

Fatal Blaze Brings Criticism on Firemen

Fire Inquiry Board Blamed By Mayor

Mother, 2 Sons Perish

By GIL HERMAN

A mother and her two boys lost their lives early Monday morning in a flash fire that ripped through their home at 1189 Brookwood in Birmingham's first fatal residential fire in over a decade.

Dead are Mrs. Thomas Couper, 40, and her sons Danny, 12, and Larry, 13. Couper's father, Lawrence W. Cross, 62, was rescued by Birmingham firemen and is reported in satisfactory condition at St. Joseph Mercy hospital, Pontiac, where he was treated for shock and smoke in the lungs.

THE HUSBAND and father, Thomas Couper, learned of the tragedy by radio message from the Birmingham police department to the cruiser, S.S. Tadoussac on the St. Lawrence river between the cities of Quebec and Montreal, Canada.

Couper, a vice-president of L. A. Young Spring and Wire Co., Detroit, was on a Detroit commute of commerce cruise with three other company officers.

He was unable to return to Birmingham immediately but had to wait until the cruiser docked at Montreal at 1 p.m. Monday. He returned from Montreal in a private plane his company sent there.

FIRST TO report the blaze was Jack Laula, 1220 Brookwood, whose car was immediately called to the street from the Couper home.

He and his wife had been sitting by a large picture window in their living room from which they easily can see the Couper house.

At midnight when the Laulas prepared to retire they noticed nothing unusual about the house across the street.

At about 12:45 a.m. they were aroused by cracking sounds Mrs. Laula heard which were caused by firecrackers.

LAULA investigated and saw flames mushrooming out of the lower windows of his neighbor's house and immediately called the fire department, then rushed across the street to try to get the people out of the house.

Flames were all over the place. We couldn't get into the house so we called and called to try to wake the people up, but the fire was so bad I was sure everybody was dead.

In the meantime, Laula had made a circuit of the house and heard screams calling for help from a rear upstairs window.

WHEN FIREMEN arrived at 12:56 a.m., Laula directed them to the rear window where they set up a ladder and brought Cross out.

CREWS of a pumper and an aerial ladder truck, first to arrive at the scene, turned their initial efforts to rescue operations, said Chief Vernon W. Griffith.

LAULA mounted a ladder at second story windows and sprayed water from the fire truck's booster to enter the upstairs bedrooms.

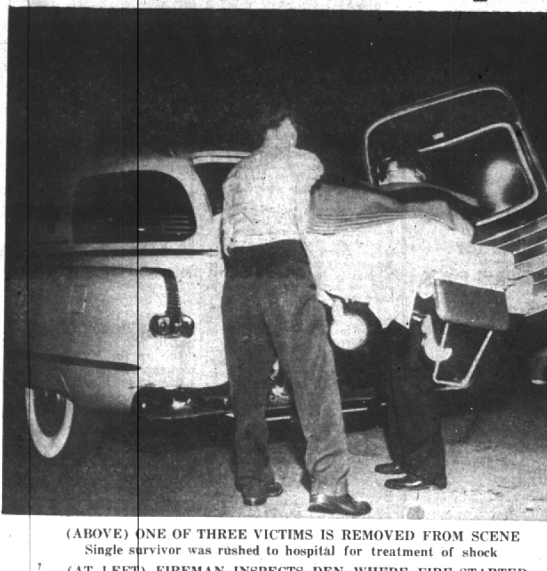


(ABOVE) ONE OF THREE VICTIMS IS REMOVED FROM SCENE

Single survivor was rushed to hospital for treatment of shock

(AT LEFT) FIREMAN INSPECTS DEN WHERE FIRE STARTED

Lighted cigarette blamed for tragedy (Eccentric Photos)



(ABOVE) ONE OF THREE VICTIMS IS REMOVED FROM SCENE

Single survivor was rushed to hospital for treatment of shock

(AT LEFT) FIREMAN INSPECTS DEN WHERE FIRE STARTED

Lighted cigarette blamed for tragedy (Eccentric Photos)

Spencer, Kass, Ball Selected

By GEORGE WM. AVERILL

A three-man board of inquiry into the performance of Birmingham firemen at Sunday night's disastrous fire which claimed three lives was initiated this week by city commissioners who are determined not to let the department's fine national reputation become tarnished without proof beyond reasonable doubt.

