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Fire Destroys Home of the Clements Family of Verona Island

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Transcript of a sound recording in MS 608, WLBZ Radio Station Records, Bangor, Maine, 1931-1973

Title: Fire Destroys Home of Clements Family on Verona Island

Date: April 11, 1952

Recording number: D 16.63; CD 9, track 5

Length of recording: 13:00

[transcript begins]

IRVING HUNTER: This is Irving Hunter broadcasting from the home of Mrs. [Orrey? Lori?] Hutchins on Main Street in Bucksport broadcasting by means of recording, and the story behind this broadcast, well you heard it earlier today over WLBZ. At 2 o'clock this morning, the Clements family of Verona Island were burned out completely. They lost their home. At the present time, Mrs. Clement and three of her sons are here at the home of the Hutchins where they are staying temporarily.

We're going to take a few moments to talk with the members of the Clements family and bring you a first-hand report of the tragic fire this morning. Mrs. Clements, I know that it's been a very trying day for you, and I certainly appreciate your taking time out and giving us the opportunity to talk with you. First of all, of course we've had stories from various people about just what did happen this morning when fire broke out at your home, and suppose you tell us a bit about that yourself.

MRS. CLEMENTS: Well, I woke up sometime in the early morning and I heard a cracking noise and smelled smoke so I immediately jumped out of bed and started for the stairs, and as I got to the stairs the intense heat and smoke struck me in the face and I had to turn around and rush for the window. At the same time, I called to the children upstairs and told them to get the children out the window just as quickly as they could, and I jumped out the lower window and went around the side of the house and caught the children as they dropped them from the window.

HUNTER: Well, that certainly was a very trying experience. I notice you have your hand bandaged there and quite a blister there on your nose. You were right in the midst of the fire.

MRS. CLEMENTS: It must have been the heat from the flame.

HUNTER: Uh, hm. We have three of the boys here as we reported earlier, your daughter, who is president of the senior class at Bucksport High School was all set to take a trip to Boston, and like all the rest of you folks, she lost all her clothing in the fire, and we're endeavoring to get some money and some clothing together so she can make that trip, and I understand things are coming along fairly well. Unfortunately, Rilla is not with us here today because she's at another home and she has a very, very husky voice because she inhaled a considerable amount of smoke and the doctor thought it would be

better for her to stay where she was and not get out in the cool winds. And incidentally, Rilla was very, very heroic. She was the one who helped the youngsters out the window, was she not?

MRS. CLEMENTS: Yes, she was. Yes, she picked up the children and took them into the one room and she knocked out the window and lowered them down to me.

HUNTER: My, land. I suppose she has been planning quite some time for this trip to Boston, has she?

MRS. CLEMENTS: Oh, yes, she was very enthused about it.

HUNTER: Well, it looks as though maybe things [record skips a few times] have been a bitter blow for her as I understand it, she had done quite a bit of planning as all the girls at the high school there have been doing, planning to go to Boston, and had bought some new things.

MRS. CLEMENTS: Oh, yes. Easter clothes.

HUNTER: Well, they all went up in flames and it certainly is too bad, and we're going to talk about that just a little bit later. Now we have the boys in the family here and quite a fine-looking bunch of lads they are, too. Let me see, well, we're going to take them in the order of their ages, the oldest one first, and I don't know but we can... Oliver? You're not going to talk, Oliver? Well, all I want to do is ask you one or two questions. I noticed, I was up at the scene where your house was this morning and we stayed around there quite a while. I noticed outside there were two rather badly burned bicycles, the tires were burned off. Was one of those bicycles yours?

OLIVER: Yes.

HUNTER: Well, it looks like you ought to have another bicycle, then, doesn't it?

OLIVER: Yep.

HUNTER: I imagine you'd miss that quite a bit.

OLIVER: Yes, I do.

HUNTER: How did you get out, Oliver, was it Rilla who helped you out?

OLIVER: Yes.

HUNTER: Well, good for her. Well, you have your fingers bandaged up there. Where did the burns come from? Were you hanging onto the window sill, or what?

OLIVER: I was hanging on the window sill.

HUNTER: All set to drop out, so your mother could catch you?

OLIVER: Yes.

HUNTER: Well, you said you didn't want to talk, Oliver, and I'm not going to make you talk any more, but thanks a lot for taking the time to spend with me right now. Let's go over and see Paul. Paul is 9 years old. Oliver is 10. Paul, that other bicycle there, was that yours?

PAUL: Yes.

HUNTER: Well, that's two bikes gone, and, you kind of like to have a bicycle, I suppose, now that spring is here and good weather coming?

PAUL: Yes.

HUNTER: Very much so. Anything else, Paul, that you lost in the fire that you think you're going to miss quite a bit? Anything special you had there that you wish you'd had time to get out?

PAUL: No.

HUNTER: Nothing special. Well, let's see, now we have little red-headed fellow over here, and I don't know just how we're going to make out. That's Brian Clements, who is five years old, and he has on a very classy yellow T-shirt here, looks like, well, I don't know just who this little character is on the front, kind of a cowboy there. You like cowboys, do you, Brian? Can you say yes or no? [Laughing.] He can't say anything but just look right ahead. Well, I suppose that Brian is pretty much bewildered after what went on today and we can understand that very much.

