

Historic Complex Ruined

Waterbury Fire Probed

WATERBURY — A century-old landmark and a fire truck were destroyed and a Goddard College professor left homeless in a fire of undetermined origin at the former Demeritt Canning and Clothespin Factory here. The loss was set at "\$40,000."

According to Waterbury Town Manager Douglas J. Finlay, the fire broke out about 3:45 a.m., today, and about an hour later 40 firefighters from the Waterbury Village and Waterbury Center Fire Departments had the flames under control.

Destroyed were two of the five buildings in the historic complex; a "spare fire truck," owned by the Waterbury Center

Fire Department, and the personal belongings of a wrought iron sculptor, Ted Scuris, a professor at Goddard College.

A third building in the structure at Demeritt Place was partially destroyed but two other buildings and a nearby shop, the Ball Ski Factory, which is now closed, were saved by the firefighters.

Finlay said that when he arrived, about one hour after the fire broke out, the flames were shooting 100 to 150 feet high and silhouetted vehicles and spectators along Interstate 89.

Owner of the complex is the Waterbury Industrial Enterprises, a partnership of Richard

J. Bessette and John Grenier.

Bessette estimated the loss of the structures at "\$40,000." He said that he is trying to find out what caused the fire as the buildings were not operative and the tenant, the professor, was not present when fire broke out.

"I don't know what our plans are," said Bessette, when asked about rebuilding, "it was partially insured."

The Demeritt factory closed its doors about four or five years ago, according to Finlay, who said the destruction represents "more a sentimental loss than tax loss to many of the residents in the area."

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Waterbury Fire

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Finlay said the destroyed complex represents a "good loss" in taxes to the community.

"I haven't any idea what impact it will have on the town at this time," he said.

The complex is located on the northeast side of the town just off South Main Street. It is believed that the larger structures — the ones destroyed — were built around 1880 or 1890 with the remaining three structures built about 50 years later.

Finlay commended the firefighters for preventing the fire from spreading to the other two structures and the nearby abandoned Ball Ski Factory.

He said that there were nearby homes but none were in any danger. "The firefighters just let the two buildings burn out and concentrated their efforts in containing the fire — which they did very well," he said.

Finlay said that Fire Chief James Sabin indicated he would call for assistance from the Vermont State Fire Marshal's Office in Montpelier to determine what caused the blaze.

Waterbury Police Chief Joseph Sprano reported that the newly appointed night officer, Clayton Wells, 23, was checking out the doors to various buildings and was at the Anderson Co. when he spotted a light in the background.

Sprano said Wells headed towards Demeritt's Mill and when he arrived the fire "exploded or there was a "huge puff." Wells used the radio in the cruiser to call the Barre City Police Department.

"He was going to have Barre police notify the fire department because there is no radio communications with the fire department at night, but I was up, intercepted the call, and telephoned the fire chief," said Sprano. At the same time, Patrolman Wells rang in the alarm.

"It really paid to have the town hire the new officer," said Chief Sprano, "because of it, several buildings were saved and no one was hurt.

Patrolman Wells started his duties a couple of months ago.

Vintage Fire Truck Destroyed

WATERBURY CENTER —
"It's like going to a fire and finding out it's your house burning."

That was the way that Waterbury Center Fire Chief Sidney Thurston described the Demeritt Canning and Clothespin Factory Fire that mysteriously broke out at 3:45 this morning.

When the fire 'phone for this department rang and the chief heard the name of the structure burning, he automatically thought of the vintage 1942 model, 750-gallon Ward - LaFrance pumper his department housed there.

About 20 Waterbury Center firefighters arrived on the scene to assist the Waterbury Village Fire Department and immediately tried to save the pumper.

"We were able to protect the front of the truck," said Chief Thurston, "but we were hampered at getting to the side and, by the time we did it was too late."

The truck, the second ever purchased by this department since it was formed in 1958, held a lot of "sentimental value" to the men, said the chief.

The first truck was a 1924 Maxim purchased from the Montpelier Fire Department and later the 1942 Ward-LaFrance replaced the old Maxim. It was purchased from the Trenton, N. J., Fire Department.

Serving faithfully over the years, it was recently retired and replaced by a 1959 Maxim, a 1,000-gallon a minute pumper that cost the firefighters \$13,500 second hand. When new, it sold for \$25,000.

The department also has a 1970, 2,000-gallon Chevrolet tanker which takes up the second of the two stalls in the fire department. Because of the lack of space, the firefighters housed the 1942 fire truck at Demeritt's "rather than let it sit outside."

"It was insured for fire and theft," said Chief Thurston, who noted the truck was valued at \$5,300.

The Waterbury Center Fire Department is owned by the firefighters of the community. The building was erected by the firefighters and the Center appropriates money for funding equipment and insurance for the building, men and equipment. The town also pays for the fuel bill.

"We tried to save it (the old truck) because we did use it for grass and brush fires," said the chief.

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Buildings Burn In Waterbury

WATERBURY — Two large wooden factory buildings were destroyed by fire here early Wednesday morning.

The Bureau of Criminal Investigation has been asked to investigate the blaze that broke out about 3:30 a.m. in the two-story structures known as the former Demeritt Mill. The buildings were adjacent to a railroad siding at the east end of the village near several other factories. One of the structures lost in the fire was built in the 1890s.

Firemen said the buildings had been vacant for the past five years after housing a canning plant and clothespin manufacturer.

The buildings were recently purchased by Waterbury Industries Inc., owned by Richard Bessett and John Grenier. The two men said they had hoped to attract a new industry to the town to occupy the structures.

There was no immediate estimate of the loss. Firemen said no injuries were reported.