

# BURGLARS WITH FIRE-BUG TENDENCIES GIVE POLICE, FIRE DEPARTMENT, OTHER RESIDENTS OF VILLAGE WEEK OF THRILLS

Three Fires, Preceded by Ransacking of Homes, Create Mystery; Schimek Home Damaged \$35,000, Johnson Home \$30,000; Caught in Act at Babson Home

7/24/30

## ATTACK HOMES OF THOSE AWAY ON VACATION

Mystery, excitement, entertainment and apprehension are the emotions which hundreds of Riverside residents have suffered and enjoyed during the past week as a result of three fires of incendiary origin. Two of the fires it is definitely known were preceded by a ransacking of the premises, and it is now thought that the other fire also followed a burglary.

Two of the fires caused losses estimated at \$35,000 and \$30,000. The third fire was discovered before it had caused more than several hundred dollars damage.

The first blaze was discovered about 3 o'clock last Saturday morning at the home of Mrs. Hermina Schimek of 133 Herrick road. Frank Templeman of 125 Herrick road telephoned to the police department that he had heard noises and seen lights in the Schimek home, and that he knew the members of the family were away for the week-end.

Lieut. Bartels and Officer Trotter of the department went to the Schimek home and when they arrived there found the place in flames. An alarm was turned in and when the department arrived the whole rear of the residence was burning. The flames had a good start and for three hours they lighted up the sky and drew the curious from all sections of Riverside and also from neighboring villages.

### Big Pajama Party

The Schimek fire might be called one of the village's biggest and best pajama and hot time parties. The night had been exceptionally warm and sultry and many residents of the community had found sleeping almost out of the question. When the fire siren blew and the flames illuminated the sky it required little effort for hundreds to slip a pair of trousers over pajamas, or a dressing gown on, or even forget about the dressing gown and the trousers, and go to the scene of the fire.

Fire Marshall Asa Dearborn reported that when he arrived at the fire he and some of the men of the department entered the house and they found the flames at that time confined to the rear part of the dwelling. However in the large living room in the front of the house they noticed that the drapes, the wall paper and wall hangings had all been badly scorched although there was no evidence of fire on the wood work. This fact alone indicated to the marshall that the fire had been set.

The fire was difficult to get under control because of the construction of the house, the lack of water pressure until an auxiliary supply was made

available, and the start the fire had before the department arrived.

After the fire had started neighbors reported that they had seen suspicious characters and actions about the house early Friday evening and about an hour and a half before the fire was discovered.

### See Strangers

Mrs. Schimek and her family left Riverside late Friday afternoon to spend the week-end at their summer home at Fox Lake. They had been spending the week-ends there for more than a month. Shortly after seven o'clock Friday evening a car with four persons in it was seen to drive into the driveway at the Schimek home, and after about fifteen minutes departed.

About one-thirty o'clock in the morning, a car was seen entering the driveway and the lights on it were turned out after it had been parked about fifty feet down the drive.

Mr. Templeman told the police that he saw what appeared to be lights flickering about the house and that he heard strange noises. He suspected someone had broken into the house but did not see anything at the time to make him think that there was a fire.

No suspicion was given to burglary. The general thought of police and fire officials was that someone had entered the house during the absence of the family and set it afire, and no one could offer a reason.

Mr. and Mrs. Schimek returned from Fox Lake early Sunday morning a few hours after they were notified by relatives. Mrs. Schimek could offer no clue to the fire saying that she was certain everything had been all right when she left the house Friday afternoon.

### Fire at 6 in Morning

Wednesday morning shortly before 6 o'clock a resident of Shenstone road noticed smoke and flames in the Dr. R. C. Johnson home at 209 North Delaplaine road. About the same time a milkman covering his route noticed fire in the home and attempted to get in and not succeeding turned in an alarm. When the department got to the Johnson home they found the upper story of the Dutch Colonial type home a mass of flames.

When firemen entered the upper portion of the house they found drawers open and apparently ransacked and their contents strewn over the rooms. Everywhere there was evidence that that place had been thoroughly searched. Downstairs a rear window pane was found broken, and easy access gained to the latch which permitted free entry to the house.

Neighbors of the Johnson remembered after the fire had been discovered that they had smelled smoke as early in the morning as one o'clock, but none had seen the flames, nor had anyone seen lights in the Johnson

home. Several people reported seeing someone run away from the house but no one could give definite descriptions.

There was evidence also on the staircase that the fire was of incendiary origin. No gasoline or oil was found but inflammable material found in the house had been piled on the stairway.

### Caught in Act

Wednesday just before mid-night, Nelson Trimble, houseman for the Henry Babsons of North Long Common road saw lights flickering in the Babson residence. As the Babson family is away at their summer home he knew that burglars were in the house. He ran back to his quarters to get his revolver and told his wife to call the police. When he got back to the house and started searching he found the burglar or burglars had flown.

