Boise Fire takes out "Little Auschwitz"

by Cathy Ramey

Boise, ID — An early morning fire severely damaged the Women's Health Care, Inc. mill at 1320 N. Garden Street in Boise, sparking accusations of "anti-choice violence" and inflammatory demands for state legislation against pro-life activities, despite a lack of evidence that pro-life activists were involved in the blaze.

Fire investigators from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco And Firearms (BATF) and local fire officials began sifting through the damage on May 27, only hours after an alleged fire-bombing made the mill inoperable. The structure and most of the contents were left standing, however extensive smoke, heat, and water damage ruined the facility lobby, destroyed a computer system, and singed client files.

Mill staff were on hand soon after the blaze and seized the opportunity to focus blame for the fire on pro-life activists in Boise. However, Fire Investigator Steve Minnis stated, "Nothing has happened recently that would lead [investigators or mill staff] to believe this would be consistent with activity by pro-lifers."

Boise police records indicate little significant protest activity of the kind that would involve authorities. A computer report showed only a single "nuisance" call to the mill in February 1989. The following month the facility was vandalized, but there was no indication that the minor damage was done by a pro-lifer. Three years later the facility reported another threatening or nuisance phone call.

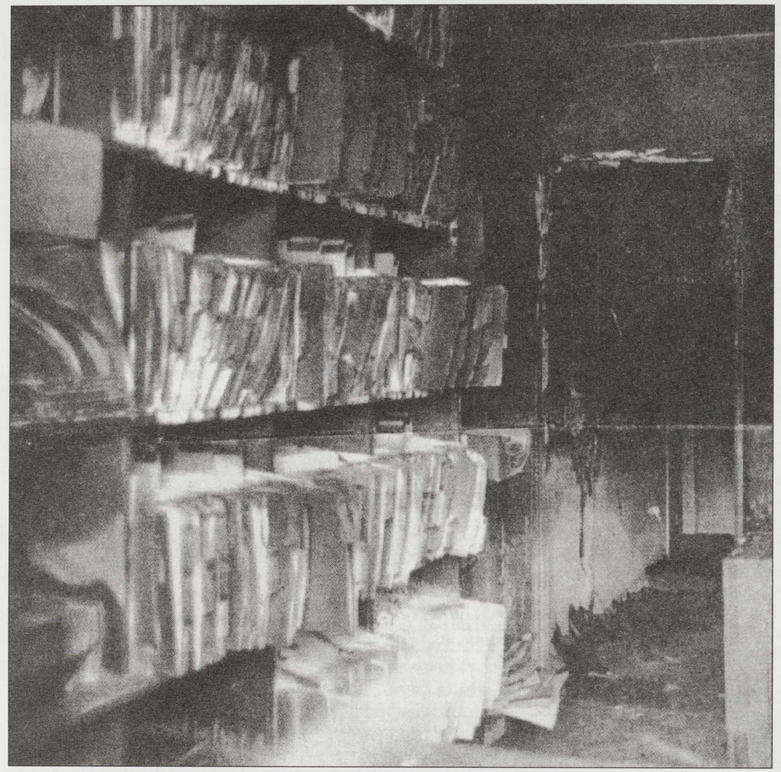
"Six to nine months ago, we had a bomb threat," stated facility manager Marsha Bittiker. However, apparently the facility made no effort to file a police report, leaving many to wonder if such an incident did occur.

Lt. Tom Rosenvall, representing the Boise Police Department, confirmed that the fire could not be automatically linked to pro-life activism, stating, "I'm not aware of any group disturbances we've had to respond to in the recent past (few years)." Other officials noted that pro-life activism in the Boise area, while it included passive resistance while blocking doors, could not be linked with the fire. "We're investigating an arson crime. (But) to say what the intentions were would be premature," according to Boise Fire Chief Renn Ross.

Pro-life experts from around the country dismissed the idea that the fire was the work of activists. Brian Clowes, Ph.D., an author and researcher who has gathered statistics on activism (*The Pro-Life Activists' Encyclopedia*) stated, "A number of the arsons and bombings that we see at clinics can be traced back to the clinic itself." Clowes cited angry boyfriends (fathers) who discovered after-the-fact that a girlfriend had killed their child, and "pro-aborts who take advantage of a political opportunity" by causing damage, focusing blame on pro-lifers, "and then ramming through some type of pending legislation" that might otherwise have failed.

