

Fire damage to 150-year-old farmhouse totals \$100,000

By Sarah Petrescu, Times Colonist January 25, 2009

Fire damage to the historic Craigflower Manor will cost more than \$100,000 to repair but could have been much worse, says the deputy executive director of the Land Conservancy. The charity organization manages the national historic site on behalf of the province.

"We were fortunate in the sense that the fire department acted so quickly and were sensitive to the significance of the site," said Ian Fawcett. "There was very little water damage."

The fire began around 5 p.m. Friday in a storage closet under the main staircase. The blaze was likely caused by an electric heater that gradually heated and ignited the brittle wood inside a wall, said fire inspector Rob Marshall from the View Royal Fire Department, at the scene yesterday.

"The whole storage room is gutted and the stairs are toast but it could have been a lot worse," Marshall said.

"In the old days, they made places like these with single walls that extended up both floors. A fire like this could've quickly blown the roof off."

Smoke damage was extensive throughout the heritage building, built in 1853 as a farmhouse and later used as a school house and museum before being acquired by the province in 1967.

Craigflower Manor is the third oldest building in B.C. -- Helmcken House at the Royal B.C. Museum and Tod House in Oak Bay are older -- and is usually open to the public during the summer months.

Fawcett is not sure if the building will be repaired in time to open this summer. "Or maybe the fire incident will become incorporated into the tour," he said.

The provincial government has insured the building, but he's not sure to what extent, or whether fundraising efforts will be needed to restore the original staircase.

For now, staff are going through the building to assess the damage and salvage historic items.

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