

Ocean View Hotel is Destroyed by Fire in the Night

Fires Ocean View Restaurant & Tavern Oak Bluffs Fire Department
 Vineyard Gazette
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The Ocean View Hotel, one of the landmarks of Oak Bluffs, was completely destroyed by fire in the early hours of this morning, as firemen from three towns fought in a brutal 7-degree temperature to contain the blaze.

The fire was first noticed earlier in the night, about 11 p.m., when a few flames were visible but smoke completely filled the huge building. The Oak Bluffs firemen under Chief Nelson Amaral soon realized that the walls were involved, and nothing could be done to prevent the fire from "popping." Only one wall was left standing at daylight this morning.

When it became apparent that the fire would explode, the Oak Bluffs firemen called for a Vineyard Haven truck to stand by. An Edgartown crew was already standing by. Soon after these trucks came to assist, an addition truck each from Vineyard Haven and Edgartown was called.



Fire Burst Through the Roof

When the first Edgartown truck came to the scene, the fire was already coming through the roof, and the smell of burning mattresses permeated the air as far as Farland Square, and flowing sparks alarmed firemen and spectators alike, who feared not only for the safety of nearby dwellings but also for buildings on the other side of the harbor and in the Camp Ground.

Two extra lines were laid by an Edgartown truck, which was pumping from the harbor to protect Our Market from flying sparks.

Meanwhile, more than 100 men fought the blaze under exceedingly adverse conditions caused by the severe cold. They were hampered by the freezing up of nozzles, thick smoke and the paralyzing degree of the cold itself. As far as could be learned this morning, however, no one was injured.

The fire is believed to have been deliberately set, and this morning Chief Amaral said that it apparently started in a store room in the basement, where the fuel tanks are also located. After the first flare-up, the firemen had no recourse but to keep the blaze contained to the building, and although the northwest wind was somewhat in their favor, the closeness of the next door cottages made the containment no easy task.

Police Chief Richard W. Blankenship and Rev. George A. Hill Jr. were the first on the scene after the alarm blew. They saw flames in the kitchen at that time. The kitchen door was open,

indicating that someone had been in the building.

The hotel, which was one of the centers of social life in the summer, particularly popular for its cocktail lounge, was a structure of about forty guest rooms. On the ground floor were a large dining room, a lobby, a kitchen and several storage rooms.

The building dates from very early in the history of the town, when it was established by the Rice family, who were the pioneers in building the village which was eventually to become the township of Oak Bluffs.

Owned by Rice Family

Generations of the Rice family owned and operated the place, the last members being the late Frank Rice and his sister, Miss Elizabeth Rice, who carried on until their deaths. In the settlement of the Rice estate, Rep. Joseph A. Sylvia first leased the hotel and then purchased it in 1938. The last Mr. Rice had built on the back ell containing fifteen rooms, and Mr. Sylvia continued the development and expansion of the facilities for the next eighteen years.

In 1956, Mr. Sylvia sold the hotel to Mr. and Mrs. Gene Porta, who have operated it since with outstanding success. The Portas, who are wintering in Florida, were notified last night of their loss, and Mr. Porta said that he would set out for the Island today. Meanwhile, no estimate of the loss in dollars was available.

At 7:30 this morning the Oak Bluffs firemen were still on the scene of the fire, which by that time was only a smoldering mess with the fragment of a wall standing. The last Vineyard Haven and Edgartown trucks headed for home about 6 this morning. As far as can be remembered, it was the worst fire the firemen involved have ever fought.

One of the things that helped make it bearable was the consideration of many Oak Bluffs residents who kept up a steady supply of coffee to revive the cold-numbed and exhausted firemen.