

Sonny's Saloon

The Last Bar Token?

by Vince Mowery



The latest of four tokens issued by Sonny's Saloon appeared just prior to the CC>CC Convention in June, 2004. Struck in a hi-security alloy by Roger Williams Mint and distributed by the Green Valley Gaming slot route company, will this be the last (i.e. final) bar token? Probably not, but only time will tell.

But it could very well be the last token with Sonny's name on it. Clifton Carl "Sonny" Morris died in his sleep this past July 31. According to his obituary in the Las Vegas Review Journal of August 3, 2004, he was born May 21, 1925 in Enid Oklahoma. At the age of 13, the 11th of 12 children came to Las Vegas with his younger brother William to stay with one of their sisters. "The orphaned boys arrived in Las Vegas in the middle of the city's worst

snowstorm in history, when a record 18 inches covered the Las Vegas Valley." At the age of 18 he volunteered for the U.S. Navy and became a member of the famous Sea Bees. After discharge in 1945, he settled in San Diego and worked for Wilbur Clark, associated with several restaurants and lounges. Returning to Las Vegas in his 20s, the "colorfit" Sonny worked at the Aqua Lounge, and later owned several lounges. Also, his brother Bill "Wildcat" Morris became part owner of the Landmark Casino.

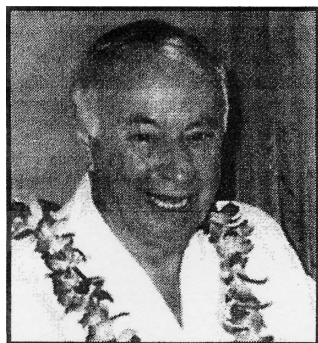
The first Sonny's Saloon was at the location of the Sneak Joint Casino at 2358 Spring Mountain Road. (Chips from this small casino, which closed in 1980, are very hard to find). This bar was a popular hangout. According to the obituary: "Sonny's was a home-away-from-home for everyone from judges to casino workers and the average working person. Morris had a smile and a joke for everyone and his understanding nature and big heart made him a true sounding board for those in need."



The first Sonny's Saloon token came from the ill-fated American Coin Enterprises slot route company in 1987. This token became obsolete in 1989 when American Coin cheating was exposed. (See "The Great American Coin Gaff" in Casino Chip and Token News, Volume 17, #2, pp 70-73.)



The second, and last, token used at the Spring Mountain location appeared at the end of 1994. The new slot route company was B.W. Corp. and the mint was Casino Tokens (CT). This was the start of a new



design with doubled letters of the name and a martini glass with olive logo. These tokens became obsolete when the building was demolished to make way for an overpass and major interchange on an interstate highway.

Sonny's Saloon reappeared at 3449 South Industrial Road. That's our Explorer in the parking lot. The large red sign over the side entrance is vaguely similar to the one at the original location. Again, the building is shared by a Chinese restaurant.

Looking southeast from the front of the building toward the back of the Mirage, shows how close the saloon is to the strip - one block behind the Fashion Show Mall. The large overpass across Industrial Road and farther west solved some of the worst traffic jams in Las Vegas. And the sign advertising "BONUS VIDEO POKER" is typical of many bars, lounges, saloons, etc. in Nevada.



The first token at this new location appeared May, 1997, in the same metallic alloy and from the same slot



route company. However, the tokens were minted by Green Duck Corp. (GDC) with their mint mark appearing on the obverse. During this time, Casino Tokens (CT) was getting out of the business of manufacturing gaming tokens, and the Nevada Gaming Control Board granted permission for slot route companies to continue using existing reverse dies. As a result, these tokens have a GDC mint mark on the obverse and a CT mint mark on the reverse, an anomaly shared by only a few route company tokens.

Well the question remains: Will the token introduced at the beginning of this article be the last Nevada bar

token? As far as we know, bar, lounge, saloon, restaurant, etc. tokens are unique to the state of Nevada. When a bartender at Sonny's Saloon was asked why they did not change over to the newer coinless machines, his response was that Sonny felt the old machines were just fine and he saw no need to replace or modify them. Apparently, that sentiment is shared by some bar owners throughout Nevada, since at least a few dozen are still using tokens.

We wish to thank Phil Jensen for many knowledgeable discussions of Las Vegas history and Janice O'Neal for meticulous record keeping of Nevada bar tokens.