

Court rules arson is cause of fatal Fort Garry Court fire

By SCOTT EDMONDS
Arson was the cause of a Feb. 1 fire that destroyed the Fort Garry Court Apartment block and killed five elderly men, Judge R. L. Kopstein said yesterday.

Judge Kopstein was summing up the evidence he had heard at the close of a provincial judges court inquest into the deaths.

The judge said the fire which swept through the 74-year-old block, which had

just passed a fire safety inspection, had been started by "person or persons unknown."

Police officers who investigated the fatal blaze tracked down all suspects but failed to find the arsonist.

But Judge Kopstein said he was "astonished" to learn that while the block's fire protection facilities were far below what was adequate

they still met existing standards.

He also expressed concern that other blocks in the city were reported to be in poorer condition, blocks "occupied by the elderly and the disabled under the constant real and imminent threat of death by fire."

He recommended standards be tightened until they become adequate.

Joseph Romanica, a fire prevention officer with the Winnipeg fire department, told Judge Kopstein that he

had paid his last visit to the apartment block only five days before the fire, though he made his last thorough check of the building Jan. 12.

Mr. Romanica said the block met existing fire safety standards.

But when asked by the judge whether existing standards were sufficient he said, "No, I feel they are not."

Early warning systems such as smoke detectors and fire alarms connected directly to the fire department

were what was needed, the inspector said.

"... It would give tenants a better chance of getting out of a building," he said.

Evidence at the inquest was that the fire alarms in the block rang for a few seconds and then stopped.

Some tenants stayed in their suites and one man said he watched the fire for about 45 minutes before leaving the apartment building.

Judge Kopstein said he realized installing this kind of equipment might be costly

and suggested that some sort of public encouragement, either in the form of financing or tax write-offs, could be provided.

Killed in the fire were James Black, 90; Andrew H. Mell (alias Lindstrom), 65; Elmer Constantine Gaul, 65; Louis Desparis, 62, and William Lochie Tait, 60.

All died from a combination of smoke inhalation and multiple burns.

Witnesses who testified earlier at the inquest, which adjourned April 29, said the

areas where the two separate fires started were completely destroyed. No evidence remained of the cause of either fire.

Crown counsel R. L. Pollock had suggestions which he said were aimed at speeding up this type of inquiry now concluding about five months after the fire.

Mr. Pollock called for a procedure which would allow for the immediate collection of information, particularly in cases such as this where so many of the block's residents

were transients and hard to locate later.

Procedures such as allowing dozens of statements to be filed might help turn up incriminating evidence, he said.

The Fatality Enquiries Act prohibits an inquest if charges are to be laid, so some time was lost while police carried out their investigations, he said.

Judge Kopstein will be forwarding his report to Attorney-General Howard Pawley for further review.

Utilities board ends hearings on gas prices

The provincial public utilities board has reserved decision on two applications by Greater Winnipeg Gas Company which could increase residential gas prices by up to 20 per cent.

The board yesterday ended three days of hearing during which the company asked for an increase on its rate of return and for permission to pass on to customers higher property taxes and domestic fuel costs. Although the board isn't expected to rule on the rate of return for several months, a company spokesman said the second application would likely be approved by Aug. 1.

The first stage of the price increase would be 13 per cent, about \$2.35 more per month for the average customer. The second stage might add an additional seven per cent.

The gas company, which serves 130,000 customers in Winnipeg, said the federal announcement of higher domestic fuel costs would mean an increase of \$3,600,000 in its bill for natural gas this year. Together with its \$680,000 higher property assessment for 1976, this increase should be passed directly to consumers.

The higher rates, if granted, would affect larger consumers by a larger percentage. The company's brief estimated the average industrial firm would have to pay about \$147.09 more per month during the first stage of the price increase.

Although there were no official interventions during the hearings, the board's lawyer said the Town of Selkirk had written protesting, against the rate rises.

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40 Thompson teachers protest

By BOB LOWERY
THOMPSON, Man. (Staff) — More than 40 Thompson high school and elementary school teachers crowded into a Mystery Lake school board meeting yesterday to protect against "delaying tactics" which they say have prevented an agreement after six months of negotiations.

About 200 teachers demonstrated in front of the school board offices yesterday morning but classes weren't interrupted.

A brief presented on behalf of the 230 members of the Thompson branch of the Manitoba Teachers' Society said "Decay of the collective bargaining process has set in because of the board's apathy and frequent delays."

"We have become very frustrated with the school

board. We're of the opinion that the time taken by the board represents delaying tactics and not deliberation."

The teachers started negotiations in November last year with 58 items on the agenda. These were whittled down to 46 when a provincial conciliator was called in.

The association asked for a 14.5 per cent increase, the board's final offer was 13.1 per cent. Recent settlements in northern Manitoba include 16 per cent in Churchill, 14 per cent in Leaf Rapids and 14 per cent in the Frontier school division, which services many remote communities.

Trustee Louise Hudson, chairman of the board's negotiating committee, said the board had bargained in good faith, calling in a conciliator making a final offer June 17.



