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Game Room Owner's Home Levelled

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK
Editor

HOT SPRINGS — A fire of undetermined origin destroyed the home of Franklin S. (Hank) Holmes here early Sunday morning.

Hampered by gusty winds and a faulty fire hydrant, volunteer firemen were unable to extinguish the blaze which leveled the single story, six-room log and frame structure located on Spring Creek Road.

Holmes and his wife, Teresa, were vacationing in Florida at the time of the fire which began at approximately 1 a.m. The house was unoccupied.

Holmes and family members say they suspect arson in the incident and requested a State Bureau of Investigation arson investigator to be on the scene Monday. The question of arson arose from recent phone threats received by other area residents in December. (See related story on this page.)

The house belonged to Holmes' mother, Mrs. Alberta Stroud who received a call in December stating everything she owned would be

burned if she didn't stay out of Hot Springs.

The fire was discovered shortly before 1 a.m. by John H. Glenn, a next door neighbor, when, according to Mrs. Glenn, "we heard something popping, like gunshots, outside." Glenn opened the door to his house and saw smoke coming from the Holmes residence and turned in the fire alarm.

The Hot Springs Volunteer Fire Department responded to the alarm within minutes but a faulty fire hydrant, located at the edge of Holmes' front yard, prevented firemen from containing the blaze, according to Fire Chief Carroll Anderson.

"The hydrant was not operating properly," Anderson said. "We could have contained it to two rooms if the hydrant would have worked. I've been a fireman for 22 years, and it's the first hydrant that didn't work," he said.

Anderson said nearly 30 minutes were needed to replenish the 500 gallon water supply in the town's only fire truck while using the hydrant.

Anderson said the fire apparent-

(Continued on Page 3)



Only Chimneys and Foundation Remain At Home Of Hank Holmes

Photo by N. Hancock

Three Hot Springs Residents Targets Of Phone Threats

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK
Editor

Three Hot Springs residents say they have been threatened of being burned out of their homes and property, while others say they have received annoying phone calls from anonymous callers in recent weeks.

Still others have had their homes falsely advertised for sale in area newspapers and have received unsolicited calls from Asheville moving companies supposedly answering "requests" for estimates in moving them to other cities.

Several of the residents feel they are being intimidated because of their support of certain candidates in the Nov. 3 town election and a local gameroom operator.

No one knows for sure who's perpetrating the threats or hoaxes, but "people here are mad" and are determined to "put a stop to it one way or another," according to Richard Waltz, a victim of some of the calls and one of the hoaxes.

Residents say they have complained to the telephone company with little results and to the State Bureau of Investigation with similar results until the early Sunday morning fire which destroyed the house of Franklin S. (Hank) Holmes, also a recipient of some of the annoying calls. SBI Agent Tom Shook told Holmes and some of the residents that an investigation into the threatening calls would be made.

In all, 15 households have reportedly received anonymous calls beginning

Nov. 7, but forms of intimidation seem to have been stepped up and centered on six families during the week of Dec. 8 through Dec. 15.

Three individuals, Burlin Ricker, Pat Gentry and Mrs. Alberta Stroud, say they received threatening calls on Dec. 8.

Ricker, who owns Ricker's Grocery, said last week that his wife received a call from a man who said, "We're going to burn your house if you don't keep your mouth shut." A few days later, the Rickers received a call from an Asheville moving company to give them an estimate on moving their belongings to Tampa, Fla. Ricker also said a representative of a realty company called shortly thereafter to offer to sell their house, grocery store and service station.

Mrs. Stroud, owner of the Country Store in Spring Creek and mother of Hank Holmes, said an unidentified male telephoned her and stated, "Keep your a-- out of Hot Springs if you don't want everything you've got burned." Mrs. Stroud owned the house and property where her son and daughter-in-law lived.

She said that representatives of a moving company in Asheville came to her store on Dec. 12 to estimate the cost of moving her household effects to Raleigh. She said she explained that she hadn't called them about moving, and the representatives said they had received a call from a middle-aged woman who said she was Mrs. Alberta Stroud.

Gentry, co-owner of Gentry and Gentry Hardware, told The News Record that he also received a call from a man on Dec. 8 who told him, "Keep your mouth shut or I'll burn your house and truck." The next day, Gentry also received a call from a moving company about moving him to Florida, he said.

