

Abridged Chronology – Cornell Heights Residential Club Fire, 1946–1975

Preface to the Abridged Chronology

On 5 April 1967, fire struck the Cornell Heights Residential Club in the Village of Cayuga Heights, NY, killing one Cornell University professor and eight students. Survivors were relocated to other campus housing. The University's Board of Trustees decreed a policy of “official silence” on the matter. On 23 May, a second fire struck the Watermargin Cooperative, and on 31 May, a third fire broke out at 211 Eddy Street. No injuries resulted, but in both cases these dwellings housed survivors of the first fire.

The New York Times, 1 June 1967, Excerpt

ARSON SUSPECTED IN CORNELL FIRES Similarities Noted in Three, Including Blaze Fatal to 9

ITHACA, N.Y., May 31 — Investigators here said today they were convinced that three recent fires in buildings housing Cornell University Students, including one in which nine persons died, were caused by an arsonist.

The New York Times, 2 June 1967, Excerpt

CORNELL PATROLS STUDENT HOUSES Acts After 3 Fires Where Ph.D. Candidates Lived

ITHACA, N.Y. June 1 — A Cornell University official disclosed today that the school had posted uniformed patrolmen at about 10 student residences following three suspicious fires in the campus community in the last two months. All of the residences house participants in an experimental six-year program leading to Doctor of Philosophy degrees.

The New York Times, 3 June 1967, Excerpt

INQUIRY NARROWS IN 3 CORNELL FIRES ‘2 or 3’ Under Investigation, Ithaca Police Report”

by Douglas Robinson

ITHACA, N. Y., June 2 — The investigation of three recent fires in housing for students enrolled in a special program at Cornell University is concentrating on “two or three people,” Ithaca’s police chief said today.

Ithaca Journal, 17 Aug 1967, p. 13, Excerpt

Ph.D. Dorm Fire Arson, Laboratory Tests Show

by Patricia Nordheimer, Journal Staff Writer.

A Canadian chemist has found and identified a fluid accelerant present at all three fires in places where Cornell University six-year Ph.D. students were living last spring according to Ithaca Police Chief Herbert Van Ostrand.

The Oneonta Star (Oneonta, NY), 18 Aug 1967 (Friday), p. 2, Excerpt

Arson Suspected at Cornell

ITHACA, N.Y. (AP) — Suspicions that three pre-dawn fires last spring at Cornell University, including one that claimed nine lives, were the work of an arsonist were strengthened Thursday by the discovery that a liquid, combustible substance was near the

origin of the fires. Police Chief Herbert Van Ostrand said a Canadian chemist hired by his department had found the remains of a “fluid accelerant” in all three structures at a point where the flames had burned strongest.

Tompkins County District Attorney Matthew Van Houten disputes the two “Canadian chemist” press reports, but does not provide his reason for declaring them to be “untrue.”

No arrests, no arraignments and no criminal prosecutions resulted, and after August of 1967 no account of the investigation —most certainly curtailed that fall, was ever reported. No police appeal to the public for information has ever been discovered.

This story of crime and community forgetfulness is unique. This writer can find no other case of an unsolved multiple homicide investigation in an American college town being so clearly abandoned without result and erased from public memory. A suspicion that the University, the press and local law enforcement colluded to bury this tragedy cannot be dismissed. Cornell University's 1967 policy of “official silence” continues to this day.

The redactions in this document have been made to respect the integrity of the criminal investigation, technically still open and ongoing.

H. William “Bill” Fogle, Jr., Cornell '70 (Engineering)
Mesa, AZ. August 2017

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Chronology, 1946–1975

HWF comments and conjectures are in italics.

07 Aug 1946, the Cornell Chapter of the Acacia Fraternity conveys a 2¾ acre property in the Village of Cayuga Heights to Fred A. Rogalski, Sherwood Holt and Margaret H. McPherson.¹ Cf. Liber (Deeds) 290, p. 318.

30 Nov 1949, **Redaction #1 (Individual #1 identification)**.

24 Oct 1952, Fred A. Rogalski, Sherwood Holt, Driscoll Brothers and Co., Inc., and Margaret H. McPherson convey said property to J. Reed Colbert (d. Apr 1970) and his son, Robert Reed Colbert. Cf. Liber (Deeds) 353, p. 384.

1952, Henry J. Shirley, an attorney with offices in downtown Ithaca, is elected as Mayor of the Village of Cayuga Heights.

In his memoir, F. G. Marcham blames Shirley and the Village Engineer for allowing an unnamed real estate developer (the Colberts) to build and operate a motel on a site that was specifically zoned against such a commercial enterprise.² A striking omission: Marcham makes no mention of the 1967 fire which occurred during his term as Mayor of the Village.

Oct 1953, the Cornell Heights Residential Club (now called Hurlburt House / Ecology House, Cornell University Facility #3127) is built at 1 (later 111) Country Club Road in the Village of Cayuga Heights NY by father and son developers J. Reed Colbert and Robert R. Colbert at a cost of \$700,000.³ Avallone & DiStasio are architect-engineers and DiStasio & Van Buren are the consulting engineers.⁴ The building contractor is Nikula Construction Company.

The building was designed as a motel for transient guests and equipped with none of the fire safety features required by law for a dormitory. See the Smith lawsuit for a full listing of the safety deficiencies.

16 Oct 1953, the Cornell University Board of Trustees Executive Committee agrees to a proposal by the owners of a new apartment hotel to change the name from “Cornell Residential Club” to “Cornell Heights Residential Club”.⁵

07 Apr 1954, Cornell Heights Residential Club, Inc., registers with the New York State Secretary of State as a Domestic Not For Profit Corporation, Registration Number: 89025.

http://www.dos.ny.gov/corps/bus_entity_search.html

This is a case of conflicting data: a for-profit motel business with a not-for-profit corporate registration.

¹ Thanks to David K. George '86, Ithaca Town Historian, for the research on the Res Club property conveyances. Cf. Balcerski, Thomas J. (*Acacia Fraternity at Cornell: The First Century*, 2007), pp. 51-62 and 124-125, for the acquisition and subdivision of this property.

² John Marcham, Ed. *The Papers of F. G. Marcham: III Cornell Notes; World War II to 1968*. Ithaca NY: The Internet-First University Press, 2006. <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/3454>

³ *Ithaca Journal*, 05 Apr 1967, p. 15: “Has Been News In Past” by Jane Marcham, Journal Staff Writer.

⁴ John E. Burton, Vice President for Business, memorandum to Dale R. Corson, 12 Apr 1967.

⁵ *Proceedings of the Board of Trustees of Cornell University*, 1953/1954. Executive Committee, 16 Oct 1953, p. 2018. <http://hdl.handle.net/1813/23414>

22 Sep 1954, the firm, Savoy-Ithaca, Inc., negotiates a fifteen-year lease of the Cornell Heights Residential Club property from J. Reed Colbert and Robert R. Colbert.⁶ Rental payments of \$37,000 per annum for the first ten years and \$39,500 per annum thereafter are agreed to. Savoy-Ithaca incorporation papers are said to be filed by Louis K. Thaler.⁷ William J. Bartholomew of South Orange, NJ, and John J. Bundschuh of New Rochelle, NY, are identified as the principals of Savoy-Ithaca.

Nov 1954, Cayuga Heights residents reject annexation of the Village by the City of Ithaca.⁸

1955, the Colberts go to court in a dispute with tenant Savoy-Ithaca over non-payment of rent.⁹

01 Jul 1955, The Cayuga Heights Fire Department (all volunteer) is activated for service.

18 Sep 1956, in a *Cornell Daily Sun* advertisement, George T. Bond, Manager of the Cornell Heights Residential Club, describes the Club's amenities and offers it as transient lodging for the guests and visiting parents of Cornell students.¹⁰

04 Oct 1957, the USSR launches Sputnik 1 (Спутник-1), the first artificial Earth satellite.

This event triggers the American Sputnik Crisis, the Space Race, the National Defense Education Act (1958) and concerns that the nation's universities were producing insufficient numbers of advanced-degreed scientists and academics. Cornell's six year Ph.D. program would emerge as a response to these political factors.

Mar 1958, Prof. Frederick G. Marcham, Cornell Ph.D. '26 (1898–1992), running unopposed, is elected to a second term as Mayor of the Village of Cayuga Heights.¹¹

Aug 1963, Cornell's Board of Trustees elects Dale Raymond Corson (1914–2012) as University Provost. He will serve in that position until 1969 when he becomes the University's 8th President.

26 Sep 1963, David I Grossvogel and Anita Grossvogel convey a property to Robert Reed Colbert and his father, J. Reed Colbert. Cf. Liber 448 (Deeds), p. 12.

04 Oct 1963, James Alfred Perkins (1911–1998) is inaugurated as the University's 7th President.

30 Apr 1964, father and son real estate developers Robert Reed Colbert and J. Reed Colbert convey the property to Cornell University. Cf. Liber 451 (Deeds), p. 197.

11 Jun 1964, Cornell University purchases and takes possession of the Cornell Heights Residential Club property.¹²

⁶ *Cornell Daily Sun*, v. 71, #4, 23 Sep 1954: "New Company to Run Club."

⁷ "Louis Thaler (1903-79) had a long and successful career as an Ithaca attorney and was the founder and senior partner of the Thaler and Thaler law firm. He was the city of Ithaca attorney from 1940 to 1941 and president of the Tompkins County Bar Association from 1944 to 1945. He also served as a special county judge and surrogate judge. Actively involved in civic affairs throughout his career, Thaler was a member of the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce Board of Governors, the American Bar Association, the New York State Bar Association, the Ithaca Rotary Club, and the Elks Club." <http://www.ithaca.edu/thaler/violin/series/>

⁸ *Cornell Daily Sun*, v. 71, #34, 04 Nov 1954: "Marcham Explains Opposition to Heights Annexation Plan."

⁹ Cf. Affidavit of Henry J. Shirley, New York Supreme Court, Appellate Division —First Department.

¹⁰ *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXIII, #2 (18 Sep 1956), advertisement: "The Cornell Heights Residential Club."

¹¹ *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXIV, #105 (20 Mar 1958): "Marcham Wins Local Election."

¹² Burton (1967), p. 2.

21 Oct 1964, the Cornell University faculty votes their approval of the accelerated Ph.D. program.¹³ Some faculty members express concerns about student elitism and immaturity in the debate preceding this endorsement.

01 Dec 1964, the Ford Foundation approves a ten-year grant for a “Special Master’s and Ph.D. program for selected students” to be administered by Cornell University. The original amount of the grant was \$2,217,000.¹⁴ The University will contribute additional funds.

Prof. Robert H. Lewis, Cornell ‘70, examined the Ford Foundation material at the Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow NY on Thursday, 27 June 2013. Lewis, a member of the Six-year Ph.D. Program’s second class established the “Biographies of Students in the Six-Year PhD Program” webpage circa 2001. <https://home.bway.net/lewis/phudbio.html>

Jan 1966, Cornell announces, “A nationwide search has been launched to find 40 superior students who will make up the first class in Cornell’s unique Six-Year PhD Program.”¹⁵ Prof. Steven Maxfield Parrish is identified as the program director.

The program was led by College of Arts and Sciences Associate Dean Stephen Maxfield Parrish (1921–2012): BA 1942 from the University of Illinois, MA 1947 and PhD 1954 from Harvard University. His Cornell career began in 1954 and ended with his retirement in 1991 as Goldwin Smith Professor of English Emeritus. He was the director of the University’s six-year PhD program in 1966–67.

