

# Firefighters' quick work saves Craigflower Manor

***Crews douse blaze before it spreads through historic 1853 farmhouse***

By Rob Shaw, Times Colonist January 24, 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, Times Colonist, Times Colonist***

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

Caretakers of the farmhouse, 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 roads is one of the last remaining links to original settlement farms established by the Hudson's Bay Company in the 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 was billowing 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," Hurst said. "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 travelled 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 last night, but fundraising will probably be needed to repair the building, Turner said.

rfshaw@tc.canwest.com

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