

Fire guts historic restaurant building

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Fire destroyed a building that has been a fixture in Wilkes County since 1932.

The Captain's Table, located in the old building on Boone Trail Road in North Wilkesboro, was gutted by a blaze that was reported at 11:35 p.m. Saturday. It believed to have been caused by a faulty fan.



When North Wilkesboro Fire Department members arrived flames were shooting from a large window in the front of the business and was quickly spreading throughout the two-story wood-frame structure, said North Wilkesboro Fire Chief Niki Hamby.

Engineer Jeff Anderson was the first on the scene, Hamby said. Anderson had been en route to an automobile accident call — he was going to assist North Wilkesboro police officers with lights from the vehicle.

Hamby said when he arrived the lower seating area on the west side of the building was engulfed in flames.

“It (the fire) had already vented through the big picture window,” Hamby said. “That’s where we started fighting the fire.”

As other firefighters arrived, arrangements were made for an interior attack of the blaze.

“We thought we had the fire out at one time, but it had got into the ceiling, the roof and additions to the building,” Hamby said. “It just kept spreading.”

Firefighters from Cricket, Broadway and Mulberry-Fairplains volunteer fire departments assisted, Hamby said. Three firefighters received slight injuries in an accident involving a ladder, he added, but none required medical attention.

Barbara Gregory, the owner of the restaurant and building, lived in the upper story of the structure but wasn’t at home at the time of the blaze.

Hamby said that Gregory told him that the last employee left the building around 11 p.m. Saturday. Hamby added that Gregory has insurance on the property.

The blaze was contained in a couple of hours, Hamby said, but firefighters remained on the scene until around 2:30 p.m. Sunday when the investigation into the cause of the blaze — assisted by State Bureau of Investigation agents — was completed.

Hamby said that it appears that a fan in a ventilation system appeared to have shorted out, causing the fire.

“We’re treating it as an accidental fire,” Hamby said. “We didn’t see anything suspicious about it. When we got there the doors were locked and there was money still in the cash register.”

The building on the side of Boone Trail Road had served as a restaurant most of the years since it was built in 1932 by Jim Williams, father of the late Ralph Williams, said Ralph Williams’ widow, Yvonne Williams.

The business was first called Tourist Lunch, but was later renamed Williams’ Restaurant after Jim Williams’ death, according to Jim’s grandson, Eric Williams.

Nettie Williams, Jim’s wife, and the couple’s daughter, Faye, ran the restaurant for many years. In the 1970s, the building was leased to Dorman Phillips, who opened The Red Baron night club there. Ralph Williams later leased the building to Jerry Moses and the name once again became Williams’ Restaurant.

In 1978, Ralph Williams sold the property to Carol and Bill Wells. They opened a seafood restaurant called The Captain’s Hut. In January 1979 Gregory bought the business and changed the name to The Captain’s Table.

When asked how she felt when she learned about the fire, Yvonne Williams said, “It just broke my heart. It was a landmark. It’s just another passing in the Williams family.”

Eric Williams was equally reminiscent and regretful.

“It was a big part of my life,” he said. “I was raised there.”