

Brookdale wedding chapel burns

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The wedding chapel at the historic Brookdale Lodge — where romance has intertwined with nostalgia through the years — lay in charred ruins today.

Boulder Creek Fire Chief Bud Tomlin said the cause of the fire which destroyed the chapel early Monday morning is still under investigation.

Built in 1956, the chapel had been the scene of elegant weddings where the bride and groom tied the nuptial knot to the sound of a babbling creek, which ran beneath the quaint structure.

Up until Monday, the chapel had withstood a series of calamities that through the years have plagued the Brookdale Lodge — a combination motel and restaurant snuggled beneath the lush greenery of the San Lorenzo Valley Redwoods.

The chapel escaped damage in 1956 when a fire destroyed the Lodge and dining room.

The Lodge's owner at that time, Barney Morrow, managed to rebuild the famous Lodge the following year from the ruins of the ashes, and once again the Lodge and chapel became something of a never-never land that attracted visitors from around the world.

The chapel also survived the flood of Jan. 4 and 5 this year, which ruined the Lodge, just days before owner Bill Gus had completed major restoration of the complex.

The rocky past history of the Lodge include a shutdown ordered by the County in 1973, after a controversial rock concert was held there.

After several public hearings in 1977, Gus was granted a use permit to operate the facility — but there were nearly 40 conditions attached to that permit.



Cause of the fire is still unknown.

theft.

The chapel had been designed by San Francisco artist and architect, Ted Duro, and was influenced by the Walt Disney style.

Gus said weddings at the Chapel have been held almost every weekend this summer, and that the number of weddings was "building."

Most of the couples married at the Chapel are from out of town, added Gus.

The cocktail lounge and motel were reopened again following the flood in January.

Monday's fire was confined to the chapel, although firefighters said there was some heat damage to windows in the Lodge.

When Gus took over the Lodge seven years ago, it was in disarray. After several years of disuse, the building was deteriorating from moisture from the creek and vandals had left their marks.

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The flood of this year was not the first time the Lodge had been ruined by water.

Waters from the flood of 1955 rushed through the dining room, washing away tables and furniture and ruining the dance floor.

One mishap which struck the Chapel occurred in 1956, when somebody stole the 350-pound bronze and brass bell which Morrow at that time had planned to house in the chapel bell tower.

The bell was no ordinary specimen. It had spent 28 years in service with the Western Pacific Railroad company, atop a locomotive.

Morrow had discovered it in a salvage yard in San Francisco.

"It must have taken at least three persons to move it," Morrow had exclaimed at the time of the

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Prior to Gus' purchase of the property, it had been known for several years in the early '70s as a hang-out for youths.

Then it was closed by the county after the rock concert was held in violation of county regulations.

In 1978, Gus had began the task of restoring the famous Lodge back to its original splendor and has persevered in that task through a major flood.

One song written about the Brookdale Lodge by Gladys Adele Johnson goes:

"Where we spent the honeymoon of our dream,

In a cozy cabin, under the evergreens;

And I love you all the day and night away;

In our little Brookdale hideaway."