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15,000 books destroyed in Twiggs library fire

Thousands of books, as well as historical documents and more were lost when the Twiggs County Library went up in flames Sunday.

Investigators still were combing through the ruins Monday and looking for a cause for the fire, but one thing was clear: The consequences of losing the 25-year-old structure and its contents will affect plenty of lives in the county.

Investigators from the state insurance commissioner's office still are reviewing the case.

They still haven't ruled out anything about the cause of the fire, but early signs were that lightning from storms that rumbled across Middle Georgia was a factor, said Glen Allen, a spokesman for the commissioner's office.

More than 15,000 books were burned and the building was destroyed, said Thomas Jones, director of the Middle Georgia Regional Library System. The library opened in 1985.

Sammy Stokes, director of the Twiggs County Emergency Management Agency, said the fire broke out just after 4 a.m. Sunday.

In the fire's aftermath, some residents were critical of the response time by safety officials, because the library is located right across the street from the Twiggs County Sheriff's Office and the Jeffersonville Fire Department.

But Morgan Slay, the fire chief, said the department is an all-volunteer unit, and no one was staffing the firehouse that night.

Slay said he arrived at the station five or six minutes after he got the call, but by then the fire had already been burning for about half an hour.

The library also has a burglar/fire alarm system. Slay said the alarm company called librarian Joyce Falk shortly after the alarm went off, but Slay said the company told her the alarm had been triggered by a low battery, not a fire.

“We’re looking at all options right now,” Jones said Monday. “There are several things we could do. I’m meeting with the (Twiggs County) commissioners and the library’s board this week. We could open a temporary facility. We also have the option of rebuilding the facility or building a new one.”

Jones said because the library is part of the PINES network, Twiggs County residents can use other Middle Georgia libraries to request books once new PINES computers are up and running in the county.