Perhaps a little wet behind the ears still, a procession of new lawyers walks to the Law Courts building yesterday after being called to the bar to begin their careers.

Air Canada starts court tax battle against Manitoba

Air Canada is appealing a three-year Manitoba tax assessment of \$1.4 million.

Documents filed yesterday in the Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench outlined the airline's dissatisfaction with the tax and a reduction made after an appeal to Premier Ed Schreyer in his role as provincial minister of finance.

Air Canada disputes the province's power to impose a tax under the Retail Sales Tax Act concerning aircraft and services, and meals and liquor consumed in the air over the province, the documents said.

The airline was assessed \$1,172,856 plus interest, penalties, and charges — for a total of \$1,402,063 — for the period from July 1, 1971, to June 30, 1974.

The airline paid the tax "under protest," but got \$26,676 back May 19 when it appealed to Premier Schreyer.

Provincial power to legislate taxes is confined to within the province and doesn't extend to its airspace, Air Canada says.

Also, the tax is on aviation and aeronautics, both in federal jurisdiction, it argues.

In the event that its jurisdictional position loses, Air Canada challenges the computation of the assessment and notes long lists of items it says were overlooked or mistakenly included.

The case is scheduled to be heard July 8 in the Law Courts Building.

Winnipeg hotels hurt by air traveller loss

Winnipeg hotels are feeling the effects of the national airline shutdown, with those catering most heavily to businessmen hardest hit.

Peter McArthur, general manager of the Northstar Inn, said occupancy dropped 30 to 50 per cent this week. Workers could be laid off next week, he said.

Cecil Ravenswood, general manager of the Winnipeg Inn, said a small convention was cancelled this week and two others weren't as busy as expected. The hotel relies on air travellers to fill its rooms, he said.

Staff members are working on reduced hours, he said.

Michael Levine, general manager of the International Inn, said room occupancy is off about 25 per cent.

There aren't any plans to lay off employees, he said.

The hotel's banquet trade has been affected but Winnipeggers frequenting the lounges and local receptions have continued.

No spokesmen reported cancellations of future meetings and conventions because of the strike.

"Everybody's playing it as a day-to-day situation," Mr. Levine said.

Geoff Garside, general manager of the Hotel Fort Garry, said about three-quarters of the rooms were filled this week but the hotel had previously been booked solid for eight days since Sunday.

Layoffs are possible next week, he said.

Mr. Garside said the hotel's proximity to the Canadian National Railways station hadn't had much effect because "people aren't travelling at all if they can avoid it."

Among this week's guests were some Air Canada employees waiting for space on trains to take them east, he said.

Arnold Edie heads Manitoba milk board

Arnold Edie of Dugald, Man., is chairman of the Manitoba milk producers' marketing board. It was incorrectly reported in Thursday's Free Press that Donald Edie of Dugald is the chairman.

News quiz on page 16

Hafez Assad, Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin are some of the personalities you'll find today in the Names in the News Quiz, which appears on page 16.

Turn to the quiz to see if you correctly identify these and other newsmakers. You'll also get a chance to answer a variety of national and international news questions.

The Free Press publishes Your News Quiz each week as a service to area students.

First-day blues at Ex brighten near closing

What began as a dismal-looking day for the Red River Exhibition Friday turned out to be a successful and sunny one by the time the tickets had been counted.

Frowns on the faces of the exhibition's organizers had changed to smiles by mid-afternoon as the rain stopped and clouds vanished, attracting a total of 34,802 people to the fair. Last year's opening day attendance was 32,671.

Frank Welsh, of 456 Louis Riel Street, went home from the exhibition \$1,500 richer as the winner of the attendance draw.

Events listed on page 8

Fantasy parade starts after lunch tomorrow

The World of Fantasy is the theme of this year's senior parade, organized by the Red River Exhibition, which is celebrating its silver anniversary. The parade starts at 1:15 p.m. tomorrow.

Graham Lount, one of the originators of the exhibition and president of the Red River Exhibition Association in 1953, will be the honorary parade marshal.

A total of 115 units will comprise the parade, including 39 floats, 16 American and Canadian marching bands, mounted horse units, the Miss Manitoba finalists, the entertainers at the exhibition, majorette groups and more than 100 clowns.

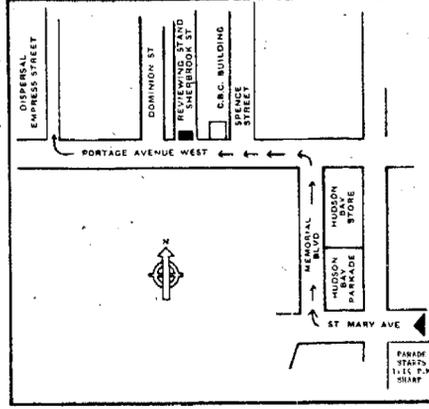
Bill Hawke, chairman of

the parade committee, said this year's procession will be comparable in size to the parades of the past four or five years. It will take about an hour and a half to pass any given point.

