

Treasure Maps of Information: Collecting Gaming-related Maps

by Robert Pardue (CH-003)

Have you ever studied maps from Nevada and its cities, or other gaming jurisdictions, in order to learn where a casino was located, how its interior was laid out, or how it related to other casinos of the same era?

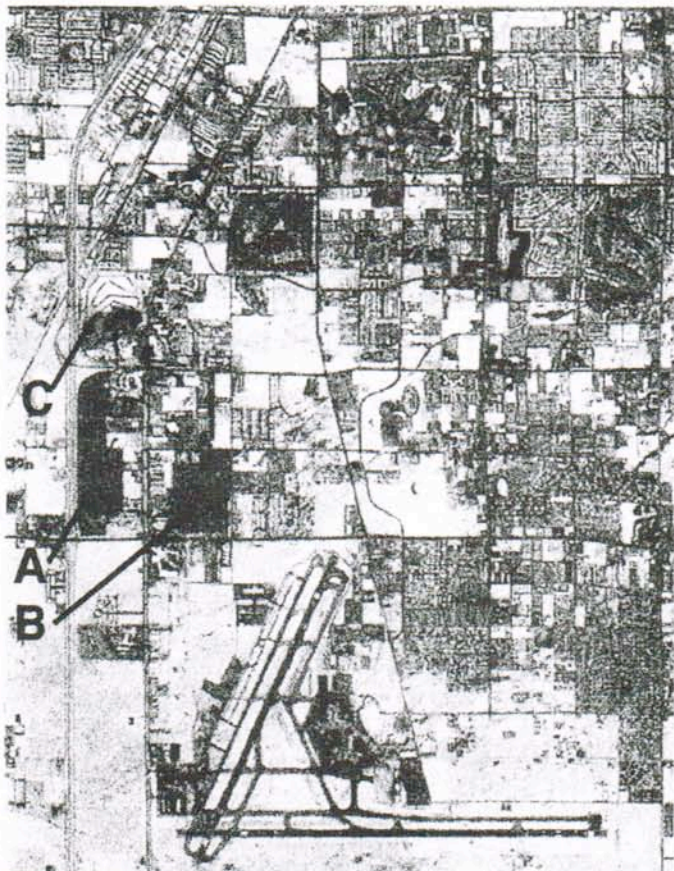
“X” marks the spot

Researching the history of clubs and casinos requires some resourceful sleuthing, including the use of old directories and phone books, records from chip manufacturers, if available, and collecting “collateral” materials such as books and magazines, advertising and logo items, postcards, matchbooks, along with the primary gaming collectibles – chips, tokens and

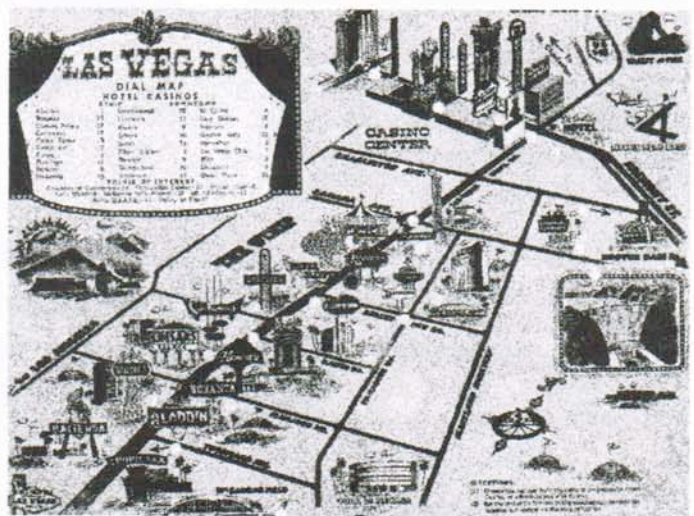
dice. The fundamental information on casinos – location, open and close dates, etc. – gets better each year with the publication of various chip guides. But to get a better feel for a club or casino from an earlier era, there’s no substitute for photos or descriptions from the time the club was operating. One source of information that I find useful (and fun to collect, too) is maps of the location in question.

