

Bodies of 4 Children Found

In Smoke-Filled Rural Home

Four young children were found dead in a rural Charles County home that started a smoldering fire that filled the residence with smoke.

The dead youngsters, all children of Mr. and Mrs. Richard E. Pickeral, were identified by authorities as Antoinette Aretha, 5, Marlene Irene, 4, Cassandra Yvette, 3, and Michael Orlando, 2.

The Pickeral's rented frame home is on Aquasco Road about 4 miles northeast of Waldorf near the Prince George's County line. County officials said the parents and five other brothers and sisters were not at home when the fire started.

Officials said the four dead children were all found in the kitchen—three huddled together near its center, and a fourth lying next to the refrigerator.

The sheriff's office said the

body was discovered about 8:25 p.m. by a brother, Andrew Pickeral, 11, when he returned home from a neighbor's residence.

The boy ran back to the neighbor's house, but there was no phone there, and the neighbor, Roy Goldsmith, had to go to still another neighbor to call for help, authorities said.

Firemen from four towns—Hughesville, Baden, Waldorf,

La Plata—responded to the call. Officials said the cause of the fire was slight, but that heavy smoke and soot had stifled the rooms.

The candle, they said, was in because the electricity had been turned off temporarily.

The sheriff's office said the father, 31, was in Waldorf at the time of the fire, and that the mother, Florence, was working at a drug store in Marlow Heights, Prince George's County. The father works as a warehouseman at the Waldorf Supply Company, where an official said he had been employed about five years.