

672 Branch Street Researcher Notes

I talked with the property management firm who owns the building: Teddy at West Holmes Enterprises and she referred me to the restaurant to find witnesses; she says that the family rented both the residence that burned, and the restaurant that is in back of it (next to Shalimar) The next day, went to Chile Pepper's restaurant and talked with the grandmother who runs it with several family members and met Isabella Nino de "R", about age 13, who was 5 or 6 years old at the time of the fire and was a witness, although too young and possibly too scared to have observed exactly what was happening. She called her great uncle Alex and he agreed to meet me. She did tell me that her uncle Joe was the one who called in the fire when a smoke detector went off, and then went across the street to the fire department to urge them to come.

My interview with Alex de "R" well and he signed the sheet and provided contact information. If you need an interview on video, he would be willing to do one as he said yes when I requested one but my computer didn't record.

To sum up: The fire wasn't handled well. First, it took 20 minutes for the trucks and personnel to arrive and that makes no sense as they are right across the street. Then when they arrived, they took too long to get set up. Alex tried to help, wanted to use a hose to start spraying the fire, but was told he couldn't do that. The fire spread fast; Alex denies that the front (or any part) of the house was used for storage (though he couldn't say if there were some boxes). The fire had started in one of the bedrooms and he said that only one room was on fire when the department arrived. He feels that the Department could have saved the residence in ten minutes if they had come quicker and applied water right away, but that they let it burn. It was burned down, 100% damaged and was never rebuilt.

I asked if there were other witnesses: Grandma De "R" doesn't speak English or not at all well, but if Isabella were willing to interpret, I think she would cooperate. The other witness, Joe, is either unavailable or Alex is unwilling to give his contact info. He did say that if more info was needed, many of the immediate neighbors had witness the fire... knock on their doors. He hadn't seen the fire dept's report and so I gave him my extra. I asked him to read it and call me if he had anything else to add.