

Early-morning fire guts Anchor Inn

By Jeff Brown
Reporter staff

A fire raged through the Anchor Inn in Newville on Wednesday morning, Aug. 4, bursting through the roof and toppling the tavern's two electric signs, gutting the inside, and causing between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000 in damage, according to a press release issued by the Rock County Sheriff's Office.

No one was injured in the fire, and the large patio tent to the east of the tavern, the stage mounted on poles driven into the river bed in front of the tavern's patio and the docks to the east of the stage and the boats moored at them were all undamaged, as was the tavern's black party bus.

Just before 4 a.m., neighbors smelled smoke and called 911. Deputies raced to the tavern, a Newville landmark located along State Highway 59 at the north end of the bridge over the Rock River. By the time the deputies arrived flames were shooting from the roof.

Firefighters from the Edgerton Fire Protection District and the Milton Fire Department responded and began battling the blaze; they were joined by units from the following fire departments: Clinton, Sun Prairie, Fort Atkinson, Whitewater, Deerfield, Footville, Verona, De Forest, Cambridge and Fitchburg.

By 9 a.m., when three firefighters from Fitchburg used a ladder truck to swing into position above the tavern and loosed a stream of



No one was harmed during an early morning fire at Anchor Inn on Monday, Aug. 4, but the blaze, which originated in the kitchen, caused at estimated \$500,000 to \$1 million in damage. Above, firefighters continue to monitor the still smoking building. (Photo by Yvette B. Harris, submitted by Sandra Truax)

water into the holes in the charred roof to douse any lingering hot spots, the fire was out and most of the engines were gone.

State Highway 59 was open again after being closed at one point during the fire, but traffic was still backed up in both directions. A group of firemen, still wearing the bulky bottoms of their turnout gear and wiping their brows, gath-

ered near the rear of the EFPD's Engine 78, a tanker truck parked in the middle of the tavern's parking lot.

Along the western shoulder of the highway Fire Chief Brian Demrow gave an interview to a TV reporter. Neighbors, standing in groups of two or three and wearing grim, pensive looks on their faces, hung back behind the yellow police

tape strung around the perimeter of the parking lot and along the east side of State Highway 59 near the intersection with North Hillside Drive.

The press release said Rock County Sheriff's Office detectives, investigators from the Office of the State Fire Marshal and an investigator from the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms determined the fire began in the kitchen but were unable to determine its cause, although they do not suspect foul play.

The press release said the building was "nearly a total loss." John Kinnett, the owner of the Anchor Inn, did not return a phone call seeking comment before The Reporter went to press Tuesday night, but he told The Janesville Gazette on Monday he planned to rebuild and hoped

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Pictured here in 1930, Simon's Magic Bar stood where the Anchor Inn stands today. The frame of the farmhouse in the center of the photo still stood at the center of the Anchor Inn, which was gutted by fire Monday morning.

(Photo submitted by Marie Doty)



Anchor Inn goes up in flames in Monday morning fire

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to begin tearing down the buildings by Thursday.

The public reaction to the fire was swift and sad.

Brian Christianson, chairman of the Rock-Koshkonong Lake District board of directors, said in an email Monday night that the Anchor Inn was a "special place" that was part of his family's history as well as the community's.

"I will always remember our surprise 90th birthday party for my grandpa that turned into a family reunion," said Christianson, who lives in a house on the river just downstream from the Anchor Inn. Christianson also said a public meeting with state Department of Natural Resources officials that kicked off a recently-completed experimental dredging project on Lake Koshkonong's north shore was held under

the tavern's patio tent.

In a press release issued Monday morning, State Rep. Andy Jorgensen (D-Milton) said he was relieved no one was injured in the fire and sympathized with the Kinnetts and their customers.

"My heart goes out to the owners, employees and 'regulars' of the Anchor Inn," said Jorgensen. "I'm reaching out to those folks now because I want them to know, for everything as basic as a friend to talk with or as complex as applying for unemployment, I'm here for them."

Nobody, however, felt the loss more keenly than Newville resident Mary Lingo, who was born on July 2, 1928 in the house whose walls still formed the middle section of the Anchor Inn.

Lingo said that in the 1920s her mother ran a grocery store where Hillside Road meets Mallwood Drive, close by a one-room school

house. Lingo said her father wanted to open a tavern adjacent to the store, but it was too close to the school, so he rented the farmhouse and the clapboard-sided store where the Anchor Inn would one day stand, opened a tavern and gas station, and moved his wife's store there.

Lingo's father named his new establishment "Simon's Magic Bar."

"Daddy put on boat races and Mama had her store there," said Lingo. "We earned our spending money by bailing out the boats if it had rained so Daddy could rent the boats out."

It was an era when doctors still made house calls. "We all three had our tonsils taken out in the kitchen by Dr. Mumm from Janesville," said

Simon, referring to herself and her two siblings.

Lingo said her nephew was in town visiting from Colorado when the fire broke out Monday morning.

On Sunday, said Lingo, her nephew and several other family members met at Culver's in Newville to reminisce. They thought about going inside the Anchor Inn, said Lingo, but the tavern was having a pig roast and it was too crowded, so they decided to wait until Monday.

Now, said Lingo, her nephew will never get to see the inside of the house where his aunt was born and grew up. "It's just very sad," said Lingo. "Fire is a horrible thing."