10 May 1966, Parrish reports the academic qualifications of the first class of students selected for the program to the Ford Foundation.¹⁶ Excerpt:

Redaction #2 (Individual #2 identification).

I found no evidence that the Program’s recruiters evaluated the candidates for emotional maturity or understanding of what a career in academic research entailed.

Redaction #3 (Individual #2’s family background and education).

15 May 1966, the University’s Faculty Committee on Student Affairs condemns the fraternity system in what will later be called the Parrish Report: “The University must disengage itself from the dominance of today’s socially oriented fraternities by offering students the alternative of living in University controlled small residence units which stress educational goals.”¹⁷

18 Sep 1966, an intruder murders Valerie Jeanne Percy, Cornell ‘66 KΚΓ (b. 10 Dec 1944) at her family’s home in Kenilworth MI. VJP was the daughter of Charles Harting “Chuck” Percy (1919–2011), U.S. Senator for Illinois (1967–1985). The case is never solved.

¹³ *NYT*, 14 Oct 1964: “CORNELL MAPPING COLLEGE SPEED-UP; Some Students Could Earn Doctorates in 6 Years Under University Plan; FACULTY VOTE AWAITED; Opponents Against Singling Out an ‘Elite Group’ - Immaturity Is Feared” by Fred M. Hechinger. *NYT*, 22 Oct 1964: “FACULTY APPROVES CORNELL SPEED-UP.”

¹⁴ Ford Foundation Program Action 650-0054B, 30 Aug 1976.

¹⁵ *Cornell Alumni News*, Vol. 68, No. 06 (Jan 1966), p. 18: “Forty superior students.”
<http://hdl.handle.net/1813/27809>

¹⁶ S. M. Parrish, Associate Dean and Director, Six-Year Ph.D. Program, Cornell University, letter to Fred E. Crossland, Program Associate, the Ford Foundation, 10 May 1966.

¹⁷ *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXXII, #142 (15 May 1966): “Faculty Group Hits Fraternity System” by Phyllis E. Kaye. Fogle (2013), *ΔΧ of ΔΚΕ Special Study #14: Scholastic Performance in the Post-WWII Deke House*.

Oct 1966, the *Cornell Alumni News* reports:¹⁸

Probably the most compelling feature of the program – the residential center – is also the most controversial. It was not part of the original proposal, but was added by Parrish. As the program is operated, the 48 students in it – 35 boys and 13 girls along with three resident faculty members – will take up quarters at the Cornell Residential Club for the first year. They will also have their meals there.

The faculty residents will not serve as proctors. Rather the three young faculty members – John Finch, Mike Balch and Adrienne Tinsley – will just be there and be available to the students if they want them. Room is also available at the Residential Club for one visiting professor.

Those who find fault in the residential center fear two things. One, they worry that those in the program will form a close-knit, elitist group. They worry more, however, that the students will become isolated from the rest of the campus.

Feb 1967, John Marcham '50 becomes editor of the *Cornell Alumni News* for the second time.

04 Apr 1967, **Redaction #4 (Individual #1 life event and relevance).**

05 Apr 1967, fire breaks out in the Cornell Heights Residential Club.¹⁹ There are nine fatalities: one faculty member, three Six-year PhD Program students and five graduate students.

Martha Susan Beck '69, Evanston, IL	Six-year PhD Program student
Meimei Chung Chang, State College, PA	graduate student, Nursing
Peter Cooch, Weston, MA	Six-year PhD Program student
Dr. John Alban Finch, Ithaca, NY	faculty, Associate Professor
Carol Lynn Kurtz, Butler, PA	graduate student, Home Economics
Anne Catherine McCormic '67, Phila., PA	student, Home Economics
Jeffrey William Smith '69, Cupertino, CA	Six-year PhD Program student
Jennie Zu-Wei Sun '68, Upper Darby, PA	student, Arts & Sciences
Johanna Christina Wallden, Helsinki, Finland	graduate student, Agriculture

Many of the survivors are temporarily housed at the golf course club house and then moved to other locations.

*Professor Finch's sister, Miss Veronica Finch, who had been located in Nigeria, flown to Ithaca, and proved a most extraordinary and compassionate person: she had lived with the students through the weekend, talked with them, stayed two extra days to do so. The students' morale would, the President said, have been far different and poorer today had it not been for her.*²⁰

07 Apr 1967, the University holds a memorial service in Sage Chapel for the fire's victims.

14 Apr 1967, the *New York Times* runs the following story.

¹⁸ *Cornell Alumni News*, Vol. 69, No. 03 (October, 1966): "The PhD In Six Years Backed By The Ford Foundation, Cornell Launches An Experiment" by Joel H. Kaplan '66, Photographs by Fred Mohn. <http://hdl.handle.net/1813/27817>

¹⁹ *NYT*, 06 Apr 1967: "Cornell Fire Kills 8 Students and Professor; 6 Girls Among Those Dead of Asphyxiation."

²⁰ *Cornell University Faculty Minutes: 1964-1967* (12 Apr 1967), pp. 3365-3370. <http://hdl.handle.net/1813/22442>

Cornell Is Assailed Again Over Fatal Dormitory Fire

ITHACA, N.Y. April 13 (AP) —Cornell University came under new criticism today over the dormitory fire that killed nine persons.

The critics were a state official and an independent organization that contended “inadequate and substandard” escape facilities contributed to the deaths.

The National Fire Protection Association issued a preliminary report in Boston saying there was an absence of a building fire alarm and properly installed fire doors and enclosure at the basement level.

In Albany, Charles R. Dorman, assistant director of the Division of Fire Safety, said that if the division’s recommendations of January, 1966, had been carried out, “I’m sure they would have saved the lives of those kids.”

A coroner’s inquest into the fire, originally set for yesterday, was postponed until next Wednesday to allow for further investigation.

The cause of the fire has not been determined.

17 Apr 1967, Steven Muller (1927–2013), Vice President for Public Affairs (1966 to 1971), complains in a letter to James Alfred Perkins (1911–1998), University President, about the policy of “official silence” imposed by Arthur Hobson Dean ‘21 (1899-1987), Chairman, University Board of Trustees.

This is where the cover-up began, and soon there would be much more to bury.

19 Apr 1967, the Coroner’s Inquest is held. Tompkins County Coroner Dr. Ralph J. Low makes the following statement.²¹

“The evidence presented at this inquest is such as to minimize the possibility of mechanical accident and makes the fire more probably the result of human carelessness or malice.

“I conclude at this time that the fire is of undetermined origin. I recommend that the investigation be continued by the District Attorney’s office.

“Although there did exist a tragic combination of physical circumstances that could have contributed to these deaths, I did not find criminal negligence.”

Architect Robert Tallman testifies that the building’s design and facilities violated the Multiple-Residence Law.

The authorities have never released the Coroner’s Inquest Report, even to the next of kin of the victims as allowed by law. Thomas Cooch, brother of the deceased Peter Cooch, was refused a copy of this report in 2013. A second request in May 2016 to Tompkins County Attorney John Wood, was honored and Cooch finally received an original carbon copy.

20 Apr 1967, the *Ithaca Journal* runs two full pages of articles about testimony given in the Coroner’s Inquest hearing on the preceding day.²²

²¹ *Cornell Alumni News*, Vol. 69, No. 11 (June, 1967), p. 30: “In the Wake of the Fire.”
<http://hdl.handle.net/1813/27825>

28 Apr 1967, University Counsel Neal R. Stamp advises the University's senior administrators by confidential memorandum that Provost Dale R. Corson has requested that steps be taken "to accomplish a disengagement of University Staff from direct participation in the continuing investigations being conducted by the Cayuga Heights Police."²³ All communications regarding the fire including requests from the news media are to be referred to Stamp's office.

[Excerpt] Finally, I request the cooperation of all concerned in asking that they clear with me any further dissemination of information to news media or disinterested third parties (public or private) concerning the essential circumstances surrounding the fire or the findings made in subsequent investigations. I realize that these constraints may be a source of frustration or even embarrassment in some instances. Nevertheless, I cannot urge upon you too strongly that our University is faced with a difficult period ahead. We are under specific obligation to give full cooperation to our insurance carriers. This involves fairly strong controls over dissemination of information as well as controls over any reimbursements to those who may have suffered loss in the fire. In addition, we have need to protect the good name of the University and of many of her loyal and competent officers and personnel. On both counts it is essential that we establish firm controls over voluntary dissemination of information.

22 May 1967, the *Cornell Daily Sun* runs a story, "Fire Passages Read" that opens with the passage, "A series of meetings at the Cornell Heights Residential Club to discuss death—at which passages from Ezekiel 1:1–13 describing the 'burning coals of fire' on the fifth day of the fourth month were quoted—preceeded [sic] the April 5 fire at the club, according to reliable sources. / One of the participants, a coed member of the Six Year Ph.D. Program, attempted to commit suicide after one of the sessions shortly before Christmas."²⁴

This story becomes the basis for authorities to persecute Six-year Ph.D. student Isabel Einstein '69. Investigators contact her parents in Philadelphia, adding further distress. She leaves the program and pursues a non-academic career. By June, the authorities declare the "Death Club" inquiry to be a complete dead end and irrelevant to the investigation.

23 May 1967, the *Ithaca Journal* picks up on the Ezekiel story and further reports on the fire investigation.²⁵

[Excerpt] As far as Cornell is concerned, the specific investigation into causes of the Residential Club fire is over, with results tallying with those presented during the Coroner's inquest April 19.

²² *Ithaca Journal*, 20 Apr 1967, p. 6, Editorial: "A Tragic Combination." 20 Apr 1967, p. 15: "Cause of Nine-Fatality Fire Still Unresolved" by Patricia Nordheimer, Journal Staff Writer. 20 Apr 1967, p. 16: "Anatomy of A Dormitory Tragedy" by Randall E. Shew, Journal Managing Editor.

²³ Neal R. Stamp. University Counsel, memorandum to Mark Barlow, et. al., 28 Apr 1967. Re: Residential Club Fire.

²⁴ *Cornell Daily Sun*, 22 May 1967: "Ezekiel 1:1-13 / Fire Passages Read" by Gary A. Goodman. Continuation headline, p. 6: "Ph.D. Group Studied Bible Fire Passages." Image of news clipping furnished by David J. Halperin, Cornell '69, A&S.

²⁵ *Ithaca Journal*, 23 May 1967, p. 11: "Prophet Ezekiel... Vision of Fire...4th Month, 5th Day—Investigation Continues on Cornell Res Club Fire Tragedy; Exact Cause Unknown; 6-Year Ph.D. Students to 'Return'" by Patricia Nordheimer, Journal Staff Writer.

The building will be rehabilitated for use next year. No major structural damage—but a great deal of “spring cleaning”—is involved, a spokesman said. The commission chaired by Emeritus Prof. T. P. Wright will bring its report on safety throughout the university to Cornell trustees for action at their June 10 meeting. A professional consulting firm in the fire safety field has been at work evaluating the campus.

The Coroner directed continued investigation into the Residential Club fire under auspices of the District Attorney's office.

The actual police work has occupied an investigator from the State Bureau of Criminal Investigation Richard Gildersleeve, and subsequently, John Murphy of the State Police, and Cayuga Heights Police Officer Harlen McEwen continuously since the day of the fire. The Cayuga Heights Police Department has been responsible for the investigation. Others have helped.

