

Playing With Matches May Have Caused Fatal Blaze



Heroic Rescue

Carbristo "Bris" Collins, operator of the Heights Motel at 4016 New York Ave., is pictured as he carried 6-week-old Bobbin Marie Ward from the family's burning home. The man attempted to get to the second story of the home three times to save the other three Ward children, but was forced back by smoke and flames.—Staff photo by Jack L. Bradley.

Richwoods and state fire officials said Friday night they expect to begin investigation this morning into the tragic fire which at 11 a. m. Friday took the lives of three Richwoods Township children.

The blaze, believed to have been started by children playing with matches, damaged the upstairs part of the story and half home of Mr. and Mrs. George E. Ward at 4013 N. Boulevard Ave.

Dead in the fire were the family's three daughters: Crystal Denise, 1; Jackie Louise, 2, and Donna, 3.

An infant daughter, Bobbin Marie, 6 weeks old, was saved when she was carried out of the burning home by a neighbor.

Richwoods Fire Department late Friday officially listed the cause of the fire as undetermined. However, a spokesman for the department said the fire was probably started by one of the three children playing with matches.

Richwoods firemen were summoned to the fire scene shortly before 11 a. m. when Mrs. Pearl Brewer of 4107 Boulevard Ave., saw smoke pouring out from an upper front window. The woman ran to the front door, alerted Mrs. Ward, who was in the basement, and then contacted the fire department.

Mrs. Ward reportedly tried to rush upstairs seconds after the blaze was noticed, but was forced back by smoke and flames. She then ran outside the building.

SCREAMS BY MRS. WARD and Mrs. Brewer attracted Carbristo

"Bris" Collins, operator of the Heights Motel nearby, and Luther Puryear of 4012 New York Ave. Collins rushed into the house and carried out the infant Bobbin Marie, who was sleeping in a downstairs room.

Collins, risking his life, then made two attempts to get upstairs in the flaming home to save the other three children.

Each time he was forced back by the flames.

Observers said that in a third attempt Collins wrapped his head and shoulders, but still was unable to get to the upstairs bedroom.

Richwoods firemen, with assistance from the Peoria Heights Department, battled the blaze for about an hour before bringing it under control. They found the charred bodies of the children in the upstairs bedroom after the flames were subdued. It could not be determined whether the girls made any attempt to reach the door of their smoke-filled room.

The bodies of the three girls were removed to Goin Funeral Home where funeral arrangements are pending.

Richwoods fire officials said they could not estimate the damage to the home Friday but said they will attempt to go through the house and talk to Mr. and Mrs. Ward today. The woman was suffering from shock and was taken to St. Francis Hospital shortly after the fire. She was released Friday night.

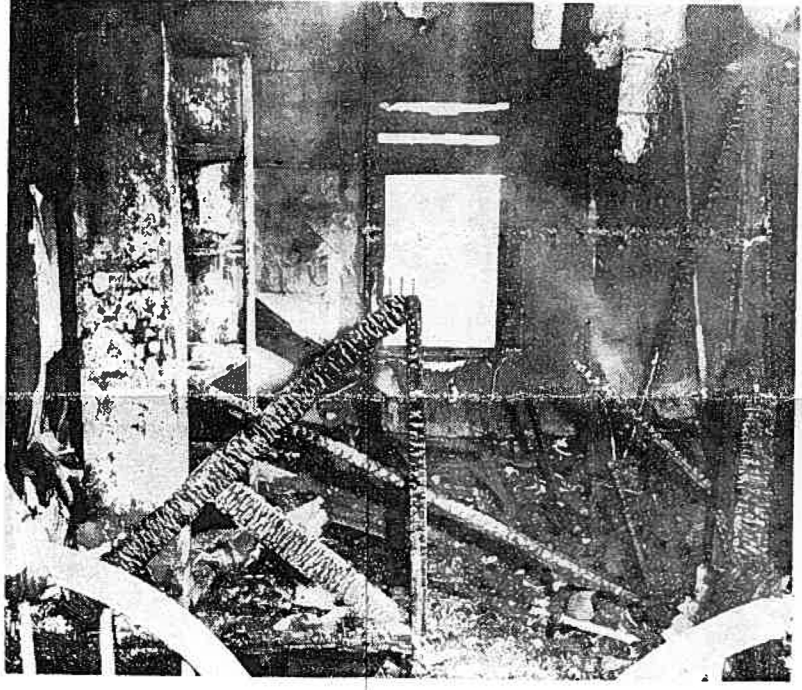
Firemen said the heaviest fire damage was to the upstairs of the home and that the flames did not reach the lower story. However, water and smoke damage to the lower part of the house was extensive, they stated.

The Ward family, in addition to the three children who perished, includes five others, a girl 10, another girl 9, a boy 8, a girl 6, and the infant. The father is an employe of Caterpillar Tractor Co. and holds a part time job at Exposition Gardens. He was at work when the fire broke out but was summoned home by a neighbor.

A RICHWOODS fireman was injured while taking additional equipment to the fatal fire Friday when the department station wagon collided with another car at War Memorial drive and Knoxville avenue.

Taken to Proctor Hospital was Howard Markgraf of 2924 N. Victoria Ave., whose car collided with one driven by Mrs. John O. Peters of 4620 N. Missouri Ave. Mrs. Peters was uninjured.

The station wagon hit an embankment after the collision and then smashed into a tree in the yard of Mrs. E. M. Harsch on Oak Park drive.



Where Three Died

Three children of Mr. and Mrs. George E. Ward of 4013 Boulevard Ave., perished in the room pictured above when fire at 11 a. m. Friday raced through the family's one and a half-story frame residence. All three bodies were found by firemen on the floor of the gutted upstairs bedroom.—Staff photo by Carl D. Schmitt.

Shortly after the blaze, Exposition Gardens where Ward is employed launched a drive to collect clothing, household possessions and money for the tragedy stricken family.

Robert Park, executive secretary of the Gardens, said the office there will remain open from 9 a. m. to 9 p. m. today to accept donations.

Clothing, Park said, is needed

for the remaining Ward children. Mrs. Ward wears a size 16 dress and her husband a size 32 trousers and medium shirts. Checks to help the family should be made payable to the Exposition Gardens Help Fund.