

# *Mizpah Hotel*



Photo Courtesy of Max Chapman at [www.Nevadamax.com](http://www.Nevadamax.com)

## *The Grand Old Lady*



## Mizpah Hotel, Tonopah, NV



One of the earliest photos of the Mizpah Hotel site. The building on the left still stands today. The "Mizpah Grill" on the right is where the current 5 story Mizpah Hotel stands. Photo Courtesy of Chip Chat

In May of 1900 Jim Butler, who at the time was the district attorney of Nye County Nevada, discovered silver in an Indian campground named Warren Averill Springs. News of the discovery traveled quickly and the population soared. By 1905 the name of the town was officially changed to Tonopah, Nevada.

Between 1900 and 1910 the population of Tonopah fluctuated between 5,000 and 10,000. Several businessmen decided that a quality hotel/dining establishment was needed for the area. The original financiers were George Wingfield, George Nixon (U.S. Senator), H. C. "Cal" Brougher, and Robert Govan. The hotel they decided to build was named the Mizpah, after the Mizpah Mine Butler started in 1900. Construction was briefly halted when the town's

mining revenues were diverted to help rebuild the city of San Francisco after the disastrous 1906 earthquake.

In 1907 Tonopah became the county seat of Nye county and on November 17, 1908 the Mizpah Hotel was open for business. Construction costs were estimated at over \$200,000, and featured 54 guest rooms (some with common baths), oak furniture, hot and cold running water, steam heat, brass chandeliers, stained glass windows, and the first electric elevator west of the Mississippi.

The "Grand Old Lady" as it has been known to be called was heralded for it's service, comfort and amenities. It was well known throughout the United States and drew rich and famous clientele because of its opulence. It was also

built to last. The 5 story hotel walls are 18" of solid granite, and until 1948 it was the tallest building in Nevada.

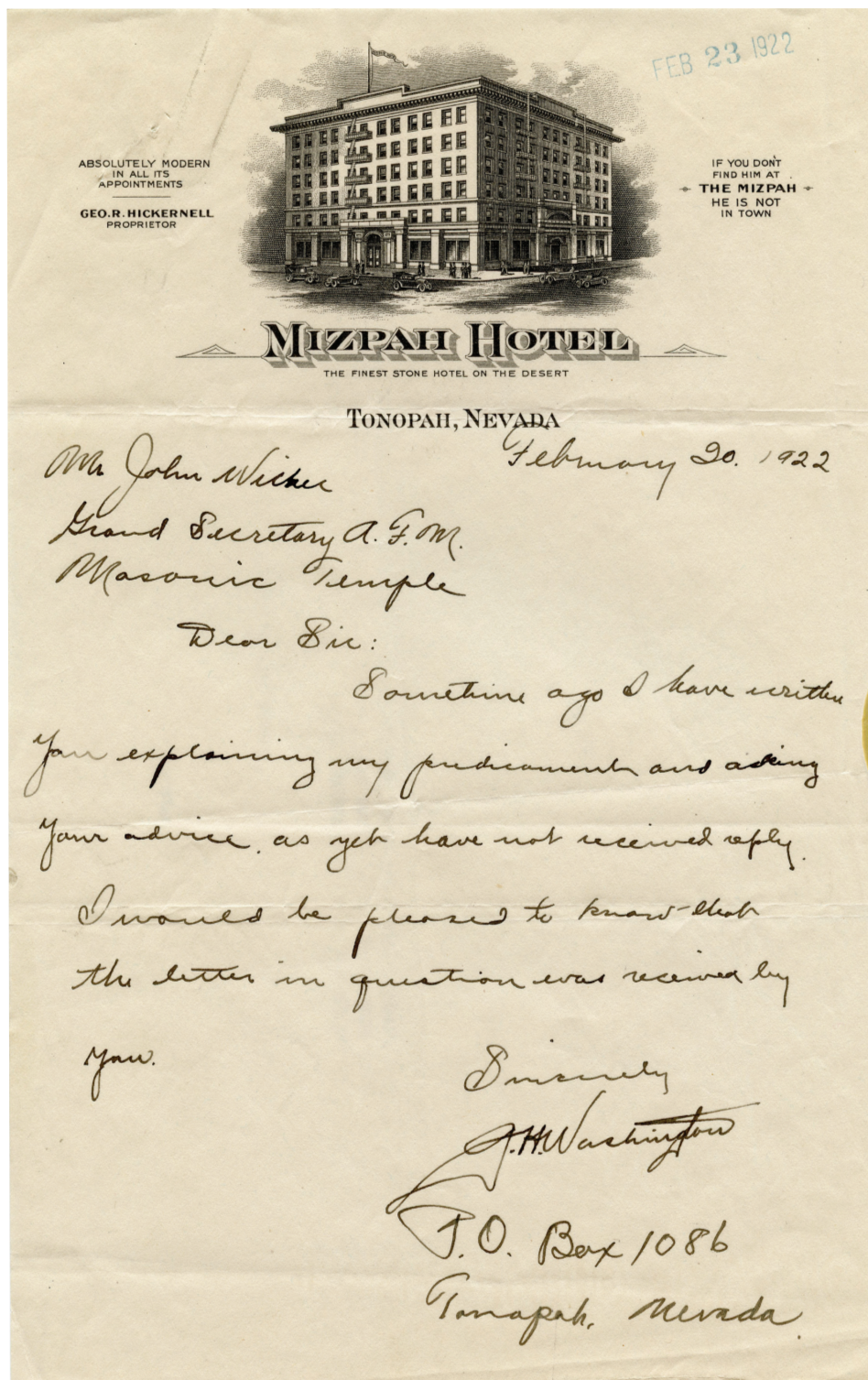
The 1930's was a tough time for the country and the town of Tonopah. The production in the mines had tapered off and the population dwindled. This, along with the great depression, had caused all but one local bank to fail. But through all of this, the Mizpah remain a profitable hotel. Because of its central location in the state, a midway point between Reno and Las Vegas, the Mizpah received a steady stream of customers even in the toughest of times.

