National Post Newspaper

Cape Breton Presbyterian church 'went up like a matchbox'

Tristin Hopper   Dec 19, 2011 – 9:30 AM ET

Instead of attending service on Sunday morning, Presbyterians in the Cape Breton community of East Lake Ainslie gathered in their church clothes on Sunday morning to watch their 131-year-old church burn to the ground.

"The congregation came to see if there was anything we could do, but it was out of our hands … she just went up like a matchbox," said Rev. Louis Ihasz, pastor of the East Lake Ainslie Presbyterian Church.

It was the second Presbyterian church on Cape Breton Island to burn down in a matter of days. In Birch Grove, Nova Scotia the 99-year-old Victoria Presbyterian Church burned down in the early morning hours of Dec. 10 after a fire broke out in the church's attic.

"It's unusual, I've never been involved in a presbytery where there's been one [church fire], never mind two," said Rev. Robert Lyle, interim moderator for the East Lake Ainslie church.

On Sunday, Dec. 11, a fire also levelled an 107-year-old Roman Catholic Church on the Kingsclear First Nation just outside Fredericton, N.B.

In 40 years as a Nova Scotia firefighter, Cape Breton Regional Fire Service Deputy Chief Brent Denny estimates he has attended about one church fire every eight years. They rarely end well: Old, dry and airy, churches are "generally hard to save," said Mr. Denny.
  Two church fires in eight days is certainly odd, but Mr. Denny chalks it up to a coincidence. So far, neither of the Nova Scotia fires have aroused suspicion — although the RCMP are still probing the fire in New Brunswick.

In many Atlantic communities, churches are often the oldest structure in town. "It's unusual to have regularly-used 100-year-old buildings in a community that aren't churches," said Mr. Denny. The longevity of 19th and early 20th century churches has made them picturesque community centrepieces — but it has also left them uniquely flammable.

The aging structures are often laced with frayed electrical wiring and outmoded heating and hot water systems, said Mr. Denny. On top of it all, the old dry wood of the historic buildings has a much lower "kindling point."

The risk of fire goes up during the winter as churches start up their long-dormant heating boilers, overload their electrical circuits with Christmas lights and deck the walls with flammable pine boughs and Christmas trees.

In East Lake Ainslie, smoke was already pouring out of the church's steeple when Mr. Ihasz arrived on the scene. Volunteer fire fighters quickly turned water on the structure, but "within a very short time, flames broke through [the roof] and then more oxygen got in," said Mr. Ihasz.

Mr. Ihasz maintains he has always kept a close watch on fire safety. "Every time I go to a congregation I say, 'What kind of electrical wiring have you got, should it be updated? What kind of furnace have you got?… I insist that everything be brought up to standard," said Mr. Ihasz.

Ironically, he suspects the culprit may have the church's recently-installed furnace.

In Birch Grove, Presbyterian officials are skeptical the church will ever be rebuilt, given that the congregation was only about 10 families.

In East Lake Ainslie, Mr. Ihasz says he has no idea what the future holds for the still-smoldering site of his church, which has hosted a church of some kind for more than 175 years. In the meantime, he is focused on healing a shocked congregation.

"We've got to cry together, to watch that church go it was just like a death in the family — and I'm sure a lot of people who grew up in that church feel the same way," said Mr. Ihasz.

National Post

Cape Breton Post Newspaper

EAST LAKE AINSLIE — An intense fire razed a 131-year-old church in the Inverness County countryside Sunday, leaving parishioners without a place of worship only one week away from Christmas.

Topics :
    Presbyterian Church , Historic Inverness County church , Cape Breton church , Inverness County , Lake Ainslie Volunteer Fire , Whycocomagh

The historic East Lake Ainslie Presbyterian Church was fully engulfed in flames when firefighters from the Lake Ainslie Volunteer Fire Department arrived on scene shortly after 9 a.m., said Mike Gillis, deputy fire chief.
"We're not sure if it was related to the furnace or electrical. It's really hard to say right now," he said. While the cause of the fire isn't known, it's not believed to be suspicious. No one was in the church at the time.
Sunday service had been expected to get underway at 11 a.m. All that remains of the building is the foundation, Gillis said. The deputy fire marshal has been notified of the fire.
Crews from fire departments in Whycocomagh and Inverness were also called in for assistance. An ambulance was placed on standby. This was the second Cape Breton church to be gutted by fire in the last eight days.
On Dec. 10, the Victoria Presbyterian Church in Birch Grove was reduced to rubble after a fire destroyed the century-old building.
The East Lake Ainslie church had the oldest continuing congregation in the Cape Breton presbytery, dating back to 1833.
The church building was the third to be built at that location, including a log church in 1855, a second church was built in 1857-58, and the present structure was erected in 1880.

