

Club La Von Destroyed; Speed Points To Arson

Pics Under
Arion Hotel

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Fire destroyed the Arion Hotel and Club LaVon at 110 W. First Ave. early today—the second major fire in 24 hours in which officials suspect arson—and possibly four persons are feared dead in it.

A nightclub entertainer from Bloomington claims

her five-months-old son was in the hotel with a baby sitter. Fire and police officials have been unable to locate either.

Mrs. Sarah Hawk, night manager, thinks 8 to 10 persons were in the ancient brick structure at the time. Only five have been accounted for.

Fire Chief Ray Miller thinks at least four bodies may be in the ruins.

The speed with which flames swept the hotel and club—a checkered part near-downtown Peoria for years—lead Miller and Al Boulton, chief fire inspector, to think it may have been deliberately set.

ONE RESIDENT of the hotel heard the sound of smashing glass shortly before the flames were discovered, Boulton pointed out. The alarm was turned in at 1:57 a. m.

The blaze came on the heels of another which destroyed the old Proctor Hospital Building—now called Parkview Arms—at 415 W. Second Ave. Sunday morning. Officials say the earlier fire was set.

Because of the casual nature of the Arion hotel's records, Mrs. Hawk was unable to say how many people were in the place when the fire began.

Authorities think one of the missing is a 73-year-old barber, James Stevens, employed by Model Barber Shop, 515 S. Adams St.

Mrs. Betty Woodrum, the night club entertainer, told police she left her son, Scott, with a woman named Louise Scott at the hotel about 8 p. m. Sunday.

She said the boy is one of a pair of twins. The other son is in Normal with her mother, she told officers. Mrs. Woodrum is appearing at the Combo Club 110 S. Jefferson Ave., and living at the Mayer Hotel.

MRS. HAWK said a "terrific explosion" shook the two and a half story building and showered plaster on the hotel desk. She said she ran from the hotel and then "smoke and fire billowed from it."

Ginger Lane, a resident, said she was in her room at the time and heard the crashing of glass.

"I didn't know what it was," she related. "I went into the hall and found it was filling with smoke. There was a sheet of fire at the rear. Then there

Club La Von Fire

which was demolished by a mysterious explosion and fire Dec. 13, 1954. At that time Fred Montgomery, then sheriff, said he thought the blast was caused by dynamite.

Every piece of fire equipment turned out to fight today's blaze. Firemen from East Peoria stood by.

Fire Chief Miller and Assistant Chiefs Ed Nash and Ira Campbell directed the operation.

The Club LaVon was closed

in July of last year. Mayor Eugene Leiter revoked its license after a case in which testimony was offered that solicitation for prostitution was carried on there.

Caldwell appealed the ruling to the Illinois Liquor Commission, which upheld Leiter's ruling.

In October of 1955, when the place was known as the Rhapsody Club, an apparent attempt was made to blow it up. A passer-by found a stick of dynamite in the club's door handle.

YEARS AGO the place was a locally famous nightspot called the Talk of the Town.

In 1956 police said it was a weekly occurrence for a rock to be thrown through the Rhapsody Club's window.

The hotel itself had figured in vice cases several times in the past few years.

When the Club LaVon's license revocation was before the state commission in 1958, a 20-year-old woman named Rosalie Snow testified she worked at the club as a waitress and solicited for prostitution. She said she was instructed to live at the Arion and to take her customers there.

The nightclub occupied the first floor of the structure, the upper two floors were occupied by the hotel.

located below ground level. The