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Harold Miller—Journal Messenger

A television crewman interviews Battlefield Park Superintendent Kenneth Apschnikat at the site of the Robinson House fire. Officials are reviewing options which include reconstructing the exterior to its original shape or tearing down the charred skeleton and exposing the original foundation to mark the home's site, Apschnikat said.

Too early to say if house will be fixed

Prince William Public Library
Manassas, Va.

J. Robinson House

By VONDA K. WOLCOTT
Staff Writer

Manassas Battlefield Park officials said restoring the historic Robinson house to its pre-fire conditions could cost \$250,000. They are reviewing options which include reconstructing the exterior to its original shape or tearing down the charred skeleton and exposing the original foundation to mark the home's site, said Park Superintendent Kenneth Apschnikat.

Apschnikat could not estimate how much it would cost to leave only the foundation. "It's too early to say when we'll make a decision," Apschnikat said. "We don't even know what all of our options are."

Apschnikat said the interior of the house will not need to be rebuilt because it is an exterior exhibit.

A fire which investigators deemed "suspicious" broke out in a first-floor room and gutted the home Monday night, said Lt. Tim Hattwick of the Prince William County Fire Marshal's Office.

The fire started about 8 p.m. in the only room which had an unlocked window in the home, Hattwick said.

The house was built in 1926 on the site of the original home and

Local, federal investigators studying fire

By VONDA K. WOLCOTT
Staff Writer

Investigators sifted through the charred skeleton of the Robinson House Tuesday but have not determined what caused the fire.

County fire fighters, who battled the blaze that broke out about 8 p.m. Monday at the historic home on the Manassas Battlefield, said a preliminary investigation indicated the fire may have been arson.

"We're very anxious to find out what happened," said Park Superintendent Kenneth Apschnikat. "There's a lot of people who want to know. We hope to have something soon."

The National Park Service, which is leading the investigation has asked for assistance from county, state and federal agencies, reportedly including the FBI.

Apschnikat would not confirm if the FBI was participating in the investigation. However, the Manassas

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FIRE VIRGINIANA FILE

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Battlefield is federal property which comes under FBI jurisdiction.

The Robinson House, as well as other historical sites at the Battlefield have been victims of vandalism this year. During the July 4 weekend vandals spray-painted graffiti on the house.

Apschnikat said the vandalisms and the fire are "not necessarily related."

The fire broke out in a first-floor room which had the only unlocked window in the house, said Lt. Tim Hattwick of the county Fire Marshal's Office. Hattwick called the fire "suspicious" and it had no apparent accidental cause.

The county Fire Marshal's Office has since turned the case over to the park service, but is continuing to assist them with the investigation, said fire Capt. Matt Smolsky.

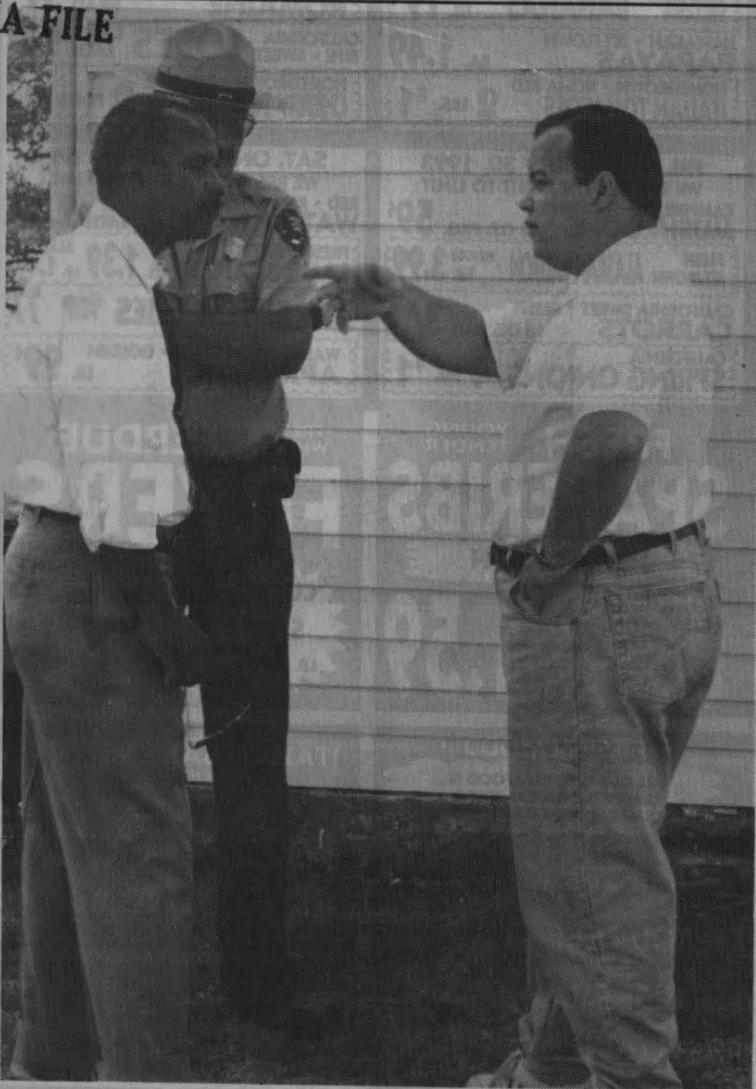
HOUSE

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tavern of James "Gentleman Jim" Robinson, a freed slave whose descendants still live in the area. That home survived two Civil War battles, including pillaging by Union troops in the second battle of Manassas in 1862.

The park service bought the home and land more than 50 years ago from the Robinson's.

Robinson's great-grandson Bladen Oswald Robinson, 83, told reporters he had planned to use his childhood home in mid-August for a family reunion.



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U.S. Park police discuss the fire which gutted the Robinson House with Mark Robinson, right, a grandson of James "Gentleman Jim" Robinson who owned the historic home.