Gillis said the congregation was planning to have its annual Christmas dinner at its church hall on Sunday. Firefighters kept spraying the hall down with water as the flames began shooting from the church's roof and steeple.

"The building was beyond saving. We kept the water to the surrounding areas and the hall next door just to protect everything around it," he said.

"Not having the church is a big impact to us. It was kind of the centrepiece of the community for sure."

The fire departments stayed on scene throughout the afternoon and evening to ensure all smouldering debris had cooled.

Inverness County warden Duart MacAulay said he was still finding out details about the church fire late Sunday afternoon.

MacAulay, who represents the area as District 4 councillor, said it's a huge loss for the small community of East Lake Ainslie.

"It would be quite devastating to the community down there whether the size of the congregation is large or small," he said.

"I'll be in touch with the people at the congregation (today)." Immediate plans for the Christmas church service haven't been released.

Church pastor Rev. Louis Ihasz couldn't be reached for comment.

cshannon@cbpost.com

CTV NEWS

A 129-year-old church was destroyed in a fire Sunday morning in Nova Scotia.

Fire departments in Cape Breton from Whycocomagh, Inverness and Lake Ainslie were all called to the East Lake Ainslie Presbyterian Church at 9 a.m. to battle the blaze.

Const. Brad Anderson with the Inverness RCMP said although there was a lot of smoke coming from the building when he arrived on the scene at about 9:40 a.m., there were no visible flames.

"However, within about half hour the flames had made their way through the roof of the church and in another half hour is was pretty clear the church wasn't going to be saved," Anderson said on Sunday.

"It was pretty much fully engulfed by that time."

Anderson says the church was built in 1882, but the congregation dates back to 1833. He said it was first built as a log church and was rebuilt in the mid-1880s before being rebuilt once again.

He said the church hall and nearby homes were not damaged.

"Certainly, there are no other buildings at risk at this point," he said.

He said the church was well used by the community.

Police do not view the fire as suspicious.

This is the third church to burn down in the Maritimes in recent weeks. The Victoria Presbyterian Church in Birch Grove, Nova Scotia, was just months away from its 100th anniversary when it was reduced to rubble on December 10.
  The next day, the Roman Catholic church on the Kingsclear First Nation reserve near Fredericton was destroyed in another blaze.

Presbyterian Record

Presbyterian Church Goes Up in Flames
Second one this month.
by Connie Wardle

posted on December 20, 2011 in News |

On the fourth Sunday in Advent, members of the congregation of East Lake Ainslie Presbyterian watched their church burn to the ground.
Firefighters were called to the 133-year-old church around 9 a.m. on Dec. 18, but flames soon poured out of the roof and the wooden structure was beyond saving.
"It was like you were seeing it and it almost wasn't real," said Johnena MacLelland, clerk of session. "It's so hard to explain. It's like you didn't believe it was really happening."
Volunteer firefighters couldn't even reach historic plaques mounted on the church, said Charles MacDonald Jr., son of a former clerk of session.
It was the second Presbyterian church in Cape Breton to be destroyed by fire this month. Victoria, Birch Grove, whose congregation was preparing to celebrate its centennial anniversary next year,
was reduced to a blackened heap in the early hours of Dec. 10. Police are not considering either of the fires suspicious.
Old wooden churches are usually dry and once burning they are "generally hard to save," Brent Denny, deputy chief of the Cape Breton Regional Fire Service, told the National Post.
 Electrical wiring and heating systems are often to blame for starting such fires.
Both congregations were small, with between 10 and 25 regularly attending members. Both buildings were insured.
The congregation of East Lake Ainslie had planned a turkey dinner to be held the evening of the fire. It was postponed until Tuesday,
 when it was held in the church hall—a building separate from the historic church—which escaped unscathed. The congregation still plans to hold its Christmas Eve

service at the local United church, and expects to continue meeting in their hall as they plan for the future.

"For members of the [East Lake Ainslie] congregation, their parents and grandparents were members of that church," said MacLellan. "Our ancestors when they came here started that church. It's a vital part of the community."

