Nevada Blaze Consumes Hindu Monastery and Historic Landmark
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AT 2:40 in the morning on June 5th' a fire swept through what was once a thriving Hindu monastery and the former headquarters of Siddhanta Press, the press which now, Hawaii, prints the newspaper you have in your hands. Located high in the sagebrush and Pinion Pine-covered Sierra Nevada mountains 15 miles from Reno, Nevada, the large 3-story, wood frame building, acclaimed a national historical landmark, was fully in flames within a half hour in the extremely dry desert weather. No injuries were suffered by the residents, the Cormany family, who had just weeks earlier moved into the building, having signed an agreement to purchase it from Saiva Siddhanta Church.

Over 50 firemen fought the blaze valiantly, but were unsuccessful in checking its advance throughout the 120-year old wood and brick structure. The blazing fire was described as an "inferno," and before dawn's light the large building had been consumed, leaving a mass of dangerous ruins and debris.

Located just outside Virginia City, the rustic and picturesque structure long known in local vernacular as "The Old Nevada Brewery" was built around 1863. It first served as the local Pony Express Station and a few years later was greatly expanded and converted into a brewery. In those days the now quiet "ghost town" of 600, and small mecca for summer tourists in the Western US, teemed with activity. It was the site of the world's largest silver discovery and a boomtown of the great Gold Rush. Virginia City's 70,000 prospecting inhabitants made it the largest city in the West, larger even than San Francisco. The great Mark Twain lived here, founded and edited the local newspaper, the Territorial Enterprise, and wrote one of his famed books here, "Roughing It."

Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, located and acquired the erstwhile Pony Express Station and Brewery in 1962 when, modern legend has it, "The only resident was an old prospector, by the Wild West name of "Bad Water Bill," who

kept his mule in the basement and a pig in the shower." In those days, the badly neglected showed more potential than anything else. Undeterred, members and monastics of the Saiva Siddhanta Church spent several years rebuilding and remodeling the 14 rooms with their own hands. By 1969, it was once again reminding all who drove by of its noble history. It was here that the Himalayan Academy was run and the Siddhanta Presses rolled long into the night for many years. It was from here that the Innersearch pilgrimages were conceived and executed. It was here at the Mountain/Desert Monastery that many of the present yogis and swamis of Saiva Siddhanta Church were trained and that the Master Course was printed along with the Pathfinder's Library series of books, as well as the first Church newspaper for members.

Later, after Kauai Aadheenam was purchased in 1970 and the Church's work shifted to Hawaii, less if the publishing work was done in Virginia City, though "Skandamalai," as it was called, was still kept open as a secluded mountain retreat for monastics. In 1979, the beautiful Heidelberg presses were shipped to Hawaii. This left the monastery virtually empty. The trustees decided to sell the property in 1979, and after many months on the market, a purchase agreement was made with the Cormany family. But this sale, it seems, was not to be, as nature took its firey course just days before the final agreement was signed. The entire burden and ownership of the property fell back on the Church.

The mass of complications brought about by the fire, particularly coming as it did right in the midst of a realty transaction, then had to be faced. The Cormany family, who had lost many of their possessions in the blaze had to be relocated and consoled. A caterpillar tractor was hired to properly remove the wreckage, and the two small outbuildings on the property had to be secured. Then the insurance claims and other legal work had to be tackled, the escrow on the land had to be terminated.

The calamity came as a great shock to the trustees and members of the Church, both for its potential financial loss (though the building was insured, a settlement has not yet been made) and for the immeasurable inner value of the property imbued in it through the many years of its use. The Saiva Swamis reflected on the loss, and thought that perhaps such a special place, endowed with so much sadhana and meditation, so many years of inner spiritual striving and changing, was never meant for others to dwell in. Perhaps the Gods themselves took possession of the red and white striped Hindu monastery leaving only pure memories of a pure place in the peaceful Nevada desert.

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