

Firefighters work through the night to put out another devastating fire

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there is no indication of this fire being related to another fire in the same building a few weeks ago. At that time according to fire department records, someone tossed a burning bag of garbage into the left front door of the house. It was extinguished by a resident. Another fire last September, which destroyed a large shed at the house next door was officially ruled as arson, but there is no indication this is related either, police say.

"Fire trap" fears

The Millers had lived in the house for about a year-and-a-half and Mr. Miller had been heard on many occasions expressing fears the house was a "fire trap".

Kathy Wears was staying overnight with Terry. They had been friends since the Wears moved to town in April, according to

the deceased girl's stepfather Gerry Brouillard and McKenzie-Smith teacher Kathy Sanford.

Miller's body was found in the kitchen/living room area, and removed from the building about 2:30 a.m. Coroner Alastair MacIntosh declared him dead at the scene. It was not until about 3:00 a.m. that firefighters received word another person was still missing. Re-entry into the house uncovered the body of Kathy, also in the kitchen/living room area.

Firefighters were exhausted fighting the difficult blaze. Because several additions have been made over the years, the building is partitioned off, making it hard to get at the flames. Some parts of the metal roof had metal on top of metal, they said. Usually in a fire like this, firefighters try to ventilate the roof to create a chimney effect, but this time

the roof was not stable enough to do so. The stairway leading to the second floor was burned away and they could not get the upper floor. Trees overhanging the roof were in the way, also hampering fire fighting attempts.

Sunday morning's fire reminded some of the firefighters of the Thompson Fuel's fire in February when a tanker truck of oil shot flames hundreds of feet in the sky and gutted the building in which it was parked. Flames in the Willow St. fire could be seen against the night sky throughout most of Acton Sunday, and many firefighters saw the flames or smoke before they reached the firehall, just around the corner from the fire scene.

Third fire this year

It was the third time in less than six months the men were called to a dangerous

blaze and the second in time five weeks. It was also the third fatal fire here since April, 1979, taking a total of five lives.

Canada Day weekend in Acton was marred by a devastating blaze which gutted apartments above Thomas Video, and badly damaged machines and video discs. It is about a half a block from Sunday's fire, and as of yet there has been no official cause determined. Several firefighters were taken to hospital suffering mainly from heat exhaustion in the over 90 degrees temperature during the blaze. None were seriously injured however.

Some firefighters suffered cuts and bruises in Sunday's fire.

Big crowd watches

A neighbor to the destroyed house, Laura Dennis, left her home immediately and spent the evening with a friend up the street.

Other neighbors watched from their home, and in spite of the late hour, many people lined Willow St. to watch the action.

The surviving members of the Miller family remained at the hospital during the fire, police say.

Occupants of the other apartments in the building have found temporary homes. No names of these people were released.

Police say there is no word yet on if there will be a coroner's inquest.

A small black and gray cat, with a red collar turned up at the nearby Free Press building later Sunday. By Monday evening a temporary home was found for her until her owner claims her. It is thought the cat was living in the downstairs apartment. She can be found at 853-1337.

Gene Miller is hero, dies in rescue attempt

Gene Miller, 56, died a hero in the same house he felt was a fire trap.

Miller, and an overnight guest, Kathy Wears, 14, died of smoke inhalation early Sunday morning as fire ripped through his home at 16 Willow St.

His brother, Stan Miller said that whenever his brother visited him he mentioned how he wanted to move because the semi-detached house he lived in was a "fire-trap," although he never mentioned any specific faults.

Gene Miller moved to Acton about one and a half years ago from Coldwater. He had been on a disability pension for some years as the result of a back injury and was often seen sitting at the front of his house.

Stan Miller told the Free Press Gene's daughter, Terry, said there was a "puff" and then the flames were coming through the floor boards. He stressed though that this was not official and noted the Ontario Fire Marshal's office is investigating. He understands three members of the family were asleep and three awake at the time of the fire.

