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Sun Times photo

Cape Croker hall in earlier days

Reserve fire destroys century-old building

CAPE CROKER — A New Year's Eve fire completely destroyed a century-old landmark on the Cape Croker Indian Reserve.

Flames still burned Tuesday afternoon in the debris of the two-storey frame structure built in 1879 for the band council and used more recently as a community hall and library.

"It's something that can't be replaced," Chief Frank Solomon said Tuesday.

He said if the reserve's volunteer fire department had been called to the scene at 11:45 p.m., when it is believed the fire started, instead of 45 minutes later, the building might have been saved.

"We can just be thankful no one was hurt," he said.

Approximately 50 people were at a dance in the hall when the fire was discovered in the northeast corner above the ceiling. "I guess they tried to put it out themselves," he said.

The building was not covered by in-

surance, and Solomon estimated damage between \$80,000 and \$100,000, which included the books, projectors and other equipment kept there.

It is believed the fire resulted from an overloaded electrical circuit.

The Wiarion volunteer fire brigade was called in to assist but Solomon said there was really nothing either department could do.

He said by the time the reserve truck arrived the blaze was "too far gone", and all crews could do was try to control the flames.

A 50 by 60 foot addition to the hall had been planned and construction was expected to start next week.

Traditionally, the council hosts a new year's eve feast, but Solomon said the money usually spent on the celebration was allocated for a grand opening party to mark completion of the addition.

"Now it's back to the drawing board," he said.