The police arrived and an alarm was sent in for the fire department as fire was suspected before it was discovered. A search through the house disclosed that fires had started in two closets. In one containing dresses and other garments the flames did considerable damage. In the other woolen blankets were not very inflammable and damage was done. On this closet the door had been closed which helped to smother the flames.

All the drawers in dressers and cupboards were open throughout the house and articles were strewn everywhere. Closet doors were open to a dozen more closets as though the fire bug had planned to set them all afire. The time taken in ransacking all the drawers and closets must have consumed at least an hour.

#### Enter Through Window

Entrance to the Babson home was gained the same way as at the Johnson's through the breaking of a window pane which permitted access to the latch.

Apparently if the burglars and incendiary had not been discovered by Mr. Trimble they would have set the foundation for another good sized blaze.

News of the three fires and their incendiary origin has placed every resident of the Third division and residents of other divisions in an apprehensive mood. The activities of the fire bug has been confined however to homes of people who are away. The Schimeks were at their summer home at Fox Lake, the Johnsons at their's at Ephraim, Wisconsin, and the Babson's at their's at Wausau, Wisconsin.

Apparently the habits of the families occupying the homes is well known to the burglars, as they appear to operate in leisure and without apparent concern at being caught.

Suspicious characters have been reported in all sections of the village, and the police have had a busy time. Several characters caught loitering about the fires were questioned and others were sought when reports were made that they acted suspiciously.

## Auto Fire Adds to General Excitement

Keeping up the good work of creating excitement for residents of the Third division of Riverside, a doctor from Austin applied his brakes so hard while driving along North Long Common road early this (Thursday) morning that he set them afire.

The members of the department had just returned to the town hall from the Henry Babson fire when they received the call that an automobile was afire. They screeched the fire truck siren as they dashed along Long Common road and kept the residents along that and neighboring streets from enjoying a night of rest.

The fire did not amount to much as far as causing damage was concerned.

7/24/30

## BELIEVE FIRE-BUG HAS CHANGED SCENE OF HIS ACTIVITIES

### Evanston Home Ransacked and Contents Ignited Early Monday

### ENTER MORE HOMES HERE

7/31/30

### Pyromaniac Interrupted in Attempt to Set Double Blaze in Maplewood Road

Has Riverside's "fire bug" shifted the scene of his activities?

After five nights of watchful waiting without further developments officials of the Riverside fire and police departments are ready to believe that the person or persons with the burglary-arson complex have either shifted to some other locality or have undergone a change in mental make-up.

The report from Evanston that early Monday morning a home in that city had been set afire after it had been ransacked, lead local authorities to believe that probably Riverside residents are being forgotten while residents in other communities will be made to suffer from the crazy antics of the fire-fiend.

The latest evidence that the fire-bug intended to continue operating in Riverside was found late Thursday evening when two homes within a few hundred feet of each other were ransacked and placed ready for the torch of the incendiary.

#### Absent Short Time

Mrs. Anna Topinka returned to her home in Maplewood road late in the evening after being absent less than two hours and found that the place had been thoroughly ransacked and the contents of drawers and closets were strewn everywhere. Entrance to the home had been gained through a window in a bedroom on the second floor of the house. The culprit had sealed a roof drain pipe to reach the window. He made his exit through a window on the first floor directly below the one through which he had entered.

There was evidence that the intruder had been interrupted while at work. It is thought that he heard the Topinkas return to the house and made his escape through a rear window while they were coming in through the front door.

Police were at the Topinka home within a few minutes after Mrs. Topinka had sent in an alarm. They surrounded the house and searched the grounds in back of the home. Guards were posted at the bridge on Thirty-first street to prevent the escape of anyone along the river bank.

The Henry A. Dickinson home at 294 Maplewood road had been registered with the police for watching while the family is away on vacation. The police returned to the house a little more than a half hour after a former visit and found a rear window broken and the latch opened.

They sounded an alarm and entered the house only to discover that the pyromaniac had escaped but not before he had left evidence of his presence. Here again the drawers had been opened and contents ransacked.

#### Wanted to Double Excitement

Police and fire officials concluded that because the two homes so close together had been both entered and ransacked at about the same time that the fire bug planned to set both afire at the same time and provide himself with an exceptional display of fireworks.

Members of the state fire marshal's office said this week that it is not unusual for pyromaniacs to start with one fire, and then set two or even more fires as their appetite for excitement demands bigger and better fires.

#### Guard Village at Night

Since the discovery of the ransacking of the Henry Babson home and the setting afire of contents in two clothes closets in that home, a vigilantes committee has been patrolling the village every night. Every member of the local volunteer fire department, the special police, the members of the regular force, and twenty members of Riverside Post of the American Legion have been on the lookout for further trouble.

