

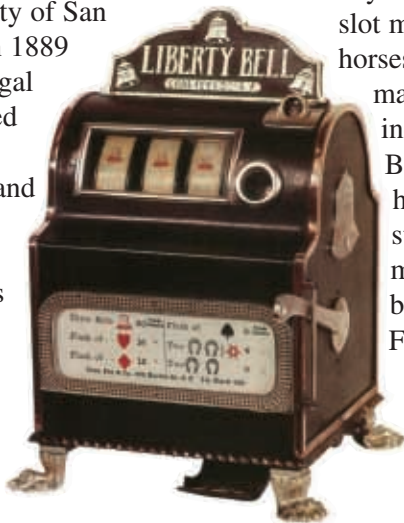
End of an Era

Article. I. - Section. 8. - of the United States Constitution states that The Congress shall have Power To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries.

Simple and what seems to be explicit wording from the constitution did not suffice in December of 1897 to protect patents of the various parts of the slot machines developed by Charles Fey and others in the competitive market of San Francisco cigar stores and saloons. By finding that the machines had no element of utility, the judge swept aside some of the greatest mechanical inventiveness of a German born immigrant. It was a decision that would allow others to freely copy invention after invention in a very competitive business.

August Charlie Fey was born in 1862 in a small village in Bavaria. As a young teenager he traveled to Munich to work in a farm tool factory. He developed a love for mechanics and wedded that passion to his own skill. From Germany he traveled to England and then on to America where he ended up in the thriving west coast city of San Francisco. In 1889 he had his legal name changed to Charles August Fey and henceforth was known to his friends as Charlie Fey.

Charlie's income was derived from his job



THE LIBERTY BELL

by Howard Herz

at the California Electric Works, but his passion was designing and improving on the numerous nickel in the slot machines that could be found in most of the cigar stores and bars of the city. By 1896 Fey had his own company for manufacturing slot machines. His first major achievement was the creation of the three reel slot machine in 1899. Poker was the rage in San Francisco, so most of the poker machines of the day featured playing cards. Charlie's slot machine reels featured stars and horseshoes with the highest pay-off made for the symbol of American independence, the Liberty Bell. By using the Liberty Bell, Fey had established a tradition that still holds to this day. One of the many symbols of a slot reel is a bell - a fair tribute to Charlie Fey's original slot machine.

The original Liberty Bell slot machine. Photo courtesy Marshall Fey. From the book, *Slot Machines, The First 100 Years* by Marshall Fey.

Without patent protection, Charlie Fey's inventions were pirated by almost every slot machine company in the country. His machines were stolen and their mechanics duplicated without fear of a law suit. As the slot machine industry developed in the 1920s and 1930s, the pressure of law enforcement led to a number of ingenious subterfuges to give the machines respectability and legality. Many of them masqueraded as gum dispensers or trade stimulatory - any terminology that would keep them from being ruled illegal as the true gambling devices that they were.

As the industry continued to grow, the traditions of the older machines were passed on. The flavors of the gum they dispense became the symbols on the slot reels - cherries, plums, lemons and the every present tribute to the Liberty Bell.



Charlie Feys only son Edmund was the neutral inheritor of the business, but the pressure from law enforcement against slot machines continued to increase. Edmund was fascinated with coin operated amusement machines and soon abandoned the creation of new slot machines for the development of new amusement devices. For years, he operated the amusements at Playland-at-the-Beach in San Francisco. In 1958, the cancellation of his lease brought an end to the San Francisco operations. Two of Edmunds sons, Marshall and Franklin moved to Reno and bought a small bar on Virginia street on the south end of town. Originally the Little Red Barn, hey christened their saloon and museum the Liberty Bell. Although the building had a full kitchen, they only operated a bar at the location.

When the Sky Room of the Mapes hotel closed, the maitre d offered to open the Liberty Bells restaurant. The Fey brothers operated the bar despite having only experience in serving beer. Within a number of months the restaurant operator gave up. A new chef was hired for the restaurant but



92 of these wooden figures were carved by Frank Polk. They held post-war Paces and Mills High-Tops



by Labor Day of 1959 he too quit. In desperation with labor day weekend approaching the Feys took command of the restaurant. Frank Feys mother-in-law took over the kitchen and the rest is history. Starting with prime rib for \$2.95 (appetizer, prime rib, dessert and coffee included) they rode the ups and downs of Reno's economy. With time and perseverance they became an established and loved Reno landmark.

