

Fatal Fire Ruled Accidental

A North Wilkesboro man was killed in a fire early Sunday morning that gutted his home at 1107 E Street, North Wilkesboro.

The body of Mark Settle, 49, was found on the floor of the kitchen at the back of the three-story, wood-frame Victorian home. The cause of death is thought to be smoke and heat inhalation, according to North Wilkesboro Fire Chief Nick Hamby, who noted that foul play is not suspected.

Settle's body has been sent to Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem for an autopsy.

Jeffery Scott Adams, 39, who was renting an apartment in the home, was able to get out of the burning residence, Major Scott Teague of the North Wilkesboro Police Department said.

Adams initially tried to flee the front of the home, but was blocked by smoke and fire, Teague said. He went down a long hallway and out down steps at the back of the residence. Adams was taken to Wilkes Regional Medical Center by Wilkes EMS, where he was treated for smoke inhalation and released.

The fire was reported at 4:22 a.m. by a neighbor, Hamby said. When firefighters arrived, the home was engulfed in flames, which were consuming the left side of the home and coming out the front.

Firemen were able to knock the blaze down, but it took some time to get it entirely out due to the fact that it had penetrated walls and ceilings in the tall structure, he said. Firemen had to use a chain saw to cut away wood in the floor of the upper stories in order to reach the blaze, Hamby said, noting that smoke and heat were intense. North Wilkesboro firemen used the department's aerial truck to train water on the burning home from above.

E Street was blocked while the emergency effort was under way. Firefighters were on the scene until around 2 p.m.

Hamby said the blaze began in a family room where there was a standing, natural Christmas tree and a fireplace that had been used on the night before the fire. Also in the room were antique Christmas decorations that used antiquated light bulbs.

Hamby said an ember from the fireplace or an electrical spark from the Christmas decorations likely set the tree on fire, particularly if the tree had become dry. Flames quickly swept into other areas of the home.

It appeared that Settle was attempting to get out of the burning house when he collapsed in the kitchen, Teague said. He said Adams was unable to move the much heavier man before he got out of the house.

Damage to the home was estimated by Hamby at over \$350,000. He noted that among the damaged contents was antique furniture collected by Settle.

Over 50 firefighters responded to the incident with trucks and equipment, Hamby said. Assisting North Wilkesboro were firemen from the Cricket, Mulberry-Fairplains and Broadway fire departments.

The Wilkes Rescue Squad brought its cascade system to refill air tanks as needed.

According to the North Carolina State Historic Preservation office, the Victorian-style home was built in 1907.

This is a tragic event, and our hearts go out to Mark Settle's family," North Wilkesboro Police Chief Joe Rankin said. Rankin was at the scene of the fire with his officers shortly after it was reported.

Rankin said he was very pleased with the quick response from firefighters and his officers.

Rankin said he was particularly impressed "with how professional the firemen were" as efforts were coordinated between the fire departments, and with the "amazing resources the North Wilkesboro Fire Department had and utilized there."

It was originally the residence of the J. Robert and Fannie Cameron Finley family. The late Kate Cameron Finley, their youngest daughter, lived in the home for many years.

J. Robert Finley was North Wilkesboro's first postmaster and one of its first merchants. Finley was secretary-treasurer of the Forest Furniture Co. and was known as a promoter of better roads.



North Wilkesboro resident Mark Settle was killed early Sunday morning when his E Street home burned. Firemen work to extinguish the blaze, which was reported around 4:20 a.m.



Firefighters remained on the scene until Sunday afternoon. Another man living at the residence sustained minor injuries, but was able to get out of the burning house.