Photographs, chemical analysis, interviewing and polygraph testing have been among the media employed in the study. The building has been sealed and under police guard.

Physical evidence continues to substantiate the thesis that mechanical malfunction was not the cause. Human carelessness or arson are the remaining alternatives, but proof to support either supposition has been hard to come by.

Many of the puzzling pieces of information alluded to at the inquest have been resolved, in theory, if not in reports to police.

So the University's position was that the investigation was over and any further work was to be handled by the law enforcement community.

23 May 1967 (cont'd), fire breaks out at Watermargin, 103 McGraw Place, Ithaca NY 14850-3922. No one is injured. The building housed several Six-year PhD students who had been relocated from the Res Club following the first fire: Gene Fry, Mark Heumann and M. Robert Showalter.

Redaction #5 (Individual #3 observation regarding Individual #2 and CHPD response).

24 May 1967, Redaction #6 (CHPD interview of Individual #3 and report thereof).

26 May 1967, Redaction #7 (Individual #2 declines NYSP polygraph examination and to discuss fire without advice of counsel).

31 May 1967, fire breaks out at a Collegetown rooming house, 211 Eddy St., Ithaca NY 14850. The building housed several Six-year PhD students (*) who had been relocated from the Res Club following the first fire and others: Patrick Alberstadt, Edgar Blaustein*, Isabel L. Einstein*, Frederick Kardon*, David Warren Katz*, William Henry Kaufman*, Harry Keagler, Philip W. Lavori* and James D. Wuest*.

Redaction #8 (Hearsay report by Individual #4, now deceased, regarding the 211 Eddy Street fire).

31 May 1967 (cont'd), investigators report that they are convinced that the three fires are works of arson.²⁶ “At least two of the 45 [Ph.D. students] in the program unexpectedly left [sic] Ithaca.”²⁷

²⁶ NYT, 01 Jun 1967: “Arson Suspected in Cornell Fires; Similarities Noted in Three, Including Blaze Fatal to 9.”

²⁷ NYT, 02 Jun 1967: “Cornell Patrols Student Houses; Acts after 3 Fires Where Ph.D. Candidates Lived.”

02 Jun 1967, Ithaca Police Chief Herbert L. Van Ostrand (1907-1997) reports that “two or three people” are under investigation for the fires, all declared to be suspected arson.²⁸ Van Ostrand says that samples of burned material have “been sent to FBI laboratories and a private laboratory in New York City.”

02 Jun 1967 (cont’d), the *Ithaca Journal* runs an editorial, “Fire Information Imperative,” calling on readers to report any information.

It becomes a deeper tragedy because there are now three fires in a two-month period in buildings housing the brilliant youngsters who are members of the Six-year Ph.D. program at the university and, in the words of Fire Chief Charles Weaver, “Frankly, it's just too much coincidence for me.”

This is the one and only call for witnesses or for those with useful information to step forward and help the police investigate the three fires that are now publically declared as suspected arson. Two careful page by page reviews of the Ithaca Journal and the Cornell Daily Sun for 1967 and 1968 reveal that no “information needed” advertisements are ever published. No such circulars are ever posted on bulletin boards in the city or on the campus, and no reward for information leading to an arrest is ever offered. The obvious reason: the authorities already have a prime suspect and the University does not want any further evidence that might lead to an indictment and a public trial.

02 Jun 1967 (cont’d), the *Amsterdam Recorder*, an AP affiliate, runs the following story (excerpt).

Doubt Any Death Club at Cornell

ITHACA, N.Y. (AP) — Campus speculation about the existence of a so-called Death Club blended with facts today as Police pressed an investigation of three fires involving an elite group of students at Cornell University.

The possibility of the “Death Club” was discounted by a faculty adviser to the students and by law enforcement officials.

Fire Chief Charles M. Weaver said, however, “very bluntly, we suspect a crime or crimes has been committed here,” when he was asked for comment about the latest fire involving the top-ranked students.

The fire Wednesday wrecked a three-story dwelling that housed seven members of an accelerated program leading to a doctoral degree in six years.

The students had moved to the unit after a fire April 5 at a dormitory in which nine persons died, including four students in the experimental program.

On May 23, a fire —quickly extinguished— broke out in another dormitory where other members of the special class called FUDS by other students had been housed following the April 5 fire. All of the fires occurred between 4 a.m. and 5 a.m.

Meanwhile, the campus was rife with reports that three to six of the high-caliber students were part of a so-called Death Club that met to discuss death and its treatment in literature, including the Bible.

²⁸ *NYT*, 03 Jun 1967: “Inquiry Narrows in 3 Cornell Fires; ‘2 or 3’ Under Investigation, Ithaca Police Report.” *Ithaca Journal*, 02 Jun 1967, p. 9: “Nothing New, Officials Say.”

Included in the discussions, campus sources said, were passages from Ezekiel describing a vision of fire during the fifth day of the fourth month —April 5.

02 Jun 1967 (cont'd), Thomas Rupert, 18, is convicted in Westchester County Court on 24 counts of first degree murder and of arson for setting a 20 December 1965 fire that killed 12 persons in the Yonkers Jewish Community Center. The trial, beginning on 1 May, was extensively covered in the press.

National news coverage of the Res Club fire investigation ceases with the 3 June 1967 story in the New York Times.

06 Jun 1967, final examinations end for Cornell's spring term.

The authorities have no legal means for keeping the students in Ithaca past this date.

12 Jun 1967, Cornell holds commencement exercises.

Summer 1967, throughout the summer of 1967 major national and international news stories dominate the front page of *The Ithaca Journal*, diverting reader's attention from local events.

05–10 June, the Six-Day War is fought between Israel and the Arab coalition of Egypt, Syria and Jordan.

08 June, Israel attacks the USS Liberty (AGTR-5) in international waters off the coast of the Sinai Peninsula. 34 American servicemen are killed and 174 wounded. The dead include an Ithaca man, CT1 John Caleb Smith, Jr. USN.

June Race Riots: Atlanta, Boston, Buffalo, Cincinnati and Tampa.

02–14 July, Operation Buffalo, U.S. Marine Corps units engage the North Vietnamese Army in the southern half of the Demilitarized Zone, around Con Thien. U.S. forces suffer 159 killed, 845 wounded and 1 missing. MVA losses are estimated to be 1,290 killed and an unknown number wounded.

July Race Riots: Birmingham, Cambridge MD, Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, New Britain CT, New York, Newark and Plainfield NJ.

In addition to the above nearly 100,000 young people converged on the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco for the "Summer of Love."

29 Jul 1967, the accidental launch of a Mk-32 "Zuni" air-to-surface rocket from an F-4B Phantom II aircraft on the flight deck of the USS Forrestal (CV-59) in the Gulf of Tonkin results in fire and ordnance explosions killing 134 servicemen, injuring 161 and causing severe damage to the vessel.

17 Aug 1967, the *Ithaca Journal* reports that a Canadian chemist has identified a liquid accelerant in samples taken from all three fires.²⁹

A Canadian chemist has found and identified a fluid accelerant present at all three fires in places where Cornell University six-year Ph.D. students were living last spring according to Ithaca Police Chief Herbert Van Ostrand.

An accelerant is a chemical substance that makes a fire burn faster such as gasoline,

²⁹ *Ithaca Journal*, 17 Aug 1967, p. 13: "Ph.D. Dorm Fire Arson, Laboratory Tests Show" by Patricia Nordheimer, Journal Staff Writer.

kerosene, lighter [sic] fluid and others. The particular accelerant discovered in the three fires was not revealed by Chief Van Ostrand.

Earlier laboratory analyses had failed to turn up evidence of any substance that would have encouraged the fires at Cornell Heights Residential Club, Watermargin and a rooming house on Eddy St.

Van Ostrand is satisfied that the fires were set deliberately, and has evidence about the accelerant used, he said. He declined to identify it before arson charges are placed. Nor would he say when such charges are expected.

The fact that the clue has been established attests to the kind of cooperation Ithaca and Cayuga Heights police have received from police agencies all over the country, Van Ostrand said. At a law enforcement officers' convention, he was talking to a New Jersey chief who told a success story about solving an arson case in which a number of elderly persons succumbed when the institution they lived in was set afire.

The New Jersey man extolled the Canadian chemist whose work had led police to the arsonist, according to Van Ostrand. Van Ostrand checked with underwriters investigators, who encouraged him to contact the Canadian, reputed to have one of the top two or three laboratories in the world for analytical purposes.

The chemist found a substance, and detected it all three fire sites, Van Ostrand said.

It could be a very commonplace, cheap easily secured agent, he said and it also could have produced very toxic fumes. (Noxious fumes have been the subject of conjecture, particularly in the Residential Club fire fatal to nine persons. Various odors were reported, and an ambulance nurse, rescuers and firemen who lived through the fire were almost overcome. Smoke patterns indicated that at least one of the dead, possibly others, were felled before the black, sooty part of the fire began.)

The more usual accelerants blamed in arson cases leave traces of residues that make them more quickly identified, Van Ostrand said. The group of chemicals in which the one present at the fires here leaves practically no trace, the chief said.

A side effect of the study may be to identify a textile that is safer than others for use in high fire-risk areas, such as dormitories, the chief added. The rug at Watermargin was doused liberally with the accelerant. but failed to sustain burning. When the substances are all identified, this could lead to a recommendation as a result of these fires, that might slow the spread of other ones, Van Ostrand said.

The "institution" arson may be a reference to one of the following: (1) 18 Nov 1963, Surfside Hotel convalescent home fire, Atlantic City, 25 fatalities (mostly elderly Jews), arson suspected; (2) 23 Nov 1963, Golden Age Nursing Home fire, Fitchville, OH, 63 fatalities; or (3) 21 Dec 1965, Yonkers Jewish Community Center fire, Yonkers, NY, 12 fatalities.

07 Sep 1967, the term opens with fire safety equipment (sprinkler and fire alarm systems) newly installed in several dormitory buildings including the Res Club.³⁰ Excerpt:

More than \$40,000 in contracts for safety devices are nearly completed at the Cornell Heights Residential Club where eight students and one faculty member died in a fire April 5.

³⁰ *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXXIV, #2 (08 Sep 1967): "University to Install Sprinklers" by Deborah Huffman.

Members of the six year Ph.D. Program who moved into the club yesterday, found a sprinkler system, an automatic fire alarm system and two enclosed fire escapes.

Smoke barriers for the corridors had not arrived and a manual fire alarm system will be installed later this fall. Cayuga Heights Police officer Harlin McEwen said at an inquest last spring that the students who died in the Res Club blaze were felled by dense grey smoke.

After the fire the National Fire Protection Association cited “inadequate and substandard escape facilities” at the club. Investigations revealed other inadequacies in University dorms.

Oct 1967, the *Cornell Alumni News* passes on the fluid accelerant story reported in the *Ithaca Journal*.³¹

“During the summer the Ithaca police chief announced that a fluid “accelerant” had been found at the Res Club and the scene of two other spring fires, one in Watermargin house and the other a Collegetown rooming house. Members of the Six-Year PhD program were living at all three places. This led to the conclusion that an arsonist was involved. Civil authorities are continuing investigation, with university cooperation.”