Now, we know that these folks are pretty much upset over what has happened today. They lost all their belongings, they lost the home as we reported earlier from the scene of the fire. There is nothing left there but the foundation. Now, this series of broadcasts today, incidentally, started when I received a telephone call this morning from Mr. Phillip W. Buxton, the editor of the Bucksport Free Press, and he told me what the story was, what had happened there, and what he had in mind, uh, should be done, and he's traveled around with me throughout the day here, he's put a little bit of time in at the office but not very much, and we have him right here with us as we are broadcasting from the home of Mrs. [Orrey?] Hutchins on Main Street here in Bucksport. Incidentally, we have a very homey scene here. We decided to set right up in the kitchen and we have the recording device set up on the kitchen table. There's a warm fire here that feels pretty good after being outdoors in the biting wind all day.

Mr. Buxton, suppose you report to the folks as you did to me this morning what had happened and what you endeavor to do.

BUXTON: I'll be glad to. First of all, I want to thank you boys from radio station WLBZ for the splendid job you're doing in helping this destitute family. First of all, I think, comes the need of Rilla Clements the president of Bucksport High School's senior class who's been planning for weeks on this trip to Boston. Molly Blaisdell and Miss Pauline Barnham have volunteered to go among the people of Bucksport to raise funds to help Rilla get off to Boston. That means the purchase of a brand-new outfit, which of course her own clothes were destroyed in the fire. The people of Bucksport are responding very generously but there's still money needed after this cause is met to help the Clements family re-establish themselves, such as buying furniture, getting themselves in a new home. I know that people of Maine, everywhere within hearing of this station will gladly respond to such an appeal to help this destitute family. I would suggest that those who wish to donate send their donations to me, Phillip W. Buxton, editor of the Free Press at Bucksport, Maine. Thank you very much.

HUNTER: Well, thank you, Mr. Buxton. Incidentally, you mentioned that you knew the people of Maine would come through, and I'd like to explain that you've picked out the state of Maine in which to make your home, having come from away from here, and suppose we go into that just a bit so that we'll get your background, if you don't mind.

BUXTON: Well, I was formerly city editor of the Courier Post newspapers in Camden, New Jersey. For twenty years or more I wanted to live in Maine. I've lived here now six months and I wish I'd come here twenty years ago.

HUNTER: Well, we certainly think that you have picked a fine state. We like the state of Maine. That of course is one of the reasons for this broadcast. As I reported earlier, whenever disaster strikes in the state of Maine, not only the neighbors get together, but people in surrounding communities to help out, and there is definitely a need for a great deal of help in this case. Now chances are, many of you might want to send clothing. We reported earlier that the folks just barely got out of the house before the house burned up completely. They had no time to get any clothing whatsoever except in the case of Roy, the older son, managed to grab a few things, but he jumped and he had a few clothes to put on, but the rest of them just didn't have time to get anything. So it might be that you have some things that you'd like to send along to the Bucksport Free Press, or incidentally if you're in the vicinity of Bangor or will be visiting there, we'd be very happy to help you out by letting you bring whatever you want to the studios of WLBZ and we'll see that they reach their proper destination.

The ages of these youngsters, in case you have something you might be able to send along until they can get lined up and buy new clothing of one sort or another, we've talked with many of them so you're familiar with some of the youngsters here, there's Brian who is five years old, Paul nine, Oliver ten. Typical state of Maine, American boys, they've, well you know just what they wear, what they would need. Then there's Rilla who is leaving Tuesday for that trip to Boston, well her need of course is money because there's no time for her to get anything together unless she goes right out and buys it, and she definitely wants to take that trip with her class, of which she is president. Incidentally, Mr. Buxton spoke about rehabilitation and an opportunity to start a new home later on. That means of course, furniture for one thing and if you have some things around the house that you would like to send to help out the

Clements family, we made arrangements with Ali Cole, of Cole's Express, to help us out on that score. And if there are things that need a truck to move them, get in touch with Cole's Express in Bangor and they'll be glad to help you make arrangements.

Well, that is just about the story, and to sum it up, this is it. The Clements were burned out at 2 o'clock this morning at their home on Verona Island. Mr. Clements is in the Merchant Marine and he is not around at the present time. Mrs. Paul Clements and her children, Roy 20, Rilla 18, Oliver 10, Paul 9 and Brian 5, barely escaped with their lives and were very lucky to get out and, well, they're very happy about that part of it, very unhappy about the loss of their home and all their belongings. If you feel that you can do anything to help them out, it would be very, very gratefully accepted. Get in touch with us at WLBZ or send donations or articles of clothing to WLBZ or to Phillip W. Buxton, editor of the Bucksport Free Press in Bucksport. This is Irving Hunter concluding this recorded broadcast from the home of Mrs. [Orrey?] Hutchins on Main Street in Bucksport. This is the Maine Broadcasting Company.

[transcript ends]

For more information about this transcript, audio recording, or other materials in Special Collections at the University of Maine, contact:

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