

Phil's Forays *Gerlach Revisited*

by Phil Jensen

Although my days of prowling the backroads of Nevada, culling chips from the green felt of its sawdust casinos are but a fading memory, I still enjoy returning to my old haunts to see what changes time has wrought. Most of the time, of course, I find them torn down or boarded up.

So, it was with great delight, when I returned to Gerlach this summer after an absence of some twenty years I found this not to be the case. Now, Gerlach is located a hundred and twenty miles north of Reno somewhere between the Black Rock desert and the twilight zone. It has gained some fame in recent years as host to the world land-speed record and the Burning Man Festival, a weeklong gathering of artists, hippies, and other "free spirits" which I surmise is another term for whack-o. Anyway, I was delighted to discover that Gerlach is stuck in a virtual time-warp. It was almost exactly as I remembered it thirty years ago.



On leaving Gerlach to the North this sign reminds one that he is still in the middle of nowhere.

There was Bruno's Country Club which burned, and was rebuilt to resemble the original building, in the early 80's and although Bruno wasn't

in he is still alive and well and running the joint. Someone at the bar said was crabbier than ever. Conspicuously missing, of course, were the twenty-one and roulette tables. I remember vividly playing 21 and rat-holing Country Club

chips despite the watchful eyes of Bruno and his dealer-wife. Fortunately, I got several without being caught. I'll always remember, too, the time Bruno gave me a set of his Bulldog, B.S. arodie roulette chips. Sometime ago I saw one sell for \$900!

Joe's Gerlach Club is just down the road and is probably the best preserved place in town. Although Joe and his wife, Ann, are gone, Joe's son runs the place. I usually dealt with Ann; she was very helpful giving me trinkets from the drawers in the back bar and of course some square-in-circle 50¢, \$1, and \$5 chips which were used on an antique 21 table that was always covered with an oil cloth and showed against the wall. I never did see it open. The old slots had been replaced with poker machines and the highly polished floor was the same. Even the Cyrus Noble liquor decanters remained on the back bar.

Next door, the Desert Club had been renamed the Black Rock with a few changes made to the exterior. Inside though, still looks like it might have in the 40s or 50s. The owner was unaware the place had ever been named the Desert Club but did say it had originally been the Capooch Club. According to Fuller, the Capooch lasted from 1932 until 1957 and was the Thompson Club



A sign at Empire, a few miles south of Gerlach, welcomes travelers to nowhere.



The Desert Club and Joe's Gerlach Club as they appeared about 1970.



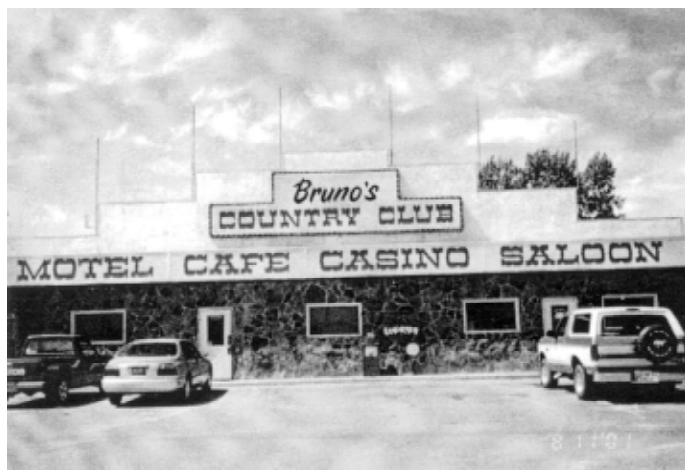
Thirty years later from the same angle

from 1957 to 1958. The Desert Club was in business from 1959 until 1971 which was about the time I photographed it. Apparently it remained closed for a number of years until it reopened as the Black Rock.

I remember locating a few Capooch Club chips in the denomination of 5¢, 25¢, and \$5 and I once talked to a guy in Elko who said he had quite a few that he kept on an old 21 table in his house.

Down the street, the Miner's Club was closed but looked like it was still in business, maybe just opening in the evenings. Also, the old Nite Cap building was still standing but the sign had been removed and someone at the Country Club said Bruno operated it while his new place was being built. The last place leaving town, The Jalisco Club, was closed and for sale just as it was thirty years ago although I remember going in there one time when it was open.

After a few hours I retrace the hundred plus miles back to civilization but the memories of thirty years ago were still with me and I thought, as I have many times, of how much neat stuff I missed by not being around Nevada in the post war years of the 40s and 50s.



The Miners Club and Bruno's Country Club as they appear today and twenty years ago