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Subject: Under Investigation: The Fire That Changed Ferris State University
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This is a press release about an interactive presentation that will take place investigating the evidence surrounding the 1950 fire that destroyed Old Main and nearly wiped out Ferris Institute (now known as Ferris State University). Was the fire an accident? Was the fire deliberately set? An examination of the evidence and the exploring of theories will be part of the event led by Jim Cook, assistant director of Ferris State University's Department of Public Safety.

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Under Investigation: The Fire That Changed Ferris

BIG RAPIDS – A bitterly-cold day, Feb. 21, 1950, marked a devastating event that nearly destroyed Ferris State University and tested its will to carry on.

On that day, disaster struck Ferris Institute and the Big Rapids community as the fire alarm rang shortly after 5 p.m. President Byron Brophy had just finished hosting a reception for graduating students when custodian Melvin Dunn and Karl Merrill, Dean of Men, informed the president of smoke in the attic of the Main Building. What resulted was a devastating fire that completely destroyed Old Main and left little of Ferris Institute standing. Today, the mystery of that fire continues to intrigue many people familiar with the history of what today is known as Ferris State University.

On Sept. 3 at 6 p.m., Founders' Day activities at Ferris features "Unsolved History: The Burning of Old Main," in G. Mennen Williams Auditorium as part of 125th anniversary celebration of the history of Ferris State University.

"This is a great opportunity for people who are interested in the history surrounding the fire to have a forum to voice their opinions and learn about theories surrounding the fire," said Jim Cook, assistant director of Ferris State University Department of Public Safety and moderator for this event. "The fire is a big event that shaped the history of Ferris and this is an attempt to analyze some of the evidence from the fire."

According to Cook, evidence shows the fire that burned Old Main to the ground was no accident, but rather was deliberately set. So, the question is less about whether the fire was deliberately set and more about who was responsible for it and what was the motive to set a blaze that burned down the historic building and nearly destroyed the school. The investigation into the burning of Old Main is an interactive one. Evidence will be examined and theories behind the fire will be explored during this event.

In addition to being the 125th year of Ferris, this academic year marks the 60th anniversary of the fire that destroyed "Old Main," which was located at the corner of Oak and Ives, the present-day location of the Prakken Building.



FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

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