

Historic 1830 home burns in Catharpin

By GARY CRAIG
of the Potomac News

Oakwood, an historic Catharpin home built in 1830, was demolished by a Sunday morning blaze that apparently started in a basement woodstove.

Mary Miller, the 83-year-old woman who lived in the home, suffered second degree burns to her hands, scorched hair and smoke inhalation in the fire, according to a Prince William County fire marshal's office report.

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Mrs. Miller was in stable condition at Prince William Hospital Sunday, the report said.

Two firefighters also suffered minor injuries in the fire. Seven fire companies responded to the call. Firefighters battled the blaze for six hours Sunday.

Oakwood, originally built as a church, was owned by former Prince William County School Superintendent Charles MacDonald between 1916 and 1925, according to the historical book, *Prince William: A Past To Preserve*.

The county history describes the structure as "a two-story, gable-roofed, frame-constructed, el-shaped, weatherboard house on a high basement."

The two-alarm fire apparently started in a woodstove in the basement, fire marshal's investigators believe. When the first fire companies responded to the blaze at 3:09 a.m., the home was engulfed in flames.

"It was through the roof when we got there," Manassas Park Fire Chief Tom Merritt said.

Betty Duley, a Catharpin resident, said the fire illuminated the area's countryside.

"About 3:30 in the morning I woke up, and we're almost a mile

away, and the whole sky was lit up," she said. "It was the worst thing I'd ever seen."

Injured battling the blaze were Kevin Hampton, a Manassas Park firefighter, and John Phillips, an Evergreen firefighter. Hampton suffered hypothermia to both hands and Phillips suffered smoke inhalation and minor burns to his forehead.

Both firefighters were treated and released from Prince William Hospital Sunday morning.

Mrs. Miller was warned of the fire by two dogs she had in the house, Merritt said.

The dogs started barking when the flames grew around them, he said.

"She had two dogs downstairs and went down to see what was wrong with them," Merritt said.

The dogs were killed in the fire, Merritt said.

Mrs. Miller once owned the Stone House Inn, which was located alongside the Stone House at the Manassas National Battlefield Park. The inn was torn down in 1952, but Mrs. Miller kept some of the furniture used there in her Oakwood home.

Mrs. Duley, who went to see the remnants of Oakwood Sunday, said, "The only thing I saw left intact was three chairs from the Stone House Inn."

HISTORIC SITE FILE: OAKWOOD
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