Miller said it is not known for sure whether his brother had escaped from the blazing building and ran back in to rescue Kathy, or not. The Halton Regional Police and the Halton Hills Fire Department are unable to confirm or deny this rumor, and Miller said he is unable to find out from his brother's family. However, he (Gene) did help his wife and daughters escape through windows.

In all, four people escaped the flames: Miller's wife Gloria; daughters Terry and Stephanie; and a niece Caroline Laver of Speyside. A son Timothy had been visiting relatives out of town at the time of the blaze.

Mr. Miller is survived by his wife Gloria, daughters Terry and Stephanie, son Timothy, brothers Stanley, Tom, Michael, Albert, Robert, Ken David, Ralph and Lloyd and sisters Eileen Emmerson, Dorothy Brazier, Loris Laver, Donna McDonald, Eleanor Brooks and Betty Quarrie.

Funeral service was held yesterday (Tuesday) afternoon at Shoemaker Funeral Home. Interment was at Fairview Cemetery.



Gene Miller, 56, lost his life after re-entering his burning residence to apparently save lives. The family had lived in Acton for about 18 months. He had told his brother Stan that he wanted to move fearing the house was a fire trap. Mr. Miller was often seen, wearing his familiar Expos ball cap, sitting on the porch of the house.

Kathy Wears was "easy-go-lucky"

Kathy Wears was an "easy-go-lucky girl, until her luck ran out," according to her stepfather Gerry Brouillard.

Fourteen-year-old Kathy and her best friend's father, Gene Miller, died early Sunday morning of smoke inhalation as fire ripped through the Miller home at 16 Willow St. N.

Kathy and Terry Miller, also 14, were very good friends, says Mr. Brouillard, and were always staying overnight at each other's homes. The two were constantly together, he said.

A recent graduate of McKenzie-Smith Middle School, Kathy would have been in grade 9 at Acton High School next month. She moved to 159 Kingham Rd. with her family last April from Thunder Bay.

Kathy was the daughter of Fay and the late Douglas Wears, and stepdaughter of Mr. Brouillard. She is the sister of Janet, Donald and Diane, all of Acton and the granddaughter of Burns and the late Marshall Fowler and Luke and Gwen Wears, all of Thunder Bay.

Funeral service was held at Shoemaker Funeral Home yesterday (Tuesday) morning followed by cremation. A memorial service will be held Friday in Thunder Bay. Interment will be at Mountain View Cemetery Thunder Bay.

Georgetown crew at Willow blaze

It wasn't just the Acton firefighters who worked so hard at the killer house fire on Willow St. for six hours Sunday morning. A crew and fire truck came up to help from Georgetown and did a fine job.

Fund established to aid Miller family

A Miller family trust fund has been established in Acton and by Tuesday morning there was already \$75 raised.

Rev. Gerald Rennie, Knox Presbyterian Church, took it upon himself to start the drive.

He's urging churches, citizens, businesses and community organizations to contribute.

Donations can be made to the fund at the Bank of Montreal, Acton Social Services and Information Centre on Mill St. (853-3310), or Knox Church office (853-2360).

