

A CHIP CHAT WITH CLYDE BARRINER

—A California Card Club Owner—

by Douglas J. Saito

Don't even ask Clyde Barriner about his chips or the chips that he has seen or bet with in his half century of making a living as a card dealer, poker player, crap dealer or card club owner unless you're prepared to sit down for an afternoon at Clyde's super-friendly Rusty's Saloon in Bishop, California, and listen to a young man of eighty-four tell more gaming stories than Damon Runyon ever devised.

But if you do get the chance, and if you have the time, as I did, to listen to Clyde, you'll learn what it was like to deal cards at the Boulder Club in Las Vegas in the 1930's, or what it was like being the gaming operator at the Hilton Creek Lodge and dealing cards to the likes of Cornell Wilde, Gordon McRae, and the Marx Brothers, or what happened when then State Attorney General, Earl Warren, and his axe-wielding, anti-gambling boys in blue slammed shut the doors of the gaming joints where Clyde worked in Southern California.

Such stories I've noted for a future book on casino

owners, but for now, here's a brief chronology of Clyde's history as a gambler/dealer/card club owner.

Early 1930's. At the age of twenty, Clyde leaves his home state of Missouri, and, like thousands of adventurous young men of that era, his mode of travel was by thumb or riding the rails from coast to coast, from Canada to Mexico, before he settles down in Orange County, Southern California, at a time when there were more orange trees than Mouseketeer ears.

1933. Clyde finds employment at Stark's Cafe in Newport Beach, learning to deal pan for gamblers who played for fifty-cent and one-dollar stacks. He also works his first summer in Las Vegas, dealing 21 at the Boulder Club.

1936. Works as a dealer at the Bamboo Room in Balboa, a club owned by Bob Murphy.

1937. Clyde opens up a snack shop on 18 W. Center St. in Anaheim, while moonlighting at various Eagle Lodges and VFW's, running poker games.

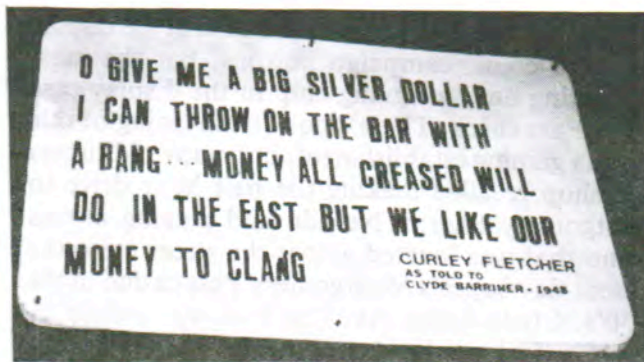
1937 to 1943. Spends several months of each year dealing at the Boulder Club, when downtown Las Vegas had wooden sidewalks, wooden buildings and



Clyde Barriner, former miner, gambler, and owner of Rusty's Saloon, whose prowess as a chef gave him the catering contracts for feeding the cast and crews of such TV shows as Bonanza, Death Valley Days and Have Gun, Will Travel.



Rusty's Saloon in Bishop, CA.



One of many signs that hang in Rusty's Saloon. This one was written by Curley Fletcher, a fellow miner and one of Clyde Barriner's best friends.

many of the early gaming establishments were covered with canvas canopies. Stays at the Pony Express Hotel, taking his meals at the Apache Club, and begins a life-long friendship with early pioneers of Las Vegas gaming, people such as Guy McAfee, Art Shelang, Cal Housen and Chuck Addison.

Also during this time span, Clyde still operates or runs quick set-up games for private parties or men's social clubs in the Southern California area.

1945. Clyde settles in Bishop. A year later, he and his brother-in-law, Angus "Rusty" MacDonald convert the Golden State Cafe into Rusty's Saloon, running pan and poker games in the back room.

1947. Clyde opens the Valley Club, one block south of his own place, Rusty's, with poker and pan games. He sells the Valley Club in 1950.

1948 to 1950. Clyde is asked by the owners of the Hilton Creek Lodge, a famous hunting lodge and resort that overlooked Lake Crowley, to set up and run the gaming operations. He also runs the gaming operations for the Village Inn at Mammoth Lakes and the High Sierra Bar during this time span.

1951 to 1954. Runs "sneak" games at the Wagon Wheel in Bishop, operating a craps game and a blackjack table.

