Special Issue: 50 Years of Gaming

# NEVADA

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## Gaming's Golden Anniversary: 1931-1981

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## The Lady and the Gangster

## Gambling Tips You Can Bet On

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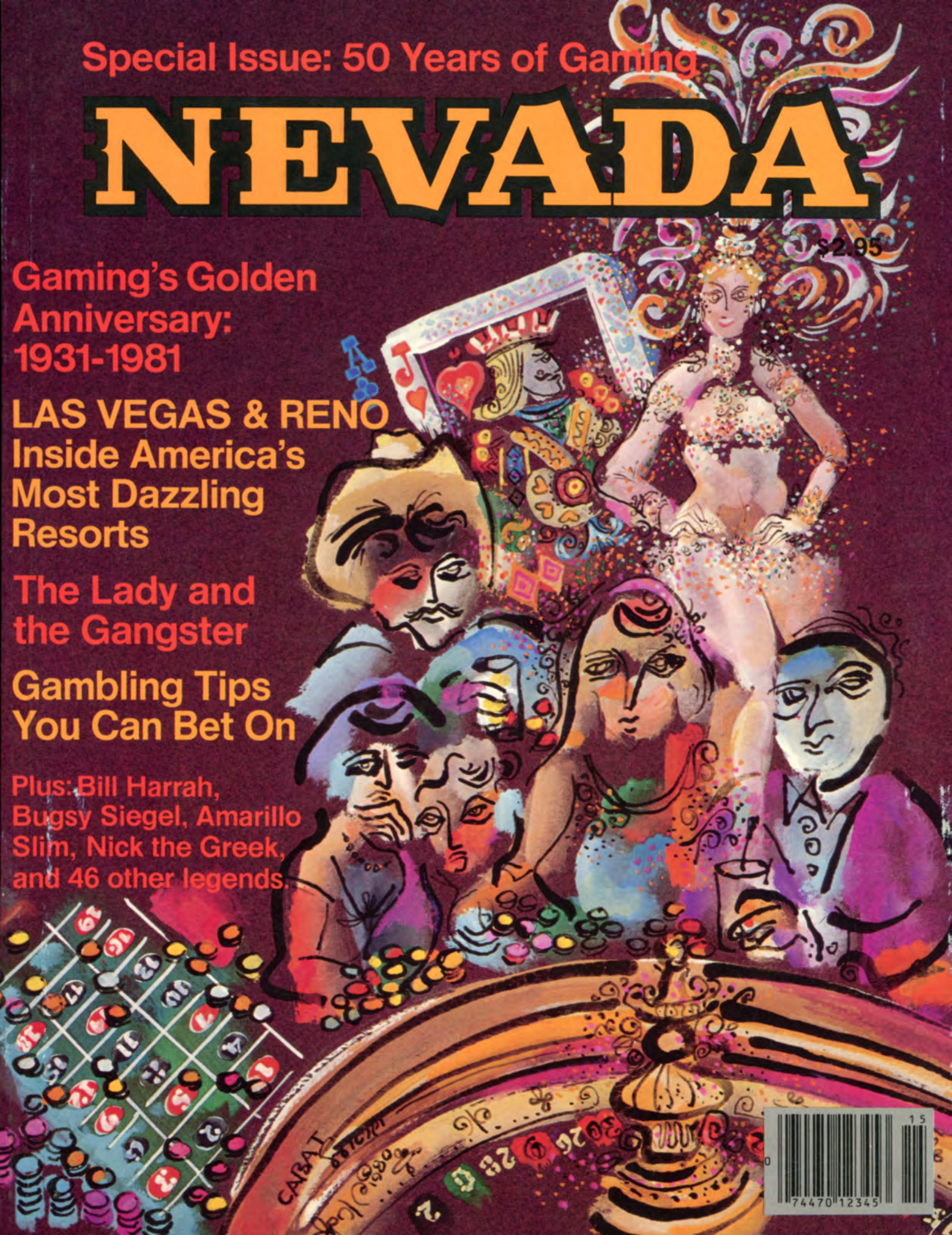


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# NEVADA

## Features & Gambling Tales



48

## Players & Games




56

Volume 41, Number 2
March/April 1981

## Special Section: Truth & Beauty




## People & Yesterday







**ON THE COVER**
Original art by Erni Cabat, an internationally renowned artist-teacher. More of Cabat's remarkable paintings illustrate "How to Play The Games," and these are available to Nevada Magazine readers as limited edition prints. (See page 54)

# America's Doxy Grows Up

## Only when Nevada is copied does the country consider her right.

**By Caroline J. Hadley**

Soon after Nevada Territory was formed in 1861, a bill was passed in the legislature prohibiting all forms of gambling. But games of chance like poker, roulette, thimblerig and monte were the only entertainment in Nevada's desert camps. "Mining went hand in hand with gambling and drinking," one journalist said, "so the law was promptly forgotten."

This year Nevadans remember another law, the wide-open gaming bill introduced in 1931 by Phil Tobin, a 29-year-old Winnemucca cowboy and assemblyman. During the "Silver Turns to Gold" jubilee the state is offering a year-long toast to its good fortune of the past 50 years and to the gaming industry's future success.

The state's gambling heritage is, however, much older than 50 years. Nevadans and visitors have been gambling for centuries, dating back to the ancient stick games of native Indians and the wild frontier days of early statehood. Nevada, residents are fond of saying, has always been a gamble.

In 1864, the year Nevada joined the union, citizens were demanding that the ineffectual and obviously ill-considered territorial law be thrown out. In Carson City 36 delegates to the Constitutional Convention drafted a bill banning lottery but allowing all other forms of wagering. The bill was approved when the legislature met the following year but was immediately vetoed by Governor Henry G. Blasdel.

The bill was produced again in 1869, and an assembly committee reported to the legislators: "Experience has fully demonstrated that prohibitory laws are but a dead letter and defied with impunity by the votaries of this vice, and your committee believes that no act prohibiting this vice can in any manner be made effectual."

Their message was clear: the gambling bill should be approved. License fees would benefit the state treasury while legalization and heavy fees would lower the gambling rate. Their report continues, " . . very few, if any, will be able or willing to pay the heavy license required, and the practicable result will be: to close once and forever hundreds of low dens and 'dead falls' which now disgrace our principal towns."

The bill passed. Blasdel vetoed it again, but the legislators overrode the governor's veto. License fees were set at $250 a quarter per gambling establishment in counties polling less than 2,000 votes, $400 per quarter in all others.

Between 1869 and 1907 the regulations changed frequently. Prohibitions included games in front rooms of saloons, admission to minors under 17, and "winning money from persons who have no right to gamble it away."

But most Nevadans only respected laws that offered them freedom; they were gamblers, sometimes wild, always independent. They knew their state was a place where penniless prospectors and other fortune hunters, with a little luck, could become very rich indeed. Towns in Nevada rose and fell like clouds of dust and millions in gold, silver, livestock, land and cash were made and lost because of luck, drought, timing or perhaps the turn of a card.

And that's the way they liked it.

In the 1870s the Comstock was making millionaires. Virginia City had a population of 18,000 and one gambling house for every 150 inhabitants. "Gambling is a broad term in Nevada," wrote Max Miller in the *Reader's Digest* in August 1941. "Each season in this dry land is a gamble with cattle raising, with sheep. Certainly mining is a gamble. Not to gamble in Nevada would mean not to be working for a living."

But the Women's Civic League and the Anti-Gambling League of Reno didn't see it that way and in 1909 worked diligently to change the law. Their persistance paid off. Effective October 1, 1910, legislators once again prohibited games of chance.

**NEVADA MAGAZINE**
Capitol Complex
Carson City, Nevada 89710
702-885-5416

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**Southern Nevada:** Tuca Productions, 557 East Sahara Avenue, Ste. 220, Las Vegas, NV. 89104, (702) 731-2666.

**Northern Nevada & Northern California:** Cynthia Kelley, Nevada Magazine, Carson City, NV. 89710, (702) 885-5416.

**Los Angeles, Oregon & Washington:** Jay Eisenberg, JE Publishers' Representative, 8732 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA. 90069, (213) 659-3810.

NEVADA MAGAZINE is published bimonthly by the State of Nevada, at 101 South Fall Street, Carson City, Nevada.

Second class postage permit Carson City, Nevada 89710 with additional entry in Denver, Colorado.

**SUBSCRIPTION RATES:** $6.95 for six issues, U.S. and Canada; $8.95 Foreign. Please allow six weeks for delivery.

**CHANGE OF ADDRESS:** New address should be accompanied by old address label and sent to Circulation Department, Nevada Magazine, Carson City, Nevada 89710. **Please allow six weeks advance notice.**

**NEVADA MAGAZINE** assumes no responsibility for damage or loss of any material submitted for publication. A stamped, self-addressed return envelope must be included.

**Printing:** A. B. Hirschfeld Press
**Type:** Sierra Graphics

Nevada's gamblers paid little attention. Their games may have moved further back in the saloons, and operators were encouraged to make regular payoffs to a variety of officials and lawmen, but they waited patiently for 21 years while the state legislators vacillated between prohibition and repeal. Some card games were legalized in 1911, prohibited in 1913, then okayed again two years later allowing

> **"Gambling is a broad term in Nevada. Each season in this dry land is a gamble with cattle raising, with sheep. Certainly mining is a gamble. Not to gamble in Nevada would mean not to be working for a living."**

"social games played only for drinks and cigars . . . or for prizes of a value not to exceed two dollars." The 1915 law also insisted that the deal change with each hand and that operators pay for a license.

The real players, however, found the legal games boring, and between 1915 and 1931 Nevada's gambling laws were enforced with decreasing effectiveness. One Nevada historian wrote, "This patchwork law remained in force for 16 years, during which time it was by all accounts either ignored completely or so feebly enforced as to be worse than useless. Its fatal defect lay in the fact that the games allowed in the licensed houses had little appeal to the gambling public, which accordingly shunned them and patronized instead the numerous undercover resorts that promptly sprang up."

It was understood that Nevada was usually willing to cash in on what other states found offensive, and by the 1930s the state was fast becoming famous for its sinful ways. Not only were its divorce laws liberal, its tolerance of wide open gambling and prostitution well known, but its lack of enforcement of the Volstead Act (Prohibition) began attracting tourists to the state.

Even though a bill had been written

*(Continued on page 12)*

# The State of Gaming

**During the past half century, Nevada and its number 1 industry have flourished together.**

## By Governor Robert List

In Nevada, the past 50 years have been a time of tremendous change. It is no coincidence that the growth we have experienced—and the economic benefits we have derived from it—correspond directly with the development of the gaming industry in our state.

In a real sense, the state of Nevada and the gaming industry have grown up together, partners in a vast stretch of land that most people have overlooked for years.

This special edition of Nevada Magazine commemorates the state's 50th anniversary of legalized gaming. The stories and pictures you will find trace the colorful history of the industry from its infant days in the 1930s to its present-day maturity. And, in a special way, the magazine traces the growth and development of the state, and the people who live here.

Nevadans are fiercely proud of the gaming industry. It has brought an end to the boom-bust cycles that had for so long characterized Nevada's economy, and transformed the state into the resort and entertainment capital of the world.

The beginnings were modest: a few, small, barroom table games and back-room card parlors scattered about the state. The first years were rough. The 1929 stock market crash was still playing on page one, and Americans were sinking into the Great Depression. It didn't seem the best of times to gamble on a new industry in America. Few people then could envision that those few dusty table games would grow into a multi-billion dollar industry.

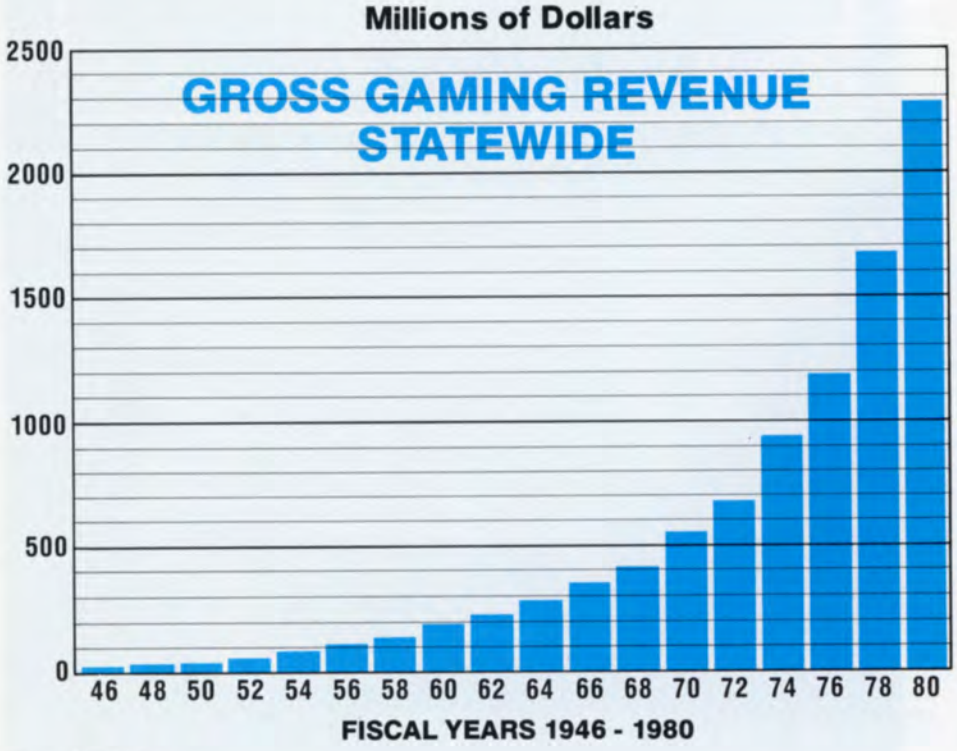
The phenomenal growth of gaming in Nevada can be best illustrated by annual gaming revenue. In 1946, the first year that the state levied a gaming tax, total gaming revenues were listed at $24.5 million. Today, that figure is more than $2 billion. Overall, gaming has experienced an average annual growth rate of 15 percent.

The gaming industry employs approximately 25 percent of the workers in Nevada, and it is estimated that an equal number are employed in other tourist-oriented businesses. During 1980, state revenues realized from state tax and license fees on gaming amounted to more than $169.7 million—48 percent of the total revenues collected in our state general fund.

Gaming is Nevada's lifeblood. While we are striving to diversify and strengthen our economic base, we have not lost sight of the fact that the gaming industry plays a leading role in maintaining the economic well-being of our state.

As the birthplace of legalized gaming in America, the state feels a special obligation to protect and defend the integrity of the gaming industry. The effective enforcement of gaming control laws remains a top priority of my administration.

This special commemorative issue of Nevada Magazine is our remembrance of gaming's past 50 years in Nevada, and our tribute to it. We hope you enjoy reading about it, as much as we have enjoyed living through it. It's been a great half-century.

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On the 50th anniversary of gaming in Nevada, the Aladdin Hotel & Casino is proud to offer its warmest congratulations to our fine state and its Number One industry.

With 50 years of growth and success behind them, both the state of Nevada and the gaming industry share a future that looks brighter than ever, and the Aladdin plans in every way to be a major part of the bright future.

Congratulations, Nevada on 50 fantastic years. We at the Aladdin are confident that in Nevada, and in gaming, the best is surely yet to come!

ALADDIN

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## AMERICA'S DOXY GROWS UP

*(Continued from page 7)*

to repeal the state's ineffective gambling law in 1929, it was not until 1931 that a wide-open gambling bill allowing betting on everything except lottery was submitted and passed. Lawmakers realized that by ignoring the gambling problem they had nothing to gain but more corruption. They also knew there were financial rewards to be reaped from licenses and fees.

And they were right. Since 1931 the state has not suffered from lack of money.

"People are going to gamble and Nevada has grown because of it," said the controller of a major casino. "After that law was passed in 1931, Raymond and Harold Smith moved from Playland at the Beach in San Francisco to Reno because they knew it was going to be a success. Harvey Gross saw the same thing and opened a club at Lake Tahoe. Sam Boyd came in from the gambling ships moored off the coast of Southern California and Jackie Gaughn moved in from Omaha and followed suit in Las Vegas. Bill Harrah knew it too. He turned a bingo game on a Reno alley into an $80 million enterprise. People have always wanted to gamble and they still do; those are the guys who let them do it."

That was gaming's beginning. The rest of the story continues on the following pages, but first a brief commercial.

This is an important year for Nevada because 1981 marks the 50th anniversary of legalized gambling in the Silver State. This is an important issue for Nevada Magazine because this is its biggest, most colorful issue ever produced.

The special commemorative issue is devoted to letting you know how Nevada gaming has grown up. It will introduce you to the powers behind 50 years of desert gaming (some good guys, some bad) and to the incomparable entertainment, cuisine, outdoor recreation and indoor games of Nevada's great resorts. You'll discover how Las Vegas grew into a desert metropolis and what Reno was like in its free-wheeling early days. You'll meet high rollers and low rollers, cowboys, gangsters and some extraordinary puffers. There are inside features on casino controls, the "eye in the sky," the chances of hitting a million dollars on a single dollar slot machine, how to play Nevada's famous casino games and—most important—have fun.

As the issue demonstrates, times have changed since Nevada was considered America's stepchild; since Flamingo owner Bugsy Siegel was gunned down in his girlfriend's Beverly Hills mansion; since gaming was a vice, even in the Silver State.

Today more Americans appreciate the view of gaming expressed by an editor of the *Territorial Enterprise* in 1952: "The casinos obviously and frankly make their living from the guests. The guests admire the caviar and champagne and pay for it painlessly and the state gets a cut on the overall take. It is Nevada's unmitigated good fortune that no other state in the Union has the horse sense to imitate our own superlative and satisfactory way of life."

It took 46 years for casino gambling to be recognized as a legitimate and lucrative business. New Jersey was first to bite the golden apple in 1977, and other states are pondering the benefits of casino gambling.

Nevada has always done what it liked; it's just taken a long time for the rest of America to find out that we were right. —*Caroline J. Hadley*



# THE MOST FAMOUS NAME IN NEVADA GAMING SINCE 1935.

A lot has happened in Nevada since Harold Smith Sr. opened a small gambling parlor on Reno's main street in 1935. Due primarily to the innovative genius of Harold and his father, Raymond I. "Pappy" Smith, Harolds Club became a household word throughout the world and greatly enhanced the image of Nevada gaming. Harolds Club is recognized as the pioneer of modern gaming. Some of its novelties included generous slots, the first to hire women dealers and a dedication to a sincere, friendly atmosphere. Innovations that remain a part of Harolds Club today. Nevada's oldest casino continues its role of leadership in the gaming industry, and proudly salutes legalized gambling's golden anniversary.

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Reno

# Hot Craps Shooter? Pass The Salt!

## Some players and casino bosses have secret ways to keep luck on their side.

By John Reible


When "Guys and Dolls" opened on Broadway in 1950, it showcased a number of Frank Loesser tunes including "Luck Be a Lady." And luck, most visitors to Nevada casinos believe, plays a vital role in determining their gambling fortunes. If their luck is good, it stems from some personal belief in one or more superstitions. If their luck is bad, then luck isn't a lady; it's a four-letter word.

Oddly enough, there is no current catalogue of the thousands of superstitions that dictate the conduct of both casino employees and their gambling guests. But here is a random sampling of some of the more prevalent voodoos, hoodoos and fee faw fums, courtesy of several superstition-watchers.

John Luckman—his real name—who is owner of the Gambler's Book Club in Las Vegas recalls these oddities:

- A former pit boss at the Frontier would spit on his hands when he spotted a hot craps shooter, then walk over to the player and slap him on the back to change his luck.
- Another pit boss would find his lucky place to stand. He would determine this by moving around until a lucky player started to lose, then stand in that spot—sometimes for hours.
- Some casino bosses still keep a salt shaker handy. When a player hits a winning streak they grab the shaker, sidle over and sprinkle salt at his feet.
- The late Major Riddle, president of the Dunes Hotel, believed in the ancient Chinese superstition that a light burning outside a building brought good luck. Riddle ordered that a red light be installed on the sultan's turban. This was in the 1950s when a huge sultan statue stood atop the hotel's entrance. One night a craps shooter was taking the hotel for thousands. Riddle, on an impulse, ran outside and looked up at the sultan's turban and saw that the light had burned out. He immediately called maintenance and ordered that the offending bulb be replaced. Riddle later claimed that after the light went on again, the man's luck changed and he started losing.

Not all casino superstitions relate to the player. Over the years casino bosses have refused to hire dealers who are left-handed, red-haired, wear horn-rimmed glasses, are bald-headed or wear mustaches. According to Herb Nunez, assistant casino manager at the Sands Hotel, the embargo against the mustachioed was born of the suspicion that if such an employee was light-fingered and pilfered house money, he could easily shave off his lip hair and avoid identification.

Desert Inn Casino executive Monte Levine claims that clothing and jewelry are the superstitious amulets for many. One player always wears the same black shirt. He never packs it, but carries it to avoid possible loss. Even launders it himself.

Another wears a gold bracelet that he refuses to remove while he is in Las Vegas.

Johnny George, baccarat chief at the Dunes, remembers a craps shooter who was so superstitious he used to keep dice in the ice box. "He felt that would make them cold. It didn't necessarily mean that they weren't going to pass, but he believed that if they were cold they wouldn't pass."

Veteran Las Vegas publicist Art Force recalled a drunk playing at the Bingo Club, forerunner of the Sahara Hotel. The drunk was winning every chip in sight and the house kept serving him drinks hoping to win back some of the mounting pile he was accumulating. Suddenly the man collapsed in a sodden heap on top of his mound of chips, unconscious for the night. The late Milton Prell, owner of the club, had the crap table removed and chopped into kindling.

"One on the floor, seven at the door." This couplet signifies to the craps shooter that when the dice fall on the floor, the next roll will be a crap seven.

But bordering on the preposterous is the notion by casino personnel that the presence of peanuts—yes, peanuts—bodes a potent omen of bad luck that rivals a witch's curse. So powerful is the superstition that relates goobers to disaster that casino old-timers will blanch at the sight of a single lowly peanut on the premises.

So a word of advice to ex-president Jimmy Carter: You never won any popularity contest in Nevada to begin with, so if you ever decide to visit Nevada's casinos, leave your peanuts in Plains. □

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YESTERDAY

# FRONTIER FARO

## The favorite game of the American West is back.

### By Lynnette Little

In the railroad towns and mining camps of the old West, anywhere there was a man with money and a man without it, there was gambling. Movies foster the impression that poker was the most popular game in a saloon, but the real game of the frontier was faro.

Faro, also called faro bank or "the tiger" (because it was a man-eater), is a game as close to a dead-even gamble as there is in casino gaming. Millions were lost and won on faro tables in Nevada until just a few years ago, when the game succumbed to simple economics. With the house advantage at barely 1.5 percent, the game did not bring in enough to recoup the overhead.

Overhead to the old time faro dealer was often just a piece of canvas, raised over his table to keep the cards dry. His layout consisted of a green felt board with 13 pictured cards, an abacus-like case box, and a shoe from which each card was drawn, face up. The equipment was portable, a business necessity in the days of mushroom towns and soap-bubble wealth.

Set up in a saloon or gambling hall, the dealer began the game by shuffling a 52-card deck and placing it face up in the shoe. After all bets were down, the dealer slid out the deck's top card, called the "soda," and discarded it. The next card to come out, the "loser," was placed on the table. The card then showing in the shoe was the "winner."

Between deals the customers placed their bets on the layout's pictured cards, betting that the next time a certain denomination appeared (say, a 10), it would be either a winner or loser. A gambler could change or remove his bet if his card did not come up. He would often put a special metal chip on top of his "lose" wager: hence the term "coppering" a bet.

The house's advantage was that it collected half the winnings if both cards had the same value.

Deck stacking and sleight of hand increased the house advantage considerably during the long history of the game. Germans solved that problem by nailing the deck to a board and tearing off the cards one by one. Italians conserved cards by placing the deck in an iron box called a "ferrero," which was corrupted to "faro."

Today the game is being revived at the Dunes in Las Vegas by Johnny Moss, a past winner of the World Series of Poker. Moss has modified the faro layout to make it easier for the uninitiated to play. □

*Lynnette Little is a freelance writer in Las Vegas.*

# Sahara Style.

The finest resorts in the West are the Del Webb Sahara Hotels in Reno, Las Vegas and Lake Tahoe. Luxurious rooms and suites, friendly, courteous service, superstar entertainment, sports, excellent dining and the non-stop thrills that have made Nevada famous. Visit the Sahara Las Vegas, towering over the glittering Strip; Sahara Tahoe, nestled on the shores of breathtakingly beautiful Lake Tahoe; and Sahara Reno, with the friendly spirit of the old West. Don't compromise on quality. Resort to the Finest. A Del Webb Sahara Hotel. The Sahara Hotel marquees at Reno, Tahoe and Las Vegas shine with the brightest stars in show business. In Las Vegas you can laugh with the world's funniest comedians; at Tahoe, marvel at the most talented musicians and singers; and while in Reno you can watch a major Broadway production. For fabulous entertainment in a big showroom or in one of our delightful lounges, you'll find only the finest at a Sahara Hotel. Superb dining is yours at all three Sahara Hotels. Step into the House Of Lords restaurant on the top floor of the Sahara Reno and enjoy the splendid panorama of the city at night. In our Las Vegas or Lake Tahoe House Of Lords you'll be feted with fastidious service and expertly prepared dishes. At the Sahara Hotels House Of Lords, you'll definitely be "Dining Knightly."


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**Mountain Shadows**
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•**La Posada**
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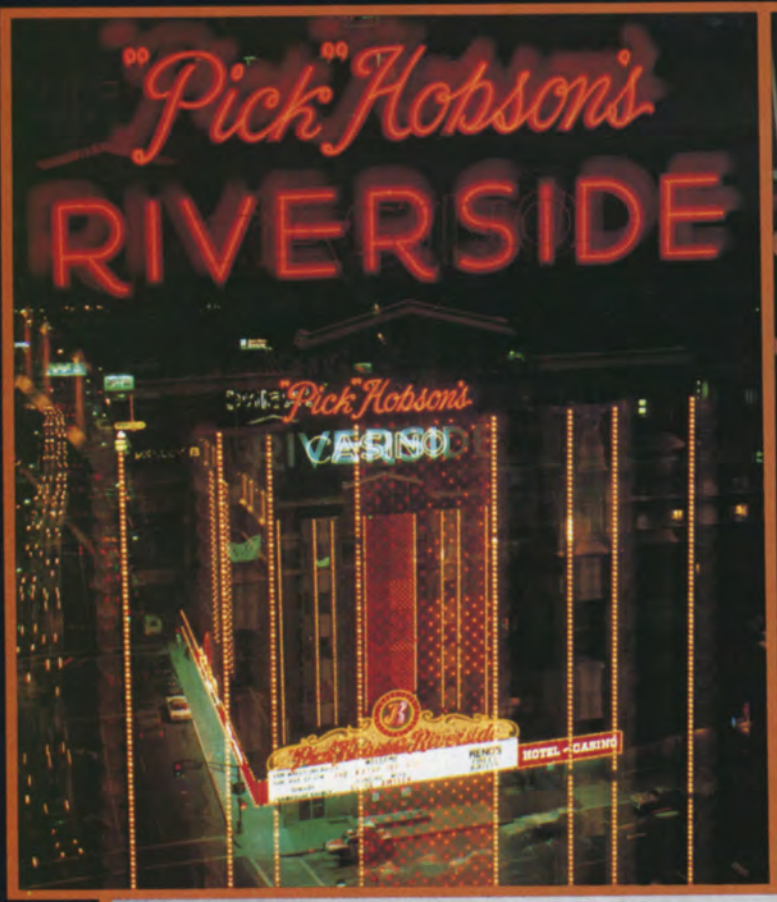


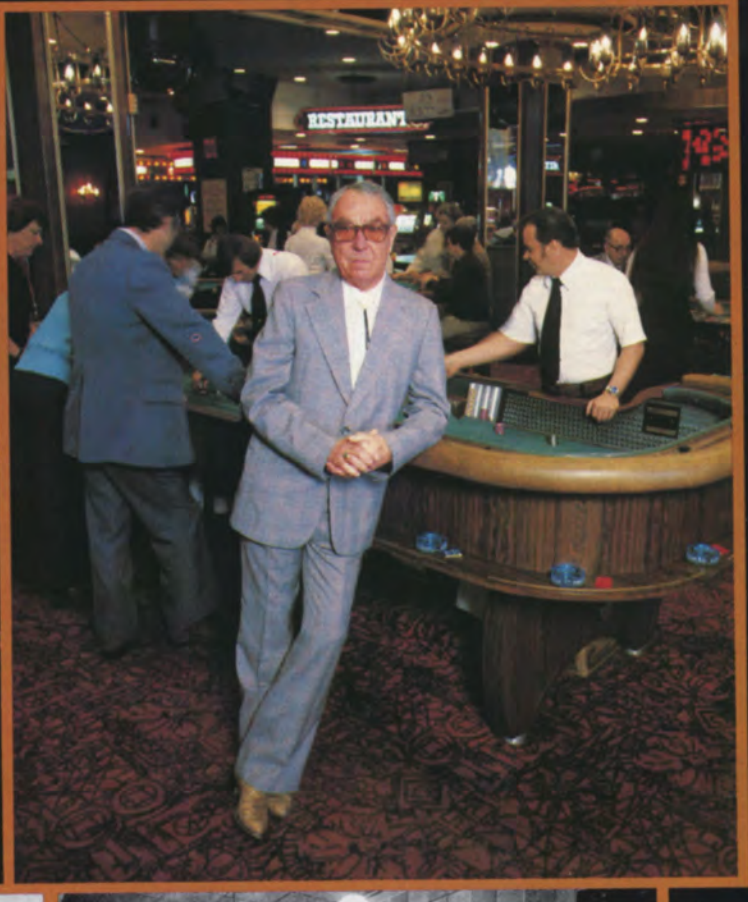


Nevada Historical Society

## And still going strong!

50 years ago "Pick" Hobson was one of the first men to be licensed by the state of Nevada to work in legalized gaming. 50 years ago the Riverside Hotel was a landmark in the small town of Reno, having been constantly in operation barring a couple of fires since 1862. It was only natural that after many years these two pioneers in gaming should come together "Pick" Hobson's Riverside Hotel Casino is still a Reno landmark, and "Pick" Hobson is still a leader in the gaming industry.

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# CITY IN ORBIT

## How Las Vegas grew from a wind-blown water stop into an international city.

## By Joe Digles

The sleek Amtrak train from Los Angeles whispers through the twilight on its desert journey. Ever gently the tempo slackens. The purple sky suddenly crackles with the brightness of fireworks on the Fourth of July as the red, white and blue "Desert Wind" slips into its berth at No. 1 Main Street, Las Vegas.

Every day Amtrak trains make the run from the coast to Las Vegas, where passengers step off amid the lights and dawn to dawn action of downtown's Casino Center. Some visitors make the trip by auto or bus, while across town, near the glittering Strip, great jetliners deposit tourists at McCarran International. Every year 12 million people, half of them arriving by air, are blown in from all corners of the world to savor and share the city's excitement.

Yet why this perpetual motion in a remote desert valley at the foot of the Great (and long dry) Basin? A century ago only a few families tended their ranches in the valley; even 50 years ago Las Vegas was a town of fewer than 6,000 souls. Since then the winds have brought great changes.

Today southern Nevada—Las Vegas and its surrounding communities—is home to more than half the population of the state. What will soon be 500,000 people reside in the pie-slice tip of the Silver State. It's Clark County and like Nevada's appetite for the future, it is immense: 7,900 square miles—room enough for the state of Massachusetts and with elbow room for the century ahead.

What forces, then, sent this isolated desert settlement into orbit?

The game started relatively late by American standards. Early in the 1800s trappers, traders and outlaws tracked through southern Nevada without paying much attention to the area's long-range prospects. In 1855 Mormon settlers from Utah arrived in the present-day Las Vegas area, but squabbling and crop failure led to their recall two years later.

Finally the first card was played in 1905. Teddy Roosevelt was in the White House. Veal sold for a dime a pound. And the entire population of Nevada (43,000) wouldn't have filled today's Dodger Stadium.

Real growth began when the railroad came to a town that was not yet truly a town. Las Vegas means "the meadows" in Spanish and alludes to the region's abundant sources of artesian water. Here the iron horses of the San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad could refresh themselves at a new division point along the vital rail trail.

Thus the railroad laid out a township of 1,200 lots in 1905 and grandly announced an auction of the properties. In fact the railroad had been beaten to the punch several years before by the creation of another tent-city township on the west side of the tracks. The weight of the railroad prevailed, however, and for decades its influence was matched by good deeds toward the community.

Prospective lot buyers came by the score, mainly from Southern California. They were driven by a variety of reasons, not the least of which was speculation. The railroad, stealing the march on the latter-day auto industry, pledged to rebate round-trip fares (Los Angeles, $16; Salt Lake City, $20) for a $25 down-payment on a lot.

After two days of bidding in the 100-degree-plus heat of May 15 and 16, 1905, the auction rang up $300,000. A city awaited building.

For the next two decades, life in Las Vegas was rough, peaceful and relatively anonymous. But in the late twenties a great project was in the works that would shield Las Vegas from the serious blows of the Depression—and launch the town into an exciting new era. The construction of Hoover Dam was formally funded in 1930, only months after Wall Street crashed. Las Vegas had 5,165 residents.

At Black Canyon, a narrow throat in the Colorado River 30 miles south of the city, massive amounts of earth and rock were moved to make way for more than 3.5 million yards of concrete. The engineering feat was monumental, the impact on Las Vegas incalculable.

The rail center boomed as a jumping-off place for supplies and host to the flow of laborers and technicians. The harnessed Colorado would pro-


*By the 1960s the big clubs of downtown Las Vegas were hugging Fremont Street. Forty years earlier Fremont was a more tranquil stretch leading westward to the Union Pacific depot.*

duce inexpensive power for Southern California and the yet-undreamed-of flowering of southern Nevada. Lake Mead, the 100-mile-long backwater created by the dam, would become a sportsman's paradise enjoyed by six million people annually. While the project provided benefits in the Southwest, for Vegas it spelled people, power and movement out of a pioneer past.

Elsewhere others toiled. Nevada's legislature passed the wide-open gambling act of 1931. Few residents cared at the time since gambling had functioned at its own pace before with winking approval from local authorities. Not much was at stake for the card-shufflers. It was simply a matter of filling out the proper form then. During the same legislative session, statutes governing divorce were liberalized. Visionary or not, Nevada had taken a position in its own dominion.

World events, translated Pearl Harbor, took the deal.

"I find myself peering around to see if a Nazi or Jap is at hand," wrote a Las Vegan, with more anxiety than justification. One bit of speculation envisioned the city as a hospital for the wartime wounded.

Geography and climate called the shot.

Only a year into the war, bomber pilots were streaking through the clear, trackless skies over their training headquarters just eight miles northeast of Vegas. It's Nellis Air Force Base now, home of the Tactical Fighter Weapons Center. Annual payroll runs to $130 million.

A magnesium plant that made the stuff for incendiary bombs was put into place at about the same time. It was the genesis for the new industrial city of Henderson, 13 miles south of Las Vegas.

Hoover Dam deflected the Depression. Military spending gave cover from the Second World War. But there was nothing, thank you, to protect the city from what was to occur in the fading forties.

The conflict over, a weary nation had put aside its weapons and set out on the pursuit of pleasure. Wartime constraints had dammed up the money flowing to those on the home front. Southern California, where a massive war effort was mounted, teemed with newcomers who elected to stay once exposed to its gentle climes and laid-back way of life. For Las Vegas, it was a classic case of supply and demand.