On 11 July 2013 HWF interviewed Richard B. Thaler, AB Cornell '53, LLB '56, by telephone. Thaler was the Tompkins County District Attorney in 1967. Thaler disclosed that Cornell interfered with his investigation by withholding evidence. Thaler did not specify the nature of the evidence withheld, but implied that it was both documentary and availability of witnesses. The implication was that the University allowed the “person of interest,” one of the Six-year Ph.D. students, to leave Ithaca before he could be questioned or arraigned by the local law enforcement authorities. Thaler also indicated that there was a second student involved, HWF wrote back to Thaler afterwards, asking him to confirm or correct HWF’s notes of the conversation, but he never replied.

1967–68 Academic Year, Redaction #9 (Whereabouts of Individual #2).

08 Oct 1967, the *New York Times* reports discussion of a proposed end to *in loco parentis*.³²

A committee of high-ranking faculty members and some students at Cornell University last week recommended a clean break with the tradition under which the university, like most others, has tried to shelter its students from the law and the police. It proposed that the university confine its disciplinary authority to on-campus misconduct damaging to its educational goals.

10 Nov 1967, Cornell issues Progress Report #3: “The Cornell Six-Year Ph.D. Program” by Parrish.

Attrition in the first class has been high. Of the original 50 members (during the first summer 2 members were added to the 48 first chosen) only 36 are still in residence at Cornell. Four are on leave of absence (and two of these may be expected to resume study); three died in the fire; two transferred to other colleges (Amherst and Yale); one dropped out of college altogether; and four were dropped from the program for

³¹ *Cornell Alumni News*, LXX, #03 (Oct 1967), p 31: “Fire Safety.” <http://hdl.handle.net/1813/27828>

³² *NYT*, 08 Oct 1968: Education; Town vs. Gown vs. Parent” by Fred M. Hechinger.

academic deficiencies. None of these last four was in any sense a gamble; all looked extremely promising and all were winners in other competitions beside the 6-year Ph.D. Program's. It is hard to see meaning in this attrition, and we sense that more time will have to pass before we can reach conclusions that have anything to do with the program.

01 Jan 1968, the office of University Proctor, last held by Lowell T. George (d. Nov 1980), is abolished.³³

14 Mar 1968, attorneys representing Jeffrey W. Smith, Sr. (b. 05 Apr 1918), the father of Jeffrey W. Smith, Jr. (b. 24 Oct 1949, d. 05 April 1967), file a wrongful death action against officials of Cornell University in the U.S. District Court, Northern District of New York.³⁴ A judgement of \$1,750,000 is demanded. This case goes to a jury trial. On 21 Aug 1972 attorney's for Cornell formally concede in a stipulation "that Cornell University was negligent in a manner which resulted in the death of Jeffrey W. Smith, Jr." The case closes with a settlement for the plaintiff.

A memorandum filed with the lawsuit on 11 Dec 1972 revealed that Smith's father suffered "a severe neurotic depressive reaction" and was ruled to be disabled by the Social Security Administration following the death of his son. Smith's mother (b. 10 Feb 1918) fell into a severe depression and "committed suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills" on 12 Oct 1969. Both parents were age forty-nine at the time of Smith's death.

05 Apr 1968, the *Sun* publishes a retrospective identifying New York State Police Investigator Donald H. Fairchild (1931–2014) as the primary investigator.³⁵

University Counsel Neal R. Stamp also refused recently to comment on the fire inspection report on the Res Club that was reportedly made less than three weeks before the fire by Alexander L. McCord, a University fire inspector. The existence of the report has never been confirmed nor has the report ever been made public.

There is no indication that Warshauer asked the District Attorney for a comment. Fairchild died on 12 December 2014, just over a year after HWF wrote to him (09 Sep 2013).

05 Apr 1968 (cont'd), exactly one year after the Res Club fire and one day after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in Atlanta, a series of fires, all arson, break out in Ithaca and on the Cornell campus.³⁶ Then a series of fires occur spelling out ATLANTA: Alt Heidelberg, 10 Apr; Triangle Book Shop, 13 Apr; Lyon Hall, 16 Apr; and Anabel Taylor Chapel, 23 Apr.³⁷ No arrests are ever made.

³³ *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXXVI, #23 (10 Oct 1969): "Safety Division Expands Service: Larger Force, Better Facilities" by Richard M. Warshauer.

³⁴ U.S. District Court, *NDNY*, Civil Action, 68-CV-91, Jeffrey W. Smith Sr., etc. v. Cornell University. *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXXIV, #107 (15 Mar 1968): "\$1.75M Suit Filed" by Sam Roberts. *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXXIV, #109 (19 Mar 1968): "Notice Given in Fire Suit."

³⁵ *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXXVI, #117 (05 Apr 1968): "One Year Later Fire Cause Still Undetermined" by Richard Warshauer

³⁶ *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXXIV, #117 (05 Apr 1968): "Violence Flares Across Nation as Three Fires Erupt in Ithaca." • *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXXIV, #118 (08 Apr 1968): "Violence Flares in Ithaca in Wake of Assassination" by Richard M Warshauer.

³⁷ *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXXVII, #111 (12 Apr 1971): "April Fires" by Mark Katz.

13 May 1968, the *Sun* reports, “Police said the April 5 fire and two subsequent blazes in buildings housing the PhD students were the result of arson but no arrests been made.”³⁸

18 Apr 1969, a cross is set burning on the porch of Wari House (AKA Wari Cooperative, CU Facility 2564, 208 Dearborn Place, built 1916) and a rock (or brick) is thrown through a window of this building.³⁹ These two staged incidents are later attributed to black activist members of the radical Afro-American Society (AAS) aiming to justify their next-day takeover of Willard Straight Hall in a demand that the University establish a College of Black Studies.⁴⁰ Firearms are later smuggled into the building. The Straight occupiers included Six-year Ph.D. Program student Edward L. Whitfield, Cornell ‘70 (A&S), the president of AAS.

31 May 1969, Perkins resigns in disgrace for his failure to defend the University from the AAS armed assault on academic freedom.

02 Jun 1969, the *Sun* publishes “Failure? First Fuds to Graduate” by Daniel M. Taubman (LXXXV, #145).

Three years after its founding, only 29 of the original 53 students remain in Cornell’s six year Ph.D. program, and only 14 of the 29 will continue at Cornell for future study as originally planned. Of the 24 students who are no longer in the program, seven were dropped for academic reasons, seven transferred to either the regular four-year bachelor program or other schools, and five withdrew for personal reasons. One student graduated in January after 2½ years at Cornell. In addition, three members of the program were killed in the Cornell Residential Club Fire of April 5, 1967, in which five other students and a professor also died. Also, one student died in a mountain climbing accident.

Steven M. Parrish, Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and director of the six-year Ph.D. program, attributes the dropout rate to the admissions process and to the Res Club fire. “The fire shattered everybody’s morale,” Parrish commented in an interview last week. “The scars left were very deep,” he added.

This article announces Parrish’s intention to resign his directorship on 01 September 1969 and resume teaching in the College. 1969 was the last year that freshmen were admitted to strike for their doctorates in the Six-year Ph.D. program.

05 Sep 1969, Provost Dale R. Corson is named as Cornell’s 8th President. His investiture took place at Commencement ceremonies in Barton Hall on 08 June 1970 (the day that Professor

³⁸ *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXXIV, #143 (13 May 1968): “Res Club Catastrophe” [photograph caption].

³⁹ *New York Times*, 19 Apr 1969: “Negro Coeds’ House Is Target of a Cross Burning at Cornell” by John Kifner. Special to The New York Times. A cross was burned on the doorsteps of a Negro women’s cooperative house at Cornell University early this morning [18 Apr] and 11 false alarms were set off in campus buildings.

⁴⁰ *Cornell Alumni Magazine*, March / April 2009 (03 March 2009): “Getting It Straight” by Beth Saulnier. For example, while both [Donald Alexander] Downs ‘71 and [John] Marcham are convinced that the cross burned outside a black women’s residence that spring—a factor in catalyzing students to take over the Straight the following day—was in fact the work of African Americans trying to stir up sentiment, [AAS member Andree-Nicola] McLaughlin ‘70 strongly disagrees. ▪ Downs (1999), p. 169. [Dale Raymond] Corson told me that he was virtually certain that some black students had planted the cross. “I am 99.99 percent sure. I’ve been told by black people involved and others on the campus at the time.” Also, a black admissions officer at the time told Corson that the same students were responsible for throwing the brick through the Wari House window. ▪ Downes ‘71, Donald Alexander. *Cornell ‘69: Liberalism and the Crisis of the American University*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.

Morris Bishop '13 "slugged a well-known Cornell radical, C. David Burak '67, who was trying to seize the microphone, with the University mace, the symbol of the authority of the University President).⁴¹

17 Sep 1969, Prof. Alain Seznec, Romance Studies, is named Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and replaces Parrish as Director of the Six-year Ph.D. Program.⁴²

25 Sep 1969, *The Cornell Chronicle* begins publication (vI, #01).

28 Nov 1969, Pennsylvania State University graduate student Betsy Ruth Aardsma (b. 11 Jul 1947), of Holland MI, is stabbed to death in the stacks of Pattee Library. The case is never solved.

This case provides points of comparison on how a murder in a major university is handled by police and how university officials elevate concerns for the reputation of the institution over the need for the criminal justice system to function.

20 Feb 1970, the *Sun* reports,

No Six-year PhD students will be permitted to live in the Cornell Residential Club next year, according to Ruth Darling, associate dean of students. The Res Club has been the home of many fuds (and several College Scholars) since the inception of the program four years ago. The decision was made following the Ford Foundation's decision to terminate the Six-year PhD program after graduation of the current participants.⁴³

01 Apr 1970, the Africana Studies and Research Center (320 Wait Avenue) burns to the ground. Authorities determine that the cause is arson.⁴⁴ The case remains unsolved.

12 Apr 1970, the Cornell campus sees more incendiary attacks: two Molotov Cocktail bombs hurled through a window of Olin Library, a fire set in a Willard Straight Hall office, and two more firebombs thrown into the basements of Morrill and McGraw Halls.⁴⁵ No arrests are ever made.

23 Sep 1970, The Division of Safety and Security is abolished and split to form a new Life Safety Services Division headed by Eugene J. Dymek and a Safety Division headed by Lowell T. George.

07 Feb 1971, Isabelle C. Anderson, Cornell '62 (Hotel). of Elmhurst, NY, perishes in a Collegetown fire (203 Linden Avenue). Ithaca Fire Chief Charles M. Weaver '39 theorizes that the fire had "some human origin."

⁴¹ *Cornell Daily Sun*, XC, #61, 26 Nov 1973: "Morris Bishop Dead at 80" by Joel Rudin.

⁴² *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXXVI, #8 (19 Sep 1969): "Arts College Designates Prof. Seznec Assoc. Dean."

⁴³ *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXXVI, #86 (20 Feb 1970): "Res Club Future Questionable When Fud Program Terminates" by Stuart A. Lipton.

⁴⁴ *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXXVI, #112 (6 Apr 1970): "Africana Fire Probe Continues: Turner Strongly Suspects Arson" by Richard L. Neubauer. However, James Turner, director of the center, said late yesterday that some investigators had told him there was "no question" but that arson was involved. "They said that they are sure that there was more than one fire and that flammable material was used."

