



Around the Northwest

How things can change in ten years

by Steve Goodrich

Hi again friends. It has been a few issues since I wrote an article for the newsletter. In that time, I passed my landmark 10th Anniversary with the club. To celebrate, I thought I would recount some of the phenomenal growth in gambling that has occurred in the Pacific Northwest, in particular Washington state, during that time.

When I began collecting chips more than ten years ago, I had no idea that the hobby would become so popular. I thought I was the only one “crazy” enough to bring home souvenirs of my travels and travails through the gambling halls around the country. Though I have always enjoyed collecting Nevada chips, I have spent more of my time and effort roaming around the great Pacific Northwest gathering chips and information from the diverse clubs I found in these states. During the last decade, sweeping changes have affected gambling in Washington, changes that have enlarged the numbers and types of games available and the chips used to run these games.

A Brief History of Gambling in Washington State

Gaming in Washington has gone through four distinct historical stages: tolerance, enforcement, legalization, and open casino gambling. The first stage, lasting from the earliest origins of the state until the 1960s, can be categorized as the era of wide-open

illegal games. Though illegal, gambling continued unabated in many locations and many clubs operated during these years.

This stage lasted until the early 1960s when enforcement rather than tolerance began to dominate. In some cities, the gambling statutes had always been enforced. In others, the “tolerance” that had once carried the day began to wane. Finally, in 1969 the state’s attorney general declared that gambling, officially illegal across the state, would no longer be permitted to continue. During this period, many long-running and historic clubs ceased to operate. However, this was not entirely the case statewide. In a few jurisdictions the games continued since uniformity in enforcement was difficult to achieve.

The desire for consistent law enforcement, and the revenues that could be generated by these clubs, led to the passage of the Washington Gaming Act of 1973 legalizing card clubs and establishing a statewide regulating body. This act ushered in the third stage, the “golden age of card rooms” and for two decades small clubs dominated the landscape with more than 100 licenses in operation during much of this time. These clubs were often operated in conjunction with restaurants, bars, bowling alleys, and other businesses and many were quite successful.

Changes during the 1990s

The age of the small card rooms continued for nearly twenty years and produced many fine chips that still survive today. This stage came to an abrupt halt in 1991 with the opening of the first full Native American casino in Washington state by the Lummi Tribe in the northwest corner of the state. The effect was immediately felt. Small clubs began to fold, accentuated by the opening of more Indian casinos which could offer blackjack, roulette and many other “Vegas style” games of chance.

After fighting the full-fledged native casinos through most of the 1990s to survive, the state lawmakers acquiesced to the small club owners and allowed, with some restrictions, the non-Indian clubs across the state to expand and begin operating many of the same games that the Native American casinos offered. This process commenced in late 1997 with the opening of Freddie’s Club of Renton, the first non-Indian casino in the state.

What started as a trickle has now become a flood. As of today, there are more than 70 non-Indian casinos currently open with dozens of new licenses pending, in addition to the twenty-odd Native American casinos across the state. The number of smaller card clubs has been reduced to less

than 40 and the larger, expanded casinos dominate the landscape. In late 2000, the state legalized slot machines in the tribal casinos, though they are “paperless” and thus do not require the use of tokens. Profits in nearly every aspect of the industry continue to increase. All indications show that the larger casinos are “here to stay.”

Forward to the Year 2001

As I write, the era of open gaming is in full swing bringing Washington state to the forefront of the nationwide gambling boom, and with it has come a plethora of great chips. For example, a Washington chip (two, in fact!) made the club’s “Chip of the Year” contest last year, a first for any Northwest casino. (If you would like to check back to last year to see which two, they are the Chips Casino-Bremerton “parrot” and the

Ruby’s Casino-Kent “sparkling ruby,” both outstanding looking chips.) The casinos in Washington are much more concerned with appearance and presentation than the old card rooms ever were and this has resulted in many great looking chips being issued over the past few years and judging by the many beautiful issues during the past year, I would expect this trend to continue. This year, I have seen great specimens from each of the major chip suppliers: Bud Jones, Paulson and Chipco. I have added a few scans of some of my favorites. Remember, the full casinos are all less than four years old and most Indian casinos have only been around a few years as well, but parts of the state already look like “mini Las Vegas.” And this is all occurring in a state with less than six million people. As casinos continue to open and close, the future sure looks bright for us Washington chip collectors!

The following is an excerpt from my new comprehensive guide, *The Casino Chips of Washington State*, which includes listings for over one thousand chips and nearly 500 clubs covering the past century of gambling in the Pacific Northwest. It will be in print and available by the time you are reading this article. You can find me at SteveMrPNW@turbonet.com via email, or:

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Feel free to send me any questions, concerns or ideas you have, I love to hear from chippers!