Las Vegas had already begun setting the table. In 1941 the El Rancho Vegas took the wraps off its casino and wagon-train ring of sprawling, one-story cabanas. A nightmare to a land-use planner, it was luxurious by the standards of the days of the Andrews

*The Tropicana opened on the Los Angeles highway in 1957, when the population of Las Vegas was about 55,000.*

Sisters. The El Rancho stood somewhat lonely, several miles south from the knot of small hotels and gambling joints downtown and fronting the haphazardly lit, two-lane highway leading to Los Angeles. It was the first hotel on the Las Vegas Strip. Company was coming.

A sense of momentum grew as three more hotels were completed by the mid-forties—the Last Frontier and Flamingo on the Strip and the El Cortez downtown. When the gaming licensing of one eager-to-go hotel operator was called into question, diarist Georgia Lewis echoed a widely held opinion: that whatever the man's background, "some feel he should be allowed a new start in Las Vegas. Especially since he is spending so much money." Las Vegas, indeed the state of Nevada, obviously had new lessons to learn, some the hard way.

The year 1955 is as good as any to measure the distance Vegas had rocketed to prominence as a genuinely international city.

The scene: Dwight Eisenhower, Mickey Spillane, Joseph McCarthy, Elvis Presley, post-Korea.

• The ides of the fifties saw the Fremont downtown and Riviera on the Strip rushing to tourist judgment as the first high-rises in southern Nevada. Once up, they finally overlooked the old height champ: the Union Pacific water tower.

Today there are more than 46,000 hotel and motel rooms in Las Vegas. Few of them are in less than a high-rise posture because of the cost of land. A planned addition to the Las Vegas Hilton would give it more rooms (3,174) than any hotel, anywhere.

• No public convention facilities existed in 1955. Only the neophyte Riviera had made a stab at convention business with a private hall. Why try in a gambling town?

Four years later the Las Vegas Convention Center welcomed its first gathering, the World Congress of Flight, an indication of how its sights were set. The center today is the public hub of an area-wide convention industry that draws nearly 650,000 delegates each year. The nation's largest single-level facility with 785,000 square feet under roof, the center handles biggies like the Consumer Electronics Show (55,000 delegates). Hotels accommodate the rest, for an average of one convention every day of the year. In the works are a downtown hall and stadium and a major addition to the main center. The bottom line: action at the rate of more than $200 million in delegate revenue, all before a single slot handle is pulled.

• Wind, dust, heat, rain. Welcome to the McCarran Airport of 1955. Hardy travelers had to be just that in the open-air terminal. Yet they kept coming: Sinatra doing a chinup for a press photo following his latest non-

*Slot machines were a brief run from the plane at old McCarran Airport.*

LAS VEGAS NEWS BUREAU PHOTOS

*More than 20 million visitors have toured Hoover Dam since 1937.*

title bistro bout, a heavyweight challenger "signing" autographs with a rubber stamp. Would the tiny terminal finally burst on some peak-traffic weekend? No way. No room.

The scene switched across the field in 1963 to a new-fangled satellite facility. It's now McCarran International Airport, the middle name added after the accreditation of a customs office. McCarran ranks in the Top 20 of America's busiest airports and handles more traffic per capita than any city in the U.S. To resist its own jet-lag the airport has programmed for expansion and renovation before the turn of the century. The future McCarran will whisk passengers from terminal to gate by rapid shuttle. With 2,000 acres there will be slim danger of bursting.

• Even in the fifties games of chance were being parlayed with entertainment. Performers have had a thing about Vegas since Hollywood's howling days when Gable, Lombard and Gary Cooper sought refuge among the mesquite. It's been an ongoing affair: Gracie Allen, mayor for a day; cowboy star Rex Bell, the state's lieutenant governor; Dorothy Parker, a former Ziegfeld Girl, the real mayor of neighboring North Las Vegas. Today, Las Vegas calls itself the Entertainment Capital of the World, a justifiable title as a quick marquee tour will show. And, anyway, where else would you find the Liberace Museum?

• Nevada in 1955 had yet to face the problem of how to let public corporations deal themselves into gaming. There was no pressing need. Individuals or closely held corporations could pack the financial load to raise their tents. Then, too, there was faint appetite in eastern executive suites for such corporate adventurism in Nevada. Moreover, there was the question—rarely discussed in the fifties—of how to keep tabs on corporate ownership as it might involve undesirables.

But the facts of economic life inexorably demanded change. In 1966 Howard Hughes arrived. In Hughes' case, ownership was not the issue; he was a corporation of one. Rather, he prompted decisions on multiple licensing and the threat of monopoly posed by his drumfire acquisitions.

Still there was the question of what to do about public corporations. Following intense debate the state adopted a formula for oversight and licensing of corporations. More recently another question was faced, whether to allow Nevada licensees to apply funds and expertise to gaming outside the state. Forbidden since misadventures years ago in Batista's Cuba, so-called "foreign" gaming investment is now permitted.

Meanwhile, back in the desert, the movement is upward and onward. Sky schooners of all sizes land or leave Las Vegas with 3,000 passengers a day. There is talk of the feasibility of a Los Angeles-Vegas schedule for an ultra-modern train capable of speeds up to 250 mph. Satellite branches of Levi Strauss and GTE Sylvania hang their hat in southern Nevada.

And now comes the one to top all. Bigger even than the nuclear test program which carries on 90-odd miles to the north. The proposed MX missile system, with a pricetag of $79 billion (and ever-escalating), is targeted for portions of central and southern Nevada. A preliminary report has recommended a main base 50 miles northeast of Las Vegas. Personnel would run to 7,000.

The desert winds sweeping across southern Nevada seem to wash away the past, leaving a future yet to be shaped. □

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*Joe Digles has lived in Las Vegas since the early '50s. Now retired, he is a former sports editor at the* Las Vegas Sun, *managing editor of the* Review-Journal, *and advertising man.*

# REPUBLIC WISHES NEVADA MANY HAPPY RETURNS!


## Together, We Join Great People with Great Times.

Happy Anniversary, Nevada. 50 years. Just could be the longest winning streak in history. And, after making gaming a serious business for 50 years, you're still betting on betting. Attracting people from the world over. All trying to beat the system, all lovin' the game.

Republic Airlines is proud to play a big part in joining great people with great times. With over 100 cities served daily, in and out of Reno and Las Vegas, odds are we bring a lot of people to the tables.

As "Silver turns to Gold," Republic toasts the great state of Nevada. Here's to another 50!

REPUBLIC AIRLINES

*Joining more of America than any other airline.*

# Puff, the Magic Braggin'

## Now let us praise famous flackers.

By Bill Willard

They call them publicists or flackers or blurbers or press agents or ballyhooers or hypers or puffers or public relations experts, all those people who dream up words and ideas to promote things.

And they call the wind Mariah.

Las Vegas has spawned some great ones through the years, especially in the fifties when the city's Golden Era had dawned and was fast approaching high noon. But some seed planting had been accomplished during the preceding decades when it was definite that Las Vegas was destined to become one of the most unique resorts in the world.

One of the town's first wacky promos occurred in 1926 to make everybody aware of Fire Prevention Week. Charles "Pop" Squires, editor and publisher of *Las Vegas Age*, front-paged the story that the biggest fire in the community's 21-year history had gutted the downtown area, leaving most of Fremont Street in cinders. The other newspaper, the *Las Vegas Review*, carried nothing on the great blaze. Squires' hoax could only be discovered in a small-print disclaimer at the end of the bannered article.

The ploy worked. The Chamber of Commerce and the Kiwanis Club made the fire prevention campaign the subject of their next meetings.

Erudite Bob Russell, a graduate of University of Southern California law and dental schools, bought the Apache Hotel in 1932 and began some legendary promoting for Las Vegas. He grew a mustache and goatee, wore cowboy togs, started talking with a drawl and looked so much like Colonel Buffalo Bill Cody that he became known as Colonel Bob.

He lucked out one day when a couple of photographers sent by the Union Pacific Railroad to take publicity pictures of Las Vegas sought out Colonel Bob at the Apache. Behind them entered an authentic prospector leading a burro with pack saddle on its back. As the photographers watched, the prospector said, "I want a room for myself and one for my burro."

Colonel Bob balked at the room for the burro, but the whiskered prospector tossed 20 ten-dollar bills on the counter and instructed, "Take him up and put him to bed and be sure to tie his feet. I'm goin' to get a drink." The photographers immediately got busy snapping the prospector and burro going in the elevator and, according to Colonel Bob, the photo-story made 236 papers across the country.

He topped this break two days later with one of the funniest hypes of the time. The photographers hung around, greedy for more shots as Colonel Bob scratched his head wondering what to do next. He hit upon an idea, but he needed some big fish because his scheme centered on the new and as yet unstocked lake behind Boulder Dam. He called a fish market in San Pedro for some bass, but all they had was barracuda about 40 inches long.

He ordered 25 packed in ice and put on the overnight bus to Las Vegas. The next morning several cowboys were enlisted to go out on Jim Cashman's boat, cast their lines and haul in a fine catch. The photographers snapped away and doubled over laughing at the fishy scene. When Colonel Bob had one of the photos blown up and hung in the Apache lobby, there were a few skeptics who said the group couldn't have caught barracuda at Lake Mead. Colonel Bob just grinned and said they

*Happy trails for Colonel Bob Russell, right, led to the cocktail room of his Apache Hotel, where this powwow took place. At left is Lone Wolf of Browning, Montana.*

GLENN DAVIS COLLECTION, UNLV LIBRARY

were indeed barracuda. So, how can a salt water fish swim around a fresh water lake? "Simple," answered Colonel Bob. "There is an underground passage from the Pacific Ocean to the Boulder Dam and these fish are coming up through it."

Colonel Bob would shake his head later in wonderment. "Do you know they loved that bunk?"

All kinds of bunk have gone down since those budding years of boosterism.

John Cahlan, executive director for the Las Vegas Diamond Jubilee events last year, also figured in some wild ventures to plug the town in the late thirties. As a reporter on the *Review*, he had access to the Associated Press wire and fired off many a plumped-up story with the dateline he wanted to make famous.

A press agent for the film "All About Eve" contacted Cahlan about getting some unusual slants on the picture. Cahlan, wanting the principal thrust to center on Las Vegas, dreamed up a story about "a nude woman running around Paradise Valley" and sent it rocketing along the AP wire. Calls came in from all over the world desiring more information about this Eve and her Paradise in the Mohave Desert.

Cahlan built the tale with many follow-ups until the deadline arrived to "find" the girl for a Hollywood screen test. At this point the studio press agent chickened out, wary of a possible lawsuit, and Cahlan was left to come up with a full explanation.

He ran into luck when two young lovers were found sunbathing nude in some Paradise Valley sand dunes. After the sheriff told him of the pair's dalliance with Old Sol, this became Cahlan's hook. So, Eve and Adam made the headlines again, as Cahlan cheerfully explained away in his wrap-up story that they had been fingered as perpetrators of the hoax.

Brigham Townsend, described by author Omar Garrison in his book "Howard Hughes in Las Vegas" as the city's wisest public relations man, was responsible for the aprocryphal tale about hotelman Thomas Hull stranded with a flat tire on Highway 91, later to become the Las Vegas Strip. Hull was checking the number of cars driving by, which prompted purchase of acreage on both sides of the thoroughfare for $5,500. That was how El Rancho Vegas was built, it says here.

That yarn is still being resurrected.


BILL WRIGHT COLLECTION

*Wilbur Clark of the Desert Inn minted coins with his cheerful likeness on one side and a swinging golfer on the other.*

Townsend helped Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel move into the good graces of Las Vegans after the Flamingo hotel-casino opened to less than salutory success in late 1946. It was pure PR.

"Benny Siegel told me he wasn't getting a play from the local people at his Flamingo," said Townsend. "I asked him why he didn't put on a show for the Damon Runyon Cancer Fund. At a meeting in Benny's office with his PR men, Hank Greenspun and Paul Price, Paul said it couldn't be done without going through committees, etcetera.

"I grabbed the phone and called Rose Bigman, Walter Winchell's secretary in New York. When I told her Siegel wanted to put on a night for the cancer fund, she cracked, 'Well, what are you waiting for—an engraved invitation?' I put Siegel on the phone with Rose. Every day after that Siegel either phoned the Winchell office or sent a telegram, most of them real lengthy.

"The night of the show, Siegel sat next to me on a barstool at the rear of the showroom. The room was jam-packed with everybody that was anybody in Las Vegas. At the conclusion of the show, singer Gene Austin auctioned off fur coats, diamond rings and other items that had been donated by local merchants. When the bidding was slow, Siegel would slip me a fistful of bills and say, 'Bid it up.' Later that night I tried to give Siegel the left-over money he had given me during the auction, but he pushed it away and said, 'Give it to the cancer fund.' There wasn't anyone around to see that gesture.

"After Siegel said good night to all the town folks he turned to me and said, 'Gee, kid, they shook my hand.' "

There were other so-called tough guys with ambivalent reputations. Moe Dalitz for one. It was no accident that Dalitz became a grand patron of the arts. It began after he had acquired the Desert Inn from Wilbur Clark with his partners from the Cleveland environs, all with notorious reputations that caused many an appearance before Senate committees and various crime busting agencies.

Astute Desert Inn publicist Eugene Murphy steered Dalitz into saving a performance of "Carmen" sponsored by the Las Vegas Opera Association, which was broke and needed a financial shot to pay off the road company. Some $3,000 did it, and from that time on, Murphy not only looked after the Dalitz reputation by means of varied good gestures, but he took care of Wilbur Clark's ego as well.

Clark had been no slouch at puffery himself ever since he hit town in the forties and made his calling card read El Rancho Vegas. He had a special minting of coins, dollar size, with his likeness on one side and the hotel on the other, plus other items and trinkets that gave him immediate impact. But nothing was so grand in Clark's life as the Murphy gambit which saw Clark and his wife, Toni, genuflecting one fine morning before the Pope in the Vatican.

Murphy's most impressive press agentry was the Desert Inn Tournament of Champions, which found all the top golfers of the country and their high-rolling followers assembling at the Desert Inn every May. Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Walter Winchell, Phil Harris and other stars indulged in the annual putting contest for the Damon Runyon Cancer Fund, every putt photographed for newspapers and the first television cameras popping up alongside the newsreel tripods, every lens aimed at the event for 'round the world exposure.

Hal Braudis was entertainment director of the Thunderbird, the fourth major Strip hotel to be built in the forties. He also was finely attuned to all manner of puffery as he carved a niche for himself booking talent at the threshhold of immense careers and paying out very few dollars for the privilege.

It was in his heyday at the Thunderbird, in November 1952, that a neat bit of chicanery was pulled for benefit of news exposure. Braudis booked a new Capitol Records singing flash named John Arcesi who, in the course of his opening night lieder, launched into a Ray Gilbert tune titled "Lost in Your

# Publicists' Big Daddy: Al Freeman


*Al Freeman, right, mugs backstage with Red Skelton and a CopaGirl.*

Al Freeman, who joined his fellow flackers on that special cloud reserved for dreamers in 1972, sharing obits with "Pop" Squires, Col. Bob Russell, Hal Braudis, Eugene Murphy and Abe Schiller, was the mover and shaker of the town's dream merchants while his regime lasted. He was often cantankerous, yet persuasively gentle at times and always firm in the knowledge of his craft. Freeman planned each onslaught with fine detail.

With all of the Freeman triumphs and extraordinary successes for the Sands in the years after it opened in 1952—which established a resort reputation for the top roster of gamblers, entertainers, world celebrities and news people everywhere—this was the prime exemplar of his working method. Encased neatly in a portfolio, bound in blue plastic, the event would unfold this way—Freeman's way:

**MILLIE CONSIDINE ROUNDUP**
**Sunday, Feb. 5, 1956**

* Attached list of guests invited to attend special party for Millie Considine, wife of INS writer Bob Considine, given by Ray Ryan and Charlie O'Curran.

* Two chartered DC4 coach planes will leave LA with some of the guests at 1 p.m. on Sunday for Palm Springs, pick up the rest of the group and head for the Sands, Las Vegas.

* Party is strictly western motif. In Palm Springs, stagecoaches, buckboards, cowboys, etc., will be used to lend real western flavor to party. Western-type entertainment and refreshments served in flight.

* Aboard planes for Las Vegas, guests will be given their Sands hotel-room keys, to avoid jam-up at front desk for registration of about 200 guests. They will have been mailed luggage tags listing name and room number for easier distribution upon arrival. Guests will be accommodated in Arlington and Belmont buildings.

**ARRIVAL AT McCARRAN AIRPORT, LAS VEGAS (APPROX. 3:30 p.m.)**

(a) As planes land, smoke signals will be sent up from three different points in landing area by Piute Indians brought in from Moapa Indian Reservation.

(b) Planes will land 5 minutes apart and will taxi to selected spot near Alamo Airways Field. Doors will not be opened until signal is given from our central point.

(c) As doors open and guests embark:

(1) 20 Piute Indians in native costume and warpaint will ring the aircraft in "wild" War Dance. Tom-toms, hoopin 'n hollerin, war cries, shooting off blanks in .38 and .45 guns to give it a flavor. If rehearsal attempts merit it, Piutes will "ambush" guests, perhaps carting off several struggling guests in general direction of waiting transportation.

(2) 10 CopaGirls in colorful Indian costumes and headdress will form a guide line from bottom of plane steps thru the War Dance ring and over to waiting transportation. Girls to be spaced so as to present obvious arrow of direction to transportation.

(3) 12 Cowboys under Tex Gates and Junior Gates in full western trappings on horseback will ride onto field during debarkation, milling around with horses at safe distance from debarking guests, firing .38 and .45 blanks and raising hell generally.

(4) 25 Jaycees (Jr. Chamber of Commerce Members) in full western outfits, dismounted, to be firing guns and adding to the general din.

(5) 15-piece orchestra in western dress mounted on flat-bed truck to be playing welcome music thru all the shenanigans.

(6) 18 Women of Nevada Lariatte, under direction of Eva Roberts, in uniform and dismounted formation.

(7) 15 mounted members of Nevada Rangerettes, under direction of Joe Gallwich, who were first place winners in the 1955 Helldorado.

(d) As soon as all guests are out of first plane and into general area of waiting transportation, entire scene and personnel shifts over to second arriving plane for repeat.

(e) Guests may have to be moved along courteously to waiting transportation, consisting of: 1 stagecoach seating 10 people, 1 buckboard seating 5 people, 1 hay wagon seating 30 people, 6 old jalopies seating total of 16 people, 1 Conestoga wagon seating total of 10 people, 3 new Greyhound buses seating total of 90 people. Guests to take choice of transportation.

(f) Once all guests are ready to move out, "parade" forms in following order: buckboard, stagecoach, hay wagon, Conestoga wagon, jalopies, buses, escort Sheriff's car.

(g) Parade moves out for Sands on signal. Cowboys on horseback escort horse-drawn vehicles. After parade gets started onto Highway 91, buses can pass slower vehicles, hooting horns, making fun of slower vehicles and passengers.

(h) Near Bond Road, masked group of horsemen ambush stagecoach, generally "terrorize" rest of wagon train.

**ARRIVAL AT THE SANDS**

(a) Cocktail Party—Lounge

(1) CopaGirls meet group in buses at front door, lining themselves up from entrance over towards the Lounge to guide guests into Cocktail Party. After buses unload, CopaGirls join party until slower contingent of horse-drawn vehicles arrives, then repeats guide-line.

(2) Cocktail waitresses and bartenders to be dressed in western outfits.

(3) Lounge musical unit to be dressed in western outfits.

(4) Portable jail from Elks Parade to be set up near entrance to Garden Room for gags and pictures.

(5) At right moment, branding "iron" to be brought out for Millie to brand bottoms of selected guests with removable color paint. Branded guests to be lassoed and held as steers are for fun-branding.

**DINNER—GARDEN ROOM**

(1) About 7:30 p.m., chef comes out and rings metal triangle set up at Garden Room entrance, shouting "Come and get it, or we'll throw it away!"

(2) Guests seated at 10-seat tables for steak dinner.

(3) Musical group in western dress plays throughout dinner. Live mike available for impromptu entertainment.

(4) Numbered paper slips are dropped into hat and winner picked by Millie as guest of honor. Prize—a live steer! Will be pulled thru kitchen door and deposited in lap of winner—and no apparent help to be given him as to what to do with the critter.

**COPA ROOM SHOW**

(1) Guests dance, drink and have a ball in Garden Room until about 11:30 p.m., then are invited to see show in Copa Room.

(2) Guests to sit at tables for 10 in Copa pit.

(3) Peggy Lee to wear six-shooters upon stage entrance.

**DEPARTURE**

(a) At 7 a.m., Monday, buses will be waiting at Sands entrance to take first group back to airport.

(b) At 3:30 p.m., Monday, buses will be waiting to take second group back to airport.

(c) For final stunt for afternoon plane, pick cooperative guest, dress him in old coveralls, tar and feather him safely, and have him running for plane after everybody else is in, being chased by cowboys firing blanks.

NOTE: Guests will wear large shiny Sheriff's badge for identification, as far as they will cooperate.

—*BW*

Love." Whereupon a good-looking blonde lass sitting ringside went into a trance. And while flashbulbs exploded, she was carried into the lobby where Dr. C. W. Woodbury examined her, finally declaring the symptoms were caused from high emotional hysteria.

While the young lady, whose name was discovered later to be Ariel Edmundson, was doing her thing, by coincidence Bill Best of United Press, Ken Frogley of Desert Sea News Bureau, photographer Don English and International News Service representative Ed Oncken were invited guests seated at an adjoining table.

Ariel the Trance Girl was carted off to Las Vegas Hospital where the next day she was given the hair of the dog, so to speak, with Arcesi humming the "Lost in Your Love" melody to snap her out of her reverie. Nurses, hospital staffers and hypnotic therapist Nahir Arthur Knight were witnesses to the transformation with Knight whispering questions.

Bert Richman, Arcesi's personal manager, claimed complete innocence, as did the singer's publicist, Leo Guild, the latter saying he was taken completely by surprise when Los Angeles papers carried the item. To give the story real heart, Richman paid Edmundson's flight from Las Vegas to Los Angeles to the side of her grandmother, Mrs. Julie E. Tiffany. It was learned that Ariel was an ex-Harry Conover model, had been an extra and bit player in films, was always writing poetry and several months before had been trying to sell screenplays to Hollywood studios.

What in the world ever happened to John and Ariel?

About one year after the Sahara and Sands hotels opened in 1952, there were great rivalries to promote the headliners, much of the blast directed toward the salaries of Marlene Dietrich at the Sahara and Tallulah Bankhead at the Sands. Bill Miller of the Sahara pulled one-upmanship on Jack Entratter of the Sands and paid Dietrich $30,000 while Bankhead came off $5,000 less per week, all that money considered enormous pay in those years. There was also Dietrich's gown, cunningly designed in beige to appear as if she wore little or nothing above the waist and touted as a "peek-a-boo" costume.

At the same time Dietrich was flashing her upper torso to the world press, the Gabor sisters arrived at the Last Frontier with the leader of the pack, Zsa Zsa, ripe and ready for exploitation. Harvey Diederich, hotel publicist, got his head together with the Gabor's press agent, Russell Birdwell of Hollywood. Diederich adorned his Hungarian headliner with a black eye patch encrusted with sequins as a story hit the papers that Zsa Zsa's fiance, the international playboy Porfirio Rubirosa, had tiffed with his lady love and his fiery temper caused a neat black eye when she got in the way of a love punch.

Not only did the unique adornment of Zsa Zsa intrigue the wire services, but when Diederich cannily planted the same black satin-sequined patches on sisters Eva and Magda, plus all of the girls in the chorus line, the visual wallop grabbed national coverage to match Dietrich's "peek-a-boo."

Stan Irwin, who was the first hotel press agent, entertainment booker and comedian to win a seat in the State Assembly, ran many a promo through his nimble mind to fruition. His base was the Sahara and, although he pushed the Dietrich business to the outer limits, there were many more

***Marlene Dietrich stunned the world with her peek-a-boo costume and unprecedented salary of $30,000 a week.***

LAS VEGAS NEWS BUREAU PHOTOS

LAS VEGAS NEWS BUREAU

*Al Freeman's floating crap game in the Sands' pool spread the Strip hotel's slogan, "fun in the sun," around the world.*

ideas from his brain that caught the public's fancy.

When Red Skelton made his Las Vegas debut in 1953 headlining the Sahara bill with Anna Maria Alberghetti, Irwin contrived one of the big splashes of his career. He ordered built, as an addition to the Sahara's billboard on the Sunset Strip in Hollywood, a miniature replica of the hotel's Garden of Allah swimming pool. Eight well-chosen young ladies were hired to dive and cavort around the pool eight hours a day in shifts of four hours per mermaid.

For some $30,000, Irwin had caught the fancy of hundreds of Angelenos who were possibly lured to the Sahara, and his idea was lauded for originality by advertising luminaries all over the U.S.

Other splashes were made using pools in Las Vegas. The Last Frontier built a glass-enclosed observation booth under its pool, fully staffed by cocktail waitresses. In time a slot machine was added underwater as a lead singer from the show dived in with coins and played the machine while photographers snapped pictures for nationwide editors who never seemed to weary of Las Vegas cheesecake gimmicks.

One of the funniest, wildest schemes using a pool was out of the devious mind of Allen A. Arthur, Flamingo publicist, who was working the department bossed by the hotel's star promo-chief, Abe Schiller, hailed for his flamboyant western attire all over the world. Arthur decided he would play while the boss was away and let it be known that on a certain day the pool would be filled with Jello, and girls representing those eight delicious flavors—Miss Raspberry, Miss Lime, Miss Lemon, Miss Orange, and so on—would dive into the gelatin for benefit of professional as well as amateur photographers.

But the hotel engineers got wind of Arthur's mad plan. They wired Schiller that if the pool were filled with Jello, it would ruin the drainage system. Whereupon Schiller wired back: "Tell Al if he fills that pool with Jello, he'll have to empty it with a spoon."

No mention of pools as a hype object can get by without pointing to the classic use of a hotel's watery oasis by the big daddy of all Las Vegas Strip publicists, Al Freeman of the Sands. It was his floating crap game, staged meticulously and photographed cunningly, that richocheted around the world plastering the inky image of the Sands' slogan "fun in the sun" in a most captivating manner as guests "get tanned and faded at the same time."

Ah, those magnificent huffers and puffers!

Dick Odessky, himself a puffer for the Flamingo, up from Los Angeles as reporter for the *Herald,* then joining the *Las Vegas Sun,* found himself again a praise-agent for the Stardust and Fremont until a new regime took over. He is back there once more helping the latest owners, although quite muted compared to some advice he handed out while writing a column for the *Valley Times* four years ago:

"Vegas PR men:
forgotten breed?

"One of the most maligned groups of professionals in our town are the public relations men and women representing the resort hotels and casinos. Most current top management was not around when men like Al Freeman, Herb McDonald, Gene Murphy and Abe Schiller *(not to slight the ebullient forensic marvel Lee Fisher—BW)* were plying their trade.

"The bosses of today simply know that when they got here business was great. How it got that way apparently doesn't concern them. They don't realize how many dollars their predecessors spent on public relations or the professionalism involved."

Odessky ended his column with a bit of sound advice echoed by all of the benighted puffers of the world:

"Perhaps one day, the top management throughout the resort industry will realize that if it doesn't have its public relations people to attract the public to its front doors, it might as well consider locking up those doors.

"A good public relations man can't guarantee certain success for a hotel. But he can certainly help its chances, if given the opportunity."

Let's all drink to that. □

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*Bill Willard, sculptor and public relations man, has been an actor, TV commentator, newspaper columnist and executive director of the Nevada State Council on the Arts. He has lived in Las Vegas for more than 30 years.*

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NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Power and Magic

The stick games played by Nevada Indians have a magic and intensity rarely encountered in a casino.
By Arline Fisher

When the cowboys sat down for a game of poker in one of Nevada's newly legalized casinos in 1931, the Indians were probably gathered under a willow a few miles away, gambling in a way their forefathers had for generations.

The Indian handgame is one of the few aspects of Indian culture that has survived in the modern world. The game is centuries old and exists in the same form from the Great Basin to the Great Plains. Even though the intricacies of a crap table make an Indian handgame seem like child's play, child's play it is not. The handgames have an intensity and a magic rarely equaled in a casino. It's an intensity that reflects what it is to be Indian—to be social, to be guided by oral tradition, to be fiercely competitive.

Basically, the handgame, sometimes referred to as a stick or bone game, is a guessing game that is so simple even the Indian children in Head Start classes learn it. At powwows, however, it is extremely rare to see young people participating. They lack the "power" and cannot seem to "psyche out" their opponents, which is the essence of the game.

The game is played by two teams consisting of five people each; originally only men played but now the teams often include women. Each team has a captain, a moneyman and a guesser (referred to by the Paiutes as the "killer"), but all these roles can be played by the same person.

Each team starts with a set of five point sticks. Two pairs of bones also are used, one pair plain white and the other with black bands around the bones' centers. The teams, usually comprised of elders, sit or kneel facing each other, about six feet apart. Bets are placed on the ground in the center, each team wagering equal amounts. The pile of bills can run into thousands of dollars.

The starting team, determined by the flip of a coin, gets both sets of bones. The team captain decides which two members will hide the bones and gives each hider one white bone and one striped. Covering their hands with handkerchiefs or scarves, the hiders conceal a bone in each hand.

Meanwhile, the starting team members sing or chant and often play a drum or beat on a pole called a kickstick at their feet. The use of drums is recent in Nevada.

To a non-Indian, the songs may sound repetitive. Not to the players, though. The songs are distracting, often humorous or taunting, always complicated and powerful. There are men's songs and women's songs using different sounds and tempos, invoking different animals and elements of nature. The men sing of elk and bear while the women sing of birds, particularly the owl.

The singing grows louder and more intense, and the hiders wave their closed fists at members of the guessing team, trying to psyche them into making a guess before their magic has worked. The guesses are not made at random. Many Indians believe "luck" is an art that can be developed, a skill to be honed, a magic. When the magic is right, a guess is made.

The guesser, or killer, now has to indicate the position of the two white bones. He has four possible choices—outside or inside hands, left or right hands—and gives a specific gesture to indicate each guess. The signals are universal so that Shoshones from Nevada can easily play against Cherokees from Oklahoma. A correct guess of both white bones is rewarded with two point sticks and possession of the bones; for one white bone correct, one point stick is thrown over. Wrong guesses lose one stick. A team must win, or "cook," the opposing team's five point sticks as well as their own. Games can last minutes or through the night depending on the players' magic.

As the game reaches its conclusion, the players are radiating power. The onlookers are transfixed by that power, by the rhythms of the songs and the players' animal cries, by the feeling of belonging, of being Indian. When the last stick is cooked, the moneyman gathers the crumpled bills, counts out the side bets and awards the winning team its share. Money is stuffed into denim pockets, coffee cans and beaded purses. Already there is talk of the next night's play. The spectators appear more drained than the players—satisfied in witnessing a tradition being carried forward, but deprived now of the communal power, surprised to learn that hours have passed.

Handgames are played at any large Indian social gathering, and like the dancers and crafts people, some players and bettors travel from other states to Nevada festivals. One handgame master, Blackfoot Blood, is from the Northern Plains. He is reputed to be nearly a hundred years old and—because of his guessing skill—a millionaire. He arrives at each game in a new black Cadillac and leaves days later with thousands of dollars and perhaps the titles to a dozen pick-up trucks.

The largest handgame tournament in Nevada is held in Schurz in September during the Northern Paiute Pinenut Festival. Handgames are also played at the Fallon Indian Rodeo in July, the Duck Valley Powwow on Veterans Day, and frequently at ceremonies in McDermitt, the home of Indians who have a more traditional lifestyle.

Nevadans are justifiably proud of 50 years of casino gaming, and they can be equally proud of many centuries of traditional Indian gaming. □

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*Arline Fisher of Reno is the editor of the* Native Nevadan, *published by the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada in Reno.*

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# Arrival in

## Bill Harrah arrived in Reno in 1937 to discover a town one national magazine called 'The City That Sex Built.' By Leon Mandel

William Fisk Harrah, 26-year-old charmer, pathological car lover and bingo entrepreneur; William Fisk Harrah, who would spend the next four decades building a gambling monument as marbled and sturdy as the Arc de Triomphe; William Fisk Harrah, who was not yet but soon would be assembling the world's most important collection of automobiles; William Fisk Harrah, the man who industrialized gambling; *that* Bill Harrah arrived in Reno, Nevada, in May of 1937

He came to a town that was then, as it is now, four or five or six communities superimposed upon one another. There was the City of Ranchers and Businessmen. There was Reno: Mecca of Divorcees. Another city within the city waited at the end of the trail for every sheepherder and buckaroo in Northern Nevada. There was the City of the Players. And, of course, there was Reno, the Nation's Harlot.

Not quite $23 million in assessed city property clumped in four square miles didn't leave sloganeers much choice but to call Reno the Biggest Little City in the World if they wanted to call it anything; unfortunately for the cause of accuracy Reno wasn't big and it wasn't little and any Easterner worth his chauvinism would have laughed at the idea of calling the place a city, although the 22,000 persons who lived there were proud to do so.

What's more, they would have argued the point. Didn't the city have an airport with four daily transcontinental mail and passenger flights? And almost 30 car dealerships including Short Gibson on Sierra Street selling Terraplanes? And 10 barber shops? Not to mention 27 dentists, five department stores, four libraries, two mortuaries, three newspapers, 10 public schools, 42 physicians and surgeons, 115 lawyers, 17 "places of amusement" and two permanent meeting places for the United Ancient Order of Druids? Talk about your haven for professionals! Thank God the medicos went along with the city directory people who described Reno as "the city with the most enjoyable climate in the world, where the sun shines every day in the year and sickness is banished."

If sickness was banished in Reno before the Second World War, so were spouses. Divorce was the city's most


NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*"Arrival in Gomorrah" is extracted from "Gambling Man: The Life and Times of William Fisk Harrah" by Leon Mandel, to be published by Doubleday & Co. in the fall of 1981.*

# Gomorrah

prominent industry. Six times over the next 40 years, Bill Harrah would take advantage of local expertise in this craft. At the moment of arrival, however, everyone was doing just fine without his business. The Reno divorce had taken on a cachet ever since Mrs. William Ellis Corey, wife of the young and prominent president of U.S. Steel, sued successfully for divorce in July of 1906, winning a $2 million settlement. What the newly rich Mrs. Corey didn't do, Mary Pickford accomplished 14 years later when she went to Reno for the divorce that would free her to marry Douglas Fairbanks.

MARGARET SCHROTER COLLECTION

*On Douglas Alley in the '40s, Reno casino prowlers would find Harrah's early bingo club as well as Harolds and the Palace Club. Above, Bill Harrah in the mid-1930s.*

Understanding the value of its remunerative if eccentric cottage industry, the state engaged in a quarter century underbidding contest with the rest of the U.S.—indeed the world—to keep its advantage.

From six months residency, Nevada lowered its requirement to three months when Mexico City and Paris began to compete for the divorce trade. Upstarts Idaho and Arkansas waited three years to watch the experiment and thereupon reduced the required term of residence themselves. Nevada replied to the threatened loss of an estimated $5 million annual divorce revenue by cutting the three-month term to only six weeks. That did it. Not only did divorce business pick up—and these were the years of the Depression—but so did the supply side of the divorce equation: marriages, which outnumbered separations 3 to 1.