⁴⁵ *Cornell Daily Sun*, LXXXVI, #117, 13 April 1970: "More Violence Hits Campus" by Peter Bartfeld.

c26 Apr 1971, Cayuga Heights Police Chief Jack McGraw, responding to the *Cornell Daily Sun*, confirms that “the case is still open on his books.”⁴⁶

23 Apr 1972, McGraw resigns as CHPD Chief. Sgt. McEwen becomes the Acting Police Chief.

25 Nov 1975, the Ford Foundation grant is decreased to \$1,636,625.

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In the years that followed not one of the fire’s survivors made any effort to identify the arsonist or find out why the criminal prosecution foundered. One former student (one of the second crop of Six-year Ph.D. students) recalled the event in a 1984 Letter-to-the-Editor of the *Cornell Alumni News*, but that obtained no action.⁴⁷

Cornell’s strategy of “official silence” and the collusion of the press and the law enforcement community combine to achieve a complete and lasting cover-up.

H. William Fogle, Jr., Cornell ‘70 (Engineering), ΔX of ΔKE
Mesa AZ

⁴⁶ *Cornell Daily Sun*, 27 Apr 1971, Probit I: “Has the arsonist who set the April, 1967 Res Club fire been caught? Are the police still looking? —J.K. Grad” The inquiry may have been originated by Jonathan I. Katz, Cornell ‘70, Six-year Ph.D. student, 2nd crop.

⁴⁷ *Cornell Alumni News*, LXXXVI, #7 (March, 1984): p. 14: “Communications / Res Club fire recalled” by Jonathan Katz ‘70.

Individuals, 1967

Cornell University

Arthur Hobson Dean (AB Cornell '21, JD '23, 1898–1987), Chairman, University Board of Trustees

Walker Lee Cisler '22 (1897–1994), Chairman, University Board of Trustees Executive Committee

Neal Roger Stamp (AB Cornell '40, 1918–2002), University Counsel and Secretary of the Corporation (1964–1981)

Theodore Paul Wright (1895–1970), Chairman, Executive Committee for Cornell Aeronautical Laboratories; Chairman of the Cornell Campus Fire Prevention Study (appointed April 1967); Acting President of the University (1951)

Mark Barlow, Jr., (1925–2012) Vice President for Student Affairs (1965–)

John E. Burton, Vice President for Business (1950–1970)

Dale Raymond Corson (1914–2012), Vice President and Provost (1963–1969); University President (8th, 1969–1977)

William R. Keast (d. 1998), Vice President for Academic Affairs (until June 1965)

Steven Muller (UCLA '48, PhD Cornell '58, 1927–2013); Rhodes Scholar, Oxford University (1949–1951); University Vice President for Public Affairs (1966–1971); President, Johns Hopkins University (1972–1990)

James Alfred Perkins (1911–1998), University President (7th, 1963–1969)

Robert Lamb Sproull '40 (d. 2014), Vice President for Academic Affairs (1965–1968)

Lowell T. George (d. Nov 1980), Proctor (1952–1967); Cayuga Heights Commissioner of Police (–1968); later head of the Safety Division (1969–); prior to his Cornell employment he served as Chief, Hornell Police Department, and as an FBI Special Agent.

Arthur H. Peterson, University Controller

Richard M. Travis, Assistant Proctor

Thomas L. Tobin (1930–2007), Director of Public Information

Milton R. Shaw '34, Director of Housing and Dining Services

Allan Tirado, Manager, the Cornell Heights Residential Club

J. Robert MacCheyne, Supervising Fire Inspector

Alexander L. McCord, University Fire Inspector

Diedrich K. “Deed” Willers, Cornell '36 (d. Mar 1978, age 64), was the University’s personnel director for 27 years. *Cornell Chronicle*, 30 Mar 1978.

Eugene J. “Gene” Dymek (1924–2010), Director, Cornell Division of Safety and Security (after the fire).

Stanley Warburton Davis (1920–2001), Dean of Students

Royce P. Murphy, Dean of the Faculty (c. spring 1967)

Robert Demorest Miller (1919–2011), Dean of the Faculty (c. Sep 1967)

Walter Snickenberger (d. 2013), Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid

Stuart M. Brown '37 (1916–1996), Dean, College of Arts & Sciences

Stephen Maxfield Parrish (1921–2012), Associate Dean, College of Arts & Sciences; Director, Six–year Ph.D. Program (1966–1969). Parrish: BA 1942 from the University of Illinois, MA 1947 and PhD 1954 from Harvard University. His Cornell career began in 1954 and ended with his retirement in 1991 as Goldwin Smith Professor of English Emeritus.

William Ball “Will” Provine, Professor (1942–2015), History Department; Head Resident, Residential Club (1969–70)

Alain Seznec, Romance Studies, Associate Dean, College of Arts & Sciences (1969–); Director, Six–year Ph.D. Program (1969–)

Frederick George Marcham (MA Oxford '23, PhD Cornell '26, 1898–1992), CU Faculty (Department of History, 1926–1969, but continued teaching until October 1992); University Trustee (1946–1950); and Mayor of Cayuga Heights (1956–1988)

John Marcham '50 (1927–2014, son of FGM), city editor of *The Ithaca Journal* (c1956–60), Editor, *Cornell Alumni News* (1961–1964, 1967–1991); Director of University Relations (1964–67)

Jane Haskins Marcham (b. 07 Apr 1930, wife of JM), *Ithaca Journal* Staff Writer (c. 1967); later City of Ithaca Council and Planning Board member

James M. Herson, Assistant Director, Cornell University Department of Public Safety (–1967). Herson resigned in January 1967 over the *Trojan Horse* scandal. The position went vacant until Eugene J. Dymek was hired to replace him in December 1967. Herson later joined the Ithaca Police Department as Deputy Chief (1969–1972) and Chief (1972–1988).

Tompkins County, City of Ithaca, and Village of Cayuga Heights

Richard Byron Thaler (AB Cornell '53 ΣΧ, LLB '56, b. 15 Mar 1932, d. 27 May 2017), Tompkins County District Attorney (1963–1968)

Dr. Ralph J. Low MD (1909–1994), Tompkins County Coroner

Robert Leon “Bob” Howard (d. 12 Sep 2008), Tompkins County Sheriff

Matthew Francis McHugh, BS Mount St. Mary's College '60; JD Villanova University '63; Tompkins County District Attorney (1969–1972); U.S. Congress (1975–1993); VP and General Counsel, Cornell University (c1993); Counselor to President of the World Bank (1993–2005)

Hunna Johns (1914–2000), Mayor of Ithaca NY (1963–1967, 1970–)

Jack Kinch Kiely '50 (1928–1987), Mayor of Ithaca NY (1967–1970)

Charles M. Weaver, Cornell '39 (1917–1992), Chief, Ithaca Fire Department

Herbert L. Van Ostrand (1907–1997), Chief, Ithaca Police Department (1958–1972)

Robert Earl Spencer (1921–1991), Detective, Ithaca Police Department

Henry J. Shirley, Mayor, Village of Cayuga Heights (1952–1956)

William Tucker Dean (1915–1999), Cayuga Heights Police Justice/Magistrate; Professor, Cornell Law School (1953–1988)

John B. Rogers, Engineer (c. 1971)

Richard Vorhis, Chief, Cayuga Heights Fire Department

Ned G. Boice, Chief, Cayuga Heights Fire Department (c. 1971)

Jack W. McGraw, Sr., Chief, Cayuga Heights Police Department (retired, 23 Apr 1972)

Harlin R. McEwen (194 Pleasant Grove Rd.), Patrol Officer (Sergeant, Lieutenant, 1964–1972), Cayuga Heights Police Department; Chief of Police, CHPD (1972–1985); Deputy Commissioner, NY State Division of Criminal Justice Services (1985–1988); Chief of Police, Ithaca Police Department (1988–1996); Chairman, Communications & Technology Committee, International Association of Chiefs of Police (c. 2015–)

Floyd Leon Darling, Jr., Patrolman #101 (1963–1972), CHPD; Sergeant (1972–), CHPD; Acting Chief (1972–74), CHPD

Larry S. Cooper (b. 1941), Patrolman #102, CHPD (Oct 1967–1971)

Lawrence H. Rabin (1949–2015, unconfirmed), Patrolman #103, CHPD (c. 1971)

Fred Whiting, Sergeant, CHPD, 336 Spencer Road (auto glass, tops and trim shop)

Robert D. Day, Patrolman #109, CHPD (c. 1971, part-time)

Robert S. Romanowski, Cornell '55 (Engineering), Volunteer firefighter (1959–2009) at the scene of the Res Club fire (05 Apr 1967); member, Board of Fire Commissioners for the City and Town of Ithaca (1992–2009); Chairman of the Board (1993–2009); member, City of Ithaca Common Council (1983–1993); and Commissioner of Selective Service (1993–2013)

Others

Donald H. Fairchild (1931–2014), Investigator, New York State Police

Richard Gildersleeve, New York State Police, Bureau of Criminal Investigation

John Murphy, New York State Police

George Proper, Jr., Director, New York State Division of Fire Safety

Charles R. Dorman (1914–2003), Assistant Director, New York State Division of Fire Safety

Robert Bradford Tallman (1919–2006), Architect, Tallman & Tallman (1946–1969)

Rita Powers Bangs (1921–2011), Bangs Ambulance Service

James S. Graham, General Manager, *The Ithaca Journal*

William J. Waters (1905–1999), Editor, *The Ithaca Journal*

Randall E. Shew (1929–2015), Managing Editor, *The Ithaca Journal*

Patricia Nordheimer (d. 1976), Staff Writer, *The Ithaca Journal*

Newspaper, Magazine and Journal Articles

Cornell Alumni News

CAN, LVI, #03 (01 Oct1953), pp. 74-75: "Ithaca Cornell Club Takes Rooms In New Hostelry Near Campus."

<http://hdl.handle.net/1813/27618>

CAN, Vol. 68, No. 06 (Jan 1966), p. 18: "Forty superior students."

<http://hdl.handle.net/1813/27809>

CAN, Vol. 69, No. 03 (Oct 1966): "The PhD In Six Years Backed By The Ford Foundation, Cornell Launches An Experiment" by Joel H. Kaplan '66, Photographs by Fred Mohn.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1813/27817>

CAN, Vol. 69, No. 08 (Mar 1967): "Man With Many Missions" [F. G. Marcham] by Mrs. Tommie Bryant.

CAN, Vol. 69, No. 10 (May 1967), pp. 28–29: "The University: A Tragic Fire."

<http://hdl.handle.net/1813/27824>

CAN, Vol. 69, No. 11 (Jun 1967), p. 30: "In the Wake of the Fire."

<http://hdl.handle.net/1813/27825>

CAN, Vol. 69, No. 11 (Jun 1967), p. 64: "Necrology."

<http://hdl.handle.net/1813/27825>

CAN, Vol. 70, No. 03 (Oct 1967), p 31: "Fire Safety."

<http://hdl.handle.net/1813/27828>

"During the summer the Ithaca police chief announced that a fluid "accelerant" had been found at the Res Club and the scene of two other spring fires, one in Watermargin house and the other a Collegetown rooming house. Members of the Six-Year PhD program were living at all three places. This led to the conclusion that an arsonist was involved. Civil authorities are continuing investigation, with university cooperation."

CAN, Vol. 70, No. 04 (November, 1967)

<http://hdl.handle.net/1813/27829>

"The last oak tree planted on the Arts quad was donated by Prof. Robert M. Adams, English, in memory of Prof. John A. Finch, PhD '64, English, resident advisor to the Six-Year PhD Program who died in the Residential Club fire in early April."

