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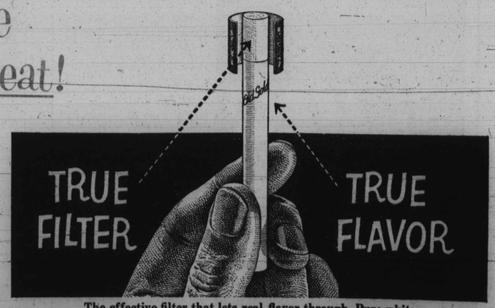

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Million Dollar Fire Razes South Baltimore

'It was awful,' housewife declares

Describes how raging fire destroyed whole city block

"If I should live to be a hundred I never expect to see anything like it again. It was awful. If it hadn't been for our neighbor we would all be dead today."

That was the way a Leadenhall St. housewife felt Wednesday after her home and belongings had been destroyed in an 11-alarm million dollar fire which left over 50 families homeless in a one block area.

Mrs. Lorrai... Waith said the first she knew about the fire which started in a lumber yard for a casket company at the rear of her home, was when she heard someone yell, "Let's get out of this house!"

Mrs. Waith told a reporter: "I was helping my little girl Beverly with her homework when I heard the noise. I went to my bathroom window and saw the biggest flame I have ever seen in my life. I then grabbed my little girl and ran out.

"We lost all of our clothing," she said, "our furniture and bedding are soaked with water, and we have been standing around out here since 9 p.m. last night."

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THE FIRE which destroyed the block was the largest in the history of South Baltimore.

It started within 150 steps of a fire department engine house Cross, Race, and West Sts.

Ironically the fire occurred in an area where residents have been striving to improve their neighborhood. Only last Monday a group of people from Area 7 told their story on a television show sponsored by the Department of Public Welfare.

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ACCORDING to George W. Hill, member of a community workshop group from School No. 162, the fire could have been avoided if there had been no industrial plants in the community.

"We have been opposing industry in our community for a long time!" Mr. Hill said, "and new people are homeless due to a lumber yard that should have been located some place else."

In connection with the fire he said, the community group will hold a meeting at his house, 2320 Huron St., in Mt. Winans on Sunday afternoon.

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ELEVEN alarms were turned in within three minutes of each other when the flames roared through the lumber yard, and dozens of other buildings including a trucking firm, two garages, and a number of shops.

Some of the places damaged included the American Trans... portation Co., Baltimore Tool Works, and the Hammond and Seidel Service Co.

The fire raged out of control for three hours before firemen with 41 pieces of equipment brought it under control.

As late as 10 p.m. Wednesday they were still pouring water on smoldering embers. At the height of the fire flames were visible as far away as Towson.

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THE FIRST alarm was turned in at 9:04 p.m. by members of Engine Company No. 26 at Leadenhall and, West Sts. Within three minutes the second alarm was sounded. At the end, over half of the city's fire fighting equipment was called to the scene.

Pending their arrival, police summoned from all districts went from house to house warning the occupants to "get out."

The tenants blocked sidewalks in the area with bundles of clothing and articles of furniture with television sets dominating the scene.

Just how long the fire had smouldered before it gutted the lumber yard was anybody's guess.

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THE REAR porches of most of the houses were facing the lumber yard. On two occasions, waves of heat forced firemen back from the flames.

One firefighter was injured. He was identified as George Powell of Engine Company No. 2. He sustained burned feet and was taken to Mercy hospital for treatment.

Shortly after the fire was brought under control the Red Cross set up an evacuation station in the basement of School No. 121.

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THE SALVATION Army, with its mobile unit served coffee and cared for some of the homeless at a nearby shelter.

The Red Cross reported at 12 noon Wednesday that homes had been found for 12 families, and 50 more had been interviewed.

Police estimated that about 10,000 persons visited the scene. Typical of those who sustained heavy losses was Mrs. Anna Clark of 1137 Leadenhall St.

In addition to losing her belongings, Mrs. Clark as late as 11 a.m. Wednesday was searching for $100 in cash savings.

She recovered the bill fold which contained the money and although it was not damaged, $100 was missing.

She said that she was combing a friend's hair when she "looked up and saw a big flame balling through my back yard.

"I got out of there with my two children and husband, Dave, and called my neighbor, Miss Effie Savage. She's an elderly lady and I thought she would never get out of there."

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MR. AND MRS. Wilbur Smith of 132 West St., parents of four children were able to save only a few of their furnishings.

Mr. Smith said: "I was looking at television when one of my kids yelled daddy it's a big fire in the back yard.""

More than one family in the West St. area attributed what little luck they had to the help of a teenage white youth who lives nearby.

They told reporters that Donald Wright, 14, of the 700 block S. Charles St., helped them with removing furnishings and at times carried articles that were too heavy for two men.

