

# A Legend Levelled

'This place at one time was the place to be when you were on Long Island'



Photo by Angela Golden

Fire destroys Sands Point Bath and Racquet Club, symbol of Gold Coast affluence / Page 7

# Fire Destroys Sands Point Club

Facility, built in 1920, was a symbol of Gold Coast affluence

By Patrick Brasley

Sweeping flames, punctuated by explosions, yesterday afternoon destroyed the Sands Point Bath and Racquet Club, an aging symbol of Nassau's affluent Gold Coast.

The cupola-studded frame structure, boarded for the winter, was unoccupied at the time of the fire. There were no injuries.

More than 80 fire fighters from the Port Washington Fire Department subdued the blaze, but by early evening the white frame and stucco structure had been leveled to a heap of charred timbers except for two smoke-blackened chimneys still standing against the skyline over the Sound.

The waterside pavilion-like building on Manhasset Bay across from Kings Point was built in 1920 to replace the original club house, which burned in 1906.

The legend among club members is that "The Great Gatsby" was inspired and partly written during F. Scott Fitzgerald's visits to the club in 1922. Fitzgerald was living in Great Neck Estates at the time.

The Dorsey Brothers Orchestra serenaded Saturday night dancers at the club in the 1920s. And later in the 1930s, Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney were frequent visitors.

In recent years, the club maintained an attitude of courtly decorum. Trustees shunned such artificial amenities as air-conditioning and heat for the swimming pool and card-playing and salty language were not encouraged.

"This place at one time was the place to be when you were on Long Island," said Sgt. Owen Kirby of the Sands Point police.

The club, located on several acres,

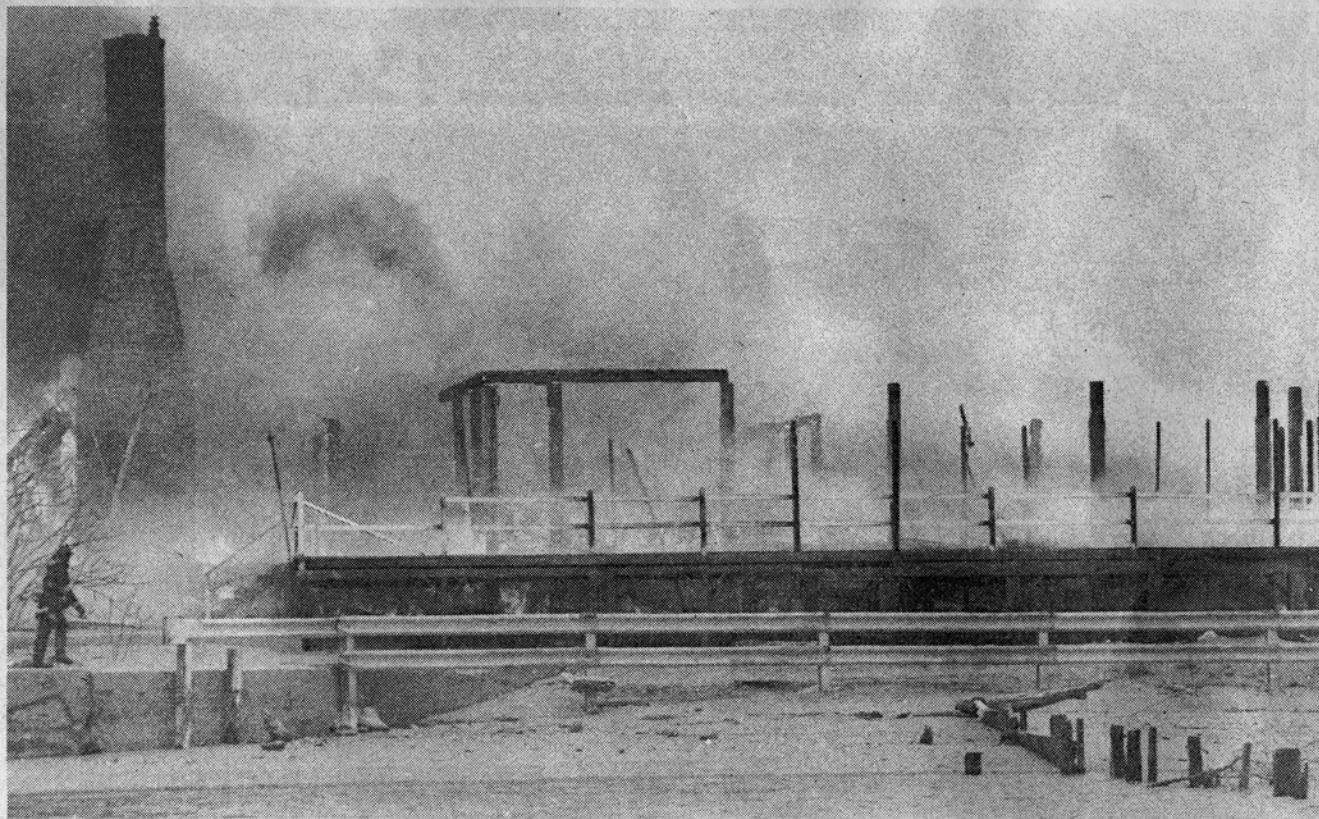


Photo by Angela Golden

Smoke streams from the ruins of the Sands Point club following blaze fought by more than 80 fire fighters

also included a large salt-water pool in back, up to 150 cabanas and a dance floor.

