

GEORGE HOWLAND, *principal of Central High School, writes to Selim H. Peabody, professor of physics at the Massachusetts Agricultural College.*



Chicago, Oct. 14, 1871

FRIEND PEABODY:

You will pardon my pencil as my inkstand has gone "where the woodbine twineth," with most of my possessions, though I am comfortably located for the time being. The schools are all closed, though I think they will begin to open them one by one as soon as they are free of the homeless, and the water works are in operation. Whether they will start the High School I don't know. It is taken temporarily for the courts, till they can erect a hasty structure on the old ground. I saved one trunk with most of my clothing, but so as by fire [*sic*], and am now at Dupee's, 219 Sangamon St. Wells carried off a carpet bag in each hand and is at Westcott's. Cate was burnt out also.¹

I noticed the fire soon after getting home from church Sunday evening, and supposing it a continuation of the one the night before, retired about 12 as calm as usual. About two the people of the house rapped at my door to ask if I knew what a

¹Oliver S. Westcott and Albion Cate were teachers at the Chicago High School. Wells cannot be identified.

TO THE PEOPLE OF ROCK ISLAND!

The Homeless and Starving Citizens of Chicago call for Cooked Food.

Let every family in the City cook food and deliver it at the Court House (for the 1st and 2d wards,) and at the Depot of the Chicago Rock Island & Pacific railroad Company, (for the 3d and 4th wards,) by five o'clock this evening. Boiled and Roast meats, hams, poultry and bread are particularly desired. It is necessary to send a car load by the evening train.

A meeting of the citizens will be held at the Court House at 12 o'clock, M. to-day to appoint committees and organize.

LET ALL ATTEND.

E. CARTER, Mayor.

Rock Island, Oct. 10, 1871.

fire there was. I thought there was no danger to us, and as I have not run with the machine lately, was about going to bed again, as a gentleman in the next room did, but hearing the remarks of some people in the street concluded to go down. The sparks were falling like snowflakes, and the wind blowing a gale, but no more, I thought, than the previous night.

I went over [to] the South Side and found it [the fire] then on the courthouse. People thought that as it had got among the brick & stone it would be retarded. I went back and watched it pushing on to the lake, till a quarter to four, when my brother, who had been driven out, came in and told me that I would have to move. I told him I thought not as it was past us already, and told him that I would make him a cup of coffee. To be ready for all emergencies I meanwhile packed one trunk & carpet bag, while he went to look at the fire. I was just pouring my coffee, when hearing a crackling, I went to the door and found the roof all on fire. As I wanted his help to carry my trunk, I seized my carpet bag and ran down across Clark St. and leaving it on the sidewalk, went for the trunk, dragged it by one handle down the stairs & out into the street—as the sidewalk was on fire—across Clark St., obtained help to carry them a block or two farther, and sat down on the trunk to rest & meditate.

The fire still coming, I asked a man riding by to take in my trunk, and I trotted by his side like little Julius [?] over Indiana Street² bridge & to Washington Street. He had a little before left his wife & little boy on the cor. of Madison & State & been unable to return to them. I afterward went back up to Sabin's, who was just starting his family to the Newberry School.³ Later

²Now Grand Avenue.

³The Newberry School stood at the corner of Orchard and Willow streets. Albert R. Sabin was its principal.

in the day he was compelled to start west & was overtaken by a farmer who carried them to Jefferson. He is going out to Rockford, Monday, to try some concerts.

Engines seemed entirely useless. The long tongues of flame would dart out over a whole block, then come back & lap it all up clean. Iron & stone seemed to come down as in a blast furnace. A single frame house on the North Side, north of Washington Park stands uninjured. Miss Warne was driven down to the sands⁴ and stood in the water almost all day, some of the time being compelled to bury her face in the wet sand. Rev. Mr. Swing slept, I am told, up in the cemetery,⁵ Chamberlain north of the park on a shed, I on Dr. Foster's home grounds.⁶

Today it has been raining all day, which relieves the anxiety a little. I have been out on patrol a part of three nights. Monday night they did not allow a fire to be lighted in the city, even for tea, & forbid all smoking, stopping men riding in the street with cigars.

You can get a better idea of ruins [here] than by a year of college.

With kindest regards to you & yours,

GEO. HOWLAND.

⁴The Sands was a triangular section of swampy, sandy land north of the mouth of the Chicago River.

⁵While the bodies had been removed from the City Cemetery and the tract transformed into Lincoln Park some years before the fire, the empty graves had not yet been filled in. On the night of October 9 they gave shelter to many fugitives other than the Rev. David Swing, pastor of the Westminster Presbyterian Church and already a controversial figure because of his liberal views. "Chamberlain" was probably Leander T. Chamberlain, pastor of the New England Church.

⁶In the original letter the last words of this sentence are so indistinct as to be practically illegible. This rendering is only a guess.