It was the third church to have stood on the site since the congregation was established in 1833.

Read more: http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Canada/20111218/ainslie_church_111218/#ixzz1hI2BqMh2

Herald News Newspaper

SUNDAY WAS A SAD DAY in this small, Inverness County community as the historic East Lake Ainslie Presbyterian Church burned to the ground.

"It was a 129-year-old church and now it's gone," said Const. Brad Anderson of the RCMP's Inverness detachment.

"Someone came in early to turn the heat on for the service early this morning," Anderson said during a telephone interview Sunday. "Shortly after 9 a.m., the call came in that the church was on fire."

By the time he arrived, Anderson said, volunteer firefighters from Whycocomagh, Inverness and Lake Ainslie were at the scene.

"There was heavy smoke coming out but I thought there might be a chance to save it, but within half an hour flames were coming through the roof.

"It's an old, old building and it was tinder dry, so it was not an easy fire to fight," he added.

The old church overlooked beautiful Lake Ainslie and featured a unique steeple on the front side of the building.

Rev. Louis Ihasz said the 25-member congregation is just so saddened by the fire.

"We were to have our congregation Christmas dinner in the church hall (Sunday) but that was cancelled because of this," said Ihasz.

"This is like a death and we have to come together and grieve and I plan to get

everyone together very soon," he added during a telephone interview.

The building was insured but the minister was not sure of the payout amount.

"It probably won't be enough to build a new one," he said.

As for whether or not a new church will be built, Ihasz said that would be up to the congregation.

"There should be a Presbyterian church there because there always has been, since the congregation was formed in 1833," he said.

The building was the third church built on the site. The first was made of logs and was erected in 1855.

Meanwhile, Anderson said volunteers kept showing up Sunday morning to make sandwiches and tea for the tired firefighters.

"It's hard on these people to lose a church like this — it's the centre of the community in many ways," said Anderson.

Just last weekend, the community of Birch Grove, Cape Breton County, near Glace Bay, suffered the same fate, as their century-old church, Victoria Presbyterian Church, burned to the ground.

(mmacintyre@herald.ca)

Fire destroys Inverness Co. church

Monday, 19 December 2011 10:45
0digg

101.5 The Hawk Radio

Fire has destroyed a church in the Quad Counties.

Police say volunteer firefighters from Lake Ainslie, Whycocomagh and Inverness were called to the East Lake Ainslie Presbyterian Church at 9 a.m. Sunday.

Inverness Co. RCMP Cst. Brad Anderson says the building was gone within an hour.

"Within about half an hour, flames had made their way through the roof of the church, and in another half-hour, it was pretty clear that the church wasn't going

to be saved," he says. "It was pretty much fully engulfed by that time."

Anderson says there was no damage to the nearby church hall.

He says the fire's exact cause isn't known yet, but it's not considered suspicious; members of the Lake Ainslie Volunteer Fire Department and the provincial fire marshall's office are investigating.

Anderson says the church is 129 years old- it was built in 1880- but the congregation dates back almost 50 years earlier, to 1833.

Metro News Newspaper

Historic Cape Breton church burns down
Third Maritime church fire in recent weeks is not viewed as suspicious
Email
more
Up in flames
Other recent church fires:

    Dec. 10: The Victoria Presbyterian Church in Birch Grove was just months away from its 100th anniversary when it was reduced to rubble on.
    Dec. 11: the Roman Catholic church on the Kingsclear First Nation reserve near Fredericton was destroyed in another blaze.

METRO HALIFAX
Published: December 19, 2011 2:14 a.m.
A 129-year-old church was destroyed in a fire Sunday morning on Cape Breton Island.

Fire departments in Cape Breton from Whycocomagh, Inverness and Lake Ainslie were all called to the East Lake Ainslie Presbyterian Church at 9 a.m. to battle the blaze.

Const. Brad Anderson with the Inverness RCMP said though there was a lot of smoke coming from the building when he arrived on the scene at about 9:40 a.m., there were no visible flames.

"However, within about a half hour the flames had made their way through the roof of the church, and in another half hour it was pretty clear the church wasn't going to be saved," Anderson said.

"It was pretty much fully engulfed by that time."

Anderson said the church was built in 1880, but the congregation dates back to

1833. He said it was first built as a log church and then rebuilt in the mid-1880s before being rebuilt once again.

He said the church hall and nearby homes were not damaged.

"Certainly, there are no other buildings at risk at this point," he said.