Fire officials said the alarm was turned in at 3:50 p.m. and the blaze was under control within 90 minutes. The cause of the fire has not been determined.

First Asst. Fire Chief Charles Lang said the blaze was "fully involved"

when the first fire fighters arrived at about 4 p.m. Lang said two explosions, believed caused by propane tanks, set flames towering 100 feet into the air.

Lang said there was a third blast: "Something else blew in there and it rocked the ground, I don't know what it was."

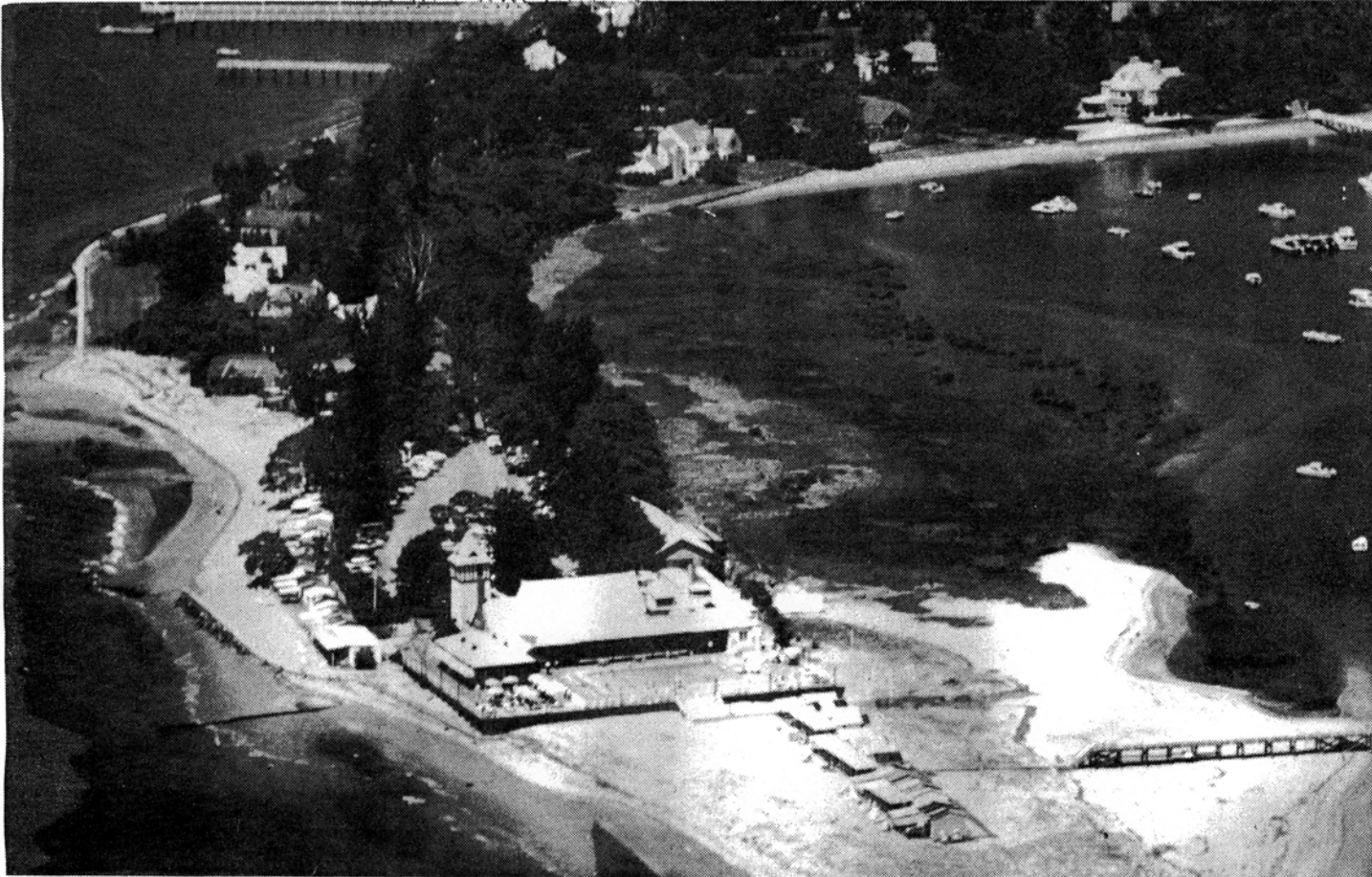
Fire fighters were hampered in their work by a lack of water, Lang said. He

said the only hydrant was several hundred feet from the club.

