

**INLAND HOUSE
DESTROYED BY FIRE
“116 Year Old Famous Resort”**

Tuesday, March 7, 1989

Conway, Emmet County, Michigan

CONWAY'S INLAND HOUSE DESTROYED BY FIRE

TUESDAY, March 7, 1989



Conway: The Inland House, a landmark on the western shore of Crooked Lake for more than 100 years, was destroyed by fire Tuesday night. Here firefighter's standby, awaiting tanker trucks with water.

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Pages 1 & 2

By John Charles Robbins, News-Review Staff Writer

CONWAY — The 116-year-old Inland House, a famous resort and one of the jewels of the Inland Waterway, was ravaged by fire late Tuesday.

The southern end of the distinctive white landmark was destroyed by the blaze, while the hotel area — now condominiums — built on in 1964 was saved.

Firefighters battled the fire and the frigid temperatures throughout the night and were still working the scene at dawn today.

One observer on the scene said it was 9 degrees below zero at the lake's edge during the height of the blaze.

While firefighters from six departments worked hard to contain the inferno, others kept a watchful eye on nearby homes and buildings.

At the height of the blaze, a huge shroud of smoke carried sparks, ashes and debris which fell over the homes that make up the small community of Conway.

It was about midnight when the bulk of the structure roared with flames and three stories of history came crashing to the ground.

Firefighters remained at the scene at noon today, dousing the smoldering rubble and calling in a giant

crane to push burned debris away from the remaining condominiums to the north.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation. Battling the fire were the Harbor Springs Fire Department, Resort-Bear Creek Fire Department, Petoskey Fire Department, Littlefield-Alanson Fire Department, Springvale Township Fire Department and Pellston Village Fire Department.

The Emmet County Sheriff's Department assisted at the scene.

"They called out all the troops," said Doug Carver, chief of the Resort-Bear Creek Department.

The fire resulted in an intentional power outage in the Conway, Oden and Alanson areas, Carver said.

A thick band of high-tension electrical lines stretch along the site between the building and U.S. 31 North.

Consumers Power Co. crews were asked to kill the power through the lines to protect firefighters working close to the building, Carver said.

Power was restored shortly after 12:30 a.m. Tanker trucks were filled at Graham Road and taken to the site, and firefighters and others worked to *"tap-in"* to the frigid waters of Crooked Lake, after breaking through about two-feet of ice.

A front-end loader was used at the former Little Traverse Township park boat launch ramp, just north of the complex, to break through ice so a hose and pump system could be set up.

The business was closed Monday and Tuesday, and no one was in the building at the time of the fire, officials said.

The fire was first spotted by a motorist, who altered a woman in the neighborhood to call the fire department.

The Emmet County central dispatch notified Harbor springs Fire Department of the *"working"* fire at about 10:22 p.m.

The fire quickly raced through the old structure. The top two floors were vacant.

A huge metal tower and TV antenna, erected in the years before cable TV, wilted in the intense heat and toppled over the structure.

Emmet County records list the owner of the Inland House as Christian K. O'Connor of Detroit. O'Connor, along with William Rupp, has an interest

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in the 18 hotel-condo units, according to county records.

O'Connor couldn't be reached for comment today. The fire apparently started in the east end of the main building, in the dinner and dancing lounge area, according to manager and chef Victor E. Beck.

Beck said the hotel complex has 16 full and part-time employees.

Beck said he expects the hotel condo units will be back in use soon, and an office may be set up in a house owned by O'Connor located across the highway.

Today, all that remained of the original Inland House was the brick chimney.

The Inland House had a rich history as a resort and as an entertainment showplace for big name musicians.

The original Inland House register shows Grover Cleveland once stayed at the hotel.

