

Monday afternoon

1934-02-26

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Dear Mother:-

I didn't get off my usual letter yesterday due to the terrible tragedy about which you have no doubt read in the papers. In spite of the discovery of the bodies during the afternoon, the report did not get around the campus until about 8 o'clock in the evening. I was one of the first to hear it, and I got Butch and went to the Theta Chi house to find out whether our friend Schooley was among the dead or not. We hoped against hope that he might have been one of those on a week-end, although this seemed unlikely since he had not mentioned it the last time he was over, Friday afternoon. At the house a watchman was in charge who did not know the names but confirmed the rumor that nine had died. At Dick's House we could get no information, but at the Dartmouth office we got a list of the dead from the editor. Schooley was one of them. What a terrible shock for the families! Schooley's mother is an invalid, and has been in very poor health for the last two years. Fullerton, another of the fellows, is a brother of a very good friend of Prentiss', and Bob says that the father died a few years ago leaving the mother with only the two boys. The younger brother fortunately did not belong to the same fraternity. Rumor has it that the President of the college was nearly frantic when he learned the news and had to inform the boys' parents. Not a living thing in the house escape. Every single man who was asleep there was killed, and even the house dog died. And yet all without any pain or knowledge of what had happened. They all looked so natural that the janitor thought they were still asleep when he came in in the morning and shut the window. Strangely enough the window of the room where they slept was

See Appendix

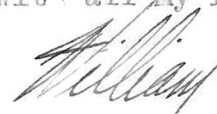
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wide open, but apparently there was not enough draft to blow the fumes out quickly enough. Be sure to be careful after this not to check the furnace too soon when you are in a hurry to go to bed, although this furnace has never blown out, has it? Remember that the fumes penetrated clear from the basement to the third floor and still caused death in spite of the open window, so don't take any chances.

I got to hear the Hall-Johnson Choir last Friday. They were scheduled to come Tuesday, but couldn't get through because of the heavy snowfall. It is snowing harder than ever now, and while Janie would probably like it, I don't think anyone here now does. The snow is several feet deep at present. For one day last week the mail trains could not get through, so if you do not get this until late, that is probably the reason.

I am very glad that you and Daddy were pleased about the grades. The fact that you are glad gives me a much stronger incentive than anything else to work hard. The bill for the tuition has arrived (\$200), so you must gather yourselves for the big push. It is to be paid by March 10; I do hope that you are all well, and be sure to give dear Aunt Mamie my very best love the next time you go out there. I hope she will get along well with the quilt. I have not heard anything about the reorganization of the Union Trust recently. Please let me know if any more steps are taken. I must close now as there is a fellow waiting here to do German with me. I will not take time to reread this, so please excuse the many errors.

With all my love,



DARTMOUTH
COLLEGE

THIRD CONCERT

Dartmouth College Concert Series

HALL JOHNSON
NEGRO CHOIR

WEBSTER HALL
February 20, 1934

1934-02-25 U89 P3/6

HALL JOHNSON NEGRO CHOIR

HALL JOHNSON, Conductor

ULYSSES ELAM, Assistant Conductor

✻

PROGRAM

I

RIDE ON, JESUS

STEAL AWAY TO JESUS

CERT'N'Y, LORD

MY GOD IS SO HIGH

II

GOOD NEWS

KEEP A-INCHIN' ALONG

NOBODY KNOWS DE TROUBLE I SEE

EZEKIEL SAW DE WHEEL

Arranged for Male Voices

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III

DIS OLE HAMMER KILLED JOHN HENRY
CARRY ME BACK TO OLD VIRGINNY
WATER-BOY
ST. JAMES INFIRMARY BLUES

~
INTERMISSION
~

IV

DID YOU READ DAT LETTER?
CITY CALLED HEAVEN
RELIGION IS A FORTUNE
JOHN, DE REVELATOR

V

BY AN' BY
TRAMPIN'
SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT
IN DAT GREAT GITTIN' UP MORNIN'

