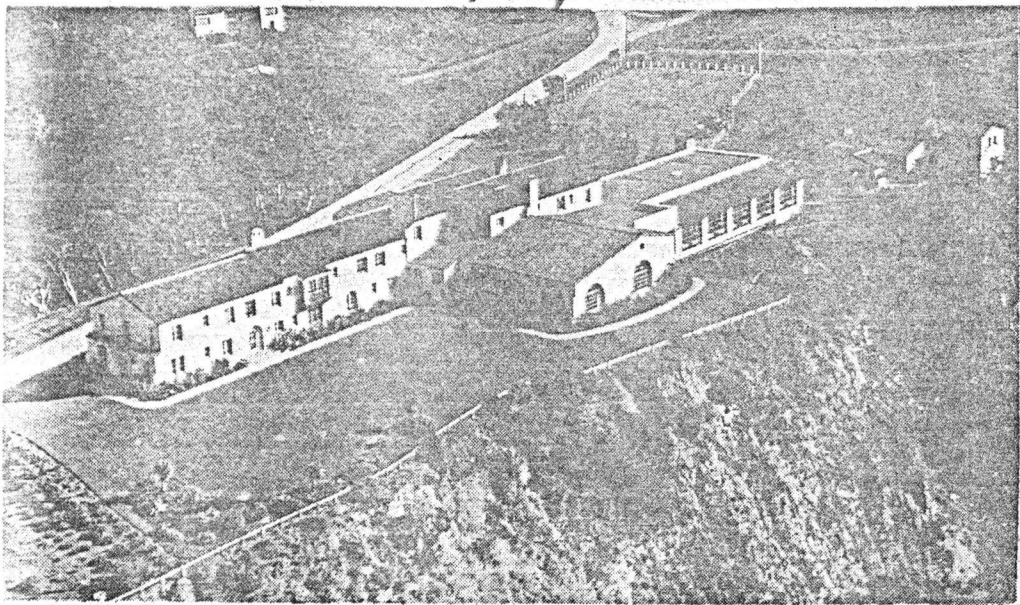


Aptos

3/22/73



Before the fire—rooms were in wing to left, with banquet and entertainment facilities at the other end of the "inn." Note lack of homes (and trees) toward top of picture. Area today is heavily developed.

A fire that ended an era

By HOWARD SHEERIN

It was 10 years ago Saturday that fire dealt a destructive blow to the social life of the county and the central Monterey Bay area.

Aptos Beach Inn, known to a prior generation as Rio del Mar Hotel, was consumed by flames, bringing down a structure which once had been a symbol of entertainment and affluence here. Nothing since has quite equaled it, and its site on the Rio del Mar bluff now is filled with condominiums.

It was just before midnight on a Saturday night that the fire was discovered. The blaze ushered in St. Patrick's Day with a flaming display that could be seen as far

away as Monterey.

Despite the efforts of firemen from five departments, including Watsonville, all that remained was charred rubble and twisted steel, and remnants of the hotel's west wing.

There were 350 people in the hotel that night, 250 of them attending a Pacific Gas & Electric Co. party which had a St. Patrick's Day theme. Everyone got out safely and only injuries were to two Aptos firemen, burned slightly in an explosion in the kitchen.

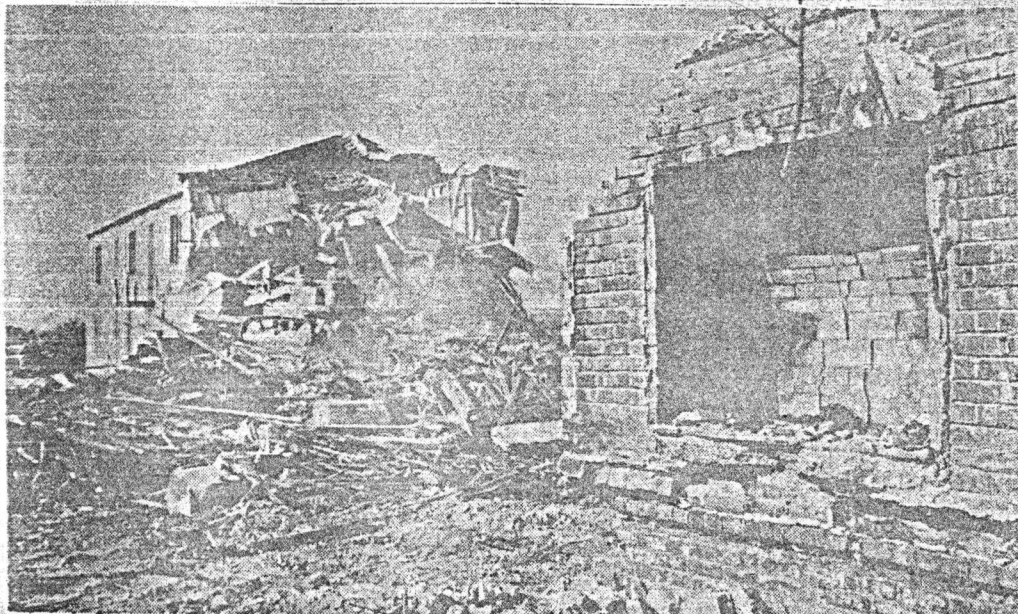
The fire was well covered for The Register-Pajaronian. Reporter George Burkhardt and photographer Sam Vestal both

were attending parties at the hotel when it broke out.

It attracted a crowd of at least 1,000 people and a traffic jam developed on roads leading to the hotel, broken up only when sheriff's officers set up road blocks.

And as the fire burned, a piano played an eerie tune as wires snapped in the heat.

Built in 1927, the Rio del Mar Hotel had had a rocky financial history after 1929. But it survived the depression years, and enjoyed a period of rejuvenation after World War II. Ambitious plans for its improvement under managership of Joe Puddu were buried in the ashes.



This was all that remained after St. Patrick's Day fire.