1952. Clyde is asked by the new owners of Hilton Creek Lodge to run their gaming operation.

1955. Clyde buys back the lease on the Valley Club, but he's forced to close down the gaming operations a year later when pressured by the owner of the building.

1956 to 1958. Clyde opens the Bishop Club, across the street from Rusty's. After a run of one year, the Bishop Club closes, becoming the last outside "interest" that Clyde owned.

1960's to present. Clyde steadfastly maintains the pan and poker tables at Rusty's, one of California's oldest running card clubs. Although it is evident by this chronology that Clyde ran a lot of gambling operations, what is not in evidence is the numerous

friendships that Clyde formed with so many notables in Nevada and California gaming—Jessie and Fred Beck, Barney Omalia, who would make the drive to Bishop because he loved playing pan at Rusty's, Harold Smith, Jr., Ernie Primm, Charlie Mapes,



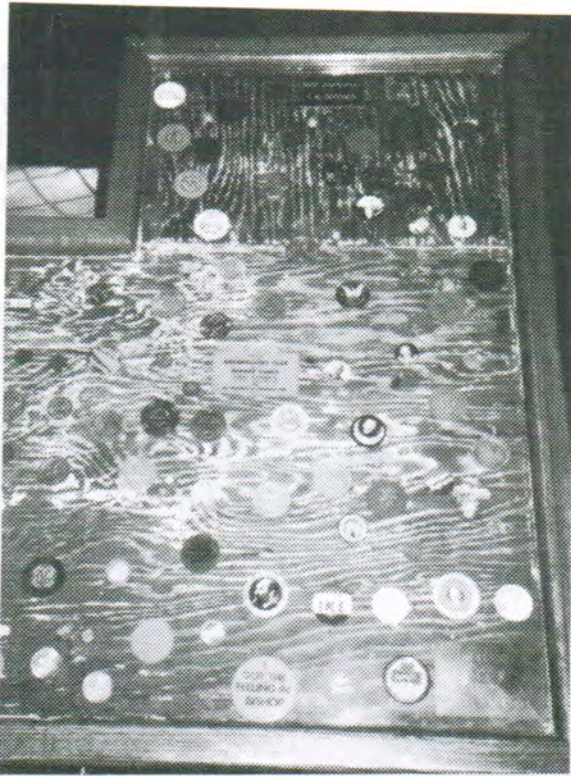
Piano bar at Rusty's Saloon. The top of the bar is a display case that contains coins, tokens, campaign buttons and chips that came from various casino and card clubs.

and even Clara Williams, at one time the oldest dealer of blackjack in Nevada at age eighty-six.

It was from his many poker-playing pals and fellow card-club owners that Clyde began a collection of gaming chips; many of which are on display at Rusty's, set beneath glass and atop a piano bar. They're something to see, but if you can't make it to Rusty's, here's a listing of the chips.

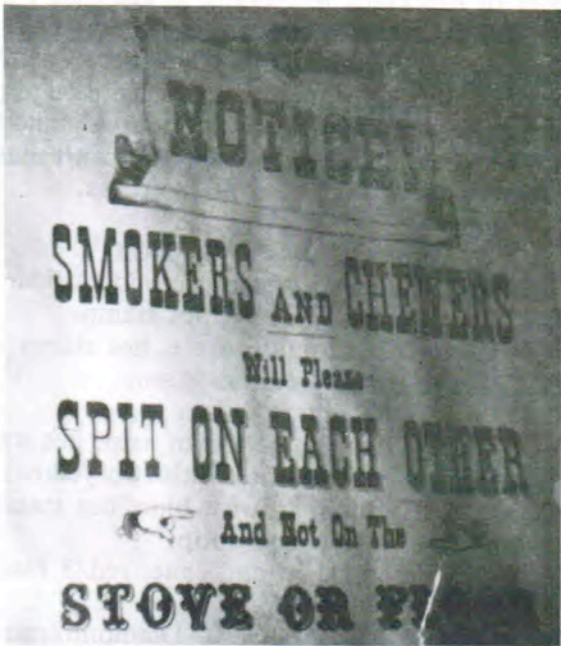
Chips On Display At Rusty's

- Monogram chips, most are unidentified.
- "DP" Large crown, yellow, hot stamp.
- "JC" Large crown, light purple, hot stamp.
- "GC" Large crown, red, hot stamp.
- "UG" plain mold, metal inlay.
- "VC" Valley Club. Large crown, rust, hot stamp.
- Sierra. Large Crown, black with two yellow.
- 1603 B.P.O.E. Small crowns, blue, hot stamp.
- From the elks club in Bishop.
- 100.00 Mortimer's. Hat and cane, red/3 black, 3 purple.
- Golden Club/Austin, Nev. Diamond/squares, yellow/3 red, hot stamp.
- The Aptos Club. Free play token.
- \$5.00 Mizpah Hotel. Small key, dark yellow, inlay says: The Bright Spot of Tonopah.