Although they were without homes, they were making efforts on Wednesday to raise a contribution for the youngster.

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A GROUP of people representing the South Baltimore Merchants' Association, along with Epstein's Department Store have donated a number of blankets at Public School 121 to be used by children and adults who suffered from the big fire.

Members of the PTA of the school went out shopping, at a discount, for sheets and other types of bed clothing to be used in the emergency.

Many of the children who were displaced are housed at the school, others have been placed in homes of relatives and friends.

Many persons of surrounding neighborhoods visited the school and offered assistance and service to the residents of the burned area.

The senior choir of Douglass Memorial Church said they will adopt and care for one of the unfortunate families.

Appeal to help victims of fire

An appeal is being made for money, food, clothing and furniture for Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Banks and their five children who were burned out of their home at 664 Bradley St., Tuesday night.

The children, including four boys, range in age from 3 to 8 years. The family is lodging temporarily at 646 Greenwillow St.

Seize youth

held Partlow without bail pending grand jury action.

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THE YOUTH'S arrest Thursday morning around 8 a.m., came as a surprise since no mention had been made of arson in reports of the fire which left 60 families homeless.

Fire department officials, however, always check each fire for evidence of arson. In this case Arson Squad members checked their files to see if anyone lived in the neighborhood who had a record for setting fires.

Young Partlow's name popped up and he was picked up for questioning. The youth was arrested by Lt. Frank Baccalo and Sgt. Thomas Bryant of the Southern District. Aiding them in their questioning were Chief John Knoerlein and Capt. Ebener Katzenberger of the Arson Squad.

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YOUNG PARTLOW, who lived only a block away from where the mammoth fire started, pleaded not guilty at his hearing through his attorney, George F. Noff.

Police said the boy admitted his guilt after questioning at the police station.

Partlow was released from Crownsville State Hospital about a year ago after having been committed there when he was 15 for setting fires in the same neighborhood, police said.

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AT THE hearing police testified that the boy had gone to his grandmother's home, in the 100 block West St. to eat the night of the fire. Afterwards, police said, he went to the rear of the house which is located next to the lumber yard.

Police said the boy admitted striking three matches and making a torch of some chips and rolled up papers. The wind, it was testified, blew out two of the matches before the torch was lit.

Police charged that Partlow then stuck the torch through the wall of the lumber yard, then walked through Creek Alley to West St., where he stood on the corner and watched firemen fight the huge blaze.

It was also testified that Partlow denied having been at his grandmother's home until his younger brother, Donald, 14, said Alexander had been there the night of the blaze.

Police also testified that several people saw the Partlow youth in front of 132 West St., between 8 p.m. and 8:10 p.m., the night of the fire. The blaze was discovered around 9:04 p.m.

60 MADE HOMELESS — Razed by a million dollar fire which had its start in the lumber yard of a casket manufacturing company, this is what remained of a city block area in South Baltimore Tuesday. The gutted home and business establishments on Leadenhall, West, Race, and Cross Sts. Sixty-one piece of equipment, manned by half the city's fire fighting force, fought the eleven-alarm blaze fire for three hours.

FIRE VICTIM'S BELONGINGS — While her sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Coleut, were looking about for a new home Miss Annie Reddick, right, of the 500 block W. West St., with the help of neighbors guarded their belongings Wednesday. The Coleyth home at 134 W. West St. was among those destroyed in Tuesday's eleven alarm fire. The Red Cross spent $1,700 for food and clothing alone in the first 24 hours of the fire.

Fire victim buried; sister still critical

Funeral services for Mrs. Elizabeth Griffin, 72, year - old housewife who lost her life Saturday in a fire which damaged her home at 1010 N. Wolfe St., were held Tuesday at the Cullick Funeral Home.

Mrs. Griffin was fatally burned while pouring kerosene into an oil burner.

Her sister, Mrs. Nancy V. Dunn, sustained second and third degree burns in the fire and is still in critical condition at Johns Hopkins Hospital.

Mrs. Dunn was placed in an oxygen tent Tuesday. She was burned when she tried to put out flames in a blazing mattress under which her sister had rolled.

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JAMES GRIFFIN, husband of the dead woman was asleep when the fire started but awoke in time to try and save his sister-in-law.

When she ran into the room with her clothing on fire, he placed her in a bath tub and turned on the water. Mrs. Dunn was burned over half her body.

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POLICE REPORTED that the fire was caused when Mrs. Griffin spilled kerosine on a linoleum and it ignited.

Services were conducted by the Rev. Dennis Barrow, pastor, Fairmount Bantist Church. Burial was in Mt. Calvary Cemetery.

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THE BURIAL of Mrs. Griffin brought an end to a struggle by a husband who wanted to bury his wife properly.

