

Chapter 4:

The Fire at Paxton Lodge

On Thursday, April 16, 1981, at 2:25 PM, a fire broke out at Paxton. The fire, which was believed to have started from a spark in the chimney, burned the sto story and roof of the lodge. If it wasn't for the incredible reaction time of the Erickson Logging Company, the entire building surely would have burnt to the ground.

Residents on the bottom story of the lodge smelled smoke, but thought it was coming from the barbecue on the patio outside. When they realized it was coming form the blazing roof of the building, they did what they could, fighting it with a small hose and pulling flaming shingles from the roof. The Quincy District Fire Department had dispatched 3 trucks to Greenville to fight a debris burn which had gotten away. When they got news of the lodge being on fire, they immediately sent one of the three trucks to the scene. This truck and the two Forest Service units that arrived on the scene all had impressive reaction times, but it was the lightning fast reactions of the Erickson Logging Company and it's skycrane, which was logging nearby at Twain that saved the lodge.

"Once we knew about it, we were there in three minutes," said Frank Stewart of the Erickson Company.

"Flames were shooting out of the roof and windows and several trees in the front of the lodge were ablaze," said John Gay of the Forest Service.

Total manpower fighting the fire was twenty people. With only these people, the building would not have stood a chance of surviving. They did what they could, removing furniture and other valuables from the lodge, but most were helpless to fight the fire itself. Although it was nearly contained after 4, the skycrane made 25 trips between the lodge and the river just below. 1000 gallons of water were dropped on the flames each trip. Fearing that the immense weight of the water would collapse the entire building, the owner cut holes in the floors of each story with a chainsaw so the water would funnel through them and relieve the pressure. Luckily, the Erickson Company had decided to pick up it's water bucket just the day before. Without it, they, too, would have been helpless to do anything about the blaze.



The skycrane dumping water on the blazing roof of the lodge in April of 1981.



UNDER CONTROL--Despite roaring flames that quickly consumed the roof and the interior of the second floor, Forest Service fire

fighters and Erickson Air Crane had the blaze under control within a short time. The bottom floor

suffered water and smoke damage, but the flames were contained before they could drop lower.

Fire fighters fighting the fire at the lodge in April of 1981.

From below, the Forest Service was somewhat helpless as they were not able, legally, to fight the structural fire. They could not even help the skycrane by telling it how close to the lodge to get because they did not share the same radio frequency. Instead, a smaller helicopter hovered around the lodge and directed the larger skycrane.

Although no one was injured in the blaze the building was not completely saved. The lodge was not covered by fire insurance and the bottom two stories suffered water and smoke damage. The estimated cost of the skycrane was nearly \$4,000, although the Erickson Company never charged Paxton for it, saying *“If we can’t help each other, what type of a world would this be?”* The estimated cost of the remodeling would be \$125,000-\$150,000.

The community response was incredible, with citizens donating clothes, materials, and money. In addition to this, the Sloop Ricket Band offered an inexpensive benefit featuring themselves to anyone who wanted to come on May 17th.

Everyone who helped, whether by donating goods, or by fighting the fire at the lodge was aware of just how close they were to losing this historic building completely, and knew how lucky they were not to.



Paxton Lodge as it appeared in April of 1981, shortly after the top story and roof burned.



Paxton Lodge Benefit

featuring

THE SLOOP-RICKETT BAND

THE VERANDA SISTERS

TERRY & KIM ROGERS

& OTHER SPECIAL GUESTS

PLUS

DRAWING FOR A MIXED CORD OF FIREWOOD

Sunday, May 17th - 1:00 p.m.

PAXTON ... come down to enjoy a full
afternoon of music & fun!

admission \$3.00 at bridge {children under 12 free}
refreshments welcome!

A flyer advertising the benefit held at Paxton on May 17, 1981, shortly after the fire.