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SEASON 1933-34

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE
CONCERT SERIES

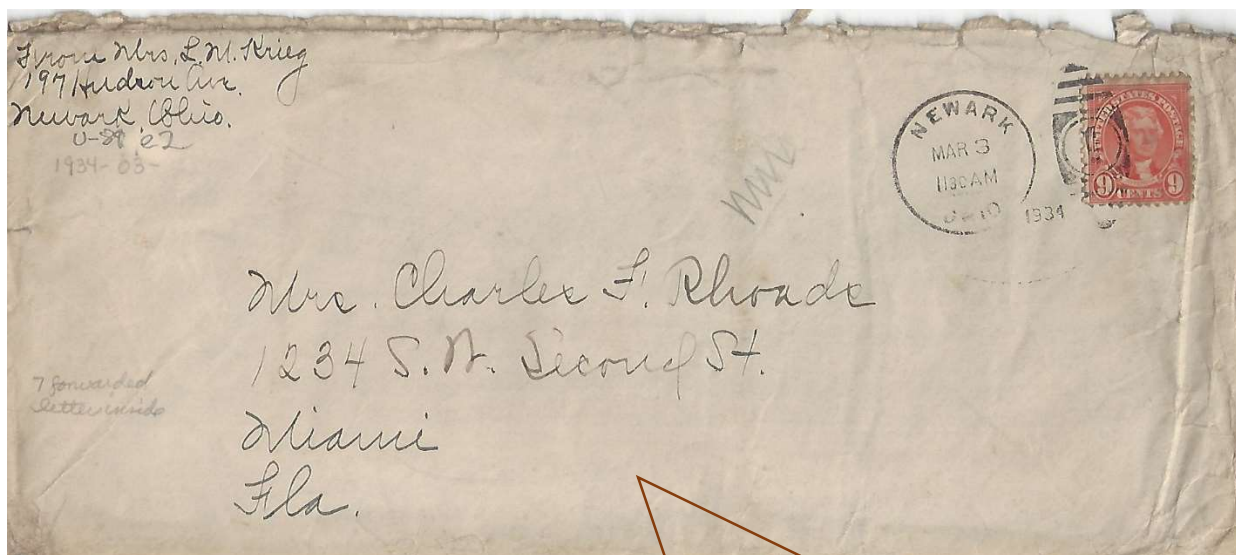
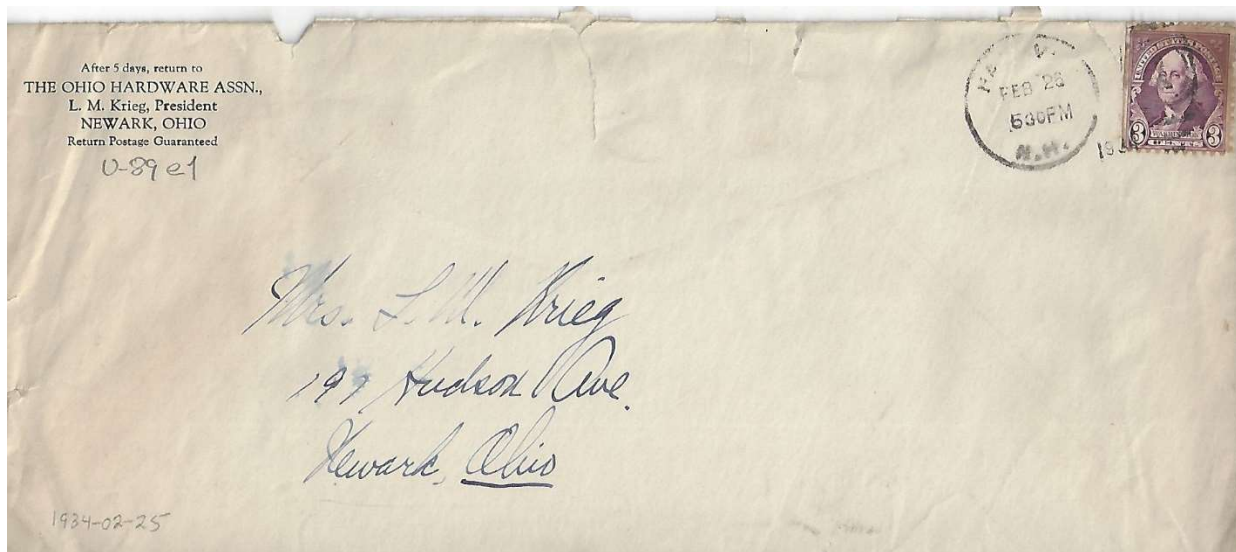
Rosa Ponselle	December 5
Budapest String Quartet	January 23
Hall Johnson Negro Choir	February 20
Albert Spalding	March 20
Handel Society Symphony Orchestra	May 6

