

THE Flamingo Capri REVISITED

by Mike Quinlivan

It all started on June 19, 1974 as I was driving my souped up '72 Vega GT to Las Vegas. I was a 20-year old Airman in the Air Force and on my way to the base at Nellis, located northeast of Vegas. Since base housing for the two-month stint working on the Nellis control tower was non-existent, the crew of seven and I were assigned to military contract quarters: The **Flamingo Capri**. Now it wasn't a hotel by any stretch of the imagination in 1974. It was a renovated 180-room motel, with parking wrapped around the front of the two-story L-shaped building. To the left of the parking lot, there was a decent sized rectangular pool, and near the entrance was the lobby and casino building. Across from the lobby was the restaurant. Checking in, I asked if the Capri was an offshoot of the neighboring Flamingo Hotel. I was told that, no, they weren't affiliated, but that the owners received permission to use the name. As you may have noticed, they also used the same "font" or type style and the now famous Flamingo bird.

I didn't do much gambling in the Flamingo Capri casino, as I was underage and I did not want to take

too many chances in my own backyard. However, the Flamingo Capri casino had a number of penny slots.....remember, I was a lowly Airman in the Air Force – the pay wasn't why I joined! Nothing computerized on the casino floors — the one-armed bandits, with their cherries, plums, watermelons and "triple 7's" were the slots of the day. Oh, don't forget the free breakfast coupons the Capri handed out!

As for our assignment, we worked for the Air Force Communications Service, updating the older transistor communications systems to highly sophisticated integrated circuit designs. On this assignment, we upgraded the ground-to-air communications systems in the new control tower, working odd hours to not interrupt the pilot training program. The highlight of our 2-month assignment was the "christening" of the control tower by the Thunderbirds. The ace flyers did a low altitude fly-by, not in formation, but one after another. It was a most exhilarating, awesome, scary and LOUD experience, and was Nellis' way of saying, "Thanks for a job well done!"

When I left for home in August 1974, all I took as a souvenir of the Capri was this matchbook below!



Flamingo Capri Motel & Casino c1974



Two years later, now a Sergeant, I was once again assigned to Nellis for 2 months, this time to help update their microwave relay station at Angels Peak, close to Mount Charleston. Five years ago, I took my family up to see if I could still find the small building where I had toiled for 2 months that summer long ago. I don't know which I am more amazed of – that the building was still there (looking virtually the same) or that I had found it!

Once again, in 1976, I was assigned off-base housing at the Flamingo Capri. A few things changed from the previous stay – now the motel had turned into a hotel and was a member of the Friendship Inns of America. It was on this trip that I recall live table games being available, as they were not there during the summer of 1974. It would appear that the first time chips were used at the Capri was sometime between the summer of 1974 and the summer of 1976. The newly designed matchbook (shown on the right) again was my only souvenir. Had I known then!!!!

Fast forward to December 1995. My wife, Corni, and I were in Vegas



Flamingo Capri Hotel & Casino c1976

for the weekend. We lucked out and saw the opening ceremonies for the Fremont Street Experience light show. Fabulous! Somewhere between revisiting some of the older downtown casinos and the new light show, I got the “unique” idea that I

should collect a \$5 casino chip from every casino in Las Vegas ... then that morphed into every casino that ever existed in Las Vegas (how hard could that be?) ... then that changed to collecting a \$5 chip from every casino that existed in Nevada! Seemed easy enough. How many casinos could there have been?

Somewhere between 1995 and 1997, I ran across a neat website called Cheques in the Mail, run by Dave Harber. His site linked me to an actual club for chip collectors. Who would have thought there were others out there who collected gaming chips! At the first CC>CC convention I attended in 1997, I met Dave and Debbie Harber in person, and became a club member. I thought I had run across a gold mine of like-minded people. My wife just rolled her eyes! She couldn't believe there were enough chip collectors out there to warrant a convention!

Around that time, I realized that my goal of collecting from every Nevada casino that ever existed was pure folly. Records of some smaller casinos in out-of-the-way places were spotty at best. I had a better chance

of flying under my own power! So, I decided to focus on collecting older chips that had beautiful inlays (in my opinion) or were historically significant. Well, at least the Flamingo Capri is historical to me. Again, had I known in 1974 and 1976 that I would be collecting gaming chips from Nevada in 1995 ...