The establishment city of Reno—whose mouthpiece was the *Reno Evening Gazette*—was not entirely sure it approved of these goings on: "The *Gazette* has not changed its opinion about the character of [the divorce bill]. It is designed to further commercialize the courts and law-making power of this state and ignores entirely the social side of the marriage relation with which, only, the laws and courts are presumed to deal." That was mild. The husband of a woman newly returned from Reno shed of him was less complimentary. Reno was " a city where perjury and more perjury is the order of the day, a city where every effort is exerted to make the marriage institution seem like a farce and where practically the entire populace feeds like vermin on profits from the divorce mill," quoth New York lawyer J.S. Robinson in *The American Weekly.*

But Reno was also a shopping hub for ranchers, their families and their hands, sturdy, plain people. Reno had two hospitals, terribly important then and now for the folk who lived in the cow counties—Churchill, Lyon, Storey, Ormsby, Douglas, Mineral, Nye, Lander, Humboldt and Pershing—an area that would come to be known as an extended Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. The city had: Baptist, Christian Science, Congregational, Episcopal, Jewish, Mormon, Lutheran, Methodist (white) and Methodist (black), Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist churches. There were four theatres; there was an auditorium with seating for 2,000. The University of Nevada had an enrollment of just over 1,000 students. There were 383 stores selling $16.5 million worth of merchandise each year. All of this was dazzling to those simple ranchers whom Nevada prose laureate Robert Laxalt described as "leathery men with quizzical, judging eyes, women who get up in the darkness to cook huge breakfasts of sausage and eggs and homemade bread and pots of steaming coffee deeply religious [people] gentle with their children, but restrictive in a way that would shock modern parents." They came to Reno to shop, to socialize, to worship, to study; some of them came to play. But they brushed only briefly against the City of the Players.

In part that was because the players in Reno slept late. In part it was because the players gambled, drank and womanized to the exclusion of normal social intercourse, an exclusion, by the

*(Continued on page 126)*

# The Shy and the Mighty

## The human factor: 50 moguls, politicians and characters who helped shape Nevada gaming's colorful heritage.

Nevada gaming may call itself an industry, but it also has a human side. Memories and casino empires are not made by corporations alone. Hundreds of men and women have distinguished themselves in the great gambling halls and crossroads casinos of the Silver State. Some came out winners; others lost their shirts. Some were gregarious, while others shied from publicity. There are many, like the person who discovered the word "gaming," who didn't get the recognition they deserved.

Following is a roll call of 50 gaming greats and characters who have made their marks in the Nevada casino world.

**Howard Hughes,** the invisible billionaire, changed the nature of Nevada gaming during the four years he lived as a hermit on the top floor of the Desert Inn. Between 1966 and 1970 he acquired the D.I., Sands, Frontier, Castaways, Silver Slipper and Landmark in Vegas and Harolds Club in Reno. His presence made gaming respectable for corporations; today's casino-owning companies include Del Webb (which had been on the scene), MGM, Hilton, Holiday Inns, Ramada Inns and Hughes' own Summa Corp.

**Doris Rose** was the first full-time woman dealer in the state. Trained by Pappy Smith, she began at Harolds Club in 1938. She made $18 a week for six or seven days' work, which, she says, "was a good salary at the time."

**Newton Crumley** inaugurated big name entertainment in Nevada in 1941 when he and his father paid Ted Lewis and Orchestra $12,000 to appear for eight days at their Commercial Hotel in Elko. Sophie Tucker, Jimmy Dorsey and the Andrews Sisters followed. Crumley had contracts requiring the stars to give a free community performance during each stand.

**Bill Harrah** brought modern corporate practices to gambling and created the world's largest auto collection in Sparks. Harrah built Reno's first casino high-rise, a 24-story hotel that opened in 1969. Harrah died in 1978, and the company was later purchased by Holiday Inn.

**John Harrah,** Bill's father, kept their club on Douglas Alley warm because he believed players were allergic to chill. John seldom gambled. "Never really cared for it myself," he said. "I find it gets monotonous."

**Jay Sarno** and partner Nathan Jacobson opened Caesars Palace in 1966. Sarno later conceived and built another Vegas landmark, Circus Circus, which

*Frank Sinatra, back on the Strip.*

*Bugsy Siegel, the farsighted mobster.*

LAS VEGAS NEWS BUREAU

*Howard Hughes, in his TWA days.*

LAS VEGAS NEWS BUREAU

featured trapeze artists flying over the gaming tables, kids' midway and a revolving bar.

**Muhammad Ali,** although roundly beaten by Larry Holmes in Caesars' parking lot in October 1980, gave Las Vegas a monumental publicity and money coup and took home an $8 million jackpot himself.

**Charles Fey** invented the Liberty Bell, the forerunner of today's slot machine, in 1895 in San Francisco. Its biggest jackpot was 10 drinks. Marshall and Frank Fey of Reno's Liberty Belle Saloon have loaned one of the slots to the Nevada Historical Society's museum.

**Morris Schenker,** famed lawyer of Jimmy Hoffa and the Teamsters, owns and runs the Dunes with his wife Lillian. It cost him $500,000—half for background check and half for witnesses' expenses—to get licensed by the state.

**Frank Sinatra,** now an important headliner for Caesars Palace, was discovered hosting Chicago underworld figure Sam Giancana at Tahoe's Cal-Neva Lodge, of which the singer was part owner, in 1963. He was forced to sell his interests in the Cal-Neva and the Sands because of the incident.

**Warren Nelson,** an owner of Reno's Cal Neva Club and northern Nevada gaming leader, arrived in Reno in 1936 and opened a keno game at Johnny Petricciani's Palace Club. He is credited with changing keno's traditional format —numbered pieces of paper rattled in pans—to the now familiar balls-in-a-cage layout.

**Phil Tobin** wasn't a gambler, but the buckaroo from Humboldt County presented the assembly bill in 1931 that made gambling legal, and taxable, again in Nevada.

**J. Kell Houssels,** prominent Las Vegas hotelman who got his start dealing 21 in Ely in the twenties, operated the Las Vegas Club, the El Cortez and the Tropicana. His son, J.K. Houssels, a horse breeder like his father, is an executive at the Union Plaza.

**Jackie Gaughan** has been involved in many Las Vegas area casinos, owning interests in as many as nine, including the Flamingo, Las Vegas Club, Union Plaza and Golden Nugget. His downtown El Cortez is known for its low table limits and high volume business.

**Nick the Greek** was a celebrity-regular in Las Vegas and Reno casinos in the fifties and sixties when the big (and illegal) action in other states had dried up. Craps was his favorite casino game.

*Creator Donn Arden, right, with executive producer Bill DeAngelis and members of the cast of Hello Hollywood Hello celebrate the show's second birthday last year at MGM Reno.*

**Eddie Sahati,** owner of the Normandie Club in Reno and the Stateline Club at Tahoe in the forties, was a narcotics addict and, in the words of Harold Smith, Sr., "the absolute, ultimate gamester." Sahati hit a lucky streak in the late forties and won more than a million at Reno clubs. His Stateline site is now occupied by Harrah's Tahoe.

**Ed Olsen,** who came to Nevada as the state's only Associated Press reporter in 1945, was named chairman of the Gaming Control Board by Governor Grant Sawyer in 1961. The most famous incident of his five-year tenure was his showdown with Frank Sinatra.

**Judy Bayley,** owner of the Hacienda in the sixties, was known as the First Lady of Gambling in Las Vegas. Bayley, who died in 1971, was also known as a philanthropist; among her good works is UNLV's Judy Bayley Theatre.

**Frank Scott,** Union Plaza head, ventured into rural Nevada to buy and renovate the historic Mizpah Hotel in Tonopah, which reopened in 1980.

**Del Webb,** the Phoenix construction magnate, entered Nevada gaming in the mid-sixties. Del Webb Corp. now has the three Saharas—Vegas, Tahoe and Reno—besides the Mint in Vegas and the Nevada Club in Laughlin.

**Graham and McKay** were proprietors of the Bank Club, prostitution overlords and money launderers in the wide-open Reno of the thirties. They got caught.

**Baby Face Nelson** was a friend of Bill Graham and Jim McKay, who laundered his bank robbery loot. While hiding out, Nelson was said to have served occasionally as a bouncer at the Bank Club.

**Kirk Kerkorian** came to Vegas in the sixties, buying into the Flamingo and building the International. Both were later bought by Hilton Hotels. The former airline magnate is the major stockholder in another important gaming corporation of the seventies: MGM.

**Si Redd** was a pioneer in popularizing the Big Bertha slot machine from 1967 to 1978 as head of Bally Distributing in Reno. The slot king still custom builds Berthas through his Sircoma Inc., which is big in the video game market, and his Antique Gambler sells and restores vintage slots.

**Liberace** was the first Las Vegas performer to earn $50,000 a week—in the early fifties.

**Harvey Gross** installed the only gas pumps between Carson City and Placer-

ville at his small Tahoe roadstop in the mid-forties to help draw customers. Today Harvey's Resort Hotel has 10 stories and is the longest-running individual operation in the state. Less than a mile north is the stylish Harvey's Inn. Gross also has the James Canyon Ranch in Carson Valley where he raises cattle and buffalo, which are served over the mountain at Harvey's restaurants.

**John Cahlan,** the distinguished Las Vegas newspaper man, has promoted Helldorado Days and other civic events since the first days of gaming in the thirties. Last year he was a director of the city's Diamond Jubilee.

**Pick Hobson** revived Reno's old Overland Hotel on Center Street in 1957 even though the big action had shifted a block west to Virginia. The Overland is no more, torn down for Harrah's new addition, but Hobson still has the Riverside and the Topaz Lodge.

**Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel** took a sabbatical from the California rackets in 1945 to build his dream hotel on the Strip, the lavish Flamingo. It opened December 26, 1946, and immediately began to lose money. The next June, Siegel was gunned down in the Beverly Hills home of his girlfriend, Virginia Hill. Bugsy had predicted that Las Vegas would be "the biggest gambling center in the world" by the end of the 1950s. He was right.

**Governor Fred Balzar,** a Virginia City native and known as "Friendly Fred," signed the open gambling law and the six-weeks divorce statute on the same day, March 19, 1931.

**Sam Boyd** developed his early gaming skills by running bingo games on gambling ships anchored off the California coast. He came to Las Vegas in 1941 and over the next three decades was associated with the El Rancho, Sahara, Mint and Union Plaza. The civic leader today owns the California Hotel, Sam's Town and, in Henderson, the Eldorado.

**Walter Kane,** longtime Hughes aide and entertainment director for Summa Corporation, has his name ("Walter Kane Presents") on more marquees than any Vegas star.

**Pappy Smith** and his son Harold opened Harolds Club in 1935. Their $500 hole-in-the-wall investment grew into a multi-million dollar casino, at one time the world's largest.

**Harold Smith, Sr.,** was a colorful, high-living gambler in his younger days, known for flamboyant stunts like riding his horse into his club's first-floor bar. Smith retired in 1969, and a year later Howard Hughes bought Harolds.


*The Yankee fiddler is Harold Smith, Sr., who set the tone of flamboyance and fun for Harolds Club in Reno.*

**E. Parry Thomas** has had a hand in the creation of many Las Vegas casinos. Currently top exec at Valley Bank, Thomas got his Bank of Las Vegas into the casino loan business in the fifties, when such loans were shunned by most financial institutions.

**Lincoln Fitzgerald,** Reno gaming figure and Nevada Club owner since 1946. Across the street from the sparsely decorated Nevada Club is his sparkling modern high-rise, Fitzgerald's. He brought the first Monte Carlo style roulette wheel to the state.

**Jimmy "The Greek" Snyder** lived in Las Vegas before he became a TV celebrity. He was a columnist for the *Las Vegas Sun* and with a widely syndicated column achieved his reputation as a top oddsmaker.

**Donn Arden,** best known for his productions of Halleluja Hollywood and Hello Hollywood Hello at MGM's Vegas and Reno, brought the Lido de Paris to the Stardust in the fifties. The stage, built especially for the Lido, has never held another regular production.

**Ben Goffstein,** late Vegas gaming figure, named his downtown hotel-casino the "Four Queens" after his four daughters.

**Mike O'Callaghan** and **Phil Hannifin,** as Nevada governor and gaming board chairman, flew to London in 1973 and met with Howard Hughes to talk about his casino properties. The two officials were among the last "outsiders" to see the billionaire recluse alive.

**Jessie Beck** was working as a cashier in Texas when vacationing Pappy Smith noticed her knack for numbers and offered her a job at Harolds. She took it in 1938 and later married Fred Beck, who had keno and other concessions at the club. She continued the business after Fred's death in 1954 until Hughes bought Harolds in 1970. Then Beck gambled $3 million that she could make the long-closed Riverside Hotel a success. She did.

**John Ascuaga,** son of a Basque sheepman, came to Nevada in the mid-fifties and worked for his Idaho employer, Dick Graves, as Sparks Nugget food manager. Ascuaga became general manager and eventually bought the place. One of his best events is the annual bull sale staged in the casino showroom.

**Wayne Newton** became a casino owner in 1980 when he purchased 50 percent of the troubled Aladdin on the Strip. In the seventies the "Midnight Idol" was an incredible showroom draw for Summa Corp. hotels.

**Benny Binion,** a former Texas gambler, would rather wear cowboy duds than a business suit. He and a partner arrived in Las Vegas in the mid-forties in a Cadillac with a trunkful of $100 bills to buy the downtown Las Vegas Club. In 1951 he founded the Horseshoe Club, famous for its no-limit bets and high-rolling gamblers.

**Major Riddle** came from the midwest to Vegas in 1956 to take over the ailing Dunes Hotel. Major was his Christian name, not a title. Riddle, who died last year, was an all-night poker player.

**Jim Kelley,** owner of the Nuggets in Reno and Crystal Bay, came to Nevada with Dick Graves in 1953 after gaming was banned in Idaho. Kelley gave slots a big role and was the first with a wheel of fortune with free hourly spins.

**Wilbur Clark** opened the Desert Inn in 1950 and became famous for his ambassadorial bearing and his penchant for having his name on as many D.I. items as possible.

**Don Laughlin,** owner of the Riverside Casino on the Colorado River, established a post office in his club and thereby had the town named after him.

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*Material compiled by Fred Hinners, Phil Hevener and David Moore.*

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# The Pot's Right

## Tournament stars and new poker faces are making it easier for the weekend player to get in the game. By A.D. Hopkins

Back in the twenties Johnny Moss decided to become a professional gambler. So, weighing the odds, he chose the game most likely to succeed—dominos. "Even in Texas," says the three-time world champion of poker, "it was easier to find a domino game than a poker game."

Poker was also hard to find in Nevada, even long after gambling became legal in the Silver State. Most casinos simply were not interested in running poker games. "They didn't want customers getting broke playing each other," Moss explains. "If people were going to lose that money, the casino meant to win it itself." When he arrived in Las Vegas in 1949, Moss recalls, "There was just a little cheap poker around town." The biggest game was in a back room at the Flamingo—and the game wasn't open to the public.

In the last decade, however, the game that Moss found so rare has become one of the most popular casino games. More and more "recreational" card sharks are following the example of pros like Amarillo Slim and Texas Dolly Brunson, who gained much of their fame from Las Vegas' World Series of Poker. The trend shows in state gaming statistics. Ten years ago only 85 poker tables were taxed in the entire state. Today there are more than 430 tables, and rare is the casino without a friendly game of seven-card stud.

The explosion of interest in this most American gambling game has also produced a new kind of player. Today's players are younger, more educated, and better skilled; they are increasingly likely to be women. They play kinds of poker that did not exist 60 years ago and, unlike their predecessors, never

LAS VEGAS NEWS BUREAU PHOTOS

*Tough gents to face across a poker table: Pug Pearson, top left, once pocketed $62,000 on a bluff; Tree Top Strauss, bottom left, who'll bet on anything—even cockroach races; and Amarillo Slim, a cagey player who claims to be a country boy.*

have to worry about being robbed or cheated.

Amarillo Slim, probably poker's best PR man, drawls: "Prior to 1972 everyone thought that the professional gambler either crawled out from under a rock or had a string of hustling girls, or was involved in narcotics or something. That was until a goofy, tall, amiable country boy won the world championship and the press took hold of it because he was not a gangster." The winner he was talking about in 1972 was none other than Amarillo Slim.

Poker differs from all other casino games in that the player wins money from, or loses it to, the other players, not the casino. The house charges by the half-hour for a seat at the table or rakes off a percentage of the pot—legally as much as 10 percent but usually less.

Today's casino attitude is expressed by David "Chip" Reese, manager of the card room at the Dunes Hotel. "A card room gives you a steady profit at no risk. The casino doesn't gamble any money," says Reese. "So, since the customers want poker, a first-class casino is going to have it just like it would have a tennis court."

Jack Binion, president of Binion's Horseshoe in Las Vegas and himself a poker player, remarks, "They've found out they can charge $6 an hour for a seat in a $30-$60 limit game, and that's pretty high rent for a piece of real estate the size of a guy's ass."

Most observers see the surge of player interest in poker as a manifestation of a growing national tolerance toward gambling. But Eric Drache, a 37-year-old professional player, thinks poker has become popular precisely

because people do not perceive it as gambling. "If you win, you can say you did it with skill," he says. "The only other game you can say that about is blackjack, and then you have to be careful saying it or they won't let you play." Drache points out that the rise of blackjack and sports betting, both perceived as games of skill, paralleled that of poker.

Whatever poker's new appeal, it has produced a breed of smart, young players. Moss, now 73, was in his forties when he hit town. He was considered young for a top poker player in those days, and he was over 60 when he won the world championship in Las Vegas.

But Doyle "Texas Dolly" Brunson, twice world champion, was a youthful 43 when he won. The current champion, Stewart Unger, won the title at 26. Chip Reese, now 29, was only 23 when he came to Las Vegas and immediately became one of the most important big-money players. His girl friend, Terry King, won the Woman's Seven-Card Stud World Championship at the advanced age of 23.

Brunson is considered a transitional model between the old-time pros and the new. "It used to be that you became a poker player only because you were forced into it, from lack of education or getting into trouble when you were young," says Brunson, who himself has a master's degree in education. "Now we've got Chip Reese, who went to Dartmouth." Eric Drache's wife, Jane, also a professional player, commutes to Columbia University, where she is majoring in psychology. Jay Noricks, a UNLV anthropology instructor, started studying the poker subculture; he went native and now plays poker under the name of "The Professor."

> "Seven-card stud gives you a greater chance to improve your hand. That means you'll stay in more pots and enjoy it more."

"The old-timers," Reese says, "generally drifted into poker because there wasn't much else they could do. But we young players chose it, and that produces better players at a younger age than drifting does. Also, it's easier to get knowledge these days. There are all sorts of books and studies of probabilities, whereas the old guys had to learn it all through experience."

Amateur players are also more sophisticated, according to Brunson. "You hardly ever see a complete sucker anymore. Even in a $1-$3 game, the average player has read a book and knows something about the game."

Another reason for the greater number and skill of players is Nevada itself, Reese says. "When there wasn't any Las Vegas, you learned in private games, on the road if you went pro, and had to worry about getting cheated, getting robbed. Things like that don't happen to you here. It took longer to establish yourself under those conditions and it weeded a lot of people out."

Players today have another advantage—they can pick their own games. "A lot of 'em nowadays just learn one game and head for Las Vegas," says Johnny Moss. "But in the old days you had to play all the games. If you were a

*(Continued on page 99)*

# Poker's World Series Stars

Nobody had ever heard of a poker tournament until Jack Binion and his father, Benny, held the first World Series of Poker in 1970.

"It gave us something that no other casino game has. It gave us stars," says Eric Drache, director of the tournament held annually at Binion's Horseshoe in downtown Las Vegas.

"People can imitate their playing styles. They can tell stories about these stars, maybe even play against them. Stars create players, and I can't think of anything else that could do it so well."

"We didn't have any idea of it getting big," Jack Binion says. "But there was a kid on television here who moved to a station in Los Angeles and got that station to cover it. By 1972 we were on national TV.

"That was the year Amarillo Slim won it," Binion recalls. "He wasn't even considered one of the very top players until then. But he got himself on Johnny Carson, worked hard getting publicity, and now he's a household word anywhere—probably the most famous poker player of all. And the tournament has just kept growing, too."

The remarkably successful World Series has spawned dozens of imitators and at least one of real status: Amarillo Slim's Superbowl Tournament, held at the Sahara Reno early each year.

One beneficiary of poker's popularity and the Series' success is Stewart Unger, the baby-faced 26-year-old who captured the 1980 championship. He took home $365,000, half the money put up by 73 players buying in for $10,000 each.

The Series, which takes place in April, is a month of games in which players enter with equal amounts of money and must quit once they lose their stakes. When only one player remains, the money is divided among the winner and the last few eliminated. The winner of the biggest such game—the $10,000 buy-in "hold 'em" game—is declared the World Champion of Poker.

To pass the time between tournament games, the players play good old-fashioned no-limit poker. A side game at the 1979 tournament, with more than $1.5 million on the table at once, is said to have been the largest poker game in history.

*—ADH*

# Champagne & Roses

**When Rosemarie played Las Vegas in the '40s, she found that Bugsy treated her square.**

## By Rick Lanning

In the old days she was known as Baby Rosemarie. People found it hard to believe the songs they heard were coming from the voice of a six-year-old child. Many were convinced the "child prodigy" NBC had under wraps was actually a 45-year-old midget.

"I had to go on tour to prove I was a kid," said Rosemarie, who is a veteran of several TV hits—Hollywood Squares, the Dick Van Dyke and Bob Cummings shows—and now a plumpish comedienne in her fifties.

When she opened the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas in 1946 with the late Jimmy Durante and a young band leader named Xavier Cugat, she was a looker. The mob, however, thought she looked like somebody's kid sister and treated her that way.

One night between shows, a tough-appearing man in an expensive suit tossed her a roll of bills. "Hey, kid, go learn to play baccarat until your show goes on," he said. There was $10,000 in the roll. Rosemarie was so nervous she could barely hold the cash, let alone gamble with it. After an hour, she took what money was left and dropped it in the lap of the man who had given her the roll. Bugsy Siegel simply looked at her and said nothing; his estimation of the young singer had shot up somewhat.

"The mob was very protective of people who were square with them," said Rosemarie. "I don't know if my treatment was special. All I know is that I gave them the best show I could, and I always got it back—in spades." For example, she said, she never asked the casinos for more money in all the years she played in Las Vegas. Yet the money was always there.

When the Riviera opened, the owners asked her to appear with Jeff Chandler for the grand opening. Rosemarie hesitated. Finally she went to the owners of the Flamingo. They asked only one question: was she going to be well compensated for her work? She said yes, and they told her to go ahead.

"They actually gave me their blessings," she said, shaking her head in disbelief. "A rival competitor wanted me, and the mob was happy that I was going places. They always looked after my best interests. I guess Bugsy had the word out," she said with a grin.

"A lot of people think of mobsters as hoods, but they had style," she declared. "For example, nobody had more class than Moe Sedway. But if he got mad at somebody, the other (mob) person usually got hurt. The only difference I found in the mob was that they got a little madder than the average person on the street."

Rosemarie, who is presently doing nightclub work, enjoys a live audience. In 1980 she played the Sahara Reno in "Four Girls Four" with Helen O'Connell, Rosemary Clooney and Margaret Whiting. She enjoys working in Nevada, but says Las Vegas has lost some of its glamour.

"It's all so cut and dried," she said. "I used to get buckets of champagne and roses on opening night. I loved it. What lady wouldn't? Now they have accountants running the clubs. If one department doesn't make money, you just shut it down and throw in a few slot machines."

What really turns her on about Las Vegas is the gambling.

"I play blackjack and sometimes I shoot dice," she said. "But God forbid I should lose $20. I'll cry like a baby. I mean it. I hate to lose." She added in a conspiratorial tone, "Craps gives you the best odds, you know." □

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*Rick Lanning is a reporter for the* Phoenix Gazette *and a freelance writer. His first book, "Lord, Why Me," was recently published, and he is co-author of a novel in the works called "Hold Page One."*

# How To Play The Games

## The house may have the odds, but you can maximize winnings by using your head, knowing the rules and riding your luck.

**By Michael Greenan**

Nevada-style gaming offers challenges for every kind of gambler, and face it: we're all gamblers. In Las Vegas and Reno, Tahoe and Carson City, Elko, Tonopah, Winnemucca and Jackpot you'll find games for assertive dice-throwers (craps), quiet competitors (21), impulsive romantics (roulette), practical eccentrics (baccarat), big-win dreamers (keno), pure-chance handle jockeys (slots), and cunning poker players. There are casinos with table games that require $1,000 minimum bets per hand; one, the Horseshoe Club in Las Vegas, is famous for its no-maximum limit. Last summer a mysterious cowboy walked into the Horseshoe, put down a $770,000 line bet on the craps table and walked out with twice that amount moments later. And throughout Nevada you can find nickel slots, 10-cent roulette wheels, 25-cent craps, and 50-cent 21 games.

Anyone who enjoys the child-like excitement that comes with every jackpot, or the tense but confident feeling of a doubled blackjack bet, can enjoy the thrills of gambling without losing the mortgage payment, the grocery money or the kids' tuition. All that is required is a basic knowledge of the games' rules and odds and some common sense.

The odds on every bet on every game have been figured out by the owners and managers of every casino. And guess what: the odds on each game are in the house's favor. In the long run, the house *will* win. Despite what all the paperbacks at airport newsstands say, there is no system which can turn a minus expectation into a plus. But if you use your head and your luck, you can minimize losses and maximize winnings—and have fun doing it.

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*Michael Greenan of Reno is a freelance writer and hotel and sales manager of the Comstock Hotel and Casino.*

## Money Management

Pit bosses call good gamblers "good money managers." Here are some hints on how to be a good money manager.

(1) Place a limit on the amount you are willing to lose. When you lose more than you can afford, the fun is gone.

(2) Don't place a limit on your winnings. Inexperienced gamblers tend to hold back their betting during lucky streaks, making it impossible for them to win significant amounts of money. So remember the gambler's cliche: "When you're hot, you're hot; when you're not, you're not." Bad money managers double up when they're losing and tighten up when they're winning. Good money managers do the opposite.

(3) The fewer the bets you make, the better off you are. The odds insure that the player will lose in the long run, but this has little or no meaning in the short run. Find that hot streak, bet like mad, and then bail out when your luck turns cold.

(4) Don't make the big bets until you're playing with house money.

(5) Bet the odds, not the "law of averages." Many people will watch, for instance, a roulette game and notice that red has come up five times in a row. They will then assume that the law of averages says that it is more likely that black will come up on the sixth spin of the wheel than red. This is not true. The odds are exactly the same that red will come up on the sixth spin as they were on each of the five preceding ones. On any individual spin of the wheel or throw of the dice the odds for any particular color or number to come up are always the same. —*MG*


ERNI CABAT PAINTINGS

# Roulette

While craps games have an earthy, even vulgar, American ambience to them, roulette games have a more aristocratic and European flair. Roulette is a simple yet exciting and very pure form of gambling.

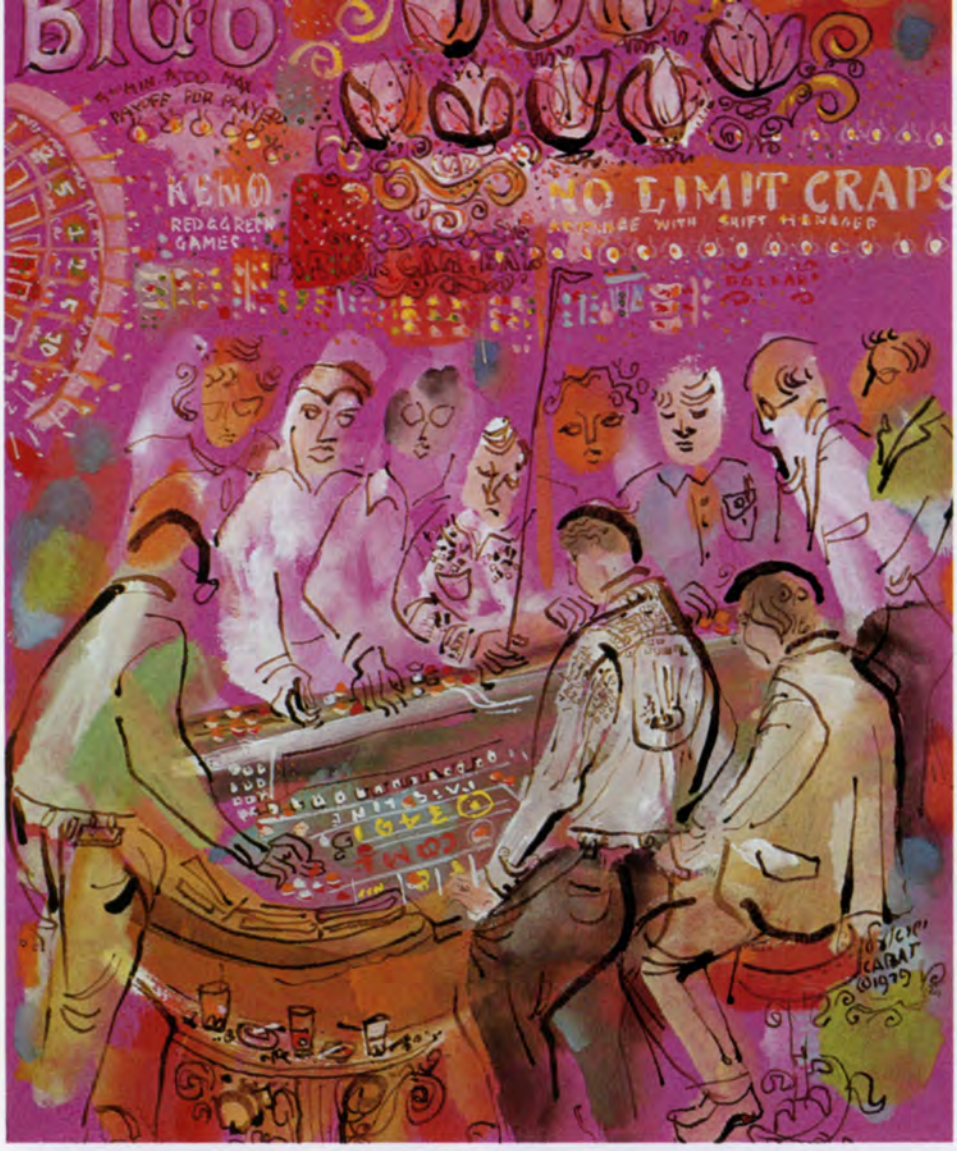
The house percentage in roulette is 5.26% for every possible bet except the five-number bet, which has a house percentage of 7.89%. Avoid the five-number bet.

In roulette each player has his own color chips, and in most casinos when he buys the chips from the dealer he specifies what value he will place on them.

On a roulette wheel and layout there are 36 numbers, half of them red and half black. There are also two green numbers, zero and double-zero. The player bets by placing his chips on the appropriate box on the layout. Most of the bets are simple to make and the pay outs are straightforward. One to 18 or 19 to 36, black or red, odd or even are all even-money bets. There are also six possible 12 number combinations that are clearly marked and pay 2 to 1.

Straight up or simple number bets pay 35 to 1. Split bets, which pay 17 to 1, are made by putting the bet on the line between two numbers. A three-number bet pays 11 to 1 and is made by placing the chip (or chips) on the line at the end of a row of 3 numbers. To make a four-number bet, place the chip in the center of the four numbers selected. This bet pays 8 to 1. Don't make the single five-number bet. It covers 0, 00, 1, 2 and 3 and it pays 6 to 1. A six-number bet is made by putting a chip at the end of the line between two rows of three numbers. The six-number bet pays 5 to 1.

Roulette is a favorite of systems players, but there is only one winning system in the game. Get hot, win quickly, and get out. The house percentage is 5.26% and you can't beat it.




# Craps

Craps is the most exciting, misunderstood and potentially profitable game in a casino. Look at a craps layout and see how the bets are made and paid off.

*Pass Line* bets are made before the shooter's first roll of the dice—the come-out throw. If the shooter throws a 7 or 11 on the come-out, all Pass Line bets win; if he throws a 2, 3 or 12 on the come-out, he "craps out" and all Pass Line bets lose; if he throws a 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 or 10, that number becomes the shooter's *Point.* Now all Pass Line bettors are betting that the shooter will throw his Point again before he rolls a 7. If the Point is rolled, all Pass Line bets are paid even money; if he rolls a 7, all Pass Line bets are lost.

*Don't Pass Line* bets are the opposite of Pass Line wagers and must also be made before the come-out. If the shooter rolls a 7 or 11 on the come-out, Don't Pass Line bets lose; if he rolls a 2 or 3 (but not a 12) on the come-out, Don't Pass Line bets win. It's a stand-off for 12. If the shooter throws a 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 or 10, the Don't Pass bettor is betting that the shooter will throw a 7 before he throws that number again.

*Come* and *Don't Come* bets are essentially the same as Line bets except that they are made after the come-out or after the shooter has a Point. When you place a Come bet, the next roll of the dice is the come-out as far as you are concerned. If the shooter rolls a 7 or 11, you win; if he rolls 2, 3 or 12, you lose. If another number comes up, that becomes your Point, and you are betting that the shooter will throw that number again before he throws a 7 A Don't Come bet works like Don't Pass.

These bets can be improved by "taking the odds" on a Pass or Come bet and "laying the odds" on Don't Pass and Don't Come bets. By taking the odds on a Pass line or Come bet, you are making an additional bet that the shooter will throw his point or your point before he throws a 7 But the odds bet pays 2 to 1 if the point is 4 or 10, 3 to 2 if the point is 5 or 9, and 6 to 5 if the point is 6 or 8. The casino has no percentage in its favor on these bets since the payouts reflect the actual odds. Laying the odds on Don't Pass/ Don't Come bets works the same.

Without a doubt, your best strategy is to bet the line with Pass/Don't Pass and Come/Don't Come and take or lay the odds. The house percentages range from .7% to 1.4%. All other bets on the table increase the house percentage considerably, from 5.5% for a field bet to 16.7% for a one-roll bet on 7

## House Percentages

How much money do casinos expect to make on individual games? The house percentages for baccarat and roulette are clear. With 21, craps, keno and slot machines, there are so many variations in house rules, payoffs and player skills that it is impossible to determine exact odds. The blackjack percentage, for example, depends on how well you play the game. The games are ranked here by approximate ranges of house advantage:

| | |
|---|---|
| Blackjack | .5-15% |
| Craps | .7-16.7% |
| Baccarat | 1.27% |
| Roulette | 5.26% |
| Slot Machines | 2-50% |
| Wheel of Fortune | 11-25% |
| Keno | 18-35% |
| Race Track | 18% |
| Neighborhood Bookie | 28% |

These figures and other information in this section are from *The Weekend Gambler's Handbook,* a straightforward and enlightening guide by Las Vegas gaming pioneer Major A. Riddle. —*MG*


# Slots

Slot machines have always been popular because they make few demands on players and have frequent payoffs. However, the new multiple-coin slots, progressives with jackpots of $300,000 and more, and dollar carousels have made slot-playing more exciting and potentially more profitable, for both the house and the player.

How can a slot player find his dream, a "loose" machine? By watching people. Casino slot managers get computer printouts describing each machine's performance. Invariably, these reports show that machines which hold a higher percentage will get fewer handle pulls. The "loose" machines are the ones getting the action.

But what if you're the only person in Wendover on a cold night in January and there are no swarms of two-handed slot players to guide you to a hot machine? There are a couple of things to keep in mind during your lonely search. First, higher denomination machines are looser than lower denomination machines. A casino can make money on a dollar machine that pays out 98% of all the dollars put into it. With 100,000 handle pulls monthly, this dollar machine can win $2,000. A nickel machine paying out 98% would only win $100. Second, it's easier to hit a jackpot on a three-reel machine than one with four or five reels.

