewalk was on fire & they had to hasten rapidly and walked a long distance in the direction of Lincoln Park when Mrs. John Douglas overtook them & they entered her carriage and drove to Evanston.

Those who had carriages escaped with little danger, but those who had not, suffered from fatigue and exposure fearfully. It is a strange sight to go over the burnt district & see the shanties covering the ground once covered with fine buildings and residences. A great many of the North Side residents assert that they will never live there again—that the recollections are too painful, and that they will locate where the southwest wind

<sup>3</sup>The Skinner residence stood on the southwest corner of Rush and Ontario streets. It burned about 3:30 A.M. on October 9.



*Booksellers  
Row, State  
Street Between  
Washington and Madison, and  
One of the Row Buildings  
After the Fire*

cannot again carry destruction to their homes—but I think that when some of the more courageous ones have rebuilt & the churches are again in their old places, the feeling of desolation will disappear & very many rebuild on their old sites.

*December 15.* My dear friend—Mr. Judd has just given me your letter dated Paris Nov. 29th, written the same day on which a part of this letter was written to you. Is not this a singular coincidence? I had dated it Dec. 29th, but as that day is some way off in the future, I had misdated & it was really written whilst you were writing to me.

I have been having another sick week, which interferes sadly with all my plans, especially my letter writing. Mrs. Hoge came down to lunch on Tuesday & invited us to lunch with her on Wednesday & promised we should meet Mrs. Wadsworth, Mrs. Dickinson & Mrs. Blatchford, all of whom are now living at Evanston. Mr. Judd went with me, and we had a delightful visit. All were in good spirits & I don't know when I have heard such a flow of wit & repartee & pleasant sayings.

We took the evening train for Lake Forest & returned home the following morning. We are expecting Ned home for Christmas, but Minnie, poor child, must spend her first Christmas without seeing her father and mother.

The young ladies at Farmington have worked nobly for the sufferers. They made up a barrel of comfortable children's clothing & a box of infants' clothing which was sent to our Hyde Park Aid Society. We have been very busy taking care of the families who have come into Hyde Park. Last week we made clothing for a baby a month old, and who had been wrapped in an old blanket & never worn a garment & before the fire the parents were people in good circumstances surrounded by every comfort.

Mrs. Blair has been very active & her house has been a depot





*Residence  
of the Rt. Rev.  
Thomas Foley, Bishop of  
Chicago, Madison at Michigan*

for supplies. I must tell you of the munificence of the Gurnees. Mr. Gurnee sent me \$500, Mrs. Gurnee \$250 for the "Home" and yesterday I received an additional \$100 & a promise of \$200 more from Irvington friends. Mr. Farnum sent \$5000 to the Relief Society & Mr. Gardner also a liberal donation, though both lost largely by the fire.

How wonderful to see the whole world moved by our great calamity & pouring out gold without stint for our relief. There is much suffering although so much is done to relieve it. The families of young men whose salaries are cut off & who lost everything & are too proud or too sensitive to make their wants known. Widows and women dependent on their own exertions. One society here was established especially to look after such cases, but we have had all manner of people applying for aid & those who were ready to work have been continually overtaken. We hope every week that we shall find some limit to our work, but the throng who come to the church where we hold our meetings was as large as ever yesterday. We meet on Fridays at the church at Hyde Park and on Tuesdays at Mrs. Higgins' to sew and give out supplies.

Mr. Judd and myself had intended leaving here early in November, and after making Minnie a visit, & spending a few weeks in Washington, to go to Florida. After the fire that plan was abandoned.

Mr. Sperry thought Mr. Skinner might find it necessary to return & had you done so, we should have insisted on your coming directly to our house. You know our children are all absent, and only my niece, Miss Chace, is with us. We have therefore room for you all including Mr. & Mrs. Willing & knowing your love for flowers, I had many of mine potted so that you might enjoy their beauty during this desolate season. Had you returned, we should have been glad to have you remain

either with us, or if we leave, have occupied the house in our absence.

In all the desolation of homes, I should have felt happier to have had our house occupied than to close it, as we probably shall, if we conclude to go South, as we may yet. The cold weather makes me ill & I suffer so much that I long to get away, & yet it is God's will that I remain. I shall try to make myself happy & do all I can to make those around me so.

I cannot tell you how much I enjoyed your allusions to Switzerland, Munich etc. . . .

I don't want to weary you—you can take a rainy day to read this—but I want to say one word about the fire. There must have been some chemical causes for a conflagration like that, other than those that usually prevail. The weather, had been dry and sultry—no rain and scarcely a thunderstorm during the summer. It is thought by many that the atmosphere must have been surcharged with electrical currents which caused such rapid combustion. In some places cast steel bars were melted and fused into a compact mass, when the structure in which they were, had burned completely to the ground in seven minutes from the moment the fire struck it—a compact mass that looked like raw iron, when there was not wood enough in the building to have made a fire which could have melted common iron. The courthouse burned within 15 minutes; Armour's building at the head of Dearborn Park was completely burned & only a debris of brick & plaster left, in seven minutes—Wirt Dexter timed it.

Blocks of granite lying in the street and not yet used for building purposes were chipped and broken by the currents of hot air which swept over them. The same causes must have ruled in the rapid conflagrations in Michigan and Wisconsin. It is asserted by survivors that balls of fire were borne on the



*The Water Tower*



blast over the woods setting fire to new localities where no danger was apprehended.

It is strange that so many thought the day of the final destruction of the earth had come.

My husband says I am getting tired & you certainly will be, so I will stop although I am tempted to begin another sheet. Excuse scratches and interlineations.

I shall be very, very glad to hear from you again. Love to all. I read Lizzie's letter to Mrs. Blair with much interest. I hope Fanny is improving. Remember us to Judge Skinner & believe me ever and truly

*Your sincere friend*

A. R. JUDD