



In October 1934, the Hermitage was completely destroyed by fire. Alma Dick-Lauder refused to move. However, she camped out on the front lawn of the estate until a house could be built for her inside the ruins.



Alma's house inside the ruins until her death in 1942.

### HISTORIC MANSION FALLS PREY TO CONFLAGRATION

Home of Mrs. Alma Dick-Lauder Burns

NEAR MINERAL SPRINGS

Part of Priceless Contents Destroyed

The Hermitage, historic mansion on the Mineral Springs road, surrounded by its acres of park land, framed in a setting of ancient oaks, to-day lies a smoking mass of ruins. Fire swept the structure, owned by Mrs. Alma Dick-Lauder, shortly after noon and left it practically destroyed, notwithstanding the efforts of the Ancaster fire department, which responded to the call for assistance.

#### Flames Unchecked

The flames, under impetus by a strong breeze, swept through the structure, battering on time-dried wainscoting and blazing through rooms, which many years ago, saw the "county" entertained.

The house, the old Leith homestead, stands in graciously sloping park lands in the centre of a farm, guarded by an old stone fence at the entrance gates, from which the house is reached by a winding driveway. Built about 85 years ago of native limestone, with the dignified architecture employed by the pioneers of the district, the dwelling was well known through the countryside, as is Mrs. Lauder, its occupant for many years past.

Although of a retiring disposition, Mrs. Lauder is very well known in the district and she is a connection of many of the older families in the Ancaster and Hamilton area.

#### Inestimable Loss

Lost in the fire were priceless heirlooms, furniture, first editions and engravings, which had been in the family for generations. Despite the efforts of the household, assisted by neighbours and members of the Ancaster department, little was saved, as the dried timbers fed the flames, which spread with great rapidity.

The fire was thought to have started from a spark from one of the chimneys lighting on the roof.

(Continued on page 16.)

...cheon party was in progress when the fire broke out, with Mrs. Sanford Carpenter, Mrs. Fred Hutchison and Mrs. T. G. Anderson as guests. It was Mrs. Anderson who first heard a crackling sound, and went upstairs to investigate. She discovered that the whole top floor of the house was a seething mass of flames.

#### Some Valuables Saved

The Ancaster fire department was called immediately and responded rapidly. When the firemen arrived, however, the whole upper storey of the house was in flames, and all the contents of the second floor had been ignited. So sturdy was the construction of the building, however, the flames were slow in breaking through to the ground floor, and it was possible for the firemen to clear this part of all furniture and valuables.

#### Col. Clifford Hurt

Colonel E. W. Clifford, member of the Ancaster volunteer fire brigade, suffered a nasty head injury when he was struck by a falling fragment of glass. The hurt was not a serious one, however.

An irreparable loss to the community and to the literary world has been suffered in the burning at the Hermitage of some original Hogarth and Archer sketches. These were highly prized by the family, in whose keeping they have remained for many years. There were, too, many priceless books from the Leith library, and furniture brought out from the family estates in Scotland.

The Hermitage has been for years an Ancaster landmark. A beautiful old stone mansion, it was set back in rolling park land at the head of the Sulphur Springs hill. The estate comprises many acres of fine bush and fertile field. It has been the homestead of the Leith family for many years.

Mrs. Alma Dick-Lauder, the present owner and tenant of the Hermitage, is the youngest daughter of George Gordon Browne Leith, from whom she inherited the estate. Her grandfather was Major-General Sir George Leith, Bart., K.C.B.



Interior view of Alma's house within the ruins.



A second blaze broke out last night in the ruins of the Hermitage, Mineral Springs home of Mrs. Alma Dick-Lauder, which was practically destroyed by fire yesterday afternoon. The above photograph taken by the Spectator cameraman, shows the historic mansion at the height of the conflagration, during which many heirlooms were saved by efforts of neighbours and members of the Ancaster fire department.

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