

Doris Rose O'Malley

(- 7 Jun 1974)

The Washington Post, June 8, 1974, p. D1

Two Women, Baby Killed in NW Fire

By Adam Shaw and B.D. Colen, Washington Post Staff Writer

Two women and a 9-month-old infant girl were burned to death yesterday when they were trapped on the second floor of a blazing row house at 1006 K Street NW. A 6-year-old boy was critically injured.

The infant was identified as Dolores Denise McFadden, and the two women were identified as Martha Elgin, 68, and Doris R. O'Malley, 45.

Police said that Mrs. O'Malley was taking care of the infant while her regular baby sitter was away.

Neither the baby's mother, Victoria McFadden, nor Mrs. O'Malley's husband, James, were in the brick, two-story building when the fire broke out about 4:28 p.m.

The injured boy, James O'Malley Jr., was listed in critical condition last night at Children's Hospital.

The cause of the fire, which began in trash in or near the basement stairwell and spread upstairs, is not yet known, fire officials said.

However, Pvt. John Boyle, 29, who climbed into the burning building through a second story window, said "the place was fully involved when we pulled up."

"You usually have a chance to beat the fire down," but not this time, said Doyle, one of the first firemen inside.

Doyle, who had been told by bystanders that children were in the building, said he looked for them immediately. "I just kept looking around for a shape that could be a person, a baby," he said. "But I started to get overcome."

He was treated for smoke inhalation and a burned ear at the Washington Hospital Center. Two other firemen suffered minor injuries in the blaze, which was brought under control shortly after 5 p.m.

Barbara Scott, who lives nearby at 1024 10th St. NW, said that she was to have cared for Dolores McFadden yesterday.

However, she said, when it became necessary to take her husband to a hospital, she asked Mrs. O'Malley to take care of the child.

Efforts to reach the baby's mother last night were unsuccessful.

O'Malley, 46, the husband of one of the women victims, was said by police to be a construction worker. The resident manager of the building, Mildred Lynn, 68, who escaped unharmed, said O'Malley paid \$20 a week for two second-floor rooms.

Martha Elgin was described as a guest of Mrs. Lynn. Additional details about the victims were not available.

Another resident of the house who escaped the blaze, in addition to Mrs. Lynn, was Norman S. Chapell, 73.

He was sitting on the front steps, which lead to a street littered with broken wine bottles, when he heard Mrs. Lynn cry "Fire!"

On seeing the smoke, he said, "I tried to go back in but the heat was too much. It was awful."

Dolores McFadden was pronounced dead at George Washington University Hospital at 4:55 p.m. Mrs. O'Malley was pronounced at D.C. General at 6 p.m. and Martha Elgin at Freedmen's at 5 p.m.

The Washington Post, June 9, 1974, p. B1

"My Wife Is Dead, A Little Baby Too, My Son in Hospital -- Help!"

By Adam Shaw, Washington Post Staff Writer

"My wife is dead, my son is in the hospital, the little baby is dead too . . . That's all I know. It's enough." A beer in one hand, a cigarette in the other, James O'Malley, 46, part-time laborer, and widower, started to cry.

He stood in the noonday sun yesterday, shaking his head as he gazed at a gutted rooming house at 1006 K St. NW, a house where at 4:28 p.m. Friday, a basement trash fire flared up the stairwell and trapped two women and two children on the second floor.

By 6 p.m. Friday, Doris O'Malley, 46, Martha Elgin, 68, and 9-month old Dolores Denise McFadden had died of burns. O'Malley's 6-year-old son, James Jr., was in critical condition at Children's Hospital yesterday afternoon. The boy was still in a coma, hospital officials said.

A former Cleveland steel worker who rented two rooms in the dilapidated house for \$20 a week, O'Malley said his wife must have "shielded Jimmy from the flames. She was burned all black when I went down to identify her at the morgue. That's why Jimmy lived." Fire officials could neither confirm nor deny that.

"I came home from work around 6 (from a temporary job moving furniture, which pays him roughly \$90 a week) and found this," he said, gesturing to the house and the soggy pile of debris firemen had thrown into the front yard.

"It was my home and they were my family," he said. "Now I just hope Jimmy will pull through, but he is an Irishman, and I think he will. What I need now is a good job and a roof to live under, please help."

A homicide detective investigating the fire said that Martha Elgin accidentally began another fire on Friday morning in the same house, but that it was put out by the rooming house manager landlady, Mildred Lynn. The cause of the second, fatal fire is still under investigation.

Norman Chapell, 73, another tenant, said he was sitting on the front step of the house when the fire began. Yesterday, Chapell, a retired mechanic from D.C. Transit searched his blackened second story room and found his life's savings \$120, unburned in a smoky wooden chest of drawers.

The neighbors reported that the infant girl's mother, who could not be reached yesterday, had arrived at the house after the fire had been put out. She had, according to police, left the child with Barbara Scott, a block resident, who, in turn, left her with her friend, Mrs. O'Malley.

O'Malley said yesterday, he didn't know the woman or the child. O'Malley poking through the waterlogged clothes, papers, and other remnants of his life littering the front yard, said of his late wife: "She was a plain looking woman, but a good mother, real good, and I loved her."

"Now," he added, "It's just me and Jimmy, I hope."