The Mizpah became home to many military families when the U.S. Army opened the Tonopah Army Air Force Base just outside of town during WWII. B-24 Liberator crews were trained there prior to being shipped out to Europe. One of those training at the air base was famous test pilot Chuck Yeager. During this time Yeager and other Army personnel were regular visitors to the hotel.





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Mizpah Hotel letterhead provided in rooms in 1922 when George Hickernall was leasing the hotel before purchasing it in 1930.  
Courtesy of Martin Kenney

Tonopah was again a busy and profitable place to be, and in 1947, the Mizpah needed to expand. Charles and John Cavanaugh, the current owners at the time, purchased and annexed the adjoining 3-story Brougner-Govan building which had housed the Tonopah Banking Corporation until its demise during the great depression. Doorways were cut through the granite walls so that 12 additional guest rooms (including two new suites) could be added. A new kitchen and another dining facility was also added to the existing hotel.



In the late 1940's the first legal gaming license was granted to the Mizpah Hotel. The Cavanaugh brothers re-configured the lobby of the hotel to fit a small casino and a cocktail bar. The first issue chips of 1945 are a Small Key mold with "The Mizpah Club" hot stamp.





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In 1956, Myron Stahl & Les E. Short purchased the hotel and installed the now famous neon lights of the hotels name on the rooftop. On Oct. 1, 1956, the neon sign was lit for the first time.

The early days of the casino had a full selection of tables games including "21" Roulette and Craps. In its last operational form the Mizpah's casino was a slots only joint. Its 3,024 square foot casino area held 80 slot machines,

including 21 bar top slots.

The cashier's cage is situated directly in front of the vault. The vault boasts 18 inch thick steel reinforced concrete walls. The vault door was previously situated next door at the Tonopah National Bank, having been brought to Tonopah in 1902 via clipper ship around the horn to San Francisco, from there by rail to Reno and then south by horse drawn wagon.

By the 1960's the hotel had fallen in to the worst shape of its historic life. The



interior had been chopped up and remodeled so many times it was possible to rent a "interior room" for the night for \$2.50. These rooms had a window that faced the main corridor and not the outside world. Bare bulb lighting and metal spring beds were the decor, and the clientele consisted of cowboys, passing tourists and transients.