Confused at first about what he should do in the way of making funeral arrangements, he was given help by his employer and the funeral home.

The day after his wife died he stated that he was unwilling to trust anyone. Asked on Wednesday if he felt any different, he said "No."

Mr. Griffin made it clear that he was not particular about talking with anyone.

Family of 10 typical of those in fire area

60 left homeless, two families had 8 kids

Of the 60 persons left homeless in Tuesday's million dollar fire in South Baltimore, Lewis Dukes of 126 W. West St. was among those who sustained the heaviest loss and is complaining the least.

Father of eight children, all girls, Mr. Duke's philosophy about the fire which destroyed an entire city block is: "Te back with our belongings, we got out safe and I can still work.

"My wife is safe, my children are safe, what better blessing could a working man ask for," Mr. Dukes said Thursday.

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WHILE LOOKING over the ruins of what was once his home he said: "I know we are going to have to start from scratch, but at least we are safe.

"My wife has been complaining about our condition but I have told her to stop worrying. We were buying our home but there is no doubt in my mind that we will be able to buy another."

The 45 - year - old construction worker said he was surprised about the fire and at first couldn't believe that his house was one of those burned down.

Mr. Dukes said he was tending bar in a neighborhood tavern when someone told him, "Dukes, your house is on fire."

"We came to Baltimore from Manning, S.C. in 1943," he said "and for five years we have been paying for that house. Now we will have to start all over."

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THE DUKES were married 20 years ago. Six of their eight children were at home with their mother, Mrs. Mary Dukes when the fire started in a lumber yard at the rear of their home. Two of their older girls are married.

Among those who fled or were carried from the home were Catherine, 14; Louise, 9; Vernell, 7; Evelyn, 5; Patricia Ann., 3; and Belva Jean.

The Dukes were not the only family to suffer losses.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Carpenter and their family including their five-month-old twins, Florence and Frederick, also had to flee from their home at 136 W. West St.

A clerk in a grocery store at Leadenhall and West Sts., Mr. Carpenter said: "What I got out with is what I've got on."

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OUT OF THE entire block destroyed, 23 buildings were left standing although most were badly damaged.

In the 1100 block Leadenhall St., 11 building, including a grocery store, and the entrance to a trucking firm were left.

In the 100 block W. West St., four buildings including a grocery store remained standing. Firemen were busy Thursday pulling down two of that number.

In the 1100 block Race St., two structures, including the entrance to a tool factory and the Ericsson Transfer Co. were left.

In the 100 block W. Cross St., an ice house, a cleaning and pressing establishment and a grocery store remained.

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THE FOLLOWING establishments were listed as damaged or destroyed.

Joe's Food Market in the 1100 block Race St.

Furst Brothers Lumber Co., 1100 block Leadenhall St.

Reall's Express Co., 101 W. Cross St.

Hammond and Seidel Truck Service Co., 117 Race St.

Norfolk Cleaners, 122 W. West St.

Brown's Blacksmith Shop, 130 W. West St.

Martin's Grocery, Leadenhall and Cross Sts.

Baltimore Tool Works, 1110 Race St.

None of the business establishments were owned or operated by colored.

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THE FIRE Department reportment reported that the following premises were pulled down on West St.: 124, 126, 138, 130, 132, 134, and 136.

On Leadenhall St.: 1141, 1139, 1137, and 1135.

Twenty-seven pupils from the Payne Elementary School were among those evicted from their homes. Nine remained away from school the day after the fire.

In the basement of the school, the Red Cross Thursday had taken care of 25 families and 81 other persons. Clothing and food were provided for each at a cost of approximately $22 per person.

Thus far, a total of $1,700 has been spent for food and clothing in the area. A staff is still working to provide shelter for those ousted.

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MISS NAOMI Levin, case worker at the disaster center, has requested that no more clothing be sent to the center.

"We have enough to take care of the clothing problem," she said, "but there is a need for financial support.

Two dozens sets of bedding, pillow cases and sheets were sent to the center by the South Baltimore Business Association and a department store in the 1100 bloc Light St.

The Rev. W. L. Green, pastor of Mt. Moriah Baptist Church, told the AFRO Thursday that a meeting comprised of representatives from all churches in the community had been called at the Leadenhall Bantist Church.

Among the churches scheduled to take part were Jerusalem, Ebenezer AME, Shiloh, Mt. Moriah and Leadenhall.

Beauticians to see steam curl exhibit

Master Beauticians, at their regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 23, 8:30 p.m., will see a demonstration of the steam curl by Mrs. Mamie Barnes.

The meeting will be held at the Beauticians' Center, 1522 Madison Ave., and members and others desiring to join the association are urged to attend. Miss Mayme Tilghman is president of the Master Beauticians.

