

Wed. A.M. Feb. 13, 1918.
Vassar College.
(what's left of it!)

Dearest Family: -

Well, talk about excitement! We've sure had it during the last twelve hours. The back of Main has burned!

Tuesday & Thursday nights we are allowed to go to other halls for dinner, and I happened to be Helen Coddington's guest in Strong (that's the nearest dormitory to Main). After dinner all the girls were standing around the hall waiting for someone to play for them to dance. All

of a sudden all the girls tore in one mass toward the south door (facing Main) and it was said they all decided to go over to Main to dance in "J" (the room on 2nd floor which is used for dancing). Then it turned to excitement and rumors of "Fire in Main" began to fly, and the girls were crying "No, don't go there; it will cause too much congestion. They don't want you to go!!"

Helen & I tore up to fourth floor and looked out the end hall window -

(Oh dear! there are 5 girls in here & we're all talking at once! I'll have to wait.)

Wed. P.M.

Mercy! everything's so different. But I must continue my story and get this in the mail in a few minutes. When we got to the hall window in Strong we could see the flames from the back part of Main - about the Assembly Hall as nearly as we could figure. Engines came shrieking up and sirens blew till it was almost deafening. In less than no time all Arlington and the greater part of the population of Pokeepsie were forming a semi-circle around the north & back sides of Main. Helen and I went out too. It was very mild, and only a gentle breeze blowing - thank goodness! Everything was terribly slushy all around but no one seemed to notice how he was wading around. We watched from the north side for awhile then stood on the steps to the Infirmary. For awhile we thought the men might just as well have been turning streams of kerosene on the flames for all the effect it had. We watched the roof of the Assembly Hall cave in and everyone stood there stricken when several of the firemen called: "Chief! Chief! man buried under there!" I don't know what happened then, but we have heard since that about five men were carried away in ambulances. While watching from the infirmary Eleanor Emerson ([Marge's?] sister) and one or two of her roommates who live on the fourth floor

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far from the middle came over and this is what she had to say about it. She said that at a little while after five she was riding up in the elevator and called out: "4th" for the elevator boy to stop, but two men in the "L" said, "go on straight up to 5th, don't stop!" Then she heard them say some more about where they had smelled smoke. A maid had told me before that when they were eating their dinner at 5 o'clock they smelled smoke & sent some men to find out the cause, but they didn't see anything, so they concluded it must be from the funny smell they sometimes smelled from the burning of the coal. Then Eleanor went on to say that just as they

were finishing their desert in the dining room the fire bell rang. (She and the girls in the back of the dining room didn't hear it on account of all the noise from the girls talking.) But all the girls put up their hands (a sign for silence) and then they all rose in silence and started marching out of the dining room. The girls though it was just a fire drill, and those who hadn't heard the bell expected to hear them start singing some national anthem to celebrate Lincoln's Birthday (the only sign of recognition it might receive here!) But everyone calmly walked out and then began the fun. We tried to help the stream of girls carrying valuable books, papers, furniture, clothing - everything.

They got 'most everything out of the book store and treasury and doctor's office and post office. The rooms of Strong were flooded with girls' stuff and detectives and others went thru the girls' rooms in the north transverse, throwing everything out the windows. They did them up in rugs and sheets and carted them to a distance. The gym was finally opened to drop things at Rocky. While the Infirm was filled to overflowing. Still the fire raged and the crowd was riveted to the sopr. There were two other fires in Po. we heard of & one of the firemen said, "Thank God, there comes engine no. __, now we can fight it!" The roof of Assembly Hall went first then [thru?] the fourth floor and then third. You could hear the dishes on the tables clatter as things fell in on them. Then back of the Assembly hall there are several turrets and lots of maids' rooms and they all went. I don't know whether they got much out of the grocery store or not but if they didn't everything probably ruined with water, for all this morning they were still playing big streams and there was about two feet of water standing anywhere - where there was a floor left.

3.

All the Main girls had to report to Strong to "sign up" and from there they were appointed to different rooms around campus for the night. Eleanor Emerson slept with Marge & we had another girl on our extra cot. We eat meals in relays & the poor maids are worked

overtime. I never saw such efficiency tho! for when we returned from watching fire (we were sent home!) about 9 o'clock - here our extra cot had been made up with clean sheets all ready waiting. The maids did it, I suppose. And at the doors down stairs girls stood hearing everyone sign up whether or not every bit of bed

space was being used in their room. - During the night, after we finally did get asleep a wind came up and being a bit excited anyway, we all thought how lucky it hadn't come earlier - Still in our [semi?]-conscious state & mingled with terrifying dreams we had visions of the flames sweeping the whole building. This morning we had no first hour class but the whole college met in chapel. Prexy spoke to us for a few min. & told us that last night he was in N.Y. when someone telephoned him saying: "Main is in flames!" He took the train immediately and felt like pushing to get here, and said

he heaved a sigh of relief when from the station the sky was not all lighted up. He congratulated us many times over & expressed his amazement (!) at our efficiency - said we had already done things when he thought of them. One [of] the faculty also gave us a little talk and told us some of the many funny - absolutely crazy - things that had happened. Then the Students Pres. gave out some instructions and we adjourned. I didn't miss any classes as I didn't have any until 4th hour - But of course no one had any work done.

The post office is now in the gym! Main girls get their mail from Students' Building & the other girls have their mail come to their rooms. We'll probably have guests for all night for a couple of nights longer, then they'll let those living in the wings (which were untouched) go in. We were quite disappointed this morning to find no headlines in the N.Y. Times but it had gone to press too early. We heard that there was an extra in N.Y. saying: "Main Building of Vassar College swept by flames - 50 killed!" You can imagine the jam in Strong sending telegrams (That's where the Messenger Room is now). Parents are pouring in, but they find all their children safe and sound.

4.

It was a beautiful sight and I wouldn't have missed it for worlds. Since I have started this lengthy epistle, I have rec'd a big letter from you, Mother, and a nice big one from Daddy. I've taken so long and written so much. I don't see how I can comment on everything now. There are so many funny things we've heard which keep coming to my mind to tell you, but I mustn't take the time. I'm wondering if Chicago will take any notice of it in the papers.

Soldiers with muskets patrolled the quadrangle a good part of the night & then - when we were trying to get to sleep we heard a bugle call repeated over & over again, so I suppose they were going then. We heard that all were searched

before being allowed to leave the grounds & after a certain time in the morning they wouldn't let any more on campus to see it, so that some girls off-campus had a hard time getting back. Mr Emerson is going to be in Po. for a few hours Friday & I'm almost as excited and glad as if he were my father.

It's funny, but for several days I've been pining for something exciting & different to

happen! Believe me! we got it & it really is fun to have the regular routine so upset. The wires are all disconnected so the bells can't be rung, so men have to ring the huge bell on top of Main to indicate the times for classes to begin &c. The heating system is affected somehow, so that certain buildings whose big [mains?] run thru Main will probably be heatless (Thank goodness for the mild weather!) The [mains?] are flooded.

Which reminds me, the enclosed clipping is for Daddy; I meant to send it some time ago. I think he'll see the significance. Also I've been noting the scarcity of fire hydrants around campus & I bet this would be a swell time for Daddy to do some business here. Also I've planned to spend spring vacation with Daddy in N.Y (he working [in?] a business trip). I need so many clothes I can't get here - shoes especially. Please I need the toe-slip badly. Thank you both heaps again for the nice letters - yours was beautifully fat Mother - let them come as often as possible. I'll answer them individually soon. Good-bye, dears & Happy Valentine's Day [crossed out] [Th?]day - Love - Gert.