James Sherman of Sands Point said he was in the Manhasset Bay Yacht Club across the bay when the propane tanks exploded. "It shook the windows over here," he said.

"Hopefully, they'll try to rebuild it," Kirby said, "but it will never be the same."

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AERIAL VIEW OF SANDS POINT Bath and Tennis Club

## Fire At Sands Point Bath Club Destroys East Egg Landmark

By EILEEN BRENNAN

Lying in the sand a few yards away from the burned-out shell of the Sands Point Bath and Racquet Club is an empty bottle of Perrier-Jouet champagne and an up-turned glass, symbol of past parties.

Nostalgia for the gold coast days is a hazard of living on the north shore, but in this place, after a disastrous fire, it is hard to avoid. The ultimate chronicler of East Egg, F. Scott Fitzgerald, painted the scene this way: "The last swimmers have come in now and are dressing; the cars from New York are parked five deep in the drive, and already the halls

*and verandas are gaudy with primary colors, and hair shorn in strange new ways, and shawls beyond the dreams of Castille. The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter and laughter, and casual innuendo and introductions forgotten on the spot."*

That was written in 1925 but it could have been written in 1945 or 1985, but sadly, not in 1986.

The club is located at the end of Plum Point, a section of Sands Point once known

as Wampage Shores and owned by real estate developer Osgood Pell. In recent years it has changed owners several times. The first clubhouse was destroyed by fire and rebuilt in the 20s. Originally called the Sands Point Bath and Tennis Club, it became the Sands Point Casino and recently the Sands Point Bath and Racquet Club.

In addition to the clubhouse with its dining room, bar and dance floor, the club had a pool, tennis courts, and was flanked by rows of cabanas that face Manhasset Bay. On summer weekends bathers could see the sailboat racers from Knickerbocker, Manhasset Bay and Port Washington Yacht Clubs.

Still in recent years, it was on summer evenings that the old magic reappeared. Music carried on the winds to West Egg across the bay sounded as romantic as it did

when the Dorsey Brothers orchestras were playing at the Sands Point Bath Club, and a dazzled college freshman could turn and see Mickey Rooney dancing near her.

Today, when the members talk about the club and its loss, it is not the roaring 20s that they mourn, but the camaraderie of today. With a small membership of about 90 regular members and 40 dining room members, it is possible for them all to know each other. About 10 percent of the members come from New York City, according to Mr. Al Hagedorn, a member of the club's board of governors, and the rest from Long Island, with the nucleus in Port Washington.

Summer will come in 1986, but for the members of the Sands Point Bath and Racquet Club, it won't be quite the same this year.

### Sands Point Fire

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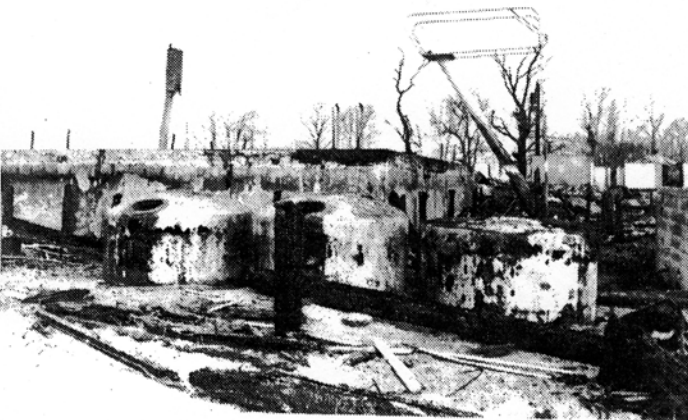
lage clerk Evan Stephens said that the owner of the club is the Sands Point Research Corporation, which in turn is owned by Dunham and Marcus of Manhattan.

The future of the property is in doubt. Although it appears to be a prime piece of real estate, both the Village of Sands Point and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation require buildings to be built no less than 13 feet above flood level and the club property does not meet that requirement. It is, in fact, a "high tide flood area," according to Mr. William Murphy, vice-president of the club.

Village clerk Stephens said he believes that it might be possible for the club to rebuild

on its old foundation because the building that just burned down was in place long before the 13 feet above flood level requirement.

Mr. Murphy and other board members have discussed the possibility of rebuilding. Another member of the board of governors, Mr. Al Hagedorn of Sands Point, gave a statement to the press that said: "It is too soon for us to have developed concrete plans for the future. However, we are actively exploring various possibilities of rebuilding the clubhouse in the manner that would retain the character and ambiance of the former structure while meeting our needs for decades to come."



RUINS OF SANDS POINT Bath Club Pool

(Photo by Mary Donnelly)