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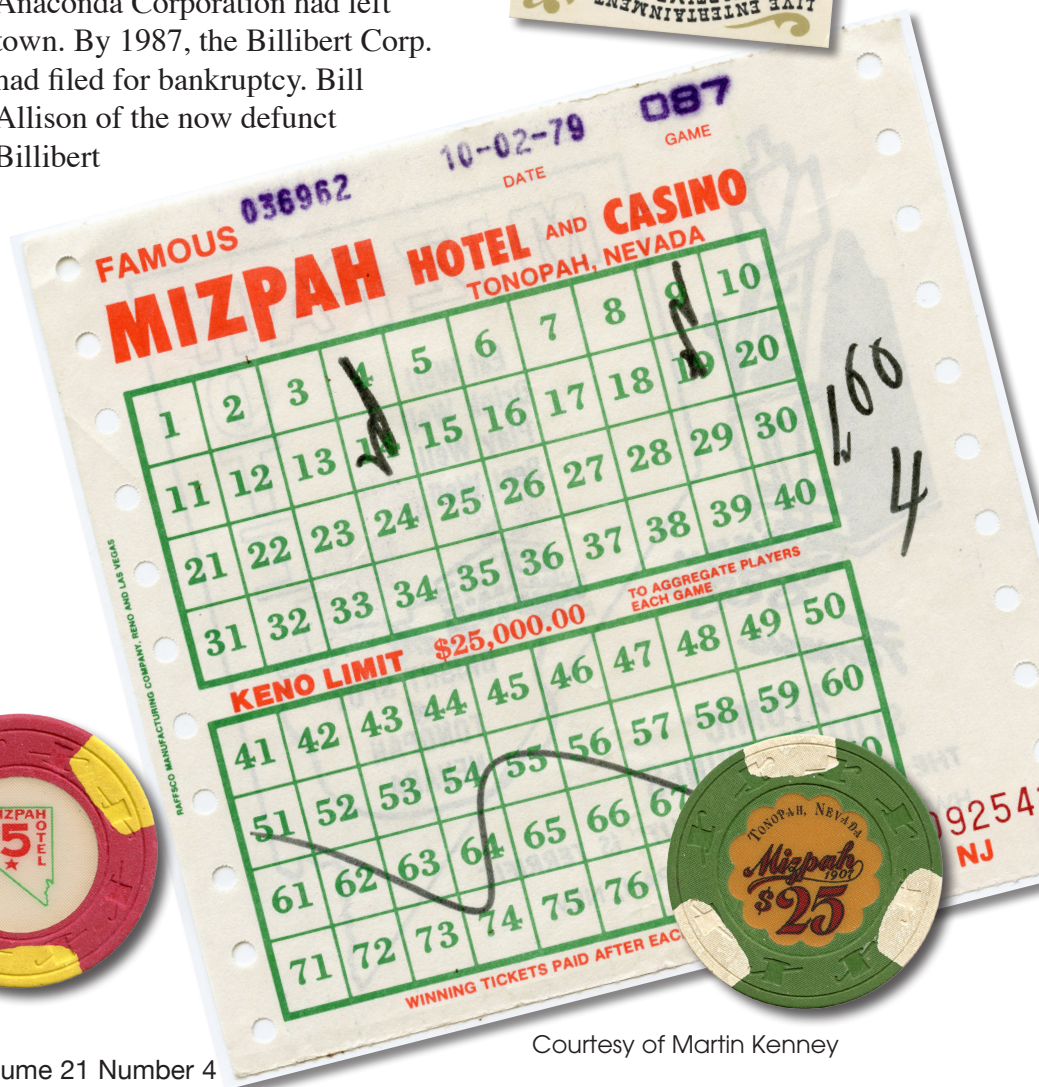
But the 1970's brought another boom in Tonopah, and this time it was deposits of gold, copper and molybdenum. The population went from 2,500 to over 4,000 in one year. The Anaconda Copper Company announced it would build a \$200 million mining operation just north of Tonopah. A 500-acre subdivision of new homes, with a new school and a park was planned by the Anaconda Copper Company.



In 1976 The Scott Corporation purchased the Mizpah Hotel buildings and some adjoining property. The hotel and annex were gutted to bare walls and completely rebuilt in the original turn-of-the-century style. The restoration included reducing the number of guest rooms from 104 to 56, including 6 parlor suites, all with private baths and thermostatically controlled heating and air conditioning. New stained glass windows were hand-crafted for the first floor, the finest of wall paper was hung on all of the walls and the finest carpet was put on the floors. The exterior was given a face lift, and park benches and iron lighting fixtures installed along the sidewalk.

