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as it was I couldn't prepay the dispatch.

Bramhall July 6, 1866

My dear Alida, I received your three letters, & they give me the first intelligence I have received from you since I left Long Branch. It gave me unspeakable pleasure darling to hear again particularly at a time when I need so much some kindly words to cheer and encourage me.

I have been prevented from writing to you by sheer physical fatigue & weariness of body & soul & even now here are tears in my eyes & tears in my heart as I attempt to tell you of the appalling calamity that has fallen upon us here in Portland. Part of it you must have seen already in the newspapers.

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Bramhall July 6, 1866

Your three letters, dearest Alida, came today (the last written on the 4th) and they give me the first intelligence I have received from you since I left Long Branch. It gave me unspeakable pleasure darling to hear again particularly at a time when I need so much some kindly words to cheer and encourage me.

I have been prevented from writing to you by sheer physical fatigue & weariness of body & soul & even now here are tears in my eyes & tears in my heart as I attempt to tell you of the appalling calamity that has fallen upon us here in Portland. Part of it you must have seen already in the newspapers.

Contributed to Maine Memory Network by Maine Historical Society

MMN # 68360

Date: July 6, 1866

Description: John Marshall Brown letter to Alida Carroll regarding the Great Fire of Portland.

I remained in New York just long enough
to attend to your commission about
gloves & then went on directly to Boston
stopping long enough to rest & recover from
a terrible head ache & then pushed on to
Portland reaching home in 32 hours after
saying "good bye" to you. The next day was
Independence Day & in the afternoon we all
went out to Glen Cove on a picnic, intending
to retire early. I for my part expecting to
take the evening for a long letter to you
my best & dearest friend. How little we
expected the frightful calamity which was
to come, just as we were ordering the horses
harnessed to return, a man came riding
up most furiously & shouted out "The Sugar House

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in "on fire" I remember saying "Good God how
can it be" and then rushing confusedly to the
stable; but the excitement passed in a moment
& I became perfectly cool & self possessed &
throughout that sad night did not again
lose my presence of mind. Phil & I left the
ladies at the Cove & taking one of the horses
drove in town at a gallop. The news was too
true; when we reached the scene the whole
of the immense building was in flames.
we saw that all attempts to save it were
fruitless & therefore devoted ourselves to that
portion of the building where our office was
and all our private papers, money & other
valuables. For five hours we fought the fire
but to no purpose. Every thing was destroyed.

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It seemed to me as if I had the strength of
ten men. I worked in the hottest places, sometimes
holding with the firemen the engine pipe; in the
very face of the fire. Once I was nearly pushed
off a high ladder & got badly bruised, once
I was obliged to drop down holding the
ladder with my hands. Of course I was
drenched with water & thoroughly blackened
with smoke, one of my eyes was burned also
but thank Heaven I received no serious injuries
Alas it was to no purpose. the magnificent
building was entirely consumed with its
contents & the labor of 25 years seems blotted
out altogether. Father was very cool and
collected although we felt very anxious about
his ability to bear the blow.

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2)



After the Sugar House was all gone we
looked about us. No words can describe
the awful grandeur of the scene as far as we
could see to the North East every building was
on fire, the flames seemed to rise to the very
zenith & the air was filled with flying cinders.
It was evident that nothing could check the
progress of the conflagration & the only course
left was to save life & property. Phil & I
started to reach my Grandmother's house which
was at least a mile from the Sugar house and
when we reached the Post Office found it im-
possible to proceed any farther in that direction
When at last we reached Grandmother's it was
evident that her house must go. I took her in
my arms, put her in a wagon & carried her

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to Bramhall & then returned to save
what we could: in less than a half
hour afterward the house was destroyed. at
that instant the noise of the flames
of the frame building seemed to burn up
instantly; the noise of the flames was like
a hurricane & wherever the hot blast swept
everything went down before it & beyond
I reached home absolutely worn out, an
hour or two after day break on Thursday
& it is only until today that I have been
able to do anything I telegraphed to you
this morning to explain my silence &
while I have been writing this last sentence
your telegram in reply arrived (10.30 P.M.)
I shall telegraph again tomorrow.

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The general result of this conflagration
unparalleled in the history of the country
you have had in the newspaper but you
can have no idea of it until you see the
ruins. All of the city between the U. S. Hotel
& the tower on the hill is destroyed absolutely
wiped out. Every building on Middle &
Exchange is gone. Every bank, printing office
lawyers office, jewelers shop, 6 hotels, 6 churches
and nearly a thousand dwelling houses
the fire extended over a mile in length
and a half mile in breadth. Our house
that is the firm of J.B. Brown & Sons are the
heaviest losers, fathers individual loss being
over a quarter of a million dollars, but
we have not lost our courage or our faith

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Father begins tomorrow to build some stores
on the burn lots & as soon as we can
clear away the debris we shall start another
Sugar House. Everything is being done that
can be done & the thousands of people
that were turned homeless and penniless
into the streets are being cared for. God
help them they need it. I have not the heart
my darling, to look at the effect of all this
upon our plans & I shall be better able
to write calmly about it all tomorrow. Oh how
much I need you now my darling my precious
love, your kind sympathy would cheer me &
make me strong again. Your faithful & loving
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