

Woman Dies In Fire Today



A 77-year-old woman died in a house fire this morning off Handy-Walker Street in the Fairplains community.

Betty Davis Brown apparently died from smoke inhalation, said Wilkes Fire Investigator Niki Hamby of the Wilkes Sheriff's Department.

Hamby said Mrs. Brown's husband, Dean Brown, had started a car in the couple's attached garage because they planned to go out for breakfast. "He went out and thought she was behind him, but when he turned around he

couldn't see her," he said.

Brown reentered the house, realized it was on fire and tried unsuccessfully to find his wife, said Hamby.

Faye Joines of Moravian Falls, who was Mrs. Brown's sister, said Brown was hampered by heavy smoke and fire when he tried to find his wife and also when he tried to get a fire extinguisher. Mrs. Joines said Brown's hair was singed.

Family members surrounded Brown as he watched the firefighting effort while wrapped in a blanket and sitting in a lawn chair in a neighbor's driveway on Handy-Walker Street, which is off N.C. 18 North.

Mr. and Mrs. Brown had been married for 56 years and had lived in the house on Handy-Walker Street since 1990, said family members.

Hamby said Brown called 911 at 8 a.m. The Wilkes Communications Center dispatched the Mulberry-Fairplains Fire Department, followed by the North Wilkesboro, Knotville, Mountain-View and McGrady fire departments to assist.

The Moravian Falls Fire Department brought its air truck to refill air tanks for firefighters. The Wilkes Rescue Squad also was on the scene.

With a large area of the one-story house in flames when they arrived, firefighters had difficulty entering the structure.

Hamby said Mrs. Hamby's body was found in the garage area. "We believe she was coming out of the house when she either became disoriented (because of the fire and smoke) or was overcome by smoke," he said. Hamby said she had few, if any, burns.

Although the investigation is continuing, he said, it appears the fire possibly started from a portable electric heater or in the vicinity of the heater. Hamby said this area is between the garage and the main portion of the house.

Mrs. Joines said Brown believed the fire started from the electric heater.

Hamby said the house consisted of multiple additions from where it was built around a camper, which he said caused the fire to advance rapidly and made it harder to fight.

Mulberry-Fairplains Chief Rick Gambill said it was the hardest fire he fought in a long time because of the many spaces between additions and also because wind kept fueling the flames and pushing the fire toward the garage.

Gambill said he went through four air tanks because of having to fight the fire for so long. Wilkes Emergency Medical Services transported one firefighter to Wilkes Regional Medical Center due to dehydration, he said.