

WEST VIRGINIA'S NOTORIOUS ROUTE 30  
GAMBLING STRIP OF THE 1950'S  
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At the most northern point of the West Virginia panhandle between the Ohio River and the Pennsylvania State Line there is a 4 mile section of U.S. Route 30 that crosses the State at its narrowest point. Throughout the 50's and early 60's the section of Route 30 that is east of Chester, West Virginia saw a number of Bars and Restaurants housing illegal gambling spring up. The better known establishments were called, at one time or another, The Rio Club, Cactus Bar, The Carriage, Jungle Inn, The Hilltop, The Red Dog, Mountaineer Club and the Tri State Social Club.

The largest and by far the most elegant of these Clubs was known as Club 30. My research concentrated on this Club because of the many stories floating around regarding its inception and its ultimate demise.

The origin of this Casino began in 1950 by a man by the name of Charles Teemer, who was a former manager of the Sands Souse Hotel and Casino in Havana, Cuba. He with several local acquaintances formed a Corporation and leased a large block building off Route 30 within a half mile of the Pennsylvania line. The property was located a couple 100 yards back from the highway and was completely surrounded by acres of woodlands. The building was remodeled into a first class Restaurant and Nite Club. He also built into the rear of the building a very plush casino that had its entrance through the Restaurant.

As indicated by the local papers the day after the raid that closed the Club permanently June 12, 1957, it was quite an elegant place. Excerpts described the area as a picturesque panorama adjacent to a crystal lake upon which white ducks swam. A large area was black topped for the parking lot with a cadre of teenagers standing by to valet park the many influential patrons from the surrounding cities of Pittsburgh, PA, Wheeling, WV, and Youngstown, OH. Employees wore special monogrammed jackets. Management people wore tuxedos. The floors were all carpeted. Meals and drinks were provided free to the gamblers. The Nite Club had adorned its name on all the dishes. Even the elaborate metal ash trays had Mr. Teemer and the Club 30 name cast into the

metal.

This Club operated openly for a number of years. Whenever an occasional raid was being considered, the Club would receive a phone call. The gambling equipment would then be loaded into a Van and driven to a hidden location until the raid or threat had passed. It would then return the equipment within a couple of days. The Nite Club and Restaurant never did close down. Business at the Club was especially brisk during the racing season at Waterford Park Race track located nearby at Newell, West Virginia.

The raid that finally closed the Club was instigated at the State level after a new group of politicians were elected. It took 10 state troopers about 2 hours to gather up the gambling equipment. As it progressed patrons entering the parking area were told that the business was closed due to a power failure. This despite the fact that dazzling neon lights lighted up the building. Twelve key employees were arrested. The other employees and some odd 150 patrons were not cited. The raid netted 5 Dice Tables, 3 Roulettes, 6 Black Jack and 2 Chuck-A-Luck Tables. Nine Slot Machines were also seized.

All the confiscated equipment was later burned on Court orders and the operators ended up losing their choice location. However, the fines by the local authorities were minimal, ranging from 50 to 100 dollars each on charges of exhibiting gambling equipment.

Although the raid was a big setback to these operators in lost equipment and their location; it was soon apparent that organized gambling was not going to end, just yet, in the panhandle. The group still had money, their contact, and a large prosperous clientele.

Within a couple of months Teemer and the group leased a new building within a mile of their old location. However, this location could not begin to match the glamorous surroundings of the former Club 30. The building was smaller and built into a sloping hill in a rather congested area just 50 some feet from the highway. Nearly all the parking for the Casino was located behind the hill and out of sight. The ground floor was occupied by a Bar and Restaurant called the Paddock Club. The Casino was called the Jockey Club and was located on the second floor. It's entrance was at the rear of the building on the second level. Valet parking was

essential.

Although it was just as plushy inside as the former Club, there no longer was a night club or gourmet restaurant and all the glitz of the former location were now missing. This new Casino did operate with impunity for another 4 plus years before Mr. Teemer and his organization were permanently put out of business. It took the FBI and the enactment, in September, 1961, of a new Federal Law that prohibited traveling interstate to operate a gambling casino.

The raid by the FBI occurred February 15, 1963 on a Saturday evening and was spectacular in its size and scope. But the most interesting aspect of this raid was the ruse used by the FBI to catch the casino operators completely off their guard. At about 10 pm a group of 4 state troopers showed up at the entrance. They were denied entry, so they proceeded to batter in the double bolted entrances with axes. By the time they broke through, there wasn't any gambling going on. The place was almost empty of gambling tables and what few gambling chips and paraphernalia that were being used were now well hidden away. The troopers appeared disappointed since it was obvious that the Club was tipped off that a possible raid was coming. The troopers did confiscate a Crap, a Black Jack and a Chuck-A-Luck table. They issued a citation to the manager for exhibiting gambling devices and then left.

After the raid, the operators felt that the night was still young, the expected raid was over, and most of the night's clientele had not arrived yet. So it was decided to call for their gambling equipment to be trucked back in the same night.

Six hours later, however, shortly after 4 am, the Feds showed up with a large force of FBI Agents and completely surprised the operators. There was now no delay in gaining entry, since the earlier Troopers had made sure that they battered in the entrance doors beyond repair for that night. They rushed in with enough agents to catch all the employees red-handed.

They arrested everyone connected with the Casino - 13 "Associates" and 44 other "co-conspirators". A school bus was on hand to transport most of these people to court arraignments. Over 34 thousand dollars was confiscated from the tables and the cage. A nearly full drawer of pledged jewelry and all the gambling chips and paraphernalia

were also scooped up. A large moving van was used to carry off 3 more Crap Tables, 6 Black Jack Tables, a Roulette and another Chuck-A-Luck Table. A large number of Slot Machines were also removed. The next day Mr. Teemer was arrested at his home in Hollywood, Florida and returned to West Virginia. This time the operators were prosecuted on inter-state commerce in gambling. If convicted under the new federal law they faced long penitentiary terms.

The raid did accomplish another unforeseen result. Now that the federal authorities were involved, all large scale gambling ended on the Strip. Today, both of the buildings formerly occupied by Club 30 and the Jockey Club are still there. Both are empty and in poor condition. The spacious parking lot at the old Club 30 is now filled with a motley collection of Trailer Homes in its still picturesque woodland setting. All the other Bars/Restaurants except one, are now abandoned or converted to other types of businesses. I did talk with about 20 old timers who worked or played at the various casinos, but located very few chips that were carried home.