Progressive slots are like keno and lotteries—very long odds for huge jackpots. They're good games for dreamers and people who are feeling *very* lucky.

# Baccarat

Although baccarat seems complicated, it is a good game for the novice gambler because it requires no skill or strategy and has the low house percentage of 1.27%.

There is no need to memorize the admittedly complicated rules of baccarat since the house allows no deviation from the rules and instructs the player on every move. All the player has to do is sit down and bet on either the *bank* hand or the *player* hand. Most casinos charge a 5% commission on all bank winnings.

Two cards each are dealt out of a *shoe* to the *player* and the *banker*. The shoe is passed around the table clockwise so each player gets a chance to be banker. (Players can refuse the shoe.) The object of the game is to bet on the hand that comes closest to 9. Tens and face cards and combinations totaling 10 have a count of zero. Aces are counted as one, deuces are two, threes are three, and so on. If either hand has a natural 8 or 9, it is declared the winner. In the case of a tie, the hand is played over. If the rule calls for a third card for either the player or the bank or both, it is dealt face up. When the dealing is concluded, the winner is declared.

# Blackjack

Twenty-one, or blackjack, is the most popular table game in Nevada for three good reasons. It is the only game other than poker where the player has some control over his destiny, it is easy to learn, and the odds aren't bad. The fact that it is also one of the most lucrative games for the house shows that most people play 21 poorly.

The object of the game is to beat the dealer's hand without going over 21. Aces count as one or 11, whichever makes the best hand. Face cards count as 10, and all other cards carry their face value.

Before making a bet, be sure to check the table minimum and maximum. Play begins after all the players have made their bets by placing their chips in the betting circles. The dealer gives two cards face down to each of the players, and then one down and one face up to himself. Any player with a *blackjack* (a natural 21) should turn his cards face up. He will be paid 1½ times his bet unless the dealer also has a natural 21, in which case the hand is a *push* (a tie). If the dealer has a natural 21, all the players turn over their cards immediately and—unless they also have naturals—lose their bets.

If the dealer does not have a natural 21, he will then ask the player to his immediate left (called first base) if he wants a *hit* (an additional card to get his score closer to 21). If a player wants a hit, he scrapes his cards towards himself. If he is satisfied with his hand, he slides his cards under his bet. The player can take as many hits as he wants, but if he goes over 21 and *busts*, he immediately turns his cards face up and loses his bet.

After each player has had a chance to hit or stay, the dealer turns his hole card. If the dealer has 17 or more, he must stay (although in some casinos the dealer has to hit a *soft 17*, which is a 17 using an ace and a six). If the dealer's cards are less than 17, he hits his hand until the total is 17 or more. If the dealer busts, he pays off all the players still in the game. If he doesn't bust, he turns over each player's cards and pays those with higher hands, takes the bets of those with lower hands, and pushes or ties those whose hands have the same value as his.

Remember that the object is only to beat the dealer's hand. Surprisingly, most experts agree on basic 21 strategy, as summarized in the following chart.

☆

| *Move* | *You have* | *Dealer's up card* |
|---|---|---|
| *Stand* | *17 or more* | *Anything* |
| *Stand* | *12 to 16* | *Less than 7 but not an ace* |
| *Draw* | *13 to 16* | *7 or more* |
| *Double Down* | *10 to 11* | *Anything but 10, face card, ace* |

☆

If your hand totals 10 or 11, you can *double down* by turning your cards face up and doubling your bet. You will be dealt one card face down for each up card.

You can also *split pairs* by putting the cards face up and doubling your bet. The dealer will then hit each card until you tell him you'll stand. Always split aces and eights. Aces can only be hit once. Split sevens if the dealer is showing 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6.

Many casinos also offer the player the option of *taking out insurance* when the dealer's up card is an ace. The dealer will call out, "Insurance," and any player wanting it places one half of his original bet in the betting circle. The dealer then looks at his own hole card, and if it has a value of 10, he pays all the players who took insurance 2 to 1 on their insurance bets. He then takes their original bets, unless they also have a natural 21. If you have a natural 21, *always* take insurance.

The house advantage in 21 comes from the fact that you can bust before the dealer can.

# Poker

Poker rooms are not profit centers for Nevada casinos since the only revenue from poker games comes from the rake, a small fee—usually 5% of the pot up to a $2.50 maximum per hand—or a half-hour seat rate charged by the house for dealing the game. Casinos offer the game for one very good reason: poker players are true gamblers, and most of them enjoy craps or 21 almost as much as a hot game of Texas Hold 'em.

There are two basic types of casino poker players: rocks and tourists. Rocks are regulars, tough players who never chase cards and only bet on good hands. Tourists are the rest of us, players who might stay in a game until the last card, hoping with every bet that the next card will be the right one. The rocks are tough to beat because they usually don't play a hand unless they have good cards. The tourists can be tough to beat because there are so many of them. If you're in a game with four tourists who are all waiting for that last lucky card, chances are that one of them will get it.

Games, antes and limits vary from club to club. Generally, antes are a quarter; betting limits are $2 and $4 in stud games and $10 and $20 in draw poker. Three or four raises are allowed. These are the most common poker games you'll find in a casino:

*Texas Hold 'em:* Two cards are dealt face down to each player and five community cards are dealt face up in the middle of the table. The first bet is placed after each player receives his first two cards. Then three community cards are dealt face up and another round of betting occurs (this is called the *flop*). There is another bet after the fourth community card (the *turn*) and again after the fifth card. The player with the best five-card hand using the seven cards available to him wins.

*Six Card Stud:* Two cards are dealt face down and one card face up to each player. The player with the highest card up bets the first, usually with a $2 limit. After the fourth card is dealt, also face up, there is another round of betting. If there is an open pair showing after the fourth card, the limit will go up to $4. The best five-card hand wins.

*Seven Card Stud:* Same as above except the seventh card is face down.

*Lo Ball:* This is five-card draw with the *lowest* hand winning. The best possible hand is ace, 2, 3, 4, 5. Limits are $10 before the draw and $20 after.

*Razz:* This is seven-card stud lo ball.

Whatever game you play, you'll find that poker, like 21, rewards the player's skill as well as his luck. □

# Keno

Economist Milton Friedman succinctly explained the appeal of keno with the Friedman-Savage Hypothesis, which states, in lay terms, that the probability of winning is very small; the amount to be won is relatively large; and the amount to be lost is fairly small. In other words, for a $1 bet you can win up to $50,000.

Keno is a relaxing, sociable way to gamble. It is not an effective way to win money, however. The house percentage averages over 25%. For gamblers willing to take a blind luck shot at winning up to $50,000 or for those interested in numerology, it can be fun. Some of the numbers are indeed fascinating. How many combinations of 20 randomly selected numbers out of 80 are there? About 3,500,000,000,000,000,000. What are your odds of hitting 6 numbers on a 10-spot ticket? One in 88. How about 9 numbers? One in 163,000. How about 10 out of 10? One in nine million. But what a rush if you hit it! And just think what you could do with all that money.

# Erni Cabat

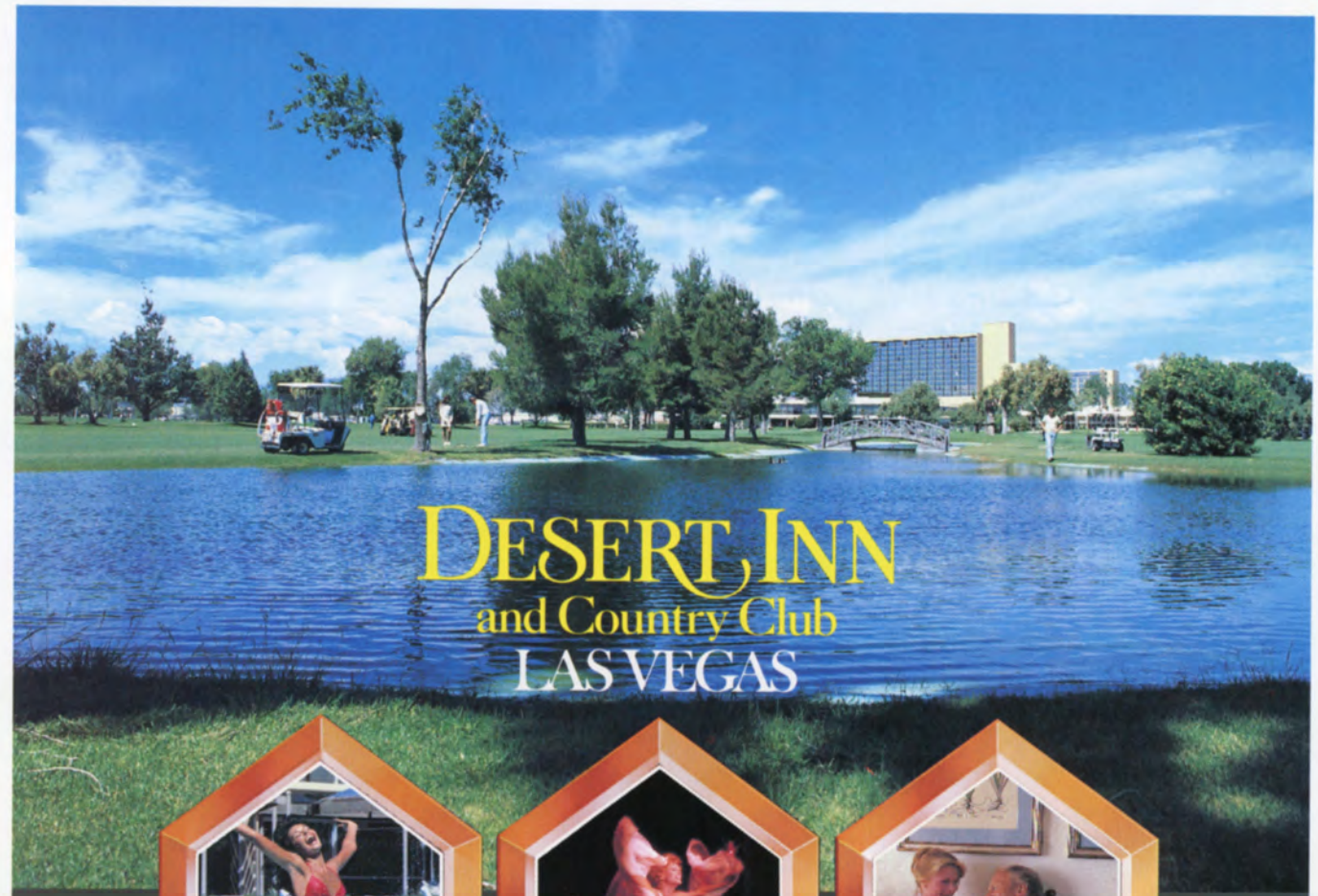
"About every 30 days when my stomach starts to rumble, I know it's time to run away and paint. It's time to refuel and get away from letters, telephones and people."

But for artist Erni Cabat, refuge is not anti-social seclusion on a mountaintop. His sanctuary is a noisy crowd in Las Vegas or Reno, a frantic street corner in Chicago or Leningrad—anywhere that Cabat can unpack his paints and capture people busy at work and play.

Cabat, the creator of the gambling scenes on the preceding pages, was once a successful advertising executive and is now in demand as a painter and as a teacher. In 1972 he taught in Brazil, and later that year he conducted a design, crafts and marketing course in Iran. "The Iranian children knew colors but didn't recognize crayons. When I handed them clay to mould, they asked, 'Should I eat this?' "

He has toured 26 countries, and last year's travels from his home in Tucson, Arizona, included trips to New York, Moscow, Leningrad and Austria. But it is his visits to Nevada that have brought him some of his best moments —artistically and personally.

"There isn't anywhere else like Nevada. The expressions of anticipation, disappointment and of joy. The glamour and the lights are all exciting. And if you have excitement, you have hope." —*Ann Henderson*



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# THE WAY IT WAS

Vigorous, lusty, joyful; Nevada's gaming history is an evocation of the lighter side of frontier life. Today, gaming is a bonanza for the likes of MGM, Holiday Inns, Del Webb and others, but it took work and guts to build the industry. From these brave monuments to individual achievements, Nevada's gaming landscape has turned into a universe of swirling, shining corporate galaxies.

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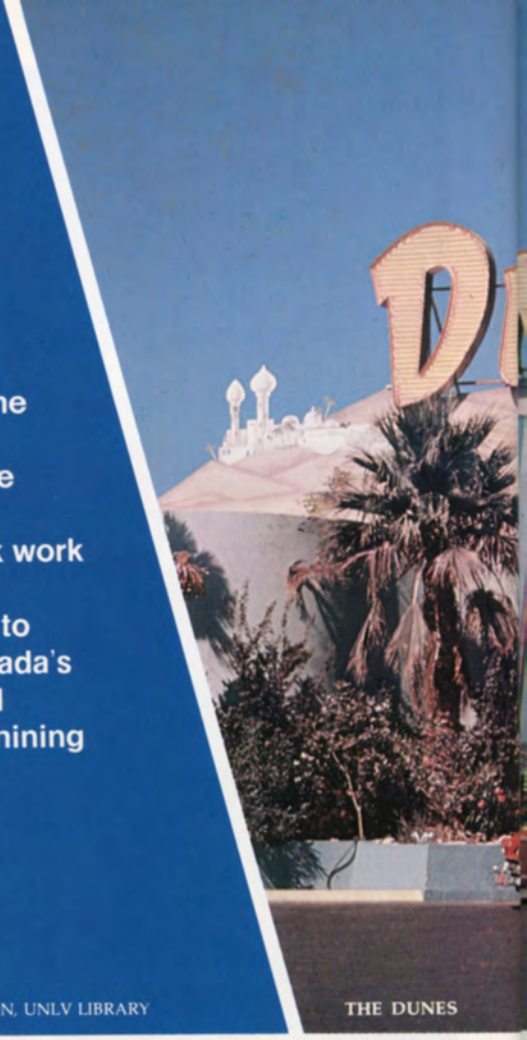


THE DUNES


POOLSIDE AT THE D.I.

THE BOYD SISTERS

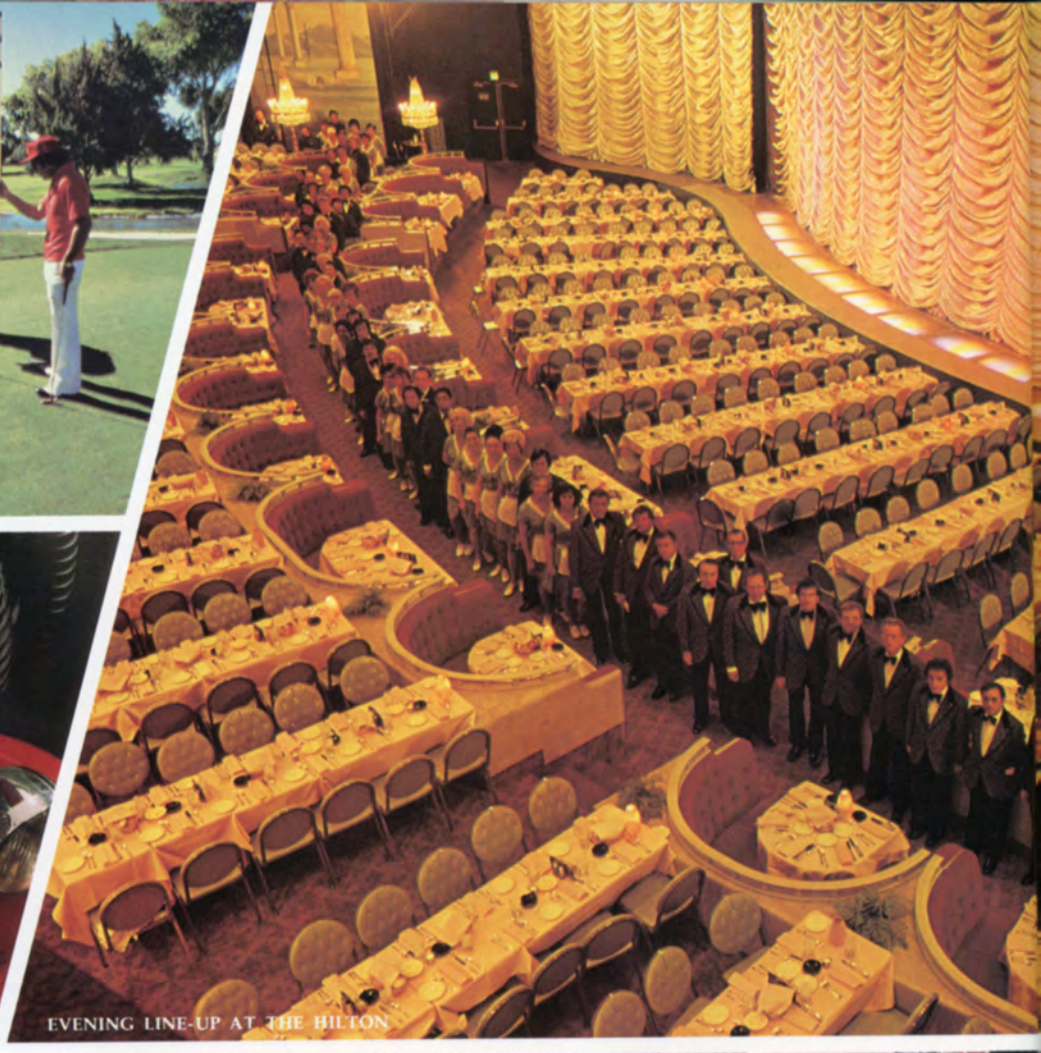

LAST FRONTIER, EARLY STRIP LANDMARK



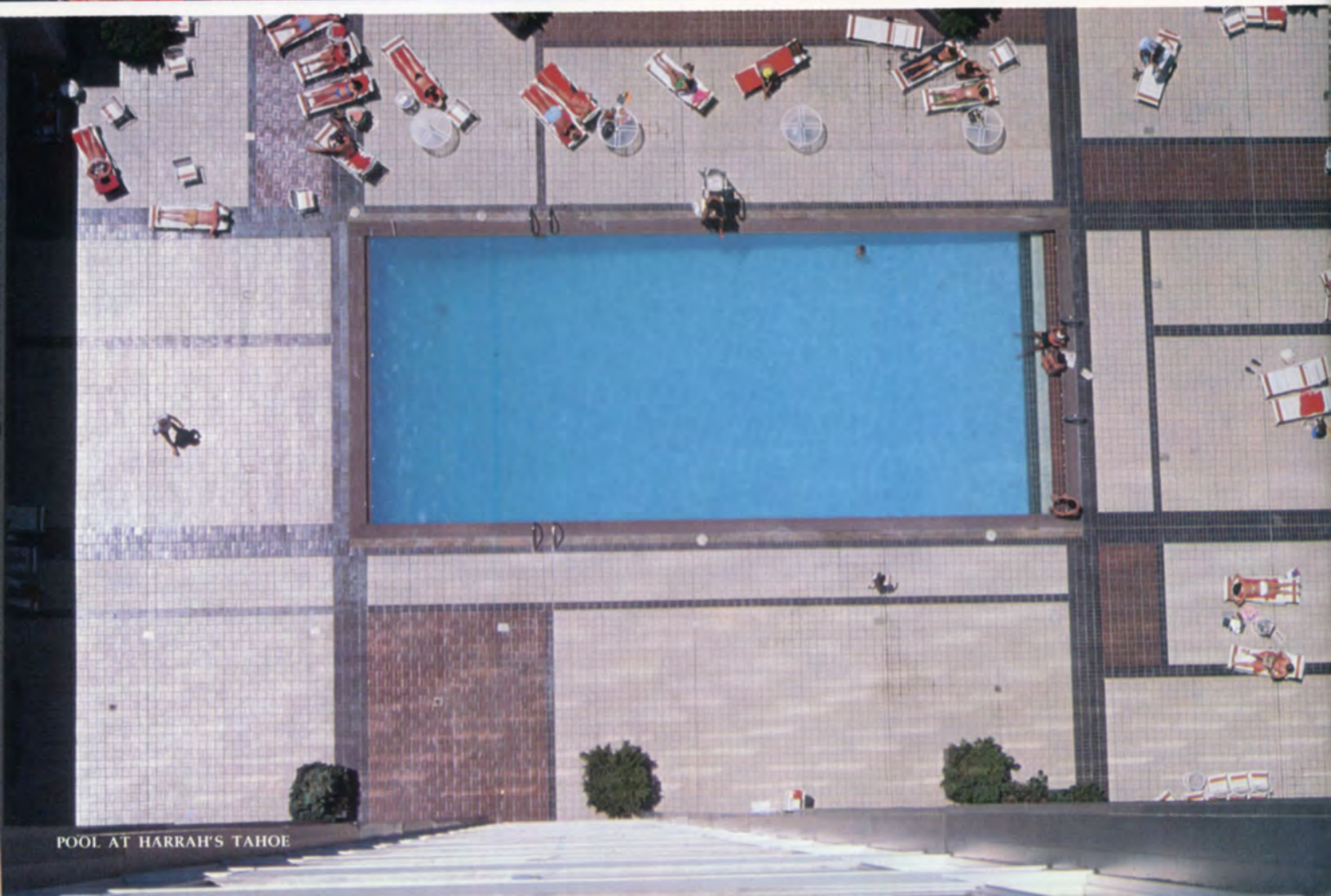
CLUB BINGO, LAS VEGAS

DESERT INN GOLF

HARRAH'S AUTOMOBILE COLLECTION



EVENING LINE-UP AT THE HILTON



POOL AT HARRAH'S TAHOE

# NEVADA: THE PERFECT HOST

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DINING OUT IN RENO

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FLAMINGO AT NIGHT

DIAMOND LIL'S, SAM'S TOWN

DESERT INN

The legendary master of haute cuisine would have sighed in envy at the enormous resources available to the kitchens of Nevada's huge resorts; he would have applauded the standard of service. But as a patriotic Frenchman, surely he would also have groaned in regret at the migration of the great chefs of Europe to Las Vegas and Reno.

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STAR SUITE, HARRAH'S

A BOUNTIFUL FEAST, HILTON

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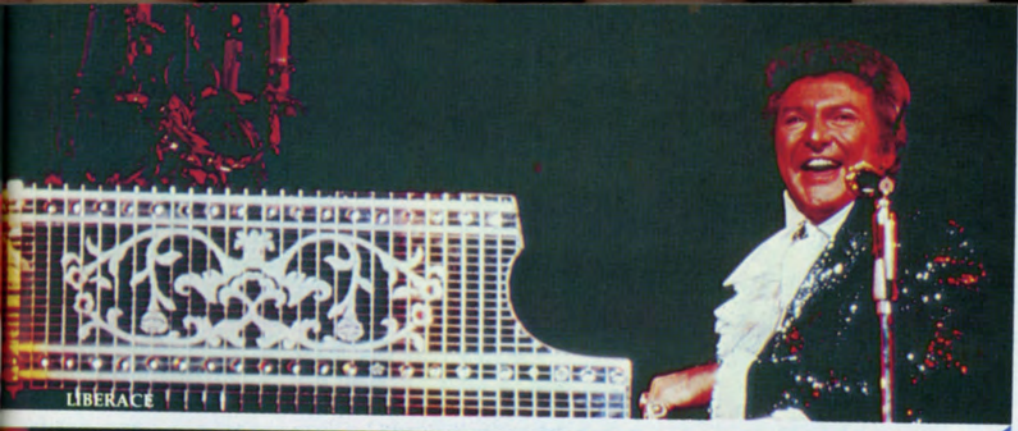

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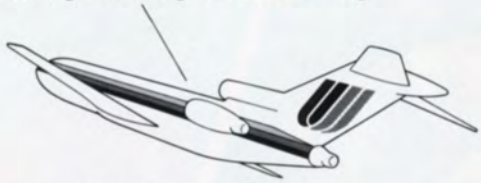

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YESTERDAY

# ACE In The Hole


**Dad Osborne's Saturday night poker games at the Exchange Club were famous in that part of the state, and one of the best was the night Jake the Snake came to town.**

**By Max Winthrop**

The greatest gambler I ever knew was old Dad Osborne who dealt the poker game at the Exchange Club Saloon up in Sky High City Nevada back between the wars.

During the week the game was mostly the dollar, two dollar kind played among cronies. But on Fridays the game picked up a little, and the Saturday night game was played for blood. Those Saturday night games of Dad's at the Exchange Club came to be famous all over the central part of the state, and they attracted a varied clientele. People still talk about the big Hollywood producer who lost $15,000 and his Packard Opera Coupe parked outside to the Dago Kid who had driven over from Lovelock for the game.

And on one gusting cold Saturday night in November, 1926, an eastern crossroader called Jake the Snake Selkirk parked his black sedan and strode across the empty street. The winds coursing across the summits of the Pogonips dragged at him and snapped his coattails as he made for the steamy window of the Palm Cafe and the spill of yellow light on the massive granite blocks of the sidewalk.

The Exchange Club was downstairs in the Pollard House, in its day perhaps the finest hotel in Nevada, and was served both by a carpeted stairway from the lobby and by a separate entrance of its own on Bradley Street, a block lower down the steep mountainside. This "back door" of the hotel gave discreetly out into the red light district of South Bradley between the famous Palm Grill oyster and chop house on the corner, and the cigar counter and two-chair barber shop on the other side. The marble-floored passage between them led into the Exchange Club.

In bonanza times four courteous and attentive bartenders in white linen jackets stood at intervals down the long gleaming bar, serving cocktails at two bits a drink and polishing the crystal to a brilliant sparkle. Their customers were successful men in broadcloth suits, and bets at the gambling tables in back were made in gold coin.

But in 1926 Sky High City was more than 50 years deep into hard times. The carpet on the stairway down from the lobby was stained and worn threadbare, and the Exchange Club's customers were miners who came in hot from work for the after-shifter special: a glass of beer and a shot for a dime. Behind the bar old Yee shuffled back and forth, ringing up each 10-cent transaction on the ornate brass cash register. The design in the pressed tin ceiling was lost beneath a gloomy deposit of soot and kitchen grease, and the chandeliers that had once cast a golden halo over the busy room were strung and fuzzed with dusty webs.

Jake the Snake stood in the doorway taking in the forlorn grandeur of the room. "Christ," he said. "What a dump."

And then he sauntered over to the poker table and started pulling bundles of hundred dollar bills out of his coat pockets, grinning down at Dad until he had $12,000 stacked up in front of an empty chair. Dad dealt him in.

Seven people played most of the night, but from the beginning the big game was between Jake Selkirk and Dad Osborne. Hour after hour the cards were flicked around the table and the pots were dragged off. And when it was over Jake the Snake had $9,000 of Dad's chips heaped up in front of him. He was cackling and crowing as he had done all through the game, and Dad excused himself and stepped outside.

The winds had blown themselves out, and a film of frost gave a cold gleam to the roofs of the delapidated neighborhoods spread across the mountainside below. The juniper tufted hills were taking on their subtle colors of day as the rose and turquoise sky of dawn faded to blue. Dad Osborne stood there with his arms folded across his chest, staring out over the desert valley far below, a broken-down old man in a broken-down old city, which is the way I saw him when I came

around the corner with the Sunday morning papers up from Reno.

He turned to look at me, but it was a moment before his eyes took me in, and another before he said, "Come here, kid, I want to buy your papers."

When Dad went back inside, Jake the Snake was stuffing money into his coat pockets and old Yee's nephew was getting ready to open the cafe for breakfast.

"Come on, old man," Jake said. "I'll buy your breakfast. Why not? You're paying plenty for it."

"All right," said Dad. "But we've been playing all night and I'm not as young as you are. Let's take a little stroll and stretch our legs. It's going to be 10 minutes before the grill is hot anyhow."

Jake shrugged, hauled on his coat, and the two men set out into the bright chilly morning. They walked along Bradley Street until it converged with Telegraph and then followed Telegraph Road's meandering course around the mountainside and out of the city. The two of them crunched along the rutted road until they reached the gates of the cemetery. Artfully chiseled tombstones of white marble thrust up from tangled clumps of brush. A swooning fence enclosed the hallowed ground.

"Well I'll be damned," said Jake the Snake and stopped. "Will you look at that!"

On one of the weathered gateposts to the cemetery had been tacked the ace of spades.

"What in hell is that card doing up there?" Jake demanded.

"Damned if I know," said Dad.

Jake looked skeptically at the card again. "Ah, to hell with it, let's get back to town."

They walked back around the mountainside to the city again, through neighborhoods of empty houses and weedy yards, past the padlocked doors along Commercial Street and back to Bradley Street and the Exchange Club. Yee was already swamping out the saloon, and his nephew had begun

**Everyone knew Dad had lost some big money, and all you could hear was the sizzle of the bacon and old Yee stacking bar stools.**

serving the usual counterful of early breakfast customers and coffee cup philosophers.

I was at the counter when the two men came in. I had to leave just then, but the whole town talked for a long time afterward about what happened next.

Everybody knew Dad had lost some big money, and all you could hear was the sizzle of bacon and old Yee stacking bar stools. They settled into the back booth and Jake waved the menu away. "Get the old man anything he wants and bring me bacon and eggs straight up. It's going to be my last taste of this crummy burg and it can't come soon enough for me."

Dad was still looking pretty gray and his smile had slipped somewhere down around his collarbone. But he looked around the cafe, and when he saw Tom Bartlett spooning down his poached eggs he said, "Say, Tom, have you got any idea why someone would tack a card to the fencepost out at the cemetery?"

"Huh?" said Tom. "No. What kind of a card?"

"Just an ordinary playing card," Dad said. "The ace of clubs, stuck there with a thumbtack."

Jake the Snake snorted out a laugh that nearly sprayed coffee with it. "By God!" he yelled happily, "I know what your problem is, you just don't know one card from another. I should have guessed by the way you play poker! That was the ace of spades on the post, old man."

Dad looked puzzled. "Are you sure?"

"Positive."

After a pause Dad said, "I thought it was clubs."

"Well," Jake said in exasperation, "I don't know whether you are blind, or deaf, or what you are, but that card was the ace of spades." Everyone was staring at them. Yee stood watching from the doorway to the saloon, his mop forgotten in his hand.

"Bet on it?" Dad asked mildly.

"Damn right I will," answered Jake the Snake with quick belligerence.

"Double or nothing?" said Dad.

Jake looked at Dad for a long cool moment and then a sneer pulled back his lips. "There's no fool like an old fool, I guess. You've got a bet."

The two of them heaved up out of the booth and hurried outside, and a second later everyone in the cafe scrambled out after them. Dad and Jake strode purposefully along at the head of a small parade as everyone in town who wasn't going to church was trotting out Telegraph Road toward the cemetery. When the two men in the lead got near enough to see the tiny white speck of the card against the grey post, they quickened their pace. Ten feet from the post they stopped, waiting in the silence as the stragglers behind caught up and crowded up behind them to gape at the card trembling slightly in the chilly morning air.

The ace of clubs.

Jake the Snake tore his astonished eyes away from the card and discovered Dad Osborne's gaze fixed on him.

"You bastard!" Jake snarled, and the men from the cafe closed in around Dad a little.

"Nice playing cards with you," said Dad, his eyes steely blue in his oatmeal face. "Thanks for the game." □

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*Max Winthrop is an award-winning Nevada newspaper man.*

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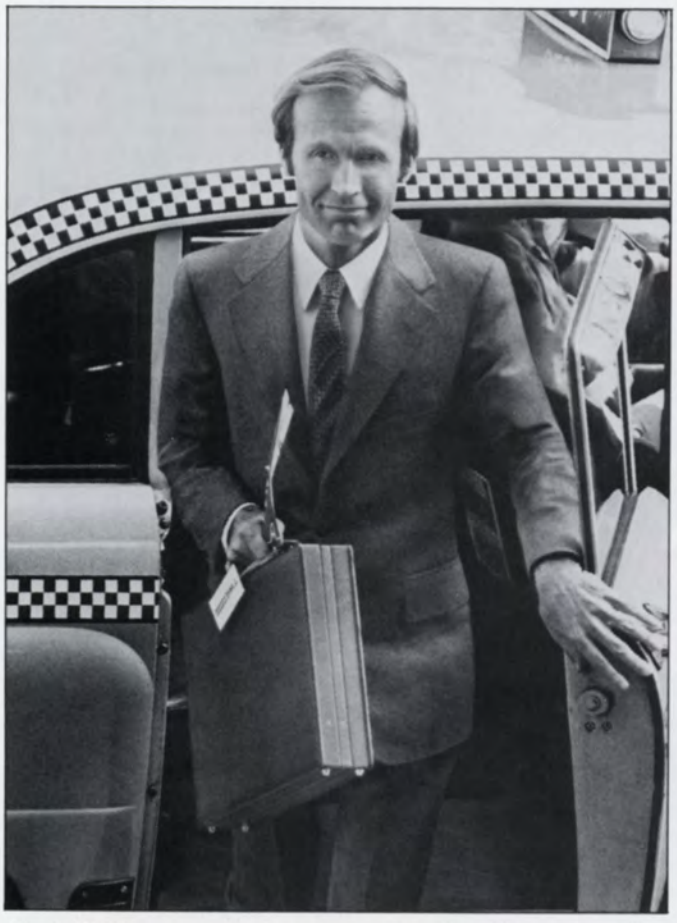

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# The Casino Quartermaster

**It takes a lot of cards and orange juice to keep a hotel/casino rolling 8,760 hours a year.**

**By Karl Walquist**


ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN BARDWELL

There's more to operating a casino than hiring a handful of trusted associates, opening up a few blackjack tables and learning to spot loaded dice.

It takes a small army of employees and a staggering quantity of supplies to keep a luxurious hotel/casino running as smoothly as a shiny, new electronic slot machine, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

An example: Harrah's, Lake Tahoe.

Besides offering 2,265 slot machines and 183 table games—more slots and games than any casino in the United States—Harrah's Tahoe has 540 hotel rooms, eight restaurants (including a 1,000-seat theater-restaurant), a cabaret and eight bars.

Harrah's is the largest employer at Lake Tahoe with 3,400 to 4,200 dealers, bartenders, maids, keno runners, cleaning specialists, racebook writers, dishwashers, security guards and other employees working year-round.

The amounts of food and beverages consumed by its customers are enormous. For example, casino customers are served 100,000 green olives, 650,000 cherries, 1,300,000 bottles of beer and 150,000 bottles of liquor every year.

Each *month* the hotel/casino goes through the following quantities of supplies:

playing cards, 23,880 decks
dice, 3,680 pairs
ashtrays, 1,080
red roses, 6,200
toilet paper, 5,000 rolls
wooden clothes hangers, 2,000
plastic shower caps, 12,000
bars of soap, 47,000
lobster tails, 4,300 lbs.
hot dogs, 9,000 lbs.
bacon, 5,200 lbs.
turkey breasts, 3,500 lbs.
potatoes, 13,750 lbs.
carrots, 1,200 lbs.
apples, 50 cases
milk, 5,890 gallons
orange juice, 1,940 gallons
Creme de Cacao, 276 bottles
Grand Marnier, 360 bottles
Coors beer, 33,120 bottles
Budweiser beer, 32,400 bottles
green olives, 8,500
cocktail onions, 6,600
cherries, 54,200

Harrah's Tahoe also has a laundry where an average of 275,000 pounds of sheets, pillow cases and towels are laundered each month, and the cleaning department disposes of 15 to 20 tons of garbage a day. □

*Karl Walquist is a publicist at Harrah's Tahoe.*


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# Tale of Two Gamblers

Thirty floors above Chicago's Lake Shore Drive, a call is placed directly to the general manager of Nevada's famous Great Hotel. Hy B., successful young cement magnate, is leaving in a few hours for the west coast. It has just occurred to him that he might stop off in Nevada for the night. "We certainly look forward to seeing you again, Mr. B.," the manager says. "We are quite heavily booked for the weekend but I'm sure we can arrange for your usual suite. And I hope you will be my guest."