CAN, Vol. 70, No. 10 (May, 1968), p. 22

<http://hdl.handle.net/1813/27835>

"The parents of the late Jeffrey W. Smith Jr. '70 have filed a negligence suit against Cornell for \$1,750,000. Smith had been in the Six-Year PhD Program, and died in the Cornell Heights Residential Club fire on April 5, 1967."

CAN, Vol. 86, No. 07 (Mar 1984): p. 14: "Communications."
<http://hdl.handle.net/1813/27999>

Res Club fire recalled

Editor: On April 5, 1967 nine people were killed in a Cornell dormitory fire, believed to be arson. Despite abundant circumstantial evidence there have been no criminal charges. Related civil cases have disappeared into a fog of silence. Now that sixteen years have passed it is time for a fresh investigation of the handling of these events, and of the ugly rumors which surround them, and for a public report.

Cornell Chronicle

CC, 21 Jan 1993, OBITUARIES: "Frederick Marcham."

CC, 04 Apr 2007: "Remembering a 40-year-old tragedy when eight students and a professor died in off-campus fire" by Krishna Ramanujan.

<http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/2007/04/remembering-campus-fire-killed-nine-1967>

Cornell Daily Sun

Note: the spring 1967 issues of the Sun are missing from the Keith Johnson Digital Archive.

CDS, LXXIII, #2 (18 Sep 1956), advertisement: "The Cornell Heights Residential Club."

[Excerpt] Dear Cornellian: I would like to introduce you to the Cornell Heights Residential Club which was organized for the purpose of providing residential facilities, club rooms, and services for the comfort, care and sociability of the members and their guests. You, as a student at the University undoubtedly have occasional visits from your parents and friends and are faced with the problem of finding suitable guest facilities near the campus. We feel that our Club represents the perfect answer to your problem and something special in the way of accommodations for entertaining your guests.

Cordially yours, Cornell Heights Residential Club, George T. Bond, Manager

CDS, LXXXII, #115 (07 Apr 1966), p. 1 & 10: "Residential House to be New Dorm" by Phyllis E. Kaye.

CDS, LXXXIII, #8 (27 Sep 1966): "The Mysterious Fuds... Group Has Seminars, Coed Housing" by Marjorie Holt.

CDS, LXXXIII, #69 (16 Jan 1967): "Marcham to Become Alumni News Editor."

CDS, LXXXIV, #2, (08 Sep 1967): "University to Install Sprinklers" by Deborah Huffman.

[Excerpt] After the fire the National Fire Protection Association cited "inadequate and substandard escape facilities at the club."

CDS, LXXXIV, #65 (7 Dec 1967): "Engineer Appointed First Head of Safety and Security Unit" by Gary Goodman.

CDS, LXXXIV, #107 (15 Mar 1968): "\$1.75M Suit Filed" by Sam Roberts.

CDS, LXXXIV, #143 (13 May 1968): "Res Club Catastrophe" [photograph caption].

CDS, LXXXIV, #109 (19 Mar 1968): "Notice Given in Fire Suit."

- CDS, LXXXIV, #117 (05 Apr 1968): “One Year Later Fire Cause Still Undetermined” by Richard Warshauer.
- CDS, LXXXIV, #121 (11 Apr 1968), editorial: “The Fud Program.”
- CDS, LXXXV, #145 (02 Jun 1969): “First Fuds to Graduate.”
- CDS, LXXXVI, #8 (19 Sep 1969): “Arts College Designates Prof. Seznec Assoc. Dean”
- CDS, LXXXVI, #37, (30 Oct 1969): “Fud Program Future Uncertain.”
- CDS, LXXXVI, #37, (30 Oct 1969), editorial: “Fud Farewell.”
- CDS, LXXXVI, #64 (10 Dec 1969): “Foundation Cuts Off Fud Fund” by Stuart A. Lipton.
- CDS, LXXXVI, #65 (11 Dec 1969), editorial: “R.I.P.” [Excerpt] The Six– Year Ph.D. Program is dead. After spending over \$2 million on the project for whiz kids, the Ford Foundation is packing its moneybags and leaving town. Cornell can get along fine without any more Fuds, and the foundation can probably spend its money better elsewhere, but the Fud Program has set some examples that neither Cornell nor the Ford Foundation should forget.
- CDS, LXXXVI, #86 (20 Feb 1970): “Res Club Future Questionable When Fud Program Terminates” by Stuart A. Lipton.
- CDS, LXXXVI, #89 (25 Feb 1970): “Seznec Says Housing and Dining Unfair to 6– Year PhD Program” by Stuart A. Lipton.
- CDS, LXXXVI, #112 (06 Apr 1970): “Club Burned 4 Years Ago.”
- CDS, LXXXVII, #12 (24 Sep 1970): “Safety Division —Changes Announced” by Richard M. Warshauer.
- CDS, LXXXVII, #72 (08 Feb 1971), p. 1: “Collegetown Flames Kill Student” by Richard M. Warshauer.
- CDS, LXXXVII, #122 (27 Apr 1971), p. 6: “Probe It.” Has the arsonist who set the April, 1967 Res Club fire ever been caught? Are the police still looking? [J.K. Grad]
 You are, of course, assuming that the fire was indeed set by an arsonist, a popular theory by nevertheless one not endorsed by the Coroner.
 Tompkins County Coroner Ralph J. Low ruled that the blaze was “of undetermined origin ... probably the result of human carelessness or malice.”
 Cayuga Heights Police Chief Jack McGraw confirmed yesterday that the case is still open on his books. McGraw, who was a sergeant at the time of the fire, was one of the principal investigators.
 The Safety Division, however, is no longer investigating the case and refers any leads to the Cayuga Heights cops.
- CDS, CXXXI, #37 (17 Oct 2014), pp 1 & 4: “Alumni Seek Answers About 1967 Fire That Killed Nine Cornellians” by Tyler Alicea.
https://issuu.com/cornellsun/docs/10-17-14_entire_issue_lo_res
- CDS, 21 Feb 2017, To the Editor, print edition, 22 Feb, p. 6: “Cornell’s Strangest Tradition” by William Fogle, Jr. ’70.
<http://cornellsun.com/2017/02/21/letter-to-the-editor-cornells-strangest-tradition/>

CDS, 10 Apr 2017: “50 Years After Cornell Blaze That Killed 9, Questions Linger” by Meg Gordon.

[Excerpts]

Cornell University was ruled negligent in 1972 by the United States Northern District Court of New York in a lawsuit filed by the parents of Jeffrey W. Smith, a victim of the fire.

Within two months, however, two additional fires broke out at residences housing the displaced six-year Ph.D. students — one at the Watermargin Cooperative on May 23, 1967, and another at 211 Eddy St. one week later.

The timing of the fires, some argued, was not coincidental, given that several “Fuds” — students in the six-year program — were staying in those particular buildings at the time. Without access to counseling or extra security personnel, several students felt personally targeted. One student, Marguerite Waller, told *The Sun* that some people on Eddy Street stayed up late “on guard duty.”

“All I know is that he is out there and he wants to kill me,” Marvin L. Marshak wrote in a cryptic letter to *The Sun* in June 1967.

In August 1967, a Canadian chemist had “found and identified a fluid accelerant present at all three places,” according to *The Ithaca Journal*.

Ithaca Police Chief Herbert Van Ostrand was allegedly “satisfied that the fires were set deliberately, and has evidence about the accelerant used,” *The Journal* reported.

The accelerant used could have caused the toxic fumes in the Res Club at the time, the chief said.

Dr. Ralph Low, the Tompkins County coroner at the time, determined that while the fire was of undetermined origin, it was likely “the result of human carelessness or malice.”

“There were at least four ‘persons of interest,’” District Attorney Matthew Van Houten said in a statement released last week on the 50th anniversary of the fire. “We are constrained by the evidence, and there was insufficient evidence to support a criminal prosecution against anyone.”

In response to allegations of a cover-up, Van Houten wrote that he is “confident that the law enforcement agencies involved in the investigation pursued every possible lead and acted with integrity and professionalism.”

More than half a century later, however, a group of over 20 survivors do not believe that the investigation was conducted in a fair and impartial way.

For Jonathan Katz, an alumnus of the Ph.D. program, the lack of arrest in the Res Club fire case was another example of “Cornell obstruction of justice in a company town whose law enforcement was subject to Cornell pressure.”

Other alumni allege that the University intentionally remained silent to shield itself from any potential responsibility stemming from buildings that did not comply with fire safety standards.

“It’s hard to imagine that the university didn’t do everything in its power to minimize its culpability and, while protecting the future safety of Cornell students, hope that the matter would fade away,” wrote Sam Roberts, a staff writer for *The Sun* at the time of the fire.

“Obviously the university was concerned about the tragic loss of life. It was also worried about negative publicity and legal liability connected with the cause ... as well as

drawing more attention to a program that was already controversial because of the insularity and intensity of many of the students.”

<http://cornellsun.com/2017/04/11/50-years-after-cornell-blaze-that-killed-9-questions-linger/>

Cornell Daily Sun Digitization Project

<http://cdsun.library.cornell.edu/>

Ithaca Journal

IJ, 05 Apr 1967, p. 1: “9 Cornellians Killed in Residential Club Fire; Professor, 8 Students Dead; Many Escape Pre-Dawn Blaze” by Patricia Nordheimer, Journal Staff Writer.

IJ, 05 Apr 1967, p. 6: Masthead.

IJ, 05 Apr 1967, p. 10: “Tragic Fire Claims Nine Lives” (five photographs) by Ralph Baker.

IJ, 05 Apr 1967, p. 15: “Coroner Plans Death Inquiry.”

IJ, 05 Apr 1967, p. 15: “Fire Toll Biggest.”

IJ, 05 Apr 1967, p. 15: “Fire ‘Unbelievable,’ ‘53 Builder Says” by George B. Clay, Journal Staff Writer.

IJ, 05 Apr 1967, p. 15: “Has Been News In Past” by Jane Marcham, Journal Staff Writer.

IJ, 05 Apr 1967, p. 15: “Neighbors Express Shock Over Tragedy” by George B. Clay, Journal Staff Writer.

IJ, 05 Apr 1967, p. 15: “Professor Finch Killed In Rescue Attempt” by Jane Marcham, Journal Staff Writer.

IJ, 05 Apr 1967, p. 15: “‘Smelled Electrical Fire’ Last Night?” by Gene Goldenberg, Journal Staff Writer.

IJ, 05 Apr 1967, p. 15: Photographs by Ralph Baker, drawing “West Basement Wing.”

IJ, 06 Apr 1967, p. 3: “Funeral Arrangements Are Being Completed.”

IJ, 06 Apr 1967, p. 3: “Survivors Return To Get Belongings.”

IJ, 06 Apr 1967, p. 6, Editorial: “Sorrow and Sympathy.

IJ, 06 Apr 1967, p. 13: “All Nine Fire Deaths Due to Asphyxiation” by Patricia Nordheimer, Journal Staff Writer.

IJ, 07 Apr 1967, p. 5: “Continue Probing In Fire Tragedy.”

IJ, 07 Apr 1967, p. 5: “Finch Memorial Is Planned.”

IJ, 10 Apr 1967, p. 10: “Inquest Delayed On Fire Deaths.”

IJ, 10 Apr 1967, p. 10: “Cornell Gets Major Ford Foundation Grant to Speed Up Doctoral Program.”

