

# Blaze Damages Elks Lodge in Manassas

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JM Staff Writer

An early Sunday morning fire caused by charcoal used for barbecuing gutted the second floor of a 78-year-old building at 9102 Center Street, Manassas Fire Marshal Don Fullem said this morning.

According to Fullem, the second floor, which housed the Manassas Elks Lodge received "severe" damage, but the first floor, which houses Didlake Production Services, was not damaged.

Volunteer fire companies 1, 4, 8, 9, 11, and 17, with Manassas Chief Wade House heading the command post, acted quickly and saved the rest of the building, Fullem said.

"We were concerned because of the paper products on the first floor, but we covered everything with all the salvage covers we had," Fullem said.

"I don't think they (Didlake) lost a penny," Fullem said.

The fire apparently went out a window through an air conditioner and progressed up the side of the building into the roof area, Fullem said.

The fire then spread between the metal ceiling and the roof, causing a "horizontal fire," he added.

"House opened the roof to vent heat

and smoke. As a result there was no smoke damage," Fullem added. "They did a fantastic job. It is hard to believe they saved a building that was that old and dry. They deserve a lot of credit," Fullem said.

The fire and rescue companies were called to the scene at 3:37 a.m. and were back in their stations at about 9 a.m., Fullem recalled. There were no injuries.

The second floor of the building was the meeting place of the Manassas Elks Lodge. Prince William County Police Investigator Jerry Mouser, an Elks Club officer, said this morning that the Lodge has been planning to move to a new site on Va. 234 near Lake Jackson Drive. The Elks Club will have an emergency meeting on Tuesday night to make some decision about finding temporary housing, Mouser said.

The building is owned by The Prince William Publishing Company and formerly housed the offices and printing presses of *The Journal Messenger*.

According to Manassas Museum officials, the structure was built as an opera house in 1906 and functioned as the local theater, dance hall and civic center until the late 1940's. It was a shoe factory during World War II.

JM 5/21/84

PN 5/21/84

## Fire damages historic building

A fire blazed early Sunday morning in Manassas' historic Conner Opera House, ruining the traditional

meeting place of the Manassas Elks Lodge and damaging offices of Didlake Occupational Services.

The fire, which sources said is believed to have begun about 3:30 a.m. in a supply closet, extensively damaged the red brick building. Built in 1906 after a major fire swept the city's heart, the opera house served as the local theatre, dance hall and civic center until the late 1940s.

Fire companies from Manassas, Yorkshire, Manassas Park, Haymarket and Fairfax extinguished the fire, which destroyed flags, documents, plaques and furnishings of Lodge 2512 of the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks.

The Elks began renting the old opera house's second floor about eight years ago, since shortly forming the Manassas Lodge, according to Jerry Mouser, chairman of the lodge trustees. Park Publishing Company owns the structure.