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## Body found at site of blaze

Publication Northwest Herald

Date March 22, 2005

Section(s) Main

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WOODSTOCK - Firefighters found a body in the basement of the county's oldest church building while fighting a Monday afternoon fire that destroyed the 19th-century landmark.

Firefighters found the body about an hour into fighting the blaze in the 156-year-old building, which had been converted into a home, Woodstock Fire-Rescue District Chief Ralph Webster said.

Officials were unable to identify the body Monday evening.

Webster said firefighters tried to enter and search the home at 3708 Franklinville Road immediately after they arrived at the scene about 12:40 p.m. But the condition of the building and intensity of the fire prohibited fire crews from reaching every part of the building, Webster said.

Webster said that when fire officials received word of the fire, they were told that an "invalid" lived there but were given no other information about the resident's physical condition.

"Based on the uncertainty of the structure's stability, we had to focus our efforts on the fire fight," Webster said. "We just didn't have the manpower to fight the fire and search the building."

Several sources confirmed that the man who lived at the residence was **David Cramer**, a former Woodstock School District 200 custodian. Cramer retired last year after working more than 30 years for the district, officials said.

Webster said the ground floor of the building had caved into the basement by the time firefighters arrived.

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"We encountered some difficulties in attacking this fire because of debris in all parts of the house," Webster said. "It's also been modified and partitioned off through the years, which makes this more difficult."

Webster said the building was a complete loss, with damage estimated at \$250,000.

The building, which was built in 1849, housed two congregations and the Seneca Grange before becoming a home, McHenry County Historical Society officials said.

Neighbors who gathered to watch the fire said they did not know the current occupant of the home but they had been inside the building before.

Trisha Doornbosch has lived across the street from the former church for 25 years.

"It's a shame," Doornbosch said as she watched firefighters saw into the roof of the home. "It is a shame."



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## Coroner IDs man found in fire

Publication Northwest Herald

Date March 23, 2005

Section(s) Main

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By ROB PHILLIPS

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WOODSTOCK - Police on Tuesday confirmed the identity of the man found in the basement of his burning home, had been McHenry County's oldest standing church building.

**David Cramer**, 53, was identified by McHenry County coroner's officials through dental records, Deputy Coroner Paula Gallas said.

Firefighters found Cramer's body about an hour after they started fighting the Monday afternoon blaze that destroyed the 156-year-old building, which was a church that had been converted into a home. The building sits on Franklinville Road between South Street and Route 176, southwest of Woodstock.

Investigators still are trying to determine what started the fire.

Gallas said a Tuesday morning autopsy would remain incomplete until toxicology results confirm whether Cramer died as a result of the fire or by natural causes. It is possible that Cramer died before the fire began, Gallas said.

"He had certain conditions at autopsy time that indicate this could be natural," she said. "At this time, we don't see any trauma that would indicate anything else."

Friends of Cramer described him as a quiet man, a hard worker, and an antiques lover.

They called him a "gentle giant" who they would see combing local auctions for antiques. The retired school custodian stored numerous vintage cars outside his unique Franklinville Road home.

"There wasn't a bad bone in the boy's body," said Mark Pitcher, Woodstock District 200 director of buildings and grounds.

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Cramer worked for more than 30 years as a custodian at District 200 schools. He retired in 2004 because of health concerns, officials said.

Tony Vanagas, a Woodstock resident and former District 200 employee, said he stopped by Cramer's home Saturday.

"He seemed to be feeling as good as he ever felt," Vanagas said.

Cramer walked with a cane because of problems related to his legs, Vanagas said.

Colleagues said that Cramer worked hard for the school district, something he had done since he was in his early 20s.

"He was on the quiet side," said Jeff Bruns, the head custodian at Olson Middle School. "He just wanted to go about his work and do it."

Friends said that Cramer wasn't married and didn't have any children. Family members couldn't be reached for comment.

"He was a tall guy who was very at ease and very easy to get along with," said Bob Hackbart, principal at Northwood Middle School. "He was just very polite and respectful of others."