Before sundown, Hy's company jet touches down at Silver State International. Great Hotel has dispatched a limousine, and within half an hour Hy and his wife Doris settle into their penthouse rooms. They find fresh flowers on the coffee table, a well-stocked bar, and a personal note from the manager which includes an invitation to the dinner show.

Downtown, several miles from Great Hotel, Sam and Mabel S. happily conclude their eight-hour bus ride from Fresno. The trip was not too unpleasant, and Sam used the time to study a new paperback, "How To Beat The House." They like to stay at Vacancy Motel because it's just a short walk from the Greyhound station and there's complimentary coffee in every room.

Sam pays for the room in advance and Mabel reminds the desk clerk about their free "Fun Book" coupons. While Sam goes for a bucket of ice, Mabel inspects the bathroom. To her satisfaction, there are plenty of little packages of instant coffee and creamer on the sink. Methodically, she gathers up four tiny bars of soap, three matchbooks and a paper shower cap for future use. They agree it's worth the $4.50 fare to take a taxi to Great Hotel. Normally they would confine their evening to the nearby casinos, but this being their 20th wedding anniversary, something special is in order.

At the suite in Great Hotel, Mrs. B. ponders her wardrobe. Hy excuses himself and takes the elevator down to the casino where he is greeted by the assistant manager and escorted to a "21" table away from the heavy traffic. Hy bets $100 on the first hand to warm up. The pit boss signals a passing cocktail waitress and just $500 later Hy is served his favorite single-malt scotch. Hy only has time to drop a grand before he must meet his wife for dinner. He walks past the restless line in front of the showroom to receive the anxious hand of Rene, the maitre d' "Monsieur B. 'Ow 'ave you been. Madame 'as already been seated." George, the captain, guides Hy to the booth where Doris is impatiently sipping her brandy and Perrier cocktail. There is no need for a menu. George has taken the liberty of ordering the B.'s filet and lobster duet, and suggests a vintage white bordeaux.

Sam and his wife enjoy their sirloin and baked potato in the coffee shop. They leave a nice tip before going to the cashier. Since this is a special occasion, they decide to queue up for the lounge show; the two-drink minimum is reasonable enough. They have seen the featured comic before on the Merv Griffin Show. For an hour Mr. and Mrs. S. stand in line, where they strike up a friendship with a couple from Bakersfield who once saw the Johnny Carson show live.

Back at the Big Room, Mr. and Mrs. B. are invited to meet the headline entertainer. There is no check, of course, but Hy leaves a 50-dollar bill

**"Hy bets $100 on the first hand to warm up. The pit boss signals a passing cocktail waitress, and just $500 later Hy is served his favorite single-malt scotch."**

# Both Hy and Sam mean a lot to Great Hotel, but only the rich guy gets suite charity. By John Bardwell

for the service. After meeting the famous singer, Mrs. B. retires to the suite to call her sister in Indianapolis. Hy wants to try his hand at baccarat.

Sam laughs out loud, repeating one of the comic's jokes as they leave the cabaret. Mrs. S. didn't think it was funny and wonders why the dancers are always topless. Sam suggests that it's time to try his luck at the crap table. Unknown to his wife, Sam has allowed himself a week's pay to invest in the dice. Mrs. S. finds her favorite bank of slots and stakes out two machines. She has saved $47 of grocery change and hasn't paid the Sears bill this month.

In the baccarat parlor, Hy is losing a bundle. He seems unconcerned and orders another scotch. After all, he works hard and this is just a little relaxation.

By 1 a.m. Sam is nearly broke. For some reason the system didn't work. Mrs. S. lost her grocery change and half of the Sears payment but has finally hit a $15 jackpot. Slightly discouraged but undaunted, they prolong the night, spending the jackpot money on keno tickets and several beers.

Hy retreats to the security of the more familiar "21" table where he drops enough to pay off Sam's mortgage.


**"By 1 a.m. Sam is nearly broke, but his wife has finally hit a $15 jackpot. Sam prolongs the night, spending the jackpot money on keno tickets and several beers."**

Sam and Mabel redeem their coupons for two Early Bird breakfasts before returning to Vacancy Motel. Their bus leaves at noon. Maybe next time they'll take the plane.

Above the clouds, Hy's company jet gets landing instructions from San Francisco Control. Hy sleeps off a hangover while Mrs. B. agonizes over what to wear at dinner.

☆ ☆ ☆

There's a lesson in this tale of two gamblers. Hy and Sam have some important things in common. They are both recreational gamblers, and both lose with predictability. They are both also important to Great Hotel and every other business in Nevada.

What startles a lot of people is the royal treatment given to the high roller who can afford to pay his own way while the little guy pays for a chance to lose the rent money. On the surface it looks pretty unfair, even downright unconstitutional.

Actually, the case of Hy and Sam is a good example of interdependence. Both gamblers seem to enjoy their unrequited affair with Lady Luck, because they keep coming back for more. Sam's relatively small disposable income helped the hotel offset the freebees which enticed Hy to leave a lot of his income on the green felt. Hy's losses became Great Hotel's profit, which was redistributed to employees and stockholders and to the state and federal governments which build highways to accommodate vehicles such as Greyhound buses. This is a free economy in action.

So the next time you grumble at the sight of some big shot getting free dinners, be tolerant. He may be covering the shift's payroll while you enjoy your own kind of game. For good or for bad, it's the way the system works. □

*John Bardwell is a Reno artist, designer, humorist, freelance writer, scriptwriter for avant-garde European films, former art director of* Nevada Magazine *and a gourmet cook.*

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# LEGENDARY GAMBLERS

## For high-stakes players, the split second before you win or lose is life itself.

By Jim Seagrave

"The greatest thrill in my life is to play and win. The second greatest is to play and lose."

The above statement so exquisitely captures the intriguingly twisted psyche of the inveterate gambler, it is fitting that it was uttered by the greatest plunger of them all—Nick the Greek.

Tens of millions of gamblers have leaned across Nevada's tables over the past 50 years, most of them satisfied with a brief exhilaration that would have no lasting effect on their daily lives. For a notorious few, however, that split second before one wins or loses is life itself. It must be experienced again and again. The more they have to lose, the greater their thrill.

The high rollers are as much a part of Nevada's heritage as the explorers and silver miners of yore. They were more conspicuous when Las Vegas and Reno were small towns catering to an elite gaming crowd, but they are still with us today and will be as long as dice roll and cards are shuffled.

Throughout most of this century, Nick the Greek was a majestic figure in every major gambling center in the world, including Las Vegas. Born Nicholas Dandolos on the Mediterranean island of Crete, he graduated from the Greek Evangelical College in Smyrna, Turkey, but soon developed a particular fascination with games of chance. During a gambling career that spanned more than 60 years, he is said to have won and lost upwards of $600 million at innumerable tables and racetracks.

In the forties and fifties The Greek was a semi-permanent resident of the New Frontier Hotel in Las Vegas, a town that suited his unquenchable thirst for action. Mort Saiger, veteran casino host at today's Frontier Hotel, recalls that whenever The Greek was playing, one of his responsibilities was to keep him supplied with Ovaltine and cigars—a supposedly lucky combination.

In his Las Vegas years The Greek was an overweight, somewhat grumpy man in late middle age. Tourists would follow him from casino to casino and flock to his tables to see the master at work. He relished his celebrity status and burnished his image as an eccentric genius by memorizing long passages from classic literature. It was not uncommon for him to punctuate a winning hand with a lengthy quote from Shakespeare, Nietzsche or Poe.

The Greek put on many a good show in Las Vegas casinos, but saved his best performances for high-stakes backroom poker games. He purportedly won $550,000 in two hours of stud, winning 37 out of 40 hands. As he left the table, a disgruntled loser mumbled, "Do you always run as soon as you win?"

As the tale goes, Nick returned to the table, shuffled the deck and slapped it down in front of his accuser. "Pull just one," he said. "High card takes $550,000." The challenge was not accepted.

Nick died broke in 1966 at the age of 83.

If Nick the Greek typified the free-wheeling old-time high roller, Ken Uston represents a more polished new breed—careful, calculating and clever.

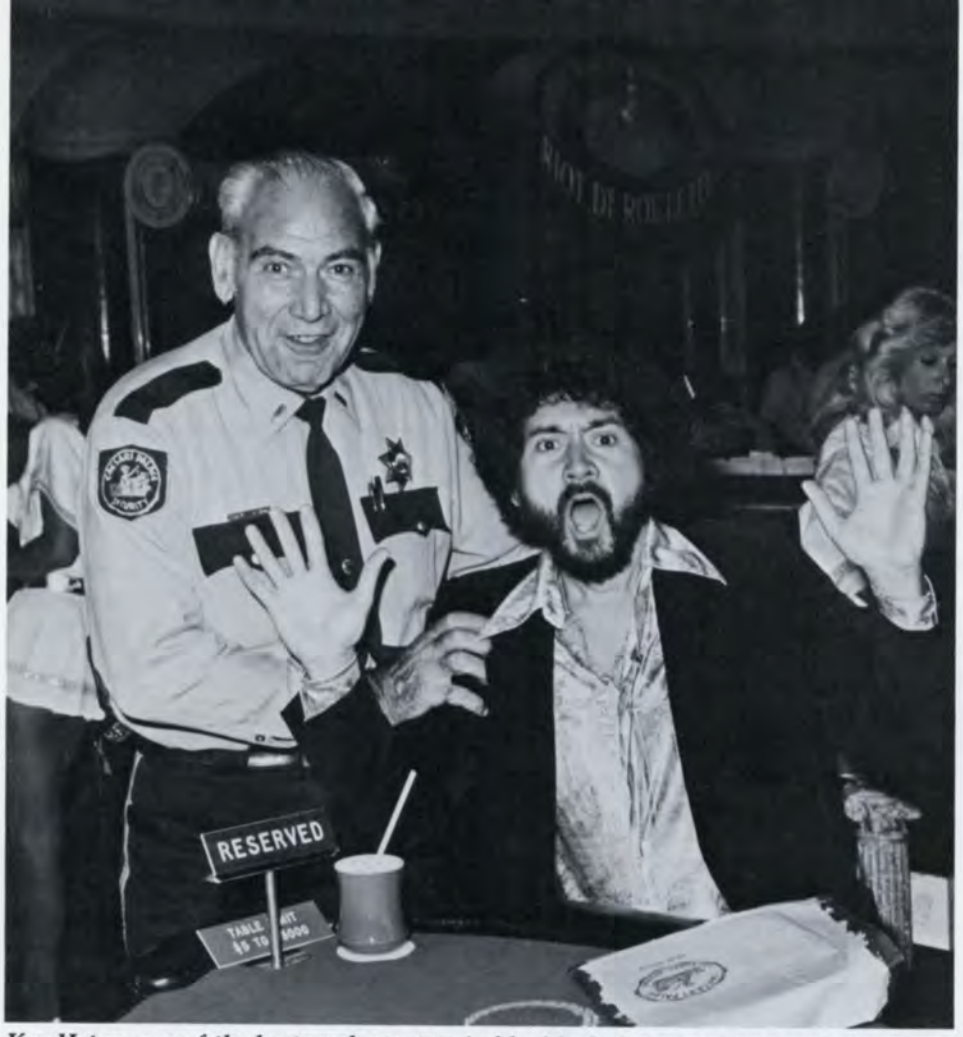
Like The Greek, Uston has handled millions of dollars on Nevada tables. Unlike his predecessor, he's kept most of it. Uston is a blackjack card counter, one of the very best. He and various "teammates," legally using calculators and hand signals, have reportedly won $4 million during the past five years from casinos on four continents. Known as "The Roadrunner" or "The Phantom" because of the bizarre manner in which he hops from table to table, Uston sometimes plays 12 hands simultaneously. He once won $27,000 during a 45-minute blackjack spree at the Fremont in downtown Las Vegas, dashing about the casino like a deranged pin ball. Less than a month later he won $9,400 in 30 minutes at the Holiday casino and $27,000 off a single four-deck shoe at the Sands.

Uston graduated magna cum laude from Yale, majoring in economics, and later graduated from the Harvard Business School. He left a $42,000-a-year vice-presidency with the Pacific Stock Exchange to become a full-time gambler.

Persona non grata in many casinos, Uston has taken to wearing disguises. Using an assortment of wigs, eyeglasses, false teeth and false noses, he plays unbothered masquerading as a swaggering cowboy, a scholarly professor, a hippie or an Oriental hit man. Away from the casinos, Uston is a pleasant, well-mannered bon vivant,

*Nick the Greek, shown with Jack Dempsey, required copious supplies of Ovaltine and cigars when he made his casino rounds in Vegas.*

LAS VEGAS NEWS BUREAU PHOTOS




*Ken Uston, one of the best card counters in blackjack, is persona non grata in many casinos. Sometimes he must resort to wearing disguises to find a game.*

whose charm and dark good looks attract the fanciest of Las Vegas ladies. He is a gifted pianist, with a style patterned after the late Erroll Garner, and is often seen playing tasty music in after-hours Strip cocktail lounges.

A sign of the changing times: Uston was recently hired by the Treasury Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas to give lessons on how to become a card counter.

Another legendary gambler who never hesitates to give lessons to novices is Amarillo Slim. Slim's unwitting pupils usually pay a far heavier price than do Uston's students at the Treasury. Over the past decade 51-year-old Thomas Preston, Jr., has earned considerable fame by winning and losing gargantuan poker pots at Benny Binion's Horseshoe casino in downtown Las Vegas. Standing 6'2" and weighing 165 pounds, Slim has lulled many a city slicker into a false sense of security with his languid Texas drawl.

He got the gambling fever as a teenage pool hustler and is still pretty handy with a cue (he beat Minnesota Fats using a broomstick). Around Amarillo he was known as a pretty fair country craps shooter and later became one of Texas' leading bookmakers. He became a media favorite while winning the World Series of Poker at the Horseshoe, gabbing friendly-like over gigantic pots while his opponents nervously twitched.

"Some of these guys play the game real uptight," he told a reporter. "But Ah like to shake 'em up, put a rattlesnake in their pocket and ask 'em for a match."

One guy who Slim can't shake up is Johnny Moss, a highly respected player who, although in his seventies, is still a familiar figure in Las Vegas card rooms. Moss holds the distinction of having defeated both Amarillo Slim *and* Nick the Greek in big games. At age 68 he bested Slim and other sharpies for the world poker championship and the $160,000 that went with it. In 1951 he engaged in a two-month stud poker marathon with The Greek at the Horseshoe, ultimately winning $250,000.

Moss, who as a young Dallas newsboy shot back-alley craps with Binion and Chill Wills, was quite a golf hustler in his prime. In 1952 at the Desert Inn he accepted a $100,000 bet from a group of foolhardy gamblers who said he couldn't break 80 using only irons. He won the bet by sinking a ten-foot putt on the 18th green for a 79.

"Money's just paper to gamble with and when I leave the table I don't pay it no never mind," Moss once said, articulating the sentiments of that rare breed of high roller.

Although the number of shrewd gamblers swells every year, only a few qualify as superstars: Like Walter "Pug" Pearson, the gnome-like Tennessean who once bluffed Moss out of a $62,000 pot in a game of Kansas City lowball in Las Vegas. Or Treetop Jack Strauss, who, according to Pearson, "will bet on anything—even a cockroach race." In 1970, down to his last $40 in Las Vegas, Strauss ran it up to $500 playing blackjack, then to $4,000 playing poker, then to $10,000 shooting craps. He bet it all the next day on the Kansas City Chiefs to win the Super Bowl. They did and he collected $20,000. And like Joe Bernstein, the savvy septuagenarian who they say was waiting for a haircut the day Albert Anastasia was assassinated in a barber shop. Another story says Bernstein was shooting craps at the Flamingo when the man next to him had a heart attack and dropped dead. "Get him outta here," Joe allegedly replied. "He's making me unlucky."

The story recalls another famous high roller, Tommy Abdo, who died while playing poker at the Dunes. His last words: "Somebody count my checks."

Abdo undoubtedly went to gamblers' heaven where he joined oilman Ray Ryan, who once won $250,000 from Nick the Greek in a freeze-out poker game in Las Vegas, and Jake Friedman. Friedman, former part owner of the Sands, bet only in cash and often sat at a Strip blackjack table with a million dollars in front of him.

When it comes to gambling guts, it's hard to beat the unidentified man who strolled into the Horseshoe last year and plunked down $777,000 on a craps table. He made his point, picked up his winnings and disappeared.

Now there was a high roller. □

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*Jim Seagrave of Las Vegas is director of publicity and advertising at the Frontier Hotel, and is a former columnist for the* Las Vegas Review-Journal *and the* Valley Times.

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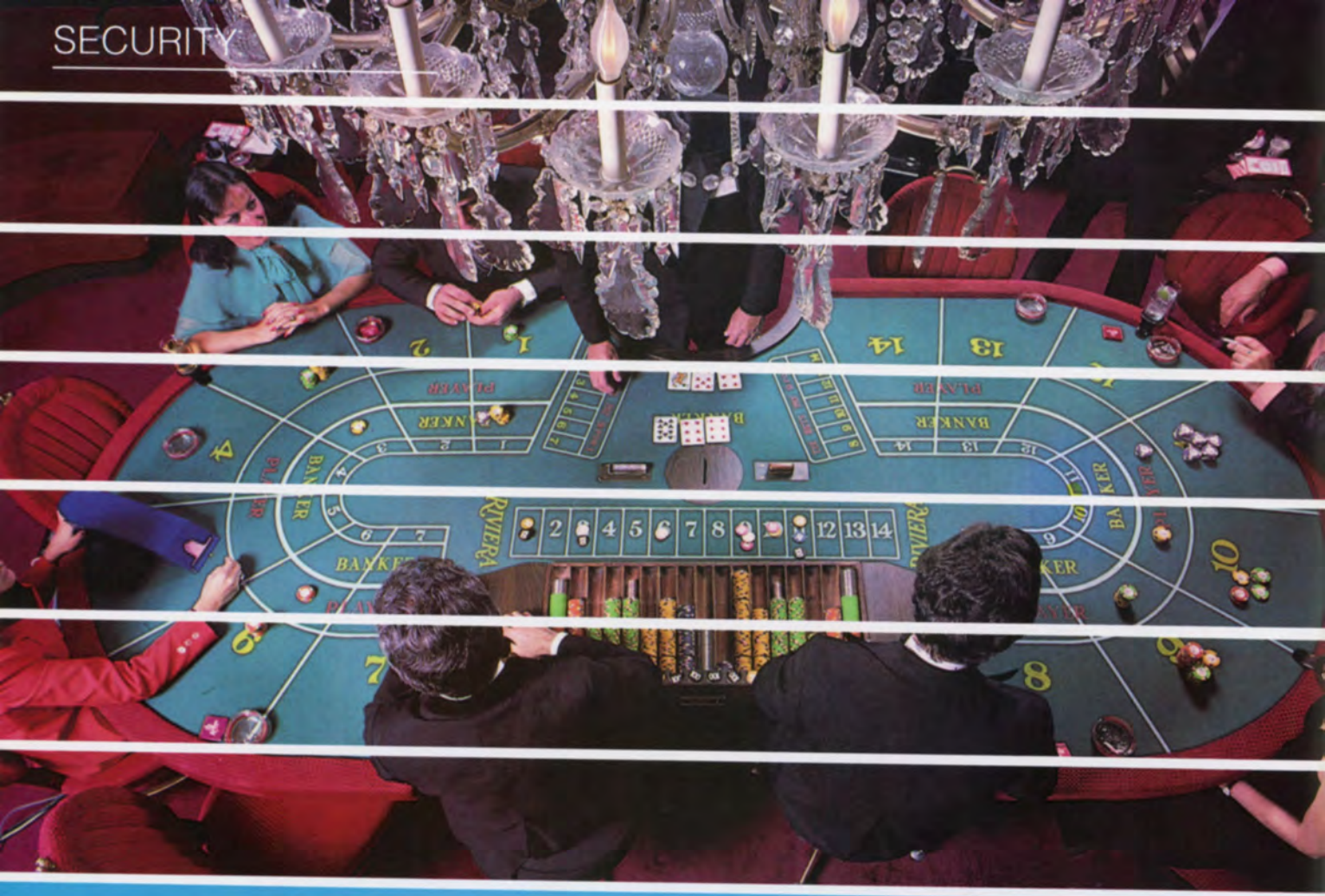
# HATS OFF TO 50 YEARS OF NEVADA GAMING




# The Eye in the Sky

## How a crossroader gets caught cold decking by the catwalk. By Buddy Frank

"You gotta send out winners to get players."

For the last 50 years, Nevada casinos have been doing just what that early ad slogan suggested. They've used every gimmick possible to let the public know that there were good times and easy money to be made at clubs from the Las Vegas Strip to the shores of Lake Tahoe.

Publicity stunts like Benny Binion's no-limit bets at the Horseshoe and Pappy Smith's use of white mice on the roulette table at Harolds Club went a long way toward selling an image of the state's freewheeling, joyful attitude toward gaming. It's a tradition that has been carried into the 1980s with the introduction of $50,000 keno and slot machine jackpots of nearly half a million.

But make no mistake. While they won't blink an eye giving away thousands of free drinks, casino owners will spend their last dollar to prevent a cheat from winning a single nickel. It's a long and time-honored Nevada tradition that crossroaders should be shown the nearest city limit.

At the same time, the days of cement shoes are gone. "Baby Face" Nelson is no longer the bouncer at the Bank Club. Instead, a card shark today faces an array of surveillance equipment and methods that would impress Darth Vader.

When a known "mechanic" arrives at a Nevada airport with a deck of marked cards in his pocket, his picture is already being pinned to the bulletin boards in front of the dispatchers who man banks of television screens in casino backrooms. By the time he places his first bet, his every move is on videotape. Special cameras, enhanced to pick up the reds and blacks of playing cards, can zoom from a wide pit shot to the eye of a Jack. The cheat's misdeeds are so well documented that he's often in jail faster than ABSCAM can nail a Congressman.

Assisting in this process is a gaming intelligence network unknown to most Nevadans. The State Gaming Control Board circulates flyers on known cheaters and their specialties. Several private agencies also do investigative work, and Griffin Investigations publishes a virtual Who's Who in the world of gaming fraud. A typical page from

this six-inch thick bible has photos of 10 suspects and a brief description of each.

*Smith, John 5'8", 160#*
*Brn/brn, Tattoo right forearm, Known Associates: Mary Smith.*
*Past Poster.*

"Past Poster" lets spotters know that John likes to add or subtract from his bet after he sees his cards. He might also use Mary to create a distraction at the other end of the table. Past posting is a common scheme in both blackjack and roulette, and most dealers are trained to be especially watchful of bets that tend to grow.

What the dealer doesn't see, "The Sky" will. That's slang for the eyes hidden behind the ceiling and wall mirrors that line every casino from Jackpot to Laughlin. Also known as the catwalk, tower or peak, the one-way observation platform first made its appearance in 1946 in Reno and has since become security's first line of defense. The "eye in the sky" has been upgraded recently with electronic cameras and recorders, but there's still no substitute for a trained spotter peering through the magic window.

The men and women who roam this eerie world of dark and deserted catwalks, sandwiched between the heating ducts and drop-ceilings, are a special breed. Since most successful cheating operations require inside help, spotters study employees as intently as they do the customers. Thus, while they are working for the same concern, they are in virtual isolation from their fellow workers. Even top gaming personnel are under constant scrutiny, so this crew of undercover agents reports only to the highest echelon. Their identities are known only by their supervisor. The spotters report to and from work via special entrances, receive their paychecks by mail, and are discouraged from fraternizing with anyone in the business.

Of course, no matter how sophisticated the surveillance systems are, someone will find a way to beat them. In the last half century Nevada casino

**"The men and women who roam this eerie world are a special breed."**

owners have taken their lumps, but each time they've learned a valuable lesson. That 50 years of experience brought New Jersey officials west in the late '70s when they were studying legalized gaming. They examined all aspects of management, but security received special attention. Some of the cases they studied are fascinating, admirable in their ingenuity if not their intent.

One of the most ingenious occurred on the blackjack tables of Las Vegas. In the game of 21, the "shoe" has taken the place of the handheld deck in a number of the larger casinos. The shoe is a long narrow box, slanted back-to-front to keep the cards neatly moving forward. This device has several distinct advantages for the house. By using several decks, it can thwart the alleged advantage of card counters, and it eliminates the possibility of dealer error in distributing cards. Because of the slant, however, there is a small space in the shoe's lower rear. Not much room, but enough to hold an intricate, miniature optical device and a remote-controlled lighting system. The cheat would activate the lights momentarily with a pocket transmitter, and then his tiny mirror system would reveal the identity of the next card to be played. Thus he had a distinct advantage.

The plot was uncovered by chance. A pit boss collecting the shoes noticed that one was heavier than the others. (It was never proved, however, how the shoe got inside the casino.) The result? Most shoes in the industry today are made of clear plastic to expose any unwanted modifications.

Few schemes have used such sophisticated technology, but they all work until discovered. In the early days of keno, one enterprising Reno janitor began injecting water into certain of the game's numbered ping pong balls with a hypodermic as he made his nightly cleaning rounds. As you might guess, the watered-down balls were seldom blown into the wings of the keno machine. Before he was discovered, the janitor had a pretty fair idea of which numbers were winners. Today, keno balls are locked inside the machines and inspected regularly to make sure the only thing influencing their flight is Lady Luck.

Then there is slot machine tampering. One favorite trick was to make a tiny hole with a dentist's drill and then use a wire to rig the machine. Some early machines had so many holes drilled in their sides that it was a miracle the handle didn't fall off. The temporary solution was to frame the area with case-hardened steel, which seemed to slow the destruction.

But there were other ways to rob the one-armed bandits. The older mechanical machines are controlled by a rotating blade know as a fan clock. It's the part that makes the little whirring sound so familiar in early slots, and it operates like a miniature windmill to make sure the mechanism runs at the proper speed. Working with a dishonest slot mechanic and a simple ice cube, a cheat could be guaranteed a big payoff. First the mechanic would open a machine and move the reels just a half notch short of the biggest jackpot. He'd pull the handle and jam an ice cube in the fan clock. Then he'd close and lock the machine, and go about his business. The cheat would simply play the adjacent machine until the ice cube melted, and then claim the jackpot when the reels dropped into place. To the watchful eyes behind the mirrors, everything looked normal. Even a close inspection revealed nothing wrong with the machine other than a few drops of water on the bottom of the case.

Such a simple ploy is impractical in this age of the computer-controlled electronic slot. But with recent jackpot

# A Crossroader's Glossary

**Bottom Deal**—Prearranged cards are dealt from the bottom of the deck.

**Catwalk**—One of several names for the platforms behind the one-way mirrors.

**Claim Agent**—Someone who squeezes between two legitimate players, "claims" a bet and moves quickly away.

**Cold Decking**—Switching the deck. Requires the cooperation of a dealer.

**Counter**—A 21 player who tries to increase his odds by remembering which cards have already been played and adjusting his bets accordingly. Debate rages between players and owners on whether this practice is fraud or simply skill.

**Crossroader**—A cheat by any other name is still a cheat.

**Daubing**—Method of marking cards that are in play. Dauber uses a small inkpad or cotton ball to indicate certain cards.

**Handing Off**—When a dealer or change person overpays to a confederate. Can be done during play or when making change.

**Hand Mucking**—Nevada term for the old practice of having an ace up your sleeve.

**Mechanic**—Same as crossroader. Sometimes refers to a skilled journeyman card shark.

**Past Posting**—Practice of adding or subtracting chips from bets after results are clear. See: Pressing and Pinching.

**Peak**—Another name for the area behind the casino mirrors.

**Pinching**—When a player tries to remove part of his bet after he knows he is losing. Can be done in both blackjack and roulette.

**Pressing**—Opposite of pinching, the player adds to winning bet.

**Rail Thief**—Someone who steals other people's chips from the rail of a crap table.

**Rhythm Player**—Old technique of cheating slot machines by pulling the handle just right. Sorry, it doesn't work on the new electronic machines.

**Sanding**—Making a small nick on the side of a card to mark it. Diamond rings were the most common sanding devices.

**Seconds**—Similar to the bottom deal, except the cards come from just below the top. Takes an expert mechanic, but a good second deal is virtually undetectable.

**Skimming**—The stealing of profits before they are entered in the books. Usually requires management cooperation, and the victim is usually the IRS.

**Sky**—Same as catwalk, peak or tower.

**Turn of Deck**—Putting stacked cards on the bottom of the deck.

**Waving**—Method of marking cards by slightly bowing or bending all the tens. This makes them have a slight wave when placed face down.

—*BF*

payoffs over $350,000, security officials have once again made slot tampering a top priority.

The age of the loaded dice has also passed, but there are still players who try to influence the odds on the crap table. One of the newest wrinkles involves a phony stack of $5 chips. Only the top chip is real. It's glued on top of a hollow tube camouflaged to look like a half dozen more chips. This scam requires the cooperation of the crap dealer and can have big rewards. The player slides his phony stack out to the "Field." If he wins, he's made a cheap profit of $35. But if he loses, he can do even better. After collecting the bet, the crooked dealer sets the hollow tube over a stack of real $100 chips. The player continues to bet the "Field" with more stacks of $5 chips until he wins. The dealer then pays off with the phony stack containing a cool $600 profit. However, once spotters discovered this device, it proved easy to identify and hasn't been seen often lately.

They are so many other ways to cheat that some have become like old standards, each with a nickname: sanding, turning the deck, daubing, cold decking, pressing, pinching and handing off (see box). At one time, getting caught practicing these arts could leave you roughed up in the back alley. Today, it's a court appearance and a possible felony conviction.

> **"With the help of a mechanic and an ice cube, the cheat would always win."**

Considering the equipment and experience of the spotters, you almost have a better chance of winning by playing the game straight. That advice also applies to the house. Over the years, a number of sensational books have claimed that many casinos use marked decks and crooked dealers. Those charges have never been proved, and today Nevada gaming enjoys a reputation for honesty throughout the world.

The Gaming Control Board has its own army of undercover investigators prowling the state for dishonest practices. The state's penalties can also be severe. Last year a major hotel-casino in Reno was shut down simply because its accounting procedures didn't measure up to standards.

As any mathematician will explain, there's a healthy profit to be made in the gaming business by following the rules. Harold Smith, Sr., the founder of Reno's Harolds Club, said it best in his biography: "No man is going to be such a damn fool as to risk a gambling casino license for the few dollars to be made dishonestly." □

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*Buddy Frank, a longtime resident of Reno and Sparks, is a former reporter and editor with the* Sparks Tribune, Gardnerville Record Courier *and* Carson Review. *For the last seven years he has been with Reno's KTVN-TV, where he is news producer.*

# JUST A WINNEMUCCA COWBOY

## The father of Nevada gaming, Phil Tobin, never played a game of blackjack.

**By Ron Tillotson**

It was Phil Tobin, a Republican state assemblyman from Humboldt County, who introduced the bill in 1931 to legalize gambling. It was a farsighted law, revolutionizing Nevada's economy and changing the course of gambling history.

But then the 29-year-old Tobin wasn't your average politician. What's more, he wasn't even a gambler. In the assembly, he may have made roll call, but what he really liked to do was roll his own Bull Durham. Phil Tobin was a cowboy.

Tobin was once described as "a clean-cut, square-jawed ranch hand who thinks before he speaks, then says what he has to say in diction so flawless it seems to belong in a classroom." He had a ruddy, deep-lined face, and when he smiled you knew he had something important to smile about.

Although he may have given a grin when he introduced his now-famous gambling law, Tobin had no intention of becoming a career politician. In fact, he served in only one session of the assembly, having been elected for the two-year term in 1930. He then served from 1932 to 1936 in the Nevada senate. By his own account, he ran for office only as a means of helping his fellow ranchers in Humboldt County.

"I first became interested in politics because we were having irrigation problems along the Humboldt River, and the main problem was the solid-fill dams which I wanted to see replaced with regulatory dams," Tobin told a reporter in 1976. "I thought I could get it done in the legislature, but I never did."

He was born Phil Metschan Lorenzen in 1901 in Portland, Oregon. His mother, the former Effie Sweetster, gave birth to Phil and his twin brother, Frank, on April 28. When they were nine, Effie married C. L. "Tobe" Tobin in Winnemucca. Tobin, a banker and rancher, adopted the two boys.

Phil was raised on his stepfather's ranch, and there he learned the ranching life—up at first sun, complete the chores, go to school, come back home, do more chores, eat a hearty dinner, and then wash up and head for the bunk, that is, if there weren't more chores to do.

"Phil was a buckaroo right out of high school," says Kelley Pearce, who ran cattle with Phil back in the twenties and thirties on the Humboldt County range. Pearce remembers one night when he and Tobin were herding cattle. They had just finished dinner and were washing their utensils when someone tossed out the dishwater. That innocent action started 600 head on a stampede. "We jumped on our

*Phil Tobin (right), T.W. Miller (left) and Benjamin Kauffman meet at Tobin's ranch in 1931 to pack for a fall hunting trip.*

T.W. MILLER COLLECTION, UNR LIBRARY

horses bareback," Pearce says. "The cattle ran clean through a feedlot fence." The two had to do some hard riding to get the herd under control.

Another time, Pearce says, they were herding about 800 head into a corral. The cattle were strung out for three or four miles. "Some guy blew a whistle on a nearby switch engine. Those cattle ran for about 10 miles before we got 'em stopped."

When they turned 21, Phil and his brother Frank bought the old Banks Ranch from their stepfather, who went back into banking in Eureka. Because the outfit's brand was a bar inside a circle, many of the cattlemen around Winnemucca referred to the ranch as the "Circle Bar."

The 2,500-acre Circle Bar was a good hay ranch and handled as many as 1,200 head of cattle, according to Pearce. In June 1926 Phil married Edith Hansen in Auburn, California. They had one son, Phil Jim, who now resides in Reno, and raised another son, Glenn, from Edith's former marriage.

Ranching was the life Tobin loved. In turn, the folks who knew him considered Phil to be forthright, honest and hard-working. With the onset of the Great Depression, life for a cattleman was pretty tough. Banks were quick to foreclose when debts weren't paid, and money was scarce. It was during these times that Tobin decided to run for the state assembly. In 1930 he was elected.

In Carson City he served on the committees on irrigation, livestock, military and Indian affairs and federal relations. He tried introducing bills in the assembly aimed at bettering conditions for ranchers. Success was minimal.

It was no secret in those days that gambling, illegal since 1910, was widespread in Nevada. "There was not a market, hotel or gas station that didn't have a slot machine or two," Tobin said. "They were in the old Golden Hotel lobby, and places like the Bank Club in Reno operated openly with casino gambling."

Tobin knew law enforcement and other local officials around the state were turning their backs—usually for a price—when it came to enforcing anti-gambling statutes. "The sheriff had the say in who operated a game, and determining who operated a game depended on how much money the sheriff got," he said, adding that he knew of one sheriff who got $50 a month from one operator to keep quiet.

**"The cattle business is the biggest gamble there is," Tobin once said. "The odds are always bad."**

"I didn't really give a damn about gambling and I certainly didn't know much about it," he said, "but I felt that if we legalized it, the tax revenue would be beneficial to the state."

A bill to legalize gaming had failed in 1929, and Tobin, after his election, obtained a rough draft of the proposal. Helped by Humboldt District Attorney Merwyn Grown and a couple of gamblers who provided valuable gaming expertise, Tobin prepared the kind of bill he thought was needed.