Immediately following the fire, pro-abortion activists storm-trooped Idaho legislators with demands that a congressional delegation support pending federal legislation (FACE) that would create felons out of those who do rescues by sitting in at abortuary doors. Abortion zealots were joined by ACLU representatives who also commandeered the media-opportunity to insist that lawmakers create stiff penalties against those who protest abortion.

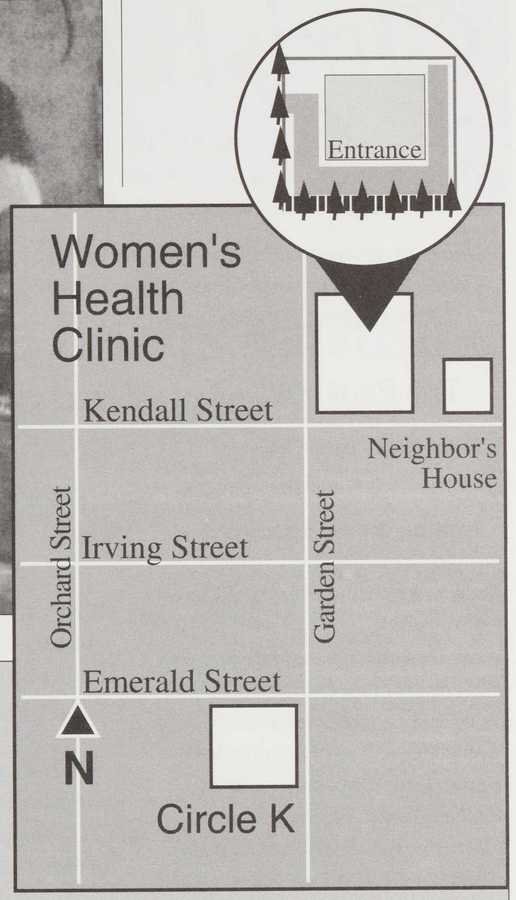
One Boise pro-lifer, who asked to remain anonymous, referred to the mill as "Little Auschwitz" and claimed that the fire was "not a serious effort to burn the place down," as so little material had been used to start the fire. "Five gallons of kerosene would have made for a much hotter fire. If it was someone who wanted to do more than create sympathy for the abortion clinic, they would have done a better job." ■



Record files damaged in the blaze are "salvagable" according to abortuary staff.

Left: *Boise fire investigators and a BATF agent examine the results of the early morning fire at Women's Health Care, an abortuary.*

Below: *Rough diagram of clinic and surrounding neighborhood.*



Piecing the Fats Together

● The man suspected of starting a fire at Women's Health Care abortion facility entered the Circle K convenience store at approximately 2:00 a.m. May 27. He had pumped one gallon of gasoline into a can and approached the counter to pay. At the counter he apparently tried to bribe the store clerk into selling a six-pack of beer to him also. He offered the clerk $50.00 if he would sell the beer, and the clerk refused. The six-pack was placed behind the counter and later put back into the store's cooler. Police dusted for prints after the fire.

● The customer drove away in a dark colored Volkswagen Bug, possibly red or maroon, heading in the general direction of the mill. The abortuary is located just six blocks from the convenience store.

● The fire at the facility is believed to have been started at approximately 3:00 a.m., after the facility's glass door was broken and a flammable liquid was dumped inside. The facility entrance is located behind the building and is surrounded by fencing and trees. No neighbors report hearing the glass breaking. Apparently, after throwing the flammable liquid through the door, the person who started the fire set the liquid on fire.

● At 3:15 a.m. an abortuary neighbor contacted the Fire Department after seeing what appeared to be flames and smoke coming from the building next door.

● Moments later, convenience store clerk Craig Brewer heard sirens and watched as fire equipment headed toward the mill location. He later contacted police to report that a customer had purchased gasoline in a can only the hour before. He had already placed the beer that he refused to sell back into the cooler, but pointed it out among the other six-packs when police arrived to dust for prints.

● The fire was extinguished within approximately 20 minutes. The facility was covered by a fire insurance policy and is expected to rebuild. ■