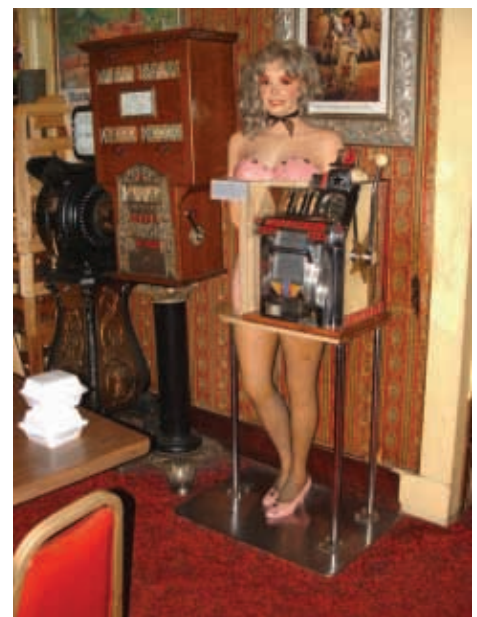
The brothers continued to collect. Marshall answered an ad in the Reno paper by a women who had wagons for sale. The lady wanted \$100 each for six wagons. Marshall, just starting out in business, offered \$50 for a single surrey. After two more weeks, the lady called Marshall and offered the other five wagons to him for \$10 each if he would come and get them. thus began their collections of old wagons.



Slot machines line the wall of the Liberty Belle in the dining area.

Reno grew with the Feys and soon they were surrounded by the city and the Reno Sparks convention center. Finally, the pressure from the growth came to a head. When the Convention Center, desperate for parking, talked of initiating eminent domain proceedings to obtain the Liberty Bells property, a fire storm of outrage ignited in the community. Every attempt was made to save the Liberty Bell and the Community support turned the tide. The Liberty Bell was saved.

But time and development in the area continued to plague the restau-



This Pace Bell slot machine was from the Golden Casino on Center Street. The cocktail waitress was made of plastic..



Marshall Fey

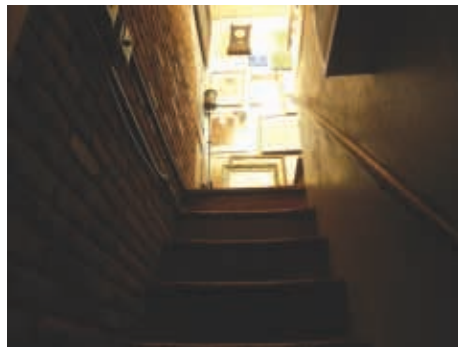


rant. Finally in early 2006 the Fey brothers announced that they were bowing to the pressure of development. On March 17th (St. Patrick's Day) the Liberty Bell served its last dinner. The property would be acquired by the convention center the Feys incredible collections of antiques would go to auction. A part of Nevada history would be divided and auctioned to the highest bidder. The heritage of the maker of the first three reel slot machine would be dispersed to collectors.

On the morning of March 18th, Marshall Fey gave a private tour of the famous bar and restaurant. Amid a decor littered with memorabilia, antiques and slots machines, I had the pleasure of hearing the story of Charles Fey, the slot machine pioneer.

In an attic jammed with machines that had been collected starting in the 1950's, the history of the American slot machine was on display. Marshall detailed the history of the machines along with a few demonstrations of how they worked.

On July 8th, 2006, the Fey collection will go to the hammer at the



Wood stairway going to the second floor.

Atlantis Casino Resort. Perhaps a fitting venue for the items that represent one of the best collections of historical slot machines in the world.

Charlie Feys legacy has been preserved by his grandson Marshall.

In a superb book *Slot Machines, The First 100 Years* by Marshall Fey, the history is brought to life in full color.



Any collector of gaming history and memorabilia should consider Marshalls book as necessary reading.

Besides their significant contributions to the development of the slot machine, the Fey brothers issued a



Slot machines from the second floor of the Liberty Belle. The second floor was closed to the public and housed the collection and a workshop.



These slot reels were introduced on the 1910 Liberty Bell Gum Fruit. They were used to give a slot machine the image of a vending machine.



Fortune telling machine.

gaming token for the Liberty Bell. Issued in 1979 the tokens were struck in nickel-silver. The original issue also includes some patterns in bronze and .999 silver. Several years after the initial issue, a number of restrikes of the token were issued in .999 silver for sale to collectors. The original pattern issues in bronze and silver have a fully frosted picture of the

original liberty bell slot machine. The restrike issues can be differentiated by the lack of frosted detail on the side of the machine.

And what would have become of Charlie Fey if his original patents had not been struck down by a judge? Today Fey’s legacy stands behind such business success stories as IGT and Bally’s. Would Fey have been the majority stock holder and the king of a gaming empire? As gaming spreads throughout the world and slot machines become one of the primary elements of gaming - would that San Francisco judge still find them to be something that has “no element of utility?”



Original gaming token.



Restrike



The old Brunswick bar came from The Owl Club in downtown Reno.