

55 FIREFIGHTERS CONTAIN THE BLAZE IN STE. GENEVIEVE

The Inn St. Gemme Beauvais, one of Ste. Genevieve's important historic structures and the oldest continuously operating bed and breakfast hostelry in Missouri, was severely damaged in a fire in the early morning hours of February 21.

The first sign of trouble at the 160-yearold, three-story brick structure on North Main Street was spotted by a patrolling city police officer at around 3 a.m. on Thursday. The officer approached the front door of the building and discovered smoke too thick to allow him to attempt to enter. The officer raised the alarm and the Ste. Genevieve Volunteer Fire Department was dispatched to the scene.

Ultimately seven fire departments sent equipment and staff to the fire, including departments from Bloomsdale, Zell, Weingarten, Ozora, Kinsey, St. Mary and Perryville. Over 55 firefighters worked to contain the blaze, which reports say apparently started in an area just above the first-floor kitchen located at the northeast corner of the building.



Firefighters encountered heavy smoke and fire on the upper floors of the building. Officials said it was fortunate that there were no guests or staff there who would have to have been evacuated. The inn has two rooms on its first floor and six rooms and/or suites on its upper floors.

Ste. Genevieve Fire Chief Mick Schwent said the job of fighting the fire was made more difficult because there have been multiple renovations of the structure, resulting in false walls and ceilings. Flames rapidly burned into those wall and ceiling spaces and spread to the timber framing of the building.

The ceiling of the second floor collapsed while firefighters were in the building. The collapse did not result in any injuries, but it moved the fire fight to outside the structure, with ladder trucks used to deliver water to the blaze.



Schwent said the situation was complicated by bad weather. “The serious cold and continuous sleet was a real problem,” Schwent said. “The fire scene was slippery. The firefighters’ suits and our ladders and vehicles were covered in ice. This was a tough one.” Schwent said other departments played an important role in extinguishing the fire, including the use of a longer ladder truck brought to the scene by the Perryville Fire Department.

The fire was contained by late Thursday morning, but firefighters stayed at the scene until mid-afternoon to extinguish hot spots.

By Saturday morning the state fire marshal had determined that the fire was started by heat tape wrapped around the copper sprinkler piping. The tape overheated, causing the wiring to become exposed which ignited the wood joist and ceiling structure. The tape had been installed by a previous owner.

According to Schwent, the major damage to the building was in the section where the fire started, however there was extensive smoke and water damage in other parts of the structure. Owners Jan and Cathy Brans say they hope to be able to rebuild the inn and resume operating their business.

Over the years the bed and breakfast has earned a number of honors, including a Mobil Three Star rating and a Golden Star Award from Inn Style, Inc., and has been named among the top-rated B&Bs in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch Readers’ Choice Awards. The hostelry also has been featured in national magazines.