Tobin dropped his gambling bill in the hopper on February 13, 1931, and the opposing sides on the question began a brief but furious battle before the Committee on Public Morals. The bill's supporters backed Tobin's stand that gambling was too common to ignore, and untaxed to boot. Anti-gambling groups argued that gambling was a vice, pure and simple, and would attract gangsters and bring shame to the state.

The legislators, however, agreed with their colleague from Winnemucca. The bill also had the support of gambling interests, and men like financier George Wingfield and State Senator Nobel Getchell were said to have used their considerable influence in the capitol corridors.

The assembly passed the bill 24 to 11, and the senate approved it 13 to 3. Two days after senate passage, on March 19, 1931, Governor Fred Balzar signed the bill into law.

Thus gambling was wide-open again, and Nevada governments found a new source of revenue under the provisions of Tobin's bill. Each month card games were charged $25 fees and slot machines $10. One quarter of the new gaming income went to the state treasury, and three quarters to the counties. Cheating was unlawful, as was allowing minors to gamble or "loiter about the premises."

In 1932, after serving his time in the assembly, Tobin ran for a four-year term in the state senate. His opponent in that election was W. J. "Johnny" Bell. Pete Pedroli, a former cowboy, butcher and longtime friend of Tobin, remembers that election and the campaign that preceded it.

"Phil and Johnny went from one saloon to the other," he says. "Phil would say, 'Well, come on, boys, have a drink. This is my friend Mr. Bell. If you don't like me, vote for him. If you don't like him, vote for me. We're friends.' " Tobin won.

He ran for re-election in 1936 but was defeated by Forrest Bell, Johnny's son, 1,005 votes to 627

Pedroli, now 76 and living in Winnemucca, also remembers Tobin the cowboy, especially during the late thirties and early forties. He says Tobin was "a good roper, good blacksmith and a good horseshoer. He fixed his own saddles and was a good windmill fixer too."

Tobin found time to participate in community activities. He was secretary for the Taylor Grazing Board of Nevada. He also served on the school board in Winnemucca and was a member of the local Masonic Lodge. After his wife Edith died in 1944, Tobin remarried, but that marriage ended in divorce.

As a young man Tobin had been at times a land appraiser for banks, the federal government and real estate agencies. But for the last 35 years of his life, Tobin worked as a cowboy or manager or handyman on several ranches in Humboldt County.

Tobin had a chance to get into the gambling business. "But I was too busy hustlin' cows at the time," he remarked. And he rarely gambled, at least in casinos. "Oh, I might drop a coin on a roulette table once in a while, but I've never played blackjack," he said in a 1975 interview. "The cattle business is the biggest gamble there is—the odds are always bad."

At the age of 75, after losing a battle with cancer, Phil Tobin died on December 8, 1976. He was buried in the Winnemucca cemetery. Gaming Commission chairman Peter Echeverria said, "I just loved that man. He was a beautiful, beautiful guy. He was an old buckaroo, just as real, as common, as honest and as square as a man could be."

Half a decade later, Pete Pedroli recalls his old friend, Phil Tobin. "He'd never ask you to do anything he couldn't do," he says. "He was one of the best fellows Nevada ever had." □

*Ron Tillotson of Carson City is a technical writer for Sierra Pacific Power Co. and a freelance journalist.*


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MARCH 19, 1931

# The Party Begins

**The papers were calm while Reno reeled for three nights with excitement over the return of wide-open gambling. By Susan Horton**

*Governor Fred Balzar, who signed gaming's controversial Magna Carta.*

The morning of Friday, March 20, 1931, dawned clear in Reno. The *Nevada State Journal* reported a prison riot at Joliet, Illinois. The night before, Sinclair Lewis had been slapped at a New York literary dinner by Theodore Drieser (the former accusing the latter of plagiarizing from his wife's book). In Reno, preparations were being made for the grand opening of the El Cortez Hotel on Second Street and the new structure was said to contain modern equipment throughout. The Piggly-Wiggly Market advertised steaks for 27 cents a pound. At J. C. Penney, white silk dresses sold for $4.98.

For Reno, the day promised to be like any other March day—nothing to get excited about. But this day was different, for the previous afternoon Governor Fred Balzar had signed two bills which would alter Nevada's future. The first required only a six-weeks residency for divorce. The other ripped the lid off gambling in Nevada and focused the national spotlight on Reno—the only town in the state ready to take advantage of the new law.

Since 1910, gambling had been illegal in the state, although that made little difference to the players. State and city officials seemed to believe that what they didn't know wouldn't hurt them, and gambling thrived on a peephole basis. The only time underground gambling was discussed was when the Great Depression exerted its influence upon Nevada and officials began to resent the fact that such a lucrative business could not be taxed.

Fortunately, the legislature was meeting in 1931 and when a freshman assemblyman named Phil Tobin introduced a bill to legalize gambling, it must have conjured up images in the minds of legislators of money, money, money.

Assembly Bill 98 was approved by the assembly, 24 to 11, and passed on March 17 with a senate vote of 13 to 3. (As proof of its moral integrity, the same assembly had considered a bill which would prohibit married women from holding positions as schoolteachers. That bill was finally rejected but it should have served to show residents that the legislators were really looking after their best interests.)

Word of Nevada's folly spread quickly throughout the country and reporters poured into Reno to record the state's return to frontier days when poker, faro bank, and roulette had flourished in the mining camps. Nevada's sister states weren't too surprised, just curious. In its early days, Nevada had acquired the dubious reputation as "Uncle Sam's naughty niece." Nevadans believed the title was undeserved and argued that their state was never one to hide behind false pretenses; the legislature had merely legalized what other states continued to do behind locked doors.

Around the state, gambling reopened with a new spirit, as roulette wheels and gambling tables were pulled out in the open. Just 24 hours after the bill was signed into law, Reno's largest gambling casino, the Bank Club on Virginia Street, was filled to capacity with what one reporter called "a cosmopolitan mass of humanity."

Curious onlookers rubbed shoulders with brush-country prospectors. Experienced dealers, their eye-shades pulled low on their foreheads, shuffled and dealt cards under glaring lights. Female "plants" moved between the games hoping to attract other women. The prevailing theory was that women were greater plungers than men, and once bitten by the bug were more addicted to the gambling fever.

Rumors flew around the crowded rooms as members of the sporting fraternity speculated about the large, elaborate casinos planned for locations in or near Reno. One member talked about the story he heard that Las Vegas was going to build a big race track and casino right on the outskirts of town. Others spoke of the Cal-Neva Lodge putting a gambling boat on Lake Tahoe to catch all the trade from California: "They'll play in California waters and when a police boat approaches, scoot for the Nevada side of the lake." Jack Dempsey, former world heavyweight champ, denied rumors that he had conferred with Nevada legislators concerning the opening of a huge casino in Reno.

While the excitement mounted, a few of the old-timers expressed doubts about Nevada's return to wide-open conditions. Many had seen the boom days when gambling flourished in rowdy, free-wheeling mining camps. "It'll take more than a law to revive the


*As patient Bank Club patrons poised for the rush to the tables, construction crews clattered as they worked into the night to enlarge the Reno casino.*

wild days of Tonopah and Goldfield!" declared one old miner who had seen poker games where $80,000 had been on the table for one hand.

One phase of the new gambling era was not expected to change. Liquor had flowed in abundance during the boom years and despite Prohibition it continued to flow. "We have only three agents in the entire state," said Nevada's Prohibition Administrator, "and that's two more than the law allows. Of course, we'll be paying the state unannounced visits with our flying squad to do what we can, but it will probably be wringing wet between times."

By Saturday evening, Reno's more fashionable clubs like the Willows and the Country Club were overflowing. Jazz orchestras and crooners entertained ladies and gentlemen in formal attire. It was hard to get a place at a roulette wheel, faro or dice game.

At the Bank Club, the chants of the game operators were punctuated by the sound of a cement mixer, hammers, saws and chisels as the enlargement of the gambling resort continued into the night. None of the patrons seemed to mind; the thoughts of winning outweighed the small distractions. Reno's sheriff was not concerned that the games were still unlicensed. He knew the printer had not yet delivered the forms.

Legalized gambling was not welcomed by all Reno residents. Many believed the gambling bill would bring disrespect to Nevada. A prominent Reno women's organization was busy garnering support for a referendum vote on the bill. The editor of the *Nevada State Journal* charged that Nevada was entering an era of "legalized liberality" during which the best interests of the state were likely to be jeopardized.

But Reno mayor E. E. Roberts defended the gambling bill with a passion: "It's all nonsense trying to regulate people's morals by law," he declared. "For eight years I've been trying to make Reno a place where everybody can do what they please—just so they don't interfere with other people's rights."

Roberts surmised that Nevada was probably about the only free state left, adding that it seemed funny that people would let a lot of conservative "long-hair reformers" take away their liberties. Reno's chief of police was not worried about the city attracting riff-raff and predicted little change for the city. He had a few words for the long-hairs, however. He wanted them to know that despite Reno's liberal views, only five murders had been committed in the previous 10 years and in 12 years the forces of the law only failed to bring one killer to account.

For three nights, Reno reeled with the excitement brought on by the return of wide-open gambling. But on the 23rd, the boom appeared to be over. Local gamblers called it "Rotten Sunday," a true let-down in the gambling fever which had gripped the city for 72 hours. Even casino construction was temporarily halted.

But Nevadans shouldn't have been too surprised. For 75 years they had witnessed booms and busts, and day-to-day living in the state had always been a gamble. "Rotten Sunday" merely signaled the end of another fast, frantic and typical Nevada roller coaster ride. □


NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PHOTOS

*The Willows was one of the more fashionable clubs in the Truckee Meadows and catered to a classy clientele. On the weekend following gaming's official return, jazz bands and singers entertained the club's players and friends.*

*Susan Horton, an historian specializing in the Middle Ages and Nevada history, has taught at the University of Nevada, Reno.*

# The Sporting Crowd

## As they showed in Goldfield 75 years ago, there's no commotion like a sports promotion.

By Ron Amos

*Holmes beat Ali before 25,000 fans.*

One has been called the "foulest fight on record." The other has been called "no fight at all." But the results of the two remarkable events were identical in several respects. Both captured the attention of the world. They profoundly affected the fortunes of their contestants. And, although the two events took place 74 years apart, they both typified the magic formula that Nevada has acquired almost by instinct: If you're looking for crowds and excitement, the best promotion is sports promotion.

On September 3, 1906, in Goldfield, Joe Gans and Oscar "Battling" Nelson punched, butted, gouged and wrestled for three hours in a makeshift stadium that seated 8,000 people for the lightweight championship of the world. Nelson was finally disqualified in the 42nd round for fouling Gans.

On October 2, 1980, in Las Vegas, a slick and finely-tuned Larry Holmes pummeled an aging Muhammad Ali for one hour in a makeshift stadium that seated 25,000 people for the heavyweight championship of the world. The mismatch was stopped by Ali's corner between the 10th and 11th rounds as the former three-time champion sat dejected on his stool.

Both fights were landmarks in boxing history. The Gans-Nelson brawl put Goldfield on the map. It was the first of the big-purse fights. It was the first fight promoted by Tex Rickard, who would go on to dominate American fight promoting for the next 18 years. And it restored the fallen reputation of a legendary fighter.

The Holmes-Ali "non-fight" put the crown on Las Vegas' claim to being the boxing capital of the world. It was one of the all-time biggest of the big-purse fights. It was the most flamboyant effort by Don King, the most flamboyant of fistic promoters. And it destroyed the fallen reputation of a legendary fighter.

As demonstrated in the stock-hungry gold camp of Goldfield and the dazzling resort city of Las Vegas, sports events have long contributed to the success of the Nevada economy. And for good reason. The riches of Nevada come out of the pockets of gamblers and into the cashier cages of casinos and the treasuries of state and local governments. To encourage the continuation and growth of same, there is a constant effort to kindle public enthusiasm for the state's top-flight entertainment, restaurants and hotels, lakes and mountains, historical landmarks and, thusly, its betting halls.

Pure and simple, you have to keep the people coming.

When an old Nevada camp like Goldfield needed a shot in the civic arm, concerned citizens staged, among other things, burro races. In more modern times, camel races have become a late-summer tradition in Virginia City. Pigeon competitions and frog-jumping have made their marks, too.

But it takes more than burros and frogs to showcase big-time gaming. In 1935, when it was a growing frontier town, Las Vegas launched its first major promotion with the annual Helldorado Days celebration and rodeo, which later attracted network television coverage. What followed has been a long roster of major sports events—fishing, trapshooting, archery, tennis, racquetball, waterskiing, hydroplane racing, billiards, table tennis, roller skating, basketball, gymnastics, karate and even boccie, to name a few.

The real breakthrough, however, came when Vegas hotel-casino executives decided to take advantage of the awesome and far-reaching powers of television. In golf, the Desert Inn annual Tournament of Champions in the '50s and '60s and the Sahara's Invitational in the '60s and '70s both attracted the biggest names in the sport. The Showboat stages the longest running bowling tournament on the PBA tour. The Mint hosts the richest off-road race in the world, the Mint 400. In tennis, the Frontier, Riviera, Hilton and especially Caesars Palace have presented prestigious tournaments.

As was the case in Goldfield, how-


*Nelson and Gans shook Goldfield in 1906 with their epic 42-rounder.*

*Rod Laver and Alan King tennis payoff.*

ever, it is boxing that reigns supreme. For years the center of boxing in America was New York. Today it is Las Vegas, and it has been for the past few years. Unlike New York and most other states, Nevada does not tax personal income, making it attractive for fighters earning big purses. Also, when a fight is televised the city where it is held usually gets blacked out. Networks would much rather darken Las Vegas, a little city in the desert, than a major market like New York, Chicago or Los Angeles.

Grasping the merits of the situation, alert local promoters, aided by an aggressive state athletic commission, succeeded in wooing Madison Square Garden, boxing's major promoter, into staging several big-time title fights at the Las Vegas Convention Center in the '60s. The first was the Benny "Kid" Paret-Don Jordan welterweight championship. Gene Fullmer, Sugar Ray Robinson, Dick Tiger, Sonny Liston, Emile Griffith and Carlos Ortiz fought there. Ali himself made four appearances during the decade, beating Floyd Patterson, Jerry Quarry, Joe Bugner and Ron Lyle.

Executives at Caesars Palace were the first to seize on the advantages of holding matches at the hotel, where the customers would be a short shuffle away from the tables and television exposure would feature the casino. By

**"Caesars Palace was first to seize on the advantages of holding boxing matches at the hotel, where the customers would be a short shuffle away from the tables"**

1979, nine world championships and five USA-USSR amateur matches had been held at the Strip hotel. The Las Vegas Hilton staged the Leon Spinks-Ali title bout and a half dozen other major matches, but otherwise Caesars has controlled the big fights.

The biggest of all was Holmes-Ali. The dollar figures and publicity, not to mention the impact on Las Vegas and Caesars Palace itself, stagger the imagination. The event drew a net live gate of $5,766,125 (the largest in the history of boxing), with 25,000 people (the most ever in Nevada) paying $50 to $500 a ticket. Tax revenue to the state was $280,645. Caesars telephone operators handled 48,000 calls that day, double any other day in hotel history. The estimated world-wide TV audience was a record two billion people, and for the first time in history, a boxing event was televised in Red China. Some 1,200 press people covered the bout, another all-time record for boxing. More than 500 writers and photographers had to be turned away.

Boxing today generates more tax revenue in Nevada than any other source besides gaming. Tax revenue from live gates, television, permits and licenses has climbed from $14,382 in 1969-70 to $324,460 in 1979-80.

Seventy-five years ago Goldfield was a high-rolling mining town where people sought gold, glory and fortune. Yet the granite monument in front of the county courthouse speaks neither of gold nor of financiers, but of an athletic contest—the lightweight title fight between Joe Gans and Oscar Nelson.

History may yet record Las Vegas the same way. □

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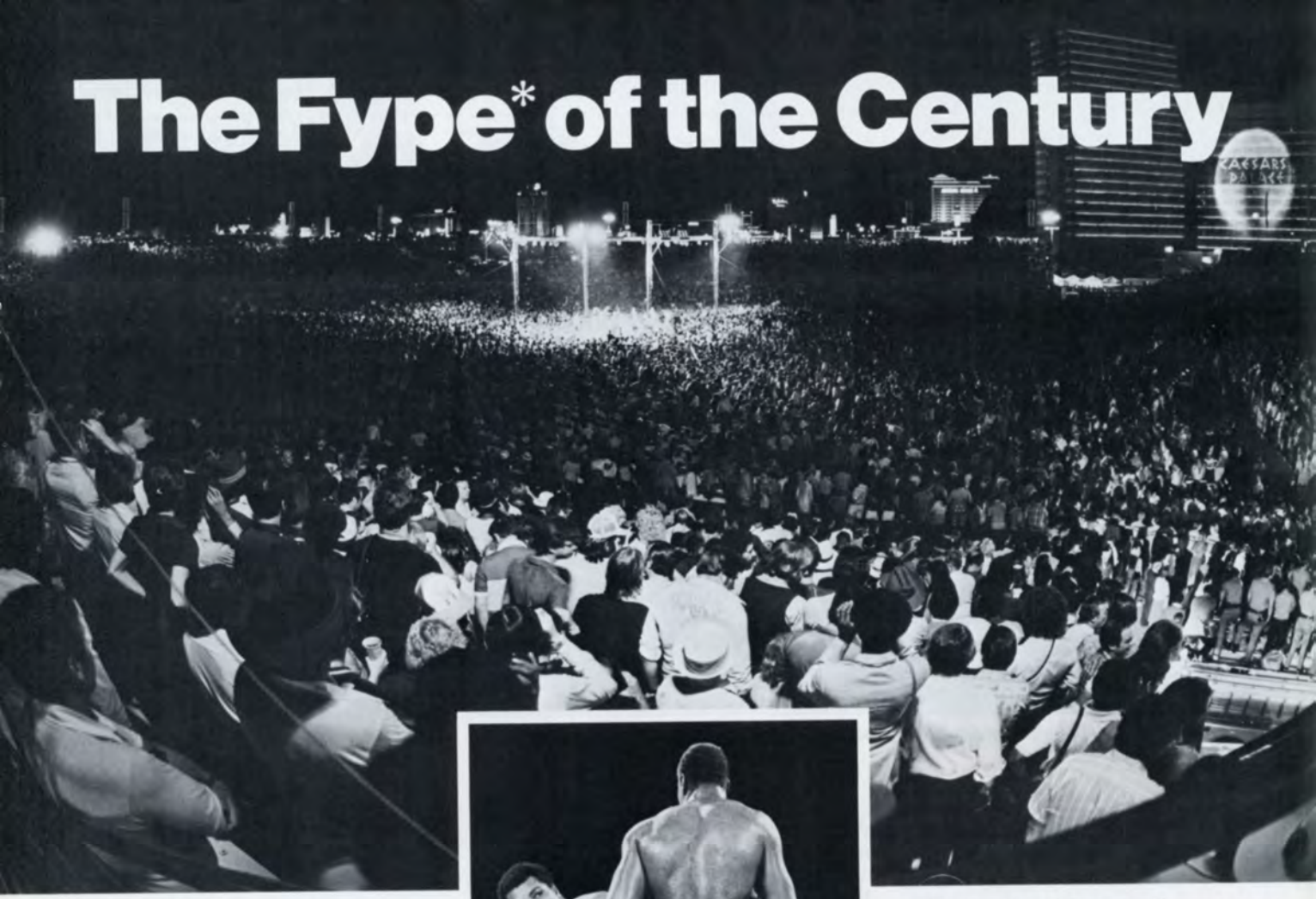
*Ron Amos is a former sports writer, editor and columnist for the Las Vegas Sun and Las Vegas Review-Journal, director of public relations at Caesars Palace and promotion director at the Las Vegas Hilton. He is currently owner of a Las Vegas-based consulting firm for sports, entertainment and public relations.*

# The Fype* of the Century



*But here, attir'd beyond our purse we go,*
*For useless ornament and flaunting show:*
*We take on trust, in purple robes to shine;*
*And poor, are yet ambitious to be fine.*
*This is a common vice, tho' all things here*
*Are sold, and sold unconscionably dear*
*"Satire III," by Juvenal*
*(Translated by John Dryden)*

Juvenal, the eminent satirist, was hot upon his principal theme in the second century A.D. that Romans desired bread and circuses and cared for little else. In those imperial times bread may have been a necessity, but circuses were the addiction of the populace.

Today's mass addiction is certainly gambling, and if the masses are furnished a couple of gladiators in a circus atmosphere and have bread (money) in profusion, a 20th century A.D. repeat of Juvenal's poetic reportage is most emblematic of an October saturnalia held in Las Vegas last year.

The Muhammad Ali/Larry Holmes fight had no equal in sporting history for its utter con and flaunting of legitimacy, nor had any such brief event gathered such crowds bent upon losing money. It was a dizzy, euphoric spell that lasted for months, not only around Caesars Palace, where the fight was staged, but among most of the resorts, casinos and lodging places in the Las Vegas area.

Revenues zoomed into colossal figures expanding from the Caesars Palace epicenter. It was like Super Bowl day, that balmy Thursday when nearly 25,000 people in the makeshift parking-lot stadium roared as one for their old gladiator Muhammad Ali to win one more.

He had brought them there on wings of another promise. Aged and full of painkillers, weak from loss of flab to come under the number for fighting weight, Ali was licked even as he made his way to the ring accompanied by audience wails of a wild, eerie "Allliiiiii-eeeeeeee "

And when the exploding traceries of fireworks etched the black sky over the stadium, with Ali a bruised and broken pulp in his corner, speechless and inert, the display became a fitting metaphor for the one-time champ, the challenger who shot off with great force, but who evanesced in dimming sparklets.

That, however, isn't the way the city's casino honchos looked at the

**The Ali-Holmes fight had no equal in sporting history for its utter con and high-rolling excitement.**

**By Bill Willard**

*Fight and Hype spells Fype

ending, or the beginning of this Fype of the Century. It was a time for rejoicing with high rollers gunning for action, hoopla, excitement. Every casino made money. Poor Ali left Las Vegas with $8 million, while Holmes, the victor, pocketed $6 million for his night's work.

Money, money, money.

Caesars Palace executives are still in the clouds from the big moola coup. Bill Wortman, native Las Vegan who as vice-president of administration engineered the planning, waxed brightly weeks later. "I think it had all the major elements of a big event and worldwide attention," he reminisced. "It had the promotion and the hype that goes along with a major event. It had a significant amount of local interest. It brought tremendous amounts of revenues into Las Vegas. I think it's probably the best event this town's ever seen. I would estimate there were 10,000 rooms reserved for those who came in for the fight."

Murray Gennis, onetime head of Emerson Radio Corp., came out of retirement at the request of fellow Clevelander William Weinberger, former Caesars president now with Bally's gambling emporium in Atlantic City, to take on casino hosting duties as executive vice-president. After handing out a *Wall Street Journal* article on his Caesars Palace role, Gennis will expound brightly about that lost and found weekend in October.

"First of all I'd have to say it was the most significant event in the history of Nevada," Gennis says. "There's only one man you can give credit and it's Cliff Perlman, who had the foresight and the guts to put on something like this, to spend millions of dollars, to spend $800,000 to put up a stadium for 25,000 people, to price the tickets at $500-$300-$200 and $100 and laid out all this money before he ever thought he'd sell a ticket." He speaks of Clifford S. Perlman, chairman of the board and director of Caesars World.

Gennis goes on, eyes alight, "I sold all the local hotels. They bought about a million dollars worth of tickets from me. In other words, would you believe that hotels sent me letters of thanks for making a promotion for them?" Gennis told of the hundreds of people invited to Las Vegas on a big-money freebie, everything picked up including tickets for the fight.

"It was such a sensational thing and accepted by everybody. Never mind the fight, but the exhibition of having

**"Do you really think I will go out a loser? Look at my pretty face, look at my pretty hair, look at my moustache. They call me Dark Gable!"**

Holmes and Ali. If this fight was, say, in Montreal, they'd be booing their heads off for hours, but being it's Las Vegas, after the fight, go and gamble, back to the hotels, shows and the whole promotion," Gennis spoke faster and faster. "People felt like—here's what everybody tells me and I know this from our hotel—we had three times as many actual players here as we would normally on our best New Year's Eve!

"Customers were betting $3,000 a card blackjack, $3,000 a throw in craps and $8,000 for a bet in baccarat.

"There were 25,000 seats at the stadium, all sold out," Gennis wound down. "There wasn't an empty seat, jammed up solid. I know from the tickets we had for our customers and those that were bought it was the biggest box office in the history of boxing, of any heavyweight fight. We had United States customers, Mexico, Panama, South America, we had groups here, many people from the Orient and from the Middle East. So I would say it was a conglomeration of all the top customers in the world, not only came to Casesars, they came to the city. Made Nevada, put us back on the map again."

It was Ali who started the hoopla last April when Don King Productions and Prime Sports set the championship fight for July 11 in Rio de Janeiro. Ali teased Holmes with vintage doggerel, "I got speed and endurance; you'd better increase your insurance." Impassively the WBC champ watched as Ali lunged at him, then smiled as Ali growled, "I'm gonna get out of my rocking chair and beat you." When Holmes exploded into laughter, Ali became furious.

"All that ghetto talk of yours," Ali hissed, "that's why I'm gonna beat you. Because you talk too much."

Later plans were set for an Ali-Holmes fracas at Caesars Palace on October 2. Contracts for the fight were signed with Don King and Caesars principals in July, which gave the hotel around 45 days to get its act together. Ground was broken for the temporary open-air arena on August 7 Both the fighters were on hand with promoter King, his trademark wiry silvery hair standing straight up as though he had stuck his finger in a light socket. Caesars' executive vice-president and chief operating officer Harry Wald also did the spading bit for photographers.

During the ceremony Holmes fired

*Among the big names at ringside were Gregory Peck and Caesars exec Harry Wald.*

*Among the 25,000 fans jammed into the parking lot stadium were WBC welterweight champ Sugar Ray Leonard and entertainer John Davidson.*

the first verbal blow. Pointing to a front-end loader, he jeered, "That's what Ali will be driving after I kick his butt." This unloosed volleys of invective from Ali as he pushed Holmes and Holmes shoved back while walking inside the hotel to the press luncheon.

During the luncheon Don King crowed, "This is truly a great spectacle. This is the greatest sports event ever."

Holmes, earnest, very straight, appealed to the reporters and VIPs present, "This is my chance to get out of the shadow of Ali. No way can Ali beat me now. This is my time." As he spoke, Ali, grimacing and waving hands, was stealing the show.

Then Ali got the floor. "Everybody asks me why I'm doing it. I want to be immortal. Thirty-eight years old, off two years. I come back against the greatest now as far as record and I come back and knock you out, Holmes." His voice mounted into a scream. "You know I'm your master. You know you're my hired hand," referring to the early 1970s when Holmes was his sparring partner.

Then came Ali's final jab: "Do you really think I will go out a loser? Look at my pretty face, look at my pretty hair, look at my moustache. They call me Dark Gable!"

The Fype of the Century had begun.

Bill Wortman put in long hours to make the fight a proper spectacle. "This was the place to be. A lot of excitement was generated out there," he recalled later in his office. "We've had those matches in Caesars sports arena, but in those previous matches you didn't have the excitement in the air. When Ali came into the ring you could feel it. The entire audience seemed to come alive. It was amazing that a group of people had that much energy."

"They came to see the swan song of a great warrior, so it had all the elements of a cliffhanger." This was the musing of Larry Aldenhoevel, Caesars' executive director for advertising, public relations and special events.

**"Everyone knew it was an event of events when Leroy Neiman arrived"**

"You're absolutely right," Wortman replied. "You had an individual there who was probably the best athlete that's ever been in the ring. During the last several years of his career he said several times he would retire, that he was through with fighting as early as 1974 when he fought George Foreman in Zaire.

"I think they had the same type of thing here. Everybody was amazed. People said he couldn't fight, shouldn't be in the ring. Most of them thought, as I did, that the man *was* somewhat immortal, if you will, and still had it within him to do those things that other humans had not been able to do. He promoted that very much himself and he made believers that he could go on forever."

His people thought so, too. They came out, the earthling stars dressed in finery, flamboyant, egregiously optimistic, boogying into Caesars. Some came early to watch Ali train and ignored Holmes. There were those who wanted added hype for their own ventures, like Sylvester "Rocky" Stallone and "other" fighters Ken Norton, Sugar Ray Leonard, Scott LeDoux, Roberto Duran, Floyd Patterson, Hilmer Kenty, Aaron Pryor, Eddie Mustapha Muhammad. Visiting in his wheel chair, half paralyzed, was the man who boxing buffs say was *the greatest,* Joe Louis, a onetime Caesars host now with marble statue facing the casino in the Fantasy Tower.

"The celebrity watchers were out full force the day of the fight," said Aldenhoevel, "watching all the limousines arrive beneath our fancy new *porte cochere.* As their favorites stepped out, people would cheer and applaud."

Instamatics popped flashes of Cary Grant, Gregory Peck, John Travolta, O.J. Simpson, Frank Sinatra, Tom Jones, Paul Anka, John Davidson, Ben Vereen, Andy Williams, Cathy Lee Crosby, Vitas Gerulaitis, Waylon Jennings, Ryan O'Neal, Kris Kristofferson, Larry Hagman, Joe DiMaggio, Gabe Kaplan, David Hartman, Aretha Franklin, Norm Crosby, Michael Landon, Arthur Ashe, Henny Youngman, Richard Crenna, George Plimpton, Phyllis George, John Huston, Wayne Newton, Jayne Kennedy, Barron Hilton, former Governor Mike O'Callaghan, Senator Paul Laxalt and Governor Robert List. And everyone knew it was an event of events when artist LeRoy Neiman arrived to sketch all the goodies for *Playboy Magazine.*

Hank Greenspun, publisher of the *Las Vegas Sun,* was less than beatific in his commentary about the event of events. Writing in his "Where I Stand" column three days later, he groused, "There was a slight odor of avarice in the arena This loudmouth Ali doesn't have a good word for anyone but himself. He has brought to boxing what Gorgeous George did for wrestling. It has become a carnival, not a sport There wasn't anyone in the vast audience who paid their money that came away without feeling suckered Promoter Don King evidently came for the sport of it, but his share of the biggest gate in history was somewhat more than a sporting chance. He has to be the super con man for no one else could have gotten away with such a farce."

But estimates are that the greatest farce in history brought $100 million into Las Vegas.□

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*(Continued from page 46)*

good seven-card player, for instance, everybody wanted to play something else so they could beat you!"

Top professionals still have to play them all, Reese says. "When you play big limit, there aren't but so many people who can afford it, and they aren't stupid. When you beat 'em, they switch games."

Switching has produced entirely new poker games over the years. Five-card stud, the standard game of Johnny Moss' youth, is hardly played today. "The best hand and best player nearly always win in five-card," Binion says. "A weaker player didn't stand a chance, and that's no fun.

"But what really killed it was that people discovered games with more action. It stands to reason that if you gamble for enjoyment, you want to be in as many pots as you can. That's where the excitement is. Seven-card stud gives you a greater chance to improve your hand as you play, because of the greater number of cards. That means you'll stay in more pots and enjoy it more. Seven-card is now the most popular game."

**"Although Amarillo Slim will never tell the biggest pot he's ever won, he does admit to losing $173,000 in one game at the Dunes."**

The same idea has been carried even further in seven-card "hold 'em." Instead of getting seven cards of his own, each player gets only two hole (down) cards, and the rest of his hand consists of five community cards shared with all other players. This method gives the top few hands a tendency to be very close in value. Thus hold 'em is a particularly exciting game.

As more customers are playing poker, no-limit games have virtually disappeared from the casinos. Fifty years ago nearly all serious poker was played at "no limit" or "table stakes," and a player could bet as much money as he had on the table. Johnny Moss once lost a $500,000 pot to Nick "The Greek" Dandolos. As recently as two years ago, at the Silverbird, a game was played regularly with antes of $500 and automatic opening bet of $3,000, putting $6,000 in each pot before anyone looked at a card.

Even though Amarillo Slim will never tell how much was in the biggest pot he's ever won, he does admit to losing $173,000 in one game at the Dunes a year or so back.

Today no-limit poker is played occasionally at the Dunes and otherwise only during the World Series of Poker. The highest regular games are $60 maximum and they are scarce.

The pots may be smaller than in the old days, but you don't have to look in back rooms for a damn good poker game. □

*A.D. Hopkins is editor of the* Nevadan, *the Sunday magazine of the* Las Vegas Review-Journal *and a frequent contributor to Nevada Magazine.*

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DEALER

# People Are The Best Deal

UNLV SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

**When the casino turns into a carnival, the dealer has the best seat in the house. By Mike Newman**

I am a dealer working the swing shift at the Dunes Hotel on the Vegas Strip. There is an innate roughness to the job: aching feet and legs, the repetition of the game, the constant need for concentration. But from the dealer's vantage point, there is no lack of variety. Every night in Fun City is different because people are different.

Dealing is people. The casino is a perpetual party, and the dealers are the caterers. The casino is a midway, circus, and cabaret; it is people seeking to become the momentary king of keno or sultan of slots, and it can happen anytime in Vegas, Tahoe and Reno.

The best way to feel the deal is to put on a tie and apron and stand behind the table. The dice are coming out, the cards are flying, the white ball is turning in its brilliant track. Customers are parading past the tables, talking, laughing, looking for the best possible buy-in, that lucky spot that might be hot.

Dealers, like bartenders, have enormous collections of I'll Never Forgets. They're always about people. Not high rollers or celebrities, but just you and me out on the town, in Vegas for a convention, on a junket, passing through, or up from L.A. or San Diego for a wild, wasted, weirdo-watching weekend.

One of my favorites happened in 1969 at the El Cortez, one of the oldest stores on Fremont Street in Las Vegas. I was dealing blackjack to my regular assortment of construction workers, PBX operators, swinging senior citizens on weekend passes from South Cal, Omaha junket gamblers, Glitter Gulch hookers and off-duty degenerate downtown dealers.

Suddenly, I had to stop the game. A white-haired lady on third base, the last position dealt to on a 21 game, was studying her cards so intently that she wouldn't look at me.

"Ma'am, do you want a hit?" I finally asked.

She ignored me for a few more seconds, then looked up and spread her first two cards open-face on the green felt. She had a 10 and a four, I had a Queen up. I had already checked my bottom card for an ace and it wasn't there. Looking me square in the eye, the woman commanded, "If you got a busting card in the hole, dealer, kick me under the table!"

Another time I was standing on a dead $100-minimum 21 table. I had just had an incredible run of cards for the house, and five high rollers had departed mumbling unprintables.

I was enjoying the rest because it was Friday night, and the joint was jumping and the dealers were pumping. Primeval screams and catcalls coming from the nearby crap pit were deafening. Jackpot sirens were howling. I was watching customers as they walked by watching me watching them. Every dealer knows how a zoo monkey feels, but players often reverse this feeling when they sit down at a game and say, "Throw *me* a few peanuts, house man!"

As I settled into my dead table trance, a young man approached my layout and tried to make his voice heard above the din. "Is this the casino?" He cracked a mile of smile when I assured him it was, and then he wandered off into the night.

Dealing is especially enjoyable when players are loose, perhaps winning a bit, but, above all, being entertained. A pleasant dealer can bring priceless PR to a club. Players often return just to gamble at a certain dealer's game because they remember previous courteous, even comical treatment.

A croupier is an entertainer. His audience consists of six or seven people on a green, half-moon shaped layout, and sometimes there is an

additional gallery watching the game if the play is enormous or a celebrity is gambling. Telly Savalas is a regular player at the Dunes, and nobody can attract a casino cheering section like that charismatic actor.

