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SCOTCH PLAINS-FANWOOD, N.J. THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 1973

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## Fire Inquiry Ends - Arson Ruled Out

An extensive investigation of a house fire which claimed three lives in Fanwood last October 31 has finally been concluded by the Union County Prosecutors Office. While no single exact cause for the origin of the fire has been determined, it has been established that the fire was definitely of an accidental nature, and arson has been ruled out.

The house fire resulted in the death of three members of the Douglas Hooper family - Mr. Hooper's wife, Christine Sandra, 27, and his two children, Kenneth, 3, and Darleen, 7 months. The fire occurred at the family home at 125 LaGrande Avenue, and the house was completely damaged. Whenever a death results from a fire, under statutory law the Prosecutor's Office must become involved.

According to Van Dyke Pollitt, Police Commissioner in Fanwood, the "fire was definitely accidental." Pollitt said the length of the investigation "caused considerable conjecture regarding the possibility of arson. This possibility was ruled out by all investigative agencies." The investigation was as long as it was to give all agencies, and particularly the Fanwood Fire Company, an opportunity to study preventability.

The agencies assisting in the investigation included: Union County Prosecutor's Office, Newark Arson Squad (which Pollitt pointed out as having a reputation as tops in the state), Plainfield Fire Prevention Bureau, Kendall Infra-Red Laboratories in Plainfield, Fanwood Fire Company, and Fanwood Police Department.

"There has been confusion regarding our alarm system, because of the coincidence surrounding a Rescue Squad call of two blasts at 10:28 a.m., followed

by a fire call of six blasts at 10:36 a.m.," Pollitt said. He continued: "The essential point is that the borough's public safety agencies are not confused by the alarm system, and the audible alarm system is backed up by a 100 percent Plectron system, which is a voice communication system into homes and by radio. The total alarm system is good, but we are going to study it for possible improvement."

A total of 24 men responded to the fire, the Commissioner noted, which proves the viability of the alarm system.

Fanwood Police Sergeant Anthony Parenti, who is Safety Officer, noted that the borough is not dropping the investigation, but is continuing it from the standpoint of preventability. Testing samples of many items from the home for combustibility will continue, and it is a form of testing which takes considerable time, Parenti said. If the further investigation yields any information which would prove useful in future fire prevention, such information will be made public, Parenti said.

Hundreds of photographs have been taken, Parenti stated, and these will continue to be studied for lessons in preventability by public safety agencies.

It is planned that the home will now be demolished.

## Board Names Klick To Acting Assistant's Post

The Board of Education named Michael Klick to the post of Acting Assistant Superintendent for Business last week. Klick had been serving in the position of Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, which duties will be reassigned.

The action was recommended by Superintendent of Schools Fred Laberge. He pointed out that the district has been functioning without an Assistant Superintendent for Business for two years, while he and Klick covered the duties, with the major burden shouldered by Klick. Laberge said he had hoped the court case involving the Board and the former Assistant Superintendent Alfred Freeland would be quickly decided, but it still has not appeared on the docket.

Therefore, the district cannot function effectively, Laberge said, without coverage. He expressed the feeling that Board approval of the acting title would enhance Klick's effectiveness in the interim slot. Klick will receive \$300 per month in additional compensation.

While there were no negative votes, Joseph Parry questioned why the function couldn't be assigned to someone by the Superintendent, without shifting of position. "I cannot see what is gained by all these acting titles," Parry said.

## Watch That Red Light

A new traffic light has been installed at the corner of Martine and North Avenues in Fanwood . . . but there are apparently a group of drivers who haven't seen it! At present, the light is a flashing one - yellow in one direction, red in the other, which is only a temporary situation. Sergeant Anthony Parenti reports that there have been many instances of "running the light" and Parenti wishes to alert residents to its existence.

When the light was hung overhead recently, there were glare problems which prohibited full use until backplates were installed to correct the glare. Those backplates have been ordered and should be in position around the week of February 1, at which time the light will go into effect full-time.

Parenti noted that the glare is strictly a seasonal one, which occurs because of the positioning of the sun in December and early January annually. The backplates are really necessary only at that time.

## OK \$12 Million For Schools, Propose New Approach In Future

### Band To Hold Paper Drive

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Raider Marching Band and the Music Booster Association will conduct a paper drive on Saturday, January 27th from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The deposit site will be in front of the high school on Westfield Road, Scotch Plains, where a trailer truck will be located to cart papers to the deposit center.

Proceeds from the drive will be used to help defray expenses of the band in festivals and marching band activities. Anyone who cannot deliver papers to the deposit site may telephone 322-6639 or 889-6326 to have their papers picked up.

### Dinner For Rescue Squad

On Saturday evening, Jan. 20, 1973, the Fanwood Rescue Squad celebrated its Silver 25th Anniversary, with its annual Dinner and Installation of Officers, held at Sulphur Springs, in Berkeley Heights.

