



North Dakota Office of the State Fire Marshal (ND)

INCIDENT REPORT

Official Law Enforcement Report - Unauthorized Dissemination is Prohibited

Incident Type: Fire / Undetermined

Agency Incident ID: NDSFM25-022

BATS ID: 1548393

Investigation Title: SAWYER RICHARDSON FIRE



Incident Date/Time/Location

Status

Investigation Closed

Jurisdiction

Primary

Start Date/Time

2/26/2025 08:51 Wednesday

Address

120 Central Ave

City/State/Zip

Sawyer, ND 58781

County

Ward County

Investigator Information

Name

Nicholas J Fettig

Phone

701-955-3294

Email

njfettig@nd.gov

Title

Deputy State Fire Marshal

Property Use or Target Information

Type

Residential

Status

Occupied And Operating



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Scene Details

Miscellaneous Information

Latitude

48.088957

Longitude

-101.051240



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Person/Organization Information

Name

WEIGEL, ANDY

Race

White

Sex

M

Juvenile

No

Relationship(s)

Firefighter – Volunteer Dept

Notes

Assistant Fire Chief



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Name

WEIGEL, PAT

Race

White

Sex

M

Juvenile

No

Relationship(s)

Firefighter – Volunteer Dept

Notes

Fire Chief



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Name

RICHARDSON, CALICO

DOB

1995

Sex

F

Juvenile

No

Relationship(s)

Resident, Victim

Race

White

Ethnicity

Non-Hispanic

Age at time of Incident

29



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Name

MELLAND, SHARON

DOB

1949

Sex

F

Juvenile

No

Relationship(s)

Owner, Victim

Race

White

Ethnicity

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Age at time of Incident

75



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Attachments

Filename	Description	Date
NDSFM25-022-1 SAWYER RICHARDSON FIRE.pdf		5/15/2025

No image specified



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Narrative(s)

Title

Distribution List

Author

Nicholas Fettig

7019553294

njfettig@nd.gov

Description

Sawyer Fire Protection District Fire Chief Pat Weigelsawyerfiredept@srt.com



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Investigator/Agent - Fettig, Nicholas

Date

Approving Official

Date



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Identify the Need

Call for Service (dispatch, request, date, time):

On Wednesday, February 26, 2025, at approximately 11:00 AM, I Deputy State Fire Marshal (DSFM) Nick Fettig was contacted by the on-call deputy regarding a fire in Sawyer, ND. The on-call deputy requested that I contact Fire Chief Pat Weigel of the Sawyer Fire Protection District. I contacted Fire Chief Pat Weigel and during the discussion it was agreed that the fire investigation would begin on Thursday, February 27, 2025, at approximately 10:00 AM.

North Dakota Century Code 18-01-07 states; "An investigation of each fire must be made by the officers required to report the occurrence of fires under section 18-01-06."

Define the Problem

Nature of Incident/Incident Overview:

A fire occurred in a two-story residential structure with a basement at 120 Central Ave E in Sawyer, ND. The fire was reported on February 26, 2025, at approximately 8:53 AM. The Sawyer Fire Protection District responded and extinguished the fire. The property tenant was not home at the time of the fire and a passerby called 911. (See Figure 1)



Figure 1 Photograph NJF_0009 North side of the structure with no fire or smoke damage.



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Authority to Enter/Search:

I arrived on scene on February 27, 2025, at approximately 10:00 AM. I met with DSFM Jess Sinerius, Assistant Fire Chief Andy Weigel and property tenant Calico Richardson and Church Council Member Sharon Melland. I presented Calico Richardson and Sharon Melland with a Consent to Search Form. Calico Richardson and Sharon Melland reviewed the form and did not have any questions or concerns and agreed to sign the form. Assistant Fire Chief Andy Weigel witnessed the discussion and Calico Richardson and Sharon Melland signing the form. The form will remain with the file.

