

# A Legend Levelled

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



Photo by Angela Golden

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# 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,

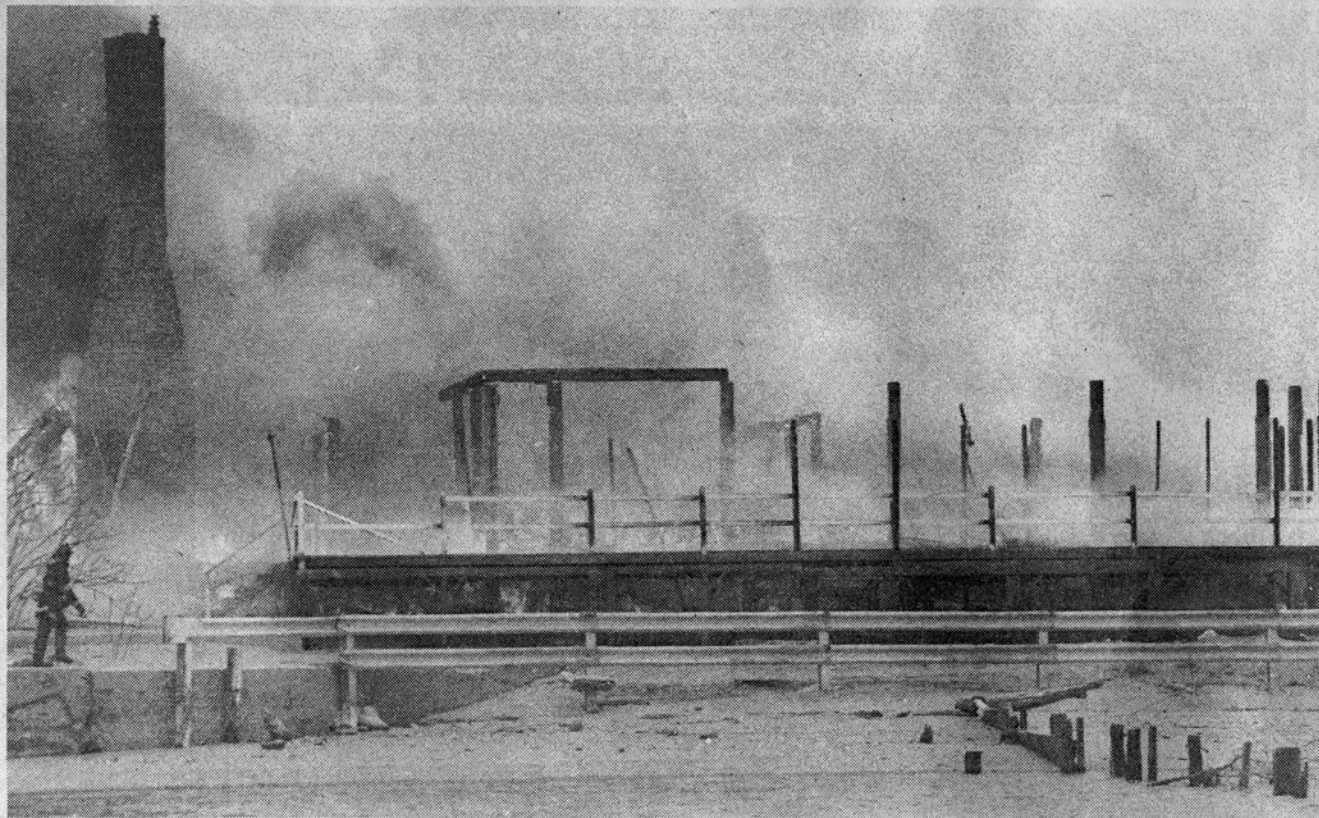


Photo by Angela Golden

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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