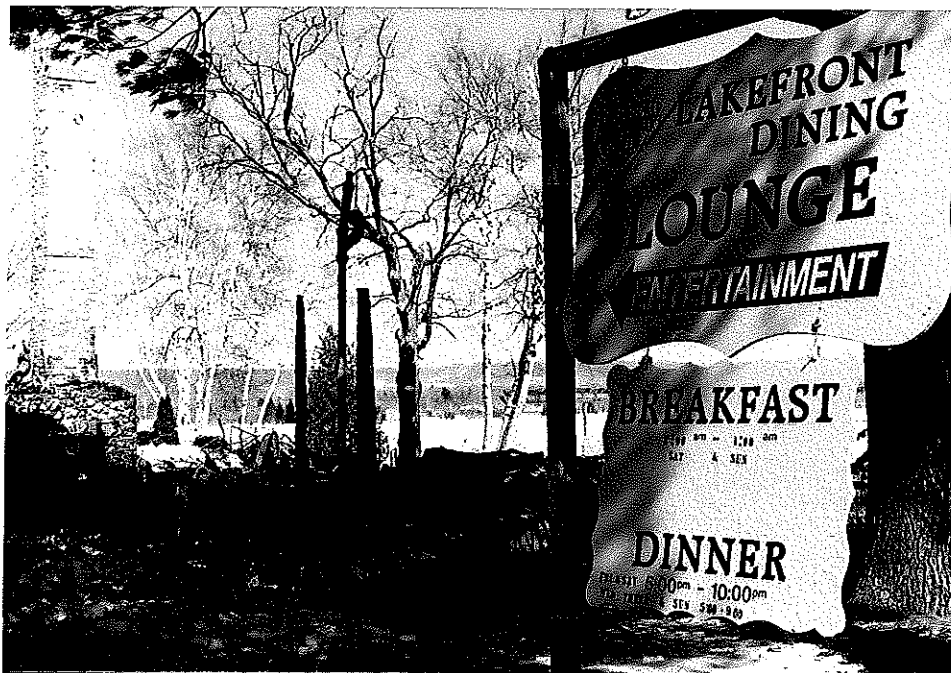
Renowned author Harriet Simpson Arnow worked at The Inland House as a waitress in 1932-35. She wrote such works as "*Mountain Path*," "*Hunter's Horn*," and "*The Dollmaker*."

Area musician Charlotte Ross Lee said The Inland House brought in big name entertainers and big bands, including Woody Herman, Lionel Hampton and Clyde McCoy. She said Frank Sinatra Jr. performed there.

Her husband, the late Carroll Lee, earned a national reputation as a musician and he played at the hotel, too, along with trumpet player Bobby Hackett.

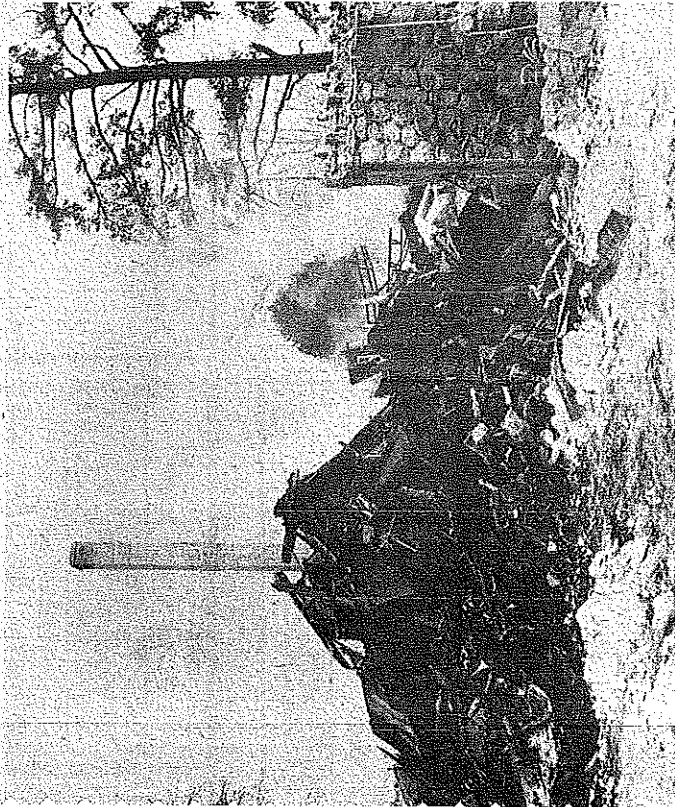
The Inland House was the home of the Epsilon Jazz Band for many years, she said.

"It was a mecca for jazz musicians and jazz aficionados," Lee said.



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Inland House fire investigation begins today



NEWS photo by G. Randall Goss

Conway: A mound of rubble frames the brick chimney of The Inland House, after a fire late Tuesday destroyed the landmark hotel and lounge.

By JOHN CHARLES ROBBINS
News-Review staff writer

CONWAY — Northwest Michigan and state investigators today began the task of determining what caused the fire which raged through and destroyed the famous Inland House resort this week.

At about 10 a.m. today the place was still burning.

The Harbor Springs Fire Department was called back to the scene at 9:49 a.m. after another flare up was reported, with flames spotted near the outer edges of the remaining brick and stone foundation.

Six area fire departments fought the blaze late Tuesday and early Wednesday.