This decision followed an impassioned heated report to the city commission Monday night by former commissioner Frank Rising, who lives only several hundred yards from where the fire occurred.

Fighting hard to control his emotions as he described Sunday night's activity as he saw it, Rising finally stopped, took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes as he accused himself and walked from the commission room.

A FEW MINUTES later, he returned and apologized for his loss of control.

Said Mayor Charles Renfrew, "I think we can all sympathize with Mr. Rising's report. He is giving his personal opinion of a very emotional experience which many persons went through."

However, we are proud of the department's attempt we did give one life, and we have every reason to believe it will continue to merit our respect.

Commissioners agreed with V. B. Watkins' suggestion that the city was obligated to establish a board of inquiry into the charges which were made by the fire department's members of early efforts of the city's firemen.

PRACTICALLY all of the criticism was aimed last week at acknowledged fact that firemen concentrated first on their homes rather than try to control the blaze.

Fire Chief Vern W. Griffith, who has been with the department for more than 18 years and was a member of the first paid department, was quickly to defend his men on the charges which began to circulate even while the fire was raging.

My orders to the department always have been to rescue first, fight fire second," he repeated again Monday night at the commission meeting.

"If we had used the five minutes to fight the fire instead of make the rescue, the fire would have been even more serious," emphasized Griffith Tuesday afternoon to this reporter.

THE THREE-MAN board of inquiry, which Mayor Renfrew appointed Wednesday and ordered to conduct an immediate investigation into the charges, is headed by Mayor Renfrew, Norman C. Currin was elected treasurer and Jack Roberts will become assessor.

Trustees elected were Winfield Hinman, Homer Hyde, J. Robert Mittle, Harry H. Rotters, Glenn Shoemaker and Wendell Smith.

B'ham School Bond Issue Wins, 8-1

Birmingham school district voters Monday overwhelmingly supported the board of education's proposal for a new \$3,500,000 bond issue to finance a building expansion program, and joined voters in Bloomfield Hills, Southfield township, and Troy township school districts in approving a bid by the Oakland county board of education to set up a special program for educating handicapped children in the county.

An unofficial tally of votes shows the Birmingham bond proposal to have been approved by a margin of 1,467 votes to 180.

Southfield commencement exercises also will be held at 8 p.m. tonight in the high school gymnasium, Labors at 10 Mile road.

W. W. Whitehouse, president of Albion college, will be the principal speaker at the commencement programs for the three schools are:

Birmingham - Singing of the Star Spangled (See GRADUATES, Page 4)

Propose Private Sewer Systems on Property in Troy

Discussion regarding the construction of a private sewer system on property at the northeast corner of Adams and 16th St. was carried over to a special meeting Monday, June 21, by Troy township board members Monday night.

The developer, George Glover of Oak Park, seeks to build about 60 homes in the subdivision, install sewer lines in the street and a central septic tank to serve the entire subdivision.

Glover agreed Monday night to drop a suit against the township that stemmed from Troy's refusal to issue building permits for the property because of sanitary sewer problems.

Under Glover's plan the developers would finance the entire construction of the system and turn it over to the township as the continuing authority for the system's operation.

PROPOSED plans also would call for establishment of a special assessment district within the area to finance inclusion of the property in a drain district to join in the interceptor sewer program sometime in the future.

Board members believe the system might answer the question of further development of the Adams road area, which, in turn, would help the township finance its part in the proposed interceptor sewer from the City of Detroit.

The long discussion also brought out a similar problem in the Leonard Lane subdivision to the north of the Glover property.

Septic tank operation forced the township recently to stop issuance of any more building permits in the subdivision being developed by the Clare Construction company.

THE DEVELOPERS also seek to construct a private sewer system (See TROY, Page 4)

Graduations Today For 3 High Schools

Commencement exercises for Birmingham high school seniors this morning and those for Southfield and Bloomfield Hills students this evening mark the end of ceremonies this year for the largest group of graduates in the history of the Birmingham-Southfield-Troy-Bloomfield hills area.

Contributing to a total of 644 high school graduates are Birmingham with 285; Southfield, 149; Troy, 98; Kingswood, 40; Cranbrook, 40; and Bloomfield Hills, 22.