Aerial Maps

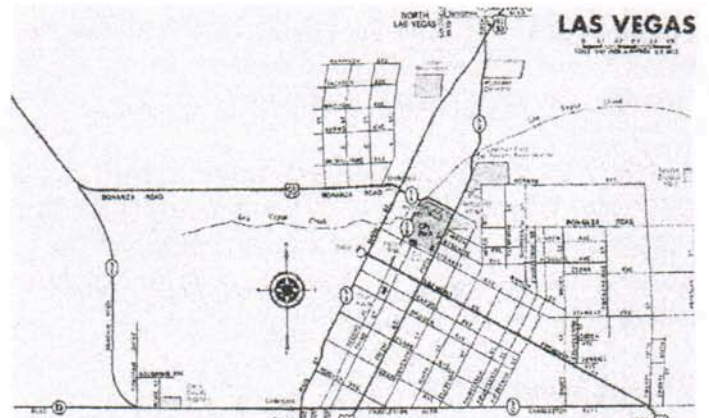
Aerial maps are particularly interesting, in that they photographically record the layout of an area at a point in time. One of my favorite Las Vegas items is a view of Las Vegas from space in the 1980’s (see image below). In the reduced size shown here, it looks pretty blurry, but I’ll bet you can recognize the airport, and also the distinctive curve of the “Strip”. (The green golf courses look darker because the image was taken with infrared film.) I also have some aerial maps taken from an airplane by a professional service which maps areas for real estate purposes. Such aerial photos can be purchased commercially if you’re interested.



Above: Las Vegas from space: Can you pick out key landmarks from this 1980’s map. Hints: dark patches are golf courses— (A) Dunes; (B) Tropicana, now gone. (C) Guess what the curved lines above Caesars Palace represent? Answer is at end of article.



Above: Las Vegas depicted in a 1971 postcard map. Note the vintage logos. The short-lived Bonanza Hotel is shown in the location where the original MGM Grand (now Bally’s) was built. How many closed casinos can you count in this picture?



Left: Reno city road map insert from a 1936 Standard Oil map for Nevada. Above: Las Vegas city road map insert from a 1953 Chevron map for Nevada

In both maps, note the pre-Interstate highway time frame.

Postcard and Poster Maps

Las Vegas has been the subject of map diagrams on postcards over the past 20 to 30 years. I've seen similar diagrams for Atlantic City too. Recent diagram-representations have shown up in poster size images, as Las Vegas has grown. The diagrams can reveal interesting relationships among casinos of the same era. One note of caution: the artists sometimes goof or use outdated information. I've seen closed or not-yet-open casinos depicted on postcards and posters, so cross-check your dates if using the image for research purposes.

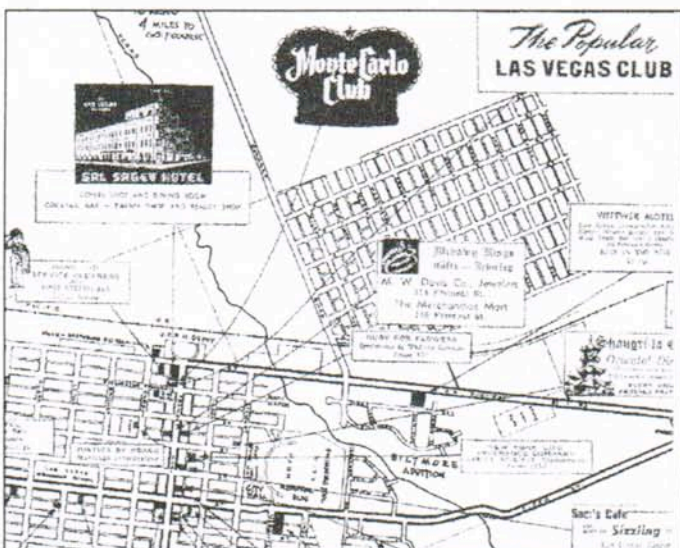
Oil Company Road Maps

Road maps of different eras are useful in understanding how Las Vegas, Reno and other gaming jurisdic-

