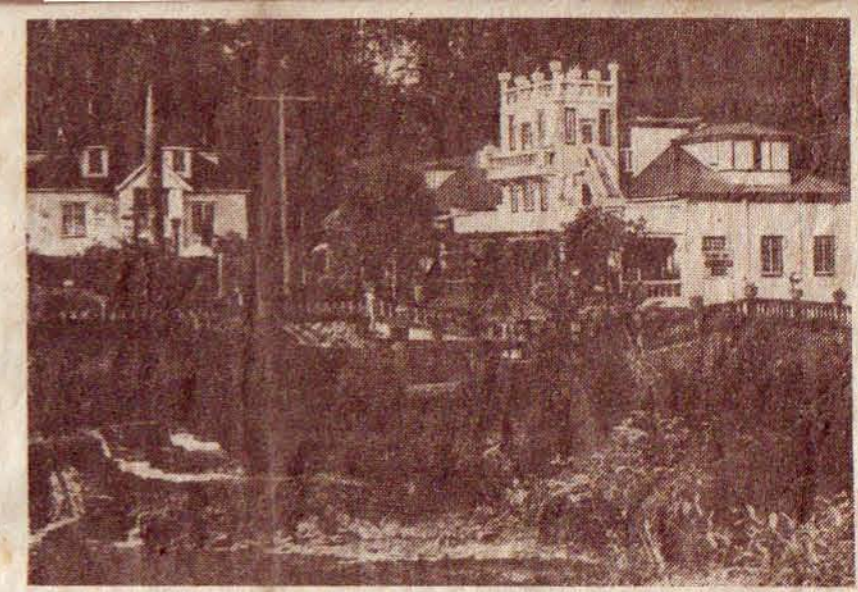


\$1m FIRE LEAVES CASTLE IN RUINS

DAMAGE estimated at more than \$1 million was caused yesterday by a fire which destroyed much of Paronella Park Castle at Innisfail.

● PARONELLA Park Castle as it was before yesterday's destructive blaze. All that remains standing is the white tower and some lower-level walls. The building to the left escaped damage.



Cause of the fire, which occurred sometime after guests at a wedding party had left at 2.15 a.m., is not yet known.

Relics lost — 'no chance' to save tourist complex

The owners of the well-known North Queensland tourist attraction, John and Alice Kickbusch, discovered the blaze at 3 a.m. and firemen from Innisfail were on the scene within minutes.

A brigade spokesman said that by the time firemen arrived the fire had a strong hold and they were able to save only the entrance to the building.

All that remains above the smouldering ruins are the white tower and lower level brick walls, which had been constructed in the old Spanish style.

Historical relics in the small museum, including valuable coins, guns, rocks and gems were lost.

These alone, according to Mr. Kickbusch, were valued at more than \$1 million. Sergeant-Mick Smith, of South Johnstone police, said that Innisfail firemen did not have a chance to control the blaze.

"Everything is tinder dry — we've had little rain for the past six months," he said.

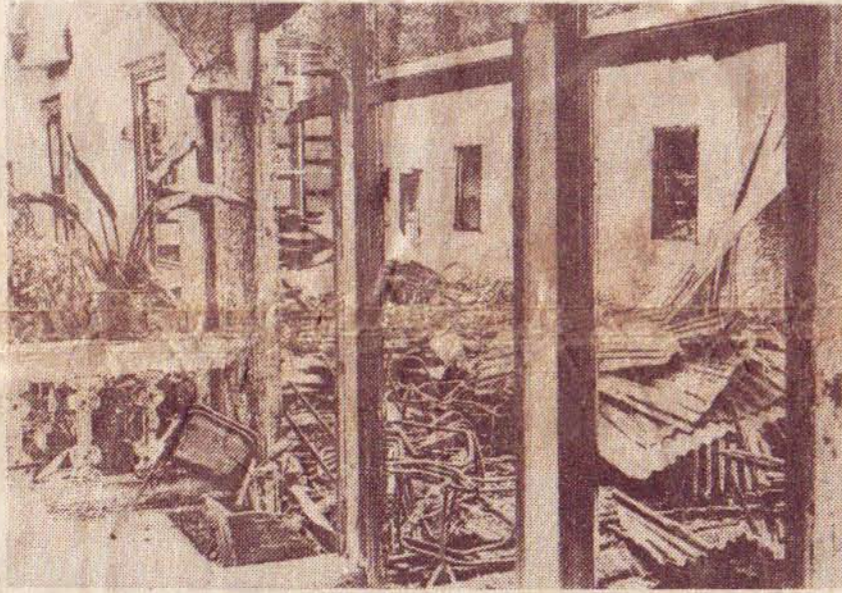
The fire apparently began in a downstairs hall used for the wedding reception on Saturday night.

