

Farewell to a Piece of Montevallo History

Fire Destroys Historic Home

A January fire destroyed the Elliott-Bailey House, a historic Montevallo home where popular Alabama College professor Paul Bailey once resided.

No one was injured but residents of the Bailey House Apartments were literally caught out in the cold.

The fire appears to have started in a rear apartment, but smoke was already pouring out of the roof of the second story when firefighters were called to the scene.

Firefighters recorded the alarm time as 12:27 p.m. and were dousing the fire with water within three minutes of the call. Several of those battling the blaze were student members of the volunteer Montevallo Fire Department.

The Elliott-Bailey House was built around 1880, according to Catherine Legg of the Montevallo Chamber of Commerce. It was the home of Dr. Paul Bailey who taught biology at Alabama College in the 1950's.

Former UM librarian Mary Frances Tipton said Bailey was "a much-loved teacher" who served as chairman of the biology department until 1960.

Bailey renovated the house, which had been rented to teachers at Alabama College for many years. After he transferred to the faculty



Smoke pours from the roof of the Bailey House as firefighters launch their first assault on the blaze.

of Birmingham-Southern College, the house was divided into apartments.

Strangely enough, the old-fashioned extra-sturdy construction of the Bailey House may have contributed to its destruction. In modern homes, one jab with an axe gives firefighters access to the spaces inside walls or above the ceiling where fire often hides. But in the Bailey House, firefighters said, the walls were hard to break and the ceiling had to be cut with a chain saw.

"I've been (a firefighter) at Montevallo for six years and that's the most difficult fire I've ever been at," said Danny Reid, 20, a UM student who was one of four brothers on the scene.

Freezing temperatures presented another challenge, said his brother, Mike Reid. Water from fire hos-

es hardened into ice on the men's face shields. Ice also coated a metal staircase on one side of the building.

It took about 45 minutes of hard work to bring the fire under control. Meanwhile, "secondaries" belonging to the Explorer post at Montevallo High School removed belongings, including aquariums and a pet guinea pig, from apartments near the front of the house.

Students who were left homeless by the fire were offered free accommodations in the campus residence halls until they could make new arrangements.

A few days after the fire, the weakened house was levelled and the lot was cleared with bulldozers.

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Five Men in One Family Fought Bailey House Blaze

You're in training to become a firefighter. Try not to think too hard about the following numbers:

Water boils at 212°.

Paper ignites at 451°.

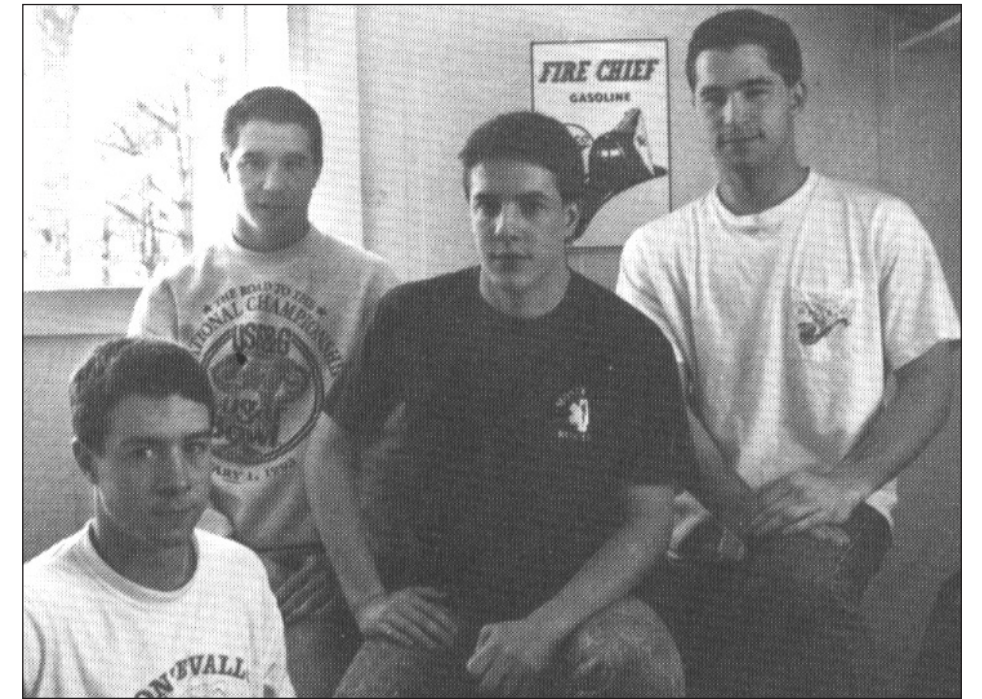
At this moment, the temperature on the other side of your protective clothing is roughly 850°.

Phillip and Mike Reid, 20, endured this situation as part of their training for the Montevallo Fire Department. When the Cobb County, Ga., trainer opened the door to let his trainees out, the sudden draft of cool air melted the visor of one man's helmet. Although the trainees were in no danger in the controlled "burn room," the experience drove home the point that entering a burning building is not a task to be taken lightly.

Not that they really needed reminding. Phillip and Mike are two of five Reids – a father and four brothers – who serve on the Montevallo Fire Department. The triplets, Phillip, Mike, and Danny, are



Stuffed animals lie among students' rescued belongings as firefighters in a snorkel aim a stream of water into the top story of the Bailey House.



The Reid brothers (from left: Andy, Danny, Phillip, and Mike) pose for a photo at the Firehouse barbecue restaurant in Montevallo.

now 20, Youngest brother Andy is 15 and a member of the Explorer post at Montevallo High School that trains young people in emergency rescue techniques.

Mike Reid is studying at UM. Danny and Phillip are also UM students, but are taking paramedic courses this semester at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

The Reid's father, Bill Reid, first got involved with firefighting in Montevallo in 1958 when he was a student at Alabama College. He now teaches at Shelby County High School and serves as assistant chief under Fire Chief Allen Blackmon, an Alabama Power employee.

All five Reids were involved when the Elliott-Bailey House caught fire. As teams fought the flames, which originated in the back of the house, Andy Reid and others entered the smoke-filled front apartments to retrieve tenants' belongings. Andy also rescued a pet guinea pig.

"When you go in, you can't see your hand in front of your face,"

Phillip says. "You could be going around and around in circles and not even know it."

"Standing the heat has a whole new meaning for firefighters. Instinct says to run from the smoke and flames, yet a number of men and women voluntarily scale burning buildings and search smoke-filled rooms.

"It's amazing how pumped you can get" when the alarm sounds, Mike says. "Nothing like it," Phillip adds, as his three brothers voice their agreement.



A volunteer leans on a ladder and aims water under the broken roof at the rear of the house. The fire is believed to have started near this spot.