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

Title: Coverage of Maine Forest Fires of 1947

Date: October, 1947

Recording number: Tape 27, part 4

Length of recording: 5:52

[Transcript begins]

ANNOUNCER: For a contrasting weather story here is W. W. Chaplin at station WCSH, Portland, Maine.

CHAPLIN: A hundred fires are racing tonight across the tinder forests of Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. This is the fourth week of the Indian summer drought. Tonight is a night of terror for many woodland and coast communities. Tens of thousands are fighting the flames to save their homes. Latest top danger point in Maine is Waterboro, a hamlet 20 miles from here. Inhabitants have fled. A switch in wind seems to have saved famous Bar Harbor but a wall of fire now sweeps toward Ford and Rockefeller estates at Seal Harbor. I flew to Portland by Northeast Airlines today, low over the Kennebunk region, where the greatest damage has been done. Where there has been looting, too. Here is an excerpt from a wire recording I made on the plane.

We are flying and approximately 1,000 feet up in the air, directly over the great fire area in Maine. A moment ago, we looked ahead and saw high purple wall of smoke that looked as if we couldn't possibly break through, but then we penetrated that and now we're in the fire area itself. The ground is half hidden. You can see great columns of smoke rising through the general pall that covers this whole part of the country. Ten thousand acres it's estimated have already been burned over. The fire is still going on, controlled in most places, but the fire still burns.

That smoke over Kennebunk grew so dense the land was blotted out. It filled our plane. It turned the sun the size and color of a bright copper penny. Even here in Portland there was day long twilight. Now that dark is here, fires leap on outlying hills. It's the most perilous fire situation New England has ever faced, and no rain is forecast for days to come. This is W. W. Chaplin at Portland, Maine.

ANNOUNCER: And in Portland, Maine, Governor Horace A. Hildreth appealed to the people of that state to organize on a wartime basis tonight to combat forest fires. He says they're causing the greatest economic catastrophe in the state's history. Now for a direct report on the scene, here's W. W. Chaplain that station WCSH, Portland, Maine.

CHAPLIN: Rorest fires whipped by 40 mile winds face large sections of New England tonight with their worst crisis ever, outside of war. Some fires are out of control again in Massachusetts, pretty well held in New Hampshire, on the rampage worse than ever here in Maine. Latest serious advance of the flames is into their society summer playland of Bar Harbor. One report says 2,000 residents are on the docks there awaiting Coastguard evacuation by sea. Bar Harbor is ablaze, but few confirmed details so

far. Roads closed and communications out. Portland itself is a walled city, walled with sky high smoke. In half a dozen directions you can see the shooting orange flames. They've ridden the windstorm within five miles of the city limits. I have just come back from a tour of the closest fire front. The outlook is bad. Toward Biddeford Pool, the flames are solid. I watched the pine woods go at Waterboro. East Brownfield is destroyed. South Portland is in emergency status. Down the coast it's worse than ever at Kennebunk. Sanitariums at Biddeford, Maine and Fitchburg, Massachusetts had been evacuated. But last word from Biddeford hospitals was, send ambulances, as many as you can, as soon as you can.

The National Guard is mobilizing. The Legion is all out. Relief agencies are collecting and distributing food and clothing to tens of thousands of refugees and firefighters. No relief by rain is yet in sight. The wind still howls across the miles of fire. This is W. W. Chaplin at Portland, Maine.

ANNOUNCER: The northeastern states are under a pall of smoke, the symbol of millions of dollars in damage mounding by the hour. Here's W. W. Chaplin in the forest fire area near Bar Harbor, Maine.

CHAPLIN: Forest fires sear the country tonight from Maine to Michigan. All of New England is still a tinderbox. I'm speaking from Ellsworth, Maine. The Red Cross haven for refugees from Bar Harbor and other evacuated communities of Mount Desert Island. That's been one of the great peril points of the past days. Here in the shadow of the blast furnace blaze from the ravaged island, there are already more than 1500 refugees, several hundred of them babies and older children, many with nothing left in the world but the clothes they wear. They're being fed, housed, clothed and the Red Cross says they can handle up to 6,000 if the need arises. On the island itself, a black out region tonight because power has failed. The fire is to a certain extent contained. There are hundreds of volunteer firefighters. One great trouble has been to get the inhabitants, all of them, to leave their threatened homes. Just an hour or so ago, authorities warned remaining residents that if they didn't leave at once the road to the mainland, it might have to be closed. A shifting wind might cut that road again and also send the Holocaust riding straight into Northeast Harbor, a community second only to Bar Harbor itself. There has already been some looting on the island, but tonight the National Guard has moved in and that will be stopped. Telephone men have been working for days almost without sleep to keep rescue lines open. Order has been brought out of chaos by the State Police with their radio automobiles coordinating rescue operations all over the island. I'm giving you this report from Ellsworth over facilities of radio station WLBZ, Bangor, Maine. This is W. W. Chaplin in the forest fire area near Bar Harbor, Maine.

[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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