IJ, 13 Apr 1967, p. 1: “Report Blames Poor Escape Facilities for 9 Deaths; No Comment From Cornell.”

The National Fire Protection Assn. blames “inadequate and substandard” escape facilities for the deaths of nine persons in the Cornell Heights Residential Club fire.

Associated Press reported this morning.

A preliminary report issued today also said the absence of a building fire alarm may have contributed to the death toll in the April 5 fire.

A University spokesman said Cornell will withhold comment on any outside report pertaining to the fire until its own investigations are completed and the Coroner's inquest on the fire is held. The inquest is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. Wednesday, April 19, at Tompkins County Courthouse.

The stairway from the basement, where the fire started in the predawn hours, lacked approved fire doors and enclosures in the basement and on the first floor level, and a second floor door had been removed for alteration, the Boston-based organization said.

“Had there been a properly installed fire door and enclosure at the basement level,” the report said, “the fire would have been confined to the basement area and the entire building could almost certainly have been evacuated without loss of life.”

Twelve students living in the basement area escaped through a door at the end of the corridor. Students on the upper floors met smoke and hot gases which had risen along the inadequately enclosed stairwell, the NFPA said.

The report said the two exits from the building were closer together than the requirements of the NFPA safety code allowed, and one of the exits was useless because it was filled with hot gas and smoke.

“Heroic rescue efforts by Prof. John A. Finch, who entered the burning building several times to bring students to safety at the cost of his own life,” and rescue operations by fire fighters “undoubtedly cut the loss of life,” the report said.

Finch was the only faculty member killed in the fire.

The report concluded that the installation of fire sprinklers— which had been planned— would have quickly extinguished the fire.

The National Fire Protection Association is an independent, nonprofit, technical and educational clearing house of fire safety information.

IJ, 13 Apr 1967, p. 12: “Thaler Asks New Drug Laws.”

IJ, 14 Apr 1967, p. 5: “Cornell Expenditures on Fire Safety Listed” (\$590,000 Since ‘64).

IJ, 14 Apr 1967, p. 6, Editorial: “Aftermath of the Fire.”

Cornell University continues to maintain official silence as the investigation continues in the aftermath of the April 5 fire in the Cornell Heights Residential Club which took nine lives.

The University will not comment until its inquiries are complete and until a coroner's inquest is held. The inquest is now scheduled for April 19.

A report by the National Fire Protection Assn. blamed the deaths on “inadequate and substandard” escape facilities.

And there was disclosure in Albany by the assistant director of the Division of Fire Safety in New York State's Executive Department that the division made certain

recommendations to the University in January, 1966. If they had been carried out, Charles R. Dorman said, "I'm sure they would have saved the lives of those kids."

Mr. Dorman added: "We can only recommend because the state law has no enforcement provisions."

Details of the association's report and the statements of officials of the Division of Fire Safety were carried in The Journal Thursday.

The report and the statements make serious charges — charges that the University will eventually have to answer.

There has been impatience in some quarters at the University's silence in the face of a number of rumors and the refusal of investigators to disclose any information at this time. This is natural. At the same time, the decision not to comment now is understandable.

The story will be unfolded in due course and with due process. One has only to recall that the investigation of the Apollo 1 spacecraft fire, which took the lives of three astronauts, lasted some 10 weeks.

But even today one point is clear — a need for a total program of fire prevention, so that so costly a tragedy shall never occur at Cornell nor at any other school or college. A good place to start would be to give the state's Division of Fire Safety some powers of enforcement.

IJ, 19 Apr 1967, p. 17: "Inquest into 9–Fatality Fire Starts —No Evidence of Arson Found, Chief Weaver Testifies; Architect Says Multiple–Residence Law Violated."

[Excerpt] [Excerpt] There were four violations of the Multiple Residence Law, as interpreted by Architect Robert Tallman —fire stairs did not extend to roof; door from basement lounge to stairway not a fireproof door; no fire detection system, sprinkler system or alarm system; fire doors not in operating condition (not closed).

IJ, 20 Apr 1967, p. 6, Editorial: "A Tragic Combination."

IJ, 20 Apr 1967, p. 15: "Cause of Nine–Fatality Fire Still Unresolved" by Patricia Nordheimer, Journal Staff Writer.

IJ, 20 Apr 1967, p. 16: "Anatomy of A Dormitory Tragedy" by Randall E. Shew, Journal Managing Editor.

IJ, 23 May 1967, p. 5: "Cornell Fire Aftermath —Recommendations Made by Fire Safety Group."

IJ, 23 May 1967, p. 11: "Prophet Ezekiel... Vision of Fire...4th Month, 5th Day —Investigation Continues on Cornell Res Club Fire Tragedy; Exact Cause Unknown; 6–Year Ph.D. Students to 'Return'" by Patricia Nordheimer, Journal Staff Writer.

IJ, 31 May 1967, pp. 1 & 15: "Third Blaze Involving Six–Year Ph.D. Students —Fire Today Called 'Suspicious'; Probe Starts."

IJ, 01 Jun 1967, p. 13: "Desires to Protect Fuds from 'Repeat'" by Sue Strandberg, Journal Staff Writer.

IJ, 02 Jun 1967, p. 9: "Nothing New, Officials Say."

IJ, 02 Jun 1967, p. 6, Editorial: "Fire Information Imperative."

The news this week has deepened the bitter tragedy of nine young lives that were lost two months ago in the fire at the Cornell Heights Residential Club.

It becomes a deeper tragedy because there are now three fires in a two-month period in buildings housing the brilliant youngsters who are members of the six-year Ph.D. program at the university and, in the words of Fire Chief Charles Weaver, “Frankly, it's just too much coincidence for me.”

Chief Weaver has made it very clear that he suspects there is a lot more than coincidence involved, although he acknowledges that he does not have concrete evidence to support his suspicion —only the fact that the three fires (the last two fortunately took no lives) all bear a great similarity in time and method of origin— all of undetermined cause at this time.

What he is saying and not saying at the same time is that we may very likely have a very sick person somewhere in our midst —a person certainly who constitutes a very real danger to the members of the six-year Ph.D. program at the least.

It is terrifying to think that anyone would deliberately start a fire that could take other human lives —perhaps even lives of persons who are friends.

If such a person does exist we can only pray that this person is caught, and soon —before other lives are loss to this tragic sickness.

Certainly anyone with any information about any of the three fires —at the Residential Club, at Watermargin, and at 211 Eddy Street should come forward with it and present it to police now. One way or another, this mystery must be cleared up so this community, and particularly the Cornell community, and more particularly the members of the Ph.D. program can go to bed once more without the fear of waking up again to cries of “Fire!” ... or not waking up at all.

IJ, 17 Aug 1967, p. 13: “Ph.D. Dorm Fire Arson, Laboratory Tests Show” by Patricia Nordheimer, Journal Staff Writer.

[Excerpts] A Canadian chemist has found and identified a fluid accelerant present at all three fires in places where Cornell University six-year Ph.D. students were living last spring according to Ithaca Police Chief Herbert Van Ostrand.

Van Ostrand is satisfied that the fires were set deliberately, and has evidence about the accelerant used, he said. He declined to identify it before arson charges are placed. Nor would he say when such charges are expected.

The fact that the clue has been established attests to the kind of cooperation Ithaca and Cayuga Heights police have received from police agencies all over the country, Van Ostrand said. At a law enforcement officers' convention, he was talking to a New Jersey chief who told a success story about solving an arson case in which a number of elderly persons succumbed when the institution they lived in was set afire.

The New Jersey man extolled the Canadian chemist whose work had led police to the arsonist, according to Van Ostrand. Van Ostrand checked with underwriters investigators, who encouraged him to contact the Canadian, reputed to have one of the top two or three laboratories in the world for analytical purposes.

The chemist found a substance, and detected it all three fire sites, Van Ostrand said.

IJ, 08 Sep 1967: “‘Res Club’ Reopens” by Patricia Nordheimer, Journal Staff Writer.

IJ, 29 Oct 1967, p. 5: “Cornell Expanding Education Concept.”

IJ, 18 Jul 1967: "Six-Year Program Accepts 2nd Class."

New York Times

NYT, 07 Feb 1962: "Text of the President's Message to Congress on Educational Needs..."

NYT, 14 Oct 1964: "CORNELL MAPPING COLLEGE SPEED-UP; Some Students Could Earn Doctorates in 6 Years Under University Plan FACULTY VOTE AWAITED Opponents Against Singling Out an 'Elite Group' -Immaturity Is Feared" by Fred M. Hechinger.

NYT, 22 Oct 1964: "FACULTY APPROVES CORNELL SPEED-UP."

NYT, 06 Apr 1967: "Cornell Fire Kills 8 Students and Professor; 6 Girls Among Those Dead of Asphyxiation."

NYT, 06 Apr 1967: "SURVIVORS TELL OF FIRE'S TERROR; Recall Screams of the Dying and Identifying the Dead."

NYT, 07 Apr 1967: "STUDENTS SEARCH RUINS AT CORNELL; Survivors Seek Belongings in Wreckage of Fire" by Terence Smith.

NYT, 14 Apr 1967: "Cornell Is Assailed Again Over Fatal Dormitory Fire."

NYT, 01 Jun 1967: "ARSON SUSPECTED IN CORNELL FIRES; Similarities Noted in Three, Including Blaze Fatal to 9."

ITHACA, N. Y., May 31 — Investigators here said today they were convinced that three recent fires in buildings housing Cornell University students, including one in which nine persons died, were caused by an arsonist.

The worst of the fires occurred April 5, when eight students and an associate professor of English died in a blaze in a residence hall just off the campus.

A second fire damaged a building housing students on May 23, and a third, early this morning, struck a three-story frame building to which some of the students driven from the residence hall on April 5 had been moved. There were no injuries in these two fires.

Investigators have been unable thus far to determine the cause of any of the three fires.

Both District Attorney Richard B. Thaler of Tompkins County and the Ithaca fire chief, Charles M. Weaver, pointed out, however, that all the fires occurred between 4 A.M. and 5 A.M. and that all involved buildings housing students enrolled in a special program for exceptionally bright students that permits them to get a Doctor of Philosophy degree in six years.

A PhD can take 10 or more years of undergraduate and graduate work to acquire.

Only about 45 of Cornell's 13,300 students are enrolled in the special Ph.D. program, which began last September. Four of the eight students who died in the April 5 fire were members of the special Ph.D. group, as were most of those who fled the May 23 fire in Watermargin House.

Seven of the nine students who escaped in this morning's fire at 211 Eddy Street, about a block south of the campus, also were enrolled in the special program.

District Attorney Thaler said the evidence uncovered so far in the investigations of the fires established that none had been caused by mechanical defects.

"That leaves only one type of ignition —human," he said.

Asked if the investigations had determined whether such human ignition could have been accidental, Mr. Thaler replied: "It would be too coincidental for that."

Fire Chief Weaver also rejected accident as an explanation for the three fires.

He said that after making a preliminary investigation of this morning's blaze he had filed a complaint with the police, as he had at the time of the May 23 fire.

'Too Much Coincidence'

"We do this when there is suspicion that a crime may have been committed," he explained. "This, coupled with the other two involving the same group of youngsters, is too much coincidence for me to accept."

The chief labeled today's blaze "a fire of suspicious origin." He said such a description is employed when there is no "explanation as to a reasonable cause from discernible equipment or human error."

