

Flames Raze Palatial Vanderbilt Mansion

Sands Point—Cedar Knoll, palatial home of the Vanderbilt clan, was reduced to a smoking ruin yesterday afternoon, when fire of undetermined origin swept through the 24-room house. Damage was conservatively estimated at \$250,000.

All companies of the Port Washington Fire Department rushed to the scene when the



In early stage of fire which reduced palatial, 70-year-old Vanderbilt home to ruins, firemen clamber over roof as hoses play on flames.

alarm was sounded at 4:50 P. M. A Coast Guard fireboat, stationed at City Island across the Sound, sped to the blaze after a pall of smoke had been seen five miles away.

The fire was discovered by Arthur Seaman, superintendent. The estate is used as a Summer home by Mrs. Margaret Emerson, mother of Alfred G. and George Vanderbilt, and Mimi Baker Topping. Seaman, who was in his lodge saw the flames darting from the third floor of the white stucco building. He immediately called the fire department and rushed into the burning house to try to quench the flames.

When the fire boat arrived, its crew, under the direction of Chief W. B. Sweeney, ran 1,200 feet of hose to the house and started pumping water into the flames at the rate of 2,500 gallons per minute. One fireman climbed to the coping of the house and gave directions to his mates aboard the ship by semiphore signals.

200 Firemen on Scene

More than 200 of the 300 Port Washington firemen arrived with all fire department equipment. The Manhasset-Lakeville Fire Department was called to stand guard in Port Washington during their absence.

Firemen and police rushed into the burning house again and again to rescue furniture, rugs, paintings and priceless relics. Smoldering ashes and sprays of

water covered an area of more than 200 feet around the mansion.

For two hours, the firemen worked unceasingly before the blaze was brought under control.

Curious onlookers, forgetful of gas and tire rationing, came from miles around, attracted by the belching smoke. They were kept off the grounds by police guards.

Portraits Saved

Portraits of the many Vanderbilts were successfully saved and hurried away to neighboring houses. The family silver, kept in a basement vault, is still intact.

Mrs. Emerson, who is spending the summer in Northern, N. Y. State was notified. It was not learned whether or not she would fly down to direct salvage work.

Peter Lynch, deputy fire com-

missioner, announced after investigation of the ruins, that he was unable to determine the cause of the fire which apparently had started in a small room used to



Alfred G. Vanderbilt →

store clothing, old papers and furs.

At the height of the blaze, over-excited rescuers could be seen carrying bizarre looking objects back and forth, seemingly unable to set them down. One man carried a foot-high ebony elephant

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around the grounds several times before someone took it from him and placed it on the ground.

A glass topped porch table sat next to a Chippendale Wing chair on the scorched lawns. First editions and autographed copies of best sellers and classics lay over a Sheraton couch and overturned primitive porch chairs.

Hurricane lamps, some crashed in the excitement, were side by side with pie crust tables and hand carved teak figurines. Brilliant red and yellow Spanish shawls sheltered scorched alabaster bowls and vases.

The grounds, separated from the Sound by a huge tiled swim-

ming pool, were muddied and the well-kept lawn torn by rushing feet.

The Georgian Colonial house was built about 70 years ago by John Wesley Harper as his summer home, but has been remodeled twice since, the last time by Mrs. Emerson when she had her whole family home. She added indoor and outdoor courts, a swimming pool recreation room.

The place was the scene of a brilliant social function when only daughter, Mimi Baker, glamour girl of her season, made her debut. The house was filled with art objects which Mrs. Emerson collected in her trips around the world.

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