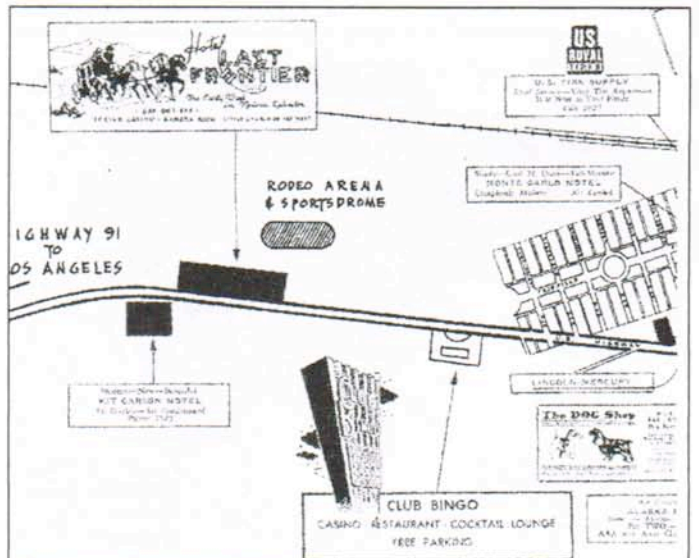
tions developed. Comparisons of the same location for different years is particularly revealing. The major oil companies began producing free maps for traveling tourists after World War II, although some pre-War street maps are available. (Example: Reno map above is from 1936, just five years after Nevada legalized gambling. In those days, the population census on the map shows Reno to be larger than Las Vegas! How times have changed!)

Advertising Maps

Maps were used to promote area businesses, so a map which combines advertising and street layouts is a very exciting find. The two images below show downtown Las Vegas and the Strip in 1947, when Las Vegas was still small and informal. "The Strip" was



Above: Downtown Las Vegas-1947 from an advertising map. Note the pointers locating the Las Vegas Club, the Monte Carlo Club and the Hotel Sal Sagev (Las Vegas spelled backwards...but you already knew that).



Above: Las Vegas strip from the same 1947 map. Note the advertisements for the Last Frontier and the Club Bingo (now Sahara). The Strip was pretty barren in those days!

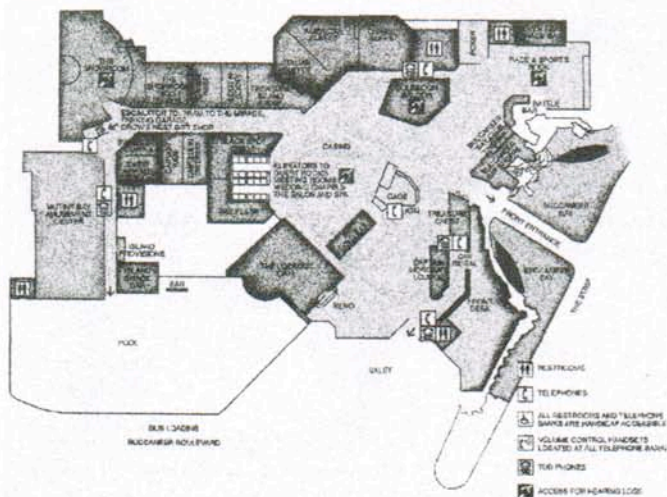
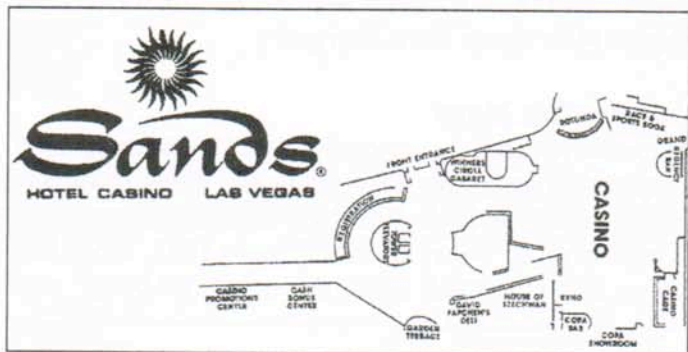
still labeled as Highway 91. Curiously, the El Rancho Vegas is not shown, although it was open in 1947. (Maybe they didn't want to pay for an ad??)