Mayor Theodore Trumpp installed the following 1973 Officers: President: James Lavelle; Vice-President: William Crosby; Secretary: John Voelker; Treasurer: Robert Kruthers; Chaplain: Robert Rau; Historian: John R. Kenyon; Captain: James Russell; 1st. Lieut.: Robert Scala; 2nd Lieut.: Alfred Lindgren; 1st. Sgt. Harry Mee; and Sgt. John R. Kenyon.

Retiring President Cyrus Twitchell was presented with a Past-President's Pin and an engraved mug for 15 years service.

Six Charter Members, who are still active, William Mathews, Robert Rau, Earl Phillips, Charles Perssons, C. Stuart Burns and John Kraus, were presented with desk pen sets in honor of their 25 years of service.

Mrs. Ruth Wegmann was presented with a gold charm for 10 years of service. Mrs. Wegmann is the first woman to complete 10 years of active service in the squad.

Alfred Lindgren, Harry Mee and Mitchell Arnold were awarded pins for 5 years of service.

Van Dyke J. Pollitt, President of the Fanwood Borough Council, presented the Squad with a Resolution of Appreciation which was adopted by the Council at a recent meeting.

Captain James Russell reported that during the year of 1972, which was the second busiest year in the Squad's history, the 39 members of the Squad responded to 375 calls for assistance, expended 2,163 man-hours, and traveled 5,560 miles.

### Board Members Critical Of Current Budgeting Procedures

The school budget for the 1973-74 school year will be presented to voters at a figure of \$12,059,732. The total remained unchanged, following a public hearing before an unusually sparse audience at Terrill Junior High School on Monday. However, while the \$12 million figure has not been altered since its initial temporary adoption earlier in the month, the amount to be raised by taxation has been reduced. A figure of \$153,848 was applied from the surplus in debt service, and appropriated toward reduction of taxes in the coming year. It brings the amount which previously to be raised by taxation (\$946,802) down by 15 percent to \$702,955. Excluding staff, approximately 45 were on hand.

The budget was adopted for presentation to the public on a split vote, with board members Richard Bard and John McCormick voting in the negative. However, many of the other "aye" voters set forth very succinct thoughts regarding future budgets -- all of them pushing for implementation of a different budget building concept as quickly as possible. Planned Programmatic Budgeting Process (PPBP) was suggested by almost the entire board as they registered their vote. It is a computerized budgeting process which provides much more extensive breakdown and identification, by program, of the monies spent by the district. A committee of board members, co-chaired by Board President Peter Britton and Bard, has been studying the approach for some time.

"The present line item accounting simply does not provide sufficient information on purposes or reasons for current expenditures," Parry said. He read a lengthy four page statement pointing out many examples of his lack of in-depth understanding of the budget. "Since we now must accept largely on face the necessity for all present appropriations, our deliberations on future budgets . . . are limited to those new programs which are presented for our consideration by our professional staff," Parry said. "If we continue to delay in establishing this form of accounting because of questions over systems, hardware, and related issues we will never get out from under the idiosyncrasy of line item accounting.

Parry pressed for earlier budget discussions, and for consideration of new forms of staffing to better utilize the expensive teaching staff.

Meyer Freiman said he was dissatisfied with the entire budget building procedure, calling it impractical and unacceptable. In voicing his approval, he asked for a commitment of fellow board members and administration to give top priority to a planned programmatic budgeting system. "I find it unconscionable to go to the public year after year in the pursuit of finer education and ask for higher and higher tax increases without what I consider a fair and equitable means of managing the monies they are entrusting us with."

Britton pointed out that the new type of budgeting is "not an

overnight task." He is not in total disagreement with those who seek its adoption, he said, and indicated it is easier to understand.

For the first time in several years, the budget includes some improvements. One brand new program, Driver Education, is included for high school students. However, it is a limited program, which could serve only about 50 percent of the total of students eligible to drive. The oldest students would have priority, the younger to be driver-educated next year. The Board seeks donated automobiles to cut costs on the program, and asked citizens with connections with the major auto manufacturers to try to attain the cars, which are donated to many districts.

Bard suggested leasing of cars, and said he had arranged for two dealers to present the board with costs for leasing, which would be much cheaper than purchasing the cars.

Other areas of improvement in this budget are for the benefit of elementary school students. The music and art offerings would be increased, to provide more regular and coordinated programs in these areas, a librarian, a library and more library books in each school, and the secondary intramural athletic program would be expanded. For the first time in several years, the budget includes an increase in textbooks. Another improvement would be provision of 17 more teacher

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### Will Crackdown On Hitchhiking

Scotch Plains-Fanwood students are to be warned that a police crackdown on hitchhiking in the locality will be undertaken. Crimes related to hitchhiking are on the upswing, and the practice is illegal it was pointed out at last week's Board of Education meeting.

Initially, the police will employ a policy of warnings, but if this is ineffective, they will pursue a course involving apprehensions.

Parents were advised to discuss the negative aspects of hitchhiking with their children and to advise them of the forth coming tightening up locally.