

Fire damages historic Craigflower Manor

By Rob Shaw, Victoria Times Colonist January 23, 2009



Firefighters from the View Royal Fire Department inspect the aftermath of a fire at the Craigflower Manor yesterday evening. Fire inspector Rob Marshall, left, and Lt. Kent Galbraith take a look at the damage.

Photograph by: Bruce Stotesbury, Victoria Times Colonist

Firefighters saved one of British Columbia's oldest buildings, the historic Craigflower Manor in View Royal, from being destroyed by fire Friday night.

Caretakers of the farm house, built in 1853, credited quick work by fire crews for containing the flames to a hallway and kitchen on the bottom floor, saving priceless and irreplaceable artifacts from damage in the dining room and living room just metres away.

“Absolutely they saved it,” said Bill Turner, executive director of the Land Conservancy, which manages the national historic site on behalf of the province. “The fire department has done a phenomenal job.”

The two-storey log home at Admirals and Craigflower is one of the last remaining links to original settlement farms established by the Hudson's Bay Company circa 1850s. It is the third oldest building in B.C. — only Helmcken House at the Royal B.C. Museum and Tod House in Oak Bay are older.

But it was its modern-day fire alarm system that alerted crews to trouble around 5 p.m., said View Royal Fire Chief Paul Hurst.

Heavy black smoke billowed out of the windows when firefighters from Colwood, Esquimalt and View Royal arrived. When crews kicked in the back door, a fireball shot out at them, he said.

“They hammered it, pushed it back, and kept pushing,” said Hurst. “But when I rolled up and saw this thing was getting worse and worse I thought, 1853 and now it’s going to the ground.”

Hurst praised firefighters for preventing the flames from entering the walls, where the fire would have traveled unimpeded to the attic and quickly engulfed the whole house.

The source of the fire appears to have been a space heater under the stairs. The original building had no heating system.

A damage estimate was not available, but local fundraising will likely be needed to repair the building, said Turner.

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