After a brief discussion with Calico Richardson and Sharon Melland about safety concerns, I released the scene back to the Sawyer Fire Protection District. I advised Calico Richardson and Sharon Melland to contact the insurance company prior to altering the scene.

I departed the scene at approximately 2:30 PM.

Assisting Person/Agencies:

Name	Agency	Case Reference if Available
Fire Chief Pat Weigel	Sawyer Fire Protection District	
Assistant Fire Chief Andy Weigel	Sawyer Fire Protection District	
DSFM Jess Sinerius	North Dakota State Fire Marshal's Office	NDSFM25-022-2

Fatalities/Injuries:

Name	Fatality/Injury:	Notes/Other Information
		No injuries or fatalities were reported to the North Dakota State Fire Marshal's Office.

Data Collection

Photographs:

Prior to physically altering the fire scene, the scene was photographed in the condition it was found. During the investigation, layering process and reconstruction process a series of 123 photographs were taken. The photographs and photograph log will remain with the file.

Drawings/Sketches:

Ground level structure diagram.



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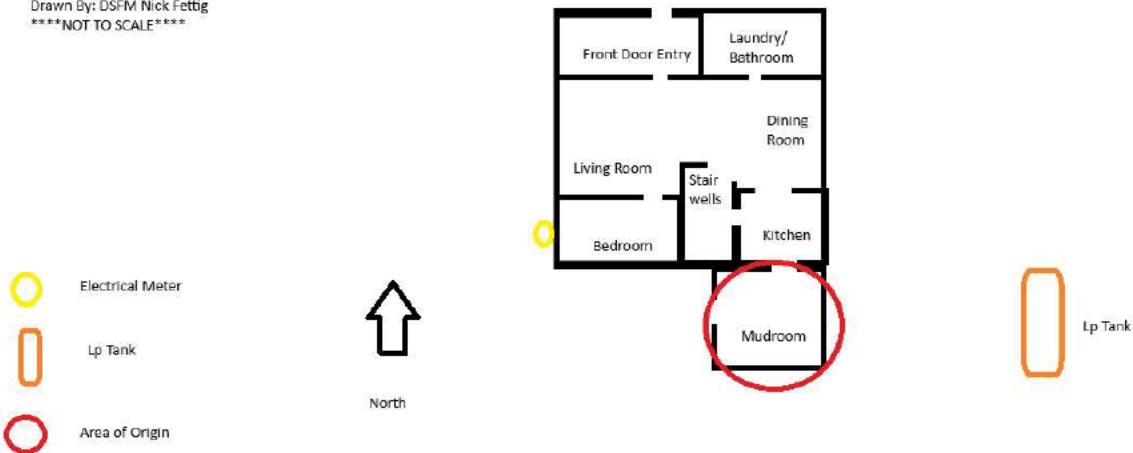
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NDSFM25-022
Date of Fire: 02.26.2025
Location: 120 Central Ave E, Sawyer ND
Drawn By: DSFM Nick Fetting
****NOT TO SCALE****



Exterior Scene Examination:

During my initial 360° walk around of the structure a Scene Safety Form was completed. The form will remain with the file. The structure was a two-story residential structure home with a basement. The structure had wood siding and asphalt shingles. The electrical meter was mounted on the west side of the structure and the electrical meter was removed. The Lp tank was located in the south side of the yard with regulator mounted to the tank. The Lp tank gauge read approximately 40% full and the shutoff valve was in the closed position. No fire or smoke damage was observed to the electrical meter and the Lp tank or regulator.

The north side of the structure did not have any signs of fire or heat damage.

The west side of the structure had smoke staining coming from the furthest north window. The smoke staining was received to the upper portion of the window and portion of siding directly above the window.

