

Metropolitan Hotel in Hemlock Lost to Fire

Carol Van Loon - The Livonia Gazette

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The Metropolitan Hotel as it looked in the early half of this century

Fire completely destroyed the Metropolitan Hotel in Hemlock this past Monday morning, May 2nd. Firemen from Hemlock and nine other area companies were on the scene for over seven hours extinguishing the flames that leveled the hotel, long a local landmark well over 170 years old.

In addition to the hotel, an old hardware store, antique store and a small outbuilding were lost. The source of the fire is unknown, according to Hemlock Fire Chief Carl Lopez. Damage estimates had not yet been calculated by press time.

Chief Lopez said that he figured the fire started in the south end of the building. A southwest wind quickly spread the flames throughout the rest of the structure. "The hotel was pretty far gone by the time we arrived," Lopez said. The alarm was called around 2 am Monday morning. The fire was under control by around 5 am, the Hemlock chief estimated.

No one was in the building at the time of the fire. The hotel had been used for the evening about one hour before the alarm was called.

Three trucks from the Hemlock Fire Department were the first on hand to fight the fire. Ten fire companies responded to the initial aid call. From Livingston County, there were three units from Livonia, six units from Lima, two units from Springwater, one unit from Lakeville and one unit from Conesus. From Ontario County, there were four units from Richmond, two from East Bloomfield and a unit apiece from the towns of West Bloomfield, Bristol and Ionia.

Plate glass windows at Collins Red and White, Bernhardt Lumber and Ann Landers restaurant, across the street from the Metropolitan, were cracked and partially shattered as a result of the heat. Livonia fireman Pete Turner reported that when he brought a Livonia truck up to the scene, within a matter of minutes, the vehicle was too hot to touch and paint was starting to melt off its side.

Traffic had to be re-routed through Springwater during the height of the fire-fighting. Although many people stopped to look at the fire, firemen reported no problems with spectators.

A green Pontiac Firebird parked in front of the hotel was crushed when one of the white stucco columns on the front of the structure fell on top of it. No one was in the car when the incident occurred. Firemen were able to save another car parked in front of the hotel by pushing it down the street away to safety.

Sparks from the fire landed on neighboring rooftops, but no additional fires resulted. Firemen were able to prevent the blaze from spreading to the Boots & Saddle next door, a neighboring house and a trailer in



The Metropolitan Hotel fully engulfed in flames 2 May 1977



A portion of the hotel's fireplace was the only thing left standing in the aftermath of the fire Monday morning. Battered fragments of the hotel's foundation and a felled column are in the foreground.

Metropolitan Hotel from Rudolph Johnson about two years ago. He had restored the barroom and was making plans to open a restaurant and renovate second floor rooms for apartments.

The Metropolitan was opened as a hotel on Memorial Day, May 30, 1850. The south end of the building, which was the old original tavern, was erected about 1810. The hotel was a stop-over on the old stage coach route, in the days before the railroad.

A ballroom on the third floor of the "Met" was supported by cork pine stringers which spanned the entire length of the building. In the basement, which was thought to be a station on the underground railroad during the Civil War days, was also one of the first bowling alleys in Livingston County.

During the 1880's the hotel was purchased by Will Haggerty, who ran it for some 60 years. His daughter, Elizabeth, continued to operate the Metropolitan after her father's death in December, 1945 at 95 years of age. The 100th anniversary of the hotel was celebrated with an open house on May 30, 1950.

back of the hotel.

Firemen were still on the scene Monday morning at 8:45 am. Equipment from the Town of Livonia and a crane from the City of Rochester were clearing away debris so that firemen could extinguish the smoldering remains of the hotel. "I can remember coming to the hotel about 30 years ago with my father," Livonia fireman Dave Conner said. "I tell you there was a tear in my eye this morning when I saw it in flames. It only took about one hour to level it from top to bottom."

Chief Lopez said that the fire was the worst Hemlock had experienced in recent years.

Eric Fairchild of Canadice bought the three-story



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