The original 116-year-old Inland House, on the edge of Crooked Lake, was lost in the fire while the hotel area built on in 1964 was saved. The hotel area at the northern end of the site includes about

18 hotel-condominium units.

The fire is being investigated by the Emmet County Sheriff's Department and the Fire Marshal Division of the Michigan State Police.

Sheriff's Department Detective Sgt. Jerry Hartman said early today he planned to meet with a state investigator at the scene to begin the official investigation.

Hartman is working with Detective Sgt. Russell Benson, of the fire marshal's office in Gaylord.

Benson planned to sift through the debris at the hotel site today, and Hartman was to begin interviewing persons with information about the hotel and about the fire.

The business was closed Monday and Tuesday, and no one was in the building at the time of the fire, according to Inland House manager and chef Victor E. Beck.

Beck said the fire apparently started in the east end of the main

building, in the dinner and dancing lounge area. The top two floors were vacant.

Hartman said proper protocol wasn't followed in the incident and fire department officials didn't request police assistance until 2 p.m. Wednesday, "which gave me a late start."

Today may prove to be a repeat of Wednesday when the site continued to smolder and rekindle.

Firefighters were called back to the scene at 6 a.m. Wednesday, and again when the site flared up at 2:24 p.m. Firefighters then stayed at the scene for several more hours, finally departing between 10:30 and 11 p.m.

Hartman said the chore of digging through the building remains it may be difficult today because it "may be too hot to work yet."

Emmet County records list the owner of the property as Christian K. O'Connor of Detroit.

Hotel fire damages Harbor department's equipment

By JOHN CHARLES ROBBINS
News-Review staff writer

The fire which claimed the historic Inland House on Crooked Lake last week resulted in more than \$2,000 in damages for the Harbor Springs Fire Department, according to Fire Chief D. Douglas Jardine.

The fire remains under investigation.

No fire is easy and this one was especially tough because of the subzero temperatures, Jardine said.

Firefighters from six departments battled the blaze, which started March 7, continued to burn for days and leveled the original 116-year-old Inland House. The motel-condominium area built on in 1964 was saved; it includes about 18 units.

Investigation of the cause of the blaze continues.

Jardine said approximately 700 feet of canvas type fire hose was ruined by burning embers landing on the 2½ inch lines.

The department also saw damaged equipment, including valves which froze up during the fire, Jardine said.

Jardine said he is very proud of the work of the firefighters.

"It could have been a horrendous thing, when you look at the roofs and yards a short distance away — we could have lost that whole area," he said.

During the height of the blaze, the wind whipped burning pieces of the inn westward, over the small village of Conway.

"The fire had a big head start," Jardine said.

The fire chief said when the de-

partment first arrived on the scene, flames were shooting out all of the windows on the east section of the inn.

Fire already had consumed much of the dining and bar area, and was through the roof by the time the firefighters arrived, he said.

Jardine wanted to express his appreciation to the departments that assisted in fighting the roaring fire; Pellston, Alanson, Springvale Township, Resort-Bear Creek Township, and Petoskey. He also thanked the fire departments which acted as backups to the departments on the scene, including Readmond-Friendship, Carp Lake, Charlevoix, Melrose and East Jordan.

Jardine had a hearty thank you for the women in Conway, and firefighters wives, who provided hot coffee and rolls at 3 a.m.

"It was colder than Christmas, and (the men) were tired and covered with ice," Jardine said.

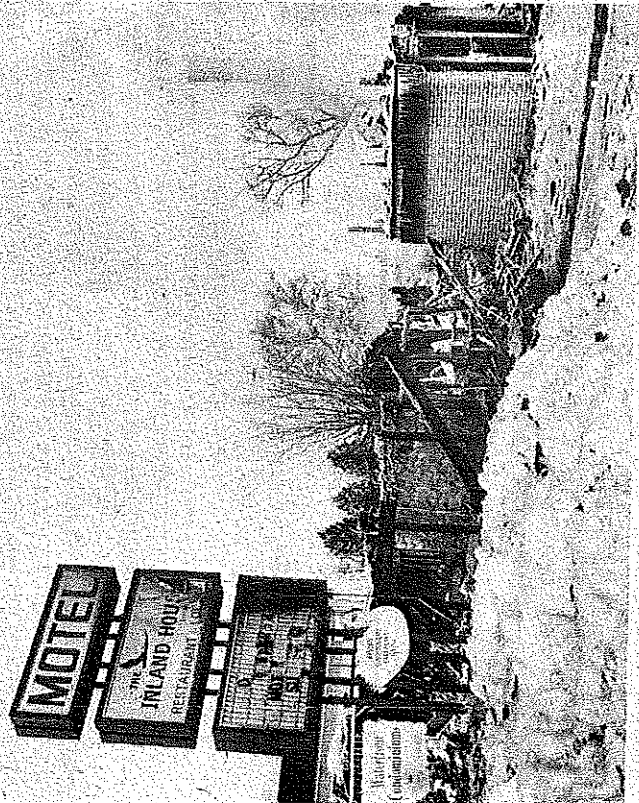
The fire is being investigated by the Emmet County Sheriff's Department and the Fire Marshal Division of the Michigan State Police.