He said the church was well used by the community.

K94 Radio

Another Church Fire

By News Room. Last updated: 2011-12-19 08:08:38

A 129-year-old church was destroyed in a fire Sunday morning in Cape Breton.

Firefighters were called to the East Lake Ainslie Presbyterian Church right around nine.

RCMP say the church was engulfed in flames within an hour. He says the cause of the fire is not being considered suspicious.
This is the third church to burn down in the Maritimes in recent weeks.

Firehall.com

.Historic Cape Breton church destroyed in blaze
[Back]

Posted by MrFirefighter on Dec 19, 2011 @ 8:16AM
Snippet:

EAST LAKE AINSLIE, NS - A historic church in East Lake Ainslie was destroyed by fire Sunday morning.

Police received the 911 call just after 9 a.m. and Cape Breton fire departments from Whycocomagh, Inverness and Lake Ainslie battled the blaze at the East Lake Ainslie Presbyterian Church.

Cape Breton Post Newspaper

Police blame faulty furnace for fire that destroyed church

Published on December 22, 2011

INVERNESS, N.S. (CP) — Police say a problem with a furnace caused a fire that destroyed a church in Cape Breton over the weekend.

Topics :
  RCMP

The East Lake Ainslie Presbyterian Church was more than 125 years old.

RCMP Const. Brad Anderson says there were problems with the building's furnace in the past.

No one was injured in the blaze and parishioners will hold services in a nearby church hall for the time being.

The church was built in 1880.

Firefighting in Canada Website

Another Maritimes church burns
Written by The Canadian Press
Dec. 19, 2011, Inverness, N.S. - A 129-year-old church was destroyed in a fire Sunday morning in Nova Scotia.
Fire departments in Cape Breton from Whycocomagh, Inverness and Lake Ainslie were all called to the East Lake Ainslie Presbyterian Church at 9 a.m. to battle the blaze.

Const. Brad Anderson with the Inverness RCMP said although there was a lot of smoke coming from the building when he arrived on the scene at about 9:40 a.m., there were no visible flames.

"However, within about half hour the flames had made their way through the roof of the church and in another half hour is was pretty clear the church wasn't going to be saved,'' Anderson said on Sunday.

"It was pretty much fully engulfed by that time.''

Anderson says the church was built in 1880, but the congregation dates back to 1833. He said it was first built as a log church and was rebuilt in the mid-1880s before being rebuilt once again.

He said the church hall and nearby homes were not damaged.

"Certainly, there are no other buildings at risk at this point," he said.

He said the church was well used by the community.

Police do not view the fire as suspicious.

This is the third church to burn down in the Maritimes in recent weeks. The Victoria Presbyterian Church in Birch Grove, N.S., was just months away from its 100th anniversary when it was reduced to rubble on Dec. 10.
The next day, the Roman Catholic church on the Kingsclear First Nation reserve near Fredericton was destroyed in another blaze.

Radio Canada International

18 December 2011, 13h55
Another historic Nova Scotia church burns

For the third time this month, an historic church in Nova Scotia has burned down. East Lake Ainslie Presbyterian Church in Inverness was destroyed by fire on Sunday morning. The church was built in 1880. Nearby buildings were not damaged.
Police say that arson is not suspected.
 The Victoria Presbyterian Church in Birch Grove, Nova Scotia, burned down on December 10 and the next day, fire destroyed the Roman Catholic Church on the Kingsclear First Nation reserve near Fredericton.

101.5 The Hawk

Police say a furnace problem led to church fire

Thursday, 22 December 2011 16:17

Police say it appears a furnace problem led to a fire that destroyed an Inverness County church.

The East Lake Ainslie Presbyterian Church burned to the ground Sunday morning; the 129 year-old church was fully engulfed in flames within an hour.

Inverness Co. RCMP Cst. Brad Anderson tells The Hawk there were problems with the building's furnace in the past.

No one was hurt in the fire; parishioners will hold service in the nearby church hall for the time being.

XFM Radio

Investigators getting closer to cause of church fire

Posted on December 23, 2011

As the congregation of the East Lake Ainslie Presbyterian Church awaits the final report of the Fire Marshall it appears the origins of last weekend's fire was not suspicious in nature. Brad Anderson, media spokesman for the Inverness RCMP, says it seems the fire began in the area of the building's furnance. Local firefighters were called to the fire Sunday morning shortly after nine.