My first Flamingo Capri chip was purchased on EBay, the 50 cent yellow hot stamp (right). Not very impressive, but it was a piece from my past. It is thought that it is from the first issue, but it may predate the set of three inlay DIECAR chips below, thought to be from the mid-1970's. Why would they have two 50-cent chips in the first issue? As I delved further into collecting, Flamingo Capri chips were few and far between. It was almost as if the casino barely existed



Over the last few years, I have collected most of the known, and a couple not previously known, Flamingo Capri chips. Using *The Chip Rack* and *The Official U.S. Casino Chip Price Guide* as reference, some of the chips in my collection include:

An "FC" chip, attributed to the Flamingo Capri, but I'm not sure if that has been validated. It is currently not listed in TCR.



A series considered to be the first issue from the mid-seventies about the time I could have brought a few of these babies home ... but didn't!



A series of chips with a more artistic logo is considered the second issue, which would have been issued after my stay in 1976. I have never seen un-notched examples of the \$25 or \$100 chips.



Fabulous Fakes! Yes, I learned about, and purchased some Flamingo Capri Borland imitations – really counterfeit chips. Bill Borland purchased the rights to the NEVADA and DIECAR molds, and the hot-stamp dies used by a number of casinos, including the Flamingo Capri. He produced some pretty decent hot stamp imitations of several chips. Not all subsequent sales of these Borland chips alluded to their “remanufactured” status.



Rust



Purple



Chocolate Brown



Brown



Orange (Obverse)



Orange (Reverse)



Imitation (identically aligned)



Genuine



The Match Play \$2 for \$1/Non Negotiable chip above (in obverse and reverse views) is listed as a Borland counterfeit. I do not believe that to be the case. The hot-stamp is not medal-aligned and the hot-stamp itself is gold rather than bronze

One indication that you have a Borland chip is to see if the hot stamp on each side is "medal-aligned". In other words, does the image appear at the same "clock position" on both sides? Usually, genuine chips do not have their images aligned perfectly on both sides. Also, the hot stamp is usually a bit darker, having a bronze appearance rather than gold. Frequently, the hot stamp overflows at the edge of the letters (but that's not always the case), and often times the chip body is of a slightly different shade of clay than the original. An example of the front and back of a genuine chip and a Borland counterfeit are shown below. Note the differences in the hot-stamp alignment. Though the black and white image may not show it, the color of the hot-stamp and the shade of the imitation chip are different from the gen-

uine. The genuine \$1.00 NEVADA mold beige chip (the bottom 2 images) is currently not listed in the 9th edition of TCR.

Quite by accident, I found more information about the changes the Flamingo Capri went through just before it officially became the Imperial Palace. Janice and Jerry O'Neal sent me some scans of Flamingo Capri matchbooks (next page). The matchbook on the left mentioned that the Capri now had 300 deluxe rooms and featured the *Shangri-La* pool. The matchbook on the right boasts it now has "650 rooms and.....The Best Kept Secret."

The Flamingo Capri is on the move! On July 1, 1977 we completed our new Imperial Palace Tower. On July 1, 1978 we will add a new dimension in Las Vegas with an oriental flavor. A new casino, show room, lounge, restaurant, meeting and convention facilities, complemented with a most unique shopping arcade... Who knows, we may even call ourselves... The Imperial Palace. Both matchbooks show that the Capri had now become part of the Best Western chain of motels/hotels.



Free Play Token - date unknown



Playing Cards - 1977 or later use



Dice - 1976 or later

Scan courtesy of Janice and Jerry O'Neal



I believe that the late 70's chips were used on Capri tables around the time they were expanding from 300 to 650 rooms. Once the Imperial Palace became the hotel and casino, the Flamingo Capri faded into oblivion.

Interestingly enough, we purchased a time-share at the Hilton Grand Vacations Club in 1994, right behind the Flamingo Hilton, and our rooms every summer overlook this huge blue-tile roofed tower named the Imperial Palace. I seem to have come full circle!

Examples of matchbooks issued prior to becoming a casino