By the way, players *do* win. An overwhelming score that I will never be able to dismiss is one where Average Joe made it with the dough.

That night I was pumping brass and plastic (Ike dollars and chips) on the graveyard. The dude of sudden fortune walked up and made a $40 bet on my game. He won the first bet, let it ride, kept winning and kept riding. Seventeen hands later, after several successful shots of doubling down and splitting at limit action, which was one grand a pop, he walked away with more than $20,000.

When he left, he threw me a black chip, one hundred bucks, and matter-of-factly stated, "Thanks, I needed this." He was The Unknown Player and never returned to the joint. □

*Mike Newman of Las Vegas has been a casino dealer since 1969, first at the El Cortez and then at the Dunes. His first book, "Dealer's Special," a collection of his columns in* Gambling Times, *was published by Gambler's Book Club Press in 1979.*

# Dealing in

Dealing is manual and mental work; outside of poker, it's mostly a stand-up job requiring tremendous concentration when the action is jam-up.

Every trade requires a basic apprenticeship period, and dealing isn't any different. The craft can be learned in a dealing school, or a person can be privately taught by someone already in the racket. Some clubs like Harrah's and the Cal Neva in Reno operate their own schools. Craps is the best shot for a new dealer; it is harder to master and less difficult to find a break-in job.

The typical dealing classroom is a simulated casino with actual dice and card tables, roulette wheels, baccarat games, and keno and poker setups. A dice or blackjack course can last anywhere from four to eight weeks. The subject matter includes chip-cutting, shuffling, how to hold a deck and properly deliver the cards, count and add cards, use a multiple-deck shoe and correctly pay off a marker or call bet.

However, the best training is on-the-job; student clerks really learn to deal after they get a gaming gig. Some hotel-casinos break in their own personnel from other departments, thereby giving their own employees an opportunity to learn the art of dealing and acquire its economic advancements.

A prospective dealer pays from $150 to $300 for a one game course, but sometimes a dealing school diploma will not get the gaming graduate a job.

The good dealing jobs are often obtained through juice, by having the proper pit politics and casino connections going for you. The gambling fraternity is traditionally cynical about outsiders, and the quickest way to bust down the dealing door is to know someone who has the fraternity's trust.

Any veteran dealer would advise a rookie clerk to try to break in at a smaller club where the action isn't sky high.

But the single most intriguing element in the trade is the human factor, the very ingredient that makes dealing an appealing profession. —*MN*




PERRY ROSE

# The House That Barney Built

**When Barney O'Malia took over the El Capitan in Hawthorne in 1944, it was a back-street bar with a couple of card tables and a coffee shop. Now the El Cap spreads across two city blocks and is as famous a Mineral County landmark as Walker Lake and Mount Grant.**

**By David W. Toll**

Surrounded by the concrete bunkers and sprawled warehouses of the ammunition depot that has been its mainstay since construction began in 1928, Hawthorne is an unprepossessing collection of modest homes and small businesses astride U.S. 95. "Hawthorne hasn't changed much since I came here almost 40 years ago," says Barney O'Malia. "Oh, there are a few more kids and some different dogs, but otherwise the only big change is the new undertaker in town."

In fact, there is at least one obvious change in Hawthorne since Barney took over the El Capitan in the summer of 1944. Then it was a back-street bar with a couple of card tables and an attached coffee shop. Now the El Capitan spreads across two city blocks, and the illuminated sign that twirls slowly above it seems to hover over the entire town. For a generation and more the El Capitan itself has been as famous a Mineral County landmark as Walker Lake and Mount Grant.

"Barney is the man who did it," says general manager Gene Terry. Barney himself says simply, "It's been my life."

Barney O'Malia has followed the gambling business more than 50 years. He was born in North Dakota, raised in Montana and graduated from high school in Spokane, Washington. "That's where I went wrong," he says with the gravelly laugh that wells up from deep within him. "I belonged to the National Guard, and I was put in charge of the recreation room. So I started a poker game."

One poker game led to another, and after several years of operating outlaw games in states where gambling was illegal, Barney moved to Nevada in March, 1942.

"I'd never gambled with a house bankroll," he says. "All my experience had been in states where it wasn't legal. So I came to Reno and there I met Pappy Smith. We became friends and I told him I wanted to learn the business. So he asked me if I could deal 21. I had played the game, and I had dealt craps and poker, so I told him, 'Sure.' And he took my hat and coat and put me right to work at one of the tables."

Barney put in 10- and 12-hour days, seven days a week at Harolds Club and eventually worked in every department in the house. Besides the practical details involved in running a gambling store, he also learned the philosophy that had made Harolds Club such a brilliant success.

"Before Pappy Smith, a Nevada gambling joint was a pretty cold place

**"At Gabbs we always had two bouncers at the start of each shift, but they didn't always make it to quitting time—the miners got playful sometimes."**

to be," Barney says. "Pappy Smith believed in providing a pleasant atmosphere. I learned the whole program from him and followed along with that."

Part of the Harolds Club program involved the employment of women dealers. One of them was an attractive young roulette dealer named Frances Kramer, whose mother was also a Harolds Club dealer. Barney and Frances were married in 1942, and when Barney moved on to Hawthorne a few months later, Frances and her mother went with him. "We had a beautiful marriage," Barney says. "When Frances died last year the fuzz went off the peach."

Barney left Harolds when opportunity knocked in the form of a poker game at Harry's Club. But a couple of weeks later a louder knock came from over the eastern horizon at Gabbs where a new magnesium mine was about to go into production.

There the Smith Brothers, Lindsay and Gordon, had a grocery store and a bar called The Bucket, and they wanted someone to run the gambling for them. So for half the take at the poker table, and $15 a day plus 10 percent of the 21 game, Barney went to Gabbs. "We always had two bouncers at the start of each shift," Barney remembers, "but they didn't always make it all the way


NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Barney's early customers reached the El Cap by an alley off Main Street.*

until quitting time—the miners got playful sometimes."

After a year Barney was promoted to general manager of The Bucket. But a year after that the government subsidy on magnesium mining was ended and the mine shut down. The gambling games in The Bucket shut down with it, and Barney moved back to Hawthorne.

"Hawthorne was going strong then, with all the wartime activity at the ammunition depot," Barney recalls, "and I found a sleeper, a little place off the main street that had been run by Mike Gallos until it burned down in 1942. He had rebuilt it with scrap and surplus lumber from the ammunition depot, and then a group of local men bought it. But they only opened the gambling games up when the bus came through town." With the backing of the Smith brothers, Barney bought the El Capitan for $30,000.

"For some reason the guys who were running the place had stocked a lot of good whiskey—they had a basement full of the best brands, thousands of dollars worth. So I brought it upstairs and put it up behind the bar, and I put up some signs: 'Bar Whiskey 50¢.' In three days the bar was packed with construction workers."

The rest is history. The buildings between the El Capitan and the main street melted away, providing a spacious parking area for travelers lured in from the highway. By the late forties matches, ashtrays and coupon books were being distributed year-round to the High Sierra communities of California, from Lone Pine to China Lake. A few years later Barney established a small charter airline to ferry players over the mountains from Burbank and other California cities. Soon people who'd have been hard pressed to find Hawthorne on the map were throwing the dice and shrieking with excitement over jackpots at the El Capitan.

In 1961 the Smith Brothers moved down from Gabbs to join Barney at the El Capitan. "We agreed to disagree," Barney says, "and they fired me out of here."

Barney went to the south shore of Lake Tahoe, where Barney's Club remains a monument to his six-year sojourn there. In 1967 he retired.

And then he found another sleeper. The El Capitan had languished under the ownership of the Smith Brothers, and Barney bought back in. He's been running the place ever since.

And it keeps getting bigger. With increased mining activity in the area combined with the already substantial tourist trade, the El Capitan's 103-unit motel holds steady at 99 percent occupancy, and 12 more rooms will be added in the spring. A three-story addition is under construction at the south end of the casino to provide floor space for more slot machines and a snack bar, upstairs offices and a basement slot repair shop.

**"The guys who were running the place had stocked a lot of good whiskey. They had a basement full of the best brands. So I brought it upstairs and put up some signs: 'Bar Whiskey 50¢.' In three days the bar was packed with construction workers."**

"I'm just trying to keep up," Barney says. "I'm lazy. I like a little place. I don't want the effort involved in running a big place."

If there is a certain irony to that statement as the El Capitan swells ever larger in the center of little Hawthorne, its business volume increasing at the rate of 10 to 15 percent a year, there is also a central truth to it: despite its size, there is nothing pretentious about the El Capitan.

On a recent visit to Hawthorne, for example, our party enjoyed a leisurely supper in the Prime Rib Room, in which the decor is elevated a degree or two above the more mundane coffee shop by wall sconces fitted with flicker-flame light bulbs, and by waitresses (ours was tattooed) who wheel in supper on carts. These cosmopolitan touches are appreciated in Hawthorne, and our neighbors at adjoining tables were, on the left, a group of high-rolling miners on a payday spree, and on the right a ranch family celebrating an anniversary.

The next morning we returned to the El Cap for breakfast, and as we were seated in the rear section of the coffee shop we felt a pang of deja vu. Those wall sconces! We had been seated in exactly the same booth we had occupied the night before, but now the accordian doors had been opened, making the Prime Rib Room a part of the coffee shop for the breakfast rush.

Some of that rush is provided by the miners who are exploring and developing dozens of properties in the historic districts surrounding Hawthorne. Until the advent of the recent mining boom, and until the ammunition depot was turned over to private management by the military late last year, the El Capitan had been the largest private employer in Mineral County.

For some employees, like the young waitress in the coffee shop who gave Barney a long look as he settled into the employees' booth ("Are you sure you're an employee?") the El Capitan provides entry-level job opportunities not ordinarily available in small rural communities. For others, such as general manager Gene Terry, who went to work as a bar boy after his discharge from the Marine Corps in 1949, it has been a career. Mabel DeMars, who began baking bread and pastries at the El Cap when Barney first took it over in 1944, has officially retired but she still works part-time in the bakery.

Courtesy buses make the haul from Bishop, California, twice a day, bringing customers to the front door free of charge, and another makes a daily round trip from the Naval Air Station at Fallon. A small program of charter flights carries players from Fresno and back, and the El Capitan advertises frequently in central California, offering free gasoline to customers who make the long drive.

"We don't see many strangers here," says assistant manager Harry O'Malia, Barney's brother and long-time business associate. "Our customers come back again and again. Anything someone might want, from a cup of coffee to a room for the night to a little entertainment, they can find it here."

"Barney's ideas built this place," says Gene Terry. "Not that all his ideas were good. He's had some terrible ideas. But he's had some good ones too, and the guts to try them all." □

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*David W. Toll is the author of "The Compleat Nevada Traveler" and editor-publisher of the* Gold Hill News. *His book, "The Story of Saint Mary's," will appear in '81. He is a lifelong admirer of Walker Lake at sunrise.*

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ADVERTISING

# NEVADA OR BUST

**Pappy Smith revolutionized casino advertising with planes, radio and 2,300 billboards.**

**By Thomas C. Wilson**

Casino advertising today is a big business with big budgets and top-flight talent bombarding major population markets with radio, TV and billboard ads. Like the growth-oriented enterprises they are, Nevada casinos launch far-reaching advertising campaigns as routinely as their charter jets land in Las Vegas and Reno.

In gaming's early days, however, advertising consisted of little more than good-will holiday newspaper ads. That is, until Raymond I. "Pappy" Smith and his son Harold opened Harolds Club in Reno and began seeking outlandish ways to attract out-of-state tourists. Their sense of promotion and advertising revolutionized Nevada gambling.

Before gambling was last legalized in 1931, most gamblers were understandably reluctant to advertise or otherwise draw public attention to their operations. Even after 1931, gambling remained inconspicuous. Most establishments operated unobtrusively and catered to working men.

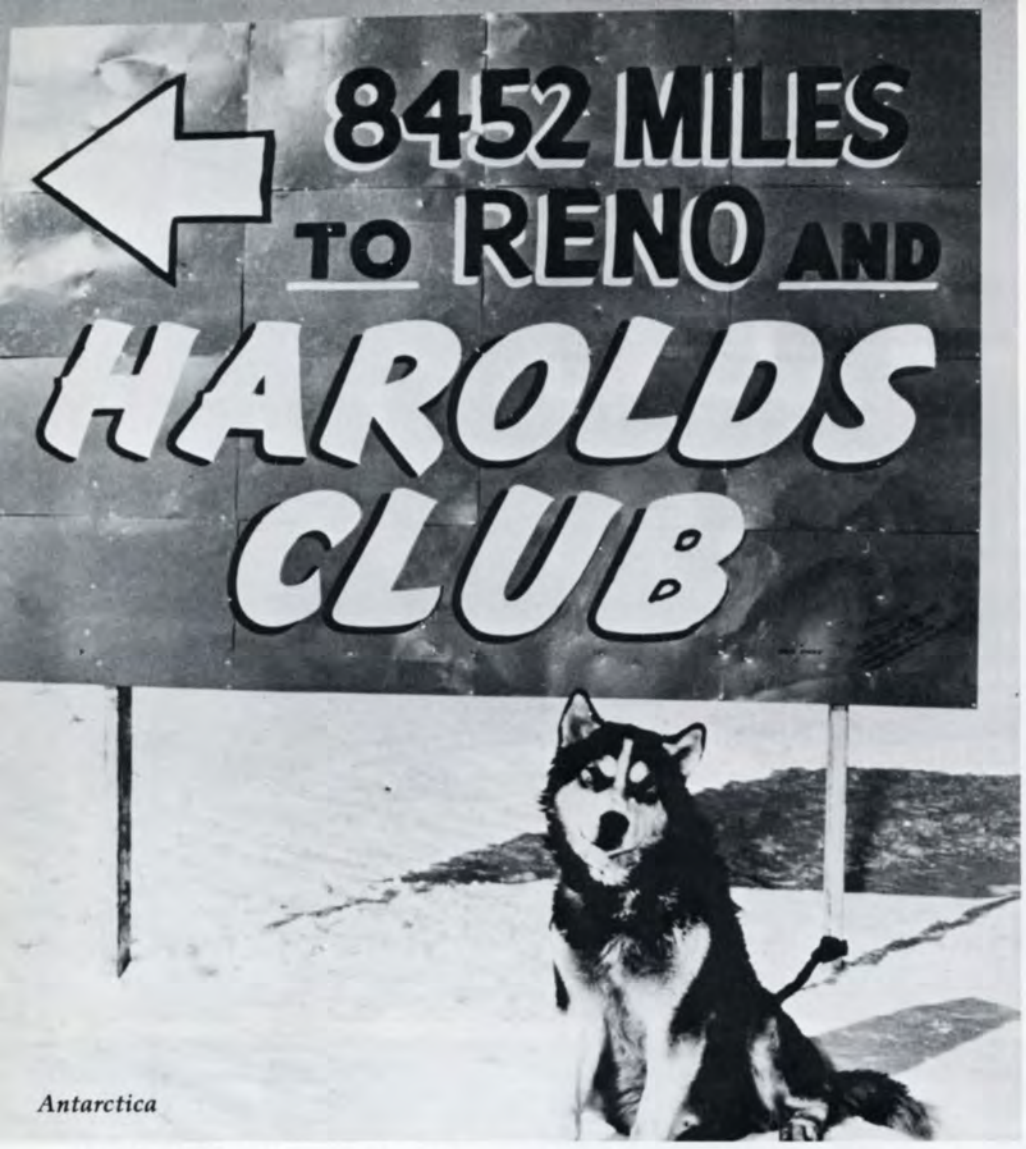
Advertising before World War II was limited largely to newspaper ads that local gamblers bought on special occasions like Thanksgiving and Christmas. The ads were used for good will, not as marketing tools. They did help the many Nevada newspapers that were having financial problems in the early forties. During that period the Boulder and Pioneer clubs in Las Vegas ran two-column, eight-inch ads for several years, ads that at times meant survival for the local dailies.

The Apache Hotel and El Rancho Vegas also advertised in the Vegas newspapers. In Elko, the Commercial Hotel, which launched Nevada's first big name entertainment billings in 1941, promoted its show talent locally and in Salt Lake City. In Reno, the Trocadero and Club Fortune promoted entertainment in local papers. But there was little in the way of marketing or advertising campaigns.

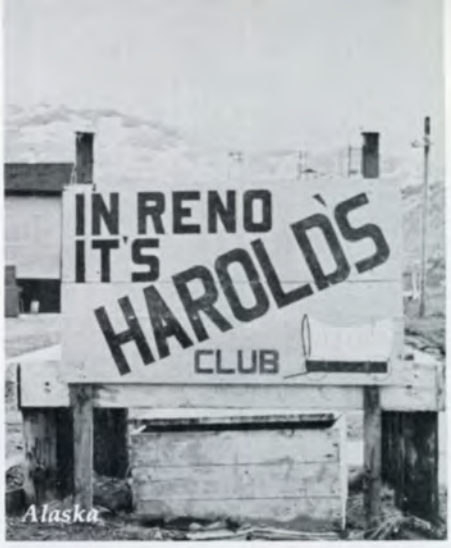
With the advent of war, however, casino gambling moved into high gear. Attitudes were changing. Servicemen and women traveled the country and the world, discovering customs and activities they never had seen back home. Thousands of GIs visited Reno while on leave, and at war's end it seemed as if the entire Western Fleet had descended on the Reno casinos. The boom was on.

As the new wave of out-of-state customers began testing the tables and slots in Reno and Vegas, gambling operators started to experiment with mass advertising. The Flamingo began

*Winter mountaintop*



*Antarctica*



*Alaska*

*Marshall Islands*

*The Smith family's road to success was lined with signs pointing to Reno.*

using highway billboards, including a spectacular sign on Hollywood Boulevard and other Las Vegas establishments ventured into outdoor advertising.

And up in Reno, under the inspired direction of Pappy Smith, Harolds Club had an agency begin testing roadside signs in the 11 western states. It was one of a series of campaigns encouraged by Smith that established new standards on how to reach the public, and how the public perceived Nevada gaming.

This old-time carnival operator, whose background was different from the Nevada mining camp gambling tradition, made the first effort to promote big-volume gambling through marketing tactics. Harolds was the first, and for years it was virtually the only casino with a planned program using multimedia in many important markets. It was the first with a national outdoor campaign, the first with a radio campaign in the western states, the first to publish ads in every newspaper in Nevada. With the slogan "Harolds Club or Bust" appearing on roads from Maine to Baja, the club grew spectacularly

Smith's contemporaries were startled by his innovations. He hired women dealers and chartered planes from California.He encouraged small-bet customers. He walked around the club, doubling customers' bets at random and buying them drinks on the house.

Some Reno clubs were content to take the overflow from Harolds. Others experimented gingerly with advertising. They believed that to be in the spotlight was to invite trouble, and they shuddered further when Smith's advertisements began promoting the entire western Nevada area.

Harolds' early advertising program included its famous long-running newspaper ads. Since it was to be a goodwill program, a theme was adopted based on authentic but colorful incidents in Nevada history. A brief test campaign indicated strong appeal, reinforced by the realization that gambling was part of Nevada's pioneer tradition. Research people went to work with the aid of the Nevada Historical Society, the Bancroft Library in Berkeley and historians in Reno, Sacramento and Salt Lake City. A San Francisco commercial art firm was commissioned to do the illustrations. The resulting ads were published every week in every newspaper in Nevada during the late '40s and early '50s.

Encouraged by the public's reaction to the newspaper campaign, a decision was made to also use outdoor advertising. Signs featuring historical illustrations were placed along Nevada highways. This led to experiments testing humorous highway signs showing cartoon characters frantically rushing to Reno with the headline "Harolds Club or Bust." More than 2,300 of the signs were placed on major highways nationwide and soon generated a

*Three generations of Smiths—Harold Sr., Pappy and Harold Jr.—hone their skill with a deck of cards.*

tremendous volume of traffic to Harolds Club and Reno.

Harolds Club then expanded its program to include radio spots broadcast to potential customers by 44 western radio stations. The spots were "wild West" in character and promoted the club as an exciting, friendly place; gambling was not mentioned.

Smith began to study the travel business, and the club arranged for a San Francisco travel agency to sell tours to Reno and launched its first air charter operation by moving a large operator from Florida to Reno. The charter service claimed to have flown more than 40,000 people from western cities to Reno in the first year, picking up passengers after work, bringing them free to Reno, and then returning them home in time for work the next day! The tour was called "The Big Night." Eventually Harolds set up its own travel agency on Post Street in San Francisco to handle its rapidly growing Bay Area business.

Meanwhile, Smith's travel study revealed that the American Automobile Association had been advising eastern motorists bound for the west coast to use Route 66 via Arizona "to avoid that terrible Donner Summit." The club's agency decided to offer AAA executives a free trip west by plane from Washington to Chicago, then by luxury automobile from Chicago to Reno. The trip included a week in Reno with a car and driver and a choice of side trips. The AAA people accepted, and from Reno took a good look at Lake Tahoe, Donner Summit, Virginia City, Carson City, Genoa and Pyramid Lake. They also toured Reno's tourist attractions. The result was a radical, and highly favorable, change in the information released by AAA.

Pappy Smith also enjoyed developing old fashioned promotions. His private "license" plates featuring the Harolds Club covered wagon with laughing oxen were immediately successful; today they are collector's items. Service groups in California sought Smith as a program speaker, and his folksy style and sense of humor kept him in great demand. The club designed a party kit, with enough game layouts, cards, dice and decorations that any organization could stage a "Harolds Club Party." Today, nearly 20 years later, party kits are still a successful project.

As the air tour business prospered, Harolds Club executives figured the club could expand greatly if it acquired a hotel to house its guests. Negotiations began for ranch lands at the south edge of Reno. But local hotelmen, nervous over the potential competition, persuaded Smith to delay his hotel project until a four-lane highway over Donner Summit could be built by the State of California. The scary, winding, two-lane highway down the Donner escarpment was considered to be a psychological barrier to "flatland" motorists coming to Reno.

Soon Smith decided he had made a

mistake in holding up his hotel project, so he authorized an aggressive lobbying campaign to get the State of California to widen the highway to four lanes over Donner. Some unexpected help came from national defense experts who said that "if an enemy ever attacked coastal California, the people would have to flee over the mountains to a refuge in Nevada." Suddenly millions of Californians were concerned about having a safe, quick route over the Sierra.

Harolds created a highway sign program over the mountains, urging motorists "to write their congressmen to widen this highway to four lanes." The billboards pictured a long string of autos lined up behind a slow-moving truck. The signs were placed at narrow, winding places where passing was impossible and drivers' tempers were assumed to be boiling. The campaign was credited with generating thousands of letters to California congressmen and legislators, and was said to be the first outdoor sign lobbying effort.

The pressure on California officials was irresistible and the project was approved, designed and built in time for the 1960 Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley.

By then other casino owners were studying Harolds Club's marketing adventures, and they became more active in promotion. Bill Harrah was one of the first to recognize the value of advertising. Harrah's advertising was conservative and tasteful, most of it devoted to promoting the club's big name entertainers. Harrah's advertising, like Harolds', did not feature gambling.

As Harrah's campaigns were showing the benefits of "big name" advertising, progressive hotel operators in Las Vegas were also experimenting with entertainment. In Vegas the early big name campaigns of the El Rancho, Frontier and Flamingo were followed by those of other Strip establishments. Advertising and publicity people from the west and east coasts were hired, and the intensity and quality of Las Vegas tourist marketing took on a highly professional profile. The strong advertising campaigns of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority also have been of great value to the economy of southern Nevada.

In recent years Las Vegas resorts have expanded their advertising in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. Newspaper ads continue, too; it is reported that in the last decade there has been more newspaper show business advertising in Las Vegas than any other market in the world.

In Elko, where big name showbiz began in Nevada, there has always been keen competition between the town's two leading casinos. Billboards for the Stockman's Hotel, in keeping with its name, featured an eye-grabbing range bull in a strong highway campaign from the Utah border to California. Scores of signs featured the enormous bull.

Elko is a cattle town and hugely enjoys a good joke. One night a group of friends of the rival Commercial Hotel took paint and brushes and drove across the entire state on U.S. 40 (now Interstate 80), painting the cattle brand of the Commercial's owner on the side of every Stockman's bull. It meant nothing to tourists. But it provoked belly laughs in every cow town in the West.

As Pappy Smith might have said, you get their attention when you advertise. □

*Thomas C. Wilson of Reno established the state's first advertising agency, Thomas C. Wilson Advertising, in 1939 and with Pappy Smith set other firsts with Harolds Club campaigns.*

# THE GREEN FELT CRYSTAL BALL

## Is Nevada's gaming future bright? Bet on it. By Dick Odessky

During the past 50 years casino operators throughout the state have been responsible for turning a back-room pastime into an exciting and thriving industry. It has been the casino bosses and regulators of this desert state who have developed gambling into a sophisticated resort concept, and they and the state have reaped many benefits.

In the future, however, it appears they will not be alone.

It's already obvious that a great deal of new competition will join Nevada and that upstart by the sea, Atlantic City, in the gaming field. New Jersey residents voted in favor of casinos in 1977 when nearby New York City was slipping into economic disaster. Garden State voters, alarmed at the condition of their own treasury, believed gaming tables and slots would be their salvation.

Even though New Jersey has not realized the windfall its people had hoped for, officials in other states continue to see casino gambling as a way to fatten their coffers without having to go back to their tax-flogged citizens for more money.

Gambling naturally entails risk, and in some cases the notion that a casino is a painless tax cure-all may be a fallacy. For states like New York or California, which have more than 20 times the population that Nevada has, taxes raised from casino gaming probably would amount to much less than what they already collect from their racetracks. Even with the millions of dollars being poured into the Atlantic City casinos, gaming accounts for but a fraction of New Jersey's economy.

However, in other western states with low populations, like Idaho, Wyoming and Washington, the idea of gaining a few million dollars a year in tax revenue becomes very attractive.

There have been predictions that as many as a dozen states might install


MIKE RITTER

casino gaming by 1990. With that potential competition staring them in the face, other industries might panic and sell the store. Will Nevada gaming worry? Don't bet on it.

Since 1931 Nevada has been written off by the rest of the country on an almost annual basis. A tight economy, gas shortages, over building, increased competition and even nuclear testing have been expected to carry the Nevada gaming industry to its grave.

Regardless of the prophecies, the state's gaming revenues and number of visitors have been climbing every year. Back in 1933 the state's income from gaming was about $200,000. In 1979 it was $2.2 billion, and close to 30 million people visited Nevada.

The main reason that gaming works so well in Nevada is because the state and the industry are absolutely unique. Before gaming was legalized, Las Vegas wasn't much more than a water stop along the Union Pacific's main line; Reno was a small, quiet, friendly town of miners, ranchers and railroaders; Lake Tahoe was a beautiful wilderness area. There were no major manufacturing plants, no large insurance or banking firms—and less than 100,000 residents. Thus, legalized gaming was destined to be the state's primary industry.

In Nevada, everyone's lives are touched by the gaming industry. Gaming tax revenues are spread throughout the state and proceeds are not limited to the areas from which they are collected. These dollars help to provide excellent public facilities as well as keeping personal taxation at a minimum.

Nevada also has the charisma to attract vacationers from all over the world. The Silver State also has a special mystique that cannot be duplicated. Its heritage is of ranchers and gold miners of the "Old West." In Las Vegas, some gaming pioneers were notorious individuals who came west so that they could operate within the law. Today Nevada's free and open spirit is still one of its best attractions. Other gaming areas could develop their own personalities, but that may take many, many years of careful nurturing.

So, Nevadans are not afraid of competition from casinos that might open in other parts of the country. As a matter of fact, they wish them well. If anything, additional gaming areas will mean bigger business to Nevada. Gaming in other regions will introduce casino activity to millions of men and women who might not otherwise have considered a vacation in Las Vegas, Reno or Tahoe.

Even without the aid of a crystal ball, Nevada's gaming industry leaders know that the future will be brighter than the marvelous half century since gaming was first taken out of the back rooms. They know Nevada has the edge over any other potential gaming areas because its strength comes from within. Legalized gaming is a respected and accepted part of the state's society and Nevada is used to hard times. In the desert, survival is essential. □

*Dick Odessky of Las Vegas is the director of public relations for the Stardust, Fremont and Sundance hotel-casinos.*

# How the White Hats Won the West

## The state's elaborate control system has helped Nevada's 50-year gamble pay off.

**By Guy Shipler**

"Listen, Siegel," Robbins Cahill shouted into the telephone at his Carson City office, "you pay up those back taxes right now, or I'll send somebody down to Las Vegas to close your joint for good."

Cahill slammed down the phone.

Next day he had a check for the full amount of the gambling taxes owed the State of Nevada. It was duly signed by Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel, builder and owner of the Flamingo Hotel, the Strip's first major resort-casino.

Probably no one else in the world could have made such a demand of one of the most powerful and dangerous underworld figures of the 1940s and expect to live, much less get such a rapid reply. But Bugsy Siegel knew that if he wanted to stay in the legitimate gambling business, Robbins Cahill was no man to mess with. As head of the state's fledgling gaming control system, Cahill would brook no nonsense when it came to enforcing Nevada's gambling laws, and paying gaming taxes on time was one of the laws.

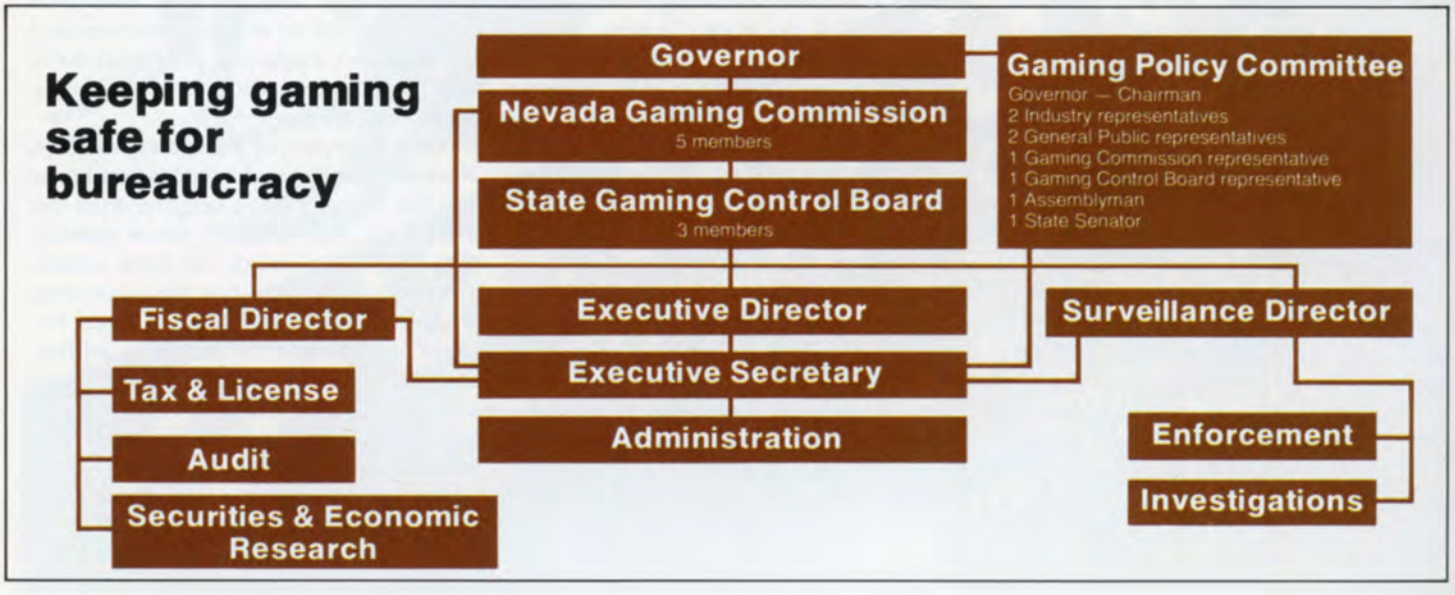
Cahill's steel-hard stance has been generally followed in principle by his successors, not only with the hoods who were Nevada's gambling experts in the early days, but also with the more respectable casino operators since. It's the main reason that the legalized gambling industry over the past 50 years has gained enough maturity and respect to flourish as the state's major tourist business by keeping the underworld at bay, if not completely off the scene.

Even gambling's most ardent advocates would not have dreamed that it would be such a huge economic success when they managed to get gambling legalized back in 1931. In fact, the rest of the nation would have laid odds of about 100 to 1 against Nevada's great gamble paying off.

On the basis of tradition, there hardly could have been a safer bet. The respectable elements of the western world had long ordained that gambling was a major vice and anti-social enterprise. So this new attempt to fit one of mankind's baser instincts into the stately patterns of society was doomed to failure. History showed that gambling had flourished only when it could operate in the darkness of the underworld. It was illogical to assume that it could function in the legal daylight.

The skeptics have lost their bet many times over because the state knew full well that there would be an onslaught by the underworld. To meet that threat, it set up a mechanism right at the start to challenge the black hats with its own rules of the road. Specifically, state officials established a rigid, virtually autocratic control system based on the principle that legal gambling was not a right, but a privilege—and a revocable privilege at that. That meant that people who might have been lawbreakers elsewhere through illegal gambling activities would be protected by Nevada's laws—but only if they walked a legal tightrope. Let them start to lose their balance, as Bugsy Siegel

*(Continued on page 118)*



# The Gaming Czar

## In the Nevada gambling world, Robbins Cahill is a man of respect.

It would be logical to assume that any man who could fearlessly tangle with mobsters and hired killers, and force them to follow the rules and regulations he laid down, must be a born adventurer.

Not so Robbins Cahill. The man most responsible for molding the no-nonsense approach of Nevada's gaming control system started out in a prosaic and uneventful way. He was quietly raised in Sparks and quietly went to the University of Nevada in Reno.

But after graduating with a degree in business administration and economics, things got less prosaic and a bit more eventful. Specifically, Cahill went broke in his first job, which was running a hardware store in St. Louis with his brother-in-law. The pattern didn't improve right away; Robbins "Bob" Cahill arrived back in Reno the day the stock market crashed in 1929.

Things began to change for the better only after he had worked as a grease monkey in somebody else's garage and eventually got a garage of his own and a Packard automobile agency. But it was when he arrived on the political scene that Cahill's career really began to take hold.

It started in earnest when he was elected to the Nevada legislature in 1938—and was immediately appointed as chairman of the powerful Assembly Ways and Means Committee. That position gave him a financial know-how that would one day serve him well in gaming control. At the time, however, he figured gambling was a pretty minor part of the Nevada economic scene.

"Not everybody agreed," Cahill recalls. "I remember that same year, 1938, Tom Carroll, an assemblyman from Las Vegas, kept saying that his town was going to become the

*Former gaming chief Cahill.*

Monte Carlo of America. The rest of us would say that poor Tom was crazy, because Las Vegas was nothing but a whistle stop on the railroad."

There was good reason for skepticism. Legalized gambling, on the books for only seven years, still wandered in its haphazard and ineffective way among a lot of little operations; like most others, Cahill wasn't paying much attention to it. But in 1945, after a job with the state insurance commission and a stint as the state's deputy controller, Cahill's whole outlook—and the future of gaming in Nevada—took a drastic change of direction.

That was the year that Cahill became executive secretary of the Nevada Tax Commission. The first thing he found was that the job had been expanded to include oversight and enforcement of the gaming laws, a move brought about by the fact that the underworld was looking at Nevada as a juicy plum for easy picking. "As state officials," says Cahill, "we knew we were going to have to do something about it."