The south side of the structure received smoke staining to the top of the mud room door and mount of the exterior porch light. The door for the mudroom received discoloration and deformation from bottom up. A ring doorbell camera was observed on the south side of the structure by the mudroom door. The window for the mudroom was broken and was boarded up prior to arrival to scene. Above the window on the siding going up to peak of the roof received charring and smoke staining to the structure. Located in the parking area of the structure household materials such as a filing cabinet, door, kitchen cabinet and wood panel that had received charring smoke staining and discoloration. (See Figure 2)



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Figure 2 Photograph NJF_0001 South side of structure

The east side of the structure received a broken window with glass on the outside of the structure and smoke staining on the furthest south window which was covered prior to arrival to scene. The second-floor window received smoke staining on the siding with the window intact.

Interior Scene Examination:

My interior scene examination began in the area of least damage and continued to the area of greatest damage. During my initial safety walk through, it was determined that the area of least damage was the basement, and the area of greatest damage was the mudroom.

Entry was made in the mudroom on the south side of the structure. Entered the stairwell into the basement and found an unfinished basement with a water heater and furnace both LP powered. Found no signs of fire or smoke damage in the basement.

Entry to the second floor from the stairwell located in the dining room was made and found smoke staining on the walls and doorways, two bedrooms were observed with smoke staining to the top half of the walls and common household items.

On the main floor entry into the area of the north front door, no fire or smoke damage was observed except at the door which had received smoke staining to the door and the wall directly above the doorway. The living room sustained smoke staining to the walls and furniture. A line of demarcation was observed across the lower



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portion of the wall. The television mounted on the east wall of the living room received melting of the plastic housing and the television screen had deformation and found on the floor. The bedroom on the main floor received smoke staining around the doorway and door.

The bathroom on the main floor received smoke staining on the walls and on appliances such as washing machine and dryer also to the sink countertop. The dining room received smoke staining to all walls and furniture, a line of demarcation to the lower section of the walls. Melting and deformation to plastic thermostat housing and light fixture laying on top of the table.

The kitchen received smoke staining to the walls and counter tops. Plastic melting and deformation was observed on the microwave and refrigerator. Charring and smoke staining to the upper cabinets. The window in the kitchen was broken and boarded up prior to arrival on scene. (See figure 3)



Figure 3 Photograph NJF_0066 Kitchen, south wall with charring to cabinets and deformation and melting of plastics.

The mud room received mass loss to paper, cardboard, plastic, and cloth items and interior wood paneling with the remaining areas of wood paneling had protected space. The wall studs received charring from the floor to ceiling and a window on the south wall was broken and boarded up prior to arrival on scene. A freezer was located on the southeast wall that received discoloration and deformation from bottom up. Electrical wiring to an outlet was found with mass loss of electrical wiring insulation and deformation and melting of electrical outlet and outlet box. Insulation was found with mass loss and charring. The closet in the mudroom located in the northeast corner of the mudroom received charring to the framing and charring to common household materials inside to include paper, cloth, cardboard and plastics. The electrical switches received mass loss to plastic components and housing, electrical wiring had charring and mass loss to the electrical wiring insulation.



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The layering process was performed in the mudroom and items found through the process was to include, lithium-ion batteries, small electrical motors, electrical wiring with mass loss of electrical wiring insulation, paper, cardboard, clothing and plastic materials. (See figure 4)



Figure 4 NJF_0106 Mudroom layering process completed

A search was conducted to the materials outside of the structure that fire crews reported had been removed during firefighting operations. The door to the structure was examined and found that the latching mechanism had received mass loss to the latch and discoloration and deformation to the door to both sides. (See figure 5)



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Figure 5 Photograph NJF_0123 Exterior door with mass loss of the latch mechanism

Interview #1:

Name:	Calico Richardson
Interview Date:	02.27.2025

Notes: Calico Richardson was the renter of the residential structure at the time of the fire. The following are notes from an informational non-custodial non-recorded interview with Calico Richardson. The interview took place in the driveway of the rental property. I informed Calico Richardson that Calico Richardson did not have to answer any questions, and that Calico Richardson could leave at any time.

