

'No beersies in Manaia now'



CATHERINE GROENESTEIN AND LEIGHTON KEITH

Smouldering debris and memories are all that is left of a South Taranaki hotel after a fire ravaged the building.

The small town of Manaia has been left without a pub after the 110-year-old Waimate Hotel caught fire about 4:13am yesterday.

Nine fire engines and 36 firefighters from seven brigades responded to the call.

Firefighters were able to contain the blaze so it did not spread to the FourSquare building next door, which had been a concern, Chief fire officer Shane Taylor, of the Manaia volunteer fire brigade, said.

The origin of the blaze is unknown but investigations are being carried out.

Because the two-storey building had collapsed inwards, layers of debris needed damping down for several hours yesterday.

A fire appliance from New Plymouth with a long arm was being used to pour water from above the smoking remains.

South Taranaki District mayor Ross Dunlop said there seemed to have been a "real spate of fires" over the last few months in the district.

The Hawera Intermediate School was razed in October 2015, and fire ripped through the Smith Brothers Trading Company, on South Rd, on February 12.

He said the pub was a feature of the town.

"It's like a community meeting place," he said.

"There will be lots of good memories of the pub."

Neighbours Wayne and Gwen Thomson, who live two doors down from the hotel, said they



Smouldering debris and memories are all that is left of a South Taranaki hotel after a fire ravaged the building on Monday morning.

were woken by the current owners knocking on their door just after 4am, asking them to call the fire brigade.

The couple are both former owners of the hotel, but had met and married since.

Gwen Thomson still worked at the hotel and had been working in the bar there on Sunday night.

She finished work about 7pm. "It's devastating," she said. "It was part of our social life as well as work."

The couple watched as the hotel burned, with the main part of the building collapsing at 5:25am.

Initially it had appeared the fire was on the south end of the building and they had hoped the public bar could be saved, but this was not the case.

"There's no beersies in Manaia now," Wayne Thomson said.

Wayne said he owned the hotel from 1992 to around 1999, and Gwen owned it between 2001 and 2006.

He had moved to the Bay of Plenty but on a visit back to Manaia

had met Gwen, who was then running the hotel.

"I got smitten and had to come back from Tauranga," he said.

John Graham, who is president of the Manaia RSA, said he was sad to see the hotel gone.

It was the town's only pub as a second, the New Commercial, burned down 10 years ago and had not been rebuilt.

Graham's wife Noeline had lost her own business, a drapery shop, to a huge fire some years before, and he said he was feeling for the hotel's owners. "I wouldn't wish a fire on anybody."

He had fond memories of the Waimate Hotel he said, and still enjoyed a drink there from time to time.

"We used to get changed there [at the hotel] and go and play [rugby] at the Waimate Park, then head back there afterwards."

"I have some great memories there, great memories."

An inferno rages at the Waimate Hotel in Manaia. The origin of the blaze was unknown but investigations would be carried out.



The building was 110 years old.