

The worst fears of owners and community officials alike concerning the Samoset Hotel were realized in the early morning hours of Friday, the 13th. The 93-year-old showplace that was earmarked for complete renovation was razed by fire of suspicious origin. Yet, while the ashes smoldered, developer Martin G. Olson pledged to replace it with a 150-room hotel under certain conditions.

The suspicion of arson was heightened Friday morning when a Samoset Hotel room key for Room 219 turned up in a Rockland mail box. The key contained the usual plea "If Found Please Drop in Mail Box."

When the Knox County Sheriff's Patrol noticed a glow in the sky as the car drove through Glen Cove and checked it out, the front of the hotel (ocean side) adjacent to the dining room was all ablaze. The first alarm was sounded at about 1 a.m. and the mutual aid call went in immediately. Rockport sounded first, second and general alarms. Every mainland fire department in the Knox County Mutual Aid system was involved in the operation, either at the scene or providing back-up coverage.

While firemen battled to stop the flames from engulfing the last remaining portion of the connected rambling structure in the early hours of Friday, Rockland Fire Chief James York firmly asserted, "This fire had some help," the inference being that he felt strongly that it was of incendiary origin.

Sad, Sad Night

The Sheriff's Patrol alerted caretaker Charles Foote, Sr., who was filled with tears when he realized that the hotel which he had worked so long to maintain was beyond saving. "It's a sad, sad night for me," he said. "There goes 40 years of my life." He spoke as flames burst through the roof of the help's dormitory attached to the kitchen. Firemen had tried to stop the blaze there but a blind attic permitted the fire to mushroom through the top of the three-story building and threaten firemen fighting it from the inside.

The fire had spread up through three floors and along most of the face of the hotel toward

Rockland Harbor by 1:15 a.m. Tongues of flame and clouds of firebrands soared into the sky so that firemen immediately set up lines to prevent the spread of the blaze to the Paul Arvidson

**Photos taken
by
Raymond Gross
and
John Hammer . . .
More Detailed
Pictures On
Pages 10 and 11**

and the Rhama Philbrick cottages.

By 1:45 a.m., fire had engulfed the entire main hotel, its turrets had fallen and the entire roof was breached. The roaring flames generated heat that twisted steel I-beams into ribbons and caused many explosions within the confines of the building.

Hose lines were strung from Camden Street and Waldo Avenue, Glen Street and Waldo Avenue and from a portable pump drawing salt water from the large swimming pool. Streams of water played on the intense flames just vaporized without apparent effect.

Near Miss

One Rockland fire department hose team was working on the northeast corner of the ballroom, nearest the swimming pool, when the walls crashed down. The crew ran but one man fell and a large piece of steel fire escape rammed into the soft lawn hardly five feet from where the man had fallen.

Martin G. Olson of Camden, general partner in Samoset Associates, the new owners, arrived on the scene shortly after 1:15 and after talking with Foote to determine that he and his wife were not endangered, watched the progress of the hungry flames; resigned to losing the Maine landmark.

As Rockport Town Manager Carl Betterley joined him, Olson observed, "Thank God there was no one in the place. Perhaps, if it had to go, it is a blessing that it happened now."

Ironically, Olson had put a crew to work in the hotel cleaning up debris after the former owners had auctioned off the

contents. The crew had worked in the kitchen area Thursday because Olson considered the mess there a fire hazard. No one had been working in the lobby area all day, and no one had been in the room on the front of the hotel formerly used as a television room, suspected as the possible origin of the fire. Electricity in the main hotel was shut off each night.

Also ironically, Olson, partner and engineer John Bright and architect Stephen Biggs had been working Thursday on plans for installing a sprinkler system in that part of the hotel which did not have one. The existing part of the system had not been activated since the sale of the property only a matter of days ago.

Following an earlier decision to keep all of the hotel except the dining room, the Samoset

Associates had reached a decision last week to renovate the entire hotel, while replacing some of the outbuildings.

At times the frustrating role of watching the hotel go up in flames was made worse for firemen and officials by a driving rain which found its way even under the collars of firefighters' rubber coats.

History

The basic hotel was built in 1887 and 1888 and opened as the Bay Point Hotel. The land area was known first as Bay Point, then as Jameson's Point.

The hotel was built by the W. H. Glover Company and opened July 1, 1889. In 1902, the hotel was acquired by the Rick-er interests of Poland Spring. They changed the name to Samoset. In 1906, an addition,

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Samoset Area Closed During Investigation

As state police and fire inspectors started the investigation into the suspicious blaze which leveled the landmark Samoset Hotel Friday morning, the Samoset Road area and the hotel grounds were closed off to the public. Investigators at the scene said that area would be closed through Saturday and possibly Sunday as well. The golf course was to be closed Saturday.

As daylight came and the smoke and flames had subsided to permit an overall view of the ruins of the famous resort, nothing but tons of charred timbers and red and gray coals were seen. All that was standing were a fireplace and a large furnace chimney. Screens and window glass which had blown out of the five story structure during heat explosions were strewn about the grounds.

Embers and charred bits of wood fell over every square foot of ground within 100-200 feet of the hotel, and were found throughout the point of land the landmark resort was located on. An Owls Head resident called The Courier-Gazette Friday to report that embers and debris from the Samoset had fallen on their home near the Head of the Bay at Ingrahams Hill.

Investigating the blaze are

State Police Detective George Massie and State Fire Inspector Charles Hopper. Another fire inspector, Robert Judkins, who formerly worked in this area, was also thought to be assisting in the investigation. Only one fire truck remained on the scene by 9 a.m., however, Central Maine Power Company and the New England Telephone and Telegraph Company workmen were on the scene.

Viewing the remains gives an immediate picture of the intense heat which remained throughout the blaze. In one area of the ruins, the front section of the building, a large section of steel fire escape structure had fallen into the center of the inferno and was twisted and warped out of shape like it had been made of plastic. The large fire escapes proved to be a problem in fighting the flames at the ends of the buildings, as firemen had to be ready to retreat when the structures collapsed from the walls. On the end of the front portion of the building where the cocktail lounge had been, facing the swimming pool, several firemen narrowly missed being hit by a section of the fire escape and a large section of a wall as it suddenly broke loose.