Sheriff's Department Detective Sgt. Jerry Hartman said he is meeting today to compare notes with Detective Sgt. Russell Benson, of the fire marshal's office in Gaylord.

The two men visited the fire site last week, with Benson sifting through the rubble and Hartman beginning interviews with persons associated with the business.

Hartman said today he can't comment on any specific part of the investigation at this time.

"It's hard to comment at this



NEWS file photo

Conway: Investigators continue to probe the fire which destroyed the historic Inland House March 7. Officials released the site to the owner this week to allow clean-up to begin.

point." Hartman said. "I don't think we're ready to call the fire one way or other."

Hartman said he doesn't know when a final determination will be made in the probe, but he noted the investigation could conclude with a finding of "undetermined"

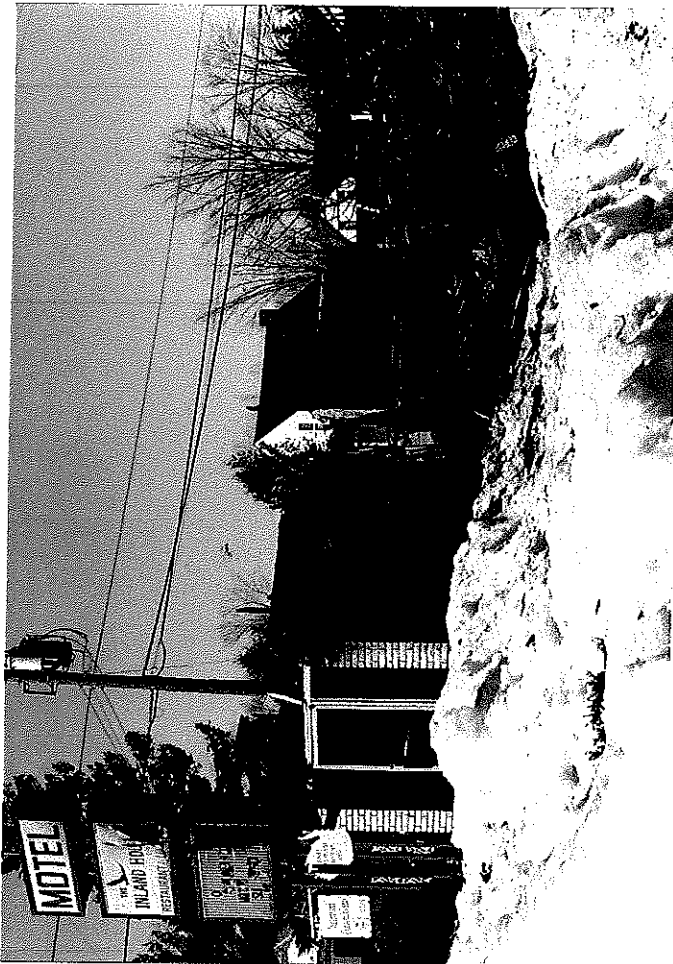
cause. That's just one possible conclusion, he explained.

The property was released to the owner Wednesday so clean-up efforts can begin, Hartman said. Hartman estimated the fire resulted in a dollar loss in excess of \$500,000.

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INLAND HOUSE

The original Inland House was built in 1879, by Merritt Blackmer, it consisted of five guest rooms. It was purchased by David Hastings in 1908 and renamed the Conway Inn. He enlarged it to 3 stories and added an eight stall boathouse. Here was the first post office. In 1914 Homer Trask purchased the hotel and named it The Inland House. There was a fire in 1985 at the Inland House that destroyed the restaurant, it was not replaced. In 2002, The Inland House sold rooms as efficiency condominiums, and an addition to the Inland house of 15 one and two bedroom condominiums in a three story structure added in 2003.

Extracted: The steamer Topinabee and The Inland Water Route of Northern Michigan.

By Mark Hill

