

Fire destroys Galey home at

Unlucky circumstances combine to prevent owner from summoning firefighters in time

By Jean Heller
Staff Writer

The main house at the historic White Grass Ranch burned virtually to the ground Saturday afternoon after an incredible set of circumstances prevented the lone occupant, Nona Galey, from doing anything to stop the fire or summon help in time to save the building.

The fire, which has been ascribed to faulty wiring, was discovered about 1:30 Saturday afternoon, but the first alarm was not received by the fire station at Grand Teton National Park headquarters in Moose until 1:55 p.m.

Galey recalled those horror-filled 25 minutes with disbelief during an interview with the *Jackson Hole Guide* Monday.

"I was upstairs in my bedroom in the south end of the house, and I smelled smoke," she recalled. "I ran downstairs in my stocking feet, and one corner of the office ceiling on the north side of the house was in flames.

"There was a fire extinguisher right there, and I grabbed it, but it didn't work. I couldn't believe it. We have it recharged every year. There was no reason it shouldn't have worked.

"I ran outside to where the garden hose was coiled and attached it to the tap right by the door. But it was frozen, and I couldn't get it to work.

"By this time, the fire had spread. I ran to the phone to call for help, but it was dead. That was really strange because the phone comes into the house on the south side, and that's the last place the fire reached. The telephone company people have told me there was no reason for the phone to have gone dead, but it did."

In desperation, Galey drove to the nearest home where she called for assistance. But, according to Ed Christian, the park's acting chief ranger, by the time fire fighters arrived, the house was totally involved, and nothing could be done to save it.

"I couldn't save anything, not my clothes or my jewelry or any of our family things," Galey said, near tears. "I was here alone. It was just awful. Incredible. Nothing worked. Not the fire extinguisher or the hose or the telephone. If the phone had worked, we could have saved at least the south half of the house."

According to Christian, the Moose firefighters called the Jackson station

out for backup, "but we were unable to slow the fire at all."

The Jackson trucks left the scene about 5:30 p.m. while the Moose fire fighters "mopped up," he said.

Galey was treated at St. John's Hospital for smoke inhalation.

The fire was investigated by officials from Grand Teton National Park, Teton County and the state Fire Marshal's office, "and it appears faulty, overheated wiring in the attic is the culprit," Christian said.

There is no estimate of damage, he added, "but the house is gone and with it a lot of very nice things, the type of things you accumulate over years of living in one place."

Galey said she was able to save several of her house pets, although two cats are missing. She said she hopes they were able to get out of the house through doors that were open before flames engulfed the building.

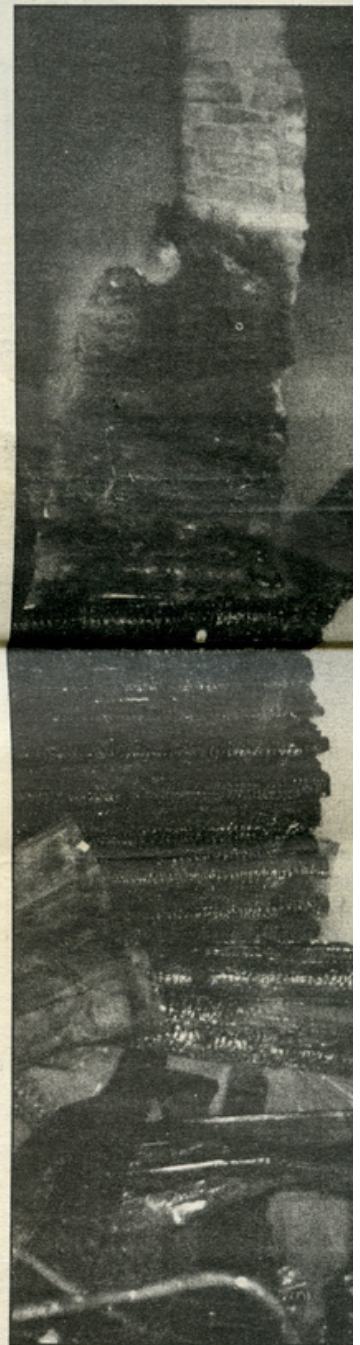
The fire was the latest grief in a terrible year for Nona Galey.

On July 6, her husband, Frank, died of a heart attack, and in September, a liquidation auction sold off virtually everything that had belonged to the White Grass Ranch except Galey's personal belongings in the main house.

The White Grass, which took its name from the Indian word for sagebrush, was the oldest operating dude ranch in Jackson Hole when Frank Galey died.

His association with the operation dated to 1919, the same year the first dudes arrived. He was two at the time, and visited the ranch with his mother, Marian Galey, who later married Harold Hammond, the man who originally homesteaded one of the 160-acre par-

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A lone fireman is nearly exhausted at White Grass Ranch

U.P. upgrade stayed pe

By Jean Heller
Staff Writer

Moving swiftly against a deadline, Forest Service Chief Max Peterson has stayed any improvements to the Union Pass road system, effectively delaying road and logging work in the area by the Louisiana-Pacific Corp. at least until the middle of next summer.

Conservationists who had opposed the road improvements immediately applauded the decision while an official

of Louisiana-Pacific said it represented a basic change in Forest Service attitudes about the uses of forest

L-P had been ready to begin Monday on 3.8 miles of primitive road that connects the Upper Green and Union Pass road systems. Improvements would have provided a shortcut for logging trucks to transport timber from L-P's Little Sheep timber sale to its lumber town Dubois.

On Friday, however, Peterson



Tom Georges/ Guide photo

Jackson Police Investigator Dave Foster, left, and Deputy State Fire Marshal Tim Reikofsky peruse the ruins of the Galey home.

Fire

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cells that made up the ranch.

Frank Galey later operated, and then owned White Grass.

From 1957 until his death, Galey was only the nominal owner of most of the property. The ranch was located within the boundaries of Grand Teton National Park, and in 1957, Galey sold 301 acres to the park. The last six acres were sold in 1983, but Galey retained

the right to live on and operate the ranch.

When Galey died, the park took possession of the ranch although Nona Galey retained the right to live in the main ranch building—the building which burned—for the rest of her life.

On Monday, Galey, obviously distraught, said she had no idea what she was going to do.

“Am I going to rebuild?,” she asked. “I don’t know. That’s like asking if I’m going to remarry. I haven’t any idea what I’m going to do next.”