



Brickerville firefighter battle flames that destroyed a Lancaster County barn last Thursday evening. Three heifers and about 30 tons of hay were destroyed along with the barn owned by Fred Heller of R1 Lititz. (Photos by Stan Hall)

Arson watch keeps northern Lancaster Co. farmers on edge

BY PEGGY FRAILEY

Editor, Lititz Record Express

LITITZ — Arson has been cited as the cause of a \$30,000 fire that destroyed a barn in Brickerville, Lancaster County on Oct. 14. Farmers in the area have mounted an unofficial alert for suspicious or unfamiliar happenings around the farms north of Lititz.

Last Thursday's fire was the second barn fire within five days to start from unknown origins and destroy farm buildings in northern Lancaster County. Five days earlier, on Oct. 10, a fire destroyed a Clay Township barn located less than three miles from the scene of the Brickerville fire.

Fire marshals have not yet determined whether the Clay Township fire was intentionally set. However, state police fire

marshal Larry Albert said a positive ruling of arson was made the morning after the Oct. 14 fire in Brickerville and he is now proceeding with a criminal investigation.

Fred Heller of R1 Lititz, owner of the barn that was destroyed in the Oct. 14 fire, said farmers in the area "are concerned" about the two fires which had a number of similarities.

"They have their eyes and ears open and are being very careful in the community," Heller said. He added that some "strange things" had happened in the two weeks prior to the fires, explaining how farmers were called away from their homes for "steer-chases" the nights of both the Brickerville and the Clay Township fires. Steers on two different farms were turned

loose on those night, and neighboring farmers had helped catch and return the animals.

On the night of Oct. 14, Heller said, he was called to a steer chase in the Lincoln area. The night of the Clay Township fire, farmers were working until 2 a.m. loading and returning steers who had run from the John Sensenich farm.

Other "suspicious" things farmers have noticed, Heller said, were unfamiliar cars on the farms during the last few weeks.

He said a car had been seen parked in the pasture on the Keener farm (where his barn was located) earlier on the day of the fire, and that someone would have had to open an electric fence gate to drive in there.

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This yearling heifer is lucky to be alive. She was rescued from Heller's burning barn by neighbors who wet the animal down and, with a rope, pulled her out of the smoke-filled building to safety.

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