

*Novi News, Wednesday, December 29, 1965*

## **Fire Ravages Walled Lake Casino**

The Walled Lake Casino, a ghost of its former self, went up in smoke Christmas night.

The fire reduced the renown dance hall to a black rubble. Seven fire departments fought the flames leaping from the tindery building at the corner of 13 Mile and Novi Roads. But the flames had their way.

Only memories remain -- but what memories they are.

Music furnished by Guy Lombardo, Buddy Morrow, the Jimmy Dorsey and Glenn Miller bands, Red Nichols, the Dukes of Dixieland, Les Brown and others, all in the summer of 1959.

That was the last big summer program of big name bands.

A name band would swing in for a brief appearance during the early 60s, but the casino was then on the wan.

Northville's Ed Yerkes, like thousands of others in the Detroit area, remembers the heydays of the Casino well. And over the conversation, tinted with nostalgia, falls an aura that suggests an era of romance.

"It was the place to dance," he said, "It was garish with a large ball of cut mirror circling over the center of the dance floor, reflecting colored light from the colored spotlights."

Yerkes described how couples by the thousands danced shoulder to shoulder six nights a week during the summer, taking a breather now and then in the expansive patio off to one side. Even the dance floor seemed special, Yerkes noted, the polished maple floor floated or had a cushion on it."

But that was another day and another year. The sweet strains of swing, the big sound, died out at the Casino as the sixties rushed in.

For many years it had thrived under the managership of the Tolettene brothers, Albert and Elmer. The Casino had been sleeping during the war years but they brought new life to it with the big names.

A slow decline began in the late fifties. The big band sound at the Casino was no longer profitable. It was dying and with it the Casino.

In its stead came rock and roll, disk jockeys, and jet age teenagers, and with them, a new name for the Casino, the Club-A-Go-Go as the club changed hands.

It was sold in 1961 to Ovid and Cleo Kraemer, formerly of Novi and now of Union Lake, who tried to revive the big band sound once more, with no success. They, in turn, sold the

building to the corporation of Hacker and Probst, who ran it for two years, then leased it to Irving Mikler of Detroit.

Novi firemen got the distress call at 11:43 p.m. last Saturday. When they arrived at the scene the flames were confined to the rear of the 120 by 140 foot building where the stage was located.

They contained the fire, extinguished the flames while the smoke billowed out of the rear. But then the fire truck tanks ran dry.

In the three minutes it took to transfer water lines to the lake, flames burst forth again, and driven by high winds, swept through the building, setting the whole roof afire.

Novi firemen were joined by departments from Northville, Walled Lake, Wixom, Commerce, West Bloomfield and Farmington township, to no avail.

Firemen did not leave the scene until 9:43 a.m. They stayed to save three adjacent buildings by extinguishing burning material on the roof of two houses and the Casino restaurant.

Within three hours, fire had leveled the dance hall. It had been a land mark since it was first built in 1928 by Mrs. and Mrs. Leona Tetettene. Gone is the building, but as Yerkes pointed out, "It was an institution." As such, it lives on, in memories.