Calico Richardson stated Calico Richardson had signed a one-year lease for the home and had lived here for 2 months. Calico Richardson stated Calico Richardson and Calico Richardson's five children lived in the structure. Calico Richardson stated Calico Richardson noticed the light switch in the entry way felt loose and would not click into place and that the lights would flicker for a while when they would get turned on. Calico Richardson stated to not knowing any other mechanical or electrical issues with the structure.

Calico Richardson stated that Calico Richardson did not have any insurance at the time of the fire. When asked about the Ring camera attached by the door on the South side of the structure Calico Richardson stated the batteries for the camera died a while ago and could not pull up any footage from the camera.



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Calico Richardson stated on the morning of the fire, Calico Richardson loaded up the children and headed out to get groceries at approximately 8:30 AM. When asked about locking the doors Calico Richardson stated, "always locks the door when leaving home". Calico Richardson stated no person was left in the structure when Calico Richardson left.

Interview #2:

Name: Sharon Melland

Interview Date: 02.27.2025

Notes: Sharon Melland was the Church council member and was the person in charge of caretaking. The following are notes from an informational non-custodial non-recorded interview with Sharon Melland. The interview took place in the driveway of the rental property. I informed Sharon Melland that Sharon Melland did not have to answer any questions, and that Sharon Melland could leave at any time.

Sharon Melland stated that the structure was built by the Sawyer Church of the Nazarene in 1929 and was church property since built. Sharon Melland stated that the church used the structure to house the past Pastors of the church. Sharon Melland stated the church had been renting out the structure for the past 10 years with no issues with any of the past renters. Sharon Melland stated the interior of the structure was completely remodeled to include electrical and plumbing 10 to 15 years ago.

Sharon Melland stated the structure was under the insurance policy of the church and the following information was obtained.

Guide One Insurance- Sawyer Church of the Nazarene

Policy Number 001419212

Interview #3:

Name: Assistant Fire Chief Andy Weigel

Interview Date: 02.27.2025

Notes: Andy Weigel was the Assistant Fire Chief of the Sawyer Fire Protection District. The following are notes from an informational non-custodial non-recorded interview with Andy Weigel. The interview took place in the driveway of the rental property. I informed Andy Weigel that Andy Weigel did not have to answer any questions, and that Andy Weigel could leave at any time.

Assistant Fire Chief Andy Weigel stated fire crews arrived on scene and observed heavy smoke with flames coming out of the furthest south window attached to the mudroom. Fire crews made entry into the structure and suppressed the fire during fire suppression heavy smoke was observed inside structure and broke windows to ventilate the structure. Assistant Fire Chief Andy Weigel stated fire crews removed a filing cabinet, the front door and a kitchen cabinet to the parking area of the property. Assistant Fire Chief Andy Weigel stated crews could not verify if the door was secure due to the fire damage to the door upon arrival and that the door just fell over. Assistant Fire Chief Andy Weigel stated no persons was located at the fire scene when crews arrived.

Video:



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No video was available or reviewed by the North Dakota State Fire Marshal's Office.

Weather Reviewed:

The weather information was obtained from www.underground.com. The data was reviewed for February 26, 2025. The closest reporting station was the Minot International Airport Station, approximately 18 miles away. The following information was learned.

Time	Temperature	Humidity	Wind	Condition
3:54 AM	31°F	85%	10 MPH	Fair
4:54 AM	31°F	85%	12	Fair
5:54 AM	30°F	88%	14	Fair
6:54 AM	30°F	88%	13	Fair
7:54 AM	28°F	88%	5	Fair
8:45 AM	27°F	92%	7	Partly Cloudy
8:52 AM	27°F	93%	9	Fog
8:54 AM	27°F	92%	9	Fog

After reviewing the weather conditions, it was determined that the weather did not factor into the ignition or spread of the fire.

