

## Blizzard-Swept Inferno in Which Three Died



Flames sweeping through the Krantz apartment building in Mears early this morning claimed the lives of three Mears children. Four others narrowly escaped death in the raging inferno as firemen were helpless to save the trapped children in a second floor apartment. (Photo by Keith Dayharsh)

### Three Die in Mears Blaze, Two Casnovia Homes Burn

Dec. 8, 1948 (?)

Two disastrous West Michigan fires, fanned by a raging blizzard, snuffed out the lives of three children in an apartment house blaze at Mears and threatened the destruction of the entire village of Casnovia early this morning. *Dec 8/48*

Seven persons had a narrow escape in the Casnovia fire that razed two homes and brought fire equipment from four neighboring villages before it was brought under control. Four others in the Mears fire also barely escaped with their lives as flames swept through a four-family frame apartment building.

Loss at Casnovia was estimated at \$15,000 while the Mears loss will exceed \$10,000.

Dead are:

Susie Riggs, 5 years old, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Riggs of Mears.

Beatrice Alexander, 14 years old, and her brother, Allen Alexander, 10 years old, children of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Alexander of Mears.

The fire presumably started from an overheated stove on the second floor of the two-story frame structure and with a raging blizzard fanning the flames the entire building was an inferno in minutes.

All of the victims were staying with Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Riggs, a brother of Susie. The Alexander children were also residing in the Riggs apartment while their parents were trying to find a home in Muskegon. The Alexander children were cousins of the Riggs girl, Mrs. Alexander being a sister of Mrs. Riggs.

Mr. and Mrs. Riggs made a frantic effort to reach the sleeping children in a rear bedroom but flames barred their entry and they narrowly escaped down a stairway before the roof collapsed. Mr. Riggs suffered second degree burns about the arms and face in his vain rescue attempt and he was being treated at the Oceana Hospital in Hart today.

Mr. and Mrs. Norman Krantz, who were married only a week ago, also occupied a second floor apartment in the building, and they fled down an inside stairway clad only in their night clothes. The two ground floor apartments were unoccupied.

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EFFORTS WERE being made at noon today to locate Mr. and Mrs. Alexander who were believed to be in Muskegon. The Alexanders were former residents of Ferry and moved to Mears last summer where Mr. Alexander was employed in a bakery until recently, when the family had planned to move to Muskegon.

Beatrice Alexander was a freshman in Hart High School while her brother, Allen, attended the fifth grade in the Mears school. Susie Riggs was in the kindergarten class at Mears.

The blaze was first discovered by Harold Van Tassel, a nearby resident, and with Murray Rossiter, another neighbor, the men made an effort to enter the flaming building but were driven back after breaking windows in the lower floor.

The fire started at 7:45 a. m. and the Hart fire department made a swift eight-minute run over the four miles of snow-blocked highways to Mears. The entire struc-

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THE CASNOVIA fire started at the Stinson home on South Main street, and spread to the next door home of Wayne Wessel, quickly leveling both at about 2 a. m. today. Hot embers from the two one frame dwellings flew for more than a block away, keeping firemen and volunteers busy snuffing them.

Firemen poured water on the home of Fire Chief Russell Morton, next in line as the flames were fanned by the stiff southwest wind.

The seven occupants of the two destroyed Casnovia homes fled safely but all the contents were lost.

The Stinson home was occupied by Earl Stinson, brother of the owner, and his son, Gordon, while the Wessel house was the home for Mr. and Mrs. Wessel and their three children. The blaze enveloped the Wessel dwelling before they could save clothing, furniture and personal items. The family was reported making their home temporarily with relatives in the area.

Two members of the Casnovia volunteer department suffered slight burns — Chief Morton and Glenn Humphreys.