

DULUTH

Suspect arrested in Duluth synagogue fire

Duluth man booked on suspicion of felony arson.

By Brooks Johnson (<http://www.startribune.com/brooks-johnson/558007041/>) Star Tribune |

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DULUTH - An arson suspect has been arrested in the fire that destroyed the Adas Israel Congregation synagogue on Monday.

A 36-year-old Duluth man was booked into the St. Louis County jail on suspicion of felony arson at 4:31 p.m. Friday, minutes after city officials sent out a news release announcing an unnamed suspect's arrest.

The man was the only person jailed under probable cause for arson on Friday. The Star Tribune generally does not name suspects until they have been formally charged.

Since 2012, the suspect has racked up nearly a dozen misdemeanor convictions for trespassing, burglary and theft.

Officials will hold a news conference at 11 a.m. Sunday detailing the "conclusion" of the fire investigation.

Congregation leaders were made aware of the arrest before their first Shabbat without a home began Friday evening. The news conference was originally scheduled for Saturday but was moved out of respect for those observing the Sabbath.

No one was inside the building at the time, but six of the synagogue's 14 Torah scrolls were destroyed.

The blaze comes less than a month before the start of the Jewish High Holy Days, which often draw home far-flung members of the congregation, which has dwindled to about 35 members locally.

"I've always been connected to Duluth through the holidays," said Diane Hamou of Silver Spring, Md. "It's been a home away from home."

The congregation formed in the late 1880s, and the building, also known as the Third Street Shul, had stood at 302 E. 3rd St. since the early 1900s. "There were three Orthodox synagogues in the area at one point, and now there are none," said board member Fred Davis. "We're very much in shock."

Davis said the congregation board is focused on finding a home for the High Holy Days before making decisions about the future of the congregation.

Hamou said she will be in Duluth for the High Holy Days — Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, begins at sunset on Sept. 29 — and she expects many others to make the trek as well. "It's almost like we're in mourning," she said. "The physical building is gone, but our memories will never be forgotten."

Brooks Johnson writes about the Duluth/Superior region. He joined the Star Tribune in 2019.

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GALLERY

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MARK VANCELEAVE

Little remained of Duluth's Adas Israel Congregation after it was gutted by fire early Monday morning.

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Gallery: Little remained of Duluth's Adas Israel Congregation after it was gutted by fire early Monday morning.