Close-up of the glass-topped display case that forms one end of the piano bar at Rusty's.

Montgomery Pass Lodge. Plain mold, blue, hot stamp.
 The Pass. Small Crowns, blue, hot stamp.
 The Village Inn. Small Crowns, blue, hot stamp.

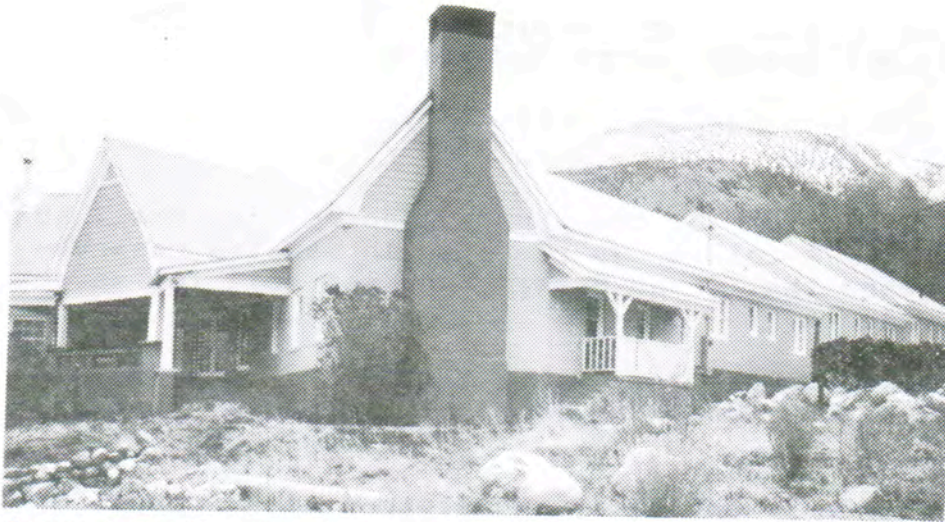


Another sign that appears inside the card room of Rusty's Saloon.

There are many other items included in the display case, old coins, campaign buttons, but the most fascinating and intriguing chip in the display case is The Pass check. There's no official listing of this Nevada gaming establishment, but many old-timers in Bishop recalled making the half hour drive to Montgomery Pass in Nevada and playing at this casino that was located across the street from the present-day Soper's Montgomery Pass casino in the 1950's. Clyde stated that The Pass was owned by Joe Conforte, who later owned the infamous Mustang Ranch, then the casino was purchased by Willie Wolf, current owner of the Mina Club in Mina, Nevada, who renamed it Montgomery Pass Lodge. At one time, Clyde had gotten together a group of investors to make a bid to buy Montgomery Pass Lodge from Willie Wolf, but were unsuccessful in making the purchase.



In the attic at Clyde Barriner's house, where Clyde has stored much of his old gaming equipment and supplies. Pictured here is the quick set-up blackjack table that Clyde built.



Present-day look at the newly refurbished Hilton Creek Lodge. In its heyday, many prominent Hollywood actors and directors stayed here while on location, playing poker at night with chips that Clyde furnished.



Obsolete chip from High Sierra Bar (more commonly known as Sierra Club). Large crowns, blue, no denomination.

My thanks to Hank Boss of Bakersfield for taking this chip from his large-crown collection and lending it to me in order for it to be reproduced here.



Bishop Elks Club chip. Small crowns, no denomination.



Current \$1.00 chip from Rusty's. Small crowns, blue with three red. Most are well worn.



Large crown, black with three yellow inserts, this nondenomination chip is still in use today, which Clyde uses for high-denomination poker games.



An old Rusty's twenty-five cent chip. Large crowns, red.



Although closed permanently, the Roundup was the location of the Wagon Wheel where Clyde operated the craps and blackjack games in the early 1950's.