

REFERENCE

Inn Was Once Top Resort In Northern California

By Gordon Sinclair

As the flames reached into the cold March skies above Aptos Beach Inn late Saturday night, Santa Cruzans began recalling fond memories of the golden days at the famed Rio del Mar hotel.

It was the setting for many a fabulous party—from the days of the great depression to the St. Patrick's fete last Saturday night.

It was the scene of intimate suppers, of gay parties, of scrumptious dinner dancing.

Perhaps, the inn was in its most golden period when the strains of "Veini Su" floated through the banquet room from the music of Carl Ravazza and his orchestra in the late 1930s.

Ravazza gained national fame with his nightly broadcasts from the Rio del Mar hotel. One of his vocalists was the late Carole Landis. Another well known orchestra at the hotel was Joe Suti.

Ravazza was followed by Neil Bondshu, formerly a pianist with Ravazza. Still later Hal Pruden

gained sufficient recognition at the Rio del Mar hotel to become a celebrated dance orchestra at Las Vegas.

In the earlier days, Ted Fio Rito, repeatedly played at the hotel.

The hotel was originally built as part of the Rio del Mar development by Monroe, Lyon and Miller, who formed the Peninsula Properties company in 1925, buying more than 3000 acres from the Spreckels family.

Earlier it was a part of the 6600-acre Don Rafael Castro, established in 1833. It was acquired by sugar millionaire Claus Spreckels for a summer estate in 1872.

Harold O. Heiner said the initial small hotel was built in 1932 and the building was expanded with the addition of the dining room, bars and desert room in 1937, opening with a New Year's Eve party.

(Earlier estimates of the hotel construction ranged from 1927 to 1930.)

The hotel gained considerably fame with its national broadcasts of dance music in the dancing days prior to World War II. It was closed in 1942 after successful operation by Manager Paul Manual.

It was leased to the Aptos Hotel company, a group of Watsonville businessmen in 1946 with James White as manager. Later it was operated by John Perkins.

The hotel was re-opened in 1957 as the Aptos Beach Inn by a group of investors who formed the Aptos Beach Development company, including Harry Tellyer, Henry Howard, Wayne Prim, Mrs. Louise Garcia and others.

It was initially operated by Peninsula Properties until the formation of the Rio del Mar Country club company in 1935.

Even as the Spanish tiles crumpled in the roar of falling roofs and exploding windows, the memory of the hotel will stay alive with nostalgic recollections of those wonderful times of not so long ago.



This is all that remains of the once fashionable Aptos Beach Inn in Rio del Mar. The

heavy tile roof hastened the collapse of the building as flames weakened the supporting timbers early yesterday morn-

ing. The hotel, which has had its financial ups and downs over the past 30 years, was mak-

ing a comeback as a swim and racquet club when the fire struck.