The regular police have been serving extra hours, and the volunteer firemen have foregone their usual night's rest to keep on duty until long after midnight.

After five nights of watchful waiting, without any trouble from the pyromaniac, police and fire department officials are willing to admit that probably the fire-fiend has decided to shift his actions to some other community. They are not going to take for granted that that is the case but are continuing their plans for intensive combing of the village during the late evening and early morning hours until the vacation is over, or until the fire bug is captured.

7/31/30

### RIVERSIDE'S FIRE BUG

No sane person would think of setting a home on fire, after he had ransacked it for valuables.

Riverside's ordeal of having a fire bug burglar at large prompts consideration of the thought: Are criminals sane? Anomaly is usually caused by some twist of the mind.

Peace-loving Riverside dwellers will probably go crazy themselves, if the pyromaniac-thief continues his rants.

## COST VILLAGE \$519 TO SCARE FIRE-BUG

### Bill For Special Police Duty Presented to Village

Trustees 8/7/30

An aftermath of the fire-fiend's operations in the village took place Monday evening of this week when the village board of trustees was presented with a bill for \$519 for special police services.

Following the ransacking of the Henry Babson home on Wednesday evening, July 24 Trustee E. H. Wagner, chairman of the police and fire committee, and Village Manager John J. O'Brien decided that the property and probably the lives of Riverside residents were in danger, and that the situation warranted the organization of a special policing group.

Members of the village volunteer fire department and special police officers were drafted to patrol the village. No damage has been done to property since the organization of the patrol, and the operations of the pyromaniac have ceased, at least as far as Riversiders are concerned.

## Prairie Blazes Keep Fire Department Busy

The Riverside fire department has been kept quite busy during the past week answering calls for prairie fires on the outskirts of the village and in the nearby forest preserves. Brooms and shovels are the implements used in battling the flames, although the large ladder truck, which carries an emergency supply of 100 gallons of water is also sent to the scene.

Fred Crowe, assistant fire marshal, is again urging village motorists to give the fire equipment a clear right of way when the siren sounds. Several accidents were narrowly averted last week, caused by motorists who failed to pull up to the curb when the equipment approached. 8/28/30

## Sunday Morning Fire Disturbs Volunteers

The members of the Riverside fire department had their Sunday morning sleep cut short last Sunday when fire of unknown origin destroyed a good portion of a building in the rear of a luncheon stand on Ogden avenue just west of Harlem.

The call was received shortly before six o'clock in the morning. When the Riverside department arrived they found the Lyons department on the job, and later three pieces of apparatus from the Berwyn department came to lend assistance. In the general excitement someone had put in a call for the three departments.

Shortly after the Riverside department had returned to the fire station another call was received from the same location. Sparks had started another fire in the roof.

The building is unoccupied but neighbors said that the people who had lived in it left about a month ago, and that the evening before the fire they had returned for some pieces of furniture they had not taken with them. 10/16/30

## VOLUNTEERS ANSWER THREE FIRE ALARMS

9/18/30

### Fireman's Automobile In Collision on Way to Fire; Motorcycle Rider Hurt

Three times during the past week members of Riverside's Volunteer Fire Department answered the call of the siren; once with almost serious consequences to a Cicero young man who drove his motorcycle into the rear of Volunteer Fireman Ted Taylor's car in which he was responding to the fire alarm.

One of the fires caused several hundred dollars damage to an automobile, another entirely destroyed a play-shack used by children, and the third was a prairie fire that was endangering nearby buildings.

The automobile-motorcycle collision occurred Monday noon when the department was called to a prairie fire in the north end of the village. Fireman Taylor had just turned into Riverside road off of Quincy road when William Simons of Cicero happened along on his motorcycle traveling north on Riverside road. He crashed into the rear end of Taylor's car.

Simons was taken to the office of Dr. W. Robert Williams where his injuries were discovered as not serious, being mostly bruises and abrasions. The worst bruise was on his side where the handle bars had jammed him. Simons said that it was his first day with the motorcycle, and that he just purchased it that morning.

The automobile fire occurred Monday evening about 10 o'clock in the driveway of the John Reinertson home on Addison road. The upholstery was completely burned but no damage was done to the wiring nor the mechanism.

### Shack on Fire

Shortly after 5 o'clock Tuesday morning police in a squad car patrolling along Burlington road found a play shack on fire in a vacant lot across from the George F. Keller garage.

The shack had been constructed from old lumber the youngsters of the neighborhood had found, and it had been used as a "club-house." An old stove had been placed in it, and it is thought that a fire had been started in the stove the evening before and that the fire had been left unextinguished when the young folks left the shack.

8/21/30