Fire damages BB city hall

Breaux Bridge - City officials here have set up offices at temporary locations and are studying several alternatives for permanent quarters after a New Year's Day fire swept through the town's city hall building, causing extensive damage to the 74-year-old structure.

Breaux Bridge volunteer firemen, assisted by men and equipment from Lafayette, St. Martinville, Cecilia, Parks and Henderson fought the raging fire, first reported at 1:55 a.m. last Thursday, and were able to bring the flames under control before the blaze reached the bottom floor of the large two-story building.

Investigators believe the fire first started in the Ward Four City Court judge's chambers on the west end of the building. The judge's office, the law library and records were destroyed. Judge Glenn Soileau indicated that the equipment and law books in his office were worth at least $24,000.

The building was insured for $260,000 and the contents for $26,000.

Two Arrested
Within hours of the fire, city police arrested Kevin Clay, 18, and McKinley J. Gabriel, 21, both residents of the Pecan Villa apartment complex in Breaux Bridge. Both men face charges of aggravated arson and burglary in connection with the fire. They are being held in the parish jail under bonds of $175,000 each.

Firemen found signs that the entrance door of the building had been forced open, as well as the doors to the courtroom and judge's chambers. In addition, equipment in the city's business office had been vandalized and a safe had been overturned.

At the time of his arrest Thursday, Gabriel reportedly was out of jail on bond in connection with the burglary of a Breaux Bridge grocery store. He had earlier served a six-month sentence for burglarizing the same store, police said.

In addition to the Ward Four Court offices, the upper floor of the building also housed the courtroom-council meeting room, and the driver's license office. The city's business offices were on the ground floor of the building, along with offices for the Division of Family Security (welfare), Veterans Administration, and Division of Employment Security.

Built In 1907
The old building was constructed in 1907 and used as a school until 1954. Then the city acquired the building from the school board and began using it as the city hall in 1959.

At a special meeting (See No. 2, Page 2)