It's estimated that 300,000 will view the parade in person and thousands more will watch it on television.

A team of parade marshals, security people, medical attendants, citizens' band radio operators and others will supervise the procession.

The parade will assemble in the vicinity of the Bay and will proceed west on Portage Avenue to the exhibition grounds at the Winnipeg Arena.



\$1,400 fine ends 100 m.p.h. car chase

A Regina man was fined \$1,400 yesterday for criminal negligence after leading police on a wild high-speed car chase through downtown Winnipeg last year.

During the chase, which started about 1:30 a.m. Nov. 8, 1975, a police cruiser car crashed into another vehicle stopped at a red light, seriously injuring the 66-year-old driver.

Larry Anthony Holland, 23, pleaded guilty to the charge in county court. He was also placed on probation for one year by Judge J.W.M. Thompson.

Crown counsel Charles Newcombe said the chase started when police saw the Holland car go through a stop sign at Winston Road and Parkside Drive in St. James-Assiniboia, then turn a corner by driving over a boulevard.

When the officers put on the siren and the flashing red light, Holland started to speed up. By this time he was on Portage Avenue, Mr. Newcombe said.

Holland, and the two passengers in the car with him,

crossed over the centre divider on Portage and drove the wrong way down the westbound traffic lanes for two blocks, then shot through a red light and crossed back to the eastbound side of the street.

He narrowly missed other cars going through the stoplight and when the cruiser car pulled abreast of his vehicle, Holland tried to force the police off of the roadway, Mr. Newcombe said.

Holland went through 10 red traffic lights at speeds between 80 and 100 miles an hour, and at Portage and Balmoral Street narrowly missed four pedestrians in a pedestrian corridor, court was told.

He went through eight more red lights until he came to Garry Street and Portage where he cut off a bus in the curb lane, collided with it, and then smashed into either another car or a light standard.

His car stalled at Portage and Main Street, and the two passengers jumped out and fled on foot.

Holland however, managed to get the car started again and drove away, eventually ditching the damaged vehicle near the Red River.

It was at Garry and Portage that the cruiser car ran into the stopped car injuring both the elderly driver and the two officers.

Holland reported his car stolen and originally denied the whole incident, but when questioned by police at the Public Safety Building he made a statement admitting he had been the driver.

He had no convictions.

Hydro pact gives 10.9%

Members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 2034, have signed a one-year agreement with Manitoba Hydro calling for a pay increase of 10.9 per cent.

A statement from Hydro said the agreement was reached after 18 days of negotiation.

Leopard tanks please driver Richardson

for the armored contingent.

"Many of those present at the recent Brussels meeting of NATO defence ministers welcomed our move warmly, and Secretary-General Luns made special reference to it at the close of the conference," he said.

"We in Canada have always believed in collective security and the need to be strong enough militarily to deter the Warsaw Pact countries, who continue to expand their military capacity beyond their defence needs."

Colonel Rolf Klages, the West German military attaché to Ottawa, confirmed that NATO is "very happy with the purchase" and regards it as "more than just a symbolic contribution."

"Many of the allies believe that a country as rich as Canada could do a little more," he said. "That's no secret. But this is a very

good start... Mr. Richardson has managed to convince your prime minister of the importance of maintaining Canada's part in the first line of defence for the free world."

Col. Klages added NATO countries are "quite aware" that the Leopard commitment, unlike the decision to purchase new long-range patrol aircraft, is not just a move to beef up domestic Canadian defences but a show of "solidarity with NATO."

Mr. Richardson drove one of the Leopards used by the 1,000 West German troops now training at the Shilo base before flying by helicopter to fire one at a testing range three miles away.

The minister then toured the 96,000-acre base by air before flying to Brandon to address that city's chamber of commerce on the progress

of the federal government's anti-inflation program.

Mr. Richardson said "other steps" in addition to the Leopard are underway to improve Canada's military capabilities, including the new \$50 million Samson communications network, trucks and armoured vehicles and a new long-range patrol aircraft.

The minister said Ottawa is "actively committed" to finding a replacement for the aging Argus aircraft and is "working aggressively" to review alternatives to the Lockheed Orion contract which collapsed for lack of financing in May.

Mr. Richardson also said no decision has been made by cabinet on the closing of a number of Canadian Forces bases in the near future, cost-saving move which has been rumoured for months.

The Leopard, regarded as possibly the best tank in the world, has a cruising speed of 45 miles per hour and a range of 300 miles. Its 105-mm. main gun is fully stabilized, and the tank itself is simple to operate and maintain.

According to a Canadian Forces spokesman, the Leopard can use any fuel, can be completely sealed off to avoid nuclear contamination to its four-man crew, and its engine can be completely replaced within half an hour.

Mr. Richardson said 85 of the 128 tanks purchased by Canada would be stationed in Europe, while the rest would be shipped to this country for training purposes. Until the deal is complete and the tanks are built, West Germany will loan the Canadian NATO contingent 35 Leopards as training vehicles, he said.