

## Hickman - Smith

The most lamentable occurrence we have ever known in this neighborhood took place at 15 minutes past 7 Friday evening, five miles northwest of Collins, when the I. N. Smith home and contents were consumed by fire in a few minutes. Four children lost their lives by the fire, one of them Curtis Smith, son of I. N. Smith, the other three being his grandchildren, their parents being Mr. and Mrs. Payne Hickman, who with their family lived with her father, I. N. Smith. Hickman children dead are Gaylard Vaughn Hickman, aged four years, Elsie Fern Hickman aged three years and Leon Wayne Hickman aged eighteen months.

By little less than a miracle Verle Brouhard was saved. He escaped by a window, all the children, except the baby were in the dining room and they thought they would make more heat. They put cobs in the stove and probably by mistake used gasoline, of which there was about 1½ gallons in the can. There was no kerosene, as Mrs. Hickman had used it up filling the lamps before she left. Mr. Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Hickman, the baby and Verle Brouhard were taken to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Granger. A nurse was hurriedly brought from Chas. Cooper's, where she had been employed, and soon afterwards two physicians from Colo and a nurse from the Nevada Sanitarium arrived.

Every care and attention was given the sufferers. The baby died the next morning. Mr. Smith's hands and face were badly burned, but he has greatly improved and it is believed he will recover. Mrs. Hickman's hand was badly cut. She is convalescing. Verle Brouhard suffered but little injury.

The story of the sad catastrophe is as follows: I. N. Smith's farm home on the northwest corner of Collins township, was occupied by himself, his son Curtis La Vern Smith, his grandson Verle Brouhard, his daughter, Mrs. Payne Hickman and husband with their children. Friday evening Mr. and Mrs. Hickman, leaving their children at home with Mr. Smith

his son and his grandson Verle Brouhard, left for Colo in a sled with their neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Granger. When they had reached the corner, a half mile east of the Smith home, looking back, were horrified to see the Smith home on fire. They returned to it in great haste. In the meantime Mr. and Mrs. Sherm Ulum and Mr. and Mrs. George Coughenour, who were also on their way to Colo, had passed the Smith house not over 60 rods when the explosion took place. They had a minute before seen the home as usual, but as they looked back they saw a mass of flame shoot up into the air about fifty feet and descend straight back into the house. The next instant flames were

licking all parts of the building. Reaching the fire they found Mr. Smith and his grandson Verle Brouhard shouting in desperation, Mr. Smith frantic in his helplessness, bodily suffering and mental anguish, while from within the burning structure were heard the cries of the children.

The house was on the south side of the road and the door on the north, which led into the sitting room, was closed on account of winter storms and fixed so that it was not intended to be opened. The snow had covered everything and they could find no axe, hatchet or heavy metal with which to break open the door, but by almost superhuman strength they

forced it in. It was in this room, facing the north where Mr. Smith and the baby were when the explosion took place. When it occurred he rushed into the middle or dining room, in which was the stove and the four other children and saw one of boys covered with flames, but could not save him. He only escaped with his life by making his exit from the kitchen which was the furthest room to the south, and had got out of the burning building when Sherm Ulum and George Coughenour arrived, followed by Henry Granger and Mr. Hickman.