Doing something wasn't easy. Although the state had virtually authoritarian power to grant or deny gambling licenses, the tools for implementing that power were almost non-existent. "I was sitting there with one man," Cahill recalls, "and all of a sudden we found out we were in the business of investigations, reading fingerprints, going into backgrounds with absolutely no experience or any real equipment to do it with."

So Cahill fashioned his own tools. All of them were based on the proposition that a gaming license was a privilege that could be revoked at any time. But czar that he was, Cahill still did not perform like a tyrant. He let even the hoodlums know that if they adhered strictly to the law, they could operate as legitimate gamblers. And the hoods were delighted; for the first time in their checkered careers they could live like respectable people—as long as they stayed within Cahill's boundaries.

In fact, they found the rules so agreeable that most of them bent over backward to cooperate. Even now Cahill says he preferred dealing with "the so-called mobster rather than the businessmen who came out here and were well thought-of and successful in other businesses. Whenever you went to the mobster with a problem, you could sit down and talk with him, and he would say, 'What do you want us to do about it?' But you hit one of these other people, the legitimate businessman, and all you got was an argument."

As the control system developed and matured under his direction, Bob Cahill's power grew, especially after the Gaming Control Board was separated from the Tax Commission and established as a separate entity in 1959. In 1963, Cahill resigned from the board to take a job as Clark County's first administrator. But three years later he was back in gaming—this time on the other side of the fence. The job: director of the Las Vegas-based Nevada Resort Association, a trade group of southern Nevada casinos.

After lobbying for the gaming industry during the 1981 legislative session, Robbins Cahill, now 75, may retire. He's tried it in the past, but his gambling knowledge and expertise is so highly regarded that one group or another, in or out of government, has persuaded him to come back and help. If he does finally make it this time, he can leave with the satisfaction of knowing that, more than any other person, he was responsible for successfully completing a job the skeptics insisted could not be done—hammering out a control system workable enough to keep the great experiment of legalized gambling not only alive and well, but flourishing. □

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Mapes
HOTEL CASINO

*(Continued from page 114)*

did in the late forties, and their licenses would be in jeopardy.

The system has not worked to keep the industry simon pure, by any means. As a matter of fact, people who had criminal convictions elsewhere were actually welcomed into the state at first and could operate if their conviction in another state was for illegal gambling only. If he had served his sentence, paid his fine, and was thoroughly checked out by Nevada authorities and found to be free of underworld ties, he could be licensed here. The Nevada philosophy was, as Robbins Cahill puts it, "You have to look at someone like that through a different pair of glasses. An illegal gambler elsewhere could be a legal gambler here."

The state allowed the convicted gamblers licenses as a realistic and practical method of insuring the success of legalized gambling. Here, they could stay out of the slammer if they obeyed the rules, and were treated as ordinary citizens. Furthermore, their experience was regarded as a valuable asset. Knowing the tools of the crossroader and how to use them made the old-time gamblers Grade A teachers. Gradually, their students learned well enough to take over. These new professionals have since largely taken over the state's gaming industry at least to a degree where the underworld now has no ownership, even though it persists in cropping up on the fringes now and again.

This evolution was possible because the gaming control system grew with the industry. Although it's far from perfect, the system has matured, tightened and expanded beyond Cahill's tough line with the gangsters. The result is the following structure and operating procedure:

**Gaming Control Board.** From its start in 1955 as an adjunct of the state's Tax Commission, this body became an autonomous agency in 1959. Each of its three full-time members is appointed to a four-year term by the governor. Each member is required to have certain expertise. The chairman must have at least five years of sound administrative experience; a second member must have five years experience as a certified public accountant and be an expert in corporate financing and auditing; and the third must have full training and experience in law enforcement or law.

This group plus its staff are the people you come up against first (and last if you don't pass muster) when you apply for a gaming license. Over the years the board has earned the reputation of investigating all applicants for major licensing as thoroughly as if they were seeking a high-security U.S. defense job. So even though you may qualify for sainthood in your own mind, you will still get the full treatment. What's more, you will have to pay all the fees that go into this microscopic search into everything from your past associates to the source of your income. And you don't get your money back if you flunk. If you do get a license, you still won't be free of the board. It has the responsibility of enforcing all the gaming laws and regulations, so its agents have peace-officer authority to arrive unannounced and examine your gaming premises. In the process, they can seize equipment or supplies summarily, check out and audit all your papers, books and records.

**The Nevada Gaming Commission.** Created in 1959, its primary job is licensing. This group grants or denies licenses, and can revoke, suspend or condition licenses of existing operations. Although it acts on Gaming Control Board recommendations, that action is independent of the board. It has the power to hold disciplinary hearings, and to set regulations that gaming establishments must follow to the letter.

Unlike the full-time board, the commission is made up of five part-time members appointed by the governor for staggered four-year terms. No more than three members can be of the same political party, no more than two from the same occupational area, and none can have a financial interest in any gaming establishment.

**Gaming Policy Committee.** Established in 1961 as the Gaming Policy Board, this body has highly limited powers. It can hold public hearings and make recommendations to the Nevada Gaming Commission—which, by law, can ignore them. But it has a high intrinsic value in that it reflects public and government opinion. With the governor as its chairman, the committee consists of eight members representing the public, the gaming industry and state government (see chart).

The stated goal of this elaborate control mechanism is to protect the gaming industry from those who would sabotage it for their own illegitimate ends. A lofty aim, to be sure, but any objective look back across the past 50 years will show that the evidence on the positive side is far more impressive than on the negative. Were that not so, the chances that Nevada would be celebrating gaming's golden anniversary would be slim indeed.

Why has it been successful?

One reason is that the casino operators themselves are fiercely on the side of the state's system of demanding an honest and orderly operation, to a point where they actively cooperate with the state. It's practical, sound business. Operators know that the security of their business —and their own licenses to operate it—rest on keeping it clean.

That job has been done well enough to convince major corporations to move in—companies such as Del Webb, Hilton, the late Howard Hughes' Summa Corporation. They get no special investigative break; officers, directors and major shareholders must be licensed. So are key employees the authorities determine hold sensitive enough jobs to demand it. And so must any shareholder owning more than a five percent interest.

Then how come the recent revelations of skimming by elements of the mob from back East?

Quite simply, in spite of its authoritarian powers, the Nevada control system does not have some of the most effective tools the federal government can use, such as wiretapping. It's because there is a deep reluctance on the part of the state government to risk going too far in invading privacy. But the FBI can use wiretapping, and thus can move against organized crime more easily than the state.

Yet no system is foolproof. New Jersey, with its relatively new and already flourishing casinos in Atlantic City, is learning that by way of its own enforcement problems. And it will be true in the other areas expected to take up legal gaming, for when the highly volatile element of gambling is involved, it will always be thus. As Robbins Cahill, who knows that better than anyone, explains, "You don't often find a bishop of the church or a member of the social register who wants to go into gambling." □

*Guy Shipler of Carson City is a correspondent for* TIME/LIFE, *newspaper columnist, radio commentator and regular contributor to* Nevada Magazine.

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# Collections & Recollections

## Gambling and history sources you can bet on.

### The Gambler's Gutenberg

One day a Las Vegas church elder asked to park a church printing press in John Luckman's carport.

That neighborly encounter led to the birth of Luckman's unique business, the Gambler's Book Club, the world's largest mail-order distributor of gaming literature and a sort of consumer protection agency for the Great American Plunger.

Now 56, Luckman entered the gambling business at age 21. "That was when I saw my first $1,000," he explains, "and the guy who had it was my bookie. Right then I decided there was more money in taking bets than making them."

The boyish apprentice read everything he could on horse and sports betting. When he settled in Las Vegas in 1955 and became a dealer, he added casino gambling to his reading list. Eventually he collected more than 300 rare books on gambling.

Luckman was a craps floorman when his neighbor asked him to store the printing press. "This machine fascinated me," says Luckman. He began printing stationery. Then he bought his own equipment, expanding the business, and in 1965 decided to reproduce one of his rare, out-of-print books. His choice was "Racing Maxims and Methods of Pittsburgh Phil," originally published in 1908 and therefore in the public domain.

"Pittsburgh Phil is the sort of patron saint of horse players because he was supposed to be the first person to make $1 million playing horses," explains Luckman. Phil's maxims sold like hotcakes, and Gambler's Book Club (GBC) was on its way.

The GBC presses have long since moved out of the carport to a building at 630 South 11th Street. Also located there is the club's friendly retail bookstore, where visiting big-name writers swap stories with Runyonesque Las Vegas system players.

GBC sells 900,000 books and magazines a year, largely through mail-order lists it sends to customers throughout the English-speaking world. Besides gambling literature, the club carries books on related fields, such as magic, and even a few collectibles like original versions of Hoyle's game rules, published in 1750 and autographed by the author.

The club publishes more than 100 of the titles it sells. The most popular are its six pocket-sized guides to casino games, first printed in 1970. Sold in bookstores as far away as Kuala Lumpur, the guides are primers for casino-dealing courses at Atlantic City's community college. Two of them, "The Facts of Craps" and "The Facts of Blackjack," have sold more than 500,000 copies each.

Almost all GBC books, says Luckman, are written by "advanced amateurs." He explains, "If you assigned a professional writer to do a book on blackjack, he'd start by researching everything written on blackjack, and that's what you'd get. Nothing new. So our jai alai book, for instance, was written by Hal Coddon, the announcer at the MGM Grand jai alai fronton. And it will be fresh to the reader."

Luckman simply sells information, making few claims for what it will do. "We feel gambling should be an amusement," he says, "and the more you know about your game, the more enjoyable it's going to be."

—*ADH*

### Las Vegas News Bureau

Las Vegas' media liaison with the outside world, the News Bureau is the publicity division of the Greater Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce. Though it's not for the general public, the bureau serves newspapers, magazines, networks and filmmakers from around the world.

*Las Vegas News Bureau, Convention Center, Las Vegas, NV. 89109.*

### UNLV Special Collections

Besides its fine cache of material on southern Nevada history and government, the Special Collections Department of the UNLV library has an internationally-recognized gambling collection. Established in 1970 by the department's first librarian, Stephen Powell, the collection includes more than 3,000 monographs, more than 500 articles, several dozen gaming-related periodicals, works on risk and odds, recordings and video cassettes.

*Special Collections Department, 4505 Maryland Parkway, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV. 89154. 702-739-3252.*

### Nevada Historical Society

The Nevada Historical Society has a great collection of materials for researchers interested in gambling and Nevada history. The society's collection includes gaming books, records of the Nevada legislature, and on microfilm virtually every Nevada newspaper ever published. There also is a huge photograph collection, including gaming photos past and present. Visitors to the society's museum section can see Charles Fey's original Liberty Bell slot machine (the first of the one-arm bandits), a faro layout and a gambler's head that will talk for seven minutes about Nevada gaming.

*Nevada Historical Society, 1650 N. Virginia St., Reno, NV. 89503. 702-784-6397.*

### UNR Special Collections

The Special Collections Department of the UNR library has a fine store of historic photos and manuscripts that include primary sources such as letters and official papers. Also on hand are minutes from the university's conferences on gaming and a biographical index to historic figures.

*Special Collections Department, University of Nevada, Reno, NV. 89557. 702-784-6538.*

### Oral History Project

Part of the UNR library since 1969, the project has taped interviews with more than 80 Nevadans who have been part of significant events or aspects of Nevada life. Among the chroniclers are many gaming pioneers and observers. A bibliography is available to researchers on request.

*Oral History Project, University of Nevada, Reno, NV. 89557 702-784-6932.*

# Silver Dollar Superstars

## A reel success story of the '70s, starring Ike, Mayland Barber, Barron Hilton, the U.S. Treasury Department and a cast of thousands.

By John Reible

LAS VEGAS, ACT I, Scene 1: As the summer of '78 falls into fall, the value of the U.S. dollar is also falling in the world's money markets. The Japanese lose their yen for it and the Swiss franc-ly would like to pass the buck.

Scene 2: But in Nevada's money markets—the casinos—the U.S. simoleon is a superstar, producing a bonanza of bucks from $1 slot machines. Only two years ago the dollar slots were prime candidates for the endangered species list of expendable gambling hardware; nobody played the darn things. But that changed in late 1976 when Las Vegas, which houses over half the state's 60,000 slots, was selected for the unveiling of a new $1 slot, cosmetically improved and presented with a revolutionary packaging concept. Almost immediately, this new darling dollar device dropped millions in windfall profits into the laps of both casino owners and players. By the spring of '78 the dramatic rise in casino profits and player jackpots was being hailed as the best thing to happen to casinos since cocktail waitresses.

Scene 3: Late summer '78; Washington, D.C. Unknown to happy casino owners and slot players, evil forces are at work. In a masterstroke of bad timing, federal bureaucrats are plotting the death of the cartwheel, a symbol of U.S. coinage since 1794, a cornerstone of western commerce in frontier days, and still a sentimental favorite among Nevadans even though the current cartwheel—the Eisenhower dollar—is merely a wafer of copper and nickel with an intrinsic value of about 30 cents. The stand-in coin for both the cartwheel and the dollar banknote will be a new one, the feds say, and only slightly larger than a quarter. One side will feature the visage of Susan B. Anthony, the czarina of women's suffrage. The smaller coin will save minting expense, the feds say, and Anthony's mug on the coin will be a sop for the ERA bloc.

ACT II, Scene 1: Flashback to the spring of '76 and genesis of the dollar dementia, at the tiny but comfortable office of Mayland Barber, whiz-brain workaholic of Bally Manufacturing of Nevada, world's largest fabricators of slot machines. Rattling around in Barber's brainpan was an idea that he thought would halt the death rattle of the $1 slot and save it from extinction. If successful, the new $1 slot would revolutionize casino thinking. It would be bigger and hold $400 to $500 in cartwheels so that $100 jackpots could be paid automatically; the reels would be larger and carry new symbols; a new color scheme would set the $1 slot apart from all other slots; the machine would be set to pay back an average of 95 percent or more, rather than the 85 percent that casino owners had been accustomed to since the days when slots were called "one-armed bandits." And finally, $1 slots would be taken from their usual spot flanking the restrooms and circled, like so many covered wagons, around a carousel that would be placed close to the casino front entrance. On a platform inside the circle of slots would be a winsome lass to make change, small talk and generally act as chief of the slot corral.

Barber speaks: "What I was looking for was a way to glamorize the $1 slot. I felt that a combination of new design, higher payoffs and packaging concept that would set the machines apart from those of lesser denominations in the casino would grab the attention of the customers.

"Our graphic arts department came up with a design for a larger machine—distinctive. A new color scheme—distinctive. And we decided to eliminate our name 'Bally' from the front panel and substitute 'DOLLARS' so that the denomination of coin was unmistakable."

Scene 2: Later in '76, still at Bally's offices. Final designs have gone from prototype to production; carousels have been custom built; change girls have been hired, have undergone a crash course in customer PR and have emerged as smiling hostesses, primed to charm slot players into creating an epidemic of economic largess. In short,


LAS VEGAS NEWS BUREAU

*After $1 slots were taken from their usual spot flanking the restrooms and circled, like so many covered wagons, around a carousel facing the front doors, their popularity took off. New packaging, new design, new colors glamorized the machine and by 1980 the dollar slot provided gross gaming revenues second only to '21' tables.*

it is time to let the reels and the good times roll. All that remains is for Barber to mount a cavalry charge at the casinos and hopefully convince at least a couple to surrender to his new theory that more frequent jackpots will result in higher profits, at first glance a contradiction. Simply put, Barber must sell casinos on the principle that paying back 95 cents of each dollar results in a nickel "hold" for each coin dropped—the same as having a nickel machine that never pays off.

Scene 3: The Las Vegas Strip. The Castaways is the first casino to allow Bally to set up a fortress of machines just inside the door and wait for the onslaught of slot addicts to storm the carousel.

Scene 4: Same Strip. The $1 slots are an instant success. Word quickly spreads and Bally is swamped with orders for the carousel package, including winsome lasses.

ACT III, Scene 1: The Las Vegas Strip, Casino Center, Downtown Reno, Stateline, super markets, you name it: $1 slots are popping up faster than Orville what's-his-name's popcorn. An El Dorado of money is pouring into casinos daily.

> "After hitting the $250,000, Laura hurries to the room to phone husband Pete. He thinks his wife has become unraveled and says so. But Laura finally gets the message across, and Pete comes unglued."

Scene 2: Hotel magnate Barron Hilton decides it is time to climb on the carousel bandwagon. He has the biggest resort hotel in the world in the Las Vegas Hilton, so why not the world's biggest jackpot—say an even quarter million? Done! Ten $1 slots are moved into the LV Hilton, surmounted with the now familiar rainbow and pots of gold at each end. The slots are wired to a progressive counter that is set at $30,000 for openers and will go up by 10 cents for each handle pull until it reaches $250,000. The time is April 8, 1977 Hilton also installs a similar slot setup at the Flamingo Hilton.

Scene 3: Early summer '77 The dollar slot craze intensifies as players hit jackpots in five figures ranging from $30,000 to $90,000. Substantial loot, but the $250,000 biggie remains elusive.

ACT IV, Scene 1: It's March 1978, at the Carson City headquarters of the State Gaming Control Board. Auditors total up the take from slot action statewide and verify an increase of $34 million—in just three months! Also revealed is that more than 94 percent of the increase is from $1 slots! And further, $1 slots are now bringing in 48 percent of *all* gaming revenue! Since state records also catalog the number of slots licensed, the records show that the number of $1 slots has shot up from slightly over 800 in 1976 to 6,948 currently. Small wonder that Bally is among the glamour gambling issues on the stock exchange and Mayland Barber is a hero. Small wonder also that Bally has enough investment capital to take a flyer in Atlantic City, but that's another story.

ACT V, Scene 1: Midsummer 1978. Internationally the dollar remains tor-

pid and the so-called crisis in the Middle East is as remote to Las Vegas as the White Cliffs of Dover. But at the Las Vegas Hilton jackpot history is in the making.

Scene 2: It's nearing midnight, July 19, 1978, at the Las Vegas Hilton. Mrs. Laura O'Neill of Miami, Florida, is down to her last 13 cartwheels. Her husband Pete has returned home on an earlier flight, but Laura lingers for one last joust with Lady Luck. She moves in on one of the progressive $1 slots and prepares to donate her remaining poke. Two pulls later the four triple bars line up on the bottom line and the Luck o' the Irish legend gets a $250,000 transfusion.

Scene 3: Moments later, grinning like Cheshire cats, Barron Hilton, who happens to be in the hotel, Senior VP Henri Lewin and a cadre of casino brass descend on Laura with spirited congratulations and the loot. Hilton, realizing that news of the historic jackpot will give the hotel worldwide publicity, sweetens Laura's $250,000 win with an all-expense paid week hiatus at his Hawaiian Village. Some sweetener.

Scene 4: Laura, check in hand and blinking from the news photographer's strobes, hurries to her room to phone husband Pete. He reacts predictably; he thinks his wife has become unraveled and says so. But Laura finally gets the message across, and Pete comes unglued. Laura returns to Miami, makes page one of *The Miami News* and orders an unlisted phone. Hawaii follows. Money can't buy happiness?

ACT VI, Scene 1: The pre-dawn hours of October 29, 1978, at the Flamingo Hilton. A touching scene of human drama, tinged with pathos, is about to unfold. James Schelich, 48, of Washington, Missouri, is playing the $1 slots. Barron Hilton, flushed with the worldwide publicity of Laura O'Neill's historic hit, has upped the jackpot limit to $275,000. A Korean War veteran, Schelich was blinded and lost 75 percent of his hearing in an accidental TNT explosion 26 years ago. When the bars line up, they are unseen by Schelich; a companion stays his hand before he can drop in another coin and "pull off" a fortune. Word of Schelich's win is flashed to Hilton execs and veeps Henri Lewin and the late Frank Johnson tumble out of bed and head for the Flamingo to offer congratulations and lead the festivities. Barron Hilton calls from the west coast to congratulate Schelich and toss in another free week in Hawaii. Schelich is characterized by his companion as "a deeply religious and patriotic man." After Schelich accepts his check he says simply, "There's going to be an awful lot of people that are going to get an awful lot of good out of this." Schelich returns to Washington, a Missouri town known as the "Corncob Pipe Capital of the World," and sends Lewin and Johnson souvenir meerschaum corncobs as a gesture of appreciation. Nice man.

ACT VII, Scene 1: News item: "U.S. To Mint New Smaller Dollar Coin." The wire story from Washington, D.C., also carries the news that the Eisenhower dollar will not be minted after January 1, 1979, and the paper buck will be discontinued. The new dinky dollar will be put into circulation by the millions on July 1, 1979. And that, say the feds, is that.

Scene 2: As news of the demise of the Eisenhower dollar spreads, slot players begin carting them off by the thousands, apparently in the mistaken belief that they will become collectors items.

This silliness causes a shortage of cartwheels in all casinos and owners go clamoring to banks and the San Francisco Mint, buying up enough coins to bridge the gap until July 1, 1979. But it is soon apparent that the coin shortage is beyond control, and casinos get approval to mint dollar-sized gaming tokens similar to the ones used some years ago, when real silver dollars went out of circulation after being hoarded for their silver content.

EPILOGUE: When the Susan B. buck was put into circulation, casino owners, to their credit, rushed to refit their slots to accept the dinky dollar at a cost of about $200 per machine, plus labor—no small investment. But the experiment quickly turned sour when the public shunned the S.B. slots in favor of the ones that took the Ike dollars or identical-sized casino tokens. Within just a few weeks, Bally claims, casinos did a fast 180 and had the machines returned to accept cartwheel-sized dollars or tokens.

During the past two years the popularity of dollar slots has grown, and these machines, statewide, provide gross gaming revenue second only to "21" tables. The feds made one low-key attempt to get casinos to buoy interest in the dinky dollar, but were told that in Nevada it was a monetary fiasco. Now, two and a half years after its introduction, the small dollar has joined the two-dollar bill as an unacceptable unit of American exchange.

And that's the reel (cq) story of the emergence of the dollar slot as the most popular mechanical gaming device in Nevada's 50-year history of legal gambling. □

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*John Reible, a 20-year Las Vegas resident, is editorial supervisor of the Las Vegas News Bureau.*

## ARRIVAL IN GOMORRAH

*(Continued from page 37)*

way, that was reciprocated. Of the 17 "places of amusement" listed in the Reno City Directory, there were three of particular consequence to Renoites and newcomers, particularly Bill Harrah. The Palace Club on Center Street was a monument to one of Reno's legendary early gamblers: Johnny Petricciani. Harolds had opened two years before Harrah's arrival, and the Smiths, pere and fils, would serve as rivals and exemplars to Harrah during the early growth periods of his own business. But it was the Bank Club where the action was and the Bank Club that was also the epicenter for unsavory activity in the players city. The place was owned by Bill Graham and Jim McKay, who, had they been born a generation later, would have sent Senator Estes Kefauver into paroxysms of delicious outrage. In fact they did, although by the time the man with the raccoon cap got around to uncovering their activity, both of them were long gone.

Graham and McKay had come to Reno from the boom town of Tonopah. Before opening in the Bank Club, they had operated a variety of small bootleg cum gambling joints in Reno as well as a nightclub near Verdi, hard by the California border, an extravagant and lavish place catering to the western equivalent of the Hamptons set. According to one chronicler of Reno gambling, Raymond Sawyer, the two men took "executive offices" in the Riverside Hotel bank, "spreading the word they were interested in *any* deal involving the movement of cash." The record shows McKay and Graham arrested in 1934 for using the mails to defraud in a $2.5 million horse race swindle. After four years and three trials they were convicted, fined $11,000 each and eventually shipped off for nine years apiece in prison. That much is certain. Also on record is a shooting death inflicted on one Blackie McCracken by Bill Graham, which was instantly dismissed as self defense. From here things get murky.

Bob Laxalt has no trouble at all attributing criminal innovation to the pair, giving them credit for " laundering money stolen in the rash of bank robberies that was sweeping the nation. Hit-and-run robbers of the ilk of Baby Face Nelson and Alvin Karpis headed straight for Reno with their loot. There, they turned traceable greenbacks over to Bill Graham and Jim McKay, and received clean money in return, less, of course, a modest handling charge." Graham and McKay's Bank Club tables were the laundromats of their day. Although a number of memoirs and even a few histories suggest that Baby Face Nelson spent a lot of time keeping out of sight during these banking transactions, he evidently didn't keep *that* far out of sight, which brings us back to the murkiness.

A key witness against Graham and McKay in the mail fraud case was one Roy Frisch, who worked at the Riverside Bank. In the classic way of prosecution witnesses of the era, he suddenly disappeared. Raymond Sawyer is certain he knew what happened:

"It was revealed later that before the bullet-ridden corpse of Baby Face Nelson was recovered from a ditch somewhere in Illinois, Nelson had been traced to Reno and it was established that he was in town at this particular time, as well as on the night that Roy Frisch disappeared.

"A gangster named John Chase, in jail at Alcatraz, confessed that he and Nelson had taken Frisch from the street, killed him, burned his body just

*(Continued on page 128)*

# INDEX TO ADVERTISERS



## ARRIVAL IN GOMORRAH

*(Continued from page 126)*

before burying it off a dirt road in a mountain range somewhere southeast of Reno "

Chase would not testify and Nelson was beyond it, so Frisch is listed to this day as a missing person.

This incident at least suggests Graham and McKay were not deacons of Reno's social church, but that didn't make much difference to their fellow players, including Bill Harrah. The Bank Club was a regular hangout also for Virgil Smith, who would later own Colbrandt's, a very tony club; the Harolds Club Smiths; Bob Ring, Harrah's confidant and drinking partner; and the rest of the rather select group of carousers who made up Reno's gambling establishment.

Every night Harrah would make the rounds: Harolds, the Palace, the Wine House and the Bank Club; a young and healthy Bill Harrah was a thirsty Bill Harrah, and he did not stint on the Canadian whiskey or the Cutty Sark.

Whether Harrah made it a point to be at the Bank Club at 2 a.m. when the ladies came up from the stockade, no one is willing to confirm. At any rate, he was often there late and they were *always* there, courtesy, who else, Graham and McKay, who had taken a substantial position in that business too.

Prostitution was a given fact of Reno life in 1937 There had been quarrels in the city council about its blatant presence; blue nose Reno was and always had been outraged by the sight of painted women within the city limits. But a permissive mayor, E.E. Roberts, and a resigned council decided that regulated prostitution was better than unregulated, and considering that whoring would be in Nevada come what may, they would confine the ladies to an undistinguished quarter of town and require health inspections.

That quarter was called the stockade. Nowadays it is the site of the Reno headquarters of Nevada Bell, to the delight of some old timers. Its existence scandalized the country and provided highly spiced copy for the sensational press, of the likes of *Real Detective:*

"New York Betty was dressing. Filmy silk panties, skin tight and gossamer sheer, blended indistinguishably with the warm, pink flesh of her curvaceous body " It was pretty racy stuff for the day. But special investigative reporter Con Ryan was not content to be descriptive; what was needed here was a little socio-economics.

"The Bull Pen, also known throughout Nevada as the District, the Stockade, the Line, or the Old Homestead, consists of 75 individual cribs, each occupied by a girl in various stages of undress, plying the oldest trade in the world with the sanction of local and state law and by the grace of a shadowy Chinese known only as 'Wong' [a.k.a., as we have discovered, Graham and McKay].

"The cribs are two-room affairs, facing inward on the Bull Pen, built of red brick, with a shoddy lean-to shanty tacked on at the back. A bed occupies most of the front room or parlor The door and window of each crib are always open to the passerby on the sidewalk, giving an intimate glimpse into the cribs "

As for those passersby, Con Ryan is not complimentary. "There were bandy-legged cowboys, hairy and smelly; sleek Filipinos, nut-brown and overdressed; stolid, slant-eyed Chinese farm hands; the inevitable sightseers; a half-drunk Reno businessman the flotsam and jetsam of male humanity, swayed by the same immemorial urge that has activated men since the dawn of life."

Obviously Gomorrah.

Which is why, in large extent, Bill Harrah brought his wife Thelma Batchelor Harrah from Venice, California, to Reno, Nevada, in the May of 1937 and thrived there until his death. For as a young man buffetted by the on-and-off enforcement of laws against the sins of bingo in Southern California, he saw in Reno an oasis of freedom. And as a live-and-let-live Westerner he saw absolutely nothing wrong with the likes of Bill Graham and Jim McKay, who after all ran straight games at the Bank Club. What they did on their own time was their business. All they wanted was to be left alone, and if anyone should have been able to understand that, it was Bill Harrah. □

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*Leon Mandel of Reno has written biographies of the late Peter Revson ("Speed With Style," Doubleday) and whiskey magnate George Garvin Brown III ("Fast Lane Summer," Van Nostrand, Reinhold; spring, 1981). He is author of "Driven," a sociological biopsy of the automobile in America (Stein and Day) and co-authored a suspense novel, "Murder So Real" published by Coward, McCann and Geoghegan. Mandel is senior editor of Motor Trend magazine, a television commentator, sometime teacher, publishing consultant and Nevada Magazine contributor.*

# 1931

## We've come a long way since our first meeting....

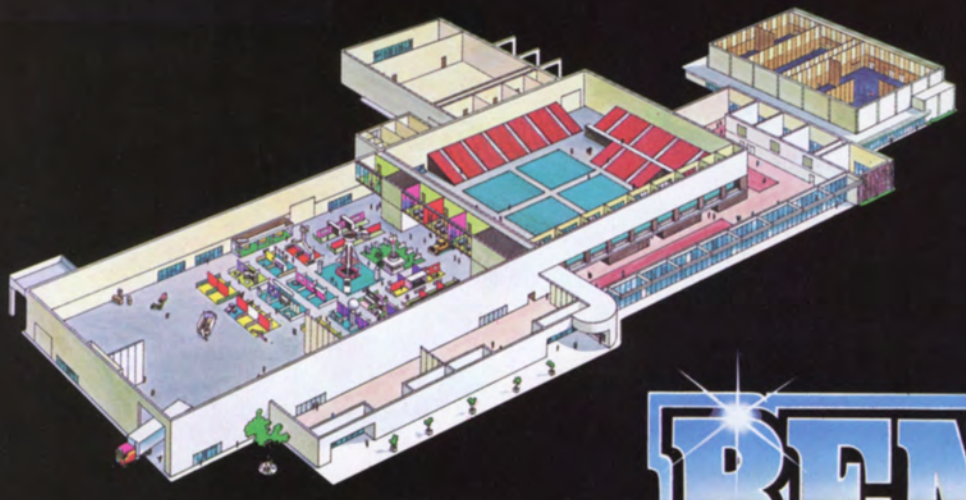
# 1981

Back in 1931, when the gaming industry was born in Nevada, folks started coming to Reno to try their luck. They liked the friendly people, and pretty soon the word was out that Reno was a fine place to get together at convention time.

The fifty years since then have seen the demand for convention facilities grow, and Reno has more than met the challenge! In 1981, as Nevada celebrates the Golden Anniversary of gaming in the state, Reno will see completion of numerous major hotel and motel expansion projects. 1981 will also mark completion of the all new Centennial Coliseum Convention Center with 195,000 square feet of display area, able to handle any floor load, and displays up to 30 feet high!

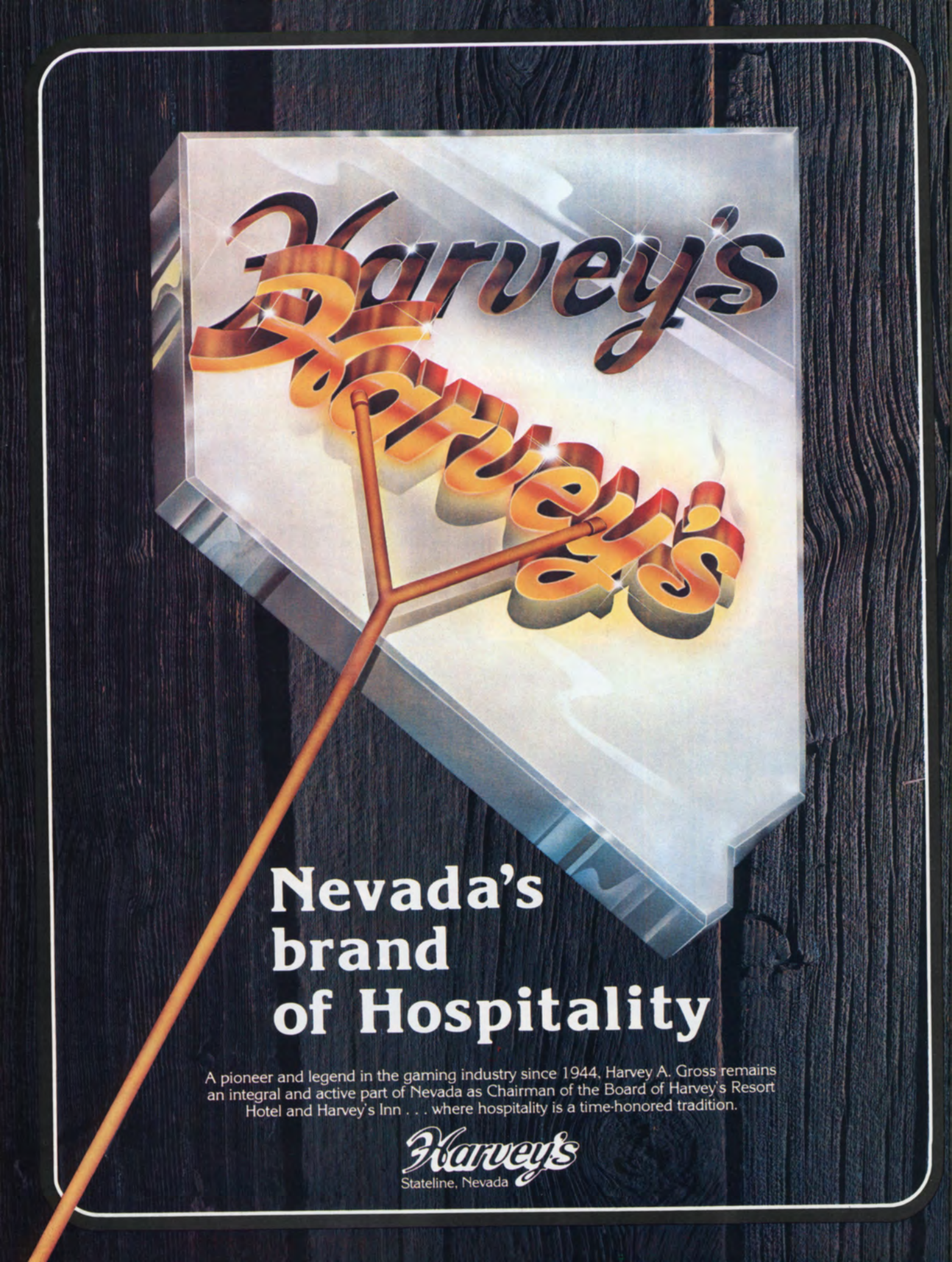
When it comes to convention facilities, we're looking 50 years into the future.....but when it comes to greeting folks with a wide smile and a warm handshake, we're still living 50 years in the past!

SILVER TO GOLD
Nevada Gaming 1931-1981



RENO!

Reno/Sparks Convention Authority


Harvey's
Harvey's
Nevada's
brand
of Hospitality
A pioneer and legend in the gaming industry since 1944, Harvey A. Gross remains an integral and active part of Nevada as Chairman of the Board of Harvey's Resort Hotel and Harvey's Inn . . . where hospitality is a time-honored tradition.
Harvey's
Stateline, Nevada


PLAYER
BANKER
STARDUST
BANKERS
PLAYERS
CABAT
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