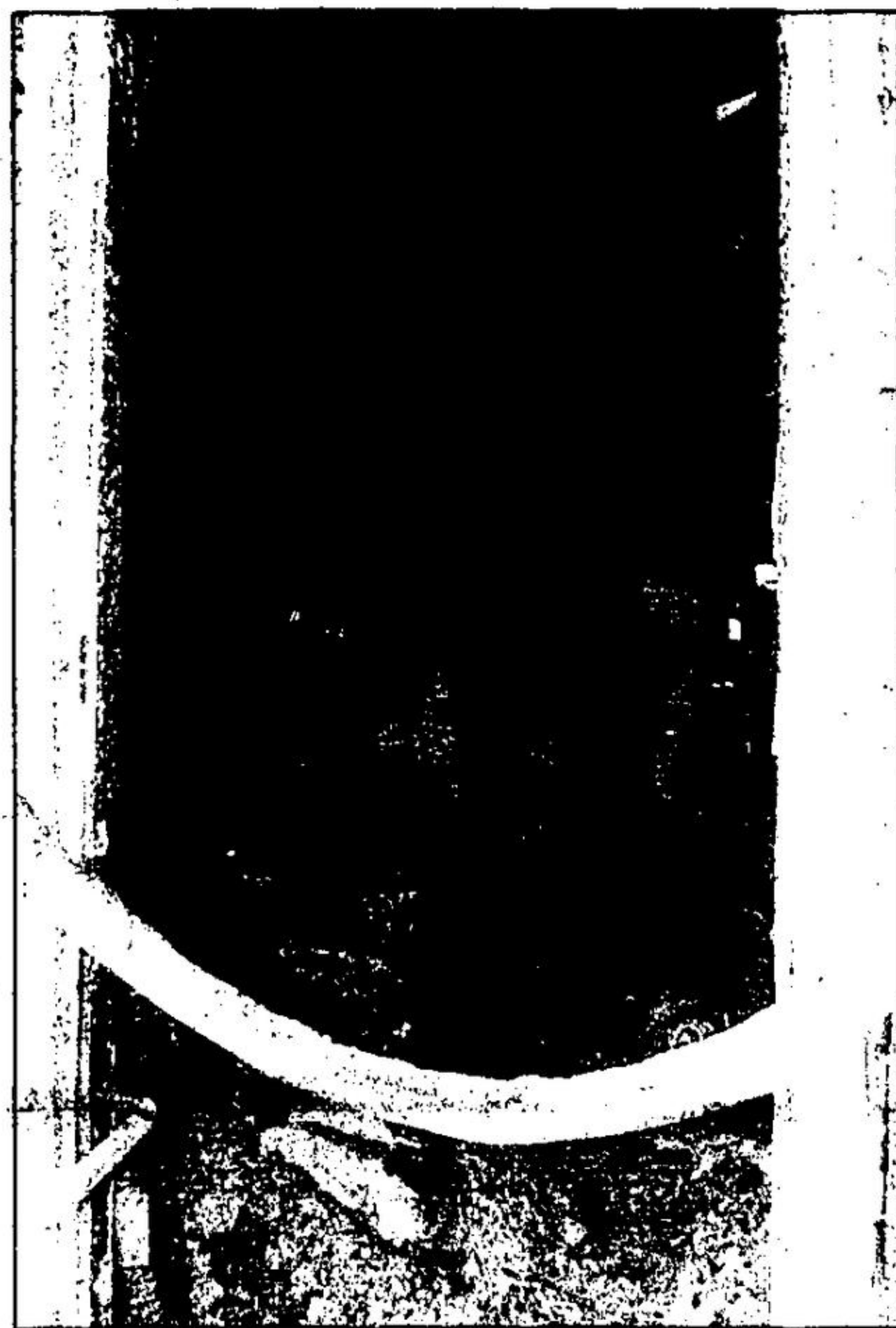
Rev. Rennie noted the family is in a desperate situation since they lost all of their household belongings. Mr. Miller was on a disability pension and the benefits won't be switched over to his widow for three months.

Currently the family is living with relatives in Speyside, but Rev. Rennie observed they will have to establish a new household.