Fatal fire tip week's top winner

The first person to call the AFRO about the fatal fire in the 1000 block of Wolfe St. is the $5 winner this week in the AFRO's Newstip Contest.

A second prize of $3 is awarded to the first person who called in the information about a newscaster's use of the expression "boy" when referring to State Senator-Elect Harry A. Cole.

A third prize of $2 goes to the person who called about a house cave - in in the 1200 block of Sticker St.

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OTHER PRIZES of $1.00 each are awarded to the persons who called in the following newstips:

First colored person hired on technical level by State Roads Commission, boy hit by car in 1200 block Aisquith St., fire at Cross and West Sts., fire in 800 block Brentwood St., death of "Miss Mary" in 1100 block Thomson St., fire in 1100 block Shields Place, car overturns on Old York Rd., trucks and car collide at Carey and Lanvale Sts.

The AFRO has $25 in awards for newstips each week. If you see anything happen which you think will make news, simply pick up the telephone and call MUlberry 5-6015. Ask for the City Desk and say:

"I've got a news tip."

Trash fire can't get too hot for youth

WASHINGTON

An eleven year old youth who refused to let things get too hot for him was in a good condition this week at D.C. General hospital after being treated for second degree burns.

Joseph Tyson, of the 5400 blk of Drake Pl., SE, was taken to the hospital last Friday by his father after sitting too close to a trash fire in the rear of his home police said.

GUEST SPEAKER — Dr. Channing H. Tobias, chairman, national N A A C P board, addressed YMCA dinner.

YMCA Dinner guests numbering 150 attended the fifth annual dinner of the Turner Station YMCA on Nov. 9 in the Sollers Point High School. Rudolph Wheeler is executive secretary of the Turner Station branch.

Crownsville has canteen, auxiliary

Open House will be staged at hospital on November 21

Crownsville Mental State Hospital, the only one of five mental hospitals in the state without a canteen or a woman's auxiliary now has both.

The auxiliary's first assignment is to raise $1,500 for canteen equipment.

The canteen is now in operation. It sells candies, cookies, cigarettes, coffee, ice cream and soft drinks to patients and to visitors.

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EVENTUALLY IT should sell stockings, night gowns, blouses, thread, needles, hair nets and pins, soap, facial tissues, tooth brushes, tooth paste, and other items needed for patients who cannot leave the premises to purchase personal needs.

The canteen is operated by volunteer workers under the direction of Mrs. Lydia Mussenden. Volunteers man the canteen three days in the week. It could remain open longer if it could find more volunteer workers.

Sunday, Nov. 21, the Crownsville Women's auxiliary will hold open house at the new Meyer Building at 3 p.m.

Sunday also is Tag Day and the 46-member state-wide committee hopes on that day to get reports of from 30,000 tags at five cents each which members have been selling for the past two weeks.

Sunday's visitors to Crownsville will be able to see the new Meyer Building, the cottages and the new canteen and meet the new women's auxiliary.

The members are Mrs. Vashti Murphy, president; Mrs. Jacqueline Fassett, Cambridge, secretary; Mrs. Albert LaForest, corresponding secretary; Mrs. Simon Carter, membership chairman;

Also Mesdames Bruce Alleyne, Sarah V. Brown, W. Wrnonam Brown Jr., Chipman W. Cunningham, J. Edward Duker, Millersville; A. H. Eichert, Crownsville Hospital; Mrs. Estella C. Evans, Charles France, Annapolis;

Mesdames William M. Garner, J. Preston Grant, D. Gross, E. H. Hall, Annapolis; Peter Hall, Annapolis; Susie V. Hilburn, Martin Jenkins; Miss Eulalia Mallory, Mesdames Pearl Palmer, Gladys V. Parker;

Miss Evelyn Perry, Annapolis; Mesdames J. N. Petty, Millersville; Abraham Ruchwarger, Crownsville Hospital; Eloise Richardson, Annapolis; Stanley C. Sergeant, Crownsville Hospital; Maud B. Smart, Addie Smith, Pearl Smith, Annapolis;

Mesdames Thomas C. Southerland, Severna Park; Edward Schad, Crownsville; Thomas Tingley, William Verge, Severna Park; Arthur M. West, Willie Valentine, Dorothy Rogers, Crownsville Hospital; Miss Elizabeth Moss, Crownsville Hospital; Edward A. Holmes, Millersville; Lillie Jones Vivetta Kramer, Crownsville Hospital; Elizabeth Hazel, Palestine Anderson, and Margaret Singletary.

Tuskegee president departs for India

TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE, Ala. —Dr. L. H. Foster, Tuskegee Institute president, and his wife, Mrs. Vera C. Foster, left by plane for India via New York, London, Frankfort and Kerachi last week.