

NORMANBY HALL AND DWELLING DESTROYED

Lack of water hampers brigade in fire.

Fire destroyed the Normanby town hall, Ketemarae Road, Normanby, and an adjacent residence early yesterday morning. The total loss is estimated at £8000, but the insurance carried by both buildings is nowhere near replacement value. Mr. J. V. Lord, owner of the house, received burns to one hand while saving furniture and household effects.

Details of loss included the records and books of the Normanby Town Board, kept in a safe in the board's office at the hall, a projector plant, speaker and screen valued at £2000 owned by Mrs. B. M. Whiting, Opunake, lessee of the picture rights of the hall and stock valued at £100 and hired plant by Mr. N. Mitchell, Normanby, lessee of the confectionery rights.

The Normanby School Committee lost a piano which had been moved from the school to the hall for practices prior to the school's break-up concert, and the Normanby Town Board lost the piano used for events in the hall.

Lack of Water

The Hawera Fire Brigade was unable to do any more than stop the fire from spreading to the Normanby Anglican Church next to Mr. Lord's house or to the residence on the other side of the hall owned and occupied by Mr. R. J. Flintoff and his wife. Because of the lack of water the brigade attempted to check the blaze by the use of bucket pumps and carried water.

The position was hopeless from the outset, as the hall was almost in a state of collapse when the brigade arrived. The proximity of Mr. Lord's home to the hall made the heat unbearable for brigadesmen and assisting residents, and efforts were concentrated on the walls of the church and Mr. Flintoff's house to prevent the fire from spreading.

The brigade was notified at 3.12 a.m. by the Hawera police who had been called by the Normanby police. The bell at the church had been rung by Mr. J. Taylor and many helpers soon gathered to assist in saving effects. A breeze was blowing across the hall towards Mr. Flintoff's house when the fire started, but this changed direction to direct the fire towards the street and so save the residence. Mr. and Mrs. Flintoff and others kept the wall of the house awash and blistering of paint and slight buckling of the roof iron was the only damage.

Being almost a community centre for the Normanby district the hall was used

for all dances, social entertainments, meetings and concerts. It is understood that the Normanby Town Hall will meet early next week to assess the position and consider possible future developments.

No Indication of Origin

The 70-year-old hall was used on Thursday night for a dance which finished at one o'clock yesterday morning. The hall was locked and all power turned off except the refrigerator. Hot water for supper had been boiled in a newly-installed copper in the kitchen, but no sign of fire was evident at about 2.30 a.m., according to advice received by the Normanby police from a resident who passed the building at that hour. Owing to the utter destruction the origin of the blaze must remain a mystery, but most probable source would be either electrical short-circuiting or a cigarette butt left burning, stated the Normanby police yesterday. There were no suspicious circumstances.

The occupants of the destroyed house were Mr. and Mrs. Lord, four sons, a daughter and a niece. All are being billeted by neighbours and friends. The house, which consisted of five rooms, was built in 1880 and three additional rooms at the back were under construction. These additions were not insured.

The hall was built in 1880 by a group of settlers who formed the Normanby Town Hall company. In 1882 it was bought by the newly-formed Normanby Town Board for £200. The house, which was built in conjunction, was originally the Normanby police station.

Recently Renovated

The original hall was 72 feet long by 32 feet wide and a supper room at the side measuring 40 feet by 15 feet was almost completed. Recently the hall, which had been renovated as a war memorial, had been fitted to serve as a picture theatre and three weeks ago the first pictures in Normanby for 20 years were shown.

"Had we been notified earlier and had there been a suitable water supply at Normanby there is little doubt that Mr. Lord's home could have been saved," stated the superintendent of the Hawera Fire Brigade, Mr. T. J. Dowdle, yesterday. "The fire probably started about 2.30 a.m. but the origin must remain unknown because of the complete damage to the building."

Appreciation of the assistance and co-operation given by the Normanby residents was expressed by Mr. Dowdle.

Mr. Flintoff stated that he immediately started to clear what was possible from his house when he knew of the fire. He could not say the exact time, but a clock which he had been carrying out of a room was dropped in the rush and when found later had stopped at 3 o'clock. The fire by this time was well under way, so this would indicate that it started between 2.30 and 3 a.m.