

**PHIL'S FORAYS**  
by Phil Jensen

**-COLLECTING IN OLD NEVADA-**

Having been coerced by several of my piers to pen my memoirs, I've decided to write a short series of articles to appear in "Casino Chip and Token News".

Now, the dictionary defines foray as ravaging in search of spoil; to pillage - so I guess that comes pretty close to describing my adventures in early day Nevada - so Phil's Forays it is.

Anyway, here it is April of 1969 and I'm just a month off the Navy's U.S.S. Hancock (CUA-19). That's an attack carrier to you landlubbers. I had been all over the far east - (this was at the height of the Vietnam War for those of you old enough to remember) - but was anxious to return to Nevada and resume my casino dealing career which I had begun a couple of years earlier in Las Vegas Downtown Glitter Gulch.

I was also anxious to get out to the hinterlands of Nevada and explore the small towns and see what they had to offer. That meant casinos and bars and any place else that might attract the attention of a young guy on his own. I had been thinking about collecting casino chips as a hobby as I had collected coins since 1953. Anyway, in those days about the only inspiration was a 300 piece chip collection on display at Harvey's Hotel in Lake Tahoe. I lived at the lake from June of 1966 until around March of '67 and spent a lot of time perusing the gambling discs mounted on a roulette layout there.

I remember thinking it was probably the most complete collection of Nevada chips ever assembled - and it probably was at the time. Anyway, the seed was planted and it flowered soon after.

My dad had offered to buy me a new truck from a dealer friend of his in Soda Springs, Idaho. So after a trip to the potato state, I was eager to explore the towns of Wendover and Jackpot. After arriving in Salt Lake City, I began the hundred mile or so drive across the Bonneville Salt Flats to Wendover. It would be the first of 200,000 miles I would drive exploring the Silver State.

Now, in those days Wendover consisted of two gambling joints, the Stateline Hotel and The A-1 Casino. The Stateline started out in 1928 as a gas station and featured a light mounted on pole which served as a beacon to travelers on lonely U.S. 40. The original hotel was demolished not long after my first visit and replaced by a modern Vegas-style operation. It still retains its original gaming license though.

Anyway, I remember sitting at the bar, listening to the entertainment and surveying the casino. I noticed that the 21 tables all had a couple of rows of 50¢ chips.

Some were faded green while others were a re-ordered bright green. I managed to buy a few of each - along with a couple of ones and a five - not realizing they'd be worth a hundred bucks each someday. I finished my beer and set off to the A-1 Club which was just down the road.

Now the A-1 was my kind of place. Upon entering, the bar was to the left along the west wall and on this day the joint was empty except for the bartender. As I pulled up a stool I noticed the crap and 21 table were across the room partially hidden from view by a partition that was probably three or four feet high. In the early days of Nevada it was my understanding that the gambling had to be separate from the bar area. I'm not sure why but it was probably some politician's idea of how to keep the two evils apart - a good idea - in theory anyway.

The bar had one of those big antique cash registers but the thing that captured my attention was a large clock-like device mounted on top with an arrow that spun around when the register was activated. There were section marked with "Free Beer" and cigars along with some blanks. I ordered a beer and the bartender rang it up. The arrow whirled around rapidly and dutifully stopped on a dud. I wasn't surprised.

I walked over to the 21 game which was also empty and started a conversation with the dealer who turned out to be Louis Dotson. He would later work at the Stateline and also owned the Hideaway - a popular locals bar located down by the old Wendover air base. Anyway, he sold me a couple of dollar chips plus a five and I went back over to the bar. This time I figured I had a "lock" on a free beer, but again the contraption on the register came up blank. It was obvious this thing was for entertainment only. Many years later Louis told me he had all the A-1 chips but they were locked in the trunk of an old car he had parked in his yard. I eagerly volunteered to pry it open but he declined. Somehow I never did get the chips and they were never to be seen again.

I headed back to the Stateline Hotel and pulled up in front. The wind was whistling off the Bonneville Salt Flats so I stretched out on the seat of my new truck and dozed off. It was to be the first of many nights I slept in the truck although I would later add a camper and cover the walls with postcards of Nevada places I'd visit.

The next morning I was off to Jackpot, my main interest. I wondered what a place with a name like that would look like. Located on the Nevada-Idaho border, it was a small isolated place with a lot of trailers and three casinos - the Horseshu, 93 Club, and Cactus Pete's. All three still exist although they have been upgraded with Cactus Pete's resembling a Vegas-style operation. Back then, though, they were small, quaint places typical of

## CC&GTCC Library Receives New Book Donations from Club Members

*Additional materials requested from members*

by Robert Pardue (CH-003)

rural, old time Nevada joints. Two other places - Diamond Jims and the Stardust - had closed but were still standing.

I say the Stardust was still standing but barely so. There was a huge hole in one of the cinderblock walls which offered easy access. All the furnishings had been removed but the floor was littered with menus, placemats, keno tickets and other items all imprinted with the Stardust logo. I gathered up an assortment of stuff hoping to find an errant chip but had no such luck. Years later I would locate a \$25 (Ray and Ruth's) Stardust chip at an exchange service in Reno - it was just a hotstamp but one of my all-time favorites. The next time I'd get to Jackpot the remains of the Stardust would be replaced by a joint called Danny's (the casino with a heart). But alas, it was a slots only operation with no live gaming or chips to offer.

As it turned out, Jackpot was the last hurrah for hundreds of old mechanical slot machines that had done time in casinos around Nevada. Many were from joints on Fremont Street in Las Vegas and I recognized some of them from the Pioneer and other clubs I had played in. The newer electro-mechanicals were rapidly replacing the old mechanical clanger-bangers.

Cactus Pete's was the major casino in Jackpot but was still a small cramped operation. The thing that impressed me most was that the five dollar chips were white and the dollars were red- just opposite of what was common in Las Vegas. Anyway I bought a few and was even able to get some promotional dollars with the boss's name on them.

The 93 Club and Horseshu were smaller operations and I not only was able to get some of their chips but some obsolete one as well. They seemed glad to get rid of them.

I especially liked the 93 Club hot stamps in 50¢, \$1 and \$5 denominations with the little hiway signs on them.

Happy with my new chip acquisitions, I headed south back to Las Vegas. I made a quick stop at a small market and discovered several dozen cases of ashtrays from Diamond Jim's - which had gone out of business several years before - stacked out in back - the manager told me to help myself and I did.

I left Jackpot with happy memories that day and have returned many times since. But, I'll always remember the first time I saw Jackpot, Nevada.

The new club library is operational, with over 100 books and related materials donated by club members so far. Special thanks goes to **Archie Black, Albert Rios** and **Michael Hurley** for contributing multiple gaming-related books and magazines to the library.

Please send library donations at any time to the address below. For members' convenience, donations can be made at the convention at The Orleans casino in August. Look for the box at the CC&GTCC club table.

After the convention, a list of library materials will be published in the next available quarterly magazine.

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- Chip and Token books of all types
- Casino and Gaming Industry books
- Historical materials related to Nevada, Atlantic City, Illegal Casinos, etc.
- Gaming-related biographies
- Other books or magazines relevant to chip or token research and education

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Note: Club Library donations accepted at Aug.'98 Convention