Times:

Hard Time Description	Time	Soft Time Description
	8:30 AM	Calico Richardson left the residence for Velva.
911 Call received	8:53 AM	
Fire Department paged.	8:55 AM	
	9:10 AM	Calico Richardson arrived back to the residence.
Fire Department arrived on scene.	9:10 AM	
Fire Department Units cleared scene.	10:40 AM	

Evidence identified/collected/preserved:



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No evidence was identified, collected, or preserved by the North Dakota State Fire Marshal's Office.

Data Analysis, hypothesis development, hypothesis testing, select final hypothesis

Other Forms/Documents/Reports Reviewed:

Call For Service Detail Report

- 911 call came in at 8:53 AM
- Sawyer Fire Protection District was paged at 8:55 AM
- Sawyer Fire Protection District arrived on scene at 9:10 AM
- Sawyer Fire Protection District cleared scene at 10:40 AM

911 Call Recording

- 911 caller stated, "fire coming out of the shed by the church, flames coming out of the windows and no one is here."

Property Insurance Policy Document

- Guide One Insurance – Sawyer Church of the Nazarene
- Policy Number 001419212

Area of Origin:

Based on the fire scene examination, witness statements, and other data reviewed, the area of origin was determined to be in the mudroom. (See figure 6)



Figure 6 NJF_0019 Mudroom



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- Fire Effects
 - This area sustained the most consumption compared to the rest of the structure.
 - The wood framing sustained more charring and consumption compared to the rest of the structure.
 - More wood paneling and insulation were collapsed and consumed in the mudroom compared to the rest of the structure.
- Fire Dynamics
 - Charring full length of wall studs compared to no wall studs exposed in the rest of the structure.
 - Charring and mass loss to common household items in the mudroom.
 - Charring and mass loss to interior wood paneling in mudroom.
- Witness Statement
 - Assistant Fire Chief Andy Weigel stated fire crews seen flames coming out of the mudroom window.
 - 911 caller stated seen flames shooting out of the window of the shed behind the structure. No sheds or outbuildings were observed on the property.

Cause Hypothesis Development and Testing:

The following were identified as the most credible potential fire cause within the area of origin:

- Overheating of electrical components in receptacles and or branch circuits that resulted in sufficient heat for a duration capable of igniting cloth materials, paper, cardboard, wood and or plastics.
 - Calico Richardson stated lights would sometimes flicker when turned on.
 - Calico Richardson stated the light switch in the mud room would not fully click into place.
 - Electrical circuit switches received mass loss to housing and plastic housing.
 - Electrical wiring received mass loss to insulation housing with heat induced color change to the wiring.
 - This hypothesis could not be eliminated.
- A person or persons unknown entered the structure utilized an open flame source to ignite ordinary combustible materials.
 - The exterior door to the mudroom received mass loss to the latch mechanism and was unable to verify if the door was locked
 - Calico Richardson stated to not being home at the time of the fire.
 - Calico Richardson stated no one should have been at the residence.
 - Assistance Fire Chief Andy Weigel stated no one was at the residence when fire crews arrived.
 - This hypothesis could not be eliminated.
- An overheating of an electrical appliance created sufficient heat for a duration long enough to ignite materials such as paper and cardboard.
 - In the southeast corner of the mudroom there was a chest freezer that was energized at the time.
 - The freezer received discoloration and deformation.
 - The electrical wiring for the freezer received mass loss of electrical wiring insulation.
 - This hypothesis could not be eliminated.

Final Hypothesis/Conclusion:



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Based on the fire scene examination, witness statements, and other data reviewed, the area of origin was determined to be in the mudroom entryway.

Due to the inability to eliminate multiple hypotheses.

This fire cause remains undetermined.

The fire was classified as undetermined.

The opinions expressed in this conclusion are based on data and evidence collected to this point. The opinions are subject to change based upon relevant, significant and credible information discovered or provided in the future.

References:

Technical Committee on Fire Investigations. 2023. NFPA 921: Guide for Fire & Explosion Investigations. 2024 Edition. NFPA. Quincy, MA