

2 Hyde Pupils Accused In School Arson

By PAUL DOWNING
District Correspondent

BATH — Complaints against two juveniles charging first and second-degree arson were issued Wednesday in connection with the \$250,000 fire which badly damaged the main building at Hyde School here early Tuesday morning.

Fire Chief Norman C. Kenney said the petitions were filed against two boys, 14 and 15 years old, from Maryland and Illinois. Both were here for the summer session, which is required of all beginning pupils at the private secondary school.

Both are represented by lawyers. They are scheduled for a juvenile hearing in district court here this afternoon. Both are charged with both degrees

of arson, the difference being determined by the type of use to which the structure is devoted.

Kenney said it has been determined that "a flammable liquid" was used in starting the fire under and around a large table in the center of the library of the former Hyde Mansion.

ON THE FLOOR above the library, 26 persons, including one faculty member, were sleeping when the fire started about 2:45 a.m. The fast-moving fire was eating its way up an open stairway within minutes of its start, but the smoke and fire were held in check by fire doors while the occupants fled down fire escapes.

— Heading the investigation is state Fire Inspector Charles

Hopper, assisted by Kenney and police juvenile officer Russell E. Alexander.

Inspection of the scene is expected to continue today, with debris to be cleared from the floor of the library to determine how large an area was doused with flammable fluid.

Insurance adjusters are expected to continue today with their work, which they began Tuesday afternoon. Kenney said his original estimate of a \$250,000 loss could turn out to be low, considering the rare materials and workmanship of the paneled rooms.

WALL AND CEILING paneling in the library was deeply charred, with similar damage to a wide hallway and the double staircase to the second

floor of the brick building. The living room adjoining the library was blistered by heat, with heat and smoke damage also occurring in the headmaster's office and other first-floor rooms.

Some smoke damage was caused in most of the 50 rooms of the 62-year-old original mansion, with less smoke damage in a 15-year-old wing protected by a fire door.

Kenney said Wednesday he still has not determined whether there was a delay in activation of the building's heat-detection alarm system.

The fire door at the head of the stairway was already hot to the touch, and heavy smoke was billowing up the stairwell, when the occupants scrambled

out of bed in response to the alarm horns. Firemen also faced raging flames in the library and corridor after making the short run from the fire station.

BOX 251 AT the school began coming in at the fire station about 2:47 a.m. with the alarm machinery automatically stamping the time of 2:49 on the tape about two minutes later when four complete rounds had been punched, the chief said.

A clock in a passageway in the fire area some distance from the library was found to have stopped at 2:51 — coincidentally the same as the fire box number — when either the electricity went off or the cord was burned through.

If the fire station and school clocks were both correct, the times would be consistent with a fast-starting fire and proper functioning of the alarm system, the chief agreed.

The two pupils accused of starting the fire appeared to be cooperative in a preliminary interview, the chief said, adding that he hopes to obtain information helpful to the fire probe after legal proceedings are concluded.

"If that alarm system failed to work properly for any reason, we want to know it," Kenney said. The system, consisting of wires separated by material that is designed to melt at 160 degrees, has always functioned properly in the past, the chief reported.

HYDE SCHOOL. BATH.

Two Hyde School pupils charged with arson in connection with \$250,000 fire at school Tuesday.

Portland Press Herald.

July 31, 1975. P. 21