

Window on the Clearwater®

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Ahsahka Nez Perce Presbyterian congregation loses historic church

Fire claimed the historic Nez Perce Indian Northfork Presbyterian Church in Ahsahka Wednesday afternoon just as members were preparing for their Christmas Eve service.

Fortunately, they were in the adjacent dining hall at a Christmas Eve meal. No one was injured in the fire.

Fire fighters from four departments responded to the blaze, but the building, built in 1890, had flames showing through the roof before the first of them could even get to their equipment. Flames could be seen from across the Clearwater River on U.S. Highway 12.

Orofino Fire Department with the assistance of Sunnyside Rural Fire District, Twin Ridge Rural Fire District and Evergreen Rural Fire District fought the blaze, primarily from the outside of the structure, because it was unsafe to enter most of the building. Some fire fighters were able to enter the back portion of the building where the fire had not yet become as intense. They worked on extinguishing flames in the ceiling and connecting wall from the front portion of the structure.

The exact cause of the fire had not been officially determined Wednesday, but it appeared to have started around a wood stove and chimney.



Smoke boils through the roof the church in this shot taken from the railroad overpass that leads to Dworshak National Fish Hatchery

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Fire fighters fought the blaze primarily from the outside of the building because conditions were unsafe for entry of most of the church.



Nez Perce Indian Northfork Presbyterian Church was founded in 1890. The structure stood near Dworshak National Fish Hatchery, east of the North Fork of the Clearwater River.



When the fire started, members of the congregation were in the dining hall (red building to toward the back of the lot) having a Christmas Eve meal.



Fire fighters from four departments responded to assist with extinguishing the blaze.



A chain saw is used to cut holes in some parts of the walls so fire fighters could get water on the flames.



Flames are showing in this burnt piece of wood jutting up from the front porch of the structure.



A Clearwater Power lineman makes sure that electricity is turned off.



The rear portion of the church was not as damaged by the flames. Fire fighters check the situation in the attic area.



A fire fighter sprays water on flames through a hole cut earlier with a chain saw.



Orofino Assistant Fire Chief Clay Hesson, Sunnyside Chief John Willard, Twin Ridge Chief Darryl Ketchum, a Nez Perce Tribal Police officer and hatchery staff watch while fire fighters work to take down part of the wall and get better access to fighting the fire.

Watch for further info about the church and the fire in *Window on the Clearwater*.