PRINCIPAL speaker for Birmingham's commencement, to be held at 10 a.m. at the high school gymnasium, will be the Rev. Henry Hitt Crane, pastor of Detroit's Central Methodist church.

Bloomfield Hills graduation exercises will be held tonight at 8 p.m. at Kirk in the Hills, Minister of the Star Spangled

SHOOTING classes will be held week days from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. This program ends July 30.

A new dramatic program, for teenage children only, will be held at Birmingham high school week-end mornings 9 to 11:30. Participants must register for this program and pay a \$2 fee.

An organized baseball program, already underway, will be conducted at nine city diamonds during evenings. Diamond facilities will be available for free play mornings and afternoons.

A NEW feature of this summer's program will be junior sports at Birmingham high school gym.

Boys and girls in fourth grade and above will be eligible to participate.

Supervised groups will participate in activities such as basketball, badminton, table tennis, archery, baseball, roller skating, volleyball, tennis, trampolining, gymnastics, etc. Gym shoes are necessary but no fee or registration. All equipment except baseball gloves will be furnished.

Springdale park will be open for golfing for boys and girls 10 years to 17 years on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday before 1 p.m. A special rate of 65 cents will be charged, golf lessons are free, and tournaments will be held. No registration is required. Participants (See BOARD, Page 6)

When Birmingham city officials opened bids last week for construction of four tennis courts at Eton park, they were surprised to find the bids much lower than they anticipated.

In fact, the low bid of \$31,500 was so far under the expected estimated cost of \$8,000 to \$10,000 that City Engineer Richard Gare said before he could recommend a contract, he would have to consult with the bidder to make sure the job's specifications were fully understood.

The only other bid was for \$5,600. Gare is meeting with the low bidder this week and is expected to make his recommendation to the city commission next week.

It is admitted universally that there never was a more helpful insurance collection of writing than the Bible.

77TH YEAR—NO. 14

and THAT

By G.R.A.

"Sure, I know it costs a lot of money to support the Lion on this earth," sighed the Old Philosopher of Piety Hill.

A Florida psychologist recently offered free services to bring a quick conclusion to the McCarty-Army controversy. He would hypnotize all the important people involved in the fracas.

"By putting them in a hypnotic state they would have to tell the truth," declared the psychologist.

Mister, if your idea would work, and mankind accepted the legality of such a method in its pursuit of Utopia, what a wonderful world you could produce.

Nobody could get away with lying, people would be afraid to do wrong, our world would almost eliminate the need for wide-spread and costly law enforcement agencies.

Slowly, but with more assurance, Birmingham business interests and city commissioners are getting closer to solving the off-street parking problem. Last week the commission and businessmen agreed to pay for such projects on a 50-50 basis.

At long last Roland (Rolle) W. Reese, 1847 Webster, has been installed as Birmingham's new postmaster. He is a man of action and you can buy his services cheap.

Dad criticized the sermon. Mother thought the organism was not made of meat and bone. Sister didn't like the choir.

One of the primary entrances to the subdivision south and west of it, Arden lane should be improved, claims T. E. Hendrickson, 1170 Arden.

City commissioners asked him to present a petition for its paving, which they said they will consider with the proposal to improve the other subdivision streets.

In honor of their schoolmate, Larry Couper, who died with his mother, Mrs. Thomas Couper, and his young brother, Daniel, in the tragic fire at the Couper home on Brookwood early Monday morning, students at Barnum Junior high school have cancelled school on Wednesday.

The balance probably will be used to mount a memorial plaque in the school, and purchase properly marked books for the Barnum library.

INSIDE THE ECCENTRIC

Table with 2 columns: Section and Page. Rows include Bits of B'ham, B'ham Background, Church, Communist's Wife, Berkshire, East Beverly, France in the School, Lathrup Village, North Adams, S'East of B'ham, Troy, Walnut Lake, West Beverly, Wing Lake Xeroxoff, Down to Earth, Editor's Mail, Nature Now, Obligations, What's Hot, Society, Want Ads.

STRICTLY FRESH

Sign in Denver, Colo. reads: "Drive carefully, please. At day they're trying to make 'pusy' toolers" out of the local motorists.



Police and firemen in Sacramento, Calif., who chased an old jalopy with its brakes failing, really had a "hot rod" on their hands.

When the national law against interstate shipment of fireworks goes into effect, dangerous celebration will turn out to be a complete fiasco.