

Moor Green renovation to proceed despite fire

Trespassing Manassas youths probably started a fire that last week damaged vacant Moor Green mansion, one of the city's prized historic structures.

There is "no doubt" the blaze, which charred the home's great hall and burned down into the basement, was set intentionally, according to Prince William officials. As evidence, they note the fire began amid trash piled around a fireplace.

"It's a kind of teenagers' hang-out," said Lt. Steven Gilbert, a county fire investigator. "The owners board it up and the boards just get pried off; I imagine it's going to continue being a problem."

But had vandals not pried open

those shutters, the fire would have burned more intensely, he said.

"If the building had been closed up... the fire probably would have extended into the second floor and gutted the place," Gilbert concluded. "It could have been a hell of a lot worse. They were really lucky to confine the fire to just that area."

Built by the Hooe family in the early 1800s, the two-story brick house is considered an outstanding example of federal architecture in the rural south. Many carefully-crafted details of the home, which is on the National Register of Historic Landmarks, are rare in Virginia.

Gilbert, conscious of Moor Green's

historic value, rues the fire's toll, as do officials with its owner, the First Commercial Bank of Arlington.

"When you have a historic landmark and a fire like that, the damage is greatly intensified," the lieutenant said. "Things just can't be replaced."

Police have no leads in the case but are continuing to investigate, Gilbert said.

Despite the fire damage, First Commercial will continue renovating Moor Green, a project begun two months ago, said vice president Harry Scott.

The bank, which has owned the home for three years and had it up

for sale the past seven months, may attempt to restore Moore Green to its original beauty, he said.

First Commercial is asking \$285,000 for the mansion and its surrounding 24 acres.

Scott, who lives between Manassas and Nokesville, regrets the damage

vandals have done to the historic structure.

"All the vandalism we've suffered in the past several years is very distressing to us," he said. "I don't know if it's kids in the neighborhood or people from out of area. They just seem to go back there and tear it

away at will.

"We've boarded it up three or four times, at least. We've put up chains, posted no trespassing signs; we've tried everything. It's just a shame for something which has stood the test of time like that to be destroyed."