The park covers an area of more than two hectares with gardens, a natural waterfall that supplies power from a miniature hydro-electricity scheme, and a caravan park.

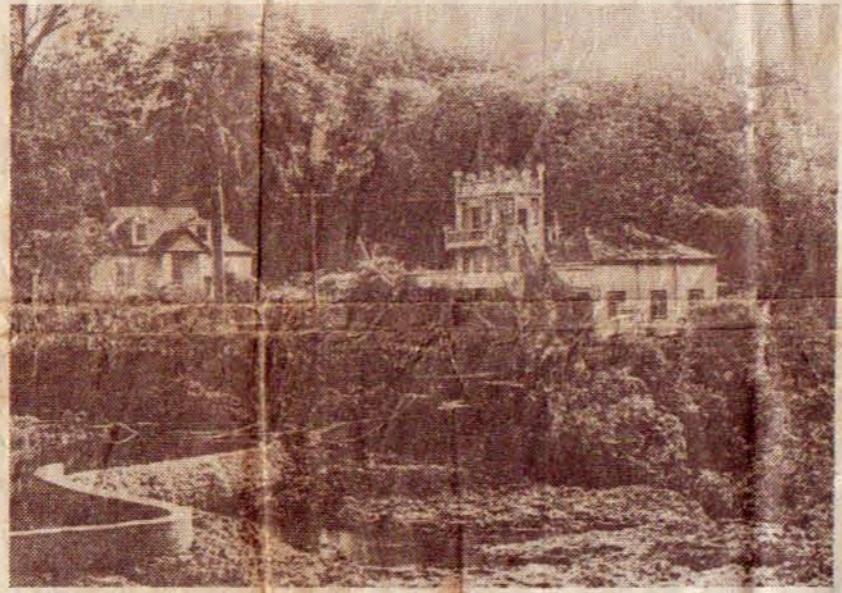
Paronella Park was established 50 years ago by a Spanish migrant, Jose Paronella, who bought the property on Mena Creek Falls with the aim of establishing a Spanish-style castle set in natural surroundings.

He built the castle, furnished it with genuine Spanish furniture, and opened it to the public in 1935.

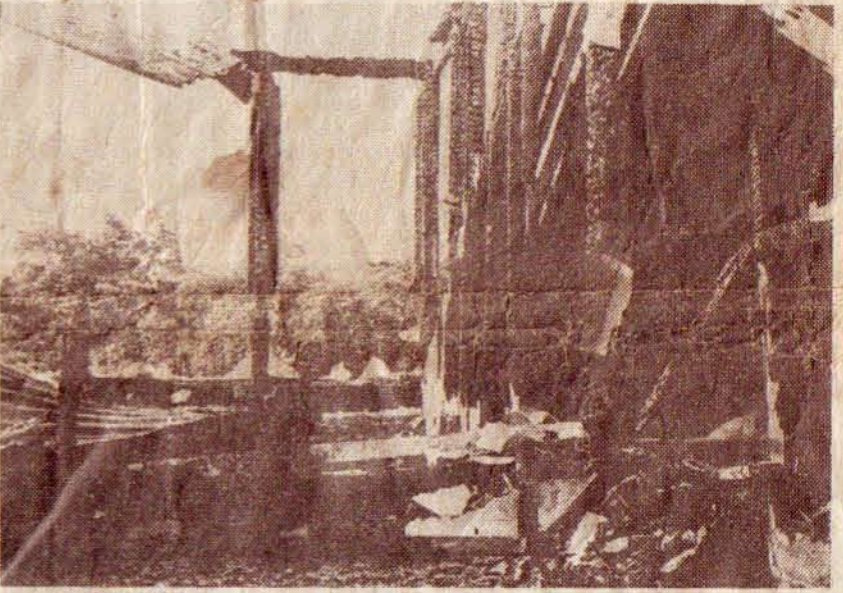
The chairman of the Johnstone Shire Council, Cr. Herb Layt, said it was a tragedy that such a well-known tourist attraction should have been so extensively damaged. He hoped the building would be restored.



● THE smouldering remains of the main reception room in the castle where 300 guests had attended a wedding reception only hours before the fire.



● THE fire-gutted remains of the Paronella Park Castle, with fire hoses drawing water out of Mena Creek during damping-down operations



● A CLOSE-UP view of the extent of the interior damage to the castle, with most timbers reduced to charcoal.