The Scott Corporation also issued a new rack of chips. Gone were the 20-year-old Small Key "Mizpah Hotel" chips. They were replaced by Paulson H&C inlayed chips.

In 1984 the property was sold once again. Bill Allison & Bert Basolis (president & vice president of Billibert Corp.) bought the hotel and hopes were high. The casino and hotel were regularly packed with patrons. But this boom was only a temporary high in the many ups and downs in the life of the Mizpah. By 1986 the mining went belly up. Prices of gold and silver slid downward, workers and the Anaconda Corporation had left town. By 1987, the Billibert Corp. had filed for bankruptcy. Bill Allison of the now defunct Billibert





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Corp., leases out the hotel and finally takes control with his wife Delores in 1996. Then in 1998 the Allison's sell the Mizpah to Equivest Holding Group of Tucson, Arizona. But Equivest could not make the payments and in November of 2000 the Allison's

reacquire the hotel. The doors have been closed since that point and a few offers have been made, but a sale has yet to go through.

For now the Mizpah sits with her doors closed with most of the furnishings still in the building.



A rather rare matchbook of the 1950's Mizpah Club inside the hotel and casino. This would have been at the time of the Cavanaugh Brothers (Charles and John) ownership. The matchbook mentions "George, Bob and Johny". Johny maybe be John Cavanaugh. There is also a set of Mizpah chips with the wagon wheel logo as well.

Courtesy of Martin Kenney



Then there are the ghost stories... one of the hotel's most well known resident is an apparition that may have contributed to the hotels ever-growing draw. The "Lady in Red," a local purveyor of female companionship who worked the Mizpah and was strangled to death by her jealous boyfriend. Apparently she still inhabits the sixth floor where she has been know to follow guest around for their entire stays.



Hundreds, if not thousands, of people have stayed at the Mizpah expressly to find the Lady in Red. Well known for her sense of humor, the ghost has played many pranks on guests. Years after Keno was discontinued in the casino and all wiring was disconnected, numbers continued to light up on the boards, attributed to the ever playful Lady in Red.

Purportedly there are two miners who were killed during an attempted robbery. These two miners roam the basement at night, and have been known to pull pranks on the employees.

You may or may not believe in ghosts, but one thing is certain, The Mizpah Hotel and Casino has a spirit that will never die.