Today's modern maps are even more detailed, with the major casinos in Las Vegas routinely marked in their proper location. Unfortunately, I still find occasional errors in name or location, even on modern maps!

Hotel Casino Maps

As Hotel Casinos have grown into "self-contained cities", it's sometimes necessary to refer to a map of the property, just to find your way from the hotel to the casino, the pool, the restaurants or the parking lot. Multi-level casinos can be particularly challenging sometimes.

Many of the larger properties publish maps for guests. It's easy to build a collection of hotel-casino maps as you make the rounds for chips & tokens, slot cards and all the other casino collectibles. Just ask for a facility map at the front desk or the bell desk, in most locations. Check for maps in your room, if



Top: Simple diagram showing the layout of the Sands casino floor. Now imploded and gone, this map may be useful for future gaming collectors. Above: Layout for Treasure Island casino and shops. Note Buccaneer Bay at right hand side of map.

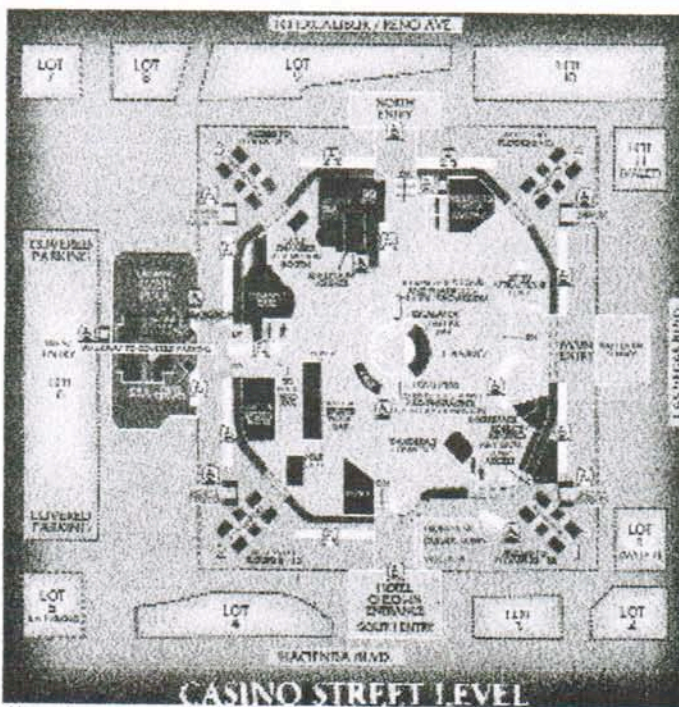
you are staying at the property.

Hotel-Casino maps are particularly good references when updated to reflect a casino's changing layout and size as new additions are made over the years. For example, look closely at the Luxor map below (dated 1995). The Nile River Ride is still located on the lower floor. This isn't the first Luxor map, as the Poker Room had been moved to the interior of the casino floor.

Casino Maps as Collectibles

Casino maps are not one of the primary casino collectibles. Certainly not in the league with chips or tokens. Not even as collectible as dice or postcards or slot cards. Not even as visible as ashtrays or swizzle sticks. But as sources of information to better understand a casino's operation, or to confirm or cross-reference some other bits of historical information, I think casino maps can be as valuable as buried treasure, where "X" marks the spot!

(If you have some interesting historical casino-related maps, particularly 20+ years old or more, I'd like to hear about them. Email me at pardue@home.com)



Above: Luxor map for the casino layout. The complete map shows all levels. This map shows path of Nile River Ride, since removed. Pre-ziggurat rooms.

Answer (see pg. 1): Curved lines are Gran Prix track behind Caesars Palace!