Two weeks after the fatal fire at the Cornell Heights Residential Club, Dr. Ralph J. Low, the Tompkins County coroner, ruled after an inquest that the fire had probably been caused by "human carelessness or malice."

The investigators were unwilling to speculate about the possibility that the fires were started by someone bearing a grudge against members of the special Ph.D. program, or possibly the program itself.

Today's fire started at about 4:50 A.M. on the first floor of the three-story building, according to Chief Weaver. It spread up the stairway to the third floor. A barrier door on the second floor had been propped open, the chief said.

All nine students inside escaped through windows or down a fire escape. Besides the seven students in the Ph.D. program, the building housed two architectural students.

NYT, 02 Jun 1967: "CORNELL PATROLS STUDENT HOUSES; Acts After 3 Fires Where Ph.D. Candidates Lived."

[Excerpt] ITHACA, N.Y. June 1 — A Cornell University official disclosed today that the school had posted uniformed patrolmen at about 10 student residences following three suspicious fires in the campus community in the last two months. All of the residences house participants in an experimental six-year program leading to Doctor of Philosophy degrees.

NYT, 03 Jun 1967: "INQUIRY NARROWS IN 3 CORNELL FIRES; '2 or 3' Under Investigation, Ithaca Police Report" by Douglas Robinson.

ITHACA, N. Y., June 2 — The investigation of three recent fires in housing for students enrolled in a special program at Cornell University is concentrating on "two or three people," Ithaca's police chief said today.

Chief Herbert L. Van Ostrand added, however, that "we haven't eliminated 64 other persons" who lived in a building where nine persons died in a fire last April 5.

Complicating the investigation is the beginning of the mass movement of students for home as the school year draws to a close. Life on the tree-shaded, 722-acre Cornell campus has slowed almost to a walk in the last few days.

All three fires had been described by investigators as suspected arson. Tompkins County District Attorney Richard B. Thaler said today that "there are too many things that are similar about the fires to be coincidental."

PhD. Students Involved

Each blaze occurred between 4 A.M. and 5 A.M., and all involved housing for participants in a program for exceptional students that enables them to obtain a Ph.D. degree in six years, instead of the 10 or more years normally required.

Only 45 of the university's 14,000 students are entered in the program, which began last September. Four of the eight students who perished in the April fire at the Cornell Heights Residential Club were members of the group. A professor was the ninth fatality.

The second fire, which occurred in Watermargin House, a cooperative residence unit, on May 23, caused no injuries. Mr. Thaler said there were fires in three separate areas of the house.

Last Tuesday, a three-story frame rooming house was heavily damaged by fire. There were no injuries.

Yesterday the university announced that uniformed private patrolmen had been stationed at about 10 student residences where members of the six-year program live.

NYT, 19 Dec 1992: "Frederick Marcham, Cornell Professor, 94."

Frederick G. Marcham, who became one of the nation's longest-serving professors in a 68-year teaching career at Cornell University, died on Wednesday at his home in Ithaca, N.Y. He was 94. The cause of death was not specified, but a Cornell spokeswoman said he had been in failing health.

In his many roles at Cornell, Dr. Marcham was a history professor specializing in the British Constitution and served two periods as chairman of the history department. He was also a boxing coach and the first chairman of the Ivy League athletic eligibility committee. In 1987 he won Cornell's first award for exceptional service. He also served 32 years as the mayor of the village of Cayuga Heights, where he fought annexation by the City of Ithaca. He retired from that office in 1988 at the age of 90.

NYT, 19 Jan 2015: "After 36 Years, a New York Town Sifts Through Suspicions on a Fatal Fire" by Susanne Craig.

GREECE, N.Y. — No obvious traces remain of the fire that killed 10 people here in 1978, no monument to remind local residents of the arson at the Holiday Inn that left an entire town in tears. A Red Lobster now occupies the spot. Amateur investigator: Anthony J. Niccoli, 34.

Miscellaneous (in chronological order)

Proceedings of the Board of Trustees of Cornell University, 1953/1954.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1813/23414>

28. CORNELL RESIDENTIAL CLUB: Counsel explained the situation whereby the owners of a new apartment hotel built in the area known as Cornell Heights, have named their new project "Cornell Residential Club". He also reported that officers of the University have objected to the use of that name. The owners of the project have been advised by their attorney that they can legitimately use that name. However, the owners have assured the President of the University that they would be willing to change the name to "Cornell Heights Residential Club". The Committee approved a settlement of the matter on that basis. Trustee Dean suggested that it would be well to enter into an agreement with the owners of the apartment hotel whereby they would agree not to use the name "Cornell Residential Club"

Topaz 1966 (Brooklyn, NY), Sheepshead Bay High School Yearbook.

World Journal Tribune (New York, NY), 09 Apr 1967, Editorial: "The Fire at Cornell."

An appalling footnote to the fire tragedy at Cornell University is the disclosure of utter absence of elementary precautions.

There was no fire escape, no alarm system; installation of sprinklers to have begun the day smoke killed eight students and a professor. Yet this was a building owned by the university for nearly three years.

Cornell has passed into its second century is one of the nation's great seats of learning. But there has been a willful lack in the education of its administrators for minimal protection of all his 13,800 undergraduates in 2,300 teachers.

This is every New Yorker's business, for Cornell receives taxpayer contributions to its maintenance

At the next session of the legislature Assemblyman Alexander Chananau (D-Bronx) plans to introduce a bill making a fire safeguards mandatory at educational institutions. But that is almost a year away.

What every parent should do now is to make sure his or her college student is housed in a fire-protected dormitory —Cornell or wherever.

Fire Journal (National Fire Protection Association), Jul 1967, pp. 5–9: “Dormitory Fire Kills Nine” by Robert E. Gaudet.

The Oneonta Star (Oneonta, NY), 18 Aug 1967 (Friday), p. 2: “Arson Suspected at Cornell.”

ITHACA, N.Y. (AP) — Suspicions that three pre-dawn fires last spring at Cornell University, including one that claimed nine lives, were the work of an arsonist were strengthened Thursday by the discovery that a liquid, combustible substance was near the origin of the fires. Police Chief Herbert Van Ostrand said a Canadian chemist hired by his department had found the remains of a “fluid accelerant” in all three structures at a point where the flames had burned strongest. Previous laboratory tests had failed to indicate such a material was present. Fire Chief Charles Weaver said last June that he suspected “a crime, or crimes, had been committed here.” The sites of all the fires, two dormitories and an off-campus student residence, housed freshman members of an experimental program leading to Doctor of Philosophy degrees in six years. The first fire occurred April 5 at the Cornell Residential Club, a three-story dormitory. Eight students and a faculty adviser were fatally overcome by dense smoke that spread from a basement lounge up open stairwells to all parts of the building. A fire May 23 damaged a first-floor lounge at Watermargin House, a dormitory housing members of the special class who had escaped the earlier fire. The last fire, June 3 [sic], damaged a three-story private residence near the campus that housed other members of the special class. Van Ostrand said he could not identify the Canadian chemist or the highly flammable, “commonplace” substance until an arrest had been made. The chief declined to speculate further on the course of the investigation. He did tell reporters “the accelerant was a very commonplace, cheap, easily procured agent that could have produced the toxic smoke blamed for the deaths in the Residential Club fire.” The material leaves practically no trace, he said.”

<https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/46041582/>

Marcham, Frederick G. *Cornell Notes: World War II to 1968*.

<https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/3454>

Cf., p, 10 (excerpt below) for history of Cornell Residential Club erection.

While we were grappling with these things a new problem arose. A real estate developer had bought a piece of property in the village and was building on it what we had assumed to be an apartment house. He had come to the board before I was a member of it and said

he wished to build the apartment house to accommodate Cornell faculty members. With the claim that he was about to help the university's faculty housing shortage he had gone to a federal agency and obtained a permit to buy a certain kind of structural steel that was then in short supply. The publicity for this building described its purpose as that of a Residential Club; the builder used the title "The Cornell Residential Club." We now began to ask questions. Was it an apartment house which happened to be christened with this name? Did he intend to do other than rent the units as apartments for the customary period of six months and more? At first the answer was that most of the building was to be designed for the customary apartment use; there would be a few units for short-term occupancy. Later the owner admitted that perhaps half the building would be for short time, indeed possibly overnight occupancy. When at last the board and the mayor and the engineer visited the building we saw that there was nothing to distinguish it from a motel, a type of building strictly forbidden in the village.

A search of the village records showed that the board had authorized the building of a residential club. The question then in law was, what was a residential club? The answer, there was no such thing, or put another way, if you have a permit to build a residential club you can build virtually anything. And this, we sadly recognized, had been done under the eyes of our attorney. Who was the owner's attorney who had concocted this ruse? Wonder of wonders, it was the village mayor. Who was the engineer who had enabled the owner to get his steel and otherwise move towards completion of the building? It was the village engineer.

These matters never became public knowledge but their unfolding before the board shook the other members, as they shook me. No one spoke a word of condemnation, except to make the point that if the owner tried to operate the building as a motel we would hound him in all possible ways. As a beginning, we would ask Cornell University if it was party to the use of its name; if not we would force a change. While these matters went forward the mayor said he would not seek re-election; and in an aside, as though to justify having served the owner, he said it was unfair to ask an attorney to serve as mayor because it limited the kinds of clients available to him.

HWF Note: Marcham's memoir makes no mention of the April 1967 fire.

Memorial Statement for Professor Frederick George Marcham (02 Nov 1898 — 16 Dec 1992)
<http://hdl.handle.net/1813/17859>

Gazette (Johns Hopkins University), Feb 2013: "Steven Muller, 1927–2013" by Tracey A. Reeves.

Spectrum News (Time Warner Cable, Syracuse, NY), Wednesday, April 5, 2017 at 07:06 PM EDT: "50 Years After Fatal Cornell Fire, District Attorney Searches For New Leads" by Philip O'Driscoll.

Five decades have passed since nine people were killed in a fire at Cornell University. The cause was never determined. Our Philip O'Driscoll tells us about the latest push to obtain more information on the case.

“I’m not the first District Attorney who has looked at this fire. It’s 50 years old and this case is unsolved,” said Tompkins County District Attorney Matt Van Houten.

Eight Cornell students and a professor were killed on April 5, 1967 in a fire in a building in what was then called the Cornell Heights Residential Club.

Following the tragedy, investigators never determined an official cause.

At the time, the Tompkins County coroner stated it was sparked by either arson or human error

“We do know that the fire was of human origin,” Van Houten said. “In other words, it was not a mechanical fire. There was nothing structural that caused the fire. It was caused by human negligence or intentional human conduct.”

Following the incident, investigators looked into some individuals that were affiliated with the school.

“There were several people of interest, as many as four people of interest, who might have been suspects at one point,” Van Houten said. “There is no evidence that would raise them from a person of interest to a suspect.”

Although the investigation has remained open all these years, there has been no new evidence since 1967.

Van Houten remains optimistic that they will find the answers they are looking for someday.

“We are always hoping that more evidence comes to light. That could be in the form of some witness or someone who may have seen something,” Van Houten said.

For now, Van Houten is hopeful that someone can come forward with information that will allow the families of the victims closure in such a tragedy.

Anyone with information is asked to call (607) 274-5461.

<http://www.twcnews.com/nys/central-ny/news/2017/04/5/tompkins-da-seeking-public-s-help-50-years-after-fire-claims-9-lives.html>