Waltz, a retired serviceman who ran unsuccessfully for mayor of Hot Springs in the November non-partisan election, said his house was falsely advertised for sale in the Nov. 13-15 editions of The Asheville Citizen. The ad described his house, stated the owner was "moving due to health," and listed Waltz's phone number.

Waltz says he did not place the ad, and that he has been unable to find out from the newspaper who placed it.

Two other residents, who asked to not be identified, had their homes similarly advertised for sale, one in the Asheville paper and one in the Waynesville Mountaineer during mid-November.

Waltz said that many of the people who feel they are being intimidated have talked to him and have expressed that "things need to be done" to end the calls and harassment.

"I feel that if it can't be done through the proper channels, people are going to disregard the proper channels and go out on their own. I don't want to see this thing go this way," he said.

"But if something doesn't break, if they (the authorities) don't come up with something — if they ignore it — it's going to be taken care of," Waltz added, indicating the present mood in the community.



Photo by N. Hancock

ROCK SLIDE — Heavy rains which inundated much of Madison County Sunday night produced swollen streams and numerous mud and rock slides along the county's roads and highways. This slide occurred on U.S. 25-70 on Hot Springs Mountain between Mar-

shall and Hot Springs. State Department of Transportation workers removed the debris, which blocked the northbound lane, within a few hours. Unofficially, nearly two inches of rain fell on the county during the night.

Barbara Cook's Mother Says Kids Were Not 'Abandoned'

Last Wednesday morning, Dec. 30, the phone rang in the News Record office. It was Barbara Cook's mother, and she was distraught.

She had some things to say that cast a whole different light on a story that ran in the previous Thursday's News Record about 16-year-old Barbara's self-proclaimed search for her sisters, from whom she had been separated since early childhood.

Barbara told a reporter from the Waynesville Mountaineer that when she was four or five years old, she and her sisters, then aged two years and six months respectively, had been "abandoned" by her mother and stepfather, then separated by welfare officials and placed in adoptive homes.

In fact, Barbara spoke of having been raised in "several" homes, according to the Mountaineer article, of "having

seen" her natural mother, although she said, "I don't think of her as my mother," and of now being interested solely in being reunited with her sisters, her sisters.

The News Record picked up the story from its sister paper.

Baltingly and tearfully, and on the promise that her name would not be used, the mother's side of the story unfolded as follows:

The children were not "abandoned." Their natural father died and their mother married a man who, she says, resented the children, beat her and demanded that she give the children up. To make ends meet she went to work as a waitress in an Asheville restaurant.

Her father, she says, "got mad at me. He turned the three girls (Barbara, Nancy and Joan) in to the DSS office." Then on Joan's birthday that year, the

mother, threatened and desperate, returned home and signed properly executed adoption papers. The children were already gone.

She has in fact stayed in more or less constant contact over the years with Barbara, the only one of the daughters whose whereabouts she knew. She says that Barbara did not live in "several" foster homes; she lived with the same couple from the time she became a Department of Social Services case until just after her sixteenth birthday, when she petitioned the court to be allowed to become a "free agent."

Upon turning 18, Barbara, whose efforts to locate her two sisters in other foster homes was thwarted in the Dec. 30 News Record, appeared to be allowed to leave the family

Continued on Page 3

DSS: Barbara Refused Mom's Offer

In a recent interview with the News Record, her Department of Social Services case worker confirmed that Barbara Cook refused her mother's offer to come and live with her after a Madison County judge declared her a "free agent."

Upon turning 18, Barbara, whose efforts to locate her two sisters in other foster homes was thwarted in the Dec. 30 News Record, appeared to be allowed to leave the family

with whom she was living and become an "emancipated person." Judge Alexander Lowery granted her request.

"When that happened, our legal responsibilities to Barbara were of course terminated," said DSS spokeswoman Sherry Hunter who had handled Barbara's case.

Ms. Marler also confirmed that Barbara had apparently decided to remain a member of

her two sisters after seeing a Privacy Act and other laws television movie, "A Long and regulations protecting the Way Home" — the account of parties to an adoption a boy who finds his brothers and sisters after they had been adopted. After seeing the program, she was inspired to contact the news media, who became interested in her story and made a human-interest feature of it.

The DSS expressed doubt that Barbara's mother would be any more successful in locating her two sisters because of the passage of time.

Asked whether she felt that Barbara's telling the press about her mother's desire to communicate with her siblings had more than she realized and made a human-interest feature of it.

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