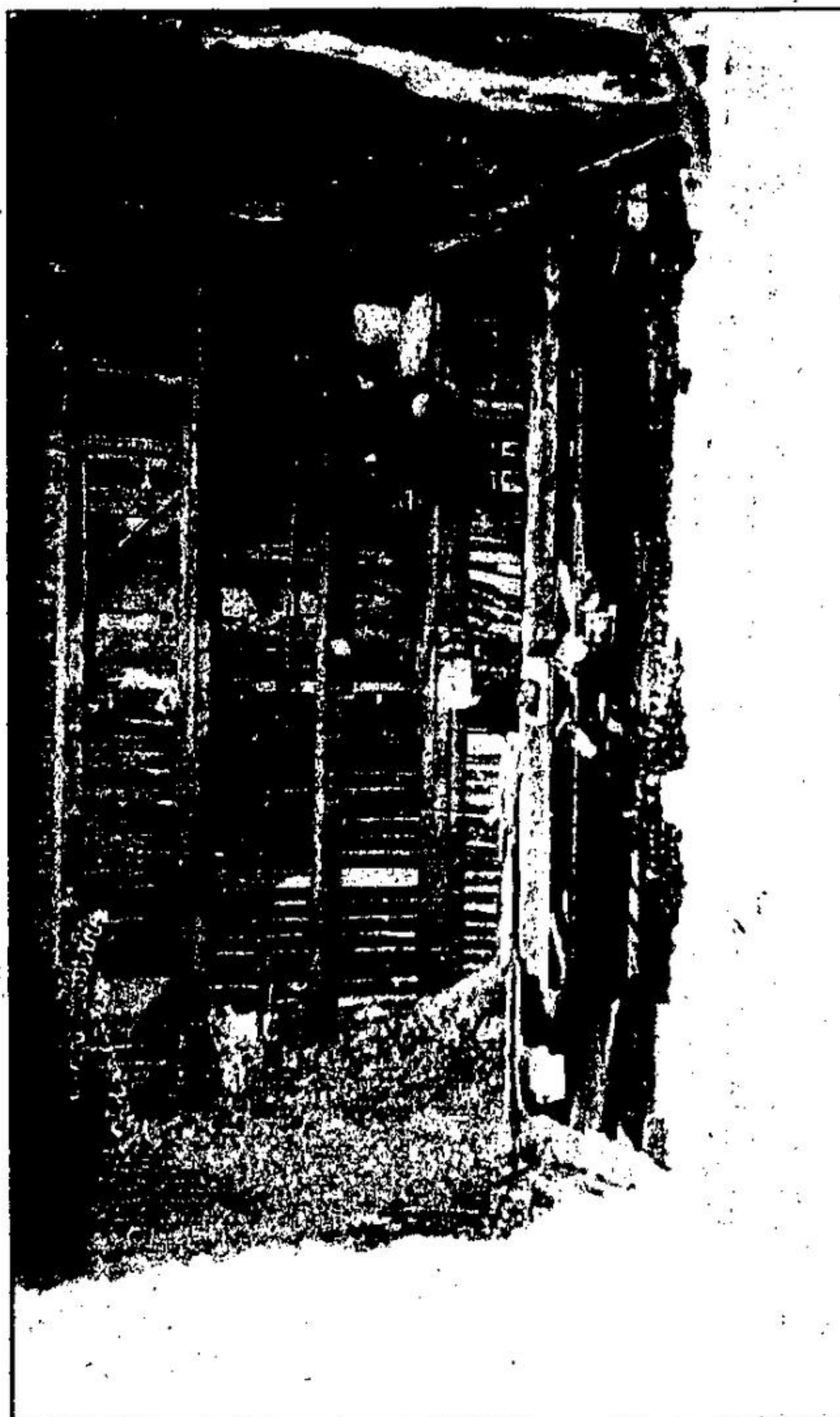
"The Millers lost everything and there was no insurance on the furniture. They are destitute. They will have to re-establish a home and if you think of it, buying furniture, appliances, drapes and everything else is an enormous cost."

The fund is basically for new furniture, Rev. Rennie said, and he's confident if Actonians put themselves in the Miller family's place they will see and appreciate the "desperate situation."

He's calling on the community to demonstrate its generosity, concern for one's neighbor and humanity, by contributing.