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MAURICE F. LONGHURST	Director
CHARLES E. WIDMAYER	Business Manager

Auspices: Department of Music

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This envelope was addressed by William's mother to her sister, Lillian "Aunt Ninnie" Crane Rhoads. When found, it contained the following seven letters, whose envelopes were stored empty nearby:

1. 1934-02-15 U-82 WLK to HCK
2. 1934-01-22 U-83 WLK to HCK
3. 1934-01-28 U-84 WLK to HCK
4. 1934-02-05 U-85 WLK to HCK
5. 1934-02-11 U-86 WLK to HCK
6. 1934-02-18 U-88 WLK to HCK
7. 1934-02-26 U-89 WLK to HCK

The Alpha Theta tragedy of February 25, 1934

Nine brothers of Alpha Theta chapter of Theta Chi died in a tragic accident on the morning of Sunday, February 25, 1934, when the metal [chimney](#) of the building's old [coal furnace](#) blew out in the night and the residence filled with poisonous [carbon monoxide](#) gas.

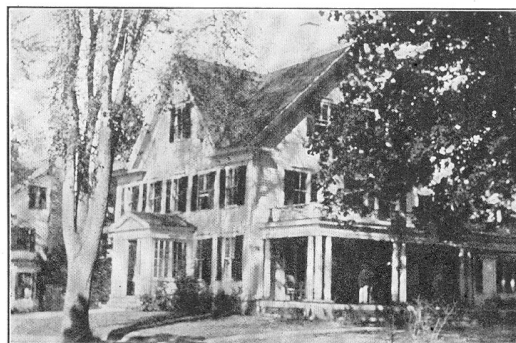
The bodies were not discovered until the afternoon of Sunday, February 25, 1934, when M.B. Little, a janitor, entered the chapter house and found the students dead in their beds. A pet collie dog was also found dead in one of the bedrooms. News of the tragic deaths was widely reported in papers and magazines. This is still the most fatal accident ever to occur at Dartmouth College.

At the time the chapter had 35–40 members (reports vary), and seventeen of them lived in the chapter house. Eight residents escaped death because they had left campus for the weekend. The deceased were:

- William F. Fullerton '34
- Edward F. Moldenke '34 (president)
- William M. Smith Jr. '34
- Edward N. Wentworth Jr. '34
- Americo S. De Masi '35 (vice president)
- Harold D. Watson '35
- Wilmot H. Schooley '35
- John J. Griffin '36
- Alfred H. Moldenke '36 (Edward's younger brother)

Following the tragedy people asked if the members would move out of the house, but faculty advisor Professor William H. Woods said: "Of course they will move back, we have men with blood in them." The surviving members met at the Hanover Inn shortly after the disaster. John Trickey Jr. '33 T'34, past president of the chapter and a student at the Tuck School of Business, was elected to replace Moldenke. The surviving members moved back into the house after the furnace that caused the accident was replaced. But membership did suffer after 1934, and eventually the chapter house was razed in 1940 and a new building, the current chapter house, opened in 1941.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alpha_Theta#Coal_furnace_accident (accessed 2021-03-30)



ALPHA THETA
Dartmouth College

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