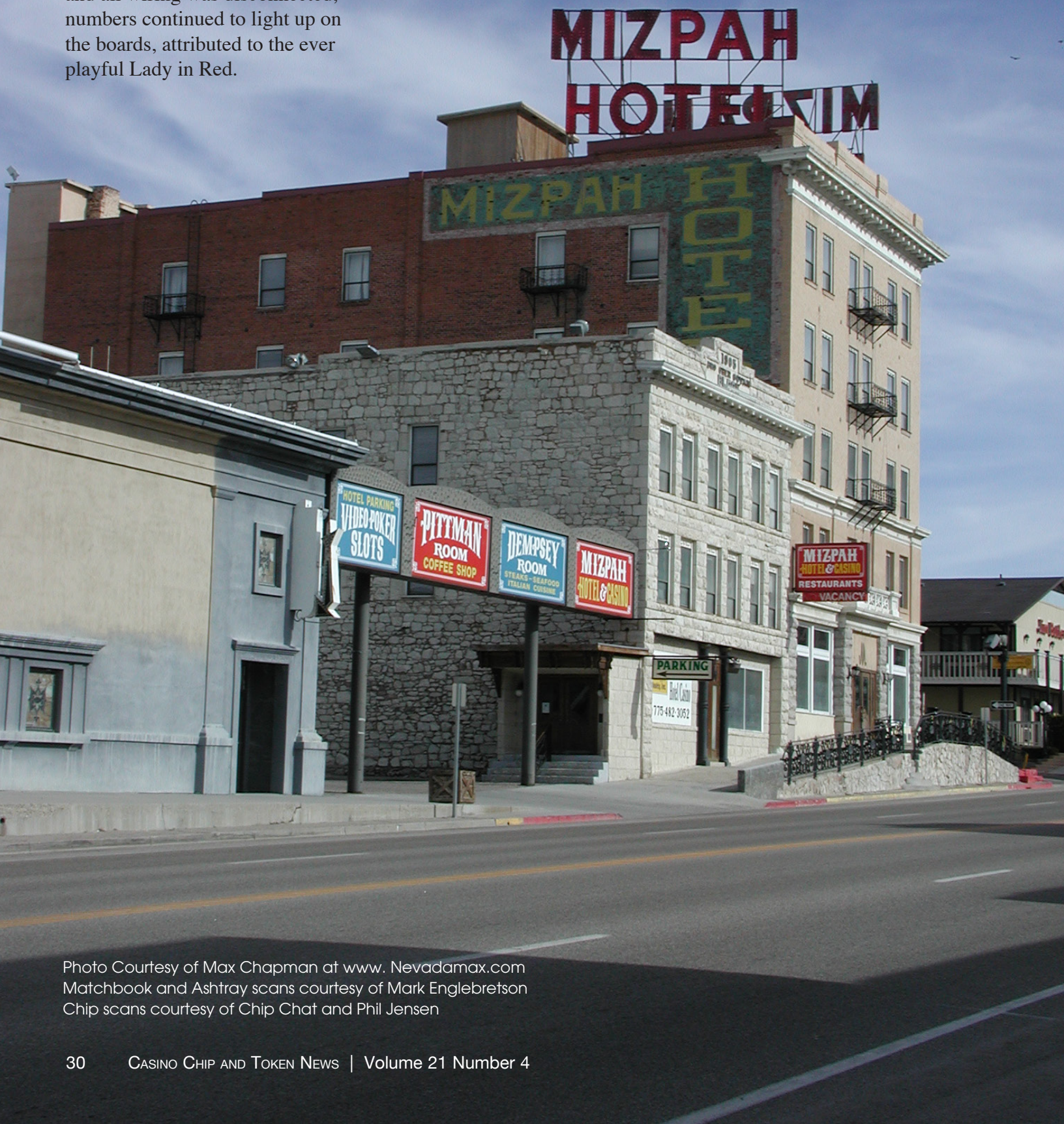


Photo Courtesy of Max Chapman at [www. Nevadamax.com](http://www.Nevadamax.com)  
Matchbook and Ashtray scans courtesy of Mark Englebreton  
Chip scans courtesy of Chip Chat and Phil Jensen



# Mizpah Hotel Timeline

1998, Allison sells the Mizpah to Equivest Holding Group of Tucson, AZ., then reacquires it in 2000 after Equivest fails to make payments.

2000 Mizpah Closes it's doors and awaits a new buyer.

1905 Name is Changed to Tonopah, NV

Nov. 17, 1908, George Wingfield, George Nixon, H. C. "Cal" Brouger, and Robert Govan open the Mizpah Hotel

1900

Gold is discovered near the area now known as Tonopah, NV

1910

1907 Tonopah Becomes County Seat of Nye County, NV

1920

1930 George R. Hickernall purchases the Mizpah

1922 the hotel was leased to George R. Hickernall

1930

1934, William Kennett, Sr. (former Clerk of the Nevada Supreme Court and Nye County Assemblyman) acquires controlling interest in the corporation. He and his wife, Katherine operate the hotel until 1943.

1945, a Gaming License is issued for the Mizpah Hotel, legal gaming starts.

1940

1943, the Cavanaugh Bros. (Charles and John) of Tonopah, purchase the Mizpah. They also acquire the Brouger-Govan building next store and start an expansion project that would include a casino.

1954, Mr. & Mrs. George Hillard of Yuma, AZ, purchase the Mizpah

0961

1950

0970

1956, Myron Stahl & Les E. Short purchased the hotel. Oct. 1, the neon sign was lit for the first time.

1984, Bill Allison & Bert Basolis, president & vice president of Billibert Corp. purchase the Mizpah

1987, the Billibert Corp. filed for bankruptcy, Bill Allison leases the hotel.

1990

1981

1976, Frank Scott, president & chairman of the Scott Corp. of Las Vegas bought the hotel.