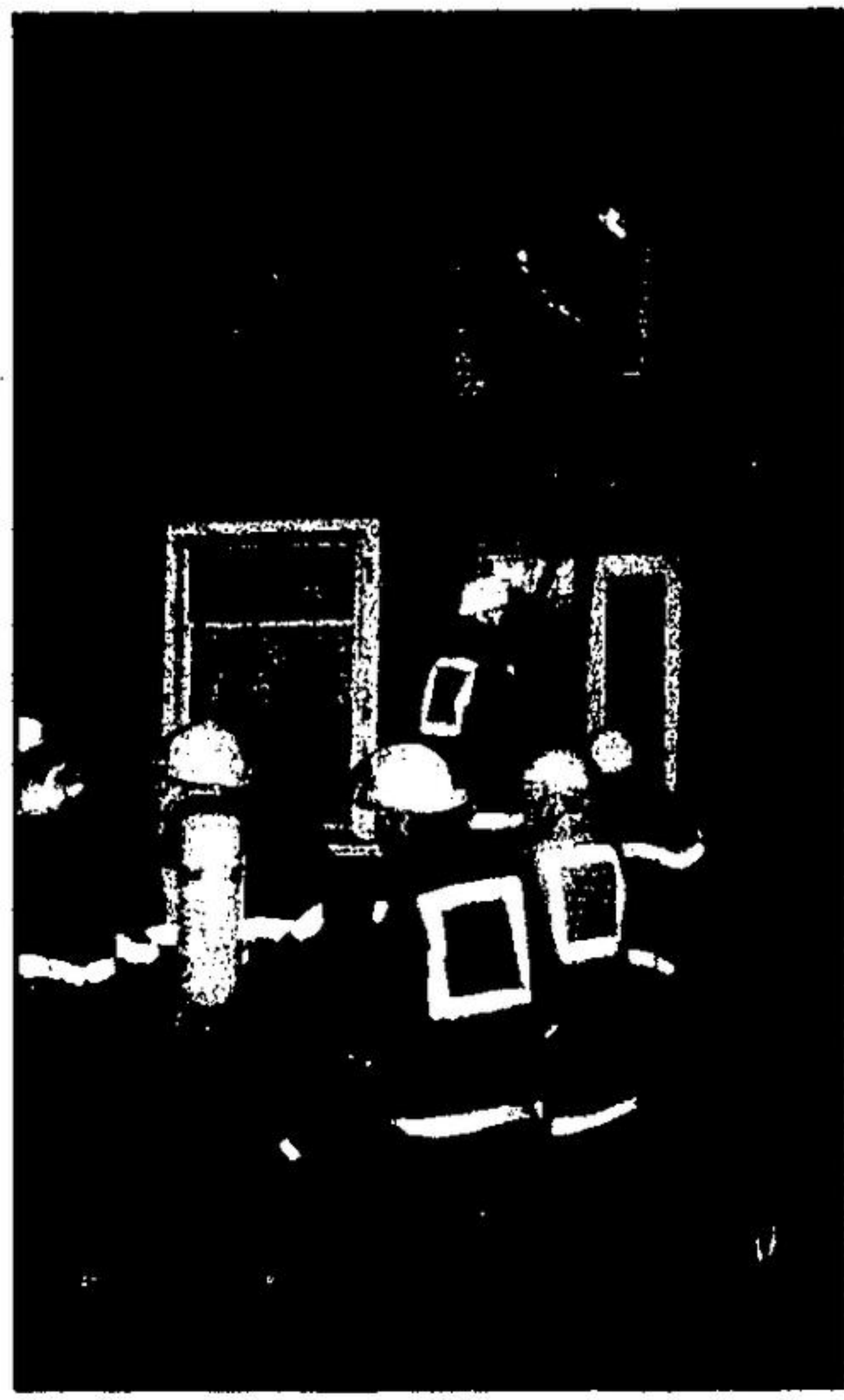
The entrance to the north half of the house showing the burned steps and debris everywhere.



A shot of the interior of the ground floor on the north half of the house.



Fire didn't do much damage to the apartment and steps upstairs on the south half of the house, as this photo shows.



Firefighters work at the middle window of the upper floor of the Willow St. home which was destroyed by fire early Sunday morning.