

The Grand Dame of White Mountains resorts succumbed to the ravages of time and the incendiary torch on Sunday, November 20th, 1977. The historic Crawford House, once the grandest of the Grand Hotels suffered the fate of so many of its predecessors as it blazed into history.

The 165 room wooden structure was the first pre-fabricated structure in New Hampshire and was completed in less than three months. It took only 3½ hours for it to disappear in a spectacular conflagration.

Twin Mt. fire chief, Gary Whitcomb, received the first call Nov. 20th at 8:30 AM from the N.H. Highway Dept. camp nearby. On arrival at the scene it was discovered that the entire third floor in the front was fully involved.

Chief Whitcomb indicated that the fire began in the third floor front wing and was obviously set. Whether intentionally torched or started by accident by someone unlawfully spending the night in the vacant hotel has never been fully determined. Whitcomb leans to the incendiary theory due to the nature of the fire's involvement throughout the whole third floor almost simultaneously and against the prevailing wind at the time which was coming out of the Northwest.

At 11:35 AM that morning the last chimney collapsed in the East wing ending the Crawford House's colorful career. All told there were ten fire trucks and fifty men on the scene to control the fire from Twin Mt., Bethlehem, Franconia and Whitefield. Water was drawn from nearby Saco pond.

Strong Northwest winds blowing against the back of the hotel slowed progress of the fire but blew smoke and sparks down into Crawford Notch and Elephant's Head Cut. At one time sparks touched off a pile of railroad ties near the depot.

Crawford House - 1859-1977

The first section of the hotel to collapse from the fire was the front center wing and lobby area followed by the center wing, dining room area, employees wing (west extension), the kitchens and the final section the rear North end of the massive East wing.

The hotel closed in the Fall of 1975 due to lack of business brought on by the need for extensive repairs. It could not compete with newer properties. The furnishings and fixtures were sold off in an outstanding four day auction on July 26-29, 1976. (Appalachia Dec. 1976, pg. 84) The remaining shell had been vandalized and was being prepared for demolition by its owners prior to the fire.

In its day, it had hosted Americas social elite, five U.S. Presidents beginning with Andrew Johnson, as well as numerous artists, poets and writers. One of its last major functions was the AMC/SPNHF celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Crawford Path in 1969 and the National conference of State Park Directors in 1972. Nameplates were affixed to the doors of many of the rooms to commemorate those who had stayed there.

National news wire services made note of its passing as did Paul Harvey News. Those few hardy souls, including the writer, who braved the blustery cold of November in Crawford Notch to watch the Crawford House's final day of infamy were witnessing the end of an era.